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Article abstract

Contemporary thinking about archives remains bound up in the vexed relationship between the political and the knowable. This essay explores the political epistemology of archives and archival practices, seeking to dislodge the contemporary scholarly discourse on archives from its tendency to instrumentalize archiving as either a repository of knowledge or an apparatus of power. In studying the collections of two members of the surrealist movement, this essay examines the extent to which archival practices instead suspend the certainties of political desire, disclosing the persistence of discontinuity within the closed systems into which such certainties always threaten to develop. It focuses on two archival collections: the studio of André Breton at 42, rue Fontaine in Paris, and the figural “kitchen” of Leonora Carrington's paintings and writings.

Breton's Wall, Carrington's Kitchen: Surrealism and the Archive

JONATHAN EBURNE

Les embaumeurs auront du mal.

Jacques Rancière¹

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Contemporary thinking about archives remains bound up in the vexed relationship between the political and the knowable. Even beyond the axiomatic question of whether the term designates a set of material holdings—such as texts, documents, artifacts, and images—or a general heuristic for the historical and psychic processes of inscription and loss, the archive raises further concerns about the status of its holdings and the administrative powers that sustain them. Does an archive constitute a repository of cultural memory, or a site of disregard and degraded utility? And to what extent is it even possible to make such a distinction? Whatever normative power might be exercised on behalf of the archive in determining what becomes archivable, the question remains as to whether this power is itself subject to the same limited circulation as its contents. Whether it corresponds to the ravages of state power, or the intransigent persistence of “vibrant matter,” one wonders whether the *arkhé* of an archive can ever be appropriated as a means of intervening in worldly politics. Indeed, are claims about the availability of archival power purely the fiction of artists, scholars, and historians?² Such concerns—like many questions about intellectual agency—are

1. Jacques Rancière, *Chroniques des temps consensuels*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. “La librairie du 21^e siècle,” 2005, p. 187.

2. See, in particular, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009; Bill Brown (ed.), *Things*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004. On the methodological resonance of such questions, see also Francis Blouin, “History and Memory: The Problem of the Archives,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 119, n° 4, March 2004, p. 296-298; Kathy E. Fergu-

hardly new; they suffuse 20th century thinking about intellectual conduct and the political responsibility of intellectuals, contributing to a body of thought that animates contemporary theory at the very moment when so much theory appears to be seeking refuge in the rhetoric of political utility.³

A vast body of contemporary scholarship in the humanities has accommodated itself to an interventionist agenda that privileges the rhetoric, as well as the ontological priority, of agency, sovereignty, and the event. By contrast, the study of knowledge, and of its storage, retrieval, and loss, risks falling prey to an intrinsic nostalgia or antiquarianism that only makes sense in terms of the more exigent-sounding language of biopolitics, information networks, and global regimes of capital. Giorgio Agamben, for instance, appropriates the Foucauldian notion of the archive as “la loi de ce qui peut être dit, le système qui régit l'apparition des énoncés comme événements singuliers” to describe a general mechanism of institutional power, making visible how questions pertaining to the storage and retrieval of knowledge have become instrumentalized.⁴ By this logic, the archive becomes worthy of analysis primarily as an apparatus of power, one of the set of institutions, norms, and forms of subjectification “in which power relations become concrete.”⁵

Such appropriations indicate the agonism with which so much contemporary philosophical and critical inquiry has sought to manage the inconsistencies of how and what we know. This managerial imperative expresses itself in a variety of ways: by asserting the self-evidence of archival material (that the archive is a repository of historical truth); by resorting unapologetically to metaphysics (that truth lies beyond the reach of archival or archivable knowledge); or, more broadly, by instrumentalizing the archive itself as an apparatus of political and

son, “Theorizing Shiny Things: Archival Labors,” *Theory and Event*, vol. 11, n° 4, 2008; Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michèle Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh and Jane Taylor (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive*, Cape Town, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002; Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002; and Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. See also the special issue of *English Language Notes* dedicated to the study of archives: John-Michael Rivera (ed.), *ELN: The Specter of the Archive*, vol. 45, n° 1, Spring/Summer 2007.

3. For a contemporary assessment of “archive panic,” see Ferguson, 2008.

4. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Bibliothèque des sciences humaines,” 1969, p. 170.

5. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 6.

historical sovereignty, whether legislative, totalitarian, or liberatory (that the archive functions as law). In each case, we find an overarching impulse to levy some sort of guarantee upon the concept of the archive, thus rendering knowledge itself—that obscure object of epistemology—merely the dominion of power, rather than, say, a modality of its being. The point here, by contrast, is to heed the insistent particularity of archival material and archival practices—storing, collecting, arranging, and retrieving as well as excluding, erasing, disordering, and losing—as the very function of an archive, suggesting the immanence of archival “power” to the knowledge it delineates.⁶ In the material accumulation of archival data itself, “power” describes something already archaic, discernible only through its traces, and articulable, in turn, only in trace form.

This essay thus seeks to dislodge the discourse on archives—at least provisionally—from its tendency toward an instrumentalization through which the archive becomes either a site of self-evidence or a domain for the concretization of power. Resisting, that is, the temptation to domesticate the archive—or, as Jacques Derrida put it, to domiciliate it as the home of the law⁷—this essay attends instead to the molecular particularity of archival functions such as collection, storage, and retrieval, which constitute alternative systems for constituting and circulating knowledge. Far from assuaging our anxieties about the function of the archive, this essay seeks to uphold the tendency of an archive toward proliferation and redistribution as a problematic within the discourses that have marginalized these processes.⁸ The critical-philosophical interest in archives that returns periodically to haunt theories of political exigency demands, I argue, that we reassess that which has been excluded from circulation: at once the atomizing minutiae of archival material, as well as the fields of study traditionally dedicated

6. Even in an early work such as *L'archéologie du savoir*, Foucault's account of the archive suspends any such instrumentalization of knowledge as simply the occasion for power to exercise itself upon us. The famous notion of “l'archive” as the law or system of laws “de ce qui peut être dit” denotes a transcendental, structuring logic of historical inscription whose nature can only be approached obliquely, “à partir des discours qui viennent de cesser justement d'être les nôtres.” Foucault, 1969, p. 170-172. For a provocative rereading of Foucault's power-knowledge heuristic, see Jeffrey Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and Its Intensifications After 1984*, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2008, p. 14-17.

7. See Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive*, Paris, Galilée, 1995, p. 20.

8. For a discussion of how “the weight of particulars in archival wealth is countered by the need to generalize, to make arguments and tell a story,” see Ferguson, 2008.

to them, such as history, psychiatry, science, literature, art and, in particular, the inventive terrain of the avant-garde.

Rather than seeking to purify political thinking about such entanglements, this essay elaborates their constitutive place in modern political epistemology. My focus in doing so will be the collecting practices of the surrealist movement, an avant-garde group notable as much for its accumulations—its heterodox assemblages of objects, expressive media, methodologies, and participants—as for its political and aesthetic commitments. In addition to their active role in leftist politics, the surrealists accumulated a body of experimental cultural work devoted to measuring the powers of resistance exercised by words, objects, and ideas. Beyond the familiar rhetoric of its manifestos, the surrealist movement can be approached synoptically—as it was by postwar intellectuals such as Foucault—for its radical inclusivity: that is, for its refusal to think of intellectual and political labor, or knowledge and power, as mutually exclusive. As a collective undertaking, surrealism's manifold artistic, poetic, and political activities constitute less a platform for "engaged" intellectualism alone, than an evolving set of discontinuous knowledges that extended to the minutiae of the movement's archival practices: the production and circulation of knowledge, but also its accumulation, its storage and display, its classification and order.⁹ As Walter Benjamin was famously aware, surrealism's attention to obsolete spaces and artifacts lay at the heart of both its political and aesthetic sensibilities, acting as a symptom of and a medium for, its forays into materialism.¹⁰ Yet, rather than constituting a mere vehicle for the movement's revolutionary desires, surrealism's collections are attuned to the resistances of and within epistemic fields; as archival practices, they both register and affect how contemporary orders of knowledge and ideology confront the not-yet-known, as well as how they exclude, absorb, or founder on their obstacles. This has less to do with political militancy, or even with ideology critique, than with a measuring of the contestations that take place between an episteme and the heterodox fields of knowledge against which it distinguishes itself. My essay concerns such tacit exercises and resistances of archival power, whose very status in French thinking as contestation not only owes much to the surrealists, but extends from the movement's attention to the archive as well.

9. See Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 2008, p. 88-89.

10. Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings and Gary Smith (eds.), *Selected Writings, 1927-1934*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 210.

In what follows, I examine two collections of artifacts—the walls of Breton's studio and the figural “kitchen” of Leonora Carrington's writings and paintings—that are dedicated as much to the practice of archivization and knowledge-collection as to leftist militancy or the production of art. At stake for Breton and Carrington, I maintain, was the expansion of the possibilities for political and epistemological transformation beyond the formalisms of parties and platforms. Far from seeking to purge surrealism—or contemporary thinking about archives—of its political intentionality, this essay examines how surrealist archival practices suspend the certainties of political desire, disclosing the persistence of discontinuity within the closed systems into which such certainties always threaten to develop.

Through their accumulation of artifacts, taxonomies, and systems of classification, Breton and Carrington exercise, as much as they theorize, the suspensive function of the archive. Their collections both appeal to, and paradoxically defy, the tendency for knowledge to systematize and commemorate itself. Their practices of collecting are thus consistent with the broader surrealist project of suspending the “*rationalisme fermé*” of ordering principles whose political consequences extended, as Breton argued, to the unconscious justification of violence as an “*exutoire à la passivité mentale*.”¹¹ It is from this suspension, I argue, that the possibility of intellectual agency emerges as an epistemic event proper to the archive. Surrealist collecting thus proposes alternatives to the contemporary inclination to instrumentalize intellectual and scholarly activity by purging it of its excesses and discontinuities. In place of a return to order, we find the insistent demand of the archive: the aggregate particularity of accumulated knowledge that at once records and suspends the historical logic of its accumulation.

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BRETON'S WALL: EMBALMING THE EMBALMERS

André Breton, the animating figure and principal theorist of the surrealist movement, died in 1966. Yet, his studio at 42, rue Fontaine in Paris remained intact

11. André Breton, “Interview de Charles-Henri Ford,” *View* vol. 1, n° 7-8, October-November 1941, in Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Marie-Claire Dumas, Étienne-Alain Hubert et José Pierre (eds.), *Œuvres complètes* vol. 3, Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” 1988, p. 583. For a related study of Situationist *détournement* as an analogously archival practice that preserves—rather than dismantles—the work it appropriates, see Claire Gilman, “Asger Jorn's Avant-Garde Archives,” in Tom McDonough (ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 2004, p. 189-212.



Fig. 1: Elisa Breton in the studio at 42, rue Fontaine, Paris, n.d. Photo: André Breton. © André Breton, DR & Association Atelier André Breton.

for nearly 40 years afterward. Until her own death in 2000, his widow, the Chilean-born artist Elisa (Bindhoff) Breton, maintained the studio, thus preserving her husband's lifelong accumulation of found objects, taxidermy specimens, sculptures, paintings, drawings, photographs, books, assemblages, masks, statues, shields, and decorated skulls. In 2003, the collection was put up for public sale at the Drouot auction house in Paris; an event that bore the paradoxical effect of publicizing and politicizing the collection it dismantled. Amidst debates about the consequences of dispersing such notable modernist holdings, public and scholarly attention alike gravitated toward the significance of Breton's collection itself: how did this assemblage of artifacts—which included hundreds of indigenous art objects as well as numerous famous paintings—reflect the political imperatives of surrealism's most visible representative?

The studio, now visible in photographs as well as in a partial reconstruction at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (Fig. 1), epitomizes Breton's habits as a modernist collector. On the one hand, in what Katharine Conley has described as his "least consciously mediated work," the studio collection itself constitutes a remarkable example of the so-called outsider art it houses.¹² On the other hand, the collection aggregates Breton's altogether conscious work of mediation, serving as the index and residue of his role as an editor, collector, and organizing pres-

12. Katharine Conley, "Surrealism and Outsider Art: From the Automatic Message to André Breton's Collection," *Yale French Studies*, vol. 109, 2006, p. 142.

ence in a major intellectual movement. As Walter Adamson has noted, Breton's career—and surrealism's at large—was made possible, principally, through the poet's prowess as an art collector and dealer. Surrealism owed much to the very circulation of art objects it famously sought to resist.¹³ The sale of Breton's estate in 2003 by Calmels Cohen at the Drouot auction house, which proposed to return its holdings to circulation, exacerbated this irony. For, at the auction house, one could now purchase lots from the collection in a way that individuated its objects in an explicitly commercial fashion.

No longer bound up in the confines of Breton's apartment, the sale also raised the commercial fantasy of returning the objects to their original contexts, which resulted in a setting in play of the archaeological fantasy of letting the objects speak for themselves. This is the fantasy Derrida describes in *Mal d'archive* as “l'instant quasiment extatique dont rêve Freud, quand le succès même d'une fouille doit encore signer l'effacement de l'archiviste: *l'origine alors parle d'elle-même*. Elle se présente et se commente elle-même. ‘Les pierres parlent!’”¹⁴ Even at the auction house, however, it would have been difficult to sustain this fantasy across the spectrum of artifacts in Breton's collection; the very determination of lots and starting bids for each object indicated the extent to which the assessment of the estate was predicated on ideas about aesthetic and commercial value, whether this favored the colonial ideology that considers tribal artifacts to be metonymic, and thus virtually interchangeable, or, by contrast, the tendency to fetishize anything that belonged to Breton as a receptacle of his auratic trace.

At the same time, in dismantling Breton's collection, the sale also dramatized the problems of preservation, categorization, and dispersal it brought to bear on the estate; the sale thus bore the ironic effect of casting attention back upon the archival function of the collection itself. The dispersal of Breton's estate in 2003—which followed the permanent installation of a wall from Breton's studio at the Centre Pompidou in 2000—reveals as much about surrealist thinking as the objects whose fate it concerns. “Only in extinction,” Walter Benjamin wrote in “Unpacking My Library,” “is the collector comprehended”—a statement which might just as well include the collection in addition to the collector.¹⁵ The fate of Breton's collection tells us much about surrealism's collective intellectual enter-

13. Walter Adamson, *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p. 285.

14. Derrida, 1995, p. 144.

15. Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library,” in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken, 1968, p. 67.

prise, and not simply about Breton's presence or absence as its organizing body. Indeed, studying the collection instead of the collector, and practices instead of principles, allows us to sidestep the endless axiomatic question of what surrealism is or was, and to focus instead on the epistemological question of what the movement knows, that is, how its thinking hinges upon the intellectual systems, practices, and archives that have animated the movement since its inception. The fate of Breton's collection, however, also indicates the narrow margin between an archive and a monument, between a collection of discontinuous knowledges and an enduring testament to political or economic utility. In either case, the public debates about how to preserve Breton's atelier and his legacy—of archiving the archive without either dismantling or domesticating it—dramatize the fragile contingency of the archive's "power" of suspension, even as they casts new light on how this archival function might operate.

In April 2003, on the eve of the Drouot auction, the Chicago Surrealist Group issued a statement entitled "Who Will Embalm the Embalmers?" The tract excoriated the scholarly listserv *Mélusine* for its eleventh-hour petition to the French President and Minister of Culture to found a Breton museum in order to keep the studio intact. Upon Elisa Breton's death in 2000, Breton's daughter Aube had donated part of the collection to the Centre Pompidou in partial payment of the estate tax; even so, preserving the remaining estate seemed financially untenable without state intervention. When no single institution complied, a private sale seemed inevitable. The Chicago Surrealist Group, while hardly in favor of the auction, directed its attack principally against the notion of state-sponsored surrealism that the *Mélusine* petition was, by default, advocating. The Chicago group proclaimed that it was essential to cleanse living surrealism of its "irreducible enemies"—which included scholars as well as representatives of the state—for their complicity in "rendering surrealism inoffensive." Institutionalizing Breton's studio as a museum would appeal to the values of nationalism, patrimony, literary greatness, and the preservation of private property in ways that would damage Breton's archive more inescapably than any auction could, destroying it ideologically rather than commercially. "By what right," the group's proclamation read, "do they falsely portray André Breton as a rich collector, shrewd merchant, pandering author, chauvinistic poet? Don't they know that such 'portraits' are nothing but lies?"¹⁶

16. Chicago Surrealist Group, "Who Will Embalm the Embalmers?" www.surrealistmovement-usa.org/pages/news_bretonsale.html (last access January 6, 2012).

The Drouot sale was itself deplorable, as the group wrote in a pamphlet published earlier that year; this was less because the auction would put a price on surrealism, than because it would obliterate the evidence of “an exemplary subversive, liberating, and revolutionary current in history and culture.” Manifesting the fear and loathing of official French culture toward “the memory and living presence” of Breton, the sale reduced surrealism to a mere assortment of curiously miscellaneous works.¹⁷ The message of the Chicago group’s declarations was clear: living practitioners of surrealism should be more concerned with preserving the “memory and living presence” of Breton than with artificially maintaining the integrity of his private collection. As the group insisted, “Breton [...] remains the embodiment of the most scandalously anti-authoritarian virtues: insubordination, revolt, revolution, and freedom now.” The Chicago group’s two tracts provocatively turn attention away from the spectacle of the Drouot sale as a dismemberment of Breton’s estate, urging us instead to heed the fact that the collection, and all it represented, was being re-archived and re-historicized before our very eyes. In turn, the group’s polemics dramatized the extent to which the collection’s epistemological function was bound up in its relationship to the historical memory of the surrealist movement as a whole. What limited the Chicago group’s declarations, however, was its fixed idea about what this historical memory *should* have been. Beyond their nostalgic claim that a body that had been dead since 1966 might still embody anything, their pamphlets concentrated on Breton’s centrality as the index and embodiment of surrealism’s “anti-authoritarian virtues.”

Analogously, a number of scholars, journalists, and other intellectuals have, over the years, noted the remarkable heterogeneity of Breton’s studio, as well as its tendency, in juxtaposing found objects, surrealist works, and so-called “primitive” artifacts, to embody several poetic tendencies of the surrealist movement. But it would be a mistake to consider the collection to be an embodiment of surrealism, just as it would be a mistake to consider Breton himself the embodiment of its anti-authoritarianism. Rather, I propose that we think of Breton’s collection, and perhaps even of Breton himself, as a prosthesis rather than a corpus. As a technological construct, Breton’s studio is at once the residue and record of surrealist practices—literary and artistic production, *flânerie*, genealogy, ethnography, exotic rapture—as well as a formal apparatus that determines the

17. Chicago Surrealist Group, “Surrealism Is Not for Sale! The Gold of Time in the Time of Gold.” www.surrealistmovement-usa.org/pages/news_bretonsale1.html (last access January 6, 2012).

kinds of activities and materials that belong to the collection, that is, which become archivable as surrealist.

In an exhibition catalogue essay, Agnès de la Beaumelle discusses this determinative quality of the studio, noting how much of Breton's 1928 essay *Le surrealisme et la peinture* was based on the works collected on the walls he faced as he wrote.¹⁸ The collection functioned as both a theoretical apparatus and an archive of surrealism. Beaumelle describes this function in cartographic terms: as a three-dimensional map of Breton's accumulated juxtapositions, the studio registers the panoramic perspective from which Breton collected the writers and artists, living and dead, who made up surrealism's ever-evolving ranks. For Beaumelle, though, this ordering logic was not only panoptic but totalizing. She rightly notes the parallels between the heterogeneity of Breton's private studio and the heterogeneity of surrealism itself. Yet, she argues that the unifying principle behind this parallel is its subordination to Breton's omnivorously organizational eye. I would argue, however, that Breton's archive is as much a determinant of any such magisterial eye, as it is determined by it.

Indeed, the very structure of Breton's collection elides such totalization, insofar as it bears the traces of the forms of categorization and display according to which its objects are displayed. The collection is of course notable for its nonhierarchical organization which, for the most part, grants no more positional privilege to Alberto Giacometti's suspended ball than to New Guinean shield carvings, or to a portrait of Breton's wife Elisa. But this eclecticism is far from disorderly, as the collection bears numerous micro-systems of order and categorization that maintain their specificity, even if residually. A domed collection of bird specimens, for instance, conserves its intrinsic logic of aesthetic naturalism, while an array of *kachina* dolls is assembled taxonomically into two ordered rows. Many of the room's other figurines are ordered by style and function, while books line the shelves in recognizable ways. Even Victor Brauner's *L'étrange cas de Monsieur K* (1934), positioned above a bookshelf topped with a row of whimsically shaped glass bottles, appears to offer a commentary on these lingering forms of seriality and classification within the collection.¹⁹ Indeed, it is in this juxtaposition of heterogeneous orders, and not just heterogeneous objects, that

18. Agnès de la Beaumelle, "Le Grand Atelier," in Agnès Angliviel de La Beaumelle, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine and Claude Schweisguth (eds.), *André Breton: La beauté convulsive*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 1991, p. 61-62.

19. For images of Breton's studio, see in particular: Gilles Ehrmann and Julien Gracq, *42, rue Fontaine: L'atelier d'André Breton*, Paris, Adam Biro, 2003. See also the images of 42, rue Fontaine at www.andrebretton.fr (last access January 6, 2012).

Breton's collection resonates most strongly with the surrealist movement's intellectual practice of what might be considered the collectivization and depersonalization of thought.²⁰

As indices of knowledge-systems brought into contact with each other in Breton's studio, these objects stage the intersection of residual structures of categorization and display: positivist scientific taxonomy, natural history, petit-bourgeois souvenir-collecting, library cataloguing, so-called primitive art connoisseurship, and even the dynamic "law" of their current archivization. The collection draws its authority, we might say, from these residual systems insofar as it registers the continuities and discontinuities between them. In place of a singular logic for the order of things, we find a proliferation of orders: an archival collection of the archival logics that structure the way we think about worldly phenomena. If, in the words of Claude Cahun, it is in witnessing "où la raison s'arrête," that we might "saisir et ne plus lâcher la matière avec le sentiment de notre libération," then Breton's archive accumulates these limits, presenting us with the points of intersection between ordering systems of knowledge.²¹ Even so, to the extent that this accumulation of limits constitutes a kind of authority, it only exercises itself in a retreat from an economy of return that would overwrite its multiplicity or enforce its heterodoxy as a formal law of "libération." Its suspensive effects extend from the impersonality of the collection itself as an accumulated surfeit of systems, rather than the domain of an authorial subject or authoritative principle.

The auction of Breton's estate recategorized the collection, albeit by way of a singular hierarchical principle. As the Chicago surrealists indicated, the problem was less that the sale dispersed or even privatized the collection, especially since much of the archive quickly found its way back into other museums and archives. Rather, the more dramatic consequence of the auction was that it anatomized the collection, dividing the lots into distinctive categories: modern painting, drawing, and sculpture; manuscripts; books; popular arts; photographs; and primitive arts. Accordingly, Calmels Cohen's massive auction catalogue was divided into eight volumes, with two volumes dedicated to books and modern paintings each. The irony is that this catalogue, lavishly published in both book form and as a DVD, is now the authoritative record of Breton's holdings, painstakingly

20. See Spieker, 2008, p. 85-103.

21. Claude Cahun, "Prenez garde aux objets domestiques!" [*Cahiers d'art*, 1936] in François Leperlier (ed.), *Écrits*, Paris, Jean-Michel Place, 2002, p. 539.



Fig. 2: Reconstruction of the wall of André Breton's studio on rue Fontaine, Paris. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Photo: Philippe Migeat. CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY. Paintings by Miro, Picabia, Giacometti: © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

indexed and photographed.²² This recategorization—with its definitive separation of primitive from modern, high art from popular art, painting from text—does more to dissolve the studio's archival, or meta-archival, function than even the sale itself.

In the face of this recategorization, the earlier phase in the simultaneous dismantling and preservation of Breton's collection by the Centre Pompidou stands out all the more notably for its effort to conserve the curatorial form of the studio by providing an archive of the archive (Fig. 2). The Breton wall faces a delicate task, as to break down the collection into individual works would replicate the anatomizing effect of any auction. To recreate Breton's studio too accurately,

22. A recently relaunched website, dedicated to the collection and funded by the Association Atelier André Breton, has sought to redress this limited categorization: the Association seeks to restore and build on the earlier Calmels Cohen documentation and web platform which was incomplete and which, moreover, had been removed from the web shortly after the auction. See www.andrebretton.fr. Also, two documentary films about the studio, *L'œil à l'état sauvage* and *André Breton malgré tout*, directed by Fabrice Maze, have been released on a DVD titled *André Breton* (2007).

on the other hand, would raise the grim prospect of erecting yet another house museum, enshrining not the collection but the domestic trappings of the genius at work. As Derrida writes about the Freud museum in London, the domiciliation of an archive, and the transformation of a house into a museum, marks the institutional passage from the private to the public by saving, but also re-institutionalizing, whatever happens to be preserved there.²³ To institutionalize authorship and genius would, as the Chicago surrealist group noted, represent an erasure rather than a preservation of Breton's, and surrealism's, contribution to intellectual history. The curation of the Breton wall takes pains to avoid such enshrinement; indeed, to the extent that the wall does resemble a shrine or altar, this effect seems more ironic or elegiac than hagiographic. Missing from the wall's display are the characteristic fetish items of the writer's trade, such as Breton's desk, his pipes, and the rack of pens that lined the desk in his working studio. This is not the case in the Freud museum, where it is precisely such objects that we find mingled with the doctor's collection of antiquities.²⁴ Even as it transforms a working studio into a static display, the installation of a wall from Breton's studio highlights the wall's composition, rather than striving to allegorize its function within the absent author's consciousness. As a public archive, the Breton wall effaces Breton's individual "memory" as an author. Instead, it favors the prosthetic effect of supplementing the historical remembrance of surrealism with the technological specificity of his collection, in its interwoven systems of display and categorization.

Yet it is curiously on the subject of authorship that the installation finds its limit, the point at which it cedes to the institutional logic of a modern art museum. Notably absent from the Centre Pompidou's Breton wall is the massive accumulation of books and manuscripts with which the other objects competed for space in Breton's studio. The missing books and documents are, like the artifacts on display, objects Breton collected rather than authored. Is not Breton's library as much a part of his collection as a series of *kachina* dolls or paintings by Dalí and Picabia? To exclude the books from the Pompidou display risks imposing a categorical separation between visual and textual arts, a separation that misrepresents not only surrealism but also the "rapport entre l'ordre du *faire*, celui du *voir* et celui du dire par quoi ces arts—et éventuellement d'autres—étaient des arts."²⁵ As objects accumulated by a movement that rejected the charmed status of

23. Derrida, 1995, p. 13.

24. On the Freud museum, see Spieker, 2008, p. 35-49.

25. Jacques Rancière, *Le destin des images*, Paris, La fabrique, 2003, p. 86.

“works,” the textual objects in Breton’s collection represented the evidence and, often, the continuation of other forms of collective intellectual work—political as well as artistic. The exclusion of books from the Breton wall historicizes surrealism according to the principle that art objects are for museums while books are for libraries. To suggest a divorce between these practices, even in such a tacit fashion, is to memorialize surrealism according to principles incommensurate with the movement’s own discourses about the deterritorialization of knowledge and the continuity between conceptual and political activity. It likewise indicates that the resistance of an archive to its “domiciliation” or instrumentalization as an apparatus hinges upon the possibility of suspending—or at least of deferring—the very tendency by which we strive to delimitate it. Thus, my argument here concerns the broad imposition of principles as an activity whose distillation of archival practices into definable axioms, however liberatory it might appear, risks recategorizing all things according to a singular, transcendental law of utility.

In the preface to his translation of Breton’s *Ode à Charles Fourier* (1947), Kenneth White writes that surrealism proposed to live under the pleasure principle rather than under the reality principle²⁶—to live, that is, according to the charmed logic of both/and rather than under the neurotic, oedipal law similarly decried by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). Yet the fate of the Breton collection demonstrates instead the extent to which surrealism lived under an archival drive—that is, not under any principle at all, but according to the prosthetic experience of inscription and loss of memory, of the breakdown of ordering systems and their partial, conditional reintegration. As a movement that operated within the field of possibility created at the points of encounter between ideologies, ordering systems, and ways of knowing, surrealism collected epistemologies: Marxism, psychoanalysis, and German Romanticism, but also scientific positivism, mysticism, ethnography, alchemy, and even error. The intention was less to uncover a single, magical principle for transforming knowledge, or the world, but rather to submit as much knowledge as possible to an archival drive. Leonora Carrington, in a 1975 essay, speaks most forcefully about the significance of this process:

There are so many questions, and so much Dogamaturd to clear aside before anything makes sense, and we are on the point of destroying the Earth before we know anything at all. Perhaps a great virtue, curiosity can only be satisfied if the millennia

26. Kenneth White, “Introduction,” in André Breton, *Ode to Charles Fourier*, trans. Kenneth White, London, Cape Golliard Press, 1970, n.p.

of accumulated false data be turned upside down. Which means turning oneself inside out and to begin by despising no thing, ignoring no thing.²⁷

Carrington's notion of clearing aside "Dogamaturd"—a portmanteau pun on the reductive function of dogmatism—may take on the glimmer of a geopolitical eschatology here. Even so, the political resonance of such a gesture lies principally in its drive to disarticulate the false continuities of historical knowledge, while persisting in their archaeological excavation. It is Carrington, rather than the Chicago surrealists, who voices the full significance of archiving Breton's wall: not to preserve the memory of an intransigent spirit, but to continually produce mechanisms for turning accumulated data upside down, and, in the process, for turning oneself inside out and ignoring no thing as a correlative to this archive.

31

CARRINGTON'S KITCHEN: AROMATIC SUSPENSION

Whereas the dispersal of Breton's collection becomes, paradoxically, the condition of its comprehension, the dispersal of Leonora Carrington's collections becomes the condition of their very existence. To comprehend these collections, in other words, we must recognize them as having already disappeared. Unlike Breton, whose 44-year residence in the same studio was interrupted only by his exile during WWII, Carrington was on the move for much of her life. Leaving her native England for France in the 1930s, she in turn left France in 1940, fleeing the Nazi invasion only to spend two years in a Spanish mental institution, a period documented in her 1943 novella *Down Below*. From Spain she immigrated to New York, later settling in Mexico City, where she remained until her death at age 94 in May 2011. Even so, she left Mexico City in 1968 in response to the state's violent suppression of student revolts, returning a few years later; she left again after the 1985 earthquake, spending the next few years traveling back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. It is hardly surprising, then, that Carrington's house bore little of the archaeological density of Breton's Parisian studio. She was not a collector of material objects in a way that would appeal to the likes of Calmels Cohen.

Visitors to Carrington's house have nevertheless been surprised by its general lack of ornamentation. In an account of her late residence in the Colonia Roma neighborhood of Mexico City, for instance, Sylvia Cherem struggles to accom-

27. Leonora Carrington, "The Cabbage is a Rose" (1975), in Penelope Rosemont (ed.), *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1998; p. 376.

modate its unexpectedly commonplace interior, which she deems so antithetical to the archival density of Breton's studio or the clutter of other working artists' studios. Cherem zeroes in on the home's kitchen as a representative space, thus ascribing a subjective principle for Carrington's refusal to accumulate anything more than ordinary objects. Cherem writes:

In this space that resembles a garage, hardly anything is kept in cupboards. Oils, sauces, plates, glasses, medications, boxes of tea, and cat food are readily visible on shelves from which also hang rows of blemished pans and rusty scoops. As decoration, there are a few postcards and magazine cutouts that Leonora has treasured, with the photos of the English royalty, including of course Lady Di and Queen Elizabeth II, and Irish writers, also an Egyptian cat, some pre-Columbian and prehistoric archeological pieces, as well as an invitation for an international conference in her honor that took place in the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City.²⁸

Seeking to restore the sense of wonder she finds lacking in Carrington's unexceptional dwelling, Cherem reimagines the kitchen shelves as a *Wunderkammer* of vernacular objects where the decor comes to replicate both Freud's and Breton's collections of artifacts in postcard miniature, presenting a domestic incarnation of André Malraux's ideal museum.²⁹ Aspiring to the cosmological dimensions of Carrington's paintings and stories, Cherem's version of the room is anything other than a blank slate. Such fancifully eisegetical depictions of her home furnishings—and her kitchen in particular—likewise characterize assessments of her writing and painting, which struggle to bring hermeneutic consistency to her difficult and highly allusive body of work.

Yet, Carrington is no less a collector than Breton. As a writer and artist who provides us with similar access to the political and epistemological predilections of the surrealist movement. Her work is significant in that it accumulates systems of knowledge-production in a manner that both invokes and suspends their

28. Sylvia Cherem, "Eternally Married to the Wind: Interview with Leonora Carrington" (2003), in Salomon Grimberg (ed.), *Leonora Carrington: What She Might Be*, Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art, 2008, p. 18-19.

29. The notion that Carrington's dwelling as consistent with her paintings tends to govern descriptions of her studio and study. See, in particular: Marie-Pierre Colle, *Latin American Artists in their Studios*, New York, Vendome, 1995; Helen Byatt, "Introduction," in Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, London, Virago, 1991, p. i-iii; and Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists of the Surrealist Movement*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1995, p. 199. For a photograph of Carrington's postcard collection, see Lucy Skaer, "The Transcendence of the Image," *Tate, Etc.*, vol. 14, Autumn 2008, www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue14/image.htm (last access January 6, 2012).

epistemic power. This archival effect occurs through the mythomaniacal diversity of her writing and painting. Throughout a large body of work beginning in the early 1950s, Carrington stages intellectual history as a series of spatialized dramas in which the confrontations between various epistemic and religious orders play themselves out in figural form. Her "archives" thus comprise a virtual rather than material set of holdings, whose doubly hypomnesic relation to such orders becomes all the more susceptible to misrecognition as mere source-material for her art. Indeed, for over half a century, critics and scholars have struggled to assimilate the proliferation of Mexican, Celtic, Kabbalistic, and hermetic imagery, occult symbolism, and mythological narrative assembled in her work. Even so, the heterogeneity of this material demands that we suspend, rather than heed, the urge to integrate it within an overarching thematic framework, whether feminist, postmodern, or alchemical. Moreover, the hermetic knowledges Carrington gathers may be discontinuous in their multiplicity, but they are neither discontinuous nor resistant in themselves: the belief-systems Carrington collects tend, overwhelmingly, to function according to unifying and totalizing logics of their own. Carrington's work exercises its archival function as much upon these systems and logics as upon the fields of allusion they designate. Comparable as much to Foucault's political epistemology as to Breton's studio, Carrington's work both gathers and disarticulates the accumulated "false data" of intellectual history, forming an archive of the power exercised in and by epistemic fields.

Carrington's 1975 painting *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (Fig. 3) has become something of a canonical work in the artist's oeuvre, providing scholars with both an example of and a key to her mythic system.³⁰ Amidst the painting's recognizable array of vegetables and culinary instruments, the eponymous kitchen forms the site of encounter between two sets of mythic figures: a massive white goose and a horned, cloven-headed figure entering the frame from the right, as well as a group of five shrouded figures preparing food to the left. The two sets of figures occupy seemingly incompatible symbolic registers. The kitchen-workers resemble similarly cloaked figures in other Carrington

30. See especially Susan Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, Aldershot, Lund Humphries, 2004; and Whitney Chadwick, "Pilgrimage to the Stars: Leonora Carrington and the Occult Tradition," in Andrea Schlieker (ed.), *Leonora Carrington*, London, Serpentine Gallery, 1991, p. 24-33; and Whitney Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: Visual Narrative in Contemporary Mexican Art," in Marjorie Agosín (ed.), *A Woman's Gaze: Latin American Women Artists*, Fredonia, White Pine Press, 1998, p. 97-109.



Fig. 3: Leonora Carrington, *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*, 1975, oil on canvas, 79 x 124.5cm, Charles B. Goddard Center, Ardmore, Oklahoma, USA. © 2011 Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

paintings, such as *The Ancestor* (1968), *The Magdalenes* (1986), and *Kron Flower* (1986).³¹ Critics have long noted the autobiographical resonance of these figures, citing both Carrington's longstanding tendency to depict herself as an old woman, as well as her gesture toward ancestry in titling *Aromatic Kitchen* after her maternal grandmother. The kitchen's visitors, by contrast, arrive from a more explicitly mythological order, whose cosmology is indicated, however tacitly, by an inscription on the kitchen floor, which frames the painting's iconography within Celtic myths about the fairy underworld (Fig. 4).³² Gloria Orenstein has

31. Gloria Orenstein likens these figures to the crones or figures of ancient gynocentric wisdom that populate much of Carrington's painting and writing since WWII. See Gloria Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess*, New York, Pergamon, 1990, p. 69-71. See also Whitney Chadwick, "Muse Begets Crone: On Leonora Carrington," in Susan Bee and Mira Schor (eds.), *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 418-422.

32. The inscription, written in inverted script, is divided among the ten legible sections of the *mandala* that lies beneath the figures. The text consists largely of passages drawn from Walter Evans-Wentz. The text in full (with section numbers added) reads: "1) Kitchen *siabra*/ People of the goddess/ DANA/ 2) Death is a pass/ To the world of the *Sídh*/ *DECHTIRE*/ 3) The Goddess Dana/ Became and is the *Sídh*/ *TIR- INNABEO*/

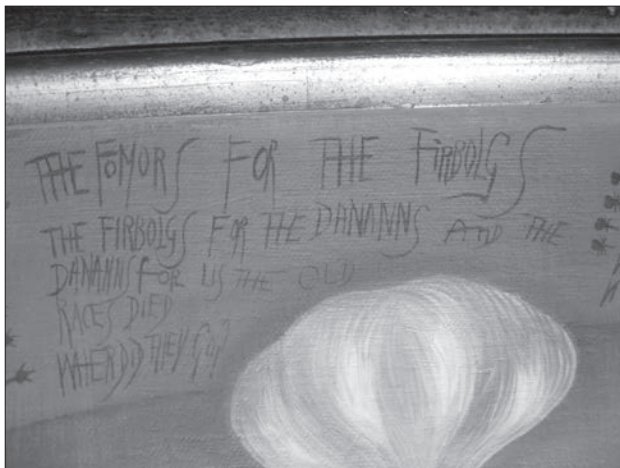


Fig. 4: Detail, inverted, from lower portion of the painting. The image has been reversed to render the inscription legible. © 2011 Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

isolated this inscription as the source of the work's "occult meaning," explaining that "the painting imparts a visionary and scriptural revelation of the underworld land of the *Sídhe* from Celtic mythology, where the Goddess Dana's tribe fled when it took refuge from the conquest by the patriarchal gods."³³ As Orenstein suggests, the drama of the painting—never intimated by the curiously affectless expressions of the figures themselves—has much to do with the conquest and suppression of epistemes: the eclipse of paganism by Christianity, or of matriarchal spirits by patriarchal gods.

More than any celebratory solution to its "occult meaning," however, the painting shares with Carrington's other explicitly epistemological paintings—such as *The Garden of Paracelsus* (1957), *Litany of the Philosophers* (1959), *El*

4) Tylwyth Teg Forming a ring/ At a place full of bones and urns/ Bayan da'N Chione, Doogh/ Dan Chione/ 5) Agallamh an d'a Shuadh/ Anradhs mind this house/ Invite the daughters of Aed Abrat/ To visit the Samhain / BEAN TIGHE/ 6) The Fomors for the Firbolg/ Firbolgs for the Dananns and the/ Dananns for us the old/ Races died/ Where did they go?/ AOIBHINN/ 7) Aine from her closely bid nest did awake/ The woman of wailing from Gur's voicy lake/ TIRNIAL/ 8) Often this fruit/ Produces music so/ Soothing that mortals/ Cease to grieve for/ Those who [sic] the *Sídhe* woman take/ 9) Tuatha be De Dan I saw a/ House in the country out of/ Which no hostages given [to a king]/ Fire burns it not Is not spoilt/ 10) Thou shalt not eat food in [Ireland]/ Untill thou bring with thee/ *Delbchaem*."

33. Orenstein, 1990, p. 9-10.

Mundo Magico de los Mayas (1963), and *The Bath of Rabbi Loew* (1969)—a staging of the encounters between disparate orders of knowledge and belief. Indeed, the hooded figures in *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* may evoke the artist's ancestry, but they also register the particularities of Carrington's research.³⁴ These kitchen-workers are themselves multiply resonant: in their culinary practices, for instance, they evoke the celebratory offerings of corn and food prepared for the dead on All Soul's Day in Mexico. Their shrouds, moreover, suggest the possibility that they emanate from the very realm of departed ancestors which their gifts commemorate: the indigenous Mexican "ancestors" whose cult of death was appropriated and transformed by Spanish Catholicism.³⁵ More generally, the figures are reminiscent of the dwarf-god figurines depicted in Carl Gustav Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944), a study whose iconography—as well as its massive compilation of references and figures—informs much of Carrington's work.³⁶ The inscription on the floor introduces an additional, Celtic, framework, naming the figures as "kitchen *siabra*," ghosts of the kitchen; *Sidhé*, the fairy folk of the underworld, and also as *Bean Tighe*, fairy housekeepers.³⁷ Such allusions—Celtic, Mexican, Jungian, autobiographical—remain dispersed according to the painting's various orders of signification: its autobiographical title, its textual inscriptions, its iconography. Rather than converging within a singular allegorical or archetypal framework, the painting's various symbolic registers maintain their incongruity, as the figural drama of the painting suggests.

Beyond the heterogeneity of its allusions, Carrington's painting notably accumulates the allegorical and archetypal frameworks for which the "alchemical kitchen" becomes a gathering point. As I maintain, Carrington's work is not

34. According to Chadwick, Carrington sees the kitchen "as both a site of oppression for women [...] and as a space for transformation," making no hierarchical distinction between domestic activities and acts of cosmic significance. Chadwick sees this as a response to Western art's tendency to privilege "certain subjects—the monumental, the public, the historical—and devalue others, foremost among them the domestic." See Chadwick, 1991, p. 30.

35. See Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, New York, Zone Books, 2005, especially p. 99-177.

36. Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1953, p. 157. Jung's 1944 text, published in English translation in 1953, is perhaps best known for its discourse on the "symbolism of the *mandala*," Jung's archetypal assimilation of various magic circles—from Aztec calendars to Tibetan world wheels—whose unifying function figures in the "magic circle" at the center of *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*.

37. See note 32.

any less attentive to the mytho-historical theories from which it draws its body of references. Foremost among these texts are Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* (1948) and Walter Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), two texts that each aspire to the heroic synthesis that Carrington's painting holds at bay. These two works on Celtic myth examine the impressions left by ancient belief systems within the modern episteme; they dwell, respectively, on poetic archetypes and folk-wisdom. While scholars have long noted the resounding significance of *The White Goddess* in Carrington's work, Evans-Wentz's book, in turn, is the direct source for the arcane phrases inscribed on the floor in the *Aromatic Kitchen* painting. Yet, far from simply mining them for hermetic miscellany, Carrington's painting registers the mytho-historical imperatives of these works, bearing traces of their ideas about the power of transhistorical continuity, as well as their desire to formalize and instrumentalize this power.

Particularly central to the painting's figural encounter between "ancestors" and zoomorphic spirits, between Mexican and Celtic folk beliefs, is the mytho-poetic system of Graves's *White Goddess*. Graves's 1948 study famously identifies the historical source of all "true poetry" in the pre-Hellenic convergence of Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, and Celtic religions. His essential claim is that true poetry owes its affective resonance to its ability to channel an archetypal pagan theme, whose residual presence Graves traces through medieval Welsh and Irish minstrel ballads. At the center of Graves's philological synthesis lies the residual historical impression of a pre-Christian goddess archetype, whose dissemination throughout Europe and the British Islands derived from the travels of early mercantile tribes during the second millennium B.C.E. Graves identifies the Irish Danu goddess of the *Tuatha dé Danaan* with the archaic Greek goddess Danae of Argos.³⁸ This pan-European historical convergence rhymes with the inverted writing on the floor in Carrington's painting, which likens the "Kitchen *siabra*" to the "People of the goddess," likewise claiming that the ancient goddess of the *Tuatha dé Danaan* persists in historical consciousness in the form of the fairy people of Irish myth.³⁹ Like Graves, Carrington exploits the affective possibilities of the historical uncanny, thereby heeding, we might say, the shock of the ancient.

In contrast to Graves's archetypalism, Carrington's inscription also reminds us of the processes of historical supersession and erasure which this continuity

38. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1953), New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966, p. 62.

39. Susan Aberth discusses this Celtic iconography in other paintings by Carrington from the 1950s onwards; see Aberth, 2004, p. 81-93.

presupposes: the goddess Dana may persist in contemporary folk belief, but only in the diminished order of a fairy underworld.⁴⁰ Citing passages from Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy-Faith*, Carrington's inscriptions offer a lineage of antique Celtic "races" that highlights this mytho-historical logic of diminution, wherein the older races (the *Fomors*, the *Firbolgs*, the *Danaans*) have become the spirits and fairies of the newer races.⁴¹ In Evans-Wentz's accounts of the Irish fairy faith, the loss and persistence of archaic beliefs already functions according to the logic of an archive, in the Foucauldian sense of "la loi de ce qui peut être dit, le système qui régit l'apparition des énoncés comme événements singuliers."⁴² Carrington's painting both cites and bears the archival imprint of Evans-Wentz's argument, reproducing his book as a series of hermetic fragments scrawled on the painting's floor in an inverted hand. By contrast, Evans-Wentz's own folkloric method is hardly so modest in that it generalizes the law of diminution and persistence as a transhistorical principle. Exploring the reasons for the persistence of a fairy-faith in a rapidly modernizing world, Evans-Wentz models the archival "law" governing Celtic folklore on the very structure of that folklore itself: that is, as the downgraded yet still measurable remnant of an earlier historical era. Analogously to Graves's appeal to the archetypal call of "true poetry," Evans-Wentz collects the folk wisdom that reveals how "the natural aspects of Celtic countries [...] impress man and awaken in him some unfamiliar part of himself—call it the Subconscious Self, the Subliminal Self, the Ego, or what you will—which gives him an unusual power to know and to feel invisible, or psychical, influences."⁴³

For Carrington, the "unusual power" of Celtic influences is but one of the orders of knowledge accumulated in *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*. As its fields of allusion suggest, the painting's deployment of hermetic imagery, occult symbols, mythological frameworks, and religious iconography, corresponds to a practice of accumulation which, like Breton's studio, functions through both additions and interruptions. As her discursive relations with Graves and Evans-Wentz suggest, Carrington was fascinated by their archeological projects, yet remained acutely aware of their susceptibility to becoming "Dogamaturd." Her own archival practices not only resist collapsing all such mytho-historical hermetic orders into an assimilated whole—a goddess myth, a Celtic twilight, a New Age philosophy—but they also suspend the very syntheses these orders propose.

40. Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, Oxford, 1911, p. xxiv.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

42. Foucault, 1969, p. 170.

43. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, p. xx.

Similar questions about the laws that determine erasure and persistence animate Carrington's own narrative of a transhistorical encounter in *The Hearing Trumpet*, a novel published the year before she completed *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen*.⁴⁴ This wildly inventive novel, which circulated in manuscript form for at least a decade before its French publication in 1974, serves as a commonplace book for Carrington's thinking during this period. The kitchen scene in the *Aromatic Kitchen* painting—which corresponds so closely with the final scenes in *The Hearing Trumpet* that we might consider the painting to be the novel's sequel—constitutes a figural and conceptual architecture through which the “return of the goddess” designates an epistemic, rather than a mystical or purely fictional event, which proceeds from the heterogeneous practices of incantation and invocation undertaken in her name. Thus, while accommodating the transhistorical projects of Graves and Evans-Wentz, Carrington's novel all the more explicitly unravels their systematic logic of inclusion and exclusion.

The scene in *The Hearing Trumpet* reprised in the painting takes place after the narrative has plunged into apocalyptic absurdity; this absurdity delineates both the condition and the means for the epistemic event Carrington invokes. The novel's ending finds the earth spun cataclysmically off its axis, leaving human civilization in ruins. Carrington's nonagenarian protagonist, Marian Leatherby, takes up with a group of fellow survivors, her friends from a ladies' retirement home, among the ruins. The women receive a visit from an itinerant postman named Taliessin, the poet-hero of the Celtic ballads Graves studies in *The White Goddess*, whom they greet with a modest but symbolic meal.⁴⁵ Their visitor recounts the cataclysmic fate of the earth, which has prompted the departure of the great Mother Goddess. The condition for her return is the restoration of the Holy Grail, whose path the poet-postman has been following for centuries. “The Great Mother,” Taliessin explains, in terms that recall the central figures in the *Aromatic Kitchen*, “cannot return to this planet until the Cup is restored to her filled with Pneuma, and under the guard of her consort the Horned God.”⁴⁶ The old women thus plan to recapture the grail; in order to do so they seek the advice of “Holy Hecate,” a manifestation of the Mother Goddess herself. The women solicit her advice by reprising their gesture of hospitality to

44. Based on internal references to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the novel appears to have been written after 1956; Orenstein reports reading the novel in manuscript form during a visit to Carrington in Mexico City in 1971. See Orenstein, p. 57-58.

45. Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, London, Virago, 1991, p. 143.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.

the errant Taliessin and concocting a powerful soup composed of the aromatics *Stramonium*, *Verbena*, and musk. After a brief “magical ceremony,” the air fills with a swarm of wild bees that form a female figure who prophesizes that “my cup will be filled with honey and I shall drink again with the horned god Sephira the Pole Star, my husband and my son,” before leading the old women into a battle for the Holy Grail.⁴⁷ The prophecy, like the means used to invoke it, converges similarly around the preparation of aromatics: the “powerful soup” used to invoke Hecate thus also prefigures the sweet “Pneuma,” the animating breath or spirit, which will mark the goddess’s return.

Grandmother Moorhead’s Aromatic Kitchen, painted as Carrington revised her novel for publication, reimagines this incantatory use of aromatics. The correspondences between the narrative and visual scenes extend beyond their morphological likeness; both works are notable for their figuration of culinary hospitality and, in particular, the preparation of aromatics as a figure and medium for the heterogeneous orders of knowledge brought together in Carrington’s work. At the painting’s center is a faint white cloud, a synesthetic depiction of the aroma that characterizes Grandmother Moorhead’s kitchen, as well, perhaps, as the very “Pneuma” to which Taliessin alludes in *The Hearing Trumpet*. By refashioning this animating breath as an aromatic, the painting depicts this spirit, or Gnosis, as a suspension of particles: not, in other words, as something inanimate and metaphysical, but as a material, much like the swarm of bees that forms the figure of Hecate. Thus, the incantatory moment is characterized by suspension rather than by pan-mythological synthesis. The faint cloud at the painting’s focal center may be instrumental to the narrative of return and unification depicted in the image; but as the visible form of this incantation, its figural logic returns us to the multiplicity of references, systems, and beliefs it calls into play.

This aromatic suspension thus provides a figure for the archival function at work in both *The Hearing Trumpet* and the *Grandmother Moorhead* painting. At the same time, it literalizes the non-synthetic function of Carrington’s mythomaniacal accumulation of knowledge systems, through which we find not a solid corpus of universal history, but a wisp of smoke, an aromatic mist of suspended particles. This literalness indicates at once the critical function of Carrington’s work as well as its humor: indeed, the absurdity and excess of such scenes prevent us, as Susan Suleiman has noted, from becoming so immersed in the “feminist meaning” of Carrington’s work that we overlook its playfulness and

47. *Ibid.*, p. 146-147.

“carnavalesque accumulation of intertexts” in favor of propositional discourse.⁴⁸ Even at her seemingly most sincere, Carrington’s tongue is always in her cheek; this ironic distance suspends the magical thinking of Carrington’s hermeticism within an intertextual framework whose instabilities render it virtual rather than propositional. This virtuality is the very condition of her work’s epistemological resonance. The “aromatic” suspension of Carrington’s work, in other words, constitutes the archival condition for the emergence of a truth-event, inscribing the very possibility for intellectual agency within its late surrealist dialectic of invocation and dispersal.

Carrington’s political intentionality, however occulted, remains undiminished; as I argue, it emerges precisely as a function of this archival suspension. “To be able to unchain all the emotions,” Carrington writes in 1970, “we must observe the elements that keep them in chains: all the false identities that we embrace through advertising, literature and the ultimate beliefs with which we feed ourselves from the time we are born.”⁴⁹ The production of alternative ways of thinking, she suggests, demands not that we naively slough off such false identities, but that we observe—and subject to the hypomnesic and prosthetic experience of the archive—the totalizing formations that sustain them: whether these be the “chains” of patriarchy and totalitarianism, or the no less dogmatic capacities of Graves’s archetypal theme or Jung’s collective unconscious. As a mode of political epistemology, Carrington’s accumulation of symbols, magical beasts, and writerly allusions derives its significance from holding in suspension the manifold forms of epistemic reduction she critiques as both “Dogamaturd” and deadly. Yet, as Carrington is well aware, the emergence of new modes of thinking requires that we nonetheless keep them in mind. As she explains in a 2003 interview, “[p]aradigms are a transitory convention for man. It is to our advantage to believe that we know, but it is obvious that absolute truths like the ones that were accepted in the times of Newton and Euclid do not exist.”⁵⁰

* * *

The urgency of Carrington’s appeal to “unchain the emotions,” like the many other surrealist injunctions to revolutionize thought and change the world, has

48. Susan Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 172-173.

49. Leonora Carrington, “Female Human Animal” (1970), in Salomon Grimberg (ed.), *Leonora Carrington: What She Might Be*, Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art, 2008, p. 13.

50. Cherem, 2003, p. 27.

itself joined the dusty ranks of the outmoded. The quaintness of such appeals—perhaps a symptom of our own discomfort with their assurance—likewise characterizes the fate of the discourse of political epistemology whose genealogy this essay has begun to excavate. My aim in doing so, however, has been less to champion this genealogy than to promote, through the fate of its collections, the claims to attention of our own relationship to the archive. The discontinuous and illegitimate knowledges archived by Breton and Carrington are significant, not for some intrinsic capacity for resistance, but for their conditional redeployment as a means for distinguishing and dislodging epistemological certainty. To the extent that we might describe the power of an archive as its ability to adjudicate the very conditions of certainty and uncertainty, the modes of practice I have been discussing in this essay exercise this archival power upon the archive itself.

42

What Foucault described in a 1976 lecture as the “insurrection des ‘savoirs assujettis’” calls neither for a triumphal return of the repressed, nor for a mere abandonment of certainty.⁵¹ Occluded and occulted though they may be, the taxonomies and mythic systems assembled by Breton and Carrington are not in themselves insurrectional. Rather, the surrealist practice of collecting them makes possible the introduction of discontinuity into systems that tend, by design, toward closure. This discontinuity arrives neither from the outside, nor from the earnest efforts of a politically minded subject, but emerges as the prosthetic effect of archivization itself: the process of gathering and suspension whose own archival function is betrayed the moment it stands triumphantly in the place of the new. Rupture—the eventual break in the “regime of circulation” cited by Alain Badiou as a condition for truth—requires the archive: the event it precipitates is an event within the history of knowledge, which opens up at the point where the endless regime of circulation folds in upon itself.⁵²

The insight of Foucault’s mid-career work, which opposes the vulgarization of “politics” to a sphere of action alone, requires that we approach the study of knowledge as something more than the measurement of power’s infiltration of the life of the mind or, conversely, as the search for new sources of revolutionary utility. In the face of what might be generalized as a contemporary shift toward the consideration of knowledge as something passive, I propose that we consider its archival suspension as constitutive of the very possibility of thought, precisely in its distance from the instrumental, the useful, and the expedient. We would

51. Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988*, Vol. 3, Paris, Gallimard, coll. “Quarto,” 1994, p. 163.

52. Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham, New York, Continuum, 2005, p. 349.

do well, for instance, to submit the seismic shifts in contemporary media technology to the same dynamic of gathering and suspension proper to their archival function—whether they be digital libraries, internet resources, or other technologies and theoretical apparatuses of the present, or even the apparatuses that have begun to accumulate the patina of obsolescence, such as print media, folklore, dissident ideologies, and traditional knowledges.⁵³

The simultaneous gathering and suspension of these archival logics suggests that we heed, rather than shy away from, what Foucault cartoons as the “ *paresse fiévreuse*” of his own work, “*celle qui affecte caractériellement les amoureux des bibliothèques, des documents, des références, des écritures poussiéreuses, des textes qui, à peine imprimés, sont refermés et dorment ensuite sur des rayons dont ils ne sont tirés que quelques siècles plus tard.*”⁵⁴ To Foucault’s inventory we might add the recent forms of archivization and order we now face: from electronic catalogues and databases to the ever-changing technologies of textual presentation. Such emergent modes of publication and circulation represent more than simple additions to Foucault’s list of amorous attentions; as technologies of obliteration and accumulation in their own right, they too must be subjected to the archive-drive.

53. On digital archives and the materiality of no-longer-new media, see in particular Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1999; Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 2008; and David F. Bell, “Infinite Archives,” *SubStance*, vol. 105, n° 33:3, 2004, p. 148-161.

54. Michel Foucault, 1994, p. 161.