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BOUNDARIES OF HORROR:

Joan Miró and Georges Bataille, 1930–1939

Vol. I of II

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*Submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

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Abstract

This thesis represents an original contribution to art historical scholarship in its investigation of the overlaps between the art of the Catalan artist Joan Miró and the writings of French philosopher Georges Bataille in the period 1930–1939. I examine three series of intimate, private works undertaken by Miró in 1930, 1935–1936, and 1938–1939 through the lens of contemporary Bataillean texts in order to identify corresponding themes, imagery, and operations. I argue that not only does Bataillean thought represent a direct source of influence on Miró’s work of this time, but also that the artist deliberately turns to this more violent, un-idealised aesthetic in order to visually confront his own professional crisis, the rise of fascism in his homeland, and the Spanish Civil War and start of the Second World War.

My research has uncovered that Miró and Bataille share an interest in the anti-retinal. Miró demonstrates this interest through his ‘assassination of painting’ and attacks on bodily representation, and Bataille in his obsession with blindness—which Miró references in 1930 in his use of imagery from Bataille’s *Story of the Eye* and through his employment of the *informe*. Bataille and Miró both use parody in advancing their aesthetic and political missions. Bataille parodies the transpositional nature of Surrealist image-making, while Miró mocks his own earlier artistic output. To this end, both employ ‘parodic landscapes’ that use the image of the volcano as a metaphor for political upheaval and to celebrate ‘real,’ non-transpositional base matter. I argue that the work of both figures exhibit qualities of the carnivalesque, in their interest in parody, ‘sacred’ (liberating) laughter, and excremental imagery. A further, significant, consideration in this thesis is the transgressing of taboos in Bataillean eroticism (and the overlaps between eroticism and war), of which I have identified

parallels in Miró's work.

By considering Miró's use of Bataillean themes in tandem with the artist's passionate Catalan nationalism, I argue that the influence of Bataille's parody, eroticism, and violence provided Miró with the tools to personally respond to the Civil War. This thesis opens a new line of inquiry into Miró in the 1930s, and invites future considerations on Bataille's influence on Miró's oeuvre.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Lesley Thornton-Cronin

‘I personally don’t know where we are heading. The only thing that’s clear to me is that I intend to destroy, destroy everything that exists in painting. I have an utter contempt for painting.’

—Joan Miró, interview with Francisco Melgar, 1931.

‘Intellectual despair results in neither weakness nor dreams, but in violence. Thus abandoning certain investigations is out of the question. It is only a matter of knowing how to vent one’s rage; whether one only wants to wander like madmen around prisons, or whether one wants to overturn them.’

—Georges Bataille, ‘The “Lugubrious Game,”’ 1929.

Introduction

After the rue Blomet

Joan Miró and Georges Bataille are among the most conspicuous figures in Surrealist scholarship of the past four decades. The importance of Bataille's scandalous writings—which challenged official Surrealist doctrines and which were marked by their base materialism, contempt for idealism, and their violent eroticism—were reintroduced into the Surrealist canon only as late as 1978 by Dawn Ades, with her inclusion of the journal *Documents* in her exhibition catalogue *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*.¹ Miró's art, meanwhile, was once written off almost exclusively as 'childlike,' but has, since the mid 1990s, been understood in ever-increasingly violent terms, primarily through his pledge in the late 1920s to 'assassinate painting.' In investigating these two figures, I have found that although Miró and Bataille occupied the same intellectual circles—firstly in André Masson's rue Blomet group and then around the Bataille-edited journal *Documents*—and

¹ Another early text to situate Bataille's writings within the greater Surrealist context is Denis Hollier's *La prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1974).

had many of the same close friends, there has not been any sufficient investigation into how Miró's proximity to Bataille may have influenced his artistic production. This thesis seeks to fill this gap.

Rosalind Krauss did broach the subject in 1994 and, while her study has significant limitations,² she ended her article 'Michel, Bataille et moi' by imploring future art historians to consider that Miró may have—for a short time in the 1920s—been swayed by Bataillean thought. Since then, no scholar has taken up Krauss's call (nor has Krauss herself in subsequent publications). Certain authors have acknowledged Bataille's short article on Miró, which appeared in *Documents* in 1930, but these publications tend to focus solely on interpreting Bataille's writing on a small selection of Miró's art, rather than consider him as a source of influence on the artist. My thesis is the first to consider the thematic similarities between Miró's work and Bataillean thought during the period 1930–1939, establishing that Bataillean thought was a readily available, often direct source of influence for Miró. It also considers Miró's inclination towards violence, eroticism, and his attack on representation through a Bataillean lens, as a way of reflecting the mounting violence (the rise of fascism, the suppression of Catalan identity, and Civil War) in his homeland.

One of the first areas that had to be explored when starting this project was whether or not Miró and Bataille had actually met, and how well they might have known one another. It seems likely that they would have been introduced at 45 rue Blomet in Paris, the secondary Surrealist hub where Miró had his first Paris studio, which he occupied from 1921 to 1926. Within the rue Blomet group, Miró and Bataille shared two important, mutual, lifelong friends: the artist André Masson and writer Michel Leiris. Masson, who led what would become the rue Blomet group, had an adjacent studio to Miró's. The two artists could not be more different in their working practices—Miró's

² See my analysis of these limitations in the 'Literature Review' (chapter 1) of this thesis.

studio was pristine, while Masson's was marked by 'indescribable disorder and filth . . . with its unbelievable clutter of paper, bottles, canvases, books, and household objects.'³ The two nevertheless formed a fast and lasting friendship; they would speak to one another through a hole in their shared wall,⁴ and Miró was also close with Masson's wife, Odette. He fondly recalls going to the neighbouring studio and bouncing Masson's daughter, Lily, on his knee.⁵ Eventually, Masson became increasingly involved in Surrealism, to which he introduced Miró, and with Breton, who Miró says ignored his work until he produced *Harlequin's Carnival* (1924-1925).⁶ Miró tells us that he 'frequently' attended Surrealist meetings with Masson, but rarely contributed to discussions.⁷

Miró characterised the rue Blomet as 'friendship, an exalted exchange and discovery of ideas among a marvellous group of friends,' brandy-fuelled nights, music ('which was scorned by the Surrealists'), and poetry readings.⁸ Leiris later remarked that the camaraderie and mutual support was so strong that the rue Blomet group could easily have formed its own independent school, if only its leader—Masson—had such ambitions.⁹ Masson described the rue Blomet as 'the home of dissidence,'¹⁰ while Bataille biographer Michel Surya's notes that it was far freer 'than Breton would ever tolerate.'¹¹ This is likely because the group formed independently, rather than as a deliberate Surrealist outpost; in fact, neither Miró nor Masson were 'Surrealists' when they first

³ Joan Miró, 'Memories of the Rue Blomet,' transcribed by Jacques Dupin (1977). Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Select Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 100.

⁴ *A Joan Miró: Col·lecció Permanent d'art en Homenatge a Joan Miró* (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró Centre d'Estudio d'Art Contemporani, 1986), 73.

⁵ Miró, 'Memories of the Rue Blomet,' 103.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹ Michel Leiris, '45, rue Blomet,' *Revue de Musicologie* 68, nos. 1/2 (1982): 60.

¹⁰ André Masson, Georges Charbonnier, and André Dimanche, *Entretiens avec André Masson* (Marseille: A. Dimanche, 1955), 45.

¹¹ Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), 75.

met.¹² In an interview with Surya, Masson describes the Surrealist hierarchy in religious terms: if the rue Fontaine was the Vatican (and Breton the pope), then the rue Blomet was like a non-ordained chapel ('a big chapel but a chapel all the same,' 'a meeting point for friends') that became absorbed and aligned itself with Breton's leadership.¹³

Leiris was an almost daily visitor to the rue Blomet, oftentimes working on his writing at Masson's studio, which is how he met Miró. Leiris's friendship was particularly important for Miró, who remarked in 1977 that Leiris had 'remained [his] closest friend.'¹⁴ Leiris also formed a very strong friendship with Bataille, and would serve as his best man at his wedding to Sylvia Maklès in 1928.¹⁵ The two remained friends until Bataille's death in 1962 and carried out an intimate correspondence, discussing matters as personal as their psychoanalytic treatments with Dr. Adrien Borel, their relationships with other Surrealists, and Bataille's declining health.¹⁶ Leiris introduced Bataille to the rue Blomet group,¹⁷ where he soon after became a 'regular.'¹⁸ He quickly became friends with Masson on the basis of their shared love of 'Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, for Greek myth, and for eroticism,' which set them apart from Breton's tastes.¹⁹ Masson later confirmed that Miró shared these literary preferences.²⁰ Over the course of this friendship, Masson would illustrate several of Bataille's writings, including *Histoire de l'oeil* (*Story of the Eye*) (1928), *L'Anus solaire* (*The Solar Anus*) (1931), and *Sacrifices* (1936). It was also while visiting Masson in Spain that Bataille completed his novel *Le Bleu du ciel* (*Blue of Noon*) in 1931.²¹

¹² Michel Leiris, interview with William Jeffett, in 'Homage to 45, rue Blomet,' trans. William Jeffett and Ariane Punset, *Apollo* 127, no. 313 (March 1988): 190.

¹³ André Masson, interview with Michel Surya, in *Georges Bataille*, 76.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, *Correspondence*, ed. Louis Yvert, trans. Bernard Noël (London: Seagull Books, 2008), 267.

¹⁶ This correspondence is compiled and translated by Yvert and Noël in *ibid.*

¹⁷ Michel Leiris, '45, rue Blomet,' 59.

¹⁸ Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 77.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ André Masson, interview with William Jeffett, in 'Homage to 45, rue Blomet,' 190.

²¹ For more on Bataille and Masson's collaborations, see Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 232.

According to Leiris, Miró and Bataille met at the rue Blomet, but beyond this he does not describe any relationship between the two.²² Miró himself seems to indicate a stronger friendship with Bataille than Leiris describes. In 1927, Miró inscribed Bataille's name onto one of his canvases, which I would argue was a powerful gesture, as the inclusion of proper names on a work was atypical of the artist. The existence of a preparatory drawing for the work tells us that the decision to paint Bataille's name onto his canvas was not a spontaneous one. The background of *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi* (Figs. 1 and 2) appears as a dirty wash, as though the canvas had been submerged in filthy water. Upon this background, in the upper left corner, Miró wrote the word 'Musique' in large script, underneath which he painted a large red circle. On the right-hand side he painted five spirals formed by yellow, red, blue, and white dots, below which he wrote 'Seine'; in the bottom right corner of the composition, he has inscribed 'Michel, Bataille et moi.'

The strongest evidence of a Bataille-Miró friendship comes from Miró's description of this painting, as transcribed by Jacques Dupin in 1977 under the title 'Memories of the rue Blomet.' The scene, as Miró describes it, is meant to depict himself, Leiris, and Bataille walking along the banks of the river Seine and his habit of throwing a coin into the water for good luck and to watch the reflected lights of the city twinkle in the ripples.²³ At the end of this vivid description, Miró reminisces: 'Yes, Bataille, I knew him well, but after the rue Blomet.'²⁴ Miró's statement is ambiguous; we cannot know for certain what he means by claiming that he 'knew [Bataille] well.' Miró may be referring either to a personal relationship or to a familiarity with Bataille's work. 'After the rue Blomet' is equally ambiguous. The year 1927 was, technically, 'after the rue Blomet' for Miró, who had moved on to a new studio at Côte des Fusains, 22 rue Tourlaque by

²² Leiris, interview with Jeffett, 191. The fact that Miró and Bataille actually knew one another has not been picked up in scholarship on either figure.

²³ Miró, 'Memories of the Rue Blomet,' 103.

²⁴ Ibid.

January. If Miró is saying that he knew Bataille well in 1927—the year of his painting—he is likely speaking of a personal relationship, since Bataille had not produced a significant body of work by this point (*Story of the Eye* was not published until 1928).

In the late 1920s, Bretonian Surrealism would experience a fracturing, with several of its members loosening their ties to the official movement, abandoning it altogether, or becoming ‘excommunicated’ by its leader. There is not one unifying reason for the splintering, but for Miró, at least, his decreased association with Surrealism proper owed to the absolute control that Breton held over the movement’s direction.²⁵ Miró had never officially pledged his allegiance to Surrealism, but was included in the group of seventy-six people associated with the movement—former and current Surrealists, former dadaists, associated groups, and independents (including Bataille)—to whom Breton sent a very important letter in February of 1929.²⁶ In this letter, Breton asked whether the recipient supported ‘the ideal of a group endeavour, or should we abandon all hope for concerted communal action.’²⁷ He then set out to ‘purge’ the group based, in part, on their responses. Bataille and Leiris were officially disassociated from Surrealism; Miró was not officially named, but his response to Breton’s call for collective action shows a willing separation. Miró writes:

²⁵ Another reason for dissent within the group at this time was Surrealism’s increasing political involvement (with the French Communist Party), although Miró does not comment on this. Miró and Breton had by no means a close relationship, but still one that appeared to be cordial. Leiris describes Miró and Breton as having a ‘very easy’ relationship, but does not consider Miró to have been a Surrealist. (See Leiris, interview with Jeffett, 191.) Miró was not particularly star-struck with Breton; in 1928, he described their first meeting, at which Paul Éluard was also present: ‘they [Breton and Éluard] struck me as being revolutionary, but within the blandest sort of traditionalism.’ (See Joan Miró, “A Conversation with Joan Miró” by Francesc Trabal.’ Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 95.) Breton sustained an interest in Miró’s work, even after the artist moved away from Surrealism. In 1958, Breton wrote poems corresponding to each painting from Miró’s *Constellation* series (1939–1941), executed while the artist was in exile during the Second World War. For more on the *Constellations*, see Paul Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000).

²⁶ Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (Boston: Black Widow, 2009), 280.

²⁷ André Breton, letter, 12 February 1929. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 107.

There is no doubt that when action is taken, it is always the result of a collective effort. Nevertheless, I am convinced that individuals whose personalities are strong or excessive, unhealthy perhaps, deadly if you like—that is not the question here—these people will never be able to give in to the militarylike discipline that communal action necessarily demands.²⁸

A letter from Max Ernst to the dealer Camille Goemans on 2 June 1926 suggests that Miró's move away from Surrealism began two years before his rejection of collective action. Breton chastised Ernst and Miró for their involvement with the Ballets Russes, and Ernst writes that Breton

had not counted on my leaving [the Surrealist group]. He had believed that, humbly, I would have confessed and that, after several months of penitence, I would have received my general absolution. Nor had he reckoned that I would be followed by Éluard, Arp, and Miró.²⁹

As Surya notes, in subjecting Miró and Ernst to 'moral judgment,' Breton was beginning to 'adopt an attitude that was inherently idealist,' which was precisely what the original rue Blomet group had rejected from its outset.³⁰

Many of those 'dissident' Surrealists purged in 1929, attracted by Bataille's anti-idealist stance, went on to form the editorial board of the journal *Documents*, of which Bataille had just become the general secretary. These included Leiris, Georges Limbour,

²⁸ Joan Miró, statement in *Variétés*, June 1929. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 108.

²⁹ Max Ernst, letter to Camille Goemans, 2 June 1926, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels. Quoted and translated by Anne Umland, in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927–1937* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 5. As chapter 2 of this thesis explores, Ernst's 'abandonment' of Surrealism was hardly permanent.

³⁰ Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 114.

Jacques-André Boiffard, Roger Vitrac and Robert Desnos. Until this point, Bataille had been of little consequence to Breton, but now that he was in a position to lure Surrealists to his cause, the two embarked upon a bitter rivalry, attacking one another over the course of several publications in the late 1920s and early 1930s.³¹ Significantly, Miró was granted three articles in *Documents* over the course of its two-year run. In these articles, Miró's work is praised for its destructive qualities, its move away from the innocent depictions of the Catalan countryside, and its mounting violence. In Miró's debut in *Documents*, Leiris writes of his art as '*salies*' ('dirtied') rather than painted, as a ruined building whose walls are covered with generations of graffiti.³² In the following year, Carl Einstein wrote a review of Miró's recent *papiers collés*, in terms of an 'assassination' and as a rejection of the 'charm' of his earlier works.³³ Bataille's short article on the artist, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' also praises Miró's attack on painting, framing it as a disintegration of reality into dust.³⁴ Each of these characterisations recounts a very different side of Miró than the one Breton described in his 1928 *Le surréalisme et la peinture*, in which he backhandedly praises Miró (who had already pledged to 'assassinate painting') for 'limiting' himself as an artist, by 'giving himself up utterly to painting, and painting alone,' and for being an artist whose work is not concerned with the 'chemistry of the intellect' and is 'childlike.'³⁵ While Leiris, Einstein, and Bataille all reference (to varying degrees) the element of the childlike in Miró's work, they refer not to whimsicality but to the destructive mark-making of a child who attacks a blank piece of paper.

While the majority of scholarly writing that has investigated Bataille's article on Miró sees the opening of the 1930s as the end of Miró's crisis of anti-painting and of any

³¹ These attacks are outlined in chapter 5 of this thesis.

³² Michel Leiris, 'Joan Miró,' *Documents* 1, no. 5 (1929): 264.

³³ Carl Einstein, 'Joan Miró (Papiers collés à la galerie Pierre),' *Documents* 2, no. 4 (1930): 241–243.

³⁴ Georges Bataille, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' *Documents* 2, no. 7 (1930): 399.

³⁵ André Breton, *Le surréalisme et la peinture* (1928), in *Surrealism and Painting*, ed. Mark Polizzotti, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), 36–38.

connection with Bataille,³⁶ my thesis is interested in how this relationship was sustained after the end of *Documents*. To this end I have uncovered primary source material linking these two figures after the year 1930, which has not previously been published in Miró scholarship. We know, for instance, that Miró owned several of Bataille's novels. The Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona has preserved the artist's impressive personal library, which contains copies of Bataille's writings published after 1930. These include two copies of *Le Coupable suivi de L'Alleluiah* (1944), *La Peinture préhistorique: Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* (1955), and *Le Bleu du ciel* (1957). Two of these publications have handwritten inscriptions from Bataille to Miró, expressing friendship and admiration. These inscriptions (Figs. 3 and 4, respectively) read:

À Joan Miró, / avec la vielle et tres fidèle amitié / et avec la profonde admiration
de / Georges Bataille

(To Joan Miró, / with the old and most loyal friendship / and with the profound
admiration of / Georges Bataille)

À Joan Miró / avec l'amitié toujours éblouie de / Georges Bataille

(To Joan Miró / with the always fascinated friendship of / Georges Bataille)

We also know that Miró—along with Masson, Ernst, Jean (Hans) Arp, Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, and others—donated some of his work to an auction at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris for the benefit of Bataille, organised by Maurice Rheims on 17 March 1961.³⁷ Bataille was dying, and the proceeds from this auction allowed him to secure a

³⁶ See my 'Literature Review' for more on this point.

³⁷ Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 580. It is not known which works Miró donated.

flat on rue Saint-Sulpice, where he lived out his last months before passing away on 8 July.

‘The Boundary of Horror’

The reason I have chosen to introduce this thesis with an overview of the biographical facts pertaining to Miró and Bataille is to support my research questions—In what ways do Miró’s and Bataille’s work display thematic overlaps? And, is it possible that Bataille’s writings provided a source of influence for Miró?²—and also to make two conditions of this thesis clear from the outset. Firstly, the decision to investigate Miró and Bataille is not arbitrary, but rather these biographic overlaps show there was a personal relationship between these two figures (the degree to which is unknown), which justifies a rereading of Miró’s anti-painting period through a Bataillean lens. Secondly, it is not the position of this thesis to suggest that Miró abandoned or rejected Bretonian Surrealism in favour of Bataille. Even in his earliest experience of the Parisian avant-garde, at the rue Blomet, Miró engaged with many sources not backed by Breton’s official movement (referred to throughout this thesis as Surrealism with a capital ‘S’) and demonstrated a lifelong resistance to being categorised as a part of any official movement. This thesis considers the likelihood that, when Miró distanced himself from Surrealism proper (he did not relinquish its hold altogether), he followed his closest friends in turning to Bataille’s work as an additional area of influence, through whose transgression the artist could confront his personal and political anxieties of the 1930s.

In answering these research questions, this thesis examines three series of works completed by Miró in the 1930s, all of which depict figural subject matter. There are two chapters devoted to each series, and every chapter investigates Miró’s work through a

different text (or texts) by Bataille. Each of these series has had very little previous scholarly representation, and many of the images described appear to have been created as private works of art, that is, as emotional responses to contemporary events. My argument employs three primary methodologies, the first of which is an analysis of Miró's work through Bataillean theory. Secondly, each series is read through its historical context, which involves such areas as the Catalan nationalist movements, the *bienio negro*, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, and the anticlericalism of the Spanish left in the 1930s. Miró was a passionate Catalan nationalist and—given the political context of the period—this fact is a major consideration throughout the thesis. Thirdly, this thesis relies heavily on visual analysis and iconographic readings of Miró's drawings and paintings and the affinities with Bataillean imagery. This is a very visual thesis, which is why I have elected to include the images in a second volume. This allows the reader the freedom to view the works simultaneously, without disrupting the formatting of the thesis or distracting from the text. It also allows me to reproduce certain works like *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* or *The Farm*, which are discussed in more than one chapter, multiple times as points of comparison for the more transgressive works of the 1930s, so that the reader is not required to flip back and relocate the image. I believe the reader must have the particular work in front of her or him in order to best grasp the conceptual connections I am making with Bataille's writing. Other methodologies used in this thesis are a psychoanalytic reading, which is used particularly in chapter 5, in analysing the use of excremental imagery in Miró's work, and an analysis of the 'savage paintings' through the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in chapter 4.

The first chapter of this thesis reviews the relevant extant literature pertaining to my argument. Chapters 2 and 3 analyse a series of drawings that are contained in two notebooks dated November 1930, which are currently held in the archives of the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona. Within these notebooks are seventy-nine drawings of

distorted, monstrously deformed human figures. Chapter 2 ('Formless Figuration') establishes the context of Miró's anti-painting period in order to argue that this new, aggressive approach to figuration was part of the artist's greater attack on representation. The ambiguous genitalia and additions and mutilations of limbs are then read through Bataille's 'operation' of the *informe* (formlessness), the antithesis of categorisation, which disrupts classifications and interpretation and 'servant à déclasser' ('serves to bring things down in the world').³⁸ This is placed within the 1990s debate in Bataillean scholarship over whether figurative art can be classed as *informe*. Chapter 3 ('A Tear in the Eye') examines the iconographic similarities between this series of drawings and Bataille's imagery in *Story of the Eye*, aligning Miró's work with Ernst and Masson, who also referenced Bataille's novella in their contemporary work. Miró's treatment of the eye in these drawings is situated within the greater Bataillean and Surrealist interest in violating the eye.

The second of Miró's series analysed through Bataillean thought in this thesis is a group of twelve oils on copper and temperas on Masonite (with six paintings in each medium) depicting the Catalan countryside, begun in 1935 and completed just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. I undertake a visual analysis of these 'savage paintings,' arguing that the crisis of anti-painting had now given way to a political catastrophe, and that the innovations in figuration and the newfound aggressiveness that Miró cultivated in 1930 were now being applied to confront political affairs. In these compositions, Miró directly recycles and references iconography and settings from his pastoral scenes of the early 1920s—and strips these motifs of their earlier associations in order to depict desolate and disquieting scenes representative of Spain on the brink of war. I argue that the savage paintings are responses to the *bienio negro*, a turbulent period

³⁸ Georges Bataille, 'Informe,' *Documents* 1, no. 7 (1929): 382. Translated by Allan Stockl et al., in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Alan Stockl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 31.

in Spanish history marked by increasingly violent clashes between the political left and right.

Chapter 4 ('The Parodic Landscape') argues that Miró uses this resurrected imagery in a cruel parody of his earlier work, transgressing his former, idyllic subject of the Catalan peasant who is in harmony with his surroundings. This chapter reads the savage paintings through the notion of parody described by Bataille in his short text *The Solar Anus*, which was first published in 1931 and in which he posits a violent, erotic world that is entirely parodic, in which every form, substance, and force is the parody of another. I argue that, in their respective works, Miró and Bataille both employ the image of the active volcano as a metaphor for violent social upheaval and represent a world that is (literally) turned inside out. One particular savage painting, *Figures and Birds in a Landscape* (1935), whose raucous and highly sexualised scene seemingly contrasts the sombre desolation of the rest of the series, is read through the notion of liberating laughter, as it appears in the work of Bataille and Friedrich Nietzsche; the carnivalesque, as described by Mikhail Bakhtin; and the connection between laughter and parody.

Chapter 5 is a focused, in-depth examination of *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* (1935), one of the savage paintings. I investigate the roots of excremental imagery in Miró's work, arguing that the motif once represented a symbol of rebirth (as a fertiliser), but in his 1930s works becomes a mocking symbol of Spain's political landscape. The artist's interest in shit imagery, I argue, can be linked to the Catalan fondness for scatological humour and to the frequent occurrence of excremental subject matter in the region's folklore. Furthermore, I interpret Miró's depiction of the turd motif—which stands rigidly upright atop a hill, surrounded by a yellow-green glow—through the associations between faeces and treasure in the theories of Sigmund Freud and through the depictions of religious visions by Spanish Golden Age painters. I argue that Miró's mocking celebration of shit recalls Bataille's own exaltation of base matter,

set forth in several of his writings. Miró's use of the motif is also read through the Bataille-Breton polemic on materialism versus transposition, during which the excremental imagery of the Marquis de Sade and Salvador Dalí was invoked by both authors in support of their causes.

The final series analysed in this thesis, in chapters 6 and 7, comprises approximately twenty works on paper (namely watercolour drawings) completed between 1938 and 1939 that depict savagely eroticised female figures in a variety of scenarios relating to war. Unlike the works investigated in earlier chapters, these drawings were not (as far as we know) conceived of as a series; however, because they contain such strongly overlapping themes and iconography, they are presented in this chapter as a unified whole and are referred to as Miró's 'woman drawings' (1938-1939).³⁹ Of the series examined in this thesis, the woman drawings are the least known, with only one (*Woman in Revolt* [1938]) having received any scholarly attention.⁴⁰ Chapter 6 ('Miró's *Milicianas*') evaluates the parallels between the depiction of the female nude in these works in terms of Bataillean eroticism, specifically in the shared nature of eroticism and war as transgressions of taboos. These works share elements of the *informe* sexuality and figuration first introduced by the artist in 1930, which is first discussed in my second chapter. I also examine the drawings—which are precisely dated—in relation to the corresponding events of the Spanish Civil War and within the contemporary sociopolitical context, which required the deeply Catholic nation to adjust to an influx of women into the public sphere—as new members of both the workforce and the military. Another primary concern of chapter 6 is a comparison of this private series with Miró's contemporary contributions to Republican propaganda (which included only male

³⁹ I have decided to call them by this name because Miró himself inscribed the backs of a great many of the drawings with titles involving the word 'woman': *Woman in Revolt*, for instance. These works are part of a larger collection of drawings (approximately sixty-five) that Miró completed during the last year of the Spanish Civil War.

⁴⁰ See the 'Literature Review' for more on *Woman in Revolt*.

subjects), as well as with the depictions of women in Picasso's *Guernica* (1937). Through these comparisons, I argue that the private nature of Miró's woman drawings afforded him the ability to transgress the contemporary, state-approved depictions of womanhood, instead producing works that merge the erotic and violent, which would, at the time, have been unacceptable for public display.

This thesis concludes with chapter 7 ('Surrealism and the Sacred Heart'), a case study of a particular woman drawing, *Woman with Necklace* (1938), in which I argue that Miró has revived the flaming heart motif, which he commonly used in the 1920s, but which had largely disappeared from his work in the 1930s. After performing a detailed visual analysis, through which I argue that this motif is indeed a flaming heart, I situate Miró's revived use of the symbol within modern Spain's cult of the Sacred Heart, its use by Francisco Franco, and its blasphemous depictions by other Surrealists. I then compare Miró's use of the flaming or Sacred Heart in this drawing with Bataille and Masson's Acéphalic man (who holds this symbol in his hand), arguing that both depictions employ the icon as a violent and parodic symbol of anticlericalism and antifascism.

The title of this thesis, *Boundaries of Horror: Joan Miró and Georges Bataille, 1930-1939*, comes from an entry in Bataille's 'Critical Dictionary,' published in *Documents* in 1929 (in the issue before Miró made his debut), that is titled 'L'oeil: friandise cannibale' ('Eye: Cannibal Delicacy'). In the entry, Bataille writes: 'la séduction extrême est probablement à la limite de l'horreur' ('extreme seduction is probably at the boundary of horror').⁴¹ This title, I believe, is apt for two reasons. Firstly, Bataille's original use of the phrase to describe the eye-cutting scene in Luis Buñuel and Dalí's film *Un Chien andalou* (1929) captures the prevailing anti-retinal attitude of Miró's anti-painting crisis. Furthermore, a number of themes emphasised within this thesis can be thought of in terms of 'boundaries.' Miró, for instance, finds himself in many ways on the boundary

⁴¹ Georges Bataille, 'L'oeil,' *Documents* 1, no. 4 (1929): 216.

between Bataillean and Bretonian thought, pledging total allegiance to neither camp. Further, anti-painting exists at the boundary of representation—paradoxically employing visual means to attack art itself. The *informe* bodies Miró depicts are at the boundary of figuration, of male and female and of human and non-human, while the operation of parody on which Miró and Bataille both rely represents the boundary between the referent and the transgressed. During the two years of the *bienio negro*, Spain teetered at the boundary of war, which eventually gave way to the Spanish Civil War; the rest of Europe felt the same effects only a few years later, when the Second World War broke out. Returning Bataille's term 'boundary' to its original use are Miró's depictions of women at war, whose sexuality and militancy hover between the boundary of eroticism and violence.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

In reviewing the extant literature concerning Joan Miró's relationship to Georges Bataille, one finds that there are no sources on the topic prior to 1994, and that, while select subsequent scholarly works have examined Miró through a Bataillean lens, none have identified a sustained interest, on Miró's part, in Bataillean thought outside of the artist's engagement with the journal *Documents* or past the year 1930. Although Miró entered the pages of Bataille's journal *Documents* three times during its fifteen issues, no art historian had seriously considered the relationship between these two figures until the publication of Rosalind Krauss's breakthrough article 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' published in *October* in 1994. Krauss takes her title from a 1927 painting by Miró entitled *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi*, and she asks why, if Miró wrote Bataille's name onto one of his canvases, has no subsequent critic, curator, or art historian investigated the impact of Bataille, or of *Documents*, on the artist. According to Krauss, the answer to this question concerns the

supreme power that André Breton wielded over the critical reception of Surrealism's artists. Consequently, Breton 'mesmerised' art historians with his explanations of works, which, for Miró, meant that his artistic production was characterised either 'under the rubric of childishness' or as a 'painter's painter.'¹ Importantly, Krauss acknowledges the erotic element in the artist's work, positing the existence of a third Miró, one whom she compares to a deviant offering to share his 'dirty pictures.'²

Interestingly, until my own thesis, Krauss's eighteen-page article has remained the only source that reads Miró's work through a text by Bataille published outside of *Documents*. Krauss focuses principally on the ambiguous iconography in Miró's works of the mid 1920s—whereby Miró's stylisation of a particular symbol triggers associations with other icons: the vulva's hairs and bulblike shape recall a comet, the parts of a flower, or the body and legs of a spider.³ She then reads this chain of symbols through the 'metaphoric chains' of images identified in Bataille's 1928 erotic novella *Histoire de l'oeil* (*Story of the Eye*), in which the author configures a series of associations around the round form—including eggs, the sun, testicles, the eye, and the vaginal opening. This type of image-making was first identified in Bataille's work by Roland Barthes, in his influential 1963 essay 'La métaphore de l'oeil' ('The Metaphor of the Eye').⁴

Ultimately, Krauss cannot reconcile the reliance on metaphor of Miró's 'dream paintings' of the 1920s with Bataille's emphatic rejection of metaphor, sublimation, and 'elevation' in any form. For Krauss, Bataille's anti-metaphorical stance was so resolute that even Barthes's analysis of *Story of the Eye* is called into question.⁵ Krauss writes:

¹ Rosalind Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' *October*, no. 68 (Spring 1994): 3.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 6.

⁴ Roland Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'oeil,' in *Roland Barthes: Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993). Originally published in *Critique* (1963). Barthes's argument is described in detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵ Contrasting Krauss's view is the work of many scholars for whom Barthes's analysis of *Story of the Eye* is so enormously important that it is nearly impossible to read Bataille's work without it. See, for instance, Patrick ffrench, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'oeil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

And yet no matter how important we may think Barthes's analysis is of the role of the metaphorical chains in *Story of the Eye*, we have to acknowledge that Bataille's avowed aesthetic, enunciated many times over in the essays in *Documents*, was hostile to metaphor in any form, whether poetically happenstance or coldly structuralist.⁶

According to Krauss, there was a 'general agreement in the Miró reception that 1930 is somehow a write-off in Miró's artistic trajectory,' and she characterises Miró's engagement with *Documents* as 'a suicidal moth' moving 'closer and closer to the flame of Bataille.'⁷ She concludes that Miró sustained no serious interest in Bataille's aesthetic after 1933 (although she does suggest that there may be some 'reverberations' in one particular 1938 work, which I will discuss momentarily), characterising him as

an artist who was determined to survive, and who must have instinctively felt that, however seductive Bataille's aesthetic of the 'real' might have been, however extraordinary the lure of the big toe, he could not embrace it and continue as a painter. So this is a story of a refugee who went to a strange and dangerous shore and almost foundered but was determined to come back.⁸

While chapter 3 of my own investigation into a Bataillean Miró also considers the artist's use of chains of images recalling those in *Story of the Eye*, this thesis is absolutely distinct from Krauss's argument in both its content and scope. Regarding the use of metonymic chains (which I feel is a more appropriate term than Krauss's 'metaphoric'), Krauss's article examines Miró's work of the 1920s—produced *before* the publication of

⁶ Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 11.

⁷ Ibid., 17–18.

⁸ Ibid., 18.

Story of the Eye, and so any similarities to Bataillean image-making can only be understood as coincidental. Furthermore, she looks at the similarities in iconography between paintings produced years apart. I, on the other hand, have identified a metonymic chain in Miró's work that Krauss has not mentioned: the *exact* chain used by Bataille in *Story of the Eye*, involving the egg, testicles, sun, and eye, all contained within a single painting: *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* (1924). While the connection to Bataille is coincidental at this point in Miró's career, I traced the use of this chain of images and found that in 1930, after *Story of the Eye* was published, Miró subjects this imagery to a violent eroticism; specifically, he conflates his symbols for the eye and vulva in a manner that mirrors the final scene in Bataille's novella.

The two sources that are particularly useful for situating my discussion on the thematic overlaps between Miró's 1930 drawings and *Story of the Eye* are David Hopkins's book *Dada's Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp* (2007) and Raymond Spiteri's article 'Envisioning Surrealism in *Histoire de l'oeil* and *La femme 100 têtes*' (2004), both of which examine the similarities between *Story of the Eye* and the work of Max Ernst. Hopkins's section 'The Story of the Eye: Ernst, Breton, Bataille' establishes the two ways of seeing depicted by Ernst in his work: outward-directed, 'scopophilic' vision, which Hopkins describes as 'fundamental to the libidinal drives of the male,' and the inward gaze linked to artistic vision.⁹ Hopkins suggests Bataille's *Story of the Eye* as a possible source for Ernst's series *A l'intérieur de la vue: L'oeuf* (1929), which is devoted to the theme of 'turned in vision.'¹⁰ Hopkins explains that although Ernst was firmly aligned with Breton, he seems able, nevertheless, to move easily between Bretonian and Bataillean principles.¹¹ In these paintings, completed one year after the publication of *Story of the Eye*, Hopkins observes that Ernst achieves the transposition from eye to egg on two levels—visually

⁹ David Hopkins, *Dada's Boys: Masculinity After Duchamp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 71.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 73.

and verbally, in a way similar to what Barthes describes in “The Metaphor of the Eye.”¹² The visual transposition occurs on the basis of shape (in the rounded shape of the composition), while the verbal alteration is achieved by ‘the shift from the word *oeil* to *œuf*, with the letter “o” at the start of each word providing a further visual trigger.’¹³ Hopkins argues that, as a result, these images—which feature bird and egg forms contained within a golden, egg-shaped vessel—turn ‘the eye into a vessel for gestation.’¹⁴ The implication of Ernst’s act, Hopkins insists, is that the interior (or visionary) eye, so often associated with artistic genius and the Romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, now joins the outward eye as a sexualised emblem.¹⁵

Raymond Spiteri’s ‘Envisioning Surrealism in *Histoire de l’œil* and *La femme 100 têtes*’ discusses the iconographic role of the eye in Bataille’s and Ernst’s work. Using one example from Bataille’s ‘dissident’ Surrealism (*Story of the Eye*) and one from ‘traditional’ Surrealism (Ernst’s collage novel, *La femme 100 têtes* [*The hundred-headless woman*] (1929), Spiteri argues that these two factions are linked by their mutual use of the eye as a vessel for imagination, and that this circumstance is where Bataille’s thought is closest to Breton’s.¹⁶ Spiteri begins by examining the similarities between two admittedly different scenes: the final tableau in *Story of the Eye* and Ernst’s *Germinal, my sister, the hundred-headless woman (in the background, in the cage, the Eternal Father)* (1929, plate 23). What these two scenes share, according to Spiteri, is the ‘equation between the eye, castration, and the female genitals,’ made implicit in *Story of the Eye* by the insertion of the severed eye into Simone’s vagina and echoed in *La femme 100 têtes* as the female character strokes the head of a man in her lap, her left index and middle finger framing his left eye in an implied

¹² Hopkins, *Dada’s Boys*, 71.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Raymond Spiteri, ‘Envisioning Surrealism in *Histoire d’œil* and *La femme 100 têtes*,’ *Art Journal* 63, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 17.

cutting gesture.¹⁷ Arguing that *Story of the Eye* is ‘caught up in the type of poetic transposition Bataille criticises in Surrealism,’ Spiteri argues that the novella embodies a ‘perverse’ adaptation of Freudian castration anxiety and fetishism.¹⁸ My argument diverges from Spiteri’s here, as my thesis understands *Story of the Eye* in terms of a *parody* of poetic transposition. Nevertheless, Spiteri’s reading of the eye in Ernst’s work as an image of both seduction and horror, and as a vehicle for revealing fantasies,¹⁹ helped to inform my consideration of such themes in Miró’s work.

Anti-Painting, Revolution, and War

What I believe is the greatest flaw in Krauss’s argument—and the reason why she cannot establish any sustained interest by Miró in a Bataillean aesthetic—is the era on which she has chosen to focus her investigation. In my view, it is unsurprising that Krauss cannot connect the dream paintings of the 1920s—with their indebtedness to Surrealist engagement with automatism, the unconscious, and the imagination—to Bataille. Charles Palermo shares my opinion; he explains Bataille’s absence from his 2008 book *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miró in the 1920s* in both the introduction and conclusion:

I join [Krauss] in insisting that the standard account of Miró’s work is wrongly dominated by Breton’s surrealism. However, Miró certainly did not know Bataille until the end of the period I consider his breakthrough, and if Bataille exerted an

¹⁷ Spiteri, ‘Envisioning Surrealism,’ 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

influence on Miró later in the 1920s, it does not appear to me to have left any discernable mark on the themes I consider.²⁰

Given that Miró himself states that he only knew Bataille ‘after the rue Blomet,’²¹ meaning after 1926 at the absolute earliest, it seems more logical to me that the appearances of Miró’s work in *Documents* should be considered as nearer to the beginning of his engagement with Bataillean themes, rather than the end.

My investigation of a Bataillean Miró begins where Krauss’s ends: the early 1930s. I believe that Miró’s distancing of himself from mainstream Surrealism during this time, along with the contemporary perilous climate—the Great Depression, the *bienio negro* in Spain, the Spanish Civil War, and Second World War—invited an engagement with more violent themes, new materials, and a newfound interest in the parodic. I would argue that the exact dating (day, month, and year) of many of his works of the 1930s (by the artist himself) is indicative of the influence that current events had on Miró’s work.

In reading Miró’s 1930s output through contemporary political events, and in exploring the ways in which he exhibited contempt for his own previous work, I must acknowledge the indebtedness of this thesis to the 2009 exhibition and accompanying catalogue *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927–1937*, curated by Anne Umland, and which was an extension on her PhD thesis, ‘Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s: The Dialectic of Painting and Anti-Painting.’ This exhibition reconciled the gap in Miró’s reception acknowledged by Krauss—reading the artist as neither childlike nor through

²⁰ Charles Palermo, *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miró in the 1920s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 3. Rather than Bataille, Palermo’s book focuses on the relationships of Michel Leiris and Carl Einstein with Miró. As mentioned in my introduction, it is highly likely that Miró did, in fact, know Bataille during this period.

²¹ Joan Miró, ‘Memories of the rue Blomet,’ originally transcribed by Jacques Dupin, 1977. Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 103.

the ‘painterly’ concerns of Greenbergian modernism²²—and instead took as its starting point Miró’s declaration in 1927 that he wanted to assassinate painting. Umland is certainly not the first to discover this statement, but, importantly, she extends her consideration of Miró’s ‘anti-painting’ to include the bulk of the 1930s,²³ and thus the Spanish Civil War. Previous scholars saw the end of ‘Miró the assassin’ by 1933: Dupin writes that by this time the artist ‘relearned’ painting,²⁴ while Krauss (as I have already mentioned) reads him as a ‘refugee’ determined to re-find himself after going down a dangerous path. Umland, conversely, reads Miró’s work through several lenses: the artist’s own aggression, ‘the so-called Roaring Twenties coming to an end . . . acrimonious schisms developing within Paris Surrealism, with the art market overheating . . . and with the threat of fascism and totalitarian ideologies looming on the world stage.’²⁵

Both Umland’s and my own history-based approaches to Miró in the 1930s position our work alongside several important publications considering the relationship between Surrealism, revolution, and war. Sidra Stich’s accompanying catalogue to the 1990 exhibition *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* considers how Surrealism was ‘born’ from the wake of the First World War and the ways in which ‘the recognition of violence as a dominant human trait and the realization that human will had caused destruction on a previously unfathomed scale shifted Western thinking about the nature of life.’²⁶ While

²² See, for instance, Clement Greenberg, ‘Review of an Exhibition of Joan Miró,’ in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 153. Originally published in 1947.

²³ Krauss, by contrast, understands ‘anti-painting’ as Miró’s literal abandonment of painting in 1930–31, during which time she argues Miró ‘had practically stopped working’ (‘Michel, Bataille et moi,’ 18). We know this characterisation not to be true, however, as Miró completed not only the impressive number of notebook drawings that I describe in chapters 2 and 3, but also many ‘constructions,’ collages, and the large paintings that Bataille reproduced in *Documents*. Umland, instead, understands the ‘assassination of painting’ *through* painting itself, an argument that I find extremely convincing and which my thesis follows. Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927–1937* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 1–4.

²⁴ Jacques Dupin, *Miró*, trans. James Petterson (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 167.

²⁵ Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, ix.

²⁶ Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California, 1990), 11.

this publication is largely focused on events in France, Stich does include a short discussion of the importance of the events of the *bienio negro* and the Spanish Civil War on Miró's work of the 1930s, which has been very useful for my own consideration of this period. Stich considers a series of Miró's pastels on paper from 1934 as responses to the *bienio negro*—specifically the violent uprising in Asturias in October of the same year.²⁷ The fourth chapter of my thesis considers similar themes—examining a 1935–1936 series called the 'savage paintings' through the lens of the *bienio negro*—but in greater detail (Stich devotes only a paragraph to this discussion). My own work also considers how the *bienio negro* affected the region of Catalonia in particular, and how this is echoed in Miró's depictions of the Catalan countryside.

While Stich does not look specifically at the Catalan context for Miró's work, a portion of her chapter 'Surrealist Environments' considers Miró's *Woman Haunted by the Passage of the Bird Dragonfly Omen of Bad News* (1938) and other contemporary works painted during the Spanish Civil War as responses 'to the threat of European war and the climate of terror.'²⁸ Chapter 4 of my thesis also examines Miró's wartime landscapes, but does so through the notion of Bataillean parody and through Miró's nationalism—two areas into which Stich's chapter does not delve. Nevertheless, her explanation of the greater Surrealist interest in hostile landscapes forced me to consider what, specifically, made Miró's savage landscapes 'Bataillean,' the solution to which involves the use of the volcano motif as a symbol of revolution and excrement (recalling Bataille's *The Solar Anus*) and the creation of a *parodic* landscape.

Like Stich's *Anxious Visions*, Martin Jay's chapter 'The Disenchantment of the Eye: Bataille and the Surrealists' in his book *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993) also examines Surrealism through the legacy of the

²⁷ Stich, *Anxious Visions*, 66.

²⁸ Ibid., 159–161.

First World War, in this case as the impetus for the movement's attack on 'ocularcentrism.' The 'violent interrogation of vision' by Bataille and others, Jay argues, is an example of the dismantling of established hierarchies (in this case, the primacy of sight) after the First World War.²⁹ Jay considers how the nature of trench warfare—specifically the constriction of vision, the inability to see one's enemy, and the physical blinding of soldiers by gas and shrapnel—made it impossible for veterans to participate in a 'collective experience' of the war.³⁰

Beginning with the fracturing of spatial order by the Cubists, Jay quickly moves towards a discussion of the importance of blindness to Bataille—his blind, syphilitic father, the violence enacted upon the eye in *Story of the Eye*, his interest in the eye as a symbol of 'ocular surveillance' in *Documents*, and the celebration of the blinding power of the sun and the conflation of the sun and anus in several of his works.³¹ As one would expect, Jay also devotes a considerable amount of his discussion to the eye-slicing scene in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's 1929 film *Un Chien andalou* (*The Andalusian Dog*). Jay contrasts Bataille's violent eye with Breton's mission, which also 'defied visual convictions,' but initially did so through 'the hope of restoring the Edenic purity of the "innocent eye."'³² He also argues how the Surrealist experimentations with the tactile techniques of 'collage, decalcomania, fumage, coulage, and étrécissements' challenged ocular dominance.³³ Jay does not argue for the 'triumph of Bataille over Breton'—as the latter also came to doubt the 'privileging of the visual, which Jay explores by discussing

²⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 211.

³⁰ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 215. Jay's interest in this area builds from Eric J. Leed's book *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

³¹ These works include 'Soleil pourri' ('Rotten Sun') (1930), *L'Annus solaire* (*The Solar Annus*) (1930), and 'L'oeil pinéal' ('The Pineal Eye') (written around 1930 but unpublished until 1967). See Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 216–227.

³² *Ibid.*, 243.

³³ *Ibid.*, 247.

the importance of the labyrinth to Breton as an ‘enfolded, convoluted, unilluminated space where the Surrealist confronts the unconscious.’³⁴

Jay does not include Miró in his discussion, but the themes explored in *Downcast Eyes* are useful for my own argument. Building, in part, on Jay’s work allows me to situate both Miró’s personal crisis that precipitated his anti-painting (in chapter 2) and his specific, violent treatment of the eye motif in 1930 (in chapter 3) within the greater context of the Surrealist attack on vision, thus establishing the artist’s ‘assassination’ as an anti-retinal act.

Simon Baker’s *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (2007) situates Surrealism within the legacy of the French Revolution, considering the ‘attitudes and ideological positions’ of a variety of Surrealist artists and writers and examining Paris as a ‘revolutionary location.’³⁵ In his book, Baker explores Surrealism as ‘a gradual agglomeration of the diverging, often conflicting interests of individuals working both for and against the Surrealist movement,’ rather than through a definition of the movement derived solely from Breton’s doctrines.³⁶ He acknowledges his own indebtedness of this ‘all inclusive’ view of Surrealism to Dawn Ades, whose exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (1978) reintroduced Bataille (through his magazine *Documents*) and those who defected to his circle back into Surrealist discourse.³⁷ While *Surrealism, History and Revolution* does not include any discussion of Miró, or of Spain, it is a useful source for considering the relationship between Surrealism and revolution, a theme that I explore in chapters 4 and 5, which focus on the *bienio negro* and the revolutionary pressures facing Spain in the two years before the start of the Civil War.

³⁴ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 261. To this end, Jay includes two important quotations from Breton’s ‘*Le Message Automatique*’ (*Minotaure*, 3–4 (1933)): ‘verbal inspiration is infinitely richer in visual meaning, infinitely more resistant to the eye, than visual images properly so called. . . . [This belief] is the source of my unceasing protest against the presumed “visionary” power of the poet. No, Lautréamont and Rimbaud did not *see* what they described; they were never confronted by it *a priori*. That is, they never *described* anything. They threw themselves into the dark recesses of being; they heard indistinctly.’

³⁵ Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: The Hayward Gallery, 1978).

Baker's chapter 'The Unacceptable Face of the French Revolution'³⁸—with its focus on the differing views of the Marquis de Sade as a revolutionary versus transgressive figure, as held by Breton and Bataille, respectively—was helpful for my discussion of excremental imagery in Miró's savage paintings and the ways in which shit imagery fit into the Breton-Bataille polemic over materialism and transposition. Another invaluable source for understanding this debate is Elza Adamowicz's article 'Exquisite Excrement: The Bataille-Breton Polemic,' published in the online journal *Aurifex* in 2003. This article centres on Breton's and Bataille's writings on Salvador Dalí during 1929–1930 and the ways in which they both sought to 'claim' Dalí for their respective groups.³⁹ According to Adamowicz, the divergent ways in which each author discusses Dalí's excremental imagery reveal not only a personal rivalry between Breton and Bataille, but also the fundamental differences between their intellectual positions. Adamowicz argues that 'Breton's idealism clashed with Bataille's materialism, and to Breton's transformation of matter into metaphor, Bataille riposted with his concept of "base materialism," matter as irrecoverable matter.'⁴⁰ She also situates the debate over excrement within the larger conflict over Surrealism's alignment with the French Communist Party.

Robin Adèle Greeley's *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (2006) is an important work on its subject, and one of the first monograph-length overviews of the topic in the English-language scholarship. The limitations of this book are, I believe, eloquently summarised in C. Brian Morris's review in the *Journal of Modern History*. Morris rightly notes that Greeley's book does not fully justify its title, as it concentrates on only five artists—Miró, Dalí, José Caballero, André Masson, and Pablo Picasso—and ignores the work of other important Spanish avant-gardists, most notably those belonging to the

³⁸ Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution*, 231–294.

³⁹ Elza Adamowicz, 'Exquisite Excrement: The Bataille-Breton Polemic,' *Aurifex*, no. 2 (2003).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Generación de 27 (Generation of 27).⁴¹ Morris also notes that two of these artists—Miró and Picasso—were never officially members of the Surrealist movement (and, by the Civil War, Miró had been taking conscious steps to move away from his association with the group) and that Caballero's version of Surrealism was far removed from Breton's doctrines.⁴² He rightly contrasts Greeley's study with a more 'panoramic' exhibition at the Museo de Teruel in 1998 entitled *El Surrealismo y la guerra civil española*.⁴³ Greeley's chapter on Miró ('Nationalism, Civil War, and Painting: Joan Miró and Political Agency in the Pictorial Realm') is also criticised for its lack of breadth, as it focuses principally on three works produced during the Civil War: *The Reaper* (1937), *Still Life with Old Shoe* (1937), and *Woman in Revolt* (1938).

While Greeley's book may not be as comprehensive as its title suggests, the chapter on Miró in *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* provides an insightful reading of the artist's propagandistic pursuits during the war, and of *The Reaper* (Miró's enormous mural produced in service of the Republican government) in particular. Greeley elucidates how regional nationalism contributed to the image that the Republican government cultivated for itself at the Paris International Exposition in 1937. While the original plans for the Spanish Republic's pavilion contained 'a wide range of political and cultural views,' including separate areas dedicated to the governments of Catalonia and the Basque Country, the final version was far more conservative.⁴⁴ Greeley argues that though the subject of *The Reaper* recalls Miró's earlier Catalan peasants, it is 'remarkably different in orientation,' both in its medium (a mural has a much different relationship

⁴¹ C. Brian Morris, 'Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War' by Robin Adèle Greeley, review by C. Brian Morris, *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 3 (September 2008): 702. The Generation of 27 was an important avant-gardist group of writers and artists working in Spain before and during the war, and included Rafael Alberti and Federico García Lorca.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Emmanuel Guigon, ed., *El Surrealismo y la guerra civil española* (Teruel: Diputación Provincial, 1998).

⁴⁴ Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 40–4.

with its audience than a painting) and in its depiction of the peasant himself. Greeley describes the work as follows:

Heroism takes masculine form, both through the peasant's upright posture and gestures and through reference to Miró's past gendering of the Catalan peasant figure. Fear of defeat cannot enter here, and the nation is presented as an unquestioned and positive entity, harmoniously joining the Catalan nationalist cause with that of the Spanish Republic.⁴⁵

The Reaper, then, is a symbol of 'uncontested nationalism,' verging on 'stereotype,' that represses Miró's own intense anxieties about the war in order to present absolute confidence in the Republic, when, in reality, the party was experiencing fierce infighting.⁴⁶ I draw on Greeley's discussion of masculinity and propaganda in chapter 6, as it provides a fascinating contrast with my own explorations of Miró's depictions of women during the Spanish Civil War. Greeley's work informs my investigation into how the artist represented women at war more frequently in his private drawings of the time, and how these could only exist as private works because they did not adhere to the Republican government's tight standards for visual propaganda (which favoured the virile male soldier and the weeping woman). Miriam Basilio's book *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (2013) was especially helpful for understanding the most common tropes in Spanish Civil War propaganda, especially how depictions of *milicianas* (militiawomen) were originally embraced by the Republic in the early days of

⁴⁵ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 41.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

the war, but were replaced by representations of women as breastfeeding or grieving mothers after women were banned from enlisting in December 1936.⁴⁷

Both Greeley and I examine Miró's *Woman in Revolt* as a response to the Spanish Civil War, and it is from this early point that our readings diverge. Of the approximately sixty-five 'woman drawings' that Miró produced in the last year of the Civil War (1938–39), and on which the final two chapters of my thesis centre, *Woman in Revolt* is the only one to receive any previous scholarly attention. Like *The Reaper*, *Woman in Revolt* shows a sickle-wielding figure, with fist raised, depicted in profile, and with the same phallic nose and jagged teeth. Both Greeley and Jacques Dupin, Miró's biographer, read *Woman in Revolt* as a terrified figure desperately seeking escape.⁴⁸ For Greeley, the figure's enormous, phallic leg (first discussed by Krauss in 'Michel, Bataille et moi') is read as her forced sexual transgression as 'a means of escape.'⁴⁹ For Dupin, even more bizarrely, it is the consequence of her inability both to fight (for him the sickle is purely symbolic) and to escape.⁵⁰ My own reading of this work refutes Greeley and Dupin, noting the formal similarities to Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) and reading the figure as a *miliciana*, whose representation transgresses the accepted roles for women in art of the Spanish Civil War.

Greeley's account of Miró and the Spanish Civil War does not mention Bataille, but her chapter on Masson ('The Barcelona *Acépale*: Spain and the Politics of Violence in the Work of André Masson') focuses heavily on Masson and Bataille's relationship during the Spanish Civil War (during which time Masson was in Spain) and has been a useful source in my considerations of overlaps between Miró's and Masson's work of the 1930s and the relationship to Bataille. Greeley's discussion of the blatantly sacrilegious

⁴⁷ Miriam Basilio, *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2013), 30.

⁴⁸ Jacques Dupin, *Miró*, trans. James Petterson (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 218; Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 42.

⁴⁹ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 16.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Barcelona Acéphale (1936), aided my own investigation into blasphemous ‘Sacred Heart’ imagery in Miró’s work (in chapter 7). Furthermore, her discussion of Masson’s political cartoons, especially *Tea at Franco’s* (1939), proved useful for my consideration of mocking humour and parody in Miró’s work.

The 2012 exhibition *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, organised by the Tate Modern and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, focuses on Miró’s nationalism and his responses to contemporary political events. While Bataille is absent from this account of Miró, the essays devoted to the Civil War proved fruitful for my research. The catalogue essay ‘Miró’s Commitment’ by Robert Lubar was particularly helpful for reconciling Miró’s intense nationalism with his ‘notorious’ evasion of partisanship.⁵¹ A further essay from this catalogue (‘The Tipping Point: 1934–9’) identifies two elements of one of Miró’s savage paintings (the corkscrew and planting hole motifs in *Nocturne*⁵²) that reference the artist’s earlier Catalan landscapes. The savage paintings have received little serious scholarly attention, the most robust of which comes from this exhibition.⁵³ While the authors—Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale—only mention this repeated imagery in passing, I link these discoveries (along with several others that I myself have identified) to Miró’s formation of a parodic landscape that recalls Bataille’s own notion of parody elucidated in *The Solar Anus*.⁵⁴

There are several other sources that were important in establishing my strong emphasis on Miró’s Catalan identity and leftist political leanings throughout my thesis. Although none of these sources align Miró with Bataillean thought, I feel that they are worth describing here, briefly. The works of Paul Preston (*A Concise History of the Spanish*

⁵¹ Robert Lubar, ‘Miró’s Commitment,’ in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, ed. Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 30–43.

⁵² Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale, ‘The Tipping Point: 1934–9,’ in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, 79.

⁵³ Dupin provides a brief formal reading of the series and reproduces three works in his biography of Miró (Dupin, *Miró*, 200–202). Umland also provides a formal reading in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 182–187.

⁵⁴ Daniel and Gale, ‘The Tipping Point: 1934–9,’ 79; Robert Lubar, ‘Small Paintings on Masonite and Copper,’ in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, 186.

Civil War), Stanley G. Payne (*Spain's First Democracy: The Second Republic, 1931–1936; Spanish Catholicism: An Historical Overview; The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933–1936: Origins of the Civil War; and The Spanish Civil War*), and Hugh Thomas (*The Spanish Civil War*) were valuable for grasping the timeline of the war and, specifically, events in Catalonia. The collection of essays *‘No Pasarán!’ Art, Literature and the Spanish Civil War* (1988), edited by Stephen M. Hart, is a useful source for understanding the artistic climate during the Civil War. The exhibition catalogues *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí* (The Cleveland Museum of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006) and *Homage to Barcelona: The City and Its Art, 1888–1936* (The Hayward Gallery, London, 1986) are excellent references for understanding Miró’s place within the Catalan avant-garde, especially his relationship with the group ADLAN.⁵⁵ Among the most important source of information on the *bienio negro* and the Spanish Civil War are, of course, Miró’s own writings, interviews, and sketches, which are collected by Margit Rowell in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (1992) and by the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona. Other important sources for modern Catalan history are Temma Kaplan’s *Red City Blue Period: Social Movements in Picasso’s Barcelona* (1993) and Robert Hughes’s *Barcelona* (1992), both of which provide insightful cultural histories of Catalonia’s largest city (Kaplan focuses on the years 1888–1939, while Hughes’s book moves from the Romans until well after Franco’s death in 1975). Most significant to my thesis is that Hughes’s *Barcelona* is among the first scholarly publications in English to devote attention to the importance of scatological humour in Catalonia and is the first to advocate for the presence of a *caganer* figure in Miró’s work. My chapter on excremental imagery builds, in part, on Hughes’s findings in this area, but is a more focused study of scatological imagery in Miró’s oeuvre, specifically, and also introduces Bataille’s overlapping interests.

⁵⁵ Amics de l’Art Nou (Friends of the New Art).

Documents

Having reviewed the most important sources for a consideration of Miró's anti-painting, the Spanish Civil War, and Catalan nationalism, I will now discuss the select sources that have sought to connect Miró to Bataille through the latter's writings in *Documents*. None of these sources look beyond the year 1930, which I conversely believe is the year that the artist's work takes its turn *towards* a more Bataillean aesthetic. The only *Documents* text through which I read Miró's work is a short entry entitled 'Informe,' which lays out Bataille's principle of the *informe* (often translated as 'formlessness'), a concept through which no prior source has adequately investigated the artist. Of the three series of works on which this thesis focuses, the first—a series of untitled figurative drawings from 1930 (in chapters 2 and 3)—has received the most scholarly attention, although it is by no means a 'famous' series in Miró's oeuvre. Because the series has been written about in regards to its focus on the big toe, it is the most conspicuous of the three that I examine and may, therefore, be familiar to a reader who is well versed in Miró's work of this period. To be clear on the originality of my first two chapters, which discuss these drawings: my own work does not centre on the prominence of big toe imagery in these works, and the findings that I have uncovered in regards to this series—namely, its participation in the *informe* and the theme of ocular violence—have not been written on in the previous literature.

The earliest examination of the series is Gaëtan Picon's *Catalan Notebooks: Unpublished Drawings and Writings* (1977). Picon provides a formal analysis of the series and reproduces selected quotations from his interview with the artist that relate to these works. There is no mention of Bataille or any Bataillean concepts throughout the text. One source that does make a connection between Miró and Bataille and which predates

Rosalind Krauss's article 'Michel, Bataille et moi' is Carolyn Lanchner's 1993 catalogue for the exhibition *Joan Miró* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Lanchner compares the parallel interests in foot iconography in the work of Miró and Bataille using drawing from this series (she reproduces six of the seventy-plus images). Where my own reading of the drawings understands the figures' ambiguous bodily architectures as transgressive and violent—the products of Miró's anti-painting aggressions—Lanchner instead describes the series as a 'tender,' 'prelapsarian bliss.'⁵⁶ Moreover, my reading of the drawings understands the indeterminate (or in some cases duplicate) sexes of these figures through the declassing operation of the *informe*; Lanchner, on the other hand, describes a 'sexual ecstasy,' and reads the work through the following quote by American artist David Wojnarowicz: 'it's really about spirituality; we're trying to find this "presence"—or the location of this presence, and really it's something we contain.'⁵⁷ It is my view that Lanchner's work is, in many ways, a product of its time, during which—as Krauss reminds us—Miró's work was typically understood as childlike or through its materiality. Miró scholarship, in 1993, had not yet identified the 'angry' Miró of the 1930s, who felt disgusted by his own work and powerless in the face of current events; this is evident in Lanchner's discussion of Miró during the Spanish Civil War, in which her primary focus is on the artist's longing for a studio while in exile,⁵⁸ rather than how his work reveals how he was tormented by the destruction of his homeland. I am not alone in noting Lanchner's resistance to a Bataillean-inspired Miró. David Lomas, writing on Miró's increased experimentations with collage, assemblage, and abrasive materials like sandpaper in the late 1920s and early 1930s, notes that 'Carolyn Lanchner is reluctant to allow more than a minor role to Bataille in explaining this new stance.'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Carolyn Lanchner, *Joan Miró* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁹ David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 240, note 177.

Lanchner ends her discussion of Miró's 1930 notebook drawings by observing the prevalence of big toe imagery and noting that Bataille's article 'Le gros orteil' ('The Big Toe') had appeared in *Documents* the year before. She argues that Miró's interest in the foot began long before Bataille, thereby making the connection coincidental. Their shared interest in the foot is further read as indicative that both men understood 'the big toe as the most human part of the human body. Its peculiar structure enabling the verticality that separates us from other animals.'⁶⁰ Beyond this, however, their interest is 'the same but different,' as 'Bataille's was part of an articulated theory, Miró's of an otherwise largely unexplicated artistic praxis.'⁶¹ She then argues that while, for Bataille, the big toe was important for its resistance to the 'idealisation of the human form,' for Miró (in her view), it had more to do with 'poetic vision,' and was 'emblematic of our common humanity . . . the support that connects the terrestrial and the celestial.'⁶² Krauss counters this view, presenting the drawing *Woman in Revolt*, with its protagonist's phallic leg (and toe), as evidence that the big toe is no longer functioning as a hinge between the earthly and celestial, but as an 'intergenital signifier.'⁶³ She also reproduces one of the images from the 1930s sketches that Lanchner had previously included in her book. At the very end of 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' Krauss writes that this work—which was completed in 1938, well past the end of the period that she understands as Miró's engagement with Bataillean thought—demonstrates the 'reverberations of Miró's Bataille connection working away in the background of his thought but made increasingly available to him, no doubt, by the ominous political events now gathering on his horizons.'⁶⁴ Anne Umland's *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting* briefly revisits Krauss's

⁶⁰ Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 56–57.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 57.

⁶³ Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

1994 article and reproduces a single drawing from the 1930 notebooks, which Umland relates to a drawing from a series of pastels produced in 1934.

Krauss's final sentence—"it is this Bataillean legacy that commands our attention and urges us to consider "Michel, Bataille et moi,""—reads as a call to arms for future Miró scholars, although no subsequent art historian has revisited the topic. Umland refers to this line, but only in passing, and she does not advance Krauss's argument any further.⁶⁵ Krauss does revisit the topic in the second edition of *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (2011). The ambitious goal of the book at large (a survey of art of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries) requires that much of the already short chapter on Miró, Alexander Calder, and Picasso be devoted to an introduction of the artist's biographical facts, his interest in Breton's Surrealism, dream painting, and his reputation as a 'childlike' painter. Likewise, much space is devoted to introducing Bataille and reiterating much of 'Michel, Bataille et moi.' Significantly, this new chapter considers Miró's big toes as *informe*, referring to their blurring of anatomical distinctions; however, this point is made only briefly before Krauss moves on to a discussion of Calder and Picasso, which dominates the remainder of the chapter. References to Krauss's reading of the big toe also appear in the 2012 exhibition catalogue for *Drawing Surrealism* (at the Morgan Library, New York, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art), which reproduces one drawing from the 1930 notebooks and summarises Krauss's argument regarding base materialism and the big toe. My thesis, in many ways, takes up Krauss's original call, investigating the influence of Bataille's work on Miró in the 1930s, on which there is a gap in the existing literature.

The remainder of the literature that considers Miró and Bataille does so in relation to Bataille's article on the artist, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' which appeared

⁶⁵ All that Umland writes on this subject is: 'As Krauss has suggested, Bataille's thinking might have been made "increasingly available to [Miró] . . . by the ominous political events now gathering on the horizon.'" *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 155.

in *Documents* in 1930. Briony Fer's thorough analysis of Bataille's article appears in the Carolyn Bailey Gill–edited collection *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, first published in 1995.⁶⁶ The chapter, entitled 'Poussière/peinture: Bataille on Painting,' considers the theme of destruction—or, more specifically, disintegration and dissolution—in Miró's 1930s works through Bataille's characterisation of them as 'une sorte de poussière ensoleillée' ('a sort of sunlit dust').⁶⁷ Fer's focus is on the artist's pledge to 'assassinate painting,' and in her analysis she provides a strong argument that Miró achieves such a destruction not through the violence employed by his contemporary Picasso (referring to Bataille's 'Rotten Sun,' article on Picasso), but rather through a variety of cancellations—erasures, scribbles, crossings-out—which dissolve compositions into dust. This dissolution is best demonstrated in the painting *Head* (1930), which was reproduced in Bataille's article.⁶⁸ Crucial to Bataille's characterisation of Miró's contemporary works as destructive, Fer argues, are the similarities in Bataille's language to Sigmund Freud's *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, published in French earlier that year. Fer explains that Bataille adopted the view that 'doing violence to representation forms the basis . . . of the representational act,'⁶⁹ giving the example that a sheet of paper is, essentially, destroyed through the act of drawing and is thereby turned into a something else.⁷⁰ She notes Bataille's reproduction of the drawings of Lili Masson (André Masson's then nine-year-old daughter) to emphasise the link between the destructive impulse and children's artwork.

My second chapter, which investigates the operation of the *informe* on Miró's notebook sketches from 1930, has some overlaps with Fer's reading of Bataille's article—even though we investigate different works. While Fer does not examine the

⁶⁶ This chapter was also reproduced in Fer's book *On Abstract Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ Bataille, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' English translation by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 399. Also quoted in Fer, 'Poussière/peinture: Bataille on Painting,' in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (New York: Routledge, 1995), 162.

⁶⁸ Fer, 'Poussière/peinture,' 160.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

informe, I found her discussion of dust and how, through this metaphor, one can imagine Miró decomposing human figuration useful for considering how Miró undoes the body's structures and attacks anatomical correctness. There is a significant difference in scope between my work and Fer's, however. Fer's chapter is, at its core, the examination of a single Bataillean text and its relationship only to those paintings that Bataille selected to appear alongside it. It is neither a comprehensive overview of Miró in *Documents* (as it does not mention the other two articles on the artist, by Michel Leiris and Carl Einstein) nor an examination of Miró in the 1930s, as it provides no context other than Bataille's article. Fer's assertion that Miró's violence is comparatively muted (like dust), in comparison to the 'hideous' or 'frightening' violence of Picasso or Dalí, is bound by self-imposed temporal constraints. Had she considered works by Miró from even a few years later—the savage paintings, for instance, with their volcanic eruptions and grotesque sexuality—then Miró's work (as I argue) could easily be described in such violent terms. This condition is symptomatic of a common issue in art historical scholarship that focuses on Miró and Bataille, and is the same issue that arises in Krauss's 'Michel, Bataille et Moi,' which is that scholars seem unwilling or uninterested in considering that Bataille's influence on Miró was sustained after the publication of *Documents*; therefore, a discussion of Bataillean themes in the artist's work after 1930 rarely occurs. With the exception of her discussion of Freud, Fer does not look beyond the themes explicitly stated by Bataille in 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes.' My thesis seeks to amend such an issue by considering an expanded period in Miró's oeuvre (from the late 1920s to the mid 1940s) and a much wider range of Bataille's texts, published both before and after the death of *Documents*.

Other publications that examine Bataille's article on Miró do so through its proximity in the layout of *Documents* to another article by Bataille on prehistoric art (a review of G. H. Luquet's *L'art primitif*), in which he introduces the process of 'alteration'

(inspired by the Freudian death drive) in relation to cave painting. This fact is also noted by Umland, who writes that many previous art historians⁷¹ read Bataille's article on Miró 'in tandem' with the *L'art primitif* review, which is much longer, comparatively.⁷² Fer, arguing Bataille's embracing of the Freudian death drive principle, uses the proximity of the review to the Miró article to emphasise the theme of destruction in the artist's anti-painting phase. Christopher Green's *Art in France: 1900–1940* (2000) describes how, for Bataille, Luquet's 'parallel between the infantile and the prehistoric artist' cannot be upheld, because prehistoric adults elected to adopt 'an aggressive "conceptual realism."' ⁷³

While she does not write on Miró, Suzanne Guerlac's 'The Useless Image: Bataille, Bergson, Magritte' provides an excellent overview of Bataille's concept of alteration, particularly in its relation to the *informe*. Commenting on the presence of realistically rendered animal forms and abstract human figures (Bataille calls them *informe*) from the same period in the same caves, Bataille attributes the deformation of the human figure in this art to a process he calls 'alteration,' defined by Guerlac as 'an innate intellectual desire to deface or deform materials, surfaces or objects.'⁷⁴ This opinion stands in opposition to that expressed by Luquet in his *L'art primitif* (the subject of Bataille's review), which compares the art of prehistoric humans to children who have not yet progressed to visual realism.⁷⁵ Bataille explains his theory of alteration as a three-step process: first, an object (for instance, paper or a wall) is 'destroyed' through scribbling; in the 'second degree of alteration,' a discernible form is identified on the

⁷¹ See Christopher Green's 'Joan Miró, 1923–1993: The Last and First Painter,' in *Joan Miró, 1893–1993* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 76–81; Didi Huberman, *La ressemblance informe, ou, Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995), 265–268; Fer, 'Poussière/peinture,' 79–81; and the 2006 exhibition *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (the Hayward Gallery, London, 2006). Although Umland does not list this source, Rémi Labrusse's *Miró: Un feu dans les ruines* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 2004), 164–167, also discusses Bataille's writings on prehistoric art in *Documents*.

⁷² Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 88.

⁷³ Christopher Green, *Art in France: 1900–1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 283–284. For more on Miró and 'primitivism,' see Georges Hugnet, 'Joan Miró ou l'enfance de l'art,' *Cahiers d'art* 6, nos. 9–10 (1931): 335–340, and Sidra Stich, *Joan Miró, the Development of a Sign Language* (St. Louis, MO: Washington University, 1980).

⁷⁴ Guerlac, 'The Useless Image: Bataille, Bergson, Magritte,' *Representations* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 32.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

destroyed surface ('a horse, a head, a man'); finally, this new 'object' is 'altered through a series of deformations.'⁷⁶

Krauss, in the catalogue for the 1996 exhibition *L'Informe: mode d'emploi* (*Formless: A User's Guide*) at the Centre Pompidou in Paris refers to this process when she defines the *informe* as 'denot[ing] what alteration produces,'⁷⁷ an operation that provokes the 'disintegration rather than creation of form.'⁷⁸ Guerlac criticises Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois's definition of alteration as a means of achieving the *informe* (which they define as being antithetical to figuration) as limiting; she argues that, according to Bataille, alteration is also capable of producing a figural image.⁷⁹ After defining the process of 'successive deconstructions' in 'L'art primitif,' Bataille continues:

However, another outcome is offered to figurative representation from the moment that the imagination substitutes a new object for the destroyed ground. Instead of acting in regard to the new object in the same way as to the former one, we can, through repetition, submit it to a progressive appropriation in relation to the originally represented object.⁸⁰

In this process, the discerned form is not defaced but actualised, producing a figurative form.⁸¹ Thus, according to Guerlac, the 'operation that renders a virtual image informe is simply an alternative practise to the one that actualises it *as a figure*. Both are operations of alteration and place us . . . outside a realist framework of representation.'⁸² Guerlac argues that for modernist critics like Krauss and Bois—who are committed to the

⁷⁶ Georges Bataille, 'Primitive Art,' in *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 41.

⁷⁷ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 64.

⁷⁸ Rosalind Krauss, 'Corpus Delicti,' *October*, no. 33 (Summer 1985): 43.

⁷⁹ Guerlac, 'The Useless Image,' 33.

⁸⁰ Bataille, 'Primitive Art,' 43.

⁸¹ Guerlac, 'The Useless Image,' 33.

⁸² Ibid. Italics in the original.

disintegration of form—alteration’s creative potential and the ‘sacred moment of figuration’ that Bataille enthusiastically describes in his writing on the cave art of Lascaux are often ignored because they are so problematic, ‘scandalous’ even, for the modernist agenda.⁸³ Guerlac’s argument is significant for my own consideration of the *informe*, in which I argue that selected figurative works—including Miró’s 1930 notebook sketches—should be classed as such. My view in this regard is shared by Georges Didi-Huberman in his *La ressemblance informe* (1995), in which he not only advocates for the participation of figuration in the *informe*, but also lists Miró as an artist whose work can be considered through this concept (although he does not list specific examples).⁸⁴

The inclusion of Miró’s work (four of the six works that Bataille reproduced in *Documents* and the 1927 painting *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi*) in the catalogue for the Hayward Gallery’s 2006 *Undercover Surrealism* exhibition is a significant moment for the consideration of Miró’s work through a Bataillean lens. Given the scope of the exhibition as a major survey of *Documents*, it is unsurprising that the catalogue does not look beyond the years that the publication was active. Even after acknowledging this fact, one cannot help but be disappointed by the limited capacity in which Miró’s art is represented in the *Undercover Surrealism* catalogue. One finds that the work of the major artists featured in the exhibition (Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, André Masson, Jacques-André Boiffard, and Salvador Dalí) accompanies an essay devoted to that particular artist by one or more of the publication’s prestigious contributors—with the exception of Miró, even though he appeared in *Documents* in three separate instances. In fact, the only inclusion of Miró within the exhibition text is a translation of Bataille’s paragraph-long article on the artist by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson and a reproduction of the aforementioned paintings. Bois, in his review of the catalogue, wrongly lists a

⁸³ Guerlac, ‘The Useless Image,’ 36.

⁸⁴ Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 265–268.

chapter as ‘Joan Miró: Mark Making,’⁸⁵ when, in reality, the chapter (which precedes the translation of ‘Joan Miró: Peintures récentes’) is simply entitled ‘Making Marks’ and concerns Bataille’s writings on cave art; Miró’s name only appears at end of this chapter in reference to the original layout of these articles in *Documents*.⁸⁶ While it is more than likely that the curators aimed to reproduce the original layout of the magazine, there is no reason that Miró’s work could not sustain its own chapter offering a fresh perspective on the artist’s association with *Documents*. Miró’s treatment in *Undercover Surrealism* is, I believe, once again indicative of a significant gap in the literature concerning his relationship with Bataille. Namely, art historians have been thus far unwilling to look past the single-paragraph article Bataille wrote on Miró and consider that Bataille may have been a significant influence on the artist, rather than simply a reviewer of his contemporary work. My thesis represents an original contribution to scholarship in its mission to fill this gap, and to consider Miró and Bataille outside of *Documents*.

Psychoanalysis

David Lomas’s book *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* examines Miró’s 1920s–1930s output through a psychoanalytic framework. Miró is first discussed in relation to Lomas’s broader inquiry into the psychoanalytic plausibility of Surrealist automatic drawing through Freud’s and Pierre Janet’s writings on the unconscious. Miró’s *Birth of the World* (1925) is an ideal case study for this investigation, representing the approximately one hundred and fifteen dream paintings for which preparatory drawings were discovered and published in 1976. Lomas calls the resurfacing of these drawings ‘the return of the repressed,’ as they expose the inaccuracy of the previously

⁸⁵ Yve-Alain Bois, ‘Reviews: Undercover Surrealism,’ *Artforum International* 45, no. 2 (October 2006): 259.

⁸⁶ Ades and Baker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism*, 127.

held belief that Miró produced his compositions automatically, or under the effects of hunger-induced hallucinations.⁸⁷ What Lomas concludes, citing Christopher Green's analysis of the sketchbooks,⁸⁸ is that there is an undeniable element of automatism to the production of the composition; however, one finds it in the 'chance marks,' tracings, and stains in the sketches, which were then transferred to the canvas.⁸⁹ While he is quick to disagree with Breton's judgment that Miró's work demonstrates a 'partially arrested development at the infantile stage,'⁹⁰ Lomas does not, at this point, suggest a re-evaluation of the work through Bataille's writings. The omission of Bataille from such a psychoanalytic discussion is curious, given the tendency of the extant literature to concentrate on a reading of Miró's anti-painting through the lens of the Freudian death drive vis-à-vis Bataille's 'L'art primitif.' Making Bataille's absence particularly glaring is that Lomas lists children's drawings and primitive cave art as the sources of Miró's inspiration. These two methods of creation are the subject of Bataille's study on Freudian impulses in 'L'Art primitif.' This book, I believe, nevertheless provides a basis for examining the strictness with which Miró may or may not have adhered to Surrealist practices, and whether or not outside influences may have played a role in the creation of his work.

With a particular focus on the artist's nationalism and the effects of Spanish Civil War, Lomas's chapter 'Making Faces' executes an important investigation into the evolution of Miró's self-portraiture.⁹¹ While we consider different works by Miró, Lomas's emphasis on the relationship between Catalan nationalism and the actual, physical landscapes of the region (in reference to a self-portrait in which Miró becomes

⁸⁷ Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 12–14.

⁸⁸ Christopher Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916–1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 267–271.

⁸⁹ Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 12–14.

⁹⁰ André Breton, 'Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism,' trans. Simon Watson Taylor, in *ibid.*, 12.

⁹¹ Labrusse also discusses Miró's self-portraiture in the 1930s. Specifically, he considers the solar imagery in *Self-Portrait I* (1937) through the 'mythe ensanglanté de notre existence humaine,' through which Bataille read the work of Vincent van Gogh. Labrusse does not further develop this connection, however. See *Miró: Un feu dans les ruines*, 202.

one with the terrain of Montserrat)⁹² is extremely useful for my own consideration of Miró's parodic landscapes. Also of great value to my thesis is Lomas's discussion (in a chapter entitled 'Traces of the Unconscious') of the almost mystical experiences of Montserrat for André Masson during the 1930s. In particular, Lomas's reading of Masson's works produced in this special place through Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was indispensable for my own consideration of the 'eternal recurrence' in Miró's savage paintings.

Bataille enters Lomas's discussion of Miró in a chapter entitled 'Uncanny Doubles,' in a comparison with Picasso. Lomas argues that in Picasso's homages to old masters there exists a representation of the Oedipal complex, manifested by a 'dialectic of identification and aggressivity' within the patriarchal lineage. As Lomas paraphrases, the 'Oedipal son topples the father, his feared and hated rival, only to take his place at a later date.'⁹³ Miró's 1930 sketches (the same ones discussed in my thesis), Lomas argues, approach 'meta-transgressive' territory with respect to the Oedipal structure, and are instead 'literally, perverse' in their depiction of the big toe.⁹⁴ Lomas credits the perverse quality of these sketches to the influence of Bataille's base materialism. Recognising the unwillingness of scholars like Lanchner to accept Bataille as a defining influence on Miró, Lomas argues that Miró was at the very least 'sympathetic to "*this gross and deforming art.*"'⁹⁵

Like Krauss, Lomas also analyses *Woman in Revolt*. Where Krauss reads the phallic leg as an 'intergenital' appendage, Lomas references it, in the chapter 'Making Faces,' as a manifestation of Jacques Lacan's concept of the 'phallic ghost,' a term first used in a reading of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1553).⁹⁶ For Lomas, Miró's employment of

⁹² Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 196–197.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

the big toe is significant as a representation of perversion in line with Bataillean principles. My interest in this thesis is not to revive old disagreements over the function of the big toe in Miró's work, but in certain instances, for the sake of wider arguments, to reference this appendage. In the cases of the 1930 drawings and in *Woman in Revolt* I believe that the toe functions as both a disruption of sexual identity and as an image of perversion as part of Miró's attack (throughout the decade) on bodily correctness, which he achieves not only through the deformation and enlargement of the toe, but through numerous other appendages as well.

Bataille and Parody

Among the issues that previous scholars have had in linking Miró's art with Bataillean thought is the importance of metaphor for Miró and Bataille's stated rejection thereof; this is most emphatic in the work of Krauss. Julia Alexandra Kelly's 1998 PhD thesis also acknowledges this issue, arguing that 'Krauss's apparent difficulty in reconciling Miró's use of metaphor' with an aesthetic of base materialism occurs because Miró's employment of fetishism was much more similar to Leiris's than Bataille's, in that it is not immune to metaphor.⁹⁷ My own, differing, solution to this problem, which I emphasise throughout this thesis, is the preoccupation by both Bataille and Miró with parody during the period I examine (1930–1939). A recurring theme in my argument is that as part of his mission to assassinate painting, Miró resurrects themes, iconography, and settings from his earlier works and mocks, degrades, and subverts them through parody. This is an area that is hitherto unexplored in the scholarship. There are, however, several useful secondary sources of the past two decades on Bataille's interest in parody

⁹⁷ Julia Kelly, 'The Autobiographer as Critic: The Art Writings of Michel Leiris' (PhD diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 1998), 96.

that have been immensely useful for forming my argument. While these are discussed in detail in various chapters throughout my work—most notably in chapters 3 and 4—it is worth mentioning here the most significant works that consider Bataillean parody. Jonathan Boulter’s article ‘The Negative Way of Trauma: Georges Bataille’s *The Story of the Eye*’ (2000) argues that Bataille’s novella is formed around a series of parodies by which the author can accommodate both transgression and a narrative structure.⁹⁸ Stuart Kendall, also writing on *Story of the Eye*, understands the work as a parody of language, storytelling, representation, and ‘the process of signification.’⁹⁹ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons’s article ‘Bataille’s “The Solar Anus” or the Parody of Parodies’ (2001) argues that Bataille’s interest in a ‘purely parodic’ world in *The Solar Anus* attacks Cartesian, Hegelian, Romantic, and Surrealist discourses; because each thing parodied is, in turn, the parody of another, Bataille prevents transcendence of any particular object or ideology.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

In examining the extant publications concerned with Miró and Bataille, I have concluded that the literature in this area is limited by scope and temporal constraints, which sets my thesis apart from previous scholarship. While the importance of Krauss’s ‘Michel, Bataille et moi’ must be acknowledged, this work is demonstrative of a limitation facing most subsequent Miró-Bataille scholarship: the reluctance of Miró scholars to consider that the artist engaged with Bataillean thought after the year 1930—that is to say, after the end of *Documents*. There have been some important attempts to align Miró’s work with Bataille, notably Fer’s consideration of violence in ‘Poussière/peinture: Bataille on

⁹⁸ Jonathan Boulter, ‘The Negative Way of Trauma: Georges Bataille’s *The Story of the Eye*,’ *Cultural Critique*, no. 46 (Fall 2000): 165.

⁹⁹ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 58.

¹⁰⁰ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, ‘Bataille’s “The Solar Anus” or the Parody of Parodies,’ *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 25, no. 2 (2001): 372.

Painting.’ I believe, however, that the case for a violent, Bataillean Miró can be made more emphatically if one looks beyond Bataille’s writings on Miró and instead examines one of the artist’s most violent periods—that is, the time of the *bienio negro* and the Spanish Civil War—through Bataillean texts that engage with themes of transgression and revolution (which is precisely what I have done in chapter 4 of this thesis).

Throughout this literature review, I have been transparent about the areas in which my own work overlaps with that of existing scholarship. This is particularly the case with the subjects of my first two chapters—Miró’s 1930 notebook drawings—whose previous attention from Lanchner and Krauss in regards to the big toe has been reiterated by several subsequent exhibition catalogues and other publications. While some of the drawings I choose to discuss may seem familiar, my interpretation of them is original. In fact, the big toe plays only a minor role in my consideration of these works as *informe* bodies. Similarly, my third chapter, which explores how these same works relate to Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, may seem familiar to those acquainted with Krauss’s often-cited 1994 article. Some may question what is at stake in revisiting this topic over twenty years after Krauss published her argument. In my view, the importance comes from the fact that the fascinating topic of metonymic chains of imagery in Miró’s and Bataille’s work was not adequately examined by Krauss for several reasons—namely that she is examining a period in Miró’s oeuvre that predates both Bataille’s novella and the artist’s interest in transgression—and because no subsequent art historian has attempted to revisit the theme. My own identification in Miró’s contemporary work of the exact chain of images used by Bataille in *Story of the Eye* allows me to conduct a thorough examination of both the connection to *Story of the Eye* and Miró’s more generalised attack on vision and representation in the 1930s, which I believe is a worthwhile and original contribution to Miró scholarship.

A careful evaluation of the extant literature finds that the investigation into the relationship between Miró and Bataille is far from exhaustive; there are several gaps requiring exploration through further research. Firstly, there exists no comprehensive inquiry into the biographical details of Miró and Bataille's alliance—when the two men met and the extent of their personal affiliation remained unexplored until the introduction to this thesis. Secondly, much of the literature fails to look past Miró's appearances in *Documents* for evidence of his engagement with Bataille. Thirdly, the extant literature fails to integrate Miró into discussions of dissident Surrealists, like Masson, who abandoned Breton in favour of Bataille, or Ernst, whose work displays both Bataillean and Bretonian themes. This thesis explores each of these gaps as I investigate how Miró's work engages with Bataillean thought throughout the 1930s and also links the Bataillean themes uncovered in Miró's oeuvre with the artist's passionate Catalan nationalism and with his visual responses to the Spanish Civil War.

Chapter 2

Formless Figuration

In November 1930, Joan Miró dedicated two notebooks to his wife, Pilar Juncosa de Miró. The pages of these notebooks are filled with over seventy drawings of anamorphic human figures, their bodies twisted, mutilated, and bloated, with limbs multiplied and severed in a manner previously unseen in the artist's oeuvre. In each of these images, Miró transgresses the natural architecture of the human body, producing figures whose monstrous limbs are abnormally placed, who are plurally sexed, and whose body parts (specifically the genitals and the big toe) are unnaturally exaggerated. And yet, in spite of their extravagant deformation, each of these figures remains implicitly *human*, calling into question the boundaries of human figuration. Despite their substantial numbers, these sketches—now in the collection of the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona—have received

little attention by art historians,¹ an interesting circumstance given their creation at a crucial moment in the artist's career. This chapter argues that with these drawings, Miró ushers in a new style of figuration that would replace the dream paintings of the 1920s. I read these distorted human figures through Miró's 'anti-painting' declarations of the late 1920s and 1930s—as a means of attacking representation *through* figuration. Specifically, this chapter looks to Miró's increased association with Georges Bataille in order to suggest that these drawings adhere to the contemporary Bataillean principle of the *informe*, which seeks to eschew academic classification, to dis-order, remove boundaries, and complicate the relationship between form and meaning. In considering these drawings as *informe*, I will evaluate the debate among theorists of the *informe* as to whether or not the operation can include corporeal representation, and also consider Bataille's own opinions on figurative art and his discussion of Miró in the journal *Documents*. Furthermore, in advocating for these drawings as participants in the *informe*, I will consider their relationship to two other dissolutive operations, Michel Leiris's '*liquéfaction*' and the grotesque.

The larger of Miró's notebooks is a G. Sennelier brand, purchased at 3 Quai Voltaire in Paris.² It contains fifty-two drawings executed on very thin and fragile

¹ There has been no comprehensive art historical evaluation of the series, but certain works have been mentioned in connection to Bataille's interest in the big toe. There has been no previous discussion of the series as *informe*. Miró discusses the series with Gaëtan Picon (with no mention of Bataille) in an interview published in *Catalan Notebooks: Unpublished Drawings and Writings*, trans. Dinah Harrison (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 22–55. Carolyn Lanchner briefly mentions the prevalence of the big toe in these drawings in *Joan Miró* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 55–57, and Rosalind Krauss refers to Lanchner's observations in 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' *October*, no. 68 (Spring 1994): 3–20. Neither publication considers the figures in Miró's drawings as *informe*. Later, Anne Umland refers to Krauss's article when she relates the drawings to a later series of pastels on flocked paper, specifically to a composition entitled *The Lovers* (1934); see Anne Umland, ed., *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927–1937* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 153–154. The catalogue for the 2012–2013 exhibition *Drawing Surrealism* at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum reproduces one drawing from the series alongside a brief summary of Krauss's discussion of big toes and 'base materialism'; see Leslie Jones, ed., *Drawing Surrealism* (New York: Prestel, 2012), 35.

² I would like to thank archivists at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona for allowing me access to these notebooks.

perforated pages (all of which are intact).³ In many instances, the pressure of the artist's pencil or erasures has caused the paper to rip. The first page of the notebook contains a dedication to the artist's wife, Pilar Juncosa de Miró, written in ink and which reads, '*Pertany a na Pilar*' (Belongs to Pilar) (Fig. 1). The earliest sketches depict tuberous bodies, with great bulges of flesh from which the artist fashions various organs. F.J.M. 900 (Fig. 2) illustrates this condition, in which one outgrowth becomes a toe, another holds an eye, and the remaining protuberances resemble hands. F.J.M. 905 (Fig. 3) marks an abrupt transition in style by which the body becomes more angular, yet streamlined, and characterised by a triangular torso topped by a small head. This image is less clean than its predecessors—it is marred by erasures, smudges, and scribbles from when Miró adjusted the image from a more curvilinear to an angular figuration. This style governs the following fifteen images, after which the remainder of the sketches merge the two styles, depicting bodies that display both angular and rounded features, often accompanied by long limbs that sweep over the figure's heads, as seen in F.J.M. 934 (Fig. 4). The second notebook, inscribed on the inside cover with the same dedication and date, continues this blending of styles. This notebook contains sketches numbered F.J.M. 856 to 881, which are drawn on paper from the Torras Hermanos factory in Catalonia, which has a rougher texture and greater thickness than that of the first notebook. The pages are of a similar size as the previous notebook: 23.6 × 15.8 cm compared to 20.6 × 17.3 cm.⁴

³ These drawings are untitled, but have been given the classification '*personatge*' (personage) or, less frequently, '*Dona*' ('woman') or '*Home i Dona*' ('man and woman'), by the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, and have been numbered F.J.M. 890–942.

⁴ This notebook has sustained some damage and its binding has been restored. Pages are occasionally removed for exhibitions and stored elsewhere in the archives of the Fundació Joan Miró.

Miró produced his 1930 drawings during a time of professional crisis, which led the artist to create works that he would subsequently characterise as ‘anti-paintings.’⁵ In 1927, in the survey *Anthologie de la peinture en France de 1906 à nos jours*, the art critic Maurice Raynal recounts Miró’s now famous proclamation: ‘*Je veux assassiner la peinture*’ (I want to assassinate painting).⁶ As Anne Umland argues in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927–1937*, the statement’s veracity is unknown, but its violent rhetoric is consistent with Miró’s contemporary interviews and correspondences.⁷ Miró continued to use such passionate language in 1929, when he described the process of painting *Dutch Interior III* (1928) to its then owner, René Gaffé, as ‘a *struggle*, a *human* struggle in my career.’⁸ A few years later, in 1931, Miró described being nauseated at the sight of his own work, refusing to look at his previous paintings.⁹ In the same interview, Miró declared his intention to ‘destroy, destroy everything that exists in painting.’¹⁰ For much of the 1930s, he would prioritise different mediums and methods over painting, the most common of which are drawing (sometimes accompanied by gouache or watercolour), collages, and his ‘constructions’ or ‘painting objects,’ which utilised non-traditional materials as diverse as nails, bone, cork, shells, various bits of metal, umbrellas, a padlock, a taxidermal bird, an eggbeater, and a carob tree trunk. Recalling the period in an interview with art critic Denys Chevalier in 1962, Miró characterises anti-painting as ‘a revolt against a state of mind and traditional painting techniques that were later judged

⁵ Miró uses this term in an interview in 1962. Joan Miró, ‘Miró,’ interview with Denys Chevalier, *Aujourd’hui: Art et Architecture* (November 1962). Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews in Margit Rowell, ed., *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 266.

⁶ Maurice Raynal, *Anthologie de la peinture en France de 1906 à nos jours* (Paris, Éditions Montagne, 1927), 34. Years later, Chevalier asked Miró whether anti-painting was ‘a true assassination of painting,’ to which Miró responded ‘yes.’ See, Miró, interview with Chevalier, 266.

⁷ Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 2.

⁸ Joan Miró, letter to René Gaffé, 19 June 1929, Paris. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 113.

⁹ Joan Miró, interview with Francisco Melgar, ‘Spanish Artists in Paris: Juan [sic] Miró.’ Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 117.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

morally unjustifiable. It was also an attempt to express myself through new materials.’¹¹ Miró credits his ‘assassination of painting,’ in part, to the dadaism of Marcel Duchamp, but even more so to a ‘revolt against a state of mind,’ an ‘inner protest, a crisis of personal consciousness.’¹² Beyond its violent associations, the militant language that Miró uses to describe his personal crisis predicts the tone of his Spanish Civil War-era works, which will be explored in chapters 4 through 7.

Miró’s professional crisis occurred at the same time as a political crisis in Spain, where Miró was spending a good deal of his time (his daughter was born in Barcelona and the notebook drawings were undertaken in Palma de Mallorca). January 1930 saw the fall of Miguel Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, a seven-year regime that proved to be particularly brutal towards the nation’s Catalan population.¹³ Under Primo de Rivera’s command, Spain saw the suppression of the Catalan languages in schools and churches, the prohibition of the Catalan flag, and the banning of certain cultural expressions like the national dance.¹⁴ While, on the one hand, Primo de Rivera’s resignation in 1930 was a step towards the regaining of rights for Catalans under the Second Spanish Republic in 1931, the resignation was precipitated by the 1929 economic crash and resulting political unrest that did not end with the dictatorship. In what Stanley G. Payne calls ‘one of the most extraordinary failures of leadership in a European era known for such failures,’ Spain would not have an election for more than a year after the end of Primo de Rivera’s regime, and the leniency of the interim government appointed by King Alfonso XIII (which was meant to be temporary, before returning to constitutional rule) quickly lost

¹¹ Miró, interview with Chevalier. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 262.

¹² *Ibid.*, 266.

¹³ Scholars have read the obvious Catalan nationalism in Miró’s 1920s works as responses to Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship. See, for instance, Robert S. Lubar, ‘Miró’s Commitment,’ in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, eds. Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale (London: Tate, 2011), 38. For more on Catalan nationalism, see chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

¹⁴ Raymond Carr, *Modern Spain, 1875–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 104.

legitimacy and only served to incite increasing anti-monarchical sentiments.¹⁵ While Miró does not comment on these events specifically, as a passionate Catalan nationalist the events in Spain certainly would have been important to him and, as chapters 4 to 7 analyse, his artistic production throughout the 1930s was often closely tied to developments in Spain.

The beginning of Miró's anti-painting period also coincides with the artist's distancing of himself from mainstream Surrealism. While it is not the intention of this thesis to argue that Miró should not be classed as a 'Surrealist,' this degree of disassociation from the movement invites one to consider outside sources of influences—like Bataille—on the artist. By March 1926, Miró moved away from the 45 rue Blomet—a secondary Surrealist hub to André Breton's 42 rue Fontaine—to a studio at 22 rue Tourlaque, Cité des Fusains, where he joined Max Ernst and Jean (Hans) Arp, two former dadaists.¹⁶ Later that year, Miró and Ernst would be criticised by Breton and Louis Aragon for collaborating with Sergei Diaghilev for the Ballet Russes production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Miró later recalled that he and Ernst had been 'expelled' from Surrealism following the performance, but that it caused them only 'a little heartache.'¹⁷ While Miró's work for the Ballet Russes was not sufficiently off-message to lead to his formal excommunication in the *Second Manifesto*, his name is absent from the accompanying *prière d'insérer*, and he elected to withdraw from any official association with the movement, for the time, by rejecting Breton's call for collective action.¹⁸ In 1931 Miró clarified his position on Surrealism, maintaining that he could not be considered a 'Surrealist' in the

¹⁵ Stanley G. Payne and Jesús Palacios, *Franco: A Personal and Political Bibliography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 64.

¹⁶ Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 5.

¹⁷ Joan Miró, quoted in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 5, 14. Max Ernst was less diplomatic in a letter to art dealer Camille Goemans on 2 June 1926, where he writes, 'I loathe churches and their saints,' referring to Surrealism, Breton, and Louis Aragon. Max Ernst, letter to Camille Goemans, 2 June 1926, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels. Quoted and translated by Anne Umland, 14, note 29. This expulsion was hardly permanent, as Ernst's name would appear in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* and Miró would continue to exhibit with the group throughout his career.

¹⁸ Miró's statement is reproduced in Rowell, ed., *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 108.

same way that Pablo Picasso is a Cubist, meaning that he had nothing to do with the founding of the movement, but rather was ‘swept along by André Masson.’¹⁹ While describing Surrealism as ‘an extremely interesting intellectual phenomenon, a positive thing,’ he was also firm in his desire to maintain a ‘total, absolute, rigorous independence’ from Surrealism’s ‘severe discipline.’²⁰ Furthermore, the move to rue Tourlaque marks the beginning of the ambiguous ‘after the rue Blomet’²¹ dating that Miró assigns to his acquaintance with Georges Bataille. Scholarship of the last decade has identified the ways in which the artists of the rue Tourlaque—namely Arp and Ernst—were able to engage with both Bretonian and Bataillean philosophies, with varying degrees of allegiance.²² As this thesis explores, it is very likely that Miró shared this stance.

There are, however, certain incongruities between Miró’s stated desires—to murder painting and to remain independent from Surrealism—and the realities of his working and exhibiting practices during the 1930s. Miró would continue to exhibit with Surrealists throughout the 1930s—at the *Exposition surréaliste* at the Galerie Pierre Colle (1933) and the Salon des Surindépendants (1933), for instance, as well as Surrealist exhibitions in London, Tokyo, New York, and Tenerife. Meanwhile, Miró’s assassination of painting proved not to be a negation of the medium itself but rather a way of using traditional mediums to violently overhaul his approach to visual representation, shifting from the poesy of the 1920s to something far more brutal in the following decade. Denys Chevalier notes Miró’s anti-painting was ‘rather like the poet who twisted the neck of lyricism and still wound up producing poetry,’ because this assault was carried out

¹⁹ Miró, interview with Melgar. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 116.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Joan Miró, ‘Memories of the rue Blomet,’ originally transcribed by Jacques Dupin, 1977. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 103. ‘Yes, Bataille. I knew him well, but after the rue Blomet.’

²² See, for instance, David Hopkins, ‘Blind Swimmers: Max Ernst and the Disabling of Male Vision,’ in *Dada’s Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 65–84. See also Eric Robertson, *Arp: Painter, Poet, Sculptor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 92.

pictorially, sometimes even through the medium of painting itself.²³ Anne Umland looks to Miró's classification of a 1935 series as 'savage paintings,' discussed in detail in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, as a means of understanding this paradox. Umland posits that the word 'assassination,' like 'savage,' is aggressive, and when such terms are coupled with the word 'painting,' meaning shifts from painting as a target of aggression to an 'agent of aggression, as a weapon or tool.'²⁴ According to this view, Miró can act at once as creator and transgressor.

Drawing had always been essential to the Surrealist process; artists experimented with techniques such as automatic drawing, frottage, decalcomania, and the game of *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) as methods for accessing the unconscious. In the *First Manifesto*, as a footnote to the phrase 'Il y a un homme coupé en deux par la fenêtre' ('there is a man cut in two by a window'),²⁵ which is said to have occurred to Breton spontaneously, the Surrealist founder considers how one might express the unconscious visually. His solution is through drawing—or rather, tracing:

Peintre, cette représentation visuelle eût sans doute pour moi primé l'autre . . . Muni d'un crayon et d'une feuille blanche, il me serait facile d'en suivre les contours. C'est que là encore il ne s'agit pas de dessiner, il ne s'agit que de calquer. . . Et j'en éprouverais, en ouvrant les yeux, une très forte impression de 'jamais vu.'

(Were I a painter, this visual depiction would doubtless have become more important to me than any other. . . With a pencil and white sheet of paper to hand, I could easily trace their outlines. Here again it is not a matter of drawing,

²³ Miró, interview with Chevalier. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 266.

²⁴ Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 3.

²⁵ André Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme' in *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 31. First published in 1924.

but simply of tracing. . . And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something ‘never seen.’)²⁶

It seems as though even Georges Bataille dabbled in automatic drawing, while undergoing psychoanalytic treatment with Dr. Adrien Borel, as evidenced by six ink drawings now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Fig. 5). Miró contributed to several exquisite corpse drawings (Fig. 6) and utilised automatism in the 1920s, although Christopher Green and David Lomas have called into question the strictness to which Miró adhered to the process and whether certain works can truly be classed as ‘automatic.’²⁷ In analysing the drawings from his 1930 notebooks, however, it seems unlikely that these works could have been produced automatically. Miró continuously erased and redrew the compositions, in some cases to correct the rendering of a particular outline, and in others to change the motif entirely, as in the case of F.J.M. 878 (Fig. 7).²⁸ Furthermore, despite the very thin paper of the first notebook, there are no similarities between compositions to suggest that Miró employed tracing, as he did in the 1920s. Rather, it seems as though Miró drew each of the 1930 compositions purposefully, intentionally, and consciously, with a specifically deformed bodily architecture in mind.

²⁶ André Breton, ‘Manifeste du surréalisme,’ 31. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 21.

²⁷ Christopher Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916–1928* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 267–71, and David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 14. The 1976 publication of Miró’s previously unseen rue Blomet-era sketchbooks raised doubts over the degree to which Miró utilised automatism. These sketchbooks reveal the use of preparatory drawings for nearly all of his approximately one hundred fifteen ‘dream paintings’ (1925–27). David Lomas notes that the sketches expose the myth that the symbols found in compositions like *Birth of the World* were guided by the painting’s background ‘stains,’ when, in reality, the work has five preparatory drawings. This out-dated reading of the work was favoured by art historians seeking to read the painting as a metaphor for the birth of painting—undoubtedly tempted by the painting’s title, which was not Miró’s own, but bestowed upon it by either Breton or Paul Éluard. Christopher Green writes that the notebooks suggest an ‘automatism once removed,’ by which automatic ‘doodles’ are transferred onto the canvas.

²⁸ Because it has been erased and drawn over, it is impossible to discern the appearance of the original composition. It does not, however, appear to correspond to the final image in any way.

If these drawings were not attempts to tap into the artist's unconscious through automatic drawing, then what was their purpose? According to Miró, the works were never intended to be studies for paintings.²⁹ He did generate exact reproductions of the figures (without the erasures and scribbles) as pencil and India ink compositions on Ingres paper,³⁰ but, as far as the artist could recall, they were not exhibited together apart from one instance at the gallery of Colette Allendy sometime between the end of the Second World War and 1960.³¹ None of the figures from either notebook have been found in subsequent paintings or other compositions. Another question is why Miró would decide to gift these particular notebooks—the contents of which are not particularly romantic—to his wife at an important moment in their marriage, as Pilar had given birth to the couple's only child, Dolores, that July, during which time Miró was working on the sketches. The likely answer to these questions is that these drawings are an important moment of transformation in Miró's approach to corporeal representation—away from the 'stick figures' of the dream paintings (the *Head of a Catalan Peasant* series [1924-25], for instance) towards a representation that favours physicality, savagery, and deformation over minimalism, and which set the tone for the duration of the artist's anti-painting-era figuration. A sketch like F.J.M. 856 (fig. 8), which depicts the body as an enormous head and eyeball connected to a big toe, while not a direct inspiration, could easily have served as a precedent for the figure on the left of the savage painting *Personages and Mountains* (1936) in which the figure's body consists of a large head directly connected to two feet. Similarly, the stance and exposed oversized genitalia of the figures in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* (1935) recall

²⁹ Joan Miró, interview with Gaëton Picon, Mallorca, 1975. Translated by Dinah Harrison, in *Catalan Notebooks*, 22.

³⁰ The exact dating of Miró's notebooks becomes difficult here. While they are inscribed with the date November 1930, the subsequent Ingres paper drawings are dated on their verso by the artist between 16 August and 11 October 1930. This suggests that Miró merely dedicated the notebooks to Pilar in November but had been working on their contents for several months. While we cannot know for certain how long Miró spent on the sketches, he certainly did not feverishly fill the pages of two notebooks in a single month.

³¹ Miró, interview with Picon, 22.

various ‘*home i dona*’ sketches from the 1930 books, including F.J.M. 906 and 925. Some of the *Dona* drawings, which feature women with enormous, legless bodies that root them to the bottom of the page and arms that gesticulate wildly, predict the parodic portraits of Miró’s woman drawings, completed during the Spanish Civil War (and discussed in the final two chapters of this thesis). This new approach to figuration coincides with Miró’s increased association with Bataille and can be understood, I argue, through the Bataillean operation of the *informe*, or formlessness, which seeks to disorder and defy classification—in this case, of bodily architecture, of sex, of the boundaries between inside and out, and of excess.

Bringing Things Down in the World

The word ‘*informe*’³² first appears in the ‘Critical Dictionary,’ a section of short entries within *Documents* by Bataille and others that often deviated in subject matter from the full-length articles on art and ethnography.³³ The paragraph-long entry for *informe* reflects the non-traditional function of the ‘Critical Dictionary’ itself. In the entry, Bataille defines the principle function of a dictionary thusly: ‘Un dictionnaire commencerait à partir du moment où il ne donnerait plus le sens mais les besognes des mots’ (‘A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks’).³⁴ It is therefore fitting that Bataille does not provide a conventional definition for the *informe*; the closest he comes to clarifying the term’s meaning is: ‘Ainsi *informe* n’est pas seulement un adjectif

³² The *informe* has been investigated by many art historical scholars, the best known of which are Rosalind Krauss and other contributors to the journal *October*. See, for instance, the 1997 exhibition *L’Informe: mode d’emploi*, at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997). As discussed in my ‘Literature Review,’ there has not been a sufficient inquiry into the participation of Miró’s work in the *informe*.

³³ Alastair Brotchie, introduction to *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, ed. Georges Bataille et al., trans. Iain White et al. (London: Atlas, 1995), 10.

³⁴ Georges Bataille, ‘Informe,’ *Documents* 1, no. 7 (1929): 382. Translated by Allan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 31.

ayant tel sens mais un terme servant à déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme' ('Thus *informe* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form').³⁵ The term is not binary; despite its common translation into English as 'formless' or 'formlessness'; the *informe* is not simply the opposite of form, but rather an operation.³⁶ The task, then, that Bataille designates to *informe* is to 'declassify,' to corrupt or undermine identification and meaning, and to lower or subvert academic inquiry and categorisation.³⁷ Furthermore, and perhaps paradoxically given the *informe*'s anti-academic qualities, the term's placement in a magazine dedicated to archaeology, fine arts, and ethnography urges us to question the relationship between form and meaning in visual art. Bataille writes:

Il faudrait en effet, pour que les hommes académiques soient contents, que l'univers prenne forme. La philosophie entière n'a pas d'autre but: il s'agit de donner une redingote à ce que est, une redingote mathématique.

(For academics to be satisfied, it would be necessary, in effect, for the universe to take on a form. The whole of philosophy has no other aim; it is a question of fitting what exists into a frock coat, a mathematical frock coat.)³⁸

Bataille's purposefully ambiguous concept becomes more complex with the paradoxical closing sentence of the *informe* entry: 'Par contre affirmer que l'univers ne ressemble a rien et n'est qu'*informe* revient à dire que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un crachat' ('On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *informe* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider

³⁵ Bataille, 'Informe,' 382.

³⁶ For this reason, I have elected not to translate *informe* into English and to instead retain the original French.

³⁷ Bataille, 'Informe,' 382.

³⁸ Ibid., 382. Translated by Allan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 31.

or spit’).³⁹ Perplexingly, in this statement Bataille employs a metaphor, a comparison (the universe is something like a spider or spit) to explain the *otherness* of the universe (‘affirming that the universe resembles nothing’).⁴⁰ The reader is left to consider how the universe can simultaneously be said to resemble nothing and, yet, be ‘something like’ a spider or spit—two entities that, despite their baseness, have recognisable forms. This quandary has prompted a debate in art historical scholarship over whether or not figural art can be understood to possess elements of the *informe*.

Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, who have become authorities on the *informe* through such publications as *L’Informe: mode d’emploi* (*Formless: A User’s Guide*) (which accompanied a 1997 exhibition by the same name at the Centre Pompidou), explicitly state their unwillingness to accept the ‘participation’ of figuration in the *informe*.⁴¹ According to this view, to concede that a figure is formless strips the *informe* of its potency and reduces its operation to mere deformation.⁴² A consideration of the formless body, Bois continues, would provoke a reading of the ‘slightest alteration to the human anatomy’ as an operation of the *informe* and, consequently, ‘modern figurative art, in its quasi-totality, would be swept up into such a definition.’⁴³ According to his view, if the *informe* could be applied to figuration, the term ‘would cover so enlarged a realm as to no longer have any bite.’⁴⁴ To support this interpretation, Bois and Krauss have elected to read the last line of the *informe* entry as follows: ‘to say that the universe is *informe* is to say that it makes no sense and thus that it should be crushed like a spider or expectorated like mucous. Bataille’s double preposition is thus not contradictory, the “something like” not referring to a resemblance but an operation.’⁴⁵ What Bois and Krauss are unwilling to

³⁹ Bataille, ‘Informe,’ 382.

⁴⁰ Brent Hayes Edwards, ‘The Ethnic of Surrealism,’ *Transition*, no. 78 (1998): 102.

⁴¹ Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 80.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

consider in this publication is a compromise whereby the action of the *informe* on a figure works not simply to deform, but to declassify, to break down—as we shall see in the case of Miró's sketches—distinctions of sex and anatomical characteristics within a figural composition.

Bois and Krauss's *Formless: A User's Guide*, while a significant contribution to art historical scholarship, applies Bataille's concept, at times, through extrapolation—the headings 'Entropy' and 'Pulse,' for instance, use terms not found in Bataille's vocabulary—in an effort to 'map certain trajectories' within modernism.⁴⁶ As Bois admits, this approach differs from Bataille's application of the *informe* to art in *Documents*.⁴⁷ Justifying the decision to depart from Bataille's original implementation of the term, Bois advocates that Bataille's writings on modern art (and especially on applying the *informe* to art) are 'less advanced than his writings on any other subject,' and that the entire staff of *Documents* 'suffered from the same limitations.'⁴⁸ An implication of the pervasiveness of what Charles Miller calls the 'Kraussian informe' is that it 'suppresses the historicity of the movement of *Documents* in Georges Bataille's theory, when avant-garde painting—Pablo Picasso in particular—was a privileged surface for the destructive operations that Bataille pursued.'⁴⁹ In investigating the ways in which Miró's figurative sketches can be read as an engagement with the *informe*, my interpretation of this operational term will be derived from Bataille's writings themselves. Furthermore, a consideration of previous attempts to apply the *informe* to figuration will look to the writings of Georges Didi-Huberman, whose interpretation of the *informe* 'goes against everything' that Bois and Krauss attempt to communicate in their text and exhibition,

⁴⁶ Bois and Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, 31, 34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁹ C.F.B Miller, 'Bataille with Picasso: Crucifixion (1930) and Apocalypse,' *Papers of Surrealism*, no. 7 (2007): 1.

and which is much closer to Bataille's own (as Bois and Krauss themselves acknowledge).⁵⁰

Written two years before *Formless: A User's Guide*, Didi-Huberman's *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (1995) argues that Bataille's *informe* favours 'transgressive resemblances,' rather than claiming an 'absolute dissimilarity' or a 'resemblance to nothing.'⁵¹ Bataille's closing line for the *informe* entry affirms this position, Didi-Huberman argues, in the equating of the *informe* universe with two forms: spiders and spit. Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, in discussing Didi-Huberman's interpretation, write that the *informe* 'operates to undermine idealised forms. . . . [It] ruptures the classificatory principle, opens it to the unsettling contagion of other forms and scuttles aesthetic judgment.'⁵² The *informe*, then, indicates 'a certain power that forms have to deform themselves constantly, to quickly pass from the like to the unlike.'⁵³ Beyond the absence of form, the *informe* denies form. According to Didi-Huberman, the subjection of a formal entity—like the human body—to this operation involves:

un processus où la forme *s'ouvre*, se 'dément' et se révèle tout à la fois; où la forme *s'écrase*, se voue au lieu dans le plus entière dissemblance avec elle-même; où la forme *s'agglutine*, comme le dissemblable viendrait toucher, masquer, envahir le semblable; et où la forme, ainsi défaite, finit par *s'incorporer* à sa forme de référence—à la forme qu'elle défigure mais qu'elle ne révoque pas—, pour l'envahir monstrueusement (magiquement, dirait l'ethnologue) par contact et par dévoration.

⁵⁰ Bois and Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide*, 80.

⁵¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1995), 21. Didi-Huberman's primary concern is with the relationship between text and image in *Documents*, but he does devote significant attention to the *informe* body.

⁵² Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty, 'Formless 2. Within and Between: Literature and Formless,' in *Formless: Ways In and Out of Form*, ed. Patrick Crowley and Paul Hegarty (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 111.

⁵³ Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 135. Translated by Bois and Krauss, in *Formless: A User's Guide*, 269.

(a process in which form *opens itself*, ‘refutes itself,’ and reveals itself at the same time; where form *is crushed*, entering into the most complete unlikeness to itself; where form *coagulates*, as though the unlike had just touched, masked, invaded the like; and where form, in this way undone, ends up *being incorporated* to the form of the referent—to the form it disfigures but doesn’t revoke—monstrously (magically, the ethnologist would say) to invade it through contact or devouring.)⁵⁴

Didi-Huberman’s reading, which identifies the work of artists associated with *Documents* as *informe* (namely Picasso, Miró, and Arp) looks directly to Bataille’s own ‘definition’ of the word to stress the primary function of the *informe* as an operation that breaks down classifications in a ‘theoretical dismantling.’⁵⁵ Under the heading ‘L’écrasement de l’anthropomorphisme,’ Didi-Huberman considers how this process applies to the human figure. Looking at a 1930 article in *Documents* by Roger Hervé, entitled ‘Sacrifices humains du Centre-Amérique,’ Didi-Huberman identifies the examples of this dismantling in descriptions of Aztec human sacrifice. In this ritualistic murder, as relayed by Hervé, the human body is skinned, dismembered, and eaten.⁵⁶ With the opening of the body and the removal of the skin, the boundaries between inside and outside are shattered, and the remaining corpse—this *informe* body—at once resembles the human figure and is implicitly ‘other.’⁵⁷ Examining a second example from *Documents*—Bataille’s ‘Les écarts de la nature’—Didi-Huberman labels as *informe* etchings of conjoined twins, or ‘double children’ (*double enfant*), which were originally published in

⁵⁴ Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 135.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Roger Hervé, ‘Sacrifices humains du Centre-Amérique,’ *Documents* 2 no.4 (1930), 206. Bataille also discusses Aztec sacrifice in ‘L’Amérique disparue,’ *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 152–8.

⁵⁷ Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 128–9, 135.

Les écarts de la nature, an eighteenth-century treatise on human teratology.⁵⁸ In one such example—in which two male children are conjoined at the face and torso (Fig. 9)—Didi-Huberman argues an *excess* of resemblance. In this image, the two children's faces merge to form a single human face, which Didi-Huberman calls 'une ressemblance *incorporée*.'⁵⁹ At the same time, however, their 'perfect' resemblance—which should be considered marvellous—is made monstrous by their conjunction. They become a human figure with eight limbs, or as Didi-Huberman argues, a kind of spider, illustrating the way in which the *informe* operates via 'mutilations and by multiplications.'⁶⁰

Further strengthening the case for inclusion of certain figural representations as *informe* are the overlaps between this operation and the grotesque.⁶¹ Just as the *informe* seeks to undo the very medium in which it is introduced (the dictionary), the grotesque is similarly 'defined by what it does to boundaries, transgressing, merging, overflowing, destabilising them.'⁶² Like Didi-Huberman's discussion of additions and subtractions, the grotesque can also operate through actions that are either 'constructive,' through the combination of disparate elements in a way that challenges perception (as in the Surrealist image, for instance) or 'destructive, in a manner that deforms or breaks down.'⁶³ It can also manifest as combinatory, as Francis S. Connelly phrases it: 'from the centaur to the cyborg,'⁶⁴ or, as we will see in Miró's case, in the merging of the human with the animal or the mundane, inanimate object. Michel Chaouli affirms this view, noting that the grotesque is not a singular motif or style.⁶⁵ Because of its indefinability, one can characterise as grotesque figural works as varied as Gustave Courbet's *Burial at*

⁵⁸ Georges Bataille, 'Les écarts de la nature,' *Documents* 2 no.2 (1930), 79-83. Discussed in Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 139.

⁵⁹ Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 141.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 141-42.

⁶¹ Carl Einstein characterised Miró's *papiers collés* of this period as 'grotesque' in his article in *Documents*. See Carl Einstein, 'Joan Miró: Papiers collés à la galerie Pierre,' *Documents* 2, no. 4 (1930): 241-243.

⁶² Francis S. Connelly, *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2-4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁵ Michel Chaouli, 'Van Gogh's Ear: Toward a Theory of Disgust,' in *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, 47.

Ornans (1849–50) (labelled as such by critics unprepared for realism) to Otto Dix's *The Skat Players* (1920).⁶⁶ According to Victor Hugo, the grotesque breaks the monotony of 'cette beauté universelle...la même impression, toujours répétée...' ('universal beauty . . . the same impression repeated again and again...'), providing a contrast to the sublime.⁶⁷ It should be noted that the grotesque is a far more inclusive term than the *informe*, and, indeed, one could argue that the *informe* be situated within the broader category of the grotesque. Hugo elaborates the wealth of possibilities afforded by the grotesque's breadth: 'Il y est partout; d'une part, il crée le difforme et l'horrible; de l'autre, le comique et le bouffon' ('it is found everywhere; on the one hand it creates the abnormal and the horrible, on the other the comic and the burlesque').⁶⁸

Miró in *Documents*

During its short life, *Documents* devoted three articles to Miró, one each by Michel Leiris, Carl Einstein, and Georges Bataille. Both Leiris's and Bataille's articles focus significant attention on the artist's new manipulation of the human form. Appearing two issues prior to the *Informe* entry, Leiris's article 'Joan Miró' discusses the artist's 'imaginary portraits' (1929).⁶⁹ In this particular article, Leiris's language in describing Miró's portraiture predicts Bataille's *informe*. Leiris considers the imaginary portraits as an operation of 'liquéfaction,' resulting in 'cette évaporation implacable des structures' ('this relentless evaporation of structures').⁷⁰ This dissolution at play in Miró's work, Leiris continues,

⁶⁶ Connelly, *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, 2.

⁶⁷ Victor Hugo, 'Preface to *Cromwell*,' *The Works of Victor Hugo*, vol. 3 (*Dramas*), trans. George Burnham Ives (New York: Little, Brown, 1909), 15. Originally published in 1927.

⁶⁸ Hugo, 'Preface to *Cromwell*,' 1.

⁶⁹ The imaginary portraits include *Portrait of Queen Louise of Prussia*, *Portrait of Mrs Mills, 1750*, and *Portrait of a Woman in 1820*.

⁷⁰ Michel Leiris, 'Joan Miró,' *Documents* 1, no. 5 (1929): 266. Translated by Lydia Davis, in *Brisées: Broken Branches* (San Francisco: North Point, 1989), 25–29.

provokes a ‘leakage’ not only of the materials that constitute the human form, but also of the ‘substance qui rend toutes choses—nous, nos pensées et le décor dans lequel nous vivons’ (‘substance that makes all things—us, our thoughts, and the setting we live in’).⁷¹ Using a metaphor that strongly anticipates Bataille’s likening of the recipient of the *informe* to a ‘spider or an earthworm,’ Leiris equates Miró’s liquefaction of forms to a ‘jellyfish or octopi.’⁷² The conformations of the spider, earthworm, jellyfish, and octopus, while contradistinctive to the human body, are not *lacking* form. Even the gob of spit—as Paul Hegarty notes—is a ‘precise, if only chaotically predictable form,’ which seems to suggest that the *informe* does not necessarily demand an absence of formal elements.⁷³ Writing specifically on the subjection of the human body to this liquefaction, Leiris writes:

Belles comme des ricanements, ou comme des graffiti montrant l’architecture humaine dans ce qu’elle a tout particulièrement de grotesque et d’horrible, ces oeuvres sont autant de caillous malicieux qui déterminent des remous circulaires et vicieux, quand on les jette dans le marais de l’entendement, où moisissent, depuis déjà de si nombreuses années, tant de filets et tant de nasses...

(As beautiful as sarcastic laughter or graffiti showing human architecture in its particularly grotesque and horrible aspect, each of these works is a mocking pebble sending out vicious, circular ripples when cast into the swamp of understanding, where for so many years already, so many traps and nets have been mouldering...)⁷⁴

⁷¹ Leiris, ‘Joan Miró,’ 266.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Paul Hegarty, ‘Review: Formal Insistence,’ *Semiotic Review of Books* 13, no. 2 (2003): 6.

⁷⁴ Leiris, ‘Joan Miró,’ 266. Translated by Lydia Davis, in *Brisées: Broken Branches*, 25–29.

Like Bataille's *informe*, Leiris's *liquéfaction* emphasises an undoing of systems—of the 'mathematical frock coat.' While Bataille's *informe* entry attacks the ultimate symbol of classification—the dictionary—the liquefaction that Leiris detects in Miró's work similarly acts on the anatomy of the human body.

In his review of *Formless: A User's Guide*, Hegarty reminds his reader that—contrary to what his theoretical writings may suggest—Bataille was 'hopelessly in thrall to figurative art,' as evidenced in *Documents*'s features on Surrealist painters, its 'Hommage à Picasso,' and Bataille's later writings on prehistoric cave paintings.⁷⁵ It is interesting to consider that in 1930, when Miró was hardly painting at all, Bataille selected two rare contemporary figurative paintings to accompany his article on the artist. Bataille's 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes' prioritises the violent decomposition found in the artist's recent works, describing them as the remains of an unknown 'disaster.'⁷⁶ Of the six works that Bataille selected to accompany his article, the two that contain bodily elements—*Painting* (Fig. 10) and *Painting (Head)* (Fig. 11) (both 1930)—particularly express this disarray. Products of the anti-painting age, the two spherical forms at the top of *Painting* contain experimentations with different mediums, in this case, blotches of gesso, plaster, and charcoal that hover over the figure like ominous clouds. In this composition, the body of the female figure appears dismembered and incomplete, as though Miró is providing just enough anatomical elements for the viewer to discern that this form is indeed a human body. In the centre of the composition is a head, rendered in profile, with its eye atypically cancelled out by eight vertical scores (in a preparatory drawing, Miró calls this arrangement of lines 'strings' [Fig. 12]). In *Painting*, moving downward, one sees what appears to be the figure's breasts and, towards the bottom right, forms that suggest a leg

⁷⁵ Hegarty, 'Review: Formal Insistence,' 5.

⁷⁶ Georges Bataille, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' *Documents* 2, no.7 (1930): 399. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (London: Hayward Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 134.

and foot. A similar marring of the human face occurs in *Painting (Head)*, which is littered with horizontally oriented scribbles.

In cancelling out the figure's eye, Miró suggests violence against both vision and representation. Several scholars have noted that Bataille's short entry on Miró followed his much longer review of G. H. Luquet's book *L'art primitif* (1930).⁷⁷ In the review, Bataille posits an explanation for the inconsistencies in certain prehistoric art sites related to the presence of 'well formed' painted representations of animals and the grotesque, comparatively abstracted renderings (often sculptural) of humans within the same location.⁷⁸ Most significantly for a consideration of formless figuration, Bataille dubs these deformed bodies as *informe*, inviting the possibility for the term to include corporeal representation. Bataille calls the transgressive operation by which these human figures were produced *alteration*, propelled by an unconscious desire to distort, mar, and damage surfaces. Bataille explains that *alteration* forms the basis for artistic creation initiated 'by successive destructions,' which liberate 'sadistic,' 'libidinal' instincts.⁷⁹ Returning to the subject in a later study—*La Peinture Préhistorique: Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* (*Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*) (1955)—Bataille discusses the advent of figural art as sacred, which, as Suzanne Guerlac rightfully notes, is somewhat surprising to the reader familiar with the centrality of Bataille's work to the poststructuralist challenge to

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Briony Fer, 'Poussière/peinture: Bataille on Painting,' in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), 154–71. See also Christopher Green, *Art in France: 1900–1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Anne Umland 'Large Paintings on White Grounds, 1930,' in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, 86–97.

⁷⁸ Bataille 'L'art primitif,' *Documents* 2, no. 7 (1930): 389–97.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 396. Bataille describes alteration as 'transforming what is at hand. . . this evolution is easy to follow, starting with some scribbles. Chance isolates a visual resemblance from a few strange lines that can be fixed through repetition. This phase represents a kind of second degree of the *transformation*, that is to say, that the altered object (paper or wall) is transformed to the point where it becomes a new object, a horse, a head, a man. Finally by dint of representation, this new object is itself altered by a series of deformations. Art, since that is incontestably what it is, proceeds in this sense through successive deformations.' Translated by Jack Flam and Mirium Deutch, in *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 227–29. For a good overview of the stages involved in *alteration*, see Suzanne Guerlac, 'The Useless Image: Bataille, Bergson, Magritte,' *Representations* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 32.

representation.⁸⁰ Once again, Bataille reveals his attraction to figuration, but beyond his admiration for the ‘well formed’ depictions of animals in Lascaux, he returns his attention to the malformed human figures in the same cave and describes their appearance in terms of a transgressive act.⁸¹ Interestingly, Miró invoked prehistoric art when describing his assault on painting: ‘painting is in a state of decadence since the time of cave painting.’⁸²

In Bataille’s discussion of Miró’s recent paintings, which directly follows his review of *L’art primitif*, he describes the cancellations and crossing-outs in similarly violent and defacing terms, positing the artist as disintegrating reality and representation into ‘une sorte de poussière ensoleillée’ (‘a sort of sunlit dust’).⁸³ Miró takes this disintegration to such an extreme, Bataille continues, that all that remains on his canvases are ‘quelques taches informes sur le couvercle (ou sur la pierre tombale, si l’on veut) de la boîte à malices’ (‘some formless blotches on the cover (or, if you prefer, on the tombstone) of [painting’s] box of tricks’).⁸⁴ Briony Fer, writing on the importance of Bataille’s dust metaphor, reads the scribbles on these 1930 canvases through Bataille’s entry for ‘Poussière’ (‘Dust’) in the ‘Critical Dictionary.’ In the entry, Bataille writes that storytellers have not considered that Sleeping Beauty, before being awakened, would have been covered in a layer of dust and spider webs.⁸⁵ Sleeping Beauty, as a symbol of the ‘feminine ideal of passive perfection,’ would, in reality, be subjected to a ‘worm eaten and rancid decrepitude.’⁸⁶ Dust is also, of course, the remnant of the final stage of human decomposition. When one considers that, in death, the human body is reduced to a

⁸⁰ Guerlac, ‘The Useless Image,’ 29.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² This declaration was first quoted by Tériade in the newspaper *L’Intransigeant* (7 May 1928). As Dawn Ades notes, however, Miró’s anti-painting statements travelled widely by word of mouth. See Dawn Ades, ‘Dalí’s Anti-Paintings of 1928,’ in *Companion to Spanish Surrealism*, ed. Robert Harward (Rochester: Tamesis, 2004), 97, 103.

⁸³ Bataille, ‘Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,’ 399. Interestingly, Leiris also described Miró’s work as a kind of defacement, comparing it with graffiti. Leiris, ‘Joan Miró,’ 266.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 399. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, in *Undercover Surrealism*, 134.

⁸⁵ Georges Bataille, ‘Poussière,’ *Documents* 1, no. 5 (1929): 278.

⁸⁶ Fer, ‘Poussière/peinture,’ 162.

formless collection of dust and bones, the marks invading Miró's 'anti-paintings,' the disaster,⁸⁷ in which terms Bataille describes Miró's work, takes on an even more sinister tone.

Miró's *Informe* Bodies

The decomposition of the human form evoked by dust and disintegration signifies an undoing of the body's structures, and it is through this attack on anatomical correctness that Miró's 1930 sketches most obviously participate in the *informe*'s mission to defy classification. These drawings subject the human form to a monstrous anamorphosis—often by means of mutilations and additions of limbs, which results in a body that is at once largely unidentifiable yet that retains just enough features to be unequivocally human. The ways in which Miró subjects the human body to significant mutilation, additions, and subtractions of body parts recall Didi-Huberman's discussion of double children in his interpretation of the *informe*. This type of operation is markedly different from the type of distortion employed in the *Dutch Interiors*, which flattens and accentuates certain elements of their source material (the collar in *Dutch Interior I* (1928), for instance) but nevertheless maintain each original motif, however abstracted. To label the deformation in the *Dutch Interiors* as *informe* would be to confirm Yve-Alain Bois's doubts about applying the operation to figuration (namely, that the *informe* would lose its potency if it were used to describe every degree of bodily abstraction in modern art). The 1930 series, by contrast, does not simply deform, but pushes figuration to its limits, adding and eliminating bodily elements and even clouding distinctions between human and animal⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Bataille, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' 399.

⁸⁸ The combination of human and animal is a fairly common trope among Surrealist artists. For instance, Max Ernst's bird alter ego 'Loplop' often retains human qualities. Francisco de Goya's *Los Caprichos*

or human and inanimate object. In some examples from the series, Miró incorporates motifs of jugs into the human body, prompting the viewer to question whether or not the merging of the inanimate and the animate still constitutes a human figure (F.J.M. 864, Fig. 13).⁸⁹ In another instance, the figure possesses a human face and the tail of a fish or a seal—straddling the boundary between human and animal (F.J.M. 876, Fig. 14).⁹⁰ In other words, the *informe* should be applied to the 1930 sketches because of the questions they provoke regarding the relationship between form and the disruption of meaning. When Miró first spoke publicly about the series, in 1975, the way in which he described the bodies of these figures and the wealth of potential forms and interpretations contained within a single motif recalls the kind of blurring of distinctions and evasion of signification elucidated by Bataille, though Miró does not use the term *informe*:

The toe, for instance, and the nail becoming a crescent moon. And the arms are like ears. This figure doesn't have feet or fingers, and he has only one toe. And his nail is like a moon. The object outside the woman? It's a wall, or a curtain, like in *Queen Louise of Prussia*. These are male sex organs—but this one's a woman, but the shape of her feet brings us back to masculinity. I put an eye on a foot. And this figure is also a tree, one of the huge Montroig carob trees that never shed their leaves. You can see the trunk, the roots growing and the toenail or crescent moon.⁹¹

In many instances in the 1930 drawings, Miró depicts only a few perceptibly *human* anatomical distinctions, leaving the viewer to rely on the presence of a handful of

(1796-1797), a source of influence for many of Surrealism's artists shows a similar human-animal hybridity. See, for example plate 67 (*Aguarda que te unten*).

⁸⁹ Miró previously experimented with this human-inanimate hybridity in a drawing from 1924 entitled *The Bottle of Wine*, where he merged the human form with a wine bottle.

⁹⁰ A later example of this operation Miró's pastel composition, *Woman* (1934)—produced just before the Spanish Civil War, at the height of Miró's assassination of painting—which Sidra Stich notes has acquired insect qualities, although she does not relate this action to Bataille or describe it as *informe*. Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 61.

⁹¹ Miró, interview with Picon, in *Catalan Notebooks*, 22.

recurring bodily features rendered according to the artist's stylised visual 'language'—particularly the male and female genitalia and the big toe—to keep the *informe* body tethered to a recognisable humanity. This employment of subtraction is most evident in the series in F.J.M. 856, in which the human form is reduced to a big toe and a single eye—two bodily elements that were the subject of important articles by Bataille in *Documents* ('Oeil' in 1929 and 'Le gros orteil' in 1930⁹²). Miró repeats this gesture throughout the series, for instance in F.J.M. 914 (Fig. 15), in which a single eye stands in place of a head. In drawings like F.J.M. 856 and 857, which are nearly devoid of other body parts, the big toe—which Bataille called 'La partie la plus *humaine* du corps humain' ('the most human part of the human body')⁹³—becomes a crucial image for identifying the work as figurative. In other works, including F.J.M. 901 (Fig. 16), 903 (Fig. 17), and 904 (Fig. 18), the toe's naturally occurring bulbous shape complements the sinuous lines of the deformed physiques. In a further example, F.J.M. 881 (Fig. 19), one discerns an eye (rotated ninety degrees), a breast, a vulva (also rotated) with pubic hair, and a big toe. The presence of these simplistically executed parts is paramount to the interpretation of the image. If one removed these four elements, leaving only the figure's outline, it would be impossible for the viewer to tell that the image is a representation of the human body. Like the body of the cannibalised Aztec described by Hervé and dubbed *informe* by Didi-Huberman, Miró's subtraction of body parts causes his figures to be at once human and other—their humanity hinges entirely on these few extremities contained within a formless physicality.

In further examples, the extreme bodily rearrangement typical of the series leads to the viewer's inability to identify certain anatomical parts within a composition. Among the most obvious examples of this is the conflation of the eye form with the female

⁹² Translated as 'Eye,' with the subheading 'friandise cannibale' (Cannibal Delicacy), and 'The Big Toe.'

⁹³ Georges Bataille, 'Le gros orteil,' *Documents* 1 no.6 (1929): 297. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 20.

genitals in such drawings as F.J.M. 898 (Fig. 20) and 900—a gesture, further discussed in detail in chapter 3, that recalls the insertion of the enucleated eye into Simone’s vagina in Bataille’s 1928 novel *Histoire de l’œil* (*Story of the Eye*). F.J.M. 858 (Fig. 21) contains an anatomical arrangement that resembles the depiction of breasts in other drawings, but its placement near the top of the composition leads the viewer to consider that it could be the figure’s eyes. In other instances, Miró uses the multiplication of features to create an anatomically indeterminate body, recalling Didi-Huberman’s notion of an ‘excess of resemblance.’ F.J.M. 933 (Fig. 22) is a relatively simple demonstration of this technique, whereby Miró has drawn a female figure with two heads—one at the apex of the figure’s body and another above this primary head, attached to an elongated form that may designate the figure’s arms. In a more complicated composition, F.J.M. 901, he depicts a figure with at least five distinct parts that could be identified as hands or feet. Especially of interest in this drawing is the dominant big toe (located along the bottom of the composition) from which sprouts another foot structure. In these select examples—there are countless others to be found throughout the series—Miró’s deliberately ambiguous rendering and placement of anatomical parts creates bodies that elude classification, complying with the conditions of the *informe* as set forth by Bataille.

In the 1990s a debate occurred in art historical scholarship over the symbolic function of the big toe in Miró’s post-1929 output, which is to say, after the publication of Bataille’s article ‘Le gros orteil’ (‘The Big Toe’) in *Documents*. In this piece, Bataille criticises the conception of human elevation, reminding that while our heads may reach towards the heavens, this erection, which separates man from beast, is made possible by the big toe—the vulgar appendage that inhabits the mud.⁹⁴ In a denunciation of Surrealist ‘poetic concoctions,’ Bataille does not seek to boost the appendage’s status, but rather advocates for a ‘return to reality,’ where one is ‘seduced in a base manner, without

⁹⁴ Georges Bataille, ‘Le gros orteil,’ 297.

transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening his eyes wide: opening them wide, then, before a big toe.⁹⁵ While Rosalind Krauss argues that Miró's depiction of the toe in the 1930s is decidedly phallic and consistent with Bataillean base seduction,⁹⁶ Carolyn Lanchner maintains that the big toe plays the same role as it did in Miró's early depictions of Catalan peasants with oversized feet—as in *Interior (The Farmer's Wife)* (1922–23) (Fig. 23), for instance—that is, as 'emblematic of our common humanity . . . the support that connects the terrestrial and the celestial.'⁹⁷ Both scholars briefly mention this particular set of sketches in their considerations, but neither do so in reference to Bataille's *informe*.

My analysis concludes that in examples from the 1930 sketchbooks, completed just months after the publication of 'Le gros orteil' and its accompanying photographs of big toes by Jacques-André Boiffard (Fig. 24), one sees the appendage functioning in both the capacities described by both Lanchner and Krauss. In terms of scale, Miró's compositions certainly privilege the 'base' toe over the comparatively elevated head by means of an unnatural augmentation. Furthermore, this favouring of a decidedly base appendage is stressed by the artist's decision—in many of these drawings—to maintain the toe's position as the lowest part of the human form ('in the mud,'⁹⁸ to borrow Bataille's phrase), even in instances where other anatomical parts are significantly rearranged. This occurs, for example, in F.J.M. 899 (Fig. 25), where the phallus replaces the head as the highest part of the human body and an eye-like structure occupies the centre of the torso. Here, the big toe anchors the figure; its corporeal positioning is unchanged from nature. A further sixteen drawings employ recognisable feet or toes as the lowest point of the composition, from which the bodies of the figures emerge. In

⁹⁵ Bataille, 'Le gros orteil,' 302. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 23.

⁹⁶ Krauss, 'Michel Bataille et moi,' 19.

⁹⁷ Lanchner, *Joan Miró*, 57.

⁹⁸ Bataille, 'Le gros orteil,' 297.

many of these cases, as in F.J.M. 892 (Fig. 26) and 900, Miró depicts very few body parts other than a detailed depiction of the big toe.

Krauss's discussion of the big toe in Miró's work does not centre on the 1930 sketches, but rather a 1938 watercolour and pencil drawing entitled *Woman in Revolt*,⁹⁹ in which a sickle-wielding female figure raises her leg to reveal its culmination in an enormous, phallic toe.¹⁰⁰ Here, the toe functions as an intergenital signifier, or, as Krauss notes, as a 'pure phallic appendage.'¹⁰¹ David Lomas, meanwhile, notes the threat of castration in this image as the viewer's eye oscillates between the sickle and the phallus.¹⁰² Continuing her analysis, Krauss rightly notes that in *Woman in Revolt* (1938), Miró is no longer using the toe to ground his figures to the earthly realm in the manner described by Lanchner.¹⁰³ On this point, I would agree with Krauss, and would add that in this instance the foot is now literally off the ground. Furthermore, as a disruption of sexual identification, the appendage operates as a vehicle of the *informe*. In the 1930 series, a similar operation could be identified in the phallic toe of the female figure in F.J.M. 898. Furthermore, I have identified several examples from the 1930 drawings in which the big toe functions as a phallic signifier, confounding the distinction between the two appendages. For instance, in F.J.M. 914, Miró moves the toe from the base of the body to a position in which it protrudes from the figure's lower torso—recalling the natural anatomical placement of the phallus. The figure's vaguely triangular form resembles

⁹⁹ This drawing is discussed in detail in chapter 6 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁰ This is not the first instance in which Miró incorporates a phallic appendage onto the female form. See, for instance, the figure's nose in *Naked Woman Climbing a Staircase*, 1937, charcoal on card, 78 x 55.8 cm, Barcelona, Fundació Joan Miró. Interestingly, in a preparatory work for *Los Caprichos*, 13 (*Estan calientes*), Francisco de Goya shows a male figure with a long, phallic nose that he holds upright with a utensil. See Goya, *Caricatura alegre*, 1796-97. Gouache and ink on paper, 23.2 x 14.2 cm. Madrid, Museo del Prado.

¹⁰¹ Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 20.

¹⁰² Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 201.

¹⁰³ Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 20. For Lanchner, Miró's employment of big toe imagery had 'less to do with theory [than Bataille] and more to do with poetic vision.' Interestingly, however, she also concludes that depictions of oversized feet in Miró's work serve to dismantle sexual distinctions between female and male, not through Batailleian terms or any resemblance to the phallus, but rather as 'emblematic of our common humanity, male or female.' See Lanchner, *Joan Miró*, 57.

another drawing in the series, F.J.M. 942 (Fig. 27), in which the placement of the phallus mirrors the positioning of the big toe in F.J.M. 914. Meanwhile, in F.J.M. 921 (Fig. 28), Miró places a toe at the base of the figure's body, and repeats the form in a motif placed in the lower centre of the torso.

Another way in which Miró challenges bodily correctness is through the ambiguous sexual features of many of the figures rendered in the sketchbooks, which oftentimes disrupt the boundaries between female and male. The figure in F.J.M. 874 (Fig. 29) possesses Miró's stylised depiction of the vulva directly below the head, situated between what appear to be breasts. Further down the torso, however, one notes that the curved appendage that forms the lower portion of the figure is unmistakably phallic. Miró repeats this gesture with the female figure on the left side of F.J.M. 870 (Fig. 30). While the figure's vulva is clearly visible, the curved form beneath it mirrors the phallus of the male figure on the right of the composition. In another instance, F.J.M. 863 (Fig. 31), despite the figure's seemingly traditional anatomy (complete with head and facial features, neck, breasts, arms, torso, and legs), the *informe* operates through the figure's ambiguous genitalia. Despite the presence of breasts—signifiers of the female form—the figure's vulva does not resemble even the most heavily stylised of Miró's renderings of this organ, and instead its form is much closer to the phallus. It should be noted that the archivists at the Fundació Joan Miró bestowed the subtitle '*Dona*' upon the image, and not the artist himself. Here, one is reminded once again of the image of the *double enfant* published in *Documents*, the original caption for which notes that the cleft in the two male figures' forehead caused by their conjunction closely resembles the female genitals. Didi-Huberman argues that this gap denotes both the place of their birth and upsets sexual difference.¹⁰⁴ Miró's figures—one could call them hermaphroditic, intersexed, or plurally sexed—reflect the core mission of the *informe*, which is to say that they escape semantic

¹⁰⁴ Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe*, 138.

classification. Because these particular figures defy sexual identification in addition to their participation in Miró's more general attack on bodily correctness by means of mutilation, subtraction, and deformation, these depictions of ambiguously sexed humans delve even further into the *informe*'s mission of dis-ordering.

Miró, in his increasing association with the *Documents* group, was not alone in his interest in producing work with ambiguous sexual elements. While she does not make reference to Bataille, Sidra Stich's descriptions of contemporary figural paintings by Picasso recall the *informe*. She writes that 'human identity' merges with the 'bestial,' and of bodies pushed to the extreme, and whose erotic energy 'conjoins and confounds male and female.'¹⁰⁵ Also contemporary with Miró's drawings is Alberto Giacometti's sculptural work *Suspended Ball* (1930–31) (Fig. 32). Composed of a lacerated sphere hung above a wedge and contained within a cage-like frame, Giacometti created *Suspended Ball* shortly after his induction into Bataille's circle. Krauss, writing on this particular work, notes the indeterminate sexual nature of the sculpture's components:

One can locate a fundamental ambiguity with regard to the sexual identity of the elements of Giacometti's sculpture. The wedge, acted upon by the ball, is in one reading its female partner, in another, distended and sharp, it is the phallic instrument of aggression against the ball's vulnerable roundness: it is not only the razor from *Chien Andalou* but the bull's horn from Bataille's *L'Histoire de l'Oeil*, which penetrates the matador, killing him by ripping out his eye.¹⁰⁶

The manifestations of sexual ambiguities in both Miró's and Giacometti's work participate in the *informe* through their upsetting of anatomical differentiations. There are, certainly, marked differences in approach; whereas Miró's work is figurative and depicts

¹⁰⁵ Stich, *Anxious Visions*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 58.

unmistakable male and female sex organs in visual conflict with one another, Giacometti creates a more abstract form containing cryptic elements that can each be at once phallic and vaginal. These differences in appearance can be attributed, in part, to the nature of Bataille's *informe*, which eschews definition itself. As an operation, rather than a motif,¹⁰⁷ one sees the *informe* acting in a similar way in two dissimilar, albeit contemporary, works by Surrealist artists.

In addition to his depictions of plurally sexed figures, Miró's sketchbooks also contain compositions in which two bodies (largely, but not exclusively, one male and one female) are fused, or merged together, recalling the images of conjoined twins reproduced by Bataille in *Documents* and discussed by Didi-Huberman. Looking back through his oeuvre, specifically to the mid 1920s, one sees an interest, on Miró's part, in depicting merged bodies as a celebration of creation. Scholars have read his 1924 painting *The Kiss* (Fig. 33) as a metaphor for the 'spark for the [Surrealist] image.'¹⁰⁸ Breton writes in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism*: 'le valeur de l'image dépend de la beauté de l'étincelle obtenue; elle est, par conséquent, fonction de la différence de potentiel entre les deux conducteurs' ('the value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors').¹⁰⁹ As Christopher Green elaborates, *The Kiss* 'could serve as an emblem for all Surrealist image-making: the emotional force released by the contact of two sexually charged "distant realities."' ¹¹⁰ In the same year, Miró painted *Maternity* (Fig. 34), continuing the theme of creation, and made an untitled drawing depicting the moment of conception through the use of a perforated line to indicate the flow of seminal fluid from the phallus into the female figure's body (Fig. 35). Miró returns to similar motifs in two of his drawings from 1930, F.J.M. 890 (Fig. 36) and 925. In the former composition, the

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Westley, *The Body as Medium and Metaphor* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2008), 169.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Green, *Art in France*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 46. Translated by Seaver and Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 37.

¹¹⁰ Green, *Art in France*, 119.

male and female bodies are connected in copulation, while the latter clearly alludes that the act is imminent. In F.J.M. 925 (Fig. 37)—as seen previously in the untitled 1924 drawing—the two figures stand next to one another, their sexual organs in alignment and unnaturally enlarged. While these two examples exhibit the type of bodily deformation typical of the series, their comparatively straightforward narrative and references to the artist's earlier tropes consequently result in images that are more representational than declassifying, or *informe*.

Other depictions of conjoined bodies in the series are more difficult to read than the previously cited examples. In F.J.M. 870, 906, and 923, bodies have been fused together, anatomically conjoined in a manner not unlike the children in the etching in *Les écarts de la nature* or by some type of perverse experimentation. The most detailed execution of this subject in the series is F.J.M. 906 (Fig. 38). Here, Miró depicts a male figure on the left who, despite his mostly indeterminate physicality, possesses a recognisable head, a neck pierced by an arrow, a toe, and a phallus. On the right, Miró has drawn a female figure whose facial features are among the most developed of the series; she has distinguishable lips, cheeks, a nose, an eye and eyebrow, and hair, and her limbless body includes identifiable breasts and a vulva. The two bodies come together not at the genitals—although they are closely aligned—but at their approximate midsections, and the point of contact is aggressively punctuated by three triangular protuberances. In F.J.M. 923 (Fig. 39), one notes that although Miró emphasises the male and female genitals—by rendering them recognisably in a comparatively abstract figural composition—the phallus has no role in the connection of these two bodies. Miró instead employs an unclassifiable, anatomically impossible bridging element that sprouts from what can be presumed to be the man's head (Miró previously employs this kidney shape for the head in *Portrait of Georges Auric* from 1929). After passing through an oversized vulva at the top of the composition, this 'bridge' widens to form the female

body on the right of the image. In F.J.M. 870, the female figure—identifiable by her triangular breasts and crudely rendered vulva—has a similar bridging appendage protruding from her chin, which then spreads to form the head and phallus that make up the male figure.

In contrast, in the disquieting images labelled F.J.M. 868 and 869, the two bodies appear as though they have begun to liquefy and melt into a single, two-headed entity. The figures depicted in F.J.M. 869 (Fig. 40) are notably minimalistic and are the clearest manifestation of this assimilation of bodies. In the composition, two heads emerge from the top of either side of the minimalistic, rounded ‘body,’ the interior of which contains a phallus and vulva, which do not come into contact. Again, in this image and in many other images throughout the series, Miró prioritises the sexual organs of the figures, which are clearly differentiated and rendered larger even than the heads. He depicts no other anatomical parts—the figures are limbless, for instance—with the exception of three spots within the figures’ heads that could stand for facial features. Even more reductive is F.J.M. 868 (Fig. 41); in this composition, the figures’ heads share their forms with those in F.J.M. 869, but in this instance only their heads—with three dots indicating facial features—identify them as human.

Purposefully ambiguous, anatomically inconceivable, and indefinite, the figures in these drawings destabilise interpretation through their nonsexual coupling. Reading the work through Miró’s biography, in addition to the crisis of anti-painting, may provide some insight into the genesis of these drawings. Given that Miró was working on the sketches during his wife’s pregnancy, or shortly after the birth of his daughter on 17 July 1930, it is possible that the conjunction of bodies in these images refers to the coming together of two individuals to create a new life. This generative reading is reinforced by the visual similarities between the female sexual organs and seeds in drawings F.J.M. 925 and 942. An even more direct reference to pregnancy is the curious motif that sits within

the amalgamated bodies of the figures in F.J.M. 868, which could very well represent a foetus.¹¹¹ The foetal conformation also brings to mind certain elements of the *informe*, as a transformational state between the moment of conception and a fully formed human being. Fascinatingly, when Gaëtan Picon wrote about the series after interviewing Miró in the 1970s, he describes some of the more reductive figures as appearing foetal, with ‘protoplasmic appendages.’¹¹² The suggestions of conception in these images are significant, not only biographically, but because they represent a point of transition—between the destructive qualities of both formlessness and anti-painting and the artist’s previous interests in celebrating the creative process in *Maternity* and *The Kiss*. In recording the progression of Miró’s new approach to figuration, one can draw similarities between the 1930 sketchbooks as a moment of artistic development and of the procreative process itself (with which the artist previously compared artistic production). In this way, the images specifically relating to conception span the poetic and the Bataillean; they may participate in the *informe*, but for Bataille, reproduction is ‘intimately linked to death’¹¹³ in a manner not represented here by Miró.

Conclusion

The figural compositions from Miró’s 1930 sketchbooks reflect an interest in depicting bodies that defy natural form and elude anatomical identification, characteristics that

¹¹¹ Many thanks to David Hopkins for bringing this motif to my attention. With the exception of this particular motif, the composition is very similar to the proceeding drawing (F.J.M. 869), which depicts male and female genitalia within the conjoined bodies. The motif that I have identified as ‘foetal’ in F.J.M. 868, however, certainly does not resemble any sexual organs in this series nor any preexisting motif in Miró’s oeuvre.

¹¹² Picon, *Catalan Notebooks*, 23.

¹¹³ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 13. Originally published in 1957 as *L’Érotisme*. For Bataille, ‘reproduction leads to the discontinuity of beings, but brings into play their continuity; that is to say, it is intimately linked to death,’ meaning that reproduction allows a species to continue, but is predicated on the discontinuity (death) of individuals within that species.

adhere to Bataille's doctrine for the *informe* and its refusal of 'academic' classification through their purposeful ambiguity and deformation. In conducting a focused visual analysis of Miró's sketches and in considering Bataille's own writings on figurative art; the similarities between the *informe* and the grotesque (which permits figuration); and Georges Didi-Huberman's postulation for the techniques of bodily multiplications and mutilations as formless, this chapter concludes that, in this instance, Miró has produced figural works that should be classed as *informe*. Just as the term '*informe*' does not necessarily negate figuration, neither does anti-painting reject visual representation. It is of great significance that Miró's engagement with Bataillean principles and his appearances in *Documents* occur at a time of intense personal and artistic crisis. Miró's simultaneous engagement with both the *informe* and anti-painting allowed him to cultivate a new and comparatively base aesthetic (of which these sketches are a type of draft), accompanied by a degree of distance from mainstream surrealism, which in turn allowed him to confront both personal and political crises of the 1930s.

Chapter 3

A Tear in the Eye

In looking through Joan Miró's 1930 notebooks, which contain the same series of drawings discussed in chapter 2, one notes that several of the compositions exhibit a striking similarity between the iconography of the eye and of the female genitals. Miró's iconographic parallels resonate with the visual equating of the eye motif with other round forms—particularly images of the egg and vulva—in the work of several other Surrealist artists in the late 1920s and early 1930s, including André Masson, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dalí. These artists' transposition of the eye recalls the metamorphosis of the round form from egg to eye in Georges Bataille's 1928 pornographic¹ novella *Histoire de*

¹ A reviewer strongly suggested to me that *Story of the Eye* should be referred to as 'erotica' and not 'pornography,' and thus, I feel it necessary to defend my decision to retain the classification of the work as pornographic. I would first note that a wide range of experts on the twentieth-century avant-garde have previously chosen to class *Story of the Eye* as a work of pornography, including Susan Rubin Suleiman, Robin Adèle Greeley, Rosalind Krauss, Martin Jay, Benjamin Noys, and Steven Harris. Furthermore, scholars from a variety of disciplines have explored the differences between pornography and erotica, and a prevailing reading is that the 'description of the sexual action' is what 'constitutes the central, indispensable unit of pornography' (see Lucienne Frappier-Mauzer, 'Truth and the Obscene Word,' in Lynn Avery Hunt, *The Invention of Modern Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800* [Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1996], 4). The language used to describe the sexual action must be explicit and should not rely on metaphor (see Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth*

l'oeil (*Story of the Eye*). In *Story of the Eye*, Bataille employs a central metonymic image—the round form—and, as the sexual transgressions of the story's protagonists unfurl, transposes it through a series of stations, beginning with eggs, moving through testicles and the sun, and ending with an enucleated eye seen inside of a character's vagina.

In early examples from Miró's oeuvre, one identifies an interest in the same permutations, expressed pictorially rather than linguistically and revealing a mutual affinity with Bataille for this type of image-making. This chapter explores the shared interest for the creation of metonymic chains of imagery of both Miró and Bataille. While Miró's work has been read through *Story of the Eye* in previous scholarship (as acknowledged in my 'Literature Review'), these previous works have simply noted Bataille and Miró's interest in metaphoric chains of imagery, whereas this chapter posits *Story of the Eye* as a direct source of influence on Miró in 1930. Furthermore, this analysis is the first to examine the link between Miró and *Story of the Eye* by looking at work by the artist completed *after* the publication Bataille's novella. First, I acknowledge earliest employment of these chains of signification in Miró's work, noting how in works like *The Hunter* (*Catalan Landscape*), the artist employs several incarnations of the round form (including the egg, sun, and testicle) to contribute to themes of fertility. I then argue that in the 1930 notebooks, after the publication of *Story of the Eye*, Miró's imagery exhibits a violently erotic transgression, depicting controlled exchanges and confluences of the eye and vulva symbols within the body of his figures in a manner that strongly recalls Bataille's imagery. This manner of image-making, with its focus on control, similarity,

Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 22). Erotica, on the other hand, relies on these devices to allude to sexual action, such as in works like 'Erotopolis. The Present State of Bettyland' (1684), which uses 'an extended metaphor of land for the female genitalia' (ibid). Ellen Willis describes the genre of erotica as 'as sentimental and euphemistic as the word itself; lovemaking should be beautiful, romantic, soft, nice and devoid of messiness, vulgarity, impulses to power, or indeed aggression of any sort. Above all the emphasis should be on *relationships* and not (yuck) *organs*' (*Beginning to See the Light: Sex, Hope, and Rock-and-Roll* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012], 223). While Bataille's novel does employ metaphor in its structure—as we will see—his depictions of sexual acts are undeniably explicit, every action is laid bare, and the pornographic actions propel the plot.

and limitations of terms, is contrasted with the Surrealist image, which celebrates automatism, the irrational, and difference, thus suggesting Bataille's novella as a source of influence on Miró outside of mainstream Surrealism. Furthermore, the eye imagery found within Miró's drawings resonates with contemporary depictions of ocular violence, providing an alternative to the Surrealist glorification of the eye and of the poet and artist as 'seer.'

'Small Equations'

In 1929, Michel Leiris wrote that in Miró's earlier work, iconography took the form of a series of 'small equations (sun=potato, slug=small bird, gentleman=moustache, spider=sex, man=soles of the feet).'² Rosalind Krauss wrote on these equivalencies in her 1994 article 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' in which she argues that between the autumn of 1924 and 1925, Miró utilised 'metaphoric strings of relationships.'³ She identifies a permutation by which the symbol for the lips of the mouth suggests those of the labia, which in turn suggests a sun and then a spider, a comet, and the stamen and corolla of a flower.⁴ This manner of image-generation, Krauss argues, is similar to that used by Bataille in *Story of the Eye*. My argument, and the permutation that I have uncovered in Miró's work, differs from Krauss's in several ways. Firstly, the permutation described by Krauss is developed over a year's worth of paintings, with one painting typically containing only a single image from this 'chain.' My own argument—elucidated hereafter—identifies the presence of an entire chain of equivalencies within a single composition (*The Hunter*, 1923-24), which is then expanded in subsequent works.

² Michel Leiris, 'Joan Miró,' *Documents* 1, no. 5 (1929): 264. Translated by Lydia Davis, in *Brisées: Broken Branches* (San Francisco: North Point, 1989), 26.

³ Rosalind Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' *October*, no. 68 (Spring 1994): 6.

⁴ Ibid.

Secondly, Krauss cannot successfully link Miró's work to *Story of the Eye* because she is examining a period in Miró's oeuvre that predates Bataille's novella; since these chains of imagery are not unique to Miró's art or Bataille's writing, this mutual interest does not establish a particularly strong affinity between the two. My own investigation, however, has identified a chain of images shared by both Miró and Bataille and involving the eye, sun, testicles, egg, and vulva.

Miró first uses this permutation in peasant scenes, as innocent indicators of fertility and, later, in the 1930s (after the publication of *Story of the Eye*), as an operation of erotic transgression. A third difference between Krauss's argument and my own is that the permutation she discovered in Miró's paintings lacks the element of the transgressive championed by Bataille. While she links the chain of images to an 'expressive goal' that is 'explicitly sexual,'⁵ the emphasis (like Miró's early peasant scenes, which contain elements of the erotic) remains on procreative sex. The example Krauss uses to illustrate her point makes this condition plain. *The Kiss* (1924), while expressing 'pure biological contact,' does so through allusions to cellular reproduction. I believe that it is worth restating here that the reason Krauss cannot strongly tie Miró's work to Bataille's, in my view, is because her analysis looks at too early a period in Miró's oeuvre. Krauss herself acknowledges that Bataille's 'return to reality' rejects the notion of Miró's dream painting and the artist's dependence on metaphor.⁶ With his anti-painting of the 1930s, however (as this thesis explores), Miró's work comes to display considerable overlaps with Bataillean themes. This chapter discusses how, in his 1930 notebooks, Miró takes two symbols from the permutation I have described—the eye and the vulva—and subjects them to a sexual transgression with implications of castration and non-procreative copulation that is in line with Bataille's own aesthetic.

⁵ Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 6.

⁶ Ibid., 11.

In considering these equivalencies I have identified a specific interest, on Miró's part, in the various permutations of the rounded form, appearing in the artist's work as early as 1924. *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* (1924) (Fig. 1) is rich with symbolic references to fertility, fecundity, and renewal. Some of these references relate specifically to regional traditions: as chapter 5 will explore, excremental imagery (functioning in *The Hunter* as a fertiliser, or a 'giving back' to the earth) plays an important role in Catalan folklore.⁷ I have also identified a possible reference in the oversized sardine in the composition's foreground to the Spanish tradition of the 'Burial of the Sardine' (also the subject of a painting by Francisco de Goya⁸), which marked the end of the Carnival and the beginning of Lent, and thereby holding associations of rebirth. Miró further emphasises the theme of generation in this painting by establishing a series of iconographic equivalencies on the basis of a shared rounded shape. At the top of the image, Miró takes two symbols of fertility—the sun and the egg—and merges them into a single, hybridised icon that he later referred to as the 'sun-egg' or 'solar egg,'⁹ a black and white orb, rounded at the top and tapered at the bottom, with seven protruding tentacle-like rays. This peculiar symbol also appears through the window in the painting *Harlequin's Carnival* (1924–25) (Fig. 2). Further emphasising *The Hunter's* theme is the visual equating of the form and colour of the sun-egg with the sexual organs of the

⁷ While there is very little scholarship that discusses Miró's excremental imagery, more can be read on other nationalistic imagery present in *The Hunter* in Carolyn Lanchner, *Joan Miró* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 24–27. For a more general account of Miró's political leanings, see Robert Lubar, 'Miró's Commitment,' in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, eds. Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale (London: Tate, 2011), 30–43.

⁸ For more on Goya's painting and its relationship to the Carnival, see 'The Carnival is Dead, Long Live the Carnival!' in Victor I. Stoichita and Anna Maria Coderch, *Goya: The Last Carnival* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 31–73. The inscription of the word 'Sard' on Miró's canvases was originally believed to be a reference to the first part of the word *sardana*, the Catalan dance (see James Johnson Sweeney, *Joan Miró* [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1941], 28). Miró affirms, however, that 'Sard' identifies the body of the fish as a sardine in 'Miró: Now I Work on the Floor,' interview with Yvon Taillandier, *XXE Siècle* (Paris, May 30, 1974). Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Select Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 284.

⁹ William Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 24.

sardine and the hunter—whose urine¹⁰ is rendered in such a way that it visually recalls the sun-egg's rays. Thus, in *The Hunter*, Miró sets up an equation (to borrow Leiris's term) that reads sun=egg=male sexual organs.

In the same year that he began *The Hunter*, Miró executed a sketch entitled *The Family* (1924) (Fig. 3), which utilises a second series of equivalencies on the basis of roundness. As its title suggests, *The Family* is similarly concerned with the theme of reproduction: the female figure is reduced to a head and sexual organs, while an arrow passes through her linear body, connecting her husband to their child, thus emphasising her role as mother. The large, disembodied eye that hovers in the window of the composition mirrors exactly the positioning of the sun-egg in *Harlequin's Carnival*. Furthermore, the eye's shape—were one to rotate it ninety degrees—recalls the form of the female figure's vulva, whose emanating pubic hairs, in turn, resemble the rays of the sun-egg. One could interpret this series of equivalences as sun=eye=female genitals. It is important to understand that in both *The Hunter* and *The Family* the sexual organs included within these 'equations' function as emblems of fertility, and not eroticism, and serve the pervading theme of the compositions in which they are situated. At this time, Miró had not yet subjected this metaphoric permutation to the erotic transgression that he would undertake in 1930.

Around 1925 and into the late 1920s—the height of Miró's experimentations with 'dream painting' and his association with Surrealism—the artist's style of figuration shifted in a direction that is iconographically reductive. Whereas, in 1924, Miró employed depictions of fully realised eyes, feet, hearts, or genitals—four body parts that he

¹⁰ Miró affirms that the hunter is 'pissing' in *Joan Miró, 1893–1993*, ed. Rosa Maria Malet (London: Little, Brown, 1993), 176. Krauss, however, writes that the figure is 'gaily ejaculating,' in 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 5.

considered as emblems of human life¹¹—in order to identify his abstracted figures as human, by 1925 these previously favoured anatomical parts became absent from most of his paintings. Among the earliest examples of this shift in figuration styles—and perhaps the best known—is the *Head of a Catalan Peasant* series (1924–25) (Fig. 4), in which the figure’s visage is composed only of two intersecting lines topped with a red *barretina* (the Catalan’s peasant’s cap) and, in some instances, a beard or pipe. Works like *Painting (Man with Moustache)* (1925) (Fig. 5) or *Personage* (1925) (Fig. 6) are nearly impossible to identify as figurative without their titles. In some later instances, Miró would further his reductive style and deny figuration altogether, instead using script to indicate the presence of human figures within a composition—as he did with *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi* (1927) (Fig. 7). Leiris likens this practice to a mental exercise, allegedly practiced by Tibetan monks, which involves the envisioning of a vividly detailed scene followed by the systematic subtraction of each of its elements, leaving one with ‘l’entière compréhension du vide physique,’ (‘a total understanding of physical emptiness’) which, he reminds, is not ‘la notion négative du néant, mais la compréhension positive de ce terme à la fois identique et contraire au néant celui’ ‘the negative notion of nothingness but the positive understanding of a term at once identical and contrary to nothingness.’¹²

Miró’s 1930 sketchbooks signal a return to a more physical figuration (which I have already discussed in relation to the *informe*) and likewise prompted the revival and exaggeration of certain iconographic forms, notably the male and female sex organs and the eye, as the artist shifted from dream painting to ‘anti-painting.’ While the previous chapter discussed the significance of Miró’s revival of foot imagery in the series, this chapter focuses on the prioritisation of the eye and vulva forms—two anatomical parts that had only limited representation in Miró’s 1927–29 output. In the 1930 sketches, I

¹¹ Joan Miró, ‘Miró: Now I Work on the Floor,’ Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 282. Examples in which Miró employs these tactics include *The Hunter*, *The Family*, and *Bouquet of Flowers (Sourire de ma Blonde)*.

¹² Leiris, ‘Joan Miró,’ 264. Translated by Lydia Davis, in Leiris, *Brisées*, 26.

have identified an element of the transgressive not yet utilised by Miró in the 1920s; that is, the eroticisation of the eye-vulva permutation, by which these two body parts are made interchangeable on the basis of their shared shape. While the sketches contain many instances of bodily deformation, there are a significant number of cases in which the images of the eye and vulva are deliberately conflated. Most significantly, this shift in the symbolic employment of the ocular and genital motifs occurs shortly after the publication of Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, which similarly employs metonymic chains of imagery involving the rounded form. Before discussing Miró's eroticised imagery in the 1930 drawings, one must first understand how Bataille initially explored the formal relationship between the eye and the vulva.

Story of the Eye

Bataille's *Story of the Eye* explores the intersection of eroticism¹³ and violence through a series of increasingly transgressive sex acts performed by its two adolescent protagonists: an unnamed male narrator and his neighbour, Simone. The narrative is concise—even in Jean-Jacques Pauvert's diminutive 1967 edition, the story's action (under the heading 'The Tale') only spans eighty-four pages—and moves quickly from one sexual tableau to another. As Roland Barthes concluded in 'The Metaphor of the Eye,' published in 1963 in Bataille's journal *Critique*, the reason the plot can progress so expeditiously is because, at its core, *Story of the Eye* does not revolve around its characters, but is rather 'the story of an object.'¹⁴ This object—the rounded form—migrates through a cycle of stations,

¹³ Eroticism, here, refers to the Bataillean concept (discussed in detail in chapter 6) and not the literary genre.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'oeil,' in *Roland Barthes: Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), 1346. This paper was first published in the special 'Hommage à Georges Bataille' issue of the journal *Critique* in 1963, shortly after the founder's death. Translated by Joachim

which Barthes calls ‘avatars.’¹⁵ According to Barthes, Bataille constructs the novella’s plot by crafting two chains of imagery. The first, formed on the basis of a shared round form, involves the eye, eggs, the sun, and testicles, while the second metaphor forms around ‘*les avatars du liquide*’ (‘avatars of liquid’), which includes tears, milk, yolk, sperm, and urine.¹⁶ As the round form moves through its various stations, Bataille not only matches the term from the ovular chain with the ‘correct’ term from the liquid chain—the round saucer of milk that Simone sits in, for example,¹⁷ or the yolk running from the eggs that she breaks with her bottom¹⁸—but he also *interchanges* the two metaphoric chains, producing bizarre imagery, whereby light from the sun is described as pouring like urine in ‘une sorte de liquefaction urinaire du ciel’ (‘a sort of urinary liquefaction of the sky’).¹⁹ This particular type of substitution is called ‘metonymy,’ by which an object or concept is referred to not by its own name but by the name of another entity with which it is associated. Throughout the novella, the action of each chapter results from the combination of liquid and ovular terms. Because these are variations of the same chain of images, language used to describe one incarnation of the round form can thereby be transferred to another; for instance, Bataille conflates the phrases ‘*casser un oeuf*’ (‘break an egg’) and ‘*crever un oeil*’ (‘put out an eye’)²⁰ to form the image of a broken eye.²¹ Bataille acknowledges this image-making strategy within the narrative itself; the narrator recognises the exchangeable nature of the terms comprising the metonymic chains, describing their association in terms of ‘en renvoyaient à l’infini les images symétriques’ (‘bouncing symmetrical images back to infinity’).²²

Neugroschel, as ‘The Metaphor of the Eye,’ in Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2001), 119.

¹⁵ Barthes, ‘La métaphore de l’oeil,’ 119.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1347.

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l’oeil* (Saint-Germain-lès-Corbeil: Willaume-Egret, 1969), 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁰ Barthes, ‘La métaphore de l’oeil,’ 1349–1350.

²¹ Bataille, *Histoire de l’oeil*, 46.

²² *Ibid.*, 56. Translated by Neugroschel, in *Story of the Eye*, 42.

The employment of ‘symmetrical’ images in *Story of the Eye* occurs not only at the formal level, based on a shared roundness, but also semantically. In a chapter entitled ‘Simone,’ Bataille plays on the similarities in the phonological sound and appearance of the verbs *urinar* (to urinate) and *buriner*²³ (to engrave), thus endowing the act of urinating (a part of the image chain based on liquidity) with violent connotations. Simone makes these connections plain:

buriner, les yeux, avec un rasoir, quelque chose de rouge, le soleil. Et l’oeuf? Un oeil de veau, en raison de la couleur de tête, et d’ailleurs le blanc d’oeuf était du blanc d’oeil, et le jaune la prunelle.

(terminate, the eyes, with a razor, something red, the sun. And egg? A calf’s eye, because of the colour of the head (the calf’s head) and also because the white of the egg was the white of the eye, and the yolk the eyeball.)²⁴

She then comments that a ‘jet d’urine’ is ‘un coup de feu vu comme une lumière’ (‘a jet of urine’ is ‘a gunshot seen as a light’), which also serves to reinforce the correspondence between sunlight and urine.²⁵ This semantic connection causes one to read Simone’s act of urinating on the open eyes of Marcelle’s corpse²⁶ as a considerably more violent act than the (already perverse) desecration of a dead body. Stuart Kendall also identifies the importance of verbal and visual puns in *Story of the Eye*, citing an example in which Simone informs the narrator that *assiettes* (plates) are for *s’asseoir* (sitting) before lowering herself into a saucer of milk.²⁷

²³ Bataille, *Histoire de l’œil*, 45. Note, the English translation of *Story of the Eye* replaces *buriner* with ‘terminate,’ in order to retain the rhyme with ‘urinate.’

²⁴ Ibid, 45–46. Translated by Neugroschel, in *Story of the Eye*, 34.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 59.

²⁷ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 62.

Bataille also establishes mirrored images between scenes involving eggs and testicles, thus emphasising the interchangeable nature of each of the ovular forms. In one such instance Simone, while performing a headstand on a chair, covers the narrator's face with the yolk of a broken egg while her face is simultaneously dampened by his ejaculate. Here, two instances of liquid imagery (yolk and seminal fluid), both of which are the product of a form of the ovular metaphor (the egg and testicles, respectively), are presented as mirror images of one another on the face of each character.²⁸ In another instance, Simone inserts a castrated bull's testicles into her vagina, recalling her use of eggs in previous sex acts and also foreshadowing the novella's final tableau in which she similarly inserts an enucleated human eye inside her body. As Barthes notes, the formal affinity between the two round objects is strengthened when one considers the reference in the French language to the testicles of some animals as '*oenfs*.'²⁹ David Hopkins further observes that the transposition from eye to egg (or vice versa) is signalled verbally, 'in terms of a shift from the word *oeil* to *oenf*, with the letter 'o' at the start of each word providing a further trigger for the transposition.'³⁰

Miró appears to employ a similar pun in the figuration of the hunter, in the way in which he renders the sexual organs as an egg. This action anticipates Bataille's equating of testicles and eggs in *Story of the Eye* and Barthes's observation of the French usage of *oenf* for animal testicles. There is, of course, no direct Bataillean influence here, as *The Hunter* predates *Story of the Eye*; however, the overlap in imagery suggests a similar interest in linguistic playfulness. It should also be noted that the Catalan *ous* and Spanish *buevos* are also used to refer both to eggs and testicles. If Miró is indeed employing a type of visual punning in the anatomy of the hunter that anticipates Bataille's imagery, it would not be the first time that he would use such an operation. In a 1927 painting, Miró

²⁸ Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, 14.

²⁹ Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'oeil,' 1347.

³⁰ David Hopkins, *Dada's Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 71.

inscribed an unprimed canvas with the phrase ‘*Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse* [sic]’ (Fig. 8), which is written in incorrect French and would translate as something approximating ‘a bird pursues a bee and lowers it.’ Since one cannot ‘lower a bee,’ and given Miró’s fluency in French, Margit Rowell contends that what was previously regarded by art historians as a spelling error actually signifies a lowering function within the image.³¹ Miró places the word *oiseau* (bird) at the top of the composition—its presence also signalled by the pasted bundle of feather—and *baisse* at the bottom. He then uses the calligraphic rendering of the word *poursuit* to map the trajectory of the bird’s flight from high to low.³² While the linguistic devices employed in Miró’s painting-poems were, undoubtedly, derived from similar experimentations by early Surrealist poets—specifically those of Guillaume Apollinaire (especially his *Calligrammes*)—the employment of a lowering operation in this painting (which is contemporary with his *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi*) strongly resonates with Bataille’s own mission to ‘bring things down in the world’³³ and to position his base materialism against Surrealism’s Icarian idealism. In *Un oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse*, Miró, by this point moving toward his anti-painting experimentations, is very likely beginning to cultivate an interest in lowering operations parallel to that of Bataille.³⁴

A final and essential component involved in Bataille’s image-making process is the female body, specifically through the use of Simone’s vagina and anus as vessels into which the various incarnations of the ovular metaphor can be inserted. Bataille makes this connection plain in the novella’s first two chapters, which include the submersion of

³¹ Rosalind Krauss and Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1972), 59.

³² Ibid.

³³ Georges Bataille, ‘Informe,’ *Documents* 1, no. 7 (1929): 382.

³⁴ It is unlikely that this painting was actually inspired by Bataille himself, as this work predates *Documents*, where Bataille published some of his most important writings on the tension between high and low. Other important works outside of *Documents*, including *L’Anus solaire*, (*The Solar Anus*) and ‘La Vielle taupe et le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surrealiste*’ (‘The Old Mole and the Prefix *sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealiste*’) had not yet been published. However, given that the work is contemporary with Miró’s inscription of Bataille’s name on the canvas *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi*, a more direct influence is not impossible.

Simone's vulva into a saucer of milk and the placement of eggs atop her anus. Similar actions undertaken by Simone are later directly linked to violence, as the insertion of a bull's testicles into her vagina during a bullfight occurs at exactly the same moment that the matador El Granero is enucleated and killed. As Bataille writes:

Deux globes de meme grandeur et consistance s'étaient animés de mouvements contraires et simultanés. Un testicule blanc de taureau avait pénétré la chair 'rose et noire' de Simone; un oeil était sorti de la tête du jeune homme.

(Thus, two globes of equal size and consistency had suddenly been propelled in opposite directions at once. One, the white ball of the bull, had been thrust into the 'pink and dark' cunt that Simone had bared to the crowd; the other, a human eye, had sputtered from Granero's head with the same force as a bundle of innards from a belly.)³⁵

The metonymic connections forged in this scene foreshadow the final and most transgressive sex act, occurring in a chapter entitled 'The Legs of the Fly,' in which Sir Edmund removes the eye of the murdered priest Don Aminado, at Simone's request, and presents it to her to insert into her body. Returning the ovular metaphor to its earliest manifestation, Simone, looking at the eye, concludes: '*c'est un œuf*' ('it's an egg').³⁶ Here, Bataille directly includes the vagina as a part of the metaphoric chain by equating the ocular with the genital. The eye fits perfectly within the vaginal opening, remaining static despite Simone's convulsions. When the narrator looks at Simone's vagina, however, he does not see the priest's eye, but the blue eye of Marcelle—the mentally ill teenager driven to insanity through her involvement in the narrator and Simone's

³⁵ Bataille, *Histoire de l'œil*, 73. Translated by Neugroschel in *Story of the Eye*, 54.

³⁶ Ibid., 88. Translated by Neugroschel in *Story of the Eye*, 64–65.

transgressions.³⁷ Being severed, the eye has lost its ability to see and now begins to take on vaginal functions: as the narrator stares at the eye, it *urinates* tears that stream down Simone's thighs.

Ocular Transposition

It is through this association of the ocular and the vaginal that Miró's 1930 notebook drawings most obviously recall *Story of the Eye's* imagery. A focused visual analysis of five of these malformed figural drawings—which, lacking titles, are referred to by their classification numbers at the Fundació Joan Miró: F.J.M. 867, F.J.M. 870, F.J.M. 898, F.J.M. 900, and F.J.M. 901—reveals that Miró's distortion of the human form has, in these instances, resulted in the substitution of the female genitalia with eyes. This action recalls the artist's treatment of the toe in the same series (in which the forms of the toe and the phallus are conflated, as discussed in chapter 2). While the drawings do indeed possess elements of the *informe* in their transgressing of bodily classification, their general adherence (however vague) to traditional bodily hierarchy—that is, the head at the top of the figure and the foot at the bottom—leads one to conclude that the replacement of the genitalia with an eye must be a deliberate decision on the part of the artist, again recalling the treatment of the toe and phallus elsewhere in the series. Throughout the series, the eye and the vulva are repeatedly conflated and swapped in a manner not extended to other body parts, and this occurs in compositions where the placement of other body parts is fairly conventional.

In F.J.M. 898 (Fig. 9), Miró depicts one of the most anatomically recognisable figures in the series: the figure begins with a defined head, shown in profile and

³⁷ Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, 90.

containing an eye, ear, nose, and mouth in their traditional placements; this is followed by a neck, breasts (indicating that the figure is female), and a torso, from which sprouts a basically rendered arm and hand; then appears a rounded form that indicates an abdomen; and, finally, the figure ends with a foot characterised by an oversized big toe. The only element that appears to be grossly anatomically incorrect is a large second eye, which sits in the lower part of the figure's torso. Given that the other bodily elements of this composition are situated in their anatomically appropriate positions, it is unlikely that this eye is the figure's unseen right eye (which, given the position of her head, is out of view). Rather, Miró appears to be using eye iconography to signify the figure's vulva. While this action recalls the earlier use of the egg to refer to the male genitalia in *The Hunter*, it is now tied to a violent eroticism. In addition to the likely reference to *Story of the Eye*, the movement of the eye implies enucleation, an action that is also rooted in the genital according to Sigmund Freud, who writes that the fear of damaging the eye is a substitute for castration anxiety, and that Oedipus's blinding of himself was 'merely a mitigated form of the penalty of castration.'³⁸ Women, for Freud, are already castrated and thereby represent the threat for young boys of the loss of their own penises.³⁹

Miró repeats this 'vaginal eye' motif, albeit in a more abstract figure, in F.J.M. 900 (Fig. 10). Again, Miró retains a degree of bodily hierarchy, even in this instance of extreme corporeal distortion and reduction. At the figure's apex is a rounded structure, likely constituting a head, which houses a single eye, followed by the curve of a neck and arms that emerge from either side of the body's torso. The body terminates with a single, oversized toe. Once more, Miró has placed an eye (rendered identically to the primary

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 139. Originally published in 1919 as 'Das Unheimliche.' According to mythology, Oedipus unknowingly fulfills a prophecy by which he kills his father and marries his mother. When he realises what he has done, Oedipus blinds himself. The story achieved even greater fame when Freud employed it in his consideration of the psychological development of children in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism,' in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 152–153.

eye within the figure's head) in the natural anatomical placement of the vulva. As in F.J.M. 898, the figure possesses only a single eye within her head, and thus it is possible (although unlikely) that the vaginal eye is actually the displaced second eye from the figure's head, which Miró has simply relocated. Dispelling this reading, however, are compositions F.J.M. 867, 870, and 901 (Figs. 11–13). Each of these examples supports my interpretation that Miró intentionally equates the eye with the vulva, since each of the rendered figures possesses within their skulls two plainly visible eyes in addition to the third, vaginal eye.

Interestingly, in each of these three compositions, the two naturally occurring eyes—which are charged with the essential task of providing vision—are rendered very simply, as single dots within the head (yet still implicitly ocular motifs). Conversely, the vaginal eye—a useless and castrated organ—is depicted in considerably greater detail. This tactic serves to further emphasise the already oversized vaginal eye. Here, Miró's method recalls a similar strategy employed by André Masson in his illustration of *Story of the Eye's* final sexual scene (Fig. 14). In this composition, Masson excludes all other eyes apart from the enucleated eye situated within Simone's vagina in much the same way as Miró understates the presence of his figure's eyes within their heads. This is a significant gesture on Miró's part, given his favouring of the ocular form in other compositions across his oeuvre. As a result, the 'vaginal eye' becomes dramatised, drawing the viewer's gaze towards it just as 'l'oeil bleu pâle de *Marcelle*' ('the wan blue eye of *Marcelle*')⁴⁰ attracts the gaze of Bataille's narrator.

In other examples from the same collection of sketches, Miró depicts the vulva according to his established personal stylisation for the symbol (rounded, tapered at each end, divided horizontally by a line, and often shaded on one side), but performs an act of rotation on the form, adjusting it ninety degrees so that it is oriented horizontally rather

⁴⁰ Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, 90. Bataille's italics.

than vertically. This action on the artist's part—which is unprecedented in his oeuvre—emphasises the formal similarities between the eye and the horizontal vulva, since both forms appear rounded at the top and bottom and tapered at each side. One clearly sees this act of rotation in F.J.M. 896 (Fig. 15); the way in which the artist has nearly aligned these organs on the right side of the composition serves to emphasise their similarities in shape. Furthermore, the ambiguous protruding bodily structure that holds the vulva in this image almost exactly replicates the bulging shape of the eye that sits above it. By altering the alignment of the figure's sexual organ in such a way that it resembles an eye, Miró once again draws parallels with Bataille's final placement of the ovular metaphor in *Story of the Eye*: the eye seen inside the vagina. Masson employed a similar technique in his cover design for the first edition of *Story of the Eye*. Looking to the figure in the upper-right quadrant of the illustration, Masson aligns the vulva horizontally through the twisting of the figure's body. Through this contortion, which displays her genitalia along a horizontal axis, Masson is able to emphasise the formal affinity between the vulva and the eye in order to pictorially establish the migration of the round form through both of these avatars in Bataille's narrative.

In a remarkable drawing from his 1930 series, Miró extends this action a step further than Masson by rotating not only the vulva, but the eye as well. In this composition, labelled F.J.M. 881 (Fig. 16), Miró depicts a (heavily abstracted) figure with an eye that is aligned vertically, mirroring the artist's symbol for the vulva. The vulva itself is rendered horizontally, like an eye, and the pubic hair that sprouts from its top and bottom contours resembles eyelashes. The inversion of the eye and vulva forms within a single composition that otherwise features very few distinguishable anatomical elements suggests not only a conscious compositional decision on Miró's part, but also a transposition from the ocular to the genital, and vice versa, consistent with the cyclical nature of Bataille's ovular metaphor and Masson's depictions thereof. Significantly, Miró

returns to this motif in a 1934 pastel entitled *Woman* (Fig. 17), produced just before the ‘savage paintings’ and responding to a period of Spanish political history referred to as the *bienio negro*,⁴¹ which preceded the Spanish Civil War and which was characterised by significant civil violence and a particular targeting of Catalan freedoms. In *Woman*, the figure’s head is thrown back in a gesture of either revolt or anguish, both of which were typical poses of women in Miró’s work of the time and in broader Spanish Civil War imagery. The positioning of her head causes the eye to appear on a vertical axis, its shape resembling Miró’s symbol for the vulva. Her abdomen, meanwhile, is rendered in bold white pastel, recalling the colour of an eyeball, and houses her enormous vulva, which the artist has rotated so that it lies horizontally, its black colour recalling a pupil and its pubic hairs resembling eyelashes. That Miró revives this bodily substitution to respond to a tumultuous period suggests that the artist considered the transposition of the eye and the vulva to be a violent act, thereby resonating with the sexual violence dramatised in Bataille’s narrative.⁴² In 1936, Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob) also used an image of the vaginal eye in a politically charged work. *Object* (1936) (Fig. 18) depicts a disembodied eyeball, rotated in exactly the same manner as Miró’s drawings and topped with a tuft of pubic hair, as well as a cloudlike wooden form, painted white and resembling a discharge of seminal fluid.

In examining the drawings within Miró’s two notebooks, it becomes clear that in 1930—that is to say, *after* the publication of *Story of the Eye*—Miró’s employment of this transposition undergoes a change by which the eye and the vulva are conflated and swapped in a manner that is deliberate and controlled: their forms substituted for one another, manipulated to more closely resemble one another, and the eye consequently undergoes a violently erotic transgression in a manner not present in the pre-*Story of the*

⁴¹ ‘Two black years.’ See chapter 4 for a detailed description of the social and political conditions of the *bienio negro* and Miró’s visual responses thereof.

⁴² See chapter 6 for more on Miró’s depictions of female eroticism during the Spanish Civil War.

Eye works, which focus on themes of fecundity. This shift in the artist's approach to the eye occurs at a time when, as discussed in chapter 2, Miró engaging with sources outside of those encouraged by Breton's Surrealism (including Bataille's *informe*). In addition to the strong possibility of a direct Bataillean influence, through *Story of the Eye*, Miró's enthusiasm for the eye-vulva permutation also aligns his interests with several other Surrealist and ex-Surrealist artists, most notably Masson and Max Ernst, whose contemporary work positions the eye as an object to be transposed with other round forms. Each of these artists surely would have been aware of *Story of the Eye's* publication. A letter from André Breton to his wife, Simone, dated 18 August 1928, confirms that the Surrealists not only knew that Bataille was *Story of the Eye's* author, but also that the work was being read and appreciated in Surrealist circles:

Il a paru dans la même collection que le livre d'Aragon (Pia, éd.) un livre de Bataille, de Georges Bataille: *Histoire de l'oeil, par Lord Auch* qui est absolument merveilleux. Non seulement c'est le plus beau livre érotique que je connaisse, mais c'est aussi l'un des sept plus beaux livres environ que j'aie lus. . . . L'événement intellectuel de l'année.

(Just published, in the same collection as Aragon's book, is a book by Bataille, by Georges Bataille: *Histoire de l'oeil, par Lord Auch*. It is absolutely marvelous. It is not only the most beautiful erotic book that I know, but it is also one of the seven or so most beautiful books that I have read. . . . The intellectual event of the year).⁴³

⁴³ André Breton to Simone Breton, 18 August 1928, in *André Breton: La Beauté Convulsive*, ed. Agnes Angliviel de la Beaumelle and Isabelle Monod-Fontaine (Paris: Musée National d'Art Moderne, 1991), 181. Translated by Raymond Spiteri, in 'Envisioning Surrealism in *Histoire de l'oeil* and *La femme 100 têtes*,' *Art Journal* 63, no. 4 (2004): 17, note 34. Also quoted in Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (Boston: Black Widow, 2009), 186.

Masson certainly would have known about *Story of the Eye*, having produced its illustrations. According to Bataille's instructions,⁴⁴ Masson's drawings that appear within the novella describe the events of the narrative literally; for instance, he depicts Simone urinating on her mother from atop the rafters. For the cover illustration (Fig. 19), however, Masson highlights the cyclical nature of the round form's metaphoric transposition in Bataille's work by means of an emblematic, rather than literal, composition by visually rhyming the eye, egg, and vulva. A large disembodied eye hovers at the top centre of the novella's cover; to its right is the twisted lower torso of a female figure (the positioning of whose sexual organs I have already discussed), and an egg occupies the bottom centre, while a second female figure with her legs splayed is rendered in the bottom-left corner. Each of these images of the ovular form is joined by a wavy border, which signifies the liquid chain of imagery found within the novella. By placing the image of the egg within a dish, Masson not only is able to reference the saucer that Simone uses during her earliest sexual acts with the narrator but is also able to more effectively mirror the physical qualities of the human organs with which he is equating the egg. The globe within a globe repeats the physical appearance of the iris within the eyeball, shown directly above the egg, as well as the vaginal opening (which will hold the egg and the eye) within the labia of the female figures positioned on each side of the image.⁴⁵

Scholars have also identified another contemporary example of this interest in the migration of the round form in the work of Max Ernst. In his book *Dada's Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp*, David Hopkins notes the 'transposition from an eye to an egg'

⁴⁴ Noah Chasin, 'Interview with Deborah Cullen,' in *Bataille's Eye: and ICI Field Notes 4*, ed. Deborah Cullen (Dalton, MA: Studley, 1997), 10. This publication also reproduces images from Hans Bellmer's drawings for subsequent publications of *Story of the Eye*.

⁴⁵ William Jeffett suggests that Masson may have expressed a similar interest in 'rhyming images' in the 1925 painting *The Wing*, which visually associates the eye and breasts, in Dawn Ades et al. *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (London: The Hayward Gallery; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 122.

in Ernst's *At the Interior of Sight: The Egg* (1929) (Fig. 20).⁴⁶ While this image remains concerned with the Surrealist interest in inward vision, Ernst equates the egg with the eye both visually and verbally in much the same way as Barthes describes in 'The Metaphor of the Eye' (through their shared shape and by the common sound and appearance of the words *oeil* and *oeuf*).⁴⁷ Through this transposition, as Hopkins argues, Ernst 'effectively turned the eye into a vessel for gestation.'⁴⁸ Raymond Spiteri argues that the 'equation between the eye, castration, and the female genitals' made implicit in *Story of the Eye* also appears in the image *Germinal, my sister, the hundred-headless woman (In the background, in the cage, the Eternal Father)* from Ernst's *La femme 100 têtes* (1929, plate 23) (Fig. 21), in which the female figure strokes the head of a man in her lap, her left index and middle finger framing his left eye.⁴⁹ Spiteri further identifies the association of eggs, eyes, and testicles in *The eye without eyes, the hundred headless woman keeps her secret* (1929, plate 133) (Fig. 22), demonstrated in the image of a female figure who sits atop a large egg as she covers the eyes of a man in an enucleating gesture that Spiteri believes to allude to castration.⁵⁰

Metaphor and Parody in *Story of the Eye*

There are several instances in his writings in *Documents*—that 'machine de guerre contre les idées reçues' ('war machine against received ideas')⁵¹—in which Bataille advocates a refusal of metaphor in favour of a 'return to reality,' free of transposition. So pervasive is

⁴⁶ Hopkins, *Dada's Boys*, 71.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Spiteri, 'Envisioning Surrealism,' 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹ Michel Leiris, 'De Bataille l'impossible à l'impossible "Documents,"' *Critique*, no. 195–196 (1963): 685. Translated by Bernard Noël, in *Correspondence*, ed. Louis Yvert (London: Seagull Books, 2008), 15.

Bataille's stated refusal of metaphor that for some scholars, including Rosalind Krauss,⁵² it is nearly enough to negate any serious consideration of Miró's alignment with the *Documents* aesthetic. How, then, can one reconcile the undeniable use of metaphor and metonymy in *Story of the Eye*, which is made explicit by Bataille throughout the text, elucidated by Barthes, and appropriated by several Surrealist artists? The solution, it would appear, lies in Bataille's penchant for parody. Several key Bataille scholars of the last two decades have identified the importance of parody to Bataille's work, and specifically to *Story of the Eye*. Jonathan Boulter, in 'The Negative Way of Trauma: Georges Bataille's *The Story of the Eye*,' understands Bataille's novella to be a series of parodies—of the quest, of Christ's passion, of the psychoanalytic case study—in order to integrate trauma into the narrative.⁵³ Stuart Kendall likewise concludes that *Story of the Eye* is 'a parody of language itself, of stories and of story-telling in general, of representation and the process of signification.'⁵⁴ Examining the text through this lens, I posit that through its employment of superficial, carefully controlled, and limited-image metaphors, *Story of the Eye* reads as a parody (or refusal) of Surrealism's employment of hidden analogies, automatic strategies, and juxtapositions of disparate realities. Unlike the Surrealist image, Barthes explains, Bataille's image:

⁵² Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 11. Krauss writes: 'And yet no matter how important we may think Barthes's analysis is of the role of the metaphorical chains in *Story of the Eye*, we have to acknowledge that Bataille's avowed aesthetic, enunciated many times over it in the essays in *Documents*, was hostile to metaphor in any form, whether poetically happenstance or coldly structuralist.' Krauss then reads Leiris's article on Miró as a rejection of the entire mission of dream painting and its dependence on metaphor. To restate my earlier point on Krauss's article, I believe that the reason she cannot reconcile the presence of metaphor in Miró's work with a Bataillean baseness is because the period in Miró's oeuvre that she examines (the 1920s) pre-dates the artist's engagement with Bataillean themes (in much the same way that Charles Palermo cannot see a Bataillean connection in the 1920s; see Charles Palermo, *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miró in the 1920s* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008], 178). For this reason, I made the decision to begin my consideration of Miró and Bataille with the year 1930. The dream paintings of the 1920s adhere more closely to an official Surrealist exploration of metaphor and the unconscious, while the mission of 'anti-painting' and its savage products in the 1930s are much closer to Bataillean baseness and violence.

⁵³ Jonathan Boulter, 'The Negative Way of Trauma: Georges Bataille's *The Story of the Eye*,' *Cultural Critique*, no. 46 (Fall 2000): 165.

⁵⁴ Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, 58.

is much more concerted. It is not a mad image nor even a free image, because the coincidence of its terms is not aleatory and the syntagma is limited by a constraint: that of choice, which means that the terms of the image can be taken only from two finite series [the ovular and liquid chains].⁵⁵

In the chapter ‘Simone’s Confession and Sir Edmond’s Mass,’ Bataille writes a parody of the Eucharist in which the priest Don Aminado is driven to ejaculate on the host and urinate into and subsequently drink from the chalice before being ‘martyred’ (restrained and strangled by Sir Edmond and the narrator, producing an erection that is exploited by Simone).⁵⁶ During the moment of his death the priest ejaculates, signifying what William Pawlett rightfully classes as a ‘moment of double expenditure,’ or profitless usages of energy.⁵⁷ Useless expenditures, as products of transgression, participate in what Bataille calls ‘the sacred,’ the world of excesses that opposes the profane drives of our work-based society. Among Bataille’s most commonly listed examples of ‘the sacred’ is ritualistic sacrifice, and especially Aztec human sacrifice.⁵⁸ Bataille thus forms a parodic and heretical link between Christ’s martyrdom and ancient ritualistic murder.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Barthes, ‘Le métaphore de l’œil,’ 1350. Translated by Neugroschel, in ‘Story of the Eye,’ 124.

⁵⁶ Bataille, *Histoire de l’œil*, 78–83.

⁵⁷ William Pawlett, *Georges Bataille: The Sacred and Society* (London: Routledge, 2015), 68.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Georges Bataille, ‘Le sacré,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 559–563. Beneath an image from the Codex Vaticanus No. 3738 depicting Aztec sacrifice, Bataille writes, ‘Le sacrifice humain est un sacrifice plus élevé qu’aucun autre—non en ce sens qu’il est plus cruel qu’aucun autre—mais parce qu’il se rapproche du seul sacrifice sans tricherie qui ne pourrait être que la perte extatique de soi-même’ (‘Human sacrifice is loftier than any other—not in the sense that it is crueler than any other, but because it is close to the only sacrifice without trickery, which can only be the ecstatic loss of oneself.’ (Plate XXX, corresponding to page 559.) Translated as ‘The Sacred,’ by Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr., in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 125.

⁵⁹ The language used to describe Don Aminado at the moment of his death recalls 1905 photographs of a victim by the name of Fu Chou Li being subjected to the Chinese ‘Torture of a Hundred Pieces.’ One of these photographs was given to Bataille by his therapist—with whom he was seeking treatment while writing *Story of the Eye*—because of the ‘ecstatic’ and ‘ravished’ look on the man’s face (a possible effect of the opium he had been given to prolong the torture). Bataille returned to the image throughout his life; in *Les larmes d’Eros* (1961), he writes: ‘this photograph had a decisive role in my life. I have never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, simultaneously ecstatic and intolerable’ (Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. Peter Connor [San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989], 20). Given Bataille’s admitted obsession with the photograph, one cannot help but see it repeated in *Story of the Eye*. Bataille echoes the image of this tortured man—whose eyes look upward, revealing only their

In the action that follows this sexual sacrifice—the enucleating and placement of Don Aminado’s eye inside Simone’s body—Bataille transgresses the eye’s function to the point of parody. In removing the eyeball, the organ is effectively rendered useless, as vision is now impossible. When Simone uses the eye by ‘fondling the depths of her thighs,’ ‘slipping the eye into the profound crevice of her arse,’ and moving it between the intertwined bodies of herself and the narrator, this organ of *sight* becomes a vehicle for *tactile* pleasure. The vaginal eye, furthermore, cannot receive any stimuli itself; it has been castrated, in the manner previously discussed in regard to Miró’s figures, incapable of fulfilling the visual imperatives of the eye or the procreative functions of the genitals. When the narrator views the eye inside Simone’s vagina, he sees not the priest’s eye, but Marcelle’s. Her eye is the parody’s referent: the eye whose witnessing of violent sex acts provoked her suicide and the eye that Simone attempted to violate with her urine. The direction of the violence subsequently becomes inverted: the now unseeing, castrated eye of ‘Marcelle’ (really Don Aminado) arouses feelings of ‘horror’ and ‘sadness’ in the narrator.⁶⁰

After the conclusion of this final narrative scene, in which the transgressive ‘obsessions’ of the narrator and Simone reach their climax, Bataille includes a section written in the first person and entitled ‘Coincidences,’ a parodic psychoautobiography of sorts, in which he attributes the entirety of *Story of the Eye*’s imagery to his childhood experiences with his paralysed and mad syphilitic father and mentally ill mother. Here, Bataille offers a biographical solution for many of the ovular images in ‘The Tale’; for instance, his father urinating into a receptacle beneath his armchair and his ‘huge,’ ‘blank’

whites, in a moment of unimaginable agony—as a parody of religious ecstasy in the treatment of the priest in *Story of the Eye*.

⁶⁰ When I presented a version of this chapter at a conference, an audience member asked me if, rather than interpreting the image as an unseeing eye, the ocular-vaginal union could be interpreted as a ‘seeing vagina.’ I would argue that the significance of this scene relies on the annihilation of vision, which invites readings into the parodying of image-making and representation. The notion of a ‘seeing’ vagina does not fit with this predominant theme of damaged vision, with its emphasis on the eye’s uselessness.

eyes rolling to the back of his head, the whiteness of which resembled eggs.⁶¹ While writing *Story of the Eye* Bataille did seek psychoanalytic treatment with Dr. Adrian Borel, a founding member of the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris and analyst to others associated with Surrealism, including Michel Leiris and Raymond Queneau.⁶² In a 1961 interview, Bataille confirmed that this treatment, which lasted one year, transformed him ‘into someone relatively viable’ and left him feeling ‘profoundly moved’ and ‘completely released.’⁶³ Some writers, like Andrea Dworkin, read ‘Coincidences’ literally, remarking that ‘the sense of the author’s personal anguish also gives the work credibility among intellectuals.’⁶⁴ The prevailing reading of ‘Coincidences,’ with its ‘hyperbolic descriptions of Oedipal crisis and castration anxiety,’⁶⁵ however, is as a parody of the psychoanalytic process in much the same way as ‘The Tale’ mocks the process of storytelling and image-making. Reinforcing this view is Allan Stoekl’s assertion that there are limited confirmed facts about Bataille’s early life, and that those who write about the subject tend to borrow ‘facts’ from *Story of the Eye* without discrimination.⁶⁶ Benjamin Noys argues that ‘Bataille parodies the idea of direct causal connections between his early life experiences and his work.’⁶⁷ Similarly, Paul Hegarty contends that ‘Coincidences’ ‘renders psychoanalysis risible through its literalness.’⁶⁸

Bataille’s ‘Coincidences’ also presents a parody of image-making, using the psychoanalytic case study as an attempt to downplay the rigidity of his metonymic

⁶¹ Bataille, *Histoire de l’œil*, 97. Translated by Neugroschel, in ‘Story of the Eye,’ 72.

⁶² Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), 78. Surya remarks that Dr. Borel read the novella chapter by chapter and provided Bataille with editorial advice.

⁶³ Georges Bataille, ‘Interview with Madeleine Chapsal,’ in *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael Richardson (London: Sage, 1998), 221.

⁶⁴ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: Women’s Press, 1983), 175–176.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2000), 12.

⁶⁶ Allan Stoekl, introduction to *Visions of Excess*, xi. Further complicating an autobiographical reading of ‘Coincidences’ is a letter Bataille received from his brother Martial, which claims that neither of their parents suffered from insanity. Quoted in Surya, translated by Fijalkowski and Richardson, in *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, 495.

⁶⁷ Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*, 11.

⁶⁸ Paul Hegarty, ‘Bataille, Conceiving Death,’ *Paragraph* 23, no. 2 (July 2000): 190, note 34.

process. This also suggests a mocking imitation of contemporary Surrealist attempts at generating images through an accessing of the unconscious. To understand the ways in which Miró, in the 1930s, looked to Bataille as a source of influence outside of mainstream Surrealism, it is essential to understand how Bataille's approach to the generation of images diverged from André Breton's. When Breton describes the Surrealist image in the *First Manifesto*, he links mental exploration with madness, writing that 'Il fallut que Colomb partît avec des fous pour découvrir l'Amérique. Et voyez comme cette folie a pris corps, et duré' ('Christopher Columbus should have set out to discover America with a boatload of madmen. And note how this madness has taken shape, and endured').⁶⁹ Furthermore, as David Lomas observes, Surrealism's rise coincided with the dissemination of Freudian psychoanalysis in France.⁷⁰ In fact, Breton specifically thanks Sigmund Freud (whom he had met in Vienna in 1921) in his *Manifesto* for revealing '...une partie du monde intellectuel, et à mon sens de beaucoup la plus importante, dont on affectait de ne plus se soucier' ('... a part of our mental world which we pretend not to be concerned with any longer—and, in my opinion by far the most important part').⁷¹ The Surrealist image was also informed by chance, the dream, and the juxtaposition of objects—which Breton saw as epitomized by Comte de Lautrémont's famous phrase '... et surtout comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie' ('... the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella').⁷²

For Breton, poetry is the ideal medium for communicating Surrealist psychic automatism, and the poet's most important tool is metaphor. Unlike the limitations

⁶⁹ André Breton, 'Le manifeste du surréalisme,' in *Manifestes du surréalisme*, ed. Jean-Jacques Pauvert (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 17. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 5–6.

⁷⁰ David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.

⁷¹ Breton, 'Le manifeste du surréalisme,' 21. Translated by Seaver and Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 10.

⁷² Comte de Lautrémont, 'Les Chants de Maldoror,' in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 432. Originally published in 1868 by Gustave Balitout, Questroy et Cie. Translated by Alexis Lykiard in, *Maldoror and the Complete Works* (Boston: Exact Change, 2010), 193.

inherent to Bataille's metonymic chains, the Surrealist metaphor is not predicated on *similarities* but *dissimilarities* between two entities. Breton, elucidating this point, writes:

La valeur de l'image dépend de la beauté de l'étincelle obtenue; elle est par conséquent, fonction de la différence de potentiel entre les deux conducteurs. Lorsque cette différence existe à peine comme dans la comparaison, l'étincelle ne se produit pas.

(The value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors. When the difference exists only slightly, as in a comparison, the spark is lacking).⁷³

Breton's characterisation of the Surrealist image builds on Pierre Reverdy's 'L'Image,' originally appearing in the journal *Nord-Sud* in March 1918. Here, Reverdy advocates for the juxtaposition of unassociated realities: 'plus les rapports des deux réalités rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l'image sera forte . . .' ('The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be . . .').⁷⁴ Ruminating on Reverdy's 'sibylline' words, Breton's goes on to describe a powerful, 'clearly articulated' phrase, which came to him one night before falling asleep ('There is a man cut in two by a window'), which was accompanied, in his mind, by the image 'of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body'.⁷⁵ As Willard Bohn argues in *The Rise of Surrealism*, Reverdy's definition of the image had to be adjusted to complement Breton's agenda, especially Reverdy's assertion that the two realities could be selected voluntarily, as Breton believed the most powerful of images are

⁷³ Breton, 'Le manifeste du surréalisme,' 46. Translated by Seaver and Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 37.

⁷⁴ Pierre Reverdy, quoted in Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, 46. Translated by Seaver and Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 30.

⁷⁵ Breton, 'Le manifeste du surréalisme,' 31. Translated by Seaver and Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 21–22.

born from irrational associations. As Bohn continues, Breton looked to Guillaume Apollinaire's interest in spontaneous images that spring forth from the recesses of the unconscious.⁷⁶

When Breton provides his own definition of Surrealism in the *First Manifesto*, he emphasises the qualities of spontaneity and freedom. He describes Surrealism as pure 'psychic automatism,' through which one endeavors to express 'the actual functioning of thought.' This practice is exempt from control reason, or aesthetic and moral considerations.⁷⁷ As Elza Adamowicz summarises, 'surrealist analogy is not grounded in prior links, to be deciphered upstream of the image; analogical links on the contrary are projective, forging new semantic realities.'⁷⁸ Sidra Stich continues that the Surrealist image is 'a dynamic, complex synthesis wherein opposites were no longer polarized but juxtaposed and interconnected in such a way that the spark of possibilities endlessly ignited.'⁷⁹ The metonymy that Bataille employs in *Story of the Eye*, conversely, is formed on the basis of formal and semantic similarities. Furthermore, as Barthes rightfully notes, *Story of the Eye* 'is not a deep work. Everything in it is on the surface; there is no hierarchy. The metaphor is laid out in its entirety; it is circular and explicit, with no secret reference behind it.'⁸⁰ Barthes continues by noting that while cross-associating the two chains of imagery does pair two distinct, incompatible images together (unassociated globular and a liquid images) in a way that could suggest a Surrealist image, Bataille's

⁷⁶ Willard Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 136. Bohn emphasises Breton's indebtedness to Apollinaire, noting that Breton once ranked him ahead of Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein as geniuses of the modern age. The poet's advocacy of the powers of the unconscious would be of particular interest for Breton's method of image-making; one can see Apollinaire's celebration of the unconscious in poems like 'Les Collines': 'Profondeurs de la conscience / On vous explorera demain / Et qui sait quels êtres vivants / Seront tirés de ces abîmes / Avec des univers entiers' (Depths of consciousness / You will be explored tomorrow / And who knows what living beings / Will emerge from those abysses / With whole new universes) (Quoted and translated in Bohn, 133).

⁷⁷ Breton, 'Le manifeste du surréalisme,' 35. Translated by Seaver and Lane in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 26.

⁷⁸ Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998), 82.

⁷⁹ Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California, 1990), 12.

⁸⁰ Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'oeil,' 1348. Translated by Neugroschel in 'The Metaphor of the Eye,' 124.

image is limited 'by a constraint: that of choice.'⁸¹ Because the two terms that form Bataille's image can each be taken from their own limited number of options, *Story of the Eye* cannot be said to possess the irrational or distant images celebrated by Reverdy and repeated by Breton. That Bataille—the enemy of metaphor and transposition—produced a work whose structure relies so heavily on both metaphor and metonymy, whose narrative makes frequent references to the structure of language and representation, and whose conclusion mocks the psychoanalytic process suggests that the image-making mechanisms at play *Story of the Eye* must be rooted in parody.

It is paramount to understand that *Story of the Eye*'s language comes from restrained and deliberate matching of predetermined images in a manner that has been likened to a machine,⁸² and not from irrationality or the unconscious, no matter how transgressive the subject matter or how extraordinary the produced images may sound. The chapter 'Coincidences' acts as a red herring of sorts, potentially leading the reader to attribute *Story of the Eye* to automatic or unconscious processes when, in reality, Bataille is subjecting those same image-making processes to parody. Likewise the bodily deformation of Miró's figures may lead one to believe that the 1930s drawings were executed automatically, while the presence of erasures and crossings-out indicates the artist's control over the look of his personages. Miró also exercises precise control over the bodily rearrangement of his figures. The substituting and amalgamating of the toe and phallus forms, and the eye and vulva forms is a restricted transposition involving only those organs—like Bataille's 'chains,' Miró works with a limited number of terms—and is certainly not the byproduct of a more generalised corporeal distortion.

⁸¹ Barthes, 'La métaphore de l'oeil,' 1350. Translated by Neugroschel in 'The Metaphor of the Eye,' 124. I acknowledge that my reading of *Story of the Eye* relies heavily on Barthes's work, at times. This owes to the quality of Barthes's analysis and the enormous influence that 'The Metaphor of the Eye' has had on subsequent Bataille scholars. Patrick Ffrench, for instance, in *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'oeil*, writes: 'I hold that one cannot read *Histoire de l'oeil* except in relation to Barthes, today' [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 7). Martin Jay humorously dubs 'The Metaphor of the Eye' 'an essay that in any other context could innocently be called seminal.' (*Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century France* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], 220.)

⁸² Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' 11.

‘Broken Eyes’

In addition to the transposing of the eye with other round forms, the references to enucleation and its association with castration—demonstrated overtly in Bataille’s work and suggested in the work of Miró, Masson, and Ernst—pertain to another eye ‘trope’ that was gaining momentum in Surrealist circles in the late 1920s: the damaged or violated eye. The notion of the ‘broken eye,’ to borrow Bataille’s phrasing in *Story of the Eye*, stands in direct contrast with the Surrealist celebration of the eye as an emblem of inward-turned sight, which granted the poet (or artist) access to the marvelous via the unconscious.⁸³

Breton reiterated his position in ‘A Letter to Seers,’ published after the *First Manifesto* and referencing Arthur Rimbaud’s 1871 ‘Lettre du Voyant,’ which declares: ‘Le poète se fait *voyant* par un long, immense, et raisonné *dérèglement de tous le sens*’ (‘The poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, gigantic and rational *derangement of all the senses*’).⁸⁴ While the Surrealists poets held a particular eminence within the movement, owing to the affinity between poetry and ‘seeing, and the associations tied to it (sight, vision, image, light, sun, etc.),’⁸⁵ Breton later reaffirmed Surrealism’s veneration of inner vision as related to artistic production, writing that: ‘L’oeuvre plastique, pour répondre à la nécessité de révision absolue des valeurs réelles sur laquelle aujourd’hui tous les esprits s’accordent, se réfèrera donc à un *modèle purement intérieur* ou ne sera pas’ (‘The plastic work of art, in order to respond to the undisputed necessity of thoroughly revising all

⁸³ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 237.

⁸⁴ Arthur Rimbaud to Paul Demeny, Charleville, 15 May 1871, in *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. Wallace Fowle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 377.

⁸⁵ John Lechte, ‘Surrealism and the Practice of Writing, or the “Case” of Bataille,’ in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), 121–122. Lechte continues: ‘through the image the poet can protect the freedom of the imagination; for the image deepens the rift between poetry as image and freedom, and what threatens it: prose. Through a fusion of inner (poetry) and outer (image), poetry and painting unite with one another. Painting becomes poetic, and poetry uses painting’s image to create “the image present to the mind.”’

real values, will refer to a *purely interior model* or cease to exist’).⁸⁶ One sees this attitude reflected in Ernst’s comments on his work, in which he asserts that the painter’s role is to reveal ‘that which sees itself in him,’ and, referring specifically to his practice of *frottage*, when he declares: ‘I have done everything to make my soul monstrous. Blind swimmer, I have made myself see.’⁸⁷ Of course, Breton (or even Rimbaud) was not the first or the only person to characterise creative vision in such a way; as David Hopkins notes, there are many predecessors—from Caspar David Friedrich to Giorgio de Chirico—whose expression of the inward-turned vision of the painter would have specifically appealed to Surrealist artists.⁸⁸ The conception of the Surrealist ‘seer’ would persist throughout the 1930s, as Martin Jay rightfully observes.⁸⁹ In 1931, Blaise Cendrars writes: ‘let us open this third eye of vision; let us surnaturalize,’ while Breton’s 1934 ‘Surrealist Situation of the Object’ insists: ‘I say that we must be *seers*, make ourselves seers,’ and even in 1943 Benjamin Péret would proclaim: ‘the man who really thinks is the seer.’⁹⁰

The violent implications associated with eye imagery do not originate with Bataille. In fact, they have a rich history in earlier Surrealist projects, and the association of the eye with castration in Freudian psychoanalysis is present in Ernst’s work as early as 1919. As Jeanne Siegel explains, the goggles worn by the characters in Ernst’s *Two Ambiguous Figures* (1919) (Fig. 23) suggests a blocking out of vision that recalls the blinding action in the Oedipal myth, while the title of his painting *Oedipus Rex* (1922) references the story directly.⁹¹ Man Ray’s *Object to be Destroyed* (1923) (Fig. 24) affixed a cut-out photograph of an eye to a metronome; the removal of the eye from the remainder of the photograph by cutting and the object’s title both imply acts of

⁸⁶ Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard-Folio Essais, 2002), 14. Translated by Simon Watson Taylor, in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (Boston: MFA, 2002), 128. Breton opens this essay with the now famous line: ‘the eye exists in its savage state.’

⁸⁷ Max Ernst, ‘History of a Natural History,’ in *Beyond Painting* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 9.

⁸⁸ Hopkins, *Dada’s Boys*, 71.

⁸⁹ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 237.

⁹⁰ Blaise Cendrars, André Breton, and Benjamin Péret, quoted and translated by Jay, in *Downcast Eyes*, 237.

⁹¹ Jeanne Siegel, ‘The Image of the Eye in Surrealist Art and Its Psychoanalytic Sources, Part One: The Mythic Eye,’ *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 6 (1982): 106.

violence.⁹² Gerald Eager also notes the violent implications of the ‘missing eye’ in de Chirico’s *The Two Sisters* (1915) (Fig. 25), in which neither architectural ‘figure’ has any facial features, but the absence of eyes is especially emphasised by the suggestion of a blindfold (in the case of the figure on the left) and the open archways present in the figure on the right, which suggests gaping eye sockets.⁹³ Siegel also notes that the familial theme in this work contributes to an Oedipal reading.⁹⁴

Both *Story of the Eye* and Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel’s film *Un Chien andalou* (An Andalusian Dog) (1929), however, approach the theme of ocular violence in a far more direct manner and associate the damaged eye with sadistic impulses. Writing on earlier depictions of blindness and eyes in Surrealist art, Siegel explains: ‘unlike Cubist decomposing and reconstituting of parts, their peculiar characteristic is that they [eyes] remain whole.’⁹⁵ Bataille, Dalí, and Buñuel, conversely, would subject the eye to explicit violation, rather than merely *suggesting* violence. Dawn Ades, writing on *Un Chien andalou*’s originality, succinctly remarks: ‘Surrealism had produced nothing like it on the screen.’⁹⁶ Given Bataille’s fascination with blindness, he was immediately seduced by *Un Chien andalou*’s now famous opening scene (Fig. 26), which cuts between images of a man sharpening a razor, a cloud passing over a full moon, and the face of a young woman, played by Simone Mareuil. As she placidly stares into the camera, the man slits her eye with the sharpened razor, the vitreous humour oozing forth. Like Bataille, Buñuel rejects metaphor when discussing the film, insisting that ‘NOTHING in this film

⁹² Siegel, ‘The Image of the Eye in Surrealist Art,’ 104. Siegel also notes that ‘Not only the destruction of the eye is involved; the eye pinned to the pendulum elicits a basic Freudian principle in dream formation, that of displacement, where a body part which often moves upward is displaced by another. In this instance, the vagina, moving in synchronization with the phallus, has been transposed to the eye.’

⁹³ Gerald Eager, ‘The Missing and the Mutilated Eye in Contemporary Art,’ *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1961): 50.

⁹⁴ Siegel, ‘The Image of the Eye in Surrealist Art,’ 103.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁶ Dawn Ades, *Dalí* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 50.

SYMBOLIZES ANYTHING.⁹⁷ It is clear, however, that the filmmakers transpose the round form: they present mirror images of the thin line of cloud cutting across the moon and the straight razor slicing across the woman's eye. Ades likens the image-making mechanism at work in *Un Chien andalou* to a 1918 text by Louis Aragon, entitled 'Du Décor' ('On Decor'), in which he writes that children 'sometimes fix their attention on an object to the point where their concentration makes it grow larger, grow so much that it completely occupies their visual field, assumes a mysterious aspect and loses all relation to its purpose.'⁹⁸ Bataille responds to the violent scene in the September 1929 edition of *Documents*—published within months of the film's release—in which he argues that the eye's 'extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror.'⁹⁹ Commenting specifically on *Un Chien andalou*, Bataille writes:

A cette égard, l'oeil pourrait être rapproché du *tranchant*, dont l'aspect provoque également des réactions aiguës et contradictoires: c'est là ce qu'ont dû affreusement et obscurément éprouver les auteurs du *Chien andalou* lorsqu'aux premières images du film ils ont décidé des amours sanglantes de ces deux êtres. Qu'un rasoir tranche à vif l'oeil éblouissant d'une femme jeune et charmante, c'est ce qu'aurait admiré jusqu'à le déraison un jeune homme qu'un petit chat couché regardait et qui tenant, par hasard, dans sa main, une cuiller à café, eut tout à coup envie de prendre un oeil dans la cuiller.

(In this respect, the eye could be related to the *cutting edge*, whose appearance provokes both bitter and contradictory reactions; this is what the makers of the *Andalusian Dog* must have hideously and obscurely experienced when, among the

⁹⁷ Luis Buñuel, 'Notes on the Making of *Un Chien Andalou*,' in *Art in Cinema: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society*, ed. Scott MacDonald and Frank Stauffacher, trans. Grace L. McCann Morley (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 29–30.

⁹⁸ Ades, *Dali*, 50.

⁹⁹ Georges Bataille, 'L'oeil,' *Documents* 1, no. 4 (1929): 216. Translated as 'Eye,' by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess—1939*, 17.

first images of the film, they determined the bloody loves of these two beings. The razor would cut open the dazzling eye of a young and charming woman—this is precisely what a young man would have admired to the point of madness, a young man watched by a small, sleeping cat, a young man who by chance holding in his hand a coffee spoon, suddenly wanted to take an eye in that spoon.¹⁰⁰

Of those associated with Surrealism, Bataille certainly produced the most passionate and frequent expressions of this assault on the eye.¹⁰¹ In 1926, prior to publishing *Story of the Eye*, he began writing another short book (which he never completed) entitled *W.C.* The book itself is now destroyed, but Bataille informs us that he accompanied the narrative with a drawing of an eye—the ‘scaffold’s eye’—gazing through the lunette of a guillotine, which he titled *The Eternal Return* (after Friedrich Nietzsche).¹⁰² Fascinatingly, he also associates the eye and the guillotine in *Story of the Eye*, in which the narrator describes viewing the enucleated eye as ‘en face de ce que—j’imagine—j’attendais depuis toujours: comme une guillotine attend la tête à trancher’ (‘something I imagine I had been waiting for in the same way that a guillotine waits for a neck to slice’).¹⁰³ In 1927, he wrote ‘L’Anus solaire’ (‘The Solar Anus’), a short text in

¹⁰⁰ Georges Bataille, ‘L’oeil,’ 216. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 17.

¹⁰¹ Martin Jay’s fascinating book *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* reads the Bataillean challenge to ‘ocularcentrism’ through the consequences of the First World War, which ‘challenged and in certain cases toppled the traditional hierarchies of European life,’ including the primacy of vision. He also argues that the effects of the First World War were more ‘visually disorienting’ than ‘those produced by such nineteenth century technical innovations as the railroad, the camera, or the cinema.’ According to this view, the ‘hesitant’ pre-war ‘interrogation of sight’ in certain philosophical works was given a new, often violent, fervour. He cites Paul Virilio’s *La Machine de la Vision* (1988), which argues that the sheer trauma of the war resulted in ‘a moment of panic in which the American and European masses no longer believed their eyes. Jay dubs the First World War ‘the Cubist war,’ because of the ‘collapse’ of the notion of shared perspective—a condition that recalls Friedrich Nietzsche’s ‘perspectivism,’ elucidated in *The Will to Power* (1901).

¹⁰² Georges Bataille, ‘Preface to *Story of the Eye* from *Le Petit: 1943*.’ Translated by Neugroschel, in *Story of the Eye*, 75.

¹⁰³ Bataille, *Histoire de l’oeil*, 90. Translated by Neugroschel, in *Story of the Eye*, 67. Simon Baker, explores the use of the guillotine in Surrealist writings as a way of identifying with ‘historically contested and potentially divisive commemorations of France’s revolutionary past.’ He specifically highlights the use of the guillotine in the work of Robert Desnos, who calls for a return to the Terror, and, in *La Liberté*

which Bataille identifies himself with the sun—not the illuminating sun, but the ‘immonde parodie du soleil torride et aveuglant’ (‘filthy parody of the torrid and blinding sun’).¹⁰⁴ In 1930, in *Documents* (where he also published ‘Eye: Cannibal Delicacy’), Bataille would associate the madness produced by this ‘blinding’ sun with auto-mutilation as he imagines Vincent van Gogh—after the cutting of his ear—staring at this ‘sphère éblouissante (ce que certains aliénistes ont tenu autrefois pour un signe d’incurable folie)’ (‘blinding sphere (which certain doctors in the past held to be a sign of incurable madness’)) from the window of his room at the sanatorium in Saint-Rémy.¹⁰⁵ Bataille returns to the notion of the solar anus with ‘Le Jesuve’ and ‘L’Oeil pineal’ (‘The Pineal Eye’).¹⁰⁶ René Descartes originally theorised that the brain’s pineal gland was responsible for uniting the body and the soul. Bataille, however, writes of the pineal gland (a small region in the midline of the human brain responsible for producing melatonin) as a vestigial eye, bursting forth through the skull ‘comme un volcan en éruption horribles’ (‘like a horrible erupting volcano’).¹⁰⁷ As Jay notes, Bataille alters the discussion of the superiority of human sight in Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*,¹⁰⁸ arguing that the horizontal axis of our eyesight is a remnant of our animality, while the pineal eye looks

ou *L’Amour* (1927), writes that he approves ‘that the magnificent obelisk [of the Place de la Concorde] has been replaced by an adorable guillotine.’ In the same work, he imagines The Marquis de Sade alongside Robespierre, waiting to be executed, and asks ‘love and hate, can they inspire other acts? A paper balloon drifts lightly over the theatre of revolution. . .’ Baker calls this image ‘perhaps the most effective and emblematic of all surrealist representations of the Revolution.’ See Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 26–54.

¹⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, *L’Anus solaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 86. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Georges Bataille, ‘La Mutilation sacrificielle et l’oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh,’ *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 260. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 62.

¹⁰⁶ As Denis Hollier notes, Bataille made five separate attempts at elucidating the ‘myth’ of the pineal eye—a mission that he never completed. See ‘The Caesarean’ in Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 117.

¹⁰⁷ Georges Bataille, ‘Le Jesuve,’ *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 14. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 74.

¹⁰⁸ Originally published in German as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* in 1930. Freud posits that before man walked upright, smell was the most important of the senses, and the anal and excremental were not yet repressed. With the evolution of an upright posture, the primacy of smell was replaced by sight, which Freud argues initiated the beginnings of civilisation. See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 21 (London: Vintage, 2001), 99.

vertically from the skull, blinding itself by staring at the sun.¹⁰⁹ Despite its verticality, the pineal eye is not associated with elevating principles, but with baseness: its ‘discharges of energy as violent and indecent as those that make the anal protuberances of some apes so horrible to see,’ and its soliciting of ‘atrocious screams, the screams of a magnificent and stinking ejaculation.’¹¹⁰

How does Miró—much of whose oeuvre engaged with metaphor, poetry, and a seeming appreciation for the eye motif—fit within this wider rejection of vision? One detects a hint of ocular violence in *The Hunter*, in which the large disembodied eye at the centre of the composition is bisected by the horizon line. The prevailing readings of this motif, however, understand it to be an all-seeing eye. In *Magnetic Fields*, Margit Rowell notes an affinity between Miró’s motif and a collage by Ernst for Paul Éluard’s *Répétitions* (1922) (Fig. 27). Ernst’s composition shows a similarly detached eye ‘pierced’ by a line or thread, which Rowell interprets as a continuous line of vision passing from one side of the organ to the other, and thus uniting ‘interior and external’ vision.¹¹¹ As one would expect, however, Miró’s approach to the eye shifts in the late 1920s with the advent of anti-painting. One identifies within the project of anti-painting an attack on representation, targeting both the role of the active ‘inner’ eye of the artist and the passive eye of the viewer. In 1927, he challenged the limits of representation with *Musique, Seine, Michel, Bataille et moi*, depicting personages through the inscription of names rather than figural representation. By 1930, the vertical ‘strings’ that Miró places over the figure’s eye in *Painting* (1930) (Fig. 28)—introduced in chapter 2—suggest in their most radical reading a violent assault on the eye, or, at the very least, the obstruction of vision. With their resemblance to scribbles or crossings-out, these ‘strings’ suggest a literal cancellation of the eye itself. Significantly, in this composition Miró limits

¹⁰⁹ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 226–227.

¹¹⁰ Georges Bataille, ‘Le Jesuve,’ 14. Translated by Stoekl et al., in. *Visions of Excess*, 77.

¹¹¹ Rowell and Krauss, *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields*, 77.

his placement of these vertical bands exclusively to the eye, stressing the deliberate nature of this assault. Briony Fer also notes that Bataille identifies this attack on representation in Miró's work in his article on the artist in *Documents*.¹¹² Fer interprets Bataille's use of the metaphor of dust to describe Miró's work thusly: 'It is as if a mass of grains or specs occupies the field of vision and forms a veil against the light. Vision is obscured, and yet the light is ravishing . . . under these conditions, the pleasures of not seeing, or at least not seeing clearly, are intense.'¹¹³

At first look, Miró's 1930 notebooks seem to participate in a Surrealist privileging of the eye, as this organ is one of the few recognisable body parts depicted in the series and because Miró's assault on the eye is less overt than in *Painting*. As mentioned earlier, the relocation of the eye and its conflation with the female sexual organs in the notebooks suggests the violent acts of enucleation and castration. Beyond these psychoanalytic readings, however, there are four instances in the series in which Miró appears to make a direct reference to the theme of cutting in Dalí and Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou*. It is highly likely that Miró would have seen the film, as he was in Paris during its release and was in contact with Dalí throughout 1929–30, and we know that he exhibited at the premiere of the duo's second film, *L'Âge d'Or*, in 1930.¹¹⁴ In F.J.M. 869 (Fig. 29) (a work already discussed in chapter 2 for its amalgamation of bodies), there appears in the top centre of the composition—that is to say, in the 'sky'—a round form that is 'cut' across its middle by a dark cloudlike motif. This lunar and cloud imagery recalls exactly the opening scene from *Un Chien andalou* (Fig. 30), in which Buñuel executes a match cut between a long, thin cloud moving across the glowing moon and a razor slicing across a woman's eye. The motif hovers in-between the heads of the two figures and is situated immediately in line with the female figure's right eye.

¹¹² Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 77.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹⁴ Rowell, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 26.

Miró makes it clear that he had lunar motifs on his mind when he created the series; in an interview, he described the way in which several of the figure's toenails were rendered in such a way so as to resemble crescent moons.¹¹⁵ In one drawing in the series, F.J.M. 857 (Fig. 31), he renders an instantly recognisable crescent-moon motif with facial features adjacent to a figure; its curved edge is intersected (one might say violently) by a circular form that envelops the figure's body. In a further example—numbered F.J.M. 896, which demonstrates the rotated-vulva iconography—Miró draws a figure with a crescent moon for a head, the outline of which cuts through the centre of her oversized eye. One sees the cloud motif repeated in F.J.M. 925, where it again cuts across a form that could easily be interpreted as a moon (in this case, a half-moon). This half-moon, in turn, slices through a second shaded, round motif. As he did in F.J.M. 869, Miró places the moon motif next to a figure's eye; in the case of F.J.M. 925 (Fig. 32), the moon's semicircle form mirrors the shape of the figure's eye to its left, which has been rotated. It also shares its shape with one half of the female figure's vulva, which is divided into two by a straight line, forming two semicircular shapes. The similarities between the moon form and the vulva thus include the female genitals in the act of cutting, as do the similarities between the bisected eye and the vulva in F.J.M. 896, with both compositions strengthening associations between enucleation and castration in Miró's series.

Conclusion

In equating, substituting, and conflating the ocular and the genital, Miró's notebook drawings transgress the generative theme of his 1920s compositions and demonstrate the same metonymic permutation as Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. In reading Miró's mid 1920s to

¹¹⁵ Miró, interview with Gaëton Picon, Mallorca, 1975. Translated by Dinah Harrison, in Picon, *Catalan Notebooks*, 22–23.

early 1930s output through a Bataillean lens, specifically through this use of metonymic chains of resemblance, one uncovers the artist's interest in the controlled image. This indicates a moment during the anti-painting period that suggests Miró's consideration of image-making techniques other than those advocated by mainstream Surrealism, with its focus on the irrational. While this chapter does not seek to disregard the Surrealist influence on Miró's oeuvre, the employment of this limited-term, transpositional image-making combined with the overlapping imagery with *Story of the Eye* strongly suggests that Bataille provided a source of influence on Miró during this period, outside of Surrealist concerns. Furthermore, an investigation into contemporary artistic depictions of the eye by Bataille, Dalí and Buñuel, Masson, and Ernst situates Miró's 1930 sketches and his mission of anti-painting within the greater coeval interest in the 'unseeing eye,' encompassing both the violent termination of vision and the association of the eye with the female genitals. This manifestation of the eye rejects, transgresses, and parodies the Surrealist privileging of the eye—as repeatedly advocated by Breton—as an emblem of poetic or inner vision.

Chapter 4

The Parodic Landscape

By the mid 1930s, Joan Miró's mission of anti-painting—originally born from a personal and professional contempt—would adopt a decidedly political character, becoming inextricably tied to contemporary events in Spain. Commenting specifically on a series of small paintings initiated in 1935, Miró explains: "They mark the beginning of the cruel and difficult years that the world lived through . . . they swarm with oppositions, conflicts, contrasts. I call them my "savage paintings." Thinking about death led me to create monsters that both attracted and repelled me."¹ If Georges Bataille once described Miró's paintings as resembling the 'traces of some unknown disaster,'² then the savage paintings show the atmosphere of overwhelming trepidation that *foreshadows* such a disaster. Responding to the rise of fascism in Spain, during a period known as the *bienio*

¹ Joan Miró, 'Miró,' interview with Denys Chevalier, *Aujourd'hui: Art et Architecture* (November 1962). Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews in Margit Rowell, ed., *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 267.

² Georges Bataille, 'Joan Miró: Peintures récentes,' *Documents* 2, no. 7 (1930): 399.

negro (two black years), these works depict anxious, foreboding scenes inhabited by strange creatures, bewildered peasants, and precariously volcanoes—all of which are rendered in astonishing, acidic, otherworldly colours. While the savage paintings signal a return to painting, they do so only because the artist needed to capture the ‘maximum feeling of aggressiveness’ and drama through a use of colour that drawing could not accommodate.³ True to his anti-painting experimentation, Miró seamlessly alternates between the non-traditional mediums of oil paint on copper support and tempera on Masonite, demonstrating technical mastery over both.⁴

This chapter explores the ways in which the savage paintings repeat themes, imagery, and even specific motifs from the artist’s earlier canvases and subject them to a parodic inversion. It is my view that Miró transforms the peaceful, pastoral scenes from his 1920s works into nightmarish wastelands in order to confront the mounting political violence of the *bienio negro*.⁵ I examine Miró’s treatment of the Catalan landscape in the savage paintings and the repurposing of motifs from earlier works through the notion of parody as set forth by Bataille in his short text *L’Anus solaire* (*The Solar Anus*), written in 1927 and published in 1931. In this work, Bataille argues that the earth and cosmos function through a ‘purely parodic’ structuring, which unites seemingly opposing natural phenomena. Specifically, he contrasts the image of solar energy with the violent

³ Joan Miró, ‘Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work,’ interview with Lluís Permanyer, April 1978. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Select Writings and Interviews*, 292.

⁴ Masonite was invented in the United States in 1924, with mass production underway by 1930. It is made of wooden chips that are steamed to form fibers, which are then pressed and heated to create boards. Miró praises these materials in his letters from 1935 and 1936, for their ‘maximum resistance.’ For more on the introduction of Masonite into Miró’s work, see Robert Lubar, ‘Small Paintings on Masonite and Copper, 1935–1936,’ in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927–1937*, ed. Anne Umland (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 182–199.

⁵ While the landscape of Mont-Roig del Camp holds a place of undisputable importance across Miró’s oeuvre, art historical scholarship on the subject typically centres on examples from the mid 1920s, specifically *The Farm* (1922), *The Tilled Field* (1923), and *The Hunter* (*Catalan Landscape*) (1924); the savage landscapes, meanwhile, have very little scholarly representation. The savage paintings were displayed and included in short catalogue essays accompanying the exhibitions *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 182–199, and *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 72–97.

terrestrial excretions of active volcanoes, which serve as the earth's anus.⁶ Furthermore, both Miró and Bataille employ the image of the volcano as a metaphor for social upheaval. I also consider the connections that *The Solar Anus* and the savage paintings share with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the 'eternal recurrence,' as well as with the examination of the carnivalesque in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*. The employment of parodic humour in the work of Miró, Bataille, Nietzsche, and Bakhtin provides a basis for exploring laughter as a weapon against anguish and as a vehicle for self-loss. Finally, this chapter identifies overlaps between Miró's work and that of his and Bataille's mutual friend André Masson, who was residing in Spain during the *bienio negro* and whose contemporary work confronts political events and engages with Nietzschean themes.

The Bienio Negro

Prior to investigating the parodic elements of Miró's savage paintings, it is necessary to understand firstly the political climate of Catalonia during their creation and, secondly, Miró's state of mind during this period. In 1932 Miró had decided—for financial reasons—to return to his parents' home at 4 Pasaje del Credito in Barcelona with his wife and one-year-old daughter.⁷ By this time, the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera's regime had fallen and a new republican government (the Second Spanish Republic) had

⁶ Georges Bataille, *L'Anus solaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 79–86. This expressed interest in parody has become one of the principal lenses through which Bataille's oeuvre is read in scholarship of the last two decades. See, for instance, Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, 'Bataille's "The Solar Anus" or the Parody of Parodies,' *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 25, no. 2 (2001): 354–375. See also Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 52–65. Kendall discusses Bataille's employment of parody in 'The Solar Anus' through the 'play of opposites' and the 'misunderstanding of scissiparity.' For more on Bataille and parody, see my discussion of *Story of the Eye* in chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁷ Jacques Dupin, *Miró*, trans. James Petterson (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 167.

been established.⁸ Accorded the nickname *la niña bonita* (the pretty young girl), the opening years of the Second Republic brought sentiments of optimism with the ushering in of political reforms by the Republican left.⁹ During this *bienio de reformas* (two years of reforms), Spain saw the beginnings of the separation of church and state, the expansion of educational facilities, military and agrarian reforms, changes in labour relations, the expansion of public works, and increased regional autonomy for Catalonia.¹⁰

The implementation of the division of church and state under the Second Republic attracted the attention of French Surrealists, who, according to Robin Adèle Greeley, seemed to have been previously uninterested in contemporary Spanish politics.¹¹ Owing to his fervent Catalan nationalism, however, Miró would likely have been most excited about the increased autonomy awarded to Catalonia during this era of reform. Francesc Macià, founder and leader of the pro-independence party Estat Català, declared an independent Catalan republic within the Iberian Federation—against the arrangements of the Pact of San Sebastian.¹² Macià's motivations seem to have been an acceleration of the independence process rather than sabotage, but nevertheless, three Republican cabinet ministers rushed to Barcelona to insist that Catalan autonomy would be a constitutional process.¹³ By 1932 a statute of regional autonomy was created for Catalonia and the Generalitat (the Catalan regional government) was granted control

⁸ Primo de Rivera established his dictatorship in 1923 through a coup d'état and governed with the support of King Alfonso XIII. In 1930, due to economic and social pressures and the loss of military support, de Rivera's regime suffered a loss of legitimacy. He was forced to resign and retreat to Paris. Alfonso was later forced to abdicate and was exiled in Rome. The consequential calling of elections led to the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic on 14 April 1931. As previously stated in chapter 2, it took over one year for these elections to finally be held, during which time Spain was ruled by an ineffective and unpopular interim government.

⁹ José Maria Magone, *Contemporary Spanish Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 10.

¹⁰ Stanley G. Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933–1936: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 16.

¹¹ Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 193. The Surrealist interest in Spain would, however, spike in 1936 when the French government ceased providing aid and closed its borders to refugees one month into the Civil War.

¹² Stanley G. Payne, *Spain's First Democracy: The Second Republic, 1931–1936* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 40. The Pact of San Sebastian was a meeting between Spanish republican parties who agreed to unite and overthrow the monarchy. It took place on 17 August 1930, after which a revolutionary committee was formed.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 40.

over education, public works, finance, and health sectors and was met with celebrations across the region.¹⁴ It is important to remember, however, that despite these celebrations, the political situation in Spain was still far from idyllic, and for many of Spain's working and peasant classes, these reforms were insufficient. In the autumn of 1932, for instance, the country experienced strikes, bomb explosions, attacks on churches, and clashes between civilians and police.

While the reforms set forth by the left appeared initially promising, the formation of the Republic coincided with the Great Depression, and the Spanish government would soon be caught in an impossible position between middle and lower classes. Paul Preston explains how the left was caught in a 'state of revolutionary tension:' if the government met the working class demands for the expropriation of large estates and factories, the army would likely intervene and threaten the Republic. Alternatively, if the revolutionary demands of the working class were quashed in order to assuage the middle class, the Republican coalition would lose its much-needed support.¹⁵ In trying to compromise, the left managed to anger both sides.¹⁶

While the left was struggling with the economic crisis and balancing between the demands of the middle and working classes, the right was receiving considerable donations from Spain's elite—including the prominent businessman Juan March.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Catholic party Acción Popular and approximately forty other rightist organisations united as the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) under the leadership of José Mariá Gil-Robles, who was formerly a key member of the Acción Popular party.¹⁸ In the months prior to the 1933 elections, parallels were being drawn between political events in Spain and in Germany, and the contemporary decline

¹⁴ Payne, *Spain's First Democracy*, 105.

¹⁵ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana, 1996), 33–34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* March was likely the wealthiest man in Spain at the time and an important early supporter of Franco.

¹⁸ Confederation of the Autonomous Right.

of the Weimar Republic was often cited by both the left (as a cautionary tale) and the right (as a course to emulate).¹⁹ Gil-Robles was certainly looking to the Nazi Party's rise in Germany and even attended a Nuremberg Rally, the rhetoric of which is evident in a campaign speech he gave shortly after in Madrid: 'we need full power and that is what we demand. Democracy is not an end but a means to the conquest of the new state. When the time comes, either parliament submits or we will eliminate it.'²⁰

By 1933, the *bienio de reformas* would give way to the *bienio negro*, in which the CEDA sought to reverse the reforms implemented by the Republican left. The CEDA won the most votes in the 1933 election, though it did not achieve an overall majority. Niceto Alcalá Zamora, president of the Republic, was therefore not obligated to invite Gil-Robles to form a government and instead appointed Alejandro Lerroux of the Radical Republican Party to the position of prime minister. The CEDA soon joined the Radical Republicans in a coalition and saw the appointment of three ministers to the Lerroux government in October 1934.²¹ While the inadequacy of the leftist reforms (in combination with the economic crisis) had led peasants and workers to a state of desperation, the reversal of these reforms by the new rightist regime propelled them to outright violence.²² Consequently, the years 1933–1935 were marked by street-level violent clashes between left and right, workers' strikes, mass deportation of striking workers and peasants, fascist-style rallies, and the founding of the Falange.²³

In October of 1934, following the appointment of CEDA ministers to the government, left-wing insurrections broke out across the country, with the worst of the violence focused in Asturias (in the form of a miners' strike) and Catalonia.²⁴ Catalonia

¹⁹ Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 34.

²⁰ José Mariá Gil-Robles, speech in Madrid, October 15, 1933, later published in *El Debate*, October 17, 1933. Translated by Paul Preston, in *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 43.

²¹ Magone, *Contemporary Spanish Politics*, 11.

²² Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 45–73.

²⁴ Magone, *Contemporary Spanish Politics*, 11.

had been swept up in a wave of nationalism that had threatened to turn violent: many students and professors became hostile towards the continued use of Castilian at universities, and leaflets urged Catalans not to sully their blood by marrying Castilians.²⁵ On 5 October, the *escamots* (the most conservative and nationalistic of Catalan paramilitary groups) began tearing up railway lines to the west of Lérida in an effort to free Catalonia from Spain.²⁶ On 6 October, Lluís Companys, then president of the Generalitat, proclaimed from the balcony of the Generalitat headquarters: ‘Catalans: Monarchists and fascists have assaulted the government. . . . the democratic Republic is in great peril,’ and declared the formation of the independent ‘Catalan State in the Spanish Federal Republic.’²⁷ Soon after, martial law was declared throughout Catalonia and, after light artillery response by the army in Barcelona, Companys was forced to surrender the Generalitat at 6:00 a.m. the following day.²⁸ Seventy-eight people died in the insurrection and Catalan autonomy was soon after suspended.²⁹ The events in Asturias and Catalonia, which led to further hostility between left and right, are understood as crucial antecedents for the forthcoming Civil War.³⁰

Preston and others have argued that the bitter political polarisation during the *bienio negro* signalled at the time an atmosphere ‘if not of imminent civil war, certainly of great belligerence. The left saw fascism in every action of the right; the right smelt revolution in every left-wing move.’³¹ It is in this political climate that Miró painted the savage paintings; he completed the series in May of 1936—two months before the start

²⁵ Gabriel Jackson, *Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–39* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 151.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁷ Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic*, 87.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Jackson, *Contemporary Spanish Politics*, 11. André Masson, who fled to Barcelona in 1934 after the fascist riots in Paris on 6 February, found himself in the middle of this violent Catalan uprising. He would later receive visits from Bataille and Michel Leiris in 1935, although there is no evidence to confirm that Miró was in contact with Masson during this period. See Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 119

³¹ Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 39.

of the Spanish Civil War on 17–18 July. His recollection in 1978 of his motivations for painting the series confirm this atmosphere of impending violence:

I had that unconscious feeling of impending disaster. Like before it rains; a heavy feeling in the head, aching bones, and asphyxiating dampness. It was a physical rather than moral sensation. I had a feeling a catastrophe was about to happen, but I didn't know what: it was the Spanish Civil War and the World War. I tried to depict this sensation of tragedy that gripped me inside.³²

In the catalogue for the recent Miró retrospective at the Tate Modern (2011–2012), Robert Lubar elucidates the issues that arise when attempting to tackle the question of Miró's politics. While undoubtedly on the left of the political spectrum, Miró was 'notoriously reluctant' to align himself with any particular party; in fact, he deliberately avoided overt partisan association until he contributed *Aidez L'Espagne* and *The Reaper* in aid of the Spanish Republic in 1937.³³ While these two works, produced as propaganda, were accordingly obvious in their messages, the artist's other Catalan peasants and landscapes employ different, subtler political themes that are nevertheless inseparably bound to nationalism. The *Head of a Catalan Peasant* series (Fig. 1) is unambiguous in its nationalism, which is made plain by the figure's *barretina* (the peasant's cap), but is also closely tied to contemporary politics—specifically, the repression of Catalan culture under Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. Greeley argues that this series 'attempted to demarcate something essential about Catalan identity that would survive in the face of such political upsets.'³⁴ She also notes how reviewers of Miró's

³² Joan Miró, Miró, 'Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work,' 'Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work.' Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 292.

³³ Robert Lubar, 'Miró's Commitment,' in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, London, ed. Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 33.

³⁴ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 22.

1925 exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in Paris, where these works were shown, celebrated the series for ‘promoting Catalan nationalism in the international sphere at a time when the censorship of all things Catalan reigned at home.’³⁵ During the Spanish Civil War, just before the fall of Barcelona to fascist forces, Miró would manifest his passionate nationalism through a direct self-association with the Catalan soil itself. David Lomas brings to one’s attention a superb drawing from the archives of the Fundació Joan Miró (Fig. 2), in which the artist depicts a lone eye staring out from within the landscape of the Catalan mountain Montserrat—a place that, as we will see, also held important spiritual value for Masson.³⁶ In an inscription on the drawing, Miró informs us that the work is in fact a self-portrait. Chapter 7 of my thesis describes in detail the ‘spiritual’ connection that Miró had to the Catalan terrain.

Lomas rightfully notes that, during this period, Miró moves ever further away from André Breton’s characterisation of him as an artist whose only concern was painting itself.³⁷ I would add that Miró makes his position plain in an important statement made in *Cahiers d’Art* in 1939: ‘the outer world, the world of contemporary events, always has an influence on the painter—that goes without saying. If the interplay of lines and colours does not expose the inner drama of the creator, then it is nothing more than bourgeois entertainment.’³⁸ In the same statement, he warns that ‘if the powers of backwardness known as fascism continue to spread, however, if they push us any farther into the dead end of cruelty and incomprehension, that will be the end of all human dignity.’³⁹ The savage paintings differ from both the suggestive iconography of flags and *barretinas* in the works that precede them and the overt militancy of the

³⁵ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 22. One reviewer, Joseph Carner, writing for *Le Veu Catalunya*, was prompted by Miró’s works to suggest that repression at home only ensured that the Catalan presence grew stronger internationally.

³⁶ David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 197.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁸ Joan Miró, ‘Statement,’ *Cahiers d’Art* (April–May 1939). Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 166.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

propagandistic works that follow, and instead convey Miró's political anxieties through metaphor and parody to express this 'inner drama.'

Catalan Landscapes

It is my interpretation that in the savage painting *Figures in the Presence of a Metamorphosis* (Fig. 3), Miró depicts the Catalan countryside undergoing a literal, physical transformation as a metaphor for the ongoing political uncertainty in Spain. In the painting, a male and female figure, both subjected to bodily deformation, gaze upon a form previously described by Lubar as 'part animal, part landscape,' which is undergoing a process of 'simultaneous corporeal fusion and separation, its extremities scattered in space and its anatomical parts quasi-liquefied.'⁴⁰ This terrestrial metamorphosis, I believe, mirrors the *bienio negro* itself as a violent transfiguration that was still in process, its outcome not yet decided at the time of Miró's painting. Accordingly, Miró does not represent the consequence of this mysterious metamorphosis in much the same way that he avoids casting a villain or other manifestation of a threat throughout the entirety of the savage paintings—because he did not yet know the form this menace would take. In using such an approach Miró visually manifests his own expressed anxieties experienced during the *bienio negro*, which are worth repeating here: 'I had a feeling a catastrophe was about to happen, but I didn't know what . . .'⁴¹

Visually, the savage paintings appear to reflect the sense of disquietude gripping Spain (and Miró, personally) during the *bienio negro*. A prevailing theme across the series is the figures' inability to comprehend their surroundings. From the first painting in the series, *Figures in Front of a Volcano* (Fig. 4), one sees panicked characters look on at the

⁴⁰ Lubar, 'Small Paintings on Masonite and Copper,' 186.

⁴¹ Miró, 'Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work.' Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 292.

landform with fear and confusion, raising their enormous hands and holding their mouths agape. Similarly, in the profoundly cynical following image, *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* (Fig. 5), two figures gaze in bewilderment at an erect and glowing turd. Here, the female figure possesses an *informe* sexuality reminiscent of the artist's 1930 notebook drawings, by which her vulva hangs between her legs like a phallus. Both figures are brutish, possessing holes for eyes and prehensile feet. This formlessness is repeated in the next drawing, *Figures and Birds in a Landscape* (Fig. 6), in which a nightmarish bacchanal is framed on one side by a hermaphroditic figure and by a human-bird hybrid on the other. The central character in this work appears to be in the act of both ejaculating—or urinating—onto another figure and passing gas. The next three in the series, *Nocturne* (Fig. 7), *Figures in the Presence of a Metamorphosis*, and *The Two Philosophers* (Fig. 8) continue this theme of confusion; in each one figures unsuccessfully attempt to understand the world around them, examining holes in the ground, metamorphosing landscape elements, and volcanic hotspots, respectively.

The series continues with *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain* (Fig. 9). These figures, barely human in appearance—with their oversized, thorny feet and huge heads—march blindly towards a volcano. In *Two Personages in Love with a Woman* (Fig. 10) one sees a similar attraction to danger, as two male figures stand before the object of their attraction, in this case an immense and monstrous female figure with mantis-like jowls, another instance of animal-human merging. *Seated Personages* and *Personages, Mountains, Sky, Star, Bird* continue this theme of grotesque, barely human figures, inheriting the spirit of Miró's 1930 figuration. In *Seated Personages* (Fig. 11), the figures appear skeletal and multi-limbed, stacked atop one another in an indeterminate space. In *Personages, Mountains, Sky, Star, Bird*, the figures are contorted and folded, and the central figure appears as though his body is merging with the landscape around him (Fig. 12). *Catalan Peasant at Rest* (Fig. 13) differs greatly from the gaiety of Miró's earlier peasant

scenes. The drooping and elongation of both the peasant and the horse's limbs—further emphasised by the vertically oriented bands of colour in the centre of the composition—contributes to a sense of dejection. The series concludes with *Personages and Mountains* (Fig. 14), the green landscape of which differs from the bleakness of the previous desert scenes. This greenery, however, offers no promise of redemption, and the figures within this composition remain just as deformed—stretched, crushed, and mutilated—as those in the rest of the series.

Two elements of the savage paintings are made abundantly clear, even on initial viewing. Firstly, the brilliant, irradiated colour that Miró employs in both the tempera and oil paintings contributes to a profound and overwhelming sense of danger. The comparatively neutral, naturalistic palate of *The Farm* (1921-1922) and *The Tilled Field* (1923-1924) are replaced with these unnaturally saturated colours. Greeley notes a similar functioning of colour in Miró's 1934 pastels, although I would argue that the level of intensity (likely owing to medium) in these works does not reach the degree of violence that appears in the savage paintings. In examining *Man with a Pipe* (1934) (Fig. 15), Greeley argues that 'social violence in Miró's homeland' provoked the use of 'ferocious colour'.⁴² One observes a similar use of colour in Masson's works of the *bienio negro* (during which time he was in Spain). His *Andalusian Reapers* (Fig. 16), shares its subject matter and scorching colours with Miró's scenes of suffering peasants. A second observation that one notes upon confronting the savage paintings is how, within the series, each element is in some way indeterminate; there is no sense of certainty. Masculinity, femininity, humanity (or animality) are all in flux—even the space itself is in the process of metamorphosis. Most disturbing is that the source of the danger is never identified—although it is represented metaphorically as a volcano—thus mirroring Spain itself, where war was imminent but had not yet erupted.

⁴² Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 34.

While Jacques Dupin's commentary on the paintings presents the series as an almost prophetic foreshadowing of the Civil War,⁴³ it is important to remember that by this time Spain was already facing a repression of the left in the form of strikes, uprisings, and the reversal of Republican social reforms by the CEDA government.⁴⁴ A historically based, perhaps less romantic, reading of the savage paintings suggests that they are a personal response to a precarious social and political climate, rather than prescient. Art historians writing on Salvador Dalí have been similarly determined in dispelling prophetic associations with *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans*, which was also completed in 1936 before the outbreak of the Civil War. As Nigel Glendinning notes, the addition of the subtitle *Premonition of Civil War* occurred later, likely in an attempt to 'boost the sense of Dalinian percipience: the artist as prophet.'⁴⁵ C. Brian Morris, reviewing Greeley's *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, agrees that the subtitle is 'opportunistic' and that the work should not be considered a 'Spanish Civil War painting' as it was begun in 1934 and completed six months before the outbreak of the war.⁴⁶ It is my position that the savage paintings should be similarly stripped of their prophetic associations and understood instead as reflections of a society undergoing the stages of a transformation and the accompanying anxieties thereof. While it cannot be argued that Miró knew that a civil war would break out, his recollections make plain that at the time he was painting the series, he was experiencing apprehension in the face of an unknown, unseen threat.

⁴³ Dupin, *Miró*, 189.

⁴⁴ Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 45–46.

⁴⁵ Steven M. Hart, *¡No Pasarán!: Art, Literature and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Tamesis Books, 1988), 38.

⁴⁶ C. Brian Morris, 'Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War by Robin Adèle Greeley,' *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 3 (September 2008): 703.

Parody

The savage paintings take the familiar Catalan landscapes of Miró's early work and transform them into something other, something malevolent and sinister. In spite of their bizarre colours and forms, Miró insisted that his savage paintings are rooted in the real. Indeed, in a letter to his dealer Pierre Matisse on 19 February 1936—written while Miró was painting *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain*—he spoke of the ability of his present work to 'transport' the viewer 'into a world of *real unreality*'.⁴⁷ Throughout the series Miró provides several hints that the fantastic landscapes depicted in the savage paintings are, in fact, the same Catalan countryside that dominates his paintings of the early to mid 1920s. My argument is that Bataillean parody—as expounded in *The Solar Anus*—provides a basis for examining the ways in which Miró's savage paintings function as acerbic reworkings of his earlier Catalan landscapes, through the reclaiming and subversion of motifs and themes from the artist's earlier works.

Bataille's *The Solar Anus* is principally preoccupied with the struggle between opposing objects and natural forces (horizontal and vertical, high and low, sunshine and rain, etc.). He describes the way in which all living things on the earth are caught in a struggle against their natural limitations. Plant life rises, erect, to meet the sun, only to be struck down by lightning, or uprooted, before returning 'avec un autre forme' ('in another form'), while humans, despite standing upright, avoid looking up at the sun, since 'les yeux humains ne supportent ni le soleil, ni le coït, ni le cadavre, ni l'obscurité . . .' ('human eyes cannot tolerate neither sun, coitus, cadavers, nor obscurity . . .').⁴⁸ Two forces, seemingly opposing—the movement between high and low that I have just

⁴⁷ Joan Miró, letter to Pierre Matisse, Barcelona, 4 Pasaje Credito, February 19, 1936. Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 125.

⁴⁸ Bataille, *L'Anus solaire*, 84–85. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 7–8.

described, as well as the earth's rotation—reciprocally propel one another in a manner that Bataille describes as sexual:

C'est ainsi qu'on s'aperçoit que la terre en tournant fait coïter les animaux et les hommes et (comme ce qui résulte est aussi bien la cause que provoque) que les animaux et les hommes font tourner la terre en coïtant.

(one notes that the earth, by turning, makes animals and men have coitus, and (because the result is as much the cause as that which provokes it) that animals and men make the earth turn by having coitus.)⁴⁹

From this 'polymorphous' and 'organic' sexual coupling of the earth and sun comes the motions of the sea, which are born from 'the uniform coitus of the earth with the moon.'⁵⁰ Stuart Kendall rightly notes that Bataille, in *The Solar Anus*, produces a 'myth of a general economy' in the continuous circulation of energy throughout the globe and within the entire cosmos.⁵¹ This cosmic sexuality is also closely tied to the author's writings on self-loss; Bataille would later expound on this condition of communal eroticism in his 1957 book *L'Érotisme* (*Eroticism*) (discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis), but one notes early evidence of this interest in *The Solar Anus*, where he writes:

Un homme placé au milieu des autres est irrité de savoir pourquoi il n'est pas l'un des autres.

Couché dans un lit auprès d'une fille qu'il aime, il oublie qu'il ne sait pas pourquoi il est lui au lieu d'être le corps qu'il touche.

⁴⁹ Bataille, *L'Anus solaire*, 82. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 6–7.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹ Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, 55.

. . . Ils auront beau se chercher avidement les uns les autres: ils ne trouveront jamais que des images parodiques et s'endormiront aussi vides que des miroirs.

(A man who finds himself among others is irritated because he does not know why he is not one of the others.

In bed next to a girl he loves, he forgets that he does not know why he is himself instead of the body he touches.

. . . They can very well try to find each other; they will never find anything but parodic images, and they will fall asleep as empty as mirrors.)⁵²

In the world that he describes in *The Solar Anus*, Bataille expresses parody through the merging of ostensibly opposing or unrelated objects or forces. He posits the parodic structure of the world, whereby each and every form and phenomenon found throughout the globe recalls, subverts, or ridicules another: 'le cerveau est la parodie de l'équateur. Le coït est la parodie du crime' ('the brain is the parody of the equator. Coitus is the parody of crime').⁵³ Making this condition plain in the opening line of his text, Bataille writes: 'il est clair que le monde est purement parodique, c'est-à-dire que chaque chose qu'on regarde est la parodie d'une autre, ou encore la meme chose sous une forme décevante' ('it is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form').⁵⁴ Consequently, through this cyclical parodying of forms, the sun—the archetypal symbol of elevation and enlightenment—becomes equated with an anus—the ultimate symbol of baseness.⁵⁵ This image recalls a quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus*

⁵² Bataille, *L'Anus solaire*, 82–83. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 8.

⁵³ Ibid., 81. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Jeremy Biles, *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 53.

Spoke Zarathustra) (1883–85), which similarly couples opposites: ‘the night is also a sun.’⁵⁶ Unlike Nietzsche, though, Bataille frames his parodic image—much like he did when describing the recycling of energies within the earth and cosmos—in terms of erotic expenditure. Specifically commenting on his construct of the solar anus, Bataille writes that ‘le Soleil aime exclusivement la Nuit et dirige vers la terre sa violence lumineuse, verge ignoble. . .’ (‘the Sun exclusively loves the Night and directs its luminous violence, its ignoble shaft, towards the earth . . .’)⁵⁷

Kendall’s commentary on the functioning of parody in Bataille’s work provides a helpful basis for examining how Miró’s savage paintings similarly engage with the parodic. Kendall writes: ‘a derivative work merely copies a respected original; a parody degrades that original with mocking mimicry, assaults its absent and abandoned authority, while nevertheless remaining indebted to it. Parody is the literary equivalent of transgression, upholding as it undermines.’⁵⁸ A parody, in this sense, cannot simply refer to a previous work but must subject its referent to transgression, mockery, or debasement. Accordingly, when Bataille equates himself with natural phenomena, declaring ‘JE SUIS LE SOLEIL’ (‘I AM THE SUN’), he aligns himself not with a symbol of illumination, but rather with ‘a filthy parody of the torrid and blinding sun,’ which he calls ‘the Jesuve.’⁵⁹ Emphasising the parodic nature of Bataille’s sun, the moniker ‘Jesuve’ combines the French ‘je’ with the volcano ‘Vesuvius’ and with ‘Jesus.’ The name thus embodies the self, the base (as the volcano, according to Bataille, is the earth’s anus), and the divine. Bataille would rearticulate these ideas in a 1930 article entitled ‘Soleil pourri’ (‘Rotten Sun’), part of the ‘Hommage à Picasso’ published in *Documents*. Here, Bataille employs the myth of Icarus to presents these two ways by which one can consider the

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Classics, 1961), 331.

⁵⁷ Bataille, *L’Anus solaire*, 86. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 9.

⁵⁸ Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, 52.

⁵⁹ Bataille, *L’Anus solaire*, 81. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 9.

sun: ‘il partage clairement le soleil en deux, celui qui luisait au moment de l’élévation d’Icare et celui qui a fondu la cire, déterminant la défection et la chute criarde quand Icare s’est approché trop près’ (‘it clearly splits the sun in two—the one that was shining at the moment of Icarus’s elevation, and the one that melted the wax, causing failure and a screaming fall when Icarus got too close’).⁶⁰ The second, ‘horribly ugly,’ ‘rotten sun’ brings forth associations with sacrifice, madness, horror, refuse, combustion, and slaughter.⁶¹

Throughout his oeuvre, Miró similarly identifies himself with a symbol—not the sun, but his representation of the Catalan peasant. Charles Palermo’s *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miró in the 1920s* has previously argued that the figure in *Head of a Catalan Peasant IV* (1925) functions as a ‘surrogate’ for the artist, while the background ‘serves as both the body of the “mediator” and as a space that Miró can think of as extending his own.’⁶² Similarly, Christopher Green suggests that the Catalan peasant paintings are ‘displaced self-portraits.’⁶³ During the Spanish Civil War Miró would use the image of the Catalan peasant in revolt in two of his most famous works of the period: *The Reaper* and *Aidez L’Espagne* (Fig. 17)—both of which were displayed at the Spanish Republic’s pavilion at the Paris International Exposition in 1937. Aligning the peasant motif with his own artistic practice (and, of course, with his anti-fascist sentiments), Miró has inscribed beneath the image in *Aidez L’Espagne*:

Dans la lutte actuelle, je vois du côté fasciste les forces périmées, de l’autre côté le peuple dont les immenses ressources créatrices donneront à l’Espagne un élan qui étonnera le monde.

⁶⁰ Georges Bataille, ‘Soleil pourri,’ *Documents* 2, no. 3 (1930), 174. Translated by Allan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 58.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Charles Palermo, *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miró in the 1920s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 124.

⁶³ Christopher Green, ‘Miró’s Catalan Peasants,’ in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, 68.

(In this present battle I see on the fascist side just the outdated forces, and on the other side, the people whose immense creative resources will give Spain a power that will astonish the world.)

Comparing the artist's treatment of the peasant in his 1920s output with the savage paintings provides a starting point for examining how the latter series mockingly transforms the features of the Catalan peasant and the countryside. In Miró's early work, the Catalan peasant is presented as being at one with the landscape that surrounds him. The peasants till their fields, farm crops, raise livestock, hunt animals, and then prepare meals from the fruits of their labour. This bucolic idealism is emphasised in works like *Threshing the Wheat* (1918) (Fig. 18) and *The Farmers' Meal* (1925) (Fig. 19). The relationship is symbiotic: the peasants care for the earth and nourish it (with their own excrement, as in the case of *The Hunter*) and the land, in turn, provides them with sustenance. Carolyn Lanchner has previously noted that the oversized feet of Miró's peasant figures serve to emphasise this connection that the Catalan peasant has to the countryside, rooting them to the earth.⁶⁴ One can see this motif expressed clearly in several paintings and drawings from the mid 1920s in which figural representation is reduced to a simplistic body attached to a single, enormous foot (Fig. 20). Extending this connection between the peasant and the land that he works is the transparent head of the hunter in *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* (Fig. 21). A precursor to the *Head of a Catalan Peasant* series, in which the blue-washed background serves as the body of the figure, in *The Hunter*, Miró uses the pinks and yellows of the terrain to serve as physical components of the figure's corporeality.⁶⁵ The landscape is thus an inseparable constituent of the figure. As Lanchner notes, this relationship is complementary; she

⁶⁴ Carolyn Lanchner, *Joan Miró* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 57.

⁶⁵ Palermo, *Fixed Ecstasy*, 100.

writes: 'If the hunter's body is deprived of mass, a compensatory sensuality is assigned to the earth, enveloped in a skin of fresh pink paint.'⁶⁶ Affirming this view is Miró's own declaration that the Catalan peasant is a figure who 'stems from the earth.'⁶⁷

These early paintings of Catalan landscapes certainly depict a harmonious relationship between man and countryside that is absent from the savage paintings. These new Catalan landscapes do not depict lush fields ready to provide sustenance, but a rocky, infertile terrain. The peasants in Miró's 1920s output are most often depicted as actively engaging with the land, whether tending to fields as in *The Farm* (Fig. 22) or *The Hermitage*, or hunting and preparing animals as seen in *The Hunter* and *Interior (The Farmer's Wife)* (1922-1923). In the savage paintings, conversely, the figures are seldom active⁶⁸ — they are depicted observing a metamorphosis, a volcano, or a pile of excrement but are rarely shown in physical engagement with the landscape. In fact, with the exception of a single horse and a few menacing birds, the savage paintings are devoid of animal life. The once-familiar setting has become foreign and uncomfortable to these figures, who look on as though struggling to understand their environment. As Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale observe, the figures of *The Two Philosophers* appear as equally unable to make sense of the surroundings as their peasant counterparts.⁶⁹ The title of *Catalan Peasant at Rest* emphasizes this passivity and depicts the peasant (identifiable by his *barretina*) slumped over, as though from exhaustion, beside his horse, his *porró* (a Catalan wine pitcher) visible behind him.

There are several instances in the savage paintings where Miró returns to the specific settings of his early 1920s paintings, oftentimes repeating landscape elements from earlier canvases and presenting them in a new, ominous light. The central character

⁶⁶ Lanchner, *Joan Miró*, 25.

⁶⁷ Miró, 'Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work.' Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 293.

⁶⁸ Dupin reaches a similar conclusion in *Miró*, 202.

⁶⁹ Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale, 'The Tipping Point: 1934–9,' in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, 79.

in *Figures and Birds in a Landscape*—which I will discuss in detail shortly—recalls the figure of *The Hunter* in both pose and iconography. The turd in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* similarly recalls the iconography of *The Hunter*. Meanwhile, the bands of colour that stretch vertically across *Catalan Peasant at Rest* call to mind the neat rows depicted in *The Tilled Field* of 1923. Where, in *The Tilled Field* (Fig. 23), these vertical bands lead the eye to an enormous, anthropomorphised tree (which, again stresses the relationship between human and nature in works of this period), in *Catalan Peasant at Rest*, they connect the despondent peasant figure with a volcano or a similar barren, rocky outcrop in the distance. Miró returns to the carob tree (a symbol of Catalonia) in a 1936 construction entitled *Object of Sunset*. Instead of painting a thriving, towering tree, Miró now used a castrated stump of an actual carob tree, to which he attached a metal shackle and chain.

Daniel and Gale, in examining *Nocturne*, note that the large hole that appears in the foreground closely recalls the planting hole around the tree in the centre of *The Farm*. This hole appears as a typical presence in a farming scene, but in the threatening environment of the savage paintings it takes on a more sinister tone, suggesting ‘an opening in reality itself.’⁷⁰ Robert S. Lubar notices another repeating of forms in the ‘corkscrew’ motif occupying the background of *Nocturne*, which relates closely to the coiled motif wrapped around the central figure in *Carnival of Harlequin* (Fig. 24) from 1924–25.⁷¹ I have identified similar ‘coiled’ motifs—a popular motif in Miró’s work of 1924—in the dotted line that wraps around the figure’s body in *The Hunter* and the flame in *The Kerosene Lamp* (1924) (Fig. 25). It is also seen in the centre of the composition in *The Family* (1924) (Fig. 26) and on the left-hand side of *Portrait of Madame B.* (1924) (Fig. 27). In the context of the savage paintings, this spiralling form may represent the winding

⁷⁰ Daniel and Gale, ‘The Tipping Point,’ 79.

⁷¹ Lubar, ‘Small Paintings on Masonite and Copper,’ 186.

trail of smoke from one of the volcanoes that pervade the series. In *Figures in Front of a Volcano*, Miró recycles a motif previously found in the foreground of *Pastorale* (1923-1924) (Fig. 28)—where it likely represents a candle or a kerosene lamp—to denote a cylindrical volcano topped by a flame. These repetitions are, I strongly believe, intentional instances of self-parody on Miró's part and serve as parallels for Spain's metamorphosis during the *bienio negro*.

'Eternal Recurrence,' Laughter, and the Carnavalesque

In the savage paintings and in *The Solar Anus*, Miró and Bataille both demonstrate an enthusiasm for parodic repetition. Bataille, of course, had previously engaged with a simultaneously playful and transgressive recycling of forms in *Story of the Eye*, in which the round form continuously returns in various guises throughout the narrative. These approaches to repetition bring to mind the work of Bataille's hero: Nietzsche and his concept of the 'eternal recurrence,' which puts forth the possibility that time is cyclical and that all things, including ourselves, have existed infinite times before and will continue to exist infinite times over. As mentioned in chapter 3, Bataille referenced the eternal recurrence in his drawing of the eye and guillotine (the 'scaffold's eye'), for his destroyed manuscript *W.C.* (1926). Nietzsche first presents the concept—without the name 'eternal recurrence,' instead calling it 'the heaviest weight'—in aphorism 341 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*), a book that Miró is known to have owned.⁷² In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche introduces the eternal recurrence thusly:

⁷² Miró's copy of *The Gay Science* (translated into French by Alexandre Vialatte) is preserved in the artist's personal library at the Fundació Joan Miró under the call number 1020375.

What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?⁷³

Nietzsche expands on the concept of the eternal return in the third part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, during a scene in which the eponymous character ascends a mountain with a dwarf on his shoulder, which Zarathustra describes as ‘the Spirit of Gravity, my devil and arch-enemy.’⁷⁴ Arriving at a gateway, Zarathustra confronts the dwarf—who had been taunting him—by threatening to reveal his own ‘most abysmal thought,’ which

⁷³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 532.

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 177. For more on the figure of the dwarf in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, see Martin Heidegger, ‘Who Is Nietzsche’s Zarathustra,’ in *Nietzsche. Volume II: The Eternal Return of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 209–236.

he believes the dwarf will not be able to endure.⁷⁵ Zarathustra then talks of the gate ahead of them as a ‘moment’ between the eternal past and eternal future; he ponders: ‘must not all things that *can* run have already run along this lane? Must not things that *can* happen *have* already happened, been done, run past?’⁷⁶ As he becomes increasingly frightened of his own thoughts, Zarathustra wonders:

And this slow spider that creeps along in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you and this gateway whispering together whispering eternal things— must we not all have been here before?

—and must we not return and run down that other lane out before us, down that long terrible lane—must we not return eternally?⁷⁷

The eternal recurrence is explained in greater detail later in the chapter, in a section entitled ‘The Convalescent.’ Zarathustra’s animals tell him:

Everything goes, everything returns; the wheel of existence rolls for ever. Everything dies, everything blossoms anew; the year of existence runs on for ever.

Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of existence builds itself for ever. Everything departs, everything meets again; the ring of existence is true to itself for ever.

Existence begins in every instant; the ball There rolls around every Here. The middle is everywhere. The path of eternity is crooked.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 178.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 234.

While the animals are able to accept the eternal return as a sort-of dance, Zarathustra—now accepting it as truth—becomes angered, nauseated, and pained. He views it as a serpent that creeps into his throat to choke him.⁷⁹ This disparity in reaction to the eternal return owes to the differences between humans and animals, and also recalls the importance placed on one's personal reaction when faced with the reality of the eternal return that Nietzsche sets forth in *The Gay Science*.

Miró returns to the landscapes of Catalonia, in a way that is 'the same but different' (using the same landscapes and motifs but through a different, violent lens), can be understood as a parodic interpretation of the eternal return, in which everything remains precisely the same. In fact, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and specifically the notion of the eternal return, is closely tied to parody. Pierre Klossowski, Bataille's friend and member of his Acéphale group, understands the eternal return not as a doctrine itself, but as 'a *simulacrum of a doctrine*, whose parodic character gives an account of *hilarity* as an attribute of existence.'⁸⁰ Other scholars contend that Bataille parodies Nietzsche, that 'he is Nietzsche in a "deceptive form"—the form of a morbid, left-hand Nietzsche.'⁸¹ For Nietzsche, the eternal recurrence is powerful in that knowledge of it governs the way an individual makes choices that will affect the rest of his or her life and alters the way that one considers oneself. For Bataille, conversely, the eternal recurrence shows that 'the best will is immaterial,' and its value is 'only as the ecstatic culmination of a visionary experience.'⁸²

For Hub Zwart and Sander Gilman, Nietzsche's parody merges two conceptions of the genre. As a student, Nietzsche was influenced by the 'classical conception' of parody articulated by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which is that parody is not 'merely

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 235.

⁸⁰ Pierre Klossowski, 'Nietzsche, Polytheism, and Parody,' trans. Russel Ford, *Bulletin de la Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 115. Benjamin Noys also quotes Klossowski in reference to Nietzsche and Bataille in *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2000), 42.

⁸¹ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*, 53.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 65.

comical or degrading' but further reinterprets its original and becomes a legitimate work able to stand on its own.⁸³ An example of this type of parody, Zwart explains, is William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, in which Shakespeare parodies Homer. Later, Nietzsche encountered Arthur Schopenhauer, who stresses parody's comic and degrading qualities and who adopted an approach in which parody 'is considered a "psychological" device that meets certain psychological needs.'⁸⁴ As Zwart explains, Nietzsche came to favour the psychological approach, but did continue to oscillate between these 'positive and negative' appreciations of the parodic.⁸⁵ The form of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* mimics the biblical gospels, while Zarathustra's ten years of solitude parodies Jesus's forty days in the desert. This parodic 'out-doing' of Jesus has been written on in relation to the instances of 'gross exaggeration' prevalent in the carnivalesque and often found in the work of François Rabelais.⁸⁶ Robert Gooding-Williams identifies parodic referents in *Zarathustra* that 'emulate, mimic, or satiriz[e]' sources as varied as 'Plato, Byron, Schopenhauer, Wagner,' among others.⁸⁷ He further states that 'Nietzsche's masterpiece is oriental myth, Wagnerian opera, spirited evangelism, and secular cultural critique,' though not simply reducible to any single category.⁸⁸ Like *Zarathustra*, Bataille's work, especially *Story of the Eye*, is able to parody several referents (particularly psychoanalysis and Surrealism) and emerge as an important work of literature in its own right. Miró's savage paintings, as acts of self-parody, simultaneously uphold their antecedents (the landscapes in Miró's own, earlier work and

⁸³ Hub Zwart, *Ethical Consensus and the Truth of Laughter: The Structure of Moral Transformations* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1995), 76. Zwart acknowledges the indebtedness of his argument to Gilman's 1975 article 'Incipit parodia: The Function of Parody in the Lyrical Poetry of Friedrich Nietzsche,' *Nietzsche-Studien* 4, no. 52 (1975): 52–74.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Zwart, *Ethical Consensus and the Truth of Laughter*, 80.

⁸⁷ Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 21. Gooding-Williams notes the particular emphasis on the Bible, referring to Zarathustra being of the same age as Jesus when he begins his journey into solitude. He also notes specific allusions to Plato's *Republic*, especially to the 'Myth of the Cave' (see pages 51–52).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 21–22.

the physical land of Catalonia), but their parody, while mocking, is also infused with a sense of mourning in their response to contemporary politics. The savage paintings are, I would strongly argue, undoubtedly parodic in nature, in their powerful responses to the rise of fascism in Spain, but they are simultaneously able to stand alone—without their 1920s referents—as some of the artist's most striking anti-painting works.

I would like, at this point, to turn attention to the third painting in the series, *Figures and Birds in a Landscape* (Fig. 6), which appears to be of a different tone than the rest of the savage works. In the paintings that precede it, figures evaluate their surroundings with confusion and bewilderment (in the case of *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*) or with panic and fear (as in *Figures in Front of a Volcano*). In *Figures and Birds in a Landscape*, however, the characters seem to revel in their surroundings. In focusing on the presence of humour and its associations with parodic laughter in the gesticulations and wagging tongue of the character nearest the centre, one notes the overlapping of themes and imagery between this composition and notions of a liberating laughter in the work of Nietzsche and Bataille as well as in the Bakhtinian-Rabelaisian carnival.

For Nietzsche, laughter is an essential indication of one's acceptance of the eternal recurrence. The trembling laughter that Zarathustra says 'tore open my entrails and slit open my heart' from fear becomes a 'secret, joyful, excessive laughter' only after he truly accepts the eternal return.⁸⁹ Tracy B. Strong explains that this laughter is not 'simply the denial of the present situation,' but rather 'the sign of a different consciousness.'⁹⁰ Zarathustra's laughter 'transforms suffering and nausea into joy.'⁹¹ Bataille

⁸⁹ Allen S. Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Excess* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 21. As Sander Gilman further notes, *Zarathustra* is 'is filled with references to contemporary man's inability to laugh truly. Almost twenty separate references to laughter are to be found in this work, all of which mirror the frustration of man unable to release tension—a tension generated by his striving to transcend his own nature.' *Nietzschean Parody* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1976), 27.

⁹⁰ Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 281.

echoes this sentiment in ‘Sur Nietzsche’ (‘On Nietzsche’) (1945): ‘ma tension ressemble, en un sens, à une folle envie de rire’ (‘my tension, in a sense, resembles a mad urge to laugh’),⁹² and he stresses the freedom from life’s burdens accorded by laughter in *Le Coupable* (*Guilty*) (1944), in which he writes: ‘rire de l’univers libérerait ma vie. J’échappe à la pesanteur en riant’ (‘to laugh at the universe would liberate my life. I escape its weight by laughing’).⁹³ This view of laughter also resonates with Freudian psychoanalytic theory, in which the pleasure obtained through laughter is understood as a response to the ‘overcoming of internal inhibitions and repressions.’⁹⁴ Bataille’s concept of laughter diverges from that of his predecessor, however. Bataille continues that this emancipatory laughter ‘ne doivent pas être mis sur le plan de l’intelligence’ (‘should not be placed on the level of intelligence’).⁹⁵ Bataille demands that this laughter remain in the realm of the real, the base, without poetic transposition. While Nietzsche writes of a ‘holy laughter’ in *Zarathustra*, Bataille criticises the way Nietzsche imagines ‘sa rupture avec l’idéologie conformiste ainsi qu’une aventure icarienne’ (‘his break with conformist ideology as an Icarian adventure’).⁹⁶ Returning to the subject laconically in ‘On Nietzsche,’ Bataille writes: ‘Il faut ruiner la transcendance en riant’ (‘transcendence must be destroyed by laughter’).⁹⁷ For Bataille, dada is an example par excellence of a liberating laughter that

⁹¹ Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, 281.

⁹² Georges Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche, Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 11. Translated by Stuart Kendall, in *On Nietzsche* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 3.

⁹³ Georges Bataille, ‘Le coupable,’ *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 251. Translated by Stuart Kendall, in *Guilty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 13.

⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, ‘Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 8, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1960), 134. Originally published as ‘Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten’ in 1905.

⁹⁵ Bataille, ‘Le coupable,’ 250. Translated by Kendall, in *Guilty*, 13.

⁹⁶ Georges Bataille, ‘La “vieille taupe” et le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 99. Translated as ‘The “Old Mole” and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surréaliste*,’ by Allan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 37. Bataille’s relationship to Nietzsche is complicated. At times he praises Nietzsche, idolises him, criticises him, subjects him to parody, and, in *The Accursed Share*, claims that ‘I am the only one who thinks of himself not as a commentator on Nietzsche but as being the same as he.’ For more on Bataille’s relation to Nietzsche (especially where laughter is concerned), see Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*, 36–71.

⁹⁷ Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche*, 71. Translated by Kendall in *On Nietzsche*, 65.

resists intellectual or spiritual elevation.⁹⁸ Jeremy Biles argues that Nietzsche's elevation of laughter does, however, produce an 'inevitability of the fall, even the unconscious desire to fall,' and that Bataille reads Nietzsche's laughter 'as the base explosion of this desire to plummet from the heights.'⁹⁹ Additionally, Bataillean laughter becomes linked to his own concept of 'the sacred' through its associations with sacrifice; a person who falls is a substitution for a sacrificial victim, while the laughter produced by onlookers becomes a sort-of 'sacred communication,' which links the spectator's joy with the victim's 'impulse to self destruction.'¹⁰⁰ This notion of a shared laughter, Bataille argues, 'suppose l'absence d'une véritable angoisse' ('assumes the absence of a true anguish'), when, in reality, anguish is its source.¹⁰¹ For Bataille, 'la mise à mort de Dieu est un sacrifice qui, me faisant trembler, me laisse pourtant rire' ('the putting to death of God is a sacrifice which, making me tremble, allows me to laugh').¹⁰² Through its association with sacrifice, group laughter (as inner experience and expenditure) sets in motion a Dionysian self-loss. Miró's depiction of humour in a time of crisis like the *bienio negro* would have likely appealed to Bataille, whose own writings on laughter's potency positions it as an important weapon in the dismantling of established hierarchies, particularly of organised religion. Bataille praises Zarathustra's laughter following the

⁹⁸ Georges Bataille, 'Chronique nietzschéenne,' in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 490. 'Que pourrait d'autre part signifier le fait que, pendant plusieurs années, quelques-uns des hommes les plus doués se sont évertués à briser leur intelligence en morceaux, croyant par là faire sauter en éclat l'intelligence elle-même? Dada est généralement regardé comme un échec sans conséquence alors que, pour d'autres, il devient le rire qui délivre—une révélation qui transfigure l'être humain.' Translated as 'Nietzschean Chronicle,' by Allan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 211: 'What else could be the meaning of the fact that, for a number of years, some of the most gifted men did their utmost to shatter their intellects, hoping in this way to make the intellect itself explode? Dada is generally seen as an unimportant failure, whereas, for others, it becomes liberation laughter, a revelation that transfigures human beings.'

⁹⁹ Biles, *Ecce Monstrum*, 56.

¹⁰⁰ Bataille, 'Sacrifice,' *October*, no. 36 (1986): 61–74.

¹⁰¹ Georges Bataille, 'L'expérience intérieure,' in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 113. Translated by Leslie Anne Boldt in *Inner Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 155. Bataille continues: 'Ce qui l'engendre justifie ta peur. On ne peut concevoir que tu ne sais d'où, dans cette immensité inconnue, abandonné à l'énigmatique solitude, condamné pour finir à sombrer dans la souffrance, tu ne sois pas saisi d'angoisse' ('What engenders it justifies your fear. You cannot imagine that, dropped, from you don't now where, into this unknown immensity, abandoned to enigmatic solitude, condemned in the end to sink into suffering, you are not seized with anguish').

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 178. Translated by Boldt, in *Inner Experience*, 154.

death of God in his article ‘La “vieille taupe” et le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*’ (The “Old Mole” and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surrealist*).¹⁰³ Later, in the unpublished ‘Manuel de l’Anti-Chrétien’ (‘Anti-Christian Manual’), intended to be a document for his ‘headless’ society, Acéphale, Bataille sets forth eleven attacks (*Les onze agressions*), the ninth of which calls for ‘Le rire libre et sans limite contre toutes les forms de piété hypocrite’ (‘Free and limitless laughter against all forms of hypocritical piety’).¹⁰⁴

In this light, one can understand the parodic humour of *Figures and Birds in a Landscape* as the characters’ acceptance of their grim reality. As in Nietzsche’s and Bataille’s works, this humour liberates Miró’s figures from their anguish. Miró translates the mounting tension between the political left and right, and the accompanying violence, into scenes of utter confusion and dejection, which, one can imagine, would have been the prevailing mindset among the Catalan peasant class during the *bienio negro*. An overwhelming sense of anguish is produced when one acknowledges the presence of threat but knows not what form that threat will assume. This anguish, in Miró’s work, both fuels and is propelled by parody, much like the way opposing natural forces propel one another in *The Solar Anus*. This notion of parodic laughter is also an important condition of the Carnival—the festive season in which laughter and excess is encouraged, immediately preceding Lent and its accompanying strictness—with which this particular composition has significant thematic and iconographic overlaps. The Carnival, in its annual return and revelling in the same celebrations year after year, echoes the eternal

¹⁰³ Bataille, ‘La “vieille taupe” et le préfixe *sur*,’ 102. This laughter, according to Bataille, shows that Nietzsche was capable of ‘wallowing in the mud.’ Bataille does criticize the way that in *Zarathustra*, this laughter soon becomes ‘elevated, weightless, Hellenic, etc.’ Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Bataille, ‘Les onze agressions,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 385. My translation.

recurrence,¹⁰⁵ but its emphasis on inversion presents a world that is decidedly ‘other.’ An early-nineteenth-century Catalan print entitled *El Mundo al Revés* (Fig. 29) clearly describes this inversion. Mikhail Bakhtin explains the Carnival as being closely linked to a parodic conception of time’s passing and the way in which time ‘kills and gives birth at the same time, recasting the old into the new, allowing nothing to perpetuate itself. Time plays and laughs!’¹⁰⁶ The Carnival turns society on its head, temporarily freeing its participants from life’s hardships and allowing them the opportunity to hope for a better future, for a more just society, and for truth; to this end, as Bakhtin explains, celebrations often incorporate utopian elements.¹⁰⁷

Just as carnivalesque laughter creates gay or comic monsters to replace the fears and anguish that it has overcome, Miró’s figures—which appear monstrous—are his same Catalan peasants, presented in deceptive form through parodic humour. Confirming that the central character of *Figures and Birds in a Landscape* is indeed the Catalan peasant figure are his affinities with Miró’s earlier painting *The Hunter*. The poses of both these figures are the same: each stands facing the viewer with waving, outstretched arms and both are in the act of urination or ejaculation. The hunter’s pipe has now been replaced with a gigantic, protruding tongue, and his genitals—once depicted with an egg icon—are now presented as an enormous and erect phallus. Given the existing readings of Miró’s early peasant portraits as a type of self-portraiture, the fact that Miró has signed his name directly above this figure tempts us to read a further identification between the artist and this parodic peasant. Furthermore, each of the human faces depicted in this scene are rare, if not unprecedented, in Miró’s oeuvre and

¹⁰⁵ For more on Acéphale’s mission, see chapter 7 of this thesis. For more on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the carnivalesque, see Gary Shapiro, ‘Festival, Carnival, and Parody (*Zarathustra IV*),’ in *Nietzschean Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 97–123.

¹⁰⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 82. Originally published in 1965 as *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kultura srednevekovia i Renessansa*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

are (perhaps with the exception of the opened-mouthed figure) characterised by an unnatural stiffness. The cut-out eyes and nose of the rightmost figure, the bulging eyes of another, and the elongated purple nose and bands of red that encircle the central figure's eyes all suggest that these characters may be donning masks. The stilt-like legs of the bird figure on the left of the composition similarly suggest that these characters are costumed. These masks communicate both a desire for and an achieving of self-loss (a consequence of the expenditure of energy in Bataille's understanding of the sacred) and constitute an important part of the carnivalesque. The mask evokes change, metamorphosis, and the type of personal transfiguration that also occurs with an acceptance of the realities of one's suffering. If one understands masks as functioning—as Bakhtin does¹⁰⁸—as a type of joyful 'reincarnation,' then one can read their appearance in this savage painting both as the entrance into a different frame of consciousness (by which one laughs at the present, unlike the figures in the other savage paintings, who fear it) and as the parodic loss of self as expounded by Bataille. In regards to this view, I would add that the wearing of a mask allows for a temporary escapism of the self, providing the opportunity to cast oneself in a new role and to adopt new traits and mannerisms; this freedom permits one to engage in parody, criticism of those in power and of current events, and other forms of social commentary. Furthermore, Bakhtin reminds us that the donning of a mask is an invitation to parody and a participation of the grotesque, as 'caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures are per se derived from the mask.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

The ‘Torrid and Blinding Sun’

Formally, Miró achieves the unsettling, familiar-yet-otherworldly settings of the savage paintings in two ways: through his rendering of light and through an extraordinary intensity of colour in both the oil and tempera paintings, as I alluded to earlier. Interestingly, even though he employs such a rich colour palette, none of the savage paintings contain a sun to serve as the origin of this fantastic light. The lack of sun is atypical for Miró, as his landscapes usually display a large red disc at the top of the composition. Adding to the mysterious atmosphere of these works, then, is the powerful, unseen source that casts its brilliant, scorching—even violent—light across the images. This mysterious glow is especially evident in night scenes, like *Nocturne*. While a thin crescent moon sits within the dark green sky of this composition, it does not seem capable of producing this brilliant nocturnal light, which is powerful enough to cast a shadow off of the sphere in the centre of the foreground. In *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, this light source seems to be the excrement itself: yellow and green phosphorescence emanates from the pile, casting a glow over the onlooking figures. The articulation of a violent light is one of the ways in which Miró’s savage works share imagery with Bataille’s *The Solar Anus* in their expression of ominous landscapes. The luminous waste in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* summons the image of the ‘solar anus,’ the sun that *excretes* light. As I will discuss further in chapter 5, the manner in which Miró depicts this glowing excrement recalls the kind of spiritual light found in the works of Spanish Golden Age painters inspired by the experiences of mystics, thus creating a categorically Bataillean image through the pairing of the holy with the scatological.

In addition to this mockingly spiritual light in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, the scorching light present throughout Miró's sunless savage paintings recalls Bataille's evocation of the image of the 'luminous violence' that the sun inflicts upon the earth and that couples with the darkness in *The Solar Anus*.¹¹⁰ As Stuart Kendall explains, through this image Bataille presents 'the night side of the human flesh,' in which 'cosmic coitus replicates sodomy; functionally useless anal intercourse, pure expenditure.'¹¹¹ Miró echoes this presentation of intercourse as 'pure expenditure'—a parody of copulation for reproductive purposes—in the parodic landscape of the savage works, in which the Catalan landscape is stripped of its former icons of fertility. One sees a direct parody in the central figure in *Figures and Birds in a Landscape*, whose act of ejaculation recalls the hunter in *The Hunter*. As discussed in chapter 3, Miró depicts the peasant's act of ejaculation in his earlier canvas alongside a number of symbols concerned with fertility, including the sun, the egg, and fertilising excrement. In the corresponding savage painting, the act takes place within a sexual, grotesque, and carnivalesque scene—emphasized by this figure's mask-like face and long, exposed tongue. Furthermore, the figure appears to be ejaculating in the vicinity of another figure's face as he stands with mouth agape and tongue exposed, thus engaging in a Bataillen performance of sexual expenditure, rather than a generative act.

While they depict scenes similar to those of their 1920s counterparts, the savage paintings display a comparatively restricted iconographic presence. In place of Miró's earlier fertility symbols, the savage paintings contain motifs associated with elimination, waste, and destruction. The active volcano finds a place of newfound prominence in the series, and this motif is perhaps the most obvious overlapping image between *The Solar Anus* and the savage paintings. While mountains are depicted in Miró's earlier canvases—

¹¹⁰ Bataille, *L'Anus solaire*, 86.

¹¹¹ Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, 55.

however rarely—they are typically relegated to the background (*The Hermitage* being a notable exception) (Fig. 30). The prioritisation of volcanic imagery (especially the imminent threat of eruption) in the savage paintings serves to heighten both drama and the sense of impending peril thrust upon the figures stranded within these landscapes. Miró makes this plain from the first painting in the series, *Figures in Front of a Volcano*, the subjects of which appear frightened of the spitting volcano in the background. Similarly, in *The Two Philosophers* the two thinkers appear perplexed by the hotspot between them—emphasized by its contrast with the cool blue landscape and its flame-like expulsion.

Bataille refers to the volcano heavily in his short text, designating the landform as the anus of the ‘terrestrial globe,’ by which the earth (although it does not eat) can expel ‘the contents of its entrails.’¹¹² The resulting natural disaster (the eruption), Bataille continues, ‘spread[s] death and terror everywhere,’ the ‘deflagrations antagonize the heavens.’¹¹³ Extending this argument even further, I would add that the volcano also functions as a symbol for the literal disordering of the earth. The act of eruption evacuates contents from beneath the crust to the earth’s surface—turning the earth inside out. This violent conflation of inner and outer would certainly appeal to Bataille, who would later write about the *informe* as an operation seeking to blur distinctions.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, and most significantly for linking Miró’s imagery to Bataille’s, the volcano’s disordering qualities also make the landform an ideal metaphor for social upheaval. In *The Solar Anus* Bataille positions the volcano as a specific metaphor for communist revolution, writing: ‘Ceux en qui s’accumule la force d’éruption sont nécessairement situés en bas’ (‘This eruptive force accumulates in those who are necessarily situated below’).¹¹⁵ In the savage paintings, the volcanic metaphor refers to a more generalised fear brought forth by contemporary political events and the brewing of political violence;

¹¹² Bataille, *L’Anus solaire*, 85.

¹¹³ Ibid. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 8.

¹¹⁴ Georges Bataille, ‘Informe,’ *Documents* 1, no. 7 (1929): 382.

¹¹⁵ Bataille, ‘L’Anus solaire,’ 85. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 8.

note that the volcano has yet to erupt. André Masson, who resided in Spain for the duration of the *bienio negro* and the opening months of the Spanish Civil War, uses the volcano as a similar symbol of revolutionary violence in a drawing for Bataille's journal *Acéphale* (1936) (Fig. 31). The goal of this secret community was freedom, achieved by toppling the power of longstanding political and religious institutions. This freedom necessarily rejected the existing power structure by which a single leader holds immense power—hence the society's headless emblem. In this version, the Acéphalic man shares nearly all of its features with Masson's original drawing, which appeared on the journal's cover in 1936: the decapitated figure is naked, with a skull in place of his genitals, and he holds both arms outstretched, clutching a dagger in one and a flaming heart in the other. In this particular incarnation, the figure hovers in front of an erupting volcano and is framed in such a way that the landform's crater sits exactly where his head should be. This particular volcano likely has a similar connection with Catalonia as Miró's, since Masson undertook the composition while residing in Montserrat, a Catalan town near Barcelona that is home to a famous multi-peaked mountain of the same name.¹¹⁶

Several of the works completed by Masson at Montserrat during the *bienio negro* have similarities with Miró's savage paintings, both in their use of scorching, violent, saturated colour and in their mutual connection with Nietzsche's eternal return. David Lomas, in *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity*, describes how Masson underwent a spiritual experience while staying in the mountains of Montserrat: 'Masson had been sketching the sunset when a sea of clouds rolled in. It quickly became dark and he and his wife Rose were unable to climb back down. Finding themselves perched on the edge of a precipitous slope, he was gripped with extreme fear.'¹¹⁷ Masson describes

¹¹⁶ Montserrat also gave its name to a volcanic Caribbean island (which is still active), named by Christopher Columbus. For more on Masson's experiences in Spain during the *bienio negro* and Spanish Civil War, see Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 117–146.

¹¹⁷ Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 42. For more on Masson and Montserrat, see 'Traces of the Unconscious,' in *The Haunted Self*, 42–51.

the event: 'the sky itself appeared to me as an abyss, something which I had never felt before—the vertigo above and the vertigo below. And I found myself in a sort of maelstrom, almost a tempest, and as though hysterical. I thought I was going mad.'¹¹⁸ He then likens this experience to his 'war wound,' referring to an incident on 17 April 1916, during the First World War, in which he faced heavy artillery fire and a spraying of 'falling earth, stones and shrapnel,' and, knowing that he would die, 'watched the cross-fire, the flares of all colours with admiration. Festival for a *gisant*. A farewell.'¹¹⁹ Lomas reads the iconography in Masson's Montserrat works through this connection to war, understanding the shooting stars and other cosmic elements as crossfire and flares. Masson dedicated *Dawn at Montserrat* and *Landscape of Wonders* (Fig. 32), which were reproduced in *Minotaure* in June 1936, to Zarathustra: 'I salute you from the heights of Montserrat.'¹²⁰ For Lomas, the 'spirals, vortices and other like motifs,' which 'convey centrifugal expansion and rupture,' are iconographic embodiments of the eternal return.¹²¹ He also wonders if, perhaps, the lone figure who, accompanied by a serpent, ascends the mountainside in *Landscape of Wonders* might be Zarathustra himself.

Miró, Masson, and Bataille are not alone in describing unforgiving landscapes. Sidra Stich observes the Surrealist tendency to render nature 'not as fertile and benevolent but as barren and hostile, itself an explosive power' as a remnant of the First World War.¹²² What distinguishes Miró's landscapes as Bataillean, however, is the artist's self-parody, which mocks his own, earlier work. Similarly, the volcano *does* feature in the work of Surrealist writers and artists, but in a different symbolic capacity than for Miró and Bataille in the savage paintings and *The Solar Anus*; for Surrealists, the volcano is

¹¹⁸ André Masson, quoted and translated by Lomas, in *The Haunted Self*, 42. Also reported in Jean-Paul Clébert, *Mythologie d'André Masson* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1971), 49–51.

¹¹⁹ André Masson, *La Mémoire du monde* (Genève: Skira, 1974), 86. Translated by Lomas, in *The Haunted Self*, 42.

¹²⁰ André Masson, quoted and translated by Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 43.

¹²¹ Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 47.

¹²² Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (New York: Abbeville, 1990), 12.

most often used as a symbol of male sexuality. In *L'Amour fou* for instance, Breton calls upon the Marquis de Sade's image of the volcano from *La Nouvelle Justine*: 'Un jour, examinant l'Etna, dont le sein vomissait des flammes, le désirais être, ce célèbre volcan...' (looking at Etna one day, with its breast vomiting forth flames, I wanted to be this famous volcano.¹²³ Dalí and Masson also conjure volcanic associations in their depictions of Gradyva. In Wilhelm Jensen's 1903 novel of that name, a young archaeologist falls in love with the classical relief of a walking woman, whom he names Gradyva. In the archaeologist's dream, Gradyva comes to life but is soon buried underneath volcanic ash expelled from Mount Vesuvius. The story was popularised through Sigmund Freud's 1907 essay 'Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens "Gradyva"' ('Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's "Gradyva"'). Scholars writing on Masson's *Gradyva* (1939) (Fig. 33) have identified the dualistic themes of 'holocaustal destruction, the sources of which may be natural, the volcano, or human: war,¹²⁴ and of regeneration, as volcanic lava 'ultimately enriches the earth's fertility.'¹²⁵ Miró's savage paintings lack the hopeful regeneration alluded to in *Gradyva* for two reasons. Firstly, Miró does not show the volcano acting upon the female body, thus lacking the theme of 'lave spermatique' that Masson would write about in 'Antille' (in his and Breton's collection of short texts, *Martinique, charmeuse de serpents* [*Martinique: Snake Charmer*], 1948). Secondly, because Miró shows the *threat* of volcanic expulsion through the presence of hotspots and the sputtering of flames (rather than a complete eruption), he emphasises a warning of potential destruction rather than the potential for regrowth in an already destroyed land. Closer to the savage paintings is Masson's *Dream of a Future Desert* (1938) (Fig. 34), which he paired with a written description of volcanic destruction. Carolyn Lanchner

¹²³ André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 94. The volcano as an expression of male sexuality is also noted by Whitney Chadwick in 'Masson's Gradyva: The Metamorphosis of a Surrealist Myth,' *Art Bulletin* 52, no.4 (December 1970): 422.

¹²⁴ Chadwick, 'Masson's Gradyva,' 422.

¹²⁵ Doris A. Birmingham, 'Masson's Pasiphaë: Eros and the Unity of the Cosmos,' *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 2 (June 1987): 287.

argues that the drawing is an ‘apocalyptic vision of the end of the world’ and reflects the artist’s reaction to the breakout of the Spanish Civil War (during which he had been in Spain) and the inevitability of the Second World War.¹²⁶

While the savage paintings lack the theme of regeneration, they do embody opposing themes of attraction and repulsion. Looking specifically at two examples, *Figures in Front of a Volcano* and *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain*, one sees the artist using the volcanic motif to express these conflicting energies. Already mentioned are the fearful *Figures in Front of a Volcano*, who witness the molten ejections of the volcanic form behind them. As the title implies, *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain* shows figures moving towards the volcano, rather than fleeing from it. The deformed bodies of the figures that climb the precarious ‘phallic’ outcroppings of the mountain contribute to the atmosphere of unease—and, as Robert S. Lubar notes, whatever force attracts them to the volcano remains a mystery to the viewer.¹²⁷ Furthermore, given the violence of *Figures in Front of a Volcano*, painted before *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain*, one cannot help but read the latter painting as an expression of the type of ‘self-destructive desire’ that Stuart Kendall identifies in Bataille’s writing.¹²⁸ Recalling Miró’s description of the series to Denys Chevalier, which I referenced earlier in this chapter, in which he describes creating ‘monsters that both attracted and repelled [him],’ one strongly detects a similar impulse towards self-destruction.¹²⁹ Given the contemporary political climate in Spain, it is tempting to read this image as either the advancing of a terrifying army, or as a citizenry blindly marching towards imminent destruction. Another possibility is to read the image through carnivalesque inversion, whereby the perception of the volcano shifts from a force to be

¹²⁶ William Rubin and Carolyn Lanchner, *André Masson* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 158.

¹²⁷ Lubar, ‘Small Paintings on Masonite and Copper,’ 184.

¹²⁸ Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, 57.

¹²⁹ Chevalier, ‘Miró,’ 267.

feared to one that is celebrated. In this light, the characters in *Figure in Front of a Volcano*, who I previously read as panicked, could potentially be understood as participating in a type of self-destructive ritual or sacrifice.

Conclusion

In appropriating and inverting themes and motifs from his earlier canvases, Miró's savage paintings subject the Catalan landscape to an intentional mockery that recalls Bataille's description of the parodic nature of the world in *The Solar Anus*. The resulting landscapes found throughout the series reflect the social anxieties of Spain's *bienio negro*, communicated metaphorically through depictions of destructive natural phenomena. The environment that once provided for its inhabitants is now rendered as severe and inhospitable—leaving both peasant and philosopher unable to acclimate. Just as Bataille equates communist revolution with volcanic eruption, Miró too uses the volcano as a symbol of imminent political violence. Beyond the general interest of Surrealist artists in depicting desolate landscapes, Miró's savage paintings are decidedly affiliated with Bataillean thought through their dependence on parodic inversion. Through his use of parodic humour, moreover, Miró's work also resonates with the theme of liberating laughter found throughout the work of Bataille, Nietzsche, and Bakhtin. This chapter has argued that, rather than prophecies of Civil War, the savage paintings are products of their historical context and of Miró's state of mind during the *bienio negro*. In stripping the series of any romanticised, sibylline associations, one can interpret the savage paintings as a characterisation of Spain on the brink of fascism, expressed through the deliberate parodic recycling of motifs from earlier in the artist's oeuvre.

Chapter 5

Ignoble Illumination

Against a starless night sky, two nude, skeletal figures stand in a barren Catalan landscape contemplating a piece of faecal matter that stands erect atop a mound, surrounded by an eerie effulgence. An unsettling image, Joan Miró's *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* (1935) captures the ambience of threatening uncertainty that seized Catalonia during the *bienio negro*, or two black years, prior to the Spanish Civil War, during which the work was produced. Beyond this disconcerting impression that the painting shares with the other works in the savage painting series, I argue that *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* also contributes to a specifically Catalan interest in scatological humour. The following chapter explores how this humour—a crude but unmalicious element in Catalan folklore, in the carnivalesque, and in the artist's own work—is mocked and parodied in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* as a symbol of hopelessness and a pessimistic metaphor for the plight of the Spanish people in the months leading towards the Civil War. The use of excremental imagery to respond to the

Civil War by another Catalan artist—Salvador Dalí—and by André Masson, who was in Catalonia in 1936, is also explored, as is the precedence for scatology as social commentary in the work of Francisco de Goya. This chapter furthermore considers Miró's renewed interest in excremental imagery in the 1930s alongside the debates between Georges Bataille and André Breton over materialism and transposition earlier in the decade, in which Dalí's coprophilic works played a significant role. Ultimately, I argue that Miró's depiction of waste matter in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* adheres more closely to the Bataillean concepts of heterology and base materialism than to Bretonian transpositional elevation of low matter.

Feculence and Folklore

Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement (Fig. 1) may seem a peculiar subject for Miró; it is explicit in both title and subject matter—lacking the poesy and transpositional qualities of his 'painting-poems' and 'dream paintings' of the 1920s—and its style conforms to neither the explorations of void space nor the iconographic frenzy with which his name is typically associated. Instead, the composition hinges on a single, overt, inescapable symbol: shit. Excrement has always held a particular status in Miró's iconographic canon. He introduces it with the tiny depiction of an excreting infant, who squats in the centre of *The Farm* (1922) (Fig. 2). Two years later, he included two references to shit in *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* (Fig. 3); the hunter himself has just defecated (the turd appears to his left) and the insect that flies around the large sardine in the foreground is depicted mid-defecation. As is well documented, both of these works are quintessential examples of Catalonia's importance to Miró, serving as visual catalogues for the familiar sights around the family farm—called Mas Miró—where the

artist frequently spent his summers. That Miró first included excremental iconography in his oeuvre in such proudly nationalistic works is not surprising, nor is it pessimistic (at this point), when one takes into consideration the abundance of excremental imagery that permeates Catalan cultural expressions.

Catalonia has a rich folklore tradition, by which Catalans distinguish themselves from the customs and preoccupations of their Castilian neighbours. Because the Catalan people have fought for self-determination and struggled against periodic censorship for the preservation of their regional identity,¹ it is unsurprising that their cultural expressions are dominated by folklore and other 'low' art. The Catalan obsession with shit, as Robert Hughes explains, is 'preindustrial,' dating so far back in the region's folk art, songs, verse, and poetry that it cannot be explained (despite Marxist efforts) as 'a product of post-industrial or bourgeois repression.'² One sees Miró employing such coprophilic humour in preparatory drawings for *Dutch Interior II* (1928) (Fig. 4), in which he depicts a dog urinating and farting, departing from Jan Steen's original composition *Children Teaching a Cat to Dance* (c. 1665–1668), which Miró used as a reference. Barcelona's scatological humour can be traced back as far as the city's medieval origins, during which time the unsanitary waters of its bordering rivers were named Cagallel (turd bearer) and Merdança (shit stream).³ It is also apparent in the language itself: Catalan and Valencian poets have demonstrated a longstanding interest in scatology, penning 'Fart Treaty' (Francesc Mulet, c. 1600s), 'The Exalted Fart' (Llicenciat Petrena, 1823), 'Virtues of Shit' (anonymous, 1823), and 'Ode to the Shit' (F. de B. Ll, 1937).⁴ Recent research in translation studies has explored how ideological, aesthetic, or cultural factors (like

¹ The region has lost and gained varying levels of autonomy since the beginnings of a united Spain, which followed the marriage of Ferdinand II and Isabella I in 1469. For more on Catalan history and traditions, see Temma Kaplan, 'Resistance and Ritual,' in *Red City, Blue Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 13–36.

² Robert Hughes, *Barcelona* (London: Harvill, 1992), 33.

³ Ibid.

⁴ These poems, and many further examples from c. 1245–1984, are reproduced (in Catalan) in the book *Versos bruts: pomell de poesies escatològiques*, ed. Empar Pérez-Cors (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1989).

Catalonia's particularly scatological humour) can affect translators' decisions. For instance, when translating the English word 'fuck' (in a non-sexual context) in commercially available novels, researchers found that Spanish translators tend to rely on the adjective '*jodido/a*' (from the verb 'to copulate'), while Catalan translators demonstrate a preference for the term '*merda*' ('shit'). The author of this study suggests that a possible explanation for this difference is the Catalan 'pride in coprology and scatology'.⁵

Catalan folk characters also feature prominent excremental imagery. This is particularly true for figures relating to Christmas (*Nadal*) celebrations. One such tradition is the *tió de Nadal*—also called the *caga tió*—a log (real or artificial) that is often decorated with facial features and a *barretina* (cap) and covered with a blanket. Like a piñata, children beat the log with sticks, shouting '*caga, tió, caga!*' ('shit, log, shit!') until it 'excretes' candy and small gifts. Another Christmas figure, the *caganer* (shitter)—popular since the baroque period—appears outside of the manger in Catalan nativity scenes. The *caganer* dons a *barretina* and is shown squatting, his trousers around his knees and a piece of swirling excrement on the ground beneath him.⁶ The society Amics del Caganer is dedicated to promoting this figure and, since its founding in 1990, regularly organises exhibitions throughout Catalonia (namely at the Museu del Joguet de Catalunya in Figueres) of hundreds of *caganers* borrowed from private collections.⁷ According to Robert Hughes, the *caganer* is a 'folk-art personage' who, despite occasionally appearing in sixteenth-century sculpture, did not enter painted representation in 'high art' until the

⁵ José Santaemila, 'The Translation of Sex-Related Language: The Danger(s) of Self-Censorship(s),' *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 21 no. 2 (2008): 239.

⁶ While he traditionally appears as a peasant, the *caganer* has also been reproduced with the likeness of famous (and infamous) political figures ranging from popes, to presidents, to monarchs. In response to today's growing support for Catalan independence, one finds *caganers* draped in the Catalan flag and bearing the likeness of former Catalan President Artur Mas. Other *caganers* reflect the connections between independentist efforts in Catalonia and Scotland, with the figure resembling Scottish politicians or wearing Saltire flags.

⁷ The Amics del Caganer (Friends of the *Caganer*) also put out a yearly newsletter, hold an annual Christmas dinner, and award a '*Caganer* of the year' award.

twentieth century, with Miró's figure of the squatting infant in *The Farm*.⁸ The *caganer* is not merely humorous, nor is it blasphemous, but rather symbolises a reciprocal relationship with the earth; through the act of excreting, the Catalan peasant nourishes the soil that, in turn, provides for him.⁹ The *caganer* also characterises our common humanity; shitting, as a biological function, is an action performed by people of all classes and social standings and cannot be ignored even—as in the case of the *caganer*—in the presence of Christ. Miró owned at least one *caganer* (Fig. 5), which he kept at his studio in Palma de Mallorca: a simple white figure, wearing a *barretina*, a white shirt, and blue trousers pulled down slightly, he crouches over a grassy hill, upon which he has just excreted.

Miró had an interest in collecting folk art objects from a variety of regions across Spain, and these items directly influenced his artistic production. His studio in Palma de Mallorca—designed by the Catalan architect Josep Lluís Sert in 1954—housed a variety of objects that Miró acquired over many years and from which he sought inspiration. In addition to his *caganer*, he also owned several *siurells*, traditional Majorcan painted pottery figurines.¹⁰ Additionally, excremental imagery seems to have provided Miró with artistic productivity in the same way that the *caganer* nourishes the earth. In a notebook of projects and working notes that the artist kept between 1941 and 1942, he refers to the process of making clay bas-reliefs as ‘making shapes like little turds with a pastry tube.’¹¹ In an interview with Georges Raillard, Miró spoke about using actual excrement in his work: ‘Yes, yes. This is made of shit. I was there, I had to crap; I let down my trousers, and there, I crapped on the brand new sand-paper. And then, bang! I pressed the other

⁸ Hughes, *Barcelona*, 27.

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ Miró's collection of small objects that he housed in his Palma studios has been photographed and presented in a recent catalogue by Jean-Marie del Moral entitled *El Ojo de Miró* (Madrid: La Fábrica, 2015).

¹¹ Joan Miró, working notes, begun July 1941 in Mont-roig del Camp. Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 192.

paper on it. And I left it, and that produced this beautiful material.¹² Similarly, in an interview with Gaëtan Picon, the artist admitted to placing sheets of paper on his studio floor and pissing on them as a starting point for his lithographs.¹³

In *The Farm*, the *caganer*-type figure finds a home alongside an impressive inventory of other essential features of country life, including farm animals (goats, rabbits, chickens, a horse, a donkey, and a dog), tools (the ladder, wagon, axe, buckets, cisterns, stool, rope, and watering can), and architectural features (the stables with attention given to every crack and stain, wagon's shed, wash basin, and chicken coop). Miró renders each item in astonishing detail—painting each leaf individually on the enormous eucalyptus tree at the centre of the image, every rock on the ground, and even including a tiny snail and lizard in the bottom right corner. Every single element of *The Farm* is essential to this depiction of rural life, and it would follow that Miró considered the depiction of excretion therein as equally essential.

It is my interpretation that the figure of *The Hunter* repeats this *caganer*-type motif, this time in the form of an adult figure. The hunter's spread legs, bent knees, and turned-out feet recall the positioning of the infant in *The Farm*. The swirling excrement beside this figure, on the left side of the image, suggests that the hunter has just finished defecating (Miró later confirmed this in an interview with William Rubin¹⁴), while the four lines emanating from his genitals demonstrate that he continues his act of fertilising the soil. While I have discussed this painting's fertility symbolism in detail in chapter 3, it is worth reminding that in this composition excrement joins the egg, sun, and emphasised genitals as an emblem of growth and renewal. The *caganer*'s association with

¹² Joan Miró, quoted in Georges Raillard, *Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves: entretiens avec Georges Raillard* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 40. English translation by William Jeffett in 'The Shape of Color: Joan Miró's Painted Sculpture, Monumentality, Metaphor,' in *The Shape of Color: Joan Miró's Painted Sculpture*, ed. Laura Coyle and William Jeffett (London: Scala Publishers, 2002), 37.

¹³ Joan Miró, interview with Gaëtan Picon, Mallorca, 1975. Translated by Dinah Harrison, in Gaëtan Picon, *Catalan Notebooks: Unpublished Drawings and Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 12.

¹⁴ William Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 22.

Catalan culture also contributes to a nationalistic tone in *The Hunter*: the carob tree (shown here as a cross section of a trunk with a single leaf) is a favoured symbol of Miró's in depictions of his homeland, and he also visually separates Catalonia from Spain by depicting their flags on opposite ends of the composition (the Catalan flag appears beside that of France, Miró's artistic base).

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised the ways in which Miró's 'anti-painting' involved returning to and subverting certain iconographic and figurative preoccupations that dominated his early 1920s works, but largely disappeared from his mid to late 1920s output (for instance, his renewed interest in fully realised figuration or the emphasis on the genitals, the eye, and the big toe). The artist's treatment of excrement is much the same: it does not feature in his works undertaken during the height of his Surrealist engagement, only to re-emerge as the subject of the savage painting *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, where it transgresses its earlier symbolic function as a fertiliser, connecting peasant to terrain. From an iconographic standpoint, *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* is a much simpler composition than *The Farm* or *The Hunter*. Gone are all of the accoutrements of country life, the animals with which the peasants share a harmonious relationship, and the implication of warm sunlight previously communicated through clear blue skies and landscapes of earthy browns, pinks, and yellows. Instead, in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, Miró paints a nocturnal scene, the only light in which emanates curiously from the immense and rigidly upright faeces, which is haloed in an unsettling yellow-green glow that spreads along the female figure's arm. The surrounding landscape is in no way arable—there is not the slightest suggestion of greenery—implying that the excrement has provided no sustenance. Here, the shit does not signify oneness between peasant and land but rather something horrible and alien, and the way in which the figures stand

before it, their hands raised in confusion, shows that its presence does not put them at ease or provide a hope for renewal.

The man and woman's grossly oversized genitalia are likely a subversion of Miró's earlier emphasis on depictions of reproductive organs. The way in which he has fashioned their genitalia certainly does not suggest a procreative concern. The male figure has a hole through the tip of his penis, and both figures possess an indeterminate, *informe* sexuality: the female figure's vulva descends like a phallus, while the man possesses breasts. I posit that *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* transgresses Miró's earlier concerns and does not glorify the act of fertilising the earth, but rather sardonically exalts waste itself, in which case the inclusion and distorting exaggeration of the phallus and vulva would also correspond to an interest in lowness and base subject matter. These *informe* sexual organs also can relate directly to the processes of excretion. Bataille explores this condition in 'L'oeil pinéal ('The Pineal Eye'), in which he writes that animals (including man) are 'un tube avec ses deux orifices anal et buccal' ('a tube with two orifices, anal and buccal') and that the 'penis, the testicles, or the female organs that correspond to them are the complication of the anal.' He then contrasts the 'privileged' mouth with the 'richesses décoratives de l'extrémité ordurière des singes' ('decorative richness of the excremental extremity of apes').¹⁵

The connection between the genital and anal is supported in Miró's painting by the formal affinity between the upright curvature of the phallus on the left side of the image and, on the right side, the shit, which stands upright yet unsupported. Miró had not previously depicted excrement in this shape; in *The Hunter*, he favours the swirling form typically seen on *cagane*r figures. The phallic and excremental motifs in the 1935 work share both their form and a gradation of colour from red to yellow, which would

¹⁵ Georges Bataille, 'L'oeil pinéal,' in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 33. Translated as 'The Pineal Eye,' by Alan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 88–89.

appear to link the piece of excrement with the male sexual organ. This compositional approach would also transgress, or parody, previous associations between excrement and fertilisation in both a self-parody of the artist's own, earlier work and within the legacy of Catalan folk traditions.

Excremental imagery in folklore is not limited to the region of Catalonia, however. Sigmund Freud—who famously wrote about the importance of the ‘anal zone’ for childhood psychosexual development¹⁶—explores the prominence of anal and excremental symbolism from a variety of European cultures in an essay entitled ‘Träume im Folklore’ (‘Dreams in Folklore’), co-written with David Ernst Oppenheim in 1901 and unpublished until 1958. In this paper Freud examines a collection of folk tales compiled by ethnographer and folklorist Friedrich S. Krauss in the periodical *Anthropophyteia*, looking specifically at stories that both contain dreams *and* analyse the symbolism therein. The aim of ‘Dreams in Folklore’ was to demonstrate that these folk stories—which faced being overlooked due to their ‘repulsively dirty and indecent nature’¹⁷—interpreted dream imagery in a way similar to Freudian psychoanalysis. In the second section of the essay, entitled ‘Faeces-Symbolism and Related Dream-Actions,’ Freud elucidates how, according to psychoanalytic theory, excrement is a highly valued substance during early childhood, a value that is transferred to gold (currency) in adulthood.¹⁸ Freud would later develop this theory in greater detail in his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) (1905). According to Freud, it is common for children to hold back their bowel movements, which produces ‘erotogenic stimulation’ and ‘sexual excitation’ of the anal zone in the form of muscle

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, ‘Infantile Sexuality,’ in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 51. Originally published in 1905 as *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud and David Ernst Oppenheim, *Dreams in Folklore*, ed. James Strachey, trans. A. M. O. Richards and James Strachey (New York: International Universities Press, 1958), 65. Originally published in 1958 as ‘Träume im Folklore.’

¹⁸ Freud and Oppenheim, *Dreams in Folklore*, 36.

contractions and in the final release of excrement from the anus.¹⁹ Another cause of excremental retention, Freud argues, is the valuing of faecal matter by children as ‘gifts,’ by which they can either demonstrate ‘active compliance with [their] environment’ or, ‘by withholding them [the ‘gifts’], [their] disobedience.’²⁰

In ‘Dreams in Folklore,’ Freud identifies a similar valuing of excrement in dream scenes found in stories from Germany, Austria, Serbia, and Ukraine. Through his investigation of these stories, Freud finds a connection between faeces and gold, noting that:

if the sleeper feels the need to defecate, he dreams of gold, of treasure. The disguise in the dream, which is designed to mislead him into satisfying his need in bed, usually makes the pile of faeces serve as a sign to mark the place where the treasure is to be found; that is to say, the dream—as though by means of endopsychic perception—states outright, even if in a reversed form, that gold is a sign or symbol for faeces.²¹

A particular Austrian folktale, which was reproduced in *Anthropopyteia* and in ‘Dreams in Folklore’ under the title ‘The Dream of the Treasure,’ makes plain the connection between excrement and wealth in dream imagery. In the story, a peasant dreams that his homeland is being ravaged by war and he seeks to hide his treasure from the enemy soldiers. He digs a hole with his bare hands, deposits his wealth, and, to ensure that he

¹⁹ Freud, ‘Infantile Sexuality,’ 51. Freud would return to this subject in 1908 and 1917. See Sigmund Freud, ‘Character and Anal Eroticism,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9, *Jensen’s “Gradiva” and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959), 167–176. Originally published in 1908 as ‘Charakter und Analerotik.’ See also Sigmund Freud, ‘On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism,’ *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, *On Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), 125–134. Originally published in 1917 as ‘Über Triebumsetzungen insbesondere der Analerotik.’

²⁰ Freud, ‘Infantile Sexuality,’ 52–53.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

can relocate the site (but without alerting the enemy to its location), marks the hiding spot with his own excrement before uprooting a handful of grass with which to clean himself. The peasant awakens from this dream—after being struck forcefully by his wife—to find that that treasure upon which he shit was actually his wife, that he had been ‘digging’ at her vagina, and that he had attempted to pull out her pubic hair.²² Freud’s interprets the dream within the story as the possible death wish against the peasant’s wife.²³

The imagery found within ‘The Dream of the Treasure’ strongly anticipates Miró’s *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*. Each features two peasants, a man and a woman, whose homeland is facing imminent war. Furthermore, the excrement’s verticality and its placement atop a mound of earth in Miró’s composition suggest the possibility that the turd is a demarcation, as in the folk story. The connection between the genital and excremental—demonstrated visually in the similarities between the shit and phallus and the phallus and vulva in Miró’s painting—recalls the association between the scatological and wife’s genitals in the tale. Knowing that Miró’s *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* was completed just before the start of the Spanish Civil War also brings forth the associations between the excremental, genital, and social upheaval in Bataille’s *The Solar Anus*, with which the entire savage painting series shares much of its imagery. In this text, Bataille imagines that to the bourgeoisie, communist workers are ‘aussi laids et aussi sales que les parties sexuelles et velues ou parties basses’ (‘as ugly and dirty as hairy sexual organs, or lower parts’) and predicts that ‘tôt ou tard il en résultera une éruption scandaleuse au cours de laquelle les têtes asexuées et nobles des bourgeoisie seront tranchées’ (‘sooner or later there will be a scandalous eruption in the course of

²² Freud, ‘The Dream of the Treasure,’ in *Dreams in Folklore*, 54.

²³ Freud and Oppenheim, *Dreams in Folklore*, 53.

which the asexual noble heads of the bourgeois will be chopped off’),²⁴ thereby uniting the images of defecation (appearing here as volcanic eruption), genitalia, and war. Like Bataille, Miró unites the excremental with the volcanic. *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* is a very similar composition as *The Two Philosophers* (Fig. 6), which also features two nude, skeletal figures who raise their arms in confusion at a mysterious glowing form. In this later painting, they do not scrutinise a piece of excrement; rather, it is a sputtering volcanic hotspot.

The Excrement Philosopher

The association between excrement and wealth in ‘The Dream of the Treasure’ allows for differing interpretations. On the one hand, the equating of two such extreme icons of ‘high’ and ‘low’ imagery strongly resonates with Bataille’s interest in heterogeneous matter and his concept of base materialism. We also see this interest in *The Solar Anus*, where the sun and anus become linked through parody. This reading is supported by Freud’s discussion of the valuing of excrement in early childhood, a stage of development of which he is emphatic that it is excrement itself—and the satisfaction of masturbatory and coprophilic instincts—that is of value.²⁵ On the other hand, the imagery in ‘The Dream of the Treasure’ could, at first glance, be thought to suggest an almost poetic sublimation of base matter. This reading could be supported by Freud’s essay ‘Affects in Dreams,’ in which he describes the way that our dreams allow us to be in ‘horrible, dangerous, and disgusting situation[s]’ without feeling ‘fear or repulsion.’²⁶

²⁴ Georges Bataille, *L’Anus solaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 86. Translated by Alan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 8.

²⁵ Freud and Oppenheim, *Dreams in Folklore*, 36.

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 5, *The Interpretation of Dreams (Second Part) and On Dreams*

Here, Freud describes his own dream in which he defecates and urinates but feels no disgust. He goes on to describe the ‘agreeable and satisfying thoughts’ that allowed this dream to come forth: the way that the toilet seat recalled a beloved piece of furniture given to him by a grateful patient, how the landscape fondly reminded him of Italy, and how the act of urination recalled the feats of Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver and François Rabelais’s Gargantua (whom Freud calls a ‘superman’).²⁷ Through these various transpositions, excrement becomes elevated from its base reality to function metaphorically. As Freud writes: ‘even the museum of human excrement could be given an interpretation to rejoice my heart.’²⁸

Refuting this sublimated reading of ‘The Dream of the Treasure,’ however, is the fact that once the peasant has awakened, his ‘treasure’ disappears and he is left only with his own waste and the knowledge that he has excreted in bed. The image moves from treasure to shit—high to low—and not vice versa. Similarly, the appearance of the excrement in Miró’s painting, which I noted resembles a marker—a sort of scatological ‘X marks the spot’—is ultimately useless, as, in this fundamentally pessimistic image, there is no treasure for the two onlooking peasants to find. This reverential, glowing, and yet un-sublimated depiction of shit in Miró’s image is almost certainly a mocking image and a reaction to the *bienio negro*. That this waste matter does not alert the spectators to anything other than itself is a scathing comparison with the hopelessness facing the Spanish people, including the Catalan peasantry with whom Miró identified and whom he celebrates throughout his oeuvre.

(London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953), 460. Originally published in 1899 as ‘*Die Traumdeutung*.’

²⁷ Ibid., 469.

²⁸ Ibid.

Miró claims that he was ‘obsessed’ with the Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn’s words ‘I find rubies and emeralds in a dungheap’²⁹ while painting *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*. While this statement cannot be positively attributed to Rembrandt, it is known that he used pigments that required manure as part of their manufacturing. Significantly, Rembrandt also executed small paintings on copper—a notable example of which is his self-portrait *Rembrandt Laughing* (c. 1628) (Fig. 7); this is the same medium Miró introduced into his oeuvre with the ‘savage paintings’ and on which he painted *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*. Regardless of the origins of this quotation, Miró’s painting appears to extol the ‘dungheap’ itself rather than find anything precious hidden within it. In fact, in my view Miró’s composition seems to mock this edifying transposition of the base. The positioning of the shit on an elevated landmass, its vertical alignment, the unworldly glow that surrounds it, and the gesticulations of the human onlookers seem to set the object up as something curiously marvellous. Ultimately, however, the excrement exists without a transpositional function; it contributes to a pessimistic image and allows neither the figures nor the viewer to escape from (or make sense of) this wasteland. This treatment of the excremental motif by Miró should be read in close alignment with Bataille’s own mission of ‘base materialism,’ outlined in several of his writings and among the most widely researched subjects in Bataillean scholarship. Specifically, Miró’s depiction of excrement brings to mind Bataille’s attack on Surrealist idealism. Raymond Spiteri astutely summarises Bataille’s view of Surrealism as ‘focused on the process of transposition as an evasion of base material or psychological processes.’³⁰ According to this view, Apollinaire’s approach to Surrealism (to which Breton was indebted), summarised as ‘Il s’agit avant tout de traduire la réalité’ (‘above all,

²⁹ Lluís Permanyer, ‘Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work.’ Translated by Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (New York: Da Capo, 1992), 293.

³⁰ Raymond Spiteri, ‘Georges Bataille and the Limits of Modernism,’ *E-MAJ*, no. 4 (2009): 1.

it is a matter of translating reality’),³¹ is a means of avoiding the ‘real.’ As mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis, Bataille’s advocacy of the real is made clearest in his article ‘Le gros orteil’ (‘The Big Toe’), in which he calls for seduction by this ‘low’ appendage, ‘in a base manner, without transpositions.’³² Commenting specifically on excrement’s participation in ‘the real,’ Allen Weiss notes that ‘excrement, as an image of death, as the formless [*informe*], as pure heterogeneous matter is excluded from the order of the symbolic.’³³ Significantly, excremental imagery also played a prominent role in the polemical exchanges between Breton and Bataille in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In ‘La “vieille taupe” et le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*’ (‘The Old Mole and the Prefix Sur in the words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surréaliste*’), likely written in 1929–1930 for the avant-garde review *Bifur* but unpublished in the writer’s lifetime, Bataille continues to criticise the ideal (and the surreal), this time through the context of a Marxist revolution. As Allan Stoekl elaborates: ‘Marx’s “old mole” burrows under and *subverts* the idealism that founds and legitimates systems as diverse as authoritarian imperialism (fascism), utopian socialism, the Nietzschean *superman*, and “spiritual” surrealism.’³⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, Bataille’s criticism of the elevated was so fervent that even Nietzsche was not safe from his critique. Breton was equally scathing towards Bataille as Bataille was towards Surrealism in the *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (*Second Manifesto of Surrealism*), published in 1930. Breton writes that Bataille represents ‘un retour offensif du vieux matérialisme antidialectique qui tente, cette fois, de se frayer gratuitement un chemin à travers Freud’ (‘an obnoxious return to an old anti-dialectical materialism, which this time is trying to force its way gratuitously through

³¹ Guillaume Apollinaire, preface to ‘Parade,’ *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Pierre Caizergues and Michel Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 866.

³² Georges Bataille, ‘Le gros orteil,’ *Documents* 1, no.6 (1929): 302. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 23.

³³ Allen Weiss, ‘Between the Sign of the Scorpion and the Sign of the Cross: *L’Age d’or*,’ in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 161.

³⁴ Alan Stoekl, introduction to *Visions of Excess*, xv.

Freud').³⁵ Breton's attack on Bataille in the *Second Manifesto* has been widely explored in the existing literature, but what is most relevant for the present argument is the ways in which excremental imagery entered the polemic. Whereas Bataille characterises horror as 'joue uniquement le rôle du fumier dans la croissance végétale, fumier d'odeur suffocante sans doute mais salubre à la plante' ('play[ing] the role of manure in the growth of plant life, manure whose odour is stifling no doubt but salutary for the plant'), Breton criticises this view as 'infinite banality,' 'dishonest,' and 'pathological.'³⁶ He then summarises the differences between Bataille's aesthetic and his own thusly:

M. Bataille aime les mouches. Nous, non: nous aimons la mitre des anciens évocateurs, la mitre de lin pur à la partie antérieure de laquelle les mouches ne se posaient pas, parce qu'on avait fait des ablutions pour les abandonnent.

(M. Bataille loves flies. Not we: we love the miters of old evocators, the miters of pure linen to whose front point was affixed a blade of gold and upon which flies did not settle, because they had been purified to keep them away.)³⁷

Finally, he characterises Bataille by paraphrasing Karl Marx, who once remarked that every generation has its 'philosophes-cheveux, des philosophes-ongles, *des philosophes-orteils, des philosophes-excréments*, etc.' ('hair-philosophers, fingernail-philosophers, *toenail-philosophers, excrement-philosophers*, etc.').³⁸ As Bataille biographer Michael Surya explains, Bataille's tastes would likely have been inconsequential to Breton, except that Bataille was in a position to lure those 'principal refugees'—André Masson, Michel Leiris, Raymond

³⁵ André Breton, *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 825. Translated in *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 183.

³⁶ Breton quotes Bataille's 'L'Apocalypse de Saint-Sever' (Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 167). Breton *Second manifeste*, 826. Translated by Seaver and Lane in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 184.

³⁷ Breton, *Second manifeste*, 825–826. Translated by Seaver and Lane in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 184.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 185. Translated by Seaver and Lane in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 185.

Queneau, Georges Limbour, and Robert Desnos, for example—towards *Documents* after they abandoned or were excommunicated from Surrealism.³⁹

Another important factor within this debate was the attempt by both Breton and Bataille to ‘claim’ the writings of the Marquis de Sade for their own cause. Simon Baker explains that Sade’s ‘participation’ within this polemic manifested in a number of ways: the author’s ‘reanimation for the Surrealist cause,’ the inclusion of his previously unpublished texts in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, and Bataille’s ‘scatological’ essay ‘Le valeur d’usage de D.A.F. de Sade’ (‘The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade’).⁴⁰ Sade’s work revels in coprophilia, and especially in coprophagia; *Les 120 journées de Sodome* (*The 120 Days of Sodom*) depicts characters wallowing and masturbating in excrement, with dozens of instances depicting characters eating excrement, watching others shit, smearing excrement on each other, and ‘worshipping’ shit.⁴¹ Sade’s work also anticipates the Freudian emphasis on shit as a commodity: ‘je veux qu’on chie dans ma culotte et garder cela toute la soirée’ (‘I’ll have someone shit in my breeches, and I’ll keep the treasure the whole evening’).⁴²

When Bataille writes on Sade’s ‘use value,’ he is discussing the two diverging groups created through their reaction to Sade’s work: those who are ‘scandalised’ and reject it, and those ‘apologists’ who praise it (notably the Surrealists, who had ‘rediscovered’ this literature⁴³).⁴⁴ It is the latter group that disturbs Bataille; through their admiration, the transgression at play in his work is made acceptable. This is a point that Bataille made several times throughout his career, first in ‘The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade’ and later in the 1957 novel *Le Bleu du ciel* (*Blue of Noon*), in which the protagonist

³⁹ Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), 129.

⁴⁰ Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 246.

⁴¹ Marquis de Sade, *Les 120 journées de Sodome*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 13–14 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1967), 168. Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and other writings*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Weidenfel, 1966), 183–674. Originally written in 1785.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 368.

⁴³ Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2000), 2.

⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, ‘The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade,’ in *Visions of Excess*, 92.

shouts ‘Ceux qui admirent Sade sont des escrocs—entends-tu?—des escrocs . . . Est-ce qu’ils avaient mangé de la merde, oui ou non?’ (‘People who admire De Sade are con artists, do you hear? Con artists! . . . Did any of them eat shit? Yes or no’).⁴⁵ He broached the subject again in *L’Érotisme* (*Eroticism*), in which he writes: ‘En vérité, ceux qui virent en Sade un scélérat répondirent mieux à ses intentions que ses modernes admirateurs: Sade appelle une protestation révoltée, sans laquelle le *paradoxe du plaisir* serait simplement poésie’ (‘Indeed, those people who used to rate de Sade as a scoundrel responded better to his intentions than his admirers do in our own day: de Sade provokes indignation and protest, otherwise the paradox of pleasure would be nothing but a poetic fancy’).⁴⁶ Breton, meanwhile, maintained that ‘Sade est le surréaliste dans le sadisme’ (‘Sade is Surrealist in sadism’),⁴⁷ and celebrates Sade’s heroism, contrasting him—‘un homme qui a passé *pour ses idées* vingt-sept années de sa vie en prison’ (‘a man who spent twenty-seven years of his life in prison *for his beliefs*’)—with Bataille, whom he calls the ‘staid librarian.’⁴⁸ Breton insists upon Sade’s ‘desire for moral and social independence’ and his ‘heroic need . . . to create an order of things which was not as it were dependent upon everything that had come before him.’⁴⁹

Given that six years passed between the publication of the *Second Manifesto* and the execution of the savage paintings, Miró’s interest in base matter almost certainly has more to do with the impending Spanish Civil War than with intentional participation in

⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *Le Bleu du ciel*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 428. Translated by Harry Matthews, in Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon* (London: Penguin, 2001), 54. First published in 1957.

⁴⁶ Georges Bataille, *L’Érotisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 10 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 179. Translated by Mary Dalwood, in *Eroticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 180.

⁴⁷ André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 152. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane in *Manifesto of Surrealism*, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

⁴⁸ Breton, *Second Manifeste*, 827.

⁴⁹ Both Bataille and Breton refer to an act allegedly committed by Sade in an asylum in which he requested a bouquet of beautiful roses and proceeded to pluck off their petals and throw them into liquid excrement. For Bataille, this act has ‘an overwhelming impact’ for his theory that ‘all these beautiful things run the risk of being reduced to a strange *mise en scène*, destined to make sacrilege more impure’ (Georges Bataille, ‘The Language of Flowers,’ translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 14). For Breton, meanwhile, it was an ‘effort to try to make the human mind get rid of its chains’ (Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, 186).

the Bretonian-Bataillean polemic. Miró does write, in a contemporary letter to his dealer, Pierre Matisse, that he felt that Surrealism had ‘already come to its extreme limit’ and that his own work exists in a ‘*human and living* way, with nothing literary or intellectual about it,’⁵⁰ although he did have a tendency throughout his career to downplay both the intellectual qualities of his work and his engagement with groups.⁵¹ Whether intentional or not, Miró’s mockingly reverential depiction of human waste certainly resonates with Bataillean heterology, resisting identification through reason, and instead participating in the ‘sacred’ world of excesses and transgression. The ‘sacred,’ here, does not refer to traditional notions of religion, but instead stands as the opposite of ‘profane,’ the world of taboo and transgression, sacrifice and eroticism. Bataille’s interest in ‘unassimilated matter,’ David Lomas explains, contrasts with Breton’s preference for assimilation and the subjection of low matter to ‘poetic indulgence and escapism.’⁵² Bataille lists all types of excrement (faeces, menstrual blood, sperm, urine) as examples of heterogeneity.⁵³ The very act of excreting—of expulsion—stands in contrast to the emphasis placed on accumulation in work-based, profane society. Miró’s excrement, as pure base matter, revelling in its lowness and resisting edification, participates in the sacred, as does the forthcoming war—as an overturning of the taboo on murder—to which it refers.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Joan Miró, letter to Pierre Matisse, 18 September 1936, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 126.

⁵¹ ‘I’m not interested in any school or in any artist. Not one . . .’ (Joan Miró, interview with Francisco Melgar, ‘Spanish Artists in Paris: Juan [sic] Miró.’ Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 117). Later, he said: ‘I am therefore totally removed from the ideas—Freudian, theoretical, etc., etc., etc., etc.—that people apply to my work’ (Miró to Matisse, 28 September 1936. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*), 126).

⁵² David Lomas, *The Haunted Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 144.

⁵³ Georges Bataille, ‘La valeur d’usage de D.A.F. de Sade,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 59.

⁵⁴ See chapter 6 for more on taboo and transgression.

Toilet-Paper Revolutionaries

In examining Miró's employment of excremental imagery in 1935 through the lens of Bataillean base materialism, and in order to situate the work within the debate over materialism and transposition, it is useful to consider the 1929 output of a contemporary Catalan artist, Salvador Dalí, which heavily features depictions of defecation and other low matter. Like Miró, Dalí's work of the late 1920s and early 1930s attracted the attention of both Breton and Bataille and elicited divergent responses. Understanding their differing interpretations of Dalí's excremental imagery—particularly that found in *The Lugubrious Game* (1929)—in light of their attempts to further their respective positions on materialism allows one to consider the legacy of this debate on later excremental subject matter, like Miró's *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*.

In 1929, the same year that he arrived in the city, Dalí held his first Paris exhibition, where he showed *The Great Masturbator* and *The Lugubrious Game* (both 1929). It seems as though Dalí brought with him to Paris his typically Catalan, scatological sense of humour. According to Robert Hughes, Dalí once insisted that the greatest unknown modernist artist was the French performer Joseph Pujol (whose name is Catalan), who went by the stage name 'Le Pétomane' (the 'Fartomaniac').⁵⁵ Pujol's farting act included such feats as imitating animals, musical instruments, and thunder. Dalí also expressed a fondness for a beloved character from Catalan children's folk tales named Patufet,⁵⁶ a very small boy (much like the English Tom Thumb) who gets eaten by an ox and escapes when the animal farts.⁵⁷ Dalí's coprophilia is made evident in *The Lugubrious Game* (Fig. 8), in whose bottom-right corner is a man, seen from behind, dressed in shit-stained shorts.

⁵⁵ Hughes, *Barcelona*, 32.

⁵⁶ Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 31.

⁵⁷ Lluís Folch i Soler, *El Món dels infants en els contes. Anàlisi psicopedagògica* (Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2006), 71.

This work caught Breton's and Bataille's eyes, each seeking to claim Dalí for their movements, and, as Elza Adamowicz explores in her article 'Exquisite Excrement: The Bataille-Breton Polemic,' Dalí's work functioned 'as a site of polemical jousting' between Bretonian idealism and metaphor and Bataillean (base) materialism.⁵⁸ Adamowicz rightfully argues that Breton's and Bataille's commentary on Dalí's early paintings is representative of their theoretical divergences, and is further indicative of 'the contemporary debate on aesthetics, concerning the materiality of the art object versus its transposition.'⁵⁹ I believe that Miró's inclusion of excremental imagery in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* could easily have incited similar debates, as it is ultimately a metaphor (representing contemporary Spain as a pile of excrement), but one that is bitter and sardonically celebrates 'low matter' without lofty transposition or poetic associations.

For the December 1929 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Breton reproduced two of Dalí's paintings from his first Paris exhibition as well as Dalí and Luis Buñuel's script for the film *Un Chien andalou*, which opened to the public in October 1929 and ran for eight months. Interestingly, the script for *Un Chien andalou* includes a reference to excrement—from the decomposing donkeys that appear inside the pianos—that was not included in the final film.⁶⁰ As Adamowicz explains, Breton's preface to these reproductions serves two purposes. Firstly, it indoctrinates Dalí into the Surrealist movement, celebrating his work as 'hallucinatory' and 'poetic.'⁶¹ Echoing his metaphor from his 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton writes how 'with Dalí, it is perhaps the first time that our mental windows have opened wide.'⁶² Secondly, Breton's claiming of the artist worked as a 'strategic annexation' of Dalí against Bataille's attempts to lure him

⁵⁸ Elza Adamowicz, 'Exquisite Excrement: The Bataille-Breton Polemic,' *Aurifex*, no. 2 (2003).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Elza Adamowicz, *Un Chien Andalou* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 56.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Adamowicz, 'Exquisite Excrement.'

toward his own brand of dissident Surrealism centred around the magazine *Documents*.⁶³ After aligning Dalí with mainstream Surrealism, Breton was able to use the Catalan artist's works to illustrate his views in the polemic concerning materialism and idealism.

Dalí's own position within the debate over materialism is difficult to ascertain. His 1928 article 'New Limits of Painting'—in which he writes: 'flowers are intensely poetic precisely because they resemble rotting donkeys'⁶⁴—seems to suggest a movement from high to low. The subject of flowers also anticipates Bataille's 'Le langage de fleurs' ('The Language of Flowers') (1929), in which he asserts that 'D'autre part, les fleurs les plus belles sont déparées au centre par l'atache velue des organes sexuels' ('even the most beautiful of flowers are spoiled in their centres by hairy sexual organs').⁶⁵ Thus, if one removes the petals of a rose—an archetypal metaphor for ideal beauty—all that remains is 'the filth of its organs.'⁶⁶ As Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons notes, while Bataille emphasises the rose's hidden baseness, and the tendency by idealists to overlook such elements, Breton embraces 'the transcendence and identity of the *idea*, despite its abstraction from the base and the particular.'⁶⁷ In the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton responds directly to Bataille, writing that Bataille 'must surely not be well,' since 'the rose, deprived of its petals, remains the *rose*.'⁶⁸ Later, in 1931, Dalí's article 'L'Ane pourri' suggests a transpositional, Surrealist position on base matter:

Nothing can convince me that this cruel putrefaction of the donkey can be anything other than the blinding and hard reflexion of new precious stones. And

⁶³ Adamowicz, 'Exquisite Excrement.'

⁶⁴ Salvador Dalí 'New Limits of Painting,' in *Oui. The Paranoid-Critical Revolution. Writings 1927–1933 by Salvador Dalí* (Boston: Exact Change, 1998), 29.

⁶⁵ Georges Bataille, 'Le langage des fleurs,' in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 176. Originally published in *Documents* 1, no. 3 (1929), 160–164. Translated as 'The Language of Flowers,' by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 12.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, introduction to *On Bataille: Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 4.

⁶⁸ Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, 186.

we know not whether behind the tree, simulacra, shit, blood, and putrefaction, might lie hidden the desired ‘treasure island.’⁶⁹

It certainly would have been advantageous for Dalí to align himself with Surrealism proper at a time when Breton was eager to champion him. It is likely for this reason that he denied Bataille permission to reproduce *The Lugubrious Game* in *Documents*, even though certain elements of his work resonate closely with Bataillean thought. In his recollections, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942), the artist distances himself from Breton, although it is impossible to know if this memory is true or simply a Dalinian ‘rebranding.’

After Dalí’s entrance into Surrealist circles, the metaphor characterising this debate between Breton and Bataille would shift from flowers to excrement. A reflection of Dalí’s interest in psychoanalysis, *The Lugubrious Game* is rich with Freudian imagery, including castration, ejaculation, and defecation.⁷⁰ Bataille praised the artist’s works as ‘laideur effroyable’ (‘frighteningly ugly’),⁷¹ even though Bataille was forced to draft his own schematic drawing—which he referred to as a ‘Schéma Psychanalytique des Figurations Contradictaires du Sujet’ (‘Psychoanalytic Schema of the Contradictory Repetitions of the Subject’)—when he wrote about the painting in his article ‘Le “Jeu lugubre,”’ since Dalí would not allow him to include an image of the original composition.⁷² In his schema, Bataille draws attention to a figure in the lower-right corner of Dalí’s composition, who faces away from the viewer to reveal his shit-stained underwear. Bataille reads this image through his interest in the ‘inferiority complex’ and makes reference to Freud, who understood the condition as an unconscious remnant of

⁶⁹ Salvador Dalí, ‘L’Ane Pourri,’ in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 223–236.

⁷⁰ Marc J. LaFountain, *Dalí and Postmodernism: This Is Not an Essence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 52.

⁷¹ Georges Bataille, ‘Le “Jeu lugubre,”’ *Documents* 1, no.7 (1929): 369.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 372.

the Oedipus complex in adulthood.⁷³ Bataille's pictorial analysis of *The Lugubrious Game* focuses on the same themes—castration, punishment, and shame—that Freud identifies in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*.⁷⁴ Bataille suggests that the 'l'ignoble souillure du personnage en caleçon' ('ignoble stain of the man in his underwear') is 'la cause profonde et ancienne de la punition' ('the profound and early cause of the punishment') depicted in the scene.⁷⁵ The figure, Bataille continues, then discovers 'une nouvelle et réelle virilité . . . dans l'ignominie et dans l'horreur elles-mêmes' ('a new and real virility . . . in ignominy and horror themselves').⁷⁶ Reading Dalí's image through a psychoanalytic perspective (as Bataille does) reveals a non-sublimated return to anality—the second stage of Freudian psychosexual development—in adulthood. As Allen Weiss notes, an adult's return to this developmental stage—whether through artistic production (as is the case here), dreams, or in an erotic context—signifies a 'return of the repressed.'⁷⁷

While Bataille gives a great deal of attention to this soiled figure, Breton mentions the excrement only in passing, preferring to praise the metaphorical and transpositional qualities of Dalí's composition, characterising the settings of his paintings as 'Cimmeria.'⁷⁸ Bataille would criticise this approach, writing: 'les rêves et les Cimméries illusoires restent à la portée d'irrésolus . . .' ('dreams and Cimmerii remain within reach of the zealously irresolute . . .').⁷⁹ Later, in his autobiography, Dalí would similarly criticise Breton's scatophobia, claiming that Breton had been taken aback by the excremental imagery in *The Lugubrious Game* and was not satisfied until Dalí conceded that the

⁷³ Sigmund Freud, "'A Child Is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions," in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, trans. Alix Strachey and James Strachey (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 111–112.

⁷⁴ Adamowicz, 'Exquisite Excrement.'

⁷⁵ Bataille, 'Le "Jeu lugubre,"' 372. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Weiss, 'Between the Sign of the Scorpion and the Sign of the Cross,' 161.

⁷⁸ André Breton, 'Première exposition Dalí,' in *André Breton, Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 307–309. Cimmeria refers to a mythical place at the end of the world and cloaked in perpetual darkness as described by Homer in *The Odyssey*. Arthur Rimbaud would later refer to Cimmeria in 'Délires II: Alchimie du verbe' from *Une Saison en Enfer* (1873).

⁷⁹ Bataille, 'Le "Jeu lugubre,"' 370. Translated by Stokel et al., as "The "Lugubrious Game,"" in *Visions of Excess*, 27.

excremental element was a ‘simulacrum.’⁸⁰ Criticising Surrealism’s ‘intellectual vice’ and ‘idealistic narrowness,’ Dalí wrote: ‘I understood from that day forward that these were merely toilet-paper revolutionaries, loaded with petit bourgeois prejudices, in whom the archetypes of classical morals had left indelible imprints. Shit scared them. Shit and arseholes.’⁸¹ Again, Dalí’s true feelings on the matter are difficult to discern: he appears to express an interest in excrement as heterogeneous matter, but then claims that nothing is ‘more in need of transcendence’⁸² than excrement, which seems to indicate a fundamentally Surrealistic approach to image-making.

Breton’s idealised assessment of *The Lugubrious Game* also brings to mind his description of a work by Picasso in an article entitled ‘Picasso dans son element,’ published in *Minotaure* in 1933. Breton describes Picasso’s intention to include human excrement in a composition that is now lost. Although he was unable to find a suitable specimen (containing undigested berry pips) and was forced to use paint, Picasso informed Breton that the work would contain real flies.⁸³ Commenting on this practice, Breton praises Picasso, writing that ‘a mind so constantly and exclusively inspired is capable of turning everything into poetry, ennobling everything,’⁸⁴ and that the work transported him ‘*elsewhere*, in some place where the weather was fine, life was pleasant and I was surrounded by wildflowers and morning dew.’⁸⁵ As David Lomas notes, Breton’s ability to glean from Picasso’s image an ‘edifying message about the sublimation of base material into art’ stands in direct opposition to Bataille’s baseness and would

⁸⁰ Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, 220. Dalí continues: ‘but had I been pressed I should certainly have had to answer that it was the simulacrum of the excrement itself.’ In an alternative reading of this statement, Roger Rothman considers that Dalí may have intended to depict a simulacrum all along, given his ‘fascination with things like fake gold and false memories.’ See Roger Rothman, *Tiny Surrealism: Salvador Dalí and the Aesthetics of the Small* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 128.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Dalí, *The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí*, 113.

⁸³ André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald, 1972), 101–114.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

undoubtedly serve for Bataille as an example of Breton's 'poetic indulgence and escapism of which he was so scornful.'⁸⁶⁸⁷

Dalí would continue to explore the transpositional potential of excrement in 1930 with his and Luis Buñuel's second collaborative film, *L'Age d'Or* (*The Golden Age*). The first appearance of excremental imagery occurs during the 'founding of Rome' scene, in which two characters—a man and a woman—playfully wrestle in the mud before being forcibly separated by a crowd. After the two characters are separated and the man is left on his own, he experiences the first of what Allen Weiss calls 'phantasms,' which he argues are born from the film's duelling symbolic models of sublimation and perversion.⁸⁸ Here, in the male character's fantasy, the woman sits on a toilet. She then disappears, leaving only a vision of the toilet and a roll of burning toilet paper, which then gives way to effusive, sputtering volcanic lava accompanied by the sound of a flushing toilet. The fantasy ends and we see the man, looking bewildered, still lying in the mud. Dalí thus establishes a formal metonymy between excrement and lava and between the anus and the volcano that could be interpreted in both Bretonian and Bataillean terms. While Dalí does transpose the excremental metaphor from mud, to shit, to lava, and while the volcanic discharge could also be read in erotic terms, there is no sublimation, no edification at work in these scenes. We have, despite his professed aversion to metaphor, seen a similar cycling of images in Bataille's *Story of the Eye* (in

⁸⁶ For more on Breton's article on Picasso, as well as Bataille's heterology, see Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 43.

⁸⁷ It is difficult to establish Breton's exact position on excrement. On the one hand, he praises it as transpositional in his writings on art and on Sade. In other instances, however, he does not shy away from excrement as pure base matter in an erotic context. Consider the following conversation: Jean Baldensperger: '... when you speak of love you are also thinking of going to bed with her. Would you got to bed with a woman who was in a disgusting state?' Breton: 'Definitely.' Baldensperger: 'I would not be able to make love with a woman whose arse was encrusted with shit.' Breton: 'That's your affair. There are people who like that very much (the Marquis de Sade and all the great *érotomanes*). ... I don't see any difference between the encrusted shit of the woman one loves and her eyes ...' Jean Caupenne: 'Shit isn't exactly part of the person, so far as I know.' Breton: 'Why not? Of course it is!' From Jean Baldensperger et al., 'Seventh Session,' 6 May 1928, in *Investigating Sex: Surrealist Research, 1928–1932*, ed. José Pierre, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 2011), 101.

⁸⁸ See Weiss's important study on excremental imagery in *L'Age d'Or* in Weiss, 'Between the Sign of the Scorpion and the Sign of the Cross,' 165.

chapter 3) and the same conflation of the volcano and anus in *The Solar Anus* (in chapter 4), which he published one year after Dalí and Buñuel premiered *L'Age d'Or*. Furthermore, *L'Age d'Or*, as an exploration of the absurdity of modernity that targets, in particular, bourgeois society and the Catholic Church, functions as a social commentary on these topics, which, as the next section explores, were arenas in which other Catalan artists (or artists responding to the Civil War) would also employ scatological imagery.

Scatology and Social Commentary

The scatological imagery in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* does not serve to transport the viewer to someplace else, someplace ‘pleasant,’ in the way that Breton found Picasso’s work did. Instead, it metaphorically represents the horrors of the *bienio negro*, thus rooting the image firmly to the real world and to contemporary events. In fact, I would argue that Miró rejects such Surrealist, transpositional qualities for excremental imagery and instead subjects them to parody and ridicule in this composition. Returning to a point that I made earlier in this chapter, I believe that Miró achieves this parodic effect through the particular quality of light that surrounds the turd. While the previous chapter described the glowing shit in this composition through the ‘solar anus’ as a sun that *excretes* light, the deep yellow light around the excrement also recalls the kind of spiritual light found in the works of Spanish painters of the Golden Age, who were inspired by the mystics. Margit Rowell has argued that the ‘mystical experiences’ of St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross served as ‘models’ for Miró’s working practice and the creation of a ‘real unreality’ in his work.⁸⁹ There is certainly a similarity between

⁸⁹ Rowell suggests that the experiences of these mystics served as ‘models’ for Miró (see Rowell, introduction to *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 17). The artist himself is slightly less emphatic when asked whether Saint John of the Cross and St Teresa influenced him: ‘it’s possible, but not directly; more as a consequence of the spiritual tension they produce in me.’ See Joan Miró, “Miró

the glowing excrement in Miró's painting and the holy illumination around the figure of Mary in Immaculate Conception paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán (1628–1630) and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1678) as well as in depictions of Saint Francis by El Greco (*Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, 1580) and Murillo (*The Vision of Saint Francis of Paola*, c. 1670) (Figs. 9–12). In each of these works, the use of an otherworldly light serves to draw attention to a divine figure, or to indicate a vision. Miró thus unites waste matter with holiness in a manner similar to the *caganer* figure. The *caganer*'s implied presence (he does not physically appear in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*) is parodied by the mysterious faeces and its traditional placement outside the manger in the nativity scene is thus satirised by the excrement's deceptive glow. Miró's excrement acts as a 'false prophet'; its mockingly spiritual light offers its onlookers not hope, treasure, nor the promise of escape. This iconographic use of shit, I believe, is indicative of Miró's own pessimism and anxiety during the period. Strengthening this view is the fact that Miró also turned to writing scatological poetry during the Spanish Civil War, one example of which reads: 'A star fondles a black woman's breast / a snail licks a thousand tits / gushing the pope-king's blue piss / so be it.'⁹⁰ At the end of another poem—a sort of rambling, potentially automatic paragraph with minimal punctuation—Miró writes: 'fart 1 (burp) / farts 2 (burps) / farts 3 (burps).'⁹¹ The notebook concludes with a list of titles that correspond to drawings of women at war, which will be the focus of the following two chapters of this thesis.

Unsurprisingly, Miró is not the first artist to use excremental imagery to comment on current events. Humorously, those disparaging of the avant-garde in Spain employed scatological references to insult Miró's work. The artist's paintings shocked the

Advises Our Young Painters," by Rafael Santos Torroella,' *Correo Literario* (Barcelona). Translated by Auster and Matthews in *Joan Miró Selected Writings and Interviews*, 227.

⁹⁰ Joan Miró, untitled poem, 25 November 1936, from 'Notebook of Poems, 1936–39,' translated by Auster and Matthews in *Joan Miró Selected Writings and Interviews*, 138.

⁹¹ Joan Miró, untitled poem, 5 December 1936, from 'Notebook of Poems, 1936–39,' translated by Auster and Matthews in *Joan Miró Selected Writings and Interviews*, 140.

public to such a degree that after his first exhibition in Barcelona, at the Galeries Dalmau in February 1918, the gallery received vandalised copies of the exhibition catalogue cover. The publication's original calligram by Josep M. Junoy, a Catalan poet, included the name 'Miró' written vertically and praised the artist's work for its formal qualities. One altered version, mailed to the gallery anonymously, changed the calligram to read: "MERDA d'una pudó ALIMENTISIA" ('SHIT' of a NOURISHING smell') (Fig. 13).⁹² Later, in 1936, the group Pro Art Clàssic (PAC) released leaflets protesting an exhibition of Picasso's work, which was being promoted by the artistic association Amics de l'Art Nou (ADLAN).⁹³ ADLAN championed the Catalan avant-garde, Miró in particular, and was crucial for the forming and sustaining of a Surrealist movement in the region.⁹⁴ PAC's leaflet design (Fig. 14), intended to attack the avant-garde, was an excreting donkey, its body and excrement formed calligrammatically by the names of artists, critics, and organisations to whom the society objected. ADLAN has been given a place of particular prominence in the composition, as the shit that falls from beneath the donkey's tail to form a pile on the ground below.

Miró's use of excremental imagery during the *bienio negro* also has roots in the work of Francisco de Goya, specifically in his *Caprichos* (1797–1798), whose eighty etchings act as social commentaries on Spanish society and the Inquisition. Number 69 of the series, the composition *Sopla (Blow)* (Fig. 15), shows a thin and aged man holding a young child up by the ankles and using his flatulence to fan a fire. As in most of the *Caprichos* compositions, one cannot be positive about whom Goya is satirising—the artist's deliberate ambiguity likely served to protect him from the very political and

⁹² For more on the reception of Miró's first exhibition, see Robert S. Lubar, 'Art and Anti-Art: Miró, Dalí, and the Catalan Avant-Garde,' in *Barcelona and Modernity*, ed. William H. Robinson et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press and the Cleveland Museum of Art, 2007), 339–347. For more on Junoy's calligrams, see Brad Epps, 'The Avant-Garde Visual Poetry of Junoy and Salvat-Papasseit,' in *Barcelona and Modernity*, 328–332.

⁹³ Their name translates to Friends of the New Art.

⁹⁴ For more on ADLAN and Miró's involvement, see Rosa Maria Subirana, 'ADLAN and the artists of the Republic,' in *Homage to Barcelona: The City and Its Art, 1888–1936*, ed. Michael Raeburn (London: The Hayward Gallery, 1985), 211–226.

religious institutions that he was parodying.⁹⁵ In the case of *Blon*—whose implications of cannibalism and paedophilia have led to its naming as ‘the most disgusting of the *Caprichos*’—scholars suggest that the target is the clergy, drawing a connection between witchcraft and the Catholic Church and the hierarchies therein (in the way in which ‘the younger [defer] to the older’ in this image).⁹⁶

Miró’s *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* also participates in parodic subversion (as do all of the savage paintings, as discussed in chapter 4), in this case acting upon the innocent humour and agricultural associations of excrement present in the artist’s earlier work. Chapter 4 also discussed Miró’s treatment of parody in the savage paintings in relation to the carnivalesque, and it is worth exploring here in greater detail the way in which excrement was celebrated as an element of the carnival.⁹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin devotes several pages of *Rabelais and His World* to a discussion of excrement, noting the importance that this base matter held in the mock-religious Medieval service ‘feast of fools,’ in which it replaced incense; after the ceremony, ‘the clergy rode in carts loaded with dung; they drove through the streets tossing it at the crowd.’⁹⁸ He also relates the throwing of excrement present in Rabelais’s work to similar scenes in ancient literature, specifically to Aeschylus’s *The Bone-Collectors*, in which a chamber pot is thrown at the head of Odysseus.⁹⁹ As it relates to the carnivalesque, excrement represents a link with renewal, birth, and fertility; but also, as ‘images of the material bodily stratum,’ they ‘debase and destroy.’¹⁰⁰ Excrement thus links life and death, man and earth, acting as ‘an

⁹⁵ Philip Hofer, introduction to Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Los Caprichos* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 15. Originally published in 1799.

⁹⁶ Robert Hughes, *Goya* (London: Harvill, 2003), 204.

⁹⁷ One can also relate excremental humour and the function of the carnivalesque to the Catalan qualities of *rauxa* and *seny*. *Seny* is the characteristics of good-naturedness, level-headedness, and good temper. *Rauxa* offers a release from *seny* in the form of the irrational, the riotous, and drunkenness (much like carnivalesque inversion). For more on these qualities, see Hughes, *Barcelona*, 25–26.

⁹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 147. Originally published in 1965 as *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kultura srednevekovia i Renessansa*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

indeterminate between the living body and dead disintegrating matter that is being transformed into earth, into manure.¹⁰¹ Miró's excremental image most closely relates to Bakhtin's insistence that excrement is inextricably tied to death. What makes *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* a terrifying image is this connection between excrement and death: in place of the squatting peasant who serves to fertilise the soil, one is left with the implication that instead of the turd, the bodies of the two figures, once they have died, will perform this task.¹⁰²

Bakhtin also draws a connection between excrement and food. He notes that tripe appears frequently in the works of Rabelais as well as in the literature of grotesque realism. The word 'tripe' refers to the stomach and bowels of cattle, which, after cleaning, are still believed to comprise 10 per cent excrement, which is then eaten along with the meat.¹⁰³ The reason that tripe was so popular in grotesque realism, Bakhtin argues, is that it ties together 'life and death, birth, excrement, and food' in 'one grotesque knot,' since the bowels relate to excrement, the stomach relates to eating but is also consumed as tripe, and the manner of preparing the meat involves slaughter.¹⁰⁴ He further notes the relationship between food and death in such language as 'being swallowed up,' as well as the characterisation by Rabelais of the underworld as the 'lower stratum'¹⁰⁵

Fascinatingly, another of Miró's most powerful Civil War images—*Still Life with Old Shoe* (1937) (Fig. 16)—uses food as its principal iconography. In this image, Miró presents a basic table setting, featuring a loaf of bread, a bottle of gin, an apple pierced by a fork, and a shoe, ultimately distorting an innocent still life into something horrible through his use of colour. The black background and hallucinatory yellows and greens

¹⁰¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 175.

¹⁰² Bakhtin writes: 'the living body returns to the earth as excrement, which fertilizes the earth, as does the body of the dead.' Ibid., 175.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 302.

that surround the objects recall *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, painted one year earlier, and push this nightmarish landscape to a new extreme while also providing a visual link in the artist's Civil War-era work between excrement, food, and death. Much like the savage paintings, Miró wrote of his motivations for painting *Still Life with Old Shoe* as being born from 'human events,' 'inner necessity,' and the desire to 'look nature in the face and dominate it,' all of which refers to the Civil War, an event he called a 'hideous drama' and which at this point had been underway for nearly half a year.¹⁰⁶

Miró would not be the only Surrealist to employ excremental imagery in responding to the Spanish Civil War. André Masson, while not associated with this Catalan coprophilic legacy in the same way as Miró or Dalí, had been in Spain during the outbreak of the war and completed a scatological drawing entitled *Tea at Franco's* for the cover of *Clé* in February 1939 (Fig. 17). The drawing depicts a Nazi soldier and Francisco Franco chained together on the left side, and a third figure—whose umbrella is read by Robin Adèle Greeley as an indication that he is English¹⁰⁷—sits on and defecates into a large toilet labelled 'city.' The scene is littered with entrails and the Englishman drops a scorpion—a symbol of anality, excrement, death, and sex¹⁰⁸—into Franco's tea. Greeley reads Masson's drawing as a commentary on Britain's contemporary non-intervention policies, which, in preventing a Republican victory, provided 'implicit political support for Franco that often translated into explicit financial support.'¹⁰⁹ Dalí's *Autumn Cannibalism* (1936) (Fig. 18), painted shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, can also be read as coprophagic. The greens and browns with which Dalí has painted the figures and the soft, formless oozing of their bodies suggests that these figures are not only

¹⁰⁶ Joan Miró, letter to Pierre Matisse, Hôtel Récamier, Paris, 12 February 1937. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró Selected Writings and Interviews*, 147.

¹⁰⁷ Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 138. Greeley reads the 'city' toilet as a symbol for London's banking centre.

¹⁰⁸ Weiss, 'Between the Sign of the Scorpion and the Sign of the Cross,' 160.

¹⁰⁹ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 137.

eating one another, but excrement as well, thus linking once again the stages of eating, excrement, and death.

Conclusion

In *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, Miró employs scatological imagery in such a way that it cannot be ennobled. As in his other savage paintings, this work is, at its core, parodic. Here, excrement is no longer the formerly favoured motif in Miró's previous celebrations of the Catalan soil and of the innocence of rural life. It is made erect, placed on an altar (a mound of earth), and set ablaze with a spurious holy glow. This defecation is a vision of Spain's future, presented in the visual language of Golden Age painters, who depicted mystical visions with the same technique. Miró's interest in shit certainly hails from its notable place in folkloric traditions, and the composition certainly recalls the type of dream imagery that Freud describes in *Dreams in Folklore*—but these interests have been subverted. The artist does not use excrement as a marker for treasure, but rather to signify anxiety and anguish; there is no treasure to be found, no 'rubies in the dungheap.' This non-transpositional approach to excrement does not serve to transport the viewer to a mythical landscape—Cimmeria or elsewhere. Instead, through its participation as pure base matter in Bataille's 'sacred' and his world, of transgression, difference, and excess, Miró's excrement seeks to confront, rather than escape, the *bienio negro*.

Chapter 6

Miró's Milicianas

The *bienio negro* ended with the 1936 elections, which the Left narrowly won by aligning several parties and organisations into the Frente Popular, under the leadership of Manuel Azaña. Under the command of General Francisco Franco, the Right, having failed at maintaining power democratically, declared war that summer. Miró begrudgingly spent the duration of the Civil War exiled in France, following the conflict in the newspaper and translating his trepidation primarily into small, private compositions. In 1937, he broke his silence on Spain's vicious political polarisation and contributed two works to the Spanish Republic's pavilion at the Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne: an enormous mural called *The Reaper* and *Aidez L'Espagne*, a design for a postage stamp, both of which feature a rebellious Catalan peasant. He did not speak out publically on political matters during the last year of the war (1938–1939), but instead coped with his exile by executing a succession of approximately sixty-five private works on paper that communicate a complex range of

emotional responses, encompassing rage, fear, frustration, and a prevailing faith in the Spanish people.

A recurring theme that governs nearly a third of these works is the savagely eroticised female figure confronting various scenarios relating to war. Miró depicts the nude female form, subjected to grotesque deformation, as both victim and attacker, in search of both escape and rebellion. As a response to historical events, these works inherit the spirit of the ‘savage paintings,’ but whereas the earlier series conveys a sense of disquietude and a then unidentified threat, the 1938–1939 works explicitly reference the reality of contemporary violence. In these compositions Miró unleashes an artistic violence directly upon the female body, as opposed to his parodic assault on the Catalan landscape in the savage paintings. This chapter examines the parallels between Miró’s treatment of the female form in the 1938–1939 works on paper and the intersection of eroticism and war as transgressions of taboos in Georges Bataille’s *L’Érotisme* (*Eroticism*), published in 1957. Furthermore, I situate Miró’s drawings within the sociopolitical context of the Spanish Civil War, in which the profoundly Catholic nation had to reconcile the introduction of women into the public sphere. A comparison of Miró’s drawings with contemporary Republican propaganda (including his own mural, *The Reaper*, and Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* [1937]) reveals how—through the medium of private drawings—the artist transgresses traditional depictions of femininity, merging the violent and the erotic in a manner inappropriate for public works.

There is no evidence that Miró conceived his Civil War-era drawings as a unified series; however, their overlapping themes, subjects, and motifs invite discussion of the drawings as a whole. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, and in order to aid clarity, the works will be referred to collectively as the ‘woman drawings.’ The aggressive approach to figuration that Miró inaugurated in 1930 reaches its most violent peak in this

series. Among the first of these compositions is *Woman Rebelling*¹ (14 February 1938) (Fig. 1). In a departure from the savage paintings, Miró gives no consideration to the landscape in this drawing, and instead the entirety of the scene's potency is carried by the central female figure. Her body is starkly naked and without any idealisation: her legs are clubbed and pigeon-toed and emerge from a distended abdomen; her breasts sag; and her serpentine neck terminates in a pointed head marked by a beady eye, gaping mouth, and ragged hairs. In this image Miró introduces the character of the wild, armed woman who willingly confronts danger (here personified as an eroticised male figure with erect phallus) and turns her back on the possibility of escape (symbolised by the blue star and ladder).² The nude warrior-woman, armed with her sickle, is a trope Miró will repeat in two other drawings: *Women Armed with Sickles* (9 December 1938) (Fig. 2) and *Woman in Revolt* (26 February 1938) (Fig. 3), the latter of which is the only of Miró's woman drawings to garner scholarly attention.³

Throughout the series Miró depicts raging fires, through the inclusion of either elongated triangular flames or a turbulent swirling of red, yellow, and orange, with smoky grey and brown watercolour and gouache or smudged charcoal and pastel, which creates the suggestion of billowing smoke and flame. One notes this type of imagery in the charred backgrounds of *Figure in a Landscape* (22 February 1938) (Fig. 4), *Woman with Necklace* (8 December 1938), and *Woman Fleeing from a Fire* (5 April 1939) (Fig. 5). In further instances, Miró includes references that link this fire imagery to the intense bombing attacks on civilian-populated areas of Catalonia during this year. In *Woman in Front of the Sun* (30 May 1938) (Fig. 6), the sun appears as a large black orb surrounded

¹ Miró titled and dated each of the works himself in inscriptions, in French, on the back of each composition.

² Miró typically associates the colour blue with a dream space, for instance the blue spot in *Photo: This Is the Colour of My Dreams* (1925). The ladder functions as a symbol of unfulfilled desire in *Dog Barking at the Moon* (1926) and is frequently used in the late 1930s and 1940s as a symbol of escape, for instance in the *Constellation* series painting *The Escape Ladder* (1940).

³ These sources will be discussed later in this chapter.

with flames, which hurdles like an explosive towards a nude female figure that runs, with arms raised, towards an escape ladder. In the backgrounds of *Woman in Revolt* and an untitled pencil, gouache, and pastel drawing from 1938, the artist depicts damaged and burning buildings.

In other examples, Miró titles his works with idyllic or poetic captions that belie the overt or metaphorical violence of the compositions. In *Woman in Front of the Sea* (7 November 1938), a female figure balances unsteadily on the edge of a cliff, the extreme angle of her body suggesting that Miró has depicted the moment just before her plunge into the choppy waters below. Miró communicates a similar precariousness in two works that are both titled *The Tightrope Walker* (14 and 15 May 1938) (Fig. 7). In the first, a lanky figure holds a parasol while balancing perilously on one foot against a dramatic background marked by eddies of red, yellow, green, purple, and black pastels and watercolours. The second composition appears rather light-hearted at first glance, but the tightrope itself is shown *behind* the figure, rather than beneath her feet, and her enormous, unbalanced body and raised arms suggest a more sinister reading: that she is in the act of falling. Both the tightrope and the cliff's edge serve as metaphors for war itself, and the inability to know whether one's side will emerge victorious from a profoundly dangerous situation. The tightrope illustrates the fine boundary between victory and defeat.

What is most significant about the woman drawings is that they depict *active*, self-reliant female figures, whether engaging in fight or flight. In the few instances in which Miró depicts a passive figure, as we will see, he does so sardonically, as an act of parody. The version of womanhood presented in these drawings differs greatly from the passive roles assigned to women in Republican propaganda of this time. Similarly, the disfiguring, 'unidealised,' and violent eroticism of Miró's woman series stands in stark contrast to the contemporary emphasis on motherhood. Before comparing Miró's

drawings to contemporary leftist works of propaganda, I believe it is important to first explore the ways in which they adhere to a particularly Bataillean type of eroticism in order to understand their merging of violence and sexuality as transgressions of traditional femininity.

Bataillean Eroticism

Much of Bataille's oeuvre is, of course, concerned with the intersection of eroticism and violence. As discussed in chapter 3, Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* (*Story of the Eye*) is devoted to the exploration of this theme, from Marcelle's suicide to the enucleating of El Granero. Bataille makes this link most strongly in the novel's most outrageous scene, in which the protagonist and Simone murder a priest and use his eye during various sex acts. A few years later, in *L'Anus solaire* (*The Solar Anus*) Bataille would position 'coitus' as 'the parody of crime,' as explored in chapter 4.⁴ In a 'filthy' parody of the generative powers of the sun, Bataille positions himself as the 'Jesuve' and writes: 'Je désire être égorgé en violant la fille à qui j'aurai pu dire: tu es la nuit' ('I want to have my throat slashed while violating the girl to whom I will have been able to say: you are the night').⁵ He continues the theme in *Documents*, for instance in 'Soleil Pourri' ('Rotten Sun') published in a special 'hommage à Picasso' issue. In this article, Bataille returns to a familiar subject—the Icarian notion of the dual suns: 'celui qui luisait au moment de l'elevation d'Icare' ('the one that was shining at the moment of Icarus's elevation')—the sun of spiritual enlightenment—and 'celui qui a fondu la cire' ('the one that melted the wax')—the sun

⁴ Georges Bataille, *L'Anus solaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 81.

⁵ Ibid., 86. Translated by Allan Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writing, 1927–1939*, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 9.

of excess.⁶ For Bataille, the notion of violent excess embodied by this second sun relates to ritual sacrifice in mythology and religious practice. He describes a priest slashing the throat of a bull, and its blood and screams pouring through the wooden scaffolding on which it stood to douse a group of people who had stripped naked and gathered below to reap ‘the moral benefits of the blinding sun.’⁷ Academic art, Bataille continues, participates in an elevation, but not in excess. He praises Picasso as the only contemporary painter whose ‘elaboration’ or ‘decomposition’ ‘ruptures’ that which is most elevated.⁸ To illustrate this assertion, Bataille selects eroticised images of women by Picasso; a drawing of a female nude appears above the article and *The Three Dancers* (1925) (Fig. 8) precedes it.⁹ *The Three Dancers* is a particularly evocative choice by Bataille. In addition to the aggressive eroticism of the figures’ poses, the work has violent undertones. Picasso claimed that ‘The Death of Pichot’ was a more appropriate title, referencing his friend Ramon Pichot, who died while Picasso was working on the piece.¹⁰ Scholars, including T. J. Clark and Roland Penrose, have commented on the sinister imagery found within the painting, including the ‘death’s head’ silhouette on the right hand-side¹¹ and the way in which the central figure’s pose recalls a crucifixion.¹²

Bataille continued pursuing this violently erotic narrative throughout the 1930s and 1940s, mainly through his novels *Madame Edwarda* (1941), *Le Bleu du Ciel* (written in 1935, published in 1957, and which Miró owned), and *L’Abbe C* (1950). In 1957, Bataille codified nearly four decades of such thought into his treatise, *Eroticism*. Therefore, even

⁶ Georges Bataille, ‘Soleil pourri,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 232. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 58.

⁷ Bataille, ‘Soleil pourri,’ 231. Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess*, 57.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ While Bataille does not discuss these two works explicitly, the decision to illustrate his article with these two images is significant. The relationship between text and image in *Documents* has been the source of significant inquiry in previous scholarship, for instance, in Simon Baker’s essay ‘Doctrines [The Appearance of Things],’ in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (London: The Hayward Gallery, 2005), 34–41.

¹⁰ Ronald Alley, *Picasso: The Three Dancers* (London: Tate Gallery, 1986), 24–25.

¹¹ T. J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 117.

¹² Remarks by Roland Penrose, quoted in Ronald Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery’s Collection of Modern Art Other than Works by British Artists* (London: Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, 1981), 598.

though this book was written after Miró's series, we can think of it as the consolidation of a lifetime's worth of thoughts on violent eroticism, and use it to identify overlaps with Miró's woman drawings. The study is divided into two parts—'L'Interdit et la transgression' ('Taboos and Transgressions') and 'Études diverses sur l'érotisme' ('Some Aspects of Eroticism')—and covers prehistory to the contemporary through such varied topics as menstruation, murder, the Marquis de Sade, religious sacrifice, prostitution, the Kinsey Reports, and incest. While others have suggested that *Eroticism* lacks the violence of Bataille's earlier essays,¹³ it is clear, in my view, from the book's opening lines that the meeting of eroticism and violence is paramount to this study: 'L'esprit humain est exposé aux plus surprenantes injonctions. Sans cesse, il a peur de lui-même. Ses mouvements érotiques le terrifient' ('The human spirit is prey to the most astounding impulses. Man goes constantly in fear of himself. His erotic urges terrify him').¹⁴

Bataille's early chapters of *Eroticism*—particularly those relating to taboos and transgressions—provide a useful lens through which one can read Miró's 1938–1939 drawings, as these chapters make explicit the link between death, war, and sexuality. Highlighting the urgency of this link for his understanding of eroticism, Bataille is quick to establish three central 'truths': that human eroticism is distinct from animal sexuality owing to man's 'mobilité intérieure, infiniment complexe' ('infinitely complex inner mobility'),¹⁵ that taboos separate man from animal,¹⁶ and that man's two 'primary' taboos relate to death and to sexual activity.¹⁷ Bataille cites two commandments from the Bible—those against killing and against extramarital sex—as fundamental prohibitions

¹³ Colin MacCabe, introduction to Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 10 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 11. Translated by Mary Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 9.

¹⁵ Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 33. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 29. Bataille makes it clear, however, that not all of human sexuality is 'erotic.'

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 33–34. Taboos came into existence as early man shed his animal nature, moving from an unashamed sexuality to one with shame.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43–45.

still observed at the time of his writing.¹⁸ Bataille relates the taboo concerning death to the Middle Palaeolithic, during which evidence of ritualistic burials suggests early man understood death as both terrifying and marvellous—a position it retains in contemporary experiences.¹⁹ Furthermore, owing to man's consciousness of his own impending death, the sight of a corpse is the image of one's own future, a reminder that this 'violence' is the fate of all living things.²⁰ Taboos relating to death, therefore, are man's attempt to put distance between the sight of, and the relationship between, a corpse (an image of violence) and his own body.

Like taboos relating to death, man has—according to Bataille—universal taboos relating to sexuality that contrast with animal sexual freedom.²¹ For early man, sexuality was a form of violence in that it was a 'spontaneous impulse' ('impulsion immédiate') that could interfere with work.²² To function efficiently, a society cannot afford to have its working hours interrupted by libidinous impulses, and therefore some restrictions against sexual freedoms (which Bataille would call 'taboos') must be enforced during this time.²³ In other words:

En tous temps comme en tous lieux, dans la mesure où nous sommes informés, l'homme est défini par une conduite sexuelle soumise à des règles, à des restrictions définies: l'homme est un animal qui demeure 'interdit' devant la mort, et devant l'union sexuelle. Il l'est 'plus ou moins,' mais dans l'un et l'autre sa réaction diffère de celle des autres animaux'

(At all times as in all places as far as our knowledge goes, man is defined by having his sexual behaviour subject to rules and precise restrictions. Man is an

¹⁸ Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 45.

¹⁹ Ibid., 46. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 43.

²⁰ Ibid., 49–50.

²¹ Ibid., 49.

²² Ibid., 53.

²³ Ibid., 53.

animal who stands abashed in front of death or sexual union. He may be more or less abashed, but in either case his reaction differs from that of other animals.)²⁴

The nature and degree of severity of such restrictions varies according to time and geographic location, but Bataille does identify a few nearly universal taboos, including concealing the erect male phallus and the seeking of privacy for sexual intercourse. The changing nature of taboos—for instance, the Western taboo on nakedness—does not negate the taboo's importance, but rather demonstrates the taboo's significance and sustainability in spite of minor changes. Among the sexual taboos that Bataille lists are those relating exclusively to the female body: menstruation and the loss of blood during childbirth, which he classes as 'manifestations de la violence interne' ('manifestations of internal violence').²⁵

Bataille argues that the link between eroticism and violence is not paradoxical. Both exist in the realm of 'excess' and can only be understood in relation to one another.²⁶ At the simplest level, sexual reproduction allows one's presence to continue after death through one's progeny. In the same way, death makes way for new life to enter the cycle. The primary taboos become indistinguishable from one another when considered as indicative of man's refusal to submit to nature. A further link between these taboos (and, according to Bataille, any taboo) is their ability to be transgressed in a manner that is oftentimes sanctioned or even commanded by a given society.²⁷ The act of transgression, Bataille explains, is 'sacred,' complementing the 'profane' world by exceeding its limits without destroying it.²⁸ Societies are not exclusively concerned with the profane sphere of work and taboo, but are also occupied with the sacred world,

²⁴ Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 53. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

which relies on ‘limited acts of transgression’ and is ‘a world of celebrations, sovereign rulers and God.’²⁹ Taboo and transgression reflect the ‘contradictory urges’ that those devoted to gods experience: they simultaneously feel the urge to retreat in terror, and the pull of fascination.³⁰ Similarly, taboo renders transgression prohibitive, but this very prohibition is what attracts us to transgression. To illustrate this point, Bataille gives the example of ritualistic cannibalism.³¹

Taboos exist in order to be transgressed, and therefore the taboo does not oppose the transgression, but complements it. Some of the examples Bataille lists as evidence to this theory—like ritualistic cannibalism or sacrifice—are too alien for a contemporary Western audience to identify with. Others, like duels or war are deeply rooted within Western historical and modern practices. The taboo that prohibits murder, therefore, does not prohibit war but, rather, makes war possible (animals, which live without taboo, cannot not have war). War, as a transgression of murder, is a uniquely human practice of ritualised and organised killing, requiring certain fundamental regulations (such as a declaration of hostilities and demarcated armies) in the aid of a political goal. Moreover, war often provokes other types of human cruelty, such as torture or callousness to suffering.

Both eroticism and ritualised violence (war, sacrifice, etc.) ‘révèlent. . . *la chair*’ (‘reveal the flesh’), dismantling the structure of work-oriented human society and replacing it with excess.³² Both war and eroticism (as opposed to procreative sex) overturn life’s structures through the ‘convulsion aveugle des organes’ (‘blind convulsion of organs’).³³ In both acts of transgression, this excess reaches the point of rupture (death

²⁹ Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 66. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 67–69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³² *Ibid.*, 93. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 92.

³³ *Ibid.*

or orgasm, sometimes called ‘le petite mort’ [‘the little death’]), followed by isolation.³⁴ In the case of erotic excess, in which two or more bodies come together and shatter individuality, or ‘the self,’ one experiences a period of post-coital isolation in which that individuality is regained. Bataille elucidates—discussing de Sade and the notion of the ‘sovereign man’—that sexual excess is an act of *expenditure*, involving the squandering of one’s own strength and resources to no productive end. Eroticism, therefore, opposes work, which has the goal of *accumulating* (‘spending is the opposite of getting’).³⁵ Because the erotic excess ‘implies disorder,’ it is linked to other such impulses, like destruction and betrayal. Brutality, murder, prostitution, and coarse language take part ‘à faire du monde de la volupté un monde de déchéance et de ruine’ (‘turning the world of sensual pleasure to one of ruin and degradation’).³⁶

Miró’s depictions of women at war make plain this overlap between eroticism and violence also found in Bataille’s writings. The figures are oftentimes as overt in their grotesque eroticism as they are violent: their sickles are as conspicuous as their sexuality. As in Bataille’s writings, Miró’s images are not idyllic, nor procreative. They demonstrate the upheaval and the contrasting conditions of the loss of self (participating in a communal experience) and the simultaneous isolation found in the heart of both war and sexual excess. Furthermore, the implicit eroticism of the woman series comes not from idealised femininity but from a transgressing (and, at times, a parody) of feminine passivity and sexual beauty and the rupturing of the notion of woman as erotic object. This vision of a self-possessed, sometimes militant, sexuality coincided with the expansion of public roles for women in Spain during the Civil War.

³⁴ Bataille, *L’Érotisme*, 170.

³⁵ Ibid. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 170.

³⁶ Ibid. Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 170.

Transgressing the Domestic

Twentieth-century warfare irrevocably disrupted the historical, Western social construct that women should occupy the private, domestic sphere while men should dominate the ‘public’ domain of the workplace and other social venues. The intense controversy in Spain over women’s liberation, including entering the workplace and the frontlines (in the case of the Republican militias), allows one to compare this sociological rupture with the type of disorder, dismantling of structures, and excess that Bataille describes in *Eroticism*. Because of the sheer loss of life during the Civil War, women were required to leave the domestic sphere to replace able-bodied men in the workforce, allowing these men to serve in the military. To rephrase in Bataillean terms, ritualised violence (war) overtook the work-oriented society, destroying its carefully cultivated structures (formed on the basis of sexual difference) and upturning the societal roles by which we identify (mother becomes worker, worker becomes soldier).

The considerable opposition to the emancipation of Spanish women from the private sphere owes to a variety of factors, the most significant of which are the nation’s slowness to develop industrially and the immense political and social power wielded by the Catholic Church. In 1926, María de Maeztu founded the Lyceum Club Femenino, the first women’s club in Madrid. The club’s members consisted mainly of the wives of prominent political and literary figures and the group met regularly to engage in scientific and literary discussions.³⁷ By 1930, the Lyceum Club had amassed nearly five hundred members and had started a second chapter in Barcelona.³⁸ Despite these numbers, the club was viewed as subversive and members were the subjects of mockery, viewed as enemies of the family, and faced threats of hospitalisation for their ‘eccentric and

³⁷ Shirley Mangini González, *Memories of Resistance: Women’s Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1995), 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

unbalanced' behaviour.³⁹ Conditions improved to a degree during the Second Republic, during which time women's organisations like the Unión Republicana Femenina, the Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas, and Consejo Supremo Feminista flourished.⁴⁰ The Republican government legalised divorce and, after a 1931 parliamentary debate, women's suffrage became a constitutional right.

These advances, however, empowered a relatively narrow selection of Spanish women, namely those belonging to the 'visible' upper classes. As Shirley Mangini González explains, the majority of Spanish women (especially the 'invisible' women of the working and peasant classes) had strong ties to the Catholic Church, which had all but 'truncated the possibility of feminism or any semblance of independent, critical thinking.'⁴¹ Speeches by prominent women leaders at the time—such as María Lejárraga, Victoria Kent, Margarita Nelken, and Clara Campoamor—acknowledged that the Right was leading in mobilising women voters and that these votes would be influenced by the deference of women to their husbands and priests.⁴² For this reason, few female politicians would support female suffrage. Ironically, female leaders actively sought to block this advancement for women. When the Right won the election in 1933, the Left attributed their defeat largely to the introduction of female suffrage. The playwright María Lejárraga scathingly denounces the power of the Church and the ignorance of working-class women in her predictions for the election:

Spanish women will have in their hands the ability to vote, which until today has interested them very little. Our campaigns without a doubt have reached a few selected middle-class groups in Madrid, but the enthusiasm of the members of

³⁹ González, *Memories of Resistance*, 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Ana Aguado, 'Citizenship and Gender Equality in the Second Spanish Republic: Representations and Practices in Socialist Culture,' *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 1 (February 2014): 107.

the Lyceum Club or the Feminine association of Civic Education—the homes of our feminism—are nothing but—why fool ourselves? —a type of polished snobbism.

. . . The great amorphous masses, the women of the provincial middle class, the women who work in union organisations, the female farm labourers, are not at all prepared to exercise their right to vote; they don't have any idea what it means to vote.

On the other hand, the Spanish Clergy has mobilised its followers, has put its formidable means into action, and each parish, each confessional is a forum for fiercely anti-Republican propaganda.

This makes one quite afraid of the result of the female vote. It's not that Spanish women are too Christian. Their clergymen have kept them in such ignorance over the centuries that, to tell the truth, there are few Spanish women . . . who know how to recite the creed. . . . The only religious duty that is universally understood by the Spanish female is to do whatever the priest says.⁴³

As Civil War drew nearer, the Republican strategy involved preparing women of all classes—both the 'visible' women of the public domain and the 'invisible' women of the domestic sphere—for the new identities they would be forced to adopt during wartime.⁴⁴ Conversely, women on the Nationalist side were expected to be 'guardians of morality,' wives and mothers who raised children to defend the nation against revolutionaries.⁴⁵ The Right considered this maternal role so important that it did not

⁴³ María Lejárraga, comments made after the 1933 election. Quoted and translated by Gonzáles, *Memories of Resistance*, 27.

⁴⁴ Gonzáles, *Memories of Resistance*, 25.

⁴⁵ Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, *Franco and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2001), 103.

bestow any mercy upon captive Republican women, who were considered maternal failures for raising a ‘generation of revolutionaries.’⁴⁶

Parodic Portraiture

At the same time the Civil War forced many Spanish women into more visible sectors of society, a shift occurred in the roles in which Miró depicted his female figures, although he never spoke publically on women’s rights. In the early 1920s, Miró almost exclusively relegated his female figures to the home, casting them as wives and mothers in works such as *The Farmer’s Wife* (1922), *The Family* (1924), and *Maternity* (1924). In these compositions the male Catalan peasant works his fields while his wife remains indoors, raising the children and preparing her husband’s meals. As Miró became increasingly involved in Surrealism, his depiction of women adopted a more sensual tone—his female figures became dancers (ballerinas were a popular subject) or the subjects of a poetic portraiture. Significantly, during the *bienio negro*, one notes an equality between the male and the female figures in the ‘savage paintings,’ as they appear equally as anxious and bewildered. By 1938, many of Miró’s wartime drawings reflected the ways in which women were becoming more visible in Spanish society, embodying both the loss of identity that accompanied the destruction (both literal and metaphorical) of their domestic sphere and the opportunities to be found in new, traditionally masculine roles. In addition to the more conspicuous militiawomen depicted in this series, Miró also depicts the dissolution of the domestic sphere and transgresses established notions of passive femininity subtly, through the parodying of traditional Western portraiture.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ de Meneses, *Franco and the Spanish Civil War*, 103. Similarly, at the close of the war, pensions were denied to Republican widows.

⁴⁷ This is not the first time that Miró uses parody to respond to the Civil War. As discussed in chapter three, his ‘savage paintings’ employ a parodic landscape as a reference to the events of the *bienio negro*.

Several of Miró's woman images reference conventional portraiture in both title and subject matter. The artist recycles some of the most popular portraiture poses in Western art history—women at their toilette or adorned with fine jewellery, for instance—and inflicts an incongruous deformation upon the represented figures. Miró adheres to the most important condition of the parodic, which is that he acknowledges his sources, in this case through titling. Unlike his *Dutch Interiors* (1928) or the *Imaginary Portraits* (1928–29), one cannot identify individual source images for the woman portraits, as Miró seems to be parodying the genre of portraiture itself, rather than any specific image. The artist specifically transgresses the limits of traditional female nude portraiture. He takes his subjects out of the boudoir and onto the battlefield while retaining typical poses and motifs from orthodox portraiture. Miró's portraits contravene the historically acceptable limits of female eroticism; there is no harmony, no intimacy, idealisation, or naturalism, but rather depictions of femininity that are unabashedly erotic in a manner that is not intended to be aesthetically pleasing nor charming, with figures oftentimes appearing enraged to the point of screaming. This type of eroticism inherits the confrontational gaze of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) or, even earlier, Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863), and becomes more disturbing when considered as a response to war.

Among the first and least ferocious of Miró's portrait-style drawings of 1938–1939 is *Bather* (Fig. 9).⁴⁸ The bather does not frolic in the water but rather lies, bloated and shapeless, on the beach, as though unable to stand. Her screwy, cartoonish facial expression distracts from the violent eroticism of her body. She raises her arms at unnatural angles, which stretches her oblong, asymmetrical breasts. The figure splays her legs to reveal her vulva, from which Miró streaks a mass of red-pink gouache, which spreads vertically along the left boundary of the page, evoking menstrual blood—an

⁴⁸ Miró repeats this figure's pose in a pencil and ink drawing dated 15 May 1939.

image, which, according to Bataille, represents both a sexual taboo and a type of internal violence.

In other works, Miró begins with the subject of an established intimate domestic scene and places the figure in an unfamiliar, chaotic landscape ravaged and scarred by war. Miró's titling of *Woman with Necklace* (Fig. 10) references a long artistic tradition of depicting the female nude clad only in a necklace.⁴⁹ Examples of this subject range from the idealised beauty of Titian's *Venus and the Lute Player* (c. 1565–70) (Fig. 11), in which the figure's fine jewellery complements the themes of beauty and sensual eroticism, to the aforementioned *Olympia* (Fig. 12), in which the wearer's ribbon necklace serves to further emphasise her nakedness. Miró's *Woman with Necklace*, however, is a hideous three-eyed figure with five arms, six breasts of varying sizes and shapes, and a flaming heart protruding from her left side.⁵⁰ She does not recline within a luxurious interior, but instead stares forward with her yellow eye opened wide and saw-toothed mouth agape against a background of red, orange, yellow, and grey-brown aquarelle, the application of which suggests the destruction of her home by raging flames and suffocating smoke. The image participates in a violent carnality rather than a passive objectification. Her beaded necklace cuts murderously across her throat, and her five arms are raised, not in the pose of Venus Anadyomene or an odalisque, but in desperation, fear, and rage.

Figure in a Landscape (Fig. 4) similarly distorts specific body parts, in this case those connected with idealised femininity. Miró emphasises the figure's hair, which sprouts from her cheek, ear, and chin, while her neck appears monstrously elongated and her breasts sagging and misshapen. Once again, Miró implies the destruction of the domestic sphere through the suggestion of bombing or fire, manifesting in this case in

⁴⁹ Miró repeats the nude with necklace motif in an oil on canvas entitled *Seated Woman II* (1939), one of the only large-scale works that the artist completed that year. In this work, the woman's figuration is certainly inspired by the *Woman* series, and she wears a thick necklace from which a vulva hangs like a talisman.

⁵⁰ See chapter 7 for my analysis of the flaming heart motif in *Woman with Necklace*.

the ashy smudges of grey pastel that litter the figure's face and the barren skeleton of a tree in the background. The dirtied woman appears to be the survivor of some type of disaster—her arms are amputated and she appears dishevelled as she glares forward, away from the swirling gouache disturbances and eerie landscape behind her.

In *Woman Combing Her Hair in Front of a Mirror* (1 June 1938) (Fig. 13), Miró parodies the tradition of depicting a woman tending to her appearance at her toilette; Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Edgar Degas frequently depicted similar subjects. I have observed that, out of the figure's left side emerges a second neck, topped by a death's head—similar to that which sits in place of the genitals of Bataille and André Masson's *Acéphalic man* (1936) (Fig. 14). This second skull, at which the primary head gazes, is possibly the woman's reflection, as the title of the drawing indicates the figure is looking in a mirror.⁵¹ In this case, the death's head reflection can be read in several ominous ways, for instance as prophetic or as a manifestation of the subject's fears relating to the war. It is also possible that the second head simply contributes to the scene's confusion and the figure's general deformation, recalling the two-headed figures from the 1930 drawings discussed in chapter 2. The scene's setting is also ambiguous. While he clearly removes the figure from the typically luxurious interior, Miró provides the viewer with no sense of space or depth, only scribbles of yellow, pink, and green crayon and charcoal. The symbols for the moon and stars, housed within the woman's swollen body, further confuse the distinction between interior and exterior.

Miró continues to violate the delineation between inside and outside (or public and private) in *Figures in Front of a Starry Sky* (27 July 1939) (Fig. 15). While the title suggests an outdoor night scene, as does the diminutive collection of stars in the top-left corner, Miró executes the drawing on wallpaper, an undeniably domestic medium. This

⁵¹ Picasso also used this motif. See for instance *Girl before a Mirror*, 1932 (oil on canvas, 162.3 × 130.2 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art).

was not the first time that Miró turned to the domestic to communicate wartime anxieties. In *Still Life with Old Shoe* (1937) (Fig. 16), he renders domestic objects—a loaf of bread, a bottle of gin, and a battered shoe—in burning, kaleidoscopic colours and in a style that bridges realism and abstraction, to generate an atmosphere of panic and hysteria by means of the mundane.⁵² The use of off-white and floral wallpaper in *Figures in Front of a Starry Sky* complicates Miró's classification of the work as a nocturnal scene. The figures suspended within this ambiguous space seem perplexed by their surroundings: the largest figure sheds a tear while the figure in the bottom right of the composition frowns and raises her arms towards her compatriots, who appear to be floating upwards among the stars. A few days later, Miró repeated this sense of confusion in *Seated Woman II* (3 August 1939) (Fig. 17) (drawn on similar, if not the same wallpaper), in which the sole female figure leans her torso backwards, a bewildered expression on her face and her hair standing on end as though startled by something outside of the pictorial space.

Although wallpaper was not an uncommon medium for twentieth century avant-garde artists, it was not one used regularly by Miró. As such, its presence in this series calls forth associations between contemporary conditions for women. The way in which these figures float, lost and hesitant, in the indeterminate space between domestic and landscape brings to mind the ways in which the war forced women—many of whom had only ever known a life of restrictive domesticity—to enter the public sphere. Interestingly, a photograph by Dora Maar of 'State VII' of *Guernica* (Fig. 18) shows that Picasso used wallpaper during the work's execution. The sheets of wallpaper were not intended to remain on the mural in its finished state, and the reasons for its inclusion are

⁵² As discussed in chapter 5, there is a connection (through the use of colour) between *Still Life with Old Shoe* and *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*. Through this link between food and excrement, the composition participates in a blurring of distinction between inside and outside—as matter enters the body as food and exits as shit. This is also an important subject in the carnivalesque.

ambiguous.⁵³ Significantly, the three strips of wallpaper that Picasso placed upon his mural are exclusively used to shroud the composition's three female characters: the woman with her dead child, the woman running on the right-hand side, and the woman falling from the burning building.

Women in Revolt

In other examples from Miró's woman series, the artist casts his female figures in scenarios that are more precarious than his mock portraits. *Woman Rebelling*, *Woman in Revolt*, and *Women Armed with Sickles* all depict women engaging with the war, not only emotionally, but also as physical participants violently defending the Republic. The protagonist of *Woman Rebelling*, the earliest of these sickle-wielding *milicianas* (militiawomen), turns her back on the possibility of escape, facing her male adversary head on. The vertical sweep of red gouache between the two figures suggests a bloody altercation. In *Women Armed with Sickles*, Miró repeats the thick, smoky background and flashes of red and yellow flames from *Woman with Necklace* (completed one day prior).

The titular weapon is the centre and focal point of *Woman Armed with Sickles*. The sickle, in Miró's work of this time, is a specifically Catalan symbol, referring to the then unofficial Catalan national anthem, 'Els Segadors' (The Reapers), from which Miró's 1937 mural takes its name (Fig. 19). The anthem refers to a Catalan peasant uprising in 1640, and its chorus rouses the reapers to pick up their sickles in order to defend their land. Women with sickles occasionally appear in propagandistic images contemporary with Miró's series—for instance, Juan Antonio's *Mujeres Trabajar por los Compañeros que luchan* (Women Work for the Comrades who Fight) (c. 1936–1939) (Fig. 20). These

⁵³ Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 167. Greeley suggests that the wallpaper may have served to 'aid the artist's thinking, perhaps to pull him out of a mental block.'

figures typically employ the tool for farming purposes, an industry that expanded its employment of women at the time. *The Reaper*, along with the Civil War drawings, clearly demonstrates the sickle's use as a weapon: the red wash over the instrument and the threatening manner in which the figure waves it makes the sickle's violent usage apparent.

The repeated references to sickles also made the anthem popular among communists during the Civil War. While Miró, unlike his contemporaries Picasso and Masson, never expressed communist sympathies—in fact, his contribution to the 1937 Spanish Pavilion represents a very rare participation in politics of any kind—there is perhaps a reference to the Communist Party in *Woman Rebelling*. The figure grips her sickle in one hand and in the other holds a small object that resembles a hammer. There is no way of confirming the identity of this object, however, and it could very well represent a number of farming tools—an axe, for instance—that the figure may have selected for her defence.

Woman in Revolt (Fig. 3) is the best-known drawing in Miró's woman series. Of all the drawings in the series, this composition most clearly depicts the attack on the domesticity. The sight of her home engulfed in flames enrages the lone figure, and she raises her sickle in protest. Her large eye rolls back, and beneath an elongated, phallic nose her mouth hangs open, revealing sharp teeth and a jutting tongue. As with all of the women in the series, the figure is nude. Her vulva intersects with the horizon line, which runs parallel to her enormous, phallic leg and foot. Her stance is militant: she plants her right foot into the ground while raising her left hand (brandishing a sickle) and monstrous leg in the direction of her charge. She looks over her right shoulder as though addressing something just outside of the picture plane—perhaps a following army of her compatriots—and beckons with her raised right hand, which resembles the closed-fisted Republican salute. I would argue that this pose recalls Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading*

the People (1830) (Fig. 21), a reading that strengthens my interpretation of Miró's figure as commanding a group beyond the page. Standing against a backdrop of smoke and civic destruction, both *Liberty* and this *miliciana* grips her weapon in their left hand and raise their right towards the sky, looking over their shoulder and stepping forward with their left foot.

It is my view that the collision of eroticism and violence that manifests in Miró's *milicianas* is a transgression of the limits of acceptable femininity that surpasses Bataille's discussion of taboos.⁵⁴ While Bataille does concede that it is 'theoretically' possible for 'a man to be as much the object of a woman's desire as a woman is of a man's desire,' in contrast to Miró's militant figures, Bataille believes women are, for the most part, passive, and are 'objects' for the active desires of men.⁵⁵ Miró's drawings also transgress the image of womanhood the Republic sought to present to its international audience. One can attribute the undeniably phallic quality of the figure's grotesque foot in *Woman in Revolt*, then, to the fact that this woman has adopted a traditionally masculine role in response to national conflict. We have seen this addition of a phallic appendage onto the female body in the 1930s drawings, and again with the indeterminate sexes of certain figures in the savage paintings. In her brief mention of the drawing in *Art Since 1900*, Rosalind Krauss situates the explicit masculine sexuality of the appendage as an operation of Bataille's *informe*, that is, as a 'disruption of the *meaning* of human anatomy.'⁵⁶

The battlefield was the most radical of the new spaces open to Republican women during the Civil War. In the early weeks of the war, regiments such as the Quinto

⁵⁴ Bataille's *Eroticism* examines the subject from a decidedly masculine viewpoint, with little mention of women beyond discussions of taboos relating to menstruation and childbirth.

⁵⁵ Bataille, *Érotisme*, 131–132. Bataille continues: 'Not every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude. In so far as she is attractive, a woman is prey to men's desire. Unless she refuses completely because she is determined to remain chaste, the question is at what price and under what circumstances she will yield. But if the conditions are fulfilled she always offers herself as an object.' Translated by Dalwood, in *Eroticism*, 130–131.

⁵⁶ Rosalind Krauss, 'European Painting and Sculpture and *l'informe*,' in Yve-Alain Bois et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 275.

Regimiento de Milicias Populares issued calls for both male and female soldiers.⁵⁷ In this relatively new area of research, scholars disagree over how many women served on the frontlines; Mary Nash estimates roughly two hundred,⁵⁸ while Anthony Beevor, Lisa Margaret Lines, and Shirley Mangini González agree that this number may be closer to one thousand.⁵⁹ The *milicianas* were initially met with enthusiasm and quickly became a symbol for the war and had their images disseminated internationally. The artist José Luis Rey Vila (working with anarchist factions under the pseudonym ‘Sim’) captures the atmosphere of enthusiasm and cooperation in the early days of the war in his *Estampas de la Revolución Española 19 Julio 1936*.⁶⁰ In one image, he depicts militiawomen leading a battalion into battle, guns in hand and fists raised in the Republican gesture of resistance, their zealousness emphasised by the intense colours that surround them. Juan Navarro Ramón presents a more sombre image of war in *Te vengaremos* (We will avenge you, plate 6) (1937) (Fig. 22), in which a female militia member—who wears the red Communist Party star on her overalls—raises her fist to salute a fallen comrade.

By late 1936 attitudes towards female combatants in Spain began to shift, and by 1937 all of the various Republican factions supported the belief that a woman’s place was in the rearguard and not on the frontlines. Republican leaders listed several arguments for the removal of women from the front, all of which relate to eroticism. The international press reported that an ingrained chivalry caused Spanish men to put themselves in danger to save their female comrades, ultimately leading to more deaths.⁶¹ Other arguments insisted that women’s biology prevented them from being effective fighters, as did their lack of military training, while anarchist sexologist Dr. Félix Martí

⁵⁷ Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization* (Denver: Arden, 1995), 108.

⁵⁸ Mary Nash, ‘Women in War: Milicianas and Armed Combat in Revolutionary Spain, 1936–1939,’ *The International History Review* 15, no.2 (May 1993): 275.

⁵⁹ Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Orbis, 1982), 89; Lisa Margaret Lines, *Milicianas: Woman in Combat in the Spanish Civil War* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), 56.

⁶⁰ Miriam Basilio, *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2013), 30.

⁶¹ Lines, *Milicianas*, 127.

Ibáñez insisted that militiawomen had to be removed from the front in order to preserve the ‘sexual energy’ of militiamen.⁶² The most persuasive argument, however, accused many militiawomen of prostitution and spreading venereal diseases among the Republican ranks.⁶³ While Nationalist rhetoric had always likened *milicianas* to prostitutes, by 1937 this attitude was also widely accepted by Republicans and the public.⁶⁴ Anarchist factions took particularly extreme action against alleged prostitutes; one account accuses the anarcho-sindicalist José Buenaventura Durruti Dumange of ordering the execution of a group of women who refused to return to the rearguard from the Aragon front.⁶⁵ By December of 1936, women were forbidden to enlist in the Republican army and very little propaganda included images of women at the front.⁶⁶ Also at this time, the allegorical figure of the Republic—which had historically been female—was increasingly depicted as male, while images of *milicianas* gave way to depictions of women in domestic, mothering (images of breastfeeding were especially popular), humanitarian, farming, and victim roles.

Miró’s militant women, drawn after the official withdrawal of women from the front, clash with the legislative regulations on women’s wartime roles. Extant literature on *Woman in Revolt*, however, has failed to acknowledge how the image transgresses the state-prescribed restrictions on women’s involvement in war. Despite the masculine quality and violent eroticism of the image, which adheres closely to Miró’s own recognition of the image (through its inscribed title) as a ‘woman in revolt,’ scholars have not previously considered the female figure as a soldier armed against fascism but rather as a victim in search of escape. In their readings of *Woman in Revolt*, neither Jacques

⁶² Lines, *Milicianas*, 105. Lines argues that these reasons are little more than sexist ‘pretexts,’ since the presence of female nurses (a role deemed acceptable for women) stationed at the front was never contested.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁴ Helen M. Greeson, ‘Gendering the Republic and the Nation: Political Poster Art of the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939’ (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2012), 69.

⁶⁵ Lines, *Milicianas*, 127.

⁶⁶ Mary Nash, *Rojas: Las mujeres republicanas en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Taurus, 1999): 96–98.

Dupin nor Robin Adèle Greeley is willing to read the figure as a heroic character or a symbol of resistance, but only as one who is desperately in search of escape.

Both Dupin and Greeley compare the composition to *The Reaper*, with which *Woman in Revolt* shares several formal overlaps, despite the figures' gender difference: both protagonists are shown in profile, facing left, with the same elongated noses, sharp teeth, and spot on the cheek. They both raise one fist and wield a sickle in the other. For Dupin, however, *The Reaper* is an 'effigy, a grandiose and monumental figure emblematic of resistance to Franco,' while *Woman in Revolt* is 'running, terrified' in search of escape.⁶⁷ According to this reading, the impossibility of escape (her flight is prevented by the page's edge) and her incapability to fight (for Dupin, the sickle is 'purely symbolic') forces the figure into a third option—sexual transgression and the growth of a monstrous appendage.⁶⁸ For Robin Adèle Greeley, *The Reaper* 'repress[es] Miró's own sense of anguish over the war in favour of a valiantly confident image of Republican and Catalan politics,' and mobilises masculinity as a 'stable aspect of an uncontested nationalism,' which veers dangerously close to 'stereotype.'⁶⁹ According to her reading, *Woman in Revolt* represents the same political circumstances through a female figure 'forced by circumstances into obscene sexual reconfiguration as a means of escape.'⁷⁰ These readings do not consider Miró's specific use of the word *révolte* in the work's title, the image of the militant female figure in *Woman Rebelling* (in which Miró sets a precedent for the female figure engaging in violent conflict), and the figure's pose, which recalls *Liberty*. My own analysis determines no inkling of escape; rather I posit the female figure's adoption of 'masculine' qualities is for the purpose of participating in war, a traditionally masculine endeavour and as a transgression of passive femininity.

⁶⁷ Dupin, *Miró*, trans. James Petterson (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 218.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

Haunted by a Bird

The repeated depiction of flame and smoke imagery throughout the series and the burning city in *Woman in Revolt* are likely responses to the heavy aerial bombardment unleashed upon the nation by the German Condor Legion and the Italian Aviazione Legionaria in allegiance with Franco's Nationalists during the Civil War. More specifically, the motifs may reference the bombing of Barcelona and other Catalan cities during 1938–1939. Furthermore, it is inviting to read the large, unnerving birds that fly in the skies of Miró's Civil War drawings as allegorical representations of warplanes. Miró depicts birds throughout his oeuvre—they contribute to scenes of pastoral Catalan life in the 1920s and to a vision of poetic escapism in the *Constellation* series (1939–1941), which followed the woman series. He even compounded bird and airplane imagery when he identified the 'Toulouse-Rabat plane'⁷¹ on the left side of *The Hunter* (1923–1924) as a 'bird-airplane' to William Rubin in 1973.⁷² The sinister birds that Miró drew during the Civil War, however, are far removed from the gentle seabirds of his 1920s works. Among the creatures' first appearances is *The Flight of the Bird* (24 June 1938) (Fig. 23), an atypically monochromatic oil on paper in which the creature appears as a white outline on a black ground, with an enormous white eye and its teeth threateningly bared. It dominates the pictorial plane, hissing its long exposed tongue at the small female figure standing below it, with her arms raised and hair standing on end. These ominous birds continue to appear in Miró's drawings throughout 1938 and into 1939; *Figures Haunted by a Bird* (Fig. 24) (6 December 1938) continues this theme of avian intimidation. In this

⁷¹ Gaëtan Picon, ed., *Joan Miró: Catalan Notebooks: Unpublished Drawings and Writings* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 64.

⁷² William Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 22.

image, as in *The Flight of the Bird* before it, figures look up in fear as the creature dives towards them.

The melding of avian and aircraft imagery recalls the wartime drawings of Paul Klee, one of Miró's heroes and an 'essential' influence.⁷³ During the First World War, and continuing into the early 1920s, Klee executed several drawings of birds with sharp beaks and geometric wings crashing headfirst towards the earth (Fig. 25). Klee's crashing bird-airplanes take their inspiration from the artist's work during the First World War varnishing airplane frames, building hangars, and occasionally photographing plane crashes.⁷⁴ Max Ernst also merged the images of the crashed airplane and bird in his 1935 series *Garden Airplane Trap*, which, as Sidra Stich notes, coincided with Hitler's declaration of non-compliance with the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.⁷⁵ The inspiration for Miró's bird-airplanes—which do not crash but instead antagonise the human figures—likely comes from the artist contemplating the destruction of his homeland. The looming presence of Miró's birds also recalls the striking abundance of aircrafts flying in the skies of contemporary Spanish children's drawings, where one would typically expect to find birds (Fig. 26). While it is not the intention of this project to perpetuate the notion of Miró as a childlike painter, examining the omnipresence of airplanes in the work of children during the Spanish Civil War illustrates the extent of aerial involvement and strengthens the identification of Miró's bird-airplanes.

Another indication that Miró's birds may be acting as metaphors for airstrikes are the titles of these drawings, all of which are Miró's own and which suggest that the animals are carrying out tasks suited to planes. *The Messenger Bird* (18 August 1939) (Fig. 27), for instance, could easily refer to a reconnaissance or, even more likely, a mail plane

⁷³ Joan Miró, 'Memories of the Rue Blomet,' transcribed by Jacques Dupin (1977), in *Joan Miró: Select Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell, trans. Paul Auster and Patricia Matthews (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1992), 103.

⁷⁴ Otto Karl Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 104.

⁷⁵ Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 121.

(given the dating of this work between the end of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, it likely does not bring good news). *Sleepers Woken Up by a Bird* (9 August 1939) (Fig. 28) takes on a particularly sinister meaning when one considers it within the context of the purposeful bombardment of civilian populations. The most conspicuously perilous title belongs to a grey-and-black watercolour and India ink work from 1939 called *The Foretelling Rocket* (Fig. 29). In this work, four figures occupy the right side of the composition, their facial expressions ranging from perplexed (the top two figures, one of which stands with her hands under her chin and the other with her mouth askew) to oblivious, as is the figure on the bottom left, who looks to the right (unlike his cohorts) and smiles, mouth agape. Instead of showing the titular rocket, Miró depicts a lone bird cutting diagonally downward across the top-left corner of the composition.

For the entirety of 1938, Barcelona was subjected to regular bombardment by Italian forces. A single week in March, described as ‘the worst sustained bombing campaign of the war,’⁷⁶ resulted in the death of eight hundred people and injuries to a further two thousand two hundred. The intention was to further damage the already demoralised population of the Republic’s main city, with no attempt to limit civilian casualties. Miró’s drawings span two other major bombing campaigns of the Civil War, in addition to the bombing of Barcelona: the Battle of the Ebro, the largest Republican offensive of the war, and the Catalan Offensive. The attack on the Ebro front had several objectives: to prevent the fall of Valencia, to buy the Republican army some much needed time to reorganise and seek out resources from allies abroad, and to reinvigorate the demoralised Catalan population.⁷⁷ Six divisions crossed the Ebro River at twelve different points in an attempt to catch the Nationalists by surprise. The attack began successfully; within one week the Republicans occupied much of the right bank.

⁷⁶ de Meneses, *Franco and the Spanish Civil War*, 54.

⁷⁷ Pelai Pagès i Blanch, *War and Revolution in Catalonia, 1936–1939* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 153.

Franco, unwilling to lose any territory, suspended his concurrent operations in order to unleash his entire air force on the Ebro. During this three-month battle, the bloodiest of the Civil War, air attacks were ‘continuous.’⁷⁸ General Rojo describes the Nationalist reaction as incessant, with ‘only brief interruptions on land and none in the air’ and characterises the battle as ‘a horribly unfair fight with the terrible clash of men against machines.’⁷⁹ During the Catalan Offensive—beginning on 23 December 1938—the ‘intense artillery fire and constant action from Italian airplanes’⁸⁰ and the arming of the Nationalists with ‘new German equipment’⁸¹ overwhelmed the already stretched Republican resistance. As the Nationalists broke through the front, the Republican government and nearly half a million refugees fled northward to Gerona on 25 January 1939.⁸²

It is imperative to understand that Miró’s woman drawings are private, personal responses to the devastation facing the artist’s homeland. These works, however, share much of their imagery (including the damaged home, flames, the sickle, and the raised fist) with the profusion of Republican propagandistic works appearing at this time. Notably, Miró’s women occupy a vastly different role than in many contemporary works with similar imagery, they endure the war as *active* participants rather than passive victims. Comparing these private drawings with government-approved pieces of propaganda provides a point of inquiry into the ways in which ‘traditional’ gender roles and countenances were used visually as a vehicle for garnering support (both domestically and internationally) for the Republican cause. Exploring the nature of private versus public works demonstrates how Miró’s depictions of transgressive femininity reflects

⁷⁸ Pagès i Blanch, *War and Revolution in Catalonia*, 154.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁸¹ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana, 1996), 211.

⁸² Ibid.

both the artist's internalised feelings towards the war and a different, underrepresented, female wartime experience.

The most famous image produced during the Spanish Civil War is Picasso's *Guernica* (Fig. 30), commissioned by the Spanish Republic for the 1937 Paris International Exposition. It refers to the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by the Condor Legion—under Franco's watch—during which 1,654 were killed and 889 wounded within four hours.⁸³ *Guernica* has received significant scholarly attention;⁸⁴ my intention here is not to reproduce these excellent studies, but to consider the similarities and differences between the roles in which Picasso and Miró's cast their female characters. Like Miró, Picasso lived in Paris during the war and therefore had to rely on (often speculative) accounts of the events in Spain in left-wing newspapers. Miró read *L'Oeuvre* and *La Vanguardia*, while Picasso relied on *L'Humanité*, then under the direction of Louis Aragon, for information relating specifically to the events at Guernica.⁸⁵

Picasso uses the female figures in *Guernica* to communicate—visually and emotionally—the barbarity of war, albeit through a different approach than Miró. *Guernica* is framed on either side by screaming women. On the right-hand side a figure plummets to her death from a burning building. On the far left side, a mother, holding her dead child in her arms, looks up to the sky and screams—the primal, animalistic quality of her cry echoed by the screaming horse in the centre of the composition. Much of this iconographically complex image's potency emerges from its focus on the devastating consequences of war for civilians—namely women and children—intensified

⁸³ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 419.

⁸⁴ See, for instance: Herschel Chipp, ed., *Picasso's Guernica: History, Transformations, Meanings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); Rudolfo Arnheim, *Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Ellen Oppler, *Picasso's Guernica: Illustrations, Introductory Essay, Documents, Poetry, Criticism, Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1988); Eugenio Fernandez Granell, *Picasso's Guernica: The End of a Spanish Era* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981).

⁸⁵ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 154. Greeley notes that *L'Humanité* was the only newspaper to keep Guernica consistently in its headlines. Furthermore, I have identified, in the archival holdings of the Fundació Joan Miró, several scraps of paper from *L'Oeuvre* and *La Vanguardia* on which Miró doodled or began preparatory drawings. See for instance F.J.M. 1319 (1939) and F.J.M. 1871—1976 (1942).

by the fragmentation and contortion of bodies made possible by the work's indebtedness to Picasso's earlier cubist methods.⁸⁶ The image of the inconsolable, heartbroken mother clutching her dead child was such an acute symbol for the plight of the Spanish people that Picasso subsequently produced thirty-six unique paintings and drawings depicting it, among the most famous of which is *Weeping Woman* (1937) (Fig. 31).⁸⁷ Scholars like Judy Freeman argue that beyond any other figure in *Guernica*, the weeping woman epitomised the catastrophe of war.⁸⁸ This particular image of female suffering, and its undeniable emotional potency, is not unique to Picasso. The mother and her deceased infant is a motif employed in countless propagandistic images throughout the Spanish Civil War to garner international and domestic support for the Republican cause. Interestingly, the weeping mother is a depiction of womanhood that does not appear in Miró's works of the time.

As with any work of propaganda, *Guernica*'s message about the horrors of war needed to be bold, in allegiance with the ideals of the group for whom it is produced, and instantly understandable. The chaos of Picasso's image actually aids this understating, as opposed to detracting from it. As a work of art representing the Spanish Republic to the international community, it had to be clearly nationalistic and able to elicit sympathy for the Left. One of the ways in which Picasso achieves this is through the inclusion of a variety of Spanish cultural motifs,⁸⁹ from bullfighting to references to Francisco de Goya.⁹⁰ Similarly, Spanish artists had been employing the 'weeping woman' with such frequency since the outbreak of the war that the motif became a symbol for the

⁸⁶ For more on *Guernica*'s formal qualities, see Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 146. For more on Cubism as annihilation, see T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 174.

⁸⁷ Neil Cox, *The Picasso Book* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), 90.

⁸⁸ Judi Freeman, *Picasso and the Weeping Woman: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Los Angeles: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1994), 32, 50.

⁸⁹ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 148.

⁹⁰ For more on Goya and Picasso, see Robert Rosenblum, 'Picasso's Disasters of War: The Art of Blasphemy,' in *Picasso and the War Years, 1937–1935* (New York: Thames and Hudson; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco), 39–53.

Republic. The innocence of the Republic and demonisation of the fascists is made more potent by allusions to the Christian *pieta*, the image of Mary lamenting the death of Jesus. By far the most common depiction of womanhood during the Civil War, the weeping woman limits the female experience to two roles: mother and passive victim.

Images of mother and child permeate contemporary propaganda posters, sometimes through the profoundly graphic inclusion of photographs of lifeless children, in an effort to paint the Nationalists as murderers—child killers—to an international audience. One such poster, produced by Gràficas Valencias, displays photographs of eight children killed by bombing attacks. Each child bears a non-sequential number, attesting to the fact that these are but a fraction of the victims. The poster reads:

‘(Murderers! Seeing this, who wouldn’t pick up a rifle to end fascism’s destruction. Children killed by rebel bombs in Madrid, innocent victims of the horrible war unleashed by the enemies of Spain.)’

Another example, in service of the Confederación Regional de Levante, a regional confederation of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT,⁹¹ uses similar rhetoric (Fig. 32). Here, a mother clutches her child as a Nazi airplane drops bombs overhead. The accompanying text reads: ‘¡Acusamos de asesinos a los facciosos! Niños y mujeres caen inocentes. Hombres libres, repudiad a todos los que apoyen en la retaguardia al fascismo.’ (We charge the rebels as assassins! Innocent children and women die. Free men, repudiate all those who support fascism.) Below the text, a bold arrow points to the image of mother and child, underneath which reads: ‘He aquí las víctimas’ (Behold the victims). A similar poster from the Madrid Ministry of Propaganda adds a destroyed home—a motif that, as we have seen, is also employed by Miró—behind the mother and child. The poster’s text,

⁹¹ Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour).

printed in English, French, and Spanish, thus aimed at an international audience, reads ‘¿What are you doing to prevent this?’

The female pacifism and emphasis on motherhood in these images owes, in part, to the nature of propagandistic materials and their requisite ability to be quickly and easily digested. These requirements were so important, and this image of womanhood so effective, that certain leftists even questioned whether *Guernica*’s treatment of the motif would be clear enough to function effectively as a piece of propaganda at the Paris Exposition.⁹² Max Aub—an influential figure in the Spanish cultural scene in Paris and the recruiter of artworks for the Spanish Pavilion—felt the need to ‘test’ *Guernica*’s potential impact on the working classes, which Miriam Basilio argues is an indication of anticipated opposition.⁹³ Aub gave a speech to the pavilion’s construction workers, encouraging them to emotionally connect with the figures in the mural and linked the work, via its connections to Goya, to a distinctly Spanish artistic tradition.⁹⁴ Josep Lluís Sert, the Catalan architect who designed the Spanish Pavilion, remarks that the ‘communists’ called for *Guernica*’s removal in favour of a depiction of dead children in the aftermath of a bombing.⁹⁵ Other accounts suggest the consideration of Horacio Ferrer’s *Madrid 1937 (Aviones negros)* as a replacement (Fig. 33).⁹⁶

While *Madrid 1937* did not replace *Guernica*, its display at the entrance to the visual arts section of the pavilion suggests its importance as a piece of visual

⁹² Basilio, *Visual Propaganda*, 102.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁹⁴ ‘Picasso had represented here the tragedy of Guernica. It is possible that this art may be accused of being too abstract or difficult for a pavilion like ours that wishes to be above all and before everything else a popular expression. But I am certain that with a little will, everyone will perceive the rage, the desperation and the terrible protest that this canvas signifies. Our time is that of realism, but each country perceives the real in its own way. . . . That is why Goya and Picasso are realist painters even if they appear to other nations as extravagant personalities.’ Max Aub, speech to construction workers at the Spanish Pavilion of the 1937 Paris World Exposition, 11 June 1937. Quoted in Basilio, *Visual Propaganda*, 101.

⁹⁵ Basilio, *Visual Propaganda*, 102.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

propaganda.⁹⁷ Ferrer had previously designed posters for the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura (the Antifascist Intellectuals' Alliance for the Defence of Culture) and aligns his work closely with Republican rhetoric. The nearly life-sized oil painting shows four women—three mothers with their children and an elderly woman—amid the smouldering wreckage of a bombed city. *Madrid 1937* is a comparatively dynamic composition compared to other contemporary 'weeping woman' subjects—although the second figure from the left does embody this trope. In Ferrer's image, the children are still alive and their mothers, rather than waiting for intervention, take the initiative for their own escape. The central figure and the young boy in the foreground both raise their fists towards their attackers—a repeatedly employed symbol for Republican solidarity also used by Miró in *The Reaper*.

Escape is a conspicuous theme in Miró's 1938–1939 works and—with the Nationalist victory of the Civil War and the onslaught of the Second World War—would also become the prevailing spirit of the *Constellation Series*.⁹⁸ The gouache and India ink painting *Woman Fleeing from a Fire* of 5 April 1939 foregoes the damaged cityscape background in favour of a barren expanse thick with smoke and fire, which takes the form of both pointed blue flames and a sinister ochre glow that closes in around the sole figure's form. Significantly, it is in this image that the ladder makes one of its first reappearances in Miró's work since its use in the 1920s. Although this motif appears regularly in the artist's earlier work, its presence in *Woman Fleeing from a Fire* marks the ladder's evolution from familiar farm object to the consummate symbol for escape.⁹⁹ A

⁹⁷ Basilio, *Visual Propaganda*, 102.

⁹⁸ Miró spent the Civil War and the Second World War in two periods of self-imposed exile. For the safety of his family and for fear that he may be on a fascist blacklist, Miró first settled in Varengeville-sur-mer, in Normandy. After the German invasion of France, the family joined Pilar's parents in Palma de Mallorca, as Barcelona remained unsafe.

⁹⁹ 'Another recurrent form in my work is the ladder. In the first years it was a plastic form frequently appearing because it was so close to me—a familiar shape in *The Farm*. In later years, particularly during the war, while I was in Majorca, it came to symbolize "escape."' Joan Miró, 'Joan Miró: Comment and Interview,' interview by James Johnson Sweeney, *Partisan Review* (February 1948). In Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 208.

testament to the particular power this symbol held for the artist is the fact that Miró made it the subject of one of his *Constellation* paintings: *The Escape Ladder* (1940). Furthermore, the figure in *Woman Fleeing from a Fire* has formal overlaps with the fleeing woman in *Guernica*, who appears on the right side of the mural. Both women have thin, elongated necks, and as both of these figures attempt to escape from fire, they step forward with one leg and drag behind them another thick, clubbed leg ending in an oversized foot.

While the theme of escape in *Woman Fleeing from a Fire* echoes the subject matter of Ferrer's *Madrid 1937*, its figure lacks the maternal emphasis so prevalent in works created for the Republican cause. In Ferrer's work, the central figure's exposed breast suggests that the bombing attack has interrupted the child's feeding. As Basilio explains, depictions of breastfeeding mothers appeared in 'countless' photographs and illustrations at the time, which were subsequently reproduced in books, posters, pamphlets, and postcards.¹⁰⁰ Miró's series show no interest in depicting motherhood, nor are there any obvious depictions of children in the compositions, even those concerned with the theme of escape. In the case of Ferrer, the partial nudity is acceptable as the bared breast of a beautiful mother (and possible widow) and a victim of fascist bombings. Miró's starkly naked figures, however, belong decidedly to the realm of the erotic, rather than the procreative.

In addition to the visual requirements for effective propagandistic imagery, and the resulting limitations on style and subject matter, there is another possible explanation for the relatively narrow roles cast for women in leftist imagery of the late 1930s, relating specifically to disputes within the Republican camp. In order to secure victory in the 1936 elections, the left adopted a Popular Front coalition with a campaign based on the threat of fascism, on the instability facing the Republic, and on the demand for amnesty

¹⁰⁰ Basilio, *Visual Propaganda*, 103.

following the devastation of the *bienio negro*.¹⁰¹ The Popular Front was initially met with enthusiasm, with hundreds of thousands of citizens travelling from across Spain to listen to Manuel Azaña's open air speeches on left-wing unity.¹⁰² The strategy was initially successful, and the Left won a narrow victory in the 16 February elections. The Popular Front's priority was to sustain an exclusively leftist government—without compromising with the centre or moderate right—and to maintain the support of the various revolutionary factions, without which the Republicans could not hope to remain in power.¹⁰³

The main issue facing the Popular Front coalition was the diversity of the various revolutionary groups that it included or from whom it sought support. On the revolutionary side, this included a large and very radical socialist element, a mass anarcho-syndicalist movement (the only one of its kind in the world), and two communist parties: the ever growing Partido Comunista de España (PCE) and the comparatively smaller but 'hyperrevolutionary' Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM).¹⁰⁴ The Republicans, who were radical but not revolutionary, stood to the right of these groups, with whom they were allied (with the exception of the anarchists) in the Popular Front. To complicate matters further, the Popular Front received additional support from certain nationalist parties, including the pro-independence Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). As Stanley Payne explains, the left Republicans intended to 'use and moderate' the revolutionaries as much as the latter hoped to radicalise the Republicans.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 42.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37. Azaña, believing that 'earlier Spanish progressives inevitably failed because of moderation and compromise,' opposed allying with the centre and instead sought to incorporate more radical leftist groups in order to secure 'domination by the moderate left.'

¹⁰⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933–1936: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 275.

¹⁰⁵ Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic*, 275.

Because of the varying agendas of the groups within the Popular Front (which, at times, were ‘mutually exclusive’),¹⁰⁶ the dream of left-wing unity was far from a reality by 1937.¹⁰⁷ By this time, cooperation had all but broken down between the more radical organisations, namely the CNT, the anarchists, and the POUM, and those calling for more moderate reform. According to Greeley, by the opening of the Spanish Pavilion, any claims that the government had to ‘representing the revolutionary rank’ were ‘illusionary.’¹⁰⁸ The Republic was certainly not about to broadcast this dissent to an international audience, and the Spanish Pavilion therefore had to present an image of a united front. The Republic achieved this vision, in large part, through depictions of the Spanish citizenry. In Miró’s contribution, *The Reaper*, an image of masculine heroism, the threat (or even possibility) of defeat present in the woman images is absent. As Greeley argues, ‘fear of defeat cannot enter here, and the nation is presented as an unquestioned and positive entity, harmoniously joining the Catalan nationalist cause with that of the Spanish Republic.’¹⁰⁹ Miró’s statements about the nature of mural art reflect this attitude of propagandistic compliance: ‘mural art is the very opposite of solitary creation . . . while one must preserve one’s personality, one must also commit it profoundly to the collective spirit of the work.’¹¹⁰ The reality of using images like *The Reaper*—an image of Catalan nationalism—to represent the revolutionary spirit of the Spanish people is that it belies the dissension between Catalan nationalist groups and other leftist parties and the animosity between the peasant classes and the bourgeoisie.¹¹¹

Just as appropriations of Catalan cultural motifs were used to represent the Spanish people in order to present the Republic as a united force, so too did leftist

¹⁰⁶ Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic*, 275.

¹⁰⁷ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 42, 43.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁰ Joan Miró, ‘Ma dernière oeuvre est un mur,’ *Sur les 4 murs: Derrière le miroir*, nos. 107–9 (1958). Translated by Catherine Blanton Freedberg in *The Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World’s Fair* (New York: Garland, 1986), 576.

¹¹¹ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 44.

representations of women shift as the government struggled to unify its various military factions. Early images of the Second Republic had often contained eroticised depictions of the *niña bonita* figure. An example by Ricardo Opisso from 1931 shows a very young figure, wearing only a Phrygian cap and a strategically draped tricolour flag, surrounded by portraits of the heads of government officials (Fig. 34). Her appearance can be interpreted as either vulnerable or as an object of sexual desire for the considerably older men that surround her.¹¹² Luis F. Cuesta and Roberta Johnson compare the image with René Magritte's *Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt* (1929) as an image of objectification.¹¹³ During the war, however, the leftist prerogative was to personify the Republic as either a nurturing mother or a masculine warrior. Furthermore, eroticised depictions of the Republic would not have assisted the Left in assuaging rumours of prostitution at the front.

As friction within the Republican ranks increased, communist and moderate factions (Izquierda Republicana, for instance) called for certain reforms to existing military structures, including but not limited to the centralisation of the military and the withdrawal of women from combat in order to replace men in the workforce.¹¹⁴ The Madrid Junta—the high command of the Republican army—subsequently commissioned imagery that projected the military as ordered, unified, and masculine. The timing of this massive propaganda campaign—which included approximately forty posters and postcard reproductions in editions up to 500,000—came at a time when the Republicans needed to promote themselves as ordered and strong, when, in reality, they had just been forced to move their headquarters after an onslaught of Nationalist attacks.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Luis F. Cuesta and Roberta Johnson, 'La *niña bonita*: Tradition and Change in Female Allegories of the Second Republic,' *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 14, no. 4 (2013): 426.

¹¹³ Ibid, 458, note 10.

¹¹⁴ Basilio, *Visual Propaganda*, 28.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

Miró's Civil War drawings, executed privately and never exhibited during the war, allow the artist to express uncertainties about the war and depict his figures with an erotic savagery that simply would not have been permitted in a public work like *The Reaper*. *The Reaper's* masculine strength and the bright, bold colours of Miró's *Aidez L'Espagne* stamp design—which pits the Left's 'immense creative resources which will give Spain a power which will astonish the whole world' against the 'out-dated forces' of fascism—masks the splintering within the Republican side and insisted to the international audience of the pavilion that the war could be won (Fig. 35). Similarly, images of weeping mothers and murdered children incited sympathy and similarly encouraged support for the Republican cause. The gnarled bodies, the conspicuous and disfigured sexual organs, and the violation of the gendered social order that manifest in the woman series would have done little to garner international backing for the Left, but, as personal emotional confessions, may have been effective ways for the artist to cope with his wartime exile.

Attacked by a Lion

There is one image in Miró's woman series that deviates from the narrative of the self-possessed, able woman engaged in flight or fight and instead recalls the victimised women of Republican propaganda imagery. The black India ink drawing on white, washed paper depicts a skeletal, hollow-eyed woman cowering before an anthropomorphised lion. The title, *Woman Attacked by a Lion* (18 February 1938) (Fig. 36), which is inscribed in French on the back of the page, removes any doubt that the woman is the victim of the beast before her. Her body seems less human than her contemporary counterparts in Miró's series and closer to the painted bronze sculptures that the artist

would undertake in the late 1960s. The lack of landscape features or spatial delineation makes it difficult to discern whether the figure is standing upright or lying prone on the ground, though she appears to be immobile in either case. Further emphasising the figure's vulnerability and her inability to flee are the two pitchforks that appear in place of her legs, which, were she to flee, would drag into the earth and impede her escape. This image is anomalous in Miró's series for two reasons: firstly for its casting of an incapable, helpless female figure and, secondly, for its depiction of a lion, which does not appear elsewhere in Miró's work. The appearance of these two figures in a single image is not a coincidence, but likely a conscious political commentary by the artist on the harmful effects of the discord within the Republican army.

The lion has a long history in Spanish art, first as a monarchical symbol and later as a symbol for the government and citizens of the Spanish Republic.¹¹⁶ The lion appears as a companion in some of the earliest Spanish adaptations of the Marianne figure—the symbol of the French Republic, now being adapted to represent the Spanish Republic.¹¹⁷ J. Serra Pausas's 1792 poster *La República Española*, for instance, depicts the Marianne figure wearing the Phrygian cap and the Spanish flag, accompanied by a lion, which stands on her right (Fig. 37). This 'lion and matron' imagery remained incredibly popular through to the formation of the Second Republic. As discussed in chapter 4, the Second Republic was often referred to as *la niña bonita* (the beautiful young girl). In visual representations of *la niña bonita*, the lion appears alongside her as her protector.¹¹⁸ Ordóñez Valdés's *La República Española* poster shows the female allegory of the Republic holding the 'sword of justice' (Fig. 38). On the figure's right stands a snarling lion, which has just broken free of his shackles; on her right is an open book bearing the dates of the

¹¹⁶ Carlos Reyero, *Allegoría, nación y libertad: el Olimpo constitucional de 1812* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2010), 46.

¹¹⁷ José Luis Bermejo Cabrero, *Máximas, principios y símbolos políticos: una aproximación histórica* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1986), 197.

¹¹⁸ Reyero, *Allegoría, nación y libertad*, 46.

formation of the two Spanish Republics (1873 and 1931).¹¹⁹ Posters from the Second Republic by Gamonal, J. Barreira, and C. G. Zunzurren all include similar imagery.

Miró certainly would have been aware of this legacy of lion imagery in Spain, although no previous literature has considered the lion motif in Miró's work. In fact, he executed *Woman Attacked by a Lion* one day after *La Vanguardia*¹²⁰ featured a pro-Republican political cartoon of a lion by the Catalan artist Lluís Bagaria (Fig. 39). Underneath Bagaria's cartoon lion is the caption 'Le Leon Español—El mundo se va dando cuenta de que nada pueden las hienas contra mí' (The Spanish Lion—the world is realising that the hyenas can do me no harm'). Like many leftist images of the time, Bagaria's message that the forces of fascism (referred to here as hyenas) are no match for the Republicans glosses over the reality of leftist in-fighting.

Woman Attacked by a Lion presents a very different message. It is unlikely that Miró's introduction of the lion motif in 1938 is a coincidence; it is far more likely a deliberate reference to the Republic. The creature's human qualities—its bipedalism, for instance—and its exposed, erect human phallus reinforce the notion that the lion is a metaphor for the Republic, which, by 1938, was pictorially depicted as a male. The inclusion of the pitchforks indicates the female figure's peasant status. In light of this symbolism, *Woman Attacked by a Lion* becomes a metaphor for the Spanish Republic attacking its own people. The work is very likely commenting on the ways in which leftist supporters—particularly the working and peasant classes—suffered because of the disharmony within the Republican government and military. Here, Miró transgresses the boundaries of acceptable leftist imagery and admonishes his own party through this inversion of the lion and matron motif and by recycling the image of the helpless woman

¹¹⁹ Cuesta and Johnson, 'La niña bonita,' 430.

¹²⁰ *La Vanguardia* was the most popular and respected voice for the Republic and for Catalonia during the war, a vehicle for the opinions of Spanish and Catalan intellectuals, and a publication on which Miró occasionally executed sketches.

from Republican propaganda posters and casting the Republicans themselves, rather than the fascists, as her attacker.

The introduction of the pitchfork motif in *Woman Attacked by a Lion* is particularly interesting, contributing to the figure's incompetence while also identifying her as a peasant. Typically in works of this time, Miró uses the sickle to identify the Catalan peasant, most famously in *The Reaper*. As a symbol relating to the peasants' resilience and readiness to rise up and defend themselves against fascism, this violent motif would not have been appropriate for the defeatist tone of *Woman Attacked by a Lion*. The pitchfork, conversely, emphasises the peasant's relationship to the land, as it literally connects them to the earth in a way that is analogous to the oversized feet that Miró gave his peasant figures in the early 1920s. Surely, the pitchfork is a form that Miró would have found appealing, as a utilitarian object created specifically for the task of tending to a field. It would not have been out of place in his early works celebrating rural Catalan life, such as *The Tilled Field* (1923), and is a form that he returns to in sculptural depictions of the female form in the 1960s. Where the sickle's sharp blade has violent connotations, the pitchfork's functional form contributes to the female figure's helplessness, lending the impression that any attempt to escape from her attacker would be thwarted, as her legs would simply root into the ground and lodge her in place.

Conclusion

Miró's woman series departs from the one-dimensional representations of women as mother and victim in public works, casting female characters in diverse roles as both aggressor and sufferer, in which they do not command sympathy, instead directing their own fates through fight or flight. Coinciding with the expansion of Spanish women's

public presence as workers, enfranchised citizens, and soldiers made possible as a result of the Civil War, Miró's figures break the bonds of traditional feminine passivity and innocence. Adhering to a decidedly Bataillean style of eroticism, in a mode that continues the brutality of the 'savage paintings,' Miró depicts the nude female form as gritty, unidealised, and viciously erotic. Here, the intersection of violence and unabashed sexuality transgresses taboos relating to acceptable conduct for women—those that relegate them to the domestic sphere—set forth both by the restrictive and immensely powerful Catholic Church and, more surprisingly, by the Republican government. Through its violently erotic aesthetic, Miró's woman series offers a look behind the curtain of Civil War imagery, candidly demonstrating the terror, hostility, and uncertainty that is so often glossed over in contemporary propaganda.

Chapter 7

Surrealism and the Sacred Heart

The title *Woman with Necklace* (Fig. 1) belies the savagery and turmoil of Miró's three-eyed nude figure, who stands with clawed hands raised and fanged teeth bared. The image, completed in December 1938,¹ in the middle of the Spanish Civil War and months before the outbreak of the Second World War features a female body that exhibits a violent deformation and the juxtaposition of a bright-red and smoky-charcoal background evokes the image of a burning landscape—a common trope in Miró's 1938–

¹ Miró was, at this time, in self-imposed exile in France. He longed to return to Spain, but fearing for the safety of his wife and child, would remain in France until just before the Nazi invasion of Paris. Joan Miró, letter to Pierre Matisse, January 12, 1937, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (New York: Perseus Books Group, 1992), 146. 'We are living through a terrible drama, everything happening in Spain is terrifying in a way that you could never imagine. I feel very uprooted here and am nostalgic for my country. . . . All my friends advise me to stay in France. If it were not for my wife and child, however, I would return to Spain.'

1939 watercolour drawings.² The lack of differentiation between figure and ground³ lends the ominous suggestion that the protagonist is to be swallowed up by the smoke and flames at any moment. Miró renders her necklace in the childlike style known as ‘intellectual realism,’⁴ which consequently cuts aggressively across her throat as a thick, black bar. While the title draws one’s attention to this necklace, there is another curious motif within the image that provides a wealth of context for the social, political, and artistic conditions in which Miró created the work.

The symbol (Fig. 2) appears on the bottom right of the composition: a rounded appendage, shaded with black, which juts forth from the woman’s left side and from which five elongated barbs emerge. The following chapter investigates this motif as a flaming heart—a common symbol in Miró’s paintings, and an organ that, in his work, always appears outside of the body. After establishing the formal conditions by which this motif should be read as a flaming heart, I will situate Miró’s use of the symbol within the historical conditions of the cult of the Sacred Heart in modern Spain; its appropriation by Francisco Franco; its blasphemous employment by Surrealists; and its appearance in the hand of Georges Bataille and André Masson’s Acéphalic man as a symbol of anticlericalism and antifascism.

² The flaming suns that Miró paints in his eyes in *Self Portrait I* (1937–1938) may also be a reference to Spain’s burning, and also relate to Bataille’s notion of a ‘blinding sun.’

³ The figure’s body is realised only through an outline—a common tactic for Miró, first seen in *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)* (1924) and the *Head of a Catalan Peasant* series (1924–1925).

⁴ Intellectual realism depicts things as we know them to be rather than how they might appear from a given angle: for example, we *know* that a necklace completely encircles the neck, but if we look at a figure head-on, we cannot see the portion of the necklace that sits behind the neck. The term was first introduced by Heinrich Schaeffer, in *Principles of Egyptian Art* (1919) (reprinted Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1986). Georges-Henri Luquet argues that both children and ‘primitive’ humans pass through the intellectual realism phase before achieving visual realism, which sparked a debate with Bataille. See Bataille, *Lascaux ou la naissance de l’art*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 9–81.

Woman with Necklace

It may be tempting to read this motif in *Woman with Necklace* as a significantly deformed hand, considering that the figure already possesses an excess of limbs. There are, however, certain qualities that discount its classification as a hand, and instead characterise it as a flaming heart. Firstly, in Miró's oeuvre, the hand lacks the symbolic importance accorded to other appendages, like the foot,⁵ and oftentimes he does not render hands.⁶ *Woman with Necklace* features hands drawn in two distinct styles: the first are cartoonish and appear almost like gloves, while the second are clawed. These two styles appear elsewhere in Miró's oeuvre—*Man with Candle* (1925) (Fig. 3), for example, exhibits the large 'gloved' style, and the origin of the 'clawed' hands can be seen in a series of drawings he produced while attending nude life-drawing classes at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in 1937. A figure with *three* distinct styles of hands would be exceedingly rare (if not unheard of) for Miró and, furthermore, the motif protruding from the bottom right of the figure's body has no precedence as a hand or arm elsewhere in the artist's oeuvre.

That there are five forms emanating from this motif should not be understood as evidence that these shapes are fingers, as oftentimes Miró's figures have deficit or extra digits (the female figure in *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement* (1935) has six fingers on her right hand). Typically when depicting hands, Miró draws an uninterrupted line from the figure's arm, to wrist, to fingertips. In this symbol, were one to read it as a hand, there is a clear distinction between 'palm' and 'fingers' (meaning that a line cuts the base of the 'fingers' off from the remainder of the hand); this division is not seen

⁵ For more on the foot's role in Miró's work, see Carolyn Lanchner, *Joan Miró* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993).

⁶ Miró begins to give his figure's hands more attention in the 1950s. His interest in the hand appears to peak in the 1970s with the inclusion of the artist's painted handprints on large canvases.

elsewhere in the artist's work. Also anomalous, in considering this motif as a hand, is the lack of defined thumb, which is normally present in even the most abstract of Miró's hands (or claws). The form's most curious attribute, however, is the black shading on either side of the appendage, which is decidedly atypical for Miró's hands.

This dark shading is, however, typical of Miró's flaming heart motifs. Shading is evident from the first instance of flaming heart imagery in Miró's work: in *Catalan Landscape (The Hunter)* (1923–1924) (Fig. 4), in which one can identify the organ on the left side of the titular character's single-lined body, it consists of four flames emphasised by the hunter's flaming rifle, pipe, and rabbit lunch. Similar shading is present on the top of the heart in *Portrait of Madame K* (1924) (Fig. 5) and the underside of the organ in *The Family* (1924) (Fig. 6). While the heart motif in *Woman with Necklace* is comparatively abstract, even hurried, in appearance, and is more rounded in form, its deliberate placement outside the confines of the body is consistent with flaming heart imagery in the 1924 compositions. The *Woman with Necklace* example, unlike earlier heart imagery, connects to the body by means of a branchlike appendage; this difference is possibly owing to the figure's more fully realised torso, as the earlier hearts each appear on the bodies of stick figures. Such differentiations do not, however, negate its status as a flaming heart. A notebook with sketches completed in Varengeville-sur-mer in 1940 shows the artist experimenting with various methods of depicting flaming hearts, including two examples in which the organ is completely detached from the body (Fig. 7–8) and another instance in which it is connected by a line directly to the figure's vulva (Fig. 9). Firmly placing this symbol in the flaming heart category, however, are the five barbs that emerge from it, which correspond exactly to Miró's depictions of flames. The pointed, tapered shape of these features are consistent with flame and solar imagery from throughout the entirety of Miró's oeuvre: see, for instance, *Painting* (1925) (Fig. 10), *The*

Firebird (1927) (Fig. 11), *Pastoral* (1938) (Fig. 12), and *Woman Fleeing the Fire* (1939) (Fig. 13).

Despite its repeated use in 1924, the flaming heart rarely appears in Miró's work after the mid 1920s. How then, can one explain its reappearance in *Woman with Necklace* and in the Varengeville notebooks in 1938 and 1940, respectively? The answer is, I suggest, in the historical context, namely the rise of the 'cult of the Sacred Heart' in Spain in the early twentieth century and the appropriation of the icon during the Spanish Civil War.

The Cult of the Sacred Heart in Spain

Devotion to the wounded or flaming heart originates with Margaret Marie Alacoque, a French nun who, beginning in the mid 1670s, claimed to have experienced a series of visions, the first of which involved Jesus revealing his heart. 'Bless this heart,' he said, 'which has loved men so much . . . and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude.'⁷ Alacoque also claims that Christ requested that the Friday after the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi be set aside 'for a special feast to honour My Heart.'⁸ Alacoque subsequently devoted her life to the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which she described as follows:

I saw this divine heart as on a throne of flames, more brilliant than the sun and transparent as a crystal. It had Its adorable wound and was encircled with a crown of thorns, which signified the pricks our sins caused him. It was surmounted by a cross which signifies that, from the first moment of His

⁷ Margaret Mary Alacoque, *The Autobiography of Saint Margaret Mary*, trans. the Sisters of the Visitation (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books and Publishers, 1986), 106.

⁸ Ibid.

Incarnation, that is, from the time this heart was formed, the cross was planted in it . . .⁹

Having heard of Alacoque's visions, young worshippers would seek out the nun hoping to participate in honouring the Sacred Heart through her mentorship. In the summer of 1685, Alacoque produced for her followers a pen-and-ink drawing of the Sacred Heart,¹⁰ which an engraving after Savinien Petit depicts her holding. While earlier depictions of the Sacred Heart existed (for instance, see Fig. 14 for a depiction in a book of hours from c. 1490), the rate at which Alacoque's drawing spread and the popularity she amassed for her visions propelled her depictions to archetypal status for subsequent Sacred Heart imagery. As David Morgan explains, Alacoque allowed several individuals to copy the image, and worked to have it reproduced as an engraving to be sold in groups of twelve. These engravings were in circulation within a year.¹¹

By the mid 1700s, the cult of the Sacred Heart, which was already considerably popular in France through the Jesuit support and validation of Alacoque's visions, spread to Spain through the efforts of the Jesuit Padre Bernardo de Hoyos. Through de Hoyos, the Sacred Heart began to develop a special significance for the Spanish people. On 14 May 1733, the priest experienced a vision of the Sacred Heart in which Christ told him: 'I will reign in Spain, and with more veneration than elsewhere.'¹² Later, as the two-hundredth anniversary of Alacoque's visions approached, Christ's words from de Hoyos's vision would be cited frequently. As John Richardson notes, this anniversary was 'exploited to the maximum by Church authorities, especially in Spain but elsewhere

⁹ Margaret Mary Alacoque, letter to Father Jean Croiset, November 3, 1689, in *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*, trans. Clarence A. Herbst and James J. Doyle (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1997), 229.

¹⁰ David Morgan, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus: The Visual Evolution of a Devotion* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹² William A. Christian Jr., *Moving Crucifixes in Modern Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 112.

in Europe as well, as a means of combatting the climate of mass-defections.¹³ Pope Pius IX beatified Alacoque in 1864, and 1899 Pope Leo XIII consecrated the entirety of the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was around this time that a young Pablo Picasso would receive his first commissions from a Barcelona convent to copy two altarpieces by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, one of which was entitled *Christ Appearing to the Blessed Marguerite Mary Alacoque* (c. 1896).¹⁴ While the subject matter ‘bored’ him, and he adhered only loosely to Murillo’s original contribution,¹⁵ studies for the altarpiece show an appropriate treatment of the subject matter by Picasso, who would later use the Sacred Heart blasphemously. In a letter to Guillaume Apollinaire, Picasso admits to feeling truly satisfied with his work and describes feeling devastated upon discovering that the altarpieces had been destroyed during the *Semana Tragica* (Tragic Week) in 1909.¹⁶ While the altarpiece is now lost, the Museu Picasso has in its collection three studies (one drawing, one watercolour sketch, and one oil-on-canvas study) that likely correspond to this commission.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart in Spain increased among the general population after the end of the First World War, with the rise of inflation and labour unrest. As the war closed, multiple instances were recorded across Spain of individuals experiencing visions of the Sacred Heart. Among the most famed of these occurred in the town of Limpias (located in Cantabria, near the Basque Country) in 1919, where a crucifixion sculpture, *Christ in Agony*, was said to have come to life. Between 1919 and 1926, over a quarter of a million people made pilgrimages to the sculpture, with approximately one in ten alleging to have witnessed the body of Christ move.¹⁷ Many Catholics in Spain

¹³ John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 1 (London: Random House, 1991), 73.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Picasso, unpublished statement to Guillaume Apollinaire, quoted in Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 73.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ William A. Christian Jr., *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 252. Christian explains how the visions at Limpias occurred ‘precisely when

interpreted the rise in visions, like those at Limpas or the Basque town of Ezkioga, as indications that Christ's 'reign' was approaching. An indication of how widespread this worship of the Sacred Heart was in Spain is King Alfonso XIII's dedication of the entire nation to the Sacred Heart in 1919, which was celebrated in a ceremony held just outside of Madrid.¹⁸

Miró's Flaming Hearts

In the midst of this cult of the Sacred Heart, Miró introduced flaming heart imagery into his 1924 compositions *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, *The Family*, and *Portrait of Madame K*. The inclusion of the Sacred Heart in Miró's work of the time is very likely a response to the symbol's ubiquity in Spanish and Catalan domestic and public spaces. From the nineteenth century, Spaniards were displaying devotional items relating to the Sacred Heart in their homes. This practice continued into the twentieth century through its promotion by Padre Mateo Crawley-Boevey, a member of the Order of the Sacred Hearts, and with the support of the Unión de Damas Españolas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. From 1914, Boevey toured Spain encouraging the display of Sacred Heart imagery not only in monasteries, but also in secular spaces, especially in homes, town halls, and factories.¹⁹ There are a significant number of domestic Sacred Heart objects from this period held in Spanish collections, including door plaques, ex-votos, amulets, and stamps (Figs. 15–18). It is possible that one of these door plaques (or perhaps a sculpture) was

World War I prevented travel to the shrine of Lourdes,' where 30 percent of pilgrims had been from the Basque Country and Catalonia.

¹⁸ William A. Christian Jr. 'Six Hundred Years of Visionaries in Spain: Those Believed and Those Ignored,' in *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics*, ed. Michael P. Hanagan et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 110. Christian notes that this 'reign of the Sacred Heart' was 'common' among Catholic Spaniards in the early twentieth century, whether they believed that it would occur presently, or in some apocalyptic future at the end of time.

¹⁹ Christian, *Moving Crucifixes in Modern Spain*, 112.

displayed at the headquarters of the Cercle Artistic de Sant Lluc, an artistic society at which Miró attended meetings for a brief time early in his career. In a letter, Miró uses the image of the Sacred Heart to indicate the site of this society. Although dedicated to the patron saint of artists, many of the Cercle's members were agnostic, and Miró certainly frames the group's purpose as nationalistic rather than religious:

Let us, the younger generation, gather around the image of the Sacred Heart that presides over the salon and valiantly continue our task of a truly Catalan artistic renaissance, truly a child of this Catalonia so chastised by men of Iberia.²⁰

Miró's public statements, interviews, and private writings do not reveal the direction of his religious leanings. There are no mentions of the artist attending church services or praying, and, unlike the young Picasso, Miró's work does not depict religious subjects. The only mention of Miró's piety in the secondary literature comes from the introduction to Margit Rowell's edited volume of the artist's writings and interviews, in which she characterises his faith as:

A kind of peasant syncretism: a mixture of devout Christianity (Catholicism), animism, or pantheism in regard to nature and an identification as well to cosmic forces, and asceticism, which, like that of the Spanish mystic poets, was achieved through a battle with his sensual, instinctive impulses.²¹

The supposition of Miró's interest animism is understandable, given his admiration of the mystics (and depictions thereof by Golden Age painters) and his self-identification

²⁰ Joan Miró, letter to E. C. Ricart, Barcelona, October 7, 1916. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 49.

²¹ Rowell, introduction to *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 3.

with the Catalan peasant. The connection between Miró and animist values, I would argue, is most evident in his reverential attitude towards the Catalan landscape, which is particularly obvious in his early writings and interviews. This interest traces back to the artist's early training with Francesc Galí, who combated Miró's difficulties with form and line by teaching him to draw from touch, but, more importantly for this consideration, who would take his students to the mountains and surrounding landscapes and encourage them to seek inspiration from nature, to visually absorb and appreciate their surroundings by wearing a 'diadem of eyes upon their heads.'²²

While one can make a case for Miró's interest in animism, Rowell's assertion that the artist's religious outlook involved 'devout Catholicism' is puzzling. In the interviews, letters, and personal notes that Rowell reproduces, there is no mention of any interest in Catholicism, and nor does she describe any discussions of faith in her personal correspondence with Miró. The closest he comes to describing any spirituality is in an interview with Rafael Santos Torroella, when he responds to a question about whether he was influenced by the Spanish mystics. Miró replied, 'It's possible, but not directly; more as a consequence of the spiritual tension they produce in me,' but did not elaborate on the nature of this 'tension.'²³ The claim that the artist reveals his 'deeply religious spirit' in his early letters (1915–1916) to friends E. C. Ricart and J. F. Ràfols is similarly perplexing, as the closest that these letters come to expressing an interest in Catholicism is the occasional use of Christian holy day names to reference dates (28 December as 'Holy Innocents Day,'²⁴ or 29 June as 'St. Peter's Day,'²⁵ for instance). In fact, most of Miró's references to God or to prayer in these early letters appear as light-hearted quips,

²² Francesc Galí's recollections, noted by Jacques Dupin in 1957, in *Miró*, trans. James Petterson (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 34.

²³ Joan Miró, "Miró Advises Our Young Painters," interview with Rafael Santos Torroella, in *Correo Literario* (Barcelona), 15 March 1951. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 226.

²⁴ Joan Miró, letter to E. C. Ricart, Caldetas, 31 January 1915. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 48.

²⁵ Joan Miró, letter to E. C. Ricart, Mont-roig, 27 October 1918. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 60.

or jokes. For instance, on the subject of his love life, Miró writes: ‘mortals cannot aspire to complete happiness, that would be rebelling against God, who was a man and suffered for us,’ after which he jokes, ‘enough preaching (and about time!).’²⁶

While he makes no references to participation in organised religion, the nearest that Miró comes to describing anything approximating a religious outlook is when he recounts the almost spiritual experiences of his working practice. He describes his first drawing classes at 13 Carrer del Regomir in Barcelona as being ‘like a religious ceremony to me. The implements were like sacred objects, and I worked as though I were performing a religious rite. This state of mind has persisted, even more pronounced.’²⁷ He does not associate his image-making with divine intervention, but rather with an emotional connection to the Catalan countryside. As early as 1917, Miró was embarking on ‘spiritual retreat[s]’ around the province of Tarragona, including to Siurana, Prades, and Cambrils, to seek inspiration. Of a particular pilgrimage to Siurana in 1917, he writes:

The more sceptical I have become to the things around me, the closer I become to God, to trees, the mountains, and to friendship. A primitive like the people of Siurana and a lover like Dante.²⁸

During these trips, ‘strolling in the mountains or gazing at a beautiful woman, reading a book or listening to a concert’ would elicit ‘forms, rhythms, colours,’ which he would then transfer to paper or canvas.²⁹ Later, while living in Paris, Mont-roig would remain an invaluable source of inspiration for Miró, who would continue throughout the entirety of

²⁶ Miró, letter to E. C. Ricart, Mont-roig, 27 October 1918. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 60.

²⁷ Joan Miró, letter to Jacques Dupin, ‘Autobiographical Sketch,’ 1957. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 44.

²⁸ Joan Miró, letter to E. C. Ricart, Mont-roig, August 1917. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 50.

²⁹ Joan Miró, letter to E.C. Ricart, Barcelona, October 7, 1916. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 49.

the 1920s to make yearly visits to his homeland. Commenting on the importance of these pilgrimages to interviewer Francesc Trabal in 1928, Miró remarked, ‘everything I have ever done in Paris was conceived in Mont-roig without even a thought of Paris, which I detest.’³⁰

The flaming heart’s initial appearance in both a nationalistic work (*The Hunter*) and a domestic scene (*The Family*)—two spheres in which devotion to the Sacred Heart was highly visible in the twentieth century—suggest that the symbol functions, for Miró, as a social and political metaphor rather than a strictly religious icon or an indication of his faith. The artist’s lack of professed interest in Catholicism also lends the impression that the flaming heart is not a purely religious symbol for Miró. When one considers that by 1924 the artist had been involved in Surrealist circles for three years and that this group’s values were already strongly anticlerical, it seems even less likely that the Sacred Heart contributes to a religious image.³¹ Emerging from the legacy of Dada, Miró, through his involvement with Surrealism, follows in the blasphemous footsteps of Francis Picabia’s *La Sainte Vierge* (*The Blessed Virgin*) (1920). Furthermore, Miró’s Sacred Hearts emerge alongside anticlerical Surrealist works of the mid 1920s, such as Antonin Artaud’s ‘Adresse au pape’ (‘Address to the Pope’) (1925), which denounces Catholicism and refers to the Pope as a ‘dog’ (the address appeared in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which proclaims ‘The End of the Christian Era’ on its cover).³² The same publication would feature the image of ‘Notre collaborateur Benjamin Péret insultant un prêtre’ (‘Our Colleague Benjamin Péret Insulting a Priest’) (1926).

³⁰ Francesc Trabal, “A Conversation with Joan Miró,” *La Publicitat*, July 14, 1928. Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 92.

³¹ There were, of course exceptions to the anti-clerical majority. The Spanish writer and poet José Bergamín, who was a member of the Surrealist-associated *Generación de 27* (Generation of ’27), was both a Republican and a Catholic, and wrote works like *Detrás de la cruz* (1941), which condemned the Church’s involvement with fascism.

³² For more on Artaud’s ‘Adresse au pape,’ see Heather Höpfl, “Artaud and the Corruption of Judgment,” *Culture and Organization* 11, no. 4 (December 2005): 249–258.

The only literature to consider Sacred Heart imagery in Miró's work—Gerta Moray's 1971 article 'Miró, Bosch and Fantasy Painting'—does so through this anticlerical lens. Although she writes on *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, Moray does not examine the flaming heart icon itself, but rather, she argues that there is a connection between another symbol in the painting and Hieronymus Bosch's *The Haywain* (c. 1516). Specifically, Moray argues that the large black-and-white, almond-shaped form with hair-like tendrils—which Miró would later identify as a 'sun egg'³³—that floats in the sky of *The Hunter* closely resembles the image of the Sacred Heart found in Bosch's composition.³⁴ In *The Haywain*, one can identify a red Sacred Heart in the bottom foreground of the central panel, on the tooth-drawer's banner. Despite the two symbols' difference in colouring, Moray contends that the shape of Bosch's Sacred Heart, with its 'streaming flames' is 'so exactly like Miró's [sun-egg] that the two must surely be connected.'³⁵ Bosch was, of course, an important influence on many Surrealist artists. Miró himself claimed to be 'very interested in Bosch' when reminiscing on his Surrealist heyday in a 1978 interview.³⁶ Connections were being drawn between Miró and Bosch from as early as 1928: the Paris correspondent for the Dutch daily *De Telegraaf* characterised Miró as the 'great grandson of Hieronymus Bosch.'³⁷ Similarly, contemporaries of Salvador Dalí were quick to draw connections with Bosch, the best known of which is a 1934 article by Herbert Read published in *The Listener*, entitled 'Bosch and Dalí,' which compares *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1503) with Dalí's

³³ William Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 24. Additionally, R. Doepel notes the formal similarities between the symbol and images of hearts in Catalan woodcuts in 'Aspects of Joan Miró's Stylistic Development, 1920 to 1925' (MA thesis, Courtauld Institute, University of London, 1967), 15.

³⁴ Gerta Moray, "Miró, Bosch and Fantasy Painting," *Burlington Magazine* 113, no. 820 (July 1971): 387.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Lluís Permanyer, "Revelaciones de Joan Miró sobre su obra," *Gaceta Ilustrada*, no. 1124 (April 1978). Translated by Auster and Matthews, in *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 291.

³⁷ Unknown, "Droomschilderkunst: Beleven wij een terugkeer der inspiratie? Joan Miró en zijn duivelarijen," *De Telegraaf*, June 6, 1928, evening edition, 9.

plates for an edition of the Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1934).³⁸

Strengthening the connection between Bosch and Surrealism is Max Ernst's inclusion of Bosch in his list of 'Max Ernst's Favourite Poets and Painters of the Past,' which he published in *View* in 1942.

Moray's assertion that Miró was in the best position to introduce Bosch to the Surrealists³⁹ is tenuous, as Miró did not make his first trip to the Prado, where *The Haywain* and other works are housed, until 22 June 1928. Dalí is a more likely candidate, as he spent the early 1920s studying in Madrid and frequenting the Prado. Given the date of Miró's first visit to Madrid, it is difficult to ascertain whether the artist would have been intimately familiar with *The Haywain* at the time he painted *The Hunter*, although it is certainly possible that he had access to reproductions. Despite this potentially problematic dating, Moray's article brings forth important details relating to Miró's early use of Sacred Heart imagery—namely how it relates to the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera—that are useful for an analysis of the resurgence of the imagery in the artist's late 1930s work. If Miró is indeed borrowing from Bosch, and this sun-egg represents a Sacred Heart, then its black colouring could be interpreted as an anticlerical symbol.⁴⁰ This heretical stance resonates with the satirical tone of *The Haywain*, which criticises both religious and political authorities.⁴¹

Sacred Hearts and Civil War

One can place Miró's early use of the flaming heart motif within the context of political and religious dissent in Spain. By 1923, Primo de Rivera's dictatorship had been

³⁸ For more on Bosch and Dalí, see Fèlix Fanés, *Salvador Dalí: The Construction of the Image, 1925–1930* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁹ Moray, 'Miró, Bosch and Fantasy Painting,' 387.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

established, and, from its commencement, sought to censor Catalan culture, identity, and political institutions through the banning of the Catalan language, national dance, costume, and the flying of the Catalan flag. *The Hunter*, which celebrates the Catalan peasant, is consequently read as a celebration of Catalan nationalism. Moray reads the coupling of the French and Catalan flags on the left side of the composition and their separation from the Spanish flag on the right side as a political statement.⁴² She also notes, albeit briefly, that the Sacred Heart—painted black, the ‘colour of death’—could be read as an blasphemous symbol, as the Catholic church in Spain was closely aligned with the monarchy and aristocratic classes, while the peasantry was largely anticlerical.⁴³ A more specific reference, which Moray fails to mention, is the *Semana Trágica* of 1909, which would have remained strongly in the minds of Catalans at this time and is considered as the ‘opening gun in the social war’ in early twentieth century Spain.⁴⁴ A response to the return of Spanish military presence in Morocco, this outbreak of violent, street-level anti-war protests and iconoclasm in Catalonia lasted for a full week. During this week, much of the violence was focused on the burning of churches and convents and attacks on statues of Jesus, Mary, and other saints.⁴⁵ Rioters also took part in the desecration of Sacred Heart emblems.⁴⁶

The reappearance of the Sacred Heart motif in Miró’s work in 1938 and 1940 with *Woman with Necklace* and the *Varengeville* drawings is not coincidental, but rather just as rooted in the contemporary political climate as the 1924 examples. A unique condition of the Spanish Civil War, Stanley G. Payne explains, is that it was largely a ‘war

⁴² Moray, ‘Miró, Bosch and Fantasy Painting’, 391.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gerald H. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914–1923* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 7.

⁴⁵ Joan Connelly Ullman, *The Tragic Week: A Study of Anticlericalism in Spain, 1875–1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 291. In their destruction of Church art, these protests join a long history of political iconoclasm. For more on the history of physical attacks on religious art, see the catalogue for the recent exhibition *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm*, eds. Stacy Boldrick and Tabitha Barber (London: Tate, 2013), and *Iconoclasm*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (London: MIT Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ Mary Vincent, *Spain 1833–2002* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), 103.

of religion,' in terms of the prominence of anticlericalism and the response thereto. This differs, Payne continues, from other modern revolutionary civil wars, in which religious issues arose but did not ascend to the same level of importance or generate such impassioned and violent reverberations.⁴⁷ After the fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the new, leftist government (the Second Spanish Republic)—whose republican, socialist, and regionalist members positioned themselves as the champions of modern Spain⁴⁸—almost immediately implemented the separation of church and state. In the constitutional debate of 1931, Prime Minister Manuel Azaña Díaz proclaimed: 'Spain is no longer a Catholic country, even though there are millions of Spanish Catholics,' and the new constitution accordingly emphasised freedom of religion and insisted on the removal of Catholicism as the official religion of Spain.⁴⁹ The separation of church and state, however, quickly devolved into the 'subjugation of the Church and the suppression of Catholic culture through the elimination of Catholic education.'⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, the Second Republic would fail to investigate, prosecute, or even condemn the wave of church burnings (executed mainly by mobs of anarchist and republican extremists⁵¹) and other violent outpourings of the anticlerical atmosphere that had been building for over a decade.⁵² The Second Republic's religious reforms are one of the earliest indications of its 'radically reformist' nature, employing a method of suppressing opposition that resulted in a government that political historian Javier Tusell succinctly characterises as 'a not very democratic democracy.'⁵³ Tusell's brusque description is a useful way to understand these

⁴⁷ Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 233. Payne contrasts the Spanish Civil War with the Russian Revolution, in which, 'despite the religiosity of the general population, the peasantry often exhibited a mild anticlericalism and did not view the civil war in strongly religious terms, in part because the Bolshevik hatred of religion was fully expressed only in the later phase.'

⁴⁸ Omar G. Encarnación, *Spanish Politics: Democracy After Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 17.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Stanley G. Payne, *Spanish Catholicism: An Historical Overview* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 155.

⁵¹ Payne, *The Spanish Civil War*, 14.

⁵² Encarnación, *Spanish Politics*, 18.

⁵³ Javier Tusell, quoted in Payne, *The Spanish Civil War*, 14.

anticlerical reforms, which, as Javier Martínez-Torrón notes, were ‘anomalous’: ‘the clergy was not fascist, although it was largely conservative’ and ‘a Republican assault on the Church was needlessly aggressive and confrontational, and did little to advance the popularity of Republican policies with the masses.’⁵⁴ In working to limit the influence of the Catholic Church—which the Republicans understood as their ‘principle nemesis’—they would ultimately alienate themselves from the Spanish public, even from those who had previously supported their cause.

These anti-church policies of the Second Republic were largely responsible for the number of Spanish Catholics who turned their backs on the Republic in favour of the Right, which sought to undo this legislation. The burning of churches and murdering of priests contributed enormously to anti-Republican sentiments in the early 1930s. While the early Nationalist rhetoric contains little religious references, the rightist vision of undoing Republican reforms made them a natural ally for Spanish Catholics, and the church’s support for the CEDA⁵⁵ coalition played a significant role in the outcome of the 1933 election. After the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, one of the factors contributing to Francisco Franco’s consolidation of power as the Nationalist forces’ sole commander—in addition to his military prowess—was his approval by the Catholic Church, which had given its support to the ‘defence of Christianity against communism.’⁵⁶ Accordingly, the Civil War came to be discussed in terms of a ‘crusade,’ mainly by church officials and Carlists.⁵⁷ The use of the term by Franco in his characterisation of the rebellion as a ‘crusade for a great Spain’ in a broadcast on Radio

⁵⁴ Javier Martínez-Torrón, ‘Religious Freedom and Democratic Change in Spain,’ *Brigham Young University Law Review* (2006): 777.

⁵⁵ Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas. In English: ‘Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightist Groups.’

⁵⁶ Sheelagh Ellwood, *Franco* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 86.

⁵⁷ Chris Ealham, ‘The Myth of the Maddened Crowd: Class, Culture and Space in the Revolutionary Urbanist Project in Barcelona, 1936–1937,’ in *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, ed. Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171.

Tetuán on 25 July 1936 is likely more strongly nationalistic than religious in tone.⁵⁸ Framing the Civil War as the defence of Christianity against communism garnered international attention and support for Franco's cause. In August 1936, German bishops approved of Adolf Hitler's support for Franco, and the Vatican 'effectively recognized Franco on 28 August 1937,' and dispatched Monsignor Ildebrando Antoniutti, an Apostolic delegate, on 7 October.⁵⁹ A letter written to Franco by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Arthur Hinsley, captures the way in which Franco was viewed by international Catholics: 'I look upon you as the great defender of the true Spain, the country of Catholic principles where Catholic social justice and charity will be applied for the common good under a firm peace-loving government.'⁶⁰

Sacred Heart imagery played a visible role in the religious politics of both the left and the right during the Spanish Civil War. One of the most famous attacks on 'the public presence of Catholicism, on the emotional power of religion as well as the institutional power of the church' was the Republican 'execution' of the statue of the Sacred Heart at the Cerro de los Ángeles in the summer of 1936⁶¹—the same statue that had been erected when Alfonso XIII dedicated the nation to the Sacred Heart (Fig. 19). This symbolic execution assaulted the church and its support of the Nationalists, but also Spain as a whole. The statue at Cerro de los Ángeles represents not only the dominion of the cult of the Sacred Heart in Spain, but it is also famed for its location in the geographical centre of the country. The shooting of the Sacred Heart in this site thus strikes a symbolic blow to the heart of the nation. As Maria Antonia Herradón Figueroa

⁵⁸ Chris Ealham, 'The Myth of the Maddened Crowd,' 171.

⁵⁹ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana, 1996), 159.

⁶⁰ Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Arthur Hinsley, quoted in Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 160.

⁶¹ Ealham and Richards, *The Splintering of Spain*, 80.

notes, the Nationalists and the church used this event to their doctrinal advantage, and the Sacred Heart became a Nationalist symbol to be defended against communism.⁶²

Among the most widely used Sacred Heart objects during Civil War were the *detentes* (stops), which Nationalist soldiers (especially the Moroccan and Carlist factions) pinned to their uniforms for good luck. Alleged to cure cholera in the late nineteenth century,⁶³ the *detentes* were popularised during the Third Carlist War and are most famous for their appropriation by Franco's troops during the Civil War. Made from wool (later paper, with the most recent examples coated in plastic) the objects appear as square, circular, ovular, or diamond shaped with smoothed, waved, or jagged edges (Figs. 20–23). The centre of the *detente* contains a variation on the image of the Sacred Heart: this can manifest as an image of Jesus with his arms outstretched, can include a solitary heart, and can incorporate the Spanish flag. The central image is surrounded by the phrase '*Detente, el corazón de Jesus está conmigo*' ('Stop, the heart of Jesus is with me'), or variations like '*Reinaré en España*' ('I will reign in Spain') or '*Christo Reina*' ('Christ reigns'). Beyond being a simple good-luck charm, these *detentes* also provided soldiers with a connection to their (usually female) relatives and acquaintances, as wives, girlfriends, and mothers would give them as gifts.⁶⁴ It is tempting to read Miró's placement of the heart outside the body—especially in the case of the *miliciana* figure in *Woman with Necklace*—through this practise of soldiers wearing Sacred Heart badges on the outside of their uniforms.

While *detentes* are familiar artefacts in Spain, little is written on their significance during the Civil War, especially in the English language.⁶⁵ When they do appear in Spanish Civil War literature, it is in relation to their mass usage by Nationalist troops. Herradon Figueroa credits this largely to Franco's attempt to exclusively appropriate

⁶² María Antonia Herradón Figueroa, "Reinaré en España: La devoción al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús," *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* LXIV, no. 2 (2009): 200.

⁶³ Ibid, 211, note 10.

⁶⁴ Michael Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution: The Nationalist Effort in the Spanish Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 171.

⁶⁵ Herradón Figueroa, 'Reinaré en España,' 200.

both the devotion to the Sacred Heart and the *detente* for the Nationalist cause, to further his campaign as the defender of Christianity.⁶⁶ A similar appropriation occurred with other religious symbols.⁶⁷ Through the employment of war illustrators, the most famous of which was Carlos Sáenz de Tejada, the Nationalists could disseminate idealised pictorial representations of their soldiers bedecked in religious iconography. De Tejada's illustrations frequently show soldiers (especially from Carlist factions, called the Requetés) wearing *detentes* pinned to the left side of their uniforms (Fig. 24). Despite both leftist anticlericalism and Franco's best efforts to exclusively claim the Sacred Heart symbol, Republican sympathisers and even soldiers occasionally used *detentes*. Michael Seidman notes how communist soldiers, out of fear of being caught with religious icons and subsequently punished, would hide their *detentes* inside their uniforms.⁶⁸ Possession of a *detente* had the added benefit of garnering sympathy with captors who may be more lenient to Catholic prisoners of war.⁶⁹ The recollections of César Torres Martínez of his incarceration reveal the nature of religious superstition in prisons and how 'everyone' wore the *detente*, believing it was the only hope for salvation.⁷⁰

How can one reconcile Miró's renewed use of the Sacred Heart in 1938–1940 with its status as a Fascist symbol, whose use by the left was strictly secretive? While the icon's purpose in both *Woman with Necklace* and the Varengeville-sur-Mer notebook is ambiguous, there are a number of ways through which one can approach this question. Most obviously, the inclusion of Sacred Heart imagery reflects the social phenomenon surrounding the icon's mass usage during this period, in much the same way as it functions in the 1924 works. A second consideration is that in both of these instances,

⁶⁶ Later, Franco would continue this use of Christian iconography when he commissioned the enormous *Valle de los Caídos* ('Valley of the Fallen'), which was completed in 1955, in part through the use of Republican political prisoners as labourers. Franco is now buried in the basilica at this site.

⁶⁷ Herradón Fiueroa, 'Reinaré en España,' 208.

⁶⁸ Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution*, 171.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Testimony of César Torres Martínez, October 14, 1977, reproduced in Ian Gibson, *The Assassination of Federico García Lorca* (London: W. H. Allen, 1979), 126–127.

the flaming heart appears on the female body, which leads one to consider women's role in distributing and using Sacred Heart icons throughout Spain. As mentioned previously, *detentes* were made by women and given out largely by female relations to allow soldiers to maintain a familial connection while at war. When the church distributed *detentes* to soldiers, the task usually fell to nuns.

One could also read this symbol as a parodic depiction of the detente. Where the detente typically appeared on the uniforms of fascist soldiers, here it appears on the body of an eroticised woman—possibly even a combatant—a role that (as discussed in chapter 6) was rejected by the Nationalists. Through this reading, Miró's decision to revive the flaming heart at this moment, on the body of a woman, is deliberate and contributes to a fundamentally caustic and enraged image. Miró had, of course, previously depicted flaming hearts on female bodies in both *The Family* and *Portrait of Madame K*. In the former, one credits the symbol's presence to the prevalence of domestic Sacred Heart iconography in the early 1920s and to the mother's role as the heart of the family. This role is emphasised by the depiction of the female body in the composition: she is reduced to a head (whose emanating hairs recall a sun, an archetypal symbol of growth and fertility), breasts, a heart, and a drastically oversized vulva. The arrow, which moves through her body, connecting the figures of father and child, explicitly elucidates her reproductive role. *Woman with Necklace*, conversely, possesses none of the aforementioned associations with motherhood or domesticity, in fact, the suggestion of flames in the background hint at the destruction of her domestic sphere (as burning cities are common elements in this series, for instance, in *Woman in Revolt* [1938]). Most significantly, in this drawing, the Sacred Heart offers no protection to its wearer and instead contributes to a profoundly cynical image. While it is possible that the flaming heart refers to passion and is not a religious symbol, the historical context makes this overlap seem too coincidental.

The failure of the Sacred Heart to protect its wearer allows for an interpretation of the icon's place in *Woman with Necklace*—as an anticlerical or even blasphemous symbol of an even stronger order than Moray's reading of *The Hunter*. *Women with Necklace* differs greatly from the propagandistic, Franco-approved depictions of Sacred Heart iconography in the work of illustrators like Teodoro Delgado and Carlos Sáenz de Tejada. In Delgado's illustrations for Jacinto Miquelarena's *Unificación* (1937), Falangist soldiers' youth⁷¹ and virility act as a metaphor for Spain's future: 'a nation with young, strong, and courageous male patriots will enjoy a successful future.'⁷² One notes similar symbolism in Tejada's *Tres Generaciones* (late 1930s), which depicts three generations of strong Carlist soldiers proudly displaying their *detentes*. Miró's figure is not a stoic male soldier, but rather a frantic woman with wide eyes, raised hands, and mouth agape—whether she gesticulates from distress, fear, or revolt is unclear. What is certain, however, is that her Sacred Heart provides no comfort; she is far from assured that the heart of Christ will protect her. If the work of Tejada and Delgado show an ideal Spain embodied by a romanticised military, Miró depicts the haunting reality of civilians across the nation.

Surrealism, Blasphemy, and Acéphale

Woman with Necklace joins several other blasphemous depictions of Sacred Hearts by a variety of Surrealist artists in the 1920s and '30s. The similarities in imagery may owe to Miró's association with the notoriously anticlerical group in the 1920s, or as independent

⁷¹ For more on the importance of youth in Falange imagery, see Iker Gonzalez-Allende, 'Dying for the Nation: Rite of Passage, Homoeroticism and Martyrdom in the Falangist Narrative during the Spanish Civil War,' *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 89, no. 3 (2012): 277–278.

⁷² As Robin Adèle Greeley notes, there were several artists who employed Surrealist motifs in service of the Nationalist cause during the Civil War. These include: José Caballero, Adriano de Valle, Cabanas, Domingo Viladomat, Pedro Pruna, Juan Antonio Acha, and Escassi. The work of these artists has not been discussed in my consideration, as it does not feature prominent Sacred Heart imagery. Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 221, note 10.

responses to contemporary events and the cult of the Sacred Heart in both France and Spain. As early as 1918, Apollinaire's calligram *Heart crown and mirror* presented three unrelated images formed by words without an attempt to connect them to one another (Fig. 26).⁷³ While the image is not explicitly Christian in reference (and therefore not explicitly blasphemous, either), it is an early example of the bringing together of heart and flame motifs. The text composing the image of a heart reads: 'Mon Coeur pareil à une flamme renversée' ('My heart like an upside-down flame'). Picabia would later use a drawing of the Sacred Heart in an illustration for the cover of *Littérature* (no. 4, September 1922), a Surrealist journal edited by André Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Louis Aragon (Fig. 27). While Picabia's work is not obviously blasphemous, the use of the symbol to represent Surrealism—with its anti-religious attitude—can only be parodic. In 1934, Ernst would use Sacred Heart imagery twice in his collage book *Une semaine de bonté* (*A Week of Kindness*) (figs. 28–29). Elza Adamowicz argues that, in Ernst's work, the Sacred Heart is 'devalued from religious to sexual fetish' in its first appearance, in which it takes the form of a '*cache-sexe*,' covering the genitals of a nude female figure. In its second incarnation, the symbol appears at the end of a woman's cigarette holder, 'depriving it of any stable meaning through the dispersal of its symbolic identity' (Figs. 28–29).⁷⁴

The Sacred Heart finds a place of particular prominence in the work of Spanish and Catalan Surrealists, namely Picasso and Dalí (in addition to Miró). Departing from his earlier Murillo copies, Picasso would return to Sacred Heart imagery in the mid twentieth century through a new, blasphemous lens. He reuses the figure of Christ from one of these 1896 studies in a caricature of his friend Jaime Sabartés as a *Poeta Decadente*.

⁷³ For more on *Heart crown and mirror*, see Laurie Edson, *Reading Relationally: Postmodern Perspectives on Literature and Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 141. Reading the calligram causes the reader to consider the formal similarities between the heart and inverted flame, their semantic similarities (both suggest passion and warmth), and also to address our own act of reading, as the word *renversée* also refers to our need to reverse our typical direction of reading in order to identify the word *une flamme*, which we must read both backwards and from right to left.

⁷⁴ Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 125.

He replaces Christ's halo with a flowered wreath and Sabartés, who is surrounded by crucifixes, holds a large purple flower. John Richardson notes how Picasso would continue in this vein, using the Sacred Heart as a sexual metaphor for Marie-Thérèse Walter in 'a series of pictorial puns of an anatomical nature on the form of a heart,' which allowed him to reveal his sexual ardour for Walter while disguising it from his wife, Olga Khokhlova.⁷⁵ He would use the Sacred Heart again in reference to Walter in 1933: Walter had written the date "1927–33," indicating the length of their relationship at that point, and Picasso had surrounded her inscription with a flaming heart pierced by an arrow.⁷⁶ In 1941 Picasso would use the Sacred Heart in a drawing for the opening scene of his play *Le Désir attrapé par la queue* (*Desire Caught by the Tail*), which was performed for the first time in the apartment of Michel Leiris in 1944. In the bottom-right corner of the drawing, a flaming heart can be identified inside of a stove. Kathleen Brunner reads the motif as a possible reference to Tristan Tzara's play *Le Cœur à gaz* (*The Gas-Burning Heart*),⁷⁷ but I believe that the image also recalls Alacoque's vision of the Sacred Heart, which she says appeared to her 'as a burning furnace' (Fig. 30).⁷⁸

The most famous and among the most blasphemous Surrealist depictions of the Sacred Heart is a 1929 ink-on-canvas drawing by Dalí. While the simplicity of the silhouette recalls Picabia's *Littérature* cover, Dalí's drawing is much more scathing in its message. On the canvas, Dalí produces an outline of Jesus, his hand raised in blessing, over which he has inscribed '*Parfois je crache par plaisir sur le portrait de ma mère*' ('Sometimes I spit for fun on the portrait of my mother') (Fig. 31). The clarity with which Dalí depicts the Sacred Heart, along with the unmistakable outline of Christ, makes it clear that the

⁷⁵ Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, 73–74.

⁷⁶ Michael C. Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Cowling, *Picasso's Marie-Thérèse*, (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 2008), 211.

⁷⁷ Kathleen Brunner, *Picasso Rewriting Picasso* (London: Black Dog, 2004), 102.

⁷⁸ Morgan, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 8.

person doing the spitting is Jesus, with the target being the Virgin Mary.⁷⁹ The drawing has also been read as an image of the Virgin herself, as the Mater Dolorosa,⁸⁰ in which she is often depicted with a wounded heart. Dalí would later use the back of a postcard with an image of the Mater Dolorosa to draw a *cadavre exquis* with André Breton and Valentine Hugo (Fig. 32). According to this ‘double image’ interpretation, ‘the son who does the spitting and the mother who receives such a cutting insult’ appear in the same image, as one.⁸¹ Beyond the anticlerical implications, the composition would all but terminate Dalí’s relationship with his father, who interpreted the work as an attack on his deceased wife.

These Surrealist depictions of the Sacred Heart are compelling evidence for classing Miró’s flaming hearts in anti-clerical terms, but they do not address the concurrent politicization of the symbol beyond a general anti-religious stance. Bataille and Masson, meanwhile, explicitly use the Sacred Heart in a call for social revolution. While they were not Spanish, the Civil War would have a decisive effect on the creation of Bataille and Masson’s figure of the Acéphale, which would serve as the cover image for the eponymous journal of Bataille’s creation and which he edited from 1936–1939 (Fig. 33). Drawn by Masson according to Bataille’s specifications, the Acéphalic man is described as:

Un être qui me fait rire parce qu’il est sans tête, qui m’emplit d’angoisse parce qu’il est fait d’innocence et de crime: il tient une arme de fer dans sa main gauche, des flammes semblables à un sacré-cœur dans sa main droite. Il réunit dans une même éruption la Naissance et la Mort. Il n’est pas un homme. Il n’est pas non plus un dieu. Il n’est pas moi mais il est plus moi que moi: son ventre est le

⁷⁹ Félix Fanés, *Salvador Dalí: The Construction of the Image, 1925–1930* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 156.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Fanés, *Salvador Dalí: The Construction of the Image*, 156.

dédale dans lequel il s'est égare lui-même, m'égare avec lui et dans lequel je me retrouve étant lui, c'est-à-dire monstre.

(a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of the Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption Birth and Death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me: his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words a monster.)⁸²

Masson had exiled himself to Tossa, in Catalonia, after the outbreak of fascist riots in Paris in February of 1934. Bataille had previously visited Masson in Spain in 1935, along with Leiris, and returned in April 1936 with plans for a new project following his resignation from the magazine *Contre-Attaque*. His plan was to form a type of community, called *Acéphale* (Headless) that would 'abandonner le monde des civilisés et sa lumière' ('abandon the world of the civilized and its light').⁸³ Bataille worked alongside Masson to create both its signature image and its manifesto, entitled 'La conjuration sacrée' ('The Sacred Conspiracy'), which appeared in the first issue.

Acéphale, in many ways, responded to contemporary political struggles—most especially the hunger for power on both fascist and communist sides. As Benjamin Noys explains, Bataille saw in leftist politics at the time a 'desire to seize power' that ultimately hindered attempts at political freedom.⁸⁴ Masson also affirmed his and Bataille's hatred of

⁸² Georges Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée,' *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 445. "The Sacred Conspiracy." Translated by Stoekl et al., in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 181.

⁸³ Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée,' 443. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 178.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2000), 9.

democracies and their ‘absolutely sickening spinelessness.’⁸⁵ Masson also maintained, however, that both he and Bataille had even greater contempt for the ‘horror of Nazism and of all possible forms of fascism, including Franco’s.’⁸⁶ Michel Surya aptly characterises *Acéphale*’s politics as ‘anti-democratic and non-communist anti-fascism.’⁸⁷ Bataille (and *Acéphale*) would later be attacked for having fascist sympathies owing to Bataille’s ‘fascination’ with the ideology. Pierre Klossowski,⁸⁸ for instance, writes: ‘in submitting to this fascination discernible on the horizon of German demi-culture, Bataille unconsciously took his place in a realm inclined to fascism,’⁸⁹ while Boris Souvarine quotes anonymous ‘friends’ of Bataille (none of whom have been subsequently identified) who used the word ‘fascinated’ to describe [Bataille’s] attitude towards Hitler.⁹⁰ Contrary to these remarks, *Acéphale* was decidedly antifascist, in the same way that it was anti-communist; it expounded an entirely anti-political agenda. As Denis de Rougemont would summarise in 1937: ‘*Acéphale* is the sign of radical anti-statism, in other words of the sole antifascism worthy of the name.’⁹¹ This anti-political stance is evident, most obviously, in the ‘headlessness’ of the *Acéphalic* man.

What Bataille sought with *Acéphale* was a community that desired liberation, not power, and would thus reject traditional institutions—both political and religious. He writes: ‘la vie humaine est excédée de servir de tête et de raison à l’univers. Dans la mesure où elle deviant cette tête et cette raison, dans la mesure où elle deviant nécessaire à l’univers, elle accepte un servage’ (‘human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe. To the extent that it becomes this head and

⁸⁵ André Masson, quoted in Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), 293.

⁸⁶ André Masson, “*Acéphale* ou l’illusion initiatique,” interview by Paule Thévenin, *Les Cahiers obliques*, no. 1 (January–March 1980), 27.

⁸⁷ Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, 543, note 15.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁸⁹ Pierre Klossowski, *La Rencontre et la différence* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 214.

⁹⁰ Boris Souvarine, quoted in Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, 291–292.

⁹¹ Denis de Rougemont, quoted in Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, 292. As Surya notes, both Leiris and Masson would similarly defend Bataille.

this reason, to the extent that it becomes necessary to the universe, it accepts servitude').⁹² With *Aéphale*, Bataille declares war on the concept of civilisation, on reason, and on the profane world of 'utility,' and instead aspires to a system with no single leader and a return to the sacred, to a world where it is 'possible de se perdre dans l'extase' ('possible to lose oneself in ecstasy').⁹³ Allan Stoekl characterises the community's principal goals as:

the rebirth of myth and the touching off in society of an explosion of the primitive communal drives leading to sacrifice. Myth . . . is the way open to man after the failure of art, science (and scientific notions of causation), and politics to reach these lower—and more 'essential' human drives.⁹⁴

Noys notes that, Bataille likened this liberation to that of a sorcerer's apprentice, 'who releases energies that he cannot control and which rebound on him. . . . *Acéphale* was an attempt to release these energies.'⁹⁵ The *Acéphalic* man invites comparisons with Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* ('overman,' or 'superman')⁹⁶ as a being who rises after the overthrowing of a system (in the case of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the overman follows the death of God), as something more than human that man may aspire to, and whose values do not conform to those of the common man or to every-day morality. Bataille believed that the contemporary way of life was beyond hope, that 'Il est trop tard pour tenir à être raisonnable et instruit' ('it is too late to be reasonable and educated'), and that mankind must surrender itself to an entirely different way of living

⁹² Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée,' 445. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 181.

⁹³ Ibid, 443. Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 179.

⁹⁴ Stoekl, introduction to *Visions of Excess*, xix–xx.

⁹⁵ Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*, 9.

⁹⁶ Several Bataille scholars have noted this connection, see, for instance: Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 130.

‘ou de cesser d’être’ (‘or else to cease being’).⁹⁷ In losing his head—the anchor to reason and civilisation—man becomes emancipated; he escapes ‘just as the condemned man escapes from his prison.’⁹⁸

The edict, which appears in capital letters on the second page of ‘The Sacred Conspiracy,’ that ‘NOUS SOMMES FAROUCHEMENT RELIGIEUX’ (‘We are ferociously religious’), is even more puzzling than Bataille’s political stance, as he had abandoned Catholicism in the early 1920s.⁹⁹ As Surya explains, however, this statement does not align Acéphale with any organised religion: ‘certainly it was religious, fiercely so even, on condition that this is understood in a Nietzschean and, without any doubt anti-Christian, sense.’¹⁰⁰ Bataille elucidates this point in 1946, when he writes,

‘l’athéisme de Nietzsche est d’une nature singulière, il est l’athéisme d’un homme qui *connaît* Dieu, qui de Dieu eut la même expérience que les saints. . . . Tout engage d’ailleurs à croire que l’enseignement de Nietzsche exige pour être suivi l’assimilation préalable du christianisme. . . .’

(‘Nietzsche’s atheism is of a singular nature, an atheism of a man who *knew* God, who had the same experience of God as the saints. . . . Everything moreover commits us to believe that Nietzsche’s teaching requires an initial assimilation to Christianity in order to be followed. . . .’¹⁰¹

It is through this seemingly paradoxical religious outlook that one must understand both Acéphale’s mission and its appropriation of Sacred Heart iconography.

⁹⁷ Bataille, ‘La conjuration sacrée.’ Translated by Stoekl et al. in *Visions of Excess*, 179.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 181.

⁹⁹ Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 235.

¹⁰¹ Georges Bataille, ‘Gide–Nietzsche–Claudel,’ in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 11 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 127. Originally published in *Critique* 5 (October 1946): 463–468. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson in *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, 54.

Like Miró's woman drawings, The Acéphalic man also has a direct association to the Spanish Civil War through a second version of the drawing that Masson completed in July 1936, the same month that the war officially began. Nicknamed *The Barcelona Acéphale*,¹⁰² this figure has a communist hammer and sickle in place of his head, and the flames of the Sacred Heart are echoed in the wreckage of a burning city in the background of the image (a trope that appears frequently in Miró's work of the time) (Fig. 34). The Acéphale's body remains much the same: he retains his labyrinthine stomach and the skull covers, or replaces, his genitals. Unlike the original design, in which the figure's feet are planted firmly on the ground, *The Barcelona Acéphale* crushes beneath his feet a cross and a swastika. Masson leaves little doubt that the image refers to the rise of fascism and violent civil war in Spain—he inscribes 'Barcelona Juillet 1936' (the month the war began) beneath the figure.

The inclusion of the Sacred Heart on the figure of the Acéphale is an anticlerical gesture, in spite of Bataille's insistence on the group's religiosity. The religious outlook is tied to a desire to liberate mankind from the insufficient, pseudo-spirituality of established institutions—including both the church and fascism, with its ability to rally citizens en masse—and to replace this with a spirituality that is concerned with myth, sacrifice, and, especially, violence. The Sacred Heart appears not on the body of Christ, but in the hand of a figure who, by Bataille's own admission, is a 'monster,'¹⁰³ and the presence of the knife in the Acéphale's other hand hints at the organ's violent removal. The Acéphale's pose and Sacred Heart are parodic references to Christ's crucifixion. In both the figure of the Acéphale and in Miró's *Woman with Necklace*, the placement of the Sacred Heart on the body of a non-biblical figure fractures the symbol's Christian potency, and the resulting image becomes a stand-in for the anathema to fascism (via

¹⁰² For more on *The Barcelona Acéphale*, see Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 117–146.

¹⁰³ Bataille, 'La conjuration sacrée', 445.

Franco's appropriation of the image) or for the failures of the Catholic Church. Both Miró and Bataille use the Sacred Heart in aid of a political message that is more socially engaged and nuanced than the obvious blasphemy of earlier Surrealists, like Dalí. Through their anticlericalism, neither seeks an official alignment with any leftist parties (although Masson, formerly a vocal anti-Marxist, would go on to produce work in aid of both communist and anarchist groups).¹⁰⁴ Their concern, instead, is for the betterment of mankind: Bataille through the liberation of buried, base impulses and Miró in depicting the suffering of the Catalan (and Spanish) people and his hope for their success over fascism. In his contributions to the Spanish Republic's pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exposition—a political domain—*The Reaper* and *Aidez L'Espagne* focus on the plight and revolutionary spirit of the Catalan peasant, rather than being obviously propagandistic. While his concern for Catalan nationalism and professed antifascism undoubtedly place him on the political left, Miró was 'notoriously' unwilling to declare allegiance to any party,¹⁰⁵ and the only desired outcome of the war that he expressed was a toppling of fascism and the restoration of peace—a goal which, he believed, the spirit of the Spanish people could surely accomplish.

Conclusion

The flaming heart motif appears in Miró's work at two points in modern Spanish history when devotion to the Sacred Heart was at its highest: during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the Civil War. Such historical conditions cannot be ignored, and prompts a reading of the motif not only through the rise of the cult of the Sacred Heart in Spain, but also through the church's alignment with the political right, the targeting of the icon

¹⁰⁴ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 121.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Lubar, 'Miró's Commitment,' in *Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape*, ed. Marko Daniel and Matthew Gale (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 33.

during the anticlerical riots of the early twentieth century, and the subsequent appropriation of the Sacred Heart motif by Franco's troops. Furthermore, Miró's alignment with Surrealism—whose members often produced anticlerical works—and his lack of stated religious devotion suggest that the artist employs Sacred Heart motifs as an anticlerical gesture, against the church's historical alignment with the Spanish aristocracy and its eventual allegiance to the Nationalists. The Acéphalic man—which has its roots in the Spanish Civil War—is a useful, contemporary comparison for understanding the enigmatic, yet implicit, blasphemy and antifascism of Miró's Sacred Hearts. While Bataille uses the Acéphale as a symbol for a society that seeks a radical departure through the liberation of base impulses, he uses the symbol of the Sacred Heart to address the insufficiencies of the existing institutions of both church and state. Read metaphorically, the severed head and Sacred Heart of the Acéphale is liberating, and signals the *Acéphale* community's desire for freedom from both the state and the church. In *Woman with Necklace*, the icon's inability to provide protection for its wearer suggests that the Sacred Heart is as ineffectual to the Spanish citizenry as the governmental and religious institutions that motivated the Civil War.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued against Rosalind Krauss's characterisation of Miró as a 'suicidal moth' who was drawn for a short time towards Bataillean thought, but who could not sustain this interest and continue as an artist. I also reject the trend in previous Miró scholarship to limit the artist's engagement with Bataille to the late 1920s. Instead, I have argued that Miró's work of 1930–1939 possesses significant overlaps in themes, imagery, and 'operations' with Bataille's contemporary writings. This investigation began with a consideration of Miró's anti-painting period of the late 1920s and 1930s as a private, individual conflict that would eventually give way by 1934 to the greater, global crisis (economic collapse, the rise of fascism, and war) that dominated the decade. This thesis finds that in the 1930s, Miró purposefully turned towards Bataillean violence, eroticism, base materialism, and parody to confront mounting personal and political adversities that could not be sufficiently addressed through the poesy of his earlier 'dream paintings' or pastoral works.

I have argued that Miró's work of the 1930s can be understood in anti-retinal terms. Anti-painting attacked not only the process of visual representation, but also of visual interpretation, employing operations like the *informe* to upset meaning. Because of the artist's newfound interest in inflicting violence upon the eye motif—through crossings-out or in the references to *Un Chien andalou*—a logical place to begin this thesis was in comparing Miró's 1930 drawings with Bataille's *Story of the Eye*. In doing so (in chapter 3), it becomes apparent that not only do Miró and Bataille share this affinity, but also that they exhibit a preoccupation with the same series of images (the eye, egg, sun, testicle, and vulva), which they both transpose (visually or verbally) in such a way that one image is able to transform into the next. It is my position that *Story of the Eye* likely provided the impetus for the transposition of the ocular and genital in Miró's 1930 drawings.^s

I have argued that among the principal ways in which Miró's 1930s works echo Bataille's writings is through their shared interest in parody. This is an entirely new area of the Miró literature, which has not received previous scholarly attention. I have argued that Miró's parody is largely dependent on the reintroduction during his anti-painting phase of iconography that was popular in his work of the early 1920s, but had largely disappeared after 1924 (the beginnings of his Surrealist engagement and the start of his stripped-down painting-poems and dream paintings). When these symbols reappear in the 1930s, they often do so in a manner that transgresses their original intention. Thus, when Miró—in returning to fully realised figuration in 1930—interchanges the eye and vulva forms in his drawings, he is no longer linking the visual with the procreative, but rather enucleates the eye, rendering it useless and subjecting it to a violently erotic subversion that recalls the imagery of Bataille's novella.

As anti-painting takes on a political spirit in the savage paintings, I have highlighted how Miró targets his parody on the Catalan landscape. Here, one notes the

re-emergence of several motifs, including the tilled field, the planting hole, the corkscrew symbol, and the figure of the hunter (all discussed in chapter 4). These symbols, formerly used to denote a fertile landscape, now contribute to a barren, inhospitable expanse. Bataille's *The Solar Anus* similarly unites the earthly and the parodic, characterising the creation and functioning of the earth and cosmos through a parodic and erotic structure. A consequence of Bataille's parodic world is that 'noble' images (the sun) become conflated with the ignoble (the anus), constituting a precursor to Miró's parodic landscapes. Chapter 5 discusses the reappearance of excremental imagery—another symbol previously used to announce fertility—in the savage painting *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*. I argue this work subverts the previous associations of excrement in Miró's work, with its glowing turd paroding religious subjects and functioning to compare Spain's political reality to shit. Miró's parodic landscapes mirror Spain's political landscape in the 1930s: hopeless, dangerous, and on the verge of attack. In chapter 7, I have identified another resurrected symbol—the Sacred Heart—which also had important political implications in contemporary Spain. Given the symbol's association with Franco and the Catholic Church's alignment with the Nationalists, Miró's use of this symbol can be read as both parodic and blasphemous.

In this thesis, I have found that Miró and Bataille both employ parody in the context of revolution and against fascism. In both the savage paintings and *The Solar Anus* the image of the volcano is used as a metaphor for political violence. Similarly, both use the Sacred Heart icon in works that can be interpreted as anticlerical and antifascist. Bataille's Acéphalic man—used to advocate for a 'headless' society—serves as a particularly strong comparison for Miró's resurrection of the Sacred Heart during the Spanish Civil War.

A strong concern throughout my thesis has been to connect Miró's artistic developments and his overlaps with Bataille in the 1930s not only to events in Spain, but

to the artist's Catalan nationalism—an identity he celebrates in his antifascist propaganda pieces *The Reaper* and *Aidez l'Espagne*. I have explored the particular effects of the *bienio negro* and the Civil War on the region and customs of Catalonia, as well as the importance of Catalan folklore and imagery to Miró. The overlaps between Catalan tradition and Bataillean base materialism—notably the shared interest excremental imagery—is discussed in reference to the *caganer* figure, Miró's *Man and Woman in Front of a Pile of Excrement*, and Bataille's debates with André Breton over the materialist versus transpositional functions of shit imagery. In chapter 4, I have discussed the suppression of Catalan identity under the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera and the region's pre-war struggle for independence during the *bienio negro*. Looking to the Civil War—era, in chapter 6 I have read Miró's Civil War drawings through the chronological events of the war and detailed the devastation inflicted upon the region by the bombing of Barcelona. I have analysed the movement of women into the public domain, including their role in the Republican military—and the backlash against this progress. This analysis was important for understanding Miró's depictions of women at war, as was a consideration of the inherent freedoms in producing a private versus propagandistic work of art. Unlike the contemporary, government-sponsored depictions of women during the war, Miró's *milicianas* exhibit a Bataillean merging of eroticism and violence—characteristics that Miró also explored and celebrated in his 1930 notebooks, with their *informe* sexuality and references to *Story of the Eye*.

I began this thesis at the year 1930 because of the innovations in figuration and iconography in Miró's notebooks of that year and their overlaps with Bataillean imagery. I decided to end it at the year 1939 for several reasons. It was a year of change both for Miró and for Europe: the Second World War broke out in September and Miró left Paris for a self-imposed exile in Varengeville-sur-mer and later in Palma de Mallorca. Miró's approach to representing his wartime experience also changed in this year. The violent

confrontation of his woman drawings gives way to his *Constellation* series (1939–1941). In this series—among Miró’s most famous work—he no longer visually confronts the war, but rather attempts to escape it. The ladder as a symbol of escape becomes extremely important in this the *Constellations*, in which Miró even titles one of the paintings *The Escape Ladder*—and the elements of the parodic, the base, and the violently erotic largely disappear. This is not to say that Miró’s work would never again confront such issues (the *Barcelona Series* [1944], for instance, returns to aggressiveness), or that all of the themes explored in this thesis disappear in 1939 (the *Constellations* inherit much iconography from the works of the 1930s, notably the prominence of the eye and the female genitalia). Ultimately, the sheer importance of the *Constellations* made this juncture the natural point at which to end my investigation. In opposition to the argument Rosalind Krauss made in 1994, I do not believe Miró abandoned Bataillean thought for his artistic survival. Rather the trauma of the war and the feelings of both fear and idleness experienced in exile resulted in the artist embarking on a new phase in his oeuvre—an oeuvre that is marked by a succession of different styles and phases—leaving behind the combative nature of anti-painting in favour of poetic escapism.

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