Tracing Threshold Events
– across Art, Psychopathology and Prehistory

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Abstract

The starting point for this thesis is the juxtaposition of two works of art from the 1960s: *Study for 'Skin' I*, a print-drawing from 1962 by Jasper Johns, and the photograph *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* from 1966 by Bruce Nauman. Viewing these works in conjunction with Palaeolithic hand stencils, the marking of threshold events emerges as a theme. Resonant material is then assembled and studied: Surrealist texts and photography, or the use of photography, by André Breton, Claude Cahun and Man Ray; the medical theses of psychiatrists François Tosquelles and Jean Oury; and works on prehistoric art by Georges Bataille and André Leroi-Gourhan. The marking of threshold events at two nesting scales of analysis – the evolutionary emergence of the human species; and the psychotic onset of hallucination and delusion – is examined. Echoes are found to resound in a third register – in the neurological events that give rise to consciousness and dream experience. Consideration of the Johns drawing and Nauman photograph in these terms is proposed.

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Introduction:
Tracing Threshold Events
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I first saw *Study for 'Skin' I*, a print and drawing from 1962 by Jasper Johns, reproduced in a lecture theatre. The face and hands represented were vastly larger than the life-size of the actual work and the whole hovered on the wall in a beam of light, rather than being anchored to a page. The lecturer spoke about Maurice Merleau-Ponty but it wasn't an illustration of body schema or self-sensation, flesh or a chiasm, that I saw but rather the marking of a threshold event. Or that is how I would now summarise what I saw, retrospectively, and what I still go back to see. At the time I saw an implacable image of the onset of my first psychotic episode. And that personal memory was provoked and then surpassed in significance through my juxtaposing this work of art with another, one so familiar I no longer recall my first encountering its reproduction – indeed so familiar I thought, until then, that I had tired of it: *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, the photograph from 1966 by Bruce Nauman.

The conjunction of *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* and *Study for 'Skin' I* liberates both from the ties suggested by their titles: self-portraiture stops being an issue for Nauman's photograph and skin ceases to be a focus for study in the print-drawing by Johns. *Study for 'Skin' I* seems to be the warped-mirror reflection of *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, or an errant negative to the other's positive. The event captured in Nauman's photograph is set reverberating by the print-drawing by Johns, with the latter presenting a vertical planar threshold that is punctured in the confrontation between the two works. But there is a crucial third term that, when first triangulated with these works by Johns and Nauman, opened up the possibility of developing a thesis in response to them: the Palaeolithic hand stencils found in caves.

In this thesis I will take the coincidental formal resemblance between these three terms – deriving from their shared if differentiated involvement of an indexical representation of hands – as a physical marker for the conceptual resonance I will be sounding out between them. Here I need to distance myself

from a primitivising of the Palaeolithic marks and from their use in order to endorse some notion of there being an objective or universal aesthetic value in the modern works by Johns and Nauman. Where there is coincidental formal resemblance I am not invested in finding 'affinity': there are no 'basic shared characteristics' beyond their collective reliance on the splayed palm in their making, and certainly no implication of commonality in underlying production intention.[1] It is against this lack of relation that I will elaborate the potential for both works, in their conjunction with each other and with further material, to mark threshold events.

The threshold events at issue in this thesis are ontological breaks as judged by that which ultimately emerges. They are perceived by the emergent being – and may be understood by us, as external observers – as the critical moment in a transformative passage. I have a specific trio of threshold events in my sights, each at a nesting scale of analysis: the evolutionary emergence of the human species; individual psychotic onset; and the creation of experience from neuronal activity. Clearly, the ontological change is distinct in each instance, involving transformative passage from *Homo Heidelbergensis* to *Homo Sapiens* in the first case; from a state of rational being to psychosis in the second; and from the objectivity of brain to the subjectivity of mind in the third. Clearly, also, the onset of a particular new species, evolutionarily over millennia, happens just once, whereas the eruption of hallucinatory or delusional experience is episodic – perennial or perhaps exceptional within a given lifetime – and the wresting of experience from the brain, by the brain, is an ongoing activity, a continually refreshed event. Nonetheless, in each case transformation emerges from across a field of activity – that is, from a population of organisms, a psychosocial set of relations, or a neuronal network – and we may seek to access and interrelate the critical moments, i.e. threshold events, potentially at issue.

There may be other areas of human – indeed non-human or pre-human – history, experience and functioning that extend the grouping I have identified,

[1] Critique of the assertion that there are 'basic shared characteristics' or 'affinities' between modern and 'primitive' art – specifically the assertion made by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe in their 1984–85 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, '"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern' – may be found in McEvilley (1984), 2001.

falling likewise within my definition of a threshold event, but for the purposes of this thesis, which has developed out of the study of materials I have assembled around the works by Johns and Nauman, these three will be focal. In each case, transformative passage is both eruptive (acting from the bottom up) and wrested (acting from the top down). If sometimes described as explosive and sometimes as implosive it is because the precise mechanisms at work cannot be specified at the applied level of analysis, if yet at all. Phenomena rather than objects, indeed leaving no visible or tangible trace, these threshold events gain, through their marking in art, a material basis for discussion – and one that maintains their elusiveness.

Turning first to the critical moment in transformative passage to *Homo sapiens* – observing on an evolutionary scale and applying a millennial timeframe – we find ourselves within the field of prehistory. Specialist prehistorians do not generally concern themselves with species onset, beyond acknowledging that a multiplicity of dispersed genetic events must have collectively constituted the eruptive event. Nonetheless, certain artists and intellectuals interloping in the field have been more bold. In his recent film, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams,* Werner Herzog is prompted by the Palaeolithic art at Chauvet to assert that our population 'burst onto the scene like a sudden explosive event. It is as if the modern human soul had awakened here.'[2] With this line and the film that it punctuates, he recalls Georges Bataille's response to the Lascaux cave and the prehistoric art found there. If we gasp as Herzog guides us cinematically round Chauvet in not two but three visual dimensions, exposing us to the depth of the rocky recesses and jutting surfaces that bear the prints and paintings, we echo, perhaps, those early readers of Bataille's book on Lascaux who, turning through its pages in 1955, found the first colour photographs to be published. When I raised Bataille's book with Herzog he dismissed it as overly theoretical,[3] however the core thesis of each work is directly comparable, albeit distinct from the arguments of this thesis: whereas Bataille perceives the 'birth of art' in

[2] Herzog 2010, at 44 min.
[3] Conversation with Werner Herzog, 23 March 2011. It nonetheless seems likely it was Bataille's publication that that first ignited Herzog's interest in prehistoric art in particular: the filmmaker describes an 'intellectual, spiritual awakening' on coming across a book 'with a picture of a horse from the Lascaux cave on it' at the age of twelve, then a year after the publication of Bataille's work. See http://www.caveofforgottendreams.co.uk/about-the-film/the-director-werner-herzog.html (last accessed 8 May 2011).

Lascaux, Herzog sees 'almost a form of proto-cinema' in Chauvet.[4] In fact, the major difference between book and film is arguably the viewing context in which each was produced, with Bataille's team having to visit Lascaux at night in order to take photographs – given crowds of visitors during the day – and Herzog one of only a tiny number of individuals ever to be allowed into the sealed and preserved environment of Chauvet. Since Bataille's time, Lascaux too has been closed to the public and this increasing lack of direct access to prehistoric cave art brings an urgency to its discussion now, whilst having precipitated my own research visits to caverns where Palaeolithic hand stencils are particularly notable, specifically Pech Merle and Gargas.

With striking similarity to Herzog's description, in relation to the Chauvet cave, of the bursting arrival or sudden awakening of modern humanity, Bataille wrote half a century earlier that 'the world alters itself and changes in the moment between the beginnings of the Reindeer Age and the burgeoning of the Lascaux cave: there was an outburst; and none since has been such a dawning light.'[5] Each, in their own voice, envisages the onset of our species as a threshold event: an ontological change signified in the emergence of one state of being from out of another. What constitutes those respective states is less important for my thesis than the moment of transformative passage between them. It is this outbreak, so difficult to access after the event, that I hope to shed some light on through considering the two works of art from the 1960s and material drawn out in connection with them.

Whereas the creation of rock art by the San, a nomadic people in southern Africa, has enabled interpretations of prehistoric marks that – as far as is possible given the vast distance of time – approach an emic account and which I will take up in this thesis,[6] my work with the 1960s art by Johns and Nauman, for instance in relation to Palaeolithic hand stencils, wilfully moves against considering this in its own cultural context. *Study for 'Skin' I* and *Self-Portrait as*

[4] Bataille 1955, title. Herzog 2010, at 13 min. Herzog specifically invokes the multiple overlaid versions of certain animals at Chauvet, describing them as being 'like frames in an animated film', further highlighting how flickering torch light on the uneven surfaces may have additionally created 'the illusion of movement'.
[5] Bataille 1955, p. 26.
[6] It is the account provided by David Lewis Williams and Jean Clottes, specifically informed by the former's work with the San, that will be adopted and reoriented here.

a Fountain share a national context and an era; however, the point of my bringing them together is not to retell the history of art in the United States of America in the 1960s. If a rethinking of this history is possible through these works, then it will not be undertaken here. Nor do I wish to further anoint canonised artists, or gloss the canonisation of their oeuvres. The point is, rather, to spring two particular works of art from out of these confines and to see what they may otherwise kindle between them – specifically how they may form the basis for reflection, via further material, on threshold events.

Turning now to the critical moment in transformative passage that gives onto madness – taking the human lifetime as our new temporal scale – we find ourselves within the field of psychopathology. The onset of madness or, more specifically, of hallucination and delusion does not necessarily involve the experience of a threshold event but, for the purposes of my thesis, I will focus on those occasions when it may be characterised in this manner. Here, moving away from the field of prehistory and from a focus on species onset, we contemplate an ontological change that we may experience, or empathetically imagine for ourselves. I will test whether material lending itself to analysis in terms of such a lifetime event – for example, the 1948 thesis by psychiatrist François Tosquelles, *Le Vécu de la Fin du Monde dans la Folie* [*Lived Experience at the End of the World in Madness*] – is also open to the other primary threshold events at issue in my research through simultaneously considering the specific works by Johns and Nauman, here again outside of their own or otherwise familiar cultural contexts.

Turning to a further threshold event to be investigated, we enter a third field – that of brain science. Now the timeframe for analysis is shorter still, involving the split-second and the neuronal, as I consider the critical moment of transformative passage from the brain to the mind. Here the basic model is the firing of an action potential – the eruptive burst of electrical charge triggered chemically in a brain cell – and it is this that, acting in concert with a distributed multiplicity of other such electrochemical events across the neuronal network, generates experience moment to moment, whether wakeful consciousness or dreams when we are asleep. While the nature of the ontological shift between brain and mind is currently obscure beyond this basic understanding, an

explanatory picture is perhaps the ultimate goal of both brain science and the philosophy of mind. My thesis challenges the dominance of either philosophical or scientific approaches within consciousness studies, drawing on each whilst seeking to establish a novel role for art.

The threshold events glimpsed in the material I will bring together amount to origins in an elusive rather than fixed sense such as they are described by Walter Benjamin in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to his work *Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels* [*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*] of 1928:

> The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis.[7]

The aim of the current project is not to isolate and secure events of origination but to bear witness to them where they are marked or reported, affirming them where implicated; it is not to freeze eddies in the stream of becoming but, when evidence suggests them, to feel the force of their tug. By bringing *Study for 'Skin' I* and *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* into the fields of psychopathology, prehistory and brain science, I will seek to explore the threshold events of species emergence, psychotic onset and the brain's creation of experience, which customarily exceed the respective disciplinary norms of analysis.

Crucially, Benjamin's 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' describes the methodological approach to be adopted in this thesis: the rhythmical digressionary method of the medieval and scholastic treatise. In turning to the treatise, Benjamin seeks a model for his own study of the *Trauerspiel*, or German tragic drama, whilst analysing the model's potential for philosophical contemplation of the arts more generally. He writes: 'In the canonic form of the treatise the only element of an intention… is the authoritative quotation.'[8] In what follows here, it is the specific works by Johns and Nauman that I shall be 'quoting', or rather repeatedly

[7] Benjamin (1928) 1998, p. 45.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

reproducing – each time extracted from their familiar context and differently relocated. Benjamin continues on the treatise:

> Its method is essentially representation. Method is a digression. Representation as digression – such is the methodological nature of the treatise. The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. For by pursuing different levels of meaning in its examination of one single object it receives both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm.[9]

Representation and 'the question of representation' are inherent to philosophy for Benjamin.[10] A little later in his prologue, he describes philosophy as 'a struggle for representation of ideas',[11] hailing the philosophical treatise for staging this struggle as a dance.[12] It is a dance choreographed through the rhythmic alternation of quotation with digression.

It is in adopting a digressionary method that I will open up a path through the fields not only of art, but also of psychopathology, prehistory and brain science. In the first chapter, Palaeolithic hand stencils will be studied in order to lead the works by Johns and Nauman astray. Each ensuing chapter will then make a new beginning and examine freshly diverting material before returning each time, in conclusion, to the original objects quoted. If, after Benjamin, meanings are to be 'pursu[ed at] different levels', then the registers I will investigate involve evolutionary, lifetime and neuronal scales of analysis. My return to *Study for 'Skin' I* or *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* at the end of each chapter and, in conjunction, my reliance on a repeated but restricted terminology around the idea of threshold events are intended to establish a fugal rather than linear development of thoughts, differentially inflected in each return and each repeat through the new material studied in the preceding pages. The ambition here,

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[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

taken on from Benjamin, is to reveal a nexus of meaning that is independent of my own initiating intention, with an order ultimately distinct from my own particular way of thinking, assuming there is a coherence to be recognised in the material itself.

In his prologue, Benjamin continues his description of the treatise by drawing an analogy with the mosaic: 'Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate'.[13] He further elaborates on what they share:

> The relationship between the minute precision of the labour and the proportions of the sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter.[14]

The eclectic – Benjamin suggests 'capricious'[15] – elements to be brought together in the present context and considered in detail include not only Bataille's book on Lascaux and Tosquelles's medical thesis on madness, as already mentioned, but also Jean Oury's medical thesis on madness and André Leroi-Gourhan's writing on prehistoric art and the evolution of our species, moreover André Breton's heroine Nadja and the Surrealist concept of convulsive beauty, together with contemporaneous photography by Claude Cahun and Man Ray – and further, in addition to the material already highlighted in the abstract: skulls and brains as inspected by Paul Broca; photographs of patients judged to be hysterical by Jean-Martin Charcot; the hashish experiments of Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours; 'Aurélia', a literary memoir of psychosis by Gerard de Nerval; the visual art of the mad, art brut and psychopathological art; and the rise of chlorpromazine as an antipsychotic drug. The image, motif or pattern to emerge through the assembly of these quoted fragments – alongside the Johns, the Nauman and Palaeolithic stencilling – may or may not cohere as that of a threshold event, such as I have sought to define it above.

[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Highlighting an intellectual connection that has often shocked post-War commentators, Benjamin sent a copy of his *Trauerspiel* book to Carl Schmitt. In a deferential covering note he describes deriving 'a confirmation of my modes of research in the philosophy of art from yours in the philosophy of the state.'[16] The similarity of investigative approach lies in an extremism, according to which a philosophical idea – the *Trauerspiel* for Benjamin – depends on encounters with singularly extreme examples that threaten to exceed or elude that very idea. As Benjamin elaborates in his book, this draws contrast with 'literary-historical treatments', which in the case of the *Trauerspiel* seek conceptualisation in terms of its generality, surveying variety and 'examining what these things have "in common"' – averaging differences – in order to define the genre.[17] Schmitt's emphasis, in his essay *Political Theology* of 1922, on states of emergency and the shock of the exception against a background of eventless continuity might be drawn into my discussion, to follow here, of threshold events. However, in a fundamental break with Schmitt – and with one of Benjamin's interests in the *Trauerspiel* – there is no sovereign power in the scenarios I will be discussing and in these scenarios the extreme challenge to the norm is crucially not repressed but instead successful in producing radical transformation.[18] In aligning his philosophical investigation of art to Schmitt's regarding the state, Benjamin announces his will to express, through rigorous examination, the very essence of the *Trauerspiel*. While my aim as regards the works by Johns and Nauman is not so grand, methodological extremism – and specifically the notion of studying comparison material that is so extreme in its difference that it threatens to defy comparative analysis – is nonetheless pertinent. Here the limit of the digressions and detours in my thesis – away from the quoted print-drawing and photograph; and as demanded by the treatise form, as described by Benjamin – is set.

The nature of what draws the material in my thesis together and what allows for the digression between elements may be clarified by comparing my method not only to medieval and scholastic labours to produce a treatise or mosaic but to

[16] Benjamin (1930) 1992, p. 5.
[17] Benjamin (1928) 1998, pp. 38–39.
[18] In his letter to Schmitt, Benjamin identifies two parallels with the former's work, before coming on to suggest a relationship between their respective research modes he writes: 'my book is indebted to you for its presentation of the doctrine of sovereignty in the seventeenth century'. Benjamin (1930) 1992, p. 5.

modern curatorial work in a museum or gallery context. This informs not only my close attention, in what follows, to the production and provenance of the art I am studying but, more significantly – and specifically informed by recent practice in curating contemporary art[19] – my ambition to encourage unconventional ways of looking at the work assembled, whilst allowing these works to maintain the autonomy to disrupt the thesis, or exhibition, with which I simultaneously aim to unite them.

In Chapter 1, 'Works by Jasper Johns and Bruce Nauman', the print-drawing and the photograph will be viewed together with a Palaeolithic hand-stencil found in the Pech Merle cave in France, releasing the modern works from the conventional art historical terms used to consider them. This curatorial triangulation will operate as a launch into the rest of the material brought together by the thesis.

This material will be anchored in nineteenth-century France in Chapter 2, 'From Paul Broca to Gerard de Nerval'. Here the two disciplines that group the ensuing chapters, prehistory and psychopathology, will be introduced with a third, brain science, presented as a hinge between them. In a moment of confluence that instigates the work of the chapter, we will find Neolithic trepanning envisaged as a cure for madness – that is, *prehistoric* activity on the *brain* is seen to treat *psychopathology*.

The two ensuing psychopathology chapters will draw on the French experience of World Wars I and II respectively. In Chapter 3, 'Psychopathology and Surrealism', the wartime diagnoses of mental illness and its subsequent uptake and reworking in Surrealist text and photography will be considered. With the eroticisation of psychological disorder by André Breton and Paul Éluard set against the horror hinted at by Claude Cahun, marks of the onset of madness will sought.

In Chapter 4, 'From Surrealist Interest in the Art of the Mad to Psychiatric Interest in Creativity', the Nazi murder of psychiatric patients sets concern for their art, as well as care, into relief. Jean Dubuffet's Art Brut project will be

[19] As discussed, for example, in Filipovic 2011.

assessed, along with its precursors and parallels. Turning to the work of clinicians, the medical thesis of François Tosquelles will be examined in particular for its emphasis on a psychopathological threshold moment – or lived experience at the end of the world – and on the creativity of psychotic responses to this predicament. A consideration of post-war developments in psychopharmacology will allow the matter of brain events to enter into discussion.

The following two chapters shift into the field of prehistory, although Surrealism remains a live point of reference for the two target authors writing in the mid 1950s and mid 1960s respectively. In Chapter 5, 'Georges Bataille and Prehistoric Cave Art', early treatments of the Palaeolithic art at Lascaux will be investigated in order to elucidate the contribution made by Bataille's book on the subject, *La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art* of 1955. His stress on the event of human species emergence, and his vision of this event as a liberation and a madness that is re-staged by prehistoric cave visitors in festive and transgressive mark-making, will be explored. The use of photographs in Bataille's book will be studied, as well as his text, and an extrapolated interpretation of Palaeolithic hand-stencils will be proposed.

In Chapter 6, 'André Leroi-Gourhan and Prehistoric Cave Art', the negative handprints at Pech Merle and Gargas will be brought into focus, first through study of Leroi-Gourhan's book *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* from 1965 and then for their potential to mark the evolutionary emergence of the human species such as it is described by the same author in *Le Geste et La Parole* of 1964–65. Anatomical evolutionary developments, for instance involving the hand and brain, will be considered together with behavioural developments, for instance involving vocal-verbal and graphic-material symbolisation. Leroi-Gourhan's overarching concept of the mythogram will be set out and, departing from this, his speculations regarding events of mental exile will be highlighted.

Each chapter in the thesis provides new material in the virtual exhibition that has been curated around *Study for Skin 'I'* by Johns and *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* by Nauman. Each provides a digression away from these works and, in conclusion, a return to them. Starting in a central gallery where I will position

the two initiating works, with a rocky path down into caves where Palaeolithic hand stencils can be studied opening up beneath me, I will then move through connecting spaces, assembling related material, and returning to the central gallery each time before starting out in a new direction.

Chapter 1: Works by Jasper Johns and Bruce Nauman

In South Carolina in May 1962, Jasper Johns made a series of works he called *Studies for 'Skin'*. Having covered his face and hands in transparent oil, he imprinted these body parts onto paper and then rendered the marks visible through overlaying charcoal. On the other side of the United States and within five years, in California late in 1966, Bruce Nauman made the colour photograph he titled *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*. This first chapter will set these works by these artists into relation in a traditional art-historical mode and then introduce a material counterpoint in the form of Palaeolithic hand stencils. *Study for 'Skin I'* and *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* will then be studied in turn – each with the other work and the prehistoric handprints in mind. Resonances will be drawn out as keynotes for the rest of the thesis.

Seen within a conventional narrative of Western art history, the works of the 1960s by Johns and Nauman articulate a developing cultural confidence that is specifically North American, whilst simultaneously suggesting an ongoing crisis of meaning that has its roots in post-War continental Europe. In the context of the United States they mark a departure from Abstract Expressionism without conforming to Pop Art or Minimalism, and from a European perspective they pick up on Dada and Surrealism. The two artists also shared some more basic starting points. Asked in 1965 about his use of pre-exiting visual forms such as letters of the alphabet, the American flag, or – more pertinent given the present thesis – parts of the body in his work, Johns said: 'I think it's just a way of beginning.'[20] In interview fifteen years later, Nauman conveyed a similar thought when asked about his working with 'a given image, your name or your knee'; he described these simply as 'Some place to start'.[21]

Johns was newly established as an artist on the East coast of the United States and a few days short of turning 32 when he made his *Studies for 'Skin'*. Increasingly renowned for his target, flag and number paintings, he had already mounted three solo exhibitions at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York and,

[20] Jasper Johns in conversation with David Sylvester 1965, see Francis 1974, p. 12.
[21] Bruce Nauman in conversation with Michele de Angelus 1980, see Kraynak 2005, p. 267.

from the first of these, sold three pieces to The Museum of Modern Art.[22] His work had been shown across the United States,[23] repeatedly in Paris,[24] and was touring Europe and South America in group exhibitions promoting national culture abroad.[25] By contrast Bruce Nauman was finishing school and starting university at this time. *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, which was made a few years later, shows him in his mid twenties. By then he was starting out as an artist on the West coast of the United States: he had recently shown sculptures at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, in his first solo exhibition, shortly before graduating with a masters in art from the University of California at Davis.

In *Study for 'Skin' I*, Johns draws attention to the picture plane and he works on the basis of a painterly practice, while in *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* Nauman allows for more of the third dimension and his production context is sculptural.[26] The two works are clearly made using different media: the first is a print and a drawing or rubbing, in shades of grey, while the second is a colour photograph showing flesh tones, primarily, against black. Nonetheless, at an equally immediate level of analysis, the two works share obvious common ground: each gives a more or less direct rendering of the artist's head and hands, with palms raised; each minimises the presence of social indicators, absenting clothes, props and scenery. In terms of traditional art genres they both evidently fall into the category of portraiture, further classifiable as self-portraiture, yet they seem to raise questions of being and possibility in general rather than issues of given or assumed individuality. At the same time there is an opaque psychological tension in each and this is ratcheted up, rather than resolved, between them,

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[22] Solo exhibitions with Leo Castelli 1958, 1960 and 1961. *Green Target* (1955), *Target with Four Faces* (1955) and *White Numbers* (1957), selected for MoMA by Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller and exhibited there in the 'Recent Acquisitions' exhibition 1959.

[23] Beyond New York representation at the Jewish Museum (1957), MoMA (1959, 1960, 1961), the Whitney Museum of American Art (1959) and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1961), note inclusion in a show at the Contemporary Art Museum Houston (1959), the 'Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture' (1961), a solo exhibition at Columbia Museum of Art (1960) and a two person show, with Kurt Schwitters, at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles (1960).

[24] Solo exhibitions at Galerie Rive Droite (1958, 1961); included in the 'Exposition inteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme [EROS]: 1959–60' organised by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp at Galerie Daniel Cordier; also participation in the American section of the 'Deuxième Biennale de Paris' at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1961).

[25] 'American Vanguard Painting' (1961) organised by the United States Information Agency and touring Austria, Yugoslavia, England and West Germany; 'Abstract Drawings and Watercolors' (1962) toured by the International Program of MoMA to seven South American countries.

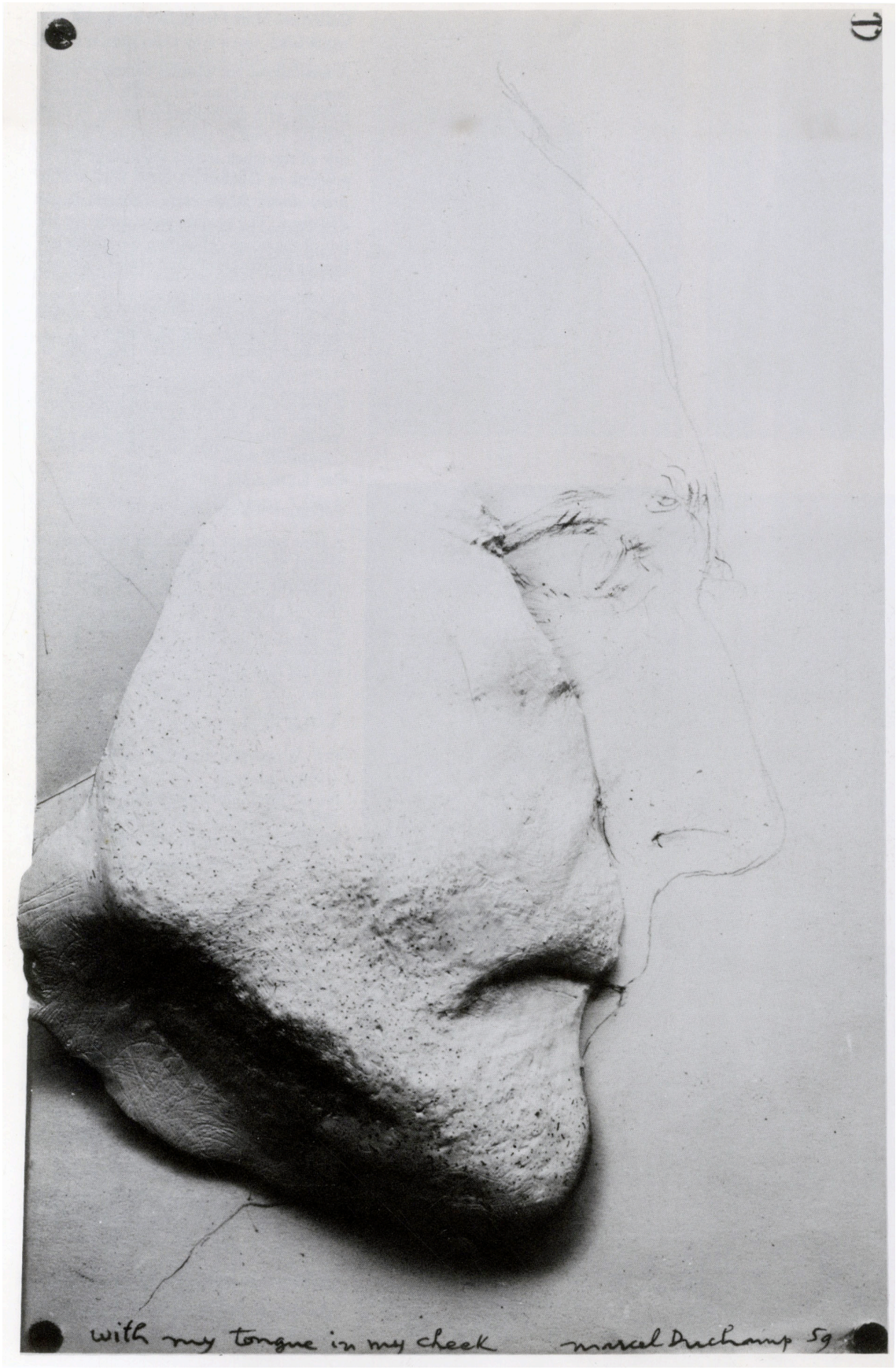
[26] Nauman's MA at the University of California at Davis had an emphasis on sculpture, the artist having shifted away from painting.

when they are considered together, as here. Cerebral and measured from one perspective, simultaneously messy and absurd from another, they jointly constitute the ambivalent findings of some existential test or experiment.

If resolution between the two works is sought we may draw on art historical means. An affinity between the practices of the two artists was immediately perceived by critics at the time, who assessed the younger man's art in relation to that of the elder man. In fact an early photographic work by Nauman, albeit not *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, was described by a Californian critic at the end of 1967 as 'extend[ing] Jasper Johns's skin print "drawing"', although this author assumes that Nauman would be unlikely to know the comparison work that here concerns us.[27] Johns's name again features in an article on Nauman written four months later by another critic who reviewed the artist's first solo exhibition in New York, which included *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* and gave the work its first public display.[28] Leo Castelli, whose gallery was the venue for this exhibition, also represented Johns, having given him his own first solo show in New York ten years previously. In an important early feature on Nauman's work, published in 1972, Robert Pincus-Witten would go so far as to remark on the frequency with which reviewers had related his practice to that of Johns.[29] Nauman himself, pressed on the issue by interviewers, has downplayed the role of direct influence from Johns, whilst acknowledging a respect for his work and recognising some shared concerns.[30]

Both artists were frequently discussed by critics – and are now typically historicised – in connection with Marcel Duchamp.[31] Albeit only after having had

[27] Danieli 1967, p. 18. The photographic work by Nauman that is described by Danieli is not readily identifiable in the artist's catalogue raisonné (Benezra et al. 1994).
[28] Pincus-Witten 1968, p. 63.
[29] Pincus-Witten 1972, p. 32.
[30] Bruce Nauman in conversation with Michele de Angelus 1980 and with Joan Simon 1987, see Kraynak 2005, p. 233 and p. 321.
[31] In his review of a group show at Leo Castelli's, Robert Rosenblum discussed Johns's work in connection with Duchamp and coined the phrase neo-Dada for this purpose, see Rosenblum 1957, p. 53; the Dada association was then picked up in a preview and reviews of Johns's first solo show at the gallery the following year, see *Artnews* (vol. 56, no. 9, January 1958, p. 5), *The New York Times* (25 January 1958) and *Newsweek* (31 March 1958). Pincus-Witten 1972 noted the frequency, since Danieli 1967, with which Nauman's work had been related to that of Duchamp (and Johns), p. 32. For historicisation of the two artists in connection with Duchamp see, for example, Foster et al. 2004, p. 404 (Johns), p. 496 (Johns and Nauman) and p. 631 (Nauman).



Marcel Duchamp, *With My Tongue in My Cheek*, 1959,
plaster, pencil and paper mounted on wood

his practice labelled 'neo-Dada',[32] Johns came to know Duchamp and his work, collected editions by him and through him had work exhibited in the International Surrealist Exhibitions of 1959–60 in Paris and of 1960–61 in New York. Nauman came to Duchamp's work a little later, without meeting him and in some part through Johns's work.[33] And although he would later retract the association,[34] Nauman initially identified himself with Dada and Surrealism, citing these movements as influential in his first interview about his practice, which was conducted shortly before making the group of photographs that includes *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* [35] – and in his artist's statement printed in an exhibition catalogue published shortly after the works were made.[36] Johns and Nauman further shared interests in European literature and philosophy, specifically in the writing of Samuel Beckett and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Johns began to engage with these two authors in the years just before making his *Studies for 'Skin'* and Nauman was reading them at the time of making *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*.[37]

However, the project of lacing together these two works of art is not quite the focus of the present research, which aims rather to pursue and elaborate the thoughts that, between them, they trigger. Here fuel is provided by a third source, most likely remote from the concerns of Johns and Nauman: Palaeolithic hand stencils.

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[32] Rosenblum 1957, p. 53.
[33] Bruce Nauman in conversation with Lorraine Sciarra 1972 and with Michele de Angelus 1980, see Kraynak 2005, p. 157 and p. 229.
[34] Bruce Nauman in conversation with Willoughby Sharp in 1970, see Kraynak 2005, p. 126.
35 Bruce Nauman in conversation with Joe Raffaele in 1966, see Kraynak 2005, p. 106.
[36] Bruce Nauman in the catalogue of 'American Sculpture of the Sixties' at Los Angeles County Museum in 1967 – as cited in Pincus-Witten 1972, p. 32.
[37] Johns received a letter from Frank O'Hara in 1959 urging him to read Beckett and he began reading Wittgenstein in 1961 (see Lilian Tone, 'Chronology', in Varnedoe 1996, p. 165 and p. 195). Nauman first read both Beckett and Wittgenstein in 1966–67 (for reference to Beckett see van Bruggen 1988, p. 18; for Wittgenstein see Bruce Nauman in conversation with Michele de Angelus 1980 in Kraynak 2005, p.231).



High up on one of the walls that shape the Pech Merle cave, at the centre of a burst of black pigment applied some 25,000 years ago, is a negative handprint. Where the thumb, fingers and palm have been used as a stencil the sandy colours of the rock are preserved, spared the hue that gives the print its outline. In fact it could equally have been the back, rather than the palm, of a hand – of the other hand, the left rather than the right. But the vision of a palm is more compelling, perhaps because it is a little tricky to lie the back of the hand flat against a planar surface, making it counterintuitive to imagine this gesture. Perhaps also the mark on the cave wall invites us to reach towards it: such exploration would involve the hand facing forwards and then this gesture determines what we see; manual identification with the person responsible commandeers our perception and we impute our own hand, palm outwards, to them.

As much as we see a hand on the wall, we see a hand's absence. The negative print records past presence and contact, also the breaking of contact and a subsequent physical lack or omission. What we see now – coming after the production event – is, in one sense, fundamentally incomplete. Writing about imprints in general and regarding the example of Palaeolithic hand stencils in

particular, Georges Didi-Huberman has reflected that 'From prehistoric times, it [the imprint] appeared as an extremely subtle tool, a tool with a transformative structural vocation, in short, a *dialectical* tool – I mean to say, capable of producing, in itself, the collision of two heterogeneous orders of reality.'[38] The hand is forever fixed to the wall in one order of reality (in the marked memory of the production event) and simultaneously, in another (in the perceptual present since the production event), it is free and apart, or lost from it. Didi-Huberman reads a bid to describe this dialectical status for the print into the writing of Norbert Casteret, when the latter is addressing himself to the stencils found not in the Pech Merle cave but in that of Gargas: 'If Casteret, in 1930, called the hands of Gargas "phantom hands", it is perhaps because he sensed the paradox of the work of art [*oeuvre*] in these prints: the collision in them of a *there* and a *not there*, of a *contact* and an *absence*'.[39] It is not simply that the marks on the cave wall are haunted by the hands that shaped them and which have long since otherwise ceased to exist; the hand prints themselves haunt the cave walls – a negative presence, and a positive absence.

Didi-Huberman draws attention to the fact that in the act of its being stencilled, a hand would also have been covered with pigment, like the rock that surrounds it. He describes how, once removed, the hand 'remembers its contact with the cave wall', as the wall remembers the same contact through the negative imprint of the hand. He goes on: 'Such complementarity is nothing other than, paradigmatically, that of the *symbolon* itself'.[40] The inaugural moment of the *symbolon* comes not with the removal of the hand from the wall, which instead inaugurates a test of the capacity for symbolisation, but in the prior moment, when both hand and wall are jointly marked with pigment. They are thrown together (if we invoke the etymological root of the Greek word for symbol), under a single layer of colour. With many Palaeolithic hand stencils this act would indeed have taken place in a moment, without longer duration, since the pigment was applied from the mouth in a single airborne burst. It will be argued that an echo of this moment may be found in the works of Johns and Nauman under discussion, and it is this echo that the present thesis seeks to amplify.

[38] Didi-Huberman 1997, p. 33, italics original.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*

Certain palaeoanthropologists have speculated that the moment of unification between hand and wall may have enacted passage through the rock surface to a world beyond. David Lewis-Williams and Jean Clottes in particular have suggested that prehistoric negative handprints mark not only a threshold, the physical barrier presented by the rock face, but the metaphysical or socio-psychological event of traversing that threshold. Elaborating a broader theory of Palaeolithic parietal cave art and emphasising the potential involvement of shamanic activity, Lewis-Williams proposes that the cave wall may have been seen as a membrane between material and spiritual realms,[41] one which yields to the hand that is covered with pigment together with the rock surrounding it.[42] Clottes likewise describes the hand thus covered as seeming 'to penetrate into the spiritual world hidden behind the veil of stone'.[43] If we entertain this possibility then what is marked other than the wall – and, less durably, the hand – in the act of Palaeolithic stencilling is not only the moment when the projected pigment hits its target but also the event of passage that this may have enabled. We contemplate a snapshot of the threshold between realms, and of explosive escape across this threshold: the eruption out of one realm and into another.

Comparable thresholds – and comparable events of passage across them – provide a focus for the present thesis. Threshold events will now be pursued through study of the print-drawing by Johns and then in Nauman's photograph.

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[41] David Lewis-Williams 2002, p. 214.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 217.
[43] Jean Clottes, quoted on the Gargas website: http://grottesdegargas.free.fr/PAGE_7.html – last accessed 21 May 2010.



Jasper Johns, *Study for 'Skin' I*, 1962, charcoal and oil on paper

Study for 'Skin' I, made by Jasper Johns in 1962, is both an imprint of the artist's rotating face and hands laid down in transparent oil and a charcoal rubbing that makes this imprinted imagery visible. Described in the art historical record, presumably at the behest of Johns, as a drawing,[44] it is executed on engineers' drafting paper, which carries a border and, in the bottom right corner, a small table with prompts for the name of the draughtsman, the drawing number, date and material. In part dutifully, in part playfully, these given boxes have been completed: 'Study for SKIN' number 'I' was drawn by 'J. Johns' on '6 May 62' in 'charcoal'. The study itself sits obediently on the page, tidily enclosed by the given border.

There are four studies in the series, all made using the same media and method, with charcoal applied over the oily imprints of head and hands. The imprinted body parts are most readily identified in the first of the series and here the composition – face bracketed by ears, between splayed palms – has the simple clarity of frontal symmetry, cohering immediately into a recognisable configuration.[45]

[44] Catalogued in Francis 1974 (*Jasper Johns Drawings*), no. 56, and in Shapiro 1984 (Jasper *Johns: Drawings 1954–1984*), pl. 59.
[45] There is a progressive decline in the legibility and iconicity of the oily imprints in the course of the series, with body parts becoming increasingly hard to identify and increasingly scattered.



Jasper Johns, *Studies for 'Skin' I*, *II*, *III* and *IV*, 1962, charcoal and oil on paper

The movements of the oiled body parts, specifically the actions that imprinted them on the page, are also most legible in the first of the works. Additional fingers on one hand and an extra thumb on the other indicate the two palms rotating briefly, either shunting into or shifting away from their principal position. In between the hands, traced from ear to ear, via the nose, is a head: a frontal roll of 180 degrees about the axis of the spinal column is mapped. Meanwhile, the prominence of the fringe on the forehead and simultaneously of the lips and chin below indicate a contrary rotation, again pivoting on the nose, this time about an axis through the ears. A vertical rocking motion complements or is complemented by the horizontal head sweep that is also in play. In other words, we see a single nod that is counteracted by a half shake of the head, and both are operative between a stifled wave of the hands. Rotation smudges away at fixity and blurs finality, announcing that an event is at issue – taking place and at stake.

There are other traces of activity in the *Studies for 'Skin'*, since the movements of the hand bearing charcoal are also mapped, independently from the prior movements of the oiled head and hands. In the first study the charcoal rubbing that shades in the oily impressions is particularly muted and diffuse: the direction of the strokes shifts restlessly and the mark-making pressure is generally light without being even.[46] These gestures of application appear exploratory – and subservient to the imagery laid down beforehand in oil, which is brought out boldly. The imprinted forms are coaxed into visible life, hand fed.

The production process that Johns developed in the *Studies for 'Skin'* was later captured on camera by Ugo Mulas. Taken two or three years after the original studies were made,[47] these documentary photographs show Johns in the studio at his Edisto Beach home, near Charleston in South Carolina, generating related works.[48] As sequential stills, these photographs overlay a production narrative post hoc, making explicit a methodology that is otherwise only implied

[46] In the final work, *Study for 'Skin' IV*, the application of charcoal involves such a strong action of the hand and arm that the mark-making sweeps, up and down across the page, are as prominent as the bodily imprints that these marks simultaneously make visible.
[47] Varnedoe 1996, p. 197, suggests 1965; Didi-Huberman 1997, pp. 246–48, suggests 1964.
[48] At least one of these related works has been preserved and subsequently exhibited: the Ugo Mulas Archives loaned *Skin* (1964) to 'L'Empreinte' at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1997, see Didi-Huberman 1997, pp. 246–47.

by the marks left behind on the page. They show Johns wiping oil over his face, then rolling his face across the paper, then applying charcoal over the top with his hands. They also add information, implying, for instance, that he sometimes worked from left to right when imprinting his body,[49] and sometimes – contrary to the expectation of viewers who read the image like an English-language text, from left to right[50] – in the reverse direction.[51] The photographs further confirm that Johns worked from left to right when bringing out the imprint in charcoal, as natural for someone right handed, since that way the active arm is not prone to inference with the marks just set down. More interestingly, given the present context, and contradicting at least one commentator,[52] they suggest that Johns taped his sheets of drafting paper to the wall, rather than to a table, and then worked upright rather than bent over, vertically rather than horizontally. In other words, in pressing his hands to his studio wall, Johns recalls the stencilling gestures carried out against the walls of caves many thousands of years before.

The imprinted body parts in the *Studies for 'Skin'* develop the artist's earlier interest in anatomical indices and specifically the practice of incorporating bodily casts into his work. *Target with Plaster Casts* and the ensuing smaller work *Target with Four Faces*, both from 1955, each unite a painted canvas with a compartmentalised shelf bearing three-dimensional renderings of parts of the body. The boxes along the upper edge of the first work bear a face (from nose to mouth), a hand and an ear, together with other parts including a foot, nipple and penis.[53] The second work is topped by another four iterations of a face, again cropped in each instance below the eyes and above the chin. The painted concentric rings that visually dominate both *Target with Plaster Casts* and *Target with Four Faces* lend their iconic status to the accompanying anatomical elements, which, as a result, stand as signs or motifs rather than portraiture.

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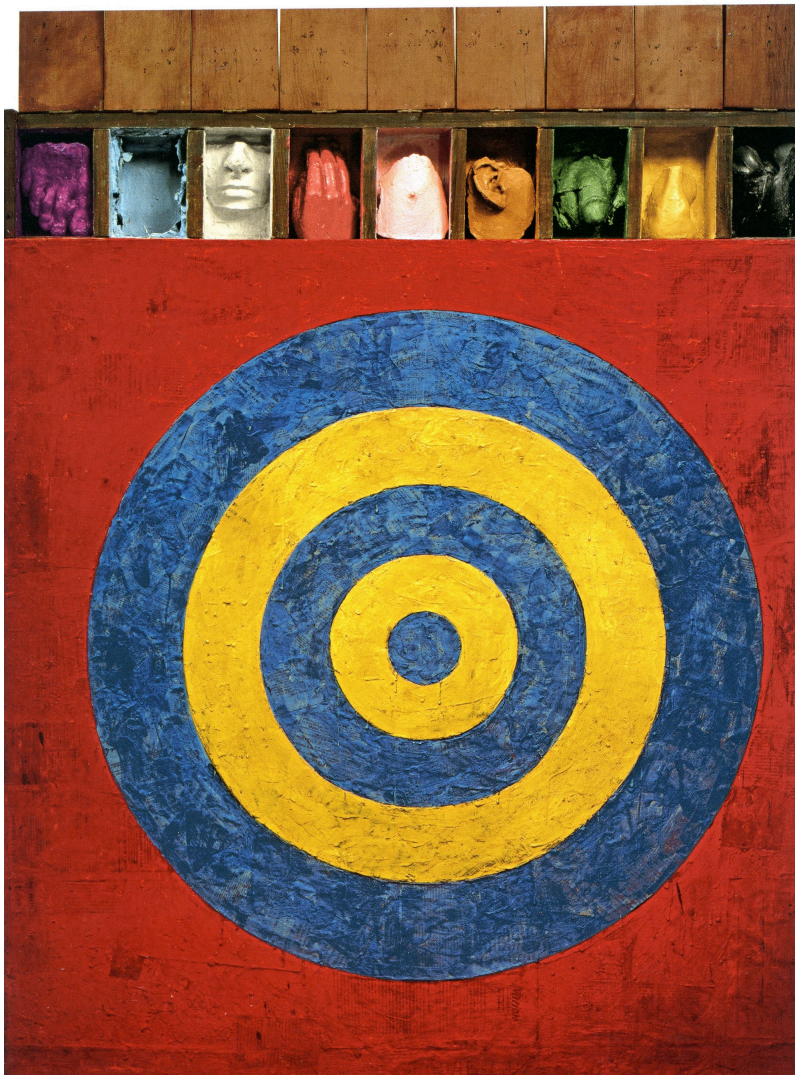
[49] See the photographs reproduced in Didi-Huberman 1997, p. 246.
[50] Jeffrey Weiss describes the bodily imprint as being 'perhaps scriptural', implying – in an English language context – a left to right progression, see Weiss 2007, p. 46. This publication actually reversed the order of Mulas's stills when reproducing them, see Weiss 2007, pp. xx–1.
[51] See the photographs reproduced in Varnedoe 1996, p. 197.
[52] Rougé 1989, pp. 78–79.
[53] Having been shown in New York and Milan, *Target with Plaster Casts* was sent to Paris for inclusion in the 'Exposition inteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme [EROS]: 1959–60', organised by Marcel Duchamp and André Breton; the former having recommended Johns to the latter. The exhibition included not only new but also old work by Surrealists, bringing this together with the work of outsider artists with a history of psychiatric illness.





Jasper Johns

above:
Target with Plaster Casts

left:
Target with Four Faces

both works 1955
encaustic and collage
on canvas

For the present purposes we need to view the face and palms imprinted in *Study for 'Skin' I* likewise – that is, without specifically seeing Japer Johns. As an indexical self-portrait, complete with fingerprints, the charcoal image clearly shows someone in particular. However the unique patterning of the fingers' friction ridges is obscured and without measuring actual parts against pictured parts we may see anyone, including ourselves, in the printed forms. Not only is biographical detail withheld and social context voided, through the omission of any subsidiary objects or a setting, but indicators of gender, race and age are evaded. Like a Palaeolithic hand stencil, the image retains a high degree of anonymity, evoking generality rather than specificity, plural possibility over identity: a depersonalised person, singular without being individual, is given the mark of embodied form.



Jasper Johns, *Painting Bitten by a Man*, 1961, encaustic on canvas

Equally anonymous are the dental tracks scraped into the encaustic surface of another work by Johns, *Painting Bitten by a Man*, from 1961. Here too a physical gesture carried out by the artist is indexically recorded and the picture plane is heightened by the performance, being put under pressure in the *Studies for 'Skin'* and aggressed in the work from the year before. The pursed lips that imprinted the first *Study* are clamped shut over the teeth that tore groves into the earlier painting. Raised to the height of the ears, the hands presented in the print-drawing are as prominent as the face between them. In the two displayed palms with their spread fingers we may see an empty-handed gesture of surrender, which undermines the assertive push against the picture plane. In fact the flicker of fingers and thumbs suggests the "ta-da!" of a showman seeking applause – the assertion of a punch line, and the simultaneous surrender to the mercy of an audience.

Looking at the very centre of the page we see a marklessness. Or rather the geometric heart of *Study for Skin I* is marked by an absence. Unlike the Palaeolithic stencils, this absence indicates not bodily contact but the opposite, a failure to make contact: the eye sockets and peak of the nose have prevented the eyes and connecting flesh from pressing themselves to the paper. Yet here again, if approximately rather than with clear-cut definition, the absence takes on anatomical form: given the surrounding presence of facial features – a nose below, temples to either side and a fringe of hair above – we fill in for the ocular gap.

The eyelessness amidst skin suggests a flayed scalp. The distant and flattened ears, linking up with the face across the full expanse of cheeks, would seem to confirm this impression: dead matter, objecthood rather than embodiment, now presents itself. The sense that we are viewing some specimen pinned-up for a pathology class, some exhibit in a pathology museum, is strengthened by the border around the page, which now seems clinical, with its tabulated label in the bottom right corner – assiduously filled out with classificatory details – apparently presenting cursory case notes.

Still more like a flayed scalp would have been *Skin*, the work for which this print-drawing was the first in a series of studies. Although *Skin* was never actually

made, Johns proposed the project in his sketchbook a couple of years before he produced the studies, apparently describing what he had in mind:

> Make a Plaster Negative of whole head.
> Make a thin rubber positive of this.
> Cut this so it can be (stretched) laid
> on a board fairly flatly. Have it cast in
> bronze and title it *Skin*...[54]

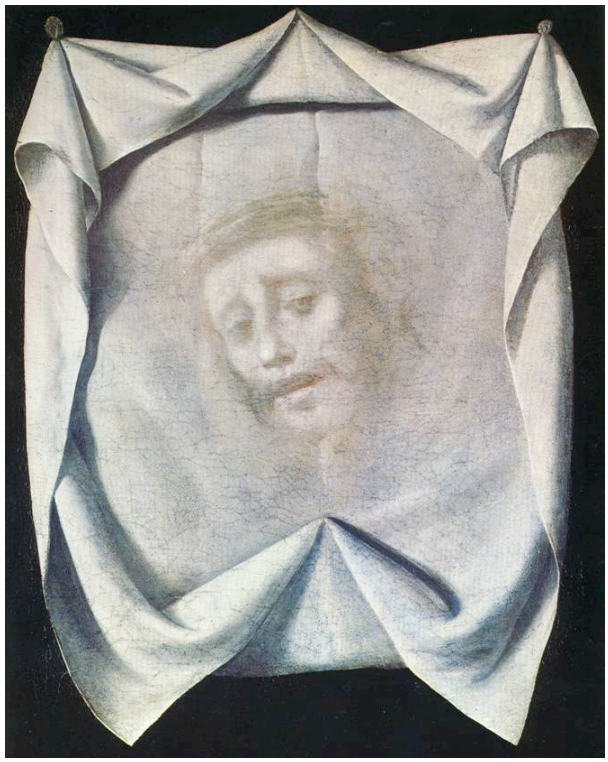
Study for 'Skin' I announces its precursory status in its title. Whilst described as a charcoal drawing, this 'study' is not produced in the manner of a conventional artistic sketch, nor – despite the engineers' drafting paper that, through its frame and table, almost asks to bear plans – does it conform to the norms of a construction diagram. More suggestive than programmatic, the work tries out an idea, offering a conceptual and formal approximation of something else to come. Its connection to something else, which was then never realised, makes the exploratory and the provisional final, turning means into an end. The print-drawing is both an embryo for a project that never reached full term, and the ghost of that project's stillbirth.

The low-contrast application of charcoal overall in the work, or the grisaille effect, suggests a liminality for the figure depicted – an existence at the brink of invisibility. Once our gaze has adjusted, however, the coalescence of shapes from shadow appears more marked, indicating a pull away from that brink and a push towards another, towards visible presence. It is as if we see an ultrasound scan of hidden life that desires appearance. The hands and face now explore the picture plane as if seeking the means of escape – access to an outside. Indeed it may be that we witness the moment of escape: passage through the containing surface; an unconventional birthing.

At the same time the fixed shadow of the bodily forms suggests a death mask and, by association, at the centre of the page we see an obliterating light that blasts the fatal moment into the work. Now the charcoal grisaille hints not at a

[54] Jasper Johns, Sketchbook A, p. 23, c. 1960, transcribed in Varnedoe and Hollevoet 1996, pp. 50–51.

prenatal state but at mortality: in place of a coming presence we see departure, withdrawal, absence. The grey dust on the page marks a retreat from form; the paper becomes a translucent shroud. And yet religious faith may turn such an ending into a beginning, through reincarnation or ascension: the mortal blow between the eyes is transformed into a release of spirit. In fact *Study for 'Skin' I* remotely and wryly echoes the Turin shroud, whose bodily imprint some Christians believe to be the miraculous product of contact with the dead figure of Jesus. The work likewise echoes certain artistic renderings of a cloth that, according to Christian legend, a woman offered to Jesus as he walked to crucifixion and which, having been used to wipe his face, bore his miraculous imprint. Particularly resonant in the present context are the seventeenth-century paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán, who portrays the face of Christ hazily but indisputably in grey tones on the white expanse of the cloth depicted with hyper-real accuracy. Here death is overruled by divinity and the mark of death redoubles as a mark of the divine.



Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Holy Face*, c.1631, oil on canvas

Or perhaps we see not the impression of an immortal god in the visage of Johns but testimony to the religious or spiritual experience of a mortal being. Now the flash at the centre of the work and the shuddering and shattering impact on the body testify to a moment of revelation or enlightenment. This may be viewed in the context of various religions or spiritual systems of thought. With recourse to the bible, we may find ourselves witnessing Saul's conversion to Christianity when on the road to Damascus, with his eyes blinded by 'a light from heaven' and his hands raised in surrender.[55] Equally, we might see the sudden event of Buddhist illumination or understanding known in Japanese as *satori*. Or indeed – with the Palaeolithic hand stencils in mind – we may be exposed to the moment of shamanic propulsion across a worldly/other worldly threshold: now the figure on the page explodes into a prehistoric spiritual realm. The limit-breaching or transformational experience defined by each frame of reference is made manifest in the print-drawing by Johns.

We may also strip out the religious or mystical overtones. What remains marked by *Study for 'Skin' I* is a dismembering or dissolving moment of escape, one that is directed into the absence at the centre of the page, into a void that simultaneously evacuates what it has swallowed, projecting everything back out into the world anew, or creating a new world. Here the work may be said to testify to the onset of a psychotic episode by capturing the implosion and explosion of reality – the break with consensual perception or logic that takes place in the eruptive throes of hallucination or delusion. Or, equally, the print-drawing captures the more routine moment of falling asleep, of losing consciousness, which is then folded back on itself, with wakefulness being turned inside out such that, in a subsequent moment, dreaming starts. Here an image of the onset of sleep and of the associated withdrawal of awareness from the world becomes an image of the onset of a dream, involving the eruption of an alternative world. Thresholds onto madness or dreaming, and the explosive passage across these thresholds, are marked. Further markings of these thresholds and events of passage will be explored in the present thesis. They will now be pursued through study of a photograph by – and of – Nauman.

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[55] The Bible, King James and International Standard Versions, Acts, ch. 9, v. 3.



Bruce Nauman, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, 1966, colour photograph

Bruce Nauman's *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* of 1966 shows the pale expanse of the artist's naked upper body as he projects an arc of liquid from his mouth. The receding black backdrop and tight crop of the photographic frame fixes our attention on the artist's figure and gesture: prominent are his bare chest, raised hands and displayed palms, tilted head and pursed spouting lips. As captured on camera, the arc of projected fluid forms a focused jet at the mouth, cresting into fuzzy droplets on ascent towards its apex and dissolving into wispy strands on its descent into the foreground. Nauman's exposed body is boldly lit from the side to which he is slightly turned. It casts and catches coloured shadows, which fall onto the flesh tones: the yellow glare turns red in the crevices of his shoulder bones and in the shade of his nose; it is green along his occluded jaw and down his neck. The print presents the artist on a scale that is a little less than life size and it is intended for the wall, denied the page: the work is to be seen vertically, by a standing viewer, rather than horizontally in a book and, combined with the given scale, it tends towards a mirroring of our viewing presence, or rather it confronts us eye to eye at full height.[56] Like Johns's *Study for 'Skin' I*, or indeed Palaeolithic hand stencils, it seems to address us as embodied visitors to the gallery, or cave. While Nauman reveals himself to be young, white and male, he otherwise, like Johns, presents a self-portrait that, by

[56] One early critic describes Nauman considering the possibility of publishing this and the associated works in book form: see Danieli 1967, p. 18.

omitting any subsidiary objects or a setting, withholds biographical particularity and voids social context, being minimally particular and maximally general.

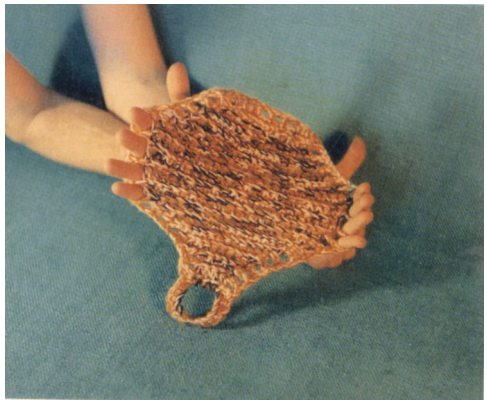
Self-Portrait as a Fountain is one of a number of works now jointly known as *Eleven Color Photographs*. Although most of the group feature the artist, often principally his hands, it is the only one of the eleven to be identified as a self-portrait. It stands out in other ways too: most of the other works feature domestic props – chiefly kitchen or workroom items – and they all either involve a horizontal surface as a support and backdrop or they have coloured surroundings. Several involve wordplay between image and title, for instance emphasising divergent doubled meanings (such as *Drill Team*/drill bits, and *Bound to Fail*/bound up).



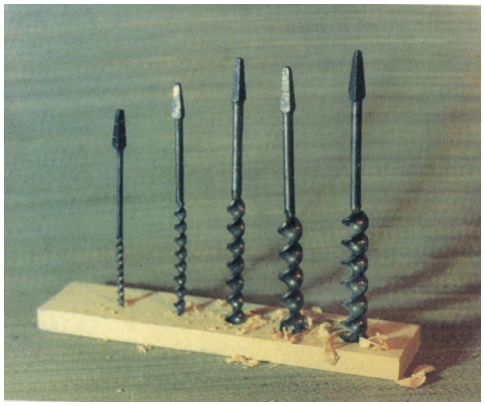
Bound to Fail



Waxing Hot



Untitled (Potholder)



Drill Team



Self-Portrait as a Fountain



Coffee Spilled Because the Cup Was Too Hot



Coffee Thrown Away Because It Was Too Cold



Feet of Clay



Eating My Words



Finger Touch No. 1



Finger Touch with Mirrors

Bruce Nauman

Eleven Color Photographs

1966–67

The set of photographs was made over a period spanning the end of 1966 and the beginning of 1967. They were staged and shot in the former grocery shop in San Francisco that Nauman had recently taken on as a studio and they were produced with the help of a photographer and friend, Jack Fulton. The set-up involved bicolour lighting, with crossed red and green sources explaining the hue of the bodily shadows captured in *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*. Fulton apparently took the pictures using Nauman's camera and the two men then printed them up in the former's dark room, using trays the latter had adapted to allow for the larger than standard size he desired.[57] Individual and unique prints were made: each work had an independent existence and was a one-off. For those works in which he appears in front of the camera, Nauman functioned as the performer as well as the composer and orchestrator, operating as the actor as well as director, but he did not work alone: the production was collaborative. Somewhat similarly, albeit at the level of technical direction rather than practical delivery, the artist involved his New York gallerist Leo Castelli: when some of the pictures were damaged in a flood in 1970 and Nauman decided to reprint them it was on Castelli's suggestion that all eleven photographs were grouped together in a portfolio and produced in an edition of eight.[58]

Self-Portrait as a Fountain is a photograph and a work of art even though the artist is not the photographer. Nauman co-opted the medium, specifically studio photography, and technical expertise with the medium, as provided by Jack Fulton, to the concerns of his practice. As well as being a work of art, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* exists as photographic documentation: it records an event or act, perhaps suggesting that a performance is at stake. Certainly the theatricality of the lighting that is used increases the sense of staged drama. As already noted, Nauman takes the role of actor or performer; he is not directly responsible for the documentary capture of the event he stages – this role is assumed by another. The division of labour involved contrasts with the combined responsibility taken on by Johns in *Study for 'Skin' I*: there the very performance by the artist generated the document that ultimately constitutes the work. The conjunction of the respective works by Nauman and Johns begs a question of the Palaeolithic hand stencils: did the person whose hand was

[57] See Lewallen 2007, p. 63, for the results of an interview with Fulton giving these and more technical details.
[58] Benezra et al. 1994, p. 243.

pressed to the rock spurt the pigment against both these surfaces from their own mouth or did someone else carry out this task? And, in other words: if passage through the cave wall was achieved by pigment projection, did the person whose handprint we now see on the wall effect their own passage across this threshold, or were they propelled or thrust by another?

Nauman has said he had entertained the possibility that the works which would ultimately emerge as the *Eleven Color Photographs* should in fact be performances.[59] This notion was perhaps not completely abandoned in *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, although the emphasis shifted away from live action. Nauman has recalled that more than one photograph was taken when making the work,[60] indicating that the performance to camera was repeated for the purposes of generating a single preferred picture. As is presumably the case for Johns, image-making would seem to have been the point, rather than the live event that is recorded by the image. It is possible that the reverse was true for the Palaeolithic hand stencillers: the event of spraying pigment against the hand may have had primary significance, if this triggered passage through the cave wall; the negative print left behind would then act as a trace, with secondary significance.

Along with the pictorial and performance aspects of *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* there is a sculptural dimension. As suggested by the work's title, Nauman casts himself as a monumental water-feature, parodying the figures found spouting water in ornamental fountains. This element of the work is brought out in an ink and wash drawing completed in 1967, shortly after the photograph was made, and titled *Myself as a Marble Fountain*. Here a male figure is shown with one foot raised to the edge of a modest pool into which he projects a strong jet of liquid, presumably water, from his mouth. There is a braced dynamism in the stepped stride of the legs and in the angularity of the arms, which terminate in clenched fists and, like the rear leg, counterbalance the backwards throw of the head. Given that the depicted figure could be a person as easily as a sculpture – flesh and blood as readily as marble – this work may be seen as a sketch or working drawing for a performance. Except that the outpouring from the mouth

[59] Bruce Nauman in conversation with Coosje van Bruggen 1985, quoted in Dieter Koepplin, 'Reasoned Drawings' in van Bruggen et al. 1986, p. 35, n. 13.
[60] Bruce Nauman in conversation with Willoughby Sharp 1970, see Kraynak 2005, p. 121.

is more than a human could manage: the fulsome and incessant flow of ornamental fountains, as enabled through pump action on recycled water, is implied. As such the work represents the fixed endlessness of a closed loop, which draws attention to, by drawing contrast with, the event status of the moment captured in *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*.



Bruce Nauman, *Myself as a Marble Fountain*, 1967, ink and wash on paper

Both photograph and drawing puncture the elaborate grandeur of baroque figurative fountains and, more broadly, the heroising stylisation of male marble nudes in the Western tradition going back to ancient Greece. Nauman also develops the retort that Duchamp's readymades addressed to historical as well as Modernist sculpture. Most tangible is a reference to the urinal Duchamp exhibited in New York in 1917 under the title *Fountain*, and which he had photographed by Alfred Stieglitz. Half a century later Nauman had his photograph taken when performing an act that suggests use of this porcelain *pissoir*. His body now the readymade, Nauman spits or metaphorically urinates, either neutrally clearing his mouth and metaphorically relieving his bladder, or – with emotional loading – expressing disgust or contempt.



Giacomo della Porta (1575) and Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1653),
La Fontana del Moro, Piazza Navona, Rome

Different acts and contrasting affects may be seen in *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* when the work is viewed in light of a related photograph Nauman made soon afterwards: *The Artist as a Fountain* (1966–67). Produced in black and white and on a smaller scale, this picture shows Nauman in a domestic garden, spurting fluid towards lilies that are only just open. Seen from the waist up, behind foreground shrubbery, the shirted artist maintains a respectful distance from the flowers, whilst leaning in to convey his oral offering to them. The erotic yet courteous gesture suggests a verbal profession of love or desire, also the climactic physical release of love making and it brings an ejaculatory sexual charge to *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*.

Nauman's reference to 'the artist' in the title of his black and white photograph opens up his concern for himself, as the artist responsible for and represented in the picture, to a broader concern for the artist as such – an interest in definitions of what it is to be an artist. It points us towards other works Nauman made around the same time, both before and after, in which text is used to proclaim a statement that is also given in their titles: *The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain*.[61]

[61] *The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain*, 1966, graphite and black ink on paper; *The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain (Window or Wall Shade)*, 1966, transparent rose-coloured Mylar (illustrated); and *Untitled (The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain)*, 1968, cut-out letters.





Bruce Nauman

above:
The Artist as a Fountain
1966–67
black and white photograph

left:
The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain (Window or Wall Shade)
1966
transparent rose-coloured Mylar

Self-Portrait as a Fountain may be seen as a physical gag at the expense of these contemporaneous text-based works: Nauman not only has himself photographed spouting water as if a fountain caught mid flow, but his hands convey a 'ta da!', which implies that amazement is appropriate, and his body is lit to appear luminous. There is a visio-verbal punning humour here that is familiar from other works among the *Eleven Color Photographs*, those in which he literalises clichéd metaphors: like showing himself with feet of clay,[62] or eating his words,[63] he proves himself as an artist by being an amazing luminous fountain. Nauman parodies the fantasy that an artist is an endlessly expressive, exceptional subject, whilst defending art-making by carrying it out in the face of this critique – that is, stripped of the claims for the artist that are critiqued.

Inadvertently perhaps, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* represents a process of oral projection that approximates how the Palaeolithic negative handprints under discussion may have been produced.[64] As such the photograph portrays not the moment in which the hand stencil was removed from the rock face to reveal the lasting mark we now contemplate, but the moment in which this mark was cast: from a position within the rock we see back out through the cave wall to the person imposing their print there. With the echo of prehistoric mark-making in our ears, or before our eyes, the liquid projected from Nauman's lips seems to land on his right hand – bearing pigment in our imagination, if transparent in the picture. The photograph offers an alternative image of the hand-stencilling event to that offered by the handprints themselves: it spins the viewers' perspective around and is indexical by means of reflected light and photosensitive film, rather than through bodily contact. The picture plane – that is, the surface of the resulting print – sets the limit that in the prehistoric context is given by the cave wall. If the Palaeolithic hand stencils mark entry into a realm beyond the rock face, the Nauman photograph marks departure from the realm before it; the same threshold moment is captured from different perspectives.

[62] Bruce Nauman, *Feet of Clay*, colour photograph, 1966.
[63] Bruce Nauman, *Eating My Words*, colour photograph, 1966.
[64] Clearly there are limits to the analogy with Palaeolithic pigment-spray stencilling and it would be pointless to insist, for instance, that a single person created each prehistoric print, blowing against their own digits, rather than it being a collaborative endeavour – a possibility that must remain open.

Having viewed the fluid projected from Nauman's mouth not only as water but now as paint, previously as spit and additionally as urine and semen, we may further apply a vocal inflection and see the liquid's potential as song, poetry, speech or a cry. The eruptive outpouring suggests numerous forms: the peaking performance of scripted words or rehearsed music; improvised verse, lyrics or melody; a burst of glossolalia; an exclamation or shout; and the irrepressible recklessness of all urgent conversation. The content or flavour of these oral emissions remains obscure, although the possibility of a profession of love or desire has already been alluded to and the notion of an artistic subjectivity being aesthetically expressed has already been ruled out. In fact there is no need to assume that the vocalisation is harmonious or even makes sense: indeed the isolation of the figure photographed may suggest an alienated articulation that finds no audience. Here the spurt of water instantiates the word-flux of logorrhoea, or the deluded excess of psychotic narrating and reasoning; the photograph captures the eruption of or explosion into madness. This event of passage, like the burst across the cave wall envisaged in Palaeolithic hand stencils, will be a recurring theme in the rest of this thesis.

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The only certain connection between the experience of Nauman, Johns and the Palaeolithic hand-stencillers is experience itself: all share, and share with us, the version of experience that is created or produced by the human brain. This abstracted – maximally generalised – notion of human experience may be illuminated with the help of neuroscience and using a concept of consciousness such as it is discussed by neuroscientists. Experience in this sense is a neurological creation or product with characteristics that while clearly inflected socially and individually are, in other ways, generic across geographically and historically disparate members of the species population. Here the subject and object of experience is not what is important – the subjectivity and transitivity implied by philosophical notions of intentional consciousness may be set aside – and our focus lies instead on the event of consciousness arising as such across a distributed network of billions of neurons. Moreover, we may go beyond consciousness by simultaneously embracing unconscious dream experience, while this is likewise to be viewed in terms of its relationship with activity in the human brain.

As such and through considering the Palaeolithic negative handprints, the Johns drawing and the Nauman photograph against one another, it is possible that they each act as a snapshot of the creation of experience moment to moment – that each marks the wresting of consciousness, or indeed of a dream state, from the brain, by the brain, through brain activity. This is to suggest that they all present the ongoing event of electrochemical flux erupting into experience. In the prehistoric hand stencils and Nauman's *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* the eruptive event is captured, in different ways, as an instantaneous projection from the mouth. In *Study for 'Skin' I* by Johns it appears as an explosive reconfiguration of the body, with an epicentre that lies between and above the eyes. In all cases the brain is implicated in the bodily indices that are present to the extent that they bear a psychological charge. Beyond this the neuronal net and electrochemical flow of the brain is specifically evoked by the quasi-efferent fingers of the splayed hands in each instance.

At the same time, as already described, the Palaeolithic negative handprints – and the Johns drawing and the Nauman photograph viewed in light of them – might all mark explosive or eruptive passage across a threshold into a spirit

world. Here a larger scale of analysis is applied: we no longer focus on neuronal activity but instead on social activity. The aggregate electrochemical event across networked neurons that generates consciousness and dreaming, as just described, finds a harmonic in the psychosocial event of religious or spiritual passage, of shamanic or mystical exit from physical limits.

A similar harmonic may be found in the psychosocial event of psychotic onset – that is, in the eruption of hallucination and delusion. Here we may view Palaeolithic hand stencils in light of our interpretations of the Johns drawing and the Nauman photograph, above. If Johns marks a psychotic implosion and explosion of reality, and Nauman instantiates entry into madness as a spurt of psychotic thoughts and speech, then we may choose to see the spirit world that is potentially accessed by prehistoric people – via pigment projection against a hand held up to a cave wall – as a hallucinated realm, navigated delusionally. While there might seem to be a heroism in the shamanic courting and channelling of what we may now experience, psychopathologically, as hallucination and delusion, the Johns drawing brings an abjection to the onset of madness, and the Nauman photograph an absurdism.

From the ongoing eruption of experience through brain activity (viewed moment to moment in every lifetime), to the episodic eruption of hallucinatory and delusional experience (exceptionally or perennially within a given lifetime), we may now shift to the evolutionary eruption (just once, but over many millennia) of novel species experience. Here Palaeolithic hand stencils, the Johns drawing and Nauman photograph, seen all together, additionally mark the threshold and transition between species – the emergence of new from out of old, conceptualised as a transformative event of passage. The outstretched hands in each instance trace the appearance of anatomically modern humans some 100,000 or 200,000 years ago. The event of this appearance is marked by the event of the hands' rendering in each instance: against the cave wall, or the page, or in the clip of the camera shutter. Whilst understood as an event, this species emergence is a dispersed development across a population of organisms, finding its echo in the emergence of consciousness and dream experience from across a neuronal network, and in the emergence of hallucination and delusion from across a psychosocial set of relations.

Among the elements that have been brought together – in the conjunction or juxtaposition of Nauman's photograph, Johns's print-drawing and a Palaeolithic hand stencil at Pech Merle – a series of interrelated threshold events are now operative. Whilst registering on vastly different scales of analysis, these distinct threshold events somehow seem to contain, invoke or depend on one another. Their particularity and overlap will be mapped and elaborated in the course of this thesis.

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Visiting Pech Merle as a tourist is something like being led round an art collection in a museum. Yet there are moments in which the similarities between the viewing experiences are ruptured, not least when the electric lights threaded through the cave are switched off and the guide flicks a torch over the walls. Suddenly the difficulty of finding one's way through the subterranean passages without full illumination becomes apparent – and the thought of getting lost underground grows troublesome. Moreover, the painted and engraved marks on the walls take on a new existence in the flickering torch light now offered. And the bodily senses previously relegated come into their own, such that the sound of dripping water and the voices, smell and touch of other visitors jointly round out the looming and lapsing views of the marks left behind by previous, prehistoric visitors.

Having considered the Nauman photograph and the print-drawing by Johns in the full glare of direct attention, they will now be viewed through the partial and particular light offered them by French thought on the subject of Palaeolithic hand stencils (via the field of prehistory) and of madness (via the field of psychopathology) from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Where brain science enters into these fields the routes it offers will be followed. The ambition is to trace moments of transformative passage at two nesting scales of analysis, involving the lifetime-scale of episodic psychosis (a concern of psychopathology) and the trans-millennial timescale of species evolution (a concern of prehistory) – with resonances sought at a third scale, involving the split-second activity of the neural net (a concern of brain science). Art, handprints, literature, scholarly books and clinical sources will all be investigated for their role in marking, or their response to, the threshold events at issue. At the close of each chapter, one or both of the anchoring works by Johns and Nauman will be revisited in light of the threshold events discussed.

Chapter 2: From Paul Broca to Gerard de Nerval

Paul Broca, surgeon and anthropologist, anchors the concerns of this thesis in Paris of the nineteenth century by uniting enquiry within the fields of brain science, psychopathology and prehistory.[65] Indeed his research into prehistoric trepanning and conclusions regarding a treatment for madness bring these three fields together within a single project. Aspects and elements of Broca's work will be outlined in this chapter and developed via that of his contemporaries and successors. His analysis of Palaeolithic human skeletons and his commentary on portable art from the same era will be considered first, leading us into discussion of Palaeolithic parietal art, which was noted as early as 1864 but not recognised in France until well after Broca's death, in the early years of the next century. Reviewing Broca's parallel work on patients at the Bicêtre hospital and asylum will then allow us to assess early evidence regarding brain function and processing, whilst introducing a medical context in which to explore experimental approaches to psychological disorders. Moving from the standpoint of a doctor to that of a patient, and from science to literature, we will find ourselves studying the account of episodic psychosis written by Gerard de Nerval.[66] We will track our way from one author to the other by taking the fields of prehistory, brain science and psychopathology each in turn. We will move from Palaeolithic bones to Palaeolithic hand stencils (prehistory); focus on cerebral processing and malfunction (brain science); and work through the fraught performances and photographic capture of hysteria, to drugs and madness (psychopathology). Between the work of Broca and Nerval, via that of Jacques Boucher de Perthes and Émile Cartailhac, Jean-Martin Charcot and Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours, we will start to address both the prehistoric event of becoming human and the psychopathological event of becoming mad – beginning to test, thereby, the possibility of a link between the thresholds involved.

As a preface to the chapter, we may consider Broca's study of prehistoric perforated skulls in the early years of the third French Republic and his

[65] Biographical details on Paul Broca from Schiller 1979, unless noted otherwise.
[66] Biographical details on Gerard de Nerval (né Lebrunie) from Pichois and Brix 1995, unless noted otherwise.

inferences regarding surgical operations to allow madness to flee the brain. Punctured skulls gathered from the dolmens of the Lozère and from the cave tombs of the Marne were inspected by Broca in 1874. He concluded from his examinations that at least some of the cranial holes had resulted from surgery conducted on living individuals 'and often a long while before death':[67] evidence of scar tissue confirmed Neolithic trepanning. In attempting to account for the perforations – and also for the associated cranial roundels apparently used as jewellery – Broca loosely invoked a religious or mystical context and some form of belief in divine causes or the agency of gods, demons or spirits. At the same time, imputing his own professional concerns to the prehistoric people responsible, he attributed medical or therapeutic intent to the act of trepanation – suggesting 'treatment of some illness of the head' as the motive for surgery.[68] Using clinical language that indicates his particular medical milieu, in nineteenth-century France, he elaborates on these illnesses, pointing towards 'certain afflictions of the head or certain nervous troubles, such as epilepsy, idiocy, convulsions, mental alienation, etc.'[69] He then suggests that these would, at the time, have been attributed 'to mystical causes', supposing that the act of drilling through the skull was performed with the intention of 'opening up a way out for the bad spirits', giving the offending 'demon a doorway through which to escape'.[70] Here Broca thinks in terms of prehistory, brain science and psychopathology simultaneously. Each field will now be considered in turn, with his work in each field and developments beyond his own work leading us to focus on Palaeolithic hand stencils, cerebral processing and the onset of madness.

[67] Broca reflecting back on 1874 in 1876, p. 237.
[68] Broca 1874, p. 546.
[69] *Ibid*.
[70] *Ibid.*

2.1 Prehistory

Prehistory became established as a discipline in France during Broca's lifetime; it was recognised as a new scientific domain more or less as he came of age, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Centred on what would become known as palaeoanthropology, prehistory inaugurated the investigation of the earliest humans. For the first hundred years the 'pre' of 'prehistory' indicated, like 'palaeo', as long ago as conceivable, without associated measure; radiocarbon dating would only be introduced into the field in the atomic wake of World War II. Nonetheless the sequence of epochs could be inferred from geology, with changes in flora and fauna plotted out according to sedimentary fossil deposits. Human remains and material culture suddenly appeared to have 'startling antiquity'.[71] Broca was among those to be credited in the new field of prehistory, acclaimed where others had previously struggled for acknowledgement, for instance against Judeo-Christian dogma centred on the biblical account of Genesis, which was challenged by the picture of early humanity suggested by gathering fossil evidence.

Examples of such evidence prompted extended debate at the Anthropological Society of Paris in the year it was founded by Broca, 1859. Flints dug up by Jacques Boucher de Perthes were presented at the eighth session of the new Society on 17 November. Boucher de Perthes was an archaeology enthusiast, a dedicated amateur then poised between notoriety and fame. The flints, which he claimed to be axes and blades crafted by prehistoric humans, as temporally classified by their geological strata, were displayed to the Society's members. The ensuing *Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie* reproduced plates showing life-size illustrations, together with a letter in which Boucher de Perthes addressed himself to Broca (as the Society's secretary):

> It was in the leaflet advertising it [his publication, *De la Création*] that I announced that if fossil humans, or their works instead of their bones, were to be found some day, it would have to be... in diluvial deposits…

[71] Broca 1973, p. 305.

> The press at the time repeated this sort of prediction which, following the extensive research I have carried out since then, proved just.[72]

Several of the Anthropological Society members who had come together to discuss the prehistoric and crafted flints expressed reservations, however Broca defended the authenticity of the finds presented and, at end of the meeting, François Baillarger, an eminent neurologist and psychiatrist, concluded: 'It seems to have emerged from our discussion that some of these diluvial flints bear real traces of human work.'[73] With two physicians who had no investment in confirming the antiquity of the flints convinced, the tide of opinion was clearly turning.

Within a few years, prehistoric human bones and portable art would likewise be found and their Palaeolithic status asserted. In 1860 Édouard Lartet, an archaeologist, discovered a bear's head engraved on a piece of stag antler, in the cave of Massat in the French Pyrenees. He published on this the following year and, with Henry Christy, in 1864 on a number of similar finds. Their paper in the *Revue Archéologique*, 'Cavernes du Périgord, Objets Gravés et Sculptés des Temps Préhistoriques dans l'Europe Occidentale', has been hailed for securing 'prehistoric times' as a field of study.[74]

Broca's claims on the subject came with the discovery of fossilised human remains. He responded to 'Remarques sur le Crâne de Néanderthal' presented to the Society of Anthropology in 1863 but his particular contribution was the first full examination and analysis of the skulls and bones subsequently unearthed in France, at Cro-Magnon in the Vézère region of the Périgord. It was industrial digging to widen railroad tracks that led to their discovery in 1868. Louis Lartet, son of Édouard, gave a report to the Anthropological Society concerning his verification visit to the site and, in the associated *Bulletins*, his paper is followed by Broca's detailed description and assessment of the skeletal fragments. Broca went on to position himself as an authority on prehistoric human life in the Périgord, presenting a survey paper at the French Association for the Advancement of Science in 1872, which was subsequently published in

[72] Boucher de Perthes (1859), 1860, p. 59.
[73] Jules-Gabriel-François Baillarger (1859), 1860, p. 78.
[74] Clermont and Smith 1990, p. 99.

English in *Nature*. Summarising the work of Édouard Lartet, in particular, he hailed some of the 'drawing, chiselling and even sculpture' produced by 'the men of the reindeer age' as 'really remarkable'.[75] Moreover, presenting his own findings from study of the Cro-Magnon skulls, he suggested these humans had 'a powerful cerebral organisation'.[76] And yet, a polygenist and racist, he drew errant conclusions from an isolated dissimilarity between these skulls and those of modern Europeans, from their greater similarity in this respect to the modern skulls of people from what he described as 'savage nations',[77] insisting that the Cro-Magnon humans had died out rather than being European ancestors. Failing to acknowledge our common species, he did not ponder the vision of the emergence of *Homo sapiens* that was otherwise seen in the Vézère fossils – before this vision of the threshold event of our species' onset became associated with much earlier remains found in Africa.

The Cro-Magnon bones were discovered a year too late to be included in the display of evidence of Palaeolithic human life, curated by Émile Cartailhac, at the Parisian Exposition Universelle of 1867 – the first to include a prehistory section. It was arguably this display, together with the associated meeting of the Congrès International d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Préhistoriques, that made the term 'prehistoric' official. The World Fair drew over nine million visitors in the six months of its run, from April to October 1867. The prehistory section was given space in the main exhibition palace built at the centre of the Champs de Mars, which was encircled by the national pavilions that – staking various claims to history and on the future – acted as showcases for household and commercial design, for fine art and crafts and for industrial and military ingenuity. While Thomas Eakins, the North American painter, would write home about visiting the Fair and extol the superiority of his country's locomotives, sewing machines and soda-water fountains,[78] Gabriel de Mortillet, a French prehistorian and anthropologist, would likewise hail his own country's display of art and artefacts from 'the reindeer age'.[79] Leading a 'Promenade Préhistorique à l'Exposition Universelle' for readers of his illustrated review, Mortillet started

[75] Broca 1873, p. 426.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 427.
[77] *Ibid.*.
[78] Thomas Eakins, letter to his father, 31 May 1867, as quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, vol. 1, Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1982, p. 30.
[79] de Mortillet 1867, p. 204.

his guided tour with the History of Work galleries, where the first vitrine showed stone implements credited to the discoveries of Boucher de Perthes. The highlight for Mortillet, however, which he acclaimed as the most significant contribution to the Fair, was the art on display: 51 prehistoric objects engraved and sculpted with patterns and animals. Seeking, with national chauvinism, to claim those responsible he proclaimed: 'here we have a product that is exclusively French'.[80] Narrowing his focus to the south west region he went on, 'One might almost say that, in remote times, the artistic sentiment appeared and was developed in this very restricted spot'.[81] Here a mysterious origin for art – and perhaps, by unexamined association, the threshold event of our species' onset – is romantically located in France.

The prehistoric bones unearthed the following year at Cro-Magnon, in the same region, would wait until 1878 to take pride of place in the next World Fair in Paris. Here they were displayed in the galleries of the Palais de Trocadéro, which – dedicated to the Anthropological Sciences – would launch the Musée d'Ethnographie.

A year later, in 1879, Don Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola, who had studied the portable art in the prehistory displays at the Trocadero, discovered wall paintings in a cave on his property, at Altamira in Cantabria, Spain. Isolated examples of parietal Palaeolithic art in France had been noted as early as 1864,[82] however its antiquity remained in question and Sautuola's 1880 claims that the overwhelming art at Altamira might be prehistoric were adamantly rejected by the leading French specialists. Both Cartailhac and Mortillet belittled the suggestion and the only person to visit from France at the time, Édouard Harlé, implied that the paintings were forged.[83] It was not until the turn of the century that the growing discovery of paintings in caves led to their widespread acceptance as Palaeolithic. Cartailhac conceded his mistake regarding Altamira in 1902, publishing a lavish retraction, 'Les Caverns Ornées de Dessins: La

[80] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 205.
[82] Félix Garrigou apparently wrote in his notebook of Niaux: 'il y a des peintures sur la paroi. Qu'est-ce que cela peut bien être?' See Groenen 1994, p. 317.
[83] Harlé 1881, p. 282: 'je crois avoir démontré que les belles peintures du plafond sont fort récentes. Il semble probable qu'elles ont été faites dans l'intervalle des deux premières visites de M. de Sautuola, de 1875 à 1979'.

Grotte d'Altamira, Espagne; *Mea Culpa* d'un Sceptique', in *L'Anthropologie*. Here he described himself as 'wrong not to acknowledge' what he had since come to recognise as 'a revelation of the prehistoric style'.[84] With painting added to engraving and sculpture, an inaugural style of art was claimed and, with the presumption of a succession of styles that led to the modern era, connecting artists of the new century to prehistoric artists, a vision of the emergence of our species rose from the cave walls. Looking beyond the animals chiefly depicted to see those responsible, prehistorians caught sight of their prehistoric selves; the threshold event of our species' onset appeared visible.

Cartailhac went to visit Altamira with Henri Breuil who, although only twenty-five at the time, had already studied paintings in the caves at Les Combarelles, claiming they were Palaeolithic. Breuil would become the first Professor of Prehistory at the Collège de France in 1929 and specialise in Palaeolithic parietal art. An ordained Catholic priest, he promulgated art as humanity's divine redemption, seeing inaugural evidence of this event in prehistoric painting.[85] Breuil would be called to authenticate the cave paintings at Lascaux in rural France in 1940. These extensive paintings – discovered shortly after national pride was obliterated by the Nazi occupation of Paris – would revive French claims to be the birthplace of art, and hence humanity, since the antiquity at Lascaux predated that at Altamira. The distinct response of Georges Bataille to these prehistoric paintings in 1955 – and the particular vision of the 'birth of *Homo sapiens*' that he saw in Lascaux[86] – will be examined in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Amongst the first examples of Palaeolithic parietal art to be claimed as such by Cartailhac and Breuil, at Altamira and Marsoulas early in the twentieth century, the two prehistorians found handprints. Shortly afterwards, marks of the same kind were noted at further sites, reported by Félix Regnault to be 'very numerous' at Gargas in 1906, in particular.[87] In his report, sent to the Anthropological Society in Paris, Regnault described the negative handprints

[84] Cartailhac 1902, p. 354.
[85] See, for instance, Breuil 1952, pp. 10–11.
[86] Bataille 1955, p. 18.
[87] Régnault 1906, p. 332.

not as hand stencils, in fact, but as pale forms on dark, inadvertently misrepresenting the marks as positive imprints by putting their image into words without venturing to imagine the process of their production. Cartailhac and Breuil's follow-up visit to the site led to the former reporting in *L'Anthropologie* later that year that the prints were 'in reality hands on red and black *backgrounds*'.[88] Cartailhac went on to elaborate: 'The technique is conspicuous. A hand was placed on the rock, with fingers spread, and colour was spread all around it; the hand removed, the outline exposed itself, pale against dark. This is the process said to be "stencilling" or "negative imprinting".'[89] Despite the ensuing discovery of comparable prehistoric handprints in other caves, the marks were broadly dismissed on the basis that 'they lack the artistic merit of the animal art',[90] as Breuil would maintain almost half a century later, in his post-War tome on Palaeolithic cave art. In the 1960s André Leroi-Gourhan, Breuil's successor in Prehistory at the Collège de France, suggested that the hand stencils at Gargas might have represented a means of prehistoric communication. Moreover, he incorporated Palaeolithic handprints in general into his bid for an all-encompassing theory regarding the structuring principles of prehistoric parietal art. His work will be studied in Chapter 6 of this thesis, where the threshold events of evolutionary emergence that he discussed will be read into Palaeolithic hand stencils.

In plotting how the subject of prehistory came to be established, we have explored early interests in tracing material signs of the event of onset for our species. In covering the discovery and first interpretations of hand stencils we have laid the groundwork for a later understanding of these prints in terms of their marking a threshold event of passage through the cave wall and into an alternative world or spirit realm. The task of connecting the evolutionary and transmillennial event of species emergence, on the one hand, with the psychosocial and daytime or night-time event of spiritual passage, on the other, will be tackled directly in the final two chapters of this thesis, via extended consideration of negative handprints.

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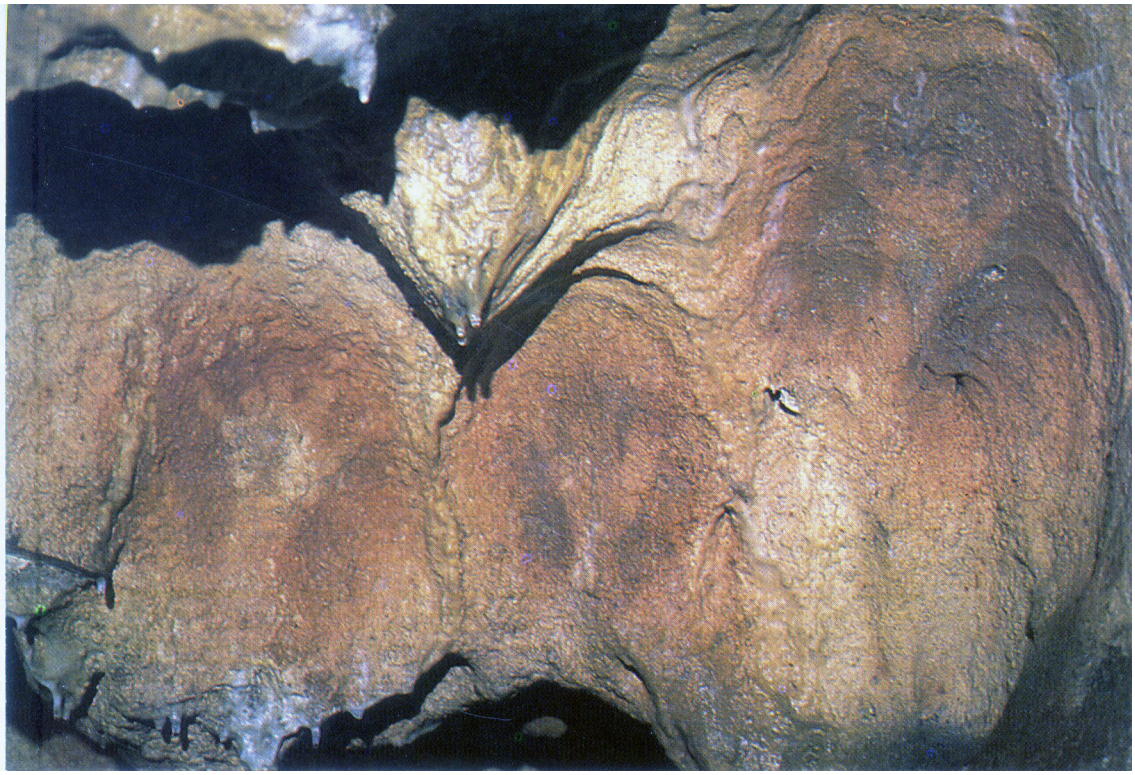
[88] Cartailhac 1906, p. 624. The italics are a little different in the original: 'ce sont en réalité des *mains sur fond rouge* et *sur fond noir*'.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] Breuil 1952, p. 17.



Hand stencils at Gargas, c. 27,000 BP

2.2 Brain Science

Paul Broca developed his particular interests in the human brain whilst working in nineteenth-century Paris where the medical context was dominated by the practice of morbid anatomy. As a professor of Pathology and Clinical Surgery his commitment was to the study of the sick or suffering not only in order to make them well but on the basis that an understanding of normal human functioning might be inferred from analysis of what can go wrong. Discussion as to whether different human faculties might be attributed to localised processing in different parts of the brain, or whether the causal or correlating activity was widely distributed, was often polarised at this time and, given the morbid anatomy context, often played out in debates over illnesses thought to affect the brain, with generalised states of pathological excitation or weakening to be considered on the one hand, and focal lesions on the other. Broca turned the tide of opinion in favour of regional cerebral specialisation of function with the results of an autopsy that he conducted and reported on the same day in 1861: he claimed his findings suggested that the expressive speech disorder of one his patients had been brain-based and localised and, moreover that, on these grounds, he had found a cerebral 'seat for the faculty of language'.[91] A century and a half later his name still adheres in medical practice concerning neurological speech disorders, being associated with expressive or motor aphasia, and, in ongoing enquiry within brain science, it is associated with a particular cortical area of the cerebrum.

Evidence regarding cerebral localisation of function was and is pursued for the light it might shed on the nature of the relationship between brain matter and processing, on the one hand, and subjective experience on the other. This pursuit will be traced here for its openings onto questions as to how the event of passage between the brain and mind might be effected, or marked, and with the prospect of viewing the gap assumed to lie between these two domains not as a gap but as a threshold.

The formal structure of the brain – at the broad scale of analysis yielded by basic dissection – lends itself to discussion of functional localisation. The

[91] Broca 1861 a, p. 235 (as given in the title of his paper).

differential anatomical characteristics are as specific to this part of the body as the ventricles, atria and valves are to the heart: the spinal cord is traceable, via the brainstem, to the cerebellum at the rear of the brain and it further connects upwards to the distinct hemispheres, and to the precisely convoluted lobes of the cerebrum, above. At the same time, generalised processing is suggested by the brain's uniform consistency: reminiscent of blancmange or the soft-boiled white of an egg, its spoonable materiality is distinct from the rest of the body and evenly distributed. By comparison, the nature of the functional activity of the brain – the events in and communication between its parts, which allow for the integration of local and general operation – is not easily revealed to the naked eye and probing hand. Nonetheless, the desire to discuss communication or vital forces acting between the brain and the rest of the body led to the positing of nerves, and the electrical nature of the impulses conveyed by or enlivening these nerves, at least in the muscles, was legendarily demonstrated by Luigi Galvani at the end of the eighteenth century. In fact popular uptake of the term 'nerveux' as a synonym for 'mentale' in the nineteenth century led to an introduction of the term 'neurologique' to reassert the physical, bodily basis originally implied. Debates regarding the neurological nature of the brain, its energetic states and internal flows – based on experiments investigating the anatomy and physiology of nerves, or rather neurons – would pick up in the slip stream of those debates concerning the attribution of mental functions to processing in distinct and localised parts of the brain.

The latter debates were particularly heated in Paris, given the phrenology fervour sparked there by Franz Joseph Gall. An Austrian émigré to the city early in the nineteenth century, Gall gained both popular success and scientific notoriety with his pursuit of phrenology; claiming to be able to locate to the skull, or to the underlying cerebral regions, such personality traits as cautiousness and destructiveness, such capacities as wonder and wit, and such concepts as number and causality. Despite bringing him some celebrity, Gall's theories were widely criticised by French scientists, who robustly attacked his methodology, or indeed his 'absence of method'.[92] In fact the whole notion of differential functional localisation was widely dismissed on this basis, until Broca stepped into the fray several decades later, bolstered by clinical case notes and

[92] Leuret 1839, p. 546.

associated autopsy reports. On the back of his reports to the Anthropological and Anatomical Societies, the human faculty of speech became the first to be ascribed a seat in the brain by the European scientific community. In announcing his first findings, Broca was careful to extricate himself from the wreckage of the phrenologist school: he emphasised the distinct location of the cortical area that provided the focus for his own attention – dissociating it from that part of the skull typically associated with language by Gall – and, most importantly, he held the pickled brain in his hands as material evidence.

Broca's early and influential papers 'on the seat of the faculty of articulate language' were based on his study of a patient with a disorder of speech production that now bears the doctor's name or is otherwise known as motor or expressive aphasia.[93] Monsieur Leborgne, the patient, was discussed clinically as 'Tan' – the word that acted as his basic means of vocal expression; the name he was given at birth has not survived in the historical record. Based at the hospice and asylum of Bicêtre for 21 years, Lebornge was apparently admitted on the basis of his inability to speak. Other problems or complications might be presumed, given the length of his confinement, but Broca asserted, when presenting the case, that Lerborgne's condition amounted to 'the loss of speech, before any other intellectual trouble and before all paralysis'.[94] A history of epilepsy was noted but downplayed. Consonant with there not being a problem with the vocal chords or other bodily parts beyond the brain, Broca reported that Leborgne proved capable of voicing an expletive, saying 'Sacré nom de Dieu' in moments of anger. He was seen by Broca in April 1861 ahead of surgery for gangrene and died, evidently unaided by treatment, just six days after his clinical assessment. Broca conducted an autopsy and presented Leborgne's brain to the Anthropological Society 'a few hours' afterwards.[95] Presumably with an eye for medical teaching, and arguably also for his own posterity, he did not dissect the brain but lodged it within the Dupuytren Museum of Pathological Anatomy:[96] 'I refrained from studying the deeper parts, in order not to destroy the specimen, which it seemed important to deposit in

[93] Broca 1861 b, p. 330 (as given in the title of his paper). Broca's own term for the disorder was, in fact, 'aphemia' (*aphémie*) rather than 'aphasia'; however the latter, coined and promoted by Armand Trousseau, is now the preferred term.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 356. Broca noted but downplayed that Leborgne had a history of epilepsy.
[95] *Ibid.*, p. 348; see Broca 1861a for the report to the Anthropological Society.
[96] See Hoüel 1877–80, vol. 3, pp. 274–75.

the Museum'.[97] He then gave a full report in August to the Anatomical Society, a prestigious medical forum over half a decade older than the young Anthropological Society. Concluding that Leborgne's aphasia was 'a consequence of a lesion of one of the frontal lobes of the brain', he placed 'in these lobes the seat of the faculty of articulate speech',[98] going on to speculate about the particular involvement of the 'third frontal convolution' in Leborgne's case.[99]

The evidence that Broca presented to the Anatomical Society in August 1861 is rather less than overwhelming, even if we set aside challenges to the assumptions of the pathological anatomy method of his time. It is compromised, for instance, by the damage to Leborgne's brain being extensive and dispersed rather than circumscribed. Broca's paper was circumspect, however, and succeeded beyond its own claims by galvanising support for arguments that had otherwise lost their impact through association with the spurious assertions of phrenologists. Causing a sensation within French medical circles, discussion of his findings drew international interest and a collective, competitive effort to interrogate and expand on them quickly spread across Europe. It was only in his consolidating papers written a few years later that Broca noted that brain lesions affecting speech were typically on the left,[100] concluding that 'we speak with the left hemisphere'.[101] He here drew on the findings of colleagues including both Jean-Martin Charcot and Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours, two clinicians whose work will be discussed below, in connection with psychopathology.

Contrasting with Broca's claims most interestingly were those of Karl Wernicke, who in 1874 highlighted a distinct area of the left cortex that appeared, on the basis of comparable pathological evidence, to be involved in the comprehension, rather than production, of speech. Receptive or sensory aphasia was dissociated from expressive or motor aphasia on the basis of differential damage to the brain; indeed Wernicke's term 'aphasia' entered the medical vocabulary for both conditions on this basis, over Broca's coinage

[97] Broca 1861 b, p. 353.
[98] *Ibid.*, p. 356.
[99] *Ibid.*,, p. 357.
[100] Broca 1863 a and b.
[101] Broca 1865, p. 384.

'aphemia'. By this time experiments with animals – specifically the electrical stimulation of a dog's brain and the resulting bodily movements reported by Gustav Fritsch and Eduard Hitzig in 1870 – had provided important corroboratory evidence of localisation of function from outside the sphere of pathological anatomy. The logic of making a positive attribution (i.e. this part of the brain has a role in this activity) on the basis of a doubled negative result (i.e. when that part of the brain is damaged, that activity is impaired) was finally exceeded. Further ambitions to label areas of the brain would lead to notable successes in association with the senses, although not before Broca had made a misguided bid to tie olfaction to a region he was nonetheless successful in naming, the limbic lobe.[102]

As already indicated, Broca's extensive study of skulls and brains allowed him to infer something about the latter as regards prehistoric humans, on the basis of his examining prehistoric examples of the former. Indeed he went so far as to make inferences about prehistoric mental functioning. Of the Cro Magnon skulls in particular he remarked: 'The forehead is wide, by no means receding, but describing a fine curve; the amplitude of the frontal tuberosities denotes a large development of the anterior cerebral lobes, which are the seat of the most noble intellectual faculties.'[103] At the same time he read 'savagery' into the cranial sutures that he observed, whilst failing to elaborate on how the brain might mediate this relation, nor indeed how different cranial sutures might impact on the brain at all.[104]

While Broca's scale of analysis considered that which was visible to the naked eye, his work to dissociate parts of the brain would be both complemented and challenged by study of cerebral microanatomy. In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, microscopes and neural staining techniques developed independently by Camillo Golgi and Ramón y Cajal gave a detailed picture of the structural architecture of neurons and this proved to be broadly the same in disparate locations across the brain. Then, with the turn into the twentieth century, neuroanatomy would begin to give way to neurophysiology and neurochemistry and, in the course of the century, a pattern of distributed

[102] Broca 1887 and 1888.
[103] Broca 1873, p. 428.
[104] *Ibid.*, p. 427.

processing would emerge to elaborate the picture of distributed structure. Loose discussion of nerves, nervous matter and neurology would yield to an increasingly detailed and shared understanding of neural networks, with neurons viewed not individually but through their synaptic interconnections and not in stasis but firing action potentials and releasing chemical transmitters. It is here that we find the basis for an understanding of experience – waking consciousness, or dreams while we are asleep – as an aggregate event: the interactive correlate of ongoing electrochemical activity across the brain.

While brain science is not given a dedicated section in the work that follows its overlap with psychopathology will be brought out in Chapter 4 in particular (in discussion of post-war psychiatry and psychopharmacology) and its role within prehistory noted in Chapter 6 (in analysis of the research and writing of Leroi-Gourhan). The notion that a threshold is crossed in the event of a brain producing subjective experience – in the passage from matter to mind – will allow the information gathered here to reverberate later in the thesis.

2.3 Psychopathology

The field of psychopathology – the study of mental illness, of psychological disorder – adds conceptualising and theorising ambition to the practical traditions of clinical psychiatry, venturing a move beyond medicine, beyond treatment, cure and care, towards scientific discourse. In quarters where the preferred term in nineteenth century Paris was 'neuropathologie', this was in order to insist on a causal role for lesions or malfunctions in the nervous system. If the expressive speech disorder suffered by Leborgne, Broca's patient, could be attributed to a damaged brain, for instance, surely other mental aberrations or disruptions in motor control would be explained likewise? Such hopes were held, at least by some, for two major syndromes of the nineteenth century: hysteria and mental alienation. Hysteria involved a heightened emotional state, exaggerated expressive behaviour and involuntary motor contractions – sometimes also a loss of consciousness, hallucination and delusion. It was secured as a nosological category in the nineteenth century by Jean-Martin Charcot, a close contemporary of Broca's and a senior doctor at the Salpêtrière hospital and asylum for women, while the latter was in post at the equivalent Parisian institution for men, Bicêtre.[105] Mental alienation, meanwhile, was the generalised clinical and medical term for madness: broadly used as the word psychosis is now, to imply a radical break with consensual perception and logic, i.e. the experience of hallucination or delusion. Both conditions will now be introduced in order to ground discussion of them, and of the thresholds giving onto them, later in this thesis.

[105] Biographical details of Jean-Martin Charcot from Goetz, Bonduelle and Gelfand 1995, unless noted otherwise.

2.3.1 Hysteria

Jean-Martin Charcot developed the role of photography and performance within the discipline of psychopathology. He inadvertently coached his patients at the Salpêtrière Hospital into eloquent displays of hysterical symptoms, through his own hypnotic performance as their medical master, and he had their most convincing swoons, spasms, convulsions and contortions captured on camera – photographically rendered for the scientific (and now historical) record.[106]

In the amphitheatre he had had built at the Salpêtrière, Charcot taught his students – and engaged other interested parties – through live demonstrations of his clinical methods. Joseph Babinkski, one of Charcot's distinguished students, emphasised the importance of the unscripted, spontaneous and improvised element in these Tuesday Lessons, describing them as intended 'to give, in particular, an image of the daily clinic, of the policlinic *imaginem belli* with all its surprises and all its complexity'.[107] He further described the individuals presented and examined in this arena as 'unknown to the professor', although some Charcot had seen previously.[108] Those sharing the amphitheatre stage with the doctor were typically drawn from amongst the visitors to the weekly outpatient clinic, which was held the same day for this purpose. As a result, the female residents at the Salpêtrière were not the focus of attention and men as well as women were seen, although the performances of the latter drew the greater share of interest. Some rehearsal, or at least vetting, of the outpatients was involved: Charcot's interns pre-examined them and drew up a shortlist – selecting the 'typical or puzzling', according to a report by Sigmund Freud, who interned at the hospital for five months – and 'the great man' then made the final pick of eight or ten with whom to perform for his audience.[109] Specifically, an examination was performed: measurements were taken, questions were posed and answers were gathered into a medical history – and then clinical judgement was exercised; diagnosis was deduced and treatment

[106] The visual fixing and theatrical display of hysteria has been extensively described and analysed by Georges Didi-Huberman as part of his thesis regarding the nineteenth-century invention of the illness through Charcot's practice – see Didi-Huberman 1982.
[107] Babinski preface to volume one of Charcot's *Leçons du Mardi à la Salpêtrière*: 1887–88, p. ii.
[108] Charcot makes this clear, for instance when introducing the first patient considered in the transcript for the lesson on 15 November 1887 – see Charcot 1887–88, p. 1.
[109] Freud (1886) 1966, vol. 1, p. 9.

prescribed. There were limits to how spontaneous or open-ended the encounters between doctor and patients could be; not only were the latter auditioned beforehand but role-playing of 'The Doctor' and 'The Patient' was surely inevitable once on stage. As props, 'all the modern tools of demonstration',[110] which were proudly in use, must have served to underscore the theatricality of the event, with the stage and audience likewise fostering a scenario of drama.

The audience for this clinical theatre was not restricted to Charcot's students; visiting medics from Russia, England and central Europe, North and Latin America came as observers, as spectators. Freud described the sessions as 'accessible to any physician who presented himself'.[111] Moreover, those outside the medical profession increasingly attended, given appropriate contacts or credentials, and they became the majority presence. In general the public could only gain admission as patient-participants – auditioning on the spot for access to what we might now describe as a reality-show of medical attention: a talent contest focused on the performance of hysteria.

Arguably, it was in performing the outward signs of mental illness that patients diagnosed with hysteria became mentally ill, as if the physical actions they perfected helped to carry them into new psychological realms, prompting as much as responding to hallucination and delusion. Here we may recall the activity that is involved in hand-stencilling and imagine the altered psychological state or the spirit zone that may have been accessed in this way by Palaeolithic visitors to caves. In each case bodily activity drives an event of mental passage, whilst marking the threshold thereby crossed.

The theatrical dimension that Charcot brought to the discipline of psychopathology was not lost on contemporaneous commentators. A journalist reporting for a medical feuilleton in 1878 explicitly refers to 'the "performance"' of a hysterical episode staged in the amphitheatre whilst he was on a personal tour of the Salpêtrière.[112] The doctor's own performance was also noted, indeed brought into question. Félix Platel denounced Charcot's theatricality on the front

[110] Charcot (1882) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 6.
[111] Freud (1886) 1966, vol. 1, p. 10.
[112] Anonymous ("M. L.") 1878, p. 893.

page of *Le Figaro*, under the headline 'Hamming it Up' [*Cabotinage*]. The author used his weekly column to urge the Academy of Sciences not to elect this leading 'ham actor' of the era to their membership.[113] An anonymous article in the *Annales Politiques et Littéraires* a couple of years later – and following Charcot's successful election to the Academy – would defend him from accusations of *cabotinage*, yet simultaneously dub him 'the Paganini of hysteria'.[114]

The performances of both doctor and patient were recorded for posterity. Charcot employed shorthand typists to transcribe the Tuesday Lessons in the Salpêtrière amphitheatre and the exchanges that they noted over a period of two years were edited into a book in two volumes.[115] This reads like a sequence of scripts for a series of short plays, with dialogue between *M. Charcot* and *Le malade* or *La malade*, plus soliloquies and asides by the doctor (the hero, as observed by Didi-Huberman)[116] and with bracketed explanations as to when he was addressing a patient resembling stage directions.

While performance is thus one aspect of Charcot's innovation within the field of psychopathology, the other is a concerted fixing of the outward physical manifestations of nervous illness through photography and casting. Photographs of the mentally ill had been a part of the discourse of psychopathology for almost as long as this technological medium of capture had existed but Charcot brought a new dedication to the process of recording his patients' bodies. He founded both a photography unit and a clay-casting studio at the Salpêtrière and he had their products archived in the pathological-anatomy museum that he likewise established at the hospital. Visual symptoms and anatomical form in general were routinely documented, with particular concern shown for action shots, and casts, taken at the various stages of a hysterical attack. Extraordinary facial expressions and flung or locked limbs were photographed and contractures of the hands and feet were rendered in clay – the demand for representation must, in itself, have courted performance. An audience was found beyond the hospital walls since the pictures were not only studied on site, in the hospital museum,

[113] Platel 1883, p. 1.
[114] Anonymous 1885, p. 12.
[115] Charcot vol. 1, 1887–88, and vol. 2, 1888–89.
[116] Didi-Huberman 1982, p. 243.

but gained wide circulation through publication: *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, ran to three volumes between 1876 and 1880,[117] and in 1888 Charcot launched *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, which would run to twenty-eight volumes over the ensuing thirty years. A decade on from the final volume issued from the hospital in 1918, Surrealists André Breton and Paul Éluard reframed a set of pictures originally published in this context half a century before. The Surrealist use of images from the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* will be examined in the next chapter of this thesis, as we pursue the notion of a threshold onto madness.

[117] Bourneville and Regnard 1876–77, 1878 and 1879–80.

2.3.2 Mental Alienation

Paul Broca worked with psychotic patients at Bicêtre, the brother instititution to the Salpêtrière, early in his career, when an intern there with François Leuret for ten months in 1845. In the course of his internship, Broca went to live with a duke whose family employed him to work as his carer. In a letter to his mother at this time, the student doctor described his charge as an intriguing psychopathological case:

> of all the lunatics I have seen so far, our duke is certainly the most interesting from a scientific point of view. He is afflicted with intermittent religious mania… His delusions are most bizarre. He believes he is God, the devil, damned at one moment and chosen the next; today he thought he was dead.[118]

His subsequent letters home describe his involvement in the controversial methods of 'moral treatment' advocated by Leuret, which included pouring 'cold water on his [the duke's] naked body' at times of relapse.[119] These 'cold affusions' brought them into some dispute with the patient's family, who saw 'punishment' instead of the 'correction' apparently intended.[120] Shortly after ending his role in attending to this patient, Broca left the Hospice de Bicêtre for the Hôpital Beaujon, moving away from psychiatry and towards his chosen specialism, surgery. The duke apparently died within six months from starvation, whilst still in the care of Leuret and his staff.

Leuret was a psychiatrist and brain anatomist who, whilst responsible (with Pierre Gratiolet) for an influential topographical mapping of the folds and fissures of the cerebral cortex,[121] resisted speculative attempts to associate psychiatric disorders with specific brain damage or malfunction. Although prevailing Parisian medical wisdom held fast to the somatic doctrine of disease, according to which anatomical or physiological foundations underlay and thus would be found for all illnesses, including those primarily manifest mentally, the

[118] Broca (1845) 1886, vol. 1, p. 287.
[119] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[120] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[121] Leuret 1839 and 1857 – naming the 'frontal', 'temporal', 'parietal' and 'occipital lobes'. To these terms Broca would later add his own coinage, the 'limbic lobe', see below.

issue of what brain-based abnormalities might underscore madness was disputed by some and set aside by others who awaited further advancement in brain science. Some doubted that physical causes, or even correlates, would ever prove identifiable but others expressed confidence that aberrant perception and belief, hallucination and delusion, would be traced to organic aetiologies. In 1881 Jules Bernard Luys, an anatomist and psychiatrist, suggested that in a state of madness the left side of the brain, which he described as ensuring reasoning and as normally the heavier, became the lighter, allowing the brutish right side to predominate.[122] Contemporaries were less audacious although typically no less convinced that some form of cerebral impairment was causal: Alfred Maury asserted, for example, that 'from a medical point of view, mental alienation is an illness with a special pathological state of the encephalon that unfortunately remains unknown'. [123] By comparison, Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours, who specialised in monomania and mental alienation, was remarkably forthright in dissociating himself from the 'many psychiatrists [who] have, with their investigative scalpels, interrogated the material causes of madness, searching in the depths of organs for the grain of sand that jams the intellectual machine and ending up by demanding that the disposition of brain molecules explains thought disorders.'[124] Here the disparaging description of 'brain molecules' with a variable 'disposition' actually pre-empts rather charmingly our more recent understanding of the brain in terms of the electro-chemical potential of neurons. While Moreau de Tours rejects the suggestion that purely physical causation will be established he is nonetheless attached to the notion and medical language of aetiology, assuming that some pathological 'lesion' or 'modification', some 'morbid fact', will emerge at the level of some mysterious juncture between mind and body, or in the depths of consciousness – he refers to that which is 'psycho-cerebral', 'primordial' and 'primitive'.[125]

Moreau de Tours was based at Bicêtre while Broca was doing his internship there in 1845; he would later overlap professionally with Charcot at the sister institution, the Salpêtrière. A short generation older than both these two other

[122] Luys 1881.
[123] Maury 1861, p. 140.
[124] Moreau de Tours 1945, p. 21.
[125] *Ibid.* p. 32 ('la lésion fonctionnelle primordiale'), p. 378 ('fait morbide psycho-cérébral primitif'), p. 392 ('une modification psycho-cérébrale une lésion dynamique de l'organe intellectuel').

doctors, Moreau de Tours's medical interests lay in the experience of mental alienation, rather than in the cerebral damage that caused speechlessness, as concerned Broca, or in the outward signs of hysteria, as promoted by Charcot. The novelty of his approach to psychopathology lay in his use of psychotropic doses of hashish, on himself and otherwise on associates, in order to approximate and come to terms with the hallucinations and delusions of his patients. He stridently claimed that 'to comprehend the ravings of a madman it is necessary to have raved oneself' and in seeking to establish his medical reputation by empathising with his patients his approach draws notable contrast with Broca's presentation of brains and Charcot's show of symptoms.[126] Nonetheless Moreau de Tours is now more commonly hailed within psychiatry as a pioneer for psychopharmacology: he also administered hashish to a number of his patients, apparently prepared to risk the compounding or aggravation of their mental alienation. Moreau de Tours published his various results and assembled reflections in a book in 1845, *Du Hachisch et de l'Aliénation Mentale:. Études Psychologiques* [*On Hashish and Mental Alienation: Psychological Studies*].

Hashish was not widely used in Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century and intoxication with the drug remained exotically associated with those relatively remote countries where its use was more commonplace. In the *Popular History of the Seven Prevailing Narcotics of World*, published in 1860, the British botanist and mycologist Mordecai Cooke devoted a chapter to Arabic *haschisch* or *hashash* and repeatedly cited Moreau de Tours, albeit amongst many other authors; he concluded that this substance was 'not at home in Europe'.[127]

For his research, Moreau de Tours both ingested hashish himself and administered it to medical colleagues. Moreover he invited poets and artists to be subjected to the same procedure, apparently on the basis that their enhanced imaginative capacities might yield interesting experiences when fuelled by the drug and that their descriptive and expressive skills would render these experiences most readily. In other words, he nominated spokespeople for

[126] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[127] Cooke 1860, p. 231.

his patients, picking sane representatives of the insane. His favoured person in this role was Théophile Gautier, a poet, dramatist, novelist and journalist, who he credits with having 'definitively' expressed the sensations prompted.[128] In fact the account by Gautier that Moreau de Tours quotes from at length in his book had already appeared two years previously in *La Presse*,[129] where Gautier was typically published as a theatre critic. Here the onset of the drug's effects, described as a modification of the soul or spirit, is said to take place 'in an instant'.[130] The sense of a threshold being crossed is denied by the reported 'lack of transition', however an event of passage is implied when intoxication is described as 'overtaking you and then quitting you; you rise into the sky and then regain the ground'.[131]

Gautier would go on to write a subsequent article regarding his experiences, this time for *La Revue des Deux Mondes* issued the February following publication of Moreau de Tours's book. It is this extended, fictionalised account of what Gautier refers to, in the title, as 'The Hashishins Club', that perhaps most secured the experiments of Moreau de Tours – or rather the sessions of 'voluptuous intoxication' that he hosted[132] – within the popular imagination. Gautier's tale richly, if not melodramatically, evokes a bohemian setting, a mysterious gathering of 'initiates' and their shared drug-induced *fantasia*,[133] merrily playing up the exclusive and exotic nature of the proceedings and giving florid descriptions of some hallucinatory extremes.

In comparison, Charles Baudelaire was dismissive of the taking of hashish and downplayed, if not denigrated, its effects. The author is known to have attended Moreau de Tours's sessions involving the drug but, at least according to Gautier's reckoning,[134] he remained an observer and did not partake. In 'Du Vin et du Hachisch', of 1851, Baudelaire implied a curt familiarity with Moreau de Tours's book. Amplifying his statement that 'Wine is useful, it produces fruitful results. Hashish is useless and dangerous', he added, in a footnote:

[128] Moreau de Tours 1845, p. 21.
[129] 10 July 1843.
[130] Gautier (1843) in Moreau de Tours 1845, p 21.
[131] *Ibid.*, p 24.
[132] Gautier (1846) 2002, p. 1015.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 1005.
[134] Gautier (1868) 1892, p. 268.

> Just for the record, the recent attempt to apply hashish to the cure of madness should be mentioned. The madman who takes hashish contracts a new madness, which chases the other one off, and when the intoxication has passed, true madness, which is the normal state of the madman, resumes its dominion, just as reason and health reign in us. Someone has gone to the bother of writing a book about all this. The doctor who has invented this fine system is not in the least bit a philosopher.[135]

Whether wilfully or negligently, Baudelaire manages to misrepresent *On Hashish and Mental Alienation*, which must surely be what he is referencing. Certainly Moreau de Tours is no philosopher, however the other claims made suggest at most a quick or partial glance at his text. Less than a tenth of the book's pages are dedicated to the therapeutic potential of hashish – and 'therapy' is the preferred word, rather than 'cure'. Case notes on just seven patients at Bicêtre are presented on this point and strong medicinal claims are resisted, with specific accounts instead reporting mild benefits, including a calming influence, headache suppression and insomnia relief, and incidental effects, such as an increase in appetite. The diverting picture of a drug-induced madness chasing off a prior and spontaneous madness is a creation of Baudelaire's own. It is noticeable, in fact, that in denying Moreau de Tours any credibility, Baudelaire did not reject or challenge the doctor's claims to be able to equate madness with drug-induced hallucination and delusion, nor his insistence that alienists should seek to understand their patients through personal psychotropic experimentation. This is particularly surprising since in a later work, 'Le Poème du Hachisch' of 1860, Baudelaire adamantly dissociated psychotic and narcotic states, insisting on an absolute demarcation between the experience of the sane and the insane, between an us and a them.

If the contribution of Moreau de Tours to the methods of psychopathology involved supplying authors with mind-altering drugs and calling on their literary powers of description, then Gerard de Nerval cut out the intermediaries – both the psychotropic substance and the literary spokesperson – and wrote about

[135] Baudelaire (1851) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, p. 397.

living through psychosis himself, indeed at a time when he was scarcely beyond it. The two men were close contemporaries in age but it remains uncertain whether or how well the one, as a notorious madman in mid-century Paris, knew the other, as a notorious psychiatrist of the same milieu. Nerval's participation in the hashish sessions hosted by Moreau de Tours has been suggested, largely because Gautier was a mutual friend, however documentary evidence remains elusive. Certainly the two men shared concerns beyond their interests in madness: for instance they each drew on their travels to 'the Orient' in their work, Moreau de Tours having spent an extended period in Egypt in the late 1830s and Nerval visiting Cairo, Beirut and Constantinople in 1843. In fact Nerval's story of hashish and madness (and Gnostic religion), his 'Tale of Caliph Hakem', first appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1847, a year after the experiments by Moreau de Tours to link hashish and madness were mythologised in Gautier's feature in the same magazine.

Nerval's earlier short story, from 1839, about a madman in the sixteenth century, now known as 'Le Roi de Bicêtre', was published anonymously in an influential Parisian daily paper a matter of months before Moreau de Tours took up his post as a doctor specialising in madness at this Parisian hospital. In what was supposedly a historical reconstruction, Nerval aimed 'to retrace the various phases of this [his protagonist's] madness',[136] describing the delusions of regal grandeur that – together with his 'mental disarray', 'bizarre actions' and 'elastic brain'[137] – lead to his confinement at Bicêtre. When, later, the writer suffered madness himself, he would avoid custody at this particular institution. Writing to the *Journal des Débats* to challenge the mock obituary dedicated to the death of his sanity, which they had promptly published, Nerval dissociated himself from the public institutional confines of Bicêtre, emphasising the 'fashionable and even aristocratic' nature of his alternative *maison de santé*.[138]

Nerval's testament to his experience of episodic psychosis, and his contribution to our understanding of this condition, is 'Aurélia, or Dream and Life'. A psychopathological document, this is also a literary construction – adding poetry

[136] Nerval (1939) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 2, p. 891.
[137] *Ibid.*, pp. 888–89.
[138] Nerval (1941) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, p. 1381. The mock obituary was written by Jules Janin and appeared in the *Journal des Débats*, 1 March 1841. Nerval's request that his letter of rectification be published by the journal was ignored.

to the discourse of psychopathology. To be successful with this work, Nerval had to convey madness but to prove himself sane – only on this basis might he emerge as an author worthy of credit, and also keep himself out of hospital. A loosely fictionalised memoir, 'Aurélia' was Nerval's last work. It was started in 1853 whilst he was still in psychiatric care in the Passy clinic of Émile Blanche, following his second major psychotic episode. In a letter to his father, sent from the clinic, he wrote: 'I am undertaking to write and record all the impressions my illness has left me. This will be a study not without utility for observation and science. Never have I experienced such ease of analysis and description. I hope you will judge likewise.'[139] The work underwent much revision, with the author rewriting up until the first part was finally published, in the *Revue de Paris*, early in 1855. Nerval then committed suicide. The second part, gathered by the editors from his drafts, appeared a short while afterwards: the issues of the *Revue de Paris* that reneged on the promise of a follow-up to the first part, due in the next issue, mark, with an absence, his death.

In 'Aurélia', Nerval posits the onset of madness as an eruption of a dream state when awake – that is, as 'the overflow of dream into real life'.[140] The equation of dreaming and madness was not novel, of course, indeed only a decade previously Moreau de Tours had asserted mental alienation as '*dreaming whilst wide awake*', somewhat emptily insisting on the 'absolute truth' of this 'often repeated' phrase.[141] More interestingly, Nerval used narrative to enact the invasion of wakefulness by dreams, at points overwhelming his rational assessment of his madness with the compelling reality of his mad visions and convictions. Moreover, 'Aurélia' is important for giving an account of the threshold moment of psychotic onset – in particular for the way in which it describes and, in the absence of words, marks the start of his initial bout of madness, in 1841.

First, however, Nerval invokes a classical vision of the threshold onto dream experience. The text opens with a description of entry into dream through the classical gates of sleep – 'those gates of ivory and horn' from the Odyssey and Aeneid – which, specifically according to Nerval, rather than to Homer or Virgil

[139] Nerval (1855) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 832.
[140] *Ibid.*, p. 699.
[141] Moreau de Tours 1845, p. 42.

'separate us from the invisible world'.[142] A limit marker is thereby established within normal experience, one which gives onto a world apart, that of dreaming. A little later on in the text it is suggested that rather than simply lying in wait for us beyond the gates, 'the spirit world opens for us' and in response to our need 'to carry on the work of existence' once we have left the material world of tangible objects behind.[143] Here effortful passage, rather than passive transportation, is gently implied and we may recall the vision of Palaeolithic cave visitors stencilling their hands on the rock face and thereby crossing through it into a spirit realm beyond.

Nerval then introduces the narrative derived from his own life. He relates a few social encounters and a gathering elation, impatience and giddiness – then a deathly vision and premonition, followed by a terrifying dream. Describing frenetic visits to all his friends and increasingly passionate loquaciousness, he builds up to the setting of night-time scene on the streets of Paris. Then he writes: 'having reached the intersection of three streets, I refused to go any further',[144] despite a friend who is with him entreating him to go home. If there is a material threshold that gives onto Nerval's first bout of madness then it is this: a juncture between three roads, which rears up, 'losing all its urban features' to become 'a hilltop surrounded by vast expanses of emptiness'. [145] Here Nerval's struggle with his friend turns into 'a battle between two spirits', in which he resists a proffered heaven in favour of those who await him in a star. [146] With a defiant 'No!' he wrests his passage into psychosis: the text breaks off from the scene and, at the opening of the next section, with the threshold that has been crossed marked by a blank space on the page, we are told: 'Here began for me what I shall call the overflow of dream into life.' [147]

The rest of part one of 'Aurélia' relays the doubled narrative of Nerval's arrest, incarceration and release, then admission to a sanatorium and his stay there, on the one hand, and his wakeful dream life, of hallucinations and delusions, on the other. In a sense, part two conveys the same for Nerval's second major

[142] Nerval (1855) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 695.
[143] *Ibid.*, p. 695.
[144] *Ibid.*, p. 699.
[145] *Ibid.*
[146] *Ibid.*
[147] *Ibid.*

episode of psychosis. However, the incidents and experiences that the author describes there are much closer in date to the time of writing and, as already mentioned, this second part was not completed to the author's satisfaction before he committed suicide. The threshold onto or event of passage into madness is not reiterated or rethought – indeed onset is simply announced, at the opening, with a reference to Orpheus and Eurydice and the words 'Lost, a second time!'[148]

'Aurélia', the title of the work, and the name Nerval gives to the woman he describes as his first and abiding love, is a Latin translation of the Greek 'chrysalis', naming the gold-coloured sheath of a larva-becoming-butterfly. In naming his text in this way, Nerval claims it as a threshold form – a form enclosing, disguising even, radical transformation; a form that, given the subtitle of the work, embodies the potential for 'dream and life' to be forced into novel relation, with dream erupting into waking life; a form that is thereby spring-loaded with the onset of madness.

While André Breton, among other Surrealists, took an interest in Nerval's writing it is the influence of 'Aurélia', post World War II, on a psychiatrist, François Tosquelles, that shall be taken up later in this thesis, in Chapter 4.

[148] *Ibid.*, p. 722.

2.4 Conclusion

Paul Broca's work on skulls and brains, also his reflections on mental illness and prehistoric art, have led us into territory where threshold events may be mapped. Passage from brain to mind, passage into madness and passage between species have all been invoked and, in this way, we are returned to *Study for 'Skin' I* by Jasper Johns and *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* by Bruce Nauman.

In Nauman's photograph a person erupts: sexual ejaculation is errant from the mouth, or vocalisation splutters out as babble; an erotic climax is enfolded into a moment of madness. As such the image responds to another: a picture of Louise X – her surname has not survived in the historical record – who was diagnosed with hysterico-epilepsy by Jean-Martin Charcot. This particular image was published in the second volume of his institution's medical compendium, *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* of 1878, where it is labelled 'Passionate Attitude: Ecstasy'.[149] As we shall see in the next chapter, it was prised from this context by the Surrealists, who dubbed its protagonist Augustine and subjected her to their objectifying gaze. Looking again at the image now, after the Surrealists and at a remove from them, we see Louise X's entwisted legs winding potential into the core of her body, gathering an energy that is released at her open hands, which are raised and spread. The displayed hands and upturned face are mirrored by those of Nauman in his photograph – and the tight crop and blank background are shared by the two pictures and resonate between them. The nineteenth-century concept of mental alienation, which is implied by the empty space that surrounds Louise X's head, attaches itself to Nauman's image though its consonant black backdrop. And, in a reverse move between the two pictures, we may attribute the staged spontaneity that we know lies behind Nauman's photograph, to Louise X's photograph. The burst from Nauman's lips imparts the sense of an event to the picture of the young woman; his moment of insanity and sexual surrender echoes and reinforces hers.

[149] Bourneville and Regnard 1878, pl. XXIII. And see p. 104 of this thesis for a reproduction of this page.



Louise X, *Untitled*, black and white photograph, 1878



Bruce Nauman, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, 1966, colour photograph

If her image is considered – like Nauman's – as self-portraiture, the threshold moment that she marks defies the clinician's classificatory endeavour, exceeding Charcot's hysterical vocabulary. He becomes the hysteric, pathologically attached to pathology, while she ceases to be his patient and – let us credit her with an awareness of being photographed – instead becomes an artist.

Meanwhile, *Study for 'Skin' I* by Jasper Johns fills a gap on the page left by Nerval in 'Aurélia'. It marks the onset of the author's first bout of madness as rendered in this fictionalised memoir. The event of astral transformation on the nocturnal streets of Paris, as it is described in 1855, is then performed in a South Carolina studio in 1962.

> 'No!' I said. 'I do not belong to your heaven. Those who await me are in that star. They predate the revelation that you have announced. Let me rejoin them, for the one I love is among them, waiting for us to meet again.



> Here began for me what I shall call the overflow of dream into real life. From this point on, everything at times took on

> a double aspect – without, however, my reasoning powers thereby ever lacking in logic and without my memory losing the least detail of what was happening to me. It was simply that my actions, to all appearances insane, were subject to what human reason chooses to deem illusion…[150]

Having been held back behind the picture plane, the Johns figure now breaks forth – and is hailed as mad. As with Louise X before him and Nauman after him, Johns may be seen to conjure mental alienation through depicting his head at the centre of a void. At the same time, he visualises what Nerval had described as his countdown into madness, with Paris 'losing all its urban features' to leave him 'surrounded by vast expanses of emptiness'. [151] Considered as an image of the point at which Nerval's dreams overflowed into his waking life, *Study for 'Skin' I* echoes the possibility that Palaeolithic hand stencils mark the subsumption of the subject into a spirit world of the mind's making. In reading 'from this point on' in 'Aurélia' we traverse a threshold presented by Johns on the paper page and marked by prehistoric hand stencillers on cave walls.

The explosive burst that Nauman and Johns each enact in their works throws a bridge from the eruptive event of human species emergence, viewed on a millennial timescale, to the firing of billions of action potentials across the brain in the refreshing of subjective experience, second to second. On a register in between the evolutionary and the neuronal, at the level of a lifetime, they present the threshold event of entering a delusional or hallucinated realm as an experiential model for these macro and micro moments of passage.

[150] Nerval (1855) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 699.
[151] *Ibid.*

Chapter 3: Psychopathology and Surrealism

Interviewed for French radio at the beginning of the 1950s, the Surrealist André Breton recalled the significance of having been employed during World War I at a psychiatric centre in Saint Dizier:

> This centre took in men who had been evacuated from the front on the basis of mental troubles (including a number of cases of acute delirium), as well as various delinquents who were facing court-martial, and for whom they wanted a medical report. My stay in this place and the sustained attention I paid to what happened there counted for a lot in my life, and no doubt had a decisive influence on the development of my thought.[152]

Breton's thoughts post World War I galvanised the artistic movement of Surrealism into action in Paris. The current chapter will examine how psychopathology came to feature in Surrealist texts and photographs, with hysteria (or pithiatism) and mental confusion (or psychosis) – or certain symptoms of hysteria and certain forms of mental confusion – emerging as particular preoccupations. Thresholds onto insanity or moments of passage into madness will be sought in the material at issue, with additional attention paid to the brain, hands and prehistoric stencilling as harmonic motifs.

After the medical context has been introduced, the work of several Surrealists – all born in the last decade of the nineteenth century and gathered together in Paris in the interwar years – will be considered. The focus for study will be their representations of the threshold event of entering madness. While Breton will be the primary author under discussion, with texts written collaboratively with Louis Aragon and later Paul Éluard also entering the frame, the core photographers will be Claude Cahun and Man Ray. Where the work of Breton and associates argues for an eroticisation of the onset of madness, redress will be found in the work of Claude Cahun, where this eroticisation is withdrawn and a horror posited instead.

[152] Breton (in conversation with André Parinaud 1952) 1993, p. 20, translation altered.

3.1 Psychopathology in France during and following World War I

The trench warfare of World War I generated psychological casualties that the medical profession were scarcely prepared, and yet urgently required, to treat. Soldiers were discharged from the front and admitted to psychiatric units with a variety of ill-defined disorders. The French word 'obusite' (literally 'shellitis') emerged, in parallel with the English term 'shellshock', in order to bracket together the diversity of troubles that were experienced and observed. Soldiers emerged from battle delusional, or with incoherent speech, or with uncontrolled movement or lack of movement in limbs, for example – in many cases in the absence of any obvious bodily damage as trigger; medical examination could find no physical explanation. Staff in military hospitals were responsible for remedying all that they could, pretty much however they could, so that manpower might be returned to action. There were suspicions that mental or neurological illness might be feigned in order to avoid combat. Nonetheless some patients were given psychiatric dispensation to leave military service, being sent home or into the care of civilian institutions – although, lost to the war effort, these men were often received in shame, rather than heroised for their sacrifice.

While the usual instability and overlap of psychiatric concepts pertained, the psychopathologies of World War I were grouped into three categories: mental confusion, neurasthenia and hysteria. Jean-Martin Charcot had distinguished between the latter two conditions in the nineteenth century, adopting the North American term neurasthenia for what he described as a discrete cluster of symptoms – primarily extreme fatigue, sexual impotency and a tight band of pressure around the head – which he attributed to psychological stress. He brought the syndrome international recognition by categorically distinguishing it from the illness with which he was famously associated, hysteria.[153] Despite being most closely associated with the female patients in his care at the Salpêtrière hospital, Charcot had in fact argued that hysteria – etymologically 'of the uterus' or womb – was not confined to women and that, in men, it was usually traumatic in origin.[154] The complaints of World War I soldiers judged to

[153] See Goetz 2001.
[154] See Micale 1990.

be hysterical included paralysed or shaking limbs, deformed gait, tremors and twitches, deafness, dumbness and partial vision – all disorders which appeared to implicate a malfunctioning central nervous system. Neurasthenic patients were likewise described as suffering from nervous exhaustion or nervous collapse. There was a tendency for officers and sergeants to be diagnosed with neurasthenia, while unranked soldiers more often emerged with hysteria.[155] At the same time, distinctions between the various forms of psychopathology arising during the war were far from clear cut and shell-shocked patients might present with symptoms that crossed the hard lines drawn in vain between mental confusion, hysteria and neurasthenia.

Joseph Babinski – who would receive André Breton as a wartime student in his neurological clinic at the Pitié hospital, Paris – had played a key role in keeping discussion of hysteria going after Charcot's death, extending debate into the new century when medical attention was otherwise dwindling. He developed his pre-war work on hysteria by applying his theories and practices to the newly militarised medical context. Whilst working as an assistant to Charcot at the end of the nineteenth century, Babinski had become convinced that hysterical attacks were comprised of unconsciously modelled or simulated behaviours, which arose through psychosocial suggestion and did not reflect an organic aetiology; he argued that no physical pathology was underlying. Advancing a theory that diverse hysterical symptoms were unintentionally self-induced, and could be made to disappear through counter-suggestion, he attempted to introduce the term pithiatism – i.e. curable by persuasion – in order to describe the new syndrome he sought to establish. At the same time he developed a means of treatment used by Charcot that involved administering electric shocks to the fingertips – the idea being that individuals would thus be shaken out of what he perceived to be their pretences. This technique became know as an 'ambush attack' and Jules Froment would, as late as 1936, praise its efficiency in 'cleaning out' hysterical symptoms.[156]

Babinski and Froment collaborated on an influential book that assimilated a broad and controversial historical field and claimed to offer firm grounds upon

[155] Shephard 2000, p. 57.
[156] Froment 1936, p. 590.

which to dissociate amongst some of the complex disorders arising in World War I. In *Hystérie-Pithiatisme et Troubles Nerveux d'Ordre Réflexe en Neurology de Guerre*, of 1917, they argued that hysterical (or as Babinski preferred, pithiatic) soldiers could be 'cured rapidly or even instantaneously' and thus might be productively returned swiftly to the front.[157] In the same book they distinguished another group of soldier-patients who presented with some similar but, they insisted, discrete symptoms, proposing the term 'reflex nervous disorders' and attributing these to 'real physiological disturbances, the mechanism of which is still a matter of discussion'.[158] Uptake of this dissociation meant that those diagnosed with reflex nervous disorders became eligible for a war pension.[159] However, with the neurological mechanism of this designated condition being unknown and undetectable, the process of diagnosis was put under considerable strain. Soldier-patients, meanwhile, were placed at the mercy of medical judgements made – and of severe treatments administered – by those under pressure to maintain the numbers in active service.

Persistently controversial in its application to those suffering from the traumas of World War I, and ebbing in civilian contexts since before the war began, the clinical term hysteria and the syndrome that it connoted gradually declined in medical currency. In an article of 1934 entitled 'Le Mythe de l'Hystérie', and published in the *Journal de Médecine de Paris*, Paul Hartenberg, a French specialist in the field, insisted 'hysteria does not exist… The word "hysteria" does not mean anything; it does not correspond to any reality'.[160]

The psychiatric category of mental confusion would also gradually slip from use following World War I, although its pathway to obscurity was somewhat different. Those diagnosed with mental confusion during the war typically presented with cognitive impairments, including reduced mental attention or difficulty in comprehension, and with more florid symptoms, such as delusion and delirium. While the former complaints were widespread, the latter, if particularly striking, were less common. One Monsieur Dide, the chief medical officer to the 24th Battalion of Chasseurs Alpins, reported that 'During a whole

[157] Babinski and Froment (1917) 1918, p. xv.
[158] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[159] Lomas 2004, pp. 637–38.
[160] Hartenberg 1934, pp. 936–37.

year I observed only a single case of delirium, oneiric in character, following the explosion of trench mortar', proudly attributing the low incidence to morale among the troops.[161]

Mental confusion had only become acknowledged as a dissociable syndrome shortly before the outbreak of World War I: Emmanuel Régis and Angélo Hesnard had given the term international currency when they used it (in the plural) as the title for their contribution to the *Traité International de Psychopathologie* of 1911. By then there was active competition amongst psychiatrists across Europe to cluster symptoms of madness into discrete medical categories and to coin nosological terms. 1911 also saw the publication of *La Démence Précoce* in Paris by Constanza Pascal and *Dementia Praecox oder die Gruppe der Schizophrenien* in Vienna and Leipzig by Eugen Bleuler. While the term *démence précoce* is generally attributed to Bénédict Augustin Morel, who described a case of adolescent insanity in this way in 1860, the Latinate version, dementia praecox, was famously taken up, in connection with a distinct symptom picture, by Emil Kraepelin. In the sixth edition of Kraepelin's psychiatric compendium, published in 1899, hallucination and delusion were described as the primary symptoms of the syndrome, which he then dissociated from manic-depressive psychosis. Pascal's book dedicated to *démence précoce* maintained the French version of term whilst disseminating Kraepelin's ideas. The rise of *démence précoce* for dementia praecox, and at the expense of the term and category of mental confusion, may be tracked through the successive editions of the *Précis de Psychiatrie* by Regis. In the third edition, of 1906, *démence précoce* is mentioned under the heading of mental confusion. By the fifth edition, of 1914, the former is raised to heading status and used as an alternative to the latter: 'mania and melancholia, or manic-depressive madness' is dissociated as one the two 'generalised psychoses', the other being 'mental confusion or *démence précoce*'. The current term for approximately the same cluster of symptoms, schizophrenia, as coined by Bleuler, was slow to be adopted in France; *démence précoce* remained a prevalent if not the preferred designation in French psychiatric literature into the 1930s.

[161] Babinski and Froment (1917) 1918, p. 30.

An institutional history for the field and period may also be plotted, alongside a history of the nomenclature of psychopathology, and this allows us to populate the scene with those whose work will form the focus of this chapter. Shortly before World War I, the Pitié Hospital was rebuilt in the gardens of the Salpêtrière. Although geographically united, the two institutions, each dating from the seventeenth century, continued to operate as distinct entities until the 1960s. Breton served under Babinski at the former during World War I and Claude Cahun attended open classes at the latter post-War. Breton first met Louis Aragon in the psychiatry department of a third Parisian medical institution, the military hospital of Val de Grâce, in 1917. In the 1930s Breton and Cahun would jointly attend lessons by Gaston Ferdière at a fourth, the Hôpital Sainte Anne. Founded by an edict of Napoleon III in 1863, Sainte Anne was made the largest Parisian psychiatric hospital and it housed the teaching department of psychiatry for the University of Paris. The Sainte Anne chair in mental illness and brain diseases was held between the wars by Henri Claude. It is his portrait that features in Breton's book *Nadja*, where the Surrealist author gives an irreverent description of 'his dunce's forehead and that stubborn expression on his face'.[162] It is Breton's early work within the field of psychopathology that we will turn to first.

[162] Breton 1928 b, p. 178.

3.2 André Breton and Wartime Psychopathology

Born to a shopkeeper in Normandy in 1896, Breton started training to be a doctor in 1913, while simultaneously developing his interests in poetry.[163] Drafted in 1915, he was sent on the basis of his medical studies to work as an orderly at the voluntary hospital in Rue du Boccage, Nantes, arriving in the summer. Whilst based in Brittany he simultaneously assisted in the neurology and psychology departments of Nantes city hospital. Requesting a transfer to the neuropsychiatric clinic of the Second Army at Saint-Dizier, some two hundred kilometres east of Paris, he proceeded to spend four months there in 1916. It was here that he came under the influence of Raoul Leroy, the director and another former assistant, like Babinski, to Charcot. In January 1917 he transferred to Babinski's department in the neurological centre at the Pitié hospital, in Paris. For much of his time at the Pitié Breton was, however, a patient himself – struggling with what turned out to be appendicitis. Nonetheless, a copy of Babinski and Froment's *Hystérie-Pithiatisme et Troubles Nerveux d'Ordre Réflexe en Neurology de Guerre*, which was published that year, found its way into Breton's collection of books, with a personal dedication from both authors.[164] In a subsequent and final posting, later in 1917, Breton would cross Paris to the Val de Grâce hospital where he met and became friends with Louis Aragon, a fellow student in the psychiatry department.

During Breton's four months at Saint Dizier in 1916, Leroy introduced him to the leading psychiatric literature of the new century, lending him books and discussing these with him. In frequent correspondence with Théodore Fraenkel, with whom he had studied medicine in Nantes, Breton urged his friend to read the same texts, copying passages and summarising core notions in his letters. He reported on Pascal's *La Démence Précoce* and, while not explicitly mentioning it, may also have known Kraepelin's work on dementia praecox directly through reading his *Introduction à la Psychiatrie Clinique*, as translated into the French in 1907. Breton directed Fraenkel to the *Précis de Psychiatrie* by Régis – the fifth edition being issued in 1914 – and also to Freud's thought as conveyed by Régis and Hesnard's *La Psychoanalyse*, also published in

[163] Biographical details on André Breton from Bonnet 1975 and 1992 and Polizzotti 1995, unless noted otherwise.
[164] Étienne-Alain Hubert in *André Breton, Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 1729–30, n. 1.

1914. He further mentioned the *Traité de Pathologie Mentale* of 1903 by Gilbert Ballet, and the same author's *Leçons de Clinique Médicale sur les Psychoses et les Affections Nerveuses* of 1897. Also from the nineteenth century he cited Charcot's multi-volume work *Leçons sur les Maladies du Système Nerveux*, Valentin Magnan's *Leçons Cliniques sur les Maladies Mentales* (1893) and Maurice de Fleury's *Introduction à la Médecine de l'Esprit* (1897). In short, Breton demonstrated a broad acquaintance with those works that formed the basis for psychopathological understanding in France at the time. Nonetheless he maintained an unconventional position regarding some, if not all, of these works: hailing them for their literary rather than scientific merits, he glossed de Fleury's *Introduction*, for Fraenkel, as 'a delicious novel' and, in a letter dated 25 September 1916, he proclaimed 'Dementia praecox, paranoia, crepuscular states. O German poetry, Freud and Kraepelin!'[165] Here he subverts the clinical authority of those whose work he is reading through celebrating their mastery, instead, of fictional and poetic forms. He announces an interest in aestheticising madness, which he will explore in his later work.

It seems Breton also found inadvertent narrative and poetry in the words of some of the patients he encountered at Saint Dizier, although the experience, at least at first, appears to have been disconcerting, causing him to question his ideas of literary practice. In a letter to Fraenkel sent at the beginning of his stay at Saint Dizier, early in August 1916, he wrote:

> A very distressing intellectual crisis is shattering my strength. It is known by the name psychopathophobia! I have given myself a little too exclusively to the examination of patients these last few days. It is in reopening *Illuminations* that I have taken fright. No longer finding disorders of mind to be 'sacred', I am restless over the outcome of literary method: to summon to some subject multiple ideas, to choose between a hundred images. There lies the originality of poetry. "My health was threatened. Terror came upon me." said Rimbaud. I have just come to know the same shock from the blow of these novelties.[166]

[165] Breton to Fraenkel, quoted in Bonnet 1992, p. 116 and p. 117 respectively.
[166] Breton to Fraenkel, undated letter, quoted in see Bonnet 1992, p. 120.

In this letter Breton reels from what Rimbaud called the 'sophistries of madness',[167] taken aback by the 'astonishing images' that patients created in words and by their evident 'intellectual faculties' despite mental confusion.[168] Actually some of the most powerful phrases that he quotes seem to owe more to the madness of war than to madness as such. One patient, for instance, is cited as saying: 'for twenty-three months I have been prostituting my skin to the guns of the enemy'.[169] Whatever the source of power, however, Breton claimed that comparison between himself and the patients that he was meeting acted to kill off the poetry in him, and he made the dramatic declaration – surely with poetic intent – that as a result he no longer knew how to speak.

Breton reworked his responses to psychotic patients in a letter sent to Guillaume Apollinaire from Saint Dizier at around the same time, dated 15 August 1916. Here he writes: 'Nothing affects me more than the logic of the mad.'[170] With this striking statement he rejects a general view of delusional madness which sees it as a profound and extensive failure in logic. Moreover he asserts that such madness has its own logic, while admitting to finding this uniquely affecting, or emotionally compelling.

Despite Breton's evident susceptibility to the phraseology and reasoning of the patients he came across under Leroy at Saint Dizier, he maintained a clinical distance from these patients. Interviewed by André Parinaud at the beginning of the 1950s, he expanded on this fact when reflecting back on his wartime work in psychiatry:

> From my stay at the centre in Saint Dizier I've retained a keen curiosity and a great respect for what are commonly called the aberrations of the human mind. Perhaps I also learned to guard against these aberrations, given the intolerable living conditions that go with them.[171]

[167] Rimbaud (1873) 1972: 'Aucun des sophisms de la folie – la folie qu'on enferme – n'a été oublié par moi: je pourrais les redire tous, je tiens le sytème', p. 111.
[168] Breton to Fraenkel, undated letter, quoted in see Bonnet 1992, p. 120.
[169] *Ibid.*
[170] Breton to Apollinaire, quoted in Bonnet 1975, p. 110.
[171] Breton (1952) 1993, p. 21.

In this same interview he would recall the elaborate delusional web apparently spun by one patient in particular, giving an account that brings the detail and hues of a specific example to bear on his expressed interest at the time in 'the logic of the mad':

> I met someone there [in the psychiatric centre at Saint Dizier], the memory of whom has never left me. He was a young, well-educated man who, in the front lines, had aroused the concern of his superior officers by a recklessness carried to extremes: standing on the parapet in the midst of the bombardments, he conducted the grenades flying by with his finger. His explanation for the doctors was as simple as could be… the supposed war was only a simulacrum, the make-believe shells could do no harm, the apparent injuries were only makeup and, moreover, under cover of asepsis no one undid the bandages to make sure. He also maintained that the corpses removed from the operating tables were distributed at night around the fake battlefields, etc. Naturally, the doctors did everything in their power to make this man admit that the outsized costs of such a spectacle could not simply be for his personal benefit, but it seemed to me he didn't really believe it. His arguments – among the richest I've ever heard – and the impossibility of making him give them up made a great impression on me.[172]

Perhaps Breton found an early source of inspiration in the elaborate convictions of the mad – in those rich arguments – as he encountered them during the war. In the first Surrealist Manifesto, published several years after he had left psychiatric practice, he would declare: 'I could spend my whole life prying loose the secrets of the insane'.[173] Instead of giving a lifetime to pursuing the aberrations of the mad, Breton would propose, through Surrealism, the adoption of mad logics, or the madly logical, as a creative strategy. Adoption, in this context, meant simulating madness rather than engendering it; Breton held back from contemplating any actual risk to one's sanity.[174]

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[172] *Ibid.*

[173] Breton (1924) 1969, p. 5.

[174] See the simulation of mental illness, for the purposes of creating Surrealist texts, in Breton and Éluard (1930) 1990, pp. 51–77. Here the authors make it quite clear in their preface that they steer clear of engendering insanity, asserting that their exercises in psychopathological

If mental confusion or delusional insanity was one of Breton's early concerns within the field of psychopathology, then hysteria – a less stable concept within psychiatry, as already discussed – was another. Even less inflected by the war than were his interests in psychosis, the form of hysteria that Breton turned to afflicted women and was manifest sexually, rather than afflicting men and being manifest through military trauma. He therefore drew on his reading of the psychiatric literature rather than on his contact with patients. In a letter to Fraenkel from Saint Dizier dated 31 August 1916, he remarked: 'Still childishly curious, I would like to know the final word on hysteria. Leroy, who I've engaged for several hours on the subject, is intriguing, "Charcot? Perversity of hysterics? Bah, aren't all women whores? And Luys?... Clarisse, Rachel, very well known: they ridiculed him. They are mine…" He aborts this brief impersonation of his teacher with a defiant 'No'.[175] As already described, Babinski was one of the leading experts on hysteria at this time and Breton went to work with him on leaving Leroy's service. On 18 November 1916 Breton declared to Fraenkel: 'I may be at the point of feeling a strange and, as usual, resounding admiration for Dr Babinski… I've asked one of my friends to accord me the vacant position at the neurological department at the Pitié.'[176] By the new year he was in post.

simulation are undertaken 'without… compromising in any way [the mind's] faculty for mental equilibrium', p. 47.

[175] Breton to Fraenkel, 31 August 1916, as quoted in Bonnet 1992, p. 116.

[176] Quoted in Philippon and Poirer 2009, p. 45.

3.3 Louis Aragon and André Breton: 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria (1878–1928)'

In 1928 Breton joined with Aragon to proclaim a Surrealist vision of hysteria, publishing an illustrated feature with this stated aim in the eleventh issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, which was edited by Breton. There are a number of articles with psychopathological dimensions in this issue of the magazine. First comes an excerpt from Breton's book *Nadja*, which narrates his encounters with a woman who is subsequently committed to an asylum. This book and the concept of convulsive beauty that it announces will be explored in some detail in the next part of this chapter for its push towards the threshold of madness. The section of *Nadja* reproduced in *La Révolution Surréaliste* details the couple's third meeting, when they first kiss, and it includes an acknowledgement that Nadja's mental health is in question: Breton has her say, '"What are you afraid of? You think I'm very sick, don't you? I am not sick."'[177] She is further described as 'suffering from a certain inner conflict' and having 'a certain confusion in her mind', with overtones of a hysterical attack resounding when 'suddenly she surrenders' or she becomes 'very abandoned in her behaviour'.[178] Following this excerpt from *Nadja*, in issue eleven of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, comes a text by Antonin Artaud entitled 'L'Osselet Toxique', which is addressed to psychiatrists. Here Artaud confronts them with an outpouring of words, intermittently resorting to the imagery of convulsion: he describes 'the free-floating spasm of an unconstrained body', for instance, and 'the immense twitching of survival'.[179]

The focus for Aragon and Breton's 1928 feature on hysteria lies not on the male casualties of World War I, a decade earlier, but on the female patients at the Salpêtrière hospital in peacetime in the previous century. This conspicuous choice of focus indicates the two authors' flight from the horror of madness and turn towards its aestheticisation and eroticisation. Nonetheless, they do make passing reference to the militarised form of the syndrome when asking 'Where are the Zouaves torpedoed by the Raymond Roussel of science, Clovis

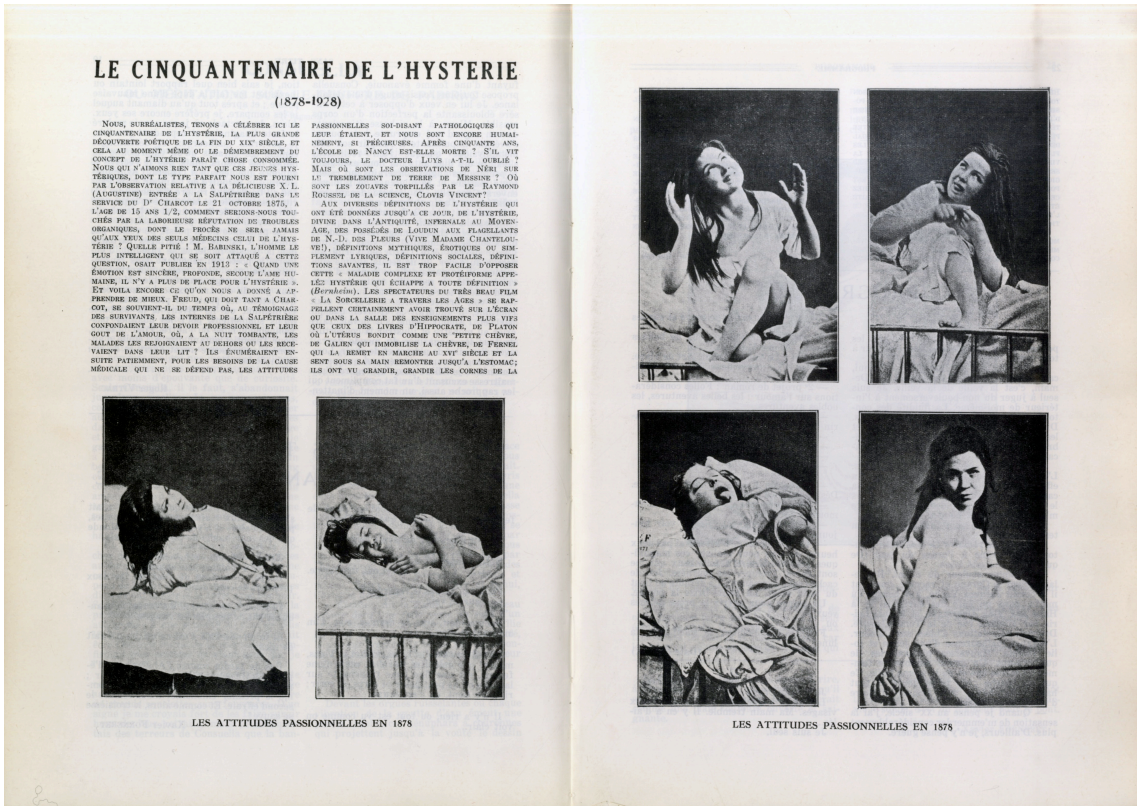
[177] Breton 1928 a, p. 10.
[178] *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11.
[179] Artaud 1928, p. 12.

Vincent?'[180] This isolated line in the text arguably references a court case from 1916, which received wide press coverage and caused considerable public outcry.[181] This case concerned a Zouave named Baptiste Deschamps who was arrested for violently opposing the administration of electrical shocks to his limbs in the course of a form of treatment for hysteria that, as an escalated form of the 'ambush attack' already described, had become known as 'torpedoing'. The solider, initially wounded during the battle of Yser in October 1914, had been sent to a series of hospitals, including the Val de Grâce psychiatric department (where Breton and Aragon would subsequently meet as students), before finally reaching the neurological centre run by Clovis Vincent, a former student of Babinski, in 1916. Forcibly resisting the prescribed electric-shock treatment, the soldier-patient was tried for assault on a superior officer, the physician. In the face of divided public opinion, the case between Vincent and Deschamps was settled with a compromise; the latter received a sentence of imprisonment but, at six months, this was lenient.

Aragon and Breton's description of Vincent as 'the Raymond Roussel of science', is somewhat quizzical, perhaps intended to call attention to the novelty of the doctor's methods and to the intense assiduousness with which he applied them, akin to the literary practice of the author. Roussel became one of the Surrealist heroes: writing in *Minotaure* nearly a decade later, Breton would hail him as being, 'along with Lautréamont, the greatest mesmeriser of modern times.' He would also note the author's early 'brush with psychopathology', his care under Pierre Janet and his enduring claim, as confirmed through his suicide, upon the 'abnormal'.[182] By comparing Vincent with Roussel, Breton and Aragon neatly conflate not only, as the former had before, clinical practice with literature,[183] but also doctor with patient. By doing so in an article dedicated to the celebration of hysteria, we might expect them to reopen the question of how

[180] Aragon and Breton 1928, p. 20.
[181] Articles sympathetic to the plaintiff featured in *L'Echo de Paris*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Gaulois*, *Le Journal*, *Le Journal des Débats*, *La Libre Parole*, *Le Matin* and *Paramidi*, with pieces sympathetic to the defendant appearing in *La Bataille*, *L'Eveil*, *l'Evenement*, *L'Oevure*, *Le Petit Parisien* and *La Victoire* see Roudebush 2000, p. 30. The story was also picked up by the international press – see *New York Times*, 21 August 1916, p. 20.
[182] Breton 1937 b, p. 6.
[183] As described above, Breton wrote in a letter whilst a psychiatric orderly during the War: 'Dementia praecox, paranoia, crepuscular states. O German poetry, Freud and Kraepelin!' As described below, Aragon and Breton would likewise hail hysteria as 'the greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century'.

this medical term might apply to the psychopathologies engendered by World War I. However, in providing no answer to the question they pose regarding the torpedoed Zouaves, they simply reassert what is otherwise explicit visually: that their emphasis falls elsewhere – on hysteria as a female phenomenon. Their male gaze lies on women.



LE CINQUANTENAIRE DE L'HYSTERIE

(1878-1928)

NOUS, SURRÉALISTES, TENONS A CÉLÉBRER ICI LE CINQUANTENAIRE DE L'HYSTÉRIE, LA PLUS GRANDE DÉCOUVERTE POÉTIQUE DE LA FIN DU XIXe SIÈCLE, ET CELA AU MOMENT MÊME OU LE DÉMEMBREMENT DU CONCEPT DE L'HYSTÉRIE PARAÎT CHOSE CONSOMMÉE. NOUS QUI N'AIMONS RIEN TANT QUE CES JEUNES HYSTÉRIQUES, DONT LE TYPE PARFAIT NOUS EST FOURNI PAR L'OBSERVATION RELATIVE A LA DÉLICIEUSE X. L. (AUGUSTINE) ENTRÉE A LA SALPÊTRIÈRE DANS LE SERVICE DU Dr CHARCOT LE 21 OCTOBRE 1875, A L'AGE DE 15 ANS 1/2, COMMENT SEIONS-NOUS TOUCHÉS PAR LA LABORIEUSE RÉPUTATION DE TROUBLES ORGANIQUES, DONT LE PROCÈS NE SERA JAMAIS QU'AUX YEUX DES SEULS MÉDECINS CELUI DE L'HYSTÉRIE ? QUELLE PITIÉ ! M. BABINSKI, L'HOMME LE PLUS INTELLIGENT QUI SE SOIT ATTAQUÉ A CETTE QUESTION, OSAIT PUBLIER EN 1913 : « QUAND UNE ÉMOTION EST SINCÈRE, PROFONDE, SECOUE L'AME HUMAINE, IL N'Y A PLUS DE PLACE POUR L'HYSTÉRIE ». ET VOILA ENCORE CE QU'ON NOUS A DONNÉ A APPRENDRE DE MIEUX. FREUD, QUI DOIT TANT A CHARCOT, SE SOUVIENT-IL DU TEMPS OU, AU TÉMOIGNAGE DES SURVIVANTS, LES INTERNES DE LA SALPÊTRIÈRE CONFONDAIENT LEUR DEVOIR PROFESSIONNEL ET LEUR GOUT DE L'AMOUR, OU, A LA NUIT TOMBANTE, LES MALADES LES REJOIGNAIENT AU DEHORS OU LES RECEVAIENT DANS LEUR LIT ? ILS ÉNUMÉRAIENT ENSUITE PATIEMMENT, POUR LES BESOINS DE LA CAUSE MÉDICALE QUI NE SE DÉFEND PAS, LES ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES SOI-DISANT PATHOLOGIQUES QUI LEUR ÉTAIENT, ET NOUS SONT ENCORE HUMAINEMENT, SI PRÉCIEUSES. APRÈS CINQUANTE ANS, L'ÉCOLE DE NANCY EST-ELLE MORTE ? S'IL VIT TOUJOURS, LE DOCTEUR LUYS A-T-IL OUBLIÉ ? MAIS OU SONT LES OBSERVATIONS DE NÉRI SUR LE TREMBLEMENT DE TERRE DE MESSINE ? OU SONT LES ZOUAVES TORPILLÉS PAR LE RAYMOND ROUSSEL DE LA SCIENCE, CLOVIS VINCENT?

AUX DIVERSES DÉFINITIONS DE L'HYSTÉRIE QUI ONT ÉTÉ DONNÉES JUSQU'A CE JOUR, DE L'HYSTÉRIE, DIVINE DANS L'ANTIQUITÉ, INFERNALE AU MOYEN-AGE, DES POSSÉDÉS DE LOUDUN AUX FLAGELLANTS DE N.-D. DES FLEURS (VIVE MADAME CHANTELOUVET), DÉFINITIONS MYTHIQUES, ÉROTIQUES OU SIMPLEMENT LYRIQUES, DÉFINITIONS SOCIALES, DÉFINITIONS SAVANTES, IL EST TROP FACILE D'OPPOSER CETTE « MALADIE COMPLEXE ET PROTÉIFORME APPELÉE HYSTÉRIE QUI ÉCHAPPE A TOUTE DÉFINITION » (*Bernheim*). LES SPECTATEURS DU TRÈS BEAU FILM « LA SORCELLERIE A TRAVERS LES AGES » SE RAPPELLENT CERTAINEMENT AVOIR TROUVÉ SUR L'ÉCRAN OU DANS LA SALLE DES ENSEIGNEMENTS PLUS VIFS QUE CEUX DES LIVRES D'HIPPOCRATE, DE PLATON OU L'UTÉRUS BONDIT COMME UNE PETITE CHÈVRE, DE GALIEN QUI IMMOBILISE LA CHÈVRE, DE FERNEL QUI LA REMET EN MARCHE AU XVIe SIÈCLE ET LA SENT SOUS SA MAIN REMONTER JUSQU'A L'ESTOMAC; ILS ONT VU GRANDIR, GRANDIR LES CORNES DE LA

LES ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES EN 1878

LES ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES EN 1878

La Révolution Surréaliste 11, 15 March 1928, pp. 20–21

The short article by Breton and Aragon on hysteria is dominated by a series of photographs of a young female patient in Charcot's charge at the Salpêtrière, one of which we have already looked at in the previous chapter. These pictures were fifty years old at the time of their republication by the Surrealists, hence the dedication in the title of the piece to 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria'. The text before and after the photographs is brief and unruly; the arguments are provocative and contrary, if often with the aim, it seems, to titillate. With their words – and with the complementary use of images – the authors make a bid to reinvigorate the ebbing concept of hysteria and to spring it from its medical confines. They hail the condition, in their opening sentence, as 'the greatest

poetic discovery of the nineteenth century', here again equating clinical and literary practice. They then go on to stake hysteria's claims to a longer history, dubbing it 'divine in antiquity, infernal in the middle ages', before referencing Hippocrates, Galen and, from mid sixteenth century, Jean Fernel.[184]

Both medically trained, indeed friends through their shared wartime tuition in psychiatry, Aragon and Breton used their text on hysteria to display their familiarity not only with its history but with recent medical arguments regarding the syndrome. They casually resist entry into the clinical discourse, whilst registering their knowledge concerning it; they mock doctors for their 'laborious refutation of organic ailments', for instance, and they likewise counter 'the deplorable disguise of pithiatism'.[185] Freud is more or less dismissed as 'owing much to Charcot'[186] – and Babinski, Breton's former tutor, whilst being described as 'the most intelligent' of the doctors assuming some authority on hysteria, is denigrated through association with exhausted medical ideas regarding the condition. The two quotes from Babinski in the text, and the one from Hippolyte Bernheim, an older French physician and neurologist, tend to undermine the nineteenth-century concept, but for the Surrealists this simply argues for its new lease of life outside of a clinical context.

Aragon and Breton 'insist on celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria… at the very moment when the dismembering of the concept of hysteria seems to be complete';[187] in other words, in full and proud knowledge that the syndrome was increasingly challenged in medical circles and ceasing to be a common complaint. The fervent Surrealist uptake of hysteria, just as the medical and popular currency of the term was subsiding, is characteristic of the movement. As Walter Benjamin wrote in his essay on Surrealism published the following year, Breton was quick 'to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded"'.[188] The defiant and ebullient tone of the article in *La Révolution Surréaliste* confirms the authors' conviction that there was potential to be tapped in hysteria even as – if not precisely because – it was otherwise nearing extinction, or entering the category of the *dépassé*. This same potential is

[184] Aragon and Breton 1928, p. 20.
[185] *Ibid.*, p. 20 and p. 22.
[186] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[187] *Ibid.*
[188] Benjamin (1929) 1999, p. 210.

realised in visual form by Max Ernst in his Surrealist bookwork, *Une Semaine de Bonté, ou les Sept Éléments Capitaux*, of 1934. Here line drawings of (female) hysterical patients, which feature in the collages that form the last 'element' of the book (that is, the last day of the week it covers) exude not only a conceptual but a formal obsolescence – one wrought by the advent of photography and by its uptake, in particular, by Charcot and his colleagues at the Salpêtrière. By comparison, then, the visual material used by Aragon and Breton in *La Révolution Surréaliste* is less deeply outmoded, and this cherished characteristic is therefore proclaimed in the text, with repeated reference made to 1878, or to fifty years before what was then present, in particular, or to the nineteenth century in general, and with repeated discussion of hysteria's loss of its defining medical traits since this bygone era. At the same time, the Surrealist authors' handling of Charcot's images – that is, the break they make with the format of the original context in which the pictures appeared – like Ernst's collaging technique, brings a categorical modernity to the visual appearance, which works to revitalise the associated concept of hysteria.

When originally published in the nineteenth century, in the second volume of the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, the pictures later brought together by Aragon and Breton were each given their own page and a precise label, and they were distributed across some one hundred pages of text, embedded within extended case notes and medical analysis. The original text accompanying the images opens with a line introducing the patient that is, in fact, almost exactly quoted by the Surrealists: 'X… L…, Augustine, entered the Salpêtrière (Mr Charcot's service) on 21 October 1875 at the age of fifteen and a half.'[189] The patient is sometimes referred to as 'X…', sometimes as 'L…' and occasionally, initially, as 'Louise', although it is 'Augustine' that the Surrealists took up in order to refer to her half a century later. After a medical history has been given in the original source and medical points of interest have been noted, a clinical log is presented. A record entered under the date '10 July' 1878 notes: 'Series of attacks, during which most of the photographs were taken.'[190]

[189] Bourneville and Regnard 1878, p. 124.
[190] *Ibid.*, p. 162.



Planche XIV.

HYSTÉRO-ÉPILEPSIE

ÉTAT NORMAL

Louise X, as represented in Désiré Magloire Bourneville and Paul Regnard, *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, vol. 2, 1878, pl. XVI

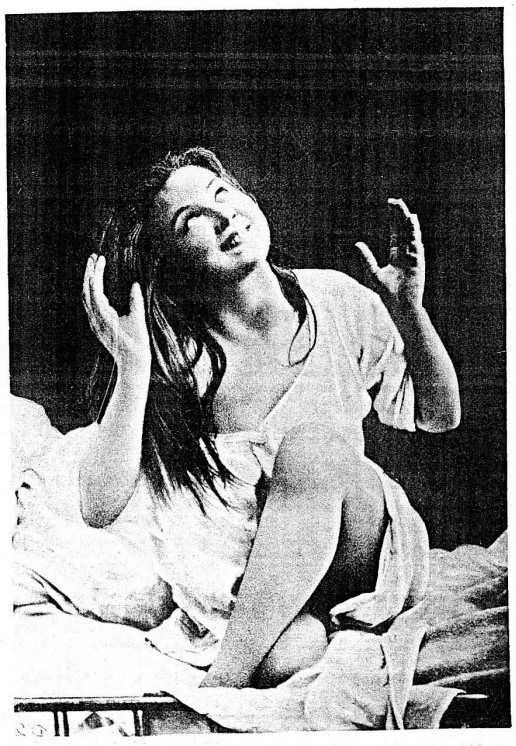


Planche XXIII.

ATTITUDES PASSIONNELLES

EXTASE (1878).

Louise X, as represented in Désiré Magloire Bourneville and Paul Regnard, *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, vol. 2, 1878, pl. XXIII

Although no indication of this is given by the Surrealists, the original text does not make for comfortable reading. In one attack the patient is described as violently resisting Charcot and quoted as saying '"You have done me too much ill…"', before being reported to choke a cry for help.[191] Electrical shocks and ether are later administered.[192] The focus of interest for Aragon and Breton, by contrast, are the so-called 'passionate attitudes', specifically amorous postures, struck by Louise X. These constitute the third stage, or hallucinatory phase, of a classic hysterical attack, as defined by Charcot. The first photograph reproduced by the Surrealists is labelled, in its original context, 'passionate attitude: calling'. The accompanying clinical notes suggest that Louise X, 'half sitting, sees an imaginary lover to whom she calls'.[193] The second passionate attitude displayed by Aragon and Breton is classified by Charcot as a 'posture of possession or eroticism' and described as follows: 'her arms are crossed, as if she were pressing to her breast the lover of her dreams'.[194] Further variations, labelled 'ecstasy' and 'mockery' respectively, in the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*,[195] are then reproduced by the Surrealists, followed by two images not classified in this original source as passionate attitudes, but as 'Beginning of an Attack: Cry' and 'Hysterico-Epilepsy: Contracture'.[196]

In *La Révolution Surréaliste* Aragon and Breton present their selection of six images of Louise X all together, on a double page spread, and here they jointly share a single title, 'The Passionate Attitudes of 1878', in the absence of any further clinical annotation. The extraction of photographs of a female teenager from out of their original medical context – that is, the casting aside of most of what ties these images to this context – reinforces the stated Surrealist ambition to let loose the passionate postures of hysteria into the world beyond the hospital. While Charcot stressed the hallucinations that apparently prompted or accompanied the striking of these attitudes, Aragon and Breton dismissed the implication of psychopathology, seeing the postures as physical displays that express ardent emotion. Ignoring the other phases and other symptoms of a

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
[192] *Ibid.*, p. 166.
[193] *Ibid.*, p. 162 – describing pl. XIX.
[194] *Ibid.*, p. 162 – describing pl. XXI.
[195] *Ibid.*, pl. XXIII and pl. XXVI.
[196] *Ibid.*, pl. XXVIII and pl. XXX.

hysterical attack, the authors describe 'the passionate and so-called pathological attitudes' of patients at the Salpêtrière as being 'as gripping as the most expressive and most pure *tableaux vivants* – its [hysteria's third phase's] perfectly simple resolution in normal life.'[197] Commenting years later, Breton would take up the same thread in summarising the whole article: 'what did Aragon and I celebrate in "The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria" in 1928? It was the "passionate attitudes", veritable *tableaux vivants* of a woman in love, which the archives of the Salpêtrière hospital had brought to light.'[198]

By invoking the *tableau vivant*, the Surrealists reject psychopathology in favour of dramatic art or erotic entertainment. They also, with this turn of phrase, bring out the stasis of the imagery, conveying the sense of a prolonged pose being held, rather than that of an event registering. Even in the photograph that Charcot or his colleagues labelled 'Beginning of an Attack: Cry', the moment of psychological detonation implied by this description, which is one of the concerns of the present thesis, is defused by the fixed mime that is pictured. While Charcot sees in the image of his patient the onset of a hysterical attack, his photograph does not convey this experience, it only presents – with clinical distance and interpretive delay – someone to whom this experience is imputed in a caption; the psychological event itself is not marked, not given visual form. When Aragon and Breton take up the same photograph, half a century later, it is not through an interest in the event of hysterical onset as experienced, performed or observed, but for the display of ardour or the staging of desire that might be represented.

The Surrealists profess their erotic interest in the matter of hysteria at the outset of their feature, describing themselves as 'we who love nothing so much as young hysterics', before singling out the teenage female patient of Charcot's, whom they show depicted, for being 'the perfect example', describing her as 'delicious'.[199] They then go on to revel salaciously in a suggestion that student doctors at the Salpêtrière had sex with the patients there. Elsewhere the authors seem to push lyricism as much as eroticism, claiming the condition as a 'poetic discovery' at the opening of the text, as already mentioned, and – in the

[197] Aragon and Breton 1928, p. 20 and p. 22.
[198] Breton (1952) 1993, p.109.
[199] Aragon and Breton 1928, p. 20.

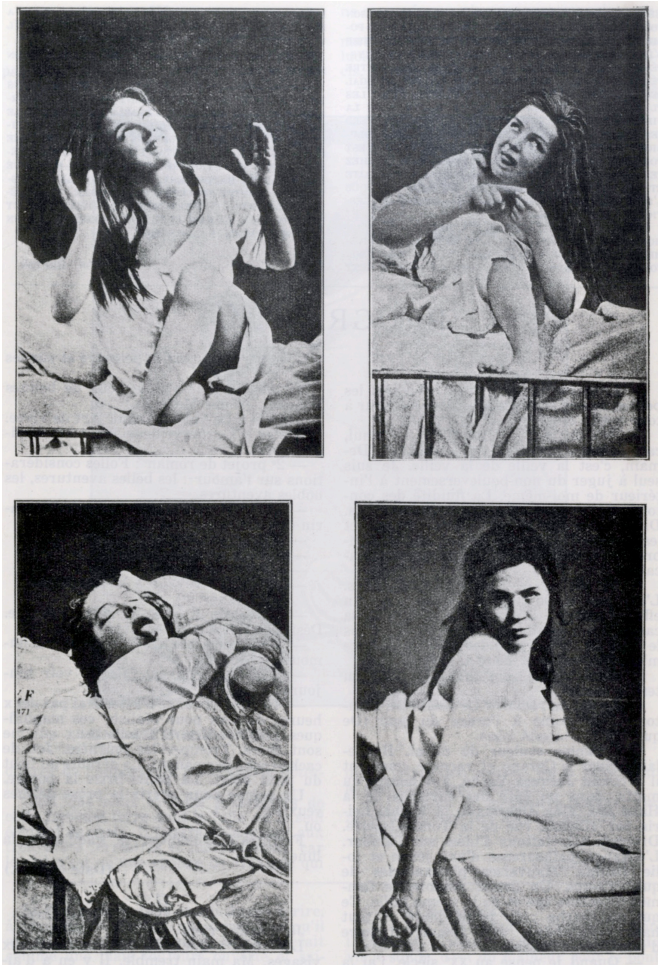
concluding statement – asserting it 'as a supreme means of expression'.[200] But it is erotic love, or desire, that they celebrate the passionate attitudes of the hysterical woman for expressing – for conveying lyrically, poetically, or rather more directly. The authors isolate and amplify the sexual and emotional dimension of hysteria, of the madness of hysteria, to the exclusion of that madness. They turn the displayed photographs of the patient at the Salpêtrière, Louise X, into erotica; Augustine becomes a pornographic stage-name.

The Surrealist treatment of the photographs in other ways has more to recommend it. As already noted, the images are presented one after another, with a shared title but without other text intervening. As such they exist like an edited film strip, like stills that the mind runs together cinematically. If each one represents a *tableau vivant*, as suggested by the authors, then in their conjunction a dynamism erupts, disrupting the stasis that each one possesses in isolation. However long every depicted pose was held, and however rigorously that motionlessness is maintained through photographic capture, through adjacency to another image and specifically to one showing another and different pose by the same person in the same context, motion is implied. It is not simply that in the transition from one image to another we fill in the movements implicated. In being neither dynamic nor yet static, the woman thus portrayed brings to mind the description Breton would use, later that same year, in the concluding paragraphs of his book *Nadja*, for his concept of convulsive beauty.[201] It is as if, in the gaps between the images, we catch sight of the animating psychological event that is at issue. Perhaps we see the onset of a hysterical attack – the shuddering passage into an episode of madness – and perhaps, in a kaleidoscopic rush of superimposition, we see its hallucinatory peak. Either way we contemplate a limit experience of madness, rather than mad behavioural symptoms as they are viewed, clinically, by Charcot and, lasciviously, by Aragon and Breton.

While the black background to the images of Louise X and the tight crop imposed in order to make her their focus jointly cast a scientific air in the pages of the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* of 1878, the same visual

[200] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[201] As discussed below, Breton writes: 'In no way static… scarcely less dynamic… neither dynamic nor static, the beauty…' – see Breton 1928 b, pp. 213–14.

characteristics become theatrical in *La Révolution Surréaliste* of 1928: the human specimen presented under controlled conditions, as viewed in the first context, is turned into an actress, dramatically staged, in the second. Nonetheless, the medical context maintains its grip through the vision of the metal bars on the bed in which the young woman, the patient, appears. Whatever the ambitions of Aragon and Breton to read normality into her passionate postures, to remove her from a clinical environment, those bars, glimpsed in four of the six pictures they reproduce, keep her entrapped. Thus, poised between *La Révolution Surréaliste* on the one hand and the *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière* on the other, between the 'normal life' envisaged for her by Breton and the hallucinatory state attributed to her by Charcot, Augustine stands at the threshold of madness. As such she is no longer an actual person but a fiction arising from two sets of representational renderings; she becomes an eroticised personification of one of the subjects of this thesis, specifically the threshold onto psychosis.



From *La Révolution Surréaliste* 11, 15 March 1928, p. 21

3.4 André Breton: *Nadja*, 1928

In the same year as the Surrealist celebration of 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria (1878–1928)' Breton published *Nadja*, a book of tangled recollections and reflections, in which psychopathology repeatedly rises to the surface as an unresolved theme. A self-conscious bid to contest and subvert literary convention, the work is nonetheless comfortably broken into three parts and, in the second part at least, delivers what the author himself calls a 'narrative'.[202] Here Breton narrates his encounters with the titular protagonist, Nadja, who is ultimately judged insane and hospitalised. In the first and final parts of the book, she hardly features. Here the author delivers two fragmented sequences of freewheeling anecdotes and convoluted musings. The whole is united through interspersed photographs of people, objects or props, and Parisian street scenes.

Near the beginning of his book, Breton commits 'to recalling without effort certain things which, apart from any exertions on my part, have occasionally happened to me' – whilst announcing that he 'will discuss these things without pre-established order, and according to the mood of the moment, which lets whatever survives survive.'[203] Amongst other things he proposes to concern himself with relating facts of an 'absolutely unexpected, violently fortuitous character', those which prompt a 'complete lack of peace with ourselves', demanding an 'instinct of self-preservation' in order to return us to 'rational activity'.[204] In other words, developing the psychopathological dimension suggested in that violent departure from normal rationality, he will consider events that convulse the mind, that risk a state of insanity. Breton goes on to imply that he will do justice to such 'cliff-facts' [*faits-précipes*] – that is, to precipitous events or convulsive moments – through a creative form of writing rather than one that is 'weighed and measured', in other words, a form which may be 'known as "surrealist"'.[205]

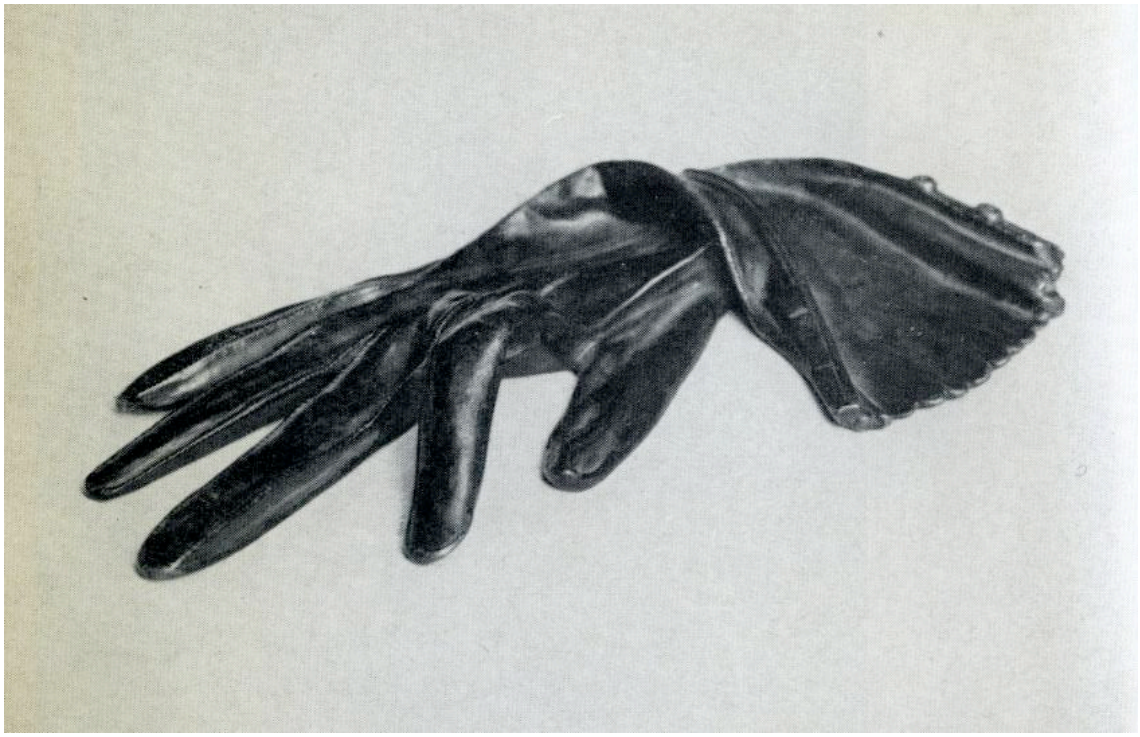
[202] Breton 1928 b, p. 22, on the pending start of his 'narrative' (*récit*); and p. 198, on the conclusion of his 'narrative' (*récit*).
[203] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[204] *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24.
[205] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

In the most extended stretch of continuous description in the first part of *Nadja*, Breton relays much of the plot of *Les Détraquées*, or *The Mad Women*. This two-act play, which he reports having back to see again 'some two of three times',[206] apparently 'remains and will long remain the only dramatic work (I mean: created exclusively for the stage) that I will want to remember'.[207] The first act, as conveyed by Breton, introduces us to two women in the context of a boarding school for girls: the Headmistress and her visiting friend, Solange. There are intimations of a strong and complicated relationship between them and Solange, in particular, is made a focus for Breton's lusty attention; she is described in titillating detail, for instance, as hitching up her skirt to inject morphine into her 'beautiful leg… a little above the black garter'.[208] In the second act the bloody body of a child is found and here Breton aborts his account, concluding with his memory of an 'unforgettable scream'.[209] He omits to mention the entry of a doctor onto the scene, who fills in for the gap in the narrative between the two acts by explaining the 'circular and periodic madness' of the women and the act of murder that they committed in a 'fit of sadistic passion'.[210] These details emerged in print nearly thirty years later, when Breton published the script of the play in the first issue of the journal he launched in 1956, *Le Surréalisme, Même*.

The playwright responsible for *Les Détraquées*, Pierre Palau, wrote a postscript to this work on the occasion of its publication in 1956. Here he describes having received medical advice whilst writing the play from Joseph Babinski and a portrait photograph of the doctor is reproduced.[211] Breton would later draw attention to Babinski's input into the play, and to his own experience of working for this 'great neurologist' at the Pitié hospital, in a footnote added to the revised edition of *Nadja*, published in 1963.[212] He would write that, 'in my own way, I think I have put his teaching to good use'.[213] Nonetheless, as with Breton's treatment of Charcot's patient Louise X in 'The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria', his interest in the murderous psychosis of the 'alluring' Solange from *Les*

[206] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[207] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[208] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[209] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[210] Palau (1921) 1956, p. 110 and p. 116 respectively.
[211] *Ibid.*, p. 117 (acknowledgement) and p. 119 (photograph).
[212] Breton 1963, p. 43.
[213] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Détraquées seems to owe at least as much to melodramatic erotic fantasy as to any clinical teaching.[214]



From André Breton's book *Nadja*, 1928, pl. 16, p. 72

At the close of the first part of *Nadja*, Breton includes a photograph of a folded glove. The text suggests this is a bronze cast and one that represents, for Breton, the moment when a woman was contemplating whether to donate to the Surrealists one of the sky-blue gloves she was wearing. He writes: 'I don't know what there can have been, at that moment, so terribly, so marvellously decisive for me in the thought of that glove forever leaving that hand'.[215] The bronze cast freezes the instant in which an animating hand is withdrawn from its second skin: the fold at the wrist announces the loss of the hand and yet the rigidity and weight insist on newfound and ongoing presence. It brings to mind a Palaeolithic stencil and is potential for marking the disappearance of a raised hand beyond the cave wall.

[214] Breton 1928 b, p. 56.
[215] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

3.4.1 Nadja: 'I Am the Soul in Limbo'

Nadja's 'entry onto the scene' is promised at the end of the first part of the book that bears her name,[216] and it then launches the second part. Here we learn that Breton initially caught sight of her out on a street; that they first met by chance, in Paris, as strangers. The contradiction that he first sees in Nadja's lowly garb and commanding countenance he then reads in her eyes:

> Suddenly, perhaps still ten feet away, I saw a young, poorly dressed woman walking toward me… She carried her head high, unlike everyone else on the pavement… I took a better look at her. What was so extraordinary about what was happening in those eyes? What was it that they reflected – some obscure distress and at the same time some luminous pride?[217]

These words arguably present Nadja, at the outset – and with Augustine also in our sights – on the threshold of madness: her radiance is given an undertow of desperation; and her fervour is spring-loaded with anguish. During their first meeting, Breton forms a clear view of what characterises the 'luminous pride' that, coincident or enfolded with an 'obscure distress', he is apparently drawn to question when first chancing upon her. He specifically celebrates her moments of confident if giddy looseness, when 'suddenly that frivolity which is hers alone, perhaps, to put it precisely, that *freedom*, flashes out'.[218] In fact he aestheticises this quality, hailing 'her purely poetic way'.[219] Here, like Charcot making the 'poetic discovery' of hysteria with his patients, as credited by Aragon and Breton,[220] the Surrealist makes his own aesthetic discovery on the streets of Paris: Nadja.

If the presence of 'some obscure distress', which Breton claims to perceive on their initial meeting, gives a first intimation of what will emerge to be Nadja's sorry fate – her battle with madness and eventual hospitalisation – then a faint warning note is also sounded when the author quotes Nadja's justification for

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[216] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[217] *Ibid.*, pp. 78–80, ellipsis added.
[218] *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92, italics original.
[219] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[220] Aragon and Breton 1928, p. 20.

her choice of adopted name: '"Nadja, because it's the beginning of the Russian word for hope, and only the beginning"'.[221] There is a hint of foreboding here: it is almost as if she perceives that the hope, only pronounced in part, will only carry her so far. The jeopardy figured by this hope that is half-expressed, half-denied, is then promoted by Breton to title status for his book. While not the story of Nadja, the book is a celebration of the precipice she represents for him: an eroticised and aestheticised existence at the edge of insanity.

About to take his leave after their first encounter, Breton asks Nadja a question which he describes as 'sum[ming] up all the rest', '"Who are you?"' and he hails her reply, given 'without a moment's hesitation: "I am the soul in limbo [*l'âme errante*]".'[222] With this succinct response she comes to embody, through her own characterisation, an unresolved waywardness, a restless wavering over a threshold or teetering at a brink. This is the Nadja that Breton is aroused and inspired by: a woman living tempestuously close to madness.

In opening his account of his second encounter with Nadja, Breton turns his narrative into a daily log or journal, which records their time together. The intensity of their early meetings, which take place almost daily for ten days, is captured with a sequence of diary-style entries, each made under the relevant date in October. Despite some hesitancy in starting conversation during their second meeting, Nadja addresses Breton informally, with *tu* rather than *vous*, shortly before they part. With this new intimacy she invites him to play a game that involves making stories out of the first thing that comes into your head. Breton reports her as saying '"You know, that's how I talk to myself when I'm alone, I tell myself all kinds of stories. And not only silly stories: actually, I live this way altogether".' The notion of living in this way, on the basis of free association, prompts Breton to add a footnote: 'Does this not approach the extremity of the surrealist aspiration, its *limit idea*?'[223] Impressed, he sees only the aesthetic dimension to her capricious existence, not the psychopathological risk. If the extreme limit of Surrealism, in this instance, amounts to a threshold onto madness, then it goes without note.

[221] Breton 1928 b, p. 84.
[222] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[223] *Ibid.*, p. 97, italics original.

A sense of Nadja's 'inner conflict' returns in their third meeting, the next day.[224] Although they kiss and over dinner her frivolity briefly returns, she is clearly unsettled and she unsettles Breton. In one of the flighty verbal meanderings that he attributes to her, as they walk the Parisian streets at night, Breton relates how Nadja asks: 'Why do you want to go away now? What are you afraid of? You think I'm very sick, don't you? I'm not sick.'[225] If she recognises her position at the brink of madness here then it is through seeing her reflection in Breton's eyes; she is otherwise claiming to be sure of her mental health. And increasingly his role in her drama at the precipice is not neutral. Breton has Nadja say: 'The hand of fire, it's all you, you know, it's you'.[226] With this description, which presents him as a blazing palm and flaming fingers, he is made a fascinating and yet dangerous presence, offering light and warmth whilst threatening conflagration. Raised as a barrier and yet enticing Nadja to transformative passage across that barrier, the hand of fire marks the threshold onto madness. Its burning imprint recollects Palaeolithic hand stencils and the entry into a spiritual realm that they may mark.

By the time we come to what will turn out to be the final entry in the quasi-diary presented, symptoms of psychological sickness or disorder – specifically: visual hallucinations – are referenced, albeit casually. On a train out of Paris, which will lead to their first full night spent together, Nadja sees a man's face, upside down, at the window. As will become clear, when Breton investigates, this is no hallucination, but the conversation between the pair reveals that this form of visual phenomenon is not new to Nadja. She is reported as saying: '"No, it's not a vision. I know when it's a vision."'[227] A little further on there is more mention made of Nadja's visions, which inspire some of the drawings she produces, including those titled *The Cat's Dream* and *The Devil's Salute* in particular,[228] but no attention is drawn to these hallucinations as a warning sign of psychopathological vulnerability. If Breton does indeed suspect Nadja could be or might become 'very sick', as he has quoted Nadja as suggesting, then he downplays the negative risk in order to play up positive proximity; he is invested

[224] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[225] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[226] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[227] *Ibid.*, p. 144.
[228] *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

in her being close to madness, not in her actually losing her mind. He will later note in the book his failure 'to become conscious of the danger she ran'.[229]

Following his day-by-day account of his encounters with Nadja, Breton opens up the second part of his book to more broadly based reflections on his titular heroine. Enquiring as to 'Who is the real Nadja…?' he admits to being increasingly bored, even appalled, by the impoverished and sometimes sordid nature of her life.[230] An 'always inspired and inspiring creature', according to his initial assessment, she is also wretched and lacking in dignity, condemned as 'the one who sometimes *fell*'.[231] He mentions that there are several further meetings between them, specifically 'a lunch in the country'[232] – which ushers in discussion of a number of Nadja's drawings, ten of which are photographically reproduced – and, when recounting her 'visiting me at home',[233] Breton summarises Nadja's reactions to his art collection, which is also photographically reproduced. Picking up on his earlier description of her 'purely poetic way' and her 'frivolity' and 'freedom', which 'approach[es] the extreme limit of the surrealist aspiration', Breton announces: 'I have taken Nadja, from the first day to the last, for a free genius'.[234] When he goes on to reference 'the last visit I paid her', however, Breton describes not Nadja's brilliance but 'the torment that carried her away'.[235] Likewise, he characterises the final period of their relationship as not only involving increasing genius and poetry – 'her thought has become still clearer, and her expression has gained in lightness, in originality, in depth' – but also increasing vulnerability to 'the irreparable disaster sweeping away a part of herself'.[236] As such Breton describes an intensification towards the eruptive onset of madness.

It is then with a cool remoteness, which is almost offhand, that the author relates what ultimately emerges:

[229] *Ibid.*, p. 188.
[230] *Ibid.*, pp. 151–52, ellipsis added.
[231] *Ibid.*, p. 151, italics original.
[232] *Ibid.*, p. 159.
[233] *Ibid.*, pp. 162–63.
[234] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[235] *Ibid.*, p. 165.
[236] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

> I was told, several months ago, that Nadja was mad. After the eccentricities in which it seems she had indulged herself in the corridors of her hotel, she had had to be committed to the Vaucluse sanatorium.[237]

The information in this announcement cannot be developed by Breton in any specific terms since not only is he not present when Nadja breaks down but he does not go to visit her in hospital. Instead he uses his next stretch of text to launch into a diatribe against 'psychiatry, its rituals and its works'.[238] Here some conflicting messages emerge, with Breton's general statements about madness and its institutionalisation often undermined by his particular response to Nadja's predicament. For instance, the imperative behind Nadja's committal to a sanatorium – her first becoming mad and her thus having 'had' to be removed to Vaucluse – is subsequently challenged by Breton when he remarks: 'Unless you have been inside a sanatorium you do not know that the mad are *made* there'.[239] The necessity of committal in Nadja's specific case is similarly contradicted by another general statement that he makes about psychiatric institutions: 'as I see it, all confinements are arbitrary.'[240] Moreover, Breton seems caught between differing models of insanity. When speaking in general terms, he is adamantly attached to a continuum model, in which the condition lies at the extreme end of normality rather than beyond some limit. To this end he refers to 'The well-known lack of frontiers between *non-madness* and madness'.[241] At the same time, when it comes to Nadja, he resorts to a *disease* model instead, invoking – as already quoted – 'the irreparable disaster sweeping away a part of herself' and 'the torment that carried her away'.[242] Indeed, the point of comprehension and empathy had apparently been exceeded when Breton confides that 'For some time, I had stopped understanding Nadja', admitting to 'considerable difficulty in forgiving her worst abstractedness.'[243] Here, a step has been taken beyond the compelling 'logic of the mad'[244] – which Breton perceived in patients during World War I – towards an abstraction that is intolerable. This notion of an alienating abstraction is

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[237] *Ibid.*, p. 177.
[238] *Ibid.*, p. 185.
[239] *Ibid.*, p. 179, italics original.
[240] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[241] *Ibid.*, p. 189, italics original.
[242] *Ibid.*, p. 154 and p. 165.
[243] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[244] Breton in a letter to Apollinaire, 1916, quoted in Bonnet 1975, p. 110.

echoed in Breton's later response to Antonin Artaud, another psychopathological casualty of the historical period. Asked in the early 1950s about their relationship, Breton reflected:

> The space that Artaud led me into always strikes me as *abstract*, a hall of mirrors… It's a place of lacunae and ellipses in which, personally, I lose all my means of communication with the innumerable things that, despite everything, give me pleasure and bind me to this earth.[245]

Here Breton presents groundedness – being bound to the earth – as desirable, even necessary, and yet he has celebrated Nadja for being 'free of any earthly tie'.[246] It is a conundrum he expands upon, amplifying rather than resolving it, in the extended concluding paragraph to the second part of his book. Here he highlights Nadja's attachment to an idea, which he acknowledges he 'had only too warmly encouraged' in her, namely that freedom 'must be enjoyed as unrestrictedly as it is granted, without pragmatic considerations of any sort'.[247] Except he then goes on to claim surprise that 'she could lose or might already have lost the minimum of common sense' which prevents us from taking an unlimited sense freedom to its ultimate conclusion in madness.[248] In other words, Nadja, unbound and untied, falls off the edge of the earth, over the 'cliff' or 'precipice' that Breton, as already noted, excitedly sets out to explore at the beginning of his book.[249] And, as such, once sectioned and hospitalised, she ceases to hold further interest for him. He removes himself from the violence of passage. It is in her prior state, whilst she is testing the precipice, and especially when she is dancing at its edge – aestheticising the limit in his eyes – that she fascinates him.

The threshold onto madness is marked in one of the drawings made by Nadja and reproduced in Breton's book. It is cursorily described in the text as one of several cut-outs, distinctive for being in two parts, 'the whole composed of a woman's face and a hand', the parts assembled 'so the angle of the head can

[245] Breton (1952) 1993, p. 86, italics added.
[246] Breton 1928 b, p. 119.
[247] *Ibid.*, p. 187.
[248] *Ibid.*, p. 188.
[249] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

be varied'.[250] The heart drawn at the centre of the work, uniting Breton's initials 'AB' and the name 'Nadja', suggests an amorous tenor and it is easy enough to assume, consonantly, that the woman depicted is a self-portrait – since the name 'Nadja' additionally appears here, coiled into the curving line of the fringe – and that the hand represents her lover Breton, given Nadja's previous insistence (as reported by him) that a hand symbolically 'recurs in anything to do with you [i.e. him]'.[251] However there is no need to attribute specific human identities to the forms depicted and the erotic overtones do not preclude, indeed throw into relief, other readings of the image.



Nadja, *Untitled*, cut-out drawing in two parts, 1926
(reproduced in black and white in André Breton's *Nadja* of 1928, pl. 33, p. 169)

[250] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
[251] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

The hand, with fingers extended, must have been traced from around a live model: it is an indexical representation of an actual hand used as a stencil. As such it draws attention to the picture plane as a surface, designating it as a limit to the world in front of it, or containing the world beyond. Viewing its negative rather than positive presence – its empty outline rather than barring presence – and with Palaeolithic hand stencils in mind, we may begin to imagine passage across the threshold it marks. The face, a combination of hair and eyes – in the absence of a nose or mouth – emerges from the bottom of the palm, in lieu of a wrist. An opening drawn into the centre of the hand doubles as an opening onto the face: if it indicates the cuff of a glove, then it also suggests the collar of a shirt; and, as such, the middle of the palm becomes the jugular notch of the neck. The face is wrested free from this anatomical vortex or, on the contrary, dissolves into it; either way, it traverses the threshold marked by the hand. Its active passage is animated by the movement of its paper element, to and fro, on top of the paper cut-out of the hand; an activity that is stifled by the work's photographic reproduction, although the picture caption in Breton's book seeks its reintroduction.[252] If we are to see this face as emerging into an insane world, or disappearing from a sane one, that is, as marking the threshold of madness, then Breton inadvertently provides us with the metaphorical means. He describes the onset of madness as being actively enacted 'by thrusting one's head, then an arm, out of the prison – thus shattered – of logic'.[253] In light of this, the face pictured by Nadja leads the way for the silhouetted hand, bursting through and out of 'the acceptable sense of reality', in a charged moment of delirium.[254]

Nadja thus pictures that which Breton pursued her for approaching, before he backed away when the encounter event seemed inevitable. If a representation of herself, she is shown at the limit of what Breton, and his eroticised and aestheticised notion of madness, could tolerate.

[252] *Ibid.*, p. 169: 'So that the angle of the head can be varied…'
[253] *Ibid.*, p. 188.
[254] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

3.4.2 Breton: 'Who Am I?'

Breton opens *Nadja* by questioning his own identity: 'Who am I?'[255] If he gives his book the name of another then he anchors its narrative expressly in an exploration of himself. Convinced 'if not of the non-existence, at least of the serious inadequacy of any so-called categorical self-evaluation',[256] he nonetheless anticipates 'The event from which each of us is entitled to expect the revelation of one's own life's meaning – that event which I may not yet have found but on whose path I seek myself'.[257] His chance meeting and brief relationship with Nadja is the core event of the book and it is mined for multiple significances, however it is resolutely one episode amongst many competing for his attention and, through his words, for our own. Breton answers the question of who he might be by presenting an idiosyncratic collection of insights into his life at the time of his writing. Rejecting autobiographical convention, by refusing to review his life as a systematic and linearly unfolding whole, he nonetheless, through reporting a mesh of coincidental encounters, fortuitous associations and fragmentary revelations, pens a self-portrait; he presents a Surrealist snapshot – in words, and supported by photographs – of the events, thoughts, convictions, people, objects and places that collectively answer the question, 'Who am I?' for a moment in time.

When looking back on *Nadja* 35 years after it was published, Breton would claim to have played a role within it as a trained psychological observer. He prefaced the revised edition of the book, published in 1963, with the suggestion that 'the tone adopted for the account' was one of 'medical observation', describing it as 'neuropsychiatric, which tends to preserve a trace of all that an examination and interrogation is able to deliver'.[258] Here, surprisingly, given his original and emphatic statement of 'general contempt for psychiatry'[259] and mockery of 'Professor Claude at Sainte Anne' hospital,[260] Breton appears to cast himself within the clinical field. Certainly, in the first section of the second part of the book, where Breton gives a daily log of his early encounters with

[255] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[256] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[257] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[258] Breton 1963, p. 6.
[259] Breton 1928 b, p. 185.
[260] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Nadja, and of his bids to encounter her, there is some suggestion of medical case notes. And his occasional use of the present tense rather than the past tense tends to add to this suggestion. Here Nadja is clearly his object of study and if there are medical roles to be attributed then she is undoubtedly the patient and he the doctor. However the same cannot be said of the opening and concluding parts of the book, where Breton must be not only the observer but also the subject of observation – analysand as well as analyst – or even, perhaps, the psychopathological casualty, as well as psychopathologist?

Breton may be found to take a notable step towards or wobble into psychological crisis in the conclusion that he gives to the second part of *Nadja*. Here he first describes the compulsion 'to hurl at myself or at anyone who comes to meet me, the forever pathetic cry "Who's there [*Qui vive*]?"'[261] He then goes on to instantiate this enquiry and, staging its claims to pathos, he puts his sanity into question: 'Who's there? Is it you, Nadja? Is it true that the *beyond*, that everything beyond is here in this life? Who's there? Is it only me? Is it myself?'[262] He seems to be confronted by a vision of Nadja and, through hallucinating her presence, is forced to cross the threshold onto madness such that 'everything beyond' is recategorised as that which is 'here in this life'. In confusing Nadja's presence and identity with his own – 'Is it you, Nadja?' and later 'Is it only me?' – Breton imputes her own psychotic predicament to himself. The string of repeated, mutating, unanswered questions acts as a convulsion in the text of the book; the authorial voice momentarily goes mad and, with the proffered words, marks that moment. To use his own conceptual terms, as set out at the beginning of the book, Breton records a 'cliff-fact', one that sums up his encounter with Nadja. As already described, such 'cliff-facts' are events of an 'absolutely unexpected, violently fortuitous character' that precipitate a 'complete lack of peace with ourselves', demanding an 'instinct of self-preservation' in order to return us to 'rational activity'.[263] With the spasm in his prose at the end of part two of *Nadja*, Breton encapsulates his brush with the titular heroine through sharing a moment of her insanity. In so doing he marks the onset event of madness. Moreover, in his passage across the threshold – that is, by moving '*beyond*' whilst simultaneously remaining within, 'here in this

[261] *Ibid.*, p. 190.
[262] *Ibid.*, italics original.
[263] *Ibid.*, pp. 22–24.

life' – Breton recalls the imagined scene of Palaeolithic cave visitors psychologically traversing the rock face, whilst stood in front of it, through the act of hand stencilling.

The third part of *Nadja* opens with a resounding return to the self-possessed and authorial 'I'.[264] Breton refuses the threshold Nadja has crossed, reaffirming and stabilising himself in the face of her apparent disintegration. He proceeds to use the first-person singular in order to muse on reaching the end of his story. The confidence of his return to the unquestioned first-person is amplified by the presentation of a highly conventional photograph of himself – a portrait by Henri Manuel.[265] Operating as a straightforward visual response to the opening query posed in the book, 'Who am I?',[266] this picture is given added prominence by its being the only image to appear in the whole third and final part. Nadja, meanwhile, is not only dropped from the text at this point but is replaced by another. Someone else has caught Breton's attention and the last sections of his book involve an impassioned address to this new woman, a beloved 'you' who is unidentified and yet adamantly not Nadja.[267]

In the final sentence of his book, Breton asserts himself as a theoretician of Surrealist aesthetics. Abandoning the first person in order to assail consensual truth with new strictures, he proclaims a Surrealist manifesto in fewer than ten words: 'Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.'[268]

[264] *Ibid.*, p. 195.
[265] *Ibid.*, pl. 44, p. 205.
[266] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[267] *Ibid.*, pp. 208–13.
[268] *Ibid.*, p. 215.

3.4.1 The Convulsion – and Convulsive Beauty in *Nadja*

The convulsion, like hysteria, is a medical term that has diverse applications to which Breton partly eludes and which he partly subverts. Unlike hysteria, convulsions have a more or less agreed definition: paroxysmal or spasmodic events involving violent involuntary contractions of the voluntary muscles. Tackled by both Hippocrates and Galen, and featured in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics,[269] the convulsion was given prominence in the nineteenth century by the Victorian neurologist John Hughlings Jackson. Opening his influential paper 'A Study of Convulsions' in 1870, Jackson asserted that convulsion implies 'an occasional, an excessive, and a disorderly discharge of nerve tissue on muscles'.[270] It was perhaps the unpredictable nature of the occasionality, the seditious implication of the disorder and the aesthetic potentiality of the excess which drew Breton's Surrealist attention towards the convulsion.

If convulsions are most closely associated with epilepsy then they are experienced or observed in an extraordinarily broad range of other conditions, from vertigo to stroke. During the war, Breton must have witnessed the convulsions of traumatised soldiers evacuated from the trenches. He presumably read about hysterical convulsions in Charcot's *Leçons sur les Maladies du Système Nerveux*. We know that he studied photographs of these convulsions since, as already discussed, he included such a picture – labelled 'Hysterico-epilepsy: contracture' in its original, nineteenth-century source – in the feature he and Aragon dedicated to hysteria in *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Convulsions were also reported amongst the motor disturbances latterly associated with the post-war phenomenon of sleeping sickness, which left five million Europeans either dead or permanently afflicted in the decade 1917–27.[271]

Nonetheless, when insisting that 'beauty will be convulsive', first at the close of *Nadja* and then later in the title of a text published in *Minotaure* in 1934,[272] which would subsequently form the first chapter of a new book, *L'Amour Fou*, in

[269] See Temkin 1971, pp. 4–5.
[270] Jackson (1870) 1931, p. 8.
[271] Evans 1991, p. 79.
[272] Breton 1934, p. 8.

1937, Breton shakes any tie to a specific syndrome. Isolated from any other symptoms, the convulsion invoked by the author, like the 'free-floating spasm' and 'immense twitching' invoked by Artaud,[273] becomes applicable to every possible syndrome and, moreover, liberated from them all. Here Breton knowingly follows in the footsteps of the Comte de Lautréamont, whose 'terrible "tics, tics and tics"' he cites early on in *Nadja*.[274] At the end of part two of the book, as already argued, he moves convulsiveness away from physical and specifically muscular confines to give it a delirious inflection: indicating towards a spasm in reality and logic, he gives literary form to a moment of psychological crisis.

At the very end of Nadja, Breton introduces the term convulsive in order to define his concept of beauty – a Surrealist concept of beauty. He does not use the term convulsive until the final line of the book; however the preceding paragraphs build towards an understanding of beauty in terms of that which – to borrow the language of Jackson – is spontaneously disordering and excessive. Arguably, Breton connects beauty to convulsiveness through an understanding of love or desire in terms of madness. According to this argument, beauty inspires mad love, which – as Breton will later discuss – amounts to a 'paroxysmal disturbance' in logical thought, convulsing the mind of the beholder.[275] The next step of the argument draws on Breton's 'instinct for self-preservation',[276] which drives him defensively to project his own convulsion in response to beauty back out onto the precipitating beautiful object, onto the object of his love or, perhaps rather, of his desire. This makes beauty that is maddening madness itself. Here beauty does not simply convulse its observer, it becomes convulsive; its power to convulse is secondary to its own convulsion.

Breton's descriptions of convulsiveness, which offer a means for understanding the onset event of madness, are wrapped in eroticised notions of beauty and, specifically, in an impassioned address to a woman he has just fallen in love with and is hotly pursuing. Here below, quoted in its entirety prior to analysis of

[273] Artaud 1928, p. 12.
[274] Breton 1928 b, p. 21.
[275] Breton 1937 a, p. 32.
[276] Breton 1928 b, p. 24.

its whole and parts, is the material he provides, in the concluding statements of *Nadja*:

> A certain attitude necessarily follows with regard to beauty, which has obviously never been envisaged here save for passionate purposes. In no way static, that is, enclosed in Baudelaire's "dream of stone", lost for man in the shadow of those Odalisques, in the depth of those tragedies which claim to girdle only a single day, scarcely less dynamic – that is, subject to that wild gallop which can lead only to another wild gallop – that is, more frenzied than a snowflake in a blizzard – that is, resolved, for fear of being fettered, never to be embraced at all: neither dynamic nor static, the beauty I see, I see it as I see you. As I have seen what, at the given hour and for a given time, which I hope and with all my soul believe may recur, granted you to me. Beauty is like a train that ceaselessly roars out of the Gare de Lyon and which I know will never leave, which has not left. It consists of jerks and jolts, many of which do not have much importance, but which we know are destined to produce one *Jolt*, which does. Which has all the importance I do not want to arrogate to myself. In every domain the mind appropriates certain rights which it does not possess. Beauty, neither static nor dynamic. The human heart, beautiful as a seismograph. Royalty of silence… A morning paper will always be adequate to give me my news:
>
> "*X…, 26 December. The radio operator of the Ile du Sable has received a fragment of a message sent Sunday evening at such and such an hour by the… The message said, in particular: "There is something going wrong" but failed to indicate the position of the plane at this moment, and due to extremely bad atmospheric conditions and static, the operator was unable to understand any further sentence, nor to make communication again.*
>
> *The message was transmitted on a wavelength of 625 metres; moreover given the strength of the reception, the operator states he can localize the plane within a radius of eighty kilometres around the Ile du Sable.*"

> Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.[277]

In this passage, Breton builds to his announcement of convulsiveness through the doubled declaration that to possess such a quality is to be 'neither dynamic nor static' and 'neither static nor dynamic'. He rejects the sobriety of stasis and the giddiness of dynamism, positing instead a threshold state between them, in which impetus does not propagate nor is it quashed, and where there is no way on and yet no rest. As such this threshold state may be said to describe the charged moment that spells the onset of madness. Breton characterises this moment with three powerful images: a train transfixed as it steams from a platform; a plane poised to drop out of the sky; and, in between them, a mixed biological and mechanical metaphor, involving a heartbeat that works to plot the event of an earthquake.

First to be described is the train, which 'ceaselessly roars out of the Gare de Lyon and which I know will never leave, which has not left.' Here we are invited to appreciate a crazed moment in which roaring energy is suspended from routine use – denied conversion into the movement of carriages. This roar, which starts as that of an engine firing for motion, becomes a raging bellow of fury that motion is somehow denied – an alarm bell that rings because of a break with conventional reality. For our own purposes, it is perhaps the sound of manic or delusional laughter at psychotic onset. And, in the language of convulsion put into medical circulation by Jackson, it is an excessive and disorderly discharge. Rather than making a normal departure from the Gare de Lyon, the train is convulsed at the platform, taking us to the threshold of madness.

The second image presented by Breton in the final passage of *Nadja*, in his push towards the convulsive, is his most succinct: 'The human heart, beautiful as a seismograph.' Here the amorous overtones of heart palpitations yield to the shuddering tumescence of orgasm or indeed to the quake of a heart attack. Either way an eruptive event, or passage over a precipice in experience, is implied. The sentence that follows this description, or rather the fragment of a sentence (it peters out into an ellipsis), then resounds with the sovereign victory

[277] *Ibid.*, pp. 213–15, all ellipses original.

of death or, perhaps, with the crowning peak of a *petit mort*: 'Royalty of silence…'

Breton resurrects his text with a quote; the final image that he presents, before actually announcing the convulsiveness of beauty, is taken from a newspaper. Like the 'train that ceaselessly roars out of the Gare de Lyon', this image involves another means of transport. This time it is an aeroplane and the technology of flight, and – far from 'beginning to age' like the railways, which Benjamin thus identified as a Surrealist trope a year later[278] – these were only just being developed for civilian use at the time and, unlike the boorishness of Breton's train, are conveyed to be precarious. The news Breton apparently quotes from his 'morning paper', involves a pilot transmitting a distress call to the radio operator of the Ile du Sable. The broken message declares that something is going wrong – or *not* going, *ne va pas*, in the French. Here again, this time in flight, we find a non-dynamism which is no more a stasis. The accompanying sound falls somewhere between that of the heart and the train: the urgency of the situation is conveyed both by silence – the vocal silence of lost radio contact – and by the usurping roar of the elements and static. With the pilot's words drowned out, the implications for him and his plane are suspended as they fly beyond the earthly ties of communication. The moment in which contact with the operator is lost marks the fraught passage across a threshold that may, for our own purposes, mark the onset of madness.

The images of the faltering aeroplane, quaking heart and transfixed train do not only give form to the dynamic stasis of the convulsiveness of beauty, such as it is proposed by Breton; in doing so they testify to moments of decisive passage. As such they echo the Palaeolithic hand stencils found in caves and specifically our vision of these as marking entry into an alternative world held back beyond the rock face. Moreover, promising erotic climax and threatening fatality, they further – and perhaps even drawing something from each of these prospects – confront us with the risk of psychosis.

Breton provides one straight description of the convulsiveness he will insist, in the final line of his book, defines beauty. He writes of 'jerks or jolts [*saccades*],

[278] Benjamin (1929) 1999, p. 210.

many of which do not have much importance, but which we know are destined to produce one *Jolt* [Saccade], which does.' In the published English version of *Nadja*, the word '*saccade*' is translated as 'shock';[279] however this shifts emphasis away from the abrupt and inconstant motion, the bodily yank or judder – indeed from the *convulsion* – that is implied. The word shock alters interpretation to include a sense of impact, suggesting a collision or crash – and a 'relation to railway accidents' has been asserted accordingly by at least one author.[280] If we insist on the bodily yank or judder instead, and we invoke a scientific understanding of brain function that admittedly comes later historically, we may read into Breton's many 'jerks or jolts' the millions of action potentials that fire across the neural network of the cerebral cortex at any one moment. We may then interpret the 'one *Jolt'* that has 'importance' – and which is produced by an aggregate pattern of neuronal action potentials – by seeing it as a threshold event on an experiential level, as a lived moment of charged significance. Here we touch upon not only the eruptive event of psychotic onset, as otherwise discussed in this chapter, but also on the eruption of experience in general, all experience, from electrochemical activity across the neuronal web of the brain. Here we interconnect two scales of analysis: the lifetime-scale, in which psychotic episodes, arising form a psychosocial set of relations, take place; and the split-second timescale, in which millions of neurons transmit and receive action potentials, giving rise to experience. Events at each scale of analysis are conceptualised for us by Breton as a convulsive jolt.

Study of the convulsion takes us from Jackson's medical writing on sudden, excessive, disorderly discharges, via Breton's Surrealist writing on the roaring, quaking, jolting of beauty, and of mad love – or desire and sexual climax – in the face of beauty, to the eruptive event of psychotic onset, the moment of passage into madness and the eruptive event of all experience as it is wrested from the brain through brain activity.

[279] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[280] Foster 1993, p. 48.

3.5 Man Ray: *Explosante-Fixe*, 1934

As already mentioned, Breton used the positive assertion of his final line in *Nadja* as the title for an elliptical text he published in *Minotaure* in 1934, 'La Beauté Sera Convulsive', and this text would subsequently form the opening chapter of *L'Amour Fou*, published three years later. Both journal feature and book chapter included photographs by Man Ray. This artist's practice will first be introduced, with hands and threshold events sought, and then a specific photograph, published in illustration of a specific aspect of convulsive beauty, will be explored in particular.

Man Ray titled his autobiography, of 1963, *Self Portrait* and in this book he recalled an assemblage that he had made with the same title almost half a century earlier:

> On a background of black and aluminium paint I had attached two electric bells and a real push button. In the middle, I had simply put my hand on the palette and transferred the paint imprint as a signature.[281]

This work no longer exists; it is now known through a photograph, which was taken by Man Ray, and through descriptions written by reviewers of the exhibition in which it appeared, the artist's second solo show at The Daniel Gallery, New York, held in January 1917. The handprint depicted in the photograph has a thick painterly presence, it emerges from the doorway that is loosely represented in the work – sitting on top of the panel that constitutes the work's plane – as if to halt our advance, pushing us back from the surface or threshold it marks. The doorbell proffered, moreover, was apparently inoperative. If a threshold was marked then passage was barred.

[281] Man Ray 1963, p. 71.



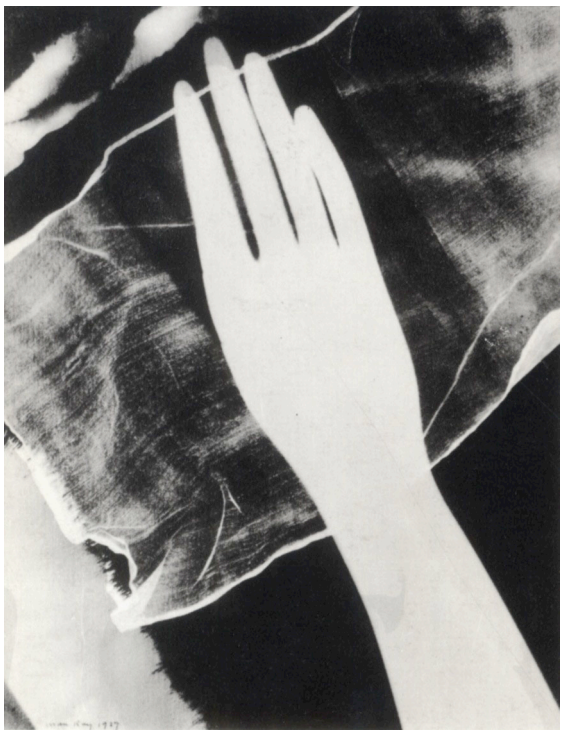
Man Ray, *Self-Portrait*, mixed media, 1916

Another photographic image of Man Ray's handprint appears on the back cover of his autobiography, acting again as a signature for this later 'self portrait'. In each case the indexical mark of his hand is further personalised – in a secondary stage – through its capture by his own photography; if distance is introduced by the intervention of the camera then it is short circuited through his close association, as an artist, with this particular means of image making. Moreover, in each case a homophone pun resounds, connecting the first part of the artist's name (Man) to the French word for hand (*main*).

Man Ray was born Emmanuel Radnitzky in Philadelphia in 1890, the eldest child of Russian-Jewish immigrants, and he later grew up in Brooklyn, New York. His parents changed their surname to Ray in 1912 and soon afterwards their son similarly contracted his forename to Man, further combining the two parts into a single moniker. Man Ray moved to Paris in July 1921 on five hundred dollars received from a collector persuaded to invest in his developing career as an artist. On arrival at the Gare Saint Lazare he was met by Marcel Duchamp and, caught up in the Surrealist movement centred on André Breton, he would remain in Paris for nearly two decades, until fleeing from the city's Nazi Occupation in 1940.

Within a year of arriving in Paris, Man Ray made his first 'cameraless photographs'[282] – exposing photographic paper, partially covered with objects, to a light source – and he named them Rayographs. Hands appear in several of these pictures and when most prominent, picked out as light silhouettes against darker tones, they may bring to mind the prehistoric negative handprints that were being found in caves in France at this time.[283] The discoveries of Palaeolithic cave art inevitably caught the interest of artists and painter Amédée Ozenfant, for instance, was so struck by the negative handprints at Cabrerets that he extolled them to others: 'Ah, those HANDS! Those silhouettes of hands, spread out and stencilled on an ochre ground! Go and see them.'[284] It is unknown whether Man Ray heeded this urging and probably unlikely. Nonetheless there are parallels between Palaeolithic stencils and his Rayographs. Whereas Man Ray's images involved hands laid directly on the surface of photographic paper, in a prehistoric context hands were pressed up to the cave wall. In each case, a contact exposure technique fixed an indexical image of the proffered hand: light was projected against the photosensitive paper, or pigment against the rock, with each surface partially occluded by a hand, such that a negative print was created. Man Ray's *Untitled Rayograph* [Hand and Gauze] of 1925 is particularly evocative when seen in this way, since the extraneous elements involved give the background of the image a texture that recalls the rough surface of a cave wall. At the same time there are visual deviations: this picture shows a streamlined hand and the concealed thumb sets it apart from all known Palaeolithic stencils, in which other digits are sometimes absent, but never the thumb. Whether or not Man Ray saw his Rayographs as a modern take upon the prehistoric act of making negative handprints, his use of a photogram approach to image-making sounds a remote twentieth-century echo of the prehistoric stencilling technique. Seen from this perspective, the gauze of *Hand and Gauze* marks a threshold between worlds that – in a blaze of light – the hand pushes through.

[282] Man Ray 1963, p. 128.
[283] The hand stencils at Gargas, in the French Pyrenees, were first discussed in print by Félix Regnault in 1906 and the cave was given official status as historical monument four years later. Prehistoric art – including hand stencils – was found at Pech Merle, in the Lot, in 1922 and the site was opened to the public in 1926.
[284] Ozenfant (1928) 1931, p. 100.



Man Ray, *Untitled Rayograph* [Hand and Gauze], 1925

An event of passage across a threshold, and the eruptive moment that is involved, is arguably caught by another of Man Ray's images, *Explosante-Fixe*. A conventionally rendered photograph, rather than a Rayograph, this work was made the first full-page image in the *Minotaure* edition of Breton's essay 'La Beauté Sera Convulsive' of 1934, and it later became 'Fig. 1' in the opening chapter of Breton's book *L'Amour Fou*, which reproduced this essay. This was not the first time that the artist had provided the author with images, indeed Breton included Man Ray's portraits of three Surrealists – Robert Desnos, Paul Éluard and Benjamin Péret, although not Breton himself – in the book already discussed, *Nadja*.

Man Ray's *Explosante-Fixe* shows an extravagant moment in a dance, in which a flurry of dancing skirts is more visible than the dancer who wears them. The more or less static folds of an underskirt cover not only legs but feet, while an upper-skirt is thrown so high that a blurred rush of fabric, seen between the dancer's bare raised arms, obscures her face. We may assume it is a woman – strictly speaking there is no indication of gender beyond that copious dress.



Man Ray, *Explosante-Fixe*, 1934, black and white photograph

Explosante-Fixe gives visual form to one of the three conditions for Breton's concept of convulsive beauty, such as it is set up in 'La Beauté Sera Convulsive' and *L'Amour Fou*. Here, echoing and amplifying his conclusion to *Nadja*, Breton writes: 'Convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magical-circumstantial or it will not be.'[285] He resists elaboration on these three conditions in his text, yet seems to amplify a notion of fixed-explosivity when suggesting that the convulsivity of convulsive beauty 'would lose any meaning in my eyes were it to be conceived in motion and not at the exact expiration of this motion'.[286] In other words he freezes the explosion, which he invokes, at the very apex of its activity – playing up the paradox involved in an eruptive beginning that is yet an expiration. As such his statement distils a defining aspect of convulsive beauty such as it is described at the end of *Nadja*, where it is said to entail neither stasis nor yet dynamism. His statement might also be specifically applied to the images that he invokes in the same section of this earlier text – to the train grounded in its moment of departure, for instance, to the plane in trouble over the Ile du Sable, or to the silenced seismograph. Man Ray's photograph may likewise be seen as a straightforward illustration of Breton's few words, simply depicting 'the exact expiration' of motion: maybe we see the flourishing finish to a dance, with those arms outstretched and that head bowed in conclusion; maybe the skirt is caught at the peak of one last trajectory, at the cusp of succumbing to gravitational fall. But implicit in the cessation of motion is the force and energy of prior instigation: the impetus that is seized is explosive and the moment thereby arrested is consequently charged. With its beginning enfolded in its end, an event of passage is caught at its critical moment – at the threshold as it is crossed.

It is unclear how Breton came to select – or maybe even commission? – the photograph that is titled *Explosante-Fixe* in connection with his text. Nonetheless, Man Ray had shown a sustained interest in trying to capture female flamenco dancers in his art by this time; the subject matter of the photograph was established in his practice. Five years previously, for instance, he had presented a picture showing a flamenco performance in the second issue of the periodical *Bifur*, where the image is one of three that are labelled

[285] Breton 1934, p. 16.
[286] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

'extracts from a film in preparation'.[287] This picture lacks the intense focus on the dancer's body that characterises *Explosante-Fixe*, instead showing the setting of the stage and accompanying musicians. More than a decade earlier still, before he left New York for Paris, Man Ray had completed a painting he called *Spanish Dancers* (1918), in which a rather staid procession of dance accoutrements – fans and mantilla veils – stands in for the women involved. A further work that he made before his arrival in Paris, *Danger/Dancer* of 1920, gives some indication – through visual metaphor and with words – of how the artist viewed the dancers he was drawn to depict. It is described in his autobiography, where he locates its origin in a particular performance:

> an airbrush composition of gear wheels, which had been inspired by the gyrations of a Spanish dancer I had seen in a musical play. The title was lettered into the composition: it could be read either DANCER or DANGER.[288]

The interconnecting cogs that feature in this work allude menacingly to one of the tropes that the Surrealists would make their own, the *vagina dentata*. The woman who is implied by the gear wheels – and was inspired by the Spanish dancer in Man Ray's memory – is held up to the heterosexual male gaze as an object prompting both desire and fear, as a lure and threat. Selfish and cowering alarm at displayed female sexuality is spelt out in the conjunction 'dancer/danger'.

As an image of female sexuality *Explosante-Fixe* suggests the experience of orgasm; we may choose to see the explosion that is fixed in Man Ray's photograph as orgasmic. Consider how, as depicted by the artist, the woman's swirling skirts turn into petals and, with her dance producing bloom, she bursts into flower – revitalising a cliché of female sexual pleasure. At the same time we may well suspect the Surrealists of viewing the dancer captured by Man Ray's camera in *Explosante-Fixe*, with her skirt thrown above her head, as an open invitation to the heterosexual male gaze and thereby as an object of arousal – albeit of fearful temptation – rather than, or at least as much as, the subject of

[287] *Bifur* 2, 1929, unpaginated (but between p. 100 and p. 101).
[288] Man Ray 1963, p. 92.

quenched desire. Breton hints, in his accompanying text, at an interpretation of fixed explosiveness in terms of a male heterosexual fantasy, hailing a vision of one 'very handsome locomotive', a male noun in French, with phallic overtones, which is 'abandoned for many years to the delirium of a virgin forest', a female noun in French and sexualised, turned into pubic hair perhaps, through association with virginity and in relation to penetration by the train.[289] If we are to find motion caught at its exact expiration here then it is the final penetrative thrust by which a man – the locus for our identification in the vision as it is described – achieves orgasm. Here the male equivalent to the female sexual event depicted in Man Ray's photograph is invoked. Either way – in the presented image of the dancer bursting into bloom, or in the described image of the train entering the forest – the experiential threshold represented by fixed explosiveness is sexual.

It is also psychopathological. Breton's vision of a man abandoning himself sexually to a delirious female virgin implies an entry into madness. As such it takes his 1928 response, with Aragon, to Charcot's young patient with hysteria, Louise X/Augustine, to its fully odious extreme: instead of rejecting her madness, he now unites in it with her sexually. Man Ray's *Explosante-Fixe* offers an alternative take upon the threshold onto or event of passage into psychosis. Now the burst into bloom, dancer turned flower, is a madness. We see an acephalous moment of insanity: in a headless blur of arms and skirts, a person erupts into abstraction. The work here is not Man Ray's alone, of course: he has a collaborative partner in the dancer he photographs, even if we may presume that her participation is inadvertent, commandeered by his own, and even though she goes uncredited. She performs the onset of psychosis and he fixes the explosion photographically. Dancer and cameraman jointly create an image of the experiential threshold at issue. And looking at the image, we find ourselves not simply contemplating a fit of abstractedness – as Breton contemplates in Nadja, first with fascination then with abhorrence[290] – but entering into the hall of distorting mirrors, the abstract space into which Breton found himself led by Artaud.[291]

[289] Breton 1934, p. 12.
[290] As cited above, Breton 1928 b, p. 175.
[291] As cited above, Breton (1952) 1993, p. 86.

While Nadja is observed, even positioned, at the edge of madness by Breton, and a dancer performs passage over the same precipice for Man Ray's camera, Claude Cahun captures her own exploration of this limit experience in two photographs to which we shall now turn.

3.6 Claude Cahun: *Que Me Veux-Tu?*, 1928 and *Frontière Humaine*, c.1929–30

Taking stock at the age of nearly sixty, Claude Cahun wrote in a letter: 'Looking at my life as a whole I am what I have always been: surrealist. Essentially.'[292] She was addressing Jean Schuster, who was part of the group that gathered around Breton to continue the cause of Surrealism post World War II. Cahun had only become a part of Breton's circle and hence a sanctioned Surrealist in the mid 1930s, a decade on from his publication of the first Manifesto. Work dating from before her formal involvement with Surrealism nonetheless resonates with its aims, concerns, sensibility and aesthetic and her retrospective identification of her whole life with the movement further argues for consideration of her practice in conjunction with that of its other protagonists. Indeed her life-long interest in psychopathology, which will be outlined below, may be tied to her identification with the Surrealist project.

The two photographs that will form the focus here, in the context of our interest in threshold events, were made a few years before publication of Man Ray's *Explosante-Fixe*; they are roughly coincident with the publication of Breton's *Nadja*. In fact Cahun was friends with Béatrice Wanger – the American dancer whose stage name, 'Nadja', may have inspired the woman at the heart of the book that Breton gave this title. But he did not encounter Cahun until 1932, when they met through the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionaires. At first he was wary of both Cahun and her work, writing to her in a letter: 'Whatever have I done to warrant your attentions, not to mention your overwhelming proposal that I become involved in your projects?'[293] However by 1933 she was one of those responding, like Man Ray, to the latest Surrealist *enquête*, posed by Breton and Éluard in *Minotaure*.[294] In the ensuing period her involvement with Surrealism intensified, as she took part in meetings of the Contre Attaque group and participated in the 'Exhibition of Surrealist Objects' held at the Charles Ratton gallery in Paris in 1936. That same year she travelled to London, with Breton, for the international Surrealist exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries. By this stage his estimation of her had been

[292] Cahun to Schuster, 19 February 1953. Unpublished letter. Quoted in Leperlier 2007, p. 213.
[293] Breton to Cahun, 17 April 1932. Unpublished letter. Quoted in Leperlier 2007, p. 213.
[294] Breton and Éluard 1933, p. 101.

transformed: 'You have extensive magical powers at your disposal… You are well aware that I consider you one of the most curious spirits (among four or five) of our times.'[295]

Claude Cahun was born Lucy Schwob in Nantes in 1894. Part of a prominent family of Jewish intellectuals, she was brought up with the frequent absence of her mother, who suffered from some form of mental illness and was repeatedly hospitalised. In her youth Schwob struggled with her own psychological troubles, including anorexia and suicidal tendencies. At an early age she met and developed a profound lifelong relationship with Suzanne Malherbe, who would herself adopt a new name, Marcel Moore. Lucy Schwob became Claude Cahun around 1917 and Cahun and Moore jointly moved to Montparnasse in Paris in 1922.

The first known photographic self-portraits of Schwob/Cahun predate the artist's adoption of her pseudonym by some three years. Already the issue of who actually took the photographs, assuming a delayed shutter-release mechanism was not used, is at stake and most commonly Malherbe/Moore is implicated. Cahun apparently dubbed her partner 'the other me',[296] and it is in this role, as a remote extension of the person starring in the pictures, that Moore may be thought to have contributed. Cahun credited herself, by name, with notable photographs that depict her and, as such, she presumably acted as their orchestrator – their designer and director – as well as their subject matter and the object of their (her) gaze.[297]

Like Breton, Cahun had a long-standing interest in psychopathology, however this was first kindled empathetically, through family circumstance, rather than clinically, through early professional inclination. Reflecting back on the late 1920s, she recalled an unsuccessful attempt to visit her mother in the Parisian psychiatric institution that housed her. She wrote in a letter:

> I had wanted to visit her to reassure myself that she was well – as I had been assured – as happy… as possible… [A] friend of my parents who I

[295] Breton to Cahun, 21 September 1938. Unpublished letter. Quoted in Leperlier 2007, p. 213.
[296] Leperlier 1995, p. 10.
[297] For instance, see *Bifur* 5, April 1930, unpaginated (but between p. 100 and p. 101).

> got on well with accompanied me. Together we insisted in vain on seeing the patient. The psychiatrist inspired in me the greatest mistrust. But what could I do?... I only saw her again when dead – practically unrecognisable: convulsed.[298]

Here, in stark contrast to Breton's musings on convulsiveness around the same time, the quality is described as working stridently against beauty: the convulsion destroys what is recognisable in a loved face; if fixing that which is the ultimate expiration of motion – fixing death – then there is no erotic element, only horror.

Cahun would include an obscure short story about a mother who 'was locally taken for mad'[299] in her book of 1930, *Aveux Non Avenus* [*Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions*]. At least as prominent for being a writer as for being a visual artist or photographer, Cahun combined diverse literary forms in this book, including aphorism, dialogue, narrative and poetry. She also included photographic montages, 'composed by Moore after plans made by the author', which provide visual punctuation of the text, opening each new part.[300] Madness is a persistent feature of the book's first part, which is gnomically entitled 'R.C.S. (fear)'. Here it is her own sanity that she seems to fear for, or in fact that she puts into question, referring to herself as 'crazy' and describing 'my insane soul' as 'such easy prey'.[301] She builds to a fragment in which she converses insanely with insanity about its onset:

> Ah, I am really going mad! And Madness – o sickly mouth with contagious breath that ripped off my ear – in a monstrous voice prompts me with its poisonous doubt: "When you lose your mind [*L'aliénation mentale*], does it start suddenly or gradually?"[302]

Cahun may have sought answers to such insidious questions about madness – and attempted to satisfy her frustrated desire to know more about her mother's

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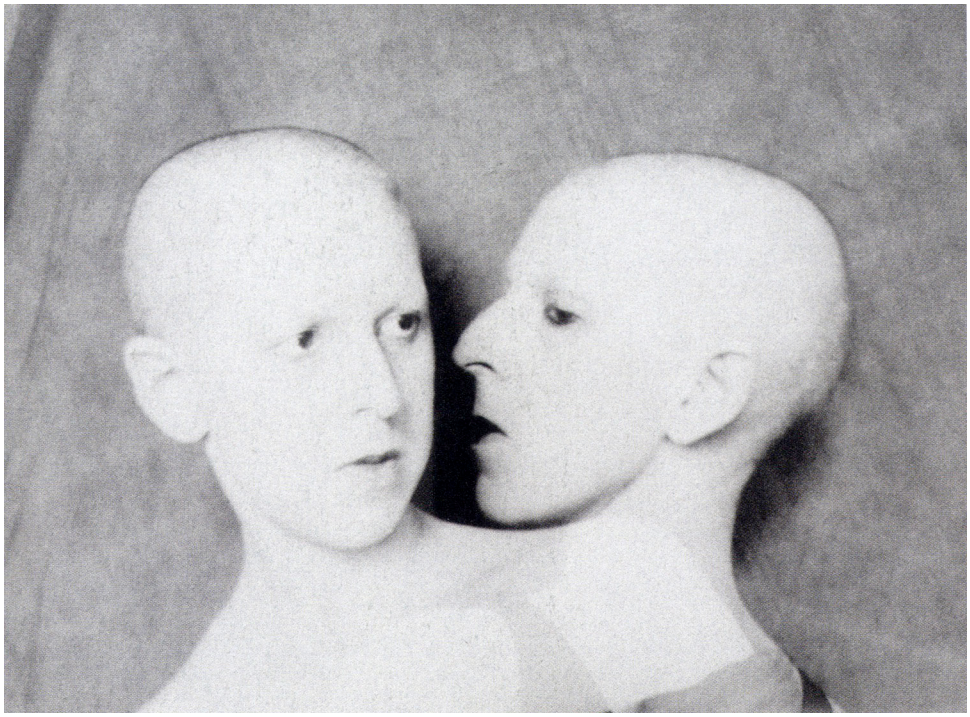
[298] Cahun to Charles-Henri Barbier, 21 January 1951. Unpublished letter. Quoted in Leperlier 2006, p. 24.
[299] Cahun 1930, p. 21.
[300] *Ibid.*, unpaginated (frontispiece).
[301] *Ibid.*, p. 8 and p. 16.
[302] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

experience in care – through her visits to patient presentations conducted at Parisian psychiatric hospitals. Néoclès Coutouzis, a friend of Cahun and Moore's from gatherings of the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionaires – and a medical student in Paris at the time – has recalled that the two women attended such events at the Salpêtrière and Infirmerie spéciale du dépôt.[303] They further attended Gaston Ferdière's lessons in the psychiatry department at the Sainte Anne Hospital in the mid 1930s. Ferdière, who would subsequently become notorious as the Chef de Service at Rodez, where Artaud endured electroconvulsive shock therapy, became and remained a firm friend of Cahun and Moore. Their extended circle of Parisian acquaintances also included Jacques Lacan.

Cahun may be seen to explore psychopathological concerns in two photographic self-portraits: *Que Me Veux-Tu?* [*What Do You Want of Me?*] of 1928 and *Frontière Humaine* [*Human Frontier*] published in 1930. In both works it is her head, shaved of hair, and her bared shoulders that appear – stark white forms against blank backgrounds. While sculpted marble busts are suggested by the anatomical crop and pale rendering of flesh in each picture, the stripping out of all personal trappings, the absence of hair and especially the physical deformities created through photographic distortion all hint instead at anatomical casts in a pathology collection: Cahun presents herself in each case as a medical specimen. Alternatively the pictures record psychiatric emergencies: the deformities of the head – a doubling in the first work and a distension in the second – making manifest convulsions of the mind. Now Cahun stages and frames psychopathological moments. Through imposing twists upon her initial photographs, disrupting their straight documentary renderings, she jolts or convulses reality, mimicking the hallucination and delusion of psychosis.

[303] Leperlier 2006, p. 222.





Claude Cahun

above:
Que Me Veux-Tu?
1928
black and white photograph

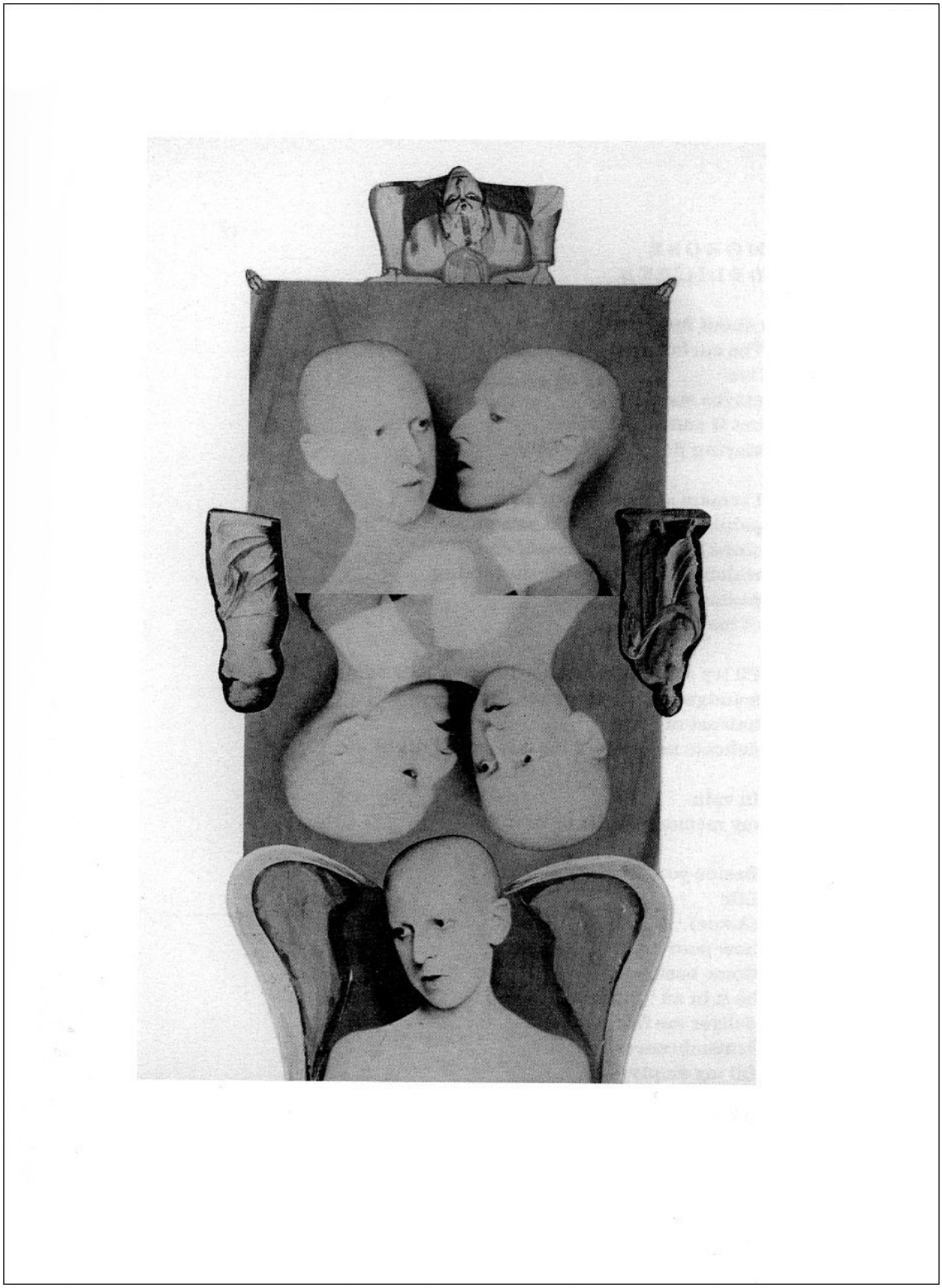
left:
Frontière Humaine
c.1929–30
black and white photograph

In *Que Me Veux-Tu?* Cahun superimposes two images of her head and shoulders so that one set of shoulders sprouts paired heads. She implies one body with two minds, turning herself into Siamese twins, perhaps, or representing the 'second life' of dreams in relation to the first of wakefulness, as described by Nerval in the nineteenth century,[304] or indeed the 'split self' etymology of Eugen Bleuler's term 'schizophrenia' from 1911. The two faces depicted are turned towards each other but their inward gazes do not meet. The one on the left seems to be disconcerted by the mutterings directed by the other, on the right, into her ear. And the perturbation prompts, perhaps, the enquiry phrased in the work's title, 'what do you want of me?'. The answer might seem to be 'your sanity': the pale and parted lips of the second face recall the 'sickly mouth with contagious breath' that Cahun describes in *Aveux Non Avenus* as speaking to her in 'a monstrous voice' to raise 'poisonous doubt' about her mental health.[305] In this text, the specific question posed by the hallucinated voice concerns the speed of passage across the threshold into psychosis: '"When you lose your mind, does it start suddenly or gradually?"' And yet the event of hallucinating the voice enacts that very passage. *Que Me Veux-Tu?* gives visual form to the audio hallucination, marking a monstrous moment of madness, and one that is far from the erotic and sexual imaginings of Breton and Man Ray.

Cahun and Moore collaged *Que Me Veux-Tu?* into one of the photomontages published in *Aveux Non Avenus* [*Disavowals* or *Cancelled Confessions*].[306] Here its image of doubled heads appears twice, surrounded by a cacophony of further photographic elements, and the vision of psychotic onset that it has offered us yields gives way. An illustration derived from the same photograph – a line drawing of the paired faces and shared shoulders – was also used on the cover of a 1929 novel by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes entitled *Frontières Humaines*. This title would be taken up, in the singular, for a further photograph by Cahun, a self-portrait published in April 1930 in issue five of *Bifur*, where Ribemont-Dessaignes was Editor in Chief. Read through Cahun's practice, the phrase 'human frontiers' refers not to the limits of the human, of humanity, but to limits experienced by human beings and specifically to experiential limits, to

[304] Nerval (1855) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 693.
[305] Cahun 1930, p. 17.
[306] *Ibid.*, unpaginated (but between p. 43 and p. 45).

psychological – indeed psychopathological – thresholds, such as they are encountered.



From Claude Cahun's book *Aveux Non Avenus*, 1930,
unpaginated (between p. 44 and p. 45)

Cahun's *Frontière Humaine*, like *Que Me Veux-Tu?*, shows the artist's shaved head and bared shoulders and once again, although otherwise atypical of her work, the eyes are averted, suggesting introspection rather than audience engagement. This time Cahun uses photographic distortion not to superimpose two images but to stretch one, thereby distending the forehead into an abnormally large expanse. This stretch is echoed in the work's title, where the French word for forehead, 'front', is verbally drawn out into that for a frontier, 'frontière'. Our perception of a head is pushed towards a limit. Even as the distorted photograph seems to offer an anamorphic representation, it proves impossible to find a perspective through which to normalise the image. Enacting the tug or flight away from consensual visual reality, the picture marks the onset of hallucinatory experience.

Que Me Veux-Tu? and *Frontière Humaine* each capture in a single image that which appears in the gaps between the pictures of Louise X/Augustine as assembled by Aragon and Breton in their feature on hysteria, whilst casting aside the erotic overtones that these two men play up. If Cahun adopts the role of a psychotic patient, she does so in order to invite us into the experience of psychosis: if she turns herself into a case study, shot – like Louise X – from the head down and against a blank backdrop, then we are also made party to her hallucinatory visions rather than left outside to observe her behaviour like a clinician; even if we read into that doubled or distended head a psychological emergency for the person photographed, we also, through perceiving these impossible bodily distortions, find ourselves hallucinating.

To the extent that *Que Me Veux-Tu?* and *Frontière Humaine* may be seen as staged explorations of madness, they bear comparison with 'The Possessions', the central section of Breton and Éluard's book, *L'Immaculée Conception*. This book was published by José Corti's Éditions Surréalistes in 1930, shortly after Cahun had made the images now under consideration. In the five chapters of 'The Possessions', Breton and Éluard aim to write as if they were psychiatric patients with different diagnoses: they handle the symptom cluster we now know as schizophrenia through a text titled to reinforce the old French term 'démence précoce'; they further tackle 'interpretative delirium', as associated

with Freudian paranoia; ‘general paralysis’, otherwise known as neuro- or cerebral syphilis; also the specific condition of ‘acute mania’; and the general condition of ‘mental debility’. In the preface to the book the authors describe their exercise of writing psychopathologically as ‘the “essayed simulation” of disorders that are generally put behind bars’, further making claims for the practice as an innovative literary form, one that ‘could with advantage replace the ballad, the sonnet, the epic, the nonsense poem, and other outdated genres.’[307] Breton and Éluard aim to portray samplings of psychopathological thinking and, as such, they imply and seek to explore enduring psychopathological states. By contrast, in *Que Me Veux-Tu?* and *Frontière Humaine*, Cahun arguably depicts the event of onset: presenting us with a normal vision that is then distorted – doubled or distended – she spring-loads documentary practice with hallucination to convey psychotic eruption. In this her two works may be compared more productively with the spasm in Breton’s authorial voice in *Nadja* – the brief passage at the end of the second part of the book, in which he trips up into a moment of madness, as argued above. And yet, through using photography rather than text, offering a vision rather than words, she can also afflict the hallucinatory moment on us: we may see her going mad, as we read Breton going mad, but we also – catching sight of her unfeasibly vast scalp, or her two heads on one set of shoulders – see her madly, becoming mad ourselves.

[307] Breton and Éluard (1930) 1990, p. 49, translation altered.

3.7 Conclusion

Looking again at Bruce Nauman's *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* will allow us to review the subject of psychopathology such as it was taken up by the Parisian Surrealists in their first wave of work, following World War I, and to conclude on the threshold events they invite us to perceive there.



Nauman's photograph may be seen as a response to the work from 1928 by Louis Aragon and André Breton using pictures taken at the Salpêtrière hospital half a century earlier, specifically those of the patient known as Louise X, who they dubbed Augustine. While the two Surrealists claimed to free her from any pathological condition, they kept her bound by the label 'hysteric' and made her the object of their sexually possessive gaze. Working visually, they animated Louise X/Augustine, running six pictures of her together in close succession; however the bars on her bed insist on the clinical context and maintain her position at the brink of madness. Her threshold condition is reiterated almost forty years later by Nauman, who puts himself in her predicament by putting himself in her place, in front of the camera. Simultaneously performing

logorrhoea and ejaculation, Nauman depicts a psychosexual event of passage that arguably corroborates and responds to Louise X's own.

Self-Portrait as a Fountain also echoes Breton's own psychopathological spasm in his book from 1928, *Nadja*: it resonates with the abrupt lurch of the Surrealist's voice towards delusion, before he breaks off at the end of the book's second part. Here, in a moment of neurotic if not hallucinatory insecurity, Breton suddenly spouts: 'Who's there? Is it you, Nadja? … Who's there? Is it only me? Is it myself?'[308] We may now see him, foreshadowing Nauman, reaching out into darkness as he does so. This darkness is metaphorically rendered by the emptiness that completes Breton's page, before the text resumes on the following page, at the opening of the next and final part of the book. The break in the flow of words ultimately marks Breton's return passage from insanity to sanity, however, for when he subsequently picks up his narrative, the episode is behind him. This draws stark contrast with the rupture in Gerard de Nerval's text 'Aurélia', as previously described, for there it is the *onset* of a psychotic episode that is marked.

Nauman's photograph further gives form to the fixed explosiveness of convulsive beauty, such as it is elaborated in Breton's follow-up text for *Minotaure* in 1934. Halting all motion with his raised hands, Nauman captures 'the exact expiration of this motion' with the arc of fluid from his mouth,[309] which, like the flung skirt of the woman dancing before Man Ray's camera in *Explosante-Fixe* of 1934, hits a peak before gravitational extinction. Indeed Nauman's paroxysmal activity suggests an absurd mime of John Hughlings Jackson's medical definition of the convulsion as 'an occasional, an excessive, and a disorderly discharge of nerve tissue on muscles'.[310] Or perhaps Nauman mimes the routine neuronal discharge of action potentials and the sense of excess then evinces subjective experience, marking the passage from matter to mind and not a gap but a threshold between them.

The eroticism of *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* wanes when the work is viewed alongside *Que Me Veux-Tu?* and *Frontière Humaine*, Claude Cahun's

[308] Breton 1928 b, p. 190, ellipsis added.
[309] Breton 1934, p. 12.
[310] Jackson (1870) 1931, p. 8.

photographic self-portraits which precede his by nearly forty years. Here convulsion prefigures death and the moment of madness at issue is monstrous. Awed by Cahun's distended forehead and doubled face, Nauman now chokes and gropes in horror, the spurt from his lips suggesting a nick into the jugular. The threshold crossed involves not only the loss of one's mind but, in this event, the spectre of losing one's life. Any previous suggestion of a *petit mort* gives way to the threat of death itself.

Viewing Nauman's work in light of Cahun's, we further see the schizophrenic moment, etymologically speaking, of all photographic self-portraiture: we are reminded that the artist simultaneously stands in front of the camera and operates behind it, in the 'self-splitting' event of taking the picture. A different but resonant splitting of oneself may have been enacted by the Palaeolithic person who, in the projection of pigment against his or her hand and the cave wall, simultaneously stands in front of the rock face and passes through it. The cleaving event of schizophrenic rupture is marked in the photographic click of the camera shutter and by a prehistoric burst from the mouth.

Chapter 4: From Surrealist Interest in the Art of the Mad to Psychiatric Interest in Creativity

Having found the threshold event of the onset of madness to be marked in certain works by the Surrealists, we now turn to their interest in artwork made by people judged to be mad. This interest will be mapped from Paul Éluard's writing in 1924 to Antonin Artaud's instantiation in 1947, via Hans Prinzhorn's collection and various art exhibitions. Reflections on the event of psychotic onset will be sought.

In the period following World War II, the art produced in psychiatric hospitals was discussed increasingly by artists and critics and Jean Dubuffet, in particular, seriously expanded and developed its consideration as part of his Art Brut project. Here again, as with the Surrealists, interest in art made by those diagnosed as insane will be explored for its elaboration of the onset event or threshold of psychosis.

Psychiatrists also paid increasing attention post-war to art by their patients, referring to it not as the art of the mad, as did the Surrealists, nor as Art Brut, after Dubuffet, but as Psychopathological Art. The emergence and connotations of this term will be introduced and then its kindling of debates concerning the relationships between psychosis, aesthetics and creativity will be analysed. The work of doctors Henri Ey, François Tosquelles and Jean Oury will be examined in particular in this connection, with a focus on the threshold onto madness or the event of its onset.

Finally, in a coda on the development of psychopharmacology in the post-War period, the brain's role in the issues at hand will be mapped from the research findings of doctors Jean Delay and Pierre Deniker back into the writing of Oury and Tosquelles. Here events at a neurological scale of analysis will be considered and the neurological threshold onto experience will be considered.

4.1 Surrealist Interest in the Art of the Mad

Writing from the Saint Dizier psychiatric centre during World War I, Breton noted that he 'admired the pure drawings' by patients, which he found on the walls there, further extolling 'watercolours by the mad!' as a welcoming element at the institution.[311] Following the war, and before issuing the first Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, he was introduced to Hans Prinzhorn's publication *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* [*Artistry of the Mentally Ill*]. Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist who had trained in art history, brought to public attention a large collection of drawings and objects created by psychiatric patients, which he had amassed whilst based in Heidelberg. His text is fully illustrated, often in colour, with a focus on the work of ten 'schizophrenic masters' in particular. Max Ernst, whose interest in psychiatry and the art of psychotic patients predated World War I, introduced the book into Surrealist circles, giving a copy to Paul Éluard in the year it was published, 1922.[312]

Éluard addressed himself to the issue of 'the drawings of the insane' in an article published in *Les Feuilles Libres* in 1924.[313] By titling this article 'Le *Génie Sans Miroir'* ['The Genius without Mirror'], he invokes the mad person as a genius who does not recognise himself or herself as such. With an effusive tone that allows for no critical caveats, Éluard presents a romanticised and provocative view of madness, suggesting that those who are mad inhabit an enchanted parallel or superimposed universe, an alternative and superior land, with a complete freedom, all granted by divine intervention:

> The country that they have discovered is so beautiful that nothing is capable of diverting their mind from it. Illnesses! Neuroses! Divine means of liberation misunderstood by Christians, you are not celestial punishments but deliverance, the supreme recompense, paradise on earth, view towards the infinite, most rapid ascension towards the spirit that rises like a vulture with the brains of Prometheus in his beak.[314]

[311] Breton to Théodore Fraenkel, 31 August 1916, quoted in Bonnet 1992, p. 116.
[312] MacGregor 1989, p. 279.
[313] Éluard 1924, p. 307.
[314] *Ibid.*, p. 302.

He goes on to describe the art of those judged to be mad as functioning as a means by which their mad vision may be shared, offering us – we who are normal – access to their world:

> The drawings of the insane transport us immediately and unwittingly to cities and countryside where the wind of revelation moves. The visions induced by cocaine and morphine are scarcely a reflection of these charming anatomies. Behold an eminently spiritual art… Open your eyes, I beg you, upon the virgin landscapes! Accept as a postulate the principle of absolute liberty, and recognise, with me, that the world where the mad live has no equivalent in our age.[315]

Here Éluard suggests that the drawings of psychiatric patients reflect a state or realm of madness, which he defines as a space of freedom and divine inspiration. He suggests that in previous eras – and we might wish to consider Palaeolithic times specifically – psychosocial passage to a spirit world beyond our own was encouraged. Contrary to our own interests, however, he does not focus on the passage or point of entry into the mad or alternative world that he celebrates; the threshold moment or event of onset, which Éluard references as 'deliverance' or 'liberation', apparently goes unmarked.

Ten of the thirteen illustrations that were published to accompany Éluard's text, which were described as coming from a Polish asylum for the mentally ill, were in fact drawn by fellow Surrealist Robert Desnos. As a Surrealist, Desnos is chiefly renowned for the automatic writing that he produced in a state of trance and it is convenient to assume that he put himself under hypnosis, perhaps with the specific intention of emulating a state of madness, before making the drawings published. Even as such, however, his drawings represent an exploration of the state of emulated madness, rather than the moment of entry into this state. And as such they bring to mind Breton and Éluard's 'Possessions', the texts published in 1930 in which the authors imagined their way through various forms of mental illness, undertaking – as discussed towards the end of the previous chapter – 'the "essayed simulation" of disorders

[315] *Ibid.*, pp. 307–08.

that are generally put behind bars'.[316] While Breton and Éluard explicitly simulated madness, Desnos covertly emulated it. His drawings, like their texts, loosely convey a psychiatric condition, or a state of madness, without addressing the threshold that gives onto that condition, or the event of onset. In fact, another drawing that Desnos completed at the same time, which was not published in this context, gives more of a sense of psychological – if not psychopathological – entry onto a fantasy realm: in *La Comptabilité du Poèt*, the outline of a hand marks the threshold onto a dreamy landscape which is apparently conjured by the head this hand cradles; the sunlit seascape and desert oasis, accessed by the head through the hand, make a nod towards Éluard's contemporary suggestion that the insane discover a country 'so beautiful that nothing is capable of diverting their mind from it'.[317]



Robert Desnos, *La Comptabilité du Poèt*, 1924,
watercolour with gouache on paper

[316] Breton and Éluard (1930) 1990, p. 49, translation altered.
[317] Éluard 1924, p. 302.

The fact that at least some of the drawings reproduced along with 'Le *Génie Sans Miroir*' were legitimately the work of psychiatric patients rather implies that the ruse in play, that of simultaneously pretending to such work, was intended to bolster the provocative gesture of celebrating the aesthetic and spiritual merit of art made by those judged to be mad. In the same context and presumably with the same intent the Surrealists further passed off their literary creations as poems by mad patients. To some extent Breton justified the practice in the Second Surrealist Manifesto, of 1930: 'let it be clearly understood that we are not talking about a simple regrouping of words or a capricious redistribution of visual images, but of the recreation of a state which can only be fairly compared to that of madness.'[318] Here he implies that a certain means of making work – that is, the Surrealist method – brings one close to madness, whilst steering clear of actually putting one's sanity in question. In the introduction to Breton and Éluard's 'Possessions', these authors emphasise the distance maintained from the threshold onto actual madness, asserting that their exercises in psychopathological simulation are undertaken 'without… compromising in any way its [the mind's] faculty for mental equilibrium'.[319]

Two Parisian exhibitions mounted towards the end of the 1920s showcased works that were actually created by psychiatric patients, rather than by artists acting under this mantle. First, the Galerie Vavin showed works from the collection of Auguste Marie, a doctor who had opened a Museum of Madness to the public at the Villejuif hospital in Paris in 1905.[320] Marie, who was the director of the Sainte Anne psychiatric hospital at the time, and the professor in charge of the psychopathology laboratory at the École des Hautes Études, wrote about the exhibition in the *Revue Scientifique*, announcing that 'All of Montparnasse came to see it.'[321] His collection was extensively reproduced and discussed in a book by one of his students, Jean Vinchon: *L'Art et la Folie* came out in 1924, two years after Prinzhorn's publication on his Heidelberg collection. Then, in 1929, Galerie Max Bine brought together some two hundred works, drawing on the Marie and Prinzhorn collections and on those of several other institutions

[318] Breton (1930) 1969, p. 175.
[319] Breton and Éluard (1930), p. 47.
[320] MacGregor 1989 dates this exhibition to 1928, whereas Wilson 1992 suggests it took place in 1926.
[321] Marie 1929, p. 395.

and psychiatrists, in a show entitled 'Manifestations Artistiques des Malades du Cerveau' ['Artistic Manifestations of the Brain Diseased'].[322]

André Breton purchased work from this later exhibition, specifically boxes of assembled items that were put together by a psychotic patient. A photograph of this work was used to accompany a Freudian text on suicide by psychoanalyst Jean Frois-Wittmann that appeared in the final issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, issued in December of that year and bearing the Second Manifesto of Surrealism.[323] The boxes – with buttons, scissor parts and other elements carefully arranged and sewn down into them – present a compelling impression of 'the logic of the mad', to borrow Breton's phrase from his time in the psychiatric centre at Saint Dizier.[324] However, they suggest a way of being rather than marking the onset of this way of being.

Also in Breton's possession at this time were the drawings produced by Nadja, the woman whose psychological instability was, amongst other things, narrated by the author in the book of 1928 that he named after her. In his book, as already described, Breton published ten of Nadja's drawings, often recounting in his text the visions that he says she told him inspired them, also the symbolism that she apparently elaborated through them. One of these, a stencilled hand and drawn face each cut out and assembled together, 'so the angle of the head can be varied',[325] has already been analysed – in the previous chapter – for the image of the onset of madness that it offers. It would be difficult to claim Breton saw such an image in the work, however, for he proves more interested in the ignorance and savagery he perceives in psychiatric practice than in the experience of onset that leads one to be subjected to this practice. Yet at the same time he hints that Nadja may have marked the development of her madness on paper, even if the works produced, or works in progress, have not survived:

[322] MacGregor 1989, p. 281.
[323] Frois-Wittmann 1929, p. 43.
[324] Breton, letter to Apollinaire, quoted in Bonnet 1975, p. 110.
[325] This is the caption given the image, taken from the body of the text. See Breton 1928 b, p. 169 (caption) and p. 161 (text). For a reproduction of this cut-out drawing see the previous chapter.

> the last drawings, then unfinished, which Nadja showed me during the last visit I paid her, and which must have disappeared in the torment that carried her away, testified to an altogether different skill.[326]

Here Breton crafts an image of works of art that mark the onset of madness by disappearing in its very event – unfinished until the moment in which they vanish.

In the 1930s Surrealist interest in art made by psychiatric patients led to such work being shown alongside that which they had created themselves. Whereas this had taken place in 1924 on the pages of *Les Feuilles Libres* without acknowledgement – that is, misleadingly all in the name of the art of the insane – then it took place openly, under the banner of Surrealism, in the international exhibitions staged by the group. Visual art by psychiatric patients was shown in amongst works created outside of a clinical context in 'The International Surrealist Exhibition' staged in London at the New Burlington Galleries in the summer of 1936.[327] Breton and Éluard, who were both involved in organising this exhibition, then loaned what would be described as 'art of the insane' to the 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism' exhibition curated by Alfred Barr for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which opened in December of that same year. Éluard lent 'embroideries by psychopathic patients' to the exhibition, while Breton contributed the boxes of assembled items that he had bought from Galerie Max Bine and reproduced photographically in *La Révolution Surréaliste*.[328] These loans were catalogued under the title 'Comparative material', where they were grouped along with the 'art of children', 'folk art' and 'miscellaneous objects and pictures with a Surrealist character'.[329]

The 'Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme' of 1938 – a more experimental exhibition in terms of installation, with a theatrical mise-en-scène that has made it famous – also included work by psychiatric patients. Organised by Breton and Éluard, with Marcel Duchamp billed in the catalogue as the 'Generator-Arbitrator', the exhibition took place at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

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[326] *Ibid.*, p. 165.
[327] Kachur 2001, p. 13.
[328] Barr 1936, p. 283.
[329] *Ibid.*, pp. 283–84.

Duchamp suspended 1,200 coal bags from the ceiling of the main space and, with the lights extinguished, visitors relied on torches in order to explore the space and see what it held. The rough, lowered and uneven surface overhead and the darkness were more suggestive of a cave than a conventional gallery environment. Moreover, sounds of hysterical laughter recorded at a psychiatric institution, which were relayed on a hidden record player, brought the space of insanity – clinically and psychologically – to bear. Amongst all the objects assembled, it would have been easy to miss those by hospital inmates. Gaston Ferdière, the psychiatrist who lent the works, described their presence in his autobiography: 'in a corner the small dolls by my patients'.[330] A subsequent author has them 'scattered in the darkness' on the floor.[331] If the staid display of the 1936 exhibition in London suggested a series of snapshots of, or a number of windows onto, various surreal worlds, then arguably the 1938 exhibition in Paris sought to invite visitors directly into such a world. Either way art made by psychiatric patients was not considered in terms of its relationship to madness in particular but more broadly co-opted to the Surrealist cause.

The Surrealist approach to displaying art from psychiatric hospitals was thrown into relief in the 1930s by the Nazi uptake of the same project for their own and opposing purposes. Whereas the Surrealists celebrated art by those judged to be insane through associating it with their own practice, the National Socialists sought to extinguish the latter, indeed all modern art, by connecting it with the former. The 'Entartete Kunst' or 'Degenerate Art' exhibition, which opened in Munich in the summer of 1937, positioned works by contemporary artists alongside those by psychiatric patients, with labels and slogans posted on the wall to denigrate all such practice. The art by psychiatric patients that was displayed came from the Prinzhorn collection, which was by then in the charge of Carl Schneider, appointed by the Nazis to the directorship of the Heidelberg clinic. The Munich show was extended by a month to cater for public interest, with visitor figures topping two million before the exhibition toured to a further twelve cities in Germany and Austria.[332] The vicious intent of the underlying project had desperate and sometimes deadly consequences: while modern artists, along with curators showing modernist sympathies, were ejected from

[330] Ferdière 1978, p. 136.
[331] Wilson 2002, p. 121.
[332] Zuschlag 1991, p. 90.

the German art world, some of the artist-patients who were represented in the Prinzhorn collection were murdered under Nazi eugenic policies.[333]

Whilst occupied during World War II, the French state was also party to a cultural strategy that united the art of the professional avant-garde with that of psychiatric patients in order to exclude both. Camille Mauclair, an aging critic who collaborated with the Vichy regime, juxtaposed works by modern artists and the mentally ill in his anti-Semitic pamphlet of 1944, *La Crise de l'Art Moderne*. During this time, avant-garde artistic practice in Paris moved elsewhere or underground. While Breton escaped to North America during the war, for instance, Éluard remained in France and was active in the resistance. For a few months during the winter of 1943, he found refuge from the Gestapo through staying with Lucien Bonnafé, a psychiatrist at the Lozère hospital of Saint Alban. His visit introduced him to the art objects made by Auguste Forestier, one of the schizophrenic patients at Saint Alban, and he admired and acquired some of these works,[334] which will be discussed later in this chapter. Post-War, Éluard published a collection of poem-portraits of hospital patients at Saint Alban, under the title *Souvenirs de la Maison des Fous* [*Memories of the Mad House*].

A Surrealist in the early stages of the movement, Antonin Artaud spent most of World War II in psychiatric care. Collapsing the distance at which the Surrealists operated, he worked both amongst those judged to represent the artistic avant-garde and amongst those judged to be insane. These roles came together notably in the event he fronted at the Vieux-Colombier theatre in Paris on 13 January 1947. He was a resident of the psychiatric clinic at Ivry-sur-Seine, outside Paris, at the time, following three years as a charge of Gaston Ferdière at Rodez in the Midi-Pyrenees, where he underwent electroconvulsive shock treatment. In front of an audience of nine hundred people, Artaud started the event billed as *l'Histoire Vécu d'Artaud-Môm*o [*The Life Story of Artaud-Môm*o], with poetry readings. After an hour of these, which were well received, he then began to deliver a prepared lecture, however he soon lapsed into free and increasingly crazed speech, scattering his manuscript pages and finally ending

[333] Brand-Claussen 1989, p. 19.
[334] Peiry 2001, p. 52.

abruptly two hours later, to be led gently off stage by André Gide. He had put a psychological breakdown – crossing the threshold into madness – on stage. Breton, amongst others, was appalled.[335]

Artaud may be said to describe the onset experience of madness in the radio play he recorded later that same year, whilst still based at Ivry.[336] In a moment of clarity in one of the scripted sections of *Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de Dieu* [*To Have Done with the Judgement of God*], he uses terms that bear some relation to Éluard's Surrealist notion of 'liberation', whilst simultaneously amplifying the idea and lessening the cliché. We are told of:

> *the opening*
> of our consciousness
> towards possibility
> beyond measure[337]

Here the event of exceeding psychological measure is named. And the promise and threat of the possibility opened up stand in the balance; if a threshold is crossed then the territory beyond lies uncharted.

[335] Finter (1997) 2004, pp. 47–48.
[336] The broadcast was scheduled for 2 February 1948, but transmission was banned the day before by the director-general of French radio, Wladimir Porché. The play was finally aired for the first time almost quarter of a century later on France Culture, 5 March 1972.
[337] Artaud (1947) 1948, p. 26.

4.2 Art Brut

Jean Dubuffet (1901–85) was given a copy of Prinzhorn's *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* in 1922 or 1923,[338] shortly after its publication and when he was on the point of abandoning his painting practice for the family business selling wine. He would later remark in interview:

> The pictures in Prinzhorn's book struck me very strongly when I was young. They showed me the way and were a liberating experience. I realized that everything was permitted, everything was possible. Millions of possibilities of expression existed outside of the accepted cultural avenues.[339]

It was immediately following World War II that Dubuffet's interest in outsider art led him to make research trips to psychiatric hospitals, where he started to acquire work by patients. After first taking the opportunity on a tour of Switzerland with Jean Paulhan and Le Corbusier, at the invitation of the Swiss National Office of Tourism, he then developed his interests within France. Early in September 1945, he travelled to Rodez hospital, in Aveyron, where he met Doctor Ferdière (and also his patient, Artaud) and from there he visited the Saint Alban hospital, in the Lozère, where he met Doctor Bonnafé.[340] While Breton – and, once at least, Duchamp – had found occasion to visit Ferdière at the psychiatric hospital of Sainte Anne in Paris before the war,[341] Dubuffet's more extensive and deliberate visits to comparable institutions were specifically motivated by his concern to study and collect art made by psychiatric patients.

In 1947 Dubuffet founded 'a centre for research and exhibition' dedicated to the work that interested him: the Foyer de l'Art Brut was established in the basement rooms of the Parisian gallery run by his dealer, René Drouin.[342] Dubuffet's concept of Art Brut was intended to encompass and celebrate the raw and pure, to the exclusion and at the expense of the culturally informed. Selectively honouring artistic practice by those who seemed to work

[338] MacGregor 1989 dates his reception of the book to 1922 (p. 292), whereas Foster 2004 suggests 1923 (p. 198 and p. 203).
[339] Dubuffet (1976) in John MacGregor 1993, p. 43.
[340] Peiry 2001, n. 40 p. 268.
[341] Wilson 1992, p. 121.
[342] Dubuffet (1951) 1967, p. 491.

independently of the Western canon and avant-garde, the grouping included art made in psychiatric hospitals but it was not restricted to this art (which was collected alongside work created by spirit mediums and eccentric hobbyists, for instance) and nor did it encompass *all* art made in this context (Dubuffet later wrote: 'bad art… finds itself, I can confirm, just as commonly amongst the mentally ill as with normal people'[343]). As such his interests in art by those judged insane developed the interests of the Surrealists, whilst demonstrating a distinctly new intensity of commitment. His post-War approach, in the name of Art Brut, was concerted rather than sporadic and it involved championing individual artists rather than co-opting individual works. Unlike the Surrealists, he did not exhibit his own or other avant-garde work alongside the art of patients or by others seen as social outsiders, apparently convinced that the different production contexts prompted a demand for separate viewing situations.

In October 1948 Dubuffet joined with Breton, Paulhan and three others – Charles Ratton (a dealer in African art), Henri-Pierre Roché (a translator, journalist and novelist) and Michel Tapié (a painter and art critic) – in issuing a leaflet bearing a 'Notice sur la Compagnie de l'Art Brut'. This document gave the first articulation of the project in text. Here Dubuffet announced the search for artistic works that show scant regard for cultural convention and instead 'make an appeal to humanity's origin, drawing on the most spontaneous and personal invention'.[344] Rejecting the work of '"professional artists"' he hailed instead the creations of those who are 'very isolated', looking in the first instance to that which was made by 'people considered to be mentally ill and interned in psychiatric institutions'.[345] It is here, he insisted, that 'true art [*l'art veritable*]' would be found.[346] The notice otherwise advertised the first exhibition of Art Brut to be staged in a new venue, the pavilion in the garden of Éditions Gallimard, and issued a 'Call to psychiatrists' requesting candidate work for potential inclusion in the gathering collection.[347]

[343] Dubuffet to Doctor Robert Volmat, 28 December 1952, in Volmat 1956, p. 90.
[344] Dubuffet (1948) 1967, p. 489, translation altered.
[345] *Ibid.*, pp. 489–90.
[346] *Ibid.*, p. 489.
[347] *Ibid.*, p. 490.

In the same year as the announcement of the Company of Art Brut, Breton wrote 'L'Art des Fous, la Clé des Champs' ['The Art of the Mad, the Key to Freedom']. Originally intended for the *Almanach de l'Art Brut*, which was never produced, it was published instead in the *Cahiers de la Pléiade* under the editorship of Paulhan. Here Breton endorsed Dubuffet's concept of Art Brut whilst narrowing his interest exclusively on 'the art of the mad'. He asserted: 'We will not rest until we are rid of that blind and intolerable prejudice that has for so long affected the works of art produced in asylums and until we have disentangled them from the pernicious atmosphere that has been created around them.'[348] Crediting the early efforts in this direction by Prinzhorn, amongst others, he argued that the art in question be considered for its aesthetic rather than clinical value. He went on to conclude:

> I am not afraid to put forward the idea, a paradoxical one only at first sight, that the art of those who are presently categorized as mentally ill represents a store of mental health. That is because it remains unaffected by everything that tends to distort the modes of expression with which we are concerned: external influences, self-interested motives, success or disappointments experienced on the social level, etc. In this instance, the mechanisms of artistic creation are free from any constraint. Through a deeply moving dialectical effect, confinement and renunciation of all profits as well as of all vanities – despite what they mean in terms of individual tragedy – guarantee the total authenticity that is lacking everywhere else and that we crave more and more.[349]

Breton's notion of an art-making that, given madness, is unconstrained, partly obscures and partly clarifies our own concern with art that suggests passage into madness. To the extent that the freedom from (social) constraints that he envisages implies a (psychosocial) breach of limits, the threshold event of psychotic onset comes into play; the key in the door, as cited in the essay's title, unlocks possibility ahead. However the art that is associated with this freedom is held up as a representation not of passage into madness, but of a store or reservoir of mental health. Moreover claims are made to a 'total authenticity' for

[348] Breton (1948) 1995, p. 218.
[349] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

the art in question, recalling Dubuffet's concurrent assertion, in his 'Notice sur la Compagnie de l'Art Brut', that this art is 'true', that this is 'the true art'. Both authors seek not adequacy to a specific experience, namely to the threshold moment of the emergent event of psychosis, as sought in the present thesis in relation to other threshold events, but a purity – or some pure form – of human expression.

Dubuffet's 1948 assertion that the artworks that interest him 'make an appeal to humanity's origin' likewise draws close to, while remaining distinct from, the threshold event of species emergence such as it will be considered later in this thesis. The French expression that he employs, '*font appel au fond humain original'*, is open to various English translations, and both 'appeal to humanity's first origins' and – drawing on the contextual sentences – 'put human originality to use' have been suggested.[350] If Dubuffet hereby essentialises originality or creativity among human capacities and, further, privileges outsider artists in their access to this originality or creativity, we must reject his assertion, for – while prehistoric art and analyses of prehistoric art-making will be studied in the subsequent chapters of this thesis – a definition of humanity in terms of art-making behaviour, or a defence of some primal kind of art, is not the intention. Instead, resonances between lifetime events (namely the onset of madness) and millennial events (namely species emergence) are being pursued through art that elaborates on the threshold moment at issue in both cases. We may therefore adopt Dubuffet's interest in oeuvres that '*font appel au fond humain original'* to the extent that this suggests an interest in art that – in marking, documenting or representing a limit event or threshold experience, such as the onset of madness – may be said to echo the evolutionary emergence of humans. Indeed there are resonances with exploratory passage, over millennia, to *any* species.

In his later and longer texts on Art Brut, Dubuffet's did not expand on threshold, onset or origination events. He moved instead towards claims that art-making is, essentially, mad. His first step in this direction was made in a text that he wrote a year after the 'Notice sur la Compagnie de l'Art Brut', entitled 'L'Art Brut

[350] As translated, respectively, by James Frank in Piery 2001, p. 11, and by Carol Volk in Dubuffet 1988, p. 109.

Préféré aux Arts Culturels'. This text was published in conjunction with a major public exhibition of the collection of Art Brut, which presented some two hundred works by 63 artists, in the absence of any so-called 'cultured' or 'cultural' arts, in Paris in October and November of 1949. Here Dubuffet asks: 'Can the act of art, with the extreme tension it implies and the high fever that accompanies it, can it ever be normal?'[351] Just over a year later, in a text published alongside an exhibition of paintings by five outsider artists that was held in a bookshop in Lille, he would define the abnormality at issue as a madness: 'What art isn't mad? When it isn't mad, it's not art.'[352] Investing in a claim that will not be defended here, where our focus lies on art that marks the threshold of madness, he made madness essential to art-making.

A couple of sketches completed by Dubuffet in Algeria around this time offer a return to the notion of thresholds and here hands and body prints come into play, albeit as any explicit interest in madness is left behind. In these drawings the artist unites imagery of footprints caught in sand with depictions of the hamsas or hands of Fatima he observed on doors to local houses. As viewers we are kept outside, in the desert, by the vertical plane of the walls that extend across each picture, however the burst of vegetation beyond is just visible above these walls and the hands on the doors set into them seem to record prior human passage across the threshold before us, even while they halt our own such passage. Coincidentally, Breton had referenced the presence of a hand 'drawn more or less schematically' on 'the door of many Arab houses' in *Nadja* in 1928.[353] And in fact we might interpret the luscious world denied us in Dubuffet's sketches, where it is kept beyond locked doors, as being related to the 'fields' of freedom that Breton suggested we might find the 'key' to in 'the art of the mad'.[354]

[351] Dubuffet (1949) 1967, p. 202.
[352] Dubuffet (1951) 1967, p. 510.
[353] Breton 1928 b, p. 136.
[354] Breton, 'L'Art des Fous, la Clé des Champs', 1948.



Jean Dubuffet
Porte de l'Oasis Avec
Traces de Pas dans le Sable
1948
coloured pencil on paper



Jean Dubuffet
Porte de l'Oasis Avec
Traces de Pas dans le Sable
1948
coloured crayon on paper

Breton and Dubuffet would eventually fall out over their respective interests in the art of the mad, with the former ultimately denouncing its subsumption into the latter's category of Art Brut. In a lecture Dubuffet gave in Lille, on the occasion of the exhibition there in January 1951, the artist made a statement that insists on the integrity of his concept. Here he does away with the notion of madness altogether and attempts to define 'true art' (to return to his 'Notice sur la Compagnie de l'Art Brut') in terms of core values that are wild, primitive or savage (the title of the piece being 'Honneur aux Valeurs Sauvages'):

> I must explain that our position in regard to that particular state of affairs, that situation which is referred to as "insanity", is as follows. We tend to ignore it completely. We have absolutely no interest in such categories. We investigate works of art characterized by a very strong personal character and created outside of all influence from traditional art, and which at the same time (because without this there can be no art) draw the upon most profound depths of the human being, from the savage/wild/primitive depths [*aux couches de la sauvagerie*] which find expression in a language of fire. Apart from this, it is a matter of indifference to us that the author of these works is, for reasons foreign to our concerns, reputed to be sane or mad.[355]

Despite the confident use of the collective pronoun 'we' in this context, in the autumn of that year the Company of Art Brut was disbanded. Breton had written to members in September asserting: 'the very concept of "art brut" has taken on a character that is more and more troublesome and vacillating. The organic solder that it purported to be operating between the art of certain autodictats and that of the mentally ill has proved itself inconsistent, illusory.'[356]

[355] Dubuffet (1951) 1967, p. 218.
[356] Breton (1951) in Dubuffet 1967, p. 493.

4.3 Psychopathological Art

The interest of the artistic avant-garde in art created by psychiatric patients intensified after World War II in tandem with, and sometimes inflamed by, the interests of the clinicians responsible for the care of those patients. If Dubuffet attacked attempts to set patient art within a category of its own – that is, aside from art by other outsiders – and, with Breton, he rejected its confinement within medical discourse, then these moves worked against those made by the psychiatric establishment in Paris. This establishment was centred on the Sainte Anne Hospital, the largest psychiatric hospital in the city and the base for the department of psychiatry for the University of Paris.

In February 1946 an 'Exhibition of Oeuvres by the Mentally Ill: Painting, Drawing, Sculpture, Decoration' opened to the public for twelve days at Sainte Anne and more than two hundred works were displayed. Although psychiatric patients were thereby credited with works of art, i.e. with the 'oeuvres' of the exhibition title, their claims to the status of artist were minimised since all works were presented without those responsible being named. This went beyond the medical convention of guaranteeing patient anonymity since it reversed the trend established by Prinzhorn, in a comparable clinical context – and subsequently adopted by Dubuffet, in an art context – of inventing pseudonyms for patients who were also artists, for the purposes of displaying and discussing their work in aesthetic as well as, or rather than, psychiatric terms. Moreover, the labels given to the work exhibited at Sainte Anne specified the psychiatric symptoms or diagnosis of the person responsible, implying that the mental illness of the artist was the suggested means of interpretation. Here the art of the insane was presented as a subject of study within the field of psychopathology, and discussion of the art of the mad gives way not to Art Brut but to Psychopathological Art. If narrowly an exercise conducted in clinical terms, the exhibition was nonetheless open to the public, with a public lecture delivered by Doctor Ferdière at the opening; and it prompted debate in both the artistic and popular press.[357]

[357] George 1950, p. 6.

The professional and popular success of the 1946 display at Sainte Anne prompted a major undertaking leading to the 'International Exhibition of Psychopathological Art', once again at Sainte Anne, in 1950. Organised in conjunction with the First Worldwide Congress in Psychiatry, this new exhibition brought together over two thousand works from seventeen countries, demanding for their display six large rooms that were previously given over to storage. In the resulting publication, issued six years later, Robert Volmat, a clinician at the Parisian medical faculty, reflected back:

> The point of this exhibition was two-fold: it concerned itself with assembling works signifying scientific interest, interesting to practitioners, and with giving the public an extended chance to perceive the aesthetic value and, by association, human expression in the alienated[358]

The first of these two motivations sits squarely within the field of psychopathology, as heralded in the title of the book, *L'Art Psychopathologique*, such as it is distilled from that of the exhibition. Volmat explicitly elaborates upon this motivation earlier on in his text, where he suggests that 'the plastic manifestations of our patients' may operate 'in the territory of the daily psychiatric clinic' as 'a privileged instrument of comprehension'.[359] Replacing Surrealist and popular interest (associated with the so-called art of the mad) with scientific purpose (connoted by the label Psychopathological Art), a newly serious and rigorous 'domain of investigation' is implied.[360]

The second motivation for the exhibition that is given by Volmat suggests a belated retort to the Nazi's 'degenerate art' project. With his recourse to 'aesthetic value' and 'human expression', the author's rhetoric is not dissimilar from that that of Dubuffet, as advanced in the name of Art Brut. At the same time Volmat confesses 'It is not easy for a doctor to want to deal with aesthetic problems. Others are certainly more qualified than us.'[361] In fact, later in the book, he goes so far as to publish a damning judgement on the aesthetic merit of the project as issued by Dubuffet in a letter dated December 1952. The artist

[358] Volmat 1956, p. 6.
[359] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[360] *Ibid.*, p. 2.
[361] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

sums up the exhibition as, 'with very few exceptions, a vast assembly' of 'bad art', 'without content and without value.'[362]

Open for less than a month, the 1950 exhibition at Sainte Anne was nonetheless seen by more than ten thousand visitors and gained significant press coverage.[363] The immediate audience was made up of the two thousand psychiatrists who gathered from nearly fifty countries for the international congress that gave occasion for the exhibition. These doctors and the general public were additionally invited to a screening programme, in which medical films were presented in a peculiar mix together with artistic and art-related films including the Surrealist *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the Expressionist *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (1920) and a documentary on Vincent van Gogh.[364]

The First Worldwide Congress of Psychiatry, which gave occasion to the 'International Exhibition of Psychopathological Art', was organised by Henri Ey. Two years before this event – and two years after the precursor exhibition at the Sainte Anne Hospital – Ey published on the subject of Surrealism, psychiatry and Psychopathological Art. It is to this essay that we shall now turn in order to set the interest in Psychopathological Art documented above within a discursive context.

[362] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[363] Attendance figures provided by Volmat 1956, pp. 5–6; press coverage in *Arts*, *Art d'aujourd'hui* and *Le Peintre*, as cited in Cousseau 1982, p. 22, n. 4.
[364] Ey 1950, vol. 8 (*Actes Généraux du Congrès*).

4.4 Doctor Henri Ey: 'La Psychiatrie devant le Surréalisme', 1948

Henri Ey completed his medical studies in Paris in the 1920s, simultaneously studying philosophy at the Sorbonne. Initially employed in the Clinic for Mental Illnesses at the Sainte Anne Hospital, he worked under Professor Henri Claude, whose portrait features in Breton's *Nadja*, where the Surrealist author gives an irreverent description of 'his dunce's forehead and that stubborn expression on his face'.[365] In 1931 Ey was appointed chief psychiatrist at the hospital in Bonneval, a hundred kilometres south west of Paris. Mobilised as an army doctor during World War II, before the fall of Paris and on liberation, he otherwise remained in post at Bonneval until his retirement. Ey sustained an influential reputation in Paris post-War through leading weekly seminars at Sainte Anne. His work within psychiatry led him to be described by fellow clinician Jean Oury as a 'king pin' and 'the "gatherer of crowds"'.[366]

In 1948 Ey published 'La Psychiatrie devant le Surréalisme' ['Psychiatry Faces up to Surrealism'] in *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*. This periodical, with its title referencing Henri Bergson's *L'Évolution Créatrice* of 1907, was launched in Paris in 1925. Activity under its name was suspended during World War II but afterwards Ey assumed and sustained the role of manager and editor-in-chief (1947–71).

From the beginning of his essay Ey is forthright in aestheticising madness. Early on he writes:

> 'What psychiatrist worthy of this title has not experienced, in contact with Madness, a subtle intoxication… the delicious anguish in the pit of the stomach, experienced as simultaneous danger and pleasure in the marvellous, as the approach of an absolute of beauty, which takes our breath away, dismembers us.'[367]

His reference to the Surrealist concept of the marvellous is knowing, indeed he goes on, in the first section of his text, which is dedicated to 'The Surrealist

[365] Breton 1928 b, p. 178.
[366] Oury 1989, p. 15 and p. 30 respectively.
[367] Ey 1948, p. 4.

Aesthetic', to quote Breton on the subject.[368] Presumably caught up in Surrealism as the dominant movement of contemporary art in France since his student days, Ey sees this form of practice as paradigmatic for art in general, venturing that all art is 'in its essence Surrealist'.[369] It is not simply the overlap of interest in madness, as exercised by psychiatry on the one hand and Surrealism on the other, that he means to address, therefore, but the very nature of madness in relation to art. His suggestion that another person's madness may be perceived as 'the approach of absolute beauty' gives an early indication of the claims that he will make.

After considering the work of Aragon, Breton, Duchamp and Éluard, also Guillaume Apollinaire and Salvador Dali, in his opening section on 'The Surrealist Aesthetic', Ey moves on to 'Pathological Aesthetic Production'. Here, 'because of its capital importance', he provides an extensive rendering of the descriptions and arguments provided in Prinzhorn's *Bildnerei der Geisterkranken*.[370] While this book had proved so popular that a new edition was issued only a year after it was initially published, its text was not translated into French until 1984. Ey's summary therefore provided greater access to the content of the book for a non-German reading audience and, given that just one image, in black and white, is reproduced, it might have acted as a guide to be used alongside the lavishly illustrated original. Ey presents Prinzhorn's descriptions of the 'aesthetic productions of psychopaths' according to the latter's classificatory system.[371] He then introduces his own categories, which seek to be less visually descriptive and, in line with the Psychopathological Art project, are themed rather in terms of symptoms. In particular he discusses 'aesthetic forms immanent to delirium', in which the art produced '"incorporates" itself with the psychosis'.[372] Here we find an intimation of art that might mark the onset of madness. Yet this art pales for Ey in comparison with the 'lyrical and magical production that constitutes the essence of the delirious conception of the World of the Psychosis' itself. The artwork 'neither brings anything to, nor removes anything from, the aesthetic essence of Delirium: Man has

[368] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[369] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
[370] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[371] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[372] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

metamorphosised into poetry. He has become “aesthetic object”.’[373] His conclusion, emphasised with italics, runs as follows: ‘the essence of madness is to BE an aesthetic forum [*foyer*], rather than to MAKE an artistic oeuvre’.[374]

In the final section of the essay, which unites the two previous ones, addressing ‘Surrealism, Art and Madness’, Ey elaborates on and reinforces his claims. Here he asserts that ‘a delirium is beautiful in the way of a sunset [i.e. rather than in the way of a work of art]... and the associated plastic or poetic productions share exactly the same aesthetic nature.’[375] In his overall conclusion he returns to his being/making distinction, and to the Surrealist concept of the marvellous, contrasting the event that ‘engenders art’ with that which ‘engenders Delirium’ by setting up ‘the “Poet”’ as one who ‘MAKES THE MERVEILLEUX’ and drawing alongside the psychotic, who ‘IS MERVEILLEUX.’[376]

Rather than attributing a mad essence to art making, as Dubuffet was doing at around this time, Ey attributes an aesthetic essence to madness. He denies mad people any agency in this regard, on the one hand denying the art made by a mad person the status of being art and, on the other, presenting the psychotic individual as passive rather than active in what he sees as the aesthetic event of their psychosis. Ey maintains such a distanced medical stance on his patients that he actually describes madness as the event of being aesthetic for others. His mention of ‘metamorphosis’ and ‘becoming’ suggests a process of emergence, however his focus lies on the final state – on madness posited as aesthetic being – rather than on a threshold moment of onset.

Although an influential figure in French psychiatry, Ey’s essay caused consternation in some quarters of the profession. Jean Oury, in his medical thesis of 1950, would single out the text for being particularly interesting while describing its core ideas as simplistic. Oury misquotes Ey as having said ‘patients are “objects of art”.’[377] In fact, as described above, Ey moves in his essay from seeing the mad person as a form of poetry to seeing him or her as

[373] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[374] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[375] *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.
[376] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[377] Oury (1950) 2005, p. 95.

more like a sunset, settling on a designation, that of '"aesthetic object"',[378] which is perhaps no less shocking than the one misattributed by the student psychiatrist. Oury rejects Ey's objectification of patients, presumably on the grounds that it reserves the role of subject for the normal person, for we normal individuals, leaving the mad person beholden to our gaze. Nonetheless, three decades later, when in conversation with his erstwhile student Félix Guattari, Oury would describe La Borde, the psychiatric institution that he founded in 1953 and which he still runs today, as 'a living museum of Art Brut'.[379] Here the objectification of the mentally ill is reinstated. Indeed his words echo Jean-Martin Charcot's nineteenth-century description of the psychiatric institution with which he was closely associated, the Salpêtrière, as 'a sort of living pathological museum'.[380] The shift, over a hundred years, from regarding patients as scientific specimens to seeing them as outsider art objects, may be dismayingly small in terms of movement towards acknowledging the subjectivity of patients, yet it represents an interesting swing in clinical aspiration, away from science and towards aesthetics.

For an attempt to reject the objectification of psychotic patients and, in particular, for an expanded discussion of the event of psychotic onset, which concerns us here, we may turn to François Tosquelles and the medical thesis he submitted to the University of Paris in the same year that Ey's essay 'La Psychiatrie devant le Surréalisme' was published.

[378] Ey 1948, pp. 42–43.
[379] Oury in conversation with Guattari, 19 June 1983 – unpublished document provided by David Reggio. See Reggio and Novello 2007.
[380] Charcot (1882) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 4.

4.5 Doctor François Tosquelles: *Le Vécu de la Fin du Monde dans la Folie*, 1948

François Tosquelles was a Catalonian psychiatrist who fled to France to escape fascist Spain, where he faced the death penalty. Having studied medicine at Barcelona University he worked at the Instituto Pere Mata, during which time he came into close contact with psychiatrists of the Austro-German tradition – refugees from Nazi National Socialism.[381] He then became responsible for psychiatry within the Spanish republican army and fought against the nationalist insurgency during the Civil War. Hunted by Francisco Franco he was forced out of the country and went to France, where he has been associated with two detention camps for Spanish refugees, Argelès and Setfonds.[382] French psychiatrist Gaston Ferdière has claimed credit for the release of Tosquelles and for finding him a post as a medical assistant in the psychiatric hospital of Saint Alban in the Lozère.[383]

Arriving at Saint Alban in 1941, while Paris was under German occupation, Tosquelles joined an institution that was isolated from the state, opposed to the eugenic ideology of the Vichy ministry for health, committed to the French resistance and suffering from the extreme food shortages of war. He became part of the team assembled around Lucien Bonnafé, one of the two directors of the hospital at the time.[384] This team included not only doctors but patients and was further open to artists and theorists. Bonnafé drew Éluard, the Surrealist author, and Georges Canguilhem, physician and philosopher, into the Saint Alban circle.

The doctoral thesis written by Tosquelles, which was the product of research in this context, was submitted to the medical faculty of the University of Paris in 1948. This established him within the medical community of his adopted country post-War and also contributed to his case for French naturalisation, which was completed successfully later that same year. Originally presented with the title 'Essai sur le Sens du Vécu en Psychopathologie' ['Essay on the

[381] Including Austrian Sándor Eiminder and German Werner Wolf.
[382] Gaston Ferdière (1978, p. 131) locates him at Argelès while David Reggio and Mauricio Novello (2007, p. 32) specify Setfonds.
[383] Ferdière 1978, p. 132.
[384] The other director was Paul Balvet.

Sense/Meaning of Pathological Lived Experience'] this title was later reformulated, when the thesis was finally published in 1986, to emphasise a crisis event associated with psychosis: *Le Vécu de la Fin du Monde dans la Folie* [*Lived Experience of the End of the World in Madness*]. In this work Tosquelles seeks to group patients who may be said to find themselves stuck at the moment of psychotic onset, caught at the threshold onto madness, and – according to his characterisation of this condition, as derived from Søren Kierkegaard – living a psychopathological form of aesthetic existence. More broadly he presents madness in general not as an aesthetic event passively instantiated (as posited by Ey) but as an active, indeed creative, response to an encounter with the end of the world.

4.5.1 Creation at the End of the World

Tosquelles opens his thesis with an epigraph that excerpts its lines from a dialogue between an unidentified patient and an unidentified doctor. Cut free from any clinical case notes, the two individuals become protagonists in a brief scene from a play. The former tells the latter 'I am broken, I am not disengaged, not broken, I am like you; I have often thought I was dead but now I am here'. Asked about his death, the patient effectively reports lived experience at the end of the world: he replies that 'it happened all of a sudden, we all disappeared'. And the following exchange then takes place:

> Dr: Who are you?
> Patient: I don't know.
> Dr: Who are you?
> Patient: The creator, the constructor, the creator.
> Dr: What is it that you have created?
> Patient: Everything, the whole world.
> Dr: And yourself?
> Patient: Yes, me too…[385]

With this conversation, which is presumably transcribed although it stands like a script and invites us to assume each of the roles offered, Tosquelles attributes the thesis that he will go on to develop in the ensuing pages of his book to the insight of a patient into the psychiatric condition that has brought him to the doctor's attention. Rather than simply proceeding to diagnose delusion on the basis of the patient's statements, Tosquelles takes what is proffered, namely personal testimony to psychopathological creativity – to world creation in response to a sudden loss of world – as a fact to be explored and amplified.

In the introduction to his thesis, which follows the clinical epigraph, Tosquelles frames and begins to expand on this project. In the first part of the introduction he commits to elaborating 'the dramatic sense [or meaning, *sens*] of mad life'. In making such a commitment he suggests that an element of performance is involved in madness. The implication is not that some form of pretence is

[385] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 19.

entailed, but that living through the end of the world demands re-enactive effort or performative recreation. He goes on:

> In the course of our research into the life of psychotics, we have found ourselves confronted by certain lived phenomena that seemed able to offer a true thread of Ariadne in the quest for knowledge [*connaissance*] of the drama of the alienated.[386]

At the centre of his 'study of the psychopathological event' of madness – in which we are asked to pay attention to the event, rather than to the condition, of madness – Tosquelles puts the lived experience of his patients,[387] leading us to consider the 'drama' of alienation as if we were living it, rather than watching it in others. He shifts emphasis away from some dramatic spectacle as witnessed by a distanced observer – away from Ey's idea of the sane psychiatrist viewing the insanity of a patient like a sunset – and focuses instead on the experience of the mad person, suggesting that living through the end of the world is like finding oneself on some empty psychosocial stage with an improvised performance demanded. With this notion that the world doesn't exist for the mad person without them actively enacting or creating it, he begins to advance a new reading of the psychopathological event of psychosis, one for which art making (the art-making event of extemporised performance) is a better model than a sunset. Here we may find echoes of a Palaeolithic hand-stencilling event and the spirit world this may have opened up for the person we may imagine stencilling his or her hands.[388]

[386] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[387] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[388] Here it matters that we imagine the Palaeolithic person stencilling his or her own hands, rather than another person doing this, since Tosquelles emphasises the activity rather than passivity of psychotic patients in their world creation.

4.5.2 The End of the World

While Tosquelles refers to both the 'existential catastrophe' and the 'cosmic catastrophe' that is suffered in or precipitates madness,[389] he prefers the terminology of 'the end of the world'. He thereby emphasises not only the event at issue but the threshold crossed by the individual experiencing this event. As glossed by Jean Oury in the preface to the publication of Tosquelles's thesis, the end of the world is perceived by the subject, in the event of psychosis, as a 'discontinuity in the line of existence'.[390] It is the moment of rupturing transition between old and new forms – or between different means – of psychosocial existence. Freud had used the same terminology when theorising the experience of paranoiacs in connection with a particular case history published in 1911: 'The end of the world is the projection of this [an] internal catastrophe.'[391] Tosquelles quotes the relevant passage from this text at length, however his concern is not restricted to the diagnostic category of dementia paranoides, or paranoia.

Tosquelles attributes the terminology, 'end of the world', to patients themselves: he includes extended quotes that make direct reference to patients experiencing such a threshold moment. The first patient to be quoted is introduced as 'one of our paraphrenics', who is thus labelled with the term that Freud preferred to schizophrenia (and to dementia praecox); the patient is assigned to the diagnostic category that Freud specifically dissociated from paranoia (that is, from dementia paranoides). This individual is reported as having 'said to us: "Since the end of the world, I am eternity made man..."'[392] The same turn of phrase then features in the reported speech of 'St J…', a 52-year-old patient, who had suffered from epilepsy since the age of eighteen and been resident in the Saint Alban hospital for a decade, with lessening 'convulsive crises'. He is credited with announcing 'It is the end of the world…'[393] Likewise, a 'Mlle L…', for whom symptoms and diagnosis are not

[389] *Ibid.*, p. 80 and p. 65 respectively.
[390] Oury (1985) in Tosquelles 1986, p. 8.
[391] Freud (1911) 1958, vol. 12, p. 70 – and quoted by Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 101. In a footnote Freud remarks: 'An "end of the world" based upon other motives is to be found at the climax of the ecstasy of love (cf. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*)' – see Freud (1911) 1958, vol. 12, p. 69, n. 1.
[392] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 61.
[393] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

given, is described – in a 1934 meeting of the Société Médico Psychologique – as having stated 'I experienced the end of the world'.[394] And similar testimony, sometimes prophecy, is attributed to further patients.[395] Of course the expression 'end of the world' is not employed as a simile by these individuals but used to describe a lived reality, albeit hallucinatory or delusional. At the same time the threat of global annihilation that must surely have been felt during World War II may have inflected their experience and their choice of language to reflect that experience.

Tosquelles relates the end of the world, as encountered in the event of psychosis, to angst, as proposed and discussed by Martin Heidegger. While this implies an uncommon but normal experience – Heidegger would say 'mood' [*Stimmung*] – Tosquelles suggests it may reach an extreme degree, becoming abnormal, in the event of psychosis. Drawing on Heidegger, Tosquelles glosses angst, in relation to his patients, as one of the '"fundamental affective moments"… in which existence becomes "unsteady"'.[396] Developing this understanding from a clinician's perspective, he proposes that existence may become *radically* unsteady, that individuals may suffer pathological angst, giving us new terms by which to understand the psychotic experience of the end of the world.

Tosquelles is quick to acknowledge the longstanding 'technical application' of the 'Heideggerian existential analytic' within European and especially German psychiatry.[397] At the same time he makes rather different use of Heidegger's writing in his own work. In this thesis, Tosquelles not only draws on the concept of angst, he also qualifies his understanding of 'world' in relation to that established by Heidegger. He writes: 'the notion of world, according to Heidegger, has nothing to do with the totality of things in nature. The world has a part in "ipseity".'[398] Here worldliness pervades or amounts to subjectivity as well as objectivity and the distinction between psychology and physicality, between interiority and exteriority, between individuality and collectivity, is erased. He later elaborates upon his interest in world 'as Cosmos, as human

[394] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[395] e.g. Mme Baub, *ibid.*, p. 73.
[396] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[397] *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.
[398] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

existence within a historic community and, finally, as “Ipseity” forming part of human reality’. Here he invokes Dasein and references Heidegger’s ‘Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?’, the first work by the German philosopher to be translated into French – the translation being published a decade before Tosquelles submitted his thesis.[399]

In drawing on a Heideggerian understanding of world, Tosquelles may be seen to distance his own theorising from that of Freud. As already noted, Tosquelles quotes Freud as describing ‘The end of the world’, such as it is experienced in ‘the acute stage of paranoia’, as ‘the projection of this [an] internal catastrophe’. The citation continues, suggesting that ‘a world-catastrophe’ arises when the ‘subjective world has come to an end’.[400] Here Freud makes a fundamental distinction between internal and external life, dividing the unified field that Tosquelles draws on Heidegger in order to posit. If the paranoid fantasy of universal catastrophe – as it is described by Freud – may be seen to leave intact a world that is secured by the collective agreement of we who are not clinically paranoid, then Tosquelles, by contrast, seeks to put this security in question by accepting the point of view of the patient. Accordingly, the world has indeed come to an end and a creative response to this loss, enabling the opening up of new possible worlds, is demanded.

[399] *Ibid.*, p. 190.
[400] *Ibid.*, pp. 101–02 – quoting Freud (1911) 1958, vol. 12, pp. 69–70.

4.5.3 Building on Paranoid Reconstruction and the Fecund Moment of Delirium

Tosquelles again develops the work of Freud, this time through recourse to the work of Jacques Lacan, when elaborating on the nature of the response to the end of the world in madness. He quotes Freud's 1911 description of the activity that accompanies a psychopathological loss of world in dementia paranoides:

> He [the afflicted individual] builds it [the world] by the work of his delusions. *The delusional formation, which we take to be the pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction*.[401]

Tosquelles takes up this notion of psychotic labour, *travail déliriante*, whilst suggesting that the 'effort of salvation' that concerns him is not simply focused upon reconstructing that which pertained before, but on producing anew.[402] Reflecting on his thesis retrospectively, in the foreword that accompanied its belated publication, Tosquelles describes how, albeit 'without ceasing to be oneself', the imperative is 'to become other'.[403] When expanding on the nature of this process of becoming other, the process of generating new worlds, he draws on a biological model of productivity that is used by Lacan in connection with delirium: fecundity.

Tosquelles all but quotes from Lacan's doctoral thesis of 1932, 'Paranoiac Psychosis and its Relationship to the Personality', when he gives an example of the sort of psychological eruption that he is interested in: 'We wish to speak of lived experiences that one envisages as participant more or less in the genesis of psychosis: at the fecund moments of delirious elaboration, for example.' [404] The connection with Lacan is made explicit by Jean Oury in his 1985 preface to the book, where he describes Tosquelles as focussing upon the transformation of lived experience at the end of the world 'through a psychotic process, in what Lacan had defined as the "fecund moment" of delirium'.[405] Tosquelles takes up the notion of fecundity and he works with the associated concept of birth, or rather – maintaining some of the Freudian sense that there is industrial agency

[401] *Ibid.*, p. 102 – quoting Freud (1911) 1958, vol. 12, p. 71 – italics as given in both sources.
[402] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[403] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[404] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[405] Oury (1985) in Tosquelles 1986, p. 8.

required of the individual in question – rebirth. He describes patients who, on encountering the end of the world, are able 'to be reborn [an active rather than passive verb in the French, *renaître*] to a new existence'.[406] Moreover, he promoted this thought to the foreword that he wrote on publication of his thesis, where he accounts for the formation of a novel existence at the end of the world as 'a renaissance'.[407] Plotting a course between labour in the sense of child birth and labour in the sense of putting in work, Tosquelles then introduces the notion of creativity. He insists, with the emphasis of italics, '*Lived experience manifests and expresses this new existence and precisely in manifesting this, creates it.*'[408] Moreover, specifically countering the conclusions of Ey, written that same year, in 1948, he stresses that '*Madness is a creation, not a passivity*.'[409] In other words, in the place of delirious industry (after Freud) and delirious fecundity (after Lacan), we may find in madness, after Tosquelles, a creative psychopathological event.

While Ey argues for psychosis as an aesthetic event to be perceived by an external observer, Tosquelles argues for it instead as a creative event that is experienced, lived in this way, by the psychotic person themselves. While Dubuffet argues that art making is essentially mad, Tosquelles argues that madness is essentially creative. Discussion of essences aside, Tosquelles suggests that an individual experiences psychosis as an eruptive event in which a performative rebirth is demanded that amounts to madness. He is conspicuous amongst his contemporaries for emphasising that a threshold moment is at stake and specifically the active event of passage across a threshold, described as the end of the world and the birthing, creation or improvisation of an alternative.

In proposing this way of understanding madness, Tosquelles allows us to align the hallucinatory and delusional world entered actively by psychotic patients to the spirit world we may imagine was accessed in Palaeolithic times through the practice of hand-stencilling against cave walls. Here the negative handprints found in the caves mark an encounter with the end of the given world, delimited

[406] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 60.
[407] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[408] *Ibid.*, p. 61, italics original.
[409] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

by the rock face, and the event of forging on into – indeed the psychosocial creation of – another world beyond. As such they give visual form to a threshold event that chimes with the onset of madness such as it is understood by Tosquelles. We will now turn to the psychopathological predicament of entrapment within this threshold event.

4.5.4 Psychopathological Aesthetic Existence

While discussing madness or psychosis in general, Tosquelles also seeks to cluster specific psychiatric cases in order to identify a particular form of madness, or to characterise a particular psychotic experience, which he aims to distinguish from established syndromes. Focusing on 'a certain number of patients for whom classic diagnosis remains difficult',[410] he proposes that these individuals – rather than developing fully fledged paranoid delirium, for instance as described by Freud or Lacan – find themselves caught at the threshold moment in which the world ends and a new world, or worlds, begin. Here it is the state of being-at or crossing the threshold is of primary importance, rather than either of the discrete states or worlds that the threshold conjoins, and it is Søren Kierkegaard who provides the theoretical basis. Tosquelles hails Kierkegaard for being 'a man devoted to the study of and research into the sense/meaning [*sens*] of lived experience.'[411] It is the philosopher's journals (and, it should perhaps be noted, the discussion of this material by Jean Wahl) that the psychiatrist quotes in particular.

For the purposes of psychiatric application, Tosquelles focuses on Kierkegaard's descriptions of a trembling of the earth and on his discussion of the state, stage or sphere that emerges out of this event, referred to as aesthetic existence. Given a clinician's inflection, the earth's trembling becomes a catastrophic rupture and the resultant aesthetic existence is psychopathological. As Tosquelles states:

> 'Aesthetic existence appears to us to be one of the forms of life that makes sense of itself [or becomes meaningful, *prend son sens*] in the face of a lived experience of catastrophe.'[412]

Tosquelles only quotes Kierkegaard as reporting a 'great trembling of the earth' once he has noted the same expression being used by his patients.[413] He describes how, for instance, a 'young girl whom we shall call Françoise', who

[410] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[411] *Ibid.*, p. 118.
[412] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[413] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

was admitted to the Saint Alban hospital when hallucinating and delusional, 'confides the terrifying impression of having been present at a "trembling of the earth and everything else", for which she felt responsible.'[414] The same turn of phrase is quoted in the testimony of a 'St-J…' and a 'Mme Baub'.[415] Whilst acknowledging the trembling of the earth reported by Kierkegaard as a 'somewhat confusing and polydetermined situation, which has often disoriented commentators',[416] Tosquelles relates this situation, in its extreme form, to the psychopathological event of suffering the end of the world. As with Heideggerian angst, an instability becomes a rupture.

The patients that Tosquelles seeks to cluster together apparently respond to a psychopathological end of the world without following through to any state that would lead to diagnosis amongst established clinical categories and 'the notion of aesthetic existence such as it was lived by Kierkegaard' comes into play instead.[417] The psychiatrist asserts that 'in aesthetic existence no delirious moment can stabilise itself'.[418] According to Tosquelles, who extrapolates from Kierkegaard, aesthetic existence 'is characterised, above all, by an attitude of "turning away from the real world" and by the substitution, in its place, of possible worlds'.[419] The turn away from the real world that is described here is prompted by a trembling of the earth and, in a psychopathological context, it amounts to the loss of world experienced in some cases of madness. It is important that what this turn or loss precipitates is an ongoing creative effort to instantiate alternatives – a restive existence in which 'one can cannot retain the least stability'.[420] As in the introduction to his thesis, although now making more circumscribed reference to some rather than all insanity, Tosquelles brings a sense of performance to bear, seeing in the act of instantiating possible worlds 'the temptation that theatre offers'.[421] The imperative to act up and the effort of doing so is emphasised when Tosquelles asserts that 'Aesthetic existence appeared to Kierkegaard himself as an attempt at salvation devoted to

[414] *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.
[415] *Ibid.*, p. 67 and p. 72 respectively.
[416] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[417] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[418] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[419] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[420] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[421] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

breakdown'.[422] If, in certain psychopathological cases, what amounts to an attempt at salvation, in the form of enactive entry into alternative worlds, is 'exaggerated sometimes perhaps to the point of caricature',[423] then this is because breakdown has 'developed to the absolute'.[424] In other words, in psychopathological extremis, a person may find themselves stranded at the threshold between worlds, at a loss to the one and teetering at the brink of multiple others.

The focus for the chapter in Tosquelles's book that is otherwise dedicated to Kierkegaard is Thaïs. This woman was a 'particularly complex patient' who was already resident at Saint Alban when Tosquelles arrived in 1941.[425] He writes that she 'posed a very delicate diagnostic problem', describing how:

> We tried in vain to apply clinical and phenomenological analysis to the case. After the breakdown of research into 'pathognomonic signs', we considered the case from a succession of different angles, desperate to understand the patient in her entirety. We homed in on the notion of aesthetic existence.[426]

We are later told the same story in different words, which elaborate on the 'different angles' of approach:

> Sometimes she presented with outright mania, sometimes with a neurotic development, sometimes with paranoid delirium, sometimes as a schizophrenic. There was, however, one link that connected these polymorphic aspects: aesthetic existence.[427]

If Kierkegaard provides the philosophical basis for Tosquelles's book then the clinical basis arises from study of Thaïs. As the psychiatrist readily acknowledges, 'The analysis of this patient constitutes one of the original

[422] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[423] *Ibid.*, p. 123.
[424] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[425] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[426] *Ibid.*.
[427] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

sources of the whole development of the ideas that form the crux of our thesis.'[428]

A number of letters by Thaïs are published, along with other texts attributed to her, including transcribed responses to questions. When interpreting this material, Tosquelles emphasises the drama of her madness and its connection to aesthetic existence such as he finds it in Kierkegaard:

> the temptation to theatre is always there in her… successive incarnations of possibilities… What it is effectively about is simply the "to be" – being in the possible, after catastrophe[429]

In concluding on Kierkegaard and Thaïs, Tosquelles reiterates his stance on aesthetic existence, describing it as 'entry into possible worlds, after the collapse of the familiar world.' Emphasising the psychiatric inflection, he goes on: 'It represents a concrete attempt at salvation in face of the "end of the world".'[430] By linking patient to philosopher, he suggests a precipitous existence for the former: she is trapped in the event of the world ending, perpetually attempting to create and enter into new worlds through improvised performance; flailing or flitting at the psychopathological threshold between worlds.

Tosquelles then moves on to consider the nineteenth century figure of Gerard de Nerval and specifically his final literary work, *Aurélia*. As noted in the second chapter of the present thesis, this text was started by the author whilst he was institutionalised following a major psychotic episode and it was published in two parts in 1855, the second part appearing in print only after his suicide. Tosquelles introduces the text, which is a loosely fictionalised memoir, as follows:

> *Aurélia* is not uniquely a literary work of art, it is a "lived document" of madness. We do not damage the spirit of this work by placing ourselves

[428] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[429] *Ibid.*, p. 139.
[430] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

> outside of all aesthetic considerations in order to examine *Aurélia* as a clinical document.[431]

In approaching Nerval's text as 'a clinical document', the psychiatrist aligns himself with those of his peers interested in Psychopathological Art. And, like his peers contemplating the visual art put on display at the Sainte Anne hospital in 1946 and 1950 (two years either side of his thesis), Tosquelles does not question the aesthetic value of Nerval's work. This is not because he is uncertain as to its aesthetic merit, however, but because he believes this to be unquestionable. Tosquelles otherwise adopts a medical stance with regard to the author's work that chimes with that taken by the doctors gathered by the event of these two Parisian exhibitions. Indeed, we may borrow Volmat's words, written in conjunction with the second exhibition, in order to describe Tosquelles's approach: he takes Nerval's text into 'the territory of the daily psychiatric clinic' to be used as 'a privileged instrument of comprehension'.[432] In other words, Tosquelles proceeds to analyse *Aurélia* in order to clarify the madness as issue for the author, finding 'the description of anecdotal elements characteristic of lived experience at the end of the world' and also the 'progressive elaboration of attempts at salvation and world creation'.[433] He thereby diagnoses Nerval, on the basis of the latter's artwork, with psychopathological aesthetic existence; he situates him at the same psychopathological threshold as Thaïs.

Yet Tosquelles also argues that *Aurélia* is not solely a diagnostic tool for psychiatric use – that it is not exclusively Psychopathological Art. He further interprets the text as 'a "lived document" of madness', that is, as a means by which and through which the author lived his psychosis. In a two-pronged assertion he suggests that:

> '1. Nerval elaborated *Aurélia* so that it would heal him. 2. It is in fixing his pathological experience, in a coherent way, that Nerval made *Aurélia* an

[431] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
[432] Volmat 1956, p. 2.
[433] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 211.

instrument of delirious or delusional elaboration [*d'élaboration déliriante*]. He thus created his personality and defined his destiny.'[434]

Here Tosquelles introduces a new approach to art produced in and reflecting madness, seeing it as an active element in, rather than as passive testimony to – or rather than, after Ey, as passively immanent to – the condition.

This approach was taken up by Jean Oury, a student of Tosquelles who has already been quoted in connection with Ey as well as with his tutor. Oury returns us to consideration of the visual art produced by psychiatric patients and gives further elaboration of the threshold event involved in the onset of madness. Whereas Tosquelles posited psychopathological aesthetic existence as the specific predicament of entrapment at the threshold onto madness, characterised by the opening up of possible worlds but the impossibility of entering into any of these decisively, Oury considered it as descriptive of psychosis more broadly and his work returns us to the event of passage involved.

[434] *Ibid.*, p. 179.

4.6 Doctor Jean Oury: 'Auguste For–', 1949 and *Essai sur la Conation Esthétique*, 1950

Jean Oury joined the team at the Saint Alban hospital in September 1947. A student in the fourth year of his medical training, he found himself in the midst of what he has subsequently described as an environment of 'theoretical effervescence'.[435] As well as heated debate of theory, the hospital introduced him to three patients who made art: Auguste Forestier, Benjamin Arneval and Aimable Jayet. All three are core to his doctoral thesis of 1950, 'Essai sur la Conation Esthétique' ['Essay on Aesthetic Conation'], which also draws extensively on Tosquelles's thesis, which was written at Saint Alban while Oury was an intern there.

Oury met artist Jean Dubuffet in Paris in 1948,[436] the year in which the latter founded the Compagnie de l'Art Brut and moved the collection of associated works to the Gallimard pavilion. In February of the following year Oury completed a short study on the subject of Forestier and his art-making, written at Dubuffet's request and on the occasion of an exhibition of the patient's work.[437] Oury donated a series of wooden sculptures that were made by Forestier to Dubuffet at this time.[438] Reflecting back on his text in 2005, Oury described it as 'a small monograph on' and 'homage to' Forestier, 'at moments in the manner of an "exercise in style" after Queneau' and under the influence of Jung.[439] When production of Dubuffet's Art Brut periodical was delayed, another publisher stepped in and the piece first appeared in print in the review *Bizarre* in 1956, where the works of art photographically reproduced are credited to the collection of an another psychiatrist, Gaston Ferdière. As a result of its prior publication, Oury's text did not make it into the belated *Fascicule de l'Art Brut* that considered Forestier's work, issue 8 of 1966, where Dubuffet himself wrote instead. Nonetheless Oury was published in this forum, in issues 1 and 3 of

[435] Oury 1998, p. 36.
[436] Oury 2005, p. 7.
[437] In the preface to the publication of his thesis in 2005, Oury distances himself from any commission from Dubuffet (p. 8), however the opening of the thesis itself is quite clear on this point (p. 55).
[438] Oury 1989, p. 13, p. 92 and p. 190.
[439] Oury 2005, p. 8.

1964, on the two other patients that he had encountered at Saint Alban some fifteen years previously, Arneval and Jayet respectively.

In his 1949 text on Forestier, Oury toes a medical line on patient anonymity and abbreviates the man's name to For–. He nonetheless emphasises Forestier's artistic practice over his schizophrenic symptoms and he repeats the name 'For–' frequently, rather than referring to him as 'the patient', as a doctor otherwise might.

According to Oury's account, Forestier lived 'in a world that is continually catastrophic'.[440] His response to this predicament is, we are told, a creative endeavour that is simultaneously physical and psychological: 'He constructs, he perpetually constructs himself'.[441] We are introduced to this idea in the opening paragraph of the text, which broaches the art-making, subjectivity and identity of the patient, whilst skirting his psychopathological condition:

> With old pieces of wood, scrap metal, stumps of rubber, broken glass, trouser buttons, old coins, he constructs himself, he builds at random. It would be totally misplaced and useless to seek to describe the man on the one hand and the work [*oeuvre*] on the other. He is man and work at the same time… Auguste For–, you see him in the fellows he makes of wood, you see him also in his boats, in his houses, in his oxcarts, in his rosettes, in his monsters and his swords. But, in addition to all that, he exists, and a whole part of him will be forever invisible.[442]

Further on in the text Oury describes certain assemblages created by Forestier, exploring their potential symbolism in some detail, however he largely stresses the fact or process of creation, and the broader project that might encompass this creativity, rather than stressing what is created. In this he would appear to follow Forestier's lead: 'One could say that the work of art [*oeuvre*] does not interest him, in itself, but rather its fabrication... He lives, he creates – as one, become inseparable.'[443]

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[440] Oury (1949) 2005, p. 16.
[441] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[442] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[443] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In the doctoral thesis that he would write a year and a half later, Oury generalised his emphasis on process over product to other patients and he proposed a name for that one inseparable faculty, in which creativity becomes the means by which a life is lived: aesthetic conation. The psychiatrist uses this turn of phrase in the title of his thesis. It implies the directing of aesthetic efforts, in the event of existential crisis, towards escape or recovery, with works of art playing a role in this process, without being the point of the efforts. What Tosquelles sees in terms of an ongoing improvised performance at the threshold of madness – that is, in terms of psychopathological aesthetic existence – Oury sees manifest in art objects.

We are told that, in the case of Forestier, creative effort in the face of psychological breakdown involves recourse to 'materials from the detritus of the world.' Oury continues: 'It is on the basis of these ashes that he wishes to be reborn [*veut renaître*]. Schizophrenic renaissance… he builds and he builds himself.'[444] Here the notion of creative action dedicated to rebirth following existential catastrophe recalls the writing of Tosquelles, however a material dimension, in the form of visual art, is added. In this way Oury develops Tosquelles's approach to *Aurélia* by Nerval – not his treatment of this final literary work as Psychopathological Art, or as some passive form of testimony to madness, but his discussion of the text as a means by which and through which the author actively lived his madness.

No works by Forestier were included amongst the two thousand presented at the 'International Exhibition of Psychopathological Art' held at the Parisian hospital of Sainte Anne in the autumn of 1950. Although Bonnafé, Tosquelles, Oury and Ferdière all took part in the event that gave occasion to the exhibition, the First Worldwide Congress of Psychiatry, none contributed works to the associated gallery displays of paintings, drawings and sculpture by patients. Oury visited the exhibition with Dubuffet and they concurred in criticising the dividing line that it drew between art created by patients and that made by anyone else.[445] Nonetheless, the two men were not wholly united in their

[444] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[445] Oury 1989, p. 16.

approach to these matters. When Oury completed his doctoral thesis in medicine shortly afterwards, the praise that he gave to the artist's project was qualified: 'The current movement of Art Brut, as represented by Dubuffet, seems to me to enlarge the notion of aestheticism by drawing on a very solid basis, although sometimes seeming to lack theoretical elaboration.'[446] In fact, Oury's thesis may be read as a bid to provide an elaboration of the sort that he found to be lacking in Dubuffet's project – a bid that tapped the 'theoretical effervescence' he had been a part of when working at the Saint Alban hospital.[447] In particular, his thesis attempts to theorise the ongoing event of psychosis such as it is experienced by patients whose condition may be characterised, after Tosquelles, as psychopathological aesthetic existence.

Whereas Tosquelles draws on the writing of Kierkegaard in order to theorise the predicament of his patients, Oury turns instead to French philosophers of his own era. The first reference in his *Essay on Aesthetic Conation* is to a work by Jean-Paul Sartre first published a decade previously, in 1940, *L'Imaginaire: Psychologie Phénoménologique de l'Imagination* [*The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*]. This work, and specifically its discussion of what Oury describes as the 'passage by annihilation into imaginary existence',[448] emerges as a cornerstone for the psychiatrist's thesis. Oury endeavours to refine the concept of imaginary existence, as considered by Sartre, into a concept of aesthetic existence that specifically suits his clinical context and particular purposes. In order to elaborate on the nature of passage into imaginary or aesthetic existence – that is, on the threshold event of annihilation and of emergence founded on this annihilation – Oury draws on the work of Étienne Souriau, professor of aesthetics at the Sorbonne in Paris at the time. In particular he quotes five paragraphs from Souriau's book of 1943, *Les Différents Modes d'Existence*. What the psychiatrist seeks to borrow from the philosopher is a notion of 'transcendentalisation', which signifies the operation of transcendence between existential states. Here the extended noun, transcendentalisation, emphasises the status of in-betweenity or in-betweeness rather than that of destination: transcendence is posited as a transformational event, without its ever being or becoming a mode of existence in itself.

[446] Oury (1949) 2005, p. 58.
[447] As already quoted, Oury 1998, p. 36.
[448] Oury (1950) 2005, p. 105.

According to Souriau, as quoted by Oury: 'transcendence, *qua* passage, active and real change, distinguishes itself precisely in this innovation of [existential] mode'.[449] The emergence of psychopathological aesthetic existence is thereby described as an active event of existential innovation.

Oury goes on to characterise this innovation in terms that recall, whilst developing, those of Tosquelles. He describes the 'shift or rift [*décalage*] between practical and aesthetic existence, in which the latter exists only through the annihilation of the former' and presents this as entailing 'a positive emergence into a new world.'[450] He further describes this emergence as:

> 'An explosive phenomenon that finds echoes in diverse directions: in a catalytic reaction, the crystallisation of a solution in superfusion, or biological mutation, in revelation or grace – existential phenomena marked by the category of discontinuity.'[451]

Here a critical moment or event of passage, with an eruptive force, is emphasised. Like Tosquelles on the subject of what emerges at the psychopathological end of the world, Oury also relates the event of emergence to that of a 'birth', expanding this to suggest that 'emergence is brutal', with inauguration founded on 'rupture'.[452] And, like Tosquelles, although specifically through stressing the agency implied by his choice of word, 'conation', Oury makes the psychopathological act of being reborn – and of rebirthing the world – the result of one's own birthing efforts. There is thus a continuity set against the discontinuity; a threshold is implicated.

Oury would bring an added dimension to this discussion four decades later, when reflecting back on the concerns of his thesis in a course of seminars that he led in Paris in 1986–88, under the title of 'Création et Schizophrénie'. Here, in describing acts of 'schizophrenic reconstruction' following breakdown, Oury gave a physical, specifically manual, interpretation, finding something 'of the

[449] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[450] *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.
[451] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[452] *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

order of the hand'.[453] He went on to describe the 'emergence' that is at issue as a 'manifestation', stressing the role of the hand [*main*] implied in this term and directing his seminar participants, to Heidegger's concept of 'Handwork'.[454] In a seminar given four months later he quoted the emphatic statement made by Tosquelles in *Le Vécu de la Fin du Monde dans la Folie*, '*Madness is a creation, not a passivity*'. He then added, 'It is a "manifestation"'.[455] Here, in the presence of the hand, as seen by Oury after Tosquelles, we see the ghost of Palaeolithic hand stencils such as they are to be discussed in the forthcoming two chapters – as marks of passage to free and mad being (after Georges Bataille) and as traces of mental exile (after André Leroi-Gourhan). Oury himself invokes the prehistoric painting at Lascaux in his seminars, hinting that this cave art testifies to an ancient and continuing urge to both creation and schizophrenia.[456]

[453] Oury (5 November 1986) 1989, p. 20.
[454] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[455] Oury (4 March 1987) 1989, p. 54.
[456] Oury (25 February 1987) 1989, p. 32.

4.7 Psychopharmacology and the Brain

The theses of Oury and Tosquelles and Ey's essay on Surrealism were written on the eve of the transformation of psychiatric treatment via the field of psychopharmacology, with different drugs that act on the brain proving to be more or less effective in combatting the symptoms of different psychological disorders. The rapidity of the international spread of drug psychotherapy after World War II echoed the turn towards electroconvulstive therapy before and during it. A major contribution to the field at this time was the discovery and use of a drug now renowned as the first antipsychotic medication, administered in order to reduce hallucination and delusion: chlorpromazine.

The story of the rise of chlorpromazine – or, more precisely, of 10-(3-dimethylaminopropyl)-2-chlorphenothiazine – originates in France,[457] where we may trace the ensuing speculation regarding the threshold and interactivity between the brain and experience. Chlorpromazine was first synthesised in the Spécia Laboratories, a branch of the French pharmeceutical company Rhône-Poulenc, in December 1950. Produced by chemist Paul Charpentier, under the tag 4560 RP,[458] it was released for clinical investigation as a possible potentiator of general anaesthesia. A little over a year later, Henri Laborit, a surgeon and physiologist in the French army, reported trials with the drug, describing it as 'a new vegetative [i.e. autonomic] stabiliser'.[459] The psychiatric application of chlorpromazine was then reported, shortly afterwards, by Joseph Hamon, Jean Paraire and Jean Velluz of the neuropsychiatric service at Val de Grâce, the military hospital in Paris. Under their care, one Jacques Lh., a 24-year-old man suffering from manic agitation, received the drug. His treatment also involved barbiturates and electroshocks, nonetheless the effective use of chlorpromazine was reported by Colonel Paraire at a meeting of the Parisian Société Médico-Psychologique in February 1952, and subsequently published in the associated journal.[460]

[457] History of chlorpromazine based on Swazey 1974, unless noted otherwise.
[458] Where RP indicates 'Rhône-Poulenc'; the drug was subsequently manufactured in France as Largactil and in North America as Thorazine.
[459] Laborit, Huguenard and Alluaume 1952, p. 206.
[460] Hamon, Paraire and Velluz, 1952.

Rather more famously, clinical investigation of chlorpromazine started at the Sainte Anne Hospital in March 1952 under Pierre Deniker and Jean Delay. Professor of Mental Illness and Brain Disease, Delay was head of the University of Paris's psychiatry department, as based at the hospital. He also acted as President of the First Worldwide Congress in Psychiatry in 1950, as organised by Henri Ey and which provided occasion for the 'International Exhibition of Psychopathological Art'. Quick to introduce electroencephalography and electro-convulsive treatment into France before World War II, Delay collaborated with Deniker, post War, on the sequence of papers that, within six months during 1952, would set the stage for the uptake of chlorpromazine into psychiatric practice. The drug became available on prescription in France in November 1952 and spread quickly to other countries. An international colloquium on its therapeutic uses within psychiatry was convened under Delay's presidency at the Hôpital Sainte Anne in 1955. This event, which was supported by Spécia, the pharmaceutical firm responsible for chlorpromazine's development, drew over 250 participants from 18 countries.[461]

In their initial report on chlorpromazine, presented at the centennial meeting of the Société Médico-Psychologique, Delay and Deniker speculated that the drug might act through the 'inhibition, disconnection or exclusion' of 'pathogenic neuro-endocrine mechanisms'.[462] Scientific research conducted since the 1950s has developed and dismissed different aspects of this early conjecture. While the strong claim that a specific pathology might be treated by the drug has generally been abandoned, the implication that it acts by disrupting neuronal activity has been upheld, with the blockage of specific dopamine receptors in the brain now widely held to be crucial. At the time when use of chlorpromazine was becoming established, an understanding was emerging that processing within the central nervous system involved electrochemical synaptic transmission, however neurotransmitters such as dopamine were only identified at the end of the 1950s.

[461] Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Venezuela.
[462] Delay, Deniker and Harl 1952, p. 112.

In a presentation to the Académie Nationale de Médecine in 1955, Delay coined the term 'neuroleptic' to describe a category of drugs that chlorpromazine was taken to exemplify. With this term he endeavoured to describe the brain-based operation of the drug; as a 'neuroleptic', chlorpromazine is said to *seize* the *nerves*, to dampen brain activity. An alternative classification of the drug, which was applied in North America, viewed it as 'antipsychotic' – thereby identifying the syndrome, psychosis, that it was held to be effective in countering. By contrast, the French preference for 'neuroleptic' hints at ambitions to understand psychosis in terms of brain activity, indeed specifically overactivity. In his thesis of 1950, Oury offers one concession to such ambitions, suggesting that when it comes to understanding pyschotic world creation, 'for those who like biological correspondences, one might propose the histological image of nervous pathways in the brain being facilitated'.[463] Here he presents increased neuronal connectivity across the brain as a correlate for the event of psychopathological entry into the aesthetic imaginary.

Tosquelles, in his thesis of two years before, expresses a wariness regarding attempts to replace or transpose discussion of the psychological with or into discussion of the neurological – resisting bids to surpass the 'semiology' of mental functions with the 'semiology of the nervous system'.[464] He stresses the fact that what matters to him (and, we might add, to Oury) is the lived reality of his patients rather than what he refers to as the 'figurative language' adopted in the guise of neurology.[465] Here he might be seen to chafe at the limited understanding of brain processing at the time of his writing, mistrustful of figuration unsupported by observation, but the forcefulness of the position he takes against what he stridently calls 'the neurological travesty' also implies a reminder that the mind cannot be reduced to the brain, that psychiatry cannot be reduced to brain doctoring.[466] And yet this position does not prevent him from occasionally echoing the tenets of pathological anatomy dating from a century previously, for instance when he describes the state of consciousness experienced in psychosis as 'more or less determined by the morbid neuro-

[463] Oury (1950) 2005, p. 69.
[464] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 51.
[465] *Ibid.*
[466] *Ibid.*

humoural structure'.[467] Nor did it prevent him from using electro-convulsive or brain-shocking techniques with therapeutic intention on some of his patients – for instance, on a 'young girl that we shall call Françoise', as reported in his thesis.[468]

In fact, Tosquelles proves eloquent when allowing himself to consider – in figurative terms – the relationship or indeed threshold between mind and brain, in particular when he describes 'the fecund moment of passage from biological to psychological structures.'[469] This description chimes with the notion of fecundity that he draws on when discussing the onset of psychosis, following Lacan's lead on delirium. And, as such, and in concert with the concerns of the present thesis, it suggests a resonance between the event of the mind being wrested from the brain, by the brain, and the event of psychotic onset. Tosquelles further elaborates on this resonance when he relates the loss of consciousness that occurs as we fall asleep, understood as a brain-based event, to the end of the world such as it is encountered in psychosis:

> on the genetico-neurological level the passage from wakefulness to sleep constitutes one of the biological catastrophes of which the lived experience of catastrophe is a harmonic or simply an echo[470]

We may further push the analogy that Tosquelles sees between the onset of sleep and the psychopathological loss of world: addressing ourselves to the ensuing moment at each scale of analysis, we may relate the onset of dream experience to the psychotic event of world creation.

[467] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[468] *Ibid.*, p. 70: 'After several electroshock sessions the patient calmed down, her language became coherent, her exaltation disappeared and a picture of seeming psychasthenia, with obsessive and hypochondriac symptoms, appeared.'
[469] *Ibid.*, p. 106. And this line is quoted by Oury (1950) 2005, p. 122.
[470] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 112.

4.8 Conclusion

Antonin Artaud not only knew the threshold onto madness but crossed it on stage and named it on the radio. Otherwise, while artists and psychiatrists in France before and after World War II showed an increasing interest in the art of the certified insane, they did not see in such artwork the event of psychotic onset. Where the Surrealists looked for a freedom and Jean Dubuffet championed this in the name of Art Brut, doctors amassed their patients' work in the hopes of its acting as an interpretive tool. At the same time certain clinicians adopted the language of art and art-making in their theorising, with the event of psychotic onset viewed in aesthetic terms by Henri Ey and as creativity in extremis by François Tosquelles.



Study for 'Skin' I by Jasper Johns is a crystallisation of the idealised view of madness that was, in a celebration of art made by psychiatric patients, playfully announced by the Surrealists and seriously pursued by Dubuffet. The free-floating hands and dazzled eyes suggest a moment of divine liberation or deliverance – a threshold event that gives a view onto the infinite – such as it

was attributed to the insane by Paul Éluard in 'Le Génie sans Miroir' in 1924. We may simultaneously see in the print-drawing the moment of entry into the oasis from which we are barred in two of Dubuffet's Algerian sketches from 1948; further construed as passage through the locked door imposed by rationality and reason, giving onto the mad fields of freedom beyond, as envisaged by Breton in 'L'Art des Fous, la Clé des Champs', written that same year. Where Dubuffet makes a hand mark the threshold, the Johns figure uses his hands and face to push across. We are reminded of the Palaeolithic hand stencils found in caves, where – through the projection of pigment from the mouth – they may mark the threshold event of flight across the rock face into a spirit realm beyond.

In his medical thesis of 1948, Tosquelles emphasised the devastating catastrophe of the world ending for those suffering psychosis and, in particular, the effort demanded in the creation of new worlds given this event. Looking again at *Study for 'Skin' I*, now after reading *Le Vécu de la Fin du Monde dans la Folie*, we see a person transfixed at the end of the known world and on the psychotic threshold of another to be created. We see the critical moment of all forms of madness, such as they are conceptualised in general by Tosquelles, or, if an enduring condition of entrapment at the precipice between worlds, the specific predicament that he describes as psychopathological aesthetic existence. The psychiatrist perceives such a predicament in Gerard de Nerval's account of, and story about, madness, 'Aurélia'. Where Tosquelles reads this text as the 'lived document' of an experience at the end of the world,[471] we may see the print-drawing by Johns as documenting a performance of this same threshold event.

Fellow psychiatrist Jean Oury saw something specifically manual, or hand-made, in the event of schizophrenic world-creation and this element is clearly emphasised in *Study for 'Skin' I*. The raised and open hands further invite analysis at a neuronal level: now the spread of fingers apes the burst of an action potential and imply the moment of experience that results from a dispersed multiplicity of such events. Moreover, the empty hands suggest the release of neurotransmitters into synapses across the brain; that is, the

[471] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 161.

chemical discharge triggered by the spike in a neuron's membrane potential. If the print-drawing freezes this moment of release into the synaptic cleft then we perhaps see the effect of the neuroleptic drug Chlorpromazine, which inhibits dendrite receptors on the far side, forcing dopamine to linger at the threshold between neurons. Now held back from hallucination and delusion pharmacologically, the Johns figure stands at, without crossing, the threshold onto madness.

Chapter 5: Georges Bataille and Prehistoric Cave Art

In 'Le Surréalisme au Jour le Jour' ['Surrealism from Day to Day'], written in 1951, Georges Bataille recalls learning of Antonin Artaud's 1937 hospitalisation for madness: 'I had the feeling that someone was walking over my grave.'[472] Here he implies an empathetic horror at losing one's mind, while specifically suggesting that the threshold at stake in the onset of madness is underscored by that between life and death. If there is empathy here, or the spectre of his own insanity, then Bataille may remind us of his early claim – made under a pseudonym – that he had witnessed the psychosis of both his parents: in *Histoire de l'Oeil* [*Story of the Eye*], of 1928, he attributed an episode of madness to each of them.[473]

In Bataille's 1951 reflections on Surrealism, he hails Artaud's letters from the psychiatric clinic in Rodez, published five years previously, for their 'singular capacity to shock and brutally to surpass habitual limits'.[474] Moreover, he quotes Maurice Blanchot in relating Artaud to '"the mind [or head, *tête*] that, in order to become free, undergoes the proof of the Marvellous"'.[475] Here Bataille promulgates the Surrealist association between freedom and the onset of madness, while presenting Artaud as a particular and tragic casualty of the event of becoming free/mad.[476] In his subsequent book on the prehistoric paintings in the Lascaux cave, Bataille would move on to celebrate this same event in a dramatic transposition of context.

Bataille's 1955 publication *La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art* [*Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*] will be the focus for

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[472] Bataille (1951) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 8, p. 180.
[473] In the epilogue to the story of sexual experimentation related in this, his first, book, his father is described as hallucinating and howling in an 'attack of lunacy', before his mother 'suddenly lost her mind too', apparently 'in a crisis of manic-depressive insanity'. See Bataille (1928) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, p. 77. Bataille would subsequently reiterate these accounts, although they have been challenged by his brother. See Surya 2002, pp. 4–5 and pp. 11–13. In fact their accuracy is not particularly at issue: the point here is not to insist that there was psychological disorder in Bataille's family but rather to establish that he had an interest in the subject and possibility of madness.
[474] Bataille (1951) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 8, p. 182.
[475] *Ibid*.
[476] He suggests that Artaud's last years show us 'the spectacular shipwreck' of Surrealism. See *ibid.*, p. 183.

study in the present chapter. As an extended essay it will be analysed for its characterisation of the evolutionary event of human species emergence, with resonances sought in the psychopathological event of the onset of madness. It will simultaneously be analysed visually, in terms of its use of photographs. First, however, the art at Lascaux, Bataille's concern with this art and the context for this concern, will be outlined.

Since it was Lascaux in particular that galvanised his thinking about Palaeolithic cave art, Bataille does not much concern himself with stencilled hand marks, which, although commonly found in amongst the other prehistoric art at various French and Spanish caves, have a disputed presence, if any, at this specific site. The current chapter will conclude with an extrapolation of how we might see stencilled hands in light of Bataille's writing on prehistoric art.

5.1 The Prehistoric Cave Art at Lascaux

The art at Lascaux was discovered by chance by four teenage boys in September 1940. Bataille gives an extended description of the discovery event in his book on the art but, unlike his predecessors on the subject, he annexes the narrative, confining it to a concluding section dedicated to 'Notes and Documentary Material'. The first report to be published on the Lascaux cave art, which opens with an account of its discovery, was written by the cleric Henri Breuil. An early and influential specialist in prehistoric art, as described in Chapter 2, Breuil was amongst those responsible for authenticating the art in the cave. He read the first official description of the paintings and engravings to the Parisian *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* in October 1940, within months of the fall of the city to the Nazis during World War II. Concluding this brief report, he described the cave as 'the "Sistine Chapel"' of its era; 'equalling in splendour' the art found at Altamira, in Spain, and yet 'still more ancient'.[477]

The Lascaux cave is located on the edge of a plateau above the River Vézère in the Dordogne region of France. It constitutes a relatively small network of caverns and passageways, some of the latter originally found to offer crawling room only. The largest chamber is typically dubbed 'the hall of the bulls' given its scale and after the four large depictions of these animals on its walls. These bulls feature in amongst and overlap several horses, deer, an ox, a cow and an invented creature for which Breuil adopted the term 'unicorn', in spite of the creature's two horns.[478] There is a profusion of black, red and tawny lines and tones. Bataille describes a 'stampede' of 'entangled animals, filling all available space'.[479] Further painted animals feature across the walls and ceilings of the connecting passageways and caverns. Church architecture has inspired the naming of the two smaller chambers in the cave, which are commonly known as the 'apse' and 'nave'.[480] Numerous overlapping engravings of animals, as well as paintings, populate the 'apse' and also the passage connecting this space to 'the hall of the bulls'. At the extreme end of the 'apse' the ground drops away

[477] Breuil 1940, p. 490.
[478] Breuil 1952, p. 118.
[479] Bataille 1955, p. 63 and p. 53 respectively.
[480] Windels (1948) 1949, p. 23.

into a shaft, sometimes known as the 'well'.[481] Here the depicted form that most closely resembles a person is found, although this figure is schematically rendered – relative to the other animals depicted in the cave – and it apparently has a beak rather than a mouth. In the 'nave' there are, amongst other paintings, grids of coloured squares: the most elaborate of the many abstract marks in the cave, which are typically known, after Breuil, as 'blazons'.[482] A painted passage that extends away from the main 'hall of the bulls' without leading into any further chambers is, with museological overtones, commonly referred to as a 'gallery'.

In Breuil's first report on Lascaux he claims to identify 'One solitary small hand, and arm, outlined in red'.[483] Here he refers to the stencilling technique of mark-making that had been noted in other caves painted prehistorically. In his subsequent tome on *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal: Les Cavernes Ornées de l'Âge du Renne*, Breuil reiterates his earlier claim but slackens its terms, so that only an arm and not strictly a hand is noted: 'an experienced eye can make out the small arm of a child stencilled in faded red. This is the only example of those Aurignacian hands stencilled in colour that are so abundant in other caves and this is probably the oldest figure at Lascaux.'[484] André Leroi-Gourhan, the prehistorian steadily emerging as a successor to Breuil, whose work will be studied in the next chapter of this thesis, addressed himself to the matter of stencils in the cave at a time poised between Breuil's two pronouncements: he proves content to acknowledge the absence at Lascaux, asserting that relative to other sites of Palaeolithic painting it 'lacks only the hands'.[485] We may nonetheless analyse prehistoric hand-stencils, as found in other caves, in light of interpretations of the marks found instead at Lascaux.

[481] Breuil 1940, p. 488.
[482] *Ibid*.
[483] *Ibid*., p. 487.
[484] Breuil 1952, p. 111.
[485] Leroi-Gourhan introduction to Windels (1948) 1949, p. 12.

5.2 Bataille's Lascaux Project in Relation to his Other Work

Bataille made his first visit to the cave at Lascaux in 1952, a dozen years after the discovery of Palaeolithic art there and four years after its first being opened to the public. Based in Orléans at the time, he addressed the local Society for Agriculture, Science, Literature and Art on the subject in the December following his trip, leading 'Une Visite à Lascaux'. The following August he reflected on his encounter with the prehistoric paintings in the cave for Paris's weekly *Arts* magazine, inviting the readership 'Au Rendez-Vous de Lascaux'. Within three years his book dedicated to the cave's art was in print and widely circulated. His Orléans audience was primed with another lecture, this time including a film-screening, in January of 1955.

La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art of 1955 is a lavish publication and acted as the launch volume for Albert Skira's lavish series, *Les Grands Siècles de la Peinture*. It was the first book to reproduce colour photographs of the Lascaux cave and was planned to reach a large audience, with simultaneous release in (American) English, for distribution – as advertised on the dust jacket – in 'Great Britain and the Dominions'. Interest in London had been tested the year before with a show mounted by the Arts Council: *Cave Drawings, an Exhibition of Drawings by the Abbé Breuil of Palaeolithic Paintings and Engravings*. While Bataille credits Breuil's oeuvre and initial assistance in the preface to his book,[486] he apparently intended his own work to address an oversight by such authorities in the field:

> There is, I think, a lacuna in the standard considerations of prehistoric times. Prehistorians inspect documents accumulated with immense patience and labour, sifting and classifying with great skill… But, following the single method that befits a specialised discipline, they restrict themselves to reflections on these documents, which constitute their domain. They do not pose the whole question of the passage from animal to human[487]

[486] Bataille 1955, p. 7.
[487] Bataille 1955, pp. 30–31.

Here we may take ‘passage’ to indicate not a prescribed path, a route laid out in advance with a preordained destination, but rather an event of transformation, or a decisive moment in the forging of a path in its walking. Bataille sees this event of passage as marked in the art at Lascaux – and he hears its echo in the mark-making event in which he imagines this art was made.

Bataille’s interest in prehistoric mark-making may be traced back through his education at the École des Chartes in Paris from 1918 to 1921: here he trained and excelled in the study and conservation of books, early manuscripts and other elements of French cultural heritage or *le patrimoine*, before starting work as a numismatist in the *cabinet des médailles* at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.[488] Whilst employed in this capacity he would form friendships with Michel Leiris, Théodore Fraenkel and André Masson, thereby coming into contact with Surrealism, and he would write his first texts touching on the subject of prehistoric art. These texts were completed for the infamous and influential periodical that he was closely associated with, *Documents*, which ran to fifteen issues between 1929 and 1930 with ‘Archaeologie, Beaux Arts, Ethnographie’ as its core concerns. Bataille specifically tackled the subject of prehistoric art in his review of Georges-Henri Luque’s book *L’Art Primitif*, where it was likened to children’s drawings, and also in his response to an exhibition at the Salle Pleyel of research into South African murals, which he compared with Palaeolithic cave art. He touched on the evolution of humanity in a number of early texts, including that which he contributed to the first issue of *Documents*, 'Le Cheval Académique'.

Documents is not only an important precedent for *La Peinture Préhistorique* because it provided a context for Bataille’s early writing on related material and consonant ideas, it also represents a key experiment in the conjunction of visual and verbal thinking: the interplay between the photographic and the textual in Bataille’s book on Lascaux builds on what he here accomplished with colleagues a quarter of a century earlier. If the more sumptuous feel of the book seems instead to recall *Minotaure*, the subsequent art magazine associated, by contrast, with André Breton – and thereby with official Surrealism – then this

[488] Biographical details taken from Bataille’s ‘Notice Autobiographique’, attributed to 1958, in the first instance and otherwise from Surya 2002, unless noted otherwise.

may be attributed to the publisher behind both ventures being Albert Skira. In fact, before clinching with Breton for *Minotaure*, Skira had first approached Bataille as an editor for the magazine, on the basis of the demise of *Documents*. The collaborative relationship between them would then wait until *La Peinture Préhistorique* in 1955.

It will be argued here that Bataille's Lascaux book hinges on the threshold onto madness. This may or may not reflect personal experience or close observation of psychological disorder. While he claimed to have witnessed the insanity of his parents in *Story of the Eye*, as already noted, Bataille would later suggest he subsequently suffered his own 'serious psychological crisis [*une crise morale grave*]' in *Le Bleu du Ciel* [*Blue of Noon*] (written in 1935).[489] This book, which has been described as both hallucinated and hallucinatory,[490] would not be published for more than two decades, coming out after *La Peinture Préhistorique* and, given the nature of its explicit sexual content, for a distinctly smaller audience. Rather than marking the onset of a form of madness or leading us into a quasi psychotic episode, which it will be argued are among the achievements of the Lascaux book, *Blue of Noon* freewheels in and out of an illusionary realm without regard for thresholds.

In the latter 1930s, Bataille mustered a group around the pursuit of erotic and horrific limit experience – founding a secret society with this among its more or less obscure aims. Here madness was less explicitly the issue than an event of ecstatic sacrifice. In the related journal, *Acéphale*, which was launched in 1936, it was proclaimed on the centre spread that 'Man has escaped from his head, like the condemned man from prison',[491] while the back page insisted that the event would be repeated, that 'Man will escape from his head, like the condemned man from prison'.[492] Although Bataille does not relate this assertion to prehistoric cave art it is tempting to read it in connection with Palaeolithic hand stencils, in particular where these come together in a pair and at shoulder height, implying a missing head between them.[493]

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[489] Bataille (1958?) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 7, p. 461.
[490] Surya 2002, p. 213.
[491] Bataille, Klossowski and Masson 1936, unpaginated.
[492] *Ibid*.
[493] As, for instance, above the loin and haunches of the second spotted horse at Pech Merle, as described in the next chapter and illustrated here and more extensively there.



Cover of the first issue of *Acéphale*, 1936



Painting at Pech Merle, c. 25,000 BP

The shift in tenses in *Acéphale* would then make sense: it is as if the evidence that the escape has happened once will ensure that it will happen again. The prison bars that define the threshold crossed in the modern scenario of escape then echo the rock face that is traversed – as will be argued below – in the prehistoric event of hand stencilling. Reflecting back on his secret society two decades subsequently, a few years after having published his book on Lascaux, Bataille would suggest that at least some of its members had achieved a comparable escape when operating under its remit, noting they 'apparently retained the impression of "exiting out of the world"', a threshold event further described as 'momentary, without doubt, and evidently unendurable'.[494]

Two books written by Bataille during World War II have resonances with his Lascaux project, which came after it. He summed up *Le Coupable* [*The Guilty*], of 1944, as 'describ[ing] a mystical and heterodoxical experience in the course of development' and this bears relation not only to his own encounter with the art at Lascaux but to how he envisages the prehistoric mark-making events in the cave.[495] Similar allusions may be found in Maurice Blanchot's summation of Bataille's slightly earlier work, *L'Expérience Intérieure* [*Inner Experience*] of

[494] Bataille (1958?) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 7, pp. 461–62
[495] *Ibid.*, p. 462.

1942. Blanchot glosses Bataille's core concept as 'limit-experience' and defines this as 'the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically in question'.[496] Here too there are hints of the event of Palaeolithic mark-making, as it is imagined by Bataille and – if we envisage finding ourselves rather than putting ourselves in the predicament of radical questioning – there is a suggestion of madness.

Bataille left Paris during World War II, terminating two decades of employment at the Bibliothèque Nationale and moving to Vézelay in Burgundy. He maintained his engagement with prehistoric art, post-war, through *Critique* – a more sober forum than *Documents* or *Acéphale* and endorsed by the National Centre for Scientific Research. Bataille founded this monthly review of publications in 1946 and his work for the journal returned him frequently to Paris. In *Critique* Bataille covered several of the books he later referenced in his Lascaux monograph, reviewing the new edition of *L'Homme et le Sacré* by Roger Caillois issued in 1950, for instance, and Breuil's veritable tome on European Palaeolithic cave art, *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal* of 1952. Emphasising the angle he would take in his subsequent book on Lascaux, this latter review was titled 'The Passage from Animal to Human and the Birth of Art'. By the time his article on Breuil's book had come out, Bataille had moved to Orléans, where he assumed a post as director/keeper of the municipal library; and by the time of his writing his review of *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal* he had visited Lascaux.

A year after his book about the cave had been published, Bataille used the forum of *Critique* in order to take on the work of Breuil's successor, Leroi-Gourhan. He does this in his review of the first volume of *Histoire Universelle* published by Gallimard's Encylopédie de la Pléiade, where Leroi-Gourhan contributes the opening chapter, on prehistory, and to which Bataille gives disproportionate attention. Leroi-Gourhan wrote this text before the major works that will be analysed in the next chapter of this thesis but he was already well established as an authority in the field at the time. In his 1956 review of the text, Bataille accuses Leroi-Gourhan of downplaying 'the passage from animal to

[496] Blanchot 1969, p. 302.

human',[497] of not according it the status of an event but dispersing it instead within a general picture of gradual change.

Bataille would return to the subject of Lascaux – in particular amongst the other examples of Palaeolithic cave art known at the time – in two of the four books he published after *La Peinture Préhistorique* of 1955. In *L'Érotisme ou la Muse en Question de l'Être* [*Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*], of 1957, he committed to developing 'a coherent interpretation' of just one collection of marks found in the cave, the so-called 'scene in the shaft', in which human figuration apparently features.[498] Bataille came back again to this particular set of marks in the cave in *Les Larmes d'Éros* [*The Tears of Eros*] of 1961, where he dedicates the first half of the book to prehistory in general and the 'scene in the shaft' at Lascaux in particular. Here, once more, under the title of 'The Beginning (The Birth of Eros)' he emphasises the event of transformative passage, seeing in it the scope to claim an originary moment.

[497] Bataille (1956, *Critique* 111–112) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 12, p. 419.
[498] Bataille 1957, p. 83.

5.3 Previously on the Subject of Lascaux

The earliest publication wholly dedicated to the Lascaux cave was produced in 1948 by photographer Fernand Windels. The first to take pictures of the cave, directly after its discovery, Windels spent three months at the site in 1940, working under Breuil. The title of his book, *Lascaux, 'Chapelle Sixtine' de la Préhistoire* picks up on the concluding statement of Breuil's first report on the cave. Here, as already indicated, Breuil suggests that, since the Altamira site had been named the "Sistine Chapel of the Magdalenian" (by Joseph Déchelette), 'Lascaux, still more ancient, represents with an equal splendour, that of the "Périgordien"'[499]. Whereas Michelangelo's central work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, depicting God giving life to Adam, offers one vision of humanity's creation, there are hints here – in the comparison of this work to Lascaux – that the prehistoric paintings offer another. This notion is not developed in either Breuil's report or Windels's book, however, and the project of interpreting the art in the cave in terms of its marking the origination event for our species would wait to be taken on by Bataille in 1955.

Windels opens his publication with a 'personal note' from Breuil, handwritten and photographically reproduced over two pages. Here the distinguished prehistorian explains that 'The years have passed; my age and my other duties prevent my undertaking' to 'publish an adequate description' of Lascaux. He concludes: 'I can therefore only rejoice at the enterprise of Mr Windels in publishing a photographic corpus'[500]. In the rest of his book, Windels further draws on the support of another two prehistorians, seeking to shore up his own lack of academic or professional credentials in a way that draws sharp contrast with Bataille's subsequent work on the same subject. The introduction to *Lascaux, 'Chapelle Sixtine' de la Préhistoire* is written by Leroi-Gourhan and the ensuing text of the book was apparently 'prepared in collaboration with Annette Laming'.[501] Laming was upcoming competition for Leroi-Gourhan and she would subsequently co-author an official booklet on Lascaux (1950), before being published at length on the subject in 1959. Windels bills both these

[499] Breuil 1940, p. 490.
[500] Breuil in Windels (1948) 1949, p. 6: typed transcription – and English translation – of Breuil's note.
[501] Windels (1948) 1949, p. iii.

individuals professionally, according to their different roles at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, and also academically (at the University of Lyons and the National Centre for Scientific Research respectively). It is conspicuous, moreover, that in his introduction Leroi-Gourhan describes Windels as having been 'inspired' by Breuil; as already noted, Bataille would credit the same individual for providing him with essential archaeological material and helpful initial advice,[502] yet he would reserve the role of inspiration in his work for the art at issue.

Windels's black and white photographs of Lascaux are extensively reproduced and evenly distributed throughout his book, although none actually appears until after the credits, dedication, endorsement and introduction are completed. Images of the paintings and engravings in the cave are shown alongside pictures that locate the site in the mid twentieth century, with shots of the town of Montignac and its surrounding countryside, for instance, and showing the cave entrance in the course of its clearance to give access. The Palaeolithic marks in the cave are photographed as more-or-less individual works of art, with only a few additional shots indicating their interrelation or showing something of the context – the chambers and passageways. Many additional shots give close-ups that highlight details and there are pictures focussed on the damaged state of the works, plus infrared photography to indicate under-painting, revealing earlier works hidden by those that came later. Four large-scale reproductions in the book, including the double-page spread at its centre, are tinted – the cows reddened, for instance, and the adjacent horses yellow-browned. More of the images are small scale and these are typically grouped on the basis of the formal similarity of the marks they depict – then laid out according to straightforward design principles, tightly applied. In the four corners of one double-page spread of text, for instance, there are images of the coloured grids known, after Breuil, as 'blazons': their irregular relationship to each other on the cave wall is not replicated; instead they are set into symmetrical alignment. Later in the book come six doubled spreads of text, each bordered with a number of very small images, the first gathering twelve heads of 'Equidae', for example, and the last showing twenty-eight pairs of 'Feet'. Overall the use of photographs amounts to a classificatory endeavour,

[502] Bataille 1955, p. 7.

reflecting palaeoanthropological and art historical and museological convention, which imposes order onto the rough character of the cave and tames the unruly nature of its art. In almost every regard, as will be seen, the visual treatment of Lascaux in Bataille's publication on the cave represents a departure from this model.

In his introduction to *Lascaux, 'Chapelle Sixtine' de la Préhistoire*, Leroi-Gourhan credits not only Windels's 'artistic mastery', presumably acknowledging his photographic training, but also his 'subtlety of scientific analysis'.[503] The idea of mastering the art in the cave and submitting it to rigorous modern-day systems of knowledge is strong in the book. This is not only evident in the type and organisation of images, the intent is declared in the text, where Windels describes 'the decorated caves' as 'museums of Quaternary art'.[504] With conventional curatorial concern, expertise in 'craft and technique' is applied (and given a dedicated chapter),[505] painting is dealt with separately from engraving (as if these were the responsibility of different museum departments), and a connoisseur's eye is lent to what is referred to as the 'decorative composition',[506] such that certain elements are judged 'superior' and 'the best examples' are discriminated.[507] With related art-historical concern, great attention is paid to setting the 'pictures' and 'scenes' within an 'evolution of styles',[508] and here Breuil's 'comprehensive system' is reverently presented and deployed.[509] Further chapters focus on anthropological and ethnographic propositions concerning the significance of the art,[510] on the geology of the site, [511] and on a zoological classification of the fauna.[512] In contrast to Bataille in his subsequent publication, as will be seen, Windels treats the art in the cave resolutely as a museological, art historical and scientific object.

Breuil, the pioneer of this approach, published his definitive work on the subject, *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal*, within five years. After various preambles,

[503] Leroi-Gourhan in Windels (1948) 1949, p. 11.
[504] Laming/Windels in *ibid.*, p. 71.
[505] *Ibid.*, pp. 69–97.
[506] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[507] *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.
[508] *Ibid.*, p. 125.
[509] *Ibid.*, p. 45.
[510] *Ibid.*, pp. 47–67.
[511] *Ibid.*, pp. 29–45.
[512] *Ibid.*, pp. 109–22.

Breuil opens his tome on prehistoric rock art with a chapter whose title, 'Origin of Art', draws comparison with that for the opening chapter of Bataille's subsequent monograph on Lascaux, 'The Birth of Art'. However, the treatments of the two authors differ considerably, with Breuil venturing pronouncements on the historical, geographical, social and scientific detail of the origins of art, whereas Bataille – as will be seen – takes Lascaux as a basis for more freewheeling assertions on the idea of the origin of humanity. Breuil specifically assumes that drawing started as mimesis, emerging both out of animal mimicry in dramatic scenarios and from accidental discoveries that clay may be conferred to a surface by the body. The latter leads him to assert, 'It is in this way that our cave art came about, first through positive and negative prints of the hands and from meanders and arabesques, "macaroni", drawn with the fingers'.[513] Religious and ritual contexts are described as fostering the development of such marks and Breuil also relates figurative mark-making to cerebral resources, albeit somewhat lamely: 'Evidently the *Homo sapiens* brain was necessary for the creation of this art'.[514]

Lascaux is featured as one of six major sites of prehistoric cave-art in *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal* and these are each given their own chapter, ahead of a broader survey of all the sites known in Europe at the time. Breuil discusses the art in the main chamber and axial passage at Lascaux in terms of his chronology of styles. On the basis that the stencilling of bodily forms requires the least technical skill, he reiterates his assumption that negative prints are the earliest examples of Palaeolithic art and he duly starts his tour of Lascaux with the claim, already quoted, that 'an experienced eye can make out the small arm of a child stencilled in faded red.'[515] In the culmination of his tour, he focuses on a large bull that he describes as possessing some 'awkwardness and heaviness', whilst hailing this figure for giving 'an impression of brutal power'.[516] With art historical reference, the same figure is later described as 'a masterpiece' that, being 'a little rough and naïve, reminds us of the work of the early Renaissance.'[517] The images reproduced in the Lascaux chapter of *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal* prioritise such 'masterpieces', with a few

[513] Breuil 1952, p. 22.
[514] *Ibid.*
[515] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[516] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[517] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

photographs and drawings giving more of an impression of the cave overall. If the visual display echoes that of the earlier monograph on the cave then this is because, as Breuil explains, 'I left to Mr Windels, closer than me to the public we are addressing, the responsibility of choosing illustrations.'[518]

Breuil's book features in the bibliography for Leroi-Gourhan's 1961 chapter on prehistory, which opens the *Histoire Universelle* in Gallimard's *Encylopédie de la Pléiade*. Neither Windels's monograph, nor Bataille's subsequent publication, appear likewise yet both books are perhaps referenced in the statement with which Leroi-Gourhan concludes his bibliography: 'The popularising works on Palaeolithic art that have appeared, numerous in the course of the last few years, have so far only reiterated the theories expounded in the books cited here. Certain amongst them offer an excellent quality of documentation.'[519] If Bataille intended to disrupt the discipline of prehistory with his approach to Lascaux, then the academic establishment did not, it seems, register the attempt.

It will be argued here that Bataille intended to respond to Lascaux artistically, at least as much as academically, in *La Peinture Préhistorique*. He was not the first to be inspired in this way. In 1952 René Char published four poems, each about a different animal depiction in the cave, in *Cahiers d'Art*, where the accompanying photographs are credited to Breuil's *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal* (and thus, indirectly, to Windels). Char, a Surrealist during the early 1930s, subsequently became a friend of Bataille's and paid him visits, notably in Carpentras. Nonetheless it would seem from hints in Char's poems that their inspiration was Breuil's book, which came out earlier that same year, rather than any direct experience of the caves themselves. The second poem opens:

> La Bête innomable ferme la marche du gracieux troupeau,
> comme un cyclope bouffe.
> Huit quolibets font sa parure, divisent sa folie.[520]

[518] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[519] Leroi-Gourhan 1961, p. 92.
[520] Char 1952, p. 190.

> The unnameable Beast rounds off the graceful herd, like a comic cyclops.
> Eight jibes adorn her and divide her madness.[521]

Whilst unsettling the benign presence implied by Breuil's description of the same beast as a 'unicorn', the alternative mythical allusion that Char makes, to a 'cyclops', maintains the single point of focus, replacing the elegant charm of a single horn with the comic alarm of a single eye. A reference to Breuil's interpretation seems likely since the animal depicted, in profile, has a laterally positioned eye that suggests another on the other side – and, as already noted, in spite of the name given to it by Breuil, the creature clearly has two horns rather than one. Char perhaps imputes to the animal our own confusion over its identity, escalating this confusion when he describes her as experiencing a madness.

If Bataille intended to respond to Lascaux philosophically, at least as much as artistically, in *La Peinture Préhistorique*, then his work followed that of another of his friends, Maurice Blanchot. Char's poem, 'La Bête innommable', prompted a response from Blanchot, 'La Bête de Lascaux', which was published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* the following year, in 1953 – coincident, in fact, with Bataille's response in *Critique* to Breuil's book on prehistoric rock art. In his essay, Blanchot contemplates the genesis of all works of art as a return to that of the first. Bataille's book on Lascaux both reworks that genesis and reflects on it.

[521] Char (1952) 1992, trans Mark Hutchinson, p. 83.

5.4 *La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art*, 1955

As indicated in the title of his book, Bataille's focus is not only on Lascaux but on what he calls the birth of art. He perceives in the paintings at Lascaux the event of art's origination and, in that, the origination event for the human species in whom we may recognise ourselves. As he expresses it in the opening words of his preface: 'In this book, I have tried to show the eminent place of Lascaux in the history of art and more broadly in the history of humanity'.[522] He later emphasises the 'decisive moment' or 'decisive event' that he feels the art represents, or rather testifies to: 'we must assign to Lascaux the importance of a beginning'.[523] His claim is a philosophical one, however, rather than being scientific. He readily acknowledges that there is even older art – although it might be noted that at the time of his writing no cave was known that was painted as extensively or as densely as Lascaux and yet dated to an earlier era, so older art was, for Bataille, less impressive – and he proves aware, if reluctant to accept, that there is anatomical evidence for *Homo sapiens* that predates by many millennia evidence of art or mark-making behaviour.[524] He is clear that anatomically modern humans, or what he calls Neanthropians, 'formed outside Europe',[525] and he puts the date of emergence at 50,000 BP (it is now widely believed to be more like 100–200,000 BP), dating the Lascaux art, in what is now France, at 30,000 BP (now understood to be 17,000 BP).[526] His concern, then, is to use the art at Lascaux as a basis for discussing that which – as already noted – he perceives to be neglected by prehistorians: the evolutionary event that gives rise to our species. Whether or not 'the date of the birth of *Homo sapiens*' coincides with that of 'the birth of art'[527] – and whatever the age of the Lascaux art relative to other art, known or unknown – Bataille argues that that cave's paintings be considered as a 'palpable sign' of the passage to our own humanity.[528]

[522] Bataille 1955, p. 7.
[523] *Ibid.*, p. 7 ('decisive moment'), p. 27 ('decisive event'), p. 19 ('we must assign to Lascaux the importance of a beginning').
[524] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[525] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[526] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[527] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[528] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

While this claim is not remarkable, the means by which it is made are unusual. It will be argued here that *La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art* configures visually, through its use of photographs, the threshold events that Bataille describes verbally, in the accompanying essay. The book includes 69 pictures, which are credited by Skira, in his editorial preface, to Hans Hinz in particular and also to Claudio Emmer.[529] However, the work of documenting the cave is very much described as a collective endeavour: 'we spent nights underground [when the place was free from visitors]… any number of times we thought that our work was done – but, once the plates were developed, we decided on the spot to begin shooting again!'[530] As the instigator as well as the author of the book,[531] Bataille is implicated in this team work and may be assumed to lie behind the arrangement or display of the resulting pictures on the book's pages. Skira may presumably have played a role too; the point is not that a specific individual was responsible but that the photographs were actively and carefully thought through in conjunction with the text. Indeed Bataille's intent that the images support his argument, or even make this argument themselves, may be indicated by his twice expressing the desire 'to *show*' the case he wishes to make, rather than necessarily to articulate it in words.[532]

It is impossible to analyse the visual import of *La Peinture Préhistorique* on the basis of studying its presentation witihin Bataille's *Oeuvres Complètes*. In this small-scale publication, Hinz and Emmer's photographs of Lascaux are considerably reduced in size and reproduced in black and white. Moreover, only a small fraction (14 out of the total 69) appear and they are relegated to an appendix position at the back of the book. It is perhaps for this reason that the visual mode and impact of *La Peinture Préhistorique* are apt to be overlooked. Stephen Ungar (1990), Georges Didi-Huberman (1995), Suzanne Guerlac (1996), Howard Caygill (2002), Carrie Noland (2004) and Edward Casey (2009), none of whom mention the photographs, all direct their readers not to the original version of Bataille's publication but to its rendering in his *Oeuvres Complètes*.[533]

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[529] Hans Hinz specialised in photography of modern European art and increasingly in traditional African and Asian art; Claudio Emmer trained in architectural photography.
[530] Albert Skira in *ibid.*, p. 5.
[531] Albert Skira credits Bataille with 'having suggested the idea', in *ibid.*, p. 5.
[532] *Ibid.*, p. 7 (both instances), italics added.
[533] Stuart Kendall (2005) references the English translation of 1955, which is as lavishly illustrated as the French original, however he does not mention the photographs. Clearly early responses to Bataille's book, written before the *Oeuvres Complètes* were issued, reference the

The most obvious achievement of Bataille's book in visual terms is the translation, onto its pages, of an experience of visiting the Lascaux cave in its detail and duration, as it unfolds along passageways and through chambers. Photographs are used to stage a tour: the continuous flow of pictures in the central section of the book turns the reader into a visitor, who is then exposed to the paintings on the cave walls in their entirety and particularity. The tour Bataille sets up for his readership – turned viewing public – follows a variety of simple experiential or touring logics. So, for example, the left-hand wall of a passage, as entered from the main chamber, first appears on a left-hand page, with the right-hand wall shown adjacent and then, overleaf, close-up shots follow, showing the different overlapping figures in the passage sequentially. Picture captions not only locate the marks underground, descriptively and through reference to maps annotated with numbers, but they give the dimensions of prominent figures. The accompanying text then includes descriptions that are more body-centred, explaining, for example, that the painted calcite surface in the main chamber begins at thigh level, 'up above ground level, at the height of the hand'.[534] Written details such as these help to present the art photographed in terms of its cave-bound existence. In other words, in *La Peinture Préhistorique*, Bataille enacts with images what he earlier promised with words, performing a 'Une visite à Lascaux' (the title of his Orléans lecture of 1952) and delivering the public 'Au Rendez-Vous de Lascaux' (the title of his *Arts* magazine article of 1953).

His visual approach was distinct from that which had come before. In contrast to the earlier leading publications by Windels and Breuil, no two pictures in Bataille's book are made to share a page and classificatory systems – grouping images by 'chronology', animal species, anatomical form or state of preservation – are avoided. While inescapably we see the paintings on the cave walls through someone else's eyes, rather than just our own, they are not thereby tamed art historically or scientifically. Relatively speaking, Bataille lets the prehistoric imagery loose on his modern-day reader. It is displayed as if it were contemporary art viewed in the studio, rather than removed to a museum: presented unframed and without a plinth or vitrine.

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original work, however neither Maurice Blanchot (1955) nor Jean-Michel Rey (1971) refer to the photographs.

[534] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

5.4.1 The Event of Evolutionary Passage

The challenge to convention that Bataille achieves in the text of *La Peinture Préhistorique* involves focussing on the evolutionary passage to humanity. When addressing himself, through the art at Lascaux, to the evolutionary becoming that became decisive for our species, Bataille posits the becoming, the passage, as an event: he views the emergence of *Homo sapiens* over many millennia from such a temporal distance that it may be seen as a 'sudden development',[535] and with such focused attention that it may be seen as 'spectacular'.[536] He does not enter into discussion of the mechanisms or process of evolution but simply acknowledges in general that 'every beginning supposes what preceded it',[537] whilst simultaneously noting 'the role, in creation, of chance'.[538]

Bataille makes use of a number of popular, indeed undistinguished, metaphors when discussing the event that concerns him. As already quoted, he invokes 'the birth of *Homo sapiens*',[539] for instance, and he further refers to Lascaux as the 'place of our birth'.[540] He also offers variations on the birthing theme, through recourse to the term '*éclosion*',[541] which suggests the hatching of an egg and also the burst into bloom of a flower, thereby eliding origination with the beginning of maturation, onset with the initial rise towards a peak, whilst maintaining an emphasis on the event status in each case. A further biological metaphor used with some regularity, '*épanouissement*',[542] reiterates the sense of a flowering, and this is expanded – magnified and escalated – through reference to the season most associated with bloom, when he writes of the 'rapid efflorescence of spring',[543] and later, likewise emphasising a restricted and early moment rather than extended duration, when he relates onset to 'the first full day of spring'.[544] Cyclical and solar events are also called on when Bataille asserts that 'the daylight that reaches us at Lascaux is the dawn of the

[535] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[536] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[537] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[538] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[539] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[540] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[541] *Ibid.*, p. 7, p. 20 and p. 26.
[542] *Ibid.*, p. 17, p. 26, p. 29 and p. 36.
[543] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[544] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

human species',[545] with subsequent repeated reference to such a 'dawn'.[546] Elsewhere he shifts to an alternative metaphor focused on illumination, making meteorological reference to onset as a dazzling flash of lightning in stormy times,[547] with the unexpected aspect of such an event then underscored when he references 'the bolt of lightning' that 'never ceases to strike a sort of magic into the uncertain course of history'.[548] As well as being more interesting for conferring an unpredictability onto the event of species emergence – that is, when compared with the daily routine of day break and the annual cycle of seasons – the lightning analogy also adds a sense of threat that offsets the implicit and unquestioned positivity associated with birth, flowers and light.

Every time he uses the expression 'passage' for the onset of our species,[549] Bataille builds an understanding in terms of the transformative event of a threshold being crossed. He adds to this through reference to our 'exiting' or 'exit' from a prior form and condition – specifically from a 'preceding larval state',[550] an animal 'mud or clay',[551] or a 'tradition' of animality.[552] And, emphasising the transition event, he refers to a movement or impulse 'opening the doors of the possible'.[553] Moreover, Bataille transposes the metaphor of bodily passage across a threshold, turning it into an event of psychological passage: now it is a state of sobriety that is exceeded, in an event of spontaneous inebriation. We are told that the evolution of humanity:

> seems to have occurred as if in drunkenness. It is as if, suddenly, accelerated movements or impulses produced themselves, in an unanticipated overstepping [*dépassement*] that intoxicates.[554]

Here, in characterising an unscripted move beyond limits in terms of an impromptu drunkenness, Bataille brings to mind the writing of the psychiatric clinicians discussed in the previous chapter, François Tosquelles and Jean Oury.

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[545] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[546] *Ibid.*, p. 26 and p. 30.
[547] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[548] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[549] *Ibid.*, p. 20, p. 22, p. 27, p. 31 (twice) and p. 39.
[550] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[551] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[552] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[553] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[554] *Ibid.*

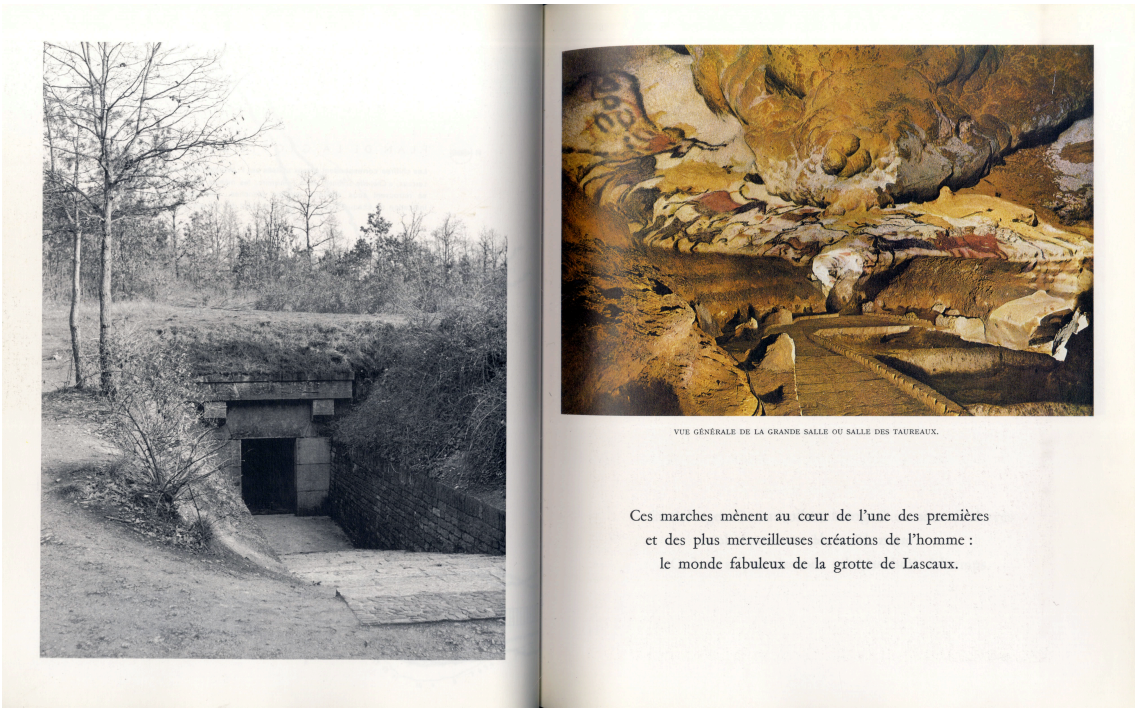
In his medical thesis of 1948, Tosquelles specifically discussed psychopathological aesthetic existence as 'a movement of thought, in an intellectual intoxication'.[555] Oury, writing two years later, and five years before Bataille, would quote this phrase,[556] later on using his own words in order to assert that schizophrenic entry into the aesthetic imaginary – that is, psychotic emergence in the face of annihilation – is 'the result of an auto-intoxication'.[557] To Bataille's understanding of the emergence of humanity, metaphorically, as a moment of drunkenness, we may now add a vision of the same event as a madness. As such, the onset of psychosis resonates in concert with the advent of our species; a lifetime event chimes with an evolutionary event.

Pictures of Lascaux are used in *La Peinture Préhistorique* in order to accentuate the event status of humanity's emergence, such as it is stressed in Bataille's text. In the first instance this is simply a matter of the images being clustered together (59 of the total 69) at the centre of the book, where the pages suddenly burst into life with the colour photographs they bear. The blaze of colour would have been particularly palpable in the year of original publication, since the previous volumes on the cave – including the book by Windels, booklet by Laming and chapter by Breuil – had all relied on black-and-white or selectively tinted images. Moreover, the gathering of pictures into a middle section, rather than the distribution of them evenly throughout, and their each being reproduced on a considerable scale, as large as a large page would allow, marked a conspicuous departure from what had come before. The withholding and then overwhelming release of imagery in Bataille's book amplifies the sense of an event being at stake.

In addition, the onset of the imagery is given particular prominence in the book in two ways. First, the heading for this section of the publication is the only one that is given an empty double-page spread; this clears the reader's palette of words, perhaps, or allows for an intake of breath, in preparation for the images to come. Second, the photograph that opens this section is reproduced in black-and-white and it is the only one like this in the book. In fact the monochrome appearance is reserved for depiction of that which is above ground and a recent

[555] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 121.
[556] Oury (1950) 2005, p. 65.
[557] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

production, rather than being subterranean and prehistoric: the image shows the external entry to the cave – a flight of steps leading to a doorway set into a hill – as constructed to facilitate modern-day access. Then, on the adjacent page, the companion shot shows paintings in the cave, in full colour. In particular it shows the view that greeted visitors as they reached the end of the corridor at the bottom of the steps shown on the previous page – that is, a cast of black, red and brown animals and abstract marks, wheeling round the walls of the rough cavern known as the main chamber or hall of the bulls. This juxtaposition of photographs, and the rupturing bloom of colour that takes place between them, in itself marks the event of passage Bataille describes in his text. It also insists that a threshold is crossed on entry to the cave, implying that on visiting Lascaux we relive the event of passage into humanity.



VUE GÉNÉRALE DE LA GRANDE SALLE OU SALLE DES TAUREAUX.

Ces marches mènent au cœur de l'une des premières
et des plus merveilleuses créations de l'homme :
le monde fabuleux de la grotte de Lascaux.

From George Bataille's *La Peinture Préhistorique*, 1955, pp. 44–45

In his text, Bataille constantly stresses that entering the cave and encountering the art there is a shocking and profoundly affecting event – presumably this was his experience and he assumes it to be universal. Describing Lascaux as astounding, amazing, stunning, striking and transfixing, he further suggests it

prompts an 'electrifying cry of stupefaction'.[558] He writes: 'I insist on the surprise we experience at Lascaux. This extraordinary cave cannot cease to stagger those that discover it.'[559] Here he uses words to describe the impact his book seeks to achieve – indeed, to recreate – with the accompanying photographs.

Much of the impact of the photographs in *La Peinture Préhistorique* is produced through their having been made with the use of powerful projectors, which were directed up against the cave walls in order to illuminate the marks there. Skira describes the process with pride in his editorial preface to the book, hailing the fact that his team was thereby able to reveal and capture that which was 'invisible in the standard lighting in the cave'.[560] Of course, it is not the standard lighting of the original audience for the cave that is referred to here – the fire of tallow lamps and torches – but the electric lighting installed for modern touring visitors. Apparently the point of the documentary endeavour for the book was not to capture how those responsible for the paintings might have seen them,[561] nor to record what would be seen retinally in the modern era, but rather to present a technologically enhanced reality, one that might actually do better justice to an embodied experience of Lascaux. Through the flood lighting of each shot, a 'somehow miraculous reality' and the 'feeling of a mirage',[562] which is what Bataille describes himself as experiencing, is created. The heightened visibility suggests a hallucinatory presence and, exposed to this intoxicated intensity, we are led into a predicament that recalls – according to the metaphorical characterisation used by Bataille – the event of passage into humanity.

[558] Bataille 1955, p. 11 ('transfiguré'), p. 14 ('cri d'une stupéfaction qui souffle and renversante'), p. 15 ('émerveillé' and 'nous étonnent and ce qui nous renverse'), p. 17 ('frappés à l'extrême').
[559] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[560] Skira in *ibid.*, p. 5.
[561] Skira describes choosing the angle of photographic capture through trying to imagine the viewing angle of the prehistoric painters, however the lighting of the images for the purposes of photography counteracts any bid to recreate the original viewing experience. See Skira in *ibid.*, p. 5.
[562] *Ibid.*, p. 14 and p. 15 respectively.

5.4.2 Passage to Free/Mad Being

Early on in *La Peinture Préhistorique*, Bataille sums up his conclusions regarding the evolutionary emergence of our species this way: 'The Lascaux name thus symbolises the time of passage from the human beast to the unbound and unhinged being [*l'être délié*] that we are.'[563] Here the prior state, before passage to *Homo sapiens*, is described by Bataille as that of 'la bête humaine'. This is typically translated as 'the human beast',[564] although at least one English author has amplified the negative connotations by opting instead for 'the beastly human'.[565] It is just possible that Bataille meant to imply Neanderthal humans through using this expression and, if so, then it is in becoming extinct as a species that, over the ages, these creatures yielded passage to the Cro Magnon or Lascaux alternative – that is, to our own species. However, following the arguments laid out by Bataille, we should interpret 'la bête humaine' as our evolutionary ancestor. Here, the 'passage' he describes refers not to the outlasting of one kind of animal relative to another but, as already suggested, to the evolution of a new animal being from out of an older one.

The subsequent state, following the evolutionary passage invoked by Bataille, is described as that of '*l'être délié que nous sommes*.' The original English translation, completed by Austryn Wainhouse in 1955, proposes the meaning of this phrase to be 'the subtler, keener, unfettered individual we are.'[566] Here use of the word 'individual' for *être* is infelicitous, since Bataille calls into question – shortly before in the same book – what he sees as a modern obsession with individuality, expressing a preference instead for collective practice and feeling, which he attributes to Palaeolithic people.[567] By contrast, Wainhouse's translation of *délié* as 'subtler, keener, unfettered' is more promising, since it conveys the positive sense of fineness or refinement that the French connotes, whilst giving a more literal – if, again, positive – translation in 'unfettered'. More recent English translations have tended to elaborate only upon the metaphorical meaning of *délié*, with Kendall offering 'slender, sharp and agile' and Noland

[563] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[564] See Wainhouse 1955, p. 20; Noland 2004, p. 132; and Kendall 2005, p. 14.
[565] See Caygill 2002, p. 22.
[566] Wainhouse 1955, p. 20.
[567] Bataille 1955, p. 15.

allowing the single word 'subtle' to stand.[568] All these English versions omit to mention a more ambivalent interpretation of *délié*, which extrapolates from 'untied' to 'undone'. Here being unfettered, unbound, or freed from ties – which summarises the literal sense of the word – is complicated by the simultaneous implication of being unhinged, deranged, or mad. This is a pairing of meanings that chimes with the Surrealist and Art Brut system of thought that, as already discussed, unites insanity and freedom. It also chimes with Bataille's description of the moment of passage to this state as a spontaneous intoxication, hinting at the psychosocial loosening experienced in drunkenness, in the sense that this both promises an unfurling and threatens an unravelling. It is as if a condition upon the freedom to be human is the possibility of spontaneous intoxication or madness and as if, when thus mad, the evolutionary passage to human freedom is relived.

A single photograph in *La Peinture Préhistorique* gives form to this predicament of being, or this event of becoming, *délié*. It is one of the few to appear in the early parts of the book, which are otherwise heavy with text, and it intervenes between the first section and that in which the statement regarding passage to unbound and unhinged being is made.[569] An extreme close up, it shows a detail of an antler from a deer painted in the axial passageway. Cropped out of the picture is the head that it crowns, which is only illustrated later in the book,[570] and in the absence of this part of the figure we see an abstract pattern, perhaps suggesting a fork of lighting or a firing neuron, scarcely hinting at bone material. If we are slow to recognise an antler this is also because the elaborate sprawling form depicted is, on reflection, more fantastical than representational: the protrusions are wayward. Here we find ourselves contemplating a hallucinated reality: the blazing vision of the whole cave is yet to come, on later pages, but this singular – either miraculous or mad – form points the way. It amounts to an exclamation mark declaring passage to unfettered and unbound being; and it simultaneously poses a question mark, overlaying the corollary of being undone and unhinged.

[568] Kendall (2005) p. 14 and Noland (2004) p. 132.
[569] Bataille 1955, p. 16.
[570] *Ibid.*, p. 75.



From George Bataille's *La Peinture Préhistorique*, 1955, p. 16

5.4.3 The Event of Festive Transgression

Bataille interprets the art at Lascaux in terms of its making manifest a festive transgression of social strictures otherwise maintained in order to further group survival. He claims it demonstrates an overstepping of prohibitions in a festival episode, or *la fête* – where the prohibitions surpassed are connected to a knowledge of death and sexuality and they insist on the necessity of work. Rather than representing work and rational functionality, the paintings in the cave arise – for Bataille – from play and they implicate a religious sensibility. His emphasis on the transgression and overstepping of limits allows us to see in the paintings a threshold event. At the same time, the festive exceeding of protective limits in what is described as a 'moment of paroxysm'[571] – bringing to mind the Surrealist interest in convulsions and their status as occasional, excessive and disorderly events – suggests a temporary state of madness; that is, a loss of reason, which might amount to psychotic episode. Because Bataille presents the exceeding of work and of rational functionality – in the form of play, art, madness and religion and in the time of *la fête* – as definitive of *Homo sapiens* and as setting us apart from all other species of humanity, the transgression of social limits in the moment of painting at Lascaux is held up as staging the transgression of biological and psychological limits in the onset of our species. In other words, the art in the cave marks not only *la fête* but the event of origination for our species.

The choice of cover image for *La Peinture Préhistorique* may be interpreted as a bid to emphasise 'the sudden time' of '*la fête*',[572] over sober duration. The photograph that is used shows the 'second "Chinese" horse' from the axial passage, off the cave's main chamber.[573] The entire horse is shown and, although the image is fairly tightly cropped, extraneous and more or less abstract marks surround the animal on all sides, distracting from its clean lines and smooth colour, and creating a hubbub.

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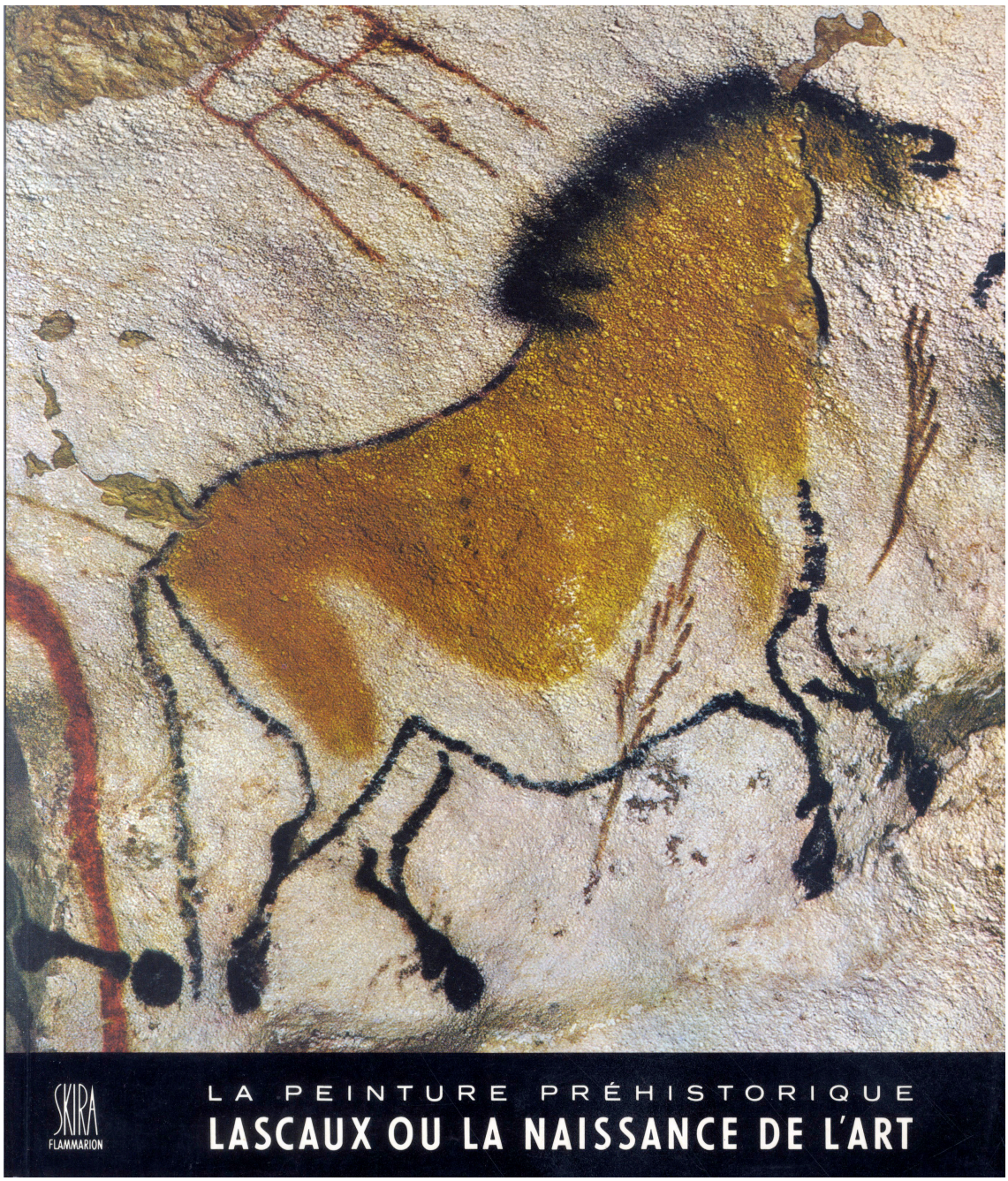
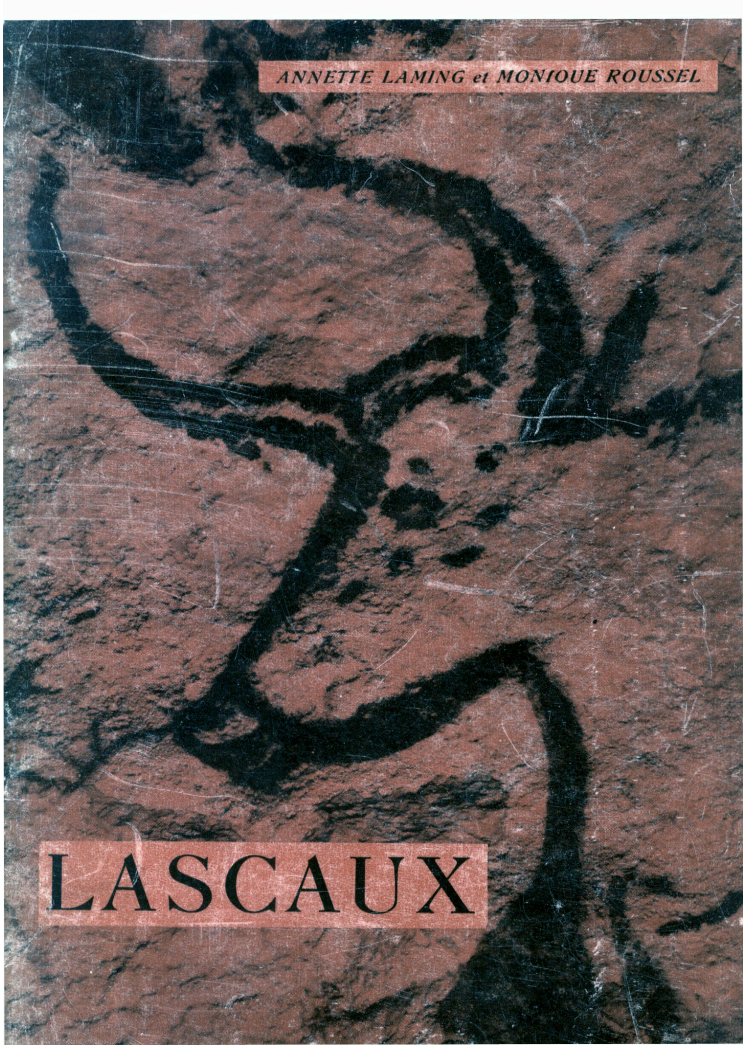
[571] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[572] *Ibid.*
[573] *Ibid.*, p. 82. This naming stems from Breuil's suggestion that this and neighbouring horses have 'the look of an old Chinese painting' – Breuil 1952, p. 118. Windels/Laming remarks that these animals 'have been named the "Chinese" horses, on account of their sagging bellies and short limbs' – Windels (1948) 1949, p. 19.



Cover of George Bataille's book from 1955 (in 1980 reprint)

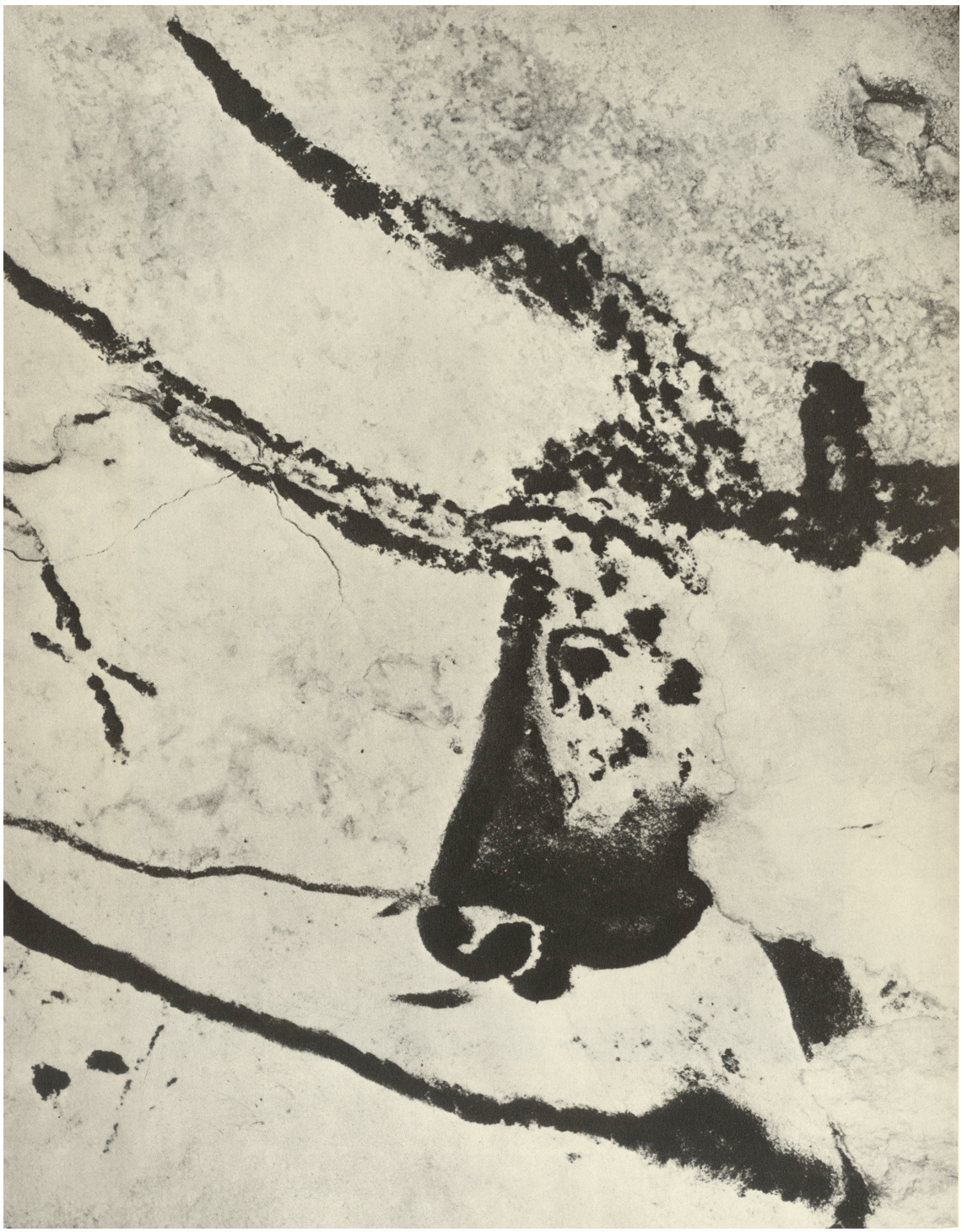
The choice of a sprightly horse – which is especially sprightly because of the jaunty angle at which its image is presented – is conspicuous because this animal lacks the physical might and imposing presence of the bulls also painted in the cave, which had conventionally been given the most prominent position for publications on Lascaux. We may compare Bataille's cover horse with the images used on the cover of Windels's book on the cave, on Laming's booklet and with that which opens Breuil's chapter on Lascaux in *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Parietal*: in each case a tightly cropped photograph of the head of one of

the bulls features. Here there is no suggestion of movement or an event and static bulk is implied instead. In *La Peinture Préhistorique*, Bataille describes the figures that include the 'second 'Chinese' horse' as 'capricious' or 'skittish', 'jostling' and 'frolicking',[574] drawing explicit contrast with his reference to the 'solemnity' of the art in the main cavern, where the bulls, which he dubs 'majestic figures',[575] are found. The photograph on the cover of his book suggests a buoyancy and giddiness to be found Lascaux, rather than weighty sobriety. It brings to mind Bataille's essay for the first issue of *Documents*, 'The Academic Horse', in which he celebrates the transformation on Gaulish coins of the noble steeds found on classical currency into frenzied beasts.



Cover of Annette Laming's *Lascaux: Peintures et Gravures*, 1959

[574] Bataille 1955, p. 74.
[575] *Ibid.*, p. 63.



Title page for Lascaux chapter in Henri Breuil's
Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal, 1952

In *La Peinture Préhistorique*, Bataille presents the 'second "Chinese" horse' as a complement to the mighty bulls at Lascaux, not a challenge to them, however the act of putting its image – and the surrounding marks – on the front cover of his book, at their expense, can be seen as subversive. With this gesture he undercuts the grandiose and staid identity of the art, as established by his predecessors, proposing a deviant energy and a tantalising incomprehensibility instead. He interjects visually – as he does verbally in his text – with an emphasis on transgression and festivity. This operates as a puncturing tactic – lancing the sombre gravity of conventional discussions of prehistoric art and typically envisaged for the prehistoric artists.

Bataille's cover horse finds its echo immediately inside the book, on the title page, where a photograph of one of a series of horses – all smaller, darker and fuzzier – is reproduced. This tiny black horse is viewed from very close up. Found a little further down the same passageway that bears the horse of the cover, it is assumed (after Breuil) to be the more ancient painting, if only for the relative lack of detail in its depiction. So, arguably, in opening the book, Bataille leads us back in time, down into the cave and close up to the walls. And, if the magnification of the small horse is not especially kind to its rendering – some of its apparent fuzziness may be attributed to the merciless proximity of the viewing position, relative to that for the other pictures reproduced – then the extreme close-up fulfils another role: setting a life-size marker in order to scale the ensuing images in the book. The dark horse of the title page acts as a companion to the tawny horse on the cover, insisting that no one set of marks in the cave be considered in isolation or out of context.

LES GRANDS SIÈCLES DE LA PEINTURE

LA PEINTURE PRÉHISTORIQUE

LASCAUX

OU LA NAISSANCE DE L'ART



TEXTE PAR GEORGES BATAILLE

SKIRA
FLAMMARION

Title page from George Bataille's *La Peinture Préhistorique*, 1955, p. 3

5.4.4 The Art-Making Event – and Hand Stencils

In the text of *La Peinture Préhistorique*, Bataille considers an aspect of the art at Lascaux that also characterises the Palaeolithic art found in other caves across Europe: the frequent overlapping of the figures depicted; their typical impingement one on another, rather than being spaced apart. Acknowledging this, he repeatedly refers to the 'entanglement' of the marks to be seen on the cave walls.[576] Pushing beyond the reasoning of those who had written on the subject before him, Bataille insists that superimposition indicates that the act or event of figurative execution was more important than what resulted from this execution – in other words, that it was of greater consequence than the figures ultimately left behind. He asserts:

> The painted or engraved images had no meaning as [*sens de*] decoration… The entanglement signifies that the existing decoration was irrelevant at the moment of the drawing of a new image… Care for the overall effect is plain at Lascaux… but surely a secondary concern. Only *the doing* [*l'*opération] fulfilled the intention.[577]

Windels/Laming and Breuil had already discussed the likelihood that the event of art-making in the caves had some significance but they had held back from suggesting that this event was *more* significant than the art thereby created. Bataille had first made this claim in his review in *Critique* of Breuil's *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Parietal*:

> Everything points to the fact that the carvings or the paintings did not have meaning as permanent figures of a sanctuary in which rituals were celebrated… If it were the image itself, and not the moment of its execution, that counted, the entanglement of the figures would be inexplicable. Without any doubt, Palaeolithic people never wanted to decorate the cave walls... These works were not, by any measure, at

[576] *Ibid.*, p. 15, p. 53, p. 109, p.110 and p. 129: 'enchevêtrement', 'enchevêtré'.
[577] *Ibid.*, p. 129, italics original.

> any time, objects of art. Their meaning emerges in the event of their appearing, not in that which endured after this event.[578]

Bataille's emphasis on the event of prehistoric mark-making allows for a fresh interpretation of Palaeolithic hand stencils. In *La Peinture Préhistorique*, he follows Windels/Laming rather than Breuil and makes no mention of there being any such marks at Lascaux. He does refer to 'the tracing of silhouettes on a surface',[579] however this is in the context of a discussion about the mimetic representation of animals and, even in the section of the book dedicated to the representation of people (which considers not only the figures found at Lascaux but also those in other Palaeolithic caves), he does not reference handprints or negative prints, stencils. We can be certain that Bataille knew of prehistoric hand-stencilling since he refers to the process in a 1930 essay for *Documents* and he mentions the resulting marks in the lecture he gave in Orléans in 1955, the January before his book on Lascaux was published. In the former article he misattributes the period of the marks, referring to them as Neolithic rather than Palaeolithic. He then goes on to describe them as follows: '*hand-templates* obtained in caves by applying the hand to the wall and surrounding it with paint'.[580] His later and comparable description comes when introducing a film showing Palaeolithic art and specifically the opening shots 'from one of the caves in Cabrerets'.[581] Here he points out the 'outlined hands, surrounded by paint [*des mains reservées en clair sur un fond de peinture*]' and he notes that 'It was relatively common at the time of the caves to apply a hand against the rock and to colour all round it so that the hand appears blank'.[582] In both of Bataille's accounts, from 1930 and 1955, he implies that paint was applied around rather than over the hand. He makes no mention of the spraying of pigment from the mouth and the likely consequence of this, that the hand held up as a stencil would have been covered in paint together with the adjacent area of wall. Given Bataille's emphasis in the 1950s on the activity of prehistoric art-making, rather than on the art objects that to our eyes result, it is

[578] Bataille (April 1953) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 12, pp. 273–74.
[579] Bataille 1955, p. 35.
[580] Bataille 1930b, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, p. 267, italics original. Here, when describing what he sees as prehistoric ablation, Bataille notes 'analogous practices found at the present time among the insane'.
[581] Bataille (January 1955) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 9, p. 334.
[582] *Ibid.*

conspicuous that his contemporary reference to hand stencils focuses so resolutely on their final form and neglects the event of their being made.



Palaeolithic marks at Chauvet, c. 30,000 BP

As already mentioned, certain palaeoanthropologists studying hand stencils have more recently drawn attention to this event of mark making, speculating that what was meaningful was the act of covering a hand held up against the cave wall in paint, rather than the negative handprint left behind as a result. To reiterate, Jean Clottes, a former Conservateur Général du Patrimoine, has suggested that the pigment involved might have been prepared ritually, with magical intent, such that its making simultaneous contact with a hand and the surrounding wall would carry significance. He argues that hands treated in this

way might have seemed to traverse the wall or, as he writes, 'to penetrate into the spiritual world hidden behind the veil of stone'.[583] Likewise, David Lewis-Williams, has suggested that a 'hand thus… "disappeared" behind a layer of paint; it was "sealed into" the wall'. He sees this as a moment of union with what he calls the rock 'membrane', or the 'living support' between 'the material and spiritual realms'.[584] In a joint article written by Lewis-Williams and Clottes in 1998, these authors suggest that the action of painting animals onto the cave walls would have been undertaken and viewed as a means of drawing 'spirit-animals… through this permeable "membrane"'.[585]

Bataille's writing on the prehistoric paintings of animals chimes readily with these subsequent interpretations. He suggests that the animals depicted were partly *found* in the wall: encouraged to emerge there, or summoned into presence via the mark-making. In his 1952 lecture entitled 'Une visite à Lascaux' he suggests 'the animal had to be, in a sense, *rendered present*', a little later describing 'the drawing or tracing that provokes the apparition of [a] bull'.[586] In his review of Breuil's *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal*, written the following year, he suggests that the animals 'would suddenly appear, making their presence tangible… The nascent image ensured the approach of the beast'.[587] In fact, Bataille uses these interpretations in order to account for the general lack of depictions of humans found at Lascaux (and in comparable caves), emphasising that, in being 'present already; there in the depths of the cave', people had no need to represent themselves on the walls.[588] Here again he overlooks the presence of handprints and hand stencils in certain caves, albeit not at Lascaux.

We may now extend Bataille's interpretative logic concerning the event-based nature of prehistoric mark-making by applying it to the Palaeolithic hand-stencils found at caves other than Lascaux. Where he sees animal forms *emerging from* the cave walls, we may now see human hands *merging into* them. It is this line of reasoning, or perhaps this field of speculation, that has been developed by

[583] http://grottesdegargas.free.fr/PAGE_7.html – last accessed 24 April 2009.
[584] Lewis-Williams 2002, p. 217, p. 219 and p. 210 respectively.
[585] Lewis-Williams and Clottes 1998, pp. 16–17.
[586] Bataille (1952) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 9, pp. 327–28.
[587] Bataille (April 1953) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 12, p. 274.
[588] Bataille (1952) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 9, p. 328.

anthropologists such as Clottes and Lewis-Williams, as just cited. Imagining a spirit world to be held back behind the cave walls, as proposed by these authors, we can then return to Bataille for his description of the marks at Lascaux as operating as an 'intervention into an inaccessible domain'.[589] Seen in this light, the hand stencils left behind bear witness to the event of passage across the threshold represented by the rock face. Viewed psychopathologically, through the work of François Tosquelles and Jean Oury, they may be said to mark 'lived experience at the end of the world', and the concurrent event of entry into – via creation of – another or other worlds.[590]

To the extent that Palaeolithic hand stencils mark transformative passage across a threshold, they echo the event of species emergence such as it is described by Bataille in *La Peinture Préhistorique*. Indeed we may see the negative handprints as remnants of prehistoric performances that re-enacted that evolutionary event. If hand stencils articulate an assertion of species existence then, following the logic of the hunt and of spoor tracking, they also represent a potential surrender of this existence, an opening to extinction. Here the precariousness of species emergence may be underlined.

[589] Bataille 1955, p. 56.
[590] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, title.

5.5 Conclusion

In *La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art*, Georges Bataille writes of the evolutionary event of human emergence as a moment of spontaneous drunkenness – a release and simultaneous madness – that was re-enacted in prehistoric art-making. He allows us to see in the threshold marked by Palaeolithic hand-stencils, the threshold crossed in the event of passage to our species. Alongside the text in *La Peinture Préhistorique*, photographs are used to stage a visit to Lascaux and to turn this into an encounter in which echoes of festive, transgressive and hallucinatory mark-making moments resound.



In *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, Nauman reiterates the threshold event of evolutionary emergence, such as it is presented by Bataille: performing passage to unbounded and unhinged being, he thrusts his free hands forwards in an assertion of his liberty and he simultaneously spurts from the mouth as if reaching a deranged high. Cut off from the past, represented as a darkness behind him, the figure photographed projects forwards into our company; breaking with preceding species and marking the onset of our own.

The excess that Nauman's photograph conveys in the form of an oral burst, with hands raised in emphasis, recalls the elaborate sprouting of an antler depicted at Lascaux – in particular as it is reproduced in Bataille's book: as an isolated element. In each image there is a sense of bodily possession by unruly forces – of overwhelm by intoxicating powers that prompt an eruptive event.



Stripped at least to the waist and spitting at us boldly, Nauman is palpably engaged in transgressive activity, which Bataille might have relished. Making art out of a defiant gesture that flouts any onus to work, insisting on play instead, Nauman engages with the sudden festivity of *la fête*, which Bataille sees in the prehistoric paintings at Lascaux. Moreover, in challenging sexual taboos described by Bataille, by miming masturbatory ejaculation, Nauman oversteps social prohibitions, risking a threshold-crossing event.

At the same time, by projecting liquid from his mouth and against his outstretched palms, Nauman may be seen to visualise the prehistoric activity that left behind hand-stencils at caves other than Lascaux. He gives physical presence to the absence marked by the negative prints, revitalising, by re-enacting, the Palaeolithic moment of contact between pigment, hand and rock face. Here he suggests the threshold event that the making of such hand-stencils may have enabled: transformative passage across the cave wall and into a spirit realm beyond.

Chapter 6: André Leroi-Gourhan and Prehistoric Cave Art

Considering the work of André Leroi-Gourhan, after that of Georges Bataille, allows us to expand an interest in Palaeolithic cave art beyond the bounds of Lascaux – and thereby to consider hand stencils, in particular, more closely. The focus material for this final chapter is a pair of books published by Leroi-Gourhan in the mid 1960s, each of which represents a synthesis of results gathered and theories developed over many years of research: *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* of 1965, which appeared in England three years later as *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe*, is a survey volume to compete with Henri Breuil's from a dozen years earlier;[591] *Le Geste et La Parole*, of 1964–65, which was translated as *Gesture and Speech* in 1993, addressed the evolution of technics, language and aesthetics. These works, their author and his concept of the mythogram will first be introduced. Then Leroi-Gourhan's discussion of Palaeolithic hand stencils will be considered in some detail, with the negative prints found at Gargas and Pech Merle studied in detail. A reinterpretation of these same hand stencils will then be undertaken, with recourse to *Le Geste et La Parole* in particular and in order to explore Leroi-Gourhan's discussion of prehistoric behaviours and complex understanding of events of evolutionary emergence.

In this final chapter, the second anchored in the field of prehistory, forming a pair following two centred on psychopathology, the threshold event of species onset will come to form the focus, studied in the image of the stencilled hand. Whereas Bataille allowed us to relate this evolutionary event to a psychosocial moment of intoxication and transgression, Leroi-Gourhan will permit something similar, through his discussion of events of mental exile. In addition, Leroi-Gourhan's study of the brain will lead us into territory where echoes may reverberate at the level of neurochemical events.

[591] The English translation was provided by Norbert Guterman and first issued, in the United States, as *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*, New York: Abrams, 1967.

6.1 André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et La Parole*, 1964–65, *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental*, 1965 and the Mythogram

Like Bataille, Leroi-Gourhan was a polymath who dissociated himself from established schools of thought. Unlike Bataille, his life was intimately connected with academia: he studied extensively and then worked continuously within higher education. He took two degrees – first in Russian (1931), second in Chinese (1933) – and then went on to study ethnology in the Parisian heyday of the subject, under Paul Rivet and Marcel Mauss. He later completed two doctorates, first in the *Archaeology of the North Pacific* (doctorat ès lettres 1945) and then on vertebrate crania (doctorat ès sciences 1954). An early member of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS, founded in 1939), Leroi-Gourhan created the CNRS Laboratoire d'Ethnologie Préhistorique. He held a chair in ethnology at the Sorbonne 1956–68 and then in prehistory at the Collège de France 1969–82. The post at the Collège de France had not been filled since its first occupant, Henri Breuil, had retired in 1947. Fuelling his writing with field work, Leroi-Gourhan made his first archaeological excavations, before World War II, in Japan and later led excavations at Pincevent near Fontainebleau in France, where he established a laboratory and teaching school in 1964.

Leroi-Gourhan started voluntary employment at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1929, just as it was beginning to be turned into the Musée de l'Homme. Made assistant director there in 1946, Leroi-Gourhan was later joined in the role by Claude Lévi-Strauss, whom he had known for over a decade, since their joint studies in ethnology. The two men would develop comparable structural approaches to their respective fields, with Leroi-Gourhan working in terms of prehistory where Levi-Strauss worked cross-culturally within his own era. The staff community at the Musée de l'Homme must also have brought him into contact with two individuals closely associated with Bataille: Georges-Henri Rivière, who was involved in *Documents* 1929–30, and Michel Leiris, Bataille's firm friend and ongoing collaborative partner. As with Lévi-Strauss, Leroi-Gourhan had presumably come across Leiris before, while all three were studying for their Certificat d'Ethnologie. The Musée de l'Homme colleague with whom Leroi-Gourhan shared most interests was none of these, however, but a

fellow specialist in prehistoric art, Annette Laming. As noted in the previous chapter, these two each contributed to the first publication dedicated to Lascaux – Fernand Windels's book of 1949.

Leroi-Gourhan was, perhaps, too young to appreciate Surrealism in its initial phase, in 1920s Paris. Yet he came of age as André Breton published the Second Manifesto in *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1929) and the avant-garde art practice of his early adulthood was dominated by the movement. In *Le Geste et La Parole* he notes the 'passion for the primitive arts' shown by the Surrealists,[592] who he suggests were inspired or influenced by psychopathological, tribal and, in particular, prehistoric art. He describes Surrealist visual art as 'relatively close to that of the Palaeolithic, in that the meaning resides in certain key elements composed in an ultra-dimensional space but lacking syntax.'[593] He makes this comparison between the modern and the prehistoric to the detriment of the Surrealists, in fact, yet by making it he opens up the possibility that his own view of Palaeolithic art – which emphasises the juxtaposition of incongruous elements – might have been informed by the Surrealist art of his time.

While Leroi-Gourhan is resolute in his lack of support for Surrealism – and equally dismissive, in fact, of other contemporary art – he was nonetheless persuaded late in life to write for the edition of Paris *Vogue* that was dedicated to the work of Joan Miró. His short text on prehistoric art and magic, titled 'Naissance de la Source', is reproduced opposite a page filled with two photographs: a picture of Miró, shown with his head thrown back as he studies Palaeolithic markings on a rock surface above him, sits together with a reproduction of an oil painting by the artist from 1954, *Le Ciel Entrebaillé Nous Rend l'Espoir*.[594] Miró's painting unites five handprints and, in the Spanish cave of Altamira whose ceiling he is shown viewing, one handprint and three hand stencils have been found. The juxtaposition of Miró's work with discussion of

[592] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 252.
[593] *Ibid.*
[594] Leroi-Gourhan 1979–80, p. 264 – with accompanying photographs reproduced adjacent, on p. 265.

prehistoric art had been ventured by Bataille in *Documents* some fifty years earlier.[595]

Whereas Bataille wrote as an idiosyncratic generalist and engaged with prehistoric cave painting as if it were fresh, or contemporary with his era, Leroi-Gourhan approached the same as scientific evidence, whilst writing as a specialist palaeoanthropologist. In conjunction with extensive research into Palaeolithic art, Leroi-Gourhan made detailed studies of prehistoric human crania and this, together with his inferences regarding prehistoric human brains, allows us to liken his practice to that of Paul Broca a century earlier. He nonetheless proved aware that materialist science offered a model that could only be applied up to a point. In his introduction to Windels's book on Lascaux, for instance, Leroi-Gourhan suggests that the art encountered in the cave 'disconcerts the mind',[596] both as a scientific conundrum and as an aesthetic proposition, perhaps, before going on to describe the loss of any illusion that 'when moved to comment [we] can ever be quite sure of our ground'.[597] Here he invokes the consequences of the vast temporal viewing distance, accepting the imposed unknowns and allowing that our understanding of prehistoric life will always be fragmentary and speculative. Or maybe he approaches Bataille in viewing prehistoric art as being potent as art in the modern moment. Either way he would insist in *Le Geste et La Parole* that it should not be approached as part of an art historical tradition of representation:

> The earliest known paintings do not represent a hunt, a dying animal or a touching family scene, they are graphic building blocks [*des chevilles graphiqes*] without any descriptive binder – the support medium of an oral context that is irretrievably lost[598]

In *Le Geste et La Parole* Leroi-Gourhan makes no mention of the Palaeolithic practice of printing the hand in the positive or negative. Palaeolithic art in general is considered at the end of the first part of the book, 'Technics and

[595] In *Documents* 7, 2e Année (1930a), Bataille reviews Georges-Henri Luquet's *L'Art Primitive* (on the work of children and of 'prehistoric man') and then, on the next page, presents 'Joan Miró: Peintures Récentes'.
[596] Leroi-Gourhan in Windels (1948) 1949, p. 12.
[597] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[598] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 266.

Language', to the extent that it may be considered a precursor to writing – and then as visual culture in the third and final part of the book, 'Ethnic Symbols'. As a whole, the remit of *Le Geste et La Parole* is vast: no less than the history, prehistory and future of humanity. It aims to cover the anatomical, behavioural and cultural evolution of our own and related species. In the concluding pages of the book, Leroi-Gourhan sums up his endeavour as 'the simultaneous study of the human from biological and ethnological angles'.[599]

Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental was published in the same year as the second volume of *Le Geste et La Parole*. A somewhat more focussed work, on portable and parietal prehistoric art found in Western Europe, it too represents a synthesis of almost two decades of research.[600] In turning to Franco-Cantabrian cave art, Leroi-Gourhan acknowledges 'the gigantic survey work' of Breuil.[601] He nonetheless distances his own approach, whilst extending credit: 'I have never been his pupil, still less a disciple, but for twenty years I have profited from his knowledge often enough to conceive a true admiration for him.'[602] As well as advancing a chronological system of classification for the prehistoric cave of Western Europe, one which challenges Breuil's own earlier assertions, Leroi-Gourhan is insistent that the original meaning of this art was bound up in its composition or assemblage – arguing that it was the juxtaposition or superimposition of forms that was significant for those responsible. In a chapter tilted 'The Meaning [*sens*] of Cave Art', he reflects back on the process by which he convinced himself that ordering principles could be discerned in cave art: 'I gradually became aware of repetitions – certain animals turned up next to each other too often for such associations to be explained by chance'. Above all he stresses 'the repeated occurrence of bison next to horses'.[603] He aligns these results with those found 'entirely independent[ly]' by Annette Laming-Emperaire (by then using her married as well as maiden name).[604] He does not acknowledge the similar and earlier assertions made by German art historian Max Raphael, in his *Prehistoric Cave Paintings* published in New York in 1945.

[599] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p.259.
[600] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 80.
[601] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[602] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[603] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[604] *Ibid.* Leroi-Gourhan likewise acknowledges Laming-Emperaire's work at Lascaux in *Le Geste et La Parole*: Leroi-Gourhan, 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 284.

If Leroi-Gourhan recognises that Laming-Emperaire publishes before him on the pairing of different animal species or types in certain caves, then he is keen to extend his own claims not only to a larger number of sites than she had considered but also to include study of markings other than those that constitute animal forms. In particular he expounds a theory that takes in the more or less abstract signs, such as dots and rectangular shapes, found on cave walls. In *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* he claims to have discovered 'a whole network of relationships among animals, human beings and signs, with each one [of these sets of marks being] divided into two complementary groups.'[605] He asserts that 'everything seems arranged according to a dualistic system', later reiterating that 'a dualistic classification [*répartition*] underlies the figurative pattern'.[606] More specifically, he asserts a 'division [*répartition*] of figures into a male group and a female group', whilst arguing that 'the fundamental principle is one of pairing'.[607] Thus, on the one hand, horses are seen as male and so are single dots, rows of dots, short strokes and barbed signs.[608] Then, on the other hand – that is, said to be paired – are what he considers to be female representations: bison, triangles (seen as pubic), ovals (seen as vulvas), rectangles and lattices, also 'claviform' and 'tectiform' signs.[609] When spotting his pairings, Leroi-Gourhan is careful to highlight not only the position of the marks relative to each other, but also their location within the cave, dissociating patterns in the open caverns, for instance, from those in transitional areas and turning passages. Moving on to consider 'The Religion of Palaeolithic Humans', in *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental*, he then reiterates his certainty that there is a basic system that 'rests upon the alternation, complementarity or antagonism between male and female values'.[610]

In *Le Geste et La Parole*, Leroi-Gourhan gives a mythological inflection to his conclusions regarding prehistoric art:

[605] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 86.
[606] *Ibid.*, p. 81 and p. 83 respectively.
[607] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[608] *Ibid.*, p. 99 and pp. 107–08.
[609] *Ibid.*, p. 100 and pp. 105–07.
[610] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

> The thousand variations of prehistoric art revolve around what is probably a mythological theme in which images of animals and representations of men and women confront and complement each other.[611]

Later in the book, when addressing the art in terms of 'Ethnic Symbols', rather than in connection with 'Technics and Language', he asserts that:

> Statistical analysis of several thousand cave paintings or art objects reveals the existence of a central theme: man/woman and (or) horse/bison, expressed in a manner that met the prescribed conditions for rendering what was probably the content of a myth.[612]

He then goes on to coin the term 'mythogram' as a summary of his contention, insisting that one 'expressive feature (phallus, vulva, bison's or horse's head)' was associated with others 'in order to translate a mythological whole into symbols – to construct a mythogram.'[613] With this coinage he describes the prehistoric marks found in caves as 'closer to ideograms than to pictograms and closer to pictograms than to descriptive art.'[614]

While Leroi-Gourhan does not give prominence to the association between his own ideas and those of his contemporaries, he does acknowledge that Laming-Emperaire discussed the possibility that the animal pairings that she observed first at Lascaux and then elsewhere might have some mythological significance.[615] Likewise, in an article he published a year later, in the monthly magazine *Sciences et Avenir*, where he elaborates on his concept of the mythogram, he makes passing reference in his introduction to the equivalently structural approach of the cultural analysis already developed by Lévi-Strauss.[616]

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[611] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 266.
[612] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 218 – and compare his subsequent statement: 'underlying all European Palaeolithic art there is a mythographical theme, obscure to our modern intelligence, involving the presence of a man, a woman, a bison and a horse within the same group', *ibid.*, p. 234.
[613] *Ibid.*, p. 221.
[614] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 268.
[615] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 80.
[616] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

The mythogram has not proved to be the key to Palaeolithic cave art that Leroi-Gourhan clearly believed, in the 1960s, that it would become. Independent study of the evidence has not born out his associated position that 'male/female symbolism' provides the basic theme of such art.[617] Nonetheless, it was this conceptual framework that he extended to the prehistoric marks to which we now turn: negative handprints, or hand stencils.

[617] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 240.

6.2 Leroi-Gourhan on Palaeolithic Hand Stencils

In *Le Geste et La Parole*, Leroi-Gourhan discusses 'realism' in prehistoric painting and sculpture without mentioning handprints or stencils. Whilst acknowledging that 'a completely satisfactory definition' of realism 'is difficult to find', he settles for 'figurative representation that is "accurate" as regards form, movement and detail'.[618] While movement and detail are necessarily absent in hand stencils, the form of these marks, being indexical, is in one sense definitively accurate. Moreover, the process by which many of them seem to have been made – the blowing or spitting of liquid pigment over a hand held flat up against the rock surface – may be likened to the process Leroi-Gourhan gives as a retrospective benchmark for realism: photography. While there is no reliance on light in their means of production, spitting or blowing against stencils nevertheless offers an instantaneous and mechanical or technical record of the object – in this case the hand – that intervenes between pigment and wall. An event of indexical mark-making is at issue. Were the Surrealists to have addressed themselves to these negative handprints they might, after Man Ray's coinage for his own 'cameraless photographs', Rayographs,[619] have called them sprayographs. The point, however, is that the indexicality conferred by their means of production was neglected by Leroi-Gourhan.

In the chapter of *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* that is dedicated to 'The Meaning of Cave Art', Leroi-Gourhan discusses 'the hands' under the category of 'signs',[620] along with the more or less geometric marks that have already been described as catching his interest, the dots, barbs, triangles, rectangles and so forth. Countering the neglect of such markings by authors before him, he defends these 'abstract signs' as 'the most fascinating [*curieux*] domain of Palaeolithic art'.[621] As already indicated, he asserts a means of interpreting all these marks, hand stencils included, by co-opting them to the system of duality or pairing that he is positing for cave art in general – the system he describes in

[618] *Ibid.*, pp. 221–22.
[619] Man Ray 1963, p. 128.
[620] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, pp. 109–10.
[621] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Le Geste et La Parole as based on 'the existence of a central theme: man/woman'. [622]

Leroi-Gourhan states 'in most cases the hands are too small to have belonged to men: the majority seem to be women's hands, and some obviously belonged to children.'[623] Neglecting the issue of what might have been signified by children contributing stencils, this feminisation of the hands allows Leroi-Gourhan the means by which to resume the overall theory of cave art that he is otherwise developing, which he describes a little further on as 'the alternation, complementarity or antagonism between male and female values'.[624] Even if we were to accept that most of the hand stencils were created by women, the case for their significance as female symbols still needs to be made. To this end Leroi-Gourhan notes 'the pairing [*couplage*] of hands, by themselves or in groups, with parallel strokes [*traits parallèles*] or with splashed dots [*ponctuations*]' – as found at Gargas, Tibiran, Rocamadour, Pech-Merle, Castillo and Bernifal.[625] He later gives a slightly different list when noting 'that at Bernifal, Rocamadour, Le Portel, and El Castillo hands occur in the immediate vicinity of short strokes [*bâtonnets*] or lines of dots [*lignes de points*]'.[626] His next move is to invoke the role of a male sign, as played by the strokes and dots. He has already established, 'beyond possible doubt', that this role is played by these marks, mainly through noting their positioning within caves alongside (the more, or less, explicit) female signs, 'vulvas, ovals, triangles, claviforms or rectangular signs'.[627] It should be acknowledged that there is, of course, reliance here on a somewhat circular argument, according to which it is claimed that the proximity of strokes and dots, on the one hand, and female signs, on the other, proves male/female pairing, while a simultaneous claim is made that male/female pairing explains the proximity of strokes-dots and female signs. Nonetheless, Leroi-Gourhan feels confident in concluding that 'It is therefore probable that when female hands were paired with male signs… they must have performed the function of female signs.'[628]

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[622] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 218.
[623] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 109.
[624] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[625] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[626] *Ibid.*, p. 264.
[627] *Ibid.*, p. 108.
[628] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Leroi-Gourhan discusses the possibility that making hand stencils involved pressing a palm up to the rock and also that in some instances, in concavities or niches in the wall, the back of the hand might have been used instead. He goes on to make at least two assumptions that we may now wish to challenge. First, he assumes that the person whose hand operated as a stencil was also the person that applied the pigment. Since in most instances this is impossible to prove, or disprove, we may wish to reserve judgement on the matter. Second, like Bataille,[629] he describes the process at issue as having involved 'surrounding' or 'silhouetting' [*détourer*] the palm and fingers with pigment, distributing the colour 'around' [*autour*] the hand, rather than coating it too, along with the rock surface.[630] As such, Leroi-Gourhan does not consider the suggestion that negative handprints were likely created with liquefied pigment sprayed from mouth. This idea was proposed by Norbert Casteret in 1934 and it subsequently gained widespread currency, arguably under Breuil, who described the technique in *Quatre Cents Siècles d'Art Pariétal*.[631] Prehistorians have since debated how the oral projection of pigments might have been carried out, with some arguing that a tube or blowpipe – a reed or hollow bone – would have been used and others countering that blowing or spitting was tool free, direct from the mouth.[632] At the same time there is scientific consensus on the pigments most commonly involved: charcoal (and sometimes manganese oxide) created black hand-stencils and clay (and sometimes iron oxide) created the equivalent in red.

While Leroi-Gourhan describes the 'total incidence' of hand stencils in amongst prehistoric cave-art as 'small', the two major sites to have been discovered since he published *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental*, Cosquer (in 1985) and Chauvet (in 1994), have each been found to include notable hand stencils. Writing in 1992, Jean Clottes and Jean Courtin describe the negative prints as 'numerous and present in many prehistoric caves', listing twenty-two such sites in France and Spain, to which we may now add Chauvet as a twenty-third.[633]

[629] Bataille (1930b) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, p. 267 – and (January 1955) *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 9, p. 334.
[630] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 109.
[631] Casteret 1934, pp. 110–16; Breuil 1952, p. 45.
[632] See summary of the debate in Guthrie 2005, p.118.
[633] Clottes and Courtin (1992) 1996, p. 64 (with list given on p. 66).

And the motif is not confined to what is now Europe, as became clear when Henri Lhote, 'with the encouragement and support of [his] revered teacher, the Abbé Breuil',[634] published *A la Découverte des Fresques du Tassili* in 1958. In this book – subtitled *The Story of the Prehistoric Rock-Paintings of the Sahara* in the English translation, which came out the following year – Lhote describes finding '"negatives" of hands' at Ti-n-Tazarift, Jabbaren and Sefar.[635]



Palaeolithic marks at Chauvet, c. 30,000 BP

Hand stencils at Gargas and Pech Merle will now be considered in particular, before we move to interpret them in terms of threshold events.

[634] Lhote (1958) 1959, p. 11.
[635] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

6.2.1 Gargas

In *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental*, Leroi-Gourhan writes that 'The best-known collection [of hand stencils] is that of the Gargas cave, where there are some hundred and fifty red and black hands.'[636] Subsequent study of this site, which remains renowned for its hands, has suggested that significantly more may be discerned: the French Ministry of Culture's 1984 publication, *L'Art des Cavernes: Atlas des Grottes Ornées Paléolithiques Françaises*, puts the figure at two hundred and fifty.[637] And the marks are thought to have been made some 27,000 years ago.

Gargas sits within the Hautes-Pyrénées, found today near the village of Aventignan. Leroi-Gourhan describes the history of its interest for visitors:

> Known for centuries, this cave was explored at the close of the nineteenth century by Félix Regnault, who discovered the famous cave-bear ossuary and the hands outlined in red and black. From 1911 on, É[mile] Cartailhac, H[enri] Neuville and the Abbé [Henri] Breuil took on the excavation and undertook a study of the engravings.

He then gives the following description of the space:

> The Gargas cave is large – 135 metres long and varying in width from twenty to forty metres – and it is readily accessible from one end to the other. Daylight enters directly as far as the back of the first chamber, and its reflection illuminates the first major run in the cave, forty metres from the entrance. Topographically, the cave decoration shows extremely interesting subdivisions. Hands in negative appear on the walls of the first chamber and again in the front part of the fourth chamber, just past the bend formed by chambers II and III.[638]

[636] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 109.
[637] Claude Barrière in Baudry 1984, p. 516.
[638] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 249.



Hand stencils at Gargas, c. 27,000 BP

Leroi-Gourhan goes on to describe the accompanying paintings and engravings, animal figures and abstract marks, before coming back to the hand stencils in order to state that the 'problem' of their interpretation 'remains untouched.'[639] He also draws attention to the fact, widely noted, that many of the hand stencils at Gargas have shortened fingers.[640] Dismissing claims that ritual and sacrificial mutilation might explain this phenomenon and not even mentioning those suggestions that frostbite, dietary deficiency or disease were to blame, he settles on the theory that all fingers were intact but some were folded when the stencilling took place. Whilst in *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* he merely concludes that fingers were bent in this way 'for reasons that escape us', he would subsequently analyse the Gargas hands in some detail and develop a stronger contention. In 1967, in the *Bulletin de la Société Préhistorique Française*, he ventured that 'it is probably the case that, for a circumscribed ethnic group, we have the direct transposition of the hunter's gestural symbols into wall painting.'[641] The suggestion is that in daylight, above ground, hunters would have used 'the play of fingers in order to signal silently the presence of game of one sort or another' and further more that in the darkness, below ground, a similar system of signals was stencilled onto the cave walls in some form of magical-religious hunting ritual.[642]

[639] *Ibid.*, p. 250.
[640] *Ibid.*, p. 109 and p. 250.
[641] Leroi-Gourhan 1967, p. 121.
[642] *Ibid.*, p. 222.



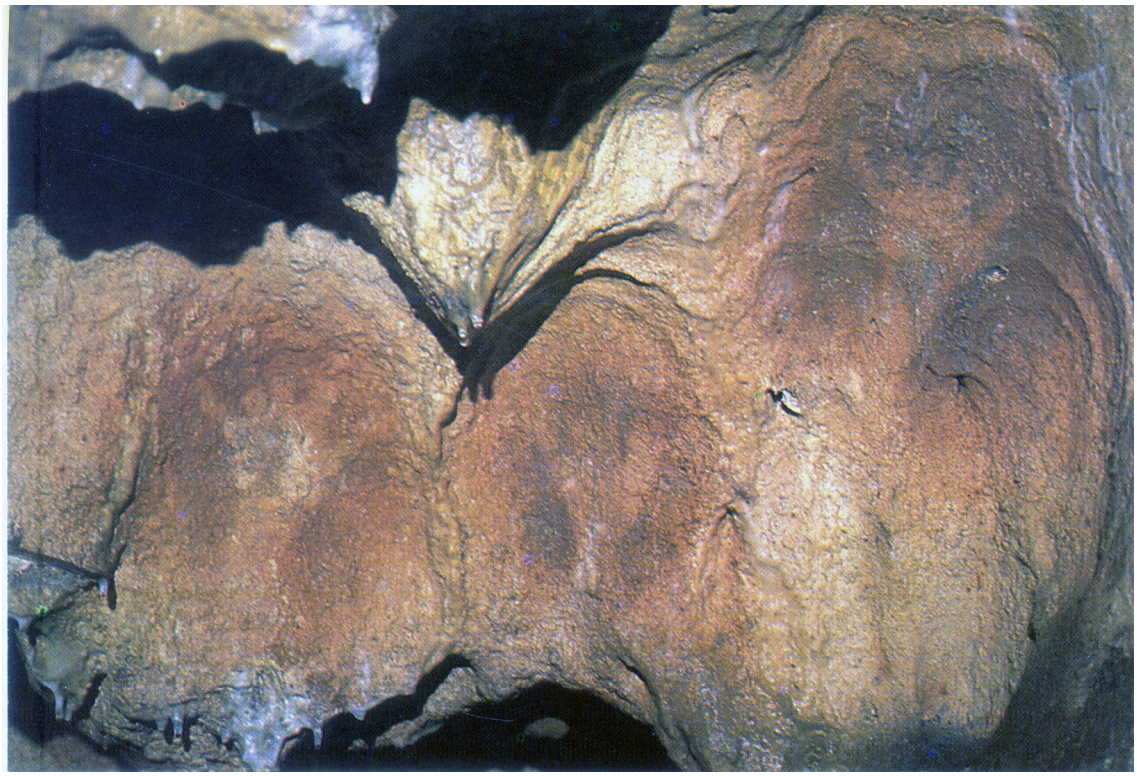
Hand stencil at Gargas, c. 27,000 BP

In his 1967 paper on 'The Hands of Gargas', Leroi-Gourhan considers the different means by which pigment may have been applied to the rock surface. Intimating that he, or at least an associate, had practiced different types of stencilling and compared the results with the Palaeolithic examples at Gargas, he relegates 'spraying from a distance' in favour of the daubing of 'powder with the help of a brush (a simple tuft of hair, straightened and bound) onto the damp surface of the wall.'[643] Subsequent researchers have analysed the Gargas hand stencils minutely and concluded that a mixture of techniques was involved.[644] Partially corroborating Leroi-Gourhan's claims, the negative prints in black found on the main wall in the first chamber are now believed to have been made using a wide brush or a piece of fur, although a paste of manganese oxide (rather than a powdered pigment) has been implicated. At the same time and by contrast, the hands silhouetted in black in the recessed space that has been dubbed 'the sanctuary' are now thought to have been made through liquid projection, the pigment having been made from finely crushed charcoal.[645]

Well over half the negative handprints found at Gargas are black, roughly a third are red, several are yellow and one is white. While the clouds of pigment sometimes overlap – like the lines that mark out animal forms – the hands do not. The numbers counted easily treble those found to date anywhere else.

[643] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[644] Clot, Menu and Walter 1995.
[645] http://grottesdegargas.free.fr/PAGE_7.html last accessed 26 March 2010.

Indeed, while the tally is over fifty in the Cosquer cave near Marseilles and also in the El Castillo cave in Cantabria, most sites where hand stencils feature have fewer than ten. Moreover, the Gargas hands tend to be clustered, rather than isolated and scattered. Walking through the subterranean chambers and looking at the crowds of stencils it is hard not to envisage a gathering of people making them; the many hands suggest many bodies and collective activity. Leroi-Gourhan emphasises Breuil's remark that the same hand was often used as a stencil repeatedly but there is a diversity of sizes to be seen nonetheless, implying that both genders – and/or adolescents as well as adults – were involved. At least two negative prints indicate an infant hand or hands. A prehistoric clamour of silent voices is heard in the darkness. And the dozen or so complete hands are drowned out by the incomplete counterparts that surround them: palms sprouting folded digits or finger stumps.



Hand stencils at Gargas, c. 27,000 BP

6.2.2 Pech Merle

The first image that you see on opening Leroi-Gourhan's *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* – that is, the photograph reproduced on the front endpaper – shows a Palaeolithic hand-stencil found in the Pech Merle cave, near Cabrerets in the Lot region of France. In the ensuing pages of his book the author describes how 'The cave and its paintings were first discovered in 1922 by [André] David and [Henri] Dutertre.' He goes on:

> Pech Merle consists of a network of underground passages over two kilometres in length. Figures occupy only one part of it, found in the 500 metres beyond what must have been the original entrance.[646]

The painted and engraved areas are more 'labyrinthine' than Gargas, with smaller chambers and paths that fork and then reconverge.[647] The marks gathered here are thought to have been made some 25,000 years ago.



Hand stencil and dots at Pech Merle, c. 25,000 BP

[646] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 263.
[647] *Ibid.*

Leroi-Gourhan is quick to note that the black hand-stencil he illustrates at the beginning of his book is accompanied on the cave wall by a short string of black dots, since this conveniently allows him to reiterate his theory of binary symbolism, according to which marks that he associates with female identity (in this instance hands) are said to be paired with marks he associates with male identity (here lines of dots). In fact the dots in question lie across the page in Leroi-Gourhan's illustration and the dividing line of the book spine – running vertically down the centre of the reproduced photograph – neatly bisects the imagery, introducing a fold that underscores the purported opposition and complementarity of the parts to either side.



Painting at Pech Merle, c. 25,000 BP, contextualising that shown in the previous photograph

The particular set of marks that are chosen to open *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* appear at Pech Merle to the far left of what Leroi-Gourhan calls 'the panel of the dotted horses'.[648] A photograph of the other end of this stretch of wall, where another black hand-stencil and one of two dotted horses are

[648] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

prominent, is used on the cover of the February 1966 issue of *Sciences et Avenir*, in which Leroi-Gourhan writes on 'The Religion of the Caves' (and asks, in a subtitle, 'Magic or Metaphysics?).'[649] He describes the imagery on this section of wall as 'monumental and also enigmatic'.[650] The horses are immediately recognisable as horses and the bulk of their dappled bodies is almost life size, yet aspects of their rendering clearly break or play with realism, while elements stray into patterning, or fantasy and arguably in both these directions at once. The puffs of black pigment that dapple the backs of the animals are not contained there but escape beyond the figurative outlines. Around the crest of the horse that is to the right, these dots suggest a mane, and surrounding the tiny painted head, or headless peak, they allow the animal to adopt the edge of the rock face, a decidedly equine profile, as its own. Smaller figures in red are overlaid or underlying: seven red stencils of hooked thumbs lie scattered across the back of the horse to the left and a red-spotted fish, a pike perhaps or sturgeon, interlocks with the barrel of the horse to the right.

Surrounding this imagery there are six hand-stencils in black, relatively evenly spaced around the edges of the stretch of wall. These hands bring a sense of rhythmic order to the whole, making it hard not to see a compositional logic at play in the assemblage of marks. If we are indeed studying what may be described as a 'panel', then the hand stencils form a frame on three sides. The lowermost handprint, which is positioned between the legs and beneath the belly of the horse to the left, is so close to the ground that the person whose hand is represented must have squatted down or lain out before making contact with the wall. It has been argued that a second person was most likely involved in making the mark, spitting or blowing pigment over the hand of the first person,[651] however my own rough experiments corroborate the findings of the detailed simulation research of Michel Lorblanchet,[652] indicating that a solo performer, using their own mouth to direct paint against their own hand, cannot be ruled out.

[649] This image reproduces fig. 64 in Leroi-Gourhan's *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental*, p. 153.
[650] Leroi-Gourhan 1965, p. 264.
[651] Lewis-Williams 2002, p. 219.
[652] Lorblanchet 1991.

Perhaps the most compelling hand stencils amongst those surrounding the spotted horses at Pech Merle are the two that form brackets around the loin and haunches of the animal to the right. Assuming the palm was placed against the wall in each case, rather than the back of the hand, we see a left hand to the left and a right hand to the right, and it is tempting to imagine them as a pair, to attribute them to the same person. Given their positioning, their spacing from each other and their distance from the ground, a standing figure with hands comfortably outstretched, at or above shoulder height, is implicated. Either the owner of the hands stencilled them, one after another, or, if other people were involved, the prints may have been made simultaneously, in a single moment in which two mouths coordinated their spitting or blowing of pigment. These two negative prints are compelling because between them they tend to conjure not just the past presence of hands, and of a mouth or mouths, but a full body – head, torso, legs, feet – a lightning rod for the mark-making event, perhaps.



As with the first picture that you see on opening Bataille's book on Lascaux from a decade before, the hand stencil and accompanying dots that appear at the beginning of *Préhistoire de l'Art Occidental* are reproduced at such a scale that the imagery is approximately life-size. The effect is especially engaging in Leroi-Gourhan's book, since life-size in the case of a hand stencil – as opposed to the case of the horse painting chosen by Bataille – is also bodily life-size: the actual size of the hand depicted. As a result a bodily response to the printed

photograph is elicited, which prompts identification with the prehistoric person whose hand is represented: we are encouraged to allow our own hand, on the page, to fill the space once taken by a Palaeolithic hand, on the cave wall. The time elapsed since the moment of stencilling suddenly dissolves and we are projected back a quarter of a million years into the mark-making scene. The throw-back in time, triggered by our re-enacting the prehistoric manual gesture, constitutes a modern threshold event. Inadvertently, perhaps, Leroi-Gourhan extends the concerted strategy developed by Bataille in *La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la Naissance de l'Art*: we encounter in our exposure to the documentation of Palaeolithic cave art, something of the limit experience that may have gone into, or come out, of its making.

6.3 Reinterpreting Palaeolithic Hand Stencils in Light of Leroi-Gourhan's *Gesture and Speech*, 1964–65

Palaeolithic hand stencils, or negative handprints, will now be considered from perspectives offered by Leroi-Gourhan in *Le Geste et La Parole*. It should be noted that the specific interpretations that will be pursued here did not concern Leroi-Gourhan: his words will be brought to bear on material that he did not address in this way himself. The ambition here is to use hand stencils as a prism through which to view events of evolutionary emergence, such as he describes these events.

To some extent the threshold onto an unpredictable future that is entailed in evolutionary emergence is anathema to Leroi-Gourhan's writing in *Le Geste et La Parole*. Here he extols the particular evolution of *Homo sapiens* as if the rise of our species followed an irresistible and secured path. At the end of his chapter on 'The Brain and the Hand', for instance, he asserts:

> Whether their orientation be metaphysical or rationalist, whatever explanations they may offer, all evolutionists agree that the stream upon which we are borne forward is *the* stream of evolution. Lichen, jellyfish, oyster and giant turtle, like the giant dinosaur, are no more than spray from the central jet that gushes human-ward.[653]

Such anthropocentrism and determinism will be set aside in what follows, with evolutionary emergence to be seen, by contrast, as a transformative event of open-ended rather than predetermined passage. Likewise, where Leroi-Gourhan tends to emphasise 'progressive' change, we may prefer to understand this as successive, while noting the implication that transition is gradual rather than sudden; in fact we will focus on those moments in *Le Geste et La Parole* when he views incremental change from such a temporal distance that it amounts to a step change, or event.

There are a number of events, which are described by Leroi-Gourhan, that hand stencils give us cause to consider: first, the evolution of the human hand, or the

[653] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 85.

‘liberation’ of the forelimbs from a responsibility for locomotion; second, the evolution of the human brain, or the opening up of the cortical fan and ‘liberation’ from the facial mask; third, the co-evolution of behaviour at the ‘manual pole' and at the ‘facial pole', or the emergence of technics and language; fourth, the evolution of ‘graphism’; and finally prehistoric ‘exploration into an alternative state, involving mental exile’.

Produced more than a million years after the evolutionary emergence of the earliest humans, and maybe a hundred thousand years after the emergence of our own species, Palaeolithic negative handprints will be seen, through the appropriated words of Leroi-Gourhan, to mark these events of anatomical and behavioural emergence retrospectively.

6.3.1 Evolution of the Human Hand: 'Liberation' of the Forelimbs from Responsibility for Locomotion

Leroi-Gourhan was certainly not the first to suggest that all human species – not only our own, that is, anatomically modern humans, who he refers to as Neanthropians; but also those species that emerged before us, including Neanderthals, who he describes as Palaeoanthropians; and also our earliest shared human ancestors, who he categorises as Australanthropians – might be collectively distinguished from monkeys on the basis of bipedal locomotion. However, his writing is conspicuous for the emphasis it places on this characteristic, insisting that sustaining an upright posture when moving is 'The first and most important of all [the criteria of humanity]'.[654] In giving it prior status – by describing it not only as the most important criterion but also as the first – he posits the freeing of the hands from the ground when we are in motion, that is, their release from the requirements of locomotion, as the definitive event of human onset. He writes: 'the origin is situated in the moment of the liberation of the hand'.[655] Anatomical liberation, a notion that Leroi-Gourhan traces back to Gregory of Nyssa's 'Treatise on the Creation of Man' of 379 CE,[656] is thus said to announce the moment of species – indeed genus – emergence.

We may approach Palaeolithic hand stencils as mark-making events that re-enact the onset of humanity in the sense of a release of the hand from the ground. For this we must rotate our frame of reference by ninety degrees about a horizontal axis, allowing the cave wall to stand in for the ground, or indeed to double as a stage. The spraying with pigment of the hand held against the wall then sets the scene: the hand, covered along with the rock immediately all around it, is dressed as a forelimb that is bound to the ground, compelled to make contact for the purposes of locomotion. The action then takes place as the palm and digits are lifted away, as the hand is liberated from the ground. In this split-second moment, in which a Neanthropian hand is released from the rock, we may find an echo of the trans-millennial evolutionary moment, described by Leroi-Gourhan, in which Australanthropians emerged to walk erect. The negative handprint revealed after stencilling, exposed in the moment

[654] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[655] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[656] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

of the hand's release, thus marks an evolutionary event that took place over a million years before: the accession to bipedalism. What Leroi-Gourhan deduces from detailed comparison of fossil bones we may now see in negative handprints: co-opting his words to our own purposes, 'it is as though we are witnessing', through marks made over a million years later, the 'liberation… of the hand'.[657] To the extent that, in looking at Palaeolithic hand stencils, we see this evolutionary event described by Leroi-Gourhan, these negative prints mark a threshold moment – giving visual form to the advent of a world in which one's hands are free in locomotion.

[657] *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

6.3.2 Evolution of the Human Brain; the Opening up of the Cortical Fan and 'Liberation' from the Facial Mask

Having asserted bipedal locomotion as primary in the emergence of humanity, Leroi-Gourhan then elaborates on the skeletal adaptation that facilitates it:

> This adaptation expresses itself… especially in the modified pelvis on which the full weight of the trunk is balanced. The spine shows compensatory curves whose resultant is a vertical line… The head's essential characteristic is that it is balanced on top of the vertebral column.[658]

Taking a closer look at the skull, he continues:

> the occipital foramen [i.e. the hole through which the spinal cord passes] is located at the base… opening downward… situated below the cranium and not obliquely at its back.[659]

Thus, 'the back of the skull is completely disengaged',[660] mechanically freed as a result of the suspension of the whole on top of an erect backbone. From the cranium he then extrapolates to what it encloses:

> The most apparent consequence of this [disengagement of the skull] is the pronounced "coiling" of the brain, which becomes L-shaped. This incurvation of the cerebral floor is geometrically conceivable only in conjunction with a considerable enlargement of the circumference of the convexity of the brain; in other words, the convexity opens up literally like a fan.[661]

In this way Leroi-Gourhan posits a secondary and brain-based event that, enfolded into the release of the hands from a role in locomotion, clinches the evolutionary emergence of humans. At the same time, the opening up of the

[658] *Ibid.*, pp. 90–92.
[659] *Ibid.*, pp. 95–97.
[660] *Ibid.*, p. 98.
[661] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

cortical fan is proposed as an event that is progressively elaborated over time, in the successive emergence of different human species. Using inter-cranial casts of fossils to give a picture of the brains of extinct species, Leroi-Gourhan writes, for instance, that 'the clearest manifestation of cerebral development from the Australanthropians to the Palaeoanthropians is the increase in the surface areas of the cortex in the central fronto-parietal regions';[662] in other words, he finds evidence of a further opening up of the cortical fan in the passage from the earliest humans to Neanderthals. In the evolution of our own species he emphasises the loss of the orbital ridge and the concomitant development of the prefrontal cortex: he anchors 'the moment of the emergence of *Homo sapiens*' in the 'liberation… of the brain from the facial mask', with echoes here of the prior event of the liberation of the hand.[663]

From the very beginning of his chapter entitled 'Brain and Hand', Leroi-Gourhan fights against what he describes as 'the "cerebral" vision of evolution', insisting instead that 'the brain was the beneficiary of developments in locomotory adaptation, not their cause.'[664] Seen in light of *Le Geste et La Parole*, the Palaeolithic prints and stencils found on cave walls may be said to accentuate the primary prominence of the hand, over the brain, in the emergence of humanity over a million years before. The pair of stencils above the loin and haunches of the second spotted horse at Pech Merle offers particularly pertinent commentary in this respect, since their conjunction (left beside right) and their positioning (shoulder distance apart and at shoulder height) implicates a head hovering behind them in the process of their making. It is as if these hands recall the fingering of the threshold onto novel species existence, while demonstrating the attendant promise – given in the head they imply between them – of concomitant activity involving the cranium and underlying cortex.

[662] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[663] *Ibid.*, p. 153 and pp. 40–41 respectively.
[664] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

6.3.3 Co-evolution of the 'Manual' and 'Facial Poles': Emergence of Technics and Language

The thrust of the second chapter of *Le Geste et La Parole* is the evolution, in disparate vertebrates (and also in some arthropods), of co-ordinated – specifically bipolar – action within what is called the anterior field of responsiveness. In other words, Leroi-Gourhan considers the evolution of behaviour that involves more than just the face, or what he calls 'the facial pole', in the process of procuring food. Taking the bodily form of humans and monkeys as his model, and specifically implicating a role for the hands, he names the second extremity involved in this activity the 'manual pole'.[665] With this expression he nonetheless simultaneously implicates anatomical parts that, while operative like the face at the front of the animal and in connection with food, are not strictly hands: the front paws of mammals such as squirrels, rats, bears and lions, for instance, also the claws of crabs and owls, and even the seabed-searching fins of fish like the tench and gurnard. His point is that the demands of coordinated facial and manual action lead to the complementary evolution of the mouth and forelimbs.

Bipolar technicity in the anterior field, such as it is elaborated across diverse species by Leroi-Gourhan, is playfully pushed in a new direction in the making of Palaeolithic hand stencils. These negative prints mark coordinated activity at the facial and manual poles, however stencilling – unlike feeding – operates from mouth to hand, rather than the other way round. With oral ingestion of food from the hand replaced by oral ejection of pigment against the hand, the direction of bipolar interplay is reversed.

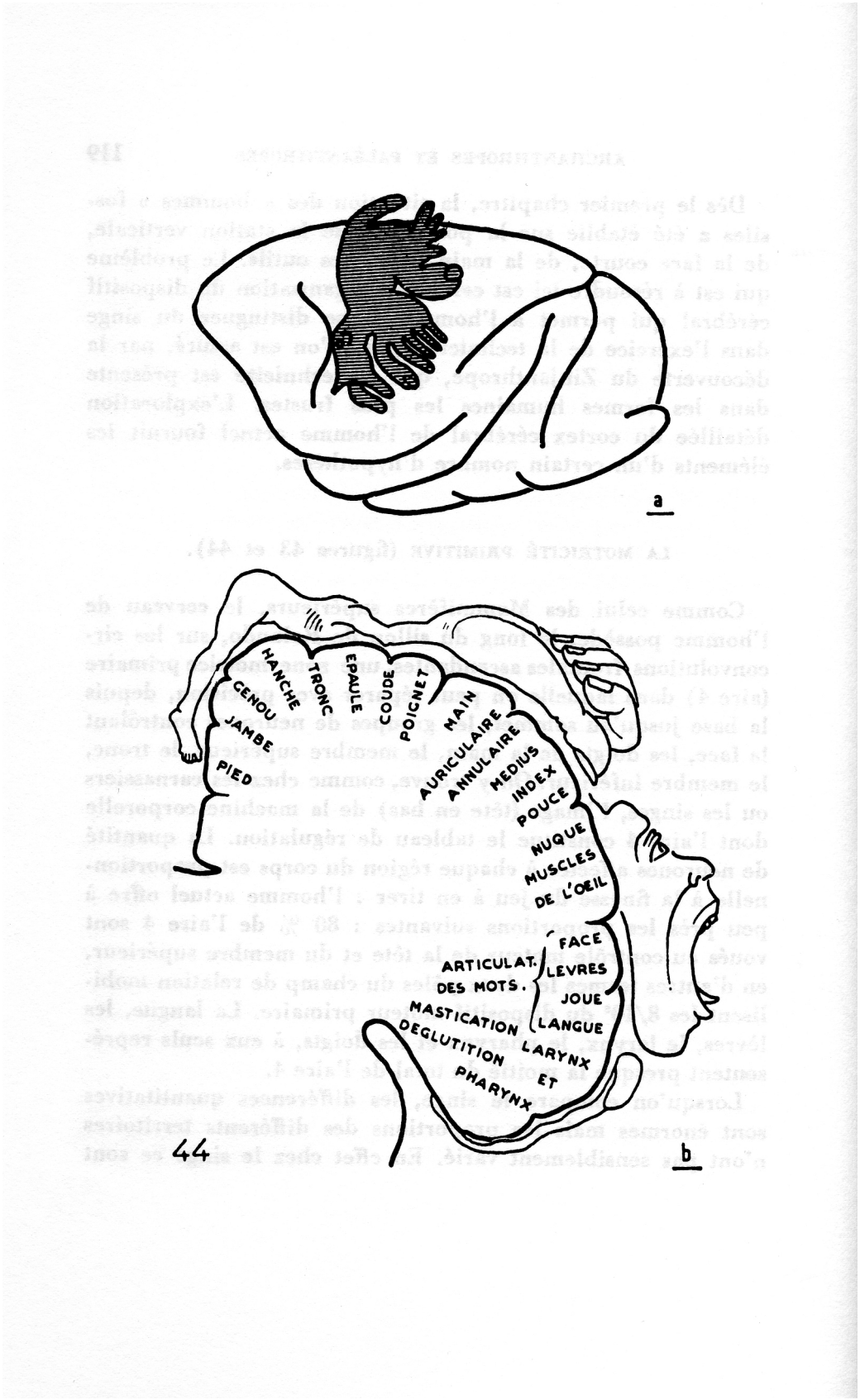
Leroi-Gourhan characterises activity at the manual pole in humans in terms of tool construction and use, and he considers the progressive development of increasingly sophisticated tools in considerable detail. Addressing himself to the technical capability of Australanthropians, he suggests these earliest humans 'seem to have possessed their tools in much the same way that an animal has claws… as if their brains and their bodies had gradually exuded them'.[666] The

[665] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[666] *Ibid.*, pp. 151–52.

Neanthropian use of hands as stencils, in the making of negative prints on cave walls, seems to offer an image of this event of exudation, as if reflecting back on the event a million years later. In the act of stencilling, the hand becomes distanced from the body, being objectified as stencil, becoming a tool.

Leroi-Gourhan characterises activity at the facial pole in humans in terms of speech. Moreover, he posits hands/tools and face/language as complementary 'functional pairs', with the formation of 'sound symbols' at the mouth related to the manual generation of 'instruments of material action',[667] in spite of food procurement ceasing to be a simple connecting factor. He argues that 'tools for the hand and language for the face are twin poles of the same apparatus', where the apparatus [*dispositif*] implicated is not the human body in general but its central nervous system in particular.[668] As described by Leroi-Gourhan, tools emerge in conjunction with humanity – that is, with the Australanthropians – and, moreover, 'as soon as there are prehistoric tools, there is a possibility of a prehistoric language, for tools and language are neurologically linked'.[669] Here we are returned to the opening up of the cortical fan in the evolutionary emergence of the human brain. Leroi-Gourhan argues this evolutionary development was centred on a cortical region that, in anatomically modern humans, includes those areas now implicated in speech production and comprehension – here Broca's work in the nineteenth is singled out for particular credit[670] – and also the primary motor cortex, where neural representation of hands and face predominates over that for other body parts. Again on the basis of intercranial fossil casts, it is concluded that 'the presence of verbal and gestural association areas [of the brain] is perfectly conceivable from the Australanthropians onward.'[671]

[667] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[668] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[669] *Ibid.*, p. 163.
[670] *Ibid.*, p. 124.
[671] *Ibid.*, p. 127.



From André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et La Parole*, vol. 1, p. 120,
showing the voluntary motor cortices for the macaque (a, after Clinton Woolsey)
and human (b, after Wilder Penfield and Theodore Rasmussen)

Palaeolithic hand stencils offer their own unification of technics and language: whilst demonstrating tool use they may also be taken as remote echoes of prehistoric speech. Clearly clay or charcoal conveyed to the wall from the mouth does not literally record words. However, given the profound silence of the prehistoric world as far as we are now able to know it, through its remnants, the pigment projected onto the rock from the lips may constitute the closest we can get to speech from the time: it stands as a trace of oral production, with each burst suggesting an ejective consonant, a plosive or fricative.

6.3.4 Evolution of 'Graphism'

Before considering 'Writing and the Linearisation of Symbols',[672] on the one hand, and 'Aesthetic Behaviour',[673] on the other, Leroi-Gourhan addresses himself to what he calls graphism, or 'the capacity to express thought in material symbols.'[674] While the term graphism is used to imply both writing and image making it further designates other practices operating in between these two – including abstract mark making and ideography.

Neglecting to mention certain ivory animal sculptures that were known at the time, Leroi-Gourhan suggests that the earliest evidence of graphism, or material symbolisation, takes abstract form. He is particularly concerned with fragments of bone and stone found to bear small, more or less equidistant incisions. He notes that these 'have been interpreted as "hunt tallies", a form of account keeping', whilst proving quick to clarify that 'there is no substantial proof in the past or present to support this hypothesis.'[675] He moves on to suggest an alternative interpretation, according to which the engraved lines might 'concretise an incantatory recitation', their presence on a shard of bone or stone turning this object into the 'supporting medium' for some form of rhythmic performance.[676] Whatever the specific significance of these marks for their makers – rational or mathematical, as traditionally understood, or religious or aesthetic, as proposed by Leroi-Gourhan – and whatever the evidence accumulated since his time, these incised lines are presented in *Le Geste et La Parole* as the 'earliest traces' of 'the birth of graphism'.[677] It is the event that they are held to testify to that is significant here.

Leroi-Gourhan writes that material symbolisation 'emerged together with *Homo sapiens*'.[678] Accordingly, 'the drawing [*tracé*] and reading of symbols' is described in *Le Geste et La Parole* as being 'exclusively characteristic of humanity in the narrow sense', and evolutionarily associated with 'the dawn of

[672] *Ibid.*, pp. 275–82.
[673] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), pp. 82–89.
[674] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 261.
[675] *Ibid.*, p. 263.
[676] *Ibid.*
[677] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[678] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

Homo sapiens'.[679] In other words, he heralds 'the birth of graphism',[680] where Bataille and others had previously heralded 'the birth of art'[681] – that is, in connection with the onset of our species. In fact, as already flagged in the previous discussion of Bataille's work, an assumption of temporal coincidence between the emergence of anatomically modern humans and the beginning of graphic representation is now often challenged, if only because in archaeological finds of the last fifty years the earliest fossil remains of the former consistently predate the earliest evidence of the latter by many tens of thousands of years. Nonetheless, the work of Leroi-Gourhan, like that of Bataille, gives us cause to look again at Palaeolithic art as a means of reflecting on an understanding of events of evolutionary onset.

When addressing himself to the first paintings, engravings and sculptures of animals, Leroi-Gourhan generalises from his mythogram theory of cave art and builds on the interpretations of the incised bones and stones as just described, suggesting that 'in its origins figurative art was directly linked with language and was much closer to writing, in its broadest sense, than to [what we now understand by] a work of art.'[682] Although he does not consider hand stencils in the same terms, these Palaeolithic marks may be seen, perhaps all too easily, as material symbols that are at least as close to writing, broadly conceived, as to visual art. Together with positive handprints, hand stencils may be seen to record a personal or collective presence, perhaps at a specific place within the cave, proclaiming 'I am, or we are, here' in the moment of making and, after the event, maintaining 'I was, or we were, there' retrospectively. However, such propositions may not have been their point. Handprints may have acted as sign posts, perhaps conferring some form of special status upon the site they marked, or they may have represented specific magical-religious entreaties, working as symbols in connection with fertility, health, hunting or any other basic, or maybe less basic, needs. Where stencilled fingers are found to be abbreviated in length – and if we set aside theories that posit pathology or mutilation as the cause – it is possible we see a whole system of symbolisation in play, with different combinations of finger foldings conveying different

[679] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[680] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
[681] As referenced in the title of Bataille 1955.
[682] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 266.

messages. As specifically suggested by Leroi-Gourhan a few years after publishing *Le Geste et La Parole*, and as already mentioned, the shortened fingers stencilled on the cave walls at Gargas may have operated as recordings in charcoal or clay of gestural symbols developed in the context of animal hunting.[683]

In fact we may also choose to see Palaeolithic hand stencils as restagings of the birth of graphism and, if we allow Leroi-Gourhan's association between events to stand, thereby of the onset of our species. Through their reliance on a projection of pigment from mouth to hand, negative prints re-enact or dramatise the transformative event by which symbolisation at the facial pole (in speech) becomes symbolisation at the manual pole (in graphism). As such, on reaching the hand and simultaneously staining the wall, the clay or charcoal marks the threshold onto novel species existence: the passage to *Homo sapiens*.

[683] Leroi-Gourhan 1967.

6.3.5 'Exploration into an Alternative State, Involving Mental Exile'

In *Le Geste et La Parole* Leroi-Gourhan writes that 'Palaeolithic art offers very few examples of what might be construed as flights of the imagination'.[684] He goes on to consider the few prehistoric 'monsters' found depicted on cave walls, including the figure at Lascaux dubbed the 'unicorn' by Breuil.[685] He does not consider the possibility, more recently elaborated by palaeoanthropologists including Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, that Palaeolithic hand stencils might mark a moment of flight from the physical to a spiritual domain. As already described in the preceding chapter on Bataille, the suggestion of these authors is that the pigment spat or blown against the rock was ritually prepared, with magical intent, such that hands then so covered might have seemed to pass through the cave wall: 'to penetrate into the spiritual world hidden behind the veil of stone';[686] or to traverse the rock 'membrane', which names the 'living support' between 'the material and spiritual realms'.[687] According to these speculative interpretations, Palaeolithic hand stencils might only have had transient import for their immediate community, or rather their primary role might have been operative in the act of their creation, with diminished value attributed to the remaining marks after the production event has passed. Thus while a negative handprint on a cave wall may have had some enduring function in the representation of particular thoughts, as a graphic sign, it might also, or indeed only, have marked the passage of someone, the person whose hand is involved, into an imagined realm – the spitting or blowing of pigment against the hand having enabled or enacted this passage.

Viewed in this way, Palaeolithic hand stencils may be seen to trace the event that Leroi-Gourhan describes as 'exploration into an alternative state [of mind], involving mental exile [*dépaysement mentale*]'.[688] He gives 'ruptures of rhythmic balance' or 'ruptures of natural rhythms' an important role in this exploration,[689] suggesting psychological alterity is attained 'by shattering the routines of the

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[684] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 248. This is the translation given in Leroi-Gourhan (1964–65) 1993, p. 393.
[685] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 249, and illustration (fig. 153) p. 247.
[686] Jean Clottes, quoted on the Gargas website: http://grottesdegargas.free.fr/PAGE_7.html – last accessed 21 May 2010.
[687] David Lewis-Williams 2002, p. 210.
[688] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 99.
[689] *Ibid.*, p. 99 and p. 100 respectively.

physiological system',[690] with 'prolonged wakefulness, the inversion of day and night, fasting and sexual abstinence' listed as potential contributory factors.[691] While we cannot tell when Palaeolithic visitors entered the caves, whether it was by day or nocturnally, nor how long they spent there wakefully, the pitch dark of the subterranean environment suggests the routine-breaking experience of perpetual night. Leroi-Gourhan further associates the achievement of altered mental states with 'exceptional rituals, ecstatic revelations, practices of possession during which subjects give themselves up in dance or through making sounds, highly charged with supernatural potential'.[692] This speculative description may be expanded to include activity that leaves behind visual marks, and specifically negative handprints. Accordingly, if we adopt Leroi-Gourhan's terms, the practice of blowing or spitting pigment against the spread hand and surrounding rock may be seen as a 'ritual' that triggers an 'ecstatic' state involving the 'revelation' of a spiritual realm beyond the physical barrier of the cave wall. Continuing to apply his phraseology, the stencilled hands that are left behind may be seen to mark an 'excitation of the psyche' that amounts to a 'change of register';[693] they trace the threshold event that inaugurates 'mental exile'.[694] To the extent that they mark events of hallucination and delusion they imply what might be called a madness.

The psychological threshold thus marked by the negative handprints then acts as an echo of the evolutionary threshold at issue in species emergence: the individual experience of mental transformation reiterates the species experience, over many millennia, of behavioural through genetic transformation. Leroi-Gourhan makes a potential connection between events in a trans-millennial timeframe and at a day-to-day or moment-to-moment scale of analysis when he implies that achieving mental exile is an example of '*des grands élans*'.[695] Translated in the English version of *Le Geste et La Parole* as 'great imaginative flights of the spirit',[696] '*des grands élans*' implies transformative bursts at the level of experience and simultaneously, at a vastly

[690] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[691] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[692] *Ibid.*, p. 99.
[693] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[694] *Ibid.*, p. 99.
[695] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[696] Leroi-Gourhan (1964–65) 1993, p. 284.

expanded temporal scale and via reference to Henri Bergson's '*élan vital*' or vital impetus, it implies passage through creative evolution.[697] A lifetime event is set resonating as a harmonic upon an evolutionary event.

We may seek a further harmonic in cerebral events – in the burst of electrochemical potential that shoots down a neuronal axon and in the emergence of experience from a dispersed multiplicity of such events. Here too, at a still smaller scale of analysis, thresholds are crossed – when a neuron's resting potential is exceeded and when widespread electrochemical flux erupts into experience. However, for all his assiduous attention to the brain, Leroi-Gourhan proves more concerned with its architecture than with the nature of its processing. Instead, for a drawing of relations between cerebral and evolutionary activity, we may turn to the work of molecular biologist Jean-Pierre Changeux and specifically to his early paper 'Le Cerveau et l'Évènement' ['The Brain and the Event'] of 1972. Here Changeux argues that one's innate neural capacity leaves 'place for a margin of non-determination or plasticity',[698] describing the brain's ability 'to self-modify' in terms of its '*evolving* towards a new homeostatic state'.[699] Events across a neuronal network, which give rise to experience, here chime with those across a population of organisms, which give rise to a new species – and, we might add, with events across a psychosocial set of relations, giving rise to mental exile. Hand stencils may be seen to mark threshold events at these three different scales of analysis. At a neural level they mark the eruption of an action potential – with pigment highlighting the edge of the palm and fingers as if critically raising the voltage difference across the membrane of a neuron's cell-body and dendrites – whilst further marking, in their open gesture, the resultant release of neurotransmitters in the synaptic gap. Moreover, the clustering of multiple handprints, in particular at Gargas, points towards the collective and distributed electrochemical activity that we register as a moment of experience.

[697] Bergson (1907) 1911, p. 53 ff.
[698] Changeux 1972, p. 41.
[699] *Ibid.*, p. 38, italics added.

6.4 Conclusion

Leroi-Gourhan's analyses of the events of evolutionary emergence that gave rise to our species offer a framework through which to view Palaeolithic hand stencils. By re-enacting the liberation of the hand from the ground, the making of these negative prints may be seen to represent what Leroi-Gourhan describes as a definitive threshold in the evolutionary passage to Australanthropians, the earliest human species, and at the same time, through mimicking the move of symbolisation beyond the mouth to the hand, the making of the prints further marks the evolutionary onset of our particular species, Neanthropians or *Homo Sapiens*. Moving from an evolutionary scale of analysis to threshold events that register within a human lifetime, we may further find in Palaeolithic hand-stencils what Leroi-Gourhan describes as the pursuit of mental exile. Here the negative prints are seen to trace, in the moment of their making, the event of passage through the cave wall and into a psychologically-instantiated realm at a remove, beyond the threshold given by the rock face. Moreover, shifting onto a neurological scale of analysis, the spreading of the hands to create the negative prints may be seen to mimic the neuronal burst of an action potential and the associated release of neurotransmitters, which may be connected back up to evolutionary events through the analyses of brain events presented by Jean-Pierre Changeux.



Viewed in conjunction with *Le Geste et La Parole* by Leroi-Gourhan and 'Le Cerveau et l'Évènement' by Changeux, Jasper Johns's *Study for 'Skin' I* suggests a related set of threshold events at the same three temporal registers: evolutionary species emergence over millennia; episodic mental exile within a lifetime; and the ongoing burst, moment to moment, of mind from brain. In addition to the mouth and hands implicated in Palaeolithic stencils, Johns brings ears and eyes into the picture. The event captured in his print-drawing seems to evince the emergence of graphism between the facial and manual poles, with symbolisation spreading out from speech production at the mouth and from its comprehension at the ears so as to take material form at the hands and, back at the face, for the eyes. Here Leroi-Gourhan's vision of the onset of *Homo sapiens* or Neanthropians – in 'the birth of graphism'[700] – is set to resound upon what he sees as the behavioural onset of a preceding, indeed the first, human species – in the origin of language and tools with Australanthropians. At the same time, to the extent that we see Johns's face pushing its way across the threshold defined by the picture plane, out of the world that the surface of the paper holds back and into another, our own, we may also see the threshold event of psychological expulsion or escape, as discussed by Leroi-Gourhan as mental exile. While the thrusting and emptying hands further recall, as do Palaeolithic stencils, neurological threshold events, the additional presence of a head, thrown against the page between the hands, suggests the wresting of the mind from the brain, in the event of this brain activity.

[700] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 1 (part 1), p. 262.

Conclusion:
On the Tracing of Threshold Events,
across Art, Psychopathology and Prehistory

I have attempted to demonstrate that particular works of art can be seen to mark threshold events, which may then be traced there – in this art – through analysis in diverse fields. It is as if the critical moment in a process of becoming ontologically other could be glimpsed and, on this basis, studied and discussed. If successful, this would be significant because such moments of transformative passage, where they do not otherwise physically register, struggle to find articulation. Their elusiveness might be preserved, through re-inscription, in the art that I hold to facilitate discourse around them.

Perhaps a strength of my research is its pointing towards something new and strange to be perceived in art that, in a Western context, is now so familiar it has become hard to look at. Rather than seeking to offer these works a novel and challenging interpretation from within the field of art history, I have extracted them for consideration in tangential disciplines. Of course it must be decided by readers of my thesis, which I have modelled as a Benjaminian treatise – or, by visitors to the virtual exhibition that I have hereby sought to present – whether this extraction is effective, such that the newness resonates and the strangeness is productive, beyond my own subjective conviction. In the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to his work on the origin of the *Trauerspiel*, which provided my core methodology as set out in my introduction, Benjamin affirms a didacticism that is nonetheless inconclusive: 'Treatises may be didactic in tone, but essentially they lack the conclusiveness of an instruction which could be asserted, like doctrine, by virtue of its own authority'.[701] Likewise, perhaps, evaluating the virtual exhibition that my thesis has attempted to curate demands aesthetic judgement. Yet, just as the arguments in a treatise may be appraised, an imaginary show also begs critical assessment in terms of the freshness, subtlety and rigour of those responses to the assembled works that the works' conjunction encourages.

[701] Benjamin (1928) 1998, p. 28.

The curator and art historian Jeffrey Weiss has already interpreted the work that Johns produced in the decade straddling his *Studies for 'Skin'* in terms of a premodern investment in images that, quasi-mechanically, testify to a miracle event. Remaining strictly within the art historical canon, however, his reference is to those Christian icons held to give an authentic, direct and literal rendering of the holy visage.[702] If my considering the Johns print-drawing as a form of testimony to transformative events is fresh, it is because I see the work as an *abstract* testimony, indeed as bearing simultaneous witness to distinct threshold moments – specifically to species emergence, psychotic onset and, on occasion, to the creation of mind from brain – which are notable only at wildly different scales of analysis. Moreover, the particular threshold events at issue do not conventionally find representation within the Western canon of art.

The most obvious danger in seeing an ontological change at its critical moment in Bruce Nauman's *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* is perhaps a matter of subtlety and rigour rather than freshness of interpretation. Have I cheated the photographic work of its humour and irony, imposing an overbearing seriousness and – through seeing it as testimony to threshold events, albeit (as already noted for the work by Johns) as *abstract* testimony – a quasi-unassailable sincerity that obscures a more germane comic absurdism? Palaeobiologist R. Dale Guthrie has similarly railed against excessively solemn and sincere interpretations of prehistoric hand stencils, recently arguing – with echoes of Bataille – for a greater role for laugher and play in the imagined scene of prehistoric mark making.[703] Nonetheless, the chief value of Guthrie's arguments, after Bataille's, might actually lie in their allowing us to insist on the irresolvable perplexity of prehistoric handprints – a quality missed if we rest in a simple state of self-identification based on our own hand-printing potential, and one deadened through an accumulated weight of interpretative scholarship based on projecting a Christian ceremonial reverence way back in time. Irresolvable perplexity is something I wish to extend or reintroduce into the works by Nauman and Johns under study here – through my methods of extraction and recontextualisation, or, after Benjamin, of quotation and

[702] Weiss 2007, p. 29. Weiss is making a general point about Johns's practice in the period 1955–65. For a specific interpretation of *'Study for 'Skin' I* in relation to such Christian icons see Steeds 2002, pp. 39–40.
[703] Guthrie 2005.

digression. If comedy is first seen in *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* by an uninitiated viewer and likewise irony by someone with knowledge of Western art history, then these initial impressions, while pertinent, deserve to be complicated.

The trio of threshold events I have argued we may study on the provocation of the works by Johns and Nauman – and through analysis of material assembled around them – may themselves be described as having an irresolvable perplexity. By seeking to illuminate the evolutionary emergence of our species, the onset of madness and, to some degree, the wresting of experience from and by networked neural activity, my project has run the risk of tidying up or taming, rather than amplifying or flaming, the rupturing bursts potentially at stake in each case. Moreover, it may be asked whether a fundamental elusiveness has been concretised in the fixed form of the hand or literalised in the near mantric repeat of a limited vocabulary of verbal expression around the subject of threshold events. Clearly, our hands are the organs by which we typically broach surfaces encountered in the physical world; however, given the treatise or virtual exhibition undertaken here, their trace is effective only to the extent that they activate two worlds, or states of being, one behind and another beyond, in order to mark the charged moment of passage between them.

I have actively sought to bring highly diverse material into relation in order to address ideas that cannot be adequately expressed in the existing knowledge of a single discipline. We may now ask whether the purported relations are strong enough to sustain the analysis attempted. In the prologue to his *Trauerspiel* book, Benjamin warns of cases in which data 'are held to establish the similarity of things which are in fact quite different', where 'the effect of such widely divergent material is not one of tension, but of sheer incongruity'.[704] This is clearly a risk in my project, yet I have aimed for something rather less than Benjamin's own theologically inflected reach towards truth; happy to settle instead for having posited possible – and, better, *felicitous* – connections between the materials I have brought together. I will now reflect on the net coherence, examining where unity is lacking.

[704] Benjamin (1928) 1998, p. 39.

While the animating event of the psychopathology section of my thesis was the onset of madness, specifically entry into hallucination and delusion, I found this to be variously construed as horrific (Claude Cahun) and creative (François Tosquelles and Jean Oury), liberatory and spiritual (Paul Éluard), erotic and orgasmic (André Breton and Man Ray). Moreover, in the opening chapter on the nineteenth century, I showed how it was personally – by which I mean both directly and idiosyncratically – understood by Gerard de Nerval as an *astral* event. There is nonetheless a common thread arguably connecting these various characterisations – one that relies on the shared symptom of losing touch with the reality that is otherwise consensually experienced. In fact it is worth noting that while the medical language and associated nosography of conditions commonly and loosely discussed as madness have drifted over recent centuries – with terminology shifting from alienation and delirium, through dementia praecox and schizophrenia, paraphrenia and paranoia, to psychosis – the symptoms of hallucination and delusion, as linked by a loss of touch with reality, have consistently featured and, regardless of diagnostic or popular labels, consistently across individuals, been experienced and described or expressed. Certainly, the onset of hallucination or delusion is not necessarily, or even usually, encountered as a threshold event; however, this is how I experienced it personally and that experience is corroborated by various clinical cases studies, crucially as gathered by Tosquelles in 1948; and by other more individually cultivated examples, like the literary testimony of Nerval.

While it would be foolishly crude, if not offensive, to suggest that a case of psychosis may somehow be equated with a shamanic state of consciousness or a possession trance, the notion of departing from consensually experienced reality is arguably held in common. Here then – in the face of vastly distinct social contexts, and perhaps most obviously cultural ostracism versus encouragement – I have found grounds to relate the psychopathological transformative passive associated with becoming hallucinated or deluded to the speculations regarding Palaeolithic human activity and experience that may be found in the writing of Georges Bataille and André Leroi-Gourhan, as I discussed them in the prehistory sections of my thesis. At points in their work, these authors envisage people tens of thousands of years ago engaged in socially-endorsed festive and transgressive events that facilitate either mark-

making that expresses the feverish impulse of intoxication (Bataille),[705] or exploration into altered states of consciousness, involving mental exile (Leroi-Gourhan).[706] Nonetheless, I am left having to assume that a threshold event might be at play in the onset of intoxication and at the point of access into mental exile, if I am to relate these to the entry into madness under discussion.

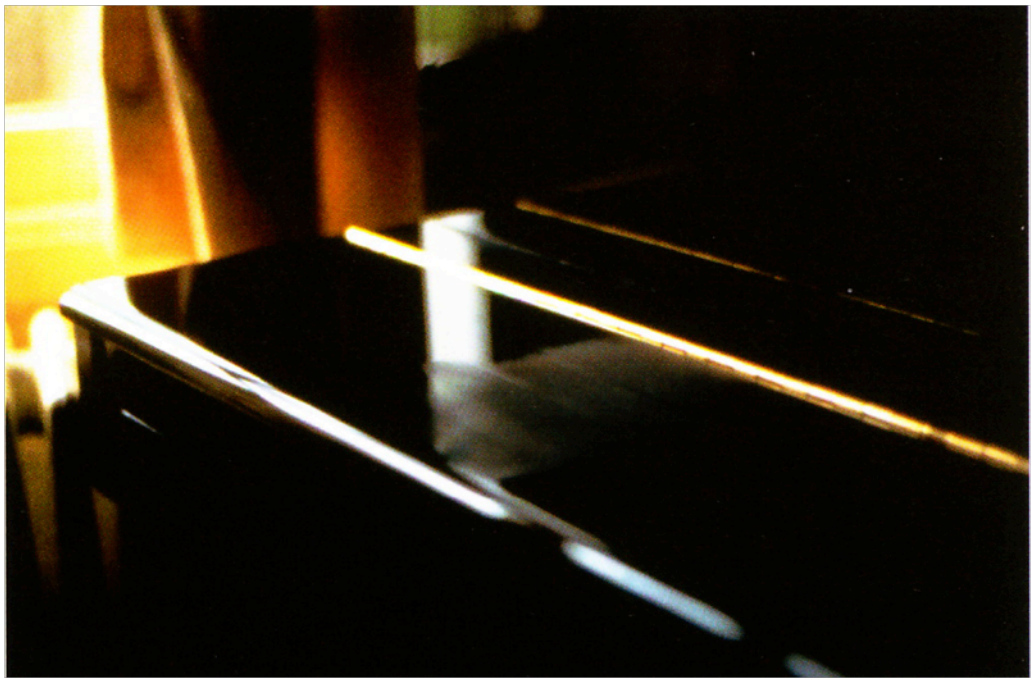
Both Bataille and Leroi-Gourhan allowed me to relate these threshold events to one on a much vaster scale that we cannot experience and may only understand at a remove – specifically evolutionary species emergence. While clearly there is no single mark that can tangibly or directly trace the passage to our species, given the multiplicity of the dispersed genetic events that collectively constitute the eruptive moment, Bataille and Leroi-Gourhan each enabled us to consider the spectre of this passage, with a psychosocial threshold event imagined to be operative in the event of stencilling, lived – in a second and by an individual – as an echo of the evolutionary event taking place over thousands of millennia and across wide geographic territories. This echo begs the question of whether a stronger connection might be made and suggests an area for future investigation: to what extent or in what ways might becoming human, as a species, be understood as an opening to the possibility of hallucination and delusion?

At points scattered throughout the thesis, in disparate rooms in the virtual exhibition, there were echoes of these evolutionary and lifetime events with neurological and neuropsychological overtones. For example, in explicitly referencing the fecund moment of passage from biological activity (the brain) to psychological activity (the mind), Tosquelles's thesis in psychiatry from 1948 offered a tantalising summary of the threshold event at stake here.[707] While the references to brain science remain sporadic in the present work, falling short of warranting a dedicated section of the thesis, the neuropsychological research effort dedicated to elaborating the nature of the transposition between brain and mind may, in future, yield findings that will suggest a more fully developed exploration.

[705] Bataille 1955, p. 130.
[706] Leroi-Gourhan 1964–65, vol. 2 (part 3), p. 99.
[707] Tosquelles (1948) 1986, p. 70.

In concluding this thesis, I am compelled to reflect on how comparable the threshold events I have sought to unite finally seem. Clearly the relationship between them is metaphorical, allowing us to appreciate what we cannot know through direct experience by relating this to what we *can* know in this way – or, alternatively, what we can empathetically imagine. Accordingly, subconscious or supra-conscious threshold events – specifically the firing of a single action potential or, in their concerted activity, the production of experience, on the one hand; and species emergence, on the other – may be approached in terms of an understanding of what it feels like, or might feel like, to exceed normal psychological limits in the onset of madness. Yet further and different transformative moments that we may experience – and some of those touched on in the thesis include orgasm and falling in love; bodily death and entry into an afterlife – might equally offer a means of grasping and interconnecting the neuronal and evolutionary threshold events otherwise at issue. We may therefore ask whether there is any intrinsic, beyond metaphorical, relationship between the events particularly under discussion. In other words: if sufficiently comparable, are they also necessarily so? Here areas already flagged for further investigation become pertinent, namely whether the potential to become mad is an aspect of becoming human as a species, and – given developments anticipated in neuroscience – whether an understanding of the transposition from brain to mind might help to explain psychotic onset.

Finally, I would like to briefly reconsider the methodology adopted for my thesis. It seems possible that, in pushing to stage Benjamin's model of the treatise in the form of an exhibition, some argumentative power has been lost. My ambition was to set particular works of art within a constellation of other material, positioning eclectic works together with a curatorial sensitivity that is attentive to diverse aspects and certain details of these works, whilst stringently resisting the containment threatened by elaborating in words all the potential interrelationships. However, given that I am inescapably working with words rather than a physical space, I have perhaps ended up by offering a curatorial tour of an exhibition rather than the exhibition as such. And, assessed on this basis, connective arguments will seem to be lacking. I therefore wish to conclude with new images rather than more words. In a bid to reassert the exhibition form of my thesis, I shall close with two further works of art:



Gabriel Orozco, *Breath on Piano*, 1993, colour photograph



Gabriel Orozco, *My Hand is the Memory of Space*, 1991, ice-cream sticks

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