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GOING POSTAL:

SURREALISM AND THE DISCOURSES OF MAIL ART

By

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ABSTRACT

The chief objective of this study is to examine how the French surrealists responded to the discourses of the post and to position the surrealists as early practitioners of mail art. References to the mail, its system and ephemera pervade early modernist art movements, such as futurism, dadaism, and surrealism. However, the term "mail art" is most commonly associated with the movement portrayed as having been pioneered in the 1950s by U.S. artist Ray Johnson. As a result, the critical literature on mail art generally overlooks the complexities and sophistication with which early modern artists viewed the conventions of postal practice.

The broader goal of this study is to reconsider mail art as a new genre that cuts across early modernism as well as postwar art movements. The development of this modern communication, and its innovations, provided artists with a radical new aesthetic, resulting in news ways of thinking about art and new forms of creative expression.

The modern post created new relays of communication and established new systems of exchange and material ephemera. As postal materials engaged early modernist interests in collage and word-and-image play, the system itself introduced conceptual art processes. In this regard, the development of modern postal communication, and its innovations, allowed artists to subvert conventional relationships between artist and viewer, thus sidestepping the gallery system. Further, the post established a space for social dissent and revolution that appealed to the artistic avant-garde.

This dissertation addresses early modernist dialogues with the post by considering the production of specific postal works in the surrealist oeuvre, such as Max Ernst's *The Facteur Cheval* (1932), Georges Hugnet's *Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series* (1937), and Mimi Parent's *Bôite Alerte* (1959). I demonstrate how the surrealists utilized the

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post, its space and materials for their own aesthetic and ideological concerns. Providing the first critical investigation into the relationship between fine art and the post, this study also intends to serve as an impetus for further inquiry within the field.

INTRODUCTION

From the late 1920s to the early 1960s the surrealists engaged in a longstanding dialogue with the mail. Roland Penrose, Max Ernst, Joan Miró and Jindřich Štyrský incorporated postal ephemera, such as postcards, stamps, letter seals, envelopes, and letters. Paul and Gala Éluard, René Char, Georges Sadoul, Penrose, Salvador Dalí, André Breton, Pablo Picasso, Adonis Kyrou, and Miró were enthusiastic collectors of popular postcards. The surrealists' appreciation of mass-produced postcards inspired them to publish their own postcard series, *The Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series*, in 1937 (fig. 1), followed by second set in 1940. From the late 1920s to the 1960s the surrealists also celebrated a humble rural postman named Ferdinand Cheval, builder of the *Palais Idéal*, who is seen, for instance, in Max Ernst's *Le Facteur Cheval* (1932) (fig. 2). In 1959 the surrealists collaborated on the *Bôite Alerte: Missive Lascives* (fig. 3), an exhibition object-catalogue designed in the form of a post-box and filled with surrealist letters.

 Nevertheless, the utilization of the postal system and its related materials by artists is neither exclusive to France nor to the surrealists. Referents to the post permeate modern art elsewhere in Europe and the United States, as evidenced by bits of postal ephemera, such as stamps, envelopes, and letters in collages by artists such as Joseph Cornell, Hannah Höch, and Kurt Schwitters. Also postcards, homemade and mass produced, pervade the *oeuvre*s of German expressionist Franz Marc and Italian futurists Fortunato Depero and Giacomo Balla.

Despite this extensive engagement, the term "mail art" is most commonly associated with the movement portrayed as having been pioneered in the 1950s by U.S. artist Ray Johnson. Explored by Fluxus and the pop artists of the 1960s, mail art is still

practiced today.[1] Jean-Marc Poinsot's landmark book *Mail Art: Communication a Distance Concept* (1971) was the first significant study on the topic, and his focus was this post-World War II phenomenon. He defines mail art as an art form comprised of postal materials, such as stamps, postcards, and envelopes that may be sent through the postal system.[2]

Just as the critical literature and scholarship on abstract expressionism and its artists have generally subordinated that movement's antecedents to make its "birth" more compellingly American, likewise scholars have downplayed or glossed over mail art's antecedents. They emphasize differences between the two movements, such as intentionality, content, and context, rather than similarities or continuities. Nevertheless, not only did early twentieth century modernists take advantage of the post, their understanding of its significance and their abilities to manipulate the postal system were as conceptually sophisticated as that of any post-World War II mail artist. Thus, to redress this historical imbalance, this dissertation presents a critical analysis of the surrealists' engagement with the modern postal system.

More than this, this dissertation addresses critical omissions in the scholarship on the surrealists, as well as consequent failures to evaluate the full extent of these artists' engagement with the postal system. Concurrent with the rise of modern art, the enactment of postal reforms and the formation of the Universal Postal Union (U.P.U) in 1874 led to the expansion of postal service in Europe and America. Up to the mid-nineteenth century, bilateral postal agreements governed international dispatches; however, these agreements grew so complex that they impeded communication. The U.P.U. unified services and rules and allowed the relay of mail among twenty-two participating nations in Europe, North America, and Africa. Overcoming national boundaries, the U.P.U. transformed communication into an easily accessible mode of universal discourse.

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[1] In this study I use "mail art," "correspondence art," and "postal art" interchangeably to refer more generally to an artist's dialogue with the postal system and/or its materials.

[2] Jean-Marc Poinsot, *Mail Art: Communication a Distance Concept* (Paris: Editions Cedic, 1971), 18.

Further, the introduction of prepaid postage stamps lowered and regulated mail rates thus revolutionizing and standardizing the post.[3] Universal postage rates based on weight and size rather than distance eased the international flow of letters. More affordable letter-writing, in turn, led to an increase in postal practice among a broader segment of society.

To encourage its use, the post created new offices in outlying provinces to distribute service evenly and ease the transport of mail.[4] Since many small towns could not afford to establish their own post offices, postboxes were set up to collect letters. Also, rural postal carriers were enlisted to transport and deliver mail to outreaching sites. These postmen were vital in linking the rural and urban populace.

The development of the U.P.U. intersected significant social and cultural changes occurring in Europe and America. In particular, it coincided with dramatic population shifts due to new industrial centers, colonial expansion, and mass tourism. As people traveled or moved from their home communities, they employed the post to stay connected to friends and relatives. In turn, the assurance of such connections encouraged tourism and migration.

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[3] As media for political messages, postage stamps featured images intended to promote national identities at home, but also abroad. The first postage stamp, Britain's *Penny Black*, issued in 1840, features the profile of a young Queen Victoria. Other countries soon developed their own stamps featuring prominent leaders and national symbols. For example, the first national stamp of the United States, issued in 1847, presents the profile of George Washington. Following the 1848 revolution, the French provisional government issued the first national French postage stamp. It features the profile of a woman wearing a crown of ears of corn, grapes, and laurels. Although referred to as 'Ceres' (the Roman goddess of agriculture), according to Maurice Agulhon, in *Marianne into Battle* (1981), "it is quite clear that the image was intended to represent the French State with an allegory of Liberty-the republic." Agulhon notes that this sedate image of Liberty represents an image of the Republic as calm and moderate. The image of Liberty was briefly replaced by that of Napoleon III in 1862. With the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870, the representation of Liberty was returned to the French stamp. Introduced in 1900, the "Merson" stamp, featuring the image of Marianne wearing a Phrygian cap, was introduced as a symbol of the republican government. Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle, Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 81.

[4] In France, the number of post offices increased significantly from 1,975 in 1830 to 5,420 in 1875. Sébastien Richez, "From the Transport to the Delivery of Mail: The Transformation of the French Postal Network in the Nineteenth Century" *Business and Economic History* vol. 2, 2004 http://www.thebhc.org accessed May 19, 2007.

As a universal system, the post facilitated the formation of international networks and created new patterns of communication through a codified system of relay. As a means of communication, the modern post encouraged the formation of discursive networks through which knowledge was disseminated and controlled. In this respect, the post provided an avenue by which the artistic avant-garde could counter the discourse of cultural institutions and political systems.

The modern post also introduced artists to new media and a maddening array of signs and symbols, such as postage stamps, postmarks, postal codes, postcards, and censor stamps. Incorporated into works of art, these signs function as metonyms, referring to periods of time, monetary values, geographical regions, and/or political authority, while simultaneously serving as synecdotal referents to letters and postal relay. While scholars have addressed contemporary artists' responses to modern developments, such as Fordism and Taylorism in the U.S., and inventions, such as the telegraph, electricity, the radio, the machine, and so forth, these same scholars have generally overlooked artists' reactions to the postal system, its ephemera, and the discourse surrounding it.[5]

The prevalence of postal-related art during the early decades of the twentieth century represents how the development of modern communication, and its innovations, provided artists with a radical new aesthetic, resulting in new ways of thinking about art and new forms of creative expression. Art historians have subsumed early modernists' dialogues with the mails in discussions of collage, generally overlooking the complexities and sophistication with which artists viewed the conventions of modern postal practice. As postal materials engaged early modernist interests in collage and word-and-image play, the system itself introduced conceptual art processes. In this regard, the development of modern postal communication, and its innovations, allowed artists to subvert conventional relationships between artist and viewer, thus sidestepping the

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[5] See for example Mary McLeod, "'Architecture or Revolution!' Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change," *Art Journal* 43, no. 2 (1983): 132-147; Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "Francis Picabia, Radiometers, and X-Rays in 1915," *The Art Bulletin* 171, no. 1 (1989): 114-123; Helen Molesworth, "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymade," *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 50-6; and Sharon Corwin, "Picturing Efficiency: Precisionism, Scientific Management, and the Effacement of Labor," *Representations* 84 (2003): 139-165.

gallery system.

In addition to being generally absent from scholarship on surrealism, postal works, in particular the surrealist postcard series and the *Bôite Alerte*, are also missing from museum and gallery displays of surrealist art. Typically, these works are relegated to the archives as merely evidentiary proof and documents of canonical works. Surrealist postcards may also be discovered pasted into old scrapbooks or sold in vintage postcards shops. Due to this lack of consideration, the significance of these works has remained undetermined.

Thus apart from the resuscitative aspects of this study, I seek to examine the multiple links, intersecting influences, and continual negotiations that occur between artists and the post. This study seeks to broaden the definition of mail art to include any work that incorporates postal matter. As the visual equivalent of the epistolary novel in literature, mail art is considered here as a genre that cuts across early modernism as well as post-war art movements. The broader objective of this study is to demonstrate that the post was not merely an incidental occurrence in early modern art nor a minor precursor to the later mail art movement, but was, in fact, a significant discourse that inspired an entire genre.

My study seeks to provide the first critical investigation into the relationship between fine art and the post and intends to serve as an impetus for further inquiry within the field. The chief objective of this study is to examine how the surrealists responded to the discourses of the post. In this regard, how did they utilize the post, its space and materials for their own aesthetic and ideological concerns? The surrealists' interest in the mail as a conceptual medium intersected with their deepening study of alchemical practice and their growing identification with Hegel and Marxism, as well as their negotiation with the Communist Party. In this regard, the post, its materials and systems, offered the surrealists a subversive and creative strategy for a desired revolutionary social transformation. Further, their efforts provide an opportunity to examine how artists perceived the mail as a radical new source of creation, circulation, and display. Finally, I ask how the surrealists' discourses function as a bridge to the contemporary mail art movement. Indeed, investigating the surrealist intersection with the post will enhance our understanding of later postwar mail art.

For the purposes of this study, I will treat mail-related art by the surrealists as a form of postal correspondence. This approach emphasizes the phenomenological experience of postal discourse. Inherent in the letter is the concept of communication as relay. In *Mail Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture* (2002) Sunka Simon notes, "A letter, real or metaphorical is a dispatch; its very existence as a letter presupposes a detachment from its originating environment (writer, sender, place, time) but also its arrival at another time elsewhere."[6]

In general, there are few studies devoted to modern artists' dialogues with the post. While there have been various texts that examine the creation of postal art by Italian futurists, such as *L'Art postale fututriste* (1979) by Giovanni Lista and *Futurisme postali: Balla, Depero e la communicazione postale futurista* (1986) by Maurizio Scudiero, they fail to consider the cultural and socio-political contexts surrounding the production of these works. Furthermore, they overlook the significance of the postal system as an unconventional means for the expression, display, exchange, and circulation of the visual arts.

Texts such as Enrico Sturani's *Nuovo cartoline: Cartoline postali di ieri e di oggi in un'ottica d'avanguardia* (1981), John Held's *Mail Art: An Annotated Bibliography* (1991), Chuck Welsh's *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (1995), and Renaud Siegmann's *Mail Art: Art postal-Art posté* (2002) generally focus on the postwar mail art movement. While these authors acknowledge the use of postal media by earlier modern artists, they generally regard these works merely as precursors to the later genre or dismiss them as play. For example, Held dismisses the futurists' production of tin postcards and Duchamp's quixotic postcards to the Arensbergs as "simply fun."[7] Clive Phillpot, in "The Mailed Art of Ray Johnson" (1995), expresses a similar perspective. He notes that these progenitors are "incidental and do not warrant separate treatment as a distinct form of art."[8]

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[6] Sunka Simon, *Mail Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 2002), xii.

[7] John Held, *Mail Art: An Annotated Bibliography* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, In., 1991), xvi.

[8] Clive Phillpot, "The Mailed Art of Ray Johnson" in *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, ed.

No studies of the surrealists' engagement with the postal system currently exist in the histories of modernism. However, some recent scholarship has begun to touch upon the relationship between the postcards and fine art. For example, a panel at the 2001 annual meeting of the College Art Association titled "From Albums to the Academy: Postcards and Art History" broke new ground in demonstrating the importance of the postcard to the development of modernism.[9] Also, Jordana Mendelson's forthcoming anthology, titled *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity,* promises to elevate the seriousness of scholarship devoted to this topic. These studies, however, focusing largely on artists' dialogues with popular postcard imagery, fail to address the more significant intersection of early modernism and the post.

Although acknowledging the aesthetic and formal value of post-inspired art, this study emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach. While postal art operates under the rubric of the fine arts, it must also be understood within the context of postal communication and networking. The cultural history of the mail is a remarkably rich site for theoretical responses to a variety of communication experiences. Scholars of communication theory have only recently begun to excavate postal history and its social and cultural implications. In particular, David Henkin's *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (2006) offers valuable insights with which to consider the influence of the post on modern society.[10] Although focused on America's burgeoning mail system, Henkin's study looks beyond the institutional history of the post into its role in mapping space and binding individuals as well as its impact on social relations and positions.

If the cultural significance of the post is only now being explored, its historical emergence is well documented in works such as Eugène Vaillé's *Histoire des Postes françaises jusque'à la Révolution* (1957), Richard R. John's *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (1995), and Howard Robinson's *The*

Chuck Welch, (Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 25.

[9] See Jordana Mendelson, ed. "From Albums to the Academy: Postcards and Art History." Special Issue, *Visual Resources* 17, no. 4 (2001).

[10] David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).

British Post Office: A History (1948). Jürgen Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), examines the construction of the modern postal system as a public space for private communication. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a social realm in which public opinion can be formed and citizens behave as a public body in an unrestricted fashion. Implicit here is the guarantee of freedom of assembly and the freedom to express and publish opinions. In this regard, the territory of the post is a public site for debate on art, literature, philosophy, and politics. Analogously, postal space is constructed through the amorphous networking of individuals. Correspondents, analogous to coordinates on a map, define space, and create communities. Within these zones of interaction, discourses on politics, art, and literature also occur.

If the public sphere, through open debate, is amenable to dissent against authoritative systems, so is the post. The appropriation of the modern postal space by the artistic avant-garde coincides with their rejection of the institutional status of art in bourgeois society.[11] A consequence of anti-institutionalism is what Rosalind Krauss termed "modern homelessness," a concept that resulted in the production of deracinated artwork and malleable display spaces.[12] This notion of the mobility and portability of artwork is most recently investigated as an aspect of a more literal homelessness brought about by geo-political displacement by T.J. Demos in *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (2007).[13] These studies on anti-institutionalism and anti-nationalism will offer insight into the surrealists' occupation of postal space.

Studies on postal practices, such as James W. Howland's *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox* (1991) and Roger Chartier's *Correspondence: Models of Letter Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (1997), provide useful lessons on the social role of the post in modern Europe. Also, scholarship on the Republic of Letters, such as Dena Goodman's *The Republic of*

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[11] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 27.

[12] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 280.

[13] T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).

Letters: A Cultural History of French Enlightenment (1994) and L.W. B Brockliss's
Calvet's Web: Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth Century France
(2002), demonstrates how postal practices served as a means of intellectual and political
dissent against the French state.

Studies of epistolary literature also yield a considerable wealth of insight with
which to consider the role of the post in society. In *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the
Postal System* (1999), Bernhard Siegert notes the impact of the post on the literary
imagination and, in turn, the effect of epistolary literature on letter writing. Most
recently, Mary A. Favret's *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction
of Letters* (2005) explores the feminine identity of the letter and its role as medium of
subversion. While focused on eighteenth century postal discourse, these texts offer a
framework by which to consider how modern artists enlisted the post as a means of
revolution.

Essential to an analysis of artists' discourses with the post is a discussion
concerning the phenomena of postal exchange. Indeed, by engaging the phenomena of
postal relay, the surrealists introduced conceptual experiences into their works. In
contemplating the conceptual practices of the surrealists, my study owes an intellectual
debt to Steven Harris's *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the
Psyche* (2004), which investigates the surrealists' production of objects as a response to
modern art and revolutionary politics. Rather than focusing on psychoanalysis as a
governing structure of interpretation, Harris's historicist approach examines the
surrealists' synthesis of Hegelian, Freudian, and Marxist sources.[14] Key to Harris' study
is his understanding of how Breton and his associates reversed the Freudian theory of
sublimation and engaged desublimation as a strategy for art production.[15] According to
Harris, the surrealists focused on the production of works which arise from the
unconscious and are deposited or projected in the material world. As such, the artwork,

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[14] Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*
(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 10-11. Harris' study is departure from the
psychoanalytical studies of Rosalind Kraus and Hal Foster. See, for example, Rosalind Kraus,
The Optical Unconscious (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) and Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*
(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

[15] Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*, 11.

akin to *trouvailles,* is available and awaiting discovery by the viewer. Positioned within the dichotomy of conscious and unconscious, the artwork is open to a subjective experience of interpretation. To this end, the surrealists circumvented the modernist notion of *l'art pour l'art*; the resulting action of this free poetic activity is, in theory, a universal knowledge to be shared by all.

Harris's study provides a base from which to consider how the surrealists' dialogue with mail art represented their interest in the movement of art into life, rather than the movement of life into art. By appropriating the post, its forms and systems, the surrealists sought to develop a strategy to liberate the unconscious and transform culture.

In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how the surrealists enlisted the post in the interests of obtaining and disseminating knowledge. This dissertation unfolds through essay-chapters, each with its own organic unity. I begin my study by examining how the post created new relays of communication and established new systems of exchange and material ephemera, providing a foundation for the surrealists' exploration of this media. I am especially interested in exploring the development of postal space as well as the evolution of the letter. Here I ask how the modernization and reform of the postal system in the late nineteenth century redefined postal space as site for social dissent and revolution. Indeed, as the post dissolved borders (class, geographic, and gender) it created a space for the open circulation of intellectual theories and Freudian desires. The modern post featured the kind of provocation and leveling of categories embraced by surrealism and it is within this context that the surrealists discovered the possibilities of the post as a medium for the artistic avant-garde.

As the surrealists' responses to the post are numerous and diverse, to gain some purchase I have chosen to focus on a handful of works that have yet to receive detailed scholarly attention or political contextualization. I have selected works that address the different characteristics of mail art and that are representative of specific periods in the surrealist movement.

In chapter two, I examine Max Ernst's postal collage *Le Facteur Cheval.* Addressing the postal collage as a form of mail art, this chapter considers how the surrealists engaged the post as a source of visual iconography. The aim of this chapter is two-fold. First, I seek to reassess the significance of the *facteur,* or postman, Ferdinand

Cheval (1836-1924) in surrealist thought. Specifically, I will examine how the surrealists reconceived the *facteur* against a backdrop of alchemical practice, as a hermetic archetype. Second, I am interested in how the surrealists' appropriation of postal ephemera, in particular the envelope, intersected their discourses with alchemy. Studies on the surrealists' interests in the occult and alchemy, such as Celia Rabinovitch's *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult on Modern Art* (2004) and M.E. Warlick's *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (2001), provide insight into their identification with Cheval and the post.

In the third chapter, I focus on the surrealists' publication of postcards. The appropriation of the postcard medium demonstrates the surrealists' engagement with postal space as a means to resist the institutionalization of art. The *Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series* (1937) has been generally overlooked in discussions of surrealism. Gérard Durozi, in *History of the Surrealist Movement* (2002), offers the only commentary on the series. He writes, "The [postcard] series further underscores the surrealist's interest in postal media but also suggested that the group meant to use the postcard as a means of disseminating some of the more significant images it had adopted."[16] I argue that the *Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series* is a historically specific work that rejected modernist aesthetics and responded to *Parti Communiste Français'* criticisms of surrealism as elitist and lacking substance. Created in conjunction with the 1937 *Exposition internationale des arts et des techniques dans la vie modern*, in Paris, the postcard series is more than merely a promotional gimmick. It represented a repackaging of surrealism with the intent of contributing to the poetic imagination of the present and future.

James D. Herbert's *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (1998) and Lewis Kachur's *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and the Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (2001) offer a lens through which to view the politics of the fair and the surrealists' negotiations. A handful of studies offer insight into the surrealists' appropriation of postcards. José Pierre's "La carte postale comme matériau du 'poeme' visible" in *Regards très particuliers sur la carte postale* (1992) provides the only analysis

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[16] Gérard Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement,* trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 331.

of Paul Éluard's extensive postcard collection. Here, the author investigates the relationship between Éluard's postcard albums and his poetry. More recently, Mendelson's essay "Joan Miró's Drawing-Collage, August 8, 1933: The 'Intellectual Obscenities' of Postcards" (2004) provides the first scholarly discussion concerning the surrealists' dialogue with postcard imagery. In addition, Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of the Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), which examines the liberation of artwork through mass reproduction, provides an important perspective for contemplating the reproduction of surrealist works as postcards.

In the final chapter, I examine Mimi Parent's the *Bôite Alerte* (1959), created for the EROS exhibition (*Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme*). The *Bôite Alerte* is examined as an example of how the surrealists appropriated postal forms and practices as a means to explore conceptual art. Here, in the context of the surrealists' invocation of the nineteenth century philosophy of Charles Fourier, I examine the work as a response to postwar repression, in particular widespread censorship, the colonial war in Algeria, and the consumer culture of de Gaulle's France. Alyce Mahon's *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968* (2005), Marie Bonnet's "Anti-Reality! Marcel Duchamp, André Breton et la VIIIe Exposition ineRnatiOnale de Surréalisme, Paris galerie Daniel Cordier" (2004), and Jennifer Mundy's *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* (2001) provide insight into the EROS exhibit and the political climate in which it was conceived. In addition, Jacques Lacan's 1955 lecture "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'" will be examined as a means to consider the conceptual function of the *Bôite Alerte*.

Finally, I will close my study with a brief examination of the dialogue between surrealist postal practices and the postwar mail art movement. Focusing on the emergence and development of Ray Johnson's New York correspondence school, I will explore their use of the post as a defiant gesture against institutional authorities. As such, I will locate the continuities and shared aesthetic strategies between the surrealists and the later mail art movement.

CHAPTER ONE

THE REPUBLIC OF THE POST

The surrealists positioned themselves within postal territory as means to create a space for communication and internal exchange. Formed as a fundamentally internationalist movement, they used the postal system as a means to establish and coordinate internationalism in the face of growing nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. Based in Paris, the surrealists maintained correspondence with satellite groups in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Britain, and Japan. Available through subscription and associated book vendors, surrealist journals, such as *La Révolution Surrealiste* (1924-1929) and *La Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (1930-33), often included questionnaires and surveys for participants as well as featured published letters. Beyond its practical applications, the postal network allowed this amorphous group to rendezvous while being free from national, religious, historical, or institutional barriers. The surrealists not only occupied postal space but enlisted it as a means of display through which they engaged popular culture.

In this chapter I will examine how the letter evolved from being highly codified to intensely individual. By the eighteenth century letters were regarded as intimate and erotic expressions. As such, artists and writers utilized the letter as a symbol of the feminine voice and body.

As I will also demonstrate, by the nineteenth century the analogous relationship between the letter and the body intersected with society's interest in the occult and psychical communication. This association was reinforced as correspondents enclosed photographic portraits with their letters. Indeed, photography was perceived as capturing the spiritual essence of the sitter. In this connection, following Joanna Drucker's argument in "Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice Among the Proto-

Modern Americans" (1992), I argue that the *trompe l'oeil* paintings of postal ephemera, such as postcards and envelopes, anticipated the surrealists' postal collages.

This chapter also explores how the development of picture-postcards impacted visual culture in the modern era. Cheap and readily available, postcards feature a broad range of themes and images that inspired modern artists and writers to appropriate the medium for their own aesthetic experiments and word-and-image play. Further, as a form of mechanical reproduction and a means of mass dissemination, the postcard appealed to the artistic avant-garde's desire to undermine the institutionalization of art. I will trace these ideas from the German expressionists and dadaists to the surrealists.

As a metonym of the author, the letter emerged as an indexical sign of the individual and, for the surrealists, intersected with their investigations of spiritism and psychoanalysis. In this context, I will examine how the post intersected with the surrealists' interests in psychical communication, Freud's concept of the subconscious, and themes of desire.

Adapting Krauss's notion of modern homelessness, I argue that the surrealists engaged with modern communication in order to free themselves from the restraints of Western bourgeois culture and the limits of national borders. Similar to physical communities or institutions, the post is an evolving organism that responds to and is defined by user participation. The territory of the post established a space for new personal and intellectual dialogues beyond the confines of social, moral, and political authority. As such, it served as a site for cultural discourse, social dissent, and political revolution. Also, postal workers, as members of the proletariat, were representatives of the popular revolution. Indeed, it is within this context that the surrealists' understanding of the revolutionary possibilities of the post would arise.

During the early history of the post communication was highly codified. Before the advent of the reformed post, mail was not a regular feature of everyday life. Since the middle ages, the royal courts of Europe, universities, and religious orders each relied on closed relay systems to handle communications for their respective institutions. By the sixteenth century, private international couriers, such as the *Thurn und Taxis*, provided mail service across Europe; however, the service was irregular, expensive, and slow.

By the early seventeenth century, the French monarchy implemented one of the first national postal systems. In 1603 King Henry IV established the *Relais de louge*, a service that transported letters between post offices by established stagecoach routes. According to Eugène Vaillé, in *Histoire des Postes françaises jusque'à la Révolution* (1957), this system was "an organism assuring, according to fixed schedules and itineraries, and in the shortest amount of time, taking into account what was then possible, the transport of correspondences in the services not only of the State, but also of individuals, for which the latter must pay the cost."[17]

As the demand for postal services grew, the French crown contracted private firms to handle the increase in communications. In 1738 the Grimod and Thiroux family provided courier service between cities across France and, in 1758, C.H. Piarron de Chamousset organized the first intercity postal service in Paris known as *Petite Post*. Relinquishing mail service to private couriers, the crown no longer had direct supervision over the mail. As such, the post emerged as a space for intellectual and political discourse as it facilitated the development of correspondence circles among learned individuals or those in letters tradition.[18]

Outside the confines and authority of faith-based colleges and universities, postal space provided an arena for broad, free-flowing dialogue beyond political and religious borders.[19] Indeed, as members of the letters tradition used the space to criticize the

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[17] Eugène Vaillé, *Histoire des Postes françaises jusque'à la Révolution* (Paris, 1957), 45-46 and Patrick Marchand, "Les Maîtres de poste et le transport public en France, 1700-1850" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Paris, 2004).

[18] The post emerged as a public medium for communication and facilitated developing French epistolary culture. Letters were written with the knowledge and expectation that the contents would be shared, circulated, displayed, and possibly published, hence the axiom "to post is to publish." Letter writing emerged as a refined and codified practice through which one displayed handwriting and social skills. For more information, see Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conservation: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth Century France* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 28; Peter C. Sutton, "Love Letters: Dutch Genre Paintings in the Age of Vermeer" in *Love Letters: Dutch Genre Paintings in the Age of Vermeer.* eds. Peter C. Sutton, Lisa Vergara, and Ann Jensen Adams (Greenwich: Bruce Museum of Arts and Sciences, 2004), 32.

[19] Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), 1: 137n. 287.

government they encouraged public opinion against the monarchy. As such, the post increasingly emerged as a site for political dissent and revolution.[20]

The post also served as a means to subvert the repressive mores of the era. Throughout the eighteenth century, letters were increasingly identified with the feminine voice.[21] Although men dominated postal space, the letter, in particular the love letter, emerged as an important medium for women, as it provided them with a refuge in which to exercise themselves unobtrusively.[22] Indeed, the letter often served as an outlet for expressing personal thoughts, opinions, and secrets.[23] Encouraging women to engage in epistolary practice, writing manuals, such as Jean Puget de la Serre's *Le Secrétaire á la mode* (1630) and du Bosque's *Secretary of Ladies* (1638), framed letter writing as a peculiarly feminine pastime.[24] The genteel class regarded women as naturally better writers because of their perceived sensitive manners, innate delicacy, and

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[20] Although private couriers managed the relay of missives, the monarchy maintained control over communication by censoring and restricting writings that threatened the tranquility of the state. Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 289.

[21] Letter-writing is a literary genre which has its own history. For further discussion see Roger Chartier et al., *Correspondence: Models of Letter Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); James W. Howland, *The Letter Form and the French Enlightenment: The Epistolary Paradox* (New York: Peter Lang Pub.,1991).

[22] Linda Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fiction* (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988).

[23] Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

[24] Writing manuals also encouraged the illustration of missives and instructed authors on the skill of calligraphy and ornamentation. The decoration and design of letters was a highly admired skill and widely appreciated as an art on par with poetry. Calligraphic scripts, such as Gothic, Fraktur, and Textura, were highly codified and often communicated education level and social position. Some writers also engaged in imaginative play by decorating missives with fanciful designs such as borders, scrolls, and stylized floral and animal designs, such as unicorns, cupids, mermaids, and sea creatures. Ornate calligraphic letters were frequently framed and displayed as art. Ann Jensen Adams, "Disciplining the Hand, Disciplining the Heart: Letter-Writing Paintings and Practices in Seventeenth-Century Holland," in *Love Letters: Dutch Genre Paintings in the Age of Vermeer*, 66.

unselfconsciousness. As such, the aforementioned manuals instructed men to adopt a similar tone in their own letter writing.

Missives also developed a new feminine corporeality. While the signature traditionally served as a material trace of the correspondent, ladies often adorned folded stationery with perfume or scented inks, ribbons, or locks of hair. These transformed the love letter into an effigy of the correspondent.

The letter fed the fantasy of instantaneous transport and bodily contact from a distance. As John Durham Peters points out in *Speaking into the Air* (1999), the post is not just a "noetic discourse (relations between minds), but an erotic discourse (relations between bodies)."[25] Indeed, "love is the postal system."[26] This new intimacy of the post is best evidenced by St. Valentine's Day. Emerging as a festival of the mail system in the eighteenth century, St. Valentine's Day is identified with Cupid, who presides over the exchange of dainty, paper epistles between amorous correspondents.

As a consequence, the letter emerged in the arts as a referent to the feminine body and symbolized affairs of the heart, from the mildest flirting to rakish libertinage. Epistolary texts, such as *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1667) by Marianna Alcoforado, the immensely successful *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1749) by Samuel Richardson, and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, associated women with love letters.[27] Eighteenth-century artists also depicted the letter as a feminine expression of love, as seen in *Lady Sealing a Letter* (c. 1770) by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Girl Reading a Letter* (c. 1780) (fig. 4) by Jean Raoux, *The Letter* (c. 1770) and *Billet-Doux* (c. 1770) (fig. 5) by Jean-Honore Fragonard, and *Lady Folding a Letter* (1704) by Marie Vigeé-Lebrun.[28]

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[25] Peters, *Speaking into the Air,* 168.

[26] Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 226. For additional insight into "postal intimacy" and gender relations within postal spaces, in particular the nineteenth century post office, see David Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Postal Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 2006).

[27] Katherine Ann Jensen, *Writing Love: Letters, Women, and the Novel in France 1605- 1776* (Illinois: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1995), 3-26.

[28] For discussion concerning images of the women reading letters and female literacy, see James

During the second half of the nineteenth century, postal practices intersected with society's fascination with occult and psychical communication. This dialogue was due, in part, to the popular perception of the letter as increasingly personal in nature. Letters developed a new aura of privacy following the development of sealable paper envelopes in England in the 1840s.[29] A sealed envelope was, as noted by one English journalist in 1844, "as sacred as the door of his own private residence."[30] As a consequence, letters became increasingly personal and conversational in style and tone. Citing examples of how correspondents "spoke with their pens" or imagined their correspondents as spiritually present, David Henkin notes that writers often imagined being brought into an instantaneous or psychical communion with correspondents.[31]

Through communication media, such as phonographs and telegraphs, Frenchman and spiritist founder, Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (pseudonym, Allan Kardec), referenced the analogous relationship between the post and spirit phenomena in his text *The Spirit's Book* (1857). The spiritists believed an individual's personality, or spirit, transcends the body. "Kardecists" often used a process of automatic writing called psychography to channel and record communications from spirits.

As a work of psychography, *The Spirit's Book* is a record of Rivail's communication with the spirit world. Here, the spirits describe the nature of their realm and the relation between themselves and the material world. The text explains that the relationship between the spirit and body is analogous to that of the letter and the envelope.[32] In this sense, the act of sending a letter is commensurate with sending oneself

Conlon, "Men Reading Women Reading: Interpreting Images of Women Readers," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 26 (2005): 37-58.

[29] Prior to the invention of the sealable postal envelop, letters were folded in on themselves and sealed with wax. The mass production of paper envelopes first began in England with the invention of the automatic envelope folding machine. Developed by Edwin Hill, brother of postal reform pioneer Sir Rowland Hill, and Warren de la Rive, the machine produced standardized envelopes that corresponded with new postal rates.

[30] General Post Office Archive, London, 23/7 Newspaper Cuttings file, *The Sun*, June 15, 1844.

[31] Henkin, *The Postal Age*, 93-117.

[32] According to Rivail, the body is the envelope of the spirit. He explains that the spirit is at the center of two envelopes. The first, a light fluidic envelope called the perispirit, is the intermediate boundary between the spirit and the physical world. The second envelope is the material body,

or a *doppelgänger*. As such, letter-writers imagined the mail as a phenomenal discourse and a portal for psychical communication.[33]

Photography also imbued the post with a mystical resonance. The contemporaneous development of the modern post and photography, in particular the cabinet card, gave a new and significant visual dimension to the letter. Developed by Marion & Co. in 1862, the cabinet card is a small, lightweight albumen print. Most cabinet cards were portraits, pasted onto a piece of cardstock. Their small size made them inexpensive and, unlike the fragile daguerreotype, easily mailed. The act of dispatching images of oneself through the mail is further evidenced by the production of novelty stamps, in which individuals could have their own photographs reproduced as mock postage stamps.

Photographic portraits were perceived as capturing not only the likeness of the sitters, but also the essence of their very being.[34] As such, the image was infused with a spectral quality. The combination of correspondents' photographic portraits with their letters reinforced their spiritual presence for the recipient.[35]

One might draw an analogy between the association of postal ephemera with psychical communication and the representation of letters as metaphors for specific individuals, as seen in *trompe l'oeil* paintings by artists William Harnett, John Haberle, and John F. Peto. Paintings of letter racks, such as Harnett's *Mr. Hulings' Rack Picture* (1888) (fig. 6) and Peto's *Rack Picture for William Malcolm Bunn* (1882) (fig. 7),

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which allows the spirit to relate to the material world. Rivail writes that during sleep or death the fluidic envelope allows the spirit to escape the human form and travel to spirit-world to commune with other spirits. The envelope also allows the spirit to communicate with the living. Allan Kardec [Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail], *The Spirits' Book: The Principles of Spiritist Doctrine* (New York: Cosimo, Inc, 2005).

[33] This notion is morbidly illustrated by the trope of "dead letters." Lost or undeliverable missives are resigned to the "morgue of the mail," the Dead Letter Office. Here, letters were opened and stripped of material tokens before being burned or cremated. Indeed, the envelope without the spirit is analogous to a body without the spirit; it is only a corpse.

[34]Alan Trachtenberg, "Likeness as Identity: Reflections on the Daguerrean Mystique" in *The Portrait in Photography*. Ed. Graham Clarke (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 173-192.

[35] For examples, see Micheal Frizot, ed. *A New History of Photography* (Köln: Könemann, 1998), 103.

generally feature the image of a wooden panel with ribbons stretched and tacked, into which letters and envelopes, often addressed to the work's patron, are tucked. Defying the conventions of traditional portraiture, these paintings function as object portraits in that the postal ephemera, as well as cards, tickets, and other indexes of an individual's life, function as mnemonic devices to mark lived experience.

Focusing on everyday objects, the letter rack paintings also reflect the growth of a new democratic art market in the late nineteenth century. Academies and critics generally dismissed these *trompe l'oeil* paintings as visual deceptions that were devoid of aesthetic sophistication. However, the new urban middle class appreciated these representations of familiar everyday objects and delighted in the novelty and cleverness of the illusions.[36] Rather than being displayed in galleries and museums, these works were often hung in non-institutional settings, such as men's clubs, hotel lobbies, taverns, and saloons.

These *trompe l'oeil* paintings represent what Barbara Novak, in *American Painting of the Nineteenth-Century: Realism, Idealism, and Experience* (1969), terms "conceptual realism."[37] According to Novak "conceptual realism" is when "the presentation of the object is controlled by a knowledge of its properties that is tactile and intellectual, rather than optical or perceptual."[38] Drawing from Novak's notion, Drucker explains how the hyperealistic representation of letters and envelopes on the frontal plane of the canvas creates a phenomenal experience of the objects. As Drucker notes, these paintings are self-reflexive, encouraging the viewer to contemplate common objects as art. This notion is evident in Haberle's series *Torn in Transit* (1889-1895) (fig. 8), which features an image of a picturesque landscape that appears to be tied with string and surrounded by the remnants of paper wrapping torn off during the postal relay. *Torn in Transit* plays an aesthetic game with the viewer by asking which is the art—the posted package or the painting within? According to Drucker, these *trompe l'oeil* works

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[36] David Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994).

[37] Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth-Century: Realism, Idealism, and Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1969).

[38] Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth-Century*, 223.

anticipate European avant-garde experiments with collage and found objects as a means to investigate the boundaries between art and reality.[39]

Implicit in Haberle's *Torn in Transit* series is the circulation of the work through the mail system itself. The production of the *Torn in Transit* series intersects the development of the picture-postcard, which transformed the post into a visual relay. Introduced in 1889 at the Paris exposition in France, picture-postcards were derived from the plain pre-stamped correspondence card, which featured the address on one side of the card and the message on the other. [40] Although correspondence cards cost only a penny to mail, the purchase price of early picture-postcards was high, making collecting an expensive endeavor. Typically sold as souvenirs, cards were an indulgence afforded only by those wealthy enough to travel. However, by the 1900s, cheaper production methods, such as photolithography, collotype, chromolithography, and rotary printing, made cards affordable and widely available.[41] As a result, a broad range of themes and subjects were introduced to satisfy the appetites of the masses.

With the postcard, private communication became public, as the postcard's open format turned the personal letter inside out. In *Relays* (1999), Bernard Siegert notes, "Because the material conditions for the confidentiality of the letter had been sites for the production of sexuality, the postcard was synonymous with the exhibition of that sexuality."[42] As such, some postal officials deemed postcards to be an indecent form of communication.[43]

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[39]Johanna Drucker, "Harnett, Haberle, and Peto: Visuality and Artifice Among the Proto-Modern Americans" *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 74, no. 1, (March 1992): 37-50.

[40] While the idea of the postcard was originally introduced by Dr. Heinrich von Stephan at the 1865 postal conference in Germany, the card received little interest. Four years later, Dr. Emmanuel Herrman developed the first official correspondence card.

[41] For a comprehensive discussion of the development of the postcard, see Richard Carline, *Pictures in the Post: the Story of the Picture Postcard and Its Place in the History of Popular Art* (London: Gordon Fraser Press, 1971).

[42] Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, 148. Also see Lisa Z. Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands: Postcards and the Expansion of Pornography in Britain and the Atlantic World, 1880-1914," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2000): 859-885.

[43] General Postal Director Philipsborn of Germany rejected the introduction of postcards, perceiving that the nudity of communication would be nothing but the communication of nudity.

The mass production of risqué cards, featuring suggestive fantasies and erotic imagery, further underscored the postcards' lascivious connotations (fig. 9). Risqué postcards, which came to be known as "French cards" as Paris became synonymous with the export of these libidinous visuals, were regarded as a threat to good morality by government officials in Europe and America. While the Comstock Act of 1873 controlled the distribution of erotic cards in America, French Senator René Bérenger, a prominent Catholic and republican social reformer, led morality campaigns in Paris during the 1890s that sought to censor licentious printed matter such as postcards. On August 22, 1900, eighty thousand objectionable cards were seized in raids of Paris postcard shops.[44] Although postal codes banned the circulation of erotic postcards through the mail, risqué cards were often enclosed in envelopes when mailed as a way of making the mailing of explicit cards and imagery more discreet.[45]

While morality campaigns banned the posting of licentious postcards, cards featuring pornographic photographs of foreign or colonial subjects, such as Algerians (fig. 10), Turks, and Polynesians (fig. 11), circulated uncensored. Cards such as these eroticized the post, but also served as means to propagate colonial Orientalism.[46]

The popularity of the picture-postcard displaced lengthier written communication as correspondence grew increasingly brief and fragmented. First introduced in England in

Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, 148.

[44]Paul Hammond, *French Undressing: Naughty Postcards from 1900 to 1920* (London: Bloomsbury Books, 1988), 10.

[45] For additional discussion concerning issues of pornography and censorship, see Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 171-174; Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking Press, 1995); and Lisa Z. Sigel, ed., *International Exposures: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography*, 1800-2000 (New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2005).

[46]For an introduction to the issue of Orientalism and exoticism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992); and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge Press, 1995). For discussions on colonial postcards, see the essays by Allan Life and David Prochaska in "From Albums to the Academy: Postcards and Art History," ed. Jordana Mendelson, *Visual Resources*, 26, no. 4 (2001): 376-382. For a more complete discussion of Algerian postcards and issues of colonialism and postcards, see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986).

1902, the divided-back postcard devoted the entire front of the card to the image, relegating all written correspondence to the back of the card. Nevertheless, the postcard provided artists and writers with a dynamic new source for inspiration. Modern poets, such as André Breton, Paul Éluard, and Guillaume Apollianare, perceived short, often fragmented postcard messages as analogous to modern prose.[47] They also drew inspiration from the postcard's word and image relationships, as the reversibility of the "divided-back" format introduced complex connections between picture and text, as well as message, caption, stamp, and signature. Member of the Austro-German Loos circle, Altenberg referred to postcards as "miniature prose" and was an avid collector. He explored their poetic potential in "Semmering, 1912" (1912), an album-poem in which Altenberg juxtaposed poetic text with two hundred and fifty nine cards from his collection.[48]

Blank postcard stock also inspired artists, professional and amateur, to create their own images, as seen in German expressionist Franz Marc's postcards to poet Else Lasker-Schülar (figs. 14 and 15).[49] The series of twenty-eight cards features ink and gouache paintings of an imaginary pastoral kingdom populated by a menagerie of whimsical animals. Marc's arcadian fantasy was inspired by his home in the remote village of Sindelsdorf, in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. These postcards of a fantasy world provided Lasker-Schülar with a paradisal escape from the tumult and despair of her life in Berlin.

Modern art movements also enlisted the ubiquitous postcard to promote aesthetics as well as political ideologies. Embracing the postcard as a medium of modern communication, Italian futurists produced their own cards, as well as envelopes and post-

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[47] The adoption of postcard prose is evident in André Breton, "Carte Postale" *L'Invention Collective*, no. 2 (1940); Guillaume Apollianare's "Cartes Postales" in Guillaume Apollianare, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)* (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1980).

[48] The albums inspired Viennese composer Alban Berg to create "Five songs for Voice and Orchestra to Postcard Text" (1913). To view a facsimile of Peter Altenberg's "Semmering, 1912" (1912), see Andrew Barker and Leo Lensing eds., *Telegrams from the Soul: Selected Prose of Peter Altenberg* (New York: Archipelago Books, 2005).

[49] Peter Klaus Schuster, *Franz Marc: Postcards to Prince Jussuf* (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 1988).

office stickers, as a means to promote futurist exhibitions and events. The futurists sought to make the bold, graphic style of the avant-garde aesthetic popular by spreading their art into everyday life, such as in interior design, décor, stationery, and fashion. According to Giovanni Lista, in *Futurism* (2001), "Postal communication was also a field where Futurism actively displayed its determination to update the semiotic and esthetic status of every single social practice. The postal institution allowed the Futurists to target the addressee of the esthetic act, thus conferring on their creations a relational, private character."[50] The futurists appropriated the postcard format and experimented with bold advertising graphics, new dimensions and shapes, and also new media, such as tin.[51] They also used postal media to create mailable postcard collages. Ivo Pannaggi's *Mail Collage* (posted to Katherine Dreier in 1926) (fig. 16), which combines a postcard with ticket stubs, stamps, photographs, and newspaper clippings, demonstrates how an everyday mail event and the artistic event collide in a new creative freedom.[52]

In the aftermath of World War I, the dadaist movement attacked conventional cultural expressions, such as realist literature and representational art. They sought to incorporate everyday materials into their art and develop new expressions that were playful, teasingly abusive, and scandalously provocative. As such, they enlisted postcards as a means to challenge and undermine cultural authority.

In particular, dadaist Marcel Duchamp engaged the post and its mediums as a means to parody conventional ideas of art and literature and engage issues of mass reproduction and authenticity. His readymade *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) (fig. 17) is a postcard reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1502) upon which Duchamp drew a moustache and goatee. Below the image he added the letters L.H.O.O.Q., which when pronounced, may be read as the French slur "she has a hot ass" (*elle a chaud au cul*).[53] The vulgar pun in association with an iconic female image plays off the lascivious

[50] Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (Paris: Terrail, 2001), 158.

[51] Lista, *Futurism,* 157.

[52] Ibid, 160.

[53] L.H.O.O.Q. may also be read as "Look," referring to the exchange between the spectator and the work. Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 142.

reputation of postcards. Further, the work reflects the use of encoded messages to subvert censors.

Duchamp appropriated a postcard reproduction of the iconic work *Mona Lisa* in order to attack the "aura" and cult value of the work. As Walter Benjamin notes, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," "That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. . . . [T]he technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of the tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."[54] For Benjamin, mass reproduction destroys the cult value of the object by removing the work from its original location and disseminating it to a mass audience. As a consequence, the value of the object is determined by its "exhibition value."[55] Postcards democratize art by mass reproducing artwork as well as disseminating images across postal territory.

By defacing the postcard, Duchamp reactivated the issue of value by transforming the reproduction into an original work of art.[56] In general, the addition of drawings and text to the postcard image was a common practice among postal correspondents. Appropriating this activity, Duchamp undermined the institutionalization of artistic practice. Implicit here is the function of postal space as a site for display and reception of art.[57]

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[54] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 221.

[55] Benjamin, "The Work of Art on the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 224-25.

[56] Michael Compton, "The Ready-mades, Meanings, and Representation in Art," in *Duchamp Readymades*, ed. JoAnne Birnie (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1978); P.N. Humble, "Duchamp's Readymades: Art and Anti-art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 22, no. 1(Winter 1982): 52-64; and Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1995).

[57] Duchamp also used correspondence cards to comment on postal communication as a failed gesture. *Rendezvous dimanche 6, Fevrier 1916* (1916) features four, taped together postcards with a typed, nonsensical message that runs across the four cards. Although addressed to his patrons Walter and Louise Arensberg, the cards were never mailed. Despite this, Duchamp's use of postal media is a metaphor for dispatch and serves as a challenge to the confines of the gallery space. For a discussion of this work, see T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 2007), 97-100.

Just as the futurists and dadaists revolted against "establishment" art, the surrealists also rejected bourgeois culture and sought to engage in the dichotomy of art and life. As a result, the group pursued alternative methods of art production that were intended to liberate the mind and spirit. In particular, the surrealists pursued experiments in psychography or automatic writing. Unlike the spiritist movement, the surrealists were not interested in communing with the spirit world. Instead, they enlisted automatic writing or "psychic automatism" as a means to tap into the deepest recesses of the subconscious mind.[58] The surrealists organized séances in order to experiment with the world of the subconscious. Entering into trance-like states, participants functioned as "simple recording devices" who transcribed unexpected words and images as they flowed freely from their subconscious.[59] These communications were then interpreted to uncover sublimated thought.

The surrealists' association of modern communication with psychical communication was derived, in part, from Dr. Emmanuel Régis's text on the mentally ill, *Préis de psychiatrie* (1887), which Breton studied during his service in a World War I military hospital. As Jennifer Gibson noted in "Surrealism Before Freud: Dynamic Psychiatry's 'Simple Recording Instrument'" (1987), Régis introduced a procedure called free association in which the patient, analogous to a telegraph machine recoding a dispatch, unselfconsciously jots down thoughts as a means of uncovering pathological problems. The analogous association between the modern telegraph machine, invented in 1837 by Samuel Morse, and Régis's method of inner dictation was shared by clairvoyants and mediums who developed the concept of the spiritual telegraph, a method of using knocks and taps on a table to transmit communication from the spirit world.

Psychologist Sigmund Freud, whose theories concerning psychical communication were highly influential in surrealist thought, enlisted the letter as a method of uncovering pathological complexes. Freud regarded the letter as a reflection or mirror of the true self. Indeed, Freud often used letters for psychological analysis.[60]

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[58]André Breton, "Entrée des mediums," *Littérature*, nouvelle series, VI (November 1922).

[59]Jennifer Gibson, "Surrealism Before Freud: Dynamic Psychiatry's 'Simple Recording Instrument'," *Art Journal* 46, (Sp. 1987): 56-60.

[60] Martin Grotjahn, "Sigmund Feud and the Art of Letter Writing" *JAMA*, no. 1, (April 3, 1967):

Similar to the dream, the letter held for him unconscious truths that could be liberated only through interpretive analysis.

The surrealists also drew inspiration from Freud's studies of dream imagery. For the surrealists, dreams represented the communication of thought from the unconscious to conscious mind. Describing an analogous relationship between the post and dreams or unconscious thought, Freud noted in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) that "dream distortion adopted the same methods as the postal censorship for expunging passages which were objectionable to it. The postal censorship makes such passages unreadable by blacking them out; the dream censorship replaced them by an incomprehensible mumble."[61]

The surrealists' engagement with modern communication media, as part of their psychical experiments into the realm of the irrational, or to use Freud's term, the uncanny, was a means to free themselves from Western bourgeois culture. In their pursuit of independence and the liberation of the mind and body, the surrealists also opposed nationalism. This position stems from their identification of nationalism as a cause of war and general violence, as well as colonialism. An enduring theme in surrealism, the anti-colonialist stance was adopted as protest against the "westernization" of the whole world.[62] Although founded in Paris, surrealism established itself as an international movement, as evidenced by its global membership. As Breton stated, "Surrealism belongs not to any nation, but to humanity itself."[63] In this context the surrealists enlisted postal space as a means to map surrealism. Krauss's discussion concerning the portability of modern sculpture provides a useful concept for contemplating the surrealists' production of mail art. Inherently portable and siteless, mail art reflects the surrealists'

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[61] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* vol. IV. trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1900), 142, n.3.

[62] For a general discussion concerning the surrealists' anti-nationalist position, see Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House Publ., 1988), 17-54.

[63] André Breton, "International Surrealist Bulletin" (1935-1936) excerpts reprinted in André Breton, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Flankin Rosemont (New York: Monad Press, 1978), 336.

rejection of the institutionalization of art. In contrast to Demos' position that surrealism was purely concerned with psychical displacement and thus failed to unleash itself from the institutional framework of the bourgeoisie, I posit that the surrealists engaged postal space as a kind of geo-political "homelessness," or anti-nationalism, despite the post's governmental associations, as well as a means to sidestep bourgeois institutional frameworks within the arts.[64]

By engaging postal space and its ephemera, the surrealists also associated themselves with postal workers. The post was closely associated with the popular revolution. By the early twentieth century, the post was one of France's largest employers. For these civil service workers, or *fonctionnaires*, working conditions were difficult, wages were low, and opportunities for advancement were limited. As a consequence, on May 18, 1899, approximately thirteen hundred postal workers in Paris went on strike. This was followed by strikes in April 1906 and February and May 1909.

The French *postiers* were the first *fonctionnaires* in a modern industrial nation to organize, unionize, and strike.[65] By 1906, *fonctionnaires* of the Postes, Télégraphe et Téléphone (P.T.T.) had become increasingly organized and militant as they aligned themselves with proletarian and working class organizations. As Judith Wishnia notes in *The Proletarianizing of the Fonctionnaires* (1990), working class unions, such as the Confédération générale du travail (CGT), declared their support for striking postal workers. "The CGT issued a call for help: 'All workers will understand that a victory of *postiers* over the bourgeois government will be like a salutary prelude to the coming of Social Revolution.'"[66] Later, during the 1909 postal strikes, other labor unions went on

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[64] T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 21-22.

[65] Judith Wishnia, *The Proletarianizing of the Fonctionnaires* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1990), 3. For international reaction to France's postal labor issues, see William Bayard Hale, "The Great Strike in Paris and Its Meaning," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1909 and "France Bows Down to Labor Leaders," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1909. Little scholarship exists concerning nineteenth century and early twentieth century postal labor issues. See *Histoire du Factuer: 1638-1990* (Paris: Musée de la Poste, 1990); H.G Swift, *A History of Postal Agitation from 1840-1899* (London: Percey Brothers, 1929); and H.G Swift, *A History of Postal Agitation: From Eighty Years Ago til Today, 1929* (London: Home Farm Books, 2006).

[66] Wishnia, *The Proletarianizing of the Fonctionnaires*, 43.

strike as a show of worker solidarity and support for *postiers,* and the CGT proclaimed, "Victory of the postiers will be that of all the proletariat"[67]

Later, Vladimir Lenin identified the post as a model for political and social reform in the early twentieth century.[68] In *State and Revolution* (1917), he wrote, "Overthrow the capitalists, crush with the iron hand of the armed workers the resistance of these exploiters, break the bureaucratic machine of the modern state—and you have before you a mechanism of the highest technical equipment, freed of parasites, capable of being set into motion by the united workers themselves."[69] Lenin noted, "To organize the *whole* national economy like the postal system in such a way that technicians, managers, bookkeepers as well as all officials, should receive no higher wages than 'workingman's wages,' all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—this is our immediate aim. This is the kind of state and economic basis we need."[70] Here, the post emerged as a model for the ideal socialist system as well as a metaphor for equal exchange. In this context, the surrealists' association with the post, by extension, reflects their desire to legitimize themselves as a revolutionary political movement.

In the post, the surrealists discovered new methods and forms of expression. Similar to eighteenth-century "men of letters," the surrealists utilized the post as a method of dissent against modernist institutions and political authority. They also engaged the post as a site for psychical and erotic discourses. In the chapters that follow I explore the surrealists' production of postal art and how these works respond to distinctive ideological concerns as well as historic events.

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[67]Ibid, 131.

[68]Vladimir I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 43.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid, 43-44.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POSTMAN CHEVAL

Between 1931 and 1933, Max Ernst produced a small group of collages that incorporate postal ephemera. Among these are some of his most complex and striking works, such as *Le Facteur Cheval* (1932), *Du Verre* (1932) (fig. 18), and *Hommage a une enfant nommee Violette* (1933) (fig. 19). In each of these works, Ernst prominently locates an envelope in the lower right corner. Overlapping other materials, each envelope appears to float over the frontal plane as if being presented or delivered to the viewer.[71] The presentation of postal matter recalls nineteenth century *trompe l'oeil* paintings of letter racks that enlist postal ephemera as a means of introducing conceptual experience.

Scholars have not accounted for the appearance or the significance of postal ephemera in Ernst's works. Most commentary concerning his postal collages locates them within a suite of large-format collages known generally as *Loplop présente*, which feature the bird Loplop, Ernst's alter ego, in various disguises. This approach tends to overlook the emergence of specific themes that appear within the series. With its obvious and prominent position in the collages, as well as its repeated use, the postal envelope holds an important message for the artist and viewer.

The broader goal of this chapter is to examine the meaning and role of postal media, in particular the envelope, in surrealist work. Indeed, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the envelope emerged in nineteenth-century thought as a receptacle for the spirit and unconscious desire. I explore here how the surrealists also appropriated the

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[71] In *Du Verre* and *Hommage a une enfant nommee violette,* the envelopes overlay calligraphic missives which are indecipherable in reproductions.

envelope, in form and symbol, as a metaphor for the alchemical transformation and liberation of the spirit.

Ernst's *Le Facteur Cheval* is a portal to a discussion of the surrealists' interest in Cheval and the hermetic tradition. The complexity of materials and symbolism make this work especially representative of the surrealists' dialogue with the post. Measuring 25 by 19 inches, *Le Facteur Cheval* is a paper and fabric collage with pen, ink, and gouache on manila paper. The work features a schematic figure with a head and torso composed of blue and white marbleized paper joined by a penciled neck wearing a silk appliqué bowtie. Three circular cutouts featuring chromolithographs of a woman's face and fanciful clothing peep through the rectangular paper torso. The figure is flanked on the left by a large, blue, paper rectangle with a cutout of a frottaged bird above an image of coral. In the bottom right of the collage, Ernst affixed an open postal envelope with a cellophane window that reveals a photograph of scantily clad women.[72] In contrast to interpretations by other scholars, I read the work as a representation of Cheval and not merely as Loplop presenting an envelope, itself a referent to Cheval.[73]

This chapter revisits the surrealists' perception of the *facteur*, or postman, Ferdinand Cheval (1836-1924). Although the surrealists embraced Cheval as a forerunner to the movement, scholars have given little consideration to the effect of the postman on surrealist thought and practice.[74] I argue that Cheval is at the center of the surrealists' growing dialogue with the post, its system and ephemera. Against a backdrop of alchemy and other occult phenomena, I examine how the surrealists reconceived the postman as a

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[72] Angelica Zander Rudenstene, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice* (New York: Abrams Inc., 1985), 297. The envelope is dated 1932 and postmarked I 8(postscript 30)/17 V/ 1932/ Paris Rue Des Halles. Rudenstene suggests that the nude photograph in the envelope reveals "[a]n elusive world of dreams and imagination, to subterranean visions of desire and beauty which stand as metaphors for the postman's own creative inspiration."

[73] Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: The Artist in the Third Person* (New York: George Brazille, Inc., 1983); Lucy Lippard, "The Technical Innovations of Max Ernst," (M.A thesis, New York University, 1962); Elza Adamwicz, "The Surrealist (Self-) Portrait: Convulsive Identities," in *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality,* ed. Silvano Levy (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), 41; Rudenstene, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection,* 292-297.

[74] For a brief discussion concerning Breton's visits to the *Palais* see, J.H., Matthews, *The Surrealist Mind* (Toronto: Associated Univ. Press, 1991.

hermetic figure who served as a catalyst for their dialogue with postal referents. In this context, Ernst conceived mail art as a metaphor for alchemy. Interwoven in this discussion is the surrealists' perception of the *facteur* as an example of the worker liberated by his discovery of the poetic relation between work and sexual desire.

Cheval was a poor, rural postal worker from the Hauterives (Drôme) region of France. He emerged as a well-known figure in the late 1920s and 1930s for his remarkable edifice, the *Palais Idéal.* The surrealists were among the first to recognize and revere the eccentric postman and his architectural achievement. Surrealist writer and filmmaker Jacques Brunius introduced the story of Cheval and his monument to the surrealists in the late 1920s. Brunius, also a native of the Drôme region, featured Cheval and the *Palais* in a photo-essay for *Variétiés* in June 1929 and later in 1936 in an essay for *Architectural Review.*[75] Recalling the *Palais'* fantastic spirit, Brunius wrote, "At the meeting place of primitive art and the art of madmen and of children Cheval established a monstrous system of imagined memories . . . [a] many sided palace, luxuriant and at the same time secret, contradictory, and inconsistent in its themes, with walls strewn with pathetic inscriptions, . . . [a] plaything of an inspired child, this rock vibrant with strangeness and ingenuousness."[76] In "Le Message automatique" (1933), André Breton declared Cheval to be "the uncontested master of mediumistic architecture and sculpture." [77] His *Palais* emerged as a pilgrimage site for surrealists, and they honored Cheval through painting, photography, drawing, film, collage, and poetry. Indeed, as

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[75]Rudenstene, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection,* 292-297. Rudenstene notes that, according to information supplied in 1982 by Ann Cottance, the daughter of Brunius, it is not clear if Brunius introduced Breton to Cheval before or after Cheval's death in 1924. Brunius had collected extensive material on Cheval and the *Palais Idéal* and had assembled an album on the subject. This has since been lost. It was included in Brunius' papers that were acquired by London collector John Lyle and later destroyed by fire. Also see Jacques Brunius, "Le facteur Cheval," *Variétés,* (June 15, 1929): 93-98; Brunius, "Un Palais idéal," *Architectural Review*, no. 80, (Oct. 1936): 147-50; and "Un palais idéal," *La Revue des sports et du monde* (1936): 31-33.

[76] Brunius, in *Architectural Review*, 147-48.

[77] André Breton, "Le Message Automatique," *Minotaure*, nos 3-4. (December 1933): 65. Breton illustrates the essay with a photographic postcard of Cheval and his wife seated in front of the *Palais.*

British surrealist Roland Penrose later noted, the *facteur* dominated the thoughts of the surrealists for a long time.[78]

The son of farmers, the postman Cheval was born in Charmes-sur-l'Herbasse, a small French village near Romans. Poorly educated, he worked briefly as a baker and performed odd jobs before being hired by the Hauterives Post Office in 1867 (fig. 20).[79] The work of a rural, itinerant postman was arduous and at times dangerous. Every day, winter and summer, for over twenty-five years, Cheval trudged along the same eighteen-mile route. Trampling each day from Hauterives to Tersanne, he often daydreamed to escape the monotony of his labor and the banality of the arid countryside. In his diary he recounted, "I used to construct in a dream a fairy palace; one that would surpass all imagination as completely as the genius of an ordinary man could achieve (with gardens, grottoes, towers, castles, museums, and sculptures)."[80]

Cheval began to realize his dream in April 1876, when he stumbled over a small rock. Picking it up, he recalled, he was immediately mesmerized by the stone's bizarre shape and, looking around, he suddenly discovered the area was filled with weathered and strangely contorted stones, each more beautiful than the other.[81] Inspired by these

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[78] Penrose, as quoted in Rudenstene, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection*, 296 n.5. The longevity of the surrealists' interest with Cheval is further evidenced by surrealist Adonis Kyrou's 1958 film *Palais Idéal*.

[79] The biographical details of Cheval's life are from John Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), 35-39; Jean-Louis Ferrier, *Outsider Art* (Paris: Pierre Terrail editions, 1998), 172-188; Marc Fenoli, *Le Palais du Facteur Cheval* (Paris: Grenoble, 1990); Ferdinand Cheval, "The Autobiography of Ferdinand Cheval; the Story of the Palais Ideal , Hauterives, December 1911, 34 years of Persistent Work, 9,000 days, 65,000 hours," *Raw Vision*, no. 38, (2002): 24-31.

[80] Cheval, from an unpublished diary quoted in Brunius, *Architectural Review*, 147-48. For discussion concerning the construction of the *Palais*, see J.P. Jouve, Claude Prevost, and Clovis Prevost*, Le Palaise Ideal du facteur Cheval: Quand le Songe deviant la Realite* (Paris 1981). This text contains a full description of the work, the postman's own notes and diaries, and an extensive photographic record.

[81] Geologically, the region of Hauterives is the site of an ancient seabed with rich deposits of tufa and shells.

marvelous rocks, Cheval realized the palace from his dream and declared, "Since nature has furnished the sculptures, I shall be the architect and mason."[82]

During his daily postal round, Cheval hunted for rocks and collected them in his pockets and mail satchel. As his obsession grew, he left piles of rocks along his route and returned later to collect them at night and deposit them in the garden behind his house. Led only by his imagination, he worked alone and mostly at night. He used a wheelbarrow to collect and move the stones as he assembled them into a series of fanciful fountains, subterranean chambers, and interconnected grottoes (fig. 21). Cheval recalled, "I was not a builder, I never handled a mason's trowel, I was not a sculptor. The chisel was never known to me; not to mention architecture, a field in which I remained totally ignorant."[83]

The surviving monument measures roughly 86 by 46 feet and rises to a height of nearly 39 feet. The western and southern facades of the *Palais* feature a mixture architectural forms and details drawn from Swiss chalets, medieval castles, Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, Roman temples, and Gothic cathedrals (fig. 22).[84] The eastern façade of the building features a four-column edifice in the style of an Egyptian tomb. The front elevation features three stone giants rising nearly 35 feet high. These colossal figures support the so-called Barbary Tower, accessed by a winding staircase decorated with cement swans (fig. 23). Beneath the structure, a subterranean chamber holds a crypt dedicated to his faithful wheelbarrow—"his partner in pain" (fig 24).

Finally, the northern side features a wall that writhes with simulated stone vegetation, combined with shells, and a menagerie of real and imagined stone animals, such as flamingos, ostriches, octopuses, lions, dragons, snakes, elephants, and bears. Sexual imagery is plentiful throughout as evidenced by the phallic mushrooms, breast

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[82] Cheval from an unpublished diary quoted in Brunius, *Architectural Review*, 147-48.

[83] Cheval in *Raw Vision*, 25.

[84] Ferrier suggests that the inspiration for his diverse array of cultural influences may have been inspired by souvenir picture postcards from the 1878 Paris world's fair. This is not possible as picture postcards were not yet in existence. More likely, Ferrier suggests that Cheval may have seen images in newspapers featuring pictures of the fair while loading mail at the Lyon-Perrache railway station. Ferrier also notes that Cheval owned a set of *Magasin pittoresque*, a forerunner to the modern encyclopedia, which would have offered him a sedentary tour of world architecture. Ferrier, *Outsider Art*, 178.

forms, and womb-like grottoes (fig. 25). Throughout the *Palais* Cheval incorporated inscriptions that announce his extraordinary feat, such as, "The work of one man," "Out of a dream I have brought forth the Queen of the World," "This is of art, and of energy," "The ecstasy of a beautiful dream and the prize of effort," "Dream of a peasant," "Temple of Life," and "Palace of the Imagination."

Although met with disdain and ridiculed by the locals, Cheval's monument soon became a regional tourist attraction.[85] Among the curious were the surrealists who toured the site throughout the mid-twentieth century.[86] During a visit to the *Palais* with Dora Maar and Paul Éluard in 1937, Pablo Picasso produced an *alleluja* (the Spanish name for a cartoon-style narrative) known as the *Facteur Cheval* sketchbook.[87] In one of his drawings, Picasso depicted Cheval as a hybrid beast standing in front of the *Palais* (fig. 26). The creature, branded with P.T.T. (the initials of the French postal service), wears a postman's cap and mailbag and holds a mason's trowel and a letter. Making a pun on the postman's name (*cheval* is the French word for horse), Picasso depicted Cheval with the body of a horse as well as the head of a bird.[88]

The association of the bird with the postman is most likely based on the use of pigeons and doves as messengers. In addition to being used to relay messages between people, birds were perceived by ancient cultures to be symbols of prophesy as well as mediators to the gods.[89] An attribute of the Roman goddess Venus, the dove also symbolizes love, and, by extension, lust.

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[85] *Raw Visions*, 26. In 1902, a young photographer named Louis Charvet produced a small group of postcards that featured Cheval and the *Palais,* which were sold to visitors in local stores.

[86] Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995). Breton, accompanied by Valentine Hugo and Georges Sadoul, visited Hauterives in 1931. Breton would later return in 1949 and 1953. In *Scrapbook 1900-1981* (1981), Roland Penrose noted that he and his wife, Lee Miller, first visited the *Palais* in August 1936 during a trip to Mougins, France to visit Pablo Picasso and Paul Éluard.

[87] John Richardson, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Picasso, Provence, and Douglas Cooper* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1999), 217-219.

[88] For a discussion concerning Picasso's incorporation of animal imagery into his work, see Neil Cox and Deborah Povey, *A Picasso Bestiary* (London: Academy Editions, 1995).

[89] James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 48 and 109.

Picasso's metamorphosis of the postman into a virile beast represents Cheval's liberation from moral and social repression. In a second sketch, in which the creature is pictured mounting a housewife while delivering letters on his daily rounds, Picasso depicts Cheval channeling his libidinous impulses into his postal-work (fig. 27).

The surrealists extended this notion of work as erotic pleasure to Cheval's use of a wheelbarrow in the construction of the *Palais Idéal*. Postcard images of Cheval often depicted him with his constant companion, his faithful wheelbarrow (fig. 28). In surrealist art and literature, the wheelbarrow functions symbolically as an anthropomorphic female form and object of arousal. Dalí developed this idea in 1932 through his paranoic-critical interpretation of Jean-François Millet's painting *L'Angélus* (1857-1859) (fig. 29).[90] The painting depicts a peasant couple who have paused from work, laying aside their pitchfork and wheelbarrow, to pray at the sound of the Angelus bells. In *Le Mythe tragique de l'Angélus de Millet* (1963), Dalí interpreted the wheelbarrow as a symbol of feminine body.[91] As such, he noted that the wheelbarrow's erotic character is among the most indisputable ones, as its shape suggests a sexual pose "that reveals the highest degree of animality and atavism."[92] Noting that the utilization of the wheelbarrow suggests the act of coitus, Dalí wrote,

> One should not neglect to note, in this regard, the full analogy that might be drawn with the very marked and obvious fetishistic fixation of the Postman Cheval on his wheelbarrow. He composes this verse on the subject (it is the wheelbarrow that speaks):
>> "Now that his work is done
>> Peacefully enjoys he the fruits of his labor
>> At his abode where I his humble friend
>> Occupy a place of honor."

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[90] Developed in 1929, Dalí's paranoic-critical theory is derived from his study of the psychology of paranoia. Dalí used the term to refer to the manifestation of irrational thought. See Dalí, "The Rotting Donkey," in Finkelstein, 223-226.

[91] The wheelbarrow re-appears throughout Dalí's oeuvre, as evidenced by works such as *Portrait of Gala*, 1935, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and *The Wheelbarrow (Pantheon Formed by Twisted Wheelbarrows)*, 1951, at the Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida. In the 1960s, Dalí developed a screenplay for an unrealized film titled *The Flesh Wheelbarrow*.

[92] Dalí, "The Tragic Myth of Millet's *L'Angelus: A Paranoic-Critical Interpretation*,"(1963) in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, ed. and trans. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 295.

Indeed, this wheelbarrow once again occupies a select place in the "Ideal Palace," a delirious creation whose eminently regressive and libidinal character cannot go unnoticed.[93]

Oscar Dominguez's upholstered wheelbarrow, titled *Fauteuil* (1937) (fig. 30), also suggests the perception of the wheelbarrow as a fetish. Man Ray's photograph of Dominguez's wheelbarrow, holding a reclining female, emphasizes the sexual dimension of the object and by extension the erotic identity of the *Facteur*.

Implicit here is the transformation of work from arduous manual labor into creative pleasure. Believing the glorification of work to be a Western bourgeois ideal, thus counterrevolutionary, the surrealists rejected the Communists' belief in the virtue of manual labor and declared a "war on work."[94] In 1929, despite being a Communist Party member himself, surrealist André Thirion wrote the essay "A Bas le travail!" (Down with Work!). Arguing that work is slavery, he wrote, "Go see for yourself, good little bourgeois. Go sit for a few hours beside the worker who spends his days drilling holes in identical plaques of metal. Or go to the printers and watch the motion of the rotary presses. You'll come out eyes blinking and hands trembling, signs of precocious senility."[95]

As an anecdote to the effects of work on the individual, the surrealists promoted the re-conception of work into erotic pleasure. The concept was noted by Freud, who remarked that an individual may achieve personal satisfaction by directing libidinous energy towards work. He wrote, "The possibility [work] offers of displacing a large amount of libidinal components, whether narcissistic, aggressive or even erotic, on to professional work and on to the human relations connected with it lends it a value by no

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[93] Dalí, "The Tragic Myth of Millet's *L'Angelus: A Paranoic-Critical Interpretation*," in Finkelstein, 296.

[94] The phrase "*Et Guerre au travail*" appears on the cover of *La Révolution surréaliste*, 4 (15 July 1925).

[95] André Thirion, "A Bas le travail!" *Varietés: numéro hors series: Le Surréalisme en 1929*, (June 1929): 41-47.

means second to what it enjoys as something indispensable to the preservation and justification of existence in society."[96]

For the surrealists, Cheval's transformation of postal work from monotonous labor into an erotic experience, which resulted in creative expression, evidenced the belief that poetic desire is the motivating force to true liberation. As such, the postman Cheval served as a model of the liberated worker.

The story of Cheval, in particular his chance discovery of a rock as the impetus for the materialization of a dream and his subsequent transformation of a stone into this marvelous edifice, resonated with the surrealists. They detected parallels between Cheval's story and their own collecting pursuits, as well as their interests in dreams and the transformative power of the imagination.

Beginning in the late 1920s, the surrealists began to collect useless and random natural objects, such as unusual fossils, pieces of wood, and curiously-shaped stones, which they often exhibited individually, or in combination, as art objects. After returning from holiday in Egypt late that decade, Penrose and his wife brought Ernst an unusual stone discovered in the Sahara. The gift was intended to represent the "Philosopher's Stone," as Ernst was a leading figure in the surrealists' growing fascination with alchemy.[97] Titled *Found Object*, the stone was exhibited as a joint ready-made at the Galerie Villon in 1929.[98] Later, while on vacation in Switzerland during the summer of 1934, Ernst discovered a streambed filled with egg-shaped river rocks, on the surface of which he carved embryonic bird forms.[99] These egg-like rocks recall the "Philosophic Egg," a round, transparent vessel or retort used for the transformation of matter during the alchemical process.[100]

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[96] Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," (1930) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), 80, n. 1.

[97] M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 130.

[98] Sarah Wilson, "Max Ernst and England" in *Max Ernst* (London: Tate Gallery, 1991), 371 n. 7.

[99] See Bill Max's photographs of Max Ernst's *Mysterious Egg* in Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 131.

[100] Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 130. Salvador Dalí also perceived rocks as objects of

Through the postal system, a rock could also be transformed into a letter. British surrealist Len Lye also collected stones while combing the beach for oddities. While he kept some for inspiration for his collages and outdoor constructions, he also delighted in sharing his discoveries. According to biographer Roger Horrocks, "Lye discovered there was nothing to stop him from sending his favorite stones to his friends as letters. Friends would receive letters that consisted simply of an interesting rock bearing a stamp and their address in Lye's handwriting."[101]

Discovered by chance, these found objects, or *trouvailles,* are mute, holding unformed meaning and provoking the imagination. The surrealists perceived the stones to be imbued with an innate potential to become something else, fulfill a wish, a desire, or some intrinsic interest. As Breton explains in "Crisis of the Object" (1936),

> *One will discover more in reality concealed within the entity than in the immediate data surrounding it.* Such a statement justifies brilliantly the surrealist aim of bringing about *a total revolution of the object* through various measures, including: diverting the object from its destination and attaching a new label to it and signing it, thus reclassifying it by exercise of choice (Duchamp's "readymades"); showing [a rock] in whatever state external forces such as earthquake, fire, or water may have left it; retaining it just because of the ambiguity resulting from its totally or partially irrational conditioning by the elements, entailing its dignification through chance discovery (the "found object") and ambiguity, which is sometimes amenable to extremely bold interpretations (Max Ernst's "interpreted found objects"); and, finally, creating it from nothing by bringing together disparate elements selected arbitrarily from the immediate data (the surrealist object, properly so called).[Italics in original.] [102]

The surrealists' affinity for rock collecting and their belief in the power of the imagination to transform natural matter coincided with their interest in alchemical practice. The surrealists' association of stones with alchemy follows logically from the origins of this pseudoscience.

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transformation. Rock collecting along a beach in 1934, Dalí made a game of arranging and stacking stones according to their contours until they appeared to morph into human silhouettes. Salvador Dalí, "The Tragic Myth of Millet's *L'Angélus*: Paranoic-Critical Interpretation," in Finkelstein, 284.

[101] Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland Univ. Press, 2001), 117.

[102] André Breton, "Crisis of the Object," in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (London: Macdonald and Company Pub. Ltd, 1972), 280.

The history of alchemy is rooted in the ancient Egyptian lore of Hermes Trismegistus. The legend of Hermes is derived from the syncretism of the Egyptian god Thoth, scribe for the gods and god of alchemy, and the classical god Hermes/Mercury. In ancient Greece, the god Hermes had multiple roles. His name is from the Greek word *herma*, which refers to a "stone-heap" or "he of the stone-heap."[103] In ancient times, stone-heaps (or stone pillars) marked the boundaries of known space. In this respect, Hermes is the god of the crossroads. He defines space, marking horizontal as well as vertical dimensions of existence. Indeed, beyond his markers lay the unknown, the dangerous, and, metaphorically, using Freud's terms, the uncanny and the subconscious.

Homer's "Odyssey" identifies Hermes as the messenger of the gods and the guide to the underworld. He connects the living with the spirits of the dead, the realm of death, and its gods. Thus associated with the underworld or night world, Hermes is akin to the spirit of night itself. Homeric hymns identify Hermes as the god of sleep who delivers messages or dreams to mortals.[104] In the modern era, through his identity as the wing-footed messenger, he is also the patron god of postal workers. His image appears on postage stamps, such as the "red mercury" stamp of Austria, first issued in 1856, the so-called "large Hermes head" stamp of Greece, issued in 1861, and French stamps issued in 1876 and 1938. His winged Helmet also appeared on the "Helmet of Mercury" special delivery stamp in the U.S. in 1908.

Since the Renaissance era, Hermes Trismegistus, author of the legendary *Emerald Tablet*, has served as the sage of alchemists.[105] Produced in Egypt over course of several centuries, the *Emerald Tablet* held the secrets of alchemy. Its enigmatic language and codified imagery was compiled in Egyptian philosophic writings and passed down to Medieval and Renaissance authors who incorporated Christian symbols to obscure the

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[103] Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion* (New York: Thames & Hudson 1954), 104-124.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Englishman and hermetic practitioner, John Wilkins, in *Mercury: or the Secret and the Swift Messenger* (1707), introduced methods of cryptology, or secret writing, for the relay of private ideas. John Wilkins, *Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger: Shewing how a Man may with Privacy and Speed communicate his Thoughts to a Friend at any distance*, 3d ed. (1641; London, 1707).

operations of the work. Alchemy's origins are rooted in Egyptian beliefs in the afterlife and in the classical pursuit of cosmic unity. Here the microcosmic and macrocosmic are held in continuum through the balance of opposing energies, such as male and female, night and day. Seven planets and their corresponding metals preside over this balance. Their relationship was: gold–Sun; silver–Moon; mercury–Mercury; copper–Venus; iron–Mars; tin–Jupiter; lead–Saturn. The balance between planets and metals determined human temperament.

Alchemy is generally known as an archaic science practiced by charlatans concerned with the transmutation of lead into gold. The true philosophical goal of alchemy is to uncover the secrets of hermetics in order to achieve self-discovery and mystical enlightenment. Alchemical practice involves a multi-stage process in which an adept gathers Primal Matter, a mysterious substance from the earth. Hermetic illustrations depict Primal Matter as being comprised of two opposing male and female principles, Philosophic Sulfur and Philosophic Mercury. The matter must be separated and refined before being joined by Salt. The process of reunification is often described as a chemical wedding in which the Philosophic Sulfur, symbolized as the King or sun, and Philosophic Mercury, symbolized as the Queen or moon, are joined in an alembic vessel or "Philosophic egg" by the catalytic salt, represented as the god Mercury. Their union results in the philosopher's stone.

Alchemical practice experienced a revival in the nineteenth century as part of a broader revival of interest in the occult, including Rosicrucianism, astrology, spiritualism, and the tarot. Alchemy's resurrection stemmed from the perceived need to find an alternative to the rationalism and the materialism of daily life. In response, various intellectual circles, such as Joséphin Péladen's Rosicrucian salons in the 1890s, formed to discuss alchemical studies and practice.[106] Also, the Paris bookshop La Libraire de L'Art Indépendant hosted discussions on hermetics. Among the attendees were various artists and writers, such as Arthur Rimbaud, Odilion Redon, and Stéphane Mallarmé, who sought to introduce hermetic themes and symbols into their works.[107]

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[106] Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (New York: Garland, 1976).

[107] John Senior, *The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell

In interwar Paris, the publication of a variety of new alchemical texts, in particular Fulcanelli's *Le Mystère des cathedrals et l'interprétation ésotérique des symbols hermétiques du Grand-Oeuvres* (1926) and *Les Demeures philosopales* (1930), and E.A. Grillot de Givry's *Le Musée des sorciers, mages et alchimistes* (1929), amplified interest in the occult and alchemy. These illustrated texts attracted interest from a new generation of artists and writers, sparking new discussions and insights into alchemical practice. Further, they provided initiates with visual representations of the principles and operations of the work.

The surrealist interest in alchemy is part of a broader interest in hermetics and the occult. In the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929) Breton officially called for "the profound, the veritable occultation of Surrealism."[108] To this end, he prescribed investigations into the discredited sciences of astrology, metaphysics, cryptography, and alchemy. The surrealists were inspired by texts that drew parallels between alchemy and psychology, such as *Probleme der Mystik und Ihrer Symbolik* (1914) by Herbert Silberer, and, later, *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944) by Carl Jung.[109] According to Silberer's psychoanalytic interpretation of alchemy, introversion is the first phase of the process. In an act akin to gathering primal matter, the individual must face and conquer the demons of childhood. Following Freud's oedipal theory, Silberer identified the parents as the cause of childhood trauma. This parallels the destruction of the male and female principles of alchemical work. Once the trauma has been overcome, the individual achieves a new unification in which the male and female principles are fused into a single unified being, the alchemical androgyne.

The surrealists used alchemical practice as a pathway to self-realization and a means to liberate the human mind, but also a method of revolution whereby matter is

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Univ. Press, 1959).

[108] André Breton, "The Second Manifesto of Surrealism," (1930) in André Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1969), 178.

[109] For discussion concerning Ernst's and the surrealists' engagement with Silberer's and Jung's writings see Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 44, 229 n65, 233 n50, 247 n66. For additional discussion of Ernst's enlistment of Silberer's text see David Hopkins, "Max Ernst's *La Toilette de la mariée," Burlington Magazine* 133(April 1991): 238; and David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 55-56.

transformed into poetic knowledge. According to Breton, "The surrealists' investigations present a remarkable analogy of goal with those of the alchemists: the Philosopher's Stone is nothing other than that which enables man's imagination to take a stunning revenge on all things, which brings us here, after centuries of the mind's domestication and insane resignation, to the attempt to liberate once and for all this imagination."[110]

Just as alchemists guarded their secrets, Breton directed surrealist initiates to conduct their experiments in private and cloak activities in the everyday. Activities such as rock collecting disguised experiments intended to access the deepest recesses of the unconscious mind and bring forth poetic desire.[111] They also performed parlor games, such as séances, *cadavres exquis*, and tarot readings as hermetic research.[112] In the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930), Breton specifically refers to "envelope reading," the clairvoyant game of "reading" the contents of an opaque envelope as a means of tapping into the unconscious.[113] Spurred on by the new hermetic direction of the group, a few surrealists also began to fold traditional signs and symbols into their works.[114] For example, as M.E. Warlick has argued in *Max Ernst and Alchemy* (2001), Ernst, in particular, regularly fused alchemical imagery into his works. In *Men Shall Know Nothing of This* (1923) (fig. 31), Ernst incorporated the sun and the moon as symbols of masculine and feminine principles, while in *Men Shall Never Know It* (1921) (fig. 32), the fusion of two birds suggests the conjunction phases of alchemical work. Ernst adopted the bird as his alter ego and often incorporated birds into his work as symbols of alchemical transformation.[115]

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[110] Breton, "The Second Manifesto of Surrealism," 174.

[111] Breton, "Entrée des médiums," *Littérature*, no. 6 (November 1, 1922): 1-16.

[112] The game *cadavre exquis* is a drawing or word game in which players pass around a folded sheet of paper so that players cannot see what previous players put on the paper. Each participant contributes a drawing or word.

[113] Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," 178.

[114] For texts that focus on the surrealists' exploration of the occult and alchemy, see Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*; and Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult in Modern Art* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004).

[115] Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 54 and 72-75.

In their quest for hermetic knowledge, the surrealists also embarked on alchemical tours through the streets of Paris. Wandering through the former haunts of legendary adepts, they searched cemeteries, architecture, and sculpture for symbols related to the alchemical arts.[116] According to texts by de Givry and Fucanelli, cathedrals such as Notre Dame, Amiens, and Saint-Merri served as secret textbooks of hermetic knowledge. Drawing from de Givry and Fulcanelli, Robert Desnos described an alchemical tour through the Les Halles district in his article "Le Mystére d'Abraham Juif" (1929).[117] Featuring reproductions of manuscripts by the famed Paris alchemist Nicolas Flamel, the article instructed followers to scan the sculptural programs of medieval churches. Here initiates would find, hidden among Christian iconography, symbols related to the alchemical process, such as dragons, snakes, birds, and lions.

Indeed, to these initiates of the alchemical arts, the *Palais Idéal's* athanor-like tower and menagerie of sculpted lions, dragons, birds, swans, and snakes immediately recalled the signs, symbols, and phases of the alchemical process. In the poem "Facteur Cheval" (1932), Breton described how the winding staircase of the *Palais* "turns itself inside out as though it were going to bite itself," an obvious reference to the circular, tail-swallowing body of the dragon or serpent Ouroborus, a symbol of unity or infinity, and, in alchemy, the union of opposites and immortality. The *Palais* is, as Breton later wrote, "constructed in a space where what is presumed to be 'behind' communicates with what is presumed to 'in front' and what is presumed to be 'above' communicates with what is presumed to be 'below' so closely that they form a unity in which no shadow is ever cast." [118] He derives his description on the celebrated aphorism of hermetic philosophy,

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[116] For a discussion concerning the surrealists' alchemical tours of Paris, see Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 94-100.

[117] Robert Desnos, "Le Mystère d'Abraham Juif" *Documents* 5 (1929): 233-239.

[118] André Breton, "Joseph Crespin," (1954) in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald and Co., 1965), 307. For Breton, the shadow represents the unconscious. In 1922, when breaking with dada, he noted in "Lâchey tout," (1922) that one should leave behind substance for shadow. Later, in his poem "The Forest in the Axe," (1931) he not only mentions splitting rocks, but he talks about his missing shadow, which symbolizes that he has found an end to dualism, and has become one. By noting the lack of shadow at the *Palais*, Breton seems to suggest that the Palais represents the fully integrated psyche. For Carl Jung, the shadow is that which is repressed and that which is most dark in the unconscious. But, when the

"As above, so below." The axiom is from *The Emerald Tablet*, which states, "That which is below is like that which is on high, and that which on high is like that which is below; by these things are made the miracles of the one thing."[119] This refers to the principles of correspondence in which the body, mind, and spirit intersect. In the alchemical arts, this unification is represented by overlapping triangles, forming a six-pointed star. For Breton, the *Palais Idéal* represents the culmination of the work—the Philosopher's Stone.

Indeed, Cheval's transformation of stone into a fantastic edifice parallels the materials and operations of alchemical practice.[120] This is suggested in Valentine Hugo's painting *Facteur Cheval* (c. 1931-33) (fig. 33).[121] Here she presents a portrait of the uniformed postman next to an alchemical vision. Cheval, represented as if in a trance-like state of introversion, appears as the catalytic salt or the god Mercury who officiates over the process. To the left of Cheval's image is a winding stone staircase that recalls that at the *Palais*. At its base lie the nude, languid bodies of a male and female symbolizing the King and Queen (Philosophic Sulfur and Philosophic Mercury), which appear at the beginning of alchemical process. On the stairs, three green, writhing serpents represent the destruction of the three principles of Primal Matter (salt, sulfur, and mercury). The

psyche is fully integrated, there is no shadow, as there is unity of the Ego and the Shadow. Jung, in his last major work, the *Mysterium Coniuntionis* (1956), directly tied the shadow to the ouroborous: "The ouroboros is a dramatic symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite, i.e. of the shadow. This 'feed-back' process is at the same time a symbol of immortality, since it is said of the ouroboros that he slays himself and brings himself to life, fertilises himself and gives birth to himself. He symbolises the One, who proceeds from the clash of opposites, and he therefore constitutes the secret of the *prima materia* which [...] unquestionably stems from man's unconscious." Carl Jung, *Collected Works* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), vol. 14, 513.

[119] Fulcanelli, *The Dwelling of the Philosophers*, (1914) ed. Jeffery Miller (Santa Monica: Archive Press and Communications, 1999).

[120] A loose association of Cheval with Hermes is first suggested by Marc Fenoli. He writes, "*Véritable travail d'alchimiste, avonsnous dit, qui vise en manipulant la matière à l'harmonie spirituelle. Si l'on songe que le dieu tutélaire du grande œuvre est Hermes, celui qui pote les messages des dieux, qui effectue leur liaison, le travail de Cheval prend dimension surhumaine.*" Fenoli, *Le Palais du Facteur Cheval*, 67.

[121] Created after Hugo's visit to the *Palais Idéal* with Breton in 1931, the painting was most likely inspired by Breton's poem "Facteur Cheval." For a discussion concerning Hugo's obsessive affection for Breton see, Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, 348-352, 367.

next phase of the work, the Albedo or purification phase, is suggested by the banister of white swan wings that spiral along the staircase. On the final steps, Hugo depicts three six-pointed stars followed by red blocks to indicate the balance and reunification of matter that results in the Philosopher's Stone.

Turning from Cheval's *Palais* and its alchemical associations, one must reconsider the role of postal media, in particular the envelope, in surrealist work. Coinciding with his projection of the hermetic principles onto Cheval's monument and his identification of him with alchemical practice, Breton began to ponder the symbolic identity of the envelope. In 1931, he introduced the *fantôme-envelope* in the essay "L'Objet Fantôme," in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Revolution*. The work is an excerpt from Breton's *Communicating Vessels* (1932), a text that demonstrates the interconnectedness of art, science, and alchemy by exploring the dialectical relay of thought between the interior and exterior or dream and waking states.[122] In "L'Objet Fantôme," Breton explained how the surrealist object emerges in a dream. He describes the "phantom envelope" as an empty white envelope with a red seal that surfaces from his unconscious (fig. 34).[123] In Breton's reproduction, one edge of the phantom envelope is lined with eyelashes (*cils*) and the opposite side features a handle (*anse*). Implicit is the envelope as a metaphor for erotic desires.[124] Breton described how these elements form

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[122] The title refers to a scientific apparatus that features two vessels joined by a tube through which a gas or liquid passes from one to another in a reciprocating equilibrium. In *Communicating Vessels*, Breton included a photograph of himself at the *Palais Idéal* taken by Valentine Hugo in 1931. Willard Bohn's text *Marvelous Encounters* (2005) examines Breton's poem "Le Facteur Cheval" in relation to Breton's discussion of the movement of thought between the dream and waking states in *Communicating Vessels*. Willard Bohn, *Marvelous Encounters: Surrealist Responses to Film, Art, Poetry, and Architecture* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2005), 72-81.

[123] The drawing first appeared as a *cadavre exquis* in *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1929). Breton's phantom envelope may be read as an alchemical metaphor. The white envelope is a symbol of the purification phase; the red seal refers to the alchemical union of female and male principles.

[124] The empty envelope suggests the repression of the unconscious. Indeed, Breton's "silent envelope" is mute. Jack J. Spector, in *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919-1939*, relates the envelope to the ending of Breton's passionate relationship with Suzanne Muzard. He writes, "The letter, which betrays his unfulfilled erotic desires, has no inscribed message and is not intended for delivery. Jack J. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919-1939: The Gold of Time* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 130.

the verbal pun "*cils-anse*" or "silence" envelope. Contemplating the mute and inchoate *fantôme-envelope*, he noted that the image visually suggests the form of an eye as well as a cup, both of which are established Freudian symbols of masculinity and femininity in surrealist art and literature.[125]

As the site for the unification of masculine and feminine principles, the envelope is a symbol of the alchemical vessel. The alembic vessel is also akin to the envelope as both are associated with the female body. Illustrations such as "Alchemical Vessels" from G. Phaneg's *Cinquante merveilles secrets d'alchimie* (1912) (fig. 35) established visual parallels between the female body and alchemical vessels. Max Ernst's illustration *The Cold Throats* (1923) (fig. 36) which features the headless body of a woman lying beside two alembic vessels, draws similar symbolic parallels between the body and the vessel.[126] In surrealist art and literature the feminine body functions as a symbol of desire or Eros and the unconscious, but also a symbol of transformation.[127] Dalí reiterated this notion in his text "The New Colors of Spectral Sex Appeal" (1934). Here he described the "phantom envelope" as a simulacrum of flesh that is embodied in the gelatinous representation of the female body.[128]

The surrealists also perceived the envelope as a receptacle for dreams and as a symbol for the relay of messages between the conscious and subconscious mind.[129] The

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[125] The cup, as a vessel, is commonly interpreted as a symbol of the female body. In his discussions concerning the oedipal complex, Freud identified the eye as a phallic object. As such, blindness symbolizes castration. Examples of surrealist works that incorporate these symbols are *Fur Lined Teacup* (1936) by Meret Oppenheim and the erotic novella *History of the Eye* (1928) by Georges Bataille.

[126]Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 81-82.

[127] The role of women in the surrealist movement as well as the *femme-enfant* theme is discussed in Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

[128] Salvador Dalí, "The New Colors of Spectral Sex Appeal," (1934) in Finkelstein, 203.

[129] The Freudian notion of the envelope as a receptacle for the unconscious is illustrated on the surrealist playing card *Freud, Magus of Dreams* (1940) by Oscar Domínguez, reproduced in Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 373. Here, a stylized image of Freud holds an envelope above a series of dream symbols, such as a gun, a key, and a ladder. Also the surrealist publication "Encyclopedia Da Costa" (1947) uses an envelope as reference to psychical truth, see Encyclopædia Da Costa, ed. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg, 1947. Reprint in *Encyclopædia*

surrealists identified the envelope as a vessel for the manifestation of unconscious or repressed desire. As such, the envelope functions as a sign of introversion and a signifier of alchemical transformation and the liberation of the soul. In this regard, a sealed envelope, analogous to a found rock, possesses a hidden meaning that awaits discovery in the imagination. Once realized, the envelope's secrets will spark poetic desire.

In *Du Verre* (1932), Ernst incorporated the envelope as a symbol of the unconscious. Here, an envelope imprinted with *Compagnie Parisienne De Distribution D'Electricite* displays an erotic photograph of a masked female. *Du Verre* was inspired by the first chapter of René Crevel's novel *Babylon* (1927). In it the red-haired cousin, Cynthia, condemned by her family as the whore of Babylon, is imagined as phosphorus, a hermetic symbol of spiritual illumination.[130] *Phosphoros* was also the ancient Greek name for the planet Venus. In his collage, Ernst included an envelope containing an erotic photograph of a scantily clad woman in the lower right corner. The envelope serves as the retort or vessel of alchemical transformation. The name Cynthia was one of the names of Artemic, goddess of the moon. In alchemy the moon represents Philosophic Mercury in its refined state. As a symbol of feminine perfection, the moon often accompanies the Queen. In the image, Ernst juxtaposed the photographic figure against a white, phosphorescent frottage of a classical nude, which recalls the goddess Venus. According to Matilda Battistini, in *Astrology, Magic, and Alchemy in Art* (2007), in Babylonian mythology "Venus was bisexual in nature: male in the morning and female in the evening."[131] This association of male and female principles recalls androgyny, a sign of transformation. As such the enveloped figure represents Cynthia's transformation and liberation from repressive social mores.

Acephalica, ed. George Bataille, trans. Iain White (Atlas Press: London, 1995), 153. Further, careful examination of Picasso's rebus card for the *Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series*, featured in chapter three, reveals a similar sealed envelope at the center of the drawing.

[130] In 1669 German alchemist Hennig Brand discovered phosphorus while attempting to create the philosopher's stone. He derived phosphorus from the distillation of salts by evaporating urine. The process produced a white material that emitted a faint chemiluminescent glow. John Emsley, *The 13th Element: The Sorid Tale of Murder, Fire, and Phosphorus* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 3-46.

[131] Matilde Battistini, *Astrology, Magic, and Alchemy in Art*, trans. Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 76.

Ernst also used the envelope as an alchemical metaphor in *Hommage a une enfant nommee Violette* (1933). Stamped as a registered letter, the worn paper envelope features a red wax seal and Ernst's address. In the center of the work, the schematic bird Loplop presents the placard "Love thy Parents." To the left, the outline of a young woman's body presents a piece of stationery that reads "Violette." Ernst dedicated the work to the Parisian schoolgirl Violette Nozieres, who was sentenced to death in 1933 for poisoning her parents. Using a rat infected with small pox from the Pasteur lab, Nozieres killed her father and permanently incapacitated her mother. During trial, Nozieres testified that she was motivated to murder her parents because she was sexually abused by her father. Proclaiming her to be an innocent victim, the surrealists heralded Nozieres as a heroine against bourgeois morality and repression.

In his collage, Ernst appears to parallel Violette's childhood trauma and crime with Silberer's hermetic theory of self-healing. Symbolically, the envelope signals the start of hermetic process in which the King and Queen must be destroyed. Ernst's sealed envelope refers to the repressed trauma of the child's rape, as suggested by its link to the missive "Love thy parents." In contrast to the closed envelope, the body of the young girl is rendered as an open letter whose text recalls "*il viol*" (the rape).

Returning at last to Ernst's object portrait *Le Facteur Cheval*, completed the same year as *Du Verre,* one sees the whole as a metaphor for mercurial transformation. In Ernst's portrayal of the postman, the torso of Cheval is dominated by three "buttons" that recall the costume of the clown, Pierrot, from the French *Commedia dell'Arte*.[132] Representing a deeply suffering character surrounded by pathos and mystery, Pierrot emerged an important figure in avant-garde art of the early twentieth century as artists such as Picasso, Max Beckmann, and André Derrain identified the character with their own feelings of suffering and alienation.[133]

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[132] I am very grateful to Dr. Karen A. Bearor for pointing out the connection between Pierrot, the fool, and Cheval.

[133] Martin Burgess Green and John Swann, *The Triumph of Pierrot: the Commedia dell'Arte and the Modern Imagination* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1993); and Jean Gerard and Clair Regnier, eds., *The Great Parade: Portrait of the Artist as Clown* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 2004).

By extension, Cheval is also associated with the Fool. The rich iconographical history of the Fool in art and literature identifies him as a witless innocent who, entitled to the special provenance of god, represents a soothsayer and truthteller.[134] The Fool, akin to Mercury, serves as a messenger between spiritual and earthly realms. The image of the Fool is also linked to the occult. Appearing in the tarot, the Fool card serves as a symbol of folly and the irrational (fig. 37). The surrealists may have detected parallels between the Cheval and the Fool through their experiences with the "Tarot of Marseilles," which depicts the Fool as an itinerant carrying a small sack, visually recalling the postal carrier.[135]

In *Le Facteur Cheval*, the "buttons" on Cheval's torso frame a woman's face and clothing. The sexual fusion of male and female imagery clearly associates the figure with androgyny and reinforces the postman's association with Mercurious, the catalyst of transformation. In the image, Ernst replaces Cheval's rock with an envelope. While the inclusion of the envelope refers to the profession of the postman, I assert that it is also a symbol of hermetic practice. Also, as signifier of postal relay, the envelope conceptually links together a sender and receiver, artist and viewer, in a psychical and physical reciprocating relationship that recalls the integration of opposites. Further, it is a means to reconcile the spirit with its embodied relation to the world, with themselves, and with each other again. As such, the envelope emerges as symbol of introversion and the liberation of repressed desire, as indicated by the exposed erotic photograph. To the left of the image of Cheval, a frottaged bird, a symbol of Ernst's alter ego, rises upwards, indicating the volatilization and purification of matter. Here, Cheval serves as the catalyst who aids Ernst in accessing his own subconscious.

As we have seen, the surrealists' discovery of Cheval and the hermetic gestures they imposed upon his work inspired their own discourses with postal media and relay.

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[134] Enid Welsford, *The Fool, His Social and Literary History* (London: Farber & Farber, Ltd, 1935).

[135] The surrealists' association of Cheval with Tarot is later evidenced at the "Surrealism in 1947" exhibition, held at the Galerie Maeght in Paris. Here the surrealists created a staircase with twenty-one steps recalling twenty-one major arcana of the tarot game. Each step was intended to represent the successive stages of initiation or illumination. The second step in the staircase was dedicated to the *facteur* Cheval. See footnote 198, p. 100.

As a messenger, the postman Cheval is a key figure in surrealist thought. Ernst's *Le Facteur Cheval* represents Cheval as a figure of transformation. He is at once Mercurius, who presided over communication between the unconscious and conscious mind, and the postman, transporter of poetic knowledge. He is also a representative of the proletariat. One of the largest civil employers, the postal service was a stronghold of ardent socialists and vehement supporters of left-wing French politics. Celebrating his discovery of desire in work, the surrealists perceived Cheval as an example of a truly liberated worker. Like the laboratory experimenters, the blacksmiths, the glassmakers, and other artisans who appear metaphorically as adepts in countless paintings devoted to alchemical endeavors, the humble Cheval, the postman and builder of the *Palais Idéal*, was both symbol and performer of the Great Work.[136]

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[136] For a discussion concerning the association of images of work with the Great Work see Battistini, *Astrology, Magic and Alchemy in Art*, 363-365.

CHAPTER THREE

POSTCARDS IN SERVICE OF THE REVOLUTION

In 1937, French surrealist Georges Hugnet, best known for his poetry, bookbinding, and collages, published *The Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series*, which featured photographic reproductions of twenty-one surrealist works. Each card features a photographic reproduction of a surrealist work printed in sepia on yellow, green, or white postcard stock. The series features examples of surrealist objects, paintings, and collages. These works represent a cross-section of surrealist interests, such as desire, dreams, transformation, and revolution.[137]

Developed in the late nineteenth century, postcards are ephemeral pieces of visual culture as well as open forms of mass communication and popular collectables. Often collected as souvenirs, postcards serve as mnemonic objects, recalling past experiences and encounters. In contrast, the publication and collection of contemporary artwork as a set of postcards was not a common occurrence. Only occasionally did galleries distribute cards featuring artwork and exhibition information as promotional material for upcoming shows, such as those created for the 1913 Armory exhibition in New York City or the Italian futurists' events in Milan.[138] In either case, as Susan Stewart argues in *On*

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[137] Later, in 1940, E.L.T. Mesens and the British surrealists organized a second series of postcards. The surrealists created a third set of postcards for the *Bôite Alerte* (1959) which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

[138] In addition to distributing over fifty thousand promotional postcards featuring the official Armory Show poster, the organizers for the exhibition also reproduced fifty-seven works of art as halftone postcards. According to Milton W. Brown, in *The Story of the Armory Show* (1988), "The 57 post cards for sale at the Show sold in thousands of copies and were a source of some artistic influence. To artists in other cities they were exciting messages of new discoveries, and for years people in remote areas had only these cards as a source of study. The 57 were equally divided among American and foreign artists, emphasizing the more radical tendencies." Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 93.

Longing (1984), the postcard miniaturizes a site, experience, or object into a personal experience.[139]

Nevertheless, the production of postcards featuring reproductions of artwork raises issues concerning authenticity. Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," noted, "The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition."[140] The publication of works of art as postcards results in what he described as a loss of "aura," that quality which emanates from the original. On the other hand, mass reproduction also liberates the work from the museum and transforms it into a democratic and accessible form.

With this in mind, this chapter examines *The Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series* and its position within the surrealist oeuvre. I argue that the series, as a collective statement, is a historically specific work that is informed by surrealism's negotiation between the institutional modernism of the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary avant-garde in the mid-1930s. This section examines the production of the cards in conjunction with the 1937 Paris Exposition internationale des arts et des techniques dans la vie modern. Despite their failed alliance with the PCF, the surrealists sought to maintain their identity as leaders of the revolutionary avant-garde. Reacting against the excessive nationalism of the exposition and the growing threat of fascism across Europe, the surrealists, as I will argue, created the postcard series as an alternative form of revolutionary action. In this context, I will also consider how the surrealists may have been inspired by Pablo Picasso's production of postcards for the Spanish pavilion. While engaging the movement's political concerns, the surrealist postcards also reflect their contemplation of issues of authenticity and of art's fate at the hand of reproduction.

A central theme is the artists' engagement with the postal system itself. In this regard, the international postal system serves as an alternative to conventional gallery space. Indeed, bypassing the gallery, the museum, and other exclusive arenas for art

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[139] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), 135-150.

[140] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Hary Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).

permitted the free exchange, display, and dissemination of art and ideas. I argue further that these works represented a tactical attempt to repackage surrealism as a popular art in order to confound expectations of fine art. As I will demonstrate, the surrealists' appropriation of the postcard medium intersected with their engagement of advertising media and lingo as a means to parody cultural standards.

Before turning to the historical circumstances in which the surrealist postcard series was produced, I will first examine in detail the surrealists' relationship with the postcards they avidly collected. Here I will focus on their perception of postcard medium; indeed, "the medium is the message." Cheap and crude in subject and material, the popular postcard defies inclusion in traditional categories of art; however, its status as non-art appealed to the surrealists' anti-art sensibilities. Believing in the power of eros as a means to liberate the individual, the surrealists were also attracted the postcard's lascivious associations. Further, the postcard's universality, its ability to transcend time, borders, and class, secured its avant-garde potential.

During the late 1920s the surrealists began to develop an interest in popular cards of the *belle époque*, and postcard collecting or cartophilia emerged as a shared activity. Around 1928, André Breton, René Char, Gala and Paul Éluard, Georges Sadoul, and Salvador Dalí began to scour markets and shops in cities and towns across France searching for cards. Found by chance, like the utensils, machine parts, broken bits of jewelry, and the other *trouvailles* that fascinated the surrealists, postcards were vended in the streets, kiosks, junk shops, and flea markets of Paris. In addition, they often pilfered old postcard albums, since these yielded large numbers of postcards. Éluard, a particularly enthusiastic collector, even salvaged a group of cards, "all very indecent and filthy," that he discovered papering the bedroom walls of an old home.[141] Occasionally, the surrealists took long weekend excursions to scour Paris' outlying communities for cards. They also picked them up while on holiday in Marseilles and Nice, and often shared or negotiated trades for prize discoveries. On one such occasion, after admiring

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[141] Paul Éluard, *Letters to Gala*, trans. Jesse Browner (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 100.

the collection of Sadoul, Éluard eagerly arranged to trade a painting by Dalí for two hundred prime postcards.[142]

Éluard and his colleagues sought cards of the *belle époque* for their imaginative and diverse themes. Avoiding straightforward homogeneous view cards, they preferred innovative pictures depicting the odd, eccentric, and fantastic, such as unexpected views, distorted images of popular monuments, rare and exotic flowers, provocative holiday cards, impassioned dramas, offbeat language, peculiar advertisements, costumed performers, commemoratives, and humorous spectacles.[143] Especially appealing were those featuring images of women, particularly those pictures steeped in sexual innuendo, lewd visual puns, and double entendres. Noting the surrealists' interest in risqué cards, contemporary French writer Jacques Bernard Brunius commented on the surrealists' discovery of vintage postcards and characterized their collecting activities as "intellectual obscenities."[144]

Erotic postcards were virtually synonymous with Paris, in particular its decaying Passage L'Opera.[145] Here, risqué cards were readily available in the bath houses, bookshops, strip joints, and philatelist's shops. With the demise of the Passage, these reclaimed cards were nostalgic souvenirs of the city's erotic character.[146] Dalí wrote, "I prophesy: from the documentary point of view, any postcard album whatsoever of the

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[142] Éluard, *Letters to Gala*, 99.

[143] Elizabeth B. Heuer, "Paul Éluard" in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity* (University Park, PSU Press, forthcoming).

[144] Brunius wrote, "*Attention. On vous parlera beaucoup de cartes, ces temps-ci. De quelques homes, c'est le métier de vulgariser sans cesse aussi bien les divertissements les plus secrets que les demarches et les fétichismes les plus confidentiels de l'esprit. Sous l'empire de cette obscénité intellectuelle, non content de se déculotter, ils tentent de déculotter autrui.*" Jacques Brunius, "La Carte Postale," *Variétés* 2, no. 1 (May 15, 1929): 53-54.

[145] Robin Walz, *Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 13-41.

[146] Paul Hammond, *French Undressing: Naughty Postcards from 1900-1920* (London: Bloomsbury Books, 1988).

streets and squares of Paris will have one day more value than all the literary descriptions that will be written by the best of writers."[147]

The postcard serves, as noted by Dalí, "as an exceptional document for the purposes of studying unconscious popular thought."[148] Indeed, the surrealists delighted in the puns and lewd symbolism associated with erotic cards.[149] The comparison of female breasts to various fruits was a common visual pun, while genital symbolism abounded. According to Paul Hammond, in *French Undressing: Naughty Postcards from 1900-1920*, "The postcard artist did not invent all the puns and double entendres he used, many of them existed already. Nevertheless, he brought them into the public domain."[150] "Indeed, just as Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis were developing their theories of sexual symbolism, postcard producers were appropriating these symbols and popularizing them into a myriad of visual clichés."[151] According to Dalí, the pornographic postcard is "the document that is most alive of modern popular thought, the thought whose profundity is often so acute as to take flight toward psychoanalysis."[152]

In his 1933 essay "Les plus belles cartes postales," for the modern art journal *Minotaure*, Éluard expounded on the postcard as a document in dialogue with popular unconscious thought, reflecting the unfettered imagination, the secret desires, and uninhibited fantasies of the masses.[153] In this three-page essay he offered a poetic survey of postcard collecting and featured over one hundred and twenty cards from his personal collection (fig. 38). "Negotiating a place for the postcard between modern art and the revolutionary avant-garde, Éluard cautioned against embracing the medium as merely a

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[147] Salvador Dalí, "Documental," (1929) in Finkelstein, 117.

[148] Dalí, "The Tragic Myth of Millet's *L'Angelus*: Paranoic-Critical Interpretation," (1963) in Finkelstein, 294.

[149] Sebastia Gasch, "L'estil targeta postal," *Mirador* (September 17, 1931): 7.

[150] Hammond, *French Undressing*, 98.

[151] Heuer, "Paul Éluard" in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*.

[152] Dalí, "The Moral Position of Surrealism," (1930) in Finkelstein, 221.

[153] Paul Éluard, "Les plus belles cartes postales," *Minotaure* no. 3-4 (Dec. 1933).

fetishistic or nostalgic thing-in-itself."[154] He encouraged artists to reconsider their perception of cards and recognize their potential. "Ordered by the exploiters to distract the exploited," he wrote, "postcards do not constitute a popular art. At most, they are the small change left over from art and poetry. But this small change sometimes suggests an idea of gold."[155]

Captivated by cards, the surrealists amassed extensive collections; unfortunately, most of these have been dismantled over the years. Only Éluard's albums survive as evidence of their efforts.[156]

> He assembled and pasted a selection of cards into a series of seven albums. Typically, the album format allowed collectors to creatively organize, embellish, and caption pictures to create personal narratives [figs. 39 and 40]. In general, each page features six cards hand-tipped and pasted onto paper album leaves and organized in either horizontal or vertical arrangements. Affixing the correspondence side of the card to the page, Éluard presented the viewer with single- and double-page compositions. The jumble and range of postmarks indicates that the albums are not organized according to chronological order. Instead, they are designed around images of the feminine figure. . . . Interspersed among these representations of women is a disparate mix of other subjects, such as flowers, locomotives, ships, holiday themes, and religious motifs. The arrangements are not arbitrary. Rather, formal elements, such as scale of objects, perspective, pose of figures, gestures, symbolism, gazes, featured texts, and colors are carefully orchestrated to create the visual equivalent of poetic syntax. . . . Echoing the visual paradoxes of dreams, these shifting and disjointed montages form collage-poems about passionate love, seduction, betrayal, desire, abandonment, and reconciliation.[157]

Éluard annotated at least one of his "poem-albums," noting, "I write on all the particularly Erotic pages of my albums."[158]

Éluard's albums were an important source of poetic inspiration. His compulsion to collect and arrange cards coincided with his creation of the collection of love poems

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[154] Heuer, "Paul Éluard" in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*.

[155] Éluard, "Les plus belles cartes postales," 86.

[156] Most recently, Breton's collection was divided and sold off in the sale of his archive in 2004. The location of Dalí's and Gala's postcard collection is presently unknown. Four albums from Éluard's collection are currently held by the Musée de la Poste, Paris, France. Three additional albums are in private collections.

[157] Heuer, "Paul Éluard" in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*.

[158] Éluard, *Letters to Gala*, 118.

titled *La vie immediate* (1932).[159] Éluard's collection served as important resource for members of the surrealist circle. Max Ernst borrowed embossed postcards from the albums to develop his frottage technique.[160] The albums were also a catalyst for Roland Penrose's postcard collages. Vacationing with Éluard during the summer of 1937, Penrose created collages by organizing cards into repetitive patterns that appear to transform into new forms. He noted, "I came across a series of brightly colored picture postcards of the sea, coast, rocks, towers, gardens, etc. It occurred to me that by mere repetition of the same image a strange transformation took place—a new personality was born—one reality lost itself in another—an avenue of trees became the hair of the girl, a row of large flower pots became a backbone."[161]

Indeed, vintage postcards served as raw material in the surrealists' aesthetic experiments. Further, the postcard's mass appeal and its ability to communicate sublimated thought made it a valuable weapon in the surrealists' moral revolution. What, then, was the impetus in their shift from arranging and pasting cards into works of art to reproducing their own artwork as postcards? To understand this change I will first consider the shifting cultural and political position of the surrealists in the mid-1930s. Negotiating a space between art and politics, the surrealists developed *The Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series* as an alternative form of revolutionary art. Developed as a reaction against the 1937 Paris world's fair, the cards challenge the promotion of nationalism as well as cultural conventions.

During the late 1920s, the surrealists developed a revolutionary consciousness and worked to secure their position as leaders of the revolutionary avant-garde.[162] As radical intellectuals, the surrealists sought to move from a revolution of the mind to political action. To this end, they situated themselves alongside the *Parti Communiste*

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[159] José Pierre, "La carte postale matériau du poeme visible" in *Regards trés particuliers sur la carte postale,* ed. Nadine Comber (Paris: L'Musée de La Poste, 1992).

[160] Warner Spies, *Max Ernst Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person* (New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1983).

[161] Roland Penrose, transcript of lecture delivered at an unspecified location in 1938, Penrose Archive, Deans Gallery Scottish Museum of Modern Art, GMA.A35.RPA.642.

[162] Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988).

Français (PCF), a group that the surrealists perceived as an organized system capable of bringing about the greatest social upheaval.[163] The surrealists believed an alignment with the PCF would facilitate their break from the intellectual bourgeoisie and legitimize their revolutionary activities against Western cultural tradition.

As a result of the growing threat of fascism across Europe in the mid-1930s, the PCF united with other Leftist parties, such as the socialist *Section française de I'Internationale ouvrière* (SFIO), the Parti Radical, and other antifascist organizations, to form the Popular Front. As a result of this alliance, the PCF shifted to a more moderate political position. Reversing its "class against class" strategy, the PCF focused on defending French national values and bourgeois cultural tradition against the threat of fascism. For artists and writers associated with the PCF, this shift in policy generally resulted in a movement away from modern abstraction and expressionism towards socialist realism. The surrealists did not follow this moderating trend, however. Nor did they move toward socialist realism.

In this regard, the surrealists' association with the PCF proved to be a difficult and ill-fated relationship, as the PCF increasingly began to intervene in cultural productions, calling for the unification of art and life through the creation of socially conscious art from within the party. In August 1934, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, the Communist Party officially adopted socialist realism and insisted on aesthetic orthodoxy. Further, in June 1935, at the meeting of the Congrès International des Ecrivains pour la Défense de la Culture, leftist intellectuals formed an alliance with the middle classes in the fight against fascism. Later that year, unwilling to surrender the specificity of surrealism and opposing the production of proletariat art as well as the idea of a broad-based "defense of culture," which they perceived to be a contradictory and unsustainable situation, the surrealists officially broke from the PCF.[164]

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[163] André Breton, "Léon Trotsky: Lenine," *Révolution surréaliste*, 5 (October 1925): 29.

[164] The debates concerning art and politics created deep divisions within the surrealist group, most notably between Éluard and Breton. While Breton maintained his political orthodoxy by aligning with Leon Trotsky, Éluard would later realign with the Communist Party in 1937. Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism*, 140-153.

Subsequently, Breton and his colleagues operated independently, developing an alternative concept of revolutionary art that left room for the poetics of interpretation. The surrealists promoted their beliefs in modernist art periodicals such as *Cahiers d'art* and *Minotaure*. They also focused on the production of artwork whose meanings were believed to be discovered in the unconscious, such as Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* (1921) (fig. 41), Dalí's *Veston aphrodisiaque* (1936), Oppenheim's *My Governess* (1937) (fig. 42), and Breton's *Poem-Object* (1934) (fig. 43).

Emphasizing the transformation of culture rather than its defense, the surrealists mounted two international exhibitions in 1936, the Exposition surréaliste d'objets at the gallery of Charles Ratton, in Paris in May, and the International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries, in London in June and July.[165] Despite their revolutionary intentions, the surrealists' works failed to communicate the artists' engagement with current social and political causes. Further, their association with elitist periodicals and *haute* galleries undercut their desire to reach the masses or the Left and threatened their self-perceived status as leaders of the revolutionary avant-garde. Critics charged their exhibitions as being meaningless and filled with relics of outworn romanticism. Guy Crouzet, reviewing the Exposition surréaliste d'objets for the Popular Front weekly *Vendredi*, dismissed the surrealists' works as non-art and over-serious expressions that could be understood and appreciated only by a bourgeois audience.[166] Press reaction to the London exhibition, which featured a small contingent of French artists, was equally harsh as critics dismissed the surrealists' works as pointless and out of touch with reality.[167]

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[165] For a discussion concerning the organization of the London exhibition by members of the French and British surrealists see Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 73-100.

[166] In the Popular Front weekly *Vendredi*, Guy Crouzet wrote, "All these objects brushed by the angel of the Bizarre, all these disturbing assemblies of line and volumes, I well understand they speak to us the language of dreams….But their chorus can no longer be heard. And we are at nothing more than a flea market of the by-products of the imagination." Quoted in Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 220.

[167] For reviews of the International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries see, "Surrealism, Or not so Realism," *Sunday Dispatch*, June 7, 1936; "Surrealist Art is Clumsy as Well as Meaningless," *Evening News*, June 12, 1936; and "Here are the Marx Brothers of Art," *Daily Herald*, June 12, 1936.

Following the close of the London exhibition on July 4, with the Moscow Trials (August) and Spanish Civil War (beginning in mid-July) underway, the surrealists entered into a period of moral crisis. Their support for the Spanish Republic and fears over the growing threat of fascism in Europe forced tactical re-alignment with the PCF. In this regard, the surrealists, in particular Éluard and Hugnet, reconsidered the problematic relationship between art and politics. At issue was the role of surrealism in the struggle against fascism, and the form that commitment would assume. In particular, to what extent could their works be made accessible to the masses? And what of the institutions in which art is produced and displayed?

The upcoming Paris Exposition internationale des arts et des techniques dans la vie modern, scheduled to open in May 1937, presented an opportunity for the surrealists to renegotiate their position between art and politics.[168] Conceived as the follow-up to Paris' Exposition des arts decoratifs modernes of 1925, the 1937 world's fair was largely sponsored and organized by the new Popular Front government. Given the precarious state of the nation, the mission of the fair was centered on economic recovery and commercial consumerism. This economic objective was reflective of an overarching focus on national unity.

General Commissioner Edmond Labbé envisioned the fair as a commercial endeavor of mutual reliance between the worker and consumer classes.[169] Here the unemployed would be put to work building the fair while artisans produced additional souvenirs and goods for the thirty-four million French and foreign consumers whose dollars would bring the nation a renewed financial vitality.

The display of arts and culture was a key concern of exposition planners, who sought to take art production out of the hands of a privileged few and give it over to every citizen. Bypassing the elite easel painting of modernism, fair organizers originally planned decorative arts and public murals as the focus of the fair's artistic display. This provided an opportunity to offer employment to nearly two thousand artists who were

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[168] James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998), 123-160.

[169] Herbert, *Paris 1937*, 29.

charged with decorative painting, including the creation the seven hundred and eighteen murals.[170]

In late 1936, as the Popular Front government sought to defend and preserve national culture, socialist Prime Minister Léon Blum personally championed a major retrospective of France's artistic heritage. Housed at the Palais de Tokyo, the exhibition Chefs-d'Oeuvre de l'art Francais featured thirteen hundred works spanning over two thousand years. Arranged chronologically, from Gallo-Roman to post-impressionism, the display was intended to serve as cohesive image of national unification.

The municipal exhibit titled Les Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant was held at the Petit Palais. Planned as a celebration of Paris and Modernism, it featured fifteen hundred works from 1895 to 1937 by twelve hundred artists. Municipal curator, Raymond Escholar, conceived the show as a contrast to the tired academicism displayed at other venues. Escholar's promotion of modern art was intended to posit Paris as the leader in modern art. [171]

The Paris fair offered an opportunity for the surrealists to align with the Popular Front government as well as showcase their art to the working classes. Ultimately, however, surrealism was essentially excluded from both the Chefs-d'Oeuvre de l'art Francais and Les Maîtres de l'Art Indépendant exhibitions.[172] As a consequence, the

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[170] Arthur Chandler, "Confrontation—Paris Exposition internationale des arts et des techniques dans la vie modern, 1937," *World's Fair Magazine*, vol. VIII, no. 1, (1988): 9-14.

[171] See Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*; and Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and the Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2001).

[172] Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, 83-121. The exclusion of contemporary art from the official exhibition at the world's fair was later acknowledged with a small consolatory display titled The Origins and Development of International Independent Art, held on the second floor at a the Musée du Jeu de Paume. While not officially a part of the fair, the space was lent by the French government. Opening on July 26, the exhibit featured one hundred and seventy-seven works of contemporary art, including works by Miró, Dalí, Ernst, Tanguy, Man Ray, Arp, Magritte, Penrose, and Hayter. In response to their exclusion from the Paris pavilion, the surrealists wrote an open letter of protest in August 1937 to Georges Huisman, the fair official in charge of fine arts administration. According to Herbert, the letter protested what the surrealists saw as a false, parochial view of contemporary international art. In an act of seeming appeasement, the surrealists were subsequently offered a venue at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in late fall of 1937. Here, after the closing of the official fair, they independently mounted the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, which opened in January 1938.

surrealists developed an alternative means to participate in the fair. By appropriating the postcard medium, the surrealists would not only repackage surrealist artwork for the masses, but also protest what they perceived as the fair's institutionalism and excessive nationalism.[173]

Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's production of postcards for the fair as a way to raise money for the Republic may have inspired the surrealists to publish their own postcard series as a method of revolutionary action. In the mid-1930s, Picasso emerged as an influential associate of the surrealist group. At this time, Éluard, in particular, began to collaborate with Picasso on several projects. Although Picasso and Éluard had been acquaintances since the late 1920s, it was not until 1936 that they forged a friendship. In January, Éluard traveled to Barcelona and Madrid to lecture in an exhibition of Picasso's work. In the summer of that year, Picasso collaborated with Éluard on several etchings and illustrations for Éluard's poem "Grand Air" (1936).

In late summer, Éluard and his new wife, Nusch, Dora Maar, Roland Penrose and his wife, Valentine, René Char, and Christian Zervos, editor of *Cahiers d'Art*, were invited by Picasso to join him at Hotel Vaste Horizon in Mougins, a hillside village located just north of Cannes. Picasso, whose own political consciousness was ignited that summer, was an important political catalyst for the surrealists. Following the news coming out of Spain and the political climate of Europe, the group re-addressed the role of the revolutionary artist and discussed ways in which to intervene by violent or subtle subversion.[174] As a result, Penrose and Zervos traveled to Spain to assist the Republic office of propaganda. Also, members of the British surrealists organized an exhibition of Republican political posters at White Chapel Gallery to raise money for the cause.[175] Breaking with Breton's prohibition of poems triggered by specific events, Éluard wrote

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[173] Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, 124.

[174] Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (London: Ashgate Pub., 1999), 101-111.

[175] According to Remy, "In Britain, a campaign in support of the Republican cause was launched, mostly centered on exhibitions. In September 1936 an exhibition of Felicia Browne's works helped to collect £260 for the Spanish Medical Aid Committee; in December 1936 'Artists Help Spain,' with participation of Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Moholy-Nagy, Pissaro, raised funds for a field kitchen for the International Column." Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 109.

his first political poem. Inspired by the November 7 aerial bombings over Madrid, he published "November 1936" in the communist party daily newspaper, *Humanité,* on December 17. In a letter to his ex-wife, Gala, he wrote, "It is the first time one of my poems has had a printing of 450,000. I wonder what Breton thinks of it. I don't see what's against collaborating with *Humanité*, read by workers rather than NFR [*La Nouvelle Revue Française*], or some other publication that is read exclusively by the bourgeoisie, provided, of course, that I don't change my poetry."[176]

During the first week of January 1937, Éluard collaborated on "At the Weight of Blood" for *Cahiers d'Art* with Spanish poet Jose Bergamín, who had recently returned from Spain.[177] According to Picasso biographer Pierre Daix, this, in turn, inspired Picasso's *Sueño y Mentira de Franco* (The Dream and Lie of Franco) (1937). Written on January 8, 1937, "The Dream and Lie of Franco" is a long automatic poem, which ridicules Franco as a "loathsome, barely human, hairy slug."[178] Picasso wrote the poem in conjunction with the creation of a series of etchings titled *The Dream and Lie of Franco* (1937) (fig. 44). The etchings feature a caricature of Franco as "an evil-omened polyp" who transforms into a horse, a symbol of the Nationalists, which is gored by a humanoid bull, a symbol of the Republic. The print series was originally conceived as a set of eighteen postcards to be reproduced individually.[179]

On January 9, 1936, Catalan architect José Luis Sert, accompanied by Spanish writer Max Aub, who was also cultural delegate to the Spanish embassy in Paris, and poet Louis Aragon, visited Picasso in his studio on Rue de la Boétie to ask him to create a

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[176] Éluard, *Letters to Gala*, 231.

[177] Pierre Daix, *Picasso* (New York: Icon Editions, 2003), 247.

[178] Picasso, as well as the surrealists, may have been motivated by political events in early 1937. On January 8, 1937, a U.S. joint congressional resolution was passed to ban the shipment of arms to Spain. On January 9, 1937, Britain enacted the Foreign Enlistment Act to curb the recruitment of British soldiers and prohibit the exportation of arms in defense of the Spanish Republic. Later, on February 21, the League of Nations placed a ban on foreign intervention in the war.

[179] Patricia Failing, "Picasso's Cries of Children…Cries of Stones," *Art News*, 126 no. 7 (Sept. 1977): 55-64. In private communication, Failing informed me that the *Art News* article translated the measurements incorrectly. According to Failing, they were not 3.5 x 9.5 inches, but rather "the exact size of French postcards." Patricia Failing, email message to author, April 15, 2005.

mural for the Spanish pavilion for the upcoming world's fair in Paris. At that time, Picasso showed his finished plate to Sert, who suggested the printed postcards be sold at the Spanish pavilion to raise money for the Spanish Republican government.[180]

Having mass marketability, Picasso's postcards were intended to broadcast outrage over the events of the Spanish civil war and the non-interventionist policies of European countries. Following the outbreak of civil war in Spain, the Spanish Republic utilized the post as a weapon of propaganda, as political posters were mass reproduced and distributed as postcards to Republican soldiers on the front lines.[181] The post also provided Picasso a means to package his work for a mass audience.[182]

Similarly, in late January of 1937, Zervos asked Joan Miró to produce a one franc stamp that would also be sold at the Spanish pavilion to raise money for the Republic.[183] The stamp design, sponsored by the Commissioner's Office on Propaganda, featured the Catalan peasant raising a great, swollen fist and wearing a red wool cap or *barettina*, which signified nationalism. Befitting its propaganda intention, Miró's *Aidez l'Espagne* (1937) (fig. 45) proclaimed an unequivocal faith in the victory of the Spanish over fascism.[184] "Aidez l'Espagne" is written in bold script while "1 franc mark" is situated to the right of the figure.

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[180] According to Failing, Luis Mongio, former Spanish republican diplomat in Morocco during the civil war, told her that postcard reproductions of Picasso's works were dropped from airplanes in Spain as anti-Franco propaganda. Patricia Failing, email message to author, April 15, 2005.

[181] Miriam M. Basilio, "Catalans! Catalonia! Catalan Nationalism and Spanish Civil War Propaganda" in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Guadí, Miró, Dalí*, eds William H. Robinson, Jordi Falgás, Carmen Belen Lord, and Josefina Alix (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), 436-450.

[182] Picasso clearly recognized the power of postcards to communicate to the public. Later, he produced two postcards for the peace conferences The Congres Mondial de partisans de la paix, in 1949, and Congres des peoples pour la paix, in 1952.

[183] Robert S. Lubar, "Painting and Politics: Miró's Still Life with Old Shoe and the Spanish Republic" in *Surrealism, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Raymond Spiteri and Donald Lacoss (London: Ashgate, 2003), 149-151.

[184] Catherine Blanton Freedberg, *The Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World's Fair* (New York: Garland Pub., 1986), 546-547.

Ultimately, Miró's stamp was reproduced as a four-color stencil print and sold at the Pavilion.[185] Picasso, upon completing his second plate in early June, decided to reproduce his prints intact as a suite accompanied by his poem in Spanish with an English translation. Picasso's engravings, as well as postcard reproductions of each of the eighteen scenes, were sold at the Spanish pavilion while it was open, from July 12 until October 31, 1937. Postcards featuring Picasso's mural *Guernica* (1937) were also sold at the pavilion counter. While never fully realized, Picasso's cards and Miró's stamps were intended for distribution among the generally unconcerned or ill-informed populace of France as well as international visitors to the Spanish pavilion.[186]

Contemporaneously, and perhaps stimulated by Éluard's connections with Picasso early in the year, the surrealists also appropriated the postcard medium and organized their own postcard series.[187] In late January and early February 1937, Hugnet wrote to his colleagues requesting that participants submit a high quality, 9 by 14 cm photograph of a recent work that had not previously been published.[188] Hugnet estimated the costs for the first printing to be approximately two thousand francs for ten thousand cards. To cover the costs of production he sought to secure private funding. On February 10, 1937, he

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[185] At the bottom of each print Miró included a facsimile script annotation that states, "In this present battle I see on the fascist side just the outdated forces, and on the other side, the people whose immense creative resources which will give Spain a power which will astonish the whole world."

[186] Freedberg, *The Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World's Fair*, 454 n14.

[187] While it is unclear exactly how *The Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series* was distributed, it is reasonable to consider that the surrealists may have developed the cards as a means to contribute to the fundraising effort to aid the Spanish Republic. The surrealists' use of their art to aid in war relief efforts is also evidenced during World War II. In 1942, Breton and his fellow artists in exile coordinated the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in New York. The location was selected because it housed the Coordinating Council of French Relief. The surrealists charged a small admission fee that was then donated to the war relief effort. They also contributed drawings to a fundraising calendar titled *France in America*. The surrealists' participation in the war effort is examined by Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous*, 166-170.

[188]On January 23, 1937 Hugnet wrote to Bellmer to ask him to contribute to the project. Hugnet explained that each card will show a previously unpublished work that plays with the idea of the postcard. "A new unpublished doll photograph would be perfect and altogether different from what others are proposing." George Hugnet's letter to Hans Bellmer, January 23, 1937, http://www.Christies.com. Lot 51, Sale 2110, April 10, 2008, New York, Rockefeller Plaza.

wrote to Penrose, "I would like to ask you to create a little propaganda for these cards. I will write to some likely patrons for help: Julian Levy, Zwemmer, [and] Mrs. Norton."[189]

Of the twenty-one works featured in the series, only Picasso's was created specifically for the postcard set. Picasso created the etching *April fool's* (1937) as he worked on the *Dream and Lie of Franco* suite. The card features an ambiguous rebus drawing, "The ax-cat of bones (7 carps) brings male hour."[190] According to Durozi, this is a verbal pun derived from an early sketch of the work that features the title *L'Achat de cette carte porte Malheur* (the purchase of this card brings bad luck)[191]

Each of the works submitted reflects the individual interests and techniques of the artist. However, among the works included in the series are a number of themes related to issues promoted by the surrealists, such as desire and dreams. The theme of desire permeates the postcard series. For the surrealists, desire was an expression of Eros or sexual instinct, but also a pathway to self-knowledge. As demonstrated in their own postcard-collecting interests, the surrealists closely associated the postcard with erotic imagery. Meret Oppenheim's *My Nurse* (1936), for instance, substitutes for the body appearing in bawdy postcards. The original sculpture, which features a pair of white shoes bound together on a platter to simulate a woman on her back with her legs splayed, represents sublimated desire. The fetishistic shoe, also a popular theme in erotic postcards, makes explicit the sexual nature of the work.

From Man Ray, Hugnet received a photograph of *What We all Lack* (1927), a surrealist object composed of a clay pipe and glass bubble. The work, probably the 1935 replica exhibited in *Exposition surréaliste d'objets*, recalls the childhood pastime of blowing bubbles and suggests the act of day-dreaming. Of course, Freud had famously linked creativity and imagination to children's games and day-dreaming in his 1907 essay

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[189] In a letter written to Penrose, Hugnet invited him to participate in the project and included a mock-up featuring a photograph of Arp's *Open this Side* (1937) as an example. On the back of the image, Hugnet wrote the title and the artist's name in red ink. Georges Hugnet's letter to Roland Penrose, February 10, 1937. Penrose Archive, Deans Gallery Scottish Museum of Modern Art, GMA A35. RP.697.

[190] Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2002), 334.

[191] Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 732 n150.

"Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." There he wrote, "Should we not look for the first traces of imaginative activity as early as in childhood? . . . Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him?"[192] The idea of rearranging things in the world in a new way would certainly appeal to the surrealists and their fascination with creating art from found objects, including postal ephemera. However, the title of the work, repeated on the card, references communist philosopher Friederich Engel's statement "What these gentleman all lack is dialectic," a phrase that had appeared on the cover of the surrealists' magazine *La Révolution surréaliste* in December 1926.[193] It should be said that, retrospectively, Man Ray denied any intention to invoke politics. He told Arturo Schwartz, his dealer and biographer, "Actually, I had in mind 'imagination,' not dialectics, what we all lack is imagination."[194] Given the time, though, one cannot completely discount other motives or meanings, including the power of imagination to transform society.

Yet, the theme of dreams and the imagination are a consistent presence in the series. An obvious example of the reference to dreams in the series is Yves Tanguy's *The Sandman* (1937). The title draws associations to Freud's "The Uncanny," which in turn draws from E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sand-Man" (1817), a tale about a young man haunted by childhood memories of the Sandman coming to tear children's eyes out. Associating blindness with castration anxiety, Freud relates the text to his theory of the uncanny, in which the aesthetic experience produced by the work elicits feelings or anxiety and distress. It is these feeling of anxiety that Tanguy seeks to bring forth in his

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[192] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," in *The Freud Reader,* ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1995), 437. I thank Karen A. Bearor for bringing this source to my attention.

[193] Frederick Engels, "Letter to Conrad Schmidt," (1890) in *Karl Max and Frederick Engels: Selected Correspondence 1846-1895*, trans. Dona Torr (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 480-484.

[194] Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 209.

own work, which features a bizarre biomorphic figure of the sinister Sandman composed of cardboard with bristle whiskers on a plaster background.[195]

The postcard series also features Paris as a theme. This relates the series to the Paris world's fair, but it also reflects the surrealists' identification with the city. Dominguez's *Overture* (1937), an object comprised of a sheet of folded tin with the word "Paris" cut-out and peeled back to reveal the head of a violin, recalls vintage travel postcards that spell out the name of a city and feature famous landmarks in the outline of the letters. Duchamp's *Ampoule containing 50cc of air of Paris* (1937) also engages the theme of Paris and tourism. It features a photograph of a glass ampoule from a Parisian pharmacy that contains air from Paris. Created as a gift for New York patron Walter Arensberg, the readymade was a clever reinterpretation on the commercial tourist souvenir. These cards by Duchamp and Dominguez demonstrate how the surrealist postcards parody tourist postcards and souvenirs. As popular souvenirs at the world's fair, postcards were often collected as a means to authenticate personal experience. In contrast, the surrealists' postcards were created to defy the institutional exhibition of art.

The surrealists used the postcard medium to liberate their works from the gallery space and defy the institutionalization of art. Rather than serving simply as a memento of an art exhibition, the postcard series functioned as an autonomous exhibition that uprooted and physically displaced the surrealists' works from the museum or gallery space. Similar to Duchamp's *Bôite-en-Valise*, the surrealists' postcards functioned as a portable, miniature gallery, which allowed the possessor to manipulate images into various arrangements. Unlike Duchamp's readymades, the surrealist postcards were created to be exhibited in the physical space of the possessor. As such the surrealists' postcards series resisted the institutionalization of art at the Paris fair by negating the physical gallery space that had been denied them.

As a form of popular media, the postcard offered the surrealists a new way to appeal directly to a mass audience. Uncontained by the gallery space, the surrealist work could pass freely through the mails and could also be entered into new contexts, such as postcard albums and scrapbooks, as seen in the scrapbooks of David Gascoyne and

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[195] Karin von Maur, ed. *Yves Tanguy and Surrealism* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Pub., 2001), 82.

Roland Penrose.[196] Here postcards from the surrealist series are entered into new arrangements with vintage postcards, personal photographs, and newspaper clippings. As a result, the postcard becomes part of a new poetic narrative.

The surrealists' postcards also raise issues of concerning reproduction and authenticity. By turning to the postcard, a medium that epitomized the crass commercialism of mechanical reproduction, to create reproductions of their original works, the surrealists defended the value and authenticity of the mass reproduced postcard itself. The surrealists' postcards challenged the cult value of the originals by making them available to the masses, thereby broadening the objects' exhibition value.

Hugnet published approximately five hundred sets of *The Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series*, each packaged in a silvered cardboard envelope with a blue label on the front that reads "La Carte Surrealists, Premiere Series, vingt et une cartes, 1937."[197] On the verso of each card, the lower left hand corner displays its number within the series, followed by the artist's name and title of the work, in French, German, and English. At Man Ray's suggestion, "La carte surrealiste garantie" appears in the upper left hand corner of the cards (Figure 46).[198]

The inclusion of "guarantee" in the title of the series incorporates popular advertising and marketing lingo. Advertising slogans that promised consumers "satisfaction guaranteed" or "money-back guarantee" were popularized by late nineteenth

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[196]The scrapbooks of David Gascoyne and Roland Penrose are located in the Penrose Archive, Deans Gallery, Scottish Museum of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Scotland.

[197] The exact number of sets published by the surrealists in unclear.

[198] The final set of twenty-one cards features the following works in this order, 1. Marcel Duchamp, *Ampoule containing 50cc of air of Paris*, 2. André Breton, *Poem-Object*, 3. Max Ernest, *Triumph of Love*, 4. Paul Éluard, *They kill as Easily as they Breathe*, 5. Rene Magritte, *The Key to the Riddle*, 6. Joan Miró, *Time-Table*, 7. Salvador Dalí, *Senile Melancholy of Dogs like a Dizzy Ski Glide*, 8. Hans Bellmer, *Step-Sisters*, 9. Man Ray, *What We All Each Need*, 10. Tanguy, *The Sandman*, 11. Oscar Dominguez, *Opening*, 12. Hans Arp, *Open this Side*, 13. Georges Hugnet, *Word for Word*, 14. Meret Oppenheim, *My Nurse*, 15. Dora Maar, *29, rue d'Astorg*, 16. Jules Breton, *Bridge of Drowsiness*, 17. Roland Penrose, *Bottled Earth*, 18. Jean Marcel, *Bird's Eye View of Paris*, 19. Wolfgang Paalen, *The Scale of Desire*, 20. Nusch Éluard, *Precious Woods*, 21. Pablo Picasso, *April Fool's*. In regards to the publication of twenty-one cards, it is noteworthy to mention the surrealists' association of the number 21 with the twenty-one major arcana of the tarot.

century direct-mail literature, such as the Montgomery Ward's mail-order catalogue.[199] By the 1930s, the slogan was enlisted as a means to arouse consumer confidence in everything from household goods to banking services.

For members of the French avant-garde, the bold and dynamic advertisements and slogans that appeared after World War I signified the modern. Indeed, French writers Blaise Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire hailed modern advertising as the poetry of the age.[200] As such, visual artists began to incorporate advertising media into their works. For members of the artistic avant-garde, such as Dadaists Raoul Hausmann and Hannah Höch, who cut advertising images from catalogues and newspapers and reassembled them into chaotic collages, the media was appropriated as a means to parody and undermine capitalist commerce.[201] According to David Steel in "Surrealism, Literature of Advertising and the Advertising of Literature" (1987), the surrealists also perceived advertising as "both weapon and target in [their] strategy to subvert and eventually demolish conventional literary and cultural standards."[202] In regards to the surrealist postcard series, the term "guarantee" reinforces the parodic stance of the cards, but also implies that the postcards, as mediums for the communication of unconscious thought, will spark the imagination and liberate the mind.[203]

The appropriation of the post and its ephemera by the surrealists was repeated in 1940, as Belgian surrealist and *London Bulletin* editor E.L.T. Mesens organized the

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[199] "Who Originated 'Satisfaction Guaranteed' or 'Your Money Back'?" *Printers' Ink* (February 26, 1920): 10-12.

[200] See Blaise Cendrars, *Selected Writings of Blaise Cendrars*, ed. Walter Albert (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp, 1966); and Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918*, ed. LeRoy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman, (London: Viking Press, 1958).

[201] For a comprehensive discussion concerning the modernist dialogue with advertising, see Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 231-367.

[202] David Steel, "Surrealism, Literature of Advertising and the Advertising of Literature," *French Studies* 41 (July 1987): 283-297.

[203] The term "guaranteed" was also applied by Roland Penrose to his *Guaranteed Fine Weather Suitcase*, 1937, a surrealist object comprised of a used suitcase with a painting of a sunny sky on the exterior. Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 118.

publication of a second set of cards.[204] "The Surrealist Group in England" published a set of twelve cards, printed by Blackmore Press, which featured color reproductions of works by Penrose, Len Lye, Eileen Agar and Man Ray.[205] The cards, packaged in a paper envelope that featured the names of all twelve contributors along the left side of the envelope, were advertised for sale in 1944 for 3 shillings and 6 pence.[206]

The production of the 1940 set coincided with publication of a triple issue of the *London Bulletin* and with the Zwemmer Gallery surrealist exhibition that had opened June 13, 1940, in London. At this time, Mesens, a key coordinator of surrealist activities in London, sought to refocus the surrealist movement in that city. Calling a meeting of all surrealists there, he stressed a reaffirmation of surrealist action and advised the surrealist group against flirting with the modernist art world. Mesens stated, "I assert that all flirting with the art world is the most crucial outrage against all perspectives the surrealist movement has had in view since its advent."[207] Here he specifically referred to the British Art Centre and its alliance with modernism. Addressing his audience, Mesens asked his fellow surrealists to "renounce all participation in group exhibitions springing from an artistic bourgeois."[208] He also encouraged the group to stand as a united

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[204] On July 9, 1940, Mesens sent one of the British surrealists' postcards to Penrose. On the back he wrote, "Dear Roland, Voici enfin 'l'surrealist post card'. Elle sera bientôt ā l'usage du commune des mortels. Affectueusement, Mesens." Postcard from Mesens to Penrose, July 9, 1940. Penrose Archive, Deans Gallery, Scottish Museum of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Scotland. GMA A35. PPA. 697.

[205] While Michel Remy, in *Surrealism in Britain* (1999), notes that a set of twenty-one cards was published by the London Gallery Editions, I was unable to locate any evidence of a set of twenty-one cards by the London group. He also notes the publication of another set after the war, but offers no specific information concerning this set. Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 213.

[206] The 1940 set includes the following works: 1. Eileen Agar, *The Foot in the Hand*, 1939; 2. John Buckland-Wright, *Siebling*, 1940; 3. Giorgio de Chirico, *Solitude d'un Apres-midi D'Automne*, 1914; 4. Matta Echaurren, *Morphologie Psychologique no.104*, 1939; 5. Esteban Frances, *Psychological Landscape*, 1939; 6. Len Lye, *Doodle Re Sun*, 1940; 7. E.L.T. Mesens, *The Well of Truth*, 1936; 8. Henry Moore, *Reclining Figure*, 1939; 9. Gordon Onslow-Ford, *The Determination of Gender*, 1939; 10. Roland Penrose, *Black Music*, 1940; 11. Man Ray, *Object*, 1939; 12. Yves Tanguy, *Arriere pensees*, 1939. In addition to the names, the envelope features an odd arrangement of numbers printed on the right side, 4/-21. An advertisement for the postcards appeared on the back cover of the surrealist journal *Messages from Nowhere* in November 1944.

[207] E.L.T. Mesens quoted in Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 210.

[208] E.L.T. Mesens quoted in Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 210.

organization, but also allow for individual expression. Further, he insisted that surrealists adhere to the proletariat revolution and maintain the specificity of the movement, but not comply with closed systems of thought.

In conclusion, highly critical of the excessive nationalism and the defensive politics of the Communist Party, the surrealists consciously situated themselves outside of this arena. As such, they located an alternative space—the discursive space of the post, as opposed to the physical and discursive spaces of the gallery system. Here the surrealists could project their works into the revolutionary subconscious. By enlisting the postcard medium, the surrealists were able to transcend the museum and gallery space. However, these works, whose possibility brought them into being, were created for a future that would never be realized. Indeed, in the mid-1930s surrealist works were predicated on the possibility of revolutionary transformation and projected into an indefinite future. As postcard collectors, the surrealists understood the value of postcards as raw material for poets and artists. Similar to seeds in the wind, the postcards were intended to scatter across Europe and beyond to await discovery in the imagination. Just as they discovered the postcards of their parents' generation, their cards would be discovered by a future generation.

CHAPTER FOUR

MISSIVES LASCIVES

In 1959 surrealist artist Mimi Parent created the *Bôite Alerte* (1959), a green cardboard box designed to resemble a letter-box, which held a cache of "*missives lascives*" contributed by surrealist artists and writers.[209] Created in conjunction with the *Exposition inteRnatiOnale de Surréalisme* (EROS) at the Daniel Cordier Gallery in Paris, the *Bôite Alerte* was designed as a limited edition surrealist object, of which only two hundred and fifty were produced. Each box included: an *Exposition inteRnatiOnale de Surréalisme* catalogue, with essays by Man Ray, Jean Arp, André Breton, and Hans Bellmer among others; six postcards featuring color photo-reproductions of works by Hans Bellmer, Dalí, Arshile Gorky, Miró, Svanberg, and Clovis Trouille;[210] six original prints, featuring color lithographs, by Joan Miró, Adrian Dax, Max Walter Svanberg, Toyen, and an etching by Le Maréchal; nine anonymous "missives lascives" filled with erotic objects, images, and letters (fig. 47); a telegram from Duchamp to Breton; one vinyl record; and a reproduction of Pierre Faucheux's axonometric plan for the EROS exhibition. Of the two hundred and fifty boxes produced, a special edition of twenty boxes included a readymade by Duchamp titled *Couple of Laundress' Aprons* (1959) (fig.

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[209] The work is often mistakenly attributed to Duchamp. However, Parent originally conceived the idea in August 1959. In a letter written on August 2, she proposed the project to Breton who welcomed its inclusion in the EROS exhibition. Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 225 n68.

[210] The works reproduced as color postcards are: Bellmer's *La Poupée* (1933-37), Dalí's *Guillaume Tell* (1930), Arshile Gorky's *The Orators* (1947), Miró's *La Piège* (1924), Svanberg's *Bouquet de lunière et en crépuscle* (1958), and Clovis Trouille's *Le Palais des merveilles* (1949).

48), packaged in a large white envelope.[211] In the upper right corner of the envelope is a postage stamp designed by Breton that was based on an illustration from Matthew Gregory Lewis' lusty gothic novel *The Monk* (1795). The stamp, franked with a cancellation stamp designed by Breton for the EROS exhibit, featured the signatures of Breton and Duchamp. The enclosed readymades were crafted from two store-bought, tartan oven mitts. Duchamp, in collaboration with Parent, opened up the seams and re-stitched the objects with small flaps that lifted to reveal male and female genitalia.[212]

The *Bôite Alerte* has received little critical analysis by scholars, who generally identify the work as a catalogue for the EROS exhibition. For example, Alyce Mahon regarded the *Bôite Alerte* as such in her *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968* (2005). There she proposed that the work served to amplify the provocative nature of the exhibition, which she argued invoked erotic themes and Sadist desires as a means to combat the colonialist policies of post-war France.[213]

Indeed, the *Bôite Alerte* engaged the EROS exhibition; however, the identification of the work a catalogue undermines its status as an art object. Further, this approach overlooks the unique conceptual properties of the work. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the *Bôite Alerte* as an "object-catalogue." This designation seeks to emphasize the work's aesthetic and formal value as a fine art object while simultaneously acknowledging its literary aspects and its relation to the EROS exhibition.

This chapter examines the *Bôite Alerte* and its relation to the EROS exhibition and its themes of desire and sadism. My aim is two-fold. First, following Mahon's insights into the surrealists' engagement with the "politics of Eros" in the postwar era, I investigate how the *Bôite Alerte* is informed by the surrealists' engagement with Fourierism as a means to respond to post-World War II issues of censorship and French nationalism. Fourier's identification of Sadism as a symbol of social repression inspired

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[211]On the upper left hand corner of the envelope, Duchamp placed the label "Form C1" for French Customs, beneath, stamped in red is "Sample No Value." Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, Abrams, 1969), 537.

[212] According to Mahon, the *Couple* is based on a pair of eighteenth century erotic purses. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968,* 167.

[213] Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968*, 166-167.

the surrealists to adopt Sade as an emblem of radical subversion. Also, Fourier's ideas concerning the feminine and sexual liberation intersected with the surrealists' belief in Eros as a pathway to true freedom. I will demonstrate how the surrealists enlisted the post as a site for dissent by examining the *Bôite Alerte's* cache of "*missives lascives*" as a response to postwar censorship and social repression.

The second portion of my chapter is concerned with the conceptual nature of the *Bôite Alerte* and its association with issues of communication. Exploring parallel themes found in Parent's *Bôite Alerte* and the writings of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, specifically his 1955 essay "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*," I examine how the surrealists engaged the post in the hope of transforming the unconscious and liberating society

In the postwar era, the surrealists struggled to maintain their footing as leaders of the Cultural Revolution. In 1947, as André Breton and his fellow surrealists emerged from exile in America and returned to Paris to reassert their position as leaders of the radical avant-garde, they were attacked by critics who proclaimed surrealism to be irrelevant in the postwar world. Associates of the Communist Party criticized the surrealists for their absence during the Occupation and attacked the movement as impotent and out of touch with the revolutionary politics of postwar France.[214] The surrealists were also attacked by the Existentialists who charged surrealism with serving only the bourgeoisie and being unconcerned with moral issues. According to Existentialist leader Jean-Paul Sartre, the surrealists' retreat into abstract concepts left them too far removed from the reality of daily experience and disengaged from cultural responsibility.[215]

Critics were reacting, in part, to Breton's interest in the writings of nineteenth-century social utopian Charles Fourier. While familiar with Fourier through the writings of Marx, Breton did not undertake a serious study of Fourierism until his exile to the United States. In 1945, Breton acquired a five-volume 1846 edition of Fourier's complete

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[214] For a discussion concerning surrealisms' struggle in post-war France see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968,* 107-115.

[215] Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is Literature?"(1947) trans. David Caute, (London: Routledge, 1993).

works from a New York City used bookstore. He perceived him to be a great visionary and an important predecessor to surrealism and enlisted his ideas as a means to revolution. The influence of Fourier's writings on surrealist thought is evidenced by Breton's book *Arcane 17* (1944), where he notes the idea of the salvation of earth by woman, and essay *Ode à Charles Fourier* (1947).[216]

Fourier's social theories were outlined in his *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808) and *Incoherent Industry* (1835). He examined various ways to purge repression from culture in order to establish a balanced and harmonious society.[217] Fourier's utopian system opposed bourgeois capitalism and stressed cooperative labor as a means to transform work into a physically satisfying and mentally fulfilling endeavor. According to Fourier, the so-called "primitive" cultures, being free from capitalism and pre-industrial labor, had achieved a more advanced stage of liberty than Western cultures.[218] Fourier also criticized repressive moral values of Western civilization which he saw as a barrier to true freedom. An ardent advocate of sexual liberation, Fourier called for the total freedom to pursue all sexual activity, including sadism. However, he noted that sadist love is also a symbol of a repressed society.[219] Another key aspect in Fourier's prescription for a utopian world was the radical alteration of the position of women. He wrote, "Social progress and changes of period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty."[220] According to Donald LaCoss, in "Attacks of the Fantastic"

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[216] Fourier is also featured in Andre Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, (1950) trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997).

[217] Charles Fourier, The Theory of the Four Movements, eds. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

[218] Charles Fourier as quoted in *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, trans. and eds. Jonathon Beecher, and Richard Bienvenu (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 139-42.

[219] Jonathon Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 301.

[220] Charles Fourier as quoted in *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, 195.

(2003), the surrealists' interest in Fourier's social utopianism represented an effort to refine and deepen its commitments to social transformation.[221]

The progressive ideals of Fourier's amorous theory and his belief in the potential of women to unify and liberate society bolstered the surrealists' opposition to patriarchal nationalism. The surrealists brought these ideas together in the EROS exhibition, which was open to the general public from December 15 until February 29.

Following Fourier's perception of sadist love as a reaction to social repression, the surrealists staged an event, in advance of the gallery opening, that celebrated the Marquis de Sade. As Mahon points out, the surrealists regarded Sade as an emblem of radical subversion. She writes, "Sade was invoked on artistic and political grounds: his revolutionary, supposedly obscene philosophy was used as a metaphoric means of shedding light on the political 'obscenities' of the day." [222]

This notion was evidenced by Jean Benoît's performance titled "The Execution of the Testament of the Marquis de Sade." The private performance, held in the apartment of surrealist poet Joyce Mansour, occurred on December 2, marking the 145th anniversary of Sade's death.[223] As Mahon describes, Benoît emerged wearing a felt costume featuring wooden panels, cloth wings, a tribal inspired wooden mask, and an enlarged iron phallus. He performed a strip tease to blaring music while Breton read aloud Sade's Testament. In a final dramatic gesture, Benoît took a hot branding iron and burned the letters S-A-D-E

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[221] Donald LaCoss, "Attacks of the Fantastic" in *Surrealism, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Spiteri, Raymond and Donald Lacoss (London: Ashgate, 2003), 26. For additional discussion concerning the effect of Fourierism on surrealist thought see, the second edition of Breton's *Ode to Charles Fourier* (Paris, 1961), which includes a long introduction by John Gaulmier with suggestive commentary on Fourier's influence on French literature. Also see Emile Lehouck, "La Lecture surréaliste de Charles Fourier," *Australian Journal of French Studies*, XX, I (1983): 26-36.

[222] Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968*, 149.

[223] According to Mahon, the event was performed to honor the burial wishes of Sade, who had requested in his will to be buried in an unmarked grave at his family estate without a religious service. However, against his wishes, Sade was buried in a church cemetery with a large stone marker engraved with a cross. By performing the reenactment, the surrealists hoped finally to liberate Sade. For a full description of the event see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 154-156 and Marie Bonnet, "Anti-Reality! Marcel Duchamp, André Breton et la VIIIe Exposition ineRnatiOnale de Surréalisme, Paris galerie Daniel Cordier," *Les Cahiers*, 87 (2004): 96-115.

onto his chest.[224] According to Mahon, "Benoît's costume and performance was [sic] a tribute to the revolutionary ideas of Sade and the 'primitive' culture and mentality that the Surrealists favored over Western, scientific rationalism."[225]

The EROS exhibition was dedicated to the feminine realm and desire. Conceived by Duchamp and designed by Pierre Faucheux, the gallery's interior was transformed to resemble an intra-uterine space. As Mahon describes, visitors arrived at the exhibition and entered the first chamber, a room hung with pink cloth on the ceiling and walls. The space rhythmically throbbed as hidden air pumps caused the fabric to billow and sway. This room led to a vaginal doorway strung with a beaded curtain, beyond which was a cavernous corridor with walls draped in green velvet and with stalactite and stalagmite protrusions from the ceiling and floor (fig. 49). The green corridor opened into a dark grotto covered in black fur. The walls emitted the recorded sounds of a woman's sighs and moans as visitors moved through the space, heightening their self-conscious awareness of participating in the orgasmic arena.[226]

The artwork exhibited in the space engaged themes of erotic desire. Among the works displayed at the show were Hans Bellmer's *The Doll* (1932-1945) and Joan Miro's *Sleeping Object* (1936), as well as American artist Robert Rauschenberg's combine painting titled *Bed* (1955). The exhibit also featured Meret Oppenheim's *Cannibal Feast* (1959). A performance piece, the work featured an erotic banquet composed of a nude woman whose body was strewn with an exotic feast of fruits, shell fish, roasted meat, and sweet biscuits.

The design of the EROS space as a feminine form represented the surrealists' retreat into the feminine realm as a means to escape patriarchal systems. Similarly, the interiors of the surrealists' "Artists in Exile" exhibition held in 1942 at the Peggy Guggenheim gallery in New York and the "Surrealism in 1947" exhibition held that year at the Galerie Maeght in Paris were both designed to resemble intra-uterine spaces. As Demos has suggested, the female body served as a home for the surrealists who were

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[224] Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros*, 158.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid, 159-160.

dispossessed by oppressive nationalism.[227] Unlike the exhibitions of 1942 and 1947, which spatially suggested the maternal womb and rebirth, the EROS exhibition engaged the vaginal cavity to refer to the act of conception and creation. This idea represents a subversive response to the oppression of creation by state censorship and moral codes.

The object-catalogue, the *Bôite Alerte*, played off the association of the intra-uterine gallery as a compensatory home for the surrealists. Indeed, the *Bôite Alerte*, as a letter-box, is a referent to the home.[228] The title *Bôite Alerte*, which literally translates to "emergency box," is a verbal pun on *bôite à lettre*, or letter-box. As such the work serves as the site for the receipt of missives. Pulling together the liberatory aspects of the feminine, as a simultaneously anti-nationalistic yet creative home for the "homeless," the letter-box became a radical extension of their earlier engagements with the post.

The surrealists' enlistment of the letter-box form recalls the *bouche de fer* used by "men of letters" in the eighteenth century as a means to circumvent government control over the exchange of social and cultural ideas deemed threatening to the state. To subvert governmental censorship, participants of the political enlightenment created the *bouche de fer* or letter-box as a repository for the will of the people.[229] Placed in an open setting, such as a shop or coffeehouse, this box was available to the public as a depository for anonymous letters, opinions, and complaints against the government that were collected, read, discussed, and published.

A consequence of postwar French nationalism was the enforcement of draconian censorship laws. Freedom of the press was an early casualty of the Algerian war. Widespread censorship was condoned by the state as necessary to protect the official ideology of France as *une et indivisible*. In an attempt to control the distribution of

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[227] Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 203-207.

[228] In describing this work, Mahon has mistakenly suggested that it is a playful reproduction of a "post-box" into which ideas could be posted. The letter-box and the post-box serve different functions. In Europe, letter-boxes are typically attached to the outside of the door to one's residence and are used exclusively for the receipt of letters. Outgoing letters are dropped into freestanding or wall-mounted public postal receptacles (i.e. post-boxes). Alyce Mahon, "Staging Desire," in *Surrealism Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press), 285.

[229] Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 289.

material that criticized the state, the government tightened control over the press. Publishers of papers and journals were required to deposit editions at the local prefecture to be scanned for objectionable materials.[230] In addition, newspapers, newsreels, and *Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française* were subordinated to governmental policies.[231]

The French government also enforced new, rigid anti-pornography laws. Originally established in France in the late nineteenth century, obscenity laws prohibited the sale and display of obscene literature and magazines, as well as political material deemed disruptive to society. In 1939 the government extended that legislation to include "engravings, photographic paintings, snapshots, reproductions, emblems, and all objects contrary to good morals."[232]

By 1949 it became illegal to expose minors under eighteen to publications of a licentious or pornographic manner. Charles de Gaulle's election to the presidency of the Fifth Republic, in 1958, began a decade of social conservatism and extreme censorship. At this time, the scope of censorship widened to prohibit obscene books, posters, paintings, and films, as well as the display or advertisement of pornographic matter anywhere. The government justified literary censorship as a necessary means to protect impressionable youths and defend *bonnes moeurs*. The *Brigade Mondaine,* or vice squad, monitored the publication, sale, and promotion of questionable materials.[233]

The surrealists, who had struggled against literary censure since the early 1930s, defended erotic literature as a route to liberation. As such, they rallied behind French publishers, such as Jean-Jacques Pauvert, who was prosecuted and fined for publishing the complete works of the Marquis de Sade as well as Pauline Réage's sadist novel *History of O* (1954). The surrealists also defended Maurice Girodia's Olympia Press as it

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[230] Martin Harrison, "Government and the Press in France during the Algerian War," *The American Political Science Review* 58, no. 2 (1964): 273-285.

[231] Ibid, 273.

[232] Carolyn J. Dean, "History, Pornography and the Social Body," in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 229.

[233] John Phillips, "Old Wine in New Bottles? Literary Pornography in Twentieth-Century France," in *International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000*. ed. Lisa Z. Sigel (New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2005), 128-129.

came under intense scrutiny by government authorities for the publication of erotic works such as Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) and J.P. Donleavy's, *The Ginger Man* (1955).[234]

In order to avoid prosecution or scandal, editors, authors, and distributors exercised self-censorship. In this context, authors often published works anonymously or by using pseudonyms to avoid prosecution. Publishers of pornography and literary erotica relied on an underground book trade and subscription to disseminate texts. Indeed, the underground book trade relied heavily on the post, and mail-order marketing emerged as an important means for the distribution of erotica.

To evade censorship of their own literary works, the surrealists often sent works abroad for publication. They also established their own independent press. The Editions Surréalistes (1926-1968) operated outside state regulation and published nearly sixty works, including a variety of books, brochures, and pamphlets featuring political manifestos, illustrated essays, and collaborative poetry.[235]

As a repository for subversive surrealist letters, the *Bôite Alerte* may be read as contesting the government's censorship of provocative literature and art in the postwar era. Located in several of the envelopes found in the letter-box are erotic literary works, such as Joyce Mansour's poem "La Point," printed as a small booklet. Another envelope, labeled "*USAGE EXTERNE,*" contains a typescript of Pieyre de Mandiargues' poem "La Marée" (1959). Alain Jourbert's "La Perle Fine" (1959) is presented as a typed letter placed in a plain double-sided envelope. The *Bôite Alerte* also holds anonymous letters related to sexual dominance and repression, such as the "Lettres d'un Sadique." Reflecting the axiom "to post is to publish," the publication of these works as letters

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[234]Girodia was fined and the offending works were confiscated and destroyed. Other works banned under this legislation were Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn* (1936) and *Tropic of Cancer* (1939) as well as Georges Bataille's *History of the Eye* (1928). For discussion concerning literary censorship see, John Phillips, "Old Wine in New Bottles? Literary Pornography in Twentieth-Century France," 125-145; Robert Netz, *Historie de la censure dans l'édition* (Paris: PUF, 1997) 111-113; and Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature, and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995).

[235] For a discussion of surrealist publication practices see Vincent Gille, "Love of Books, Love of Books" trans. John Fletcher in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* ed. Jennifer Mundy (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 125-135.

demonstrates the surrealists' recognition of postal space as a site for dissent and a means to evade censorship.

Also included in the *Bôite Alerte* is a letter that refers to the surrealists' struggle to publish texts considered dangerous to national morality. Addressed "Dear Monsieur," the letter is from an unknown publisher who wrote to inform the author, surrealist poet Robert Benayoun, that his work contains words and phrases that may encourage licentiousness.[236] Thus, for the "moral health of the nation's youth," the questionable content must be censured. The back of the letter features Benayoun's text with words and passages blacked out (fig. 50). The absurdity of censure is evidenced by the surviving nonsensical text, which evokes Freud's description of dream censorship and reiterates the surrealists' perception of the letter as a receptacle for unconscious thought.

Recognizing the mailbox as a site for uncensored expressions, Duchamp suggested that the exterior of the letter-box be stamped "missives lascives." The envelopes within the box are labeled with statements such as "*STRICTEMENT PERSONNEL*," "*HUIS CLOS*," "AVIS DE SOUFFRANCE," and "*A N'OUVRIR SOUS AUCUN PRETEXT*." These statements may be read as ironic remarks that play off censorship laws and societal fears of erotic or sexually explicit material. Further, the warning labels daringly tempt human nature as these labels do more to provoke the recipient's curiosity than dissuade.

Among the letters in the *Bôite Alerte* is a paper ticket serving as a coupon: "*Bon Pour 2 Disques Souples*." The ticket refers to an enclosed seven-inch vinyl record, which features a recording of Joyce Mansour's poem "L'Ivresse religieuse" on one side and Benjamin Pèret's poem "La Brebis galante" on the other. The verso of the ticket reads "OBJECTS SIGNALÉS." Read in relation to the exhibition's homage to Sade, the phrase suggests Sade's use of what he called "signals" to decode hidden messages in letters he received while imprisoned by a *lettre de cachet*, authorizing his incarceration without benefit of trial. Through these "signals," Sade tried to locate information regarding his release from prison, as well as news of the outside world.[237] In *Anthology of Black*

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[236] The identification of Benayoun as the author of the censored text is noted in the *Bôite Alerte* curatorial file at the Centre de Pompidou, Paris.

[237] Sade focused on the number of lines in a sentence, the number of times a word is repeated and

Humor (1950), Breton included a selection of Sade's letters to his wife, in which he first discusses his concept of "signals." In his introduction to the selection, Breton quotes Gilbert Lély, the original publisher of Sade's letters from prison. Breton writes that, according to Lély, the signals "constitute a kind of reaction of [Sade's] psyche, an unconscious struggle against despair into which his sanity might have collapsed without the help of such distractions."[238] Breton identified with Sade's obsessive search for secret messages, as it reflected his own struggle against oppression and censorship. In this regard, the reference to OBJECTS SIGNALÉS alerts the viewer to hidden messages related to unconscious desire that may be found within the cache of letters and images.

Missives within the *Bôite Alerte* also reflect the surrealists' association of women with liberation. For example, a yellow envelope stamped "SOIS ARDENT EN FORET" contains a card with a single ink blot print (fig. 51). Referring to the psychiatric Rorschach ink-blot test used to access the unconscious mind, the depicted image suggests female genitals. A similar reference is found in the envelope labeled "*A N'OUVRIR SOUS AUCUN PRETEXT*," which holds a folded card that opens to reveal *Le Corridor* (1959) by Benayoun (fig. 52). *Le Corridor* features a succession of mirror-image photographs that also visually suggests female anatomy. These positive celebrations of the female are contrasted by references to sexual cruelty found in an international airmail envelope marked "HUIS CLOS." It includes a photograph of an exotic female, named Edelmira B, whose lifted skirt and splayed legs reveal that her labia are sewn shut. Contributed by Mexican poet Octavio Paz, the image refers to a disturbing medical account of a Bolivian man who had his wife infibulated.[239] The image represents the surrealists association of Eros with exotic or "primitive" cultures and protests colonization and its imposition of Western morals and authority.

Parent's assemblage of various letters, texts, images, and objects into the letter-box recalls Duchamp's *Bôite Verte* (1934) (fig. 53). Duchamp's "Green Box" is a textual

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even those words that when spoken sound like another word.

[238] Gilbert Lely, as quoted in Andrè Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 218.

[239] The identification of Octavio Paz as the contributor of the missive is noted in the *Bôite Alerte* curatorial file at the Centre de Pompidou, Paris.

complement of his sculptural masterpiece *The Large Glass* (1915-1923). Created as an edition of three hundred and twenty, the *Bôite Verte* is comprised of a green-flocked cardboard box containing collotype facsimiles of the ninety-three pages of notes related to his design and creation of *The Large Glass*. By replicating his notes, Duchamp underscored the conceptual aims of the *Bôite Verte*—to reproduce the experience of the idea rather than its resulting object.

In a similar manner, the *Bôite Alerte* serves as the reproduction of the collaborative ideas behind the EROS exhibit. Letters, as documents or archival matter, serve to evidence the communication of ideas. Each may also be regarded as an authentic trace of experience. Indeed, the reading of another's letters is to partake vicariously in his or her experience. By reproducing this cache of letters, Parent enables the recipient to engage remotely and asynchronously in the concepts and experience of the EROS event.

The *Bôite Alerte* also functions conceptually by engaging issues of communication. The work is more than a box of documents and ephemeral traces of ideas—it is a box of letters. As such, it rejects the passivity of modernism's art for art's sake and fuses art and everyday experience. Further, it is interactive. Yet, as with all human interactions, letters have the potential to miscommunicate, and miscommunication has also found theorization within psychoanalysis. Indeed, for Jacques Lacan, in his often-quoted phrase, "all communication is miscommunication." Thus, to gain even more insight into Parent's appropriation of the post and its ephemera, it is useful to investigate the psychological insights concerning the letter raised by Lacan in his seminal essay "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'" (1955).

Lacan's interest in Freudian psychology and Hegelian dialectics drew him into the surrealist circle in the early 1930s.[240] Lacan made significant contributions to surrealist thought by publishing several articles and even a poem in surrealist journals. He was closely linked with Breton and Dalí, as well as Picasso, and, reciprocally, the surrealists were no doubt attracted to Lacan's interest in female hysterics.[241] As Julie Nicoletta notes

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[240] Anna Balakian, *Andre Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), 4.

[241] Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 31, 59, 88.

in "Louise Bourgeois's Femme-Maisons" (1993), the surrealists were intrigued by the idea of the woman hysteric as they perceived women to be closer to nature and the "uncivilized" and therefore instinctually capable of tapping into their natural drives.[242] In his article "Le Problème du style et la conception Pyschiatrique des Formes Paranoiaques de L'Expérience" (1933), published in *Minotaure*, Lacan examined the tendency of symbols in art to be linked with symbols in myth and the visions of the mentally disturbed. He determined that these symbols are grounded in a collective human unconscious. In this sense, women hysterics, akin to mentally disturbed people or *délirants*, are naturally able to access these symbols. As such, the woman hysteric serves as a medium for the communication of the unconscious.[243]

In the mid-1950s, Lacan opened his own center for psychoanalytic studies at the Saint-Anne Hospital in Paris. Here he offered weekly seminars to the philosophical and literary elite of Paris. These seminars involved his re-reading of Freudian theory with the aid of structural linguistics. According to Freud, the subconscious transmits to the conscious mind symbols or dream imagery which must then be deciphered and interpreted. Lacan, perceiving the subconscious to be structured similar to language, turned to language as a means of probing the unconscious. In language, words or signifiers substitute for real objects, but often meaning is displaced through metaphor and metonymy. As a result, it is impossible to establish a stable word and image link. Lacan identifies this instability of signification between word and image as slippage. Therefore, according to Lacan, the structure of language prevents clear communication and understanding. This slippage of meaning between word and image and breakdown of communication is played upon throughout the *Bôite Alerte*. For example, a *missive lascive* holds a black silk stocking that is printed with the white letters H.A.U.T. When pronounced as a word, H.A.U.T suggests the English "HOT," but it also translates from the French to mean "high." In a verbal pun, the French word for stocking *bas*, also means low. In a separate example, a reproduction of a telegram from Duchamp's alter ego Rrose Sélavy ("Eros, that's life") to Breton features the cryptic message: "Je purules, tu purules,

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[242] Julie Nicoletta, "Louise Bourgeois's Femme-Maisons," *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1993): 22.

[243] Ibid, 22.

la chaise purule. Grâce au râble de vénérien qui n'a rien de venerable." Durozi translates the message as: "I suppurate, you suppurate, the flesh suppurates. Thanks to the poor venereal fool who is scarcely venerable."[244]

Lacan's insights into the difficulties of communication are further explored in his seminal lecture on the Edgar Allen Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1845). Originally titled "The Ego in the Theory of Freud and the Technique of Psychoanalysis," Lacan's "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'" was part of a year-long commentary on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).[245] In this lecture Lacan addressed Freud's theory of "repetition automatism," the tendency of the human psyche to reminisce automatically or obsessively about an object through dream repetition. Lacan postulated that the repetition of experience is the result of the mind's being caught in a chain that continually returns to the moment of loss. To explore his theory he engaged Poe's "The Purloined Letter," a story about the loss and recovery of a letter.

First appearing in Paris as an unsigned translation titled "Une lettre vole" in *Magasin Pittoresque* in 1845, Poe's "The Purloined Letter" was wildly popular with French readers. His macabre tales were also very popular among French literary circles and were influential for both the symbolist movement and surrealism. Breton lionized Poe in the 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto*, noting that "Poe is Surrealist in adventure." [246]

Set in Paris, "The Purloined Letter" follows the story of a letter stolen from the Queen by her rival, the Minister. While the contents of the letter are never revealed, the scandalous nature of the letter is in implied. Despite numerous searches of the Minister's residence by the police, they continually fail to locate the letter. The hero of the tale, detective Dupin, is charged with aiding in the recovery of the letter. During a visit with the Minister, Dupin spies the letter hanging from a letter rack in plain sight. With slight of hand, Dupin reclaims the letter, replacing it with a facsimile, and returns the original to the Queen.

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[244] Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 760, n8.

[245] For a complete discussion of Poe's original text and an interpretation of Lacan's "Seminar on the Purloined Letter" see John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988).

[246] Breton, "Surrealist Manifesto," 27.

In his psychoanalytical reading of the tale, Lacan identified the letter as a pure signifier that is independent of its signified or content.[247] Tracing the letter through the story, he emphasized the role of the letter in binding together the characters in a signifying chain. He noted, "The letter is the symbol of a pact and that, even should the recipient not assume the pact, the existence of the letter situates her in a symbolic chain."[248] According to Lacan, to possess the letter is to be possessed by the letter.[249] In this respect, the letter governs the chain it traverses. For Lacan, the purloined letter is merely delayed or a "letter in sufferance" as it moves along a circular path back to its point of origin. He wrote, "The sender, we tell you, receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form. Thus it is that what the 'purloined letter,' nay the 'letter in sufferance,' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination."[250]

At the core of Lacan's engagement with the letter is the concept of inter-connectivity. Indeed, implicit in the post is the concept of human interdependence. The *Bôite Alerte*, as a collective work composed of letters, establishes a chain between artist and viewer. In receiving the box of letters you enter in to the pact. The *Bôite Alerte* provides the recipient with the opportunity to extend the chain by posting the letter themselves. In relying on the interaction of its recipient, the work is not merely a collection of mnemonic traces recalling the impetus of an idea, but also it functions as a conceptual work that awaits posting.

For the surrealists, Lacan's discourse on the letter intersected their belief in the power of the unconscious to transform society. In contrast to Sarte's existentialist theory, Lacan's signifying chain not only binds society together, but it also influences the unconscious. In other words, a letter transforms you, unbeknownst to you. In this regard, the surrealists distributed "*missives lascives*" with the expectation that they would inspire erotic desire in their recipient. The result here is the liberation of the mind.

Parent's *Bôite Alerte* is far more than simply a catalogue for the EROS exhibition.

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[247] Muller and Richardson, *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, 58.

[248] Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on the Purloined Letter," in Muller and Richardson, 42.

[249] Ibid, 44.

[250] Ibid, 53.

The work seeks to challenge social and cultural repression in post-war France by incorporating themes of censorship and sadist desire. Mocking the art market, it bridges the gap between art and life by transforming the gallery experience into a mail order delivered directly to one's doorstep. Further, the *Bôite Alerte* must be understood as a conceptual expression designed to create a network through which the surrealists could disseminate their amorous philosophy.

CONCLUSION

"Indeed, mail art has a curious way of reversing traditional art definitions. As the mailbox replaces the museum, the address becomes the art. The mailman carries the avant-garde between networking artists."[251] The surrealists' engagement with the mail initiated patterns of behavior and artistic paradigms that were put into practice by the later postwar movements. Indeed, the surrealists' production of the *Bôite Alerte* coincided with the development of the postwar mail art movement.

In France, the utilization of postal media was continued by the nouveaux realists. According to Ken Friedman in "The Early Days of Mail Art," the nouveaux réalists, founded as an offshoot of French surrealism by Pierre Restany was, the first postwar movement to use correspondence media as art forms.[252] Friedman cites, in particular, Yves Klein's famous *Blue Stamp* (1955), a regulation-size blue postage stamp that pushed the limits of art as well as the legal use of the postal communication system. Klein negotiated with the post office to have his real art stamps function as valid stamps in the regular mail.[253] According to Nan Rosenthal, in "Assisted Levitation: The Art of Yves Klein" (1982), Klein used his stamps to send postcards that announced his exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery, Paris, 1957. Fellow nouveau réalists Arman and Daniel Spoerri also created mailed works using postcards and artistamps throughout the late

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[251] Chuck Welsh, "The Ethereal Open Aesthetic" in *Eternal Network*, xvii.

[252] Ken Friedman, "The Early Days of Mail Art," in *Eternal Network*, 4.

[253] Nan Rosenthal, "Assisted Levitation: The Art of Yves Klein" in *Yves Klein 1928-1962: A Retrospective*, exhibition catalogue (Houston, Rice Univ., 1982), 43.

1950s.[254] Akin to the surrealists' dialogues with postal media, the nouveaux réalists utilized the post as a means to inject art into the everyday.

If the surrealists forged paradigms for correspondence and mailed art, it was the New York correspondence school (NYCS) of the 1960s that adopted the paradigm and expanded its practice. Founded by Ray Johnson in 1963, the NYCS's name is a play on the New York school of abstract expressionist painters that prevailed over the American art scene in the postwar era. The name also refers to correspondence art schools in which art is taught through the mails.

In the mid-1950s Johnson had utilized the mail as a means to exchange ideas with fellow artists as well as circulate information regarding new works to patrons. At this time, he was focused primarily on the production of collages that incorporated postal media with old photographs, advertisements, and cut-outs from magazines and comics. His artistic experiments with the mail, its media as well as its system, developed more fully with the formation of the NYCS. Comprised of a network of friends, public figures, and strangers, the NYCS engaged in an ongoing exchange of artwork through the post.

The NYCS' utilization of postal materials was an implicit counter-response to the formalist aesthetics and lofty ideals of abstract expressionism. Similar to the surrealists, as well as the later nouveau réalists, the NYCS sought to work in the gap between art and life by introducing artful experience into the mundane actions of everyday life. Informed by ambivalence towards exclusive art institutions and art markets, the NYCS relied on the mail to circulate and exhibit artwork. As Donna De Salvo notes, in "Correspondences" (1999), the NYCS relied on the mail network, in part, out of necessity, as galleries and museums were initially unreceptive to this "throwaway" art produced by Johnson and his associates.[255]

A key concept of the NYCS is the notion of reciprocity. Johnson and his associates stressed the value of exchange and social intercourse, as the mailed object is secondary in importance to the experience of networking and shared communication.

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[254] Friedman, The Early Days of Mail Art," in *Eternal Network*, 4.

[255] Donna De Salvo, "Correspondences," in *Ray Johnson: Correspondences* ed. Donna De Salvo and Catherine Gudis (Columbus, Wexner Center for the Art, 1999), 20.

According to Clive Philpot, in "The Mailed Art of Ray Johnson" (1995), "the irrelevance of what is physically original; the collaboration; the gift; the casting of art into the mailstream—adds up to a view of that is not only a true alternative to most current art practices but implicitly questions the normal machinery of the Western art worlds."[256] In this sense, Philpot argues that mail art, as a practice of exchange, is actually akin to those attitudes and practices of "primitive" cultures.[257]

 As a counter-culture movement, mail artists discovered that the post offered a means to evade America's postwar morality and consumer values. In "Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School: The Fine Art of Communication" (1999), Sharla Sava writes, "The NYCS was an imaginative conceptual space that welcomed strange behavior, sexual fantasy, and creative living. It allowed for the circulation of material that rejected the dominate ideology of U.S liberal corporatism by questioning its cherished values—the traditional family, patriotism, and the need to be a good consumer."[258] This postwar engagement of the mail as a means to collaborate against dominate culture systems further evidences the bridge between surrealist postal art and that of this later era.

From the beginning, this study has sought to expand the parameters of mail art by re-examining early modernists' discourses with the mail. The postal works of the surrealists constitute a unique episode in early modernist dialogues with post, its ephemera and system. Indeed, other modernist movements, such as the futurists, dadaists, and expressionists, periodically incorporated postal media into their works. However, for over thirty years the surrealists engaged the post, incorporating postal media in collages, appropriating postal forms in order to create their own stamps and postcards, and adopting the system itself as a means to circulate their ideas and artwork.

An important aspect of this study has been to consider why the artistic avant-garde was drawn to the post. As I have argued, the modern post developed as an

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[256] Clive Phillpot, "The Mailed Art of Ray Johnson" in *Eternal Network*, 28.

[257] Ibid, 28.

[258] Sharla Shava, "Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School: The Fine Art of Communication," in *Ray Johnson: Correspondences*, 126.

alternative site for political and cultural discourse. In this sense, it provided a space for dissent against social and cultural authority.

The surrealists recognized the post as a means for dissent as well as free expression and communication. As such, they adopted its symbols and forms as metaphors for the liberation of the unconscious. They also enlisted the post as a means to resist bourgeois art institutions. For example, their production of postcards allowed for the dispatch of art beyond the confines of the gallery and institution and also challenged Western definitions of fine art.

As this study is the first to consider the intersection of the modern post and the artistic avant-garde, there remains a rich vein of ideas for further study. In particular, Hugnet's postcard collage series *Spumifiers* (1948). Also, initial investigations in the British surrealists' dialogues with the post reveal significant connections between the surrealists and Britain's General Post Office film unit. Indeed, during the interwar periods surrealists Len Lye, Humphrey Jennings, and Alberto Calvacanti were employed as filmmakers by the G.P.O. While there have been countless studies concerning documentary film and the G.P.O. film unit, scholars have failed to consider the dialogue between the film unit itself and the surrealism. My current study also serves as an impetus into investigations of how artwork by other modernist movements and individuals engages the medium of the post. But for now, I have achieved my objective of rectifying an important deficit in the literature on surrealism.

APPENDIX

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: George Hugnet, *Guaranteed Surrealist Postcard Series*, twenty-one sepia prints, each 3½ x 5½ in., 1937. [Gérard Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement.* trans. Alison Anderson. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 330.].

Figure 2: Max Ernst, *Le Facteur Cheval*, mix media collage, 25 x 18 in.,1932. Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice. [Peggy Guggenheim Museum, http://guggenheim-venice.it.].

Figure 3: Mimi Parent, *Bôite Alerte*, mix media, 11 x 7 x 2.5 in., 1959.
Tate Britain Museum, London. [Tate Britain Museum,
http://www.tate.org.uk.].

Figure 4: Jean Raoux, *Girl Reading a Letter*, oil on canvas,
31½ x 39⅜ in., c.1780. Louvre, Paris. [Jean Leymarie, *The
Spirit of the Letter in Painting*, trans. James Emmons (Paris: Hallmark and
Albert Skira, 1961), 61.].

Figure 5: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Billet Doux*, oil on canvas, 32¾ x 26⅜ in., c.1770. The Jules S. Bache Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [The Metropolitan Museum of Art, http://www.metmuseum.org.].
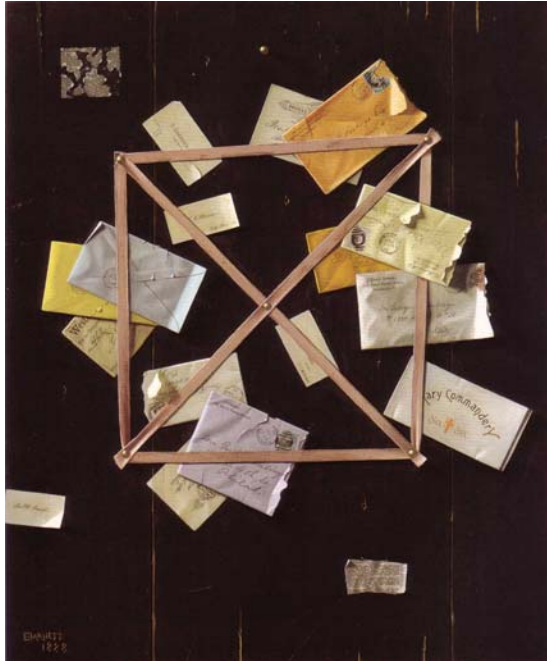
Figure 6: William Harnett, *Mr. Huling's Picture Rack*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in., 1888. Private collection. [www.artchive.com.].

Figure 7: John Peto, *Rack Picture for William Malcolm Bunn*, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in., 1882. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC. [Smithsonian American Art Museum, http://www.americanart.si.edu.].

Figure 8: John Haberle, *Torn in Transit*, oil on canvas,
14 x 12 in., c.1889. Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester,
Rochester, New York. [Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester,
http://www.magart.rochester.edu.].

Figure 9: Anonymous, untitled, postcard, 3½ x 5½ in., c. 1900.
[Paul Hammond, *French Undressing: Naughty Postcards from 1900 to 1920* (London: Bloomsbury Books, 1988), 35.].

Figure 10: J. Geiser, untitled, postcard, 3½ x 5½ in., c. 1920. [Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 100.].

Figure 11: Anonymous, *Samoan Girl*, postcard, 3½ x 5½ in., c. 1920.
[Private collection of James Wilkerson].

Figure 12: Anonymous, untitled, postcard, 3½ x 5½, 1914-1915.
Private collection. [Albert L. Moore, *Postal Propaganda of the Third
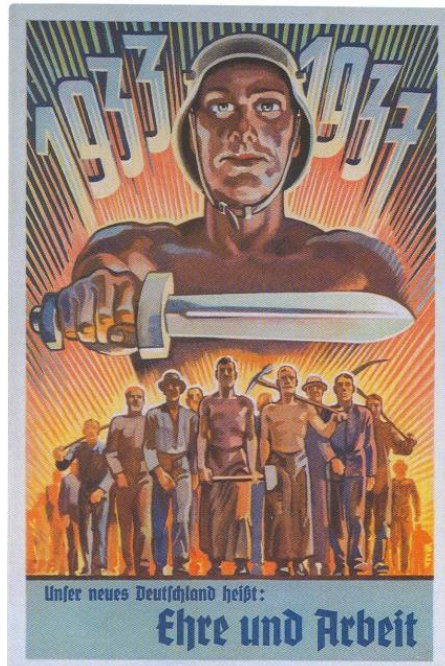Reich* (Pennsylvania: Schiffer Military History, 2003), 27.].

Figure 13: Anonymous, untitled, postcard, 3½ x 5½, 1933-37.
Private collection. [Albert L. Moore, *Postal Propaganda of
the Third Reich* (Pennsylvania: Schiffer Military History, 2003),
60.].

Figure 14: Franz Marc, *Tower of the Blue Horses*, India
ink and gouache on postcard stock, 5⅜ x 3½ in.,1913.
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich. [Peter Klaus-Schuster,
Franz Marc: Postcards to Prince Jussuf (Munich: Prestel Publishing,
1988), plate 2.].

Figure 15: Franz Marc, *The War Horse of Prince Jussef*, India ink and gouache on postcard stock, 5⅜ x 3½ in., 1913. [Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich. From: Peter Klaus-Schuster, *Franz Marc: Postcards to Prince Jussef* (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 1988), plate 13.].

Figure 16: Ivo Pannaggi, Mail Collage, mix media, 14 7/8 x 19 7/8 in., October, 16, 1926. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. [Giovanni Lista, *Futurism* (Paris: Terrail, 2001), 161.].

Figure 17: Marcel Duchamp, replica of *L.H.O.O.Q.*, from *Box in a Valise*, 1941-42. Rectified ready-made: reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* to which Duchamp added a moustache and beard, 7 ¾ x 4 7/8 in.,1919. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. [Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 140.].

Figure 18: Max Ernst, *Du Verre*, mix media collage, 46 x 64 in.,1932.
Private Collection, Stuttgart, Germany. [Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Loplop:
the Artist in the Third Person* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1983),
plate 4.].

Figure 19: Max Ernst, *Hommage a une enfant nommee Violette*, mix media collage, 35 x 45½ in., 1933. Staatgalerie, Stuttgart, Germany. [Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Loplop: the Artist in the Third Person* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1983), plate 31.].

Figure 20: Louis Charvet, *portrait of Ferdinand Cheval*,
postcard, 5⅜ x 3½ in., c.1902. [The Autobiography of
Ferdinand Cheval; the Story of the *Palais Idéal*, Hauterives, December
1911, 34 years of Persistent Work, 9,000 days,
65,000 hours," reprinted in *Raw Vision*, no. 38, (2002): 27.].

Figure 21: *Palais Idéal*, Hauterives, France.

Figure 22: western façade, *Palais Idéal*, Hauterives, France.

Figure 23: southern facade, *Palais Idéal*, Hauterives, France.

Figure 24: wheelbarrow in crypt, *Palais Idéal*, Hauterives, France.

Figure 25: Detail of western façade, *Palais Idéal*, Hauterives, France.

Figure 26: Pablo Picasso, page from "*Facteur* Cheval Sketchbook," charcoal on paper, 1937. Private collection. [John Richardson, *Sorcerer's Apprentice: Picasso, Provence, and Douglas Cooper* (New York: Random House, 1999), 218.].

Figure 27: Pablo Picasso, page from "the *Facteur* Cheval Sketchbook," charcoal on paper, 1937. Private collection. [John Richardson, *Sorcerer's Apprentice: Picasso, Provence, and Douglas Cooper* (New York: Random House, 1999), 218.].

Figure 28: Louis Charvet, *Cheval with Wheelbarrow*, postcard, c. 1910. ["The Autobiography of Ferdinand Cheval; the Story of the *Palais Idéal* , Hauterives, December 1911, 34 years of Persistent Work, 9,000 days, 65,000 hours," reprinted in *Raw Vision*, no. 38, (2002): 26.].

Figure 29: Jean-François Millet, *L'Angélus*, oil on canvas, 21.9 x 26 in., 1857-59. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [Musée d'Orsay, http:www.musee-orsay.fr.].

Figure 30: Oscar Dominguez, *Fauteuil,* upholstered
wheelbarrow, 1937. Private collection. Photograph by
Man Ray, ca. 1937. [Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and
Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*
(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 161.].

Figure 31: Max Ernst, *Men Shall Know Nothing of This*,
oil on canvas, 31 x 25 in.,1923. Tate Modern Museum,
London. [Edward Quinn, *Max Ernst* (New York: New York
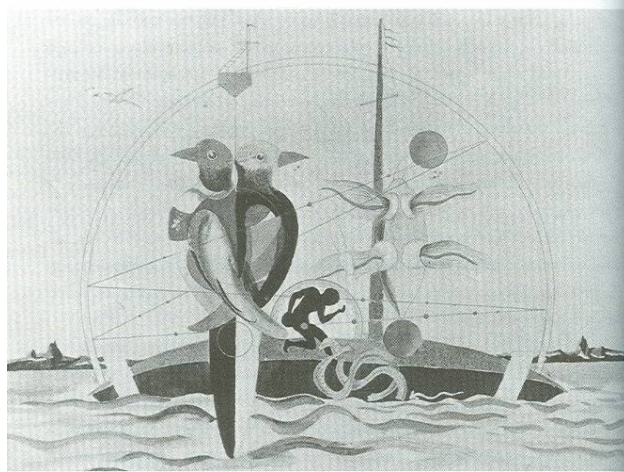Graphic Society, 1977), 113.].

Figure 32: Max Ernst, *Men Shall Never Know It*, gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 19 x 25½ in., 1921. Collection of Peter Schamoni, Munich. [Edward Quinn, *Max Ernst* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1977), 113.].

Figure 33: Valentine Hugo. *Portrait of the Postman Cheval*, oil on canvas, 28.5 x 35in., c.1932. [Edward Weisberger, ed. *Surrealism: Two Private Eyes, The Nesuhi Ertegun and Daniel Filipacchi Collections* (New York: Abrams, 1999), 164.].

Figure 34: Andre Breton, *Fantôme-envelope*, 1931. ["L'Object Fantôme,"
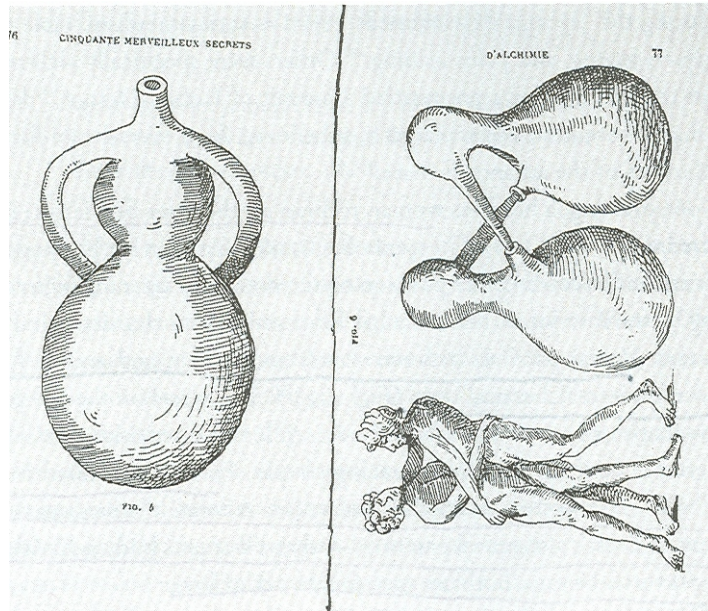*Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, no.3 (December 1931): 21.].

Figure 35: Anonymous, *Alchemical Vessels*, illustration from G. Phaneg, *Cinquante merveilles secrets d'alchimie*. [M.E Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2001), 82.].
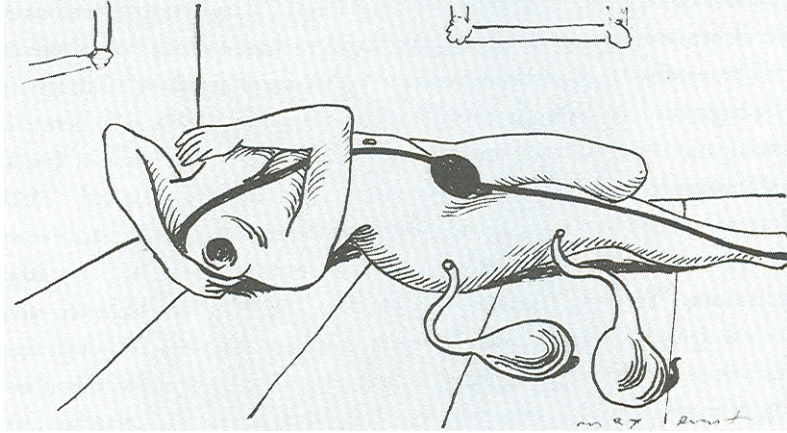
Figure 36: Max Ernst, *The Cold Throats*, illustration for a poem by Robert Desnos. [M.E Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 2001), 82.].

Figure 37: Tarot de Marseilles, Fool Tarot 1701-1715. [Lo Scarabo, *Tarot de Marseille* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2006), 37].

Figure 38: Paul Éluard, postcard montage. ["Les plus belles cartes postales," *Minotaure* no. 3-4 (Dec. 1933), 85.].

Figure 39: Paul Éluard, page from Paul Éluard postcard album. Musée de la Poste, Paris, France. [José Pierre, "La Carte postale matériau du poeme visible" in Regards trés particuliers sur a carte postale, ed. Nadine Comber (Paris: L' Museé de la Poste, 1992), 41].
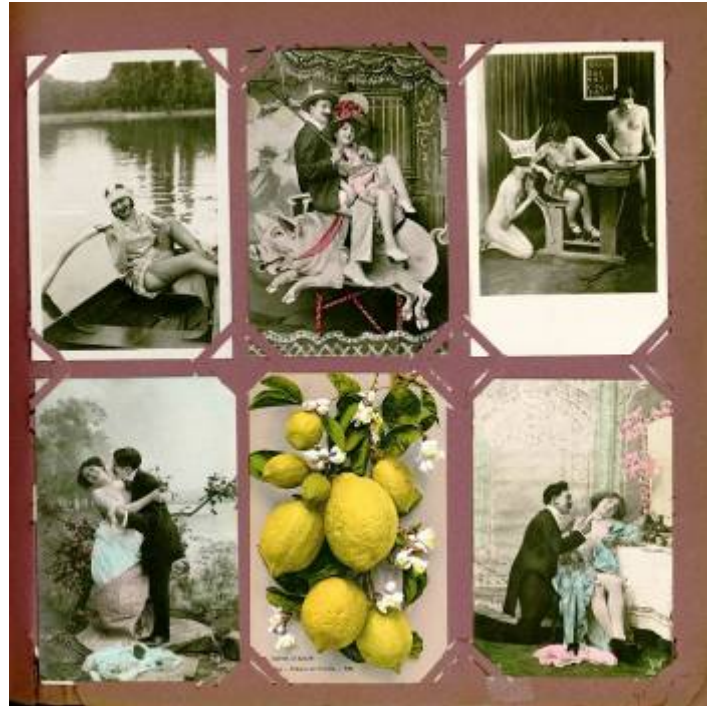
Figure 40: Paul Éluard, page from Paul Éluard postcard
Album, 1931-33 Musée de la Poste, Paris, France. [José Pierre,
"La Carte postale matériau du poeme visible" in Regards trés
particuliers sur a carte postale, ed. Nadine Comber (Paris: L' Museé
de la Poste, 1992), 46].

Figure 41: Duchamp, *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* Painted metal birdcage containing marble blocks, thermometer, and piece of cuttlebone, 4 7/8 x 8 3/4 x 6 3/8 in., 1964 (replica of 1921 original). Museum of Modern Art, New York. [Museum of Modern Art, http://www.moma.org].

Figure 42: Meret Oppenheim, *My Governess*, Metal, shoes
and paper, 5 ½ x 13 x 8 in., 1936 (Replica made by the artist in 1967).
Moderna Museet, Stockholm. [Moderna Museet,
http://www.modernamuseet.se.].

Figure 43: André Breton, *Poem-object*, mix media, 6 x 8 in., 1938.
[National Galleries of Scotland, Deans Gallery, Edinburgh. [National
Galleries of Scotland http://www.nationalgalleries.org.].

Figure 44: Pablo Picasso, *The Dream and Lie of Franco*, Etching and aquatint, 15 1/16 x 22 1/4 in., 1937. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. [Metropolitan Museum of Art http://www.metmuseum.org.].

Figure 45: Joan Mirò, *Aidez l'Espagna*, serigraph poster, 10 x 7 ¾ in.,1937.[Gérard Durozi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2002), 226.].
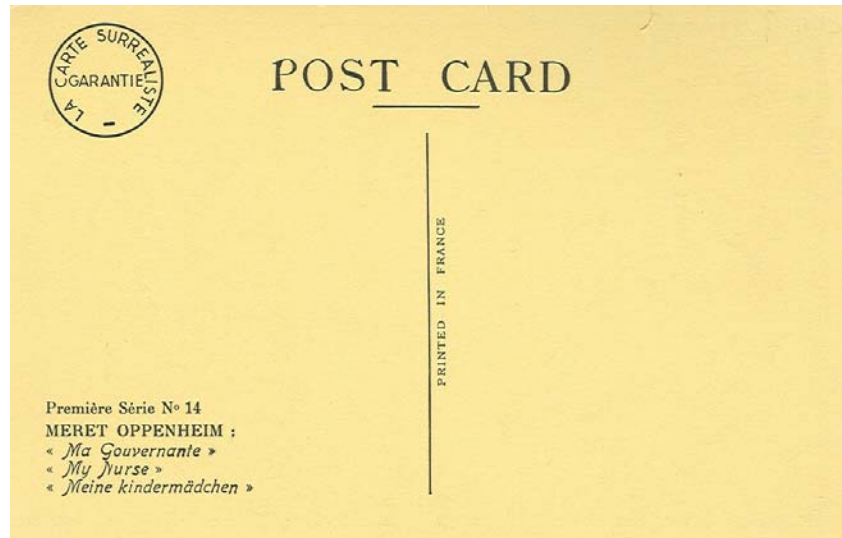
Figure 46: Meret Oppenheim, verso of *My Governess*, sepia postcard, 3½ x 5½ in., 1937. [collection of the author].

Figure 47: Missives Lascives from *Bôite Alerte*, 1959. [photo from curatorial file at Centre de Pompidou, Paris].

Figure: 48: Marcel Duchamp, *Couple of Laundress's Aprons*, Fabric and fur, Edition of 20, each 9 x 7 in., 1959. Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA [Norton Simon Museum http://nortonsimon.org.].

Figure 49: Interior of EROS exhibition, Galerie Daniel Cordier, Paris, 1959-60. [Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938-1968* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 160.]
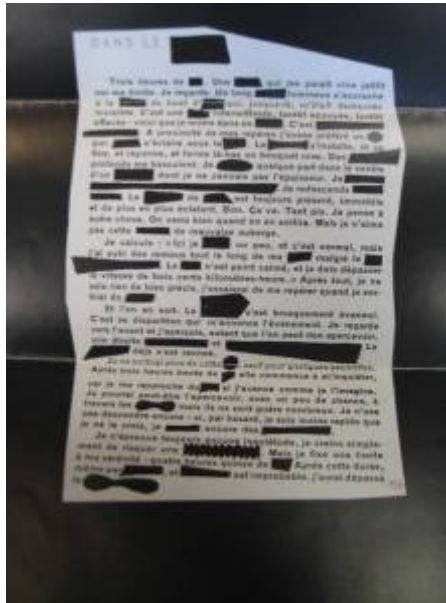
Figure 50: Robert Benayoun, *Dear Monsieur...*, paper,
1959. Museé de la Poste, Paris. [photo by author].

Figure 51: Anonymous, *SOIS ARDENT EN FORET*, paper envelope, card, and ink, 1959. Museé de la Poste, Paris.
[photo by author].

Figure 52: Missives Lascives from Boite Alerte, featuring Robert Benayoun's *Le Corridor*, 1959. [photo from curatorial file at Centre de Pompidou, Paris].

Figure 53: Marcel Duchamp, *Bôite Verte,* Felt-covered cardboard box containing one color plate and ninety-four paper elements, 13 x 10 x 1 in., 1934. Tate Modern, London. [Tate Modern, http://www.tate.org.].

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