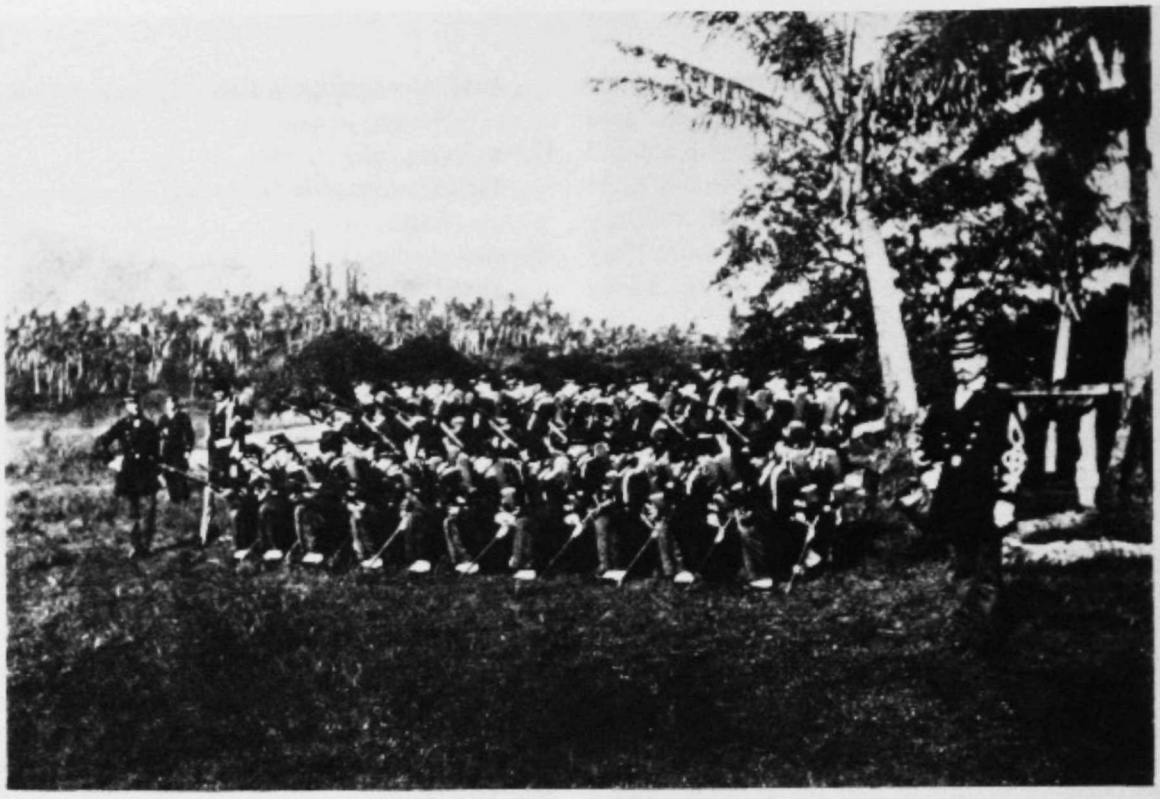


La garnison du pénitencier de Kinala, Nouvelle-Calédonie (Albums E. Robin).

Les Lew Leslie's Black Birds à leur arrivée en France, à bord du paquebot "France".

Documents: *A Decomposition*[1]

James Clifford

For N.O. Brown, revisionist

(. . . and Alejo Carpentier, who was a collaborator on the journal *Documents*.)
—James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), n. 4, 127.

To rewrite Paris of the twenties and thirties as travel encounters: New World detours through the Old; a place of departures, arrivals, transits...

Context/Context

"Why not just adapt something you've already written?"

In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin describes the transition from a traditional mode of communication based on continuous oral narrative and shared experience to a cultural style characterized by bursts of "information"—the photograph, the newspaper clip, the perceptual shocks of the modern city. Benjamin begins his essay with the First World War:

> A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath the clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.

Reality is no longer a given, a natural, familiar environment. The self, cut loose from its attachments, must discover meaning where it may.
—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 119.

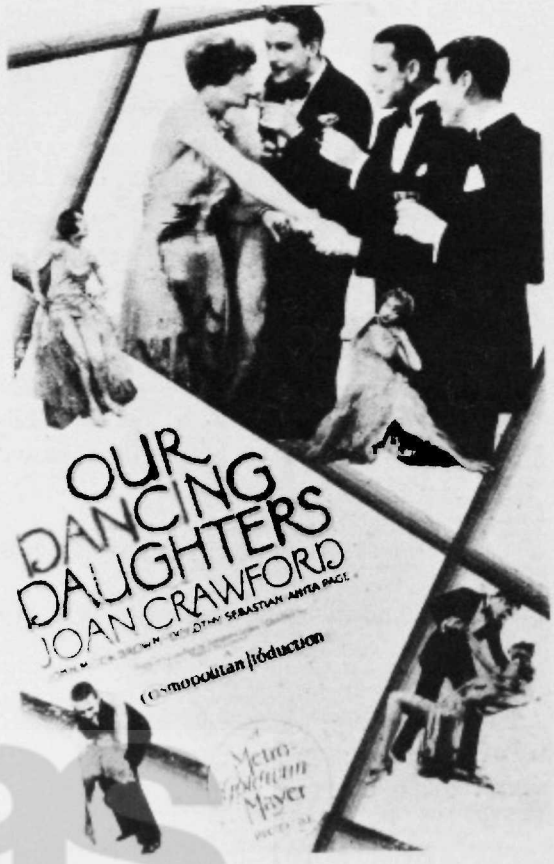
A page in *Documents* (1929): the penitentiary garrison of Kanala, New Caledonia; Lew Leslie's Black Birds upon their arrival in France on the steamship *France*.

(niggers-are-all-alike, I-tell-you vices-all-the vices-believe-you-me
nigger-smell, that's-what-makes-cane-grow
remember-the-old-saying:
beat-a-nigger, and you feed him)
—Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land" (1939), 59.

Crocodile et python, Inde (p. 278)

Phot. Keystone

Le meurtrier Crépin aux Assises de l'Oise (p. 278)



Cliché publicitaire du film sonore
" Les nouvelles vierges " (p. 278)

Betty Compson dans le film parlant
" Weary River " (p. 278)

A page in *Documents* (1929): crocodile and python, India; The murderer Crépin in the Assizes of Oise; Betty Compson in the talking film *Weary River*; publicity photo for the sound film *Les Nouvelles vierges*.

The War had thrust me, as a soldier, into the heart of a mechanical atmosphere. Here I discovered the beauty of the fragment.

—Ferdinand Léger, quoted in "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 120.

Alto, high; *azor*, hawk. *Altazor*, a poem in seven cantos, written by a Chilean living in Paris. Begun in 1919 and published in 1931, the poem spans those extraordinary optimistic years between the two global disasters. An age that thought itself post-apocalyptic: the war to end all wars had been fought and was over, and now there was a new world to create. A time when the West was, literally and figuratively, electrified; when the mass production of telephones, automobiles, movies, record players, toasters, radios, skyscrapers, airplanes, bridges, blimps and subways, matched an aesthetic production obsessed with celebrating the new, an aesthetics that (in Margaret Bourke-White's famous remark) found dynamos more beautiful than pearls. Painters, sculptors and photographers saw their task as making the new out of the new, dismantling and reassembling everything from egg-beaters to spark plugs to the Hoover Dam. Poets, the citizens of international progress, wrote in other languages or invented their own. Cinematic jumpcuts, verbal and visual Cubism, simultaneity and collage: on the page and on the canvas, all time collapsed into the single moment of now. "Speed," said Norman Bel Geddes, who redesigned the world, "is the cry of our era," and *Altazor* is, among other things, surely the fastest-reading long poem ever written. What other poem keeps reminding us to hurry up, that there's no time to lose?

—Eliot Weinberger, introduction to Vicente Huidobro, *Altazor* (1931), v-vi.

. . . the squadrons of madmen, the wheel monsters, the cries of the mechanical somnambulists, the liquid stomachs on silver tablets, the cruelties of the carniverous flowers will invade the simple rural day, and the cinema of your sleep;
Captain
watch out for blue eyes.

—Tristan Tzara, "Monsieur AA, Antiphilosopher" (1933), 306.

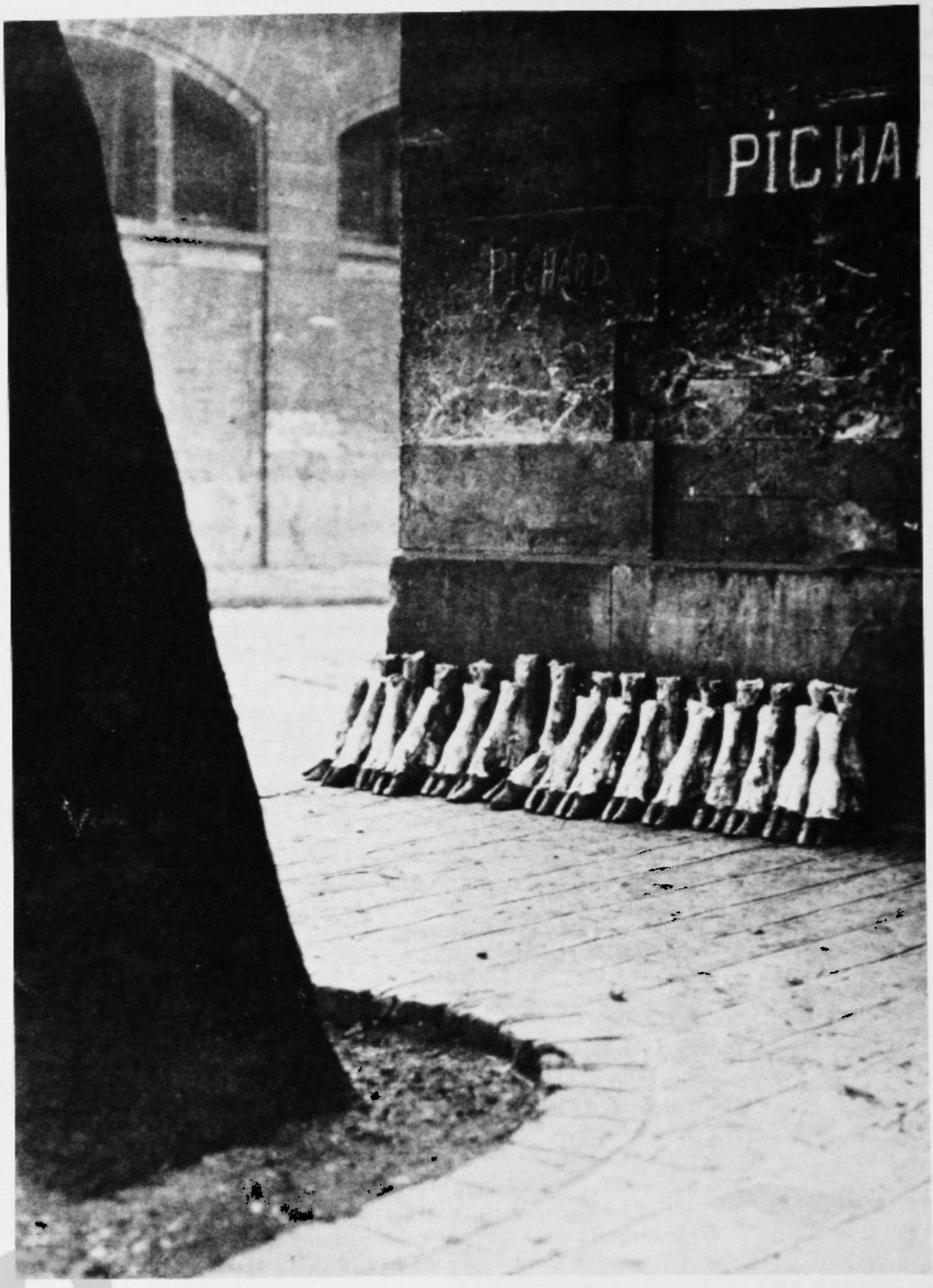
As everything was dying,
I did, I did grow—as big as the world—
and my consciousness wider than the sea!
Last sun.
I explode, I am the fire, I am the sea.
The world is dissolving, but I am the world . . .

—Césaire, "The Thoroughbreds" (1941), 101.

Swept along by violent bursts of tropical energy, jazz still had enough of a "dying civilization" about it, of humanity blindly submitting to The Machine, to express quite completely the state of mind of at least some of that generation: a more or less conscious demoralization born of the war, a naive fascination with the comfort and the latest inventions of progress, a predilection for a contemporary setting whose insanity we nonetheless vaguely anticipated, an abandonment to the animal joy of experiencing the influence of a modern rhythm, an underlying aspiration to a new life in which more room would be made for the impassioned frankness we inarticulately hoped for. In jazz, too, came the first appearance of *Negroes*, the manifestation and the myth of black Edens. . .

—Michel Leiris, *Manhood* (1946), 109.

James Clifford teaches in the History of Consciousness program at University of California, Santa Cruz. His recent publications include *Travelling Theories/Travelling Theorists* (coeditor, with V. Dhareshwar), *Inscriptions*, 5, 1989. *Inscriptions* (ISSN: 0899-666) is published by the Center for Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064.



A page in *Documents* (1929): Eli Lotar photo of the slaughterhouse at La Villette.

The world of the city for Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* or for Breton in *Nadja* was a source of the unexpected and the significant—significant in ways that suggested beneath the dull veneer of the real the possibility of another more miraculous world based on radically different principles of classification and order. The Surrealists frequented the Marché aux Puces, the vast flea market of Paris, where one could rediscover the artifacts of culture, scrambled and rearranged. With luck one could bring home some bizarre or unexpected object, a work of art with nowhere to go—"ready mades" such as Marcel Duchamp's bottle rack, and *objets sauvages*, African or Oceanian sculptures. These objects—stripped of their functional context—were necessary furnishings for the avant-garde studio.

—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 121.

. . . the legacy of all of America, where an inventory of cosmogonies has yet to be completed.

—Alejo Carpentier, "Prólogo, "*El Reino de este mundo* (1949), 13.

Collage/Collage

Documents, edited by Georges Bataille, published twenty numbers in 1929 and 1930. Its printed list of "collaborators" (all of whom were men) included dissident Surrealists (Michel Leiris, Robert Desnos, Raymond Queneau, Georges Limbour), ethnologists (Marcel Cohen, Paul Rivet, Marcel Mauss, Alfred Métraux, Marcel Griaule, Leo Frobenius), museologists (Georges-Henri Rivière), musicologists (André Schaeffner), orientalists (Sylvain Lévi, Arthur Waley), and a mixed bag of writers and scholars (Clive Bell, Alejo Carpentier, Carl Einstein, André Malraux, Jacques Prévert, Georges Ribémont-Dessaignes, William Seabrook, Sacheverell Sitwell . . .). The journal mixed archeology, reports on non-Western art and customs, European folklore and popular culture, with articles on modern art, music, and writing. The *currency* of the "other" (exotic, forgotten, excluded, devalued, ugly, bestial, excessive, occult) was a constant theme, contributing to a relentless criticism of European "civilization."

Modernism is a major act of cultural self-definition, made at a time when colonial territories are being reparceled and emergent nationalisms are beginning to present the early outlines of decolonization. As a cultural ensemble, modernism is assembled, in part, through the internalization of jeopardized geographical territory— which is not incorporated either as "primitive" image/metaphor or as mobile non-linear structure. Though intended as a critique, such incorporation often becomes a means for the renovation of bourgeois ideology, especially with the institutionalization of modernism.

—Kum Kum Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible" (1987), 182.

The fragmentation of modern culture perceived by Benjamin, the dissociation of cultural knowledge into juxtaposed "citations," is presupposed by *Documents*. The journal's title, of course, is indicative. Culture becomes something to be collected, and *Documents* itself is a kind of ethnographic display of images, texts, objects, labels, a playful museum that simultaneously collects and reclassifies its specimens.

—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 132.

Photo Paul Coze

"L'enfant de la grenouille" (cf. p. 396).
Jeune peau-rouge devant les poteaux totémiques de sa famille.

A page in *Documents* (1929): "Child of the Frog": Young Indian in front of her family totem poles.

A page with two photographs: 1) "Bessie Love in the talkie 'Broadway Melody'"— scantily clad dancing girls with plumes, lined up on stage; 2) "Children of the Bacouya School, Bourail"—scantily clad Melanesian boys lined up beside a uniformed instructor, holding wooden rifles.

—in *Documents* (1929), 215.

The journal's basic method is juxtaposition—fortuitous or ironic collage. The proper arrangement of cultural symbols and artifacts is constantly in doubt. High art is combined with hideously enlarged photographs of big toes; folk crafts; *Fantômas* (a popular mystery series) covers; Hollywood sets; African, Melanesian, pre-Columbian, and French carnival masks; accounts of music hall performances; descriptions of Paris slaughterhouses. *Documents* poses, for the culture of the modern city, the problem facing any organizer of an ethnographic museum: what belongs with what? Should masterpieces of sculpture be isolated as such or displayed in proximity with cooking pots and ax blades? The ethnographic attitude must continually pose these sorts of questions, composing and decomposing culture's "natural" hierarchies and relationships. Once everything in a culture is deemed worthy in principle of collection and display, fundamental issues of classification and value are raised.

—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 132.

The cultural simultaneity of Latin America must be distinguished from the cultural synchronicity of the "First World." Here it is a matter of historical conjuncture in which different modes of production, different social formations, and different ways of seeing overlap as the ground of conflict, contradiction, change and intervention, both indigenous and foreign . . . The synchronic vision of culture in the West takes shape through the conglomerative modality of collage as "different times and different spaces are combined in a here and now that is everywhere at once." [Octavio Paz]

—Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible" (1987), 160.

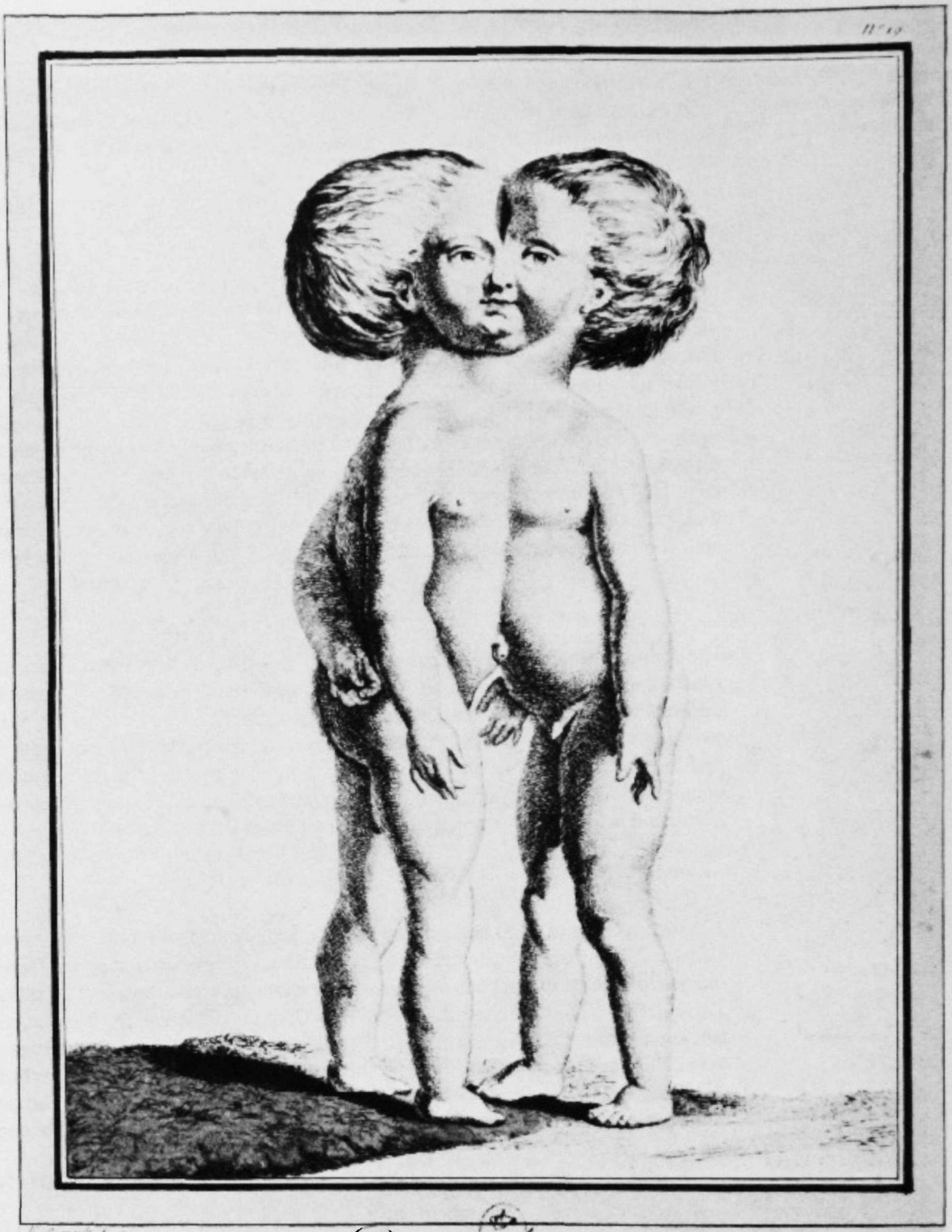
The second issue of 1930 begins, for example, with an article by Leiris, "Picasso's Recent Canvases," profusely illustrated with photographs. (These were the years when Picasso seemed to be breaking and bending, almost savagely, the normal shape of the human frame.) These deformed images are followed by "The Outcasts of Nature" by Bataille, a characteristic appreciation of freaks, illustrated by full-page eighteenth-century engravings of Siamese twins. Next an illustrated review of an exhibition of African sculpture provides further visual dislocation of the "natural" body as realistically conceived in the West. The body, like a culture semiotically imagined, is not a continuous whole but an assemblage of conventional symbols and codes.

—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 133.

The form of the big toe is not, however, specifically monstrous: in this it is different from other parts of the body, the inside of a gaping mouth, for example.

—Georges Bataille, "Le Gros orteil," *Documents* 1 (1929), 302.

Documents, particularly in its use of photographs, creates the order of an unfinished collage rather than that of a unified organism. Its images, in their equalizing gloss and distancing effect, present in the same plane a Châtelet show advertisement, a Hollywood movie clip, a



Regnault, *Les ecarts de la nature*, 1775. — Cabinet des Estampes. (Reproduction d'une cire du Cabinet Pinson, aujourd'hui au Muséum d'histoire naturelle).

A page in *Documents* (1930): Regnault, *Outcasts of Nature* (1775).

Picasso, a Giacometti, a documentary photo from colonial New Caledonia, a newspaper clip, an Eskimo mask, an Old Master, a musical instrument—the world's icongraphic and cultural forms presented as evidence or data. Evidence of what? Evidence, one can only say, of surprising, declassified cultural orders and of an expanded range of human artistic invention. This odd museum merely documents, juxtaposes, relativizes— a perverse collection.

—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 133-34.

Ironically, the "liberating" possibilities of an international, oppositional, and "revolutionary" modernism for early twentieth-century "Third World" writers and artists came into being at a time when modernism was itself recuperating the cultural products of non-western countries largely within an aesthetic of the fragment.

—Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible" (1987), 182.

History/History

At about the time [Blaise] Cendrars began to bring African motifs and jazzlike compositional patterns into this writing, the Zurich dadaists were organizing their notorious "Soirées" at the Cabaret Voltaire. The program for 14 July 1916 announced "noises, Negro music (trabatgea bonooooooo oo ooooo)." Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara beat on drums and intoned invented "negro" chants, simulating a return to wild, purely rhythmic, presyntactic forms of expression presumed to be typical of black cultures. These racist displays—stereotypical savagery recast as scandal and poetic regeneration—were short lived. But the influence of black culture on Tzara's *"poèmes nègres"* (most of them unpublished during his lifetime) was more enduring. He was a more critical collector than Cendrars, drawing on the best-documented sources of his time, especially the respected Swiss journal *Anthropos*. Transcribing African or Australian Aboriginal myths and chants, Tzara used scholarly word-for-word translations rather than smoothed-over "literary" versions. His literalism resulted in obscure, syntactically-disjointed "poems" that, like the language experiments of the Italian and Russian futurists, estranged and reassembled basic linguistic components.

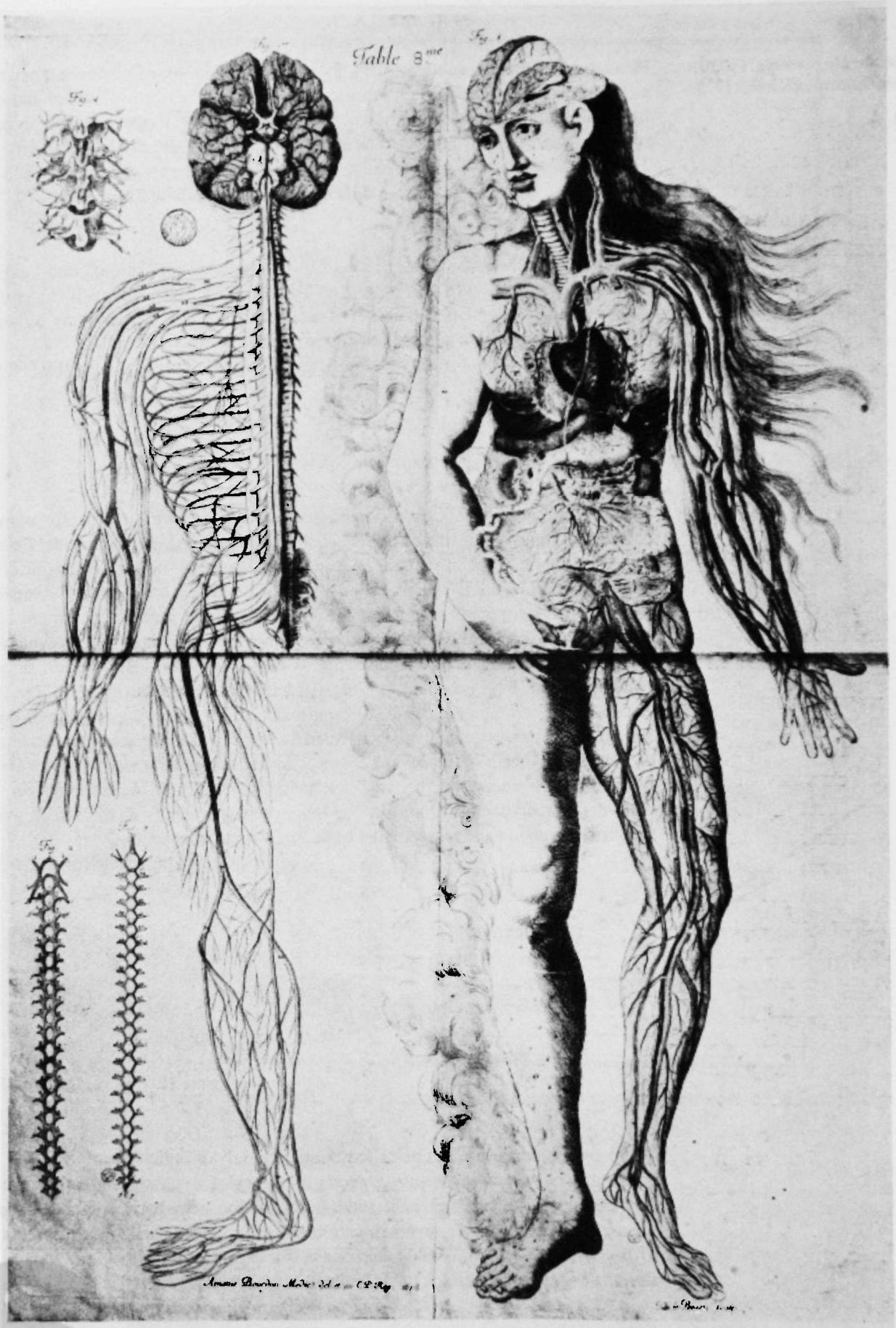
—Clifford, "Negrophilia" (1989), 903.

. . . Tempovío
Infilero e infinauta zurrosía
Jaurinario ururayú
Montañendo orarania
Arorasía ululacente
Semperiva . . .

—Vicente Huidobro, *Altazor* (1931), 164.

There are moments that can be called *crises*, the only ones that count in a life. These are moments when abruptly the outside seems to respond to a call we send it from within, when the exterior world opens itself and a sudden communion forms between it and our heart. From my own experience I have several memories like this, and they all relate to events that seem trifling, without symbolic value, and one might say *gratuitous*: in a luminous Montmartre street, a negress of the *Black Birds* revue holding a bouquet of roses with both hands...

—Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," *Documents* 1 (1929), 209.



Amé Bourdon, *Nouvelles tables anatomiques*, 1678. — Bibliothèque Nationale.

A page in *Documents* (1930): Amé Bourdon, *New Anatomic Charts* (1678).

The discovery of things "*nègre*" by the European avant-garde was mediated by an imaginary America, a land of noble savages simultaneously standing for the past and future of humanity—a perfect affinity of primitive and modern. For example, jazz was associated with primal sources (wild, erotic passions) and with technology (the mechanical rhythm of brushed drums, the gleaming saxophone). Le Corbusier's reaction was characteristic: "In a stupid variety show, Josephine Baker sang 'Baby' with such an intense and dramatic sensibility that I was moved to tears. There is in this American negro music a lyrical 'contemporary' mass so invincible that I could see the foundation of a new sentiment of music capable of being the expression of the new epoch and also capable of classifying its European origins as stone age—just as has happened with the new architecture" [Jencks (1973), 102]. As a source of modernist inspiration for Le Corbusier, the figure of Josephine Baker was matched only by monumental, almost Egyptian, concrete grain elevators, rising from the American plains and built by nameless "primitive" engineers [Banham (1986), 16]. The historical narrative implicit here has been a feature of twentieth-century literary and artistic innovation, as a redemptive modernism persistently "discovers" the primitive that can justify its own sense of emergence.

—Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern" (1985), n. 7, 198.

In a complex way Latin American history *secretes* the History of Europe and in turn renders it ironic. Márquez's intent is obvious when he points out in his Nobel Lecture that "the statue of General Francisco Morazán [1792-1842, the last president of the Central American Federation] erected in the main square of Tegucigalpa is actually one of Marshall Ney [1799-1815, one of Napoleon's commanders], purchased at a Paris warehouse of second-hand sculptures."

—Sangari: "The Politics of the Possible" (1987), 159.

In a complex way European history *secretes* the History of Latin America and in turn renders it aesthetic.

Body/Body

In *Documents* we observe the use of ethnographic juxtaposition for the purpose of perturbing commonplace symbols. A regular section of the journal is a so-called dictionary of unexpected definitions. The entry for the word *homme* is characteristic. It recites a researcher's breakdown of the chemical composition of the average human body: enough iron to make a nail, enough sugar for one cup of coffee, magnesium sufficient to make a photograph, and so on—market value twenty-five francs. The body, a privileged image of order, is a favorite target. Together with a variety of other "natural" entities, it is recoded, and in the process it is thrown into doubt. Robert Desnos contributes a disconcerting inventory of rhetorical forms concerning the eye (*Documents* 1:215), and his entry for the mobile symbol "nightingale" begins, "except in special cases, this does not have to do with a bird." (*Documents* 1:117)

—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 132-33.

FORMLESS—A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves

La Seine pendant l'hiver 1870-71 (cf. ci-contre).

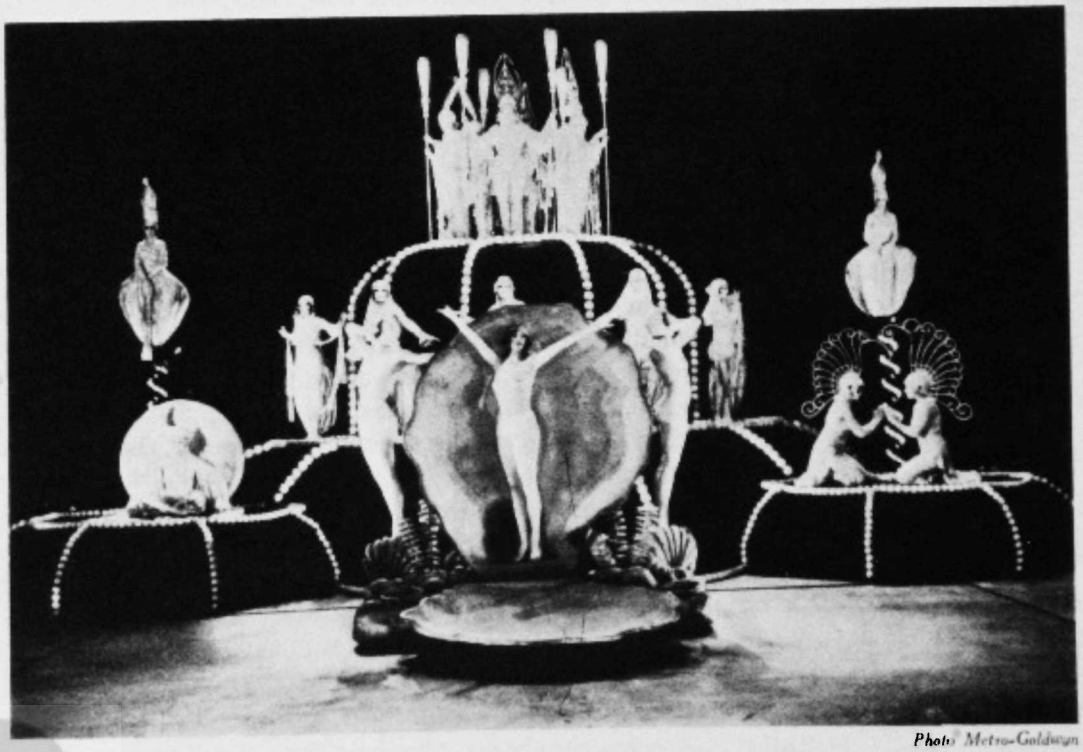


Photo Metro-Goldwyn

Un des tableaux du film parlant "*Hollywood revue*".

A page in *Documents* (1929): the Seine during the winter of 1870-71; a scene from the talking picture *Hollywood Review*.

to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.

—Bataille, "Informe," *Documents* 1 (1929), 382.

Crachat, "spittle," is redefined by [Marcel] Griaule using black African and Islamic evidence with the result that spit becomes associated with the soul, and with both good and evil spirits. In Europe, naturally, to spit in someone's face is an absolute dishonor; in West Africa it can be a mode of blessing. "Spitting acts like the soul: balm or garbage" (*Documents* 1:381). The ethnographer, like the surrealist, is licensed to shock. Leiris takes up Griaule's definition and goes further: spittle is the permanent spermlike sullying of the noble mouth, an organ associated in the West with intelligence and language. Spit thus resymbolized denotes a condition of inescapable sacrilege (*Documents* 1:382). In this newly recomposed definition to talk or to think is also to ejaculate.

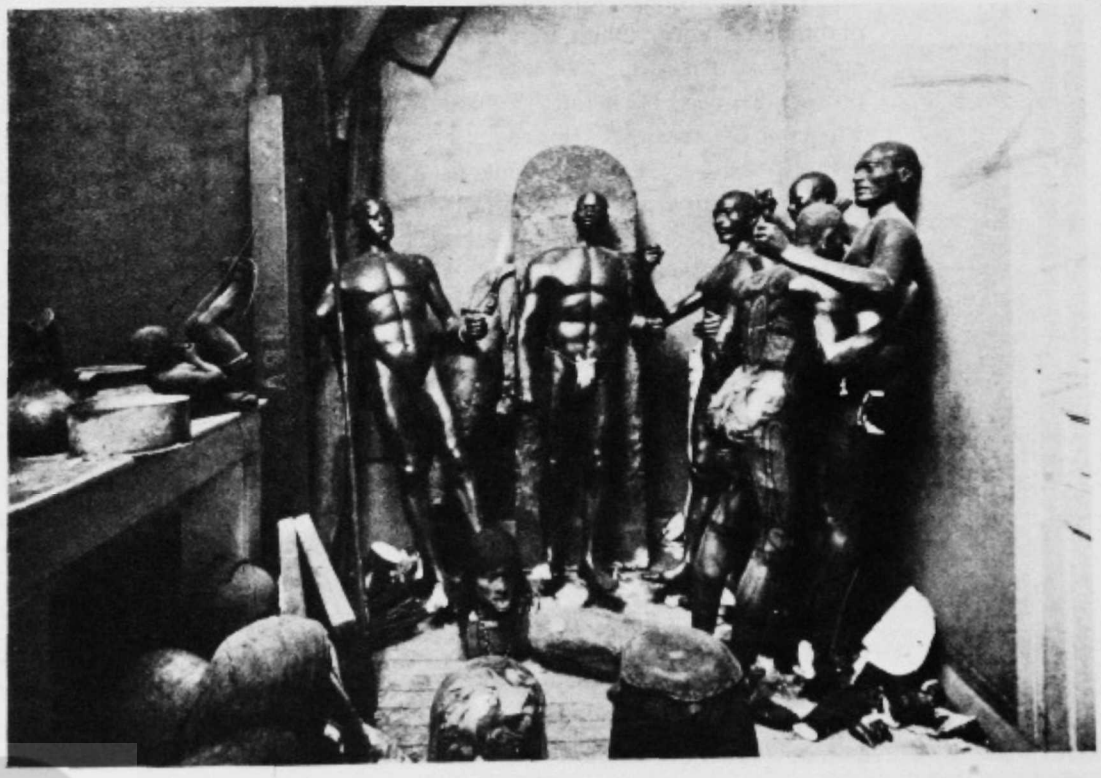
—Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), 133.

Or can formlessness be produced as well by mechanical means, such as the turning of a camera or a body 180 degrees? Bataille's substitution of the idea of a dictionary as a giver of tasks rather than meanings heralds the active, aggressive tenor of his thought, separating it from that expectantly passive attitude of Breton's availability to chance... Two of the texts that explore this rotation into baseness, "The Big Toe" and "Mouth" [Documents 1:297; 2:299] were illustrated with photographs by Boiffard. In the essay "Mouth," where the issue of rotation is more explicit, Bataille contrasts the mouth/eye axis of the human face with the mouth/anus axis of the four legged animal. The first, linked to man's verticality and his possession of speech, defines the mouth in terms of man's expressive powers. The second, a function of the animal's horizontality, understands the mouth as the leading element in the system of catching, killing, and ingesting prey, for which the anus is the terminal point. But, beyond this simple polarity, to insist that at its greatest moments of pleasure or pain the human mouth's expression is not spiritual, but animal, is to reorganize the orientation of the human structure and conceptually to rotate the axis of material existence. With this act of Bataille's, mouth and anus are conflated. Boiffard's photograph for this essay is a woman's open mouth, wet with saliva, its tongue an amorphous blurr.

—Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti" (1985), 65.

From the age of twelve the woman of Buenos Aires learns to be seen, and thus, to exist. The gaze of the other constructs her. Her skeleton, her vertebrae, are forged in the intensity of the gaze. From this comes her solidity, the perfect assembly of her joints without a hint of creaking, the pride of her bearing: chin up, clicking heels, the "two by four" rhythm of her hips which repeats the tango's beat. The gaze is an inexhaustible language. It costs nothing, requires nothing, runs, floats, undulates, free and easy as air. The woman blossoms like a flower in a hothouse. Used to such glances, she cannot pass them by. How to live, if not through this mirror which serves as an identify? She would live—certainly—but clouded, dulled, without brilliance.

—Alicia Dujovne Ortiz, *Buenos Aires* (1984), 74.



Greniers. Mannequins, débris et poussières (p. 278).

A page in *Documents* (1929): Storage rooms. Mannequins, debris, and dust.

A variety of photographic methods has been exploited to produce an image of the invasion of space: of bodies dizzily yielding to the force of gravity; of bodies in the grip of a distorting perspective; of bodies decapitated by the projection of a shadow; of bodies eaten away by heat or light.

—Krauss, "Corpus Delicti" (1985), 70.

. . . an image of the invasion of space: of women's bodies dizzily yielding to the force of gravity; of women's bodies in the grip of a distorting perspective; of women's bodies decapitated by the projection of a shadow; of women's bodies eaten away by heat or light.

Love thus reduced—very lucidly—to a natural, bestial process due to the fact that, because of this mask, the head is symbolically crushed, the fatality that oppresses us finally subdued (since, thanks to this instrument, the woman we hold in our hands is nothing more than nature itself, formed of blind laws, without soul or personality, but for once totally tied to us, as this woman is tied), the look—that quintessence of human expression—for a moment blinded (which confers on the woman in question an even more infernal, subterranean signification), the mouth reduced to the animalistic role of a wound (thanks to the thin orifice that leaves it alone visible), the usual arrangement of attire entirely reversed (here, the body is naked, the head covered, whereas usually the head is naked and the body masked), so many elements making these pieces of leather (material for boots and whips) into prodigious instruments, admirably adapted to what is most truly eroticism: a way to get out of yourself, to break the bonds that morality, intellect, and customs impose on you . . .

—Leiris, "Le 'Caput Mortuum' ou la femme de l'alchimiste," *Documents* 2 (1930), 26.

This is exactly what happens when she leaves her city to come to Europe. Outside the Mediterranean countries, she finds herself not before eyes but before eyelids. No one sees her. Or rather, she is seen in a very modest manner, very discreet, so that she feels invisible. Then her skeleton cracks and slackens. Her spinal column sags, a marionette suddenly dangling. In Buenos Aires the gaze was like a life-line stretched over the abyss. She always walked on this line. Now, if it disappears, she falls. To the bottom of the abyss? No, because this Europe that is so very blond, so atrociously Nordic, indifferent and polite, is not an abyss. She falls into a very soft, reassuring, and comfortable net. But at the bottom of this fluffy mattress, where no one sees her, bothers or hassles her, she sometimes dreams of the days when she walked proudly in the streets of the razor-sharp gaze.

—Ortiz, *Buenos Aires* (1984), 74.

. . . an image of the invasion of space: of European bodies dizzily yielding to the force of gravity; of European bodies in the grip of a distorting perspective; of European bodies decapitated by the projection of a shadow; of European bodies eaten away by heat or light.

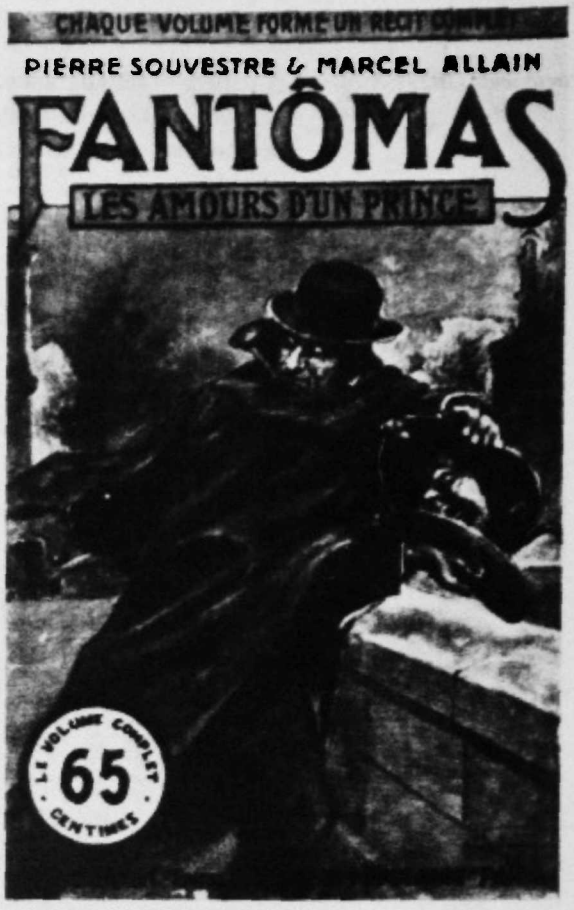
Paris/Paris

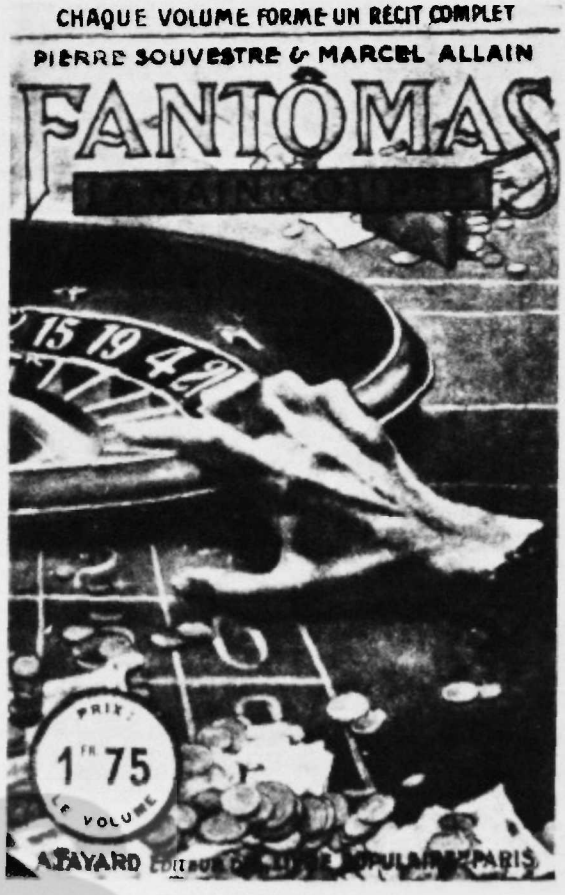
. . . crossing histories, different detours.

The three sub-editors of *Documents:* Georges Limbour (also in Egypt), Michel Leiris (also crossing Africa), Marcel Griaule (also in Ethiopia, Soudan Français).

Luis Buñuel in the '30's, traveling between Surrealist Paris, Civil War Spain, Hollywood...

In the summer of 1935 Aimé Césaire vacationing on the Yugoslav coast... dreaming of Martinique, beginning *Cahier d' un retour au pays natal.*





Quatre couvertures de Fantômas (cf. p. 50). Éditions Arthème Fayard.

A page in *Documents* (1930): Four covers of *Fantômas*, Éditions Arthème Fayard.

"Contemporary poetry begins with me"

—Vicente Huidobro.

Paris. Lycée Louis-le-Grand: travel encounters of Césaire with the Senegalese students, Léopold Senghor, Ousmane Socé. Three Antillians, Etienne Léro, René Ménil, Jules Monnerot: *Légitime Défense*. Senghor, Léon Damas, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire: *L'Etudiant noir*.

Huidobro (1893-1948) arrived in Paris in 1916 and stayed in the thick of it. Bilingual poet, novelist, screenplay writer, war correspondent, painter, propagandist, self-promoter, founder of newspapers and literary magazines (the first, *Nord-Sud*, edited with Apollinaire and Reverdy), candidate for President of Chile.

—Eliot Weinberger, Introduction to *Altazor* (1988), vi.

The Detour is a profitable ruse only when the Return makes it fruitful: not a return to a dream of origin, to the immobile One of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement . . .

—Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais* (1981), 36.

I never felt in tune with the French . . . and my surrealist drive seemed a vain task to me. I was not going to add anything to that movement. I had a contrary reaction. I felt passionately a desire to express the world of America. Even though I didn't know how . . . But surrealism did mean a lot to me. It taught me to see structures, aspects of American life I had not perceived, caught up as we were in waves of nativism. . .

—Carpentier (returned to Havana 1939), in Leante, "Confessiones" (1964), 32.

The sky is that pure flowing hair
Braided by the hands of the aeronaut

And the airplane carries a new language
[. . .]

Tomorrow the countryside
Will follow the galloping horses

The flower will suck the bee
For the hangar will be a hive

—Huidobro, *Altazor* (1931), 73-74.

The Harlem Renaissance was known to black students in Paris, in part through the literary and artistic salon of the four Nardal sisters, Martinicans, and the *Revue du monde noir* (1931-32), which Paulette Nardal organized in collaboration with a Haitian, Dr. Sajous. Césaire read the *Revue du monde noir* during his first year in Paris and through it became acquainted with the writings of Langston Hughes and Alain Locke as well as the poets [James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, and Claude McKay].

—James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude* (1981), 11.

A page in *Documents* (1930): The Empire State Building under construction.

Cuban music, as it exists today with its definite forms, its special instruments, its amalgams of rhythms, is of quite recent formation...A true *Son*, with all of its parts, variations and repetitions, can last about forty minutes, in a continually increasing movement. No other music in the world can provide a greater feeling of joy, of straining force, than can this prodigious sound machine invented by negroes beneath the heavy sky of the Antilles.

—Carpentier, "La Musique Cubaine," *Documents* 1 (1929), 324, 326.

The cultural heterogeneity of Latin America is at once different from and determined by the "linear" history of the West, which both nests inside and shapes Latin American history, often by erasure. The simultaneity of the heterogeneous is a matter of historical sedimentation that results from the physical coexistence over time of different ethnic groups (native American-Indian, Arab, African, Indochinese, Asian, Spanish), each laden with its respective cultural freight of myth, oral narrative, magic, superstition, Roman Catholicism, Cartesian education, and Western rationalism. Simultaneity is the restless product of a long history of miscegenation, assimilation, and syncretism *as well as* of conflict, contradiction, and cultural violence.

—Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible" (1987), 158-59.

This was made particularly clear to me during my stay in Haiti, when I found myself in daily contact with what we could call the *marvelous real*. I was treading the same ground where thousands of men, avid for their freedom, believed in the lycantropic powers of Mackandal to the point that their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution. I already knew the extraordinary story of Boukman, the Jamaican High Priest. I had been in the La Ferrière citadel, an architectural anomaly forseen only in Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons*. I had imbibed the atmosphere created by Henri Christophe, a ruler with incredible designs, much more astonishing than any cruel king ever invented by the Surrealists, with their fondness for tyrannical regimes they dreamed up but never suffered through. With every step I discovered the *marvelous real*. But at the same time, it occurred to me that the presence and predominance of the marvelous real was not a phenomenon unique to Haiti, but rather the legacy of all of America, where an inventory of cosmogonies has yet to be completed.

—Carpentier, "Prólogo," *El Reino de este mundo* (1949), 12-13.

The history of the West and the history of the non-West are by now irrevocably different and irrevocably shared. Both have shaped and been shaped by each other in specific and specifiable ways. The linear time of the West or the project of modernity did not simply mummify or overlay the indigenous times of colonized countries, but was itself open to alteration and reentered into discrete cultural combinations.

—Sangari, "The Politics of the Possible" (1987), 185-86.

Time would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place, the relations of classes had to change, before I discovered that it is not quality of goods and utility that matter, but movement; not where you are or what you have, but where you come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there.

—C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), 116-17.

Autel/*Hotel*

Or begin again with hotels. Conrad in the first pages of *Victory:* "The age in which we are encamped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel." In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss evokes an out-of-scale concrete cube sitting in the midst of the new Brazilian city of Goiania, in 1937. It's his symbol of civilization's barbarity, "a place of transit not of residence." The hotel as station, airport terminal, hospital, and so on: somewhere you pass through, where the encounters are fleeting, arbitrary.

Its most recent avatar: the hotel as chronotope of the modern in the new Los Angeles "downtown," Portman's Bonaventure Hotel evoked by Fredric Jameson in an influential essay, "Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." The Bonaventure's glass cliffs refuse to interact, merely reflecting back the surroundings; there's no opening, no apparent main entrance; inside a confusing maze of levels frustrates all continuity—the narrative stroll of any modernist *flâneur*.

Or begin with June Jordan's "Report from the Bahamas"—her stay in something called the Sheraton British Colonial Hotel. A Black woman from the United States, on vacation, confronting her inescapable privilege and wealth . . . uncomfortable encounters with people who make the bed and serve food in the hotel . . . reflections on concrete conditions for human connection and alliance, cross-cutting class, race, gender, and national locations.

Begin again with a London boarding house, the setting for V.S. Naipaul's *Mimic Men*, a different postcolonial place of transience, exile, rootlessness . . .

Or again the Parisian hotels, homes away from home to the Surrealists: launching points for strange and wonderful urban voyages, *Nadja, Paysan de Paris*—places of collection, juxtaposition, passionate encounter . . . "L'Hôtel des Grands Hommes."

Begin with the hotel stationery and restaurant menus, lining (along with star charts) Joseph Cornell's magical boxes. "Untitled: Hôtel du Midi, Hôtel du Sud, Hôtel de l'Etoile, English Hotel, Grand Hôtel de l'Univers . . ." Enclosed beauty of chance encounters—a feather, some ballbearings, Lauren Bacall. Hotel/*autel:* reminiscent of, but *not the same as*, marvelous-real altars improvised from collected objects in Latin American popular healing cults or the home "altars" constructed by contemporary Chicano artists. A local/global faultline opening in Cornell's Queens basement, rooms filled with souvenirs of Paris, the place he never visited. Paris, the Universe, Queens N.Y.: basement of an ordinary house, 3708 Utopia Parkway.

Note.

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