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**À belles mains. Livre surréaliste-Livre d'artiste. Mélusine ed. by  
Andrea Oberhuber (review)**

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**Oberhuber, Andrea**, ed. *À belles mains. Livre surréaliste-Livre d'artiste. Mélusine*, No. XXXII. Lausanne, Éditions L'Âge d'Homme, 2012. Pp. 336.

This issue of *Mélusine* pursues the research initiated in 1982 on the surrealist book, without giving the last word on such a complex subject. Demonstrating erudition worthy of *La Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, the contributors propose new ideas and points of view. By the sheer abundance of technical terms, the articles would have astonished the avant-garde poets and artists in question, who were so very fond of entertainment. Some contributors examine the illustrated book, the artist's book and the book-object in general as surrealist publications, while others focus on a single book or even on the non-book imagined by André Breton.

In her introduction, editor Andrea Oberhuber describes the evolution of the modern book in relation to Surrealism. She examines the diverse relations between poets and artists and traces the origin of book-objects, which go back to the copyists of the Gothic era. We can even go back further, to colored Romanesque accordion calendars. (And why not consider prehistoric caves, such as Lascaux and Chauvet, as vast books, whose "pages" our ancestors turned as they walked about?)

Elza Adamowicz classifies these collaborations of words and images into three categories: analogical or almost mimetic collaborations; collaborations where there is no connection between words and images; and those books where the poet (Paul Éluard) or the artist (Joan Miró) uses the text or illustrations to deploy their own lyricism or graphic art. Ideally, the dialogue between poet and painter produces a book-object—the book as art object, where text, images and layout are subordinate elements. Miró's *À toute épreuve*, with text by Éluard and printed by Gérald Cramer (Geneva) come close to this ideal, which harks back to the early printed book. The same is true of L. Curmer's edition of *Paul et Virginie*. I would add that Miró, Masson, Matta and Hérold produced their beautiful artists' books after World War II, hence after the "militant era" of Surrealism.

Judith Schuh limits herself to pre-war surrealist books, giving a complete list. She argues that in terms of the book as art object, André Breton and his circle did not propose anything very new, but preferred to conform to publishers' guidelines in order to promulgate their revolutionary views. With a few exceptions, in particular *Nadja* published by the NRF, they dealt with avant-garde publishers such as GLM, Corti and Le Sagittaire, whose books were quite expensive and only attracted a select group of readers. For their part, surrealist painters were less concerned with publishers than with galleries. Like Picasso, Juan Gris, and Braque, André Masson published three of his books with Kahnweiler, who also exhibited his paintings. Starting in 1946, galleries, art publishers and

societies of bibliophiles published large illustrated books by Masson, Matta, Miró, and Hérold.

Sophie Lemaître and Eddie Breuil discuss two of Breton's book projects—one unrealized, and the other completed thanks to his team—and theorize why Surrealism came late to book-objects. With the help of Soupault and Aragon, Breton had conceived "Le Livre des peintres" as a thick volume containing essays, reproductions and poems. In spite of his repeated efforts, the project failed. In its stead, he founded the review *Littérature*, which proved a success. Thanks to Breton, and especially to Éluard and Aragon, GLM published an edition of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, said to be definitive. Eddie Breuil gives refined analyses of the illustrations accompanying each section. He even rehabilitates Man Ray's drawing, showing that Ray was addressing himself to Breton rather than Lautréamont's text. Ray would have preferred to include a photograph as in *Violette Nozières*. And it seems that Breton played a more important role in the edition of *Maldoror* than Breuil suggests, since *Violette Nozières*, printed in Brussels in 1933, could be considered a first version of *Les Chants de Maldoror*. It contains illustrations by the same four artists, Magritte, Ernst, Tanguy and Man Ray, to accompany poems by Breton, Éluard, and Char. This "Surrealist Bible in spite of itself" could be taken, if not for the New Testament, at least for the Apocalypse, and *Violette Nozières*, which deals with laws and punishments, for the Old Testament. In spite of all the efforts put into it, the GLM edition could hardly be said to be definitive. We had to wait for the Pléiade edition.

Surrealist writers clearly worked more often as a team under the direction of a leader than in one-on-one collaborations. William Blake, poet, engraver, printer and book merchant, whom Soupault introduced to the group, had no influence on them. Neither have the Russian futurists, nor the women painters among them, who had played an important role in producing book-objects with limited means. In Paris two friends of Apollinaire, the Russian painter Sonia Delauney-Terk and the Swiss writer Blaise Cendrars, created in the artist's studio an extraordinary book-object: *La Prose du Transibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France*. The surrealist poets of the golden era were interested in art and even in objects, but neglected the possibilities of crafting book-objects. And what surrealist, aside from former Dadaist Tzara, would have wanted to upset everything—language, culture, society, art, typography—as Alexei Kruchenykh had done?

Marc Aufraise shows the role that photography plays in *La Femme visible* and, surprisingly, Marcella Biserni reveals its function in *Les Chant de Maldoror*, two luxurious limited edition books. Aufraise demonstrates how Dalí starts from precise representations of modern buildings, which he despised, to come up with texts of an extreme savagery and eroticism. His use of the "real" indicates that hallucination had little importance in

his excesses. And the photographic presence of Gala leads Dalí to paroxysms of love and terror.

Like Walter Benjamin, Dalí was interested in the transformation of art by industrial reproduction. He consciously used photographs of paintings—his own or those of others—to elaborate his plastic work and to support his theories. While we can hardly accuse the artist of mimeticism, Marcella Biserni often finds in Dalí's etchings graphic allusions to the text, confirmed by comparing this text with reproductions available via Google. Biserni suggest that Dalí, like Benjamin, avoids the dead-end of the Bretonian dream with an "awakening" in the form of a montage. I would add that Dalí's *Maldoror* is already a book-object, which distinguishes it from the books (still quite remarkable), where Masson collaborated with his friends. Aside from the frontispieces ornamenting copies of text by Breton, Éluard and others, Dalí has not illustrated surrealist works. Rather than illustrating works authored by his group, as Miró, Masson and Valentine Hugo had done, Dalí followed Doré's example by furnishing numerous images for the Bible, Dante, Cervantes, Lewis Carroll, and Shakespeare.

*Répétition* and *Les Malheurs des immortels* announce the transition from Dada to Surrealism. Constanze Fritzsche discusses the different structures of these two works. She stresses the importance of children's literature as well as poetic and visual reminiscences, but leaves it to the reader to interpret the texts and collages. It seems that Ernst and Éluard sought to minimize remembrances and memory. Like Dalí in *Maldoror*, they practice an art of quotations. Reduced to bits, the past gives way to dreams.

Man Ray had given Dalí a portrait of Gala capable of making him dream, but in photographing his model, Nusch Éluard, he created a masterpiece. In his article "*Facile, l'alchimie des mots et des photographies*," Danielle Méaux shows how the chemical traces of photographs reproduced in heliogravures, take on a magic power. She stresses the tactile element that the reader/spectator can have in touching and turning the pages. Nusch, Man Ray's model for his fashion photography, "exhibits" dresses and jewelry. Man Ray collaborated with publisher, layout artist and typographer Guy Lévis Mano, in the difficult endeavor of harmoniously assembling texts and images on the same page. Paul Éluard was of the opinion that the poems and the images should occupy facing pages, which suggest that like Breton, he was hardly interested in the book as an art object.

Around the end of 1941, Breton chose Spanish-speaking artist Wilfredo Lam to illustrate his love poem *Fata Morgana*. Jacques Leenhardt focuses on the wartime situation of Breton and other "dissidents" who were looking for ways to leave France; this preoccupation and the need for freedom inform *Fata Morgana*. Lam did not have an adequate knowl-

edge of French to understand this long and difficult text, but his future wife, Helena Bernitez, translated the text into Spanish and pointed out the passages that he could best interpret. According to Leenhardt, these illustrations reveal a change in Lam's art. This may be true, but it is difficult to compare these line drawings to his past and future paintings. Because of censorship, it was not until 1942 that the poem was made available in English in New York, and finally in French the following year in Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup>

Women take the limelight in four articles. Writer Valentine Penrose, whose husband Roland Penrose financed the publication of Max Ernst's surrealist novel in collage, *Une semaine de bonté*, quarreled with him about the book, seeing in it violence against women rather than Ernst's social and political intentions. It took her many years to eventually see the work as a masterpiece. In Penrose's own collection of poems and collages, *Dons des féminines* (1951), Doris Eibl stresses the essential role played by the relationships not only between the images and the texts, but within the collages and the narrative as well. She shows how Penrose foils the reader's expectations. Thus the reading of *Dons des féminines* becomes even more problematic than that of *Une semaine de bonté*. Is it about feminist demands, or about the love adventures of two lesbians, among other possibilities? And are we reading a novel? The confrontations of collages and poems, both ambiguous, disorient the reader. By their elongation and framing, these images reject the visual unity characteristic of Max Ernst's collages. This intentional lack of unity of perception multiplies the difficulties, as well as the pleasure of the reader.

Annie Richard, who has focused in the past on the work of Gisèle Prassinós, here shows Prassinós's evolution from the woman child celebrated by Breton to the mature poet/artist. In Prassinós's *Calamités des origines*, her short poems accompany drawings by her brother, painter Mario Prassinós, who would also become well known. Richard retraces this subordination of the written to the graphic to the oriental origin of the family: only the son counts and becomes an artist, while the daughter takes care of the sewing. Thanks to the ambiguities of genre, Gisèle Prassinós is able to combine these two roles in her felt-art and her artist book, *Brelin le fou*, a family portrait that juxtaposes calamities and good humor.

In an article that deftly combines erudition and poetry, Virginie Pouzet-Duzer shows that in 1967, shortly after Breton's death and two years before the so-called dissolution of the movement, Surrealism was alive and well thanks to the Czech artist, Toyen, the Croatian writer, Radovan Ivsic, and a young French poet on her way to becoming famous, Annie Le Brun. This three-way collaboration based on love and friendship resulted in two books edited by Ivsic and published simultaneously, which can only be appreciated by considering them as a single work. In *Puit dans la tour: Débris de rêves*, Ivsic's text reacts with sympathy to Toyen's

images, as it does again in *Sur le champ* (both 1967). What is at work here is not mimesis, but the subtle relationship between the participants. In *Tir* (1973), Ivsic's text accompanies Toyen's terrifying drawings of the disasters of the war.<sup>2</sup>

As Georgiana Colville and Marc Kobert demonstrate, critics can collaborate as well as poets and artists. In "Mise en boîte : *Les Variations citadines* d'André Pieyre de Mandiargues, lithographies de Bona" they give a subtle analysis of this book-object produced by the husband-wife team of writer Pieyre de Mandiargues and his artist wife Bona. The book is both playful and funereal. The book is an autobiographical summary of their marriage, their separation and their return, and reveals Bona's artistic versatility in lithographs, collages and drawings.

I wish that the article by Racula Lupu-Onet had included a page from the *Logbook* of Christian Dotremont, the "inheritor of Belgian Surrealism" and founding member of Cobra. Dotremont, a painter, poet, novelist, essayist, and polemicist, developed the logogram, which made him famous. Others had included letters and even entire words in their poem-paintings, but Dotremont painted sentences and even paragraphs in India ink, most of them undecipherable without the accompanying text. He treats those logograms as paintings to be exhibited in a gallery. The *Logbook* tells the story of the author's travels in Lapland. When he is under the influence of inspiration, the logograms become completely unreadable. However at these moments, the collaboration between the text and the paintings-letters reaches new heights, with revelatory mises-en-abîmes. As spontaneous works, the logograms are traces of the painter's body, and suggest, without any mimesis, various travel incidents.<sup>3</sup>

The connection between Surrealism and Oulipo seems at first glance problematic, despite the fact that Raymond Queneau was one of the founders of Oulipo. Dreams, the unconscious, and automatic writing have little in common with oulipian constraints, which require an energetically awakened mind. But since most of the articles in this issue of *MéluSine* are about collaborations, a theoretical study of dialogue is justified. In "Une poétique algorithmique du partage dans *Eros mélancolique* de Jacques Roubaud et Anne F. Garréta," Caroline Lebrec presents lucid analyses of the novelistic collaboration of these two members of Oulipo. She shows the complexity of any collaboration, to which is added the daunting complications of constraints. The exchange between the two collaborators is done by computer, and Garréta has software problems. The resulting text consists of quests, inquiries, losses and finds. A radical negativity characterizes this novel, where mourning and melancholia dominate. There is nothing left of the world but fuzzy traces, and a white rectangle takes the place of a photograph. Is Oulipo, then, that much different from Surrealism? Constraints, particularly Perec's in his poetry, often lead to encounters that are as surprising as *Cadavres Exquis* and Max Ernst's col-

lages, but more numerous. In disturbing the established order with their conventions, they open the door to the imaginary. The oulipian constraint comes close to the Surrealists' "objective chance."

The Brazilian poet Sergio Lima has contributed here a well documented inventory of the "crisis of the object," which attracted the avant-gardes before World War I and from which the surrealists in the 1920s drew an instrument of subversion. This attitude towards the object made an artist of Breton the writer, and allowed Man Ray and Meret Oppenheim to create masterpieces, notably the erotic *Déjeuner en fourrure*. Lima moves from the surrealist object to the book-object, which, like the object and the collage, lends itself to subversion. In this connection, he discusses the Brazilian review *Menu*, which publishes book-objects by poets opposed to the political regime, such as Juan Carlos Valera and Lima himself.

In "Iconolecture et tactilecture: la réinvention du lire dans le livre-objet de Roland Giguère," Emanuelle Pérard uses a technical vocabulary, rich in neologisms, in order to put forward the book productions of Québec's poet, engraver, printer and publisher, Roland Giguère. She shows his various strategies to abolish the separation between the graphic and the textual in order to change our reading habits. Since there are no illustrations, we have to make do with the author's descriptions plus Google, also indispensable for other contributions to the volume. It seems that surrealists in Quebec have lost all respect for their old idol, Louis le Bien-Aimé.

Alexandre Streitberger's article is titled, paradoxically, "Le Livre comme objet d'interdiction." Paradoxical because books, especially those mentioned in this issue, proclaim liberty and abolish censorship. The article focuses on two short films by Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976), "*Analyse d'une peinture*" and "*Voyage en mer du Nord*." Paradox is a perfect fit for this poet and filmmaker from Brussels who has created innumerable objects whose playful quality often masks an aesthetic or political message. But the paradox goes further: we are not told the name of the painting, its title, or its date, only its subject: a seascape. Broodthaers, like, Magritte and Scutenaire before him, is more interested in enigmas than mysteries. Streitberger observes that in *Analyse d'une peinture* and *Voyage en mer du Nord* the filmic representations of the pages remain static while the "book" takes on the appearance of a film. These two works are less on the painting or aesthetics than on the problems of the separation of media—problems that lead to other paradoxes and to all kinds of interdictions. For example, he advises his readers in "*Voyage en mer du Nord*" not to cut the pages since a knife is not reassuring. Broodthaers took fifty copies of his collection, *Pense-bête*, which had not sold a single copy, and transformed them into a sculpture that found a buyer, thus transforming the unread into the unreadable.



As a disciple of Lacan, Broodthaers is interested in language only where it “falls and even interrupts itself.” (237). On the other hand, he declares that Baudelaire paints and that Ducasse copies. Broodthaers’ humor in the film *Défense de fumer* contains a message about contradictions. While we see no cigarette or pipe, puffs of smoke emerge from the poet’s mouth, and he is surrounded by smoking objects such as a gun and a volcano; the “no smoking” injunction thus becomes absurd. The same absurdity can be seen in *Musée d’Art Moderne Département des Aigles*, installed on the sand along the shore. Signs such as “Défense absolue de toucher aux objets” (“It is strictly forbidden to touch the objects”) make no sense because the sea covers everything. By association, such prohibitions call into question, by association the divide between spectators and those who profit financially from exhibited works of art. For Broodthaers, prohibition reveals the contradictions or confusions in art and politics.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in “Note sur Renée Riese Hubert et le livre surréaliste,” Michel Pierssens generously pays homage to one of the pioneers of the study of the surrealist book-object and to the contributions American researchers have made to the this field. He also discusses the book collection she assembled in partnership with her husband. The rare volumes of this collection are now at the Lilly Library in Bloomington, Indiana.<sup>5</sup>

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#### Notes

1. Leenhardt does not mention the fact that there are five copies of the censored edition, signed by the poet and the artist, who colored his drawings. Let this be a notice to collectors of rare books!
2. Toyen did not leave a will. The Czech authorities, her worse enemies, took all her belongings, sold her works of art and searched in her papers for anything that could be considered compromising. At a round table directed by Michel Décaudin (*Mélusine* No. 4: *Le Livre Surréaliste*), the writer Ivšic declared, “I am not a publisher. I made a few books. No one wanted to publish Toyen; I made a book with her drawings. It had to be done.”
3. In adhering to Cobra, Dotremont had not abandoned Surrealism. He figured among the directors of the review *Le Surréalisme révolutionnaire* in 1948, with Noël Arnaud, Asger Jorn, and Czech surrealist Zdenec Lorenc. According to Dotremont and Jorn, Surrealism must become experimental and Marxist. The review appeared only once. Another much more elegant surrealist review, *Vrille*, came out in July 1945—before Breton’s return to France—and had the same fate. It contains the very first publication of Michel Butor: “Hommage partiel à Max Ernst” with reproductions by the artist. Butor abandoned the novel to come back to poetry. His innumerable dialogues with artists often manifest a return to Surrealism.
4. A sign on the grass of a Montréal cemetery proclaimed in capital letters: DEFENSE DE TREPASSER (TRESSPASSING IS PROHIBITED). Let the Parisians laugh, but the Québécois had their reasons, since language, as it evolved, has replaced a forward step with a lugubrious metaphor.
5. Renée Riese Hubert’s contributed an article to *Mélusine*, No. IV. In comparing issues IV and XXXII of *Mélusine*, one notices that the first deals more with books by surrealists, and the second with surrealist book-objects. Is it an evolution of criticism or a fondness for post-war large book-objects?