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Integrated self Assimilated surrealism in later 20th Century American poetry and music

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THE INTEGRATED SELF:
ASSIMILATED SURREALISM IN LATER 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN POETRY AND MUSIC

by
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Since the Surrealists were specific about their aims, their work can be evaluated partly by how well they accomplished those aims. In addition, those aims themselves have become so ingrained in our current artistic sensibility that they go nearly unquestioned as the starting point for contemporary poetry and music. Surrealist ideas have been overlooked in the avant-gardist rush to reject everything past as passé; the Surrealists have thus not been imitated by so much as subsumed into subsequent movements.

What the Surrealists were after was a sort of affirmative action for the irrational, which would give the irrational equality with the rational. The artist, by foregrounding his or her repressions, would be able to force the audience to do the same, revealing the ways in which reality reflects and is shaped by the repressed desire of the subject within the strictures of sanctioned discourse.

For the Surrealists, beauty was to be found in the illogical juxtaposition of commonplace, but decontextualized, objects. The Surrealists emphasized inspiration over technique. Painting was thus for the Surrealists both a plastic art, the mimetic claims of which were always suspect, and a performative art which allowed them to enact the shaping of reality by desire. This privileging of the power of the image over the reinvention of form separates the Surrealists from most other schools of avant-garde Modernism.

The Surrealists made use of Freud's discoveries in order to access in a systematic way the unconscious, repressed elements of the self. They used stream of consciousness narrative and free association as their two main tropes to emphasize the artistic process as an act of discovery; this concern with process is their most important legacy, and it flourishes today in American painting, music, and especially poetry. This thesis examines the Surrealist influence in America, which radiated outward from New York, in the poetry of James Tate, Richard Hugo, and John Ashbery and in the music of Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Circle, and The Art Ensemble of Chicago.
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In his introductory essay to an anthology of Surrealists' writings and interviews, Herschel B. Chipp points out one of the initial difficulties of talking about Surrealism as a set of ideas, products, and methods of production in the arts. Chipp differentiates between "accidental" and doctrinaire surrealisms:

Surrealism may be described in two quite different ways: in the broadest philosophic sense, as one of the important poles toward which art and thought have always been drawn, and specifically, as the ideology of an organized group of artists and writers who from about 1924 on gathered around Andre Breton in Paris. (366)

The discussion which follows will deal with the latter notion of a doctrinaire Surrealism, and will explore the permutations and lines of influence which have radiated outward from Breton's group of writers and painters: surrealism as it has been assimilated by other artists and arts in the post-war period. The Surrealist group, because of its relatively cohesive program, was able to validate its ideas on a broad scale; since the Surrealists were so doctrinaire, their ideas are also particularly suitable as a template for cross-media discussion.

Because their methods were, in a unique way, subject to and dictated by their goals, Surrealist products, in any medium, can be read as attempts to enact those goals, and those goals have themselves become so ingrained in our current artistic sensibility that they go nearly unquestioned as the starting point from which the various
procedural modes of contemporary art emerge. As John Ashbery puts forth:

What has in fact happened is that Surrealism has become a part of our daily lives: its effects are seen everywhere, in the work of artists and writers who have no connection with the movement, in movies, interior decoration, and popular speech. (RS 4)

At the same time, so thoroughly have Surrealist ideas been assimilated that they have in part been overlooked in the avante-gardist rush to reject everything past as passe; the Surrealists have thus not been imitated by so much as subsumed into subsequent movements.

Surrealist doctrine was established from the birth of the group in 1924 by Breton, who in that year published the first Manifesto of Surrealism, which included this definition of Surrealism:

SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations. ENCYCL. Philos. Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought. It tends definitely to do away with all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in the solution of the principle problems of life. (26)

Breton here announces the anti-logos project of Surrealism—irrational procedures are to be substituted for rational ones.
But Breton's opposition of "thought" to "control exercised by the reason" and "aesthetic or moral preoccupations" is a distinction which, its point made, he is quick to undercut. In the same manifesto, Breton calls for "the future transmutation of these two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of surreality" (Chipp 370). It appears that what Breton was after, initially at least, was a sort of affirmative action for the irrational, which if all went well would bring the irrational into an equal relationship with the rational, creating an artistic consciousness which would be able to draw upon the attributes of a healthier state of being. The artist, by transcending his or her repressions, would be able to force the audience to do the same, forcibly revealing the ways in which reality reflects and is shaped by the desire of the subject, regardless of the essentially superficial repression of desire by society. The "superior reality" Breton envisions, then, exists at "a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable... cease to be perceived as contradictions" (Breton 123).

That the Surrealists were not attempting to entirely discard reality in favor of fantasy is a crucial realization: realism is an integral aspect of Surrealism, and the Surrealists were clearly interested in a certain
kind of accessibility, which would allow them to achieve their desired results. Like Dada before it, Surrealism was a reaction against the state of Western civilization, especially as exemplified by its wars, and also against the art produced by that civilization—which the Surrealists considered to be complicit in the repression of sexuality, violence, and the awareness of death, in their minds the central facts of human existence and recurrent themes in their work. In this way, according to Peter Nicholls:

Surrealism destroys the limits of a merely useful reality, regarding it as no more than a simulacrum which thwarts the power of the imaginary, and puts in its place not a separate world of 'art', but a world which is (like the dream) made up of elements of reality that have been exposed to the force of desire. (287)

But the Surrealists were neither anti-art per se (according to Simon Wilson, they "firmly believed in art as the repository of true and humane values in society" (5)) nor, according to Nicholls, were they anti-intellectual. Wilson sees the Surrealists as actively concerned with the fate of society, in contrast to the Dadaists, who felt themselves to be hopelessly mired in the soulless moral and imaginative constructs of the modern world:

The Surrealist programme [was] to tap the creative and imaginative forces of the mind at their source in the unconscious and... through the increase in self-knowledge achieved by confronting people with their real nature, to change society. (5)

The Paris Surrealists of the late 1920's were trying to reshape society, using the shock value of upsetting
conventional, dualistic hierarchies as their primary tool, rather than solely to react against it in loud but fruitless, nihilistic protest.

The Surrealists sought also to undermine conventional notions of beauty. Their aesthetic called for a "convulsive beauty," the famous example of which was voiced by Comte de Lautreamont, years before the Surrealists began working (Lautreamont was hailed by Breton as "the fixed point for Surrealism in literature," and his novel Les Chants de Maldoror a Surrealist Bible): "as beautiful as the chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." For the Surrealists, beauty is to be found in the encounter, the illogical juxtaposition, of commonplace objects, in which normal but dissociated elements of the rational world are removed from the context which normally allows us to understand them and placed into relationship with each other. Says Breton in his typical manner: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be."

Surrealism demanded of painting, according to Dawn Ades, "that its interest should not lie in the sensuous pleasure of the paint surface, but in the enigmatic, hallucinatory, or revelatory power of the image" (14). In that the Surrealists were concerned with finding ways of accessing such imagery rather than developing new ways of rendering it, they are set apart from most of the other schools of avant-garde Modernism, which tended to focus
their energies on technique rather than inspiration. For the Surrealists, painting is both a plastic art, the mimetic claims of which are always suspect (as in Magritte's famous "The Treachery of Images") and a performative art which allows them to enact "the ways in which reality is shaped by and responds to our desires" (Nicholls 288).

Giorgio de Chirico, the Italian painter whom Breton considered to be Lautreamont's accidentally Surrealist counterpart in painting, provides an example of convulsive beauty, which, like Lautreamont's work in literature, predates the organization of the Surrealist group in "The Philosopher's Conquest" [1914; fig. 1]. (Breton also claimed Dante and Shakespeare for Surrealism (26).) De Chirico had a huge influence on the Surrealists, particularly on Breton, but, according to Chipp:

[He] painted the works which interested Breton the most... between 1911 and 1917, before the existence of either Surrealism or Dada, and apparently with no contact with any of the artists who were so important later for the movement. (374)

Moreover, De Chirico anticipated the Surrealists not only in the character of his practice but in his theory as well. In "The Philosopher's Conquest" De Chirico explores what later would become Surrealist obsessions: the clock introduces the idea of time, which in the painting seems, under the massive smokestacks of the modern industrial horror, to be standing still, as the steam from the locomotive rises straight up;
and the phallic imagery of the cannon and artichokes plays upon the repressed sexuality of the viewer, using a very unsexy vegetable to undercut the potency of sexual "firepower." But such rational readings are limited; says De Chirico of his own work, in perfect proto-Surrealist spirit:

To become truly immortal a work of art must escape all human limits: logic and common sense will only interfere. But once these barriers are broken it will enter the regions of childhood vision and dream. (qtd. in Chipp 401)

Though De Chirico obviously held similar aesthetic values to those of the Surrealists, and achieved similar results, it took the organization of Breton's group about ten years later to begin to systematize the pursuit of the unconscious mind's imaginative potentials and to begin to explore possibilities for tapping the unconscious using techniques suggested by psychoanalysis. De Chirico's desire to escape the limits of logic and common sense in order to "enter the regions of childhood vision and dream" (Chipp 401) and thus achieve immortality is in line with Freud's division between the unconscious and the conscious, dream and reality; it is here that the doctrinaire Surrealists part ways with both of them.

Breton's remark in his 1924 Manifesto of Surrealism about "the futile task of curing patients" (47) is more than a playful or obligatory dismissal of the foundational assumption of a cultural institution; according to Nicholls,
the Surrealists carefully "ignored the therapeutc aims of psychoanalysis" in order to first invert then explode "Freud's hierarchy of consciousness/unconsciousness" (281), replacing that notion of a divided self with a notion of an integrated self composed of the subject's perceptions of reality as they reflect his or her desires. Hence, the Surrealists' privileging of the singular power of the image over the fragmentation of perspective which had been initiated by Cezanne and Henry James, among others, and which had dominated the innovatory thinking of avant-garde Modernism from the Cubists to Pound, the Futurists to Eliot.

The Surrealist movement made use of Freud's discoveries nonetheless in order to help them access in a systematic way the unconscious elements of that integrated self which had been repressed by society. Breton himself "had studied with Freud, was experienced as a military psychiatrist, and was eager to apply his knowledge to literature and to painting" (Chipp 362). Techniques which the Surrealists developed from the theories of psychoanalysis fall roughly into two tropes: first, stream of consciousness, in which an "automatic", uninterrupted flow of expression is sought, producing a continuous and unified narrative which "disclose[s] the double articulation of the unconscious with the conscious, of desire with reality" (Nicholls 282); second, free association, in which the artist responds irrationally and instantaneously to something in the real
world, producing wacky juxtapositions--Lautreamont's sewing machine and umbrella and their equivalents. The distinction is useful particularly in considering assimilated Surrealist works from later in the 20th century, and in placing such works in the larger schema of Modernity. Stream of consciousness techniques tend to produce Surrealist narratives which are still continuous and unified in temporal or grammatical sequence. Free associative techniques, on the other hand, generally produce an insistent disconnecting of the narrative dots Freud's psychoanalysis wants to trace.

The emphasis Surrealism placed upon the artistic process as an act of discovery rather than as a carrying out of conventionally established formal structures is also traceable to Freud's psychoanalysis. Said Yves Tanguy of his process, "The painting develops before my eyes, unfolding its surprises as it progresses.... For this reason I am incapable of forming a plan or making a sketch beforehand" (Ashbery 22). Such a stream of consciousness approach to painting, in its attempt to stimulate surprise through discovery, is very much akin to Freud's use of the stream of consciousness narrative to discover the patient's unconscious desires and impulses, but the Surrealists, unlike Freud, sought desire in order to revel in it, to elevate it to the same status as reason, and to allow the interchange between the two to blur the lines between them, producing "realistic" imagery in which the subject's desire
is fully integrated. This aspect of the Surrealist program has perhaps been most thoroughly assimilated by subsequent movements in the U.S.; compare Tanguy's statement of 1930 above to this by poet James Tate in 1997: "When I make the mistake of imagining how a whole poem should unfold, I immediately want to destroy that plan. Nothing should supplant the true act of discovery" ("LYP" 3).

Tate's poem "Like a Scarf" illustrates this imperative. The first sentence announces the initiating conceit: "The directions to the lunatic asylum were confusing; / most likely they were the random associations / and confused ramblings of a lunatic" (WCoF 23). We are visiting the asylum in this poem, we learn in the first line, and already we begin to make assumptions which the joke that follows begins to confirm, setting us at ease with a speaker who is casual, witty, and a bit irreverent. But Tate quickly sets the speaker's wit on edge, switching to a slightly awkward diction in the lines that follow:

We arrived three hours late for lunch
and the lunatics were stacked up on their shelves,
quite neatly, I might add, giving credit where credit is due.
The orderlies were clearly very orderly, and they should receive all the credit that is their due. (WCoF 23)

The speaker's insistence on giving out appropriate credit for neatness of lunatic stacking sneaks up on us, but is clearly over-the-top. The poem's opening joke begins to prepare us for this kind of punning and silliness, but the
dogged repetition of the words "credit" and "due" and the overly dense alliteration of "orderlies were clearly very orderly" start to undermine our perception of the speaker's coherent state of mind. The doctor in the next lines is able, upon request, to produce a corkscrew "without a moment's hesitation," and the speaker's absurd admiration of both the corkscrew and the doctor himself triggers a landslide of hilarious and increasingly bizarre surprizes—"I was very close to howling and gnashing the gladiola"—which destroy what little pretence of the speaker's reliability remains, until the hysterical speaker cries out toward the end of the poem, "Who could eat liverwurst at a time like this" (WCoF 24)?

To this point it is easy to see that Tate has consciously undertaken to disintegrate his speaker's sanity through the course of the poem and has done so in fine style. The language throughout has been tightly controlled, communicating on a rational level. There are no problems of understanding, disjunct syntax, or shatterings of conventional grammar, person, tense, or perspective. In the final lines of the poem the poet abandons reasonable speech, employing first stream of consciousness and then free associative tropes in order to "surprise" even himself:

Lacking a way home, I adjusted the flap in my head and duck-walked down to the pond and into the pond and began gliding around in circles, quacking, quacking like a
The flap in the head is strange enough, but makes a sort of sense for a speaker who has literally lost his mind. Duck-walking is the kind of wackiness for which we are, by now, prepared. And where would one duck-walk? To the pond, of course. It is the moment when the speaker steps off dry land and into the pond that his journey becomes truly irrational; desire has suddenly altered reality in such a way that there is no reasonable way to come to grips with it, but the mimetic gaze of the speaker does not flinch—as with much Surrealist painting, the poem uses the striking image, rather than technical manipulation, to achieve its effect.

The speaker has become a duck; he is no longer merely duck-walking, and the transition is seamless. The poet's stream of consciousness has produced for the poem a reality in which the speaker transforms himself into a real duck, swimming in a real pond. For him to quack like a duck, then, would be redundant. Tate arrives via sound-driven free association at the image of a quacking scarf, a "convulsive beauty" which, in this poem, makes just the right kind of non-sense.

Such use of tropes derived from psychoanalysis by the doctrinaire Surrealists to achieve surprize is characteristic of assimilated Surrealism. Unlike doctrinaire Surrealist poets, Tate's employment of
psychoanalytic tropes is not necessarily in the interest of achieving the purest possible automatism. Like them, however, Tate is interested in representing spontaneity, in capturing the creative moment in which the unconscious self comes into being on the page. This privileging of process, and the innovations through which the Surrealists tried to find ways of representing it, is the most important legacy of doctrinaire Surrealism.

Among these innovations is collective effort toward individual ends; said Breton of the early years in Paris, "Never has so precise a common will united us" (qtd. in Chipp 417). Breton's group would spend days on end in communal hypnosis sessions, taking drugs and starving themselves. Painter Joan Miro describes "living on a few dried figs a day," starvation being "a great source of... hallucinations. I would sit for long periods looking at the bare walls of my studio trying to capture these shapes on paper or burlap" (qtd. in Chipp 434). Breton was enthusiastic about these group efforts, praising the Surrealists' explorations of various states of consciousness with characteristically hyperbolic sobriety: "Nothing could be more coherent, more systematic, or more richly yielding of results than this phase of Surrealist activity" (qtd. in Chipp 417). But the real possibilities of collaborative effort are not fully explored in the Surrealists' work; a truly spontaneous expression of collaborative free
association would have to wait another 30 years for Ornette Coleman's "Free Jazz."

In addition to using hallucinations as a basis for free association, Surrealist painters developed a number of techniques for manipulating materials into automatically produced shapes which would suggest to them material for their paintings. Miro describes using newspaper collages for this purpose:

I used to tear newspapers into rough shapes and paste them on cardboards. Day after day I would accumulate such shapes. After the collages were finished they served me as points of departure for paintings. I did not copy the collages. I merely let them suggest shapes to me. (qtd. in Chipp 434)

Max Ernst used similar free associative techniques to produce fantastic landscapes, including, for his 1942 anti-war painting "Europe After the Rain," decalcomania, which according to Wilson "involves pressing thin paint on the canvas with a sheet of glass or other smooth surface" (13). In 1925, Ernst had pioneered the technique of frottage; here he describes the "insupportable visual obsession" which gave him the technical means to work with imagery suggested by rough surfaces:

I was struck by the obsession that showed to my excited gaze the floor-boards upon which a thousand scrubbings had deepened the grooves. I decided then to investigate the symbolism of this obsession and, in order to aid my meditative and hallucinatroy faculties, I made from the boards a series of drawings by placing on them, at random, sheets of paper which I undertook to rub with black lead.... I was surprized by the sudden
intensification of my visionary capacities and by the hallucinatory succession of contradictory images superimposed, one upon the other, with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories. (qtd. in Chipp 429)

Poet Richard Hugo, in a 1979 instructional essay on writing, put forth his notion of how free associative techniques express the author's individuality: "When you are writing you must assume that the next thing you put down belongs not for reasons of logic, good sense, or narrative development, but because you put it there. You, the same person who said that, also said this" (TT 5). By 1979, the Surrealist notion of an integrated self, the utterances of which hold together by virtue of their origin, regardless of how disjunct they may seem, has been thoroughly assimilated, to the point where Hugo can write, "it is impossible to write meaningless sequences" (TT 5).

In Hugo's "In Your Bad Dream" (SP 146), time and space are shattered as the speaker's perspective leaps from one scene to the next without any rhetorical explanation. The speaker starts out the poem in a cage, the bars of which "are silver in honor of our emperor," and from there watches two animals fighting. Hugo's rhetoric here actively works against the reader's understanding of the spatial relationship between the cage and the scene of the battle: "Two animals, too far to name, are fighting." The animals are not too far away to name but too far to name; "far" becomes, in the absence of the locator "away," an adjective
modifying "animals" in an unfamiliar way. The unconventional syntax implies the ellision while also making possible, even demanding, other readings, blurring what would in conventional usage be a more fixedly defined poetic space.

A third of the way into the poem, Hugo leaves behind the cage scene entirely, without any warning or explanation, initiating a sequence of short vignettes which appear entirely disjunct in time and space and entirely devoid of thematic relation to each other except by virtue of their proximity in the poem:

... Your car's locked in reverse and running. The ignition is frozen, accelerator stuck, brake shot. You go faster and faster back. You wait for the crash. On a bleak beach you find a piano the tide has stranded. You hit it with a hatchet.... On a clean street you join the parade....

For Hugo, the integrated self is the starting point which justifies the poem's apparent perspectival disunion. Rational coherence is upset in favor of emotional coherence, and Hugo is able to presume that the poem's emotional imperative is able to communicate in other than rational terms. For the Paris Surrealists, however, the need to validate their work's claim to an unconsciously produced meaning was pressing.

In 1929, Andre Masson developed his own version of Ernst's frottage in response to the difficulty of attaining
automatism like that of automatic writing in the relatively laborious medium of painting. His prose is only slightly less entertaining than Ernst's:

I had to find a way. That was Sand. I began by laying flat a piece of canvas on a stretcher covered with raw canvas. On it I threw pools of glue that I manipulated. Then I scattered sand, then shook the picture to produce splashes and pools, sometimes I scraped it with a knife.... And all this done at express speed.... In the end it became a sort of wall, a very uneven wall, and then at particular moments the layers would suggest forms although almost always irrational ones. With a little thinned paint I added a few lines, but as rapidly as possible and then, already calming down a bit, a few touches of color. Nearly always the sky was indicated at the top with a little patch of blue and at the bottom there would always be a pool of blood, I have no idea why. (qtd. in Wilson 14)

As Masson suggests, there is a constant tension in Surrealist art between automatism and accessibility; the use of shaped materials "which had no meaning but which could stimulate meaning" (Masson qtd. in Wilson 14) was a basis for a conscious manipulation of those shapes into recognizable forms, which would to varying degrees represent realistically the symbolic suggestions of the artists' unconscious mind.

Masson's "Battle of Fishes" [1926; fig. 2] is a case in point. As the title suggests, Masson has interpreted the spontaneously generated sand shapes and enhanced their fish-like form with added lines to confirm his interpretation for the viewer. According to Ades, "Masson was interested in
the moment of metamorphosis, when a line was in the process of becoming something else" (36). But the act of noticing that the sand shapes appear "like fish" is a conscious comparison between the automatic material and what it may come to represent in the conscious world of the artist: in effect, the shapes become signifiers which stand in a quite rational relationship to what is being signified. The emotional and irrational imperatives which drive the artist's free associations are restricted as much as they are stimulated by the automatic material, and so fail (where Hugo's poetry succeeds) to effectively represent an integrated reality.

Nicholls summarizes the issue of signification in "automatic" Surrealist art as a conflict between the desire "to restore the integral connection of consciousness to the unconscious" (285) and the means through which that connection is to be established:

The medium of this connection is language, a system of signs whose very mode of operation entails a certain negation and separation.... The word gives us the meaning of the thing, but in doing so replaces what it names, thus condemning the thing to a kind of non-being. (285)

But, for Nicholls, this very negation of a reality codified by law and logic enables the Surrealists' work to operate on a political level as a reinstatement to the realm of "what is" of desire, imagination, and art (286).

Seeking to establish in their work a greater degree of
integration of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self, Surrealist painters in the mid-1920's reacted against the "oneiric" (dreamlike) style of De Chirico; they felt that such realistic painting was not spontaneous enough, and so, led by Miro, they turned to a "biomorphic" style which used systems of signification that could be produced very rapidly, rendering concrete the suggestions of their unconscious minds, with a minimum of interference by the passage of time spent laboriously painting. The idea was to record a moment of unconscious activity by representing it with symbols, rather than trying to reproduce it on the canvas, supplanting mimetic convention with a system of signs that would serve to both negate conventional reality and reify the artists' unconscious impulses.

Miro's "The Birth of the World" [1925; fig. 3] is considered the masterpiece of this phase of Surrealism (Wilson 40) and, like Miro's collage-based work discussed above, is free associative in that it allows the material of the background to suggest shapes which become signs. According to Nicholls, "the... objective is to be present at the moment of creation, when thought takes shape" (285). But this formulation of automatism suggests that there exists a moment prior to the formation of the signifier/signifed relationship when thought exists outside culture-based hierarchies or, in Breton's words, "aesthetic or moral preoccupations" (26). What, then, is the
automatic, acultural formulation of the encultured self?  
How would such a being express itself? Ashbery suggests that this paradox led the biomorphic movement into a kind of nihilistic objectivity:

...the governing principle seems to be not so much automatism... as self-abnegation in the interests of a superior realism, one which will reflect the realities both of the spirit (rather than the individual consciousness) and of the world as perceived by it. (RS 26)

Miro says of his biomorphic paintings "for me a form is never something abstract; it is always a sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else" (qtd. in Chipp 432). In "The Birth of the World," the black triangle represents a bird, according to Miro: "One large patch of black [in the already completed, spontaneously produced background] seemed to need to become bigger. I enlarged it.... It became a triangle, to which I added a tail. It might be a bird" (Wilson 40). Miro's uncertainty as to this particular sign points to another problem with this style of painting: in the absence of De Chirico's spooky realism, the painting relys upon the audience's ability to translate the painting's signs into the "realism" of its own unconscious experience. In order to do so, the audience is required to perform an imaginative act very much akin to the one that produced the painting in the first place; for an audience accostomed to dealing with the world primarily in rational terms, an encounter with an encoded unconscious experience
is unlikely to evoke empathy—in short, the painting will tend not to resonate with the audience's repressed unconscious awareness. The crucial shock value of the earlier, oneiric Surrealism is entirely abandoned in biomorphic Surrealism. In order to engage an audience, the biomorphic movement developed a style in which, according to Ashbery, "abstraction and fanciful figuration coexists" (RS 21), but that figuration compromised the aims of the artists' automatic techniques, placing them firmly within structures of signification infused with cultural judgements. For Ashbery, "automatism was not a viable possibility in art until much later, in the hands of artists like Jackson Pollock" (RS 26).

In discussing methods of improvisational composition in music, Bill Evans describes what may be an analogous procedure in that medium: "spontaneous material can be worked over and developed.... And the result will somehow be in touch with the universal language of understanding in music" (qtd. in Gottlieb 426). Evans' 1958 "Peace Piece" [Appendix (1)] was composed this way—it was originally meant to be an introduction to a Leonard Bernstein show tune, but once it took shape Evans decided he'd rather record it as an independent song—and it was recorded as an improvisation; the melodic spontaneity of the recorded version is governed by a preestablished rhythmic and harmonic structure which, though it was automatically
produced, had been "worked over and developed" (Evans in Gottlieb 426) The result is an irrational music which still maintains its unity and coherence. As Evans explains, even in improvisational performance, the jazz musician deals with spontaneously generated material in a rationally determined communicative structure:

In jazz, a mistake can be--in fact, must be--justified by what follows it. If you were improvising a speech and started a sentence in a way you hadn't intended, you would have to carry it out so that it would make sense. It is the same in spontaneous music. (qtd. in Gottlieb 426)

Evans' analogy between improvisational music and speech is revealing in terms of technique, though it needs some further consideration in terms of the relationship of musical "language" to meaning and signification. Still, it provides a basis for understanding the music as a stream of consciousness expression: the irrational right hand is in constant dialogue with a unified structure communicated by the rational left.

In that they use automatically produced material as an initiating basis for imaginative association, the decalomania, collage, and frottage of Miro, Ernst, and Masson, the surprize tactics of Tate, Hugo's disjunctive rhetoric, and the improvisational composition and performance of Evans all establish relationships in their work between the irrational and the rational, rather than replacing entirely the latter with the former, and, as
Breton says in noting a similar aspect of his procedure for automatic writing, "therein precisely lies the greatest interest in the Surrealist exercise" (Chipp 413).

In painting, the limitations of the biomorphic style were recognized by two newcomers to the Surrealist group: Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali, who arrived in Paris in 1927 and 1929 respectively. Their ascendance marks a return in the Surrealist group to oneiric painting and a near abandonment of biomorphism. During this period, the Surrealists explored what, according to Ades, "Breton defines as the other route open to Surrealist painters" (41). Ades further clarifies the term oneiric thus:

The illusionistic 'hand painted dream picture' [Dali] is not necessarily dealing with symbolic dream images.... It may be using dream images; it may use images culled from different dreams; it may merely remind us of certain general characteristics of dreams. It is illusionistic painting, but not of the external world—the model is an interior world. (41-42)

Magritte's "Time Transfixed" [1939; fig. 4] is clearly a return to the onieiric style of De Chirico, and to some of the central concerns of earlier Surrealism; the title indicates that the clock on the mantelpiece is a fixed marker, rather than a device for the measurement, of time. The locomotive in the fireplace is an example of the convulsive beauty Breton proposed in the original Manifesto. Moreover, the restored realism of this masterpiece of Surrealism makes possible the introduction of several other
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thematic concerns. The clearly defined space of the painting further emphasizes the incongruity of the scene and forces the viewer to wonder whether the locomotive is miniature or the room is gigantic, whether the locomotive has just emerged from some nether region behind the wall (suggested, perhaps, by the eerily empty mirror) or has been placed there during the sequential void of transfixed time, and whether, in fact, the train is imaginary or is real and will crash to the floor should time resume its "natural" progression. The deadpan vision of the painting does not allow the viewer out of these questions, forcing him or her to deal with the scene "objectively" while through its improbable character insisting also on the primacy of subjective expression.

If Magritte returned the oneiric style to the forefront of Surrealist painting, then Dali verified once and for all its significance in the greater schema of twentieth century art. Ironically, the most famous of Surrealists considered his own work to be diametrically opposed not only to Surrealism but to all of modern art. There is a sense in which that kind of attitude is exactly in line with the main thrust of modernist and avant-garde thinking, but rather than trying to make a clean break with tradition, as does most modern art, Dali wanted to destroy technical modernism in painting in order to return to what he considered the rigorous virtue of Romantic art. In place of the earlier
methods developed by the Surrealists for cultivating automatism, Dali proposed his Paranoiac-Critical Method (Chipp 416), which:

> uses the external world in order to assert its dominating idea and has the disturbing characteristic of making others accept this idea's reality. The reality of the external world is used for illustration and proof, and so comes to serve the reality of our mind. (Breton in Chipp 415)

Dali's project is to render the world in such a way that it literally verifies the concreteness of the artist's unconscious obsessions by fully incorporating them into a reality of which those obsessions are a constituent element. In the artist's own words, his goal is "the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations" (qtd. in Chipp 416). The difference between Dali and the other Surrealists, then, is that he attempted to deal with the irrational productions of the unconscious in an obsessively "rational and objective way." In that way, Dali's persona enacted his dogma. Both were calculated assaults on the weaknesses of biomorphism, especially its ambiguity around the signification of an already linguistic unconscious: Dali consciously imposes his desire on reality, rather than trying, as biomorphism does, to render symbolically the unconscious prior to its encounter with the external world. For Dali, there is no separation between desire and reality; his "objectivity" is only another tongue-in-cheek appropriation of the codes he
wants to subvert.

Dali attempts to resolve the Surrealist conflict between "automatic" access to unconscious activity and the technical requirements of its expression by recasting the act of painting as an objective "reporting" of an inherently subjective world. His definition of painting as "hand-done color 'photography' of 'concrete irrationality'" (qtd. in Chipp 416) is particularly telling: in figuratively comparing painting to the "ultra-objective" medium of photography, Dali seeks to legitimize an irrational reality even more concrete than the rational one of his hero, Raphael. In his understanding of Dali's method, Breton suggests that Dali manipulates "the images of the exterior world" into a reality consisting "of his impressions," which allows:

the paranoiac who is their witness to consider the images of the exterior world as unstable and transitory, or suspect; and what is so disturbing is that he is able to make other people believe in the reality of his impressions. (qtd. in Chipp 416)

But Breton here misses Dali's point entirely. For Dali, "reality" is not composed of subjective impressions which can assume visible form in an unreliable world--rather, the world is entirely reliable in its state of "concrete irrationality"--for the critical paranoiac, the world doesn't seem to verify his or her obsessions but actually does. What Breton calls an "uninterrupted becoming" (qtd.
in Chipp 416) of the object of paranoiac-critical activity is, for the paranoiac (Dali would say: in all of us) actually an *always had already become*, and the difference between these views is as significant as is the difference between sleight-of-hand and actual magic.

Dali's "The Persistence of Memory" [1931; fig. 5] addresses once again the Surrealist concern with time; the "soft watches" indicate not only the inevitable decay which goes along with the passage of time, but also the corruption of mechanized standards for its measure. The sleeping head with the soft watch draped over it exists in another state of consciousness just as it does another form--perhaps the head is dreaming its own distortion and that of the watches, or perhaps the head is dead or dying--it evokes both the dream state and the mortal decay of things washed up on the shores of thought. What is most striking in the painting is the integration of abstract, irrationally produced forms which act as signifiers for familiar elements of the "exterior world" and the realistic deadpan of Magritte; Dali paints his unconscious reality as a Renaissance painter would imitate nature, and in doing so seeks to reveal the underrepresented pathos of concrete realism.

In discussing the Art Ensemble of Chicago's 1991 rendition of Thelonius Monk's "Round Midnight" [Appendix (2)], band leader Joseph Jarman suggests that its "deconstruction" (qtd. in Mandel) of Monk's composition is
akin to "The Persistence of Memory." Says Jarman mysteriously about AEC's piece, "Midnight is not approaching, but has already passed" (qtd. in Mandel). Though Jarman's parallel seems tenuous, it is interesting to consider the expressive content of the song in relation to Dali's painting; in each, there is clearly an obsession not only with time but with the way in which time is measured and in which that measurement is communicated. The soft watches in "The Persistence of Memory" are as insistently subversive, in terms of the ordinary, practical function of watches, as are the overlapping and variegated alarm clock chimes in "'Round Midnight," and as Dali seeks an engagement with the masters of his tradition, so also AEC wants to engage with the conventions of its medium as they have been defined by Monk. Moreover, the album on which this song is heard is titled "Dreaming of the Masters": the emphasis that this title places on changing or altered consciousness and engagement with tradition, coupled with Jarman's comment in the album's introductory essay, suggests that the connection between AEC's work and Dali's may not be limited to an incidentally common thematic interest. It may be that AEC wants to expose the essence of Monk's work in a way that is analogous to Dali's desire to legitimize unconscious and irrational elements of reality, and that such parallel agendas may promote the employment of methods which can be compared outside of the media which govern their expression.
The idea that music might be an appropriate medium for Surrealist expression was unwelcome and even repugnant to the Paris Surrealists. But Breton's objections to music as a valid area of interest for Surrealists (he was also the author of the early statement "Everyone knows there is no Surrealist painting") are more than a little mysterious:

Auditive images, in fact, are inferior to visual images not only in clearness but also in strictness, and with all due respect..., they hardly seem intended to strengthen in any way the idea of human greatness. (qtd. in Chipp 403)

The idea that music expresses itself through images is itself more than a little na\ve, a tempting comparison of music to visual forms of expression which apparently leads Breton to the conclusion that music lacks clarity. (What sort of clarity? Was Breton hard of hearing?) To say that music lacks also "strictness," if by that he means rigor of creative procedure or technique, or perhaps even the necessity of disciplined practice, seems as purely snobbish as does the criterion which Breton suggests as the measure of superior expression. Interestingly, it is De Chirico who pinpoints the crucial issue which Breton perhaps senses; the forerunner of Surrealist painting, itself considered at one point to be a contradiction in terms, points out the quality of music which for interests of comparison is its definitive feature. Says De Chirico, "Music cannot express the non plus ultra of sensation. After all, one never knows what music is about" (qtd. in Chipp 398). In other words, music
is the only art which is not representational in practice. 
But it is exactly this failure of knowing, a knowing which 
in literature and painting is rendered via signification, 
which jazz critic Gene Lees points out as the primary virtue 
of musical expression:

   Our vocabulary for the nuances of emotion is 
inadequate, though we can somewhat compensate for 
this by creating compound words such as happy-sad, 
wistful-joyous, and the like. But music can go 
beyond that. It doesn't and of course can't name 
these subtle nameless emotions. It can evoke 
them. (Gottlieb 420)

Thus, music sidesteps signification's quality of "obtaining 
meaning at the expense of the thing it names" (Nicholls 285) 
by expressing the thing without representing it.

   Where Lees suggests that music operates on an evokative 
emotional level outside the realm of language, Amiri Baraka 
defines a context for that evokation, in which the emotional 
content of the music can be read:

   The notes mean something; and the something is, 
regardless of stylistic considerations, part of 
the black psyche as it dictates the various forms 
of Negro culture. (15)

Moreover, the context of black culture in America at the 
time of the early development of jazz suggests another 
affinity with the motivations behind Surrealist production 
in post-war Europe; just as the Surrealist aesthetic 
developed in reaction and in opposition to the dominant 
conventions of rational discourse which directly and 
indirectly glorified the mechanization of all areas of
European culture, so too black music developed as an alternative and as a response to linguistic strictures which in white America prohibited the full expression of black experience. As Baraka explains:

Negroes played jazz as they had sung the blues or, even earlier, as they had shouted and hollered in those anonymous fields, because it was one of the few areas of human expression available to them. (12)

Further, and contrary to Baraka's earlier assertion, "stylistic considerations" have everything to do with the context in which Baraka suggests we should understand jazz, and as a reaction to expressive prohibitions developed along some of the same lines as Surrealist literature and painting in Europe, are significant in terms of both procedure and product. Certainly jazz developed quite independent of Surrealism, but just as certainly jazz was affected by it in the historical moment where the course of the evolution of jazz intersected with the dispersal of Surrealist ideas through the art community in this country. Because of the agenda so clearly articulated by the Surrealists, which operates on the extra-media level of thought and communication as well as on levels which are concerned primarily with questions produced by the particulars of media, there is opportunity to make useful comparison between the methods employed in these disparate cultural contexts and even between what generalizations can be made about their results.
Miro was less resistant than De Chirico and Breton to the expressive possibilities of music, and even utilized music as a basis for free associative procedures in his own work:

In 1939 I began a new stage in my work which had its basis in music and nature.... Music had always appealed to me, and now music in this period began to take the role poetry had played in the early '20's. (qtd. in Chipp 434)

Miro seems to have discovered that the "problem" which De Chirico identifies of music's self-referentiality is, as Lees suggests, not a problem at all, but rather the chief virtue of the medium, especially in terms of the Surrealist project. Miro mentions in his discussion of music's influence on his work being exposed to classical and chamber music, which were of course much more entrenched in French culture than the American form of jazz; if he had heard any jazz, it apparently didn't affect him as strongly. What Miro may have overlooked, and what De Chirico and Breton weren't able to see, is that jazz, because of its self-referential quality and its spontaneous, improvisational form, may be uniquely qualified to carry out the Surrealist project by providing through its own automatism access to pre-linguistic unconscious emotions and impulses which cannot be expressed in words, but which can be evoked in musical language without having to filter them through the rationalizing, generalizing procedure of signification.

John Coltrane's 1960 "Giant Steps" [Appendix (3)], in
which the solo improviser performs an irrationally produced automatism within the rationalizing structures of rhythm and harmony, themselves created in an automatic compositional procedure and subsequently worked over, is in some ways akin to the stream of consciousness, automatic writing produced by Breton and the other Surrealist writers. The compositional structures of the song, which alternate improvisational solos and pre-established refrains create a rational unity within which the irrational automatism of the improvisation takes place. Though the improvisational sections seems not to make musical "sense," the song as a whole maintains a structural unity by establishing a pattern of refrain sections which the listener is able to recognize as thematic. Coltrane presents us here with a modernist consciousness--structurally bound to time and space, coherent yet subjective, cohesive yet irrational--which is comparable to that of Magritte's "Time Transfixed."

So also Ornette Coleman's 1965 "European Echoes" [Appendix (4); from Live] maintains its expressive unity by alternating wildly dissonant solos with a recognizable refrain, and like AEC's "'Round Midnight," Coleman's piece seeks out an engagement with its musical heritage in order to call into question the rational structures of the tradition, which, for Coleman, restrict the full range of his musical self-expression. The rhythm and melody of the refrain calls to mind a simple, three-note waltz, and
through its repetition it becomes a sort of simulacrum of European folk tradition, a lullaby from which Coleman is quick to wake us. The improvisational sections use the refrain as a template, but the oversimplified melody nearly vanishes into gradually more radical atonality, surfacing in fragmented form only often enough to remind us that it is still present as a musical equivalent of poetry's "ghost meter."

In contrast, Circle's 1970 "Ballad" [Appendix (5)] is more akin to the Surrealist trope of free association; this composition is structured in such a way that the musicians are freer to improvise in response to each other, rather than along lines pre-established and fixed. Similarly, Coleman's 1960 "Free" [Appendix (6); from Change] is a collective improvisation, and as one of the first such recordings is a direct forerunner of "Ballad." In "Free," Coleman's band members "each [go] his own way and still [add] tellingly to the group endeavor" (Coleman, Change). According to Coleman, for this song "there [is] no predetermined choral or time pattern," and in it "we got a spontaneous, free-wheeling thing going here" (Change). The result in each of these works is a fragmented, irrational expression of a postmodern consciousness, which has no internal cohesion and in which the musicians interact within an irrationally shifting field of spontaneously generated structures; each song creates a fragmentary music based on
surprising juxtapositions, a music of "convulsive beauty" which in terms of its product fulfills exactly the Surrealist program.

In terms of process, also, Coleman's description of his music is reminiscent of the Surrealist painters' descriptions of their work, and of their ideas about collective hypnosis:

When our group plays, before we start out to play, we do not have any idea what the end result will be. Each player is free to contribute what he feels in the music at any given moment. We do not begin with a preconcieved notion as to what kind of effect we will achieve. When we record, sometimes I can hardly believe that what I hear when the tape is played back to me is the playing of my group. I am so busy and absorbed when I play that I am not aware of what I'm doing at the time I'm doing it. (Coleman, Change)

Even though it's unlikely that Coleman consciously employs techniques which were pioneered by the Surrealists, the reactions of his audience and critics to his music are certainly conditioned by an indirect awareness of the Surrealists' project which has existed for some time in the U.S. That Baraka could write of Coleman that his "screams and rants are only musical once one understands the music his emotional attitude seeks to create" (15) demonstrates an openness to expression which does not make rational sense which is a direct product of the Surrealists' influence in American arts.

As early as 1913, Dada entered the consciousness of the American avant-garde; according to Chipp, after the Armory...
Show, which shook the very pillars of American art and literature, Francis Picabia "remained [in the U.S.] to inject a proto-Dada spirit into Alfred Stieglitz's review, Camera Work, and later into 291, the journal of Stieglitz's gallery" (368). Even more significantly, during and after World War II a number of important Surrealists lived in the U.S., among them Breton, Ernst, Masson, Miro, and Dali (Wilson 12), and had a huge influence on the "New York School" of American artists and writers, who went on to have profound influence upon the direction of the post-war arts in this country. In 1944, Jackson Pollock commented on the presence of these painters in the U.S.:

The fact that good European moderns are now here is very important, for they bring with them an understanding of the problems of modern painting. I am particularly impressed with their concept of the source of art being the Unconscious. (qtd. in Chipp 546)

As William Rubin points out, "what Pollock really took from Surrealism was an idea--automatism--rather than a manner" (177). Indeed, it is the idea that the unconscious is "the source of art," rather than the technical or stylistic innovations of the Surrealists, which has been assimilated in American art. Without the ideological grounding of Surrealist ideas, according to Ashbery, "the signature art of our time would not have been produced" (RS 7).

Of course, the stylistic aspects of doctrinaire Surrealism have been rejected many times over by the various
emergent avante-gardes, but, says Rubin, "With each new stylistic wave the vestiges of... Surrealist ideas have become further attenuated and diffused" (185). As Surrealism has been rejected, in other words, its founding assumptions have become more and more entrenched.

In poetry, the expatriate Surrealists influenced such early postmoderns as W.C. Williams and Wallace Stevens, and along with and through them helped shape John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Frank O'Hara, and others, in lines of influence which radiated outward from the New York School and the Black Mountain group. According to Ashbery, "Surrealism has influenced us in so many ways that we can hardly imagine what the world would be like without it" (RS 5). His long poem "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror" is among the most influential poems in English of the second half of this century, and its opening section summarizes the evolved Surrealism which American poetry has assimilated while putting its own postmodern slant on Surrealist concerns.

Even prior to the opening lines of "Self Portrait," Ashbery initiates the first layer of what will become through the course of the poem an exponentially multiplying doubleness, as the title itself both announces the subject of the poem (Parmigianino's self-portrait) and qualifies the poem itself, which is also the poet's self-portrait. Ashbery's doubleness here is deliberate and is something
altogether different from ambiguity: where ambiguous poetic images end up not being quite one thing or quite the other, Ashbery's trick mirrors reveal both a "transparent" window-view on the soul of their maker and a confounding array of "reflective" surfaces which ultimately return the viewer's now distorted but no less accurate gaze back upon his or her own responses to the text. The poem thus engages from the outset the reader's desire by allowing (or forcing) him or her to choose between a number of figurative realities, producing a situation where the poem itself exists in multiple and contradictory narrative states, any of which is "real" in the mimetic sense.

Ashbery's realism is surrealist in the truest sense of doctrinaire Surrealism and effective in forcing the reader to integrate an interpretive desire with an apprehension of the poem's familiar lyric format. The poem is about a portrait of a self as seen in a convex mirror ("the portrait/is the reflection once removed"), but it is also both the portrait and the mirror of the poet's self, and this doubleness comments upon the poem's initial conceit, which is an encounter of the lyrical self with a rendering of an Other done by himself as he has seen himself othered by the artificial mechanism of the convex mirror. Thus, before the lyrical encounter of speaker with Other, Ashbery has already brilliantly undermined any attempt one might make at a reason-based or mimetic reading, establishing for
the poem a shifting, "super-real" state of which Breton would certainly have approved.

The poem's opening sentence is an open fragment, half a simile which the title seems, but fails, nearly to complete. Here Ashbery's grammar enacts his rhetoric: the fragment suggests meanings but fails to commit, announcing that there's something to be said then refusing to say it, just as Parmigianino's convex aspect suggests that his hand simultaneously offers and retracts some secret of which the "sequestered" face reveals nothing. At least, Ashbery seems to offer such an interpretation of the painting and to explain his intention to mimic its method even as he does so:

As Parmigianino did it, the right hand
Bigger than the head, thrust at the viewer
And swerving easily away, as though to protect
What it advertises. (SP 188)

The opening lines of the poem, then, suggest that the missing half of the simile might be something like "I'll do it," an announcement and an enactment of the poem's intended conceit. So Ashbery lets us in a bit on how he's planning to proceed while concealing just what it is he's hoping to do in his self-portrait. Nonetheless, we are warned already that what is advertised (meaning, personal insight, or truth) is also protected by the very mechanism (a rhetorical convex mirror) through which its presence is promised. We know already that "the right hand" of action and process is
"bigger than the head" of rational sense, an inversion of Enlightenment hierarchy typical of Surrealist work, and that a pervasive rhetorical doubleness, like that of double imagery in Surrealist painting by Picasso, Dali, and others, will continually defer the location of a fixed, mimetic realism.

But Ashbery isn't the obstructionist, out to hide his real concerns. On the contrary, he is critical of an overly technical approach which might offer "false disarray as proof of authenticity" (SP 189). The relationship of Ashbery's subject(s) to time and space is continual rather than fragmented, not fixed but suspended "Lively and intact in a recurring wave/Of arrival" (SP 188), "treated humanely" on the page. Thus, he is able to consider "the soul" with which he is concerned at his leisure in the lyrical role of first-person viewer:

But how far can it swim out through the eyes
And still return safely to its nest? The surface
Of the mirror being convex, the distance increases
Significantly; that is, enough to make the point
That the soul is a captive, treated humanely, kept
In suspension, unable to advance much farther
Than your look as it intercepts the picture. (SP 188)

The eyes, comic "windows to the soul," are artificial ones, painted in such a way that the soul only seems to advance through them, as though poised on the surface of the page, ready to leap off. It is only the viewer's look that intercepts the soul, and that look penetrates only to the
surface of the mirror/painting/poem. It is this "too plain" secret, the captive condition of the soul as rendered in art, which the portrait(s) reveals, and the soul is captive not even of the surface on which it is rendered but of the fleeting interest of the viewer:

...the soul is not a soul,  
Has no secret, is small, and it fits  
Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention. (SP 188)

The soul is suspended not in time but out of it, is brought into being more by the attention of the viewer than by the artifice of the maker, and is characterized finally, Ashbery continues, by the mere words (which do not then do exist) which the viewer fruitlessly uses to speculate about the "meaning of the music":

That is the tune but there are no words.  
The words are only speculation  
(From the Latin speculum, mirror):  
They seek and cannot find the meaning of the music. (SP 188)

The "soul" is visible only as "postures of the dream," a "tune" which seems not to communicate outside its own discrete structure, a "motion" of which we can view only the aftereffects. We are left to deal with the things we can say about what we see--words which for Ashbery are themselves, at heart, another reflective surface. This reflection, the words of Ashbery's self-portrait, "life englobed" on the figuratively convex surface of the page, is all we have:
One would like to stick one's hand
Out of the globe, but its dimension,
What carries it, will not allow it. (SP 189)

The reflective surfaces of our perspectives restrict us to understanding only what we can "see." Ashbery here introduces one of the central concerns of the poem: the boundaries of the self are defined in language, and laid out performatively in the act of self-representation. But, for Ashbery as for the Surrealists, the self is never merely its expression but exists also as a shadow within that expression, as the "othered self" relegated to a paradoxical non-being by its own act of naming itself.

But later, we find that surfaces, though frustrating, are not void of the capacity for meaning:

...your eyes proclaim
That everything is surface. The surface is what's there
And nothing can exist except what's there. (SP 190)

Ashbery is tongue-in-cheek here. The "nothing" is exactly the thing he wants to get at, because the true self exists as non-thing, the absence of which only the presence of defining surfaces makes us aware. We can percieve the presence of the shadow self, the non-linguistic "hollow" of the soul, at the point where signification fails--within its own failure to signify itself. The attempt, then, is worthwhile, successful in its failure.

Later, in a gesture which finally reconciles the desire to know truth through words with the contingency that
desire, through words, gives shape to the very surfaces of a "reality" they are meant to describe, Ashbery writes:

And just as there are no words for the surface, that is,
No words to say what it really is, that it is not Superficial but a visible core, then there is No way out of the problem of pathos vs. experience. (SP 190)

In this opening passage Ashbery, with Jackson Pollock and Ornette Coleman, aligns himself with a kind of thinking inherited from the doctrinaire Surrealists, and which, partly through Ashbery's influence, permeates much postwar poetry in the U.S., namely, that reality is made up of perceived surfaces exposed to and altered by the force of irrational, subjective desires: pathos and experience cannot be conceived as being in opposition to each other, but only as mutual contributors to versions of "what's there." For Ashbery, desire is made of dreams and hinted-at motions which are both revealed and hidden in the act of speech, by words, and the surfaces they define are ultimately the dimensions of an inexpressable self.

Coleman, certainly, is aware of the problem of self-expression in a culture governed by the linguistic proscriptions of logic, and that that problem exists outside the mere conventions of media and genre:

With my music, as is the case with some of my friends who are painters, I often have people come to me and say, 'I like it but I don't understand it'.... [In my music] there is a continuity of expression, certain continually evolving strands of thought that link all my compositions together.
Maybe it's something like the paintings of Jackson Pollock. (Coleman, *Change*)

Through an impressive array of important American artists, the ideas of the Surrealists, we can now see, had an influence the scope of which is hard to overestimate on the U.S. arts. Surrealist procedures, and along with them ways of understanding art which are based on Surrealist ideas, have been assimilated (though rarely in pure form) to the extent that many layers of meaning in contemporary U.S. art would be inaccessible, or wouldn't exist in the first place, but for Surrealism, which succeeded in securing validity in the arts for irrational procedures and modes of expression which are now the cornerstone of our artistic consciousness.
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