Defying Pygmalion: New Critical Approaches to Women in Surrealism

Isabelle Pyle, MLang

School of Global affairs

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2025

Contents

"My Spirit moves to tell of shapes transformed

Into new bodies. Gods, inspire my work

(for you've transformed it too) and from creation

To my own time spin out unceasing song"

—Stephanie McCarter, *Metamorphoses*

Introduction

A Moment of Disorientation

The role of women in surrealism has witnessed a surge in scholarship over recent years, with reassessments of their contributions to and impact on the wider surrealist movement coming to the forefront of several major publications. My thesis aims to build on this scholarship by resituating the discursive approach to analysis of their work, critically examining the psychoanalytic framework often ascribed to them and suggesting alternative theoretical frameworks that may offer fresh insight into their work. This is primarily achieved through a queer phenomenological analysis of the mythological imagery found within women's surrealism, examining how these narratives and motifs may act as tools of reorientation and construction of their own artistic identities. From this queer phenomenological angle, I will explore how the process of reorientation invites a reparative approach to surrealist scholarship, and how this can encourage discussion of the relationship between women artists and the surrealist movement — to what extent can it be said that there was a community of women surrealists? Georgiana M. M. Coleville notes that "'women surrealists' constitute a slippery category. They never defined themselves as a separate school and often passed through surrealism, before finding their own related but individual creative

way."[1] Is there an identifiable "women's surrealism", and would taxonomizing

the work of artists in this way be useful? Drawing from Jean-Luc Nancy's

concept of a *communauté désœuvrée*, works by artists such as Claude Cahun and

Valentine Penrose as exposures of being-in-common that, through presenting

ruptures in identity and the body, form a community not through a shared goal

or identity but through co-existence and shared orientations. Their use of

imagery often illustrates the human body transversing the natural and sacred.

These ruptures of identity, shown through the subversion and appropriation of

mythological imagery, in turn invite an investigation into New Materialist

thought and its notion of the nomadic subject— not ruptures at all, but

withdrawals that demonstrate the plurality of being. Such demonstrations, I

suggest, take on autotheoretical qualities by repositioning the relationship

between the body and identity, and forming a nascent feminist discourse

surrounding the experience of marginalisation. Furthermore, this thesis will

attempt to engage with the works of these women surrealists in novel ways,

building on the idea of community as being-in-common by exploring how

scholarship may function as a shared moment of exposure. A creative critical

response to Valentine Penrose's *Les Magies* seeks to resituate the researcher in

relation to the text, demonstrating participation with it from a subjective

position.

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[1] Georgiana M. M. Coleville, 'Women Artists,
Surrealism and Animal Representation' in *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surealism*, ed. by
Patricia Allmer, (Manchester: Manchester Art Gallery, 2009), p.64

Through tracing an arc through several different approaches— beginning with

Jean-Luc Nancy and phenomenology, moving to New Materialism and

autotheory— this thesis aims to re-evaluate the relationship between women

surrealists and the research conducted on them, for them, and around them.

The changing nature of the following chapters represent a reorientation in

themselves; through the act of research, the act of close reading and analysis

not only of the works themselves but the machinery employed to analyse them,

I aim to reorient the study of women's surrealism to allow for a more natural

extension of surrealist philosophies into the world of academia, and for the

realignment of methodological axes to be oriented around the experiences of

these artists.

To assert such a reorientation, of course, rests upon the existence of a

disorientation. The scholarship surrounding women surrealists to date, in many

ways can be argued to be far too attached to mimicking the psychoanalytical

critiques that dominated at the time of the works' creation. That is not to

reinforce the notion that Surrealism as a movement is in some way "finished",

bound to that narrow time frame and removed from the contemporary arts.

Indeed, Surrealism is alive and well, pockets coalescing across the globe in the

form of journals, collectives, reading groups and Discord servers that hash over

the legacy and continued relevance of the surrealist movement.[2] Penelope

Rosemont, in *Surrealist Women*, writes that

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[2] I have sought out and been in contact with numerous of these groups: notable organisations are Chicago Surrealist Group, Leeds Surrealist Group, and Peculiar Mormyrid

Surrealism could be considered the last of the great non-academic

intellectual movements, for like Marxism, anarchism, and

psychoanalysis, it has thrived largely outside the universities [...] Even a

quick summary of surrealism's manifestations in the plastic arts since

the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition would take up many pages. The

subject is well worth a book in itself. However, it is rarely chronicled in

the slick, commercial art magazines.[3]

Although written in 1998, this continues to ring true of contemporary

Surrealist scenes: the august mechanisms of academia are largely viewed as

distinctly hostile to the movement at large. Indeed, what might be considered

rudimentary knowledge in the classroom is rejected by practicing artists. In a

conversation with a surrealist associated with Peculiar Mormyrid, a Chicago-

based collective, I experienced such a moment of disorientation, as he asserted

that

there's actually a highly contentious point about whether surrealism is

considered part of the "modernist/avant-garde" but most of us today I

think consider it more like a mutant upsurge that while coming out of

that milieu overcame that stuff... closer to romanticism if anything. But

Duchamp is also not really an avant-gardist.[4]

This disconnect from what I, over the course of my studies, had taken for

truth— that Surrealism falls under the umbrella of Modernism, that its

[3] Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Women : An International Anthology,* (London : The University of Texas Press, 1998), p.386

[4] @mindape, message posted in SurrealistRevolution server. *Discord*, 27 July 2023.

philosophies were avant-garde, and that while it was unique in many ways it certainly did not "overcome" its heritage— opened a rupture in how I understood the field. This moment of exposure reoriented the perspectives I held on Surrealism, and opened a novel possibility: Surrealism, and the methods employed to study it, contained incommensurable tensions that stifled one or the other at every turn. Here is literature that resists comprehension, that troubles the relationship between signifier and signified. Here is art that relies on symbology found purely within the dreams of the artist, speaking an unintelligible language. It is not the first time, over the course of studying Surrealism, that I have encountered such tensions; my Master's thesis considered the difficulties of translating feminist surrealist poetry, and how much of translation theory that assumes the basic function of language as conveying *meaning* may prove ineffective:

> As a literary movement, surrealism aimed to disrupt traditional bounds of logic in literature by bridging the gap between the conscious and unconscious mind. Language was seen as a tool to be played with, and automatic associations often guided the writing process in order to allow the subconscious to guide what content was created. This poses a unique challenge to the translator, that of having to translate without being able to try and decipher the author's intentions.[5]

The question of translation will be returned to in the final chapter of this thesis and prove pivotal for the futurities I try to imagine for study of women's

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[5] Isabelle Pyle, "Work Grief Work: Translating the Surrealist Poetry of Valentine Penrose", unpublished Master's thesis, University of Lancaster, 2020.

surrealism. However, we may see that surrealism presents a similar issue to the researcher, that of having much of the intention and context of the work's production obscured by the methods Surrealism employs— automatic writing, the reliance on chance and unconscious choice. An analytical framework founded in rational logic may struggle when presented with the irrational paralogics of Surrealism. The ways in which Surrealism views itself, and the way it is viewed by academia, are worlds apart. They are speaking different languages. Surrealism operates upon paralogics, networks of association and happenstance that defy any attempt at logical progression or evidence. It creates its own spatial and temporal norms that are deeply unnatural to the orderly investigations of academic enquiry. In some ways, the environment of academic study does not allow Surrealist principles to be extended easily, much less the marginalised identities expressed through its techniques. Bataille writes that "surrealism is mutism: if it spoke it would cease to be what it wanted to be, but if it failed to speak it could only lend itself to misunderstanding".[6] On Bataille, Hollier writes "If writing *on* is formalizing, this operation cancels transgression by reducing (or elevating) it to the level of concepts. As if Bataille never *wrote*. To write on Bataille is thus to betray him. At the same time to miss him. To write on Bataille is not to *write* on Bataille".[7] There is something of a fractal mirror of interruption in the studying of surrealism, one that perhaps compounds when considering what fresh ways writing may betray the surrealist works produced by women artists associated

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[6] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, (London: Verso, 1994), p.56
[7] Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p.49

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with the movement. Indeed, this is the phrasing that Chadwick uses- artists *associated* with surrealism, rather than women surrealists. "Their own stories are often contradictory;", she writes, "the independence of these women serves as a constant warning to the art historian whose language is more often the generalised language of movements and groups than that of individuals". [8] Rachel Grew, whose scholarship on Fini is invaluable in any discussion on the women of surrealism, asks "if she also cannot be contained in surrealist discourse due to her rejection of the *femme enfant* and *femme fatale* tropes, how are we to speak of Fini at all? This suggests that an intervention is needed in these various discourses; one which emphasises ambiguity, overlap, and multiplicity".[9] Patricia Allmer states with some authority that "feminist art historians might thus be divided between those who seek to parse the complexities of modernist allegiances and identifications, and those prepared to overlook these complexities for the sake of discursive and other economies".[10] I argue that the economy at times exhibited within this thesis is not a dismissal of the complexities within the identifications of women in surrealism, but rather an acknowledgement of it— time has been spent parsing each artist's exact relationship to the surrealist movement in the incisive scholarship that has come before me, and while there are arguments still to be made, there are also exciting avenues ahead. What is attempted in this thesis is a remobilisation, a reorientation rather than a resurrection or rediscovery, that

[8] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement,* (London : Thames & Hudson, 1985), p.9

[9] Rachael Grew, "Feathers, flowers, and flux: artifice in the costumes of Leonor Fini" in *Intersections: Women artists/surrealism/modernism*, ed. by Patricia Allmer, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) p.270

[10] Patricia Allmer, "Introduction" in *Intersections*, p.9

frames the exploration of subjectivity by women artists associated with the surrealist movement within new critical lenses.

The Problem of Woman

The women artists who participated in Surrealism are a notorious sticking point for the movement, as they "experienced a marginalisation not only in male-dominated bourgeois culture but within the ranks of the avant-garde as well [...] a full recognition of their conceptual and creative force seems lacking". [11] While they frequently worked alongside and in collaboration with their male contemporaries— Valentine Penrose's *Dons des Féminines* contains a frontispiece drawn by Picasso[12]— their names have often been excluded from major texts examining Surrealism, and their work frequently excluded from major exhibitions. Patricia Allmer notes that "critical and popular histories of Dada and Surrealism have often preferred to construct a markedly different story, one that sometimes partially but often altogether omits women artists and their actual presence in publications, exhibitions, and collections".[13] It is crucial here to avoid inadvertently belittling the role women played in the Surrealist movement— when this thesis discusses their marginalisation, it is not suggesting that women artists were anything other than crucial to the movement as a whole, and participated in it fully and with great influence. Rather, this thesis operates on the understanding that, as Allmer again points

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[11] Gwen Raaberg, "The Problematics of Women and Surrealism" in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary-Ann Caws et al., (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), p.2

[12] Pablo Picasso, *Dons des féminines*, 1951, illustration, from *Dons des Féminines* (Paris: Les Pas Perdus, 1951)

[13] Patricia Allmer, "Feminist Interventions: Revising the Canon" in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism* ed. by David Hopkins, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), p.577

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out, there has been a "critical erasure of feminist interventions, and the successful androcentric writing-out of women artists from history",[14] inasmuch as "history" here accounts for key publications and historicisations of Surrealism. This thesis intends to discuss a particular range of artists, who operated at a particular time, not in an effort to homogenise the women who worked within Surrealism, or claim their work was monolithic either in intent or method. As Whitney Chadwick writes

> The task is not to seek out a shared style, a similitude of politics or attitude, or a shared heritage predicated on sexual difference. [...] Yet this need not blind us to the variety of ways in which women have written their own legacies of transmission and effect or to parallels in how they have framed the particulars of women's experiences.[15]

 Neither does it wish to claim that an extant community of women in surrealism can be identified and taxonimised in such a manner. Indeed, the artists discussed in this thesis— Penrose, Carrington, Fini and Cahun— cannot be defined so simply as "surrealists" given the breadth and variation of their work. Instead this thesis wishes to suggest that women artists that produced work in conjunction with surrealist movement may be viewed as part of an inoperative community with one another, and through the exposure of their shared thematic elements may be remobilised to offer insight into their construction of identity through mythology. Ahmed asserts that "Groups are

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[14] Ibid., p.587
[15] Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation" in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation,* ed. by Whitney Chadwick and Dawn Ades, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), p.6

formed through their shared orientation toward an object. Of course, a paradox is already evident here in that to have ''something'' that can be recognized as ''the same object'' is an effect of the repetition of the orientation toward ''it,'' just as the orientation seems directed toward the object that exists ''before'' us. In a way, ''what'' is faced by a collective is also what brings it into existence. As such, the object ''in front'' of the ''we'' might be better described as ''behind'' it, as what allows the ''we'' to emerge".[16] I suggest that these artists may be grouped a shared orientation towards surrealism— that is, surrealism becoming the object behind them, from which position they were able to expand and elaborate upon their artistic identities in different, novel ways. Once again, these women worked contemporarily with the likes of Andre Breton, Max Ernst, and Robert Desnos. Despite this, Allmer points out that "whilst surrealist thought radically challenged hierarchies, it often remained blind to its own gender politics, locked in a heterosexual, sometimes homophobic, patriarchal stance positioning and constructing women (and never men) as artists' muses."[17] It is these women artists who have been often excluded from the "canon" of surrealism, whose art has been regarded as auxiliary to a prevailing body of surrealist work that takes precedence in academic discussion. Allmer certainly seems to assert that such marginalisation was deliberate, at least in historicisations of Breton's surrealism, although does not outright claim it is a result of misogyny, although recognising that "male artists exaggerate their importance to the [dadaist] canon, and often do so at the expense of their

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[16] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p.119
[17] Patricia Allmer, "Of Fallen Angels and Angels of Anarchy" in *Angels of Anarchy*, p.13

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female colleagues".[18] Both the sidelining of these artists, and the isolation of a monolithic Surrealism, represent a fundamental failure to appreciate qualities of surrealist thought that could provide enduring revolutionary potentials: unique attitudes to the concept of community, immanence, and the relationships of self/other, subject/object, observer/observed.

Recognising and exploring women artist's contributions to Surrealism has gone through what Allmer calls "alternating cycles of critical attention and neglect".[19] There seems to be a perpetual state of re-discovery, re-establishment, re-vitalisation. the first major publication calling attention to women surrealists, Gloria Orenstein's *Art History and the Case for the Women of Surrealism*, states that the author

> should like to show that the Women of Surrealism forged their own autonomous identities above and beyond the restricting confines of any definitions such as those of the Femme-Enfant or the Femme Fatale bestowed upon them by the surrealists, that they maintained their independent identity and created their own artistic worlds without sacrificing their ability to penetrate the realm of the imagination or to capture the magical imagery of the dream.[20]

Even in the earliest literature, then, the divide between the women of surrealism and their male counterparts was made clear, alongside the fact that the nature of this divide rested upon the expression of women surrealist's

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Gloria Orenstein, "Art History and the Case for the Women of Surrealism" in *The Journal of General Education*, 27:1, 1975, pp.31-54, p.33

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identity. Orenstein goes on to establish preliminary remedies to this, bringing together a wide range of women surrealists and examining how their use of symbolism aimed to uncover the nature of women artist's creative identity within the bounds of surrealism. Of course, even then the term "women surrealist" is noted for its fragility- how many of these women identified as surrealists? How many, while producing work we might identify as surreal in purpose or aesthetic, outright rejected any association with the movement? Leonor Fini "never became a member of the group"[21] and yet would go on to be included in many major collections of women surrealist's artwork.

Once more, we see a disconnect between the ideologies of the artists themselves and the critiques of their work popularised in academic circles. Indeed, Fini's work will play a key role in this thesis. When establishing what is meant by "women surrealists" and to what extent a community is presumed to have existed that could claim that label, there must be an acknowledgment of this imperfection. It is not novel to suggest that women artists, largely and generally, operated alongside surrealist principles in a way different to their male counterparts: Chadwick writes that "they made significant contributions to the language of Surrealism, replacing the male Surrealists' love of hallucination and erotic violence with an art of magical fantasy and narrative flow, and moving, however tentatively, toward laying claim to female subject positions within male-dominated movements".[22] In order for a study to be

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[21] Anne Sutherland-Harris, *Women Artists 1550-1950,* (Los Angeles : Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1987), p.329
[22] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, p.183

conducted on these works, the grouping of artists together exerts some level of force upon them; they are pushed together in ways that do not always recognise the full complexities of their allegiances, and does so for convenience and efficiency. Fini is included in this thesis because her work exhibits characteristics that enhance a discussion around women artists in surrealism, and the discussion in turn sheds new light on how her works may be appreciated.

Her disavowal of the surrealist community itself can indeed mark an important distinction between the ways in which women surrealists and their male contemporaries operated, in that the women artists were far more resistant to monolithic organisation. To discuss a community of women surrealists is to operate under a false premise; the artists discussed do not always define themselves as such, and the boundaries of such a community are porous, shifting and mercurial. Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the "inoperative community" offers a compelling critical framework for re-evaluating the place of women artists both in relation to Surrealism and to each other— by dismantling the notion of community as a unified, identity-based totality, Nancy's paradigm may help to reflect the discrepant positions many women artists held in relation to dominant canonical narratives, challenging traditional frameworks that have too often sought to assimilate women artists into a male-defined avant-garde or in turn isolate them into a homogenous monolith. For Nancy, community is "a gift to be renewed and communicated, it

is not a work to be done or produced[23]". The women artists studied within this thesis did not form an end product, a neatly closed circle of defined community; rather through their modes of communication, the certain actions undertaken during the artistic process to engage in a particular semantic field, a form of community is also communicated. An inoperative approach invites us to recognise the ways in which the practices of these artists expose the fractures, fluidities, and untranslatabilities of surrealist discourse, and make way for an ontologically plural reading that highlights multiplicity of identity and interruption over a mythic unity or cohesion.

I have selected the artists I wish to examine in this thesis on the merits not of how deeply involved they were in the "canonical" surrealist community— Leonora Carrington, for example, was perhaps the most recognised women artists who worked with Surrealism of her time, while Fini shunned the structured surrealist community as mentioned above— but rather on merits of the questions their work poses to how we understand the symbolic language and potentialities of women's surrealism, and by extension surrealism as a contemporary field of study. Subversive depiction of the body, conscious engagement with the relationship between artist and the observer, key use of mythological imagery: all of these were deciding factors in which artists to include.

As previously stated, Claude Cahun is perhaps one of the most well-known women surrealists; born Lucy Schwob in 1894, her adoption of a gender

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[23] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p.35

neural name later in life is indicative of her broader rejection of social norms regarding gender; she frequently dressed as a man in her photographs, that exhibited "Cahun's multiple photographic identities, not all of them human or even alive, [which] intentionally destabilize rational assumptions and conventions, thereby fundamentally questioning how and what we know as human beings".[24] She is well known to have engaged in homosexual relationships, specifically with her stepsister Suzanne Malherbe, who became a fellow artist under the name Marcel Moore. Included heavily in her work, these explorations of psychosexual identity and frank depictions of topics like cross-dressing and homosexuality set her apart from many of her contemporaries, both male and female. This thesis refers to her using she/her pronouns, as she did during her own lifetime, but it is important to note her now famous declaration in *Aveux non avenus*: "Masculin ? féminin ? mais ça dépend des cas. Neutre est le seul genre qui me convienne toujours".[25] The memoir itself "sets out to dismantle both a literary genre, autobiography, and its subject —the authoritative self whom the artist's signature authenticates".[26]

Cahun very much saw herself as an active disrupter of gender norms, and relished in her multiple identities. Shelley Rice, in *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, and Cindy Sherman*, describes how "begun when she was only a teenager, Cahun's photographic self-portraits manifest a restless

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[24] Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness*, (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p.45
[25] Claude Cahun, *Écrits,* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 2002), p.366.
[26] Tirza True Latimer, *Women together / Women apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris, (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005),* p.81

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need for metamorphosis already evident in the pseudonyms she would adopt".[27]

Before she was Claude Cahun, she was Claude Courlis, or Daniel Douglas. This

deep recognition of the multiplicity contained within the self is remarked upon

by Cahun herself, who said "under this mask, another mask, I will never finish

lifting up all these faces".[28] Cahun's engagement with Surrealism began in the

1930's after meeting Andre Breton at the *Association des Écrivains et Artistes*

Révolutionnaires , however "Breton remained relatively unresponsive to

Cahun's attempts to gain artistic affirmation from them. She knew many of the

Surrealists and socialized with them, but she was never embraced as a core

member of the group. Upon her death in 1954, Cahun was virtually forgotten as

an artist".[29] This existence outside of the surrealist canon, and resulting

obscurity before modern revival is common among women artists; we will see

the same story played out for Valentine Penrose, Leonor Fini, and Leonora

Carrington.

Cahun's work did not come back into prominence until late in the 20th

century, decades after her death, with the scholarship of Francois Leperlier

leading to her inclusion in the Institute of Contemporary Arts' exhibition *Mise*

en Scene. Her work "hit contemporary practice like an arrow through time"

according to the writer of the exhibition catalogue David Bate[30], and

throughout the 90's and 2000's she was included in many volumes seeking to

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[27] Shelley Rice, *Inverted Odysseys : Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, and Cindy Sherman*, (Cambridge : The MIT Press, 1999), p.21
[28] Claude Cahun, quoted in *Inverted Odysseys*, p.36
[29] Christy Wampole, "The Impudence of Claude Cahun" in *L'Esprit Créateur*, 53:1 (2013) pp.101-113 (p.102)
[30] David Bate, quoted in Katy Deepwell, "Uncanny Resemblances: Restaging Claude Cahun in Mise en Scene" in *n.paradoxa,* vol.1 (1996), pp.46-51 (p.46)

unearth the feminist potentials of surrealism, including Penelope Rosemont's

Surrealist Women, and Mary Ann Caws *The Surrealist Look: an Erotics of*

Encounters. *Inverted Odysseys* is among the first texts to note that Cahun

"created a private vocabulary, a personal mythology that was always tangential

to her life in the social world".[31] The first English language biography of

Cahun, *Exist Otherwise* by Jennifer L. Shaw, praises Cahun's work that "was

less about telling her readers and viewers what to think, than it was about

asking them to think for themselves".[32] This appraisal More recently, Gene

Doy's *Claude Cahun: A Sensual Politics of Photography* remarks upon her

penchant for Medusa-like imagery in her self-portraits, and goes some way to

analysing her use of masks and mirrors through a psychoanalytical lens, citing

Levi-Strauss and Joan Riviere, although seeming to disavow any theoretical

involvement on Cahun's part, stating "The photographs of her do not seem to

form part of a 'discourse' [...] I have not come across references to other

psychoanalysts [than Freud] in her writings".[33] In this thesis, I will argue that

this view of Cahun's work constitutes a major oversight, unaware of Cahun's

translations of Havelock Ellis, and glossing over the insightful discursive

elements both in her writing and visual art.

This thesis aims to illustrate that Cahun not only engaged meaningfully

in psychoanalytical discourses around gender identity and sexuality, but also

acted as an "arrow through time" as put forward by Bate, demonstrating the

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[31] Rice, Inverted Odysseys, p. 23
[32] Jennifer L. Shaw, *Exist Otherwise: The Life and Works of Claude Cahun*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), p.8
[33] Gene Doy, *A Sensual Politics of Photography*, (London : I.B.Tauris & Co, 2007), p.54

contemporary qualities of her work through nomadological analyses. Indeed, I aim to build more properly on the scholarship of Georgiana Coleville, particularly her posthumously published monograph *Slippery Selves: Women Surrealists Reprised*, where she adroitly notes that Cahun "is now known but not necessarily understood".[34] Coleville describes her psychoanalytical approach to Cahun's work as "germane" given the artist's preoccupation with narcissism and identity, and suggests it as a productive way to address the lack of in-depth scholarship around Cahun's literary productions, going on to draw parallels between Cahun's early life and both Freudian and Lacanian theories of development. I agree with Coleville fundamentally: such an approach is germane, and has its place within our conceptions of Cahun's work, however I wish to build upon this approach by also exploring the limitations of such historicised critique, and go on to draw attention to ow such limitations might be overcome.

Coleville also investigates Fini and Carrington, particularly in relation to their animal symbology and use of hybridised figures. Born in 1907, Fini as an infant was brought from Buenos Aires, Argentina to Triesta, Italy by her mother to flee her abusive father. Despite receiving no formal artistic training, she exhibited her first artistic pieces in Milan at age 17. She then moved to Paris by herself at the age of 24, and continued this profound independence throughout her artistic career, rejecting Bretons authority and operating outside of the

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[34] Georgiana Coleville, *Slippery Selves: Women Surrealists Reprised*, (London: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2020), p.77

more dogmatic principles of surrealism.[35] Despite this, she worked closely with

many surrealists, and exhibited alongside notable women surrealists Frida

Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Dorothea Tanning and Kay Sage in New York,

1942.[36] Rachel Grew notes that Fini's use of metamorphic imagery

> challenged the concept of a fixed, stable self, and created a more
>
> complex, ambiguous image of Woman. The theme of transformative
>
> bodies that cause shifts in identity and blur bodily borders is visible
>
> across Fini's oeuvre, infiltrating not only her painting practice and
>
> design work but also her life.[37]

 It is worth noting that her critical recognition occurred much earlier

than Cahun, Xaviere Gauthier's monograph *Leonor Fini* published in 1973 at a

time when "by the 1970s Fini – by her own admission – had largely fallen out of

contemporary debates about the status of avant-garde art and had little bearing

on debates about the politics of feminism".[38] Gauthier built on her previous

work asserting that surrealism's true transgressive potentials lay in its use of

sexuality as a destabilising political tool, and Fini's imagery that blended the

human with the monstrous demonstrated a darkly subversive approach to

sexuality:

> Les règnes animal, végétal, minéral et humain s'imbriquent, s'accolent,
>
> sans jamais se confondre, fusionner dans un temps mort, mais en se

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[35] Ibid. p. 14

[36] Peggy Guggenheim, *Art of This Century*, 1946

[37] Rachael Grew, "Leonor Fini and Dressing UP: An Act of Creativity" in *Women's Art Journal*, 40.1, 2019, p.19

[38] Jonathan P. Eburne, "Leonor Fini's Abhuman Family", in *Surrealist Women's Writing: A Critical Exploration*, ed. by Anna Watz, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p.181

heurtant toujours. Ce mélange n'est pas réconciliation béate, mais

tension.[39]

Fini's work was later included in Ann Sutherland Harris's *Women Artists 1550-1950* in 1976, and Nancy G. Heller's *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* in 1987, alongside other key figures such as Carrington, Kahlo, Tanning and Sage. Sutherland remarks upon the way in which "the sphinx—half-woman, hall-lion or sometimes half-woman, half-root—appears most often in her work of the 1940s but continues to inhabit the later paintings as well. This being who poses the riddle of life has Fini's own face united with the beast/root/bone forces of the unconscious"[40], a sentiment echoed by Coleville who notes that "Her sphinxes ominously guard the limits between masculine and feminine, human and animal, the world and the underworld".[41] Fini's overt interaction with mythological imagery as a tool to trouble the boundaries she so vehemently rejected in her artistic career, frequently depicting androgynous-looking men overpowered next to fierce sphinxes or harpies, is like Cahun considered part of a fascination with masks and costume. Andrea Kollnitz, in *The Self as an Artwork: Performative Self-representation in the Life and Work of Leonor Fini,* remarks upon Fini's affinity for surreal costuming during her attendance at events for the artistic upper-echelons, stating

The personas Fini embodied at masked balls were not only animal-like

creatures such as lions and owls, but also powerful female mythological

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[39] Xaviere Gauthier, quoted in "Leonor Fini's Abhuman Family", translation by Jonathan P. Eburne
[40] Sutherland-Harris, p.330.
[41] Coleville, p.16

characters such as Persephone, Goddess of the Underworld, at the Bal des Rois et des Reines in Paris 1949 or the more or less androgynous character of Pierrot at the Bal de la Lune sur Mer in Paris in 1951.[42]

Kollnitz's work provides meaningful insights into how Fini physical fashioned her body in order to adopt the authority and liberation of both myth and animal hybridism, likening it to the Deleuzoguattarian notion that "'becoming animal' leads to a 'nomadic mode of existence' where one is 'inaccessible to any form of definition' achieving the freedom of 'non-identity'".[43] Johnathan P. Eburne, in *Leonor Fini's Abhuman Family*, details how such nomadic modes of existence form

> an abhuman practice and discourse of queer kinship and multi-species world-making that both anticipates and, to a certain extent, also challenges the political exigency of establishing new conditions of possibility for non-normative sexuality and counter-hegemonic love.

This work, drawing directly from Gauthiere's close analysis of Fini's work while also making similar observations as Coleville, marking the mythological nature of the sphinxes as a way for the artist to "demarcate the conceptual as well as spatial and temporal contours of the familial universe to which Fini's written and painted work beckon"[44], goes further and begins to situate Fini's work within the realm of the posthuman, drawing on Braidotti as a critical lens through which to view Fini's hybridities.

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[42] Andrea Kollnitz, *The Self as an Artwork: Performative Self-representation in the Life and Work of Leonor Fini*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p.132

[43] Ibid. p.128

[44] Eburne, p.194

It is precisely this scholarship that I aim to build on in my second chapter, and expand upon to suggest these themes of "the ecological imbrication of human and non-human, animate and inanimate, with polymorphous desire as well as fear, cruelty as well as kindness, intimacy as well as despair and disgust"[45] were found in her female contemporaries' work as well. Expanding upon Eburne's scholarship to explore more precisely the importance of mythology in women surrealists' proto-posthumanism addresses a particular mechanic of their self-creation, and in situating it amidst a nomadological critique more clearly brings attention to the fluid, creative potentials of adopting New Materialistic lenses within the field of women's surrealism. Fini's own existence on the boundaries of the surrealist community, refusing to be strictly categorised within it and instead embracing "non-identity", also allows us to expand our perspective on women's surrealism and explore how it operated outside of simply an auxiliary part of the more male-dominated movement as set out by Breton.

A close friend of Fini's, and similarly concerned with defying societal norms throughout her life is Leonora Carrington. Carrington exists perhaps on the other end of the publicity spectrum to artists like Cahun and Penrose: she occupied a central space within the surrealist movement during her lifetime, and continued to be widely popular and productive until her death in 2011. She was one of the few to be acknowledged by her male counterparts as well:

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[45] Ibid, p.204

One of the very few women artists Breton wrote about was Carrington, a story by whom he included in his Anthology of Black Humour . Even as he writes about her in glowing terms, she is idealised and identified as Michelet's witch: possessed of the 'womanly gifts' of 'illuminism of lucid madness' and 'the sublime power of solitary conception', and furthermore young and beautiful too – a quality he could not care less about with respect to male artists.[46]

Despite her renown, this did not save her from the objectification and exoticisation many women surrealists faced. She had met prominent surrealist Max Ernst while still a 20 year old student at art school in London, following a turbulent upbringing and education in England and Italy that saw her expelled from a half-dozen schools, and led to "the development of her personal belief system and, ultimately, her unique and peculiar brand of feminism".[47] The first book written in English to e her biographically and artistically, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* by Susan L. Aberth, remarks also that this upbringing and influence from her family led to a long-lasting interest in fairytale and myth. Carrington herself declared

My love for the soil, nature, the gods was given to me by my mother's mother who was Irish from Westmeath, where there is a myth about men

[46] Tessel Bauduin, *The occultation of Surrealism: a study of the relationship between Bretonian*

Surrealism and western esotericism, (unpublished thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2012)

[47] Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2010), p.14

who lived underground inside the mountains, called the 'little people'

who belong to the race of the 'Sidhe.' My grandmother used to tell me we

were descendants of that ancient race that magically started to live

underground when their land was taken by invaders with different

political and religious ideas. They preferred to retire underground where

they are dedicated to magic and alchemy, knowing how to change gold.

The stories my grandmother told me were fixed in my mind and they

gave me mental pictures that | would later sketch on paper.[48]

After her exposure to surrealist principles via Ernst, with whom she was

romantically involved in the late 1930's, Carrington produced work that is

characterised by its personal mythologies— recurring motifs of horses are

noted, as well as an increasing presence of hybridised mythological creatures

as her career developed. These are well remarked upon in contemporary

scholarship, with increasing recognition of the mythological influences behind

her symbologies: Coleville recognises that "most of these [surrealist] women's

animal imagery comes from dreams or from various myths they chose to refer

to"[49], and Joanna Moorhead's *Surreal Spaces: The Life and Art of Leonora*

Carrington describes the formative effect "legends about Irish saints like Saint

Brigid and Saint Patrick; legends of birds and horses, deer and eagles; legends

of war, and others that centred on inexplicable happenings and events"[50] had

on her work. This personal dictionary of mythological images was

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[48] Ibid. p.12
[49] Coleville, p.12
[50] Joanna Moorhead, *Surreal Spaces: The Life and Art of Leonora Carrington,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), p.28

fundamentally *inventive*; Carrington invented new ways to interact with surrealist principles that allowed for the expression of these personal mythologies to centre women's experiences and sexuality in her work. Watz suggests that Carrington's written works "anticipate aspects of second-wave feminism's critique not merely of surrealism but of patriarchal society generally[51], and I wish to build upon this to illuminate how her visual art does so too, through the use of mythology as a tool to destabilise the objectification of women's bodies.

Carrington certainly became more active among women's rights circles in her later life; central to this political development was her flight to Mexico as World War Two swept across Europe, where she would join other surrealists such as Remedios Varo. Whitney Chadwick, in *Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness* remarks that "significant for the history of feminist consciousness were the artistic results of the close emotional and spiritual relationship that developed between Carrington and Varo, which propelled their work into a maturity distinguished by powerful and unique sensibilities newly independent of earlier influences by other Surrealist painters".[52] The development of Carrington's artistic practice brought about by the centring of women artists' experience, as well as operating independently of the male-dominated surrealist movement, provide further evidence for the inventive nature of her work, and forms a major reason for her inclusion in this thesis.

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[51] Watz, p.47

[52] Whitney Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness" in *Woman's Art Journal*, 7:1 (1986), pp.37-42 (p.40)

Investigating how Carrington's artistically distinct visual languages and relations to mythology helped her to assert such independence will provide significant insights into the role mythology plays in the formation of women surrealists' identities more broadly.

The importance of fringe figures in women's surrealism cannot be overstated, and it is partially for this reason Valentine Penrose becomes so prominent in this thesis; she is continuously influential and well-connected, working with the likes of Max Ernst and Pablo Picasso[53], while remaining even less critically recognised than Cahun, with the first English language volume dedicated solely to her as an artist still forthcoming[54]. She held a troubled place within the movement, as most women did, but specifically felt a keen political distaste for much of the movement's misogyny, Chadwick writing that "she disdained the limitations of a surrealist vision that, while assigning woman and the feminine a powerful role in the (male) imagination, failed to overcome the dependent position of women in Western culture".[55] She is also one of the earliest women involved in the surrealist movement, participating from the late 1920s onward. Somewhat erratically, we see a translation of large swathes of her poetry by Roy Edwards published in 1977, to little fanfare. These translations are groundbreaking in their way for simply being the first to introduce Penrose's poetry to an English audience, however the somewhat

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[53] Karen Humphreys, "Collages Communicants: Visual Representation in the Collage-Albums of Max Ernst and Valentine Penrose" in *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 10:4 (2006), pp.377-387

[54] Valentine Penrose: Landscapes of the Feminist-Surrealist Odyssey, ed. By Felicity Gee (forthcoming).

[55] Whitney Chadwick, *The Militant Muse; Love, War and the Women of Surrealism,* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017)

stuffy language and neglect of some important linguistic context in the work's references to myth leave it somewhat inadequate.

Indeed, there was little critical analysis conducted on Penrose's work until Renee Riese Hubert's *Gender, Genre and Partnership: A Study of Valentine Penrose* published in 1990. Hubert's work examines Penrose's artistic productions through the lens of her relationship with her husband, Roland Penrose, but includes critique of her collage and poetry on its own merits too. She notes that "spatial metaphors constantly orient and disorient the reader as their movements encompass sky and earth [...] Not only does the poet suggest a world of constant change, but a universe in which transgressions bring forth new contacts between the everyday and the mythological, between humanity and nature".[56]

This early recognition of the mythological nature in Penrose's work is reflected in the crucial scholarship of Coleville as well, who notes that Penrose "opens doors with a "jouissance plurielle", pre-figuring "écriture feminine", onto intertextual worlds of myths, legends, fairy tales and other literary or historical sources"[57] in her 1996 examination of another one of Penrose's relationships, this time with Alice Paalen. Paalen was indeed an important touchstone in Penrose's career: after marrying and subsequently divorcing Roland Penrose, they travelled India together, and Penrose soon began including erotic imagery in her work that can be "read as a celebration of

lesbian love".[58] Coleville continues to be the most eminent scholar on Penrose, collating and publishing the first comprehensive anthology of her work in *Ecrits d'une femme surrealiste,* which is accompanied by a foreword by Roland Penrose's son Antony Penrose. "A moi," he writes, "Valentine était une sorcière".[59] Penrose's affinity for witchcraft, alchemy, and mythology are all well reported, however where I wish to build upon this scholarship is to go beyond simple recognition, and connection with her upbringing to diagnose the likely source of this influence, but to provide critical insight into function mythology serves in Penrose's work, which I believe to be far more fundamental than previously recognised. Hubert refers to two figures in *Dons des féminins* merely as "hybrid bird-figures"[60], whereas consideration of Penrose's preoccupation with both myth and Indian esotericism leads to a fruitful interpretation of these figures as Kinnara, figures of eternal yet sterile love. The oversight regarding much of Penrose's literary and historical references, and an underappreciation for the role such temporal disorientations play in her work, calls for a timely intervention in order to firmly situate Penrose's artistic and literary productions as operating uniquely underneath the umbrella of surrealism, and moving beyond it, as many of her female counterparts did.

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[58] Ibid, p.37

[59] Roland Penrose, "Preface", in *Ecrits d'une femme surrealiste*, ed. by Georgiana Coleville (Paris, Mango Littérature: 2001), p.7

[60]Hubert, p.132

Myth and a Nascent Community

Establishing the existence and proliferation of a community of women artists aligned in some way with surrealist principles, creates the foundation for further study of the extent to which this community operated in a way that could be considered unique. Orenstein asserts early on that these artists were concerned with the definition of their own subjectivity, and the tensions between that subjectivity and the objectification they faced from their male peers. They "have long been involved in a search for their own nature and have been probing the symbolism related to the Feminine Archetype in order to postulate the attributes of their emerging identity".[61] While Orenstein identifies key symbolic archetypes within the works of women surrealists as that of the Goddess, Great Mother, Alchemist, Scientist, Spinner, Weaver, Creator, Spiritual Guide and Visionary, these represent a preliminary investigation. They echo both the bioessentialism characteristic of 1970s feminist literature, foregrounding rhetoric equating creation with maternity and the womb, as well as the exoticisation of female experience that was so key to how women were treated by the surrealist movement at large. While the presence of a nascent mythology in women's surrealism is identified, most of this initial work is taken up with just that: identification. Further research as to the specificities of women's surrealism, and what set it apart from the centralised movement, would come in later years.

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[61] Orenstein, p.34

Whitney Chadwick, whose extensive body of research is core to the field, published *Women Artists and The Surrealist Movement* in 1985. More so than simply the identification of women artists who participated in surrealism, and an assessment of just how "surreal" their works might be considered to be, Chadwick goes to great lengths to examine the symbolic language of women's surrealism, and how we might find common motifs and concerns throughout the corpus. Biographical content is still present, but is lightly interspersed among much more close analysis of the actual content of the work. This work represents several developments in the study of women surrealists: firstly the rebalancing of the relationship between the artists themselves and the work they produced. While biographical information need not be discarded entirely, shifting the focus of the study away from the women themselves and allowing their work to speak for itself was a departure from approaches of the past. Furthermore, in allowing this work to come to the forefront of the work, it is more easily recognised that women's surrealism participated in surrealism in unique ways, specifically in how they utilised symbolism to express the formation of their artistic identities. While this is also acknowledged in Orenstein's work, *Women Artists and The Surrealist Movement* becomes the first major publication on the topic, and building on Orenstein's work provides close readings of many surrealist works from women artists. Notably, a chapter entitled *The Hermetic Tradition* claims that

Myth, magic, and the occult joined together in shaping the Surrealist image of woman as the repository of hermetic knowledge [...] because

they believed in fairy tales, legends, and the magical properties of artistic creation, and because they followed the threads of that creation deep into their own dreams and unconsciousness, and derived specific and potent images from stories that, whether theosophical legendary, or alchemical, confirmed these inner searches, they forged the first links in the chain that has more recently been used to reconnect contemporary feminist consciousness with its historical and legendary sources.[62]

Undertaking an examination of these mythical influences, the inclusions of Greco-Roman monsters or European fairy tales in the works of women surrealists, develops the close readings undertaken by Chadwick in the volume. The mythologies of male surrealism, in particular Gradiva, are also explored by Chadwick, but it is through her exploration of artists such as Carrington and Penrose's relationship to fantastical narratives that seems most striking. Discussing Carrington's *Self-Portrait*, she recognises that "the source of Carrington's magical white horse lies not in Freud's use of the horse as a symbol of male power but in the Celtic legends that nourished her childhood and that she first heard from her Irish mother[63]". Women surrealists used a language of symbolism that differed greatly from their male counterparts; they used mythologies, so present in the surrealist philosophy and system of values, differently.

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[62] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and The Surrealist Movement*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p.186-187
[63] Ibid. p.79

Penrose, too, is remarked upon for the extent to which her work contrasts with Ernst's, an artist with whom she worked closely. Chadwick asserts that

> The use of female figures in each of her collages provides a sense of continuity missing from Ernst's more violently disruptive and psychologically loaded vision, and it establishes a narrative flow that implies a story telling content despite the fact that the reader is left without the logical links between one scene and the next that have traditionally established plot. In *Dons des Féminines* , an implied narrative built out of freely associated images replaces the Freudian model of erotic disjunction[64]

Women surrealists told their own stories: they created mythologies that parted ways with the prevailing surrealist preoccupations with Freudian psychoanalysis, and these myths were inextricably tied to their perception of the self, and the construction of their artistic identity. If we consider the uniqueness of their relationship to surrealist myth-making, and the reflection this may have on their unique artistic practices under the umbrella of Surrealism, the need for a distinctly separate mode of critique for women's surrealism begins to surface.

 If, building from Orenstein, women's surrealism is primarily concerned with the expression of Woman as Subject, explored through the lens of unique symbolic languages of mythology and a departure from psychoanalytic

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[64] Ibid. p.227

discourse, these should underpin the critique used to engage with the work they produced. *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, while providing groundbreaking insight into works that demonstrate women surrealists' engagement with their own identities, much of the volume is still devoted to mapping how these women operated in conjunction or in opposition to male artists. This is not necessarily a criticism; in fact, it is arguably necessary in the early stages of a field of study for scholarship to centre the boundaries and tensions that separate it from other areas, and thus the relationship between women surrealists and their male counterparts take centre stage. The downside of this, alongside the possible impression that women's work remains auxiliary to the men's in critique as well as the movement itself, is that the same theoretical tools that are used to interpret the works of Dali, Breton, or Ernst, are carried over to the investigation of women's work.

Katherine Conley's *Automatic woman : the representation of woman in surrealism* explores the presentation of women by male surrealist artists, including their frequent mythologisation through images of the Sphinx, Melusine, and Christian images of the Virgin Mary. It does much to explain the ways in which Freudian psychoanalysis as well as the conflicting values of male surrealists inform their seemingly contradictory views of women. There is certainly an argument for parity here— women surrealists were finally receiving the recognition that had previously been denied to them, and similar critical stances being taken certainly makes gestures towards equality. However, the study of women's surrealism has demonstrated its ability to move

beyond relying on comparison with male artists, and indeed can allow the works of women surrealists to be critiqued not as auxiliary to a canonical, "male surrealism", but rather establishing their own claim on the legacy and future of surrealism more fully.

Indeed, Chadwick's later volume *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation* centres the subjective experiences of women surrealists and uses them to guide an exploration of how the surrealist self conflicts with feminist and queer paradigms. Written in conjunction with the titular exhibition that toured three cities in the United States, it asks

> How is the art of [women and male modernists] distinguished by a subjective experience that is consciously female? What precedents for imaging female subjectivity does Surrealism offer contemporary women? What do contemporary practices involving the use of the human figure owe to the earlier women Surrealists? To male Surrealists? What is the relationship between the self-image and self-knowledge? What are the visual and textual sources for elaborations of fluid and unfixed gender and sexuality?[65]

Prioritising not only how the figures of women surrealists may be seen by others, but how they are experienced in the first person, is a crucial step towards formulating critiques that align with the ideals and values of women's surrealism. *Mirror Images* confronts how images of the body, images of the self,

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[65] Whitney Chadwick, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), p.ix

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are "fluid and unfixed" in their presentations partially as they describe the disjointed and othered experiences of the artists themselves. This, too, is a disorientation; the crisis of the self in women's surrealism stems from the hostile nature of phallocentric, heteronormative conventions that were often directly in opposition to the experiences of women surrealist's themselves. To be able to bring considerations of queerness and more contemporary conceptions of feminism into the discussion allows for a more complex discussion, primarily, of *difference*.

We begin the study of women's surrealism with the assertion that they were, in some ways, different from their male peers. They were not treated in the same way, they used different techniques and different motifs, they viewed themselves as sperate from the community created by Breton. They were aligned differently, along different axes of expression and action. Their experiences of difference were inextricably linked to the ways in which difference was portrayed in their work; Chadwick's passage *Self as Masquerade/Self as Absence* grapples with the ways in which women surrealists felt the contingencies of their own identities, the roles they were expected to fill shaped by male-dominated social conventions and found to be ill-fitting.

How can the autonomy of a woman artist be reconciled with the position they held, when "constituted as Other, as object, in Western representation, the woman who speaks must either assume a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulation) or set about unmasking the opposition within which she is

positioned[66]"?. Indeed, the act of unmasking may be seen as a crucial concept for Chadwick's conception of women surrealists/ modus operandi- "masking, masquerade, and performance have all proved crucial for the production of feminine subjectivity through active agency".[67] That there is a veneer to be looked beyond, an aberration to be discovered, or in other ways the existence of a truth hidden behind falsities in the work of women surrealists (indeed, artists across disciplines and gender) is always presumed. This assumption seems to echo the psychoanalytical frameworks that so interested the surrealist movement. Natalya Lusty's *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* continues to examine the interplay between Surrealism's queer feminist potentialities and their conflict with psychoanalytical discourse: Discussing Cahun, she questions

> how do we read these portraits without losing the force of their transgression? What constitutes a sense of disturbance in these portraits is their astute knowingness of the trajectory of theories of the modern subject in relation to technologies of representation. The assorted display of stylistic identities developed in the self-portraits, indeed the continual metamorphosis of the self through the photographic image, illustrates Sedgwick's axiom that "People are different from each other" (1990: 22). [...] In Cahun's work the mask illustrates this aspect of internal difference by revealing the contradictions that inform the changing temporal, spatial and psychic structures of individual subjectivity.[68]

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[66] Ibid. p.26
[67] Ibid. p.22
[68] Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.83

While the concept of masquerade may lend itself to facilitating discussions of queer identity concern multiplicity, disorientation and performativity, it may also be seen to pathologise it: the mask, after all, is an indicator of deceit, of separation between the "true" self and what is being portrayed. They indicate the boundaries of an identity that is inherently separated from the world around it; a mask is something that must, ultimately, be taken off, and the true nature of what is underneath revealed. Lusty continues

> Since the contingencies of knowing the self are fraught with the risk of misrecognition, the unconscious undermining of everyday consciousness and aims, the mask, as an internal and external mechanism, both marks the inevitability of classification as a socially constitutive endeavor as well as the impossibility of its coherence for self-knowledge. But here the materiality of the mask is inseparable from its "carnal" and "verbal" variants in a way that underscores the subject as the necessary product of a symbolic, psychic and bourgeois social economy.[69]

If the mask reveals contingency, it is by nature disorienting, juxtaposing the self with the other in a way that highlights the mutual unintelligibility of both. By bringing them together, Lusty suggests that women surrealists troubled this boundary, highlighting the conflict between the Subject and Object in ways that questioned the nature of selfhood. However, this analysis draws upon foundational assumptions put forward by psychoanalytic theory: namely, that there is a distinction between the Self and the Other at all, and that of these

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[69] Ibid. p.85

two the Self is a superior position, the othered object being cast out of a paradigm that denigrates difference. The mask, then, is not just the literal mask worn in many surrealist artworks, and not just the distortion of physical appearance that might mask the true form: we might consider the "mask" put forward by this scholarship is the art itself. Lusty says of Cahun

> The dialectic of self and other, authenticity and copy produced in these images with Cahun's experimentation with masculine and feminine costume, both before and away from the camera. As such the self-portraits read like a kind of visual diary, a collection of moods, erotic styles, favorite costumes, masks and identities[70]

As a site of performance, self-expression, and boundary between the subject/creator and object/created, psychoanalytical approaches may consider the visual art and writings of women surrealists to fall under the category of mask. The "impossibility of its coherence for self-knowledge" is an ultimately pessimistic view of the potential for an artistic identity that unites artistic agency with the freedom of queer fluidities. It highlights disorientation without the possibility of a reorientation that might allow queer bodies to extend themselves readily into the world.

How useful, then, is this category? To consider the existence of a strict boundary, even in the context of the ways in which it is troubled, poses difficulties for a critique of women surrealists that emancipates them from phallogocentric approaches. A more useful method through which to assess the

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[70] Ibid. p.90

works of these artists may be one that does away with such a dialectic, and instead more fully embraces the fluid nature of identity in a way that cuts across these boundaries altogether. Over the course of this thesis, I will more fully explore the ways in which psychoanalytical paradigms limit the radical potentialities of women's surrealism through hampering the perspectives that they may be viewed through, and attempt to chart a course towards modes of critique as "The concept of crisis must therefore assert itself as a moment of renegotiation, one in which the production of dissonant mechanisms and strategies extends our concept of the feminist subject in its theoretical and political contexts".[71]

Summary of Chapters

The first chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to observing these "dissonant mechanisms". By examining the use of myth-making as a community-forming activity, and discussing its inclusion in the works of Valentine Penrose, Leonora Carrington and Claude Cahun, I will demonstrate that the prevalence of mythological imagery in women's surrealism can be seen as a direct response to the sensation of disorientation created by marginalization from the mainstream surrealist movement. This chapter in will suggest that the disconnect between the lived experiences of women surrealists and their portrayal as fantastical muses in much of surrealist art posed a moment of crisis for their artistic identities, and the artistic productions they created functioned as a remedy to this crisis. Prioritising a queer

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[71] Ibid. p.157

phenomenological critique, I will argue that through the repeated action of engaging with mythological narratives, and subverting them to explore their queer feminist potentials, Penrose and Cahun worked to assert their own subjectivities in the face of objectification. Objectification itself, both paralysing and disorienting, is discussed in the context Jean-Luc Nancy's inoperative community, and the recognition of myth as a site of self-fictioning for the expression of subjectivity. Indeed, the rigid boundaries between object and subject may be understood as antithetical to critiques that wish to embrace the fluid nature of identity as it is expressed in the works of women artists associated with surrealism.

Following this interrogation of the validity of subject/object distinctions, the second chapter of this thesis attempts to embrace the more fluid paradigms of New Materialist thought. This change in theoretical machinery is undertaken through engaging with the concept of monstrosity— creatures of abjection, bodies that threaten boundaries between human and animal, life and death, cleanliness and filth. Coleville writes of surrealist artists that

> the strange creatures invented by surrealist men were usually results of
> automatic techniques, such as frottage (Ernst), fumage (Paalen), abstract
> tachisme (Miro) or Freudian jokes (Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia),
> whereas the women tended towards an inner identification with bestial

metamorphoses, often inspired by myths or deities such as the Celtic

White Goddess or the Mayan Coatlicue, who could change shapes at will[72]

Using the transgressive nature of monsters in order to explore how

mythological creatures such as the minotaur and the harpy may represent a

fluidity in the identities of women surrealists, I will argue that in order to more

fully contribute to a critique in which women surrealists' work can be

examined outside of its relationship to male-dominated surrealist philosophies,

and indeed from phallocentric or heteronormative paradigms more widely,

scholarship should too exhibit this fluidity across arbitrary boundaries. This is

mostly exhibited through the nomadic qualities of this chapter; being able to

transition from one school of thought to another allows for reparative motions

to take precedence. Eve Kosofsky-Sedgewick's *Paranoid Reading, Reparative*

Reading influences this chapter's attempts to shift the paradigm through which

the works of artists such as Leonora Carrington and Lenor Fini are viewed. In

particular, the bringing together of historical women's surrealism with

contemporary New Materialist theory as a disruption of rigid temporal

boundaries often enforced by more paranoid academic conventions. Sedgewick

writes that "To recognize in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to

temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise,

is also to glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities".[73] Instead, this chapter

begins to welcome the idea of surprise, which Nancy also posits as foundational

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[72] Coleville, in *Angels of Anarchy*, p.65
[73] Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You"*,* in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. by Michele Aina Barale et al. (Cambridge: Duke University Press, 2003) *pp.123-151* (p.124)

to the artistic process, and a further demonstration of how permeated the self is by the other. He writes "the schema of man is the monstration of this marvel: self outside of self, the outside standing for self, and he being surprised in face of self. Painting paints this surprise. This surprise is painting[74]".

Surprise as an eruption/disruption within the self, an interruption encouraging further interruptions in the form of artistic production, encourages in turn surprise and artistry in the production of research in response to art. Surprise acts as a disorientation, a recognition of multiplicity and fluidity that when adopted into a nomadic approach to research reassesses the relationship between the researcher and object of research; the "lineaments of other possibilities" inspire more nomadic approaches to theory that place women artists' identities at the forefront of research.

This approach is particularly fitting when considering women artists associated with surrealism: Katharine Conley notes that "in part because of her fundamental otherness, woman best embodies the modern notion of surprise so important to André Breton and the other surrealists".[75]By prioritising the inclusion of scholarship that might shed greater light upon the individual qualities of women surrealists' work, rather than a loyalty to a particular theoretical standpoint, this chapter aims to explore the manifold potentials the corpus contains, as well as recognising their singularity of being outside of monolithic definitions of artistic community. This includes analysis based on

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[74] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p.69
[75] Katharine Conley, *Automatic woman : the representation of woman in surrealism,* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p.69

Rosi Braidotti's concept of the posthuman, and how this deconstruction of subjectivity might help us to mobilise critique of women artists associated with surrealism.

Exploring how this may be carried out in real terms, the third chapter of this thesis illustrates how autotheoretical frameworks might facilitate better understanding of women surrealists' work, drawing from Braidotti's framework for a posthuman critique. Through the observation of how women surrealists themselves participated in discourse surrounding their identity, an act of autofictionning that Nancy observes in myth, and that autotheoretical ideas might allow greater insight into this process. This chapter sets out to prove that such assertions of artistic identity, that did not shy away from the autobiographical and instead used it to process the disorienting experiences of marginalisation, connects with one of the first viewpoints on women's surrealism put forward by Orenstein:

> By delving into the female psyche to unlock the symbols that the unconscious reveals, she has shown that individual autonomy can enhance a woman's ability to come into contact with the sources of her creativity in the ongoing process of spiritual and creative development[76]

However, rather than a "delving", a phrasing that suggests intrusion and manipulation in order to uncover something that has been withheld from the observer, or an "unlocking" that implies forcible entry, we might consider that such individual autonomy is rather witnessed, experienced firsthand as a force

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[76] Orenstein, p.36

that brings the researcher into contact with women surrealists' work. Through a critique that centres the sovereignty of women artist's identity and subjectivity, allowing the personal and the academic to comingle in the study of their works and thus reimagine readings of texts that might otherwise be seen as diagnostic or paranoid in approach, scholarship surrounding women surrealists may begin to operate in the same way that the community itself did: fluidly, transgressively, and shifting ever forwards as part of an "ongoing process of spiritual and creative development".

Indeed, it is the ongoing possibility of this field that comes to the forefront in the conclusion of this thesis. If a critical approach to women surrealists wishes to reflect their boundary-troubling work, and allow itself to change and grow in response to situational circumstances— the nomadic approach taken over the course of preceding chapters serves to illustrate the usefulness of a mutable style. Such mutability carries within itself the possibility of future change, in such a way that recognises the ever-unfolding potentials of the works themselves. Surrealism, as previously stated, is far from over. Penelope Rosemont rightly remarks that

> This favoring of the past over the present is part of the modus operandi of the disciplines which thus far have taken surrealism as a field of study. It is no secret that art criticism, art history, and museum curatorship have generally been bastions of social conservatism. Those whose job it is to preserve and protect the traditions of the status quo prefer to look on surrealism as a dead cultural artifact. Living surrealism

remains an embarrassing problem, an irritating nuisance that they prefer to ignore.[77]

We may refuse to favour the past over the present when studying women's surrealism both when considering whether to historicise critical approaches to works, allowing contemporary schools of thought to bring out new possibilities in surrealist works, but also in opening new avenues of enquiry for future research. To frame the study of women's surrealism as an ongoing process of development, recognising the living, vivid nature of its legacy, builds on the quasi-narrative built throughout the body of the research undertaken here. The nature of the process of reorientation, the metaphor that conjures a physical journey from one position to another, necessitates movement: we do not finish in the same place we have started. This new position, wherein academic approaches become oriented more fully around the methods and identities of women surrealists, allow these methods and identities to extend out into the world— new possibilities present themselves, and multiple paths forward open up. By signposting potential new critical approaches to women's surrealism— new poetics that may be employed, new angles that may be examined— this thesis will conclude ultimately with the acceptance of its own fallibility, its own potential to be surprised.

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[77] Rosemont, p.384

The Importance of Narrative

How best, then, to practically apply this prioritisation of movement, agility, transience, alongside an open transparency with regards to subjectivity and fallibility? To replicate the sense of progressive change and creation found in the works of women surrealists, a long-form piece of work dedicated to them may choose to utilise autotheoretical gestures and nomadic critical practices to create a quasi-narrative: centring the experiential qualities of study, allowing the researcher to relay their own discursive journey through the act of research. To employ a narrative turn in the study of women surrealists orients the work within a particular temporal and spatial framework, moving away from the omnipresent tendencies of paranoid readings and instead emphasising the subjectivity and identity of the researcher and artist:

> Personal identity rests upon a self-image that is physical, emotional, mental as well as practical, and this self-image is internally reflected and externally communicated in the narrative process. [...] Narrative forms, with their inherent structures of temporality and meaning, indeed appear to lend themselves particularly well to questions concerning one's own (individual) identity: it is possible in a story for one to change, develop, and integrate sudden changes (peripeteia) while somehow remaining "the same".[78]

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[78] Norbert Meuter, "Narration in Various Disciplines", in *Handbook of Narratology,* ed. by Peter Huhn et al., (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), p.243

Meuter asserts here that narrative is, essentially, in a constant state of self-confession: when we construct a narrative, we are shaping not only our view of the subject matter, but also delineating our own identity in relation to it. Narrative is a structuring, cartographical in its situating of various actors against a background in a process that orients both story-teller and story. The women associated with surrealism were themselves often concerned with the creation of narrative: Chadwick describes how

> In general, the works of women associated with the Surrealists display an affinity for the structures of fabulist nar-rative rather than shocking rupture, a self-consciousness about social constructions of femininity as surface and image, a tendency toward the phantasmic and oneiric, a preoccupation with psychic powers assigned to the feminine, and an embrace of doubling, masking, and/or masquerade as defenses against fears of non-identity.[79]

Narrative is its own orientation, the creation of frameworks and rules by which we can understand information that would otherwise remain inaccessible, disconnected from us. The bringing together of , or reparative approach to, information allows for us to form "cartographical" images of that which we are trying to understand. Like Sarah Ahmed's queer phenomenology, this takes place in a very material, spatial realm; progression is indicated by the movement from one place to another, and the observation of what is observed in the journey between those two places. To instil a process of

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[79] Chadwick, *Mirrors*, p.6

orientation within our methods of critique, particularly when dealing with subject material that is founded in the exploration of self-image, using a narratological structure not only encourages a sense of metamorphosis that mimics the fluidity of identity, but also allows the work to move agilely between schools of thought in a comprehensible manner. In order to convey this metamorphic critique narratologically, it is worth exploring how we may conceptualise two major ways of spatialising information, and the experiential qualities of both. Marie-Laure Ryan writes that

> On the macro-level, spatial information can be organized according to two basic strategies: the map and the tour (Linde & Labov 1975), also known as the survey and the route. [80]

To compare the methodology of critique to this "survey/route" binary, we might draw parallels firstly between paranoid modes with the strategy of the map— "In the map strategy, space is represented panoramically from a perspective ranging from the disembodied god's eye point of view of pure vertical projection to the panoramic view of an observer situated on an elevated point".[81] The creation of a map positions the observer in an omniscient, third person perspective able to view the collected information simultaneously as part of a singular static image. The map situates the observer in a position of power: it is authoritative, bending a three dimensional, living environment into a consumable document that draws boundaries and

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[80] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Space", in *Handbook of Narratology,* ed. by Peter Huhn et al., (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), p.427
[81] Ibid.

relationships along strict lines. There is an paranoia here—an adversarial

relationship with the landscape and the resulting attempt to yoke it to paper. In

contrast, "the tour simulates the embodied experience of a traveler"[82], and

gives a subjective perspective onto the subject matter grounded in the spatiality

and temporality of the observer's environs. The traveller bends to the contours

of the environment, rather than vice-versa as the cartographer does. Moving

forward with Braidotti's call for "cartographical accuracy" as a prerequisite for

posthuman critique, I suggest that such cartographical accuracy can be

portrayed as the researcher-traveller moves through a field of study with

evident chronological or physical progression, discovering new things, and

allowing for the uncertainty that lies beyond one's immediate perspective. It is

a process of orientation within an environment that does not lay claim to

finishing that process, and acts more as exploration of the boundaries between

the text and the reader, the art and the observer.

The tour, then, becomes an interesting metaphor for the process of

research, and the presentation of the "final product", the telling of this

research. Incorporating narrative structures that situate the researcher within

the environment of the research, and "simulate the embodied experience" of it,

allows for an approach that "may serve to reformulate the scientific and

rational nature specific to the humanities".[83] The presence of the researcher

within the research, their voice moving away from impartial objectivity

through narrative exploring the innate subjectivities in research, also serves to

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Meuter, p.243

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orient the reader; it allows them momentarily to commune in turn with the researcher as they trace their steps through a particular subject:

> This being the case, narratives have not only an informative function, but also a presentational one. The analyst must thus take note not just of what is told but also how it is told, taking into account both the content and the style of narrative self-presentation and its performative or theatrical manifestations (Lorenzer [1973] 1995, [1979] 1997), since this is precisely the area where the patient's unconscious identity and personality traits are articulated.[84]

Following Lorenzer's argument, a narrative turn in research practices is particularly relevant in the field of surrealism, wherein the unconscious is so important to our understanding of artistic output. In plotting a route through surrealism, rather than attempting to create a static map of it, there is perhaps the possibility of harmony being achieved between the unconscious practices of surrealist art and the unconscious expressions of the researcher's narration. Equally, to return to the matter of orientation, we may describe surrealism as being a fundamentally disorienting space; the disruptions between images, words, and their meanings alongside the deliberate construction of alternative social norms are all intended to disorient the observer and throw up the world into new configurations, new possibilities.

Particularly for artists like Cahun, who so often instil radical values into their work, incorporate the disorientation they faced in their own lives at the

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[84] Ibid. p.248

hands of heteropatriarchal hegemonies into the disorientations presented in their art. To attempt to map such a disorienting space would be self-defeating; the process forces the object of study to become oriented to the observer, rather than allowing an observer to orient themselves towards the space. A mapping of surrealism is to tame a wilderness that must remain wild if it is to be properly engaged with; instead, I suggest we must plan expeditions, journeys, routes through surrealism that provide a narrative account of the researcher's findings. In doing so, it may be made easier to engage with the works of women's surrealism without resorting to exclusively paranoid methods of critique, instead fostering a relationship with women's surrealist art founded in the recognition of singular beings existing together without being consumed into a monolithic community.

How does one plot a course through a disorienting space? Narrative is founded on the connection of disparate points into a cohesive whole that may be followed from one place to another— this implies conventions of spatial and temporal causality, that do not at first glance align with the disruptions presented in the work we are to study. Crafting a narrative in this way may also be seen as a paranoid gesture, the shuffling and reordering of material in order to situate it in reality, each step made comprehensible and predictable. Indeed, this leads to a necessary distinction between two major forms of narrative: the "natural" narrative and the "unnatural" narrative. Unnatural narratology seeks to define the ways in which narratives may not be be bound by mimetic structures; Aber et al. begin by explaining that "most definitions of

the term "narrative" have a clear mimetic bias and take ordinary realist texts or "natural" narratives as being prototypical manifestations of narrative". Natural narratives reproduce the conditions and aesthetics of the world we know, obeying its spatial and temporal conventions, rooting itself in the familiar and comprehensible on a fundamental level. In contrast

> Unnatural fiction is different not only from mimetic fiction but also from what I call nonmimetic or nonnatural fiction. Nonmimetic narratives include conventional fairy tales, animal fables, ghost stories, and other kinds of fiction that invoke magical or supernatural elements. Such narratives employ consistent storyworlds and obey established generic conventions or, in some cases, merely add a single supernatural component to an otherwise naturalistic world. By contrast, unnatural texts do not attempt to extend the boundaries of the mimetic, but rather play with the very conventions of mimesis.[85]

An unnatural narrative may challenge our understanding of the world, or the story-world, by operating along impossible mechanisms of time, space, or personhood. They are in many ways surreal, in that they allow the reader to follow paralogical constructions of the self:

> Firstly, in unnatural narratives, the narrator can be an impossibly eloquent child, a baby without a brain, a female breast, an animal, or a tree. In other cases, the narrator has already died or is still unborn. Further impossibilities concern the telepathic first-person narrator (see

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[85] Brian Richardson, "Unnatural Narrative Theory", in *Style*, 50:4 (2016), pp.385-405 (p.386)

Nielsen 2004, 2013; Heinze 2008); you-narratives; and we-narratives in which the 'we' comprises the minds of people who have lived over a period of one thousand years (see also Richardson 2006; Alber et al. 2012). Secondly, in unnatural narratives, characters can be half-human, half-animal or speaking corpses. Also, they may transform into other entities, or they can exist in numerous co-existing but incompatible variants (see also Iversen 2013).[86]

The ability to transplant the self into the other, to trouble the boundaries between the two and allow for the co-existence of "numerous [...] but incompatible variants" is a distinctly reparative gesture, and one that is also echoed in much of the works of women's surrealism. This troubling of boundaries, the recognition of connection, will often be referred to as "contact" within this thesis, however the notion of contact is in itself troubling. For the purposes of this thesis's argument, we will look to Nancy's discussion of beings in relation to one another, wherein their relation to each other is in fact a prerequisite for being. He recognises that

> there is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. Contact is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If "to come into contact" is to begin to make sense of one another, then this

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86 Jan Alber, "Unnatural Narrative", in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/104.html/> (16 Nov 2016) [Accessed 12 March 2024]

"coming" penetrates nothing ; there is no intermediate and mediating "milieu".[87]

When speaking of "contact" between the "self" and the "other", I do not mean to suggest that artists portray literal physical or emotional connections with the objects or beings they portray in their work. I do not mean to put forward that Leonor Fini feels herself, the artist, to be a sphinx, or that Cahun believes she, as a person, is as mirrored and fractured as the subjects of her photography. There are certainly arguments to be made for such biographical interpretations of their work, but this is not what is intended in the scope of this thesis. The "self" referred to in conjunction with the works studied here is the one *fashioned*, or *revealed*, by the artists in a process of mythic "autofictionnement".[88] That myth should be "the fashioning of a world for the subject, the becoming-world of subjectivity" creates the potential to view the subjects presented alongside myth in the works of women surrealists as interruptions of that mythic reality, produced by the co-existence of myth and the artist engaging with it. The process that occurs here suggests that "neither the community nor, consequently, the individual (the poet, the priest, or one of their listeners) invents the myth: to the contrary, it is they who are invented or who invent themselves".[89] The autofiction of the self in these works represent not only a mythic fictioning of the subject, in order to better understand it, but also a subjectivising of myth wherein the presence of a self reveals the

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[87] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) p. 5
[88] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.53
[89] Ibid., p.59

boundaries and finitude of myth. The self may be constructed through exposure

to myth, and act as an expression of potentiality, illustrating the fluidity of

identity when considered as a site of relationality.

In many ways, the use of the word "self" may be a misnomer, and equally

so the use of "other". As Nancy points out, "all forms of the "capitalized Other"

presume this alienation from the proper as their own".[90] Indeed, in this logic of

co-appearance and co-existence, there is no "self" and "other", replaced by a

mutual "we". Distinguishing between two beings is by necessity introducing an

interruption between them, but this interruption provides opportunity to

explore their closeness and their separation. It is through myth that the

troubled borders between self and other may be expressed: for Nancy

> Myth, in short, is the transcendental autofiguration of nature and of
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> humanity, or more exactly the autofiguration— or the autoimagination—
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> of nature as humanity and of humanity as nature. Mythic speech thus
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> performs the humanization of nature (and/or its divinization) and the
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> naturalization of man (and/or his divinization).[91]

This "autofiguartion" will be brought into conversation with Braidotti's

posthuman theorising that "A figuration is the expression of alternative

representations of the subject as a dynamic non-unitary entity; it is the

dramatization of processes of becoming".[92] The use of animal-human hybrids in

order to explore identity and monstrosity will be explored in later chapters, but

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[90] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.12

[91] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.54

[92] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, (Cambridge : Polity, 2013), p.164

proves fundamental to how these artists explore identity and co-existence. Leonor Fini took on the guise of a sphinx, Claude Cahun moved through the ranks of Greek antiquity to define herself, and Leonora Carrington often rejected the form of any recognisable creature entirely, instead opting for mysterious robed figures of uncertain species or origin. This thesis will explore how these examples of hybridity and monstrosity may represent a demonstration of relationality between the self and other, and the cutting across of boundaries between humanity and nature configures a fluidity of identity through mythological narrative

The comparison between postmodern narrative and ancient narrative is one remarked upon in the field of unnatural narratology. Alber writes that "postmodernist narratives hark back to conventionalized impossibilities in well-known genres; they draw on features of earlier narratives via a shared concern with the unnatural".[93] Michael Scheffer makes particular note that

> in the 'adventure-time' of Greek romance, the passage of time "is not
>
> registered in the slightest way in the age of the heroes" (90), and that
>
> since there are no 'traces' of temporal change, time remains "empty" in
>
> this pre-modern narrative even though particular episodes are
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> sometimes based on a last-minute rescue scheme[94]

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Michael Scheffer, "Time", in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/104.html/> (20 Nov 2016) [Accessed 12 March 2024]

Mythmaking through chronomontage, the blending of the "present" self with the mythic "other" may form an "adventure-time" for women working within surrealism by which their own odysseys into self-discovery and self-creation operate, the temporal disorientation giving their work both a dreamlike paralogic and a mythological function; myths themselves observe, according to Eric Gould, "the "logic" of a mythological plot: its bricolage (to use Levi-Strauss' terms), its habit of offering solutions to social compromise by taking events and patterns of experience familiar and directly available and rearranging their components into some new significance".[95] By adopting the hallmarks of myth, women surrealists make myths of their own experiences. Their narratives, still rooted in the foundations of postmodernism, set themselves apart by virtue of challenging the myths upon which they are founded, subverting and constructing their own mythologies in order to lay the axes by which their identities may orient themselves.

The mythological qualities of postmodern narrative are brought to the forefront, for example, in Valentine Penrose's *Dons des Féminines* , which through short, episodic poems details a queer love affair set against the background of a collaged landscaped rife with mythological images. The narrative is distinctly unnatural in its rejection of conventional spatial or temporal organisation, and its use of disorientation allows for the subversive creation of queer mythologies to be expressed far more richly simply by virtue of freeing itself from those conventions. Richardson argues that unnatural

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[95] Eric Gould, "Condemned to Speak Excessively: Mythic Form and James Joyce's Ulysses" in *SubStance*, 8:22 (1979), pp.67-83 (p.82)

narratives are uniquely suited for exploring post-colonial and feminist narratives, given that "we can see division, dissolution, hybridization, and the multiplication of selves and stories; we note as well the divided nature, experience, and consciousness of the oppressed that these practices express".[96] While the term "unnatural" may be weighty given the nature of the themes we use it to discuss, particularly with regards to queer identity, I argue that this term should be embraced in the same way that the word "queer" has been for academic purposes; it marks a distinct departure from the norms of a heteropatriarchal society, and conjures images of the monstrous and the divine in equal measure. Exploring the queer themes of postmodern art, particularly within women's surrealism, nods to the deliberate reclaiming of the strange, the disorienting, the abject and the bizarre within surrealism to be repurposed into queer feminist explorations.

To plot a course through the disorienting space of surrealism, then, we may perhaps turn to mythology both as a focus of study and a framework by which to conduct that study. Engaging with the mythologies of women surrealists allows us to consider how they are specifically interested in playing with the conventions of postmodern narrative, yes, but in the construction of our own narrative around their works we too may adopt the mythological "adventure-time", and refuse the mimesis of conventional critiques. This thesis makes efforts to construct its own chronomontages in the form of a reparative approach to theory, drawing connections between the works of women

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[96] Richardson, p.160

surrealists and scholars that came far after their time, placing them into dialogue and suggesting ways in which these artists could be said to have heralded much later postmodern thought, such as Braidotti and the post-human.

These concepts were not coined until decades after much of the work of women surrealists was produced, but in placing them outside of this timeline we are able to draw parallels between them, showcasing the contemporary relevance of so much the work while also acknowledging the intellectual heritage that has led to new modes of critique becoming possible. The thesis has a narrative of it's own, one that begins in the psychoanalytical traditions of Lacan and then moves onwards: it leaves these traditions behind, contradicts them, grows its argument through a tour of contemporary queer feminist theory and phenomenology. A narrative starts in one place, and finishes in another. Research itself operates in a kind of mythological adventure-time, the order in which facts are presented rarely reflecting the order in which they were discovered, or indeed written about; there is a disorientation inherent to the reading of such research, if it is to be meaningfully interacted with and understood. By moving fluidly through different schools of thought, it constructs an unnatural approach to critique that embodies the experience of the researcher. The trajectory of the presented research echoes my own trajectory through the world of women's surrealism, my own initial findings giving way to doubt and further questions that then throws what was written before into question.

Rather than obfuscating this process, pruning the dead ends and creating that cartographical representation of research rooted in paranoia, I have chosen instead to construct the thesis around the process of investigation. Constructing a research narrative that moves nomadologically between schools of thought in order to build an evolving, changing argument throughout this piece is an attempt to reflect the fundamentally disorienting nature of women's surrealism, and it's resistance to comprehension through conventional means. This process is intended to place their work in a position of authority, recognising that my own research does not, cannot account for the entire canon of work, the women surrealists that themselves often rejected the label of surrealist, or else did not abide by the conventional definitions of surrealism. The research-as-route rather than map allows for the possibility of being surprised, of something not having been noticed or observed the first time around; it opens itself up to the possibility of futurity, self-correction, alternity. It becomes a myth to be passed on via oral tradition, changing a little each time it is retold, re-examined. Myth, after all, is an ongoing endeavour, "everlasting, Levi-Strauss argues, only insofar as they are incomplete, in the process of signification, and actively perpetuating their argument[97]". It is their incompleteness that allows for their longevity, the acceptance that one might return again and again to find something new, a novel way to tell the story.

In this way, I argue that research too should aim to be incomplete; you could walk a hundred times through the same landscape and still not have

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[97] Gould, p.70

covered every part of it. Mary Ann Caws, in assessing the incomplete and disjointed bodies of women in surrealist photography, argues that "being partial prevents our being seen as homogeneous, and thus acts against the exclusion or appropriation of "all of us," all of our mind and body, since we are seen only in part".[98] We learn our politics in various ways, and these How many times may we walk through the landscape of women's surrealism, as shifting and disorienting as it is? In abandoning our desire to produce a "complete" account, abandoning map-making and paranoia, the mythology of women surrealists might continue to provide meaningful dialogue with contemporary thought, the stories they elect to tell and the way on which we elect to tell stories about them opening new avenues into queer feminist analysis. The contemporary importance and potential of women surrealists, and their unique approaches to identity and surrealist philosophy, represent a site of resistance not only to the dominant cultural narratives under which they were working, but also to the narratives guiding critical approaches that stifle the eclectic possibilities for their study. Rosemont further writes that there are "those throughout the world who are convinced that the surrealist adventure is more indispensable today than ever, and that its actuality and future potential are greater than its historic achievements".[99] Through the prioritisation of mobility and sensitivity, compassion and agility in the study of women's surrealism, I aim to demonstrate how the current and future potentials of the field far exceed this previously underserved community of artists.

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[98] "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art" in *Symbolism, Dada, Surrealisms : Selected Writing of Mary Ann Caws*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2024), p.185
[99] Rosemont, p.384

Disorientation

The Myth of Surrealism

The myth of community and the communities formed by myth are inextricable. Community itself, Jean-Luc Nancy argues, is the oldest myth of all, and at the same time "nothing is more common to the members of a community, in principle, than a myth".[100] If myth and community do indeed define each other, then it becomes necessary to understand and map the functions of both, each to understand the other. This is inherently problematised in modernism, the breakdown of community at the hands of capitalism and industrialisation being central to the philosophy of the 20th century. While this breakdown is in itself also a myth, the perfect small scale community of close-knit bonds and transparent, harmonious coexistence being relegated ever further into an imaginary past, it proved an arresting

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[100] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community,* trans. By Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis and Oxford, University of Minnesota Press: 1991) p.42.

preoccupation for modern thinkers, and gave rise to another inevitable conclusion: if the world suffered from an absence of community, then it suffered equally from an absence of myth. If community has become inherently perverted from its original form (an idealistic *Gemeinschaft* that precedes the urban, modernist *Gesellschaft*), then the mythology of our time must reflect that; there is an absence of myth, as Bataille attests, that stems from loss of faith in the narratives and institutions that had defined society up to that point. The search for community, and a new myth, consumed the surrealists. Breton's "quest for the sacred" and his "concern with myths"[101] came to define the community he created, and so the surrealist mythology becomes in itself a quest for mythology.[102] For the surrealists

> Myth, a formal device which transcends the limitations of space-time and rational thought, served to communicate in much the same way that it had historically transmitted social values. In the area of Surrealist painting, where there exists no single and identifiable Surrealist "style" and where the value of the work is determined almost exclusively on the basis of its content, myth became one way of organizing and synthesizing Surrealist beliefs within a recognizable set of symbols. [103]

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[101] George Bataille, *The Absence Of Myth*, trans. By Michael Richardson (London, Verso: 2006) p.75.

[102] Mythology making a myth of itself leads to questions addressed in later chapters of this dissertation; what, reasonably, can be placed under the parameters of myth? To what extent is any communal narrative a functional myth?

[103] Whitney Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Paintings 1929-1939,* (Ann Arbor : UMI Research Press, 1980), p.9

These symbols were adopted throughout the movement: that of the minotaur, Oedipus, Narcissus, Echo and Theseus. They stood in for psychoanalytical concepts, as well as offering sites of paralogical temporality and spatiality.

The surrealist community was one infatuated by the idea of a more "primitive" time that would grant them freedom from the capitalist alienation of the early 20th century. This intense alienation caused by increasing industrialisation and urbanisation was a point of anguish for modernist thought and art more widely. Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* describes how

> modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.[104]

For surrealists then, mythology was the path out of this maelstrom; a return to ancient truths upon which society could be rebuilt. Alyce Mahon notes that

> Mythology may be a text whose meaning remains "arbitrary, meaningless, absurd", open to a multitude of ideological and geographic interpretations, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued. For the surrealists, however, it offered a fantastic discourse with which to champion the irrational.[105]

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[104] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London, Verso: 2010) p.15.
[105] Alyce Mahon, "La Feminité triomphante: Surrealism, Leonor Fini, and the Sphinx" in *Dada/Surrealism*, ed. by Patricia Allmer et al., 19.1, 2013, p.1

Of course, such a society is in itself a myth, but this is a clear demonstration of the function of mythology in modern times: it is a way to orient oneself. The set narratives of mythology, the shared convention, form a kind of *logos spermatikos* through which the rest of the world, both inner and outer, can be understood and codified. Nancy recognises myth's orienting power, noting that "it is myth that arranges the spaces, and/or symbolizes. Myth works out the shares and divisions that distribute a community and distinguish it for itself, articulating it within itself. Neither dialogue nor monologue, myth is the unique speech of the many, who come thereby to recognize one another, who communicate and commune in myth".[106] This seems at odds with surrealism's desire to foster the irrational, but it is rather these alternative logics of myth that were able to work separately from the mundane world that gave it such transformative power. Surrealism's political aspirations of accessing a new communal consciousness necessitated this search for, and construction of, myth. Breton himself described the goals of surrealism to be to discover "to what measure can we choose or adopt, and *impose*, a myth fostering the society that we choose to be desirable".[107] This imposition, a forceful reorientation of the confusing and disruptive modernist experience, would ultimately render the surrealist movement self-defeating, as it reproduced the restrictive social conditions they sought to fight against, albeit on a smaller scale. Georges Bataille had fierce criticism for Surrealism's regard for myth, decrying it as

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[106] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.50
[107] Andre Breton, *Manifestoes Of Surrealism* (Michigan, Ann Arbor Paperbacks: 2010) p.287.

reminiscent (if not directly comparable) to the trappings of religious dogma; he writes that

> Myth is, together with the sacred, plainly one of the essential movements within religious life; with the sacred it lies at the heart of all that has been analysed by philosophy under the form of participation. [...] . No one, then, can fail to know that the clearest certainty of surrealism is to manage to rediscover the attitudes of mind that allowed primitive man to combine in ritual and, more precisely, to find in ritual the most incisive and tangible forms of poetic life . Everything Breton has put forward— whether it concerns the quest for the sacred, the concern with myths, or rediscovering rituals similar to those of primitives - represents the exploration of the possibility we again discover, possibility in another sense; this time it is simply a question of exploring all that can be explored by man.[108]

The aping of myth through attempts to create it without true, communal belief led to Surrealism having a "feeling of emptiness, hopelessness, uselessness, superfluity and frivolousness".[109] For Bataille, any attempt to engage with old mythologies was tainted by fascistic fetishisation of the past, and any attempt to inscribe new mythologies was met by a society too fractured and alienated to be truly bound together by a shared narrative. For him "the notion of an 'absence of myth' meant a failure of communication which touched all levels of society. And a society which ceases or is unable genuinely to communicate

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[108] Bataille, p.75
[109] Ibid., p.78

ceases to be a society. In a very real sense it becomes an 'absence of society' or, more specifically, an 'absence of community'".[110] The lack of common rituals on which mythologies were built, and both the sacred and taboo could be expressed, denied society a crucial opportunity: the opportunity to transgress. Transgression here takes on a double meaning: both "transgression" as in the crossing of a taboo, and also transgression of the boundaries of the self, the sacred also being "the forbidden aspect of society, crystallising the moment of rupture between one thing and another."[111] Nancy criticises the very concept of a community bound together by a shared mythology— decrying it as "totalitarian in its content, for its content is always a communion, or rather all communions".[112] A community founded in shared myth erases the differences within its own ranks, becomes homogenizing and static. Nancy continues that "For beings who are essentially, and more than essentially, beings in common, it is a privation of being"[113] to become homogenised into such a community. Community that does not represent such a "deprivation of being" must instead rest on the being-in-common, the resistance to totalitarianism and foundational myths that would consume them. Nancy asks (and answers) himself "is there a myth for this community of compearance? If myth is always a myth of the reunion and the communion of community, there is not".[114] It is here I will attempt to differ from Nancy, and suggest that a community of compearance, here the women surrealists who resisted becoming homogenised into the

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[110] Michael Richardson, "Introduction" in *The Absence of Myth*, p.13
[111] Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.47
[112] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.57
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., p.58

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mainstream surrealist movement, engaged and created myths for themselves in a productive, non-homogenising manner. In the subversion of mythological images and the utlisation of its power to trouble the boundaries between self and other, several women artists associated with surrealism were able to create a "fiction that founds" for their own artistic identities, without mimicking the totalitarian impulses that Nancy ascribes to such mythologies.

Mythology and Women

Mythology, mimicking as it does the social conditions under which it is created, can be a site of hostility for women. Simone de Beauvoir writes

> Tout mythe implique un Sujet qui projette ses espoirs et ses craintes vers un ciel transcendant. Les femmes ne se posant pas comme Sujet n'ont pas créé de mythe viril...c'est encore à travers les rêves des hommes qu'elles rêvent. (...) [Elle] est artifice, bavardage et mensonge ; elle est la guérisseuse et la sorcière ; elle est la proie de l'homme, elle est sa perte, elle est tout ce qu'il n'est pas et qu'il veut avoir, sa négation et sa raison d'être.[115]

Women are not the heroines of mythology. Even when they are central to the narrative of a myth, they remain the object, viewed from a male perspective. They are contained within the male-dominated narrative, and so are bound to

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[115] "All myth entails a Subject that projects their hopes and fears onto a transcendent sky. Women, not acting as subjects, have not created virile myths… They still dream through the dreams of men. (…) [She] is artificial, babble and falsehood; she is the healer and the witch; she is man's quarry, his lost thing, everything that he isn't and that he wants to have, his contradiction and his reason to be." Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, (Paris, Gallimard : 1976), p.201-202.

follow their societal role as the Other, the Object of male subjectivity. The violent implications of forcing women into the role of the object is apparent: through being denied their own subjecthood, women occupied an uncomfortable, stagnant position. This binary is a well-established one: the male figure who, through their subjectivity, can access reason and culture is opposed to the woman, who may have no internal agency of her own. She is the nature to man's culture, the absence to his presence, an empty space that he desires to fill. The place of women in mythology is inherently under threat, as she lives under the constant pressure of *being desired*. Desire can never be abated, defined as it is as the demand for the other which is not yet part of the self,[116] and so it exists perpetually: we cannot experience desire of that which we already possess, and so for desire to propagate itself the object of desire can never be attained. Equally when the object *cannot* fully be made part of the self, desire becomes a force that endeavours, but may never fulfil itself. The object of desire, the woman, is *almost* subsumed, encroached upon and absorbed into the agent of desire, but this process is never complete. Women, caught in this position, find themselves paralysed as they are unable to interact with the world according to their own agency; they become, through their mythologisation and the unrelenting pressure of objectification, statues to be marvelled at, marble muses to be consumed and digested at the viewer's leisure.

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[116] Lacan goes into great detail explaining the mechanics of desire and lack in *La relation d'Objet,* and elsewhere describes desire's purpose as not to be fulfilled, but to reproduce itself. Upon obtaining the object it demands, desire would cease to exist. Therefore, desire is deferred continuously, and acts metonymously.

For the surrealists, women took on the role of conduits through which inspiration would flow; they were the Other, and it was the Other that the surrealists sought, the resurgence of the sacred. Despite this seeming idolisation "an idealized view of woman as muse and mediator did not resolve their conflicting responses to her spiritual role as an inspiration for male creativity and her biological role as the actual generator of life".[117] This is a dichotomy that echoes throughout modern philosophy- men are the Subject, the Self, and women are the Object, the Other. De Beauvoir writes in *Le deuxième sexe* that

> L'histoire nous a montré que les hommes ont toujours détenu tous les pouvoirs concrets ; depuis les premiers temps du patriarcat ils ont jugé utile de maintenir la femme dans un état de dépendance ; leur codes se sont établis contre elle ; et c'est ainsi qu'elle a été concrètement constituée comme l'Autre.[118]

 Women were beyond reason and rationality, and so could not escape their existence as the object of study; they were the goal of surrealism, on the opposite side of the male surrealist artist. Their selfhood and subjectivity were continuously repressed and stifled in order to impose the new mythology of muses, the marvelous, and the ever-irrational *femme-enfant*. Breton's most famous work, *Nadja*, claims that the narrator's obsession with the titular Nadja

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[117] Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist painting,* p.29
[118]" History has shown us that men have always held all concrete power; since the dawn of the patriarchy they have found it useful to keep women in a state of dependence; their codes were established against them, and it is like this that women were firmly constructed as the Other" De Beauvoir, p.164.

stems from the fact that she is "so pure, so free of any earthly tie, and cares so little, but so marvelously, for life".[119] Nadja is the perfect surrealist woman: one who's waking and dreaming life are entangled, who exists somewhere beyond yet adjacent to the mundane, and entirely possessable by Breton as her unstable mental state renders her dependent in his eyes. This desperate need for women to be exotic creatures, unreachably high up on their pedestals, is revealed even more by the narrator's aggressive reaction to her revealing aspects of her life he would rather not imagine, "concerning which I decided, probably quite superficially, that her dignity could not have survived entirely intact".[120] If the illusion of the ever regal, immaculate muse was shattered, the surrealist positioning of women as their prized "marvelous" was threatened, in *Nadja* leading the narrator to become alienated and repelled by the woman who had, so recently, captivated him. If women were subject to mythologisation, then it may serve us to return to this quotation from Nancy:

> Neither the community nor, consequently, the individual (the poet, the priest, or one of their listeners) invents the myth: to the contrary, it is they who are invented or who invent themselves in the myth.[121]

Myth is a site of transgression between the self and the other, and the myth of woman cast them as transgressive objects— their role was invented for them. The ongoing myth of the *femme-enfant* "worked to exclude woman artists from the possibility of a profound personal identification with the theoretical side of

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[119] Nadja, trans. Richard howard, 1960.
[120] ibid p113
[121] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.53

Surrealism",[122] and held them in a fragile place within the surrealist community. I argue that the process by which they were mythologised, and the process which sought to exclude them from identifying with surrealist theory, creates the possibility of examining both how the concept of self was explored within the works of women surrealist artists, and how this reflets on what we might consider to be their community.

If women were not artistic subjects, but rather objects to facilitate male artistic expression, then a phenomenology of these women's experiences may grant them recourse from further objectification. The artworks of Carrington, Penrose and Cahun may be seen as explorations of the particular position women held within surrealism— their productions are "centrally concerned to assert rather than to question women's identity".[123] A phenomenological approach also allows us to examine how these artists positionality in relation to hegemonic structures defined both their place in the surrealist movement and informed their notions of identity. Nancy writes that "singular beings compear: their com-pearance constitutes their being, puts them in communication with one another".[124] Being and identity being so defined by relationality, in how singular beings resonate and communicate to one another, opens avenues for discussion on *how* these beings relate to each other, and to what extent their being-together is affected by orientation within a discursive space. Equally, it is

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[122] Whitney Chadwick, Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985) p.33

[123] Dawn Ades and Michael Richardson with Krzysztof Fijalkowski, *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas* (London: Tate Publishing. 2015), p.27.

[124] Nancy*, Inoperative Community,* p.60

important to modify the above quote by noting that Nancy continues "the interruption of community, the interruption of the totality that would fulfill it, is the very law of compearance".[125] Investigating the role that interruption between beings plays within the works of Carrington, Penrose and Cahun through a phenomenological lens in this chapter may bring light to how their works can be seen as an exploration of this experience.

The Phenomenology of Valentine Penrose

Sara Ahmed specifically discusses the experience of disorientation felt by marginalised groups in her monograph *Queer Phenomenology*, and while these methods have been used to explore the disorientation felt by queer communities and ethnic minorities, all marginalised identities can be considered in these terms; occupying a space that does not fit them, experiencing a moment of wrongness, the crisis of disorientation and then the arduous process of rebuilding one's relationship with the outside world. Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, claims that:

> We remain physically upright not through the mechanism of the skeleton or even through the nervous regulation of muscular tone, but because we are caught up in a world. If this involvement is seriously weakened, the body collapses and becomes once more an object[126]

[125] Ibid. p.61.
[126] Maurice Merleau-Ponty Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (New York, Routledge: 1962) p.296

It is our orientation in the world that allows us to act as subjects; without it, we are robbed of our agency. A moment of disorientation is also a moment of objectification, where we are temporarily disconnected from a world where we can perform actions and extend ourselves. For women surrealists, this moment of disorientation comes from attempting to engage in surrealist practices and finding the space hostile to them. I use the term "hostile" in place of "unwelcoming"; the marginalisation of women within the movement was an active process, which in conjunction with their significant contributions to the movement leads Allmer to note that their "exclusion or marginalization of their works and influences from historical accounts seem all the more deliberate".[127] The process of othering is a purposeful one, and firmly situated women as the objects of action rather than as agents themselves. For Ahmed, "disorientation involves becoming an object"[128], and the alienation of women surrealists from their surrounding community rendered them both disoriented and alienated from their subjecthood.

This sense of disorientation is evident in the poetry of Valentine Penrose. Demeter, the opening poem of her collection *Les Magies* (notable for its plethora of mythology inspired titles) reads:

S'il est une pierre de tristesse j'y suis assise

Là où les bandelettes tombent obliques sur la plaine

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[127] Allmer, *Feminist Interventions*, p.578

[128] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, Duke University Press: 2006) p.159.

Blancs voiles. Ceci est léger.

Où la deese aux gros yeux trempe l'enfant des autres dans le feu.

L'arbre refuse de s'orienter. L'émeraude

Tient son poing fermé. S'il est

Une pierre de tristesse j'y suis assise. [129]

Indicators of disorientation are clear; the paper strips do not fall straight down, but to the side. The tree is not only crooked, but is given an active role in its own disorientation. It is the narrator, as sure as she believes herself on her reference point of stone and sadness, who finds herself positioned incorrectly. That the only orienting device that keeps the narrator steady happens to be a "stone of sadness", an impermeable base of misery and grief, is almost too explicit in its metaphor for the anguish of objectification. We can see that the narrator is directly experiencing the process of becoming disoriented, and the resulting difficulty in interacting with the world around her; inanimate objects, such as the emerald, become threatening, and she seems incapable of moving from her point of surety, the sadness to which she has become accustomed. The blurring line between subject and object reflects Nancy's conceptualisation of being as a fundamentally equal being-with between entities. The poem is perhaps a kind of mythic speech, which

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[129] Valentine Penrose, "Demeter" in *Ecrits d'une femme surréaliste*, ed. by Georgiana Colvile (Paris, Mango Littérature: 2001)

thus performs the humanization of nature (and/or its divinization) and the naturalization of man (and/or his divinization). Fundamentally, mythos is the act of language par excellence, the performing of the paradigm, as the logos fictions this paradigm to itself in order to project upon it the essence and the power it believes to be its own.[130]

Penrose's poem performs a paradigm that that stifles and disorients its narrator, leaving her actionless. However, to frame this purely as an *inability* to take action could be seen as short-sighted. While the disoriented subject does find themselves cut off, thwarted in their attempts to extend themselves to the outside world, they also cause their observers themselves to feel disoriented: "an effect of being ''out of place'' is also to create disorientation in others[...] disorientation occurs when we fail to sink into the ground, which means that the ''ground'' itself is disturbed, which also disturbs what gathers ''on'' the ground".[131] The narrator is not only disoriented, she is *disorienting*. The tree refuses to right itself, and the narrator equally refuses to align herself with it. There is a standoff, in a sense; we are left with some doubt as to who exactly is holding their correct orientation.

The tensions between Penrose's narrator and the outside world that does not harmonise with her speaks to an incommensurability, a refusal to fully be subsumed by the world that very much echoes Nancy's inoperative community wherein "the community resists: in a sense, as I have said, it is resistance itself. [...] The compearance of singular beings— or of the singularity of being— keeps

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[130] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.54

[131] Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* (Durham, Duke University Press: 2006) p160.

open a space, a spacing within immanence".[132] It is the narrator's disorientation from the world, and thus the distance introduced between her and it, that allows for her singularity of being— she is an interruption, a rupture, and while this experience may be alienating, perhaps it need not be an objectification as Ahmed and Merleau-Ponty suggest. It is important to avoid, through the concept of disorientation, unwittingly furthering stereotypes of women as helpless in their situation of oppression. Has the poet really become disoriented from the "correct" axes of the world around her, or have they become disoriented from her? It is easy, when discussing disorientation, to cast the disoriented figure into the role of a victim, who had lost their way and suffers as a result. A more useful, and indeed more radical interpretation would be to illustrate how the woman surrealist actively participates in her disorientation, and instead challenges the world to align itself with her.

Similar imagery may be observed within Leonora Carrington's 1969 painting, *Le Fruit Défendu (Forbidden Fruit)*.

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[132] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.58

FIG. 1.1. Leonora Carrington, Le Fruit Défendu (Forbidden Fruit), 1969, Galería RGR.

A central figure is encircled by a labyrinthine snake in the Garden of Eden, fed pomegranates in place of the biblical apple. Cattle that almost blend in to the background stare back at us, the observer. This painting muddles the biblical story of Eve with the myth of Persephone, whose eating of pomegranate seeds trapped her in the Underworld for six months of each year. The central figure is isolated, at once offered knowledge and entrapment, separated from the world by the coils of the snake that bind them. Coleville suggests the serpent is a phallic metaphor, a "humorous reference to Graves'"[133] description of the god Osiris's fifty foot phallus. The snake is the bearer of knowledge, but its gift is also one that entraps the eater into becoming possessed as Persephone was, wed to Hades and taken away from the living. It is possible that this plays on Carrington's own views on her relationship with surrealism:

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[133] Georgiana M. M. Coleville, "Beauty and/is the Beast: Animal Symbology in the Work of Leonora Caringtn, Remedios Varo and Leonor Fini", in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws et al., p.170

The women Surrealists were considered secondary to the male

Surrealists. The women were considered [...] people there to inspire,

aside from doing the washing, cooking, cleaning and feeding [...] I never

thought of myself as a muse. I thought of myself as being whisked away

by my lover.[134]

Being "whisked away" by her lover certainly carries undertones of the

Persephone myth, and certainly Carrington appeared to perceive that women in

Surrealism were treated as lesser than their male counterparts. However, it is

also important to note that she herself never viewed herself as a surrealist per

se, stating "I was never a Surrealist, I was with Max".[135] Despite this assertion,

it is also important to note that "Carrington [...] like several of the other

women surrealists, such as Kage Sage and Remedios Varo (companions to Yves

Tanguy and Benjamin Péret respectively), was already an artist when she met

Ernst, and her personal relationship with him was motivated initially by

professional interest—by her admiration for his work".[136] Before meeting him

in person at a dinner Carrington refused to orient herself along the axes of a

Surrealist movement that belittled the contributions of the women who worked

within it— while it may have been her own artistic independence that

prevented her from fully entering into the movement rather than any feminist

impulse, it places her in a compelling position as an artist that co-existed with

Surrealism without being fully consumed by it. In her disorientation from the

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[134] *The Flowering of the Crone: A Portrait of Leonora Carrington*, dir. By Alli Acker, (USA, 1987)
[135] Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement,* p.12.
[136] Conley, *Automatic Woman,* p. 50

movement, Carrington in fact carries the power to explore and embody new orientations, and alternative ways of relating to the artistic process.

The Work of Reorientation

Ahmed asserts that the writer turns to the objects closest to her; as our actions come to shape our surroundings, we use our immediate surroundings to facilitate further action. As surrealism aligned women with myth, women artists could take myth and make it their own. Through the repeated reappropriation and subversion of mythological imagery they fashioned their own artistic identities as subjects capable of action and invention. Ahmed writes that "to use the table that supports domestic work to do political work (…) is a reorientation device"[137]; by extension, using the mythology that marginalised women artists to instead develop their artistic identity is also a reorientation device. Whitney Chadwick notes that

> Alienated from Surrealist theorizing about women, and from the search for a female muse, women turned instead to their own reality. Surrealism constructed women as magic objects and sites on which to project male erotic desire. They re-created themselves as beguiling personalities, poised uneasily between the worlds of artifice (art) and nature, or the instinctual life.[138]

Indeed, the appropriation of mythology enabled women engage in "fictioning as the fashioning of a world, or the becoming-world of fictioning. In

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[137] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, Duke University Press: 2006)

[138] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), p.313

other words, the fashioning of a world for the subject, the becoming-world of subjectivity".[139] The tools used to marginalise women artists became the tools of their liberation, further demonstrating the inherent arbitrariness of their exclusion from the surrealist canon. Women surrealists were not only capable of engaging with the symbols and mythological imagery explored by surrealism, but interacted with them in unique ways to reflect their exploration of subjecthood; H.D.'s interactions with Freud were remarkable for their beneficial rather than alienating effects, and the dialogic nature of their relationship[140]:

> Today, lying on the famous psychoanalytic couch, . . . wherever my
> fantasies may take me now, I have a center, security, aim. I am
> centralized or reoriented here in this mysterious lion's den or Aladdin's
> cave of treasures

The centre that H.D. refers to is the support Ahmed describes as necessary to steady oneself and one's identity. Without an anchor with which we can right (write?) ourselves, the feeling of being thrown up, of being shattered becomes a crisis. A solid point of reference becomes critical to orienting oneself; the process of reorientation can only come through repeated action in a space, and this space must be defined. Ahmed goes on to write that "for bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not ''in place,''

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[139] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.53

[140] The quote below may lead the reader to believe that H.D.'s relationship with Freud was rather one sided, as she appears to be relying on him for a stable basis on which to build her identity. However, this ignores the influence that H.D. also had on Freud himself, taking on the role of a student as well as a patient: Susan Stanford Friedman makes the argument that we should see "Freud's influence as a collaboration, a dynamic interaction of two whole human beings" (Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.,* (Indiana, Bloomington: 1981) p. 49)

involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labor".[141] This painstaking

labour manifests as prolific artistic production, and self-examination in order

to understand the space that their own bodies would come to occupy. This leads

to a radical rejection of the metaphysics of presence at a fundamental level—

the rejection of the Subject as a positivist presence, and instead formulating it

as a point of resistance to the Other; the boundaries of each only becoming

identifiable through their compearance. Identity is fundamentally relational—

the work of orienting oneself can only be achieved through relating that

orientation to others.

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[141] Ahmed, p.62.

This may also be observed in the collages of Valentine Penrose, such as *Ariane* below.

FIG. 1.2. Valentine Penrose, *Ariane*, 1934-1942.

Here the two central figures, both women, are placed at odds with one another: one dressed darkly, stood at an angle on a platform covered in a dark cloth, and the other dressed in white, seeming to belong more properly to the world presented in a similar palette. The woman dressed darkly, stood crookedly on darkness, looks at her with a sombre expression. Behind her, a bizarre monster with an insectoid body and human legs looms. In *The Imaging of Magic*, Roger Cardinal suggests that "it's not clear which

of the two women depicted is the Ariadne of the title".[142] While there is no concrete evidence to support either woman being the titular Ariadne, I suggest that we may interpret the rightmost woman as playing this role. Ariadne, the heroine whose gave Theseus the means to escape the labyrinth with a skein of wool, here is an orienting figure in the face of the other woman, whose position is lopsided and cl that of the monster's. Indeed, the crooked woman's proximity to the monster in their darkened environment is reminiscent of Nancy's description of "the interweaving through which myth holds together and structures men, gods, animals".[143] This interweaving, for Nancy, is also the exposure of finitude between beings, the proximity a catalyst for shared co-creation. If the darkly dressed woman is disoriented, in proximity to mythological monsters, it seems fair to interpret her as a stand in for Theseus, lost in the labyrinth, while the woman dressed in white is the orienting presence of Ariadne, whose upright position is the metric by which we consider the other figure disoriented. However, Cardinal also notes that "both women are dressed with incongruous decorum, presumably in defiance of the material context of untrust worthy shingle and imminent tide".[144] Their incongruity does not necessitate discomfort however— Chadwick asserts that "however odd and unreal the landscapes into which Penrose places her female figures, they seem to belong, moving through them with a studied grace and casual elegance".[145] The women are equally at ease extending themselves into a disorienting

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[142] Roger Cardinal, 'The Imaging of Magic' in *Angels of Anarchy*, ed. by Patricia Allmer, p.41
[143] Nancy*, Inoperative Community*, p.78
[144] Cardinal, p.41
[145] Chadwick, *Women artists and the Surrealist Movement*, p.227

landscape, which in itself is "untrustworthy" and under threat of change as signified by the tides. If such disorientation doesn't seem to be harming either figure, this renders the question of Ariadne's identity once more ambiguous— we could equally interpret the image as the darkly dressed woman offering new orientations, and therefore freedoms, the woman dressed in white, whose face is hidden perhaps to signify her own lack of identity. One woman can not be inherently designated as disoriented, or as taking one particular role within the image— they implicate each other, creating ambiguity in their respective orientations and their isolation from the world they are both set in.

The Power of Disorientation

This alienation is also found in Penrose's bilingual collection of self-illustrated poetry, *Dons des Féminines* . The shortest and perhaps most striking poem reads

Pas pour cette fois la dernière ;

Pendant ce temps où je parais je brise.

This time cannot be the last

And meanwhile where I appear I shatter.[146]

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[146] Valentine Penrose, *Ecrits d'une femme surréaliste*, ed. by Georgiana Colvile (Paris, Mango Littérature: 2001)

Here the parallels to Ahmed's queer disorientation are even clearer; the sensation of shattering, of a lack of coherency, reflect Penrose's inability to be recognised as an artistic subject in her own right. There does seem to be a contrast to Demeter, however; whereas that stone gave Penrose a sense of solidity, if a paralysing one, here solid ground is inaccessible. Equally, the translation of "je brise" as "I shatter" highlights a problem of ambiguity: in the French, the implication appears to be that the poet-narrator is shattering not herself, but the world around her; were it a reflexive action, surely "je me brise" would have been used. The ambiguity is possible in the English formulation "I shatter", but the phrasing implies quite strongly that it is Penrose herself that shatters. The differing interpretations offer a meaningful difference in the message of the poem; the poet-narrator is either describing their own shattered identity, the multiplicity of self that they cannot reconcile under one coherent identity, or instead their disruptive influence on the world around them, shattering the axes of orientation with which they are expected to align.

Of course, it would be remiss to attempt to resolve this ambiguity; the fluidity of meaning her is, perhaps, the point. There is no solid self, and no solid authorial message to be received. Penrose's shattering appears ultimate, far more pessimistic than the previous poem, and the bilingual presentation of the entire volume reinforces this image of multiple pieces of identity. To suggest that these multiple facets represent a kind of brokenness would undermine the fluidity I wish to attribute to women surrealists; through

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breaking from their previously static position of the muse, they opened up possibilities of mobile, fluid identities: the ability to hold several points of view at once, and to imagine states of self that defy the ordinary and conventional. Through translating her own work, Penrose chooses which parts of her speech, and by extension herself, to put forward in each of the translations. Upon a first reading, the English translation seems in many ways insufficient; clunkier than the French, and failing to capture the same intricacies of meaning.[147] However, rather than assuming this to be an insufficiency of language, we can interpret it as a deliberate choice— Penrose purposefully confronts the reader with a jarring experience, and challenges their perceptions of how a translation should function. The shattering becomes the other kind, the shattering of another rather than the self. She highlights the flexibility of meaning inherent in all written work, but especially in surrealist literature that aims to transcend older, more rigid forms of poetry. Indeed, by presenting different aspects of the same poem simultaneously, through translation, Penrose *disorients* the reader. We are confronted, lashed out at, as our own comfortable orientations are thrown up and scattered by the uneasy alignment of the poem and it's translation.

Here, it is also important to note that *Dons des Féminines* contains another vital aspect of Penrose's work- her collage. All surrealist collage, defined as it is by the juxtaposition of jarring images from various sources, can

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[147] "Pas pour cette fois la dernière" and "this time cannot be the last" seem particularly "poorly" translated at first glance. The use of "cannot" in the English seems out of place, and renders the meaning differently- there is an inversion present in the French that the English ignores.

be said to be disorienting in nature, but Penrose's use of images that

"transgress proportion, perspective and present a strange display of victoriana

and other kitsch"[148] centre the female form in this disorientation. The women

in her collages are not only often set at odd angles, or presented at odd sizes,

but are active in this disorientation.

FIG. 1.3. Valentine Penrose, *Collage,* (Paris :1951)

In the above figure[149], we see two sets of three women: one set presented as

being East Asian, seated normally around a table, and the other three of varying

sizes set at odd angles on the other side of the room. The women are posed ever

so slightly off centre, leaning at an angle away from the orientation of the room

(here "orient" takes on a double meaning, referring also to the prominence of

the East Asian women to the side). The two smaller figures are locked staring

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[148]Georgiana Colvile, *Through an Hourglass Lightly: Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon*. In King, Russell; McGuirk, Bernard (eds.) Reconceptions Reading Modern French Poetry (Nottingham, University of Nottingham Press: 2012) p.102.

[149] Valentine Penrose, *Collage,* (Paris :1951)

at each other— the disoriented woman in virginal white, and the upright woman dressed in dark, occult robes. Penrose's preference for the occult threads through her work, and its use to seek out both orientation and agency illustrates the inability of women artists to right themselves through conventional means; it was necessary to resort to the extra-ordinary, to embrace one's position in a realm that operates outside of conventional logic and socially acceptable behaviour.

The image of the Asian women sitting around a table to the left only compounds this image— the Orient for surrealism was a colonial Other, the unfamiliar culture embodying what was at once familiar and strange. The dark robed woman stands along the same axis as them, symbolically reorienting herself to become able to interact with the world around her. One of the women seated at the table turns to face her, showing that she has successfully integrated into this otherness— she is recognised and acknowledged. This further separates the figure from the other two women who accompany her. Whereas the dark robes woman appears to have achieved some sense of stability, both the smaller woman and the larger are disoriented within the collage, notably on the same axis. This challenges any interpretation that might suggest they represent a kind of dialectic, thesis and antithesis finally resulting in the oriented, dark robed synthesis. The two disoriented women are not at odds with each other, and indeed replicate each other's positioning. This I also mirrored by the women seated at the table, two facing one way with the central figure turned in a different direction. Can these positionings be taken as a sign

of further connection between the two groups? A possible interpretation is that these similarities only draw further attention to the marked difference in orientation and stability. The group of women on the left have literally found a "seat at the table", a space in which they can interact and assert themselves. This a product of their inherent otherness, and their ability to embrace it. By contrast, the other group of women are scattered and disoriented, unable to interact with each other or their surroundings. The internal disorder of the two groups— looking in different directions regardless of their collective orientation— demonstrates a continued inclination towards fluid perspectives, and the affinity for subjectivity this begets.

The narrative here is one of a newly constructed identity, transitioning from the chaos of an identity unable to structure itself to one that finds a greater degree of stability while retaining its fluidity. The symbolic value of the use of a group of three women on both sides of this collage could be interpreted in several different ways. Trinities in mythology are widespread: a triad of women often speaks to an embodiment of women's power— the three Fates in Greek mythology, for example, controlled the past, present, and future of people's lives. Conversely, the three Furies were symbols of wrath and justice, monstrous figures inviting terror and respect. In Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, the Furies are described as wearing " black robes"[150], a sight that instilled fear into those they pursued? An allusion to the Furies may not only embody literal feelings of anger, but also foreshadow a desire for justice and retribution. This

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[150] Aeschylus, 'Eumenides' in *The Oresteia* (London, Nick Hern Books: 2007).

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dark robed figure, again, is the only one of her trio to have oriented herself in accordance with the other; this implies that the regaining of agency starts with, above all else, a pursuit of justice. While the associated poem suggests a crisis of identity, the unending shattering of being disoriented in space, the collage offers a more grounded approach, depicting both the disoriented figures and the darker woman who has reoriented herself to embrace the strange transition from object to subject.

No woman surrealist was more bold in the assertion of her own identity through self-examination that Claude Cahun, surrealist photographer and writer. Allmer describes Cahun's work as able to "unhinge and mock gender stereotypes whilst revealing gender to be a fluid category which can literally take on many faces".[151] Self-examination by women challenges the negative association of narcissism in women, a stereotype championed by Freud in his introduction to *On Narcissism*: "Strictly speaking," he writes, "it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them".[152] But it is in fact a vital part of the process of reclaiming artistic identity and agency. When women were forced into objecthood, canvases upon which meaning could be forced upon according to the whims of their observer, in order to create space for their own agency and identity they must work to shed the meanings given to them. The subjects of Cahun's work are always either herself or a surrogate, as she becomes both subject and

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[151] Allmer, *Angels of Anarchy*, p.16
[152] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV,* p.88

object, the artist and the muse. She demonstrates an acute awareness of her position within the surrealist movement, and the negative ramifications of the role women in general were coerced into playing. This is evident in her photography, which frequently features imagery that challenges conventions of the artist/subject divide, as well as gender binaries. Photography was a powerful medium for Cahun— Tirza True Latimer describes its "ability to cite, to repeat, to reconstrue" was able to render Cahun's at times overly-citational style "into a more playful and more legible practice that could be shared with a partner or partners".[153] Indeed, the experience of fluidity and petrification are well explored in Cahun's work, and illustrate a rebellious attitude both towards the standard practices of surrealism and the viewer themselves, who often become implicated in her restructuring of artistic norms.

Alienation in the Works of Claude Cahun

A rather literal approach to the experience of petrification is shown in the figure below, *Je tends les bras.*

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[153] Latimer, p.68

FIG. 1.4. Claude Cahun, *Je tends les bras* (London: Tate, 1931)

The image, initially, appears a simple one. A pillar of stone with a woman's arms, reaching into the abyss, perhaps pleading, perhaps astounded. It is a visual depiction of restriction, the unmoving stone body that mimics statues of Ancient Greek muses and illustrates the rigidity of women's place in surrealism. However, unlike these ancient statues, the stone here is rough and unhewn, covered in moss, the only markers of gender appearing as jewellery on the undoubtedly feminine arms. The arms extend out into the void, reaching blindly, ready to either grasp or steady. The emptiness that surrounds the figure results in disorientation, with no landmarks with which the body may align itself.

An area of ambiguity that immediately strikes the viewer is this: are we looking at a woman, turned to stone bar her arms? Or is this a concrete pillar

undergoing some divine metamorphosis, brought to life by an unseen power? The answer is, predictably, both. Woman and stone are one here, and the ambiguity of any "original" state of being allows for multiple interpretations, particularly through the lens of mythology. Woman as stone, either becoming or being born from it, is a familiar mythological image, particularly in Greco-Roman mythology. The first narrative we could compare this image to is the myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor who became so besotted with his own creation that he shunned mortal women. Aphrodite, pleased by offerings he left at her altar, brings his sculpture to life, and the sculpture goes on to marry Pygmalion and bear his children. To say that woman being made by man in order to serve him is a common part of most mythological systems would be an understatement— Pandora was sculpted form clay by Zeus, and even in Maori mythology the first woman was made from the reflection of the first man combined with soil— and these narratives seem only to serve the idea that women are merely auxiliary, secondary beings.

In Cahun's photograph, the metamorphosis appears to only be partially complete, the woman's identity not yet fully created. The creator, if there is one, is entirely absent. Is Cahun effecting her own transformation, clawing herself out of the constricting stone? Or else is the viewer implied to be the metaphorical architect of her identity, giving her a shape and form entirely without her consent? In both possibilities, this process is inherently traumatic. Cahun was no stranger to alienation, confessing to her publisher Adrienne Monnier "There are times," she confessed to Adrienne Monnier "there are times

when I suffer so much from this isolation, of which my nature and all kinds of other circumstances are the cause, that..".[154] This disorientation from society, on account of her "nature" as a queer, transgressive individual, demonstrates the possibility of an inverse interpretation of the image: that Cahun, rather than emerging from the stone pillar, is instead being trapped within it. Petrification in mythology only occurs to women in a few select cases— Ovid's *Metamorphoses* details Lethaea, who is petrified for her vanity, in a fairly typical vilification of women's supposed narcissism.

Cahun, who almost exclusively features herself in her artwork, may be commenting on the paradox of how women are treated in surrealist art— on the one hand, their form and beauty is treated as inspiration; however they are entirely disallowed from claiming it for themselves. Women in surrealism were not only alienated from the world around them, but also from themselves, and Cahun's body is as foreign to her as the unnavigable emptiness around her. The pillar of stone characterises her own form as shapeless, inhuman, and unrecognisable as the self, illustrating the isolating effects of objectification that result from the coercion of women into the role of the muse.

While the above figure showcases representations of restriction and rigidity, many of Cahun's works tend towards fluidity and exploring an identity that may shift and change at will. Engaging with the social paradigms that alienated and disoriented her were crucial for Cahun as well as other women artists: "constituted as Other, as object, in Western representation, the

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[154] Lucie Schwob to Adrienne Monnier, Paris, 2 July 1926, IMEC, Caen (quoted in Latimer)

woman who speaks must either assume a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulation) or set about unmasking the opposition within which she is positioned".[155] Yet cross-dressing and doubling are major recurring images that quite literally *reflect* this dual identity is Cahun's use of the mirror, and mirror images.
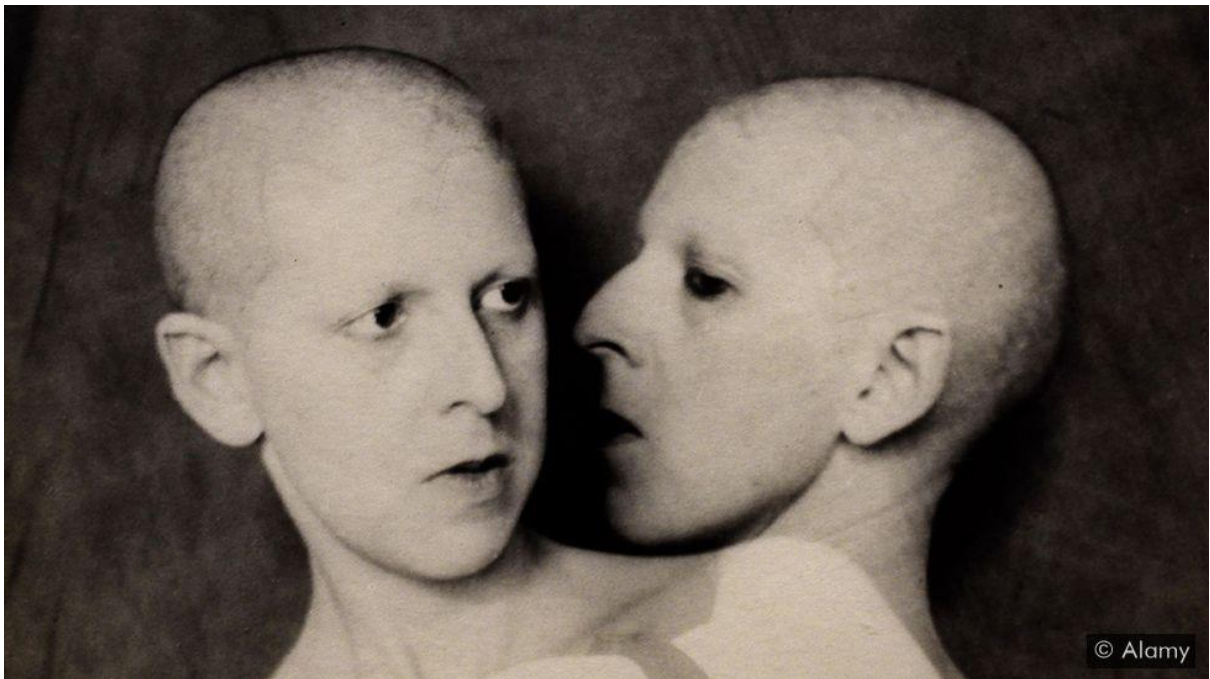
FIG. 1.5. Claude Cahun, *Que me veux tu?* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris: 1929)

In the above figure, Cahun is a two-headed creature. Perhaps playing off the mythological chimera, a beast with two heads and symbol of disparate entities becoming one, Cahun is at once staring into the distance and immediately turning to face herself. This returning gaze directed at the self is also reminiscent of the Narcissus myth, a key myth for Cahun. "The myth of

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[155] Chadwick, *Mirrors*, p.26

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Narcissus is everywhere. It haunts us"[156] she writes. Her attitude towards the myth is clearly not a positive one—we might suspect this to be in part due to the prevailing attitudes of the time linking Narcissus to negative views of homosexuality. It is true that Freud favoured the myth of Narcissus as a metaphor for the percieved psychological failings of the homosexual, stating "we have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts and homosexuals, that in their later choice of love objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves".[157] I suggest that while Cahun's meditation on Narcissus is certainly a response to this castigation of homosexuality, it is also a construction of herself as a homosexual, focusing on her personal identity, feelings of isolation and objectification alongside the countering of Freudian psychology. The double image created by the mirror allows for a more plastic identity, the opposing aspects of the object mirrored meaning that

> what appear to be objects lose the identity which appeared inherent to them if one passes from one subject to another, and each of them is resolved in a series of actually irreconcilable objects. Or more accurately, they lose that quality of object that common sense discerned in them. There is no longer an object, even the most basic one.[158]

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[156] Cahun, *Aveux non Avenus*, p.38
[157] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p.88
[158] *ibid*

By allowing multiple representations, and therefore multiple meanings, to be contained within her identity, Cahun breaks free of objecthood altogether. Latimer sees the work as a specific rejection of Freud's interpretation of the Narcissus myth, stating

> Cahun's restaging of the narcissistic scene —the simultaneous evocation of both likeness and difference, the triangulation of a doubled internal image with an external point of self-regard (that of her lover's camera) — offers an alternative to representations of the same-sex partnership as a self-enclosed unit deficient in social or cultural meaning.[159]

It is worth noting here that Cahun's depiction of her lover's gaze, even when unseen, as fundamentally constitutive of her being opens up discussions of the subject in her photography being inherently the product of compearance— she does not exist without the co-existence of Marcel Moore. David Lomas believes that "Cahun escapes the 'narcissism of appearances' through her incorporation of an actual other, her partner Marcel Moore, into a structure of self-sameness".[160] The two even refer to themselves as "singular plural"[161], engendering each other's respective beings. Mary Ann caws writes that

> we don't really know which of the self-portraits and self-postures she snapped and which were taken by her half-sister and always lover Suzanne Malherbe, known as Marcel Moore, since they both chose

[159] Latimer, p.90
[160] David Lomas, Narcissus reflected : the myth of Narcissus in surrealist and contemporary art, (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2011), p.63
[161] Ibid., p.104

masculine names; but in my view, that doesn't really matter. Cahun chose the pose. She chose the angle. And the entire presentation.[162]

I would argue that in this instance, while we still cannot know whether it was Cahun or Moore who took the photograph, that does very well matter— through making her own being and Moore's interchangeable, Cahun is able to orient herself by way of their relationship. Cahun does not exist without co-existence with Moore, and so is in constant reference to her. With Latimer's interpretation of this subversion of the Narcissus myth as demonstrating queer possibilities of being, the orienting power of queer desire through the gaze of the lover gives Cahun subjective power. She has reoriented herself to be able to interact with the world around her on her own terms, aligning herself with the tools of analysis and artistic presentation of the surrealist movement.

FIG. 1.6. *Self-portrait (reflected image in mirror with chequered jacket),*
(Washington D.C.: Wilson Centre for Photography,1927)

The use of the literal mirror in this photograph achieves similar results to the previous one – "Here Cahun reclaims the doubly stigmatized Narcissus as both a feminist and a homophile signifier[163]". with notable exceptions. However, the use of the mirror has been noted to signify an even more direct reference to psychoanalytical theory, this time of Lacan's mirror stage. Jennifer L Shaw. Writes that "Cahun uses the myth of Narcissus to highlight the power of ideal images to instill in subjects either a mirage of self-deception or a sense of their own failure or insufficiency".[164] This is an insightful observation, the "ideal image" here nodding to Lacan's concept of the mirror image being crucial for the creation of subjectivity. Elizabeth Grosz summarises Lacan's theory as

The child sees itself as a unified totality, a gestalt in the mirror: it experiences itself in a schism, as a site of fragmentation. The child's identification with its specular image impels it nostalgically to seek out a past symbiotic completeness, even if such a state never existed... and to seek an anticipatory or desired (ideal or future) identity in the coherence of the totalized specular image. Lacan claims that the child is now enmeshed in a system of confused recognition/misrecognition ... It is the dual, ambivalent relation to its own image that is central to Lacan's account of subjectivity ... Lacan posits a divided, vacillating attitude that is incapable of final resolution. This "divided" notion of the self and the

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[163] Latimer, p.93
[164] Jennifer L. Shaw, *Reading Disavowals*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p.143

problem of self-recognition are crucial in so far as they may explain

processes of social inculcation and positioning[165]

The infant finds their image in a literal mirror, during normal childhood

development, and comes to identify with the image in delight.[166] However, for

the woman surrealist, the mirror image presented to her is not really a mirror

image at all; rather, it is the image constructed by her male counterparts, her

ego encouraged to aspire to an object with which she is incapable of

identifying.

The moment of disorientation, essentially, stems from this crisis. It is

little surprise then that so much of women surrealist's work seems to revolve

around imagery associated with shattering, the unwhole, multiplicity of self,

haunted by depictions of severed body parts and many headed beasts. Cahun's

photographs acknowledge and combat this disorientation, finding ways to

orient her image through expressions of queer desire and shared identity with

her lover. Shaw continues of Cahun's relationship[167] with Lacanian theory in

Aveux non Avenus:

The parallels between Cahun's literary description of Narcissus and

Lacan's psychoanalytic description of the human subject are many. Lacan

describes the development from childhood, a development facilitated by

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[165] E.A. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.39–40

[166] Adrian Johnston, "Jacques Lacan", *The Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy* (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University: 2018).

[167] Relationship here in the sense of positionality, rather than direct knowledge and reference— while Cahun and Lacan would meet in the 1930's, per Shaw, Lacan posited the mirror stage of development several years after Cahun published *Aveux non Avenus*.

the mirror, of a desire to seek out an "ideal … identity in the coherence of the totalized specular image" that enmeshes the subject in a state of recognition and misrecognition. Similarly Cahun writes about Narcissus "falling" for his own image and loving his "mirage" and alternately by the "insufficiency" of his gaze. Perhaps most interesting for our purposes, both Lacan and Cahun see the idealization inculcated by the mirror as helping to explain "processes of social inculcation."[168]

I argue that this "social inculcation" is synonymous with Ahmed's process of orientation, aligning one's image with the axes of hegemonic society. In the above self-portrait, Cahun takes control of her own image and presents it in a way that does not rely on Lacanian idealisation. There is still the same sense of Cahun as a person, of her confrontation of the observer. Mary Ann Caws writes that it's "my favourite of all the self-reflections […] you have the feeling you are contemplating the real Lucy Schwob, as near to original as it gets […] As if, from the beginning, it were always to be a double shot: in the mirror, face turned toward you and, in the mirror turned away: she's looking at you to size up your reaction."[169] The viewer is directly addressed by Cahun, who is looking defiantly outwards. Shaw describes in detail the ways in which Cahun takes ownership of her body via resistance:

Her hair is cropped too short to be a fashionable 1920s bob; her eyebrows are indiscernible; her clothing looks more like part of a harlequin costume than either male or female dress. Where, in the

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[168] Shaw, p.143
[169] Caws, p.29

reflected image, her shirt is open to reveal her neck, we see not a soft and supple feminine swath of skin, but taught tendons. The eyes in the reflected image turn away defiantly both from the viewer and from herself in a rejection of self-absorbed narcissistic self-regard.[170]

While in the previous figures, the viewers participation was only implied, here it is undeniable; the subject is aware of her observer, and turns them into the observed. The mirror shows a reflection looking away, the other half of Cahun's face on full display. While the interpretation of reflections as a demonstration of fluid perspective remains valid, in the above figure it takes on another meaning and becomes a display of agency and self-assuredness. Cahun is aware of our observation, yes, and equally aware that we are able to observe her from multiple angles. What previously could have been seen as voyeuristic is fundamentally altered as Cahun takes ownership of her own image, allowing the viewer to see as much of herself as she chooses. She is unconcerned with the reflection, challenging conceptions of women as narcissistic, presenting a kind of inversion of the Narcissus myth. Mabille's assertion that the mirror image is essential for identity becomes baseless: The mirror does not hold any power for Cahun. Rather than looking into it in an effort to identify with the self-image, she appears to reject its role in the formation of identity and instead present herself as a fully complete entity.

What's more, there is a prominent use of orientation within the image. Cahun herself is oriented, clearly caught up in the world as demonstrated by

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[170] Shaw, *Reading Disavowals*, p.98

her interaction with the viewer. However, the mirror is presented at an odd angle, and her reflection leans at a slant as a result. What purpose does this disorientation serve? It doesn't disorient Cahun, as she does not observe the reflection. One interpretation may be that this is an expression of vulnerability, revealing an aspect of Cahun that *is* disoriented, but this seems at odds with the otherwise defiant and rebellious persona Cahun presents. Another interpretation, reminiscent of Penrose's use of disorientation discussed above, is that the purpose of this disorientation is to in turn disorient the viewer. Cahus uses her image as a weapon to challenge her observer, and reverses the usual dialectic between subject and object; the observer finds the stability of their own outlook is thrown up, and is forced to reconsider the role they play as Cahun's viewer.

These dynamics are also found in the photomontages found in Cahun's *Aveux non avenus*. Take the below figure.

FIG. 1.7. Claude Cahun with Marcel Moore, photomontage introducing Chapter 7, entitled

H.U.M, in *Aveux non avenus* (1930)

Here the subject is certainly disoriented: flashes of Cahun's face are scattered

across the page, as are fragments of the female body. Birds' heads join

gruesomely onto ribcages and shattered statues, while a flayed man leans back

in anguish beneath. In the top left corner, Cahun faces the viewer head on, a

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gin held to her temple. Beneath her and to the right, an inverted Medusa's head also stares at us. It's undoubtedly a haunting image: Shaw calles it a "nightmarish vision", and links its inclusion of scissors and body parts to its accompanying text which "includes a long dream narrative employing metaphors for castration".[171] This may symbolise a resistance to patriarchal structures of power, particularly in the image of the bird whose beak is being severed by the scissors. Shaw attributes this as a reference to Cahun's occasional alter ego "Claude Courlis", or "Claude Curlew" transliterated into English— she writes that "the representations of birds are, on one level, a symbol of Cahun herself."[172] The medusa, too, is another photo of Cahun, albeit manipulated:

FIG. 1.7. Claude Cahun, *Untitled* (Cahun Medusa), 1914

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[171] Shaw, *Exist Otherwise*, p.122

[172] Shaw, *Reading Disavowals*, p.193

Cahun takes on the paralysing powers of Medusa herself, taking the opposite role to the stoney figure in *Je tends les bras*. Here, she takes on this mythological role alongside symbols of castration, and places this Medusa head "at the bottom of a slit, takes on a clitoral resonance."[173] Situating iterations of her identity, as both Claude Courlis and Medusa, in symbols of both male and female genitalia, Cahun "wittily poses herself as both male and female, both penis replacement and clitoral bump".[174] Cahun allows her disoriented fragments of being to instead becomes sites of fluidity in terms of gender and sexuality.

Orienting the Subject

For women surrealists, resistance is the unifying hallmark of their work. As explored in this chapter, Cahun and Penrose both exhibit unique lines of approach to establishing their own artistic identity through resisting both the roles they were expected to fulfil, and the very foundation of how meaning is ascribed even in a surrealist context. Both Cahun and Penrose are, although there was little recognition of it at the time, a part of the nebulous community of women surrealists. This community, while affiliated with the wider surrealist movement, operated in a fundamentally different way; while the male surrealists were united in their common goals and values, the community of women surrealists was instead defined by resistance. While their artistic approaches can be compared and analysed, they followed no common creed and instead developed varied artistic identities that are as defined by their

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[173] Ibid, p.194
[174] Ibid.

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eclecticism as they are by their shared experience— that of being shattered, thrown up, and then reclaiming the space around them through radical reappropriation of the symbolic order through their use of mythology.

This then places their experiences within the scope of Nancy's "being-in-common", as it is their resistance to being fused as a single artistic entity despite shared aspects of their identity that prevents them from becoming a monolithic entity. This is in part thanks to the fundamentals of surrealism itself; despite the side-lining of women, it remained an artistic movement focused on the subjective reality, and gave credence to the imagined and the unconscious in a way that granted women surrealists recourse from their position encouraged by their male counterparts. Surrealism "hence, paradoxically, liberated the creative drives of the very women it was reducing to objects or muses".[175] Women surrealists used mythology not only to craft a unique identity for themselves, but also to subvert pre-existing binaries that lay outside of surrealism— presence versus absence, or subject versus object.

The properties of their community become apparent inasmuch as the subjective realities they explore can be critically examined, and the responses to the common experience of objectification can be contrasted to reflect the crucial nature not only of the process of reorientation, but of the disorientation

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[175] Georgiana Colvile, *Through an Hourglass Lightly: Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon*. In King, Russell; McGuirk, Bernard (eds.) Reconceptions Reading Modern French Poetry. University of Nottingham: 2012. p. 102.

that precedes it. To portray the work of women surrealists as a monolith would be objectifying as ignoring it entirely; a community defined by eclecticism and the search for subjecthood must be examined in kind— through strategies that acknowledge both subjective experience and the resistance to a unified entity that would overtake such an experience. Crucially, through the examination of the subverted and personal mythologies that women surrealists introduced into their works, we may gain greater insight into the mechanics of objectification they railed against and the nature of the subjecthood they strove to create.

The Monstrous Material: Towards Reparative Readings and Accepting Alterity

Beyond Boundaries

Having begun to explore the ways in which the works of women surrealists explore the relationality of being through expressions of disorientation and orientation within mythological frameworks, the exact troubling of the boundaries of the self must be examined in more critical detail. In order to facilitate this, the material site of the self must be examined: that is, the body. The body is a central concern for many women surrealists, searching for a way in which they could "seek to move beyond polemics and binary oppositions toward a discourse— a mythology and iconography— based on

women's own psychology and experiences",[176] The body is the object that they were at times reduced to, and control of the body stood in for control of the self— the manipulation of the female form in men's surrealism proved mastery over the being of women. The desire explicitly for their physical form, and the violence enacted upon it in surrealist art, led to the subversion of corporeal imagery being a powerful tool to demonstrate agency. With images of women's bodies deconstructed and fragmented as they were, the woman surrealists' presentation of the female physical form seems to be one primarily concerned with integrity— the bodily depiction of transgressed boundaries between the self and the other. The blurring of the inner and outer, demonstrated in motifs of dismemberment and disembowelment, animal hybridity and depersonalisation, marks women surrealists' presentation of the body with both a particular anxiety surrounding their physical form, alongside a particular determination to master such anxiety in a reclamation of monstrosity. Coleville observes how "Women surrealists' paintings, collages and photographs include mythical creatures, hybrids or zoomorphic shapes"[177] frequently, while Chadwick expands that

> Often women artists in the Surrealist movement wove the pieces of
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> feminine self-awareness into fabulist narratives peopled with magical
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> beasts and legendary characters [...] the female body in the works of
>
> women Surrealists served as an important harbinger of women's desire

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[176] Gwen Raaberg, "The Problematics of Women's Surrealism", in *Women and Surrealism*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991) pp.1-10
[177] Coleville, *Angels of Anarchy*, p.66

to image themselves by speaking through their own bodies. It is perhaps through their many and diverse images of embodied femininity that women Surrealists left their most powerful and pervasive legacy[178]

This chapter will illustrate the ways in which several women surrealists can be seen to critically explore the experience of being othered, exploring the transgression of physical boundaries through mythological imagery, and in turn troubling the boundaries that have been enforced by a phallogocentric environment in order to contain them in restrictive social role. These mythological narratives "dramatize the dilemma of persons who are out of place in the spaces designated for them (...) but in all cases the search for personal moorings leads not to self-definition but to a state in between, a sort of limbo".[179] By playing into their own fluid, multiple identities through the presentation of their bodies, women surrealists were able to imagine ways of being that acknowledge the plurality of being through literary and artistic production. Nancy writes that

> literature inscribes being-in-common, being for others and through others ... It inscribes us as exposed to one another and to our respective deaths in which we reach one another-in passing to the limit-mutually. To reach one another-in passing to the limit-is not to commune, which is to accede to another total body where everyone melts together. But to reach one another, to touch one another, is to touch the limit where

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[178] Chadwick, *Mirrors*, p.13

[179] Judith Preckshot, "Identity Crises: Joyce Mansour's Narratives", in *Women and Surrealism*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991) pp.96-113

being itself, where being-in-common conceals us one from the other, and, in concealing us, in withdrawing us from the other before the other, exposes us to him or her.[180]

Such "exposures" in the works examined here will be in the shape of literal, physical contact— bodies whose boundaries are drawn up against those of mythical beings, hybrids and monsters that shift between the human and animal in a constant back and forth. By examining how the works of women surrealists portray their exposure to the world, including the fantastical elements of myth, this chapter hopes to further the argument that rather than aiming to "accede to another total body" with respect to their artistic identities, these artists instead recognised the way in which they came into contact with the world, and how this contact constituted being itself.

In order to fully engage with a model of identity that does not distinguish between subject and object, this thesis will also turn to a New Materialist ontology that "cuts across 'the mind-matter and culture-nature divides of transcendental humanist thought' (van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010: 155), thereby putting into question other social theory dualisms including structure/agency, surface/depth; reason/emotion, human/non-human, and animate/inanimate".[181] This way of conceptualising being is reminiscent of Nancy's view of myth as a "the transcendental autofiguration of nature and of humanity, or more exactly the autofiguration— or the autoimagination— of

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[180] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.66
[181] Nick J. Fox, Pam Alldred. *Sociology and the New Materialism: Theory, Research, Action,* (London: SAGE Publications, 2016), p.13.

nature as humanity and of humanity as nature".[182] This thesis will allow for those multiple emergences of corporeality through allowing the examination of women surrealist's bodies and how they are represented through mythological imagery to be founded in the fundamental necessity of existence as co-existence. The New Materialist engagement with the mythological imagery present in women's surrealism will examine how it is used as an exploration of the Otherness felt by marginalised identities, and the alterity that exists within the self at all times.

This will largely be conducted with reference to Rosi Braidotti's work on the "post-human", a reconfiguration of subjectivity that deconstructs the oppositions built up between self and other in favour of a more relational, embodied approach to identity. Braidotti notes that

> Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self- regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'.[183]

In defiance of this essentialism, and the frequently phallocentric mechanisms of this binary framework, Braidotti puts forward what she describes as an "anti-humanist" view of being that claims "Subjectivity is rather a process of auto-poesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with

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[182] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.54
[183] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p.15

dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability".[184]

This definition of subjectivity seems to resonate with Nancy's description of

myth as "self-styling— in an autopoetic mimesis".[185] Braidotti relates her theory

of the posthuman to art and modernism closely when discussing "the inhuman

nature of the artistic object [which] consists of a combination of non-

functionalism and ludic seductiveness. This is precisely what the surrealists

meant by the 'bachelor machines' – an idea that Deleuze and Guattari adopted

and transformed in the theory of 'bodies without organs' or a-functional and

un-organic frames of becoming".[186] Art is capable of connecting us to the other,

exploring and revealing the limits of being to us. By exploring the ways in

which women surrealists engaged with artistic practices and mythological

imagery as ways of rejecting their role as the artistic object, and how this

crucially involved constructing an identity that was relational and collaborative

in nature, a posthuman perspective may guide critique towards a deeper

understanding of myth's power to reimagine the self.

Experiencing the Abject

Myth is recognised by Bataille intimately tied to the sacred as a domain

of taboo and its necessary transgression. Myths often encode the very taboos—

around death, sexuality, filth, and the sacred—that structure communal life, yet

they also stage the ritual breach of these taboos. Myth is capable of expressing

paralogical narratives and states of being in order to confront and displace

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[184] Ibid, p.35
[185] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.56
[186] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.107

normative structures. The role of taboo, in this context, serves less as a moral boundary than as a generative threshold, where the self confronts the other within and outside itself. This "other" can be embodied by mythological monstrosity, women artists reimagining the body as repulsive, animal, and undesirable. Chadwick describes how "Surrealism has provided the starting point for works that challenge existing representations of the feminine through re-imaginings of the female body as provisional and mutable"[187]; the mythological expression taboo through monstrosity challenges the representation of the body in this manner. One perspective on such monstrosity can be explored through the idea of abjection. Abjection, for Kristeva, belongs to an undefined "past", a pre-oedipal stage of development. It is what comes before, that which we must reject in order to fully create ourselves, while simultaneously being that which we can never escape. For Kristeva, "The tragic and sublime fate of Oedipus sums up and displaces the mythical defilement that situates impurity on the untouchable "other side" constituted by the other sex, within the corporeal border-the thin sheet of desire [...] it proceeds by means of exclusion, as we have seen it at work in the logic of other mythical and ritual systems."[188] The abject is othered frequently by a means of spatial exclusion, and exists as such in the realm of mythology. Mythology too is that which has come before, in an ever-vanishing past, and showcases the monstrous and taboo that its culture rejects; for Bataille, it is transgression and taboo "which gave shape to the myths that provided the basis for human

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[187] Chadwick, *Mirrors*, p.15
[188] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection,* (New York Columbia University Press, 1982), p.83-84

society".[189] If it is "the foundation of life, the timeless schema, the pious

formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the

unconscious"[190], then it too has its abject that must be rejected in order to

preserve itself. This abject comes in the shape of the monstrous- the gorgon,

the minotaur, the many-headed sea monster, are slain, or locked away far from

humanity. This monstrosity, in its various forms, represent the threats to

culture contained by the abject— threats to the border between self and other,

between life and death, human and animal. It is the bodily site of abjection, and

a channel through which an exploration of the other through the self may

present itself.

The artist's image and that of the myth they employ both threaten each

other; the observer struggles to differentiate between the subject and the

monster whose form they are taking on, and finds their own position of power

as the active party in relation to a work of art brought into question; rather

than holding the upper hand over the work they are observing, suddenly they

themselves are becoming observed, an unearthly predator returning their gaze.

An example of this is in Leonor Fini's *Angel of Anatomy,* depicting a female

figure flayed and disembowelled, reduced to a skeleton with scant muscle

tissue and only an intact head alongside large wings.

[189] Richardson, p.113

[190] Thomas Mann, "Freud and the Future", *Daedalus*, 88 (1959) 374-378 (374).
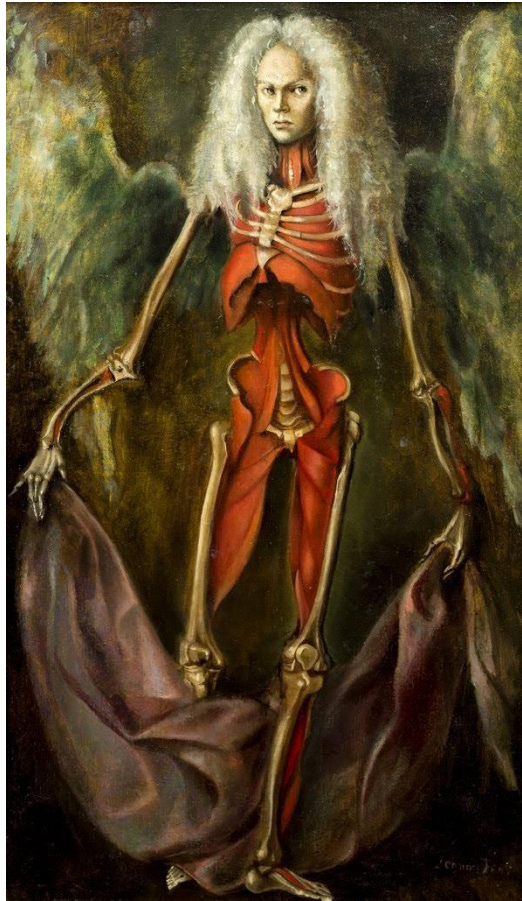
FIG. 2.1. Leonor Fini, *Angel of Anatomy* (Paris: Private Collection, 1949)

The figure poses gracefully, at odds with its gruesome appearance. Any identifiably female anatomy has been stripped away, and the rippling sheet pooling around the figure's feet denotes a willingness to this exposure— the viewer's presence is recognised. The head and face, the only parts of the woman's body left unmutilated, return the viewer's gaze, mirroring the defiance of Cahun's work explored in previous chapters: the viewer becomes the viewed, and the subject becomes the object. Indeed, the head being the only part of the body left intact is a defiance of woman as muse, as the physical form that was fetishized is stripped away. The image has the air of a medical study,

or some scientific investigation as the body is taken apart calmly. This debridement is perhaps a quest for self-knowledge, an attempt to master the body through peering inside, mimicking the violence of objectification often felt by women surrealists. Fini herself "eschews categorisation"[191], and rejected the labels of surrealist, feminist, or anything that might infringe on her autonomy, stating

> It seemed that women were expected to keep quiet … yet I felt that I was just as good as the men…. I never saw the point of being part of one group, and … I refused the label Surrealist….I preferred to walk alone.[192]

For Fini, the idea of belonging to a community seemed to carry with it the anxiety of being completely subsumed and robbed of individuality- Grew recognises that "any discussion of this artist requires breaking out of traditional categories and adopting a more fluid approach."[193] While she may not have accepted the label of feminist, the imagery used here can certainly be viewed from a feminist perspective. There is a double meaning to such medicalised imagery; on the one hand, the organs that were used to justify a "scientific" basis for women's oppression have been stripped away, leaving the hollowed-out body androgynous, and perhaps free from the burden of such heavily overseen organs. However, it also speaks to that very same rigorous observation— that women, often, were metaphorically stripped for parts,

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[191] Grew, *Dressing UP*, p.1
[192] Interview with Leonor Fini by Peter Webb, *Sphinx: The Life and Art of Leonor Fini*, (New York and London: The Vendome Press, 2009), p.69-72
[193] Grew, *Dressing UP*, p.1

splayed and laid bare under a medical lens so as to be deconstructed and further dominated.

What this painting perhaps does is force the viewer to confront this process; it is made explicit, in all of its (literally) gory detail. The sheet has been dropped to allow a viewer's gaze, but there is nothing to see but bone and ligament; the figures has escaped objectification by having nothing to objectify, undercutting the very mechanics of desire. Fini is communicating through this unveiling, communicating with the observer. For Kristeva

> Communication brings my most intimate subjectivity into being for the other; and this act of judgment and supreme freedom, if it authenticates me, also delivers me over to death. Is this to say that my own speech, all speech perhaps, already harbors in itself something that is mortal, culpable, abject?[194]

The act of communicating is the creation of contact between the self and the other— what on its face may seem a banal definition opens space for further discussion on the role of artistic production and the abject. If we take it that all communication harbours something of the abject inside it, then so too does the compearance of beings that are always in communication with one another, whose co-presence "is a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows, or the communication of the passion to be fellows, to be in

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[194] Kristeva, p. 129

common".[195] Simply by the virtue of their co-existence, beings brought into contact with one another are confronted by the boundaries that separate them, but also interminably cross and re-cross them through that act of recognition. The contact between self and other is literal here, demonstrated in the bird wings sprouting from the figure's back. The body is stripped bare, but it is also hybridised, grafted with bird wings- hybridisation was a central interest for Fini, who once wrote

> J'ai toujours pensée que les attributs des humains sont bien réduits, bien limités. J'ai toujours envié les bêtes… surtout leurs cornes…Les cornes qui permeetent de si joli mouvements de tête—ells donnent étrange allure, dignité, exaltation, aggressivité … [L]es femmes cornues ne pouvant que bouger avec souverineté et parfois avec la plus gracieuse modestie.[196]

While the figure depicted here has wings, rather than horns, it is clear that the hybrid nature of Fini's figure is part of the transgression, a transgression of the animal into the human. They are also, in this manner, something of a performance- Fini takes them onto her body, with the full intention of later discarding them and taking up a different form. They are, for Grew, an artifice[197], which demonstrates "both her belief in the multiplicity of self afforded to her by dressing up, and her engagement with the concept of

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[195] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.61

[196] Leonor Fini, *Le Livre de Leonor Fini,* (Lausanne: La Guilde du Livre et Les Éditions Clairefontaine, and Paris: Vilo, 1975), p.44

[197] Grew clarifies that her use of the term artifice does not imply falsehood, but rather intentional construction of something that is "other" than what it seems

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continually fluctuating self".[198] Fini's engagement with the abject confronts the idea of the abject itself— the idea that there is anything that is truly outside of the self at all.

The Limits of Abjection

A purposeful lean in to the abject, as an inherent state of disorientation, or "What disturbs identity, system, order [...] What does not respect borders, positions, rules"[199] would allow women surrealists to explore identities that did not rely on fixed, stable definitions. For Chadwick,

> The articulation of self through strategies that identify the self and the exterior world or that register the self through traces, absences, or disguises both afflrm and deny the embodied self. Masking, masquerade, and performance have all proved crucial for the production of feminine subjectivity through active agency.[200]

Just as embracing their disorientation would allow them to disorient those observing them, the fear of the abject is transferred to a spectator who finds their own boundaries threatened by explicit portrayals of abjection. This abjection of the self comes in the form of bodies mutilated, hollowed out or dismembered into separate parts. The corpse, the ultimate expression of abjection, walks and talks in women's surrealism, at once brashly independent and balefully accusatory. The horror of those parts of the body that were not desirable, and thus repressed, instead comes to the forefront.

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[198] Grew, "Feathers, flowers and flux", p.265
[199] Kristeva, p.4
[200] Chadwick, *Mirrors*, p.22

Another example of the monstrous body being used in a productive mode, and repositioning explorations of the abject into the first person, is Leonora Carrington's *Evening Conference,* pictured in Figure 2.2. The strange, humanoid figures often found in Leonora Carrington's works are entirely desexed, shrouded beneath layers of feathers, fur, or flowing robes. Their faces are covered— Madeleine Cottonet-Hage notes of Carrington's penchant for the mask that it "strongly suggests abandoning the possibility of distinct, analytical knowledge of the self and of the universe and enacting a desire to be One with— diffused in— an undifferentiated cosmos"[201].

FIG. 2.2. Leonora Carrington, *Evening Conference* (Paris: Private Collection, 1949)

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[201] Madeleine Cottonet-Hage, "The Body Subversive: Corporeal Imagery in Carrington, Prassinos, and Mansour", in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws et al., (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p.78

This is certainly true in several of her other works, such as an untitled three-panelled folding screen[202] (Fig. 2.3) painted with animals intermingled with other animals, and even vegetation, certainly giving the impression of such undifferentiated existences. These animals transcend multiple boundaries: the first, a boundary between itself and other animals, serpentine head and neck from a quadrupedal body. The central figure transcends the boundary between animal and human, taking on the sapient ability to play a musical instrument, and wearing a crown perhaps symbolic of human sovereignty.
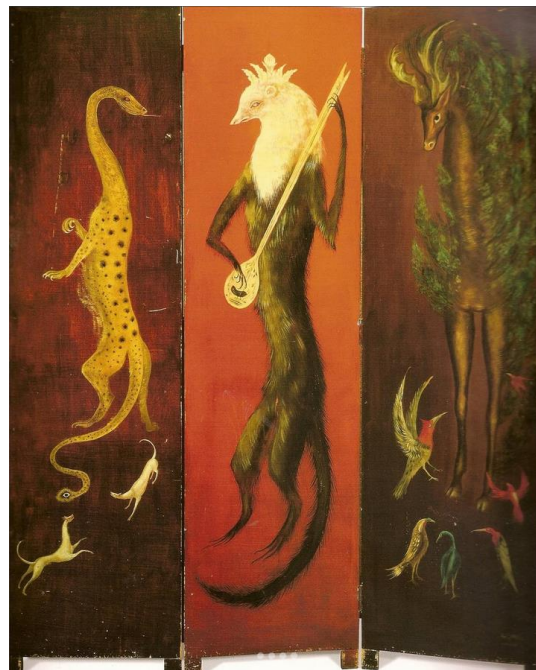

FIG. 2.3. Leonora Carrington, Untitled three-panelled folding screen, Private Collection, 1964

Carrington presents humanity and animality as existing on a spectrum, an ongoing negotiation of co-creation. Braidotti's assertion that

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the point about posthuman relations, however, is to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the 'nature' of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction.[203]

Here in Carrington's work we may see the middle ground— not just human figures with animal aspects, but the converse arrangement as well. Finally, the third stag-like creature finds itself on the borders of animal and vegetation, green branches erupting from its skin and mingling with the antlers protruding from its head. Interestingly, the first and third creatures have smaller animals playing around their feet, looking upwards at their much larger counterparts. This gives the transgressive animals a sense of authority, a power over the other animals by virtue of their otherworldliness.

The forms depicted in *Evening Conference* in contrast are vague, suggestive of limbs and features without conforming to expected arrangements of either component. The masking of the body here pushes the limits of interplay between subject and object; there is a barely legible humanity to these figures, and it is perhaps easier for the observer to at first recognise them as "things" rather than "people". They are disorienting in their shapelessness, as the viewer searches for a recognisable configuration of anatomy and is left wanting. Susan L. Aberth describes Carrington's favouring of such shapelessness as a replacement for her previous portrayals of feminine

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[203] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.87

androgynous power, declaring both "serve as signifiers of the appropriation of male esoteric knowledge".[204] They are to a certain perspective disoriented, as such improbable bodies could not hope to extend themselves into the space around them in any meaningful way, unsuited for interaction with the mundane world. However, it is clear that these bodies are oriented in their own space, conducting their conference in a manner outside of the observer's comprehension. Their alternative organisations and orientations gives their bodies novel possibilities, ones the observer is not privy to. For Cottonet-Hage, the bodies portrayed in Carrington's works are "amenable to limitless possibilities of exchange with the outside".[205] The ritual significance of the objects in front of them is evident, even if what that significance entails is obscure; the figures are engaging with a world that others cannot hope to fathom, perhaps proving that they themselves have become reoriented in a space constructed *for* them: they are rendered no less disorienting to an outsider, but are able to express and extend themselves on their own terms. This image is a testament to alienation, both of the figures from the world around them and of the world to the figures; it is a mutual, and unchangeable, incompatibility. They exist *outside*— outside of our comprehension, outside of object/subject distinctions, and outside of the surrealist's much feared "tyranny of reason".

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[204] Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, (London: Lund Humphries, 2010), p.23
[205] Cottonet Hage, p.78

However, this presents a problem within our Kristevan framework—while the blurring between subject and object found within the semiotic can rupture into our consciousness, for Kristeva this state cannot be sustained. To reside outside of the subject/object binary is psychosis, a breakdown both in one's identity and the fabric of culture itself. Poetic language may allow for semiotic expression, but it can only be short lived, and is not permitted to perpetuate itself without becoming pathologised. In her assessment of Kristeva's body politics, Butler writes that

> Kristeva accepts the assumption that culture is equivalent to the symbolic, that the symbolic is fully subsumed under the "Law of the Father", and that the only modes of non-psychotic activity are those which participate in the symbolic to some extent. Her strategic task, then, is not to replace the symbolic with the semiotic nor to establish the semiotic as a rival cultural possibility, but rather to validate those experiences within the symbolic that permit a manifestation of the borders which divide the symbolic from the semiotic [206]

To view the ways in which the other is in contact with the self through the lens may indeed be problematic in its hierarchical approach that prioritises the latter over the former. Furthermore, this hierarchy certainly seems to be at odds with Nancy's more egalitarian approach to beings-in-common as being equally indebted to each other in their compearance. In order to fully appreciate the scope of women surrealists' methods for engaging with their

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[206] Butler, p.10

own identities, it becomes important to build upon the concept of abjection in a way that recognises it's social, material roots, and move away from the essentialism that it can engender. To borrow further from Nancy, "the whole task, here, is to do right by identities, but without ceding anything to their frenzy, to their presuming to be substantial identities".[207] In order to "do right" by the identities of these artists, who often rejected strict differentiations in the form of defined communities, and even in the form of defined bodies, moving away from such delineated roles of self and other may offer more fruitful insights into their use of imagery.

New Materialism and the Reparative Motion

When attempting to expand on the abject, there is the temptation to approach it on its on terms— through imitation, something may be more fully understood, and thus more effectively engaged with. However, in doing so, the structure of a coherent self versus the unreachable other are propagated, and these separations of nature from culture, human from animal, woman from the realm of man, are taken for granted. The difficulties of engaging with this psychoanalytic discourse without unwittingly partaking in it is noted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick in her *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You* (Paranoid Reading). She observes that

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[207] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.149

the absence of any guaranteed nonprejudicial point of beginning for

feminist thought within psychoanalysis has led to widespread adoption

by some thinkers of an anticipatory mimetic strategy whereby a certain,

stylized violence of sexual differentiation must always be presumed or

self-assumed— even, where necessary, imposed.[208]

New Materialism, particularly the works of Braidotti as discussed below, in

contrast will allow for an analytical approach that more fully reflects the

fluidities presented in the examined works, and builds upon Nancy's view of

myth as a humanisation of nature and naturalisation of the human. By adopting

a framework that cuts across the boundaries of the cultural versus natural, or

the human versus animal, this thesis may find toll that can better encapsulate

and explore the transgressive work of women surrealists. This approach,

centring the material and social realities of women surrealists, also encourages

an alternative view of the oppression they faced:

While post-structuralism and social constructionism provided a means to

break through top-down, determinist theories of power and social

structure, the focus upon textuality, discourses and systems of thought in

these approaches tended to create distance between theory and practice,

and gave the sense that radical, interventionist critiques of inequities and

oppressions were merely further constructions of the social world. The

turn to matter offers a re-immersion in the materiality of life and

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208 Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You", in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, ed. by Michele Aina Barale et al. (Cambridge: Duke University Press, 2003) *pp.123-151* (p133).

struggle, and a recognition that in a monist world – because there is no 'other level' that makes things do what they do – everything is necessarily relational and contextual rather than essential and absolute.[209]

The necessity of relationality is in step with previous discussions of being-in-common and queer disorientation. Indeed, we must take responsibility for our own place within this system, and the relationship that this creates with the Other, and the fluidity of both the self and that which surrounds it. This new may help to acknowledge the relational nature between self and other, prioritising a reparative approach to women surrealists' work. Such an approach may build from Nancy's singular beings that "are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear"[210] and more fully immerse ourselves in a framework of relationality where "instead of starting from universal laws -social or natural- and to take local contingencies as so many queer particularities that should be either eliminated or protected, it starts from irreducible, incommensurable, unconnected localities, which then, at a great price, sometimes end into provisionally commensurable connections".[211]

These localities represent the esoteric approaches to surrealism that these women artists undertook, their resistances to the misogyny of Breton's surrealist movement, as well as the personal and invented mythologies they

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[209] Nick J. Fox and Pam Alldred, *Sociology and the New Materialism: Theory, Research, Action.* (London: SAGE Publications, 2016) p.8

[210] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.58

[211] Bruno Latour, "On actor-network theory: a few clarifications", *Soziale Welt,* 47.4 (1996) 369-381 (p.370)

used as a unique symbolic language. In their frequent rejection of labels that would have marked them as part of a coherent community, they become a community which "resists this infinite immanence. The compearance of singular beings— or of the singularity of being— keeps open a space, a spacing within immanence".[212]

This spacing within immanence prioritises the multiplicity of being above its sublimation, and therefore reduction, to a monolithic community. Through it's recognition, we might interpret a reparative gesture in this approach to the work of women alongside surrealism. Sedgewick's call for a reworking of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" that lead to such reductions proffers instead the possibility of reparative reading that is "frankly ameliorative"[213] in its critical practice. This amelioration relies on moving past the suspicious motives that define paranoid reading's ever-defensive position; rather, "instead of powerful reductions, it prefers acts of noticing, being affected, taking joy, and making whole"[214]. In bringing together women artists who operated within surrealism, who Allmer says "occupies a permanently impermanent position, haunting the discourse at its margins[215]" and putting the fluidity of their approach to identity and physicality into focus, we may better understand their conceptions of how identity was constructed.   Braidotti notes that

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[212] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.58
[213] Sedgewick, p.144
[214] Heather Love, "Truth and consequences: on paranoid reading and reparative reading", *Criticism*, 52.2 (2010), pp 235+, (p.238)
[215] Allmer, *Intersections*, p.1

The dialectics of otherness is the inner engine of humanist Man's power, who assigns difference on a hierarchical scale as a tool of governance. All other modes of embodiment are cast out of the subject position and they include anthropomorphic others: non-white, non-masculine, non-normal, non-young, non-healthy, disabled, malformed or enhanced peoples. They also cover more ontological categorical divides between Man and zoo-morphic, organic or earth others. All these 'others' are rendered as pejoration, pathologized and cast out of normal-ity, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestial-ity.[216]

This pathologization of otherness reproduces harmful hegemonies that render those considered as "other" as, necessarily, worse. This is where a model of subjectivity founded in the post-human becomes a strength— we are able to observe how the women artists associated with surrealism explore otherness and the relational nature of their being without framing otherness as aberrant.

Let us examine, for example— *La Bergere de Sphynx*.

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[216] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.68
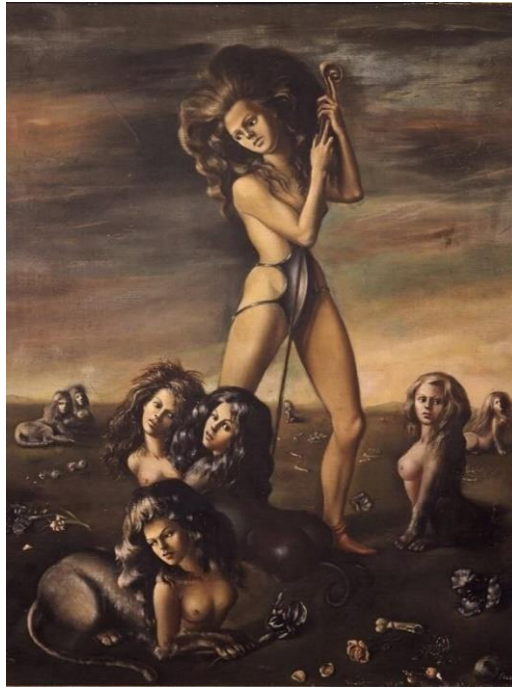
F<small>IG</small>. 2.4. Leonor Fini, *La Bergere de Sphynx*, (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, 1941)

The figure here is similar in many ways to that in *Angel of Anatomy*- Fini
is recorded as saying "In a sense my painting has always been my
autobiography. A revealing autobiography because my paintings do not
interpret either my conscious development or my experiences; rather they
'unmask' a being inside me[217]". As before, there is a significance to the
presence both of recognisably human features and those of animals,
culminating in the image of the mythical Sphynx. It is perhaps worth discussing
here the difference in symbolic meaning between sphinxes of different
cultures— the Greek Sphinx versus the Egyptian. Mahon writes of this
difference "where the sphinx of Greek mythology was a monstrous threat to
stability, the sphinx of Egyptian mythology was a protector, the guardian of the

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[217] Interview with Leonor Fini, *Leonor Fini: Pourquoi Pas?*, trans. L-H. Svensson (Umea:
Bildesmuseet, 2014), p.121.

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temples of the Nile Valley, the figure who guarded the entrance to death".[218]

Mahon sees Fini as largely embracing the latter, stating that she "presented a sphinx who is often an androgynous and benevolent figure, frequently adorned with Oriental jewels and headdress. Fini presents the sphinx as Nature empowered but also poised against 'civilization' and all its violence".[219] Fini's sphinx, for Mahon, is a guardian against the consumption of "nature" by "culture", the irrational by the rational. I argue that this does not perhaps fully represent the destabilising powers of Fini's sphinxes, which do not so much guard and reify boundaries as they do explore their porosity. Victoria Ferentinou notes that

> Fini relies upon the idea of woman as closely linked with the natural world and the life/death cycle. Her description, however, reveals a holistic conception of nature that transcends spirit/matter distinctions, as well as an active role for women. Meaningfully, the twofold image of woman as both creator of life and harbinger of death, benevolent and dangerous, carnal and spiritual is employed by Fini to configure her self-portrait characters.[220]

The "holistic" conception of nature is especially important here, particularly in its capacity to transcend the distinctions between spirit and matter. Fini cuts across the divide between human/animal, as well as real/mythical, blurring the

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[218] Mahon, p.10
[219] Ibid.
[220] Victoria Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism" in *Aries*, 13.1, (2013), p.124

boundaries of the self as she explores the alterity inherent in her own subjectivity. Chadwick writes of Fini's sphinx imagery in particular that "by assuming the form of the sphinx she exercises all the powers that have been lost to contemporary women".[221] This exploration of new power and possibility is an ongoing negotiation, even within the bounds of the painting— the multiplicity of the sphynxes suggests an iterative process, or else one that diverges and co-exists with its own manifold possibilities Grew recognises Fini's affection for repeating the self, writing that

> In repeating herself differently throughout her different works, Fini
> creates a series of reflections, repeating specific fragments that enable
> her to reiterate her body without confining her identity to a single 'type'.
> [...] In doing so, Fini creates a series of self-portraits which reveal any
> notion of an individual, 'true' self as a masquerade; her identity has
> shifted each time, multiplying to the extent that finding a single self is
> highly problematic.[222]

This iterative process can be seen in the numerous pieces produced by Fini where she is hybridised with other creatures: again with the sphinx in *Sphinx de profil*[223], and with birdlike features in her costume designs for *Le Reve de Leonor*[224].

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[221] Chadwick, *Women artists in Surrealism*, p.188
[222] Grew, "Feathers, Flowers and Flux", p.260
[223] Leonor Fini, *Sphinx de Profil*, Private Collection, 1980
[224] Leonor Fini, Costume Design for the Black Bird, Leonor Fini Archive, Paris, 1949

FIG. 2.5. Leonor Fini, *Sphinx de profil,* (Private Collection, 1980)

FIG. 2.6. Leonor Fini, *Costume Design for the Black Bird*, (Paris: Leonor Fini Archive, 1940)

These figures further demonstrate Fini's appetite for demonstrating the hybrid, fluid nature of her identity. The black bird costume in Figure 2.6., labelled with the name of Belgian ballet dancer Oleg Briansky, indicates it is intended for a male dancer despite the androgynous nature of its appearance. The use of avian imagery in the form of feathers sprouting from human flesh repeatedly through her different works can be seen as "a series of interactions[which] break down generic categories of male and female, as well as seduction and creativity".[225] Braidotti notes that

> This idea of the subject as process means that he/she can no longer be seen to coincide with his/her consciousness but must be thought of as a complex and multiple identity, as the site of the dynamic interaction of desire with the will, of subjectivity with the unconscious. Not just libidinal desire, but rather ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject toward being.[226]

The process of subjectivity, here seen as both the woman-becoming-animal and the animal-becoming-woman embodied by the figure of the sphynx, signifies the artists desire to be plural through the medium of the body. Allmer writes that in Fini's work, "In-between-ness is not only anchored in the figure of the

[225] Grew, "Feathers, flowers and flux", p.265
[226] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.196

sphinx but also in its role"[227], as they guarded the boundaries between the world of the living and the dead. Coleville concurs, stating "Death always lurks in Fini's work. She creates a surreal antimony between the worlds of the living and the dead. [...] Her sphinxes ominously guard the limits between feminine and masculine, human and animal, the world and the underworld."[228] Here, I would like to differ from Coleville slightly- while it is clear that Fini's sphinxes do indeed stand at the boundaries, I would argue they are not "guarding" per se— this would seem contrary to Fini's delight in transgressing said boundaries, and her frequent refusal of strict binaries. Rather, they appear to be a site of transgression themselves, a point of intermingling and hybridity. Mahon notes that Fini's use of sphinxes differs from their traditional usage in Surrealism to signify the forbidden commingling of the sexes, instead "Fini presents a peculiarly Egyptian sphinx, expanding the sphinx's mythology for surrealism so that the feminine denotes humanism rather than the simple threat of death".[229]

For Grew, the sphinx is representative of Fini's interest in hybrids, which were "a key theme of Fini's oeuvre and one which perfectly encapsulates the notion of transformation, as it reveals a body that is caught between states, blurring borders between human and animal [...] Fini's interest in such hybridity is most commonly expressed through the motif of the sphinx".[230] Hybridity here is a powerful representation of entanglement, a co-existence that is productive rather than diluting. It is wrong perhaps, to even refer to the

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227 Allmer, *Of Fallen Angels,* p.26
228 Coleville, "Beauty and/is the Beast", p.162
229 Mahon, p.5
230 Grew, *Dressing UP*, p.17

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hybrid in the singular, as Nancy insists "hybridization is not "something." And if the hybrid, which each one of us is in his or her own way, is someone, it is not by virtue of any essence of hybridization (a contradictory notion), but rather insofar as it provides a punctuation".[231] Even the melange of human and animal into mythological monster is not a reductive gesture— both identities exist in their entirety, alongside and within the sphinx. This punctuation is a notation of relationality; I suggest that it is one of an orientation towards one another, the repeated exposure of the self to mythological monstrosity reorienting the artist's identity in an act of mutual co-creation. The noted iterative nature of Fini's work is reminiscent of Ahmed's description of repeated actions that reorient the body into a space where it can fully extend into the world— here, Fini's repeated interaction with myth fictions a world for the subject where it might extend in manifold, fluid ways.

Fini's hybrid is an embodiment of an entangling with the mythological, a demonstration of the monstrous other within the self, and vice-versa. These mythological figures are held within Fini's work out of a deep compassion *for* that otherness, her affection for dressing up and becoming other— she held a profound desire to "changer de dimension, d'espèce, d'espace. [Se costumer] c'est pouvoir se sentir gigantesque, plonger dans les végétaux, devenir animal, jusqu'à se sentir invulnérable et hors de temps, se retrouver, obscurément, dans les rituels oubliés."[232] In the forgotten rituals of myth, Fini refinds herself; precisely because identity cannot be completely subsumed by myth anymore,

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[231] Nancy*, Being Singular Plural*, p.150
[232] Leonor Fini, "Mes Théâtres" in *Corps écrit* (1984) p.31.

because myth no longer has the power to bring about an immanent community, it is a powerful vehicle for the exploration of the boundaries of the self, and a site of shared being with the other.

Braidotti writes that "a posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism".[233] By deconstructing her own individualism through presenting fluid and multiple identities, Fini can be seen to create such a non-unitary subject. Mythological monsters such as the sphinx or harpy are able to donned as costume, their aspects recognised in the self without the identity of the wearer becoming threatened, as "myths, ideas, motifs drawn from occulture were revised, re-modified and utilized to create new feminine/feminist myths pictorially manifested in their artistic output". [234]

The woman surrealist sustains contact with the other through her co-existence with the mythological, and all of its inhumanness. By recognising and reaching out to the alterity of the monstrous, Fini is able to perpetuate her own becoming as it continually emerges. Braidotti notes that "'others' are the integral element of one's successive becomings [...] subjects are collective assemblages, that is to say they are dynamic, but framed: fields of forces that aim at duration and affirmative self-realization. In order to fulfil them, they

[233] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.49-50
[234] Ferentinou, p.126

need to be drawn together along a line of composition."[235] Fini, as both the shepherdess and the sphynx, quite literally draws the lines upon which her own becomings may occur through her artistic practices. Leon Kotchnisky describes her role in the painting as "the imperious shepherdess of a herd of sphinxes [who] really creates a new myth; these are other Arianes, Andromedas, Cleopatras – although they do not have these names".[236] While I would not suggest that what Kotchnitsky perceives as "imperiousness" carries with it any of the implied disdain or superiority, I argue that Fini does indeed take up a role of authority within the milieu of myth, situating herself as a guider and shaper of mythological narrative.

Expanding upon the quest for self-knowledge in Fini's *Angel of Anatomy*, the New Materialist reconfiguration of abjection and its mutable boundaries of the self creates space for the vulnerability portrayed again to move from anxiety into compassion.

Fini's self-examination in Figure 2.1. is one that dissects the body, cutting across and into it. However, rather than a destructive impulsive, this might rather be seen as an act of supreme connection, and of vulnerability as mentioned in previous analysis. Fini's figure sheds her outer layers as though she may finally be able to rid herself of the boundaries between the self and the other; by exposing the core of her body, she may better touch the outside world, and the outside world may better touch her. Braidotti writes that

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[235] Rosi Braidotti, "Writing as a Nomadic Subject", *Comparative Critical Studies*, 11.2-3 (2014), pp.163-185 (p.173)
[236] Leon Kotchnitsky, "Shepherdess of the Sphinxes" in *View*, 3.2 (June 1943), p.66

"empathy and compassion are key features of this nomadic yearning for in-depth trans-formation"[237] and Fini's work shows visually the depth with which this compassion is felt: to the bone. She is exposed, having undertaken the ultimate troubling of the self by physically dismantling the borders of her own body. There is some suggestion that this process has been a successful one— the growth of wings on her back indicates the finitude of her own humanity, the rupture of the mythological other springing from her body.

Her form is in a state of flux, shedding its humanity as well as gaining a mythological aspect, half-fixed in a state of transformation much like the Sphinx. There is a diffusion of the self into the other, and, as always, vice-versa. The abject is not a threat, one which menaces the boundaries with the promise of robbing the self of its subjectivity. Neither has hybridity consumed her, forcing her into a singularity of being. Rather, through this allowance of the other to enter into the self on Fini's own terms ,the subject is enhanced, ameliorated through the expression of its multiplicity. The artistic process of painting the body in in this state, the process of creating a form open to the other, is ultimately an act of creating the discursive self as well. Through corporeal vulnerability and exposure, Fini is able to portray firm contact with the alterity that runs through her being.

A Position of Compassion

If these expressions of the self and alterity by way of the body are facilitated by the artistic practices of women's surrealism, then what

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[237] Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p.170

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possibilities are they creating? Not just other ways of being, positive

alternatives to the phallogocentric conception of subjectivity. Rather, through

their contact with alterity and compassion for the Other, women surrealists are

creating the possibility for future compassion, and a critical practice based

upon it; Ahmed note the importance of repeated action within a space for

reorientation, and the repeated monstrous, mythological motifs of women

surrealists are repeated expressions of care through exposure to other beings.

Braidotti too refers to the recognition of identity's dependence on co-creation

as a "humbling experience of not-Oneness [which] anchors the subject in an

ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive

of that entity which, out of laziness and habit, we call the 'self'".[238] Mythology

becomes a productive site of self-introspection and the examination of porous

boundaries between the self and the other— it is

> representation at work, producing itself— in an autopoetic mimesis— as
>
> effect: it is fiction that founds. And what it founds is not a fictive world
>
> (which is what Schelling and Levi-Strauss challenged), but fictioning as
>
> the fashioning of a world, or the becoming-world of fictioning. In other
>
> words, the fashioning of a world for the subject, the becoming-world of
>
> subjectivity[239]

The ruptures of the self portrayed by women surrealists represent both the

interruption of mythology in the form of a monstrous other into their beings,

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[238] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.100
[239] Nancy*, Inoperative Community*, p.56

but also their own interruption of myth. The portrayal of hybrid beings who take on mythological aspects while maintaining their multiplicity of identity act as a form of resistance to the strict differentiation between the self and other. Furthermore, rather than seeking to recuperate these artists into a seamless feminist lineage or enclose them in a rigid definition of "surrealist", a reparative–inoperative approach demonstrates how their works embody community as an ongoing, unfinished relation, built from imagined co-presence with myth.

It also becomes necessary to emphasise the importance of this compassion, as it is through this desire for amelioration and community that a reparative position may be taken. The reparative, seeking to make whole the things that are incomplete, or broke, may be seen as the necessary position for the achievement of justice; here, the justice for women artists, who were "seen by the male Surrealists only in terms of what she can do for them[240]". Justice, then, is to recognise the irreducibility of their identities and artistic practices, to recognise them in their singular originality even as they are placed in relation to each other. Nancy writes that "Justice, therefore, is returning to each existence what returns to it according to its unique, singular creation in its coexistence with all other creations".[241] Acknowledging the alterity that they expressed through mythological imagery and depictions of physical otherness

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[240] Rudolf Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny", in in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws et al., (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p.18
[241] Nancy, *Being Singular Common*, p. 187

does justice by their identities by recognising the deep, unavoidable entanglement between the self and the rest of the universe.

It also recognises how the body is indebted to this otherness, and indeed indebted to an incommensurable aspect of the world that we may never truly touch. In honouring the body's versatility both physically and discursively, allowing it to change shape, change species, become monstrous and become divine, women's surrealism confirms that "indeterminacy is not a lack, a loss, but an affirmation, a celebration of the plentitude of nothingness".[242] To celebrate indeterminacy is to embrace a fundamentally queer position in the world, much like the embracing of disorientation as a useful position for the liberation of the self from the axes of hegemony. Indeterminacy, disorientation, and general failure to align with heteronormative and phallogocentric ideals of the self all enable such a discourse founded on compassion for the other, and the bringing about of justice, justice being an ongoing negotiation between beings inhabiting the world without erasing their difference. Rather than simply addressing historical omission of women artists from surrealist canons, we may consider how they presently stage encounters with the other, imagining new orientations and expressions of being-in-common, . The mobility granted by nomadic critical practices creates flexibility when considering how the body might be expressed in a way that perpetuates its own becoming.

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[242] *Ibid,* p.218

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Making Masks, Making Myths: Women's Surrealism as Autotheory

Blurring Textual Boundaries

Investigating the discourses of compassion found in women surrealists'
work draws further attention to the new critical approaches necessary to fully
engage with their innovative artistic practices. To promote a discourse founded
on compassion for the other, and the recognition of alterity in the self, may also
invoke a discourse founded on fluidity between states of being, and is able to
defy strict categorization. The power of a subversive approach in opening
dialogues with subversive art forms opens new avenues for researchers and
critics, yes, but there is another necessary expansion of this assertion: the

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suggestion, and the acknowledgment, that perhaps these artists were interacting with subversive forms of critique themselves, through their artistic productions. Nancy recognises myth as an autofictionning, and we may see the engagement of women artists with surrealism as a form of autofictionning as well, exploring identity and subjectivity. As women surrealists re-situate their own roles in the production of knowledge alongside art, it becomes clear that their construction of their own subjectivities was in fact crucial to their interaction with theoretical paradigms. There is a certain amount of auto-mythologization: Susan L. Aberth begins her biographical account of Carrington's life by noting "her own droll personal recollections assist in promoting a kind of biographic mythology [...] it is the omission of homely detail that gives these narratives their mythic potency".[243] On Leonor Fini's sphinxes, Mahon asserts that "In their fusion of the personal and the political these sphinx paintings must be appreciated as proto-feminist, offering a female interpretation of the riddle of the sphinx and extending surrealist mythology beyond its focus on the master-muse or Oedipal scenarios".[244]

It is certainly not a novel idea that the women of surrealism were undertaking critical work of their own place within the movement and society at large; what I mean to explore here is the specific autotheoretical aspects of their work resonated with mythology as a site of self-creation. n previous chapters, work has been done to try and capture the way in which women surrealist were able to escape the objectifying position of the ever-observed

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[243] Aberth, p.11
[244] Mahon, p. 15

muse, refusing to be simple objects of study and instead as artistic subjects in their own right. This chapter will attempt to continue this line of reasoning to portray how through this escape, and through the fluid, dynamic practices of troubling the boundary between self and other, women surrealists also confound the borders between being the object of academic study, and engaging in para-academic critique themselves. The delineation between academic and artist need not be impermeable; indeed, through the act of creation in their artistic practices, women surrealists are not simply introducing autobiographical elements into their work. They centre their own bodies, yes, in their depictions of disorientation and dehumanization that unpin their identities from patriarchal, phallogocentric definitions. But the "decidedly contentious reputation"[245] of autobiography, with its perceived flaws of narcissism and inability to achieve objectivity, may not be considered weaknesses here.

This chapter will demonstrate how, through an exploration of women's surrealist art *qua* proto-feminist theory, deconstructing the preconceived boundaries between abstract discourses and lived experience can produce a richer set of potentialities in the analysis of women's art. The divide between the academic and the artistic is deeply entrenched in the vocabularies and practices of critique. Art, the subjective, the personal, are dark stains on the endeavours of academic understanding, which itself must be sterile, objective, and detached. Sara Ahmed, in *Living a Feminist Life*, writes that "theory itself is

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[245] Robyn Wiegman, "Introduction: Autotheory Theory." Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory, vol. 76 no. 1, 2020, p. 1-14.

often assumed to be abstract: something is more theoretical the more abstract it is, the more it is abstracted from everyday life. To abstract is to drag away, detach, pull away, or divert".[246] This statement correctly identifies the impulse to enforce a divide between the objects of academic study in the arts, which are often deeply personal creative expressions of personal experience, and the tools with which they are understood, and "made academic" through the process of abstraction; they are detached from the subjective experiences that led to their creation, and measured up against a supposedly objective metric of rigorous analysis. Braidotti, in her posthuman proposal for novel forms of academic critique, recognises that "creativity and critique proceed together in the quest for affirmative alternatives which rest on a non-linear vision of memory as imagination, creation as becoming".[247] I suggest that surrealist artistic practices formed such a non-linear approach to critique and creativity, and formed meaningful explorations of "a more rhizomatic style of thinking, allows for multiple connections and lines of interaction that necessarily connect the text to its many 'outsides'".[248]

If to abstract is indeed to drag away, or divert, then it is also to disorient: we may understand the process of dividing the artistic from the academic as an act of disorientation, along the lines of Ahmed's queer phenomenology, and place this process in the context of previous discussions within this thesis. While disorientation, even as a product of deliberate alienation, may offer a

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[246] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017) p.10.
[247] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.165
[248] Ibid.

transitive space in which new possibilities and perspectives are revealed, reorientation is always necessary in order to interact and engage with such new possibilities, at the risk of descending into crisis. Women surrealists, faced with the disorientation engendered by their abstraction into muses for their male counterparts, turned to artistic production as a way of creating a discourse in which they could assert their own artistic identities and thus become reoriented. They felt the detachment created by being "theorised upon", the scrutiny of psychoanalytic critique pulling them away from their own lived experiences, and instead pulled back, their work fracturing boundaries between the observer and the observed, the subject and the object. Through their prolific artistic productions that question the divides between the self and the other, they reinject a sense of physicality, of materiality, into their work that engages with surrealist philosophy from a unique, startling angle. Here is a surrealism that is experienced in the first person; here is a surrealism that disintegrates the models that keep those who would be objectified by its critique from themselves picking up its tools. The surrealisms explored by the artists in this chapter turn in on themselves not through a psychoanalytic conception of narcissism, but through the impulse to recognise the vitality and immediacy of the actions that create it. These surrealist practices herald the need, as Ahmed states, "to drag theory back, to bring theory back to life".[249]

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[249] *Ibid.*

Bringing Theory to Life

The exploration of the self and its limits, through motifs of mythology and hybridity, gives these artists work a necessary autobiographical quality. This in itself is often enough to cause questions of critical legitimacy, suspicions that "its claims to truthfulness and facticity have been sullied by the imprecision that accompanies human memory and by the psychoanalytically inflected suspicion that its devotees are willing to engage fabrication for their own narcissistic fulfillment, delivered under the cover of personal experience and subjective knowledge".[250] Autobiography is plagued by the subjective, offering personal accounts of the world in a manner seemingly entirely at odds with the process of theoretical abstraction; its accounts of embodied experiences and lived realities are antithetical to the abstraction and objectivity demanded by academic rigour. This is perhaps why for so long women's art, like the women themselves, was derided as narcissistic for its continuous preoccupation with the existence and politics of the self, how it is perceived, and how it is experienced. The disdain held for autobiography and its centering of the self, the material, the experiential, distances it from theory, or rather leads theory to try and distance itself from it. However, it is the autobiographical elements found in the work of women surrealists such as Penrose, Cahun, and Fini, that allow them to dismantle so many of the rigid boundaries surrounding the portrayal of the female form in Surrealism, and grant their approaches to self-conceptualisation such fluidity and originality. They are not simple retellings of experience, they are the restructuring of power dynamics between the

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[250] Wiegman, "Introduction: Autotheory Theory", p.2.

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subjective and the theoretical; rather than attempts to vanish the self from engagements with surrealist philosophy, or to abstract such experiences to serve an overarching theoretical objectivity, theory is brought back into contact with the material, living world, and enters into a dialogue with the lived, subjective experiences that might otherwise be disregarded. These elements are instead perhaps *autotheoretical-* they engage in academic critique through creative methods, crossing the boundaries between the subjective connotations of autobiography and the objective critical aims of scholarship.

Autotheory, a relatively recent concept in literary critique, thrives on the shaky boundaries of what might be considered critically legitimate. Ralph Clare notes that

> it is autotheory's unique triumph to marry the truly personal, private, and/or confessional (the private details of life that Barthes, Derrida, and Kristeva shy away from) with critique, to insist against the poststructuralist reduction of self purely to a textuality that produces a distancing kind of impersonality by ultimately maintaining divisions between the public and private[251]

Through integrating the personal-subjective with the discursive-objective, autotheory situates otherwise abstract, philosophical discussions in a vibrant environment of lived reality and fluid movement between genre and style. Acknowledging the dependency of theory on reality, and thus the abstract on

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[251] Ralph Clare, "Becoming Autotheory." Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory, vol. 76 no. 1, 2020, p. 85-107.

the real, is a powerful political and academic tool that builds on the New Materialist and reparative strategies discussed in chapter 2. In particular, making space for- and even celebrating- the physicality of theoretical discussion encourages a reparative approach to critique; abandoning the prioritisation of impersonal objectivity and allowing discourse to flow freely between the subjective and the abstract also deprioritises paranoid readings, the need to unroot and unveil some fundamental aspect of the text that has been hidden from us.

The "mistakes" of subjective viewpoints are not failures teeming with waiting humiliations— indeed, they are not mistakes at all, but qualities particular to a certain subjectivity that need not conform to an overarching theoretical structure. There is no "seepage of toxicity from the experience of the body that is going to invade language and invalidate theory"[252], that might rupture the perfectly rational order of academic discourse. Just as the intrusion of the Other into the Self does not have to represent an abjection in need of banishment, the at times irrational and particular personal can interact with the abstract and orderly nature of theory and form a productive, liberating discourse. Genre, and the distinctions between the creative and the academic need not be so strict: autotheory is "a system of resemblances, not representations, composed of what we arrange and assemble, not what can be measured up and classified. In its in-between-ness, autotheory is a strange, hybrid thing. It is something endlessly blooming, and beautifully so. For if

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[252] Carolee Schneemann, *Imaging Her Erotics: Essays, Interviews, Projects* (MIT Press, 2002), p.21.

anything, autotheory, which both is and isn't, is most definitely becoming".[253] If paranoid readings disorient the conceptual from the personal, then autotheoretical approaches may present reparative motions that allow disoriented figures to realign theory with their lived experiences, and repurpose paradigms that had previously excluded them into vivid, fluid practices that affirm their identities and desires.

The overtly political potentials of autotheoretical writing when considering the works of marginalised identities, particularly with a queer feminist bent, are found again in the assertion that the structural, and the theoretical, are inevitably indebted to the personal and the material. Bringing into question the definitions of objectivity and "truth", and the power dynamics associated with who is given access to these concepts; as "The act of aligning theory and the self, discourse and life, raises issues when it comes to the question of critical legitimacy— a matter that is complicated further for women and femmes (and others whose subjectivities do not fit into the category of white and male) working in this mode".[254] The subjectivities of women surrealists were frequently disregarded and excluded from the Surrealist canon, as were the subjectivities of queer and non-white artists.

When allowing the subjective to foreground itself in academic writing, it is important to recognise the political weight assigned to *which* subjectivities are allowed entrance. It is not enough for autotheory to simply allow the personal

[253] Clare, "Becoming Autotheory", p.104.
[254] Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, (The MIT Press: 2021), p.14.

into the work of theory; it must represent "a wrestling with, and a processing of, discourses and material realities of theory that pervade contemporary art and literature".[255] Autotheory allows for alternative experiences and epistemologies to be shape existing theory, yes, but it also recognises how the politically charged nature of theory affects the personal, and materially affects communities who are made the object of theory. If autotheoretical work can move between the experiential and the academic the subjective and the objective, then it can also work in para-academic context to move between the localised struggle of individual artists and the systemic, political conditions that lead to this struggle. The autotheory of women surrealists in particular not only hybridise the academic and the creative, but the political and the personal. Through surrealist practices, they draw connections between their lived experiences and the socio-political conditions that affected them, their work formulating a discourse within which they were able to "drag back" the theories that so often alienated them, and explore the materialities of their experiences.

Cahun's Mythic Masks

Claude Cahun's portrayals of queer identity through photography have already been explored in this thesis; indeed, she is often regarded as a surrealist artists who explored personal experience and identity more than any of her contemporaries. Caws remarks that

the particular genius of the woman photographer, especially in the magic

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[255] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice*, p.15.

domain of surrealism, is that ability to self-costume like Claude Cahun in all her various disguises of self and other.[256]

We see these disguises in works such as *Self-portrait (kneeling on quilt)* in Figure 3.1. Cahun wears a bird-like mask, head shorn and arms covering her chest. There is something of the grisly image of the plucked bird, ready for roasting— the angles of her elbows and knees mimic legs and wings bound tight together. However, these angled limbs also conceal both her chest and genitalia, rendering the figure androgynous and asexual.
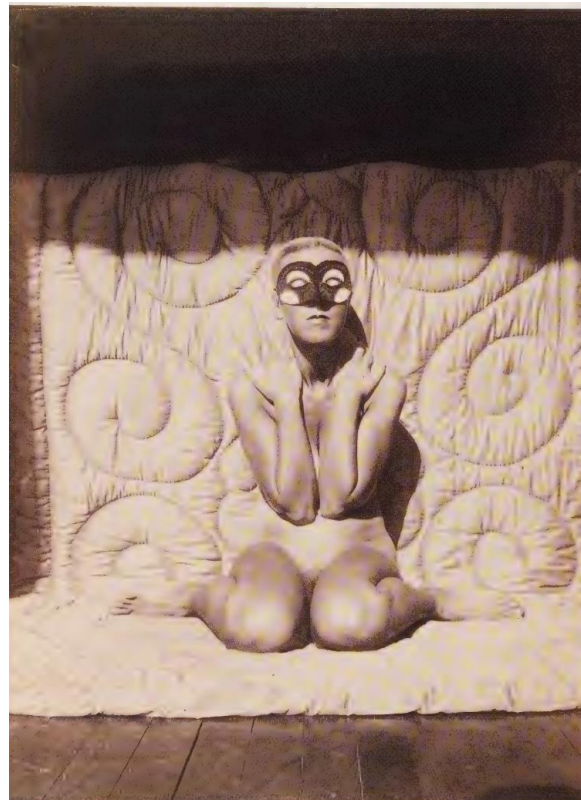
FIG. 3.1. Claude Cahun, *Self-portrait (kneeling on quilt)*, c. 1928

So too the mask, which denies the viewer access to her face, takes a little of her identity beyond the gaze of the observer; while in some ways she may

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[256] Caws, *Angels of Anarchy,* p.35

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resemble a butchered bird, she is not so easily consumed. There is a similar vulnerability to this photo as in Fini's angelic figure, although taken to a less bloody extreme. Cahun's bird has no wings, and allows only a limited portion of its body to be seen: even in this consumable state, wings clipped and feathers plucked, Cahun presents an act of defiance in withdrawing some or all of her body and identity. This may also act as a reference to Cahun's affinity with angels, as Shaw points out that "that Cahun has transformed her androgynous self into an angel begins to make some kind of sense when we take account of the notion that angels were themselves imagined to be of indeterminate gender and sexuality".[257] Taking on the ambiguous guise of a wingless angel, or a bird-faced androgyne, allows Cahun to situate her gender and identity within the ambiguous as well.

Her construction of gender and sexuality through her work seem prescient to those in the present day, and are far more often approached from recent feminist theoretical angles than through critical methods of her own time. The distinctly modern air of her discursive presence also resonates loudly with autotheoretical ideas, as we may see equally in her written work. Shaw has produced critical research which suggests that in Cahun's *Aveux non Avenus*

Cahun elaborates a dream of intersubjectivity in which distinctions between self and other literally, even physically, break down. I am not trying to claim that Cahun and Moore literally wrote *Disavowals* in a collaborative effort akin to some Surrealist texts. Rather, for Cahun, the creation of the book is

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[257] Shaw, *Reading Disavowals*, p.108

completely connected with her sense of self; to imagine her subjectivity as intertwined with her partner would also be to imagine her partner as an author of the book.[258]

Writing, for Cahun, may be seen as the expression of being-in-common that facilitates what Shaw calls "intersubjectivity", relation between subjects. In loosening the rigid boundaries of creator vs created, Cahun frequently asked questions of the artistic process and the nature of subjectivity within it. Throughout her work "there would seem to be operative [...] a dialectical play between mimetic and identificatory impulses, manifest, on the one hand, by the perpetual mimetic staging of herself as an 'Other'".[259] These identificatory impulses, are inherently autotheoretical, and when examined alongside her use of mythological imagery and personas represents a mythic autofictionning of the subject. Cahun's use of the term "singular plural" in *Aveux non Avenus* seems to herald Nancy's, using it in conjunction with queer desire to imagine other ways of being outside of what she viewed as harmful mechanisms of heterosexual desire. Shaw writes

> The text of "Singular Plural" addresses more than collaboration in love. The game of desire described in the text is collaborative, but so, too, Cahun suggests, are the images and texts of Disavowals. In the text, this reciprocity in love seems to enable collaboration in art.[260]

Cahun imagines collaboration and love, synonymous perhaps with what

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[258] Shaw, p.187
[259] *Inverted Odysseys*, p.122
[260] Shaw, p.186

previously has been referred to as compassion within this thesis, as providing

new opportunities for reckoning the relationship between the self and the other

not only in the context of queer potentialities, but in figuring artistic

production as an act of autotheoretical exploration. We see this in the passage

> As soon as they have become one, in order to carry on provoking each other,
> and to continue to spur each other on, they will have to cheat [...] Separate
> ourselves. Mask ourselves. To make a new skin and a new landscape each
> night. This is the price of our duels. To move beyond our defeats. To imitate,
> simulate the first comer who pleases you and suits me, to reconstitute the
> diamond of a look, the charm of these passersby. I am one, you are the
> other. Or the opposite. Our desires meet one another. Already it's an effort
> even to disentangle them.[261]

The couple cannot be allowed to achieve immanence— as soon as they "become

one", they must re-establish their difference though separating, masking

themselves. Cahun sees this endless crossing and re-drawing of boundaries

between the self and the other as an act of creativity, the creation of a "new

skin" and a "new landscape" suggesting both the reformulation of the self and

the re-orientation towards the outside world. This process is reminiscent of

Nancy's view of community as "a gift to be renewed and communicated, it is

not a work to be done or produced. But it is a task, which is different-an

infinite task at the heart of finitude".[262] Cahun's construction of queer desire

through masquerade is the endless renewal and communication of the self to

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[261] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p.103
[262] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p. 35

the other, without whom the self could not exist. David Lomas notes that she "introduces a spacing within the subject through doubling — sometimes with the aid of a mirror, sometimes by double exposure — a spacing that opens onto an affirmative play with multiple, fictive selves. In her words, a play of masks behind masks repeated *ad infinitum*".[263] The doubling of her identity through masquerade— and the double exposure of the self— opens up a spacing within her own subjectivity wherein myth may be used to expressed such "multiple, fictive selves". This constant act of self-creation through artistic production allows Cahun to imagine new ways of constructing identity that are deeply founded in fluidity.

This approach to the construction of her own identity as fluid and changeable signified Cahun's interest in the political and psychological attitudes towards the self of her time. The volume *Heroines,* dedicated to capturing snapshots of the lives of various mythological women, demonstrates how keenly aware Cahun was of the socio-political conditions that affected contemporary ideas of womanhood, and sexual desire. It is no coincidence that she explores these issues through the lens of mythological narratives; the role that mythological narratives play in providing cultural touchstones that may be subverted in order to conceive of novel forms of community provide a foundation upon which Cahun may construct her critique of heteropatriarchal norms. This recurring motif appears even In the subheading: "From Andromeda to the Monster". Andromeda, the Aethiopian princess chained to a rock in order

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[263] Lomas, p.63

to be sacrificed to a terrible sea monster, is perhaps the origin of the typical "damsel in distress" archetype. She is forsaken by her own father in order to appease the gods, and then is only narrowly saved by the actions of great hero Perseus. There is no agency afforded to her beyond what is acted upon her by men; even her name "Andromeda" can be translated as "mindful of her husband". Her only options were to be consumed, be it literally by the sea monster Cetus or more metaphorically, by Perseus, who takes her and makes her his own. Such is the fate of many women in mythology, whose voices Cahun will take on in order to create this volume. She speaks as the sacrifice, giving words to figures who were previously denied them. This subheading also introduces the notion of dialogue— Andromeda speaks *to* the monster. She engages with that which would consume her, a defiant demonstration of artistic agency against seemingly insurmountable power, shaking free the paralysis of objectification that leaves her figuratively chained to a rock, helpless. Cahun is not, in fact, helpless. If the heterocentric paradigms of society would make a sacrifice of her, force her to choose between annihilation of salvation through marriage to a heroic male figure, then she at least will have her voice heard.

Cahun's penchant for masquerade, as explored through her use of mirroring and doubled images in her photography, reaches a climax in this volume, in which she constructs a theory of identity deeply rooted in communal feminist experience. Each section is written as a kind of monologue, first person explorations of the characters and motivations of each fictional woman. This

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repeated use of the first person perspective speaks to the dynamic, shifting nature of identity that so often features in Cahun's oeuvre, and reinforces the continuing theme of multiplicity. Tirza true Latimer comments on Cahun's use of "narrative indeterminacy" can be seen as "a placeholder for illegitimate subjects —homosexuals and women, for instance —within the larger system of social signification".[264] Cahun's masquerade points to the masquerade of all subjects, the performative nature of identity. Over the course of *Heroines*, Cahun becomes all of these women, finding commonality in there mythological status. Nowhere is this connection stronger than in the section entitled "*Salmacis la suffragette*"[265], dedicated "a Claude", and detailing the story of Salmacis and Hermaphrodite. Salmacis, the nymph, is enamoured by the androgynous Hermaphrodite, and the two engage in an affair remarkable for its queer, transgressive approach to gender and sexuality. The androgyny of Hermaphrodite is perhaps the most obvious example of Cahun's attention to fluid gender identity; as the famed mythological figure from whom the term "hermaphrodite" is named, they represent the ultimate expression of neutrality, existing outside of the gender binary as as the child of two powerful gods. Using Hermaphrodite as a tool to elevate the expression of gender neutrality, an identity that today might be referred to as nonbinary, situates Cahun's own gender expression alongside the prestigious canons of ancient mythology. Cahun herself identified outside of gender, stating "Masculin ? féminin ? mais ça dépend des cas. Neutre est le seul genre qui me convienne

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[264] Latimer, p.85.
[265] Claude Cahun, *Heroines*, trans. By Norman Mcafee, in "Inverted Odysseys", ed. by Shelley Rice, (The MIT Press, 1998), p.88-90.

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toujours"[266] in *Aveux non avenus.* The self-dedication of this section would support this reference to her own experiences of gender— and indeed, as the only section not told directly from the point of view of its heroin, but seemingly Cahun herself, as revealed in the phrase "Hermaphrodite can visit the house of Narcissus—and introduce himself there on my behalf".[267] Hermaphrodite as an avatar for Cahun's experiences, elevated to the status of myth, begins the section's discussion of queer desire and transgressive sexual practices— reflecting a theme of sexual deviance more widely in the volume.

Cahun describes sexual intercourse for the purposes of procreation as being undertaken "not joyfully", and instead as a means of "sowing" another generation[268]. There is a clear sense of temporal continuity here, the axes being created by heteronormative expectations working in literal straight lines, as they are planted into a furrow. This temporal disorientation is what allows for the ephemeral nature of affects to be fully realised, and indeed for the exploration of new ways of being to take place. For Nancy, the "together" of being-together hinged on occupying the same space-time:

> "Same time / same place" assumes that "subjects," to call them that, share this space-time, but not in the extrinsic sense of "sharing"; they must share it between themselves [...] For in order to be together and to communicate, a correlation of places and a transition of passages from one place to

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[266] Claude Cahun, *Aveux Non Avenus*, 1930.
[267] Cahun in "Inverted Odysseys", p.90.
[268] *Ibid.*

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another is necessary.[269]

The temporal disorientations engendered by anachronistic mythological imagery, brought into contact with the body of the self through artistic production, facilitates the movement and correlation that allows for subjects to communicate with one another. The contingent, ephemeral modes of being that allow for nomadic approaches to identity and subjectivity necessitate failure, at times, in order for them to continue. The failure to align oneself, in terms of time or being, with heteronormativity is what allows for such vast creativity and diversity in the works of women surrealists. As Braidotti explains, "the proliferation of discourses about life, the living organism, and the embodied subject is co-extensive with the dislocation of the classical basis of representation of the human subject".[270] It is this dislocation through the employing of mythological imagery, that disorients the works in time and space, that allows for women surrealists to progress inwards in their expression of the self, and by extension, their expression of the Other.

The queer temporalities experienced by Salmacis and Hermaphrodite, in contrast, are seen as being the initial product of joy. Queer temporality, as conceptualised by Jack Halberstam, describes the disoriented timelines experienced by gay and trans individuals whose lives are not dominated by the temporal norms of marriage, child-bearing, and other heteronormative institutions; he writes that "Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be

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[269] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.61
[270] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p.57

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imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience-namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death"[271] (Halberstam, 2). Salmacis and Hermaphrodite's love can be considered queer *because* they shun the expected procreation— Salmacis takes great care to castrate them both, removing her own ovaries as well as euphemistically "disarming" Hermaphrodite, so that the "ulterior motive, the common concern to perpetuate the species" is taken away from the act of intercourse. Cahun goes further, showing her disdain for the act itself, calling it "vain— as it is imperishable". This deliberate rejection of heteronormative temporalities leads the pair to embrace the alienation caused by disorientation, as they "shut themselves away and lived in the present as in the center of a citadel". The citadel is a protective metaphor- there is an extension of youth while within its walls, immortality granted by not ceding to the temporal markers imposed by normative, heterosexual relationships. Cahun, describing the experience of a queer relationship that allows her to exist outside of the dull, monotonous procreative routine shares in the triumph of the mythological couple who "escaped the shears and became immortal". Salmacis and Hermaphrodite are joined together in this frozen pocket of time, fused into one being; this certainly echoes Cahun's own relationship with Marcel Moore, who she frequently referred to as "l'autre moi", a doubling or copy of herself. The experience of Salmacis and Hermaphrodite rejecting linear, heterosexual timelines and instead becoming a strange, immortal amalgam is readily

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[271] Cahun in "Inverted Odysseys", p.89.

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interpreted as a parable for Cahun's own queer experiences, and engagement

with transgressive practices in the presentation of her gender and sexuality.

This fable also presents an incisive commentary on the academic

interpretation of homosexuality at the time, particularly the Freudian narrative

that

> homosexuality is a question of now three sets of characteristics, one
>
> of which is object choice. The others have to do with physical
>
> characteristics "physical hermaphroditism", literally the possibility of
>
> one person bearing the physical attributes of both sexes, the most
>
> extreme being the possession of both male and female genitals, and
>
> "mental sexual characters, or masculine or feminine attitudes" linked to
>
> one or the other sex[272]

While Salmacis and Hermaphrodite may better be defined as queer than strictly

homosexual, the prevailing notion at Cahun's time that homosexuality was

closely tied to queer experiences of gender grants validity to this

interpretation. The first characteristic, that of object choice, outlines an innate

bisexuality in all infants that may then either develop healthily into

heterosexuality, or else be diverted into homosexual behaviour by narcissism—

men, for example, "proceed from a narcissistic basis, and look for a young man

who resembles themselves and whom they may love as their mother loved

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[272] Sara Flanders and others, "On the subject of homosexuality: What Freud said", *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*¸ 97:933-950 (2016), p.97.

them"[273] (Freud 1905, p.145). This narcissism itself stems from a form of castration anxiety. Salmacis is far from a narcissistic figure, showing instead disdain for her won figure as Cahun remarks "how Salmacis above all shuns Salmacis!".[274] Neither do Salmacis and Hermaphrodite begin as similar to each other— it is through conscious action, and effort, that they become so alike they ultimately become one organism. This effort is partially embodied in the act of castration. Cahun, in *Salmacis*, rejects the notion of castration anxiety seemingly in its entirety— castration is rather something that both Salmacis and Hermaphrodite engage in willingly, as a joyful act that facilitates their ability to love without becoming beholden to the production of children. The removal of physical sexual difference also challenges Freud's second basis for homosexuality, wherein the physical presence of hermaphroditic anatomy accounts for the behaviour. Hermaphrodite still desires Salmacis even after castration; indeed, the castration again proves that there is no physical precondition for their desire. Cahun appears to be engaging with the overwhelming medicalisation of homosexuality at the time, and demonstrating how their desire is instead founded on an attraction of the spirit. While these arguments may seem to illustrate a discourse of queer joy within *Salmacis,* wherein the lovers are freed from their physical constraints and are allowed to exist in a transgressive, liminal space, it soon becomes clear such happiness is to be short-lived. When Salmacis and Hermaphrodite have met their fate,

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[273] Sigmund Freud, trans. by James Strachey, *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*, (Imago Publishing Go, 1945), p. 145.

[274] Cahun in "Inverted Odysseys", p.90.

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separated forever and placed in the wrong bodies as kind of creation myth for queer experiences, their spiritual successors will find "truly find the body, this time, not at all the soul that it desires"[275], trapped in endless futility. There is no happy ending for the lovers, although they create their own, perverse joy through violence and sexual transgression; Cahun illustrates a queer existence fraught with contradictions, and irreparably damaged by the outside forces bent on enforcing heterosexual norms.

The inability of those on the outside to properly understand and convey the beauty of the unknown is a common theme in *Heroines*. Cahun engages explicitly with the matter of making art itself in *Salome, le sceptique,* and creates a narrative demonstrating the inability of male artists to truly capture the beauty of their female subject. Calling them "self-styled lovers of the Ideal"[276], she scorns their distortion of her appearance, their failure to produce anything with real artistic meaning. There is, above all, a sense of disdain that illustrates her attitude to being cast in the role of artistic muse, and indeed the attitude of all women made to be consumed by the male artistic gaze. Taking on the persona of Salome, daughter of King Herod, she writes "they say that I turn round and round, now on my palms, now on my toes, like an acrobat—because they don't know how to see: I am a siren, a serpent, standing erect on my tail; I am a bird, an angel, dancing lightly on the hardened tip of my wings".[277] This is explicit consideration being given to the way in which Cahun as the narrator

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[275] Ibid.
[276] Cahun in "Inverted Odysseys", p.77.
[277] Ibid., p.78.

troubles the boundaries of her own being, crossing the divides between human and animal or monster, in a way she feels is not properly recognised by her male contemporaries.

For Cahun, the almost worship of Salome's dance across art and literature has resulted in nothing but poor imitations, "content to piece together, without any discernment, what they found scattered in nature, or at their colleagues': stencil copies".[278] The incomprehensibility of true beauty, at least for the male artist, is Cahun's major critique, and is used to question the repression of women artists who may capture the world in a different, more vivid way. The final lines of this section ask "If I vibrate with vibrations other than yours, must you conclude that my flesh is insensitive?"[279]. It is a powerful provocation: Cahun recognises the inherent differences between her and her male counterparts, both in their perception of artistic purpose and in their perception of female beauty. However, Cahun questions why this difference must be seen as a deficiency. Her realm of experience may lie outside what others can perceive, but that does not mean it doesn't exist. Indeed, she characterises this realm of experience in a seemingly explicitly autotheoretical way: she declares that "Art, life: it's the same either way. It is what will be furthest from the dream—even from the nightmare"[280]. The equation of art with life makes strong implications about the personal nature of Cahun's work; the two are inextricable, necessarily informing one another. She goes further in her

[278]Ibid., p.77.

[279] Cahun in "Inverted Odysseys", p.79.

[280] Ibid.

statement that both art and life are the furthest thing from dreams, which seems to be a direct attack upon the precepts of canonical surrealism, which saw dreaming as a quintessential experience of the unconscious. Cahun is perhaps decrying this, and calling for the theories of surrealist art and literature to move away from dreaming; rather, they must return to the waking world, return to life. Trapped in the dreamland of false representations, distorted faces and women who are forcibly altered to suit the artistic palate, the narrator calls for a return to truth: the truth being queer in its failures, its fluid motions. Cahun writes that "'failures' appealed to me, those portraits that managed to stand out from the others. I bought the rejects. At least these lovers of the real were that, *for lack of anything better: Forgive them, for they know not what they do!*".[281] Salome longs to remain out of reach, seeking the value in being incomprehensible, unobservable, and unconsumed.

The text, as a way in which Cahun could herself engage with academic theorising on homosexuality, works to undermine the popularised psychoanalytic conceptions of queerness, and also to reorient the perspective from which these issues were studied; that is, from the outside in. Cahun's figurative presence within the piece allows her to explore the intricacies and contradictions of queer experience from *the first person*, rejecting academic objectivity in favour of a subjectivity that offers a novel angle of inspection. Indeed, rather than inspection, it is a kind of introspection with which Cahun

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[281] Cahun in "Inverted Odysseys", p.77.

writes. Salmacis and Hermaphrodite represent aspects of her own queer

experience, and a creation myth for her own personal identity, illustrating the

ways in which she conceptualises her selfhood as being composite, made up of

components both mundane and mythical in nature. Salome mourns the inability

of male artists to fully recognise and know the depth of female artistic

subjectivity. If *Je tends les bras* represents the petrifying experience of

objectification, the subject being reduced to a literal monolith, then *Heroines*

explores the multitudinous effects (and affects) of subjectivity, which allow the

alterities of the self to rise to the surface. Barbara Johnson writes that "Not

only has personal experience tended to be excluded from the discourse of

knowledge, but the realm of the personal itself has been coded as female and

devalued for that reason"[282]— Cahun's many heroines, the women who have

been mythologised and now form her own personal mythology, all become

avatars for Cahun's personal experience that deconstruct the boundaries of

academic enquiry. These mythological figures are in essence masks for Cahun

to take up, prisms through which she may express her artistic subjectivity in

direct dialogue with contemporary artistic and psychoanalytic theory,

challenging readers by breathing new, transgressive life into these women's

stories and uncovering "practices of disclosing lived experience as a means of

becoming conscious of the ways in which so-called personal issues were, in

fact, structural and systemic.".[283] Their mythologies are brought back to life in

much the same way Ahmed suggests theory might be, by enriching them with

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[282] Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference*, (The John Hopkins UP: 1987), p.64.
[283] Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as feminist practice in art, writing, and criticism*, (The MIT Press: 2021), p.11

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the personal and allowing them to cross through the delineations drawn between the objective and the subjective.

Autotheory, as a way to describe these practices, allows for the acknowledgement of the performative nature of Cahun's work; it is not only through the presentation of these mythological narratives, but the act of creating the text itself that allows Cahun to shore her identity up through repeated iteration. Cahun is writing the women of mythology into new, transgressive identities, and simultaneously writing her own identity into existence; the queer desires, the sexual deviations, the fluid genders are all reified through their enshrinement in mythological narrative, and their inclusion in artistic work with strong political motivation and awareness of contemporary academic theory. Latimer asserts that

> Cahun and Moore, I conclude, did not aspire to create a new paradigm so much as a new process. By engaging each other in continuous acts of artistic and subjective re-creation, they improvised spaces of possibility that extended beyond the sphere of their partnership to "quelques autres," to certain kindred spirits capable of envisioning "new heavens and a new earth."[284]

Fournier describes the way in which autotheory may at as a space "where performativity and a kind of postmodern self-awareness mark certain shifts from preceding modes of writing the self in a manner that might be described as "postconfessional." [...] predicated on the notion that one's life and identity

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[284] Latimer, p.103

do not preexist their constitution through a mode of doing"[285], and Cahun's exploration of her own identity through mythological figures may be seen to take on this postconfessional role. Through the presentation of a contradictory, fluid identity reiterated through multiple mythologies, Cahun demonstrates the necessary performativity of her being: the nigh infinite alterities within the self themselves carry nigh infinite possibilities, of ways of being, of ways of desiring, of ways of self-creation. *Salmacis* offers a particularly disorienting account of queer desire— the tale's swapped souls and confronting depictions of sexual transgression question heteronormative values outright, and allow Cahun to imagine the divine origins of her own experiences.

The Text as a Site of Becoming

Exploring the multiplicity of identity in this way injects the mythologies Cahun selects with life, as the women contained within them are allowed to change and grow according to their resonance with Cahun herself. Cahun emphasises "the processual rather than the finite and reveals identity as endless becoming, which can be shaped, re-shaped and changed, rather than being"[286] within her oeuvre at large. It has been stated before within this thesis that mythology was often a site of hostility for women, just as Surrealism was; women relegated to the role of the muse are necessarily alienated from their own sense of agency and subjecthood. Cahun finds commonality with these women here, and through her creative approach is able to rejuvenate the mythological narratives that would otherwise undermine women's selfhood.

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[285] Fournier, *Autotheory as feminist practice*, p.16
[286] *Angels of Anarchy,* p.17

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Cahun traces the characters assigned to mythologised women, prowling the finitude of her own being through examining the its relation to others. She stages continuous exposures between herself and figures of mythology, fashioning her own subjectivity in the process. This echoes Nancy's claim that

> It is not a question of an Other (the inevitably "capitalized Other") than the world; it is a question of the alterity or alteration of the world. In other words , it is not a question of an aliud or an alius, or an alienus, or an other in general as the essential stranger who is opposed to what is proper, but of an alter, that is, "one of the two.[287]

The other is inherently an intimate being, wrapped up in the self, or indeed simply the same self in another configuration. Cahun demonstrates through her work that straddles the border between theoretical and creative both the creative powers of theory and the academic powers of creativity: equally, through her masquerade, she illustrates not only what she shares with the mythological characters, but what these characters share with her

To promote a discourse founded on compassion for the other, and the recognition of alterity in the self, may also invoke a discourse founded on joy. As women surrealists re-situate their own roles in the production of knowledge alongside art, it becomes clear that their construction of their own subjectivities was in fact crucial to their interaction with theoretical paradigms. The combination of mythological narrative with personal experiences reinforces the way in which "experience here is not an

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[287] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.11.

unquestioned zone of personal truth to which one retreats but a site of becoming, of subject formation—it is an ongoing process that produces the conditions of possibility for recognition, under-standing, and difference".[288] Through interacting with and subverting the discourses surrounding women artists' identities in the first person via creative production, rather than a removed "third-person" perspective traditional to hegemonic academia, they successfully reoriented these discourses and reshaped them in their own image.

There is a rebalancing in the power dynamic between theory and subject-rather than theory being "done" to the subject, as an outside force intruding into the self, the subject makes theory beholden to the human, the personal, the individual. This blending of the personal and the subjective with critique creates an approach reflective of the compassion and joy inherent to reflecting upon the alterity within the self, and through repeated, intentional iteration creates a space wherein such techniques become more readily performed. Throughout *Heroines*, Cahun is not the only one in a state of becoming; they mythologies and academic concepts themselves are troubled in away that might free them from unwieldy rigidity. As they are touched, they are changed, and in the process of change they are brought back to life.

Text as a site of becoming extends to the work of other women surrealists, and can be used as a foundation for novel modes of critique based on the methods these artists themselves employed. To define autotheory in this context as writing that holds space for such continuous becomings, theorising

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[288] Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press: 2013), p.146.

the self and in turn bringing theory back to the realm of the living, foregrounds the vitality of women's surrealism, and invites further reflection on their movement across the boundaries of creative expression and theoretical critique. Cahun undoubtedly uses mythological narrative to great effect, but we may observe how the use of myth also enables women surrealists to create a new mythology, a mythology of the self. In the creative choices made under the umbrella of surrealist technique, autotheory and the revivification of theory allow women surrealists to build this novel mode of discourse. *Dons des Féminines* , Valentine Penrose's collection of bilingual poetry and collage, can be viewed as an autotheoretical account of her relationship with Alice Rahon-Paalen. Each poem, written in French and then translated into English-or perhaps vice versa- is accompanied by its own collage. The choice to delve into self-translation, and the resulting triad of self expression— writing, translation, visual art— is what will drive my discussion of the text's autotheoretical functions.
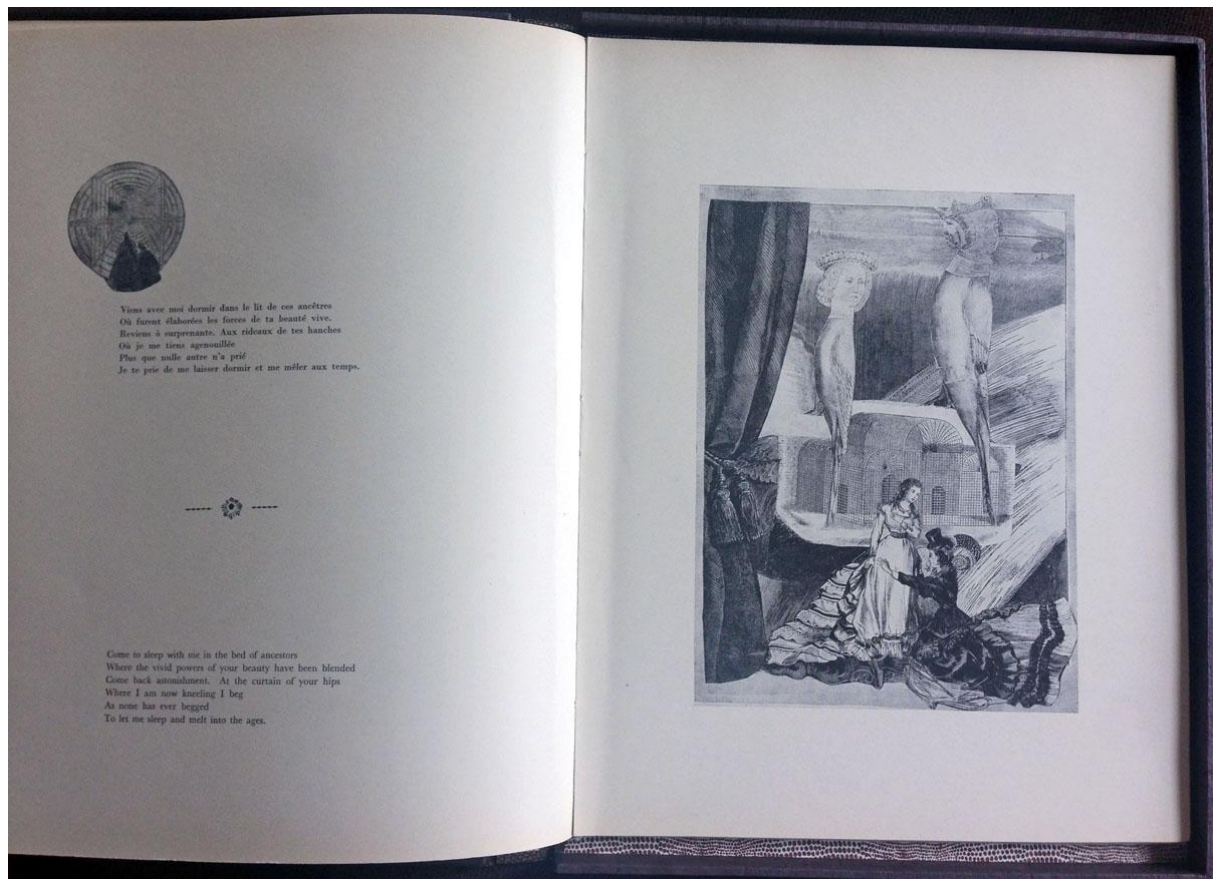
Fɪɢ. 3.2. Valentine Penrose, Pages from *Dons des féminines*, (Paris: Les Pas Perdus,

1951)

Penrose's bilingual presentation of her poetry is unique to this volume,

the two versions presented on the same page, English following French. There

is a collage like nature to this presentation, offering a pleasing quasi-symmetry

to the collage overleaf. The two languages exist within the same space, the

translation acting as a strange echo, a sense of alterity in its translated form.

The translation might be referred to as a "companion" piece, and this terminology is rich in implication. Indeed companionship is an important motif throughout the collection; we follow the narrative of two women traveling strange lands together, dressing as men and taking each other as lovers, their affair eventually being foiled by the dastardly male antagonist "Cock Norah". Penrose in this collection is preoccupied with connection, the creation, preservation, and loss of it. The poems are often written in a conversational style, one woman addressing the other, with no reply given. The example above shows the layout of a collection referred to hereafter as "Ancêtres". Here, the poet-narrator calls for her lover to come with he "in the bed of ancestors", longing to "melt into the ages"[289]. The plea here for companionship is twofold—she at once wishes for personal companionship form her lover, and for the sense of community and companionship granted by assuming a place in historical narrative, taking part in the continuity of familial- heterosexual- reproduction.

The autobiographical elements of this desire stem perhaps for Penrose's relationship with Rahon, both women at the time married, although Penrose would divorce her husband the following year. Chadwick certainly seems to see these poems as being autotheoretical in nature, speaking of Penrose and Raahon "It is in their verses that we witness the love that grew between them, as well as their struggles to replace the surrealist muse with a new feminine principle that merged the world of nature, the ineffable realm of the mystical

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[289] Valentine Penrose, *Dons des féminines*, (Les Pas Perdus : 1951)

and a desire located in sameness rather than sexual difference".[290] The apparent longing to fulfill heterosexual reproductive lineages without replicating heterosexuality itself reflects the feeling of instability engendered by the taboo nature of homosexual relationships at the time, the poet-narrator seemingly aware that her longing for this kind of companionship is ultimately futile: she begs "as none have ever begged", and the reader hears no reply. Penrose's insight into the seemingly anachronistic nature of her desire that exists outside of the conventional timelines of heteronormativity may be seen as a nascent construction of what is contemporarily called queer temporality. Temporal disorientation in women surrealist's work is evident in the aesthetics of antiquity embodied in mythological imagery, as the artists connect with the ancient monsters with which they feel kinship. This temporal disorganisation is a major feature both of reparative critical practices and of queer theory: paranoid practices, and heteronormative temporalities exercise strict boundaries over the body.

Sedgewick writes that "a paranoid reading practice is closely tied to a notion of the inevitable, [and] there are other features of queer reading that can attune it exquisitely to a heartbeat of contingency".[291] Contingency here can be equated with two things: possibility, and failure[292]. To be nonreproductive, non-accumulative, for the body to be more concerned with the disorienting self-touch of alterity than with the temporal stability that comes with following the

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[290] Chadwick, *The Militant Muse*, p.29
[291] Sedgewick p147
[292] These two concepts of course necessitate each other— there can be no failure if there is no possibility, and in order for there to be possibility one must risk failure.

hegemonic lifestyle laid before them, positions the work of women surrealists as profoundly queer, even when not explicitly portraying same-sex desire (as it often does anyway). The inability to follow these normative narratives alienates Penrose from heteronormative temporalities; she is disoriented from them. Ahmed explains that "Disorientation involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach".[293] Here, Penrose is unable to extend herself through the normative temporalities, and so must conceive of a way to exist outside of them.

The possibility of orienting oneself towards a queer temporality, free from the constraints of heterosexual paradigms, is explored through the mythological imagery used in the collage above: the Hindu myth of the Kinnara. They are human bird hybrids, eternal lovers, exhibited in the Mahabharata where they proclaim:

> We are everlasting lover and beloved. We never separate. We are eternally husband and wife; never do we become mother and father. No offspring is seen in our lap. We are lover and beloved ever-embracing. In between us we do not permit any third creature demanding affection. Our life is a life of perpetual pleasures.[294]

These figures are another clear example of Penrose's engagement with queer ideas of non-reproductivity. The queer temporalities suggested by Halberstam

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[293] Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Duke University Press: 2011), p.160.
[294] Subodh Ghosh, *Love stories from the Mahabharata*, transl. Pradip Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Indialog, 2005), p.71.

are founded upon a refusal to engage in traditional timelines of heterosexual life, eschewing institutions like marriage and childbirth in favour of an extended youth, a life of "perpetual pleasures". Halberstam writes that

> Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience-namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.[295]

Penrose imagines a life outside of those paradigmatic markers by way of the Kinnara, mythological figures who they themselves rejected traditional temporal milestones, particularly that of childbirth. Penrose herself, never producing children and pursuing queer relationships after her divorce from Roland Penrose in 1937, uses this mythological disorientation from reproductive norms to fathom queer modes of being; through aligning her own queer experiences with those of the otherworldly figures of the Kinnara, Penrose uses the disjointed temporality created by their presence to mythologise, and validate, her own queer desires.

Mythology as Queer Discourse

The use of mythology to convey a divine authority upon the narrator is common in the works of women surrealists, but we may also discuss how this power dynamic may be reversed; instead of beseeching these master narratives for a portion of their power, likening themselves to myths in order to elevate their own identities, both Penrose and Cahun can be seen to bend mythology to

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[295] Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York University Press: 2005), p.2.

their will "according to how well they help tell the story". This approach, wherein the autobiographical is in fact given precedence over the established mythological, represents a departure from rigour found in conventional forms of critique. The radical prioritisation of the lived experience, the material reality of the narrator, centres the queer bodies that Penrose wishes to portray. Queer existence, and queer desire, and not made subservient to either myth or prevailing academic theory; rather, it is these concepts that are dragged towards the lived experiences of the artist.

Mythology functioning as a "master discourse" of narrative, its employment by queer artists allows for the further proliferation of narratives that may orient the author and reader towards the possibilities of queer futures. Such queer temporalities are evident in the lives imagined for Penrose's lovers: the poet-narrator and her lover are clear, one knelt begging as is mentioned in the text. However, looming over the both of them are two hybrid figures, The Kinnara are shown watching over the two women beneath, a king and queen with the bodies of birds, their birdcage empty beneath. This might be considered a particularly evocative image for multiple reasons; firstly, the plain visual metaphor for escape encapsulated in birds flying free of their cage reinforces our interpretation of *Dons des Féminines* as being a creative space in which queer identities were allowed to flourish, and queer futures could be imagined through critical engagement with self-translation. The kinship between them is one of re-enactment; the anachronism of the Kinnara is given new temporal bearings in the queer desire of the two women, who perform the

transgressive dynamics laid out by the myth that preceded them. Through the echoing of such transgressive identities long past, Penrose may begin to define future possibility through repeated action, creating a phenomenological "tendency" towards a life and identity separate from heteronormative paradigms. Ahmed reminds us that in order to orient the body, repeated action is necessary in order to fully realise new possibilities:

> Depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view. If such turns are repeated over time, then bodies acquire the very shape of such direction. It is not, then, that bodies simply have a direction, or that they follow directions, in moving this way or that. Rather, in moving this way, rather than that, and moving in this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies in turn acquire their shape.[296]

If these Kinnara, beloved celestial figures in Hindu mythology, may set themselves apart from the heteronormative timeline of child-bearing, then co-existing with them grants Penrose these same possibilities. Mythologies of transgression create a landscape in which future transgression may be welcomed, reinforcing its own existence with each iteration. Through aligning her own queer experiences with those of the otherworldly figures of the Kinnara, Penrose once again touches on that compassion between the self and the other, communing with the divine and exploring how her own subjective desires may be echoed within them. In doing so, she fashions a discursive space

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[296] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.16

inclined towards the exploration of queer possibility; the blending of her own experience with those of mythological creatures fallows for an expansion of how desire and identity may be expressed. If these Kinnara, beloved celestial figures in Hindu mythology, may set themselves apart from the heteronormative timeline of child-bearing, then co-existing with them grants Penrose these same possibilities.

That the Kinnara are portrayed as husband and wife may bring its defiance of heteronormativity into question, but given the prevalence of cross dressing and other acts of gender nonconformity within *Dons des Féminines* we may instead interpret this as a further expression of figurative drag for Penrose. The collage, with its visual references and metaphors, enriches our understanding of the poetry enormously. There is an aspect to this work, and to what Penrose is attempting to communicate, that is portrayed as transcending language altogether. The subconscious is expressed through automatism in the poem, and then confronted and examined through translation. After these linguistic exercises in self-expression Penrose turns to the visual in order to once more translate herself, this time intersemiotically. Each iteration of this process brings its own additional details, its own characterisation of what Penrose is attempting to express, the meaning moving fluidly between forms as it is translated and retranslated. This iterative process is reminiscent of earlier phenomenological analysis, wherein it was established through Ahmed that the reorientation and stabilisation of identity requires repeated action within the same space. Within *Dons des feminins*, it appears that Penrose puts this into

practice, repeating her poetry in various forms in order to more fully capture the fluid nature of its expression, and showcase areas that are inarticulable through language alone, the parts of her own psyche that she cannot put words to. Through repeatedly, iteratively, attempting to articulate this (a process that is not shown to be fully completed or resolved, only attempted), Penrose creates a discursive space that is in a constant state of becoming, just as Cahun did. There are no permanent resolutions here, or points wherein identity must become fixed and static. Penrose uses mythologies to welcome paralogical, fluid explorations into the matter of her own identity.

This importance of iteration is echoed in the bilingual presentation of Penrose's poetry. There is an inherent performativity to these self-translations, as the author-translator appears to realise their own identity in the act of translating— or Penrose, self-translation offers an avenue into exploring her own relationship with intimacy and companionship. This translation is not only literal, but discursive in her representation of queer identities transcending temporal norms; her own desire is translated into mythology, allegorical retellings of her identity through subverted narratives and reappropriated archaic imagery. Through the performance of these narratives, Penrose is able to encode her own meaning into them. Although it is presented in two languages, both versions of the poem represent the same voice, as the poet-narrator addresses a love that never replies. There is a certain Orphic tragedy to this style that might be considered mythic in quality, as the lover is forever silent, vanished, leaving Penrose to only speak to herself. This act of self-

translation, wherein Penrose takes her own work and transposes it into another language, can be seen as another form of disorientation that reiterates the non-reproductive themes present in *Ancêtres*.

The act of translating removes the author from their own work as it grants new perspectives in the process of transformation, creating a new voice through which the meaning of the text may be expressed. Here, though, this otherness is artificial, Penrose's own voice filling in for where we might expect the companion, the translator, to be. The use of this self-translation perhaps has an autotheoretical poignancy to it— Penrose is constructing an "other", an examination of her own automatic writing from a removed perspective, in order to create the duet we see on the page, and thus trace the remnants of the Other in the Self. It is not enough for the psychic automatism of Surrealism to attempt to convey the experiences of her relationship with Rahon; there is also the desire to be seen, to take part in the call-and-response of a relationship, that cannot be achieved. Self-translation as a theoretical remedy to the loss of companionship Penrose experienced at the end of her affair with Rahon also reflects an analysis based in queer failure, a continuation of the theme of non-reproductive love. Just as Penrose can never succeed in joining her ancestors, or melting into the ages through participation in familial continuity, self-translation can be seen as a non-reproductive mode of creativity, one which troubles psychoanalytical paradigms of narcissism and instead offers an exploration of how autotheoretical engagement with translation may illuminate queer identity and desire. Penrose never consummated her marriage with

Roland Penrose, and indeed never went on to have children; queering forms of reproduction through self-translation may be seen as creating a discursive space in which Penrose's identity could be expressed, the possibility of queer futures given space and structure through these autotheoretical writings. This use of self-translation is perhaps an expression of Penrose's desire for that "queer intimacy" that comes from embracing the other through touching the self, the creation of a translated piece functioning as a discursive autopsy of where the companionship between self and other still resided. There is an inherent performativity to these self-translations, as the author-translator appears to realise their own identity in the act of translating— for Penrose, self-translation offers an avenue into exploring her own relationship with intimacy and companionship.

Autotheory and Myth-making

The construction of narrative within which one's identity may be given space and stabilised may be characterised itself as a form of myth-making. Penrose creates a personal mythology, one built on narratives of queer possibility and desire, that while interacting with existing mythologies focuses on the personal, autobiographical interaction of the author with hegemonic paradigms

of language and representation of meaning to explore how these paradigms may be considered inadequate. The queer futures, and queer possibilities of the lovers within the collection cannot be contained within the confines of language- they are translated and translated again as a vivid, living text with the agential power to defy total articulation, to demonstrate a subjectivity not freely available to observation and consumption. Penrose's personal mythology is one of queer possibility, wherein the narratives of its characters are founded in the concept of compearance— the relationality of being, and its dependence on the being of others. Autotheory is itself a practice that invites communal attitudes to knowledge:

> just as autotheory is *placed*, so too is it relational. The autotheoretical "I" draws shared breath with communal bodies of knowledge. In contrast to an "auto" that may appear to imply a narcissistic and solipsistic insularity, in this issue, the "auto" of autotheory not only occasions critique but situates subjectivity as inextricable from sociality.[297]

Communal forms of knowledge, or rather knowledge as narrative that shapes community, is introduced via mythologies. These myths are presented as defying stacity, metamorphosing as they are translated from form to form, vibrant and fluid in their nature as they allow for marginalised identities to exist in flux. Through the blending of subjective experience with creative-critical discourses, Penrose's autotheoretical approach to the construction of mythology and identity fashions its own paradigm under which to examine and

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[297] Alex Brostoff and Lauren Fournier, "Introduction: Autotheory ASAP! Academia, Decoloniality, and "I".", in *ASAP/Journal*, 6.3, p.494.

express queer possibilities. This resonates with Cahun's heroines, who find new possibilities in their own narratives and in turn allow Cahun to map queer alternate existences that enrich her own concept of identity.

Both artists employ critical self-narration through mythology to demonstrate agency, and their critical ability as women artists to engage with serious dialogues surrounding the nature of selfhood and artistic subjectivity. Their ability to move between modes of artistic production, as well as between theoretical and creative modes of expression form the foundation for both a new discourse within surrealism, and the possibilities of new discourses within the modern study of the movement. At the heart of these discourses, the necessity of compassion for the other, and indeed the rejection of otherness having any concrete meaning, engenders fruitful possibilities for discussing how communities of minority artists may operate, and how they may be studied from an academic perspective without the paranoid impulses of critique recreating conditions of hostility for their identities. Through the recognition of alterity as being fundamental to the self from a metaphysical perspective, and by extension the recognition of the self being fundamental to observations of alterity from an academic perspective, we may begin to create a discourse founded upon compassion, and the critical importance of subjectivities in the "doing" of theory. The delineations between art and theory need not be so distinct, and certainly their porosity has begun to be recognised; by bringing women's surrealism into this new discourse, we may see how they themselves unpicked the creeds of psychoanalytic theory and conventional surrealist

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thought in order to not only create art, but allow their art to create their own identities. Fournier describes the way in which

> Autotheoretical works move between theory and philosophy—these master
> discourses, with their status as intellectually rigorous and critical modes
> that thrive, most often, in academic and para-academic contexts— and the
> experiential and embodied [...] In what ways and to what extent can a
> theorist engage "the personal," or can the personal be properly or
> legitimately theoretical—and how does this question shift when we think
> about it intersectionally? How personal can one get without sacrificing
> rigor, and by what—or whose terms do we define said rigor? Are theory and
> the personal opposed, or are they inextricably enmeshed, as so many
> feminist texts intimate?[298]

The women of surrealism, so often denied their status as proper artists within their own right may also be situated as theorists, as their creative outputs detail prototheoretical understandings of issues surrounding queer identity. Their theorising is a different from traditional academic critique; experienced from the first person, and written not from a place of omniscience but personal authenticity, it centers the embodied and the material at its heart. It is another way of knowing, outside of the paranoid paradigms of psychoanalysis, that instead focuses on finding commonality, expressing marginalised voices, and prioritising dynamic, vivid existences over static ones. Cahun and Penrose both use manifold mythologies to explore the queer aspects of their identities, and

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[298] Fournier, *Autotheory as a Feminist Practice,* p.14.

allow these identities to shift and change and remain not entirely knowable in their work.

It is a show of resistance, perhaps, against their male contemporaries and devotees of psychoanalytic theory who would pathologise the very existence of women, let alone queer women. It is a sentiment that has been expressed several times over the course of this thesis: women surrealists, being made into myths themselves, turned to what was closest them in order to reorient their experiences and extend themselves into the artistic world. The use of mythology, by virtue of being made into mythology, demonstrates how for these artists questions of identity and discourses of artistic subjectivity were indeed inherently personal. They were *made* personal, simply by being made exclusive. The inclusion of their subjectivities and autobiographical elements in their work was indeed crucial, because it was their own existences as artists and as sexual minorities that was put in peril. Theory and the personal were "inextricably enmeshed" as a result. Fournier describes a group of modern feminist artists who "By reiterating the discourse and rituals of feminist psychoanalytic theory and its academicization through their speech and other performative elements as performance artists—including the images in their PowerPoint presentations, the staging and props, and their stern style of dress—they parodied the theory that held a hegemonic place in contemporaneous feminist theorizing and art-making.".[299] Women surrealists' engagement with psychoanalytic theory from the perspective of those

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[299] Fournier, *Autotheory as a Feminist Practice*, p.18.

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objectified by it may also be seen as a form of this parody. They take on the mask of the theorist in the same way Cahun takes on the mask of Salmacis, or Penelope, or Sappho. The tools of theory are bent to their will, and used to create subversive pieces that reject traditional ideas of rigour. Their work functions as a testimony to "this distinction between a writer approaching their work from an interest in memory and performativity [which] is a distinction between being driven by psychology—a characteristic of many psychoanalytically informed innovations of the early to mid-twentieth century—and being driven by aesthetics, politics, and philosophy"[300]; the rejection of psychoanalytical paranoia and instead the acceptance of creative, reparative approaches to mythology and identity mark a radical approach that heralds critical paradigms occurring decades later.

Telling the Story Again: Translation as Surreal Creative-Critical Practice

Avowals of the Self

How do we reorient the scholarship surrounding women surrealists to the artists themselves? In previous chapters I have suggested the recognition of the autotheoretical qualities to women surrealists work, as well as the need to distance research from paranoid critical modes in favour of the reparative and posthuman. However, it is important to offer a proposal on how such precepts might inform a living practice of surrealist scholarship, and how this might be oriented towards the artists in order to serve better as an insight into their work. This process of reorientation in the critique of women surrealist artists

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[300] Ibid., p.17.

must stem from the previous discussion held surrounding the reassessment of the relationship between research and researcher through autotheoretical motions. The manner in which autotheoretical work hybridises the academic with the personal, and by extension the author with the text, lays a foundation for how modes of critique may most productively engage with the works of women surrealists. On posthuman academic practices, Braidotti asserts

> My golden rules are: cartography accuracy, with the corollary of ethical accountability; trans-disciplinarity; the importance of combining critique with creative figurations; the principle of non-linearity; the powers of memory and the imagination and the strategy of de-familiarization[301]

To satisfy some of these precepts— combining critique with the creative, trans-disciplinarity, the principle of non-linearity— I wish to put forward an approach to the study of women's surrealism founded in autotheoretical tradition, and extending towards translation studies.

To allow research into women's surrealism to facilitate a trans-disciplinary hybridisation, this chapter will argue in favour of a critical process by which "the protagonists *co-individuate themselves*, that is they trans-form themselves together".[302] This co-individuation, an ongoing hybridisation between the reader/writer and text, destabilises the hierarchies often enforced by traditional academic hegemonies and grants agency to texts particularly from marginalised authors; acknowledging the transformative influence a text

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[301] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.163
[302] Bernard Stiegler, "Interobjectivity and Transindividuation", *Open!*, September 28, 2012, https://onlineopen.org/interobjectivity-and-transindividuation/, [Accessed 17 Feb 2024]

may have upon its reader, alongside the influence a reader asserts over the text, encourages a weaker theory of women's surrealism to flourish, one that might orient itself towards the particularities of the movement rather than further displacing it into a hostile paradigm. An autotheoretical critique that acknowledges, remaining conscious of the risks of paranoia, the affecting contact between researcher and research may present itself as

> a journey, like all autotheoretical works, in self-transformation and therefore self-translation. One in which a relation is created anew with each critical encounter, which is to say one in which, in the manner of translation, there can be no theory, no form of representation, without touch and responsibility. A weaker theory, which solicits creativity as a method of critical adaptability.[303]

Translation of the self, and processes of translation that co-individuate the self alongside the text, will be the focus of this chapter. In considering how to construct an authentic, autotheoretical approach to the study of surrealism, it seemed unavoidable that this would be the case: this thesis as a whole was brought about as a result of my own translations of Penrose's work. I had undertaken these translations in fulfilment of my master's thesis, and as a result of the many hours spent closely reading the texts, the intricacies of how mythology was utilised to further her poetic narratives became apparent. Translation acted as perhaps the single most effective way to immerse myself in the text and develop my own academic practice; centring it in the discussion

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[303] Delphine Grass, *Translation as Creative Critical Practice,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.23

around how scholarship surrounding women's surrealism can prioritise compassionate engagement and mutual co-creation pays homage not only to the importance of self-translation in the works of Penrose and Cahun, but also to the researcher. It is an avowal of self-interest, and of subjectivity. This might be considered in terms of how Braidotti posits the idea of faithfulness:

> the faithfulness that is at stake in nomadic ethics coincides with the awareness of one's condition of interaction with others, that is to say one's capacity to affect and to be affected. Translated into a tem-poral scale, this is the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one's continuing attachment to certain dynamic spatio-temporal coordinates.[304]

It also follows a naturally progressing argument throughout our argument based on self-creation and shifting identity; the ways in which the text itself may shift between languages and iterations grants it its own fluid identity just as the donning of animal masks or the adoption of mythological personas freed the identities of women surrealist artists. We explore not only the boundaries of the self as contained within the text, but also the boundaries of the text, and the boundaries outside of the text that it may move across with the engagement of a critical translator. The role of the researcher and translator in the co-individuation that occurs between them and the text calls for reflection on the necessarily co-operative nature of the process. Translation as a process is one that compels the translator to consider their positionality, their level of

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[304] Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006) p.156

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intervention when engaging with a text. It is also one that is posited as inherently creative for this very reason, the translator bound to acknowledge and engage in the transformative nature of their presence. Sylvia Kadiu writes, exploring the experimental translations she undertakes in order to highlight subjectivity in the translation process, that

> Translating compels the translator to transform the original text. The translator's role as mediator [...] makes non-intervention impossible. In fact, the decision to remain neutral and stay as close as possible to the source text is itself a form of positioning[305]

Reflecting on how translation, a practice that self-reflexively interrogates its own creativities and positionalities, can inform our research into women's surrealism grants us yet another level of theoretical agility, and what's more one that has direct implications for how research is *done* from a mechanical standpoint. Drawing from my own background as a translator, I aim to illustrate how not only the theory but the mechanics of translation encapsulate the destabilisation— of borders and hierarchies— that might allow us to reframe the relationship between researcher and text. Fundamentally, it is a reflection of the continuous metamorphosis evident within the works of women surrealists, and demonstrates starkly how this metamorphosis affects not only the artist but also facilitates the affect-ion of the observer.

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[305] Silvia Kadiu, *Reflexive Translation Studies: Translation as Critical Reflection*, (London: UCL Press, 2019), p.60

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But how will this self-transformation appear in the process of critique? How may theory be "done" in the manner of translation, and solicit such creativity? Through the repeated and continuous exposures which allowsthe self and the other to co-create each other, defining identity through relations with the beings around it. In terms of the text, we might see how contact between surrealist poetry and its reader co-individuates both particularly keenly: the avant-garde, so determined to deeply affect its observer and jar them from the capitalist conventions of society, already aims to disrupt and destabilise the boundaries between art and the viewer. The viewer, too, has a profound ability to contribute to the identity of surrealist art in terms of the scope for innovative interpretations. The production of critique that allows for such wide-ranging interpretation, while also considering the disruptive effect of surrealist artistic methods, may in this way find an affinity with translation practices and theory, and include translation in its approach to a text. Translation may be included into our research practice not only to observe how these surrealist texts may transcend the geographical boundaries surrounding them, and upend linguistic convention in their transformations, but also how the metaphorical borders between the self and other may be made more porous in order to facilitate close contact between author, translator, reader. Texts then become sites for further metamorphosis as facilitated by their own: in the action of becoming transformed, they orient themselves towards further transformation.

The process of translation is one that

can inscribe, erase, and distort borders; it may well give rise to a border where none was before; it may well multiply a border into many registers; it may erase some borders and institute new ones. Similar to the manoeuvre of occupation in war, translation deterritorializes languages and probable sites of discommunication. It shows most persuasively the unstable, transformative, and political nature of border, of the differentiation of the inside from the outside, and of the multiplicity of belonging and non-belonging.[306]

Sakai here is talking more literally in his use of geographical space, however I would argue this can also be applied to the discursive space through which research is done. If we are planning a route through the disorienting space of surrealism, then the disorientation of language through its destabilisation becomes an important tool; translation may shift language through the borders of the self and the other, facilitating new ways in which the two may co-exist and co-create each other. Translation and the carrying of a text from one language into another, exposes the instability of the borders that exist not only between linguistic systems but between author and translator themselves. There is an inherent intimacy to this destabilisation of borders, as the reader may find their own language to be the one deterritorialised, made strange and other in as it is juxtaposed so closely with another. It is affecting— the reader/translator finds their own boundaries disrupted, their own identities brought into contact with others. The process of translating Penrose during my

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[306] Naoki Sakai, "The Modern Regime of Translation and the Emergence of the Nation" in *The Eighteenth Century,* 58:1 (2017), 105-108 (p.106)

Master's thesis was affecting in this way: in the repeated reading of her words, the excursions into her life through biography and autobiography, I admit the borders between our identities at times seemed entirely permeable. Venuti warns against the allure of simpatico, the personal relation by a translator to an author that could nominally render their translations more transparent. Its fundamental flaw according to Venuti is that

> it conceals the fact that, in order to produce the effect of transparency in a translated text, in order to give the reader the sense that the text is a window onto the author, translators must manipulate what often seems to be a very resistant material, that is, the language into which they are translating, in most cases the language they learned first, their mother tongue, but now also their own.[307]

Does surrealism not abhor being understood? In these feelings of compassion for Penrose, the suggestion that such close contact between myself and her work allowed me to understand and engage with her work better, mimic the diagnostic assaults on her agency made by psychoanalytical critiques? In the feeling of *simpatico*, the translator risks undermining the resistance of the text to being comprehended, and made static in its reduction to a single meaning. Indeed, more nuance could perhaps be added: rather than translation revealing how the translator and author are alike, and how this offers the translator deeper insight into the text and more skill in its presentation, we might consider that the permeability of their boundaries and the affect they may have

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[307] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, (London: Routledge, 2017), p.248

on each other during this period is one that equally affects how the translator does their work, and what the text draws out of them.

The text holds power over the translator as well; I was myself translated. The process of translating Penrose placed emphasis on aspects of my work and my identity in the same way that my choices in translating placed emphasis on certain aspects of the text. The largest, most notable of these transformations was obviously my translation into a scholar: my engagement with Penrose's mythological imagery made me more attuned to further mythological influences in surrealist literature, and then through repeated interactions with these influences I became somebody who wrote, academically, about mythology in women's surrealism, a career path I had not previously considered. There is the suggestion of surrealism here; the close contact between objects that might otherwise not have associated with each other used to disorient and defamiliarize. But surrealism has held a long-troubled place within translation theory, often seen to present unique challenges to the translator. Tamara Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz writes in her *Translating Surrealist Poetics* that

> The Surrealist delight in subverting all forms of functionalism and
> textual economy stands in sharp opposition to function-oriented
> strategies of literary translation. Moreover, translation's requirement for
> intersubjective communicability and verifiability in the target text is at
> odds with the basic characteristics of Surrealist writing, in which

semantic norms and rhetorical conventions are stretched to their
breaking point.[308]

The esoteric use of language so common in surrealism, particularly the surrealist writing that is automatically produced, may seem to defy translation by conventional means. Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz's assertion that one must be able to communicate a concrete meaning between subjects, in a verifiable manner, is certainly at odds with surrealist poetics of serendipity and opacity in its language use. This sentiment is echoed by Dawson F. Campbell, who writes that

> Through Surrealism, reality is disposed of and consciousness is hijacked. It Is safe to say that when dealing with Surrealism we are not dealing with an average text— it is naturally problematic. Indeed, Surrealism naturally poses peculiar problems not only for its reader, but especially its translator[309]

These peculiar problems appear to be tied innately with what Campbell conceptualises translation to be: in the above instance, a method of transporting meaning from language to language in a transaction with concrete cargo, origin, and destination. Translation becomes a process of mimesis, an effort to prove that an exact recreation of the source text is possible in the target language, with little evidence of creative interference from the

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[308] Tamara Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz, "Translating Surrealist Poetics", *Comaprative Critical Studies*, 19:1 (2022), 27-40 (p.27)

[309] Dawson F. Campbell, "The Harmony Past Knowing: Research on & Experiments in Translating Surrealism", *World Literature 404: Literature and Translation*, Vol.3 (2018) 1-17 (p.3)

translator. A reparative translation of surrealism moves away from transportational metaphors, and instead embraces the translation process as "an exercise in tact that is alive to translation as a form of physical embodiment of someone else's writing practice: one with the responsibility that comes with the power of touching the cultures, subjects and voices it performs".[310] If, as previously stated, the relationship between text and reader is inherently affective, then the act of translation is a testament to this affect; it is an expression, or embodiment, of the affect left both on the translator by the text, and the text by the translator. Through the intimate act of close reading, translation allows for the hybridisation between translator and text and the co-individuation of the two. Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz suggests that

> the key factor for recognizing a 'Surrealist translation' is neither the historical poetic programme represented by the original nor the paradigm of poetics into which the original was integrated into the target culture, but rather the idiosyncratic, 'unmimetic,' 'anti-illusionist,' 'aberrant' properties of the relation between the target metapoem and the original, conceived as a powerful initial stimulus for the unconstrained creative activities of the poet-translator.[311]

To highlight the importance of idiosyncrasy and aberration harks to the weakening of theory surrounding both translation and surrealism, encouraging translations of the surreal that revel in specificity— there is a personal nature, then, to the work of translation here. Bringing the text into a space where it

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[310] Grass, p.18
[311] Brzostowska-Tereszkiewicz, p.28

can more readily mingle with the reader/translator, the personal nature of the otherwise academic process, in turn encourages us to consider how "portraying translation as an operation of response highlights the subjective dimension of the translator's relation to the source text".[312]

To reworld surrealism, through a translation process that is reflexive and responsive, has manifold reparative possibilities. Steiner, in After Babel, explains that

> All understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding that is translation, starts with an act of trust [...] the radical generosity of the translator [...] his trust in the "other", as yet untried, unmapped alternity of statement, concentrates to a philosophically dramatic degree the human bias towards seeing the world as symbolic.[313]

Framing translation in the name of reparative work as an act of trust, and thus "radical generosity", is particularly pertinent to the critique of women surrealists. Firstly, the inclusion of trust alongside affection and compassion as fundamental requirements for a reparative critique opens further discussion around the uncertainty contained within surrealist poetry, its ambiguities and disorientations. The avant-garde philosophies of its production showcase not only the multiplicity and opacity of its potential meanings, but also works to make the reader/translator question their own boundaries, and unmapped alternity. By allowing oneself to also become an object of study, entering into a

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[312] Kadiu, p.62

[313] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.276

co-operative relationship with the text, we may see how the hierarchy between the two parties is renegotiated. Guyatri Spivak notes that "Translation is the most intimate act of reading. I surrender to the text when I translate".[314] The translator surrenders to the text in allowing themselves to be affected by it, allowing their own boundaries to be redrawn and troubled by close contact with textual alterity. Surrealism in particular demands this surrender from its reader; through challenging the norms and assumptions carried in to their encounter with the text, surrealist writing resists easy consumption. This is the clue as to where the self loses its boundaries. The researcher-translator is confronted by the limits of their own interpretation of the text, the limits of their own language with which they may express such an interpretation, and find themselves resisted in their efforts to engage with it. In many ways, and attempt to engage with a surrealist text is an act of translation; the uneasy dynamic between art and observer necessitates active participation on the part of the latter, who may not remain passive in their attempts to unravel meaning and form their own interpretation. Surrealist translations then begin here— at a place of surrender, of negotiation, of reaching. It is the reaching out, in order to touch, that facilitates close contact between reader and text; reaching out, as Ahmed notes, is what allows us to reorient ourselves in space, to align ourselves and extend our bodies into the environment, the better to interact with it. This gesture is motivated by trust, that these efforts will be rewarded,

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[314] Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface", quoted in "The Politics of Translation", *Outside in The Teaching Machine,* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 179-200 (p.180)

and affect-ion for the text, that is the willingness to affect and be affected. The process of the translation itself sets out from here, and treats

> A text as a participative endeavour, a relational matrix, an open and inclusive map of work: what comes to my mind in the shape of the word 'ouvroir' (a workroom, a sewing room) which is a creative space that is openly and self-consciously collaborative and co-creative. A form of writing which acknowledges its material entanglements and co-dependence on a wide network of actors and factors.[315]

Autotheoretical insertions serve well to create this "open map of work", transparent in the co-operation and co-creation of the translator and the text. Clearly indicating the ways in which the researcher/translator has negotiated with the text, a careful cartography of reformed boundaries being created, allows translation to become "the condition of a transformative encounter, a way of establishing alterity at the core of transmission".[316]

Ecstatic Translations

The acknowledgement of the material entanglements when translating women's surrealism must first and foremost recognise the socio-political forces that led to such authors being marginalised. It was the material realities of women surrealists that they were limited in their influence and outreach as a consequence of their sex. The importance of the body has been discussed in

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[315] Grass, p.22

[316] Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) p.17

previous chapters, and returns here in the matter of translation. Susan Bassnett explores the importance of the body in translation in *The Translator as Writer*:

> One must speak, then, of translating the body. This is particularly true when the female body is considered, as it is by many current critics and theoreticians, to constitute one of not a few long silent bodies that have historically resorted to translation in order to speak the dominant tongue, albeit in a highly individualized and often parodic manner[317]

Cahun herself translated the first volume of *L'hygiène social: Études de psychologie sociale* by Havelock Ellis, a notable sexologist active at the time whose research often sought to make sense of queer experience both in terms of homosexuality and transgenderism. Many of his theories surrounding "inversion" can be seen to be represented in her creative works going forward: the body-swapping Salamacis, the mirrored images and disoriented faces in her photography. Cahun's translation of Ellis's work brought her into intimidate contact with it, an extended close reading that allowed both for her to influence the work in her translation of it, making it available in another language, and also for the work to influence her: it gave shape for her identity, provided new avenues through which it may be explored and developed. It gave Cahun's personal conceptions of gender the opportunity for dialogue with more hegemonic academic frames, responding to them and building on them creatively through her work in an undoubtedly autotheoretical gesture.

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[317] Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, *The Translator as Writer,* (London : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), p.138

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The degree to which female surrealists may be considered to have translated themselves in order to speak the dominant tongue is variable; certainly, there are instances of artists such as Claude Cahun taking on masks of dominance, speaking through borrowed tongues in their work. She achieved this in her translation of her own gender identity through the medium of drag, posing in her photographs as "as a dandified young man with a shaved head, as a young sailor, and somewhat later as a dapperly suited, moustached man"[318]. This posing as a male subject gives a symbolic access to the "dominant tongue" of surrealism, that is the hegemonic power held by its male participants. However, this masquerade is just that— a mask, and one that is not hidden from the observer. There is a self-awareness in Cahun's presentation that draws attention to her own performance, a self-reflexive visibility of the process by which Cahun has translated herself that echoes Bassnett's observation of the often parodic quality these performances take on.

Shown literally in Figure 1.6.,, the intentional exposure of multiple angles of the self while in drag, paired with the direct, almost accusatory gaze at the observer, creates a process of co-individuation in Cahun's translation of the self. We the observer are pulled into the piece as witness to Cahun's metamorphosis, ourselves implicated in her self-creation purely by our presence, and her acknowledgment of it. She makes eye contact with us, observing us from behind the paper and ink of the photograph. The implication

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[318] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Equivocal I: Claude Cahun as Lesbian Subject" in *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*, ed. by Shelley Rice, (Cambrudge: The MIT Press, 1999) pp.111-126 (p.117)

that we, too, are being remade under Cahun's gaze, our preconceptions of the boundaries between art and observer being challenged and remade, leads to our own complicity in this translation. Cahun and her observer translate each other, and themselves, as the boundaries between them are cut across. The use of drag in particular may be seen as a commentary on the nature of such translations: Butler explains that

> there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and a consequence of the imitation itself.[319]

Drag as a performance that destabilises the hierarchy between translated object and original subject, allowing the former to precede the latter, is another avenue through which Cahun expands the space through which her own identity may be created. By ridding herself of an original gender, and holding up a translation as an authentic expression of the self, the boundaries between original and translation are troubled. Butler continues that

> What "performs" does not exhaust the "I"; it does not lay out in visible terms the comprehensive content of that "I," for if the performance is "repeated," there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated. And if the "I" is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a

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[319] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* ed. by Henry Abelove et al., (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.307-320 (p.313)

continuity or coherence, then there is no "I" that precedes the gender

that it is said to perform; the repetition, and the failure to repeat,

produce a string of performances that constitute and contest the

coherence of that "I."[320]

In her drag, Cahun's performative translation of the self draws close attention

to the discursive rigidities of gender norms, and in its transparent translations

loosens such inelasticities. The translation itself *is* critique, a particularly fluid

translational dialogue that "is also one that consciously and unconsciously acts

with a range of other voices –intertexts or previous translations – as it

performs for its audience and invites their response".[321] The intertexts here are

the contemporary texts discussing gender and sexuality, albeit as biological

aberrations, that Cahun herself translated and engaged with. Lomas suggests

that the doubled, collaged depictions of the self Cahun presents in *Aveux non*

avenus can be "Viewed alongside the photographs, as a gloss or commentary on

them, [...] seen as belonging to the ekphrastic tradition that is so relevant to

Dali's Metamorphosis of Narcissus".[322]

For Lomas, the interplay of text and image was inherently adjacent to

narcissism, and the deconstruction of it by Cahun who is "careful to keep

Narcissus, or at least the usual reading of the myth, at arm's length".[323]

Through presenting image and text side by side, the same content given in

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[320] Ibid., p.311
[321] Sandra Bermann, "Performing Translation", in *A Companion to Translation Studies,* ed. by Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons : 2014), pp.285-297, (p.285)
[322] Lomas, p.59
[323] Ibid., p.63

different media, Cahun rejects the act of such translations as being non-productive. Rather than Narcissus staring back at his own reflection, we see the doubling of art is a transformative process, the text and images co-creating each other in their shared exposure. Where this process differs from the assumption of dominance set out by Bassnett, I argue, is that it is not necessarily the language of dominance that Cahun aims to translate into. Rather, there is no target language at all, no fixed point to which the act of translation points to. Instead it is the performance of the translation, the act of translating, that takes precedence. It is the process of translation that deterritorialises the self and allows it to seek alternative orientations, a series of gestures

> which raise to our consciousness the historical provisionality of translational forms and norms, making us aware, through their defamiliarizing presence, of the structures which maintain unequal representations of language, cultures, genders and sexuality in the process of translational repetition.[324]

This appears as a common thread in Butler and Grass's descriptions of performative translations— the importance of repetition in implicating continuity. Indeed, Nancy also recognises that literature may never truly reach an end: "literature's revelation, unlike myth's, does not reveal a completed reality, nor the reality of a completion. It does not reveal, in a general way, something— it reveals rather the unrevealable: namely, that it is itself, as a

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[324] Grass, p.30

work that reveals and gives access to a vision and to the communion of a vision, essentially interrupted[325]". Literature is always an interruption of an unfinished reality: an interruption that invites further interruptions, and thus further revelations, of work that may never be completed. The repetition of interruption is the medium through which difference, and identity, is performed.

For Butler, it is the repetition of performance that constitutes the self, and allows an identity to be constructed. This can be paralleled with Ahmed's necessitation of repeated action in order to orient one's body in space. We may in turn compare this to Grass's reference to "translational repetition", where the repetition constituted by the translation itself allows the translated text to take on new life, to diverge and grow as the reader/translator's understanding of it is changed through close proximity and hybridisation. Braidotti also notes that "this kind of imaginative recollection of the self is about repetition, but it is less about forgetting to forget (Freud's definition of the neurotic symptoms), than about retaking, as in refilming a sequence [...] These are not elaborated by voluntaristic self-naming, but rather through processes of careful revisitations and retakes, or patterns of repetition".[326] It is a process of iteration that changes, by degrees, allowing for a fluid development in knowledge through repeated interaction with the text. It is, gradually a digression, an almost nomadological progression as reader and text create and recreate their identities in the context of the other. Grass notes that

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[325] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.63
[326] Braidotti, *Transpositions*, p.170

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A digression is etymologically, 'a going away', a 'departing' but also a deviation from what are normally subject and object positions in theorisation. [...] Digressing is, thus, a poetic strategy with a theoretical edge which allows autotheoretical translation memoirs to stay with the theoretical-affective 'troubles' of translating[327]

What may be seen in surrealist translations is not necessarily a departure of meaning in the sense that a loss has occurred; rather, there is a going away from the self in a more ecstatic manner, the opportunity to abandon the boundaries of the self and come into contact with the other. This is indeed a deviation from normal subject/object positions— vitally, it is a disorientation, the queer potentialities of disorientation expressed through ecstatic translation. There is perhaps a need, in the translation process, for an iterative or fractal disorientation, followed by the reorientation of reaching out into space and reworlding the text/self. Steiner goes on to explain that

our own being is modified by each occurrence of comprehensive appropriation [...] though all decipherment is aggressive and, at one level, destructive, there are differences in the emotive of appropriation and in the context of "the bringing back". Where the native matrix is disoriented or immature, the importation will not enrich, it will not find a proper locale.[328]

[327] Ibid. p.15
[328] Steiner, p.299

The autotheoretical translation is a naturally enriching process— repeated

digressions and returns to the self, disorientations and reorientations, are

transformative and rich with creative potential. It is important to note that

"mutual trans-formation can confirm and even deepen a divergence or

disagreement: not all dialogue leads to, nor necessarily even aims at, the

production of a consensus".[329]

Indeed, the reaching of a consensus in this instance would interrupt the

iterative process of translation and retranslation, continual recreation of the

self in relation to the text and the text in relation to the self. This mutual

cocreation implies a site of regenerating possibility. The two are forever in

contact, forever translating into one another, and as such there is an iterative

quality to the work undertaken with translation at its core. Steiner writes that

"the ideal, never accomplished, is one of total counterpart or re-petition—an

asking again— which is not, however, a tautology".[330] The asking again, the

repeated reorienting action that brings us closer to the primary text without

ever entirely consuming it, speaks once more to the fluid nature of identity in

the works of women's surrealism. As Mary Ann Caws notes in the surrealist

photographic process

> Doubling, or the showing of this spacing by a double imprint, is the most
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> important strategy in Surrealist photography for letting the sense of
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> difference and deferral penetrate the image (and so, we might want to

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[329] Stiegler
[330] Steiner, p.302

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add, the imagination) [...] Doubling destroys the impression of

singularity, the original.[331]

There can be no fixed point, no static image through which the
researcher may gain full knowledge of the work and the artist; this ignores the
multiplicities and manifold potentialities contained within them.

Navigating Cognitive Cartographies

This may be seen in Penrose's visual art as well; her use of collage to juxtapose
startling images also fits into this paradigm of translation. Her collages
represent the way in which "the multi-layered process of translation therefore
self-reflexively explored curation as a translational action in its own right. A
'work of relation' ('mise en relation'), in other words, producing its own
'cognitive cartography' ('cartographies cognitives')".[332] Braidotti also calls for a
cartography of knowledge, explaining that "cartographies aim at epistemic and
ethical account-ability by unveiling the power locations which structure our
subject-position. [...] This stresses the situated structure of critical theory and
it implies the partial or limited nature of all claims to knowledge".[333] These
cognitive cartographies provide the environment for the narrative journeys we
undertake as part of the nomadological research process, and within which
translation is one method of travel; the fractured translations of Penrose's
identity build a disorienting space through which we may attempt to navigate.

[331] Mary Ann Caws, "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art" in *Symbolism, Dada, Surrealisms : Selected Writing of Mary Ann Caws*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2024), p.177
[332] Grass, p.49
[333] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.164

The fractured nature of these images certainly make visible the ways in which they have been recontextualised and translated from their original settings, and the curation of disparate images into a unified piece produces the cognitive cartography that allows for an autotheoretical insight.

The exploration of relationalities in novel orientations creates a structure through which being-in-common is observed across space-time. To revisit another of Penrose's works, the collage she includes in *Dons des feminins* exhibiting the mythical figures of the Kinnara has obvious scope for interpretation in this way.

This collage not only translates Penrose's own queer experiences into a mythical narrative, as well as disrupting the borders between mundane and divine, but also acts as a form of intersemiotic translation, accompanied as it is by bilingually presented poetry:

Viens avec moi dormir dans le lit de ces ancêtres

Ou furent élaborées les forces de ta beauté vive.

Reviens ô surprenante. Aux rideaux de tes hanches

Ou je me tiens agenouillée

Plus que nulle autre n'a prié

Je te prie de me laisser dormir et me mêler aux temps.

Come to sleep with me in the bed of ancestors

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Where the vivid powers of your beauty have been blended

Come back astonishment, At the curtain of your hips

Where I am now kneeling I beg

As none have ever begged

To let me sleep and melt into the ages. [334]

The translation of Penrose's poem is presented alongside the original, albeit afterwards and situated below. This creates a clear hierarchy in the presentation of the two texts, but not one that diminishes the impact of the second; rather, it appears to serve as an echo, a reattempt, a reiteration. It contains several marked discrepancies with the first poem, for example in the second line where " Ou furent élaborées les forces de ta beauté vive » seems to differ in important ways from "Where the vivid powers of your beauty have been blended". The key difference here, I would suggest, is in the description of her lover's beauty: "élaborées" is expansive, building, growing, where as "blended" suggests a dissolving or breaking down. I would not suggest that "blended" should be interpreted negatively: indeed, its connotations of connecting and comingling with the world around may even intensify the previous poems implications of growth. By "élaborées" Penrose implies a multiplying, expanding beauty, and by "blended" she paints the quality of this expansion as a permeating one, that colours the world around it, a touching of the universe that still recognises elaborate differences. The iterations of the

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[334] Valentine Penrose, « Untitled » in *Dons des féminines*, (Paris : Les Pas Perdus, 1951).

same poem provide additional information by virtue of deterritorialising the language and expressing it in ways that allow for alterity to shine through. Penrose's poetry suggests that it *cannot* be communicated in one language alone, that by the translation process more of it may be discovered and comprehended. This is reinforced by the accompanying collages.

There are similarities, certainly, in how both Penrose and Cahun portray their identities as requiring multiple angles simultaneously to be viewed properly; more than one iteration is needed, snapshots taken from different angles or languages or voices working together to produce a representation of fluidity. Both, as well, allow these fluid personas to span across myth, providing a retelling of mythological women's identity in a way that co-individuates their own through deterritorializing temporalities. Where I would argue Penrose distinguishes herself is her direct translation between sign forms as exhibited in *Dons des Féminines ,* constructing a clear relationship between her written and visual work as a form of intersemiotic translation.

Intersemiotic translation, as conceptualised by Roman Jakobson, represents a kind of transmutation, or metamorphosis, as something is translated not only between languages or cultures but also media. In this case, the translation process brings together poetry and collage to co-individuate each other, the "mise en relation" once more implicating the reader into the co-creation of the piece, as they work to draw links between text and image. This creates a further destabilisation of hierarchies between the written word and

the visual image, allowing communication to be deterritorialized from a particular medium.

"Deterritorialization" here is perhaps a word with troubling connotations— the orientalism displayed in much of surrealist thought, and certainly within Penrose's works, falls into colonialist narratives wherein the myths of other cultures are removed from their original contexts and exoticised, reproducing the dynamics of othering. While the white surrealists of France and Britain may have had nominally radical views of hierarchy and equality,

> Overall, the surrealists remained caught between their Marxist affiliations and the construction of a mythic Africa, the Caribbean, Oceania, and the Americas. To some extent, they were more concerned with the exploration of exoticism than in actual research on the specificity of various colonial context.[335]

Removing these myths from their cultural contexts, no matter what progressive disruptive intent is bandied around, still carries with it the inescapable fact: these cultures are then becoming disoriented within the milieu of the artwork they are represented in, taken advantage of for their perceived distance from the "self" and closeness with the exoticised, oriental other. Ahmed agrees that "The Orient is not only full of signs of desire in how it is represented and ''known'' within the West (for example, through the image of the harem), it is

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[335] Martine Antle and Katherine Conley, "Introduction: Dada, Surrealism and Colonialism" in *South Central Review*, 32.1, (2015), p.2

also desired by the West, as having things that "the West" itself is assumed to be lacking".[336] It is eerily reminiscent of the conflicted place women held within the surrealist movement, prized for their otherworldly qualities while also politically and social disenfranchised. There is no neat trick of semantics here to respin the colonialist implications of deterritorialization of myth, particularly not the myths of South Asia and the Middle East. Instead, it becomes necessary to remain cognisant of the interplays of disorientation between peoples — the political implications of disorientation and deterritorialization raise valid criticisms of Penrose's work.

This deterritorialization is also evident in the motifs employed both in poetry and collage— the environment in which the figures rest is nondescript at best, striking from an artist normally fastidious in her attention to the natural, material world. The Kinnara sit freed from a large enclosure, able to mingle with the world around them. The temporal deterritorialization present within the bilingual poetry has been discussed in the previous chapter, but it remains important to note that as the three elements of this work bleed into one another— poetry translated between languages, and then between a third medium— the continued disorienting imagery further invites the reader to participate in their own translation of the piece, a close interpretive reading that unbalances the observer in its unorthodox presentation. In order to engage meaningfully with the work, we are required to cede power to it, learn its

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[336] Ahmed, p. 114

language rather than attempting to impose our own and allowing ourselves as the reader to become translated as well.

In many ways this thesis has concerned itself primarily with learning the language of surrealism, identifying the syntactic specificities of the works of women's surrealisms, how they tell us about themselves in the myths and symbologies that they employ. Indeed, I will argue that the language of women's surrealism is myth. The creation and subversion of such unifying narratives are the mechanism that allows the identity of women artists to transgress so many boundaries, deconstruct the separations between self/other, human/animal, mortal/divine, and escape the borders of language itself. By engaging with the mythologies of women's surrealism, we may ourselves explore our compearance with the text. Prioritising the mythologies of surrealism and responding reparatively, creatively, engenders a kind of reciprocity within the academic endeavour that may previously have been disregarded. Steiner's re-petition, asking again, is also a telling again— the repeated interaction with and subversion of mythological narratives is a kind of translation, and invites this porosity between author, reader/translator, and myth. Penrose, in particular, may be seen to translate myths through autotheoretical gestures, her more overt self-translation having been discussed previously. Take, for example, Penrose's interpretation of Demeter:

If there is a stone of sadness I am sat upon it,

There where the confetti falls slantwise on the plain

White veils. It is light here.

Where the large-eyed goddess soaks the child of others in fire.

The tree refuses to right itself. The emerald

Holds its closed fist. If there is

A stone of sadness, I am sat upon it.[337]

There is a retelling of the Homeric hymn to Demeter here, the earliest known version of the myth surrounding the kidnapping of Persephone. Detailing the rage and grief of her mother Demeter, goddess of the harvest, it follows her wandering the earth in search of her lost daughter. Demeter is clearly the "large-eyed goddess", the child "drenched in fire" a reference to Demophon, an infant Demeter made god like through feeding ambrosia and plunging into a fire. Penrose inhabits this myth alongside the goddess and the child, but distinctly separate from them; she is frozen, paralysed on upon the stone. The isolating, disorienting nature of this has been explored previously within the thesis, but as we consider how the inclusion of Penrose within the narrative brings her own identity into dialogue with that of Demeter, the metaphors for loss and grief give insight into possible autotheoretical efforts within the poem.

Just as the self-translated poems of *Dons des feminins* can be interpreted as an autotheoretical exercise in the fluidity of queer identity, here Penrose's isolated, stifled avatar brought into dialogue with the grieving goddess of the harvest may give insight into the grief she experienced mourning her relationship with Alice Paalen, a prominent theme in much of her poetry. The hybridisation created here between Penrose and the goddess Demeter, whose winter-trapped realm she may inhabit for a while and whose divine mourning she may wear for her own, allows for the construction of a kind of memoir, in which reparative translations of myths and folk tales alongside conventional surrealist practices allow Penrose to co-individuate her identity through the disrupted borders troubled by translation.

Her work becomes a form of autotheoretical translation memoir in which her identity can be iterated upon over and over through the process of transindividuation alongside the more conventional translation process. While Penrose's collection may not explicitly be a memoir, or indeed explicitly theoretical, I argue that in undertaking these processes of translation Penrose was creating a proto-theoretical text, utilising artistic expression in order to do the work of self-theorisation through surreal creativities. She re-worlds mythological figures and narratives through hybridising them with the personal, and in turn allows the boundaries of her own self to become troubled as she takes on aspects of divine or monstrous characters.

Surreal Translations

Through the examination of Cahun and Penrose, we may begin to guess at the nature of a surrealist translation. It is something that must be guessed at; there is little literature surrounding the translation of surrealist texts, and those who do translate surrealists leave little trace of how they arrived at their chosen strategy. Indeed, this is not a problem this author is encountering for the first time; the many months I spent translating the works of Valentine Penrose allowed me to encounter firsthand the necessity of invention when studying not only surrealist poetry, but specifically women's surrealist poetry. Frustrating as this was at the time, we may interpret this gap in theoretical literature a site of opportunity now; where better to begin constructing a weak theory of surrealist translation than in an environment where no strong theory existed in the first place.

There can be lengthy discussions on the importance of preserving meaning over phrasing, or the signified over the signifier to delve into Saussurean linguistics. Campbell puts forward his two theories of the "surrealist satisfied" and the "surrealist skeptic": the former calls for an automatic process of translation that is able to "create a passive translation: one that moves through the translator as quickly as thought, without consideration for what is being done, accepting words freely as they come, welcoming the mistranslations and interpretations as surrealist inevitabilities"[338]. There is certainly a ludic charm to this approach— the recreation of surrealist techniques in the act of translation could certainly be

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[338] Campbell, p.3

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interpreted as fulfilling our goal of orienting research towards the axes upon which women surrealists operated. Additionally, the use of a fast pace and acceptance of mistakes appears reparative in its spirit, allowing for digression and visibility of translation that invites a more conscious appraisal of what translation might offer surrealism.

However, we might consider how useful the lack of care towards the source text is when engaging with writing from marginalised communities, and when compassion has been already been earmarked as a cornerstone of reparative practices. In contrast, the "surrealist skeptic" concerns themselves more closely with the language and grammar of its translation, producing an end product that is "maintaining a conventional syntax [...] while neglecting 'the rules of verisimilitude... that is... the automatic text's departure from logic, temporality and referentiality' (Riffaterre, 41-42)".[339] Ultimately, Campbell aims to unify these two approaches, by first translating automatically and then editing heavily into a consumable text that may capture the original's "convulsive beauty". There is a level of artifice included here, the suggestion of adding em-dashes to give the appearance of a more automatic piece despite the original automatism having been chopped and changed. While this is an intriguing experiment in translating surrealism, I believe that for this thesis's purposes it falls short; there is a good deal of artistic freedom afforded to the translator, yes, but little sustained close reading of the text, or attention paid to the context of its production as well as the context of its translation. There is a

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[339] Ibid. p.7

matter of loyalty to consider— Braidotti eses the importance of it when engaging in posthuman methods of critique. But loyalty to what? Certainly not the linguistic sign, or the metre of a particular text. Rather, Braidotti argues that

> Loyalty is instead required to the intensity of the affective forces that compose a text or a concept, so as to account for what a text – or a concept or theory – can do, what it has done, how it has impacted upon one's self and others.[340]

How then may we propose a weak theory surrounding the translation of women's surrealism? Foregrounding intimacy, affect-ion and reparative gestures into our translation practice, we may not only build the foundation for more fruitful translations of women's surrealist poetry, but also uncover how such translations form the basis of a "our understanding of critique itself as the most able form of self-exploration of one's own culture, proposing translation as a practice-based critical engagement with poetry instead".[341]

The translation itself must be performative, in that it is the act of translating rather than the produced translation that yields insights into the text which constitute productive dialogue between the self and other. Producing a performative translation requires the porosity of boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, reader and text. Autotheoretical gestures may

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[340] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.167
[341] Grass, p.29

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encourage closer contact between the reader/translator and the text, and allow

them to embody the writing practice of the text they are communing with.

Grunenwald, in her autotheoretical translation memoir, "stretches its textual

fabric so it may accommodate portraits of the invisible women who have

sustained her, or whose life stories, such as her aunt's suicide, have

accompanied her in her own journey into feminist and queer theory"[342] ; to

stretch the fabric of a text, without tearing, to hybridise the text and

reader/translator provides an opportunity for poetic strategies of digression, a

departing from the source text, in order to usher forth more creative

possibilities and also to more expansively "reworld" the text, bring it into

contact with a multiplicity of outside cooperators that might contribute to the

iterative process of inviting further translation, and further interpretation. The

creation of autotheoretical translation memoirs may facilitate this process: the

translator bringing their own identity into frank dialogue with that of the

author, and the text, through autotheoretical asides that at once attests to their

subjectivity and plots a course through the cognitive cartographies that led to

their translation.

     This process "reframes translation as a collective endeavour and 'drama':

hers is a translation which invites other translations".[343] Indeed, it is the

framing of translation as a collective endeavour, not just among the academic

community but between the reader/translator and the author, that allows for a

shift in the dynamics and hierarchies that have mimetically reproduces harmful

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[342] Ibid. p.21
[343] Ibid. p.39

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socio-political forces within the study of women's surrealism. The translator acknowledging their own presence, their own creative choices, and in this way inviting others to come and make different choices, engage with the text in different ways, creates a vibrant, living tradition of translating surrealism that may also provide useful academic insights into the texts themselves. There can be no fixed point, no static image through which the researcher may gain full knowledge of the work and the artist; this ignores the multiplicities and manifold potentialities contained within them. Indeed, Karen Emmerich asserts that "teaching textual scholarship and translation together, as mutually implicated processes of textual iteration, in a Derridean sense that resists fixity or closure, can help us avoid this incessant return to the idea of a stable point of origin".[344] A translation "does not transfer content but rather puts forward an embodied interpretation of a literary work"[345], and in the subjectivity of this interpretation we may find the potential for further interpretations, repeated snapshots of a subject matter that resists comprehension in its entirety.

The translation of women's surrealism, and the study of it, cannot abide by the paranoid modes of critique if it is to function properly; rather, it must embrace the necessity of surrender, and the mutual co-creation between researcher-translator and text. The translations of women's surrealism must, in themselves, be surreal, in that they disrupt the direct correlations between source and target, and "As such, they express complex singularities, not

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[344]Karen Emmerich, *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*, (New York : Bloomsbury, 2017) p.196
[345] Ibid.

universal claims".[346] Instead, creative-critical approaches may take precedence as a reparative gesture towards reorienting the scholarship surrounding women's surrealism to align more closely with the languages and mythologies they wrote for themselves.

Practice Based Research

Undertaking a creative-critical translation of surrealist work may draw inspiration from several experimental translation strategies used by contemporary translators. Below, I have produced my own translation of Penrose's *Les Magies*, a volume that has proved fundamentally transformative for my scholarship and life as a researcher. I first translated it in fulfilment of my masters degree, but in order to explore the beneficial effects of iterative readings and translations, I have returned and translated it again. This process included typing the entire original text by hand, a process that certainly facilitated "close contact" in its necessity for attentive reading. In many ways, this process felt similar to Spivak's suggestion that one must "surrender" to the text; for the duration, I was a conduit for it, having no effect or influence, simply moving the words from one place to another. I did so in one day, breaking for food and water, continuously and quickly. This method produces interesting insights into the text: for one, the recurrence of certain words or phonemes becomes obvious, Penrose's fondness for words containing "ouï" being a notable example, as well as recurring language that connoted sinking or

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[346] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p.164

descending. These insights, once the translation process proper had begun, led to translation choices that were markedly different to the ones initially made several years ago. Partially, this is likely due to the sustained contact I have had with the text through its study during those years, but that prolonged period of immersion was also crucial. It also facilitated the inclusion of autotheoretical aside, enhanced understanding giving way to enhanced relation with the text. Indeed, these asides form one of three columns within the text, alongside the source text and opposite the translation itself. The dividing of the page into three columns is mean to allow the three elements to co-exist on the page, and also bring them into dialogue, bringing them physically close together. By centring the source text, not only do I mean to literally "centre" Penrose's voice in the translation process, but also create a palimpsestic document that allows the translation and autotheoretical asides to mimic marginalia. The use of palimpsestic techniques harks to Kwame Anthony Appiah's "thick translation", that is "translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context[347]". It literally thickens the text, broadening it to the point of needing to be printed landscape on the page, requiring the reader to reorient themselves in order to read it. The translation exists directly in the context of the original by its side: the occasional indented stanzas form curving parallel lines that visually affirm this relationship. It is also meant to draw parallels with Penrose's self-translations found in *Dons des feminins*, asking the same questions about the necessity of

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[347] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Thick Translation" in *Callaloo*, 16:4, 1993, pp.808-819, (p.817)

multiple languages to express the identity of a poem. Beneath each translation, square bracketed notes on language and cultural references thicken the text further. These square brackets are intended to pay homage to Carson's own renderings of holes torn in the Sappho fragments in her translation. These physical markings of silence, lack, are here used to denote where the translation fails, in my opinion, to fully explain itself, where a small silence exists between it and the source text. The other context that I attempt to bring the text into is the context of its reader and translator, that being the context of myself. There is a column of personal commentary, anecdote, and explanation of personal relation to the text on the left hand side. Chantal Wright, who employs a similar method in her experimental translation of Yoko Tawada's *Portrait of a Tongue*, explains that "despite the inclusion of personal response, the translation was never intended to be an exercise in narcissism. Rather, it aims to be a protocol of how a translator encounters a text[348]". Certainly, this translation provides far more detailed personal context than Wright does, but I argue that this is fitting for the project; it is a manifestation of the co-individuation between researcher and subject that this thesis has built towards arguing for, and represents the avowed positionality of the translator in this way. Its presentation to the side, in a smaller font to the source text and translation, is meant to evoke at once the marginalia scribbled onto academic texts by students, and the ivy that Penrose so frequently references in this volume, growing alongside the main structure. Wright goes on to say that "the

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[348] Chantal Wright, *Portrait of a Tongue*, (Ottowa : University of Ottowa Press : 2013), p.26

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reader of the target text should have the opportunity to experience a similar

range of cognitive effects to the ones I experienced when reading the source

text[349]". By offering up my own reading and experience of the text as an object

of study, I aim to create space for a further layer of the palimpsest, another

journey through the cognitive cartography that by journeying I myself have

become a part of. There are frequent empty spaces despite these additions:

places where the text has fallen silent to me, but may not to another. They are

intended to create a futurity to the reading and translation of the text, space for

further contribution. This is the way in which I envision translation enriching

the scholarship surrounding women's surrealism: by providing manifold

recontextualisations through "thick translations", centring the source text but

illustrating the co-individuation experienced by the reader and translator, and

reflecting on the multiplicities of identity created by presenting source and

target text side by side.

Les Magies

My family, before they were teachers, were miners. We hollowed out the vast mountains of slate that litter most of Wales, and sold the clean sheets of rock to the English. The hill near my house (one metre shy of a mountain) is half split open, towers of slate spilling out like guts from roadkill, and when I went off walking sometimes I would perch on a pile of rock and think about how my great-great-grandfather probably did the same thing, eighty miles to the north. Wales is a sad country, I am often told; it's soaked into our songs, our stories. [*tremper: to soak or dip, in the sense of submerging something beneath water.*] The last thousand years of belonging to somebody else makes us stagnant. R.S Thomas says that "There is no present in Wales/And no future/There is only the past/Brittle with relics".

Déméter

My grandmother became a good middle-class wife, teaching maths to school children while her husband finished his doctorate, and then retiring to raise the children and keep the house with militaristic zeal.

S'il est une pierre de tristesse j'y suis assise
La ou les bandelettes tombent obliques sur la plane
Blancs voiles. Ceci est léger.
Où la déesse aux gros yeux trempe l'enfant des autres dans le feu
L'arbre refuse de s'orienter. L'émeraude
Tient son poing ferme. S'il est
Une pierre de tristesse j'y suis assise

She forged the family as she deemed fit; her children went to good universities, and received good degrees, and didn't speak a word of Welsh. [*s'orienter: to orient oneself, to steer oneself, here to right oneself as in to both conform and to find one's proper place*]

Demeter

If there is a stone of sadness I am sat upon it,
There where the confetti falls slantwise on the plain
White veils. It is light here.
Where the large-eyed goddess plunges another's child in fire.
The tree refuses to right itself. The emerald
Holds its closed fist. If there is
A stone of sadness, then I am sat upon it.

My family, after they were miners, were teachers. It was truly an astounding act of social climbing that my grandmother was able fight tooth and nail into reading Mathematics at Cambridge, marrying my grandfather and producing four children, erasing any trace of Welshness from her accent.

Welsh was not down to my father or his siblings either. I can't ascribe a reason for this, having never asked her, but I can only imagine at its root was class.

Even here, even having myself been born and raised in Wales, spoken the language all my life, I have changed her name: Nain is the north Welsh term for grandmother. I don't feel comfortable using it with strangers. I also speak with a tremendously cut-glass English accent. That forge has shaped me too, burned away the provincial vowels and generations of coal dust.

Then comes the work again: the better part of five years spent trying to do justice anyway, writing tens of thousands of words that aren't quite right but are better than silence. [*Filer: to spin, as in textiles. The past participle "weaved" rather than "wove" has been selected to echo the textile connotations (as in Penelope's endless weaving as she awaited Odysseus) as well as those of nimble movement.*]

Peau d'âne

Donkeyskin

Travaille chagrin travaille. I first read it in the fourth year of my undergraduate degree, and since then it has etched itself into my brain. Work grief work. The work is the starting point, from which we discover the grief, and then determinedly return to the work to escape it

C'était Peau d'âne dans la sphère
La belle chargée de voyance
La sphère de bijoux
Travaille chagrin travaille
La lanterne filait le ferme faiblissait le gâteau bleuissait

Il était vrai : tu me donnas dans la joie
Une robe couleur de temps
De quel jour de quel temps zéphyr ô pluie ô nuit.

There will be more grief, there will be more work. I will make the journey again and again.

The right words to truly do justice to her work never seemed to come; I grieved that I could not express better why her work was so vital, so electrifying among all other surrealists.

Time makes narrative, and as time slips the foundations upon which the narrative of a life are built weaken and give way.

It was Donkeyskin in that land
The beautiful girl gifted with sight
The jewelled land

Work grief work
The lantern weaved the leaven dwindled the cake moulded

It was true: joyfully you gave me
A weather-coloured dress
No matter the day or the time gale O rain O night

Work has been at the cost of time. Ahmed gives, in her opening chapters of Queer Phenomenology, the example of how becoming absorbed in writing and then suddenly distracted from it is a disorienting process. [*la sphère : a sphere, literally and metaphorically. A realm, a domain. Here "land" is used to emphasise spatiality, well as the autocthonous qualities of Penrose's symbolism.*] To become oriented so completely towards a task and then pulled abruptly in the other direction leaves one adrift, removed from both.

I discovered Penrose through my university work, and from there arrived at the grief; grief that she had been so forgotten, grief that I had not found her work earlier, grief that I could not champion it better.

Upon emerging from work, as though emerging from the underworld, time has often been the debt. Food gone mouldy in the fridge, unanswered messages, hopefully written diaries and planners and calendars amended and re-amended until they become useless again, worse than if they had remained blank.

I grew up dancing in ceilidh's, vestiges of Welsh tradition that clung on so close to the English border. A stuffy varnished village hall, children and parents and the elderly, frenetic violins and a moaning accordion, feet pounding the same rhythms that had echoed in this valley for two hundred years. [*sabot: a hoof, or a clog. Hoof has been used to preserve and emphasise animal-human hybridity.*] Sometimes, at school, we would wear traditional Welsh clothing while we danced: puffy frocks and stovepipe hats and woollen capes. It was a costume, it was a mask. I wore the clothes but my accent didn't sound right. I stumbled over the dances. I couldn't tell left from right.

In the second year of writing my thesis, I fell to pieces. This is a useful metaphor for all manner of emotional distress, but the process was a more literal one. Stress and anxiety made certain parts of my brain decouple from the rest. I walked through the world as though a pane of glass separated my senses from it, as though my ears and eyes and hands belonged to somebody else.

At the time, in the face of real bona fide lunacy, I feverishly assumed I had stared into some Nietzschian abyss

and invited the horrors of Kristeva's chora into my head. It is, in hindsight, a logical process that my brain chemistry was going through.

Le Berger

Berger affolé de fées
Toute science oubliée
À vau-l'eau le vent la lune

Danse en peau de hyènes
Aux chambres des planches
Et pour la sarabande
Douce amère l'Antique
Tant soit peu souriante
Te fera vis-à-vis
En beaux sabots dorés.

Puis vous vous nourrirez d'argent salé
Avec l'eau qui court dessus dessus.

Et quand ce sera assez
Des colloques désordonnés
Des cadeaux et des raisons

Tu laisseras les bougies et les ombres au plafond
Tu laisseras l'éternelle dépitée en ses cheveux
Chargée brillante près du feu récriminant aux poutrelles

Et tu partiras là-haut
Où la sibylle tourne
Les améthystes et le vent

[*la sybille : the Sibyl, a female prophetess in Ancient Greece, notably Delphi. From the Attic Theoboúlē: θεός (theós, "god") + βουλή (boulḗ, "volition, will"). Cassandra was made a Sybil by Apollo, then cursed never to be believed.*]

The Shepherd

Shepherd plagued by fey
All science forgotten
By the wayside the wind the moon

Dance in hyena skins
In wooden rooms
And for the saraband
Sweet bitter Antiquity
Smiling just a little
Will bring you face to face
In beautiful golden hooves

Then you feed yourself salted silver
With water that runs below below.

And when you've had your fill
Of haphazard symposiums
Of presents and of reasons

You will leave the candles and the shadows on the ceiling
You will leave the disheartened eternal in her hair
Filled brightly near fire accusing the beams

And you will walk upwards
Where the sybil turns
The amethysts and the wind.

I occasionally reread passages I had written on the process of disorientation and erupted into hysterical laughter. Worse, at night, these fractured portions of my brain couldn't manage to all fall asleep at the same time; parts would jerk back to wakefulness like wilful toddlers, crying out at the dark, and instead of my bedroom I saw terrifying masses of colour and shapes. Hypnopompic hallucinations: hallucinations experienced upon waking.

Hypnopompic hallucinations: hallucinations experienced upon waking. H.D. saw shining glyphs on her walls, I saw stained glass animals that unfurled and twisted together, dragons to donkeys to snakes. 237

Since childhood I have preferred to walk alone. I grew up in a valley, so every direction was upwards: every path led to the top of a hill from which the entire village could be seen. You can't hear the cars, or even see them really, let alone the people. From that distance, everything is still, and laid out neatly, like a map. [*partir: to leave, depart, walk away. I chose walk, for the personal significance that walking has taken in my life as a manner of leaving.*] Nothing changes. I can go back and walk through the streets and count ow many things have changed, the new families, the different paint on the doors, the cleared away undergrowth. But walking away far enough make it all look the same again, the same as it did ten, fifteen years ago. You wouldn't be able to tell that it was alive. It will look the same in another fifteen, barring unimaginable disaster. It is easy to predict the future in this way, ignoring the hundreds of tiny lives living within that scrap of land. If it is still, it is without life, which is the same as being dead. I climb the hills and watch my village die all over again.

Placed high beside my parent's house is a church to St. Mary— a new thing by the Roman village's standards, only one hundred and fifty years old, but the local archaeological trust mostly mourns the countless churches that it was built on top of. In a less prestigious place, down the hill and over the road, is the hunkered form of the English Baptist Chapel. [*La Saint-Jean: the feast of Saint John the Baptist starts at sunset on the 23rd of June, and is closely associated with midsummer festivities dating back to the Roman Empire. Traditions include bonfires and the burning of gathered herbs, leaping over the embers to draw good luck. In the south, it is also traditional to bathe, mimicking baptism.*] I don't know anybody who goes there; we all go to St. Mary's on Sunday. But the English Baptists sit in an overgrown plot of land, easy to skip over, brooding in silence beneath us the whole time. I don't know what songs they sing, I don't know what sermons are given. It is a small black hole in the middle of a valley I otherwise know like the back of my hand.

La Saint-Jean

Midsummer

Here, I moved to a city on the other side of the world, and stumbled through busy streets so disoriented that I would take a great interest in maps for decades afterwards.

Après l'ondine marche et vient la salamandre
La rousse du Jourdain en feu
—Saint-Jean des templiers et de l'airain des salamandres—

Comment la fée porte son deuil
Petit ange violet
Ceci me fut révélée
Sur le chemin de midi
                    Dieu le sait.

Les fées ont le cœur gros toujours et bondissant
Le lièvre le sait et le fait
                    C'est la Saint-Jean

Source source source
Chemin de ton bruit
Source toujours source
                    C'est la Saint-Jean

What is the source of all this? It is easy to look back and draw clear lines through my life when climb up onto a hill in my mind and kill it dead. Here, my parents read me the Iliad as a child to help me fall asleep.

There is always a moment where the work births grief, that births further work.

[*porter le deuil: to grieve, to mourn in an official sense. Often marked by wearing black for a prescribed length of time.*] There seems always to be an inciting incident, a crisis to precipitate the disorientation and the frantic action to right myself.

After the water nymph walks and the salamander comes
The burning redhead from Jordan
—Saint John of the templars and salamanders' bronze—

How the fey mourns
Small violet angel
This was revealed to me
On the path at midday
                    God knew it.

The fey's hearts are always large and leaping
The hare knows it and does it
                    It is midsummer

Source source source
The path of your noise
Source always source
                    It is midsummer

In St. Mary's I shift about in hard wooden pews, and sweat through my pinafore dress even in the dead of winter. I am sure that imminently, there will be a test. I don't know what kind, but it will reveal to the congregation that I am inherently, fundamentally evil.

There will be a sigil on my forehead or a spotlight down from the heavens, and my friends and neighbours and parents will gasp because it is true, I am a uniquely evil child. God knows it. I have never quite been able to reach out properly, say the right thing, or understand what people are saying underneath the words that actually leave their mouth. There is something wrong with me, and God knows it. I stop going to church when I turn thirteen.

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I work on farms, during lambing season, because my mother does and I am very tall for my age. I like spending time outside, and I can carry things just as heavy as the grown ups can. A major part of the job, however, is the collection of dead bodies and placentas. You don't need to be very strong for that— their little bodies, stiff as wood [*cloué: nailed or pinned, affixed by a spike, immobile*], are only a few days old before they succumb to the cold, or the crows, or their mothers trampling them to death. I scoop them up into a wheelbarrow, carefully at first, but then with hardly any thought at all. The placentas smell like iron and iodine, and are horribly soft when I slop them in alongside. Both dead bodies and the organs that gave them life will be taken to a large cage and burned. They never really leave the barn.

When I am too young to remember it, my parents read me the Iliad, and then the Odyssey.

Les troupeaux   The Flocks

When I am seven years old we move to Australia, and I look for Orion again, this time in the polluted orange glow of Sydney's inner city sky. On the rare occasions I can find his belt, he isn't where I expect him to be, upside down and flipped around. All the heroes from my books are out of place here, as am I.

Les enfants animaux passaient les monts vers de buts	The young animals pass by the mountains towards the end
Sous Orion sous Jupiter entiers	Beneath Orion beneath Jupiter whole
Les étoiles regardaient clouées	The fixed stars watch
Avancer les sabots ternes	The dull hooves move forward

À la vitre je pleurais des étoiles.   I cry stars in the window.
Les sabots se mouvaient de plus en plus là-haut   The hooves move ever higher
Des gouttes de lait sur la rosée   Drops of milk on the dew
Tombaient secrètement des femelles en marche.   Fell secretly from the roaming cows.

En toi ô nuit manteau de laine noire des bergers.   O night, within you is the black woollen coat of shepherds.

When I am older, I get a child's version to read myself, and more Roman myths, and Greek ones, and then the original Iliad and Odyssey in vintage Penguin paperback.

A lot of my springs and summers are spent helping move sheep from field to field, blocking off roads, and guiding them along the right path to their new home. They aren't particularly interested in my directions; they charge hedgerows and skitter through tiny gaps left in barricades. A sheep that walks forward slowly, as you tell them to, without startling or going astray, is a sheep that will die soon.

I feel like I see them everywhere, their characters chopped up and reassembled into spiralling iterations on the page or the television. There is only one streetlight on our road, so I can look up and see them there too.

[pleurait: first person imperfect form of pleurer, to cry. It has been translated into the present tense in an effort to further deterritorialise the text temporally, and to reworld it into the present]

The valley where I live is the second most archaeologically important area of Britain, next to Stonehenge. There are the remains of a Roman fort, built on top of an Iron age fort, built on top of a Bronze age fort, surrounded by burial mounds and standing stones. It's thought people walked for days to come here and bury their dead: I walk my dog on a road next to a holloway that dates from the Stone Age. I look at the same hills, the same sky, far away enough that it all looks unchanged. My schoolmates find arrowheads and chipped pottery in riverbeds, and proudly bring them to school. It is a valley where things come to die, and then leap up from the earth millennia later.

Vénus   *[se tourmentent: to torment, plague, mistreat or abuse oneself.]*   Venus

Que fonts les amants ils s'aiment et se tourmentent   What do these lovers do they love and abuse

Aiment et se tourmentent pour pouvoir s'aimer encore un peu plus loin   Love and abuse so they can love a little longer

Et d'être tant passés et repassés sous leurs propres arbres   And to be both carried and returned under their own trees

Ils gisent clairsemés les bras défaits dans le foret   They lie thinly arms undone in the forest

Machant encor des bouts de flèches et de branches   Still chewing arrowheads and branches

Inoccupés constants commençant et laissant   Always unwitting beginning and permitting

Troupeau charmant gardé au bois de la magie   Charming herd kept in the magical woods

Par la plus forte et plus nonchalante des mains   By the strongest and most aloof of hands

Que font les amants ils s'aiment et se tourmentent   What do these lovers do they love and abuse

Leurs parlers leur langage   Their words their languages

Leurs perles leurs abeilles   Their pearls their bees

Leur force coutumière   Their strength truly lies

Quand des déesses d'aube   When the goddesses of dawn

La fière chasse à courre   Hunt pride with hounds

[chasse à courre, or la vénerie: to hunt with hounds, during which the Fédération Nationale des Chasseurs tells us "the hunted animal will use cunning as its natural insticts command him to".]

Puis l'antique quiétude.   Then the ancient silence

Que font les amants ils s'aiment et se tourment.   What do these lovers do they love and abuse.

in Vénus, as with much of Penrose's poetry, there is evident musicality in her verse; often translation choices have been made that prioritise that rhythm and rhyme. This strategy has not been fixed: It was simply possible here, and was pleasurable to translate in this way.

In the summer before university I work for a local family who own most of the fruit in the county. They live in a very big house on the hill that I can just about glimpse through the trees as I drive to the farm. It's hard work, picking blackcurrants for twelve hours at a time in the hot sun. For a week, the owner's children come to help, on a lark I imagine. They are cheerful, energetic, and chatty with the other workers.

[verseau: from verser, "to pour", and eau, "water", a calque of the Greek ὑδροχόος (hudrokhóos). The constellation represents Ganymede, a young man desired and stolen away by Zeus, spending eternity as cupbearer on Olympus. Orpheus sings his tale in Ovid's Metamorphoses]

Verseau

Mon frère nettoie ton fusil
À la porte du seigneur.
Les tristes échassiers sont vendus par le ciel
Depuis ce Janvier dans la ville du capitaine
Ou se tordaient— à l'ouest la seule primevère—
Les cheveux suffoqués de notre mère jeune.

In the blistering heat, I am invited to the big house to get some water, and I try not to leave dark purple stains on the brilliant white of their kitchen as they discuss dinner parties they will throw, how the tennis courts need cleaning, where their Oxford friends are summering this year. There are marble busts just outside, but I can't get close enough to see which classical figures they are supposed to be. When their mother returns home, it is made very clear that farmhands aren't really supposed to be brought into the house, and I am politely driven back to the farm.

Aquarius

My brother cleans your gun
At the lord's door.
The sad stilt-walkers have been sold by the sky
Since January in the captain's town
Where writhing— the only primrose to the west—
Our young mother's strangled hair .

My mother has a recurring dream. She is walking along a deep-rutted road to a destination she is familiar with but doesn't know. She is leading a horse. She knows that when she reaches her destination, when the journey has ended, she will have to kill and bury the horse herself. She cries the whole way. It is a dreadful journey.

[Capricorn: a half-goat,
half-fish figure said to
represent Pan's
desperate
transformations in
order to escape the
monster Typhon.]

Capricorne

Capricorn

Il y a dans l'air une odeur de noir animal
Il y a dans l'air glacé une odeur militaire
Un claquement verni tel d'un bec de vautour
              Sous le ciel obéi.

In the air is the smell of a beast-blackness
In the frozen air there is a military smell
A polished snap like a vulture's beak
              Under the obeyed sky.

[se ternir;
to tarnish,
to sully, in
the sense of
losing
former
beauty or
glory.]

Je suis sur un banc comme l'épervier se perche
Un uniforme ancien se ternit dans les branches.
Et je pense à des capitaines
Dont la femme croyante et suffocante enfant
Face à la fenêtre
Par la nuit de Janvier.

I am perched on a bench like a hawk
An antique uniform fades in the branches.
And I think of the captains
Whose faithful woman and suffocating child
Face the window
On a January night.

[croyant: a believer,
often in the religious
sense.]

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I am randomly assigned another PhD researcher to talk to, in these early stages where none of us really know each other. My luck, we are both enamoured with mythology, her work specifically focussed on Melusine, a mermaid-like spirit who lives in holy waters.

Gilles de Rais

Eau secoue la pluie des toits
Celle des châteaux lierre
C'était vert l'eau bouillonnait

Ce furent des draperies
Tiges antique garnison
Chœurs cachées des Mélusines
Sous de feutrées floraisons.
Jamais étoile du berger
Ne montra si féerique
Il n'était plus soir ni jour.

Au long battant à la longue aile
Terrifiant
Toi l'aîné le seul le lierre.

Il y eut un tel sourire
Quand ce fut le nid de feu
Parmi le cierge et la fleur
Un plat sourire de pierre
Une Lilithe toute blanche
Grande géante là-haut
Au-dessus du nid de feu.

On ne pouvait arriver
À plus vielle sécurité
À plus sereine bienveillance
Dans les bras d'avant Adam
Au cercle des démons blancs.

Gilles de Rais

Water shakes the roof rain
Of ivy castles
It was green, the seething water

It was the curtains
Antique garrison rods
Melusina's hidden choirs
Beneath muffled blooms.
The shepherd's star never
Showed such enchantment
It was no longer dusk nor day.

At the great beating of the huge wing
Terrifying
You, the eldest, the only the ivy.

There had been such a smile
When there was the nest of fire
Among the votive and the flower
A flat stone smile
Lilith, all white
Great giant above
Beneath the nest of fire
None could reach
An older safety
To the calmest benevolence
In the arms before Adam
In the circle of white demons.

It's one of the few times I meet a researcher with similar passion for the importance of mythological narrative—albeit she is a medievalist, the common thread ties our work together in interesting ways across the span of centuries. *[cierge: a specifically religious candle used in ceremonies]*

I wonder if there is an irony in bonding over studying Melusine, when it is unsanctioned observation that mythologically causes her to flee forever from the mortal gaze. I wonder in a lot of cases if there is an irony in studying artists and myths that very much did not want to be seen at all.

Delecroix puts it as a "pre-adamic innocence" that is sought constantly, but only exists in the impossible adventure-times of the archaic myths. It is something we must all strive for.

The myth conveniently folds the years over themselves like paper, propping a ladder up between two points that should be miles apart. *[féerique : magical, but with strong connotations of fantasy and fairytale, as in fée, "fairy"]*

My first major translation project is Tombeau d'Achille by Vincent Delecroix, a study of the titular hero that lauds "l'exultation et la risqué de la course en avant" as opposed to "la médiocrité obscure et mesquine de la prudence" .

The hedges are the tiny gaps between, where wild garlic still sprung up amongst the hazel, rodents and birds invisible to the eye but producing a crashing noise far larger than their small bodies would suggest.

I am cut open by a discarded length of barbed wire, the scar lingering fifteen years later

Disons disons
Le cœur marron
Noir de baies boules chatons
Résidus violets des haies
Fruit de fusain
Oui zinzolin
Et laurier-tin
Manche étain talisman plombe
Car il est une saison
Où l'on relève la garde.

Là
la belette saute comme une guerrière le château hurle
Y suivent des manches de couleurs sans noms
On revient
—Peut-être encore un matin perlé une rose blanche—
Puis traînant ces ailes et ces manches somptueuses il faut tuer.

Hedges cut the rural landscapes of my childhood into significant pieces, marking the beginning of one neighbour's land and the end of another's, turning what had once been a sweeping area of woodland into easily identifiable fields with names, and owners, and purpose.

It is a difficult way of thinking to marry as a translator, whose entire work is defined by the meticulous, the painstaking, and indeed the paranoid. What would it be like to rush forward, without impairment or doubt?

The monocultural fields froth into life at the borders, a network of interlocking paths that shape the valley. They are shorelines, mineral seams, covered markets, last bastions. We climb through them to reach the river and swim.

Let us say let us say
The chestnut heart
Black with berries knots catkins
Violet remains of hedgerows
Charcoal fruit
Yes zinzolin
And laurestine.

Tin shaft lead talisman
As it is an age
Where we change the guard

There
The weasel leaps like a warrior the castle howls
Followed by shafts of nameless colours
We come back
—Perhaps still a beaded morning a white rose—
Then hauling these wings and lavish shafts we must kill.

Delecroix writes eloquently on the childhood fascination with myth, and with heroes, but Achilles was not my favourite, as his was. I preferred Odysseus for his cunning, his way with words, and above all the long and winding journey he found himself on, the endless surprise of his adventures. He shows prudence yes, but not mediocrity, not pettiness. The journey must be completed after all; Odysseus must find his way home

My hallucinations continued well into my third year. I took new medication, I tried breathing exercises to try and lash the fractured parts of my brain back together, absolutely, absolutely didn't tell anyone. It seemed these episodes were a manifestation of everything I was trying to hunt down and pin to paper in my research at the time: formless, shifting beasts that I couldn't fully describe, in colours that were vivid and completely black at the same time, unutterable and incomprehensible. Unnatural. I had caught them like a disease from too many long evenings staring at Alice Rahon's paintings. Instead of wrestling surrealism into the realm of the understandable, I had been wrestled away, disoriented and alienated from the world around me. I was sure I would never find my way back.

La Chatelaine d'Oueil

La chatelaine d'Oueil a perdu la mémoire
Dans le grand vent du nord elle a perdu le boire
Elle a fait de sa chambre une haute montagne

Les troupeaux et la pluie ont descendu les pentes
Avec tous les poignards des cloches de septembre
Ils sont entrés au seuil de cette cathédrale
Cœur mince et si offert des chatelaines d'Oueil.

Et haussant dans ses mains la creuse solitude
L'incalculable hiver et à venir le rien
Heureuse de l'écho glacé de l'eau intacte
La chatelaine d'Oueil a perdu la mémoire.

The Lady of Oueil

The Lady of Oueil has lost her memory
She has pored over in the great north wind
She has made of her bedroom a high mountain.

The flocks and the rain come down the hills
With all the daggers of the September bells
They pass the threshold of this cathedral
Heart so thin and freely-given by the ladies of Oueil.

And raising in her hands the hollow solitude
The immeasurable winter and the nothing to come
Happy with the frozen echo of unbroken water
The Lady of Oueil has lost her memory

This valley is where things go to die, including the last dragon in Wales according to local legend. These four churches seal the dragon's body beneath the earth after being slain by St. Michael himself. If any of the churches are destroyed, the dragon will claw itself out from the underworld and be released upon us.

St. Mary's is not the most significant church in the valley, although its bells are certainly the ones I hear most loudly. The more salient churches, at least in the area's necromythologies I had constructed in my mind, were the four churches to St. Michael spread in a large quadrilateral

Everywhere around me, the dead were threatening to rise again, memories refusing to be laid to rest, ghosts stalking the country lanes.

My medication makes me nauseous. The hallucinations dip in frequency, and intensity, but it seems this has been achieved by rendering my entire body into one singular concrete slab, devoid of appetites of any kind. Food, reading, writing, walking, all are out of reach.

Château de Forchtenstein   Forchtenstein Castle

Les dames de Hongrie ne mangent plus   The ladies of Hungary no longer eat
Mélangées aux dames d'Autriche   Mingled with ladies from Austria
Dans le fort château suspendues.   Suspended in the mighty castle.
Leur plus bel amant   Their more handsome lover
Sur le plancher beige   On the beige floorboards
Debout il ne bouge   Upright he no longer
Plus dans son costume.   Moves in his suit.

The living move, and the dead stay still.

Food, reading, writing, walking, all are out of reach. My mouth seals over and my brain becomes mute, and the world that previously had been so teeming with symbols and meaning became a very dull thing indeed, impenetrable and stiff.

I go home. I walk through the hills again and watch the standing stones, the old holloways, the faint ridges in fields that contain walls of Roman camps. The scars they leave on the otherwise ever-renewing growth of the woods and crops around them are the same as they ever were; decades and centuries and millennia have not buried them. Everything else, the plants and the animals and the people, ripple around them.

Les couleurs orange   The orange colours
Les occupations   The pastimes
Comitats gardés   The protected counties
Bornes constellées   The studded landmarks
Le long des halliers   Along the thickets
De majuscules de couronnes et de portes   Of capital letters of crowns and of doors

[constellées :scattered, sprinkled, in a manner comparable to stars. The choice of "studded" is an homage to how I have previously translated this word in Tombeau d'Achille, and wished to evoke the leather of Achilles' armour].

Je passe les portes les voutes les bornes   I pass the doors the arches the landmarks
Pour aller cueillir par voies magnifiques   To forage by magnificent paths
Pour aller chercher les irreprochables   To search for the immaculate
Racines et toutes plantes valables   Roots and all the valuable plants
Dans le temps du cerf celui des duvets   In the time of the deer, of the down.

Le roi sous le dais. Il a des guirlandes   The king under the canopy. He has such white
Très blanches de bras comme des muguets   Garlands of arms like lily of the valley
Le roi sous le dais. Il a des bougies   The king under the canopy. He has candles
Des grands yeux luisants les facile coupes   Of large gleaming eyes the easy cuts

Quand le vent du nord vous voit sous la porte.   When the north wind sees you beneath the door.

The first time I read Valentine Penrose's work I am struck not by its mythological qualities, but by her specific reference to numerous plants. Alpine valerian, laurestine, agapanthus. They are what she turns towards when speaking the world around her into existence, not just the prestigious figures of antiquity but the fragile leaves and flowers that were nonetheless steeped in magic. I remember learning the names of a hundred different plants in my grandparents' garden, wielding a trowel in my stubby hands as my grandfather (Taid, in north Welsh dialect) helps me to walk. He uses the picture in his "about the author" sections of the monographs he writes, and his colleagues laugh that they have never seen him that happy in the office.

<table>
<tr><td>Le Templier</td><td>The Templar</td></tr>
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Dans le forêt nantie de vent et de nards celtiques
De ce que l'on n'avait jamais plus ouï dire
Menée par les graines des plantes tombées du coin
Du tablier des nièces des Templiers

Livrée suivons qui fait fleurer et germer
Qui reste et qui écrase.

[écrase : to overwrite, but also to squash, flatten, push down. Rather violent connotations, "overwrite" has been chosen despite lack of supporting context to draw attention to the physicality of writing over something.]

Tiz Tiz. Au cachée les mésanges
Des syriennes complaisances
Le Templier au monument
De la forêt de vent et de nard celtique.

L'esprit dans le bois descend.

In the forest rich with wind and alpine valerian
With something we never heard of again
Led by the falling seeds of local plants
 From the Templars' nieces' aprons

Let's follow the livery that flowers and sprouts
That stays and overwrites.

When I read Penrose's description of more obscure plants, I ask my mother what they might be, and wonder if Valentine also sat in her mother's garden and learned latin names patiently from small weatherbeaten book.

Tiz Tiz. They are hidden, the titmice
Of Syrian favours
The Templar at the memorial
Of the forest of wind and alpine valerian

The spirit in the woods descends.

Sappho, in whose Ode to Aphrodite violets feature so prominently they became a long-lasting symbol of queer desire, first captured my interest in translation. The lacunas, the empty spaces that could not be translated, that served as unchanging landmarks in the otherwise shifting landscape of her work as it was passed from translator to translator, laid heavy on my mind. They were scars, undeniable instances where the millennia had removed the writer's words from the reader. There was a chasm that could not be crossed. An appetite that could not be satisfied.

Les Templiers de Pierrefitte

The Templars of Pierrefitte

They were not, in fact empty— something had been there, all those years ago. They were just inaccessible, empty to me. I could work with the rippling spaces around them, the malleable language that surrounded them, but I couldn't fill the silence, heal the scar, fill the gap.

Sous les grands reflets de font violette
Avec le lierre l'emblème de toison
Qu'ils dorment à l'arc brisé. Poignée d'épée
Croix luxure rentrées ordre des saisons.

Là-haut en haut de ce blé parcimonieux
Plus d'engrangements. La stérile violette.
Plus de frère a deux ni d'automnes équestres
Plus de norme d'Orient. Dormez Templiers.

Under the great reflections of the violet font
With ivy the picture of thick hair
They sleep beneath the shattered arch. Sword's hilt
Cross lust returned order to the seasons.

High up above this miserly wheat
More is stored. The sterile violet.
No more brothers in arms nor autumns on horseback
No more law of the East. Sleep, Templars.

The silence could not be translated because it was silence, it could only exist as itself— it was outside of language. When I took my medication and felt my brain go quiet, or looked helplessly at Cahun's self-portraits that seemed to beat me back from trying to comprehend them, I thought about the empty spaces.

The silences slept and dreamed of the same myths I did.

I danced at the ceilidhs, but terribly so— chronically uncoordinated since birth, I stepped on toes and flung my arms around uncomfortably. This close to the border, we were far from the competitions and stiff traditions of deep Wales, and instead move with a half-English self-consciousness.

Chœurs des Reines du Pays de Kousch

Là où sont les étoiles
Tournait une perdrix
Elle tournait la terre
De la Mère Kali.

Le sexe de fleur bleue
Qui grimpe à la liane
Ici c'est la violette.
—Que je sois que tu sois heureuse—

Pour plaire à sa compagne
A boité la femelle
Dans la danse du cycle
Quand Venus descendait

Peu sévères sont les rives d'Ionie
La mer Noire voilà se borde de chevaux
Le nuage s'abaisse et l'étoilée perdrix
Sous l'acanthe expirée ne saura plus danser.

L'étoile fait sa nuit la lune tient son feu.
Nous hases des iles mitrées
Biens de Vénus de noire Asie
Encore un peu chantons nous l'avons cru
Sous les chapiteaux marins confondues :

« D'où te viennent ces beaux yeux cernés perdrix de plumes ? »
—Que je sois que tu sois heureuse—

The Queen's Choirs in the Kingdom of Kush

There, where the stars are
A partridge turns
She turns the earth
Of Mother Kali

The blue flower's sex
Which climbs the vine
It's the violet here.
—That I might, that you might be happy—

To please her partner
The woman limped
Through the dance of the time
When Venus descends

Gentle are the shores of Ionia
The Black Sea lies next to the horses
The cloud hunches down and the starry partridge
Will forget how to dance beneath the dead acanthus.

The star makes its darkness the moon holds its fire
We the jill hares of the Mithraeum Isles
Belonging to the Venus of dark Asia
We sing a little more we believed her
Beneath the bewildered ocean tents.

"From where are your lovely tired eyes, plumed partridge?"
—So that I might that you might be happy—

[mitrées : a Mithraeum, Roman temple to Mithras. Often built underground, with a single entrance, they were used primarily for initiation into the cult's mysteries. Mithras is said to have been born from a rock, and his festival was also at midsummer.]

Translating Tombeau d'Achille and its fervent love for a certain purity of intent and spirit might bring the translator to consider how far they themselves have fallen from these Achillean ideals. Worrying at nuances and repeated self-revising are anathema to the forthright hero that Delecroix idolises. In my translation I wanted to be brave, unadulterated, "whole" with the strength of monolithism that pierced the world like a spear. But with every attempted bold stroke I felt keenly what was being lost, which parts of the text were being silenced. I remembered Odysseus, the man of many ways, his guises and tricks that led him through his long journey and brought him home alive.

L'Agapanthe	Agapanthus
La triste agapanthe de Vienne	The sad agapanthus of Vienna
Bleue comme ce palais du dimanche vu par elle.	Blue like the Sunday palace she had seen.
Je me délivre de l'air même	I set myself free from the air even
Des gentils siècles en arrière	The kind centuries are left behind.
Si facile il m'est si facile	So easy it's so easy for me
À travers les murs d'interroger le cœur des abdiqués	Through the walls to question the heart of the abdicated
Sans pleureuses sans bruits. Ce n'est plus dans la rue	Without weepers without sounds. No more in the street
C'est vers cette cœur beige que tout se retourne.	It is in this beige courtyard through which all things return
Un seul érable humide et sous les longues pierres	A single damp maple tree and under the long stones
Courant comme souris la dernière nichée de merles	Scampering like mice a flock of blackbirds
Avec la ruse dans les yeux	With mischief in their eyes.
L'empereur dort	The emperor sleeps.
Par la au-dedans.	Over there.
Abolis les tourments. C'est la bastion la plaine	Do away with the torture. It's the stronghold the plain
La force des chevaux des bêtes qu'on amène	The power of horses and the beasts we lead
Par le licol griffons des basilics des onces	By the halter griffins basilisks snow leopards
Des dragons en troupeaux a la nuit menés paitre.	Dragons led in herds by night to graze.

I spent the majority of my life walking through a valley that belonged to a long-dead dragon and the countless burial mounds, and in Penrose's poetry these figured walked alongside me.

I read Penrose's work and I see the dead come back to life. Templars and dragons walk alongside Demeter and Kali. The stained glass beasts of my night time hallucinations are superimposed over the lush greenery of my mother's garden.

Penrose's vivid imagery made me once more consider Odysseus. With each new book I studied, I thought how it could explain a new aspect of her work. Phenomenology illuminated the spatiality of it, the mixed temporalities, the mythology carried Freudian significance, her collages were all bodies without organs that invited schizoanalytic insights.

My work would have to travel, lost at times, in the hope of returning to land. It would have to become disoriented in the hope of stabilising itself and reorienting again. And it would then have to make that journey again and again, covering new ground, knowing that it cannot cover it all.

I couldn't tell the story in only one way; I couldn't draw a map of something that contained so many shifting possibilities. Penrose's poetry exists perpetually just beyond the edges of whatever framework I brought to it, whatever paradigm I translated it into.

I had been at university for several years, in a city that no matter how small still felt impossibly cosmopolitan in comparison; I had left the dead behind, and now they had come back to me.

Incalculable vie. Assis sur la pierre
Ou les merles rampaient le dimanche passait
Et j'entendais tinter l'émeraude et l'épée
Les magiques fourreaux nus sur des cramoisis.

Pour prédire il faut se conserver
Un cœur d'une main
Une agapanthe en boule de l'autre
Ce sont les signes de royaume

Je te laisse agapanthe fleur douce inexistante
Ô brume belle de fleur bleue
Tournée vers ce point cardinal du dimanche
Qui n'exista jamais que toujours je connais.

Incalculable life. Sat on the stone
Where the blackbirds hop Sunday has passed
And I heard chiming the emerald and the sword
The magics bare scabbards on shades of crimson.

To foresee one must keep
Your heart in one hand
An agapanthus curled up in the other
These are the royal seals

I leave you agapanthus sweet non-existent flower
O beautiful mist of blue flowers
Turned towards the cardinal point of Sunday
That will never exist that I always know.

Anne Carson recounts in Variations on the Right to Remain Silent how Homer describes Odysseus discovering MOLY, A plant belonging to the gods whose name remains untranslated into the mortal tongue. She praises the silence, much as she does in her translations of Sappho's fragments, for its untranslatability, its refusal to be moved from its time and place. This refusal confounds the researcher, who might try to deduce what exact plant is being referred to, whether it exists or not in the first place. It falls silent.

The word orientation comes from the latin *oriēns* (dawn, sunrise, appearing, originating), which is the active present participle of *orior* (to rise, to appear, to become visible, to come to exist). I was reoriented by Penrose: the centuries of myth I had left behind rose again, became visible, came back into existence. They were living, moving again. In this way, we might also say reorientation is a kind of resurrection.

In many ways, much of Penrose's work falls silent to the researcher-translator, the esoteric imagery constructed according to chance and subconscious inclination remaining disoriented from the observer and refusing to be reoriented, comprehended, wrangled into a static meaning. It is full of oddities, erratics, standing stones around which syntax can flow and change but not grow over. There are dragons buried underneath that cannot be dug up, only passed around in iterations of mutable folktales. We can only engage with the silence in any meaningful way by talking around it, over and over, creating a myth of it.

Ivy is a symbol of fidelity because it clings so tightly to the structure that supports its growth— often misconstrued as parasitic, in reality it has its own root structures and garners its own nutrients, allowing it to grow so prolifically on buildings and monuments. It carries older connotations of victory, laurels being given to winners of poetry contests in Ancient Greece: "symposiasts". It probably is not difficult to construct one's own allegory for the translation process in reference to the ivy plant, entwining itself with the text, growing on top and alongside it, fidelity demonstrated in the close contact sustained between translator and text. Similarly, a translation might be seen as a celebratory wreath around the text, a recognition and manifestation of favour.

Au Lierre   To the Ivy

Je quitte chevaliers et purs hennins et neige   I leave the knights and soft hennins and the snow
La tour   The tower
Et de la maison du merle   And the blackbird's house
Toi la blason toi le lierre   You the arms, you the ivy

[stéphanotis: a genus of white flowering plants. The word comes from the Greek στεφανωτίς, a feminine adjective meaning "fit for a crown or wreath".]

Veuve des astres du septentrion quand je partirai quand je m'en irai quand
Loin j'irai
J'emporterai
Un bouquet de graines de lierre
Joyaux du vert éternel.

[astres de septentrion: le Septentrion is an archaic name for what is now called La Grande Casserole, "the Big Dipper". Part of Ursa Major, its crucial position in the north led to "septentrion" sometimes being used as a synonym for "nord". I have translated it as such in order to once more highlight influences of direction and positionality within the work.]

Et du jasmin blanc du stéphanotis
de tout ce qui es lis
Je n'aurai jamais ce baptême amer
De ta dure feuille en la nuit d'hiver
Trempée raclant a l'obscure vitre
Triste oiseau triste cœur

North star-widow when I left when I would go when
I would go far
I will bring
A bunch of ivy seeds
Eternal green jewels

And white Madagascar jasmine
All that is white all that is lilies
I will never have that bitter baptism
Of your stiff sheets on a winter's night
Plunged scratching at the dark glass
Sad bird sad heart

More critically, the presentation of subject-led, autotheoretically inspired dialogue with the text represents new growth, a palimpsestic overlay that charts the translator's own reorientation towards the work.

This is another symbolic value of ivy: eternal life, renewal, rebirth

In my translation of Les Magies, I have interspersed these asides in a way that tries to follow the structure of the poetry, growing in and alongside it, as sentimentally I have imagined my identity as a translator and researcher growing alongside my study of Penrose's works.

More critically, the presentation of subject-led, autotheoretically inspired dialogue with the text represents new growth, a palimpsestic overlay that charts the translator's own reorientation towards the work.

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament tells us that baptism, from the Ancient Greek βαπτίζω is more often used to mean to sink, to go under, to be immersed or overwhelmed, overtaken by something. Connotations of shipwreck, drowning, perishing through the act of sinking link it closely to the idea of death; a baptism is a descent, a katabasis, that is rewarded with communion. I frequently knelt in St. Mary's while those around me received wine and bread, as one of the few in the community who had not been baptised, and felt so keenly excluded I doggedly attended confirmation classes for several weeks before my religious fervour petered out. I wanted so badly to be immersed, to be overtaken by something, reach communion through devotion and sacrifice. Odysseus made blood sacrifices to summon the shades of the underworld so that he might speak to them. To be overtaken requires surrender.

La Verte

Mousse herbe et toi graminée fleur sa feuille
Monde de masse verte ou s'avance la dame
Si hautement coiffée et de robes variées
Distraite et tournant partout son col de oiseau

Et le chêne viellait épais sur ta venue
Connaissant de tout temps vieux serviteur parfait
Ta robe de septembre et ta robe de mai

The Green Lady

Moss herb and you the grass flowers for her sheets
The lady walks forward through the world of green masses
Her hair coiffed so high in changing dresses
Distracted her bird neck turning everywhere

And the oak grew thick and old when you returned
Knowing those perfect times it had served you before
Your dress for September and your dress for May.

[variées : also means mixed, assorted, multi-faceted. Translated as "changing" here to allow me options to occupy the same space, fluidly.]

Chanson	Song
Notre chambre suspendue	Our hanging room
Au creux du ciel	In the hollow of the sky
Hors des lames de la pluie	Beyond the rain's blades
Hors des larmes de la lune	Beyond the moon's tears
Au bas des murs sont les tournois	The tournaments are at the foot of the walls
Et les orties nous ne les verrons pas	And we do not see the nettles.
La lune a parlé de nuit je ne sais pas	I don't know what the moon said of the night
La nuit l'emmène courir	The night carried it away running
Sur la rive et dans son lit	On the shores and in her bed
De nuit.	Of night.
Ceci cela jusqu'à l'aube du jour	This and that until the break of day
Qui fait rentrer les salamandres	That brings the salamanders back.

[lames: also means waves, in the sense both are long parallel lines.]

A story I often tell the people in my life about why translation has overtaken me so thoroughly in my work and personal life is that of David Lehman's translation of Zone by Guillaume Apollinaire. The first draft of the translation produced in 1978, he spent nearly forty years returning to it, refining it, translating and retranslating while numerous other translations were published in the interim. At the time I first heard that story, this amounted to nearly twice my entire lifetime.

To direct oneself so faithfully towards the same text, to find new routes through it, to immerse oneself again and again to commune with the words of the dead was a transformative idea

.

For Lehman, the text was mythological: a touchstone that he oriented himself towards through repeated efforts, through repeated departures and returns and with them new potentialities. [*sévères : to do something in a hard or ruthless manner.* *"deeply" perhaps does not have the same forceful connotation, but I have chosen instead to render the aspects of rigour and diligence, in a poem so filled with devotio*n.].

It was a labour of love, he says: "The love of the work sustains the effort

Nuit

La nuit d'hiver reviendra-t-elle
Pour me reposer près de toi.
Les façades boiront sévères
Le clair de lune et sa lumière
Sera chassée de nos baisers et de nos bras.

La chambre est là seule et rideaux fermés
Tu es là seule avec tes yeux fermés
Le clair de lune est le clair de tes bras
Et la nuit porte l'insouciant navire.

Night

She will come back, the winter's night
To lay me next to you.
The facades will drink deeply
The moonlight and it's glow
Will be chased from our kisses and our arms.

The bedroom is alone there with curtains closed
You are alone there with eyes closed
The light of the moon is the light of your arms
And the night carries the careless ship.

Poème

Accueille-moi dans ton berceau
Il est brûlant et de tout temps
C'est la boite des diligences
C'est lui qui longe la forêt
De tous les voleurs d'Allemagne

De saintes portées du lièvre
Il est l'éternel habitat
La jeune sorcière innocente
Les tend le long du voyage
Nous le tend à bout de bras
Les rideaux de cuir l'orage

Un oiseau aux grandes ailes
A fait un nid désolé
D'innombrables pèlerinages y sont allés
—Hurlez vous plus que pleurez
Mes solennels défilés—

Avec un couteau de roses
Dans l'acier de ses jointures
Dans son passé de métal
L'oiseau frappé ne maudit pas
Il meurt davantage
—Meurs petite mouche noire—

Penrose is often called a witch by those around her. She wanders the forest gathering herbs, she keeps to herself, she travels far and wide in search of esoteric knowledge and enlightenment. She absents herself, and the empty space left behind is filled with magic.

Poem

Welcome me into your cradle
It burns and has since forever
It is the stagecoach carriage
That hugs the forest
Of all the German thieves

The hare carries saints
She is the eternal home
The young innocent witch
Cares for them all through the journey
We care for them at arm's length.
The leather curtains the storm.

A bird with great wings
Made a stark nest
Of the countless pilgrimages who had gone there
—Scream more than you cry
My solemn parades—

With a knife of roses
In the steel of his knuckles
In his metal history
The struck bird did not curse
He dies some more
—Die my little black kitten—

[longe: to closely follow the border of something, here "to hug". The navigation of boundaries characterised as close, affectionate contact is fitting for this thesis.]

This, for me, is perhaps the most intriguing quality of her work: the parts that fall silent to me, just as much as much as the parts that speak to me. I do not understand all of the references made, despite painstaking study. I cannot untangle all of the wordplay. Perhaps I will in future, or somebody else will find a new route through the text and unearth new landmarks that I have missed; the surprises, the conjurations, the transmutations are part of the ritual of translation.

In a pot made of scales
Scales and linen
I am well, stiff and black
Better ask for a drink

Dans un vase d'écailles
D'écailles et de lin
Roide et noir je vais bien
Bien demander à boire.

One journey through a space will never suffice; it requires countless iterations and travels to provide an adequately rich account. This is the importance of the palimpsest, the katabasis, the route: it is meant to be walked by others, to be deviated from, to be written over. Forty years may not be enough.

C'est la monastère droit
Sur la promontoire étroit

On the right is the monastery
On the narrow bluff

The journey must be taken again. The future of reading, writing, translating women's surrealism that I am trying to suggest is one founded on the narrativization and structure of the journey, in contrast to the static nature of a map.

Un seul lis dans la vallée.
C'est à prendre ou à laisser
Pour l'occasion d'un seul lis
Il fait mille fois plus nuit.

A single lily in the valley
It is there to be taken or left
For the chance of one single lily
Night falls a thousand times more.

Fallait-il qu'une brillante
Me rappelât tout le bien
—Mouche il faut bien que tu meures—
Nous nous périrons au-delà
À la façon des rosées
Sur le trésor de la nuit
Il faut que je m'en aille
À cause de la pluie
Suivie de capricornes
Qui m'obéissent bien
Long poème comme un long fleuve
Va a qui aimera.

Something brilliant must have
Reminded me of all the good
—Kitten you had better die—
We perish then
Like dew does
On the night's treasure
I would have to go
Because of the rain
Followed by capricorns
Who obey me well.
Long poem like a long river
Goes to the who will love it.

I read Jeanette Winterson's Weight, consider Atlas trying to bear the while world at once, and Winterson pleads: "I want to tell the story again". The retelling of a story is necessarily a translation, new tellings then new translations, and from there necessary divergences. I walk the same paths in the same hills for fifteen years, and while the dead stay the same the life that springs up around them changes. I tell my mother about new birds that live by the river, new lambs, a peacock that had disappeared some years ago only to mysteriously return. To preserve, to extend the life of the text, to reorient it and bring it speak with its shade requires journeying through again and again.

The love of the work sustains the effort. Just as my colleague could not have studied something she loved, I don't think I could have studied something I didn't.

La Source

La source est là dans le plancher
Mange autour la fête brillante
Les astres luisants ont ciré
D'anciens insectes allumé.

Comme en un gazon ou s'étonnent
À plat et d'or scellées les fleurs
Alentour le petit orchestre
Les chaises de jardin. La chouette pleure.
Qui ne pleure pas.

Montant l'escalier feutré
Vers l'eau froide à la Chandeleur
J'attends je m'attends
Sans nourriture je sais où manger ailleurs.
Voilà le ton de la demeure
Non pas pauvre non pas obscure
Non plus vivante mais si sure.

L'orchestre est parti. Les étoiles rangées.
Les chaises ordonnées. Ô plancher de chêne
Tantôt c'est la neige
Et tantôt les cires
Et toi rêvée pure
La nonne lunaire
Viens boire à la source
La source de bois.

Ouvrez venez à la fontaine
Ce qui n'avait jamais brillé va venir.

The Source

The source is there, in the floor
Eat around the bright festival
The gleaming stars have polished
The ancient insects alight.

As on a lawn where astonished
Flat and gold-sealed the flowers
All around the tiny orchestra
The garden chairs. The owl weeps.
Who does not weep.

Climbing the muffled stairs.
Towards the cold water at Candlemas
I wait I expect
Without food I know where else to eat.
Here is the hue of the house
Neither poor nor dark
Nor living anymore but so safe.

The orchestra has gone. The stars have been tidied.
The orderly chairs. O oaken floor
At times it is snow
And at times wax
And purely you were dreamed
The moon's nun
Come drink from the source
The source of wood

Open, come to the fountain
What has never shined will come

I felt cut off from the world around me, trying to speak with the dead who would not speak back using a language I was not yet fluent in: I had always been a translator, not an art critic or a literary scholar, and felt hugely out of my depth.

I crumbled, and frequently considered abandoning Penrose and Cahun and all the rest of them, letting the work I had done slump back into non-existence. The journey down seemed to hard, the immersion too suffocating.

In the end, this is what provided my anabasis, the way out. I returned to translation, encouraged by my supervisor, and observed how approaching the work from a place of joy opened up so much more possibility, brought so much more life to it. I faced the text from a position that allowed me to more fully extend myself into it, and remembered how I had felt I could revisit the same text for the rest of my life and find something new each time.

The dead stay still, and are predictable. A living text, one that still has the potential to change and move, is a more frightening thing: it exists on the border of comprehension, extending beyond it, uncharted abject wilderness. It carries the danger and acceptance of failure. Halberstam acknowledges and indeed extols the queer virtues of failure; my friends and I assure each other after each negative supervisor meeting that we are simply making him proud. I know that each time I speak about a text, a painting, I am failing. The words always fall short, my perspective is always limited, the fluidity of surrealism cannot be fully conveyed in a static line of text. I resolve to keep failing, from different angles, sonar pings that track the movement of a leviathan or snapshots that, when looked at very quickly, show a moving image.

À Jean Rhys
La Folle des Sargasses

To John Rhys
The madness of Sargasso

It is a comfort not to be seen, a comfort to look up and see the usual stars and the visiting Perseids. I don't carry a torch like other late-night dog walkers, happy to let my eyes adjust instead. I sometimes lingered for longer than I needed to on a particularly dark corner, and stayed still long enough that I felt as though my body was dissolving into the night around me.

Ne retourne pas obscure
Vers l'oranger amer.

À la cime les arbres
Les pirates entiers
Remuent dans les iles
De tes yeux tes cheveux

Nous irons aux Antilles
Ise folle
Voir le stéphanotis sur la rampe de fer.

La goyave la mangue
S'incrustent a la maison
Moisie. Luciole et blatte
Trouent de leur poison
Ton corps long dans la chambre.

Do not return dark
To the bitter orange tree

At the top of the trees
The intact pirates
Disturb the islands
Of your hair your eyes

We will go to the West Indies
The mad Ise
To see the Madagascar jasmine climb the iron railing.

Guava, mango,
Root themselves in the musty
House. Firefly and cockroach
Pierce your long body
With their poison in the bedroom.

When I go home for the summer, I am another dead thing in the valley. I can't seem to conjure the energy for conversation, or do much other than walk my usual paths and then sit in a chair for the rest of the day, distracted and vague. [*la perte certaine du voyage : this could mean either the loss of travel itself, or the loss demanded by travel. I have rendered it similarly ambiguously*].

I go out again at night and walk with my neck craned, the darkness I can't find in Lancaster lying thickly over me.

The narrative hinges on movement. We start in one place, and go to another, which is sometimes the same place but different. I have painted the journey I have taken as katabasis, the journey to the underworld, and anabasis, the return. . It is a fundamental mythological structure, undertaken famously by Odysseus, and one that necessitates loss to be completed.

The sin of looking back, that seems inevitable: the violence of observation, that damned Lot's wife, that protected Medusa, that cut loose Eurydice. In constructing a narrative, we must look back to see where our journey has led, and join the disparate points into one continuous line; it is a process that necessitates the looking taboo. We can stay in a disorienting, fluid space for a while, recount our journey through it, but in that recounting there is inevitably an element of loss as we commit it to a predictable narrative.

La basque et la violette
Luxe entête te mènent
À la perte certaine
Du voyage. Adieu.
Bientôt bientôt.

Le cheval part l'oiseau se fixe
Entre les sourcils obstinés
Où sont les pirates. L'oiseau
De montagne. Sa note unique et solitaire.

Jaune le carton
Des corridors longs
Et comme un terreur effondrée
La robe rouge qui sentait la poussière et la pluie.

Ne retourne pas obscure
Vers l'oranger amer.

The basque and violet
Pigheaded luxury leads you
To the certain loss
Of travelling. Farewell.
I will see you soon, soon.

The horse leaves and bird is still
Between the wilful brows
Where the pirates are. The mountain
Bird. It's solitary, unique cry.

Yellow is the cardboard
Of long corridors
And like a sunken fear
The red dress that felt the dirt and the rain.

Do not return dark
To the bitter orange.

Odysseus makes blood sacrifices to lure out the spirits, and gain their wisdom. But the return requires loss too: we cannot bring the dead back with us for good. Orpheus, desperate to bring his love back with him from the Underworld, cannot resist turning around to look at her, thus losing Eurydice forever (or for at least until he himself is dead).

I worried I had spent too long among the dead; I had revitalised my work but not myself. I was still sunk, overtaken, overwhelmed. *[effondrée : collapsed, caved in, plummeted. A sense of descending as well as ruin.]* I hadn't reoriented, by which we might also mean I had not been resurrected.

The journey has finished. The potential energy has been spent. In order to recapture some of that magic, a new journey must be undertaken, and then looked at once more. We can't bring Eurydice back with us, only visit her for a time, and then vanish her when we turn back to see how far we have come.

Tantum Ergo

Dormons sur les oreilles
Des Tantum Ergo roux.

Le chat de matin rentre sous la planète
Elle pend seule dans ses piques de cristal.
Mais tout étant brassé la famille l'été
Une autre aube et prairie
Sur l'autel embaumé
Plan de satin de joie
S'installe à mi-soirée
S'habille le Tantum Ergo.

Dans le drap couleur ciel des choses arrangées
Sautent et brillent en musique
Les anneaux boucles d'oreilles
De la Juive immaculée

Débordant l'ouïe fine
Des milliers de saphirs
Choquent et s'entrechoquent
Puis va le chant bien endigué et grand
Roulant l'antique document des jubilants.

Tantum Ergo

Let us sleep on the ears
Of the scarlet Tantum Ergo.

The cat of the morning returns to the world
She hangs alone among her crystal spikes.
But all being stirred, family, summer,
Another dawn and meadow
On the embalmed altar
A map of silk and joy
Moves in at mid-evening
dresses the Tantum Ergo.

In the sky coloured sheet of arranged things
Leap and shine in musique
The rings and earrings
Of the immaculate Jewish woman

Flooding the sharp hearing
Thousands of sapphires
Shock others and each other
Then the large halting song goes
Rolling the ancient paper of the joyous.

Qui sait quoi. A la voute des pigeons couvent et traversent
Au bec de corinthiennes écailles d'ore
Et Venus se relève
Plus que blanche et que bleu

Sur les grandes oreilles
Des Tantum Ergo roux
Dormons plus démunis
Qu'un chat dans la caverne
Que vous dire ô cierges.

Who knows what. At the arch pigeons brood and mill
To the Corinthian spouts flakes of gold
And Venus arises
More than white and blue.

On the large ears
Of the scarlet Tantum Ergo
Let's sleep more roughly
Than a cat in the cave
What could I say O votives.

[bec de corinthiennes : a spout at the top of a Corinthian column, the same word as and visually similar to "beak".]

Certain parts of Penrose's work fall silent to me. Parts of all my work fall silent to me, intellectual understanding not equating an actual working comprehension. Simply, it doesn't speak to me, though I may study it, appreciate it, and encourage others to do the same. The language is beautiful— she speaks well. But it is not to me. The silences are not empty, but rather points where what is said is not oriented towards the listener, unintelligible by virtue of separation. I don't know why the standing stones in my valley were erected, or the names of those who lived in the Bronze Age fort beneath the Iron Age fort beneath the Roman fort. Their forms have nevertheless directed the lines I lived my life along, the paths I walked through the fields just as much as the books I chose to read.

Tenerife I

El Carrito

Et le carrito Messieurs
De la Grande Ourse étoilée ?
Féerie du bois sacré
Les enfants rient de l'été.

Seuls aux bancs des économes entr'eux et des prophètes
Quelques-uns parlant bien dans l'espace des branches.

Ce paradis tire des cruches et des herbes
Ce paradis mange de nuit
Quand les grillons sont aux racines
L'oiseau au nid l'abeille près

Tu vas enfant boudeur des sommeils des jardins
Tard dans la nuit où tes pères nourriciers se croisent
Des males aquatiques détiennent la place
Des Jupiters muets sont installés aux astres.

Mais la pluie lisse le vent
Et demain chacun son tour
La Grande Ourse et ses rubans
Auront raison des époux.

El Carrito

And the carrito, sirs,
Of the starry Great Bear?
The enchantment of sacred wood
The children laugh at summer.

Alone on the bursar's benches among them and prophets
Some speaking well in the space between branches.

[cruches: a jug, with an air of antiquity that harks back to the myth of Ganymede earlier in this collection.]

This paradise drags pitchers and herbs
This paradise eats the night
When the crickets are among the roots
The bird in its nest and the bee nearby.

You are going, sulky child of sleep and gardens
Late in the night where your foster fathers cross each other
The aquatic men hold the place
Mute Jupiters are settled into the stars.

But the rain softens the wind
And tomorrow each in turn
The Great Bear and her ribbons
Will be right for suitors.

Tenerife I

Ursa Major is the only constellation that never submerges itself beneath the horizon, making it invaluable for navigation. Homer notes this in the Odyssey. Before she was a bear she was Callisto, nymph of Artemis, violated by Zeus and permanently morphed as punishment. She can never slip beneath the waves; Zeus pinned her to the sky in such a way that any sailor in his boat could look upon her, and use her to orient his own journey.

She is a symbol of aspiration, but also one of fear: Aratus, in his Phaenomena describing the constellations, writes "dread is the Bear and dread stars are near her". How terrible, to be pinned in place and made a myth of, never allowed to disappear into the world around you in communion.

The journey ends in a different place than it was before. It has been reoriented, baptised and resurrected. The traveller returns to the land of the living. I haven't lived in Wales properly since I left for university, barring some extended spells during the pandemic and in the third year of my doctorate. My grandmother has died, I've forgotten Welsh words that used to be second nature, and the breeds of sheep in the fields a mile from my flat are only fleetingly familiar. Doctors tell me that when I look at my reflection and don't feel the flicker of recognition that accompanies seeing another person, this is a form of dissociation. It will get better in time.

How do I finish this chapter of my time with Penrose and the women surrealists? The journey has to come to an end. How do I return to the land of the living?

[verdino: Spanish in origin, I have left it in the language as Penrose has.]

Tenerife II

El Verdino
(Le chien vert)

Tenerife II

El Verdino
(The green dog)

Even as I finish writing, there is so much still left to do. There are a hundred more journeys that could be charted through the texts I have studied. I need to think about post-doctoral study, more publications, applications for funding.

De la hauteur de la chambre
Laide comme un fort dans cette ville de loisir et de plaisir
De ces mains vertes qui entrent d'arbres
Je dis
Que je voudrais un chien vert.

Madame qu'as-tu fait aux gens
Pour qu'ils t'aiment et ne t'aiment pas
Pour rire et pour pleurer tant eux et toi ?

Ayant vue sur de grands insensibles lauriers
Fais pour les avenues sans gloire et abriter
Allumée à mon propre feu comme une médaille
J'ai ramasse l'éclat de l'ile et à mon poing
A mes blasons à mes cotés
Je vous le dis
Je voudrais un chien vert.

From the top of the room
Heavy like a fortress in this town of leisure and pleasure
From these green hands that enter the trees
I say
That I would like a green dog.

Madam what precisely have you done to people
To make them like or dislike you so
To make you laugh and cry so much?

Having a view of great senseless laurels
Made for inglorious avenues and shelter
Lit by my own fire like a medal
I picked up the shine of the island and in my fist
In my coats of arms in my sides
I tell you
I would like a green dog.

I consider for a long time leaving it unfinished, suspended, endless possibilities for how it could have finished. But I want it to end, now.

The line stretches out before me; it is the one I have built for myself through years of repeated action, orienting myself towards academia to the exclusion of everything else.

Car je suis tournée à l'est
A mon est est la goyave
Et quand le soir reviendra
Aura très peur la médaille.
Ce parc peu sûr est contre vous dans ses habits
Les araignées dessous y marchent en armées
Sous la fiancée inerte au banc de son soldat.
Des lilas peu gentils y dévorent la nuit
De fiels verts exhalés qui vous feront souffrir
Aussi sur le banc noir des fiancées et soldats.

Il y a des cristaux inouïs transparents
Pour les noces des gens qui ne savent pas quoi
Et sont le perroquet et le chien de quinquet
Dans leur ile étoilée en son trottoir sans garde.

 Quelqu'un m'a dit passe à l'ombre
 M'a dit passer dans le fiel
 Et j'ai trouvé la colonne
 Tournante a l'église morte.

Voilà pourquoi je veux cette chose tangible
Un chien vert de conquêtes chevronné de pistes
Où les sceaux sont frappés sur un peau de feuille
Et durement mené par l'ile aux doigts de pierre

Because I have turned to the east
To my east is the guava
And when the evening returns
It will fear the medal.
This unsure park is against you in its clothes
The spiders underneath march there in armies
Beneath the motionless fiancée on her soldier's bench.
The unkind lilacs there devour the night
Green exhaled bile that will make you suffer
As well on the black bench of fiancées and soldiers.

There are astonishing clear crystals
For the weddings of people who don't know anything
And are the fifty-something parrot and dog
On their starry island on their unwatched pavement.

 Somebody told me to go into the shadows
 Told me to go into the bile
 And I found the pillar
 Turning in the dead church.

So this is why I want this tangible thing
A green dog of victory seasoned traveller
Where the seals are stamped on the skin of a leaf
And roughly led by the island with stony fingers.

Winterson wrote that "the future, though invisible, has weight. We are in the gravitational pull of past and future. It takes huge energy - speed of light power- to break the gravitational pull". The end pulls me towards it inevitably, because only dead things stay still.

My interest in Penrose began, in many ways, as a crying out. Having studied surrealism as part of my undergraduate degree, it became clear how little information was available about women surrealists, how little about Penrose, and that injustice launched me forwards. It was a moment of crisis, knocking me off kilter from my previous trajectory.

« Je sais depuis longtemps
Ce qui me reste à faire
Et de tous mes verdinos
Et mes voix de cratère. »

"I've known for a long time
What I have left to do
And of all my verdinos
And my craterlike voice"

Les femmes mages sont debout ont marché se sont assises
Avec leur petit chapeau leur mante sont allées prédire
Prédire à l'envers.

The women mages are standing have walked have sat down
With their little hats their manta has gone to predict
Predict backwards.

[râlons : to whinge or complain, but here rendered as "to bitch" in order to emphasise a distinctly female form of protest, one often maligned.]

Les chiens ont mangé toutes les feuilles de Tacoronte
Puis ils ont hurlé
Dans les siècles
En amont de leurs mères
La chanson d'aujourd'hui

The dogs have eaten all of the leaves in Tacoronte
Then they have thrown
Through the centuries
Upstream from their mothers
The song of today.

Et râlons tordons crions
Sans savoir pourquoi
Petits sans massues :

And let us bitch and twist and cry out
Without knowing why
Little ones without clubs:

The Welsh hat is tall and brimmed, slightly tapering at the top, worn by women in the 1800's and still popularised as part of our traditional national dress. I wore one on St. David's day as a child, and when I show my English friend's pictures they ask why I'm dressed like a witch so far from Halloween

« un rat a descendu
Reprisant une chaussette
Un autre rat a monté
Rapiéçant un caleçon
La grande rue del Castillo »

"A rat has come down
Taking back a shoe
Another rat has climbed up
Patching some underpants
The great rue del Castillo."

I am asked frequently by colleagues and friends why that injustice was felt so keenly, why Penrose rather than Cahun or Carrington or Fini, although I engaged with all of them. I didn't really know, without once again sliding into the sentimental attachment that academia abhorred.

Because she was a witch, because she walked through the woods and learned the names of the plants, because she watched the birds and read ancient myths just like I did. I can argue about her underappreciated relevancy to the canonical surrealist movement, how her connections and collaborations extend far beyond the recognition she received, or even how her poetry and collage are some of the finest examples of surrealist technique used to its fullest effect. But more simply, it was because I loved her work, and I loved translation, so I decided to ranslate her. The love of the work sustained the effort.

Conclusion

Potentials

It has perhaps become clear to the reader by now that this thesis has undergone a process of metamorphosis. In many ways, it will continue to do so. In tracing an arc through various critical modes, I have attempted to portray a study of women's surrealism that is fluid, growing, and alive. This desire for movement and change may seem to render a conclusion redundant to an extent; the bounds of a written thesis must at some point curtail the continuity of the argument, and leave the nomadic approach to critique stunted. It must interrupt itself, in the manner Nancy ascribes to literature, "at the point where it shares itself out – at every moment, to you, from him or her to you, to me, to them".[1] The journey must end however, at least for the reader, and the survey undertaken through the cognitive cartologies of women's surrealism must report faithfully what it has found. The endeavour initially stated in the introduction of this thesis, to suggest novel modes of critique in the field of women's surrealism, has at least begun to be completed; there is of course the ever-present, reparative possibility of surprise, and change, and growth from the foundation I have attempted to set. The metaphor of cartography for the study of women's surrealism, and the spatiality it invites into our thinking, brings the notion of boundaries and borders to the fore: their construction, their necessity, and then the necessity of crossing them. While the ability to

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[1] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.65.

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move fluidly, nomadically across boundaries has been crucial to the arguments of this thesis, one must be constructed around the work itself. However, if the approach taken throughout this work has been nomadic in nature, then it will aspire to further nomadism, moving not only from theory to theory but from project to project, further works to be written to document additional sojourns into such disorienting territory. With this in mind, my conclusion here will serve to suggest the further *potential* in such a nomadic approach, and how a reparative critique of women surrealists may lead to future changes in how their work, and the works of other minority artists, are considered. By discussing what, first, is meant by "potential", and exploring how it may be included in discussions of disorientation and construction of the self, we may create the possibility of these future journeys, and imagine futurities within academic understandings of women's surrealism. This potentiality will be founded in the conceptions not only of narrativized research and the troubling of boundaries that this thesis has illustrated, but also the mythologization of surrealist women and the work surrounding them. This conclusion will review the journey that has been taken towards a reparative mode of critique that culminates in autotheoretical suggestions rooted in compassion for the other. It will go on to comment on the narratological qualities of this progression, and the role of myth in our understanding both of women surrealists work and the stance we take towards it. The role of myth-making in academic practice, and the cues we may take from its conventions and temporalities should inform the ways in which we construct narratives around the subjects of our study, and

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how these narratives may be developed further by repeated surveys into the field of women's surrealism.

Irit Rogoff, in *Academy as Potentiality*, describes potential as

the opposite of actuality, so that it inhabits the realm of the possible without prescribing it as a plan [...] it is as much the potential for not doing as it is for doing, and radical evil is not this or that bad deed but the potentiality for darkness which is at the very same time the potentiality for light. "To be potential", says Agamben "means to be one's own lack, to be in relation to one's own incapacity. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality are capable of their own impotentiality; and only in this way do they become potential. They can be because they are in relation to their own non-being.[2]

In the act of our becoming, there is also a trace of unbecoming, everything that we are not held tightly against everything that we are. Indeed, this otherness, this unbecoming, is instead an indication of everything that we *might be*, a site of possibilities and above all potential. The compassion exhibited in women surrealists work for the Other, and the way in which it is depicted as being so fundamentally a part of the self, is founded on this connection- the compassion is founded upon empathy, recognising that within the artist is the *potential* of commonality with various mythological beasts and monsters. It is a kind of stored energy, a tension that draws itself between the two subjects without

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[2] Irit Rogoff, "Academy as Potentiality" in *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y Revolver*, ed. by Angelika Nollert and Irit Rogoff, 2006, pp.4-9 (p.7)

reaching an obliterative resolution To continue this metaphor, the potential

presented by women surrealists invocation of the Other can be characterised as

a force of potential energy. This representation of stored energy, dependent

upon the positionality of the relevant objects, may serve as a metaphor for the

manifold possibilities created by queer disorientation and being-singular-

plural. Potential energy is increased in a given situation dependent on their

distance from the "default" position. A spring may have more potential energy

when stretched than when compressed, a steel ball contains more potential

energy the further it is raised from the ground. The British encyclopedia

explains that this is because the object "is capable of doing more work".

How is an artist like a stretched spring, or a queer woman like a steel ball

suspended in the sky? This study of the physical properties of potential draws

our attention back to the very physical nature of how women surrealist's

portray their experiences. Explorations of physical orientation, physical

permeability, distance and alienation have remained central to discussions

throughout preceding chapters; the physical sensation and experience of

marginalisation is the impetus for artistic expressions of how that experience is

then combatted. Returning to Ahmed's queer phenomenology, that so deftly

spatialises queer relationships to heteronormative society, a certain discursive

distance from the default position can be readily inferred. The tensions

inherent to being-in-common that are a "touching, the transmission of a

trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us

fellows"[3] also lend themselves to this metaphor – it is our own finitude, the space between singular beings, that gives rise to the possibility of community. Equally, when considering how we have used cartography, and the difference between surveying/mapping as an important distinction when considering how research is done, we may also consider the idea of distance as implied by nomadic journeys, in the form of ground covered between beginning and end. Parallels may be drawn between Ahmed's work and the notion of cognitive cartographies, particularly in reference to the key nature of new perspectives that either disorientation, or displacement, may bring. Indeed, we may conceptualise one in terms of the other, queer disorientation as an embarking from the axes of a heteronormative society, and nomadic journeys as the deliberate disorientation of oneself into a new space, fraught with surprise. Both signify a departure. Both signify the revelation of new spaces, inaccessible or unknown to those who have not undertaken such a departure. Both are fraught with the promise of novelty, alternatives, and thus potential.

By becoming disoriented, journeying into spaces not sanctioned by hegemonic power structures, women surrealists create a distance between themselves and these power structures. I phrase this action here as an active one, a choice, although it must be noted that this disorientation is often involuntary by way of existing in a body that is marginalized from mainstream society. In particular, the artists focused on in this thesis— Valentine Penrose and Claude Cahun in particular— faced marginalization due to the expression

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[3] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.61

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and embodiment of their queer desires, as well as their gender presentation in Cahun's case. Ahmed notes the crisis of disorientation begins when one's body cannot be fully extended into the space around them.[4] Disorientation is a state of becoming distanced, of losing touch, of becoming removed from the world around you. The creation of distance in terms of diversion or deviation, following a path not entirely parallel to the socially prescribed axes such that one is led further and further away from them, is not inherently an active process. The body *cannot* be extended, because the space is not shaped towards it the body is rejected, rather than actively rejecting. In this way, we might say that the queer experience of failure, and its rejection from heteronormative society, creates the necessary distance which facilitates potential— the potential for alternatives, futurities, fluidities. Disorientation is a site of possibility, queer and marginalised artists able to embody such great potential by virtue of that distance, the codified markers of cultural hegemony denied to them and thus creating a larger space for novel possibilities. This positionality relative to the "oriented" body, one that operates naturally in line with the values of straightness, whiteness, and gender conformity, places queer identities closer to the conceptualized "other", as the lines of their existence move closer to the boundaries placed around the notion of "self" as a hegemonic entity. The potential itself is characterised by the ability to empathise with the other, and recognise the mutual indebtedness that links them together. After all, potential energy is not a characteristic limited to an

individual entity- it is by necessity a characteristic exhibited by a system. Positionality is always relative— in order to arrive somewhere, we must have left somewhere else, and our orientations are always in reference to drawn axes. Orientation may also be spoken about in terms of direction, as Ahmed notes that

> ''Life itself '' is often imagined in terms of ''having a direction,'' which decides from the present what the future should be. After all, to acquire a direction takes time, even if it feels as if we have always followed one line or another, or as if we ''began'' and ''ended'' in the same place. Indeed, it is by following some lines more than others that we might acquire our sense of who it is that we are.[5]

The route is a process of orientation, of realization. Through the creation of narrative, delineating a journey for one's identity to travel along, we may create futurities through the repeated followings of lines, or paths. The women surrealists created their own mythological narratives through engaging with its imagery, created paths for their identities to follow along, and thus acquire direction, orientation, and agency. The creation of distance through departure from the norm, and thus the creation of potential, is what allows for such futures to be discovered and imagined. It is this act of resistance that allows individuals not only to express their own being, but to refuse consumption by a homogenising categorisation. For marginalized artists, becoming disoriented might not always be an active choice, but their assertion of agency over such

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[5] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* p.20

disorientation and the engagement with it through artistic processes allows

them to construct and define their own identities apart from heteronormative

patriarchy. The experience of disorientation, and compassion felt for the Other,

creates the necessary space for imagined queer futures and subversive

possibilities to be expressed; the subject is able to express itself through fluid

potentialities rather than immobile realities: the reflection of one's being

becomes a route, not a map. They express their identities as rapidly

transforming, refusing to settle into a static form, speaking not in terms of a

lack- lack of stable identity, lack of agency, lack of control- but rather in terms

of possibility- here are all the identities that I *may* have, here is everything I

have the *potential* to become.

Distance and Disorientation

In order to construct a critique that might in turn commune with these

expressions of selfhood, without resorting to the paranoid map-making

tendencies discussed in the introduction, the researcher too must reflect on

distance and disorientation in the discursive space they occupy, their own

compearance with the objects of study. The distance between the researcher

and the artists they attempt to research is in many ways central to the

academic process: I attempt to close this distance through a process of

uncovering, close reading, moving closer to Penrose, Cahun, and Fini so that I

may see them better, and thus understand them. I am removed from them by

many decades, and many miles, and the unmeasurable distances created by

existing in profoundly different societies that provide markedly different axes

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with which we are expected to align. One might argue that any research into the field of surrealism is a disorienting process, surrealism as it is intended to disorient, situating itself in a manner that deliberately disrupts the stabilizing axes of conventional artistic expression. Its jarring imagery, dreamlike juxtapositions, and nonsensical narratives are disorienting both spatially and temporally. However these disorientations take on new significance when utilized to explore the queer identities of women surrealists; when I investigate them now, there is a sense of intrusion into the constructed worlds in which they are attempting to find liberation. Trying to make sense of deliberate nonsenses, to create a consultable map of space intended to shift and change, is undoubtedly damaging at worse, misguided at best. There is a distance that exists not only through the accidents of time and location, but also through conscious choice; the deliberate engagement with disorientation that women surrealists exhibit also plays with our ability to extend our bodies into *their* space. The refusal to build a discursive space that may be easily navigable to an outsider is one that works to resist comprehension by conventional modes of critique. Queer feminist experiences in the works of these artists construct a landscape that is, functionally, unmappable by virtue of its fluidity and indeterminacy; identities shift and morph, the adoption of personas and making of masks invoking a multiplicity that challenges the perception of the observer. We see it in Cahun's portraiture and pageantry in her style of self expression, we see it in Penrose's intricate collage, or Fini's animal hybrids. By representing the self as something not only made differently to conventional

expectation, in composition as well as form, but also as being continuously in the process of *being* made, constituting itself through porous boundaries with the other, these artists defy rigid definition or designation. To undo this defiance and attempt to wrangle it back into something easily consumable would surely be a disservice; to prune away the complexities and fluidities of the queer identities explored in their work surely an act of violence. The researcher, in an attempt to orient the cognitive cartographies of women surrealists to their own axes, risks repeating the same disorientating, alienating process imposed upon them during their lifetime.

However, in this distance between the researcher and the artist there is still, again, potential. This potential stems from the way in which the researcher chooses to navigate the distance, the route chosen through the discursive space. Such distance, as imposed by time and geography and cultural background, allows for an increased range of theoretical techniques to become available: we may move beyond a historicised psychoanalytical approach and instead embrace the new possibilities ushered in by adopting more contemporary critiques and reflecting on their relevance to the material. By charting new courses through the space of women's surrealism using ideas such as posthumanism, autotheory, and queer phenomenology, the researcher may draw meaningful lines through the distance between themselves and the material they study, that allow for manifold orientations and perspectives towards it. In coming into contact with material far outside of our immediate discursive surroundings, and embracing the novelty engendered by such a

position, allows the researcher to shuck many of the expectations placed upon them by traditional modes of critique. Acknowledging the distance between the researcher and the material allows us to highlight the methods used to cover that distance, and usher in a more practice-based approach to study. The potential created by making this distance visible, and engaging meaningfully with it through incorporating alternative practices into the research process that reflect on the researcher's positionality, grants us what Rogoff calls

> A different set of permissions. Permission to not cover all the bases all the time, permission to start in the middle, permission to mix fact and fiction, permission to invent languages, permission to not support every claim by the proof of some prior knowledge, permission to privilege subjectivity as a mode of engaging the world and its woes, permission to be obscure and permission to chart a completely different path of how we got here, at this very moment.[6]

These permissions, new pathways opened to us by virtue of alternate orientations and the distance required to open up so many of them, are what allow us to come into contact with women's surrealism from increasingly new angles, and new perspectives. Indeed, without distance there could be no journey, and by paying close consideration to the nature of this journey— its length, its direction, the methods we employ to undertake it— the way in which we come to approach women's surrealism may be radically recreated. Over the course of this thesis, in exploring the potentialities created by the distance

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[6] Rogoff, p. 9

between my position as a researcher and the artists I wish to research, I have attempted to create such an examination of the journey taken to study women's surrealism, and signal the necessity of practice-based research so as to open further potentialities again.

Covered Ground

The first chapter of this thesis, in its exploration of the possibilities and limitations of a psychoanalytic critique, discusses how the position of muse was both alienating and disorienting for women artists, and indeed suggesting that alienation and disorientation are much the same experience, I have established the need for fluidity in approaching women's surrealism. The process of disorientation, of growing distance between oneself and the axes of a heteropatriarchal order, allows for novel expressions of the self that posit new axes, challenging existing arrangements through the autofictionning of myth. There are numerous reasons: firstly, the mythologised status of women within the surrealist movement mean that they were more easily oriented towards such narratives, and as such could utilise and subvert them for their own means. Mythologisation becomes a double edged sword, here: the creation of myth is an empowering act, and an orienting one, whereas to be mythologised is alienating, restricting, objectifying. We might return to Simone de Beauvoir's quote:

> Tout mythe implique un Sujet qui projette ses espoirs et ses craintes vers
> un ciel transcendant. Les femmes ne se posant pas comme Sujet n'ont pas

créé de mythe viril...c'est encore à travers les rêves des hommes qu'elles rêvent. (...) [Elle] est artifice, bavardage et mensonge ; elle est la guérisseuse et la sorcière ; elle est la proie de l'homme, elle est sa perte, elle est tout ce qu'il n'est pas et qu'il veut avoir, sa négation et sa raison d'être.[7]

The trouble is not the mechanics of myth, but rather whether you are the one writing the myth yourself. De Beauvoir mourns that women have no mythologies of their own, and thus are paralysed as objects onto which men may project their fantasies; throughout this chapter, I assert that women surrealists did indeed create their own mythologies, and worked hard to deconstruct objectification heaped on them by the cultural myths of surrealism. Furthermore, such mythologization resisted the totalitarian impulses Nancy ascribes to myth, and rather than creating a "fiction that founds" a homogenous community, the individual approach each of these artists took to myth allowed them to operate as singular beings *in* community with surrealism.

The second chapter concerns itself largely with the manner of how the mythologies created and subverted by women surrealists formulated a break down in boundaries between self and other, nature and culture, divine and monstrous, and allowed them to explore myth as an ontological framework wherein "fictioning is the subject of being".[8] Kristeva proves a useful pivot point, demonstrating the ways in which a psychoanalytic framework might

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[7] de Beauvoir, p.201-202.
[8] Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.55.

engage with this kind of breakdown, and also revealing the limitations of such an approach. Kristeva's concept of abjection is a useful lens through which to vie the monstrous figures depicted in the works of Fini and Penrose, however it does not allow the researcher to fully engage with the fluid, multitudinous discursive spaces being constructed by these artists. Butler criticises Kristeva by asserting that she refuses to "replace the symbolic with the semiotic nor to establish the semiotic as a rival cultural possibility[9]". Kristeva documents transgressions of these boundaries, but cannot account for existence outside of them, or indeed take these transgressions beyond their designation of simple aberrations. In this way, the chapter demonstrates the necessity for a nomadic turn to New Materialism, a mode of critique that can explore theoretical agility and existence outside of strict discursive boundaries. Rather than relying on psychoanalytical models of the self and other with firm lines in between them, we may now explore how mythological hybrids demonstrate a deep rooted connection between the two. Indeed, this co-creation between the artist and the world around them, depicted through the adoption of mythological personas that blend animal and object with human, proves to be a fundamental aspect of how women surrealists construct their identities. Their engagement with myth serves as an examination of the finitude of the self, as well as the finitude of myth, hybridity between the two experimented with in a way that did not extinguish the singularity of being many of these artists desired. Nancy asserts that

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[9] Butler, *Body Politics*, p.10

The mélange as such can take on , or seem to take on , two different identities: that of a fusion or a thorough going osmosis, or that of an accomplished state of disorder [mise en désorder achevée]. These two fantastical extremities are alchemy and entropy, extremities that, in the end, come together and identify with one another in an apocalypse or a black hole. But the mélange is, in fact, neither the one nor the other, nor is it the fair mean between the two. It is something else, or again, it "is" in another way, in quite another way.[10]

The identities of women artists associated with surrealism as mélange allows them to occupy as space not governed by a necessity of being one thing or another- they too can be in another way, both an osmosis through proximity and an entropy of singular beings appearing together. Mythology acts as a tool with which they may grant themselves an otherworldly authority to be in such a way, straddling the real and the fantastic with typical surrealist spontaneity.

This fluidity of identity is best served by an equally fluid theoretical approach. Paranoid readings, like the medicalised thinking of psychoanalysis, seeks to diagnose and uncover, asserting authority through the removal of uncertainty or surprise. It is the map-making of cognitive landscapes, the reduction of dynamic sites of possibility into static images free from novelty. This potential for change encouraged by the fluid approach to critique is inherently reparative in nature— we maintain as well the potential to be surprised by a work, for novel aspects and interpretations to come to light.

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[10] Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p.150

Study of women's surrealism may become generative, favouring appreciation of and cooperation with a particular work rather than falling towards mimesis of psychoanalytic impulses to explain, to diagnose, to lay bare. These dynamics ultimately recreate the objectifying conditions which women surrealists fought to escape from; it undermines the subjecthood of the artists, wrests power away from them in the communication of their own experience and identity. A focus on reparative, weak theory allows instead for the researcher to essentially take the artist at their word, and take a necessary step back that at once may give rise to novel perspectives and foreground a sense of compassion for the relative piece. Allowing the art to take precedence, and figuratively approach the observer rather than the other way around, more readily respects the integrity of both the piece and the artist. Rather than cutting the work apart to find what may lie within, we might allow the work to unfurl itself in ever-changing, dynamic ways. We might know an artist instead by what they leave behind, what they impart, how they codify their own experiences on self-sovereign terms. In short, we may know them by their mythologies.

    The use of mythology to deconstruct boundaries and articulate new orientations is not confined to the borders of the text. I argue, in my third chapter, that this work is continued through the creation of the text itself, the use of autotheoretical gestures through the works of Penrose and Cahun demonstrating how women surrealists engaged in the autofictionning that Nancy recognises as the power of myth. Their narratives blend fact and fiction in a way that allows them to engage both creatively and critically with their

own lives, such as Cahun's frequent references to contemporary sexology in her *Heroines*, situating herself both as a Freudian subject and a mythological deity. They create their own myths, recurrent motifs and narratives that exhibit a marked allegorical quality; allegorical for their own identities and experiences, outside of heteropatriarchal norms. Autotheory provides an avenue for the creation of myth, and as a result the assertion of subjecthood and the orientation of identity. Mythology itself, operating in that paralogical space prized by surrealism, offers alternative insights in best practice for the study of marginalised artists. A vehicle of fluid knowledge, communally owned narrative that is changed repeatedly through iterative tellings (often, we note, through an oral tradition that challenges logocentric epistemologies). Myth-making within the scope of this thesis has been treated as a gesture towards the construction both of community identity and personal identity, a demonstration of subjecthood. By approaching artistic productions on these terms— that they function as expressions of a self/community containing potential to be changed and changed again, interpreted and reinterpreted— we may continuously affirm the subjectivity and artistic identity of those that created them. The mytho-logics of women's surrealism invite not the gestures towards certain static understandings, but rather a recognition of identities, and artistic work, in constant flux. By utilising weak theories, and nomadic, iterative discussions of the work, idiosyncrasies that may before have appeared to be imperfections in critique become extant, if transient, qualities of the piece. With each novel critical approach, new interpretations and aspects of the

work may come to light. Moving between theoretical machineries, just as these artists moved between their own creative methods and expressions of self-identity, becomes perhaps the best way to capture the more ephemeral physicalities of women's surrealism, and the manifold potentialities it contains.

The Creative Turn

This combination of creative-critical practices, which utilise the tools of a male-dominated surrealism to instead illustrate and affirm queer female experiences, suggest to the researcher that a the theoretical machinery of conventional academia may also have its limitations, and a turn to more creative-critical, practice based research may unlock new insights into women's surrealism. If these artists created their own myths, their own orienting narratives that allowed them to escape the objectification of being made myths themselves, then the researcher may also participate in this process, by perpetuating the myths that women surrealists created. Perpetuation here means the repetition and proliferation, the passing on, the re-telling. The identifying of the mythologies created and explored by women surrealists goes some way towards making concrete their position as artistic subjects, affirming their role as myth-tellers, rather than the objects of myth themselves. Iterative engagement with these myths, in particular formulating creative responses, works to "reworld" the works of women surrealists by bringing these myths into contact with contemporary, autotheoretical critiques that at once recognise and co-create new possibilities and futurities for them. Rogoff's discussion of potential rounds off in a call for an academy "which is partly university and

partly museum, partly theoretical and partly practice-based, a space in which it is unclear whether the materials or the subjects are what make up its manifest, a mode of operating, [...] which insists that we can learn not just from doing but also from being."[11] To learn by being, to consider the materials with which we construct a critique as important as the critique itself, leads us to novel possibilities for creative-critical responses to women's surrealism. I have chosen to undertake an experimental translation, presenting the original text side by side with its translation as well as autotheoretical asides that both avow and critique my positionality as a researcher-translator. The purpose of this approach is manifold. The act of translation, the extended close contact with a text that results in a recreation of it, is one that brings close attention to the voice and purpose of the translator. The inevitable transformation of the text through its conveyance into another language, as well as the ramifications of such a transformation for its identity and purpose, allows the researcher to more closely examine their own relationship to the text, how they chose to engage with and relate to it, and the transformative effect the text also has upon them. Translation, in this way, grants the text and the author a kind of agency; one that acknowledges its power to co-individuate identities with the reader as well as the translator. It is an exploration of the boundaries between the text and those who engage with it, and in the act of translation those boundaries are revealed to be porous, shifting, and malleable.

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[11] Rogoff, p.9

Translation, too, speaks to the importance of iteration and repetition in the creation of identity. Orientation is a process founded on the repetition of actions that allow the body to extend into space; here, the repetition of the text, albeit a transformative repetition, orients the translator towards the work in a way that allows them to engage more fully in it, while destabilising the usual hierarchy constructed between text, reader, and author. Here, rather than attempting to reorient the extend towards the researcher's comprehension through the use of critique, I instead attempt to orient myself towards the text, and the author, through repeating its words in my own voice. It is an ecstatic experience, one that works to move the translator past the boundaries of their identity in order to come into closer contact with that of the author. Indeed, the text was selected with this close contact in mind— translating Penrose, becoming familiar with her work through that process, is what sparked the love that then motivated this thesis. Through the retelling of the mythologies Penrose constructs for herself by means of translating them, the researcher-translator cedes authority to the artist, and to the text they are translating; what's more, in acknowledging their own subjectivity through the creative choices inherent to the translation process, they situate themselves in a reparative position towards the work. There is room for surprise, and change, and error— works may be retranslated, and done so differently, in ways that offer alternative routes through the original text and bring with them alternative insights. There is again a nod to the oral tradition surrounding mythology here, ongoing iterations of the narrative allowing for variant

retellings, distortions in the route taken through it. By encouraging this iterative philosophy towards creative-critical engagement with women's surrealism, I hope to promote a living, vibrant discourse that orients itself towards the artists, and encourages engagement with them on their own terms.

The nomadic nature of this thesis represents a major departure from the conventions of studying women's surrealism, as nascent as they are, but also promises an arrival: it is not one reached within the confines of a single work, but rather one that will be perpetually worked towards over the course of many such journeys. An arrival into a discursive space within which the transgressive identities of marginalised artists can be studied and engaged with using techniques that fully reflect their fluidity will only become possible through the same process of orientation that allows for our initial departure: repetition, iteration, painstaking work. While this thesis has demonstrated that there is ample room for such fluidity within the study of women's surrealism, it has also demonstrated the diverse opportunities for further study that might further showcase such fluidity. The use of mythology as a guiding light by Penrose, Cahun, Fini and Carrington has been documented previously, but the ways in which these artists use and create mythology in order to trouble the boundaries of identity and artistic expression are here illustrated in the fullest capacity to date; the importance of mythology in women's surrealism particularly, above and beyond its relevance to mainstream surrealism, is of marked significance. The mythologisation of women within surrealism was undoubtedly an alienating, objectifying process that prevented many

astounding artists from reaching the renown they deserved during their lifetimes, but it is through myth that we may begin to recover them, converse with them, and bring them back into the public eye. Employing creative-critical practices that consider carefully the route we take through the cognitive cartographies of women surrealists allows the researcher to operate within that same paralogical space where surrealism and the adventure-time of myth dwell. It is a route charted through a disorienting field, but one that comes to attune itself to such disorientation, and moves nimbly through modes of critique so as to better serve the material it makes its journey through. It is also, by necessity, a journey motivated by compassion, and empathy; it is these emotions that allow us to abandon paranoia, and move forward from what has been done before in order to find better, do better, be better. The injustice done to so many women surrealists means that the study of them is greatly displaced, and therefore disoriented, by both time and physical space. But there is time still, and abundant space, to begin the work of righting these wrongs, finding justice, and slowly orienting the scholarship surrounding women surrealists towards them. We may create a field of study that allows for the full extension of these artists' identities, and the proliferation of further possibilities that reflect the rich potentials contained within their work. The work of such a reorientation will be long, and it will be difficult, but it will in the end be done: the love of the work sustains the effort[12].

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[12] David Lehman, "Apollinaire's 'Zone'", in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 89:2 (2013), pp.58-59 (p.59)

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