AN ANTICOLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS:

SURREALISM, MARXISM, AND COLONIALISM

IN INTERWAR FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

An Anticolonial Consciousness:
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The historiography of interwar surrealism demonstrates that as part of the movement's revolt against the intellectual, cultural, and political categories that defined Western civilization, the surrealists embraced both Marxism and anticolonialism. This study argues that the existing literature on surrealism has maintained an interpretive divide between surrealist Marxism and anticolonialism that obscures the decisive interplay between these elements of the movement's political project during the interwar period. As a result of this separation, scholars have failed to account properly for why the movement first turned to Marxism and they have offered an overly simplistic understanding of surrealist anticolonialism, construing it as a simple inversion of the fallacy of French cultural superiority that proponents of colonialism championed to legitimize the colonial system. This study brings together these two strands of the historiography to overcome the failings of each. Relying on an examination of the political texts and images produced by the surrealists, drawing largely on the official periodicals *La Révolution surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution*, this study shows that the movement's anticolonialism was not an outgrowth of its Marxism, but rather that an anticolonial impetus actually motivated surrealism's engagement with

Marxist politics and the French Communist Party. This commitment to Marxism endured even after the movement's alliance with the PCF collapsed in the early 1930s, but these changes in the movement's relationship to Marxism generated important revisions to surrealist anticolonialism, which this study reconstructs. Thus this reappraisal of the relationship between surrealist anticolonialism and Marxism shows that the true nature of the surrealist project and its influence on broader interwar debates about colonialism, communism, and the role of art in society can be uncovered only when these elements of the movement's political agenda are understood in tandem.

For Kate

CONTENTS

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

INTERWAR SURREALISM AND THE QUESTION OF COLONIALISM

At least throughout the 1920s, the surrealist rebellion against the West was conceived in terms of colonialism. During an interview he gave to anthropologists Sally Price and Jean Jamin in 1988, Michel Leiris reflected on his involvement with surrealism between the two World Wars. Prior to his lengthy career as an ethnographer, Leiris participated in surrealist activities as a young poet and writer after being introduced to the movement's members by the painter André Masson in 1924. Throughout the course of the interview, which addressed how anthropology had been influenced by literary, artistic, and political developments throughout the twentieth century, Leiris explained how he had been drawn to the discipline. As part of his explanation, he cited surrealism's interest in non-European culture, and in doing so, he foregrounded the movement's relationship to anticolonialism.

At the beginning of the exchange, Leiris asserted that in the first decade of its existence, surrealism represented a "rebellion against the so-called rationalism of Western society," which in turn, compelled the members of the movement to pursue "an intellectual curiosity about peoples who represented more or less what Lévy-Bruhl called at the time the *mentalité primitive*." When Jamin inquired as to whether the surrealist rebellion was at its essence a rejection of capitalism, Leiris responded: "Yes. But then – not right away. That happened only later." He asserted, "Our first political manifestation was the Saint-Pol-Roux banquet, which was, in effect, a protest against the war in Morocco . . . Our first political statement was the adoption of an anticolonialist stance."

He continued, "We were concerned with the situation of colonized peoples well before we were concerned about the situation of the proletariat."

Leiris explained that this concern for colonized populations rather than the European proletariat stemmed from the fact that the surrealists viewed non-Europeans as mysterious and otherworldly. He explained, "We were much more inclined to be solidary with 'exotic' oppressed people than with oppressed people living here." The surrealist interest in colonized groups and their intellectual and cultural heritages was bound to the movement's broader "hatred of ways of thinking and ways of being which were accepted as a matter of course in our own society." Leiris contended that his disavowal of surrealism in 1929 was due in large part to his realization that the movement's anticolonial position Othered colonized groups by valorizing their so-called primitivism, thereby perpetuating the structure of the prejudiced discourse of difference promoted by proponents of colonialism. The surrealist position, he stated, "was a kind of inverted racism."[1]

Leiris' recollections about surrealist anticolonialism allude to a number of important questions about the movement's political commitments during the interwar period. For instance, why were the surrealists so interested in colonialism? How does this commitment to anticolonialism relate to the movement's later embrace of Marxism? Did the movement's engagement with Marxist politics alter their position on colonialism? In the early 1920s, the surrealist movement emerged in Paris as one of the most vocal critics of Western notions of progress. According to historian Robert Short, "the Surrealist group probably exercised a greater influence on the intellectual climate of

[1] Sally Price and Jean Jamin, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (February 1988), 158-162.

the inter-war period in France than any other comparable movement." Conjoining art and politics, the surrealists aimed at liberating humanity from its oppression under the conformist conventions and institutions generated by Western rationalism through an exploration of the irrational. This aesthetics of the irrational was cultivated as "an instrument of discovery."[2] The surrealists, who coalesced around the charismatic poet André Breton, sought to explore the unconscious mind not to escape the conditions of material existence, but rather, to gain access to untapped intellectual resources that they hoped to harness to transform reality.

The Historiography of Surrealism

These rebellious aspirations informed the movement's aesthetic pursuits and compelled the group to commit to radical political activity. As Leiris' words demonstrate, this political activity included a commitment to anticolonialism. Colonialism offered to the surrealists an opportunity to mount an incisive critique of French society and culture. Texts and images produced by the surrealists throughout the interwar period show that the movement attempted to undermine the colonial system by attacking the notions of French cultural superiority that were used to legitimize the Third Republic's *mission civilisatrice*. To undermine this pervasive belief in French superiority, the surrealists inverted the hierarchy of cultures championed by proponents of colonialism. The surrealists valorized seemingly primitive non-European cultures because the movement believed these societies had special access to an irrational and

[2] Robert Short, "The Politics of Surrealism 1920-1936," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1966), 3-4.

primordial body of knowledge that the movement hoped to deploy against Western reason.[3]

Leiris' interview also alluded to the fact that the movement eventually engaged with communist ideology during the period. Broader interpretive trends within the discipline of history ensured that this aspect of the surrealist project was the central focus of scholarship until the early 1990s, when scholars of surrealism began to examine in detail the movement's anticolonialism. However, much like earlier scholars of surrealism, historians concerned with the movement's opposition to colonialism devoted little substantive attention to the relationship between this anticolonial impetus and the surrealist engagement with Marxism. Thus historical interest in the surrealist movement's political activities has been defined by a conceptual split between the movement's commitment to Marxism and its commitment to anticolonialism, with little cross-fertilization.[4] As a result of this historiographical divide, the literature that

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[3] Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 83.

[4] The division between anticolonialism and Marxism is a more general issue in intellectual history. Prior to collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, some of the most significant research produced by intellectual historians assessed the influence of Marxism on twentieth century thought and culture. Emblematic of this historiographical trend are works including Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973); Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France, From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Even Tony Judt's study *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), published after the end of the Cold War, demonstrated that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union did not signal the end of the discipline's preoccupation with the pervasive influence of Marxism over twentieth century thought and culture. The collapse of the Soviet Union compelled scholars to explore aspects of intellectual history other than Marxism in much greater detail. Although Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) confirmed that colonialism was a fertile area of study for intellectual historians prior to the end of the Cold War, the 1990s and 2000s witnessed a proliferation of publications on the topic. Included among the important works published during this period are Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, editors, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France*

addresses surrealist Marxism has failed to account properly for why the movement first turned to Marxist politics.

Maurice Nadeau, whose foundational text *The History of Surrealism* first appeared in French in 1944, before its translation and publication in English in 1965, established many of the thematic parameters to which the subsequent scholarship on surrealism conformed.[5] Originally written during a period when most of the surrealists had been forced into exile by the Nazi victory over France in 1940, Nadeau's text systematically traced the movement's political evolution from its inception in the early 1920s to the outbreak of the Second World War. He emphasized that the surrealist movement must be understood above all as a political enterprise that aspired to integrate Marxism into its revolutionary project. Even in its pre-Marxist phase, the surrealist movement was driven by an anti-capitalist and anti-nationalist impetus, thus Nadeau viewed surrealism's embrace of institutional communism in the mid and late 1920s as a logical outgrowth of this earlier political disposition. To Nadeau, surrealist anticolonialism was merely an expression of the movement's Marxist commitments since the PCF argued that the struggle of colonized populations was synonymous with that of the proletariat.

Much like Nadeau's study of surrealism, historian Robert Short's influential article, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-1936," from 1966, explored the movement's engagement with institutional communism. Short's most important contribution to the historiography of surrealism was to show how the movement embraced communism

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and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[5] Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965).

during the interwar period largely out of necessity rather than complete devotion to the political project of the PCF. He argued that the surrealists' revolutionary political and aesthetic ambitions were premised on the movement's position as a group of radicals, but as surrealist art and poetry gained acceptance by mainstream audiences, Breton's circle felt compelled to align themselves with a political project that would enable surrealism to avoid being completely absorbed by bourgeois society. Since the bourgeoisie was repulsed by communism, it followed that the movement selected the PCF as its political ally. Short devoted little substantive attention to the movement's anticolonialism. Like Nadeau before him, Short suggested that the movement's anticolonial endeavors should be viewed as a product of its relationship with the PCF.[6]

Much like Nadeau and Short, Helena Lewis' *The Politics of Surrealism*, from 1988, argued that the surrealist movement could not be truly understood without thoroughly examining its political commitments. Unlike her predecessors, who devoted little attention to surrealist artistic pursuits, Lewis acknowledged the centrality of aesthetics to surrealism in its formative years and she contended that by the mid to late 1920s, the movement had run out of cultural targets to critique as part of its revolutionary agenda. It was for this reason that the movement turned its attention to radical politics. Lewis' argument is founded on the belief that the surrealist movement was essentially motivated by its devotion to individual liberty. Just as its aesthetics were compelled by this devotion to liberty, so too was the movement's politics, which sought to derail the cultural and political conventions imposed upon humanity by bourgeois society. Lewis argued that the political entity whose project was aligned most closely with this impetus was the PCF, which is what compelled the movement to conceive of its politics along

[6] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism 1920-1936," (1966).

Marxist lines. Lewis' preoccupation with how the surrealists conformed to the political project of the PCF led her to conclude that the movement's anticolonialism was a byproduct of its commitment to Marxism.[7] Yet the centrality of Marxist politics to all three of these accounts fails to recognize the importance of anticolonialism to surrealism during the interwar period. In particular, these attempts to portray surrealist anticolonialism as an outgrowth of the commitment to Marxism suffer from poor chronology. As I will show, the surrealists embraced anticolonialism prior to their engagement with Marxist politics and it was the movement's commitment to anticolonialism that actually compelled the group to embrace Marxism.

Even the publication of path-breaking articles by James Clifford and Hal Foster during the mid 1980s, which exposed the fact that scholars had largely ignored the relationship between surrealism and anticolonialism, did not immediately inspire a wave of studies on the topic.[8] Only after the discipline began to explore the history of colonialism in greater detail did historians of surrealism follow. Since the mid 1990s, numerous publications have addressed the movement's anticolonial activities during the interwar period, though there exists very few book-length treatments. Nevertheless, these studies have maintained the historiographical divide between surrealist anticolonialism and Marxism. This has led to a rather simple understanding of surrealist anticolonialism

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[7] Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1988). Other recent works which foreground the movement's relationship to Marxism and the political project of the PCF include Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Between the Street and the Salon: The Dilemma of Surrealist Politics in the 1930s," in *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990-1994*, edited by Lucien Taylor (New York: Routledge, 1994); Kirsten Strom, *Making History: Surrealism and the Invention of a Political Culture* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002); Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).; and Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

[8] See James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (October 1981) and Hal Foster, "The Primitive Unconscious of Modern Art," *October*, Vol. 34 (Autumn 1985).

as an inversion and thus a maintenance of the hierarchical structure of the discourse of difference and discrimination the movement sought to overturn. Among the most significant of these contributions are Louise Tythacott's *Surrealism and the Exotic*, from 2003, Phyllis Taoua's "Of Natives and Rebels," which was also published in 2003, and David Bate's *Photography and Surrealism*, from 2004.[9]

Tythacott's *Surrealism and the Exotic* analyzed the relationship between surrealism and non-European cultures through the lens of ethnography. Expanding on the work of James Clifford, she argued that in terms of their relationship to colonized populations, the surrealists were radicals but also locked within the prejudiced conceptual parameters of their particular historical moment. Much like the pioneers of the field of ethnography, Breton's followers cultivated an interest in 'exotic' societies as means of "transgressing, reshuffling, and subverting" the European conventions which engendered the trauma of the First World War.[10] Despite their desire to undermine European ideology by embracing the output of non-European cultures, the surrealists exoticized and valorized these societies for the sake of social and political subversion. She suggested that the decontextualization and romanticization of non-European cultures by surrealism

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[9] Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (2003); David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Social Dissent* (New York: Taurus, 2004); and Phyllis Taoua, "Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture," *South Central Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2/4 (Summer - Winter, 2003). Other notable contributions to the historiography of interwar surrealism and colonialism include Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Jack Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919/1939: The Gold of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Janine Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 40 (Autumn 2001); Jody Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: *Art indigène* in Service of the Revolution" *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2002); and Amanda Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, edited by Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCross (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003). For an encyclopedic examination of surrealism which touches on the movement's anticolonialism and its Marxism, see Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, translated by Alison Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[10] Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 2.

was similar to the exploitative measures of the colonial regime, thus the movement perpetuated the discourse it was trying to subvert. Nevertheless, Tythacott failed to recognize that surrealism's anticolonialism led to the movement's support of the PCF, which suggests that the surrealist position cannot simply be seen as a justification of colonialism.

Taoua's article "Of Natives and Rebels" argued that primitivism structured the logic of surrealism while a commitment to anticolonialism shaped the group's politics. She explored how the surrealists attempted to escape from bourgeois rationality by retreating into an idealized primitive unconscious. Simultaneously, she claimed that the surrealists embraced anticolonialism since they viewed it as a means of asserting their concern for the liberation of the individual on a political level. Taoua's study showed that the surrealist attitude toward colonialism impeded their "engagement with the pressing issues of the day such as racism, nationalism, class conflict and the realities of imperial exploitation." In other words, the surrealist position on non-Europeans did not completely transcend the discourses of alterity that pervaded interwar France, but Taoua stopped short of suggesting that the movement functioned as an apparatus of the prejudiced bourgeois ideology that justified colonialism.[11]

In *Photography and Surrealism*, Bate reconstructed how the surrealists utilized the medium of photography to resist and fight "the pessimistic inevitability of certain modes of thinking, living and acting in a society."[12] He contended that surrealist photography attacked Eurocentrism by engaging with the cultural output of colonized populations in a manner that was outside of a primitivizing discourse. The surrealists

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[11] Taoua, "Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture," 99.
[12] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Social Dissent*, x.

valued non-European aesthetic objects "in their own right and placed [them] alongside" the works of art produced by members of the movement as opposed to other modernists who viewed these objects as "another iconographic source to appropriate and devour."[13] Though he did not state so explicitly, Bate's work obliquely alluded to the fact that the surrealists aimed at inverting the conceptual valence of French colonialism.

As these recent accounts demonstrate, almost all the existing scholarship which focuses on the surrealist movement's response to French colonialism debate whether Breton's circle continued to Other colonized populations despite their desire to undermine a bourgeois discourse of Otherness. This line of analysis illuminates insights into the nature of surrealist anticolonialism in surrealism's formative years, but it overlooks the important revisions to the movement's anticolonial project that occurred in the 1930s as a result of a sustained engagement with Marxist politics. These revisions include the deliberate depoliticization of the movement's engagement with non-European culture. After 1932, the surrealists discontinued concrete anticolonial activities as the movement came to understand their engagement with non-Western culture as a source of revolutionary inspiration for their rejection of Western rationalism that needed to be shielded from the corrosive influence of concrete political activity. Thus these studies perpetuate the trend in which scholars concentrate exclusively on either the relationship of the surrealist movement to communism or on its relationship to anticolonialism.

Only very recently have scholars tried to transcend this historiographical divide. Maria Kunda's recent dissertation "The Politics of Imperfection: The Critical Legacy of Surrealist Anti-Colonialism," from 2010, examines the extent to which surrealist writing and art succeeded in exploding notions of French cultural superiority over non-European

[13] Ibid., 193.

populations, but she also attempts to consider the movement's anticolonial position in relation to that of its commitment to Marxism. In particular, she argues that the movement's anticolonialism originated far before its interest in communism and that this aspect of surrealism also outlasted surrealist engagement with Marxist politics. Her objective is to dispel the myth propagated by earlier treatments of surrealist politics that "present Surrealism as a depoliticised movement after its break with the Communist Party in 1935."[14] Like earlier treatments which focused exclusively on the movement's communist tendencies, Kunda suggests that the surrealists' interest in Marxist politics stemmed from a pervasive belief within Breton's circle that the PCF's platform offered the best means of liberating humanity from bourgeois oppression. She also suggests that the movement's anticolonialism was relatively untouched by Marxist considerations. Thus while Kunda discusses both surrealist anticolonialism and Marxism in detail, she keeps these two aspects of the movement's project conceptually separate, and in doing so, she fails to move beyond the interpretive impasses of the earlier historiography. Kunda fails to recognize that the movement's anticolonialism actually motivated its engagement with Marxist politics.

Historiographical Intervention

My account seeks to bring together both strands of the historiography of surrealist politics, that of Marxism and that of anticolonalism, to remedy the failings of each. By building on the conclusions offered by earlier contributions to the historiography, my study will show that it is necessary to understand the movement's approach to

[14]Maria Kunda, "The Politics of Imperfection: The Critical Legacy Surrealist Anti-Colonialism," (Ph.D diss., University of Tasmania, 2010), 5.

colonialism within the broader context of political debates unfolding during the interwar period, the growing power of the Communist Party, and changing understandings of the French colonial mission, all of which led to a profound questioning of surrealism's anticolonialism and its broader revolutionary position. In doing so, my study builds on the interpretive path opened by Kunda to bring together the discussion of surrealism's anticolonialism and Marxism. Unlike Kunda, however, I will illustrate that the movement's commitment to anticolonialism and Marxism were conceptually and historically related, so much so that even after their break with the PCF in the early 1930s, Marxism served as a guiding light in the surrealists' discussion of anticolonialism. In this sense, my project demonstrates that the movement's revolutionary politics cannot be understood by assessing its anticolonial and Marxist commitments in isolation. These elements of the surrealist project were conjoined throughout most of the interwar period.

At the same time the surrealists emerged as a subversive cultural force within the Parisian avant-garde, proponents of French colonialism were promoting a colonizing fantasy to legitimize the Third Republic's *mission civilisatrice*. This fantasy entailed the belief that France was a culturally superior nation whose responsibility it was to enlighten so-called savage populations throughout the world. As my first chapter illustrates, this colonial imaginary, popularized in films, periodicals, and colonial exhibitions, and by prominent academic figures including Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Henri Massis, aimed at rehabilitating the French national identity in the wake of the First World War, which had engendered anxiety and doubt over the status of France on the global scene. Positing colonized subjects as inferior beings outside of modern civilization was a means through

which proponents of colonization attempted to restore their belief in the superiority of all things French.

At the time they developed their critique of Western rationality, greatly influenced by the thought of Sigmund Freud, the surrealists latched onto France's civilizing mission, which they viewed as a dominant means of asserting Western reason, but whose structure permitted an inversion of its valence. To challenge notions of French cultural superiority, the surrealists inverted this fantasy by valorizing colonized populations, associating their intellectual and cultural traditions with a body of irrational knowledge that the movement believed could be harnessed to undermine Western rationalism and the bourgeois society to which it was conjoined. This valorization of non-European culture, which is the focus of my second chapter, implied that these colonized societies were primordial or what Louis Althusser, criticizing a later version of this argument, calls "originary."[15] For the surrealists, valorizing non-Western culture was a means of asserting the resurgence of the irrational over Western reason. Yet the movement's valorization of non-Western culture led them to produce an argument that was structurally similar to the discourse of difference and differentiation they sought to undermine. By valorizing non-Europeans, the surrealists exoticized them as outsiders to Western civilization. In doing so, the surrealists inadvertently reiterated the Otherness of non-Europeans. This aspect of my project is aligned with earlier discussions of surrealist anticolonialism. Yet I intend to show that this was not the end of the narrative. After the early 1920s, the surrealist position toward non-Europeans and the movement's fledgling anticolonial awareness underwent significant changes.

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[15] Louis Althusser, "On Levi-Strauss" in The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-67), edited by François Matheron and translated by G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), 23.

My third chapter illustrates that by the mid 1920s, it had become clear that surrealist efforts to valorize non-Western societies proved ineffective in producing meaningful opposition to notions of French cultural superiority. A defining event for the movement was the Rif War of 1925 and 1926, which demonstrated to the surrealists that they would have to reassess their tactics in order to have a political impact. The conflict compelled the surrealists to turn toward the French Communist Party, whose campaign against the war showcased the Party's political efficacy. Breton's circle viewed an alliance with Marxism as a means of asserting the movement's own potential as an effective political force in France, thus the surrealists attempted to situate their understanding of the non-Western world into Marxist categories. Though Marxism's materialist interpretation of existence contrasted with surrealism's aesthetic idealism, the movement viewed the political project of the PCF as generally acceptable because, at least throughout the late 1920s, institutional communism was still informed by the thought of Leon Trotsky, which the leaders of surrealism viewed as largely compatible with their own language of destruction. In particular, the surrealists believed that Trotsky's call for a permanent, international revolution to topple bourgeois rule across the globe conformed to their own commitment to a revolution against the dominant values of Western civilization.[16]

The period after 1926 marked the growing dominance of Stalin's power in the Soviet Union. Trotsky's power slipped; he was expelled from the Party by the Stalinists and then fled the country in 1929. These political developments illustrated that institutional communism was increasingly dominated by the influence of Stalinism,

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[16] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 129.

which the surrealists viewed as a monolithic form of politics that was incompatible with their revolutionary ideals. My fourth and fifth chapters illustrate that by 1932, the movement's fraught alliance with the PCF had disintegrated. This disintegration was illustrated by the counter-exhibition the surrealists mounted with the Party in response to the Colonial Exposition of 1931. Unwilling to fully adopt the Party's discourse about non-Europeans, which posited colonized populations and the European proletariat as allies in the same struggle against bourgeois capitalism, the surrealists continued to valorize non-Westerners. This commitment to the valorization of non-Western culture proved that surrealist anticolonialism was incompatible with the official communist stance and it served as an expression of the movement's hostility toward institutional communism.

Nevertheless, this alliance with the PCF had left an indelible Marxist imprint on the movement's political disposition. As I discuss in chapter six, after the collapse of their alliance with the PCF, the surrealists began to criticize institutional Marxism from a Marxist perspective, arguing that the Stalinists and the PCF had betrayed the original communist ideals championed by the heroes of the Russian Revolution. This debate about the true nature of communism was viewed as a fundamentally European problem, thus at least on a concrete political level the surrealists were distracted from action against French colonialism. This lack of concrete political action on behalf of anticolonial forces did not however mean that a concern with the non-Western world disappeared from the movement's work.

Unlike earlier scholarship that contends the surrealists abandoned their anticolonial position as part of a broader depoliticization after the break with the PCF, I

argue that the movement's need to revitalize Marxism came to be premised upon the appeal to other sources of understanding that were not contaminated by Western rationality. These sources included non-Western culture. But in response to their earlier endeavors and to avoid such contamination, the surrealists believed that these sources could not be mobilized for direct political goals. Thus the movement's inversion of the colonial hierarchy was not simply a reinforcement of the colonial enterprise, but was rather a major component in a broader criticism of Western rationalism, bourgeois society, and institutional communism. Only if it is examined in isolation does this aspect of the surrealist project look like a reinforcement of the colonial discourse. The irrational art of Salvador Dalí and non-European culture became political again not by being mobilized for a specific, concrete political end, but rather, by being cast as inspirational articulations of the very irrationalism and primordialism toward which surrealism was perennially striving. This position persisted throughout the 1930s, confirming that the movement's broader revolutionary project during the entire interwar period was founded in large part on the surrealists' fascination with the non-Western world.

Method

My approach to this project is premised on the view that the surrealist circle which coalesced around Breton must be regarded as an institution that operated under the direction of an official hierarchy which envisioned and articulated specific programmatic goals to which all members were expected to conform. As multiple waves of excommunications demonstrate, Breton left little room for dissent from the positions of the surrealist leadership. These positions were articulated not only through official manifestos produced by Breton and Louis Aragon, but also within the pages of *La*

Révolution surréaliste and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, the two periodicals published by the movement which aimed at promoting surrealism's views on culture and politics. My project interrogates the official political face of the surrealist movement. Since the surrealists attempted to present themselves as a unified political force, my study examines in detail their positions as expressed primarily within the pages of their two official periodicals. Though there were certainly debates amongst the surrealists on specific positions prior to the articulation of the movement's official views, these internal discourses are not within the scope of this project since I am concerned only with the movement's public face. Nevertheless, these internal debates represent a fertile area for further research since they would shed significant light on how individual members negotiated with each other on issues like colonialism and communism and how these figures reconciled their unique views with the broader aims of the movement.

My project utilizes close textual readings of surrealist documents to reconstruct the movement's official approach to anticolonialism and how that position informed surrealist views on communism and the role of art in politics. I attempt to situate surrealist texts within a broader intellectual context to illuminate their significance to interwar discourses on colonialism, communism, and the role of art in society. I also include photographs and paintings produced by members of the surrealist movement within my interpretive purview, drawing on approaches embraced within the discipline of art history. Rather than focus on the formal qualities of surrealist imagery alone, I analyze the visual language deployed by various artists as expressions of the movement's political positions. In this sense, my work largely conforms to the interpretive approach championed by T. J. Clark, who posited that modernist aesthetics must be considered as

historically contingent responses to broader debates. According to Clark, "By and large modernism's relation to the forces that determined it were . . . uneasy . . . antagonistic. Contingency was a fate to be suffered, and partly to be taken advantage of, but only in order to conjure back out of it."[17] Yet unlike Clark, whose analysis of modernist art is limited by a Marxist framework, which implies that early twentieth century art was largely informed by broad economic and political structures, my study suggests that surrealist art must be situated within a different set of historical conditions. In particular, my project advocates for a more significant consideration of the influence of colonialism over the surrealists by the historiography of modernism. Ultimately, I contend that surrealist aesthetics and politics, both of which were informed by the movement's anticolonialism, must be understood in tandem, each influencing the other and evolving in unison. The true nature of interwar surrealism can only be uncovered when these aspects of the movement's project are understood as inextricably intertwined.

[17] T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 11.

Chapter 1

SURREALISM IN CONTEXT

In March 1918, Romanian poet Tristan Tzara declared that the participants of the Dada movement, which had established a firm foothold in major European cities like Zurich, Berlin, and Paris, were driven "by a need for independence" and "mistrust for the [European] community." He continued, "People who join us keep their freedom. We don't accept any theories."[18] An international response to the brutality and devastation of the First World War, the highly rebellious and diverse Dada movement provided the intellectual spark out of which surrealism emerged in the early 1920s. Enraged by the "establishment values that had helped to bring about mass slaughter," those affiliated with Dada aimed their aesthetic experimentation at the complete rejection of Western ideology.[19] Since they viewed the traditional morality of the West as bankrupt and hypocritical, Dadaists valorized anarchy, chaos, and unreason. According to Tzara, "morals have an atrophying effect, like every other pestilential product of the intelligence . . . there is great destructive, negative work to be done. To sweep, to clean."[20] The Dadaists viewed their efforts as a means to negate the influence of Western civilization over humanity, which they believed had generated the destruction of the war.[21]

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[18] Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto," in *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, edited by Neil Matheson (Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2006), 207. Tzara first read this manifesto publicly at the Salle Meise in Zurich on 23 March 1918. The document was originally published in *Dada 3* (December 1918), 1-3.
[19] Matthew Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, (London: Phaidon, 1997), 11.
[20] Tzara, "Dada Manifesto," in *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, 208.
[21] For a more extensive discussion of the Dada movement, see Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, editor, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Stephen C. Foster and Elmer Peterson, editors, *Paris Dada: The Barbarian Storm the Gates* (New York: G. K. Hall, 2001); Leah Dickerman, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2005); Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Dafydd Jones, editor, *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006); and Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

This energetic impetus attracted many of those who would found surrealism, including Breton, Aragon, and Philippe Soupault, since they viewed Dada as an outlet for their frustration with capitalism and bourgeois militarism. In the wake of the First World War, Breton and his circle played an instrumental role in popularizing Dada throughout Europe. The periodical *Littérature*, which Breton, Aragon, and Soupault founded in 1919, was used to legitimize the movement and disseminate radical, experimental Dadaist writing and poetry to broader European audiences.[22] The output of *Littérature* was diverse, but pieces like Jacques Rigaut's "I Will Be Serious," from the December 1920 edition, are emblematic of the Dada spirit. Rigaut's essay articulated his nihilistic attitude through a language of disorder and unreason. Disappointed by all those who adhere to bourgeois ideologies, he suggested that these individuals were blinded by their own ignorance. He lamented, "There are no reasons for living, but there are no reasons for dying either." Every system of belief is an illusion that denies individuals their liberty for the sake of some so-called greater aim. In this sense, human experience is devoid of any significance. "Despair, indifference, betrayals, faithfulness, solitude, family, liberty, weariness, money, poverty, love, the absence of love, syphilis, health, sleep, insomnia, desire, impotence, banality, art, honesty, mediocrity, intelligence – none of these are worth a damn." Rigaut's profound pessimism compelled him to endorse suicide. Suicide is not simply an escape from the oppressive conventions that define modern life. Instead, the act of suicide is a subversive and deliberate rejection of one's obligations to the bourgeois world. Rigaut contended that it is a true expression of individual agency and

[22] The first issue of *Littérature* was published on 19 March 1919. Breton, Aragon, and Soupault edited all twenty issues of the journal until they terminated its circulation in August 1921. After a nine month hiatus, the trio launched a second series under the same name, which ran for an additional thirteen issues from March 1922 to June 1924. Almost entirely devoid of visual art, both versions of the journal showcased Dadaist writing and poetry. For more on *Littérature*, see Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 60-68.

liberty. He concluded, "The important thing was not whether I died or not but that I [alone] had taken the decision to die."[23]

Despite their eagerness to produce and publish works that undermined the bourgeois way of life, by the early 1920s, Breton and many of those within the *Littérature* circle believed that the movement was incapable of successfully dismantling bourgeois ideology. They viewed Dada's rampant individualism and anarchism as far too imprecise to ever actualize substantive reform or change. Its general negativity and contempt for Western civilization needed to be redirected toward precise ends. As Matthew Gale notes, Breton's circle believed that they "needed to shed Dada's mockery in order to take matters more seriously."[24] "Leave Everything," which Breton published in *Littérature* in April 1922, called for those who were truly dedicated to eradicating Western civilization to abandon the Dadaist strategies they had embraced for over half of a decade and pursue new modes of critique. He observed, "Dadaism, like so many other things, was for certain people no more than a means of sitting down."[25] Dada was impotent. Only a new, more focused project that elaborated on Dada's revolutionary ambitions could topple the hegemony of bourgeois ideology.[26]

Like their predecessors and contemporaries within the early twentieth century avant-garde, the surrealists hoped to reverse the "disenchantment of the world" which they believed bourgeois capitalism, nationalism, and militarism had engendered. As art

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[23] Jacques Rigaut, "Je serai sérieux," *Littérature*, No. 17 (December 1920), 5-8. Unless otherwise noted, all translations to English are my own.
[24] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 203.
[25] André Breton, "Lâchet-tout," *Littérature*, No. 2 (April 1922), 8-10.
[26] For a more extensive discussion of the disintegration of Dada and the emergence of surrealism in Paris, see Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*; Malcolm Haslam, *The Real World of the Surrealists* (New York: Galley Press, 1978); Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism*; and Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris,* translated by Sharmila Ganguly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

historian T. J. Clark argues, this struggle by the avant-garde to create spaces for experience outside of bourgeois modernity was ultimately an effort to return to the humanist "bedrock" which Western ideology had nearly destroyed. Resisting the corrosive bourgeois drive to erect a social order driven by the "accumulation of capital, and the spread of capitalist markets into more and more of the world and the texture of human dealings" and the rationalist need to exert hegemonic "control over nature," the avant-garde sought to re-enchant humanity by leading its audiences back to a humanist realm of "World/Nature/Sensation/Subjectivity."[27] In this regard, surrealism embraced Nietzsche's belief that rationalism, like "an ever-increasing shadow in the evening sun," had become a menacing force that threatened to obstruct any engagement with irrational thought and desire, thereby imprisoning the human mind.[28] For the surrealists, this campaign to undermine the dominance of reason and to re-enchant humanity involved an exploration of the irrational as part of a relentless and carefully crafted critique of Western institutions. In other words, the movement posited the irrational as Western reason's Other – a mysterious and often repressed realm of mental activity which possessed the potential to help the surrealists undermine what they perceived to be the stifling intellectual formalities of European society.

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[27] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, 7-9. Among the avant-garde movements that attempted to re-enchant humanity at the same time as the surrealists was the German Expressionists and the Constructivists in the Soviet Union. For detailed discussions of these aesthetic enterprises, see Donald E. Gordon, *German Expressionism: Art and Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by William A. Haussmann (New York: MacMillan Company, 1923), 113.

Psychoanalysis and Surrealism

In November 1922, nearly two years prior to the publication of the *Surrealist Manifesto*, which formally announced the creation of the surrealist movement, Breton revealed that he and the group of artists and poets coalescing around him had begun to explore their growing fascination with dreams. In one of the final installments of *Littérature*, Breton noted, "What our friends and I mean by *surrealism* is known up to a certain point . . . we are agreed it designates a certain psychic automatism, a near equivalent to the dream state, whose limits today are quite difficult to define."[29] Fascinated with the idea that unconscious mental activity possessed the potential to liberate individuals from the constraints of rationalism, Breton's circle was eager to uncover what Jack Spector calls the "secret rationale" of dreams. In addition to automatic writing, at the early meetings of the group that would found surrealism, individuals including Paul Éluard, René Crevel, Robert Desnos, and Benjamin Péret would fall asleep in the hopes of entering into a "quasi-hypnotic trance," during which time the sleeper would be interrogated by his conscious associates. The responses would be recorded since the surrealists believed they contained insights about "the transpersonal and luminous significance" of the unconscious.[30] Breton and his colleagues were not interested in the latent content of the dreams they recorded. Instead, they hoped to uncover otherwise inaccessible truths from which the group hoped to construct a new aesthetic project capable of destabilizing Western rationalism.

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[29] André Breton, "Entrée des médiums," *Littérature*, No. 6 (November 1922), 1-2.
[30] Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919/1939: The Gold of Time*, 42.

The influence of Freud's theory of dreams and their interpretation over the thought of Breton's circle in the early 1920s is beyond doubt.[31] In the years immediately preceding the First World War, Breton was enrolled as a student of medicine, thus when hostilities erupted in 1914, he was quickly mobilized as a medical intern. Assigned to a neuropsychiatric ward in Saint-Dizier in the summer of 1916, he worked alongside former students of the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, who encouraged Breton to pursue his nascent interest in psychiatry. It was during his tenure in Saint-Dizier that Breton began to read in detail psychiatric literature, including an extensive summary of Freudian theory penned by the French psychiatrist Emmanuel Régis. According to Jean-Michel Rabaté, Breton studied this précis thoroughly, copying entire pages into his personal notebook. Though he read the psychiatric literature of his times voraciously, it was Freud's thought that exerted the most lasting influence.[32]

In Breton's estimation, more than any other figure writing on psychiatry and dreams, Freud demonstrated that human thought had a much wider scope than the traditional discourses on mental activity acknowledged. The imagination possessed powerful possibilities which Western rationalism actively suppressed. This fascination with Freud's thought compelled Breton to visit the psychoanalyst in Vienna in October 1921. Although the meeting between the two left Breton disappointed since he found himself unable to engage Freud in meaningful dialogue about the unconscious, the young Frenchman did not abandon his interest in Freudian theory.[33] As Breton would later

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[31] See David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[32] Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Loving Freud Madly: Surrealism Between Hysterical and Paranoid Modernism," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (July 2002), 59.

[33] Breton recounted this exchange in his essay "Interview du Professeur Freud à Vienne," *Littérature*, No. 1 (March 1922), 19.

acknowledge in the *Surrealist Manifesto*, "Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at the time," and given his familiarity with Freud's "methods of examination which I had some slight occasion to use on some patients during the war," Breton and his circle engaged in a sustained exploration of dream states and automatic writing. These activities were aimed at obtaining "a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*."[34]

As Spector observes, the surrealists were not interested in "the technical aspects of psychoanalysis and [they] did not share its therapeutic and educational objectives."[35] Breton's circle believed that the exploration of dreams could help reinvigorate avant-garde aesthetics as they grew increasingly distant from Dada, but the centrality of the irrational to the surrealist project was not bound to aesthetic intentions alone. Breton asserted in the *Surrealist Manifesto* that his circle's exploration of the irrational and the imagination was not a form of escapism, but rather, an effort to transform how humans engaged with and understood reality. Accessing the irrational unmediated by the influence of positivism could help overturn bourgeois conventions and free humanity from the limits of reason. Rejecting the pervasive belief in the ability of reason and logic alone to expose universal truths, Breton argued that dreams and the imagination possessed revealing and liberating capacities. He asked, "Why should I not expect from the sign of the dream more than I expect from a degree of consciousness which is daily

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[34] André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)" in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 22-23.
[35] Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919/1939: The Gold of Time*, 47.

more acute? Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?"[36]

As part of their search for a means of liberating humanity from the confines of Cartesian rationalism, the surrealists explored the mental activity of the mentally ill and children because Breton's circle believed that the thought of these groups was pure and unconstrained by reason. In other words, children and the mentally ill embodied the irrational. Thus Breton's circle valorized childhood and the mentally ill as part of a broader effort to assert the resurgence of the irrational over Western reason. For instance, in the *Surrealist Manifesto* Breton argued that surrealist artists and poets should strive to recapture childhood. He proclaimed, "The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood."[37] Spector notes that passages like this one "might seem analogous to the psychoanalytic project of searching for clues in early memories," but they actually "have more to do with Romantic presumptions of innocent origins."[38] Breton contended, "From childhood memories . . . there emanates a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of having gone astray, which I hold to be the most fertile that exists."[39] For the surrealists, childhood was viewed as a source of inspiration for their project of irrationalism rather than the origin of neurosis.

Other surrealists praised the mentally ill for their detachment from the world of reason. The writer and artist Max Morise, one of the first participants in Breton's dream séances, lauded the mentally ill for their so-called freedom from rationalism. He wrote, "Let us admire madmen and mediums who manage to fix their most fugitive visions, as

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[36] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 12.
[37] Ibid., 39.
[38] Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919/1939: The Gold of Time*, 256 n. 86.
[39] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 40.

does, in a different way, the man devoted to surrealism."[40] Likewise, Théodore Fraenkel, a close friend and former colleague of Breton's who also studied medicine and psychiatry during the First World War, echoed Morise and articulated the surrealist interest in modes of intellectual activity well outside the domain of European reason. Of the mentally ill, he asserted that Breton's circle "affirm the absolute legitimacy of their conception of reality, and of all the action derived from it."[41]

The surrealist exploration of the irrational via an engagement with childhood and the mentally ill has received a great deal of attention by historians of surrealism.[42] But they were just two of a broader range of strategies for destabilizing Western rationalism, of which the appeal to non-Western culture was another. This latter strategy, however, warrants closer and more sustained attention than has been devoted to it by previous historiographical interventions because of the way it framed the surrealists' political activities during the interwar period. To understand why the surrealists believed their engagement with non-European culture would be so politically effective, and thus why it would provide their project with the vitality that Dada lacked, it is imperative to understand what has been called the "colonial imaginary" in the period immediately following the First World War.

The Colonial Imaginary

To truly understand the surrealist engagement with non-Western cultures, it is necessary to situate the movement's position within the broader colonial discourse

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[40] Max Morise, "Les yeux enchantés," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 1 (December 1924), 26-27.
[41] Théodore Fraenkel, "Lettre aux Médecins-Chefs des Asiles des Fous," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 3 (April 1925), 29.
[42] See Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 67-74; Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 54-55; and Katharine Conley, "Surrealism and Outsider Art: From the 'Automatic Message' to André Breton's Collection," *Yale French Studies*, No. 109 (2006), 129-143.

prevalent in interwar France. This discourse, structured by the colonial imaginary, is the immediate context and target of the surrealists' anticolonial literature. Abdelmajid Hannoum argues that the colonial imaginary refers in part "to the product of imagination (our world made up of systems of meanings) and to activity, the ability by which we create a system of meaning that we identify as our world." By creating meaning, the imagination conditions the manner through which individuals comprehend reality and also how they behave within it. In other words, the imagination helps to produce knowledge.[43] Within the context of the Third Republic's colonial system, the imagination shaped French perceptions about the cultural and intellectual attributes of colonized groups. In this way, the colonial imaginary refers to the persistent idea that France's many colonies were realms outside of civilization, dominated by the mystical, monstrous, and irrational. This fantasy, which exerted a widespread influence over French consciousness during the interwar period, also entailed the idea that the inhabitants of the colonies were uncivilized, deviant savages for whom progress was possible only via their prolonged exposure to French culture through the processes of colonization.

This essentializing conceptual construct was part of a broader discursive order in France, which as Valentin Mudimbe notes, was characterized by the "self-righteous intolerance" of non-Western societies that functioned to perpetuate "the chain of beings and of civilizations." The colonial imaginary erased the cultural distinctiveness of colonized peoples and generalized these groups, characterizing them as the French population's Other. This construct served to "simultaneously account for the normality,

[43] Abdelmajid Hannoum, "Translation in the Colonial Imaginary: Ibn Khaldûn Orientalist," *History and Theory*, Vol. 42 (February 2003), 63. For more on the role the imagination plays in constructing systems of meaning, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 44.

creative dynamism, and achievements of the 'civilized world,'" and in particular France, "against the abnormality, deviance, and primitiveness of 'non-literate societies.'"[44] This binary schematic relegated colonized groups to a position of innate inferiority and functioned as a justification for French colonial endeavors throughout the interwar period. It was the colonial imaginary, which was conjoined to France's civilizing mission, that the surrealists hoped to overturn as a means of undermining the Third Republic's system of colonialism.[45] The anxieties this fantasy manifested about the decline of the West suggest why the surrealists believed that the location of the irrational in non-European thought had the potential to more effectively challenge Western rationalism than the Dada movement. To the surrealists, the structure of the colonial imaginary showed that this fantasy was a weak spot in Western rationality. [46]

Scholars like Alice Conklin note that the Third Republic's official *mission civilisatrice*, which by the end of the First World War had been adopted for more than a quarter of a century, was founded on the notion that "civilized" France was offering to the "uncivilized" world an opportunity to progress politically, economically, and culturally. This civilizing mission was rooted in the pervasive colonial imaginary that exalted France over non-Western societies. Proponents of the French colonial project tried to cultivate widespread support for overseas expansion by arguing that it was the moral duty of France to civilize and enlighten those perceived to be of inferior cultural

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[44] V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 27.

[45] Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 83.

[46] For one of the most insightful investigations of the process through which Europeans attempted to confirm their cultural superiority by Othering the non-European world, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). For a more recent discussion of how the colonial imaginary buttressed the Third Republic's colonial endeavors, see Harry Gamble, "Peasants of the Empire: Rural Schools and the Colonial Imaginary in 1930s French West Africa," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 49, No. 195 (2009).

standing.[47] For instance, in a speech before the Chamber of Deputies on March 28, 1884, Jules Ferry argued, "We must say openly that indeed the higher races have a right over the lower races." For Ferry, humankind was hierarchical and the French population was at the very top of this arrangement. He elaborated, "I repeat, that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have a duty to civilize the inferior races." While he acknowledged that over the previous three centuries European interactions with non-European cultures often resulted in bloodshed and enslavement, Ferry contended that in his historical moment "European nations acquit themselves with generosity, with grandeur, and with sincerity of this superior civilizing duty."[48] A similar position was articulated in official records like the General Act of the Berlin Conference, which France endorsed on February 26, 1885. Though it specifically referred to the Congo Free State, the sixth article of the document illustrated the Third Republic's general attitude toward colonialism. It stated: "All the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in these territories pledge themselves to watch over the preservation of the native populations and the improvement of their moral and material conditions of existence, and to work together for the suppression of slavery and of the slave trade."[49] Messages of goodwill

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[47] Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa,* (1997). For more on the racial underpinnings of the Third Republic's civilizing mission see James J. Cooke, *The New French Imperialism 1880-1910: The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973); William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); and Matthew G. Stanard, "Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2009).

[48] Jules Ferry, "Speech Before the French Chamber of Deputies, March 28, 1884," *Discours et Opinions de Jules Ferry*, edited by Paul Robiquet (Paris: Armand Colin & Cie, 1897), translated by Ruth Kleinman, Modern History Sourcebook website, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1884ferry.asp (Accessed 12 December 2014).

[49] "General Act of the Berlin Conference, 1885," quoted in Leighten, "The White Peril and L'Art *nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," 613.

veiled the discriminatory underpinnings of the colonial imaginary, which persisted well into interwar period.

The colonial imaginary was not generated by official doctrines alone. In the decade prior to the outbreak of the First World War, this discourse of hierarchical difference was promoted by many widely read periodicals, including the popular Parisian newspaper *Le Petit Journal*, which endorsed the Republic's colonial exploits by portraying them in a favorable manner. As William Schneider demonstrates in his study *An Empire for the Masses*, the articles printed in *Le Petit Journal* served as some of the most important sources of information about colonial expansion for French audiences prior to the war. So too did the newspaper's illustrated supplements, which he argues had a far more significant influence than articles themselves because images appealed to both literate and illiterate audiences alike.[50] According to Schneider, the sheer volume of the paper's circulation at the turn of the twentieth century, with nearly a million copies sold daily, verifies its popularity and influence. The paper's circulation also suggests that while *Le Petit Journal* was not a direct expression of the French populace's views on colonialism, it was a much more accurate barometer of popular opinions in France than publications aimed at elite audiences.[51] The pictorial coverage of the Third Republic's overseas exploits in *Le Petit Journal* and other widely read periodicals attempted to legitimize colonialism to audiences by depicting French cultural superiority. Illustrated supplements that focused on non-European populations frequently depicted these people as barbaric Others, trapped within a pre-modern existence and in desperate need of French benevolence.

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[50] Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900*, 37.
[51] Ibid., 71.

Elizabeth Ezra's study *The Colonial Unconscious* confirms that interwar France was indeed captivated by this hierarchical fantasy.[52] Ezra examines interwar literature and film to demonstrate that while artists, writers, and intellectuals appear "to celebrate the mixing of cultures," they are best understood as seeking "to preserve the exotic as such – that is, to keep it literally outside" French culture.[53] In other words, she argues that the culture of interwar France was defined in large part by a desire to confirm the superiority of French society over non-European groups. As Ezra notes, overtly racist depictions of colonized peoples were extremely common in interwar France. These portrayals included the highly popular native villages at the colonial exhibitions, which "emphasized the distinction between colonizer and colonized, first world and third."[54] Yet Ezra's aim was not merely to recount the instances in which colonized groups were willfully represented as the Other in French culture. Her primary objective is to expose the discourse of exclusion that can be found in texts that were not consciously colonial. This, she argues, confirms the pervasiveness of a discourse that situated colonized groups "outside civilized society" and deemed them "radically different from those inside."[55]

According to Ezra, the films of Josephine Baker and the literature of René Crevel and Paul Morand, all of which played a highly visible role in interwar French culture, articulated exclusionary and implicitly racist attitudes toward colonized groups. So too did the plays of the author Raymond Roussel, whose work served as an inspiration for

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[52] See also Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) and Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*.

[53] Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 8.

[54] Ibid., 23. I will discuss these exhibitions at length in Chapter 5.

[55] Ibid., 18.

Breton and other early members of the surrealist movement.[56] For instance, Roussel's controversial play *L'Étoile au front* is comprised of a number of seemingly unrelated stories which are each linked by the fact that they involve situations "in which differences among individuals are effaced in order to establish homogeneous groups that are then opposed to one another." To efface differences among individuals in his play, Roussel projects onto them an idealized "type," thereby denying them their unique, individual traits. Each of the oppositional factions that Roussel crafts in his play coalesce around a certain set of ethnic differences, which ultimately prohibits any type of agreement or assimilation between the groups. Ezra contends that Roussel's work mirrors the broader discourse about colonized Others unfolding in interwar France since the play emphasized ethnic difference and distinctions over reconciliation and tolerance.[57] In this way, it is a representation of the "will to dominate" which characterized the colonial imaginary.[58]

The persistence of the colonial imaginary during the interwar period must be viewed in relation to the outcome of the First World War. No single event exerted as profound and permanent an influence over the political and intellectual culture of the late Third Republic than the Great War.[59] When war broke out in the summer of 1914, it was met with enthusiasm throughout France. The majority of the population rallied to defend the nation and viewed the conflict as an opportunity to both showcase the power of France's vast empire and to validate the essential superiority of the French way of life. The nation was captivated by the conviction that "the war would turn out to be an adventure, cruel perhaps, but of short duration, and that, coming as it had done after a

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[56] Ibid., 47.
[57] Ibid., 48-52.
[58] Ibid., 6-7.
[59] Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 210.

long period of peace, this martial interlude would be no more than a brief interruption of the normal course of events." This belief was shattered as quickly as the German army advanced toward Paris. By autumn the conflict had deteriorated into a stalemate of catastrophic proportions.[60] Enthusiasm was replaced by a widespread feeling of disillusionment and loss. When the conflict ended four years later in 1918, France emerged as one of the victors, but at an alarming price. Over a million French combatants had been killed in battle, with over three million more wounded. The economy was ruined, as was the country's infrastructure, devastated by the prolonged fighting that had unfolded within France's borders.[61]

The conflict also destroyed the widespread sense of confidence in the cultural superiority of France that had dominated the decades prior to the war. The belief that France was at the forefront of human civilization had served as a fundamental motivation for the French imperial project. The war dealt a debilitating blow to this pride, replacing it with anxiety and doubt over the status of France on the global scene. The colonial imaginary therefore served as a useful response to this post-war crisis. Positing colonized subjects as inferior beings outside of modern civilization was a means through which proponents of colonization attempted to restore their belief in the superiority of all things French. In other words, the colonial imaginary was utilized to rehabilitate the crippled French identity and refurbish national pride. Proponents of colonialism who attempted to "persuade the French to accept an imperial sense of Frenchness and to persuade the

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[60] Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, translated by Arnold Pomerans (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 3-4.

[61] David Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation* (London: Palgrave, 2005), 67-69. For more on the influence of the First World War on French society and thought during the interwar period, see Philippe Bernard and Henri Dubief, *The Decline of the Third Republic, 1914-1938*, translated by Anthony Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

colonial people to return to French-nurtured roots" perpetuated this fantasy.[62] For instance, Victor Augagneur, governor of French Equatorial Africa, declared in November 1921, that the indigenous population of the African continent was "among the most backward of the world." He argued that the African mind was inferior because the logic and abstractions endemic to the French intellectual tradition were "simply without meaning for them." To Augagneur, Africans existed outside of history, trapped in a pre-modern world untouched by reason. Captivated by the fantasy of French superiority, he suggested that it was the duty of the French to spread their thought and culture as a means of lifting non-Europeans out of barbarism.[63]

The Primitive Mentality

It was out of this discursive context that the surrealist movement's position on non-European cultures emerged in the early 1920s. Yet the surrealist attitude must also be viewed, as Tythacott contends, as a response to the major figures that "formulated the dominant perceptions" of non-European culture at the time.[64] These dominant modes of perception served as the conceptual foundation upon which the colonial imaginary rested throughout the interwar period, even when they were not directly mobilized to support the French colonial project. Breton's circle hoped to undermine these perceptions about the position of the West in relation to the non-Western world as a means of exerting a real political impact in France. The sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl was among the most prominent of the figures to which the surrealists responded indirectly during the period.

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[62] Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 189.
[63] "Afrique Equatoriale Française: Déclarations de M. Augagneur," *Le Temps*, No. 22008 (November 5, 1921), 2.
[64] Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 51.

At the same time that surrealism was developing in interwar France, so too was the field of ethnography, which sought to develop a scientific understanding of seemingly foreign societies and cultural traditions. As Clifford notes, ethnography sought to make the strange comprehensible.[65] Lévy-Bruhl influenced the field by arguing that human intellect was defined by an evolutionary teleology that began with the so-called primitive mind and culminated with that of the West. Although the surrealists did not attack Lévy-Bruhl by name in their discussion of non-European cultures, his work was an object of their scorn. The surrealists confirmed their disdain for Lévy-Bruhl by including his name on a list of specific writers and intellectuals that the movement believed were not worth reading.[66] Though the precise date of this inventory's creation is unknown, the list was eventually printed on the back cover of a catalogue released by José Corti, the movement's Parisian publisher, in 1931.[67]

Lévy-Bruhl's book *Primitive Mentality*, published for the first time in 1922, examined the intellectual differences that he believed set non-Europeans apart from Europeans. In the opening pages of the study, he stated, "I have been led to try and differentiate and describe certain mental practices characteristic of primitives and to show how and why they differ from our own."[68] The book is founded on the premise that different cultures do not share the same inherent intellectual capabilities. Like many thinkers during the interwar period, Lévy-Bruhl suggested that non-European societies

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[65] Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 502.
[66] This list is reproduced as "Read… Don't Read" in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, edited and translated by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 146.
[67] Robert Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 163.
[68] Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, translated by Lilian A. Clare (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923),
11-12.

remained in an infantile intellectual state. While non-Europeans mobilized reason on a daily basis, he contended that this mobilization was far different than that of Europeans. Europeans exercised reason on its own account, but the population of colonized regions use of rationality was instrumental. He claimed, "these mental processes are not independent of the material objects which induce them, and they come to an end as soon as their aim has been attained." For the primitive mind reason is employed in direct response to practical challenges and concerns. Lévy-Bruhl argued that colonized peoples generally utilized reason in relation to necessary tasks like fishing, hunting, and eating because these people lack "the power of applying their minds generally to other things than those which appeal to their senses."[69]

Though Lévy-Bruhl insisted that the primitive mind was not dominated by an inaptitude or incapacity for reason, his argument consistently reinforced a divide between the thought of Europeans and non-Europeans. He claimed that when the European mind is confronted with mysterious phenomenon its faith in reason is not disturbed. On the contrary, Europeans turn to logic and the scientific method to uncover the cause of that which appears unfamiliar. For the European mind, there exists an order or logic to everything that merely needs to be uncovered before it can be fully understood. Thus Europeans possess a "complete confidence in the immutability of natural laws." On the other hand, he argued that non-Europeans believe that the world in which they live and "all its entities are involved in a system of mystic participations and exclusions; it is these which constitute its cohesion and order."[70] When non-Europeans encounter that which is mysterious or unfamiliar, they are overcome by intense fear and attribute that which is

[69] Ibid., 22-25.
[70] Ibid., 35.

unfamiliar to the supernatural, and in particular, to witchcraft. The same is true, however, for the familiar. Everything in the primitive world has a mystic cause.[71]

According to Lévy-Bruhl, this indifference to determinism is one of the defining characteristics of the primitive mind. Non-Europeans know "nothing of joys and advantages of knowledge." Notions of time, space, and logic were of no use to many of these cultures. Mysticism and emotion dominated their mental life. The primitive mind is therefore "prelogical," struggling to grapple with conceptual thought.[72] Since the primitive mind habitually turns to the irrational to account for the natural world, it has little self-awareness. It cannot recognize the benefits associated with the consistent and prolonged use of reason. This reliance on the supernatural has eroded the capacity "to conceive of a future which is regularly arranged." Since they do not conceive of their world in an ordered manner, at least in relation to Lévy-Bruhl's sense of order, he believed that these societies fail to truly manipulate and amend their circumstances in the name of long-term improvements. In other words, because many non-European societies lack any conception of a "fixed order of the universe," they are unable to mature on political and economic levels.[73]

Willfully ignoring cultural distinctions, Lévy-Bruhl stated that as a general rule, primitive societies "show themselves hostile to everything coming from without." In particular, he contended that non-Europeans are extremely resistant to the technology introduced to them by European colonizers because of their irrational fear of the unfamiliar. Therefore, "Any changes, even if they are undoubted improvements, must be

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[71] Ibid., 43-47.
[72] Ibid., 61.
[73] Ibid., 124.

forced upon them."[74] He concluded by suggesting that there exists an incommensurable divide between the civilized intellectual life of Europe and the savage irrationalism of the non-European world. If Europeans "try to guess why primitives do, or refrain from doing, certain things, what prejudices they obey in given cases, the reasons which compel them with regard to any special course, [they] are most likely to be mistaken." This is because mystical elements permeate so deeply into non-European methods of thinking, feeling, and acting that their mental life is entirely distinct from that of European rationality. He praised Europeans, whose use of abstract thought has made logical process nearly instinctual. He argued that Europeans were unable to degenerate to the level necessary to truly understand primitive mental life.[75] He proclaimed: "To follow primitive mentality in its course, to unravel its theories, we must, as it were, do violence to our own mental habit, and adapt ourselves to theirs."

This approach did not appeal to Lévy-Bruhl since he believed that rationalism was so deeply embedded in civilized thought that Europeans would struggle to truly divest their minds of logic and reason. He believed that Europeans would not know how to begin to descend to the level of non-Europeans to engage them in meaningful intellectual interactions. Of Europeans trying to understand the mental activity of uncivilized populations, he wrote, "It is an effort which it is almost impossible to sustain, and yet without it their minds are likely to remain unintelligible to us."[76] It is clear that he believed a vast and unbridgeable distance existed between the European and non-European mind, which greatly limited the possibility of sustained communication and cultural exchange. By denying any substantive resemblance or affinity between

[74] Ibid., 384.
[75] Ibid., 431-433.
[76] Ibid., 442.

European and non-European thought, Lévy-Bruhl argued that the "uncivilized" world was full of pre-rational, inferior beings. He assigned non-Europeans the role of the primordial Other in a narrative of French identity and he validated an approach to the evaluation and classification of colonial Others which was founded on a fundamentally hierarchical view of human societies. While on the surface Lévy-Bruhl was writing about non-European cultures, he was simultaneously writing about France, implicitly arguing that French thought and culture was at the apogee of his evolutionary teleology. Lévy-Bruhl did not explicitly champion the colonial system, but his position was consistent with a more pervasive belief that the non-European world was, as Matthew Stanard notes, "underdeveloped, poor, pre-modern, and economically backward, and that people there were in need of technology, fortitude, and knowledge of a different, higher [European] order."[77] Though Lévy-Bruhl framed the so-called Otherness of non-European culture and thought as a deficiency, as the next chapter will show, it was precisely because non-Europeans were viewed by Lévy-Bruhl and the bourgeois establishment as Other that the surrealists lauded these groups.

Lévy-Bruhl was far from the only prominent figure from the interwar period whose scholarship incensed the surrealists. One of the most notable participants in the discourse of difference and discrimination concerning non-Europeans was the nationalist intellectual and literary critic Henri Massis. As Breton noted in his response to a survey conducted and published by the periodical *Les Cahier du mois* in 1924, the surrealist movement's anticolonialism was aimed at combating the nationalist and racist fanaticism

[77] Stanard, "Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda," 44.

popularized by Massis.[78] More so than Lévy-Bruhl, Massis articulated profound anxieties about the spread of non-Western culture and its degenerative influence on Western civilization. Like many of his contemporaries, Massis was deeply disappointed by the effects of the First World War on France. His post-war work engaged with the colonial imaginary to ameliorate the problems related to the myth of French cultural superiority that was exposed by the war. He considered himself a guardian of French civilization and believed that his intellectual efforts would rehabilitate the national identity and restore France to a position as one of the world's major political, economic, and cultural powers.[79] To achieve these aims, he deliberately engaged with a wider interwar conversation that employed an "essentialist, determinist language of lost or hidden authenticity, that, once uncovered, yields a single, immutable national identity."[80] Though he promoted his position throughout the 1920s, his tactics are embodied in his work *Defence of the West*, which first appeared in 1927. The text exemplifies the conservative intellectual attitude that took on a "modern, militant, and political form" in France during the first half of the twentieth century.[81]

Massis' work was an aggressive attack on what he called the "cult of the East," or the influence of non-European ideas on French thought in the interwar period.[82] According to Bate, "Frankly xenophobic, blatantly racist, the paranoid text indicts

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[78] See André Breton, "Les Appels de l'Orient," *Les Cahier du mois*, No. 9/10 (February-March 1925), 250-251. I discuss this survey and the significance of Breton's response at length in Chapter 2.
[79] Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation*, 96.
[80] Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945*, 9.
[81] Ibid., 189.
[82] Henri Massis, *Defence of the West*, translated by F. S. Flint (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), 15.

everything to which the author is opposed."[83] In particular, Massis cautioned his audience against spiritual and philosophical doctrines like Hinduism and Buddhism because he believed that the influence these ideas exerted over Europeans was both widespread and degenerative. He warned: "The future of Western civilization, indeed the future of mankind, is today in jeopardy."[84] To illustrate exactly why the thought originating in non-European societies should be regarded as dangerous and corrosive, Massis portrayed non-Europeans as pernicious Others intent on dragging Western civilization back to a primordial state of existence. The entire argument of *Defence of the Wes*t is founded on the idea that "Thought, which is subdued to the character of national temperament, displays its incompatible differences."[85]

Massis characterized the influence of Eastern philosophies on European thought in the interwar period as the "tragic epilogue" of the devastation produced by the First World War. He argued that the war's unparalleled destruction destabilized the French political and colonial system, which rendered France, as well as Europe in a more general sense, extremely vulnerable to outside influence. The war "singularly weakened [European] prestige as 'civilised peoples' in the eyes of the Asiatics." Since so many groups from Asia had suffered under colonial rule in the century prior to the First World War, Massis believed that these populations welcomed the chaos of the war as a sign that Europe was not nearly as powerful as it had previously appeared. This perceived weakness emboldened colonized groups and compelled them to set into motion a deviant agenda aimed at the complete overthrow of European hegemony. The threat that "Asiatic

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[83] David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Social Dissent* (New York: Taurus, 2004), 131.
[84] Massis, *Defence of the West*, 15.
[85] Ibid., 19.

mysticism" posed to Europeans was magnified by the fact that many in Europe had actively turned to non-European thought as a means of combatting their disillusionment in the wake of the conflict. This growing interest in Eastern thought would precipitate the collapse of Western civilization, allowing "Asiaticism" to spread like a parasite in Europe. He wrote, "On the pretext of bringing us what we need . . . Asiaticism is disposing us to the final dispersal of the heritage of our culture and of all that which enables the man of the West still to keep himself upright on his feet."

For Massis, the idealism of Eastern thought, and in particular of Hinduism and Buddhism, glorified untrammeled individualism, which distracted humans from their social obligations. These philosophies represented a form of escapism, isolating individuals and inspiring anarchy and nihilism.[86] He claimed that Buddhism, for instance, shared nothing in common with Kantianism, positivism, or Catholicism, all of which he lauded. Buddhism is "nothing more than an intellectual and moral chaos, in which the lowest of ethics stands cheek by jowl with the most grossly superstitious of polytheisms." Along with Hinduism, he considered Buddhism to be "alien to the true interests of the human race."[87] He associated Eastern thought with degeneration and offered to his audience a powerful commentary on the cultures that produced these ideas. These non-European societies were so far outside the realm of rationality and of civilization that they were unable to contribute to human progress.

Massis claimed that the French thinkers who had already turned to Eastern philosophy as a means of ameliorating their disillusionment with the destructiveness of World War I and the hypocrisies of Western civilization had weakened France and

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[86] Ibid., 23-28.
[87] Ibid., 124-126.

exacerbated its decay. They betrayed civilization and humanity by helping poisonous ideas infiltrate and infect the French consciousness. He argued, "All these Asiatic ideas would be inoperative if they were not, so to speak, galvanised by contact with the heresies of anti-Christian Western thought."[88] To combat the process of degeneration, the population of France should continue to embrace its rich intellectual traditions. It is from this body of knowledge and "the intellectual hierarchies it admits of" that human progress is made possible.[89] In particular, Massis argued that in the West reason had been employed to impose "its form on the internal world of the soul, show it, beneath the successive modes that affect it, its substantial reality, its unity, its specificity, and what in it is complete, autonomous." Reason endows a human being with the capacity to exert hegemony over reality and to secure a position as "the noblest and highest creature in nature."[90] Massis suggested that if France succumbed to the cult of the East, it would essentially return to a primordial state of nature. In other words, the nation would plunge into a state of intellectual infancy characterized by a "distrust of true civilization" and an intense "hatred of society and law."[91]

Massis concluded *Defence of the West* by suggesting that France was obligated to combat cultural degeneration by spreading its superior intellectual traditions throughout the world. He contended that through the embrace of both reason and the central tenets of Christianity, the "wounded West" could both repair the damage it inflicted upon itself during the war and cure the minds of Asiatic populations. He wrote, "In spite of all the obstacles we have indicated, there can be no doubt that the Eastern world has many

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[88] Ibid., 171.
[89] Ibid., 181.
[90] Ibid., 182.
[91] Ibid., 163.

points that lie open to Christianity" and Western rationality. Yet Massis offered little in the way of an explanation for why he viewed the Asiatic mind as vulnerable to Western thought. The only support he offered was that the Christian intellectual tradition, which had so greatly informed thought in France, was "divine enough to discern and foster what there is of natural desire for truth in the native wisdom of Asia, for truth is never radically destroyed in any man."[92] He characterized non-European minds as flawed but malleable. In doing so, Massis asserted that the French tradition possessed the capacity to successfully "cure" non-European thought by replacing it with an ideology of its own design. Much like Lévy-Bruhl, Massis suggested that there existed an evolutionary teleology of human intellect that culminated with European thought. Yet unlike Lévy-Bruhl, Massis believed that this teleology had been disrupted by the spread of non-Western thought in Europe and that it could only be repaired by the active spread of French culture and thought. Thus his work subtly endorsed the Third Republic's *mission civilisatrice*, suggesting that colonialism would enable France to rehabilitate its national identity and confirm its intellectual and cultural superiority over non-Europeans.[93]

The Defense of the Non-Western Cultures

Marcel Mauss, the nephew and protégé of Émile Durkheim, viewed non-European culture in a far more favorable manner than both Lévy-Bruhl and Massis.[94]

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[92] Ibid., 235-236.

[93] In addition to *Defence of the West*, another notable indictment of non-European culture authored by Massis was the pro-colonial tract "A Manifesto of French Intellectuals for the Defence of the West," which was published in *Le Temps* on October 4, 1935. Signed by sixty-four right-wing thinkers, including Robert Brasillach and Charles Maurras, the document supported Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, portraying it as a civilizing mission that ultimately helped to defend France from the enemies of the West. For a more extensive discussion of this manifesto, see Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation,* 130-133.

[94] Together with Paul Rivet and Maurice Delafosse, Mauss and Lévy-Bruhl founded the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Paris in 1925. For more on this collaboration, see James Clifford, *The*

James Clifford notes that Mauss' humanist project envisioned "an expansion and an opening-out of local conceptions of human nature." Mauss tried to show that no single society, including France, epitomized humankind, thus all cultures were worthy of sustained scholarly attention. The lectures and written work that conveyed this belief exerted a significant influence over French thought in the first half of the twentieth century.[95] In *The Gift*, his most prominent interwar work, published in the *Année sociologique* in 1923, Mauss examined several non-European cultures as a way of remedying Europe's perceived social decay. As Clifford notes, "*The Gift* is an allegory of reconciliation and reciprocity in the wake of the First World War."[96] *The Gift* argues that the economic practices of "archaic" cultures demonstrate that these societies all share one foundational element: reciprocal exchange. To support this claim, Mauss directed his attention to the indigenous populations of three regions: the Pacific Northwest, Polynesia, and Melanesia. Ultimately he observed that in primitive societies, "exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents; in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily."[97]

Occurring most frequently between groups rather than individuals, gift giving is intimately bound to an unspoken system of morality. By offering a gift to another group, the giver conveys their generosity. This generosity suggests that the giver is worthy of the respect of the recipient. Accepting a gift demonstrates that the receiver does indeed respect the giver. There exists an obligation to accept gifts, since to refuse a gift is to

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Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 61-65.

[95] Ibid., 138-139.

[96] Ibid., 64.

[97] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by W.D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 3.

"proclaim oneself the victor and invincible" in relation to this system of moral obligation.[98] To refuse is to deny the common bonds between giver and recipient. Finally, by reciprocating the original gift, a group demonstrates that they too are generous and worthy of at least as much respect as the original gift giver. Mauss contended that "To accept without giving in return, or without giving more back, is to become client and servant, to become small, to fall lower."[99] Mauss referred to this process of obligatory exchange as a "total social phenomenon" since it informs all aspects of the societies involved, including politics, economics, religion, law, and morality.[100] Therefore gift exchange is not simply a method groups use to engender wealth and secure strategic alliances. It is a conduit through which solidarity is fostered between human collectives.

Mauss' most significant conclusion is that gift giving is simultaneously self-interested and selfless. He argued, "To make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself." Gifts are closely conjoined to the identity of the giver. He elaborated, "In this system of ideas one clearly and logically realizes that one must give back to another person what is really part and parcel of his nature and substance, because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul."[101] The gift exchange is a means through which humans permit others to influence their existence and identities. This exchange transcends the barrier between the self and Other. In this sense, the gift is a euphemism for collaboration. It is for this reason that Mauss concluded his study by championing modern civilization's embrace of an economic system that more closely resembled this form of interpersonal

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[98] Ibid., 41.
[99] Ibid., 74.
[100] Ibid., 3.
[101] Ibid., 12.

interaction. While he conceded that certain elements of this reciprocal system existed in "advanced" societies, he contended that modern capitalism had "recently made man an 'economic animal.'"[102] The rationalist, capitalist exchange economies of Western civilization severed and dissolved bonds between humans in the name of self-interest. He contended that the archaic societies his study investigates are in fact more "pure" than those in Europe and could offer to capitalist societies important and seemingly timeless lessons about how to sustain meaningful human relations. From these archaic groups and their systems of reciprocation, Europe, which had been ravaged by the First World War, could learn both "how to create mutual interests, giving mutual satisfaction" and how to "defend [these interests] without having to resort to arms." Only when Europeans truly embraced these lessons would they experience goodness and happiness.[103]

The Gift demonstrates that Mauss harbored a great deal of admiration for the indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest, Polynesia, and Melanesia. He believed that their systems of exchange offered to Europe a model that could help to ameliorate widespread anomie. His study invited Europeans to engage with cultures Lévy-Bruhl and Massis characterized as outside of civilization. In this sense, Mauss called upon the European self to open itself to the non-European Other. Though this strategy may at first glance appear to call for Europeans to transcend the divide engendered by the colonial imaginary, in many respects it inadvertently contributed to the essentializing discourse of difference that buttressed the fantasy of French cultural superiority. Mauss valorized archaic cultures by exalting their forms of exchange and suggesting that within them resided at least some of the answers to European problems. This is a form of

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[102] Ibid., 76.
[103] Ibid., 82-83.

exoticization. Only by appropriating and recontextualizing the wisdom of societies that appear entirely foreign to Western civilization could Europe heal its perceived socioeconomic shortcomings. By portraying particular cultures as primordial and pure, he foregrounds difference. So while Mauss' project aimed at making the unfamiliar familiar, he also reiterated that an observable divide existed between European and non-European cultures.

The surrealists were drawn to the work of Mauss precisely because he insisted that there existed innate differences between European and non-European culture. Like Mauss, the surrealists believed that so-called primitive non-European cultures were entirely different from European society, and as such, their knowledge and traditions had not been contaminated by the Western conventions and thought that had generated the destruction of the First World War. Since Mauss and the surrealists believed non-European culture was characterized by an originary purity, they also viewed it as a regenerative force that could be harnessed and redeployed to transform European society. As Clifford contends, the surrealists, and especially Michel Leiris, were heavily influenced by Mauss' position throughout the movement's formative years because, like the sociologist, they viewed non-Europe culture as "a prime court of appeal against the rational, the beautiful, the normal of the West."[104] As the following chapter will show, the surrealist movement shared Mauss' optimism about the ability of non-European culture to expose the weaknesses endemic to Western rationalism.

During the interwar period France's national identity was defined in large part by "establishing a relation of dominance and oppression" between colonizer and

[104] Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 546.

colonized.[105] France's nightmarish experience in the First World War severely weakened the illusion that the nation occupied a position of cultural, political, and economic supremacy on the global scene. To combat this perceived fall from prestige and to rehabilitate the damaged national identity, many in France deployed a discourse of difference which cast the colonies and their indigenous inhabitants as France's inferior Other. This colonial imaginary first emerged in the decades prior to the conflict, but it persisted during the interwar period in the face of a fledgling anticolonial movement. Many influential interwar thinkers, including figures like Henri Massis and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, overtly endorsed the idea that non-Europeans were primitive savages. Even figures like Marcel Mauss, whose work showed that he admired foreign cultures, unintentionally exoticized non-European groups. All of these thinkers demonstrated that notions of French cultural superiority structured the interwar discourse about colonized populations. It was this discourse that the surrealists around Breton engaged as means of articulating their emancipatory agenda, though it its earliest years, the movement shied away from attacking colonialism explicitly. As the following chapter will show, the surrealists viewed the dominant discourse about non-Europeans as offering them a valuable opportunity to mount an incisive critique of French society and culture that would help to cultivate the political vigor lacking in Dada. By inverting the valance of this hierarchical cultural order, exploiting the anxieties that had fueled the colonial imaginary in the period following the First World War, and by championing non-Europeans, the surrealists attempted to demonstrate that the colonial imaginary was a weak point in Western rationalism.

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[105] Nkiru Nzegwu, "Colonial Racism: Sweeping Out Africa with Mother Europe's Broom," in *Racism and Philosophy*, edited by Susan E. Babbitt and Sue Campbell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 127.

Chapter 2

THE EMERGENCE OF AN ANTICOLONIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In his essay "Souvenirs de Voyages: L'Exposition coloniale de Marseille," from January 1923, the painter Francis Picabia recounted his visit with Breton and Aragon to the Colonial Exhibition of 1922. Picabia, who fled Europe and spent the war years living in New York and Barcelona, returned to Paris in 1919. Having collaborated with Guillaume Apollinaire prior to the outbreak of the conflict, upon returning to Paris to help spread Dada, Picabia was immediately reintegrated into the poet's circle and introduced to Breton and Aragon.[106] The essay outlined Breton's purchase of an armadillo from one of the native displays at the event. Picabia suggested, albeit obliquely, that Breton's purchase was an articulation of his respect for the culture of non-European societies. Picabia recounted that Breton was fascinated both by the armadillo and the indigenous vendor who sold it to him. According to Picabia, during the transaction, Breton acted as though the encounter and his acquisition of the armadillo "was the only miracle [to occur] since the beginning of the world." Additionally, the piece indicates that after their visit, Breton stated that the exhibition's native displays were "the saddest zoological gardens he knows of."[107] Though "Souvenirs de Voyages" does not articulate a formal political position, it does imply that even during the formative phase of the movement, some of the most important founding members of surrealism were interested in and sympathized with the people colonized by European

[106] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 75-78.
[107] Francis Picabia, "Souvenirs de Voyages: L'Exposition coloniale de Marseille," *Littérature*, No. 8 (January 1923), 3-4.

powers. Picabia's piece alludes to an underlying disdain for the French colonial project that the surrealists would eventually foreground in their writing.

As part of their campaign against Western civilization, the surrealists began to attack, often indirectly, France's civilizing mission in 1924 and 1925. They believed that the colonial imaginary testified to the hypocritical and oppressive tendencies which characterized the bourgeois worldview and that an attack on this fantasy would expose the weaknesses of the society which supported this system of oppression. This critique of bourgeois reality rested on a valorization of non-European peoples. Building on the thought of Mauss, the surrealists argued that these non-European groups were culturally superior when considered in relation to Europe because they embodied that which was of primary interest to the movement: the irrational. Thus the movement's embrace of non-European cultural traditions marked the shoehorning of the divide between the colonizers and colonized into the surrealist argument about the struggle between the rational and irrational. Due to the difficulties of trying to declare the colonized to be irrational, the surrealists built their analyses around cultural groups that were not visible in France. The growing presence of non-Europeans from the Third Republic's African and Caribbean colonies in the economic, social, and political life of the metropole in the years after the First World War compelled the surrealists' to construct their discussion about the relationship between non-Westerners and the irrational primarily around less familiar indigenous cultures from Asia, Oceania, and the Pacific Northwest.[108] Therefore, what follows will show that the treatment of non-European culture and the irrational by

[108] Elizabeth Cowling, "The Eskimos, the American Indians and the Surrealists," *Art History*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (December 1978), 484.

Breton's circle in early texts and images helped surrealism to articulate its opposition to Western rationalism.

An Anticolonial Heritage

Although the surrealists foregrounded a valorization of the so-called primitive within their aesthetic project throughout the interwar period, they were not the first members of the Parisian avant-garde to utilize this strategy. As early as 1901, the cultural circle which included the symbolist writer Alfred Jarry, Polish-born poet Guillaume Apollinaire, and the painter Pablo Picasso began to "pursue strategies of primitivism . . . to rebel against bourgeois morality and bourgeois art."[109] Informed by descriptions of Africa in the popular press, figures like Jarry and Picasso associated non-Europeans with the mystical, irrational, and violent. However, unlike proponents of colonialism who viewed these associations as proof that non-Europeans were savages, Jarry and Picasso believed that the perceived connection of colonized cultures to the irrational and mystical was precisely what made these groups praiseworthy. As far as these artists were concerned, non-European culture offered an alternative to the stultifying conventions and hypocrisy of European thought and culture. Patricia Leighten shows that Jarry's text *Ubu colonial,* from 1901, romanticized and valorized African culture, thereby willfully inverting the "fiction of Western cultural and racial superiority."[110]

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[109] Leighten, "The White Peril and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," 611. For a thorough investigation of the political disposition of this particular enclave of the Parisian avant-garde, see Patricia Leighten, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[110] Leighten, "The White Peril and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," 621. The Fauves and the German Expressionists also looked admiringly at non-European culture. For more on this, see James D. Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics* (New Haven: Yale University

Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* aimed at exploding European aesthetic conventions.[111] Yet Leighten also describes how the painting can be understood as having inverted the structure of the colonial imaginary (Fig. 1).[112] In particular, she shows that the painting testifies to Picasso's valorization of African culture and how it accuses "the French of 'hypocrisy' and 'bankrupt' artistic traditions."[113] Exposed to African sculpture during his visits to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris in 1905 and 1906, Picasso integrated this knowledge into the painting, which depicts the fractured faces and bodies of five nude women in a brothel. The two figures on the far right side of the painting are adorned in African-style masks. Though the aggressive sexual display of all the women and their projection forward toward the viewer "threatens the spectator-customer," it is the presence of non-European masks on the two women to the right that increases considerably the painting's "horrific voltage." The sense of "perverseness" exuded by these figures subverts the rational and orderly world of the European bourgeoisie. The African influence within Picasso's visual language is an act of rebellion. These masks are intended to embody the antithesis of Western civilization, subverting "aesthetic canons of beauty and order . . . as a way of contravening the rational, liberal, 'enlightened,' political order in which they are implicated" and they

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Press, 1992); Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); and Said's *Orientalism*.

[111] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 192.

[112] Alternative interpretations of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* which challenge Leighten's postcolonial assessment include Anna Chave's assertion that Picasso's image should be read as an attack on patriarchal authority and Christine Poggi's belief that the work should not be analyzed in relation to class, gender, or racial inequalities, but rather, as a commentary on rules of representation and how individual elements of the painting acquire their meaning from other representations. See Anna C. Chave, "New Encounters with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (December 1994) and Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Elsewhere, Leighten argues that Picasso's entire oeuvre should be viewed as a conscious effort to participate in contemporary political debates. See Leighten, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[113] Leighten, "The White Peril and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," 623.

simultaneously assert "that the culture of such 'savages' has a power and a beauty all its own."[114] In this way, Picasso romanticizes African culture can be understood as an effort to expose the fallacy of European cultural superiority. Yet as Leighten observes, this appropriation and recontextualization of elements of African culture by Picasso for the sake of cultural critique is still an inherently colonial act. She also contends that Picasso's belief that non-European culture embodied a mystical and romantic precivilized state emphasized the so-called Otherness of these groups, and as such, this position was deeply embedded in the very prejudices that he and his avant-garde cohort sought to expose.[115]

Fig. 1: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907. New York, Museum of Modern Art.

[114] Ibid., 625-627.
[115] Ibid., 610. For more on the significance of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, see Christopher Green, editor, *Picasso's 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

The early surrealists were exposed to the sentiments expressed by Jarry and Picasso throughout the 1910s via their mutual contacts within the Parisian avant-garde, but Breton did not actually meet Picasso until November 1918, in the Parisian apartment of Apollinaire.[116] So while the work of Jarry and Picasso did permeate the thought of the early surrealists, it was the influence of Apollinaire, an affiliate of Dada who first coined the term 'surrealism,' who left the most lasting impression on Breton and his circle.[117] The influence of Apollinaire over Breton and his circle most certainly included the position on non-European culture. A proponent of cultural "innovation of all types," Apollinaire was an early advocate for the art of non-Europeans in France and he was responsible for exposing many of the early surrealists to the cultural output of colonized groups.[118] As Breton recalled, he and other visitors to Apollinaire's Parisian apartment during the Dada era, including Aragon and Soupault, were forced to physically navigate through an extensive collection of books, modernist art, and "rows of African and Oceanic fetishes."[119] These intimate encounters with Apollinaire's collection of non-European objects helped to further nurture an awareness of the cultures of colonized peoples in the group of artists and poets that would eventually found surrealism. Just as important to the development of a surrealist anticolonial awareness, however, was their

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[116] Michael C. FitzGerald, *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 142.

[117] Apollinaire used the term 'surrealism' for the first time on 18 May 1917, in a program note for the ballet *Parade*, which was the product of collaboration between Cocteau, Picasso, Satie, and Massine. Apollinaire's use of the term referred to a powerful and exciting unity of arts that he believed would exert a lasting effect on human expression. The movement would not officially announce its presence within the European avant-garde until 1924. For more on Apollinaire's first use of the term and his intellectual influence over the movement, see Ruth Brandon, *Surreal Lives: The Surrealists, 1917-1945* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 9-42.

[118] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 15-16.

[119] André Breton, *Entretiens (1913-1952) avec André Parinaud* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 23.

exposure to Apollinaire's ideas on the topic, which he articulated in publications like *Sculptures nègres.*[120]

An album of reproductions of African and Oceanic sculptures, Apollinaire published *Sculptures nègres* with the prominent Parisian art dealer Paul Guillaume in 1917. In the preface to the album, Apollinaire declared that Europeans had failed to appreciate the significance of African and Oceanic art and he rejected the notion that non-European objects should be evaluated in relation to the aesthetic standards and achievements of Europe. He suggested that his publication would remedy this negligence by showcasing the "energy" and "true and simple beauty" of non-European works. This, in turn, would prove that non-European objects were indeed "real works of art." This attempt to situate non-Western culture within the limits established by Western civilization implied that the African and Oceanic societies which produced these objects could only truly be understood when considered relative to European points of reference.[121]

Apollinaire's *Sculptures nègres* inspired the "Première Exposition d'Art Nègre et d'Art Océanien," which was organized by Paul Guillaume and held at the Galerie Devambez in May 1919. Showcasing dozens of objects from France's colonized cultures, the exhibit praised the art of these peoples and presented the masks, amulets, and statuettes it featured as the aesthetic foundation from which the European tradition

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[120] For more on Apollinaire's position on non-European art, see *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918*, edited by Leroy C. Breunig (New York: Viking Press, 1972).

[121] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Concerning the Art of the Blacks," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, 107-110. Originally published in *Sculptures nègres: 24 photographies précedées d'un avertissement de Guillaume Apollinaire et d'un exposé de Paul Guillaume* (Paris: Paul Guillaume, 1917).

had emerged.[122] This approach was also reflected in "Savage Art," the main essay in the exhibition's catalogue, written by the librarian Henri Clouzot and the art collector André Level. They declared that the workmanship of the non-European artists who crafted the objects on display in the exhibit was so "clear, firm, and conclusive," that the art testified to an aesthetic "purity" which would "contribute to the renewal of [European] decorative arts." Non-Western culture was not simplistic, but rather, more attuned to foundational aesthetic premises which allowed it to maintain and articulate a timeless purity. In addition to announcing their admiration for non-European art, Clouzot and Level concluded, "there is no such thing really as primitive art, but that we are confronted here with a sequel that has descended from ancient civilizations, branches from a single source, from which ours evolves as well." Clouzot and Level posited that a return to an unalloyed aesthetic foundation, of which non-Western art was an index, would permit Western artists to reinvigorate their work with the sense of purity the duo admired.[123]

"Savage Art" echoed Apollinaire's thought by depicting non-European objects as worthy of admiration and an important element in a broader narrative of art history. Clouzot and Level argued that the non-European and European aesthetic traditions shared similar aesthetic origins. Apollinaire, however, did not suggest that European and non-European art emerged out of a common aesthetic heritage. Despite their desire to undermine the perception that non-European culture was insignificant and inferior when considered in relation to that of Europe, Clouzot and Level instrumentalize the art of colonized subjects. They claim that non-European objects testify to a primordial

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[122] Blake, *Le Tumulte noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930,* 87.
[123] Henri Clouzot and André Level, "Savage Art," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, edited by Jack Flam with Miriam Deutch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 123-124. Originally published in *Première Exposition d'art nègre et d'art océanien*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie Devambez, 1919), 1-4.

aesthetic purity, which possessed the potential to reinvigorate European art. Yet it is worth noting that this instrumentalization stemmed from an underlying appreciation for non-Western art's innate aesthetic qualities. The surrealists valorized non-European art for similar reasons.

Although it is not clear whether Breton and the other founding members of surrealism visited the "Première Exposition d'Art Nègre et d'Art Océanien," the exhibition and the associated essay by Clouzot and Level built on Apollinaire's stance and allude to the position on non-European culture that the movement embraced throughout the first half of the 1920s. In this sense, Apollinaire's preface to *Sculptures nègres,* Guillaume's "Première Exposition d'Art Nègre et d'Art Océanien," and the essay "Savage Art" must be viewed as important antecedents to surrealist movement's aesthetic project, but they also serve to illustrate the specificity of the surrealist position. Much like Apollinaire, Guillaume, Clouzot, and Level, the surrealists around Breton aimed to overturn derisive stereotypes about non-European culture. While these earlier arguments maintained a sense of difference between European and non-European art, they did not place this difference in the same conceptual structure as the surrealists, whose argument was premised on a sharp opposition between reason and the irrational. Thus the surrealists expanded on the arguments of their antecedents and crafted a position on non-Western culture that was unique to the movement. To assert the resurgence of the irrational over Western reason, the early surrealists argued that non-European cultures were privy to a primordial form of knowledge and truth that could stimulate cultural renewal in the West if it was adopted and applied by Europeans. Breton's circle believed that Western civilization had lost touch with essential, instinctive, and irrational mental

states that had been eroded by rationalism and that non-Europeans had access to this body of knowledge because before their subjugation to colonialism, their cultures had developed outside the contaminating influence of Western reason.[124]

Early Ruminations on Non-European Culture

Breton's involvement with the sale of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* from Picasso's personal collection on February 20, 1924, which while relatively well known within the avant-garde had been displayed publicly only at the Salon d'Antin in 1916 and again at the Gallerie Paul Guillaume in 1918, must be viewed as evidence of his position on non-European culture. In the early 1920s, Breton was employed as an artistic advisor to the collector and designer Jacques Doucet. Doucet, who had amassed a large collection of eighteenth and nineteenth European century works, grew increasingly interested in investing in twentieth century art. Though he had been exposed to some of Picasso's oeuvre prior to the First World War, Doucet was not familiar with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and upon viewing the painting for the first time in Picasso's studio, was extremely reluctant to purchase what he considered a visually abrasive piece.[125] This was no doubt due, at least in part, to the fact that Picasso's aggressive visual language challenged the traditional conventions of European portraiture showcased in many of the Baroque and Rococo era works amassed within Doucet's collection, including paintings by artists like Georges de La Tour and Louise Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun.[126]

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[124] Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 59-62.
[125] FitzGerald, *Making Modernism*, 142-145.
[126] A. C. R. Carter, "Forthcoming Sales - Christie's Third Report: Scottish Mazer at Sotheby's: The Jacques Doucet Collections," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 57, No. 332 (November 1930), xxxix-xl.

By 1924, Picasso's path-breaking experiments with cubism had helped him to establish a position as one of the most important members of the European avant-garde, so Breton encouraged Doucet to consider the seemingly undeniable historic importance of the painting. In a letter to Doucet, Breton referred to *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as the image that signaled the rupture between the painting of the past and that which was truly modern. He argued, "It is a work that for me singularly surpasses painting, it is the theater of everything that has happened over the last fifty years, it is the wall before which passed Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Jarry, Apollinaire, and everyone else we still admire." He also suggested that if the painting were to fall into the hands of another buyer, less appreciative of its revolutionary significance, "it would take with it the largest part of our secret."[127]

Breton's efforts to persuade Doucet to make the purchase also include a comment on the appearance of non-European influences within the painting's visual language. As Maria Kunda rightly notes, Breton interpreted Picasso's work as an incisive commentary on the cultural traditions of Western civilization. Breton argued that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* captured the hypocritical "sense of an age" and that the painting endowed the avant-garde with a visual language that could be used to successfully attack bourgeois ideology. Without *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* there would exist "no means of representing the state of our civilization today from this particular [critical] angle."[128] Breton's words reveal that he believed an attack on Western civilization was essential to avant-garde activity. Furthermore, because African culture was a central aspect of

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[127] Letter dated November 6, 1923, sent by André Breton to Jacques Doucet, quoted in FitzGerald, *Making Modernism*, 145.

[128] Letter sent by Breton to Doucet, quoted in Kunda, "The Politics of Imperfection: The Critical Legacy Surrealist Anti-Colonialism," 112.

Picasso's cultural critique, Breton's letter implies that he had begun to contemplate the utility of non-European traditions to this critical objective. Aware that the bourgeoisie viewed non-Europeans as an irrational, barbaric Other, Breton believed that asserting the primacy of non-Western culture could prove to be an extremely subversive challenge to European conventions and categories. He would allude to this revolutionary potential throughout the movement's foundational tract.

Foundational Declarations

The publication of the *Surrealist Manifesto* by Breton on October 15, 1924, further signaled the position the movement would adopt toward the French colonial project during this formative period.[129] Although colonialism is not explicitly mentioned in the manifesto, which outlined the movement's initial goals and agenda, the document expresses surrealism's general contempt for Western rationality and the conventions this logic generated. By championing the exploration of the unconscious, Breton obliquely implied that his circle would look toward non-European culture as inspiration for their subversive project. Surrealism, according to Breton, is best understood as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express . . . the actual functioning of thought." This willful turn toward the unconscious by the surrealists was motivated by what Breton describes as "the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought."[130] Europe's reliance on reason and realism had only served to produce hostility to any real intellectual advancement and had generated destruction and loss of

[129] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 216.
[130] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 26.

catastrophic proportions. He contended that this obsession with reason encouraged complacency and conformism, ultimately enslaving the creative and constructive potential of the human mind. He devised surrealism as a mode of complete intellectual "nonconformism."[131]

Drawing heavily on the psychoanalytic writing of Freud, the *Surrealist Manifesto* argued that abandoning the fixation on the conscious realm and embracing the irrational would solve for humanity "all the principal problems of life."[132] The surrealists viewed their project as inherently utopian. According to Breton, the key to this utopian project involved accessing a fundamental body of knowledge – a universal unconscious – through automatism, or the performance of creative activity unmediated by conscious thought. Automatism would disclose this essential form of knowledge by exposing humans to the "marvelous." While Breton equated the marvelous with beauty, he also suggested that it is best understood as that which expresses a "passion for eternity" and "exercises an exalting effect only upon that part of the mind which aspires to leave the earth . . . it constitutes a paragon of precision and innocent grandeur." The marvelous is characterized by a timeless and almost spiritual quality that demonstrates to individuals that there is more to life than the temporal reality of which they are a part. He suggested that nearly every religion as well as the "Nordic literatures and Oriental literatures" have deployed the marvelous as a means of expression because all individuals possess the capacity to comprehend it. In other words, the ability to recognize the marvelous is universal. That which is marvelous is more than beautiful. It is also primordial.

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[131] Ibid., 47.
[132] Ibid., 26.

Breton noted, "the marvelous is not the same in every period of history." Instead, the marvelous "partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*" or any symbolic entity which shapes "human sensibility for a period of time." The marvelous is not revealed to humanity in its totality. Instead, over the course of history, various fluctuations in how populations experience and interact with their world have largely estranged humanity from the marvelous, ensuring that it is obscured and its disclosure infrequent. Yet because the marvelous is primordial it can be recognized by all who seek it as long as it is searched for in the appropriate locations. Thus the marvelous is primordial, but so too is the human capacity to comprehend it.[133] Breton contended that Western rationality worked to "bury" this critical faculty and dismiss the marvelous as an absurd form of escapism. Reason is therefore a form of intellectual enslavement, estranging humanity from the marvelous. Reconnecting with the marvelous through the exploration of dreams and the imagination, or reason's Other, serves to liberate the mind and expose it to limitless expanses of knowledge and experience. As Gale observes, surrealism as outlined in the first *Surrealist Manifesto* is at its essence a "pursuit" of the marvelous in human life.[134]

Breton's discussion of the marvelous in the *Surrealist Manifesto* and his allusions to its relation to the primordial suggests that this would be a fundamental element of the surrealist project throughout the 1920s. Aragon's essay "A Wave of Dreams," published in October 1924, in conjunction with Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, reiterated the surrealist rejection of Western rationality and alluded to the obsession with that which

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[133] Ibid., 14-16.
[134] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 218.

can be called the primordial.[135] Of the advocates of rationality, Aragon declared: "Their minds are monstrous hybrids, born of the grotesque conjugation of oyster and buzzard." More importantly, however, in his description of the objectives of the surrealist exploration of dreams, Aragon implied that the movement aimed at exposing a universal and eternal form of knowledge that could liberate the modern mind from the strictures of reason. In contrast to those preoccupied with realism, he hoped that the surrealists could prove to humanity that there was much more to life than just conscious thought and experience. All those willing to take seriously "chance, illusion, the fantastic, dreams" could access an "equally fundamental" body of knowledge.[136] In publications to follow, Aragon and his fellow surrealists would attempt to overtly conjoin the irrational body of knowledge they hoped to access with the cultural output of non-European populations.

Both the *Surrealist Manifesto* and "A Wave of Dreams" present Western thought as repugnant. They also imply that the key to transcending this nearly hegemonic system of thought resided in the ability of the surrealists to reconnect with a primordial element of human existence through their engagement with the irrational. This aspect of the arguments presented by Breton and Aragon established the conceptual structure according to which the surrealists would understand the relationship of Europe to the non-Western world. Breton's brief mention of Oriental literature in his treatment of the marvelous in the *Manifesto* reiterates this point.[137] By presenting Oriental literature as conversant with the marvelous, he asserted that non-European culture was not a foreign and threatening Other, but rather an important arbiter of knowledge vital to the liberation

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[135] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 82.
[136] Louis Aragon, "A Wave of Dreams," translated by Susan de Muth, *Papers of Surrealism*, No. 1 (Winter 2003), 3. Originally published as "Une Vages de rêves," *Commerce*, No. 2 (Autumn 1924).
[137] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 15.

and regeneration of thought in the West. Much like Nordic literature, Oriental literature may appear entirely foreign, but he suggested to French audiences that it could indeed have relevance within a Western context. Breton simultaneously valorized and instrumentalized non-European culture and in doing so, he established a precedent that the movement would embrace throughout the interwar period.

The surrealist position on non-European cultures toward which the *Manifesto* gestured was announced explicitly in Breton's "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality." Penned in September 1924, a month prior to the publication of the *Surrealist Manifesto*, the piece was not published until the end of 1924. Most of the "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality" reiterates the argument Breton originally made against Western rationality in the *Manifesto*. He argued, "The danger into which reason (in the most general and arguable sense of the term) places us by submitting works of the mind to its unbending dogmas, by not allowing us to choose the mode of expression that does us the least disservice – this danger, without doubt, is far from having been averted." Mental activity had been regulated by what Breton believed were arbitrary, corrupt, and constricting conventions that stymied pure expression. Yet the First World War had made Western rationality appear vulnerable. He claimed, "Latin civilization is over and done for and, as for me, I ask that not a single finger be lifted to save it. At present, it is the last bastion of bad faith, of decrepitude, and of cowardice."[138] The time had come for a concerted attack on the boundaries imposed upon the mind by Western rationality. Breton called upon individuals to welcome the irrational into their experience of life. According to Raihan Kadri, this shows that surrealism "was not meant

[138] André Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," translated by Richard Sieburth and Jennifer Gordon, *October*, Vol. 69 (Summer 1994), 142-143. Originally published as "Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité," *Commerce*, No. 3 (Winter 1924), 25-57.

as a denial or escape from the real."[139] Instead, the movement hoped to expand the limits of what was considered real. This expansion of the real would entail the integration of the irrational into everyday life.

To undermine the hegemony of Western rationality, Breton encouraged Europeans to turn to the intellectual life of non-European cultures. In the final paragraph, Breton declared: "Orient, O victorious Orient, you whose value is only symbolic, I am at your service, Orient of pearls and of rage! Be it in the flow of a phrase or in the mysterious wind of a jazz tune, allow me to recognize your resources in the Revolutions to come." Breton presented the non-European world as a mystical foil to the West. He portrayed the cultural output of non-European peoples as intrinsically rebellious and corrosive when considered relative to Europe's reliance on reason. Thus the piece encouraged those dissatisfied with the hypocrisies of Western civilization and who sought an alternative means of engaging with reality to turn to thought and culture with origins outside of Europe. Unlike figures like Massis, Breton endorsed non-European culture as an important tool the surrealists could utilize to both engage with the marvelous and undermine rationality. To close his essay, he exclaimed: "You who are the radiant image of my dispossession, Orient, beautiful bird of prey and innocence, from the depths of the realm of the Shades, I implore you! Inspire me, that I might be someone who no longer has a shadow."[140] For Breton, the non-Western world was a bastion of a more pure, primordial form of experience, yet also as a bird of prey, whose powers could be unleashed to destroy the systems of thought which defined existence in the West.

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[139] Raihan Kadri, *Reimagining Life: Philosophical Pessimism and the Revolution of Surrealism*. (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 6.
[140] Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse of the Paucity of Reality," 144.

The Photography of Man Ray

While *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* left a lasting impression on Breton's thought in the early 1920s, it was not the only image within the surrealist milieu that contained similar undertones. A practitioner of Dada in the 1910s, the American artist and émigré Man Ray was quickly welcomed into the Parisian avant-garde after traveling to Europe from New York in July 1921. Almost immediately after his arrival in France, Man Ray was introduced by Marcel Duchamp to Breton, Aragon, and Soupault at the Café Certa. His radical work and disdain for Western conventions helped him to easily ingratiate himself into Breton's circle. As the surrealists began to assert their place within the European avant-garde throughout 1924, Man Ray's eagerness to investigate the irrational in his photographs secured his position as one of the movement's most provocative founding members. Much like Breton and Aragon, Man Ray was eager to announce his hostility for bourgeois ideology and Western rationality and he turned to both the unconscious and non-European culture as instruments of critique.[141] This impulse is made strikingly evident in his photograph *Violon d'Ingres*, from 1924 (Fig. 2).

[141] Erin C. Garcia, *Man Ray in Paris* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 12-18.

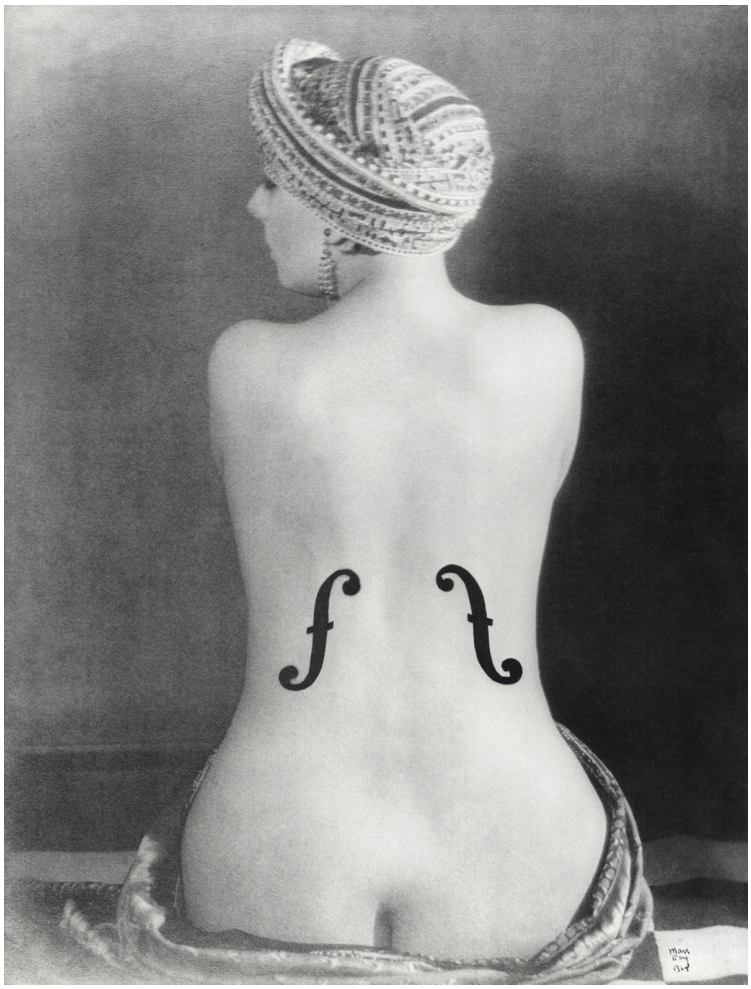

Fig. 2: Man Ray, *Violon d'Ingres*, 1924. Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum.

Originally published in *Littérature* in June 1924, Man Ray's *Violon d'Ingres* serves as a visual analog to many of the sentiments Breton expressed later the same year in the *Surrealist Manifesto* and the "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality." The photograph features the model Alice Prin, more commonly known within the Parisian avant-garde as Kiki of Montparnasse, seated with her back to the viewer and her head turned to her left as she glances off into the distance. An earring dangles from her left ear. Kiki wears a turban on her head and a robe around her waist, but otherwise she is entirely nude. Her position alludes to those of the models featured in many of

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres nudes, including *The Turkish Bath*, from 1862 (Fig. 3). Superimposed upon her back are two *f*-holes from a violin, which allude to the musical instrument played by one of the figures in Ingres' painting. These *f*-holes induce a comparison between Kiki's body and an instrument. The image's title *Violon d'Ingres*, which is a French phrase meaning "hobby," reinforces this comparison since it also suggests that Kiki's body is best understood as an instrument being played by the artist.[142]

Fig. 3: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath*, 1862. Paris, Louvre.

As David Bate notes in his analysis of *Violon d'Ingres*, the piece is "premised on a visual pun" through which the photograph establishes a connection between Kiki's

[142] Roland Penrose, *Man Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 92.

torso and a violin, "which have no logical relation." This false homology functions to objectify the woman represented within the photograph. Man Ray's deliberate placement of *f*-holes on Kiki's back implies that the woman is, like a violin, an inanimate object, "brought to life [only] by being 'played.'" The type of play to which this juxtaposition makes reference is inherently sexual. Kiki is presented as a sexual object to be manipulated by both the artist and the viewer. The image alludes to what Bate refers to as a "common-sense figurative language" which is "available to anyone, without any specific interest in, familiarity with, or knowledge of surrealism . . . Preconscious reverie with the appropriate cultural knowledge is all that is required to 'get the joke.'"[143] The fact that *Violon d'Ingres* engages with this preconscious and sexualized system of signifiers demonstrates that it is consistent with the surrealist "commitment to the unleashed imagination" which Breton and Aragon champion in their early tracts. As such, the photograph epitomizes the early surrealist style and the movement's rejection of "established genres" in favor of "new imagery rooted in the unconscious."[144]

The title Man Ray assigned the photograph and the visual language he employed within it suggests that he was trying to make a vulgar joke at Ingres' expense. When Man Ray arrived in Paris in 1921, Ingres' oeuvre had reached an apex of popularity. In the early twentieth century, reputable critics and writers like Henry Lapauze, who organized key exhibitions of Ingres' work in 1901, 1911, and 1921, exalted the painter and presented his oeuvre as that of a great master of the French tradition.[145] This campaign was amplified immediately after the First World War, as Ingres was consistently portrayed as patriotic and quintessentially French. The painter's oeuvre

[143] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, 117-118.
[144] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 228.
[145] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, 119-120.

served as an ideological tool intended to rehabilitate the French national identity.[146] As part of this rehabilitation, the neo-classical conventions and the "Oriental" themes Ingres embraced in many of his works, including *The Turkish Bath*, were presented by proponents of the imperial project as evidence that the Third Republic was destined to surpass the grandeur of the Roman Empire, which had also attempted to export "civilization" to many of the same regions France had colonized. As such, in the early 1920s, Ingres was increasingly associated with the French imperial project.[147] For instance, the critic Arsène Alexandre, a contributor to the conservative art journal *Renaissance*, declared that Ingres embodied "the personification of French attributes 'of neatness, clarity, luminous enthusiasm, of intelligent good – all qualities that allowed the French to annihilate the enterprises of brutality and arrogance'" which many believed were intrinsic to the non-Western world.[148]

Given his appropriation by proponents of France's civilizing mission in the 1920s, Man Ray's attack on Ingres implied a critique of the culture that had produced colonialism. As Bate suggests, by "implicating Ingres in a 'base' sexual interest," Man Ray's photograph could be viewed as an "affront" to bourgeois sensibilities and nationalist ideology.[149] The few articles of clothing and jewelry Kiki wears within *Violon d'Ingres* make reference to non-European sources. This use of fashion both strengthens Man Ray's allusion to Ingres' work and suggests that the woman depicted in the photograph is either non-European in origin or appreciative of non-European culture. By

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[146] Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War*, 1914-1925 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 71.
[147] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, 120-121.
[148] Arsène Alexandre, "Comprendre Ingres, c'est comprendre la Grèce et la France," *Renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe*, No. 4 (May 1921), 201.
[149] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, 124-125.

imbuing Kiki with this non-European aura, Man Ray's joke takes on another layer of meaning. The woman is manipulated in a sexual manner, but she is also "played" in a colonial one. Since Kiki is depicted as being not of the "Occident," the image also functions to objectify her as a colonial subject. So too does Kiki's position within the image, with her back turned toward the viewer and with her face glancing over her left shoulder. It is obvious that the model is a woman, but Man Ray's positioning of Kiki obscures her individual identity. Since Kiki's true identity appears unknowable, she is robbed of her subjectivity and presented as a mysterious and exotic object. Man Ray's use of *f*-holes on Kiki's torso, which further renders her an object, legitimizes her exploitation by viewers and indicts Ingres, who the photograph explicitly attacks, for his posthumous affiliation with the French bourgeoisie's patriarchal and dehumanizing colonial enterprise.

La Révolution surréaliste

La Révolution surréaliste, the movement's first official periodical, grappled with surrealism's position on non-Europeans in several of the early issues. Edited by Pierre Naville and Benjamin Péret, the inaugural edition of *La Révolution surréaliste* appeared on December 1, 1924, just three months after the publication of Breton's *Manifesto*. Modeled after the scientific journal *La Nature*, popular amongst the French bourgeoisie, *La Révolution surréaliste* hijacked this more conventional journal's austere format to legitimize itself to reading and viewing audiences.[150] The first issue of the surrealist periodical opened with a preface, composed by Jacques-André Boiffard, Paul Éluard, and Roger Vitrac, in which the trio reasserted the movement's rejection of realism and their

[150] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 92.

belief that dreams were closely related to freedom. They declared: "As the trial of knowledge is no longer relevant and intelligence no longer need be taken into account, the dream alone entrusts to man all his rights to freedom." Like the earliest surrealist documents published by Breton and Aragon, the brief essay penned by Boiffard, Éluard, and Vitrac claimed that the movement would act as a "breaker of [the] chains" imposed upon humanity by rationalism.

As part of their argument in support of this belief, Boiffard, Éluard, and Vitrac alluded to the oppressive exploits of Napoleon, who used force to subjugate massive populations in the name of French "patriotism." They claimed, "Between Napoleon and the phrenologist's bust which represents him there are all the battles of the Empire." In the eyes of the surrealists, it was impossible to disassociate Napoleon from his militaristic exploits. Yet according to Boiffard, Éluard, and Vitrac, the movement had no interest in manipulating representations of the notorious emperor to critique French chauvinism. They implied that doing this would amount to benefiting from the experience of all those who suffered under Napoleon for the sake of their twentieth century revolution of the mind. Surrealism, they asserted, would not "exploit" these representations "in a sense which could imply progress." They argued that the surrealists would look elsewhere to strengthen their attacks on reason. The focus would instead be on the "exaltation of mystics, inventors and prophets."[151] As subsequent issues of the periodical demonstrate, these mystics, inventors, and prophets to whom the movement turned for access to the marvelous were largely from the non-Western world.

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[151] Jacques-André Boiffard, Paul Éluard, and Roger Vitrac, "Preface," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 1 (December 1924), 1-2.

The first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* also contained a brief reference to a survey conducted by the journal *Les Cahiers du mois* in 1924 called "On the Mutual Penetrability of East and West."[152] Breton, along with twenty-one other members of the French intelligentsia, responded to the survey, which was published in a special double-issue of *Les Cahiers du mois* titled "The Call of the East." While figures like Massis were outright hostile to cultural and intellectual exchange between the East and West, others were skeptical but far from combative.[153] For instance, Paul Valéry claimed, "I do not think that we have much to fear *now* from the Oriental influence. It is not unknown to us. We owe to the Orient all the beginnings of our arts and of a great deal of our knowledge. We can very well welcome what now comes out of the Orient, if something new is coming out of there – which I very much doubt." Though the non-Western world was once a threat to the intellectual and cultural stability of Europe, Valéry believed that the West had established its supremacy in all aspects of life and thought. Interactions with the non-European world had endowed Europeans with a great degree of familiarity with colonized cultures. Any ideas engendered by non-Europeans could be evaluated and rejected or embraced by Europeans through the use of reason, though he clearly viewed the non-Western world as incapable of any real innovation. Reiterating his belief that the West was culturally and intellectual superior to the non-West, he argued, "Besides, the real question in such matters is to *digest*. But that has always been, just as precisely, the great specialty of the European mind through the ages . . . The Mediterranean basin seems to me to be like a closed vessel where the essences of the vast Orient have always

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[152] "Enquêtes," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 1 (December 1924), 31.
[153] See Henri Massis, "Mises au point," *Les Cahier du mois*, No. 9/10 (February-March 1925), 30-38.

come in order to be condensed."[154] Though elements of non-European culture had permeated Western civilization for centuries, the West possessed the innate intelligence necessary to determine which aspects of foreign cultures were of any use and which were worthless. In this sense, Valéry portrayed the West as a culturally supreme entity with the conceptual tools necessary to accurately evaluate which intellectual traditions had any inherent value and utility.

Breton's contribution to the survey rejected the Eurocentric assertions made by Valéry. His response acknowledged the surrealist fascination with non-European culture more explicitly than any of the earlier documents and declared that the movement would actively attack those who believed in European cultural superiority. The surrealist engagement with non-Western cultures "is a question of fighting . . . [the] fanaticism of Mr. Massis and some others." Aware that a colonial imaginary had contaminated French thought, Breton acknowledged, "I find it pleasing that western civilization is at stake. Enlightenment now comes from the Orient. I do not expect 'the East' to bring riches or renewal to us in any way, but rather for it to conquer us." Attempts to extract knowledge and resources from the non-Western world for European gain would prove futile. He posited Eastern intellectual and cultural traditions as intrinsically superior to those of Europe and that they would eventually exert this superiority by conquering the minds of those in the West. He longed for the day when "the East of dreams could pass more and more into the West of daylight [and] banish the gloomy politics typical of these terminal days of our decadence."[155] The tragedy of the First World War and its aftermath had

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[154] Paul Valéry, "Puissance de choix de l'Europe," *Les Cahier du mois*, No. 9/10 (February-March 1925), 16-17.
[155] André Breton, "Les Appels de l'Orient," *Les Cahier du mois*, No. 9/10 (February-March 1925), 250-251.

illustrated that Western civilization was vile, corrupt, and self-interested. The primordial knowledge innate to non-European culture would expose these shortcomings and enlighten the disillusioned population of Europe. It would offer to Europe an emancipatory alternative to bourgeois society. This insistence by Breton on the innate superiority of Eastern thought is the earliest instance in which he explicitly inverts the conceptual valence of the colonial imaginary.

Breton's desire to attack the West was shared by Soupault, who also responded to the survey. Soupault argued, "One need not be astonished that the past few years of humiliation (which have taught us the weakness and the poverty of our Western civilization) are also those where certain Westerners have leaned toward the East." Alluding to First World War and the cultural chaos in the years that immediately followed it, he claimed that "Like a large sick body, Europe has tossed and turned on its bloody couch and called for help, and its weakened, *demoralized* spirit seeks a light."[156] It is this belief that European culture was in need of a renewing "light" which suggests that like Breton, Soupault hoped to overturn France's colonial imaginary as a means of undermining rationalism. Proponents of colonialism had attempted to justify the French imperial project by claiming that France was essentially a beacon of light for the non-Western world, sharing with foreign cultures its "enlightened" form of knowledge. Soupault's claim that the East was a source of enlightenment for the declining West rotates this discourse of cultural superiority in favor of the cultural traditions France had long exploited through colonialism.

The responses of Breton and Soupault to *Les Cahiers du mois* are significant because they suggest that a consensus had begun to form within the movement in terms

[156] Philippe Soupault, "Vanité de l'Europe," *Les Cahier du mois*, No. 9/10 (February-March 1925), 66.

of the surrealist position toward non-European culture. Earlier documents prove that members of the movement were interested in the knowledge harbored by these cultures. Nevertheless, these early publications engage with non-European culture often indirectly, as part of a broader critique of Western reason. Yet the contributions of Breton and Soupault to the double issue of *Les Cahiers du mois* which appeared in the first months of 1925, show that prior to 1926, there were some tantalizing signs that the movement's aesthetic valorization of the non-Western world was evolving into a political project of anticolonialism. Gérard Durozoi notes that Breton confirmed as much in an entry he wrote within the notebook of the Bureau of Surrealist Research on January 16, 1925.[157] Breton asked of his fellow surrealists "that we examine very closely the question of to what degree *La Révolution surréaliste* can or must join in a campaign *for the Orient*."[158] Much like earlier documents, those produced by Breton and Soupault in response to *Les Cahiers du mois* continued to valorize non-European cultures, depicting them as a source of regenerative, emancipatory knowledge.

Surrealism's commitment to concrete political activity was further intimated in the *Declaration of January 27, 1925,* which was published by the Bureau of Surrealist Research. Within the tract, surrealism is defined as "a means of total liberation of the mind and of everything resembling it." Consistent with earlier surrealist literature, the *Declaration* foregrounded the rejection of Western rationality and reaffirmed the determination "to create a Revolution." Although the document did not explicitly

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[157] Opened daily by the surrealists from October 1924 to January 1925, the Bureau of Surrealist Research, also known as the Centrale Surréaliste, functioned as the official office where members of the movement met to discuss the irrational. Housed at 15 rue de Grenelle in Paris, the Bureau of Surrealist Research also recorded interviews with Parisians willing to share with the movement the content of their dreams. For more on the Bureau of Surrealist Research, see Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 91-93; Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism*, 20; and Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 226.

[158] Breton is quoted in Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 715.

address Breton's notebook entry about mobilizing *La Révolution surréaliste* against the colonial imaginary, it did confirm that the movement as a whole was eager to commit to a more deliberate political agenda founded on the embrace of reason's Other. The fact that the text was signed by over a dozen surrealists, including Breton, Aragon, Éluard, and Boiffard, as well as Antonin Artaud, Max Ernst, Robert Desnos, and René Crevel, confirms this consensus. Though the object of this attack, or "the Western world," could still be understood as bound to an aesthetic project, a striking passage within the *Declaration* suggests that it also began to have political undertones. The *Declaration* stated that the movement "lay no claim to changing anything in men's errors but we intend to show them the fragility of their thoughts, and on what shifting foundations, what hollow ground they have built their shaking houses."[159] In this passage, the surrealists reiterate their rejection of Western rationality and reveal their desire to expose the inherent instability and hypocrisy of European conventions and categories. When coupled to the fact that the text explicitly attacked Western civilization, this desire to expose the mendacity of European categories also suggests that the surrealist revolutionary vision had begun to shift over to an implicit anticolonial position.

Breton's inquiry about the obligation of the movement to deploy *La Révolution surréaliste* against notions of French cultural superiority was resolved by the publication of the journal's third issue on April 15, 1925. This issue of the periodical was one of the movement's most obvious efforts to valorize non-European culture. The movement's desire to condemn the West and glorify the East was articulated within three pieces authored by Antonin Artaud. In his "Letter to the Chancellors of the European

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[159] André Breton, et al., *Declaration of January 27, 1925*, quoted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 103.

Universities," Artaud declared, "In the narrow tank which [university chancellors] call 'thought' the rays of the spirit rot like old straw." Western rationality was for Artaud a prison that stymied creativity and engagement with a more preternatural and spiritual realm of intellectual activity. Outside of the West's system of limitations, "our spirit stirs, watching for its most secret and spontaneous movements – those with the character of a revelation, an air of having come from elsewhere, or having fallen from the sky." In other words, humans achieve fulfillment and freedom by engaging with sources of knowledge well outside those championed by European universities. Furthermore, rationality functions to deny the complexity of the human mind by insisting that humanity structure existence around a narrow and rigid set of accepted principles. He asserted, "The fault lies with your moldy systems, your logic of two plus two equals four . . . You manufacture engineers, magistrates, doctors who do not know the true mystery of the body or the cosmic laws of existence; false scholars blind in the other world, philosophers who pretend to reconstruct the spirit."

European universities perpetuated what the surrealists viewed as the Western plague. He contended that European universities impeded humanity's ability to connect with primordial forms of knowledge typically embraced by those the West viewed as Others. Of this estrangement from primordial knowledge, he observed, "You know nothing of the spirit, you ignore its most secret and essential ramifications, those fossil imprints so close to our own origins, those tracts which occasionally we are able to discover deep in the most unexplored lodes of our minds." Turning to Eastern

philosophies would help Europeans to recognize and overcome the limitations of their intellectual traditions.[160]

This rejection of Western ideology was echoed in Artaud's "Address to the Pope." For the surrealists, Christianity was one of the most important bourgeois institutions thus they viewed it as synonymous with the nation of France.[161] Like reason, the movement believed that Catholic doctrines imprisoned humanity and denied individuals the opportunity to experience a wider range of intellectual experience. Artaud suggested that Catholicism was inherently imperial, as the institution of the church enforced its ideology throughout history on those with different worldviews through violence. Anyone who embraced beliefs outside of Catholic doctrine was generally viewed as an Other who was entirely unaware of their so-called spiritual ignorance. Artaud indicted the Pope and Catholicism for relying too heavily on this violent "sword of truth." He asserted that the surrealists "couldn't care less about your canons, your index, your sin, confession and band of priests, we've got another war in mind, war against you." Catholicism was especially repugnant because of what he perceived to be its fundamental "hatred of the soul's immediate truths, of those flames that burn straight from the spirit."[162] Artaud called for an unmediated engagement with the primordial spirit, one that he believed Catholicism did everything in its power to prevent.

Artaud's "Address to the Dalai Lama" was published on the page immediately following his "Address to the Pope." The vitriolic language mobilized within "Address

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[160] Antonin Artaud, "Lettre aux Recteurs des Universitiés Européennes," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 3 (April 1925), 11.
[161] Jack J. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919-1939: The Gold of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.
[162] Antonin Artaud, "Adresse au Pape," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 3 (April 1925), 16.

to the Pope" is a stark contrast to the complimentary tone of the "Address to the Dalai Lama." This juxtaposition emphasizes the surrealist turn away from Western civilization toward that of the East. Whereas Artaud lambasted the Pope and referred to him as "crooked" in his "Address to the Pope," the "Address to the Dalai Lama" immediately conveys a feeling of awe and reverence.[163] It opened with the line: "We are your very faithful servants, O Great Lama." The tract conveys its author's fascination with the capacity of Buddhist philosophy to both expose the shortcomings of the West and to reveal the marvelous to the members of the surrealist circle. He pled, "Grant to us, address to us your wisdoms, in a language which our contaminated European minds can understand, and if necessary change our Spirit, fashion for us a perception wholly attuned to those perfect summits where the Spirit of Man suffers no longer." He suggested that the Western intellectual tradition could only progress through the spread of Eastern principles. The wisdom innate to the Dalai Lama, whom Artaud refers to as the "acceptable Pope," is described as the key to the "transparent liberation of [European] souls."[164]

The photograph featured on the cover of the third edition of *La Révolution surréaliste* emphasized the anti-establishment and anti-Western position articulated by the surrealists in the pages that followed. Titled "1925: End of the Christian Era," Man Ray's image captures what Simon Baker calls an "Atget-esque" scene (Fig. 4).[165] Several Christian statuettes, including multiple angels and a small Pieta, are visible through the glass windowpane of the storefront in which they reside. Yet the reflection

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[163] Ibid.
[164] Antonin Artaud, "Adresse au Dalaï-Lama," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 3 (April 1925), 17.
[165] Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (New York: P. Lang, 2007), 36. Baker refers to the work of Eugène Atget, a documentary photographer famous for the images he took of Parisian street scenes as the city endured widespread modernization at the turn of the twentieth century.

of a Parisian street within the same windowpane, which appears as if it has been superimposed on the statuettes by the artist, distorts and disrupts the sanctity of the religious scene. This visual device reminds viewers that Christian values and ideology, intrinsically bound to Western civilization, are no longer stable. Instead, more secular forms of thought and expression are overtaking the Christian order. Jeremy Carrette suggests that Man Ray's photograph testifies to the surrealist obsession with a "Nietzschean-like 'devaluation of values'" and "'reclassification of life.'"[166] The image is a visual analog to the surrealist belief that the thought and culture which had once been marginalized by the Western, Christian order would soon assert its supremacy.

Fig. 4: Man Ray, *1925: End of the Christian Era*, featured on the cover of *La Révolution* surréaliste, No. 3 (April 1925).

[166] Jeremy R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 54.

Since it was almost entirely devoted to attacks on French nationalism and patriotism and to glorifying non-European cultures, Helena Lewis notes that this third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* must be considered the movement's formal announcement of its opposition to the colonial enterprise.[167] Éluard's "The Suppression of Slavery" suggested that the movement's primitivist aesthetic impetus had begun to transform into an anticolonial political project because the essay explicitly articulated the surrealist position on colonialism. The piece argued, like most surrealist literature, that the categories, conventions, and institutions of Western civilization, which appeared hegemonic and permanent, were in fact dissoluble. What is unique to "The Suppression of Slavery," however, is that it suggested that the West's collapse would be directly related to the hypocrisy of European colonialism. Éluard claimed, "The people struggling for their independence will soon perceive that they are capable of overthrowing their masters, whether native or foreign." The overthrow of European colonial rule abroad would lead to the collapse of Western civilization because it would expose the fallacy of European cultural supremacy, which in turn would help to make the West vulnerable to the transformative influence of non-European thought.

Colonized populations were not ignorant Others as proponents of France's colonial imaginary had consistently argued. These colonized groups would not be liberated by their exposure to the allegedly superior culture and thought of Europe. It was this exposure to European categories and conventions that enslaved non-Europeans. "How is it possible," Éluard asked, "that the most stoic of these slaves would put up with the imbecilic cruelties of white decadence forever?"[168] Colonized groups were on the

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[167] Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism*, 30-31.
[168] Paul Éluard, "La suppression de l'esclavage," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 3 (April 1925), 19.

cusp of a breaking point and Éluard contended that they would soon respond to European enslavement and exploitation through force, rebelling against notion of French cultural superiority. By asserting its cultural supremacy over Europe, the non-European world would expose the colonial imaginary as a fallacy. Éluard believed that Europeans were blinded so thoroughly by their arrogance and infatuation with prejudiced traditions to ever view colonized peoples as anything but Others simply because Western rationalism suggested that these groups were trapped in the state of nature. Therefore, "The Suppression of Slavery" shows that Éluard believed, as Frantz Fanon argued several decades later, that "colonialism . . . is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence."[169]

Like Éluard, Robert Desnos' contribution to the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* confirmed that an attack on colonialism would serve as a centerpiece of the surrealist political agenda. In his provocative "Pamphlet Against Jerusalem," Desnos, one of the leaders of the original surrealist circle in Paris and its only prominent member who was Jewish, argued vehemently against Zionism.[170] Equating Zionism with nationalism, he claimed that the Jewish population did not need its own state, since "the atmosphere is transformed wherever the Jews pass," despite having to submit to "the influence of the countries where they live." In other words, Desnos believed that the Jewish population was extremely adaptable and altered the complexion of the societies in which they lived in a manner that generally allowed them to thrive. He rejected Zionism as "sentimental" and claimed that it amounted to a "desertion of [innate] intelligence."

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[169] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York, Grove Press, 2004), 23.

[170] For more on Desnos' life and his important contributions to surrealism, see Katharine Conley, *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

The creation of a Jewish state would only confirm that the Zionists had fallen victim to the chauvinistic nationalism that plagued Europe. Rather than resolve tensions, the formation of an official state would perpetuate discourses of difference and notions of alterity.

Desnos devoted a great amount of attention to the relationship between Zionism and colonialism. Since he believed Zionists were infatuated with Western civilization's rationality and militant nationalism, he argued that the formation of a Jewish state on the shores of the Mediterranean would further expand the corrosive influence of European thought, which was plagued by "the worst maladies of the spirit," throughout the non-European world. Thus for Desnos, the creation of a Jewish state would be its own form of colonialism. He lamented that a Jewish state would end up "becoming the advanced outpost of the nations of the West and will be more dangerous than the English and French colonies." The Jewish state would be especially dangerous because Desnos believed Jewish society originated in the East. This Eastern origin enabled the Jewish population to assimilate with other non-Western groups more easily, allowing them to spread Western ideologies with little detection. He contended that the expansion of a Western worldview to regions outside of Europe was always predicated on conquest and oppression and he argued that advocating for a Jewish state ultimately functioned to strengthen a broader campaign to destroy Eastern traditions. This colonial campaign contradicts what Desnos calls the Jewish "mission to defend" non-European thought and culture. Since he views them as non-European, the fact that Jewish populations were spread throughout the nations of Europe confirmed to him that they had a special mission to temper the progress of the "Western epidemic." He asked, "Delegated among its

enemies, are [Jewish populations] not, consciously or not, the servants of the primitive spirit?" In this way, he argued for a reverse colonialism, in which non-Western societies spread their intellectual and cultural traditions to the West for the sake of liberation.

The use of the phrase "primitive spirit" in relation to non-European culture suggests that Desnos viewed these traditions as mystical and primordial – the "citadel of all hopes." Like Breton and Aragon before him, Desnos' argument throughout his "Pamphlet Against Jerusalem" was an attempt to valorize non-Western culture as the domain of a pure and regenerative form of knowledge that existed outside of history. Yet this body of knowledge would liberate Western civilization from the limits of rationalism only if the Jewish population committed itself to spreading non-Western traditions rather than the creation of what Desnos believed was a colonial state. He declared, "From the foothills of Tibet to the lush valleys with colorful rivers, to the plains of elephants, to the alligator-filled marshes; from the Himalayas to Coromandel; from Amon Daria to Sakhalin, profound souls sense the approach, as an ocean does the storm," of the menace that is Western thought. In this way, Desnos portrayed the spread of Western culture as a threat to the exotic natural world that harbored primordial, universal truths. He noted that this battle between Europe and the non-European world was being waged most prolifically on the African continent, as the indigenous groups there continued to grapple with colonization. It is clear that Desnos believed this battle would determine the fate of humanity. If European aggression prevailed, humanity would be doomed to an existence of repressed desire and an extreme lack of creativity. A victory for the non-European world would endow humanity with the opportunity to unleash these desires for the sake of individual freedom. Emphasizing the originary nature of non-European culture and

thought, he proclaimed: "May no defection occur among the defenders of the knot of the universe for which they must take sides in the name of infinity and eternity!"[171] If non-Western culture was entirely eradicated by European colonialism, the primordial knowledge capable of liberating humanity from enslavement under rationalism would be lost forever, dooming future generations to oppression under a Western juggernaut. Dismantling French colonialism, as well as the hierarchical conceptual valence which underpinned it, was of utmost importance to the surrealists as they worked to eradicate the West's obsession with reason.

The surrealist art and literature produced in the movement's formative years demonstrates that Breton and his followers were eager to attack Western rationality as they continued to cope with the trauma of the First World War. Early surrealist manifestos and tracts confirm that the movement embraced the rebellious anti-establishment elements of their Dadaist heritage. By dismantling bourgeois conventions and subverting the hegemony of reason, the surrealists believed that they could re-enchant Western civilization. Central to this project of surrealist re-enchantment was an engagement with reason's Other – the irrational – since the founders of the movement believed this aspect of mental experience was a conduit which could expose humanity to long-lost primordial forms of knowledge and spirituality. Foundational surrealist texts like Breton's *Manifesto*, his "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," and Aragon's "A Wave of Dreams" showed that by reconnecting with these essential, universal, and transhistorical bodies of knowledge, the surrealists believed they could undo Western civilization's "emptying and sanitizing of the imagination."[172]

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[171] Robert Desnos, "Pamphlet Contre Jérusalem," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 3 (April 1925), 8-9.
[172] Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 7.

This obsession with the originary and transhistorical fueled the movement's fascination with the non-Western world, which they viewed as embodying the irrational and primordial. In much the same way that Mauss did in his conclusion of *The Gift*, Breton and his circle valorized the non-Western world. The surrealists consistently argued that the West would benefit not by trying to exert cultural superiority over the non-West, but instead, by bowing to the East and allowing it to assert its intellectual and cultural superiority. Although this valorization of non-European culture was actually compatible with an imperialist mindset, the movement's position did leave space for the surrealists to attack the more extreme racialist thought of France's colonial culture. Early texts and photographs, like those published in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, show that the within a year of its official formation, the movement had begun to conjoin its valorization of non-Europeans to an attack on French colonialism as a means of illuminating the oppressive nature of bourgeois ideology and Western rationalism. At this time, however, these were only tantalizing glimpses of an anticolonial project. It would take a colonial war, the Rif crisis of 1925, to transform this into a fully-fledged political enterprise.

Chapter 3

SURREALISM AND THE RIF WAR

Shortly before the first exhibition at the Galerie Surréaliste opened in late March 1926, dramatic changes to surrealist politics had occurred. The impetus was the Rif War, an ongoing conflict that was waged in Morocco to secure the stability of European colonial rule in North Africa. Morocco became a protectorate of France in March 1912, as a result of the Treaty of Fez, which had ended the Agadir Crisis.[173] Just over six months later, in November 1912, an agreement signed with France granted Spain control of a small protectorate in northern Morocco, which included the mountainous Rif region. It was here, in June 1921, that a Berber uprising commenced, led by Abd-el-Krim, who hoped to use the forces he had assembled to drive European colonizers out of the Rif and the surrounding regions.[174] In late June 1921, Abd-el-Krim's guerrilla army, comprised of just a few thousand Berbers, attacked a Spanish colonial army of twenty-four thousand men near the village of Annual. By July 1, a week after the Riffians initiated their attack, nearly eight thousand Spanish troops had been killed. As David Slavin observes, over the course of just one week, an outnumbered Riffian force had "dealt a stunning blow to Spain's decade-long effort to turn northern Morocco into a Spanish colony."[175] Thereafter, Abd-el Krim organized a regular army and in September, he announced that the Riffians had created an independent Islamic republic. Fighting continued for more than three years, but by the autumn of 1924, Spanish forces had been driven out of the

[173] For a thorough discussion of the Agadir crisis, see Edmund Burke, *Prelude to Protectorate in Morocco: Precolonial Protest and Resistance, 1860-1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
[174] David Drake, "The PCF, the Surrealists, *Clarté* and the Rif War," *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 2006), 173.
[175] David H. Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25: Racism and the Limits of Internationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History,* Vol. 26, No. 1 (January 1991), 5.

region by Abd-el-Krim's army, which had successfully consolidated Riffian control over Morocco's mountainous interior.[176]

Spanish defeats by Abd-el-Krim's army convinced the French government that the Riffians posed a serious threat to the Third Republic's colonial interests in Morocco. By 1924, General Hubert Lyautey, commander of the French military forces in Morocco, began to devise a plan to eliminate the Riffian menace. Under his direction, a force of over ten thousand soldiers crossed the Ouergha River into the Moroccan interior to establish a series of defensive positions intended to protect the city of Fez and the vital railways in the surrounding area from being overrun by Riffian troops. Interpreting these actions as evidence of French aggression, Abd-el-Krim coordinated an attack that was launched by the Riffians in April 1925. For nearly three months, the Riffians assaulted French positions surrounding Fez and they came close to dislodging the colonial forces from the city. To prevent the loss of the city, the French government replaced Lyautey with Marshal Pétain, who organized a more robust defense while the government convinced the Spanish to join France in a military alliance against Abd-el-Krim and his fledgling republic.[177] In September 1925, an army of several hundred thousand Spanish soldiers landed at Alhucemas on the Moroccan coast. Surprised by the amphibious invasion, Abd-el-Krim's forces could do little to slow the Spanish army, which advanced unopposed to the Riffian capital at Ajdir. As the Spanish burned Ajdir to the ground, an equally large French force advanced from Algeria into the Moroccan interior, where along with the Spanish army, they encircled the Riffian forces. Despite being severely outnumbered, the Riffians resisted until May 1926, when Abd-el-Krim finally

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[176] Ibid.
[177] Drake, "The PCF, the Surrealists, *Clarté* and the Rif War," 173.

surrendered before being deported by the French to the island of Réunion, thus ending the conflict.[178]

The importance of the Rif War to the history of surrealism has not been lost on other scholars. Several recent contributions to the historiography of interwar surrealism argue that France's quest to defeat Abd-el-Krim and his Riffian rebels in North Africa galvanized the movement politically. While I argue that the surrealists were interested in anticolonialism prior to the conflict, the work of scholars like Phyllis Taoua and Martine Antle suggests that the Rif War created a "surrealist anticolonialism."[179] Taoua contends that the surrealists harbored a nascent interest in "primitivism" as part of their crusade against Western rationalism prior to the Rif War, thus the movement was eager to express their solidarity with the Riffian rebels as part of their broader condemnation of European institutions. This interest motivated Breton's circle to join "a group of intellectuals in and around the Communist Party" which was already busy organizing a robust campaign against the conflict. Though they remained ambivalent about most of Marxist ideology, Tauoa argues that this collaboration compelled the surrealists to adopt the PCF's explicit "opposition to Western imperialism."[180] In Taoua's opinion, surrealist anticolonialism must be viewed as a product of the movement's engagement with the PCF during the crisis. Unlike Taoua, Antle argues that the PCF did not wield great influence over surrealism's anticolonial impulse. She views this anticolonialism as originating within the movement since it served surrealism's broader goal of undermining the hegemony of

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[178] Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25," 5. For a more detailed account of the Rif War, see David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd-el-Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968).

[179] See Taoua, "Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture," 84-85; and Martine Antle, "Surrealism and the Orient," *Yale French Studies*, No. 109, (2006), 4-5.

[180] Taoua, "Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture," 84-85.

Western reason over social, political, and economic relations around the globe. However, she contends that it was only after the Rif War that the surrealists consistently attacked colonialism and "proposed an idealized form of Eastern thought as an antidote to the evils of Western civilization."[181]

Both scholars are right to characterize surrealism's response to the Rif War as a turning point in the movement's political history. Yet their insistence that surrealism's collaboration with the PCF against the Rif War essentially created the movement's anticolonialism neglects the significance of the literature produced by the surrealists on the topic prior to the outbreak of the conflict. Other than Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* and his "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," neither Taoua or Antle devote any substantive attention to other early documents which address non-European culture and the European colonial project, including the first and third editions of *La Révolution surréaliste* and the responses of Breton and Soupault to the survey "On the Mutual Penetrability of East and West," conducted by *Les Cahiers du mois* in 1924. The theoretical parallels are so strong that when Maria Kunda examined the texts neglected by Taoua and Antle, she concluded that the movement's response to the conflict was largely consistent with its earlier pronouncements on colonialism and non-European culture. Of surrealism's campaign against the Rif War, Kunda asserts that "The sentiments of anti-colonialism, anti-nationalism, and denunciation of Western civilization are abundantly evident," and "the tone is not new: it reiterates the sentiments already expressed in *La Révolution surréaliste*."[182] Kunda portrays the surrealist response to the Rif War as evidence of continuity within surrealist political ideology, rather than

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[181] Antle, "Surrealism and the Orient," 4-5.
[182] Kunda, "The Politics of Imperfection: The Critical Legacy Surrealist Anti-Colonialism," 125.

innovation. She admits in passing that the Rif War helped to stimulate political activity on the part of the surrealists.[183] But this stimulation should not be overlooked, for as I will argue, it also had significant implications, not least for the surrealists' relationship, both ideological and practical, with the Communist Party. Compelled by their fledgling commitment to anticolonialism, the surrealists turned to the Marxist project of the PCF out of political necessity. Taoua thus gets the relationship the wrong way around. It was the surrealist opposition to colonialism that motivated and shaped their embrace of the PCF, and not vice-versa.

As the texts produced during the period demonstrate, Breton and his fellow surrealists loathed France's military campaign in Morocco so much that the movement was compelled to reconsider its approach to criticizing the Third Republic's overseas exploits for the sake of political efficacy. For the surrealists, the Rif War cast into sharper relief the true face of colonial capitalism. The conflict demonstrated to them that French colonialism was an inherently militaristic and patriarchal campaign by the Third Republic to enslave entire populations for the sake of economic profit, simultaneously exposing capitalism's violent, ruthless, and exploitative nature. Since they viewed the Rif conflict as a brutal episode of colonial capitalism unlike any they had witnessed, the surrealists realized that the tactics they had previously used to criticize France and the colonial project could do little to truly undermine the Third Republic's imperial apparatuses. Breton's circle turned to anticolonialism and the valorization of non-European culture as a way to be politically effective, but now they realized that they had to commit even further to achieve this goal. Surrealist anticolonialism had to be transformed because the movement began to believe that radical strategies were

[183] Ibid., 123.

necessary to undermine the government's efforts to destroy "a colonized people seeking its freedom."[184] Therefore, in contrast with the interpretation offered by much of the recent historiography, the surrealists abandoned their reliance on individual critiques of colonial capitalism and embraced communal revolutionary action as a means of realizing their language of destruction.

This new emphasis on communal political activity brought the surrealists closer to the PCF, which by the summer of 1925 had already achieved considerable success organizing protests against the conflict. Since they recognized the efficacy of the PCF's anticolonial tactics and because they considered such efficacy necessary to mount a successful campaign against the Third Republic's colonial system, the surrealists felt compelled to embrace institutional communism. Such practical exigencies allowed the surrealists to overlook their differences with the communists especially with respect to the PCF's position on non-Europeans. Whereas the surrealists foregrounded the dissimilarities between non-European and European cultures as part of their campaign against Western reason, the PCF promoted a discourse of inclusion. For the communists, colonized populations endured the same struggle to which the European proletariat was subjugated by bourgeois capitalism. While the two groups held different anticolonial positions, the convergence of surrealist and Marxist anticolonialism against the same enemy permitted Breton and his circle to engage with the PCF, despite implicit fears that their commitment to the irrational would be compromised by this collaboration. The movement believed that such a compromise was a worthwhile sacrifice in their fight against European colonialism and Western rationality.

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[184] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 117.

Surrealism and Communism

Surrealism and communism share a similar desire to radically critique bourgeois institutions. Nevertheless, prior to their campaign against the Rif War, the surrealists were reluctant to endorse an explicitly Marxist political project. The surrealists believed that Marxism, which privileged the collective over the individual and favored material existence over that of the mind, was ultimately one of the West's ideological "straightjackets that kept man from living according to his desires."[185] The surrealists refused to embrace Marxism because they believed it stymied individual expression and rejected surrealism's insistence that the irrational "depths of our minds contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them."[186] This hostility on the part of the surrealists to Marxist doctrine was epitomized in their response to the death of Anatole France, the Nobel Prize winning poet and novelist, admired by conservatives and communists alike, who died on October 12, 1924.

On October 11, 1924, just one day prior to the death of Anatole France, the Bureau of Surrealist Research, under the direction of Antonin Artaud, opened its doors at 15 rue de Grenelle in Paris.[187] As one of its first items of business, the Bureau of Surrealist Research organized and published a four-page pamphlet attacking France, a national icon whose life was celebrated by the French press after his death. France's death does not seem to have caused the surrealists to soften their tone. Six days afterwards, a pamphlet titled *Un cadavre* featured scathing contributions by Soupault,

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[185] Ibid., 97.
[186] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 10.
[187] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 91-93.

Éluard, Breton, and Aragon. For instance, Breton characterized France as a symbol of the French establishment and argued that "the lowest actors of the period have Anatole France as their accomplice." He also claimed that France embodied the "cunning, traditionalism, patriotism, opportunism, skepticism, realism, and lack of heart" which surrealism hoped to subvert.[188] Likewise, Soupault portrayed France as a self-interested conformist. He opined, "The man who has just left us, however, was not very sympathetic. He never thought of anything but his own petty interests, his own petty health . . . But aside from that, seriously, what has he done? what has he thought?"[189]

Aragon shared his fellow surrealists' disgust for France, whom he viewed as a symbol of the French bourgeoisie. He claimed, "I consider any admirer of Anatole France a degraded being." Among those Aragon chastised for mourning France's death were prominent political figures like Charles Maurras and Paul Painlevé, as well as the Soviet government, which he referred to as "senile Moscow."[190] Aragon included this rebuke of Moscow in his contribution to the pamphlet because following France's death, the Kremlin had sent a telegram to the French government offering its condolences on the nation's loss. Aragon's words convey frustration with the communist state, implying that he viewed the Soviet Union's response to France's death as proof that it was newly bound to the conventions and decorum of Western civilization, which the surrealists hoped to dismantle. Though the Clartéist faction of the PCF with whom the surrealists would later collaborate approved of "the general spirit" of *Un cadavre*, they took issue with Aragon's treatment of Moscow. Aragon responded to the Clartéist group's disapproval by penning a letter to Jean Bernier, one of the editors of the journal *Clarté*,

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[188] Philippe Soupault, et al., "Un cadavre," quoted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 235.
[189] Ibid., 233.
[190] Ibid., 235-237.

explaining in detail his views on communism. The letter epitomizes the position held by the surrealists toward Marxist theory in the autumn of 1924. As Robert Short observes, the document clearly demonstrates that "the group did not yet see revolutionary politics as the means of satisfying their grievances against the world."[191]

Aragon acknowledged to Bernier that he was not impressed by the communist state and he reiterated his commitment to the anarchic, idealistic project of the surrealist movement. He wrote, "I have always placed, and place today, the spirit of revolt far above *any* politics . . . The Russian Revolution? Forgive me for shrugging my shoulders. On the level of ideas, it is, at best, a vague ministerial crisis." Even so-called radical political systems like communism were defined by a doctrinaire set of beliefs that imposed limitations on human thought and action. By subscribing to a particular form of politics, an individual consented to the associated intellectual restrictions. As Aragon noted, on the level of ideas, Marxist ideology was not as radical a break from bourgeois conventions as communists believed it to be. For Aragon, as well as many of his fellow surrealists including Breton and Éluard, allegiance to any political project outside of surrealism was tantamount to the imprisonment of the human mind. While communism appeared to subvert the bourgeois order that dominated Western civilization, Aragon believed that it was still at its essence a regime of social control which imposed its will on individual humans. For this reason, he argued, "It is a real abuse of language that [the Soviet Union] can be characterized as revolutionary."[192] Aragon's letter to Bernier confirms that for surrealism, truly revolutionary activity was conjoined not simply to the

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[191] Robert Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-1936," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1966), 6.

[192] Louis Aragon to Jean Bernier, printed in *Clarté* (1 December 1924), quoted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 100-101.

material conditions of life, but more importantly, to ideas. Rationality and all of the conventions it generated had to be subverted before humanity would experience true liberty. Thus when seeking an antidote to such rationalism the surrealists felt compelled to look beyond Moscow and outside of European traditions. The appeal to the "primitive" would bypass the errors of both capitalism *and* communism. Though communism threatened to undermine the hegemony of bourgeois capitalism, it was produced by Western reason and was viewed by the surrealists as helping to extend the grasp of European rationality over humanity.

The Anticolonial Agenda of the PCF

The official communist approach to the colonial question was established at the First Congress of the Comintern, which was called by Lenin and held in Moscow in early March 1919. At the Congress, communist delegates from across the globe attempted to determine how the international revolution could be protected from the corrosive influence of capitalism. Robert O'Melia observed that during the Congress, it was made evident that "colonial resistance would play a significant role in the campaign against capitalism." The delegates at the Congress agreed that capitalism and colonialism were inextricably bound to each other. In their opinion, the most powerful capitalist nations were also imperialist, thus it was determined that "an enormous revolutionary potential existed among the subjugated colonial masses." By aiding revolutionary movements which already existed in the colonies and by "astutely cultivating those not quite yet formed," the communists could greatly weaken European colonialism, and in turn, the capitalist system which was bolstered by colonial endeavors. Furthermore, they believed that colonialism had generated such a great amount of wealth, that capitalist nations had

been able to silence, or rather, "buy off" their critics, including the proletariat, at least temporarily, thus compromising their revolutionary potential. The Congress also agreed that it was the colonized populations that endured the brunt of European exploitation, thus they were viewed as volatile and more eager to revolt than the Western proletariat. According to O'Melia, Lenin, who had expressed a similar position in earlier publications, along with the rest of the delegates, "came to regard the colonial masses as the true proletarians of the industrialized world."[193] Therefore, the Congress agreed that the Party should actively support colonized populations in their struggle against European rule as a means of weakening capitalism and the power of the bourgeoisie.

This position did not change the view, however, that a proletarian revolution in the industrialized West was necessary to truly topple capitalist hegemony. This view was enunciated in Leon Trotsky's "Manifesto of the First Congress of the Comintern," which was unanimously adopted by the Congress on March 6, 1919. The document read in part: "The emancipation of the colonies is possible only in conjunction with the emancipation of the metropolitan working class."[194] Just as the Party viewed capitalism and colonialism as inextricably intertwined, the same was true of the struggle of the colonized and the European proletariat. In other words, the manifesto did not say so explicitly, but it confirmed that the Party viewed the struggle of the colonized as being synonymous with that of the European proletariat since both groups were exploited by the same group for the same economic purpose. The communists believed that it was in their revolutionary interest to promote a discourse of inclusion that united the two

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[193] Robert Emmet O'Melia, "French Communists and Colonial Revolutionaries: The Colonial Section of the French Communist Party, 1921-1926," (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1980), 68-69.
[194] Leon Trotsky, "Manifesto of the First Congress of the Comintern," quoted in O'Melia, "French Communists and Colonial Revolutionaries: The Colonial Section of the French Communist Party, 1921-1926," 72.

populations against a common, bourgeois enemy.[195] While this position, as O'Melia notes, was "as much utilitarian as it was humanitarian," the communist view differed considerably from the stance championed by Mauss and later by the surrealists.[196]

After the PCF was formed in late 1920, it committed itself to the revolutionary project outlined at the First Congress of the Comintern the previous year.[197] This included a commitment to anticolonialism, which was articulated by numerous articles published within the PCF's official periodical, *L'Humanité*, throughout the early 1920s. Many of the articles that promoted the Party's anticolonial position were included within a special feature entitled "*L'Humanité* aux colonies," which was organized under the directorship of Charles Lussy and published every Thursday between May 11, 1922 and November 2, 1922.[198] The first installment of the series confirmed that the PCF was committed to the cause of anticolonialism and that it viewed colonized populations as part of a global proletariat whose struggle against bourgeois capitalism mirrored that of the European working class. Promoting a discourse of inclusion, the piece referred to colonized populations as "The indigenous proletarians" and declared that these populations, which had been "horribly oppressed, coerced, and dispossessed [by European colonialism], deserve our support. We will hear their protest." The PCF wanted to ensure that the oppression of the colonized was not ignored in the metropole. Though the piece did not advocate for a specific course of action against colonialism, it

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[195] Martin Thomas, "Albert Sarraut, French Colonial Development, and the Communist Threat, 1919-1930," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (December 2005), 934-935.
[196] O'Melia, "French Communists and Colonial Revolutionaries: The Colonial Section of the French Communist Party, 1921-1926," 73.
[197] David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 73-75.
[198] O'Melia, "French Communists and Colonial Revolutionaries: The Colonial Section of the French Communist Party, 1921-1926," 155.

assured the newspaper's readership that the PCF would actively combat the Third Republic's colonial apparatuses as part of its broader campaign against capitalism. As an expression of solidarity with the colonized, the article proclaimed: "We strongly denounce their abusers and the abhorrent practices of colonial imperialism." [199]

Similar sentiments were expressed in dozens of contributions to the series, including an article that appeared on August 31, 1922. Penned by Ulysse Leriche, a frequent contributor to the column, the article lamented the deplorable conditions for those enslaved under the colonial system on the island of Guadeloupe. He argued that it was important to recognize that while the shameful oppression of the indigenous population was orchestrated in part by the French clergy, judicial officials, and military on the island, "capitalists," or the "fourth oppressor," were also responsible for "bleeding dry the worker."[200] By characterizing the indigenous population as victims of capitalist greed, Leriche was trying to suggest that the readership of *L'Humanité* could relate to the group and should join them in their struggle against their oppressors. Leriche depicted the population of Guadeloupe not as a foreign and mysterious Other, but rather, as a familiar and sympathetic ally to the European proletariat.

He foregrounded the same theme in a column from September 21, 1922, which was not part of the "*L'Humanité* aux colonies" series. Like his piece about Guadeloupe, Leriche bemoaned the suffering of the native population of Indochina. In particular, he criticized the colonial officials for permitting acts of brutality against the colonized population. He argued that this indifference toward violence by colonial administrators in Indochina stemmed from a more pervasive enthusiasm within the government and

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[199] "'L'Humanité' aux colonies," *L'Humanité*, No. 6620 (11 May 1922), 4.
[200] Ulysse Leriche, "Guadalupe: Les suppôts de la colonie," *L'Humanité*, No. 6732 (31 August 1922), 4.

military for the use of brutal methods of coercion. Leriche opined, "Should we be astonished that the dissolution of recognized morals in the civil and military authorities should extend to the majority of colonial officials?"

Leriche believed that the escalation of violence committed by the colonial authorities against the native population of Indochina warranted an immediate response on the part of the PCF, which he hoped would prove that the French proletariat identified with and stood in solidarity with those suffering under the colonial system. He insisted that the PCF "actively address the colonized countries and the social movements unfolding there because, while our colonial authorities commit misdeeds and crimes with impunity, the natives are pilloried." Although Leriche wanted to cultivate sympathy for the colonized within the French working class, he did not want this sentiment to be conjoined to the belief that non-Europeans were inherently inferior to their European counterparts. Instead, he tried to show that the colonized were destined to make important contributions to the international revolution against bourgeois hegemony. The brutal measures committed against the colonized by their French oppressors produced in the indigenous population "a fierce glow, that of a hatred that will produce revolts." The place of the colonized was not below, but rather, alongside the European proletariat.[201] This approach to the colonial question guided the PCF's response to the Rif War.

The PCF's Response to the Rif War

At precisely the moment the surrealists were attacking communism for its complicity in Western reason, the PCF was adopting a course of action that would cause the surrealists to change their tune. On September 11, 1924, they officially announced

[201] Ulysse Leriche, "Les crimes des coloniaux," *L'Humanité*, No. 6753 (21 September 1922), 2.

their opposition to European involvement in the Rif by publishing in *L'Humanité* a telegram sent to Abd-el-Krim by Pierre Sémard, General Secretary of the PCF, and Jacques Doriot, an affiliate of the party and leader of the Fédération des Jeunesses Communistes. The message praised recent Riffian victories over Spanish forces and claimed that the PCF hoped the Rif Berbers would succeed in their struggle to force European troops, including those of France, out of Morocco. Suggesting that the plight of the Riffians was part of a broader struggle against Western capitalism, Sémard and Doriot encouraged Abd-el-Krim to continue his anticolonial insurrection "in conjunction with the French and European proletariat."[202] This endorsement was followed by a campaign within France's Chamber of Deputies, led by Doriot, aimed at garnering legislative support for Abd-el-Krim, which commenced in February 1925, two months prior to the outbreak of hostilities between the French military and the Riffians.[203]

To the applause of his fellow communists, Doriot condemned colonialism in Morocco and argued that European banks alone "profit from the occupation." The colonial exploitation of the native population in Morocco was not conjoined to a civilizing mission, but instead, to capitalism, which he argued was illustrated by the fact that large French banks, including the Bank of Paris and the Netherlands, "control either directly, or indirectly a considerable number of industrial and commercial groups" in Morocco.[204] Doriot's efforts to expose the capitalist motivations behind the colonization of Morocco were hailed by the PCF. In a show of support for "the vigorous and decisive intervention of Jacques Doriot," the communist faction within the Chamber of Deputies

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[202] "Le Parti Communiste français unanime félicite Abd-el-Krim pour ses succès," *L'Humanité,* No. 7562 (11 September 1924), 1.
[203] Drake, "The PCF, the Surrealists, *Clarté* and the Rif War," 175.
[204] Doriot is quoted in *Journal Officiel de la Chambre des Députés*, No. 17 (5 February 1925), 558-559.

voted unanimously on February 5, 1925, to abolish the "credit of 325 million [francs] for military spending in Morocco." Although this effort by the twenty-nine members of the communist faction to cut funding to the French military was unsuccessful, Marcel Cachin praised Doriot in *L'Humanité* for clearly showing "the country that these hundreds of millions taken from the pockets of the workers and the farmers of France served only to enrich the sharks of the Bank of Paris and the Netherlands."[205]

Doriot continued to advocate on behalf of the Riffians until May 1925, after French forces engaged in combat with Abd-el-Krim's army. His "insistence that French involvement in Morocco was in the interests of French industrial and financial groups" was intended to suggest that the French working class and the Riffians shared a mutual enemy, thus he promoted the discourse of inclusion that the Party had embraced since its inception. Yet this campaign ignited tensions within the Chamber of Deputies and he was "quickly denounced as a traitor by a number of his fellow parliamentarians." Thereafter, the PCF founded the Comité Central d'Action whose objective was to cultivate a broad base of opposition for the conflict by asserting that "France and Lyautey's imperialist policies were solely responsible for the war."[206] As Slavin notes, an effort to produce and distribute anti-war brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets resulted in a massive protest against French aggression in Morocco, held at Luna Park in Paris on May 16, drawing over fifteen thousand participants.[207] The PCF boasted that the protest was a "magnificent" illustration of the French proletariat's "solidarity with the people of the Riffian republic" and an expression of their outrage at the "hirelings of finance"

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[205] Marcel Cachin, "Les socialistes refusent de voter contre les crédits militaires du Maroc," *L'Humanité*, No. 7756 (6 February 1925), 1.
[206] Drake, "The PCF, the Surrealists, *Clarté* and the Rif War," 176-177.
[207] Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25," 13.

advocating for the war in Morocco.[208] The PCF's campaign against the Rif War continued throughout the rest of 1925, and dozens of other mass protests and rallies were organized. These demonstrations culminated in the general strike organized by the Comité Central d'Action on October 12, 1925. Galvanized by rallying cries like "Down with the imperialist wars" and "Long live immediate peace," several hundred thousand French workers protested for twenty-four hours against the imperialist killings in Morocco.[209]

The Surrealist Strategy

The PCF's efforts in late 1924 and the first half of 1925, made it the sole element of the French Left to take any concrete political action against France's colonial endeavors in Morocco prior to the summer of 1925.[210] While the surrealists offered no explicit commentary on the crisis in the Rif prior to the summer of 1925, they were far from speechless on many of the issues at stake in the debate during this period. As their valorization of non-Europeans demonstrates, the surrealists were extremely vocal about their desire to undermine the chauvinism and rationalism that underpinned the colonial system. Though this anticolonial impetus originated as part of a general critique of Western civilization, by the autumn of 1924, when Breton and Soupault submitted their responses to the survey "On the Mutual Penetrability of East and West," printed by *Les Cahiers du mois* in the first months of 1925, the movement had begun to view anticolonialism as the foundation of their political project. The centrality of this impetus

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[208] "Plus de quinze mille travailleurs condamnent la guerre du Riff," *L'Humanité,* No. 7855 (17 May 1925), 1.
[209] Pierre Sémard, "Prolétariat, défends-toi! Oppose ton action à la réaction capitaliste!" *L'Humanité*, No. 9803 (12 October 1925), 1.
[210] David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 205-207.

to the surrealist project was confirmed in April 1925, by the third edition of *La Révolution surréaliste* and in a lecture delivered by Aragon at Madrid's Residencia des Estudiantes on April 18, 1925.

In the lecture, Aragon asserted that the surrealists were primarily motivated by their desire to eradicate Western civilization. He boasted, "We shall triumph over everything. And first of all we'll destroy this civilization that is so dear to you, in which you are caught like fossils in shale." Aragon restated many of the arguments made by the surrealists in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which had been published just three days prior to his lecture. He declared that the surrealists would continue to look to the primordial knowledge that the movement believed was endemic to non-European cultures to help them topple the intellectual regimes of the Western world. He stated, "Western world, you are condemned to death. We are Europe's defeatists . . . Let the Orient, your terror, answer our voice at last!" Praising the so-called Otherness of the non-Western world, he called upon the populations of European colonies to assert their cultural superiority over Europe by actively rebelling against the colonial system. "Rise, thousand-armed India, great legendary Brahma. It is your turn."[211]

Though he does not mention the Rif War explicitly, the outbreak of fighting between French forces and Abd-el-Krim's Riffian army on April 12, just six days prior to Aragon's address, clearly informed the meaning of the lecture. French newspaper coverage on April 18 ensured that the Rif War was fresh on the minds of the public. For instance, *Le Petit Journal* published a report which confirmed that the Spanish government, eager to preserve its colonial foothold in Morocco, intended to "act in complete agreement with the French government" in terms of its approach to defeating

[211] Louis Aragon, "Fragments d'un Conférence," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 4 (July 1925), 23-25.

the army led by Abd-el-Krim.[212] Similarly, an article in *Le Temps* noted, "supporters of Abd-el-Krim had spread word of the resumption of hostilities [against French and Spanish forces] after the holidays of Ramadan."[213] Given the prominence of such developments in the press, many of those in attendance at Aragon's lecture would have understood his presentation within the context of events unfolding in Morocco. In this sense, Aragon's call for colonized populations to rise up and actively resist their oppression by Europeans must be viewed as an oblique endorsement of the Riffian cause. His insistence that the surrealists "are the ones who always hold out a hand to the enemy" implied that the movement sought to align itself with the Riffians, the enemies of France and Spain who were helping to undermine the hegemony of Western civilization by fighting for their right to self-determination.[214] This anticolonial theme was amplified by the fact that Aragon delivered his address in Madrid, the capital of the Spanish colonial empire. Aragon's muted condemnation of the colonial system confirms that like Doriot and the PCF, the surrealist movement recognized the necessity of a campaign of anticolonialism as the fighting unfolded in Morocco. The fact that Aragon's lecture merely encouraged those in attendance to consider the hypocrisy of Western civilization and offered no specific suggestions about how the surrealists would attempt to undermine European colonialism outside of their general valorization of non-European culture shows that unlike the PCF, the movement had not yet committed itself to concrete political activity. This ambivalence would be replaced by a commitment to revolutionary

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[212] "Le Général Primo de Rivera ne retournera peut-être pas au Maroc," *Le Petit Journal*, No. 22738 (18 April 1925), 3.
[213] "Afrique du Nord," *Le Temps*, No. 23260 (18 April 1925), 3.
[214] Aragon, "Fragments d'un Conférence," 23-25.

action consistent with surrealism's language of destruction as the conflict in the Rif intensified by July 1925.

Prior to April 1925, French forces were not actively fighting in the Rif, thus the surrealists likely believed that the inflammatory anticolonial rhetoric they had embraced for the better part of a year was sufficient to articulate their contempt for France's colonial endeavors. However, once French forces began to clash with Abd-el-Krim's army, it soon became clear that words alone were not enough to undermine the strength of France's colonial apparatus. With the French army fighting furiously to secure their colonial foothold in Morocco, support for the war in France remained strong. A large segment of the French population viewed the Riffian uprising as a threat that could undermine France's national prestige and the ability of the Third Republic to implement its *mission civilisatrice*.[215] For instance, conservatives like the journalist Henri Vonoven contended that France's involvement in the Rif was essentially a matter of defending French civilization. He proclaimed, "Abd-el-Krim presents us with a problem of national honor, defense and French prestige."[216] Many of those serving within the Chamber of Deputies agreed with Vonoven's assessment. After three days of intense debate about France's involvement in Morocco, the Chamber voted almost unanimously on May 30, 1925, to continue to support and fund the military's efforts against Abd-el-Krim, with only the twenty-nine members of the communist faction voting in opposition. Several of the deputies championing France's intervention in the Rif argued that the Third Republic had been provoked by the unwarranted and barbaric aggression of Abd-el-Krim. The socialist Pierre Renaudel attempted to legitimize the intervention and the military's brutal

[215] Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 217.
[216] Henri Vonoven, "La rédaction difficile," *Le Figaro*, No. 146 (26 May 1925), 1.

tactics when he declared: "I say with clarity my belief: the attitude we have had in Morocco, the way we have developed our grip on the territories, is not foreign to the decisions that were taken by Abd-el-Krim."[217] Supporters viewed the war as a justified defense of French honor and of Western civilization. During the debate within the Chamber, major newspapers like *Le Temps* praised the "desirable policy of France with regard to the necessary repression of the aggression of Abd-el-Krim and his supporters" and suggested that the Third Republic's intentions were noble and consistent with its civilizing mission. France was not interested in conquest, but instead, aspired only to "maintain order and peace in areas entrusted to her care."[218] Similarly, the outcome of the debate was celebrated by the editorial staff at the conservative *Le Petit Journal*, which argued that the vote proved to Abd-el-Krim that the "entire French nation, with all its strengths, is in front of him on the Ouergha [River]."[219]

That the Third Republic's colonial efforts in Morocco were supported by such a large coalition confirmed to the surrealists that their criticisms had done little to destabilize the colonial system. As Breton would later acknowledge, this realization illustrated the necessity of coordinated political action against the war.[220] Since the surrealists had never organized a political demonstration, it took nearly two months after the outbreak of combat for the movement to coordinate what they believed to be an adequate response to the hostilities in the Rif. This response, however, was distinctly surrealist in nature, relying on absurd and perhaps frivolous theatrics. The occasion was

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[217] Renaudel is quoted in *Journal Officiel de la Chambre des Députés*, No. 71 (27 May 1925), 2444.
[218] "Debat sur le Maroc," *Le Temps*, No. 23302 (30 May 1925), 1.
[219] "L'unanimité du vote du Parlement a réconforté nos protégés marocains," *Le Petit Journal,* No. 22781 (31 May 1925), 3.
[220] See André Breton, "What is Surrealism?" in *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings,* edited by Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Monad Press, 1978), 157. Breton originally delivered "What is Surrealism?" as a lecture in Brussels on June 1, 1934. The speech was later issued as a pamphlet.

a banquet to honor the Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux, held by the publishing firm Mercure de France at the Closerie des Lilas in Paris, on July 2, 1925.[221] Saint-Pol-Roux was a favorite of the movement and a figure Breton regarded as "magnificent," thus the surrealists attended the banquet to convey their admiration for the poet.[222] Yet the surrealists also used the banquet as a forum to express a political statement.

As Durozoi notes, Breton's cohort "were careful to arrive [at the Closerie des Lilas] somewhat early," which enabled them to hide a copy of their "Open Letter to M. Paul Claudel, French Ambassador to Japan" under each plate at the restaurant.[223] Dated July 1, the letter was signed by twenty-eight members of the movement, including Aragon, Artaud, Breton, Desnos, Éluard, Leiris, Péret, and Soupault, emphasizing the fact that the document was indeed a collective response to statements made by Claudel during an interview with the Italian press in June 1925, which was reprinted by the French periodical *Comoedia* on June 17, 1925. In the interview, Claudel made a series of self-congratulatory claims about his patriotism and service to France during the First World War. He stated, "Many are surprised not that I am a good Catholic, but a writer, a diplomat, French ambassador, and a poet. But I find nothing strange about this." He continued, "During the war, I went to South America to buy wheat, tinned meat, and lard for the army, and managed to save my country some two hundred million francs." Claudel's reflection on his ability to negotiate favorable prices for France during the war followed an incisive comment he made about the French avant-garde. Eager to portray the avant-garde as a corrosive and degenerative force that was undermining the patriotic work he and others like him had done for France, he declared, "As for the present

[221] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 90.
[222] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 112.
[223] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 90.

movements, not one can lead to a genuine renewal or creation. Neither Dadaism nor surrealism which have only one meaning: pederasty."[224]

Disgusted by Claudel's chauvinism and arrogance, the surrealists opened their response: "The only pederastic thing about our activity is the confusion it introduces into the minds of those who do not take part in it. Creation matters little to us." Alluding to their disapproval of French actions against the Riffians, the letter continued, "We profoundly hope that revolutions, wars, and colonial insurrections will annihilate this Western civilization whose vermin you defend even in the Far East, and we call upon this destruction as the state of things least inacceptable to the mind." This was consistent with earlier critiques penned by the surrealists, as it demonstrated that the movement was still very much interested in witnessing the West's defeat by those cultures Europeans had long exploited and oppressed. Furthermore, this passage suggested that Claudel was loathsome for even trying to legitimize Western civilization to the Japanese as France's ambassador. As far as Breton and the surrealists were concerned, Claudel was helping to infect non-Europeans with Western rationality. Eager to reiterate that they aimed to eradicate Western institutions and viewed their project as European reason's Other, the surrealists declared, "We take this opportunity to dissociate ourselves publicly from all that is French, in words and in actions. We assert that we find treason and all that can harm the security of the State one way or another much more reconcilable with Poetry than the sale of 'large quantities of lard' on behalf of a nation of pigs and dogs."[225] Mocking the ambassador as a cog in a larger barbaric machine, the surrealists asserted

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[224] "Interview with Paul Claudel," in *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, 348. Originally published in *Comoedia*, 17 June 1925.

[225] André Breton, et al., "Open Letter to M. Paul Claudel, French Ambassador to Japan," in *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, 348-349.

that they would continue to do everything in their power to undermine the nation of France. As the letter stated, this would include supporting anti-French insurrections, like the one unfolding at that moment in the Rif.

As Durozoi has written, the distribution of the "Open Letter to M. Paul Claudel" by the surrealists was "hardly conducive to an atmosphere of serenity among the guests at the banquet."[226] The sense of unease the letter engendered at the banquet was compounded by the fact that earlier that same day, *L'Humanité* released a manifesto titled "Call to Intellectual Workers," which explicitly addressed the Rif War. Penned by Henri Barbusse, a member of the PCF and leader of the Clarté group, the statement posed the question "yes or no, do you oppose the war?" Among the 106 writers and intellectuals on the French left who endorsed the piece was a large contingent of the surrealists, including Breton, Aragon, Crevel, Desnos, Éluard, Artaud, and Leiris.[227] Barbusse's tone was deliberately moderate and "steeped in reformism, humanism and pacifism" since he hoped to "build the broadest possible consensus" in opposition to France's involvement in the crisis.[228] The piece lamented "the tragic events of Morocco" and the "imperialist origin" of the conflict. It championed "the right of peoples, of all peoples, of whatever race they belong, to self-determination."[229] Though the piece did not overtly endorse the violent means through which Abd-el-Krim and his followers hoped to secure their independence, Barbusse and his collaborators affirmed the right of colonized groups to determine their own allegiances. In this sense, it rejected France's colonial project.

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[226] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 90.
[227] Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960*, 206.
[228] Drake, "The PCF, the Surrealists, *Clarté* and the Rif War," 182.
[229] Henri Barbusse, "Appel Aux Travailleurs Intellectuels: Oui ou non condamnez-vous la guerre?" *L'Humanité*, No. 7901 (2 July 1925), 1.

Durozoi notes that the majority of the guests who were in attendance at the banquet, including conservatives figures within the avant-garde like Joseph-Henri Rosny, Jean Royère, Édouard Dujardin, Lugné-Poë, and the author Marguerite Vallette-Eymery, known within the avant-garde as Rachilde, would have seen the "Call to Intellectual Workers" earlier in the day and been aware that the text "strongly opposed national policy."[230] Thus the distribution of the surrealists' response to Claudel, which reiterated the movement's disgust for France and Western civilization, likely exacerbated tensions at the banquet. The banquet featured a number of speakers, including Rachilde, who praised France and mocked other nations like Germany during her speech. This provoked the surrealists. Breton reacted by creating a disturbance during the middle of Rachilde's address. He stood up and forcefully declared that her words were offensive to his German friend, Max Ernst, who was also in attendance. Thereafter, one of the surrealists began throwing fruit toward Rachilde and the banquet erupted into an uproar. Rachilde recalled in an interview that "The tables were knocked over, the dishes trampled. The adversaries came to blows, while the windows were smashed."[231] Members of Breton's cohort shouted phrases like "Long live Germany! Bravo China! Up with the Rifs!" The police were summoned as the riot began to spill out onto the Boulevard Montparnasse and Leiris exclaimed from a window to the crowd gathered on the street: "Down with France!" The disturbance ended when several of the surrealists were arrested, including Leiris, who was beaten by the police.[232]

The surrealists' riot, and the anti-French and anticolonial sentiments they expressed during the uproar, did not go unnoticed. Durozoi notes that in the days

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[230] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 92.
[231] Rachilde is quoted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 113.
[232] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 114.

following the tumultuous banquet the surrealists were labeled as traitors by most of the French press. Several notable literary institutions in France, namely the Société des Gens de Lettres and the Association des Écrivains Combattants, denounced the movement and avenged "the honor of Rachilde, the [French] flag, and civilization."[233] Orion, a columnist for *L'Action française*, was particularly incensed and urged that the surrealists be barred from the "road that leads to the great public." He recommended that French columnists "say nothing of their articles, their books, until they have adopted somewhat less unworthy methods of publicity."[234] Orion's hope was that by ignoring the antics of the surrealists, the movement would eventually lose its energy, forcing it to disband.

Despite the publicity generated by their actions, the surrealist protest at the banquet for Saint-Pol-Roux did little to cultivate real support outside of the membership of the movement for their anticolonial agenda. As Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron notes, the antics the surrealists deployed to communicate their disaffection with the Third Republic and its colonial project resulted in the widespread "loss of the popularity they had still been enjoying" outside of the avant-garde prior to the banquet.[235] By the same token, Breton's publication of a photograph of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in the fourth edition of *La Révolution surréaliste*, released in the middle of July, did little to cultivate a broader base of support.[236] As I argued in the previous chapter, Picasso's path-breaking painting aimed at exposing the fallacy of European cultural superiority and the visual language mobilized within the image was aligned with a broader anticolonial

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[233] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 92.
[234] Orion, "Lettre ouverte aux courriéristes," *L'Action française*, No. 187 (6 July 1925), 4.
[235] Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, translated by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 42.
[236] *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 4 (15 July 1925), 7.

impetus.[237] The surrealists' attempt to claim Picasso and his painting as their own via its inclusion within *La Révolution surréaliste* suggests that the movement believed *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* could help them to better illustrate their opposition to the colonial imaginary which had motivated France's exploits in Morocco. Yet the movement's theatrics at the banquet for Saint-Pol-Roux, its endorsement of Barbusse's "Call to Intellectual Workers," and its publication of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* did not galvanize broader support for surrealist anticolonialism. If anything, these efforts seem to have had the opposite effect.

On July 7, 1925, Lucien Romier, the chief editor of *Le Figaro*, warned in an editorial essay that the population of France should support the efforts of the Third Republic because the conflict in Morocco threatened not only the stability of French rule in North Africa, but more importantly, France's "entire colonial empire and, as a result, [France's] position of great power."[238] On the same day, *Le Figaro* published a manifesto titled "Intellectuals on the Side of the Fatherland," which was formulated as a direct response to the "Call to Intellectual Workers." Signed by hundreds of right-wing intellectuals and writers, most of whom were affiliated with the academy, the tract praised the French troops fighting in Morocco, referring to them as the protectors of "law, civilization, and peace." The document lambasted Barbusse and his fellow signatories for debasing France and its civilizing mission, which was described in the manifesto as a noble and worthwhile project that delivered to the African continent a state of order, peace, and progress. The document characterized Abd-el-Krim's army as a band of barbaric "looters" intent on destroying civilization and it claimed that those who

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[237] Leighten, "The White Peril and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism," 621-627.
[238] Lucien Romier, "Les réalités du Maroc," *Le Figaro*, No. 188 (7 July 1925), 1.

supported the Riffian cause should be viewed as proponents of moral and cultural degeneration. Additionally, "Intellectuals on the Side of the Fatherland" attempted to reassure the French forces fighting in Morocco that those who opposed France's colonial project represented a tiny minority of the French population. The manifesto claimed that the "immense majority of intellectuals and writers" support the French troops and stand "on the side of the Fatherland."[239]

Even moderate figures like Léon Blum, the leader of the French Socialist Party, announced their support for France's *mission civilisatrice* in the week following the surrealist protest and the publication of the "Call to Intellectual Workers." During the session of the Chamber of Deputies held on July 9, Blum suggested that France should begin to reduce the importance of the military to the colonial project, but he also noted that France had a duty to colonize the non-European world. He stated, "We admit the right and even the duty of superior races to bring the same degree of culture to those who have not succeeded in achieving it, and to summon them to progress realized thanks to the achievements of science and industry."[240] While he did not support the use of overt force to administer France's civilizing mission, Blum believed that French culture and thought was inherently superior to that of the non-European world.

A New but Uneasy Alliance

It is in this context that Breton's circle turned to the PCF, and specifically to the Clarté group. The fiasco of the surrealists' attempt to challenge French colonial rule compared unfavorably to the communists' relative success in organizing mass protests,

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[239] François Mauriac, et al., "Les Intellectuels aux côtés de la Patrie: Adresse aux troupes françaises qui combattent au Maroc," *Le Figaro*, No. 188 (7 July 1925), 1.
[240] Blum is quoted in *Journal Officiel de la Chambre des Députés*, No. 96 (9 July 1925), 3314-3318.

like the one held at Luna Park on May 16, against France's campaign in Morocco.[241] It was clear that the surrealists' tactics would have to change. Following the publication of Barbusse's "Call to Intellectual Workers," the radical editors Jean Bernier and Marcel Fourrier began to exert a greater influence over the Clarté group and they agreed to collaborate with the surrealists on an anticolonial agenda. After a series of meetings between the Clartéists and Breton's circle, during which the issues relating to this common agenda were discussed at length, the two groups penned "The Revolution First and Always!" in August 1925. Printed for the first time by *L'Humanité* on September 21, 1925, and appearing again in both *Clarté* and *La Révolution surréaliste* on October 15, the manifesto was signed by all of the members of Breton's circle, the Clartéists, and many of the young writers associated with the journals *Philosophies* and *Correspondence*, like Henri Lefebvre, Camille Goemans, and Paul Nougé.[242] The document testified to the belief that political action was a necessary response to the colonial capitalism of the Rif War and it also helps to account for why the movement was willing to move beyond its ambivalence toward Marxist theory.

The manifesto articulated important continuities and discontinuities with the movement's earlier thought. Like earlier texts and images, "The Revolution First and Always!" insisted that the surrealist movement viewed itself as Europe's Other. It read, "We are certainly Barbarians, since a certain form of civilization disgusts us" and reiterated an interest in "total detachment, and in a sense our purification, from the ideas still rigidly forming the basis of European civilization." This reaffirmation of Otherness alluded to the surrealists' desire to align the movement with the colonized cultures that

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[241] Drake, "The PCF, the Surrealists, *Clarté* and the Rif War," 184-185.
[242] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 118-119.

the West viewed as culturally and intellectually inferior. Suggesting that the knowledge and culture embraced by the West was inherently exploitative and thus repugnant, the surrealists and their collaborators turned their "gaze towards Asia" because the cultural traditions of the Asian societies possessed the capacity to liberate humankind from the bonds imposed upon it by both reason and capitalism. They argued, "It is the Mongols' turn to set up camp in our squares." This valorization of non-European thought and culture helps to account for why the movement was so bitterly opposed to France's military exploits in Morocco. The surrealists supported the Riffians because they believed that their culture was inherently superior to that of Europe and could provide the movement with access to the knowledge they believed was necessary to liberate humanity from the West's regime of reason. This knowledge was at risk of being totally obliterated by France in the name of colonial capitalism.

For the first time, Breton's collective mobilized Marxist rhetoric to articulate their position on the colonial question. The manifesto opened by calling the Rif crisis an "*absolutely shocking* state of affairs" and continued with the assertion: "Beyond the reawakening of the self-respect" of peoples who "wish for nothing more than to regain their independence, or the unappeasable conflict of the work and social demands at the very heart of the states still holding power in Europe, we believe in the inevitability of total deliverance . . . in the end humanity will have no choice but to change its relations." Referring to the end of history as foretold by Marx, the authors of the manifesto implied that all those who had been oppressed by the European bourgeoisie, including colonized cultures and the working classes, were on the cusp of acquiring the self-awareness necessary to overcome the nearly hegemonic forces exploiting them. The surrealists and

their collaborators were eager to assist these groups in their struggle because they feared that if the Rif rebels were defeated, and their culture destroyed by France, the West would succeed in further subjugating humanity to the brutal, dehumanizing strictures of capitalism, alienating individuals from the experience of true liberty. They noted, "Wherever Western civilization reigns, all human attachment but that motivated by self-interest has ceased, 'money is the bottom line.' For over a century, human dignity has been reduced to the level of exchange value." The conception of liberty proposed within the document by the surrealists was predicated on the belief that freedom is bound to an individual's ability to maintain a connection with fundamental spiritual and material needs, as well as with other humans. Breton and his cohort admitted that "we vitally need liberty, but a liberty modeled on our most profound spiritual needs, on the strictest and most human demands of our flesh." The surrealists' rejected capitalism because its fetishism of money undermined the innate value of human life while alienating humans from their own desires and from meaningful exchange with others. This portrayal of oppression as intimately bound to capitalism must be viewed as an important shift in the movement's anticolonial rhetoric. [243]

The surrealist position on capitalism, as articulated in "The Revolution First and Always," must be viewed as the common conceptual framework that permitted the surrealist movement to collaborate with the Clartéists. In other words, like the PCF, the surrealist movement came to agree that capitalism enslaved populations. Additionally, both groups believed that colonialism was inextricably conjoined to the capitalist system. As the "The Revolution First and Always!" suggested, "It is already not only unjust but monstrous that those who do not own property should be subjected by those who do, but

[243] "La Révolution d'abord et toujours," *L'Humanité*, No. 9782 (21 September 1925), 2.

when this oppression goes beyond the bounds of simple wage labor, and assumes the form of slavery inflicted on populations by international high finance, it becomes an iniquity for which no massacre could begin to atone for." This passage shows that the surrealists and the Clartéists both viewed the rebellion in the Rif as a legitimate attempt by an enslaved population to overcome the capitalist constraints forced upon them by French colonialism. In this sense, "The Revolution First and Always!" testifies to the fact that while the surrealists had not yet committed themselves to materialism, the necessity of political action made apparent by France's militaristic intervention in the Rif compelled Breton and his followers to willfully amend their position on colonialism to more closely align with that of the Marxists. Thus anticolonialism offered to Breton's circle an opportunity to engage with Marxist theory in manner that did not totally compromise the movement's belief that a resurgence of the irrational was a necessary element of a broader revolution against Western values. Of course this engagement with the PCF was motivated by the surrealist movement's desire to more effectively campaign against the Third Republic's colonial enterprise and the *mission civilisatrice*. In this way, "The Revolution First and Always!" demonstrates that the surrealists had come to believe that the "revolt against history" which the movement had championed since its inception would only be realized when their mutiny against Western rationalism was coupled with a revolution, as they put it, "in social form."[244]

Like "The Revolution First and Always," an essay included within the fifth edition of *La Révolution surréaliste*, published on October 15, 1925, confirmed that despite the movement's willingness to collaborate with the PCF on anticolonialism, the surrealists were still unwilling to totally abandon their commitment to the revolution of

[244] Ibid.

the mind in favor of strict materialism. In "Letter to Seers," Breton championed clairvoyants, a segment of the European population that he believed had access to the lost wisdom of the non-European world. Breton claimed that during a visit to one of these seers, he was encouraged to travel within China for six years (until 1931), since this sojourn to the East would enable him to discover the lost, primordial wisdom that the surrealists hoped to encounter in their exploration of dreams. He recalled that the experience with the clairvoyant unfolded as if "doors were opening in the Orient, as if the echo of an all-enfolding agitation reached me, as if a breath, which might well be that of Freedom, suddenly makes the old chest of Europe, on which I had gone to sleep, resound."[245] This reflection demonstrated that Breton remained firm in his belief that the knowledge inherent to non-European cultures, not Marxism, would enable the surrealist movement to stimulate a new form of consciousness capable of toppling the hegemony of rationality in the West. Breton implied that the surrealists united with the PCF because both groups viewed the anticolonial struggle as a crucial facet of their own unique project. For the PCF, anticolonialism was merely an extension of the proletariat's own revolutionary activity, whereas for the surrealists it was a manifestation of the rising up of irrationality over Western reason. Therefore, despite their recent collaborations with the Clartéists, "Letter to Seers" showed that Breton remained unwilling to embrace what Eugene Lunn calls "the mechanical materialism and dictatorial behavior of official Communism" as a means to achieve his goal of subverting bourgeois rationalism and the dense network of oppressive institutions engendered by this intellectual tradition.[246]

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[245] André Breton, "Lettres aux Voyants," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 5 (15 October 1925), 20-22.
[246] Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 57.

Breton continued by arguing that despite their role as "guardians of the Secret . . . the great Secret, the Unrevealable," clairvoyants had been systematically oppressed by bourgeois society. In fact, it was precisely because they possessed access to the primordial that the bourgeoisie sought to marginalize clairvoyants, dismissing their craft as absurd and by repeatedly submitting mediums to "the observation of doctors, 'scholars,' and other illiterates." He lamented their plight, claiming that for these visionaries, "Life, undesirable life, goes on ravishingly." Though he was disgusted by their treatment, Breton was also dismayed by the consistent patience and passivity of these clairvoyants. He claimed that the willingness of seers to accept their position in modern society served to legitimize the "scientific" views of the bourgeoisie, thereby justifying their marginalization. In other words, Breton believed that the seers played a role in their own oppression. He encouraged them to awaken from their passivity and to forcefully assert the "all-powerful authority" their engagement with the primordial afforded them to demolish the "woeful 'legal' limits" imposed upon them by the bourgeoisie.[247] Although this attempt to encourage European clairvoyants to awaken from their ignorance to help in the struggle against Western civilization paralleled the rhetoric of false consciousness championed by doctrinaire Marxists, Breton refused to employ the language of historical materialism.[248] It is clear that Breton used "Letter to Seers" to advocate for revolutionary action aimed at toppling the regime of bourgeois reason in the West, but he refused to do so in overtly Marxist terms. This reluctance stemmed from the fact that despite the desire of communists to create an entirely new form of society, Marxist theory was still a Western ideology. The fact that Breton used

[247] Breton, "Lettres aux Voyants," 20-22.
[248] For more on false consciousness see Christopher L. Pines, *Ideology and False Consciousness: Marx and his Historical Progenitors* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

his "Letter to Seers" to valorize the primordial, non-Western knowledge to which clairvoyants had access, demonstrates that he feared Marxist theory was not capable of truly liberating humanity from the limitations of rationalism. For Breton and the surrealists, Marxism was not sufficiently revolutionary.

Breton's "Leon Trotsky's 'Lenin,'" which appeared in the same issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* on October 15, 1925, confirmed why the surrealists were attracted to the PCF outside of their position on anticolonialism. In the opening sentence of the piece, Breton sought to dispel the view that the surrealist movement maintained "a less-than-favourable judgment of the Russian revolution and the spirit of its leaders." Instead, he emphasized his personal admiration for the revolutionary leaders, who, using Marxism's spirit of radical critique, were able to dismantle successfully the institutions and conventions of the bourgeoisie, replacing them with a new form of social life in Russia. Concerned about the potential of a coordinated Marxist revolution to limit the aesthetic creativity of individuals, he nevertheless acknowledged that "Good or mediocre in itself, defensible or not from the moral point of view, how can we forget its role as the instrument by which ancient buildings are destroyed, as it reveals itself to be the most marvellous agent ever for the substitution of one world for another." Suggesting that the Marxists realized more of their political objectives than any other radical movement, including surrealism, Breton's passage alludes to the rationale behind his movement's attraction to the project of the PCF. Unlike the surrealist movement, whose only attempt to coordinate revolutionary action at the Saint-Pol-Roux banquet resulted in little more than condemnations in the French press, the communists were far more effective at organizing mass demonstrations and protests. Of course, the Russian Revolution also

testified to the ability of communists to realize their revolutionary goals through collective political action. Breton conceded, "I believe, indeed, that communism alone among organized systems permits the accomplishment of the greatest social transformation."[249] While Breton's piece recognized the efficacy of Marxist political activity, he did not suggest that the surrealists would embrace in full the ideology of the PCF. Breton was obliquely acknowledging that the goals of surrealism could only be achieved through collective political action. Additionally, the complimentary tone adopted throughout the piece may suggest that Breton was strategically trying to foster amicable relations between his own group and the PCF to maintain the possibility of further anticolonial collaborations. Since the Rif War made it apparent that surrealism could not effectively topple colonialism with its language of destruction alone, Breton was eager to maintain relations with a useful ally in the movement's struggle against the colonial imaginary.

Breton's eagerness to collaborate with the PCF on anticolonialism compelled the surrealists to sign another important political manifesto issued by the PCF in response to the war, which in the autumn of 1925, was still unfolding with no end in sight. Published on October 16, just one day after the fifth installment of *La Révolution surréaliste*, "To the Soldiers and Sailors" attacked colonialism by arguing that France had not learned anything from the destruction of the First World War. "In spite of the promises made to us in 1918, war has again broken out in Morocco, as horrible as the one that ravaged the war for more than four years." The document aimed at convincing French soldiers and sailors that the Rif War was not a matter of national prestige, but instead, that the conflict was a result of capitalist greed. To its intended audience, the manifesto suggested, "You

[249] André Breton, "Léon Trotsky 'Lénine,'" *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 5 (15 October 1925), 29.

are being sent to die in Morocco to allow the bankers to get their hands on the natural resources of the Riff Republic to line the pockets of few capitalists. *You are fighting the bankers' war*." By arguing that French involvement in Rif was occurring only to help an elite segment of the population accumulate as much wealth as possible, the surrealists adopted an explicitly anti-capitalist tone to frame their anticolonial project. This demonstrates that the surrealists were willing to adopt the rhetoric of the PCF as a means of galvanizing the military around an anticolonial campaign. The true enemy of the military was not the Riffians, but the capitalists who viewed the lives of the soldiers and sailors fighting in Morocco as expendable. In fact, the plight of French soldiers and sailors was analogous to the Riffians against whom they were fighting.[250]

"To the Soldiers and Sailors" was not designed to simply inform its audience that they were being manipulated for capitalist ends. The PCF and the surrealists also expressed their empathy for the French soldiers and sailors being forced to wage war in Morocco. The signatories asserted, "Comrades, soldiers, sailors, we have confidence in you: we know you will do your duty toward the Riffians who are struggling for their independence. You will not be the flunkeys of the banks." The text emphasized the notion that French soldiers and sailors were not passive and unthinking automatons entirely at the disposal of their superiors and the economically elite. On the contrary, those fighting for France in Morocco were historical agents free to make decisions about the war and the significance of their individual actions. The text attempted to instill in French soldiers and sailors a sense of self-awareness and thus a subversive political consciousness.

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[250] Georges Altman, et al., "Aux soldats et aux marins," *L'Humanité*, No. 9807 (16 October 1925), 2.

"To the Soldiers and Sailors" concluded by suggesting a specific course of action that could be used to undermine France's illegitimate war effort and assert the human dignity of those actually involved in the fighting. The manifesto encouraged French combatants to reflect on a series of examples from history, like "the Russian Bolsheviks, the glorious sailors of the Black Sea, [and] the soldiers of Odessa" to convince them that the war could be stopped by actively fraternizing with the so-called enemy. "You know your duty: FRATERNIZE WITH THE RIFFIANS. STOP THE MOROCCAN WAR . . . Down with the war in Morocco! Long live fraternization with the Riffians!"[251] This strategy was predicated on the belief that the Riffians were not the Other, but rather, an admirable group compelled by the ideals of independence and liberty. In promoting this strategy of fraternization, the surrealists aligned themselves directly with the PCF, which had been encouraging this specific tactic since January 1925. This strategy conformed to the discourse of inclusion about colonized groups the PCF had promoted since 1922.[252]

That most of the surrealists, including Breton, Aragon, Desnos, Éluard, Ernst, Leiris, Péret, and Soupault, endorsed "To the Soldiers and Sailors" confirms that the movement recognized the necessity of overt and subversive political action as a response to the fighting in the Rif. Moreover, the document demonstrates that the surrealists still believed their anticolonial agenda was compatible with that of the Marxists and that their subversive ambitions could be realized by collaborating with the PCF. Yet the surrealist engagement with the PCF posed certain challenges to their idealistic program, and a critic from within their ranks was eager to point these out, causing a new split within the movement. Pierre Naville, who along with Péret had served as an editor of the first three

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[251] Ibid., 181-183.
[252] Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25," 11-12.

editions of *La Révolution surréaliste*, issued his pamphlet "The Revolution and the Intellectuals" in early 1926, announcing his skepticism about the collaboration of the surrealists with factions of the PCF. By no means did Naville oppose the political project of the PCF. In fact, shortly after the publication of his pamphlet he would quietly leave the surrealist movement and officially join the Party.[253] Rather, Naville was eager to show that these recent collaborations had muddled the political position of the surrealist movement and he called for Breton's circle to express more concretely what it was that they believed and hoped to accomplish. He argued that since it began collaborating with the PCF, the movement had failed to distinguish precisely whether surrealism favored political or intellectual revolution as the central impetus of its anti-Western project.

Moreover, Naville accused surrealism of participating in spectacles like the Saint-Pol-Roux banquet, not to achieve political goals, but rather, to champion anarchy and absurdity. He contended that surrealism, like Dada, had fallen into the trap of championing individual expression above all else, which compelled them to embrace a "negative attitude of anarchic order . . . dictated by a refusal to compromise its own existence and the sacred character of the individual in a struggle that would lead to the disciplined action of the class struggle." Surrealism's metaphysical attitude was far too detached from the realities of social life to inspire any observable transformation of modern life. He suggested that the movement needed to come to terms with the fact that aesthetic revolt was not synonymous with political revolution and he demanded that the surrealists make a definitive choice as to whether the individual or the collective would be exalted.

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[253] Taoua, "Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture," 87.

According to Naville, if surrealism was going to achieve its goal of subverting Western rationalism, it had to adopt "the revolutionary path, the only revolutionary path, the Marxist path."[254] Naville believed that the mind could not be liberated without first altering the structure of society. He also called for the movement to abandon its obsession with its "abusive use of the Orient myth." Instead of obsessing over the intellectual and cultural traditions of non-Western peoples, he argued that the movement should concern itself with the wage inequities generated by capitalism which enslaved the vast majority of the world's population, both European and non-European alike. He declared, "Wages are a material necessity by which three-quarters of the world's population are bound, independent of the philosophical or moral conceptions of the so-called Orientals or Occidentals. Under the rod of capital, both are exploited. This is all their present ideology."[255] By helping to construct the dictatorship of the proletariat, the strictures of Western civilization which surrealism found so abhorrent would be entirely eradicated, opening the door for them to pursue their metaphysical revolution. Furthermore, it is clear that Naville believed the primary distinction that surrealism should strive to transcend was not that between the rational and irrational or European and non-European, but that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In other words, he encouraged the surrealists to adopt the discourse of inclusion championed by the PCF. Although "To the Soldiers and Sailors" implied that the movement was willing to adopt this position for strategic purposes, the rest of the surrealist output during the period suggested that the movement would continue to valorize non-Europeans.

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[254] Pierre Naville, "La Révolution et les intellectuels: Que peuvent faire les surréalistes?" quoted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 128.
[255] Ibid., 129.

Breton's Response

Fearing that Naville's pamphlet would fragment the movement, Breton seized the opportunity to clarify the objectives of surrealism. He responded by publishing his essay "Légitime défense*"* in September 1926. Breton's response articulated that in principle the surrealists supported the communist project, but he argued that much more than a revolution of the proletariat would be needed to replace Western civilization with a more tolerable form of social relations. The preoccupation of Marxists with the material conditions of life had failed to produce the revolutionaries needed to dismantle Western rationalism and the hegemony of the European bourgeoisie. He wrote, "Class instinct seems to me to have everything to lose which the instinct of individual preservation has, in the most mediocre sense, to gain. It is not the material advantage which each man may hope to derive from the revolution which will dispose him to stake his life – *his life* – on the red card." The PCF's promise that life would improve for those who rebelled against bourgeois institutions was far from the truth. For true revolutionaries, existence would be defined by sacrifice and loss, potentially of life itself. Breton elaborated, "He must be given all the reasons for sacrificing the little he may hold for the nothing he risks having. These reasons we know, they are our own. They are, I think, those of all revolutionaries."[256] Breton contended that unlike the PCF, the surrealist movement's radical interests could not be contained within the confines of the political realm, since in addition to politics the movement was preoccupied with transforming the life of the human mind. It was this concern for mental activity which Breton believed would attract true revolutionaries, dissatisfied both with the bourgeois hierarchy of things and thought.

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[256] André Breton, "Légitime défense," in *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, 48-49. After its initial release in September 1926, "Légitime défense" was reprinted in *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 8 (December 1926), 30-36.

As Taoua observes, Breton viewed surrealist revolt, "conceived of outside of a strictly political context" as a far "more noble pursuit than the path to revolution defined by the Communist Party."[257]

Breton rejected what he viewed as the rigidity of Marxist doctrine. He argued that that which constituted the "revolutionary flame" should not be determined by a small group who "decree that it can burn only here or there."[258] Alluding to the movement's Dadaist and anarchist heritage, Breton suggested that surrealism was far more open to the range of revolutionary possibilities than the PCF. This openness enabled surrealism to resist being absorbed by any one particular set of doctrines, which Breton believed would drain the movement of its revolutionary vigor forcing it to conform to an ideology of Western origins. He proclaimed, "It seems to us that revolt alone is creative, and that is why we consider that all subjects of revolt are valid."[259] Moreover, he claimed that it was of the utmost importance that "the experiment of inner life continue, and do so, of course, without external or even Marxist control."[260] Surrealism was truly revolutionary because it continued to exalt the unrestricted expression of individuals and because it positioned itself as a critical outsider to all systems of politics and thought, including those viewed by the mainstream as radical. For Breton, these so-called radical political systems that conformed to Western rationality included communism.

Breton also used "Légitime défense" to defend surrealism against Naville's claim that the movement had abused the myth of the Orient. In doing so, Breton clarified the movement's official position on colonialism. He argued that the word "[Orient], which

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[257] Taoua, "Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture," 88.
[258] Breton, "Légitime défense," in *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, 49.
[259] Ibid., 53.
[260] Ibid., 56.

plays, in fact, like many others, on various double meanings, has been uttered more and more in recent years." He suggested that for a large segment of the French intelligentsia, including figures like Massis and Valéry, the Orient stimulated a great deal of anxiety, since they believed it embodied an irrational, barbaric threat to Western civilization. This characterization, which asserted European cultural superiority, was deployed by the West to justify colonial oppression and exploitation. For a smaller segment, which included the surrealists, the word referred to the cultures that harbored the mysterious, yet enlightened and primordial knowledge the movement believed would allow them to engage with the marvelous and destabilize the control of rationality over mental activity. As France's involvement in the Rif War proved, non-European thought and culture, like that of the Riffian Berbers, was viewed by Europeans as a threat which could corrode the stability of Western civilization. Since this outcome was precisely what the surrealists hoped to achieve, Breton asked, "Why, under these conditions, should we not continue to claim our inspiration from the Orient?" The surrealists supported the Rifs and other cultures from the "Orient" as a deliberate attempt to challenge the fallacy of European cultural superiority.

Drawing inspiration and knowledge from non-Western sources was intended to undermine rationalism. It was also used to show the West that European civilization was morally and intellectually bankrupt. Indeed, Breton argued that surrealism's use of the myth of the Orient illuminated "what [the surrealists] cannot tolerate . . . that the equilibrium of man, broken, it is true, in the West, for the sake of its material nature, should hope to recover itself in the world by consenting to new sacrifices to its material

nature."[261] Knowledge acquired from the Orient underlined the centrality of mental activity to human liberation. Changes in material conditions always entail material sacrifices of some kind, thus humans cannot truly be free if they are totally consumed by these types of concerns. These words reiterate Breton's belief that Marxism could not successfully achieve the radical transformation of human life envisioned by the surrealists. Marxist systems still subjugated humanity to material sacrifices engendered by a commitment to rationalism, which the surrealists hoped to transcend. In this sense, Breton's defense of his movement's use of the Orient myth demonstrated that the surrealists would continue to mobilize a discourse of valorization, and ultimately Otherness, in relation to non-Europeans. While "Légitime défense" articulated important differences between the surrealist political project and that of the PCF, it did not dismiss Marxism entirely. Breton concluded the essay by arguing that despite his many doubts about the ability of Marxism to achieve the radical social, political, and intellectual transformation of Western civilization, he was "not ready to turn elsewhere."[262] The surrealist turn toward the PCF did not overturn the movement's anticolonialism. The collaboration was merely a pragmatic and provisional one.

"Légitime défense" demonstrates that despite his concerns Breton still embraced Marxism because of both the necessity of political action in response to the Rif War and the relative efficacy of the PCF's campaign against the conflict. The PCF's campaign against the Rif War in late 1924 and early 1925, demonstrated to the surrealists that they shared the communists' eagerness to "ruthlessly denounce the methods of [European] imperialists in the colonies" and to support "not in words, but in deeds, every

[261] Ibid., 57-58.
[262] Ibid., 60.

independence movement in the colonies."[263] Therefore, Breton's text confirmed that the Rif War galvanized the surrealist movement around the type of collective political action embraced by the PCF. Anticolonialism provided an overlap between the surrealist and communist political projects, and in both cases it was an extension of their broader concerns, which were not themselves compatible, hence the delicacy of the surrealists' position with respect to communism. For the communists, anticolonial agitation was an extension of the proletariat's resistance to capitalism, while for the surrealists it was a particular manifestation of the resurgence of the irrational against Western reason. Clearly, the surrealists and communists were aligned on the question of colonialism, but because they supported anticolonial agitation for different reasons, the alliance between the two groups was an unstable one. Breton's circle still favored radical idealism over materialism. Marxism's obsession with the material conditions of life alone did not transcend the limits of European rationality.

Although the surrealists intended to engage with the PCF only on the issue of colonialism to maintain their idealistic purity as they tried to realize their subversive ends, as Naville pointed out, Breton's circle could not successfully shield themselves from the Marxist concern for the conditions of material life. "Légitime défense" implied that moving forward, Breton and the surrealists would continue to collaborate with the communists on the topic of colonialism while maintaining their distance from the official platform of the PCF. Yet as the following chapter will show, throughout the late 1920s, Breton and his followers would struggle to navigate their relationship to Marxism as some surrealists extended the PCF's anticapitalist argument about colonialism to Western civilization as a whole, suggesting that only communism was able to liberate humanity

[263] Slavin, "The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25: Racism and the Limits of Internationalism," 8.

effectively. But this would only sharpen the contradictions in the surrealist position, threatening to derail the movement.

Chapter 4

THE QUESTION OF COMMUNISM

France's victory in Morocco showed that the surrealists, along with the Clarté group, had failed to undermine the colonial system and that their tactics were unlikely to be successful. However, the leading figures within the movement believed that just because they had failed to achieve this goal did not mean that the surrealists were destined to be an unproductive political body. As Nadeau observed, by 1927, the surrealists had acknowledged that their political strategies had been ineffective and that submitting "to an element that was external, of course, but one that was capable of giving a meaning to pure protest, of making it valid" was a necessity if the movement hoped to remain a disruptive force in French society.[264] It was for this reason that the surrealists viewed a formal alliance with the PCF, an entity thoroughly committed to dismantling the bourgeois establishment, as a symbolic means of confirming surrealism's inherent radicalism, which had been cast into doubt in the wake of the Rif War.

The surrealist alliance with the PCF was premised upon a Trotskyite reading of communist politics. Yet as Stalin came to assert control of the Party throughout the late 1920s, the inherent tensions in the surrealists' position toward communist politics only increased. To many of the surrealists, Stalinism represented a monolithic, overwhelmingly rational form of communism that they viewed as fundamentally incompatible with their own more idealist ideology. By 1929, the movement's internal debates about the relationship between surrealism and communism had not been resolved, but rather exacerbated. A faction of the surrealists sought to extend

[264] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 136.

communism's anti-capitalist argument about colonialism, which they had embraced during the Rif War, to Western civilization as a whole, suggesting that only communism was able to liberate humanity effectively. Another group came to view an alliance with the Communist Party as untenable, since they believed the influence of Marxist political ideology was distracting the surrealist movement from its aesthetic commitment to the exploration of the irrational.

This chapter reconstructs the debate over surrealism's engagement with communist ideology in the late 1920s. These internal debates involved the differences between surrealist anticolonialism, which was premised on the valorization of colonized groups for their access to the primordial and irrational, and the more inclusive communist position, which sought to illuminate important parallels between non-Westerners and the European proletariat. During this period, Breton utilized the surrealist movement's engagement with non-European culture as a means of expressing his circle's reluctance to conform completely to the political project of the PCF. Thus the surrealist engagement with non-European culture during this period must be understood as greatly informed by the movement's collective concerns about the broader compatibility between the movement's interest in the irrational and the material interpretation of existence championed by the communists. Breton's circle considered this to be the fundamental tension that could preclude an effective political alliance between the groups. Yet as the decade came to a close, and the expulsion of Trotsky from the Soviet Union heightened the movement's ambivalence toward the PCF, Breton refused to renounce the alliance with the PCF because of a persistent fear that surrealism would lose its political vigor. This maintenance of a political alliance between the surrealist movement and the PCF

would ultimately exert a lasting influence over the political strategies pursued by Breton's circle throughout the 1930s.

The Failure of the Campaign Against the Rif War

As my previous chapter illustrates, the surrealists viewed Abd-el-Krim as a visionary who sought to challenge the cultural hierarchies established by the West through his rebellion against French rule in Morocco. This position was not shared by the vast majority of French society. The Riffian general was viewed by many as a nuisance whose actions against colonialism were perceived as an audacious and unwarranted effort to undermine French national prestige. For instance, figures like Marcel Ray, a contributor to the conservative *Le Petit Journal*, praised France's battlefield successes over the Riffians while chastising Abd-el-Krim. Ray argued that the Moroccan general was a megalomaniac whose "disproportionate" ambitions had threatened to destabilize the peace and order established in North Africa under the Third Republic's colonial system. "Intoxicated by his own success," Abd-el-Krim had "lost sight of reality" and initiated a brutal and unnecessary war against Western civilization.[265] In spite of the movement's efforts against the war, support for the Third Republic's efforts in Morocco remained strong within the French populace.[266]

By April 1926, the defeat of the Riffians by the French and Spanish forces fighting in Morocco appeared imminent. Realizing that defeat was inevitable and hoping to avoid the complete humiliation of the Riffian republic, Abd-el-Krim agreed to send a group of delegates to a joint peace conference that commenced in the Moroccan city of

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[265] Marcel Ray, "Abd-el-Krim s'est rendu" *Le Petit Journal*, No. 23142 (27 May 1926), 1.
[266] Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society*, 217.

Oujda on April 27, 1926. Yet as historian Moshe Gershovich notes, "Having secured an overwhelming superiority over their foe, the military establishments in both [France and Spain] had no incentive to support a moderate approach" at the conference. "The Spanish high command was eager to avenge the humiliation of Anual, and its French counterpart regarded a separatist Riffian entity in any form as a potential threat to French rule in North Africa."[267] As a result, France and Spain introduced a series of demands to which they knew the Riffians would never acquiesce, including the release of all prisoners of war prior to the formal ending of hostilities. The refusal by the Riffians to agree to these terms led to a renewal of hostilities in early May. However, by this point in the war, the Riffian army offered little in the way of resistance to the French and Spanish offensive. Before the end of May, Abd-el-Krim surrendered to French forces.[268]

The capitulation of Abd-el-Krim and his Riffian rebels in late May 1926, confirmed that European colonialism would survive in North Africa, at least in the short term. The Third Republic's victory over the Riffian army restored to the people of France a sense of pride and honor that the First World War had eroded. In a piece published by *Le Figaro*, columnist Auguste Thomazi conveyed this very sentiment. After praising the "admirable" French troops whose sacrifices had ensured that the Third Republic emerged from the conflict victorious, he alluded to the memory of the First World War, noting that "More than anyone in France," the soldiers who had fought to preserve colonialism in Morocco "knew the necessity of a [French] victory, and especially of a swift victory," over the "Riffian menace" since a success of this nature

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[267] Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco: Colonialism and its Consequences* (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 141.
[268] Ibid., 140.

would confirm that France was once again "an invincible force."[269] On May 27, 1926, one day after Abd-el-Krim's official surrender to French forces, *Le Petit Parisien* celebrated France's success, declaring that this "happy news, of immense importance for the future of North Africa and sure to enhance French prestige throughout the Muslim world, reached Paris yesterday afternoon and was welcomed by the public and by politicians, with profound satisfaction." The editors of *Le Petit Parisien* also praised the French forces whose efforts secured final victory for the Third Republic, celebrating "the great zeal of our soldiers."[270] This sense of pride and patriotism was shared by others, like the conservative historian Jacques Bainville, who claimed that despite the destruction and loss of life, the conflict in Morocco was worthwhile in that it confirmed French cultural superiority over the non-Western world, thereby legitimizing France's *mission civilisatrice*. In a piece published by the right-wing and pro-Catholic journal *L'Action française* on May 27, Bainville argued that Abd-el-Krim's surrender proved that it was no longer possible to contest the innate "superiority of Europeans and whites." Alluding to the colonial imaginary, he insisted that "European domination over Muslim countries and people of color" should not be viewed as "outdated," but rather as a necessity.[271]

According to Gershovich, "the rapid ending of the conflict with Abd-el-Krim silenced the anti-war movement and saved the government from further embarrassment." Nevertheless, despite the many declarations of French cultural superiority and national pride that abounded in the days following the official surrender of Abd-el-Krim, France's victory over the Riffs "did not [completely] erase the opposition of metropolitan public

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[269] Auguste Thomazi, "Un coup d'oeil d'ensemble sur la campagne du Rif," *Le Figaro*, No. 148 (28 May 1926), 1.
[270] "Abd-el-Krim a Capitulé," *Le Petit Parisien*, No. 17985 (27 May 1926), 1.
[271] Jacques Bainville, "La soumission d'Abd el Krim," *L'Action française*, No. 147 (27 May 1926), 1.

opinion towards overseas adventures."[272] Among the metropolitan groups that continued to direct their energy against the Third Republic's colonial system were the surrealists. In other words, the inability of surrealism's joint campaign with the PCF to undermine the Third Republic's military intervention against Abd-el-Krim and the Riffian rebels in Morocco did not mark the end of the movement's political aims.

In the spring of 1926, when French victory over the Riffians was all but assured, Éluard contributed a scathing piece to the sixth edition of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which confirmed that the surrealists would not be silenced. In an article entitled "On the Proper Use of Dead Warriors," Éluard argued that all the Europeans who had been killed in wars, including the one unfolding in Morocco, should not be revered or honored for the sacrifices made to their country. On the contrary, these soldiers were foolish, unthinking automatons who willingly died trying to kill others in the name of nationalism, which he regarded as a worthless, repugnant cause. Éluard suggested that these soldiers had been brainwashed by nationalist and bourgeois ideology and that they embodied the thoughtlessness that rationalism and capitalism helped to breed. These soldiers represented everything the surrealists hoped to eradicate through their revolution of the mind. "Shame on all those soldiers who for so long lost the taste of freedom . . . shame on those who are dead, for they shall not be redeemed." Those who fought and died for the sake of national prestige had "accepted evil" in an attempt to enslave those portrayed as threatening. Soldiers, "faithful servants of their masters," accepted and perpetuated through their actions a notion of cultural superiority over so-called Others. Consistent with earlier anticolonial tracts, Éluard vowed that the surrealists, who refused to accept the arbitrary cultural hierarchies generated by Western civilization, would

[272] Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco*, 144.

continue to actively combat this form of "society founded on the basest of man's realities."[273]

Just as Éluard's piece implied that the surrealists would remain committed to a subversive political project in the wake of the Rif War, so too did a photograph released by Man Ray the same month the conflict came to an end. May Ray's *Noire et blanche* features the face of the model Kiki of Montparnasse, who was also the subject in *Violon d'Ingres*, and a mask from the Baule culture of West Africa (Fig. 5).[274] The juxtaposition of these subjects is emblematic of Man Ray's broader desire, and that of his fellow surrealists, to present "evidence conflicting with inculcated ideas about what is real" as a "powerful [political] weapon."[275] As Whitney Chadwick observes, Man Ray's pairing testifies to the seemingly "unmotivated collision of disparate realities" embraced by the surrealists.[276] Kiki's head is posed horizontally on a flat surface as her left hand balances the Baule mask upright on the same surface. Other than her face and arm, Kiki's body is entirely obscured, giving the impression that her head is detached from her torso, floating in space alongside the African mask. Her eyes are closed, ensuring that the model does not reciprocate the gaze of the viewer. Thus like the smooth, dark mask she embraces in her left hand, Kiki is portrayed as an object, brought to life by the imagination of the viewing audience.

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[273] Paul Éluard, "De l'usage de guerriers morts," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 6 (1 March 1926), 29.
[274] Grossman, "Man Ray's Lost and Found Photographs: Arts of the Americas in Context," 122.
[275] J. H. Matthews, "Modes of Documentation: Photography in *La Révolution surréaliste*," *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer 1985), 39.
[276] Whitney Chadwick, "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture: Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1995), 3.

Fig. 5: Man Ray, *Noire et blanche*, featured in *Vogue*, Vol. 7, No. 5 (May 1926).

Printed underneath Man Ray's photograph was a brief caption that helped to shed light on the composition. It read in part: "The face of a woman, soft, transparent tending to throw off the hair through which it was still clinging to a primitive nature . . . Sometimes mournful, the evolved white creature returns, before reaching, with a feeling of curiosity and fright, to one of the stages through which it might have gone."[277] The passage, produced by the Parisian editorial office of the periodical, espoused the highly sexualized and racist discourses prevalent in France during the 1920s.[278] The caption suggests that the Caucasian model is a visual index to European cultural and racial superiority over non-Western cultures. That is, the image and the associated caption imply that the culture of which Kiki is a part has progressed far beyond that from which

[277] *Vogue*, Vol. 7, No. 5 (1 May 1926), 37.
[278] Chadwick, "Fetishizing Fashion/Fetishizing Culture: Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*," 11.

the mask originated. Yet the caption also suggests that the model, like the mask she holds beside her, is consumed by an inherently instinctual, irrational, and primitive mysteriousness. Thus Kiki is also portrayed as the Other of patriarchal and rationalist Western civilization. She is exoticized and objectified alongside the Baule mask. Chadwick argues that this objectification is synonymous with commoditization and Man Ray's photograph can therefore be viewed as reinforcing "unconscious processes of fetishization which . . . secured women and other peoples within systems of exchange produced and controlled by the institutions of capitalism and patriarchy."[279] For Chadwick, *Noire et blanche* is striking not because of any nascent anticolonialism, but instead, because the image suggests Man Ray perpetuated the discourses of sexual and racial difference which underpinned the colonial project.

This interpretation of *Noire et blanche* is compelling, but when the photograph is considered in relation to Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Man Ray's anticolonial predilections become far more apparent. As David Bate suggests, the juxtaposition of Kiki's face with an African mask is a deliberate attempt by Man Ray to reflect upon the visual language Picasso deployed in his iconic painting. As discussed in previous chapters, Picasso combined non-Western exoticism with female sexuality in the two prostitutes adorned with African masks in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* to shock viewing audiences and to undermine bourgeois aesthetic hierarchies and cultural sensibilities. However, Man Ray's photograph maintains a visual distinction between African culture and his model's face, placing "together in the same space objects from different taxonomies; it does not, as Picasso's painting does, condense them into the *same*."[280]

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[279] Ibid., 12.
[280] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, 196.

Though the image suggests that both subjects are related to the irrational and primitive, *Noire et blanche* emphasizes the differences between both Kiki's face and the Baule mask to undermine European hierarchical conventions. Since Kiki's face is positioned horizontally with her eyes closed, this implies that she is not conscious. Furthermore, her pale skin, juxtaposed against the dark tones of her hair and that of the African mask, give the model an almost lifeless quality. The inanimate mask, however, stands upright and radiates what Bate refers to as a "timeless youthfulness."[281] The mask is glorified. Its simple features engender a sense of harmony and beauty that have seemingly outlasted the European *chic* against which it is contrasted. The mask embodies the irrational and primordial and it is the object about which the model dreams.

The Baule mask in *Noire et blanche* served as a metonym for the primordial and irrational knowledge to which the surrealists believed non-Europeans had special access, which accounts for the object's valorization within the photograph. Given the prominence of the Rif War to surrealist politics during the mid 1920s, the photograph must be understood in relation to the conflict in Morocco. Though it is only implied, Man Ray's insistence within *Noire et blanche* that non-European culture be valorized demonstrates that the movement intended to remain active in the struggle against the Third Republic's civilizing mission and the fallacy of French cultural superiority which underpinned it. Just like Éluard's piece, Man Ray implies that France's success in the Rif War would not deter the movement from the pursuit of its anticolonial aims. Despite these assertions, more than anticolonialism, the question of how communism related to the movement's broader political project proved to be a preoccupation for Breton's circle in the late 1920s. Although Breton had used "Légitime défense" to assert the surrealist

[281] Ibid., 197.

movement's autonomy and declare that it would not serve as a puppet of the PCF's materialist ideology, in the wake of the Rif War the surrealists began to seriously consider whether prolonged engagement with communist ideology could be politically advantageous outside of anticolonial collaborations. This debate was informed in large part by Breton's fascination with Trotsky.

Trotsky's Permanent Revolution

Breton had first revealed his admiration for the Soviet leader in the review of Trotsky's biography of Lenin that was published in the fifth installment of *La Révolution surréaliste* on October 15, 1925. As I discussed in chapter three, Breton used this review to praise the Communist Party's political efficacy, while simultaneously suggesting that the surrealists remained reluctant to adopt communist ideology in its entirety. Despite this ambivalence, Breton expressed his deep admiration for the leaders of the Russian Revolution, who he believed had been "slandered and presented as enemies of everything we deem worthwhile." For Breton, Trotsky's biography of Lenin had confirmed that these revolutionaries were not the contemptible "executors of a forever-inexhaustible will," which they had been made out to be by popular portrayals in France. Instead, Breton confided that he was now aware of their "full humanity" and viewed Lenin and Trotsky as "men arriving at their destiny, discovering themselves unexpectedly, speaking to us, questioning themselves." Though Breton lauded Lenin, it was Trotsky whom he described as "brilliant."[282]

Despite his reservations about communism's focus on materialist concerns, it is not surprising that Breton admired Trotsky. Breton was first exposed to Trotsky's

[282] Breton, "Léon Trotsky 'Lénine,'" 29.

thought during the surrealist movement's collaboration with the Clarté group in 1925.[283] Articles published by the Clarté group which approved of Trotsky influenced Breton's opinion of the Soviet leader. For instance, a piece contributed to the journal *Clarté* by Victor Serge, a proponent of Trotskyism in the Soviet Union, suggested that Trotsky had been unnecessarily subjected to "the most severe criticism" by the Party establishment.[284] As such, Trotsky appeared to Breton as an outsider who sought to subvert the rigid doctrines of the Party while championing an international revolution against bourgeois civilization. In this sense, Breton regarded Trotsky as being quite similar to the surrealists. According to Jack Spector, Breton and other surrealists like Aragon believed that the Russian Revolution proved that Trotsky had successfully materialized his political "dreams and visions," and along with Lenin, created his "own version of poetry from real events on a world stage. Here art became life and life art."[285] While the subversive dreams of the surrealists were not identical to those of Trotsky, Breton viewed the Soviet leader as an icon from whom the movement should draw political inspiration.[286]

Earlier surrealist documents, like the article "Le Bouquet sans fleurs," suggested that Breton's circle would be receptive to Trotskyism as they sharpened their understanding of his form of communism during their collaboration with the Clarté group. In "Le Bouquet sans fleurs," published in the second edition of *La Révolution surréaliste* on January 15, 1925, Breton stressed "the purely revolutionary nature" of the surrealist enterprise, vowing that the movement was committed to revolutionary activity

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[283] Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919-1939: The Gold of Time*, 75.
[284] Victor Serge, "Un Portrait de Lénine par Trotsky," *Clarté*, No. 75 (June 1925), 255-258.
[285] Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919-1939: The Gold of Time*, 75.
[286] Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "The Situationist International, Surrealism, and the Difficult Fusion of Art and Politics," *Oxford Art Journal*, Volume 27, No. 3 (2004), 375-377.

and "always on the side of those ready to give their lives for liberty."[287] Although this article made no reference to a specific political philosophy, given the position conveyed within the piece, it is not surprising that Trotsky's notion of permanent revolution greatly appealed to the surrealist attitude. According to Pierre Taminiaux, despite the fact that the Soviet leader did not privilege aesthetics or the exploration of the irrational, Breton and his circle had convinced themselves that Trotsky's call for a permanent revolution generally conformed to surrealism's commitment to "the preeminence of rebellion" in "a world dominated by bourgeois interests."[288]

At its essence, Trotsky's theory entailed the belief that the bourgeoisie could not be trusted to initiate a revolution that would produce a state of democracy. He argued that the Revolution had to be undertaken by the proletariat and that this enterprise had to surpass the moderate objectives that would have been achieved by the bourgeoisie. Trotsky believed that this proletarian democracy would continue to struggle against a largely capitalist world, thus a permanent revolution would ensue, as the proletariat resisted being consumed by this corrosive influence, which could only be defeated if an international revolution against capitalism succeeded.[289] In *The New Course*, from 1923, Trotsky opined, "The permanent revolution is an exact translation, is the continuous revolution, the uninterrupted revolution . . . It is, for us communists, that the revolution does not come to an end after this or that political conquest, after obtaining this or that social reform, but that it continues to develop further."[290]

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[287] André Breton, "Le Bouquet sans fleurs," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 2 (15 January 1925), 24-25.
[288] Pierre Taminiaux, "Breton and Trotsky: The Revolutionary Memory of Surrealism," *Yale French Studies*, No. 109, "Surrealism and Its Others" (2006), 58.
[289] John Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 17.
[290] Trotsky is quoted in Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution*, 29.

When coupled with their belief that Trotsky embodied an anti-establishment force challenging the conventions of both the bourgeoisie and the Party of which he was a member, the perceived congruence between the surrealist revolution and the one championed by the Soviet leader legitimized the decision of the movement's leadership, Breton, Aragon, Éluard, Péret, and Pierre Unik, to join the PCF at the beginning of 1927.[291] Trotsky inspired these surrealists, giving them hope that they too could exist on the periphery of the Party, pursuing a project detached from traditional Marxist ideology to help undermine the hegemony of bourgeois civilization. Thus Breton and the surrealist leadership viewed joining the PCF not as an endorsement of institutional communist ideology, but as a strategic solution to what they perceived to be a significant crisis within surrealism. As discussed above, the failure of the surrealist campaign against the Rif War and the criticism directed toward surrealism by Naville instilled in Breton the belief that his movement was about to implode. In Breton's view, "Légitime défense" had not done enough to stabilize the movement and confirm to its membership that surrealism was both radical and politically effective. By November and December 1926, a number of meetings were held during which the question of politics was thoroughly discussed by the movement's members. Although they acknowledged that communism's materialist interpretation of human existence left little room for the exploration of the irrational, Breton and Aragon, enamored by Trotskyism, insisted that a formal alliance with the PCF was in the best interests of the surrealist movement. They argued that a failure by surrealism to align itself with the PCF would, according to Durozoi, "relegate it to a type of intellectual dilettantism that [the movement] refused to accept."[292]

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[291] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," 10.
[292] Durozoi, *History of Surrealist Movement*, 138.

Although these meetings illustrated that "the Five" joined the Party to confirm their political radicalism as the movement wavered in the wake of the Rif War, several of the surrealists remained ambivalent. This ambivalence did not stem from the differences between the surrealist movement's anticolonial attitude and the more inclusive stance of the PCF. Instead, Durozoi explains that figures like Desnos, Leiris, Tanguy, Morise, and Jacques Prévert were more concerned about the incompatibility of the PCF's materialism and surrealist aesthetic idealism. This cohort expressed their fear that the PCF might force them to abandon their aesthetic activity if they decided to join the Party. Nevertheless, several of these figures, including Desnos and Prévert, suggested that they would be willing to join the Party if it was deemed by the majority of the movement to be absolutely vital to the surrealist political project.[293]

Other members refused to consider the option. Roland Tual indicated that he was unwilling to abandon the spirit of individualism upon which the surrealist movement was originally founded. He was not willing "to join [the PCF] just to add to the numbers and to obey a decision taken out of hand." Likewise, Artaud believed that surrealism's growing interest in collective political action was forcing the movement away from its foundational objectives and he announced that he remained committed to the aesthetic exploration of the irrational alone. In November, he abandoned the surrealist movement, stating: "If for me what is meant by revolution . . . has to be what is meant by revolution for you, then no, I don't give a damn."[294] The same month, Soupault's ties with the movement were severed because of similar objections to the movement's willingness to

[293] Ibid.
[294] Tual and Artaud are quoted in Durozoi, *History of Surrealist Movement*, 138-139.

jeopardize its exploration of the irrational for the sake of a growing interest in a formal political alliance with the PCF.[295]

Willing to cut ties with Artaud, Soupault, and Tual, the surrealist leadership felt that it was necessary to illustrate to the rest of the movement that political efficacy outweighed any potential impact communist influence would have on surrealist aesthetic pursuits. In a meeting on December 24, 1926, "the Five" agreed to enter the ranks of the PCF. When Breton joined the PCF on January 14, 1927, he viewed the crisis that the movement had endured since the end of the Rif War as resolved once and for all. Since surrealism's political allegiances had been clarified, Breton and the rest of the surrealist leadership believed that the movement could return its focus to aesthetic endeavors, which could help to subvert bourgeois rationalism and illustrate their willingness to challenge the communist establishment from within its ranks, much like Trotsky in the Soviet Union. Breton confirmed as much in "Au grand jour," a tract he wrote in collaboration with Aragon, Éluard, Péret, and Unik in the spring of 1927.

Published in May, around the same time Breton abandoned the Party, "Au grand jour" explained why its authors had originally joined the PCF earlier that year. The document demonstrated that the failure of the campaign against the Rif War and Naville's subsequent attack had shaken surrealism to its core and that the movement's leadership agreed that decisive action needed to be taken to resolve the turmoil. "In the absence of any external manifestation of this activity," which illustrated the movement's political radicalism, the conclusions reached by the surrealists who joined the PCF "were inevitable." Only through joining the Party could the surrealist leadership confirm surrealism's commitment to collective political action. To justify their decision, Breton

[295] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 135-136.

and his coauthors argued that even the surrealists who were reluctant to join the PCF could not "deny that the communists and surrealists share their aspirations to a large degree."[296] The oppositional attitude Breton had embraced in "Légitime défense" had been softened considerably for the sake of political efficacy. Unlike "Légitime défense," which asserted the surrealist movement's complete autonomy, "Au grand jour" suggested that the surrealists were desperate to realize their revolutionary dream.

The surrealist fascination with Trotsky had compelled Breton and his closest allies within the movement to accept that despite the fact that the PCF exhibited little concern for aesthetics and no interest in the irrational, surrealism did not have to close itself off from the Party's political agenda. In fact, the movement's leadership suggested that surrealist aesthetic endeavors would only be supplementary to the political dictates of the Party. "The ends, which require the means, do not preclude discussion of the means."[297] The authors of "Au grand jour" closed the piece by admitting that the movement's political ambitions would crumble without the legitimacy gained through an alliance with the PCF because surrealism's revolution of the mind was not sufficient to subvert Western civilization on its own. A political and social overhaul would also be necessary, and the movement possessed little real grasp of how exactly they could initiate this element of the Revolution. Hence the surrealists argued that the PCF could teach the movement how to bolster their intellectual rebellion through effective political action. To Breton and his coauthors "Purely economic debates, discussions requiring an advanced knowledge of political methodology, or even some experience of trade union life" were all absolutely necessary for a successful revolution against Western conventions, but the

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[296] André Breton, et al., "Au grand jour," in André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes,* Vol. 1, edited by Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 928-929.
[297] Ibid., 935-939.

surrealists acknowledged that "these are things . . . for which we are not at all prepared."[298]

Proletarian Art

The actions of "the Five" were not viewed by the PCF as an ideological triumph over a rival enclave or the start of a great alliance between the two groups. Other than a brief entry from late January 1927, which listed Breton as a member of the PCF, the party's official publication *L'Humanité* devoted no attention to this development.[299] Instead, the commitment of "the Five" to the Party troubled the leadership of the PCF given surrealism's ambivalence toward Marxist ideology in the midst of the Rif War, during which time Breton's circle conveyed the idea that they "were put off by the oppressive atmosphere in the Party under the narrow, sectarian and fundamentally anti-intellectual leadership."[300] The Party leadership feared that the surrealists' commitment to communism was inherently subversive and that the cohort remained committed to their anarchist idealism, aspiring to undermine the PCF from within its ranks. As such, between January and May 1927, Breton was "summoned five times before its Control Commission and asked to explain why he still needed to call himself a Surrealist now that he had become a communist."[301]

Despite this initial skepticism about the motivations of "the Five," "Au grand jour" helped to alleviate the concerns of the Party leadership about the willingness of the surrealists to defer to the PCF on political matters. Instead, it was the question of culture that continued to make the PCF uneasy. Leaders like Pierre Semard, Maurice Thorez,

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[298] Ibid., 939-942.
[299] "La Souscription du parti," *L'Humanité*, No. 10271 (24 January 1927), 5.
[300] Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960*, 96-97.
[301] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," 10.

and Henri Barbusse, who had been appointed literary editor of *L'Humanité* in early 1926, continued to worry that the aesthetic idealism practiced by Breton's circle would begin to "define the cultural policy of the PCF."[302] This disdain for surrealist aesthetics and its perceived ability to corrode the Party's efforts to topple capitalism motivated Barbusse, with the support of the Party's leadership, to champion a style of art antithetical to the surrealist project. As early as April 28, 1926, almost a year before the first surrealists joined the Party, Barbusse expressed his contempt for surrealist aesthetics in an article published within *L'Humanité*. He argued that only art grounded in reason could serve the revolution. Art related to the exploration of the unconscious distracted the proletariat from the realities of capitalism, thus he called for a "healthy" style of art, "young, loud and clear, that illuminates and sustains, at the same time it expresses the loud cry of the masses towards the affranchisement."[303] He elaborated on this position in "L'Art Prolétarien," published in *L'Humanité* a week later. In contrast to the aesthetic attitude of the surrealist movement, Barbusse believed that a more realistic style of art could be used to advance the revolutionary cause by authentically documenting the suffering of the proletariat and illuminating the steps necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie. He argued, "We want art that is the tool and even the weapon of an idea, and that the literary or artistic work becomes an absolutely essential object" existing "parallel to the revolution."[304]

Barbusse's oblique objection to the surrealist movement's aesthetic project continued after the surrealist leadership joined the Party. For instance, in early March 1927, a piece by Barbusse from *L'Humanité* lamented that the aesthetic impulses that

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[302] Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation*, 93.
[303] Henri Barbusse, "Un nouvel élan," *L'Humanité*, No. 10001 (28 April 1926), 1.
[304] Henri Barbusse, "L'Art prolétarien," *L'Humanité*, No. 10007 (5 May 1926), 4.

originated in the Romantic era had resurfaced in modern art. Alluding to the cultural project of the surrealist movement, Barbusse feared that a resurgent tendency to "recreate a vanished era" and "exhume a state of mind" encouraged people to indulge in fantasy rather than the conditions of reality. This aesthetic impulse failed to advance the revolutionary cause. For him, this resurgence of the idealism first embraced by nineteenth century avant-garde movements "is not a new conception of life," but instead, a distraction which inadvertently helps to maintain an unacceptable social, economic, and political status quo.[305] Likewise, in May 1927, he launched a subtle critique of surrealism by reiterating that truly proletarian art was focused entirely on the material conditions of reality. He disparaged those who pursued aesthetic projects that deviated from this realism. Of the PCF, he noted, "We turn away from the sadism of abstraction."[306] Though he did not mention the surrealists explicitly, given the existing tension between Breton's circle and the PCF on matters of culture, there can be little doubt that the surrealists interpreted Barbusse's words as a critique of their aesthetic output.

Barbusse's veiled attacks against the movement and the pressure placed upon Breton by the Control Commission proved that the leaders of the PCF were skeptical of the surrealists. Nevertheless, by the middle of 1927, friction between the PCF and the surrealists had eased considerably. Though the PCF did not view Breton's circle as fully committed to the communist cause, the Party's leadership had begun to believe that the alliance with the surrealists could eventually blossom into a fruitful union. This is due at least in part to the fact that Breton had withdrawn from the Party, ameliorating the fear

[305] Henri Barbusse, "Romantisme," *L'Humanité*, No. 10319 (13 March 1927), 4.
[306] Henri Barbusse, "De chaque coté de la barricade," *L'Humanité*, No. 10388 (22 May 1927), 4.

that he would actively seek to coopt the cultural policies of the PCF from within its ranks. Additionally, "Au grand jour" assured the Party's leadership that the surrealists were willing to follow the directives of the Party on political matters.[307]

On the other hand, Breton believed that his original goal had been accomplished. Although his membership was temporary, along with Aragon, Éluard, Péret, and Unik, he had validated the political radicalism of the surrealist movement by joining the Party. In doing so, these leaders of surrealism enabled the movement to move beyond internal debates about the relationship between surrealist idealism and communism that had troubled the movement since the Rif War. The membership of the surrealist leadership within the PCF implied that the movement endorsed a Marxist revolution and that further debates over whether surrealism should commit to materialism were unnecessary. This, in turn, enabled the surrealists to devote their collective resources and mental energy to aesthetic pursuits, which were not actively barred by the Party's leadership. Nadeau suggests that this symbolic political gesture by "the Five" enabled the movement to eliminate political distraction and initiate a broad effort to "turn back on itself, to reflect on its limits" while trying to deepen "its substance."[308] In other words, after Breton, Aragon, Éluard, Péret, and Unik joined the Party, "surrealism withdrew into itself" and "it chose to tighten its hold on the autonomous treasure it had discovered."[309]

Surrealist Aesthetics in the Late 1920s

As part of this collective introspection, the surrealists continued to explore how the cultural traditions of the non-Western world granted the movement access to the

[307] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 147.
[308] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 133.
[309] Ibid., 138-139.

irrational. These endeavors helped to demonstrate that the surrealists intended to pursue their commitment to the irrational despite the movement's political attachment to the materialist project of the PCF. The exhibition entitled "Yves Tanguy and Objects from America," held at the Galerie Surréaliste between May 27 and June 15, 1927, exemplified this tendency. The first exhibition for its French namesake, "Yves Tanguy and Objects from America" was organized under the direct oversight of Breton, who along with Éluard, contributed a number of non-Western objects from his personal collection to the show. Tanguy's show juxtaposed twenty-three of the artist's paintings with dozens of non-European objects, the majority of which originated from the native peoples of British Columbia.[310] Though there were no obvious connections between Tanguy's work and the non-Western artifacts on display, the exhibition implied that the movement's obsession with automatism and the exploration of the unconscious were aimed at gaining access to the primordial knowledge harbored within these so-called primitive cultures. As Katharine Conley suggests, "Beyond their appreciation of a primitive aesthetic," exhibitions like that of Tanguy at the Galerie Surréaliste show that "the surrealists sought to access a sense of primitive within – within things, and within themselves."[311]

Imagery included within the double issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, published on October 1, 1927, reiterated the centrality of both the irrational and non-European culture to the movement's aesthetic project. A picture of a Kachina doll, carved and decorated by the peoples indigenous to the American Southwest, illustrated a poem composed by Péret (Fig. 6). Kachina dolls, which Éluard described as "the prettiest things in the world," were of great interest to the surrealists, who believed these figures

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[310] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 121-124.
[311] Conley, "Surrealism and Outsider Art: From the 'Automatic Message' to André Breton's Collection," 137.

were indexes to the very body of originary wisdom the movement hoped to access through their exploration of the unconscious.[312] The coupling of the Kachina doll with an absurdist recollection of a dream, which opened with the line, "To wake up at the bottom of a carafe, haggard like a fly, here's an adventure that will incite you to kill your mother five minutes after you escape from the carafe," represented a deliberate attempt by Breton, who was still in control of the journal's editorial responsibilities, to suggest that the object was illustrative of the irrational forces akin to those which inspired Péret's piece.[313] In this way, the Kachina doll reminded readers of *La Révolution surréaliste* that the movement's "insistence on dreaming was never meant to separate the surreal from the real, to relegate the former to a zone where imaginative activity might be kept safely removed from the world of observed reality."[314] By casting the Kachina doll as a manifestation of the surrealist imagination, Breton reiterated that surrealism would not renounce the aesthetic project it had initiated prior to the Rif War despite the movement's political alliance with the PCF.

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[312] Letter from Éluard to Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova, Eaubonne, 29 May 1927, in *Letters to Gala*, translated by Jesse Browner (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 5-6.
[313] Benjamin Péret, "Corps à Corps," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 9-10 (1 October 1927), 33-36.
[314] Matthews, "Modes of Documentation: Photography in *La Révolution surréaliste,"* 39.

34 CORPS A CORPS

Nouveau-Mexique

voir. Il n'avait pas de nez et ses oreilles pendaient comme des tiges de vigne vierge arrachées par le vent. Naturellement il était bête, c'est pourquoi il était marchand de marrons. Un jour, ayant arraché la queue d'une truie, il se promena partout dans la ville de Troyes en hurlant : CECI EST MON SANG. Bientôt les pharmaciens coururent sur ses traces, puis les avoués, les quincailliers, les vidangeurs, les dentellières, les orthopédistes, les juges de paix, les cafetiers, les sacristains, les herboristes, les pêcheurs à la ligne, les enfants de cocksons et enfin les curés. C'est alors que, pris d'une intense terreur, il cacha la queue de la truie dans une boîte à cirage qu'il mit dans une boîte aux lettres avec l'adresse suivante :

PIPE EN TERRE
à TOUR D'IVOIRE
par SCORBUT (Morbihan)

Et la lettre s'en fut avec des hauts et des bas. Tantôt elle gravissait un iceberg, tantôt elle descendait dans une cave, tantôt encore elle rampait sur une branche d'arbre dont elle dévorait les feuilles, ce qui, peu de temps après, la faisait tomber dans quelque puits d'où un sceau de verre bleu la tirait pour la remettre dans le droit chemin. Enfin, après mille vicissitudes, elle arriva dans un palais. A vrai dire, le palais en question ressemblait plutôt à une tulipe qui aurait surgi d'un crâne en décomposition qu'à un palais bien ordonné. En effet l'escalier était étalé comme un serpent mort dans le hall et on accédait aux étages supérieurs par une flèche qu'on s'enfonçait dans les fesses et que le rez-de-chaussée lançait à l'étage désiré. C'est là que la lettre rencontra son destinataire, lequel arpentait l'escalier de long en large sans rencontrer « âme qui vive » et se demandait dans quel désert il vivait, dans quel désert sans caravane, si chameaux, dans quel désert peuplé uniquement de craquements et de bruits de verre brisé, dans quel désert il promenait ses pas mélancoliques comme une asperge qui, croyant être mangée à la vinaigrette, s'est que suée à la sauce blanche. L'inconnu n'était autre que Pipe en Terre, célèbre pour son duel avec les bouteilles vides.

C'est alors que je vis le jour.

Mais peut-être n'est-il pas inutile de raconter les merveilleuses aventures de Pipe en Terre et des bouteilles vides.

Pipe en Terre avait toujours cru que les jeunes filles vierges vivaient dans des tessons de bouteilles. Mais ayant découvert son œil gauche dans l'un d'eux, il s'aperçut qu'il s'était trompé et en fut assez vexé. C'est alors que faute de trouver dans les bouteilles les jeunes filles vierges qu'il cherchait, il résolut d'y élever des grand'mères convenablement ratatinées par un demi-siècle d'usage. Est-il besoin de dire que ce projet avorta misérablement? Les grand'mères à peine enfermées dans le tesson de la bouteille se liquéfiaient et devenaient en très peu de temps une sorte de goudron semblable à celui qu'on utilise pour réparer les rues de Paris. Tout espoir d'obtenir ainsi une génération de grand'mères d'un modèle réduit était donc perdu. Mais Pipe en Terre était infatigable. Sans se décourager, il sema des officiers de marine dans le fond de ses bouteilles et c'est ce qui le perdit, car les officiers de marine ne fument pas de pipes en terre, mais des débris de navires et des cheveux de matelots, lesquels sont, comme chacun sait, très néfastes à la santé des bouteilles vides. Pipe en Terre ne tarda pas à en voir les effets sur ses protégés, et il s'en vengea sur les officiers de marine qu'il réduisit à l'état de limaces, animaux fort appréciés par les bouteilles vides qui en font une grande consommation surtout au printemps. Il eut cependant le tort de ne pas leur cacher l'origine de leur nourriture et les bouteilles qui malgré tout étaient fort attachées aux officiers de marine se fâchèrent net. Un duel au lampion en résulta et Pipe en Terre fut vaincu, n'ayant avalé que 721 lampions tandis que le moindre de ses adversaires en avait dévoré au moins un millier. C'est depuis ce jour que

Fig. 6: "Corps A Corps" illustrated by a Kachina doll from New Mexico, *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 9-10 (1 October 1927), 34.

These mobilizations of non-European culture for the purposes of the surrealist aesthetic project deviated considerably from the official position championed by the PCF. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the Comintern mandated that all "anti-colonial movements were to be supported" by members of the Party because colonized populations and the European proletariat were each struggling against a ruthless capitalist

system aimed at preserving bourgeois hegemony on a global scale.[315] The surrealists' insistence that non-European culture was conjoined to the irrational, and thus entirely foreign to the European way of life, did not compel a direct attack by the PCF on the movement's position. Instead, Barbusse's tactic was indirect. Unwilling to jeopardize the PCF's tedious alliance with Breton's circle over the political issue that had originally brought the groups together, Barbusse preferred to remind the readers of *L'Humanité* that the European proletariat and colonized populations were allies in the same struggle against capitalism.[316]

This was the lesson Barbusse attempted to convey in his brief review of André Gide's "Voyage au Congo," an essay published by the *Nouvelle Revue française* in June 1927, which chronicled the appalling conditions of life endured by the colonized population of the Congo that the writer encountered during his tour of the colony between June 1925 and May 1926.[317] Barbusse's piece, which appeared in *L'Humanité* on June 12, 1927, praised "Voyage au Congo" for exposing the abominable conditions imposed upon the indigenous population of the colony by Europeans. In particular, he noted that Gide's work "contains moving charges" against colonial oppression and exploitation, enacted for the sole purpose of enabling an elite segment of the French populace to enhance their wealth at the expense of a population whose suffering mirrored that of the European proletariat.[318] In this sense, Barbusse praised Gide's account because it reiterated the rationale that underpinned the PCF's position against colonialism. That the piece was published during the final week of the "Yves Tanguy and Objects from

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[315] Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960,* 205.
[316] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," 14-15.
[317] Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation*, 108.
[318] Henri Barbusse, "Le Bétail colonial," *L'Humanité*, No. 10409 (12 June 1927), 4.

America" exhibition implies that Barbusse was prompting the surrealists to acknowledge that their view of colonized peoples did not conform to the official stance of the PCF. Outside of this oblique criticism, the PCF did not mount a substantive attack against the surrealists as they continued to produce work that asserted their aesthetic autonomy. Nevertheless, Barbusse's subtle critique of the surrealist potion indicated that tensions between the groups endured.

Breton's efforts to confirm that surrealist aesthetics remained untouched by Party doctrines were met with a restrained response from the PCF. However, important members of his immediate circle responded to these tactics in ways that suggested the debate over the relationship between surrealism and communism had not yet been resolved within the movement itself. For instance, Aragon's *Treatise on Style*, from 1928, affirmed that he was more willing than Breton to align surrealism with the political project of the PCF. His most significant contribution to surrealism before fully committing himself to the PCF, Aragon's *Treatise on Style* attacked the French literary establishment and indicted bourgeois society for its obsession with traditional morals and reason. His diatribe, which unfolds as a stream of consciousness essay, opened with an attack on a number of figures embraced by the bourgeois establishment who he believed had helped to perpetuate the conformism and ignorance that both the surrealists and the communists aspired to eradicate. Among these "clowns" were "Julien Benda, Monsieur Thiers, Goethe, Paul Fort, Abbé Brémond, the author of *Rien que la terre*, Raymond Poincaré, Gyp, Pastor Soulié, André Maurois, Ronsard, and especially Julien Benda."[319] Aragon proceeded to lambaste a series of bourgeois institutions, including the

[319] Louis Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, translated by Alyson Waters (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 8.

government, which he viewed as motivated only by the acquisition of wealth.[320] He also targeted religion, which he argued had been designed to promote false consciousness by diverting "the attention of mindless victims once and for all from anything that they might prefer to religious practice . . . and . . . to place these victims at the mercy of dealers in celestial drugs, bosses of prayer brothels, masturbators of consciences, pimps and blackmailers all."[321]

Aragon's work was littered with subtle affirmations of the communist project. Including among these was his attack on the Third Republic's military establishment. For Aragon, France's most repulsive institution was the military, which was specifically organized and trained to oppress and enslave massive populations in the name of capitalist greed. He proclaimed, "I refuse to salute these brutes and their badges, their tricolored Gessler hats . . . I have the honor, in my own home, in this book, here and now, very consciously, to say that I shit on the entire French army." It is clear that Aragon despised the military and those who served it willingly, but he also took aim at those who granted the army its fundamental power. He argued that it was the civilian population's refusal to revolt against the armed forces that legitimized the military's abuses and the bourgeois way of life it underpinned. He lamented this indifference that reinforced the ability of the military to enforce a bourgeois will. He argued, "I find the right that the French government and the law claim today to forbid those who despise the army from expressing in writing . . . the disgust that they feel toward a revolting institution, against

[320] Ibid., 40.
[321] Ibid., 49.

which all undertakings are humanly legitimate . . . I find this right to be a vile violation of the rights of man."[322]

Aragon suggested that a social and political revolution against the bourgeois way of life, embodied by the military, was necessary for humanity to achieve true liberation. Furthermore, he argued that for the surrealists to be politically effective, they should view the dream and the irrational merely as a source of "inspiration." This inspiration needed to be "recognized, accepted, and put to work." For Aragon, the revolution was not merely concerned with the transformation of mental life. He implored the surrealists to recognize that concrete action aimed at the transformation of the material conditions of reality was an essential element of any successful revolution.[323] In this way, Aragon's work remained loyal to the surrealist attitude, but it simultaneously endorsed the PCF's materialist revolution.

Benjamin Péret's *Collage (Untitled)*, from early 1929, buttressed Aragon's implicit endorsement of a communist political revolution (Fig. 7). According to Amanda Stansell, Péret's piece is significant because its visual language exposes the links between colonial brutality and the "glories of Western civilization" as part of an effort to challenge European colonialism.[324] Occupying the left foreground of the piece is a white male figure, who appears as a "modern equivalent of the ancient Greek hero." In the right foreground of the piece is a naked African woman, who faces the white male. Péret leaves little doubt that the African woman is has been enslaved by the male who holds a whip that is wrapped around the female figure's neck. Suspended between the two

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[322] Ibid., 116-118.
[323] Ibid., 93-94.
[324] Amanda Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, edited by Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 114.

figures is a framed painting of a slave ship and below the painting stand two soldiers from the American Civil War, guarding what appear to be oversized artillery shells. The entire scene, which clearly alludes to the slave trade, unfolds in a corridor characterized by "highly ornate classical architecture." This corridor opens onto a pastoral landscape dominated by a range of mountains and a setting sun. As Elza Adamowicz contends, the juxtaposition of these various visual elements demonstrate that Péret "has deliberately dismantled and reassembled the syntagms of the colonial narrative; reshuffling them to construct another story."[325]

Fig. 7: Benjamin Péret, *Collage (untitled)*, 1929.

[325] Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 70-72.

Unlike the recent efforts of Breton to conjoin non-Europeans to the irrational as a means of asserting surrealist aesthetic autonomy, Péret's piece unmasked the inner workings of the colonial system from a perspective inspired by Marxism. For the artist, the Third Republic's *mission civilisatrice* was not conjoined to acts of goodwill and peace, but rather willful oppression and exploitation. As the presence of the painting of the slave ship and the two small soldiers guarding a stock of ammunition suggest, the participation of colonized populations in the colonial system was far from voluntary. At the root of the colonial enterprise is a master-slave relationship, to which the white male, his whip, and the African woman make reference. Thus the collage depicts the history of colonialism as essentially the struggle of the oppressed for their liberation from the shackles of the capitalist system that generated the opulent background in front of which the scene unfolds. In this way, Péret reinterprets "the classic Marxist thesis – class struggle as the battle of the exploited against their exploiters" within a colonial framework. The piece indicts European society as ignorant and barbaric, but it also implies that Péret, like Aragon, was beginning to approach his aesthetic endeavors from the position of a committed communist. Although the piece does not draw an explicit parallel between colonized populations and the European proletariat, the image conforms to communism's materialist interpretation of French colonialism, suggesting that colonized populations endured a master-slave relationship with which the working classes could identify.[326]

[326] Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 10-11.

The Question of Trotskyism

Breton devoted the last part of 1927 and most of 1928 to the completion of his iconic novel *Nadja*, but the leader of the surrealist movement did not completely abstain from the debate over the relationship between surrealism and communism. On February 12, 1929, after a year of political inactivity, Breton distributed a letter he drafted with Aragon to dozens of surrealists and to many figures who had already been formally expelled. Among the recipients were Artaud, Crevel, Desnos, Ernst, Leiris, and Tanguy.[327] The letter, inquiring as to whether surrealism should commit to collective political action consistent with that of the PCF, read in part: "Do you believe that . . . your activity should or should not be definitively limited to an individual form?"[328] Requesting that the recipients of the letter be prepared to defend their position on the matter publicly, Breton called for a general meeting of the movement, held on March 11, 1929, at the Bar du Château in Paris.

At the meeting, Breton revealed that his primary motivation for calling the gathering was the expulsion of Trotsky from the Soviet Union by Stalin, which had occurred just two months earlier in January 1929.[329] Trotsky's Marxism, which had been founded on a "profound internationalism," was also defined by "an organic contempt for every manifestation of chauvinism, national prestige and narrow-mindedness," as well as its insistence that the whole world should be viewed as "a single battlefield on which the class war was being fought."[330] Therefore, Trotskyism represented the antithesis of Stalinism, which was obsessed with building a truly communist society in the Soviet

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[327] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 176.
[328] Letter penned by Breton and Aragon, quoted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 155.
[329] Durozoi, *The History of the Surrealist Movement*, 177.
[330] Molyneux, *Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution*, 144.

Union without the international revolution. It was this difference that precipitated Trotsky's expulsion as Stalin consolidated his power in the Soviet Union.[331] According to Taminiaux, "the rule of terror established by Stalin" was viewed by Breton as "a profound betrayal of the original ideals of the Russian Revolution defined by both Lenin and Trotsky."[332] Since he had romanticized Trotsky and the internationalist, permanent revolution the Soviet leader championed as a form of communism roughly compatible with the surrealist project, the growing influence of Stalinism within the PCF was extremely troublesome for Breton. The PCF viewed Stalinism as a "planned and rational society" capable of exercising the most "far-reaching influence" throughout Europe and eventually the world. For them, it was a "welcome tonic after years of retreat and defeat."[333] Yet Breton viewed Stalinism as an increasingly ruthless, monolithic, and highly rational form of communism that did not permit any kind of ideological dissent, thus he felt it was necessary for all those within his circle to determine the precise significance of Trotsky's expulsion to surrealism and how the movement would officially respond to this development.[334]

The majority of the surrealists present at the meeting did not believe that a complete renunciation of communist ideology was necessary. Yet of the nearly fifty individuals who voted on the matter, thirty-six supported a collective protest. A handful dissented primarily on the grounds that the movement should concern itself with aesthetics alone. These figures included Masson and Leiris. Despite the fact that the majority of those in attendance agreed with Breton and Aragon about the necessity of

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[331] Ibid., 104.
[332] Taminiaux, "Breton and Trotsky: The Revolutionary Memory of Surrealism," 58.
[333] Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960,* 108-109.
[334] Durozoi, *The History of the Surrealist Movement*, 177.

collective action, the form of this response was never decided as the meeting was quickly sidetracked when the collective's attention was diverted toward a group of the movement's fellow-travelers associated with the journal *Le Grand jeu,* who had participated in surrealist meetings intermittently since 1927. Invited to participate in the gathering by Breton, Durozoi notes that the group quickly "found itself on the hotseat, to such a degree that its members . . . had the feeling that they had been tricked."[335] Confronted by committed surrealists like Unik, the group was challenged to clarify its commitment to the surrealist project. The scrutiny intensified to the point that many participants withdrew from the meeting, unwilling to participate in what Nadeau describes as an "inquisitorial judgment."[336] Thus the official surrealist response to Trotsky's recent exile was never defined. Instead, the meeting showed Breton that important rifts over the inherent nature of surrealist activity and the aims of the movement still existed within his circle. He sought to resolve this uncertainty through the publication of the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*.

While Breton was drafting his *Second Manifesto*, the movement devoted its collective energies to the issue of *Variétés* that appeared in the summer of 1929. The surrealist issue showcased the movement's aesthetics and it included a wide range of work, including the experimental writing and poetry of Breton, Aragon, Péret, and Unik, a lecture on science by Raymond Queneau, and an essay by Éluard asserting surrealism's interest in sources of knowledge from origins outside of Europe. The same issue included a subtle response by the surrealists to Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union. The map, entitled "Le Monde au temps des surréalistes," most likely drawn by

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[335] Ibid.
[336] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 156-158.

Tanguy, was the result of a collaborative effort by a number of surrealists, including Breton and Éluard (Fig. 8).[337] A striking composition, the surrealists' image of the world, which conjoins the practice of mapmaking to the imagination, "literally belittles Europe." An attack on Eurocentrism, the map relegates an extremely diminished Western Europe to a corner of the page. In contrast with cartographic traditions that featured Europe most prominently, the surrealists showcased the Pacific basin in the center of the map. The Asian continent, Alaska, and islands like New Guinea and the Polynesians are foregrounded. Though the massive size of Russia suggests that the movement was trying to emphasize that they still believed in the project of the Russian Revolution, as David Roediger notes, it is just as important to recognize that the only European city included within the map other than Paris is Constantinople, which at the time was the site of Trotsky's exile. As Roediger contends, this counterpoint to the aggrandizement of Russia helps to convey the movement's valorization of Trotsky and hostility toward Stalinist doctrines.[338]

[337] David Roediger, *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 171-172.
[338] Ibid., 173-174.

Fig. 8: "Le Monde au temps des surréalistes," from *Variétés*, 'Le Surréalisme en 1929,' (June 1929).

In addition to suggesting that the surrealists intended to remain loyal to Trotsky, it is clear from the movement's rendering of the world that a form of anticolonialism that emphasized the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans was still at the center of its official consciousness. The deliberate resizing of the Pacific basin is clearly consistent with the movement's strategy of valorizing the Asian, Oceanic, Eskimo, and Pacific Northwestern cultures over Western civilization. Denis Hollier observes that the movement's exaggeration of the size of locales like Alaska and Easter Island in relation to the rest of the globe implies that the surrealists viewed these regions and their indigenous peoples as admirable and exceptional because of the dramatic differences in their cultures to those of Western civilization. Therefore, this surrealist geography perpetuates what Hollier describes as an "East/West opposition."[339] In doing so, the map rejected the PCF's anticolonial discourse of inclusion and further reiterated the

[339] Denis Hollier, "Surrealism and its Discontents," *Papers of Surrealism*, No. 7 (2007), 6-7.

movement's ambivalence toward the official political positions of the Communist Party, which had succumbed to the influence of Stalinism.

Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*

A letter from February 1930, which Éluard sent to his to lover Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova, known among the surrealists as Gala, referred to Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* as "absolutely magnificent, irrefutable."[340] At the same time that the surrealists were preparing their contributions to the journal *Variétés*, Breton was busy crafting an explicit clarification of the movement's project and aims. The failure of the meeting of the movement on March 11, 1929, confirmed to Breton that it was necessary to remind surrealism of its foundational principles and to officially purge the group of members deemed detrimental to the project. Originally published in the twelfth and final installment of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which appeared on December 15, 1929, the *Second Manifesto* reiterated first and foremost that surrealism remained a means of "testing by any and all means, and of demonstrating at any price, the meretricious nature of the old antinomies hypocritically intended to prevent any unusual ferment on the part of man." Couched in gendered language, Breton made clear that despite all that had transpired between the founding of the movement and his contemporary moment, surrealism was still fundamentally concerned with subverting Western reason and the numerous institutions engendered by this intellectual paradigm. To accomplish this task, Breton invoked Trotskyism, declaring that the movement maintained its allegiance to the notion of "total revolt." Consistent with the assertions made within countless earlier surrealist tracts, Breton declared that "Everything remains to be done, every means must

[340] Letter from Éluard to Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova, Paris, February 1930, in *Letters to Gala*, 69.

be worth trying, in order to lay waste to the ideas of *family, country, religion*. No matter how well known the Surrealist position may be with respect to this matter, still it must be stressed that on this point there is no room for compromise."[341]

Breton also hoped to use the *Second Manifesto* to prove that surrealism was not an "intellectual pastime."[342] To portray his movement as inherently modern, he rejected the avant-garde precursors that surrealism had once admired. Figures like Rimbaud, Poe, and Sade were described as not truly embodying the surrealist spirit of revolt because their work had been absorbed by the bourgeoisie. He also contended that a number of individuals who had long been important contributors to the movement were incapable of committing themselves entirely to the surrealist political project. As such, Breton officially excommunicated these figures from surrealism as further proof of the movement's radicalism. Among those officially expelled were founding members like Artaud, Soupault, Vitrac, and the painter André Masson.[343] As additional proof that surrealism was still a dynamic threat to Western civilization, Breton reminded his readers that the movement remained enthralled by Otherness. He noted, "Surrealism aims quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves." To unlock the full strength and capacity of the human mind entailed the unrestrained exploration of elements of intellectual life viewed by the West as inherently mysterious and foreign. According to Breton, this exploration depended on "the systematic illumination of hidden places and the progressive darkening

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[341] André Breton, "Second Manifeste du surréalisme," *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 12 (15 December 1929), 1-2.
[342] Ibid., 4.
[343] Ibid., 2-3.

of other places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory."[344] There can be little doubt that Breton was referring to a sustained exploration of the unconscious by the surrealist movement as a means of undermining the reign of reason over human experience in the West. However, this passage also implied that surrealism was committed to the valorization of the knowledge innate to the non-European cultures viewed by the West as mysterious and otherworldly.

Although the *Second Manifesto* merely implied that the movement would continue to valorize non-European culture to help showcase surrealism's Otherness in relation to Western reason and to topple the colonial system, Breton engaged far more explicitly with the issue of communism. Breton utilized the *Second Manifesto* as an opportunity to clarify the movement's official stance. His position remained largely consistent with the one expressed within "Légitime défense" several years prior. He opined, "I really fail to see . . . why we should refrain from supporting the Revolution."[345] At the time that Breton penned the *Second Manifesto*, he still viewed his movement as a political failure. Of Breton during this period, Nadeau observed, "He deplores, in fact, the failures, the deficiencies, the lack of rigor that have been manifest in the domain the movement has marked out for itself . . . the experiment [had] not been carried to its conclusions."[346] Surrealist aesthetic endeavors, like automatic writing and the exploration of dream states, which had dominated the movement's energies over the last two years, had failed to motivate any widespread action aimed at undermining Western reason and bourgeois conventions. Therefore, because the surrealist engagement with the

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[344] Ibid., 5.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 161.

irrational could not topple rationalism, Breton reiterated the importance of collective political action.

Breton believed the surrealism lacked the rigor needed to topple Western categories and conventions. Therefore, despite his concern for Trotsky's treatment by the Stalinists, whose influence had spread to the PCF, he suggested that out of necessity the movement should embrace the social and political revolution championed by the communist establishment. "Provided that communism does not look upon us merely as strange animals intended to be exhibited strolling and gaping suspiciously in its ranks – we shall prove ourselves fully capable of doing our duty as revolutionaries."[347] Breton believed that the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat envisioned by the communists would engender a political and social environment more receptive to the revolution of the mind that remained the fundamental goal of surrealism. In other words, Breton viewed the social revolution as just one aspect of a broader revolution intended to liberate humanity from Western rationalism. He also sought to assert a distinction between Stalinist communism and the surrealist project. He reminded his readers, "The problem of social action, I would like to repeat and to stress this point, is only one of the forms of a more general problem which Surrealism set out to deal with, and that is *the problem of human expression in all its forms*."[348] Collective political action was a necessity, but so too was individual creativity and the exploration of mysterious realms of mental activity. Despite his movement's inability to successfully undermine Western categories and conventions in the years following the Rif War, Breton was unwilling to

[347] Breton, "Second Manifeste du surréalisme," 6.
[348] Ibid., 8-9.

curtail the significance of the exploration of the unconscious mind to surrealism's revolutionary ambitions.

Breton's official position remained generally consistent throughout the late 1920s as he tried to navigate a commitment to the Marxist ideology championed by Trotsky and the anarchist, aesthetic idealism which had defined surrealism since its inception. Motivated by what he perceived to be the inefficacy of his movement's endeavors, Breton argued in the *Second Manifesto*, like he did in the immediate wake of the Rif War, that if surrealism was going to realize its language of destruction, it was necessary for his circle to commit itself provisionally to an organized project like that of the PCF, if only to validate the revolutionary credentials of his followers. Additionally, just as he did in "Légitime défense," Breton's insistence within the *Second Manifesto* that surrealism would also remain committed to the exploration of the unconscious confirmed that he was reluctant to fully submit surrealism to institutional communism. In Katharine Conley's opinion, Breton's persistent need to affiliate his movement with a group like the PCF, which he viewed as on the periphery of Western civilization, despite important reservations among his circle testified to his desire "to match what he idealistically believed to be the *unscathed* honesty of all those residing *outside* mainstream culture."[349] Otherness, as far as Breton was concerned, was what endowed surrealism with its corrosive potential, thus for the movement to maintain its revolutionary vigor after nearly a decade of existence, it needed to embrace strategies and affiliations which illuminated a distance between itself and mainstream bourgeois culture.

[349] Conley, "Surrealism and Outsider Art: From the 'Automatic Message' to André Breton's Collection," 141.

The *Second Manifesto* illustrates that the late 1920s was a period of internal indecision for the surrealist movement, as the tensions heightened over the relationship between surrealism's aesthetic independence, premised on the exploration of sources of irrational and primordial knowledge, and its engagement with the PCF on political matters. Despite this increase in tensions, the movement demonstrated throughout the late 1920s, as it had done in its formative years, that non-European art and thought remained an important element of its political project since it served as a manifestation of the resurgence of the irrational against Western rationalism. Although Breton attempted to utilize the *Second Manifesto* as a means of resolving the movement's internal strife and to craft another strategic reconciliation with the communists for the sake of political efficacy, the following chapter will show that this reconciliation was put to the test when the surrealists attempted to once again collaborate with the PCF on the issue of colonialism. The way this collaborative effort unfolded, however, forced the surrealists to come to terms with the fact that their form of anticolonialism, which valorized non-Europeans for their perceived Otherness, was antithetical to the position embraced by the PCF and that the incompatibility of these positions was symptomatic of broader, irremediable ideological differences between the two groups.

Chapter 5

THE COLONIAL EXHIBITION AND THE FAILURE OF SURREALIST ANTICOLONIALISM

For six months in 1931, *L'Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris* celebrated colonial expansion.[350] The official opening of the Exposition was commemorated by widely read newspapers like *Le Petit Parisien* as a "day of achievement" for colonial France, whose prestige and goodwill was finally on display for the entire population of the metropole to see.[351] Similarly, *Le Temps* praised the opening because it successfully demonstrated "the vitality, the entrepreneurial spirit, and sense of civilization" of France and its people.[352] According to critic Marcel Zahar, for the French organizers of the Exposition, led by Maréchal Hubert Lyautey, the underlying purpose of the exhibition, held from May 6 to November 15, 1931, was to showcase "the model of the colonial world" and "the progression of the beneficial French effort."[353] Part of a long tradition of exhibitions which lauded the accomplishments of colonialism, the Exposition of 1931 was devised as a means of garnering broad public support for the Third Republic's civilizing mission and to champion France's national prestige.[354] To accomplish these aims the Exposition relied upon the colonial imaginary, advocating a hierarchical cultural order which promoted what historian Patricia Morton called the "radical segregation of the European and native worlds."[355]

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[350] Patricia A. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 3.
[351] "L'Exposition coloniale est ouverte," *Le Petit Parisien*, No. 19791 (7 May 1931), 1.
[352] "L'Exposition coloniale," *Le Temps*, No. 25458 (7 May 1931), 1.
[353] Marcel Zahar, "Batir! Informer!" *L'Art vivant*, No. 151 (1931), 384.
[354] Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," 339.
[355] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris,* 6.

Seven foreign colonial powers, including Belgium and the United States, were invited by the organizers and contributed representations of their own territories to the Exposition, which was held in the Bois de Vincennes on the southeastern edge of Paris. Nevertheless, it was France's vast empire that served as the Exposition's centerpiece. Along with a permanent Musée des Colonies, the Exposition was comprised of dozens of pavilions that purported to represent accurately life in each of the Third Republic's many colonies (Fig 9). Structures like the Cambodian pavilion, designed by Georges Groslier, director of the Cambodian Arts Service, borrowed aspects of indigenous architecture to help physically manifest the colony's culture to European audiences (Fig. 10).[356] These pavilions and the exhibits housed within them, along with the display of indigenous peoples brought from the colonies, ensured that Exposition "served as a catalog of the colonial universe."[357] This colonial universe was defined by its Otherness, with the Third Republic's overseas possessions presented as "the site of rampant sexuality, irrationality, and decadence," whereas the Exposition's organizers portrayed France as the pinnacle of human civilization. As Morton observes, "by making this dichotomy visible and legible, the Exposition was intended to provide rationale for French colonization."[358] In other words, the Exposition promoted a colonial imaginary that entailed the belief that the colonies were laboratories of Western rationality, in which Europeans were testing whether a superior, more advanced culture could guide savage populations out of their intellectual ignorance and cultural backwardness.

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[356] Ibid., 38.
[357] Ibid., 79.
[358] Ibid., 4-6.

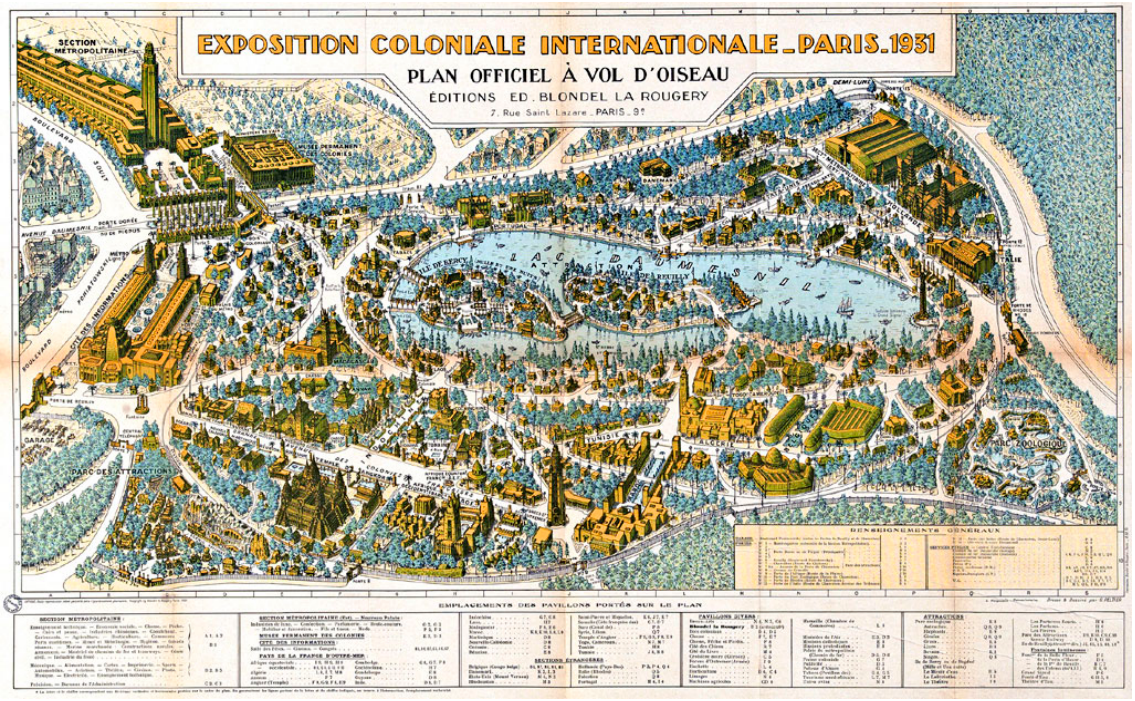

Fig. 9: Georges Peltier, "Exposition Coloniale Internationale, Paris 1931: Plan Officiel À VolD'Oiseau," Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Fig. 10: Léo Guimard, "Exposition coloniale internationale de 1931, Pavillon du Cambodge," Archives départementales de la Dordogne, Périgueux.

The Colonial Exposition was an overwhelming success. As Janine Mileaf notes, the appeal of the Exposition can be attributed in large part to "feelings of nationalism that were stirred by the devastation of the first World War, as well as to the unprecedented popularity of various forms of exoticism and 'negrophilia' in Paris at the time."[359] Nearly thirty-three million tickets were sold to audiences eager to view the pavilions and experience the variety of scholarly lectures, musical performances, and parades which were held on a daily basis on the event's grounds. This enthusiastic attendance ensured that the Colonial Exposition was the "most popular French world's fair since the 1900 Universal Exposition."[360] Furthermore, the Exposition inspired the enthusiasm of the popular press, which praised the event while it was open and mourned its closing.[361] On November 16, 1931, the day after the great spectacle ceased operations, a piece by René Bruyez published in *Le Petit Journal* lamented the closure, calling the Exposition the "apotheosis" of French colonialism.[362] On the same date, *Le Temps* praised the Exposition for instilling in audiences an immense sense of pride in the "national goals" which the Third Republic was trying to achieve overseas. The Exposition "proved to be of the first order of interest" among the metropolitan population, confirming to visitors that France's *mission civilisatrice* was indeed a worthwhile cause.[363] Part of this popular interest in the Exposition and its numerous offerings was also due to the fact that French audiences were not exposed to the gruesome realities that underpinned the so-called

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[359] Janine Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 40 (Autumn 2001), 241.
[360] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris,* 313.
[361] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement,* 220.
[362] René Bruyez, "L'Exposition n'est plus…" *Le Petit Journal,* No. 25141 (16 November 1931), 1.
[363] "A L'Exposition Coloniale," *Le Temps*, No. 25650 (16 November 1931), 3.

successes of the colonial system. "The messy reality of the colonies was ordered into a cohesive, pacific world" at the Exposition, offering to visitors a "sanitized view . . . of French colonization and its results."[364]

Although the Colonial Exposition enjoyed an extremely favorable reception by the majority of the French population, the spectacle was not without its critics. Among the critics of the Exposition were the surrealists, who vehemently repudiated the narrative of benevolent colonialism displayed throughout the Bois de Vincennes in two anticolonial pamphlets they issued around the opening of the Exposition. These pamphlets testified to the willingness of Breton's circle to fold their ideas on colonialism into the framework of the anticolonial argument promoted by the PCF. This approach was also utilized by the surrealists in a counter-exposition they mounted with the communists, which was designed to further undermine the government's narrative and expose the brutality and hypocrisy of colonialism. Several recent contributions to the historiography of interwar surrealism, including articles by Mileaf, Lynn Palermo, and Jody Blake, assert that this response to the Colonial Exposition serves as one of the most significant moments in the movement's political history.[365]

As my previous chapter explained, in the late 1920s surrealism was tormented by internal tensions as the movement attempted to navigate its precarious relationship with communism's materialist and collectivist ideology. Several members of Breton's circle, including Artaud, Soupault, and Masson, viewed communist ideology as fundamentally

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[364] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 94.

[365] See Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton;" Lynn Palermo, "L'Exposition Anticoloniale: Political or Aesthetic Protest?" *French Cultural Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (February 2009); and Jody Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: *Art indigène* in Service of the Revolution," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2002).

incompatible with surrealism's idealistic, individualistic aesthetic ambitions. On the other hand, a faction within the movement lead by Aragon and Péret began to extend the PCF's anticapitalist argument about colonialism which they had embraced during the Rif War to Western civilization as a whole, suggesting that only communism was able to liberate humanity effectively. As I will show, the Colonial Exposition of 1931 compelled the movement to once again unite with the PCF on the question of colonialism for the sake of political efficacy. This collaboration did not represent a full capitulation of the surrealists to Marxist anticolonialism, but rather a folding of surrealist ideas into a Marxist framework. The surrealists still portrayed non-Western culture as a source of great value, but they aligned with the PCF in the identification of the villain in the narrative of colonialism: capitalism. In other words, the surrealists did not propose a unity of the proletariat and the colonial subject, but instead, they asserted that capitalism was the common opponent of both groups. This renewal of the movement's allegiance to the PCF's political campaign against colonialism allowed Breton to temporarily resolve his movement's internal strife while offering the movement a means of protesting the Colonial Exposition and the bankrupt civilization it lauded. Yet in the wake of the anticolonial counter-exhibition, the movement began to deliberately separate its Marxist political endeavors and aesthetic exploration of the irrational as it moved forward with an explicit critique of the institutional communism embraced by the PCF.

The movement's response to the Colonial Exposition demonstrated that the surrealist and official communist anticolonial positions were incompatible. Although the surrealists dressed their section of the counter-exhibition in Marxist rhetoric, they insisted on pursuing the strategies they had embraced for nearly a decade which Othered non-

Europeans. On the other hand, the PCF maintained its commitment to the belief that the European proletariat should identify with colonized populations since both groups endured a similar fate under capitalism. The surrealists refused to truly conform to the PCF's position, thus the tensions between these two anticolonial visions ensured that the counter-exhibition was a failure. This failure forced the surrealists to finally address its attitude toward the political project of the PCF, which it had grappled with since the Rif crisis. In other words, the movement's collaborative response to the Colonial Exposition demanded that Breton's circle come to terms with the fact that moving forward, the surrealists could not maintain their attitude toward non-Europeans and successfully unite with the PCF on the question of colonialism. In the wake of the counter-exhibition, the surrealists shifted their attention from anticolonialism, which was conjoined to their aesthetic interests, and focused exclusively on the struggle of the European proletariat. This placement of the anticolonial to one side and commitment to the proletarian struggle was motivated by the movement's changing priorities as it sought to criticize the institutional communism of the PCF, which was increasingly influenced by Stalinism.

The Rebirth of an Anticolonial Alliance

Morton's study of the Colonial Exposition illustrates that throughout France, there were "very few opposing voices" willing to challenge the fallacy of French cultural superiority on display throughout the Bois de Vincennes. Although figures like Léon Blum "criticized the Exposition for its excessively frivolous and smug atmosphere," the only groups who mounted substantive campaigns against the Exposition and the colonial

imaginary it showcased were the PCF and the surrealists.[366] For the PCF, the Colonial Exposition endorsed a violent and exploitative system of rule that underpinned European capitalism. On May 6, 1931, the day the Colonial Exposition officially opened its gates to the public, *L'Humanité* published a piece by Florimond Bonte which condemned the colonial spectacle on the grounds not only that it glorified France's overseas expansion, but that it did so by willfully hiding from the public the ruthlessness through which inherently capitalist goals were achieved in the colonies. Bonte noted, "French imperialism will stop at no crime." He argued that capitalism transported to the colonies by France was far from benevolent, but instead, more accurately characterized by the "appalling massacres" of indigenous populations like those which occurred in "Tonkin, Madagascar, Dahomey, Senegal, Indochina, [and] Morocco." As a declaration of his contempt for the Exposition and the colonial system it lauded, he concluded: "Long live the independence of oppressed peoples of the colonies! Down with imperialism!"[367]

Bonte's objection to the Colonial Exposition echoed the sentiments conveyed by an article published in *L'Humanité* in the month leading up to the Exposition's formal opening. As the Exposition's organizers attempted to finalize the spectacle's last details, the columnist Henavent anticipated that the Exposition would portray the colonized peoples on display as inferior and savage beings who benefited greatly, both culturally and intellectually, from European rule. In particular, Henavent was concerned that the Exposition's organizers would characterize these non-Westerners as "man-eaters." According to Henavent, this fallacy of cannibalism represented the great "bluff" propagated by proponents of colonialism, and specifically, by the French bourgeoisie.

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[366] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 97-98.
[367] Florimond Bonte, "L'apothéose du crime," *L'Humanité*, No. 11831 (6 May 1931), 1.

The columnist warned that the French bourgeoisie was portraying non-Westerners as cannibals and thus as savage and backward "to justify its crimes and its exploitation of millions of human beings." The piece cautioned the French proletariat to recognize that this was not grounded in reality, but rather, that is was a deceptive tactic mobilized by the bourgeoisie which he feared would be implemented at the Colonial Exposition to prejudice the French workers against colonized peoples. For Henavent, like all those committed to institutional communism, colonized populations were viewed as the counterparts of the French working class enslaved under capitalism overseas. He asserted that efforts to portray non-Europeans as barbaric cannibals were precisely how the bourgeoisie convinced French workers "that the colonized workers are still in a 'savage' state, that they are 'inferior beings.'"[368]

The PCF continued to publish anticolonial articles in *L'Humanité* throughout the period the Exposition was open to visitors. For instance, on June 19, 1931, the newspaper published an article that lamented the capture of the communist rebel Nguyen Ai Quoc, who would later use the name Ho Chi Minh. Praising Nguyen Ai Quoc as "one of the best pioneers of the global communist movement," the article also decried the colonial abuses unfolding throughout Southeast Asia and encouraged French readers to both draw inspiration from Indochinese revolutionaries and join them in their campaign against "the international oppression" imposed on the world by capitalist powers like France and Britain.[369] Nonetheless, much like during the Rif War, the PCF augmented these written attacks by planning more concrete protests against the Colonial Exposition.

The most notable of these anticolonial protests was the counter-exhibition the

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[368] Henavent, "Le Cannibale est sans danger," *L'Humanité*, No. 11815 (20 April 1931), 2.
[369] "Les Anglais arrêtent à Shanghaï le révolutionnaire annamite N'Guyen Aï Quoc," *L'Humanité*, No. 11875 (19 June 1931), 1.

PCF mounted with the surrealists, which the two groups titled *L'Exposition Anti-Imperialiste: La Vérité sur les colonies*. Archival research conducted by Mileaf at the Bibliothèque Marxiste de Paris uncovered seldom-examined minutes from PCF meetings on anticolonial activities and a lengthy report on preparations for the counter-exhibition. Although the surrealists have generally been credited with proposing the idea for an anticolonial exhibition, Mileaf's research proves that this proposition actually emerged within the ranks of the PCF.[370] Her study shows that meeting minutes sent to Moscow prove that in early February 1931, while Lyautey and his fellow organizers were finishing their preparations for the official Exposition, an unnamed figure within the PCF suggested that the communists respond to the state-sponsored spectacle with an exhibition of their own, which would be aimed at generating broad support for anticolonialism throughout France. Furthermore, the leadership of the PCF decided that the French section of the Ligue anti-impérialiste, a syndicate of the Comintern formed in 1927 and based in Berlin, would officially sponsor the event, although the Colonial Section of the PCF would oversee its organization.[371]

Despite their skepticism toward Stalinism after Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union, the surrealists announced that they were willing to collaborate with the Party on the question of colonialism over six months before they were officially invited to participate in the counter-exhibition. Following the release of Breton's *Second Manifesto* in December 1929, which announced that the movement would affirm the political revolution championed by the PCF while maintaining a commitment to their own revolution of the mind, *La Révolution surréaliste* ceased publication. *La Révolution*

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[370] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 244.
[371] Ibid., 244-245.

surréaliste was replaced by a new periodical that was named *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* at Aragon's behest. Although this new title implied that the surrealist movement had pledged its complete allegiance to the Party, this was far from reality. Taminiaux observes, "the manifestation of unconditional solidarity with the cause of the working class did not prevent Breton from affirming at the same time the radical independence of his movement from any political authority, including that of the Communist Party, both in France and in the Soviet Union."[372] Indeed, the movement's reluctance to relinquish its autonomy was evidenced in the first issue of the new periodical, published under the direction of Breton in July 1930, which was comprised of numerous surrealist texts concerned with the exploration of the irrational in addition to an assortment of articles that focused on political matters. Among the many texts which testified to surrealism's continued commitment to the irrational, and thus to the movement's independence from the PCF, was an essay by Breton which championed the untapped powers of the imagination.[373]

On the first page of this first edition of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, the surrealists announced that they were willing to unite with the Party to combat the spread of capitalist imperialism. This announcement took the form of a reply to a telegram sent to the surrealists by the International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature, which posed the question: "What will your position be if imperialism declares war on the Soviets?" The surrealists responded, "Comrades, if imperialism declares war upon the Soviets, our position will be, in accordance with the directives of the Third International, the position of the members of the French Communist Party." In other words, the

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[372] Taminiaux, "Breton and Trotsky: The Revolutionary Memory of Surrealism," 55.
[373] André Breton, "Il y aura une fois," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 1 (July 1930), 2-4.

surrealists affirmed that they would join forces with the PCF to combat capitalist aggression. Nevertheless, this declaration should not be mistaken as an expression of the movement's complete fidelity to the entire political project of the Communist Party. Although the document confirmed that Breton and his circle were willing to collaborate with the Party on political matters, it did not explicitly endorse the PCF's interpretation of reality, increasingly informed by Stalinism. On the contrary, the surrealists specified in the final passage of their response that "in the present situation of unarmed conflict, we believe it is pointless to wait to place our own particular capacities at the service of the revolution."[374] These words demonstrate that in July 1930, Breton's circle was determined to pursue revolutionary action in the name of a Marxist revolution, but that this action would not necessarily be informed by the directives of the Party. The surrealist movement remained independent from the PCF.

This position was put to the test in the spring of 1931, when the surrealist movement joined forces with the PCF after being invited to assist with preparations for the counter-exhibition.[375] As discussed in my previous chapter, after the Rif War, Trotsky's form of communism appealed to the surrealists since they viewed his thought as generally compatible with their own revolutionary project.[376] Yet following Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1929, the ambivalence the movement fostered toward communism was heightened as Breton's circle viewed Stalinism's inherent rationalism as overbearing and incommensurable with their aesthetic ambitions.[377] This heightened ambivalence exacerbated the already turbulent internal debates about the movement's

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[374] André Breton, et al., "Question et réponse," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 1 (July 1930), 1.
[375] Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: *Art indigène* in Service of the Revolution," 40.
[376] Taminiaux, "Breton and Trotsky: The Revolutionary Memory of Surrealism," 56.
[377] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 175.

ideological differences with the Communist Party. Of course, this dispute continued to undermine the stability of the movement and impressed upon Breton that, as a political entity in France, surrealism was ineffective.

A year before the surrealists began to collaborate with the PCF on the counter-exhibition, surrealism's political ineffectiveness was reiterated to Breton by an exhibition of African and Oceanic art organized by Tzara at the Galerie Pigalle in Paris. Held between February and April 1930, Tzara's "Exposition d'art Africain et d'art Oceanien" showcased over four hundred objects from non-Western cultures.[378] Much like earlier surrealists shows, this exhibition intended to present these pieces not as rudimentary objects produced by savage, uncivilized peoples, but rather as important works of art that explored the irrational and primordial. Tzara's exhibition received mixed reviews.[379] Waldemar George, a critic and editor of the journal *Les Arts à Paris*, penned one of the more noteworthy commentaries. George, who by 1930 was captivated by fascism, deplored abstract art and the work of the avant-garde, advocating for a return to classicism.[380] His review of the exhibition was highly critical and he argued that Tzara and the surrealist movement fetishized and exoticized non-European art as irrational and primordial, thereby perpetuating notions of European cultural and intellectual superiority. He attempted to show that non-Western art was part of a continuous tradition in which contemporary Europeans participated. Of the surrealists, he argued that they "find what they seek . . . If so many unknown idols have been dug up in recent years, it is because

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[378] Alisa LaGamma, editor, *Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 294.
[379] Palermo, "L'Exposition Anticoloniale: Political or Aesthetic Protest?" 36-37.
[380] Matthew Affron, "Waldemar George: A Parisian Art Critic on Modernism and Fascism," in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy,* edited by Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 184.

the diggers themselves are idolaters." George objected to surrealism's assertion that non-Western cultures existed outside of the European tradition. As far as he was concerned, African and Oceanic works did not represent the apogee of human creativity like the surrealists claimed. On the contrary, these objects served as indexes of the rudimentary aesthetic foundation upon which centuries of European artists had improved.[381]

Although George's critique of Tzara's "Exposition d'art Africain et d'art Oceanien" asserted French cultural superiority over non-Western populations, his argument attempted to convince his audience that these colonized cultures were not Others. Disparaging the avant-garde, he observed, "Painters, critics, and collectors are the only ones who feel an irresistible need to believe in the myth of the revolution carried out by our era."[382] George's piece sought to demonstrate that non-European cultures should be considered "prior" to modern civilization, not its Other. Although this position is itself a form of Othering, George's criticism served as a poignant reminder to Breton that his movement's attitude toward non-Europeans was exclusionary and as such, it maintained the structure of the colonial imaginary. Thus the PCF's willingness to collaborate with the surrealists to organize a counter-exhibition in response to the Colonial Exposition of 1931 endowed Breton with an opportunity to prove that surrealism was a relevant political force in France, capable of overcoming its shortcomings to realize its revolutionary and anticolonial goals. Despite the movement's heightened ambivalence toward communist ideology in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the circumstances of 1930 and 1931 compelled the surrealists to revisit their earlier

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[381] Waldemar George, "The Twilight of the Idols," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, 214. Originally published as "Le Crépuscule des idoles," *Les Arts à Paris*, No. 17 (May 1930), 7-13.
[382] Ibid., 215.

alliance with the PCF for the sake of political efficacy. As Nadeau contends, by 1931, the surrealists had resigned themselves to accepting "'orders' from the social and political Revolution."[383]

The Truth About the Colonies

The surrealists officially announced their disdain for the Colonial Exposition and their commitment to a Marxist campaign against the spectacle in a tract titled "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale." Written in the spring of 1931, the document appeared on May 4, two days before the official opening of the Exposition. Signed by twelve surrealists, including leading figures like Breton, Aragon, Éluard, Péret, and Tanguy, five thousand copies of the document were distributed by the movement with the assistance of the PCF around the Bois de Vincennes and throughout working-class neighborhoods in Paris.[384] The tract opened by attacking the Third Republic's colonial system for enslaving vast populations of non-Europeans simply to increase "the gold reserves lying in the vaults of the Banque de France." Although the surrealists did use their tract to valorize these oppressed populations as "people who unlike [Europeans] have retained an insight into the true goals of the human species as regards human knowledge, love and happiness," Breton and his circle mobilized a language of anticolonialism they had not embraced since the Rif War, emphasizing that they rejected colonialism first and foremost because of its attachment to capitalism.

Consistent with the anticolonial attitude of the PCF, the surrealists declared that the Colonial Exposition testified to the "complicity of the whole bourgeoisie" in the

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[383] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 170.
[384] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 100.

Third Republic's colonial system. Rather than acknowledge that "hardly a week goes by without people being killed in the colonies" in the name of French prestige, the bourgeois population of France was content to celebrate the nation's overseas endeavors because these efforts had engendered significant economic prosperity. The surrealists closed their piece by encouraging the proletariat to recognize that colonialism was an element of a broader capitalist regime and that colonized peoples endured the same struggle as that of the French working classes. They encouraged the proletariat to not only boycott the Exposition, but to demand that France finally abandon colonialism. Of "all those who refuse once and for all to be among the defenders of the bourgeois fatherland," the surrealists declared that it was "their duty to oppose such rejoicing and exploitation in the appropriate way in accord with the attitude of Lenin, who was the first person at the start of this century to recognize colonial peoples as allies of the world proletariat."[385]

"Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale" illustrates that by 1931 the surrealist movement had decided to endorse a Marxist political and social revolution as a means of toppling Western rationalism and the institutions it underpinned. Yet if the tract left any doubt about the movement's attitude toward the PCF's brand of anticolonialism, the movement's response to a fire at the Colonial Exposition confirmed that Breton's circle was trying to situate its own position within this Marxist framework. On the night of June 27 and 28, 1931, the Dutch East Indies pavilion and all of the indigenous artifacts housed within the structure were destroyed by fire. Newspapers like *Le Petit Journal* lamented the blaze, arguing that the total destruction of the pavilion left a "real 'hole' in the Exposition" and that the event was a tragedy for the Netherlands and for the

[385] André Breton, et al., "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale," reprinted in *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives 1922-1939*, Vol. 1, edited by José Pierre (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1980), 194-195.

collectors who had contributed objects to the pavilion.[386] Though the surrealist response was also characterized by a somber tone, the movement did not grieve for the Exposition, the Netherlands, or any of the dealers who loaned pieces to the pavilion. Instead, in their tract "Premier bilan de l'Exposition Coloniale," which appeared on July 3, the surrealists mourned the indigenous peoples whose cultural heritage had been destroyed in the blaze.

The surrealists argued that "The pavilion which the journalists call, without the least embarrassment, the 'Dutch' pavilion unquestionably contained the most valuable manifestations of the intellectual life of Malaysia and Melanesia." Although the objects destroyed by the blaze were the possessions of Dutch collectors, the surrealists described these pieces as the "rarest and oldest artifacts" of the Oceanic cultures from which they originated and argued that these works "had been violently torn from those who made them" to enable Europeans to advertise colonialism. The presence of these objects within the Dutch pavilion did not testify to the benevolence of colonialism, but rather to its inherent brutality. Just as they had argued in "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale," the surrealists claimed that this colonial violence served capitalism and the European bourgeoisie. Outraged, the surrealists declared, "We shall limit ourselves to noting that capitalism must take full responsibility for what currently happens at Vincennes, since it is capitalism that has coined it there." As far as Breton's circle was concerned, the fire at the Dutch pavilion and its obliteration of the non-Western objects on display within the building was a metaphor for the cultural destruction unfolding overseas under capitalist colonialism on a regular basis. Thus the surrealists combined their valuation of non-Western art with a critique of capitalism. Yet this convergence did not signal a full

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[386] "La section néerlandaise est dévastée, à l'aube, par le feu," *Le Petit Journal*, No. 25001 (29 June 1931), 1-2.

embrace of the anticolonial argument proposed by the PCF, which would not have valorized the art destroyed by the blaze in the same way as the surrealists.[387]

Both "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition Coloniale" and "Premier bilan de l'Exposition Coloniale" attest to the surrealist movement's eagerness to align itself with the PCF. This eagerness to embrace a Marxist attitude was recognized, albeit obliquely, by the PCF itself shortly after the publication of the two surrealist tracts. According to an article published in *L'Humanité* on July 4, 1931, just one day after the surrealists released "Premier bilan de l'Exposition Coloniale," the PCF contended that a collaboration between the Party and its "friends and sympathizers" would enable their counter-exhibition to successfully expose "the conquest, the appropriation of land, [and] the forced labor" endemic to capitalist colonialism.[388] While the article does not mention the surrealist movement by name, there can be little doubt that Breton's circle was among those considered sympathetic to the PCF's anticolonial campaign. That the surrealists were not mentioned by name is also significant. The unwillingness of the PCF to explicitly mention the movement implies that the Party was trying to present their brand of Marxism as most capable of subverting French colonialism. Any mention of the surrealists, who prior to 1931 had championed an alternate form of anticolonialism, might undermine the prominence of the PCF's position within the broader anticolonial discourse. Nevertheless, the PCF allowed the movement to design an entire floor of the counter-exhibition.

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[387] Yves Tanguy, et al., "Premier bilan de l'Exposition Coloniale," in *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives 1922-1939*, 198-200.

[388] "L'Exposition anti-impérialiste se prépare: elle montrera la vérité sur les colonies," *L'Humanité*, No. 11890 (4 July 1931), 4.

The counter-exhibition, held in a bourgeois neighborhood in northwestern Paris on the opposite side of the city to the Bois de Vincennes, officially opened its doors to the public on September 20, 1931. Staged in the former Soviet Pavilion, which was designed by Konstantin Melnikov for the Paris Exposition of Modern and Decorative Industrial Art of 1925, the counter-exhibition was divided into three distinct sections occupying two floors of the building.[389] The first floor housed the PCF's ideological exhibit, which was designed and implemented by André Thirion, a member of the PCF who had participated in meetings held by the surrealist movement since 1927.[390] Thirion's section of the counter-exhibition included "texts defining colonial imperialism, notes from prominent figures in the PCF" as well as "photographs and caricatures of the Colonial Exposition," all of which emphasized Lenin's attitude toward imperialism, encapsulated in the quote "Imperialism is the last stage of Capitalism," which was featured prominently on a banner within the exhibit. According to Mileaf, other materials within the ideological section of the counter-exhibition highlighted the "the division of Africa and foreign occupation of Tunisia and Morocco, instances of colonial exploitation, positive views of indigenous life, and images of revolution and resistance to colonization" as well as "Forced labor, prostitution, famine, and the Moroccan war for independence."[391] Though there were no indigenous objects included in this room, all of these elements functioned to highlight the parallels between colonized populations and the proletariat, both of which suffered under a merciless and oppressive form of capitalism.

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[389] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 245-246.
[390] Palermo, "L'Exposition Anticoloniale: Political or Aesthetic Protest?" 32.
[391] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 245-247.

The second floor of the counter-exhibition was divided into two sections. The first of these sections, organized by Georges Sadoul, a member of Breton's circle who had grown especially close to the PCF in the early 1930s, was designed to overtly proselytize the success of communism.[392] Displays in this section lauded life in the Soviet Union and claimed that the Party's benevolent influence was spreading rapidly throughout the world without the use of force. Non-European populations were accepting communism freely. Charts, photographs, and other materials showcased building projects, cultural achievements, and suggested that Stalin's Five-Year plan was a success. Propagandistic banners featured prominently, including one that read: "In France, the greatest value goes to the bourgeoisie. In the USSR, the greatest value goes to the workers." Other displays noted that foundational texts penned by Marx and Lenin and had been translated into dozens of languages and that the Soviet Union was extremely progressive and inclusive in terms of dealing with its national and cultural diversity.[393] The underlying premise that Sadoul's section of the counter-exhibition tried to convey to audiences was that the Soviet Union was not a colonial power, but rather that it was a liberating force which aimed to free both the proletariat and colonized populations from capitalist oppression.

In recognition of their commitment to the Party's anticolonial campaign, the PCF invited the surrealists to design the third and final section of the counter-exhibition, a cultural exhibit housed on the second floor of the Pavilion. The exhibit was designed by Aragon, Tanguy, and Éluard, who claimed that the surrealist section of the counter-

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[392] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 102-103.

[393] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 247.

exhibition would be "very good and very useful" for the movement as it tried to assert its political efficacy.[394] Though he was not officially included within the planning committee, Breton also wielded a great deal of influence over the exhibit's design.[395] This section of the counter-exhibition provided visitors with the opportunity to engage with the culture of African, Oceanic, and North American populations. Non-European art from nearly a dozen collectors, including some of the surrealists, was prominently featured throughout the exhibit while music from Polynesia and Asia was played over a loudspeaker in the space. These items included large sculptures from several regions in Africa, statues from New Ireland, and totems and tapestries from British Columbia. Alongside these works were explanatory labels that lauded the associated object to illustrate to visitors that the colonized peoples who produced these pieces were not the so-called savages the Colonial Exposition made them out to be, but rather visionary artists oppressed under capitalism. Another display explicitly attacked Christian missionaries, who the surrealists critiqued for destroying indigenous cultures in favor of European traditions and practices.[396] The surrealists' room was designed in a manner that was largely consistent with earlier exhibitions of non-European art that had been staged by the movement throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, discussed in previous chapters. As Jack Spector notes, like these previous shows, the cultural section of the counter-exhibition "went beyond the purely aesthetic preferences and formalism prevalent in the

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[394] Letter from Éluard to Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova, Paris, 11 September 1931, in *Letters to Gala*, 116.
[395] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 103.
[396] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 247-248.

sophisticated circles that shared their taste for non-Western art" to instill in non-European objects an anticolonial political significance.[397]

Although both of the documents the surrealists released prior to the counter-exhibition implied that they were willing to try to situate their anticolonialism within the discourse promoted by the PCF, the movement's section of the counter-exhibition demonstrated that this ambition would not be realized. The surrealists were not willing to truly abandon their valorization, and thus their Othering, of non-Europeans. Unlike previous exhibitions, however, the surrealists did include explicit references to communist ideology. As was the case in the other sections of the counter-exhibition, Breton's circle showcased various quotations from communist figures, including Marx's phrase: "A people that oppresses another cannot be free."[398]

Although very little documentation of the counter-exhibition exists, two images that recorded the surrealist section were printed on the last page of the fourth issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, which appeared in December 1931 (Fig. 11).[399] The first image captures a number of objects from Africa and Oceania, including a Baule mask situated against the rear wall and a statuette from New Ireland in the right rear corner of the room, all of which rest in front of the large banner proclaiming Marx's aforementioned axiom. The second image presents a group of objects labeled by the surrealists as "European fetishes," consisting of three figurines. In the center of the arrangement is a figurine of an African youth, holding a collection pot imprinted with the word "merci," begging for contributions to Christian missionary activities. This figure is

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[397] Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919-1939: The Gold of Time*, 179.
[398] See *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution,* No. 4 (December 1931), 40.
[399] Ibid.

flanked to the left by an African carving of a bare-breasted woman and to its right by an Africanized Madonna and Child.[400]

Fig. 11: Photograph of the exhibition arranged by Aragon, Éluard, and Tanguy, titled "La Vérité sur les colonies," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 4 (December 1931), 40.

The grainy images of the counter-exhibition included within *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* suggest that the surrealists attempted to juxtapose non-Western art with overt criticism of Western missionary activity to both valorize colonized populations and to indict Western culture and the society from which it emerged for its oppressive, capitalist tendencies. As discussed above, the display of non-Western art, coupled with labels which extolled their aesthetic virtues, aimed at convincing visitors that colonized populations were not savages, but rather, visionaries who were culturally and intellectually superior to the West because of their access to a primordial and irrational body of knowledge. To the surrealists, Western thought, epitomized by

[400] Blake, "The Truth about the Colonies, 1931: *Art indigène* in Service of the Revolution," 51.

Christianity, had engendered a morally bankrupt society, which promoted conformism, oppression, and greed. Non-western systems of thought represented an alternative to the constraints of rationalism, which the surrealists believed could liberate humanity from the dehumanizing institutions generated by reason. The juxtaposition of these more traditional surrealist displays with the arrangement documented in the second image was intended to further expose the hypocrisy of the West. In particular, the figurines included within the image resembled a variety that was extremely common throughout Europe during the period. Mileaf observes, "Such statuettes of young black boys dressed in clerical garb held collection plates in their hands, begging for donations to help support missionary activity," and thus by extension, France's civilizing mission. The inclusion of these pieces within the exhibition was intended to mock the "European custom of translating Christian objects of worship into racial types of tribal people" and illuminate the fact that "money drives the dissemination of religious beliefs."[401] For the surrealists, Christian missionary activity, which embodied France's civilizing mission, did not save massive populations, but instead, coopted their customs and culture only to destroy them. Therefore, the juxtaposition of a display that valorized non-Western culture and an assemblage that critiqued the greed-driven colonial enterprise was deployed by the movement to expose the artificial nature of the hierarchical cultural values prevalent throughout France during the interwar period.[402] Although this aspect of the surrealist section attempted to critique colonialism using a Marxist framework, the underlying valorization of non-Western culture implied that the movement's attitude had not truly conformed to the PCF's position.

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[401] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 248.
[402] Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 539.

The Shortcomings of the Surrealist Position

Although the Marxist anticolonial framework offered the surrealists a means to de-Other colonial peoples by allying them with the European proletariat, the surrealist movement's attitude toward colonized populations remained largely unchanged from earlier anticolonial texts. The surrealists continued to valorize colonized groups, inadvertently upholding the distinction between colonizers and colonized. Emblematic of the movement's approach was their decontexualization and presentation of the indigenous objects within the exhibition. Much like the ethnographic displays at the Colonial Exposition, which drew on techniques utilized in institutions like the Musée du Trocadéro, the surrealists' exhibit aimed at presenting installations in a seemingly scientific manner, which the movement believed would illustrate the cultural prowess of non-European peoples. In her book *In the Museum of Man*, Alice Conklin observes that the Musée du Trocadéro, the Colonial Exposition, and later, the Musée de l'Homme, which opened its doors to the public in 1938, strove to assert the legitimacy of ethnographic displays by presenting the items included within them in a manner that implied objectivity. Objects from the colonies were displayed in austere galleries, accompanied by brief explanatory labels that outlined the cultural significance of each item to the societies in which they originated. These minimalist arrangements suggested to museum and exposition audiences that the objects on display were not being judged, but rather, documented and shown exactly as they had been found, unmediated by the influence of museum staff (Fig. 12). According to Conklin, in these exhibits "the facts were supposed to speak for themselves."

Fig. 12: View of "L'Exposition ethnographique des colonies françaises" at the Musée du Trocadéro, 1931. Paris, Musée du quai Branly.

Conklin observes that because the objects displayed in museums and colonial exhibitions had been torn from colonized populations, and thus thoroughly decontextualized, narratives that reflected the dominant discourse about Otherness and European cultural superiority tended to emerge within ethnographic exhibits.[403] The official exhibits were intended to instruct audiences about the various stages of human evolution, implying that the non-European objects on display testified to a pre-modern, infantile stage of human history. Furthermore, that curators believed these non-European objects could only be made comprehensible to European audiences by recontextualizing them within a Eurocentric framework implied that the cultures from which they originated were entirely otherworldly. The same is true of the surrealists' exhibit, which mobilized similar documentary exhibition techniques for the purpose of valorizing non-

[403] Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 148-153. For more on the extent to which the fields of ethnography and anthropology served as apparatuses of colonialism, see Vincent Debaene, *Far Afield: French Anthropology between Science and Literature*, translated by Justin Izzo (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Europeans. The surrealists suggested in the exhibit labels that the objects on display were associated with the irrational, which effaced the unique position and meaning each object held within the culture within which it had been produced. This implied that these non-Western works were of interest to the movement only because they could be appropriated and mobilized as tools in surrealism's struggle against Western reason. Therefore, the surrealist movement's exhibit reiterated the perceived Otherness of non-Europeans, undermining the PCF's attitude toward these groups.

The contradictions between the surrealist and Marxist positions ensured that the counter-exhibition did not produce the revolutionary activity the PCF envisioned when the idea for the event first emerged in February 1931. Morton contends that the counter-exhibition made "relatively little impact on the Parisian public at the time."[404] While the Colonial Exposition garnered widespread attention by the French press, which published dozens of favorable reviews, the only major newspaper that did not entirely ignore the counter-exposition was *L'Humanité*. Even coverage within the PCF's publication was minimal. Outside of a brief announcement of the counter-exhibition's opening that *L'Humanité* printed on September 22, 1931, only one review of the event appeared within the newspaper.[405] Published on October 31, 1931, Marcel Cachin's short article briefly outlined the three rooms at the counter-exposition and praised its organizers for creating an admirable response to the Colonial Exposition on an extremely limited budget. Nevertheless, Cachin acknowledged that the counter-exhibition would not have nearly as broad an influence over popular attitudes toward colonialism as the official

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[404] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 103.
[405] See "La vérité sur les Colonies...." *L'Humanité*, No. 11970 (22 September 1931), 2.

Exposition. He wrote, "And, unfortunately, it will not be visited by thirty million visitors, called from all France and from elsewhere by a powerful demand."

Despite this reality, Cachin encouraged the French proletariat to visit the counter-exhibition to acquire a more accurate understanding of colonialism than the narrative offered to visitors at the official Exposition. Cachin believed that the proletariat would gain a stronger appreciation for the struggle endured by the colonized and that visiting the counter-exhibition would help French workers to "get a clear idea by themselves of the artistic productions that are held to be 'savage' art in the capitalist world."[406] Despite this plea, by the time the counter-exhibition closed to the public in February 1932, it had attracted only 4,226 visitors, with very few visits from leftist organizations and workers' unions. On the other hand, the Colonial Exposition had been attended by tens of millions.[407] Nevertheless, that the Ligue anti-impérialiste attracted nearly two hundred new members during the period the counter-exhibition was opened to the public compelled the PCF to declare the event a success.[408]

The Aragon Affair

Aragon's renunciation of surrealism helps to illustrate the significance of the counter-exhibition to surrealist politics. According to Matthew Gale, "Aragon embodied the political difficulties of Surrealism in 1931-2."[409] Less than a month after the counter-exhibition closed, Aragon officially abandoned surrealism and committed himself to the

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[406] Marcel Cachin, "Une visite à l'Exposition Anti-Imperialiste," *L'Humanité*, No. 12009 (31 October 1931), 1.
[407] Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, Paris*, 103.
[408] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 245.
[409] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 302.

PCF. On March 10, 1932, a short article published by *L'Humanité* announced his official disavowal of surrealism. The article asserted that Aragon "disapproved entirely" of the movement's position on aesthetics and that he believed the surrealist exploration of the irrational was "objectively counter-revolutionary."[410] This repudiation of surrealism was the culmination of a process that had begun almost a year before Aragon embraced a role as a principal organizer of the surrealists' section of the counter-exhibition. In the autumn of 1930, he and Sadoul had traveled to the Soviet Union to participate in the Second International Congress of Revolutionary Writers, held in the city of Kharkov. Though he had been sent to the Congress to defend the legitimacy of the surrealist project, Aragon signed a letter sent to the International Workers' Union by Sadoul that discredited Freudianism and idealism, a signal that he was beginning to seriously question surrealism and the intellectual currents that underpinned it.[411] Before returning to Paris from Kharkov in November 1930, Aragon penned the poem "Front Rouge," a pro-Soviet piece that among many other acts of violence, called for the murder of French political leaders. Aragon published the poem in April 1931, but it was not until January 1932, several months after he had helped to organize the surrealist section of the counter-exhibition, that he was arrested by the French government for provocation to murder. Breton immediately came to his counterpart's defense, circulating a petition within the Parisian avant-garde that defended Aragon's right to express himself freely as an artist.[412] Additionally, Breton wrote and distributed a lengthy essay on Aragon's behalf.

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[410] "Mise au point communiquée par l'Association des Ecrivains Révolutionnaires," *L'Humanité*, No. 12140 (10 March 1932), 2.
[411] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 177.
[412] Ibid., 178-179.

In this essay, titled "Misère de la Poésie: 'L'Affaire Aragon' devant l'opinion publique," Breton's central thesis was that no matter how controversial or politically-charged a poem appeared, the progenitor could not be held legally responsible for sentiments expressed within the work. He justified this position by arguing that poetry was at its essence a transcription of unconscious thought. Breton contended, "The poem is not to be judged on the successive representations it makes, but on its power to incarnate an idea, to which these representations, freed of any need for rational connection, serve only as a starting point." Furthermore, he asserted that the inherent "meaning and significance" of a poem was detached from the "specific elements" contained within the work and that "these specific elements cannot, to any degree, determine [a poem's] value or process in and of themselves." For Breton, a poem could only be comprehended and evaluated as a whole. Isolating and analyzing specific lines from a poem distorted their original function within the piece, causing them to lose their meaning. Thus in Breton's estimation, the Third Republic's interpretation of Aragon's poem was entirely illegitimate.[413] "Misère de la Poésie" and the campaign Breton initiated eventually succeeded in extricating Aragon from prosecution by the government.[414]

That "Misère de la Poésie" helped Aragon to avoid prosecution is not the only reason the tract is of significance in relation to the broader history of the surrealist movement. More importantly, the essay implies that by February 1932, before the counter-exhibition had closed its doors, Breton had begun to believe that surrealist aesthetics should be regarded as distinct from the movement's politics. His assertion that

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[413] André Breton, "Misère de la Poésie: 'L'Affaire Aragon' devant l'opinion publique," reprinted in Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism,* 296-303.
[414] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," 16.

a poet should not be held legally responsible for their creative output was an attempt by Breton to articulate this belief. He advocated for a strict separation of surrealist aesthetics and politics asserting that "The social drama exists, the surrealists have announced on many occasions that they would not be content to remain spectators of this drama." He continued, "The poetic drama also exists . . . These determinations define us under two rather distinct relations."[415] Breton revisited this dichotomy in the closing paragraphs of his essay, in which he argued that the authenticity of aesthetic endeavors would be effaced if works were created with particular political ends in mind. Although he endorsed a Marxist revolution earlier in his piece, Breton noted in his conclusion that even artists committed to the Revolution needed to maintain their aesthetic autonomy. To associate aesthetic endeavors with particular political pursuits would result in the individual becoming entirely confused as an artist and as a political actor, which would only hinder the Revolution. He proclaimed, "Without the right to pursue his investigations in the domain which is his own, sooner or later this man will be lost to himself and to the revolution."[416]

The confusion to which Breton referred at the end of "Misère de la Poésie" must be viewed as a veiled confession about surrealism that helps to shed light on the significance of the counter-exhibition. Ever since their participation in the campaign against the Rif War, the surrealist movement had tried to strike a balance between its desire to explore the irrational through aesthetic strategies while simultaneously participating in a collective, effective form of politics which could topple Western rationalism and the system of capitalism to which it was conjoined. Yet this was a

[415] Breton, "Misère de la Poésie," 299.
[416] Ibid., 302.

balance the movement struggled to find. During the period between the Rif War and the counter-exhibition the movement endured an intense series of internal debates, as individual members of Breton's circle tried to reconcile their aesthetic pursuits with a political project that paralleled the communism of the PCF. When coupled with previous demonstrations of surrealism's political inefficacy, Breton was convinced that his movement had little choice but to collaborate with the PCF on the counter-exhibition to ensure that surrealism achieved its subversive anticolonial aims. However, the counter-exhibition ultimately illustrated to the surrealists that their anticolonialism, tied closely to their aesthetic project, was incompatible with that of the Party. Moving forward, the movement would continue to pursue a revolutionary project framed in Marxist rhetoric, but the surrealists would divorce their interest in non-Western culture and thought, conjoined to their exploration of the irrational, from concrete political endeavors for the sake of political efficacy. That the surrealist movement remained committed to drawing its revolutionary inspiration from the irrational and primordial, however, served as the primary motivation for Aragon's departure from the movement.[417] Like Breton, Aragon viewed the counter-exhibition as an opportunity to assert the movement's political efficacy and the compatibility between surrealist and communist politics. Yet in the wake of the counter-exhibition, Aragon's actions proved that he had decided, according to Gale that "the pursuit of the dream had to be set aside for the demands of reality."[418] For Aragon, even if the surrealist commitment to the irrational was divorced from politics, it continued to undermine rather than buttress the PCF's political and social revolution.

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[417] Palermo, "L'Exposition Anticoloniale: Political or Aesthetic Protest?" 38.

[418] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 301. For more on Aragon's departure from the surrealist movement, see Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 175-182.

Peter Bürger argued that the fundamental impetus of surrealism and the avant-garde movements which emerged after the outbreak of the First World War was to successfully overcome art's perceived "lack of social impact." At surrealism's core was the motivation to "reintegrate art into the praxis of life."[419] The *Surrealist Manifesto*, published in 1924, announced that this reintegration was indeed the movement's foundational aim. An expression of surrealism's general contempt for Western rationalism, the *Manifesto* called for an aesthetic exploration of the irrational that Breton hoped would be deployed to alter the conditions of material reality. He wrote, "If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them."[420] These efforts to amend the conditions of reality included an embrace of anticolonialism and Marxism. Yet the counter-exhibition illustrated the incompatibility of the surrealist movement's approach to the question of colonialism, rooted in their idealistic valorization of non-Western culture, with that of the PCF. It also signaled to Breton that a broader ideological alliance between the two groups was not sustainable.

Though the counter-exhibition proved that they were not willing to conform entirely to the project of the PCF, the surrealists' engagement with the Party did leave a lasting influence over the movement's thought. The surrealists did not renounce Marxism. Instead, as my next chapter will show, Breton's circle was convinced that it needed to be even more involved in the discussion of how to revitalize Marxist politics, which it felt was being coopted by the Stalinist influence over the PCF. Thus in the wake of the counter-exhibition, the surrealist movement pursued a political commitment to

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[419] Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22.
[420] Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 10.

materialism, which came to be premised upon the appeal to other sources of understanding which were not contaminated by Western rationality. As was case throughout the movement's history, these sources of understanding including irrational art and non-European culture. Yet to prevent the contamination of these sources of revolutionary inspiration and knowledge, which the surrealists hoped to draw upon in their critique of the PCF, the movement began to separate their politics from their aesthetic commitment to the irrational. In doing so, they depoliticized their interest in non-Western culture. Additionally, the spread of fascism throughout Europe in the mid and late 1930s, which for the surrealists included Stalinism, was regarded as the most important political issue facing the movement. This fascist threat distracted the surrealists from concrete action against French colonialism, which helped to fuel the movement's embrace of a depoliticized form of anticolonialism. In this sense, the counter-exhibition served as the last overt manifestation of surrealist anticolonialism during the interwar period and it represents an important turning point in the movement's revolutionary project as it committed itself to a critique of institutional communism. By the spring of 1932, the surrealists' attempt to be politically efficacious, which had led to their embrace of anticolonialism in the first place, now led to the abandonment of that position, and thus ironically to the depoliticization of their aesthetics.

Chapter 6

THE DREAMS OF THE PROLETARIAT

In late June 1935, the Communist Party held the International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture in Paris, to determine how art and literature could be mobilized in the fight against the spread of fascism. Breton was excluded from the proceedings. As a result, he penned the statement "When the Surrealists Were Right," from August 1935, which vehemently protested the institutional form of communism embraced by the PCF. Endorsed by dozens of surrealists, "When the Surrealists Were Right" argued that the cult of Stalin had derailed the Marxist agenda envisioned by Lenin and Trotsky during the Russian Revolution and replaced it with a totalitarian system that enslaved the proletariat to serve the political interests of a maniacal despot. The surrealists denounced the Communist Party that was infatuated with Stalinism, because of its "will to drive militants from the Party, to support the enemies of the proletariat and to act 'objectively' as a counter-revolutionary." For the surrealists, Stalinism, with its insistence on communism in one country and its ruthless consolidation of political power within a monolithic state, negated the permanent, international revolution championed by Trotsky. It left no room for introspection or debate about particular ideas. The surrealists refused to act as unthinking automatons in accordance with all of the political directives emanating from the Soviet Union. They declared that they would not "accept uncritically the current watchwords of the Communist International and to ratify *a priori* the modalities of their application. We think that if we accepted these watchwords before having admitted them, we would be failing in our duty as revolutionary intellectuals."

Though the movement remained committed to a Marxist revolution, they believed in the necessity of an unrestrained discourse about the true goals of communism because the open exchange of ideas would enable those committed to the cause to amend its shortcomings and revitalize the project. That the PCF, under the direction of "Vaillant-Couturier, Thorez, and their consorts," was conforming to the cult of Stalin illustrated that it was contributing to "the process of rapid regression" and undoing all "the finest socialist conquests." The surrealists could no longer trust the PCF to act in the interests of the proletariat. For this reason, the movement confirmed that it refused to collaborate with the PCF and would attack it as a puppet of Stalin and his totalitarian regime.[421] "When the Surrealists Were Right" marked the end of political relations between the surrealist movement and the PCF. In this way, the text embodied the political position Breton's circle embraced in the 1930s after the counter-exhibition.

As my previous chapter demonstrated, the counter-exhibition illuminated the incompatibility of the surrealist movement's anticolonial position, founded on the valorization of non-Western culture, with the official stance of the PCF, which attempted to portray colonized populations as part of the world proletariat. In doing so, it signaled to Breton that a broader ideological alliance between the two groups was not sustainable. What follows will show that because anticolonialism had been the primary issue on which the two groups had found common ground, the realization that their respective positions were incommensurable only exacerbated underlying tensions. In the period after the counter-exhibition the surrealists confirmed their unwillingness to ally with the PCF on political matters. The movement pursued a political commitment to Marxism,

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[421] André Breton, et al., "When the Surrealists Were Right," in *Surrealism Against The Current: Tracts And Declarations*, 106-111.

but it argued that the Stalinists and the PCF had betrayed the original Marxist ideals championed by the heroes of the Russian Revolution. As part of this new political agenda, the surrealists mobilized their anti-rationalism to explicitly critique Communist politics. That is to say, the commitment of Breton's circle to the irrational, which had been the source of earlier tensions in the surrealists' relationship to the PCF, became the movement's means to criticize institutional communism. Yet the movement viewed this critique of the political project of the PCF as possible only if its sources of irrationalism, including non-Western culture, were depoliticized to ensure they were not contaminated by rationality. Thus the mid to late 1930s showed that earlier attempts by the surrealists to politicize the movement by focusing on anticolonialism led eventually through their fraught alliance with the PCF to the depoliticization of surrealist aesthetics.

After the counter-exhibition, Breton and his circle believed that art could have no external end so that it could be a source for revitalizing politics, especially communism. During the mid 1930s, the irrational art of Salvador Dalí and non-European culture became political for the movement not by being mobilized for specific, concrete political aims, but rather, by being cast as inspirational articulations of the irrational and primordial knowledge the movement hoped to deploy against the West. This position persisted throughout the 1930s, demonstrating that the movement's broader revolutionary project was still influenced in large part by the surrealists' fascination with the non-Western world. In addition to informing the political disposition of surrealism throughout the interwar period, the movement's interest in non-Western culture also left a lasting impression on the fledgling Négritude movement, which emerged in Paris in the 1930s. Through their exposure to the work and thought of Breton's circle, those within

the Négritude movement inherited surrealism's valorization of the irrational and non-Europeans as part of a non-political politics. In their formative years, the founding members of Négritude movement did not participate in concrete, collective political activities, but instead, like the surrealists, they produced literary and artistic works which foregrounded the importance of Otherness as a disruptive force. Just as the surrealists recognized that de-Othering Otherness actually eliminated its subversive potential, so too did early practitioners of Négritude. Thus the surrealist anticolonial project endured even as the movement grappled with Marxism and focused its political energies on a critique of the PCF and the spread of fascism.

The Proletarian Revolution

Although the counter-exhibition failed to engender broad support for anticolonialism, the PCF continued to criticize the Third Republic's colonial system and promoted the idea that colonized populations were allies of the European proletariat in the struggle against world capitalism. On February 25, 1932, just days after the counter-exhibition closed its doors to the public, *L'Humanité* chastised the military for suppressing an anticolonial insurrection in the French mandate of Syria. The article argued that the French victory over the Syrian rebels allowed France to maintain its prestigious military and political influence throughout the Middle East and guaranteed that the Third Republic would continue to benefit from the natural resources in the region. In other words, the French military's brutal response to the uprising protected France's capitalist interests. For this reason, the piece called upon the French proletariat to recognize the parallels between their own struggle and that of the colonized population of Syria. Supporting a Syrian uprising would help to weaken the colonial system upon

which capitalism was founded, and as such, it would also serve the anticapitalist interests of the French proletariat. Reiterating the Party's inclusive position on colonized groups, the article concluded with the reminder: "French workers sacrificed to capitalist interests must fight for the evacuation of Syria and link their struggles to those of peoples oppressed by imperialist France."[422]

Even Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, which the Party viewed as a major threat to communism in Europe, did not distract the PCF from their campaign against the French colonial system.[423] For instance, on February 10, 1933, alongside multiple articles lamenting the political situation in Germany, *L'Humanité* maintained its commitment to the struggle of the colonized population of Indochina against its French oppressors.[424] As a gesture of the PCF's solidarity with the colonized people of Southeast Asia, the editorial staff of the newspaper, which by 1933 was directed by Marcel Cachin, published a piece penned by Nguyen Quoc Te, a Vietnamese member of the Party. Throughout the piece, Nguyen Quoc Te reminded French readers that the indigenous people oppressed by colonialism in Indochina had been actively resisting the colonial system for three years. Despite the violent response of the French government, he asserted, "Indochinese workers and peasants, under the direction of the Communist Party, have not fought in vain." He remained optimistic about the ability of these oppressed people, which he referred to as the "Indochinese proletariat," to assert their independence. Nevertheless, in keeping with the official

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[422] "Les troupes françaises noient dans le sang une révolt à Alep," *L'Humanité*, No. 12126 (25 February 1932), 2.

[423] For the PCF's reaction to Hitler's appointment to the position of chancellor in Germany, see Gabriel Peri, "Hitler chancelier!" *L'Humanité*, No. 12467 (31 January 1933), 1; "Le Reichstag dissous par Hitler," *L'Humanité*, No. 12469 (2 February 1933), 1; and "À l'aide du prolétariat allemand!" *L'Humanité*, No. 12475 (8 February 1933), 4.

[424] See "A Berlin, les nazzis assaillent des ouvriers dans un guet-apens," *L'Humanité*, No. 12477 (10 February 1933), 1; and Gabriel Peri, "La guerre qui vient," *L'Humanité*, No. 12477 (10 February 1933), 3.

position of the Party, he reminded his readers that the struggle of the colonized was synonymous with that of the European proletariat, and as such, he encouraged French workers to join in the campaign against the colonial system and the massacres unfolding in the name of the Third Republic's civilizing mission. He argued that "the Indochinese proletariat needs the support of the world proletariat," and in particular, that of the French proletariat. "The workers and the toiling masses of France and Indochina have to combat the same enemy: French imperialism." Toppling the French empire would liberate colonized populations, but it would also weaken the capitalist system conjoined to colonialism, thereby serving the interests of the European proletariat.[425]

While the PCF continued to champion the cause of colonized groups as part of its broader project against capitalism, the surrealists opted to focus on the struggle of the proletariat because the counter-exhibition revealed important tensions between the movement's political positions and that of the PCF. Furthermore, the movement believed that the growth of Stalinism warranted a discussion of the true nature of a communist revolution. The surrealists' concern for the proletarian struggle over that of the colonized was illuminated in the piece titled "Murderous Humanitarianism." Written in English and released to audiences in Nancy Cunard's tome *Negro: Anthology*, "Murderous Humanitarianism" was signed by nearly a dozen surrealists, including stalwarts like Breton, Éluard, Péret, and Tanguy, as well as newcomers J. M. Monnerot and Pierre Yoyotte, both of whom were Martiniquan students studying at the Sorbonne. Although the essay was drafted in 1932, it was not published until 1934. Nevertheless, it confirmed that in the immediate wake of the counter-exhibition, the surrealists had decided to direct

[425] Nguyen Quoc Te, "Trois années de luttes héroiques en Indochine," *L'Humanité*, No. 12477 (10 February 1933), 2.

their political energies to a discussion of Marxism's materialist interpretation of existence. Bate argues that the piece should be interpreted as an anticolonial essay that elaborates on earlier themes. He contends, "As in the surrealist part of the anti-colonial exhibition, they emphasize . . . a confrontation with the social contradictions of colonialism."[426] There can be little doubt that the document verifies the movement's contempt for colonialism. After all, it opens with the line: "For centuries, the soldiers, priests and civil agents of imperialism, in a welter of looting, outrage and wholesale murder, have with impunity grown fat off the coloured races." The text also conjoined capitalism and colonialism, foregrounding an anticapitalist prose that is largely consistent with that of the PCF. "The colonial machinery that extracts the last penny from natural advantages hammers away with the joyful regularity of a poleaxe."

While the text confirmed the movement's contempt for colonialism, at several points throughout the piece, the surrealists foregrounded the struggle of the European proletariat. They declared that their principal aspiration was to ensure that the proletariat "is no longer to be fooled by fine words as to the real end in view, which is still, as it always was, the exploitation of the greatest number for the benefit of a few slavers." Moreover, the surrealists asserted that they have "placed our energies in the service of the revolution – of the proletariat and its struggles." Although certain passages implied that the movement conceived of the European proletariat and colonized groups as united in a "civil war" against capitalism, the final paragraph of the document suggested that non-European culture and thought originated in "a universe from which Western peoples have willfully withdrawn," a world which the movement argued was far more favorable than Western civilization.

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[426] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Social Dissent*, 231-232.

Despite the parallels between the struggle of the European proletariat and the colonized, the surrealists reaffirmed their commitment to the belief that non-Europeans existed in a world entirely different from Europe. In doing so, they illuminated their desire to tease apart the PCF's forced unity between colonial and domestic revolution. Of course, this perpetuated the discourse of Otherness that defined the surrealist section of the counter-exhibition, but it was this Otherness from which the movement intended to draw the political inspiration necessary to revitalize Marxism. The fact that the surrealists devoted a significant amount of "Murderous Humanitarianism" to a discussion of the proletariat suggested that moving forward, Breton's circle intended to frame their attack on Western civilization in explicitly Marxist terms. Though it is not entirely obvious, especially when considered from Bate's perspective, the surrealists' eagerness to separate colonial and proletarian revolutions alluded to the anti-PCF direction the movement would pursue in the following years.[427]

The dedication of the movement to the needs of the proletariat was made obvious during a dispute between the surrealists and the PCF that began in late 1932 and unfolded throughout the first part of 1933. On November 3, 1932, an article appeared in *L'Humanité* which announced that the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR), founded in March 1932 as one of the Party's cultural bodies, was holding a contest of proletarian art and literature.[428] The article proclaimed that the AEAR welcomed submissions from "every worker" and encouraged prospective entrants to send poems, songs, short stories, photographs, and drawings that documented the experiences of the French proletariat and portrayed the class struggle. The announcement

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[427] André Breton, et al., "Murderous Humanitarianism," *Negro: Anthology, 1931-1933*, edited by Nancy Cunard (London: Wishart, 1934), 574-575.
[428] Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960*, 44.

also indicated that after the final deadline in late January 1933, the AEAR would organize an exhibition and publish an official volume to showcase the best of the entries.[429]

According to Durozoi, this announcement garnered significant interest and was answered by over eight hundred entries.[430] This general enthusiasm for the competition, which was described by Louis Paul, a member of the AEAR, as an opportunity for the French proletariat to articulate their personal struggles navigating existence "between capitalist pincers," was not shared by the surrealists, and in particular, by Breton.[431] On February 23, 1933, Breton delivered a speech before the AEAR that was published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* later that year in which he explained why he did not support the competition and the forthcoming exhibition and publication. He argued that any art generated in response to the competition was not truly proletarian in nature because French workers did not yet have an adequate understanding of the class struggle. He suggested that French workers were influenced greatly by what they read in newspapers and what they had been taught within the school system of France. Breton contended that newspapers and the education system served as ideological apparatuses of the bourgeoisie, elements of a "systematic effort . . . to paralyze the intellectual development of the working class, in order to assure its passivity."

To counter this bourgeois impetus and awaken the French proletariat from its false consciousness, Breton proposed that the PCF develop a manual that would recommend various texts to audiences that had not yet been exposed to Marxist literature.

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[429] "Aujourd'hui commencent nos 3 concours," *L'Humanité*, No. 12378 (3 November 1932), 6.
[430] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 234.
[431] Louis Paul, "Pour notre concours de littérature et d'art prolétariens," *L'Humanité*, No. 12390 (15 November 1932), 6.

Additionally, he suggested that the Party organize a series of more advanced lectures that could be used to educate French workers about their position within the class struggle.[432] The PCF did not act on either of these recommendation, but Breton's suggestions demonstrated not only that the movement was committed to the edification of French workers and to a proletarian revolution, but also, that the surrealists were not afraid to criticize the directives of the Party. Breton proved that he maintained his long-standing concern about the oppressive nature of Western rationality and that he was worried the Party and its project was too wedded to the institutions and conventions engendered by reason.[433]

A few months later, in June 1933, the surrealists asserted their commitment to what they viewed as a truly Marxist project with the release of the tract "Mobilization Against War Is Not Peace." Breton's circle issued the document in response to the International Congress Against War that was organized by Barbusse and Romain Rolland, with the support of the PCF, and held in Paris from June 4 to June 6, 1933. Although the event was originally intended to gather communist intellectuals who sought to address Japan's imperialist incursion into Manchuria, which had begun in the autumn of 1931, Hitler's recent rise to power in Germany was viewed as a more pressing threat by the time the Congress convened, thus fascism was made the primary topic of discussion.[434] Ultimately the Congress endorsed a nonviolent response to the spread of fascism. As a means of preventing war in the West, historian David Fisher notes that the Congress urged the European proletariat to participate in a "mass general strike to

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[432] André Breton, "A Propos du concours de littérature prolétarienne organisé par *L'Humanité*," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 5 (May 1933), 16-18.
[433] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 235.
[434] David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 158-159.

incapacitate production, hinder mobilization for war, and ultimately topple the state apparatus."[435] The surrealists believed that the pacifism endorsed by the Congress was, at its essence, a means of ignoring the threat of fascism and a betrayal of the revolutionary principles established by Lenin and Trotsky during the Russian Revolution. For the movement, the PCF had endorsed an approach that would, over time, enslave the proletariat since passive protests would not stop the aggressive and militant spread of fascism. Signed by ten surrealists, including Breton, Crevel, Éluard, Péret, Tanguy, and Thirion, "Mobilization Against War Is Not Peace" asserted that the suggestions made by the Congress had left the movement with no choice but to "denounce the counter-revolutionary role of intellectuals taking such an initiative." The surrealists were not content to acquiesce to the PCF. Instead, they explicitly attacked it.

The surrealists condemned Barbusse and Rolland, referring to the duo as "the most dangerous promoters in the world today of a humanitarian mysticism that is generally more pernicious than any abstract theology." As far as the surrealists were concerned, the nonviolence championed by Barbusse and Rolland was best understood as "pseudo-revolutionarism," or a form of false consciousness that was misleading the European proletariat into believing that it could realize its political ambitions without the use of force. Breton's circle argued that this approach obscured the true nature of systems of oppression, including capitalism. They viewed the pacifism advocated by Barbusse and Rolland as an extension of bourgeois ideology, which encouraged complacency and cooperation. Tying the PCF to the bourgeois rationalism of western Europe, the surrealists referred to Barbusse, Rolland, and others like them, as "intellectuals who are the auxiliary of [the proletariat's] oppressors." In keeping with the

[435] Ibid., 161.

spirit of the Russian Revolution, the surrealists argued, "If the proletariat of every country know where to find their principal enemy, they also know that the 'national' bourgeoisies have the headquarters of their cartel in Geneva, under the flag of non-violence." The only way the workers of the world would enjoy a truly peaceful existence in which no individuals were forced to experience exploitation or oppression was through the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat. They exclaimed, "IF YOU WANT PEACE, PREPARE FOR CIVIL WAR!"[436] That "Mobilization Against War Is Not Peace" countered the directives of the PCF testified to the desire of the surrealist movement to revitalize Marxist politics as Marxists. Breton's circle believed that the PCF and the institutional communism it championed needed to be released from its Western rationalism and as the movement would demonstrate in the years to come, this release would be achieved through an appeal to the colonial Other.[437]

The Moscow Trials

The movement's commitment to Marxist politics was tested during the Moscow Trials, held in the Soviet Union under Stalin's direction between 1936 and 1938. The Moscow Trials were an element of Stalin's broader campaign to systematically eliminate all of his political rivals throughout the 1930s. As Robert Chandler noted of Stalin, "He evidently considered it not enough simply to execute his real and imaginary rivals; it was equally important to him to discredit them politically and humiliate them morally." As such, Stalin placed many of his most important rivals on trial in a series of proceedings held in central Moscow between August 1936 and March 1938. The trials resulted in the

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[436] André Breton, et al., "Mobilization Against War Is Not Peace," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, 99-104.
[437] Chenieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 149.

execution of Soviet figures like Nikolai Bukharin, the prolific author and former head of the Communist International, as well as Alexei Rykov, former Premier of the Soviet Union. Many of those sentenced and eventually executed had been forced into signing confessions by the Stalinist regime, which accused those on trial of being supporters of Trotsky, who the regime portrayed as an agent of Hitler intent on derailing the Revolution by conspiring against Stalin's life. Meticulously orchestrated by the regime, the trials were accompanied by "meetings in almost every Soviet institution, from factories to universities and cultural establishments, at which all present were required to demonstrate their hatred for the 'Trotskyists,' 'Western spies,' and 'enemies of the people' placed on trial." These meetings were organized to generate a sense of legitimacy for the trials since they suggested that the general population supported the sentencing and executions of those portrayed by the Stalinists as enemies of the Soviet Union. Those who refused to attend the gatherings were coerced by threats of imprisonment, torture, and execution.[438]

Durozoi contends that the Moscow Trials were well received by most communists throughout Europe, who found the arguments popularized by Stalin's propaganda machine persuasive.[439] So too did Caute, who observed that many within the PCF felt that there existed no reason to believe that those on trial had produced false, coerced confessions. Even those within the PCF who maintained a degree of skepticism about the guilt of those on trial maintained their belief that the Soviet state "was the least likely of all to permit injustices on a massive and planned scale . . . For them, Stalin remained the

[438] Robert Chandler, "'To Overcome Evil': Andrey Platonov and the Moscow Show Trials," *New England Review*, Vol. 34 (January 2014), 148.
[439] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 329.

embodiment of a just society."[440] Accounts of the trials in *L'Humanité* championed the Stalinist position. For instance, Marcel Cachin, who remained the editor of *L'Humanité*, attended the proceedings against Karl Radek and Georgy Pyatakov in early 1937. On January 30, 1937, both Radek and Pyatakov were found guilty of high treason for their support of Trotsky. In a piece published in *L'Humanité* on February 14, 1937, Cachin reflected on the guilty verdict, arguing that the evidence presented at the trial confirmed that the duo had indeed conspired against Stalin. Furthermore, he claimed that the verdict was legitimate because the duo confessed to their crimes. Arguing that these confessions were genuine, Cachin wrote, "Everyone, with the exception of the fascists and the Trotskyists recognize the materiality of the facts confessed by the accused." He urged members of the PCF to dispense with skepticism and "admit that the revelations of the accused are indisputable."[441]

Despite the PCF's willingness to condemn the accused, the surrealists made no secret of their opposition to the Moscow Trials. In doing so, the movement further distanced itself from the political project of the PCF. On September 3, 1936, Breton delivered a brief address to his circle at a meeting called to discuss the Moscow Trials, in which he condemned the first trial that had resulted in the execution of the prominent Soviet politicians Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev.[442] The speech, which was later endorsed by twelve other figures within his circle, labeled the outcome of the trial "abominable and unpardonable." Breton asserted that he and his fellow surrealists "categorically deny the validity of the accusation . . . We consider the staging of the Moscow trials to be an abject police undertaking . . . We believe such undertakings

[440] Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960*, 128-131.
[441] Marcel Cachin, "Le crime," *L'Humanité*, No. 13939 (14 February 1937), 1.
[442] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 327.

dishonor a regime forever." For the surrealists, the Stalinist regime had betrayed the revolutionary ideals first established by Lenin and Trotsky. The Moscow Trials instilled in the movement the fear that the Stalinist regime was the actual form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Concerned that under this system the proletariat had not been mentally freed, Breton lamented the fact that countless members of the Party both in the Soviet Union and throughout the rest of Europe accepted the findings of the Moscow Trials without any hesitation. He argued that most communists were being deceived by the cult of Stalin, which he posited was a form of false consciousness distracting the masses from their enslavement under a brutal and oppressive regime. Dismissing the thought and actions of the heroes of the Russian Revolution as inconsequential compared to his regime, Stalin was a "principal falsifier" who not only "undertakes to falsify the significance of people, but also that of history." Though Stalin championed the total liberation of the proletariat, Breton believed that he had actually "entered into a pact with the capitalist states," whose oppressive intellectual and political tendencies he had appropriated for his totalitarian purposes. Breton insisted that the surrealists would do everything in their power to fight against the influence of Stalin, "the great negator and principal enemy of the proletarian revolution." To the surrealists, Stalinism was no longer communism, but rather, a counter-revolutionary dictatorship that was beginning to resemble the fascist regimes in both Italy and Germany. Breton concluded his speech with a reminder that communists across the globe should embrace the political philosophy championed by Trotsky, which he characterized as "very far above all suspicion," because Stalinism represented a perverted form of communism far removed from the ideals of the Russian Revolution.[443]

[443] André Breton, et al., "The Truth About the Moscow Trials," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts*

The surrealist movement reiterated its contempt for the Moscow Trials and those who welcomed the advance of Stalinism in another scathing statement delivered by Breton on January 26, 1937, in response to the proceedings against Radek and Pyatakov. Whereas Cachin celebrated the guilty verdict in *L'Humanité*, Breton protested the legitimacy of the proceedings, arguing that they resembled the "witchcraft trials of the Middle Ages." In particular, Breton criticized the confessions of the accused, indicating that he believed the duo had been compelled by force to admit to crimes they did not commit. He also speculated that the Stalinists were destroying evidence that would exonerate the accused and "expose the most terrible injustice in human history – all that could help unmask the terrorist-imperialist Stalin." He implored his fellow communists to abandon their indifference and to accept that the trials were not eliminating enemies of the proletarian revolution, but rather, consolidating their power. He argued that those loyal to the communist project must concentrate "not on the means by which [the accused] have been extorted but rather on the ends for which they were extorted." Breton concluded by arguing that the actions of Stalin were those of a despot, not a liberator. He likened Stalin to Hitler and reminded his audience that it was the revolutionary ideals of the Russian Revolution, embodied by Trotsky, which were ultimately on trial in Moscow. Whereas Trotsky welcomed an international revolution, Stalin had conformed to bourgeois rationalism and was "determined at all costs to prevent a new revolutionary wave from breaking on the world."

The figures under scrutiny in Moscow were being convicted and executed because they aspired to uphold the ideal of a perpetual revolution that would topple the capitalist institutions generated by bourgeois rationalism. Though he did not indict

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and Declarations, 117-119.

rationalism explicitly, Breton observed, "Socialist thought will amount to zero the day it accepts the cheapening of human dignity." The Moscow Trials actively debased the appreciation for human dignity that Breton believed was crucial to a truly Marxist project. For this reason, he compared the Stalinist regime with that of Napoleon, who portrayed himself as "the messenger and spokesman for the French Revolution," but who actually represented the interests of the "bourgeois republic." Napoleon's repressive regime negated the ideals of the French Revolution, which Breton viewed as having been founded on the recognition of the innate dignity of all humans. Breton lamented, "We are at the same point as regards Stalin." Like that of Napoleon, the Stalinist regime conformed to bourgeois interest and thought. Thus it was imperative that European communists, including the surrealists, stand together and assert that the "men who are being arraigned on the shaky stands of the Moscow trials have earned from their past the right to live." To ignore the plight of those on trial, who were true revolutionaries, would be to destroy "the honor and hope of our time."[444] The movement's objections to the Moscow Trials did little to hinder the advance of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, but they confirmed that relations between the surrealists and the PCF were irreparable. According to Short, this "break did not mean that the Surrealists ceased to participate in politics."[445] Nevertheless, this political activity did not include a concerted, collective effort by the movement to revisit the earlier campaign against anticolonialism.

Following the Moscow Trials, Breton's circle maintained their commitment to radical politics by championing the project outlined by Trotsky. As an expression of this commitment to Trotskyism, Breton traveled to Mexico, where the exiled leader had

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[444] André Breton, "Declaration on the Second Moscow Trial," in *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, 223-227.
[445] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," 19.

settled in 1937. Breton's trip to Mexico was sponsored by the Third Republic's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had charged him with the task of delivering a series of lectures on French art and literature from the eighteenth century, yet he was primarily motivated by an overwhelming desire to finally meet Trotsky.[446] By the time Breton had made arrangements for his journey, which commenced on March 30, 1938, Trotsky had been familiarized with the poet's efforts to defend and promote Trotskyism within the Parisian avant-garde, thus the former Soviet leader wanted to articulate his gratitude. Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, who had assisted Trotsky during his efforts to find asylum in Mexico, arranged for a meeting between he and Breton, which took place in early May. Thereafter, Breton and Trotsky "rapidly become close friends" while they traveled together throughout the country in the summer of 1938, discussing a wide range of topics, including the relationship between art and politics.[447]

During their journey throughout the Mexican countryside, Trotsky suggested to Breton that there existed a need to establish an International Federation of Revolutionary Artists and Writers, which could be used to help protect art from the threat posed by totalitarianism in Europe. Breton and Trotsky set about drafting an inaugural manifesto for the group, which was completed on July 25. Although he contributed several paragraphs to the manifesto, titled "For an Independent Revolutionary Art," Trotsky did not sign the piece. Instead, it was the names of Breton and Rivera that appeared on the document, which was distributed to several periodicals sympathetic to Trotskyism in multiple languages in the autumn of 1938. Trotsky withheld his name because he

[446] Durozoi, *History of Surrealist Movement*, 348.
[447] Taminiaux, "Breton and Trotsky: The Revolutionary Memory of Surrealism," 56-57.

believed that the signatures of two artists would lend more legitimacy to the manifesto.[448] As Bate argues, the manifesto was "far from a 'bourgeois' claim to an autonomy of art, devoid of political commitment."[449] Instead, the piece opened with a reminder that all of humanity was threatened by the recent rise of totalitarian regimes throughout Europe: "We can say without exaggeration that never has civilization been menaced so seriously as today . . . today we see world civilization, united in its historic destiny, reeling under the blows of reactionary forces armed with the entire arsenal of modern technology." The manifesto argued against the state control of cultural production that was occurring under the regimes of Hitler and Stalin. Art generated under state direction was not at all revolutionary. The document contended that artists and writers must not direct their work toward an external aim. On the contrary, art must be considered an end in itself. They argued, "In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint and must under no pretext allow itself to be placed under bonds." By not having direct political aims, art could resist totalitarianism. Thus works that might at first glance appear entirely uninterested in politics could actually serve as important political weapons in the struggle against fascism, exposing viewing audiences to alternative modes of existence.

While this passage, and others like it, could be interpreted as an endorsement of art for art's sake, the manifesto argued that the autonomy of art actually served the proletarian revolution. Breton and Trotsky believed that contemporary artists from countless aesthetic movements had already internalized the necessity for the transformation and emancipation of society, thus their artistic productions would

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[448] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 350.
[449] Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, 239.

articulate this reality in an organic, unmediated manner. As far as Breton and Trotsky were concerned, this oblique aesthetic call for the liberation of humanity promoted the proletarian revolution. The concluding statement asserted this belief: "The independence of art – for the revolution. The revolution – for the complete liberation of art!"[450] Although "For an Independent Revolutionary Art" argued that art could indeed serve the proletarian revolution, the document did not call for the surrealist movement to efface the dichotomy between art and politics that it had established earlier in the decade. It reiterated the importance of the separation between aesthetics and politics and it implied that this separation could still have revolutionary implications. Therefore, the manifesto can be read as an effort by Breton to reassert what the surrealists had attempted to achieve since the movement's inception. The surrealists wanted to produce political art, but ironically for art to be political it could not ally itself to a political movement. Furthermore, the document showed that Breton considered the irrational and primordial embodied by the non-West as a resource for knowledge that escaped European totalitarianism.

After Breton returned to Paris in the autumn of 1938, and with the likelihood of another catastrophic war in Europe increasing on a daily basis, the movement devoted itself to a critique of fascism "while at the same time lying outside the rhetoric of Stalinism."[451] This preoccupation was illuminated through documents like "Neither Your War Nor Your Peace," from September 27, 1938. Distributed as a leaflet during the Munich talks, the surrealists argued that any compromise arranged between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy over Hitler's desire to annex the Sudetenland would not save

[450] André Breton and Diego Rivera, "For an Independent Revolutionary Art," *Partisan Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Fall 1938), 49-53.
[451] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 323.

the world from war. A compromise would embolden the Nazis by illuminating the inability of France and Britain to quell the spread of fascism. The impending war, which the surrealists believed would only be delayed by an agreement, "will not be the war of democracy, nor the war of justice, nor the war of liberty." Instead, it would be a war fought to assert the hegemony of "tyranny, arbitrariness, and blood." The surrealists believed that both sides in the Munich talks were inherently tyrannical and that an agreement with Nazi Germany would render Britain and France complicit in the spread of fascism. The surrealists asserted, "Today, if the pseudo-democratic powers set themselves in motion at last, it is only to defend a state they have created in their own image, a state thoroughly capitalist, centralised, police-like and static." To the surrealists, neither capitalism nor fascism could solve the ills plaguing humanity. Committed to its Marxist project, the movement contended that it had been "called on to re-create Europe, in its entirety, by proletarian revolution." This, and only this, would liberate humanity and save it from self-destruction.[452] Despite their desire to help Europe avert another calamitous war, a year later the continent witnessed the outbreak of hostilities. Unwilling to participate in the massacre, most of the surrealists fled Europe, taking refuge in places like the United States and Mexico, effectively halting the movement's political impetus until the end of the Second World War.[453]

Dalí and Paranoia-Criticism

While the surrealists asserted their collective commitment to a proletarian revolution and a critique of the PCF, individual members of the movement attempted to

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[452] The Surrealist Movement, "Neither Your War Nor Your Peace," in *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, 446-447.
[453] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 210-211.

gain access to the irrational through their aesthetic pursuits. Numerous texts included within *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* testified to this aesthetic impetus, which was severed from the concrete political agenda in the wake of the counter-exhibition. For instance, Max Ernst's essay "How to Provoke Inspiration," featured in the sixth installment of the periodical, testified to this recent shift toward a non-political aesthetic exploration of the irrational. Ernst argued that in recent years surrealist artists, and especially those utilizing the medium of collage, had discovered a visual equivalent to the poetic automatism championed by the movement. Techniques like collage had allowed surrealist artists to retreat from reality to truly explore and articulate their inner thoughts and desires.[454] Though he does not mention the painting by name, it is likely that Ernst's *Couple zoomorphe en gestation* was among the images to which he was referring in "How to Provoke Inspiration," (Fig. 13). Completed in 1933, Ernst composed *Couple zoomorphe en gestation* by arbitrarily placing paint-covered twine over the canvas before applying another layer of coloring to the surface. This generated a series of furrow-like markings, over which the artist dripped and splattered additional paint. Around these markings, which suggest that the painting was the product of pure happenstance, Ernst composed an ominous and otherworldly scene. From the dark palette that dominates the lower half of the painting emerges a birdlike creature that antagonizes another figure resembling a human.[455] This ghastly imagery suggests Ernst had turned inward, away from reality, drawing on the content of his nightmares. As Breton later remarked, paintings like *Couple zoomorphe en gestation* demonstrated that

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[454] Max Ernst, "Comment on force l'inspiration," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 6 (15 May 1933), 43-45.

[455] Jean-Jacques Lévêque, *Les années folles, 1918-1939: le triomphe de l'art moderne* (Paris: ACR Édition, 1992), 484.

Ernst embodied the surrealist spirit since his imagery proved that the artist was not afraid to "plunge into the unknown," including the deep recesses of his unconscious. Though this access to the unconscious was not directly linked to concrete politics, it was through these types of aesthetic activities that the surrealists hoped to gain access to the irrational knowledge needed to revitalize Marxism.[456] The fact that Ernst's article, and others like it, were contained in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, a journal that explicitly endorsed revolution, suggested that the piece and its commitment to the irrational could indeed have political implications.

Fig. 13: Max Ernst, *Couple zoomorphe en gestation*, 1933. Venice, Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

[456] André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2002), 66.

Although Ernst remained an important figure within the movement throughout the 1930s, it was Salvador Dalí who exerted the greatest influence over the nature of surrealist art during this period. Dalí, who had first made a name for himself within the Parisian avant-garde with the film *Un Chien andalou*, which he made with Luis Buñel in 1929, emerged as one of surrealism's principal figures after 1932, filling a void that Aragon's acrimonious departure had created within the movement's leadership.[457] According to Nadeau, his "arrival afforded the movement a new youth, in that it reoriented it to its earlier goal: the omnipotent mind, capable of molding, by its very delirium, the harshly material world of facts."[458] Dalí's aesthetic program, which he described as "paranoia-criticism," promoted an aesthetic sensibility that was seemingly detached from political concerns. According to Haim Finkelstein, Dalí aspired to use his paranoia-criticism to "subvert the world of reality" by creating a new order out of elements unrelated to each other in the external world. Dalí's methods appealed to the surrealists precisely because they represented a withdrawal from any type of ideological reality in search of a source for real, substantive change.[459]

Paranoia-criticism was first outlined in an essay titled "The Rotting Donkey," which was published in the first edition of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* in July 1930. The opening passage of the essay expressed the fundamental purpose of the method Dalí hoped the rest of the surrealists would embrace in their work. He declared, "I believe that the moment is at hand, when by a process of thought which is active and paranoiac in character, it will be possible . . . to systematize confusion and to contribute

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[457] Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, 183.
[458] Ibid., 203.
[459] Haim Finkelstein, "Dali's Paranoia-Criticism or The Exercise of Freedom," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (February 1975), 60.

to the total discredit of the world of reality."[460] Dalí intended to harness paranoia, in which delusions gradually develop into an obsessive psychosis, because of the ability of this form of mental activity to modify the external world according to neurotic ideas. In other words, paranoia subverts external reality, replacing it with the subjective reality of an individual's mind. He explained that through a painterly process drawing on the effects of paranoia, a double image could be produced which corroded commonly accepted notions of reality. Dalí defined the double image as a "representation of an object which, without the slightest figurative or anatomical modification, is at the same time the representation of another absolutely different object, itself also devoid of any kind of deformation or abnormality betraying some arrangement."[461] He warned critics that the mobilization of paranoia-criticism would engender works that foregrounded demoralization and confusion and championed an "imminent crisis of consciousness."[462]

Dalí reiterated the subversive potential of this theory throughout the 1930s in texts like "Psycho-Atmospheric-Anamorphic Objects," from the fifth edition of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*.[463] Yet this aesthetic of ambiguity was best illustrated by his painterly output during the period, including works like *La Charrette fantôme*, from 1933 (Fig. 14). The painting depicts a desolate, dream-like landscape. In the lower left corner, what remains of a shattered ceramic jar casts a shadow away from the viewer. In the distance, a small town is visible, rising out of the desert like a mirage. The town is obscured in part by a two-wheeled cart, which carries a pair of occupants toward the remote outpost. At first glance, the work appears to be a simple, though disquieting

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[460] Salvador Dalí, "L'âne pourri," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 1 (July 1930), 9.
[461] Ibid., 10.
[462] Ibid., 12.
[463] See Salvador Dalí, "Objets psycho-atmosphérique-anamorphiques," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 5 (May 1933), 45-48.

landscape painting, reminiscent of the hallucination of a dehydrated individual lost in a barren desert. Yet upon closer examination, the painting reveals its innate complexity as a double image. The boundaries between the cart and its occupants and the town they approach are effaced. That is, the two figures inside the cart appear as silhouettes of buildings in the distance and the roof of the cart itself no longer seems to be distinct from the buildings, but rather, ensconced among them. Upon closer examination, the cart's wheels are actually two wooden posts that have been forced into the ground. These optical illusions cast into doubt perception. As Finkelstein observes, *La Charrette fantôme*, and numerous other works produced by Dalí in the 1930s, articulate a visual delirium in which "solid becomes fluid, the animate and inanimate merge."[464] In this way, *La Charrette fantôme* embodies Dalí's paranoia-criticism and his underlying desire to renounce the reality of the external world. His work embodied the surrealist desire to uncover untapped sources of irrational knowledge that could be harnessed to inspire meaningful changes in material reality.

[464] Finkelstein, "Dali's Paranoia-Criticism or The Exercise of Freedom," 66.

Fig. 14: Salvador Dalí, *La Charrette fantôme*, 1933. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery.

Dalí's paranoia-criticism inspired the experiments described in articles like "On the Irrational Possibilities of Penetration and Orientation in a Picture," from the sixth edition of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*. The piece is a transcription of an experiment conducted by eleven surrealists, including Breton, Éluard, Péret, Tzara, and René Char on February 11, 1933. The group participating in the experiment gathered at Breton's residence at 42 rue Fontaine in the Pigalle district of Paris to collectively view Giorgio de Chirico's painting *L'Énigme d'une journée*, which hung on the apartment's wall (Fig. 15). After viewing the piece, the participants responded to fifteen questions, like "Where is the sea?" and "Where would one make love?" These prompts were designed to evoke absurd and spontaneous answers, which aimed at articulating the primacy of subjective experience. For instance, responses to the question "Whom does the statue represent?" varied from Breton's "Lincoln" and Yolande Oliviero's "Benjamin Franklin," to Péret's "The inventor of decalcomania" and Éluard's "The father."

Answers to "What advertisement should be put up on the building at the left?" included Éluard's "Spend your honeymoon in Detroit" and Tzara's "Bowling." Building on Dalí's directives, these responses projected the subjective interpretations of eleven individuals onto a single painting, challenging the distinction between reality and the imagination. Devoid of any overt connection to the movement's Marxist politics, this exercise demonstrates that after the counter-exhibition, the surrealists embraced the message conveyed by Breton in "Misère de la Poésie" by committing the movement to an aesthetic agenda that was detached from concrete political concerns.[465]

Fig. 15: Giorgio de Chirico, *L'Énigme d'une journée*, 1914. New York, Museum of Modern Art.

[465] André Breton, et al., "Sur les possibilités irrationnelles de pénétration et d'orientation dans un tableau," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 6 (15 May 1933), 13-16.

Despite the potential of Dalí's methods to grant the surrealists access to the irrational, serious reservations about his political commitments emerged within the movement. Not only did Dalí express hostility toward the movement's Marxist politics to several members of Breton's circle, he also praised the rise of Hitler. As Durozoi notes, throughout 1933 and early 1934, Dalí "seemed intent on treating Hitler's rise to power as a positive disturbance of all intellectual certainties." This attitude was extremely unpopular within the surrealist circle, thus a meeting was held at Breton's Parisian apartment on February 5, 1934, to determine whether Dalí should be officially excommunicated from the group. Other than Breton and Dalí, a dozen surrealists attended the gathering, including Crevel, Éluard, Ernst, Péret, Tanguy, and Tzara. Though Breton hoped the meeting would result in Dalí's exclusion, the artist's "clownish behavior" helped to save him from excommunication.

Dalí arrived at the meeting with a thermometer in his mouth while wearing six sweaters, each of which he removed one after the other during the course of the meeting. He acted as if he was extremely ill throughout the entire proceeding. When interrogated about his political allegiances, Dalí asserted that his interest in the German chancellor was, according to Durozoi, "strictly apolitical" and that given his predilection for the absurd, he would likely be among Hitler's first victims. Though he was willing to accept his excommunication, Dalí's actions and response resonated with Crevel, Éluard, and Tzara, who advocated successfully for his inclusion.[466] In a letter from early February 1934, Éluard commented on the meeting and reflected on the importance of Dalí to the surrealist project. He expressed his "regret [about] the violence of the attacks to which Dali has been subject, and that we did not feel it possible to continue surrealist action

[466] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 218.

without him . . . It is too much in our interest, his as well as ours, not to break up . . . Let him drop Hitler, as it is positively dangerous, and quite a few among us will support anything he does."[467] Éluard's words demonstrate that while the surrealists viewed Dalí's interest in Hitler with great repugnance, they were willing to tolerate his antics because the movement relied on his artistic explorations of the unconscious. Éluard believed that the movement's tensions with Dali could be productive. While his affiliation with the movement endowed Dali with artistic legitimacy, the painter's irrational aesthetics provided the movement with a source of political inspiration. Much like non-European culture, the movement viewed Dali's art as non-political, but it granted the movement access to the irrational and primordial knowledge it hoped to use to revitalize Marxism. As such, Dali's art was indispensable to the movement's broader revolutionary project throughout the 1930s.

Exhibitions of surrealist art during the late 1930s included items from non-European cultures, but none of these exhibitions were envisioned as demonstrations of the movement's concrete politics. Instead, they were organized to showcase the wide range of nonconformist works which defined the surrealist canon as interest in the movement's aesthetics spread amongst popular audiences throughout Europe, due in large part to a growing fascination with the work of Dalí.[468] By showcasing the movement's interest in the irrational and primordial, however, the surrealists illuminated their political inspirations. These showcases included the *Exposition surréaliste d'objets*, held at the Galerie Charles Ratton off the Champs Elysées in Paris for one week in May 1936. As Mileaf's discussion of the event demonstrates, the exhibition did include a

[467] Letter from Éluard to Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova, Nice, February 1934, in *Letters to Gala*, 185.
[468] Durozoi, *History of Surrealist Movement*, 304-305.

number of objects from Africa and Oceania, but these items constituted a fraction of the broader collection on display, unlike earlier exhibitions which focused on these non-European works. The exhibition was dominated by "an array of surrealist artworks, along with Cubist constructions, readymades by Marcel Duchamp, animal and mineral specimens, mathematical models," as well as "curiosities of natural and artificial manufacture."[469] The wide variety of objects was arranged in a manner intended to make visitors believe that they were passing through a waking dream, characterized by the strange and unfamiliar. While the exhibition once again mobilized non-European art as a means of evoking the irrational, Othering these objects and the cultures out of which they originated, "the Ratton exhibition did not draw political conclusions."[470] Instead, the exhibition reiterated the movement's interests in sources of irrational and primordial knowledge. Additionally, the exhibition alluded to the movement's belief that these sources of knowledge could be used to revitalize the movement's politics as it distanced itself further from the institutional Marxism championed by the PCF.

Négritude

In the decade following the counter-exhibition, at the same time that surrealism was affirming its Marxist political commitments while pursuing an aesthetic project separated from concrete politics, the Négritude movement was beginning to assert itself as a cultural force in Paris. According to historian Gary Wilder, Négritude was a "cultural project that emerged through intense discussions and intimate friendships among a diasporic peer group whose members shared similar colonial backgrounds and

[469] Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," 249.
[470] Ibid., 251.

metropolitan challenges, as well as an interest in Africa." Among the founders of the movement were Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon-Gontran Damas, all of whom were students in Paris during the interwar period and "products of colonial assimilation," originally hailing from Senegal, Martinique, and French Guiana respectively.[471] Though it was not a formally organized movement like surrealism, the founders of Négritude conceived of their project as a response to the colonial system and the French nation-state, which they believed was founded on inherently racist, exploitative, and illiberal principles. In particular, early participants produced poetry that articulated their rejection of the assimilationist ideology that they believed aspired to efface the distinctiveness of colonized cultures in the name of Greater France. For figures like Senghor, Césaire, and Damas, assimilation asserted French cultural supremacy and dismissed non-European culture and thought as simplistic and savage. Thus Négritude represented a rejection of the colonial imaginary. This rejection entailed "an identification with blackness, and a celebration of African civilization" as a means of asserting the inherent value of non-Western heritages.[472]

Suzanne Valenti noted that Négritude "represents an attempt to erect a new man, a black man in a white world."[473] This was the ambition articulated by Césaire in his essay "Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution," the first piece to discuss the meaning of the term "négritude." Published in *L'Étudiant noir*, a short-lived student publication edited by Senghor, Césaire, and Damas, "Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution" encouraged blacks within French society to stand up against their marginalization and to

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[471] Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 151.
[472] Ibid., 156.
[473] Suzanne Valenti, "The Black Diaspora: Negritude in the Poetry of West Africans and Black Americans," *Phylon*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (1973), 390.

assert their African heritage as means of subverting the hegemony of a racist bourgeois culture. Césaire argued, "The white exploiters have given us . . . a culture, but a white culture, a civilization, but a white civilization, a morality, but a white morality, thus paralyzing us with invisible nets for the hypothetical case when we might liberate ourselves from the most appreciable material enslavement they have imposed upon us." The deliberate imposition of white conventions and customs upon black colonial subjects alienated vast populations from their culture and thought. This served to amplify their oppression under the colonial system since these efforts aimed at convincing populations with African origins that their indigenous traditions were meaningless and worthless compared to those of Europe. In other words, the policy of assimilation suggested that the only way for colonial subjects to achieve progress was by submitting to the colonial system. To escape this oppression, Césaire implored black colonial subjects to embrace aesthetic strategies and pursuits that valorized African heritage. He believed that only by reminding the broader population "that it is beautiful and good and legitimate to be Negro" would a racial consciousness be formed that could be mobilized against their oppression.[474]

Césaire, along with Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas, attempted to realize this imperative throughout the 1930s. For instance, Damas' book of poems titled *Pigments*, published in 1937, celebrated indigenous African values and culture as a means of condemning assimilationist ideology. So too did Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, from 1939, which in the words of Raisa Rexer, valorizes African culture "to

[474] Aimé Césaire, "Conscience raciale et révolution sociale," *L'Étudiant noir*, No. 3 (May-June 1935), 1-2.

overturn white cultural hegemony and rebuild the world anew."[475] Although these works do not state so explicitly, the founders of Négritude were influenced greatly by the surrealist movement and its earlier anticolonial impetus. According to Wilder, Senghor and those within his immediate circle treated the work of surrealists like Breton and Éluard "as if they were examples of 'Negritude in French.'"[476] The same was true of Césaire, who according to Gregson Davis, viewed surrealism as having a "very ambitious agenda for a wholesale spiritual revolution" and admired the movement for "allying itself . . . with radical politics." When coupled with the movement's earlier endeavors against the colonial system, this "combination of the socially progressive with the artistically iconoclastic" appealed greatly to black intellectuals actively resisting colonialism and racism in the Third Republic.[477]

Perhaps the most important visual artist associated with the Négritude movement was Wifredo Lam, a Cuban painter of African and Chinese descent, who studied painting in both Madrid and Paris during the 1930s. Like his contemporaries involved with Négritude, Lam's work drew on African themes to disrupt European notions of racial and cultural superiority.[478] When Lam relocated from Madrid to Paris in 1938, Picasso immediately took him under his wing and introduced him to several of the surrealists, including Breton and Péret, who encouraged the young painter to explore his interest in African culture. It was during this brief period, before the outbreak of the war forced the surrealists to flee from France, that Lam began to produce works that aimed at reclaiming

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[475] Raisa Rexer, "Black and White and Re(a)d All Over: *L'Étudiant noir,* Communism, and the Birth of Négritude," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter 2013), 11-12.
[476] Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars*, 206.
[477] Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66-67.
[478] Charles Merewether, et al., *Wifredo Lam: A Retrospective of Works on Paper* (New York: Americas Society, 1992), 13.

African heritage for anticolonial purposes. In particular, Lam indulged his interest in African tribal sculpture and as Robert Linsley notes, the painter "treated this art as a source of forms to be re-used in a very different context and for very different purposes, in much the same way as Picasso and other European painters had."[479]

Though Lam's Négritude would manifest itself most prominently in works produced throughout the 1940s and 1950s, earlier interwar productions alluded to his desire to conjoin European painterly techniques to non-European sources of inspiration. Consider, for instance, Lam's *Femme Violette*, from 1938 (Fig. 16). A portrait of an African woman, adorned in a dress inscribed with flora and whose face resembles a Baule mask, the painting emphasizes its geometric qualities, stark lines, and a somber palette. Though the painting alludes to Africanized women showcased in avant-garde works like Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the painting testifies not only to Lam's growing interest in African culture's formal qualities, but also, "its literalness and realism," which he hoped to harness to create "an authentic contemporary Black art."[480] Lam's work does not foreground an explicit critique of Eurocentric conventions, but his stylistic modifications illuminate his desire to Africanize aesthetics. Though it was not overtly surrealist, *Femme Violette* and other works like it conformed to the movement's valorization of non-European culture.

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[479] Robert Linsley, "Wifredo Lam: Painter of Negritude," *Art History*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (December 1988), 530-531.
[480] Ibid., 531-533.

Fig. 16: Wifredo Lam, *Femme Violette*, 1938. Austin, University of Texas.

Césaire clarified the attraction of his circle to surrealism in an interview he gave to the Haitian writer René Depestre in 1967. In the interview, Césaire explained that earlier proponents of Négritude were receptive to surrealism during the interwar period primary because they viewed the movement as "dynamite to the French language." In Césaire's opinion, surrealism had been successful in many of its attempts to expose the hypocrisy of Western rationalism, a goal which Négritude shared, thus he and his cohort regarded the movement's project as "an aid to mutual intent." Césaire explained that applying the surrealist project to his own aims enabled him to "call up the forces of the unconscious" and to mobilize them against colonialism and racism. Like the surrealists, who had associated the unconscious with non-European culture, Césaire remarked, "For

me this was a call to Africa. I told myself: 'It is true that superficially we are French, we are marked by French customs . . . but if one breaks through this, if one descends to the depths, one can discover the fundamental African."[481]

Césaire's explanation for why the surrealist project was well-received within his circle during the interwar period demonstrates that the founders of Négritude shared surrealism's desire to topple conventions of Western rationalism and that they intended to achieve this by valorizing the culture and thought of African society. Wilder argues that figures like Senghor believed that African thought represented "the ideal surrealism" because it existed outside of the Western tradition, thus it represented "pure antipositivism" and was "fundamentally anticapitalist." As such, practitioners of Négritude championed the African cultural tradition because, like the surrealists, they believed it served "as the superior mirror opposite of modern Europe."[482] In this sense, it is clear that earlier exploits of the surrealist movement inspired the founders of Négritude to pursue the anticolonial strategy from which Breton's circle was distracted in the wake of the counter-exhibition. Thus Négritude emerged to fill a void in the anticolonial discourse left by the surrealist movement as it directed its collective energies toward other political concerns. In the mid and late 1930s, the Négritude movement promoted a form of non-political politics much like Breton's circle, which in the wake of the counter-exhibition, had set aside its concrete anticolonial activities as it vigorously criticized the political project of the PCF. This is not to say that the surrealist movement alone produced Négritude. On the contrary, the social, economic, and political inequities generated by the colonial system necessitated a response by Césaire, Senghor, Damas,

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[481] Interview of Aimé Césaire conducted by René Depestre, quoted in Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 72-73.
[482] Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars*, 248-249.

and Lam, whose experiences as students in Paris illuminated the magnitude of suffering endured by non-Europeans in the metropole and overseas under French colonialism. Yet the surrealist approach to non-European culture offered to these figures a means of articulating their opposition to colonialism and the Western rationalism upon which this system rested.

By pursuing the strategy of valorization, however, the founders of Négritude were, like the surrealists before them, emphasizing Otherness. This emphasis on Otherness is precisely why Frantz Fanon later criticized the Négritude movement in *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to Fanon, in their attempts to appropriate African culture, the practitioners of Négritude operated from the same position as colonizers, emphasizing a discourse of difference and differentiation. He argued that the founders of Négritude championed a return to a cultural past that was just as unfamiliar to them as it was to their colonial oppressors. Fanon opined, "Rediscovering one's people means . . . going as native as possible, becoming unrecognizable." Yet the attempts by the Négritude movement to reconnect with African culture were "strangely reminiscent of exoticism. The colonized intellectual who returns to his people through works of art behaves in fact like a foreigner" captivated by "mummified fragments" of this culture. Fanon believed these attempt to reappropriate African culture relied on a superficial understanding of this heritage, which simplified and debased its original meaning.[483] For Fanon, the advocates of Négritude inadvertently maintained the structure of the colonial imaginary.

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[483] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York, Grove Press, 2004), 158-160.

Fanon's criticism of the Négritude movement illustrates the innate similarities between its anticolonial project and that of the surrealists. Therefore, the emergence of Négritude in the 1930s helped to confirm that the surrealist approach to anticolonialism, which contrasted that of the PCF, had attracted important appeal outside of Breton's circle despite the fact that the surrealists were preoccupied with explicitly Marxist political concerns by this point in the movement's existence. In other words, although the surrealists had set aside their anticolonialism to focus on a critique of the PCF, their valorization of non-Western culture was still exerting an influence over the discourse about colonialism in interwar France. By drawing on the surrealist attitude toward non-Europeans, the Négritude movement reiterated that it was possible to contribute to anticolonial discourse in France without conforming to the project of the PCF.

As this chapter shows, even after it repudiated its alliance with the PCF over the overbearing influence of Stalinism within the Party, the surrealist movement did not reject Marxism. The movement reasserted its commitment to the revolutionary principles espoused by Trotsky. Following the Moscow Trials, the surrealists were engrossed in a struggle against the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe. Thus by the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the surrealist movement's commitment to a concrete form of anticolonial politics was a distant memory, since the counter-exhibition of late 1931 and early 1932 was the last time Breton's circle actively campaigned against France's civilizing mission. However, the practitioners of Négritude ensured that the movement's earlier approach to colonialism endured throughout the period. Although the movement lost touch with its concrete anticolonialism as it separated its aesthetics from its politics, Breton's circle never lost touch with the outlook that had originally motivated

its anticolonial disposition. In other words, when the surrealist movement first emerged in the early 1920s, it committed itself to anticolonialism because of its complete disgust for Western rationalism, which it viewed as inherently hypocritical, oppressive, and unjust. But even after the counter-exhibition and their break from the PCF, the surrealists "never lost their original pessimism or their awareness of the eternal gap between the aspirations of man and his achievements."[484] During the 1930s, as the Ratton exhibition shows, they continued to turn to non-European culture as a source of political inspiration that could help them realize their revolutionary ambitions and transform reality. Thus as the concrete political expressions of surrealism's interest in both Otherness and the irrational evolved throughout the interwar period, the underlying motivation for the movement's involvement in the political realm remained the same. The desire on the part of the surrealists to transform reality would survive the Second World War and manifest itself again during the post-war period, when Breton and his circle revisited the question of colonialism.

[484] Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," 25.

Epilogue

SURREALIST REBELLION AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The fall of France to the Germans in June 1940 fractured Breton's surrealist circle as many of its members fled from Paris to escape Nazi repression. Breton relocated to New York by way of Martinique. Among those who also fled to the United States were Dali, Duchamp, Masson, Tanguy, and Man Ray. Another contingent coalesced in Mexico City around Péret, who was unable to meet the visa requirements necessary to enter the United States. Éluard and Tzara remained in Vichy France, where along with Aragon, they became active participants in the Resistance. Captured by the Nazis, Ernst was interned by the regime because he was German while Desnos, a Jew, was sent to his death in the concentration camps.[485] After the Allied forces defeated Hitler's Germany and restored peace in Europe, several of the Parisian surrealists, including Tanguy and Masson, remained in the United States. Éluard and Tzara, whose wartime affiliation with Aragon and the Resistance transformed their politics, aligned themselves with the Communist Party. Breton and Péret returned to Paris, in 1946 and 1947 respectively, where they worked to continue the revolutionary project first initiated by their circle in the wake of the First World War. Durozoi observes, "The aims of surrealism had not changed." Breton and Péret maintained their commitment to a project that sought to explore the irrational as a means of subverting the bourgeois categories and conventions that defined Western life. Among the new additions were the writers Jean Schuster and Yves Bonnefoy, as well as the poet and painter Claude Tarnaud. All of these new

[485] Gale, *Dada & Surrealism*, 359-370.

recruits were attracted to the surrealist project because the movement represented an alternative to the "rigidity of communism or existential pessimism."[486]

The publication of Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* was among the factors that compelled the surrealists to demonstrate actively that the movement did indeed represent an alternative to existentialism and the rigorous political point of view championed by the PCF. Thus Sartre inadvertently helped restore to the movement the political vigor that the Second World War had temporarily eroded. While he shared the movement's general contempt for bourgeois society and its revolutionary spirit, in *What is Literature?* Sartre lambasted surrealism as inherently bourgeois. According to Sartre, surrealism's "revolutionary doctrines remain purely theoretical (since they change nothing by their attitude), do not help them gain a single reader, and find no echo among the workers; they remain parasites of the class they insult; their revolt remains on the margin of revolution."[487] Sartre's argument, which was originally published in six installments in the periodical *Les Temps modernes* between February and July 1947, suggested that the surrealist movement's desire to integrate the irrational and unconscious activity into everyday life was impossible and only served to distract the movement's audience from immediate, material conditions. Only literature grounded in reality could help to achieve revolutionary progress. At its essence surrealism was merely a form of escapism consumed by bourgeois audiences. According to Michel Beaujour, Sartre rejected surrealist practices because he believed they tried "to evade the limits of human life and its responsibilities."[488]

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[486] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 461.
[487] Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is Literature?" in *What is Literature? and Other Essays*, with an introduction by Steven Ungar (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 159.
[488] Michel Beaujour, "Sartre and Surrealism," *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 30 (January 1963), 86.

Sartre's characterization of surrealism as fundamentally pre-political failed to recognize that the seemingly apolitical nature of surrealist aesthetics was in fact political because it had emerged out of the movement's fraught struggle with Marxism during the interwar period. His critique of surrealism as a form of bourgeois escapism did not go unnoticed by Breton and his followers. To assert their political radicalism and their desire to amend the oppressive material conditions to which so much of the world's population was subjugated, the surrealists once again turned to a critique of French colonialism. The pamphlet "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word," which the movement released in April 1947, reasserted the anticolonial stance the movement embraced throughout the interwar period. Signed by twenty-five surrealists "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word" united several prewar members, including Breton, Péret, and Tanguy, with a number of the new recruits.[489] The document praised the Vietnamese rebels revolting against French rule and denounced the silence of the French press and government. "Everything is done to hide from the French people a scandal that disturbs the entire world." The surrealists argued that this silence testified to the inherent hypocrisy of the French government and populace, who had only recently been liberated from an oppressive occupying force. According to the surrealists, the Fourth Republic hoped to obliterate the rebellion in Vietnam to "continue its traditional imperialist policies and reestablish the power of its bourgeois financiers, army and clergy." In this sense, the surrealists argued that French efforts against the indigenous population of Vietnam were, like colonial exploits during the interwar period, an attempt to restore France to a position of prominence after the embarrassment it endured during the Second World War.

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[489] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 463.

In "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word" Breton's circle asserted their allegiance to Marxist politics, arguing that if the French proletariat refused to revolt against bourgeois conventions, they should consider themselves culpable for the abuses of the colonial system. Of the French working class, the surrealists declared: "Whether through corruption or blind submission to a strategy imposed from above, they have capitulated to demands whose unchecked effect will henceforth be to conceal or to invert the true nature of the struggle."[490] Though the surrealist critique of the French working classes confirmed their commitment to a Marxist political project, this was not an affirmation of allegiance to the institutional form of communism toward which Sartre gravitated in the post-war period. As David Sprintzen notes, in the wake of the Second World War "Sartre became convinced . . . that anything that weakened the Communist forces objectively played into the hands of bourgeois reaction." Though he tried to develop a communist political project outside the orbit of the Stalinism, ultimately Sartre concluded that "The Communist Party was the objective expression of the domestic interests of the working class, as the Soviet Union was the expression of its international class solidarity, and they must be supported."[491] As a rejection of Stalinism and a response to Sartre's critique of the movement, the surrealists argued in the closing passages of the text that they refused to conform to an institutional form of revolution. Instead, "surrealism declares that it has renounced none of its demands, least of all the desire for a radical transformation of society." Weary of institutional politics and the "lies, errors, and

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[490] André Breton, et al., "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, 193-194.

[491] David A. Sprintzen, preface to *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, edited and translated by Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), 23. For more on Sartre's commitment to the political project of the Communist Party in the post-war period, see Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

inevitable divisions" endemic to these types of projects, the surrealists asserted, "surrealism has chosen a wider and deeper domain; one which is in proportion to a true human fraternity." While the material conditions of reality were of great concern to the surrealists, the movement was unwilling to renounce its desire to champion the resurgence of the irrational over all aspects of Western life. Meaningful social and political change could not be realized if a radical transformation in thought did not also occur. Alluding to their belief that non-Westerners had special access to the irrational and primordial, the surrealists closed their manifesto by asserting that the Vietnamese rebels embodied "at this very moment, the evolution of freedom."[492]

According to Mark Boyle and Audrey Kobayashi, Sartre framed his position on colonialism in terms of his commitment to the historical teleology championed within communist ideology. This teleology was premised on a belief in the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism and the oppression and evils generated by this system, which would in turn be replaced by a global socialist society. Like those committed to institutional communism, Sartre viewed anticolonial insurrections, including the Algerian War, as decisive moments in the anticapitalist struggle. Consistent with the communist belief that colonialism was at its essence a brutal apparatus of capitalism, Sartre believed that "all particulars were part of a universal process. All struggles were in the end struggles over capitalism and freedom for the colonized was freedom for the laborer." In

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[492] Breton, et al., "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, 194. The surrealists would later sign the "Manifesto of the 121," in 1960, which denounced the actions of the French government and military against the indigenous population of Algeria. For more on this, see James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria*, 2nd Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 234-236.

other words, the "defeat of colonialism was in crucial ways the defeat of capitalism."[493] For Sartre and his fellow Marxists, anticolonial conflicts like the Algerian War represented constituent moments in the broader struggle against capitalism that would eventually result in the establishment of a truly socialist society. In this way, Sartre offered a totalizing view of anticolonial struggles that conjoined them to a communist political project. Furthermore, he believed that the brutal behavior of the French government against the Algerians and the imperialist tactics the United States implemented in its international activity around the world proved that capitalist societies had no intention of liberating colonized populations struggling to free themselves from brutal exploitation. Only the Soviet Union, guided by its communist agenda, had defended colonized populations throughout Asia and Africa as they fought for their independence from the brutal regimes imposed upon them by colonial capitalism.[494]

The position of Breton's circle on the question of colonialism confirmed that the surrealist movement represented a Marxist political alternative to the project championed by Sartre, whose views on anticolonialism were more closely aligned with the project of the Communist Party. In other words, the surrealists demonstrated that in the wake of the Second World War, it was still possible to be both anticolonial and Marxist without endorsing institutional communism, which was increasingly Stalinist in nature. As was the case during the interwar period, that "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word" praised the Vietnamese confirmed that the surrealist movement's anticolonial position was premised in part on the belief that non-Europeans were a source of emancipatory forces which

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[493] Mark Boyle and Audrey Kobayashi, "Metropolitan Anxieties: A Critical Appraisal of Sartre's Theory of Colonialism," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (July 2011), 413.
[494] Sprintzen, preface to *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, 23. For a more thorough examination of Sartre's anticolonialism, see Paige Arthur, *Unfinished Projects: Decolonization and the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (London: Verso, 2010).

could free humanity from the oppressive limits of Western reason and the bourgeois conventions generated by rationalism. Breton's circle continued to allude to their desire to draw political inspiration from non-Western sources, valorizing colonized populations for their Otherness. In this sense, the surrealists did champion an escape from the material conditions of life in the West. While Sartre contended that this escape was not capable of producing revolutionary changes to reality, the surrealists believed the very opposite. By willfully turning toward the irrational through an engagement with non-Western culture, the surrealists suggested that they could find the intellectual and political inspiration necessary to liberate humanity from Western conventions. Thus their seemingly apolitical aesthetics were far more political than Sartre described.

Likewise, that "Freedom is a Vietnamese Word" illustrated that the surrealists intended to critique colonialism outside the orbit of institutional communism confirmed that the movement's commitment to radical politics was founded on a belief in the necessity of Otherness to the surrealist project. Just as surrealism posited itself as the Other to Western civilization during the interwar period, Breton's circle alluded to the differences between itself and institutional communism to suggest that it was capable of reinvigorating Marxist politics. The movement's resistance to both the French bourgeoisie and to institutional communism confirmed that Breton's circle refused to serve as an ideological apparatus, in Althusser's sense of the term, of any dominant system of thought.[495] While the membership of the movement changed in the years following the Second World War, surrealism's fundamental goal remained the same. Breton's circle continued to assert that, according to Durozoi, "there is in every human

[495] For a more thorough discussion of ideological apparatuses see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186.

being a radical seed of permanent dissatisfaction and that the various anesthetizing responses of society remain hopelessly inadequate."[496] Though the movement may not have radically transformed the conditions of material life in the twentieth century, the surrealists succeeded in illuminating that humanity can eventually realize true freedom from the innumerable constraints imposed upon it by perpetually exploring and engaging with that which appears unfamiliar and unknown.

[496] Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 647.

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