THE MINOTAUR IN ITS LABYRINTH: ART AND POLITICS IN THE SURREALISTS' WORLD

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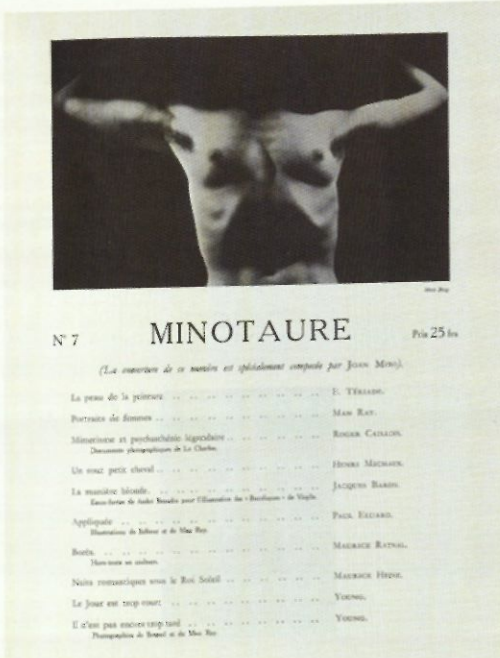
In 1935, the American Surrealist photographer Man Ray produced a remarkable image, titled *Minotaure*, for the frontispiece of the seventh issue of the Parisian journal of the same name (FIG. 37). A human torso, arms splayed, looms from an ink-black background. Shadows engulf its head and starkly define the contours of its breasts, stomach, and arms. Deprived of its head—the site of human reason—the body metamorphoses into the "head" of a monster: the Minotaur, half man and half beast.[1] Two years later, another shocking image of a decapitated body appeared, whose torso displayed not the Minotaur itself but the architecture of the monster's lair: the labyrinth (FIG. 38). Drawn by André Masson for the cover of *Acéphale*, it encapsulated the new journal's Nietzschean, antihierarchical ethos. *Acéphale*'s founder, the dissident Surrealist Georges Bataille, noted that Masson's headless figure conjured forth powerful subterranean impulses linking men to monstrous beasts:

> Human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe. . . .
>
> Man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison. . . . I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption Birth and Death. . . . [His] stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster.[2]



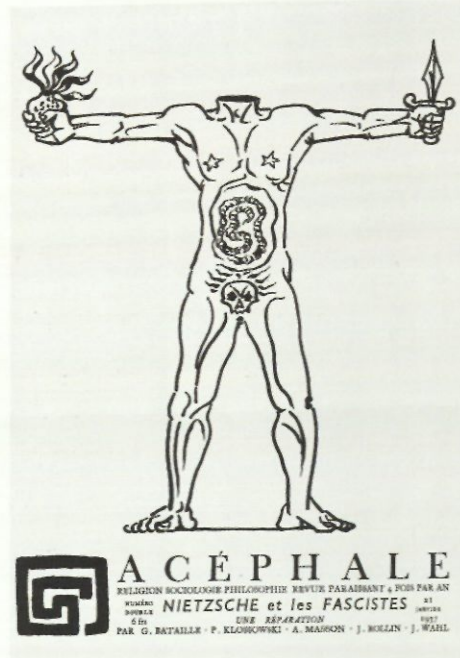


FIG. 37
Frontispiece of *Minotaure*, no. 7 (June 1935), with photograph by Man Ray (American, 1890–1976)

FIG. 38
Cover of *Acéphale*, no. 2 (January 1937), with illustration by André Masson (French, 1896–1987)

In the 1930s, the figure of the Minotaur in his labyrinth became increasingly central to Surrealism's reformulation of the relationship between art and politics. Since its founding in the early 1920s, the movement had probed the dark recesses of human desire, seeking to release the libido's irrational drives into the public realm in order to psychically and socially disrupt capitalism's status quo. Through a systematic melding of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Surrealists argued that the psychic unconscious had political dimensions that affected broader social relations than simply those of the individual or the domestic sphere. Interestingly, they also insisted that the reverse was equally true: that class conflict and economic relations had a psychic dimension, with a corresponding visual or representational character. The Surrealists had thus long understood visual representation as a political enterprise, in which politics could be embedded in praxes of picture making such that representation itself became a political enterprise. Images did not simply illustrate politics, the Surrealists maintained; rather, they functioned as the very matrix through which political challenges to existing social conditions could be articulated. In the words of the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, images had the power to "embody [society's] contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in [their] innermost structure," as a "force of protest."[3]

By the 1930s, the Surrealists were being confronted with the particular challenge of Fascism's deadly recoding of human desire in the public sphere.[4] As Europe fell first into the Spanish Civil War, and then into the even deeper calamity of World War II, the figure of the Minotaur and its related visual tropes—labyrinth, bull, toreador, and corrida, or bullfight—came to the fore as a key Surrealist mechanism for undermining the Fascist ethos. Thus, for example, although the journals *Minotaure* and *Acéphale* were generated from opposite ends of Surrealism's political and philosophical spectrum, both arose out of attempts to confront the rise of Fascism and the failures of the Left to stop its advance. *Minotaure* (1933–39), produced under the sway of André Breton, the leader of orthodox Surrealism, sought to reinvigorate the movement's engagement with objective chance (*le hasard objectif*) and the marvelous (*le merveilleux*) as specific tools to combat the dual threat of Nazi Germany and the Stalinization of the French Communist Party (Parti communiste français, or PCF). The shorter-lived review *Acéphale* (1936–39) sought to bring a revitalized Nietzschean philosophy to bear on the deteriorating political situation of 1930s Europe. Edited by Bataille, who had often clashed with Breton over the latter's lofty idealism, with its remnants of bourgeois humanism, *Acéphale* aimed to counteract the viciousness of Fascism and Stalinism on the one hand and the deadening mediocrity of the Popular Front on the other.[5]

Surrealism's repeated return to the theme of the Minotaur foregrounded the movement's prescient critique of instrumentalist rationalism—a naïve belief in human reason, argued the Surrealists, that had plunged Europe into a catastrophic world war and threatened to do so again. Emphasizing not the hero Theseus's emergence into the light of reason after slaying the Minotaur but rather the dark irrationality of the monster in his labyrinth, the Surrealists sought to develop a politics of representation that could thwart Europe's nightmarish fall into Fascism.

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> One figure in particular [in] the labyrinth of surrealist intimations of desire and death . . . connects the psychic involvements of surrealism to its mythological, historical, and contemporary interests; and that figure is the Minotaur."
>
> —Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*

In May 1933, the principal organ of the Surrealist movement, *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, announced the forthcoming publication of a new journal, *Minotaure*. It appeared the following month, sporting cover art by Pablo Picasso (FIG. 39). In contrast to the ubiquitous association of the Minotaur with the dark myths of primitive Crete, Picasso's man-bull, ruling over a Cubist "labyrinth" of collaged bits of paper and cardboard, embodies noble virility. The beast's brutishness has been muted in favor of the majestic, classical masculinity that Picasso consistently associated with the artist and his métier in the one hundred etchings of the *Vollard Suite* (1930–37).[6] Here, with its calm gaze, the Minotaur vigorously lays claim to all it surveys, and the carnal is linked with the visual, the sensual with the aesthetic.

As Surrealism's latest publishing venture, *Minotaure* needed the clout that Picasso, already the world's most famous living artist, could provide. The movement's fortunes had suffered a dramatic downturn in the preceding years. Its two earlier journals, *La révolution surréaliste* (1924–29) and the aforementioned *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930–33), had acted as platforms for the movement's literary and artistic endeavors as well as its ideological and political commitments. Yet, by 1933, the Surrealists' militancy, expressed in the provocative allusion to revolution in their journals' titles, was proving ever more difficult to sustain in print. Surrealist definitions of the term "revolution" had themselves undergone substantial alteration over the past decade. The movement's initial advocacy of automatism as an explosive means of disrupting bourgeois consciousness had been on full display in early issues of *La révolution surréaliste*. But by the early 1930s, *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* had shifted tone as the Surrealists sought to exploit their explorations of psychic, social, and aesthetic revolution in support of Communist revolution under the aegis of the PCF and the Soviet Union. Collaboration with the PCF proved elusive, however, and Breton became increasingly wary of the party's dogmatic approach to creativity and intellectual freedom.[7] Additionally, a precipitous drop in sales had made *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* financially—and politically—unsustainable, so that Breton was receptive to the Swiss publisher Albert Skira's proposal for a new, luxuriously illustrated art journal. Skira envisioned a magazine that would explore the many interconnected aspects of Surrealist production, broadening out from art, literature, and poetry to ethnography, archaeology, psychoanalysis, popular culture, and philosophy, among

FIG. 39
Cover of *Minotaure*, no. 1 (June 1933), with illustration by Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). The Baltimore Museum of Art, E. Kirkbride Miller Art Research Library

other fields. He sought to capitalize on Surrealism's reputation for avant-garde provocation and scandal while downplaying the movement's radical politics; indeed, Skira was adamant that the word "revolution" not appear in the magazine's title, and, reluctantly, Breton agreed.

This ostensibly apolitical stance prompted considerable criticism. The Hungarian Surrealist photographer Brassaï, despite having himself contributed regularly to *Minotaure*, later argued that in collaborating with Skira on the magazine, the Surrealists had become that most detested of all things: "respectable."

> If *Minotaure* let them keep their Surrealist notions, they had to give up the fighting spirits that had been typical of their earlier reviews. . . . This sumptuous production, beyond the reach of proletarian pockets, could only be written for the despised upper classes. . . . With *Minotaure,* Surrealist art and poetry no longer made a "radical break with the world" but rather made its grand entry into the world and into "society."[8]

Contributors to *Minotaure* certainly now found themselves compromised in their desire, on the one hand, to continue promulgating Breton's earlier, scathing critiques of hackneyed notions of salvation through art and, on the other, to conform to Skira's deluxe, inoffensive coffee-table format, intended for polite society. Still, Brassaï's harsh criticism ignored not only the collective, polyphonic nature of *Minotaure* but also the consummate skill of both Skira and Breton in guiding the reader toward a Surrealist experience in all its complexity.[9] Two aspects stand out in particular. The first is the centrality of images. "The procession of images swept [the reader] along with it," the literary critic Jean Starobinski has noted. "The text remained in limbo: reading it was put off until later. Thus the relative and provisional autonomy of the image prevailed, already challenged by the following image, but still surrounded by the dream it had aroused."[10] The magazine's artistic director, E. Tériade, wrote that *Minotaure*'s "image documents speak sufficiently to be understood on their own, and above all, in their alternation, they possess the merit of meaning."[11] For the Surrealists, this aesthetic "meaning" exemplified the movement's concept of a "politics of representation," in which meaning occurs not simply (often, not even primarily) at the level of content but also at the level of form. Politics function within an image—or sequence of images, as in *Minotaure*—as a type of negative dialectic, a refusal of objects to assume conventional political symbolism, a refusal that is carried out on a pictorial level.[12]

The second aspect of *Minotaure*'s politics of representation is what Starobinski calls a "continual looming-up of the unexpected" in the magazine's "labyrinth"-like structure.[13] Darkness and light alternate visually, conjuring up a shadowy world where familiar places and things constantly metamorphose into strange entities with the capacity to unnerve (FIG. 40; see also CAT. 5). Further, *Minotaure* interweaves these images with an astonishing array of vanguard texts, ranging from Salvador Dalí's shattering attack on the iconic Surrealist practice of automatism and Jacques Lacan's provocative analysis of paranoia as a primarily visual condition to Roger Caillois's subversive analysis of mimicry in the insect world as a metaphor for the collapse of Cartesian subjectivity and the field reports of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, a Surrealist-inspired ethnographic expedition across central Africa that took place in 1931–33.[14]

Denied the use of their talismanic word, "revolution," contributors nevertheless found ways of pressing their ambitions under camouflage. Thus, Breton

FIG. 40
Brassaï (Gyula Halász; French, born Hungary, 1899–1984). *Quai de Bercy, Trees near the Wine Market*, 1932–33. Gelatin silver print, 11 15/16 x 9 13/16 in. (30.4 x 24.9 cm). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Foundation (94.376)

used his introductory essay on Picasso in *Minotaure*'s inaugural issue to categorize encounters between opposites as a substrate of the explosive power of the unexpected. Picasso's work, poeticized Breton, evokes the revelatory meeting of night and day, the "unity of light and darkness," that generates revolutionary new knowledge.[15] For the scholar of French literature Denis Hollier, this was one of Breton's most insurrectionary critiques, one that reversed capitalism's imposition of exchange value over use value. Breton's model of the unexpected, he argues, ruptured the quotidian flow of sensations and stopped dead in its tracks the very basis of capitalism's model of exchange. Noting that "pleasure (use-value) is thus literally a break in communication," Hollier goes on to say:

> For it's not a question of agreeable sensations that would become incommunicable beyond a certain threshold; rather, pleasure is the result of incommunicability itself; the unexchangeable is what gives rise to the enjoyment that is the most characteristic feature of use-value.[16]

Breton, in Hollier's view, was equating provocative aesthetic experiences with use value—that is to say, with the opening up of a space for critical thinking that could resist capitalism's relentless commodification of all aspects of human life. Aesthetic experience thus became the ground for crossing Freud with Marx and conceptualizing a revolutionary resistance to capitalism's ruthless abstraction of concrete human relations into an endless flow of commodity circulation.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE LABYRINTH

> A thousand pockets of darkness, the blind, irrational space of the labyrinth.
> —Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*

In 1936, Georges Bataille had just published "Le labyrinthe," a recondite essay that describes the "disconcerting sight of a human being's labyrinthine structure," when André Masson began drawing his emblematic image for Bataille's new review, *Acéphale* (FIG. 38).[17] After having sketched a version of the Vitruvian Man bereft of his head, outstretched arms holding sacred emblems, Masson mused on what to do with the figure's stomach. His solution—to transform its entrails into the Minotaur's labyrinth—thrilled Bataille, and the Cretan maze became a recurring symbol in their shared work.

The labyrinth is, of course, an overdetermined theme encountered throughout both orthodox and dissident Surrealism. "For the Surrealists," writes the art historian David Lomas, "the labyrinth is commonly taken to symbolize the unconscious."

> It does so most obviously by conjuring a shadowy, subterranean realm inhabited by the forces of Eros and death, but additionally, the labyrinth implies a distinctive mode of psychic temporality belonging to the unconscious and determined in opposition to the linear, directional time of consciousness and rational causality.[18]

The Surrealists had repeatedly spatialized the labyrinth-unconscious in architectonic terms, from Max Ernst's *Vision Induced by the Nocturnal Aspect of the Porte Saint-Denis* (1927), which reimagines that classical triumphal arch as a tangled, impenetrable space of bleak ruins, to Alberto Giacometti's 1930–31 *Project for a*

Passageway (Labyrinth) and Masson's many renderings that hurl us into the Greek myth's configurations of desire and death.[19] Both Masson and Bataille used the labyrinth to develop, with an assist from Nietzsche, a theory of the antirational, "headless," decentered self as a form of political opposition to Fascism. In the second issue of *Acéphale*, Bataille described Nietzschean thought as "a *labyrinth*, in other words, the very opposite of the *directives* that current political systems demand from their sources of inspiration."[20] Thus, the labyrinth constituted a Nietzschean alternative to Marxism. Both Masson and Bataille were suspicious of the Marxist emphasis on rationalism; they deplored Stalin's perversion of revolutionary politics, and they objected to the French Popular Front's mealymouthed response to its Spanish counterpart's pleas for help in combating Fascism. Both criticized orthodox Surrealism's reliance on Marxism's "rationalist and utilitarian" models of mass political organization.[21] The labyrinth, for its part, symbolized energies whose power could not be brought into the service of a hierarchical, homogeneous political system; it was a space in which "what had suddenly come forward strangely loses its way."[22]

In contrast, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, writing on Nietzsche, regarded the labyrinth less as a disorienting maze than as one that enforces an inescapable spatiotemporal repetition—one that "designates the eternal return itself: circular, it is not the lost way but the way which leads us back to the same point, to the same instant which is, which was and which will be."[23] Freud, of course, associated this endless corporeal compulsion to repeat with the uncanny and traumatic. In his 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche" (The Uncanny), the psychoanalyst described wandering through the narrow, twisting streets of a small Italian city and chancing upon its red-light district. Hastening away, he nevertheless found himself suddenly back in the same disreputable location. He again escaped, "only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time," where he was overcome by a feeling of uncanniness he ascribed to an "unintended recurrence of the same thing."[24]

Echoing Freud's association of the uncanny with a mazelike urban environment, Breton famously spatialized the unconscious in his novels *Nadja* (1928) and *L'amour fou* (*Mad Love*) (1937) by treating Paris as a psychic *dédale* (labyrinth) of desire and chance.[25] Yet, unlike Freud, Breton associated the experience of endlessly wandering a maze of medieval streets and modern boulevards not with a sense of foreboding or the uncanny but with the revelation of secret desires, surging up unexpectedly. His 1926 chance encounter with a woman named Nadja on the streets of Paris, published as the documentary novel of the same name two years later, envisioned the radical, transformative potential of two key Surrealist concepts (cited earlier in connection to his work in *Minotaure*): objective chance (random events or found objects that act as tangible signs of the subject's own desire) and the marvelous ("the conjunction of desire and outer reality").[26]

Written during a tense period in the Surrealists' attempted reconciliation with the PCF, the book interweaves with Breton's imaginative description of his relations with Nadja a series of "voluntarily banal" photographs of deserted Parisian streets.[27] Yet, the seeming innocuousness of the photographs, theorized the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, hides a potentially revolutionary energy. Breton's "extraordinary discovery" in *Nadja*, Benjamin argued in 1929, was to situate the connection between the liberating energies of desire and revolutionary political action in what he called the "image-realm" (*Bildraum*). Surrealism's crucial political breakthrough was "to discover in the realm of political action a realm reserved one hundred percent for images." The "image-realm" is that space in which, during periods of crisis in the hegemonic order, "action puts forth its own image" to challenge existing social hierarchies.[28]

In *Nadja*, Breton strove to articulate an intricate relationship between the quotidian and the marvelous that would stand as a model for a Surrealist politics of the imagination. The book marked a key moment in the development of Breton's political views, in which "revolutionary action which has Communism as its goal" was seen to depend on the "intercession of the marvelous."[29] As such, *Nadja* can be understood as a protest against the PCF's dogmatic insistence on the "irreconcilability" of the "inner life" of the mind and "the world of facts"—an opposition Breton deemed "artificial."[30] The book's photographs, such as a view from the street of the awning and window of the bookstore operated by the PCF's newspaper, *L'Humanité* (FIG. 41), ensure the documentary, "antiliterary" character of *Nadja*, balancing the "realm of facts" with the "experiment of the inner life" and recording the factual status of the marvelous.[31] Their seeming mundanity reworks Freud's theories of dream interpretation and the function of memory, transforming the medium of photography into a mechanism for documenting the supposedly undocumentable "reality" beyond our quotidian, visible experience. Each image evokes, in Freud's terms, a "memory-trace" as a means of registering Nadja's existence but does so in the absence of the

FIG. 41
Jacques-André Boiffard (French, 1902–1961). *La librairie de L'Humanité* (*L'Humanité Bookshop*), 1927, published in André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928)

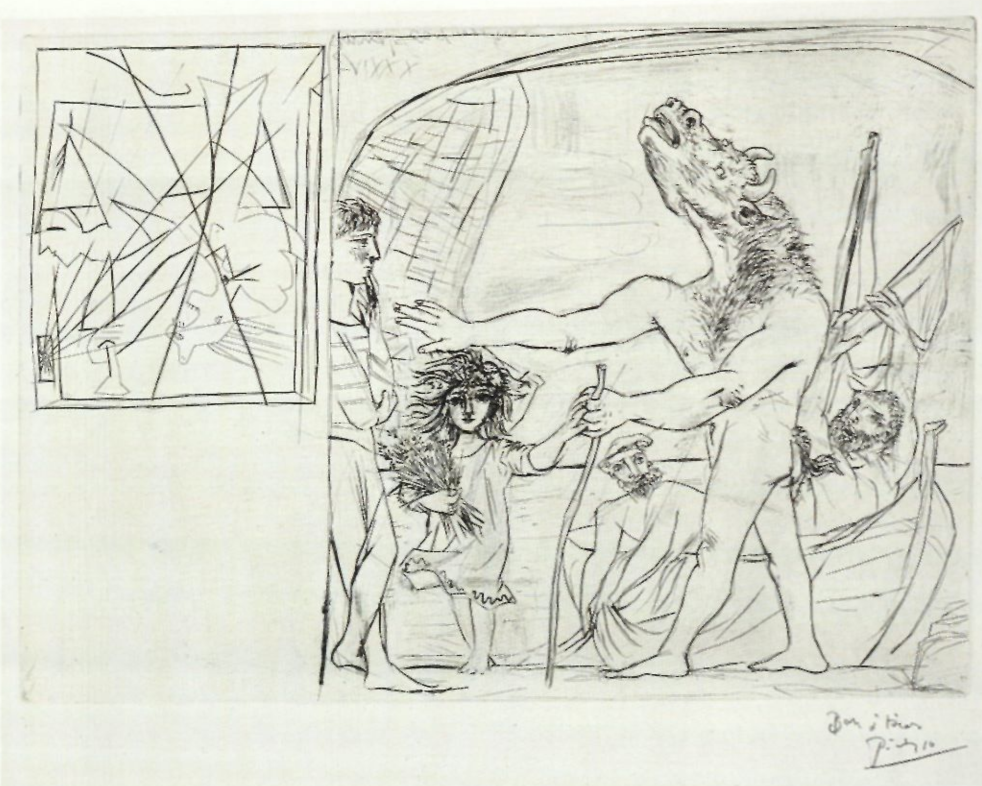
woman herself. By inserting a deliberate ambiguity into the connection between revolution and the marvelous, the photographs in *Nadja* open a conceptual shift in the relationship between "politics" and "culture."

THE MINOTAUR AS POLITICAL METAPHOR IN PICASSO

> This tauromachic figure of beauty—"tauromachic beauty" as once there was talk of "convulsive beauty"—will prove to have roots in terrain that is not strictly speaking aesthetic.
>
> —Michel Leiris, *The Bullfight as Mirror*

In September 1934, Picasso etched the first of the *Blind Minotaur* plates to be included in his *Vollard Suite* (FIG. 42). Unlike the example on the artist's cover for the first issue of *Minotaure*, this man-beast offers no redemptive evocations of noble virility, vision, or art. Here, the Minotaur casts its head back in unseeing

FIG. 42
Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *Blind Minotaur Guided by a Little Girl with Flowers*, 1934, published as plate 94 of the *Vollard Suite* in 1939. Drypoint and engraving, 9 13/16 x 13 11/16 in. (25.1 x 34.8 cm). Musée national Picasso, Paris



agony, mouth agape. Weakened and dependent on the eyes of a small girl to guide him, he blunders along, his "carnal vision replaced by blind, feeble groping."[32] Picasso reprised the theme of taurine suffering in May 1935, when he began work on the large etching *Minotauromachy* (FIG. 43). Two years later, the artist returned yet again to the motif in his painting *Guernica* (FIG. 44), filtering it through a Surrealist-inflected post-Cubist visual language. Both *Minotauromachy* and *Guernica* reiterate the thematics and central compositional elements of *Blind Minotaur*, and both, stylistically, are usually interpreted within the purportedly apolitical classicism of Picasso's post–World War I *rappel à l'ordre* period. Yet, while *Guernica* is taken to be profoundly political—a powerful outcry against the Fascist bombing of the Basque market town on April 26, 1937—*Minotauromachy* is not typically understood as such.[33] That view, however, ignores the way in which Picasso specifically incorporated Surrealism's politics of representation into both works.

Although never an official member of the Surrealist movement, Picasso was nevertheless attracted by Surrealism's insistence on representations of sexuality

FIG. 43
DETAIL of cat. 8. Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *Minotauromachy*, 1935

FIG. 44
Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *Guernica*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 11 ft. 5½ in. x 25 5¾ in. (3.49 x 7.77 m). Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

and the body as mechanisms for understanding the construction of meaning.[34] The artist valued Surrealism's view of the relationship between the disruptive aspects of sexuality and the transgressive possibilities of images and was also intrigued by Surrealism's refusal of the conventional split between the rational and the irrational. He used these aspects of Surrealism to develop a powerful imagery in which layers of private meaning were built up and made to stand for a range of issues far beyond the personal. For Picasso, the violence and confusion of private sexuality became a mode for coming to grips with the violence and confusion (ideological or physical) of the world at large. The frantic distortions of the women's bodies in works such as *The Three Dancers* (1925; Tate, London), for example, mark his growing fascination with Surrealism's insistence on the human body as the register of unconscious psychic terrors and desires.[35]

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Picasso frequently pushed the two strands of Surrealism and classicism, both present in his work, into dialectical conflict. By the mid-1930s, he had begun physically opposing the two styles in order to contrast the rational serenity of the classical with the irrational violence of the Surrealist. This approach is evident in the small, inverted etching *The Death of Marat*, which accompanied, on the same sheet, the first version of *Blind Minotaur* (FIG. 42). In it, Picasso echoed the powerful but equivocal visual balance in Jacques-Louis David's famous canvas of 1793 between the open, rationalist purity of public heroism and the obscure violence of the private and the sexual, finding in that balance a visual equivalent for the violence of modern life in general. The two aspects are assigned different stylistics: the controlled, quietly jubilant line describing the classical figure is set against the wildly erratic line of the malevolently rampaging figure. These two versions of the drawn line meet, as it were, at the point of the knife. And again, in the first plate of his *Dream and Lie of Franco* (FIG. 45), in which a maniacal polyp attacks a classical personification of beauty, Picasso used this stylistic antagonism to overtly condemn the Spanish dictator.

In *Guernica*, this visual tactic takes on a powerful political significance. More than any other image of the period, Picasso's painting has come to represent, synecdochically, the specific horrors of the Spanish Civil War and the catastrophe of warfare in general. But tracking exactly how Picasso imbued the canvas with such an intensity of meaning is by no means straightforward; it requires coming to grips with the particular ways the artist maneuvered between the painting's content and the formal procedures of making and viewing it. Picasso

FIG. 45
DETAIL of cat. 32. Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *The Dream and Lie of Franco* (Plate 1), 1937

saw in Surrealism something nearly analogous to his own thinking about the workings of representation. Like the Surrealists, he understood that lived reality could not be separated from the representational procedures used to articulate it but also that those representational strategies could never be completely congruent with the surface appearance of reality. The lack of transparency between representation and reality made bringing the two into some kind of alignment a disruptive, problematic enterprise. The Surrealists conceptualized this troublesome relationship as the site of revolutionary social action. Their work focused heavily on the body (especially the female body) as a highly charged erotic field and a never-neutral object of representation.

The human body as *object* of representational strategies was just one aspect of Picasso's interest in Surrealism. There are also parallels in his work with the Surrealist concept of the body as *mediator*—between the conscious and the unconscious, the public and the private, and the differing worlds of external and internal reality. Both Picasso and the Surrealists viewed the body as an active participant in representation—as the solicitor, intermediary, and organizer of otherwise mute, obscure, or seemingly unconnected visual elements.

THE SURREALIST CONCEPT OF THE DOCUMENT

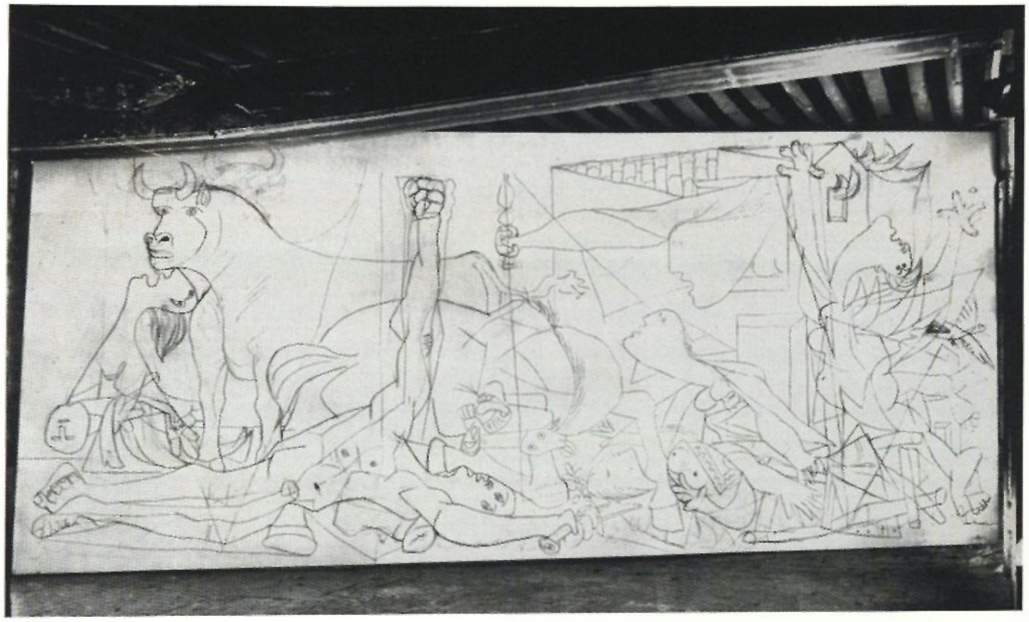
> The signs that cover the surface turn out to be active; they force us to live the time we are trying to escape.
>
> —Christian Zervos, "Histoire d'un tableau de Picasso"

A third point in common between Picasso and the Surrealists was the notion of the "document," which neither, however, understood in any straightforward way. Like *Nadja*'s photographs, *Guernica* records the traces of things that do not appear directly in the final image, tracking, rather than the thing itself, its aura or "memory-trace." It is precisely through mobilizing Surrealist strategies of "documentation" that the final canvas we know as *Guernica* presents the vestiges of its own production, including the precedents of *Blind Minotaur* and *Minotauromachy*.

Let us begin with the compositional coincidences between *Minotauromachy* and *Guernica*. Flipped (as Picasso would have seen it, as he etched image onto metal plate), the print reveals a number of similarities to *Guernica*. In both, the wounded horse pinions the center, while the bull/Minotaur ranges off to the left. The two women looking down from their window in *Minotauromachy*, along with the schoolgirl holding the candle, have all merged into one in *Guernica*. Furthermore, that woman has taken over the role of illuminating the scene—and so on. But *Guernica* turns *Minotauromachy*'s muted unease into a massive panorama of terror. Bodies are strewn helter-skelter across the starkly lit proscenium. The running woman to the right of the horse is skewered in place by a guillotine-shaped black triangle, while the bare overhead lightbulb becomes the apex of a triangular swath of visual fragmentation located dead center in the painting. The screams of the hysterical mother holding her dead child culminate in her pointed tongue, as though the entire weight of her agony can be compacted into that infinitesimal tip with the unbearable density of a cosmic black hole. Her abjection is repeated and magnified in the scream of the horse, whose shattered body drags the cool detachment of Picasso's post-Cubist classicism into the realm of mindless fear. *Minotauromachy*'s schoolgirl is all grown up in *Guernica*, thrusting her lantern onto a scene of unbounded agony. Her lamp embodies the intolerable contradictions of illumination *and* apocalypse, creation *and* destruction.

And what of Picasso's female toreador? In *Minotauromachy*, she is fused with the wounded horse in a deliberate feminization of the quintessentially macho figure of the bullfighter. That the model for the *torera* was Picasso's then-lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter (1909–1977), has long been established. Eyes closed, body passively open, she serves as a somnambulant mediator between the schoolgirl and the Minotaur, light and dark, conscious and unconscious worlds. In *Guernica*, however, the *torera* has vanished into thin air, leaving only the mortally wounded horse.

FIG. 46
Photograph by Dora Maar (French, 1907–1997) of *Guernica* in progress in Picasso's studio (state I bis), May 1937. Gelatin silver print, 7 x 11⅝ in. (17.9 x 29.5 cm). Musée national Picasso, Paris



In earlier stages of the painting, as documented in photographs taken by Dora Maar while the work was in progress, the *torera* appears as a female figure being trampled by one of the horse's hooves.[36] In state I bis of the canvas (FIG. 46), that figure wears a bullfighter's costume, and her serene features, with eyes closed, recall those of Marie-Thérèse in *Minotauromachy*. By state II (FIG. 47), her eyes are open, glassed over in pain or death. In state IV, she has become genderless, her body truncated, and by state V, she has disappeared completely. Like several other key figures and symbols that appeared only in earlier versions of *Guernica*, this female body has been forcibly repressed, channeled into the remaining figures.[37] This leads us to ask: why? Why work obsessively on this figure in detailed sketches and states of the painting, only to leave mere fragmentary traces in the final canvas?

Such pictorial maneuvers register what we might call *Guernica*'s "unconscious"—motifs weighted with meanings accrued over decades of Picasso's artistic production that only reach the light of day distorted and/or displaced onto other figures. Sketches and photographs of Picasso's process show us these highly suggestive traces of the painting's production—the "memory," as it were, of the subterranean forces that produced it.

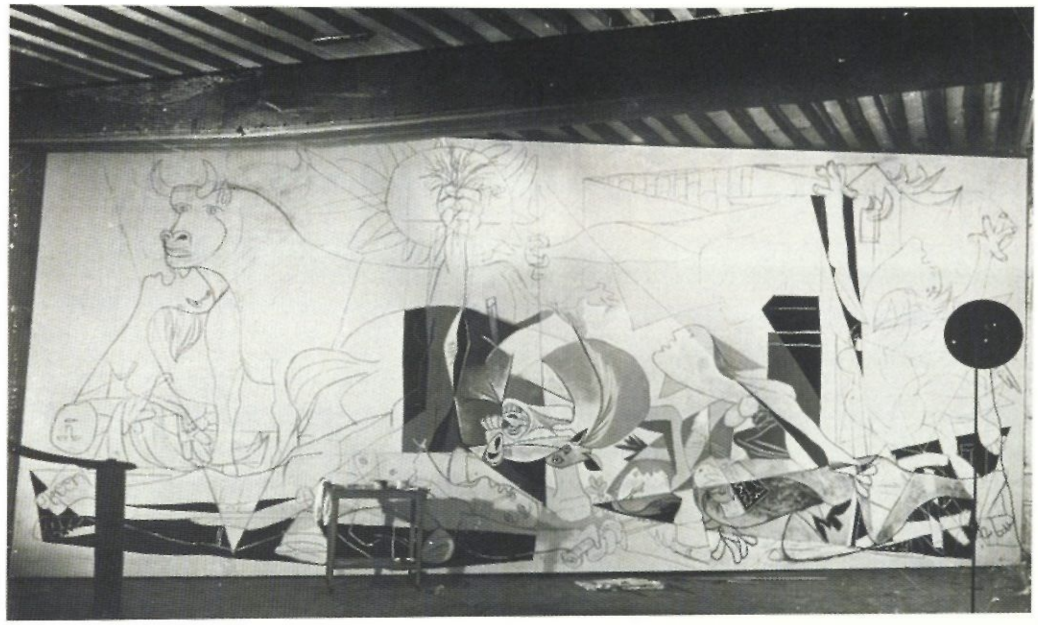
The fallen *torera*'s presence in the preparatory stages of the painting and her markedly different emotional tone from the other terrorized women reveal the artist manipulating a dynamic balance between distinct emotional responses while composing the final canvas. The tension between a "masculine" heroic pose and a "feminized" hysteria would later be figured through multiple characters—the bull and the fallen warrior; the horse and the screaming women—but here, they are united in a single figure. The *torera*'s presence as the gendered object of violence is an important—if elliptical—focal point for the themes of sexuality and brutality in the painting. Sexuality, we begin to understand, enters the painting not as an abstract concept but through the artist's very personal memories of a particular woman. At no point, however, is the image confined to the personal realm. Instead, through it, we can track the trajectory from the intense private emotions generated by the artist's relationship with Marie-Thérèse to a public allegory of terror and tragedy. We are witness to the mode through which Picasso reworked a deeply private iconography to provide the visual underpinnings for his most public political work.

PICASSO'S *GUERNICA* AND "THE BULLFIGHT AS MIRROR"

> To incorporate death in life, to make it in some way voluptuous.
>
> —Michel Leiris, *The Bullfight as Mirror*

In 1938, the dissident Surrealist Michel Leiris, a close acquaintance of Picasso's, described the bullfight in a way that resonates strongly with *Guernica*. Its "beauty," he wrote, "is comprised not simply by the joining of opposing elements, but by their very antagonism, by the . . . active way that the one tends to erupt in the other, making its mark like a wound, like devastation."[38] Leiris's observation sounds remarkably like a description not only of the overall form of *Guernica* but also of the specific way fragments of its making were left visible in the final canvas. From Picasso's reworking of *Minotauromachy*'s composition through a post-Cubist shattering of bodies and spaces to the great bull twisting in confusion and the sublimation of the *torera* into a nightmarish staging of terror and pain, *Guernica* harnesses the power of the fragmentary and contradictory to address the tragedy of war. This is especially true of the gaping wound in the horse's flank. *Guernica*'s dying horse is a visual metaphor for abjection in war. As the composition's central figure, it posits hopeless misery—not heroism—as a central meaning of war. Importantly, it does so directly through and against the partially erased gesture of a fist defiantly raised in heroic resistance, visible in earlier states of the painting (FIGS. 46, 47). The stunted remnant of that defiant

FIG. 47
Photograph by Dora Maar (French, 1907–1997) of *Guernica* in progress in Picasso's studio (state II), May–June 1937. Gelatin silver print, 7 x 11⅝ in. (17.9 x 29.5 cm). Musée national Picasso, Paris



gesture, now incorporated as a fatal wound into the most debased figure in the painting, signals the horse's gashed side as both a physical *and* an ideological devastation of the most profound sort. In the end, it is the antagonism between the heroic and the abject, united in one visual moment, that gives the wounded horse its powerful significance. Or, as Leiris would say, its "beauty."

Titled *Miroir de la tauromachie* (*The Bullfight as Mirror*), Leiris's 1938 text argues that the essence of the bullfight's revelatory emotional power resides in its "tragic" side, in which "all the movements are technical or ceremonial preparations for the public death of the hero, . . . that bestial half-god, the bull."[39] Tragedy is lodged not simply in the death of the bull but in the "double tragedy" of uniting opposites—the bull and the matador—whose union can only result in destruction. For Leiris, this double tragedy derived its pathos from its essentially aesthetic character:

> No doubt it is reasonable to say of any valid aesthetic activity that it possesses . . . its share of tragedy (the true artist's obligation to be "authentic," engaging himself unreservedly in what he creates, with the understanding that to bring it to completion without recourse to any shortcuts or tricks is a vital necessity for him—as for the matador who finds the right spot for the final stab and, poised in between the two horns, sinks the sword in all the way). From this perspective, the tauromachy can be regarded as a sport augmented by an art in which the tragic, made explicit as it were, is particularly affecting.[40]

Yet, paradoxically, aesthetic perfection exists only through the incorporation of its opposite, an imperfection—the last-moment contortion that the torero must undergo with every "pass" to thwart his convergence with the bull—and the stake in that process of incorporation is death:

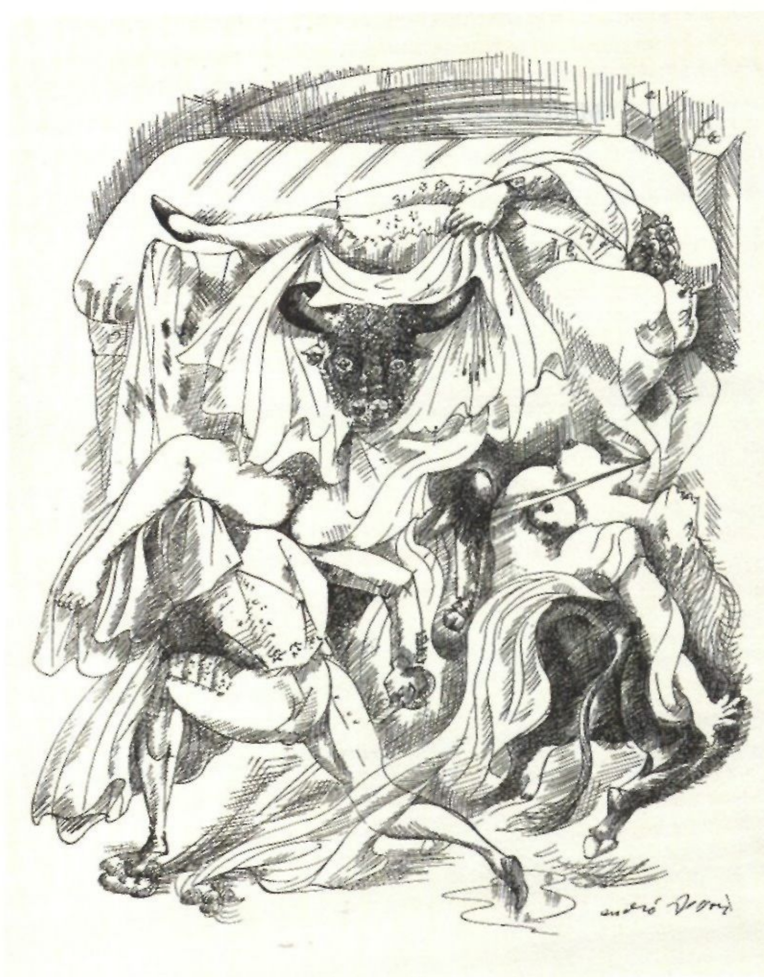
> In these bullfighting maneuvers, the torero, with his calculated movements, his skill, his technique, ultimately represents a superhuman, geometric beauty. . . . This would still be just a contrast, an opposition, if the pass didn't also present itself as a kind of tangency or convergence immediately followed by a divergence (the bull nears the torero, then man and beast are separated) . . . in such a way that the contact, at the very instant it is just about to happen, is just barely avoided, . . . a slight swerve, a mere slant of [the matador's] body, a kind of twist that he makes his coldly geometric beauty undergo, as if he had no other means of avoiding the bull's evil power than partly to incorporate it, stamping his person with something slightly sinister—something from the wrong, the twisted side of things, not the right.[41]

The bullfight thus acts as a "revelation," resolving, even if only momentarily, the unbearable paradox of life and death.[42]

Leiris published *Miroir de la tauromachie*, with illustrations by André Masson, at the height of the Spanish Civil War. The year before, 1937, the artist and the writer had already begun discussing the possibility of using the bullfight as a metaphor for Spain's tragedy. For both, the moment of union between man and bull in the corrida was an imperiled yet erotic joining. Masson's *Miroir* drawings evoke the ritual transgression of the boundary between life and death as a sensual tumult of bodies that are often difficult to distinguish from one another.[43] Figures interpenetrate, suggesting both sexual activity and violent physical wounding, dreaming and death. In one drawing (FIG. 48), a welter of bodies is disentangled only with difficulty to reveal a torero stretched horizontally above the bull, while a nude woman lies, eyes closed, draped over the animal's back. The torero, whose arm rests gently on his chest, may be dead or merely asleep. Or he may be a reflection of the sexual ecstasy of the woman below. Another matador escapes, sword drawn, to the left, under the woman's outstretched leg. The bull itself looks alertly out at us, the central force that has caused the various states of death, sleep, ecstasy, and fear on display.

In contrast, *Guernica* posits neither eroticism nor heroism as its central meaning. Although elsewhere Picasso frequently concurred with Masson in envisioning the encounter between matador and bull as an inherently erotic, even heroic union, in *Guernica* abjection and misery replace heroism and sensuality as the central meaning of violent conflict. *Guernica*'s greatness—indeed, its heroism—lies largely in its acknowledgment of what is generally considered most unheroic in war: confusion, panic, conflict, and terror. It is a work of art that recognizes such states, even acts upon them, in ways largely forbidden by everyday reality. It thus gives us a certain agency, a means of carrying on in the face of tragedies such as the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, it incorporates the elusive quality of memory into its own compositional fabric, binding that quality to a deep historical analysis. As a painting of a somber historical moment, *Guernica* admirably fulfills Walter Benjamin's call to "organize pessimism" in the hope that we might learn something from it for the benefit of all humanity.[44]

FIG. 48
André Masson (French, 1896–1987). One of three untitled drawings published in Michel Leiris, *Miroir de la tauromachie* (*The Bullfight as Mirror*) (Paris: G. L. M., 1938)



NOTES

I dedicate this essay to Gérard Mauger, who writes faster than I do.

Sources for epigraphs within the essay are as follows: Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 206; Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 21; Michel Leiris, "The Bullfight as Mirror," trans. Ann Smock, *October*, no. 63 (Winter 1993), 25; Christian Zervos, "Histoire d'un tableau de Picasso," *Cahiers d'art* 12, no. 4–5 (1937), 108; Leiris, "The Bullfight as Mirror," 39.

1. Scholars have noted that Man Ray's photograph is of a woman's body.

2. Georges Bataille, "La conjuration sacrée," *Acéphale*, no. 1 (June 1936), in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 181.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (London: Spearman, 1967), 32; Adorno, "Theses on Art and Religion Today," *Kenyon Review* 7, no. 4 (Autumn 1945), 678.

4. See René Crevel, "Notes en vue d'une psycho-dialectique," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (May 1933), 48–52. On Fascism and desire, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, trans. Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

5. See Georges Bataille, "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix 'Sur' in the Words *Surhomme* and *Surrealist*," in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 32–44; "Nietzsche et les Fascistes: Une réparation," *Acéphale*, no. 2 (January 1937).

6. Although he had treated the theme sporadically in his earlier work, Picasso, at this time, began actively incorporating the figure of the Minotaur into his *Vollard Suite*.

7. On Surrealism's engagements with the Communist Party, see Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*.

8. Quoted in José Pierre, "André Breton and/or 'Minotaure,'" in *Focus on Minotaure: The Animal-Headed Review* (Geneva: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1987), 100. Brassaï's comments were made in 1964.

9. See Jean Starobinski, "Day Side and Night Side," in *Focus on Minotaure*, 35. Eventually, Breton managed to shift editorial control of the magazine to the Surrealists.

10. Starobinksi, "Day Side and Night Side," 35.

11. E. Tériade, "Aspects actuels de l'expression *plastique*," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (May 1934), 33, cited in *Focus on Minotaure*, 201–2. Although Tériade was designated *Minotaure*'s artistic director, it is often unclear who actually designed the magazine's layouts.

12. The term "negative dialectic" comes from Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973). Adorno used the term to describe the contradictory resonance between an idea and its object that never reaches any final resolution. I thank Ray Spiteri for helping me articulate this idea.

13. Starobinksi, "Day Side and Night Side," 35.

14. See Jacques Lacan, "Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l'expérience," *Minotaure*, no. 1 (June 1933); Roger Caillois, "La mante religieuse," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (May 1934), and "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire," *Minotaure*, no. 7 (June 1935); "Mission Dakar-Djibouti 1931–1933," *Minotaure*, no. 2 (June 1933). Labeled "ethnographic surrealism" by the anthropologist James Clifford in his famous essay, the mission's scientific aims were entangled with Surrealism on many points. See James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1981), 539–64. The expedition included the dissident Surrealist Michel Leiris as "secrétaire-archiviste," who published an essay in Georges Bataille's journal, *Documents*, at the mission's outset; in 1931, the results of the expedition were published in a special issue of *Minotaure*. As Ian Walker notes, this issue of *Minotaure* acted as both publicity and catalogue for the expedition's findings, which became part of the collection of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris. See Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 191.

15. André Breton, *Minotaure*, no. 1 (June 1933), cited in Starobinksi, "Day Side and Night Side," 5.

16. Denis Hollier, "Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don't Cast Shadows," *October*, no. 69 (Summer 1994), 113.

17. Georges Bataille, "Le labyrinthe," *Recherches philosophiques*, no. 5 (1935–36), trans. by Allan Stoekl in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 174.

18. David Lomas, "Labyrinth and Vertigo: On Some Motifs in André Masson and Their Meaning," in Elza Adamowicz, ed., *Surrealism: Crossings/Frontiers* (Oxford: Lang, 2006), 106.

19. See Rosalind Krauss, "No More Play," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 74. *Project for a Passageway (Labyrinth)*, in the collection of the Alberto Giacometti Foundation, is housed at the Kunsthaus Zürich. For a reproduction of Ernst's 1927 painting (private coll.), see Werner Spies and Sabine Rewald, eds., *Max Ernst: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 174.

20. Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche et les Fascistes," *Acéphale*, January 21, 1937, trans. by Allan Stoekl in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 187. Italics in the original.

21. André Masson, *Le rebelle du surréalisme*, ed. Françoise Will-Levaillant (Paris: Hermann, 1976), 284.

22. Bataille, "Le labyrinthe," 173. On Masson, Bataille, and Nietzsche, see "The Barcelona *Acéphale*: Spain and the Politics of Violence in the Work of André Masson," ch. 5 in Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 117–45.

23. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone, 1983), 188, cited in Lomas, "Labyrinth and Vertigo," 108.

24. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Lachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74), vol. 17, *"An Infantile Neurosis" and Other Works* (1957), 237.

25. See André Breton, *L'amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937/1986), 21.

26. Pierre Mabille, quoted in John Herbert Matthews, *The Surrealist Mind* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991), 93. The concept of the marvelous was never strictly defined in Surrealism and elicited many interpretations.

27. Michel Beaujour, "Qu'est-ce que *Nadja,*" *La nouvelle revue française*, n.s., no. 172 (April 1967), 797.

28. Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985), 229, 238.

29. André Breton, quoted in Spiteri, "Surrealism," 59. My argument is indebted here to Raymond Spiteri, "Surrealism and the Political Physiognomy of the Marvelous," in Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, eds., *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 52–72.

30. André Breton, "In Self-Defense," in *Break of Day*, trans. Mark Polizzotti and Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 34, cited in Spiteri, "Surrealism," 8. Breton was responding to the PCF member and former Surrealist Pierre Naville. Spiteri's account gives an in-depth analysis of the relationship between *Nadja* and Surrealist politics.

31. André Breton, cited in Spiteri, "Surrealism," 9.

32. Lisa Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis: Picasso's Classical Prints of the 1930s*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 46.

33. Kenneth Silver and Rosalind Krauss contend that this period marks Picasso's retrenchment from the pictorial daring of Cubism and from any Leftist avant-garde politics. Silver, in particular, accuses Picasso of eclecticism and a "lack of focus." See Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 135.

34. Both orthodox and dissident Surrealists worshipped Picasso: witness Breton's uninterrupted deference to the Spanish artist and Bataille's dedication to him, in 1930, of an entire issue of the journal *Documents*.

35. *The Three Dancers* was first reproduced, as *La Danse*, in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 4 (July 1925).

36. For Dora Maar's photographs of *Guernica* as Surrealist "documents," see "The Body as Political Metaphor: Picasso and the Performance of *Guernica*," ch. 6 in Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 147–87.

37. Other repressed motifs include certain details of the hand of the fallen warrior, references to the "artist's studio," and the upraised fist holding the Communist hammer and sickle. See Greeley, "Body as Political Metaphor."

38. Leiris, "Bullfight as Mirror," 26.

39. Michel Leiris, "Espagne 1934–1936: Exposition André Masson à la Galerie Simon," *La nouvelle revue française*, no. 281 (January 1937), 135; Leiris, "Bullfight as Mirror," 23.

40. Leiris, "Bullfight as Mirror," 24.

41. Ibid., 27–28.

42. Ibid., 22.

43. Both the *Miroir* drawings and the difficult *Massacres* images stem from Masson's traumatic experiences in World War I. That war, which caused the artist recurrent nervous breakdowns, defined a visual aesthetics of voluptuous horror that he carried with him from that moment on. See Yve-Alain Bois, "André Masson: De la guerre aux 'Massacres,'" *Critique*, no. 342 (November 1975), and, in this volume, pp. 58–61 of the essay by Oliver Shell.

44. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 191.

MONSTERS & MYTHS
SURREALISM AND WAR IN THE 1930S AND 1940S

Edited by Oliver Shell and Oliver Tostmann

Essays by
Robin Adèle Greeley, Samantha Kavky,
Oliver Shell, and Oliver Tostmann

The Baltimore Museum of Art
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