

Psyche & Muse: Creative Entanglements with the Science of the Soul
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**Symbolism to Surrealism: Dreams, Madness, Insurrection
Checklist and Descriptions**

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Symbolist Paris: Gateway to Dreams

Marcel Schwob, *La Porte des Rêves*, Paris: Pour les Bibliophiles indépendants chez Henry Floury, 1899. Illustrations by Georges de Feure.

Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, Leipzig and Vienna, F. Deuticke, 1900.

Published within months of each other, these two works both deal with dreams, but apart from that they seem to have little in common. De Feure's lavish "gates" open to reveal a landscape filled with Symbolist-inspired fantasies, while the stark sober script of this first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* bespeaks the seriousness of Freud's enterprise as he seeks admission to the world of academic science in Vienna. Yet both works are in some ways cut from the same cloth, vintage 1885/86, the year of Freud's sojourn at the Salpêtrière clinic and of the Symbolist Revolution in Paris. The hidden powers of dream, myth, and the unconscious were common subjects for both. And the motto of Freud's masterpiece—*Flectere si nequeo Superos, Acheronta movebo*—could just as easily appear on the title page of any Symbolist tract. In fact, it is from Juno's appeal to the furies in Vergil's *Aeneid*: "If I cannot bend the higher powers, I will move the infernal regions."

Paul Adam, "Le Symbolisme," *La Vogue*, no 12 (October 11, 1886).

Describing the press wars unleashed by the Symbolists and their opponents in Paris, Adam quotes from both sides, but ends with Gustave Kahn's claim that "the dream [was] indistinguishable from life" in his thundering "Response of the Symbolists:"
"So we wish to take the analysis of the *self* to the extreme, to make the multiplication and interlacing of rhythms accord with the measure of the Idea, to create literary enchantment by doing away with a modish, constrained and spiritual modernism, to build up a personal vocabulary on all levels of the work, and to seek to break out of the banality of all received molds."

Gérard de Nerval, *Le Rêve et la Vie*, Paris: Victor Lecou, 1855.

Like Freud, the French Symbolists looked back to the Romantics for inspiration and for insight into the nature of dreams and the unconscious. Here, in the opening lines of *Aurelia, or Dream and Life*, the French Romantic Gérard de Nerval explores the ego's path along the slippery slope between waking and sleep in words that seem perfectly to describe Odillon Redon's image of "Limbo" (left) from his 1879 suite of engravings, *In Dream*:

"The Dream is a second life. I have never been able to penetrate without a shudder the gates of ivory or horn that separate us from the invisible world. The first moments of sleep are the image of death; a hazy numbness seizes our minds and we cannot determine the precise moment when the *self*, in another form, continues the work of life. It is a subterranean wave that brightens bit by bit, and where the pale figures, gravely immobile, who inhabit limbo detach themselves from the shadows and the night. Then the painting takes shape, a new clarity illuminates these bizarre apparitions and brings them into play—the world of the Spirits opens up for us.

Je est un autre ...

Arthur Rimbaud, *Les Illuminations*, Paris: Publications de *La Vogue*, 1886.

Among the radical explorations of self published in the Symbolist journal *La Vogue* were the *Illuminations* of Arthur Rimbaud, whose famous proclamation "I is another" echoed loudly through avant-garde excursions beyond the realm of centered consciousness for decades to come. Rescued from oblivion by Paul Verlaine, Rimbaud's manuscripts were later scattered to the winds by proprietary conflicts over their publication in 1886, the year of the Symbolist Revolution. Here a few lines from "A Common Nocturne:"

"A breath opens operatic breaches in the walls—blurs the pivoting of crumbling roofs,—
disperses the boundaries of hearths,—eclipses the windows"

"Isolated hearse of my sleep, shepherd's house of my insanity, the vehicle veers on the grass of
the obliterated highway: and in the defect at the top of the right-hand windowpane revolve pale
lunar figures, leaves, and breasts."

Comte de Lautréamont, *Chants de Maldoror*, Paris and Brussels, 1874.

First printed in a small run for private consumption in 1869, the pseudonymous prose poems of Isidore Ducasse did not reach the market until 1874 because the printer feared prosecution for blasphemy and obscenity in Brussels. Bound and distributed in Paris five years later, the unused sheets of the original edition were fitted with a new title page, which bore no indication of the publisher, but instead made the dubious claim: "On Sale at All Bookstores." Almost nothing is known of the author, who died of fever shortly after finishing the work, during the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870.

The weird dreamlike quality of *The Songs of Maldoror* made a powerful impression on Symbolists and later the Surrealists, who reveled in Ducasse's redefinition of beauty as "the fortuitous encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table." In the same book, Ducasse compares the work of a writer to psychiatric experiments vaguely reminiscent of Charcot's work with hypnosis at the Salpêtrière:

"In order to construct mechanically the brain of a somniferous story, it is not enough to dissect the reader's understanding with all kinds of folly and brutalize it completely with renewed doses, so as to paralyse his faculties for the rest of his life ... one must, apart from this, by means of a good mesmerizing fluid, ingeniously reduce him to a somnambulant state in which it is impossible for him to move, forcing him to close his eyes against his inclination by the fixity of your own."

Eel Nerves and Beyond

Sigmund Freud, *Beobachtungen über Gestaltung und feineren Bau der als Hoden beschriebenen Lappenorgane des Aals*, Vienna, 1877.

When Freud arrived in Paris, he had little interest in the power of "the infernal regions" featured so prominently on the title page of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trained in the science of physiological psychology, he sought the origins of psychosis in the empirical realm of nerve endings and lesions in the brain. His first published work reflects this emphasis: *Observations on the Configuration and Finer Construction of the Lobate Organs of the Eel Described as Testes*. Coming to work under Charcot, one of the greatest names in the field, Freud expected to learn more about the science of material causes, but in the meantime something had changed. Unable to find physical lesions to explain mental disorders, Charcot turned to less tangible causes, above all hypnosis, understood as the power of suggestion—mere *words*. While neither abandoned the belief in underlying anatomical causes, Charcot and Freud began to explore the dynamics of the psyche in its own right, without necessary recourse to materialist explanations. "The lesion in hysterical paralysis will therefore be an alteration in the *conception*, the *idea*, of the arm," Freud wrote, echoing the lessons he learned at the Salpêtrière, in the early 1890s. Or, more boldly a few years later: "Hysteria has no knowledge of anatomy."

Demons, Hashish, and the World of Art

J. M. Charcot and Paul Richer, *Les démoniques dans l'art*, Paris: Adrien Delahaye and Émile Lecroisnier, 1887.

Henri Meige, *Charcot-Artiste*, Paris: Masson et cie., 1925.

The path beyond eel neurology into the realm of ideas also took psychology closer to the world of art, as Charcot and Richer's 1887 study of *Demoniaques in Art* shows. After a survey of the

Old Masters, the authors compare poses with clinical drawings of hysterical patients observed at the Salpêtrière. No stranger to Symbolist circles, Charcot was fascinated by the artistic revolution of the 1880s and also dabbled in art himself. Seeking to experience altered states of perception from the inside out, he even went so far as composing his own notebooks of delusional drawings and scribbling, modeled after those he found at the asylum, occasionally with the aid of hashish.

Charcot's Lessons

La Disque Verte (Paris, 1924)

“Of the many lessons *Maître* Charcot at the Salpêtrière lavished on me at the time (1885–1886), there are two that left a very profound impression: that one should never get tired of considering the same phenomena in a new light (or suffer the consequences) and that one should not worry about even the most general contradictions if one works in a sincere manner.” Freud, February 26, 1924.

Art on the Couch

Sigmund Freud, *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci*, Leipzig: Deuticke, 1910.

Unlike Charcot, Freud had little interest in the artistic breakthroughs of Symbolists in Vienna, who were exploring the world of dreams and myth with startling results at the turn of the century. But he did share an interest in art, and in 1910 he could not resist the urge to put Da Vinci on the couch. Although the work was quickly discredited due to his reliance on a faulty translation of the master’s notebooks, Freud remained fond of *A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci*, regarding it as “the only beautiful thing I ever wrote.” The analysis of the bird figure as symbolic representation of the mother made a strong impression on the Surrealist painter Max Ernst, who translated his own memory of a bird into a powerful motif—Loplop—in his works of the 1920s and 1930s.

Art in the Asylum

Marcel Réja, *L’art chez les fous: le dessin, la prose, la poésie*, Paris: Société du mercure de France, 1907.

Richard Pfeiffer, *Der Geisteskranke und sein Werk: Eine Studie über schizophrene Kunst*, Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1923.

Hans Prinzhorn, *Die Bildnerei der Geisteskranken: Ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Pathologie der Gestaltung*, Berlin: J. Springer, 1922.

Heinrich Stadelmann, *Die Stellung der Psychopathologie zur Kunst: Ein Versuch*, Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1908.

The psychoanalysis of artists went hand in hand with the study of art in the asylum—a connection not always welcomed by members of the avant-garde, who quickly found themselves stigmatized by diagnoses of mental illness, as in Max Nordau’s infamous assault on modern art, *Degeneration*. Yet the great collections of asylum art assembled by psychiatrists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries could also be a source of inspiration. Max Ernst is reputed to have brought Prinzhorn’s study of the collection at Heidelberg, begun under Emil Kraepelin, as a gift for André Breton in the early 1920s. And the same book made a deep impression on Jean Dubuffet, founder of *Art brut*, who corresponded with patients and doctors at asylums before conducting a three-week tour of psychiatric hospitals himself in 1945.

Playing at Madness?

August Strindberg, *Inferno*, Stockholm: C. & E. Gernandt; Berlin: G. Bondi, 1897.

On July 30th, 1896, August Strindberg checked himself into a Swedish hospital, hoping to find refuge from the invisible forces and murder plots he felt were dogging his heels. Diagnoses have varied from schizophrenia and paranoia to manic depression over the years, but today most scholars agree with Marcel Réja, author of the 1907 study *Art in the Madhouse*, who believed Strindberg drove himself to this state through a mixture of absinthe, occult obsessions, and poisoning from chemicals used in countless alchemical experiments. All part of Strindberg’s plunge—via a fascination with hypnosis—into the Symbolist obsessions of his friends in Paris. Many scholars now suspect Strindberg was only playacting at madness, also very much in vogue in Strindberg’s circles. Whatever the case, Strindberg was never quite the same after the “Inferno crisis.” The invisible “Powers” that drove him to the asylum never left Strindberg and in fact played a key role in the so-called “dream plays” of his later years. Recounting his brush with madness in *The Inferno*, Strindberg describes the torments of voluntary confinement under Dr. Eliasson in a chapter called “Hell:”

“Trifling occurrences ceaselessly arouse my suspicions regarding the doctor’s evil intentions. Today he deposited an entirely new set of axes, saws, and hammers in the garden verandah. What does he want with them? In his bedroom are two guns and a revolver, and in a corridor a collection of axes which are much too heavy for mere domestic use. What a Satanic coincidence that I should have these implements of execution and torture before my eyes!”

“Soul Murder:” A Writer in the Asylum

Daniel Paul Schreber, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken, nebst Nachträgen und einem Anhang über die Frage: “Unter welchen Voraussetzungen darf eine für geisteskrank erachtete Person gegen ihren erklärten Willen in einer Heilanstalt festgehalten werden?”* Leipzig: O Mutze, 1903.

There can be no question of playacting in the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, who wrote this weirdly lucid account of his experiences at the “Sunshine” asylum in Leipzig. Like Strindberg, however, Schreber felt himself the plaything of invisible forces—in this case cosmic “rays” capable of sending his nerve-endings into lascivious vibrations—and he describes a life-and-death struggle with an “evil” psychiatrist, Professor Paul Flechsig, whom Schreber accused of plotting “soul murder” against him. Although Freud and others credited Schreber with coining the term—much to their delight—Strindberg had already published an essay called “Soul Murder” in 1887. Inspired by psychological experiments with hypnosis in France, Strindberg’s essay defined the term in much the same way as Schreber in *Memoirs of a Neuropath*—telepathic imposition of a foreign will on a helpless subject.

Gripping and yet impossible to get a hold on, Schreber’s fantastic prose was enthralling to contemporaries. “I am just Schreber, nothing but Schreber,” Freud confided to one of his colleagues while reading the *Memoirs* alongside da Vinci’s notebooks. The subject of psychoanalysis (at a distance) for Freud, Schreber’s bizarre masterpiece also sent shock waves through the avant-garde, and the appendix addressed an issue that would soon become a matter of burning importance for the German Expressionists: “Under What Circumstances Can a Person Deemed Mentally Ill Be Confined against His Express Will in a Sanitarium?”

Dreams auf deutsch

Oskar Kokoschka, *Die träumenden Knaben*, Vienna: Wiener Werkstätte, 1908.

Alfred Kubin, *Von verschiedenen Ebenen*, Berlin: Fritz Gurlitt, 1922.

While Freud was turning to the childhood memories of da Vinci, Viennese artists like Oskar Kokoschka might have provided striking diagnostic material closer to home in works like *The Dreaming Boys*. Driving the Symbolist obsession with dreams, sexuality, and violence to new extremes, Kokoschka’s bloody visions of pubescent fantasy would soon merge into the oedipal revolt of German Expressionism.

For his part, Alfred Kubin expressed the contempt for the taming impulse of Freudian psychoanalysis shared by many Expressionists. “Let the power of the symbol remain unbroken,” Kubin wrote, defending “My Dream Life” in the artist’s book *On Different Levels*. “We will take care not to dismember individual apparitions along the lines of any interesting moral or psychological system to get at the secret of their interpretability; let’s leave their true, unbroken, symbolic power intact,” Kubin declared. “I consider unmediated creative vision much stronger and more sustaining than some longwinded analysis:”

“What would I have to gain if a few images I dreamed were traced back to childhood days, mountains, the sea, reeds, or all kinds of spooky masquerades? The strangest thing—that I am sunk in a sort of reality-dream that compels me to assume that I, a thinking being, am a two-legged mammal, a man, something capable of evolving, dependent on millions of external things, ever misunderstanding and misunderstood—that wouldn’t be clarified in the least. No, of course not! My musings must submit to the ever-changing stream of forms and feelings and seek to penetrate it.”

Expressionist Insurrection: Œdipus in the Asylum

Franz Jung, Der Fall Gross: Novelle, Hamburg: Konrad Hanf Verlag DWB, 1921.

Walter Hasenclever, Der Sohn: Ein Drama in fünf Akten, Leipzig: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1914.

Was the libido a force to be peacefully contained or a potent wellspring of revolution? For Otto Gross, an early student of Freud and “guru” of the German Expressionists, the answer was clear: “The revolution of today, which with the aid of the psychology of the unconscious envisions the sexes in a free and happy future, fights against rape in its most original form, against the father, and the law of the father.” Publishing such views in avant-garde journals like *Die Aktion*, Gross quickly won converts among artists and writers from Berlin and Munich to Vienna and Prague. Freud, however, disagreed. Disavowing Gross’s heresy, the father of psychoanalysis denied any link to social or political agendas: “We are doctors, and we want to remain doctors.”

A sore spot for decades to come, this feud between psychoanalysis and the revolutionary avant-garde came to a head in November 1913, when Prussian police broke into the Berlin apartment of Franz Jung, editor of the Expressionist magazine *Die Revolution*, to arrest Gross and commit him to an asylum. Conducted at the request of Gross’s own father—who was himself a specialist in criminal psychology—the action unleashed a storm of protest and inspired numerous works of Expressionist literature, such as Walter Hasenclever’s 1914 drama, *The Son* and Franz Jung’s novella *The Gross Affair*.

Free Otto Gross!

***Revolution*, no. 5 (December 20, 1913).**

The Expressionist campaign to liberate Gross from the asylum (and his own father) was led by Franz Jung, soon to be a key figure in the emergence of Berlin Dada, who gathered signatures and appeals from writers across Europe for a special edition of *Die Revolution*, a radical avant-garde paper that had its own problems with the Prussian police—as the confiscated tag—*Beschlagnahmt*—on the first issue demonstrates. Jung had thousands of copies of the “Gross issue” sent to cafés in Austria and Bohemia in order to take the fight to the enemy (Gross’s father

was a professor in Graz). Erich Mühsam, René Schickele, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Blaise Cendrars are among the contributors to *Revolution* no. 5, which also included this incendiary warning from Ludwig Rubiner:

“The smothering of Dr. Gross by his father is typical. We will explode this type ... With the case of Dr. Gross, an important son, we take the side of the many unimportant sons who are quietly put away in broad daylight. We intellectuals, we the sub-proletariat, are strong—the professor in Graz is only frightened.”

Matriarchy and Revolution

Franz Werfel, *Barbara, oder die Frömmigkeit*, Berlin: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1929.

Heinrich Vogeler, “Ekstase,” *Die Aktion*, 4, no. 22 (May 30, 1914).

Otto Gross, *Drei Abhandlungen über den inneren Konflikt*, Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers Verlag, 1920.

Revolting against “the law of the father,” Gross also committed a second act of heresy against Freudian psychoanalysis by attributing a positive and active role to female sexuality, which he saw as a powerful force capable of liberating society if it were itself freed from the clutches of patriarchal tyranny. Frieda von Richthofen—soon to marry D.H. Lawrence—seemed to embody this power for Gross, who was involved in an affair with her when he developed these ideas and credited her for having “removed the shadow of Freud” from his path. Transformed into an ideal of “matriarchal” femininity, Frieda’s “strength and ardor” did much to inspire Gross’s calls for the overthrow of male-dominated “bourgeois” society.

Later portrayed in Franz Werfel’s *roman à clef*, *Barbara, or Piety*, Gross’s radical visions of matriarchy found deep resonance in Expressionist circles on the eve of the First World War, as Heinrich Vogeler’s woodcut “Ecstasy” suggests, and they echoed loudly in the radical slogans of the avant-garde in the revolution of 1918/1919. The “transformation of bourgeois society” could not be separated from “the formation of a feminine society,” Raoul Hausmann proclaimed in the Dada/anarchist journal *Die Erde*, “which leads to a new promiscuity and also to matriarchy (against the patriarchal family of masculine imprint).”

Capitalism on the Couch

Wilhelm Reich, *Der triebhafte Charakter: Eine psychoanalytische Studie zur Pathologie des Ich*, Leipzig: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1925.

Wihelm Reich, *Dialektischer Materialismus und Psychoanalyse*, Copenhagen: Verlag für Sexualpolitik, 1934.

Zeitschrift für politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie 1, no. 1(1934).

Wilhelm Reich, *Der sexuelle Kampf der Jugend*, Berlin: Verlag für Sexualpolitik, 1932.

A few years after Gross's assault on "bourgeois" patriarchy reached its climax, the torch was picked up by another Freudian renegade, whose name is more familiar (or notorious) today: Wilhelm Reich. Repudiating the patriarchal structures of domestic family life, Reich blamed them for what he, like Gross, saw as the dominant feature of modern society—"sadistic" and "masochistic" tendencies that crippled the ego, transforming it into a mere tool in service of the repressive status quo. What Reich added was a powerful dose of Marxism, so that, while he still spoke of paternalism, his analysis focused on the psychopathology of capitalism.

Driven out of Berlin by the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, Reich was expelled from the German branch of the International Psychoanalytic Association the same year, and he set up operations in Scandinavia—first in Copenhagen, then in Oslo—where he developed the controversial notions about cures via stimulation of physical sensuality that he brought with him when he emigrated to the United States in 1938. Reich's "organon theory" soon won converts among American writers like William S. Burroughs, but it also brought notoriety and, briefly, imprisonment. With the rise of social protest movements in the 1960s, however, Reich's militant psychoanalysis of the 1920s and early 1930s came back into vogue, reprised by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's incendiary tract of 1971, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Cedipus*.

Surrealist Revolution

***La Révolution surréaliste* 1, no. 3 (April 15, 1925).**

André Breton, "Interview du Professeur Freud," in Breton, *Les pas perdus*, Paris: Nouvelle revue française, 1924.

Psychology, symbolism, and revolution came together to form an especially explosive mixture in Surrealism. Led by André Breton, this flagship movement of the European avant-garde declared allegiance to both Marx and Freud, but it also drew on artistic and literary explorations of dreams and the unconscious that fuelled the Symbolist Revolution—Nerval, Rimbaud, Lautréamont—as well as the "dynamic psychology" of Charcot, Richet, and Pierre Janet, which dominated France at least until the *Saison Freud* of 1922.

Breton first encountered Freud's theories in 1916, when he was stationed as a medical conscript in the neuropsychiatric ward at Saint-Dizier during the First World War. "Oh German poetry, Freud and Kraepelin!" Breton wrote to a friend after the discovery, and as soon as possible he sought out the psychoanalyst in his famous Viennese consulting rooms. First published in 1922, Breton's "Interview with Professor Freud" betrays disappointment at his staid manner, so remote from the young poet's revolutionary visions. Yet Breton soon adopted a similarly austere manner

as Director of the “Surrealist Bureau of Research,” whose findings he insisted were anything but a laughing matter.

The First Manifesto of Surrealism

André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme: Poisson soluble*, Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1924.

Freud’s presence dominates the first manifesto, but Breton’s inscription to Max Ernst consists of a quote from Lautréamont: “their cretinized heads, from which a tile has been removed . . . (Ducasse).”

Defining Surrealism as “pure psychic automatism,” Breton’s manifesto betrays the influence of Pierre Janet, whose 1889 thesis *L’Automatisme psychologique* went through multiple editions before the First World War. Yet Breton attributes the Surrealist practice of “automatic writing” to Freud:

“Quite busy as I was then with Freud at that time, and having been familiarized with his examination methods that I had somehow used with patients during the war, I decided to obtain from myself what one seeks to obtain from them, that is a monologue flowing as fast as possible and upon which the critical mind of the subject makes no judgment whatever, letting it be unhampered by any reticence so that it may render as exactly as possible *spoken thought*.”

The Survey on Love: I Can’t Put it Better than Freud

***Enquête sur l’amour*, bound volume containing 54 manuscript responses (1928–1929).**

Published in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1929, the “Survey on Love” elicited responses from writers and artists across Europe. Bound in this volume, the original manuscripts sent back often bear the mark of Breton’s heavy editorial hand, but not this one from painter Max Ernst, who cites Freud chapter and verse in his reply. Responding to the question of whether love required a sacrifice of personal liberty or principles, Ernst writes:

“I am incapable of explaining my views on this subject better than Freud did in his book *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*—Translation of Dr. P. Jankélévitch, p. 66 ff.—A real conflict (on the moral plane) between love and freedom cannot exist.”

Freud Season

***Exposition Dada Max Ernst*, Paris: Au sans pareil, 1921.**

Paul Eluard and Max Ernst, *Les malheurs des immortels*, Paris: Librairie Six, 1922.

Max Ernst knew his Freud. Having studied psychology and art history at the University of Bonn, he had read *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Introduction to Psycho-Analysis*, and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* before the First World War. Like Breton, he considered a career in psychiatry and is said to have brought Hans Prinzhorn's study of asylum art with him as a gift when he came to Paris. Ernst was certainly an important conduit for in-depth knowledge of Freud, whose works were not available in French for years after psychoanalysis became a popular (and controversial) fad in the so-called *Saison Freud* in 1922.

Among the first Surrealist painters, Ernst joined the group around Breton, Eluard, and Aragon even before they founded their own movement. Breton helped arrange his first Paris exhibition under the banner of Dada in 1921, and Ernst collaborately closely with Eluard on many artist's books while involved in a long affair with the poet's wife, Gala, in the 1920s. Ernst's remarks about love and liberty (at left) are particularly interesting in light of his relationship to the Eluards.

Max Ernst and Paul Eluard, *À l'intérieur de la vue: 8 poèmes visibles*, Paris: P. Seghers, 1948.

André Breton, "Le message automatique," *Minotaure* no. 3/4 (1933).

When Max Ernst returned to Paris in 1925, he found his Surrealist friends under the thrall of automatic writing. Determined to follow suite, he turned to found images and collage as a painterly counterpart. These random constellations—like Lautréamont's "chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table"—spoke from the unconscious in mysterious ways, and interpreting them became something of a Surrealist art in itself, though not for the uninitiated. Desnos's mock-up for *The Night of the Loveless Nights* (at left) likewise displays this rebus-like character.

A Wave of Trances: Automatic Writing

Georges Leroux (binding, 1971). *Max Ernst, Oeuvres de 1919 à 1936*, Paris: Éditions "Cahiers d'art," c. 1937.

André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les champs magnetiques*, Paris: Au sans pareil, 1920. Dedication from Breton to Max Ernst, March 24, 1921.

Louis Aragon, *Une vague de rêves*, Paris: Hors commerce, 1924.

Benjamin Péret, *Au 125 du boulevard Saint-Germain: Conte*, Paris, 1923.

Drawn from experimental techniques in psychology and psychiatry, automatic writing was a key practice in the early years of “Surrealist Research.” Although Breton credited Freud’s free-association techniques as inspiration, the Surrealist version more closely resembled the methods of Pierre Janet, a French psychiatrist who encouraged patients to write down random thoughts while under a state of distraction similar to a hypnotic trance.

Generally recognized as the first Surrealist work, *Magnetic Fields* was an experiment in automatic writing conducted by Breton and Philippe Soupault at the Hôtel des Grands Hommes in Paris in 1919. The practice became widespread in the early 1920s, leading to a wave of Surrealist trances. Louis Aragon describes the technique in *A Wave of Dreams*:

“Have someone bring you writing materials after getting settled in a place as favorable as possible to your mind’s concentration on itself. Put yourself into the most passive, or receptive, state you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and those of everyone else. Tell yourself that literature is the saddest path to anything. Write quickly, without a preconceived subject, fast enough not to remember and not to be tempted to read over what you have written. The first sentence will come all by itself. Continue as long as you like. Trust in the inexhaustible character of the murmur.”

Danger Signs: Robert Desnos’s Involuntary Trances

Robert Desnos, Papers Relating to *The Night of the Loveless Nights* (1927–1930).

Man Ray, Photographs of Robert Desnos in a trance, in André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris: Gallimard, 1928.

The young poet and journalist Robert Desnos proved so adept at the Surrealists’ experiments at automatic writing that he began falling into trances unawares. Alarmed, Breton warned Desnos to desist for fear that he would fall into madness. The mock-up title page for Desnos’s *Night of the Loveless Nights* (shown above) contains a message to Theodore Fraenkel, who served with Breton as a medical orderly and shared his interest in psychiatry during the First World War.

Flirting with Madness

André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris: Gallimard, 1928.

In October 1926, Breton met a young girl who had been living an itinerant existence in Paris for several years. Her real name was Léona-Camille Ghislaine D., but she went by the nickname “Nadja,” which she had picked up in cafés, bars, and hotels. Borderline psychotic, she seemed to Breton to have an uncanny ability to interpret the Surrealists’ automatic writing, eerie collages, rebuses, and found images. Between October 4th and 13th, 1926, the two saw each other almost daily, Breton openly encouraging her Sybil-like pronouncements and visions while Léona/Nadja

guided him through Paris. Soon, however, Breton distanced himself from the girl, who was clearly falling into madness. Suffering from severe hallucinations and screaming in terror, she was admitted to the psychiatric ward at Sainte Anne's on March 21st, 1927. "Nadja" never recovered.

The brush with madness obviously shook Breton, who refused to visit Léona, much as he would turn his back on the Surrealist playwright Antonin Artaud when he was put in an asylum ten years later. Lauding Nadja for thrusting herself "out of the jail—thus shattered—of logic, that is, out of the most hateful of prisons," Breton also expressed guilt and fear of the consequences: "It is from this last enterprise, perhaps, that I should have restrained her, but first of all I should have had to become conscious of the danger she ran."

"I should ... murder anyone, preferably a doctor"

André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris: Gallimard, 1928.

Nadja ends with sharp polemics against psychiatry and asylums that provoked angry responses in Parisian medical journals, where the Surrealists were accused of inciting violence. Singling out "that Professor Claude at Saint-Anne, with his dunce's forehead and that stubborn expression on his face," Breton argued that "madmen are *made*" in asylums, "just as criminals are made in our reformatories:"

"They shut up Sade, the shut up Nietzsche; they shut up Baudelaire. The method which consists of surprising you by night, forcing you into a strait-jacket or capturing you in any other way is no better than that of the policeman who slips a revolver into your pocket. I know that if I were mad, after several days of confinement I should take advantage of any lapses in my madness to murder anyone, preferably a doctor, who came near me."

"Are You Crazy?"

Renée Crevel, *Êtes-vous fous?* Paris: Gallimard, 1929.

André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris: Gallimard, 1928.

André Breton and Paul Eluard, *L'Immaculée Conception*, Paris: Éditions Surréalistes, 1930.

The title of René Crevel's 1929 novel—*Are You Crazy?*—is a question many Surrealists must have been asking themselves. Looking to short-circuit rational thought in order to liberate the revolutionary powers of the unconscious, poets and artists explored altered states of consciousness via psychological experiments that could all-too-easily lead to the brink of madness. Breton had already warned Desnos of the danger, and by 1928 his experiments with the Surrealist muse

“Nadja” had ended with her commitment in an asylum. Following the example of psychiatrists like Charcot, who had made his own asylum art in order to see madness from the inside out, Breton and Eluard simulated five mental disorders—debility, mania, general paralysis, interpretive delirium, and precocious dementia—in *The Immaculate Conception* of 1930. Introducing a section titled “The Possessed,” Breton endorsed the results as an effective means to achieve a new poetic language for the modern world:

“... we offer the generalization of this device and in our eyes, the ‘attempts at simulation’ of diseases that land you in jail might advantageously replace the ballad, the sonnet, the epic, the nonsense rhyme and other genres that are now totally obsolete.”

From Automatic Writing to Paranoia-Criticism

André Breton, *Second Manifeste du Surréalisme*, frontispiece by Salvador Dalí, Paris: Éditions Kra, 1930.

Salvador Dalí, *La conquête de l’Irrationnel*, Paris: Éditions Surréalistes, 1935.

Salvador Dalí, *La femme visible*, Paris: Éditions Surréalistes, 1930.

Shortly after the publication of *Nadja*, the Surrealist movement was rocked by severe conflicts, both internal and external, surrounding Breton’s leadership. While most of the writers and artists sided with him, Breton issued a new manifesto, changed the name of the movement’s journal, and touted two new champions: the painter Salvador Dalí and the psychologist Jacques Lacan. Along with them came a perceptible shift away from the early focus on automatic writing, an essentially passive mode of experimentation, to a more active approach Dalí called “paranoia-criticism.”

“Above all the birth of these new Surrealist images must be considered as the birth of images of demoralization. The particular perspicacity of attention in the paranoiac state must be insisted upon; paranoia being recognized, moreover, by all psychologists as a form of mental illness which consists in organizing reality in such a way as to utilize and control an imaginative construction ... Recently, through a decidedly paranoiac process, I obtained an image of a woman whose position, shadow, and morphology, without altering or deforming anything of her real appearance, are also, at the same time, those of a horse.”

Doubles, Desire, and The Mirror Stage

Jacques Lacan, *Le mythe individuel du névrosé, ou Poésie et vérité dans la névrose*, Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1953.

Jacques Lacan, “Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je,” *Revue française de Psychanalyse* 12, no. 4 (1949).

Dalí’s essays on paranoia-criticism made a powerful impact on Jacques Lacan, who was still a medical student at Saint-Anne’s—the same psychiatric hospital Breton singled out for such stinging polemics in *Nadja*—when he began publishing articles on paranoia in the movement’s revamped journal, *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution*. Given the bad state of affairs between the movement and the Parisian psychiatric community, this affiliation was somewhat daring for Lacan, who distanced himself from the Surrealists as he sought to establish himself in the profession a few years later. But, alongside Dalí, he played an important part in establishing the Surrealists’ new focus on paranoia in the early 1930s.

Dalí’s insistence on the active role of Desire in producing hallucinatory images gained a “scientific” grounding in Lacan’s understanding of paranoia as narcissistic doubling, a decisive breakthrough that culminated in his theory of “The Mirror Stage” as a crucial phase in the constitution of the ego not only in paranoiacs, but in “normal” subjects as well. Although not published until 1949, Lacan presented the new theory at the 14th Congress of the International Psychoanalytic Association in August 1936.

The Papin Sisters

***Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no. 5 (1933).**

While Lacan was working out his theory of the Mirror Stage, a gruesome case made the headlines: the Papin Sisters. In a murderous fit of rage, Christine and Léa Papin fell on the wife and daughter of the bourgeois home in which they had served as maids for six years, bashing in their skulls, tearing out their eyes, and mutilating their bodies before washing up and going to bed. The murderers became instant celebrities in the Surrealist press. Lacan analyzed the sisters’ motives as an important case of paranoid narcissistic doubling in *Minotaure*, while Paul Eluard and Benjamin Péret justified their actions as a revolt against class oppression in *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution*. Referring to the bloody visions of the Symbolist poet Lautréamont, the caption to these “before” and “after” shots of the Papins reads: “They came out each armed with a Song of Maldoror.”

Jean Genet, *Les bonnes*, in *L’Arbalète*, no. 12 (Spring 1947).

The Papin sisters featured prominently in Lacan’s exposition of the Mirror Stage, and they also reappear as “Claire” and “Solange” in Jean Genet’s play, *The Maids*. Here one of the sisters specifically refers to her murdered mistress as a mirror of her own desire.

Mirrors, Mirrors, Everywhere

Pierre Mabille, “Miroirs,” *Minotaure* no. 11 (1938).

The Surrealists’ fascination with mirrors, doubling, and Desire continued long after Lacan distanced himself from the movement, as Pierre Mabille’s article of 1938 shows, and it was already evident in Dalí’s collection of essays on paranoia-criticism, *La femme visible* (at left), published in 1930, long before the psychologist conceived his theory of the Mirror Stage.

Reflected in the silvered paper of this limited first edition, the mirror image of Gala Eluard certainly belonged to the “new Surrealist images” Dalí and others (including Max Ernst) craved.
