(Re)Visions of Difference: Surrealist Encounters, Magical Realist Moments, Bi-Sexual Desires.
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(Re)Visions of Difference: Surrealist Encounters, Magical Realist Moments, Bi-Sexual Desires.

Anna C. Haynes

PhD in Critical & Cultural Theory
Cardiff University 2007
Here and there the contest breaks out into riots.
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Anna C. Haynes, May 2007
Abstract

The aim of this project is to assess how Surrealist encounters, magical realist moments, and bi-sexual desires problematise the dominant framework of differences in which (sexual) subjects are enmeshed.

Part One considers the French Surrealist Movement in the 1920s. I begin with a cultural contextualisation of Surrealism which focuses on its leading journal, *La Révolution surréaliste*. Reading its texts in the light of Marx, Freud, and Einstein's three-fold disavowal of Descartes' cogito, I explore the extent to which Surrealism undermines the oppositional certainties proposed by Enlightenment claims to subjectivity. In Surrealist texts, discursive constructions of 'man' and 'women' police sexual norms and it is precisely here, in the regulation and/or resistance of hierarchical binary difference in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, that the inevitability of the hetero/homo dyad is unravelled or reconfirmed. Claude Cahun’s photographic self-portraiture signifies a reappropriation of 'woman' at the level of representation that fissures the heteronormative realist narrative of singular—and singularly sexualised—subject positions.

Following a brief interlude on Frida Kahlo’s paintings, Part Two reconsiders ‘magical realism’ as a mode of knowledge that questions the naturalised assumption of oppositional difference. Close readings of Gabriel García Márquez’s *Of Love and Other Demons* demonstrate that ‘magical realist moments’ align with bi-sexual desires in their reclamation, and reconfiguration, of spaces 'in between'. In addition, discourses of racial separatism and assimilation intersect with the sexual matrix in the elision of ambiguity and ‘queerness’, and my analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* asks what it means to represent subjects as neither black nor white, gay nor straight. Finally, I call on existing bisexual theories to foreground how indeterminacy re-imag(in)es cultural spaces and alters the limits of cultural intelligibility. This shift in the topography *and topology* of difference seizes the referential slipperiness that Surrealist encounters, magical realist moments, and bi-sexual desires all thrive on and demand.
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Introduction

The picture is of happiness, the story is not.

Margaret Atwood

Take a rectangular strip of paper. Secure the shorter ends to form a cylinder. The shape exists in three-dimensional space as a surface with two sides and two edges which are dependent yet distinct. Cut along the circumference of the cylinder and it is split into two disconnected surfaces. Take another strip of paper. This time, twist it through 180° before securing the shorter ends. The resulting möbius band is a surface with one continuous side and one continuous edge. Cut along the circumference of the band and the surface remains intact; thinner, and longer, but still one unbroken surface. Originating from the same geometric shape as the cylinder, the möbius band is topologically different. An exertion of pressure on the existing surface has remoulded it into a new form which, though shaped from a genealogy of binary logic, resists and ultimately refutes it. The original rectangle is thus transformed into a structure that hitherto seemed untenable. One twist deconstructs expectations and reconstructs the limits of how difference is conceived in space.

The topology of the möbius band acts as the point of departure for this project which, in its own small way, seeks to perform a twist. Like Diana Fuss’ figure-eight or four knot, which spatially resists the binary exclusions that the hetero/homo dyad demands, this ‘möbius’ twist undermines ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’: surfaces are no longer

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distinct. The möbius band, then, signifies as a useful trope for reading representations of binary sexual subjectivities in Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments precisely because its spatial reconfiguration calls into question the either/or distinction which constrains bi-sexual desires and which these two contestations of realism purport to defy. Moreover, since my principle aim is to interrogate the limits of culturally intelligible spaces in order to reconceive the possibilities for sexual spaces differently, a ‘möbius’ shift in perspective is required. By foregrounding the relations between where we look from and where we look to, this study makes that necessary shift. In so doing, it activates the disregarded space we look across: the ‘in between’ space of interstitial encounters which, at the level of sexuality, is usually designated the ‘bisexual’ domain.

What, though, do the terms ‘bisexual’ and ‘bisexuality’ signify? And what does it mean to use the term ‘bi-sexual desires’ rather than the noun and adjective which most commonly describe indeterminate sexuality? ‘Bisexuality’ is, I propose, a series of desires that cannot be spoken within the structural limitations of dominant sexual discourses that the hetero/homo dyad governs. That is to say, in confining the range of desires deemed neither heterosexual nor homosexual to a single signifier, the word ‘bisexuality’ attempts an improbable task: to map complex and incongruent differences

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2 In the editorial introduction to *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), Diana Fuss makes the link between the opposition ‘heterosexual’/‘homosexual’ and the ‘inside’/‘outside’ couple upon which it is founded, and asks what gets elided by this oppositional structure of difference: ‘Inside/outside functions as the very figure for signification and the mechanisms of meaning production. It has everything to do with the structures of alienation, splitting, and identification which together produce a self and an other, a subject and an object, an unconscious and a conscious, an interiority and an exteriority...[but] what gets left out of the inside/outside, heterosexual/homosexual opposition, an opposition which could at least plausibly be said to secure its seemingly inviolable dialectical structure only by assimilating and internalizing other sexualities (bisexuality, transvestism, transsexualism...) to its own rigid polar logic,’ 1-2. Her inverted Borromean knot offers an alternative model. In questioning where, and how, we draw the line between interiority and exteriority, it makes space for those sexual desires which resist the inside/outside trope that has historically governed sexual discourses in the modern western world.
onto a singular and stable sexuality and/or identity. It is this crudely imagined sexuality and/or identity that the ‘bisexual’ subject purportedly adheres to and/or occupies. The unified stasis, for both sexuality and subjectivity, that the signifiers ‘bisexuality’ and ‘bisexual’ demand is precisely what the term ‘bi-sexual desires’ contests. Firstly, it unsettles the closed relation assumed between a generic subject and a generic sexuality by the nominal form ‘bisexual’, relocating the movement *between* specific subjects and specific sexualities in the more fluid arena of desire. At the same time, it acknowledges the plurality of desires enclosed by the term ‘bisexuality’ to challenge its assumed unity. And finally, in self-consciously highlighting with hyphenation the ‘bi’ that signifies a concomitant presence and absence of binary sexualities, and in accounting for the necessary plurality of desires, the term ‘bi-sexual desires’ enacts the very tension which constitutes the genesis of this project: how can desires and differences, which are historically rooted in binary oppositions, resist those very strictures through which sexualities and (sexual) subjectivities are normatively conceived? It is from this critical perspective that my project makes an important intervention into existing scholarship in the fields of Surrealism and magical realism.

Interestingly, in an essay published in *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire*, Ki Namaste claims that ‘bisexual identity is undermined in the very instance of its utterance’. Namaste’s argument, which theorises the expression of social relations in language with specific regard to bisexual encounters, goes someway to explaining the difficulties dominant discourses find in defining ‘bisexuality’ and locating

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'bisexual identity'. Indeed, to name 'bisexuality', to make it visible in order that 'bisexual' subjects can claim a 'bisexual identity', fixes indeterminate sexualities—and the 'bisexual' subjects who claim them—in the very hetero/homo dyad which paradoxically elides the presence of bi-sexual desires. 'Bisexuality' and 'bisexual identity', as significative utterances as well as material realities, thus enforce a degree of structural similitude upon those differences which, in and of themselves, exceed fixed binary locations. At the same time, bi-sexual desires, which can only be spoken within the terms of the binary sexual paradigm that, in naming them, negates them, operate as absent presences which do not signify—and cannot be located exactly—in any one particular way. In addition, they cannot exist outside the dominant sexual nomenclatures that inadequately represent them: they are partially bound by, yet simultaneously exceed, the hetero/homo dyad. It is precisely this paradox, which renders bi-sexual desires irreducible to the binary oppositions that police sexual cultures in the western world, that urges a (re)examination of the sexual matrix, specifically its composite relations between and among the terms of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Furthermore, desires that place oppositional relations of difference under scrutiny challenge not only the structure of sexual identity but also the notion of 'identity' per se. In Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life, Marjorie Garber raises a notable point with regard to the relationship between identity and difference: 'Is bisexuality a “third kind” of sexual identity, between or beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality? Or is it something that puts in question the very concept of sexual identity in the first place?' The tendency in western cultures to view differences as external phenomena from a

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position of internal consistency and coherence renders crucial a deconstruction of the
historically entrenched mythology of identity versus difference. And, as Garber indicates,
bi-sexual desires are poised to undertake this. Indeed, ‘identity’, which signifies the state
of being the same as yourself, both demands and depends on a unified and consistent ‘I’
that stands in distinct opposition to others deemed in some way different. In enacting
ambiguity and internal contradiction, subjects of bi-sexual desires counter the liberal
humanist illusion of ‘identity’ by acknowledging and activating the Lyotardian
differends \(^5\)—or the indeterminate and indeterminable differences—within and between
subjects rather than subsuming them. Bi-sexual desires thus rupture the latent fissures in
identity’s demand, and in so doing pose some incisive questions. If we do not, indeed
cannot, always speak from the same subject position, then how can we legitimately
inhabit fixed identities? And if discrete oppositions between subjects, as well as unity
within them, are ‘natural’ and inevitable, then why are they so ubiquitously and
meticulously policed?

Certainly, substituting ‘subject positions’ for ‘identity’ offers more freedom and
flux for subjects in general and for ambiguously held subjects in particular. This semantic
shift avoids recourse to limiting notions of similitude and unity in the struggle for
viability and equality. With this in mind, and without intending to elide the material
realities of those who identify as ‘bisexual’, bi-sexual desires are enlisted in this study
primarily as instances of cultural paradox which, in undermining the normative
conditions of ‘identity’, problematise what we (think we) know about sexuality, and at

\(^5\) ‘[A] differend would be a case of conflict between (at least) two parties, that cannot be resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable in both arguments. One side’s legitimacy does not imply the other’s lack of legitimacy’, Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xi.
the same time question what we (can) know with certainty about subjectivity. While acknowledging, then, that ‘bisexuality’ is never simply a theoretical tool, I would like to clarify here that it is specifically the revision of difference impelled by bi-sexual desires that concerns me. By detailing the motivations and effects of dominant sexual discourses which are textually inscribed at the level of the signifier and thus recirculated as cultural norms, this study agitates normative relations between and among the terms of the presiding sex-gender-sexuality matrix to harness the critically productive power of the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and interstitial moments that bi-sexual desires refuse to resolve. As with Surrealist and magical realist rearticulations of realism, it is a matter not simply of rejecting or replacing differences but of resignifying the motivations, limitations, and implications of their production and elision.

Central to this project is a deviation from historical tracings of bisexuality’s ontology which operate under the closed remit of ‘proof and validation’ in favour of a more open critical approach which explores the cracks and complexities that bi-sexual

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6 I use the term sex-gender-sexuality matrix to describe the grid-like configuration of binary terms that describes sex, gender, and sexuality. This presiding sexual matrix is structurally similar to the ‘heterosexual matrix’ critiqued by Judith Butler in her seminal text, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990). In note 6 of Gender Trouble’s first chapter, ‘Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire’, Butler acknowledges the influence of Monique Wittig’s ‘heterosexual contract’ and Adrienne Rich’s notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ to her theory in defining her use of the term ‘heterosexual matrix’: ‘to characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality’. In Gender Trouble’s second chapter, ‘Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix’, Butler theorizes how heterosexuality is produced through the confines of normative categories of sex and gender. The sex-gender-sexuality matrix as I conceive it differs slightly from the ‘heterosexual matrix’ in that relations among its terms are not sealed by the regime of compulsory heterosexuality. While the relations between each set of binary terms remains oppositional, the possibility of homosexuality is not occluded. This seems to me an important differentiation with regard to how bi-sexual desires are excluded—not only from the heterosexual matrix Butler critiques, but also from and sex-gender-sexuality matrix that makes space for homosexuality yet, in operating exclusively through the terms of oppositional difference, continues to elide bi-sexual desires.
desires reveal in the heterosexual matrix and its structure of oppositional difference.\(^7\) In reframing analysis so that ontology and taxonomy are no longer principle concerns, this study is more aligned with the scholarship of Clare Hemmings, Jo Eadie, Maria Pramaggoire and Bi Academic Intervention who, in seeking to address both the lack of bisexual theory in the academy and the lack of theory in activism, refute the compliant preoccupation of identity politics.\(^8\) Indeed, if theory sometimes seems inaccessible, the socio-historic domain of the white, western, male, middle class, educated elite, this is exacerbated by a preoccupation with structures of inclusion and exclusion that pervade and uphold western cultures and predetermine legitimate subject positions in oppositional terms. Contrary to the claims of a reactionary mindset endemic in western hegemony, ‘theory’, like ‘sexuality’, takes place everyday and everywhere: the practice of theory is in no way contained by the corridors and conference rooms of academia, and neither is sexuality confined only to the bedroom. How we think, perceive, and interpret the world, how we read and rewrite the cultures we inhabit—in short, how we make things signify and how we are placed as signifying subjects—are inextricable from the things we do, the choices we make, and the way we live our lives. In other words, signification is a matter

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\(^7\) This study, then, is not a cultural history of ‘bisexuality’—Marjorie Garber’s *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* performs this task adequately; it does not trace the ‘origins’ of indeterminate sexualities in the manner of Eva Cantarella’s *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (London: Yale University Press, 2002); it is not a socio-anthropological or sexological study—Lorraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu’s editorial collection *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1991) constitutes the former while research led by Henry Havelock Ellis, Wilhelm Stekel, Alfred C. Kinsey, and Fritz Klein engage in the latter; and it does not focus on bi-sexual desires in the exclusive domain of sexual practice or as loci through which to fix and regulate sexual identity in the vein of dominant sexual identity politics.

\(^8\) For a comprehensive overview of current debates in bisexual politics and bisexual theories which locates my contribution to the field see the essays collected in eds Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggoire, *RePresenting Bisexualities*, eds Joseph Bristow and Angela R. Wilson *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics* (London: Lawrence&Wishart, 1993), and eds Phoebe Davidson, Jo Eadie, Clare Hemmings, Ann Kaloski and Merl Storr (Bi Academic Intervention) *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire* (London: Cassell, 1997).
of theory and practice that challenges the distinction usually drawn between the two. By continuing to separate theory from practice, and by annulling their multilateral reciprocities, the polarities against which struggles for identity and freedom have purportedly fought are recouped and the possibilities for viewing differences differently are impaired. Besides, it would be naïve, and critically untenable, to imagine that the derision of theory is itself a strategy absolved of political intention.

To this end, the project takes the form of a critical examination of cartographies of difference that deconstructs normative modes of representing ‘otherness’. Close readings of specific texts across interdisciplinary borders, which pay particular attention to the signifiers of difference, are guided by two closely knitted questions. What are the text’s claims to reality? And how do these claims break down? The former probes the inscriptions woven into the fabric of the text, and the latter unpicks the contradictions enmeshed in these inscriptions, specifically the discrepancies between their effects and their purported aims. This double-pronged critical approach is influenced by poststructuralist theory in general, and by deconstruction and queer theory in particular.

Firstly, my approach is underpinned by poststructural theories of culture, subjectivity, and difference that address the spaces in which indeterminate sexual subject positions reside, and thus alter the possibilities for bi-sexual desires. I read through a critical lens which is methodologically inclined both to Foucault’s theorisation of knowledge, power, and resistance, and to the Derridean notions of undecidability and différence. That is to say, my concern is with how the regulatory mechanisms built into power relations and discursive regimes codify (sexual) bodies as objects of knowledge in order to render bodies and their desires policeable. At the same time, I examine how the
undecidability with which bi-sexual desires are marked both differs from and defers the
call for sexual certainties at the level of discourse and text.

Secondly, and in conjunction with this poststructural approach, my queer lens of
enquiry calls into account the oppositional locations of viewer/viewed, centre/margins,
inclusion/exclusion, hetero/homo, theory/practice to undermine not only the former
terms’ supremacy but also the discursive implementation of hierarchical binaries through
which their supremacy is determined, legitimated, and maintained. ‘Queer’, which
properly interrogates the ‘heteronormal’ and its discursive (re)construction rather than
simply the ‘heterosexual’, disputes both the assumption of compulsory heterosexuality
and, crucially, the cultural mechanisms of naturalisation and normalisation which enable
and perpetuate institutionalised oppression.9 In resisting the entrenched discursive
regimes through which we normatively categorise the world and make its differences
intelligible, a ‘poststructural-queer’ approach politicises not only the terms of sex,
gender, and sexuality but also their signifying relations in a way that severs the notion of
‘identity’ from referential certainty without eliding the specificities of subject positions
and desires. As Michael Warner suggests, ‘queer theory offers a way of basing politics in
the personal without acceding to this pressure to clean up personal identity’.10 In querying
the borders between the personal and the political, theory and practice, desire and
difference, poststructural-queer views heteronormativity as an effect of the cultural texts

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9 By making this distinction between ‘heteronormative’ and ‘heterosexual’, I mean to problematise the
assumed link between desire for the opposite sex and compulsory heteronormativity: the two do not, of
course, necessarily go hand in hand. Moreover, such a distinction underlines that ‘queer’ extends beyond
the parameters that usually demarcate ‘sexuality’ to encompass other constitutive elements of subjectivity.
Queer theories presented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Diana Fuss, Judith Butler, and Audre Lorde have
been of particular influence in this understanding of ‘queer’.

10 Michael Warner, Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of
that write it; an effect which is concurrently bound by the language, structures, and teleology of the discourses those texts engage. In addition, queer theory’s relentless demand to interrogate borders as well as the strategies of naturalisation and normalisation enmeshed in their (re)production has influenced my choice of interdisciplinary texts, and in turn reading across disciplines has influenced my theories. This self-reflexive approach offers a juncture from which to put theory to the practice of rereading the interstitial tensions which, largely concealed from view by the veil of hegemony, bind the terms of the sexual matrix and are thus located to disrupt their oppositional relations. In other words, by questioning the relations that make us signify as specifically sexed, gendered, and sexualised subjects, bi-sexual desires in a poststructural-queer context displace normative claims to ‘reality’ and insist on (re)visions of different realities. It is this critical lens, which looks across the axes that comprise subjectivities and across disciplinary boundaries, that (re)views difference to make original contributions to scholarship. Certainly, different areas of enquiry—like different fields of difference—have something to offer each other. Foregrounding this contention, my close readings of sexual representations, which I conceive as sites of theoretical production that problematise the theory/practice dyad rather than as simple applications of pre-existing theories, explore contingent trajectories in each chapter with a view to destabilising precisely how ‘reality’ is inscribed in order to re-imag(in)e how ‘it’ might be resisted.11

The project is divided into two main sections which each comprise three chapters. Part One considers the French Surrealist Movement in the 1920s epoch of modernist

11 It is also my hope that such an approach makes this project more relevant, more critically attuned, and more accountable to the questions queer theory poses—and is posed with—in current theoretical debates as well as in the wider cultural climate.
experimentation. The Surrealists sought 'freedom' through the exploration of contradictions and in the coexistence of apparently distinct oppositions, and it is in this endeavour that Surrealist texts are aligned with, and of critical interest to, bi-sexual desires. In light of the space restrictions presented by a project such as this, I limit my enquiry to the Paris based French Surrealist Movement precisely because, as the self-proclaimed revolutionary ‘origin’ of surrealism located geographically and culturally at the centre of European modernism, there is an immediate, if somewhat concealed, ambivalence in its claimed site of both marginality and centrality. Its reputation as a sexually seditious, artistically experimental, and politically subversive revolutionary enterprise seems at odds with its strikingly masculine role-call and rigid membership requirements. I want to explore this discrepancy at the level of Surrealism’s sexual representations to see how the texts themselves substantiate or recoup Surrealism’s revolutionary claims. Though Whitney Chadwick, Dawn Ades, and Rosalind E. Krauss have led critical enquiries into representations of women in the French Surrealist Movement from a feminist perspective, there is little written in the field on the relation between male representations and female representations, and even less on the relations between sex, gender, sexuality and their contingent constitutive binary terms. It is at this juncture that this study makes a significant intervention into the existing body of

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12 I use ‘Surrealism’ as a proper noun with an upper case ‘S’ to refer specifically to the French Surrealist Movement and ‘Surrealist’ with an upper case ‘S’ as its adjective. Elsewhere ‘surrealism’ and ‘surrealist’ with a lower case ‘s’ encompasses surreal encounters and experiences which are not confined to the canonical French Surrealist Movement.

scholarship on sexuality in Surrealism. Close analyses of specific Surrealist sexual representations which untangles the meanings inscribed at the level of the signifier, and a concomitant theorisation of the effects therein of and for dissident subjects and dissonant desires, seek to delimit sexual difference in the cultural context of European modernist insurgence.

Chapter One sets out the cultural context of Surrealism in France and interrogates its departure from the realist tradition. My primary sources are predominantly taken from the Surrealist Movement’s leading journal, *La Révolution surréaliste*, which published twelve issues between 1924 and 1929. These are read in the light of three crucial splinters of modernism’s epistemological undertaking: Marx’s shift away from the Cartesian notion of self-determined subjectivity which situates individuals in the cultural conditions of their production and thus unnerves the prevalent assumption that freedom is an ‘eternal truth’ available to all; Freud’s revolutionary theories of dreams and the unconscious which undo the division between interiority and exteriority underpinning rational thought to cleave space for a semantic play across oppositional frontiers; and Einstein’s rejection of absolutes proposed in his theories of relativity which foreground the significance of perspective in determining how ‘reality’ is conceived. In this three-

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14 Another interesting study that would build on existing Surrealist research would be an examination of how primitivism—which was prevalent in modernist artistic discourses in Europe and has been documented in Marianna Torgovnick’s *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Susan Hiller’s collection of essays *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* (London: Routledge, 1991), and Colin Rhodes’ *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994)—operates as a sexual as well as racial discourse to surreptitiously maintain Eurocentric patriarchal heteronormative values.

15 *La Révolution surréaliste* was written and edited collaboratively by the founding members of the French Surrealist Movement and is widely regarded as the Surrealists’ official journal. *Documents*, another important journal published at the time, was regarded as peripheral and was compiled by artists and writers who had been exiled from the French Surrealist Movement by its leader André Breton (‘Undercover Surrealism’, an exhibition based on *Documents*, was recently held at the Hayward gallery in London’s South Bank Centre).
fold disavowal of Descartes' *cogito*, Surrealism undermines some of the cultural
certainties proposed by Enlightenment claims to subjectivity, and in reclaiming
subjectivity from realism's constraints, it begins to delimit subject spaces differently.
Through a reconfiguration of oppositions, then, Surrealism avers the unintelligible spaces
of the rationalist framework, but does Surrealism's renowned demand for the
'impossible' extend to its sexual representations? To what extent, and with what effects,
do the textual inscriptions of Surrealist discourse make a difference in legitimating
dissident subject positions in general and dissonant sexual subject positions in particular?
In exploring these questions, I examine the entrenched cultural anxiety *vis-à-vis*
difference which I trace back to Aristotle's flawed principle of non-contradiction and the
excluded middle since it is here, and in its legacies, that the assumption of inevitable
binary hierarchies takes a firm foothold. Indeed, the 'surreal' convergence of
contradiction demands a radical questioning of historical cartographies of difference that
take shelter in the metaphysical scaffold of hierarchical binary edifices.

At the level of sexuality, this policing of hierarchical binary difference takes place
in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, and it is from this premise that the second chapter
proceeds. Bi-sexual desires present a radical challenge to the dominant sexual matrix that
is entangled in the relations between sex, gender, and sexuality. Since gender occupies a
crucial location as a regulatory apparatus in the matrix wherein sexual subjects are
shaped and their freedoms and constraints determined, Surrealism's problematic stance
with regard to gender is of critical import in theorising dissident desires. Indeed, visual
representations of 'woman' in the Surrealist canon, which have been well documented in
Whitney Chadwick's monograph *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* and her
editorial collection *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, are enmeshed in heteronormativity and its oppositional demands. Reading André Breton’s gender inscriptions alongside the discrepancies between Man Ray’s photographic portraits of men and of women in Chapter Two bears witness to this proposition by asking if the sexual representations of Surrealism’s leading proponents present a revolutionary or reactionary picture. I suggest that Surrealism’s gendered textual politics present a schism—both among the Surrealist Movement’s members and between its ideological aims and material effects—which questions whether canonical Surrealist texts are as radically seditious as Surrealism’s manifestos and political discourses claim. The pivotal position gender occupies in the sexual matrix, however, situates it to resist as well as reinscribe assumptions of oppositional sexuality, and it is precisely here that the certainty of the hetero/homo dyad begins to unravel. Accordingly, scrutiny of sexual difference in the work of Marcel Duchamp and René Magritte reframes gender norms to destabilise the sex-gender-sexuality matrix and the lineages it draws between misogyny, heteronormativity, and the cultural anxiety undecidability provokes.

The final chapter of Part One, which considers the photographic self-portraiture of the little known French Surrealist Claude Cahun, protracts Chapter Two’s claim that agitating the rules of realist representation reconfigures sexual spaces. The shift from male representations of women to female self-representation signifies not only a move away from viewing ‘woman’ as ‘other’ but also a troubling of the oppositional division between subject and object in the act of looking. Cahun deploys the Surrealist trope of doubling and the feminist trope of masquerade to render her own body a political site of entailment through which she explores relations between subjectification and difference.
Reading the textual and sexual tensions her self-portraits enact alongside Freud’s theory of feminine narcissism and Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, this chapter calls into question the discursive strategies that police sexual dissidence to maintain the parameters of intelligible sexualities. Crucially, Cahun’s reappropriation of the Surrealist ideal of ‘woman’ exposes the fissures in the heteronormative realist narrative of singular and singularly sexualised subject positions. (Re)presenting herself as a subject in flux, her images of sexual ambiguity and inconsistent subjectivity destabilise the notion of gender cores. Her self-portraits thus problematise the assumptions and certainties normally enlisted in the hermeneutic process, which exhorts viewers of her texts to review the process of representation and consider more closely the links between its mechanisms of reconstituting differences and indeterminate sexual subject positions. In this way, I argue, her photographs unknot and reweave both the strictures and structures of oppositional sexualities in particular and of binary hierarchies in general.

The Interlude between Part One and Part Two, which examines the paintings of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, bridges the project’s shift from modernism to postmodernism; the French Surrealist Movement to magical realist moments; European visual art to postcolonial fiction. This shift seems important on several levels. Firstly, the uncertainty and plurality with which postmodern contexts mark modern (sexual) subjects is of critical interest to bi-sexual desires. Secondly, in taking race into account, the predominantly postcolonial contexts of magical realist moments address a notable lack in Surrealism’s enquirey, which was largely a white Eurocentric pursuit. And thirdly, the effects with which the uncanny schisms of Surrealist visual encounters are rewritten in fiction offer an interesting juxtaposition of image and text (which are usually considered
in isolation). Part Two considers ‘magical realism’, a term I contest in favour of ‘magical realist moments’ for similar reasons that I substitute ‘subject positions’ for ‘identity’ and ‘bi-sexual desires’ for ‘bisexuality’ and ‘bisexual’. Existing scholarship tends, once again, either to map a history of magical realism, to seek a magical realist ontology, or to convene a framework of reference through which to represent its diversity. Maggie Ann Bowers publication Magic(al) Realism focuses on the similarities and differences between the German based art movement of the 1920s, ‘magic realism’, and the more evasive ‘magical realism’ that emerged from South America’s lo real maravilloso in the mid-twentieth century and proliferated thereafter predominantly in postcolonial contexts.

Lois Parkinson Zamaro and Wendy B. Faris’s editorial collection, Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community, serves as a critical overview of magical realism, locating its various roots and exploring its development across different cultural and epistemological contexts. My line of enquiry, however, differs in two significant ways. Firstly, my concern is not with tracing, defining, or comprehensively representing ‘magical realism’, nor with categorising texts and oeuvres as ‘magical realist’ entireties, but with the significative effects of ‘magical realist moments’, specifically with regard to interstitial subject positions and indeterminate desires. These ‘moments’ are best understood as fleeting presentations of the unpresentable which willingly destabilise the hierarchical binary certainties that normative patterns of difference demand. Secondly, and in conjunction, I explore how these textual eruptions remould relations between sex, gender, sexuality, and, finally, race. I aim to determine how magical realist moments compare and contrast with canonical Surrealist textual inscriptions of sexual relations in their
resignifications of realism. Do postmodern contexts of dissenting sexual differences permit more radical challenges to realist sexual discourses that stifle dissident desires?

To this end, the first chapter of Part Two presents ‘magical realism’ as a mode of knowledge rather than an organised cultural movement, definitive literary genre, or circumscribed and fixed ontology. I begin with an overview of magical realism’s inception that leads to my contestation of the term itself in favour of ‘magical realist moments’. These moments are aligned with bi-sexual desires in their reappropriation of the ‘middle ground’, which dominantly signifies weakness and indecision. Resituating the limits of intelligible desires in this way counters the battle between mutually exclusive categories of difference with the seemingly unthinkable presence of viable spaces ‘in between’ to unsettle the ostensibly exclusive polar distinctions they divide. Close textual analysis of Gabriel García Márquez’s novel Of Love and Other Demons, which begins to consider the implications of race and postcolonialism on the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, illustrates my argument that magical realist moments are, in their questioning of structures of difference as well as their spatio-temporal movements, poised to refute realism’s call, echoed in identity politics, for singularity, certainty, and non-contradiction. In undoing the binaries of visibility/invisibility and presence/absence, and in questioning the link conventionally drawn between visibility and presence, poststructural-queer readings of these moments rearticulate the limits of sexual and racial ‘knowledge’ to problematise the assumptions which have historically governed how it seems possible to think about difference.

Chapter Five continues to (re)weave the thread of identity versus difference, focusing on the racial politics of separatism and assimilation to determine the role
heteronormativity and its restrictions play in simultaneously regulating interstitial racial and sexual subject positions. How are bi-sexual desires placed to resist the blueprint of oppositional difference in the politically imbricated arenas of race and sexuality and to confront its divisive implications? With this question in mind, this chapter considers two historical documents from the emancipation era in the United States: Thomas Nast’s engraving ‘Emancipation’, and H.R.51, or ‘The Freedmen’s Act’. What constraints does the liberal humanist notion of ‘freedom’ that these ‘racial’ texts purport to offer insist on and for whom? And how are the regulatory norms of the sexual matrix, such as the nuclear family, deployed to stabilise dissident desires? I read Toni Morrison’s novel set in post-Abolition Ohio, Paradise, to uncover resistances to structures of oppositional difference in its magical realist moments. In documenting a shift from single-axis identity politics to multiply-sited subject positions, I suggest that Paradise’s magical realist moments address the elision of liminal and interstitial subject positions to present the unpresentable of realist discourse and thus resignify difference. What does it mean to be neither black nor white, gay nor straight; to never be only raced or sexed or gendered or sexualised but to be always already all these things and ambiguously so? And, crucially, what does it mean to represent subjects accordingly?

The final chapter pulls together the project’s various strands by reconvening the fractious relations between and across the terms of oppositional difference and (re)presenting subjects as self-differential clusters, held in culture and its signifying discourses, yet poised to resist its dominant oppositional demands. Engaging with existing bisexual theories, I call on moments in Jeanette Winterson’s novel The Passion to illustrate how, as diversely sexed, gendered, sexualised, and raced subjects, we cite
differences differently to enact ourselves as signifying subjects. It is not simply a matter of culture making space for interstitial subject positions; it is, more radically, a matter of ambiguity and indeterminacy re-imag(in)ing cultural spaces to alter the limits of cultural intelligibility. I suggest the Lacanian real partially accounts for those inconsistencies, contradictions, and excesses of bi-sexual desires which cannot always be mapped. The shift in the topography and topology of difference that incursions into the real denote seizes the referential slipperiness that Surrealist encounters, magical realist moments, and bi-sexual desires all thrive on and demand. In response to Homi K. Bhabha’s question ‘[m]ust we always polarize in order to polemicize?’, these vital slippages resist the unity that ‘identity’ and its naturalised oppositional differences demand to expose it, contrary to realism’s claim, as a dangerous and divisive illusion.

The picture that realism paints of the world, then, is, to refer back to this Introduction’s epigram, one of ‘happiness’ in which subjects appear as unified coherent totalities. Yet the stories elided by its predetermined monocular viewpoint are not. By unraveling dominant culture’s framed illusion of oppositional difference in Surrealist and magical realist moments, this study seeks to read, and to begin rewriting, the ambiguities woven in(to) realism’s ellipses and aporias. With the thorny tension between binary sexuality and bi-sexual desires as its defining focus, I reframe the questions that mould the dominant language of sexual representation in order to agitate the written and visual signifiers that reiterate and (re)naturalise oppositional differences and thereby restrict legitimate subject positions to the either/or paradigm. I do not propose here a comprehensive and inclusive study of ‘bisexuality’, ‘surrealism’, and ‘magical realism’:

16 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 19.
study of this length could never sustain such a venture, and, moreover, it is not my aim to achieve this. Nor do I approach the issues explored with a view to finding fixed answers or definitive solutions. Rather, I seek in the course of this study to (re)view the vital differences that Surrealist encounters, magical realist moments, and bi-sexual desires impart and extol through a critical lens that makes space for difference. The abundance of questions already posed here indicates that foregrounding ambiguity and difference over unity and totality opens up pathways concealed in and by the hegemonic narratives of realism and heteronormativity rather than closing them down. It is precisely in this endeavour of unfolding and resignifying that I seek to perform a small yet significant twist.
PART ONE

Surrealism:
Delimiting Sexual Difference
Chapter One

Surrealism in the Modern Context

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his existence, in his social relations and in his social life?

Karl Marx\(^1\)

Very rarely does the complexity of human character, driven hither and thither by dynamic forces, submit to the choice between simple alternatives, as our antiquated morality would have us believe.

Sigmund Freud\(^2\)

In what does it consist, if not the endeavor to know how and to what extent it is possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?

Michel Foucault\(^3\)

Surrealism makes a dramatic departure from realism. It rejects, in its aims, realism’s established notions of subjectivity; and it contests, in its praxes, realism’s dominant significations. In questioning the hierarchical oppositions that have historically governed relations in and between culture and its residing subjects, Surrealist discourse challenges


the assumptions of universal oppositions and metaphysical truths endemic in modern western societies. From this point of departure, two important questions that this chapter considers emerge. How does Surrealism make differences with regard to subjectivity in general and sexual subjectivity in particular? And what difference does it make?

In October 1924, a group of French writers, artists, and intellectuals, who would later become known as the founding members of the French Surrealist Movement, signed a manifesto written by André Breton declaring war on western civilisation and its philosophical pilasters: logic, rationalism, and realism.\(^4\) Certainly, the official birth of Surrealism in France is located in modernism’s turbulent social and political contexts, and (re)viewing Surrealism in light of this detail foregrounds its wider significance as a cultural movement and as a mode of knowledge that alters the way subjectivity is conceived. Firstly, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ nineteenth-century political ideologies were of inaugural importance to the Surrealist uprising. Marx’s shift away from the Cartesian notion of self-determined subjectivity, which situates individuals as subjects of and to culture and its power relations, underpins Surrealist dissent. Autonomy is viewed as a bourgeois myth, which is dependent on the institution and reiteration of hierarchical class distinctions and designed to pacify the masses and repress proletarian revolt. Secondly, Sigmund Freud’s *fin de siècle* theories of dreams and the unconscious, and their revolutionary implications for subjectivity, resound through Surrealist works. In the Freudian world-view, subjects are confronted with a dual address: not wholly determined in consciousness, we are partially governed by forces and desires that Enlightenment legacies are either unaware of or do not acknowledge. The Surrealists

exploited the innovative possibilities that lay beyond the illusory realm of full-consciousness fractured by Freud’s theories. Thirdly, Albert Einstein’s early twentieth-century theories of relativity forced an epistemological shift that troubles the notion of absolutes. As a result, cultural certainties were unsettled by Surrealism’s reconsideration of the role that perspective plays in understanding subjectivities: subject and object are no longer conceived as stable, inert, and distinct. Rather, they exist in dialogic relationships in which the spaces they occupy and the relations between those spaces are vital. Marx, Freud, and Einstein represent just three modes of thought that converge in Surrealism to illuminate and undermine the supposition that subjects are autonomous, unchangeable, isolated consciousnesses. It is here, in the three-fold disavowal of Descartes’ *cogito*, that the Surrealist endeavour rejoins subjectivity from realism and its rationalist framework and begins to delimit difference differently.

In contextualising the implications of these three crucial (yet by no means definitive) splinters of Surrealist inspiration, this chapter traces Surrealism’s impact on normative conceptions of subjectivity and dominant patterns of difference. The French Surrealist Movement was inspired by the rejection of Cartesian models that privilege mind over body, reason over the imagination, and realism over experimentation: although we cannot fix, define, and ‘know’ all things with certainty, Surrealism seems to say, we cannot deny their significance. In other words, epistemology does not subsume or occlude ontology, and it is here that my enquiry into Surrealism begins. Through this lens of uncertainty, which exploiting a culturally endemic anxiety about difference tracing back to Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, I focus on Surrealism’s repudiation of received knowledge and its cartographies of subjectification

23
and signification. This serves as a crucial prerequisite to the scrutiny of sexual representations that follows in Chapters Two and Three.

I

Surrealism’s aims contest the basic taxonomies of western rationalism and the realist remit. As Franklin Rosemont explains in his comprehensive two-volume study of the French Surrealist Movement, Surrealism refuses the rigid boundaries and definitions assigned by conventional rationality.5 While realism offers subjects a ‘rational’ illusion of security and unity, for the Surrealists, the paths that subjects etch as they move in social spaces carve out a deconstruction and reconstruction of the ‘reality’ inscribed by rational thought.

Etymologically, the word ‘surrealism’, derived from a fusion of the French sur via the Latin sub [beneath; under; from below] and super [above; beyond; beside] and réalisme [actually existing or present; at source], is itself a contradiction which unsettles dominant culture’s propensity to set reality in opposition to the imagination. It was the French Surrealist Movement’s principle concern to explore possibilities located beneath, above, beyond, and beside the conventional ‘reality’ that realism purports to transparently reflect.6 Indeed, the ruptures forged in western rationalism by moments of ‘surreality’—the point where two diverging realities converge7—offer glimpses of something

6 My use of the term ‘reality’ here, and elsewhere when enclosed by quotation marks, refers to the rationalist notion, enmeshed in realism’s demand, that ‘reality’ is fixed, singular, and determined both in and by full-consciousness.
7 Breton used the term ‘surreality’ extensively to refer to a realm wherein ‘reality’ and ‘imagination’ simultaneously coexist.
structurally different to realism. As Breton describes in the emphatic conclusion to the first manifesto:

Surrealism, such as I conceive it, asserts our complete nonconformism clearly enough so that there can be no question of translating it, at the trial of the real world, as evidence for the defense...Surrealism is the ‘invisible ray’ which will one day enable us to out over our opponents...This summer the roses are blue; the wood is of glass. The earth, draped in its verdant cloak, makes as little impression upon me as a ghost. It is living and ceasing to live that are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.\(^8\)

Surrealism, then, insists on a qualitatively different relation with difference that rejects established conventions in pursuit of the extensive possibilities life presents beyond the realist illusion. Its unyielding ‘nonconformism’ exploits the tensions between reality and the imagination that oppositional binaries normatively sever. In encounters with the ‘invisible ray’, which paradoxically render it, if momentarily, visible, the Surrealists envisaged, and enacted, their guiding rationale: the quest for freedom \textit{in and through} the exploration of contradiction. It is here, in a disavowal of the awkward and ambiguous cultural distinctions drawn between art and politics, the individual and society, reality and idealism, ‘either’/‘or’, that Surrealism twists the discursive limits of ‘freedom’. And, with this in mind, it is to Aristotle’s foundational principle of non-contradiction and the excluded middle (which the Surrealist so vehemently renounced), and to the Marxist deconstruction of ‘freedom’ (which they fervently upheld), that my analysis now turns.

Firstly, in ‘Book Gamma’, the fourth book of \textit{Metaphysics}, Aristotle sets out his thesis that it is not logically possible to hold a position that disputes the principle of opposites. This established hypothesis is central to how differences have been, and still are, dominantly conceived in the western world, and its authenticating legacy of

\(^{8}\) Breton, \textit{Manifestos of Surrealism}, 47.
embedded discourses delimits the parameters through which it seems possible to think about differences. However, close textual analysis demonstrates that the premise of non-contradiction is, at its moment of inception, a spuriously justified assumption. Speaking from a self-appointed position of universal representation, Aristotle begins by insisting that all things are organised by nature into two opposing columns:

[A]ll the items of both columns are derived from that which is and that which is not...almost everybody agrees that the things of substance are composed of opposites...everybody claims that the principles are opposite...For all things are either opposite or derived from opposites.9

Thinly veiled by this liberal humanist approach, which professes to include ‘everybody’, is a self-assumed authority that discursively mirrors the supremacy of the divine in religious ideology. Recalling the Barthesian ‘God re-introduced’10 effected by uncritical drives to unity and illusory inclusion, this stance conceals the power relations at play in the gnostic claim that any challenge to the praxis of Aristotle’s view is a result of ‘innocence of logical training’.11 Aristotle’s discourse, embroiled in divisive hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion, is articulated as a transparent description of things which pre-exist cultural invention; of being qua [by virtue of being] and being per se [by or in itself]. The metaphysical assumption that constitutes Aristotle’s First Principle—‘it is impossible for the same thing at the same time both to be-in and not-be-in the same thing in the same respect’12—thus demands the unquestioned exclusion of the coexistence of

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10 In ‘The Great Family of Man’, published in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), Roland Barthes argues that postulating a human essence, a necessary stage in the construction of a singular human race, demands that someone somewhere must claim a position of authority from which to confer and disseminate this illusory unity. It is this stance that he describes as ‘God re-introduced’ in liberal humanism.
mutually exclusive worlds. In the supreme Aristotelian world-view, contradiction is not simply a misconceived result of intellectual ignorance, but an altogether unfeasible impossibility which the Surrealists, whose mantra was ‘be realistic demand the impossible’,\(^\text{13}\) contested outright.

Secondly, freedom’s paradox, like Aristotle’s liberal humanist claims to an inclusive unity that in material reality depends on exclusion, is that it demands, in some way and for certain individuals, restriction. Marxist ideology, which discredits the essentialism surrounding culturally constructed notions of freedom and oppositional difference, radically altering their semantic strictures and shifting their naturalised parameters, determines that ‘eternal truths’ are in fact iniquitous mythologies, historically reproduced and resisted by complicit and competing discourses.\(^\text{14}\) By dispelling the liberal humanist myth of freedom, and more crucially the hierarchical binary mechanisms through which the mythologies of eternal truths operate, Marxist ideology, advocated by Surrealism, radically questions the notion that freedom is a fixed, predetermined, singular truth located at the terminus of a two-dimensional path of progression. The political motivations for depicting freedom as a ‘natural’ constant are unearthed in *The Communist Manifesto* where freedom’s topography is represented as dependent on relations between subjects and culture. Indeed, Marx and Engels’ radical demystification constitutes the first major discord in western thought with the Enlightenment notion of the self-determined autonomous subject. René Descartes’ often cited *cogito* proposes a widely accepted and historically legitimated notion of subjectivity

\(^{13}\) ‘Be realistic, demand the impossible’ is a phrase used in various Surrealist texts as a call to arms and has become a recognised Surrealist mantra.

that is engendered in, and only in, the individual’s rational mind.\textsuperscript{15} For this intentional subject, which is purportedly independent of the world around it, mind is distinct from, and superior to, matter. Not only does the well-documented Cartesian rupture between mind and body assume a division that renders the body redundant, it also ignores the subject’s place in discourse, renouncing the effects of the social and ideological norms that discursive practices inscribe. It is here that Marx and Engels (and the likes of Louis Althusser and Judith Butler in their wake) make a vehement shift away from the egocentricity of dominant western tradition towards theories of subjectivity that enlist what is normatively cast as external to subjectivity for its very constitution. The Surrealists adopted this alternative viewpoint, and explored the claim that subjects are neither isolated—within themselves, from each other, or from the complex and fluctuating cultural conditions they inhabit—nor impervious to contradiction. It is, it seems, precisely in this contested space of subjectification that a principle such as freedom both comes into being and is made critically accountable.

Nikolas Rose’s critique of the political mechanisms of the so-called ‘Free West’, wherein subjects are imagined, in the Cartesian legacy, as independent and autonomous agents of free choice, is significant here. His text unravels the properties and function of ‘agency’, a contested term in poststructural and queer theory, in the intricate processes of subject production to articulate the Marxist idea of ‘freedom’ deployed in Surrealist texts. In \textit{Inventing Our Selves}, Rose states:

\begin{quote}
[A]gency is itself an effect, a distributed outcome of particular technologies of subjectification that invoke human beings as subjects of a certain type of freedom and supply the norms and techniques by which that freedom is to be recognized,
\end{quote}

assembled and played out in specific domains... Agency is, no doubt, a ‘force’, but it is a force that arises not from any essential properties of ‘the subject’ but out of the ways in which humans have been-assembled-together.\textsuperscript{16}

Agency, then, is not inherent to subjectivity. Nor does agency reside outside of subjects. In being-assembled-together, subjects are enmeshed in both the forces that shape them and the spaces they are produced in and simultaneously produce. In other words, as individuals and as groups, subjects interact with each other and their cultural contexts in a process of ‘becoming’; a ceaseless play of reciprocal exchanges wherein freedom neither pre-exists the subject as an essence nor functions as a unilateral and universal constant. In this schema, freedom is a movement, or series of movements, bound in power relations that manifest themselves differently between subjects and social spaces in particular contexts and at specific points in time and space. Since freedom depends upon restriction, the importance of tracing these movements, and interrogating the structures that govern them, is crucial in firstly identifying who does and who does not have access to freedom in any given situation, and then determining the reasons for, and effects of, these inequalities. Only from here, and in the integration of mind and body, individuals and culture, ideologies and practices where subjects are-assembled-together, can the necessary conditions for effective resistances to hegemonic structures and practices be established. And this is where Surrealism begins to make its necessary intervention.

\section*{II}

The first issue of \textit{La Révolution surréaliste} (Figure One) published on the inside front cover a declaration of Surrealism’s indefinability within existing nomenclatures:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
LA RÉVOLUTION SURREALISTE

Directeurs:
Pierre NAVILLE et Benjamin PÉRET
18, Rue de Grenelle
PARIS (7e)

Le surréalisme ne se présente pas comme l'exposition d'une doctrine. Certaines idées qui lui servent actuellement de point d'appui ne permettent en rien de préjuger de son développement ultérieur. Ce premier numéro de la Révolution Surréaliste n'offre donc aucune révélation définitive. Les résultats obtenus par l'écriture automatique, le récit de rêve, par exemple, y sont représentés, mais aucun résultat d'enquêtes, d'expériences ou de travaux n'y est encore consigné : il faut tout attendre de l'avenir.

Nous sommes
à la veille
d'une
RÉVOLUTION

Vous pouvez y prendre part :
Le BUREAU
CENTRAL
DE RECHERCHES
SURREALISTES
15, Rue de Grenelle,
PARIS 7e
est ouvert tous les jours de 4 h. 1/2 à 6 h. 1/2

Figure One
Le surréalisme ne se présente pas comme l’exposition d’une doctrine... Ce premier numéro de la Révolution surréaliste n’offre donc aucune révélation définitive. Les résultats obtenus par l’écriture automatique, le récit de rêve, par exemple, y sont représentés, mais aucun résultat d’enquêtes, d’expérience ou de travaux n’y est encore consigné : il faut tout attendre de l’avenir.17

Rather than presenting a definitive exposition of Surrealism, the journal set out to represent, primarily through the practices of *l’écriture automatique* [free writing18], dream analysis, and the play of signification systems, phenomena that had until then largely been precluded from rigorous scrutiny. Its aim was not to consign signifiers with fixed meanings—a move that reduces the complexities of surréality to the confines of existing epistemologies—but rather to access and examine the effects that possibilities exceeding rational thought and full-consciousness inspire.

In the preface to the 1924 inaugural issue (Figure Two), Jacques-André Boiffard, Paul Éluard, and Roger Vitrac insisted upon the value of dream as a realm capable of expanding and redefining the boundaries of human subjectivity: ‘Le process de la connaissance n’étant plus à faire, l’intelligence n’entrant plus en ligne de compte, le rêve seul laisse à l’homme tous ces droits à la liberté’.19 Entwined in a treatise of emancipation, dreams present a perspective of ‘reality’ that is qualitatively different to rational experience. Exceeding the realm of somnolence in Surrealist ideology, the mechanisms and effects of dreams traverse the frontier of sleep and wake to invade

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17 *La Révolution surréaliste*, No. 1, 1924, inside front cover [translation: ‘Surrealism does not present itself as a statement of doctrine...this first issue of the *Surrealist Revolution* offers, therefore, no definitive disclosure. The results obtained by automatic writing and the narrative of dream, for example, are represented there, but no results of surveys, of experiences or studies have yet been recorded: we must all await the future’].

18 This phrase has been translated literally as ‘automatic writing’ and as ‘automatism’ in the body of writing on Surrealism. However, ‘free writing’ seems to me to better encompass the notion of free or associative writing as a way of capturing glimpses of the unconscious.

19 *La Révolution surréaliste*, No.1, 1 [translation: ‘the process of knowledge being no longer made, intelligence no longer being taken into account, only dream allows man all his rights to freedom’].
PREFACE

Le procès de la connaissance n’étant plus à faire, l’intelligence n’entrant plus en ligne de compte, le rêve seul laisse à l’homme tous ses droits à la liberté. Grâce au rêve, la mort n’a plus de sens obscur et le sens de la vie devient indifférent.

Chaque matin, dans toutes les familles, les hommes, les femmes et les enfants, S’ILS N’ONT RIEN DE MIEUX A FAIRE, se racontent leurs rêves. Nous sommes tous à la merci du rêve et nous nous devons de subir son pouvoir à l’état de veille. C’est un tyran terrible habillé de miroirs et d’éclairs. Qu’est-ce que le papier et la plume, qu’est-ce qu’écrire, qu’est-ce que la poésie devant ce géant qui tient les muscles des nuages dans ses muscles ? Vous êtes là béguinant devant le serpent, ignorant les feuilles mortes et les pièges de verre, vous craignez pour votre fortune, pour votre cœur et vos plaisirs et vous cherchez dans l’ombre de vos rêves tous les signes mathématiques qui vous rendront la mort plus naturelle. D’autres et c’est les prophètes dirigent aveuglément les nuits vers l’ave- PARLE par leur monde ravi ou se félicite. ouvre les portes ceux pour ouvrir. Le sur-

Carrefour des ments du sommeil, du tabac, l’opium, de la morphine; le brouiller de ne dormons buvons pas, mais pas nous ne nous piquions pas et nous rêvons, et la rapidité des aiguilles des lampes introduit dans nous cerveaux la merveilleuse éponge défluerie de l’or. Ah ! si les os étaient gonflés comme des dirigeables, nous visiterions les ténèbres de la Mer Morte. La route est une sentinelle dressée contre le vent qui nous enlace et nous fait trembler devant nos fragiles apparences de rubis. Vous, collés aux échos de nos oreilles comme la pieuvre-horloge au mur du temps, vous pouvez inventer de pauvres histoires qui nous ferons sourire de nonchalance. Nous ne nous dérangeons plus, on a beau dire : l’idée du mouvement est avant tout une idée inerte", et l’arbre de la vitesse nous apparait. Le cerveau tournant comme un ange et ses paroles sont les grains de plomb qui tuent l’oiseau. Vous à qui la nature a donné le pouvoir d’allumer l’électricité à midi et de rester sous la pluie avec du soleil dans les yeux, vos actes sont gratuits, les nôtres sont rêvés. Tout est chuchotements, coïncidences, le silence et l’étincelle raviscent leur propre révélation. L’arbre chargé de viande qui surgit entre les pavés n’est surnaturel que dans notre étonnement, mais le temps de fermer les yeux, il attend l’inauguration.

Berkeley

Figure Two
conscious reason. Indeed, a dream image, or a dream memory, can haunt subjects in their waking state differently to, and sometimes more acutely than, an event perceived in consciousness. The extent to which the spectres of dreams permeate waking ‘reality’ is often overlooked or repressed, and Surrealism insists this imbalance is redressed (‘nous sommes tous à la merci du rêve et nous devons de subir son pouvoir à l’état de veille’).

Harnessing the elusive power of unconscious experiences that haunt consciousness, and exploring the possibilities that exist between and beyond this binary pairing, was perceived as a route towards the emancipation of the human subject from restrictive bourgeois rationalism:

Le surréalisme ouvre les portes du rêve à tous ceux pour qui la nuit est avare. Le surréalisme est le Carrefour des enchantements du sommeil, de l’alcool, du tabac, de l’étér, de l’opium, de la cocaïne, de la morphine; mais il est aussi le briseur de chaînes, nous ne dormons pas, nous ne buvons pas, nous ne fumons pas, nous ne prions pas, nous ne nous piquons pas et nous rêvons, et la rapidité des aiguilles des lampes introduit dans nos cerveaux la merveilleuse éponge déflurie de l’or.

Surreal encounters force fissures through which the unconscious can be glimpsed. By loosening the threads that bind dream in the ‘immaterial’ realm of sleep and imagination, the Surrealists sought to liberate suppressed nodes of creativity therein in order to liberate the play between consciousness and unconsciousness.

The direction of this enquiry was doubtless influenced by Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical work of 1900, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This seminal text propelled the unconscious from its Enlightenment status as an irrational subordinate of

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20 *La Révolution surréaliste*, No.1, 1 [translation: ‘we are all at the mercy of dream and we should be subject to dream’s power in the waking state’].

21 *La Révolution surréaliste*, No.1, 1 [translation: ‘Surrealism opens the doors of dream to all those for whom the night does not offer enough. Surrealism is the crossroads of the delights of sleep, alcohol, tobacco, ether, opium, cocaine, morphine; but it is also the breaker of chains, we do not sleep, we do not drink, we do not smoke, we do not snort, we do not inject ourselves, and we dream, and the speed of the needles of the lamps introduce in our brains the marvelous deflowered sponge of gold’].
consciousness to an indisputable component of human experience. The theoretical repercussions of Freud’s text resound through Surrealist explorations of the unconscious and its relation to consciousness. Dreams, like the subjects who enact them, are aetiologically linked to the conditions under which the body occupies space: physically, psychically, and socially. In this sense, the Surrealist fascination with dreams as manifestations affected by a synthesis of internal and external worlds exerts pressure on the oppositional slash that separates interiority from exteriority. Interestingly though, by attempting to reinstate the self-determined subject, the language usually used to talk about dreams seeks to preclude the latent threat they present to Cartesian legacies of subjectivity. As Freud explains:

[T]he finished dream strikes us as something alien to us. We are so little obliged to acknowledge our responsibility for it that [in German] we are just as ready to say ‘mir hat geträumt’ [‘I had a dream’, literally ‘a dream came to me’] as ‘ich habe geträumt’ [‘I dreamt’]. What is the origin of this feeling that dreams are extraneous to our minds?²²

The ‘rational’ subject, whose mind is superior to and in control of the body, is ill-equipped to cope with the implications of the revered cerebral being producing such irrationality. It therefore expels the source to the most remote regions of exteriority in a repressive process of purification which ostensibly enables its rationality and coherence to be maintained. However, Freud’s incisive example highlights the extent to which language (re)etches the dominant codes of modern western epistemologies deep in the collective cultural consciousness. Furthermore, the spatial demarcation of relations between interiority and exteriority undoes itself where dream is concerned: a dream is both interior and exterior in rationalist thought; inhabiting the mind yet expelled from it,

²² Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 112.
it is cast outside the internal realm yet experienced within it. The unconscious, which
dreams both reside in and represent, is thus ominously cast in an ambiguous position
outside of the subject even though it arises within it, exceeding the taxonomy that seeks
to restrain it. As with Aristotle’s case for non-contradiction, the very premise of this
common sense argument undoes itself, countering the threat of contradiction with the
illogical contradiction it paradoxically abhors.

The Surrealists seized these inconsistencies endemic in rationalism’s tracing of
interior and exterior domains. Their investigations demonstrate that if language is capable
of reproducing the normative meanings extolled by the Cartesian world-view, it is also
poised to produce challenges to these meanings. Cultivating points of resistance not only
inspires different meanings to open up possibilities, it also unearths the motivations and
implications embroiled in the reproduction of conventional meanings, and it undermines
the dominant preoccupation with the fixing of meaning itself. Free writing, described by
Breton in Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme as ‘une clé capable d’ouvrir indéfiniment
cette boîte à multiple fond qui s’appelle l’homme’21 (Figure Three), was adopted as a
method of experimentation by André Breton and Philippe Soupault prior to the birth of
the French Surrealist Movement. A collection of their free writings was serialised in the
review Littérature throughout 1919, and later published as Les Champs magnétiques,
which is largely regarded as the precursor to Surrealism. The unpremeditated
performance of writing through free association seeks access to parts of the self that are
usually obstructed by the rational and rationalising orders of consciousness. The aim is
not to uncover a definite ‘truth’ buried beneath the strata of normative conscious ‘reality’,

21 André Breton, Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme (Paris: Galerie Beaux-Arts, 1938), 4 [translation: ‘a
key capable of opening indefinitely this box of multiple depths that is man’].

33
AUTOMATIQUE (écriture) — L'écriture automatique et les récits de rêves présentent l'avantage de fournir des éléments d'appréciation de grand style à une critique désemparée, de permettre un reclassement général des valeurs lyriques et de proposer une clé capable d'ouvrir indéfiniment cette boîte à multiple fond qui s'appelle l'homme (A. B.) — Durant des années, j'ai compté sur le débit torrentiel de l'écriture automatique pour le nettoyage définitif de l'écume littéraire. A cet égard, la volonté d'ouvrir toutes grandes les écluses restera sans doute l'idée génératrice du surréalisme (A. B.)

VENIR — « L'Avenir n'est qu'un mort, qui, s'étendant, revient. » (Formes)

VERSE — « L'averse boule de neige des terrains nordiques » (A. B.). « Cette averse est un feu de paille » (P. E.)

AVION — « Sym. de Aéroplane » — L'avion est un symbole sexuel, qui sert à aller rapidement de Berlin à Vienne (attribué à Freud).

Les avions redoutent les jardins, et pour cause (cf. les Jardins Gobe-Avions, de Max Ernst). » (J. L.)

AZUR — « Une étoile nommée azur — et dont la forme est terrestre » (P. E.). « Si une femme échevelée te suit n'y prends pas garde. — C'est l'azur. Tu n'as rien à craindre de l'azur. » (A. B.)

Figure Three
but to encounter the apparent disorder through which unconscious aspects of the self, and their relation to consciousness, can be more fully explored. In this sense, free writing seeks to emulate a waking dream state in which the opposition between consciousness and unconsciousness are temporarily abated, if not permanently resolved. ‘Lune de miel’ (Figure Four), an example of free writing, eludes interpretation in the conventional sense. To ‘understand’ the text is not to assign it with fixed meanings, but rather to acknowledge the effects its contradictions produce. Indeed, a preoccupation with conventional hermeneutics constitutes a grave miscomprehension of the practice and its purpose. The value of free writing lies not in how we can pin its meaning but in its presentation of the ostensibly conflicting domains of imagination and reality, unconsciousness and consciousness, in the same spatio-temporal moment.

In its semantic play across the culturally imposed frontiers of ostensibly distinct states, free writing enables the imagination to express creativity which is often comical, inspiring, revealing, and threatening in turn. Moreover, in harnessing the revolutionary possibilities of language, it profoundly disrupts the complacency of established taxonomies. The unveiling, and inclusion, of fleeting moments of unconsciousness through the technique of free writing enacts Freud’s proposition that ‘dreams give us an occasional glimpse into the depths and recesses of our nature to which we usually have no access in our waking state’. Free expression, with its capacity to access, if fleetingly, fragments of unconscious thought in the waking state, developed Freud’s demystification of the opposition between waking consciousness and sleeping unconsciousness. In bringing the ‘occasional glimpse’ of unconsciousness into an actively creative and

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Lune de Miel

A quoi tiennent les inclinations réciproques? Il y a des jalousies plus touchantes les unes que les autres. La rivalité d’une femme et d’un livre, je me promène volontiers dans cette obscurité. Le doigt sur le tempe n’est pas le canon d’un revolver. Je crois que nous nous écoutions penser mais le machinal “A rien” qui est le plus fier de nos refus n’eut pas à être prononcé de tout ce voyage de noces. Moins haut que les asters il n’y a rien à regarder fixement. Dans quelques trains que ce soit, il est dangereux de se pencher par la portière. Les stations étaient clairement repartées sur un golfe. Le mer qui pour l’œil humaine n’est jamais si belle que le ciel ne nous quittait pas. Au fond de nos yeux se perdaient de jolies calculs orientés vers l’avenir comme ceux des murs de prisons.

Honeymoon

To what are mutual attractions due? There are some jealousies more touching than others. I willingly wander in such baffling darkness as that of the rivalry between a woman and a book. The finger on the side of the forehead is not the barrel of a revolver. I believe that although we paid heed to each others thinking, the automatic “Of nothing” that is our proudest denial did not once need to be uttered during the whole wedding spree. Lower than the stars there is nothing to stare at. No matter what train you may be travelling in, it is dangerous to lean out of the carriage-door window. The stations were plainly distributed about a bay. The sea that to the human eye is never so beautiful as the sky did not leave us. In the depths of our eyes disappeared neat reckonings bearing on the future like those of prison walls.

Figure Four
political arena, it troubles dualist partitions more radically than might first be imagined. Indeed, the spectral presence that these ‘glimpses’ assert cannot easily be contained by the frontiers that police artistic endeavour, cultural contestation, dissident subjects, and political enquiry.

Similarly, Surrealist language games use free association as a basis from which the collaboration of conscious and unconscious worlds exacts a redistribution of meaning wherein contradictions appear as nodes of ingenuity rather than anomalies in need of resolution or exclusion. Breton’s ‘Poem’ (Figure Five) comprises a selection of newspaper clippings pasted together at random. The fantastic images the process fabricates deconstruct the space inhabited by the stroke of oppositional difference, creating original semantic maps through an unpremeditated reorganisation of existing words in new spatial configurations. Normative assumptions that meaning is singular, definitive, and fixed are undermined as words are physically decontextualised and meanings are resignified. This tangible process of recontextualisation explicitly demonstrates both the contingencies of meaning and the importance of spatial relations between signifiers in the mechanics of semantic production: it is not the isolated signifier that is imbued with meaning but its occupation of space in relation to other signifiers in the process of signification. Likewise, the word game ‘Definitions’, in which subjects ‘free write’ answers to their partner’s concealed ‘free written’ questions, yields some remarkable results.25 As Marcelle Ferry and André Breton’s example of this game, ‘1934 Dialogue’ (Figure Six), demonstrates, the spontaneous exchange in which language

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25 In this Surrealist game, one person writes a random question at the top of a piece of paper, folds the paper to conceal the question, and hands it to their partner who writes a random answer without having seen the question. It is crucial that both the questions and the answers are written immediately and without conscious thought, as in free writing.
Tout pourrait s'arranger si bien
PARIS EST UN GRAND MÉLANGE
Surveillez
Le feu qui couve
LA FIÈVRE
Du beau temps
Sachez que
Les rayons ultra-violets
tombent sur la tâche
Courte et bonne

LE PREMIER JOURNAL BLANC
DU HASARD
Le rouge sera

Le deuil est
OUI, EST-IL ?
dans la mémoire
dans sa maison
au-delà des Ardents

Je vais,
entr'ansant
Ce qu'on a fait, ce qu'on va faire

ANDRÉ BRETON, Poème, 1924
THE 1934 DIALOGUE
Marcelle Ferry and André Breton

B. What is beauty?
M. It is an ethereal cry.

M. What is mystery?
B. It is the proud wind through a suburb.

M. What is solitude?
B. It is the queen sitting at the base of the throne.

M. What is an encounter?
B. It is a savage.

M. What is [chance]?
B. It is a Gothic novel.

M. What is saying farewell never to meet again?
B. It is a slave market stretching as far as the eye can see.

B. What is everything that is not?
M. It is a liking for the worst.

M. What is jealousy?
B. It is a bugle on a laid table.

B. What is the number 7?
M. It is a four-poster bed with a hanged man.

M. What is fire that smoulders?
B. It is a screech-owl followed by a horse.

M. What is debauchery?
B. It is the place in a meadow where the grass suddenly becomes thicker. It can be seen from a long way off.

B. What is the future?
M. It is something we don't think about enough.

M. What is a path through the imagination?
B. It is a light green wheel-driven pump that has never been of service.

M. What is surrealism?
B. It is old tin cutlery before the invention of the fork.

M. What is not knowing?
B. It is a blind eagle guided by its prey.

M. What is black magic?
B. It is a litter of small cats spotted with butterflies.

B. What is womankind?
M. It is a star in water.

Figure Six
traverses divisions between and across the conscious and unconscious worlds of multiple subjects further complicates the flow of creative (re)signification. The playful contradictions and peculiar ambiguities produced in these collaborations sanction a certain freedom from restrictive oppositions between subjects as well as between consciousness and unconsciousness. Furthermore, the interrogative form, which typically demands a coherent answer, is destabilised by these incongruous images, calling into question not only the assumptions of semantic content but also the rules that govern semiotic forms. Indeed, if meanings are not isolated but dependent on the shifting relations of their production, then a redefined spatial paradigm is certain to inflect language and its significations so that ‘reality’ can be understood differently.

Surrealist word play, then, is not simply a self-indulgent form of futile expression: it is a political tool deployed as a revolutionary practice. The notion that thought is essentially rational is problematised by Surrealist creative expression, which is incongruous with rationalism and hence cannot be governed by it. Certainly, Surrealism presents a paradigmatic alternative to the rationality/irrationality dichotomy wherein thought and experience do not stand in presupposed opposition. Freud’s description of dream makes a significant claim:

[I]n dreams...we appear not to think but to experience; that is to say we attach complete belief to the hallucination...far from being mere presentations, the elements of dream are true and real mental experiences of the same kind as arise in a waking state...it must therefore be allowed that in dreams the mind is in the same relation to its images and perceptions as it is in waking.  

Indeed, thought and experience are relationally codependent: a thought is an experience, and we cannot experience without thinking. They are neither diametrically opposed nor

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26 Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 115-16.
confined respectively to the precariously estranged realms of waking and sleeping, consciousness and unconsciousness. Subjects are always already embodied, in sleep as in wake, and thought can no more be separated from experience than the mind can from the body. Surrealist experimentation thus questions not only where the line between reality and the imagination is drawn, but if, indeed, it can be drawn at all. If dream and the unconscious cannot be expelled from the subject’s interiority, then the imaginary cannot, within the parameters of rationalism’s own reasoning, be exorcised from the realm of reality. By demonstrating the sophism of normative assumptions as well as the dichotomous premise through which they are formulated and extolled, Surrealist explorations of language and its significations cohere with Freud’s general thesis that the unconscious, far from being an irrelevant realm situated ‘elsewhere’, is of utmost significance to the everyday life of the individual. Furthermore, in challenging binary exclusions, these semantic encounters forge open fractures already present in the restrictive surface of realism and its rationalist framework. In so doing, they open up pockets of resistance to enable richer understandings of human realities.

The Surrealist endeavour for individual and collective freedom from rigid social structures, then, thrives on the paradoxes and ambiguities endemic in dreams and in surreal waking states. In dream, free of the constraints of dualist taxonomies, thoughts and experiences that in rational consciousness appear contradictory coexist. Freud writes:

Thoughts which are mutually contradictory make no attempt to do away with each other, but persist side by side...In waking life the suppressed material in the mind is prevented from finding expression and is cut off from internal perceptions owing to the fact that the contradictions present in it are eliminated—one side being disposed of in favour of the other, but during the night...this suppressed material finds methods and means of forcing its way into consciousness.27

27 Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 755 and 768-69.
In other words, oppositional binaries are both rationalised and naturalised as ‘facts’ in the realm of consciousness, by consciousness’ mechanisms, and in the interests of its preservation. However, Surrealist expression, which emulates in waking states the coexistence of contradiction present in dreams, seeks in the relation between the terms of binary oppositions a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of ‘reality’ as a fluctuating and dialogic network of exchange. This deployment of contradictions as dynamic nodes, rather than destructive flaws, presents a useful juncture from which to reconstitute ‘freedom’ across patterns of non-hierarchical equality.

A common thread woven through Surrealism, Freudian theory, and Marxist ideology is an avowal of the supreme imperative to continually reassess established ideas and to think beyond existing paradigms in order to understand the world differently. Their mutual resistances to the structures of hegemonic assumptions align them morphologically with (sexual) subject positions and dissident desires that challenge the hierarchical binaries of the dominant sexual matrix. In spite of their vital differences and specificities, these philosophies converge in Freud’s affirmation that ‘we must always be prepared to drop our conceptual scaffolding if we feel that we are in a position to replace it by something that approximates more closely unknown reality’. 28 The notion that subjects operate as part of a series of interwoven mechanisms in constant flux attests to Freud’s proposal that ‘[w]hat we are doing here is once again to replace a topographical way of representing things by a dynamic one’. 29 Certainly, redefined spatial patterns that disentangle representation from its grounding in stasis offer a more flexible way of looking and seeing from which to (re)position subjects in space. Furthermore, as I will

discuss next, this process enlists 'space' itself as a reproductive concept, rather than simply a representational backdrop, which surpasses the limits of realism.

III

There resides in western epistemologies a rationalist preoccupation with assigning and fixing meaning. 'Explaining' something, or at least occupying the position of being deemed able to do so, arguably asserts some form of control over any threat that the previously 'inexplicable' presents. However, attempting to explain the 'unknown' within existing nomenclatures—to trace it back to something already known—results at best in a fragile and fallible description of uncertainty and at worst in a reinscription of an inadequate paradigm which misrepresents both the 'unknown' and the established paradigm's incapacity to deal with it. Surrealism aims to exploit these ruptures in rationalism's desire to make the unknown signify in accordance with the oppositions of hegemonic reasoning, and in opening up the possibilities of signification rather than closing them down it seeks to restituate the parameters of 'freedom'. The contingent demand for a critical approach that enables us to think about space differently is crucial to (re)viewing subject positions and sexual desires normatively elided by the oppositional strictures of hetero- and homosexuality.

Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity, published in 1916, troubled the ostensibly 'essential' rules of physics that had governed conceptions of space since Isaac Newton's discoveries two hundred years previously. Newton's scientific discourse, inhabiting a historical moment in which science held the omnipotent esteem that had previously been the exclusive domain of God, determined that space and time intervals
are absolute. However, Einstein’s findings quashed the notion that space and time are fixed, replacing Newton’s metaphysical absolutes with a proposition that measurements in time and space change according to both the position of the observer in relation to the observed and the compliant or divergent movements of the observer and the observed through space. This challenge to the framework of classical physics undoubtedly inflects the way we understand subjectivity, since science, as a cultural discourse like any other, both produces and is produced by culture, its resident subjects, and their various motivations. Hence, in relative time and space, subjects are never independent inert entities; rather, they are integral to the functioning of the complex and variable relationships that engender them. Indeed, as ‘subjects’ in and of culture, we have no intrinsic meaning external to our interactions with each other as part of time and space.

In the wider cultural context, then, Einstein’s theories urge an ontological shift which foregrounds both the significance of perspective and the relation between subjects and objects in determining conceptions of ‘reality’. How something appears to the viewer and is subsequently experienced is always relative: to the transient positions occupied by subjects in specific cultural contexts and with regard to a spatio-temporal framework that is neither stable nor predetermined but dynamic and in flux. Hence exchanges within and between individual subjects not only transgress the cultural boundaries that police interiority and exteriority, as Marx and Freud denoted, they are also inflected by movements in and across space and time. This Einsteinium model of spatio-temporality is deployed by Surrealism primarily through anamorphism, which Katherine Conley

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30 Isaac Newton proposed that space and time were absolute and the speed of light was relative whereas Einstein found measurements of space and time to be relative and the speed of light to be a material absolute.
suggests is emblematic of the Surrealist world-view in that it enables two different images to coexist in the same space, metaphorically conveying the concomitance of two mutually exclusive worlds that converge at the point of ‘surreality’. From the Greek *morphe* [form] and *ana* [seen backwards or retrospectively], anamorphism contests two historically entrenched myths about time. Firstly, that it is separable into discrete categories which move through space, independent of it, to carve a path of singular linear progression. Secondly, that it is indifferent to the subjects and objects with which it interacts. Both of these repudiations are of particular interest in Surrealist textuality.

The idea that ‘reality’ is, at very least, inflected by the specific point from which it is viewed, is pursued in Max Morise’s caricature of time, ‘Itinéraire du Temps de la Préhistoire à Nos Jours’ [Itinerary of Time from Prehistory to Now] (Figure Seven), published in *La Révolution surréaliste*. The opening line, ‘La préhistoire prend place dans le Massif Central’ [Prehistory took place in the Massif Central], sets out the Newtonian relation between space and time, denoting a period of time as fixed in a specific place. However, the figurative character ‘Temps’ [Time] etches ‘des voies détournées et peu précises’ [diverted and imprecise routes] through the spaces of history, encountering events which cause deflections and diversions in its path. In Morise’s narrative, as Time enters the seventeenth century, the observer shifts from his or her elevated position that has regarded Time’s route as a linear procession ‘à vol d’oiseau’ [as the crow flies] in order to view it from a new perspective, ‘au ras du sol’ [at ground level], from where the undulations of Time are more apparent, for ‘elle cesse d’être tracée sur une surface plane’ [it stops being traced on a flat surface]. Time’s coordinates hence exceed the two-

ITINÉRAIRE DU TEMPS
DE LA PRÉHISTOIRE À NOS JOURS

La préhistoire prend place dans le Manuscrit Central.

Du lundi, par des vents variables et peu précis, s'échappe lentement vers le ciel
soumis au temps, le temps qui l'a emporté brutalement au plafond pour partie et météorite
vue en Toile ou ailleurs en J.-C. Le nom d'Énée est écrit là en gros caractères.
L'emblème au centre est l'émicité, le temps emporté la Cohue au sixième siècle et l'espace
fleuvent à Rome. II ne veut d'être plus de deux ou trois siècles à traverser les Alsace, au cœur de
promenades de Curie le temps de l'Atlas et, commençant une fois de plus de direction, il pointe nada vers Paris, où il se coiffait. En l'an 800, Charlemagne est servir un peu au nord de la Camargue. Puis le temps tourne quelque
difficile à se laver en passage par les murs et les corridors du centre de la France, et la Romanisation se fait dériver l'empire vers le dehors, tandis que l'Inde est
acheter par un soin vif de salut.

Bien que le texte soit par le temps et affiche successives de commis, l'obsé
ration doit alors quitter la position très élevée qui l'attirait jusqu'à de temps
par cette ligne à vol d'oiseau, puis remonté au rut du sol à proximité du rocher
qui marque l'entrée du XVIIe siècle, comme le montre la figure 1. De ce mouvement pour
, l'observation voit un peu de ce qui est plus apparents avec Frans
cine R et le Mon IV. A la banlieue de Béthel III, la ligne suit une ligne méridionale
que semble bien être elle au massif Cévennes.

À l'entrée du XVIIe siècle, la ligne grille de l'immensité est qu'elle vient jus
coups pour prendre une ascension considérable, un fleuve échappe jusqu'à la mort de
Louis X. La survenue tuer est heureux, à un commencement, par une gravure
représentant un rocher grimper où l'on voit le temps de Lefebvre, étrangers des hérésies sans
l'aide envoyé de Louis XIII et, à l'endroit de leur écart de 1731 en gros caractères. Cette
dевенет posséder la direction qui elle va au sud de la tache de Louis XIV.
Devant cette direction, il existe une complète à la fin du XVIIIe siècle, qu'on
alors à côté à la mort du Marius-Auguste (fig. 2).

À partir de Louis XVI, la ligne continue à décrire sa courbe vers la gauche
partie de la mort de Temple et, en suite, le relief non uniforme, ils vont dans une courbe de courbe dans le trait qui est occupé
par l'usure.

La XIVe siècle commence au 1815 (fig. 3). Pour l'abscisse, il faut se placer sur
le lieu du temps même, et pointe 1800 à son sommet. La ligne continue
1828 Ce siècle laisse une hémisphère féodal rompant le développement des lois
mesures de, mais une direction grossièrement rectiligne et, après une courte descente, gagne
vers une partie qui devient abordée dans les défilés venus.

Mais maintenant, et celle du XXIe siècle, marque la sortie de la lumière éclairée et le
sétablement d'émigrer avec plus l'aventure. Mais le ligne se trouve peu de temps en direction une
nouvelle et légère courbe vers la gauche, de remettre une marche de plus et plus juste.
En 1939, elle est conclue d'un plus mauvais de 45. En 2000, elle sera rattachée de la ven
tiqué et l'on peut de même en même la position, on va donner qu'elle
traité à un porteur dans l'adieu de l'espace.

Au delà de l'an 2000, il n'y a rien.

Figure Seven
dimensional plane, and the topographical mode of representation is replaced with a dynamic one. Furthermore, in order to grasp the increasing complexity of Time’s path, the observer must overtake Time itself and glance back on it anamorphically; a movement which complicates hitherto clear distinctions between past, present, and future: ‘pour le bien voir, l’observatuer doit se transporter à fin du XVIII siècle’ [to see well, the observer should go to the end of the eighteenth century]. Like the illustrious anamorphic skull in Hans Holbein’s celebrated 1533 painting, ‘The Ambassadors’ (Figure Eight), Time can neither be viewed nor inhabited in its entirety from a single perspective. Indeed, to submit to the limitations imposed by epistemological tunnel-vision elides the significant objective of Time’s journey: to demonstrate that a change in the observer’s position alters the meaning and effect of Time itself at any given point in space. Entering the eighteenth century, the diagram of Time secedes into two separate lines running concurrently towards the twenty-first century where ‘on peut de moins en moins lui attribuer une orientation, étant donné qu’elle tend à se perdre dans l’infini de l’espace’ [the observer can less and less attribute time with a direction, given that it is losing itself in the infinity of space]. Here the narrative ends, for ‘au delà de l’an 2000, il n’y a rien’ [beyond the year 2000, there is nothing]. From its fixed location in space during the epoch of prehistory, Time has carved increasingly deviant paths, finally becoming lost in, or fusing into, space.

Morise’s Surrealist account twists normative assumptions about time and its relation to space. The precept that time inhabits space as an absolute that moves through it monochromatically is subtly deconstructed and replaced with the proposal that time and

32 In order to glimpse his or her own mortality, symbolised by the skull, the viewer must look at the picture from an oblique angle which is almost parallel with the picture’s plane.
Figure Eight
space are relative, contingent, and ultimately inseparable from each other. The tension between Morise's representation of time and the narrative path it weaves plays on the convergence of purportedly separate worlds. In this spatio-temporal schism, moments of surrealism force a reconsideration of time's mechanisms that looks beyond this particular depicted 'reality' to other realities existing alongside it. The mobile observer, released from the Newtonian position of inertia, testifies to the notion that time, even within the same space, exists differently according to the contexts it partially constitutes and the specificities through which those contexts are observed. Morise caricatures the rationalist precept that time is a constant and progressive absolute existing independently in space rather than as part of it, and realities are reconfigured as both multiple and contextual, more suited to Einstein's model of space-time than to the Newtonian model of timeless absolutes. As Stephen Hawking describes, '[w]e must accept that time is not completely separate from and independent of space, but is combined with it to form an object called space-time'.

Though the idea that space-time is an 'object' may be problematic, the implications of its morphological (re)visions for a more inclusive and uninhibited conception of subjectivity, in which discrete dichotomies are undermined and differences are extolled rather than elided, are indubitable. The spatio-temporality that Morise's text expounds certainly exerts pressure on the edifice of hierarchical binaries that has historically expelled dissident desires and rendered indeterminate sexual subject positions illegitimate.

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34 Describing space-time as an 'object' gives the impression of a 'thing' rather than a set of relations, which is how space-time might be better understood in the context of my argument.
Similarly, André Mason’s ‘dessins automatiques’ [drawings created through free association as in free writing], published in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (Figure Nine is an example), consist of points and lines produced across the borders of consciousness and unconsciousness to depict sexual subjects more freely in space-time. Rather than serving as reflections or transparent representations, the images perform a conglomeration of realities that distort and undermine both normative ‘reality’ and the finite space it purportedly resides in. Bodies are manifest but indistinguishable, partly individual yet entirely interwoven, entangled in each other and in the spaces they both occupy and assemble. The lines that comprise and connect these bodies, themselves produced through a process that displaces the stroke of oppositional difference, are no more and no less than points in motion, and can be understood as inter-related fragments of subjectivity which deconstruct and reconstruct themselves as part of the dynamic field of space-time. Charles Deleuze and Félix Guattari theorise a similar notion of subjectivity in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

You are a longitude and a latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of non-subjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a *life* (regardless of its duration)—a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its singularity). Or at least you can have it, you can reach it.  

Like André Mason’s reconstructed bodies, these nodes of subjectivity are not substances that can easily be traced, plotted, and defined, but relations of movement and rest. Operating integrally as part of space-time, with the capacities to shape and be shaped by the diverse lines within and among subjects as well as the lines that inform the contexts those subjects inhabit and assemble, these nodes redistribute subjects in/and space in non-

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binary configurations. In this spatio-temporality, the ‘can’ in the last sentence of the Deleuze and Guattari quotation above is not a semiotic construction of future fantasy that is deployed in the ominous promise of capitalism and in the utopian vision of false unity. In Deleuze and Guattari’s text, as in Morise’s, time is not a simple linear progression distinguishable into past, present, and future, and, as a consequence, memory, reality, and fantasy do not inhabit temporally distinct realms. Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘can’ is more aligned with Breton’s call in the ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ for mobilising the always already present yet quashed creativities of the imagination than with a constantly deferred, and morphologically unattainable, potentiality. Indeed, the ‘impossible’ seems possible when viewed from a perspective that twists culturally embedded restrictions, and though culture cannot simply be disposed of and replaced with a facile utopia that ignores material realities, its restrictions can be called to account and resisted. Certainly, resistances to the established hierarchical oppositions that legitimate and uphold hegemony already exist as material realities in the form of indeterminate and interstitial subject positions. Bi-sexual desires, and the subjects who enact them, bear testimony to the repressive limitations of rationalism’s sustaining oppositions, and as such they make possible the apparent impossibilities of the realities realism disclaims.

To imagine spaces in which the surreal convergence of ostensibly exclusive worlds has revolutionary effects demands a critical interrogation of the historical myths that take shelter in the scaffold of hierarchical binary edifices. At the level of sexuality, the governing edifice is, I suggest, the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. While the existing body of work on Surrealism’s founding movement informs its aspiration for emancipation from the oppositional mark that has historically restricted ‘freedom’—a
crucial preliminary to considering sexual freedom in particular—important questions remain unanswered regarding representations of oppositional sexuality and its relations with sex and gender. In what ways, and with what effects, are the binary hierarchies of sex, gender, and sexuality (re)conceived in Surrealist sexual representations? How are dominant relations between sex, gender, and sexuality reinscribed and resisted in Surrealist images and in the sexual narratives these images are written from and rewrite? Does Surrealism constitute a temporary aberration to the principle of non-contradiction that brings bi-sexual desires into the parameters that normatively determine and govern ‘reality’, or does it offer a site through which bi-sexual desires represent other(ed) realities? Do Surrealism’s textual inscriptions erode realism’s ruling edifice of reason to radically alter and expand spaces for dissident desires, or do they ultimately reinstate the hierarchical sexual binaries of the dominant sexual matrix—and relations of difference therein—to occlude sexual dissidences? ‘Be realistic, demand the impossible’: in the field of sexual politics, this demand is for a sexual epistemology which repudiates divisive dichotomies, wherein bi-sexual desires disconcert the very oppositional strictures that have systematically sought to contain them. Is Surrealism’s ‘realistic’ demand for the same ‘impossible’ thing?
Chapter Two

Sex-Gender-Sexuality

All known human societies seem to formulate ideas of the ‘other’ in order to define and legitimate their own social boundaries and individual identities.

Susan Hiller¹

They show him the sights. Sights of what he may possess.

John Berger²

[W]hat is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to exclusive ‘masculine’ parameters, that is, according to phallocentric order. It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it—that amounts to the same thing in the end—but of disrupting and modifying it.

Luce Irigaray³

Contrary to the common assumption that ‘bisexuality’ is a universalising principle that negates difference,⁴ bi-sexual desires depend on difference, embracing and disseminating

⁴ This assumption is derived from, and sanctioned by, western sexual discourses from the Ancients through fin de siècle sexology to late twentieth-century popular culture. Proponents of this widespread belief, which paradoxically coexists alongside oppositionally exclusive sexualities wherein heterosexuality is normative and homosexuality operates as its deviant ‘other’, quote—and, indeed, often misquote—a long narrative of ‘proofs’. These include sources as diverse as the Ancient Greek and Roman etiquettes of marriage alongside pederasty—see Eva Cantarella’s *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* for a thorough critical examination of this; the proliferation of sexology at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—for specific references to bisexuality see Henry Havelock Ellis’s theory of sexual inversion; Sigmund Freud’s theory of pre-Oedipal polymorphous perversity; Wilhelm Stekel’s theory of bi-sexual love; and Fritz Klein’s theory of one hundred per cent intimacy; and the advent of bisexual chic in popular culture during
the possibilities that differences impart. The challenges bi-sexual desires present to the regulatory heterosexual matrix of dominant western culture inhabit a structural schism within the oppositional framework that underpins intelligible patterns of difference. It is in this schism that bi-sexual desires foreground the inadequacies of the presiding sexual matrix, subverting its assumed authority. In the relations between sex, gender, and sexuality—a set of relations wherein sexual subjects are shaped and their freedoms and constraints determined—the location and construction of gender is crucial. With this in mind, Surrealism's problematic stance with regard to gender, and the oppositional sexual relations its representations thus either trouble or maintain, are of critical significance here.

The cultural inscriptions 'male' and 'female', and 'masculine' and 'feminine', are etched into, and from, sexual epistemologies. Alongside heterosexuality and homosexuality, these are the vital constitutive terms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. Typically, 'sex' denotes the anatomical differentiation between men and women who are referred to respectively as 'male' or 'female'; a purportedly oppositional difference that is located in biology and the primary sexual organs. Mental, psychical, and emotional characteristics usually collate in the term 'gender' which is described as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Gender is thus conventionally understood as the cultural expression of binary biological sex. 'Sexuality' is normally described in the modern western world as 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' and refers in general to a sexual attraction towards the

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the late twentieth century—precariously front-lined in *Newsweek* which Marjorie Garber critiques in depth in *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life.*

5 In *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), Michel Foucault explains how the 'homosexual' was born as a species in 1870, some years prior to the birth of the species 'heterosexual': 'Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it
opposite or same sex respectively, and more specifically to the various mechanisms through which such attractions are manifested. Although ‘bisexuality’ is increasingly becoming an accepted term in describing sexual orientation,⁶ it has largely been ignored or subsumed by the hierarchichal hetero/homo coupling.

Even this brief overview of the three composite terms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix hints that its authority is under strain. Sex, gender, and sexuality, and the exchanges among these terms and their derivatives, signify meanings both too complex and too diverse to be impounded in discrete sets of binary opposites, even within the strabismic ideology of heteronormativity. Indeed, the normalised and normalising sexual narratives that underpin and are upheld by the heterosexual matrix are neither comprehensive nor absolute. Inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in and between the conventions of sex, gender, and sexuality, which heteronormativity purports to seamlessly resolve, surface in instances of intersex and gender atypical children; in cross-dressing and drag; in transexuality and transgender; in tomboys and sissies; in people attracted to both men and women or neither; in sexual fetishes and sexual subcultures, sado-masochistic practices and autoeroticism; and more precariously as paedophilia, necrophilia, bestiality, and incest. Less flagrant but equally as threatening to the theoretical complacency of the heterosexual matrix are ‘straight-deviants’⁷ who, though apparently contained by the signifier ‘heterosexuality’ (because that is the term which, from the limited options available, most closely approximates their sexual behaviour

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was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species’, 43.

⁶ Marjorie Garber charts the rising use of the term ‘bisexuality’ in the introduction to Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life.

⁷ I use this term to describe culturally-identified heterosexuals who may or may not self-identify as such, but in some way disturb the ideals of heteronormative sexuality.
though they may politically and epistemologically refute it), do not engage with heteronormativity and may partake in some way or at some point in practices, fantasies, dreams, intimacies, political practices, or ways of thinking that surpass its boundaries. Indeed, sexual desires and sexual practices do not always subscribe to mutually exclusive categories, and can seldom be made to do so without complication, if at all. Furthermore, desires are neither stable nor consistent but are manifested differently within and between different people at different times in different contexts. The fact that sexual desire and sexual practice do not always cohere—within and between individuals and culturally organised collectives—only increases the uncertainty with which dissident desires address an already anxious sexual matrix. Certainly, the movements of dissident desires disturb systematic sex-gender-sexuality configurations and trouble the oppositional division that seeks to contain their composite terms. Viewed this way, such desires exact resignifications of relations between sex, gender, and sexuality wherein sexuality is no longer envisaged as the final stage of a process which puts the finishing touches on a gender derived from biological sex. The resilient presence of dissidence enacted by bi-sexual desires, which continue to activate differences in spite of the manifold cultural discourses and practices that urge bodies to adhere to the culturally fixed oppositional hierarchies of the heteronormative matrix,8 confirms that the sex-gender-sexuality debate is by no means complete. Indeed, the punctilious policing of these categories bears witness to the contrary. If such rudimentary analysis reveals the instability of heteronormative supremacy as well as the inconsistencies in its principle signifiers and

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8 Bodies are, indeed, regulated by the binary codes of heteronormativity: from liberal politics that favour the nuclear family as the root of citizenship and the hetero-couple-friendly society liberalism promotes to its morphological mimesis in the biphobia of lesbian and gay separatist politics and the violent legacy this has carved onto ‘not-gay-not-straight’ bodies.
the mutability of relations between them, how have they been so ubiquitously etched as the bedrock of modern western culture upon which family values, sexual health, emotional wealth, economic security, political ideologies, and epistemological viability (read: personal fulfillment, social stability, and cultural utopia) are based? How have the heterosexual ‘norm’ and its requisite matrix of oppositional terms suffused ideology and the collective unconscious even in divergent discourses such as Surrealism that seek to inspire cultural revolution? These questions demand a theory of representation that takes account of gender’s part in constructing sex and sexuality in general, and makes space for the specific demands of bi-sexual desires wherein the mark of oppositional differences comes undone at the level of gender.

As a charged arena of social taboo,⁹ sex (both as the marker of male and female division and as a physical expression of sexual desire) is a persistent theme in Surrealism. Sexual images that were shocking at the time, and sometimes still are now, are prevalent in Surrealist texts. Yet among the works of its canonised authors, artists, and thinkers, images and narratives that resist dichotomous gender configurations are few and far between. In his seminal book on modern art, The Shock of the New, Robert Hughes suggests that ‘Surrealism was only interested in one kind of sexual freedom, the man’s, and the heterosexual man’s at that’.¹⁰ Indeed, the sexual significations at play in the official story of the French Surrealist Movement reveal schisms between ideological aims and material effects which question if it is as radically seditious as its manifestos and political discourses claim. Taking André Breton’s gender inscriptions as a point of

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⁹ Foucault argues in The History of Sexuality, Vol.1, that, contrary to the perceived notion that they silenced sex, the Victorians introduced a proliferation of discursive and institutional practices concerned with sex. This is the paradox to which I allude in describing sex as at once ‘taboo’ and located in a ‘charged arena’.

departure, I examine how visual representations of ‘woman’ in the Surrealist canon are entangled in the post-WW1 crisis of masculinity which was primarily addressed with a heteronormative policing of sex and gender. Scrutiny of the differences in Man Ray’s portraits of men and his portraits of women unearths a paradox endemic in the French Surrealist Movement which considered sexuality as both a principle site of liberation and the final bastion of hierarchical divisions. If, as I argue, gender norms are enmeshed in heteronormativity, then it follows that gender is ideally located as a site of resistance to inscriptions of oppositional sexualities. In line with this supposition, rereading representations of sexual differences by Marcel Duchamp and René Magritte demonstrates how exerting pressure on gender norms troubles the sex-gender-sexuality matrix by disclosing the hidden contingencies between heteronormativity, patriarchy, and cultural anxiety vis-à-vis difference. How do Surrealist texts extrapolate or quash the vital tensions between subversive sexual images and normalising sexual narratives? This question compels a reconsideration of the incumbent meanings and effects of Surrealist sexual representations for bi-sexual desires.

I

André Breton’s foreword to a collection of monoplates by Man Ray, La photographe n’est pas l’art (Figure One), replicates a historical oppositional division between the sexes that is central to sexual representations in the French Surrealist Movement. Breton uses the personal subject pronoun ‘je’ [I] to universally describe ‘hommes’ [men] as seeking the humble status of ‘petite sourise d’alcove’ [little mouse in an alcove]. It was not uncommon for Breton to assume the role of speaking for, as well as about, others
Convulsionnaires

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HOMMES: Je voudrais bien être petite sourise d’alcôve.

- Je voudrais créer à moi seul des êtres vivants même avec la complicité des orages.
- Que le vent tombe quand je cherche à diriger mes rêves.
- Que ma présence puisse être constatée à la fois en plusieurs lieux.
- Je voudrais pouvoir changer de sexe comme de chemise.
- Qu’on me laisse me promener librement dans les autres planets.
- Et moi mener la vie d’un oiseau, d’un arbre, d’une Pierre le temps de m’en souvenir.
- Je voudrais trouver et perdre la piers philosophale.
- Faire l’amour sans désemparer jamais.
- Supprimer impunément un grand nombre des vivants…
- Après quoi ressusciter un très petit nombre des morts.

FEMMES: Séduire le monde entier comme le premier soleil!
     A défaut seulement de ne pas veiller.

*

Mais voici Man Ray, VOICI L’HOMME A TÊTE DE LANTERNE MAGIQUE.

André Breton

Figure One
with such self-certified authority. Indeed, he was often referred to, with both reverence and derision, as ‘La Pape’, self-appointed Pope of the French Surrealist Movement.

Whether the effects of his personal desires ring true for all ‘men’ is doubtful, though the masculinist impulse of Breton’s text does seem to engage with the crisis of masculinity endemic in post-WW1 Europe¹¹ that reverberates through gender inscriptions in the Surrealist canon. Without making fully-present any ‘male’ weakness, this emphatically, yet ineffectively, denied Achilles’ heel is malevolently exploited: the men of Breton’s text submit to an imaginary subservience, which they paradoxically abhor and eschew in material reality. Certainly, the extensive list of ‘male’ desires that follows contradicts the initial image of men as timid mice in favour of a narrative that reconfirms men in a far from revolutionary gendered narcissism which is disparaging of non-male, non-masculine, and non-heterosexual subject positions.

The numerous motivations Breton claims for men are in no way diffident. He wants to create life ['créer à moi seul des êtres vivants']; to inhabit time and space so that his presence is felt multifariously ['ma présence puisse être constatée à la fois en plusieurs lieux']; to change sex at ease ['changer le sexe comme de chemise']; to wonder

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¹¹ Historically, the advent of Surrealism during the aftermath of World War One was entangled in fraught social circumstances. The material, political, and psychological state of nations involved in the conflict and of their citizens was volatile: at once forward-looking and nostalgic, optimistic and foreboding, frivolous and stoic, relieved and in trepidation. In such a state of flux, norms that had in previous times purportedly offered stability were often reinstated, albeit unwittingly, even by the individuals and the social, political, and creative mechanisms that sought relentlessly to inspire revolution. The material and psychical emasculation of nations—both ‘victors’ and ‘defeated’—who had suffered immense losses infiltrated their populations, resulting in a crisis of masculinity which was often countered by a reinscription of strict male/female polarities (policies of financial reward aimed to promote the woman’s role as child-bearer and increase the population, and policies that reconfirmed the man’s role as bread-winner to boost the crumbling national economy in France are examples of this). For further discussion of the effects of this crisis of masculinity and its manifestation in Surrealism see Dawn Ade’s ‘Surrealism, Male-Female’ published in ed. Jennifer Mundy, Surrealism: Desire Unbound, 171-225 and David Hopkins’ ‘Men Before the Mirror: Duchamp, Man Ray and Masculinity’ published in Art History, Vol.21, No.3 (September 1998), 303-323.
freely in unknown places ['promener librement dans les autres planets’]; to find and lose
the philosopher’s stone ['Trouver et perdre la pierre philosophale’]; to make love
continuously ['faire l’amour sans désemparer jamais’]; to effortlessly stifle life then
resuscitate a selected part of it ['supprimer impunément un grande nombre des
t rappes…apres quoi ressusciter un très petit nombre des morts’]. Men are represented as
seeking an active role in creation and exploration: they are colonisers who depend on the
very categories they are deemed to exceed. Not only do Breton’s men seek ownership of
knowledge; as epistemological fanaticists whose interest is governed by the sowing of
‘self’ and the reaping of profit they demand unconditional control of knowledge, using it
and discarding it at will. However, even the archetypal male preoccupation with
insatiable libido and limitless sexual pursuit cannot ward off the ultimate fantasy of
supremacy: the power to cancel out life and resurrect a selected few from death. The
images posit men firmly as self-determined authors of action, conquest, possibility, and
control. Yet woven into this textual display of masculine audacity is a barely concealed
question: faced with the impossible reality of these desires, what would ‘men’ do? The
authoritative tone barely conceals an endemic anxiety, and the fantasies of omnipresence
and omnipotence belie a fear of obscurity and impotence that the text’s bravado only
confirms. Breton’s adopted notion of masculinity is presented with a grave threat: the loss
of ‘omni’ represents a litany of loss, from primordial unity through all the social
mechanism emplaced to substitute the imaginary impossibility of plenitude. In short, the
loss signifies, and is provoked by, an end of absolutes. Although the Surrealists claimed
to embrace the annihilation of the old order, the subtext here reveals a nostalgic concern
regarding the consequences of such change for those who profit from the structures of
phallocentrism and heteronormativity with which their discourses engage. There is a
nuance of regret for the passing of a time when, in the absence of God, heterosexual
masculine virile man presumed a ‘divine’ position of omnipotence; a feeling of mourning
for realism’s illusory certainties. The paradox of Breton’s ‘man’, neither self-determined
nor ready to relinquish control, is solidified by an inability, or refusal, to look beyond
bipolar divisions of gender, and this runs counter to revolutionary claims for the
dissolution of divisive polarities. In this instance, then, the schism between the Surrealist
aim and the textual inscription is laid bare.

In contrast, the inscription of the role of ‘femmes’ [women] in Breton’s text is
singular: to seduce. The signifier ‘séduire’, however, exceeds singular meaning.
According to the virgin-whore paradox engendered in the biblical narrative and
propagated in western sexual discourses, when seduction is passive (the consequence of
the inert beauty and virtuous humility of the virgin ideal) it is deemed righteous. In this
first scenario, indicative of Catholicism’s Virgin Mary, women are statuesque paragons.
Set in stone, they are worshipped as unreal, and therefore immobilised in the face of the
masculine conquistador drive. The second scenario, wherein seduction is actively
choreographed by the woman who lures, tempts, and beguiles her male ‘prey’, demands a
rupture from the passive ideal and is motivated beyond the control of men. However, the
threat this female action presents to male supremacy is quelled by the ultimate moral
arbitrator, which in the absence of God in Surrealism’s atheist ideology is Breton’s
deified vision of ‘man’. This proposition of a universal if contradictory concept of
‘woman’ that elides crucial differences patently recalls the ambiguity of Eve in the fall of
Eden. Made of Adam’s sacrificial rib, ‘woman’ is forever derivative: she is secondary to
man and forever indebted to him. Any action beyond male jurisdiction is thus deemed treacherous. Moreover, male supremacy is decisive in the imaginary return to Edenic plenitude since when, in Adam’s brief absence, Eve momentarily occupied the realm of full presence, she was tempted by original sin and submitted, irrevocably terminating primordial bliss and marking ‘woman’ simultaneously as a naïve, vulnerable, perfidious enigma. In this fleeting moment of agency, where Eve activates herself to take ownership of knowledge to which Adam is not (and because of her can never become) privy, the paradox of ‘woman’ is located and from here it is perpetually recalled. Through acting when she should have, under God’s instruction, remained passive, Eve’s singular historical ‘creation’ foretells the future of women: she ‘made’ the original mistake (original in that it was the first and original in that it is, in Christian ideology, the source of human suffering). For this fatal action, women continue to be judged, blamed, despised, and contained; free agents when at fault, puppets of man’s tuition when esteemed. At once conniving and credulous, disloyal and subservient, tainted and pure, feared and revered, the irresolute resolution of the Biblical narrative ensures that ‘women’ are bound to operate within male consent.

It is in this contradiction that Breton’s text delivers confirmation of the inexorable role of women: ‘Séduire le monde entière comme le premier soleil! A défaut seulement de ne pas veiller’ [Seduce the entire world like the first sun! Only for lack of not staying up/watching over/looking after/attending to]. The sun, in the aesthetic world-view that Surrealism extols, is both source and sustenance of life on earth. Its role, like that of the ‘women’ with which it is aligned, is pre-scripted and timeless, as is its habit of rising and setting. The promise of dawn followed by the inevitable fall of dusk guarantees that even
in the singular task of seduction, ‘women’ are destined to disappoint, ‘de ne pas veiller’: to fail in simultaneously and unremittingly exciting, protecting, nurturing, and servicing male desire. The terminal female fault is thus fixed in the failure to realise an ideal ‘woman’ that exists only in representations governed by men and, more precisely, pre-exists her as representation. Always already objects of desire in this realm of phallocentric fantasy, women occupy a dubious presence that excludes any discernable future and is contained in a predetermining and predetermined Edenic moment. As Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex*, ‘that is why the being who is most firmly anchored in nature...is also the key to the beyond. Truth, Beauty, Poetry—she is All: once more all under the form of the Other, All except herself’.

Rooted in nature, and cast as ‘Other’, ‘woman’ is placed ‘beyond’ in an imaginary, apolitical, primitive realm. Caught between pedestal and pit in the same spatio-temporal instant, the paradoxical domain of ‘woman’ is held in one contradictory image: object of, and subject to, the entire range of ‘male’ desires, she is never subject herself. Breton’s ‘séduire’ enacts a sinister chain of signification that ensures ‘women’ are made present only in the service of men. Moments of excess which might offer resistance to this incongruous representation are, in the praxes of Breton’s thesis, expelled to an imaginary realm spatially and temporally prior, and external, to the material realm of culture wherein women are rendered immobile.

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13 The primitive realm is, as I explored in detail in my MA thesis ‘Cartographies of Difference: (Re)Visions of the Primitive Space’, a spatio-temporally deferred realm wherein the Other, and the imaginary origins of the self, are located. In my thesis I made the case that the racial, gendered, and sexualised ‘other’ of the white, colonial, male, heterosexual ‘self’ resides in a primitivist space which is constructed by the white, colonial, male, heterosexual self in order to maintain and perpetuate existing power structures. This systematisation of power is evident here in both the paradoxical representation of ‘woman’ and in the spatio-temporality of sexual subjectification.
Accordingly, the ideal that seemingly elevates women to the status of the sun is undermined. More than an isolated nodule of finely veiled misogyny, the male-postulated ideal is embroiled in the fear of male impotence (of being unable to ‘faire l’amour sans désemparer jamais’ or ‘resuciter...des morts’ and, ultimately, of sacrificing male supremacy). As a symbol stripped of agency in material reality, ‘woman’ represents the embodiment of a male-determined ‘feminine’ ideal that operates in necessary hierarchical opposition to ‘man’ and ‘masculinity’. Deployed as a regulatory category, rather than to signify individual material female subjects, ‘woman’ serves as a political mechanism, installed in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, to legitimate and maintain its oppositional hierarchies. As Monique Wittig argues, ‘the category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual’.14 In obscuring the vital differences between ‘woman’ as symbol and women as material subjects, and in deploying the former as the political category that Wittig suggests, Breton’s discourse reconstructs women in an eternal ambivalent contradiction: political as a category only when apolitical as subjects; apolitical as subjects in and of politics. This stifling strategy, which submits women to a mendacious interior exclusion,15 is discernible in the inaugural photo board of the French Surrealist Movement published in the first issue of La Résolution surréaliste (Figure Two). This pictorial register positions an unidentified woman as central to the Surrealist Movement’s composition, yet in reality she is no more than a vehicle through which heteronormative masculinity is persistently reconfirmed. In the Bretonian world-view, de

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15 Diana Fuss uses the term ‘interior exclusion’ to refer to the necessary exclusion of homosexuality from the heterosexual matrix. However, as she states, '[e]very outside is also an alongside; the distance between distance and proximity is sometimes no distance at all', Inside/out, 5-6. This applies equally to the construct of ‘woman’ upon which ‘man’ depends.
Figure Two
Beauvoir writes, ‘she must save humanity’. Indeed, she must ‘save’ it, the grand narrative with which Breton conspires demands, since it is she who originally tainted it. This subtext is substantiated by the inscription at the foot, cited from Charles Baudelaire: ‘La femme est l’être qui projette la plus grande ombre ou la plus grande lumière dans nos rêves’ [woman is the being who casts the greatest shadow or the greatest light into our dreams]. Left untheorised, this notion of ‘women’ (re)naturalises a divisive gender narrative, which is itself dependent on the images it reproduces to consolidate hierarchical oppositional divisions among the terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. In this way, male heterosexual supremacy in hegemonic power relations is dubiously preserved, as is the oppositional morphology—founded in the fixing of sex and gender categories necessary to exclusive heterosexuality and its homosexual counterpart—that negates bisexual desires.

In the same vein, Man Ray, arguably the most celebrated surrealist photographer and certainly the most influential in the French Surrealist Movement, (re)presents in his photographic portraiture an ideal of ‘woman’ that works in opposition to his images of men. In engaging with, and legitimating, pre-discursive gender norms, Man Ray’s photographs secure yet another reiterative layer in the inscription of the mutually exclusive binary terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. His early portraits, taken when he moved from New York to Paris in the early 1920s, document the predominantly male world of the Parisian avant-garde in which he immersed himself. Most striking about these early pictures are the artistic traditions and gender stereotypes they (re)etch in the cultural fabric of modernism, a movement which aspired to subvert established

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16 Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 266.
ideological paradigms. Indeed, at the level of form and content, they make no discernible break with realist painting and its conventions. On the contrary, the historically ‘male’ poses and gazes that confront the viewer of these works suggest a nostalgic desire to reinstate a sense of authority in the face of crumbling ‘masculinity’. It is, I suggest, by considering the process of representation, in particular the gendered and gendering mechanisms deployed in male and female representations, that the effects of such reinscriptions on the sex-gender-sexuality matrix are revealed.

The idea of the portrait as a genre, which developed during the Renaissance to present individuality through facial expressions, bodily mannerisms, adornments, posture and gaze, marked a shift in pictorial traditions away from the depiction of people as generic types towards representations of autonomous, authoritative individuals in the realist tradition. Portraiture, which focused for the first time on representing ‘individuals’ in western art, was seen to immortalise subjects for prosperity (subjects, that is, who held the necessary social and economic status). By fixing a reality that purportedly pre-existed the depiction, Renaissance portraits supposedly conform to the mimetic notion, derived from the Ancients, that a representation is a simple reflection of a preceding truth. However, Pisanello’s two preparatory drawings for a portrait of Filippo Maria Visconte, Duke of Milan (Figure Three) demonstrate explicitly how representation moves beyond mimesis to distort the ‘reality’ it represents. By questioning the site and production of ‘reality’, and relocating it in the relations between original and copy, representation shifts towards the Enlightenment concept of verisimilitude wherein the representation appears
to (re)present a truth but is, knowingly, not that truth.\textsuperscript{17} This is the idea that circulates as a rational norm in culture today, as Susan Sontag explains in her theory of photographic representation: ‘The picture may distort, but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what’s in the picture’.\textsuperscript{18} Even photography, citadel in the visual arts of the common sense reasoning that ‘to see is to believe’ and ‘the camera never lies’ (which functions, in Lyotard’s account, to achieve realism’s primary task of ‘protecting consciousness from doubt’\textsuperscript{19}), is not beyond the opacity of representation. However, photographs inhabit the cultural unconscious as imitations, impervious to artistic intervention, that \textit{present} rather than \textit{represent} ‘reality’. They are, therefore, ostensibly compliant with ‘truth’. The gendering of subjects in photographic images is hence of paramount importance to how the mythologies of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix are reconfirmed or subverted, albeit unwittingly, and arguably even more so than in paintings which are often dismissed as ‘just paintings’: interpretations of ‘truth’ rather than ‘truth’ itself. Certainly, in the cultural imagination photographs tend to harbour a closer kinship with ‘reality’. At the same time, this illusion confirms that representation is crucial to how the limitations of gender, and its place in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, are understood and (re)formed.

In Man Ray’s photographic portraiture, male subjects occupy the material world of culture. An overview of his oeuvre reveals that, case-by-case, men are clothed in the post-Edenic wrapping that conceals the shame of nudity and distances them from nature.

\textsuperscript{17} For a comprehensive account of the history of representation from the Ancients to the Enlightenment, which documents in detail the shift from mimesis to verisimilitude, see M. H. Abrams \textit{The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).


Their gazes strike the viewer as predominantly confrontational, fixed in classic profile poses, or focused in the domain of thought. Together Man Ray’s male subjects present a remarkable air of confidence, composure, and control. These reproductions, conscious or unconscious, of classical Renaissance poses authorise ‘masculinity’ to reclaim the patriarchal authority that is imperative to the order of heteronormativity. His portrait of Pablo Picasso (Figure Four) invokes the prevalent Renaissance belief that located morality in the upright characteristics of the classic Roman profile. As in Masaccio’s ‘Portrait of a Young Man’ (also Figure Four), Picasso’s steadfast stature, gaze staring nonchalantly out from an unyielding face, recalls the symbolic heads of state that certify coinage. The male subject is firmly rooted in the material world where wealth, and the mobility to partake in its exchange, confers supremacy. In the stillness of these two images, then, there resides an incongruous dialogic movement between subjects and culture. The confrontational gaze in Man Ray’s portrait of Salvador Dali (Figure Five) is reminiscent of Botticelli’s ‘Portrait of a Young Man’ (also Figure Five). Though the lighting of the former bestows Dali with a more sinister air, the bold confidence of both men, revealed in their self-assured mastery of the viewer’s gaze, draws the viewer convincingly into the charged relations between observer and observed. In both instances the portrayed subject, watching rather than being watched, seems to command the supreme position in the power play. In these four portraits, the male subjects, though momentarily frozen in time, maintain a certain freedom to be subjects in their own right as well as subjects of the pictures that represent them. The men, represented as real, (re)naturalise the culturally located norms of masculinity, and are thus equipped to set about achieving the extensive list of desires ascribed to Breton’s ‘men’. The referent and
its significations are stabilised, and the crisis of ‘masculinity’, entangled in modernism’s fragmentation of the unified subject, seems to be under control. However, there remains a thread of ‘masculinity’ unseen in these images. It is found in the idealised serenity of Titian’s reflective pariah in the ‘Bust of Christ’ (Figure Six), seated in profile and gazing solemnly ahead, and is replicated in Man Ray’s portrait of Marcel Duchamp (also Figure Six). Here, the slight tilting forward of heads enhances the humble expression that conveys a feeling of pious if silent suffering: the sacrificial lamb of Christian ideology is thus aligned with the generic bearer of the sacrificial rib. The loosely folded arms enclose the clothed yet vulnerable body, signifying first an awareness of the shame inscribed on the naked body by Eve’s transgression then the subsequent self-conscious desire to conceal that shame. The image returns ‘man’ full circle to Breton’s unassuming ‘little mouse’, recalling in her absence the inexorable female fault and the male suffering that it has caused. In these subtle nuances, the image of ‘man’ is made complete, and the divisive schisms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix are resealed.

Like the oil portraits of the Renaissance’s Great Masters, Man Ray’s photographs of men purport to depict individuals either as a direct reflection of a pre-existing reality or as a semblance of reality that purports to leave it untouched. Even the overtly doctored portrait of Max Ernst (Figure Seven), which patently presents modernist fragmentation, rearticulates the notion that an established reality exists, and remains somehow intact, ‘beneath’ the distorting effects of the superimposed text. There is no radical shift at the level of form from the realist mode of representation: the male subject, coherent and resolute, maintains an essential ‘masculinity’ in spite of the cracking surface above him. The lighting and the depth of field in Man Ray’s photographs only emphasise their three-
Figure Six
dimensional realism, enhancing on the one hand their claims to reality and on the other hand the illusory nature of these claims. Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida* that ‘the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum’, anticipating Jean Baudrillard’s influential theory of representation. The simulacrum can be understood as the copy of the represented ‘original’ reality which, in the process of representation, supplants the ‘original’ to become ‘reality’. In other words, it is the copy of a copy which has effectively replaced its original and, as such, can no longer be considered a mere copy. To return to the example of Filippo Maria Visconte’s Duke of Milan (Figure Three) by way of explanation, the ‘original’ sketch of the Duke, nose slightly crooked and head awkwardly hung, is superseded by the ‘improved’ representation upon which the painting is then based. In other words, the ‘original’ sketch, along with the sketched man, ceases to exist as the improved sketch takes its place as the original of which the oil painting then becomes a representation. Barthes explains this process in the context of photographic representation as ‘like the ectoplasm of “what-had-been”: neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch’. Aware that reproduction is more than a copy yet attempting to mask its opacity, Man Ray states that ‘[t]o create is divine, to reproduce is human’. However, his portraits of men enact and conceal this slippage, identified by Barthes, that problematises canonised Surrealist texts: representation is reproduction and creation; a semantic process in which meaning is continuously fixed and unfixed, and established divisions simultaneously etched and subverted, to draw subjects and objects incontestably into the

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inaugural play of difference in which intelligible genders reside. The failure of Man Ray’s visual representations of men is not in acknowledging these tensions, but rather in seeking all too easily to resolve them.

From this analysis of male representations in Man Ray’s photographs, a significant absence emerges. Where are women in this male-dominated world of French Surrealism? In the struggle to impress masculinity on the crumbling scaffold of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix and retain its heteronormative compulsion, women are not entirely absent but, I suggest, more ominously cast as inert object-subjects; bound in the oppositional hierarchies of sexual difference that consolidate heterosexual male dominance. Max Ernst’s caricature of the Surrealists, ‘Rendez-vous of Friends’ (Figure Eight), endorses a gender discrepancy evident in their group photographs taken in the 1920s and 1930s. In ‘Rendez-vous of Friends’, Gala Éluard, then wife of eminent Surrealist poet Paul Éluard and later wife of Salvador Dali, incarnates the Surrealist muse. Unlikely the pictured men—all productive poets, writers, artists, or philosophers of the French Surrealist Movement or historical forefathers of Surrealism who are predominantly depicted in action poses—Gala’s presence is primarily as possession of (Paul Éluard’s wife), and inspiration to (Max Ernst’s muse), men. Positioned towards the background with her back turned on the exclusively male group, she looks coquettishly over her shoulder, looking out of the canvas to meet the viewer’s gaze in a manner that is provocative rather than confrontational. Her self-conscious appearance demonstrates an awareness of being looked at, and this seems her main preoccupation. Her posture and her gaze suggest she is aware of her physicality and artifice; indeed, of her

23 For an extensive examination of the female muse in Surrealism, see Whitney Chadwick, Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement, 28.
Figure Eight
representationality. The men, in contrast, are altogether immersed in their activities and occupied within the ‘reality’ of the picture’s frame. Concerned with what they are doing, rather than with how they appear to the viewer in doing it, the men seem unaware of themselves as either spectacle or representation; a gendered difference which is crucial to the mechanisms of sex-gender-sexuality. Significantly, Gala is divided: the part of her self being watched is contained by the frame yet the part of her that is watching herself being watched escapes into the external domain of the viewer, confusing bipartite subject/object positions.24 Her right hand points gracefully outwards, in contrast to the hands of the men which are directed towards the centre, indicating her interior exclusion. Represented, by men and for men, in this historically assigned ‘feminine’ role, Gala is acted upon as the ‘woman’ that normative sex-gender-sexuality relations demand. Consequently, and necessarily, she is always already other to herself. Present and absent, imagined and real, her divided presence moves across the stroke of oppositional difference that governs sexual representation and sexual subjectification, while men remain firmly at the centre.

Similarly, the overall impression of Man Ray’s women is one of stark contrast to his men. The ‘Kiki of Montparnasse’ photographs (Figure Nine) are unusual in that Man Ray names his female subject. In ‘Men Before the Mirror’, David Hopkins notes a distinct lack of titles or naming in Man Ray’s portraits of women: ‘None of these females are accorded any textual identification…they add up, therefore, to a kind of cumulative,

24 In Ways of Seeing, John Berger describes how, as a result of historically entrenched gendered ‘ways of seeing’ in the West, women are divided into a part that is watched and a part that watches her self being watched, 63.
generic “femininity”, to be consumed visually”. Interestingly, the identified Kiki, renowned cabaret entertainer and illustrious figure in Parisian café life, was also Man Ray’s lover when he was seeking a foothold in the artistic community. This may go some way to explaining his claiming of her. Indeed, she was an idealised myth in 1920s Montparnasse, and through her Man Ray initially gained much sought after recognition.

The poses in the Kiki portraits once again recall artistic conventions, this time of the classic female nude from Renaissance to Pre-Raphaelite traditions, grounding the ‘feminine’ in a culturally woven narrative of timelessness that (re)casts ‘woman’ in primordial eternity and fixes ‘it’ as a foundational pillar of heterosexuality’s cultural codes. Through this process of reiteration, she becomes a modern day Venus or Madonna. Revealed and on display, she bears the mandatory cloth, draped over her legs in both pictures to suppose a certain ‘feminine’ dignity that her equally ‘feminine’ modesty grasps. She gazes into the distance, eyes half closed in apparent reverie in the first photograph, and self-consciously out at the camera-viewer in the second, offering up her ‘femininity’—which constitutes the principle axis of her subjectivity—to be consumed by the masculine heteronormative gaze. Enmeshed in this gaze, the logic of consumption perpetuates the ideal of ‘femininity’, which at once fuels and is fueled by masculine desire. A demand to continually reproduce the notion of ‘woman’ is thus

26 This is evident in ‘The True Story of Kiki of Montparnasse’, published as Chapter Four of Man Ray, Self Portrait (Canada: Bulfinch Press, 1998). That Man Ray offered Kiki no support during her demise to death in the 1940s, much like André Breton’s disregard of his famous muse Nadja once she was incarcerated in Perray-Vaucluse psychiatric hospital, says something about the sincerity—or otherwise—of some Surrealist men’s idealisation of women.
27 Susan Sontag uses the phrase ‘logic of consumption’ in On Photography, 179, to describe the mechanisms of a consumer impulse that drives and perpetuates a desire to photograph everything. I adopt this phrase here to argue that the perpetuation of the role of ‘woman’ is crucial in upholding heteronormative ideals of masculinity and the sexual matrix they partially comprise and reproduce.
sustained, Breton’s omnipotent ‘man’ is maintained, and the binary hierarchies of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix are upheld. Certainly, in these images Kiki’s value is her beauty, and her beauty is located exclusively in her (sexualised) appearance and the promise it offers to men. She is flesh, body, and nature; the necessary counterpart to intellect, mind, and culture in the logocentric world-view. However, as ‘woman’, she is also, like Gala Éluard in ‘Rendez-vous of Friends’, artifice (as the overlooked detail of her jewelry denotes). Kiki is not naked, but nude. In this representation she does not occupy the primordial realm of nature unreservedly, but is caught in a complex movement between nature and artifice. This shift in—and shifting—location unsettles the logic of a sexual matrix that demands genders and sexualities signify oppositionally, consistently, and without either internal or relational contradiction. Though the binaries of the heterosexual matrix are, in a sense, recast as the bedrock of subjectivity, and constituent gender roles are performed to achieve the regimented categories through which ‘identity’ is primarily achieved, the incongruity also highlights the limitations of the established sexual matrix, its composite terms, and its oppositional structure. In addition, acknowledging that representing women as nature is itself a paradox that is in no way natural is important to the readings of Man Ray’s unnamed women that follow.

The alignment of the female body with ‘nature’ is evident in the progressive pictorial narrative that plots Man Ray: Photographs Paris 1920-1930, a selection of photographs that he chose to represent his work of this period. The images are spatially divided into four themed sections, starting with depictions of the natural world, and moving to pictures of women, then portraits of men, and finally experimental
rayographs. The proximity of women and the natural world in Man Ray’s editorial sequencing, wherein femininity is seamlessly born out of nature, is repeated in his untitled still life photographs of single isolated apples and peaches which are echoed in ‘La Prière’ (Figure Ten). The forbidden fruits are transposed onto the female buttocks, which are arranged in a suggestive position of simultaneous invitation and non-admission. The shielding hands indicate a non-compliance that seems at odds with the desire, embedded in the artist-viewer’s masculine gaze, to conquer the prohibited domain of its dissected female object. The title itself, which translates variously as ‘The Prayer’, ‘The Request’, or ‘The Plea’, traverses the boundary between the observer and the observed. It is unclear whether the subject of the title is asking for permission to penetrate or pardon from violation. What is ‘la prière’? Who is making it? And how does this inflect gendered hegemonic structures? What implications does this moment of undecidability hold for the binaries that mould the process of signification in general and sexual significations in particular? This severed portion of the female body, consumed by the eye in the act of looking and poised to be consumed by masculine desire, is depicted as a tempting fruit ripe for the picking but with the texture of stone. ‘Woman’ is thus represented in a moment of tension immediately preceding the possible quest into the unknown; the biblical moment where the original knowledge of sexual difference is located. The fact that the infraction of non-consensual penetration is made to look so natural and beautiful by an image woven from established narratives of oppositional

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28 A rayograph is a kind of photogram: a photographic image made without a camera by placing objects on a photosensitive surface and then exposing light to it. Man Ray’s particular style, which he coined the ‘rayograph’, capitalises on the unusual effects of negative imaging this process creates. By juxtaposing familiar objects, moving them during the development process, and altering the length and intensity of exposure, he created his renowned blurred silhouettes and unidentifiable images.
Figure Ten
sexual difference does not mask the inequity of power relations at play in this photograph and beyond its frame. On the contrary, it makes the seal of supremacy stamped by the masculine-gendered gaze all the more sinister. While the hands suggest a moment of agency (they prevent, for now, the imminent penetration), that agency operates either as a plea or as a titillation (which once again secures ‘woman’ in the paradox of helpless temptress) and is delimited by discursively determined masculine and heteronormative desire. In its wider contexts, then, the image signifies to (re)ground the female body problematically in the artificial construct of nature. It thus conspires with established sexual narratives that depict the dissected female body as a topography to be navigated in search of virgin territories; a strategy prevalent in primitivist representations of sexuality in Surrealism’s historical moment of modernism. Indeed, the furtive violence deployed in pinning this paradox of ‘femininity’ is rooted in the colonial drive to compulsory heterosexuality and its hegemonic mechanisms that seek to confine differences in oppositional hierarchies. As a textual and material fixation, ‘woman’ is cast simultaneously inviting and averting the penetrative dominant gaze like the ideal virgin-whore who is imagined both resisting and succumbing to masculine, heteronormative, colonial desire.

This poetic dissection of female corporeality for the pleasure of the assumed masculine artist-viewer29 is more baleful still in an untitled photograph of a caged and dismembered woman (Figure Eleven). The woman’s hypnotising gaze, which punctures

29 André Breton makes explicit the underlying presumption underpinning the French Surrealist Movement that the artist is male and the gaze masculine in *Arcane 17* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1971) when he states that ‘it is the artist who must rely exclusively on the woman’s powers to exalt, or better still, to jealously appropriate to himself everything that distinguishes woman from man’, n.p. His discourse emphatically endorses, albeit unwittingly, the dominant colonising and divisive notion that man is the viewer and woman is the viewed and that the two are diametrically opposed.
the image’s surface to haunt the conventional determining viewer with the spectre of ‘his’
conventionally determined other, is formally impounded in Man Ray’s representation and
by the viewer’s gaze thereafter. Her subjectivity as ‘woman’ is thus secured—according
to an agenda set by this masculine gaze—in the inaccessible domain of representation
enclosed by the photograph’s surface. Held up in stasis as temptation; as an object that
simultaneously motivates unattainable desire and reconfirms the artist-viewer’s dominant
position in hierarchical power relations, the arrested and entrapped female is deployed as
an inert symbol upon which the inequitable battle for male supremacy, inspired and
consumed by oppositional difference, is waged. Similarly, in one of Man Ray’s few
images of women where the model is clothed, her dissected body stands in stark contrast
to the dressed bodies in his portraits of men. In the latter, clothing adorns the male body
as skin: it is as natural for men to be clothed, the images seem to say, as it is for women
to be naked. Such is the strength of the male body as signifier of ‘culture’ that it seems
not to be a body at all, but rather a necessary antipode to the feminine body of ‘nature’.
The portion of female anatomy presented in ‘Anatomies’ (Figure Twelve), however, is
scantly wrapped like a gift; offered to the viewer as an object of exchange. The
iridescent translucent wrapping, which restricts—physically and metaphorically—the
already decapitated and maimed torso, resembles a wrinkled second skin, yet unlike the
first skin it is neither porous nor penetrable. Culture is seen embellishing nature, yet the
increased value is in the enhanced aesthetic pleasure of the viewer rather than in any
profit it offers the exposed torso. The fabric does not confer any of the beneficial material

30 For a parallel reading of this image, see Mary Ann Caws, ‘Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a
Problem’, published in eds Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Keunzli and Gwen Raaberg, Surrealism and Women
Figure Twelve
realities of culture on the female body as it does in Man Ray’s male portraits (it offers neither comfort nor stature nor protection) but paradoxically returns the body to the tightly bound ideal of ‘woman’. Mary Ann Caws articulates this notion that women are made present-to-be-seen when she writes of this image that it ‘is none of us, exactly. But maybe all of us, as we are seen. Sure and strident, ready to do anything we can—except we can neither think nor speak nor see, nor walk and run, certainly not love and paint and write and be. Surrealist woman, problematic and imprisoned, for the other eyes’.\(^{31}\) While the self-confident pose stages a cursory challenge to the viewer, its self-assurance is achieved through the citation of discursively produced ideals of sexual attraction that are culturally policed under the masculine heterosexual gaze. In its content, the image ascribes physical beauty as the principle and definitive site of female subjectivity, further entrenching ‘woman’ in the paradox of empowered goddess and disempowered subject. At the level of form, the visual dissection of the female body, held in its predetermined position by the gaze of dominant culture, halts any movement that would prove problematic to the established yet precarious hierarchies of sex, gender, and sexuality. As the embodiment of artifice, ‘imprisoned, for the other eyes’, the proper subject of Man Ray’s images of women is not simply the unnamed, silent, inert females they purportedly represents, but female subjectivity as representationality itself.

Certainly, none of the representations of women I have so far discussed are transparent depictions inhabiting an ostensibly apolitical realm of aesthetics. They are, rather, politically motivated statements woven in and from the fabric of culture. The variously textured threads—sometimes barely visible, sometimes unashamed—which

\(^{31}\) Caws, ‘Seeing the Surrealist Woman’, 11.
bind female subjects in the complex construction of ‘woman’ I have explored in this section are crucial to preserving the iniquitous oppositions of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. It is, I have argued, this politically implicated paradox of ‘woman’ that enables ‘man’, discursively and ideologically, to continue (re)producing himself as well as the hierarchies from which masculine subjects have historically profited. Indeed, the hierarchical oppositions that constitute and validate the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, which are reproduced at the level of the eye, are not natural essences merely reflected through the process of representation. On the contrary, they are culturally produced categories, operating in/as cultural discourses, and reproduced in the discursive mechanisms of dominant culture. Sexual difference, then, is not oppositional per se. Rather, it is constructed as oppositional, typically by those occupying positions of supremacy. Moreover, it is, indubitably, constructed with political motivations and effects.

The extremely rare phenomenon in Surrealism of a male nude (Figure Thirteen) marks a significant contravention of the cultural assumptions embroiled in the masculine heteronormative gaze and its normalising apparatus. Little wonder such homoerotic images were few and far between in the French Surrealist Movement: they confronted the officious leader, Breton, with his homophobic anxieties. In the first Surrealist symposium specifically concerned with sexuality, published as ‘Recherches sur la sexualité’ in La Révolution surréaliste, Breton passes a draconian judgment on homosexuality which is entirely at odds with the claims he makes that universal freedom be achieved via reciprocal love and human equality: ‘J’accuse les pédérastes de proposer à la tolerance humaine un déficit mental et moral qui tend à s’ériger en système et à paralyser toutes les
enterprises que je respecte'. By advocating a rereading which exposes this hypocrisy, Man Ray's male nude signifies a rare moment in which his subversion of binary constrictions touches the domain of sex-gender-sexuality in defiance of heteronormative assumptions. The image does not cohere with the historical narrative with which Breton's 'man' and 'woman' conspire. Rather, it invites the viewer to examine firstly how dominant culture looks with a gaze that is emphatically masculine and heterosexual and secondly with what effects dominant culture (re)presents what it sees in the act of looking. As Berger shrewdly suggests:

Women are depicted in quite a different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the women is designed to flatter him. If you have any doubt that this is so, make the following experiment. Choose...an image of a traditional nude. Transform the woman into a man...notice the violence which that transformation does. Not to the image, but to the assumptions of a likely viewer.

This transformation is strikingly illustrated in Man Ray’s male nude. The violence of the heterosexual matrix is displayed not only in the construction and policing of its iniquitous oppositional terms, but more pointedly in the codes, mechanisms, and assumptions that (re)construct the construction as natural.

By questioning how sexual differences are etched across hierarchical opposition, this point of resistance begins to untangle the threads that have tied gendered bodies in hostile relations of supremacy and subordination in the struggle for 'freedom'. In so doing, it cleaves a space wherein alternative patterns of difference might alter relations between sexes, genders, and sexualities to make space for bi-sexual desires. This crevice

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32 La Révolution surréaliste, No. 11, 1928, 33 [translation: 'I accuse homosexuals of proposing to human tolerance a mental and moral deficit which aims to set itself up as a system and paralyse all the enterprises I respect'].
33 Berger, Ways of Seeing, 64.
in the scrupulously tended landscape of heteronormativity exposes a fissure so deeply
ingrained it almost goes unnoticed. The demystification of oppositional gender
differences thus awakens the possibility that men and women alike need not continue in
perpetually paying for Eve.

II
René Magritte’s collage ‘Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt’ (Figure
Fourteen), published in La Révolution surréaliste, has suffered charges of collusion with
conventional gender divisions.34 Close scrutiny of the piece, however, gives rise to an
alternative reading. The picture comprises sixteen mug shots of recognised male
Surrealists surrounding a painting of a single naked woman poised between the lines of
eponymous text. The title, which is spatially and semantically central to the picture, is
composed of image and word. In juxtaposing these typically distinct signifying systems,
and in collapsing title and image, the collage activates a semiotic play that contests the
notion of transparent representation to suggest naming is not supplementary but intrinsic
to signification. The gender relations embroiled in this unconventional exchange unsettle,
and are unsettled by, the ostensibly bipartite visual distinction. Accordingly, the
implications for understanding representations and reproductions of sexuality and
subjectification—specifically the notion that sexualities cannot be understood in isolation
from the mechanisms through which subjects are continually enacted and vice versa—are
vital for sexual subject positions that exceed binary distinctions.

34 For erudite examples of cases that charge Magritte with misogynistic gender reinscriptions in ‘Je ne vois
pas [la femme] cachée dans la forêt’, see Rudolf E. Kuenzli’s ‘Surrealism and Misogyny’ and Robert J.
Belton’s ‘Speaking With Forked Tongues: “Male” Discourse in “Female” Surrealism?’, both published in
eds Caws, Kuenzli and Raaberg, Surrealism and Women.
Figure Fourteen
The nameless men, cast in anonymity, all have their eyes closed on the world of culture that their suit-and-tie clad bodies signify. Read as a parody of ‘culture’, this schism draws attention to established gender distinctions, mimicking the process through which they are naturalised, to demonstrate that ‘reality’ is constructed through the same cultural praxes as ‘myth’: the defining difference between the two is located in the way culture chooses to conceal or reveal its modes of production and reproduction respectively. Such a salient discrepancy between the men in Magritte’s picture and the confrontational focused gazes of the men in Man Ray’s portraiture bears witness to what Dawn Ades describes as an ‘embarrassingly public self-reflexive daydream’. Unlike Man Ray’s male representations, which aim to mask the status of the gender myths they reinscribe, Magritte’s men acknowledge that the ‘woman’ they seek hidden in the primordial forest exists only as a masculine fantasy; in the purportedly private internal realm of dream and reverie. By making public the self-reflexive daydream, Magritte’s picture illustrates that the masculine fantasy of ‘woman’ is by no means a private affair. On the contrary, as a cultural construction, the fantasy is ingrained with political implications for sexual subjects. The conventionally gendered masculine and feminine realms of reality and fantasy are further parodied by the striking photograph-painting incongruity mentioned earlier. Roland Barthes suggests in Camera Lucida that ‘Photography…is haunted by the ghost of Painting…it has made Painting, through its copies and contestations, into the absolute paternal Reference’. In Magritte’s composition, the construction of ‘woman’ as spectral goddess is made present as ‘the absolute paternal Reference’, rendering suspect the mechanisms that take possession of

35 Ades, ‘Surrealism, Male-Female’, 175.
36 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 12.
the female body as a symbol whose primary objective is to signify male subjectivity. The lack of ‘reality’ in photographic realism is thus highlighted. In superseding the ensnaring masculine gaze that has conventionally constructed and controlled her, this representation acknowledges that female subjectivity is not entirely dependent on male certification. With eyes closed, the men break the tradition of active male subjectivity that is conventionally confirmed in the act of looking to render the ‘je’ undecidable. Indeed, the ‘je’ of the title may not refer to a male viewer who fixes the woman as object rather than subject of the sentence. It may, in fact, be spoken by the woman herself. In this case, the syntax emphasis shifts from ‘woman’ to ‘hidden’, since as the subject of the sentence, she does not see herself as hidden. This reading is sustained by the woman’s pose and her body’s occupation of space. The reclining nude of traditional oil painting has mobilised herself and is walking towards the viewer, yet she seems unaware of, or unconcerned with, the viewer’s presence. Her movement in—and out of—the picture signifies a rupture from the traditions of female representation: as she navigates the space in which the foundational binary terms of sex-gender-sexuality reside, she is no longer looking at herself being looked at; she is simply looking at herself. Meanwhile, the men are being watched as they would usually watch. This momentary inversion and reversal of gender roles in the acts of looking and being seen, wherein gender norms are cited a little differently and their internalisation is exteriorised, enacts a play between the culturally gendered binaries of motion and inertia which exposes the imbalance endemic in normative representations. In this critique, which unearths the extent to which gender politics and sexual relations govern the construction of active and passive subject
positions, the violence of cultural assumptions that perpetuate these divisions as ‘natural’ is made clear.

Dichotomous distinctions between subject and object, dominantly interpreted as inherent in the gendered social order that simultaneously produces and is reproduced by the conventional gaze, are thus exposed as neither essential nor inevitable. However, although the introverted men are primarily observed rather than observing, the masculine-gendered gaze of heteronormative culture does not enable a simple reversal or rejection of gender norms: female subjects can neither engage in the act of looking in the same way as male subjects nor eschew the power inscribed in and by culture’s gaze. Positioned around the painting’s perimeter as an integrated frame, Magritte’s men are neither wholly excluded nor wholly included by the picture. Rather, they operate, in Derridean terms, as part of a parergonic exchange between assumed male and female positions, relinquishing to an extent the all-consuming desire for male control evident in some of Breton’s and Man Ray’s texts. That is to say, as a frame that ‘comes against, beside, and in addition to’ the painted woman, Magritte’s photographed men are ‘[n]either simply outside nor simply inside…without being a part of it and yet without being absolutely extrinsic to it’. The undecidability of relations among gendered subjectivities, which unnerves the assumed oppositional terms of sex, gender, and sexuality, are thus shown at the level of representation. In this way, ‘Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans le forêt’ acknowledges the incumbent threat to male identity. Yet rather than seeking to violently quash it and resignify ‘man’ according to his historically derived supreme status, Magritte’s collage, in exploring the bridges and gaps between reality and representation,

interiority and exteriority, essence and artifice, viewer and viewed—and with a specific
focus on the gendering of relations among these not so disparate realms—extrapolates the
frictions of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix to make visible the act of looking. While in
Figure Two ‘woman’ is central only as a vehicle through which masculinity is
reconfirmed, Magritte’s problematisation of gender marks a shift that significantly
implicates bi-sexual desires. If, as Magritte’s collage suggests, gender is a cultural
construct, and one that is neither contained nor containable in oppositionally distinct
terms, then the boundaries which demarcate exclusive heterosexuality and exclusive
homosexuality as natural are necessarily impaired. Moreover, since the gender of object
choice is the marker that ‘defines’ heterosexuality and homosexuality in dominant sexual
discourses, then as soon as gender is shown to be neither essential nor bipolar—and
therefore open to inconsistencies across time and place—so the defining foundations that
limit desire to two mutually exclusive choices are undermined. At the level of form and
discursive iteration, then, Magritte’s text contests the possibility of containing both
sexual differences and sexual desires in discrete oppositional categories.

Similarly, Marcel Duchamp’s major work, ‘The Bride Stripped Bare By Her
Bachelors, Even’, also known as ‘The Large Glass’ (Figure Fifteen), exploits tensions in
the field of sexuality. This piece is an assemblage of images, individual yet connected,
that turns the spatio-temporal conventions of narrative in general, and narratives of sexual
subjectivity in particular, inside out. Many of its components are also elements of
Duchamp’s other projects or works, the most striking of which are the group of
‘bachelors’ to the left of the ‘male’ lower half of the composition, and the ‘bride’ in the
‘female’ section directly above them. The bachelors are represented by empty corporeal
tombs, or encasements, which restrict and shape the notably absent bodies to signify how
the gender norms that mould male and female bodies in dominant culture precede the
material existence of those individual bodies. As the spectral presence of the bride and
her bachelors’ corporealities can be traced in a narrative that includes yet exceeds the
installation itself, so the process of sexual subjectification takes place both within and
beyond the subject. In addition, neither the narrative of the artwork nor the narrative of
sexual subjectivity is finite. The codes of gender, like the codes of artistic endeavour, are
repeated only, it seems, to highlight the mechanisms through which artworks and sexual
subjectivities are normatively determined, legitimated, and reproduced. Calling on
conventional artistic techniques and established gender divides, the composition brings
together fragments, but makes no claims of either unifying them to make ‘art’ and
‘sexuality’ easily intelligible or terminating the narrative process that enacts and is
enacted by the incoherencies of its images. Reworking established assumptions of what
‘art’ and ‘sexual subjectivity’ are to be, the points of orientation that map linear sexual
narratives from origin to terminus are diametrically altered, both in the content and the
form of Duchamp’s work. Certainly, sexual subjectivity is represented as transitional: the
mechanical components drive the machinery of subjectification in a process that, like
‘The Large Glass’ itself, is infinite and never completed. This emphasis on process rather
than final result, in which individual parts interrelate in an anomalous relation of cogency
and disparity with each other and their wider contexts, underpins a redistribution of
sexual subjects in space that exerts pressure at the structural foundations of
heteronormativity and its homocentric counterpart in divisive identity politics. Subjects
do not simply subscribe to and embody given categories of sex, gender, and sexuality.
Rather, in citing the norms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, they repeat, modify, resist, and reform them. In accordance with Nikolas Rose’s concept of subjectivity as an assemblage discussed in the previous chapter, sexual subjects are here represented as always changing and always changeable.

This relation between image and narrative, which is a prominent theme in Duchamp’s work, most patently converges with sexual subjectivity in his alter ego Rrose Sélay (Figure Sixteen). The name, a phonetic play on ‘eros, c’est la vie’ [love, or desire, is life] and ‘arouser la vie’ [live life to the maximum, or celebrate life], underscores Duchamp’s preoccupation with the inconsistency of meaning. Rrose Sélay explicitly parodies how gender is carved onto, and adorned by, the body to question the authenticity of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix and its underpinning assumptions. The visual discrepancies between the portraits of 1921 (on the left) and those taken three years later (on the right) display the learned language of ‘femininity’, which extends beyond dress to the subtleties of physical mannerisms, poise, gestures, and demeanour. The hands elevated towards the face, the slightly tilted head nestling into softening fur, and most notably the switch in gaze from confrontational to suggestive, coalesce in a feminine masquerade that transports Rrose Sélay convincingly from the world of ‘masculinity’. The presumed veracity of male/female and masculine/feminine distinctions is thus exposed as a naturalised cultural myth. In successfully acquiring ‘femininity’, Rrose Sélay repudiates the dichotomous categories and the fixed relations that conventionally order sex, gender, and sexuality to become the face of Duchamp’s perfume ‘Belle Haleine’. She thus performs the ‘feminine’ ideal, demonstrating at once that gender inscriptions are not bound by the skin and that the body is not a static site upon which
gender inscriptions are immutably fixed. Rather, the norms of the heterosexual matrix are
grounded in the body in a simultaneous and continuing process of citation,
internalisation, and embodiment. The possibilities of gender are thus delimited by the
archetypal oppositional dualism which is coerced to adhere to a particular—and
discursively determined—relation with sex and sexuality. In performing the conventions
of gender, and in adorning the ‘male’ body with ‘femininity’, Rrose Sélavy enacts the
signifying gestures that produce gender and, in so doing, reveals the mechanisms that
inculcate gender norms as natural.38

Marcel Duchamp also published a short text, bearing Rrose Sélavy’s name as the
title, that consists entirely of word play.39 Its focus on the rhythms and slippages of
approximate homophones and homonyms explores relations of difference in the
reproduction and distortion of meaning. This examination of the semantic process recalls
René Magritte’s celebrated painting ‘The Treachery of Images’. Here, Magritte engages
Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of semiotics,40 contemplating in particular the relations
between object, image, and word. The painting, which depicts a pipe above the seemingly
contrary text ‘ceci n’est pas une pipe’ [this is not a pipe], demonstrates how ‘un objet ne
fait jamais le même office que son nom ou que son image’41 [an object is never the same
as the word or image that denotes it]. The gap between the object, the image, and the
word renders visible the opacity of representation. Indeed, there is no pipe in ‘The
Treachery of Images’: what the viewer sees is not a pipe but a two-dimensional

38 I will explore this notion of masquerade and drag in more detail, and from a different angle, with
reference to Claude Cahun’s self-portraits in Chapter Three.
40 Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics (1916), trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana,
1971).
representation of a pipe painted onto a canvas. This raises an important point with regard to sexual subjectivity that I frame here with reference to the photographs of Rose Sélavy. What, precisely, does the viewer see when looking at Rose? What claims are being made about the ‘reality’ of gender, and by whom? And how are these claims problematised? Interesting here, particularly with regard to the important role that representation plays in policing the sexual matrix, is the relation between metaphor and metonymy. Magritte’s surreal images, which he explained ‘function...to make poetry visible’, are generally understood to inhabit the realm of metaphor. Metaphor, described by linguist Roman Jakobson, is ‘the internal relation of similarity (and contrast)’, whereas metonymy is ‘the external relation of continuity (and remoteness)’. The relation of metaphor and metonymy, wherein the former links referents via comparison or unilateral description and the latter links referents through substitutions and their spatial and temporal relations, is thus restricted by the same oppositional metanarrative of difference that governs the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. Bi-sexual desires demand that similarities and contrasts between gendered and sexual subjects are determined through—not in opposition to—the very spatio-temporal relations that engender similarities and contrasts and render them intelligible. When Magritte’s picture of a pipe is understood to signify as a representation in this way, through both its difference from a pipe as referent and in its spatio-temporal relation with the pipe as referent, the implications for sexual subjectivities are vital. It is at this point, where the oppositional distinction between the ostensibly internal and external worlds of metaphor and metonymy breaks down, that the

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heterosexual matrix and its composite hierarchical binaries reveal *in themselves* an intrinsic failure.

‘Attempting the Impossible’ (Figure Seventeen), as the title suggests, explores more acutely this significant detail exposed by the theory of representation imparted in ‘The Treachery of Images’. The painted artist is intently focused on his subject, scrutinising her to exact a precise reproduction, yet she is composed entirely from the learned knowledge of ‘woman’ that the artist is seen recalling. Moreover, not unlike Max Morise’s personification of Time discussed in Chapter One, the painter does not exist objectively in a spatio-temporal realm outside of discursive practices, but very much as part of them, a point made emphatic by the painter’s presence in the painting and by the photograph of Magritte painting ‘Attempting the Impossible’. Concentrating on the empty space where the subject he depicts should be, Magritte parodies the mimetic notion of representation as transparent repetition to demonstrate that the painter does not reflect in his work a pre-existing constant truth *as truth*. On the contrary, he paints contextualised ‘truth’ into the painting. In other words, the codes—of gender, of representation, and of *gendered representation*—Magritte cites in the painting precede the moment of the paintings conception *and* the artist-viewers act of looking, and it is the citation *and* reading of these pre-existing codes, normatively conceived as facts of nature (or ‘truth’), that (re)produces the codes *as reality*. This performative theory of representation is here made visible at the level of sexual politics: the ideal ‘woman’ of the heterosexual matrix with which Breton’s sexual politics conspire is declared an illusion of reality, conjured by and for men, and naturalised at the level of representation.
Figure Seventeen
In the light of these findings, Magritte’s notorious painting ‘The Rape’ (Figure Eighteen) can be reread to refute the charges of misogyny it has often faced, and, in so doing, further unsettle heteronormativity’s restrictive oppositions by questioning the assumptions of an uncritical backlash. Robert Hughes explains that ‘the image of woman in surrealist art had no real face: she was always on a pedestal or in chains’. While I have already discussed at some length the paradox that locates ‘woman’ simultaneously on a pedestal and in chains, what is of particular interest at this juncture is the fact that women in Surrealist art have no real face. Magritte’s subversive painting does not presume to superciliously redress the historical imbalance by benevolently, and uncritically, bestowing on woman the missing face. More pertinently, it shows the world the face women have been given. While the title can be variously interpreted as referring to the symbolic rape of the female face (signifying ‘identity’) and the female body (signifying sexuality), a more incisive reading illustrates that the violence of the image, which converts female sex organs into the vehicles of vision and speech and transposes them onto the face, is not directed at the represented woman but at the stagnant history of female representation it critiques. Anatomical discord is exaggerated rather than concealed, and the narrative threads of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, which have historically bound female subjectivity aggressively, and awkwardly, onto the body, are frayed. The image thus confronts the viewer with the impossibility of realism’s apparent transparency, constituting a rape of the oppositional principles that normatively govern how realities are both seen and shown. In violating a history of representation that has for so long violated women, ‘The Rape’ confronts the limitations of a heterosexual matrix

44 Hughes, The Shock of the New, 249.
which discredits encounters that exceeds the signifiers of its established oppositional
c hierarchies. Neither passive nor transparent and relentlessly in sight, representation is
pictured as a culturally motivated site of conflict between subject and object, and the
spatio-temporal shift that this reconception demands erodes the very distinctions through
which oppositions, and the subjectivities that enact and reproduce them, are engendered
and persist. The theoretical and political spaces that such a radical (re)vision of
representation opens up—for sexual politics in general and bi-sexual desires in
particular—demand critical address.

René Magritte’s pictures, like Marcel Duchamp’s compositions and his alter ego
Rrose Sélagy, exhort a game of differences between differences in which, I have argued,
the fragile transcendental signified is constantly deferred. Operating more as non-linear
narratives than as sets of unrelated images, the works of these eminent Surrealist artists
scrutinise the intricate movements of sexual subjectification. As such, they demonstrate
how oppositional hierarchies of sex and gender repeatedly confer particular meanings on
particular realities to solidify the divisive oppositional structure of difference upon which
the heterosexual matrix, and any uncritical attempts at a reversal of it, are secured. They
also detail how authorising or subverting normative values closes off or opens up
previously unimagined and unimaginable possibilities. This presents a grave threat to the
paradigm of oppositional thought which both legitimates and demands the elision of bi-
sexual desires. Acknowledging the necessary instability of the signifier establishes a
space where sexual subject positions and desires do not necessarily depend on
singularity, similitude, relations of divisive oppositions, and inequity. Critical discourses
and cultural practices that extrapolate and exalt the differences within and among sexual
subjects loosen the discursive threads which bind dissident desires into the firmly established yet terminable 'reality' of a sex-gender-sexuality matrix grounded in distinct oppositions. To examine this link between representation and interstitial sexual subject positions more closely, I now turn to the self-portraits of the androgynous and sexually indeterminate Surrealist photographer, Claude Cahun.
Chapter Three

Desiring Difference

What then is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonomies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.

Freidrich Nietzsche

When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is ‘male or female?’ and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty.

Sigmund Freud

The issue is never to reduce the unconscious or to interpret it or to make it signify...the issue is to produce the unconscious, and with it new statements, different desires.

Deleuze and Guattari

Though ‘woman’ is everywhere in Surrealist representations and ‘the feminine’ is ardently extolled, women who represent themselves are few and far between in Surrealist texts of the 1920s and 1930s. Certainly, women were not among Surrealism’s founding

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3 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 18.
fathers; rather, ‘woman’ was Surrealism’s Goddess, Muse and Mother.\textsuperscript{4} However, this mythical construction, central pillar to the edifice of heteronormativity and its prerequisite oppositional differences, did not exist unchallenged. A radical reappropriation of ‘woman’, and its relation to ‘man’, by certain female artists constitutes a concurrent resistance that shook the foundations of oppositional gender assumptions as well as the established sexual matrix and its embedded binary hierarchies.

Whitney Chadwick details in the editorial introduction to \textit{Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation} how self-representations by female artists associated with the French Surrealist Movement question not only the location of women as ‘other’, but also the oppositional relation between subject and object which has both etched and been etched in the masculine-feminine polarity.\textsuperscript{5} In the process of female self-representation, the ‘otherness’ that has historically defined women in the western world—an alterity that was rooted, polarised, and enclosed in the primordial realm by some of the more celebrated Surrealist texts\textsuperscript{6}—is brought under the feminist lens of enquiry. This shift raises a critical question which serves as a useful point of departure for this chapter: do female Surrealist artists adopt a culturally defined ‘masculine’ stance in their self-representations, do they impose a ‘feminine’ position as subjects rather than objects, or does something morphologically different occur? How do male-subject


\textsuperscript{5} Chadwick also discusses how Surrealism offered a site for female self-representation precisely because it mobilised the body as a site of cultural signification and so enabled a rereading of the relation between the female body and female subjectivity, see ‘An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors’, 12.

\textsuperscript{6} As I argued in the previous chapter, while men often sought a reassertion of ‘masculinity’ through ‘woman’, women artists focused more on the self with regard to the relation between ‘self’ and ‘other’, which was largely assumed in dominant culture to be diametrically opposed. Chadwick’s ‘An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors’ details a collection of self-representations among female artists which support this case, notably an erudite analysis of Dorethea Tanning’s painting ‘The Mirror’, 8-13.
female-object pairings, wherein the subject positions of female artists are located primarily in terms of gender while male artists remain unmarked and their gender unremarked, perpetuate the surreptitious yet endemic cultural assumption that men constitute the human norm while women—or, more precisely, ‘woman’—operate in subjugated deviance to that norm? How does the self-represented and self-representing ‘feminine’ subject, always already partially defined as ‘object’, redeploy the bipartite division of a priori gendered subject/object positions? And finally, how, and with what effects, do self-representations that undermine naturalised subject/object positions impinge upon the oppositional narrative of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix and, in so doing, call into question the hegemonic strategies that police dissident desires to maintain the established parameters of sexual intelligibility?

Claude Cahun’s photographic self-portraits present an opportunity to unravel and rewind these theoretical questions from the historical and cultural context of Surrealism. Using her own body as a political site through which to explore the relation between bodies and ‘identities’, and re-imag(in)ing its production, Cahun exploits the silenced fractures in the heterosexual narrative of singular and singularly sexualised subjectivities. In so doing, her work also addresses the schism between the Surrealist discourse of ‘freedom’ and the restrictions some Surrealist texts impose on subjects ‘othered’ by the conditions and demands of an oppositional sexual matrix. Her pictures often provoke

7. Interesting here is Carolyn J. Dean’s contention in ‘Claude Cahun’s Double’ that ‘the surrealists’ antibourgeois sentiments—at least in the realm of gender and sexuality—sustained the dichotomies between heterosexuality and homosexuality, pure and impure, and fantasy and reality they sought in theory to challenge’, *Tate French Studies*, No.90 (1996), 78. Similarly, in ‘Considering Claude Cahun’, published in *Seeing Through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art* (New York: Gordon&Breach, 2000), Laura Cottingham writes: ‘Cahun and her female lover constituted a political and sexual avant-garde that could not be easily assimilated into a movement whose otherwise revolutionary ambition to “change the world” did not include challenging the regulation of female sexuality by men’ (205).
immediate responses that confirm her relatively uncharted work is invaluable to the study of sex-gender-sexuality, specifically with regard to the significance of the gendered body therein: ‘Is it a man or a woman? A lesbian? An androgen? A transvestite? How strange’. These interrogative responses echo Freud’s shrewd comment, cited as an epigram to this chapter, concerning the prevalent cultural imperative to assign sex immediately and definitively. There is, doubtless, a latent tension between certainty and uncertainty that articulates the desire, albeit unconscious, to assign meaning to one end of the binary poles of sex-gender-sexuality against the anxiety that a failure, denial, or refusal to do so induces. In this sense, Cahun’s self-portraits, which refuse not only the dominant Surrealist conception of ‘woman’ but more crucially the heteronormative paradigm of hierarchical oppositions in which it is embroiled, raise more questions than they answer. Her striking images of ‘self’ boldly confront the ostensibly distinct terms of an inadequate yet entrenched sexual matrix to address Kaja Silverman’s contention that ‘[w]hen a woman doesn’t identify with a classically female position, she is expected to identify with a classically male one’. In this chapter, close readings of her self-portraits made with mirrors and doublings, analysis of her textual inscriptions of mimicry and masquerade, and finally a poststructural-queer review of her reappropriation of ‘woman’ from nature, together examine how Claude Cahun’s bodies rise out of their historical groundings to resist the oppositional terms through which exclusive binary sexualities are (re)constructed and bi-sexual desires repeatedly annulled.

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8 These are the some of the repeated responses received when showing people Claude Cahun’s self-portraits (my emphasis added).
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Doubling is not an uncommon trope in Surrealism, and nor is the use of mirrors in images that explore subjectivity. One of the photographs in Claude Cahun’s fragmented oeuvre\(^\text{10}\) (Figure One) uses these visual devices to critique dominant patterns of sexual difference and their contingency with the subject and object positions that constitute sexual ‘identities’.\(^\text{11}\) Interrupted in a moment of dialogue between the image of her ‘physical’ self and the image of her reflection, Cahun draws the viewer into a space that challenges the parameters through which subjects signify. Certainly, the striking indeterminacy of the image both marks the subject(s)-object(s) depicted, and in some way underpins them. The photograph’s arrant schism addresses the viewer’s desire to seek out attributes tacitly coded ‘male’ or ‘female’ in order to settle this crucial marker of ‘identity’—the features of the face, the expression, the gaze, the posture, the gestures, the clothing, the space in which the figure is located—and each time the differences between the two ‘selves’ re-enact a bipartite gender divide. Her harlequin’s coat, which is loose and held firmly at the lapel, renders the body unremarkable. Grounded in the material world with head directed to meet the onlooker’s gaze, her ‘physical’ self adorns the cultural markers of ‘masculinity’. In contrast, her ‘other’ self, a dissected reflection floating in an undetermined space, looks out into the distance. Evading eye contact with the objectifying gaze, she directs it towards her cricoid-free throat with a hand gesture that begins to peel the coat away from the concealed yet focal body beneath. The cultural

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\(^{10}\) Much of Claude Cahun’s work was destroyed when her home on Jersey, *La ferme sans nom*, where she lived in exile from 1938 until her death in 1954, was repeatedly ransacked by Nazi occupying forces during her incarceration for acts of resistance in World War Two.

conventions of ‘femininity’ are thus adhered to the reflected image in the act of looking, which has aligned the differences between the two images in a distinct gender dichotomy. The chequered pattern of the coat, however, which visually dominates the picture, transgresses the division that Cahun’s temporally concurrent ‘selves’ critique, announcing with its ambiguity the dissonant pantomime of gender.

This self-portrait exceeds the dualist edifice in which the notion of the singular unified subject in stasis resides. Consequently, the masculine/feminine distinction, a primary marker of subjectivity, is permeated as cultural assumptions about how the ‘self’ is determined are turned back on normative culture. Contingency within, between, and among the terms of sex, gender, and sexuality is made clear: from the moment anatomical difference is assigned, the inscription of gender continuity and sexual ‘identity’ begins.

The difficulty in assigning a single sex to Claude Cahun in this self-portrait problematises the category of ‘sex’, revealing it as a discursively produced false unity of arbitrary attributes to which the corresponding ‘gender’ and oppositely-sexed object of desire are properly consigned. As the secondary player in a chain of binary progression that follows sex and precedes sexuality, dimorphic gender maintains oppositional relations between the sexes which are finally unified in the heterosexual coupling. Culturally fabricated ideals of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, central to the process of subjectification, are thus pivotal in the production of oppositional sexualities. Indeed, this portrait’s peculiar intensity is located in the undecidability that radically contests the ruling discourse of gender to unveil its crucial function in the heterosexual narrative. Rather than offering a determinable answer to the initial uncertainty, Cahun’s doubled image asks questions of an ideological taxonomy that assumes such an answer can be ascertained and contained
within the framework of oppositional difference. What moves between the two images to reconfirm or resist the gendered subject/object divide? And how do movements of power inside, outside, and across both the mirror's and the photograph's frame inflect different subjects differently at different points in space and time?

The gaze of dominant culture, which predetermines sexed, gendered, and sexualised subject/object distinctions, extends beyond the specific act of looking but is also susceptible to disruptions through it. Indeed, culture is always already 'looking at' its subjects, who consciously and unconsciously both return and resist that gaze. Yet in taking up this historically masculine gaze and adopting a theoretically masculine position from which to look at its conventional object, 'woman', Cahun engages in the difficult task of representing a 'self' already 'othered'. Representation sets out the domain of the subject, and although it extends, in a sense, only as far as can be acknowledged by the subject, by looking at herself from the perspective of culture, she forces culture to look at itself looking at her looking back. The tension between subject and object is thus exploited to expand the domain of the subject. This point of friction, which agitates the photograph's subject-cum-object as well as the viewer who comes to it, signifies that culture is not only external to the subjects and objects of representation but also, and crucially, part of both. In continually recreating divisive schisms, culture—and its formative discourses and practices—perpetually reconstructs the 'selves' and 'others' it accommodates and inhabits. Indeed, the implicit vulnerability between Cahun's 'physical' gaze (which searches hopefully for conformation) and her 'reflected' gaze

\footnote{This organisation of the gendered positions variously taken up by the gaze was inspired by David Bate's essay 'The Mise en Scène of Desire', published in ed. Francois Leperlier, 	extit{Mise en Scène} (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1994), 5-10.}
(which at once defers and rejects it) confers the photograph with a melancholy that is not itself violent but rather mirrors the violence of the assumptions culture brings to it.

The mirror, then, reflects culture’s presence before and behind, as well as inside and outside, the subject. It also engages in a play of signification between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ that fissures the stroke of oppositional difference governing (sexual) subjectivities and (sexual) desires. This image, which both denies and affirms the ‘self’, is repeated in one of Cahun’s written texts:

Une feuille de verre. Où mettrai-je le tain? En deçà, au delà; devant ou derrière la vitre?...Devant. Je m’emprisonne. Je m’aveugle. Que m’importe, Passant, de te tendre un miroir où tu te reconnaisses...Derrière. Je m’enferme également. Je ne saurai rien du dehors 13

As devices that transform a transparent surface into a reflective one, mirrors are, both literally and metaphorically, tantamount to how subjects see themselves and others. Both determined by and determining of the subject, the mirror’s position offers an ostensible choice which for Cahun, the text suggests, is an elaborately dressed constraint. Although some subjects may recognise themselves in the reflection, she does not. The topography of the binary restriction described in the text ensnares her, imprisons and encloses her, and occludes any knowledge that exists beyond, or is able to traverse, the boundaries of its repressive choice. However, in seeing what culture sees, she glimpses ‘culture’ itself: seen in the act of looking she confronts the very gaze which situates her ambiguously. Simultaneously seeing and seen, active and passive, subject and object, she confounds the very distinction through which oppositional (sexual) subject positions originate and

13 Claude Cahun, Aveux non avances (Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1930), 29 [translation: ‘A sheet of glass. Where shall I put the reflective silver? On this side or on the other: in front of or behind the pane?...Before, I imprison myself. I blind myself. What does it matter to me, passer-by, to offer myself a mirror in which you recognise yourself?...Behind, I am equally enclosed. I will not know anything of outside’].
subsist. Recalling the Lacanian mirror stage, Cahun's selves seem to be operating in the
gap of méconnaissance, yet the lack of a definitive distinction between the identities and
locations of plural selves and others (Lacan's inaugural split is played out both within the
image and in the relation between the image and the world of objects it inhabits beyond
the frame) complicates the movements of recognition and misrecognition.\textsuperscript{14} Performed
across the axes of sexual subjectivity, these movements expose the fantasy of a unified
self, which purportedly complies coherently and consistently with the demands of the
heterosexual matrix, as an inauthentic agency functioning to conceal a disturbing lack of
unity.

Moreover, in the mirror none of these movements are independent of each other.
As 'she' moves, so does her reflection, and culture's gaze must also shift in order to still
see 'her' in the same way. The monocular viewpoint that realism demands in order to
stabilise the referent—in this case, Claude Cahun's (sexual) subjectivity—is thus
troubled: both its accuracy and adequacy are called into question. This dynamic exchange
is further complicated by the fact that she is situated across the very divide that seeks to
contain her. Undermined by the encroaching ambivalence, the cultural ideal of a crudely
gendered containable 'self' existing in discrete opposition to its external 'others' is
disturbed. In this sense, the indeterminacies that exceed normative assumptions about
sex, gender, and sexuality impinge on dominant narratives of sexuality. A simple
mapping of the body in space is thus transformed into a (re)mapping of space through the
body, or, more precisely, through presumptions about how bodies signify. Nikolas Rose

\textsuperscript{14} See Jacques Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic
Lacan's mirror stage is discussed further with regard to Frida Kahlo in the Interlude.
suggests that 'a body is not “the” body, but merely a particular relationship capable of being affected in particular ways'.\(^5\) Cahun’s mirrored image demonstrates that bodies are not only sites upon which culture is passively inscribed; they are also capable of affecting the contexts they inhabit. ‘Identities’, or subject positions, are reconstructed, regulated, and resisted in the exchanges between subjects and objects, themselves neither distinct nor self-identical. The mirror, often a symbol of narcissism, is in Cahun’s self-portrait as much a window looking out as a reflection turned in. ‘Une feuille de verre’ covered with reflective silver leaf, it illuminates the space between oppositional differences wherein meaning is normatively assigned, disclosing the vulnerabilities and inconsistencies of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix.

Similarly, the two contraposed heads of ‘Que me veux-tu?’ (Figure Two) engage in the psychoanalytic narrative of narcissism only to disrupt it. In *Aveux non avances*, Cahun writes: ‘Individualisme? Narcissisme? Certes. C’est ma meilleure tendance, la seule intentionelle fidélité dont je sois capable...Je mens d’ailleurs: je me disperse trop pour cela’.\(^6\) Certainly, Cahun relentlessly pursued questions of subjectivity in her flagrant self-interrogations, yet her ‘lie’, which echoes the myth of the singular and unified self, reveals a contradiction inherent in narcissism. In ‘On Narcissism’, Freud defines the mechanisms of an unambiguous and excessive self-love that coalesces in the oppositional distinction normatively drawn between subject and object: ‘The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives


\(^6\) Cahun, *Aveux non avances*, 9 [translation: ‘Individualism? Narcissism? Of course. It is my strongest tendency, the only intentional constancy I am capable of...Besides, I am lying; I scatter myself too much for that’].
Figure Two
rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism'. Dependent on a division between the external world and the internal ego, narcissism sees the libido's attachment, which is 'normally' directed to the externally located libido-object, transferred to the internal realm of the 'self' wherein it seeks to 'obtain[] complete satisfaction'. In 'Que me veux-tu?', a strikingly surreal image of hybridity in which two heads seem to be attached to a single body in a superimposition of selves, this distinction is first enlisted then distorted and temporarily erased. Once again, the doubling elicits a binary split, yet as soon as the viewer encounters this it merges and mutates: the two heads are not fully engaged, eye contact is not maintained between them, and the torsos present as neither distinct nor congruent but obscured and interposed. In this awkward juxtaposing of bodies, ostensibly immutable oppositions of self and other, and the chain of binary significations they generate, invade one another. The monologue of the cohesive subject is fractured and through the expanding fissures emerges the movement of sexual subjectification. As the humorous photograph of Cahun covering her ears and holding her head—which almost looks superimposed—suggests (Figure Three), this is a noisy process, which requires a steady head. 'What do you want from me?', the question her selves ask of each other and of culture's persistent gaze, problematises the principle of narcissism. The object-libido cannot simply be 'replaced' with the 'self' since the two always already coexist as integral parts of each other. While Cahun ironically claims that narcissism is 'la seule intentionelle fidélité dont je sois capable', her relentlessly pursued multiplicity—'je me disperse trop pour cela'—reveals this statement is a contested thread in a fabricated

18 Freud, 'On Narcissism', 73.
discourse which does not transparently describe, but effectively deconstructs, the notion of coherent, unified, and oppositionally exclusive sexual subject positions.

Furthermore, narcissism, like subjectification, is a gendered and gendering affair. Indeed, the connection between ‘femininity’ and narcissism in Freudian theory is clear. In accordance with the dominant Surrealist ideal of ‘woman’, Freud details the female body as the principle site of narcissism:

Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-containment...it is only themselves that such women love...The importance of this type of woman for the erotic life of mankind is to be rated very high. Such women have the greatest fascination for men...since as a rule they are the most beautiful, but also because of a combination of interesting psychological factors...The charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-containment and inaccessibility, just as does the charm of certain animals which seem not to concern themselves about us, such as cats...[they] compel our interest by the narcissistic consistency with which they manage to keep away from their ego anything that would diminish it. It is as if we envied them for maintaining a blissful state of mind—an unassailable libidinal position which we ourselves have since abandoned.  

This explication is riddled with reinscriptions of ‘woman’ as inert object which embodies a predestined notion of ‘femininity’ grounded in physical beauty and psychological enigma: femme-enfant, femme-sauvage, femme-naturelle; the archetypal femme-fatale of the Surrealist imaginary. Freud’s narcissistic ‘type of woman’ is constituted to malevolently perpetuate the historical paradox of woman central to western sexual narratives. She becomes ‘active’, in a sense, only in terms of her expedient malice: ‘The great charm of narcissistic women has, however, its reverse side; a large part of the

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20 It is interesting here that the ‘innocent’ narcissism of the child is attached to the boy. If heterosexual men grow out of narcissistic tendencies through ‘normal’ development, then homosexual men, who develop ‘abnormally’, remain, like ‘woman’, susceptible to the narcissistic state. Links between misogyny and homophobia are thus reinscribed.
lover’s dissatisfaction’. Indeed, she is valuable, and alluring, precisely because she presents to ‘man’ (read: heterosexual masculine man) an opportunity to authorise and maintain the oppositional hierarchies upon which heteronormativity depends. An image transposed from the narrative of Eden, this Freudian Eve, like Breton’s ‘femme’, is revered, treacherous, and lacking. A frigid temptress incapable of returning the ‘love’ bestowed on her, she is disdainfully envied for the blissful state of egotistic ignorance long since abandoned by the ‘normally’ developed progressive speaker. Moreover, since this ‘type of woman’ does not demand an exchange between her self and her libidinal-object which might confuse the distinction between self and other and complicate its binary edifice, ‘man’ remains discrete from ‘woman’ whom he can worship from a distance without ever having to prescribe his ego to the demands and risks of ‘love’. Accordingly, the dichotomies of the established sexual matrix are strengthened and renaturalised, as are the privileges they effect for heterosexual men (the presumed ‘we’ of Freud’s text). Indubitably, it is not simply in ‘the erotic life of mankind’—if, indeed, such a life could exist apolitically—that this ‘woman’ bears significance ‘to be rated very high’. This contradictory fascination, a male-manufactured masculine-orientated construction firmly entrenched in the heterosexual masculine imaginary, is a vital stake that upholds and legitimates the malevolent hierarchies imperative to heteronormativity and oppositionally distinct desires.

Notably though, in the Freudian narrative there is a route via which this most despised and pitied of women, condemned source of her ‘lover’s dissatisfaction’, can gain redemption: ‘Even for narcissistic women…there is a road which leads to complete

object-love. In the child which they bear, a part of their own body confronts them like an extraneous object, to which, starting out from their narcissism, they can then give complete object-love’. Procreation, principal minister of heteronormativity, and its necessary oppositions of sex and gender, not only authorises the subjectivity of ‘woman’, it ensures that ‘normal’ relations between masculine men and feminine women, guided by ‘normal’ sexual desires, are maintained and reinstated as normal. Any other outcome is, by implication, deemed deviant and ‘abnormal’. The discourse of narcissism thus concludes with a unifying image of triumphant omnipotent father presiding over a pacified redeemed mother of a blossoming child-love-object. The holy trinity of heteronormative society—the nuclear family—is thus nurtured and reproduced as a microcosm of society which maintains its oppositional hierarchies. Everyone is happy; or so it seems.

Claude Cahun, however, is not. Nor are ‘other(ed)’ subjects excluded from this familiar picture of heteronormative bliss. ‘Self-Portrait with Cat’ (Figure Four) can be read as a pastiche of the narcissistic ‘woman’ so often called upon in Surrealist images to validate and sustain oppositional sexual relations. Ultra-feminine with a lustrous mane of hair piled high around her smooth pale face, bare flesh draped in fur, and provocative gaze, Cahun’s enigmatic beauty is enhanced by the shadow that occludes half her face. Semi-masked in darkness, her focal point is the single piercing eye, which is repeated in the pool of light that collects on the retina of the cat she holds close to her breast. Together this feline pair evoke the sister deities of ancient Egyptian mythology, Sekhmet the lion-headed goddess and the cat-headed Bastet, who were the two omniscient eyes of

the sun god Ra. Staring directly back at the culture which frames them in narcissism (not unlike 'woman', the cat, also cited by Freud as a narcissistic creature, has been mythologised in 'a kaleidoscope of naturalistic, mystical and anthropomorphic images', this contingent double-gaze incises strata of ideological discourses that have historically solidified to ground them in alterity. Indeed, the Egyptian word for cat, 'mua', also means 'to see', and this unnerving shared-and-split gaze visually dissects the politically motivated narratives that fix female (sexual) subjectivity and thus problematises the gendered assumptions of narcissism.

Less confrontational yet equally as bold is a self-portrait produced in 1929, the only of Cahun's photographs to be printed for public scrutiny at the time of its production (Figure Five). The anamorphic image dramatically (re)presents the human form. As David Bate points out in 'The Mise en Scène of Desire', in order to visually 'normalise' the photographically distorted skull (which bears reference to the celebrated skull in Holbien's 'The Ambassadors', discussed in Chapter One), the viewer must look down at an acute angle from above the photograph so that the shaded upper part of the extended cranium merges into the background to liberate the 'feminine' head. However, the fragile upper torso, accentuated by a revealing off-the-shoulder dress, is then truncated and the elegant clavicles distorted. There is, then, no singular or definitive place to look from, and no unified and coherent totality to be seen. From all perspectives, the male and female components are in conflict: the brutally shaven scalp (which in 1929 would have been still further removed from assumptions of 'femininity' than it is today) is juxtaposed with the 'feminine' décolletage beneath, awkwardly compounding oppositional poles.

jarring rupture in the purportedly congruent dyad, the image does not cohere. The striking visual fault embodies an obscure excess which mocks the apparent order and simplicity of the male/female and masculine/feminine planes upon which oppositional sexualities precariously rest.

In this way, Cahun uses her own body as a signifier of deformity and incoherence to contend realism’s rational ordering of inexorable binary distinctions. The barely concealed tensions of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix reactivate the stroke that at once divides and coalesces masculine/feminine, hetero/homo, self/other. In this interstitial space, where subject and object move and metamorphose, conventional patterns of difference are redressed. Yet in the self-portrait with elongated skull, Cahun’s gaze complicates any neat resolution that presumes a utopic realm devoid of sexual and gender hierarchies can be effortlessly acheived. David Bate asks an important question with regard to this contention: ‘To become not-a-woman and not-a-man in representation is to become what?’24 Cahun’s work does not answer this question; rather it ensures it is continually (re)posed. Is it liberating or restricting for her to be not-quite-female and not-quite-straight? Is her doleful gaze a symptom of the melancholia caused by a refusal to relinquish the phallus and become a fully developed female heterosexual subject or is she mordantly mourning the end of a cultural paradigm that elides divergent subjectivities?

The context of Cahun’s life and works, her theories and practices of subjectivity and sexual identity, suggest that the only viable answer to these undecidable questions is ‘both’. Indeed, the cracks that this compelling image unearths in the foundations of hierarchical binary exclusions conspire with, and in some way mock, the discourse of

melancholia as unmourned loss of the phallus. Melancholia, 'the loss of the ability to love, the unfinishable grieving for that which founds the subject'\(^{25}\) as Judith Butler notes, is, in psychoanalytic terms, conceived as the unsuccessful outcome of grief which is successfully resolved in mourning. 'Not male', she lacks the phallus; 'not straight' she lacks the lack of it: a double deficiency wherein the castration complex remains unresolved and irresolvable. As 'female' she cannot be the phallus, and as 'lesbian' she cannot have it. Yet, as undetermined player in the dimorphic sexual matrix, she determines this movement of signification can never come to rest.

Beyond either 'having' or 'being' and towards 'becoming', Cahun's image enacts a relentless movement of signification that rewrites the metanarrative of heteronormativity and its order of hierarchical oppositions. It also retains a vulnerability, wistfulness, and sensibility that recall an earlier self-portrait in which, according to Cahun's biographer Francois Leperlier, she is dressed as her father (Figure Six). Leperlier's reading is interesting here because although Cahun 'is' not, and does not 'have', the phallus, she is by no means immune to its imposing signification. Certainly, this portrait acknowledges a candid awareness of her position as a subject \textit{in and of} ideological discourse. She is not, the image imparts, a transparent commentator whose every word, movement, image, and gesture subverts the heteronormative narrative she abhors. Partially produced through the discourses of dominant culture—which is largely masculine, patriarchal, and heteronormative—she is, for all her resistances, also written from and into it. Cross-legged on the floor beside the empty paternal throne she can never occupy, dwarfed by the material signifiers of 'culture' she can never fully escape, she

seems to momentarily accept the omnipotence of the Paternal Law. Perhaps this ambiguity is where Cahun located her raison d’être: in the juncstures between male and female, masculine and feminine, being and having, internal and external, compliance and subversion, straight and gay. It is certainly where her self-representations begin to re-imag(in)e sexual difference. In ‘L’aventure invisible’, Cahun writes of the interminable and shifting process in which her work and subjectivity are caught:

L’objectif suit les yeux...L’expression du visage est violente, parfois tragique. Enfin calme—du calme conscient, élaboré, des acrobats...Reparaissent la glace à main, le rouge et la poudre aux yeux. Un temps. Un point. Alinéa. Je recommence.26

In the stillness of the tender image of Cahun dressed as her father, the viewer glimpses a moment which seems, in part, to account for her persistent search for meaning in the question ‘Que me veux-tu?’ The morphological shift from ‘what is being?’ to ‘how is being constituted?’ releases sexual subjectivity from a stifling ontological paradigm of inevitability into a more open critical enquiry from which it might be possible, in Cahun’s own words, to ‘start all over again’.

II

In 1929, at the height of activity in the French Surrealist Movement, Joan Rivière published ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’.27 Amidst the political furore, this seminal text sets out to explore the structural demands, motivations, and effects of the

26 Cahun, Aveux non avouées, 1 [translation: ‘The lens follows the eye...The face’s expression is violent, sometimes tragic. And finally calm—the lucid elaborate calm of acrobats...Then in the hand mirror the rouge and the eye shadow reappear. A pause. A period. A new paragraph. I start all over again].
27 Joan Rivière, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, published in ed. Saguaro, Psychoanalysis and Woman, 70-78. Also, prior to the publication of the Second Surrealist Manifesto in 1930, the French Surrealist Movement was in a period of flux. Many of its central players were leaving or being expelled by its ‘leader’ Breton, primarily due to problems with the Communist Party. For a detailed overview of this complex political entanglement, see Franklin Rosemont’s First Principles of Surrealism.
construction of ‘femininity’ so crucial to canonised Surrealist explorations of sexual subjectivity. Dated almost two decades prior to Rivière’s publication, one of the earliest recovered self-portraits of Claude Cahun (Figure Seven) visually parallels the case study in Rivière’s text.

Cahun was clearly an erudite, insightful, and articulate young woman with the capabilities and credentials to achieve success in her chosen fields. However, in the context of early twentieth-century France, her intellectual inclinations, innovative outlook, and determination to explore and expand conceptions of the world and her place in it situate her in a typically masculine domain. Pictured here in her teens, she could, like the woman in Rivière’s account, be seen as compensating for her ‘masculine tendencies’ by overtly ‘feminising’ herself in a mimesis of the famously beautiful courtesan Cleo de Merode.28 Rivière suggests that ‘women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared by men’.29 Though the reinscriptions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘womanliness’ may themselves require further problematisation, in the light of Cahun’s lived-experience, social concerns, politics, and work—which are altogether inseparable—the theory of masquerade acts as another critical lens through which to view sexual subjectification. At the time of this early self-portrait, Claude Cahun may have been Lucy Schwob, the name given to her at birth, or Daniel Douglas (in homage to Oscar Wilde’s lover, Lord Alfred Douglas), one of the several names she briefly took for herself before settling on Claude (a girl’s and boy’s

28 Abigail Solomon-Godeau details this link to Cleo de Merode in her essay ‘The Equivocal “I”: Claude Cahun as Lesbian Subject’, published in ed. Shelley Rice, Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), 122. As a courtesan, Cleo de Merode would have been well schooled in—and, in a sense, symbolic of—many of the assumed requirements of ‘feminine’ subjectivity.
29 Rivière, ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’, 70.
Figure Seven
name in French) Cahun (the surname of her great uncle, Léon Cahun, an eminent
nineteenth-century literary figure in France). Accordingly, Claude Cahun’s self-portraits
do not seek in masquerade a final explanation of singular subjectivity, but rather another
beginning. As her photographic oeuvre increased and multiplied, so did her interest in,
and experimentation with, masks and metamorphosis. Collectively, her mimetic and
masked self-representations attest to the underplayed significance of ‘femininity’—and
its modes of production—to sexual subjectivity in general and the elision of
indeterminate desires in particular.

The ‘I am in training don’t kiss me’ series of 1927 (Figure Eight) makes explicit
the idea of subjectification as a ‘process of becoming’ enmeshed in the interminable
showdown between oppressive cultural assumptions and repeated resistances to them.
Staging herself as an eccentric weightlifter, Cahun is first seated cross-legged in a short
skirt and crudely fetishesque laced leg warmers. Her tight shirt clings to a seemingly
pubescent torso adorned with pertly positioned stick-on nipples between which the phrase
‘I AM IN TRAINING DONT KISS ME’ is written, saluted beneath by an outlined pair of
sealed lips. A ‘masculine’ pursuit carried out by a hyper-femininised body ‘in training’,
the image interrogates the notion of essential gender cores. Cahun is seen at once bearing
the weight of cultural binary inscriptions and resisting them: the dun bar signifies a
repressive tool deployed to ‘train’ femininity while her adorned body mocks the
performance of ‘femininity’ which heteronormativity demands. Certainly, the look of
concentration on her face reveals that femininity is no ‘natural’ ontology but a series of
codes that female subjects must learn and perform in order to accomplish mature

30 ‘Masks and metamorphosis’ is the title of the only monograph on Claude Cahun, François Leperlier’s
Figure Eight
‘womanliness’. Furthermore, this self-conscious performance, like weight-training, is a continuous practice, and its effects begin to diminish the very moment repetitions cease. From a distance, her torso appears as a comical face whose sealed lips contain gender’s unspoken secret. Parody is thus implemented by Cahun to expose the culturally inscribed mythology of discrete gender cores that ambiguously adheres an ostensibly essential relation between sex and gender onto the body.

The next photograph in the ‘I am in training’ series, a close-up of her decorated face, meets the demands culture exerts on its female subjects head on. The startled eyebrows and eyelashes resembling tears (which recalls Man Ray’s famous depiction of ‘female’ fragility in ‘Les Larmes’), the pouting lips, and decorative hearts on her cheeks, are all quite literally ‘drawn’ from the naturalised codes of femininity through which the ideal of ‘woman’, and the political realities of feminised subjects, are perpetuated. Her look of unease mimics the awkward departure from the myth of ‘natural feminine beauty’ that is knowingly enacted. Reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp’s alter ego, Rrose Sélavy, yet vitally different, she is not trying to ‘pass’. Rather than simply traversing the gender divide to demonstrate how ‘femininity’ (re)produces ‘woman’ as a consumable object of beauty which must consistently, and persistently, maintain the rigid relation between sex and gender, Cahun’s image reveals how ‘passing’ itself operates to conceal the meanings, implications, and motivations at play in the production of sexual subjects. It thus exposes the relation between biologically sexed females and conventional femininity as one of political entailment. Certainly, she is not the little girl naively miscomprehending the subtleties demanded in the manufacturing of ‘womanliness’. Her deliberately kitsch
visage makes explicit the absurd and malevolent mechanisms that establish gender
imperatives and exact uncritical compliance to their conventions.

In the final image of the series, she adopts a challenging provocative-submissive
pose. Against a dark backdrop her white face and torso stand out as a subverted Man Ray
female dissection: her eyes, ears, mouth, and hands, often absent in Man Ray’s
representations of women, empower her to see, listen, comprehend, speak, and create
(herself) for herself. This unusual nymphet, like the confined girl in another self-portrait
who quite literally spills out of her box (Figure Nine), exceeds the boundaries that
compel her to identify as a docile subject and at the same time to resist that
simultaneously recognised and misrecognised identification. In this staged persona,
hyper-feminine artificiality underpins a failure that cannot simply be assigned as a denial
of ‘true’ identity (an accusation often thrown at subjects who act out the ambiguities and
indeterminacies of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix). Playing the contorted clown, Cahun
grasps and unfolds the double failure with which she is charged: the failure of ‘being’
woman compounded with the failure of never successfully achieving its demands. In so
doing, this queerest of coquettes (re)turns deficiency to the sexual paradigm, relocating
‘failure’ in the paradigm’s incapacity to contain repressed dissidence.

Across the ‘I am in training’ series, relations of power among intelligible subject
positions in the heterosexual matrix are made visible. Judith Butler writes:

[P]ower that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the
subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s
self-identity…The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of
turning, a turning back upon oneself or even as turning on oneself.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} Butler, \textit{Psychic Life of Power}, 3.
Together, the weightlifters present Judith Butler’s theory of subjection as a movement in which power is exerted on, and assumed by, the subject. They demonstrate visually that power both precedes and is performed by the subject. Contrary, then, to Danielle Knafo’s claim that in these photographs ‘Cahun transcends gender and sex’,32 by undoing the spatio-temporal modalities which disguise power as a unilateral mechanism at work ‘before’, ‘after’, ‘above’, and ‘beneath’ a singular instance wherein subjectivity is located and defined, Cahun demonstrates how gendered subjects repeatedly come into being through a dialogic exchange—a ceaseless and multilateral motion of ‘turning’—within and between the binary pairings of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. Interestingly, this exploration of the role of gender norms in constituting sexual subjects is not confined to the codes of femininity. Several earlier self-portraits see Cahun performing masculine identities (Figure Ten). Whitney Chadwick suggests that ‘the woman who speaks must either assume a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulation) or set about unmasking the oppositions within which she is positioned’.33 Characteristically, Cahun’s images do both. In performing ‘both’ genders, she extends her critique beyond the masculine/feminine dyad to incorporate the discursive structure of ‘gender’ as a political category and its function in regulating sexual subjectivity. As a result, the contingencies between sex, gender, and sexuality fixed in and by dominant culture, are disrupted. The dramatisation of gender performed in these images demonstrates, in the words of Judith Butler, ‘the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its

contingency’. Moreover, in performing ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ differently, Cahun reveals the discrepancies at the level of performance between the ostensibly oppositional terms of gender. As Judith Halberstam points out, male impersonators dress down and achieve masculinity through ‘understatement’ and ‘cool macho’, while female impersonators dress up and rely on ‘theatricality and histrionics’.

This distinction at once parodies the established notion of femininity as artifice and self-consciously performs the idea that ‘masculinity’ is the norm, and hence the power base, against which ‘other’ subject positions are regulated. The resistances, surpluses, and reductions in Cahun’s drag images, then, not only question the presumptions that ground sexual subjects as self-identical, coherent, and in oppositional relation to ‘others’, they also expose the surreptitious double movement through which hegemonic discourse first constructs ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ as metaphysical substances and then seeks to conceal the inherent impossibility of ‘being’ a sex or a gender. With the dissolution of gender cores comes the realisation that gender is neither ‘natural’ nor a ‘cultural’ manifestation of ‘natural’ sex. More than a univocal mimesis or masquerade, gender operates in contingency with sex and sexuality, and together they repeatedly (re)establish themselves through a continuous movement of subjectification which is both repressive and subversive.

The sinister Little Red Riding Hood self-portrait (Figure Eleven) sees Cahun cloaked in masks. Another photograph taken in the same year sees her naked but for a single mask (Figure Twelve). Endemic in her work, masks are not simply adorned as a

34 Butler, Gender Trouble, 175.
Figure Twelve
concealing disguise. Rather, they poise the wearer to re-enact and defer reflections, refractions, absorptions, and resistances to the objectifying gaze of heteronormative culture. Indeed, the subject that emerges from these exchanges at any given instance depends on its specific location in relation to the various ideological discourses it (re)produces and is (re)produced in. Hence, by altering the surface upon which subjects signify as sexed, gendered, and sexualised beings, masks unsettle prevailing certainties about how the subjectivity of the wearer is assigned and secured. Shifting and indeterminate, the masked subject emphasises and further distorts the normative assumption that locates the ‘self’ in an essential core. In Figures Eleven and Twelve, the enveloping motion—of the masked cloak in the former and the light-lustred metallic skin in the latter—folds the subject in on itself. In this tide of folding and unfolding, wherein the subject is seen to signify in a dialogic movement between inside and outside, its ‘enigma’, normatively situated ‘behind’, ‘under’, and ‘inside’, to be ‘discovered’, ‘extracted’ and ‘explained’, is unwrapped. It is a repeated stylisation of the body, its gestures, performances, and acts, strictly policed by an ideological paradigm comprised of naturalised sex, essential gender cores, and compulsory heterosexuality, that congeal over time to produce the effect of an internally located subject which has come to be regarded and fixed as an individual’s ‘truth’. At the level of sexuality, this ‘truth’ is contained by the oppositional limits of heterosexuality (coded ‘normal’) and homosexuality (coded ‘deviant’). In this model of sexual difference, of course, bi-sexual desires are nowhere in sight.

Certainly, Claude Cahun’s subjectivity does not reside ‘beneath’ any of the many masks she wears. Neither is it located in the histrionic play of seemingly voluntary
‘identities’. Rather, in citing the gender norms that pre-exist her individual subjectivity and deploying them differently, Cahun stages the discursive structure through which dimorphic gender operates as the governor of oppositional sexualities. At first glance, the self-portrait with hanging mask (Figure Thirteen) appears as a transparent presentation of her unadulterated state, yet the mask overlooking the scene acts as a reminder of the far-reaching and transformative mechanism of masquerade which Cahun writes of in ‘Captive Balloon’:

Les masques sont d’étoffe aux qualities diverses: carton, velours, chair, Verb. Le masque charnal et le masque verbal se potent en toute saison...on appliqué son masque...on soulève un coin pour voir...decalcomanie manquée. On s’aperçoit avec horreur que la chair et le cache sont devenus inséparables...Je frottai tant pour nettoyer que j’enlevai la peau.\(^{36}\)

Unveiled she is still masked, since the masquerade extends beyond the physical adornment and the two become ‘inseparable’. Furthermore, masks of one form or another are always worn, and once finished with they cannot simply be erased. ‘Photomontage Planche X’ (Figure Fourteen), published in \textit{Aveux non avenues}, contains the adage ‘sous ce masque un autre masque. Je n’en finerai pas de soulever tous ces visages’ [Under this mask, another mask. I will never finish revealing all these faces]. All these masks, their repetitions, hesitations, and deviations, do not conceal an elusive yet definitive ‘identity’. Rather, they \emph{are} her ‘identities’—or, more precisely, the various subject positions she inhabits differently. The grafting and recycling of images from earlier works only emphasises this crucial avowal. Repeatedly performed and discarded, these ‘identities’

\(^{36}\) ‘Captive Balloon’ is excerpted from ‘Carnival en chamber’ published in the journal \textit{La Ligne de coeur}, Issue 4, March 1926 [translation: ‘Masks are made of different quality materials: cardboard, velvet, flesh, the Word...The carnival mask and the verbal mask are worn in all seasons...one puts one’s mask on...one lifts up a corner to see...a failed decal. With horror one sees that the flesh and its mask have become inseparable...to clean them off I rubbed so hard that I took off my skin’].
are stored in her museum of faceless selves in the Claude Cahun archive at the Jersey Museum. On display while at rest as in use, they are indelible signifiers of a gender performativity that relocates sexual subjects in and as dynamic networks constituted in and through a continuing play between differences. This unremitting repetition, which reproduces, reconfirms, and resists 'identity', rewrites the logic of cause and effect to radically undermine conventional understandings of the sexual matrix wherein gender and sexuality are envisaged as the 'natural' effects of a causal and 'naturally' sexed body. As Rivière foresees:

The reader may now ask how I define womanliness of where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference: whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.37

In unpacking the historically woven mythology of gender essences, Claude Cahun's masks and mimicries operate as a series of effective contra-attacks. The systematic grounding of dimorphic sex, gender, and sexuality in a contained, containing, and containable framework comprised of metaphysical substances that subjects can purportedly either 'be' or 'not be' is exposed as a cultural effect. The notions that pre-discursive gender norms are cited voluntarily, and that the constraints they impose on sexed and sexualised bodies are resisted easily or completely, are also problematised. At once a cultural imperative and a cultural impossibility, the inaugural paradox of sexual subjectivity that Cahun exhorts undoes the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction. The fractures this forges in the foundations upon which the hetero/homo dyad is assembled open up spaces for resistances 'in between' that Cahun's masquerades seize.

37 Rivière, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', 75.
III

Claude Cahun’s self-portraits are inundated with traces of her multiply-sited and dissident subjectivity. They are vital in her rigorous critique of relations between the oppositional terms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. Unlike some of her more celebrated Surrealist counterparts, her pictures signify a concern with sexual politics rather than sex; with body politics rather than the aesthetics of the body; and with the processes through which heteronormativity is inscribed both on the body and in the body politic. In the slippages between the heteronormative ideal of ‘woman’ and the material realities of women, Cahun’s self-representations encourage a sentient rereading, and reappropriation, of ‘femininity’.

On the left hand side of ‘Photomontage Planche X’ (Figure Fourteen), the two iniquitous towers of superimposed faces, selected from various self-portraits, rise out of a single neck to look up to a sky filled with virile symbols of heteronormativity. The largest Russian doll, which leads the precession of maternal promises, heralds a flag with the title ‘La Sainte Famille’. Beside her an imposing prism containing the heteronormative lineage of father-mother-child, unified by an abdominal core of shared flesh that binds them through procreation, looms above Cahun’s repeated faces. The protective father carries a flash of lightning in anticipated response to the dangerous threat upon which he looks down. Recalling Uranus, god of the skies and bearer of lightning, who was father of the twelve Titian gods, the imagery underpins the patriarchal structure of heteronormativity. Firmly grasping his child by the hair, this personification of the heavens envelops his woman, whose physical and ideological centrality is defined by, and limited to, her relation to the male sentinel and authenticating child. Stifled and inert,
her jaded expression signifies an awareness of her historically inscribed and culturally prescribed position. Entirely bound by her husband and child, it is here that her agency is fixed: as fertile mother and deferential lover of ‘man’ and what she bears for him. ‘Il reste dieu’: her subjectivity as procreator is verified under the omnipotent eye of God, and Freud’s Holy Trinity of narcissistic redemption is reconfirmed. However, below the scene of the archetypal family, an incongruent detail catches the viewer’s eye. A male body floats aimlessly in space, and rooted in the navel a tree bears the stolen ears, eyes, mouths, and hands of Man Ray’s female torsos. These peculiar fruits, appropriated and consumed by heteronormative Surrealist inscriptions of ‘woman’, are reappropriated by Cahun to cause an arresting visual schism. The viewer is thus invited to reconsider how the heteronormative ideal that presides over this floating body is engendered, and with what consequences for whom. As in Adrienne Rich’s ‘Floating Poem’ in the 21 Love Poems series where the narrator laments ‘your body will haunt mine’,38 this detached and isolated spectre, bearing the symbolic relics of woman’s historical oppression, disrupts the ideal that cannot contain it. In sum, the various bodies that comprise this striking montage emerge from different discursive perspectives and as such register disparate yet connected personal and cultural anxieties. As an assemblage, the collage operates reflexively within the terms of the established matrix of power, engaging sexual assumptions in order to resist and uproot them.

Undoubtedly, Cahun did not envisage a utopic escape from the realities of a deeply entrenched western tradition of hierarchical binary sexual politics. Aware that repression partially produces the subject it simultaneously elides, her images of resistance

operate from within the terms of the oppositional law that constrains them. There is, indeed, no place outside the symbolic order of language from which to speak. In response to this dilemma, her later works, which present a topographical shift from enclosed interiors to open gardens and seascapes, mark a return to nature that ties prior explorations of performativity into a (re)positioning of ‘woman’ in nature. Enacting the vital differences between an uncritical replication of culturally repeated discourses of domination and an exacting distortion of them, Cahun’s later self-portraits liberate the ‘woman’ of the masculine Surrealist imagination to disconcert the framework of heteronormativity ‘she’ fantasmically maintains. The details of these later works confirm a life-long endeavour to reconfigure the female body’s dominant inscription as an apolitical sight of spectacle with the dissident recognition that bodies, as principal sites of signification, are crucial in reactivating resistance.

The self-portrait lying prostrate in a sandy cove (Figure Fifteen) appropriates the visual and discursive tropes extolled by Surrealism’s more recognised forefathers: the naked body set out for consumption could be lifted from a Man Ray nude, the binding ropes from Hans Bellmer’s female ‘Poupées’ series, and the shadow at the bottom casts a Daliesque anamorphic face that looks out of the sand to indulge in the masculine-gendered fantasy of scopophilia. At first glance, the image grounds ‘woman’ in her primordial ‘home’; a paradoxical place of refuge and constraint constructed in and by a tightly knitted history of phallocentric and heteronormative discourses. However, a close reading against this grain unpicks the details and discrepancies to show ‘woman’ in an act of innovative reappropriation. Unlike the soporific ‘woman’ of the canonical Surrealist imagination she critiques, this image catches its subject-cum-object in a moment of
uprising. With her head turned away from the masculine gaze that seeks to fix her, she refuses to lie down. Pushing against the earth in which her subjectivity is normatively rooted, she loosens the corporeal ties that bind that subjectivity in, and onto, her body. As Jacqueline Rose explains in *Sexuality and the Field of Vision*, ‘there is a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life...so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved’.\(^3^9\) Cahun’s restrained yet powerful defiance of her purportedly preordained position extrapolates this tension of reinscription and resistance. First engaging with an image of ‘woman’ that subscribes to the heteronormative narrative of what women ‘should be’, she then shrewdly articulates within a particular set of ideological parameters a shift between object and subject which exploits the concealed incongruence of ‘subversive’ Surrealist images and the conformist sexual narrative they so often rewrite. In its context as a Surrealist self-representation, the double and simultaneous staging of sexual difference in this photograph, which mimics the spatio-temporal movement of bi-sexual desires, makes visible a historic moment where women are, quite literally, beginning to free themselves from the limitations imposed on them by ‘woman’ and stand up to the self-fulfilling institution of oppositional sexual difference. In forging a way to differentiate between her own subjectivity and the position of being seen,\(^4^0\) Cahun discloses the political requirements of the dominant signifying economy of sex-gender-sexuality which delineates the boundaries of sexual intelligibility and cultural plausibility. Indeed, in a later self-portrait (Figure Sixteen), Cahun is, perhaps, seen as she sees herself: sitting and standing, fully-clothed and

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\(^4^0\) Whitney Chadwick elucidates this struggle in the wider context of subjectivity and visibility in 'An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors', 9.
Figure Sixteen
‘feminine’ yet in no way overtly sexualised, her ‘selves’ exceed and resist reduction to a singular object of masculine desire. Serenely self-assured without the trappings or exposures that have historically ensured intelligibility in phallocentric heteronormative culture, this image inconspicuously relates the cultural anxiety that belies the hierarchical terms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. The double image, not quite a reflection, imitates the dualist framework that limits differences to binaries of mutual exclusion. However, the vital incongruity between her two represented ‘selves’, at first glance unseen yet indubitable once noticed, manipulates the principal of non-contradiction that has historically solidified as an unquestionable regulatory ‘truth’ underpinning oppositional sexual subjectivity. This self-portrait ties together some of the threads that run through Cahun’s diverse works. Indeed, she is never the same twice; never the singular Surrealist ‘woman’; never the keystone upon which the regulating arch of sex-gender-sexuality tenaciously, yet anxiously, rests.

By agitating the false certainties of essentialised gender cores, Cahun’s images access a domain that is precariously concealed by them. In this domain, bi-sexual desires, and their implications for normative structures of sex, gender, and subjectivity at large, are crucial. The self-portrait of her legs (Figure Seventeen) shows Cahun standing alongside a child-like sculpture that encompasses the foundational male/female divide. Hands splayed to secure a seaweed skirt that visually multiplies her two legs and disregards the historically consecrated point of female reference at which they meet, Cahun envisages an ‘in between’ born of a difference that undoes either/or morphology. Interposed with this vision of Coatlicue, the Lady of the Serpent Skirt who, in Mexican
folklore, encompasses the dualities of man and woman, light and dark, life and death, this stick and stone figure, penis sprouting from its abdomen and vulva inscribed in the sand beneath, recalls the unification of male and female halves in the myth of Hermes and Aphrodite. However, this ‘hermaphrodite’ is not a simple amalgamation of distinct oppositions that it then obscures. Rather, it exists beside the superimposed figure that has produced it in and through a mutually dependent relation of sexual difference. More like the ‘alongside’ of recent bisexual theories, the ‘selves’ of this image, multiply situated in the photograph’s frame and beyond, reshape the oppositional morphology of dominant sexual narratives. Neither ‘male’ nor ‘female’, ‘masculine’ nor ‘feminine’, ‘heterosexual’ nor ‘homosexual’, the subject of this image is partially and significantly none and all of these at once.

Absence and excess: the resounding trope of bi-sexual desires emerges from within the very matrix of power that seeks to elide them. Like the ghostly figure in one of Cahun’s last retrieved self-portraits (Figure Eighteen), its ceaseless return haunts the neat binaries of the presiding sexual matrix. A spectre that troubles the distinction between presence and absence, this faceless desexualised zombie, lingering in the space where life and death converge, makes visible the undecidability that threatens a sexual paradigm governed by decidable oppositional categories. The inherent failure of the discourse of sexual certainty is foregrounded in this eerie self-representation, and the concealed structural discrepancies of sex-gender-sexuality are illuminated to make the seemingly insignificant signify. Poised between ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ desire, which are discursively grounded as the two intelligible (though in no way equitable) outcomes of

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41 For a more detailed exploration of Coatlicue, see Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 54.
binary sex, bound in the cultural inscriptions of dimorphic gender, this liminal apparition exceeds, and in so doing displaces, the foundational boundaries of oppositional logic.

In staging life and death, absence and presence, the volatile self and the curiously indomitable other, in the same spatio-temporal moment, Cahun’s graveyard figure holds up—with one hand gloved, one hand not—the ‘impossible realise en un miroir magique’ [the impossible made real in a magic mirror]. This impossible possibility is, in a sense, realised in Cahun’s self-portraits, which inhabit and recirculate the values of an ideological moment wherein normative terms of identification and patterns of sexual subjectivity are distorted. In her automythography, she wrote:

MOI—L’ une: Quelle vie! ce n’est pas la mienne. L’autre: L’intonation est juste. Un peu plus de conviction et je viendrais à ton secours.
Œ—En vain j’essaye de remettre mon corps à sa place (mon corps avec ses dependences), de me voir à la troisième personne. Le je est en moi comme l’e pris dans l’o.42

Visually conflating the vaginal ‘O’ with the phallic ‘I’, symbols which respectively signify ‘other’ and ‘self’ in psychoanalytical discourse, the diphthong œ, recurrent in Cahun’s written texts and featuring as a textual symbol in her collages and photographs as well, problematises the crudely gendered subject/object division. Within ‘moi’, the ‘une’ and the ‘autre’ already coexist; in ‘œ’, the ‘je’ is also pressed into the ‘other’. The ‘I’, then, is everywhere, as is its relational ‘other’. In becoming an object of her own gaze, and in turning culture’s gaze back on itself, Claude Cahun announces the ‘becoming’ of the subject in a manner that deconstructs and redefines how the established matrix of sexual difference is conceived. A self-acknowledged work-in-progress, she

42 Cahun, Aveux non avenue, 236 [translation: ‘ME—One: What a life! It is not mine. Other: The intonation is right. A little more conviction and I would come to your rescue. Œ—In vain I try to put my body back in its place (my body with its dependencies), to see myself in the third person. The “I” is in me like the “e” is taken into the “o”’].

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unremittingly challenged the fixity of sex, gender, sexuality, and subjectivity, unknotting and reweaving relations between and among their composite terms. In this sense, at least, her arresting self-representations undo the categories of ‘self’ and ‘representation’, and her explorations of sexual subjectivity, embroiled in a fervent desire to preserve ambiguity and promote undecidability, coerce the strictures and structures of oppositional sexual difference to undo themselves.

The principle aim of this study, as set out in the Introduction, is to question the restrictions which govern how it seems possible to conceive of sexual spaces in order to reconceive them differently. In Part One, I have demonstrated how Surrealism, with its intervention into realism’s demands, claims to redefine the paradigm of binary certainties that underpin dominant modes of knowledge, and I have examined the extent to which Surrealism’s claim to unsettle naturalised binary hierarchies takes effect with regard to sexual subjectivity. Certainly, an ardent belief that oppositional structures in no way represent the limits of difference drove Surrealism’s revolutionary spirit. In this respect, then, Surrealist discourse and its textual inscriptions present a threat to the ostensibly timeless and transparent principles of realism and its rationalist framework, and here Surrealism both makes a difference and makes differences differently. Yet close readings of sexual representations, specifically the relations drawn between the terms that comprise the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, illuminates how certain Surrealist texts (namely André Breton’s gender discourses and Man Ray’s photographic portraits) recoup Surrealism’s challenge to the naturalised structure of hierarchal oppositional difference.

In contrast, other texts, which have now regrouped to form part of what might be termed the Surrealist canon, perform a shift in perspective that is successfully transposed
to the field of sexual representation (those by Magritte and Duchamp, for example). Here, Aristotle’s case for the principle of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, which concludes with the claim that ‘there can be nothing intermediate…we must either assert or deny any single predicate of any single subject’,\textsuperscript{43} is contested to open up spaces between the bipartite polarities of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. In addition, Claude Cahun’s images stand out as exceptional nodes of resistance to the historical groundings of exclusive binary sexualities. Her representations of ambiguous and inconsistent subject positions agitate the oppositional slash of difference to make space for bi-sexual desires that unsettle both the terms and, crucially, the structures, of the established sexual matrix. In so doing, these representations present, as Tirza True Latimer suggests, a ‘process of re-creation’ which ‘calls for the implementation of new modes of expression, and the development of new modes of perception’.\textsuperscript{44} Questioning the morphology of sexual difference in this way makes possible those desires which Aristotle’s principle, as well as Enlightenment notions of subjectivity and their legacies of oppositional difference, have historically elided. Indeed, the sexual representations that Cahun’s self-portraits form bear witness to Nietzsche’s proposition, cited as this chapter’s epigram, that ‘[t]ruths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.’

Surrealist sexual representations which exploit rather than annul the creative tensions that differences impart displace dominant culture’s attempts to continually (re)enshrine itself. However, just as the possibilities of and for interstitial subject positions and desires are entangled in relations between the axes of sex, gender, and

\textsuperscript{43} Aristotle, \textit{The Metaphysics}, 107 (my emphasis added).

sexuality, so they are also implicated in the politics of racial difference. The second part of this study explores what happens to the framework of oppositions that bi-sexual desires inhabit and contest when issues of racial subjectivity intersect with the sexual matrix. The Interlude on Frida Kahlo’s paintings that follows marks this shift and also acts as a bridge between Surrealism in the modern context and magical realist moments as a postmodern mode of knowledge.
INTERLUDE
Frida Kahlo: An Artist In Between

I am
the sun and moon and forever hungry
the sharpened edge
where day and night shall meet
and not be
one

Audre Lorde

‘I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality’: such was Frida Kahlo’s resolute response when conferred with the title ‘Surrealist’. Her work, which seems to impinge on both modern and postmodern worlds, brings together the purportedly disparate realms of fantasy and reality; mythology and rationality; native Mexican votive art and the European artistic tradition. In her paintings, the personal, national, ideological, and political overlap. Her self-portraits, rooted in the convergence of indigenous culture, western imperialism, and postcolonial struggle, represent her sundry hybridity. The locations her artwork explores between and across the culturally constructed polar axes

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2 This quotation is taken from an interview with Frida Kahlo which was published in Time magazine on April 27th 1953 and is cited in Martha Zamora, Frida Kahlo: The Brush of Anguish, trans. M. S. Smith (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990), p.114. Kahlo did have some material as well as artistic and personal connections with the French Surrealists. André Breton and his wife Jacqueline Lamba, with whom Kahlo had an intimate love affair, were among the French Surrealists with whom she had encounters. Whilst on a trip to Mexico, Breton invited Kahlo to France to exhibit her work to the European artistic fraternity and general public, but when she took up the invitation she found upon her arrival that nothing had been organised by Breton and it was only with Marcel Duchamp’s help that the exhibition went ahead. On several occasions in her diary and in a letter to her childhood love and life-long companion, the communist activist and leader of Las Cachuchas, Alejandro Gómez Ariaz, she displayed a vehement distain for the Surrealist Movement and its members who were variously described as a ‘bunch of cocoo lunatic sons of bitches...so damn “intellectual” and rotten that I can’t stand them anymore’—see Hayden Herrera, Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo (London: Harper&Row, 1989), 242-45. Ideologically, she expressed an attitude shared by the Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier, that what the Surrealists codified in their manifestos as revolutionary had always existed in the fabric of Mexican and Latin American culture—see Carpentier’s essay ‘On the Marvelous Real in America’, originally published in 1949 and reproduced in eds Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 79-88.
of race, sex, gender, and sexuality queer the binaries through which difference is normatively mapped. As such, Frida Kahlo’s subjectivity and her relations with difference embody a multifarious and questioning ‘reality’ which she embraced and disseminated as both an ardent proponent of ambiguity and an artist ‘in between’.

Born in Coyoacán on July 6th 1907 to Guillermo Kahlo, a German Jew of Hungarian descent, and Matilde Calderón, a part-Indian devout catholic and meticulous conservative, Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo Calderón was thrust into the restless social climate that prefaced the Mexican People’s Revolution. Her lived-experience contained in a chrysalis the major elements that mark her art: an uncompromising commitment to resistance enmeshed in an abiding racial and sexual heterogeneity which itself became an identity she both struggled with and seized. In a deferential introduction to her diary, Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes aligns Kahlo with her homeland, suggesting that the pain and resilience endemic in her work underscores both her personal turmoil and the political state of Mexico. Describing her birth in coincidence with the 1910 uprising he writes: ‘Born with the Revolution, Frida Kahlo both mirrors and transcends the central event of twentieth-century Mexico...mak[ing] her fantastically, unavoidably, dangerously symbolic—or is it symptomatic?—of Mexico’. ³ An overview of Kahlo’s oeuvre suggests that her paintings in some way reflect and reproduce a ‘reality’ which is both individual and national. Indeed, so rigorous was her ideological fervor, and so strong her national affiliations, she reassigned her date of birth to match the year of the peasants revolt, erasing a chronology purportedly etched in stone by making herself three years

younger. Bed-ridden for months after a horrific streetcar accident in her teens that left her spine, pelvis, legs, and reproductive organs permanently damaged, her father arranged for a mirror to be fitted over her bed so that she could pass her convalescence painting herself. Her explanation for the enduring exploration of her own subjectivity began here. In this sense, her ‘self’ was her reality, and her paintings of the reality she saw reflected in the mirror became the public Frida that lives on in her self-portraiture as well as the private Frida she lived as every day. Certainly, the ‘reality’ that she claimed and painted as hers was doubtless a complex ‘mestizo’. Neither wholly external nor wholly internal, both symbolic and symptomatic—and, crucially, symbiotic—her inconsistent yet contingent realities, it seems, also painted her.

The Casa Azul, Frida’s family home which now houses the Frida Kahlo Museum, is full of mirrors. Lola Alvarez Bravo’s image of Frida walking in the courtyard there, ‘The Two Fridas’, (Figure One) shows her simultaneously peering into and out of a mirror built into an external wall. The image recalls Claude Cahun’s self-portrait before the mirror discussed in Chapter Three in which Cahun agitates the oppositionally gendered subject/object divide in order to return the gaze of dominant culture. In Alvarez Bravo’s photograph, though, the two Fridas seem engaged in the search for something undefined, yet specific, which the focal point of their convergent gazes paradoxically locates both inside and outside of their selves. Oblivious to the viewer’s gaze and looking into a space between the two planes they occupy respectively, their eyes rest on the same point but from two different perspectives; a point that the viewer of the photograph

4 ‘Mestizo’ and ‘mestiza’ (masculine and feminine forms respectively) translates from the Spanish as ‘mixed race’. Its traditionally derogatory signification has been reappropriated by mestizo/mestiza populations in much the same way that gay rights movements have reappropriated the term ‘queer’, and it is in this reclaimed sense that I use it here.
presumes exists although it remains to them unseen. The picture critiques the common
propensity to put faith in ‘reality’ without questioning what ‘reality’ itself signifies or
with what motivations it is constructed and with what universalising effects. Alvarez
Bravo remarks that ‘it seems as though there really is another person behind the mirror’. 5
Though there is little sense of posteriority about the reflected Frida, the mirror image
appears as ‘real’ as the ‘real’ Frida, recalling Lacan’s mirror stage. This stage of
psychical development, which inaugurates a continuing tendency to seek ‘identity’ in the
imaginary totality the child first sees in its mirror image, may enable the subject to
function as ‘I’, but always under a misrecognition. An identification rather than an
‘identity’, what the child sees in the mirror—and what the subject continues to
(mis)recognise in a process which is never finally completed—*both is and is not ‘I’*. Like
Cahun’s self-portrait before the mirror, Alvarez Bravo’s photograph of Frida and her
mirror image makes visible the *méconnaissance* enmeshed in the mirror stage, fissuring
the oppositionally discrete relation between inside and outside, unconsciousness and
consciousness, heterosexuality and homosexuality. Furthermore, as a representation of
the distinction between reflection and reality—of the invisible space between the two
Fridas that exists as a division or bridge to rupture the illusory unity of ‘identity’—it
illuminates the notion that both Fridas are in fact reproductions whose contingency
unsettles the viewer’s sense of how ‘reality’, and our place in ‘it’, is conceived, managed,
and redeployed. The photograph corresponds to Kahlo’s understanding of how ostensibly
incongruent positions converge in her varied and varying subjectivity. While the conflict
of opposites in which she was consistently entangled remained an elusive mystery to her,

5 Cited in Salomon Grimberg’s *Lola Alvarez Bravo: The Frida Kahlo Photographs* (Dallas: City of Friends
the plurality she insisted upon impelled an extraordinary creativity that cross-examines
how subjects are both normatively constructed as, and in, singular realities and
strategically bound in the static binary distinctions of naturalised ideological truths.
Through this simultaneous questioning of essentialist and dualist thinking, which is arrant
in Claude Cahun’s photographs, a viable ‘in between’ space, or at the very least a
possibility for it, is opened up.

Kahlo’s self-portraits, which comprise roughly a third of her entire oeuvre,
explore precisely this tension. One of her most famous paintings, also called ‘The Two
Fridas’ (Figure Two), shows her direct encounter with, and resistance to, the established
notion that subjects cannot concurrently inhabit or house the oppositional terms of
contradictions. Framed in the same spatio-temporal moment, her two ‘selves’ are
different yet connected in a visually brutal and tender image: they share the same heart.
The rich, lustrous colours that swath the body of the Mexican Frida radiate in stark
contrast to the stiff white purity of her European self. In traditional Tehuana dress she
sits, legs parted and facing the viewer, more open than her somewhat prim counterpart
whose knees are appropriately held together and turned in. Her left hand presents a
talisman bearing a portrait of her beloved Diego, which acts as a symbolic origin-
destination of the main artery that twists around her arm to carry life-supporting blood to
her heart and back. In the right hand of her neatly embroidered lace-clad self, she holds a
surgical clamp to halt the flow of blood, which, if left untapped, would hemorrhage to
cause her death. Her ‘rational’ self, then, whose heart chamber is empty, is also fighting
to sustain life at a time when, recently divorced from Riviera, Kahlo is documented to
have temporarily lost her characteristic joie de vivre. To let her heart rule over her head
Figure Two
might in such circumstances prove fatal. In ‘The Two Fridas’, heart and head are at once in conflict and connected by multiple lineages that surpass mutually exclusive polarities. The mind/body polarity derived from Descartes' *cogito* and endemic in western thought is thus enlisted only to be disturbed.

Indeed, in this arresting painting, as in the narrative of Kahlo’s life, Riviera both sustains her and represents her gravest threat (she was reported to say to a friend after discovering his affair with her sister: ‘I have suffered two serious accidents in my life, one in which a streetcar ran over me...The other accident is Diego’,

yet she also wrote in her diary a lament to Riviera in which her consuming love and admiration for him is emphatic). This allied dissonance, so crucial to Kahlo’s self-identification, is condensed in the joining hands at the centre of ‘The Two Fridas’. The white Frida, with gravity and reason on her side, pushes her hand down into the Mexican Frida’s hand, which embraces it while resisting a pressure that might otherwise submerge her. Before a turbulent skyscape, Kahlo’s two selves are conjoined yet separate, generically similar and crucially different. Exceeding simple oppositions, the conflicts exist between *and* within them, and knitted into these disparities is a vital dependency. Historically naturalised binary mythologies coalesce to be repeated and distorted in Kahlo’s doubling which enacts a complex negotiation of her own subjectivity. Her internal organs, seamlessly ejected into the external world, question the distinction between these purportedly exclusive realms and make visible the concealed ‘in between’ space of Alvarez Bravo’s photograph. The suggestion is that the process of division itself cannot be detached from the contexts it is

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surrounded by and attempts to separate. In ‘The Two Fridas’, Kahlo paints a reality wherein differences are mutually dependent and opposed to opposition (an idea prevalent in magical realist moments and which I explore more fully in Part Two). The dominant assumption that the world and its components are always already divided into two columns of hierarchical binary terms that are horizontally and vertically discrete is painted out of this canvas. Indeed, for Kahlo, it seems never to have existed as a natural law at all.

Interesting here is a diary entry entitled ‘Origin of The Two Fridas’ in which Kahlo describes the memory of an imaginary friend of her childhood:

[M]y imaginary friend always waited for me…I do remember her joyfulness—she laughed a lot. Soundlessly…I followed her in every movement and while she danced I told her my secret problems…How long had I been with her? I don’t know. It could have been a second or thousands of years…I was happy…It has been 34 years since I lived that magical friendship and every time I remember it it comes alive and grows more and more inside my world.8

The unity of which Kahlo writes recalls the imaginary plenitude of the primordial and pre-oedipal realms; sacrosanct and innocent places where established markers of time make no sense, where the past comprises the present and the future is speculative, and where dream and magic are integral parts of reality. Rooted in nostalgia, the remembered friendship describes a connection with her ‘self’ which psychoanalytically might be explained as a fantastic meeting of an ego and id whose connection had been severed by a perceived unloving relationship with her mother. This fracture in the maternal relationship is documented to have been amplified by Kahlo’s inability to bear a sorely desired child. The memory of cohesion and contentment, which feels more and more ‘real’ to her as it is (re)remembered, seems to be sought in the passionate attachments

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8 Fuentes, ed., The Diary of Frida Kahlo, 82-85.
Kahlo made throughout her life: in friendships and fixations, and most notably in her love for Riviera. However, while these intense dependencies have been deliberated and theorised as attempted resolutions of narcissistic tendencies—or as ‘self-objects’—in a recent study by Salomon Grimberg, the small but significant drops of blood on Frida’s lap (Figure Two) have been largely overlooked.

The ‘One Drop of Blood’ myth, which the drops on Frida’s dress recall, decrees that a person with one drop of ‘negro’ blood is black. As a ‘mestiza’, Kahlo is neither a native Mexican Indian (descendant of the Aztecs) nor a Mexican European (descendant of either the Spanish conquistadors or succeeding French invaders). However, the imbalance of racial hierarchy does not simply posit her ‘in between’, for the cultural location of mestizos and mestizas in Latin America, like criollos and criollas in the Caribbean and mulattos and mullatas in the Southern United States, is complex. Racially neither black nor white nor a simple combination of the two, mestizos and mestizas are caught in a volatile battleground between cultural assumptions of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’. Alongside these categories of ostensibly contained and containable racial purity, the mestizo/mestiza presence plays across the slash of visibility/invisibility, destabilising its oppositional logic. On the one hand, mestizos and mestizas, like ‘bisexuals’ in the sexual hierarchy, are deemed ‘preferable’ to blacks and gays respectively for their greater proximity to the hegemonic citadels of whiteness and heterosexuality. On the other hand, and in the same breath, they are despised for the stain of the ‘opposite’ they bear, for the racial and heterosexual privilege that ‘passing’ might

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10 I refer to the ‘One Drop of Blood’ myth again in Chapter Five with respect to black separatist reversals of it in Toni Morrison’s novel Paradise.
earn, and thus for daring to claim an identity of any sort within or outside the binaries that
govern established identity politics. The trace of oppositionality remains, and, as such,
any value the mestizo/mestiza or ‘bisexual’ is accredited, positive or negative, is derived
through the terms of binary opposites and, most pertinently, allocated by those who, in
one way or another, ‘belong’. As Fritz Klein explains in a proposal that aligns bisexuality
with racial hybridity:

Why is the person not seen as white at least in degree? The answer is as simple as
it is profane. A threat is best dealt with if it is dismissible. In the world of sexual
choice the homosexual is the black…the bisexual is really a homosexual with a
screw loose…the homosexual may have been despised for his ‘perversion,’ but
his of her psychosexual existence has never been in question. The homosexual
belongs. He or she has a culture. He or she can be loyal to a team.\textsuperscript{11}

In such a scheme, the threat of undecidability can purportedly be contained in and by the
‘excluded’ terms of binary hierarchies, in this case black and gay, where it can then be
marginalised so that white heterosexuality continues to reign supreme. However, mestizos
and mestizas and ‘bisexuals’ represent a graver threat to heteronormativity than blackness
and homosexuality. Cultures structured around polarities need groups its members can
identify either with or against. Normative cultural practices that carve racial and sexual
topographies into territories of ‘us’ and territories of ‘them’ are always suspicious of
those who traverse or tread the borders ‘in between’. The reactionary discursive tropes of
invisibility and silencing ensure that for those subjects who contend the cultural
boundaries which ostensibly demarcate the ‘self’ from the ‘other’ by resisting the
mechanisms through which these divisions are continually (re)etched, it can be difficult
to enact viable or legitimate subject positions. However, the vital difference between

\textsuperscript{11} Fritz Klein, ‘The Bisexual Option: A Concept of One Hundred Percent Intimacy’, published as excerpts
difficult and impossible is a creative challenge which Kahlo’s paintings refuse to deny and which her dissenting desires continue to re-enact.

In her stained white dress, then, Frida acknowledges that ‘purity is the enemy of change, ambiguity and compromise’\(^\text{12}\) and grasps the pleasures and discomforts of playing her equivocal self. Her self-represented plurality does not only signify the divisions within and beyond her own subjectivity, it also demystifies the mechanisms through which culture regulates multiplicity and flux. In ‘Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States’ (Figure Three), Frida’s ostensibly conflicting and inconsistent subject positions are depicted in the landscapes of the backdrop. Slightly elevated on an electric generator, Kahlo, statuesque and inert, places herself between the barren industrial landscape of North America and the fruitful earthy Mexican plains. The sun, moon, and lightning of her homeland are paralleled by a United States flag and plumbs of smoke; the ancient Aztec monuments and symbolic spiritual artifacts by factories and metallic piping; the plants’ nourishing roots by reels of utilitarian electrical cable. Dressed in an ornate pink dress and long lace gloves, she holds a Mexican flag in her left hand, and in her right hand a lit cigarette which hints at the anxiety masked by her stony posture and gaze. In this image, the geopolitical location Kahlo inhabits between boundaries marks a postcolonial shift away from the centre which converges with her sexual indeterminacy. Indeed, the self-identifications she (re)presents recall Jo Eadie’s discussion of bisexuality as a miscegenate location which he describes as ‘a place where there is a difficult mixing of supposedly incompatible orientations...dangerous exchanges, which disrupt the identities we have built up, and lead to unpredictable

places'.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, the material realities of these geographical \textit{and} sexual borderlands constitute ‘dangerous exchanges’, on a personal and political level, for subjects who traverse them.\textsuperscript{14}

In spite of—and, perhaps, because of—difficulties there inherent, Kahlo sought out unpredictable places where meanings could be untied and rearranged to create things anew. The ‘Exquisite Corpse’ pictures she created with Lucienne Bloch (Figure Four), which replicate the Surrealist game of the same name, exploit the instability of signification, and in so doing enable seemingly contradictory oppositions to coexist. A form of shared free-associative drawing, one person draws the head, folds it over to conceal it from the other person who then draws the body, and so on. The process is similar to the free-associative interviews discussed in Chapter One, but here the focus is on pictorial rather than written presentation. In this case, the result is a pair of comical yet revealing portraits of Kahlo and Riviera. Taking the head as the identifying marker of each lover, Frida, round-breasted with full hips, holds a fig leaf on strings over prominent male genitalia which drips into a cup placed between hairy calves, while Diego’s broad head tops a broom-bearing twisted torso adorned with breasts, male buttocks, and curvaceous feminine legs. These sexual hybrids recapitulate the excesses of gender in Kahlo’s self-portraits where her stern masculine expression, characteristic single eyebrow, and fuzz of facial hair are juxtaposed with the exotically feminine dresses, jewels, ribbons, and braids with which she adorned her small and shapely body.


\textsuperscript{14} Gloria Anzaldúa discusses at length the personal and political implications of borderlands in \textit{Borderlands/La Frontera}. 
Figure Four
Interestingly, as a young adult she dressed in men’s suits for several family portraits, an image that she returned to in ‘Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair’ (Figure Five) after her split with Riviera. In the painting, a musical score with the lyrics ‘see, if I loved you it was for your hair; now you’re bald, I don’t love you anymore’ is inscribed overhead. Frida pictures herself cutting off her ‘femininity’: an act of resistance that expresses the frustration provoked by feeling valued solely for her original costumes and striking long dark hair. However, in her left hand she holds on to a tress and in her right ear she still wears a dangling earring, and the masculinity she wears in the form of an oversized dark suit is ill-fitting: her tiny feet, hands, and head seem lost. The combined strength and vulnerability of this portrait, then, is a rejection of the mutual exclusiveness of masculinity and femininity in favour of a simultaneous coexistence of both. Performing concomitantly the oppositional gender norms that pre-exist her own subjectivity, Kahlo’s ‘Exquisite Corpse’ drawings and ‘Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair’ question the parameters of dimorphic gender as well as the mechanisms and motivations of its production. In so doing, they begin to unfold the implications—for the heterosexual matrix in particular and the binary edifice of western conceptions of difference in general—of compliance and resistance to the demands of normative sexual subject positions. These two images extend the discursive limitations of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix through which dissident desires are discursively policed, both in terms of the movement along the axes that comprise subjectivity and, crucially, in terms of movements between them. Sexual differences are seen enmeshed in, rather than separate from, the multiple axes of subjectivity through which individual subjects and group identities symbiotically come into being. Like Duchamp and Cahun’s performative play
Figure Five

Mía que si te quise, fue por el pelo,
Ahora que estas sola, ya no te quise.
discussed in Part One, and like Márquez and Morrison’s magical realist explorations of sexual and racial subjectivities which follow in Part Two, Kahlo’s sexual representations critique the imaginary unified stasis of sexuality and subjectivity to trouble the discursive limits of the heterosexual matrix and its oppositional demands.

Certainly, Kahlo’s delight in difference was pervasive and it disregarded cultural distinctions between and across the terms of sex, gender, sexuality, and race. As an active proponent of liminality, she also contested perceived partitions between the realms of art, politics, ideology, and lived-experience. Accordingly, the hopes and anxieties she entertained in her paintings were entangled in the way she lived her life. A significant detail which has for the most part been silenced by studies to date on Frida Kahlo (and where spoken, only as an appendage) is that although devoted to Diego Riviera, her sexual subjectivity was not confined to him. She had many intimate affairs with other men and women, during Diego’s infidelities, marital rifts, and the years of divorce.

Notably, though not surprisingly, those with men are well-documented while those with women remain largely concealed.15 However, in her diary Frida includes a transcription of a love letter written to painter Jacqueline Lamba, wife of André Breton, shortly after her return from France where she visited Lamba:

I have not forgotten you—the nights are long and difficult. The water. The ship and the dock and the parting…and you gazing at me so as to keep me in your heart. Today, I wish my sun could touch you. I tell you, your eyeball is my eyeball…Yours is the huipil with magenta ribbons. Mine the ancient squares of your Paris…You too know that all my eyes see…is Diego…You felt it, that’s why

15 Kahlo’s ‘bisexuality’ is mentioned as an after thought by Grimberg in ‘Frida Kahlo: The Self as an End’, seemingly as no more than an apparent mark of evidence for what is explained as ‘an exotic persona that could not help but draw the attention of others’, 87. Also, in the recent biopic film of Kahlo’s life, Frida (Dir. Julie Taymor, Miramax Films, 2002), her affairs with women are only briefly touched upon.

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you let that ship take me away from Le Havre where you never said good-bye to me. I will write to you with my eyes always. Kiss xxxxx the little girl.\textsuperscript{16}

The intimate connection between these two women is severed, it seems, by Kahlo’s eclipsing adoration of Diego, yet there remains a bond that exists alongside Diego’s omnipresence. This understanding of dissident desires fissures and redefines the established conception of sexuality which determines a subject is either ‘straight’ or ‘gay’ at any given point in time. In revealing here that she is neither one nor the other, Kahlo’s dissident desires trouble the dominant cultural framework that seeks to order and curtail insurgency. This is, perhaps, where the strength and fragility of her ‘self’ and her art are indecipherable: her self-representations push the boundaries of a ‘reality’ which seeks to paint her, turning back on it to (re)paint it (and) her self. As such, they agitate the boundaries that demarcate oppositional spaces to make space for bi-sexual desires and, more radically, to illustrate how bi-sexual desires redefine sexual spaces

The ribbons, arteries, roots and vines that run like threads throughout Frida’s work tie together the elements that comprise her ambiguous ‘self’ and demonstrate an acute awareness of the complex connections within and between subjects and cultures. Her self-portraits explore contradictions and liminal spaces to exert pressure at the boundaries of oppositionally configured subject spaces, and the writings and sketches that comprise her diary explore the tangibility of simultaneous opposites. The painting ‘Xóchitl’, or ‘The Flower of Life’ (Figure Six) marks an important moment where exclusive oppositions are superseded. The sexualised phallic-vaginal flower uses body parts recognisable as male and female to engender an image that is not part-male-part-female, but something new that retains contingency alongside difference. While dominant

Figure Six
ideology and discursive practices thicken the oblique slash of binary sexual distinctions, Kahlo’s image erodes their foundational metaphysical premise, rendering the divisive slash mutable. Crucially, ‘Xóchitl’ neither extols nor negates sexual difference. More compellingly, like Diana Fuss’s inverted knot and the möbius twist, it reconceives the signifying structures through which differences and conventions are normatively coded, contended, and impressed. As such, Frida Kahlo’s artistic ethos, rooted in her ideological outlook, overlaps with contemporary bisexual theories and epistemologies. Jo Eadie, satirising the ruling premise of identity politics, states that:

The Other cannot be inside our own space: its birth destroys the host, so that where ‘them’ begins ‘us’ has to stop...the two cannot, ultimately, coexist...to acknowledge, to give birth to the other in us is supposedly to cease being who we are altogether. The reality, of course, is very different.¹⁷

Indeed, Kahlo’s paintings present this different reality, announcing, quite dramatically, that giving birth to the other within us is where ‘who we are’ begins. Self-proclaimed as ‘the one who gave birth to herself’,¹⁸ Frida Kahlo painted her own reality; embracing her sexual and cultural heterogeneity as an urgent political standpoint as well as an innovative personal imperative. A performer of gender roles, unabashedly excessive in femininity as well as masculinity, and an intimate lover of both women and men, she painted narratives and wrote images that exploit the creative tensions concealed and compelled by oppositional rationale. Perhaps most compellingly of all, though, is her arresting gaze, which fixes the viewer, unsettling the assumed division between the mobile viewing subject and its inert viewed object to return the viewer’s scrutiny to the world beyond the frame. How, and with what effects for whom, are (sexual) subjectivity

¹⁸ Fuentes, ed., The Diary of Frida Kahlo, 49.
and (sexual) difference normatively dealt with, reconfirmed, resisted, and reconceived?

Frida Kahlo’s question*ing* gaze confronts the viewer with the very challenges that situate her, as an artist ‘in between’, to deal with difference differently. And it is from this interstitial stance that these very questions, encountered through the Surrealist lens in Part One, will be (re)viewed in the context of magical realist moments in Part Two.
PART TWO

Magical Realist Moments: Dissenting Sexual Differences
Chapter Four

Magical Realist Moments in Postmodern Contexts

The postmodern would be that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself.

Jean-François Lyotard¹

The only way to claim the legitimacy of your desire when the dominant culture fears it is to pretend desire can be exposed to light, can be discussed, analyzed, categorized, mapped, recorded...This act of exposure not only distorts the course of desire; it also has no choice but to express desire in terms the culture has already provided. Your desire and its articulation will resist those terms.

Marlon B. Ross²

Despite our desperate, eternal attempts to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.

Trinh T. Minh-ha³

Magical realist moments seize the paradox enmeshed in the union of polar opposites. Their textual inscriptions interrogate the borders that demarcate subject spaces and delineate sexual subject positions, and the postcolonial contexts from which they are so often written confront Eurocentric discourses of modernism with the issues of race and

³ Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 94.
nation. As a mode of knowledge diverse in cultural location as well as in political
deployment and effect, magical realism invades the omnipotence of western hegemony’s
oppositional edifice, critiquing not only its constitutive terms, but also the formal
conventions that have historically consigned them as hierarchical oppositions. In light of
the challenges with which magical realism presents established ideas about difference at
the level of content and form, it is ideally located as a dissident—and dissenting—
cultural lens through which to view bi-sexual desires.

My project set out to problematise the essentialist notions of fixed, unified, and
self-identical sexual subjectivities that inscribe, and are inscribed in, the terms of
hierarchical oppositional differences. Accordingly, this chapter shifts Part One’s focus on
gender and its relations with sex and sexuality in the historical moment of Surrealism to
the postmodern contexts of magical realist moments. I argue that it is critically myopic—if, indeed, it is possible—to theorise sexual subject positions and bi-sexual desires in
magical realist moments without considering their intersections with racial and nationalist
discourses, particularly under postmodernity’s scrutiny of relations between ‘identity’
and difference. Retaining in name the realist endeavour they critique, magical realist
moments, like bi-sexual desires that engage the binaries they also disturb, contest
oppositional spaces. At the same time, in traversing the borders that normatively
constitute subjects in culture they unsettle the structure of dominant hegemony. This
‘other(ed)’ mode of resistance, which, like Marlon B. Ross’s conception of desire and its

4 Eurocentric modernist discourses—of which Surrealism is just one—interrogate realist and Enlightenment
ideas about subjectivity, freedom, equality, and sexual subjectivity yet they rarely take the role of race
and/or nation into account in their theories and practices.
articulation challenge the very terms that seek to contain it, is the focus of this part of the study.

Beginning with an overview of the inception of ‘magical realism’, this chapter outlines some shared characteristics of fictions described as ‘magical realist’. I formulate the notion of ‘magical realist moments’ to describe a spatio-temporal reconfiguration of binary hierarchies that is both more akin to the morphology and movement of bi-sexual desires and more useful in determining their implications for conventional patterns of difference. Reframing the limits of intelligible desires in the postcolonial contexts of liminality, border crossing, and hybridity avows the presence of spaces ‘in between’ to unsettle the ostensibly exclusive polar distinctions they divide. Finally, close readings and theoretical contextualisations of magical realist moments in Gabriel García Márquez’s *Of Love and Other Demons* illustrate my argument that magical realist moments are poised to refute realism’s demand, echoed in identity politics, for singularity, certainty, non-contradiction, and stasis.

I

Unlike Surrealism, ‘magical realism’ claims no founding manifesto of organised aims, principles and objectives that outline a discernable movement. It has no leader, no members, no fabricated network; no fixed origin, and no definitive home. Indeed, the complex historical manifestations and disseminations that situate ‘magical realism’ variously as a literary genre, aesthetic mode, cultural epistemology, and ontological spirit are difficult to determine. For this reason, a brief genealogy of the term and its associated meanings seems crucial to contextualising magical realist moments.
German art critic Franz Roh first coined the phrase ‘magic realism’ in his 1925 essay, ‘Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism’, to describe a new form of painting emerging in Europe. Referred to more broadly as ‘post-expressionism’, this artistic method valued a formalistic return to realism with an important semantic twist: the supplemental emphasis was on the magic contained within reality; with the everydayness of magic and the magic in the everyday. Normatively in western world-views, ‘magic’, which is described variously as the act of conjuring, occult control of the natural and spiritual world, inexplicable occurrences, and enchanting phenomena, operates in opposition to ‘realism’, which is concerned with providing a convincing illusion of reality as western hegemony has, since modernity, historically perceived and deployed it. Already, then, a contradiction arises. How removed is the ‘illusion’ in magic from the reality that realism purports to represent? This question, central to magic realism’s artistic endeavour and to magical realism’s epistemology, is of primary interest to Frantz Roh, who makes clear from the outset that his conception of ‘magic’ is not concerned with the supernatural elements of external fantasy realms, but with instances that inhabit and expand quotidian reality as it is dominantly conceived and represented: ‘With the term “magic”... I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world,

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5 Magic realism as a form or artistic expression and political interrogation is largely concerned with painting. It developed primarily in Germany in the 1920s in response to the European movements of Impressionism and Expressionism that preceded it. Magical realism refers more broadly to the literary genre and mode of knowledge that developed in Latin America and other postcolonial locations from the 1960s (I will discuss its development later in this chapter). Though the two movements are not, contrary to popular belief, one and the same, they are contingent in questioning the prevailing mode of realism by unsettling the assumed division between ‘magic’ and ‘reality’. For detailed discussions of the similarities and differences between magic realism and magical realism, see Maggie Ann Bowers, Magic(al) Realism (London: Routledge, 2004) and eds Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community.
but rather hides and palpitates behind it'. Roh’s ‘magic’, then, is envisaged as integral to ‘reality’, marking its contingency with magical realism as well as a departure from the Surrealist fascination with eruptions of ‘fantasy’ and the ‘strange’ that were placed in hierarchical opposition to rational—and rationalising—‘reality’, and venerated over it. This crucial discrepancy between Roh’s ‘new art’ and its French faux ami, namely the spatial (re)location, (re)presentation, and (re)conception of ‘magic’, demonstrates how their respective parameters (re)mould established western structures of difference differently. Situated ‘behind’ the represented world, and concealed by the oppressive history of western realism, Roh’s ‘magic’ is poised to break through the fissures in rationalism’s purportedly unassailable reasoning and rupture its smooth surface. In contrast, by locating ‘magic’ and the ‘strange’ outside the dominant ‘reality’ of western hegemony, André Breton’s Surrealism not only limits how ‘reality’ can be conceived beyond the opposition of interiority and exteriority; it more ominously reinscribes that very malevolent division.

This strategic departure from Surrealism conceives of ‘magic’ moving within—and, crucially, between—the already dubiously segregated realms of representation and reality to question if the realms of ‘magic’ and ‘reality’ exist either in distinct opposition from each other or in isolation from representation, hermeneutics, and signification. Indeed, Roh notes that ‘[t]he new art is situated resolutely between extremes’ and predicts that ‘[t]he new position, if it survives, will exist on a middle ground not through weakness but, on the contrary, through energy and an awareness of its strength’. This

‘new’ form juxtaposes the extraordinary and the everyday, idealism and realism, subjectivity and objectivity, to agitate the borders that dominantly demarcate differences and explore the ‘beyond’ that exists within these couplings. Aesthetically and politically, magic realism thus reworks and supplements what already exists, untying the strands that bind dualist terms in the paradox of oppositional distinction and dependence, and (re)weaving them in the spaces between existing extremes. Similar to Maria Pramaggoire’s queer epistemologies of the fence, this critical stance reclaims the ‘middle ground’, a contended space that historically, in sexual politics and elsewhere, connotes a dubious lack of conviction, commitment, and self-knowledge. Working concurrently with and against the historically entrenched binaries of western thought in order to alter its limits, rather than either reversing the hierarchies of its composite terms or proposing a cursory rejection of them, magic realism, like the fence, stakes out a position between two terms without transparently reproducing them. Pramaggoire explains that the fence identifies a place of in-betweenness and indecision. Often precariously perched atop a structure that divides and demarcates, bisexual epistemologies have the capacity to reframe regimes and regions of desire by deframing and/or reframing in porous, nonexclusive ways...opening up spaces through which to view, through which to pass, and through which to encounter and enact fluid desires.  

The fence does not demarcate an enclosed space for bi-sexual desires outside of or apart from other culturally demarcated sexualities in an apolitical realm independent of the discursive practices and ideological contexts of its production. Nor does it contain ‘magic’ in a place distinct from reality. Like the stroke of oppositional difference, it delimits the spaces that comprise normative ‘reality’ yet remains invisible in authorised mappings of ‘reality’. In foregrounding this concealed detail, Roh’s relocation of ‘magic’

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8 Maria Pramaggoire, ‘Epistemologies of the Fence’, published as an editorial introduction to eds Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggoire, RePresenting Bisexualities, 3.
refuses the damaging stereotypes of indecision, promiscuity, and weakness that liminality elsewhere suffers. In name, in direction, and in its topographical location, magic realism plays with the significations of contradiction and coexistence, unsettling the assumption of naturalised oppositional difference, and sowing the discursive seeds of magical realism. Historically, Roh’s ‘magic realism’ became a site against which magical realism’s other important genealogical thread, ‘lo real maravilloso’, was set.

In response to European modernist artistic movements in general, and to magic realism and Surrealism in particular, Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier made a hostile distinction with Roh’s term. ‘Lo real maravilloso’ [the marvellous real] was coined in his 1949 preface to The Kingdom of this World, ‘On the Marvelous Real in America’. Carpentier’s argument hinges on the reciprocal equation that everything pertaining to ‘lo real maravilloso’ is in essence Latin American and everything Latin American intrinsically pertains to ‘lo real maravilloso’. This strategically colonial demand represents a disavowal of the European tradition it critiques: though Carpentier was involved with the French Surrealist Movement in the 1920s and 1930s, he disparagingly describes Surrealism as ‘that old deceitful story’ in which the marvellous is formulated and coldly codified. Deploying a medley of archetypal Surrealist images, Carpentier alleges that ‘the marvelous is stuck in umbrellas or lobsters or sewing machines or whatever on a dissecting table, in a sad room, on a rocky desert. Poverty of the imagination…is learning codes by heart’. Perpetuating the oppositional myth of erudition versus lived-experience central to the hegemonic strategies of colonialism’s distinction between ‘enlightened’ subjects and ‘primitive’ objects, Carpentier dismisses

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Surrealism as a formulaic western epistemology, isolated from the vibrant material realities of quotidian Latin American life, and discordant with the ‘natural’ ontology of the marvellous that he claims for himself and ‘his’ America. Carpentier states that ‘the marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace.’

Similarly, by placing himself—and his vision of the marvellous real—on one side of Roh’s borderline aesthetics, and in outlawing its provocative ambiguity, Carpentier’s critical myopia fixes his subjectivity—and the marvellous real—firmly within the oppositional framework that sustains the Surrealist fascination with the ‘exotic other’.

The European modernist discourse of primitivism with which his text engages reinstates the hierarchical subject/object divide of colonialism in a reversed, yet structurally similar, and equally damaging, separation of the exotic subject and its implicitly mundane other. By redeploying essentialist notions of racial difference, Carpentier attempts, in the image of Audre Lorde’s groundbreaking analogy, to bring down the master’s house using the master’s tools. The construction of the Latin American ‘self’ in a contained realm of purity from which the demonised intruding European ‘other’ must be purged postpones the urgent work of re-imag(in)ing the hierarchical subject/object oppositions through which differences are normatively constituted and policed. In addition, the presupposition underpinning Carpentier’s argument—that to occupy one side of a binary necessitates relinquishing those subject positions located either on the other side or in between—

effectively constitutes the antithesis of revolutionary change. If emerging cultural
discourses neither expand nor alter both the content and form of knowledge by signifying
differences and their governing structures differently, those differences will never be
perceived, interpreted, and (re)presented beyond existing limits. As a result, not only will
hegemonic contexts remain unchanged, but, more precariously, the illusion that they are
unchangeable, precisely because they are understood as reflections of predetermined
natural laws of difference, will be continually reinscribed in, and as, the bedrock of
prevailing logic. As Lyotard warns, ‘the price of this illusion is terror’: we need to seek
ways to avoid ‘the consolation of correct forms’ that elide dissident subjectivities; to
‘invoke…the unpresentable in presentation itself’, for ‘it is not up to us to provide reality
but to invent allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable.’ Allied with
Surrealism, magic realism, and the marvellous real, but with some vital differences which
distinguish it from these modernist enterprises, ‘magical realism’ (and to an even greater
extent magical realist moments), questions the logic of western hegemony and uncritical
reinscriptions or reversals of its constitutive terms, to ‘wage war on totality’.13

II
How, then, might moments of textual, sexual, and cultural paradox, which collate under
the term ‘magical realism’ and foreground the illusory status of ‘unity’ and non-
contradiction, be identified? ‘Magical realism’ has come to describe certain works of
fiction that have proliferated since the 1960s, most notably in Latin America, Eastern
Europe, the Indian subcontinent, former African colonies, and New World postcolonial

nations, but also in marginalised pockets of the United States and the United Kingdom. The term was not coined, and has never been claimed, by anyone. Rather, it has transpired from political histories of conflict, at the intersection of different cultures, in reaction to the aesthetics of the European modernist tradition, and into the ideological conditions of postmodernity. Accordingly, any fixed definition of magical realism would, in and of itself, be reductionist. However, in order to understand how magical realism operates as a signifying discourse, to determine its differences from Surrealism, and to clarify its connections with the epistemological spaces that bi-sexual desires inhabit, it seems necessary to consider some of the loose characteristics its fictions might share.

Firstly, magical realist fictions are underpinned by a resistance to the rules of ‘reason’ governing what is dominantly understood in the western world by the term ‘knowable’. Events that are irreducibly ‘magical’ really do happen in magical realist fiction, and, unlike fantasy fiction, which demands readers’ suspended disbelief, the fictional ‘reality’ of the text is, during the course of reading and often thereafter, unquestioned. Magical realism is thus not speculative: unlike fantasy fiction, it does not depend on some aspect of ‘objective’ reality (read: the here and now) being different, and it does not exist in a spatio-temporally ‘othered’ space. Rather, magical realist texts tell stories from perspectives that already exist but are often negated by hegemonic western discourses. In giving voice to historically silenced subject positions, magical realist fictions engage equally legitimate yet marginalised epistemologies and experiences which impinge on the subjugating colonial world-view to undermine both its authority and its value. Magical realism does not, then, only play with the rules that determine what is largely considered in the dominant western world-view to be ‘reality’; it presents
different coexistent realities. In this sense, it charts double histories: of the silenced subjectivities of pre- and postcolonial peoples, and of the presencing of differences per se.

Secondly, and in connection with the first point, there exists an intensity of integrated psychic and bodily experiences in magical realist fictions. Metaphors are made real. Objects, experiences, and even emotions take on lives of their own, and as a result, the most extraordinary things are commonplace and the world is enchantingly haunted. Readers are, on the one hand, addressed by the text’s ‘realism’ only to be unsettled, on the other hand and at the same time, by interwoven ‘magical’ events and phenomena and, more compellingly, the entrancing ‘magical’ detail with which they are vivified. Liberated from the mimetic illusions of classic realism, magical realism represents ‘reality’ by (re)viewing the parameters that normatively define it. As such, aeroplanes, icicles, and passionate love are all as astonishing as demons and gods. The ‘supernatural’ is neither questioned nor questionable, and its eruptions are presented in the same realm as the ‘natural’ to enervate the hierarchical prefix ‘super’ (and the ‘sur’ of Surrealism). Similarly, the characteristic carnivalesque spirit of magical realist fiction, which draws heavily on literary and artistic tradition as well as on folklore, underlines the magical power of fiction rather than the magic in fiction.\(^\text{14}\) Self-consciously metafictional in this sense, magical realist fictions, playing on ontological and phenomenal tensions, trouble the purportedly fixed parameters of ‘fiction’ itself as well as its presumed oppositional relation to ‘truth’.

In addition, a propinquity and coincidence of purportedly disparate worlds opens up spaces of national, racial, sexual, and cultural ‘in between-ness’ and intersection which, under the constraints of classic realism, can be neither seen nor shown. To clarify the meaning of ‘in between’ spaces here, and to illustrate the critical import of their undecidability and unpresentability, I return briefly to my analysis of Lola Alvarez Bravo’s photograph of Frida Kahlo discussed in the Interlude. The space occupied by the convergent gazes of both depicted Fridas separates them yet remains to the viewer unseen. This invisible space exists as a division rather than in and of itself, and it is only shown in that which it purports to divide. In this sense, borders themselves remain unpresentable, and though they are crucial to dominant understandings of difference in that they make oppositional distinctions possible, in the same twisted logic a ‘middle ground’ cannot exist as a viable political space for it cannot be seen. However, magical realist visions inhabit and aver these liminal spaces of encounter, in terms of colonial histories, dissident subjectivities, and borderline political aesthetics. Tracing the unseen discursive boundaries that regulate oppositional differences, they make visible the invisibility of these boundaries to unsettle the presumed ‘naturalness’ of oppositional hierarchies and thus destabilise the logic of hegemonic reasoning. These ‘in between’ spaces, where the gaps in the histories of sex, gender, sexuality, and race dwell, narrate the loss of absolutes. Their movements away from a world conceived in binary terms critique, in Bhabha’s terms, who ‘you’ are, or not; where and how that ‘you’ can live, or

15 In The Postmodern Explained to Children, Lyotard claims that one of the breaks modern and postmodern art makes with realism is in its attempt to foreground the invisible presence of that which cannot be seen: ‘Showing that there is something that we can conceive of which we can neither see nor show: this is the stake of modern painting’, 20. This ‘unseen’ and ‘unshown’ spectral presence also invades subject positions in the form of undecidability and interstitiuality, as I argue here.
not; what that ‘you’ can learn and think and with what effects, or not; and who and how that ‘you’ can love, or not.16 A proliferation of eccentric, anti-establishment characters in magical realist fictions intensifies the challenge that these liminal visions present to the rules that legitimate subject positions as normative, marginal, and, indeed, possible.

Similarly, magical realist fictions elicit in readers a sense of undecidability between seemingly contradictory or ambiguous understandings of events. Writers use several narrative techniques to achieve this effect. As in Max Morise’s caricature of Time discussed in Chapter One, time and space are often released from the linear and mimetic mappings of classic realism, urging readers to consider what they are looking at, and, crucially, from where they are looking. This review of authorised relations between time, space, and viewing subjects, exhorted by repetitions of narrative strands and images as well as language, questions how notions of sameness and difference are signified across time, space, and subjectivities. The demand to (re)orientate, (re)assess, and (re)consider is thus kept constantly in play. Readers’ sense of knowingness is undermined as they ask: ‘Have I been here before?’ Interestingly, moments of déjà vu address readers with uncertainty without focusing on that uncertainty, which, as Freud remarks, elicits most effectively the uncanny. Feelings of the uncanny—‘the name for everything which ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light’17—are, indeed, evoked

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16 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 15. I draw on the work of Homi K. Bhabha here—and later in this chapter—because his postcolonial theories of hybridity and interstitiuality unsettle the presiding paradigm of oppositional difference in the western world, and as such are aligned in their motivations and effects with ‘magical realist’ fictions. Like Frida Kahlo’s paintings, his theorisations of relationships between cultures, and between subjects in and of culture, (re)view the ‘inter’ as a significant signifying space capable of undermining the logic of non-contradiction which has historically sought, with catastrophic consequences, to divide ‘us’ from ‘them’. His theories are thus useful in reframing the limits of intelligible desires in the postcolonial contexts of magical realist moments and in the context of bi-sexual desires.

everywhere in magical realist fictions. As well as disconcerting the boundaries of ‘reality’ by making invisibility present, uncanny hesitations and repetitions undermine knowing subjects’ certainty regarding their identification with the ‘self’ in opposition to the presumed ‘other’. By exposing consciousness to doubt, uncanny moments question the rationalist demand to own and control the parameters of knowledge and recuperate the very ‘magic’ that is unsettling.

This overview of characteristics generally shared by magical realist fictions situates ‘magical realism’ as an opposite postmodern lens through which to (re)view dissident sexual subject positions and dissonant desires. Indeed, an endemic and deep-seated concern with uprooting historically entrenched borders and the social spaces they demarcate aligns the magical realist endeavour with the struggles of historically elided sexual subjectivities. Moreover, in magical realist fictions, realism and its framework of rationalism are disputed from within. The magic is part of reality and erupts from within a realistically rendered fiction to place ‘reality’ and its construction under scrutiny. The challenge is all the more disarming since, like bi-sexual desires, it moves simultaneously from inside out and from outside in. Purported oppositions do not rebuff one another because seemingly oppositional and conflicting elements coexist in the same place and at the same time. Imbricated sites of subjectivity enact some of the intricacies bi-sexual desires share with magical realist fictions, and these converge in the context of postmodernism’s mode of address. Indeed, postmodernism’s emphasis, in line with poststructural-queer’s endeavour, is on opening up possibilities rather than formulating

76, Freud explains that ‘one of the most successful devices for creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty...and to do so in such a way that his attention is not focused directly on his uncertainty’, 347. Freud also cites Schelling’s definition of the uncanny, 345.
definitions to stabilise meanings, and it is here that I articulate its contingency with both magical realist moments and bi-sexual desires. By acknowledging the deficiencies inherent in critical complacency, they together refuse, eagerly, the premise that any rigid terminus of signification is useful, exacting, or ultimately achievable. Moreover, to ‘begin’ with a preconceived knowledge of the ‘end’ is not only futile but also imprudent as it confines subjects in established, and often destructive, subject spaces. To stage the difficulties that differences impart is a strategically crucial principle of postmodernism, magical realist moments, and bi-sexual desires. As such, they intersect to enlist and explore contradictory realms rather than cursorily eliminating the conflicts and tensions that prove problematic to paradigms of hierarchical binary oppositions.

Structurally similar, and allied in their readings of differences, bi-sexual desires and magical realist fictions are not concerned with ‘fitting in’ as an ideal destination but as a means through which to enter into existing discourses and initiate ‘breaking out’. Through resident fractures in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, these internal commotions are poised to disturb its heteronormative—and discursively colonial—façade. The myth of binary sexual instincts, which converts legitimate sexual histories into nature and grounds the values of dominant sexual epistemologies as natural, is exposed as a constructed ‘reality’ that propagates in obscurity the political interests and motivations served by naturalising particular gender and sexual ideologies. Postmodern contexts permit a discerning demystification wherein individuals inhabit axes of subjectivity differently and inconsistently, unisonant voices are queried and queered, and singular self-identical subjects are untenable. As a result, all discourses are seen as necessarily

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political, and specific subject spaces, such as sex, gender, sexuality, and race, cannot be
theorised adequately in isolation. As Bhabha confirms:

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the
epistemological ‘limits’ of...ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative
boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices—
women, the colonized, minority groups, and bearers of policed sexualities.18

However, ‘policed sexualities’ (read: all sexualities, since heteronormative and non-
heteronormative sexualities are all vehemently policed by the heterosexual matrix) are
rarely fully-engaged in issues of race, and vice versa. An approach that addresses this
discrepancy, and validates interstitial spaces to conceive a critical perspective that does
not see various issues of subjectivity as separate, is imperative. With this in mind,
Bhabha’s Third Space, viewed through a queer lens to foreground ambiguously raced and
sexualised subjectivities, is of critical value to bi-sexual desires. Indeed, as Bhabha
suggests:

[We should remember that it is the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and
negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of
culture...by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and
emerge as the others of ourselves.]19

An awareness of the effects of this theoretical and political space for bi-sexual desires in
magical realist fictions, which takes into account the intersections of race with the sex-
gender-sexuality matrix, acts as a reference point for a rearticulation of the form of
difference.

A series of moment’s rather than a definable movement, magical realism is as
much a mode of representation as it is a fictional genre, artistic technique or political
movement; a way of interpreting, exploring, and refusing the culturally encoded

18 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 4-5.
19 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 39.
restrictions placed on dissident realities. As such, it seems prescient to use ‘magical realism’ as an adjective instead of a noun, and, crucially, as an adjective which in no way seeks to represent the limits of the noun it describes. ‘Magical realist’ writers identify—or, more often, are identified—as ‘magical realist’ with regard to one of many axes that constitute their subjectivity. Moreover, this identification is not fixed. Hence, writers are never only ‘magical realist’ just as subjects are never only sexed or gendered or sexualised or raced. And similarly, writers are never always ‘magical realist’. To describe writers or texts as consistently ‘magical realist’ both miscomprehends the ontology and squanders the value of magical realist fictions by imposing a hegemonic system of order in much the same way that colonial powers enforce western ideas on a subjugated social system and heteronormativity imposes restrictions on dissident desires. Maintaining movements between and among the terms of normative classification, textual encounters described as ‘magical realist’, which I refer to as ‘magical realist moments’, may appear sporadically among a writer’s oeuvre and within a single text. These magical realist moments, like bi-sexual desires, highlight the inadequacies of categories presently deployed to describe, define, and divide the world. Exploiting differences rather than seeking to resolve them, such moments redress the paradigmatic imbalances through which the excesses of oppositional differences are normatively contained, unknotted the structures, discourses, and practices that insist such divisions remain in place. The interminable battle for supremacy of x versus y is thus countered with the unthinkable proposition that somewhere ‘in between’ there resides an alternative to both. In the section that follows, close readings of magical realist moments in Gabriel García
Márquez's *Of Love and Other Demons*, which illustrate those characteristics of magical realist fiction discussed above, will explore this probability.

**III**

The opening of *Of Love and Other Demons* contains within a page a stray dog, black slaves (alive and dead), a dissident *mestiza* maid, an Abyssinian woman of iconic beauty, a white girl of noble birth whose name indicates descent from the heavens, and a Governor whose name is superfluous to his social status and contingent expendable wealth (Figure One). Here, amidst the characteristic excess of magical realist moments, the rewritten histories of liminal subjects, marginalised along the axes of race, sex, gender, and sexuality, begins. This depicted reality is, in line with the first point made in this chapter's previous section, not speculative. Rather, it already exists alongside western realism to challenge the parameters realism seeks to impose. The interwoven intricacies of 'otherness' render audible and visible the fissures forged in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix by the pressure that multiple and inconsistent subject positions exert.

The setting, a rambling market on the quay of an unnamed South American metropolis whose economy is, quite literally, driven by the cargos of imported Africans, is infused with a cacophony of circulating and spiraling movements, colours, textures, smells, and sounds. Upturned stalls of exotic food collide creating chaos which is echoed by the gamble of lottery kiosks; the fetid slums of the racial under-classes bustle with the brutal commodification of human life; the tide swims with magenta blood and swollen bodies harbouring threateningly inexplicable disease; and a single 'article' of unsettling beauty is exchanged at a price determined by weight of flesh for gold. All these images jostle for
An ash-gray dog with a white blaze on its forehead burst onto the rough terrain of the market on the first Sunday in December, knocked down tables of fried food, overturned Indians' stalls and lottery kiosks and bit four people. Three of them were black slaves. The forth, Sierva María de Todos los Angeles, the only child of the Marquis de Casalduero, had come there with a mulatta servant to buy a string of bells for the celebration of her twelfth birthday.

They had been instructed not to go beyond the Arcade of the Merchants, but the maid ventured as far as the drawbridge in the slum of Getsemani, attracted by the crowd at the slavers' port, where a shipment of blacks from Guinea was being sold at a discount. For the past week a ship belonging to the Compañía Gaditana de Negros had been with dismay because of an unexplainable series of deaths on board. In an attempt at concealment, the unweighted corpses were thrown into the water. The tide brought them to the surface and washed the bodies, disfigured by swelling and a strange magenta coloring, up on the beach awaited. The vessel lay unanchored outside the bay, for everyone feared an outbreak of some African plague, until it was verified that the cause of death was food poisoning.

At the time the dog ran through the market the surviving cargo had already been sold at reduced prices on account of poor health, and the owners were attempting to compensate for the loss with a single article worth all the rest: an Abyssinian female almost two meters tall, who was smeared with cane molasses instead of the usual commercial oil, and whose beauty was so unsettling it seemed untrue. She had a slender nose, a rounded skull, slanted eyes, all her teeth and the equivocal bearing of a Roman gladiator. She had not been branded in the slave pen, and they did not call out her age and the state of her health. Instead, she was put on sale for the simple fact of her beauty. The price the Governor paid, without bargaining ad in cash, was her weight in gold.

Figure One
position in a narrative that, from the outset, demarcates and traverses various social and
topographical boundaries. In the intemperate climate, the preparations for the celebrations
of Sievra María de Todos los Angels' twelfth birthday coincide with a moment in which
time fleetingly freezes: along with three 'other' unidentified slaves, María is bitten by a
rabid dog.

Thrown into this unruly textual space, readers, a little like 'the vessel [that] lay
unanchored outside the bay' and the 'unweighted corpses...thrown into the water', are
awash with information and have few points of orientation but for the traces of realism's
archetypes. Beauty is the tallest figure, and she is a woman bought by the richest person,
the Governor. Strategies of ownership, appropriation, and control are immediately drawn
into the oppositional battleground upon which the colonial conquest of bodies and land is
played out. However, the Abyssinian's extraordinary height and shaven head identify her
as an unusually authoritative, masculine, and individualised 'object' who, having escaped
the typical branding of slaves, occupies a position in power relations differently. The
racial hierarchy is troubled by the fact that the standard mark of inferiority, blackness, is
also the site of her superiority. Her potent beauty is thus held in tension with the
Governor's wealth: the opposition of hatred and veneration becomes entangled and
strained as colonial and primitivist desires overlap and intersect with the paradox of
'woman’. Also, the slaves, described singularly as 'a shipment' whose individual
subjectivities are ruthlessly elided, are less dismissible than the ideological paradigm
represented by the Governor might admit. Their ailing bodies, caught between life and
death, refuse to be erased. They are 'unanchored', existing 'offshore', beyond the license
of law, as anomalies coming to the surface, rising from 'concealment' to reassert their
denied presence. This resistance to imposed rule is underscored when the maid trespasses onto territory deemed ‘off limits’ to the accompanying aristocratic girl. It is no narrative coincidence that immediately after this physical and ideological transgression the novel’s founding catastrophe takes place. The dog, perpetrator of the punitive bite, is marked with a suspicious white blaze and perilously untamed. Unlike the disciplined hound of English realist literature that recognises his master’s authority and complies to it with unquestioned loyalty, this wild canine represents the unknown, and as such is disconcertingly knowing. In biting the girl, this receptacle of cultural anxieties draws readers into one of the many possible narrative paths the frenzied opening engenders. The magical realist moments that follow take from this opening passage the signifiers of realism and its hegemonic rationalist framework, which governs what is dominantly conceived of in the western world as ‘knowable’, and (re)views them from the perspectives of subjects caught ‘in between’. Though the text superficially engages normative significations of difference by presenting uncertainty governed by brutality, dissidence reigned in by violence, beauty brought and freedom curtailed, it does so with ulterior effect. Indeed, scratches in the textual surface reveal that uncritical rescriptions of realism’s rigid archetypes constitute neither the complete nor the completed story.

Racial hierarchy is immediate and candid in *Of Love and Other Demons*, and the violence of its dehumanising effects is vicariously portrayed. Territories for blacks, *mulattos* and *mulattas*, Indians, *mestizos* and *mestizas*, and whites map the colonial racial order topographically as well as ideologically. The axes that comprise the sex-gender-sexuality matrix intersect with these racial divisions to further problematise the notion of coherent and consistent subjectivities both within and among the individuals that
comprise collective identities. By day, female black slaves are found in their owner’s kitchens or in slave yards full of children while their male counterparts maintain sugar and cacao plantations. *Mulattas* and Indian women are admitted to the white domain of grand colonial houses in order to clean, and their male counterparts to make repairs, but they must remain, at all times, unseen and unheard. At night, these slaves cross the drawbridge spanning the segregating river to return to the Getsemani slum, while their white ‘masters’ of European descent immerse themselves in the pursuit of knowledge, capital gains, and sexual gratification to secure the hierarchically drawn boundaries of race, class, and gender that colonialism demands. However, the ethereal presence of the slaves that haunt the Marquis de Casalduero’s house, relaxing, playing cards, chewing molasses, and sleeping, mark the ghostly return of the colonial ‘other’ wherein what should remain hidden becomes ephemerally apparent. This magical realist moment engages a counter-colonial discourse that unpicks the paradox of the colonial mode of representation by writing the silenced disorder of subaltern murmurs *alongside* the more vociferous colonial order of classic realism. Making present a historical absence in the colonial world-view, the text engages equally legitimate yet dominantly elided subject positions and experiences. Hierarchy is thus countered with hybridity. Indeed, movements between purportedly fixed and distinct identifications of race and the sexual matrix extend the possibilities for spaces wherein liminal subjectivities can experience more freely desires and differences beyond the hegemonic restrictions of hierarchical binaries.
Sievra María articulates this ‘interstitial passage’ occupied by hybrid identities. The threat with which this space addresses the colonial psyche is illustrated when the Marquis, in seeking to reclaim his daughter from a childhood spent in the shadows, implements a normalising strategy of purification. In order to expunge Sievra María of the rabies symbolic of her cultural impurity, he attempts to reinstate the territorial boundaries of self and other (‘Most important of all, she was not to cross the thorn bush fence he would place between the slave yard and the house’). However, Sierva María, a willful product of a collision of cultures who takes for herself the African name María Mandinga, identifies with a combination of contradictory influences, and experiences difference in ways which exceed her father’s restrictive topographical mapping. The intricate subject position(s) she adopts sharply foreground the colonial self’s misconception of its relation to alterity:

The girl, daughter of an aristocrat and a commoner, had the childhood of a foundling...Dominga de Adviento suckled her, baptized her in Christ and consecrated her to Olokun, a Yoruban deity of indeterminate sex whose face is presumed to be so dreadful it is seen only in dreams and always hidden by a mask. Transplanted to the courtyard of the slaves, Sievra María learned to dance before she could speak, learned three African languages at the same time, learned to drink rooster’s blood before breakfasts and to glide past Christians unseen and unheard, like an incorporeal being. (43)

María’s simultaneous occupation of multiple subject positions across the binary divide militates against her father’s colonialist purification precisely because ‘self’ and ‘other’ are not distinct in her experience. The differences within herself, as well as from those with whom she would normatively identify via sameness, locate her at ‘the rim of an “in-

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20 Bhambha describes the ‘interstitial passage’ as the space between fixed identifications that entertains difference without submitting to assumed hierarchies, *The Location of Culture*, 4.
between" reality', which is neither seen nor shown in classic realism's monocular viewpoint, and where magical realism plays.

Interestingly, through the multiply sited mestiza subjectivity María embodies, she is, from the colonial perspective, disembodied: 'she is not of this world' (43). Transplanted from the illusory purity of the white domain, she is grafted into the 'other' space, and hence split between the two. Like Frida Kahlo and Claude Cahun in so many of their self-portraits, she occupies a liminal space where cultures converge to render visible the invisibility of borders that seek to press subject positions into oppositionally discrete, and thematically distinct, differences. Magical realist in its signification and effect, María's schismatic presence also splits the oppositional stoke that divides her. In response to the threat this fracture poses to the purity/impurity hierarchy, her signification is limited to 'incorporeal being'. Since she exceeds the oppositional paradigm historically inscribed as the natural order that determines what is and is not of this world, she is deemed unworldly. Wrapped in an incongruous skin—'[t]he only thing white about that child is her colour' (46)—that should signify 'supremacy', she is neither black nor white but both and neither. This transgressive racial location impinges on the masculine and heteronormative laws that underpin colonialism. Indubitably, María's alterity is unsettling not only with respect to the colonial 'self', but also with respect to the historically entrenched western metaphysics of difference. Distinct polarities exist neither in María nor for her: the differences she inhabits cannot be properly understood in terms of their opposition from sameness, but rather as differences from the established oppositional structure of difference itself.

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22 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 13.
Consioned and feared as an 'unseen and unheard incorporeal being' by the restrictions of colonial discourse, Maria takes hold of her invisibility and silence to exploit the very trope through which hegemonic strictures have fashioned her, and others like her, in silence. This reappropriation is useful in reading marginalised sexual subject positions which are historically familiar with the concepts of invisibility/visibility and secrecy/exposure, in particular subjects of bi-sexual desires who experience the trope of 'invisibility' ambiguously. The sustained efforts of dominant identity politics to adorn sexual subjects with visibility and audibility have focused on the act of coming out.

Aspiring to avow 'closeted' subjects by confirming their viability beyond the closet doors, the process—which purportedly places self-determined subjects in control of both knowledge of their own sexuality and the consequences of disclosures concerning it—involves a move towards emancipation, which may or may not be achieved. In 'Framing Contention: Bisexuality Displaced', Mariam Fraser outlines the importance of remaining critically cautious, warning that 'to reveal our sexuality, to expose it, declare it, and confess it...serves only to bind us all the more tightly into regimes of knowledge and power'. In this sense, the political effects of uncritical outing may serve to reinstate or reverse fixed identities within the inside/outside polarity, for the reality of the open secret is, certainly, an extremely complex battleground. Coming out is never a simple act of avowal that progresses in one direction towards an achievable destination where the unified and empowered subject is located. Rather it is a continuing, and often risky, process of managing the borders between inside and outside to negotiate subject spaces that are viable, liveable, and safe. Entering into the power dynamics of border control

23 Mariam Fraser, 'Framing Contentions: Bisexuality Displaced', published in eds Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggoire, RePresenTing Bisexualities, 253.
holds implications beyond the original motivation, and, as recent bisexual epistemologies have charted, it is vital to avoid a myopic reversal of damaging hierarchies.\textsuperscript{24} As ‘identities’ become more violently contested, there is so much more at stake, yet it is vital not to lose sight of the far-reaching critical implications of reactionary political action.

What seems crucial to understanding the critical significance for bi-sexual desires of María’s liminality, and to avoiding the damaging consequences of reactionary identity politics, is an analysis of the inscription of disclosure as at once compulsory and forbidden. D. A. Miller suggests that ‘the phenomenon of the “open secret” does not, as one might think, bring about the collapse of those binarisms [private/public, inside/outside, subject/object] and their ideological effects, but rather attests to their fantasmatic recovery’.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, the paradox of the open secret in a sense reinscribes the hierarchical dichotomies it seeks to overcome by enabling heteronormative discourses to gain control of subjects who have made themselves present and thus subordinated themselves within the logocentric tradition that privileges presence; the same tradition that has laid the foundations and conditions for their hostile exclusion. The cleansing process that normatively pursues the act of disclosure seeks to rid the heterosexual paradigm of the contagious impurity that haunts it, as Jo Eadie describes: ‘To put itself at ease, the body politic rids itself of all those dis-easing (for which read “diseased”) subjects, practices, pleasures and attitudes which trouble it’.\textsuperscript{26} In making themselves fully-present, ‘deviant’ subjects not only enter into a war of oppositions they may be ill-

\textsuperscript{24} The various consequences of outing have been an important issue in bisexual histories, theories and lived accounts in recent years. For an interdisciplinary overview, see eds Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggoire, \textit{ReRepresenting Bisexualities} and eds Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, \textit{Bi Any Other Name}.

\textsuperscript{25} D. A. Miller, \textit{The Novel and the Police} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 207.

\textsuperscript{26} Eadie, ‘Activating Bisexuality’, 151.
equipped to fight; they also submit themselves to a position predetermined by the heteronormative paradigm their presence contests and, in so doing, endorse the oppressive archetype. Judith Butler explains that ‘[t]o speak within the system is to be deprived of the possibility of speech; hence, to speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot “be” within the language that asserts it’. 27 The excessive and visible are thus rendered always already invisible. While subjects cannot freely exist shrouded in secrecy and fear, nor can oppositional exclusions be effectively redressed and reconceived within the terms of oppositional exclusion. It is, then, the preoccupation that inextricably links objective visibility and political presence, reiterating the fiction of solidity prevalent in western epistemologies, 28 that contributes to the continued subordination and exclusion of non-heteronormative subjects. For this reason, close scrutiny of the premise that inevitably equates visibility/invisibility with knowledge/ignorance, truth/denial, and presence/absence (read: unified vociferous identity/fragmented apolitical anti-identity) is expedient.

María’s power, then, resides in her capability to expose and ubiquitously spread a threat which is always already present precisely because it is unseen. Her surreptitious movements endanger the ‘solidity’ of those very ideologies that have condemned her. As she ‘glide[s] past Christians unseen and unheard’ (43), she undermines, in the spirit of magical realist moments, the rules of reason, making visible the invisibility of the stroke of oppositional difference that engenders the ‘rational’ in opposition to ‘irrationality’.

27 Butler, Gender Trouble, 116.
28 Clare Hemmings discusses the fiction of solidity in some depth in ‘Resituating the Bisexual Body: From Identity to Difference’, published in eds Joseph Bristow and Angelia R. Wilson, Activating Theory, 127.
Rather than conforming to—and thus confirming—the dyad of presence versus absence, her undecidability disturbs it. Similarly, Dulce Olivia, the Marquis’s estranged first wife and inmate of the Divina Pastora asylum, negotiates the spaces between presence and absence, reason and madness, to problematise dualist gender discourses. Dulce Olivia’s exile from the ‘female’ sphere of domesticity, signified by her choice of career as a saddle maker, is, in the gendered narrative of realism, the attributed cause of her psychosis that warns women to adhere to their allocated social spaces (‘[s]o unusual an incursion into a man’s trade was the explanation given for her losing her reason’ (49)). At once enlisting and resisting rationalist illogic at the level of gender norms, realism’s monocular viewpoint is characteristically queered and the parameters that normatively define ‘reality’, both in terms of gender and of madness, are (re)viewed. Concealed in the asylum’s attic, the parodied mad woman of western literary realism\(^{29}\) is not, however, contained there:

> Whenever she could she would escape from Divina Pastora through breaches in the orchard. She tamed the mastiffs and made them her own with the food of her chaste love, and devoted the hours when she should have been sleeping to caring for the house she never had. (40)

Mourning an unfulfilled loss, this dutiful housekeeper, attuned to the nostalgic ideals of devotion, self-sacrifice, compliance, and respectability, fulfils and excels in all the requirements of a good wife. Both present and absent in the marital home, Dulce Olivia simultaneously refuses and engages conventional constraints to claim the craved agency she was previously denied.

The double narrative of this magical realist moment recalls, with a difference, Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, but as a repetition of gender norms which is ‘almost the same but not quite’. In the slippage between pre-discursive codes of gender and Dulce Olivia’s citing of them, a schism is produced which ruptures the heteronormative discourse of colonialism, turning scrutiny from its subjugated ‘object’ to the subjugating discourse itself. In a sense, then, the policing of gender is policed: the normative and normalising concept that male and female domains are distinct, consistent, and harmoniously aligned, so that all women occupy all ‘female’ roles equally, is contended. As such, the oppositional configurations of realism’s sexual matrix—of female neurosis and male control, female domesticity and male mobility—are revealed as fallacious, if compelling, cultural myths. In Dulce Olivia’s portrayed ‘madness’, where ‘[c]razy people are not crazy if one accepts their reasoning’ (35), the strategies and structures of ‘reason’, and the concurrent deployment and reinscription of the heterosexual matrix, is called into question. Undecidable yet decidedly performative, this magical realist moment cites the norms of realist fiction and re-enacts them to force a resistance from within.

 Appropriately, undecidability marks the close of Of Love and Other Demons, which concludes with María’s uncertain death. Discovered tied up and emaciated in her bed, ‘dead of love…her eyes radiant and her skin like a newborn baby’ (160), her estranged mother’s dismissive prophesy upon hearing of the inaugural dog bite—‘she’ll either die or she won’t: there’s no other possibility’ (30)—is disputed. María’s hair never finally dies, and as the subject of the novel’s epigram as well as its last sentence, it weaves together with its undecidability the novel’s frayed and knotted threads. As a

30 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 86.
marker of María's enduring resistance to the requirements of oppositional difference, it posthumously 'gushed like bubbles' (160) from her brutally shaven head: an uncanny eruption that marks the return of historically silenced dissident desires and demands an urgent reconsideration of normative silencing strategies. Indeed, death is rarely final in Márquez's narrative. Subjects are caught 'in between' life and death: from the chronically ill bishop, the timeless alchemist and the listless Marquis to the sentient spectre Dulce Olivia, the walking corpses and flying nuns, the dismembered slaves and the damned lovers. As in Claude Cahun's graveyard self-portrait, this textual ambivalence with regard to whether subjects and objects are dead or alive, animate or inanimate, imagined or 'real', awakens, as Freud suggests, the conditions of the uncanny which are endemic in magical realist moments as well as in the movements of bi-sexual desires.31 Certainly, in demonstrating that liminality exceeds firstly the polarities that strive to regulate it, and secondly the coding of 'in between' subject positions as undecided not undecidable, uncanny encounters relocate cultural anxieties in the inadequate framework of oppositions rather than in the dissent its form cannot contain.

María, with her irrepressible hair and host of ambiguous compatriots, performs this characteristic tension of magical realist moments. Her invisible, inaudible, interstitial presence haunts the novel and the world beyond the text. And in so doing, it coerces readers to view differences differently.

The enduring challenge of magical realist moments, then, like that of bi-sexual desires, is to the assumptions of difference that have historically governed not only how

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31 In 'The Uncanny', Freud states that 'a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one', 354.
subjects and cultures think, but also the limits of what it seems possible to think.

Oppositional thought creates demons and demands exorcisms; it constructs differences as malevolent threats that must be ensnared, eradicated, and eschewed. In such a schema, liminal desires are rein ed in and meticulously policed. Yet they always, somehow, manage to resist. Nowhere are self-di erential differences su ciently stabilised and controlled; nowhere are they successfully immobilised in distinct, coherent, consistent oppositions ad in nitem. As Bhabha contends:

The aim of cultural di erence is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position...where adding to does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signi cation.32

With these spaces of rearticulated di erence in mind, and using magical realist moments in Toni Morrison’s Paradise by way of illustration, the next chapter demonstrates that, in spite of racial separatism and racial assimilation’s struggles to establish the contrary, categories always leak.33

32 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 162.
33 Trinh T. Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other, 94 (as per the chapter’s epigram).
Chapter Five

Racing Interstitial Encounters

It is precisely the notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place ‘other’ than ‘the’ or ‘a’ center, which seems...an essential feature of that strain of postmodernism we call magic realism.

Theo L D’haen

[T]he hybrid acknowledges the part that the past has played in constituting new cultures and identities, and then displaces the dominant (and dominating) culture’s attempt to enshrine itself...by supplementing it and thereby rewriting the future.

Jo Eadie

Turn down the daily noise and at first there is the relief of silence. And then, very quietly, as quiet as light, meaning returns. Words are the part of silence that can be spoken.

Jeanette Winterson

Including race in the politics of bi-sexual desires, as the previous chapter demonstrates, complicates the omnipotent presence of oppositional distinctions in sexual subjectification. It also agitates the lean of dominant identity politics to exert difference

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2 Eadie, 'Activating Bisexuality', 159.
from a position of sameness, enabling essentialist sexual politics to be (re)viewed through
a cultural lens that demystifies historically naturalised ideas about race and racial
relations. Certainly, in the politics of race, the tenacious, if muted, effects of essentialist
policies are not delimitied by race. Racial politics and the axes of sex, gender, and
sexuality are mutually implicated: together they circulate and resist dominant cultural
values and established ideas about identity and difference. With this reciprocal
connection in mind, this chapter addresses three principal questions. What is at stake in
the utopian politics of racial separatism and racial assimilation for subjects marginalised
along the axes of sex, gender, and sexuality? How might interstitial subjects place
themselves in such politics to contest oppositional difference and counter its divisive
implications? And how do magical realist moments challenge the universalising agenda
of realism and the separatist agenda of dominant identity politics to resignify racial and
sexual differences simultaneously, and in so doing produce new—and activate existing—
spaces of signification?

As explorations of Seivra María's subjectivity in Of Love and Other Demons
confirm, 'purity' is a familiar theme in discourses of difference, and 'purging' a recurring
trope. Central to this cleansing rhetoric is the blood rule. Originating from the notion that
one drop of black blood marks the white body as impure, the blood rule operates as a
furtive thread in separatist racial politics, and is also invested in cultural anxieties
surrounding the spaces of difference that govern sexual identities, both in the
heterosexual matrix which marks any instance of non-heterosexual desire as 'gay', and in
disavowals of 'bisexuality' in certain gay identity politics wherein any instance of 'non-
homosexual' desire is marked as 'straight'. In this proposal resides a two-fold tension. On
the one hand, the idea of 'purity' depends on a play between the oppositional terms of any given axis of subjectivity, each term seeking to cleanse itself of its 'impure' other. On the other hand, and at the same time, the multiple axes that comprise subjectivities ensure that an individual subject can never, for instance, be only racial or only sexual. In other words, subjects are rarely, if ever, black or white, male or female, masculine or feminine, straight or gay; and they are always already sexed and gendered and sexualised and raced—and sometimes multiply so. In addition, none of these identifications are temporally fixed, and neither of the contingent systems they move in is impartial. In the former, where difference is measured between hierarchical binary terms, 'purity' is signified by absolute conformity to the superior term of the binary pair, and anything constituting less than one hundred percent adherence is stained with 'impurity'. This is most noticeable as blackness tainting whiteness, femaleness tainting maleness, and gayness tainting straightness. In the latter, where differences are marked across the categories or race, sex, gender, and sexuality, the demarcated domains themselves compete for supremacy in a framework that leaves little space for plurality. Here, one prevails as primary, while the others are coerced to fall into subsequent lines of submission. Accordingly, where 'race' is deemed the urgent issue, concerns of sex, gender, and sexuality are, at best, considered subsidiary and, at worst, regarded as obstacles and revoked. However, subjects who, at one point or another, occupy interstitial positions (and such subjects together constitute a significant part of most communities) enact the very tension that undermines the apparent cohesive unity of 'identities' rooted in policies of exclusion. From the oppositional blueprint of 'purity' versus 'impurity', then, a subcutaneous murmur emits which demands critical address.
Starting with the contention that race is at once a pertinent category in identity politics and a meaningless ontological ‘fact’ beyond the cultural contexts of its production, this chapter disentangles the paradox of subjectivity (which is engendered through the play of differences) and identity (which normatively coalesces through sameness). Reading the textual details of several historical documents from the post-Abolition period in the United States (Thomas Nast’s ‘Emancipation’ and H.R.51, or The Freedmen’s Act), I examine how the discursive practices deployed to inscribe racial difference interact with the utopian promise of ‘freedom’. To what effects do these strategies recruit and reproduce the norms of sex, gender, and sexuality so crucial to heteronormative family, community, and nation building? I read Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* alongside, and in view of, these findings to foreground how structures of oppositional difference are repeated across the multiple axes that constitute racial and sexual subjects. More specifically, I ask how these structures uphold the distinctions through which the ideal of purity is enlisted to legitimate and preserve hierarchies of inequity that elide bi-sexual desires.

Finally, I explore how re-imag(in)ing race in contingency with the sex-gender-sexuality matrix is aided by magical realist moments in its aim to represent differences differently. Interestingly, Morrison, like Jeanette Winterson whose writing I refer to in the next chapter, refuses the label ‘magical realist writer’. Indeed, she questions the phrase ‘magical realism’ when used as a definitive term for either her oeuvre or individual works therein. Morrison’s text, I argue, reflects this repudiation of ‘magical realism’ in a renunciation of taxonomy *per se* as a restrictive and iniquitous systematisation through which subjects are, necessarily, either centralised or
marginalised. Textual encounters signify an endemic concern not only with liminality but, more acutely, its elision in representation. What does it mean, then, to represent anything as wholly and consistently white or black, straight or gay, real or magic? It is from this angle that I address the structures that underpin myths of binary difference; their applications, their repetitions, their motivations, and the limitations they impose. In foregrounding the differences within and among specifically demarcated subject domains, this chapter questions, and rearticulates, received ‘knowledges’ of subjectivity, sexuality, and dissident desires.

I

Paradise’s textual politics suggest that race is only meaningful in its cultural context, and as such can only be comprehensively theorised alongside other constitutive axes of subjectivity. In saying this, I do not mean to negate the realities of racial oppression or dilute the urgency of resistance to it. On the contrary, by releasing race from a position of singular primacy and relocating it in its wider concerns, I seek to interrogate how certain racial discourses enact a strategic paradox that centralises race while surreptitiously drawing on and reconfirming normative assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality. This applies both to racial discourses which seek to ‘elevate’ blackness from its inferior position on the vertical ladder of oppression and assume the privileges hitherto accorded to ‘whiteness’, and to discourses which reverse the binary hierarchy and reinscribe blackness as superior within the morphological constraints of patriarchal heteronormative supremacy.
In response to the charge from black separatist groups\(^4\) that multiply-identified subjects adulterate the struggle for racial equality and thus moderate its efficacy,\(^5\) rereading racial representations reveals a disconcerting pattern. The demands of single-axis identification elide differences both within and between markers of 'identity', constituting a critical deficiency that reinforces harsh material realities for many individuals by establishing new divisions while enabling existing ones to remain in tact. For example, nationalist and racial discourses which claim feminism and sexual politics to be 'white' issues resort to a racial essentialism that functions to precede and preclude other important determinants of individual subjectivities and group identities. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks suggests that '[a]bandoning essentialist notions would be a serious challenge to racism'.\(^6\) Indeed, essentialist notions of race extolled by black power movements in the 1960s and beyond not only stifle multiply-identified subjects by deriding equally pressing issues and persistently validating divisive oppositional differences, they also fix individuals as 'raced' within a framework of racism; albeit in a hierarchical reversal wherein 'the sentiment is old; only the color is new'.\(^7\) In addition, when primacy is accorded to 'racing' subjects in this way, the significance of differences in and between 'sexed', 'gendered', and 'sexualised'...  

\(^4\) For example, The Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers who, in the civil rights era of the 1960s, called for both racial separatism and an adherence to the belief that racial oppression is the only form of oppression for black people and therefore the only issue to be addressed.  

\(^5\) In *The Fire Next Time* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), James Baldwin narrates his experiences when visiting the house of Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam. As a gay former Christian atheist with white as well as black friends, he is confronted with charges—overt and unspoken—of weakness and uncertainty. His reticence to fix his blackness in a violently expressed opposition to all white 'others', and his refusal to occlude gender and sexuality as equally permissible sites of oppression, are met with disapproval and accusations of poor self-knowledge and lack of commitment to addressing racism, see 56-72.  


\(^7\) Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 53
subject positions are misconstrued and precariously underplayed. As Uma Narayan
suggests:

[C]ultural essentialism assumes and constructs sharp binaries...the discursive
reiteration of such ‘essential differences’ operates in a manner that helps construct
the sense of gender identity and cultural identity...[but] discourses about
‘difference’ often operate to conceal their role in the production and reproduction
of such ‘differences’, presenting these differences as something pre-given and
prediscursively ‘real’ that the discourses of difference merely describe.  

Consequently, if essentialist discourses remain unchallenged, racism, along with its
sexed, gendered, and sexualised counterparts, escapes the critical enquiry that would
more radically trouble single-axis identity politics. The rudimentary and divisive
framework of identity versus difference that depends on the oppression of subjects who
are not ‘the same’ is effectively endorsed.

Situating race in its cultural context clarifies the paradoxical proposal that while,
indubitably, race matters, matters of race are inexorably entwined in the wider struggle
for ‘freedom’. The striking opening line of Paradise, ‘[t]hey shot the white girl first’,
calls for an urgent (re)vision of racial representations. Race seems imperative in this
deceptively simple description of a murdered girl, and significantly, the ‘girl’ is raced as
‘white’, staging an aberration of dominant racial discourses wherein the primary signifier
of race is ‘black’. Whiteness is immediately, and unusually, made visible in a narrative
strategy which, as Robert J. Corber remarks, ‘racialize[s] whiteness. It demonstrate[s]
that white supremacy [is] grounded in racist constructions of blackness’.  

8 Uma Narayan, ‘Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism’,
published in eds Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding, Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a
9 Toni Morrison, Paradise (London: Chatto&Winds, 1998), 3. All references to Paradise hereafter will be
given parenthetically in the text.
10 Robert J. Corber, Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity
(London: Duke University Press, 1997), 162. In his comprehensive discussion of the racialisation of
Paradise, in line with Richard Dyer, who in his seminal text, White, contends that 'whiteness needs to be made strange' in order that it no longer functions as the authoritative human norm against which all ‘other’ races are subjugated, immediately questions this cultural assumption prevalent in the West that race is a ‘black’ issue. In highlighting the issue of white invisibility, Paradise both renders suspect the spurious knowledge ‘blackness’ signifies as a purportedly reliable indicator of racial identity and indicates the implications, for subjectivities oppressed by the sex-gender-sexuality matrix as well as race, of continuing to view whiteness as the raceless face of human commonality. Certainly, it is not sufficient for white people to simply address ‘blackness’ and its construction and representation without addressing ‘whiteness’ and the institutionalised privileges it affords in relation to similarly structured and seemingly concealed patriarchal and heterosexual norms.

Accordingly, in addition to the racial debate, the ‘white girl’ signifies as a gendered subject who, the text later reveals, is a sacrificial lamb in the brutal corollary of the exclusionary politics of Ruby, the all-black Oklahoma town where Paradise is set. The inaugural enigma, then, in a single instance questions racial assumptions and engages gender as a significant factor alongside race in the violent outcome; a double movement that is sharpened and protracted in the initial magical realist moment, which describes the white girl’s fleeing companions as '[b]odacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary...like panicked does leaping toward a sun that has finished burning off the mist and now pours its holy oil over the hides of game’ (18). The anointing sunlight illustrates a momentary

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shift in the signification of their twice-tainted black and female bodies—from overdetermined to invisible—offering them a chance to escape the predators’ gazes and guns. Facing death at the hands of nine Ruby men, these black Eves activate a vital thread in Paradise’s textual politics. Race, in and of itself, ‘means’ nothing: it is how race is culturally implemented as a category of hierarchised divisions, and how its values come to signify in relation to gender and other axes of subjectivity, that imbues race with meaning and determines its cultural implications. By highlighting the codes that are naturalised in and by culture as ontological truths, and challenging the covert manner in which these codes are malevolently deployed, Paradise exerts pressure at the discursive borders of a monocular identity politics founded on the principles of unifying homogeneity versus disruptive heterogeneity. The critical myopia of single-axis identification, which fails to see different axes of subjectivity as mutually constitutive and therefore crucially imbricated, is, indeed, the refuge of the unexamined racial paradox. In order to analyse the ambiguities this paradox holds, and with a view to questioning its constraints, I turn first to the historical moment that marks the inception of Paradise’s one hundred year history: the post-Abolition period of Ruby’s Old Fathers.

American utopianism reached its zenith in late nineteenth-century Abolitionism and Reconstruction. The Enlightenment ideals of equality and freedom these cultural

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12 In Homosexuality in Cold War America, Corber suggests that ‘[b]ecause race, class, and gender function... as constitutive categories of identity, they cannot be understood apart from one another’, 178. Similarly, in Yearning, bell hooks states that ‘racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination which uphold and sustain one another’, 59. These critical engagements indicate an increasing awareness of the necessity to theorise all systems of oppression both specifically and alongside each other in order to better understand each one’s role in eliding dissident subjectivities.

events encapsulate and extol are effectively condensed in Thomas Nast’s celebratory vision, ‘Emancipation’ (Figure One). In this represented shift from slavery to utopia, the pursuit of racial parity is foregrounded, yet tacitly woven into this ideal are the unacknowledged constraints of gendered and sexual norms. Published in 1865, Nast’s printed wood engraving documents the promise of freedom for black slaves in the Southern United States at the end of the Civil War. The document illustrates an idealised shift from the violent oppression of slavery to a beguilingly optimistic model of liberation. On the left hand side, a series of images formulate a brutal picture of life for black people in the southern states under the Confederacy. At the top, a fugitive slave is hotly pursued by a band of horsemen, presumably sent by slave owners or government officials to curtail his bid for ‘freedom’. Below this, a black man, separated from his pleading wife and children, is put to auction under the hammer of an imposing white ‘gentleman’ dressed in top hat and tails. At the bottom, a woman is flogged, a man is branded, and a field slave is beaten by his supervisor who is elevated on horseback.

Together these images weave a narrative of passive, immobilised blacks at the mercy of white supremacy. On the right hand side, however, the contrast is decided. This story tells of controlled productivity, cultural mobility, and social accord. At the bottom, a foreman greets his workers who, above this, are remunerated for their hard graft. The orderly queue signifies the successful implementation of social stability, which will, via a good education and learned family values, be inculcated in the children whose nurturing mother, babe in arms, attends the threshold of the home. A sense of harmony is projected

14 The Confederacy, or the Confederate States of America, existed between 1861 and 1865 in North America and covered the territory that now constitutes the southeastern part of the United States.
by this controlled scene of male economic production and female domesticity, and the pet
dog, tail wagging, renders the picture of happiness complete.

This leads the discussion to the document’s focal point around which these
images circulate. The enlarged detail acts as both a close up and a preview of life inside a
freedman’s house. It shows the family gathered around a Union stove,\textsuperscript{15} each going about
their specific roles in the warmth and security offered by this new concept of ‘home’. In
the middle, the father figure, face radiant with paternal pride, affectionately cajoles his
little boy. The little girl sits patiently at his side while his wife busies herself with the
tasks required to maintain their hard-earned domestic bliss. The father, though dominant,
is pictured as a liberal, loving, family man who leads his disciplined unit, rather than a
strict and controlling patriarch. Framed in a circle symbolic of harmony, the interior vista
resembles a keyhole view, which at once assigns viewers a monocular perspective and
situates them firmly on the outside looking in. As strategically placed ‘voyeurs’, viewers
neither impinge on nor disrupt the presented picture. Thus, in accord with realist
tradition, the representation in no way refers to itself as representation. On the contrary,
viewers are addressed with, and specifically placed by, a strategically ordered snap shot
of ‘reality’ that makes sense only as long as viewers adopt the prescribed position. The
effect reconfirms distinctions between inside and outside while presenting representation
as reality. Interestingly, the only disruption in this stilted and predetermined spatio-
temporal moment is Abraham Lincoln’s presence which upholds and overlays the values
inscribed in the nuclear family; values to which this freedman and his family

\textsuperscript{15} Union stoves were manufactured in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century by
Union Stove Works. They were used as central heating systems and as ranges for cooking, and signify
western ideals of progress and prosperity as well as representing the advantages of reliable warmth and
nourishment.
constructively adhere and which the uncritical viewer of the text receives and digests as
the norm. Overseeing all of this is the statue of Freedom, exultant in a blaze of fire baring
the title, ‘Emancipation’. The woman to the right of the inscription holds the scales of
justice, equally weighted, in one hand, and extends her other hand to wave an olive
branch symbolic of peace. Under Freedom’s watchful eye, the image narrates, the Liberal
utopian dream will be accomplished.

A rereading of ‘Emancipation’, directed by the discrepancy between Paradise’s
inaugural magical realist moment and the emancipatory ideals upon which Ruby is
founded, reveals that though the picture is of happiness, the story, alarmingly, is not. The
idyllic promise that the narrative of Nast’s text weaves is betrayed by some small yet
significant details. Though the foreman to the right of Lincoln’s portrait greets his
workers with apparent civility, he remains elevated over them. Similarly, the servile
stoop of the cotton picker’s body is mirrored in the man who, above him, gratefully
receives his remuneration that is, quite literally, handed down. His corporeal
configuration and its relation to the white man confirm that he remains at the mercy of an
economy governed by white supremacy yet driven largely by black labour. The
represented spatial relations suggest that the differences of race, central to the slave-
driven economy of the United States in the eighteen hundreds and knitted into its cultural
fabric, cannot be easily repudiated or resolved. Certainly, the power structure remains
paternalistic and the hierarchy of racial difference, though modified in application,
persists. Furthermore, the subservient black male subject, rooted in the soil that
constitutes the earth, remains physically and figuratively connected to the land. The
imperatives of labour and production necessary to the burgeoning economy of the United
States collude with this depiction of the ‘freedman’ who is represented as an autochthorous being; etymologically derived from the Greek for ‘self’ and ‘soil’ and meaning ‘sprung from the soil’. As in the biblical narrative, where ‘the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being’, the autochthorous black man, rooted in nature, is imagined to inhabit a realm temporally prior to, and spatially outside of, ‘civilisation’. It is the white man who is situated to administer the breath of life: to ‘civilise’ the black man and offer him progress through assimilation into ‘white’ culture and its hegemonic principles. Is this iniquitous racial division, which signifies subjects as either ‘determined’ or ‘determining’ depending on skin colour, to be read as the dawn of racial equality in the United States or as a continuation of cultural imperialism? Certainly, the contradictory picture of racial equality, where ‘freedom’ is imagined through a series of constraints, is only feasible as long as the black man is (re)defined as a differently yet equally determined subject. It is, doubtless, in the interest of white supremacy to both continue this covert policy of subjecting the black man to an illusion of self-determination which can, in practice, only function within the constraints of a ‘self’ governed by the rules of the white man’s game.

The projected changes in Nast’s print detail how the ideal of racial equality operates in the discourse of emancipation. By ‘rising out of his condition’ and, effectively, becoming ‘white’, the black man, in a sense, colludes with James Baldwin’s contentious claim that ‘[c]olor is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality…the value placed on the color of the skin is always and everywhere and forever a

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delusion’. In the emancipation narrative, this ‘delusion’, or culturally constructed essence, of colour operates as a curious symbol in a system of racial oppression built on and built with differences between the ‘superficial’ and the ‘essential’, the outside and the inside, the political and the personal. In (re)etching these divisions, Nast’s vision, an ‘iteration of the sign of the modern nation-space’, engages in a discourse of civil obedience that plays on normative and normalising western codes of sex, gender, and sexuality, both to promote the image of ‘freedom’ and, crucially, to uphold the humanist ideal that it is attained through assimilation. Indeed, in ‘Emancipation’, the woman’s role is secondary yet crucial; supportive and enabling, she upholds the ideal of the nuclear family, which serves as the key to regulating gendered and sexualised subjects within the nationalist discourse so central in this liberal concept of ‘freedom’. To enlist Butler’s critique of female agency is to comprehend that in the context of the nation, “being”…is always a “being for” a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that “being for”. The female subject of ‘emancipation’ comes into being, then, only in relation to the masculine subject (black husband or white master) who defines her agency in the role of serviceability. In other words, female agency is delimited by the value of wife and mother. The success or failure of the utopian promise depends on a social order wherein heterosexual coupling, procreation, and the inheritance of heteronormative cultural values from generation to generation operate as presumed facts of nature. Evidently, the political has surreptitiously invaded the personal to ground ‘private’ affairs in the public domain. Social discipline

18 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 159.
19 Butler, Gender Trouble, 58.
may be less visible, but it is intrusive in a different kind of way. This new schema of
guise and disguise is explained by the significantly 'minor' detail of Lincoln's second
portrait, which hangs above the stove, uniting family and nation and acting as a continual
reminder—to the depicted family and viewers alike—of the rhetorical similarities and
dependencies between these two ostensibly separate spheres. In a movement of
simultaneous transgression and reinscription, the Head of State is poised to survey,
control, and finally either assimilate or expel alterity, and the hierarchically regulated
structure of difference remains crucial to the pictured ideal of 'freedom'. Personal and
political are not only connected, it is specifically through their connection that the
cultural status quo is maintained. In constructing the ideal of a private realm wherein
black men have access to 'freedom' via ownership and control, Nast's vision colludes,
two-fold, with the oppressive discursive strategies it confronts. Not only is female agency
curtailed, but the remasculinisation of the black family man also demands a certain set of
conditions for black subjects who are not male or heterosexual or family-orientated while
insisting on limitations and constraints even for those who are.

An awareness of subjective agency or, more precisely, of who has it and who does
not, makes it possible to reread, at the level of representation, the masked discrepancies
in equality between and across the axes of race, sex, gender, and sexuality. Certainly,
inequities are neither resolved in nor contained by the racial politics of 'Emancipation'
since they extend to the regulatory mechanisms that underpin 'family' and 'nation-state'
and are repeatedly represented in realist discourses as reality. The urgent need to theorise
how, and with what effects, the norms of the heterosexual matrix operate alongside race
to discipline bodies is touched on by bell hooks in Killing Rage:
A fundamental characteristic of being black in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is that we are all socialized to believe that only race matters...while it certainly is important for black folks to foreground discussions of white supremacy, it is equally important for us to affirm that liberation takes place only in a context where we are all able to imagine subjectivities that are diverse, constantly changing, and always operating in states of cultural contingency.\footnote{bell hooks, \textit{Killing Rage: Ending Racism} (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 248.}

Indeed, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, and as \textit{Paradise}'s narratives confirm, fixing subjects singularly as ‘racial’ is as problematic as fixing subjects as essentially raced. Mechanisms that promote unity via a demand for similitude work against the diversity and relational flux that hooks advocates. Racial subjects—black, white, and ‘in between’—are also enmeshed in the demands of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, as the rereading of Nast’s print demonstrates. Accordingly, the halo of fire upon which the promise of ‘Emancipation’ is inscribed in Nast’s vision denotes a jubilant liberation of black former slaves, which is, indeed, fundamentally flawed. Offered up as a gift from the white man to the black man, emancipation is, contrary to its own proclamation, entangled in an inequitable system of exchange that is specifically gendered as well as divisively raced. Take part in the exchange in which heteronormativity and racial purity are inextricably interwoven and adhere to its rules, the subtext reads, and it will lead you towards ‘freedom’. In order to participate, though, you must relinquish, to an extent specified by your colour, sex, gender, and sexuality, that illusion of ‘freedom’ which, ironically, is never really ‘yours’.

The paradox in which Nast’s figures are caught, as subjects of and to the liberal ideology of ‘freedom’, is repeated in the juridical discourse that sought to realise the utopian ideal of emancipation rejected by the influential men of \textit{Paradise}'s Ruby.
crucial similarity exists which, I suggest, restricts the possibilities of ‘freedom’: their reinscriptions of the structures that normatively govern difference. By imagining difference as the root of inequality, humanism, under the guise of a move to equality, and separatism, under the guise of protection, justify what Audre Lorde terms an ‘institutionalized rejection of difference [which is] an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people.’ However, it is not difference per se that leads to inequality but an understanding of difference that confuses the need for equality with the need for homogeneity in ideologies that have ‘no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals.’ 21 A critical approach that reveals inequality to be neither inevitable nor ameliorated through reversal, but rather a constitutive element of power networks that situates their components in oppositional formations, is a valuable one as it offers possible sites of resistance in inequitable struggles. Indeed, by reading the political discourses of assimilation and separatism in conjunction to reveal their similarities at the level of form (in line with Lorde’s proposal and hook’s demand for a recognition of the diversity, movements, and contingencies within and between subject positions), the mechanisms that instill the oppositional terms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix alongside racial divisions are laid bare.

The discursive and ideological mechanisms at play in The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, commonly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau (which was established on March 3rd 1865, the same year that Nast’s print was published) confirms this claim. Originally intended to function for only one year, the Bureau’s jurisdiction was extended, both in duration and in scope, in July 1866. It was finally

disbanded in 1872. The aims of the Bureau, which are outlined in a series of bills and acts passed through the Senate and the House of Representatives and finalised in H.R.51, ‘An Act to establish a Bureau of Freedmen’s Affairs’ (referred to hereafter as the Freedmen’s Act), can be condensed into seven principal areas.\(^\text{22}\) The immediate call for relief from physical suffering incurred by former slaves constitutes the Bureau’s initial concern. This is followed by proposals for the implementation of institutions of free labour, resettlement and land distribution, the establishment of state-funded education, the awarding of payments due, and the administration of justice. Finally, these objectives were endorsed by a managerial and financial plan.\(^\text{23}\) In contrast, Ruby represents an extreme counter-reaction to this humanist proposal of assimilation. The founding principle of freedom in Ruby is played out in ‘the town’s view of itself’ as a faithful replication of the first-generation Old Fathers’ separatist settlement, Haven:

> From the beginning its people were free and protected. A sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight. And if she felt like it she could walk out the yard and on down the road. No lamp and no fear. (8)

Depicted as a proud place of isolated sanctuary, Ruby’s projected self-image qualifies freedom with the mutually dependent prepositions of place, ‘to’ and ‘from’. The freedom to move, at night, alone and with neither fear nor light, is determined by the town’s proclaimed freedom from a presupposed ominous, dark, and threatening external presence. This concept of haven, then, demands an ‘other(ed)’ space, which is first constructed in an external location then repeatedly demonised and proscribed. Indeed, the

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\(^\text{22}\) H.R.51 is held in archive at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C., and can be viewed in their digital archive hosted on http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw.

town is built on a historically entrenched and constantly remembered threat of 'Out There': 'Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space, once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose...Out There...being alone was being dead' (16). As an exclusionary strategy endemic in essentialist conceptions of difference, such spatial segregation operates alongside psychic dehumanisation to reconfirm an authentic and unified 'self' in distinct opposition to an unruly, impure, and categorically discrete 'other'.

The 'self' through which the town of Ruby both speaks and sees itself, however, is significantly singular in its unity: it is specifically 'eight-rock' black,\(^{24}\) male, and straight; and strictly racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative. Indeed, it is under the paternalistic guidance and economic sovereignty of twins Steward and Deacon Morgan, (direct descendents of Haven's 'Big Daddy' Zechariah Morgan), that the town claims 'freedom' for itself, protection for its residence, and control over its externalised others. Orators of the certified Ruby 'self', the Morgan twins' jurisdiction recalls the guidelines through which the Freedman's Act is discursively mapped. In a sense, the Freedmen's Act is as much a treatise on the organisation and legitimisation of authority as a documentation of Freedmen's rights, which, like Ruby's sovereign discourse, stresses the question of agency: who is instituting what and for whom? In a protracted document in which far more textual space is assigned to securing and remarcating hegemony than to outlining the Bureau's aims and proposed strategies for their materialisation, the reading

\(^{24}\) In her genealogy of Ruby, Patricia Best describes the 'pure' black blood (sometimes referred to as blue-black blood in racial discourses) through which Ruby's 'core' citizens define themselves: their skin colour is described as 'eight rock, a deep level in the coal mines' (193).
of ‘freedom’ as a meticulously regulated betrothal from determining to determined subject is confirmed. The ‘blessings of liberty’, passed down through the ranks of officials who replace Lincoln’s symbolic omnipotence in Nast’s print, are recuperated in the context that frames the emancipatory gesture. Precisely whose ‘freedom’ is at stake here? On whose terms is it officiated and with what constraints and effects? The representative treasurers, commissioners, assistant commissioners, secretaries, and superintendents in this bureaucratisation of power are set up ‘to reconcile and settle any differences in which freedmen may be involved, whether among themselves or between themselves and other persons’. However, even as ‘impartial mediators’, those placed to ‘reconcile’ differences operate with specifically designated agency, in stark contrast to those who either remain silent and inert or have their mobility restricted and voices controlled. Contrary to the proposed ideal, these acts of ventriloquism make audible the absence of former-slaves voices and make present the fact that, in this socio-juridical discourse, racial and sexual subalterns are, like the family of Nast’s engraving and those submitted to Ruby’s eight-rock rule, always already spoken for.

The Freedmen’s Act, which ostensibly seeks to resolve divisions among freedmen and between freedmen and ‘other persons’, refers to, recalls, and finally reinscribes a discourse of difference that segregates ‘us’ from ‘them’. Similarly, in Ruby’s eight-rock vision, the ‘Out There’ space, occupied by the Convent and the ‘detritus...throwaway people’ (4) who inhabit it, represents the necessary ‘other’ to Ruby’s narrowly conceived ‘self’. The increasing menace these ‘others’ pose to Ruby’s isolated unity serves as justification, in the eight-rock causal logic, for the requisite lynching; ‘to make sure it

never happens again. That nothing inside or out rots the one all black town worth the 
pain.’ (5). Paradise thus exposes a brutal consequence of propagating a monocular 
viewpoint from which a singular sovereign subject position can be assumed and 
imaginary unity attained: it closes off, quite literally in this case, all other possible subject 
positions. However, these elided subject positions, as the Convent women attest, do exist. 
Moreover, their existence is, in fact, central to the policing of oppositional subjectivities 
precisely because it signifies a breach of the inside/outside distinction that presides over 
subjectification. The Convent women’s location as neither fully-absent nor fully-present 
in Ruby yet vital to the eight-rock unified ‘self’, mirroring the silent presence of the 
freedmen in the legislative tract which appears to determine their rights yet in its 
discursive practices surreptitiously confirms hegemonic supremacy, alters the precarious 
balance of ‘freedom’. Indeed, it is in this very tension that paternal and colonial laws, in 
theory as in practice, write themselves and are rewritten. Though the Freedmen’s Act and 
eight-rock policies are grounded in very different ideologies, the dissemination of 
freedom is, in both these instances, determining of freedmen and of the Convent women, 
and determined by the mechanisms of white supremacy and by paternal separatism 
respectively.

However, the multiple axes that comprise subjectivity complicate both of these 
neat binary divisions. To this means, ‘freedom’ is dependent on a series of obscured yet 
visible distinctions which, as readings of the Freedmen’s Act and the paternal law that 
governs Ruby have shown, are necessarily reinscribed in and through patriarchal and 
heteronormative discourses. Nast’s ‘Emancipation’ has already demonstrated that in the 
domain of patriarchal hegemony, women, whose agency is determined by Butler’s ‘being
for’, are required only to quietly maintain necessary sexual norms, and this requisite sexual ideal explains the equally resounding absence of ‘queers’. As Marlon B. Ross explains, racial normalcy and sexual normalcy are mutually dependent, and white supremacy ‘needs a sexual norm in order to perpetuate the myth of whiteness as the racial norm’. This imperative sexual norm applies equally to the eight-rock inversion of white supremacy that reverses racial hierarchies. In both, the policing of excessive and ambiguous sexualities is crucial: in white supremacy black women are historically seen as excessively sexual in relation to white refinement, and in the eight-rock vision the racial impurity of the Convent women, who are described as ‘whores’ (18) and ‘bitches’ (276), is aligned with an excessive and immoral sexuality, whereas the diligent purity of Ruby’s ‘elegant black women’ is signified by their ‘orderly cupboards minus surfeit or miserliness; linen laundered and ironed to perfection; good meat seasoned and ready for roasting’ (111). Furthermore, the sexual norm these regimes of racial supremacy demand reinstates a sex-gender-sexuality matrix that speciously presents sexuality as ‘personal’ and race as ‘political’ while enlisting heteronormative sexuality and contingent patriarchal strategies to uphold its racial politics. The result is a repeated (re)construction of racial identity at the expense of any desire which is neither patriarchal nor heteronormative. While the violence of the eight-rock attitude with respect to its necessary ‘other’ in Paradise is arrant, the Freedmen’s Bureau, arguably the most notable material example of an attempt to realise the ideals of racially inclusive utopianism in

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26 ‘Queer’ refers here to sexualities and subjectivities that deviate from the required sexual norm or query the boundaries that culturally demarcate normal from abnormal.

27 Ross, ‘White Fantasies of Desire’, 44.

28 See ‘The Matter of Whiteness’, published as the first chapter of Richard Dyer’s White, for a detailed analysis of the differences between historical inscriptions of black female sexuality and white female sexuality.

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post-Abolition America, also relied on a series of divisive discursive practices and paternalistic mechanisms to exploit an uncritical vision of emancipation. Racial equality is presented as attainable through racial assimilation, yet assimilation demands an ambiguously constructed and invested category of race which presides over sexed, gendered, and sexualised subjectivities to occlude dissidences therein. Finally, the politically implicated heteronormative ideal is envisaged as the only structure wherein crises of racial identity might be resolved.

The reality is, of course, very different. Historically, sexual deviance has played on cultural anxieties that exceed the parameters of ‘sexuality’, and dissident sexualities have constituted a persistent threat to the structures of difference that organise, uphold, and police group identities and individual subjectivities beyond the realm of sexual politics. Indeed, sexualities and desires deemed ‘deviant’ because of their menacing difference pose, as M. Jacqui Alexander explains, ‘a challenge to the ideological anchor of an originary nuclear family, a source of legitimation for the state’, and as such are central to the policing of racial impurity. Seeking to conceal or resolve the vital tensions such analysis unveils only underscores that desires are not heteronormative in mechanism, movement or structure; they are destabilising, dynamic, and resistant. Furthermore, in utopias where differences, racial or otherwise, are elided in the drive towards ill-conceived unity, deviances and dissidences tend to recoil and reassert themselves in a reversal of violent hierarchies, often serving to breed, as Paradise reveals, mutual contempt, and aggravate, rather than appease, volatile cultural climates.

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While the failure of Reconstruction in 1860s America is conventionally ascribed to an economic infrastructure under pressure, the lack of psychic decolonisation, reflected in assimilation’s surreptitiously repeated patterns of racial separatism, patriarchal authority, and compulsory heterosexuality, must also be held accountable. Indeed, the dissolution of the bureau in 1872, which marked the beginning of Reconstruction’s demise, led to Black Exodus from the southern states and the construction of all-black separatist towns in the Midwest. This post-utopian moment, which locates the historical origins of Ruby’s authorised story, confirms that while the oppositional terminology and hierarchical infrastructures of heteronormativity remain in place, the divisive ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinction, and its harmful repercussions across subject spaces, are never radically revised. It is, without doubt, the structure of the oppositional divide, in all its manifestations, that must be interrogated and undermined. For this to happen, a change of tools is required.

II

Paradise is not simply concerned with what freedom ‘is’, but with how, and with what effects, representations of difference govern, regulate, and disseminate it. In this task, magical realist moments can be read as tools enlisted to trouble the framework of hierarchised binaries that normatively govern subjectivities and contain dissident desires. Such moments draw on the possibilities that resistant threads in repressive politics of separatism and assimilation weave. The Convent, which exists in, and as, a heterogeneous liminal space connected to, but contrasting with, Ruby and the homogeneity it demands, is the text’s principal locus of magical realist moments. Not,
significantly, because it is an ethereal place situated on Ruby’s periphery ‘between the material and the ghostly or spiritual worlds’ as J. Brooks Bonson suggests, but more specifically because it makes space on this earth for ‘other(ed)’ subjectivities to signify differently.

The first encounter with the Convent is through the eyes of the eight-rock men who, one misty July morning before dawn, set out to exterminate the ‘outlaw women’ (169) who inhabit this ‘diseased’ (8) receptacle of their anguish; ‘the mansion floated, dark and malevolently disconnected from God’s earth’ (18). The profanity immediately assigned to this female realm engages with a discourse of ‘woman’ that pre-exists both the Convent and its inhabitants. Already circulating in culture (note the Surrealist reinscription of ‘woman’ discussed at length in Chapter Two), this assumed prior knowledge of ‘woman’, deposited primarily in the space represented by the Convent, underscores the extent to which gender is intricately enmeshed in Ruby’s separatist ‘racial’ politics. In stark contrast to this misogynistic picture is the second textual encounter with the Convent, perceived through Mavis, the first of the five Convent women to have their stories told. Mavis, a young mother accused of infanticide after the death of her baby twins, flees her hometown and abusive marriage in fear of her life, and, on her first night spent at the Convent she experiences ‘a swept place. Unjudgemental. Tidy. Ample. Forever’ (48). This description of a revivialising and unthreatening sanctuary is confirmed by Pallus, a girl of sixteen who, in the flight from her mother and lover’s double betrayal, is run off the road, beaten, and raped by a gang of men. She explains how ‘[t]he whole house felt permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected

30 J. Brooks Bonson, Quiet as It’s Kept: Shame, Trauma and Race in Toni Morrison’s Novels (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 206.
domain, free of hunters but exciting too. As though she might meet herself here—an unbridled, authentic self” (177). As a ‘floating’ yet ‘secure’ and solidly three-dimensional edifice, the Convent seems, between these two starkly contrasting accounts, to encompass, and so question, apparent oppositional distinctions. Certainly, ambiguity defines this place, which was originally an embezzler’s folly and hedonist’s retreat then the Christ The King School for Native Girls. Notably, its signifying indeterminacy, echoed in these contradictory responses to it, applies equally to its matriarch, the displaced South American Creole with ‘smoky, sundown skin’ and ‘tea-colored hair’ (223) who is kidnapped from the streets of her native Brazil at the age of nine and spends the rest of her life at the Convent.

Consolata, also known as Connie, embodies a resistance to the logic of non-contradiction that prevails in Ruby. Her textual debut, described ‘like an apparition’ (43), coincides with Mavis’s arrival at the Convent. An incarnation of incongruity and difference—termed ‘impurity’ in Ruby rhetoric—her mestiza subjectivity is announced not only in her racial genealogy and spatial location, but also in the uncertainty generated by the magical realist moments she inhabits. Assailing the conventions of realism, Consolata’s ‘apparitions’ encroach on conventional subject divisions to first address the failure of single-axis identity politics and then restage the construction of multiply-identified dynamic subjects. In addition, the linguistic slippages, wherein ‘she found herself speaking and thinking in that in-between place, the valley between the regulations of the first language and the vocabulary of the second’ (242), place her embodied liminality equally in the realm of language; a site which is scrutinised in two of
Paradise's principle magical realist moments: her forbidden love affair; and loud dreaming.

The affair between Consolata and Deacon Morgan some twenty years prior to the lynchings, which is enveloped in magical realist heady tension, manifests a significant failure in the established regulations of language and desire. Upon first seeing him during a rare excursion into Ruby, Consolata is simultaneously struck by silence and 'the wing of a feathered thing' which 'undead, fluttered in her stomach' (226). Accompanied by a 'sha sha sha' rippling through the tangibly charged air (a sound void of linguistic meaning that comes to signify their mutual proximity) this fierce desire ravages Consolata, propelling her into a state of untold turmoil. It is when Deacon takes her, wordlessly, to a legendary pair of entangled fig trees with an 'in between place', that the undead feathered thing finally unfolds and in this fleeting moment of illicit union, a significant—and significant—fragmentation of language takes place: 'What had been uttered during their lovemaking leaned towards language, gestured its affiliation, but in fact was un-memorable, -controllable, -translatable' (229). This desire, which cannot be named since naming kills the signifying differences that engender it, exceeds existing limits of language. Consequently, Deacon and Consolata's location, wherein origins seem tangible, desires seem attainable, and unity seems achievable, momentarily reconfigures language, as well as the limitations it imposes, to present the unpresentable. In a moment that seems to both precede and surpass the stroke of oppositional difference that normatively delimits legitimate subject positions, Consolata and Deacon operate simultaneously as subjects and as pre-subjects in 'gobble-gobble love' (240); as
unabashedly greedy, needy animals and as divided desiring human beings in search of their nostalgic, pre-linguistic, paradise.

The spatial and temporal split bridged in this intense magical realist moment alters the structures that govern Ruby’s racial and sexual politics in particular and dominant politics of difference in general. Negotiations of signification in the interstices of differences, which displace normative domains of difference and their ruling oppositional structure, constitute a threat that is quickly redressed. The primordial realm is, by nature of its construction, inaccessible to the signifying subject, as Consolata, to her despair, discovers. Her desire for a return to imaginary plenitude is transposed from Christ onto ‘living man’, and when she attempts to reconcile the split between body and spirit by biting Deacon’s lip, he is immediately reminded of the ‘impurity’ that marks this ‘ravenous ground-fucking woman’; this ‘Salomé’, a ‘travesty of what a woman should be’ (280). The discrepancy here is that in eight-rock terms, all these things are precisely what ‘woman’, in concordance with its dominant historical reinscription, always already ‘is’. Moreover, the paradox of female impurity that Consolata is caught in during her restricted libidinal encounter ties the sex-gender-sexuality matrix inexorably into Ruby’s misogynistic and racist separatist politics, wherein, Deacon realises, his temporary aberration could have proven fatal (‘suppose the hussy had gotten pregnant? Had a mixed-up child?…that barely averted betrayal of all they owed and promised the Old Fathers’ (279)). Desire between an upstanding eight-rock leader and a sexually and racially ‘impure’ woman—that is to say, desire across the violently imposed boundaries that demarcate subject positions as discrete—represents, in a sense, the unimaginable. At the same time, language is released from the realist illusion of mimeses to question the

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limitations of what is and what is not possible. This mimicry of desire in language and its slippages recalls Bhabha’s notion of ‘a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them’. 31 In neither harmonising nor repressing ‘deviance’, this magical realist moment partially resembles realist codes in order to assert its differences, and, in so doing, defends and extends the presence of difference. Such a contravention of both the remit and the limits of realism paves the way for ‘loud dreaming’.

After an extended period of alcoholic degeneracy, self-imposed isolation, and negotiations with madness, Consolata reappears before the four Convent women—Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallus—whose stories of disorder, deception, and drift, all relating to men, outline their only mutual bond: the historically entrenched burden of ‘woman’ and its ensuing material realities. Visibly altered, Consolata takes hold of her plural mestiza ‘self’, rejecting the accusations that previously fixed her, and her foundlings, as inert and fully-predetermined subjects. In announcing ‘I call myself Consolata Sosa’, she renounces a former ‘self’ which was named, occupied, and determined by others, and offers the women an ultimatum: be prepared to do the same, or leave. Accepting the condition to remain in their one ‘safe’ space, the women stay to hear Consolata’s frenzied history, which concludes with a fervent warning: ‘Hear me, listen. Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary’s mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve’ (263). This insistent request to acknowledge relations between the body and the spirit discards uncritical reinscriptions of oppositions that generate ‘safe’ subject spaces at the

31 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 89.
expense of danger for ‘others’. It also directs a broader call to recognise the multiple, interstitial, and mutually dependent sites of individual subjectivities and group identities, relocating the mark of oppositional difference from its normative grounding between individual subjects to a more dynamic movement which exists within and among individuals and groups. This concept is expounded in a sinuous narrative moment:

[S]he told them of a place where white sidewalks met the sea and fish the color of plums swam alongside children. She spoke of fruit that tasted the way sapphires look and boys using rubies for dice. Of scented cathedrals made of gold where gods and goddesses sat in pews with the congregation. Of carnations tall as trees. Dwarfs with diamonds for teeth. Snakes aroused by poetry and bells. Then she told them of a woman named Piedade, who sang but never said a word...That is how the loud dreaming began. (263-64)

With this description of an abundant yet peaceful place, teeming with vitality and, crucially, without hierarchy, the brutality of racial separatism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity is momentarily allayed to make a space that legitimizes their earlier dancing, ‘[f]irst apart, imagining partners. Then partnered, imagining each other’ (179).

Suddenly oppression is no longer their only bond; ‘life, real and intense’ (264), is. Subject positions that exceed repressive oppositional hierarchies are shown forging space for themselves. And concomitantly, these breaches reshape the constrictions that have, for so long, been shaping them.

In this reconfigured space, where differences are not likened to inequality, loud dreaming, the mutual exchange of individual histories through the practice of free association (also adopted by the Surrealists) begins. Taking Consolata’s lead, the Convent women yield to a series of verbal avowals that emit from fissures between the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness; ‘[h]alf-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips’. Significantly, these ‘monologues’, ‘no different from a shriek’,
are shared: all of the women 'step easily into the dreamer's tale' and 'it was never
important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning' (264). Signification is
released from the constraints of fixed definition and authorial intent, and the conditions
imposed on subjects by the regulations of language are unlaced. In this differently
protected and inclusive space, where the women begin to identify with each other and
with themselves, they relate their individual traumas and confront their collective
'shame', finally addressing '[t]he male voices saying saying forever saying push their
own down their throats. Saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict'
(264). No longer defined exclusively by the insufferable paradox of 'woman', they each
embellish the 'templates' of their former selves etched onto the basement floor with
'memorabilia' that signifies pasts no longer present: 'Yellow barrettes, red peonies, a
green cross on a field of white. A majestic penis pierced with a Cupid's bow. Rose of
Sharon petals, Lorna Doones. A bright orange couple making steady love under a
childish sun' (265). These persistent documents of each woman's past are thus
acknowledged as spectres borne in the present which, like the subjects they haunt, both
are and are not present. As Derrida explains, 'the structure of the archive is
spectral...neither present nor absent 'in the flesh', neither visible nor invisible, a trace
always referring to another whose eyes can never be met'. In unearthing these 'traces',
the women recognise that the Derridean 'another' who inculcated their defining impurity
and shame and is represented by the 'memorabilia', is present only through its presence
in the past. A resistant fracture is exhumed that Ruby's reactionary politics has
consistently sought to suppress: the past need not a priori determine the present.

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In loud dreaming, then, an ongoing process of (re)etching and (re)vision which in this inaugural instance lasts for months, histories—individual and shared—are disentangled and rewen. The naturalised ideal of a singular, fixed, and absolute past that governs, and is governable in, the present is contested. Newly acknowledged interstitial spaces, where ‘fiction’ and ‘fact’, ‘magic’ and ‘real’, ‘unconsciousness’ and ‘consciousness’ collide to unsettle their mutually determining oppositional divide, emerge in which ‘accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love’ (264). In ‘Reading Cultural History’, Catherine Belsey explains:

[T]he problem of history is not the real, but our account of it, our record of the past, which is always delimited in the signifier. We cannot know the past outside the residues it leaves, and these remains are always subject to interpretation…

history as a relation between present and past is neither a recovery of the past nor an affirmation of the present, but an acknowledgment of the gap that divides them from each other.33

Loud dreaming alters the temporal relation wherein history is made by destabilising the regulatory constraint usually emplaced on the signifier. The ‘residues’ and ‘remains’ it enlists from the past are (re)placed in the present enabling differences to coexist within, between, and among subjects. Neither a ‘recovery’ nor an ‘affirmation’, loud dreaming is partially, significantly, and **simultaneously** both. It concedes that the Derridean ‘eye’ can never be met while affirming that its glance cannot be ignored. In other words, the past can neither be revivified in the present nor can it be erased because its permanent traces persist in the present as the very distinction that makes ‘past’ and ‘present’ possible.

As a consequence of this spatio-temporal rearticulation and resignification of difference, 'the Convent women were no longer haunted' (266), and what follows is a fleeting moment of non-utopian earthly paradise: 'This is the most peaceful place on earth' (182).

The Convent is also, we are sharply reminded, the site of a brutal massacre. Shortly before Paradise returns to its opening image of the lynching, the narrative juxtaposes in a fractious textual battle the rejuvenating turmoil of loud dreaming with the embittered whispers of the nine Ruby men gathering in preparation to kill:

I caught them kissing on each other...it ain't natural...I know they got powers...No men...Bitches. More like witches...They don't need men and they don't need God...the mess is seeping back into our homes, our families. We can't have it, you all. We can't have it at all'. (275-76)

Xenophobia, misogyny, and homophobia coalesce in these odious rationalisations of what they are about to do. Naturalised laws of 'us' versus 'them' are invoked as, in the absence of men and god, the fear of an unknown that surpasses oppositional classification and singular fixing takes hold. This threat, which mirrors in form that presented by bisexual desires to dominant identity politics (gay as well as straight) is, in the eight-rock vision, out of control and requires immediate address. Equally specious are the stories the eight-rocks tell themselves after the event. There are 'two editions of the official story' (296); one in which nine men go to talk the Convent women into leaving, a fight ensues, and the women disappear into thin air; and one in which five men go to evict the women, four other men go to stop them, and they are all attacked by the women escaping in their Cadillac less Consolata Sosa, who is killed in the chaos. Indeed, 'the story was being retold...people were changing it...inventing misinformation' (297): like historically elided dissident subjectivities that exceed oppositional curtailment, these stories are representations of histories always already present and unpresentable; stories written and
read from specific perspectives and with specific motivations that, in seeking to confirm
realist, patriarchal, colonial, and heteronormative claims to sovereign authority,
effectively displace it.

Hence, when Anna Flood, one of Ruby’s defiant women whose ‘unstraightened
hair’ registers a ‘rumbling, deep-down disorder’ (119), visits the Convent in the aftermath
of the shooting, she does not see in the material relics of loud dreaming the
‘pornography’ or ‘Satan’s scrawl’ reported by the men. She sees, instead, ‘the turbulence
of females trying to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them’
(303). Similarly, Patricia Best’s reading offers an alternative version of events followed
by a set of correlative reasons:

[N]ine 8-rocks murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were
impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at the least,
abortionists at most); and (c) because they could—which was what being an 8-
rock meant to them and was also what the ‘deal’ required. (297)

While, in retrospect, the eight-rock men seemed puzzled as to how Ruby’s arbiters came,
in the lynching, to repeat the atrocities of slavery they sought in founding their town to
redress (‘How could so clean and blessed a mission devour itself and become the world
they had escaped?’ (292)), historically silenced voices have already returned to answer
the forlorn cry, making audible Paradise’s preceding response. In this sense, Bhabha’s
notion of ambivalent identifications, wherein ‘love and hate occupy the same psychic
space; and paranoid projections “outwards” return to haunt and split the place from which
they are made’,34 is suitably played out. Certainly, for as long as oppositional boundaries
are maintained between races, sexes, genders, and sexualities, violence is projected on to
the ‘other Out There’. But what if subjects are not self-contained, self-same, self-

34 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 149.
determined entities composed in strictly oppositional terms? What if, as Bhabha claims, subjects ‘are the articulation of a doubling’ enacted in ‘an ambivalent movement between’ the oppositional spaces that seek to both contain subjects in their similitude and separate them in their differences from others? And what if, as Chandra Mohanty suggests, ‘it is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the center’? This uncomfortable murmur, previously stifled by the frenetically smoothed surfaces of Nast’s ‘Emancipation’, ‘The Freedmen’s Act’, and Ruby’s protectionist politics, bears witness to the possibility that peripheral subjects, engendered in interstitial movements, in fact define the very ‘centres’ which seek to deny them. Indeed, the eradication of an apparently distinct oppositional ‘other’ fails in identifying the rudimentary flaw in established understandings of difference: impurity cannot be contained ‘Out There’.

Indeed, atrocities tend to occur when the oppositional framework of hierarchical differences is left untouched. As Baldwin explains in relation to slavery and the alienation of black African-Americans during the post-Abolition period and beyond, ‘[t]he glorification of one race and the consequent debasement of another—or others—always has been and always will be a recipe for murder.’ This applies equally to the constitutional binary hierarchies that fix sexual and gendered subjects in the heterosexual matrix, and to western rationalism’s subordination of ‘magic’ in favour of a purportedly transparent ‘objective reality’ which is, in fact, itself an illusion. However, anomalies

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35 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 149.
within purportedly unified and sealed categories of difference expose these fallacies and thus impinge on the oppositional slash that demarcates inside from outside. They also produce frictions that impel movements of resistance, revealing racial stereotypes as cultural untruths which are naturalised to political ends. It is precisely in these frictions that the politics of purity and impurity are incisively performed across the political axes of race and the sex-gender-sexuality matrix. Patricia Best, Ruby’s schoolteacher and local historian, presents a genealogy of the town that exhumes the eight-rock fixation with racial purity to demonstrate how racial politics are underpinned by heteronormativity. Patricia’s text, pieced from her genealogical notes, discloses that the reviled racial ‘others’ of the eight-rock community include light-skinned blacks as well as whites. This morphological shift in alterity contests the mechanics of purging: how can the tainted ‘other’ be effectively located and eradicated if racial categories ambiguously exceed their presumed oppositional terms?

Certainly, when racial difference is inconsistent, and at times invisible, race marks the body’s surface with the xenophobic epidermalisation of inferiority and superiority differently. The skin, as the primary signifier of racial distinctions, offers immediate ‘knowledge’ of race and its implications. However, like the inverted blood rule that Ruby’s elders adopt, which was established to endorse presumed eight-rock purity and decrees one drop of non-eight-rock blood marks the body as impure, race is a cultural construction masquerading as a biologically determined ontology. As a consequence, the spurious knowledge attained from skin colour, which is enveloped in a system of

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38 In Black Skin, White Masks (London: Pluto Press, 1986), Frantz Fanon talks about the epidermalisation of inferiority, wherein the black subject’s status is inexorably inscribed on the body in the colour of his or her skin, 13.
assumptions that link colour, race, biology, and character, is destabilised when intra-racial disparities erupt. Patricia Best describes her ‘lightish but not quite whiteish baby’ (199), as ‘the first visible glitch’ (196) in the pure eight-rock bloodline. Patricia’s father’s choice of ‘a wife of sunlight skin, a wife of racial tampering’ (197) introduces an ‘external’ impurity which becomes visible within the Ruby community two generations later. As Patricia concludes, ‘you can see the problem with blood rules’ (196). Decidedly undecidable, the light-skin threat casts a ubiquitous shadow over ‘purity’ which (like sexual indeterminacy) makes emphatic racial (and sexual) subjectivity while refusing to fix or determine race (and sexuality). Interestingly, Richard Dyer ties the construct of racial purity to heterosexuality:

Inter-racial heterosexuality threatens the power of whiteness because it breaks the legitimation of whiteness with reference to the white body...if white bodies are no longer indubitably white bodies, if they can no longer guarantee their production as white, then the 'natural' basis of their dominion is no longer credible.\(^\text{39}\)

In the eight-rock vision, this applies equally but with reference to the ‘black’ body. Even the covert practice of ‘takeovers’, marriages implemented to counteract the tainting effects of internal differences that discredit the blood rule, cannot conceal the interstitial movement of differences. In fact, such Machiavellian social engineering only illuminates the extent to which racial and sexual ambiguities are mutually implicated in the purging process. As bell hooks points out, ‘[t]o build nations and “pure” races the bodies of women must be controlled, our sexual activities policed, and our reproductive rights curtailed’.\(^\text{40}\) Certainly, in the avowed bedrock of racial purity, ‘the policing and the

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\(^{40}\) hooks, *Killing Rage*, 244.
shaming of gender is imperative, and as such the oppositional defences through which
difference is normatively organised and 'freedom' cautiously assigned is radically
undermined.

Discourses that engage uncritically the utopian ideal of freedom, either by
reinscribing existing relations of difference or reversing them while leaving their
mechanisms in tact, mask the silences, gaps, ellipses, and tensions wherein meanings are
produced. The crucial limitation of such rhetoric is pinpointed by Ruby's liberal minister,
Richard Misner, who surmises:

They think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They
think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming
them...deafened by the roar of history, Ruby, it seemed to him, was an
unnecessary failure. How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent
happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it. (306)

In accordance, James Baldwin asks an important rhetorical question: 'How can
one...dream of power in any other terms than in the symbols of power?' It is, doubtless,
imperative that power relations are structurally interrogated, rather than superficially
probed and simply reversed, and this demands a rudimentary shift in the entire frame of
reference. A poststructural-queer rereading of 'freedom' demonstrates that prerequisite to
any discourse of emancipation is a contextual (re)examination which takes into account
the specific conditions of freedom's production, the particular meanings, motivations and
effects implicit in its deployment, and its inextricability from the complex power
relations that preserve its culturally constructed edifice. Indeed, 'freedom', to refer back
to Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, necessarily

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41 This phrase makes reference to terminology coined by Judith Butler who theorises that sexuality is
'regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender', see Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive
Limits of 'Sex' (New York: Routledge, 1993), 238.
demands a principle in opposition, and, as an eternal and eternally unachievable promise enmeshed in oppositional inequality, it is attainable only in so far as limitations are imposed. Furthermore, shortcuts to ‘freedom’ which operate as inverted patterns of racial subjugation are mutually entwined with oppositional sexual politics, as close readings of Nast’s ‘Emancipation’, ‘The Freedmen’s Act’, and Paradise have shown. Due to their structural parity, they are as dangerous as the oppressions they seek to conquer if not more so since they veil stasis with the illusion of revolution. As William J. Spurlin insists, ‘one cannot define one’s identity in relation to the oppressor and only from a single axis of difference’. To do so is to foreclose the psychic decolonisation and assuage the movements in the structure of hierarchical binary differences which are both vital in the move towards equality. As racial, sexual, gendered, and sexualised signifying subjects, we are caught, from all directions, in between the axes that variously enact and act upon us. Without first acknowledging then acting on this knowledge, struggles to assert differences differently remain interminable and incomplete. Energy expended on futile ‘justifications’ of subject positions always already invalidated by the presiding discourse of oppositional difference is better utilised in reworking its impasse to agitate the edifice of oppression. For this to happen, structural changes, which make space for differences, are required at the level of discourse and practice alike.

Accordingly, magical realist moments in Paradise, as in Of Love and Other Demons, address the thinness of human imagination to which Paradise’s Richard Misner refers. Paradise’s action places dreamlike realities alongside silenced histories. Its imagery is, like Frida Kahlo’s and Claude Cahun’s self-representations, at once brutal

and piercingly beautiful, and its narrative structure, never finally complete, is beguiling and disquieting in equal measure. The neatly defined oppositions that prevail in the discourse of realism and in its cultural codes—which paradoxically and opaquey assert unity through exclusion—are offered up together: ‘magic’ does not simply reflect or refer to reality; it comprises realities, denaturalising differences and (re)activating them in meanings previously unspeakable and unspoken. As such, Paradise extends the focus on liminality in Márquez’s fiction to critique the elision of liminality and interstitality in representation itself, resisting the very categories it enlists. And herein lies both Paradise’s peculiar enchantment and its critical value. In refusing to reduce diversity to order, its textuality celebrates incongruity to reveal the motivations of dominant demands for adherence. By teasing out the internal and external difference between subjects constituted in and by particular experiences of exile, and severing the ‘unifying’ ties of conventional identity politics,⁴⁴ its magical realist moments persistently question what norms are being reinscribed, whose interests are being served, and what restrictions remain in place. While Nast’s ‘Emancipation’ and ‘The Freedmen’s Act’ represent the liberal humanist drive for equality via assimilation which seeks to stifle vital differences, Paradise’s magical realist moments embrace differences and the spaces between speaking and silence, between the spoken and the silenced. Paradise thus articulates how seeking to stabilise desire will always, ultimately, fail precisely because such a move ignores the silent conversations and unheard dialogues that coexists in tension with those heard and spoken. Indeed, the repression of dissident desires and the suppression of

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⁴⁴ bell hooks discusses at length the importance of distinguishing between ‘blackness’ as ‘essence’ and ‘blackness’ as the result of a particular experience of exile in ‘Postmodern Blackness’, Chapter Three of Yearning.
dissenting differences ensure that wherever voices are silenced, and whenever silence is unspoken, meaning will always return.
Chapter Six
Identity and Difference

[T]he middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks.

Deleuze and Guattari¹

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.

Martin Heidegger²

Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same.

Michel Foucault³

To be set apart is, in conventional identity politics, to be set against. In the postmodern context of multiply-sited subjectivities and interstitial subject spaces, however, this assured avowal is unnerved, and the ramifications of this disclosure for bi-sexual desires are decisive. The critical lens through which this project views identity and difference re-imagines the fractious relations between and across binary parings to re-image subjects as

¹ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 25.
neither self-identical, nor bound in immutable distinction from ‘others’, nor removed from culture, its ideologies, and its practices. As I have suggested in various ways throughout this study, as subjects in and of culture we are internally divided and different from ourselves. These differences are multiple and intersect in relation to different subjects differently, according to changing and changeable contexts, to undermine the presupposed and prevailing oppositional distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Difference here is, evidently, a dominant term. Yet the differences we cite in order to signify ourselves and others as sexed, gendered, sexualised, and raced subjects are not, contrary to the logic that underpins identity politics, oppositional per se. Rather, as I have argued, differences are regulated and naturalised, through the reiteration of conventional ideological discourses and legitimate cultural practices, in mutually exclusive binary hierarchies. Where, though, in this picture that hegemonic cultures paint, are the spaces ‘in between’ and their resident undecidable subjects? Where are the narratives of ambiguity, liminality, and cross-cultural identification that agitate the stroke of oppositional difference? This study, in its own small way, hews a theoretical space for them. In its various textual interrogations, it also demonstrates that ambiguities, liminalities, and cross-cultural identifications contend the boundaries which at once demand their exile and mark the beginning of their presencing. With some reference to Jeanette Winterson’s The Passion, this final chapter pulls together the various strands that have explored the tension between identity and difference.\(^4\) In foregrounding the

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\(^4\) I refer to magical realist moments in The Passion to illustrate how their re-articulations of difference, like bi-sexual desires, hold implications for understanding difference which trouble the oppositional certainties upon which ‘identity’ normatively rests. To this end, and with a view to drawing together and foregrounding the guiding theories and themes of my thesis, I have intentionally given less textual space to analysis and close reading of The Passion than I have given other texts in previous chapters.
limitations of ‘identity’, I consolidate how interstitial subject positions in general, and bi-
sexual desires in particular, question the demands of dominant identity politics for a
‘unity’ which appears, through a poststructural-queer lens, both dangerous, divisive, and
illusory. In so doing, I suggest alternative ways of looking, and of seeing, that take into
account movements across the boundaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality, magic
and reality, culture and the ‘real’.  

I

The security that ‘identity’ claims to offer subjects masks a deep-seated insecurity which
comes into view at the meticulously policed frontier between heterogeneity and
difference. In dominant identity politics, similarities, within individuals and groups, tend
to masquerade as pre-discursive ontologies. Close examination reveals, however, that
they are engendered in culturally constructed oppositions that ground the ‘self’ in the
necessary exclusion of ‘others’.

As Paradise illustrates, such divisive policies, which rely on the simultaneous
reproduction and prohibition of differences and the systematic verification of similitude,
have fiercely imposed limitations and violent effects; not only for those ‘othered’ but also
for those who seek in ‘identity’ and its oppositional exclusions a secure sense of ‘self’.

Marlon B. Ross suggests that ‘[b]y defining one’s identity so narrowly, one also risks
defining narrowly the authority deriving from that identity…[a]s a mode of false security,

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5 The term ‘real’, which I use here in the Lacanian sense, can be understood as different, though not
distinct, from culture. It is this relation of difference, specifically the pressure its excesses exert on the
normative framework of oppositional significations, that renders the real useful in theorising bi-sexual
desires. I explore this proposition more closely in the second section of this chapter.
identity can easily become avoidance'. Indeed, thinness of imagination in conceiving differences restricts not only the authority, but also the authenticity, accuracy, and accountability of 'identity' in describing and delimiting the complex movements and relations through which subjects signify. Subjects who are coerced to settle on a singular fixed 'identity' risk submitting to a construction of safety that is not only illusory but also depends on someone else's peril. This is neatly illustrated in an exchange between Henri, one of The Passion's protagonists, and a little girl from his village as he leaves to fight in the Napoleonic wars:

'Will you kill people, Henri?'
I dropped down beside her. 'Not people, Louise, just the enemy.'
'What is enemy?'
'Someone who's not on your side.'

The trouble with oppositional divisions is that 'us' and 'them' depend on purging, and inherent in mechanisms of purging are objectification, dehumanisation, denial of the 'other' within, and the elision of anything in anyway 'in between'. In Sister Outsider, Audre Lorde saliently pinpoints and critiques this unspoken demand of 'identity': if similitude is deployed uncritically and privileged over difference, unified self-identical subjects are enlisted as essential to forge groups that rarely exist across the multiple axes that intersect in subjectivities:

I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as a meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of myself. But this is a destructive and fragmented way of living. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves.

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7 Jeanette Winterson, The Passion (London: Vintage, 1996), 8. All references to The Passion hereafter will be given parenthetically in the text.
8 Lorde, Sister Outsider, 285.
In Lorde’s experience, the ideals of ‘unity’ and ‘sameness’ are ‘destructive’, ‘fragmented’, and precariously deficient. Contrary to their claims, they isolate subjects who cannot, or will not, conform in an essentialist move towards homogeneity that constitutes dangerous lacks of detail. The notion that subjects consistently occupy one position, which is adequately defined by a singular axis of subjectivity and fixed on either one side or the other of the binary schism, is problematised by Lorde’s demand for the free movement of power within and between her different ‘selves’. This critical perspective resists the ensnaring trap of identity versus difference, demonstrating that it is the naturalised precept of difference as essentially oppositional and inherently divisive that is damaging, rather than differences per se.

It is this seemingly contradictory way of looking that liminal and multiply-sited subjectivities espouse to effect a double disavowal of ‘identity’. Firstly, the reliance in identity politics on oppositional binaries of exclusion and inclusion as productive, rather than simply descriptive, tools is problematised by the movement of bi-sexual desires between and among the oppositional terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. Secondly, and concomitantly, in exposing sexual subjectification as a politically implicated function in and of culture, with reproductive and resistant capabilities that are enmeshed in multiple subject spaces, bi-sexual desires question the cultural essentialism that renders ‘sexuality’ apolitical and sexualised subjects immobile. This shift in perspective, which subverts

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9 Uma Narayan uses the phrase ‘dangerous lacks of detail’ to explain the damaging effects of essentialism in Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism (New York: Routledge, 1997), 54.
repressive power structures with a Foucauldian counter-resistance, is both significant and significative. It confirms that representation, as analysis throughout this enquiry demonstrates, is not a simple mimetic reflection of pre-existing truths. Rather, as a discursive practice, representation actively produces and reproduces specific subject positions—which tend in dominant culture to be those historically singled out, with political motivations and effects, as legitimate—and entrenches them as natural.

Oppositional differences between races, sexes, genders, and sexualities are denaturalised by this reappraisal of representation wherein normative power relations are queered to contend the limits of legitimate subject positions.

Certainly, transgressing the heteronormative conventions of vision and visuality offers a viewpoint from which sexual differences are seen inhabiting space quite differently. Taking into account the asymmetrical matrix of knowledge and power in the field of vision (discussed in detail in Chapter Two), I extend John Berger’s claim that ‘[m]en look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at’ to argue that gay subjects, caught under the heteronormative gaze, are always watching themselves being watched. In other words, gay and lesbian subjects are aware of their sexuality in a way heterosexuals are not, and have never had to be. In being seen primarily as ‘homosexual’, gay and lesbian subjects are also encumbered embodiments of a sexuality which, unlike heterosexuality, dominates subjectivity: the impure mark of the other, once carved onto

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10 I refer here to Michel Foucault’s claim that power is a symbiotic relationship of flux: ‘where there is power, there is resistance’, History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, 95. This is well illustrated by the movement of bisexual desires.

11 In relation to this point, in ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’, Gayle Rubins also insists that ‘it is time to recognize the political dimensions of erotic life...it is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others’, published in eds Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M Halperin, The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader (London: Routledge, 1993), 34-35.

12 Berger, Ways of Seeing, 47.
bodies, is often foregrounded and can seldom be erased. To be visible is thus not only empowering but also diminishing, since the gaze of dominant culture not only fixes its necessary ‘other’ from the outside, it also coerces its ‘other’ to self-regulate as other from within. The heteronormative act of looking, then, has little to do with the homosexuality it is looking at, more to do with the heterosexuality it is looking from, and everything to do with the oppositional division it is looking across. This bridge of gazes further complicates the already imbalanced relation of power between heterosexual and homosexual subjectivities since it is also the domain of bi-sexual desires. Largely unseen in the act of looking, bodies inscribed as ‘bisexual’—itself a decidedly undecidable inscription—ensure, in their invisibility, that knowledge of bi-sexual subjectivities are neither contained by, nor containable in, the terms of oppositional difference. The failure to see bi-sexual desires, which as Paula Rust claims, lies in the observer not the observed,\(^\text{13}\) is a necessary condition of heteronormative supremacy. As I have argued throughout, heteronormativity demands of heterosexuality a subservient and consistently externalised ‘other’. By rigorously and repeatedly policing this strictly oppositional relation between the self ‘in here’ and the other ‘out there’, differences, and the contingent threats they represent, are inserted into existing binary hierarchies with disconcerting ease. However, as Brian Loftus argues, the fiction of natural vision, itself a misrecognition, is undermined by the realisation that the eye is conditioned by ideological categories that pre-exist it.\(^\text{14}\) In other words, the act of looking, neither

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\(^\text{13}\) In ‘Who Are We and Where Do We Go From Here? Conceptualizing Bisexuality’, Paula Rust locates the failure to see ‘bisexuality’ in the heteronormative gaze rather than in bisexual subjectivities themselves, see ed. Elizabeth Reba Weise, *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1992), 299.

\(^\text{14}\) This is discussed in Brian Loftus, ‘Biopia: Bisexuality and the Crisis of Visibility in a Queer Symbolic’, published in eds Donald E. Hall and Maria Pramaggoire, *RePresenting Bisexualities*, 207-233.
transparent nor objective, is laden with preconceptions that determine, to an extent, what we see even before we start looking. This is illustrated in my readings of Man Ray’s reinscription of ‘woman’ in the act of looking. At the same time, analysis of Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments shows that denaturalising the dominant gaze of culture renders its premise, its motivations, and its effects suspect. Claude Cahun’s photographs and Frida Kahlo’s paintings illuminate how viewers are confronted with the cultural demand for oppositional clarity in the act of looking, and the apparent ease with which differences are managed is thus called into question. (Re)viewing the relations of difference enmeshed in vision and visuality in this way also makes space for heteronormativity’s necessary exclusions and failures to return and unsettle the stability of realism’s singular viewpoint, as textual eruptions in Of Love and Other Demons and Paradise demonstrate. Similarly, in The Passion, Patrick, the disgraced priest who ‘could put the best telescope to shame…thanks to the miraculous properties of his left eye’ (21), parodies the requirements embroiled in the heteronormative fiction of natural vision. In a magical realist moment of incongruity and excess, his incredible monocular vision sees, quite literally, beyond the constraints placed on sexual subjects by realism’s restrictive and inadequate framework of binary hierarchies.

Certainly, Patrick’s telescopic eye looks at the world differently. What it sees, and what it shows, suggests that though sexual subjectivity is grounded in the body, bodies are no more ‘bisexual’ than they are ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’. Cahun and Kahlo’s self-portraits and the Convent women in Paradise bear testimony to the distinction made in this claim. Bodies are both written in sexual discourses and marked by the dissidences of desire, and it is in this tension that they signify within the limits of defined
sexualities—and sometimes beyond. In The Passion, Villanelle’s cross-dressing becomes problematic only when she falls in love with a woman who she assumes thinks her a man. The schism between the inscriptions of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix that adorn her body and the sexual differences made visible in the pursuit of desire cause Villanelle to question the oppositionally fixed terms of sex, gender, and sexuality, and to reassess their constitutional norms. In asking ‘was this breeches and boots self any less real than my garters?’ (66), she acknowledges that the terms are neither laterally nor vertically distinct, and that the norms they reiterate are by no means fixed corporeal essences. It is, then, what the body performs that is encoded, in the relation between looking and being seen, as either ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’. The very fact that there remains a notable lack of visible ‘bisexual’ norms means that bi-sexual desires continue to signify, for the most part, as either heterosexual or homosexual or as altogether unseen. What seems crucial, then, is how subjects might cite the oppositionally configured norms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix differently in order to rewrite the notion that bodies are either heterosexual or homosexual, and, concomitantly, how bi-sexual desires position subjects to agitate the boundaries between terms that permit certain sexualities whilst denying others. To conceive bi-sexual desires as a series of performative re-enactments, which cite oppositional norms simultaneously to impinge on the very divisions that seek to define sexualities in exclusive opposition, cleaves spaces for resistance to identity’s demands. Consequently, dissident subjects and dissonant desires remain mobile; their interstitial locations are defiantly undefined; and their sexual significations resist subsumption in the hetero/homo dyad they ultimately exceed and undermine.

A shift away from the restrictive impasse of attempting to decipher where the
singular unified ‘I’identity of bi-sexual subjectification resides is of critical significance here. This is explained by the fact that a singular, unified ‘bisexual’ identity simply does not exist. ‘The bisexual’, whose name belongs, in the words of Toni Morrison, to the definers not the defined,\(^\text{15}\) is a paradox in terms: s/he presents as neither ‘one’ nor ‘the other’; at the same time both and neither. As Clare Hemmings suggests:

The bisexual is set outside compulsory heterosexual performance through the expression of same-sex desire, yet is simultaneously within it. Hence she [or he] is the ‘outside’ (which is also ‘inside’), and the ‘inside’ (which is also the outside). From ‘inside and outside at the same time’ to ‘inside and outside, and outside and inside at the same time’. The ‘I’ in ‘I am bisexual’ is not simply an insubstantial assumption of fixed identity...rather, it signifies transition and movement itself. To say ‘I am bisexual’ is to say ‘I am not “I”’.\(^\text{16}\)

Bi-sexual desires thus relocate subjects in the significatory utterance ‘I’. Since only the subject can say ‘I’, the speech act ‘I am not “I”’ revises the praxes of unified ‘identity’ to embody the conditions for a radical form of resistance to it. Not an anti-identity, but a series of anti-‘I’identities, bi-sexual subject positions repeatedly traverse the frontiers of oppositionally demarcated spaces, occupying them simultaneously as sites of undetermined and indeterminate ambivalence, and thus (re)mapping legitimate sexual topographies. Read this way, liminality, ambiguity, and intersticiality are positioned to trespass the boundaries of interiority and exteriority and to see both inside from the edge and outside to beyond. This offers a different perspective of difference and a commanding stance which, in disrupting the dominant morphology from within, are not easily dismissed.

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\(^{15}\) Morrison writes that ‘definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined’, \textit{Beloved} (London: Vintage, 1997), 190.

\(^{16}\) Hemmings, ‘Resituating the Bisexual Body’, 129.
Consequently, the apparatus of mainstream identity politics, which largely (re)etches in oppositional differences the very network of oppression it purports to subvert, is troubled by subjects who surpass both the hetero/homo dyad and the increasingly precarious edifice that upholds it to ensure its reproduction. At the same time, the signifiers of exclusively oppositional sexuality exceed their primary location in the scrupulously regulated domain of sexuality, as Steven Seidman argues:

Whereas identity political standpoints framed homosexuality as an issue of sexuality and minority politics, poststructuralists position hetero/homosexual symbolism at the very center of Western culture—as structuring the very core modes of thought and culture of Western societies...Poststructuralists urge an epistemic shift from the resisting gay subject to the analysis of the homo/hetero code and its pervasive structuring of modes of thought, knowledge, and culture whose themes are both sexual and non-sexual.17

In proposing that the hetero/homo dyad—which operates as a referential code for sameness versus difference across the sexual and ‘non-sexual’ spheres of western hegemony—be the focus of critical analysis, and in questioning if such a division is indeed possible, poststructural-queer enquiries bring sexualities and their cartographies indisputably into the wider critical arena of the late twentieth century. Pivotal in the will to knowledge that is central in ‘identity political standpoints’ and in modern western societies, sexuality, as Foucault’s historical analysis reveals, must be made visible and ‘fully-present’ where ever possible and what ever the consequences. Contrary to the normative, and specious, assumption that sexuality has been historically consigned to secrecy, cathartic rituals of cleansing that thrive on confessions of the flesh make sexualities and their practices ubiquitously visible in ‘a regulated and polymorphous

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incitement to discourse'. In the western context at least, to see is, ostensibly, to be in a position of power and knowledge; and to be seen is to be subjected to that power and knowledge. Visibility is thus crucial with regard to sex and sexuality, since it is in seeing that we purportedly come to know, and in being seen that we are known, ordered, and legitimated. Yet, interestingly, the mark which defines the presiding sexuality of modern western societies and its necessary opposite, and then regulates sexual subjects in accordance with its limits, remains unseen and unspoken. Bi-sexual desires, though, make visible the invisibility of this mark, and in so doing disturb the illusion that full-presence retrieves a self-same essence of 'the subject' and engages singular sexual subjectivity.

The gravest menace, it seems, to the essentialist illusion of unity that underpins the notion of 'identity' is constituted not by the interior exclusion of opposing terms, but in a (re)vision of both the signifying terms interior/exterior and of the borders which enable them to exist in unchallenged opposition. Like Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments, sexualities that are neither exclusively heterosexual nor exclusively homosexual, that refuse uncritical adherence to either one side of the other in the unrelenting will to knowledge, contravene the model of 'self' and 'other' upon which 'identity' depends and through which differences are normatively elided. Jo Eadie states that '[k]nowledge...is partial in two senses: it is incomplete, and it is biased'. Indeed, the instability of knowledge about 'bisexuality' and of 'bisexual' subjects cannot be contained by the hetero/homo dyad and the discursive patterns of difference which, as

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18 Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 34.
19 Foucault wrote with respect to sexual practice that 'we are compelled to know how things are with it, while it is suspected of knowing how things are with us', *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 78.
Seidman suggests, it symbolises in western thought. In this sense, by agitating the oblique stroke, bi-sexual desires inhibit the reproduction of hierarchical restrictions that authorise and perpetuate divisive patterns of difference. Bi-sexual subject positions reappropriate the invisibility from which adherents to normative identity politics have struggled to escape, and penetrate the supposedly impermeable oppositional slash precisely because they remain at the same time unseen and present. This movement exposes an endemic flaw in ‘identity’ in general, and constitutes an exacting threat to the structural supremacy of the oppositional sexual matrix in particular. Indeed, as scrutiny of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix has shown, heterosexuality and homosexuality are not distinct, coherent, natural ontologies located at the extremes of transparent polar difference. Nor do they represent the limits of sexuality, subjectivity, and desire. In revealing this deep-seated inadequacy in established sexual cartographies, bi-sexual desires expand the limits of what dominant culture presents as intelligible.

II

What might the seemingly unthinkable picture of difference that bi-sexual desires permit be like? Since bi-sexual desires, like the subjects they enact and act upon, are continually in process, attempts to fix them in a closed model or to make them fully-visible runs counter to the deconstruction of ‘identity’ they urge. Moreover, such attempts would, unavoidably, result in failure. The focus of this study has been on how, and with what effects, the movements and morphology of bi-sexual desires perform a twist that opens up the spaces dominant cultural scripts and their oppositional discourses can never quite contain, and it is here that the domain of the ‘real’, and its topological relation to bi-
sexual desires, is of critical import.

The so-called real refers to the unmapped territory beyond the ‘culturally intelligible’. In Lacanian terms, the real is the irreducible remainder when the imaginary and the symbolic collide. That is to say, if what we normatively conceive of as ‘reality’ is understood to be comprised of the symbolic (the order of language and symbols, ruled by consciousness, through which desire is represented and through which we come to signify as human subjects) and the imaginary (which includes the field of images, fantasies, and ‘perversions’ and is imbricated by the unconscious), then the real operates alongside the dialogical encounter between the imaginary and the symbolic in their ongoing struggle to gain mastery of subjects and/in culture. The real, then, represents precisely what is normatively excluded from ‘reality’, and it is thus configured as that which we fail to situate and signify. Shifting, unpredictable, and comprised of slippages, aporias, and excesses, the realm of the real, wherein consciousness and unconsciousness are both split and inextricably bound, resists symbolisation. In so doing, the real, with a topology that recalls the movement of bi-sexual desires, acknowledges desire as the repressed yet perpetual effect of symbolic articulation: though the real is distinguished from culture along similar praxes that the not-yet-known is distinguishable from the known, it is neither inevitably unknowable nor absent nor spatio-temporally distinct. It is precisely because the real resides neither wholly in the realm of language and signification nor wholly in the realm of unconscious images and fantasies that, like bi-sexual desires, its differences are not yet accounted for in dominant cultural scripts.

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21 I qualify this statement by positioning the ‘culturally intelligible’ as not fixed but subject to change with regards to both temporal and spatial location. This is a crucial distinction, specifically since it is the very limits of cultural intelligibility that bi-sexual desires redefine.
Certainly, the interstitial play between the contingent realms of the imaginary and the symbolic ensures that the real, though different from culture, is also subject to—and subject of—movements and mutations in culture. This double-pronged detail may be crucial in understanding (sexual) differences differently. In *Culture and the Real*, Catherine Belsey explains that:

Sexual difference belongs to the real, to the extent that it generates anxiety as difference, while resisting symbolization. Sexual difference cannot be reduced to a distinction between this and that, or to decisive criteria for assigning bodies to one side or another of a single binary axis.22

Locating sexual difference in the domain of the real, where things are neither defined nor definable, queers the mark that conventionally signifies sexual difference to urge a (re)examination of its oppositional regulation in the realm of culture with expedient effect. Indeed, as sites and symptoms of cultural (re)production, sexual differences are at once bound in and poised to resist established oppositional assumptions. Irreducible to the hetero/homo dyad that governs modern western cultures, the real and its resident sexual differences do not exist apart from the imaginary and the symbolic; rather, they exceed the very ‘distinction between this and that’ which seeks to hold, regulate, and control dissidence. Concomitantly, in calling into question the oppositional terms of the sex-gender-sexuality matrix, the real contests any notion that ‘desire’ abides to binary hierarchies. Indeed, its movement and morphology do not permit bodies to be assigned with certainty to one term of a binary pairing (male/female, masculine/feminine, hetero/homo, white/black) or to be contained by the singular axis of any one pairing (sex, gender, sexuality, race). Enmeshed in the cultural anxieties generated by the real’s excursions into ‘reality’ is the demand to seek new ways of conceiving sexual subject

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positions and desires across differences, wherein ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ are neither discrete nor transposable in direct binary correlation onto ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’.

Take, for example, Heidegger’s jug. The jug is not made present simply in its visibility; it is the relation between the space inside and the space outside which holds the jug and makes it present, marking in three dimensions the hitherto invisible boundary through which something begins its presencing. This distinction is an important one, since it is not only the jug that holds space, but also the space that holds the jug: the two are mutually dependent. Furthermore, it is in the relation between the jug and the space it occupies—the space wherein differences move—that both mutually dependent parties come into being. This analogy aids us in imagining how relations between subject spaces and the ‘invisible’ borders that they make present, when reconceived as reproductive movements of symbiosis that mirror eruptions of the real in Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments, alter dominant topographies as well as the topology of sexual difference and desires. The contested domain of the real, then, might also be envisaged as a möbious band with each side comprised of the imaginary and the symbolic. Operating at the margins of signification, this realm of ambiguity and decided undecidability is the place where illusions occur: where ‘magic’ invades ‘reality’ and where the uncanny takes hold of consciousness. A lateral ‘möbious’ twist, like that alluded to in the Introduction, relocates sexual subjects across the boundaries of culture and the real quite differently.

While sexual difference evidently resists symbolisation to give rise to uncertainty, one

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23 Heidegger describes the significance of the jug: ‘The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel’, Poetry, Language, Thought, 169. I borrow this insightful reference from Belsey in Culture and the Real, 74, by way of illustration rather than as a reductive ontological model.

24 Elizabeth Wright locates the realm of the real, where the imaginary and the symbolic collide and the unconscious and conscious are split, as the place of illusions in Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 102.
certainty remains: sexual differences and desires are partially bound in yet also, and at the same time, exceed the hierarchical binary terms that delimit cultural intelligibility. And, in questioning the *structure* of oppositional distinctions (in terms of encountering the real as well as across the sex-gender-sexuality matrix), bi-sexual desires exploit this paradox to re-imag(in)e the world differently, as Henri experiences in *The Passion*:

> How is it that one day life is orderly and you are content, cynical perhaps but on the whole just so, and then without warning you find the solid floor is a trapdoor and you are now in another place whose geography is uncertain and whose customs are strange? (68)

Indeed, ordered worlds are made strange by dissident desires, which demand new ways to incorporate alterity. Residing in, and punctuating, the frontiers between the known and the not-yet-known, the scripted and the as-yet-unscriptable, bi-sexual desires—and the subject positions their disavowal of binary certainty reconvene—confirm that interiority and exteriority, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, cannot be contained in realism’s regulatory oppositions.

Bi-sexual desires, then, to expand Heidegger’s example, begin their presencing in culture through allusions to this always-present-absence of the real, and they are motivated, like all desires, by the drive to unity and/or fulfillment that re-entry into the real promises. The vital question to ask of relations between identity and difference, and the distinction which bi-sexual subject positions make, is whether this drive locates ‘unity’ as its object, or whether ‘unity’ manifests as a consequence of desire’s inaugural loss *because* the illusion of unity that identity offers sets the conditions of cultural intelligibility. In proposing the latter, I secure the thread running through this project to suggest that unity, and the desire for it, is neither innate nor imperative to subjectivity.
Rather, it is ‘essential’ only in so far as it is made so. In other words, subjectivity’s essentialism is itself a cultural construction. Bisexual desires confirm this in several ways. Firstly, since they are neither discursively pre-scripted nor scriptable, they exceed the cultural boundaries that police them, making their policing under the heteronormative gaze all the more necessary. Secondly, the trace of the other in the self-same that bisexual desires make present undermines Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction and its resounding legacies in western hegemony. Thirdly, in the movement of sharply defined yet mutually dependent alternatives that bisexual desires enact, difference is conceived as a relationship of flux in which interstitial spaces are imperative: without the ‘in between’, there is no ‘either/or’. In addition, if, as Derrida suggests, desire carries in itself the destiny of non-satisfaction, then bisexual subject positions embrace the exacting paradox of its narrative by substituting for ‘identity’ the idea that subjectivity is an ongoing, and incomplete, process of becoming.

Desiring bisexual subjects, then, can neither escape the oblique stroke of difference nor be submitted obsequiously to it. Furthermore, they demand that this paradoxical condition of sexual signification is not subsumed by the realist illusion that differences are oppositional and divisive per se. It is, indubitably, how we manage differences that opens up or closes down possibilities for dissident (sexual) subject positions. In one of The Passion’s self-reflexive gestures, Henri considers the incredulity of difference, which challenges the reader not to passively accept the common-sense, and specious, reasoning that governs dominant ideas of difference: ‘They say that every snowflake is different. If that were true, how could the world go on? How could we ever get up off our knees? How could we ever recover from the wonder of it?’ (42-43). The
wonder is that every snowflake is different: we can believe this, the world still goes on, and we never quite recover. These ‘ordinary miracles’ (87) that the movement of bisexual desires permit and heteronormativity rules out, which operate between the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness, can be seen in glimpses of the real that realist narratives of difference deny and Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments acclaim. Realism and its politics of illusory unity seek to stultify these uncanny excesses of desire, coercing subjects, as The Passion imparts, to ‘fear passion and laugh at too much love and those who love too much’ (155); to conceal its residues of loss by fixing them in a particular set of closely regulated representations which masquerade as reality; and, finally, to curtail the human desire to think about difference differently. And it is here that Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments, like the ghost of Cahun’s graveyard self-portrait, María’s hair in Of Love and Other Demons, and the spectres of the Convent women’s pasts in Paradise, enable repressed and culturally insurmountable subjects to make their untimely return.

The slippages in signification that Surrealist encounters, magical realist moments, and bisexuality contest the norms that inscribe and legitimate the limits of culturally intelligible sexual differences. They also, in line with Morrison’s earlier cited contention that definitions belong to the definers not the defined, ask of the security ‘identity’ claims to offer: whose security is it? If identity depends on naming, then it also depends, historically and within the constraints of normative signifying practices, on being named. By whom, we might ask? In whose language, under what conditions, and with what motivations, limitations, and effects? Bisexual subject positions that think critically posit poststructural-queer theory to consider these questions
and to exploit, across the intersecting domains of politics, ideology, and desire, the
pleasures and pluralities with which differences mark us as signifying subjects. In other
words, bi-sexual desires continue, across the culturally constructed boundary of theory
and practice, the Foucauldian endeavour to seek out new ways to think and live
differences differently, instead of falsely legitimating what is already known. Like all
desires, they set subjects ‘apart’, but unlike some desires, they do not set them ‘against’;
and herein lies its rudimentary challenge to established visions of difference. As
interstitial moments which undermine the banks they move between, bi-sexual desires
both perform the challenges of culture’s richly varied and diversely experienced
topography and acknowledge the transformative possibilities posed by the real. And, in
queering the lens through which differences are normatively viewed, they dispute the
frames in which differences are normatively held to reconceive sexual spaces, redefine
the limits of the culture these spaces inhabit, and reconfirm that subjects are neither static
and self-identical nor separable into discrete and homogenous groups. Where subjects
are, difference is: the two are never divided. Of this, at least, we can be sure.

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25 In *The History of Sexuality, Vol.2*, Michel Foucault suggests: ‘There are times in life when the question
of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely
necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all...In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to
know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is
already known?’, 8-9.
Afterword

A little two-step, two-step, make-a-new-step, slide, slide and strut on down

Toni Morrison¹

Surrealist encounters and magical realist moments have something in common with bissexual desires: they exact a shift in ways of looking, seeing, reading, and being. As mutually illuminating fields of enquiry, they are poised to develop poststructural-queer approaches which activate spaces ‘in between’ to alter perceptions of, and question assumptions about, the possibilities differences impart.

In an interview with Ntozake Shange, Toni Morrison reflects that ‘somewhere someone forgot to tell somebody something’.² This timely expression, which resounds the absences made present in the interstitial spaces that inhabit her work, recapitulates my motivation for this project. Indeed, I have begun here to tell a story of a forgotten something; a story which urges rereadings of The Story that western realism, and its heteronormative matrix of hierarchical binary oppositions, tells. In doing this, I have attempted to perform a twist, or a shift in critical perspective, that foregrounds the relations between where we look from and where we look to in order to articulate the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and tension that are so often ignored, subsumed, expelled, or ‘resolved’ precisely because of the threat they pose to the tradition of binary oppositions. By interrogating the relations of difference in the sex-gender-sexuality matrix and

¹ Morrison, Beloved, 74.
beyond, this study positions its readers to consider how bi-sexual desires, and the spaces they cleave, redefine patterns of difference to trouble dominant—and dangerous—ideas about (sexual) 'identity'. Indeed, in maintaining, rather than superficially resolving, tensions between 'identity' and difference, and in deploying these tensions as productive nodes of contention that dot the landscape of western hegemony and pierce its semblance of unified stasis, bi-sexual desires disturb ideological constructions and discursive reiterations of oppositional difference as natural. Historically consigned either to conform to a sexual matrix comprised of male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, or to submit to the cultural implausibility of existing outside of it, bi-sexual desires, and the (sexual) spaces they inhabit, have been (re)pressed and (re)formed by the dominant cultural imperative for compliance with both the political motivations of heteronormativity and the structural demands of its hierarchical norms. Yet, as this project contends, bi-sexual desires also renounce, quite fervently, this restrictive and improbable demand.

While polar logic insists that alternate terms remain discrete, critical practice must develop ways of resisting and challenging the divisive practices and discursive structures through which ambiguous and interstitial subject positions are so often suppressed. In theorising that 'intelligibility is established through a relation with the other: it moves (or 'progresses') by changing what it makes the “other”', Michel de Certeau rightly indicates that the 'self' demands a ceaseless appropriation of the 'other', or 'others', in the process of maintaining mastery in power relations. It is precisely here, in the interstices of 'selves' and 'others', that future poststructural-queer (re)visions of

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difference must focus. Indeed, until the structures of power and difference are re-imagined in ways that surpass the limits of oppositional exclusions, this hierarchical division will remain in place as a naturalised inevitable ‘truth’. In response to this alarming certainty, this study has aimed to move beyond the culturally endemic preoccupation with such divisive exclusions towards a critical approach that questions the slash of oppositional difference to remarcate the borders that mould differences. Of what does the mark that separates oppositional couplings consist? And how does agitating that mark problematise the terms’ strictly oppositional configurations in relation to other binary pairings with which they are enmeshed in dominant culture?

By addressing the structures of difference in which bi-sexual desires are held, this project has begun, in response to these questions, to ask what it means to remain decidedly undecidable. A strategy of unknotting the ‘nots’ and retying them in patterns of difference that challenge existing culturally demarcated spaces extricates the creative tensions woven in the paradox of bi-sexual desires to reconceive the topology of sexual spaces. As Marlon B. Ross states, ‘[w]hen desire is involved, sometimes the most direct route to a solution is a detour’.⁴ Similarly, where ‘truths’ are invoked, their defining boundaries—as well as their political motivations, discursive constructions, legitimating edifices, and cultural implications—demand rigorous critical interrogation. It is, indeed, in a ceaseless process of unfolding and resignifying that we might, in Toni Morrison’s image, make new-steps from existing two-steps, and, in so doing, agitate the limits of the dominant binary certainties that have for so long restricted ways of understanding desires and differences in theory as well as in cultural, critical, sexual, and political practice(s).

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