

HISTORY OF A NATURAL HISTORY: MAX ERNST'S *HISTOIRE NATURELLE*,
FROTTAGE, AND SURREALIST AUTOMATISM

by

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When André Breton released his *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924, he established the pursuit of psychic automatism as Surrealism's principle objective, and a debate concerning the legitimacy or possibility of Surrealist visual art ensued. In response to this skepticism, Max Ernst embraced automatism and developed a new technique, which he called *frottage*, in an attempt to satisfy Breton's call for automatic activity, and in 1926, a collection of thirty-four frottages was published under the title *Histoire Naturelle*. This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of *Histoire Naturelle* by situating it in the theoretical context of Surrealist automatism and addresses the means by which Ernst incorporated found objects from the natural world into the semi-automatic production of his frottages. All previous scholarship on the subject is consolidated and critically examined, and the development of frottage is traced from its earliest manifestations to its long-lasting influences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: "HISTORY OF A NATURAL HISTORY"

"We know the exact day it happened. On August 10, 1925, in a hotel room in Pornic on France's Atlantic coast, Max Ernst discovered the technique of frottage."¹ Werner Spies, perhaps Max Ernst's leading biographer, opens his 1968 essay on frottage with this cool statement, which is informed by the 1936 publication of "Au delà de la peinture," Ernst's semi-biographic and largely poetic account of his artistic production throughout his engagement with the Dadaist and Surrealist circles.² Ernst's agenda in "Au delà de la peinture" cannot be confined to a single motive, but he certainly endeavored to provide a firsthand account of his varied artistic techniques, arguing for the intrinsic value of each one. The description of his discovery of frottage, the one to which Spies refers, reads as follows:

On the tenth of August, 1925... finding myself one rainy evening in a seaside inn, I was struck by the obsession that showed to my excited gaze the floor-boards upon which a thousand scrubblings had deepened the grooves. I decided then to investigate the symbolism of this obsession and, in order to aid my meditative and hallucinatory faculties, I made from the boards a series of drawings by placing on them, at random, sheets of paper which I undertook to rub with black lead. In gazing attentively at the drawings thus obtained... I was surprised by the sudden intensification

¹ Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Frottages* (1968), trans. Joseph M. Bernstein (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 6.

² "Au delà de la peinture," *Cahiers d'Art II*, no. 6-7 (1936): 149-184.

of my visionary capacities and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory images superimposed, one upon the other, with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories. My curiosity awakened and astonished, I began to experiment indifferently and to question, utilizing the same means, all sorts of materials to be found in my visual field: Leaves and their veins, the ragged edges of a bit of linen, the brushstrokes of a 'modern' painting, the unwound thread from a spool, etc. There my eyes discovered human heads, animals, a battle that ended with a kiss (the bride of the wind), rocks, the sea and the rain..."³

This oft-quoted passage, or excerpts from it, is frequently cited in conjunction with studies of frottage and Surrealist automatism. While one might easily believe Ernst's romantic version of his discovery without question, it is dangerous to accept it too quickly, a reservation also held by Spies, who notes, "Ernst's account is so convincing that we forget only too easily that such exactitude is usually a cover for skillful mystification."⁴ Indeed, Ernst carefully constructs his own history, perpetuating a powerful myth of origin for both himself and his semi-automatic innovation.⁵ According to Ernst, frottage is born in the wake of André Breton's 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*. A closer look at Ernst's oeuvre however, reveals examples of frottage that predate both the manifesto and the moment of origin that Ernst provides in "Au delà de la peinture." It would seem that Ernst aimed to situate his *new* technique in direct dialogue with Breton's

³ "Beyond Painting," as translated from the French and published in *Max Ernst: 'Beyond Painting' and other Writings by the Artist and his Friends*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 7.

⁴ *Max Ernst: Frottages*, 6.

⁵ See also Julia Drost, "Biographical Notes: How Max Ernst Plays with a Literary Genre," in *Max Ernst: Life and Work, An Autobiographical Collage*, ed. Werner Spies (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2005), 17-31.

theoretical and aesthetic concerns as well as the controversy surrounding the possibility of Surrealist visual art that followed quickly after the release of the manifesto.

When Breton's manifesto debuted on the Parisian scene in 1924, Max Ernst was not in France. Instead, he was in Indo-China pursuing Paul Eluard, who had fled the country in a state of emotional distress, spurred by the ménage à trois relationship between himself, his wife Gala, and his best friend Ernst. Upon Ernst's return to France, he was confronted with a frenetic, animated atmosphere of philosophical, intellectual, and artistic debate, and, regardless of the *exact* time and place of frottage's inception, Ernst responded to the contemporary discussion by *cultivating* the technique of frottage and compiling the fruits of his semi-automatic process in a collection of the rubbings. During 1925, Ernst produced 134 documented frottages, and, with the help of Paul Eluard, thirty-four were selected to be published by Jeanne Bucher the following year. In 1926, these rubbings were assembled, reproduced as large collotype prints, and bound in book-format. The collection of frottages included an introductory poem by Hans Arp, and it was presented under the provocative and all-encompassing title, *Histoire Naturelle*.

Ten years after the release of *Histoire Naturelle*, "Au delà de la peinture" was printed in *Cahiers d'Art*, and Ernst framed his text as a Surrealist examination and discussion of frottage, titling his introductory chapter, "History of a Natural History." However, the first time that Ernst wrote about his semi-automatic process and the imagery found in *Histoire Naturelle* was not in 1936, but several years earlier in a 1932 article, "Inspiration to Order," which served as the sketch from which the later "Au delà

de la peinture” was developed.⁶ As his first written statement about frottage, “Inspiration to Order” contextualizes the artist’s concerns and ambitions in the early 1930’s.

Upon reading the first several sentences of the 1932 article, one recognizes that Ernst’s primary intention was to establish the technique of frottage as the most important response in visual art to the initial Surrealist project. However, this claim was made within the framework of Surrealism in the early 1930’s, a period when it was experiencing considerable changes and distancing itself, to some degree, from its initial priorities. *Histoire Naturelle* is placed under the aegis of Breton, appropriate considering that Breton was the editor for this special Surrealist issue of *This Quarter*, and Ernst cites numerous passages from Breton’s literary works of the past decade.

Ernst opens with a definition of the modern artist’s principal responsibility: “Just as the poet has to write down what is being thought — voiced — inside him, so the painter has to limn and give objective form to *what is visible inside him.*”⁷ This remark is heavily indebted to Breton’s discussion of the “internal model,” which he touched upon in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, but revisited with heightened conviction in “Le surréalisme et la peinture,” the text which served as the first serious investigation of

⁶ “Inspiration to Order,” *This Quarter* 15.1 (1932): 79-85. The 1932 version of “Inspiration to Order” appeared in a special Surrealist issue of *This Quarter*, which was edited by André Breton. The French version was labeled, “Extraits du ‘Traité de las peinture surréaliste’” and appeared as “Comment on force l’inspiration,” *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* 6 (May 15, 1933): 43-45. In 1948, “Au delà de la peinture” was printed in book format and, along with the main body of text, included the draft of “Inspiration to Order,” and a psycho-autobiography (“Some Data on the youth of M.E. as told by himself,” *View*, April, 1942).

⁷ “Inspiration to Order,” in *Max Ernst: ‘Beyond Painting’ and other Writings by the Artist and his Friends*, 20.

Surrealist painting.⁸ Breton states: “In order to respond to this necessity, upon which all serious minds now agree, for a total revision of real values, the plastic work of art will either refer to a purely *internal model* or will cease to exist.”⁹

Breton’s concept of the internal model grew out of the Surrealist’s ambition to liberate one’s mental faculties while distancing oneself from bourgeois reality by questioning the boundary which demarcates the *real* and the *imaginary*. For Breton, modern art, and its precursors, perpetuated a “narrow concept of imitation” and “the error lay in thinking that the *model* could only be selected from the external world, or, less dogmatically, that the model could legitimately be selected from that world.”¹⁰ In short, early Surrealist theory demanded that the generation of a work result from the creator’s *internal* vision and not from an *external* model. Artists had been using the real world as their model for painting and sculpture for thousands of years, and Breton’s revolutionary goals for Surrealism aimed to find a new means of expression in which the artist or poet did not try to mimetically recreate a representation of the natural world, rather they were encouraged to distinguish their *optical* impressions from their *internal* visions. It is important to make the distinction between *optical* vision and *internal* vision, as seeing something with one’s eyes is not the same as seeing something in one’s mind, and both modes of vision constitute a disparate model of reality. Ernst offers frottage as a means

⁸ This treatise was first published in two consecutive issues of *La révolution surréaliste*, no. 9-10 (October 1, 1927).

⁹ *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald and Company Publishers, 1972), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

of accessing Breton's "internal model," and, by appropriating tactile objects in order to facilitate his creativity without using the objects as a model for traditional, mimetic representation, he marries his optical vision with his internal vision. Material from the external world, such as leaves and wood grain, is internalized, transformed into imagery residing in the artist, through the automatic process.

After addressing Breton's concept of the internal model in the first few paragraphs of "Inspiration to Order," Ernst goes on to cite a passage from Breton's preface to the catalogue of an exhibition of Ernst's Dada collages at Au Sans Pareil, a Paris bookstore, in 1921. The works displayed at the venue were much celebrated by the Paris Dadaists, garnering praise from Louis Aragon, Tristan Tzara, and especially André Breton, who posed this skillfully provocative question, which was repeated by Ernst: "May it not be that we are thus getting ready to break loose *someday* from the laws of identity?"¹¹ While Ernst's Dada collages were heralded as proto-Surrealist by select members of the Surrealist milieu, Ernst set out in 1932 to combine his explanation of frottage with a critical reexamination of his collage-based work of the last decade. His discussion was timely, considering that Cubist, Dadaist, and Surrealist collage had recently become a focus of historical and theoretical discourse in *La Peinture au défi*, Louis Aragon's text of 1930. By returning to a discussion of his Dada collages in "Inspiration to Order," Ernst likely hoped not only to relate the technique of frottage to

¹¹ "Max Ernst," preface to exhibition, "La mise sous whisky marin... Au delà de la peinture," (Paris: 1921) in *What is Surrealism?: Collected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 15-16.

his celebrated collages but also to establish and secure his place in the history of Surrealist art.

La Peinture au défi was the first significant attempt to define and contextualize the technique of collage in the recent history of the European avant-garde and presented examples from various individuals and periods, ranging from the Cubist's papier collé to the Surrealist's incongruous juxtapositions. It was published in relation to the Goeman Gallery's exhibition of collage that opened on March 28, 1930.¹² Aragon made no secret of the power he attached to this medium, noting, "Once the principle of collage was admitted, painters had passed unaware from white to black magic. It was too late to retreat."¹³ For Aragon, the greatest contribution of collage was the disconnection of the artist from the final product, and he argued against previous conventions in which the artist assumed the role of the creator and evidenced the presence of his or her hand: "What is now being sustained is the negation of the technique... and the personality technique; the painter, if it is still necessary to call him that, is no longer bound to his painting by a mysterious physical relationship analogous to generation."¹⁴ This sentiment, emphatically expressed by Aragon, was largely shared by other members of the Surrealists and had been voiced in Breton's 1924 manifesto, in which he described

¹² For a comprehensive analysis of Aragon's *La Peinture au défi* and his response to Max Ernst's collage-based work, see Cheryl K. Shurtleff, *La Peinture Au Défi: Aragon, Surrealism, and Collage* (M.A. thesis: University of Oregon, 1988). 41-51, 111-118.

¹³ *La Peinture au défi*, catalogue for Exposition de collages (Paris: Galerie Goemanns, 1930). In *Surrealists on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 40.

¹⁴ *La Peinture au défi*, 41-42.

himself and his colleagues as “modest recording instruments,” who “in our works have made ourselves into simple receptacles of so many echoes.”¹⁵

Aragon celebrated Ernst’s “pure” collages for adhering to this rejection of artistic invention and overt authorial control, a process that, for Aragon, culminated in Ernst’s 1929 collage novel, *La Femme 100 Têtes*, that is “finally, owed to only one technique, in which nothing is drawn by the author.”¹⁶ Aragon goes to great lengths to draw a distinction between all of Ernst’s different approaches to collage, but hardly makes any mention of frottage or *Histoire Naturelle*, which clearly did not constitute the appropriate circumvention of artistic technique in Aragon’s opinion.¹⁷ Ernst confronted Aragon’s minimization of frottage’s significance in “Inspiration to Order” by linking frottage with collage. He argues that the diminishing of artistic personality, as celebrated in *La Peinture au défi*, is present in his works created through the process of frottage, declaring, “It was thanks to restricting my own active participation ever more and more, so as thereby to increase the active share of the powers of the mind, that I succeeded in looking on like a spectator at the birth of [my] pictures.”¹⁸

¹⁵ *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 28.

¹⁶ *La Peinture au défi*, 48.

¹⁷ Aragon describes the various approaches Ernst utilized in the construction of his collages: “One must make an inventory of the processes Max Ernst used then in order to understand where the collage stood at that point. Ernst employed: photographic elements glued onto a drawing or painting; drawn or painted elements superimposed on photographs; images cut out and incorporated in a painting or another image; photographs, pure and simple, of an arrangement of objects made incomprehensible by photography.” *La Peinture au défi*, 47.

¹⁸ “Inspiration to Order,” 25.

By making this point, Ernst returned to Breton's question from the 1921 preface to his Dadaist collage exhibition by turning the question back on itself: "May it not be that we have *already* broken loose from the law of identity?"¹⁹ Aragon had pointed to Ernst as the founder of Surrealist collage, and Ernst, taking note of this recognition, at once reemphasized his critical contribution to the medium and movement while extending Breton's concept of "breaking loose from the laws of identity" into the realm of frottage, where natural objects are transmogrified into new forms and thereby assume new identities.²⁰

Here, it is important to note that "Inspiration to Order" reintroduced *Histoire Naturelle* into the public sphere by coining the term, "frottage." Before this, Ernst's technique of rubbing did not have its own terminological classification. The 1932 essay aimed to develop a personal vocabulary in which Ernst, who likely grew tired of the extent to which the term "collage" had been applied to the majority of his works from the 1920's, deemed it necessary to create a new genre in order to distinguish the new technique stemming from his experiments with collage. Werner Spies, assessing the literature of the 1920's, argues that there was no one who was truly attempting to "figure out what actually underlay his [Ernst] work," and the first serious attempt to provide a definition came in *La Peinture au défi*.²¹ However, since Aragon avoided mention of

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ Aragon: "When and where did collage appear? I believe... that homage must be paid to Max Ernst, at least for the two forms of collage most removed from the principle of the papier collé – the photographic collage and the illustration collage." *La Peinture au défi*, 46.

²¹ *Max Ernst, Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person* (New York: G. Braziller, 1983), 76.

Histoire Naturelle, it is likely that Ernst penned “Inspiration to Order” as a critical response to Aragon’s cursory dismissal of the rubbing technique of “Max Ernst, who found this playing with materials could be fun and could be got by rubbing a pencil across a piece of paper...”²²

The polemical nature of “Inspiration to Order” should also be set against the changes that were occurring from 1929-1930 within the Surrealist movement. While Breton’s *Manifesto of Surrealism* had stressed the pursuit of “psychic automatism” - maintaining the heightened importance of unconscious mediums (automatic writing, automatic drawing, dream transcriptions) that were at the forefront of early Surrealist experimentation in the years before and immediately after Breton released his treatise - the late 1920’s experienced a turn away from automatism in both text and imagery. In place of the previous emphasis on the automatic *action* involved with producing an image, the early 1930’s were less concerned with technique and embraced the *real* as represented in collage, photography, film, objects, and *realist* paintings of Salvador Dalí, Rene Magritte, and Yves Tanguy.

Goeman’s 1930 collage exhibition and Aragon’s privileging of collage in *La Peinture au défi* were clear factors which led Ernst to provide his own account of Surrealist collage in “Inspiration to Order.” After creating *La Femme 100 Têtes*, Ernst continued to make “pure” collages, publishing two subsequent novels (*Rêve d’une petite fille qui voulut entre au Carmel*, 1930; *Une semaine de bonté*, 1934). In addition to these works however, he continued to produce paintings, which were based on his frottage

²² *La Peinture au défi*, translated in Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person* (New York: G. Braziller, 1983), 76.

method, and by connecting frottage to his celebrated collages he may have hoped to position himself in relation to his new Surrealist colleagues. In his 1932 text, Ernst cites Dalí twice, quoting passages from Dalí's essays on the paranoiac-critical method and the Surrealist object in order to acknowledge a similarity between collage, frottage, and Dalí's paranoiac imagery.²³ In "Au delà de la peinture," Ernst states, "Do not forget the other conquest of collage: Surrealist painting, at least in one of its multiple facets, of the kind that, between 1921 and 1924, I was the only one to develop, and which, later, while I advanced alone, feeling my way into the still unexplored forests of frottage, others continued to research (Magritte, for example, whose paintings are collage painted entirely by hand, and Dalí)."²⁴ In the 1936 essay, Ernst identifies himself as the inventor of both Surrealist collage and the semi-automatic technique of frottage without ever mentioning Joan Miró or André Masson, the two other Surrealist artists who notably embraced automatism in their work during the mid 1920's, and this purposeful omission suggests that Ernst aimed to identify himself as the leading proponent of automatic investigation.

Surrealism's reevaluation of its previous interest in automatism is linked to its reevaluation of the object, and this exploration increased after Ernst's 1932 essay. In 1933, the Galerie Pierre Colle staged an object exhibition which was followed by the

²³ *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* no. 1, 3.

²⁴ "Beyond Painting," 17. Elizabeth Legge also points to this quote and discusses it in terms of Ernst's psychological desire to date certain theories and works before those of his fellow Surrealist painters. Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* (London: U.M.I Research Press, 1989), 28-29.

important 1936 “Exposition Surréaliste d’objets” at the Charles Ratton Gallery.²⁵ On the occasion of the 1936 show, Andre Breton published “Crise de l’objet” in a special issue of *Cahiers d’Art*, and he provided an assessment of Ernst and the “interpreted found objects” that he had produced. Breton calls for:

“...a total revolution of the object...by showing it in the condition in which external agents such as earthquakes, fire and water have sometimes left it; by retaining it because of the very uncertainty of its previous assignment or the ambiguity resulting from its totally or partially irrational conditioning, which gains dignity by discovery (found object) and leaves an appreciable margin in the case of the most active kind of interpretation (Max Ernst’s interpreted found object).²⁶

It seems reasonable to assume that Breton’s comment is connected to Ernst’s frottages in *Histoire Naturelle*, and perhaps this provided additional motivation for Ernst to reassess his works and the manner in which he had discussed them.²⁷ “Au delà de la peinture” was published several months after Breton’s essay, and Ernst included forty-three illustrations to better inform his text.²⁸ Among the numerous reproductions of his collages and paintings, Ernst included several of his object-based works: *objet dad’art*,

²⁵ André Breton identifies the following categories of objects from the 1936 exhibition: “Mathematical objects, natural objects, primitive objects, found objects, irrational objects, ready-made objects, interpreted objects, incorporated objects, mobile objects.” “Crise de l’objet,” *Cahiers d’Art* 2, nos. 1-2 (May, 1936): 21-22, 24, 26. Trans. Lucy Lippard, *Surrealists on Art*, 54.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ernst also responded to the Surrealist object to some degree in his essay, “What is Surrealism?” In *Max Ernst* exh. cat. (Zurich: Kunsthau, October 11- November 4, 1934).

²⁸ It is interesting to note that of these forty-three illustrations, not a single reproduction of frottage appears. There are paintings that owe their subject/composition/ title to previous frottages, but Ernst opted to omit any visual reproductions of his rubbings. The reasons for this omission are conjectural, but perhaps Ernst intended to reinforce or foster the notion that the technique of frottage is present, to a degree, in almost all of the included images.

from the 1919 Cologne Dada exhibition, and *objets trouvés* from 1930. Through his publishing of “Au delà de la peinture,” Ernst sought to emphasize the manner in which “Histoire Naturelle” took stimulus from the natural world in order to illuminate the workings of the unconscious, but he also displayed the eclecticism of his oeuvre by presenting a compendium of his techniques and arguing for his involvement with each one.

Ernst opened “Au delà de la peinture” with the section, “History of a Natural History,” where he provides veiled biographic information, codified in dream form.²⁹ He reproduces three dream transcriptions which had first been published as “Visions de demi-sommeil” in 1927, and, by opening his text with accounts from half-sleep, Ernst recalled Breton’s 1922 “Entrée des médiums” and pointed to his own experimentation mediumistic activity.³⁰ The first section is followed by a poetic sub-section, “From 1925 to Present,” in which Ernst created literary passages akin to automatic prose, whose imagery is taken, sometimes verbatim, from the titles of Ernst’s earlier works: “The earth quaked softly. I decided to erect a *monument to the birds*. It was summer, the *beautiful season*. It was the time of *serpents, earthworms, feather-flowers, scale flowers, tube-*

²⁹ Hal Foster suggests that these accounts served as the germ from which “Au delà de la peinture” was formed, “in which Ernst employs infantile scenarios, family romances, and screen memories.” He continues to discuss “Au delà de la peinture” in terms of Ernst’s search for origins by analyzing the text through a Freudian lens and suggesting that Ernst narrates the origins of his art as traumatic and primal. “Convulsive Identity,” *October* 57 (1991): 35.

³⁰ Max Ernst, “Visions de demi-sommeil,” *La Révolution Surréaliste*, nos. 9-10 (1927); André Breton, “Entrée des Médiums.” *Littérature*, no. 6 (1922).

flowers. It was the time when the *forest took flight and flowers argued underwater*. The time of the *circumflex medusa*.”³¹

After presenting his reaction to the first models of automatic experimentation (dream transcription and automatic writing) Ernst transitions into his account of the discovery of frottage, the same one that was cited at the beginning of this introduction, and then begins the second section with a similar creation myth of his discovery of collage. Opening with a passage from Aragon’s *La Peinture au défi*, which identified Ernst as the forerunner of Surrealist collage, and titling the section, “La mise sous whisky marin... Au delà de la peinture,” which was the name of his much-celebrated 1921 exhibition at Au Sans Pareil, Ernst suggests that a history of his natural history must consider the interconnectedness of frottage and his earlier collage-based works.

With the help of “Inspiration to Order” and “Au delà de la peinture,” scholars have approached *Histoire Naturelle* from a number of different angles. Werner Spies wrote the first essay on frottage, and while it remains a valuable reference, Spies’s text presents only a brief and general survey of Ernst’s frottage.³² Elizabeth Legge took Ernst’s natural history as the subject of a 1993 article, but it is primarily an iconographic study, concerned with alchemical and mystical symbolism, and only briefly touches upon

³¹ “Beyond Painting,” 9. The format and content of this section clearly recalls Aragon’s praise of Ernst’s use of language in his collage titles: “Don’t forget the written element. The title... took on with Max Ernst the proportions of a poem.” *La Peinture au défi*, 47.

³² Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Frottages*.

the use of frottage in the context of Surrealist automatism.³³ Pamela Kort also approaches *Histoire Naturelle* by considering its role in the Darwinian search for origins, but does not continue this investigation beyond the scientific sources to which Ernst was allegedly responding.³⁴ A number of texts on Surrealism mention *Histoire Naturelle*, but they generally accept Ernst's commentary without much question and only discuss frottage as one sub-style of Surrealist automatism.

Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* established the pursuit of psychic automatism as Surrealism's principle objective, but less than a decade later, in his essay, "The Automatic Message," his understanding of automatism and its previously central role in Surrealism had changed significantly.³⁵ Surrealist automatism has been a topic of numerous scholarly projects but remains largely misunderstood as many studies have failed to understand that the Surrealist concept of "automatism" was in a constant state of flux, and even after Breton revised his 1924 definition of automatism, declaring in his 1933 essay that *pure psychic automatism* was not the singular means of accessing the Surrealist paradigm, individuals like the ex-Surrealist, Roger Caillois, still clung stubbornly to a notion of automatism in which works were required to be completely

³³ See Elizabeth Legge, "Novalis's Fossils, Zeuxis's Grapes, Freud's Flowers: Max Ernst's Natural History," *Art History* 16 (1993): 147-172.

³⁴ See Pamela Kort, "Arnold Böcklin, Max Ernst, and the Debate around Origins and Survivals in Germany and France," in *Darwin: Art and the Search for Origins* exh. cat., eds., Pamela Kort and Max Hollein (Cologne: Wienand, 2009), 24-53.

³⁵ André Breton, "The Automatic Message." In *What is Surrealism?: Collected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont, 132-148 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978).

automatic in order to be justifiable.³⁶ Caillois's radical definition of automatism is important because it proves that there was dissent concerning the definition of automatism which appeared during Dada, remained after the 1924 manifesto debuted, and continued into the 1930's. Thus, it is important to approach *Histoire Naturelle* with respect to the development of automatic theory in order to determine the means by which frottage affected the trajectory of Surrealist automatism.

There is no work that takes frottage and *Histoire Naturelle* as its subject, satisfactorily discusses the work, and consolidates the numerous, previously separate arguments and scholarship. This thesis will provide a comprehensive analysis of *Histoire Naturelle* by situating it in the theoretical context of Surrealist automatism and the debate concerning the possibility of a graphic Surrealist art form, examining the development of frottage from its earliest examples in 1919 to its lasting influences after its 1926 release. The introduction has critically analyzed Ernst's biographical and theoretical texts in relation to the ambitions and concerns of both himself and the Surrealist milieu. In the following chapter, the examination of *Histoire Naturelle* will begin with a look at Ernst's engagement with Dada after the First World War in an attempt to define the contemporary role of chance and Ernst's early concepts of automatism. After looking at the early collages and proto-frottages produced in the period leading up to the 1921

³⁶ In his essays, Caillois expressed shock that the Surrealist poets would talk about their automatic poetry and then make revisions, and he maintained that works must be wholly automatic (if that is even possible). Roger Caillois, "La mante religieuse: de la Biologie a la Psychanalyse," *Minotaure* 5 (1934): 23-26; Roger Caillois, "Le côté nocturne de la nature: Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire," *Minotaure* 7 (1935): 5-10. For further discussion of Caillois's interpretation of automatism, see Joyce Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin and Surrealism in the 1930s," *Modernism/modernity* 16, no. 1 (2008): 61-86.

exhibition at Au Sans Pareil, the second chapter will address the association between *Histoire Naturelle* and Breton's 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*. Here, the issue concerning the legitimacy of Surrealist art will be considered along with an evaluation of Ernst's semi-automatic work in relation to other proximal examples of graphic automatism, thereby revealing Ernst's journey to perfect Surrealist art. In the third chapter, Ernst's concept of "natural history" will be addressed through a close analysis of select plates from *Histoire Naturelle*, additionally focusing on the interrelationship between Ernst, Surrealism, and the natural world. Finally, the conclusion will focus on frottage's lasting effects after the 1926 publication of *Histoire Naturelle*.

CHAPTER II

THE SETTING UNDER WHISKEY MARINE... BEYOND PAINTING:

ERNST'S EARLY CONCEPTS OF AUTOMATISM

abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create: Dada;... abolition of memory: Dada;... elegant and unprejudiced leap from harmony to the other sphere;... Freedom: Dada Dada Dada, a roaring of intense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE

-Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto"³⁷

In 1918, after serving time in the German military, Max Ernst married Luise Straus and settled in Cologne. Later, in his biographical notes, he would state, "Max Ernst died on August 1, 1914. He came back to life on November 11, 1918, as a young man who wanted to be a magician and find the myth of his era."³⁸ Numerous scholars have taken Ernst's rhetoric here as a point of departure for further speculation. What seems clear though, is that Ernst's journey to discover the myth of his era is indissolubly linked to his artistic quest to discover new methods of pictorial representation following the conclusion of the First World War.

³⁷ Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto," *Dada* 3 (1918). In *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 81-82.

³⁸ "Some Data on the Youth of M.E.," In *Max Ernst: 'Beyond Painting' and Other Writings by the Artist and his Friends*, ed. Robert Motherwell, 28.

When Ernst returned from the Belgian front in 1918, he was still working in the Expressionist style which he had adopted while associated with August Macke and the Rhineland Expressionists. Contemporary works such as *Kampf der Fische* (*Battle of Fish*) [Fig. 1] bespeak his commitment to the expressivity of color and form.³⁹ However, his work would soon undergo a significant stylistic and conceptual transformation, and this shift is highly indebted to the Dadaist interchange of thoughts and images that Ernst became privy to during a trip to Munich in 1919.

During the summer of 1919, Ernst and Johannes Baargeld, who edited *Der Ventilator*, a proto-Dadaist journal, stopped in Munich while returning from a mountain climbing trip in the Königssee region. There, Ernst and Baargeld had the chance to meet with Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings and discussed the Dada presence in Zurich; Ernst made first contact with Paul Klee, and he learned that his old friend, Hans Arp, had survived the war and was living in Zurich. In his biographical notes, Ernst recalled a visit to Hans Goltz's bookstore where he encountered reproductions of works by Giorgio de Chirico, Carlos Carra, Paul Klee, and Francis Picabia, and he was able to view a number of texts, prose, and manifestoes drawn directly from the Berlin and Zurich Dadaists.

Scholars have rightly pointed to the importance of this encounter, as this served as Ernst's first point of contact with individuals who would continue to exercise influence on his artistic development throughout the 1920's, and one of the most affecting results of this newly established connection with the Zurich Dada circle was Ernst's response to

³⁹ See Max Ernst, "Vom Werden der Farbe," *Der Sturm* 8, no. 5 (1917): 66-68. Reprinted in *Max Ernst in Köln* exh. cat, ed. Wulf Herzogenrath (exh. cat. Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1980).

the Dadaist concept of chance as applied in their work.⁴⁰ As evidenced in the introduction, the linguistic and graphic experiments of the Surrealist milieu, which thrived in the years before and after André Breton's 1924 manifesto, centered around tactics of subverting pictorial and literary conventions. This was achieved in differing forms and procedures, which will be addressed in the next section, but the entrance of randomness into their works owes much to the role of arbitrariness which was first established and exploited by the Zurich Dadaists. Here, a new form of collage-based arrangement emerged with intentions that radically differed from the aesthetically-driven, formal interests of the Cubist's papier collé and instead celebrated the revelatory and destructive power of accidental relations. Ernst responded to these initial models in various ways, and in order to fully understand the evolution of his plastic works it is necessary to briefly consider the proximal experiments in the semi-automatist realm of chance that had either transpired or were unfolding concurrently with Ernst's reevaluation of his artistic trajectory.

In Zurich, Hans Arp's 1916-1917 *Rectangles Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* were created by tearing paper into preselected geometric shapes and subsequently dropping them onto a page randomly, allegedly gluing the pieces in the exact position where they fell. This gesture bears resemblance to Marcel Duchamp's similar project, *stoppages étalon*, where he dropped meter-long lengths of string onto a

⁴⁰ Ernst's knowledge of Dada prior to the summer of 1919 is not well documented. However, he had developed contacts in Berlin during occasional trips and through his 1916 exhibition at Der Sturm gallery. Wieland Herzfelde existed as a source of information for him since 1918, and Luise had previously sent him several unidentified Dadaist publications. See William Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 55.

canvas and glued them in place, subsequently mimicking the strings' curvilinear path by cutting their shapes out of a wooden board. And Raoul Hausmann's 1918 *Poster Poem* was created by asking the printer at the shop to choose type blocks at random and print them on the page in the order that they were selected, effectively nullifying any authorial role by the "creator." In 1921, Aragon penned the essay, "A Quoi pensez-vous?" in which he championed semantic arbitrariness, a concept which had been explored earlier in Tristan Tzara's "Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love." Here, Tzara provided the instructions for creating a Dadaist poem and advocated the chance procedure of cutting out bits of text from a newspaper, putting them in a hat, then selecting words at random, and recomposing them as a Dadaist poem.⁴¹

Ernst's exposure to these new methods clearly exercised an immediate effect on him, and his reactive artistic transformation is reflected in his complete break with Expressionism and emotive, gestural brushstrokes. Ernst's rejection of his former Expressionist style in favor of techniques that better accommodated objective chance is particularly pertinent to the discussion of Surrealist automatism, which the second chapter will cover in more detail. The next chapter will address the Surrealist's initial automatic models; of these early investigations there are two main concepts, occasionally overlapping, that contributed to the search for an automatic mark: 1) the application of chance in order to subvert the conventions of authorial creation and the direction of talent

⁴¹ "And here you are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar." Tristan Tzara, "Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love," in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 92.

2) psychic improvisation - or the rapid, graphic transcription of the unconscious – which would later be dubbed, “automatic drawing.”

The free formal invention and expressive spontaneity associated with automatic drawing can also be identified, to some degree, in select works of the German avant-garde between 1916-1918. Within Expressionist circles, there seems to have been a shared investigation of semi-automatic mediums in which artists explored the expressivity of their gestural marks, and the resulting drawings suggest that contemporary artistic circles were already tapping into the unconscious, to some degree, as a wellspring for *natural* images. Paul Klee⁴² adopted the innocence and honesty of the child’s vision, Hans Richter⁴³ demonstrated a newfound autonomy of the line in his still-figurative compositions, Johannes Baargeld⁴⁴ imbued a number of his grotesque ink drawings with a heightened linear spontaneity, and Georg Muche⁴⁵ similarly created works that seem to issue, to an extent, from semi-consciousness.

When Max Ernst returned to Cologne in 1918, his first postwar projects were executed in an Expressionist vein. Two metaphysical drawings were published in the

⁴² See Kathryn Porter Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee Drawings* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1960); Richard Verdi, *Klee and Nature* (London: Rizzoli, 1984).

⁴³ See Stephen C. Foster, *Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998); Leah Dickerman, “Zurich,” in *Dada* exh. cat., ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2006), 16-44.

⁴⁴ See Sabine T. Kriebel, “Cologne,” in *Dada* exh. cat., ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2006), 214-237.

⁴⁵ See Magdalena Droste ed., *Georg Muche: Das Künstlerische Werk, 1912-1927: Kritisches Verzeichnis der Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Fotos und architektonischen Arbeiten* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1980).

first issue of *Der Strom* [Fig. 2]. Around the same time, Ernst produced five similar drawings that served as illustrations for Johannes Theodor Kuhlemann's volume of poetry, *Consolamini*, published in 1919 [Fig. 3]. Kuhlemann, who was a friend of Ernst, had written a poem on the occasion of the marriage between Ernst and Luis Straus, which was included in *Consolamini*, and the respective illustrations remain the best example of Ernst's experiments with psychic improvisation as he would never return to this emotive style in the same manner again. Following the trip to Munich, Max Ernst and Cologne Dada launched a caustic attack on Expressionism, and Werner Spies notes that these drawings were already "anachronistic" by the time they debuted – a claim reinforced by the presence of an announcement for Ernst's upcoming *Fiat Modes, pereat ars*, the artist's homage to Giorgio de Chirico, which appeared in the same inaugural issue of *Der Strom*.⁴⁶

Ernst's disconnection from the more expressive modes of formal invention marks a new beginning for his experiments with automatic processes. This break with his previous stylistic and conceptual concerns is especially interesting considering his renewed contact with Hans Arp after the war. Ernst and Arp became friends in 1914, and as a result of their postwar reunion, Ernst encountered Arp's recent automatic work. Beginning in 1917, Arp had initiated a critical exploration of the role of the unconscious in his visual art and began producing biomorphic works in which he celebrated the "decisive forms" revealed to him through India ink drawings of "broken branches, roots,

⁴⁶ *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, trans. John William Gabriel (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 33.

grass, and stones that the lake had thrown up on the shore.”⁴⁷ From these natural elements, Arp “simplified these forms and united their essence in fluid ovals, symbols of metamorphosis and development of bodies.”⁴⁸

As opposed to his earlier geometric works that betrayed no physical evidence of the painter’s authorial role, his biomorphic works retain faint pencil lines beneath the amoebic, organic shapes, suggesting that the first stage of Arp’s process concerned itself with the delineation of forms suggested to him by the natural world and that the second step, in which he would incorporate the ink, was spontaneous and corrective. Arp did not create his biomorphic forms through the psychic improvisation akin to the Expressionist’s experiments with automatic mark-making. His graphic work did not attempt to emulate another style, such as the mimicking of the drawings of the insane or the young, but instead took the natural world as his model and recorded images which were spontaneously suggested to him, subsequently abstracting forms from an external point of departure.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Arp, “Signposts,” (1950). In *Arp on Arp*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Viking, 1972), 271.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Cologne Dada celebrated both *Dilletantism* and the art of the mentally ill, devoting sections of its exhibitions and journals to such visual art, and Ernst certainly entertained an interest in psychological practice and the drawings of patients. Ernst claimed that he had intended to one day write a book on psychology and art, but this feat was accomplished in 1922 by Hanz Prinzhorn in his seminal text, *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill*. While a discussion of the art of the mentally ill is certainly relevant to modern art in the 1910’s - 1920’s and the development of Surrealist automatism, it is beyond the scope of this project. Hal Foster provides an excellent starting point though, in “Blinded Insights: On the Modernist Reception of the Art of the Mentally Ill,” *October* 97 (2001): 3-30.

After first seeing Arp's biomorphic ink drawings and chance assemblages, Ernst did not engage in automatic investigation through the exploration of different spontaneous processes of *drawing*, and although Arp's effects on Max Ernst's visual art are numerous, they are not as readily apparent in Ernst's work from the Cologne Dada period as they are in his later frottages for the *Histoire Naturelle* cycle, an issue which will be considered in more detail in the third chapter. Arp's most immediate effect on Ernst can likely be located in Ernst's newly informed insight on the disruptive and revelatory powers of chance.⁵⁰

After learning of Arp's whereabouts and seeing reproductions of some of his work in the Dada publications, Ernst produced his first project in dialogue with those texts and images that he had recently seen. *Fiat modes, pereat ars* was an album of eight lithographs which paid homage to Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, and Ernst produced the *Fiat modes* project at a printing office, owned by Max Hertz, where the Cologne Dada publications and posters were printed (*Der Ventilator, Bulletin D, Die Schammade*). While spending time at Hertz's print shop, Ernst had access to innumerable stereotypes, typographic blocks, and stock plates with which he could experiment. Here, Ernst produced a variety of stamped, printed, and rubbed *drawings* where he built up compositions through the appropriation and application of existing

⁵⁰ Arp's concept of chance and his influence on Ernst resulted in several collaborative projects between the two men. Ernst and Arp made a number of FATAGAGA works (FABrication de TABLEaux GASométriques GARantis), in which Ernst would provide an image and Arp, or someone else, would provide the title with neither individual being aware of the other's intentions. Ernst continued to produce similar cooperative work with Paul Eluard throughout the 1920's, providing collages to illustrate Eluard's volumes of poetry, *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs des immortels*, and in both cases the text and images were conceived separately and then brought together to heighten the incongruity of such fortuitous combinations.

materials in the print shop.⁵¹ His work during this period encompassed various mediums, but the common factor between all of his imagery is its juxtapositional, collage-like nature. Werner Spies states, “Together with the early prints, these drawings are among the first of his works to embody a combination, a collage, of various disparate, already existing elements.”⁵² As noted in the introduction, Ernst’s account of his discovery of frottage in 1925 might lead one to believe that the rubbings in *Histoire Naturelle* were the first examples of such image transferal, but a closer look at the stamped, printed, and rubbed drawings that Ernst produced in Hertz’s shop indicates a close connection with Ernst’s subsequent experiments in the fields of collage and frottage.

Ernst’s printer’s plate drawings assumed different forms, which depended, to some degree, on the type of material interrogated. By inking stock plates, Ernst created quasi-mechanistic compositions, and Hal Foster proposes a fascinating reading of these diagrammatic prints in which he identifies psychological and political themes which focus on schizophrenia and Ernst’s personal response to the aftermath of the First World War.⁵³ These works perhaps are a reaction to the compromised societal values of Germany and the rest of Europe after the war, and Ernst likely communicated an

⁵¹ Spies has pointed out that nowhere in Ernst’s letters to Tristan Tzara does the term *collage* or *Klebebild* (pasted pictures) crop up. Ernst refers to his works simply as *drawings* and *paintings*. Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 41, footnote 190.

⁵² *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, 41.

⁵³ For further discussion of Ernst’s diagrammatic printed collages from Cologne, see Hal Foster, “A Bashed Ego: Max Ernst in Cologne,” in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 127-149.

additional regional critique of the Rhineland.⁵⁴ In prints such as *Hypertrophic Trophy* [Fig. 4], Ernst created fragile and dysfunctional machines in which the thin belts and unstable pulleys defy technical logic as the mechanical elements have been rearranged to create a new machine that serves no readily comprehensible function.

Of principle concern here though, are the rubbings that Ernst created by placing paper over wooden letters and other flat blocks and rubbing graphite on the page, resulting in abstract, and occasionally pseudo-anthropomorphic compositions divorced from the previous semantic associations of the typographic blocks.⁵⁵ These works have no political agenda, existing as purely formal, aesthetic investigations, devoid of any signs of social or moral activism. In works such as *Von minimax dadamax selbst konstruiertes maschinchen* (*Small Self-Constructed Machine by Minimax Dadamax*) [Fig. 5], from 1919-1920, Ernst juxtaposes several letter blocks with other geometric forms, and, as the stacked letters lose their initial signification, the abstracted composition takes on a new visual meaning. The letter “J” is flipped upside down and protrudes from the awkward tower of other forms, such as “A’s,” also vertically reversed, that serve as the

⁵⁴ His forms here suggest a polemical challenge to the ideals of the Werkleute, who praised modern technology and believed that art should exist in service to the war and industry.

⁵⁵ Here, it is important to distinguish between Ernst’s typographic assemblages and the visual poetics of Guillaume Apollinaire. In spring 1919, Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* were published in the Paris *Mercure de France*. Here, the poet arranged his text into corresponding visual compositions so that prose could mimic forms such as a shower of rain, a woman with a hat, or a smoking cigarette. Ernst’s drawings are very different from these linguistic constructions because Ernst’s superimposed letters avoid any type of legible reading and cannot be viewed as constructions with semantic connotations. Werner Spies identifies two works where Ernst has, consciously or unconsciously, created forms that read, “MAX” in *Beautiful Woman and Upright Woman* and “ARP” in *Von minimax dadamax selbst konstruiertes maschinchen*. *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, 46. However, whether or not this association is purposeful or coincidental remains purely conjectural.

foundational support, or architectonic legs, of the structure. In addition to those rubbed, geometric shapes, which retain the contour of the interrogated object, Ernst often finished his respective works with detailed pencil additions, an example that is apparent in *Von minimax dadamax selbst konstruiertes maschinchen*, where a hand-drawn water spout mirrors the upside-down, rubbed “J.”

Ernst’s printer’s plate drawings certainly represent a rejection of his previous Expressionist style, influenced, in part, by the 1919 trip to Munich and Ernst’s new understanding of the *accidental*, but the degree to which randomness enters into these rubbed works from 1919-1920 is not immediately recognizable. It seems likely that Ernst’s typographic rubbings could have been influenced by reproductions of Francis Picabia’s imagery that Ernst would have seen in Goltz’s bookstore. Picabia’s recent machine drawings likely influenced Ernst’s diagrammatic collages of dysfunctional machines but, the work that most directly relates to the rubbings is Picabia’s deconstructed/reconstructed alarm clock which Ernst would have seen in *Dada 4-5*, published in May 1919 [Fig. 6]. Picabia’s illustration was created by dismantling an old alarm clock, dipping its parts in ink, and pressing the forms onto paper at random. In this sense, the composition is generated through a random selection of parts from a preordained collection of shapes and the subsequent superimposition of those forms on the page. This procedure is similarly reflected in Ernst’s rubbings, and chance likely played an introductory role in Ernst’s initial gravitation to certain forms from which he would create abstract compositions.

As evidenced by the creation of Picabia's alarm clock, Dadaist techniques containing degrees of randomness were never reducible to pure chance. Elements of chance could be applied to certain production processes, but a certain expectation of the final product always remained as the composition was somewhat dictated by the predetermination of the formal elements to be used. Picabia was aware of the clock parts' initial form, Arp had torn the paper into rectilinear shapes before dropping them onto the page, and Duchamp had chosen string as his experimental object. Similarly, Ernst's selection of the materials with which he would work reflects a certain visual expectation in the finished piece.

Despite the impossibility of purely accidental relations in these various works, the element of chance is still clearly mobilized in the generation of its imagery. Ernst's printer plate drawings share their initial moment of creation – the attraction to certain available objects without overbearing premeditation – with that of Picabia's alarm clock. However, there is a second stage in the production of Ernst's rubbings, akin to the corrective, secondary phase of Arp's biomorphic works, in which Ernst modified his work with drawn lines and, later, rubber stamps and watercolor. In this final stage, Ernst demonstrates conscious control and a significant predilection for order and composition, which separates his rubbings from the "careless, awkward tracings of the entrails of an alarm clock."⁵⁶ In the work, *Lächeln Sie Nicht! (Do Not Smile!)* [Fig. 7], from 1919, the carefully composed letters and forms, while possibly *selected* randomly, are not *assembled* randomly, and this work by Ernst, along with others from this period, conveys

⁵⁶ Lucy Lippard, "Dada into Surrealism: Max Ernst," in *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1971), 66.

an underlying unwillingness to completely abandon all aesthetic taste to pure chance – a claim which can and should be directed at the Dadaist work of Picabia, Duchamp, and Arp as well.

In *Lächeln Sie Nicht!*, some objects are rubbed, transferring their contours to the page, but most of the detail comes from penciled-in additions, in which the initial rubbed forms exist as a subtle, moderate point of departure. Two keys are illusionistically inserted into a lock that is surrounded by hand-drawn woodgrain. Ernst renders the woodgrain mimetically, demonstrating his early attraction to a motif to which he would later return in his frottage cycles, but there is nothing transformative about the woodgrain here, exposing the critical difference between these rubbings and the later frottages. The *Histoire Naturelle* and Cologne rubbings might use the same technical process to generate imagery, but the freedom of interpretation differs greatly.

The rubbings from Max Hertz's print shop are relevant to this project for several reasons. First, the technique of *image transfer*, first used in the Cologne assemblages, anticipates Ernst's later experiments with frottage. The concept of image transfer, in which Ernst transmits existing imagery from sources, such as stereographic plates or leaves, to the page, is very important for Ernst's artistic practice because it represents a means of fashioning an image without relying on the conventional technique of *drawing* or *painting*. In the following chapter, Ernst's avoidance of introductory, authorial mark-making will be considered more closely, but, here, it is worth establishing that the Dada prints and rubbings served as Ernst's first model of automatic production as his creativity was jumpstarted by the semi-random appearance of printed and rubbed, but *not* hand-

drawn, forms. The more immediate effect of the Dada rubbings on Ernst's later work though, owes much to his further development of the collage aesthetic, which, as Spies noted, first appeared in the typographic juxtapositions, and there is a compositional connection between the printer's shop rubbings and Ernst's consequent experiments with collage. However, Ernst's account of his discovery of collage relegates the invention to an accidental find, in a manner similar to his version of the origin of frottage, and the importance of arbitrariness is emphasized in both the *discovery* of collage and its ensuing *manifestations*. In "Au delà de la peinture," Ernst provided the following retrospective description of his new innovation:

One rainy day in 1919, finding myself in a village on the Rhine, I was struck by the obsession which held under my gaze the pages of an illustrated catalogue showing objects designed for anthropologic, microscopic, psychologic, mineralogic, and paleontologic demonstration. There I found brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me and brought forth an elusive succession of contradictory images, double, triple and multiple images, piling up on each other with the persistence and rapidity which are particular to love memories and visions of half-sleep.⁵⁷

Recognizing the revelatory and disruptive power of incongruous juxtaposition, Ernst applied this newly "discovered" technique in a number of disparate mediums. In works such as *Le cygne est bien paisible* (*The Swan is Quite Peaceful*) [Fig. 8] from 1920, Ernst created photomontages by bringing dissimilar objects from differing sources together in a unified composition. A swan sits in the grassy foreground, and an airplane is shown with a framed window, out of which three cherubs gaze, placed where the plane's propellers should normally be located. Objects are displaced and disconnected from their original

⁵⁷ "Beyond Painting," 14.

range of expectation, and, as a result, new relationships can be formed. In addition to these photomontages, Ernst also created fantastic vegetal and animal hybrids through cut-and-paste methods, similar to synthetic Cubist construction, in which he would build forms from existing material. *Un peu malade le cheval – la belle saison* (*The Slightly Ill Horse – The Beautiful Season*) [Fig. 9] from 1920, presents the recognizable shape of a horse, which is created from fragments of a biological instructional chart.

In these cut-and-paste collages, Ernst took an additional step after the finalization of the image in which he concealed all visual traces of the work's synthetic production by photographing the works and then reprinting them. In "Au delà de la peinture," Ernst pointed to the mistake of addressing his collages too *literally*, noting, "If it is the plume that makes the plumage it is not the glue that makes the gluing (ce n'est pas la colle qui fait le collage)."⁵⁸ Ernst's definition of collage is much more rigorous and includes a number of various approaches to juxtapositional assemblage, and his affecting development of the collage aesthetic is also apparent in his overpaintings, works in which Ernst applied paint on top of pages and charts taken from instructional catalogues. *Schichtgestein naturgabe aus gneiss lava Isländisch moos* (*Stratified Rock Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Iceland Moss*) [Fig. 10], from 1920, takes the preexisting scientific imagery of a *Lehrmittel* instructional catalogue as a starting point and consequently forms a new, autonomous image. Here, the resulting visual resembles an abstracted landscape where the original medical illustrations have been transformed into a colorful geological/biological cross-section. For Max Ernst, the chance exposure to certain elements from

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

the illustrated catalogues inspired a sort of hallucination, one which he attempted to recreate through his painted and drawn additions.

Following the 1919 trip to Munich, Ernst had begun conversing with the other Dadaist factions outside of Cologne. Tristan Tzara served as his first point of contact, and letters, reproduced in Werner Spies's *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, confirm the exchange of imagery and ideas that began in November 1919. As he grew disenchanted with the stagnancy of Cologne Dada, Ernst's connection with the young French poets and artists developed into an intimate dialogue, and, after Ernst made initial contact with André Breton in 1920, efforts to stage a Paris exhibition of Ernst's recent works commenced. Such an event was difficult to organize though, considering the hostile postwar relationship between Germany and France, but an exhibition was finally arranged, taking place in 1921 at the Au Sans Pareil bookstore.

Max Ernst debuted on the Parisian Dada scene in 1921 with his exhibition, "La mise sous whisky marin... Exposition Dada: Max Ernst - Au delà de la peinture." The show was a great success and was grandly received by the Paris Dadaists. Louis Aragon, in *La Peinture au défi*, declared, "Max Ernst's collage exhibition in Paris in 1921 was perhaps the first manifestation to permit the perception of the resources and the thousands of possibilities in an entirely new art."⁵⁹ Years later, in "Le surréalisme et la peinture," André Breton recalled his first time seeing Ernst's collages:

I remember the day when I first set eyes on them: The external object had broken with its normal environment, and its component parts had, so to

⁵⁹ *La Peinture au défi*, in *Surrealists on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970): 46-47.

speaking, emancipated themselves from it in such a way that they were now able to maintain entirely new relationships with other elements, escaping from the principle of reality but retaining all their importance on that plane.⁶⁰

Ernst exhibited fifty-six collaged works, and, as he would later reinforce in “Au delà de la peinture,” only twelve of those works “justified the term *collage découpé*.”⁶¹ In the announcement, the exhibited works were identified as “peintopeintures,” not *drawings* or *paintings* or *collages*, and Ernst displayed an eclectic variety of collaged works, including his overpaintings from commercial catalogues. The use of the strange term, “peintopeintures,” indicates Ernst’s strong desire to distinguish his Dadaist works from the conventional Parisian understanding of *collage*, which had grown out of Cubist practice. Breton organized the 1921 show and wrote the preface for the catalogue, celebrating Ernst’s collages for their ability to liberate one’s imagination and differentiating them from the Cubist papier collé, in which the found objects retained their initial identity:

It is the marvelous faculty of attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience; of bringing them together and drawing a spark from their contact; of gathering within reach of our senses abstract figures endowed with the same intensity, the same relief, as other figures; and of disorienting us in our own memory by depriving us of a frame of reference.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald and Company Publishers, 1972): 64-66.

⁶¹ “Beyond Painting,” 14.

⁶² “Max Ernst,” In *What is Surrealism?: Collected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978): 15-16.

In 1922, following the successful exhibition at Au Sans Pareil, Max Ernst moved to Paris, and in the years leading up to Breton's demarcation of the Surrealist agenda in the 1924 manifesto, Ernst's work experienced another dramatic shift in which he applied the collage principle, so celebrated by the Paris Dadaists, to canvas paintings. The consequential search for a technique which was *au delà de la peinture* (beyond painting) continued and culminated with the 1925 "discovery" of frottage and its relative manifestations in *Histoire Naturelle*, and the next chapter will address Ernst's development of frottage and its polemical relationship with Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

CHAPTER III

*WHIPLASHES OR LAVASTRINGS:*FROTTAGE AND THE *MANIFESTO OF SURREALISM*

It is like the tinkling of a bell which makes one hear what one imagines.

-Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattata della Pittura*⁶³

Following Max Ernst's exhibition of his Dada collages at Au Sans Pareil in May 1921, the Paris Dadaists organized a summer gathering in the Tyrol. This meeting was prompted in part by Francis Picabia's recent defection from the Dada group and the ensuing publication of "Le Pilhaou-Thibaou" in *391*, in which he mocked his former Dada associates, but the summer vacation also served as the first opportunity for Ernst and the French poets to meet face-to-face. Ernst was not able to attend his exhibition in 1921 due to unreceptive postwar conditions, but the ensuing exchange in Tyrol resulted in fruitful experimentation which eventually would prompt another shift in Ernst's artistic practice.

During the Tyrolean trip, Ernst produced the first frottage that bore no direct relation to the object underlying the surface. On the back of a telegram sent to Tristan

⁶³ Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattata della Pittura*. Ernst introduces his "History of a Natural History" in "Au delà de la peinture" with this line. "Beyond Painting," 7. For the full translation of Leonardo's treatise, see *Treatise on Painting*, Translated and annotated by A. Philip McMahon, introduction by Ludwig H. Heydenreich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956).

Tzara, Ernst fashioned an animal's head out of the grooves of wooden floorboards [Fig. 11]. As opposed to the previous typographic rubbings from Cologne, in which the printed object retained most of its strong visual identity, the Tyrolean frottage anticipates the heightened metamorphosis found in the *Histoire Naturelle* rubbings. Scholars recognize this work as Ernst's first mature example of the frottage procedure, which he claimed to "discover" in 1925. Robert Rainwater discusses this work, rightly noting that the frottage technique had already existed, but not as one for generating original imagery. He goes on to note that Ernst did not immediately carry this experiment any further.⁶⁴ While Rainwater is correct in recognizing that Ernst would not produce another "pure" frottage until 1925, he is quite wrong in his assertion that Ernst did not further experiment with the rubbing technique before 1925. In works such as *Trinity of Anatomy* (1921) [Fig. 12] and *Visible Pear* (1924) [Fig. 34], Ernst uses the rubbing technique in order to question issues of *materiality*, an important topic which will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. Such post-1921/pre-1925 rubbings, however, are never transformative, and the transfer method simply allows Ernst to capture texture within the contours of recognizable forms, effectively filling out the silhouettes of shapes such as human bodies and fruit.

In the months following the gathering in Tyrol, Ernst refocused his attention on traditional easel painting, from which he had distanced himself after his trip to Munich, instead of pursuing the image transfer technique of the rubbings. In these new paintings, Ernst applied concepts of collage from his Dadaist assemblages to his painted canvases

⁶⁴ "Max Ernst, Printmaker," in *Max Ernst: Beyond Surrealism*, ed. Robert Rainwater (New York: The New York Public Library & Oxford University Press, 1986).

by bringing various unrelated forms together within the pictorial frame. These works, recognized by Breton and the Dadaists for their relation to the earlier metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, did not take found objects as a starting point in the same manner as Ernst's overpaintings or *collage découpage*. Instead, in such works as *Elephant of Celebes* [Fig. 13], Ernst captured dream-like landscapes with fantastical monsters that were suggested to him by his imagination.⁶⁵ Ernst's intentions here are similar to those of his previous collages, in which he endeavored to create works that simulated images one might experience in hallucinations or the dream world, and this effect, admired by the Parisian Dadaists, would soon gain additional power under the proto-Surrealist investigation of mediumistic activity that Ernst observed following his 1922 move from Cologne to Paris.⁶⁶

Following his move to Paris, Ernst's artistic productions largely reflect the principal concerns of the French poets and artists by whom he was now surrounded, and his poetic, collage-based paintings took on new significance in relation to the experiments with mediumistic activity, organized by Breton, which began in September

⁶⁵ In addition to breathing life into latent imagery from his imagination, Ernst also created forms which had previously been suggested to him by existing objects. In *Elephant of Celebes*, Werner Spies has identified various objects which he believes Ernst has appropriated in a different approach to visual collage. For example, he argues that Ernst had seen a particular cylindrical granary in rural Paris which he subsequently transformed into the torso of the monstrous figure. Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*.

⁶⁶ Ernst's desire to leave Cologne and relocate to Paris increased exponentially following the November 1921 meeting between himself and Paul and Gala Eluard. The Eluards visited Max and Luise in Cologne where Paul purchased Ernst's recent collage painting, *The Elephant of Celebes*, and selected eleven collages for his poetry volume, *Repetitions*. Here, a mutual attraction developed between Max, Gala, and Paul, and by the end of 1922, Max had abandoned his wife and son in Cologne, taking Paul's passport and moving to Paris to live in a ménage à trois relationship with the Eluards in their home at Eaubonne.

1922. Robert Desnos and Rene Crevel revealed a talent for entering hypnotic sleeps, or trances, during which they engaged in strange activities, made drawings, and spoke/wrote in an unrestricted, automatic manner.⁶⁷ While Ernst's paintings might well have corresponded to the *imagery* to which one might be privy during a trance, Breton's essay, "Entrée des Médioms," already pointed to the importance of the *process* involved with image generation. Breton's 1922 concept of "psychic automatism that corresponds rather well to the dream state" anticipates the definition he would provide for Surrealism in his 1924 manifesto, in which he established the pivotal importance of *automatic* investigation.⁶⁸

Several years later, in his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton defined Surrealism as

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.⁶⁹

With such a description Breton dictated the nascent movement's express objective and professed priority, calling for the heightened investigation of automatic *mediums*.

However, Breton's first attempt to dictate Surrealism's goals was overlaid with significant bias, as Breton the poet discussed psychic revelation largely in terms of the

⁶⁷ Ernst was present for these sessions, but he only participated as an observer and never engaged in any type of hypnosis himself. Breton eventually had to cancel the sessions after they became increasingly violent; Crevel tried to lead sleepers in mass suicide, and Desnos chased Eluard around the room with a knife.

⁶⁸ "Entrée des Médioms," *Littérature*, no. 6 (1922). In *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, ed. Neil Matheson (Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries, 2006), 249.

⁶⁹ "Manifesto of Surrealism," *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 26.

written or spoken word.⁷⁰ Automatic writing and the dream were proffered as the most successful means of “living our fantasies” by giving “free rein to them.”⁷¹ Stemming from the recent experiments in realms of unconscious thought, the newly established Surrealist agenda might have considered the image to be the most significant result of automatic activity, however the central element of such investigation was not located in a visual image, rather in a linguistic one, which could best be recorded through the written or spoken word.

André Breton’s model for automatic writing was informed by, and developed from, Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic methods, in which a patient’s rapid semantic dictation could aid doctors in the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. Such writing exercises were believed to allow for the liberation of desires and memories that had previously been repressed by the conscious mind. The first proto-Surrealist examples of such automatic writing developed during the same time as Ernst’s experiments in Max Hertz’s print shop, but were in no way connected. In 1919, Breton and Philip Soupault, using Freud’s model, collaborated to produce poetic, disconnected prose that challenged the format of the traditional novel and the manner in which a reader would engage with a text. The results were published in *Littérature*, numbers 8-10, between October and December, and were later issued as a book in 1920, titled, *Les Champs magnetiques (Magnetic Fields)*.

⁷⁰ See Anna Balakian, *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁷¹ Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 18.

As Rosalind Krauss suggests, the ambition of *Magnetic Fields* is provided in the title of the first chapter: “La Glace sans tain.” She notes, “The *mirror without silvering* was to be language that could cut two ways... It was to reflect the speaker back to himself even as it was to be transparent, allowing the speaker’s subjectivity to flood past him and merge with the whole of the world outside.”⁷² Max Ernst, in the months following the release of Breton’s manifesto, would adopt the powerful model of the mirror for his frottages. However, as opposed to envisioning a mirror *without* silvering, Ernst considered his frottages to be like *partially* silvered mirrors. In this sense, a mirror without silvering is more like a window, through which one looks out onto the natural world, but a partially silvered mirror allows one to look out onto the world while simultaneously looking into the internal world. Subjectivity and objectivity are both reflected back to the viewer, and, as a result, they fuse together.

Before Ernst would apply the concept of “La Glace sans tain” to his 1925 frottages, however, his graphic response to automatic writing took a form similar to his collage-based paintings. Ernst’s 1923 *Lessons in Automatic Writing* [Fig. 14] represent the artist’s commentary on the psychic *procedure* of automatic writing as opposed to attempting to present a comparable graphic technique.⁷³ The line drawings are rendered

⁷² “Magnetic Fields: The Structure,” in *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields*, ed. Rosalind Krauss (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1972), 13.

⁷³ Werner Spies dates Ernst’s scroll drawings to 1923, but William Camfield provides a date of 1924. Spies’s date seems more plausible though because Camfield’s suggestion that the scroll drawings were created in the winter of 1924 implies that they were already in direct conversation with André Breton’s manifesto. However, it seems more likely that the scroll drawings were created before Ernst ever read the manifesto, and Werner Spies’s date of 1923 is thus more appropriate. See Werner Spies, Sigrid Metken and Gunter Metken eds., *Max Ernst, Oeuvre*

on a long scroll, and the horizontal format of Ernst's *Lessons* allows them to read as diagrams of automatic thought. Ernst is not attempting to convey the visual equivalent of automatic writing in the form of an automatic mark, rather he speculates about the unraveling of mental processes. Just as the poet records latent images on the page in words written from left to right, Ernst's scroll illustrates the latent images of his own psyche in smoothly inked lines: mountainous, architectural, and vegetal forms populate an otherwise flat landscape which stretches along an undulating horizon where nude and clothed figures interact and fuse with other organic elements.

In this work, each successive image is clearly demarcated as Ernst illustrates his theoretical model of the automatic formation of images in one's mind. However, his concept of automatism in the visual arts is still developing, and the creation of the scroll drawings more closely resembles the *production* of his previous collage-based paintings, in which an image might be suggested to the artist spontaneously, but the realization of that image required a secondary moment of conscious control that succeeded the initial moment of inspiration.

However, Ernst's work would soon undergo a significant change following the release of Breton's manifesto. After the manifesto debuted in 1924, Ernst reacted to Breton's claim that Surrealist expression should be, "exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern," by discontinuing his practice of collage-based painting, which he would not return to until the later 1920's, and by searching for a visual model that was *beyond*

Katalog (Houston, Texas: Menil Foundation, 1975); William A. Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1993).

painting and could satisfy the embryonic movement's devaluation of aesthetic concerns; this polemical investigation resulted in the fostering of frottage.

Breton's call for Surrealist practice certainly posed a difficult problem for the visual and plastic arts. Since all art, regardless of its formal objectives, requires at least a modicum of aesthetic constitution, it seemed inconceivable that the revolutionary goals of Surrealism could be conveyed through painting. This initial paradox was further complicated by Breton's apparent hesitation about possible projections for Surrealist painting processes, considering that visual artists were only mentioned very briefly in a footnote which listed several individuals, including Ernst, whom Breton considered to be quasi-Surrealists.⁷⁴

Breton's skepticism in the 1924 manifesto sparked a heated debate about the legitimacy or possibility of Surrealist painting, and the movement's new journal, *La Révolution surréaliste*, provided the forum for this critical discussion. While some individuals would speak in favor of Surrealist visual arts, Pierre Naville, who served as co-editor with Benjamin Péret for the first three numbers of *La Révolution surréaliste*, dismissed from the beginning any possibility of Surrealist art in his famous attack on the "beaux-arts":

The only taste I know is distaste. Masters, master crooks, daub your canvases. Everyone now knows that there's no surrealist painting. Neither the strokes of the pencil given over to chance gestures, nor the image retracing the figures of a dream, nor imaginative fantasies can, of

⁷⁴ After citing a number of authors who "have performed acts of ABSOLUTE SURREALISM," Breton named several philosophers and artists who "are not always Surrealists, in that I discern in each of them a certain number of preconceived ideas to which—very naively—they hold... They were instruments too full of pride, and this is why they have not always produced a harmonious sound." *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 27.

course, be so described. But there are spectacles. Memory and the pleasure of the eyes: there's the whole of aesthetics.⁷⁵

Published in the inaugural issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, Max Morise's article, "Les Yeux enchantés," provided a considerably more optimistic, albeit tentative, agenda for Surrealist visual art by declaring, "What surrealist writing is to literature, surrealist plastic art should be to painting, to photography, and all that is visual."⁷⁶ Morise went on to note, "We have all the reason in the world to believe that the direct and simple element which is a stroke of paint on the canvas carries meaning intrinsically; that a stroke of pencil is equivalent to a word."⁷⁷ Morise elaborated on Breton's call for psychic automatism delineated in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* by locating the primary vehicle for the transcription of unconscious mediums in the automatic mark of painting or drawing.

Morise's article acknowledged the contemporary hesitancy to endorse an artwork as being "Surrealist" without first agreeing on a definition of what Surrealist painting might entail.⁷⁸ However, in opposition to Naville's outright disavowal, Morise identified threads of the marvelous in existing artworks as a means of arguing for both the possibility of an automatic mark and its rightful place within the collective Surrealist brief. Morise discussed the hauntingly deserted plazas of Giorgio de Chirico's earlier

⁷⁵ "Beaux-Arts," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3 (1925). In *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, ed. Neil Matheson, 328.

⁷⁶ "Les Yeux enchantés," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 1 (1924). In *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, Neil Matheson ed., 324.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁷⁸ See Jennifer Mundy, "Surrealism and Painting: Describing the Imaginary." *Art History* 10, no. 4 (1987): 492-508.

paintings [Fig. 15], which were held in high esteem by Breton, Ernst, and their colleagues, by paralleling their images to those in Surrealist poetry, but Morise also pointed to the troubling nature of a Chirico painting's *creation*. To paint the initial impression of an image, whether suggested by a dream, one's creative faculties, or the recalling of previous experiences, is an act of memory. For this reason, Morise claims that such a "secondary effort, which necessarily alters the images by bringing them to the surface of consciousness, makes it clear that it cannot provide here a clue to surrealist painting."⁷⁹ In this sense, with respect to the process involved with the manifestation of an image, a Chirico painting can "pretend to be typically surrealist: the images are surrealist, but not their expression."⁸⁰

Morise's clear distinction between *vision* and *realization* greatly affected the trajectory of Max Ernst's work. The criticism of Giorgio de Chirico's "expression" was likely also directed towards Ernst's 1921-1924 collage-based paintings, which similarly could be considered Surrealist in their imagery, but not in their production. Following the release of the manifesto and the first several issues of *La Révolution surréaliste*, Ernst decisively abandoned his traditional easel painting and set out to find a process in which both the image and its technique would encompass the Surrealist paradigm.

In mid 1925, Breton began to write in some support of painting in a series of articles titled "Le surréalisme et la peinture," first published in the July issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*. However, the apparent contradiction between the academic

⁷⁹ "Les Yeux enchantés," 325.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

technique of oil painting and the automatic recording of the streamlined unconscious remained at the forefront of controversy and debate, evidenced by Breton's decision to title his 1925 treatise "Surrealism and Painting" instead of "Surrealist Painting." Morise's high hopes for a graphic automatism had first been given form in a drawing by André Masson, which was published in the inaugural issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* and placed next to "Les Yeux enchantés," and this early drawing constituted the first attempt to define what Surrealist automatism might entail in painting.⁸¹ The 1925 juxtaposition of the ink drawing and Morise's text reinforces Breton's initial impressions of Masson when, in his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, he described Masson as being "so close to us," and Masson's automatic drawings became a staple for *La Révolution surréaliste*, with nine of them appearing in the first eight issues of the journal.

During Surrealism's heroic years, between 1924-1927, automatism of the mark overshadowed the dream in painting, and the results of this investigation were displayed in the first exhibition of Surrealist painting, held in November 1925 at Galerie Pierre. Here, Ernst first displayed the results of his recent "discovery" of frottage, and, along with the rubbings, works by Miró, Masson, Arp, Picasso, Chirico, and Klee were also shown. The eclectic exhibition showcased a variety of different automatic techniques

⁸¹ In his essay, Morise only cites three artists: Picasso, Man Ray, and de Chirico. But Masson's untitled ink drawing is given visual primacy through its placement next to the text. Masson's drawing, through its proximity to Morise's article, might have served as the first example of Surrealist visual art, but it should be noted that this piece has been criticized by scholars for its deliberateness, and this work perhaps should be classified in the formal realm of synthetic Cubism rather than Surrealism. See Christopher Green, *Cubism and its Enemies: Modern French Movements and Reactions in French Art, 1916-1928* (London: Yale University Press, 1987) and Clark V. Poling ed. *Surrealist Vision and Technique: Drawings and Collages From the Pompidou Center and the Picasso Museum, Paris* exh. cat. (Michael C. Carlos Museum/ Emory University, 1996).

while also presenting works by artists who were never officially associated with Dada or Surrealism but whose art Breton deemed relevant to contemporary Surrealist art theory. With respect to the works that were most directly associated with the Surrealist idiom, the drawings and paintings of Joan Miró and André Masson serve as the most appropriate examples of proximal automatic experimentation for a formal and procedural comparison with Ernst's frottages.

The one characteristic which is common to the automatic work of Ernst, Masson, and Miró is the systematic separation of *vision* and *realization* through the demarcation of two separate stages in the manifestation of an image. The inclusion of Chirico's art in the 1925 exhibition would have served as a visual reminder of Morise's recent commentary on the problem of Surrealist "expression." While Breton did not directly address graphic automatism in the 1927 edition of "Le surréalisme et la peinture," he later amended his initial prejudice against secondary conscious elaboration in the 1946 edition, writing, "I will concede that it is possible for automatism to enter into the composition of a painting or a poem with a certain degree of premeditation."⁸² However, he goes on to note, "In the field of art, a work can be considered surrealist only in proportion to the efforts the artist has made to encompass the whole psychophysical field (in which the field of consciousness constitutes only a very small segment)."⁸³

⁸² "Surrealism and Painting," trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald and Company Publishers, 1972), 68-70. For a discussion of Breton's concept of automatism from 1924-1927, see Jennifer Mundy "Surrealism and Painting: Describing the Imaginary." *Art History* 10, no. 4 (1987): 53-54.

⁸³ Ibid.

Ernst, Miró, and Masson all provided distinct accounts of their automatic process, but the first steps are all closely connected. For Masson, there was an initial unconscious phase, described as “pure gesture, rhythm, incantation, and, as a result, pure scribbling.”⁸⁴ In the second phase though, “the image (previously latent) claims its rights.”⁸⁵ Similarly, Miró noted, “Forms take reality for me as I work. In other words, rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself or suggest itself under my brush. The form becomes a sign for a woman or a bird as I work.” Miró, using a rhetoric similar to that of Masson, adds, “The first stage is free, unconscious... but the second stage is carefully calculated.”⁸⁶ Ernst provided a similar testimony when replying to the question, “Ou va la peinture?,” in the 1935 issue of the periodical, *Commune*:

No diver knows, before he goes down, what he is going to bring up. Nor can the painter choose his subject... The ideological content, whether manifest or latent, cannot depend on the artist’s conscious will. The development of the artist and that of his work are undeniably, indissolubly linked. If they are not, it is a cheat... Of all he has brought to the surface, the diver will retain only the elements which seem to be real ‘finds.’⁸⁷

For each of these three artists, a work is allegedly begun without any preconceived notions of the final visual result. Following the initial, rapid, and

⁸⁴ *Le rebelle du surréalisme*, “propos sure le surréalisme,” *Mediations*, no. 3 (1961): 173. Quoted in Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images*, trans. Mark Treharne (London: Reaktion Books, 2002): 287.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Quoted in interview with James Johnson Sweeney, “Joan Miró: Comment and Interview,” *Partisan Review* XV, 2 (1948): 208-212. In *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968): 435.

⁸⁷ “Ou va la peinture?,” *Commune* (1935) in *Ecritures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970): 401. Trans. Edward Quinn, *Max Ernst* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1977): 88.

unconscious marks though, the artist re-approaches the work with increased deliberateness and consciously interprets the original forms. Masson's *Dessin automatique* [Fig. 16], from the second issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, was begun with rapid, calligraphic pen strokes, but Masson then discovered distinct figurative imagery and captured the fleeting forms of human torsos, breasts, and whirling, arabesque bird forms that flutter around the edges of the work. The development of Miró's 1925 *Peinture au cirque (Painting of the circus)* [Fig. 17] also bespeaks an initial unconscious stage in which Miró first lay down feathery patches of color and then, with a slightly more steady hand, created flowing, linear shapes that materialized from the first application of paint. Similarly, the final image in Ernst's *Stallion and the Bride of the Wind* [Fig. 18], from *Histoire Naturelle*, resulted from first rubbing graphite over pieces of string underneath the page and subsequently transforming/ consolidating those suggestive lines into two wild, intertwined horses.

The semi-automatic model used by these three artists had, in fact, already been explored to some degree during the 1922 trance sessions and had been given a visual form in the mediumistic drawings of Robert Desnos, who scribbled and scratched ink on a page during periods of half-sleep and then subsequently provided an unmediated response to the products of that first stage [Fig. 19]. In his 1924 manifesto, Breton addressed Desnos's drawings and, speaking of "apparitions" that he recognized in other forms, he wrote:

With a pencil and white sheet of paper to hand, I could easily trace their outlines. Here again it is not a matter of drawing, but simply of tracing. I could thus depict a tree, a wave, a musical instrument, all manner of things of which I am presently incapable of providing even the roughest sketch. I

would plunge into it, convinced that I would find my way again, in a maze of lines which at first glance would seem to be going nowhere. And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something 'never seen.'⁸⁸

Breton's ability to distinguish imagery in a "maze of lines" is connected to collective optical experience, such as the act of children or adults identifying various shapes in the clouds, and the imagery in Ernst's frottages was discovered in a similar manner. As mentioned in the introduction, Ernst first coined the *term*, "frottage," in the 1932 article, "Inspiration to Order," but his first attempt to describe the *method* of frottage appeared in his 1927 dream narratives, "Visions de demi-sommeil."⁸⁹ Recalling a fever-dream he had during his youth, Ernst addressed his earliest exposure to the methods of frottage:

I see before me a panel... representing false mahogany and calling forth associations of organic forms. In front of the panel, a glossy black man is making gestures... This rogue of a fellow wears the turned-up moustaches of my father. After having executed some leaps in slow motion... he smiles and draws from the pocket of his trousers a fat crayon... He sets to work: painting violently he hurriedly traces the black lines on the panel of false mahogany. He quickly imparts to it new forms, forms which are at once surprising and abject. He accentuates the resemblance to ferocious or viscous animals to such a point that he extracts from it living creatures that fill me with horror and anguish.⁹⁰

This account highlights the importance of woodgrain's suggestive patterning, and Ernst would emphasize this more strongly in his later version of the 1925 interaction with the Pornic hotel floorboards. By staring at the floorboards, Ernst encountered a "sudden intensification of [his] visionary capacities" which led to the "hallucinatory succession of

⁸⁸ *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 21.

⁸⁹ *La Révolution Surréaliste*, nos. 9-10 (1927).

⁹⁰ "Beyond Painting," 3.

contradictory images.”⁹¹ By placing paper over the woodgrain and rubbing graphite over the grooves, semi-autonomous forms were revealed which Ernst, following the example of his father, could consciously transform into autonomous compositions. In frottages from the *Histoire Naturelle* cycle, Ernst presents recognizable imagery, discovered through the example of his father’s hurried tracing of organic forms, such as the horses in *The Stallion and the Bride of the Wind*. However, he also includes several frottages, such as *Whip Lashes or Lava-Strings* [Fig. 20], in which there is no recognizable form delineated by the artist’s hand, but rather his created compositions simulate Breton’s “maze of lines” and persuade the viewer to reach his or her own subjective conclusions by reenacting the same investigative steps which Ernst himself first undertook.

The visual exercise of detecting recognizable shapes within clouds or woodgrain had, in addition to a biographical precedent in Ernst’s childhood dream, an existing art historical framework, and Ernst’s later text, “Au delà de la peinture,” called attention to a similar artistic model from the Italian Renaissance. Here, Ernst cited a passage from Leonardo da Vinci’s 16th century *Trattata della Pittura*. In response to Botticelli’s contemptuous distaste for landscape painting and his remark that “by throwing a sponge soaked with different colors against a wall one makes a spot in which may be seen a beautiful landscape,” Leonardo da Vinci praised such a procedure for the suggestions it might offer to the creative faculties of the imagination:

He is right; in such a daub one may certainly find bizarre inventions. I mean to say that he who is disposed to gaze attentively at this spot may discern therein some human heads, various animals, a battle, some rocks,

⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

the sea, clouds, groves, and a thousand other things — it is like the tinkling of a bell which makes one hear what one imagines.⁹²

Ernst's reference to Leonardo's wall in "Au delà de la peinture" helps one better understand Ernst's artistic practice, but its inclusion served additional purposes. Ernst had, in fact, stumbled upon Leonardo's wall earlier in his career, contemporaneously with his experiments in Hertz's print shop. Speaking of his overpaintings, in which he would paint directly on top of found pages from illustrated instructional catalogues, Ernst noted, "It was enough at that time to embellish these catalogue pages, in painting or drawing ... thereby... gently reproducing only that which saw itself in me... Thus I obtained a faithful fixed image of my hallucination and transformed into revealing dramas my most secret desires."⁹³

For Ernst, the initial hallucination, resulting from staring at Leonardo's wall, was mirrored in the moment of inspiration affected by his visual engagement with the catalogue pages, and by locating Leonardo's model in the previous Dada collages, Ernst clearly emphasized the fact that collage had provided the first testing grounds for representing the "fixed image" of a hallucination. Thus, Ernst established his own automatic investigations before the proximal post-manifesto experiments of his colleagues and Desnos's 1922 mediumistic drawings while also paralleling the technique of frottage with his earlier experiments in collage. In "Au delà de la peinture," Ernst reinforced the similarity between frottage and collage, noting, "The bright bridge was flung between those two procedures... The similarity of the two is such that I can,

⁹² Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattata della Pittura*, quoted in "Beyond Painting," Max Ernst, 7.

⁹³ "Beyond Painting," 14.

without changing many words, use the terms employed earlier for the one, to relate how I made the discovery of the other.”⁹⁴ In this sense, frottages are the collaged shadows of objects from the real world. In distinction to Cubist collage, where found objects are fixed directly onto the page, Ernst captures the texture of tactile things through image transfer, and the textured materiality of various, disparate elements are combined to form a semi-automatic assemblage.

For the overpaintings, the *chance* encounter with random illustrated objects provided the spark for the ensuing hallucination, which Ernst consciously interpreted through his painted and drawn additions. Similarly, chance played an important role in the manifestation of the image in frottage, as Ernst could not completely control the initial forms which materialized from the objects placed beneath the page. However, those initial forms and the respective suggestions imposed on one’s unconscious served as points of departure, like the faux mahogany panel that Ernst’s father engaged and the color splotches on the wall that Leonardo transformed, and the interrelationship between these modes of *vision* and *realization* allowed Ernst to describe the gradual emergence of latent imagery in his frottages in a rhetoric akin to his account of collage. Writing about his frottages in *Histoire Naturelle*, Ernst stated:

The drawings thus obtained lost more and more, through a series of suggestions and transmutations that offered themselves spontaneously – in the manner of that which passes for hypnagogic visions – the character of the material interrogated... and took on the aspect of an unhopd-for precision, probably of a sort which revealed the first cause of the obsession, or produced a simulacrum of that cause.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 8.

With frottage, Ernst fashioned a successful polemical retort to Naville's uncompromising stubbornness while providing an answer to Breton and Morise's tentative endorsement of Surrealist visual automatism with a technique which was Surrealist in both its expression and its final appearance, and in the years following the release of Breton's manifesto, the automatic works of Miró, Masson, and Ernst dominated the Surrealist art scene. While the previous section covered the commonalities between the three artists and their procedures though, it is equally important to point to their acute differences, and perhaps the greatest disparity is the direction of *talent*.

Breton's directions for automatic writing, as proposed in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, advise the "traveler" to, "Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else."⁹⁶ However, the poetic results of Breton's automatic recipe seem to be at odds with his devaluation of the poet or painter's talent considering that creativity is deeply ingrained in the direction of talent and authorial control.

When Breton and Soupault first experimented with automatic writing in *Magnetic Fields*, they shut themselves in a room with nothing but blank pages and a pen, translating their thoughts into automatic prose. All lingual experiments and products resulting from the session must be recognized as works stemming directly from individual minds and lacking external agents which could exercise any type of intervention. Granted, the spontaneous issuing of thought in Breton and Soupault's texts was not predetermined, but without a peripheral degree of chance to balance the author's

⁹⁶ *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 30.

input, the final product remains a work wholly created by the poet. In other words, the artist or poet confronted, in this case, with a blank canvas is the singular vehicle through which verbal or visual automatism is transferred.

To a degree, the same conclusions can be drawn from the works of Masson and Miró. Masson, in a retrospective account of his drawings, made no secret of his artistic talents, claiming:

This graphic world is a universe that I create. It is composed of images that fill my expectation, signified by the sheet of white paper. Whence come these imagined forms? They come from my impassioned meditation, an attitude that poses an object, even in its first movement when it seems to be completely sunk in the indetermined.⁹⁷

The first line of Masson's description calls attention to the artist's primary role in the creation of an image; *he* is the creator of his graphic world. Miró, who spoke of hunger-induced hallucinations, among other things, as points of departure for his compositions, would discuss his work in a different rhetoric than that of Masson, but both artists, for the most part, shared a common preliminary step in the production of their art. The first marks on the page or canvas issued directly from the hand of the artist.⁹⁸

While the rubbing technique of frottage might have required Ernst to physically press graphite against the page, the initial generation of shapes and forms should not be mistakenly likened to the *drawing* of Masson and Miró. It is true that frottage and

⁹⁷ *Anatomy of My Universe* (New York: C. Valentin, 1943), ii.

⁹⁸ While it is true that Miró's initial marks often were laid down by his own hand, it should be noted that he occasionally allowed elements from the external world to come into his paintings and exercise their influence: "I even used some spilled blackberry jam in one case as a beginning; I drew carefully around the stains and made them the center of the composition. The slightest thing served me as a jumping-off place in this period." "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview," 435.

automatic drawing/ painting both constitute modes of improvisation in which the image surfaces from a seemingly extraneous *maze of lines*, but, in the works of Masson and Miró, the first marks on the canvas spring from the impulses of the artist regardless of the extent to which they might try to minimize their conscious control. However, the beginning stages of frottage heavily impinge on the accidental. Growing out of his earlier experiments with chance during his involvement with the Dada circles, Ernst's frottages allowed him to lift unpredictable textures from the natural world without fashioning his points of departure with the conventional and authorial technique of *drawing*.

Ernst's cautious avoidance of such introductory, authorial mark-making likely developed from his break with Expressionism and his unwillingness to create works in which psychic improvisation and gestural spontaneity served as the primary starting points, and in conversation with Werner Spies, Ernst confided that when he faces the white sheet of paper he is "seized with a virginity complex."⁹⁹ Spies elaborated on this confession, maintaining:

Ernst needed a medium that would rid him of timidity in the face of what he considers the supreme arrogance: the confrontation of artist and empty canvas... Ernst cannot begin with brush strokes. To overcome his shyness he has to resort to little devices.¹⁰⁰

In short, Ernst's response to automatism in the mid 1920's is indissolubly linked to his notions of artistic creativity. His experiments with frottage indicate an

⁹⁹ Quoted in Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Frottages*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

investigation of psychic activity that questions concepts of image generation. For Ernst, the central problem surrounding artistic practice was always concerned with determining the best way to create an image, and he describes his Surrealist work as the final product of an initial romantic *discovery*, one which minimizes his authorial input. Ernst's written accounts of frottage present the technique as "the graphic equivalent of automatic writing," and he claims that he was able to "look on like a spectator at the birth of his pictures."¹⁰¹ The model of frottage certainly offered a means of discovering imagery, but most of the rubbings are so tightly constructed and detailed that they appear to be more like skillfully guided *collages* of the underlying material than purely automatic creations. As seen in the two similar, yet distinct, variations of *The Dead Man's Meal*, [Figs. 21, 22] Ernst often discovered the same image in different frottages. While both of these works cannot possibly be fully automatic, the technique of frottage did allow Ernst to detect an image out of a seemingly extraneous maze of lines, but he also clearly created frottages that were wholly premeditated. The finished frottage is then not fully automatic but rather a conscious recreation of a previously discovered image – the fixed recreation of a hallucination.

Almost all discussions of Ernst's frottages happily agree that the rubbings are automatic without probing the question of what automatism in the formative years of Surrealism truly entailed. Despite Ernst's retrospective accounts, in which he subtly describes frottage as the most successful translation of graphic automatism during Surrealism's embryonic years, the technique of frottage is complicated in that it is

¹⁰¹ "Inspiration to Order," 25.

partially automatic, yet not automatic at all. Stemming from his experiments with the Dadaist concept of collage and objectively guided chance, Ernst's materials might be *selected* randomly, the paper might be *placed* randomly, but the frottages are not *assembled* randomly. Beginning with his Dadaist works in Cologne and continuing throughout his entire artistic career, Ernst embraced the accidental but refused to ever let chance or gestural spontaneity play the dominant role in artistic creation.

With the technique of frottage, Ernst challenged the contemporary understanding of visual automatism, joining his Surrealist colleagues in a shared investigation but distinguishing himself from the proximal experiments through his individual interpretation and application of chance in the preliminary stages of his work. Thus, the defining factor separating frottage from the aforementioned, alternate mediums is the element of randomness that issued directly from the natural world, and the complex, telling interrelationship between Ernst and nature will be addressed in the following chapter through a closer analysis of select plates from *Histoire Naturelle*.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE STABLE OF THE SPHINX: FROTTAGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD

It is a difficult task to give novelty to what is old, authority to what is new, brilliance to the common-place, light to the obscure, attraction to the stale, credibility to the doubtful, but *nature* to all things and all her properties to *nature*.

-Pliny the Elder, Dedication, *Historia Naturalis*¹⁰²

While living with Paul and Gala Eluard between 1923 and 1924, Max Ernst painted a number of brightly colored murals on the walls of the couple's home in Eaubonne, and the majority of these panels depict anthropomorphic and vegetative scenes of the natural world. Doors and walls were painted in the style of his collage-based, dreamlike works of 1921-1924, and, through the extensive use of trompe l'oeil, Ernst's decorative program playfully and mysteriously reflected his contemporary perception of the animal and plant kingdoms and their association with mankind. Perhaps the most celebrated mural of the Eaubonne cycle, described by Spies as resembling the illusionism and color scheme of Roman wall paintings from Pompeii, shares its title with Ernst's 1926 collection of frottages, *Histoire Naturelle* [Fig. 23].¹⁰³

¹⁰² Pliny the elder, "Preface," *Historia Naturalis* v. I, ed. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938), 11.

¹⁰³ Werner Spies, *Die Rückkehr der schönen Gärtnerin: Max Ernst, 1950-1970* (Köln: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1971).

The *Histoire Naturelle* panel, located in Paul and Gala's bedroom, presents two partitioned spaces. A garden filled with bizarre flora and creatures can be seen on the left and, on the right, a mysterious, hidden space lies beyond a cut-stone wall which recedes into the distance. Several prehistoric reptiles sit atop the garden wall, peering over its edge, and a large beetle/ praying mantis is visible amongst the vertical, plantlike forms which shoot upward. Among these organic forms, leafless trees flail their bare branches, brussel sprout-shaped flowers grow from long stalks, and twisted cacti forms mingle with a giant dandelion.

Given that this panel shares its title with the 1926 collection of frottages, scholars have used this semantic connection to argue for greater relationships between the murals and the rubbings, suggesting that Ernst recycled the title from the wall painting and reused it for his later frottages.¹⁰⁴ However, Béatrix Blavier, in her thesis on the Eaubonne murals, has shown that the title was coined by someone else years after Jeanne Bucher's 1926 publication of Ernst's frottages.¹⁰⁵ In contradistinction to the Eaubonne mural, the title which Ernst used for his frottages and their ensuing exhibition was undeniably intentional and meaningful, and it provides the thematic framework for reading the album of rubbings. Thus, by investigating Ernst's motivation to title his collection accordingly and by looking closely at individual plates as well as the narrative

¹⁰⁴ See Diane Waldman, *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* exh. cat. (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1975).

¹⁰⁵ See Béatrix Blavier, *Max Ernst Murals for the Home of Paul and Gala Eluard, Eaubonne, 1923* (M.A. thesis, Rice University, Houston, TX, 1985), 128. The title of *Histoire Naturelle* was suggested by Robert Valette (Cecile Eluard's husband in the late 1960's) and André François Petit (the art dealer who was facilitating the removal of the paintings from their original support and overseeing their transfer to canvas in collaboration with Gérard Guyomard, the restorer).

developed by the progression of their imagery, Ernst's concept of, and relationship with, the natural world, in addition to a better understanding of the underlying metaphorical content of *Histoire Naturelle*, will be proposed.

Regardless of misleading connections suggested by the communal title, the *Histoire Naturelle* frottages and the Eaubonne panel do share some similarities. Both works present fantastic animal and vegetal forms which spring from primordial earth. However, upon first glance, there are more obvious discrepancies, the most distinctive being the medium and the use of automatism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ernst abandoned conventional oil painting, for a time, in response to Breton's manifesto, and the semi-automatism of frottage allowed him to incorporate stimulus from the external world in order to illuminate the internal. The *Histoire Naturelle* frottages expand association with the natural world beyond iconic representation by actively incorporating indexical representation of material from the natural world. Thus, frottage should be considered as an active model of man's relationship with the universe, and, here, it is important to revisit the influence of Hans Arp in order to better understand Ernst's semi-automatism and its correlation to microcosmic and macrocosmic forces.

Ernst and Arp first met in 1914 at the Werkbundaustellung in Cologne. They lost contact during the First World War, but it was renewed in Cologne in 1919. The first chapter discussed how this postwar reunion provided Ernst with information on the Dada presence in Zurich and also introduced him to Arp's biomorphic ink drawings. While some of Arp's work addressed the concept of objective chance, such as *Rectangles Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, the biomorphic shapes in his *Earthly Forms*

[Fig. 24] series approached the accidental differently. In *Earthly Forms*, Arp took the natural world as his artistic model, and while these works were spontaneous, they were always derived from organic shapes and forms which could be found in nature. Arp's attraction to automatic practice was removed from the graphic automatism of artists like Masson and Miró, who celebrated such a technique for its ability to liberate the unconscious mind. In contradistinction, Arp's automatism was linked to automatic processes, such as breathing, found in the microcosm of the human body, as well as processes found in the natural world.¹⁰⁶ Lynn Gamwell points to Arp's unique approach, noting, "In abandoning himself to chance processes, Arp was connecting with natural forces" which "occur below conscious awareness," as opposed to solely engaging his "Freudian unconscious."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Hans Arp, in his location of automatic processes in both the human body and the natural world, promulgated a theory of art/ life that is similar to the connection between art, the body and the natural world as expressed in East Asian calligraphy. John Hay, in his essay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Value," compares semantic Chinese characters with body structures, speaking of "supporting skeletal structures made beautiful with flesh, and strong with muscle and sinew," and argues that such an interpretation allows one to "grasp kinesthetically the implications of movement, so that they can perceive the tensions and balance within the writing through the same functions within their body." Hay continues to identify the link between Chinese medical theory, art, and philosophy by suggesting, "They all are concepts of energy. It is as a system of energy flow and transformation that Chinese medical theory was most distinctive in its achievements and most fundamentally integrated with the Chinese universe as a whole." John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Value," in *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, eds., Thomas P., Kasulis, Roger T. Aimes, and Wimal Dissanayake (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 75.; For further discussion of the connection between the image and the body in East Asian practice, see also Robert E. Harrist and Wen Fong. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection* exh. cat. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Lynn Gamwell, "Abstract Art with a Cosmic Perspective," in *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science, and the Spiritual*, ed. Lynn Gamwell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 210.

Arp was not interested in recreating a simulacrum of the natural world, rather, he was driven to convey the interconnectedness of its processes. In his retrospective account of *Earthly Forms*, he speaks of “broken branches, roots, grass, and stones” as points of departure from which he subsequently “simplified these forms and united their essence in fluid ovals, symbols of metamorphosis and development of bodies.”¹⁰⁸ He took natural forms such as broken branches and combined them with sprawling landscapes, and, through this fusion, he united the microcosm with the macrocosm.

Arp’s biomorphism served as Ernst’s first automatic model. In these biomorphic ink drawings, Arp was abstracting from nature, and while Ernst’s frottages are more tightly contained than the gestural freedom found in *Earthly Forms*, Ernst was abstracting from nature as well.¹⁰⁹ However, Ernst’s abstraction is different because material from the natural world is transmitted through his hand like accidental electricity. This initially uncontrollable current is subsequently tamed and reconstituted into an image which is abstract but simultaneously retains material traces from the external world. In frottages such as *The Earthquake* (Pl.V) [Fig. 25], varicose veins of leaves give rise to concentric ripples, which, by the title, signify the tremors of an earthquake. Nature’s smallest

¹⁰⁸ Arp, “Signposts,” (1950). In *Arp on Arp*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Viking, 1972), 271.

¹⁰⁹ Here, it should be noted that the difference in medium (The brushed ink of Hans Arp and East Asian calligraphy vs. Ernst’s rubbed lead) does not allow for a full comparison between Ernst’s automatism and Chinese brushwork. For Arp and the Chinese, the brush functions as a gestural extension of the body. Ernst’s *drawing* instrument can similarly be viewed as an extension of his body, however, it is important to reinforce Ernst’s previously mentioned problem with the gestural and emotive spontaneity associated with free-form drawing, as such active image making was connected to his disillusionment with Expressionism. Such a comparison is still worthwhile though, because Ernst, Arp, and Chinese calligraphers recognized the connection between the human body, the natural world, and visual art, and they all allude to this correlation in their respective drawings/ rubbings/ paintings.

elements are transformed and assume the form and character of nature's most powerful forces.

Frottage's commentary on the union of nature's microscopic and macroscopic elements finds a direct parallel with the *Naturphilosophie* of the German Romantics. For the Romantics, there was an intrinsic universality found in the relationship between microscopic fragments of nature and the macrocosm, and they believed that in order to fully comprehend the natural world one must recognize the inseparability of its smallest components from its largest. In regard to this apperception of universality, Nicholas Jardine recognizes in Romantic writing, "nostalgia for the morning of the world when mankind was at one with itself and nature."¹¹⁰ Indeed, the *Naturphilosophen* promulgated a concept of nature in which all of its living elements, encompassing plants, animals, humankind and the cosmos, were considered to be linked, and Ernst's appropriation and modification of this theory in *Histoire Naturelle* will be considered in detail later in the chapter.

First, however, it is important to locate the means by which German Romanticism initially entered Ernst's work after the renewed contact with Arp in Cologne. Scholars have approached the contention that Ernst incorporated German Romanticism into his oeuvre from numerous, disparate angles.¹¹¹ For this project, Jane Hancock's excellent

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Jardine, "Naturphilosophie and the Kingdoms of Nature," in *Cultures of Natural History*, eds., Nicholas Jardine, James Secord and E.C. Spary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 231.

¹¹¹ See also David Hopkins, "Max Ernst and Romanticism," *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 9 (University of Iowa, 1979), 48-61; Karin von Maur, "Max Ernst and Romanticism: Between the

account of Hans Arp's connection to *Naturphilosophie* seems to fit with the role his art played in provoking Ernst's interest in Romantic theories about nature. Hancock argues that the Romantics affected Arp's "rejection of *logic* in favor of an intuitive understanding of the natural world."¹¹² Arp celebrated nature for its balance of irregularity and supreme order. His critique of human reason resulted from the belief that mankind's rationality was inextricably opposed to primal nature, and his written accounts about his work detail caustic rejection of an over-reliance on logic. In *On my Way*, Arp writes:

I wanted to find another order, another value for man in nature. He was no longer to be the measure of all things, no longer to reduce everything to his own measure, but on the contrary, all things and man were to be like nature, without measure. I wanted to create new appearances, extract new forms from man.¹¹³

The initial, proto-Surrealist revolt against rationalism and excessive reason was inaugurated during postwar Dadaism¹¹⁴ and sustained through Surrealism, as Breton, in his 1924 manifesto, noted:

We are still living under the reign of logic... In this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest.

Lyrical Celebration of Nature and the Aesthetics of Horror," in *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* exh. cat., ed. Werner Spies (London: Prestel, 1991), 341-350.

¹¹² Jane Hancock, "The Philosophy in Arp's Formal Language: Towards an Interpretation," in *Arp 1886-1966*, eds., Jane Hancock and Stephanie Poley (1987), 66.

¹¹³ Arp, *On my Way* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 47.

¹¹⁴ Tristan Tzara gave a voice to the Dadaist attack on logic and reason in his 1918 "Dada Manifesto," *Dada 3* (1918), in which he claimed, "Logic is a complication. Logic is always wrong... Its chains kill, it is an enormous centipede stifling independence. Married to logic, art would live in incest, swallowing, engulfing its own tail..." In *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 80.

The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience.¹¹⁵

In 1919, Arp informed Ernst of the Zurich Dadaist circle and their new emphasis on irrationality, and Ernst immediately responded to this concept with his experiments in Hertz's print shop. The resulting parodic critique of rationalism is apparent in select diagrammatic prints such as *Hypertrophic Trophy*, in which Ernst subverts technical logic by creating functionally impotent machines. Contemporaneously, Ernst also began to address the authority of scientific methodology, and this tactic is apparent in his account of the discovery of collage.

I was struck by the obsession which held under my gaze the pages of an illustrated catalogue showing objects designed for anthropologic, microscopic, psychologic, mineralogic, and paleontologic demonstration. There I found brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me.¹¹⁶

Here, Ernst credits scientific sources as a wellspring for his inspiration, but it was the *absurdity* of the educational catalogue's presentation that affected the "sudden intensification of the visionary faculties."¹¹⁷ Ernst absorbed this absurdity and reformed it with artistic intentionality, and such a reaction offers insight into his interest in undermining both the scientific authority and the taxonomic principles associated with the *Lehrmittel* catalogues and other encyclopedic works.

¹¹⁵ Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 9.

¹¹⁶ "Beyond Painting," 14.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Ernst had explored taxonomic issues in his 1921 collage, *Microgramme Arp 1:25.000* [Fig. 26], in which he appropriated a wall chart on geology, reconfigured its composition, and included a short poem which randomly lists a number of Hans Arp's indiscriminate attributes.¹¹⁸ David Hopkins claims that this piece exploits "structural compartmentalization to produce an internal organizational logic."¹¹⁹ Legge suggests that in this work, "things ordered according to the particular requirements of selling are recognized by Ernst as being inherently parodic of higher scientific categories and are overpainted to establish further arbitrary relations and categories."¹²⁰ Legge additionally links Ernst's 1921 collage to Hans Arp's *Introduction in Histoire Naturelle*, recognizing in this dialogue a shared cynicism for scientific authority. Arp's preface to Ernst's natural history takes the form of automatic prose, inserting the poetic titles which Ernst fixed to his frottages into a semantic whirlwind of incongruous imagery.¹²¹ Arp's introduction additionally responds to the encyclopedic critique that Ernst proposed in his

¹¹⁸ See Ralph Ubl, *Prähistorische Zukunft: Max Ernst und die Ungleichzeitigkeit des Bildes* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 20-25.

¹¹⁹ *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 161.

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Legge, "Novalis's Fossils, Zeuxis's Grapes, Freud's Flowers: Max Ernst's Natural History," 151.

¹²¹ "Scarecrows with volcanoes and geysers in their buttonhole show cases of eruptions displays of lava string systems of solar currency labeled abdomen walls razed by poets the palettes of the caesars thoroughly still (and dead) lives the stables of the sphinxes the eyes of the man turned to stone while squinting at sodom the scars of... Enter the continents without knocking but with a muzzle of filigree... The marine sky has been decorated by expressionist paperhangers who have hung a shawl with frost-flowers on the zenith." Hans Arp, "Introduction," in *Histoire Naturelle* (1926), reprinted in *On my Way*, Hans Arp (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 38. The titles which Arp references in this quoted passage are *Scarecrows*, *Whiplashes or Lava-strings*, *Systems of Solar Coinage*, *Shaving the Walls*, *The Palette of Caesar*, *In the Stable of the Sphinx*, *The Scars*, *Come into the Continents*, and *The Shawl with Flowers of Hoar-Frost*.

1921 collage by poking fun at the seriousness of scientific formats and systematic methodology:

This introduction contains the pseudo-introduction, the original, the variants of the original, the pseudo-original as well as variants of the pseudo-original, the apocrypha, and the incorporation of all these texts in an original apocryphum with apocoped whiskers as well as fifty calcinated medals and fifty suns of fifty years because the medal rises.¹²²

While Ernst and Arp both demonstrated a sarcastic skepticism for rational scientific methods, they did not completely disregard all sense of logic and order. Rather, they accepted the fact that the universe had its own organizational logic but that it was incomparable to inferior human reason.¹²³ The Romantics similarly acknowledged the inherent order of the natural world, and Jardine suggests that *Naturphilosophen* sought to better understand this concept by aiming at a “total history, one that would encompass the entire differentiation of the cosmos from original oneness, through the formation of the solar system and the earth, the proliferation of the three kingdoms of nature..., to the culmination in humankind.”¹²⁴ Ernst’s *Histoire Naturelle* is similarly interested in exploring the derivation of the universe and its natural kingdoms, and, through its title and imagery, it is connected to previous natural histories which had also dealt with an

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ David Hopkins discusses the concept of universal order in *Histoire Naturelle* through an analysis of Ernst’s use of geometry. In works such as *The Sea and the Rain*, Hopkins implies that the “literal emergence of insistently man-made geometrical forms out of frottages... suggests that a Platonic order might ironically emerge as the ‘unconscious life’ to be elicited from a personalized bestiary or *Histoire Naturelle*.” *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). 154.

¹²⁴ Jardine, “*Naturphilosophie* and the Kingdoms of Nature,” 232. See also Alexander Gode, *Natural Science in German Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).

analogous search for origins and respective categorization. Here, it is important to briefly consider those earlier works with which Ernst was familiar in order to situate his cycle of frottages within the larger context of natural history.

The implications of Ernst's title, *Natural History*, indicate an interest in taxonomy and the subdivision of natural phenomena from universals to particulars, an interest that goes back to Pliny the Elder. Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* (A.D. 77-79), containing an exhaustive breadth of subjects, is perhaps the earliest model for the modern encyclopedia, and Pliny aimed for comprehensiveness in his multivolume treatise on nature.¹²⁵ Denis Diderot's eighteenth century *Encyclopédie* took Pliny's example but imbued it with the absolutism of the Enlightenment, a period during which reason was promulgated as the principle authority.¹²⁶ The theme of natural history was addressed by many artists, poets and philosophers, and Ernst certainly was aware of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's morphological plant studies in *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*¹²⁷; Edgar

¹²⁵ Pliny the elder, *Historia Naturalis* v. I-X, ed. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938); See also Mary Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Pliny the Elder and Man's Unnatural History," *Greece and Rome* 37, Second Series, no. 1 (1990): 80-96.

¹²⁶ See also James Llana, "Natural History and the *Encyclopédie*," *Journal of the History of Biology* 33, no. 1 (2000): 1-25; George, Boas, "The Arts in the *Encyclopédie*," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23, no. (1964): 97-107.

¹²⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (1790). trans. Gordon L. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). In Goethe's text, he argues that contemporary plant organs and animal vertebra are transformations of earlier fauna and vertebra. See also Matthew Bell, *Goethe's Naturalistic Anthropology: Man and Other Plants* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); H. B. Nisbet, *Goethe and the Scientific Tradition* (London: The Institute for Germanic Studies, University of London, 1972). For a discussion of the influence of *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* on André Masson in the 1930's, see Gavin Parkinson, "Emotional Fusion with the Animal Kingdom: Notes Toward a Natural History of Surrealism," in *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, eds. Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 262- 287.

Allen Poe's *The Conchologist's First Book*¹²⁸; Odilon Redon's *Les Origines*¹²⁹; and Ernst Haeckel's *Kunstformen der Natur*.¹³⁰

Elizabeth Legge rightly notes, "Ernst assumes a pedigree of German intellectual history when he turns to natural history."¹³¹ It would be fascinating to follow Ernst's

¹²⁸ The complete title of Poe's book is, *The Conchologist's First Book : a system of testaceous malacology, arranged expressly for the use of schools, in which the animals, according to Cuvier, are given with the shells: a great number of new species added and the whole brought up, as accurately as possible, to the present condition of the science* (Philadelphia: Haswell, Barrington and Haswell, 1840). See also Liliane Weissberg, "Vom Naturalienkabinett zur Ästhetik der Moderne: Die Marginalien Edgar Allan Poes," in *Die Erfindung der Natur: Max Ernst, Paul Klee, Wols und das surreale Universum* exh. cat., eds. Karin Orchard and Jörg Zimmermann (Hannover: Rombach Verlag, 1994), 90-97.

¹²⁹ Redon's *Les Origines* has been compared to *Histoire Naturelle* by scholars such as Dario Gamboni and William Rubin, who argue for the similarity of their techniques (Redon occasionally placed objects underneath paper in order to capture the texture beneath. Gamboni additionally establishes Redon's influence on André Masson's automatism, which can be similarly be connected to that of Ernst). William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art* (New York: Abrams, 1969); Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images*, trans. Mark Treharne (London: Reaktion Books, 2002). Pamela Kort's essay on Redon and Darwin is in the same catalogue as her essay on Ernst, and it seems clear that Redon and Ernst were both responding directly to Darwin's theory of evolution by creating works in which plants, animals, and humans shared physical characteristics. Pamela Kort, "Making Things Real: Odilon Redon and Jean Carriès," in *Darwin: Art and the Search for Origins* exh. cat., eds., Pamela Kort and Max Hollein (Cologne: Wienand, 2009), 154-171.

¹³⁰ Haeckel was an enthusiastic supporter of Darwinian theory and combined art with scientific practice in his extremely detailed renderings of specimens which he used for classroom teaching. See Marsha Morton, "From *Monera* to Man: Ernst Haeckel, *Darwinismus*, and Nineteenth Century German Art," in *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, eds., Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 59-91; Robert J. Richards, "The Tragic Sense of Ernst Haeckel: His Scientific and Artistic Struggles," in *Darwin: Art and the Search for Origins* exh. cat., 92-125. Pamela Kort, in her essay on Ernst and *Histoire Naturelle*, identifies the format of *Kunstformen der Natur* as the collection of frottage's immediate forerunner, and she locates a similarity between the sequential numbering of the plates in both works. See Pamela Kort, "Arnold Böcklin, Max Ernst, and the Debate around Origins and Survivals in Germany and France," in *Darwin: Art and the Search for Origins* exh. cat., 24-53.

¹³¹ Legge, "Novalis's Fossils, Zeuxis's Grapes, Freud's Flowers: Max Ernst's Natural History," 149.

example and engage the interconnection between *Histoire Naturelle* and these related works more critically, however, retracing all of the links between Ernst and his predecessors is beyond the scope of this project. Some conclusions can be reached though, and, generally speaking, Ernst, by situating his natural history in dialogue with those notable works that predate his own, fashions a commentary on, and digression from, the older models. He shares the same enthusiastic interest in taking nature as the subject for a discursive project, but he lampoons the rational foundations of previous encyclopedic works. *Histoire Naturelle* tries to find the balance between the rational and the irrational, but this distinction is not so simple. Thus, the pressing question concerns Ernst's concept of exactly what a natural history should constitute, and in order to address this issue, it is necessary to look closely at the *Histoire Naturelle* frottages, both individually and collectively.

Histoire Naturelle is not only Ernst's first collection of mature frottages, but the album has also been recognized by Evan Maurer as constituting Ernst's first collage novel.¹³² In 1929, Ernst released *La Femme 100 Têtes*, in which the traditional format of the written book was sublated through a highly illegible, or nonexistent, narrative constructed solely through the succession of collaged engravings with poetic, but often obtuse and uninformative, titles. Similarly, *Histoire Naturelle*, through its sequence of imagery and vague, ambiguous titling, does not present an obvious narrative, but, in

¹³² Evan M. Maurer, "Images of Dream and Desire: The Prints and Collage Novels of Max Ernst," in *Max Ernst: Beyond Surrealism*, ed. Robert Rainwater (New York: The New York Public Library & Oxford University Press, 1986), 37-92.

contrast to the later novels, *Histoire Naturelle* does suggest a more readily comprehensible chronology.

Ernst's natural history presents cosmological, vegetal, and animal forms on the empty stages of a frozen landscape. Werner Spies defines the progression of imagery by separating various plates into groups which advance, for the most part, in the following order: 1) cosmogonic-cosmic sheets 2) plant-like sheets 3) animal sheets 4) anthropomorphic sheets 5) human, mystical sheet.¹³³ In *The Sea and the Rain* (Pl. I) [Fig. 27], a storm rages in the primeval waters of creation. In *The False Positions* (Pl. XIII) [Fig. 26], signs of life first appear in small plant forms that shoot straight up from the ground, and these initial vegetal forms develop into the mature, bushy foliage seen in *The Scarecrows* (Pl. XIII) [Fig. 28]. Next, a variety of anthropomorphic forms emerge, beginning with insects, such as the dragonfly in *Teenage Lightning* (Pl. XXIV) [Fig. 30], and then advancing to animalistic beings, such as the stoic rhinoceros with wide leaves sprouting from its legs in *The Dead Man's Meal* (Pl. XXVIII) [Fig. 21]. Finally, the frottage cycle concludes with *Eve, the only one to Remain ours* (Pl. XXXIV) [Fig. 31], which presents a mysterious woman with her back turned toward the viewer.

This progression of imagery, ranging from the geological/ cosmological birth of the world to the generation of mineral, botanical, and animal forms, can and should be read as a narrative diagram of evolutionary development. Ernst demonstrates his concept

¹³³ Spies, *Frottages*, 15. Jürgen Pech similarly divides the sheets into five successive groups: 1) Naturkräfte 2) Vegetative Landschaften und fossile Räume 3) Kreaturen und Chimären 4) Visionäre Augen 5) Die 'unsichtbare' Frau. "Frottage - Modifikation einer Technik im Surrealismus," in *Max Ernst "Histoire Naturelle" Frottagen* (Stadt Brühl: Max-Ernst-Kabinett, 1983).

of evolutionary ontogeny by recognizing the interconnectedness of all living forms, akin to the principles of Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, and by suggesting that humans, regardless of their arrogant identification as earth's superior species, are living in world that is dominated by natural forces, vegetation, and other animals. Reading *Histoire Naturelle* in such a way recalls Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection and evolution, first proposed in his revolutionary text of 1859, *The Origin of Species*, and, thus, it is important to consider the significance of Darwin's theories in relation to the overall Surrealist objective in order to better understand Ernst's aesthetic and ideological intentions in *Histoire Naturelle*.¹³⁴

Darwin's theory of evolution, which deserves more than a few sentences of explanation, can nonetheless be summarized as an organic, biological model for the existence of living organisms as opposed to a metaphysical, esoteric concept. His premise assumes that there is always a degree of variation in the characteristics of plants and animals within the same species. Organisms will reproduce, but there will not be enough resources to sustain and accommodate all of their offspring. As a result, a competition for those available resources ensues, and through the process of *natural*

¹³⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species* (1859). Reprint (New York: New American Library, 1958). Pamela Kort also suggests that *Histoire Naturelle* responds to Darwin's theory of evolution, and she defends this claim by challenging the dismissive statements by Charlotte Stokes and Werner Spies which denied that the sources from which Ernst took collaged material carried meaning beyond aesthetic taste. Kort suggests that Ernst did not only select imagery based on its aesthetic appeal but that he purposefully engaged numerous sources that either directly responded, or more subtly alluded, to Darwin's theory, such as periodicals like *La Nature*, and 19th century popular science books and science fiction novels. Pamela Kort, "Arnold Böcklin, Max Ernst, and the Debate around Origins and Survivals in Germany and France," in *Darwin: Art and the Search for Origins* exh. cat.; Charlotte Stokes, "The Scientific Methods of Max Ernst: His use of Scientific Subjects from *La Nature*," *The Art Bulletin* 62, no. 3 (1980): 453-465; Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages, The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*.

selection, only the strongest organisms survive to pass on their genetic material. In a gradual process, spanning generations, earlier life forms from specific plant and animal species will *evolve* into different, albeit related, forms, affected by changes in the environment and natural selection.

Darwin argued against the notion that all contemporary life forms were to be viewed as perfect realizations of an initial moment of conception from a spiritual Creator.¹³⁵ Instead, he maintained that no organism had a permanently fixed identity, and this supposition allowed for the possibility of *metamorphosis*. At once, there is a clear parallel between Darwin's theory of evolution and the Surrealist's pursuit and celebration of *transformative* processes, in which objects could be stripped of their initial signifying roles and assume new meanings. Here, it is important to establish the likely means by which Darwin's theory first entered the Surrealist consciousness, and in order to do so, it is necessary to consider a 19th century text which, upon its discovery by André Breton and Philippe Soupault, planted the seeds that would later form the roots of the Surrealist movement.

Soupault, in his memoirs, recalled the day in 1917 when he discovered a copy of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, written by Isidore Ducasse (more commonly known as Comte

¹³⁵ Darwin was a devout Christian, and while his theory of evolution challenged previous theological concepts of Creationism, he opted to adjust his religious beliefs rather than completely abandoning his faith. He did do by suggesting that there was a God who had created the earliest forms of life, but after this initial act of creation, the processes of evolution and natural selection took over. See Phillip R. Sloan, "The Sense of Sublimity": Darwin on Nature and Divinity," *Osiris* 16, 2nd series, Science in Theistic Contexts: Cognitive Dimensions (2001): 251-269.

de Lautréamont) in 1869, in the mathematics section of a Parisian bookstore.¹³⁶ After reading it with enthusiasm and sharing it with Breton, who echoed his enthusiasm, Lautréamont's poetic rhetoric and disregard of both literary and social conventions became a model for emulation. *Les Chants de Maldoror* chronicles the tragic and disturbing journey of Maldoror, a disfigured, monstrous man – neither fitting into the category of protagonist nor antagonist – who wanders the earth and is trapped in an endless battle with both God and his own psyche. Maldoror commits horrifying acts of violence, but is blissfully aware of his evil deeds: “My reason never abandons me, as I have just claimed to deceive you. And when I commit a crime, I know what I am doing: I did not want to do anything else!”¹³⁷ Lautréamont's presentation of a man who speaks and acts upon his most basic, animalistic desires certainly corresponded to the Surrealist's support of the Freudian liberation of repressed desires.

The Surrealists additionally celebrated *Les Chants de Maldoror* for its unorthodox utilization of analogy and simile. Lautréamont would call something “y” but then compare it to, or associate it with, something seemingly unrelated or contradictory. This tactic likely inspired the comments Breton made in the preface to Ernst's 1921 Parisian exhibition, in which he championed the “marvelous faculty of attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience; of bringing them

¹³⁶ Philippe Soupault, *Philippe Soupault* (Paris: P. Seghers, 1957).

¹³⁷ Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1869) trans. Paul Knight (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 110.

together and drawing a spark from their contact.”¹³⁸ Ernst elaborated on this concept and expressed his admiration for Lautréamont in a number of different ways, first textually implicating him in “Inspiration to Order,” in which Ernst notes that collage:

amounts to the exploiting of the fortuitous encounter upon a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities (this being a paraphrase and generalization of the celebrated Lautréamont quotation, “It was as beautiful as the chance meeting upon a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella.”)¹³⁹

While numerous studies have pointed to the undeniable influence of Lautréamont’s text on the trajectory of Surrealism, Anna Balakian was, perhaps, the first scholar to seriously consider how *Les Chants de Maldoror* related to Darwin’s 1859 publication of *The Origin of Species* and what the implications of such a relationship might entail for Surrealism.¹⁴⁰ She correctly observes that Lautréamont, while never directly mentioning Darwin’s theory, was writing *Les Chants de Maldoror* in the years after the translation of Darwin’s 1859 text into French and during the heated French debate spurred by the controversial evolutionary text.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ André Breton, “Max Ernst,” in *What is Surrealism?: Collected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 15-16.

¹³⁹ “Inspiration to Order,” 21. Ernst also recalled this same Lautréamont quote in “Au delà de la Peinture” and again referenced him in “Max Ernst’s Favorite Poets and Painters of the Past,” *View 2* (April 1, 1942).

¹⁴⁰ Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959).

¹⁴¹ Balakian points to a particular statement from *Les Chants de Maldoror* and suggests that Lautréamont was thinking of Darwin when he wrote, “As I write this, new tremors are traversing the intellectual atmosphere: all we need is the courage to face them.” *Ibid.*, 27.

Gavin Parkinson, in a 2009 essay, offers his insight on the effect of Darwin on Lautréamont, noting that *Les Chants de Maldoror* is, “heavily populated by species of animals, humans, and plants furiously cross-fertilizing in a universe in which the kingdoms of man, God, and beast intermingle at war and in love.”¹⁴² Indeed, Lautréamont filled his text with an impressive variety of disparate life forms and demonstrates a formidable understanding of scientific and zoological terminology. David Rose, a mycological enthusiast, claims that the text boasts, “approximately 70 botanical, 34 entomological, 60 ornithological, 106 zoological, 11 mycological, and 9 fabulous taxa.”¹⁴³

Ernst’s interest in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, and the homage he paid to Lautréamont in *Histoire Naturelle*, was likely inspired by Lautréamont’s fantastical taxonomy, and Ernst similarly fashioned poetic titles for his frottages, often unrelated to the respective image and probably prompted by Lautréamont’s contradictory language, in place of the scientific terminology normally associated with encyclopedic classification (example: *The Dead Man’s Meal* refers to the reticent rhinoceros). *Histoire Naturelle* also embodies Ernst’s reaction to both Darwin’s and Lautréamont’s stance on the biological relationship between humans and animals. Lautréamont, in his introduction to *Les Chants de Maldoror*, calls attention to the reader’s bestial, animalistic characteristics:

¹⁴² Gavin Parkinson, “Emotional Fusion with the Animal Kingdom: Notes Toward a Natural History of Surrealism,” in *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, eds. Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 274.

¹⁴³ David Rose, “The Mycologically Strange: Fungi and Myxomycetes in Surrealism, Fantasy, and Science Fiction,” *Fungi* 2, no. 1 (2009): 26.

Reader, perhaps it is hatred you wish me to invoke at the outset of this work! What makes you think that you will not sniff – drenched in numberless pleasures... with your proud nostrils wide and thin, as you turn over on your belly like a shark, in the beautiful black air...- its red emanations. I assure you, they will delight the two shapeless holes of your hideous muzzle...¹⁴⁴

By highlighting the animalistic, primal nature of man, Lautréamont not only engages Darwin's claim that human beings had evolved from earlier life forms but also teasingly provokes readers by implying that their bestial genealogy will encourage them to actually enjoy the brutal and immoral actions of Maldoror. Ernst makes a similar insinuation by placing the frottaged image of Eve at the end of the *Histoire Naturelle* cycle. Eve, representing all of mankind, is physically connected and related to the hybrid creatures depicted in the previous plates. She is a descendant of monsters, and, with her back turned away from the viewer, how can one distinguish her true form? Perhaps her face displays the same "hideous muzzle" which Lautréamont associated with his readers.

It seems likely that Ernst's exposure to Lautréamont before 1925 invigorated his curiosity of evolutionary theory, transformation, and the origins of mankind. Anna Balakian, while not directly locating the Darwinism of *Les Chants de Maldoror* in *Histoire Naturelle*, does describe Lautréamont's text in a manner that links it to Ernst's natural history, noting, "the primary concern of the author [Lautréamont] is the reorganization of the living world, biologically integrated and by the same token bereft of the *moral supremacy of man*."¹⁴⁵ Darwin's theory had shaken the foundations of

¹⁴⁴ *Les Chants de Maldoror*, 30.

¹⁴⁵ Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*, 27.

religious Creationism and affected an international philosophical debate. The suggestion that man had descended from apes in turn meant that man had not been formed from God's true image, and the belief that human beings might not have directly come into existence by the hand of the Creator prompted concern and a necessary reevaluation of previous religious dogmatism.

In the *Histoire Naturelle* frottages, Ernst responds to the philosophical implications of Darwinian theory, critiquing Creationism through the semi-automatic procedure of rubbing. In his 1934 essay, "Was ist Surrealismus?," Ernst adamantly sought to downplay the privileging of artistic talent, declaring, "The fairy-tale of the artist's creativity is western culture's last superstition, the sad remnants of the myth of creation."¹⁴⁶ The process of frottage can thus be read as a metaphor for Ernst's commentary on the origin of mankind and the genesis of earthly life forms. As noted in the previous chapter, Ernst does not assume the role of an all-powerful, elevated creator when he begins a work but, instead, minimizes his authorial control through objectively guided chance. The final image, which Ernst discovers gradually, develops as a result of its relationship with proximal suggested forms, similar to the evolution of organisms based on their relationship with their environment. Frottage appropriates a visual model of Darwin's natural selection, in which the strongest image prevails.

Elizabeth Legge, in the concluding statement of her 1993 article, summarizes her account of Ernst's technique of frottage and its application in *Histoire Naturelle* with the following claim: "Finally, what Max Ernst seems to have discovered in *his* book, is that

¹⁴⁶ Max Ernst, "Was ist Surrealismus?," *Max Ernst* exh. cat. (Zurich: Kunsthaus, Oct. 11- Nov. 4, 1934) trans. Gabriele Bennett, in *Surrealists on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard, 134.

there is nothing *natural* about a natural history.”¹⁴⁷ The pressing question, therefore, is whether or not Max Ernst endeavored to create a work so completely displaced from the realms of possibility that he would have agreed with Legge’s bold allegation, and, for the author of this text, the answer is a resounding no. Granted, *Histoire Naturelle* contains veiled criticism of earlier natural histories and taxonomic projects whose aim was a comprehensive categorization of natural elements, and perhaps such a critique indicates Ernst’s disapproval of the *unnaturalness* found in those preexisting texts. However, *Histoire Naturelle* proposes a visual and symbolic program that is wholly natural in its associated artistic technique, its imagery, and its message.¹⁴⁸

Legge’s emphatic assertion that *Histoire Naturelle* is unnatural partly refers to the apparently impossible creatures and vegetation to which Ernst imparts form and breathes life into. Select plates depict chimerical, mythological beasts, such as *In the Stable of the Sphinx* [Fig. 32], in which the physical traits of avian and reptilian specimens are combined to form an autonomous hybrid. Such improbable imagery finds its parallel in the strange, aberrant zoology of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Lautréamont describes

¹⁴⁷ “Novalis’s Fossils, Zeuxis’s Grapes, Freud’s Flowers: Max Ernst’s Natural History.” *Art History* 16 (1993): 169.

¹⁴⁸ Legge’s claim that *Histoire Naturelle* is unnatural is at odds with the opinions presented in this thesis, but it is reasonable to assume that her definition of “nature/ natural” differs from my own. Insofar as automatism can be understood as a *natural* model, the last chapter showed how frottage straddled both sides of the automatic fence, existing as a technique which incorporated semi-consciousness but clearly gave priority to deliberateness and conscious control. Perhaps Legge was suggesting that *Histoire Naturelle* is unnatural because the technique of frottage is not wholly natural (not wholly automatic). However, her article is concerned with *Histoire Naturelle*’s iconography and barely addresses the theory behind Surrealist automatism. Regardless of Legge’s exact definition of nature, her concluding sentence is misleading and does little to strengthen or secure her argument, and this thesis aims to present a more complete definition of nature according to Ernst’s artistic technique, imagery, and intended message.

“scorched elephants” with “burning wings” and “legions of winged octopi.”¹⁴⁹ Legge dismisses such fantastic organisms as mere inventions of the poet’s or author’s imagination, but Darwin’s theory of evolution provides an alternative, more accommodating method of interpretation.

Ernst’s imagery in *Histoire Naturelle* gains credibility through the *immediacy* of its presentation, and while individuals such as Legge might relegate such visuals to implausible fantasy, Ernst’s incorporation of Darwinian theory allows him to exhibit images that might initially seem fantastically inconceivable but simultaneously provide an intellectual and informed commentary on the science of evolution and natural transformation. Who can say for sure whether or not such an animal with a bird’s head and reptilian feet (*In the Stable of the Sphinx*) might have existed in the distant past or might emerge in the distant future? In light of Darwin’s concept of evolutionary metamorphosis, is it not possible that elephants or octopi might someday have wings?

Histoire Naturelle is a Romantic campaign for the unity of all living things that celebrates the Darwinian potentiality of new, unimaginable vegetal and animal forms. In addition to the aforementioned animal chimeras with hybrid characteristics of multiple animals, Ernst also suggests the possibility of organisms with hybrid characteristics of both *plants* and animals. The inspiration for Ernst’s union of plant and animal was perhaps affected by a passage from *Les Chants de Maldoror* which assumes new significance here. Lautréamont writes:

An enormous mushroom with umbelliferous stalks is growing on my [Maldoror] nape, as on a dunghill. Sitting on a shapeless piece of

¹⁴⁹ *Les Chants de Maldoror*, 86, 114.

furniture, I have not moved my limbs now for four centuries. My feet have taken root in the ground; up to my belly, they form a sort of tenacious vegetation, full of filthy parasites; this vegetation no longer has anything in common with other plants, nor is it flesh. And yet my heart beats.¹⁵⁰

Lautréamont goes on to describe the other animals, such as snakes, hedgehogs, crabs, and toads, who take residence in Maldoror's altered, decaying body, and, all together, the community of various life forms becomes a giant, synthetic organism. The second-to-last line of the passage is the most telling, as the lower half of Maldoror, over the centuries, has been transformed into "tenacious vegetation," which is neither plant nor flesh, but something in between.¹⁵¹ Maldoror now belongs to both the animal and the plant kingdoms.

This biological fusion of plant and animal finds a direct correlation with select imagery in *Histoire Naturelle*. In *The Dead Man's Meal*, for example, Ernst uses the grooves in wooden boards to create a type of stage, and a rhinoceros, with broad leaves stemming from its legs, emerges as an extension of the wooden stage's undulating striations. The rhinoceros, formed from leaves and wood, is neither plant nor flesh, and resultantly shares its condition with Maldoror. While the rhinoceros can certainly be read as both plant and animal though, there is another possible interpretation of this plate which calls upon Darwin's concept of mimesis.

While Darwin did not suggest that animals would actually assume *genetic* characteristics of flora and fauna, he argued that the natural world was filled with plants

¹⁵⁰ *Les Chants de Maldoror*, 160.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

and animals that exercised mimicry or imitation as a survival tactic. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin notes:

Insects often resemble for the sake of protection various objects, such as green or decayed leaves, dead twigs, bits of lichen, flowers, spines, excrement of birds, and living insects... The resemblance is wonderfully close, and is not confined to color, but extends to form...¹⁵²

Margot Norris, in her study of Darwin's relationship with Kafka and Nietzsche, quotes this passage more extensively, for reasons different from those in this paper, but she correctly observes the monumental consequence of Darwin's breakthrough: "that imitation belongs to the realm of nature rather than culture, to the inhuman as well as the human."¹⁵³ The implications of Darwin's discovery have several effects on Ernst's imagery in *Histoire Naturelle*. The wooden patterning apparent in the rhinoceros's skin can now be read as naturally occurring camouflage. Works such as *The Origin of the Clock* (Pl. XXVI) [Fig. 33] similarly point to such chameleonic acts of mimicry, evidenced by the bird's imitation of the bark surrounding it, perhaps as an attempt to remain invisible to predators through environmental adaptation. Darwin's notion that mimesis was intrinsically linked to nature also provides another, alternative lens through

¹⁵² Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 205.

¹⁵³ Margot Norris, "Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, and the Problem of Mimesis," *MLN* 95, no. 5 (1980): 1232. The issue of natural imitation would later be addressed by Roger Caillois in his 1934 essay on praying mantises and his 1935 text on mimicry, which was published in the 'natural history' issue of *Minotaure*. Roger Caillois, "La mante religieuse: de la Biologie à la Psychanalyse," *Minotaure* 5 (1934): 23-26; Roger Caillois, "Le côté nocturne de la nature: Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire," *Minotaure* 7 (1935): 5-10. For a discussion concerning issues of mimicry and metamorphosis within Surrealism, see Joyce Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin and Surrealism in the 1930s," *Modernism/modernity* 16, no. 1 (2008): 61-86.

which Ernst's *Histoire Naturelle* frottages can be viewed, as select plates directly address the dialectical relationship between optical illusion and tactile reality.

As previously discussed in the second chapter, Ernst introduced his frottages as a polemical response to the post-manifesto disillusion with veristic, trompe l'oeil painting. Trompe l'oeil adopts the *real* for its model and attempts to illusionistically recreate a visual representation of the *tactile* on canvas with brush and paint, respectively. Ernst cleverly engages trompe l'oeil in works such as *Shaving the Walls* (Pl. XXX) [Fig. 34], which depicts vertical wooden planks with a leafy sprig tenuously rising in the background. Here, Ernst presents the unadulterated materiality of the woodgrain. In contradistinction to those plates in which the interrogated objects undergo a type of transmogrification and assume new forms, there is no transformation present in *Shaving the Walls*, but rather the woodgrain has been transferred, almost photographically, from the natural world directly to the page, retaining both its original texture and identity. Furthermore, Werner Spies suggests that, "the title of the sheet implies the technical process of frottage."¹⁵⁴ The shaving and scraping suggested in the title implies a reductive process. Here, Ernst assumes the role of the archaeologist, and, through his excavation, he brushes away the opaque whiteness of the blank page and reveals the fossilized shapes hidden underneath. This metaphorical *reduction* is also evidenced by Ernst's removal of the line which separates the *real* from the *illusionary*.

André Breton, in "Le surréalisme et la peinture," vaguely reflected on Ernst's simultaneous circumvention and espousal of illusionism:

¹⁵⁴ Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Frottages*, 16.

Whether or not, in the absence of what is, and in the presence of what is not, we choose to affirm our desire to dispense simultaneously with what we are deprived of and what we are given; whether sterile and ridiculous systems of classification choose to include us or not, we can only praise Max Ernst for having built the second phase of his work, extending from his *Natural History*... upon the foundations of the illusions to which we are exposed by... our indifferent sense of tactile recognition.¹⁵⁵

Ernst had pointed to such an “indifferent sense of tactile recognition” in a number of proto-frottages from 1924-1925. In these works, Ernst pitted two contrasting artistic techniques together within the same pictorial space. *Visible Pear* [Fig. 35], from 1925, presents two pears, one rendered with trompe l’oeil illusionism and the other formed from the rubbed-through texture of an underlying object. The frottaged pear might seem to be the shadow of the watercolor fruit, but each pear shape has its own independent shadow. By bringing together conflicting techniques, Ernst skillfully questions tactile recognition and creates a work in which it is difficult to distinguish which represented object is more *real* than the other – is it the form on the left, which illusionistically mimics the optical appearance of a pear, or is it the form on the right, which contains actual material traces of the external world?

Elizabeth Legge and Werner Spies, in their discussions of illusionism in *Histoire Naturelle*, both reference an anecdotal story from Pliny’s natural history.¹⁵⁶ Pliny devoted a whole volume of his natural history to visual art, and in this section he recalled a competition between the two painters, Zeuxis and Parhassius. The men staged a

¹⁵⁵ Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 28.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Legge, “Novalis’s Fossils, Zeuxis’s Grapes, Freud’s Flowers: Max Ernst’s Natural History.”; Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person* (New York: G. Braziller, 1983).

contest, in which each man would make a painting, and the one who made the most realistic painting would be named the winner. Zeuxis's painted grapes were so life-like that birds tried to eat them, but when Zeuxis confidently tried to pull back Parhassius's curtain to reveal the work behind it, he was surprised to realize that it was the curtain itself that was painted. Zeuxis was forced to concede defeat, since he had fooled only the birds but Parhassius had fooled him.

Ernst takes up Zeuxis's and Parhassius's call for optical illusionism in several proto-frottages, such as *Visible Pear*, but, in doing so, he questions the credibility of the trompe l'oeil fruit by pairing it with its thickly textured, frottaged counterpart. He similarly challenges the viewer's "sense of tactile recognition" in *The Palette of Caesar* (Pl. XX) [Fig. 36], in which frottage is used as a means of contrast. A deceptively convincing leaf appears to have been cut out of its surrounding textured environment and is fixed onto a type of page, set within a frame. Legge describes this as a picture within a picture as the viewer is encouraged to ascribe to Ernst's illusionistic representation of a representation of a leaf.¹⁵⁷

With frottage, Ernst formed a new relationship with nature that was not based on illusionism but still cleverly addressed issues of mimicry. Frottage communicates a telling self-awareness – it is art that is aware of its materiality. In *Shaving the Walls*, Ernst presents the *object* that allegedly inspired the technique of frottage – the Pornic hotel floorboards – and by looking into the woodgrain, the viewer can engage Leonardo's wall in the same manner as Ernst had in 1925. One might associate Ernst's image with

¹⁵⁷ "Novalis's Fossils, Zeuxis's Grapes, Freud's Flowers: Max Ernst's Natural History."

illusionistic recreations of wood, such as the faux mahogany panel which Ernst's father engaged in the childhood fever dream, but the image also demands to be recognized for its *tactility*. In this sense, frottage seamlessly integrates *subjectivity* and *objectivity* in a manner similar to the partially silvered mirror.

While Ernst seized the mirror metaphorically, other Surrealists notably fashioned more literal commentaries on the partially silvered mirror during the 1930's. Raoul Ubac's 1938 *Portrait in a Mirror* [Fig. 37] shows the reflection of a girl's face in a mirror, but the surface is peppered with lacunae where the silvering has flaked away. The result is a cloudy image in which the mirror obscures as much as it reveals. Both the mirror and frottage are aware of their materiality, and both allow one to see the world through them while also reflecting subjectivity back to the viewer/ creator.

Histoire Naturelle's tactile awareness connects it to the natural world, but it would be wrong to assume that Ernst only interrogated/ appropriated material which issued directly from nature. In *Shaving the Walls*, the woodgrain was transferred from the wood of a tree to the surface of the page. While wood is a naturally occurring, organic element, Ernst placed *machine-cut* wooden boards underneath the page, and it is a well-known fact that there are no perfectly straight lines found in nature, effectively calling attention to the intermediary stage of the wood's transformation. The wood has experienced the transformation of growth, then the transformation into a man-made, commercial good, and finally the transformation into a work of high art. Gavin Parkinson, pointing to Wolfgang Paalen's *Articulated Cloud* (1938) and Meret Oppenheim's *Fur Cup, Spoon, and Saucer* of 1936, identifies a type of metamorphosis in

which the object is “halfway between nature and culture” and “could be justified by means of a theory of Darwinian selection.”¹⁵⁸

Similarly, the metamorphosis present in *Histoire Naturelle* addresses Darwinian selection through the marriage of nature and culture. In *Shaving the Walls*, the straight-edged, manufactured boards stretch straight upwards while a small cluster of rubbed-through leaves peeks over the fence. Both the leaves and the boards come from the same original source, but they have different relationships with nature and culture – one has been untouched by man and the other is a product of technology. Ernst often appropriated bits of string, circular metal disks, straw hats, and brushstrokes from modern paintings to create his frottages. By using unadulterated material that issued directly from nature alongside machine-made material from the external world, Ernst conveyed a type of Darwinian selection by alluding to the tension between technology and nature and reconstituting the byproducts of that confluence.

Pamela Kort, in her analysis of Ernst’s artistic process, suggests that Ernst introduced “pseudo-paleontological evidence” into his frottages by conceiving his rubbings as fossils.¹⁵⁹ In this sense, the image transfer technique of frottage, which captures the illusionistic traces of organic material from the natural world, is analogous to the preservation of both *preexisting* and *modern* life forms in petrified “artifacts,” and

¹⁵⁸ Gavin Parkinson, “Emotional Fusion with the Animal Kingdom: Notes Toward a Natural History of Surrealism,” 273.

¹⁵⁹ Pamela Kort, “Arnold Böcklin, Max Ernst, and the Debate around Origins and Survivals in Germany and France,” in *Darwin: Art and the Search for Origins* exh. cat., 42.

such a connection in turn strengthens the naturalness of *Histoire Naturelle*.¹⁶⁰ Darwin celebrated fossils for their ability to preserve information which could later be used to recreate extinct life forms and to argue for the possibility of potential organisms. As a result, Ernst's frottages, just like fossils, can be viewed as historical repositories which contain information to be decoded. Frottage harbors Ernst's commentary on the history of art, his response to contemporary art theory, his conception of the natural world, and his theory of the origins of mankind and the universe. In light of all this, what Max Ernst seems to have discovered in *his* book, is that there is nothing *unnatural* about a natural history.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: FROTTAGE AFTER *HISTOIRE NATURELLE*

Is it the mirror that has lost its illusions or rather the world that has disengaged itself from its opacity?

- Paul Eluard, "Est-ce le miroir?"¹⁶¹

In the years following Max Ernst's discovery of frottage and the publication of *Histoire Naturelle*, he experimented with a number of various mediums and techniques. He returned to oil painting, engaged various types of printmaking, made sculptures, and produced book illustrations for both his own collage novels and also for the works of other authors. André Breton, in *Surrealism and Painting*, praised Ernst for his "imperious need... to search ceaselessly for what is new," and excitedly stated, "Let us await impatiently Max Ernst's transition to a new 'period' (in the curious phrase applied to painters) and to yet a new one..."¹⁶² However, while Ernst certainly was *progressive* in his ongoing investigation of his own creative faculties, and while he certainly searched "ceaselessly for what is new," he never completely abandoned the technique of frottage.

¹⁶¹ Paul Eluard, "Est-ce le miroir," in *Histoire Naturelle* (Cologne: Galerie Der Spiegel, 1965), 10.

¹⁶² Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 66, 30.

He might have explored alternative processes, but throughout his lifetime, Ernst continuously incorporated frottage into his visual art.

In the early 1930's, Ernst created an animal alter ego for himself named Loplop, and in the *Loplop Presents* series [Figs. 38, 39], frottage was used often as a means of contrast, similar to *Visible Pear* and other works which juxtapose thickly frottaged texture with a different artistic technique.¹⁶³ In 1931, Ernst produced nineteen small frottages for the English translation of *Mr. Knife and Miss Fork*, the first chapter of Rene Crevel's 1927 novel *Babylone*. Ernst made these frottages on translucent paper, and, with the help of Man Ray, photosensitive paper was laid underneath the rubbings so that light could expose the areas which were not covered by the rubbed texture, producing a negative image akin to cliché-verra and Man Ray's *rayograms*. In 1936, eight color frottages were reproduced in André Breton's *Le Chateau etoile (The Starlit Castle)*. In addition to the numerous rubbings created during various time periods that have fallen into the hands of private collectors, Ernst also made a number of colored frottages especially for the first edition of Werner Spies's seminal essay, *Max Ernst: Frottagen* (1968), before dying in 1976.

For Max Ernst, the discovery of frottage affected a new mode of visibility. This new manner of seeing – the appropriation and reconstitution of Leonardo's wall – was explored in the Cologne Dada overpaintings but was fully realized through the later

¹⁶³ See Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person* (New York: G. Braziller, 1983); Jürgen Pech, "Loplop, the Presentational Figure," in *Max Ernst: Dream and Revolution*, eds., Werner Spies, Iris Müller, and Tanja Wessolowski (Stockholm: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 145-156.

interaction with the hallucinatory grooves of woodgrain. After “discovering” frottage in 1925, Ernst applied its methodology to various sister techniques which differed slightly in medium and process but similarly adopted the theoretical, visual model that frottage offered, and the first and most immediate results of such automatic extension are apparent in a process which Ernst dubbed *grattage*.

In grattages, such as *La roue du soleil – Grand Marine (The Wheel of the Sun – Grand Marine)* [Fig. 40] from 1926, several coats of paint were initially applied to a canvas, underneath which various objects were placed. The material beneath the canvas, in turn, created raised bumps, and Ernst, by scraping away these bumps, removed the topmost layers of paint and revealed underlying colors and shapes, which he then consciously interpreted with a brush, imparting form to suggestive elements. In his grattages, Ernst fashioned petrified cities and densely vegetated jungles, harboring a variety of animals and insects. Through his sustained interest in the natural world, Ernst revisited imagery and motifs from *Histoire Naturelle*, even recycling titles from the 1926 album of rubbings (*La roue du soleil* is similar to the title of *La roue de la Lumière Pl. XXIX* in *Histoire Naturelle*).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Ernst’s grattages demonstrate a stylistic and thematic dialogue with the *Histoire Naturelle* frottages. In his semi-automatic paintings of the late 1920’s, Ernst revisited the popular German *Windsbraut* motif, which he had explored in *The Stallion and The Bride of the Wind*. The numerous images of frottaged birds inspired such grattaged works as *Aux 100,000 colombes* [Fig. 41]. Also, M.E. Warlick has pointed to grattaged scenes of “cavorting” animals trapped in the dense underbrush of Ernst’s forests and suggests that such imagery parallels that of animals trapped between walls, found in *Histoire Naturelle* plates such as *The Origin of the Clock*. Warlick continues to note that the “exuberant undergrowth” of Ernst’s forests “becomes the site of spawning wild animals and human beings, whose descendants, the Hordes [*The Hordes* series depicts anthropomorphic, bestial, grattaged forms] finally break free into paintings of their own.” M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 193.

Grattage allowed Ernst to integrate the concept of objective chance, previously addressed in his pencil rubbings, into the colorful, vibrant medium of oil paint. Frottage had provided him with a means of circumventing his virginity complex when he was confronted with a blank canvas, and the initial creation of gratted shapes and forms similarly were divorced from the initial creative impulses of the artist. The semi-automatism of these two related processes continued to be influential throughout Ernst's oeuvre and affected his later predilection for the technique of decalcomania.

The invention of decalcomania is credited to the Spanish Surrealist, Oscar Dominguez, who started using the painting technique in 1935, but Ernst experimented with the process frequently in the late 1930's and early 1940's.¹⁶⁵ In works such as *The Fascinating Cypress* [Fig. 42] from 1940, (a title which is also borrowed from *Histoire Naturelle*, Pl. XVII), paint was applied to certain areas of the canvas, and then glass or paper was pressed down onto the wet surface. When the glass or paper was shifted slightly or lifted, accidental air pockets, smears, and root-like tendrils appeared, and Ernst could secondarily interpret those chance forms with a brush.

In 1941, Ernst's semi-automatism further evolved, and he invented a new procedure which he described as the *oscillation* technique. In oscillated works such as *Jeune homme intrigue par le vol d'une mouche non-euclidienne* (*The Young Man Plots the Theft of the non-Euclidian Fly*) (1942-1947) [Fig. 43], a canvas was laid flat on the

¹⁶⁵ The technique of decalcomania actually had a number of previous art historical precedents, and earlier examples are evident in select eighteenth century British art. For a discussion of decalcomania in Ernst's work, see Ludger Derenthal, "Playing with Decalcomania: The Reanimation of Old Motifs and Ideas in New York Exile," in *Max Ernst: Dream and Revolution*, eds., Werner Spies, Iris Müller, and Tanja Wessolowski (Stockholm: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 177-186.

ground, anticipating Pollock's drip paintings, and a tin can filled with liquid paint was suspended above the canvas from a cord.¹⁶⁶ After poking a hole in the bottom of the container, Ernst rhythmically guided the swinging can in sweeping arcs, creating parabolic, atomic curves from the stream of paint flowing from the opening. Here, Ernst creates his own version of Francis Picabia's *Le Sainte Vierge* [Fig. 44] from 1920.¹⁶⁷ Picabia's recklessly splattered ink, dropped onto the canvas, constitutes a visual composition which is uncontrolled and impossible to recreate except by reenacting the same steps which Picabia, himself, had undertaken. While the curvilinear structure of Ernst's oscillated paintings is more refined and calm than the frenetic, violent explosion of ink in *Le Sainte Vierge*, Ernst similarly could not wholly account for errant drips, splotches, the thickness of line, or disconnections within the stream of paint, all of which had a causal relationship with the speed and height of the swinging can.

The fortuitous design, resulting from the dripping paint, played the same preliminary role as the mottled color in decalcomania, the underlying shapes revealed by scraping in grattage, and the rubbed-through texture in frottage. Ernst responds to Leonardo's wall in all of these processes, and in *Jeune homme intrigue par le vol d'une mouche non-euclidienne*, Ernst approached the curvilinear composition after the paint

¹⁶⁶ While it is helpful to make the connection between Ernst's oscillated works and Pollock's drip paintings, the critical difference between the two techniques must be established. Both artists laid a canvas flat on the ground and dripped paint onto the surface, but Ernst attempted to disengage his own body from the final product through a marked reliance on chance while Pollock aimed to wholly integrate his expressive, gestural, and bodily actions into the authorial creation of the work.

¹⁶⁷ For a further discussion of Picabia's *Le Sainte Vierge*, which was published in the twelfth issue of *391* in March 1920, see George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007).

had run out and transformed its superstructure into the grotesque head of a man. In all these related techniques, Ernst exploits the uncontrolled emergence of accidental forms which later serve as points of departure for subsequent artistic elaboration. As Werner Spies correctly suggests, “Throughout his oeuvre we come upon problems he set for himself - in almost every work one detects a tiny trace of frottage or collage.”¹⁶⁸ Frottage provided Ernst with a theoretical means of creating imagery without relying on the initial creative impulse of the artist, and it was this semi-automatic model, “discovered” in 1925 and later applied to ensuing techniques, that enabled Ernst to dispel the “myth of artist as creator.”¹⁶⁹

These distinctive, yet connected, techniques inspired Ernst to sustain his investigation of the external world, an objective which he had so purposefully proposed in *Histoire Naturelle*, and Ernst’s application of the aforementioned semi-automatic processes often resulted in a similar realization of *natural* forms.¹⁷⁰ Ernst was always thinking about the world around him and contemplating man’s relationship with the universe, and his post-1925 visual art continues to reflect the balance between order and disorder, which he had originally located in nature.¹⁷¹ In his grattages, Ernst created eerie

¹⁶⁸ Spies, *Frottages*, 9.

¹⁶⁹ Max Ernst, “Was ist Surrealismus?,” (Zurich: Kunsthaus, Oct. 11- Nov. 4, 1934) in *Surrealists on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard, 134.

¹⁷⁰ Throughout his career, Ernst frequently rendered natural forms in *semi-automatic* works, but he also engaged similar themes in *non-automatic* works, such as *La joie de vivre* [Fig. 45] of 1936, which depicts detailed scenes of vegetation and revitalizes the verism and illusionism found in his dream-like, collage-based paintings of the early 1920’s.

¹⁷¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, Ernst’s visual art often addresses the dialectical coexistence of order and disorder in nature. David Hopkins has pointed to works such *The Sea*

vegetal environments, such as petrified cities overrun with plants and forests teeming with wildlife, thereby further implicating the examples of Lautréamont and Darwin. In his use of decalcomania, Ernst maintained his interest in natural phenomena, presenting marbled landscapes filled with organic columns and thickets of brightly colored coral, flora, and fauna, in which potential animals can be distinguished in the fluid rivulets of paint. And his oscillated paintings bespeak a curious attraction to the cosmos, as the parabolic curves mirror the microcosmic infrastructure of an atom and the galactic macrocosm of orbiting planets, moons, and stars.¹⁷²

The effects of *Histoire Naturelle* are lasting, and Ernst's continuous thematic engagement with the natural world not only affected changes in his artistic techniques but also helped to shape the trajectory of the Surrealist movement. Gavin Parkinson promulgates a view of "1930's Surrealism increasingly attuned to natural forces," and he rightly points to the abundant images of animals and plants featured in articles and photographs in the Surrealist journal, *Minotaure*.¹⁷³ Additionally, the 1930's witnessed a considerable increase of natural imagery in the poetry of Breton and Benjamin Péret, the

and the Rain (Histoire Naturelle, Pl. I), and suggested that Ernst's use of manmade geometrical forms, apparent in the perfect circle inscribed on a flat plane set amidst the storm, aims to emphasize the underlying organization present in the seemingly chaotic natural world. See David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Ernst continues this geometrical tactic throughout his career, and, in his 1926 grattage, *La roue du soleil (Grand Marine)*, he similarly set a golden disc in the sky above wild underbrush.

¹⁷² Ernst's gravitation to astronomical themes during the 1940's likely developed out of his earlier experiments with such motifs during the 1920's, evident in works such as *Little Tables around the Earth (Histoire Naturelle, Pl. III)* [Fig. 46].

¹⁷³ Gavin Parkinson, "Emotional Fusion with the Animal Kingdom: Notes Toward a Natural History of Surrealism," in *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, eds. Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 274.

paintings of Dalí, Magritte, and Tanguy set their subjects in front of organic, landscaped backdrops (similar to Ernst's empty landscape/ stages in *Histoire Naturelle*), André Masson engaged Darwinian theory in his drawings of plants and insects, and Roger Caillois addressed issues of insect mimicry in his essays.¹⁷⁴ In regards to Ernst's text, "Inspiration to Order," in which he first coined the term, *frottage*, and sought to solidify his identification as the leading proponent of Surrealist automatism, one could convincingly argue that by revitalizing the theoretical model of *frottage* in his 1932 essay, Ernst refocused attention on his previous embracement of natural phenomena in *Histoire Naturelle* and resultantly advocated the permanent and intrinsic value of the natural world, a concept which resounded firmly with contemporary Surrealist concerns.¹⁷⁵

Histoire Naturelle, in addition to the influence it exercised on 1930's Surrealism, continued, and still continues, to be an influential work, and since its inauguration in 1926, Ernst's cycle of *frottages* has survived through a number of republications. Werner Spies notes that during the early phases before *Histoire Naturelle's* release, the decision was made, for financial reasons, that only thirty-four *frottages* could be printed.¹⁷⁶ Ernst

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ernst's sustained engagement with motifs from the natural world certainly affected his Surrealist colleagues' impression of him, and André Breton, in a 1942 essay on Ernst, utilized an organic, biological rhetoric (which was common to the naturalism of Breton's poetry in the 1930's and 1940's) in order to better illuminate Ernst's philosophical and theoretical sensitivities: "Meanwhile, even the snow cannot overwhelm certain carnivorous plants. Here is Max Ernst much farther back in time... The hanging gardens have been planted with huge, invisible nepenthes... Change of scenery: this is just jungle now, not human jungle any longer. The first ages of man." "The Legendary Life of Max Ernst, Preceded by a Brief Discussion on the Need for a New Myth." (1942). In *Surrealism and Painting*, 165.

¹⁷⁶ Spies, *Max Ernst: Frottages*.

wanted to burn the other works that were not selected, but Paul Eluard rescued them and had the sheets bound. Years later, this volume was somehow acquired by a Belgian art dealer, who promptly put it up for Paris auction, and several collectors subsequently purchased the set and divided the remaining frottages. These rescued and preserved works were exhibited in 1956 in Paris and in 1957 in Cologne. In 1960, *Histoire Naturelle* was republished for the first time since Jeanne Bucher had first released the rubbings in 1926. In this edition, financed by Jean-Jacques Pauvert, the thirty-four original frottages were reproduced but greatly reduced in size. In 1965, *Histoire Naturelle* was emphatically republished by Galerie Der Spiegel, and, here, fifty-two sheets that had been omitted from the 1926 edition were included along with the original thirty-four plates.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, Hans Arp's *Introduction* was printed in German, Ernst provided a poetic commentary titled, *Leitfaden*, and a previously unpublished poem by Paul Eluard was included.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ The aforementioned reproductions of *Histoire Naturelle* constitute all of the republications up until the 1968 release of Werner Spies's essay on frottage. Since then, and especially in the years after Ernst's death in 1976, other reproductions have emerged in various contexts, generating numerous exhibitions and new scholarship.

¹⁷⁸ Arp's *Introduction* had previously existed only in its original French version, which was included in Jeanne Bucher's 1926 release of *Histoire Naturelle*. Eluard's poem, "Est-ce le miroir," was written in 1926 but was not published until 1965 when it was presented in its original French and was also translated into German ("Hat der Spiegel"). Ernst's *Leitfaden* takes the form of a theoretical stage play in which characters such as die Mutter aller Lebendigen, der Naturforscher, ein Kunsthistoriker, die süßen Kind, Paul Eluard, der junge Baum, die junge Sphinx, and ein junger Lümmel all discuss poetic, artistic, and philosophical issues. To my knowledge, no scholarship has considered this text in relation to the 1926 edition of *Histoire Naturelle*.

The inclusion of Paul Eluard's 1926 text, "Est-ce le miroir," in the 1965 edition of *Histoire Naturelle* offers a poetic interpretation of Max Ernst's technique of frottage.

The French prose reads as follows:

Est-ce le miroir qui a perdu ses illusions ou bien le monde qui s'est dégagé de son opacité? La terre se cultivé elle-même. L'hiver il n'y a qu'à fouiller la neige pour trouver du soleil, l'été, le fruits ont un noyau de glace.

Les oiseaux marquent les heures: midi, le serin brûle, six heures, l'étourdi tremble (le jour est fêlé), minuit, c'est un trouble-fête rageur qui lance des boules de nuit dans des yeux vides.

Il n'y a de cachette que pour un seul être qui vous échappera toujours. Si vous le cherchez la nuit, il es dans la lumière, si vous le cherchez le jour, il dort.

Tendons les pièges de l'amour!¹⁷⁹

Eluard's subtle allusion to frottage in "Est-ce le miroir" seizes the motif of the mirror.

The Neoclassical mirror reflects a simulacrum of the natural world back to the viewer, a method which is paralleled in the illusionism of trompe l'oeil. Robert Nugent, in his discussion of the mirror in Eluard's poetry, recognizes that "the essence of surrealist doctrine is the truth of the mirror itself; a kind of reversal is operative: not the holding up of the mirror to nature by the poet, but the image in itself constitutes a mirror."¹⁸⁰ Here, Rosalind Krauss's previously mentioned reading of Breton and Soupault's model of "La Glace sans tain," in *Magnetic Fields*, is worth revisiting. Breton and Soupault's vision

¹⁷⁹ [Is it the mirror that has lost its illusions or rather the world that has disengaged itself from its opacity? The earth cultivates herself. In the winter you only have to brush away the snow to find the sun, in the summer, the fruit has a core of ice. The birds mark the hours. At noon, the canary burns, 6:00, the foolish one trembles (the day is cracked). At midnight, there is an outraged killjoy that throws the balls of night into empty eyes. A hiding place exists only for the single being who will always escape you. If you seek him in the night, he is in the light; If you seek him in the day, he sleeps. Let us set/ tighten the pitfalls/ traps of love.] Paul Eluard, "Est-ce le miroir," in *Histoire Naturelle* (Cologne: Galerie Der Spiegel, 1965), 10. Translation by author.

¹⁸⁰ Robert Nugent, *Paul Eluard* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974).

of a mirror without silvering was adopted and modified by Max Ernst and was consequently recognized by Paul Eluard. Ernst's concept of frottage as a partially silvered mirror is further evidenced by his literal and metaphorical treatment of the motif in the 1925 frottage, *Le Miroir* [Fig. 47]. Here, the shape of a mirror is set amongst a mass of thickly frottaged texture, and the mirror's glass reflects its textured surroundings without revealing anything close to a recognizable image. Only raw, unidentifiable materiality is presented. In this sense, Ernst implicates the mirror as an *object* and simultaneously envisions the entire work as a mirror.

In the *Histoire Naturelle* cycle, the mirror does not reflect the illusionistic imitation of the natural world back to the viewer, rather, the mirror, as Eluard suggests, loses its illusions (just like a mirror loses its silvering) and the earth disengages itself from its opacity. Eluard's use of the term, *opacité*, allowed him to engage issues of *transparency* which had always been at the forefront of Surrealist debate. A silvered mirror is still opaque insofar as it fails to reveal anything other than a reflection of the natural world, and a wholly unsilvered mirror is still opaque insofar as it fails to reveal anything other than a vista of the natural world as viewed through a window. However, the partially silvered mirror marries objectivity and subjectivity, and, in this duality, Ernst recognized the *mystery of the earth's transparency*.

Ernst lyrically addresses the *mystery of the earth's transparency* in a 1956 poem titled, "Histoire Naturelle."¹⁸¹ Here, Ernst engaged Eluard's 1926 text by citing "Est-ce le miroir" almost in its entirety, situating quoted, italic passages within his own prose and

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

fashioning a type of rhythmic question-and-answer format. Following Eluard's claim that "La terre cultivé elle-même,"¹⁸² Ernst responds, "Le poète se réjoit... La terre, à notre émerveillement, offer le jeu de ses transparences."¹⁸³ Eluard envisions the methodology of automatic transcription as an inherently natural process: The earth *cultivates* and literally *farms* herself. The earth is intrinsically automatic, and its natural processes of genesis, transformation, and regeneration are connected to automatic exercises, such as Hans Arp's concept of automatism in his biomorphic works and his location of automatic processes in both the unconscious human body and the natural world.¹⁸⁴

Eluard's initial question, posed in the first line of "Est-ce le miroir," was addressed directly by Ernst in his 1956 prose:

Quand à propos de mon *Histoire Naturelle*, Paul demandait se c'est *le miroir qui a perdu ses illusions ou bien le monde qui s'est dégagé de son opacité*; les plus endurcis parmi nous sentirent leur sang se glacer de joie. Gracieux spectacle: le vieil enseignement scolaire d'après lequel la terre n'attaquerait pas l'homme, du coup s'effrita. En se dégageant de son opacité, l'univers attaque bien l'homme. En se dégageant de son opacité, l'univers tend à se fondre en l'homme. En se dégageant de son opacité, l'univers tend à se confondre avec l'homme. A l'homme, alors, de se dégager de sa cécité.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² [The earth cultivates herself.] "Est-ce le miroir," 10.

¹⁸³ [The poet rejoices in this... The earth, to our amazement, presents the mystery of its transparency.] "Histoire Naturelle," 330.

¹⁸⁴ I owe thanks to Joyce Cheng for suggesting the English translation, "farms," for the French term, "cultivé."

¹⁸⁵ [When, on the subject of my *Natural History*, Paul asked if it is the *mirror that has lost its illusions or rather the world that has disengaged itself from its opacity*; The more hardened among us sense their blood running cold with joy. A graceful spectacle: The old scholarly doctrine in which the earth does not attack mankind, has radically crumbled. In disengaging itself from its opacity, the universe certainly attacks mankind. In disengaging itself from its opacity, the universe tends to blend into mankind. In disengaging itself from its opacity, the universe

Ernst notes, “the old scholarly doctrine in which the earth does not attack mankind has radically crumbled.”¹⁸⁶ In disengaging itself from its opacity, the universe both *attacks* and *blends into* mankind. Here, there is an apparent reciprocity between mankind and nature in which the universe asserts its dominance over, and melds into, mankind, recalling the Romantic interconnectedness of all life forms, espoused by the Naturphilosophen, while also calling attention to Darwin’s theories of natural selection and the ultimate triumph of *nature* over the *unnatural*. The crumbling of the old scholarly doctrine was affected by the technique of frottage, and when Ernst suggests that “it is up to man, therefore, to disengage himself from his blindness,” it seems that Ernst is placing a normative qualification on both the previous scholarly doctrine and, by relation, *cécité*.

However, a too literal interpretation of *cécité* is problematic because Ernst celebrated the blindness associated with the first stages of frottage and other related semi-automatic techniques in which there was much emphasis on the *accidental* appearance of suggestive forms. It seems more likely that Ernst’s use of the term, *cécité*, connects it to a general ambivalence, and such nonchalance was addressed by André Breton in his previously mentioned approbation of Ernst’s 1926 *Histoire Naturelle*, in which he praised the frottages for critically engaging the “illusions to which we are exposed by... our

tends to merge with mankind. It is up to man, therefore, to disengage himself from his blindness.] “Histoire Naturelle,” 330. Translation by author.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

indifferent sense of tactile recognition.¹⁸⁷ It is also tempting to associate the blindness of the *previous scholarly doctrine* with the previous artistic conventions that had met so much opposition in Dadaist experimentation, prompted Ernst's break from Expressionism, and, in turn, fueled Ernst's Surrealist work. Ernst's account of blindness could also serve as a retrospective, witty jab at the early hesitancy to endorse Surrealist visual art in the period following the release of Breton's manifesto. Certainly, the blindness of the old doctrine is connected to an undesirable mentality that does not recognize the inherent power and potentiality of nature, and frottage dissolved this *cécité* by firmly establishing the central role of nature in art, literature, philosophy, and automatism.

As a means of wrapping up his emphatic demand for man to free himself from his blindness, Ernst concludes his poem with the following moralistic message:

Morale: ne craignons pas de tomber dans l'enfance de l'art. Ne dérangeons pas ces aveugles qui, la nuit, dansent sur les toits de nos villes et campagnes. Plus amoureux de la vie que vivants, ils ne cherchent qu'à vivre, ils ne cherchent pas à voir. Saluons les mers qui se lèvent, les lunes aussi.¹⁸⁸

Ernst's underlying moral in *Histoire Naturelle* warns, "we must never be afraid to fall into the infancy of art." The blind ones, who dismiss the value of visual art that embraces its infancy are not truly alive because they seek only to live and not to see. Frottage

¹⁸⁷ Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, 28.

¹⁸⁸ [Moral: We must never be afraid to fall into the infancy of art. Do not disturb these blind ones who, during the night, dance on the rooftops of our villages and countryside. More in love with life than alive, they seek only to live, they do not seek to see. We greet the tides that rise, and also the moon.] "Histoire Naturelle," 330. Translation by author.

offered a new means of *seeing* and, through the integration of natural phenomena and themes, promulgated a new appreciation for *living*.

In the thirty years following Jeanne Bucher's 1926 publication of *Histoire Naturelle*, Max Ernst produced a number of written accounts that each addressed the technique of frottage in a slightly different manner, and Ernst's 1956 response to Eluard's "Est-ce le miroir" relays Ernst's theoretical concept of frottage through a lyrical rhetoric that indicates his previous engagement with Surrealist poetics. Ernst's 1956 "Histoire Naturelle" allows for an important reading of the 1926 collection of rubbings as the colorful dialogue with Eluard's poem provides Ernst's concise, albeit codified, summation of the principal issues connected to frottage and its history.

Through his appropriation of Leonardo's wall, Ernst answered the Surrealist call for automatism by incorporating stimulus from the natural world into his visual art, thereby dissolving the border between the internal and external worlds, challenging the distinction between the real and the illusory, and arguing for the Romantic interconnectedness of all living things. Throughout his career, Ernst consistently created images of a natural world emanating with potentiality and metamorphosis and consistently addressed the equilibrium between chaos and order, rationality and irrationality. Amidst this complex web of interrelationships, the discovery of frottage prompted Ernst to recognize that automatism was not simply an artistic tactic, but it was located in the processes of the natural world, and the imagery found in *Histoire Naturelle* reflects an intimate understanding of, and attraction to, natural cycles. *We greet the tides that rise, and also the moon.*

The technique of frottage not only affected the trajectory of Ernst's artistic career, but it challenged the definition of automatism that Breton had provided in his 1924 manifesto and eventually forced Surrealism to reconsider its stance towards automatic activity. In Breton's 1933 essay, "The Automatic Message," he confessed that the history of automatic writing had been one of "continuing misfortune," but he rightly noted that automatism should be considered in relation to its times.¹⁸⁹ He admitted that he still utilized automatic writing and that it still provided a worthwhile means of discovering imagery, but he dismissed the notion that pure automatic writing was the only road for the Surrealist poet. In response to Leonardo's wall and its integral importance to early Surrealist automatism, Breton wrote:

It is often repeated that Leonardo da Vinci advised his pupils... to stare fixedly at an old decrepit wall... The beautiful interpretative wall, brimming with lizards, is now but a fence post toppling on the highway, before which a landscape that never has had time to form itself reconstitutes... the magic mirror in which life and death may be read.¹⁹⁰

Breton is not necessarily implying that Leonardo's wall is wrong or retrogressive. One could still see animals or landscapes in the toppling post. However, provoking such a hallucination is not the *only* way to find an image, and Breton speaks of another landscape – one that has never had time to form itself — which unites the imaginary and the real. In the 1930's, Breton formed a new relationship with the natural world but maintained his celebration of automatism by advocating a *new* automatic model in which

¹⁸⁹ André Breton, "The Automatic Message," in *What is Surrealism?: Collected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 137.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

the “distinction between subjective and objective ceases to be necessary or useful.”¹⁹¹ As a result, Breton admits that mediumistic works do not represent the singular, ideal way to engage automatism.

With frottage, Ernst proved that successful graphic automatism does not require the full suspension of consciousness either by entering into a trance, periods of half-sleep, or using mind-altering drugs. After he exposed the problems with early automatism, the *process* or *action* involved with the creation of a work became less important and Surrealism embraced painting, modifying its previous prejudice against the visual and plastic arts. In the 1930's, Surrealism increasingly embraced the *natural*, and this shift owes much to *Histoire Naturelle*. The complex history behind Surrealism's burgeoning support of natural themes, ranging from the 1920's through the 1940's, has yet to be written, and while this thesis has demonstrated the means by which *Histoire Naturelle* invigorated and altered contemporary attitudes towards nature, the exact details of Surrealism's increased attraction to natural forces in the 1930's remains unclear. What is clear though, is that Ernst's natural history addressed issues in the mid 1920's which would later become central to Surrealist art theory in the 1930's, and he proved that the only way to fully understand automatism is to understand its relationship with nature.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 147.

APPENDIX

FIGURES

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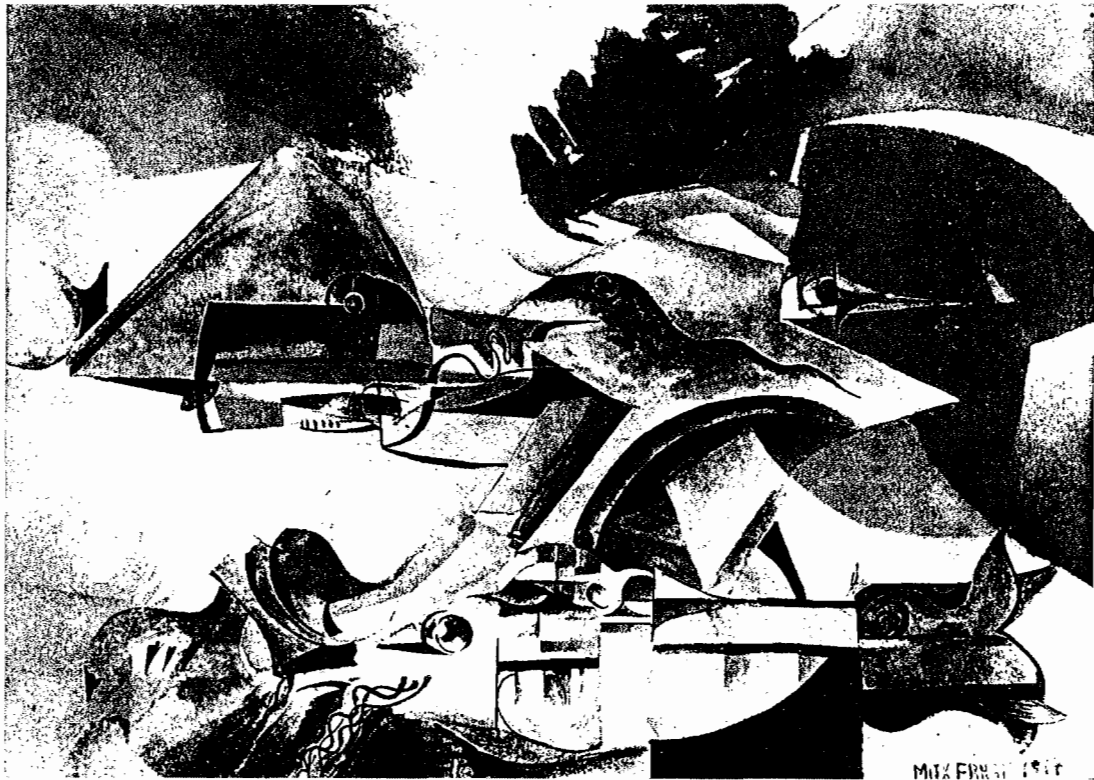


Fig. 1 - Max Ernst, *Kampf der Fische* (Battle of Fish), 1917

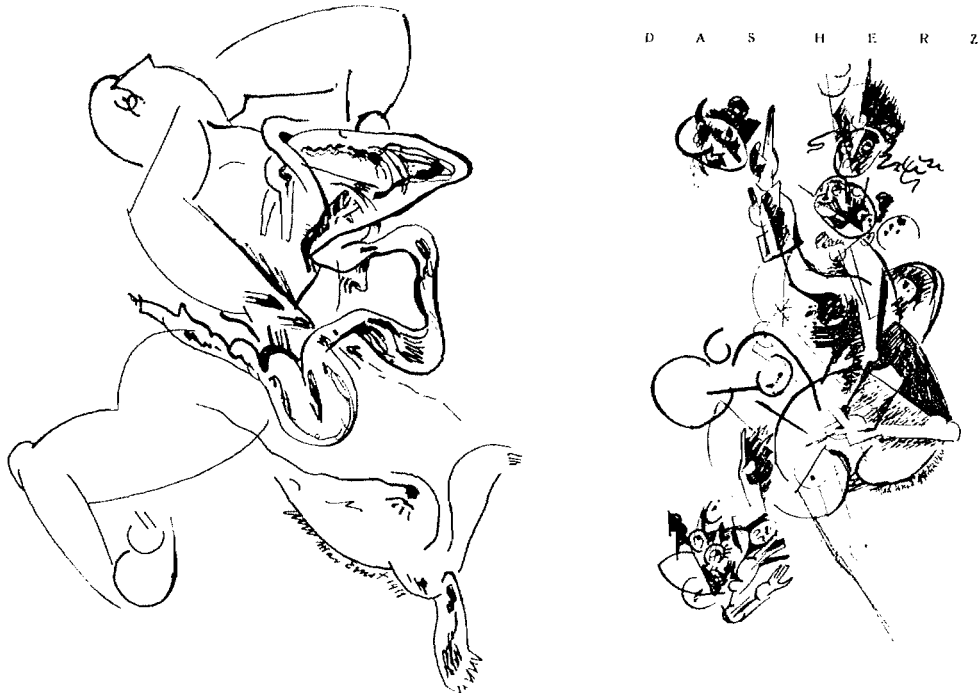


Fig. 2 - Left: Max Ernst, Drawing in *Der Strom*, no. 1, 1919

Fig. 3 - Right: Max Ernst, *Das Herz*, illustration for Johannes Theodor Kuhlemann's volume of poetry, *Consolamini*, 1919

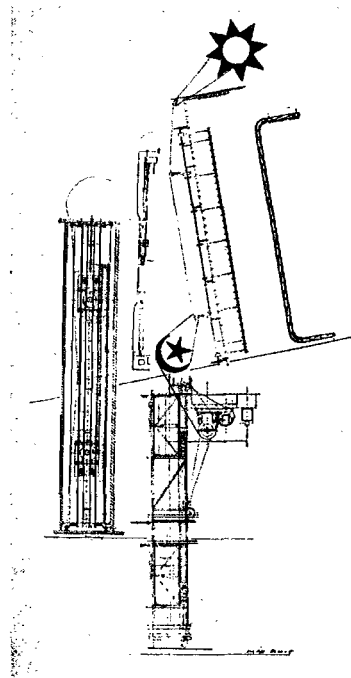


Fig. 4 - Max Ernst, *Hypertrophic Trophy*, 1919

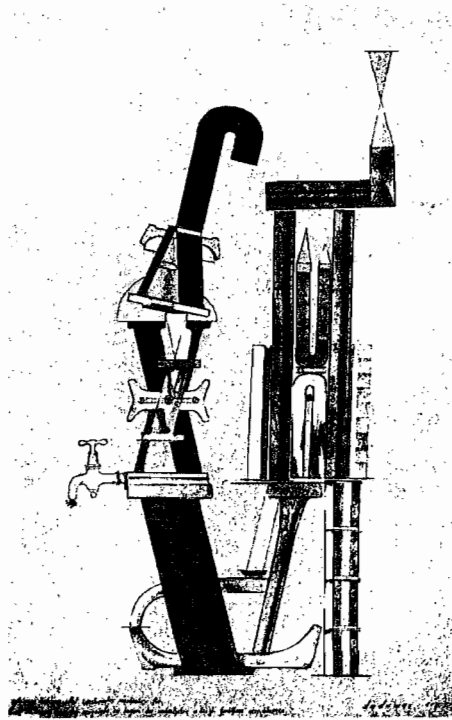


Fig. 5 - Max Ernst, *Von minimax dadamax selbst konstruiertes maschinchen* (Small self-constructed machine by Minimax Dadamax), 1919-1920

DADA 4-5

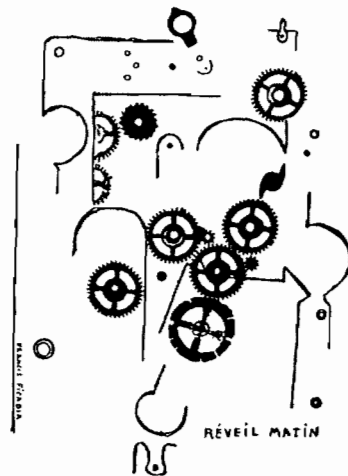


Fig. 6 - Francis Picabia, alarm clock print, cover of *Dada 4-5*, 1919

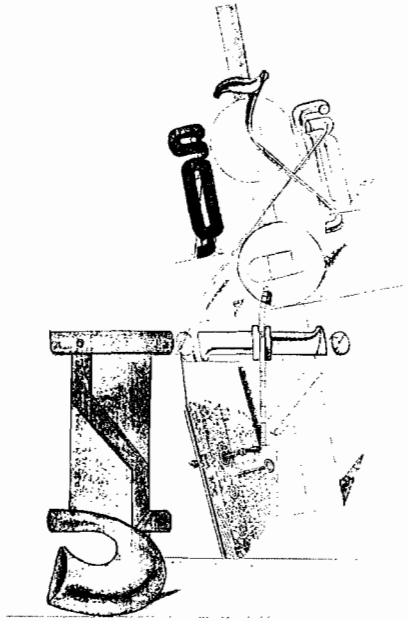


Fig. 7 - Max Ernst, *Lächeln Sie Nicht* (*Do not smile*), 1919

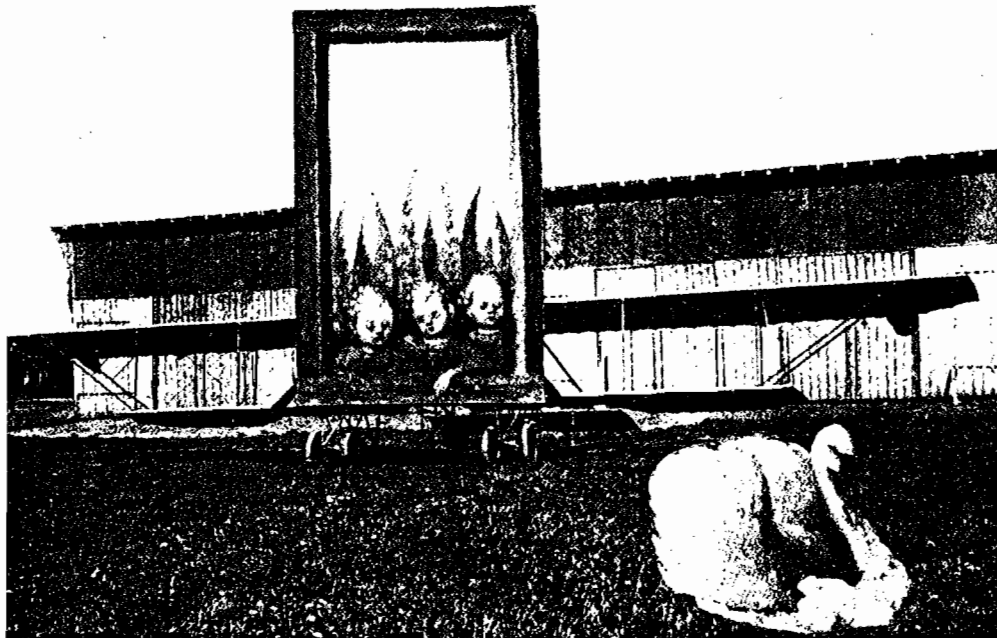


Fig. 8 - Max Ernst, *Le cygne est bien paisible* (*The Swan is quite peaceful*), 1920

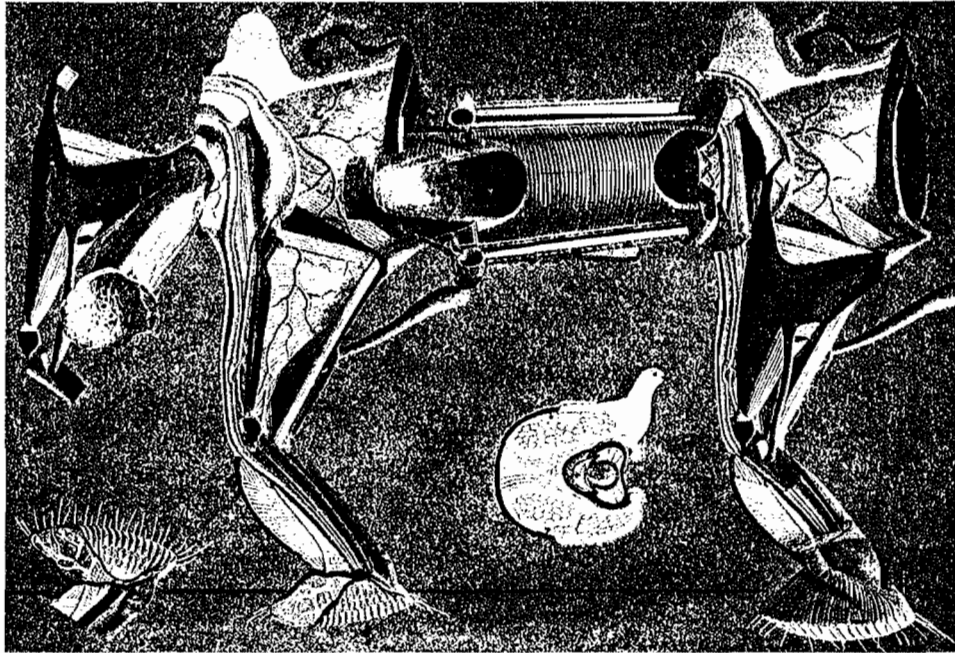
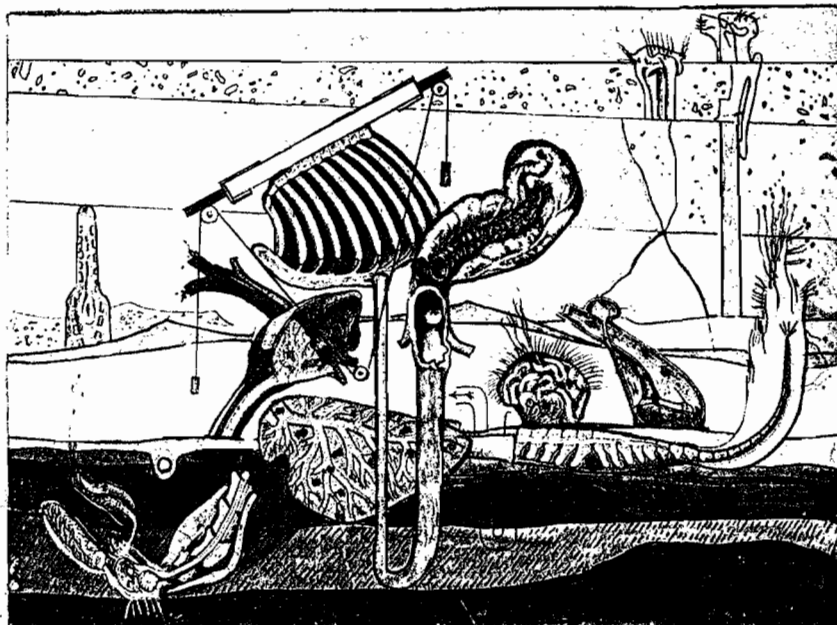


Fig. 9 - Max Ernst, *Un peu malade le cheval – la belle saison* (*The Slightly Ill Horse – The Beautiful Season*), 1920



schichtgestein naturgabe aus gneiss lava isländisch moos & sorten lungenkraut & sorten dammeris
herzgewächse b) dasselbe in feine polierten kästchen etwas teurer

Fig. 10 - Max Ernst, *Schichtgestein naturgabe aus gneiss lava Isländisch moos* (*Stratified Rock Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Iceland Moss*), 1920

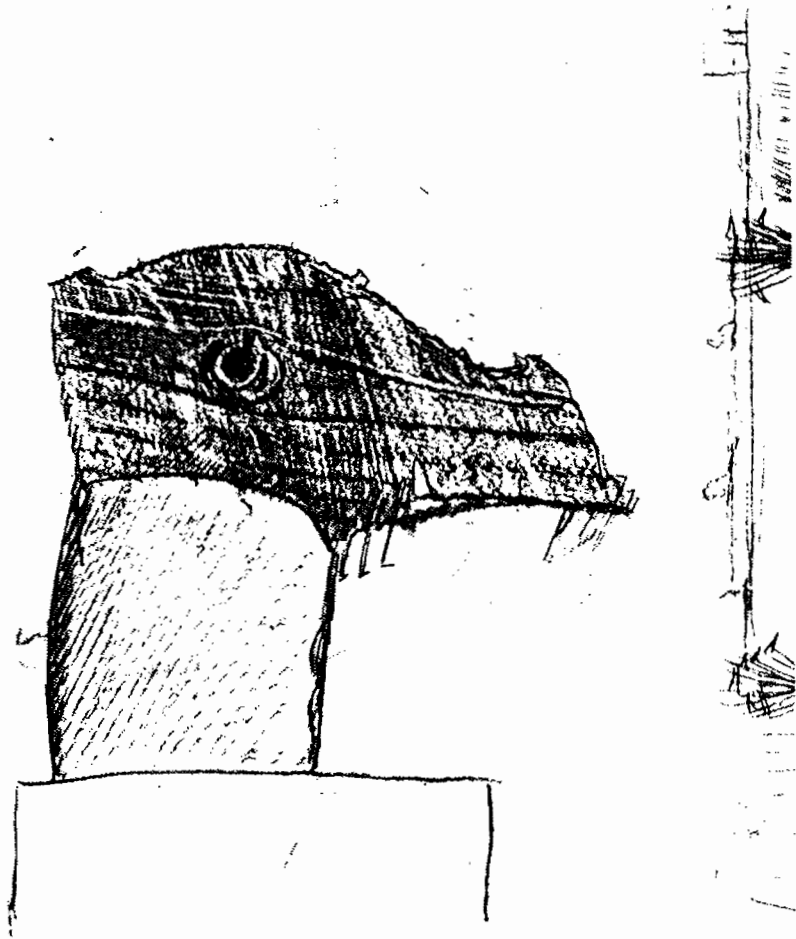


Fig. 11 - Max Ernst, *Animal Frottage*, Telegram to Tristan Tzara, 1921

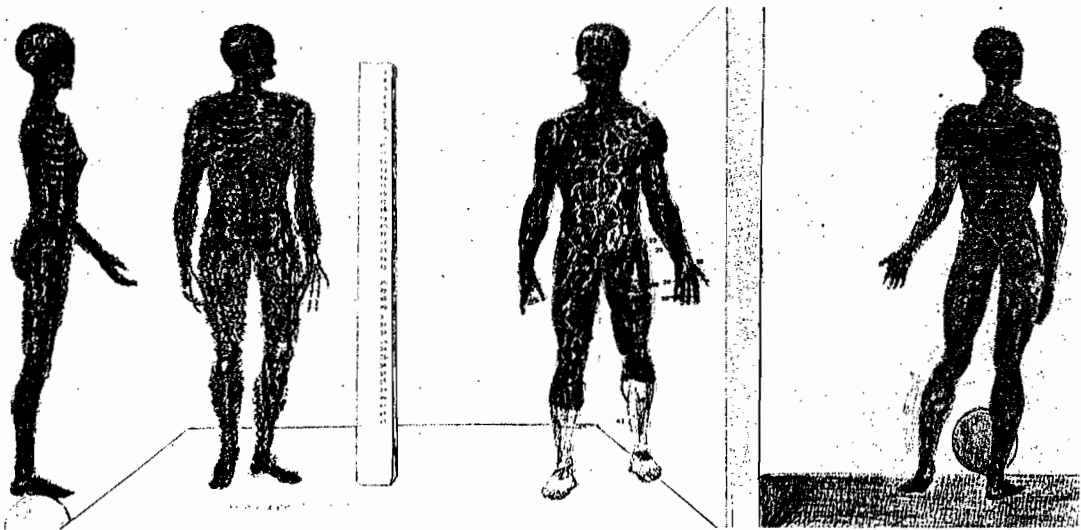


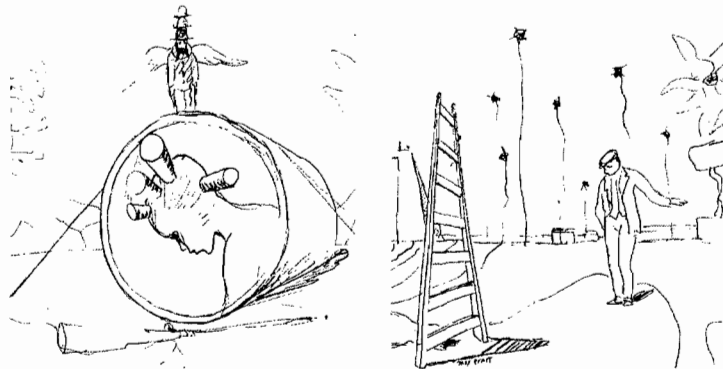
Fig. 12 - Max Ernst, *The Trinity of Anatomy*, 1921



Fig. 13 - Max Ernst, *The Elephant of Celebes*, 1921



Fig. 14 - Max Ernst, *Lessons in Automatic Writing*, 1923



Max Ernst, *Lessons in Automatic Writing*, details

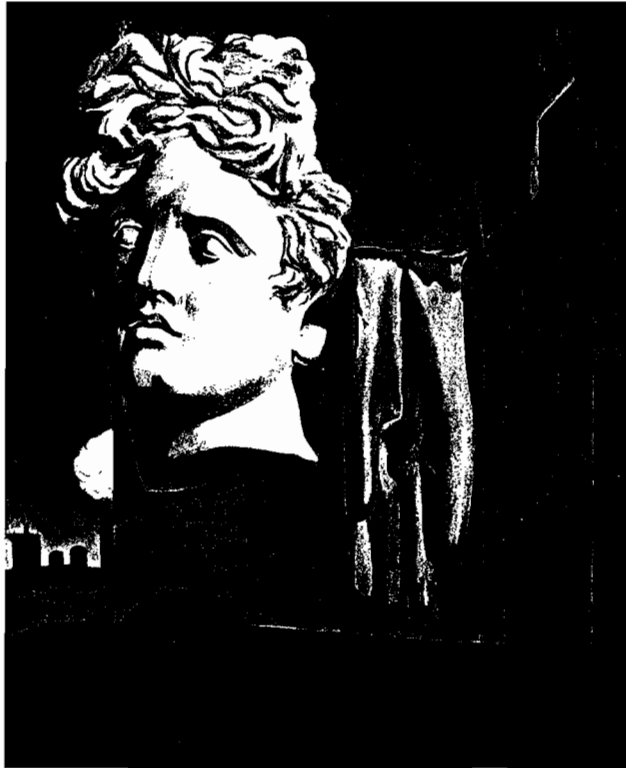


Fig. 15 - Giorgio de Chirico, *The Song of Love*, 1914

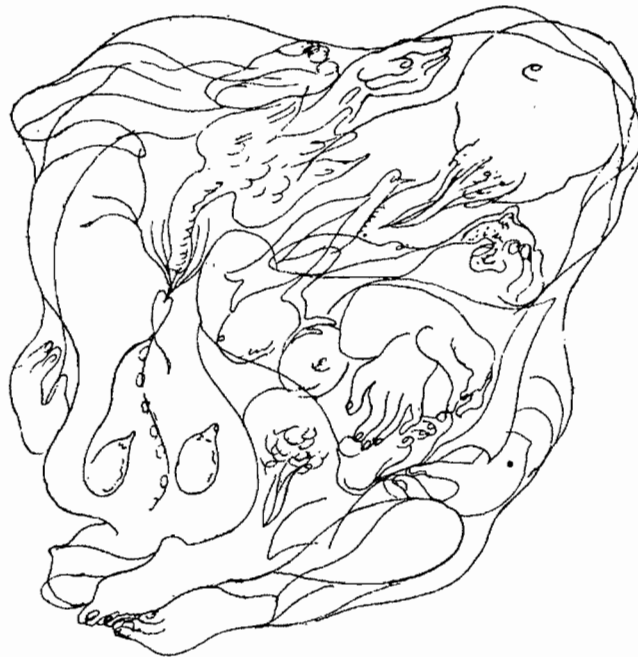


Fig. 16 - André Masson, *Dessin automatique (automatic drawing)*, *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 2, 1925



Fig. 17 - Joan Miró, *Peinture au cirque* (Painting of the circus), 1925

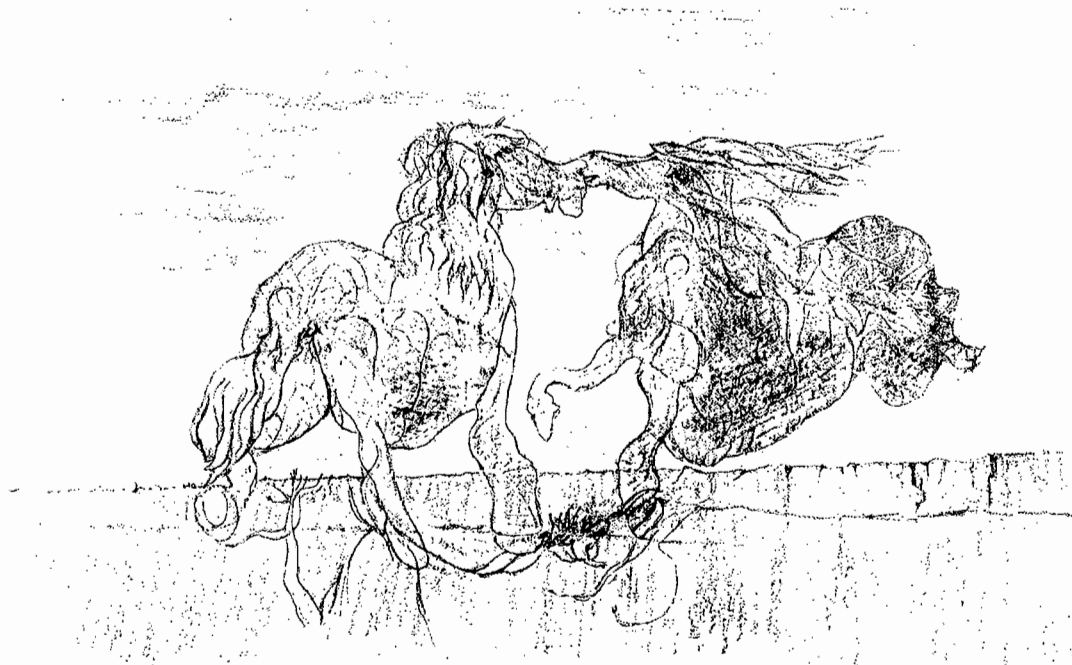


Fig. 18 - Max Ernst, *The Stallion and the Bride of the Wind*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXXIII)



Sinistres Rencontres humaines

Fig. 19 - Robert Desnos, *Sinistres Rencontres humaines* (Sinister Human Encounters), 1922

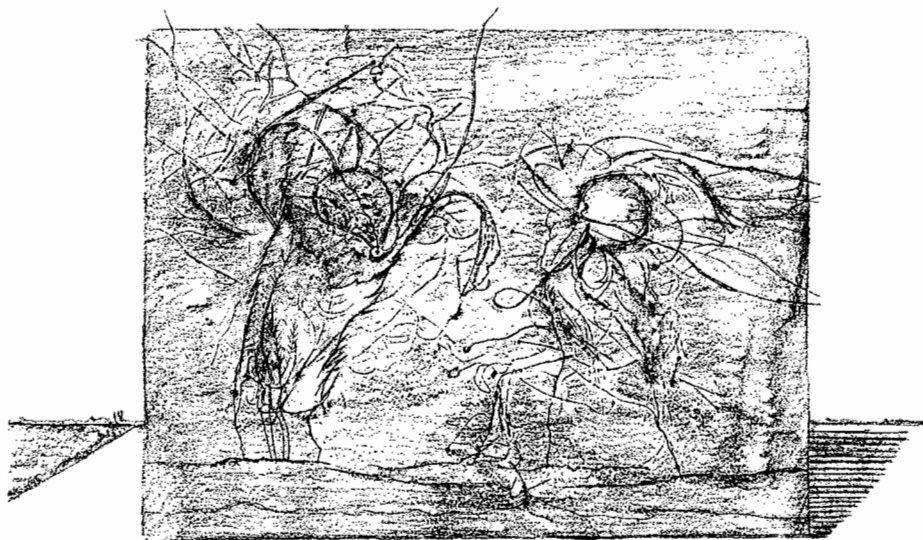


Fig. 20 - Max Ernst, *Whiplashes or Lava-strings*, *Histoire Naturelle*, (Pl. XXX)

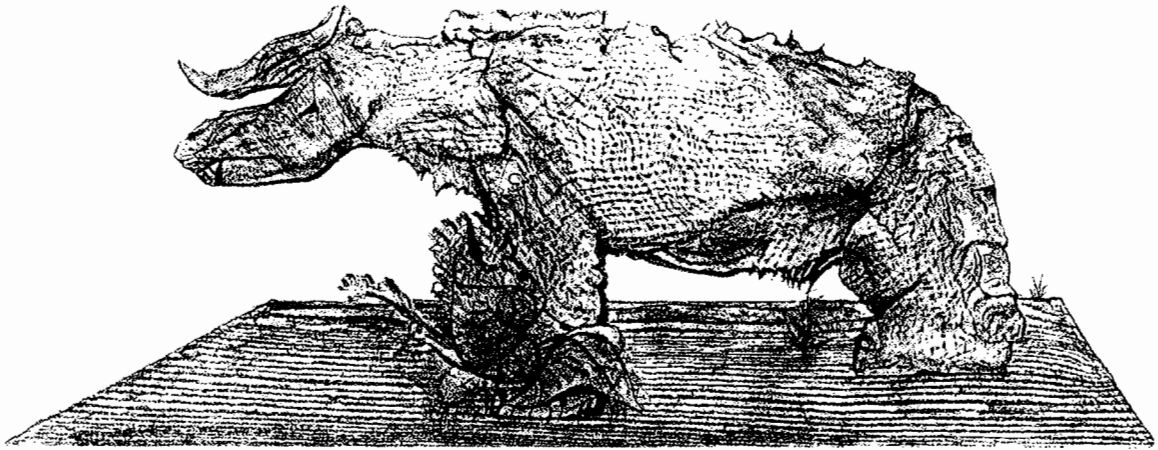


Fig. 21 - Max Ernst, *The Dead Man's Meal*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXVIII)

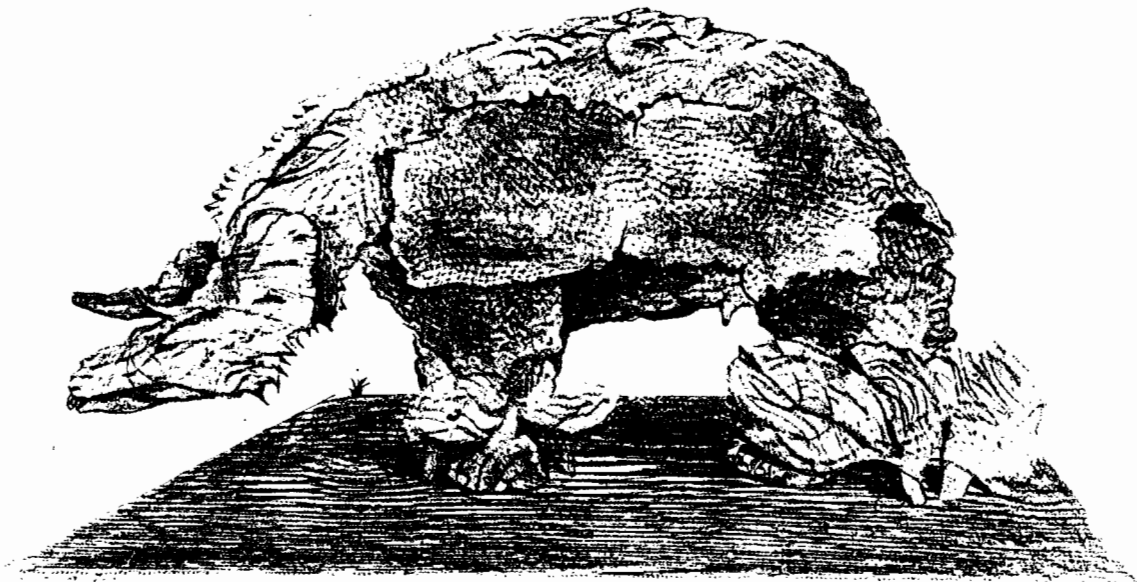


Fig. 22 - Max Ernst, *The Dead Man's Meal*, 1925

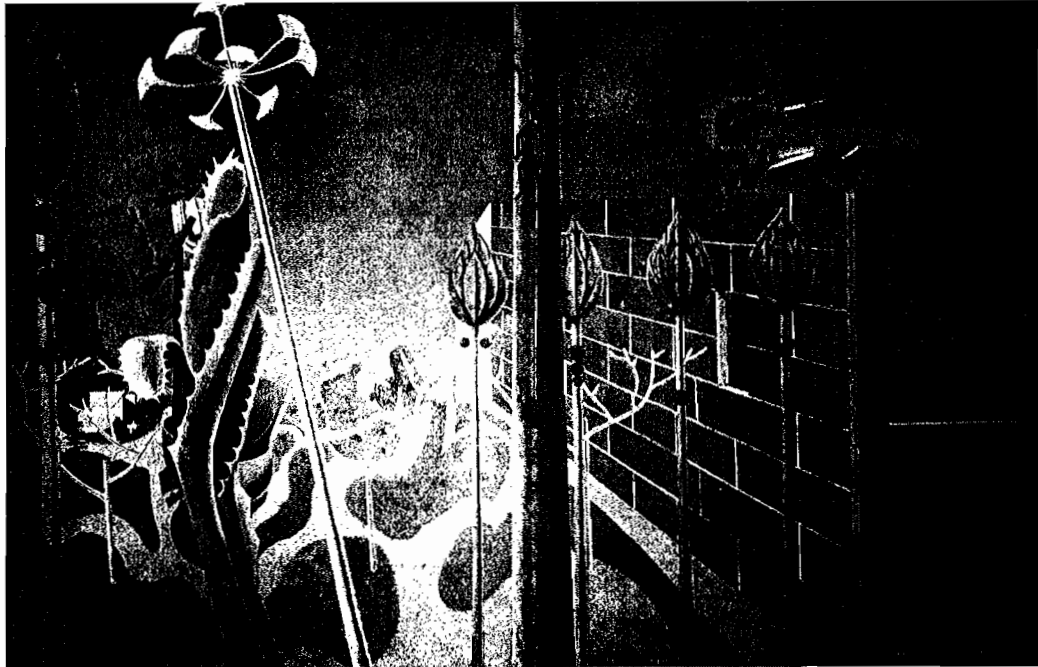


Fig. 23 - Max Ernst, *Histoire Naturelle*, wall painting from Paul and Gala Eluard's house in Eaubonne, 1923



Fig. 24 - Hans Arp, *Biomorphic Drawing*, 1917

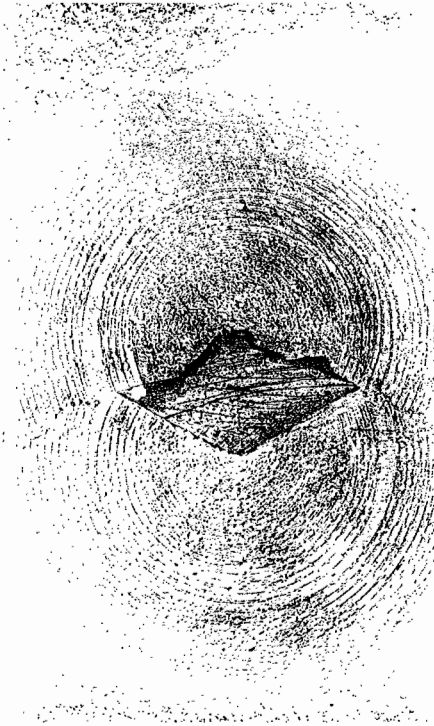


Fig. 25 - Max Ernst, *The Earthquake*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. V)

Microgramme Arp 1 : 25.000

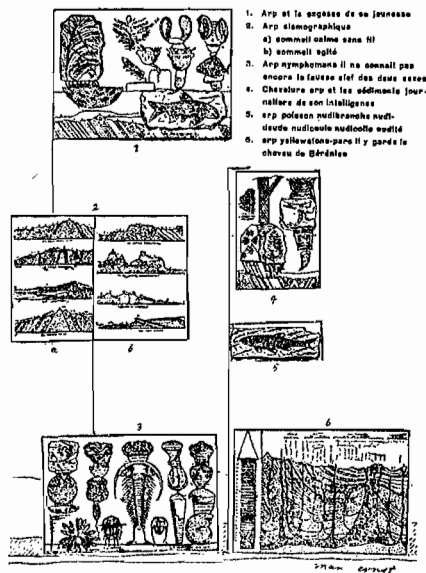


Fig. 26 - Max Ernst, *Microgramme Arp 1:25.000*, 1921

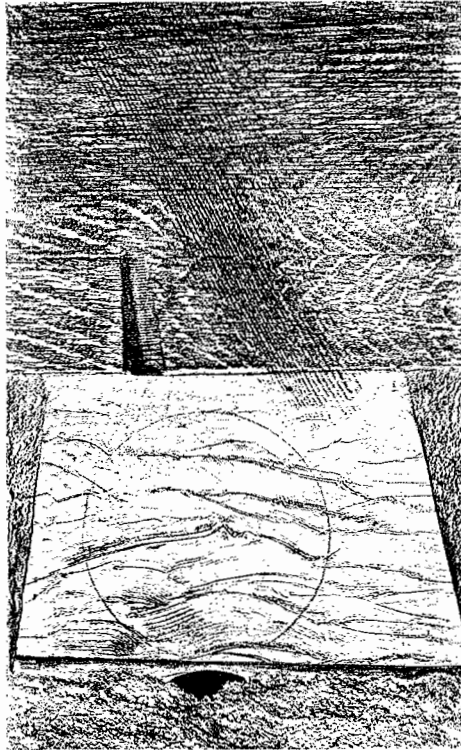


Fig. 27 - Max Ernst, *The Sea and the Rain*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. I)

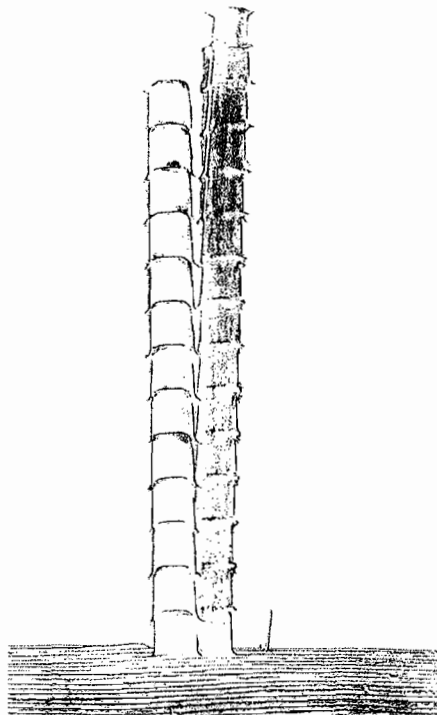


Fig. 28- Max Ernst, *The False Positions*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. VIII)



Fig. 29 - Max Ernst, *Scarecrows*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XIII)

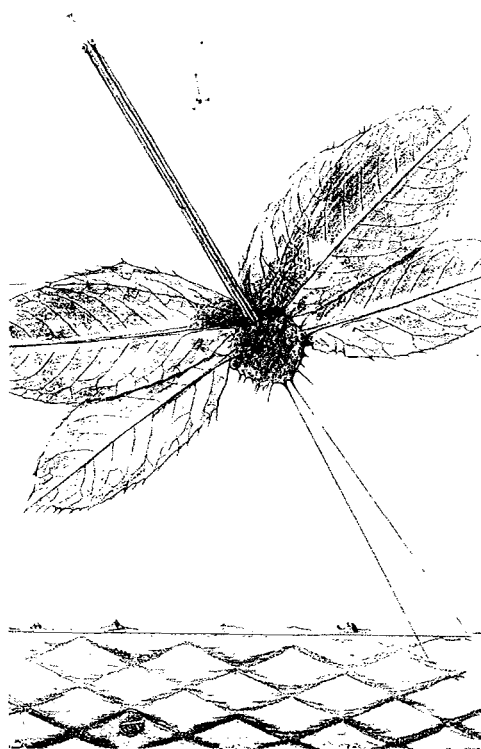


Fig. 30 - Max Ernst, *Teenage Lightning*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXIV)

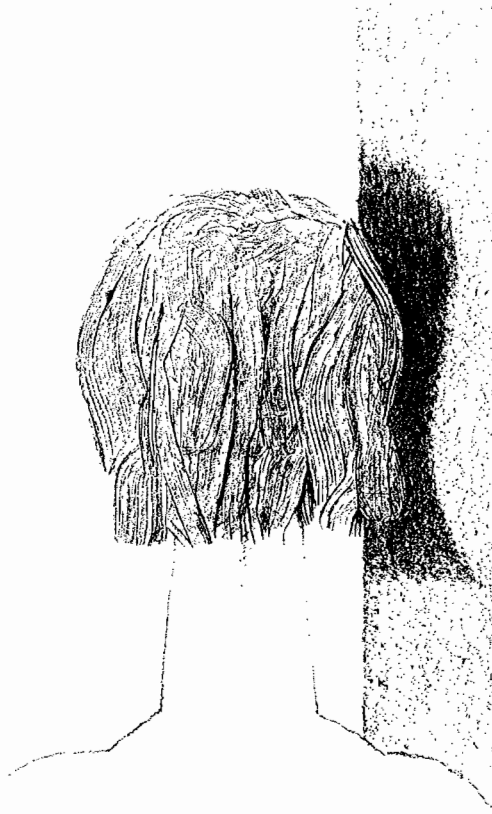


Fig. 31 - Max Ernst, *Eve the only one to Remain ours*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXXIV)

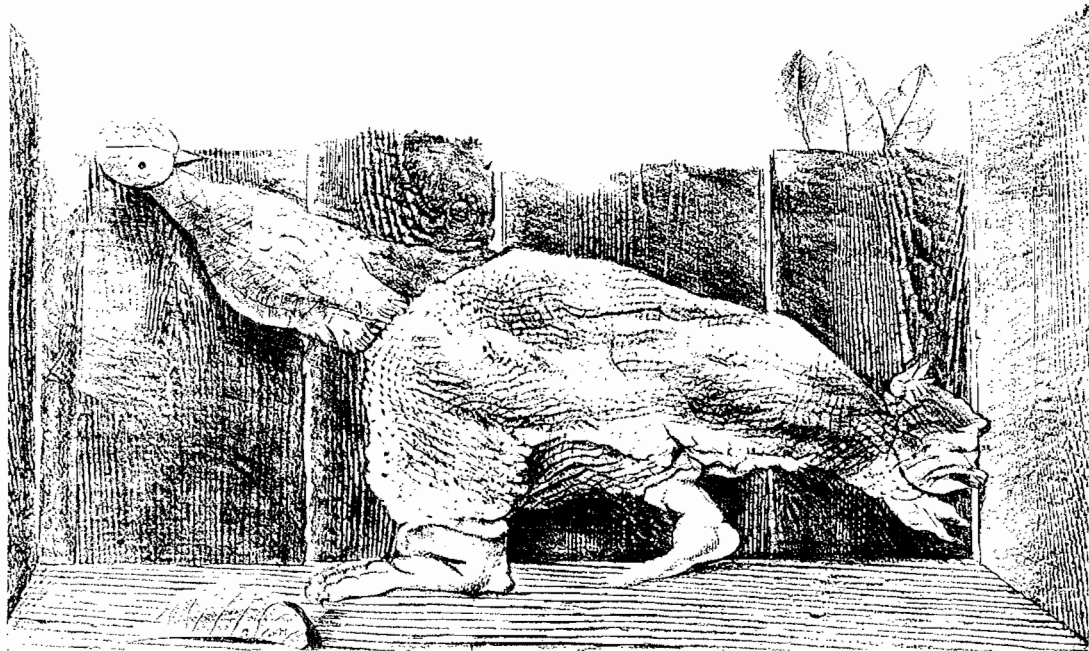


Fig. 32 - Max Ernst, *In the Stable of the Sphinx*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXVII)



Fig. 33 - Max Ernst, *The Origin of the Clock*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXVI)

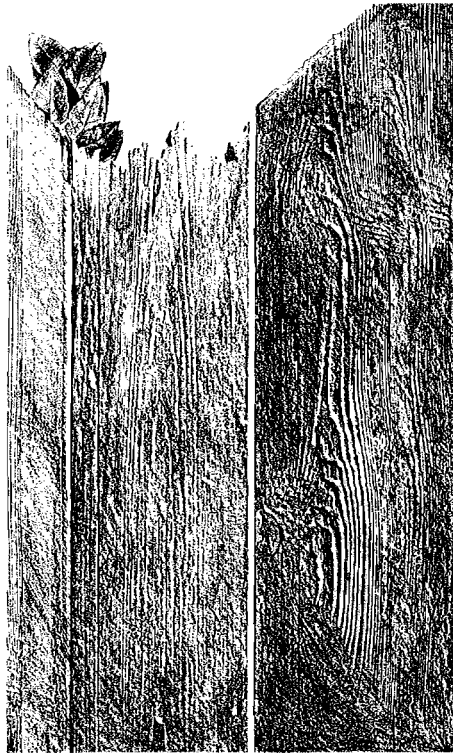


Fig. 34 - Max Ernst, *Shaving the Walls*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XXI)

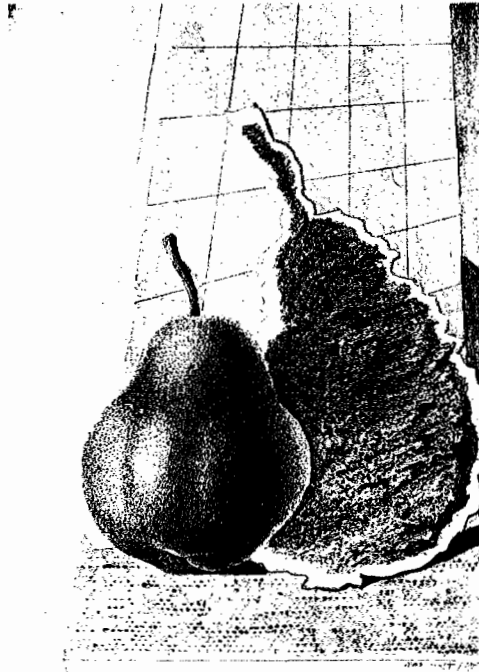


Fig. 35 - Max Ernst, *Visible Pear*, 1925

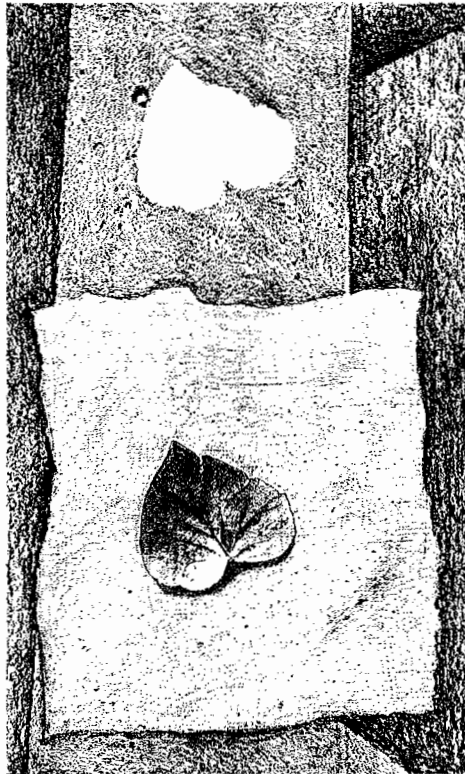


Fig. 36 - Max Ernst, *The Palette of Caesar*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. XX)



Fig. 37 - Raoul Ubac, *Portrait in a Mirror*, 1938

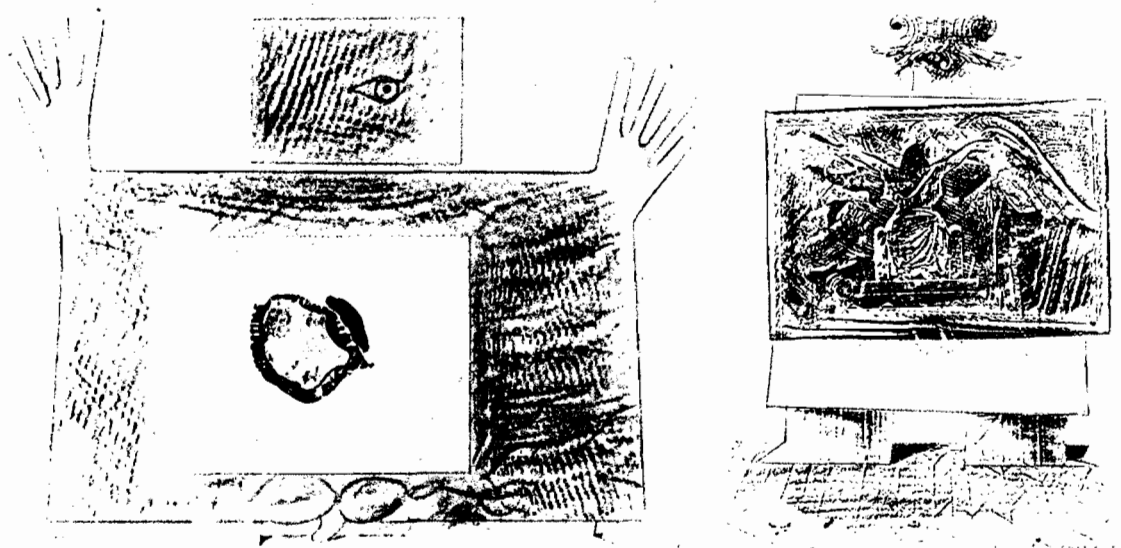


Fig. 38 - Right: Max Ernst, *Loplop présente (Loplop presents)*, 1931
 Fig. 39 - Left: *Loplop présente (Loplop presents)*, 1931

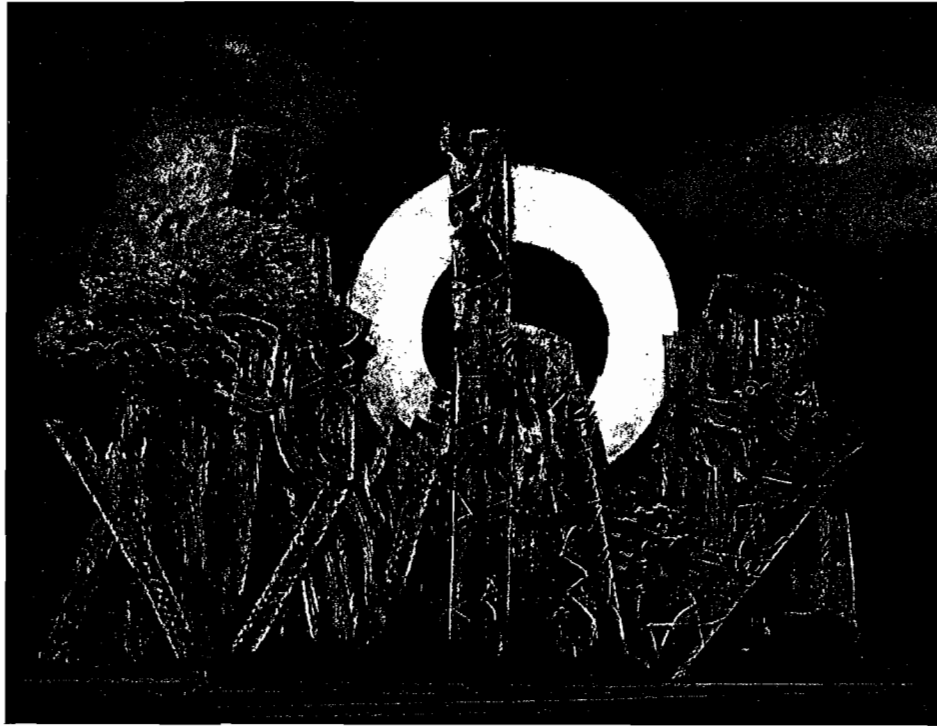


Fig. 40 - Max Ernst, *La roue du soleil – Grand Marine* (*The Wheel of the Sun – Grand Marine*), 1926



Fig. 41 - Max Ernst, *Aux 100,000 colombes* (*100,000 Doves*), 1925



Fig. 42 - Max Ernst, *Le fascinant cypress* (*The Fascinating Cypress*), 1940

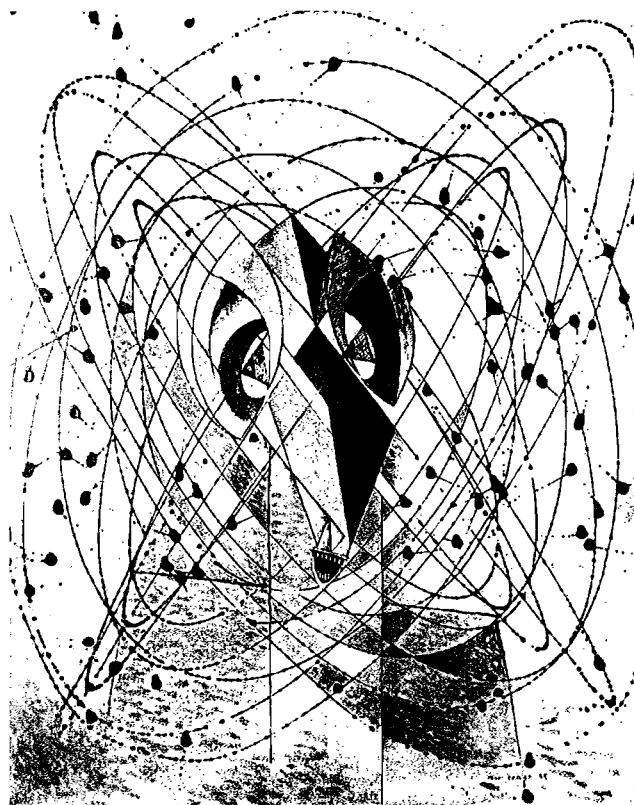


Fig. 43 - Max Ernst, *Jeune homme intrigue par le vol d'une mouche non-euclidienne* (*The Young Man Plots the Theft of the non-Euclidian Fly*), 1942-1947

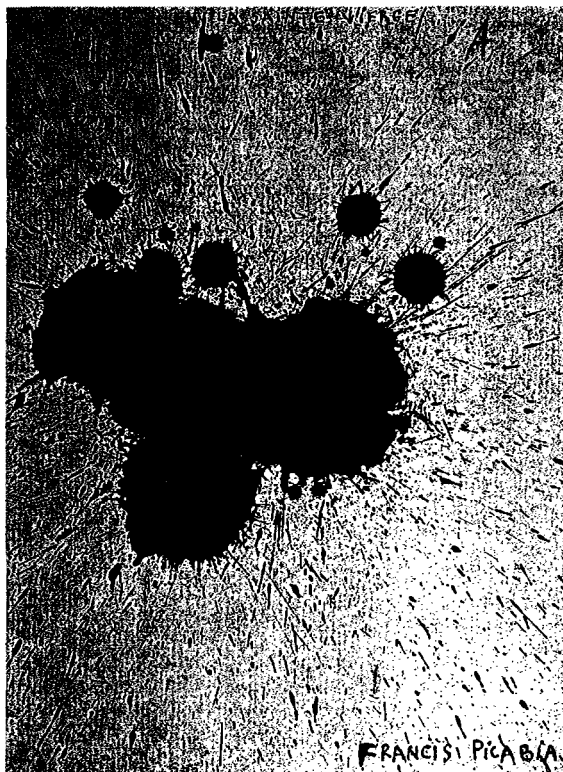


Fig. 44 - Francis Picabia, *La Sainte Vierge (The Virgin Stain)*, 1920



Fig. 45 - Max Ernst, *La joie la vivre (The Joy of Life)*, 1936

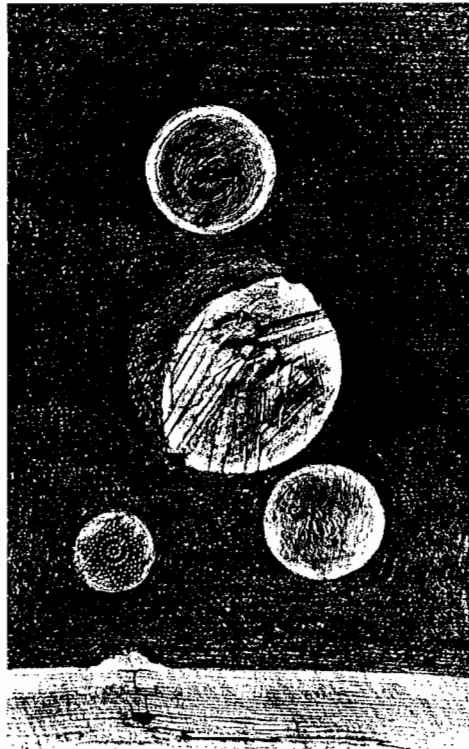


Fig. 46 - Max Ernst, *Little Tables around the Earth*, *Histoire Naturelle* (Pl. III)



Fig. 47 - Max Ernst, *Le Miroir* (*The Mirror*), 1925

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