

THE AUTOMATON WITHIN MAN RAY'S FILMS: FROM MECHANICAL TO
DARWINIAN

by

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DARWINIAN

by

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THESIS

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This thesis explores two films within Man Ray's oeuvre: *Le Retour à la Raison* (1923) and *L'Étoile de Mer* (1928). These films seem wholly unrelated to one another – *Le Retour* emphasizes avant-garde filmmaking techniques and machines and *L'Étoile* concerns violent romantic love and a living sea creature – but I argue that they are consistent with one another. I explore this connection through my term the “Darwinian Automaton” and its implications on Man Ray's transition from Dada to Surrealism. The first chapter investigates Ray's early life and the reasons why he founded New York Dada with Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. In New York, Ray developed the machine iconography that he explored throughout the rest of his artistic career. The second chapter delves into Ray's expatriation to Paris from New York and the beginning of his short-lived filmmaking career. I analyze his first short film *Le Retour à la Raison* and the concept of the half-abstract, which illuminates how he adapted his earlier machine iconography to the milieu of Paris Dada. The third chapter details Ray's transition to Surrealism and what led him to create of his third film *L'Étoile de Mer*. I explore his friendship with the poet Robert Desnos and his utilization of footage from the biologist Jean Painlevé. The

conclusion signals for the importance of rereading Surrealist art through the lens of Darwinism and Ray's lasting impact on avant-garde cinema.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Man Ray commenced his short-lived film-making career after he expatriated from New York to Paris in 1921. Between 1923 and 1929 he created four short films that abjure established cinema norms: *Le Retour à la Raison* (1921), *Emak Bakia* (1926), *L'Étoile de Mer* (1928), and *Les Mystères du Château de Dé* (1929). Ray's 1928 film *L'Étoile de Mer* is one of only a few examples of true Surrealist cinema from the early-twentieth century. *L'Étoile de Mer* exhibits the ethereal qualities, figural presence, and erotic subject matter that classifies much of Surrealist art. This film also devotes a significant amount of screen time to shots of a starfish to establish the animalistic, primal aspects of romantic love. Ray describes this theme in his 1965 essay "Tous les films que j'ai réalisés...":

The increasing violence of the second half [of *l'Étoile de Mer*] takes place largely in connection with the associative use of the starfish. In the first half the starfish remained an object of wonder, free of specific suggestive associations. Now it becomes closely linked to a violence of sexual origins... While [the starfish] is an organic underwater creature whose ponderous movements suggested a primitive sexual force, it is also a cold attractive object like a glass flower and, in fact, follows the caption which refers to the woman as being "Beautiful, beautiful as a flower of glass." Starfish – flower – woman – sexual violence form a cycle of overlapping associations.¹

¹ Man Ray quoted in Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (New York: Rizzole International Publications, 1977), 299.

Ray utilizes various scenes of the starfish that the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos kept in a jar by his bedside table to create this motif. However, the longest scene in the film is an underwater shot of the sea creature *in vivo* – alive in its environment. Ray did not have much trouble filming Desnos' preserved starfish but filming the living animal in its natural habitat presented various logistical problems. Since waterproof cameras were neither common nor in mass-production in the early twentieth century, filming the starfish underwater was no simple feat. Ray did not film these underwater scenes in *L'Étoile de Mer* himself, but instead asked the biologist Jean Painlevé for starfish footage. From this perspective, Ray the artist collaborated with Painlevé the scientist.

Ray's work prior to *L'Étoile de Mer* is concerned with technology's relationship to humans, not underwater life. His first film *Le Retour à la Raison* (1923) showcases mechanical motion and avant-garde filmmaking techniques, such as the filmic photogram. The photogram, or what Ray called his "Rayographs," is typically a still photograph in which the artist produces an image by placing objects directly on the photographic negative and exposing them to light until the objects leave ghostly imprints on the negative. Ray created his filmic photograms for *Le Retour* by placing objects directly on the undeveloped film strip. He emphasizes the found object, the female mannequin, and the filmic Rayograph to deny the traditional attributes of a film, like characters and narrative. In his earlier New York Dada work, Ray regularly substituted the human figure with the mass-produced object, such as an eggbeater or coatrack, to draw attention to humanity's relationship with technology. The industrial object typically acts as a stand-in for the biological figure in these works. Why did an artist who was so interested in the machine make a film focused on biological life?

In this thesis, I argue that *L'Étoile de Mer* is, in fact, consistent with Ray's oeuvre because he utilizes the starfish similarly to the mass-produced object in his earlier Dada work. Instead of an eggbeater or coatrack, biological life, a starfish in particular, becomes the automaton that replaces the human figure in this film. Ray's shift from machine to fauna is a shift from the mechanical to the Darwinian automaton. The Darwinian automaton is the unconscious non-human animal that replaces the human figure in a work of art to reveal the similarities between them. This wet, biological automaton is Darwinian because it critiques the anthropocentric model of life, where humans are central and unrelated to other animals, by revealing our physical commonalities to the "wild" being. Rather than drawing attention to humanity's relationship to technology, the Darwinian Automaton emphasizes humanity's relationship to nature.

We must first understand Ray's interest in the mechanical automaton to understand his utilization of the Darwinian one. Scholars often state that Ray's fascination with machine aesthetics began when he met the European artists Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia.² However, his attraction to the machine began much earlier in his childhood.³ He was also interested in human anatomy and portraiture in his youth, often painting his sister in their parents' home as practice.⁴ Ray's interests in the machine and human anatomy did not coalesce

2 Barbara Zabel, "Man Ray and the Machine," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3, no. 4 (Autumn, 1989): 69.

3 Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 15.

4 Francis Naumann mentions how Ray's sister Dorothy was one of his favorite subjects while he was in high school. In Francis M. Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Work of Man Ray*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 11.

until he met Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia in 1915. Duchamp and Picabia were mainstays of the New York Dada world. Together, the three artists employed a machine-driven artistic vocabulary to critique traditional aesthetics and wartime technology. In New York, Ray photographed his mixed-media sculptures that he composed of everyday objects. Photographs such as *Homme* (1918), *Femme* (1918), and *Portmanteau* (1920) exhibit how these mixed-media sculptures replace or alter the human subject, drawing attention to Ray's personal life and New York Dada's captivation with the anti-aesthetics of the machine.

When New York Dada disbanded in 1921, Ray expatriated to Paris with Duchamp and Picabia to join the European Dadaists. In Paris, Ray continued experimenting with technological media such as found-object sculpture, photography, and film. Ray discovered the Rayograph photographic process the year that he arrived in Paris. The Parisian Dadaists admired the Rayograph so much that Tristan Tzara, the Romanian poet who was the head of Paris Dada, volunteered Ray to create a film showcasing the Rayograph for his 1923 exhibition *Le Coeur à Barbe*. Ray then made his first film *Le Retour à la Raison* in just one night for Tzara's *soirée*, producing a series of Rayographs by sprinkling salt, tossing thumbtacks and nails, and twirling strips of paper onto the undeveloped film strip. He juxtaposes these filmic images to found objects and, in the last scene, the nude torso of Kiki de Montparnasse, underscoring his earlier fascination with machine-human analogies. In *Le Retour*, Ray retrofits the iconography of New York Dada into the context of interwar Paris Dada. Though the Dadaists loved Ray's film — especially since his shoddily cemented filmstrips broke the projector during its screening — it marked the end of Dada as such.

In 1923 shortly after *Le Coeur à Barbe*, André Breton founded Surrealism with a group of his ex-Dadaist friends. It is in this milieu that we find Ray transitioning from the mechanical to biological, from technological to organic imagery. Unlike most Dada artists, Breton and many of the Surrealists drew inspiration from the natural sciences. Surrealist writers such as Roger Caillois photographed insects and majestic flora in Martinique to induce “re-enchantment” with nature.⁵ Surrealism’s focus on the natural world exhibits the growing anti-humanist sentiments in European avant-garde groups of the interwar period. Surrealists challenged the humanist ideals of ratiocination and anthropocentrism, or the view that humans are rational actors and the most important animal.⁶ Anti-anthropocentrism, or what I am calling here “ecocentrism,” refutes the humanist hierarchy which places humans at the top, using as its structural undergirding Darwin’s theory of descent with modification, or evolution, that demonstrates how each animal is related to one another.⁷ Kirsten Strom argues that the Surrealists’ focus on biological life and human-animal comparisons illuminate Darwin’s impact on their work, even if they were not entirely aware of it.⁸

After Breton identified him as a Surrealist, Ray became active within the movement, frequently attending meetups, parties, and poetry readings. In 1928, during a going-away party for Robert Desnos before he left for Cuba, Desnos read a selection of his poems to the attendees,

5 Raihan Kadri, *Reimagining Life: Philosophical Pessimism and the Revolution of Surrealism* (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 11.

6 Kirsten Strom, *The Animal Surreal: The Role of Darwin, Animals, and Evolution in Surrealism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 9.

7 See Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 21-43.

8 Strom, *Animal Surreal*, 9–10.

one of which being *L'Étoile de Mer*.⁹ Ray was so moved by this poem that he promised Desnos that he would adapt it into a short film before he returned.¹⁰ Though he later regretted this promise, Ray put together his film that month without input from the absent poet. Ray's film retains most of Desnos' original motifs but includes Jean Painlevé's forty-five-second-long scene of the starfish that does not appear anywhere in Desnos' scenario. Why would Ray find this scene necessary?

Painlevé's ecocentric documentaries were radical films because they displaced human actors with live animals, affirming Darwin's idea that humans are related to all other animals. Darwin anticipated that the latent assertions in his theory of descent with modification would jeopardize notions of the "soul" and how God fit into the history of human development.¹¹ Kirsten Strom notes that Darwin did not publish the *Descent* with the express purpose of undermining the Book of Genesis, but the idea that humans were both physically and intellectually related to all other animals destabilized both Creationism and Humanism.¹² Ecocentrism is a necessarily anti-humanist position since it refutes the ideas of human exceptionalism. Ray thought Painlevé's ecocentric documentary film bore a fresh vocabulary of images to include in his work, just as he viewed Duchamp's readymades inspiring during his time as a New York Dadaist. Ray's artistic development – from his assisted readymade

9 Carmen Vásquez, *Robert Desnos et Cuba : Un Carrefour du Monde* (Paris : Harmattan, 1999), 10.

10 Ray, *Self Portrait*, 224.

11 Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 682-689.

12 Strom, *Animal Surreal*, 3-5.

photography in New York Dada, to *Le Retour à la Raison*, to *L'Étoile de Mer* – illuminates not only his fluidity as an artist, but his concern with dismantling social hierarchies. From Dada's critiques of wartime technology and reason comes Painlevé's anti-Humanist, anti-Creationist arguments set in the context of Breton's Surrealism. Since Ray was the only artist to create films for both movements, we can see him as a case study in this broader shift in the artistic community. In this project, I identify the shift from mechanical to organic forms within the greater transition from Dada to Surrealism, according to the "Darwinian automaton": the unconscious non-human animal that replaces the human figure in a work of art to reveal the human's similarities to the non-human animal, giving shape to ecocentrism. The Darwinian automaton introduces a new perspective not only on Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer* but the influence of the natural sciences and animal studies on the avant-garde in the early twentieth century.

CHAPTER 2

MAN RAY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MECHANICAL AUTOMATON

Before turning to Man Ray's films, we must first determine the recurring motifs that originated in his early work. After developing an interest in machines and architecture in his childhood, Ray attended art classes at an experimental school called the Ferrer Center after graduating high school. These art classes exposed Ray to New York's artistic avant-garde and radical anarchist circles, which both rejected the academic models of art from the nineteenth century and the first World War. Ray then founded the New York chapter of Dada with Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia in 1920 at the age of 30. In New York Dada Ray experimented with the anti-aesthetic qualities of machine art to advance the anti-war sentiments he cultivated at the Ferrer Center. He discovered the language of the found object and the mannequin, which appeared consistently throughout his work, especially in his films. The foundation of Ray's fascination with the machine-human interface commences early on, maturing in his New York Dada work.

Man Ray established his unique moniker while he was a young adult, a few years before he became a Dadaist. He was born Emmanuel Radnitzky in 1890 in Philadelphia to Russian-Jewish immigrants. His family moved to Brooklyn in 1897 just after his youngest sister Essie was born. Though Emmanuel shrouds his name change in some mystery, we can be sure that he began using "Man Ray" in the spring of 1912 after his younger brother suggested that the family

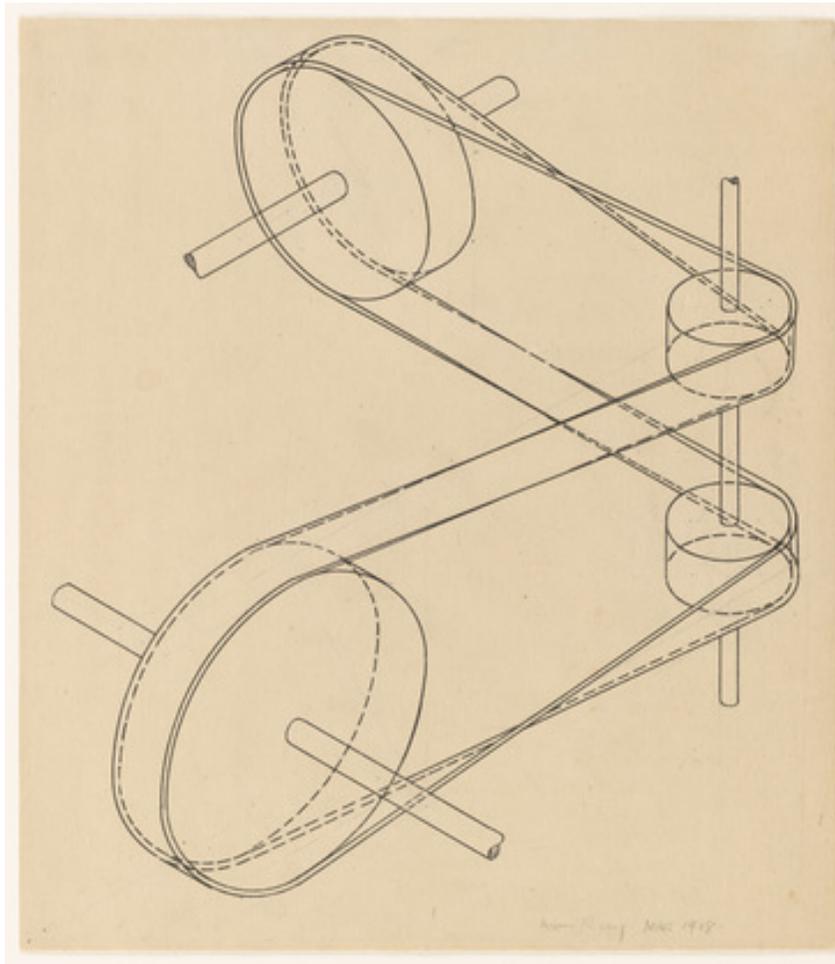


Figure 1. Man Ray, *Untitled*, 1908, ink and pencil on paper, 9 x 7 in., The Museum of Modern Art

change their last name to “Ray.” This was a common practice for immigrant families to anglicize their names to avoid discrimination, especially given the prevalent anti-Semitism of early twentieth-century New York. That spring, Emmanuel also shortened his childhood nickname “Mannie” to “Man” and then began signing all of his work with “Man Ray.”¹³

¹³ Francis M. Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism: The Early Work of Man Ray*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 7–16.

Ray neglected much of his schoolwork during his childhood to draw and paint, often hiding his work from his parents who disapproved of this tendency. The art from his childhood shows his natural inclination towards the human figure and the machine. Ray states in his autobiography: “Looking back, I cannot help admiring the diversity of my curiosity, and of my inventiveness. I was really another Leonardo da Vinci. My interests embraced, besides painting, human anatomy, both male and female; ballistics and mechanics in general.”¹⁴ Ray’s aversion to school and interest in mechanical art continued into high school, where he disliked all of his classes — especially history — except for a mechanical drawing class.

One of his drawings from high school, *Untitled* (1908) [Figure 1], shows an exercise from this mechanical drawing class. Here Ray sketches a system of wheels on axels connected by belts. This sketch demonstrates his natural dexterity for rendering precise mechanical systems. Ray draws the wheels and axels on the ends of the system with a clean, exact line, likely sketched with a compass, and an accurate perspectival relationship between the wheel closest to the viewer and the one furthest away. Ray renders the rightmost set of wheels on a vertical axel, which connect the two larger wheels to one another. The series of belts tactfully crisscross and stretch around the wheels on the vertical axel, further exhibiting Ray’s skill of depicting mechanical systems and perspective.

After graduating high school, Ray worked various jobs in New York — from marketing, to advertising, to cartography. Since these jobs were in New York City, he began visiting art museums and local galleries during his lunch breaks and after work. Ray frequented Alfred Stieglitz’s gallery *291* when he was not working, which familiarized him with the European

¹⁴ Ray, *Self Portrait*, 15.

modernist artists, such as Cézanne and Brancusi. Stieglitz recognized Ray's interest in his gallery and began taking him to lunches with his artist friends, exposing Ray to the artistic circles in New York. Then one day at Stieglitz's, Ray heard about a small school called the Ferrer Center that just moved to East 107th Street where he could begin taking sketching and painting classes. At the Ferrer Center, Ray's teachers introduced him to anarchism, the radical political ideology that catalyzed his decision to create New York Dada with Marcel Duchamp.¹⁵

The Ferrer Center was founded in 1911 by writer Will Durant and the prominent anarchist philosopher Emma Goldman in order to replace the traditional structure of American educational institutions with a more modern curriculum and looser structure. Durant and Goldman named The Ferrer Center after the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer, who was a notable figure in anarchist circles, known for opening a series of avant-garde educational institutions in Spain called the "Modern Schools." Ferrer's Modern Schools combatted the rigid structure of the Spanish education system in favor of a pro-libertarian model of teaching. The Spanish government eventually suspected Ferrer of radicalizing the youth and forming revolutionary groups within the Modern Schools. In 1909, Spanish officials arrested and executed Ferrer by firing squad. Following in Ferrer's footsteps, Durant and Goldman envisioned a school without a traditional institutional hierarchy and subject matter. Prominent teachers offered a rich and eclectic curriculum. Bayard Boyesen, Professor of Germanic Languages at Columbia University, volunteered to teach classes such as "Prostitution, Its History, Causes and Effects" and the controversial "Sex and Religion" at the school. Anarchist Leonard Abbott gave

¹⁵ Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray, American Artist* (New York: C. N. Porter, 1988), 17.

lectures on radical literature on Monday nights; painter Robert Henri taught classes on Fauvism and Cubism on Tuesday nights; poet-sculptor Adolf Wolff trained people in French language on Wednesday nights; there were multiple language courses on Thursday night; and George Bellows' taught painting on Friday nights.¹⁶

In the spring of 1912, Ray frequented Henri's and Bellows's art classes after work, and quickly became one of the Center's most active participants. Both Stieglitz and Henri encouraged Ray to distance himself from academic training to pursue a freer, more experimental artistic style. Henri prompted his students to imitate Picasso's and Matisse's modernist aesthetics of abstraction, and he often sent his students to Stieglitz's *291* to view exhibitions of modern art.¹⁷ In addition to art, Henri imparted Walt Whitman's ideas of personal liberty and existentialism to Ray. Henri taught classes on Matisse's Fauvism because it represented Whiteman-esque freedom in painting, advocating emotional rather than realistic uses of color. Ray was so active in his courses that he became one of the artists included in the Ferrer Center's first exhibition held from December 28, 1912 to January 13, 1913. A watercolor titled *Female Nude* signed and dated by him in 1912 illuminates Ray's experimentation with a Cézannesque

16 Ann Uhry Abrams, "The Ferrer Center: New York's Unique Meeting of Anarchism and the Arts," *New York History* 59, no 3 (July 1978): 307–314.

17 Allan Antliff, "The Culture of Revolt: Art and Anarchism in America, 1908–1920," (PhD Diss., the University of Delaware, 1998), 55.



Figure 2. Man Ray, *Capitalism, Humanity, Government*, cover illustration for *Mother Earth* August 1914, The Newberry Library

watercolor technique (a technique Stieglitz introduced him to at 291) and the Fauvism from Henri's classes.¹⁸

Ray finished taking classes at the Ferrer Center in 1912 and moved to an artist colony in Ridgefield, New Jersey. Though he was no longer taking classes in New York, Ray continued to collaborate with the artists and political figures from the school, such as Adolf Wolff and Emma Goldman. In 1914, while Ray was still living in Ridgefield, he contributed cover art for *The*

¹⁸ Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 21.

International, a socialist magazine to which Wolff contributed articles, and *Mother Earth*, Goldman's anarcho-feminist publication. Ray's cover for *The International* depicts two images, one of a ship passing through a lift-lock and the other of pyramids and sphinx in an Egyptian landscape. These images, according to Francis Naumann, had political importance in 1914 since that was the year that the Panama Canal was informally opened.¹⁹ The Panama Canal was a strategically important transportation route during WW I, and Ray draws attention to his and Wolff's anti-war sentiments by illuminating its importance in the global conflict. In his cover for *Mother Earth* (Figure 2), Ray drew a two-headed dragon with one head labeled "capitalism" and the other "government," each biting and tearing apart a third figure labeled "humanity." These periodicals, as the historian Christine Stansell notes, showed the "social iconoclasm" that anarchists were launching against American institutions in search of equity and freedom.²⁰ As a result of Wolff's, Goldman's, and the Ferrer Center's influence, Ray identified as an "out and out anarchist" until at least 1919 and, as Neil Baldwin argues, his radical stance against industrialists is what initially drew him to the Dada movement.²¹

¹⁹ Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 28.

²⁰ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2000), 161.

²¹ Baldwin, *Man Ray*, 64.

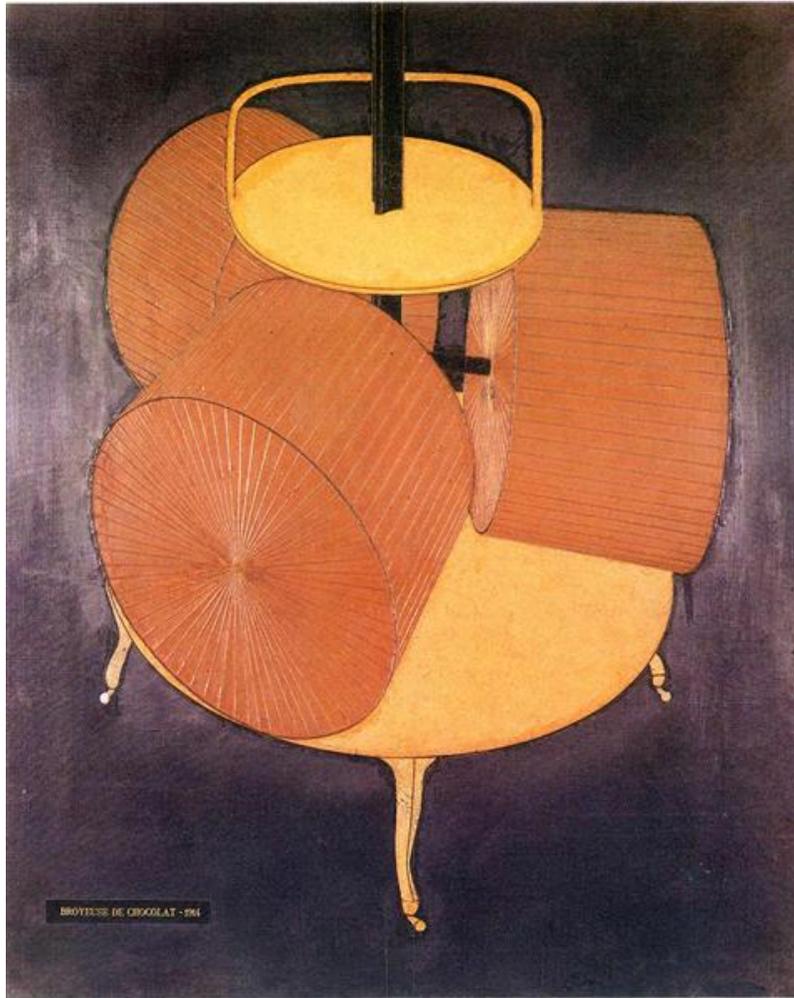


Figure 3. Marcel Duchamp, *Chocolate Grinder no. 2*, 1914, oil, graphite, and thread on canvas, 26 x 22, The Philadelphia Museum of Art

Dadaist Duchamp and Ray met two years after Ray produced these cover illustrations. The art collector Walter Arensberg brought Duchamp to the artist colony in Ridgefield. Ray and Duchamp were unable to have much of a conversation at first due to the language barrier. Yet, Naumann contends that Ray's "anarchist leanings" would have attracted him to Duchamp's iconoclastic art, leading him to follow the French artist's work quite closely for the following

year.²² Duchamp's work from this time was becoming increasingly mechanical and distanced from the artist's hand — such as his 1914 work *Chocolate Grinder* (Figure 3). Soon after Duchamp's initial visit, Ray moved back to New York to focus on his growing number of exhibitions in the city.

The art critic Robert Lebel states that Duchamp had been “particularly close” with Man Ray and that the two collaborated frequently following Ray's return to New York.²³ Ray and Duchamp's friendship also marked the beginning of the most important American avant-garde movement in the early twentieth century: New York Dada. Hans Richter states in his seminal text *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* that he and the other Zurich Dadaists were unaware of the New York chapter of Dada until about 1918; but, he deemed activities of the New York scene as legitimately Dada nonetheless because “its participants were playing essentially the same anti-art tune as we [the Zurich Dadaists] were.”²⁴ Sarah Archino argues that scholarship has reduced the Dadaist activity as solely emanating from Duchamp, Ray, and Francis Picabia, even though the “Dada spirit” had existed in New York years prior to Duchamp and Picabia's arrival.²⁵ While the label New York Dada is problematic until at least 1918, Duchamp and Ray's collaborations demonstrate the novel ways in which Ray channeled his anarchistic spirit into this movement.

22 Naumann, *Conversion to Modernism*, 134.

23 Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Paragraphic Books, 1959), 39.

24 Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 81.

25 Sarah Archino, “Reframing the Narrative of Dada in New York, 1910–1926,” (PhD Diss., the City University of New York, 2012), 2.

Ray quickly adopted Duchamp's readymade into his own work. The readymade is undoubtedly New York Dada's greatest contribution to the artistic movement. Duchamp "created" his readymades through the act of appropriation: by signing a manufactured object, such as a urinal or a snow shovel, and giving it a new name. He states that he never wanted the choice of the readymade to be dictated by "aesthetic delectation" but rather "visual indifference."²⁶ This quotidian object ridiculed the sanctity of art by taking it to its logical conclusion: nothing, *nihil*. Duchamp's iconoclasm was not just an argument against the institution of high art, but an argument against every other societal institution as well. He undermined the artist's creative act to highlight the futility of human reason. As Hans Richter states, Duchamp's artistic nihilism "render[ed] meaningless any further inquiry after art."²⁷ Similar to the Cubism and Fauvism that Henri and Bellows taught him at the Ferrer Center, Duchamp's readymade became Ray's new anti-academic model of art. In 1915, Ray began shifting his art away from the Cezanne-esque watercolors of female nudes and Fauvist landscapes to focus on the machine and its relationship to humanity.

Duchamp's and Ray's industrial object-based work is not overtly political, but their machine iconography actively critiqued "progressivist technological rhetoric and mechanized warfare."²⁸ Like Ray, Duchamp and Picabia abhorred WWI, which is why they fled Europe, like

²⁶ Marcel Duchamp quoted in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 89.

²⁷ Richter, *Dada*, 91.

²⁸ David Hopkins, "New York Dada: From Beginning to End," in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism* ed. David Hopkins (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 110-111.

many avant-garde artists, to New York City in 1915.²⁹ The war permeated every aspect of French and European culture, and people viewed young men who did not fight as incredibly dishonorable. Even Sigmund Freud thought that men who did not see wartime combat were “disoriented” and were inhibiting their “powers and activities.”³⁰ Amelia Jones argues that many scholars wrongfully interpret New York Dadaist work “as political in an abstract sense (critiques of traditional aesthetics) but as otherwise autonomous of the social realm – unrelated to the cultural and social effects of WWI.”³¹ Ray did not continue making propagandistic work like his 1914 magazine covers with Duchamp and Picabia. But he still viewed the context of New York Dada as a powerful way to continue his critiques of war.³² Ray’s radical political ideologies that began at the Ferrer Center persist in his New York Dada work, even if it is not immediately detectable.

Two of Ray’s most famous New York Dada works are the 1918 photographs *Femme* and *Homme* (Figure 4). In these works, Ray created mixed-media sculptures through various mass-produced objects. *Femme* is the photograph of two concave light reflectors and a plane of glass notched with six clothespins. The viewer can read the mirrors at the top of the construction as breasts and the clothespins as the woman’s ribs or spine. Billy Klüver and Julie Martin suggest

29 Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 43-46.

30 Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts on War and Death,” in *Collected Papers*, vol. 4, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 288-9.

31 Amelia Jones, “Equivocal Masculinity: New York Dada in the Context of World War 1,” *Art History* 25, no 2 (April, 2002): 164.

32 Antliff, “The Culture of Revolt,” 117.

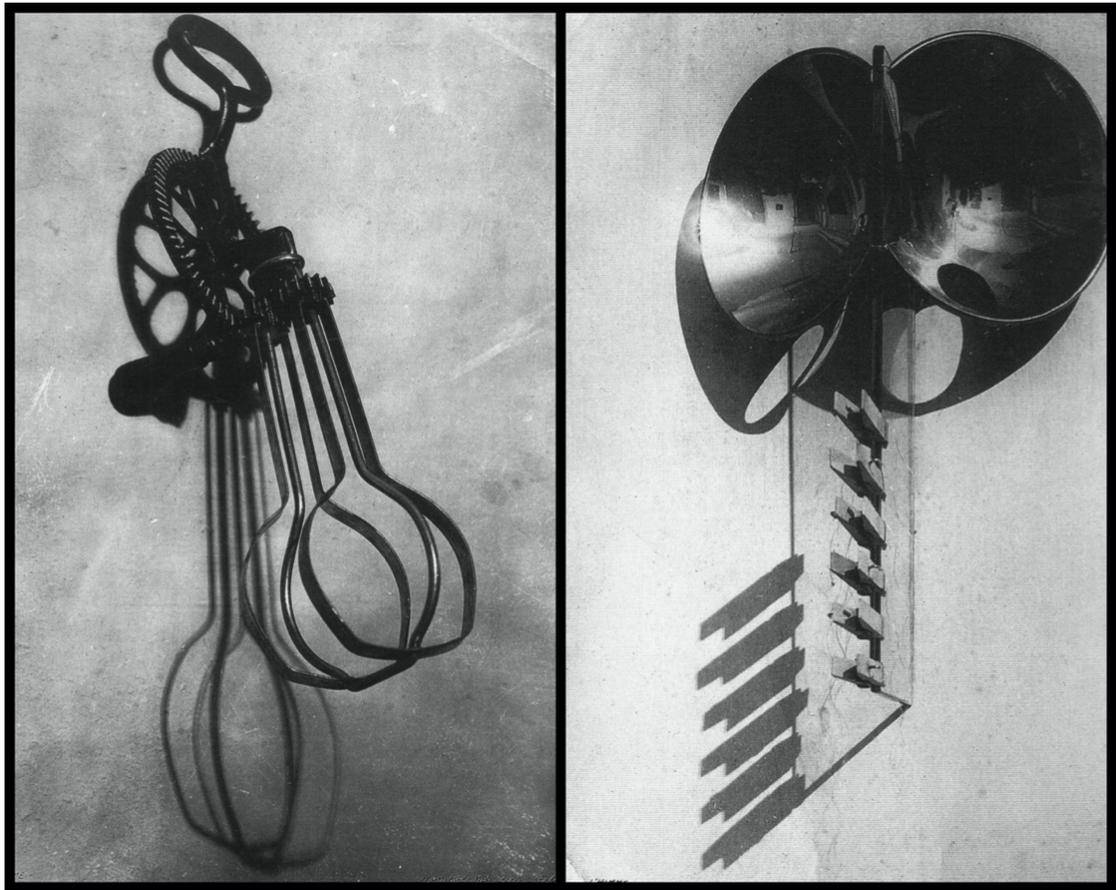


Figure 4. Man Ray, *Homme* (Left), 1918, gelatin silverprint, 17 x 13 in., unknown. *Femme* (Right), 1918, gelatin silver print, 17 x 13 in., Gilman Collection, Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation, 2005, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

that the clothespins can also hint at entrapment, where the slightest touch could snap the panels shut. These authors argue that the circular opening in the light reflector implies a singular orifice, or the “anatomical metaphor for woman.”³³ In contrast, *Homme* is an explicitly phallic image of an eggbeater. Ray arranged the eggbeater in such a way that it reveals a penis-like shadow on the wall, accentuating the masculine form of the banal household object. *Homme* is a more overtly

33 Billy Klüver and Julie Martin, “Man Ray, Paris,” in *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* ed. Merry Foresta (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian, 1988), 77.

phallic object, but *Femme* is still reminiscent of the male appendage. When Ray sent these photographs to Tristan Tzara, he purposefully reversed the names of the two photos when he exhibited them at the first *Salon Dada* at the Galerie Montaigne in Paris in 1921.³⁴

Margaret Sundell argues that *Femme* and *Homme* participate in Duchamp's logic of the readymade by how Ray dismisses the artist's hand and replaces it with the everyday mass-produced object.³⁵ Ray's work, however, differs dramatically from the readymade in a few notable ways. In terms of medium, it is a hybrid work; a simultaneous consideration of the fine art of photography and mechanical found objects. The act of taking a photograph removes the found object from the final work, rendering it useless after the photo is developed.³⁶ The importance of the photograph allowed Ray to manipulate the final image to achieve his desired effect – a further departure from the logic of the readymade. Klüver and Martin state that, “presenting only a photograph of the eggbeater, the artist was able not only to exercise complete control over the spectator's point of view, but also carefully to adjust lighting and shadows so as to make the anthropomorphic reading possible.”³⁷ Without the overtly phallic shadow in *Homme*, the viewer might have simply read it as a photograph of a readymade, a utilitarian household object given a new name within the context of art. The shadows of *Femme* also create the “legs”

34 Mason Klein, *Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 60.

35 Margaret Sundell, “From Fine Art to Fashion: Man Ray's Ambivalent Avant-Garde,” (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2009), 17.

36 Mason Klein contends that Tzara's intentional name change of *Femme* and *Homme* undermined the status of the original object, which Ray already made precarious by disassembling or disposing the object after he photographed in Mason Klein, *Alias Man Ray*, 60.

37 Klüver and Martin, “Man Ray, Paris,” 77.

extending from the light reflector “breasts,” which makes Klüver and Martin’s reading of the vagina at the top of the legs possible.

While the anthropomorphized eggbeater or clothespin seem harmless, Arturo Schwarz presents a bleaker reading that invokes Ray’s personal life. He states that the “egg beater” is the compound noun of woman, or egg, and beater, which in this case is Man Ray.³⁸ The title *Homme*, or *Man*, then might be referencing Man Ray’s own name. Schwarz states that he made these images while he was having marital problems with his wife Adon Lacroix. He thinks *Femme* is consistent with Ray’s dry humor in that the light reflectors “allude to women’s narcissism and inconstancy, and the laundry pins are a reminder of household duties.”³⁹ Ray expands the performative roles associated with these household objects by suggesting that he often feels like hitting his selfish wife. This reading accentuates the wordplay that he and Duchamp employed in the titles of their readymades and assisted readymades.

Amelia Jones presents an even gloomier reading of *Femme* and *Homme* that analyzes Ray’s wartime anxiety rather than his failing marriage. She argues that the shadows in Duchamp’s and Ray’s work reference their position as men who chose not to fight in a war-

38 Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (New York: Rizzole International Publications, 1977), 158.

39 Schwarz, *Man Ray*, 158-159.

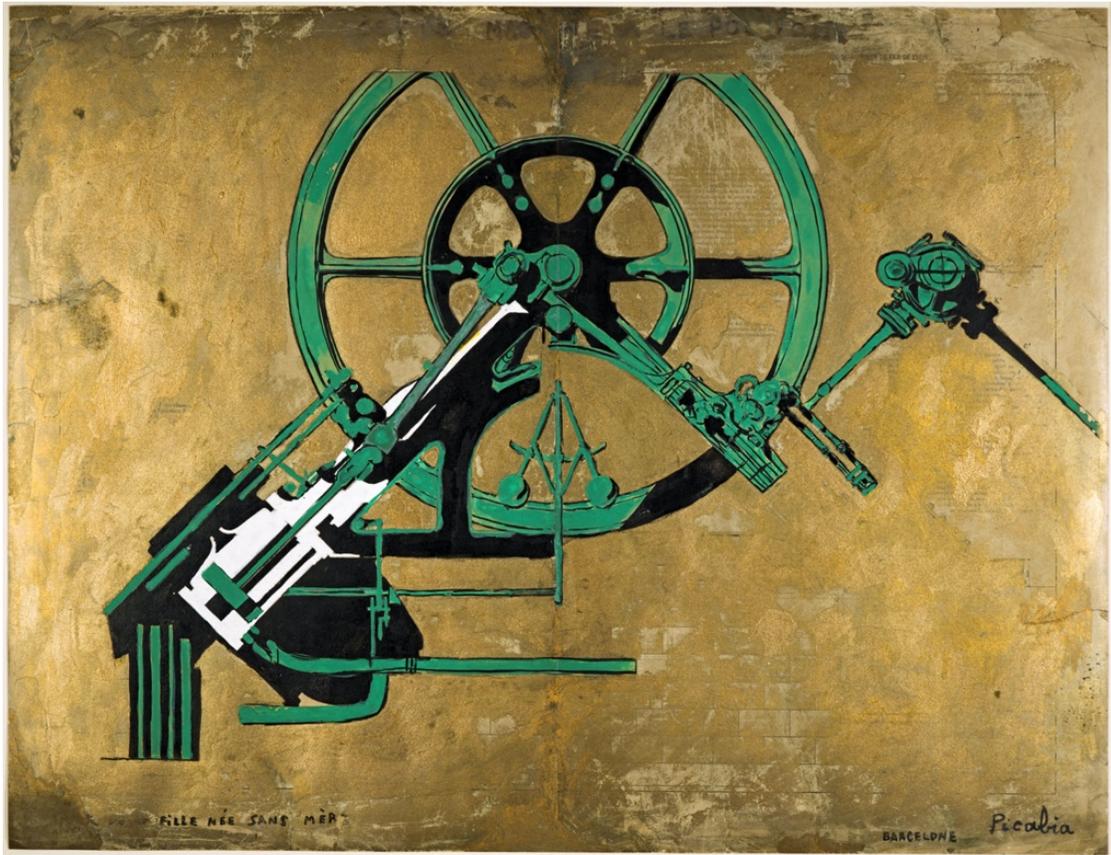


Figure 5. Francis Picabia, *Fille Née Sans Mère*, 1916-1917, Gouache and metallic paint on printed paper, 20 x 25 in., The National Gallery

obsessed culture.⁴⁰ Their decision not to enlist in WW1 followed them everywhere in American society, causing both artists a great deal of angst. Jones asserts that the trace left by the shadows in Ray's *Femme* and *Homme* reference the limits of the human condition: death.⁴¹ Since the found object functions as the stand-in for the human figure, its shadow necessarily parallels the human's shadow, or the index of their loss. The industrial object is the cause of the shadow,

40 Jones, "Equivocal Masculinity," 181.

41 Jones, "Equivocal Masculinity," 183.

which underscores how the weapons that militaries employed in WW1 were responsible for the death of so many people.

New York Dada's mechanical automatons also functioned as a way for the artists to express their anxieties surrounding changing gender roles in the West. With *Femme* and *Homme*, Peggy Elaine Schrock suggests that Ray took advantage of the pre-coded cultural associations related to the objects when he anthropomorphized them.⁴² Ray named his objects *Woman* and *Man* to transform them into "fetishized emblems of sexual difference" in an attempt to demarcate the roles of each gender in the household.⁴³ Industrialization was not only responsible for producing gendered domestic objects on a mass scale but was a part of the milieu in which the concept of the New Woman arose. Granted greater agency by first-wave feminism, the New Woman was economically and sexually liberated. The mass-produced object embodies the cultural tension between the established gender roles where women are controlled by domestic duties and their mounting autonomy in society. Schrock asserts that men at the turn of the century feared the "uncontrolled" woman because it had the potential of "de-sexing" the man. In Freudian terms, free and mobile women create fears of castration in men. Ray's *Femme* and *Homme* project his frustration with his marriage and his fear of losing his masculinity by drawing attention to the pre-coded roles associated with the objects.

Ray was not the only Dadaist projecting his sexist anxieties onto female subjects in his work. Caroline Jones interprets Picabia's 1915 drawing *Fille née sans mère* (Figure 5) in a

42 Peggy Elaine Schrock, "Man Ray's 'Le Cadeau': The Unnatural Woman and the De-Sexing of Modern Man," *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no 2 (Autumn 1996): 26.

43 Schrock, "Man Ray's 'Le Cadeau,'" 26.

similar light to Ray's *Femme* and *Homme*. This work depicts an illustration of a steam engine from a technical journal that Picabia painted over, reducing the anatomy of the machine and taking it out of its intended context. This machine is an ironic metaphor for life, and the title alludes to the birth of Eve from Adam's rib and the Virgin birth. The gold background, according to Elza Adamowicz, recalls the gilding in early European images of the Virgin.⁴⁴ Caroline Jones argues that Picabia's machine imagery in *Fille née sans mère* is a projection of the "male hysteria circulating around the 'femme nouvelle,' and, in the case of Picabia, the gender negotiations epitomized by neurasthenia."⁴⁵ Picabia projects his angst surrounding his decision to not fight in WW1 – that is, his neurasthenic disorder – by questioning the role of a mother in a society in which the New Woman becomes commonplace. Amelia Jones, expanding on her sister Caroline Jones' reading, situates the *fille* in this work in relation to Picabia's woundedness from WW1.⁴⁶ His decision not to engage in the war left him without a country to call his home – he is the girl without a mother. This feminization of the artist was a common tactic of Dadaists. These artists often projected their own anxieties onto the female form to relieve themselves of their own anxieties.⁴⁷ Peter Fussell argues that the loss of power that soldiers experienced in WW1 resulted in a gross dichotomizing of gender where the soldier was excessively masculine to

44 Elza Adamowicz, "Hybrid Bodies: the Impossible Machine," in *Dada Bodies: Between Battlefield and Fairground* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 73.

45 Caroline Jones, "The Sex of the Machine: Mechanomorphic Art, New Women, and Francis Picabia's Neurasthenic Cure," *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. by Caroline Jones and Peter Galison (New York and London: Routledge Press, 1998), 146-50.

46 Jones, "Equivocal Masculinity," 179.

47 Jones, "Equivocal Masculinity," 179.

reaffirm his manhood.⁴⁸ In *Fille née sans mère*, Picabia intentionally does not draw a dichotomy between him and the female figure, signaling his perceived loss of manhood from not fighting in WW1. By combining the mother, daughter, and himself into the single image of the steam engine, “there is no distance between Picabia and the women (or other non-combatant men?) who surround him.”⁴⁹

Ray’s *Femme* and *Homme* exhibit, as Hans Richter calls it, the “distinctly melancholic air” of Ray’s personality.⁵⁰ He created his machine-human analogies to comment on his failing marriage and assert his anti-war sentiments. The mechanical automaton that replaces the human figure draws the viewer’s attention to the often-destructive relationship that humans have with technology and themselves. The New York Dadaists emphasized machine aesthetics to assert their dominance over technology and, as Barbara Zabel suggests, illuminate the ways industrialization has impoverished human uniqueness.⁵¹ The automaton is dehumanizing. It robs the human subject of emotions, reducing her to the movement of interconnected parts, like the wheels and whisks of an eggbeater. As an anarchist, personal freedom was a guiding principle of Ray’s career.⁵² He contributed to periodicals like *Mother Earth* because he was sympathetic to the anarchistic ideals of “workers against capitalist exploitation” and “the right and duty of the

48 Peter Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), 75.

49 Jones, “Equivocal Masculinity,” 179.

50 Richter, *Dada*, 97.

51 Zabel, “Man Ray and Machine,” 77.

52 Carl Belz, “The Role of Man Ray in the Dada and Surrealist Movements,” (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 1963), 17.

individual to express himself fully and completely.”⁵³ In 1918 New York, WW1 – and the wartime technology the armies employed – was actively impoverishing the human experience of the fallen soldiers. With *Femme* and *Homme*, Ray shows that his wife, like the war, is taking his spirit and individuality away from him – a dejected way to look at a failing relationship.

The gender issues and general melancholic attitude in Dada continues throughout Ray’s career, especially in his short stint as a filmmaker. Ray adapts his machine iconography in *Le Retour à la Raison* and *L’Étoile de Mer* to the current cultural milieu and his newfound relationship with Kiki de Montparnasse. Since he made his first film by the time WW1 concluded and his divorce was finalized, Ray does not comment on his personal draft-dodging anxieties or his ex-wife Adon Lacroix. The automaton is not solely an anti-aesthetic creation, it is a malleable and powerful symbol that Ray molds throughout his career. Ray adapts the automaton as a Surrealist into an anti-humanist critique aimed at dismantling the technophilic society that led towards WW1. The machine iconography that Ray establishes in New York persists in his films, ultimately evolving into the Darwinian automaton in his Surrealist film *L’Étoile de Mer*.

⁵³ Leonard Abbott’s definition of Anarchism quoted from *The Free Comrade* periodical in Allan Antliff, “The Culture of Revolt: Art and Anarchism in America, 1908–1920,” (PhD Diss., the University of Delaware, 1998), 87-88. Abbott contributed articles to *Mother Earth* and was an organizer of the anarchist circles in early-twentieth century New York. Man Ray ascribed to much of the popular anarchistic sentiments that promoted individuality.

CHAPTER THREE

LE RETOUR A LA RAISON AND THE MACHINE IN POST-WAR PARIS

In 1921, Marcel Duchamp returned to Paris, catalyzing the disintegration of New York Dada. New York Dada was already a loose affiliation of artists, and once it lost one of its most essential organizers, there was little hope for its survival. This same year, Adon Lacroix divorced Man Ray, driving him to nightclubbing, heavy drinking, and traveling to Long Island and Provincetown for weekend parties.⁵⁴ Ray confided in Alfred Stieglitz about his depression, and Stieglitz suggested writing to one of Ray's avid collectors, Ferdinand Howald, for sponsorship to Paris.⁵⁵ Ray and Howald met one day for lunch when Howald was staying in New York, and he agreed to give Ray five-hundred dollars to move to Paris on the condition that he produced some "good work" by then.⁵⁶

Ray arrived in Paris in July of that same year. Duchamp spared no time familiarizing him with the Parisian artistic community, introducing Ray to the "young writers of the Dada movement" — which included figures such as André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, and

⁵⁴ Lauren Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman: Man Ray, Dada and Surrealist Film-Maker," *Southwest Review* 64, no. 4 (Autumn 1979): 361.

⁵⁵ Ray, *Self Portrait*, 88.

⁵⁶ Ray, *Self Portrait*, 88.

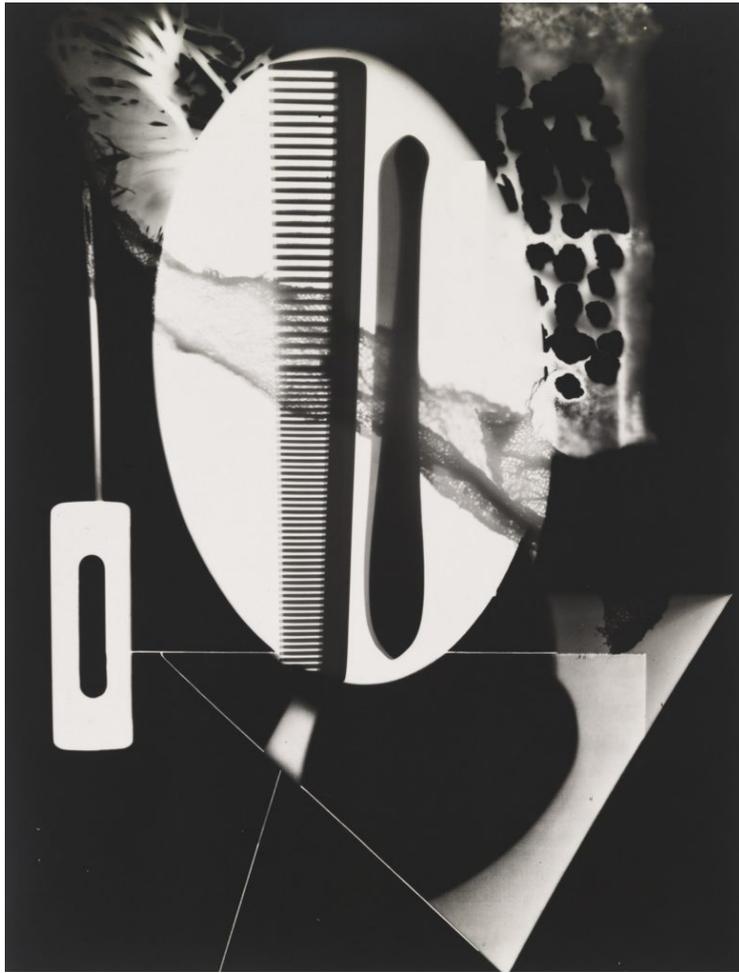


Figure 6. Man Ray, *Rayograph*, 1922, gelatin silver print (photogram), 9 x 7 in., 2020 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. The Museum of Modern Art.

Philippe Soupault — the afternoon that his boat docked in France.⁵⁷ This community took to Ray immediately, though they knew almost nothing of his work. Soupault even suggested having a solo exhibition for Ray at his bookstore Librairie Six that fall.⁵⁸ Ray's rapid integration into the Parisian avant-garde is what spurred his short-lived filmmaking career.

⁵⁷ Ray, *Self Portrait*, 91.

⁵⁸ Baldwin, *American Artist*, 83.

Before Ray created his first film, he discovered the photographic process that heightened his popularity in the winter of 1921–1922. One night in his room at the Hôtel des Écoles in the Rue Delambre, Ray was developing a series of photographs that he took for Paul Poiret. Ray recalls that, “one [undeveloped] sheet of photo paper got into the developing tray...regretting the waste of paper, I mechanically placed a small glass funnel...I turned on the light; before my eyes an image began to form.”⁵⁹ The ghostly image left by the glass funnel was something novel for Ray, a photograph of an image that was not exactly a photograph. He excitedly made print after print, placing numerous objects in his hotel room — his room key, pencils, paint brushes, and a candle — onto the unexposed negatives. The following day, Tristan Tzara came to Ray’s hotel room for lunch. When he saw Ray’s prints on the wall he became “very enthusiastic,” deeming them “pure Dada creations.”⁶⁰

Ray was not the first person to discover this process, the Rayograph (Figure 6), as he named it, but it perfectly displayed the Dadaist spirit of spontaneity. He established a new way to express himself purely by chance. Ray innovated the mechanical medium of photography by displacing the need for the camera; he became the machine that facilitated the chemical processes on the photographic paper. Neil Baldwin argues that, “to Man Ray, the chemical factor was paramount...that in fact images were seared into paper by a convulsive interaction of silver and salts, light and water” made the Rayograph such a compelling activity.⁶¹ Ray was also enthralled by this chemical process by how fast it created images. The artist no longer had to

⁵⁹ Schwarz, *Man Ray*, 236.

⁶⁰ Schwarz, *Man Ray*, 236.

⁶¹ Baldwin, *American Artist*, 97.

shadows or imprints to anchor the viewer in a specific moment in time.⁶³ The shadow in his early photographs like *Femme* and *Homme* link the object to the temporal world, dramatizing photography's condition as an index or trace.⁶⁴ With the Rayograph, the imprint is the object itself, which emphasizes the material conditions of the chemical reaction between the physical thing and the photographic paper. Krauss notes that the "sense of being rooted at the spot is the very opposite of a circuit of exchange."⁶⁵ The found object in the Rayograph is reproduced in such a way that it becomes useless; it functions as a solely anti-aesthetic imprint that links the image to a certain moment in space and time. Ray no longer needed to alter or construct an assisted readymade to make the household thing unusable. He simply needed to set the object onto the undeveloped negative and expose it to light to render it "useless." The Rayograph is thus the more austere version of his earlier New York Dada photography – the transformation from shadow as index to the object itself as index.

63 Rosalind Krauss, "The Object Caught by the Heel," in *Making Mischief Dada Invades New York*, ed. Francis M. Naumann (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), 250.

64 Sundell, "From Fine Art to Fashion," 20.

65 Krauss, "The Object Caught by the Heel," 250.

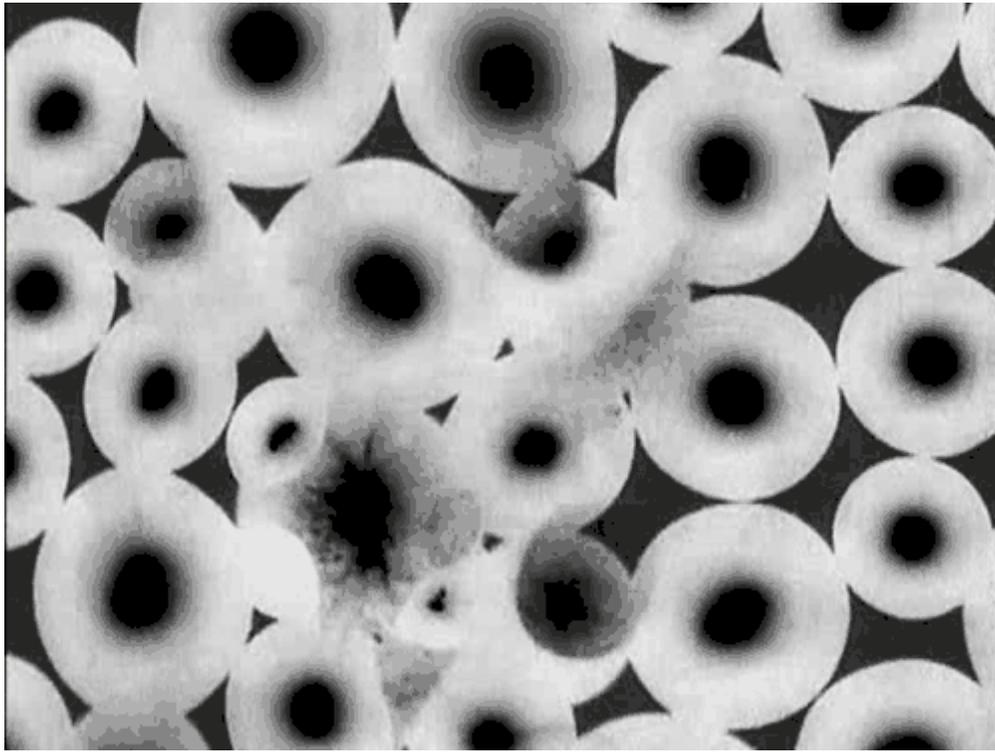


Figure 8. Man Ray, short clip from *Le Retour à la Raison* of a moving Rayograph, 1923, gelatin silver print.

Tzara adored the Rayograph and continued promoting Ray's discovery throughout the artistic community. In 1923, Tzara began organizing a Dada exhibition entitled *Le Coeur à Barbe* (Figure 7), which showcased an array of Dadaist work from Jean Cocteau's and Philip Soupault's automatic poetry, Hans Richter's stimulating *Rhythmus 21* film, and Tzara's disjointed, nonsensical Dadaist play *Le coeur à gaz*.⁶⁶ Twenty-four hours before the *soirée*, Tzara asked Ray to produce a film for the exhibition, preferably one that showcased the flimic Rayograph. Though he had never completed a film and knew practically nothing about the entire process, Ray agreed to Tzara's wishes and created *Le Retour à la Raison* that evening.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, *American Artist*, 122.

At just under three minutes in length, *Le Retour* is a collection of incongruous shots juxtaposing the Rayograph to spinning mass-produced objects. The first scene is a series of flickering black-and-white specks reminiscent of television static. Ray concocted this static by sprinkling salt and pepper like a “cook preparing a roast” onto a section of the hundred feet of film that he acquired for *Le Retour*.⁶⁷ The following scene is a Rayograph of a lone spinning thumbtack on a white background. The thumbtack is then joined by several nails that Ray tossed onto the unexposed negative. After alternating scenes of the salt and pepper static, twirling thumbtack, and bouncing nails, there is camera footage of a lightbulb floating across the top of the screen. The light is rapidly displaced by another Rayograph of unidentifiable objects shifting around the screen like growing bacteria on a Petri dish (Figure 8). *Le Retour* turns again to camera footage, this time of a spinning carousel at night. The lights of the carousel shine against the black background, creating an almost dreamlike state where the viewer’s childhood nostalgia is met with the disorientating movement of the lights and camerawork. The following scene is more camera footage, now of Ray’s New York Dada creation *Danger/Dancer* (1920) obscured by cigarette smoke in an attempt to give “kinetic life to the static image.”⁶⁸ *Le Retour* then transitions into Rayographs of rope, pieces of paper, and more salt and pepper, taking the viewer once again away from perceptible reality and into Ray’s fabricated reality. He then shows another one of his earlier New York Dada works *Lampshade* (1919), a spiral paper lampshade that slowly unravels as it spins in circles. The next scene is a spinning egg crate that parallels the

67 Shwarz, *Man Ray*, 290.

68 Kim Knowles, “A Cinematic Artist: The Films of Man Ray” (PhD Diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2006), 29.

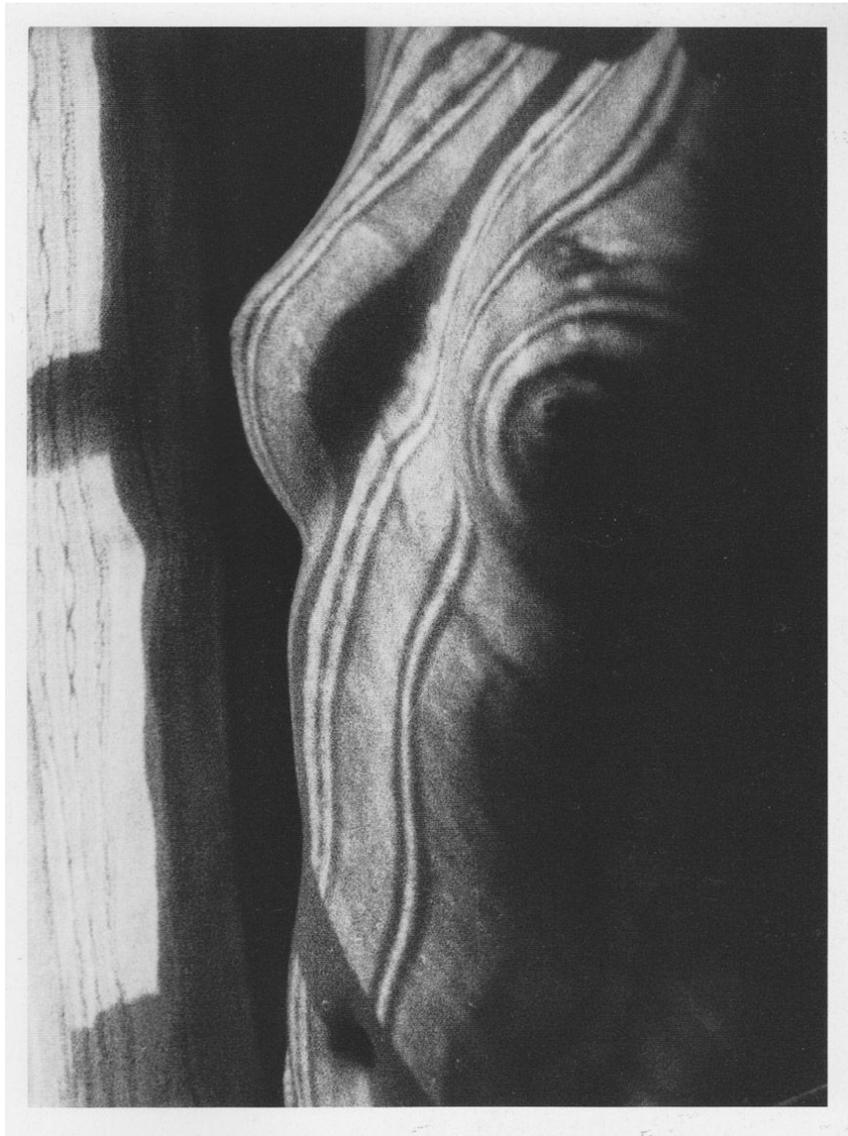


Figure 9. Man Ray, *Torso*, 1923, gelatin silver print, 7 x 6 in., The Museum of Modern Art.

motion of *Lampshade*. Ray superimposes footage of the egg crate rotating in the opposite direction onto itself, disorienting the viewer via its movement. The final scene is the bare torso of a woman spinning in a similar but much slower manner to the egg crate, and the window in front of the woman's chest casts light and shadows onto her bare body (Figure 9).

Le Retour à la Raison is jarring and confusing, subverting most if not all of the viewer's expectations of a film. The title "The Return to Reason" is comedic irony that highlights just how unreasonable the film is. A more proper title would be "The Return to Unreason." Rudolf Kuenzli asserts that *Le Retour* "expresses through its anarchic arrangement of sequences and strips of Rayographs Tzara's Dada spirit of spontaneity and chance, which were the Dadaists' strategies to disrupt logic and rational order."⁶⁹ Instead of a narrative, Ray made *Le Retour* compelling by generating "unexpected juxtapositions" between Rayographs and real footage of everyday objects.⁷⁰ Ray puts the salt and pepper static next to the bouncing nails and thumbtacks; he ties the carousel's revolution to the "moving" cogs of *Danger/Dancer*; he parallels *Lampshade*'s twirl to the egg crate's rapid spin; and he rotates the nude torso like the utilitarian objects before it. Ray stimulates the viewer's interest by comparing two unrelated images via parallel movement. Ray did not arrange *Le Retour* with pure anarchy like Kuenzli suggests, but instead purposefully contrasts two unrelated images to bewilder and disrupt the viewer's expectations.⁷¹

69 Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Introduction," in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), 3.

70 Merry A Foresta, "Listening to Light," in *Man Ray*, ed. Roland Penrose (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 8.

71 For a discussion of Ray's intention of putting his earlier photographs in motion in his films see: Yves Kovacs, "Témoignages," in *Surréalisme Et Cinéma ... Ensemble Réalisé Avec Le Concours De Yves Kovacs, Etc. [With Plates.]*, (Paris: Études cinématographiques, 1965).

Ray's application of the moving Rayograph in *Le Retour* is not only a tactic to disorder linear narrative but also to disrupt the mimetic qualities of film.⁷² In the early twentieth century, film became popular in the West for how it immersed the viewer in familiar reality. Thomas Elsaesser cites early critics of film who argue that filmic images cannot be art by the way they merely reproduce the factual qualities of the material it captures.⁷³ These critics did not think that "form," or the interpretive aspects of literature and theatre, penetrated the materiality of cinema. While these qualities of film might at first seem fitting for Dada – propping up the most banal objects into the aesthetic realm – Dadaists found the absence of materiality in film a problem.⁷⁴ Dada artists preferred the objects themselves to establish a relationship with the viewer, rather than a reproduction of the material. This distinction is what Gabriele Jutz calls the factual over the representational.⁷⁵ With the cinema, the viewer sits in a dark room and stares at reproductions of a three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional screen; the film medium had, historically, not drawn attention to the material conditions of the technology itself. By utilizing the Rayograph, Ray emphasizes the medium's materiality since he creates most of the film on the film strip itself. Ray does not attempt to imitate real-life or, as Elsaesser puts it, "disguise" the

72 Gabriele Jutz, "Sticking to the 'Factual': Man Ray's *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic cinéma* (1924–26) and Peter Tscherkassky's *Dream Work* (2001)," *Portugese Journal of the Moving Image* 1, no 2 (2014): 315.

73 Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), 20.

74 Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?," 22.

75 Jutz, "Sticking to the 'Factual,'" 315.



Figure 10. Man Ray, *Danger/Dancer (L'impossibilité)*, 1920, gelatin silver print, 7 x 4 in., Galerie Von Bartha

mechanics of the medium; instead he creates a film that is ascetically concerned with the mechanics of the camera.⁷⁶

The moving Rayograph has also prompted scholars and critics to wonder if *Le Retour* is an abstract film. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, who was one of the most prominent Dada personalities in France, thinks *Le Retour* is an abstract film, and that abstraction led naturally

⁷⁶ Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?," 23.

from Ray's discovery of the Rayograph.⁷⁷ Ray denied that he ever made an abstract film, stating that he always deals with the concrete in his cinema.⁷⁸ While these two understandings of Ray's film are in tension, Raoul Hausmann's notion of the half-abstract in Dada effectively describes how Ribemont-Dessaignes and Ray are both correct. Hausmann states: "Anti-art withdraws from things and materials their utility, but also their concrete and civil meaning; it reverses classical values and makes them half-abstract."⁷⁹ Ray creates his ghostly Rayographs by placing real-life objects onto the real-life photographic paper. This creation does not produce a simulacrum like a typical photograph but instead uses an object's physical qualities to generate an image that is simultaneously abstract and figurative.⁸⁰ Though Ray can create a Rayograph with a piece of rope, the final image is not representative of that piece of rope. This photographic process, as Hausmann states, withdraws the utility from this object, rendering the Rayograph as a half-abstract image.

Ray explores the half-abstract in the real-life shots in *Le Retour*, as well. We can see the half-abstract initially in the *Dancer/Danger* scene (Figure 10). This work depicts a series of wheels and cogs that are so tightly interlocked they cannot spin. The work needs a "dancer," or a human element with the precise movement of a machine, to make the mechanism function.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Man Ray* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), 19.

⁷⁸ Man Ray quoted in Kim Knowles "A Cinematic Artist: The Films of Man Ray" (PhD Diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2006), 60.

⁷⁹ Raoul Hausmann quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" in *Dada and Surrealist*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), 23.

⁸⁰ Knowles, "Cinematic Artist," 62.

⁸¹ Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" 25.

Thomas Elsaesser argues that the Dada machine is not so much a metaphor for the real machine, but a metonymic device that makes the viewer “look and think in several dimensions at once.”⁸² That is, after looking at this piece, the viewer must consider the pun “Dancer/Danger” and replace the “g” — the machine element — with the “c” — the human element — to activate the cogs. Ray renders this simple machine as half-abstract because the cogs in *Dancer/Danger* should operate without human input. He alters this system and presents it as an intellectual puzzle centered around a pun, destroying the utility of the real machine.

We can further observe the half-abstract in the final scene of *Le Retour* with the spinning nude torso. This footage is of Kiki de Montparnasse, Ray’s lover and frequent subject of his photographs, with all of her identifiable features cropped from the frame. Kim Knowles states that Ray’s fragmentation of Kiki’s body and juxtaposition of her to the utilitarian object puts her on the same level as the paper spiral and egg crate.⁸³ Elza Adamowicz further suggests that the human body is indistinguishable from the objects it is collaged with in the film.⁸⁴ These comparisons are characteristic of Ray’s earlier Dada work that often draws machine-human analogies between banal mass-produced objects and the female body. In his earlier work, Ray, like Duchamp and Picabia, asserted his dominance over technology and women.⁸⁵ While Ray’s motivations are likely similar in *Le Retour*, when put next to scenes like *Dancer/Danger* and the

82 Elsaesser, “Dada/Cinema?” 25.

83 Knowles, “Cinematic Artist,” 56.

84 Elza Adamowicz, “Limit-Bodies,” in *Dada Bodies: Between Battlefield and Fairground* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 208.

85 Zabel, “Man Ray and the Machine,” 77.



Figure 11. Fernand Léger, *Ballet Mécanique*, 1924, 35mm film (black and white, silent), 12 min., The Museum of Modern Art.

moving Rayographs, Kiki's loss of identity transforms her into a half-abstract image. Ray exhibits her nude body as a kind of biological mannequin – a pale canvas that contrasts the dark shadows cast from the window. He subverts her identity as a human and reduces her to the aesthetic object. In both *Dancer/Danger* and Kiki's torso, Ray disturbs identity and an object's initial function, making these shots of real-life objects similar to the Rayograph.

Kim Knowles explores Ray's theme of "body as object" and how he created the half-abstract scene with Kiki's body on multiple occasions. She compares his representation of Kiki in *Le Retour* to his representation of her in Fernand Léger's 1924 film *Ballet Mécanique*. *Ballet Mécanique*, or *Mechanical Ballet*, is an avant-garde film that, like *Le Retour*, is a succession of disparate images from Kiki on a swing to kaleidoscopic arrangements of Kiki's face, various

geometric shapes and machine elements, and kitchenware (Figure 11). Léger collaborated with Dudley Murphy and Man Ray on *Ballet Mécanique*. There has been controversy surrounding the extent of Ray's contribution to *Ballet*, but Knowles is confident that he had a substantial impact on this film by how he presented Kiki similarly to *Le Retour*.⁸⁶ In *Ballet Mécanique*, multiple scenes depict Kiki with her head disconnected from her body, transforming her into an androgynous, mechanical figure. Knowles contends that the most crucial part of the film is “the mechanization of the human form and the blurring of the distinction between animate and inanimate phenomena.”⁸⁷ Like the mechanical automaton, Ray presents the biological body as a figure void of human expression; he presents Kiki as an unconscious humanoid figure rather than a thinking, emotive person. Knowles concludes that Ray's fragmenting of Kiki's body uses the

86 Knowles, “Cinematic Artist,” 56.

87 Knowles, “Cinematic Artist,” 56-57.



Figure 12. Man Ray, *Portmanteau (Coat Stand)*, 1920, gelatin silver print, 23 x 14 in., Museum van Boijmans Beuningen

isolated body parts to abstract the part from the whole, and it is this abstraction of the part-whole relationship that creates the half-abstract figure.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Knowles, "Cinematic Artist," 58.

We can parallel Ray's half-abstract figure in *Le Retour* and *Ballet Mécanique* to his earlier New York Dada work *Portmanteau* (1920) [Figure 12]. Ray's combination of body art, found object, and painted cardboard create a figure not unlike Kiki's body in these films. When he juxtaposes the cardboard panel to the biological body, Ray abstracts the body parts from her body as a whole; he presents her appendages on the same plane of existence as the painted cardboard. This part-whole abstraction results in the found object automaton because Ray robs the nude model of her identity and replaces it with the utilitarian object. Like *Portmanteau*, *Le Retour* emphasizes the relationship of technology to humans. As Inez Hedges points out, Ray's "inclusion of filmed sequences of moiré patterns on a nude, a moving image version of a photographic project that was to become a recurrent theme in his work, accentuates the idea of the celluloid as skin, since the equivalent French word 'pellicule,' comes from the Latin word for 'little skin.'"⁸⁹ Ray continues his multi-dimensional wordplay to connect the material of the film strip to Kiki's skin. *Le Retour* is Ray's successful attempt at updating the machine iconography of New York Dada into a new medium for the Paris Dada community.

Ray altered his machine iconography in response to the antiwar sentiment of Paris Dada. Mason Klein states that, "Man Ray had made Paris his home when France was dealing with the traumatic aftermath of the Great War, a conflict that had killed or maimed the bodies of men and upended the very foundations of gender...During the decade following the war, every social convention was open to public challenge."⁹⁰ In New York Dada, Ray, Duchamp, and Picabia

⁸⁹ Inez Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's L'Étoile de Mer," in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), 99.

⁹⁰ Klein, *Alias Man Ray*, 63.

criticized the mechanized warfare that militaries were actively using to kill other humans. In Paris Dada, the avant-garde artists were concerned with attacking all social institutions by questioning the validity of human reason. While the Parisian artists' nihilism is, in many ways, a continuation of Duchampian nihilism, it is much more reactive than Duchamp's New York Dada work; these artists were hoping to reform the unjust social institutions in a society ravaged by war. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes contends that it was important for the viewers to understand that Paris Dada was against "all Culture," which, according to him, was "all order, all hierarchy, all sacralization, all idolatry, whatever might be the idol."⁹¹ By utilizing his machine vocabulary to disrupt reason, Ray effectively condemns all hierarchies, signaling for the cultural reform that Paris Dada desired. *Le Retour à la Raison* is a paradigmatic film showcasing the goals of the post-WWI avant-garde.

The inherent contradiction of Ray's Dadaist work is the simultaneous signal for cultural reform and anxiety about changing gender roles. Elza Adamowicz argues that in Dada, "the eroticized femininity of the machine, in such works, is used not only to express a celebration or a critique, but also to voice male anxiety regarding the new social and sexual freedom demanded by women..."⁹² Dada's progressive anti-war and anti-culture arguments are frequently accompanied by sexist rhetoric and ambivalence towards the liberated woman. The men at the head of these avant-garde artistic movements are primarily concerned with their freedom from oppression and continue to use the female figure, particularly the nude female, as a way to

⁹¹ Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes quoted in Hans Richer, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 175-176.

⁹² Elza Adamowicz, "Hybrid Bodies: the Impossible Machine," in *Dada Bodies: Between Battlefield and Fairground* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 76.

express their personal anxieties, not women's. Adamowicz further explains that Kiki's nude body in *Le Retour* is a projection of Ray's fears of his own self-image, demonstrating how the Dadaist quest for the "other" is often a search for the self.⁹³ Like Ray's earlier work – such as *Portmanteau*, *Femme*, and *Homme* – *Le Retour* underscores Ray's insecurities with women and his need to exercise power over them, all while rejecting oppressive social institutions.

Though the Parisian Dadaists revered *Le Retour à la Raison*, its initial screening ironically marked the beginning of the end for the movement. At *Le Coeur à Barbe*, tension was high between Tristan Tzara's and André Breton's friends. When Ray presented his film, its poorly glued celluloid strip kept breaking the projector and it had to be reset multiple times. During the second break, Breton and his friends instigated a fight in the crowd that had to be broken up by the police.⁹⁴ This chaos is one of the chief reasons why the Dadaists deemed *Le Retour* a great success. *Le Coeur à Barbe* was the last official Dada exhibition before it dissolved, and Surrealism rose from its ashes.

93 Adamowicz, "Limit-Bodies," 211.

94 Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman," 361.

CHAPTER 4

L'ETOILE DE MER AND THE DARWINIAN AUTOMATON

Breton officially established Surrealism in 1924 with other WWI veterans such as Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, André Masson, and Max Ernst. While bearing a unique name, there was continuity between Dada and Surrealism. Abigail Susik suggests that, “the automatism and objective chance of French Surrealism in the 1920s [was] a continuation and development of Dada chance after World War I by those Dadaists who were specifically veterans of the battlefield.”⁹⁵ Many of these artists, like Breton, were either involved with Dada or closely related to the movement. These ex-Dadaists transitioned seamlessly into Surrealism since many of its themes, such as chance and anti-reason, were similar. Surrealism differs dramatically from Dada, however, in how many artists draw inspiration from nature and the natural sciences.

In 1915, the French government drafted Breton into WWI, where he worked at a military hospital in Nantes. In 1916 he began his studies in clinical psychiatry under Dr. Raoul Leroy at the French Second Army Neuropsychological Center in Saint-Dizier. Leroy exposed Breton to psychologists such as Pierre Janet and his influential text *L'Automatisme psychologique* (1899), which discusses the subconscious and Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.⁹⁶ David Lomas proposes that Breton aligned with Janet's theories more than Freud's since Janet dealt

⁹⁵ Abigail Susik, “Chance and Automatism: Genealogies of the Dissociative in Dada and Surrealism,” in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism* ed. David Hopkins (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 323–324.

⁹⁶ Susik, “Chance and Automatism,” 325.

with “pure psychic automatism.”⁹⁷ When Breton returned from the war in 1919, he began investigating automatic writing in hopes of tapping into the pure unconscious desires that Janet researched as a scientist. Automatic writing was a novel concept so Breton and the writer Phillip Soupault experimented with varying techniques: writing together, writing alone, writing at alternating speeds for 10 hours at a time, and writing alternating lines of text on the same piece of paper.⁹⁸ The first automatic text they produced was *Les champs magnétiques* (1919), which was a novel without any logical narrative or structure; chapters ended when the author decided to stop it, and sentences made little to no sense. For example, an excerpt on page thirty-five reads: “The bird in this cage makes the pretty blue doomed child cry. His father is an explorer. Little newborn cats are spinning.” (L’oiseau dans cette cage fait pleurer la jolie enfant vouée au bleu. Son père est explorateur. Les petits chats nouveau-nés tournent.)⁹⁹

Breton envisaged Surrealism as a writer’s movement centered around the automatic writing that he and Soupault explored in *Les Champs magnétiques*. Their concept of automatic writing blended scientific theories with poetry and prose, resulting in a pseudo-scientific study of the subterranean parts of the human mind. Surrealist artists engaged with the natural world to understand humanity’s relationship to it. Donna Roberts shows that, “Surrealism which, as Foucault noted, traversed art history, psychoanalysis, linguistics, the history of religions, and

97 David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 9.

98 Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 105–107.

99 *Les Champs Magnétiques* quoted from Clifford Browder, *André Breton, arbiter of surrealism* (Genève: Droz, 1967), 77.

ethnology, can also be seen to incorporate natural history into its attempts to develop a means of investigation that navigates the relations between subjective and objective realms and which finds significance in the emotional, poetic, and imaginative affectivity of nature.”¹⁰⁰ Breton’s attention to psychoanalysis opened Surrealism to all of nature as a means of understanding human thoughts and emotions. Surrealist writers like Roger Caillois began documenting wild flora and fauna to compare the unconscious forces of nature to the human unconscious.¹⁰¹ Unlike Dada, Surrealists did not attempt to take viewers away from reality, but instead reintroduced them to the nonsensical, automatic aspects of the real world.

Breton incorporated Ray’s work into this scientific vocabulary when he included him as one of the first Surrealist visual artists. Breton’s decision followed Pierre Naville’s – who was the editor of the first Surrealist magazine *La Révolution surréaliste* – suggestion in 1925 to incorporate the visual arts into Breton’s movement.¹⁰² That same year, Breton published the treatise “Surrealism and Painting,” where he established a group of Surrealist visual artists, some without their knowledge. This list included Pablo Picasso, Giorgio de Chirico, André Masson, Joan Miró, and the transitioning Dadaists Max Ernst and Man Ray.¹⁰³ This was Breton’s attempt to take ownership of artists like de Chirico whose works predate his concept of Surrealism by

100 Donna Roberts, “Surrealism and Natural History: Nature and the Marvelous in Breton and Caillois,” in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism* ed. David Hopkins (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 373–374.

101 Roberts, “Surrealism and Natural History,” 377.

102 Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh, “1920-1929,” 190.

103 Foster, Krauss, Bois, and Buchloh, “1920-1929,” 190.



II

J'arrive à Paris et descends l'escalier d'une gare assez semblable à la gare de l'Est. J'éprouve le besoin d'uriner et m'apprête à traverser la place, de l'autre côté de laquelle je sais pouvoir me satisfaire lorsqu'à quelques pas de moi et sur le même trottoir, je découvre un urinoir de petites dimensions, d'un modèle nouveau et fort élégant. Je n'y suis pas plus tôt que je constate la mobilité de cet urinoir et que je prends conscience, comme je n'y suis pas seul, des inconvenients de cette mobilité. Après tout c'est un véhicule comme un autre et je prends le parti de rester sur la plate-forme. C'est de là que j'assiste aux évolutions inquiétantes, non loin de nous, d'un second « urinoir-volant » semblable au nôtre. Ne parvenant pas à attirer l'attention de mes co-voyageurs sur sa marche désordonnée et le péril qu'elle fait courir aux piétons, je descends en marche et réussis à persuader le conducteur imprudent d'abandonner son siège et de me suivre. C'est un homme de moins de trente ans qui, interrogé, se montre plus qu'évasif. Il se donne pour médecin militaire, il est bien en possession d'un permis de conduire. Étranger à la ville où nous sommes il déclare arriver « de la brousse » sans pouvoir autrement préciser. Tout médecin qu'il est, j'essais de le convaincre qu'il

peut être malade mais il m'énumère les symptômes d'un grand nombre de maladies, en commençant par les différentes fièvres : symptômes qu'il ne présente pas, qui sont d'ailleurs de l'ordre clinique le plus simple. Il termine son exposé par ces mots : « Tout au plus suis-je peut être paralytique général. » L'examen de ses réflexes, que je pratique aussitôt, n'est pas concluant (rotulien normal, achilléen dit *émoussé* dans le rêve, faible). J'oublie de dire que nous nous sommes arrêtés au seuil d'une maison blanche et que mon interlocuteur monte et descend à chaque instant le Perron haut d'un étage. Poursuivant mon interrogatoire, je m'efforce en vain de connaître l'emploi de son temps « dans la brousse ». Au cours d'une nouvelle ascension du Perron, il finit par se rappeler qu'il a fait là bas une collection. J'insiste pour savoir laquelle. « Une collection de cinq crevettes. » Il redescend : « Je vous avoue, cher ami, que j'ai très faim » et ce disant il ouvre une valise de paille à laquelle je n'avais pas encore pris garde. Il en profite pour me donner à admirer sa collection qui se compose bien de cinq crevettes, de tailles fort inégales et d'apparence fossile (la carapace, durcie, est vide et absolument transparente). Mais d'innombrables carapaces intactes glissent à terre, quand il soulève le compartiment supérieur de la valise. Et comme je m'étonne : « Non, il n'y en a que cinq : celles-là. » Du fond de la valise il extrait encore un rable de lapin rôti et sans autre secours que celui de ses mains, il se met à manger en râlant des ongles de part et d'autre de la colonne vertébrale. La chair est distribuée en longs filaments comme celle des raies et elle paraît être de consistance pâteuse. Je supporte mal ce spectacle écœurant. Après un assez long silence mon compagnon me dit : « Vous reconnaîtrez toujours les criminels à leurs bijoux immenses. Rappelez-vous bien qu'il n'y a pas de mort : il n'y a que des sens retournables. »

III

C'est le soir, chez moi. Picasso se tient au fond du divan, dans l'angle des deux murs, mais c'est Picasso dans l'état intermédiaire entre son état actuel et celui de son âme après sa mort. Il dessine distraitement sur un calepin. Chaque page ne comporte que quelques traits rapides et l'énorme

Figure 13. Page of *La Revolution surréaliste* (1924) that includes still from Man Ray's *Le Retour à la Raison*.

twenty years. He admired de Chirico's paintings because, as Bryan Brazeau notes, they captured “unsettling scenes populated by hybrid figures and a dreamlike pastiche of bizarre objects.”¹⁰⁴

Though there were competing concepts of Surrealism, Breton's popularity in Paris and his attempt to systematize Surrealist artistic production led to his community gaining notoriety in the artistic avant-garde.

¹⁰⁴ Bryan Brazeau, “Building a Mystery: Giorgio de Chirico and Italian Renaissance Painting,” *The Italianist* 39, no 1 (2019): 20-21.

Similar to de Chirico, Breton retrofitted Ray's Dadaist work into his Surrealist framework. Ray was not particularly interested in psychology or the natural sciences but Breton revered Ray's photography and his use of the mannequin — particularly the female mannequin — for the ways they induced an uncanny feeling in the viewer. The uncanny is a concept that Breton extracted from Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny," which explores the fear one experiences when she recognizes herself or a familiar quality in something that is not herself.¹⁰⁵ Photography, to Breton, embodied this unsettling feeling since one recognizes reality in a photograph even though it is not reality. Breton viewed the mannequin as uncanny because it is the artificial, lifeless double of the human being. The mannequin is marvelous in that it invokes the same "stirring of human capabilities" that one finds in dreams.¹⁰⁶ Breton quickly propelled Ray to popularity in the Surrealist movement with his photography as the driving force. He even included the still of Kiki's torso from *Le Retour à la Raison* in the first edition of the Surrealist magazine *La Revolution surréaliste* (Figure 13) in 1924.

Ray's popularity in the Surrealist community exposed him to artists he did not meet while he was a Dadaist, many of whom were writers. Ray's newfound friendship with the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos proved to be especially important since it led to their collaborative film *L'Étoile de Mer*. Desnos was an extraordinarily talented Parisian writer, with an extensive oeuvre of notable poems such as *Siren-Anemonie* (1929) and novels such as *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (1927). Breton saw brilliance in Desnos' work, taking indirect ownership of it by

105 For a complete context of the Freudian uncanny, see Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," trans. Alix Strachey, *Sammlung* (1919), 1–21.

106 André Breton, *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, trans. A. S. Kline (2010), 12.

claiming him as the “prophet” of Surrealism.¹⁰⁷ Much of Desnos’ writing concerned love, which was a hegemonic theme in all of Surrealist creative activity. According to Mary Ann Caws, Surrealists believed love was akin to madness — as is evidenced by Breton’s famous novel *L’amour Fou* (1937), or *Mad Love* — and that the danger associated with falling in love was the driving force of life.¹⁰⁸ Desnos often analogized the wild or violent aspect of passionate love with the natural world, which is a motif he explores in his poem *L’Étoile de Mer*.

In 1928, the Surrealists hosted a farewell party for Desnos before he sailed to Cuba.¹⁰⁹ That evening, Desnos read his short automatic poem *L’Étoile de Mer*, among others, for the attendees:

How beautiful she is/After you/If flowers were made of glass/Beautiful, beautiful
like a flower of glass/Beautiful like a flower of flesh/You do not dream!/Beautiful
like a flower of fire/The walls of health/How beautiful she “was”/How beautiful
she “is.”¹¹⁰

107 Timothy Adès, “Robert Desnos: ‘Siren-Anemone’ and Other Poems” *Translation and Literature* 14, no. 2 (Autumn, 2005): 212.

108 Mary Ann Caws, “Introduction” in *The Milk Bowl of Feathers: Essential Surrealist Writings* ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions Publishing, 2018), 5.

109 Carmen Vásquez, *Robert Desnos et Cuba : Un Carrefour du Monde* (Paris : Harmattan, 1999), 10.

110 Translated into English from the original French: “Qu'elle est belle/Après tout/Si les fleurs étaient en verre/Belle, belle comme une fleur en verre/Belle comme une fleur de chair/Vous ne rêvez pas!/Belle comme une fleur de feu/Les murs de la santé/Qu'elle "était" belle/Qu'elle "est" belle,” in Marie-Claire Dumas, *Robert Desnos: Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 421.

Desnos' poem highlights the how Surrealists often compared romantic love to dreamlike imagery, such as flowers of glass, fire, and flesh. These metaphors link the narrator's emotions to nature and the absurd imagery of the human unconscious. This poem notably does not reference a starfish in the text. The absence of starfish imagery might imply that the woman who is the subject of the poem is the starfish.

Ray stated that he was particularly moved by this poem, and he promised Desnos that he would make a short film based on it before Desnos returned from Cuba.¹¹¹ Though Ray regretted his proposal, he kept his word to Desnos and enlisted Kiki and Desnos' neighbor as the main actors. That month he filmed and edited almost the entire film, only including Desnos in the final scene after he returned. Since Desnos was not in Paris for the majority of the filmmaking process, we can think of *L'Étoile de Mer* as Ray's adaptation of Desnos' scenario, rather than a close collaboration between the two artists.¹¹²

Like *Le Retour à la Raison*, *L'Étoile de Mer* is a confusing, non-linear poetic short film that eschews most conventional cinema norms. The film begins with the couple walking along a riverbank. The woman adjusts her stocking, which Ray couples with the text Desnos wrote for the scenario: "Women's teeth are such charming objects, that one should only see them when dreaming, or at the moment one falls in love." (Les dents femmes sont les objets si charmants ...

111 Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 224.

112 See Knowles, "A Cinematic Artist," 128-130, for a more detailed explanation about Ray's adaptation of Desnos' poem.

qu'on ne decroit les voir qu'es rêve ou à l'instant de l'amour).¹¹³ This text embodies the Surrealist themes of dreams and love, introducing the tension between the two lovers in the film. In the next scene, the couple enters a room in a house to have sex, but after the woman undresses, the man kisses her on the forehead and leaves. The following scene displays a smokestack, alluding to the phallus and the man's frustrating position with the woman. The first image of a starfish appears in the next scene when the man and woman reunite and look at a starfish in a jar. In this shot, the starfish represents the uncanny nature of constrained eroticism; the relationship between the man and the woman in the movie is as odd as the starfish's appearance. The next shots contain more close examination of the starfish, and collages of spinning jars that contain the starfish. These shots also include more smokestack footage, wine bottles, bananas, newspaper, and then an image of the woman's leg superimposed by an image of a starfish. The majority of these objects' shapes allude to the phallus, while the starfish emerges as a symbolic feminine force.

The film shifts dramatically after the woman dons and removes a mask. Lauren Rabinovitz argues that the mask symbolizes the darker, primal violence associated with sex.¹¹⁴ The film now compares the woman with *le fleur de chair*, or the flower of flesh, instead of *le fleur de verre*, or the flower of glass. The flower of glass signifies the woman at the receiving end of the male gaze when the two first met. The woman is initially a fragile, elegant object that the man observes from afar. Once sex is introduced in the relationship, the woman becomes the

113 For an in-depth look at how Desnos adapted his original poem for Ray's movie, see "Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's Manuscript Scenario for *L'Étoile de mer*," in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), 207-219.

114 Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman," 371.



Figure 14. Still from *L'Étoile de Mer* that showcases the effects of Ray's gelatin filter.

flower of flesh, transforming her into an object for the man's sexual pleasure. *L'Étoile de Mer* enacts the misogyny of the male gaze and the male intentions in this relationship. The next shot of the starfish is superimposed on the bleeding hand of the man, which begins to change the symbolism of this uncanny creature to the violent aspects of nature. Then as the woman climbs the stairs in the next scene, a starfish appears on the stair-steps. This starfish is then superimposed over an image of the woman brandishing a knife. Instead of the starfish representing the fragility of a woman's love, it illuminates the violent nature of love and eroticism.

L'Étoile de Mer's closing sequence opens onto the same riverbank with which the film began. Here the couple is interrupted by a third man with whom the woman then leaves with, abandoning her original lover. The next scene shows the man examining the starfish in the jar with captions "Qu'elle était belle" and "Qu'elle est belle," or "she was beautiful" and "she is beautiful." The man realizes that he is still attracted to the woman even though she abandoned him. The final shot shows the woman with the word *belle*, or beautiful, superimposed on the screen. The glass of the camera then shatters, revealing the tension between the destructive nature of a woman's love and her eternal attraction.

Arturo Schwarz states that Ray abandoned the "a-aesthetic" of Dada for a more constructive approach to filmmaking that was tributary to Surrealism.¹¹⁵ *L'Étoile de Mer* plays out many central Surrealist themes, such as a Freudian focus on dreams and sex, the voyage into the unknown or uncanny, alchemy, misogyny, and androgyny. Freud argues that the analysis of dreams has unveiled the prevalence of man's anxiety for castration.¹¹⁶ He contends that human's disposition to create the "double" such as the soul or the photograph is found in the language of dreams, which represents castration by doubling images of the phallus.¹¹⁷

Since Ray creates a film in which the characters are always in a dream-like environment, there is the latent castration anxiety in almost every scene of *L'Étoile de Mer*. The voyage into the unknown is referenced through images of the sea, and the narrative acts as a kind of voyage

115 Schwarz, *Man Ray*, 299.

116 Freud, "The Uncanny," 7.

117 Freud, "The Uncanny," 9.



Figure 15. Salvador Dalí, *Les Atavismes du Crépuscule* (*Atavism at Twilight*), 1939, oil on wood panel, 5 x 7 in., Kunstmuseum.

into the unknown of human love and sexuality. Ray's decision to film the majority of the film with a gelatin filter creates a muddy, jumbled image in which the "unknown" persistently surrounds the characters (Figure 14). Alchemy is invoked, as Inez Hedges suggests, in the title; the "mer" represents the dangerous sea on which the alchemist travels, searching for the "unification of elements."¹¹⁸ Ray reinforces the alchemist theme through the consistent imagery of the jar, which is the vessel alchemists use to create mixtures. The Surrealists were fond of

¹¹⁸ Inez Hedges, "Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer*," in *Dada and Surrealist*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1987), 101.

alchemy as a thematic element since it existed halfway between reality and mysticism, just as dreams existed halfway between reality and unreality.¹¹⁹

Ray employs the idea of the *femme fatale*, or the alluring woman who entraps her lover into dangerous situations, in Kiki's character. In *L'Étoile de Mer*, the woman's teeth and the starfish both represent the vagina, what Rabinovitz calls the "vaginal teeth," and the "castrating nature of the woman's active sexuality."¹²⁰ The starfish functions similarly to the praying mantis in Roger Caillois' essay "The Praying Mantis: From Biology to Psychoanalysis" (1934). Surrealists like Caillois often paralleled the automatic aspects of nature and animals to the human subconscious. They were fascinated with the praying mantis in particular by the way the female ate the male's head after intercourse. The praying mantis represents the base, carnal desires of erotic love – a central theme in much of the Parisian avant-garde's work. To Donna Roberts, the praying mantis embodies the idea of the vampire or *femme fatale* in nature by biologically grounding men's castration fears.¹²¹ Since the starfish represents the woman's vaginal teeth that can castrate the male, it functions similarly to the praying mantis in much of Surrealist art.¹²²

119 Hedges, "Constellated Visions," 106-107.

120 Rabinovitz, "Independent Journeyman," 371.

121 Roberts, "Surrealism and Natural History," 381.

122 Ruth Markus, "Surrealism's Praying Mantis and Castrating Woman," *Woman's Art Journal* 21, no 1 (Spring – Summer, 2000): 33.



Figure 16. Jean-François Millet, *L'Angélus (The Angelus)*, 1857-59, oil on canvas, 21 x 26 in., Musée d'Orsay

To demonstrate the popularity of the praying mantis in Surrealist art, we can turn to one of the most famous visual artists from the movement, Salvador Dalí. Dalí's 1934 painting *Atavism at Twilight* (Figure 15) depicts a man and woman in the desolate, sand-colored environment that categorizes much of his work. The figures are based on an 1859 painting by Jean-François Millet *L'Angélus* (Figure 16), or *The Angelus*, which is the prayer that the Pope recites every Sunday from his window in Saint Peter's Square. The woman and man in Millet's poignant landscape are bowing their heads at one another in prayer. In Dalí's *Atavism at Twilight*, the figures assume a similar position as Millet's figures, but the man has a skull for a head and has a large section missing from his chest. Dalí, according to Ruth Markus, interpreted

the posture of Millet's woman as similar to the female praying mantis before she bites the head off of her male lover.¹²³ Dalí's praying woman is the *femme fatale* that bit the massive piece from the his chest, underscoring the violent dimension of romantic love. Dalí's title *Atavism at Twilight*, where "atavism" means reverting to something ancient, shows how the Surrealists construed the praying mantis as illustrative of the animalistic desires that humans have during passionate lovemaking. Though we have evolved past less sophisticated beings, we still retain aspects of their nature – the history of our deep past lies within our genome.

Film historians like Rabinovitz and Hedges analyze the Surrealist iconography of *L'Étoile de Mer*, but they often under explore Ray's utilization of biologist Jean Painlevé's footage and the implications from this collaboration. Kim Knowles notes that Painlevé's starfish close-up (Figure 17) is "a shot that does not feature anywhere in [Desnos'] scenario," and it "signals a noticeable change of direction in the film."¹²⁴ This scene marks Ray's comparison of the woman to the appearance of the starfish, a comparison that parallels his previous machine-human analogies in his Dadaist work. And, like his previous work, Ray's focus on the starfish-human analogy is not just an aesthetic choice, but one that advances a societal critique. A look at Painlevé's history as a scientist-turned-filmmaker can help illuminate why Ray chose his work for *L'Étoile de Mer*.

123 Markus, "Surrealism's Praying Mantis," 33.

124 Knowles, "A Cinematic Artist," 141.

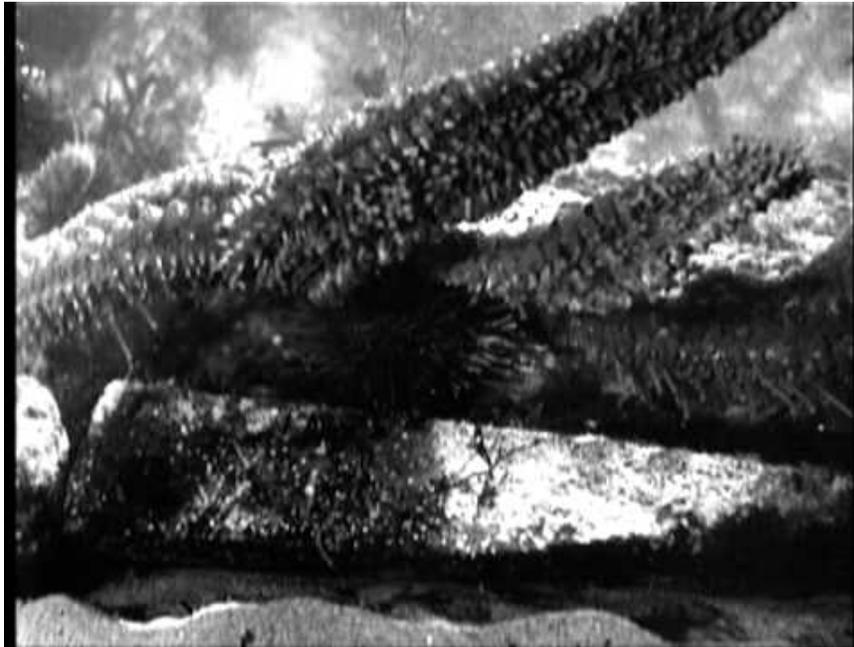


Figure 17. Still of Jean Painlevé's footage in Man Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer*.

Jean Painlevé was the son of a prominent left-wing politician in Paris, Paul Painlevé. Due to his father's progressive politics that were unpopular at the elite schools he attended as a child, other kids often bullied Painlevé throughout his childhood.¹²⁵ Though he was a good student, Painlevé detested school for the majority of his life. He attended the prestigious Lycée Louis le Grand to study mathematics, but he quickly became unsatisfied and transferred to the Sorbonne in 1921 to study medicine. While at the Sorbonne, he abandoned medicine to study zoology and biology and interned at the Roscoff Marine Biology Station.¹²⁶ Painlevé's interest in biology and animals stemmed from summers spent at his grandmother's house on the coast of Brittany at Ker

125 Brigitte Berg, "Contradictory Forces: Jean Painlevé, 1902-1989" in *Science is Fiction*, ed. Andy Masaki Bellows, Marina McDougall, and Brigitte Berg, trans. Jeanine Herman (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 6.

126 Lauren E Fretz, "Surréalisme Sous-l'Eau: Science and Surrealism in the Early Films and Writings of Jean Painlevé," *Film & History* 40, no 2 (Fall, 2010): 48.

Ster. Since he was passionate about biology, Painlevé succeeded in his new studies, and in 1923 he published a paper with one of his professors, Dr. Maurice Parat, and presented it at *the Académie des sciences*. He did not want to continue with a career in academia because he despised the elitism and stodginess of the profession.

Painlevé turned to film after he denounced his academic career. He spent his summers with his life-long partner Geneviève Hamon and her family at their home in Brittany after they graduated from the Sorbonne. The Hamons turned their home into an informal salon where they hosted many young scientists and “artists with controversial ideas” to exhibit their work and discuss politics.¹²⁷ This salon is where Painlevé met many Surrealist figures, including Jacques Boiffard, who was Man Ray’s assistant.¹²⁸ Painlevé soon drew inspiration from Luis Buñuel’s and Jean Vigo’s cinema, and aimed to create films that led viewers to puzzle about the natural world rather than accept it for what it is.¹²⁹ He then created *La Piuvre*, or *The Octopus*, in 1928 which was the first instance that he mixed poetry and dreamlike imagery with a scientific study of an animal.¹³⁰ Painlevé maintained his uniqueness from other underwater documentarians, such as Jacques Cousteau, through his deep commitment to depicting aquatic animals in a poetic manner, such as comparing them with ballets and armies, and filming them so closely as to disrupt the viewer’s understanding of the animal. The avant-garde viewed his close-up footage of

127 Fretz, “Surréalisme Sous-l’Eau,” 48.

128 Fretz, “Surréalisme Sous-l’Eau,” 48.

129 Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (New York: Berg, 2006), 85.

130 Fretz, “Surréalisme Sous-l’Eau,” 49.

foreign sea creatures as a compatible with their artistic vision because it did not have human “actors” and, like Breton’s and Caillois’ work, induced re-enchantment with the natural world.¹³¹

The absence of human actors was a conscious decision on Painlevé’s part intended to reject anthropocentrism. As a biologist educated in the early twentieth century, Painlevé knew both Lamarckian and Darwinian theories of evolution and was well-aware of the theory of natural and sexual selection. Lamarckian evolution refers to the French biologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck who was the first scientist to publish a unified theory of evolution in his 1809 work *Philosophie Zoologique*.¹³² Lamarck proposed that some species had physically changed from their ancestors over time. He studied these changes through the fossil record and then extrapolated that an animal’s environment causes it to adapt to the conditions, formulating the idea of the heredity of acquired characteristics to explain this phenomenon. Lamarck’s innovative theory of acquired characteristics in *Philosophie Zoologique* was also congruent with his now-dated speculation that all fauna are genetically progressing towards the ideal animal: the human.¹³³ Lamarck’s genetic determinism where nature follows a teleology towards humankind is problematic since it suggests that there is a natural direction towards “perfect” traits that

131 James Leo Cahill states that, “Surrealism and cinema provided mediums for renewing, extending, and magnifying methodologies of comparative anatomy in new contexts...Painlevé emphasizes underexamined connections across its disparate forms, which draw on a shared study of comparative anatomy among many of the pioneering figures, including Louis Aragon, André Breton, and...Jacques-André Boiffard.” In *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 31.

132 Jeffrey Bowman, “Jean-Baptiste Lamarck,” *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck*, last modified August 1, 2017. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libproxy.utdallas.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mat&AN=21571708&site=ehost-live>.

133 Bowman, “Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.”

benefit all living organisms.¹³⁴ Though there were problematic aspects of Lamarck's work, he catalyzed the contemporary notions of genetics and epigenetics – or the heredity of the traits that are over or beyond (the Greek prefix epi-) genetics – that are still lively debated in scientific journals. Ladislav Kováč even describes Darwin as a Lamarckian since he incorporated Lamarck's theory of inherited characteristics into his theory of descent with modification. The final version of Darwin's descent with modification, as Yongsheng Liu notes, includes four factors that influence an organism's evolution: natural selection, the inherited effects of the use and disuse of organs, inherited variations that were influenced by environmental conditions, and mutation.¹³⁵ Both Lamarck and Darwin presented similar ideas about descent with modification but Darwin's theory differs dramatically in the randomness of the descent with modification; he did not postulate that there is a teleological path of genetics towards an ideal animal. The radicalism of both of these scientist's theories was the displacement of humans from the center of existence – we are related to all other living things.

Both Lamarck and Darwin were popular in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. The chair of the Comparative and Histology laboratory in which Painlevé participated while studying at the Sorbonne, Paul Wintrebert, was a staunch neo-Lamarckian and neo-epigeneticist.¹³⁶ Wintrebert was so influential on Painlevé's development as a scientific filmmaker that scholars

134 Ladislav Kováč, "Lamarck and Darwin Revisited," *EMBO reports* 20, no. 4 (April 2019): 1-2.

135 Yongsheng Liu, "Revisiting Darwin's Thoughts on Environmentally Induced Heritable Changes," *Science of the Total Environment* 738 (March, 2020): 1.

136 James Leo Cahill, "Jean Painlevé's Cinematic Wildlife, 1924-1946," (PhD diss., The University of Southern California, 2010), 64.

wonder if Wintrebert taught with film in his laboratory.¹³⁷ Painlevé’s neo-Lamarckian education “emphasized the metamorphic potential of organic life and gave the milieu an increasingly important causal role in transformations...”¹³⁸ Put more simply, Painlevé’s biological education was built on evolutionary theory, which argued that humans and all other animals descended from a common ancestor, dispelling the humanist anthropocentric model of nature.¹³⁹ Lamarckian and neo-Lamarckian theories “advanced the theory of the heredity of acquired traits,” which facilitated France’s reception of Darwin’s theories of natural and sexual selection.¹⁴⁰ When Painlevé began making his scientific documentaries, he deliberately focused on underwater fauna to challenge the established ideas of human exceptionalism.

Moreover, the Surrealists celebrated Painlevé’s human-animal comparisons because they invoked what Kristen Strom calls the “Darwinian uncanny,” a term that echoes the Freudian theory that so captivated the avant-garde artists of the first half of the twentieth century. Strom states: “a cross-pollination of the writings of Darwin and the ideas of Freud enables a model of what might be called a ‘Darwinian Uncanny.’ Indeed, while the bodies of horses, sparrows, and lizards are easily distinguished from those of a human body, they are demonstrably similar and clearly related nevertheless.”¹⁴¹ Freud was fascinated with mannequins, dreams, ghosts, etc.

137 Cahill, “Jean Painlevé’s Cinematic Wildlife,” 64.

138 James Leo Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painleve* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 39.

139 See Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 21-43.

140 Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism*, 37.

141 Strom, *The Animal Surreal*, 13.

because they invoke the double of the reality. One can see oneself as a mannequin, even though the mannequin is insentient and inorganic. Strom asserts that Freud's theory can also apply to wild animals and Darwinian theory. She argues that the wild animal is the exact corollary of the mannequin since they are sentient, living beings, but are still an unhuman form.¹⁴² From this we deduce an uncanniness connected to nature and ecology. When interacting with wild animals, one can easily notice human emotions, such as happiness or fear, in a decidedly unhuman being. In his 1871 text *Descent of Man*, Darwin argued that humans share not only bodily features with animals – such as bones, muscles, and nerves – but share senses and intuitions with them as well.¹⁴³ His assertions mean that humans can recognize oneself in the animal because they are a part of our history, or family, as beings. When one couples this aspect of Darwinian theory with Freud's, wild animals act as the mannequins or ghosts: animals are doubles of humans in so far as they are not human but are a part of the same family.

The similarities that we see in wild animals can be unsettling for many. Freud contended that the discomfort one feels from the uncanny stems from a repressed infantile desire or the evocation of a primitive nature that we retain from our evolutionary past.¹⁴⁴ In both situations, the discomfort arises as a threat to our ego since we do not like to think of ourselves as

142 Strom, *The Animal Surreal*, 13.

143 Darwin, *Descent of Man*, 22-25. Darwin also outlines this argument in his 1872 work *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. For a detailed overview of Darwin's argument about the continuity between animal and human emotions, and its historical relevance to the humanities, see Daniel M. Gross, "Defending the Humanities with Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872)," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no 1 (Autumn, 2010): 34-59.

144 Strom, *The Animal Surreal*, 14.

uncivilized, unevolved, and immature. He concluded that psychoanalysis was one blow to human narcissism and Darwin's theory of evolution was another.¹⁴⁵ Surrealism's turn to the natural sciences and novel interest in the uncanny aesthetics of wild animals jointly function as a critique of humanism since it demonstrates our similarities to other animals. Even if the artist was not entirely aware of it, the comparison of human emotion, senses, and qualities to wild animals is a critique of anthropocentrism since it demonstrates that human attributes are not unique to them. In *L'Étoile de Mer* there is a filmmaker and poet actively comparing many aspects of the human experience – love, eroticism, fear, androgyny – to the appearance of the starfish.

The starfish thus emerges as the Darwinian automaton in Ray's *L'Étoile de Mer* because of the power that Ray saw in Painlevé's ecocentric human-animal comparisons. The Darwinian automaton is the unconscious non-human animal that replaces the human figure in a work of art to reveal the human's similarities to the non-human animal. Ray, like the Parisian scientist, utilizes a living sea creature as the substitution for the human subject. At forty-five seconds in length, Painlevé's footage is the longest scene in the film. Painlevé produced the slow scene by manually disengaging the camera crank, permitting only one frame per crank rather than the standard sixteen frames per crank.¹⁴⁶ By slowing down the frame rate, Painlevé presents the biological processes of nature in a way that the human eye cannot perceive without the mediation of the camera. Kim Knowles states that this scene follows the first shot in the film that reveals Kiki's face without the gelatin filter, linking her to the starfish, which "symbolically cancels out

145 Strom, *The Animal Surreal*, 14.

146 Lauren E Fretz, "Surréalisme Sous-l'Eau," 49.

the presence of the woman.”¹⁴⁷ Since the living starfish is the only figure on the screen, the viewer is meant to think of the starfish’s body as replacing Kiki’s, and the length of the scene causes her to meditate on this relationship.

Painlevé’s close-up of the starfish is also the only scene that presents the movement of the starfish’s tentacles, which accentuates the Darwinian uncanny in the viewer. Carl Belz states that along with Kiki’s soft, sensuous scenes, “the more blatant and obscene image of the star fish constantly reappears with its wreathing tentacles, scaly surface, and ugly, devouring mouth...[which] emphasize the opposition of the female with the sea creature.”¹⁴⁸ Though Belz references the starfish’s consistent recurrence throughout *L’Étoile de Mer*, Painlevé’s footage is the only section that highlights the “wreathing tentacles” and “ugly, devouring mouth” as the creature moves underwater. This demonstrates just how important this long close-up scene is for establishing the relationship between the human qualities of the starfish and Kiki. Knowles states that Belz’s interpretation of the starfish focuses on the Surrealist themes of attraction and repulsion, especially since we can read the slow movement of the starfish’s tentacles as sensuous and erotic.¹⁴⁹ Ray invokes the uncanny by comparing such foreign limbs to a human’s; the viewer experiences a deep sense of disgust when she thinks about her arms and legs covered in wriggling spikes like the starfish’s tentacles.

In his 1965 essay “Tous les films que j’ai réalisés...”, Man Ray explains the theme of his starfish-animal comparison:

147 Knowles, “A Cinematic Artist,” 140-141

148 Carl Belz, “The Film Poetry of Man Ray,” *Criticism* 7, No. 2 (Spring 1965): 124.

149 Knowles, “A Cinematic Artist,” 153.

The increasing violence of the second half [of *l'Étoile de Mer*] takes place largely in connection with the associative use of the starfish. In the first half the starfish remained an object of wonder, free of specific suggestive associations. Now it becomes closely linked to a violence of sexual origins... While [the starfish] is an organic underwater creature whose ponderous movements suggested a primitive sexual force, it is also a cold attractive object like a glass flower and, in fact, follows the caption which refers to the woman as being "Beautiful, beautiful as a flower of glass." Starfish – flower – woman – sexual violence form a cycle of overlapping associations.¹⁵⁰

This section of Ray's text informs the *femme fatale* interpretation of the starfish imagery in *L'Étoile de Mer*. Like Caillois' and Dalí's praying mantis motifs, Ray establishes the comparison of the sea creature to Kiki as way of evoking the base, violent desires latent in human eroticism. The inhuman, grotesque aspects of the starfish are a direct antithesis to Kiki's smooth, sensuous features. Ray utilizes Painlevé's scene to strengthen the *femme fatale* connection to Kiki, which illuminates, according to Rudolf Kuenzli, Surrealist's ambivalent, if not misogynistic, attitude towards the increasing sexual liberation of the New Woman.¹⁵¹

Though Painlevé's footage employed effective animal-human analogies, Ray also includes his footage because he liked Painlevé's radical mindset. Like his friendship with

150 Man Ray quoted in Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination* (New York: Rizzole International Publications, 1977), 299.

151 Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny," in Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg, eds., *Surrealism and Woman* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 17-26.

Duchamp, Ray was captivated with outsiders who dispelled traditional societal norms. Painlevé was aiming an attack on both commercial cinema and the established humanist belief system in Europe.¹⁵² His popularity in the Surrealist circles ensures that Ray was aware of his work and the arguments behind it. Though Ray never explicitly stated that he was interested in Painlevé's ecocentric arguments, he likely read Painlevé's radical scientific vocabulary as a powerful way to advance the motifs in Desnos' poem. The Darwinian automaton is Darwinian instead of "biological" or "animal" because of the Darwinist implications of Painlevé's documentaries. Like the machine iconography of New York Dada, Ray inserts the Darwinian automaton to dispel of the bourgeois mores that led to World War I, augmenting Desnos' initial Surrealist motifs with a radical social critique.

152 Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism*, 5.

CHAPTER 5

THE LASTING IMPACT OF DARWIN, PAINLEVE, AND RAY

Man Ray's development from the mechanical automaton in Dada to the Darwinian automaton in the Surrealist *L'Étoile de Mer*, though puzzling, is entirely consistent with his oeuvre. The Ferrer Center fostered his sense of individuality and exposed him to the anarchistic politics that made him anti-war and anti-industrialist. He carried these beliefs into Dada, where he explored the mechanical automaton to comment on WW1, the ratiocination of the West, and his romantic relationships. While Ray's Dadaist work is less overtly political than the magazine covers that he designed in 1914, he still produced it within New York Dada's anti-war and anti-aesthetic context. He then continued this iconography in his first film *Le Retour à la Raison*, where he updated the mechanical automaton into the stark anti-reason framework of Paris Dada. In his first and final Surrealist film, Ray incorporates Jean Painlevé's anti-humanist belief system into his animal-human analogies. Ray's shift from machine to animal illuminates his concern with radical ideas and how he utilizes human and non-human comparisons to comment on bourgeois values, such as the idea of human exceptionalism.

As the only filmmaker who made both Dada and Surrealist films, Ray is a case study for the broader thematic shift between the two movements. Dada exemplified the anxieties and trauma associated with WW1. Hans Richter states, "it is impossible to understand Dada without understanding the state of mental tension in which it grew up."¹⁵³ The Dadaists vehemently combatted bourgeois institutions such as the militaries that were actively destroying society as

153 Richter, *Dada*, 13.

they knew it. From the Dadaists operating in New York to those in Europe, their machine-driven works “contain allusions to the symptomatology of neurasthenia and ‘shell shock.’”¹⁵⁴ Ray’s use of the mechanical automaton in the anthropomorphized assisted readymade and Kiki’s torso in *Le Retour à la Raison* highlights this broad anti-war and anti-reason motivation in Dada.

When Dada transitioned into Breton’s Surrealist movement, the avant-garde began utilizing the natural sciences to achieve their critiques against war and reason. Darwin’s impact on the natural sciences in early twentieth-century Europe cannot be understated. In Chapter 3 of his *Descent of Man*, Darwin states that, “there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties.”¹⁵⁵ Kirsten Strom argues that these statements from Darwin aimed to dismantle Creationist and humanist beliefs in Europe.¹⁵⁶ Breton and Roger Caillois adapted this central Darwinist theory to their work. As Donna Roberts states, “André Breton and Roger Caillois both perceived nature as continuous with the human mind: the sinuous life of vegetation as a reflection of the entangled character of desire and the imagination, and the clarity and structure of minerals as a model for the lucid potential of human thought.”¹⁵⁷ Like the Dadaists, they attempted to subvert conscious desires and reason, but unlike Surrealism they used a nature-affirming iconography to explore the unconscious.

Jean Painlevé emerged as a cinematic innovator within this Surrealist milieu. He was the only Surrealist filmmaker that focused on the foreign, uncanny aspects of nature without a

154 Hopkins, “New York Dada,” 111.

155 Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 86.

156 Strom, *Animal Surreal*, 5.

157 Roberts, “Surrealism and Natural History,” 367.

narrative.¹⁵⁸ The slow framerate of much of Painlevé's footage mystified nature in an aesthetically soft and dreamlike way that confounds the viewer, causing them to puzzle about the world in which she lives. The scientific community rejected his documentary film, according to Lauren Fretz, because it was too mysterious and did not make the unfamiliar parts of nature more accessible to the audience.¹⁵⁹ James Leo Cahill states that Painlevé's cinema produced a "zoological Surrealism that displaces us from the world we think we know and offers it to be encountered anew, so as to be conceived otherwise."¹⁶⁰ Painlevé was the first filmmaker who merged scientific studies of wild animals with the aesthetic qualities of Surrealism, creating a kind of short film that was truly novel. Ray saw the significance of Painlevé's documentaries and utilized them to create his paradigmatic Surrealist film *L'Étoile de Mer*. Desnos' poem does not describe a starfish, leaving Ray a *carte blanche* for depicting the animal in his adaptation. Ray then effectively drew comparisons between Kiki de Montparnasse and the writhing sea creature that Painlevé captured underwater.

The dramatic variation in technique between Ray's *Le Retour à la Raison* and *L'Étoile de Mer* demonstrates his command on the film medium. His short-lived film career reveals how he viewed film similarly to other artistic media like photography and painting. Ray innovated across these various media over his entire career, using a breadth of iconography – from machine to fauna – to express his revolutionary artistic ideas. Ray's four films, according to Kim Knowles, are among the most historically significant from the early twentieth century because they

158 Fretz, "Surréalisme Sous-l'Eau," 47.

159 Fretz, "Surréalisme Sous-l'Eau," 47.

160 Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism*, 315.

represent “the first sustained example of an alternative mode of filmmaking, both economically and stylistically.”¹⁶¹ She further argues that the cinematic experiments of Ray and Duchamp influenced certain neo-Dada developments in the Fluxus movement of the 1960s.¹⁶² Nicky Hamlin argues that Ray’s filmic Rayographs inspired an array of later filmmakers such as Len Lye, Stan Brackhage, Lis Rhodes, Tony Conrad, and Peter Kubelka to experiment with camera-less cinema.¹⁶³ James Leo Cahill ascribes what he calls the “Painlevé effect” onto Painlevé’s documentaries, which describes the cumulative force of his actions, films, and the responses they produced both during and after his life.¹⁶⁴ Ray’s incorporation of Painlevé’s footage highlights how he used Painlevé’s revolutionary cinema as a further variation on the film medium. The Darwinian automaton brings the importance of this collaboration forward, underscoring how Ray adapts his revolutionary disposition across varying contexts. A rereading of Ray’s *L’Étoile de Mer* via the Darwinian automaton demonstrates the depth of his films, from their materiality to the power of his animal-human comparisons. Though he referred to himself as the “*directeur du mauvais movies*,” Ray’s lasting influence in experimental film routinely suggests the opposite.¹⁶⁵

161 Knowles, “Cinematic Artist,” 210.

162 Knowles, “Cinematic Artist,” 26-28.

163 Nicky Hamlin, “Frameless Film,” in *The Undercut Reader: Critical Writings on Artists’ Film and Video* ed. by Nina Danino and Michael Mazière (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 163.

164 For an in-depth discussion of the “Painlevé effect” see James Leo Cahill, “Jean Painlevé’s Cinematic Wildlife, 1924-1946,” (PhD diss., The University of Southern California, 2010), 14-30.

165 Letter from Man Ray to Tristan Tzara, reproduced in Jean-Michel Bouhours and Patrick de Haas, *Man Ray: directeur du mauvais movies* (Paris: Editions Centre Pompidou, 1997), 8-9.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Craig Cole was born in Austin, Texas. After moving to Plano, Texas, he completed high school at Plano East Senior High. He attended Collin County Community College in 2014, transferred to St. Edwards University in 2015, then transferred to The University of Texas at Austin in 2017. He majored in Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts with High Honors in 2019. He was inducted as a Collegiate Scholar, which denotes that he was in the top 8% of the university, and received University Honors every semester that he attended the University of Texas at Austin. Soon after graduating with his Bachelor of Arts, Craig attended the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History at the University of Texas at Dallas to pursue a Master of Arts in Art History. During the 18-month program, Craig served as the research assistant to the Distinguished Scholar Bonnie Pitman and as the Edith O'Donnell Curatorial Research Assistant for the Arts of the Americas at the Dallas Museum of Art under the direction of Dr. Michelle Rich. He graduated Phi Kappa Phi with his Master of Arts in December 2020 after writing the thesis "The Automaton Within Man Ray's Films: From Mechanical to Darwinian."

Craig Cole

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EDUCATION

Edith O'Donnell Institute at the University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX Dec. 2020
Master of Arts in Art History
GPA 3.96

The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX August 2019
Bachelor of Arts with High Honors in Philosophy
GPA 3.92

Relevant Art History and Aesthetics Coursework:

Dada & Surrealism
Rome as Systems
Architecture of the Ancient Bay of Naples
Research Methods in Art History: Cézanne
Materials of Art History: Panel Painting of Renaissance Italy
Making a Museum of Texas Art
American Art 1958-1985
20th Century European Art to the 1940s
The Fourth Dimension in 20th-Century Art and Culture
History of Modern and Contemporary Continental Philosophy

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Texas Modernism
- Aesthetics
- Contemporary Marxism
- Modern American and European art
- Plato and idealism
- Biology and art
- Dada and Surrealism

PUBLICATIONS

- C. Cole, "My Neighbor," *Echo Literary Journal*. 69-75 (2018).

EXPERIENCE

The Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX June 2020 – Present
EODIAH Curatorial Research Assistant for the Arts of the Americas

- Conduct research on topics of Arts of the Americas from ancient to contemporary art
- Assist Curator of the Arts of the Americas Michelle Rich with object files and documentation

- Facilitate and maintain relationships with other art museum staff

The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX
Research Assistant

Aug. 2019 – June 2020

- Conduct research on topics of art and medicine for Bonnie Pitman
- Assist with Bonnie Pitman’s UT Southwestern course “The Art of Examination”
- Create slide set for Bonnie Pitman’s lecture at the Nasher Lecture Series presentations

St. Edward’s University, Austin, TX
Undergraduate Research Assistant

Jan. 2017 – May 2017

- Facilitated reading groups and tutoring on topics of epistemology and philosophy of mind
- Lead class discussions and presentations for 10 students in a research seminar

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Research. Art. Writing. Graduate Conference

Feb. 2020

The Founders Building at The University of Texas at Dallas

The Dallas Art Institute’s Impact on Texas Modernism

A presentation of the research I conducted in Dr. Richard Brettell’s class “Making a Museum of Texas Art.” The Dallas Art Institute was a small arts school open for less than 20 years in the early 20th century, but dramatically changed the course of Texas modernist art. I presented the lack of current scholarship on this enigmatic organization, demonstrated the stylistic changes in Texas modernism after its inception, and posed questions for further research.

Highlighting Inequality and Identity in History Website Launch

May 2019

The Perry-Castañeda Library at The University of Texas at Austin

Strategies to Promote Black Equality

A presentation of the archival research I conducted in the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History on the former Black Panther member Alli Aweusi. A discussion of Black art and poetry in Austin, TX and the tactics used in Black politics to promote equality in America.

FELLOWSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND GRANTS

Humanities Merit Scholarship, The University of Texas at Austin

March 2019

Awarded \$500

Humanities Merit Scholarship, The University of Texas at Austin

September 2018

Awarded \$500

Liberal Arts Honors Creative Writing Prize, The University of Texas at Austin March 2018

Awarded \$400

Trustee Excellence Scholarship, St. Edwards University
Awarded \$15,000 annually

August 2015

HONORS

College Scholar, The University of Texas at Austin April 2019

University Honors, The University of Texas at Austin. May 2017-May 2019

Winner Liberal Arts Honors Creative Writing Contest, The University of Texas at Austin
March 2018

Distinguished Scholar in French Studies, St. Edwards University Dec. 2016

ACADEMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Philosophy Club St. Edward's University, Austin, TX. Sep. 2016 – Aug. 2017

Vice President

- Hosted meetings on various topics in philosophy ranging from aesthetics to medical ethics
- Led discussions with 8-10 philosophy majors on a weekly basis
- Researched journal articles to present to members on philosophical topics
- Advertised meetings and readings around campus