Jay Peierls

Professor Louise Geddes

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The Alias and Gender Fluidity in Surrealism and Dada

Introduction

This paper examines the creation of aliases within Surrealism and Dada as a way of exploring gender and queerness, how such creation connected to that period's art, politics, and concepts of queerness, and how it influenced subsequent periods and movements. The use of an alias allowed artists room for rebellion, differing opinions, and alternative modes of presentation not available in a mainstream setting. For some artists, aliases served to protect identities, or to shield queer people physically from the attention of rigidly homophobic and transphobic regimes. They were also artistic/performative acts, attempts to break boundaries founded on nineteenth-century moral codes. In exploring these possibilities, I hope to uncover the queer history of those who may have been forgotten or intentionally erased and to understand how these aliases and alter-egos affected the Surrealism and Dada movements specifically.

These two movements flourished before and during the Second World War, in places that were mercilessly repressive to Jewish people, queer people, and others who were deemed social outcasts. The artistic output of these marginalized artists becomes even more crucial and brave in light of that repression. The sense of freedom apparent in these works of art might otherwise not have appeared during this period. Even so, some of the artists were confined to the use of disguises to express themselves.

In this paper, I argue that the identities of marginalized people and people without privilege cannot be separated from their art, especially during the time of targeted bigotry and fascism during which Dada and Surrealism emerged. I explore the history of these two movements, as well as their historical context and their relationships to gender and sexuality. I will use the modern lens of queer theory to analyze the alter ego and the ideas of queer failure

and queer utopia within art, and will explore these themes through analyses of several queer artists.

Alias, Alter-Ego, and Pseudonym

The history of the alias in art and literature is a long one, and typically occurs in instances of women or members of other marginalized groups using the name of someone who would be associated with a powerful group in order to be taken seriously. The term "alias" is defined as a "false or assumed identity" or an indication that "a named person is also known or more familiar under another specified name" ("Alias"). An alias may be used as a false identity with which to fool others, but it may also represent a facet of a person, an additional name they go by. These two uses of the term can both be applicable in different pieces of art, literature, and music, but they have different implications depending on the usage. Within art, an alias can imply a different perspective as well, asking that a work be analyzed as if it were the work of a different artist. For example, many famous authors (such as Stephen King) write from a pen name in order to have their works judged on content and not fame.

The idea of the alias is also related to the idea of mimesis, originally translated from Greek as imitation. This definition relates to the representation of nature in art and literature. The mimetic nature of performance is both an imitation of the Self and of the Other; the queer self serves as both. Mimesis is a representation, and the queer alias exists both to show more of oneself and to hide it, hence why it is the Self and the Other at the same time.

Historically, the alias was has often been aligned with queerness. In 1905, for example, an English court found that an American named Paul Downing was legally named Caroline Brogden and labeled him a lunatic and a 'cross-dresser'. He had been living and working as Paul

Downing for years before being caught and sent to an asylum, where he died a year later. Downing and others like him could be accused of giving false statements in the name of the law simply for expressing their gender in order to obtain a job or to get married. In addition, aliases were used in performance groups, such as burlesque, drag, and freak shows, in the late 1800s and 1900s. This tradition has continued through the realm of modern drag and performance art, though the separation of gender expression and performance through alias has blurred lines. Both can be considered queering identity. Use of an alias is analogous to the modern forced use of deadnames[1] by closeted gender non-conforming people and transgender people, who create art and otherwise live their lives under a chosen name.

The Surrealist and Dadaist intent is difficult to navigate in their works, as Dada was famously known for its lack of assignment of meaning, and Surrealism was steeped in many layers of meaning within the conscious and unconscious mind. However, the alter egos created in different works, using various gender expressions and queer symbolism, are indicative of explorations of queerness and identity. A few of these works were probably a result of the fashion of the times, and the contemporary trend of portraying societal taboos might have motivated some artists, but the repeated creation of aliases indicates that these alter egos were vitally important to most of the artists who used them. Though these expression were sometimes inflammatory to the general public, they were also achingly personal and rarely mocked gender fluidity or transgender people.

Understanding queer culture and theory often hinges on language, rather than imagery. Words that have been used with both negative and positive connotations since the twentieth century include ‘butch’, ‘fairy’, ‘dyke’, ‘fag’, ‘twink’, and ‘queen’. Their use evolved over

[1] A *deadname* is the modern term for the birthname of a transgender person who has changed names since coming out as transgender.

decades and changed meanings often. The words themselves create archetypes and identities outside of the individual, allowing for anonymity within a larger group of queer people, and removing the ability to hide amongst the cisgender-heterosexual homogeneity. In a sense, the slur becomes a form of alias, allowing this anonymity, through subversion. The very naming of queerness, as nicknames and slurs create aliases alongside people's names, allows not only artists but everyday queer people to experience this phenomenon. The alias can be a queer occurrence, the ability to have separate lives, multiple identities, and even different names/pronouns depending on the situation at hand. This is a variation on the Self and the Other, with the alias functioning as both a true representation of the Self for queer people (specifically transgender or gender non-conforming people) while functioning as the Other for the cisgender heterosexual majority.

Origins of Dada and Surrealism

Following the First World War, a group of modernists seeking to move beyond classical constraints of art and the more recent Dada movement created what was later termed Surrealism, a movement focusing on the subconscious and its taboo nature. In his foundational 1924 "Manifesto of Surrealism," author André Breton (1896–1966) rails against the confines of a society that doesn't accept madness or imagination, while ironically limiting his definition of what surrealism could comprise.

> The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience … Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed

> superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices. (“Manifesto” 2)

His definition shifted over time, but it always relied heavily on Freud’s ideas about dreams, the unconscious and the psyche, the truth and beauty of childhood, and the different realities that the unconscious mind may experience. In his “Manifesto”, Breton gives this specific definition of “surrealism”: “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express — verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner — the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (5). Breton’s definition inhibits the Surrealist movement from expanding beyond literature, but allows himself and other cisgender male writers the opportunity to create without ‘moral concern’, a liberty not available to outsider surrealists.

Around this time, Breton started losing authority among the surrealists, possibly because of the grander demands and restrictions he was trying to place on the movement. After the rise of surrealist visual art, Breton backtracked slightly and in 1928 wrote a series of essays to maintain his place as a leader amongst the surrealists (“Surrealism and Painting”). In another attempt to tighten his hold, his 1929 “Second Manifesto of Surrealism,” he placed further limits on his definition, alienating various members of the group, including Salvador Dali.

Within surrealism, the idea of psychic automatism maintained its importance in literature throughout the course of the movement, but was expressed differently in visual art, theatrical production, and literature. It can be defined as a thought that is not inhibited by social concern or with the goal of expressing a thought as it emerges in the unconscious. In writing, there can be an immediacy to this act, by using an uninterrupted stream of thought. Breton’s primary initial

objection to painting in surrealism was that it lacked true immediacy due to the nature of the medium:

> A few lines, a few blobs of color hold me in their thrall as nothing else can do. The object, the strange object itself draws from these things the greater part of its power of provocation, and heaven alone knows whether this is a great provocation, since I have no idea of the destination involved. … In such a domain I have at my disposal a power of illusion of which I cease to perceive the limits, unless I am very careful. ("Surrealism and Painting" 2)

The nonsensical potential of such thought is often connected to Dada, an artistic movement that emerged before Surrealism during the First World War. These movements had many artists in common, and the lines between them were often blurred, as Dada was also illogical and often satirical. Though both movements defied the horror and meaninglessness of the devastating First World War, Dada was focused on absurdity, while Surrealism tried to find meaning in the subconscious and its relation to reality. The most significant difference between Surrealism and Dada may be the importance placed on thought and the artist by Surrealism, as opposed to Dada's surrender to meaninglessness. The Dada and Surrealist artists overlap in many cases, with some of the most prominent artists of the Dada movement being Marcel Duchamp, Hannah Höch, Man Ray, Max Ernst, Hans Arp, Francis Picabia, and Kurt Schwitters. The Surrealist movement was a mixture of visual, literary, and performance art, and the most well-known of the Surrealist artists were René Magritte, Max Ernst, André Breton, Joan Miro, Meret Oppenheim, Yves Tanguy, Paul Éluard, Man Ray, and Remedios Varo.

The Surrealists and Dadaists were integral to the early art scene of the 1900s, although many of them were involved in other artistic movements, or were retroactively defined as

Surrealists or Dadaists. Breton resented the painters joining his initially purely literary movement, but historians have assigned artists with similar themes to the surrealist movement, though they may have been unaware of these likenesses at the time. Just as importantly, Breton's selectiveness about who could identify as a Surrelist relates to his bigotry against queer people, women, and people of color, further limiting the movement.

Early on, Marcel Duchamp, a dadaist and later surrealist, created 'ready-made objects', raising questions of intent in art that were not present in Baroque art or earlier. Duchamp also devised the term "retinal art", meaning art that appeals to the eyes, rather than the mind. His dada and surreal art provoked the viewer, not allowing the mind to rest, asking for thought and interaction. Following Duchamp's example, the Dadaists and Surrealists continued to break down social norms and expectations by challenging the audience and the authority of art that came before them, as well as the assumptions that are ingrained in the collective unconscious (another Freudian point). Although this core group of Surrealist and Dadaist artists did attempt to break through traditional cultural taboos, including representation of sex, death, and the subconscious, they were uncomfortable with women being in the group and with women's artistic pursuits, and were somewhat conservative in their values involving queer people, gender expression, and inclusion of those outside of their cis-heteronormative group.

In fact, there was one core member of the early Surrealists who was publicly known to be queer, Breton's arguably closest friend, Louis Aragon. Breton chose to ignore his queerness, though Aragon was notably close with Breton, to the point of devotion. "...Malcolm Cowley…described Aragon in a letter of 4 June 1923 '... he is always seriously in love; he never philanders…I ought to add that he has a dog-like affection for André Breton'" (Haslam 113). While Cowley uses a rude comparison for Aragon's queerness, it is easy to see that there were

queer people within the Surrealist movement, but that this was not acceptable or recognized by Breton and his most ardent followers. Another source, Jacques Prevert, said "André Breton was loved by the other Surrealists with an emotion with which they would only otherwise have loved a woman" and Adrienne Monnier said that he had "a libidinous power" over his friends (Haslam 113). The only reason that the support of homosexuality and the liberation of women movements were not Surrealist causes was because "everybody whom they least respected was chattering about them", an example of *le snob*, which, hypocritically, the Surrealists often spoke against (Haslam 99).

Surrealism and Dada are both considered to be part of the Modernist movement, and Fascism and Modernism were proud enemies. Modernists created works critical of fascism, notably Picasso's "Guernica" (1937). Many Modernists, however, including Surrealists and Dadaists, left Nazi-occupied territories when faced with standing up against fascism. That is not to say that the Surrealists did not try to act on their principles in other ways. The core surrealists published several pamphlets trying to adopt an anti-imperialist mindset, including "The Truth about the Colonies" and "First Report on the Colonial Exhibition." The relationship between the mainstream Surrealists, the outsider Surrealists, and fascism is complex and important to the understanding of why the queer and minority Surrealists would have acted the way they did, and part of the historical background of their art. The Surrealist artwork was greatly affected by the rise of the Nazis, who actively sought to erase queer and marginalized histories, and who spread vicious rumors that many outsiders, including non-conformists and queer people, were actively a part of the fascists. Though that was disproved, many of the histories of queer people were as a result forgotten and suppressed.

The term 'outsider'[2] refers to those who were not 'core surrealists' approved by Breton. Those not meeting Breton's criteria, most often because of their gender, race, or sexuality, were nevertheless surrealist in their artistic style, writings, goals, and proximity to the group. I label them 'outsider surrealists'.[3] The concept of Rejected and Independent Dadaists is more fluid than that of the corresponding Surrealist categories, but still serves the purpose of designating artworks as less mainstream than other Dadaists. The Dada movement set fewer (if any) restrictions on its "membership," however, so the boundaries are blurred as to what would have been considered rebellious within the movement.

Queer History and Symbols

In this essay, I examine the queering of the alias and Surreal/Dada identity through multiple modern lenses, taking into account the effect of the two world wars. When studying queer histories, it can be difficult to navigate the complexities of queer historical culture and to understand the implications of language and attire. Not all colloquial language of the time and contemporary public knowledge was recorded directly, and facts obvious to the average person of that era are not always accessible to the modern reader. Halberstam elaborates, in *The Queer Art of Failure*:

> It has proven quite difficult to theorize sexuality and gender deviance in historical ways, and often the field is divided between untheoretical historical surveys and ahistorical theoretical models. Debates about the history of sexuality and the history of gender

[2] I do not mean 'outsider' as in 'outsider art', i.e., art made by self-taught or 'naive' artists not necessarily part of the mainstream art scene. The outsider surrealists were almost all trained formally and either took part in the artistic scene or were very aware of what was happening around them in the art world. The reason they were not part of the core group was rather because of Breton's elitism and general racism, sexism, and homophobia.

[3] These outsider surrealists correspond to Desmond Morris' categories of Independent, Antagonistic, and Rejected Surrealists (9–10).

> deviance have also very often reproduced this split, rendering historical sexual forms as either universal or completely bound by and to their historical moment. The challenge for new queer history has been, and remains, to produce methodologies sensitive to historical change but influenced by current theoretical preoccupations. (Halberstam 46)

Queer history, as described by Muñoz, is more than what is recorded, and it is up to historians to discover its impact based on the effects that are less measurable, including oral history and non-material objects ("Ephemera"). "Is history simply a matter of events that leave behind those things that can be weighed and measured—new institutions, new maps, new rulers, new winners and losers—or is it also the result of moments that seem to leave nothing behind, nothing but the mystery of spectral connections between people long separated by place and time, but somehow speaking the same language?" (Marcus 4).

Performance itself is an ephemeral idea, something that has currency without being a material object:

> Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things. It is important to note that ephemera is a mode of proofing and producing arguments often worked by minoritarian culture and criticism makers. (Muñoz, "Ephemera" 10).

This relates to the idea that queer history is a forgotten and destroyed history, with recordings and memories intrinsically linked to the queer community, who were erased both by

the present and the ephemeral nature of their art, which was not captured except occasionally in photos and paintings.

Muñoz writes that "Queer failure…is more nearly about escape and a certain virtuosity" (*Cruising* 169). In this sense, Surrealism can be seen as a queer failure for Breton. Under his heteronormative terms, it was a failure, because it either puttered out or expanded beyond his control. Under Halberstam's definition, this was a successful attempt at failing, as it fell outside the parameters that were previously set in art and by Breton. For the outsider artists,including Claude Cahun, Leonora Carrington, and other queer people and women, Surrealism was a queer art and revolved around expressing taboo ideas and failing to meet societal expections or to convey normalcy.

Within the artistic movements Surrealism and Dada, there were many areas of philosophical, aesthetic, and social overlap. These periods of art took place between two world wars, in a time of great existential anxiety and general questioning. This anxiety was reflected in modern art more than ever, as a way to try and understand what meaning there could be beyond suffering in war. The lens of one war ending and another looming on the horizon, specifically the rise of the Nazis and fascism in Europe, came to define the work of the surrealists and dadaists. When evaluating the rebellious attitudes of these artists, one must note that the stakes were high. Most of the mainstream surrealists canonized in art history were European, white, and straight (ish) men, who were often not a part of targeted minorities. Though many of them were called 'degenerate artists' by the Nazis, their identities did not inherently put them in danger, even if their inflammatory art and political statements would.

The marginalized people of Surrealism and Dadaism have been categorically erased in favor of their mainstream counterparts, whose art, though shocking and avant-garde, did not have

the same revolutionary effect as the works of the oppressed. Queer identities and all of their intersectionalities were hidden even in movements that prided themselves on being out of the mainstream, and were meant to be incendiary. The expression of gender fluidity, *genderfuck*,[4] and queerness was a rebellion from contemporary normative ideas, especially those perpetuated in artistic groups rife with misogyny, racism, and homophobia. Mainstream history does not usually cover these subcultural or hidden histories. It is up to historians to reconstruct them through ephemera left by the marginalized. For example, in Bob Damron's 1960s address book, names of gay venues were listed with codes: "OC stood for 'Older/More Mature Crowd' and RT for 'Raunchy Types-Hustlers, Drags, and other "Downtown" Types,' " (Campbell 31).

The queer community has long used various signifiers to take up space and signal to other outsiders of their existence, including the pansy, the violet, handkerchiefs, sex toys, various jewelry, and symbols (e.g., the lambda and the axe) (Campbell 49). Some of the aliases and artworks of Dada and Surrealist artists included use of symbols and signifiers, such as Claude Cahun's celestial bodies and shaved head and Frida Kahlo's hairstyles and use of a suit:

> These hankies were part of a sexual signifying system known colloquially as 'the hanky code,' which corresponding particular colors with particular sexual activities. Red, for example, represented the desire to fist … But Fischer … cleverly undercuts the seriousness of the meanings of hanky code by feinting toward the hanky's everyday use: "Red handkerchiefs are also employed into the treatment of nasal discharge, and in some cases may have no significance in regard to sexual contact." (Campbell 89)

While analyzing these works of art, it is critical to understand them through the lens of the time as much as possible, and look at what would have been communicated through images

[4] Genderfuck means transgression of the traditional gender binary, often through performance of self-identity. The term is seen as early as 1972… ("genderfuck")

created by outsider artists. The use of signifiers also allowed plausible deniability, especially when under regimes when gender and sexuality were more restricted. The artist could hide behind the literal meaning of the object and the aesthetics of surrealism/dadaism, using art and mimesis as a form of mask.

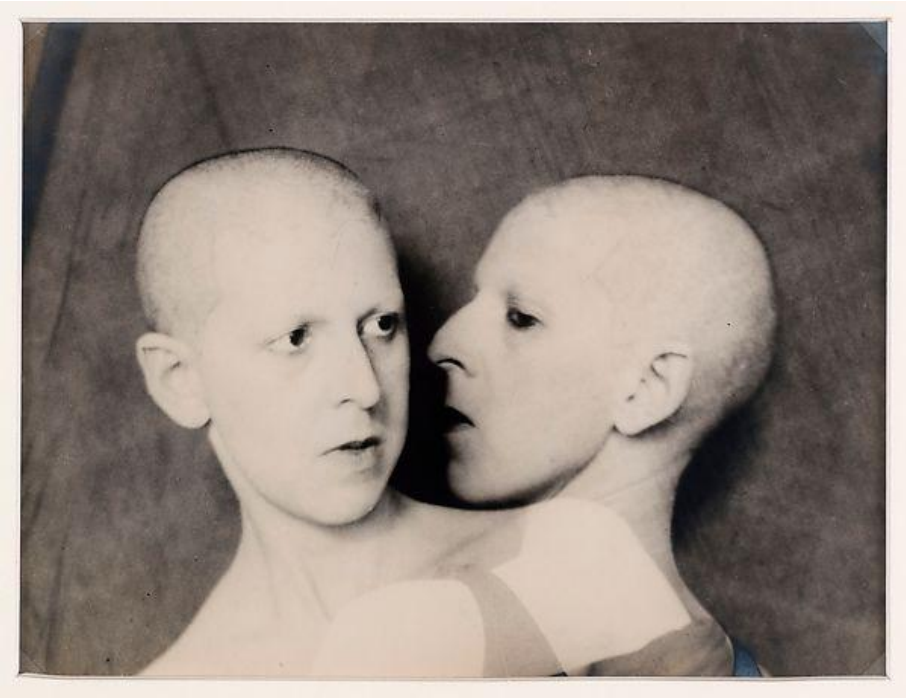

Fig. 1: Claude Cahun. *Que Me Veux Tu?* 1929, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/296276

Surrealist queer artist Claude Cahun's series of self portraits, all with different versions of themself, exemplifies the use of symbols and signifiers. These are works of performance for Cahun at that time, and also exist as art objects that have had audiences since the 1930s. Cahun's shaved head would have been a signifier of otherness, both to their peers and the general public, and it has remained such, based on historical context. As a queer person, Cahun's so-called 'spinsterhood', androgynous looks, and romantic interactions with themself within their artwok all were signifiers of queerness in their art.

At the time that these artists were producing surrealist works, queer playwright Jean Genet (1910–1986) was writing about his experiences of being jailed for petty theft and "lewd" acts as a homosexual in France. Genet's work also included signifiers of queerness, similar to Cahun's shaved head:

> Like Genet, we are intrigued by the most mundane objects—a safety pin, a pointed shoe, a motor cycle—which, nonetheless, like the tube of vaseline, take on a symbolic dimension, becoming a form of stigmata, tokens of a self-imposed exile. Finally, like Genet, we must seek to recreate the dialectic between action and reaction which renders these objects meaningful. For, just as the conflict between Genet's 'unnatural' sexuality and the policemen's 'legitimate' outrage can be encapsulated in a single object, so the tensions between dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture—in the styles made up of mundane objects which have a double meaning. On the one hand, they warn the 'straight' world in advance of a sinister presence—the presence of difference—and draw down upon themselves vague suspicions, uneasy laughter, 'white and dumb rages'. On the other hand, for those who erect them into icons, who use them as words or as curses, these objects become signs of forbidden identity, sources of value. (Hebdige 2)

Dada and Surrealist Subcultures

The creation of Surrealist and Dada queer objects was in itself an act of political rebellion, particularly considering when they occurred, at the end of the First World War and between the world wars, times when subculture was flourishing and fascism was pervasive. The subversive nature of the queer artists was not recorded as much as the mainstream Surrealists and

Dadaists. Ironically, the oppressor group of Surrealists would have still considered themselves to be underground and subcultural, despite the fact that they were almost all European men with some access to money.

Unlike Surrealism, Dada is based around the nihilism that was prominent after the First World War, often with a feeling of protest, whereas Surrealism was brought about by the fall of Dada, and was largely based on psychoanalysis. Tzara's *Manifeste Dada 1918* explicitly warned against psychoanalysis, though many of the Dadaists would join the Surrealists in their search for meaning. "He asserted the importance of chance and surprise; he warned against the danger of psychoanalysis which puts to sleep man's irrational fantasies" (Haslam 39). The death of Dada had left space for a new literary concept, and Surrealism filled that space. One of the distinguishing factors between dada and surrealism is the concept nihilism, a core tenet of the former. "Nihilism means to close the world around its own self-consuming impulse; negation is the act that would make it self-evident to everyone that the world is not as it seems … Negation is always political: it assumes the existence of other people, calls them into being" (Marcus 4).

The nihilistic nature of Dada allowed for space to explore gender and sexuality, with the belief that it would not matter. Such exploration was a playful way to explore different artistic modes. The social relationship of women to the First World War also invited investigation, as the role of women was studied through satire and performance. The Dada artists were also led by a spirit of girlhood, one that was taken from the American movies, called *La Jeune fille Americaine*, a girl filled with playful exploration, youth, and impulsivity.[5] The unconscious was

[5] "*La jeune fille americaine* had a particular presence among the Parisian avant-garde's earliest speculations about an alluring, exotic New World. Known through the vast network of transatlantic transport and communications that brought American images, inventions, marketing ideas, and personalities abroad, she personified a modern American spirit—widely admired but as yet not widely emulated. In her freedom from convention, in her caprices and her almost comic innocence, she differed from the typical male artist's muse or femme fatale" (Turner 5). *La jeune fille americaine* was eventually a male fantasy just like the violent fantasies of the Surrealists, an early manic pixie dream girl who was beautiful, perfect, but conditioned to be homosocial and sexually submissive.

not a dogmatic idea for Dada, but the concept of creation without meaning often allowed for unconscious meaning to be assigned by the viewer, and both artistic movements were freeing themselves from classical rules of art. “There could be nothing traditional, nothing measured about the dictation of the unconscious” (Haslam 51).

While Surrealism was initially purely literature, thanks to Breton, only later encompassing visual and performing arts, Dada started somewhat simultaneously as a literary and artistic movement. Dada also was less restrictively defined and had fewer rules outside of chaos, whereas Breton tried to strictly limit the surrealist inner circle. The Dadaists need not be separated by this, as the Dada manifesto by Tristan Tzara clearly states that, “I oblige no one to follow me and everybody practices his art in his own way...And so Dada was born of a need for independence, of a distrust toward unity. Those who are with us preserve their freedom. We recognize no theory. We have enough cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas” (Tzara 2). That being said, the idea of the outsider still permeated society at the time of Dada, so they would still have been societal outsiders. Dada did not have enough of a group to be outside of.

The Surrealist and Dadaist movements were already subcultural and not accepted by the mainstream society until after their disintegration, so the further lack of acceptability of the queer artists was even further from the mainstream/hegemonic/heteronormative culture:

> Subcultures are not ‘cultural’ in this sense, and the styles with which they are identified cannot be adequately or usefully described as ‘art of a high degree’. Rather they manifest culture in the broader sense, as systems of communication, forms of expression and representation. They conform to the structural anthropologists’ definition of culture as ‘coded exchanges of reciprocal messages’. In the same way, subcultural styles do indeed

> qualify as art but as art in (and out of) particular contexts; not as timeless objects, judged by the immutable criteria of traditional aesthetics, but as 'appropriations', 'thefts', subversive transformations, as movement. (Hebdige 129)

The works of the Surrealist and Dadaist subcultures were not high art in the neo-classical sense; rather they held up a distorted mirror to social taboos, and many were later deemed examples of 'degenerate art'.

The Surrealists were originally split into camps of two, one headed by Tristan Tzara, and the other by Breton himself. Tzara had previously been a Dadaist, and later moved to Surrealism. Famously, Breton and Tzara even came to physical blows at a performance of Tzara's play, during which Breton beat a main actor with his cane. Prior to this, during the Dada movement, Breton and Tzara were allies and even friends:

> One who had recently received a taste of this disregard was Breton's former comrade in Dada, Tristan Tzara…Breton dismissed the foreign-born poet as a "publicity mongering imposter… a person known as the promoter of a movement that comes from Zurich"--a hint of xenophobia that lost him credit with many of the cosmopolitan writers he sought to attract as allies. (Polizotti 17)

Coming from Dada's flamboyant nature and lack of rules, Surrealism, in both parties, was much more structured, already setting up a binary of two that there would inevitably be outsiders of.

André Breton and the mainstream group of literary Surrealists initially tried to define Surrealism and place it within a strict binary understanding of the artistic movement, opposite to their spiritual predecessor of Dada. The attempts at categorizing and limiting Surrealism proved to be a failure, as Surrealism grew far outside of the bounds of Breton's smothering reach, and he

was left scrambling to keep up with the power of the movement, accepting his own failure as a leader. The realities of Surrealism and Dada were innumerable, and there could not be a single binary or set of rules applied to all of them, which is reminiscent of many modern queer theorists' ideas of gender.

Queering Reality

The idea of a sought-after *queer utopia* constantly resonates within the creation of queer aliases and identities of the Surrealists and Dadaists. Muñoz uses this term to describe the potentiality of queerness:

> Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and quotidian contain a map of the utopia that is queerness. (*Cruising* 2)

The search for an unknown hope is similar to the struggles against fascism that the artists faced, in addition to their search for gender and sexual euphoria. "It is my belief that minoritarian subjects are cast as hopeless in a world without utopia" (*Cruising* 98). The creation of Surrealism and the end of Dada aligns with the period in between the two world wars, a period that was known for being hopeless, a second wave of *fin de siecle*.[6] This hopelessness could have been overpowering, were it not for this search for queer reality that Halberstam and Muñoz both allude to.

[6] The term *fin de siecle* refers to the end of the nineteenth century in European art. It meant a despair in art, a fashionable fear for the future.

Queer reality, one that does not procreate traditionally, and one that is a liminal space (not unlike the period between the wars), is reflected in the art of the Surrealists and Dadaists, though not always intentionally. Many of the works of art that are discussed here are performance art, or photographs of performances, which may be considered more ephemeral than procreation. The creation of different selves as aliases within queer Surreal and Dada art serves as a form of procreation, rebellion, exploration, and euphoria. Within the cult classic musical, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Hedwig sits with her lover and tells him that love is a form of creation that can exist without procreation, sharing her vision of a queer reality:

> HEDWIG: Seriously, Tommy, yes. I believe love is immortal.
>
> TOMMY: How is it immortal?
>
> HEDWIG: Maybe because love creates something that was not there before.
>
> TOMMY: What, like procreation?
>
> HEDWIG: Well, yeah, but not only.
>
> TOMMY: Recreation?
>
> HEDWIG: Sometimes just creation.

This excerpt demonstrates a principle that Muñoz discusses, the idea that queer utopia (referred to as love in this case), creates something lasting, it has waves of impact that reverbrate long after the act itself. In the context of Utopian futurity, performance has a different meaning. "Performance, seen as utopian performativity, is imbued with a sense of potentiality" (*Cruising* 99).

The signifier of the shaved head mentioned earlier and the androgynous aliases within the works of Cahun and their partner Marcel Moore have remained relevant, full of queer potential and desire for queer utopia. Figure 1 shows Cahun with their bald head and duplicate image of

themself, creating a new form of queer reality in which this may be considered the ‘norm’. This reality, available only through Marcel Moore and Cahun’s vision, is desirable to them because of the lack of gender and freedom that it implies. Again, it is a reality to be accessed by hope and failure, according to Halberstam and Muñoz.

The lack of structure of the Dadaists, and the less rigid nature of their work allowed for the idea of failure, more specifically queer failure. Though the Surrealists were also rigid, their ideas were revolutionary, and the outsider groups of the Surrealists became more rebellious than the mainstream, also creating a space for queer failure. Queer failure is about alternatives to the mainstream heterosexual cisgender culture, and how queerness can thrive outside of these boundaries. In different ways, both Dada and Surrealism created many queer artistic failures that stand out from conventional successes of even their own movements.

Fig. 2: Méret Oppenheim, *Object*, Paris, 1936, MoMA, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80997

For example, while Méret Oppenheim’s “Object,” the piece she is most known for today, has been reduced in popular opinion to `just’ a Freudian metaphor of vaginal imagery, in the lens of queer failure it transcends those boundaries. This fur-lined teacup serves as an object that

implies sexuality, and exists as something that was frequently gendered, as it is a container for water, which is related to the idea of the womb. At the same time, the actual purpose of this cup is now ruined, and it fails at being the object it was designed to be, while being celebrated for its merit as an artistic object.

The idea of embracing failure, as put forth by Halberstam, liberates one from living up to the standard ideas of success. This creates a distinctly strange reality (similar to the realities of Dada and Surrealism) that is illogical and not 'proper, also similar to the queer realities described by Muñoz in "Cruising Utopia", in which activists are asking for a new reality based on a new society: "Yet I contend that there is a great value in pulling these words from a no-longer-conscious to arm a critique of the present…The 'we' speaks to a 'we' that is not yet conscious, the future society that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment" (20). Muñoz admits that this might seem naive, but the same impulse is present in the surrealist and dadaist works, both mainstream and outsider.

Dada and Duchamp are often credited with some of the first pieces of conceptual art, defined loosely as art made for the mind, not the eye. Duchamp is quoted as saying "I am interested in ideas, not merely visual products". This is antithetical to many of the Neoclassical beliefs of art and its purpose, and allows for freedom of the artist, making the definition of art, already difficult to capture, even broader. The boundaries between art and life, as well as performance and reality rapidly begin to dissolve under Dada, and is further continued in Surrealism, as the border between taboo and acceptable, wakefulness and sleep are also blurred. Haslam (41) argues that Dada itself is "anti-art and self-mocking", which parallels the modern ideas of gender in queer spaces. This anarchic expression of identity that seemingly places itself in power and denies its own importance is similar to queer theorists' interpretations of society

and gender now, namely that gender is a social construct, and that our expression of it is important because of our own interpretation of it rather than its inherent value.

Dada's constant reinvention and, some may argue, destruction of the concept of art is similar to the movement of Sexual Anarchists that took place from 1850 to 1930: "During this first wave of sexual liberation many of these radical intellectuals shaped new understandings and forms of same-sex political and social consciousness that had immediate and long-term impacts on the lives of European people. Within the United States, unlike Europe, the politics of sex radicals did not arise from a blossoming homosexual rights movement. Instead, it arose from the anarchist movement of the time" (*Queering* 3). Both Dada and sexual anarchism arose at similar times between the world wars and had a shared interest in deconstructing the previous status quo, whether that be the assumptions of sexuality and gender in relation to ethics, or the way that art impacts a society. Both were considered to be groups of outsiders and radicals as well. However, the crackdown of the Nazis in the late 1930s forced most of the sexual and queer anarchists back into hiding:

> By the late 1930s the anarchist movement and sex radicals were a shell of their original heyday of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Coincidental with this decline in the anarchist movement we saw the rise of the Communist Party (CP) as the primary vehicle of the left. Sex radicals of this period began to work under a left that was dominated by the CP, which marginalized the ideas and ideologies of their anarchist predecessors. The CP was an organization that, contrary to the anarchists, enforced uniformity of belief and action. And in regards to homosexuality, the CP had a policy of discouraging membership of gays and lesbians who refused to be silent about their private lives. (*Queering* 3)

What Dada and the Sexual/Queer Anarchists both sought to do was to challenge previous societal groupings, including labels and assumptions of the binary. I argue that Dada and the Sexual/Queer Anarchists are similar in that they are both considered ‘failures’, to either the classical world of art, or the societal ideas of what identity and relationships look like.

Similar to Dada, Surrealism of the time also escapes the boundaries of what was socially acceptable in the art world. To this, Halberstam brings up the concept of ‘darkness’, and how this relates to queerness and art. “Following Brooks’s aesthetics and Crisp’s advice to adjust to less light rather than seek out more, I propose that one form of queer art has made failure its centerpiece and has cast queerness as the dark landscape of confusion, loneliness, alienation, impossibility, and awkwardness … The idea of a queer darkness, a strategy of reading as well as a way of being in the world, explains a series of depictions of queer life in photography from the early and mid- twentieth century” (Halberstam 98).

Queer art/culture, Dada, and Surrealism all fall into the same space of existence, in which darkness, such as the subconscious and our desires, are explored. This concept of darkness being a different reality and space in which queer people live, parallels the worlds created by the Surrealists, both those grounded in realism and those in abstraction.

One important example of this is Marianne Breslauer, a student of Man Ray. Breslauer was a queer, Jewish woman and photographer in Germany during the Weimar Republic. Some of her most frequent subjects were homeless people and the queer community of Germany.

Fig. 3: Breslauer, Marianne. *Self-Portrait*. Berlin, 1933.
https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/artists/24376.html

In her photography, it is easy to see another reality from that of mainstream Germany. Though she was not officially a part of Dada or Surrealism, she was intertwined with the groups, and was similarly a part of the queer darkness/alternative reality that was integral to those groups and artists. Breslauer acted as her own model in this photo, capturing herself as part of the queer

subculture that was not present in media otherwise. Her version of this was directed by her own hand, and she is exposing herself as a queer women, without use of an alias in this case.

Taboo Sexuality

Although the Surrealists were revolting against the constraints of a puritanical society, in following Freud, they fell prey to his misogyny, exploring sexuality primarily through the lens of cisgender and heterosexual men, looking into their subconscious desires. While this has its merits within art, it often also led to art that was exploitative and violent against women. This mainstream theme of Surrealism allowed for different interpretations by queer people and women, such as rebelling against the violence that was aimed at them. Within Freud's ideas, there was a deep fear that women would overthrow and become men, and this ties into the fear of transgender people, queerness, and women that was pervasive in the group of Surrealists (Gay). This panic about whether women would become the 'dominant sex' was a common misogynistic trope, and one that was rooted in transphobia as well.

Sexuality and other 'taboo' subjects were at the forefront of Surrealism, thanks to the Freudian concepts of repression and sex. Cisgender and heterosexual white men were primarily the people in Surrealism that were exploring their taboos, focused mainly on violence towards women and dehumanizing female figures. There is a significant difference between the predatory gaze of the majority, made up mainly of the officially recognized Surrealists, and the introspective gaze of the queer minority, which included voyeurism of the self. Blessing accurately addresses the photographic gaze and intent of the subject and photographer when speaking of queer surrealists. "This is not a subject 'captured' on film, this is a subject who is capturing you: you are its other, through which it defines itself with a vengeance" (Blessing 15).

Fig. 4: René Magritte, *The Menaced Assassin*, Brussels 1927, MoMA, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79267

The power dynamic was vastly different in these two groups, and the exploitation of women was much more present in the former. Many works by Magritte, hailed as one of the most prominent official Surrealists, contain images of women being oppressed, a theme which ties into the oppression of the other artists and groups of people that Breton would not recognize. When looking at Magritte's 'The Menaced Assassin', the power imbalance is immediately apparent: The surreal landscape depicts one woman and six men, the woman is the only one who is unclothed, and the men are all standing while she is unconscious. One of the men holds a net, presumably what he used to capture her.

This is a more typical representation of the official Surrealists artwork, one that can be analyzed through a Freudian lens and is based on sexuality and aggression. This is the artwork of the oppressor, not the oppressed. The oppressor uses sexual domination to explore the unconscious, whereas the oppressed use the unconscious by exploring the ineffective and unfair nature of society in class, gender, and sexuality.

Modes of Expression in Surrealism and Dada

Though Breton prized literature in surrealism above all, he also accepted photography when Man Ray entered the formal Surrealists, bringing visual art to the forefront of the movement, as well as implicitly recognizing the Dadaists within Surrealism. This may have been because photography had a similar immediacy to the automatism of writing that Surrealists used in their works (Krauss 15–16). Surrealist use of photography as a primary method of recording imagery and sharing ideas, illustrating surrealist writing in publications such as *La Révolution Surréaliste*, had as a valuable by-product of allowing historians to analyze the artists in the photographs, including what they were interested in and their presentation of themselves in self-portraits. Blessing writes:

> The medium of photography yields the perfect arena for the play of gender and sexuality…The rise of mythologies of the self such as psychoanalysis and capitalism coincide with the technological means to reflect each being unto itself, as well as to promote it in the world without. Representing the physicality of the body in contemporary art, photography and other reproductive mediums such as film and video share with sculpture and performance a special relationship with notions of the Real. This exhibition examines the manner in which photography's strong aura of realism and

> objectivity promotes a fantasy of total gender transformation, or, conversely, allows the articulation of incongruity between the posing body and its assumed costume. (Blessing 3)

In Dada the photomontage, a method of political critique and historical documentation, reigned supreme as a way to visualize chaos. The photomontage was another understanding of reality, with its combination of pictures, words, and scenes that could not exist in real life. Though not as popular with the surrealists, it falls into a form of early Paradoxical Surrealism, as described by Morris. Hannah Höch, a German Dada artist, was known for her photomontages, and the dizzying, often socially charged effect they achieved. “Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany” is one of her most famous works, and it also serves as a queer piece of art of the time. The combination of male and female figures, as well as charged images of war and women’s protests, creates a queer narrative, though perhaps unintentionally. The image, a photomontage of men and women from various newspapers and magazines, combines to form a view of the time in history. The use of so many bodies combined in one image without a singular focus created a many-gendered hydra of a collage. Höch often attaches apparently female bodies to male heads, and vice versa, and women in her works are often portrayed as doing ‘masculine’ things.

Fig. 5: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919–1920, (Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin), https://bit.ly/hannah-hoch-kitchen-knife-dada

Her imagery was also politically charged, and took a strong stance against fascism and colonialism, both issues that the outsider Surrealists and Dadaists often critiqued in their work. "While an implicit critique of the 'normative' rigidity of advertisements seems apparent in this

work, there is also an undeniable playfulness and humor" (Blessing 23). Höch's rebellion against the normative in her work was an expression of a queer reality.

Breton loathed the inclusion of painting in Surrealism at first, even as he accepted the photographers and their quick photos that captured impulse and the unconscious.[7] "Painting could only relate to Surrealism so long as it disorientated the observer, so long as it provoked a response from the eye of the unconscious rather than the eye of the intelligence" (Haslam 164). This relates to the Dada movement as well, as it, too, was attempting to provoke the viewer, most famously in Duchamp's 'Fountain' of 1917, which was one of his more goading ready-made works, in which he painted meaningless words on a factory-made object, in this case a urinal.

Fig. 6: Marcel Duchamp. *Fountain*. 1917.
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573

The idea of the alias appears with the signature on the urinal, the hypothetical R. Mutt that Duchamp impersonates. The urinal itself can be construed as a coded reference to the

[7] Another creation of the Surrealists was the 'fetish', a strange object remembered when waking from dreams, leaving the dreamer questioning the object and its relation to the material world.

bathroom trysts that were some of the only ways gay men engaged in sexual relations, and was a symbol for public sex. By using the alias, Duchamp brings in an anonymous person with this urinal, and the idea of the public and the private merge with an alias.

Fig. 7: *Cadavre Exquis with Yves Tanguy, Joan Miro, Max Morise, Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky),* 1926–27, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/35701

The creation of different entities and selves in art relate to the alias and alter-ego, as both are works of performance. Surrealism and Dada are more interactive than other works of art due

to the more open nature of their interpretation, and that is important in the works of outsider subcultures. There is a playfulness apparent in these groups, even though they tackle serious issues. Literary and artistic games emerged from the gatherings of artists, such as the popularization of Blackout poetry and creation of 'Exquisite Corpse', a drawing game in which one draws a third of a body, before passing it to the next person, who will draw another section of the body without seeing what the previous artist made, eventually creating a surreal creation that may be humanoid.

These games were attempts to "...closely approximate[s] the automatism—the direct expression of the unconscious and, in particular, of unconscious desire–that Surrealism at least practiced, if not preached…" (Powers 228). These creations continue to allow freedom from the conscious nature of thought, allowing the subconscious ideas and desires to come to the surface with less judgment. They may have helped create an artistic environment that allowed for experimentation.

Fashion and art go hand in hand. The Dadaists referred to fashion as 'moving sculpture', and in general the modernists had a major impact on fashion. Likewise, changes in fashion had cultural repercussions, particularly in music, art, and performance.

The flappers of the 1920s invited androgyny into mainstream fashion and were inspired by artistic forms of the late 19th and early 20th century. Cubism and German Expressionism contributed design elements like harsher angles: "The flapper silhouette was distinctive…angular (basically rectangular), androgynous, slender and straight. It was influenced by Braque, Picasso, Léger and other artists whose work had hard, geometric forms and visible lines" (Spivack). The androgynous and waif-like look of the flappers in the Twenties took place during the end of the Dada movement and before the Surrealists, well before the Second World

War. At this time Berlin was a hub of queer culture, and Magnus Hirschfeld was able to perform his most radical work with transgender clients.

This was a time that queerness and genderfluidity were pervasive around the globe, and the fashion industry reflected that. Instead of the figure that corsets emphasized on women, the flapper look, possibly inspired by the playfulness of *La jeune fille americaine* and the Dada movement, used a prototype of a binder, the Symington Side Lacer.[8] Hairstyles were shorter than before, making the bob and the square silhouette the look of the 20s. These fashions allowed women much more freedom than restrictive corsets and long, heavy hair, and gender fluidity flew to the forefront of the era in these styles. These fashions were all very much related to the sale of fabrics and celebration of the end of the First World War. The beginning of the Second World War would change these styles yet again in both Europe and America. "By the end of the decade, Europe had entered into the Second World War and the US still had not yet left the Great Depression behind. As the thirties closed, the popular style of broad, padded shoulders, nipped in waists and shorter A-line skirts that would dominate the early 1940s had already emerged" (Spivack). This transformation is again reflective of the stricter gender roles and normative ideas that were put in place in the 40s, especially under the Nazi regime that affected Europe.

Gender Performance

In the Surrealist and Dadaist movements, as well as throughout modern and contemporary art, there are uses of gender as a political and social investigation, as self-expression, or even as a punch-line. The question arises: Is it possible to distinguish the

[8] The point of this was to minimize the chest, creating a flat and boxy shape to go underneath the shift that was so popular at the time. This fashion movement has been questioned extensively by historians, as it can be argued that the look achieved was not only an androgynous one, but similar to that of a prepubescent boy, putting the lustful gaze on a vulnerable population and asking women for yet another unattainable standard.

artist's intent in creating this subversion of the binary? In this sense, we are thinking about the alias as a broader construct, as a performative piece of art as well as a queer construction. It is difficult to distinguish between performance art, the alias, trans identity, and fashion, as there are major overlaps in all of these categories, especially when viewing artwork at a historical distance.

The gender performance that artists often partake in is an expression of art, often political or social, to convey an idea of oppression or break a social taboo. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is not also inclusive of transgender ideas. The modern ideas of gender identity and gender roles only emerged in the 1950s, however, so the historical categorization of queer people appears different from the current LGBTQ+ understanding. In the modern sphere of drag, many transgender performers consider drag to be an art form that is separate from their gender, using it as a method of performance and exaggeration of stereotypically gendered features. Miss Peppermint, one of the first transgender drag queens on RuPaul's Drag Race, talks about the drag creation as a separate entity, similar to the art form of gender performance used by artists. "I love hearing from drag entertainers who sort of refer to their drag persona as a creation that's separate from them" (Grande). The distinction between gender performance and gender fluidity/identity is not so easily delineated, however. Surrealist and dadaist artists may have been expressing their own nuanced gender identity through performance, using these different forms of gender presentation in lieu of more modern transgender vocabulary. Although Dora Richter and Lili Elbe had early versions of gender confirmation surgery in 1930 and 1931, queer and trans people were rejected strongly by society, especially with the rise of the Nazi regime. The work of Magnus Hirschfeld, the doctor to Richter and Elbe, had his work destroyed by Nazis in 1933, stopping the progress of a form of the trans rights movement in its tracks.

The concept of gender performativity is an intrinsic part of the queer Surrealists, and often applicable in the mainstream Surrealists as well, explained in a controversial description by Judith Butler as “the acts constituting the identity” (Gender Trouble). Salih deconstructs Butler’s theory further, arguing that “all bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means there is no ‘natural body’ that pre-exists its cultural inscription” (Salih 55). Though the idea of the ‘natural body’ is being used to describe a Platonic idea, one where atoms are arranged but not yet objects, the natural body can also be used in the context of Surrealism and Dada. The complete lack of context for Dada allows the natural body to begin to exist in the Platonic way, and begins to destroy the notion of gender with this nihilistic arrangement of atoms.

Queer Works

The examination of this subsection of the surrealists/dadaists is using a historical lens, retroactively assigning them to these movements, based on past evidence and similarities in art and themes that may have occurred at the same moment in time (Morris). For example, though Frida Kahlo is famous for her surreal art style, she is not considered an official member of the Surrealist movement. She created works of art that had thematically similar elements to many of the official Surrealist artworks, but was not accepted due to her gender, heritage, and political leanings.

Such categorization is reductive, however, and fails to recognize the time period in which the other artists may not have been receptive to their art. The work of this marginalized artists differs from that of the mainstream surrealist/dadaist artists, at least partially because of the misogynistic depictions of bodies, and the objectification of women and queer bodies that was

prominent in surrealist works, particularly in Ernst and Magritte's works, which maintain a high level of realism, making the viewer aware of their intent and the discomfort that this brings to the subjugated people.

Fig. 8: Max Ernst, *Attirement of the Bride (La Toilette de la mariée) (L'habillement de l'épousée (de la mariée)),* 1940, https://guggenheim.org/artwork/1186

In Ernst's *Attirement of the Bride,* multiple women without heads are decked in lavish costumes, with their bodies fully displayed, and a seemingly pregnant, four-breasted creature sits on the floor next to them. A more androgynous figure holds a spear to the women, threatening their bodies without giving the audience a clue of her identity beyond her body. The dream-like

anthropomorphic figures tie into Freud's ideas of the subconscious, and the hidden violence towards women that was often tackled in subconscious painting.

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore are two names that are synonymous with queer French surrealism. Cahun lived from 1894 to 1954, Moore from 1892 to 1972, both in France. They were lovers for a significant period of both of their lives, from their youth until Cahun's early death. However, they met under different names: Cahun was named Lucy Schwob, and Moore was named Suzanne Malherbe. Together they changed their names to create artistic identities, or aliases. Claude Cahun named themself after two of their uncles, as well as calling it a tribute to their Jewish heritage. They are quoted as writing "Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me" (Cahun).

Cahun is often considered non-binary because of the way they described themself as an 'androgyne', and they/them/theirs pronouns are used out of respect and our modern understanding of them, so I use those pronouns here. However, Cahun's writings refer to themself and their partner Marcel Moore with feminine pronouns in their original French works, so it is called into question whether the way we view them based on their art is more important than their self-descriptions in literature. French is a language with no neutral or un-gendered words, and can effectively act as an oppressive force.

Cahun and Moore were partners in art and activism, as they were both imprisoned on Jersey by the Nazis during the Second World War. Cahun successfully hid their Jewish background and both of them hid their queerness in order to survive the situation. They were politically prolific during the war, creating pamphlets and flyers to sow distrust and anger amongst German soldiers (Cahun). In order to pretend that the German soldiers were the ones

with the problems of the regime, Moore and Cahun came up with another pseudonym, called ‘Der Soldat Ohne Namen’, or ‘The Soldier With No Name’, creating a fictional angry German that dared to rebel through their flyers.

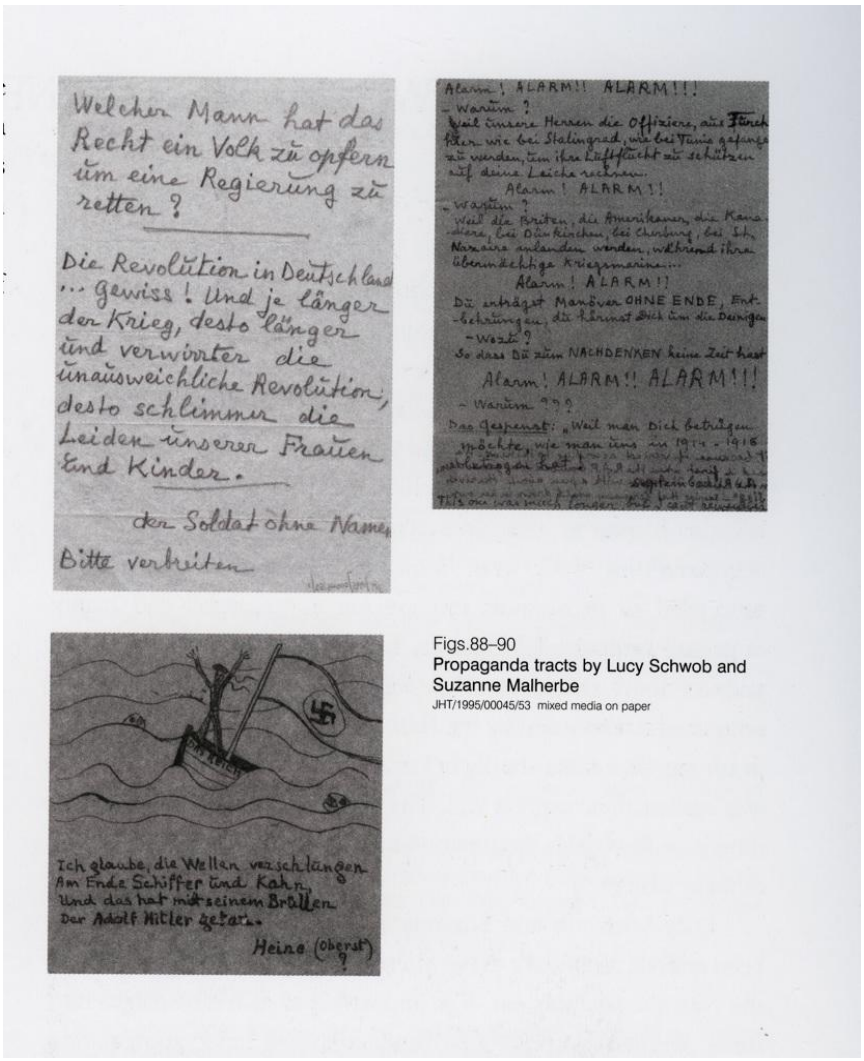

Fig. 9: Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, Propaganda from Der Soldat Ohne Namen, 1940–1944, *Don’t Kiss Me, The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*

At this point in time, both Cahun and Moore were living with two ‘aliases’ and hiding their respective identities during wartime. This venture was extremely dangerous, and they both would actively risk their safety in order to sow discontent with the soldiers. Their use of an alias in this

case changed the dynamics of power in their favor, allowing them to assume the status of a German man, giving them a voice, though without a physical presence outside of the paper trail.

A third series of aliases arises in Cahun's work in the 1920s when they were in Paris and about to enter the more mainstream Surrealist circle of artists. During this time they wrote 'Heroines', a series of monologues from famous women, including the biblical Eve, Cinderella, Delilah, Judith, Salome, Sappho, and Salmacis. In addition to these pre-existing characters, they wrote of two archetypes, the wife and the androgyne:

> These heroines "perform roles … that reinforce traditional cultural narratives." However, Cahun subverts these roles by allowing [their] protagonists to acquire a degree of self-consciousness, even though their dawning understanding is not at all what our dominant cultural narratives would have led us to assume. (Antle and Conley 25)

These historical and fictional women, all set in Cahun's twentieth century, are more relatable characters who begin to form alter-egos of Cahun, performing their indiscretions and desires freely. The work is also a fervent exploration of the stereotypes and truths of being female, which Cahun seems to connect to in much the way that they connect to their masculinity through their portrait series.

Claude and Marcel worked together in photography and illustration. It is thought that Moore was the photographer of Cahun's most famous photographs, including the surreal and queer works of gender fluidity and genderfuck. Arguably most famous was Cahun's "I'm in Training, Don't Kiss Me," in which Cahun portrays an androgynous, cherubic figure, confusing the viewer with their delicate stature in contrast to the large barbells that they hold. They sit in a clearly staged room, very delicately made up with hearts on their cheeks and perfectly coiffed hair, the antithesis of what one might assume a heavy-weight lifter might look like. Their posture

and positioning is more traditionally feminine, and they look at the viewer knowingly, as their image contradicts itself. It subverts expectations of what womanhood 'should' be, and how masculinity can be performed.

Fig. 10: Claude Cahun, *I am in training, don't kiss me,* 1927, https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/claude-cahun/i-am-in-training-dont-kiss-me/

This 'gender confusion' is a common theme in Cahun and Moore's works, such as in Cahun's numerous Self-Portraits, in which they challenge the viewer to decide between masculinity and femininity. In addition, the creation of the androgynous figure that we as viewers

are challenged to be attracted to, creates a queerness within the gaze of the viewer. The combination of the flat, 'masculine' nipples, and the stylized feminine makeup of the time creates a new queer sexual icon.

Marcel Duchamp / Rrose Sélavy

Duchamp was first and foremost known as an artist of the Dada movement, creating the category of 'ready-made art', and rejecting retinal art to begin making pieces to challenge the mind. His alter-ego of Rrose Sélavy was one of his conceptual pieces. Rrose Sélavy was a pseudonym that he signed on Francis Picabia's painting, sounding like the French saying "*Eros c'est la vie*" ("(Sensual) love, such is life") when read aloud. Duchamp used this identity in puns and other word-play to challenge the idea of the artistic identity. Many of Duchamp's ready-made sculptures are credited to Rrose Sélavy, some referencing femininity. Most well-known are the photos of Rrose Sélavy taken by Man Ray and directed by Duchamp. None of these photos are mocking, and nothing suggests that Duchamp was making a joke out of womanhood, rather that he was exploring identity.

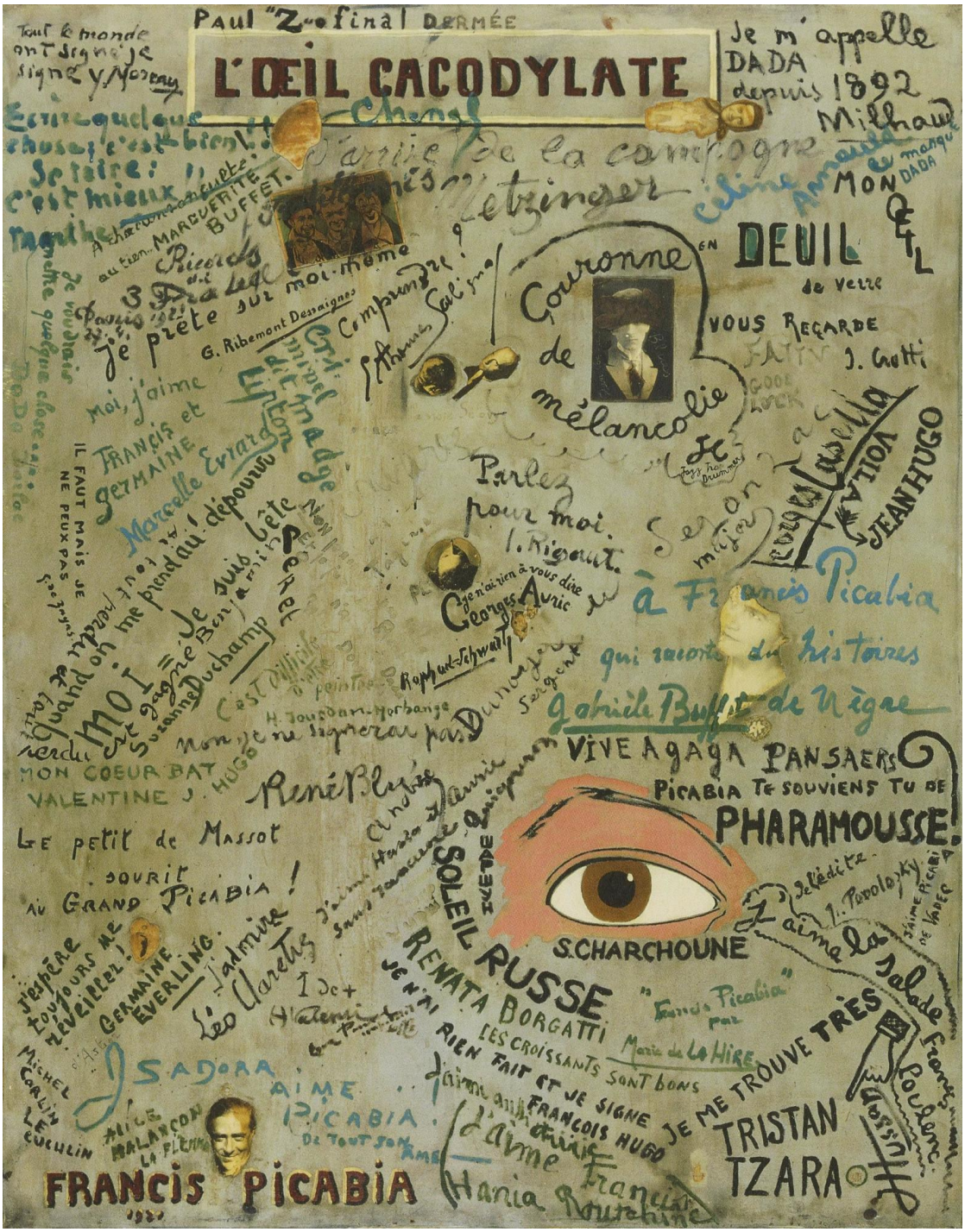

Fig. 11: Francis Picabia, *L'Oeil Cacodylate,* 1921, https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/37/597

The painting itself consists almost entirely of signatures of Picabia's friends and fellow artists, creating a new form of portraiture made by a group of artists out of words. It changed the

idea of what a painting could consist of. Duchamp created his alter-ego as a joke within this group effort, a joke which grew over time into an alias spanning multiple works of art. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp said:

> I wanted to change my identity and had the idea of taking a Hebrew name. I was a Catholic, and this new religion already meant a change. But I did not find any Hebrew name that I liked, or that struck my imagination, and I suddenly had an idea: why not change sex? That is how the name Rrose Sélavy came about. It sounds quite good today, because names too change through time, but in 1920 it was a silly name. The double 'R' is linked to the Picabia's painting *Oeil Cacodylate* [Fig. 11], exhibited at the 'Le Boeuf sur le Toit' cabaret—I don't know if it was sold—and Picabia asked all friends to sign the painting. I don't remember what I wrote, but the painting was photographed and, therefore, someone must know. I think I wrote 'Pi Qu'habilla Rrose Sélavy'. (Duchamp 118)

Fig. 12: Man Ray, *Rrose Sélavy (Marcel Duchamp),* 1923, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/104AMQ

The phrase Duchamp wrote on Picabia's painting sounds phonetically like "Picabia l'arrose c'est la vie", which changes the meaning from "Eros c'est la vie" to the phrase "Arroser la vie", that is "have a drink over it, make a toast to life." In that same interview, Duchamp said, "My intention was always to get away from myself, though I knew perfectly well that I was using myself. Call it a little game between 'I' and 'me'." With the phrase 'using myself' Duchamp expresses his

awareness of the delicate social line that he crossed. This phrase is an acknowledgement of the use of femininity and a queer persona as escapism, a form of performance art that juxtaposes Self and Other while acknowledging the Self **in** the Other. Part of the Surrealist impact of Rrose Sélavy was that she was not considered a youthful beauty of the time, but that she was an impersonator of the beautiful women who would be muses to photographers such as Man Ray. Duchamp even went so far as to use the hands and hat of Germaine Everling, girlfriend of Francis Picabia, in some of the photos of Rrose, to fool the audience into believing the illusion (National Portrait Gallery).

Fig. 13: Florine Stettheimer. *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp 1923.* New York City.

Duchamp and Sélavy were immortalized together by Florine Stettheimer in a surrealist painting that portrays both his alias and himself in a rare moment of the Self and the Other

coexisting. Their gender confusion is depicted as otherworldly, with a Surreal space and exaggerated bodies. Stettheimer uses the idea of Duchamp's ready-made sculptures, having him lift up Rrose with a parody of one of his objects in a playful acknowledgement of his own art. The sinuous curves of both their bodies serve to convey a less-defined idea of gender, neither the masculine nor feminine figure displaying a strong sexual characteristic. Both figures have Duchamp's everyday hairstyle, with Stettheimer choosing not to put any wig or hat on Rrose to convey traditional femininity, implying that though one is a character, these are simply different facets of the same person. The frame, with its Dada-like repetition of the letters "MD", was a later addition to the work.

Fig. 14: Duchamp. *L.H.O.O.Q. or La Joconde.* 1919. Norton Simon Museum. https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/P.1969.094

Along with the creation of Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp was well known for his depictions of female anatomy and sexual puns, such as *L.H.O.O.Q. or La Jaconde*, often considered to be a juvenile prank, translating loosely to “She is hot in the ass”, or “she has a hot ass.” While it is true that this is a ready-made object that frankly jokes about sexuality, it is also a subversion of gender that refers to the rumor of DaVinci’s homosexuality, again bringing queerness to the forefront of Duchamp’s work. This little joking disguise of a mustache added to one of the most

well-known works of art queers the idea of the artwork, with Duchamp claiming it is entirely different based on facial hair and a new name. This freedom in Dada to discuss the sexually explicit, and to depict genitalia, is indicative of the direction that Surrealism will take in its more frank analysis of sexuality and gender.

Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo is already considered a queer historical icon due to her numerous affairs with women, including Paulette Goddard and Josephine Baker. Interestingly, many of the women she had an affair with had previously slept with her husband, Diego Rivera, forming a convoluted love triangle. Kahlo can be called an Independent Surrealist (by Morris' definition), because she discovered Surrealism for herself, being aware of the group's existence, but not taking active part in it. Later, she would be claimed by historians as a Surrealist, though she was far away from the main group, and focused on her own understanding of herself. Kahlo used herself as an alias in many ways, exploring her body and the injuries she suffered,[9] and viewing her identity through a cold and analytical lens. She separated herself from the versions of her that existed in paintings. For example, in her work 'Self Portrait with Cropped Hair', she expresses a version of herself that is influenced by Diego Rivera, wearing his suit and cropping her hair, creating an alter-ego that has the power of her husband, but is still distinctly her. "Frida Kahlo, who felt she was loved, as in the song, only for her female attributes, decided to put these aside and renounce the feminine image demanded of her. She cut off her hair, symbol of womanly beauty and sensuality … She also gave up the Tehuana costumes so liked by her husband and wore instead a man's suit, its cut so broad that it might well have stemmed from Rivera's own wardrobe" (Kettenmann

[9] Kahlo was seriously injured in a bus-tram collision in 1925 when a rail punctured her abdomen and uterus in addition to breaking her pelvic bone and spine (Kettenmann 17).

57). Hair repeatedly emerges as a symbol and signifier of gender, and both Kahlo and Cahun's removal of longer hair indicates a subversion of gender and gender roles of the times.

Fig. 15: Frida Kahlo. *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair.* 1940.
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78333

When asked why Kahlo painted herself so often, she said "Because I am often alone, and I am the subject I know best." Though she says this, most of her paintings use her own image as

a starting point and change her into someone or something barely recognizable, a Kahlo from another dimension. In this way she makes herself into men, women, non-gendered figures, animals, and bodies, a form of mimesis. As with Cahun, these self-portraits exist as both expressions of the inner self and creations of the alias. The use of gender fluidity and genderfuck in these self portraits changes the tone and meaning, separating it from the artist while also making it more personal.

The image of 'Self Portrait with Cropped Hair' is a transformative moment, as the viewer is witnessing the change take over Kahlo, the moment after she has chopped off her hair, and the taunts that Rivera sings floating above her. But despite this, she is changed, she is someone new, more powerful than the locks of hair that follow her.

Fig. 16: Frida Kahlo. *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree)*. 1936. https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78784

In Kahlo's painting, 'My Grandparents, My Parents, and Me', we see the evolution of Kahlo's family, and we view the male and female pieces that make her up, becoming different

aspects of her identity. The family tree and Kahlo's childhood androgyny all create an image of her exploring both the masculine and the feminine.

It is her heritage that has been denied, as a woman of color, and the importance of her racial identity as well as her political affiliations. Her paintings are often said to be showcasing her version of reality, and creating aliases through her own body, as there was a cognitive dissonance between herself, her history, and the body she was in, as well as its different abilities.

Other Surrealist artists experimented with the idea of the alias and changes in identity, and this often produced a queer effect. For example, Remedios Varos would create humanoid figures, costumed or changed partially into an animal, to stand in for himself and others. While this is not a direct link to the queer surrealist and dada artists' intentions, it did change the idea of the self, making the figures into something outside the norm. By comparison, the men in Magritte's "The Menaced Assassin" were not outside the norm, they were examples of 'average' men fulfilling their desires. Varos queered his reality, similar to Man Ray and Claude Cahun.

Influence on Later Fashion and Culture

The Cockettes, a psychedelic Sixties drag ensemble, are a famous example of later twentieth century artists influenced by Surrealism. They were a "multiracial drag ensemble composed of members of various and fluid genders and sexual orientations. Their first impromptu performance gave way to campy, drug-fueled midnight musicals typified by outrageous costumes and sexual anarchy… Today, they are credited with influencing the glitter rock era and raising the profile of drag performance outside the gay community" (Harvard Library).

David Bowie, Annie Lennox, and Grace Jones, outsiders themselves, were also inspired by the outsider surrealists and dadaists in their own styles of fashion and performance. Bowie, in particular, was inspired by his dream state and directly influenced by Surrealists ("David Bowie"). His alter-egos, which include Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, and Thin White Duke, epitomized the modern incarnation of surrealist and dadaist aliases. These performers' genderfluid and genderfuck creations helped to popularize glam rock and glitter rock, like the Cockettes before them, making queerness slightly more mainstream than before, and increasing exposure for outsider voices. Performers like this helped to change the music scene irrevocably, allowing more freedom of expression.

Surrealist and Dadaist artworks and ideals paved the way for modern drag artists, specifically drag kings, quings, and things.[10] Performance art, now more easily captured by cell phone and camera, has taken elements from Surrealism and Dada, and is part of the mainstream more than ever. Even though the subcultural has become mainstream in some ways, the queer use of alias is still present: in drag, in performance arts, and in online spaces. The presence of drag in the mainstream means that more of the queer ephemeral performance is captured on film, becoming part of the culture, rather than the subculture. Mainstream cultures have become more aware of non-binary and trans identities in many places.

The use of the alias and alter-ego by the Surrealists and Dada artists has inspired generations of future artists, particularly those interested in exploring identity and queerness. The history of Surrealism is one that was not inclusive of those outside of the cisgender, heterosexual male influence. This is reflective of the time period and values that were exhibited by the

[10] 'Drag quings' and 'drag things' are terms used to de-gender drag culture, allowing for non-binary drag participants.

incoming Nazi regime and rise of fascism. These artistic acts of rebellion that made up the alias were continued in punk, drag, performance art, and other pieces of modern culture.

Through the exploration of outsider artists in surrealism and dada, we see the alias portraying hopes of queer utopia, and creating queer spaces, as well as failing at the mainstream. These two movements are intertwined with queerness by nature of the artists, and the binary that Surrealism imposed, as well as the lack of structure of Dada.

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