CHAPTER ONE

AnXiety and PerVersion in Postwar Paris

Hans Bellmer's photographs of distorted and deformed dolls from the early 1930s seem to be quintessential examples of surrealist misogyny (see Fig. 4). Their violently erotic reorganization of female body parts into awkward wholes typifies the way in which surrealist artists and writers manipulated and objectified femininity in their work. Bellmer's manipulation and reconstruction of the female form also encourage comparison with the mutilation and reconstruction that prevailed across Europe during World War I. By viewing the dolls in this context, we might see their distorted forms as a displacement of male anxiety onto the bodies of women. Thus, Bellmer's work—and the work of other male surrealists who depicted fragmented female bodies—might reflect not only misogyny but also the disavowal of emasculation through symbolic transference. The fabrication of these dolls also expresses a link to consumer society. The dolls look as if they could be surrealist mannequins made by the prosthetic industry; their deformed yet interlocking parts reflect a chilling combination of mass-market eroticism and wartime bodily trauma. These connections between misogyny and emasculation anxiety, between eroticism and the horror of war trauma, and between consumption and desire are not specific to Bellmer's idiosyncratic visual rhetoric, however. The practice of joining contradictory approaches and blurring boundaries between objects, identities, and media was more prevalent among the male surrealists than is usually acknowledged. If we open our eyes to consider these contrasts as part of a broader surrealist agenda, we can see how the surrealists aimed to destabilize their viewers' assumptions about the boundaries

FIGURE 4 Hans Bellmer, *Poupée*, 1935. In *Minotaure* 6 (Winter 1935): 30–31. © 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

between apparently contradictory things: between conventional and "perverted" sex, between fine art and mass culture, and between men and women.

The French surrealists of the 1920s grasped the economic and political implications of the state's postwar promotion of images of a "new and improved" male populace. The French state wanted to erase signs of personal trauma and economic distress through programs promoting social regeneration—from rebuilding destroyed churches and villages to promoting high birthrates to swell the future labor pool—all in the service of securing a stable postwar social order. The surrealists, however, wanted to shake the foundations of the morally bankrupt government, which had sent young men to war and then used images of a resurgent, unimpaired masculinity to boost public confidence in the success of postwar reconstruction. Thus, men who seemed more like "typical" women—weak, hysterical, and sexually unrestrained in line with neuropsychiatric accounts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—became part of the surrealist lexicon during and after the war.[1] By creating works that dwelled upon male emasculation or confused ideas about sexual difference and gender identity, the surrealists challenged the tenets of national reconstruction that reinforced clear differences between

the sexes. In their works, they regularly exploited stereotypes of femininity to undermine commonly held beliefs about the links between rationality, progress, and male creativity. Although the infusion of feminine stereotypes into their work was meant to critique French patriarchal models, the visibility of male anxiety in some works suggests that the surrealists sought to intervene in the consensus discourse about the nature and function of manhood after the war. By emphasizing hybrid subjects, male anxiety, and gender indeterminacy and by infusing their works with rhetorical and structural conventions borrowed from advertising, pornography, psychology and the mass media, the surrealists developed strategies that they hoped would upset the status quo.

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The displacement of cultural anxieties from the masculine to the feminine is not new in the history of art and literature. Male artists and writers have traditionally used images of the female body to shore up their cultural capital, whether by painting languorous and available female nudes as objects of desire or by manipulating these nudes to demonstrate their mastery of their medium. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, avant-garde artists often claimed subversive artistic identities for themselves by incorporating stereotypically feminine elements into their work. Like their modernist predecessors, the surrealists are known for their frequent recourse to feminine stereotypes. Following the publication of Sigmund Freud's work on hysteria and psychoanalysis in France in the 1910s and 1920s, the surrealists grew increasingly interested in some of the specific psychic "effects" of femininity that Freud noted. They sought to embody the irrational and the unconscious that many psychologists of the period presumed to be the domain of women, especially women who were diagnosed as hysterics. Their familiarity with the published accounts of hysteria by the French physician Jean-Martin Charcot—work that influenced the direction of French neuropsychiatry during the war—cemented their infatuation with the idea of using hysteria as a model for artistic practice. In 1928, for example, more than ten years after they left the French military medical corps, André Breton and Louis Aragon published an homage to the female hysteric that celebrated her "passionate attitudes" as compelling aesthetic models for surrealism.[2]

Most modern psychologists presumed that hysteria was a female affliction. Although the influential Charcot recognized the existence of male hysteria in the late nineteenth century, not until World War I did the reality of hysterical men come into public view. Evidence of uncontainable war-related traumatic memories was crucial to the diagnosis of male hysteria (although sexual trauma was also noted in some cases). The diagnosis remained problematic, however, because to diagnose a man as hysterical was to emasculate him. The symptoms exhibited by the male hysteric were nearly identical to those exhibited by women, a fact that scientifically linked the disease to women. Moreover, since the 1880s, Charcot had argued that the disease in men was usually the result of an effeminate or homosexual constitution. As if to

disavow this similarity between the illness in men and women, however, physicians named the affliction according to the patient's gender. Women suffered from "hysteria" (from the Greek work *hystera,* or uterus), whereas men suffered from "shell shock" in England and "neurasthenia" in France. Yet regardless of this effort to sanitize the disease in men by renaming it, the role of trauma in the production of the disease was central to its diagnosis in both men and women. As doctors began to see an increase in soldiers who returned from the front with hysterical symptoms, French neuropsychiatrists like Joseph Babinski redefined male hysteria in neurological terms to remove the threat of feminization.

André Breton and Louis Aragon learned of male hysteria during their wartime military medical training, at which time they studied the work of Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Babinski.[3] Throughout the 1920s, they wove elements of hysteria into their work, acknowledging it as a form of psychic release that rejected the rational world and its constraints in favor of irrationality and a lack of psychological or social control. Although they did so to undermine literary and artistic conventions, they also implicitly undermined traditional notions of masculine creativity by making work that courted the physical and psychological automatism associated with the hysteric. The emphasis upon automatic writing by Breton, Aragon, and Philippe Soupault in the early 1920s suggests that they wanted to parallel aspects of the hysteric's experience in their own processes of artistic production. Breton and Philippe Soupault's 1920 text *Les Champs magnétiques (The Magnetic Fields)* grew out of experiments with automatic writing, a technique by which writers jotted down thoughts as they came, without concern for organization, reason, or control. By 1924, Breton's first surrealist manifesto codified such practices by defining surrealism as "psychic automatism in its pure state."[4] According to Breton, individuals who refrained from "filtering" their thoughts became "recording instrument[s]," or receptacles, for the unconscious mind.[5] Breton's early medical training at Saint-Dizier (under a man who had himself studied with Charcot), and then at the Hôpital de la Pitié with Babinski, surely alerted him to the concept of hysteria as a kind of bodily speech emanating from the unconscious.[6] The hysteric's body externalized symptoms: tics, spasms, numbness, or partial paralysis reflected the psyche's (failed) effort to repress unconscious fears and desires. The writer practicing automatism tried to achieve a mental state approximating the hysteric's detachment from logic or reason, a "mental state characterized by subversion of the rapports established by a subject with the moral world under whose authority they [*sic*] believe themselves, practically, to be."[7] Breton and Aragon surmised that an author, like the hysteric, could subvert literary convention by fleeing the oppression of reason to court the unconscious.

In addition to modeling their own practices after the fits and starts of the hysteric, however, many of the surrealists nominated other individuals to their aesthetic pantheon. The striking aspect of the names on that list, including the Comte de Lautréamont and the Marquis de Sade, is their association with images of sexual and psychological deviance, trauma, and mutilation—a powerful concoction whose destabilizing ingredients bubbled underneath the well-

publicized postwar "return to order" that many people hoped would move French society beyond the painful memories of a deadly, grueling war.

Reconsidering Lautréamont

In 1869 a young Frenchman named Isidore Ducasse wrote *Les Chants de Maldoror* using the pen name Comte de Lautréamont. As far as we can tell, however, the text did not appear in print until 1874, four years after Ducasse's death at the age of twenty-four. Chronologies of the text are sketchy at best, and although the work received intermittent attention throughout the 1880s and 1890s, it gained its greatest visibility at the end of World War I when the surrealists claimed it as a precursor to their attacks on literary and moral conventions. Populated by deformed, disreputable, and mutilated images of masculinity, *Les Chants de Maldoror* was rediscovered by Breton, Aragon, and Soupault during World War I. And with their help, the text became an important aesthetic touchstone for the surrealist movement. Surprisingly, however, most commentators on the text refrain from analyzing the work's content. The *Chants*' compulsion to rip apart male bodies and its elaborate descriptions of male devastation might seem an obvious point of contact between Lautréamont's work and that of his surrealist admirers. Yet most historians of surrealist art and literature do not discuss its literary or aesthetic parallels to the post–World War I context of surrealism, the important role that masculinity played in *Les Chants de Maldoror,* and the possible effect of its imagery of male destruction and deviance on its young surrealist readers. Instead, scholars usually quote a single phrase from the middle of the book to symbolize surrealist aesthetic theory. However, reading the book closely and holistically produces a more intensely graphic, visceral experience than analyses of the *Chants* in the literature on surrealism usually suggest. Images of bodily fragmentation, dismemberment, and psychic perversion permeate the pages of *Les Chants de Maldoror;* and importantly, the bodies being abused, emasculated, or otherwise defiled are largely those of men. We can imagine that the repeated descriptions of physically and psychologically damaged men in Lautréamont's text would have reminded postwar readers of the results of World War I. Thus, Lautréamont's text is not only a model of formal juxtaposition and fragmentation but also a work that sparks associations between past and present destructions of the male body in highly visceral, imagistic language.

The most famous phrase in *Les Chants de Maldoror,* "as beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella," is often analyzed in largely formal literary terms. Scholars focus primarily on the passage's nonsensical juxtaposition of incompatible elements in connecting the work to surrealist aesthetic theory. André Breton emphasized this position by claiming in his first surrealist manifesto of 1924 that such juxtapositions were key because they produced a spark of surrealist inspiration in their audience.[8] Today, however, the passage is nothing more than a cliché, used primarily to convey the important role of chance and spontaneity in the production of surrealist images.

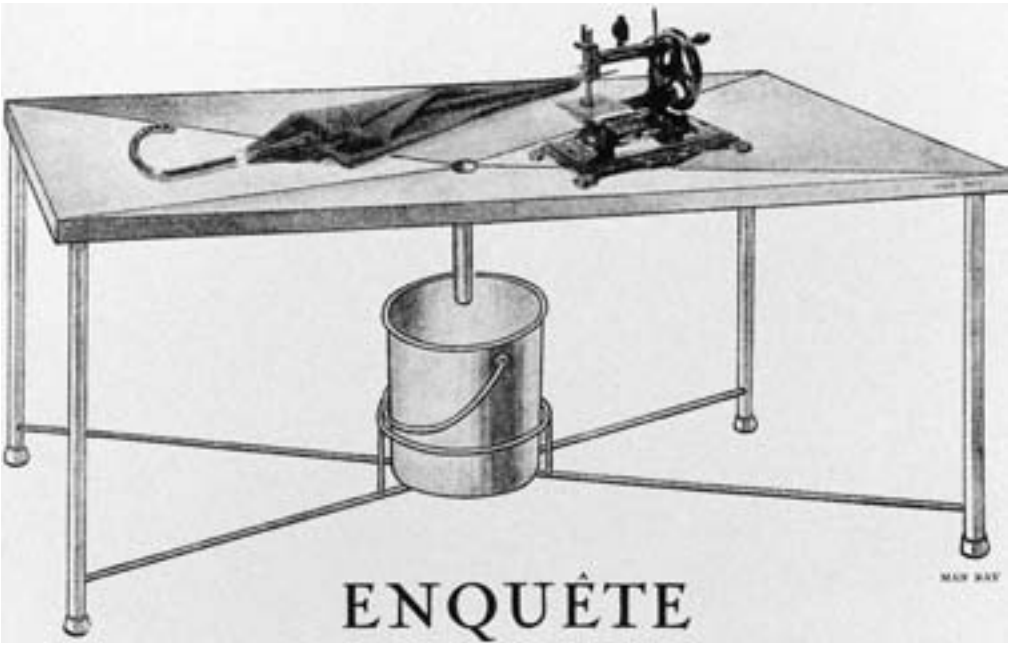

FIGURE 5 Man Ray, drawing referring to the *"beau comme"* passage in *Les Chants de Maldoror.* In *Minotaure* 3–4 (1933): 101. © 2006 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Neither the imagery of this phrase nor the larger text's viscerally charged descriptions of male bodies have received sustained analysis. If we break down the image—dissecting table, umbrella, and sewing machine—and take seriously the claim that it crystallizes a surrealist approach to representation, what do we actually find? What effects do the language of forensic science, the morgue, and domestic life have upon our ability to recognize a surrealist image? How can we reconcile the medical and consumer references of the passage with the book's overarching concern with depicting mutilated and degraded men? What does the contradictory set of objects on that dissecting table tell us, exactly, about Lautréamont's appeal to young surrealist poets?

Obviously, the dissecting table at the center of the passage and at the center of Man Ray's representation of this passage (Fig. 5) symbolizes bodily death and destruction. As a site of posthumous surgery and evisceration, the dissecting table promotes an association with the scientific analysis of death. The placement of the umbrella and sewing machine on top of a table designed for efficient bloodletting—a process finely detailed in the drainage structures in Man Ray's drawing—establishes morbid continuity between the site of the image and the

objects that clash within it. The gendered associations provided by this unlikely encounter of objects highlight ideas about sexual difference too. The umbrella, a pointed object that alludes to the male sex, inhabits the same space as the sewing machine, a tool associated with the feminized labor of a seamstress. By laying out both masculine and feminine objects on the table, the image unites them as objects for dissection, analysis, and scrutiny. The sewing machine, however, also echoes a surgeon's labor to suture his patient's body, making an oblique reference to reconstruction and thereby complicating our sense of the image's meaning. One could see this odd juxtaposition as nothing more than an effort to shock its audience. But the image's fragmentary quality and the specific choice of objects also suggest a connection between the grisly realities of dead and mutilated bodies, reconstruction, and an emerging surrealist aesthetic. The passage's radical juxtaposition of the three elements generates a new way of seeing the world. Moreover, those elements define the surrealist image as an unstable mixture of objects with myriad cultural associations that themselves connect to assumptions about war, productivity, and gender identity.

Throughout *Les Chants de Maldoror,* Lautréamont delights in producing images of moral and physical decay and dismemberment. Sometimes he focuses on violated female bodies, but for the most part, the text describes devilish and disturbing moments of male violation. Images of a sickening, hypocritical God; a vicious, yet violated Maldoror; and a beautiful, yet finally corrupted Mervyn populate Lautréamont's strange world. Bloated bodies float along the Seine; Maldoror cuts and licks children as they sleep in their tiny beds; men recognize their bodies as wounded, pestilent, and diseased. The repeated images of male degradation, violation, and death that permeate *Les Chants de Maldoror* demand a second look. Could the *Chants* have seduced the surrealists because of the perfection with which the Comte de Lautréamont described traumatized, wounded masculinities?

Maldoror's Body

> A nasty viper devoured my prick and took its place: it rendered me a eunuch, this villain. Oh! If I could have defended myself with my paralyzed arms; but I believe they have been changed into logs. Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*

The male bodies described in *Les Chants de Maldoror* lack both limbs and morality; many of them are mutilated or racked with disease. Their physical inadequacies often parallel their moral laxity and thus prevent readers from seeing them as sympathetic characters. Indeed, the most attractive aspect of the *Chants* for the surrealists appeared to be the outright rejection of conventional identities and moralities. When Lautréamont created a God for his text, for example, he made him a disgusting creature with a taste for human flesh and an unparalleled moral depravity. God was an uncaring brute who, like Saturn, relished devouring his mortal brood:

> He [the Creator] held in his hand the rotting trunk of a dead man, and he raised it, alternatively, from his eyes to his nose, and from his nose to his mouth; once at his mouth, one can guess what he did with it. His feet plunged in a vast sea of boiling blood. . . . The Creator, with the first two claws of his foot, seized another swimmer by the neck . . . and raised him in the air, outside the reddish slime, exquisite sauce! . . . He devoured first the head, the legs and the arms, and lastly the trunk, until there remained almost nothing.[9]

In this section of the *Chants,* the horrific patriarchal Creator consumes men with inhuman ferocity. The sorry bodies that swim in blood-tinged pools are no more than bits of mealtime fodder, their bodies ripped apart by his hungry mouth. Like the men who fell at the western front as fuel for the machines of the Great War, the men in Lautréamont's hellish imaginary are captive supplicants to a God that is nothing more than a greedy beast. Replete as the text is with images of bodies rotting, torn apart, devoured, and emasculated, the *Chants* likely resonated with the experience of the trenches that so many of the young surrealist poets had had. Maldoror's wounded body, as well as the bodies he sees or creates throughout the text, not only rewrites the image of the *grand homme* but also displays the male body as a site of cultural violence and decay.

The Comte de Lautréamont, as Philippe Soupault would write in 1946, would remain forever outside the confines of conventional literary and moral histories—a position the surrealists also courted.[10] The "odor of death and the stench of corpses" prowled around Lautréamont's "crib," according to Soupault, like a thick haze of gloomy smoke.[11] Soupault's words conjure up not only the pacing and tenor of Lautréamont's own text but also focus the reader's attention. Whiffs of rotting bodies, the chalky smell of the muddy coffinlike trenches we might recall at the sound of the word "crib"—these words project Lautréamont's world onto the recent history of World War I. Soupault, who read the *Chants* while recovering from war wounds, was overwhelmed by the book's visceral language and violent content. "Since that day," he recalled a few years later, "no one . . . recognized me. I myself no longer know if I have a heart."[12]

The *Chants* juxtapose Maldoror's pestilent figure with a beautiful flaxen-haired young man named Mervyn, a character with whom Maldoror eventually has a subtly erotic friendship. The contrast between the profligate, disreputable Maldoror and the idealized, naïve Mervyn underscores a choice between diseased and healthy masculinity in Lautréamont's text. And as Maldoror pursues a friendship with Mervyn, the reader soon understands that Mervyn's freshness will not last long. Spying Mervyn near the corner of the Rue Colbert and the Rue Vivienne, Maldoror describes his young friend as follows:

> He is fair as the retractility of the claws of birds of prey; or again, as the uncertainty of the muscular movements in wounds in the soft parts of the lower cervical region;

> or rather, as that perpetual rat-trap always present by the trapped animal, which by itself can catch rodents indefinitely and work even when hidden under straw; and above all, as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella![13]

In an inversion of the logic of the return to order—decay and degradation restored to beauty through reconstruction—Maldoror likens Mervyn's beauty to sharpened talons, pulsating muscle, or the metaphorical bodies displayed on a dissecting table. This juxtaposition of conventional definitions of beauty and horror, purity and corruption, is key to the unresolved conflicts that permeate *Les Chants de Maldoror.*

The shifts between Maldoror's descriptions of his own body and the violent beauty he sees in Mervyn impede the reader's ability to settle on a coherent, idealized concept of masculinity. The text forces the reader to oscillate between possibilities. For this reason, we can consider the text an endorsement of juxtaposition as a protosurrealist form; but we might also come away with the idea that the beauty the surrealists saw in Lautréamont's text was the product of conflict, trauma, and perversion. Maldoror is a filthy eunuch in persistent pain, yet the moment he sees Mervyn, his fantasies turn to the beautiful youth's corruption. The unsuspecting young Mervyn (Maldoror tell us that he is only sixteen) is no match for Maldoror's wily depravity. And nowhere is this disjunction between concepts of masculinity more evident than in a section of the *Chants* that reveals Maldoror's plan to seduce and then murder his youthful prey. Escaping one attempt on his life, Mervyn is eventually killed by Maldoror. The book ends with Mervyn hanging dead from the roof of the Pantheon in Paris—the tomb of some of France's most illustrious male citizens—after Maldoror catapulted him there, having completed his slow torture of the golden-haired man's young body.[14]

If a conflict between healthy and diseased forms of manhood structures much of the narrative about Mervyn and Maldoror's relationship, a second important theme of the book is male passivity and impotence. The postwar environment, in which many soldiers faced physical and psychological traumas that made them either physically or sexually impotent, gave the text's articulation of impotence an added rhetorical charge. One of the text's more disturbing images of a violated male body—in which the body is penetrated and defiled by a host of unwelcome guests—recalls the rat- and mud-filled trenches of the war:

> I am filthy. Lice gnaw me. Swine, when they look at me, vomit. The scabs and sores of leprosy have scaled off my skin, which is coated with yellowish pus. . . . From my nape, as from a dungheap, an enormous toadstool with umbelliferous peduncles sprouts. Seated on a shapeless chunk of furniture, I have not moved a limb for four centuries. . . . A nasty viper has devoured my prick and taken its place. It rendered me a eunuch, this villain. Oh! If only I could have defended myself with my paralyzed arms, but I believe they had been changed into logs. . . . Two small full-grown hedgehogs flung to a dog—which did not decline them—the contents of my testicles; inside the scrupulously

> scrubbed scrotal sac they lodged. My anus has been blocked by a crab. Encouraged by my inertia, it guards the entrance with its pincers and causes me considerable pain![15]

Maldoror's body has been mutilated, invaded, and paralyzed. He is a eunuch, emasculated by a snake and a pair of hedgehogs who have taken up residence in the hollow sac that once enshrouded his sexual organs. Unable to move or fight back because of paralysis, his body is a passive host for a gang of pain-inflicting parasites. In this passage—singled out by Soupault in his book on Lautréamont—the male body is impotent and lacks the will and energy to fight the invading creatures. The language of this passage focuses the reader on the physical body and its pain rather than on the mind and its reason. Horrifically, it details things from which a reader is likely to recoil. Yet its visual character also creates a fascinating space for imagining Maldoror's victimized flesh. A haunting reminder of the passivity imposed on so many soldiers during the war, and of their anxieties about returning home with arms and legs missing, this passage exquisitely bridges the gap between Lautréamont's time and that of the immediate postwar years.

A third theme in *Les Chants de Maldoror* highlights a deviant, perverse strain of male sexuality. Given anxieties about male impotence and the prevalence of postwar psychological and sexual illness, this theme likely resonated with cultural anxieties about war's potential to exacerbate male sexual deviance. Maldoror, for example, has "congenitally" deformed sexual organs; he admires pederasty and other forms of sexual depravity. Homosexual conduct is at once a "great degradation" and a sublime form of intelligence.[16] And for the surrealists, the celebration of such perversity not only represented an attack on conventional sexual habits but linked Lautréamont to another perennial surrealist favorite, the infamous Marquis de Sade.[17]

Maldoror also reveals an interest in ambiguous sexual identity in a section in which he describes a hermaphrodite. The hermaphrodite incorporates aspects of both masculinity and femininity, yet deep ambivalence about "his" own desires creates a visceral experience of the splitting of the self, presenting sexual identification as a difficult, even traumatic experience:

> When he [the hermaphrodite] sees a man and a woman who walk in several alleys of plane-trees, he feels his body cleave in two from bottom to top, and each new part strain to clasp one or other of the strollers; but it is only a hallucination and reason is not slow to regain her sway. This is why he mingles neither with men nor women: his excessive modesty, which dawned on him because of this idea of being but a monster, prevents his bestowing his glowing compassion upon any man.[18]

In Lautréamont's text, the hermaphrodite's attraction to each member of the heterosexual couple causes him to fantasize about his body's splitting in two. Fearful that he is a monster whose identification morphs from one gender to the other, the hermaphrodite insures social and sexual decorum only by avoiding contact with the objects of his desire, thus protecting

himself from the anxiety and pain of his conflicting desires. The hermaphrodite's ambiguous sexual identity foregrounds both physical and psychological fragmentation in ways that parallel the themes that the surrealists were exploring in the 1920s and 1930s, including the heterogeneous bodily forms resulting from the game of "exquisite corpse."

André Breton defined an exquisite corpse as a text or image assembled simultaneously by several individuals, with each participant furnishing "a single element (subject, verb or predicate, head, belly, or legs)." This single work made collectively was thus the textual or visual representation of a fragmentary but unified body.[19] Breton's definition compared body parts to parts of speech, emphasizing that the body could be a form of representation just as a sentence is. Breton also made clear that he considered the exquisite corpse's visible fragmentation to be a key surrealist model, one that echoed the stylized forms of contemporary advertising that juxtaposed bodily fragments in surprising combinations to enhance their visual power.

Salvador Dalí's work reveals his ongoing interest in the *Chants*' graphic investigation of bodily dismemberment and sexual ambiguity. The illustrations he made for a 1934 edition of *Les Chants de Maldoror* (edited by Albert Skira) recall both the texture of Lautréamont's visceral prose and the structure of the exquisite corpse. Interestingly, the first published example of an exquisite corpse, which appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste,* was resolutely masculine (Fig. 6).[20] A dark jacket and white shirt signify the figure's contemporary bourgeois status. His body, however, contradicts such conventionality. He lacks a head and shoulders—apparently just eaten by a spider—and his juglike feet seem to have immobilized him. Like a descendant of Maldoror, he is a passive victim, his petrified legs and disappearing head rendering him a helpless target of the hungry insect.

Dalí's illustrations for *Les Chants de Maldoror* were popular enough to warrant publication in the surrealist-friendly journal *Minotaure* in advance of the book's release (Fig. 7).[21] Of the four figures reproduced in *Minotaure,* the one in the lower right transforms the exquisite corpse into a Maldororian image: the figure appears to be at war with itself, grasping and violating its own flesh while struggling to maintain a sense of corporeal unity. Etched with thick hatchings suggestive of tree bark, the figure recalls the moment in the *Chants* when Maldoror's arms become logs. The body also seems sexually ambiguous in ways that mirror Lautréamont's anxious hermaphrodite. The breastlike forms at the top of the figure imply femininity, whereas the wooden limbs at left look vaguely phallic. This body attests to a deep and deliberate confusion about gender: it is split and conjoined simultaneously by symbols of male and female.

The hybrid structures of Dalí's figure and the exquisite corpse reflect a surrealist understanding of the body as a construction of disparate pieces. These images emphasize the body as a liminal object caught in a place where it is neither part nor whole. By emphasizing discontinuity, Dalí's representation mirrors Lautréamont's linguistic descriptions of bodily violence and confusion. Because the exquisite corpse's hybridity called into question ideas of unity and

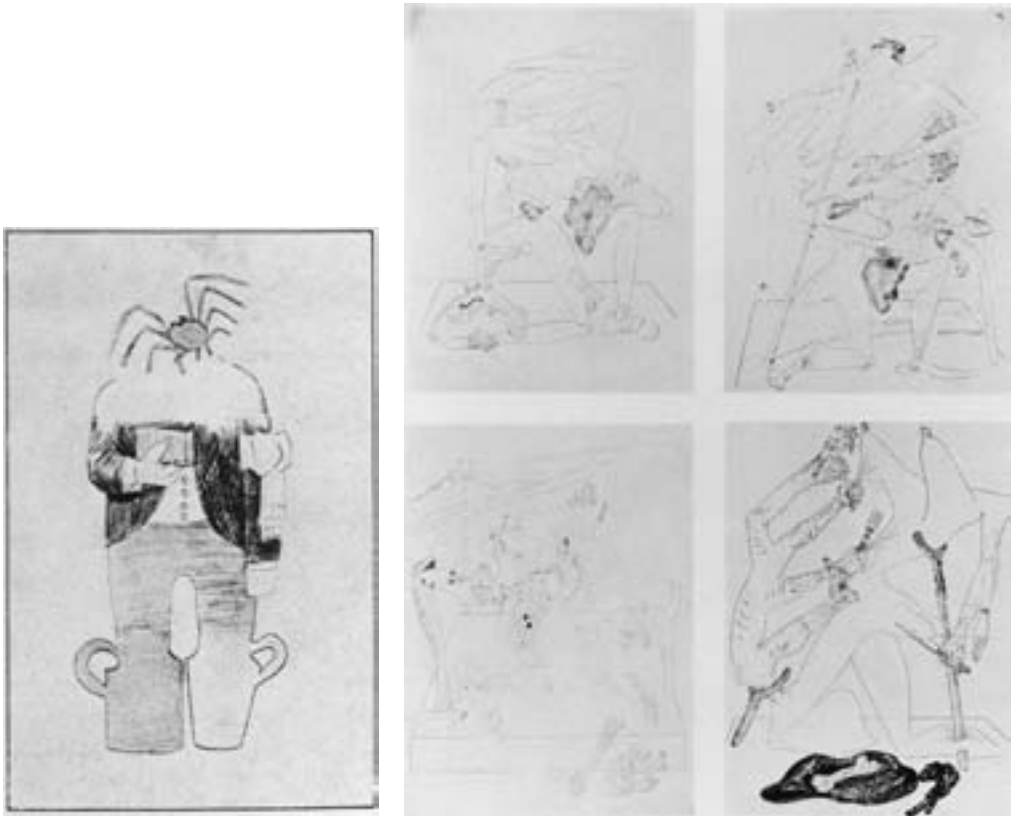

FIGURE 6 Exquisite Corpse, 1927. In *La Révolution surréaliste* 9–10 (1 October 1927): 8.
FIGURE 7 Salvador Dalí, etchings for *Les Chants de Maldoror.* In *Minotaure* 3–4 (1933): 37.

coherence, it was a powerful model for surrealism, delineating a new body riddled with instability and incoherence. Pitted against conventional images that played to people's desire for a return to order, the exquisite corpse and its offspring celebrated the discontinuous body as a symbol of cultural confusion and decay.[22] Armed with models like Lautréamont's scandalous world and the exquisite corpse, surrealist artists and writers created images of masculinity that deviated in varying degrees from bourgeois cultural norms as they perceived them. Such images complicated viewers' efforts to grasp an essential image of postwar manhood because they created a range of competing masculinities. And many of them, particularly those of damaged or deviant masculinity, made postwar stabilization seem like a distant goal.

Sexuality, Perversion, and Cultural Politics: *L'Âge d'Or*.

L'Âge d'Or, the 1930 film by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, remains one of the most compelling examples of surrealism because it still has the capacity to surprise viewers with its antiestablishment, anticlerical message. Depicting a modern world in which sexual desire rules the lives of its two main characters, it promotes deviant social and sexual behavior as a way to reject the forces that André Breton named as the most important elements of social conservation at the time: family, nation, and religion.[23] The film is both a direct critique of these fundamental institutions within French society and a précis of the ways in which surrealist images could catalyze subversive behavior. As films go, it was quite effective at creating outrage when it first screened: Studio 28, the theater where it had its first public showing, was attacked, and the surrealists seemed to have expected as much, for they laid out the group's thinking about the film in the program. For the film to have the greatest cinematic and political impact, they believed it had to be viewed in the context of bourgeois cinema.[24]

L'Âge d'Or signals this desire to attack the social bases of French society from its first scene: it begins with two scorpions locked in mortal combat and quickly shifts to a single scorpion battling a rat. Although the rat is much larger than the scorpion, the scorpion slays the rat with his tiny yet powerful stinger. Using the metaphor of a small yet deadly scorpion whose venom can kill its larger opponent on contact, Buñuel and Dalí saw their film as an opportunity to attack the powerful forces of social, cultural, and political convention that they and their surrealist friends despised.[25] Soon after the rat's untimely death, in fact, the film proceeds to attack bourgeois sexual mores as well as the institutions of family, church, military, and state. The film both revels in images that produce antiestablishment behavior and lays down images that are explicitly antifascist: a blind war veteran is kicked to the ground, and a note taped to the window of St. Peter's references the 1929 Lateran treaties between Mussolini and the pope. Such vehicles point to the state's complicity with fascism and are essential to the film's biting wit.[26]

According to Dalí, the film also sought to "present the straight and pure line of 'conduct' of a being who pursued love across the ignoble humanitarian ideals, patriotic and . . . miserable mechanisms of reality."[27] And in many respects, the central characters in the film live for love, often in direct conflict with patriotic, social, or moral ethics. Their disruptive, erratic behavior parallels the film's antiestablishment message, whereas their individual exploits exemplify surrealism's agenda, as Dalí saw it: to attack social and ethical propriety.

> Being quite on the fringes of plastic investigations and other kinds of "bullshit," the new images of Surrealism will more and more take on the forms and colors of demoralization and confusion. . . . The new images, as a functional form of thought, will adopt the free disposition of desire while being violently repressed. The lethal activity of these new images, simultaneously with other Surrealist activities, may also contribute to the collapse of reality, to the benefit of everything which, through and beyond the base and

> abominable ideals of any kind, aesthetic, humanitarian, philosophical, and so on, brings us back to the clear sources of masturbation, of exhibitionism, of crime, of love.[28]

Although the handpicked, opening-night audience appreciated this bohemian critique of bourgeois conservatism, the film's inflammatory content (particularly its antipatriotic and antireligious passages) drew hostile words from some press and political organizations. A letter in the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* in early December 1930, just a few days after the first screening of the film, illustrates the hostility with which the film was received: "*L'Âge d'Or,* in which I defy any authorized technician to find the least artistic value, multiplies into public spectacle the most obscene, repugnant and poor episodes. The Fatherland, the Family, and Religion are dragged through filth."[29]

By tarnishing the institutions of nation, family, and church upon which the authority of contemporary bourgeois society depended, Buñuel and Dalí's film achieved its disruptive aims. At an early screening on December 3, for example, members of the ultranationalist League of Patriots and the Anti-Jewish League started a riot inside the theater. Shouting "We will see if there are any more Christians in France!" and "Death to Jews!" members of these two groups hurled purple ink at the screen and destroyed the exhibition of surrealist art on view in the theater lobby. The rioters were particularly upset about the film's depiction of religion: near the end of the film, a man dressed in a simple robe with a rope belt who looks suspiciously like Jesus Christ emerges from a mountaintop chateau along with several men dressed in revolutionary-era costumes. The film's intertitles identify this Christlike figure as the Duke of Blangis, the devious ringleader of the Marquis de Sade's pornographic novel *The 120 Days of Sodom*. By linking the image of Christ with the Duke of Blangis, *L'Âge d'Or* viciously attacked the church's morality and tormented those members of the audience who put their faith in Christ's beneficence. This scene was not the only instance of cultural heresy in the film, but this particular scene could well have been the spark that lit the fire under the rioters. The police who came to squelch the riot prohibited future screenings pending an investigation. Incensed by this turn of events, the surrealists made hay from the incident by publishing their own account of the riot, including a photograph of the iconoclastic attack on the artwork on view in the lobby (Fig. 8).[30] In response to accusations that extra footage had been added to the film after it received the censor board's approval, the police confiscated the film.[31] In early January 1931, nearly a year later, the group pushed the film back into public view with a text on "the affair" of *L'Âge d'Or* that detailed the film's seizure by the police and asked readers if that suppression was not a "sign of fascisization" in France.[32] In some respects, the riot, the film's suppression by the state, and the surrealists' counterattacks all worked to ensure the film's surrealist credentials.

Even today we can see why the film might have shocked some viewers in 1930. The film's central male character, played by Gaston Modot, is a pervert and a menace to society (though

FIGURE 8 Lobby of Studio 28 the day after the 3 December 1930 screening of *L'Âge d'Or*. Courtesy of the Salvador Dalí, Gala – Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain.

we learn that Modot was once an upstanding citizen in the employ of the French state). Modot drives the film's narrative, taking the viewer on a tour of his corrupt activities. Coprophilia, sadomasochism, and murder are just a few of his more sensational crimes. The female object of his desire, played by Lya Lys, lives an aberrant life herself. She partakes of autoerotic pleasures, laughs at her mother's humiliation, and daydreams about infanticide. Lys and Modot's unconventional desires push them to antisocial acts, effectively tearing at the fabric of bour-

FIGURE 9
Still from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala–Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

geois social convention. The couple rejects conformism to fulfill their most immediate desires, thereby revealing a culture in conflict—between so-called normality and perversion and between buttoned-up respectability and pulsating desire.

An early sequence in the film in which viewers first meet Lys and Modot cements the film's antiestablishment position. Both Lys and Modot are offscreen, during a scene in which the keystone of a religious monument is being dedicated. The only clue to their presence is the sound of Lys's voice emitting cries of pain or ecstasy. The camera moves to find the source of those cries, and we soon see Lys and Modot entwined on a muddy patch of earth, writhing with erotic pleasure (Fig. 9). The camera pans outward, and we suddenly see that they are lying just a few feet away from the monument.

Shocked onlookers separate them immediately. Lys is escorted away by two nuns, while Modot remains on the muddy ground, his hands compulsively squeezing the mud between his fingers as if to hold onto his lover's body through tactile association. Then, in a juxtaposition of images that exaggerates the perversity of Modot's hand gestures, the film presents Lys astride a toilet (the location implied by a pull chain and plumbing visible behind her). A second cut shifts from her face to an image of roiling, shitlike mud whose status as excrement is confirmed by the sound of a flushing toilet. Modot's erotic desire emerges in this initial sequence as both compulsive and abjectly perverse. He is out of control both physically and psychologically: he rejects social convention by engaging in sexual play during an official pub-

FIGURE 10
Still from Luis Buñuel and Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala–Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

lic ceremony, and he reveals a perversity of mind in the pleasure he takes in the thought of coprophilia.

Modot's deviant manhood surfaces in different ways throughout the film as if to illustrate the wide variety of perversions that could taint the image of conventional bourgeois masculinity. He kicks a small white dog; he squashes bugs with pleasure; he knocks a blind man to the ground to steal his cab; he slaps his lover's mother; he marvels at seeing a father shoot his son dead with a rifle; he languorously sucks his lover's fingers (and encourages her to do the same) (Fig. 10). Although these incidents solidify Modot's reputation as a man without much of a social conscience, we learn toward the end of the film that he was once an upstanding member of the bourgeois political class whose work on behalf of the government saved the lives of hundreds of women and children. He is a man who has rejected a life of state service and social respectability to pursue his innermost fantasies and desires. Once a lionized member of the political and social elite, he has become an antisocial deviant and sexual pervert by the end of the film.

In a sequence toward the end of the film in which Modot is finally alone with Lys, the introduction of male trauma suggests that the intimacy he wants with his female lover may be both exciting and dangerous. While Modot caresses his lover's face , his hand almost imperceptibly turns into a fingerless, mutilated stump (Fig. 11). The effect is twofold: the scene underscores a moment of tender intimacy and then transforms that tenderness in a way that illuminates

FIGURE 11
Still from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala – Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

FIGURE 12
Drawing by Salvador Dalí in an undated letter to Luis Buñuel. Courtesy of the Filmoteca Española, Madrid, Fondo especial Buñuel, R.305. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala – Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

FIGURE 13
Still from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. Copyright 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala–Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

the trauma embedded deep within such moments of intimacy. At this point in the lovers' story, Modot changes from a citizen with a defective moral compass into an erotically obsessed yet emasculated man. His weakened sense of patriotism, familial duty, and social responsibility cinematically appear to be the result of his mutilated body's uncontrolled yet unfulfilled desires.

Intriguingly, a letter from the Dalí-Buñuel archives suggests that Dalí initially envisioned this sequence differently. Dalí had imagined that before Modot stroked Lys's cheek, he would kiss her fingertips. Then, as if gripped by passion, he would grasp her fingers with his teeth and rip off her fingernail and a piece of flesh in plain view of the audience.[33] In the letter, Dalí laid out how he and Buñuel could achieve this grisly effect. He suggested that they use a mannequin hand and attach a nail to it with a bit of paper trailing behind so that they could mimic the dramatic tearing of flesh and fingernail from Lys's hand.[34]

Two drawings in the letter show how he envisioned the scene (Fig. 12). Especially when juxtaposed with the film's final scenes of mutual finger sucking, the drawings' violence (complete with drops of blood from the torn-away finger, detailed in the upper right) prefigures the structure eventually chosen for this final sequence. Instead of showing Lys's finger being torn, the final version of the scene sequentially depicts two mutilated images of Modot's body: his fingerless hand caressing Lys's face (see Fig. 11) and his trembling, wounded face mouthing the words, "mon amour, mon amour, mon amour" as blood trickles down his cheeks and his neck, pinched by his formal attire, becomes a distended, blood-engorged muscle (Fig. 13).

Dalí's initial idea about violating Lys's hand changed to the image of Modot's fleshy, fingerless one. The image of violence to the female body that Dalí initially envisioned gave way to one that perpetrated violence on the male body, conjuring associations with the wounds of veterans in the recent world war.[35] Indeed, in a letter Dalí wrote to Buñuel about the use of a bloody male face in the film, he described two alternate scenarios: a horribly bloody man walking among a group of pedestrians or a split-second image of the man's bloody face.[36] Although the final choice in the film was a long shot of Modot's bleeding face, the wounds afflicting his body provide visual cues for the audience's fantasies. The wounding of Modot's body at this point in the film—his hand a fingerless stump, his face lacerated and dripping blood while he repeats the words "my love, my love, my love"—suggests that Modot finds sexual release in his own wounds and presumes that the audience will have its own visceral attachment to the pleasures and pains of Modot's experience.

These images of Modot's mutilated hand and bloodied face at the end of the film suggest that the strange mix of pleasure and pain in his desire might be an outgrowth of the wounded male body. The image of his bloodied face above his tightly bound neck suggests a phallic shape, further asserting a potential connection between his facial wound and attacks on male (phallic) power. Modot and Lys are a disconcerting if fascinating pair of lovers whose unconventional approaches to erotic satisfaction—the sucking of toes and fingers, pleasure in pain, the trauma of intimacy—in *L'Âge d'Or* demonstrate that desire could become a useful means of undermining not just sexual but social convention. Although the film's characters grovel in the mud, kick a small dog and a blind man, dream of masturbation and the murder of their own children, the film was more than a shocking catalog of social taboos or perverse sexual pleasures to viewers at the time. *L'Âge d'Or* showed that desire wouldn't be controlled easily and that it might crash the gates of restraint protecting the bourgeois subject from the workings of his or her unconscious. And the film did so by visualizing the power of advertising posters and photographs to elicit unconventional acts from unsuspecting viewers.

Advertising Surrealist Desire

L'Âge d'Or not only tried to destabilize audience assumptions about appropriate behavior and proper sexuality, but it also promoted the idea that advertising images had exceptional potential to awaken strange new desires in the viewer. Buñuel and Dalí apparently believed that contemporary pictorial advertisements could successfully jump-start a surrealist aesthetic experience by using images to evoke a chain of associations. Dalí wrote of the fabulous "antiartistic world of advertisements!, magnificent invitations to the senses and to the voyage of discovery of unknown objects."[37] Like the "double images" he believed were necessary to provoke "mental crisis" in their viewers, these advertisements could entice viewers to see and experience the world in entirely new ways.[38] Thus, in two key sequences, the film methodically illustrates how

cutting-edge advertising posters and photographs can first arrest the viewer's attention and then plunge him or her into a landscape teeming with fragmentary images. These fragments retained the power to create new associations, which in turn produced new forms of desire, pleasure, or perversity in viewers.

To make their point as effectively as possible, Buñuel and Dalí worked with the well-known photographer and advertising designer André Vigneau to produce several posters and a photograph especially for *L'Âge d'Or*.[39] Using Vigneau's images in ways that paralleled the actual deployment of posters in and around the city of Paris (Figs. 14 and 15)—on a fence next to a sidewalk, on a sandwich man, or in a shop window—the film showed exactly how mass-marketed images could trigger powerful, psychologically dense associations. The first advertising sequence shows Modot, immediately after being arrested for his mud-spattered indiscretion with Lys, escorted through a city by two policemen. The three men walk by a wooden fence plastered with Vigneau's posters. One of the posters, an ad for Leda facial powder, attracts Modot's attention (Figs. 15 and 16). A series of rapid cuts between the poster and Modot's face suggest that the poster impresses itself on Modot's subconscious. Soon, a cinematic dissolve suggests Modot's mind at work: the female hand and powder puff in the poster have turned into oscillating objects in Modot's mind (Fig. 17). With the box of powder supplanted by a mound of dark hair and the female hand now moving in rapid circles at hair's edge, the film at this juncture baldly suggests female masturbation.[40]

A second advertising image that soon crosses Modot's path reiterates how advertising posters arrest their viewers' attention with careful yet strange and unexpected juxtapositions. After shaking himself out of his masturbatory fantasy about the Leda poster, Modot focuses on a pair of inverted female legs attached to a man's sandwich board that advertises hosiery. As Modot whips around to follow the man, whose body has become a living billboard, his face registers his surprise at the mixture of signs: a man who is also a pair of woman's legs. Quickly, however, Modot's escorts get him moving again. A few moments later Modot notices a third image, this time in a shop window: a photograph of a woman's tipped-back head. Once again, the visual effects grab his attention; they also forge an associative link to his earlier fantasy of female masturbation. A rapid dissolve overtakes his sight of the photograph and turns the woman in the picture into an image of his girlfriend lying on a couch with her hand in her lap and her neck arched back in a suggestion of autoerotic pleasure.

In Modot's eyes, the poster, the sandwich man, and the photograph each generate an erotic fantasy or at least, a visual shock. But the film also shows how one image's effects lead to other experiences as the viewer makes visual links between the varied, often fragmentary images Modot sees as he walks along the city's streets. The images accrue power because they suggest chains of associations that in turn create new webs of desire—unplanned and previously unimagined. Vigneau's advertisements do not sell products; they trigger narrative fantasies that may create desire for a product but may also irritate the mind to generate other, more

FIGURE 14
Boulevard Haussmann, Paris, 1925. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Department of Prints and Photographs, Collection Meurisse.

FIGURE 16
Still from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala–Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

FIGURE 17
Still from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala–Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

FIGURE 15
Still from Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, *L'Âge d'Or,* 1930. © 2006 Salvador Dalí, Gala–Salvador Dalí Foundation, Figueras, Spain/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Herederos de Luis Buñuel.

visceral forms of desire with the potential to destroy the vestiges of the bourgeois social order.[41] Thus, by using Vigneau's advertising, Buñuel and Dalí imagine a world of images that teach their audiences to desire a new way of being in which love can conquer the brittle, sacrificial "religions" of bourgeois society. *L'Âge d'Or* dramatized how individual experience could catalyze political transformation, and Vigneau's posters, as channeled through the eyes of Gaston Modot, sought to create a longing for both personal, erotic satisfaction and a newly desirous surrealist society.

Dreaming the Surrealist City

Although recent work on surrealism has begun to ask questions about surrealism's relationship to popular culture—cinema, pulp fiction, public exhibitions, even wax museums—scholars often shy away from analyzing how advertising theory and practice might have informed surrealist work, particularly surrealist visual representations, in the 1920s.[42] In the years preceding *L'Âge d'Or,* writers like Louis Aragon and Robert Desnos had already begun to imagine advertising's potential to produce a surrealist experience of the city, and in their novels, they seem to have laid the groundwork for Buñuel and Dalí's surrealist flâneur to contemplate the posters that dominated many Parisian boulevards. Aragon remarked on the city's potential as the site of advertising-created revelations in his 1929 essay "Introduction to 1930": "a poem . . . if it were written on the walls, would it stop the crowd? would they read it? would they hold on to it?"[43] His comments alluded to the phenomenon that *L'Âge d'Or* was to envision a year later. Perhaps, the surrealists thought, visual images that used the strategies of visual fragmentation and juxtaposition so familiar in contemporary publicity could prepare the passing crowds to see the world differently. Perhaps these images could help consumers see the largely invisible ideological and psychological structures that were so central to surrealism's interpretation of modern life. How could one make advertisements that would create a surrealist individual? What would the advertising images look like, and to whom would they be pitched? Robert Desnos' work, as reflected in his 1927 book *La Liberté ou L'Amour,* may well have been the textual precursor to the practical, associational applications that Buñuel and Dalí imagined for advertising in *L'Âge d'Or.* Desnos' text explores how a surrealist city could provoke its inhabitants to experience the city differently and, subsequently, to succumb to their repressed desires. Lying in wait for the unsuspecting viewer, the billboards that populate Desnos' vision of Paris become living beings: at one moment, these beings lie flat and still, plastered against the city's walls; in the next, they come to life and jump into the streets so that they can unleash their audience's wildest dreams. Desnos' city—not unlike the cities of *L'Âge d'Or* and Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*—feels like a dream.

Desnos mounts his surrealist ad campaign at the beginning of *La Liberté ou L'Amour.* A well-known contemporary advertising image—the giant face of the Bébé Cadum, a "logo" that

FIGURE 18
Bébé Cadum billboard in Paris, 1926. In *L'Art Vivant* (15 August 1926): 619.

sought to represent Cadum soap's purity (Fig. 18)—leaps from its two-dimensional surface and is transformed, through Desnos' prose, into a living, breathing inhabitant of a dreamlike urban landscape in which the Michelin man, Bibendum, also lived:

> Bébé Cadum was born without the aid of parents, spontaneously. On the horizon, a somber giant stretched his limbs and yawned. Bibendum Michelin introduced him to a terrible battle of which the author of these lines will be the historian. At the age of twenty-one years, Bébé Cadum was big enough to fight with Bibendum. . . . A policeman who was strolling foolishly along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées heard suddenly great clamors in the sky. The sky was obscured and, with thunder, lightning, and wind, a soapy rain fell upon the city. In an instant the landscape was ghostly. The roofs were covered with a light mousse which the wind picked up by flakes. . . . A multitude of rainbows emerged. . . . Passersby walked in an odiferous snow that rose up to their knees. . . . Then a charming madness moved into the city. The inhabitants removed their clothing and ran around the streets, rolling on the soapy carpet.[44]

Desnos conjures an image of Paris in which streets turn into strange theaters and billboards, and posters and marketing symbols come to life to battle for market share. Their antics encourage others to behave erratically: people begin to shed their clothes and to follow their desires rather than their good sense—all at the behest of these strange new residents. Desnos imagines that the poetic potential of the advertising icon is real in this text. Thus, the beholder's experience of the city shifts from one of passive consumption to one of active participation—mimicking the trajectory of the iconic corporate logos' newfound embodiments. Bébé Cadum doesn't simply want to sell soap; he aims to change the world into a place of his own

making. He will blanket the city in a sudsy snow, and he will entice the city's residents to rip off their clothes and roll shamelessly in the streets.

Walter Benjamin, in his writing on surrealism, echoes the ideas in these two surrealist texts about the potential effect of advertising on contemporary culture. In a passage from his unpublished "Arcades Project" on advertising, he notes that "publicity [is] the ruse that permits the dream to impose itself on industry."[45] Surrealist poems use words that are "like the names of commercial firms," and "their texts are at bottom prospectuses for businesses which have not yet been created."[46] Benjamin noticed that surrealism's appropriation of advertising language encouraged the development of imagery with widespread commercial power. Thus, he likened surrealist works to proposals for surrealist businesses whose products would not be commodities but a new society shaped by the unconscious desires made manifest by these advertising images. Interestingly, by the mid-1920s many prominent advertising theorists and practitioners had already begun to codify the crucial relationship between unconscious desire and the success of visual advertisements, and Desnos, Buñuel, and Dalí were apparently at least somewhat aware of these developments.

Advertising-industry publications were full of discussions about how best to develop new visual languages that would attract a customer's attention just long enough to lodge desire for a product in his or her mind. Most advertising professionals at the time understood that co-opting the viewer's sense of sight was crucial to this process. Through visual suggestion, an advertisement should capture and then modify the viewer's consciousness through an associational chain of psychological attachment or identification with the depicted object, eventually leading to action: purchase of the desired consumer product. In this way, advertisements could create a set of lasting, if unfocused, experiences of desire in the beholder. According to a 1927 essay in the high-end advertising and design journal *Arts et Métiers Graphiques,*

> The advertisement, when it is simply "seen," does not have the same value for immediately creating the desire for the purchase; it is even frequently seen by passersby without their knowledge. Because publicity, like any thing which falls under the senses, may be perceived in the state of waking, or on the contrary in the state of sleeping—during the hours where the spirit is passive, available for the impressions that are indifferent to it in appearance.—An idea is going to lodge itself in one of the folds of the brain, in one of its mysterious pockets, in the subconscious!—The seed is sown; and external influence will make it germinate. The need for a product or an article will happen unexpectedly one day, and this need, impersonal at first, will make itself more concrete and will take for its object the brand read everywhere.[47]

Visual advertisements not only generate desire, but they also push their viewers to act upon a potentially endless, and individualized, series of psychological and emotional experiences. This advertising principle is strikingly close to the formula at work in the publicity sequences in

L'Âge d'Or. Where the film's account of publicity diverges from this textual account, however, is in the final product: rather than working to create desire for a commodity, the posters in *L'Âge d'Or* release Modot's desires without a discernible commodity, or purpose, in view. His emerging desires push him to become a social pariah instead of going shopping.

In advertising, surrealist artists and writers found a means to turn the rhetoric of mass culture—whose most potent form is publicity, as I have suggested—into a tool to develop new and potentially subversive surrealist messages. Working on its audience's subconscious, the surrealist text, image, or object had potential to alter the social order by luring people's desires away from assembly-line products and toward new forms of individual and collective expression. *L'Âge d'Or* dramatized the way in which a visual language of juxtaposition and decontextualization could achieve both the publicists' and the surrealists' goals: to produce and consolidate desire in the consumer. But *L'Âge d'Or*—and to an extent, Desnos' *La Liberté ou L'Amour*—sought to produce desire for a surrealist experience, and this "product" was unconventional, antiestablishment conduct.

Reconstruction and the Promise of the Postwar Body

From the *grands magasins* to the walls of Parisian streets plastered high with visually arresting advertisements (see Fig. 14), consumer culture was dependent on fragmentary images whose primary purpose was to generate visual shock through the use of a properly aestheticized visual fragment. Many of the images by advertising professionals like André Vigneau, the poster artist for *L'Âge d'Or,* effectively used body parts to sell consumer products. Yet many modern publicists also promoted the reconstructed male body as a sign of the nation's increasing economic and industrial stability in the 1920s. And nowhere was this thrust more evident than at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, an exhibition designed to signal France's increasingly important role as an international leader in advertising, design, and industrial arts. As a result, some of the imagery of the exposition's publicity campaign linked national power and industrial productivity not to the derealized bodies produced by the avant-garde but to an idealized image of masculinity.

An official advertisement for the 1925 exposition (which ran from April through October) exemplifies this embodiment of productivity (Fig. 19). With robust male bodies piled high in the foreground and factories belching smoke at the rear, this advertisement heroizes industrial labor and presents pictorial evidence that reconstruction depends not just on the cooperation of man and machine but on the use of the powerful male body as an engine of national rebirth. The exposition also showcased the latest in mannequin design, which favored idealized images of postwar masculinity and femininity. These new standards of beauty and potential marketing power attracted attention not only in professional advertising journals but also in the surrealist journal *La Révolution surréaliste*.

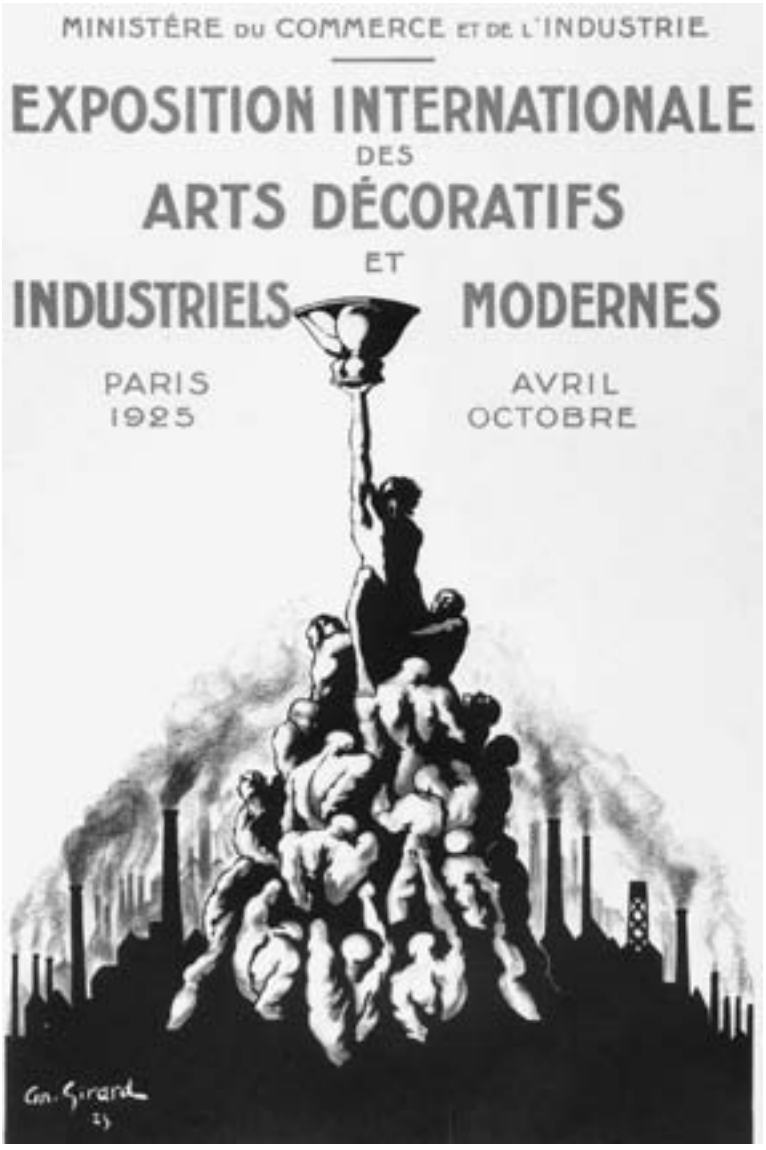

FIGURE 19
Poster, International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts, Paris, 1925. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Department of Prints and Photographs.

FIGURE 20 Man Ray, Siégel mannequin, 1925. Cover of *La Révolution surréaliste* 4 (15 July 1925). © 2006 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

N° 4 — Première année 15 Juillet 1925

LA RÉVOLUTION SURRÉALISTE

ET AU

GUERRE TRAVAIL

SOMMAIRE

ABONNEMENT.
Les 12 Numéros :
France : 45 francs
Etranger : 55 francs

Dépositaire général : Librairie GALLIMARD
15, Boulevard Raspail, 15
PARIS (VII^e^)

LE NUMÉRO :
France : 4 francs
Étranger : 5 francs

A l'Exposition Internatio

Pour la défense des Manne

Nous avons déjà parlé (numéro de juillet, page 397) de l'évolution des mannequins de mode, à propos de l'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs : il faut y revenir. Ne cite-t-on pas telle maison qui pour cette manifestation a créé jusqu'à six cents modèles!! Ce très gros effort mérite attention puisque demain, pour nos étalages, nous serons appelés à choisir celui-ci ou celui-là, qui doit plaire à la clientèle et au passant. Le mannequin étant un élément publicitaire important, il n'est pas superflu de revenir sur ce sujet, — très vaste d'ailleurs.

Mannequin Worth. Fig. 1. Photo Rey.

M. André de Fouquières lui-même, dans une de ses chroniques du *Figaro*, n'a pas craint de citer ces « personnages de cire », auxquels de nombreux journaux et de nombreuses revues ont déjà consacré de nombreux articles et de nombreuses reproductions.

A notre point de vue commercial, reprenons la critique ou l'éloge qu'on en a faits au point de vue artistique.

Ne trouvez-vous pas qu'il était nécessaire de bousculer un peu, en cette matière, nos vieilles habitudes? Nous avions accoutumé de voir de mignonnes figures sans caractère, qui posaient devant nous comme chez le photographe : pas de naturel, des gestes faux, précieux et toujours semblables. Les perruques, les cils, les sourcils étaient véritables et personne n'imaginait qu'il en pût être autrement... Et, pourtant, en l'espèce, à quoi cela sert-il?

Le mannequin n'est qu'un support, un « portemanteau », qui doit mettre en valeur une étoffe, un vêtement ou une partie du vêtement; il n'est que cela. Au fond, on ne devrait pas le voir, ou, tout au moins, il ne devrait rester dans notre souvenir qu'à l'état de second plan.

Les fabricants — mais ne sont-ils pas orfèvres, comme M. Josse? — parlent autrement : « Si vos yeux conservent l'image du mannequin, disent-ils, vous vous rappellerez la robe et le manteau qu'il porte. De plus, pour ne pas compliquer vos souvenirs, nous stylisons, nous revenons à la ligne. »

L'erreur du bon public est de croire que le mannequin doit être obligatoirement une statue de cire « ressemblante ». Il veut pouvoir se tromper et dire comme le cicerone de l'abbaye de Hautecombe en montrant une statue : « Regardez cette main; on dirait qu'elle va parler. » Il veut comme au Musée Grévin pouvoir enlever son chapeau devant M. Rostand ou Mme Dieulafoy. Faut-il le contenter, même aux dépens de l'art et de la publicité? Nous ne le croyons pas.

D'ailleurs, et peu à peu, les yeux s'habituent à

Although the surrealists' work did not receive direct recognition in the exposition, the surrealists understood the implications of the exposition's glitzy presentation of a new commercial culture. Both intrigued by and disdainful of the exposition and its commercial goals (indeed, Louis Aragon wrote a rather scathing review of the exposition in October 1925), the surrealists' decision to publish a Man Ray photograph of one of the mannequins at the exhibition on its July 1925 cover (Fig. 20) indicated their willingness to explore the increasing power of simulated bodies as marketing tools.[48] This female mannequin, a product of the Siégel design firm, whose mannequin division was led by André Vigneau, would presumably stimulate consumer desire for the clothes that she wore or for the personality she seemed to embody. One can imagine that the same held true for her male counterparts, such as the mannequin that appeared in a 1925 issue of the trade journal *Publicité* (Fig. 21).

The presence of the Siégel-Vigneau mannequins at the exposition, with their seductive, uncannily lifelike bodies, underscores the importance in 1925 of creating images of a vibrant, healthy consumer society that would attest to the success of social and cultural reconstruction. Instead of simply marketing paintings to go with chairs or promoting the rebuilt veteran as a more productive version of the old, Vigneau's Siégel mannequins created desire for those commodities or social results by encouraging viewer identification with the perfected images of well-crafted, conventionally gendered mannequins. Like streamlined descendants of the rebuilt male veteran, perhaps Vigneau's male mannequins helped erase the gap between the reality of postwar trauma and the promise of regeneration. Men and women could interact with these humanoid symbols of postwar progress through corporeal identification and desire. Perhaps these embodied ideals held the key to a newly minted, blemish-free social body.

Throughout the 1920s, the surrealists co-opted the images of contemporary publicity for their own purposes. Using techniques of juxtaposition and comparison that mirrored those popular with designers in the 1920s, the surrealists labored to reveal the slippages in meaning that most images of postwar reconstruction tried to avoid. They sought to show that the ideology of regeneration was in large part a fantasy, concocted as a balm for the traumatized national psyche, and that the promised changes of reconstruction had not yet taken place. By producing images that emphasized dismemberment instead of seamless reconstruction, surrealist writers and artists launched a movement that I think of as an ad campaign for a surrealist future. The surrealists borrowed the visual and rhetorical structures that the establishment was using to promote national progress and used them to emphasize anxiety, trauma, and uncertainty. And because their images seemed poised to trigger unconscious desires and, by

FIGURE 21 Male mannequin (Siégel), 1925. In *Publicité* 213 (November 1925): 676. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.