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Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*. Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, Ruiz de Alarcón, Cape Town, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 340 pp., 35 black-and-white illus., $90.00 Cdn. Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, 244 pp., 7 black-and-white illus., $141.00 U.S.

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lighted by provocative imagery, a peephole to absent figures in art's history, and perceptive ways of handling the gendered nature of visual culture. In short, the most significant contribution this book makes is the way in which the author discloses how women in the Third Republic discussed, represented, and delighted in the bodies of other women, away from the moral underpinnings which pepper so much of late nineteenth-century literature on the body. Thus, what makes this book unusual and compelling is how the author weaves the stories of women as full participants in culture by forging identities on their own terms, something Dawkins herself can lay claim to.

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Notes

1 Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Garden City, New York, 1956), 23.
2 See Lyn Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London and New York, 1992).
3 Nead, *The Female Nude*, 16.

Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*. Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, Ruiz de Alarcón, Cape Town, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 340 pp., 35 black-and-white illus., $90.00 Cdn.

Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, 244 pp., 7 black-and-white illus., $141.00 U.S.

These new texts by Harris and Malt appear in the wake of a long period of writing on surrealism dominated by scholars associated with the journal *October* (namely Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, and Denis Hollier). The important work of the *October* scholars opened up the field of surrealist studies and brought it to the forefront of academic discussions, but now a new generation has begun to take research on surrealism in other directions. One of these directions is to return to the problem of political surrealism. While questions of aesthetics are imperative, it is easy to forget that when surrealism was launched in 1924 its purpose was revolution, not just a revolution of art, but a "revolution of the mind" that would change life. A collective statement issued by the Bureau de recherches surréalistes in 1925 makes this explicit: "*Surrealism* is not a new means or expression ... nor even a metaphysics of poetry. It is a means of total liberation of the mind *and of all that resembles* it. We are determined to make a Revolution."[1]

In 2003, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, edited by Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, signalled a new direction in scholarship. Spiteri and LaCoss lamented the lack of serious study of political surrealism in English, noting that "the revolutionary political ambitions of Surrealism ... [and] the Surrealists' ambitions for radical change and their obstinate love of freedom [have been replaced] with expensive paintings hanging in museums and poems taught in literature class."[2] That surrealist works of art are now valuable and have become part of the canon of Western art signals the merging of surrealism and the mainstream art market, something the movement's members wanted to avoid. A shift in academic discourse to address politics more overtly has not meant the end of aesthetics or theory, but has meant a change in the kinds of questions that are asked. Taking different approaches, two recently published books, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* by Steven Harris and *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics* by Johanna Malt, take the surrealist object as a starting point for considering surrealism's relationship to politics. The focus on the surrealist object is significant, for these items, both found and assembled, marked an attempt to transcend the traditional aesthetic categories of painting and sculpture. As an "art that would no-longer-be-art," as Harris describes it, the surrealist object was the most significant development in surrealism in the 1930s and certainly warrants comprehensive study (p. 4). Where Malt's work is theoretical, however, Harris's study is historical, making the two excellent companion volumes.

One of the pitfalls of writing on surrealism is to rely solely on the movement's self-referentiality for material, adopting its own terms, without criticism. In *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*, Malt attempts to overcome this predicament by analyzing the movement's literature and questioning what its practitioners preached. Malt addresses the relationship between Freudian and Marxian concepts of fetishism in surrealist objects, looking at the objects themselves as political rather than focusing on surrealist political ideology. While sexual fetishism of the surrealist objects might seem to be obvious, their commodity fetishism is less so. In her "dialectical treatment of these fetishisms in relation to the object" (p. 6), Malt intends to avoid regarding surrealism only as subjective and introspective, but instead address it as collective, objective, and political. Underlying Malt's treatment of the subject is a question applicable to other periods in the history of art: can there be a political art?

In chapter one, "Subjectivity and Revolutionary Commit-

ment," Malt establishes her theoretical premise and reviews the historical and theoretical points of contention between surrealism and revolutionary communism in the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on the debates about the role of cultural objects in pre- and post-revolutionary society. To do this, Malt first reviews surrealist writing on political engagement and then reads the work of Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, and Walter Benjamin, three interwar period writers who deal with the question of the artist and political engagement in a reformulation of Marx's base/superstructure model. She settles on Benjamin's claim that the role of the critic is to engage with bourgeois culture. For Benjamin, surrealism is "an archaeology of ideology" and its images can produce "revolutionary energy" that reveal and undermine the workings of bourgeois culture through criticism (p. 38). In addition, Benjamin's ideas allow for a shift from an emphasis on the artist as subject (or a subjective point of view) to the role of the object. Malt posits this critical engagement, especially in the form of objects, as a possible method for subverting what she calls the "subjective idealist trap" that continually arises when addressing surrealism's role in politics (p. 40).

In her second chapter, "Archaeology and Mythology: Benjamin and *Le Paysan de Paris*," Malt performs a reading of Louis Aragon's important surrealist text through the lens of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. As Malt claims, *Le Paysan* is "in many ways the archetypal surrealist text" (p. 41), for it combines the observations of a flâneur in Paris with poetry, fictional dialogue, and a search for the marvellous. Aragon's narrative, written between 1924 and 1926, is divided into two sections: one looks at the now destroyed *Passage de l'Opéra*; the other focuses on the fantastical, human-made pastoral landscape that is the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont. In writing *Le Paysan*, Aragon later claimed, he intended to use the novel form to undermine the genre rather than to avoid it entirely as did other surrealists, for he wanted to "use the accepted novel form as a basis for the production of a new kind of novel that would break all the traditional rules governing the writing of fiction, one that would be neither a narrative (a story) nor a character study (a portrait)."[3] Thus, Aragon looked at his work as a critical engagement, making it an apt choice for Malt to analyze. Malt focuses on the ways in which Aragon addresses material objects in his novel and concludes that both Benjamin and Aragon appreciate outmoded and obsolete objects as revolutionary because they contain vestiges of ideology's displaced utopian desires. Benjamin's work is particularly appropriate for he uses the image of the dream to describe the workings of capitalism and conceives the critic's interpretation as part of the awakening process, imagery that is analogous to surrealism's focus on the interpretation of dream. In this densely theoretical chapter Malt successfully draws out the nuances of early and more recent theorizations of surrealism (with Maurice Blanchot, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno representing the earlier group). Malt also elucidates the relationship between the material and psychic realms of surrealism.

In chapter three, "The Surrealist Object in Theory," Malt defines two poles of surrealist practice and theory in the 1920s and 1930s: the subjective, passive, critical mode, which is governed by automatism, produces subjective texts, and favours *trouvailles*, or found objects; and the politically engaged, active interventionist mode where artists actively produce objects based on dreams. The found object is the manifestation of repressed desire, and the finding of it provokes an analysis of what the object means in terms of desire. The created objects are instead the material expression of the unconscious. They are replications rather than attempts to understand or connect to one's unconscious. Malt relates this deliberate object first to an early text by Breton where he describes the possibility of recreating what is seen in dreams (early surrealist publications recounted dreams, so it was a logical extension) and second to Salvador Dalí's text on paranoia criticism published in *Minotaure* in 1933. Dalí wrote of the desire to make tangible the dream world, where according to Malt, "it will in some way alter or contaminate more familiar or more rational objects" (p. 86). In the end, Malt determines that it is through the deliberately constructed surrealist object that we are able to read surrealist works as politically engaged, particularly in the dialectical relationship between Marxian and Freudian notions of the fetish.

In the final three chapters of the book Malt works through her theorization of the surrealist object as fetish by examining specific surrealist objects. Chapter four, "The Surrealist Object as Fetish," provides an extensive analysis of Dalí's *Buste de femme rétrospectif*, 1933, that transcends a discussion of the artist's personal obsessions and fantasies (although it does address them), and situates the artist as cultural critic. For Malt, Dalí's *Buste* parodies the "reverential treatment of the work of art" but also confronts its own nature as a fetish, because "the object also revels in its own fetishistic quality, juxtaposing within its construction the fetishized commodity, the superstitious totem, and art itself as commodity" (p. 129). Thus, the constructed surrealist object has the potential to reveal the working of commodity fetishism. Because surrealist objects make use of already-fetishized commodities, whether in circulation or discarded, the surrealist work critically engages bourgeois society.

Chapter five, "Poetry in the Object World," is a discussion of André Breton's remarkable *poème-objets*, objects that combine text and image in a material manifestation of poetry. Here Malt argues that by using an automatic text and material objects, Breton attempts to merge subjective with collective meanings. This merging is especially political when the objects comment on "the role of desire in looking" and on the display of

commodities (p. 179). While the treatment of the themes in the *poème-objets* is particularly astute, Malt's dialectical method begins to falter. An analysis of the objects as Freudian fetish flows easily, but her attempt to see Breton's *Un Bas dechiré*, 1941, as an allegory of the Marxist process of production and consumption seems forced, especially when she concludes that "[l]ooking at a work of art, it seems to say, is not so very different from looking in a shop window" (p. 179). Part of the problem, however, is that most of the discussion of the fairly obscure *poème-objets* is not supported by illustration, making her analysis challenging to follow as the objects are difficult to visualize. Indeed, there are only seven black-and-white illustrations in the book.

While chapter six, "Windows: Painting and the Fetish Surface," is interesting in its attempt to avoid reverting to a purely psychoanalytic interpretation of Dalí's paintings by examining their form, the smooth, glossy surface sheen as "mark[ing] [their] own fetish status" (p. 208), Malt admits that, in the end, because they do not incorporate commodities as surrealist objects do, Dalí's paintings do not seem to confront their own material status or exhibition value. One wonders if this chapter might have better been devoted to Magritte's paintings, which, as Malt states at the end of the chapter, comment on the relationship between words, objects, and images.

Malt's study is valuable for its untangling of the nuances of the fetish in surrealist practice and its adroit handling both of a great volume of surrealist theory and of theoretical writing on surrealism. Although her analysis falters in places, it is a skilful effort that moves beyond a mere consideration of the politics of surrealism and focuses on the political potential of the movement's objects. What Malt's analysis lacks, however, is an examination of how these objects functioned both in the movement and in its relationship to external material and historical conditions. This is a gap that is filled by Harris's book *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche.*

Harris also considers the intersection of Marx and Freud in surrealist art and politics in his book, however he focuses on how the surrealist object functioned in surrealist political thought, namely on how it contributed to and reflected surrealism's changing notion of what art should be. Harris's book is a noteworthy discussion of the history of surrealism and the movement's engagements with politics in the period between 1929 and 1939. Claiming that "there have been very few studies that attempted to engage with surrealism on its own level of complexity, as a synthesis of the political, the aesthetic, and the psychical ..." (p. 1), Harris proposes to look at the movement's intellectual sources, situating surrealism within its historical moment, and understanding its motives. In his view, focusing on the surrealist object is important to explicate surrealism's historical relationship to politics, for "[t]he surrealist object, posed between art and politics, is located in a utopian space that is, precisely, nowhere, a space of possibility that is entirely contingent, and whose contingency is realized in the fragmentary and temporary nature of the objects" (p. 5). The object, then, bridges the space between art and politics.

In his first chapter, "L'Au-delà de la peinture," Harris outlines surrealism's early years, focusing on its dialectical relation to modern art and the imperative to "go beyond" painting. Like Malt, although he goes into greater detail, Harris posits the publication of surrealist objects in the 1931 issue of *La Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* as an important moment in the development of the surrealist object. Although Dalí and Breton theorized the object differently, both appreciated it for its symbolic sexual function. It is this desublimation of erotics that made the objects personal, but, as Harris claims, the objects were also collective in their refusal of traditional art making practices. Surrealist objects "refused the mastery of skill considered necessary in order to be taken seriously as an artist" (p. 42). Harris extends this refusal to a broader social context, and he claims that, in their refusal of power and artistic norms, the objects also refuse gender categorization, which renders gender distinctions in the objects troubled or unstable.

In his second chapter, "L'En-deçà de la politique," Harris clearly outlines the surrealists' political strategies until the early 1930s when the movement broke definitively from the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). While this is familiar territory for many studies of surrealism, Harris describes the surrealists' attempts to forge a relationship with the PCF in light of the turmoil within the party and in left politics in general in France. In addition, the author provides a well-researched account of the expulsions and ideological changes within the surrealist group that places the movement within the larger context of the struggle to understand the role of revolutionary and post-revolutionary art and literature in Europe in the 1930s. This shift in ideology led the surrealists to rethink their methodology and develop a more research-focused, scientific approach to the production of art and literature. Harris explores this scientific approach in his third chapter, entitled "A Delay in Glass," and focuses on the differing ways in which surrealists dealt with the question of the relationship between subject and object, or interior and exterior, with special attention to theories of poetry and the role of the artist in society. Thus, Harris outlines Breton's notion of objective chance, Dalí's paranoia-critical method, as well as the lesser known theories of poetry as a scientific investigation of Tristan Tzara and Roger Caillois. Those such as Aragon, Caillois, and Tzara who broke with the surrealist group in the 1930s did so because "taking surrealism at its word, they found it wanting, and intend to make their next collective venture ... *more* scientific in its rational investigation of affectivity" (p. 132).

Harris's last two chapters, "Avant-Garde and Front Populaire" and "Beware of Domestic Objects: Vocation and Equivocation in 1936," present closer analyses of surrealist objects. In the first, an extended discussion of Claude Cahun's *Objet*, 1936, as both a political (its text made a clear reference to the political climate of the 1930s in France) and psychical (it dealt with issues of sexuality and gender) refusal of the symbolic order supports his suggestion that in the 1930s the surrealist object functioned as a way for the movement to supersede traditional categories of art. In the second, Harris examines the 1936 *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* as both the theoretical and actual site of a struggle between Dalí's paranoia-criticism and Breton's automatism, two strategies to "reconcile subject and object" (p. 194). This last chapter is most interesting when Harris again raises the question of sexual difference and refusal, reading the image of the "castrating" praying mantis, "an object of fascination for all the surrealists," in the work of both Dalí and Breton and Jacqueline Lamba (p. 212). While it acknowledges the misogynistic tendencies in surrealism, in its complexity Harris's reading offers alternative analyses of gender in surrealism, particularly the "femme fatale" image of the praying mantis or Medusa head as disrupting patriarchal culture.

It is difficult to find fault with Harris's book, for it makes a significant contribution to the understanding of how and why surrealism changed in the 1930s. Harris's analysis is particularly strong because it avoids reducing internal conflict to a battle of personalities, which is so often the case in histories of surrealism; instead, he carefully examines the differences in ideas and aims of the movement's members and describes how those who left the surrealist movement continued cultural and political work in other arenas. His only oversight is to not fully acknowledge and explore the scientific method that was part of the surrealist movement from its beginning. The first issues of *La Révolution surréaliste* were, after all, produced by a collective in the Bureau de recherches surréalistes, which was conceived as a kind of artistic and intellectual think tank.

While Malt and Harris cover some of the same territory, they do so differently. Whether we think of surrealist objects as political in themselves, or as responding to the political and surrealist climate of their historical moment, the work of both scholars is valuable for its re-examination of surrealism as a revolutionary political movement.

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Notes

1 Louis Aragon et al., "Declaration of January 27, 1925," in "Famous Manifestoes and Documents," *History of Surrealism*, ed. Maurice Nadeau, trans. Richard Howard (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 240.

2 Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, eds, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT., 2003), 7. While a discussion of market forces influencing the value of surrealist works of art is not the point here, LaCoss and Spiteri's observation is interesting in the era of the sale of the contents of André Breton's Paris studio, which were auctioned at CalmelsCohen in 2003. *La Mélancolie extatique des chiens, gâteuse comme une vertigineuse descente en ski*, 1931–32, a collaged postcard by Salvador Dalí, for example, sold for €200,000. See Lot 4017, *André Breton, 42 rue Fontaine*, available at http://breton.calmelscohen.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=recherche.lot&lot_id=4017&cat_id=3

3 Louis Aragon, quoted in Simon Watson Taylor, "Introduction," in Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (1971; Boston, 1994), xi.

Michael W. Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture*. Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 2002, 246 pp., 8 colour, 58 black-and-white illus., $121.95 Cdn, ISBN 0-521-81321-2.

Margaret A. Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini. Sexuality, Masculinity, and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy*. New York, N.Y., Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 214 pp., 16 black-and- white illus., $95.95 Cdn, ISBN 1-4039-6107-7, paperback, $30.95 Cdn, ISBN 1-4039-6896-9.

Alessandro Nova and Anna Schreurs, eds, *Benvenuto Cellini. Kunst und Kunsttheorie im 16. Jahrhundert*. Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 2003, 413 pp., 228 black-and-white illus., €64, ISBN 3-412-11002-7.

The past five years have been exciting and eventful ones for art historians interested in the sixteenth-century Florentine goldsmith, sculptor, and writer Benvenuto Cellini. His name is now well on its way to becoming, if not like Machiavelli, Michelangelo, or Leonardo, a household word, at least like Castiglione, a classroom word. Cellini was a largely forgotten figure until the nineteenth century when new publications and translations of his autobiography provoked a flurry of artistic activity. Stendhal passed a *nuit blanche* reading it, Berlioz set it to music in his opera of 1838, the elder Dumas wrote its sequel with his *Ascanio*, and a number of painters recreated its more dramatic scenes in oils.

Despite Cellini's literary notoriety, until very recently his plastic oeuvre has been the object of comparatively little study, partly because much of it has been lost and partly because