

Linda Steer, *Appropriated Photographs in French Surrealist Periodicals, 1924–1939*, London/New York: Routledge (Ashgate), 2017, 180 pp. 23 b/w illus. \$ 165 USD (hardback) ISBN 9781409437307

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opportunity to preview the catalogue for this review. Gilbert explores the importance of the postcard medium for Image Bank's networking activity; Keefer investigates how the "eternal network" developed as an expanding organism in which Morris and Trasov were active participants; Watson elaborates on his 1994 essay "Hand of the Spirit," describing Image Bank's cinematic exploration of mass culture via performance props as tool for social and sexual critique; Taylor develops her previous observations in "Indexing Vancouver: Image Bank's International Image Exchange Directory" by exploring in greater detail the relationship between queer futurity and the language used to situate people from different urban locations within the network's publications; and Laroche describes the history of Babyland in great detail, showcasing the importance of this rural site for artistic exploration and travel in the example of Robert Filliou.

The catalogue also includes previously published material, such as AA Bronson's "Pabum for the Pabum Eaters" from *FILE Magazine* (May 1973). It reproduces unexhibited material relevant to the exhibition, further developing the idea of Image Bank's ever-expanding networking by way of art envelopes, photographs, and correspondence. The catalogue advances the importance of Image Bank's networking in the context of a larger Fluxus community as well as exploring the history of its social milieu in Vancouver. It focuses on the 1970s, and while there is much scholarship to be done on Morris and Trasov's activities between 1978 and 1991, the catalogue refines previous scholarship concerning the network and offers readers a seemingly definitive account of Image Bank's Vancouver history during the period it addresses.

The *Image Bank* exhibition begins the important work of revising the role of the "eternal network" within Canadian art history, even as it resembles a directory list in its inclusion of so many collaborators. In

the Summer of 2020, the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at UBC will exhibit the second leg of this two-part exhibition for a Vancouver and Canadian public. The kw Institute iteration of *Image Bank* traces the history of the network to offset the historical amnesia that has downplayed the significance of Morris and Trasov within Vancouver history. It will be interesting to see how the show plays out in Vancouver, where the archive is housed, as the second exhibition will have the benefit of all eighty meters of material. *Image Bank* at the kw Institute is an example of concise curatorial editing, and though it only scratches the surface of the material housed in the *Morris/Trasov Archive*, the exhibition and catalogue conclusively construct the narrative of Image Bank as a network. ¶

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1. Scott Watson. "Hand of the Spirit: Documents of the Seventies from the Morris/Trasov Archive". In *Hand of the Spirit: Documents of the Seventies from the Morris/Trasov Archive*. UBC Fine Arts Gallery, Vancouver. 1992. 5.
2. Kathrin Bentele, Krist Gruijthuijsen, Friederike Klapp, Scott Watson, and Katja Zeidler. "Image Bank". *Image Bank*. KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. 2019. 1. Exhibition Pamphlet.
3. Byron Black and Vincent Trasov. *My Five Years in a Nutshell*. Video. 31:01 minutes. Vancouver: Western Front Archive. 1975.
4. Felicity Tayler. "Indexing Vancouver: Image Bank's International Image Exchange Directory." *Canadian Literature* 235, Winter, 2017. 52–53.

Linda Steer

Appropriated Photographs in French Surrealist Periodicals, 1924–1939

London/New York: Routledge (Ashgate), 2017

180 pp. 23 b/w illus.

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Charlene Heath

The seed of Linda Steer's *Appropriated Photographs in French Surrealist Periodicals, 1924–1939* can be found in two of

her 2008 published articles: "Photographic Appropriation, Ethnography, and the Surrealist Other" in *The Comparative* and "Surreal Encounters: Science, Surrealism and the Re-Circulation of a Crime-Scene Photographs" in *History of Photography*. Certainly, discussions about surrealism and photography are not new: in the first half of the twentieth-century Walter Benjamin and André Bazin come to mind, followed by critics and scholars such as Rosalind Krauss and John Roberts in the second half of the century. While Steer's book grapples with photography's ontology, it does so without entirely leaving behind the social and political reality in which photographs are made and exist. Steer's book is a contribution worth noting: it examines how photographs are appropriated as art and put to work in different discursive contexts. Yet it addresses not how photography influenced surrealism, but what surrealism and its use of photographs in various periodicals might tell us about photography itself. Ultimately, Steer's study demonstrates how two competing theories about photography are both true: that a photograph has a special connection to the real and that a photograph's meaning is instituted through discourse (131).

In the book's introduction, Steer explains how she plans to combine four main sets of ideas that shape her discussion. First and foremost



are French linguist Roland Barthes ideas pertaining to the relationship between text and image as elucidated

in his infamous 1964 essay, “The Rhetoric of the Image.” Here, she emphasizes how the meaning of a photograph is not inherent but created through the interplay between words and pictures. Second is French philosopher Jaques Derrida’s linguistic concept of excess, remainder or *différance*. In her brief introduction of how surrealists reframe photographs, Steer explains that, like language in translation, meaning always remains or is left over—something from the first language that does not fit into the new one always gets left behind. Third is German cultural critic Walter Benjamin’s concept of “the optical unconscious.” Benjamin, who was writing about photography in Paris at the height of surrealist activity, claimed, as Steer emphasizes, that photography reveals our “optical unconscious” just as psychoanalysis reveals our “instinctual unconscious” (5). Finally, she presents John Tagg’s concept of discursive framing and the “disciplinary frame” that draws not only on Michel Foucault’s concept of discursive orders, but also on Derrida’s analysis of the frame. According to Steer’s understanding of Derrida, the frame is the invisible boundary that defines and limits the meaning of a work of art (8). Therefore, for Steer, surrealist reframing of photographs as art is always already radical because it makes the invisible frame visible, “destabilizing both the notion that the photograph’s meaning is intrinsic and the idea that it is an effect of extrinsic social, political, or cultural forces” (8). Reading photographs through these concepts, Steer attempts to demonstrate that while surrealists rejected the positivist, empirical, evidentiary and indexical nature of photographs in their critique of bourgeois culture, the movement in fact depended upon these attributes to achieve its ends. Accordingly, the reframing and redeployment of photographs as proof of surrealist concepts constitutes what

Steer calls “surrealism’s unconscious”: “a gesture that is unaware of itself yet manages to de-sublimate a number of the movement’s underlying social and political tendencies.” Surrealism’s unconscious was unconscious, Steer claims, because the movement never articulated its complex use of photographs (6).

There are four main sections of the book that attempt to compensate for this lack of articulation. In Chapter 2, “Picturing hysteria in *La Révolution surréaliste*: from pathology to ecstasy,” Steer analyzes photographs of hysteria created in Jean-Martin Charcot’s clinic at the Salpêtrière Hospital during the 1870s as they are reframed in the surrealist periodical. In this section, she considers the process by which journal authors Louis Aragon and André Breton embedded Paul Régnard’s scientific photographs of a young female patient having a hysterical episode in their manifesto. Published in surrealism’s official mouthpiece on the occasion of the illness’ fiftieth anniversary in 1929, hysteria was conceptualized as something free of rationality by both authors. The photographs of “Augustine,” as she was called, were mobilized as *evidence* that the illness was the “greatest poetic discovery of the nineteenth century” (10). To be sure, Steer emphasizes that images of Augustine published in the periodical were meant to represent an attack on rationalism and its institutions; for surrealists, the female hysteric “was a mysterious figure who, in her madness and denial of the real world, was a symbol of freedom from logic and rationalism, a symbol that captured the imagination” (15–16). Yet as Steer continues, the “remainder” in this surrealist reframing foregrounds a certain attitude towards women: “‘troubled’ women, belligerent women, women who attempt to refuse the limits of nineteenth-century social norms and, by extension, twentieth-century restrictions on their gender.” And that “despite the early movement’s claims to cultural revolution, attitudes about women

as muses, as art objects, or in the day-to-day workings of the group continued to mirror the social and cultural norms of early twentieth-century France rather than challenge them” (19). For Steer, the operation of surrealism’s unconscious is two-fold: first, it depends on photography’s positivist and evidentiary qualities—attributes surrealism sought to overturn in society in general—and second, its platform of freedom and liberation clearly did not extend to women.

In Chapter 3, “Ethnography’s photographic unconscious in *Documents*: savagery in civilization/civilization in savagery,” Steer makes a similar case with regards to colonialism and race. In this instance, she analyzes two photographs that together become an ironic juxtaposition when embedded in an article written by George Bataille for the periodical *Documents*. Here the comparison is between a nineteenth-century ethnographic photograph depicting a group of Melanesian schoolboys set against a Hollywood film still showing a group of chorus girls. A periodical with roots in fine art and architecture, Steer explains that *Documents*’ editors and audience were mainly comprised of dissident surrealists; surrealists engaged less in ideas of the unconscious and dreamscapes, and more involved in politics of refusal (74). It was common, Steer states, for both official and dissident surrealists to look to ethnography to assist in their project of cultural criticism; what ethnography and surrealism apparently shared was a vision of “the other” as an object of modern research (11). Published in *Documents* in 1929, the ethnographic photograph in Bataille’s article was taken in New Caledonia in the 1870s by Ernest Robin. It was originally housed in an album in the collection at the *Musée d’ethnographie du Tracado*. *Documents*, Steer emphasizes, had as its mission the denaturalization of modern Western culture: “Indeed, for many of *Documents*’ contributors, modern

culture itself was to be studied as an ethnographic document" (53). By juxtaposing the two photographs in his article—one that like most articles in *Documents* was an attack on traditional French culture—an equivalence between the schoolboys and the chorus girls disrupted and problematized a reading of the latter as "normal." For Steer however, the "remainder" in the comparison—surrealism's unconscious—is most significant, for it bears the trace of colonialism left behind in the photograph of the Melanesian schoolboys: "The way the boys are carefully lined up to mimic the pose of the French official serves as 'evidence' that the boys were willing, or able, to conform and therefore that French government had some success in training its colonial subjects." What is paramount for Steer is that, although embedding the photograph of the Melanesian schoolboys within the broader text of *Documents* was meant as cultural critique, its effect was to reproduce colonial power (59).

In Chapter 4, "Aesthetics and horror: forensic photography in *Minotaure*," Steer analyzes forensic photographs from the infamous 1888 "Jack the Ripper" murders and subsequent investigation as they transform from evidence to art in the periodical *Minotaure*. As Steer states, *Minotaure* was a lavish, large format fine art publication (88). Yet in this instance, photographs of Ripper victim Mary Kelly's mutilated body come to operate as illustrations in a fictionalized play written by Maurice Heine published in the magazine. Unlike chapter two and three, in which photographs were appropriated from discourses of medicine and ethnography, the photographs of Mary Kelly's body were never released to the public or published in newspapers of the day. Instead, over ten years later, one appeared in a study of serial murderers called *Vacher l'Eventreur et les Crimes Sadiques* by Alexandre Lacassagne, a professor of legal medicine from Lyon where they were subsequently

discovered by Heine. As Steer explains, the photographs function as records of a crime in the play in a discussion between the ghost of Jack the Ripper, Marquis de Sade, and one of Sade's characters, the Comte de Mesanges (12). In the play, Jack the Ripper uses the photographs as evidence for the "artistry" in his method of killing (99). What is significant for Steer is that Heine did not use the photographs to support extant critiques but instead used them as inspiration for his fictional work (88).

While the previous chapters closely analyze photographs used in different surrealist domains, in chapter five, "From the marvellous to the monstrous: photography and the past," Steer compares how photographs used as documents of France's recent past in *Documents* and *La Révolution surréaliste* signal contested ideas of politics, history and identity within the movement itself. First, Steer discusses French photographer Eugene Atget's photographs published in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1926. Although we know that photography was Atget's trade and not his art—his calling card simply read "Documents for Artists"—(118)—*La Révolution surréaliste* reframes them as such (118). What remains, however, is nostalgia, or what photographs by Atget were originally valued for: depictions of Old Paris prior to the Haussmannization of the city. This Derridian "'remainder'" for Steer, however, cannot be erased and allows us to see surrealism's 'unconscious surface as a link to a French past that once (or never) was. The "'remainder,'" Steer states, "works with what the surrealists intended and supports their interpretation of the past as a dream" (118-120). Second, Steer elucidates elaborates on a number of photographs published in *Documents* whose effects function as critique and negation of French heritage. An essay by Bataille titled "*Figure Humaine*" was published in 1929. A photograph of an anonymous wedding party and a series of portraits by French nineteenth-century photographer Nadar

accompanied it. What is significant for Steer is that Bataille's essay reads as abhorrence for the figures of France's recent past with the photographs serving as illustrations. Those of Bataille's generation, Steer states, spent all their time trying to erase their cultural lineage: "The erasure amounts to a negation of ideas about human nature and progress because it reveals the figures of the past for what they are: horrific, absent, monstrous others" [emphasis in the original] (139). According to Steer, the figure of the bride and groom specifically became the symbols of historical discontinuity that, as Bataille sees it, "stands as the negation of the idea of human nature. Humanity, rather than following a teleology dictated by the eternal truths of the natural or metaphysical worlds, generates instead incompatible offspring—future generations that see their predecessors as monsters" (141). Photographs in both these instances are used as tools to make differing arguments about the past: as a dream on the one hand, and as monstrous on the other.

Indeed, Steer's study of surrealist appropriation demonstrates how photographic meaning is created discursively and ontologically; according to the author, it is not so easily bifurcated between the two competing theories. Like language, photographic meaning, Steer argues, "signifies in stutters, echoes, and gaps. Some of this meaning comes through discursive framing and is not carried in the image...[as]...there is always more than can be contained within the frame...There are latent, sublimated meanings that are less obviously seen" (154-155). Scholars working in the field of visual culture and the history and theory of photography will find Steer's book a significant contribution, as debates in photography have almost always been dominated by these two competing schools of thought. Instead, Steer's book demonstrates that how photographs come to mean anything at all is done by reading them across both. ¶

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Erin Manning et Brian Massumi
Pensée en acte: vingt propositions pour la recherche-crédation

Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2018

135 pp. (relié)

12 € ISBN 9782378960391

Benoit Jodoin

À la fin de 2018 paraissait dans la «Petite collection ArTeC» des presses du réel *Pensée en acte, vingt propositions pour la recherche-crédation* d'Erin Manning et de Brian Massumi. Traduction partielle de *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* publié à l'University of Minnesota Press en 2014, l'ouvrage est le résultat d'une collaboration entre Erin Manning, praticienne et théoricienne de l'art professeure en arts visuels et en cinéma à la Faculté des beaux-arts de l'Université Concordia, et Brian Massumi, spécialiste et traducteur du travail de Deleuze et Guattari, qui a mené une longue carrière au Département de communications de l'Université de Montréal où il demeure professeur associé.

Pensée en acte présente un bilan des réflexions développées par les auteurs à travers le SenseLab. Fondé et dirigé par Manning, le SenseLab est un laboratoire de recherche-crédation montréalais dont l'objectif est de créer des environnements de rencontres entre chercheurs et artistes. Depuis 2004, des groupes de lecture, des cycles de conférences et autres événements y sont cocréés collectivement afin d'initier des processus expérimentaux et transdisciplinaires où la pensée émerge comme

forme de création et où la création est reconnue comme un travail de la pensée. Ces processus, très influencés de Whitehead, Deleuze, Guattari et Nietzsche, ont pris dans les dernières années une dimension internationale, grâce notamment à un pro-



gramme de résidences, à une série de publications des membres du laboratoire et à la création d'un réseau de partenaires en Amérique du Nord, en Europe et en Australie.

La section principale du livre, écrite par ces auteurs, s'ouvre sur une mise en garde contre la tendance à la capitalisation de la recherche-crédation. D'emblée, ils annoncent ce qui apparaîtra comme le principe directeur de l'ouvrage: penser la recherche-crédation comme une pratique de la «critique immanente», suivant l'expression de Deleuze et Guattari. Pour eux, cela suppose d'habiter la complexité des processus impliqués dans la rencontre entre la création artistique et la recherche en sciences humaines que permet la recherche-crédation, de rester au milieu des tensions économiques qui la constituent, et ce, sans projeter de résultats prédéterminés. Contre sa récupération par le néolibéralisme, les auteurs proposent d'investir les institutions qui tentent de la formater vers la production de «livrables» pour l'industrie et d'imaginer une alternative de résistance anticapitaliste.

L'ouvrage se donne comme objectif de préciser cette alternative dans une liste de propositions illustrées par certaines initiatives

du SenseLab. À partir de *Danser le virtuel*, par exemple, où danseurs et philosophes se sont réunis à l'été 2005 pour penser ensemble le mouvement du corps et le mouvement de pensée, les auteurs expliquent le «pragmatisme spéculatif» (p. 37) depuis lequel il faudrait envisager la recherche-crédation. Selon eux, un projet de recherche-crédation n'est pas un processus d'idéation élaboré en amont, mais un travail à partir des potentiels inhérents à l'événement lui-même et aux protocoles qui lui sont sous-jacents au moment même où l'événement se déroule.

À partir de ce même exemple, les auteurs imaginent des manières d'envisager la recherche-crédation comme un travail de création collective sans imposer un cadre fixe déterminant des modalités de participation ni basculer dans l'improvisation entièrement indéterminée. Ils invitent à «inventer des techniques de relation» (p. 40), à «concevoir des contraintes encapacitantes» (p. 41) et à «inventer des plateformes de relation» (p. 51) permettant, à partir de la contrainte, de créer les conditions favorables à l'émergence de nouvelles manières de penser.

Les auteurs citent un autre projet du SenseLab, la *Société de molécules*, un événement où ces protocoles de création collective ont été mis en pratique simultanément à différents endroits à travers le monde, avec la participation de cellules locales du SenseLab. La dimension diplomatique de ce projet montre que la recherche-crédation ne doit pas viser la création d'une communauté consensuelle au sein de laquelle les citoyens peuvent se fédérer, mais doit plutôt inciter chacun à rester sensible aux singularités au sein du collectif.

Avec l'exemple de *Générer l'impossible*, organisé à la Société des arts technologiques en 2011, les auteurs défendent une recherche-crédation pensée comme un processus qui trouve sa forme dans l'«ici et maintenant» de son automodulation et qui se conceptualise comme un don