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Surrealist Ghostliness

SURREALIST GHOSTLINESS

Katharine Conley

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Set in Minion by Laura Wellington.
Designed by Nathan Putens.

For Marian, who helped me see ghostliness

And for Richard, always

Contents

List of Illustrations viii

Preface xi

Acknowledgments xvii

Introduction 1

1 The Cinematic Whirl of Man Ray's Ghostly Objects 21

2 Claude Cahun's Exploration of the Autobiographical Human 45

3 The Ethnographic Automatism of Brassaï and Dalí's *Involuntary Sculptures* 69

4 The Ghostliness in Lee Miller's Egyptian Landscapes 91

5 Dorothea Tanning's Gothic Ghostliness 119

6 Francesca Woodman's Ghostly Interior Maps 151

7 Pierre Alechinsky's Ghostly Palimpsests 179

8 Susan Hiller's Freudian Ghosts 201

Conclusion 227

Notes 233

Bibliography 257

Index 275

Illustrations

1 Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors* xiii

2 Marcel Duchamp, *Bottlerack* 10

3 Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* 22

4 Man Ray, *La Femme* 23

5 Man Ray, *L'Homme* 23

6 Man Ray, *Champs délicieux (Rayogram)* 24

7 Man Ray, still from *Retour à la raison* 31

8 Man Ray, *Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp)* 46

9 Man Ray, *Hommage à D. A. F. de Sade* 47

10 Claude Cahun, *Untitled* 50

11 Claude Cahun, *Frontière humaine* 58

12 Claude Cahun, photomontage from *Disavowals* 59

13 Brassaï, *Sculptures involontaires* 70

14 Lee Miller, *Tanja Ramm and the Belljar, Variant on Hommage à D. A. F. de Sade* 92

15 Lee Miller, *Under the Belljar* 94

16 Lee Miller, *Exploding Hand* 96

17 Lee Miller, *Nude Bent Forward* 97

18 Lee Miller, *Domes of the Church of the Virgin (al Adhra), Deir el Soriano Monastery* 101

19 Lee Miller, *The Procession (Bird Tracks in the Sand)* 103

20 Lee Miller, *The Cloud Factory (Sacks of Cotton)* 105

21 Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space* 109

22 Lee Miller, *From the Top of the Great Pyramid* 113

23 Dorothea Tanning, *Pelote d'épingles pouvant servir de fétiche* 120

24 Dorothea Tanning, *Children's Games* 124

25 Dorothea Tanning, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* 126

26 Dorothea Tanning, *Palaestra* 128

27 Dorothea Tanning, *Birthday* 129

28 Dorothea Tanning, *Premier péril* 134

29 Dorothea Tanning, *Cinquième péril* 137

30 Dorothea Tanning, *Interior with Sudden Joy* 139

31 Dorothea Tanning, *Canapé en temps de pluie* 145

32 Dorothea Tanning, *Murmurs* 147

33 Francesca Woodman, *House #3* 154

34 Francesca Woodman, *then at one point* 157

35 Francesca Woodman, from *Space²* 162

36 Francesca Woodman, *Space²* 166

37 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled* 169

38 Francesca Woodman, *Space²* 170

39 Francesca Woodman, *On Being an Angel* 172

40 Francesca Woodman, from *Angel* series 173

41 Francesca Woodman, from *Angel* series 174

42 Pierre Alechinsky, *Central Park* 180

43 Pattern in Pierre Alechinsky's painting *Central Park* 186

44 Pierre Alechinsky, *Page d'atlas universel (III)* 193

45 Pierre Alechinsky, *Page d'atlas universel (VII)* 195

46 Pierre Alechinsky, *Page d'atlas universel (X)* 196

47 Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum* 202

48 Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum* 211

49 Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum* 220

50 Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum* 223

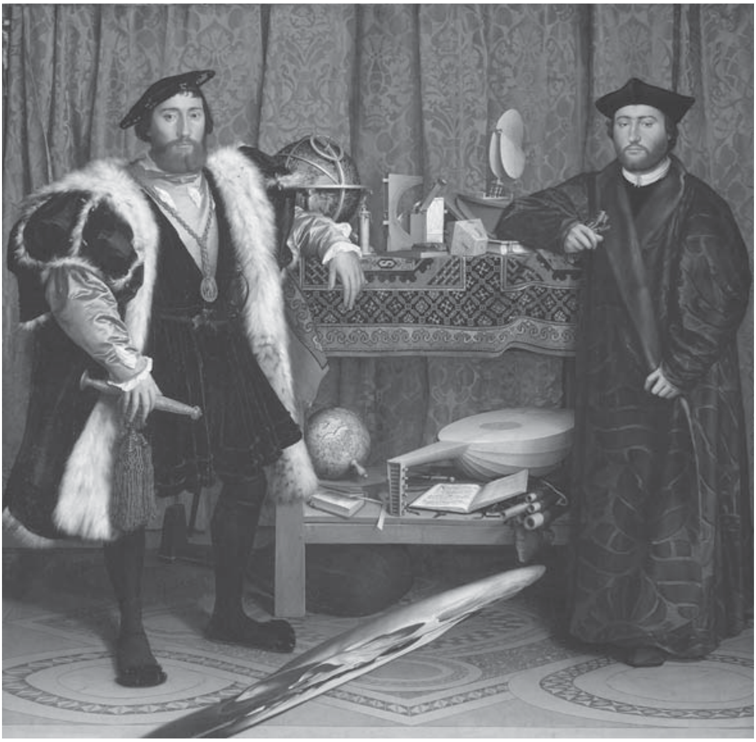
Preface

Surrealist Ghostliness began with the insight I had in 2000 that surrealist perception was necessarily double and that anamorphosis functions well as a visual paradigm for this doubleness because of the way surrealism purports to harness both our conscious and unconscious minds into a kind of idealized synthesis, what André Breton, the author of the first two "Manifestoes" of surrealism in 1924 and 1930, would call a resolution of old antinomies or a sublime point. As a result of this insight, I wrote an exhibition catalogue essay on surrealist love poetry called "Anamorphic Love." There for the first time I integrated fully an appreciation of surrealist visual art into my more literary work, paving the way for my focus on art in *Surrealist Ghostliness*. As I was finishing my book on Robert Desnos in 2002, I realized that his tongue-twisting poetry produced in automatic trances at the outset of the surrealist movement provided a textual model for the double nature of surrealist perception. Anamorphosis on a visual level and Desnos's "Rrose Sélavy" playful punning poems on an aural and textual level require an analogous two-step process of comprehension, what I called a double take, involving a first look or hearing, followed by a second, retroactive look or hearing.

My interest in anamorphosis began with the standard image we know of the urn that, on a second look, resolves into the silhouette of two human faces looking at one another or the duck that transforms into a rabbit. I then turned to the picture-poems of Guillaume Apollinaire, the French poet who coined the word *surrealism* in 1917 and who created his handwritten "calligrams" when he was a soldier in World War I, decades before the concrete poets identified these poems as early twentieth-century precursors to their own. Apollinaire arranged the words on the page to replicate playfully the objects he described, such as a tie, a fountain, or a heart. First we see the picture the letters make and read the words, and then, retroactively, through a mental double take, we see that the two sign systems — visual and textual — represent two versions of the same thing, two intense images, literal and metaphoric, with the dominant version standing in for conscious reality and the secondary version hiding like a ghost behind it, standing in for unconscious, dream reality that we know exists but have trouble seeing simultaneously with the conscious reality. Each version looks like the thing described but in a different way. Neither replicates the other exactly; the two coexist, yet it is difficult to apprehend them both *at the same time*.

This train of thought led me to the most famous anamorphic painting, Hans Holbein's sixteenth-century *Ambassadors* (1533; see fig. 1), which was created to hang next to a door so that it could be seen head on, and then once again over one's shoulder at the instant of leaving the room, at which point the skull lying at the ambassadors' feet springs into focus as the ambassadors themselves fade into a blur. This over-the-shoulder, retrospective glance functions like the double take Apollinaire's poems invite when we realize these two perspectives constitute two aspects of the same reality.

Surrealist perception is anamorphic in a way similar to the moment when a viewer perceives Holbein's *Ambassadors* sideways and backward, when, for an instant, both aspects of the painting become apparent at once. We suddenly understand that underlying the glorious achievements of the magnificently dressed men in the painting lies the mortality that awaits them — that awaits us all. On second glance, the suppressed, primitive truth of mortality is even more real than the overt reality most of us live by, which is actually more of a dreamlike fantasy, for it deludes us into believing that we will live forever, protected from the inevitable by prosperity. The repressed truth is more real than the reality we live consciously. The distinction between these realities, like a membrane or elusive line that is always moving away from us, just out of reach, dissolves, in such a



1. Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors* (1533). © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, New York.

way as to make them almost indistinguishable from each other. For the surrealists, the sublime point resides at the instant when one reality bleeds into another so that, for an instant, both sides of the duality may be understood simultaneously.

I first understood this anamorphic paradigm as ghostly in 2003, when I began to study Lee Miller's Egyptian photographs from the 1930s, starting with her *Domes of the Church of the Virgin (al Adhra), Deir el Soriano Monastery* (ca. 1936) (see fig. 18). Here I discovered the ghost of a woman's nude body looking down at herself, hidden in a landscape photograph of a monastery that for centuries had housed only men, as though the ghosts of all the monks from the past suddenly had succeeded in fulfilling a secret desire. I was sure this was not a mistake when I thought about Miller's wry sense of humor, and then I began to find ghost images in her other photographs; it became clear to me that this anamorphic effect was at once surrealist and ghostly. The ghostliness was confirmed for me by her elegiac *From the Top of the Great Pyramid* (ca. 1937; see fig. 22), shot when Miller knew she was soon to leave Egypt for Europe and an impending war, which would provide the surrealists with new ghosts, beyond those of friends and family from the previous war. The photograph hints at the ghostly presence of the photographer herself looking out at the landscape and also seems to invoke ghosts from the distant past in dark anticipation of the upcoming war, in which Miller would enlist as an American photographer with the U.S. Army.

Surrealist Ghostliness begins at the outset of the surrealist movement, when the young surrealists listened, entranced, to Desnos's hypnotic utterings that sounded oracular and prophetic, profoundly ghostly and otherworldly, and Desnos's friend Man Ray—the American who recorded the movement photographically and later worked with Miller—began his experiments with film. I turn then to works created in dialogue with the movement, from the 1920s through the 1990s, including Miller's Egyptian photographs. *Surrealist Ghostliness* continues the exploration of surrealism I began in my first book and pursues the sense my book on Desnos gave me of what it might feel like to be haunted by someone: by a ghost exhorting me to move forward and complete a task that at times felt akin to conjuring, not unlike the experience of all writers of critical biographies who open themselves to a kind of willed haunting. This book, then, allows me to see the movement as a whole in a historic sweep that allies it even more closely to the century into which I was born, the century that still shapes our current era. It also includes Americans such as Ray, Miller, Dorothea Tanning, Francesca Woodman, and Susan Hiller, who, like me, were drawn to surrealism.

My study of the artists presented here through the prism of anamorphosis has taught me about the human condition as a constant negotiation with our own mortality, in which our beings are divided between dreams and everyday realities, between the psychic and the mundanely material, the latent and the manifest — the manifest at times holding more secrets than the oft-probed latent content of personal experience. In the preface to my first book, *Automatic Woman* (1996), I wrote about my discovery that scholarly lives often mirror personal histories and that my own academic writing had an autobiographical connection. On a personal level *Surrealist Ghostliness* has helped me to explore the interrelationship between manifest and latent realities in my own life, in my own family story — what we tell others about our family life, what others tell us, and what we admit only to ourselves. More broadly, with its focus on the latent and the visible, the manifest and the ghostly, this book points to the ways surrealism activates the mechanism by which all literature reveals the secret at the core of the human condition — namely, that mortality implies a life doubled by death, a finitude within which multiple, baroque infinitudes may be imagined.

Most of all I found affirmation of a long-held belief: that we live experiences that are defined by what we intuit as much as by what we think, by what we feel to be the case as much as by what we believe we know, by our nonrational impulses as much as by our rationally informed perceptions. To perceive fully we must perceive doubly, at once peripherally and directly, not unlike the way we look at *The Ambassadors*. We need to remain open to what lies in between the words or images in order to appreciate them. The surrealists understood this, both those who worked in the movement's mainstream and the several artists I present here who thrived at its margins, finding their centers elsewhere. With this book I hope to show how this rational surrealist quest for the knowledge of what lies beyond the rational anticipated the ways our contemporary lives, which we live in a state of perpetual and virtual reality, have expanded to include what we do not fully understand in this increasingly post-postmodern, possibly even post-Enlightenment world.

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"Claude Cahun's Iconic Heads: From 'The Sadistic Judith' to *Human Frontier*," *Papers of Surrealism* 2 (Summer 2004), http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal2/index.htm.

"Modernist Primitivism in 1933: Brassaï's *Involuntary Sculptures* in *Minotaure*," *Modernism/Modernity* 10.1 (2003): 127–40. © 2003 by the Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted with permission by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

"Les révolutions de Dorothea Tanning," *Pleine Marge* 36 (December 2004): 146–75.

"A Swimmer between Two Worlds: Francesca Woodman's Maps of Interior Space," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 2.2 (2008), jsa.asu.edu/index.php/jsa.

"Nous habitons tous dans la maison de Freud: Susan Hiller chez Freud à Londres," *Gradiva* 1.11 (2008): 51–64.

Introduction

Surrealism was a haunted movement from the beginning. It began not quite four years after the end of World War I, with the response of André Breton to René Crevel's story about what he did over his summer vacation. Walking on a beach in 1922, Crevel met a medium who invited him to a séance because she had "discerned particular mediumistic qualities" in him, resulting in what Breton called Crevel's ""spiritualist' initiation" (*Lost* 92). Breton and his friends, most of whom were involved with dada, then decided to practice on themselves the mediumistic techniques Crevel had learned, hoping to reveal buried secrets within themselves because of what they knew about Freud's theory of the unconscious, while at the same time refusing "the spiritualist viewpoint" and the possibility of any "communication . . . between the living and the dead" (92). In his essay "The Mediums Enter," a curious title given his categorical rejection of spiritualism, Breton identified this practice for the first time as surrealism (in homage to Apollinaire) and described it as "a certain psychic automatism that corresponds rather well to the dream state" (90).[1] He thus claimed the legacy of spiritualism for this new, Freudian-inspired avant-garde movement while simultaneously repressing and transforming it into a ghost, thus creating what I call surrealist ghostliness.[2]

Spiritualism was launched in 1848 when the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, claimed to communicate with the dead through knocking sounds in their house. It spread quickly to Europe and led to a rise in popularity of mediums and magnetic somnambulism, otherwise known as hypnosis, which was taken seriously by scientists such as Camille Flammarion and Pierre and Marie Curie.[3]

It had originated with the French craze for Franz Anton Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism during the political upheaval of the late eighteenth century, a theory that destabilized the ascendency of Enlightenment thinking and concurred with the rise in popularity in England of gothic fiction by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Mesmer's "discovery" of "a primeval 'agent of nature,'" a "superfine fluid that penetrated and surrounded all bodies" that he claimed could be used to "supply Parisians with heat, light, electricity, and magnetism," captivated his contemporaries, as Robert Darnton explains, because, like Newton's gravity and Franklin's electricity, Mesmer's fluid confirmed that human beings were "surrounded by wonderful, invisible forces" (3–4, 10). Subsequently, despite Mesmer's abhorrence of "superstitious and occult practices of all kinds," his theories paved the way for both nineteenth-century spiritualism, which also explored invisible forces, and twentieth-century theories of psychology and psychoanalysis (Crabtree 171).[4]

THE GOTHIC IMAGINATION

Surrealism's historical link to the late eighteenth-century's gothic imagination surfaces in Breton's 1924 "Manifesto of Surrealism," in his high praise of Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk* (1796). Breton makes it provocatively clear that he prefers Lewis's ghosts to Dostoyevsky's realism and holds up fairy tales as exemplars of literary fiction. In paying homage to Freud in the "Manifesto"—stating that he practiced Freud's methods while working as a medical auxiliary during World War I—Breton embraces the creative practice of automatism, signaling surrealism's attachment to both of Mesmer's legacies, intentional and unintentional: the scientific and the spiritualist, the Freudian and the occult (*Manifestoes* 23). When Breton effectively recast the Cartesian *cogito* "I think, therefore I am" in the second sentence of the "Manifesto" with the suggestion "I dream, therefore I am" and with the characterization of "Man" as "that inveterate dreamer," he established surrealism's dedication to exploring *all* the ways in which nonrational, psychic, and paranormal phenomena may inform the understanding of human experience (3).

Although partly motivated by the ghosts of lost friends and their own experiences in World War I, with their appropriation of spiritualist automatism the young surrealists transformed the ghosts that practitioners of spiritualism sought to conjure into ephemeral forces within the unconscious mind. The psychic forces they sought to understand were like metaphorical versions of the ghosts of spiritualism, which looked like bodies — particularly those captured on film by spirit photography — but were in fact only traces of bodies, matter left over after death yet retaining psychic awareness, an ability to communicate, and the double knowledge of life and the afterlife, of life before and after death. Unconstrained by mortal chronology or rules of behavior, spiritualist ghosts are simultaneously threatening and inspiring in their freedom, symbols of rebellion against fate and the constraints of mortality. While the surrealists rejected the ghosts of spiritualism, they retained the subversive ghostliness of the gothic imagination that had spawned those ghosts. Their embrace of automatism signaled a desire to explore the fundamentally ghostly experience of opening oneself up to whatever might be hidden within the psyche, intentionally putting oneself into a trance state in order to access otherwise repressed thoughts, words, and images buried in the unconscious mind.

By 1933, however, although in keeping with his early spiritualist-inflected titles, *The Magnetic Fields* (1920) and "The Mediums Enter" (1922), Breton's use of mediumistic art to illustrate "The Automatic Message" contradicts his argument in the essay against spiritualism's goal of accessing outside spirits in favor of the surrealists' goal of accessing ghostly voices within the self. He thus once again affirms the link between spiritualism and surrealism in his negation of spiritualism, eleven years after his negation of it in "The Mediums Enter," while the plentiful illustrations present spiritualism as a significant forebear. Roger Cardinal confirms that these "images directly lifted from Spiritualist publications . . . create an impact in their own right . . . foregrounding the complementary discussion of visual automatism and mediumistic creativity" ("Breton" 24–25). By 1949, however, when he cofounded the Compagnie de l'Art Brut with Jean Dubuffet, Breton finally explored openly the correspondences between surrealist and mediumistic and spiritualist art at which he had only hinted in 1933 (see Cardinal, *Outsider*). By the 1950s surrealism was well established, and spiritualist automatism no longer threatened surrealism's Freudian appropriation of it. Breton even included admiring essays on mediumistic and spiritualist art from the 1950s in the book version of *Surrealism and Painting* (1966).[5] The ghost of spiritualism could cease to be repressed and denied and was finally allowed to coexist with the movement that had sought to replace it.

Surrealist ghostliness as a concept names both the repressed historical legacy of spiritualist automatism and the ghostliness of surrealist psychic experimentation. More broadly the profoundly ghostly aspect of all human psychic experience could be attributed to Bretonian surrealism, according to Foucault, who, in an interview given shortly after Breton's death in 1966, credited Breton with having wiped out "boundaries of provinces that were once well established." Foucault attributed a new "unity of our culture" in the "domains of ethnology, art history, the history of religions, linguistics, and psychoanalysis" to "the person and the work of André Breton. He was both the spreader and gatherer of all this agitation in modern experience" (*Aesthetics* 174).

Foucault's use of the word *agitation* appropriately identifies the unknown within the self to which Breton fiercely advocated receptive attunement. This constitutes surrealist automatism's most ghostly aspect and extends the injunction of Arthur Rimbaud, a surrealist forebear, to find the other within the self and let it speak. "*I* is someone else," Rimbaud wrote in May 1871 ("*Je* est un autre"). "I am present at this birth of my thought" (*Complete* 305). For the surrealists, as for Freud, inner voices have the potential to shed light on the human condition, divided as it is between conscious and unconscious perception. In "The Automatic Message" Breton describes the inner voices that surface during the automatic experience as communicating a "subliminal message" that speaks in a language "which has nothing supernatural about it," while at the same time insisting that that language remains "for each and every one of us . . . *the* vehicle of revelation," using religious terminology to describe a psychological phenomenon (*Break* 138). The gothic, the fascination with magnetism, the rise of spiritualism, the establishment of psychoanalysis, and the exploration in literature and art of psychic phenomena trace a trajectory that extends from the eighteenth century to the twentieth and joins spiritualism to surrealism.

THE PSYCHIC GEOGRAPHY OF SURREALIST GHOSTLINESS

The psychic geography of surrealist ghostliness extends from Europe to North America as the twentieth century progresses. I study here eight examples of works or bodies of work by artists and writers who explore ghostliness from mainstream surrealism to its distant periphery, from 1923 to the 1990s. These artists and writers all used automatic experience as a point of departure for examining the ghostly in their work. In chapter 1 I discuss the ghostly liveliness of inanimate objects in Man Ray's early films *Emak Bakia* (1923), *L'Etoile de mer* (1928), and *Les Mystères du château du dé* (1929). In chapter 2 I examine how Claude Cahun questions the human in her ambiguous self-portraits from the 1920s and specifically in *Frontière humaine* (*Human Frontier*) from 1930, which highlights the ghostly truth of human mortality. In chapter 3 I look at Brassaï's and Salvador Dalí's irreverent examinations of the sacred in modern European society through Dalí's essay on Art Nouveau architecture and Brassaï's photographs of found objects from 1933 that, like Ray's inanimate objects, resonate with a ghostly inner life. Chapter 4 completes the study of surrealist ghostliness in the 1930s with an analysis of the empty landscapes shot by Lee Miller in which she playfully reveals ghostly human forms.

In chapter 5 I investigate Dorothea Tanning's disturbingly ghostly animation of domestic space in her turn from painting to sculpture in the mid-twentieth century. Chapter 6 illuminates the surrealist ghostliness the young American photographer Francesca Woodman invested in her studies of the permeable parameters of time and space characteristic of the baroque in her series of self-portraits from the 1970s. Chapter 7 finds surrealist ghostliness in Pierre Alechinsky's 1980s paintings on nineteenth-century maps, in which he reenvisions European history as a ghost within the present while blending intensely personal and political concerns. Chapter 8 concludes this study of surrealist ghostliness with Susan Hiller's mimicking of Freud's personal collection in *From the Freud Museum* (1991–97). This work incorporates her feminist and postmodern experience, haunted by the ghosts of Freud, the Holocaust, and the cold war.

Whether or not they identified themselves as surrealist, all of these artists and writers enter into dialogue with mainstream surrealism. They respond to Breton's recipe for making surrealism in the "Manifesto" and to the implicit invitation to participate fully in what I have called the "surrealist conversation," as surrealists like Louis Aragon, Robert Desnos, and Max Ernst did.[6] This conversation also includes women, who had a place at the surrealist "banquet," as Tanning put it, thanks to the open invitation for everyone to participate in the "Manifesto" and later in "The Automatic Message," where Breton declared, "Every man and every woman deserves to be convinced of their ability to tap into this language at will, which has nothing supernatural about it" (Tanning, *Birthday* 11; Breton, *Break* 138). In the nature of most collectives there was a dominant voice, that of Breton, but there was room for other voices too: a space for dialogue that Breton tried to guarantee in the literary art journals he edited until his death in 1966.

Why does surrealist ghostliness become apparent now, in the twenty-first century, like a lost photographic negative emerging out of developing fluid? Is it tied to a global response to the turn of the century, for example, the events of September 2001, which produced a heightened sense of vulnerability in the West, or to a desire to believe we might overcome mortality and never lose ourselves or our loved ones, despite the truth about mortality that we all know, the truth unveiled in *The Ambassadors* (see fig. 1)? Could it be connected to related cultural phenomena, such as a renewed interest in the supernatural manifest in films like *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *The Others* (2001), *Twilight* (2008), or *Paranormal Activity* (2009), television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), *Charmed* (1998), or *The Ghost Whisperer* (2005), or novels like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or books by best-selling authors such as Anne Rice, Stephenie Meyer, or J. K. Rowling, and, more recently, art exhibitions like *The Perfect Medium* (2004–05), curated by Clément Chéroux and Andreas Fischer, about the link between photography and spiritualism?

Interest in the ghostly has also been manifest in academic culture, such as Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994), in which he reflects on Marx and Shakespeare and exhorts his listeners "to learn to live *with* ghosts" because "time is out of joint" (xviii, 19), or his *Archive Fever* (1996), in which he shows how Freud's theories about the unconscious necessarily incorporate ghosts. Marina Warner, in her encyclopedic *Phantasmagoria* (2006), theorizes "a new model of subjectivity" linked to the virtual realities available through the Internet (378), and Avery Gordon, in her sociological study *Ghostly Matters* (1997), argues eloquently that ghostliness is a way of knowing and being in the world. In *The Unconcept* (2011), Anneleen Masschelein identifies the Freudian uncanny, the psychoanalytical corollary to surrealist ghostliness, as "*a late-twentieth-century theoretical concept*" for similar reasons (4). "In various disciplines," she argues, "the concept of the uncanny fits within a larger research program that focuses on haunting, the spectral, ghosts, and telepathy as a material phenomena in culture and society" (144). The current fascination with the paranormal, the supernatural, and the psychic is the result of the normalization of the phantasmatic, of acts of psychic doubling, that occurred throughout the twentieth century, beginning with Freud; it makes visible the degree to which an avant-garde movement linked to the arts, like surrealism, was invested in the phantasmatic.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF SURREALIST GHOSTLINESS

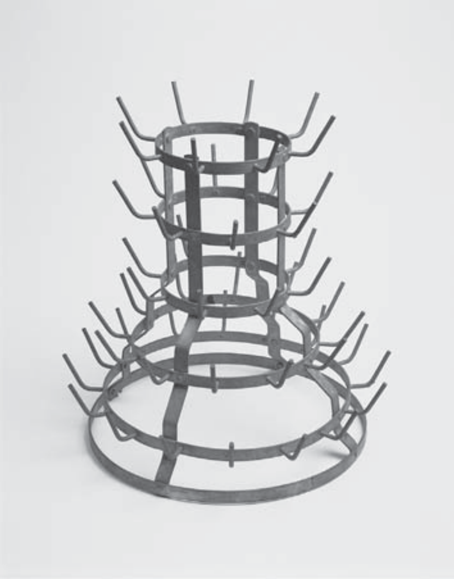
Surrealist ghostliness may be identified by a series of four primary characteristics, all of which will be explored in this book. The first of these characteristics reveals a recognizable link to spiritualism: namely, its trace as the repressed ghost of surrealism and as a ghost that has sprung back into popular culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The second characteristic of surrealist ghostliness consists in the rhythm of automatism as characterized by alternations between moments of suspension and moments of flow. Suspension here means the conscious and concentrated direction of thought toward pure receptivity; at the outset of automatic practice all conscious activity is suspended as one falls into a trance. Flow, on the other hand, describes the rush of automatic words, images, and voices that flood consciousness in sensual ways. Flow is another way to characterize the sensation Foucault evoked when he described Breton as "a swimmer between two words [who] traverses an imaginary space that had never been discovered before him" (*Aesthetics* 173).

The oscillating doubleness of the automatic rhythm of suspension and flow also characterizes another surrealist practice that surrealist ghostliness illuminates—that of the impulse to create archives. Jonathan Eburne has argued that the surrealist desire to collect, visible in Breton's extensive personal collection, reflects "the suspensive function of the archive" because of the way such a collection serves as "a means for distinguishing and dislodging epistemological certainty" and simultaneously appeals to and defies "the tendency for knowledge to systematize itself" ("Breton's Wall" 21, 42). Indeed the surrealists explicitly rejected the modes of categorization that typify state-sanctioned archives.[7] John Roberts identifies surrealism's propensity for the "counter-archive" with the surrealists' taste for photographs that document aspects of human existence that would rarely find their way into a municipal archive, such as Cahun's intimate portraits of herself in multiple disguises, which constitute an almost archival study of alternative identities for a European woman of her generation (106). These doubles for herself, ghostly presences captured on film, emblematize the way all archives are ghosts of previous times, traces of something lost, that speak to the present and future out of the past.

In thinking about the papers, objects, and thought stored in Freud's house in London, Derrida ascribes a "shifting" quality to the notion of the archive in *Archive Fever* that resembles the rhythm of suspension and flow of surrealist automatism. In the case of the archive, this rhythm is linked to the tension the desire for archivization stimulates between the death drive — triggering a retrospective instinct to memorialize — and the life force, which faces the future. This oscillating "shifting figure" of a notion thus yokes together the impulse to stop time with the impulse to rush forward and thereby mimics the equally alternating rhythm of automatism (Derrida, *Archive* 29).

The third characteristic of surrealist ghostliness involves the sensual aspects of surrealist experience. Foucault evokes this characteristic with his metaphor of swimming, thus describing surrealist automatic writing as an intensely experiential "raw and naked act" (*Aesthetics* 173). Although surrealism had a consistently strong visual component, the surrealists were also attracted to the creation of works that depended on touch, beginning with collage, which was adopted as a technique by dada artists who later became surrealists, such as Ernst.[8] Janine Mileaf even ascribes "a form of embodied or tactile knowing" to the surrealists' courting of "disturbance" (*Please* 17).[9] Touch was a key factor in the dada and surrealist fascination with objects, beginning with Marcel Duchamp's invention of the readymade, a found object turned away from its original function, such as an industrial bottle dryer used in cafés, renamed *Bottlerack* (1914; see fig. 2) and displayed in a gallery. By the 1920s Ray had begun to create *assisted* readymades, such as his *Cadeau* (*Gift*; 1921),



2. Marcel Duchamp, *Bottlerack* (1961; replica of 1914 original). © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Succession Marcel Duchamp. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Jacqueline, Paul, and Peter Matisse in memory of their mother, Alexina Duchamp, 1998.

an iron impractically studded with nails, adding an emotional and surrealistically psychological aspect that reflects Ray's feelings about work in the garment industry, which could have been his fate.

Linked to a political rejection of "high" art in favor of art that could be made by anyone, the pursuit of art that involved touch allied the surrealists with what Martin Jay, after Rosalind Krauss, has identified as a "crisis of visual primacy" in France during this period (212). Later this crisis would manifest itself in the dissident surrealist Georges Bataille's embrace of "base" materialism, "derived from the bodily experience of materiality," and in the surrealist craze for making objects (Jay 228). Such a "haptic aesthetic" has been identified broadly by Adam Jolles as a "tactile turn" in surrealism tied to Tristan Tzara's essays on African art. In 1933, in "Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste," Tzara identifies the attraction to African art as "bound to an intrauterine account of the world that originated with tactile representation" (in Jolles 36). He links tactility to "our most powerful desires, those that are latent and eternal" because they are “prenatal,” tied to memory and “the satisfactions offered by substances that can be touched” (“Concerning” 213, 209). The patina on African objects that makes them “precious” stands as “proof that the object has already answered the intrauterine desires of a whole series of individuals,” desires that in Western culture have been submitted to a transference to visual experience (210).

Tzara’s claim that objects we touch daily, such as buttons, eggcups, and children’s toys, can acquire “totemic” status akin to the patina that makes an African statue “precious” anticipates and supplements the argument made three years later by Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Reproduction” (Tzara, “Concerning” 212).[10] Tzara’s patina, which comes from generations of handling that involves an erosion of the original material out of which a golden glow emerges, parallels Benjamin’s understanding of aura as irrevocably tied to withering, even shriveling. For Benjamin, aura is linked to uniqueness and history; reproductions substitute what he views favorably (because they are nonelitist) as “a plurality of copies for a unique existence.” Mechanical reproduction “withers” “the aura of the work of art,” which is linked “to the history which it has experienced” (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 221). What Benjamin leaves out of his argument is the possibility that a mechanically produced object such as a toy (a material corollary to a mechanically reproduced image), through the acquisition of “history” by handling (Tzara’s patina), might be reinvested with “aura” because the desire it awakens reactivates a ritualistic function. The reactivated “cult value” then conforms to the occult meaning of aura as a luminous substance surrounding a person or a thing, possibly blurring boundaries between person and thing (224).

Although it was precisely this occult meaning of aura from which Benjamin wished to distance himself, as Miriam Bratu Hansen argues, he remained ambivalent about the aura (337–38). Hansen ascribes Benjamin’s insistence on the aura as “a phenomenon in decline” to the political climate of the time. It expediently allowed him to introduce a term with occult associations into Marxist debates while also seeking “to counter the bungled (capitalist-imperialist) adaptation of technology that first exploded in World War One and was leading to the fascist conquest of Europe” (338). She views in his overall mode of theorizing the concept of aura dialectically as “open to the future” despite his emphasis on the aura’s decline, on “a past whose ghostly apparition projects into the present” (349, 341).

One of the multiple definitions of aura Hansen finds in Benjamin’s work from the 1930s echoes the link between a person and an object Tzara suggests through the parallelism he draws between the patina on African objects and childhood toys (Hansen 339). “To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return,” Benjamin states in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (188). For Tzara the auratic connection that blurs the boundaries between person and thing (going back to the occultist sense of aura) is inevitably linked to touch. We experience an object’s totemic value when we touch it. This activation of a latent force within a manifestly ordinary thing, an irrational yet powerful and intense desire buried in an industrially manufactured object rendered precious by touch, conforms to the paradigm of surrealist ghostliness as a nonrational experience and as double: having latent and manifest aspects that forcefully and visibly coexist.[11]

As well as touching, touch also manifests itself as the sense of being touched, the experience of envelopment, of the frisson linked to ghostliness that Foucault identified as characteristic of Bretonian surrealism. Ernst, a pioneer in dada collage, described this feeling of envelopment linked to touch in paintings he made in 1934. One of these had the subtitle *Effect of a Touch*, suggesting the feeling at once physical, sexual, and emotional of being touched by someone. Similarly when he wrote in “Beyond Painting” (1936), “Blind swimmer, I have made myself a seer,” he was referring to the kind of inner vision and insight stimulated by the experience of sensual envelopment that is more connected to touch than to any of the other senses (122).

The fourth and most dominant characteristic of surrealist ghostliness involves three paradigmatic mechanisms for doubling and creating ghosts within surrealism — textual, visual, and corporeal — all of which have their origin in surrealist automatism, first explored through automatic trances at the outset of the movement. The first of these, textual puns, were typical of the automatic nonsense poems spoken by Desnos during the surrealists' first experiments with "automatic sleeps" that served to launch the movement in 1922. That fall Duchamp had been publishing tongue-twisting nonsense poems in the proto-surrealist journal *Littérature* under the signature of his punning alter ego, Rrose Sélavy (*éros, c'est la vie*; see fig. 8). On one of the first nights of "automatic sleeps" conducted in Breton's apartment, Desnos was challenged by Francis Picabia to speak an Rrose Sélavy–type poem while in a hypnotic trance. Desnos complied and began to produce one-line tongue-twisting, punning poems in series. He later published 150 of them in *Corps et biens* using Duchamp's pseudonym, Rrose Sélavy, as the title.

With Desnos's "Rrose Sélavy" poems, the version on the page and in the ear is doubled by another, often more logical ghost. The nonsense poem "Time is an agile eagle in a temple" ("Le temps est un aigle agile dans un temple"), for example, is doubled by a series of truisms all based on rational realities: time flies (like an eagle); an eagle is noble; nobility is admired as if it were (in) a temple; time governs us as assuredly as a noble eagle symbol in a temple; and surrealist time — dreamtime — is agile in the sense that it does not follow strict chronology. Surrealist time flies the way a bird does: with swoops and halts, soaring and gliding speedily in fits and starts; it does not follow the intervals typical of a Western clock. The reader-listener of this poem makes all of these associations unconsciously because of the resemblances between the way the words look and sound — the way they "make love" to produce meaning, as Breton wrote in an admiring essay (time, temple, agile, eagle, *temps, temple, aigle, agile*; Breton, *Lost* 102, translation modified).[12] A nonsense poem makes sense partly in the way the puns create ghostly doubles that interconnect all the words and meanings to emphasize the ghostliness that typified those early surrealist experiments with automatic trances because of the mysterious, at times oracular pronouncements uttered by the participants. Furthermore, as Marie-Paule Berranger argues, his puns help to "render more visible the physical existence of words"; they show that words lead a double life (106, my translation). Desnos's punning poems, with double meanings, manifest and latent content, set the stage paradigmatically for the ghostly objects that would become characteristic of the movement.

Visual doubles or puns as paradigms for surrealist ghostliness have their origin in the exquisite corpse game, invented in 1925 initially as a group word-play game whereby each person added a word to a sentence without seeing any of the other words. The first sentence produced by the game gave it its name: "The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine!" The game quickly evolved from a verbal to a visual format: each person added a body part from head to toe or vice versa, without being able to see what others had drawn. These games yielded fantastically unrealistic bodies tied together by a single, ghostly double: the body of a real human being, or possibly even a corpse. The body deformed by the game nonetheless makes one think of a nondeformed body that can still be identified by the head, the torso, the legs, the feet. As with Desnos's "Rrose Sélavy" poems, it is the more rationally recognizable form that serves as the "ghost" to the surrealist nonsense pun.

The double image of the exquisite corpse, whereby we see one thing and imagine another, may best be characterized as anamorphic. In the same way, we almost hear another poem when we hear or read a "Rrose Sélavy" poem, since, as Marie-Claire Dumas asserts, these poems fold back on themselves, saying the same thing twice (310).[13] Anamorphosis, from the Greek for "form," *morph*, seen "backward," *ana*, or understood retrospectively, identifies a process of perception that requires a double take—a first look, followed by a second, retrospective glance. As described in the preface, Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* stands as the most famous visual example of anamorphosis.[14] In *L'Art Magique* (1957), Breton recognized this painting as an important precedent to surrealism because its anamorphosis offers a “*double reading* of the universe” to the viewer (213, my translation).[15] At the feet of two magnificently dressed men standing in front of a beautifully rendered table with objects on it representing human achievements in knowledge, travel, and commerce lies an indiscernible blob that comes into focus as an elongated human skull only when looked at sideways with the lateral backward glance made possible by the door on the painting’s right. This skull points to the underlying reality of mortality that subtends the main image like an unwanted ghost under any record of human achievement: despite all accomplishment possible within a human life, each and every one one of us will die, will become a corpse, a thing. The painting as a whole works something like Desnos’s “Rrose Sélavy” poems and like exquisite corpse drawings in that first we see one reality, and then we see another. Within the phenomenon of surrealist ghostliness two aspects of the same human experience coexist.

Surrealist anamorphosis varies a great deal, from actual anamorphic paintings by Dalí, in which two concurrent images overlap, to much more subtle examples where there are only hints of a double image embedded in the work, such as in Miller’s Egyptian landscapes. Anamorphosis is widely prevalent in surrealist art and represents the strongest evidence of surrealist ghostliness as a unifying phenomenon throughout the movement. In this book I consider the anamorphic qualities of the works I analyze, and in each case these anamorphoses underscore the presence of surrealist ghostliness. I believe that the anamorphic qualities of surrealist ghostliness resonate at this historic and cultural moment because of the recent revolution in technology linked to the normalization of the Internet and its widespread use, which has also generated a proliferation of subjectivities in the virtual world (e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter), and because of the layering effect and depth that computers have given to the screen, transforming it from a two-dimensional into a three-dimensional space.

The third and last paradigmatic mechanism for doubling and revealing surrealist ghostliness involves the human body—what I call the corporeal pun based on the literalness of Breton’s analogy between a surrealist body and a recording machine, which makes it more of a pun than a metaphor. The surrealist interchangeability of a body with a machine began with Breton's contention in the "Manifesto" that true surrealists are human beings able to transform themselves into receptacles "of so many echoes," into "modest *recording instruments*," at once inanimate and sentient, passively receptive and insightfully able to interpret the sounds and echoes that imprint themselves on the unconscious before emerging into consciousness (*Manifestoes* 27–28). Human beings and recording instruments share a propensity for receptivity. In the automatic trance, the surrealist surrenders all control over mind and body in order to capture as many voices, words, and images as possible, as they bubble up from the unconscious. The recording machine is not only *like* the body; it is the *same as* the body—a corporeal pun. Body and machine are alike in their most salient feature of receptivity.

The body as machine has a deadly corollary as well: a machine is a thing, and the body will become a thing when it dies, when it becomes reduced to the skull hidden as a blob in Holbein's *Ambassadors*. This is the future that arrests our attention as though it were an eye looking back at us, which is exactly how the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who was closely allied with the surrealists in the early 1930s, describes the "flying form" of Holbein's skull (*Four* 90). That skull that looks back at us with the truth of our own mortality "opens up the abyss of the search for a meaning—nothing is what it seems to be," explains Slavoj Žižek about Lacan's reading of Holbein (91). This sudden knowledge of what we repress every day—the knowable unknowable future that levels human experience—this confrontation with the reality of ghostliness, is captured by Breton in his metaphor of the human being as a recording instrument.

Two other surrealists use objects to describe the body in an automatic trance, and these objects are also receptacles "of so many echoes," like Breton's recording instrument. Desnos's body-bottle from "If You Knew" and Paul Eluard's body-house from "The Word" (both published in 1926) describe the automatic experience as ghostly because of the reduction of the body to a thing that looks like and sounds like a human being in the manner of a pun and because of the images and sensations that pass through these receptacles. In “If You Knew,” Desnos imagines his body as “the night bottle of the poet” transformed into a baroque space of contained infinity capable of capturing a falling star. Then, in a suspended moment of separation from the immediacy of the experience, he detaches himself, corks the bottle that is himself, and watches from the outside “the star enclosed within the glass, the constellations that come to life against the sides” (*Essential* 157, translation modified). In Eluard’s “The Word,” the sensation of space takes place outside of the body, which in this poem is represented as a house with windows for eyes that shut slowly at the moment of sunset, as a shadow falls across the façade. The “word” comes from outside and “slides” over the roof, animating the house. Although it “no longer know[s] who’s in charge,” in a manner typical of the trance, the word slipping into the body-house can “nakedly love” like a living being and express pride: “I am old but here I’m beautiful” (*Capital* 23). In each case a poetic trance allows the poet to discover previously unknown voices buried within.

All of these body-objects, whereby an inanimate thing stands in as a metaphor or corporeal pun for a human being who has momentarily suspended all willed conscious activity for the sake of the revelations the flow of automatic practice brings, have their corollary in the 1930s with the development of the surrealist object out of the dada readymade. The surrealists imbued objects found or made with a psychoanalytic function, leading the person who finds or makes them to striking insights. “The found object seems to me suddenly to balance two levels of every different reflection,” explains Breton, “like those sudden atmospheric condensations which make conductors out of regions that were not before, producing flashes of lightning” (*Mad* 33). The found object can “enlarge the universe, causing it to relinquish some of its opacity” since we live in a “*forest of symbols*” that can provoke “sudden fear” (15).

Breton uses the words *latencies* and *forces* to compare objects to human bodies, suggesting a sentient, animate quality to fundamentally inanimate things. He did this in 1936, three years after Freud's essay "The Uncanny" was published in French translation for the first time. In "The Uncanny" Freud identifies in psychoanalytic terms the constellation of phenomena I call surrealist ghostliness; these are uncanny or ghostly experiences like that of mistaking a doll for a living human being. The attribution of psychological *latencies* to objects was codified by Breton in "Crisis of the Object," where he identifies the latent forces found in the surrealist object ("Crise" 24).[16] These forces, while made up of psychological feelings, from desire to anger, are impenetrable because they arise from the clashing conjunction of conflicting realities, from the utilitarian function of Duchamp's *Bottlerack*, for instance, with its modernist elegance, which paradoxically makes sense of this practical tool's place in an art gallery. This clash operates according to the paradigm Breton established in the "Manifesto" for the surrealist image as a collision of "distant realities." This "*juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities*" generates energy and forces, which Breton compares to an electric spark generative of shock, a "luminous phenomenon," akin to an instant of insight or revelation (*Manifestoes* 20, 37).[17]

Having been found, collected, turned away from its original function, and displayed by a surrealist, the object represses its "manifest life"; its transformation generates a veritable force field (*champs de force*), whereby what was formerly manifest becomes latent, revealing ghostly energies inherent in the object's former manifest life.[18] In a short article Breton published about the 1936 surrealist exhibition of objects, he describes objects as capable of releasing surplus "poetic energy . . . found almost everywhere in a latent state."[19] Using language reminiscent of surrealism's spiritualist origins, Breton suggests that objects provide access to psychological revelation through the release of this "latent energy," a release that creates what I call ghostliness. Objects of the sort explored in this book have the ability to inform humans about themselves as if they were thoughtful sentient beings, in other words, just as surrealist human beings still themselves, like objects, in order to attune themselves more thoroughly to the world around them. This is because Bretonian "subjective reality," as Michael Sheringham explains, "is not hidden deep inside us so much as scattered around the perceptual world, where we can piece it together from our sensory reactions" (71).[20] These points of reference outside of ourselves, such as objects, help us to make sense of what emerges in a ghostly way out of the unconscious through attuned receptivity.

The prism of ghostliness allows a retrospective look at surrealism that continues all the way back to late eighteenth-century challenges to Cartesian rationalism, a period that the art historian T. J. Clark locates at the beginning of modernism.[21] I argue in *Surrealist Ghostliness* that the ghostliness that haunted automatism historically, experientially, and poetically remained imprinted on the movement's works throughout its history. Ghostliness as a keystone idea unifies a movement with disparate artistic practices; it concentrates on the common thread the ghostly legacy of automatism weaves through the movement's thought and works: its punning texts and anamorphic images, its vision of the human body as uncannily like and not like the thing it will become in death, its tacit way of accepting mortality. Through surrealist ghostliness, surrealism insisted that we know more than we think we know, more than we can see in front of us, and that human beings are capable of a wisdom that is at least as intuitive, emotional, and instinctive as it is rational. This book shows how the surrealists, and those who were in dialogue with them, explored that wisdom in a way that was ultimately hopeful, thus creating a solid basis for further exploration of psychic realities in the twenty-first century.