UPPING THE ANTI
IN CLAUDE CAHUN AND MARCEL MOORE'S
COLLABORATIVE "SELF-PORTRAITS"

by

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*****Where I have included Marcel Moore as either artist or collaborator, it does not necessarily indicate a consensus on the authorship, but rather that the image has been referenced as such by at least one other author. I understand Moore as having had some role in the production of most, if not all, of the images of Claude Cahun. In addition, the titles that I employ here are also open to question. It was very rare for Cahun and Moore to title their images, but they have been widely reproduced as *Self-Portraits*, so here I refer to them as essentially untitled images, but in parenthesis indicate the title by which they are usually identified.

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the themes of identity, gender and self-representation through an examination of the large body of so-called self-portraits created by Claude Cahun (1894-1954) and Marcel Moore (1892-1972). Following the recent shift in scholarship on Cahun—who has typically been understood as a singular artist—I refer to Cahun and Moore as partners and collaborators whose work can no longer be addressed individually. In exploration of an alternative approach to understanding these images as other than self-portraits, I investigate both artists' numerous creative activities that coincided with the creation of these images, including artistic, literary, and theatrical work, as well as their engagement with Surrealism and political activism. The self-portrait images are often discussed in isolation from these other highly relevant undertakings. My argument is structured around an understanding of Cahun and Moore's photographs not as a portrayal of the self, but rather, as a practice of *anti* self-portraiture.

INTRODUCTION:

CONTEXTUALIZING CLAUDE CAHUN AND MARCEL MOORE

Like so many women artists who have come before and after her, Claude Cahun's entire existence was virtually erased from the art historical record, as was her all but forgotten partnership with Marcel Moore. Even before Cahun's death in 1954, the two had already begun to fade into invisibility. As early as World War II (1939-1945), Cahun and Moore's work began its fall into obscurity, no doubt due in part to the couple's move from the artistic center of Paris to the Channel Island of Jersey in 1937. The work would not be rediscovered until the late 1980s.[1] Although it has steadily received more attention throughout the last two decades, there is much left unexamined in both the life and work of Cahun. Consequently, there is an air of mystery that still surrounds her today despite or, perhaps in some ways, *because* of her posthumous success. This success is due in part to the fact that Cahun's photographs appear surprisingly contemporary to today's viewers; yet, as I will show, this deceptive appearance has ironically lead to the images' misapprehension on the part of contemporary scholars. The purpose of this introduction is, first, to give an account of the way in which the discourse surrounding Cahun's work has been formed and how it has only recently begun to change, and, second, to establish certain biographical and historical information which is

[1] After Claude Cahun's death in 1954, all of her possessions went to Marcel Moore. Upon Moore's death in 1972, the contents of her Jersey home, including all of her possessions as well as those she inherited from Cahun were put up for auction at which time they were purchased by a local collector, John Wakeham. Wakeham was initially attracted to Cahun and Moore's large collection of Surrealist books; he began to sell items in this collection both in Jersey and through London auction houses from the mid-1970s through the '80s (Louise Downie, introduction, *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie [London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006] 7-9). Cahun's work began to make its reappearance after its inclusion in the major Surrealist exhibition, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1985.

fundamental to the project of contextualizing her work, rather than just depositing her in the twenty-first century.

In much scholarship on Cahun there have been repeated attempts to force Cahun into a kind of mold for the sake of our own understanding. The alignment of Cahun's body of work to contemporary art and artists has become one of the most problematical of these molds. It is no accident that this sudden awareness of Cahun's work coincided with an increased interest in contemporary photography by women as well as theoretical writings on feminism and postmodernism.[2] This tendency to situate Cahun within such a framework is due to the fact that she was indeed very concerned with questions of identity and self-representation. These concerns were shared by women photographers of the 1970s and '80s who also used their own bodies as the subject of their work, such as Cindy Sherman and Francesca Woodman. Issues of gender and identity were also at the fore of feminist theory and criticism in the late 1980s and early '90s, exemplified most notably by the writings of Judith Butler and, in photography, the *Untitled Film Stills* of Cindy Sherman. The heightened interest in the work of Sherman combined with the rediscovery of Cahun's work led to an almost compulsory identification of Cahun with Sherman—an association which still lingers today. While it can be useful to speak of Cahun as a predecessor to more contemporary artists, art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau touches on a crucial point when she suggests that "it requires almost more of an effort to resituate Cahun in her actual time and milieu than it does to consider her work in the context of contemporary theoretical formulations about femininity, identity and

[2] Gen Doy, *Claude Cahun: a Sensual Politics of Photography* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007) 10.

representation."[3] Solomon-Godeau also points out that specifically the Cindy Sherman link was posited by Cahun's biographer François Leperlier in 1992, and has been reiterated in nearly all subsequent writing on Cahun.[4]

Clearly, in overstating (or just restating) certain links to Cahun, we run the risk of obliterating the significance of such a link. While drawing parallels between themes in the work of artists which span several decades can actually be very powerful, the significance lies in the *differing* contexts in which each artist was working. It is this context that has been ignored to a large degree in these earlier discussions of Cahun, especially when her work is examined in relation to contemporary women photographers. If a linkage to, say, Sherman is dwelled upon to the point that Cahun herself and her work become emptied of historical specificity, then the potential that this kind of a parallel holds is in effect, nullified. In repeatedly aligning Cahun with Sherman, it becomes easy to conflate their two highly disparate projects, unifying their work on the basis of the ultimately superficial similarities of the medium of photography and their use of their own bodies. This kind of exploration of Cahun becomes in many ways counterproductive because it neglects the repercussions of the context that necessarily informed Cahun's work—her milieu, the other artistic activities she engaged in, and perhaps most importantly, her collaboration with Moore.

Although Cahun has been most commonly associated with photography, as both photographer and photographic subject, her primary engagement was in fact literary. In

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[3] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Equivocal "I": Claude Cahun as Lesbian Subject" *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*, ed. Shelley Rice (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 114.

[4] François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'écart et la metamorphose* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992) 229. Leperlier's book was the first critical monograph on Claude Cahun; his initial comparison of Cahun and Sherman is one that has come to characterize subsequent discussions of Cahun's work (Solomon-Godeau 114).

1894, in the provincial French town of Nantes, Lucy Schwob (Claude Cahun) was born into a prominently intellectual family with significant ties to the French literary world. Cahun's paternal background, which includes both her father Maurice Schwob, a successful newspaper owner, and more specifically, her uncle, Marcel Schwob, a well-known Symbolist writer, had a major influence on Cahun's artistic and literary development. Cahun's link to the Symbolist literary tradition through Marcel Schwob is actually an important precursor to her engagement with Surrealism, one which later informed her mature literary work.[5] This literary inheritance as well as her early education in both France and England were defining factors that enabled Cahun to gain a vast knowledge of European literature from a young age—a working knowledge which is evident in her writing.[6] Because Cahun came from a relatively privileged material background, neither she nor Moore ever needed to earn a living from their work in the arts.[7]

Cahun was actively writing from the 1910s through the 1930s, during which time she published several major literary works, the most pivotal being what has been described as her "anti-autobiographical" book entitled *Aveux non avenus*, published in 1930. *Aveux non avenus* has been referred to by scholars as an "anti-autobiography" because it is not in any straightforward way about herself or her life; rather, it is better understood as a critique of the conventional autobiographical narrative.[8] The majority of the self-portrait images that have come to characterize Cahun's work were also produced

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[5] Jennifer Blessing, "Claude Cahun, Dandy Provocateuse" *Dandies*, ed. Susan Fillin-Yeh (New York: NYU Press, 2001) 195-96.

[6] Kristine von Oehsen, "The Lives of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore" *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie (London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006) 10-11.

[7] Solomon-Godeau 123.

[8] Tirza True Latimer, "Entre Nous: Between Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore" *GLQ: a Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.2 (2006): 199.

during this time period, although she and Moore continued to produce such images up until Cahun's death in 1954. After the couple's move from Nantes to Paris's Montparnasse in 1922, Cahun became deeply involved with the theater, participating in various productions between the years of 1923 and 1929,[9] coinciding with the years in which some of the most well-known self-portrait images were created. Because Cahun and Moore's theatrical and literary activities developed in tandem with the self-portrait images, it is crucial to locate the points at which these separate trajectories intersect.

In any evaluation of the life or work of Claude Cahun, the figure of Marcel Moore must also be examined. The two met in 1909 when Cahun was only fifteen years old and Moore was seventeen; apparently it did not take long for them to begin what has been euphemistically referred to as their "lifelong friendship," but is better described as a romantic and intellectual partnership—one which has come to inform the way we understand their lives and work.[10] Until recently Moore's entire identity has often been comprised parenthetically: either (stepsister and lifelong companion)[11] or (half-sister and lover).[12] It seems that many scholars do not hesitate to give their relationship distinctly incestuous overtones, when to do so is in fact inaccurate. Moore's mother and Cahun's father married in 1917, eight years *after* Moore and Cahun had met, meaning they would have actually been lovers before their parents were; they are stepsisters through marriage, not blood relatives.[13] Moore is often referred to by her given name, "Suzanne Malherbe," rather than her pseudonym, "Marcel Moore" by the same authors who unquestioningly

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[9] von Oehsen 14.

[10] "Lifelong friendship" is a term used in von Oehsen 11.

[11] Moore is referred to as Cahun's "stepsister and lifelong companion, Suzanne Malherbe" in Therese Lichtenstein, "A Mutable Mirror: Claude Cahun" *Artforum* 30.8 (1992): 64.

[12] Moore is described as "Cahun's half-sister and lover" in Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 29.

[13] von Oehsen 12.

use the name "Claude Cahun" over "Lucy Schwob." It is in this way that Moore's significance is often downplayed, possibly because we just do not have all of the specifics on the nature of Cahun and Moore's artistic collaborations. Furthermore, art history itself tends to have a bias against collaboration in general, preferring instead the notion of the artist as individual genius. With the figure of Marcel Moore it is crucial to understand that, as the operator of the camera, Cahun is essentially posing for *her* eyes. *She* is the one who Cahun calls *l'autre moi*, the other me.[14] Together for forty-five years, the two were inseparable from the first time they met and, though it can only be speculated, the eighteen years that Moore was alone after the death of Cahun must have been unbearable, culminating in her suicide in 1972.[15]

It is only recently coming to light just how important Moore was to Cahun, both professionally and personally. In particular, Moore's role becomes fraught with questions in relation to the production of the self-portrait images which she and Cahun collaborated on together. The question of whether or not these images can truly be considered Self-Portraits—strictly in regard to their production—is inevitable. One of the most well-known and most reproduced images of Cahun is her 1928 *Untitled (Self-Portrait with Mirror)* in which she stands beside a mirror, looking directly into the camera lens (figure 1). What is often not seen, because it has rarely been reproduced, is a matching photograph of Moore in the same position, except that in this photo Moore looks at the camera through its reflection in the mirror (figure 2). There also exists an alternate version of this portrait in which Moore is positioned facing away from the mirror in the same way that Cahun was in figure 1. This photograph was then printed in

[14] Solomon-Godeau 116.
[15] von Oehsen 21.

reverse to make it appear, when the two photographs are aligned, as though Cahun and Moore are looking "at" one another through the mirror.[16] In Julie Cole's essay, "Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore and the Construction of a Lesbian Subjectivity," she argues that the interaction between these images illustrates the reciprocal nature of Cahun and Moore's identification with one another.[17] Cole also suggests that the inclusion of objects such as mirrors and masks in many of the self-portrait images are actually meant to be stand-ins for Moore who is most often *behind* and not in front of the camera.[18]

If we understand Cahun as one of a pair, as Cole would have us do, then it makes sense that the inclusion of an object such as a mask was meant to signify Moore's participation in their mutual project. Moore's shadow was in fact intentionally included in many images of Cahun to mark Moore's presence and *active* role in the creation of the images (figure 3). Tirza True Latimer, who has written extensively on the nature of Cahun and Moore's collaborative process, argues that the shadow functions as an index of Moore's physical presence, whereas the mask as a stand-in for Moore functions on a symbolic level.[19] This 1928 photograph of Cahun is one which includes Moore's shadow—visible in the lower-right-hand corner. In most reproductions of this particular image Moore's shadow is not visible because the photograph is often cropped closer to the central figure of Cahun.[20] A similar earlier example of the presence of Moore's

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[16] Julie Cole, "Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, and the Construction of a Lesbian Subjectivity" *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 350-51.

[17] Cole 350-51.

[18] Cole 344-45, 351.

[19] Tirza True Latimer, "Acting Out: Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore" *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie (London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006) 57.

[20] Examples of the cropping of this particular image can be found in Doy plate 3, and in Shelley Rice, ed., *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 99. In both instances the image is credited to the Jersey Heritage Trust which does not have a negative of this image, only an un-cropped print that includes the shadow. Surprisingly, this cropping is not indicated

shadow can be found in a photo of Cahun taken circa 1915 (figure 4). Significantly, Moore's shadow is again in the lower-right-hand corner, the place where Latimer points out, "we are conditioned to look for the artist's signature."[21] Regardless of whether the placement of the shadow was an intentional reference to the signature, it nevertheless situates Moore in an active role as Cahun's collaborator.

On a strictly technical basis, it would have been impossible for Cahun to stage all of these images on her own; according to James Stevenson, the Photographic Manager at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, "the camera that Cahun used for the majority of her career almost certainly did not have the in-built facility to take delayed-action photographs."[22] Although there were clockwork devices available that could be attached to the shutter to make delayed-action photographs possible, it cannot be determined whether Cahun used such a device. In many photographs Cahun appears at quite a distance from the camera, at times she is even behind a closed window, which leads Stevenson to infer that "it is difficult to imagine that she could have operated a delaying device and still have time to get in front of the camera."[23] In addition, there is no indication in the photographs which would suggest that Cahun used a long cable shutter release because as Stevenson asserts, "[w]hen these are used they are almost always visible in the photograph and none of her images show the slightest evidence of this."[24]

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as such in either book by the appearance of a word such as "detail" in parentheses after the title, as is standard art historical practice.

[21] Latimer, "Acting Out" 57

[22] Stevenson discusses evidence that he obtained from Cahun's negatives which indicate that she was using the same Type 3 Folding Pocket camera as early as 1909 through the 1940s (James Stevenson, "Claude Cahun: An Analysis of Her Photographic Technique" *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie [London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006] 52-53).

[23] Stevenson 53.

[24] Stevenson 53.

The recent trend in scholarship on Cahun to include Moore as an active participant in the staging of the self-portrait images is echoed by Lizzie Thynne in her 2004 film, *Playing a Part: the Story of Claude Cahun*. This is a biographical film that is based in academic research, but still attempts to provide a non-authoritative account of Cahun's life. Thynne states that in *Playing a Part*, she sought to represent "narratively and visually, the complexity of identity in the same way that Cahun's work challenges the concept of the self-portrait as the authentic portrayal of a single self."[25] In this film the staging of the self-portrait images is reconstructed dramatically through the use of actors who play the parts of Cahun and Moore. In these dramatizations Moore is seen as the one who steps into the frame to position and costume Cahun, stepping back out of the frame to take the photo.[26] Although this enactment is partially conjecture, seeing as it is not possible to know for certain the exact way in which these photos were staged, Thynne puts forth a compellingly plausible model of collaborative authorship in these recreated scenarios.

Although the images of Cahun are widely referred to and titled as "Self-Portraits," it is crucial to note that it was extremely rare for Cahun and Moore to give titles to their images; the majority of the so-called self-portraits came to us without titles.[27] Equally important to keep in mind is the fact that these images were of a private nature, not meant to be exhibited or distributed; rather they were created for Cahun and Moore's personal use.[28] Consequently, the category of Self-Portraiture has not proven to be an altogether accurate analysis of the photographic body of work that was produced collaboratively by

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[25] Lizzie Thynne, "Claude Cahun: an experimental biopic" *Journal of Media Practice* 2.3 (2002): 169.

[26] *Playing a Part: the Story of Claude Cahun*, Dir. Lizzie Thynne (Sussex University, 2004).

[27] Cole 343.

[28] Solomon-Godeau 117.

Cahun and Moore. The idea of self-portraiture or self-representation and its relevance to gender and identity issues is an often explored theme in the work of women artists. Women's self-representation has been variously interpreted and has been seen at times as merely a narcissistic pursuit of vanity. But it has also been acknowledged that many women artists use the self as a vehicle to engage arenas that exist outside of that self; identity and gender become not only personal, but political. Historically, self-portraiture in particular has been used by women as a means to gain a better self-understanding and to move towards an illumination of some aspect of the interior by means of the exterior. Art historian Whitney Chadwick describes women's self-portraiture as follows:

> No single model of self-portraiture can fully stand for the experiences of women generally, or fully express the rich interplay that exists between the examination of the reflected image and the exploration of the social dimensions of lived experience, but self-representation remains critical to self-understanding and it plays a particularly important role in women's creative lives.[29]

Chadwick maintains that the connection between a woman artist's "lived experience" and her self-portrayal is one that promotes self-understanding. However, such an understanding of women's self-portraiture is not consistent with Cahun and Moore's images which present Cahun in a series of guises, none of which are representative of a singular authentic identity. Their images are specifically disconnected from a lived experience. Through these images we are denied access, unable to enter the image in order to get to the maker.

Indeed, many scholars have expressed concern over the fact that the images which have heretofore been identified as Cahun's self-portraits cannot truly be considered as such. Latimer argues that the labeling of Cahun and Moore's work as Self-Portraiture

[29] Whitney Chadwick, "How Do I Look?" *Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists*, ed. Liz Rideal (New York: Watson Guptill, 2002) 21.

has more accurately become a "categorical designation [which] has provided scholars, curators, and other contemporary viewers with what seems to be a viable term of convenience."[30] Solomon-Godeau also points to the complex nature of labeling Cahun's work when she footnotes her use of the term "self-portrait" thus: "Limitations of language being what they are, I have little recourse but to refer to Cahun's pictures as 'self-portraits' or, more awkwardly, 'self-representations.'"[31] The classification of Cahun's work as Self-Portraits is problematic because the subject of self-portraiture is not utilized in a straightforward or conventional sense; it is used instead as a means to get beyond rather than inside the self. Self-representation can be seen in the work of Cahun and Moore as an innovative means to deconstruct social categories and accepted notions of gender, but never in these so-called self-portraits do they ever suggest that what is being seen is an "authentic" self.

The question of identity is continually revisited and interrogated throughout Cahun and Moore's entire oeuvre; the self is seen as a complex subject that is continually negotiated and challenged, its borders fluid and its definition in constant flux and revision. This notion of multiplicity in an often variable identity is a central theme running through the entirety of Cahun's artistic and literary collaborations. For Cahun and Moore, self-representation becomes a subversive activity as they use the mirror and the lens *not* to define or converge upon a unified and stable self, but to investigate it as a problematic site—a point of divergence. Cahun is often misrepresented as being involved in a perpetual quest for self-definition, but upon closer examination her work

[30] Latimer, "Entre Nous" 198.
[31] Solomon-Godeau 124.

seems to be engaged in quite the opposite. Her and Moore's journey takes them away from the self, on a quest to un-define and destabilize identity.

This thesis sets out to explore an alternate approach to understanding Cahun and Moore's so-called self-portraits by drawing on the most recent scholarship that acknowledges first, the complexity of their collaborative mode of authorship; second, the disparity that exists between the category of Self-Portraiture and the actual images produced by Cahun and Moore; and last, the relevance of Cahun and Moore's artistic undertakings in the realms of theater and literature. In order to examine the effect of each of these aspects on the production of Cahun and Moore's photographic work, this thesis has been organized into three chapters. Chapter 1 first situates Cahun and Moore's activities of the 1920s and '30s in relation to contemporaneous discourses of gender and Surrealism—a movement with which they were closely connected. Chapter 2 examines the complexities of naming and the taking of pseudonyms by Cahun and Moore to problematize notions of authorship. In this chapter I will be examining their collaborative mode of authorship in relation to the theories of authorship put forth by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Chapter 3 discusses the so-called self-portraits in relation to Cahun and Moore's literary and theatrical activities that coincided with their production. In the Conclusion, I bring together all of Cahun and Moore's creative activities, from the taking of pseudonyms and their model of collaborative authorship to their various literary and theatrical endeavors in order to illustrate one of the only constants present in all of their work—the underlying notion of critique that is meant to challenge tradition and convention. I propose that this notion of critique is also at the heart of Cahun and Moore's photographic work; thus the images that have come to be

known as self-portraits are not self-portraits at all but rather a critique of the genre of self-portraiture. I put forth the concept of "anti self-portraiture" not as a category that defines the work, but rather, as a practice of critique that the work *enacts*.

CHAPTER 1:

GENDER AND SURREALISM

The movement known as Surrealism emerged during the interwar period which was a time of great social uncertainty and political upheaval. "The unparalleled slaughter of World War I," writes art historian Matthew Gale, "raised doubts for those in all walks of life about the merits of progress if this was the result."[32] Those associated with the Surrealist movement took an ideological stand in which they challenged, even "assaulted," as Gale states, "all fondly held social, political and artistic conventions."[33] Although the Surrealists were rebelling against convention and rationality towards a common goal, Surrealism was not an entirely coherent movement; it was in fact highly fragmented. Thus, Cahun and Moore's engagement with Surrealism is necessarily diverse. Their work responds to cultural issues of gender and identity but is also bound up with Surrealism on artistic and political levels. Surrealism was a movement dominated primarily by men, and Cahun was one of the few women associated with the original group.[34]

Certainly, the male Surrealist attitude towards women and women's bodies could be extremely limiting, if not outright misogynistic. The female body did not function as a subject within Surrealist discourse; instead, it was more often used by male artists as a fetishized or sexual object. A woman was able to become a muse at best, but not a person with her own agency.[35] This was true of Lee Miller who was a photographer

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[32] Matthew Gale, *Dada and Surrealism* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997) 5.
[33] Gale 6.
[34] Leperlier 13.
[35] Gale 307-8.

herself, but is more well-known for her role as model, lover and muse for photographer Man Ray, from 1929 to 1932.[36] Miller's body functioned, Chadwick writes "as an object...onto which [Man Ray] could project his sexual and creative desires."[37] At times Man Ray photographed the beauty of Miller's body in a flattering, albeit conventional manner, but he also often depicted it in eroticized fragments. In either case Chadwick insists that it is Miller's "individuality" which is "lost in her transformation from subject to object."[38] Chadwick makes the crucial differentiation between the Surrealist "Woman" and Surrealist *women*; "Woman," she writes is "a representational category shared by the projections of the masculine heterosexual unconscious" whereas *women* constitutes "a diverse group of individuals for whom Surrealism had played a significant role in their struggle to articulate an autonomous feminine subject."[39] Miller occupies a position in each category; she is one of the Surrealist *women* that Chadwick writes of, but she also represents a Surrealist "Woman" in Man Ray's images of her. It was not until the 1980s when Surrealist *women*—the women artists who were associated with the movement—began to receive their due attention.

This attitude towards women's bodies would seem to put Cahun and Moore at odds with Surrealism in general, but they did in fact share a number of commonalities with the Surrealists including their anti-bourgeois and anti-fascist political stance, their interest in psychology, and in their technical use of fragmentation, collage and montage. Cahun and her image offer up a much-needed alternative to the typical Surrealist

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[36] Whitney Chadwick, "Claude Cahun and Lee Miller: Problematizing Surrealist Territories of Gender and Race" *Gender Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality*, ed. Toni Lester (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002) 143.

[37] Chadwick, "Claude Cahun" 143.

[38] Chadwick, "Claude Cahun" 143.

[39] Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors" *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 3-4.

depiction of the female body, the image of an exposed, disfigured or dismembered female body.[40] Despite this treatment of the female body, the Surrealists rebelled against the social institutions of church, family, and state which were the very institutions that sought to govern a woman's place within society.[41] This chapter examines Cahun and Moore's work in relation to first, the discourses surrounding gender, identity, and "New Womanhood" prevalent during this time period and second, to their artistic and political affiliations with the Surrealists.

The 1920s brought with them new possibilities for women of Cahun and Moore's era. The role of women in society was being crucially revised during this time period that witnessed the emergence of the "New Woman." "[T]he epochal 'new women,'" Solomon-Godeau writes, were "…part of the first generation of European and American women to have come of age in a period of relative emancipation."[42] After World War I had ended, many women who had joined the workforce during the war did not want to give up their newfound autonomy. The women who joined the movement in the 1930s understood Surrealism as a similar opportunity for social liberation, a chance to escape "what they perceived as the inhibiting confines of middle-class marriage, domesticity, and motherhood."[43] This New Woman was associated with a different kind of freedom and an opening up of the possibilities and alternatives which enabled women to lead lives outside of the traditional realms of family and domesticity. However, these new prospects brought with them a new set of cultural anxieties surrounding the position of women in society. If women were able to occupy positions in the workforce which were

[40] Krauss 24.
[41] Chadwick, "Infinite Play" 5.
[42] Solomon-Godeau 115.
[43] Chadwick, "Infinite Play" 5.

thought only to be feasible for men then the fear was that women could potentially usurp the role of men in society.

The idea of the New Woman became linked to the concept of masquerade by fellow New Woman and psychoanalyst, Joan Rivie□□re, in her 1929 essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" which responds to, or perhaps, verifies this particular moment of cultural anxiety surrounding the place of women in society. Rivie□□re argues that femininity is not inherent, but that it is instead a kind of social performance enacted to disguise the fact that a woman possesses masculinity—the capability of claiming a position of social and intellectual power equal to that of a man. However, contemporary gender theorist Judith Butler, in her seminal book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), argues that the very idea of masquerade implies that there is in fact a "femininity *prior to* the masquerade, a feminine desire or demand that is masked and capable of disclosure, that, indeed, might promise an eventual disruption and displacement of the phallogocentric signifying system."[44] Butler draws on Rivie□□re's concept of masquerade in her investigation of what—if anything—is actually masked through masquerade. Departing from and expanding on Rivie□□re's formulation, Butler argues that all gender is performative.

Cahun is often discussed in relation to Butler's idea of the performativity of gender because of the role that gender performance plays in Cahun's photographic self-transformations. While Cahun and Moore's photographs of Cahun are certainly relevant to Butler's theories of gender it was the ideas such as androgyny and the "third sex," raised in the 1920s and '30s, which truly influenced their work. Rivie□□re's argument

[44] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 60.

was part of the discourse surrounding gender and sexual identity which was contemporaneous with Cahun and Moore's photographic investigations. Cahun and Moore continually employed the concept of masquerade in their portraits of Cahun by emphasizing the mutability of gender and identity through the assumption of various guises. Jennifer Blessing, in *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography* points out that "the psychoanalytic roots of current gender theory date to the late 1920s and 1930s."[45] It was this early discourse in which Cahun and Moore were immersed and one that has informed their work. In 1929, the same year that Rivie□□re's essay was published, Cahun translated *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: The Task of Social Hygiene -1- The Woman in Society* by sexologist, Havelock Ellis who was at the time controversial and influential in his ideas of the third-sex. Although it may seem quite limiting to us today, this idea of the third-sex would have been appealing at this time because of the possibilities that androgyny opened up through the union of masculinity and femininity.[46]

The evolution of gender roles within society throughout the 1920s and '30s were also reflected in the changing of women's fashions: short hairstyles, trousers, shorter skirts and generally less restricting, more casual garments, all of which served to challenge normative representations of feminine identity.[47] It has been difficult to ascertain exactly what Cahun's day-to-day fashion might have looked like; although much has been made of the portraits in which Cahun is understood to represent herself as a male subject. It is for this reason that Cahun is often regarded as having been engaged

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[45] Jennifer Blessing, introduction, *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography*, ed. Jennifer Blessing (New York: Guggenheim Museum Press, 1997) 8.

[46] Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman" *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 71.

[47] Doy 88-93.

in transvestitism or cross-dressing, but in reality the images in which Cahun appears in "drag" are quite rare.[48] One of the relatively few examples of this kind of cross-dressing is a 1920 photograph of Cahun in which she is dressed as a sailor (figure 5). However, Cahun also appeared as equally feminine personae as well; for instance, in a photograph taken circa 1911 Cahun presents herself as the beautiful and famous Clèo de Merode (figure 6).[49] Clèo de Merode was a dancer and courtesan—one of the most photographed women in France at the turn of the century—her image disseminated throughout Europe and the United States via postcards (figure 7).[50] De Merode's personal style of adornment was trend-setting, her popularity reaching its apogee in the late 1890s and early 1900s, in the decade just before Cahun's photographic imitation of her.[51] In these two seemingly dissimilar photographs, sailor and courtesan, Cahun is essentially doing the same thing—playing with gendered codes of masculinity, beauty and femininity, not necessarily assuming male and female identities. There is no indication in either photo that Cahun identified any more or less with the sailor than she did the courtesan.

It was much more common for Cahun to display androgynous traits in her photographs, rather than strictly masculine or feminine characteristics. The figure of the androgyne held an appeal for the Surrealists because it destabilized gender and identity by presenting ambiguity in sexual difference. The attraction that androgyny held for Cahun can be observed in many of her writings; Cahun's statement in *Aveux non avenus* is an oft-cited example: "Shuffle the cards. Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the

[48] Cole 346.
[49] Solomon-Godeau 122.
[50] Claude Conyers, "Courtesans in Dance History: Les Belles de la Belle Èpoque" *Dance Chronicle* 26.2 (2003): 232.
[51] Conyers 232.

situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me."[52] Such a statement was undoubtedly influenced by her familiarity with the work of Ellis and his notion of the third sex. The figure of the androgyne is portrayed by Cahun in her 1925 fictional text, "Héroïnes," as originating in the classical mythic character of Salmacis. Each story in "Héroïnes" is dedicated to someone; this particular story, entitled "Salmacis the Suffragette," is addressed "to Claude."[53] However, in Cahun's creative writing, as is true of her photographs, it is never safe to assume that the written words, or images for that matter, correspond in such a straightforward way to a claim of truth or identification.

In her discussion of the nineteenth-century figure of the androgyne, Blessing establishes that the significance of both androgyny and the third sex during this time period lies in the fact that they were both seen as ways to escape sexual and gender binaries. Blessing writes, "these troubled genders are described as ambiguous, yet they seem to be anything but.... " continuing, she reminds us that "a gender-ambiguous subject is never invisible, it announces the juxtaposition of codes in one subject."[54] In many of Cahun and Moore's images we can perceive this kind of juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory symbols of gender which were able to coexist in the problematic subject of the androgyne. For example, Cahun is often portrayed with her hair cropped short, but as Cole has pointed out, she also frequently dyed it pink, green, silver or gold, preventing this hairstyle from being read as purely masculine or feminine.[55] It may be safe to conceive of Cahun embracing androgyny on a theoretical level, but it would be

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[52] Claude Cahun, *Disavowals*, 1930, trans. Susan de Muth (London: Tate, 2007) 151.

[53] Claude Cahun, "Heroines," 1925, trans. Norman MacAfee, *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman*, ed. Shelley Rice (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 88-89. "Heroines" was never published in full during her lifetime, although excerpts from it appeared in both *Mercure de France* and *Le Journal Litt□□□□□□□□érair□□□e* as early as 1925. It was published in its entirety and translated into English for the first time in Rice 43-94.

[54] Blessing, introduction 12-13.

[55] Cole 347.

difficult to conclude to what extent she may have embodied androgyny in her everyday life.

The issue of androgyny also brings to the fore the intrigue that the figure of the dandy held for many women at this time. Both androgyny and dandyism offered women ways of fashioning the self that were radical in their opposition to traditional modes of gender representation. Cahun's contemporary, painter Romaine Brooks, is one who embraced the figure of the dandy in her well-known *Self-Portrait* of 1923 (figure 8). Brooks' painting compares to a photograph of Cahun (figure 9) taken slightly earlier in 1921 in which Cahun also appears in similar dandy attire. However, their embodiments of dandyism are highly divergent from one another. Cahun performs the part of a dandy as only one of many ways of imaging the self, whereas Brooks embodies the role of the dandy exclusively.

In her essay, "Looking Like a Lesbian: Portraiture and Sexual Identity in 1920s Paris," Latimer compares the self-representations of Cahun and Moore to those of Brooks, emphasizing the ways in which they differ. Of Cahun and Moore's "dandy" image, Latimer calls our attention to Cahun's "overstated pose, the ill-fitting costume, the jerry-rigged backdrop, the emphatic power of formal choices such as cropping and lighting," each an element that marks this image as performative in status.[56] Where Cahun and Moore's image questions the self, Brooks's painting emphasizes an authoritative and singular self.[57] Latimer differentiates between these two projects when she states that Brooks's portrait "monumentalizes a manner of appearing and a manner of

[56] Tirza True Latimer, "Looking Like a Lesbian: Portraiture and Sexual Identity in 1920s Paris" *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 137.

[57] Latimer, "Looking" 127.

seeing that correspond with the painter's elitist vision of artistic, social, and sexual subjectivity" whereas "Cahun and Moore envisioned collaboration as an emancipatory alternative to hierarchizing social and artistic systems."[58] The figure of the dandy can be a tempting identity to apply to Cahun because the dandy, embodied by Oscar Wilde, a figure who Cahun championed, was in fact a legacy of the Symbolists who Cahun was linked to through her uncle. This connection is one of the factors that leads Blessing to claim: "the identity [Cahun] wears most comfortably—that appears to be most transparent, 'most natural'—is that of a presumably male dandy."[59] However, there is no evidence to suggest that Cahun embodied dandyism in her daily life and appearance;[60] the dandy is yet another of Cahun's masquerades, not an actual lived identity as it was for Brooks.

When Cahun poses as a male sailor and dandy, a female courtesan, or any of her multitudes of androgynous personae, she is always deferring her own identity, seeming to be in a continual process of "othering" herself. This aspect of otherness is explored by Laura "Lou" Bailey and Lizzie Thynne in their article "Beyond Representation: Claude Cahun's Monstrous Mischief Making." Bailey and Thynne observe the way Cahun challenged the dominant cultural discourses surrounding gender, sexuality and race by displaying on her own body, physical traits that were commonly associated with both homosexual and anti-Semitic physiognomy in an attempt to parody and thus subvert such eugenic readings of the body.[61] Chadwick similarly understands Cahun as consciously

[58] Latimer, "Looking" 129.

[59] Blessing, "Claude Cahun" 195-96.

[60] Cahun's daily attire and style seems to have been highly varied and eclectic throughout different periods of her life. This issue is discussed at length in Doy 81-108.

[61] Laura "Lou" Bailey and Lizzie Thynne, "Beyond Representation: Claude Cahun's Monstrous Mischief- Making" *History of Photography* 29.2 (2005): 141-42.

inserting her body and image into a representational discourse in which "early twentieth century writing about sex and the body shared a set of ideas about perversion, heredity and degeneracy that often linked Jewishness, homosexuality, and degeneracy."[62] In a 1920 photograph (figure 10) Cahun adds yet another dimension of otherness to her image; Bailey and Thynne argue that here Cahun "presents herself as a sexual but also racial 'other'—'third sex,' Jew, and vampire."[63] The severe lighting in this photo does indeed make Cahun appear vampiristic; the stark contrast of the black clothing and backdrop makes her skin become ghostlike in its paleness and her eyes hollow, giving her an almost predatory expression. Bailey and Thynne examine the relationship of this image of Cahun and the character Nosferatu, the vampire in F.W. Murnau's 1922 film by the same name, writing that "the vampire condenses not only fears of sexual 'others' but racial difference."[64] Judith Halberstam, a gender theorist who has examined "monsters" such as Dracula and Frankenstein as cultural objects, points out that "the anatomy of the vampire, for example, compares remarkably to anti-Semitic studies of Jewish physiognomy—peculiar nose, pointed ears, sharp teeth, claw-like hands."[65] Cahun exaggerates these very qualities in this photograph by drawing attention to her prominent facial features, questioning, even parodying, as Bailey and Thynne suggest, the monstrosity that was assumed to be an inherent component of Jewish and homosexual identities in anti-Semitic and sexological discourses of the late-nineteenth and early-

[62] Chadwick, "Claude Cahun" 154.
[63] Bailey and Thynne 143.
[64] Bailey and Thynne 143.
[65] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) 3. Quoted in Bailey and Thynne 143.

twentieth centuries.[66] Cahun would seem, in this image particularly, to *want* to emphasize and construct these features on her own body as signifiers of her otherness.

Bailey and Thynne also point out that Cahun's "vampire" photograph relates specifically to the Surrealist notion of "convulsive beauty"—a concept established by André Breton, a writer who helped found the Surrealist movement and is often considered to be the mouthpiece of it. Hal Foster, in his book *Compulsive Beauty*, explains the way in which Breton's convulsive beauty stems out of the concept of the "marvelous"—a term that signifies "a rupture in the natural order."[67] In Surrealism the marvelous was committed to "the reenchantment of a disenchanted world, of a capitalist society made ruthlessly rational."[68] Convulsive beauty, Foster writes, is "an uncanny confusion between animate and inanimate states," one that exposes "the immanence of death in life."[69] Convulsive beauty is a kind of beauty which is evoked through uncanny experience, a beauty that, like in Cahun's photograph, Bailey and Thynne argue "simultaneously attracts and repels the viewer through morbid fascination."[70] The monstrosity constructed in this image is one that has a visceral effect on the viewer, as art historian Mary Ann Caws writes of Cahun in this photograph: "she fascinates. She horrifies. She is monstrous. There is no better way to put it.... You are tempted to look away."[71] The undead, subhuman state of the vampire is one that embodies a rupture in the natural order of things, conflating states of both life and death in one subject.

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[66] Bailey and Thynne, 142.
[67] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) 19.
[68] Foster 19.
[69] Foster 21.
[70] Bailey and Thynne 142.
[71] Mary Ann Caws, "Doubling: Claude Cahun's Split Self" *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997) 113.

While Cahun's photographs may relate to Bretonian concepts such as convulsive beauty, her involvement with the Surrealists and Breton himself was more of a political rather than artistic affiliation. Although Cahun and Moore were closely following the Surrealists' activities through their journals and books throughout the 1920s, they would not associate themselves with the Surrealist movement until 1932.[72] However, the images that seem to be most influenced by Surrealism, the majority of the now famous self-portrait images, were all produced prior to 1932. The only artistic endeavor that Cahun engaged in with the Surrealists was her participation in a 1936 exhibition of Surrealist objects at the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris.[73] This was the only exhibition that Cahun ever participated in during her lifetime; the artworks that she displayed in this exhibition were assemblages of objects and were not related to the self-portrait images.[74] During the time that Cahun and Moore were involved with the Surrealists their work began to undergo a marked change, especially in regard to the self-portrait images. Beginning in 1932, portraiture gradually began to give way to photographs of objects and still-lives, eventually leading to the snapshot-like images of Cahun that characterize their later work, generally set in outdoor scenes in the surroundings of their home in Jersey. Photographs of Cahun had drastically diminished between the years of 1932 and 1935, suggesting that her political concerns were more central during these years.

While Cahun never officially joined a political party she was active in left-wing political organizations that were linked to the French Communist Party. Following the

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[72] Jennifer Shaw, "Singular Plural: Collaborative Self-Images in Claude Cahun's *Aveux non avenus*" *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 159.

[73] This exhibition was entitled *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets*, and was held at the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris, 22 May—29 May, 1936.

[74] von Oehsen 16.

publication of *Aveux non avenus* in 1930, both Cahun and Moore became increasingly involved in politics with Cahun joining the *Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires*, the Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (AEAR), in 1932. The AEAR was an anti-fascist, Communist organization; however the French Communist Party was enormously skeptical of the Surrealists commitment to the Party because of what it perceived as the Surrealists' lack of discipline.[75] It was the same year that Cahun joined the AEAR that she met André Breton and began to draw closer to the Surrealist group. In 1935, Cahun also met Georges Bataille, Breton's longtime rival, who was also a highly influential figure within the Surrealist movement, and became a founding member of the political group *Contre-Attaque*, which like the AEAR, was an anti-fascist group, formed through the partnership of a newly reconciled Breton and Bataille. At this point in time, as art historian Alastair Brotchie explains: "both Breton and Bataille had followed similarly dispiriting paths in leftist political organizations and their mutual disillusion, and dismay at the rise of Fascism, allowed them to bury their differences with the founding of *Contre-Attaque*, intended as an anti-fascist movement outside of Stalinist influence."[76] In 1937, following the dissolution of *Contre-Attaque* after only eighteen months, Cahun and Moore left Paris for the Island of Jersey. This move was due to a combination of events, the dissolution of *Contre-Attaque*, but also Cahun's long-standing

[75] Helena Lewis, "Surrealists, Stalinists, and Trotskyists: Theories of Art and Revolution in France Between the Wars" *Art Journal* 52.1 (1993): 64.

[76] Alastair Brotchie, introduction, *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, ed. Georges Bataille (London: Atlas Press, 1995) 11.

health problems[77] as well the changing political climate of Paris—the outbreaks of anti-Semitism and the encroaching threat of fascism.[78]

In 1934, the year prior to the founding of *Contre-Attaque*, during this time of decreased photographic activity, Cahun published a pamphlet entitled, *Les Paris sont ouverts* (*All Bets Are Open*), a tract on politics and art which she dedicated to Trotsky. The title responds to the moment of antagonism between the Communist Party and the Surrealists that led to the formation of *Contre-Attaque*. The Surrealists' called for a revolutionary, anti-bourgeois art that undermined notions of reality while the Communist Party was increasingly pushing for the opposite approach—socialist realism.[79] *Les Paris sont ouverts* expressed the way in which Cahun valued a dialectical approach to bring together art and politics—a Marxist approach reflecting Cahun's short-lived involvement in the Marxist discussion group, *groupe Brunet*.[80] In *Les Paris sont ouverts* Cahun writes: "Indirect action to me seems the only efficient action, from the point of view of propaganda and poetry."[81] This dialectical approach also involved the role of the unconscious as the creative source through which the artist/writer would be able to communicate political ideas to the viewer/reader and in an indirect way, incite political action.[82] Along with the dialectical approach was the democratic positioning of the author as an anti-elite non-professional, coincident with the Marxist belief that in a socialist society everyone has the opportunity to develop their own skills and talents

[77] Cahun suffered from bouts of poor physical and mental health throughout her life including, and possibly stemming from, periods of anorexia during her adolescence (von Oehsen 17).

[78] The couple had also discussed moving to Canada, but it is thought that they chose Jersey for many reasons: their familiarity with it, its neutrality, and its proximity to France which would have allowed them to maintain bonds with their Parisian circle of friends (Latimer, "Acting Out" 68-69).

[79] Doy 110-14

[80] Doy 111.

[81] Claude Cahun, *Les Paris sont ouverts* (Paris: José Corti, 1934). Quoted in von Oehsen 15.

[82] Doy 113-15.

outside of the realm of professionalism.[83] Of *Les Paris sont ouverts*, Kristine von Oehsen writes that "Cahun remains true to her political refusal of professionalism…parading her amateurish approach to an art work…thus demonstrating that art as a means of expression should be open to all and turning against the reification of old values."[84] Although Cahun never had to support herself financially, it is thought that part of the reason she never became a "professional" artist was due to her political, Marxist-influenced refusal of the artist as an elite figure.[85] It was these ideas that Cahun articulated in *Les Paris sont ouverts* which would later be put into practice by Cahun and Moore in their resistance campaign against the Nazi Occupation of Jersey between the years of 1940 and 1944.

The milieu of Paris in the 1920s and '30s had a great impact on the work that Cahun and Moore produced during this time, but was also an influence on the work that came later in the 1940s and '50s. Their engagement with the Surrealists is one that informed not only their artistic work but also their political consciousness as well. The destabilization of categories of gender and identity—a feature which scholars have readily identified and in Cahun and Moore's work—can be seen as stemming from the debates and developments surrounding the changing nature of women's place within society throughout this time period as well as part of the Surrealist project of disrupting rationality and conformity. While women's positions within the Surrealist movement were at times highly complicated, it was Cahun and Moore's adherence to the more libertarian Surrealist principles that came to influence the whole of their creative and political activities. The following chapter will examine the way in which Cahun and

[83] Doy 125.
[84] von Oehsen 17.
[85] Doy 125.

Moore, invoking the nonconformist spirit of Surrealism, disrupted conventions of authorship through their model of collaboration as well as through their taking of pseudonyms.

CHAPTER 2:

NAMING AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF AUTHORSHIP IN CLAUDE CAHUN AND MARCEL MOORE'S COLLABORATIVE "SELF-PORTRAITS"

In his seminal essay "What Is an Author?" Michel Foucault presents the difficulties associated with the name of the author. The author's name is not simply a proper name; rather it performs a "classificatory function."[86] "Such a name," Foucault continues "permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others…it establishes a relationship among the texts."[87] In Cahun and Moore's model of collaborative authorship there are many names of the author to take into consideration. The concept of an unstable identity is often discussed as an element that is visible in the photographs of Cahun, but in this chapter I will examine the way in which this notion of an unstable identity functions in relation to Cahun and Moore's adoption of multiple pseudonyms. The names that both artists take are integral to their personal relationship as well as their collaborative mode of authorship. Drawing upon the theories of authorship put forth by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, this chapter will investigate the way in which authorship is a site of problematization in the work of Cahun and Moore. It is in the self-portrait images in particular that authorship takes on this problematizing function; their unconventional model of collaboration is used as a method of complicating interpretations of their work.

Both Cahun and Moore adopted the specifically gender-neutral names "Claude" and "Marcel" to their given names Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe. While Cahun's

[86] Michel Foucault, "What Is An Author?" *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) 148.
[87] Foucault 147.

pseudonym is better known, it appears that Moore was the one who initiated these name changes. The name "Marcel Moore" appeared in her publications beginning in July of 1913 while Cahun first began to use pseudonyms in 1914.[88] The pseudonyms adopted by Cahun and Moore functioned on a somewhat different level than that of an alias or a pen name; these names signified actual lived identities. The earliest names that Cahun took on, or perhaps tried on were Claude Courlis and Daniel Douglas, ultimately leading to the name Claude Cahun in 1917.[89] While the issue of the pseudonym has received some attention in recent scholarship, it is a topic which deserves to be revisited.

Even before Cahun and Moore began taking pseudonyms, naming figured prominently as a kind of symbolic foundation of their relationship. In 1909, the year that Cahun and Moore met, Cahun created a drawing that makes clear the love that they shared, but also the nature of the emotional and artistic interconnectedness that their collaboration rested upon (figure 11). In this drawing the *single* monogram, LSM, represents a shared set of initials that stand for both Cahun and Moore; the "S" is the intersection that connects the two names, "Lucy Schwob" and "Suzanne Malherbe." The "S," Latimer points out, not only stands for Schwob and Suzanne, but is also a sign in language that turns the singular into a plural.[90] When the letters LSM are pronounced in French, it sounds like "Elles s'aiment" meaning "they love each other."[91] The image is composed of a hand, mouth, eye, and foot—each an element of the body that signifies agency—a hand that can reach, a mouth that can speak, an eye that can see, and a foot

[88] It was in June of 1913 that Moore first began publishing articles that she both wrote and illustrated (on fashion) appearing in Cahun's father's regional newspaper, *Le Phare de la Loire* under the name Marcel Moore (von Oehsen 11).

[89] Kline 17.

[90] Latimer, "Entre Nous" 205.

[91] Latimer, "Entre Nous" 205.

that can stand and support the weight of a body. The foot is in high heels nonetheless, emphasizing this agency to be expressly female. The mouth reads the name "Lucy Schwob" while the eye bears the name "Suzanne Malherbe" written in a circle around the iris. Latimer analyses these symbols as a kind of code that reveals the nature of Cahun and Moore's artistic and emotional division of labor: "if Lucy Schwob reaches for the sky, Suzanne Malherbe both balances and grounds her…Schwob speaks (writes, performs), Malherbe visualizes."[92] The eye that stands for Moore as the one who *sees* is implicated in the eye that is also the camera lens.

The act of naming, even at this early point in Cahun and Moore's relationship, functions to ultimately link the two of them together both emotionally and artistically. Cahun's earliest pseudonyms, Claude Courlis and Daniel Douglas, share with the partners' final pseudonyms—Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore—the literary device of alliteration as well as the visual component of repetition. "CC," "DD," and "MM" are each doubles, and each set of initials is in essence two of the same—plurals. Like the function of the "S" in *LSM*, the initials of all of the pseudonyms used by both Cahun and Moore pluralize, but also seem to contain in their very doubling, if not the identity of the other, at least a space in which each name can be present in both simultaneously. In this way the names Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, CC and MM, function, in a sense, as mirrors that reflect both artists; one name can ultimately stand for two identities. Ironically, in Moore's historical erasure as co-author, the name Claude Cahun has *had* to stand for the collaborative work of both.

In a letter written by Cahun later in life she explains the significance of her choice of the name Cahun for her final pseudonym: "So, you'll see elsewhere in this letter that

[92] Latimer, "Entre Nous" 205.

I'm not at all attached to the memory of my father, nor even that of Marcel Schwob. I always used a pseudonym to write, the name of my obscure Jewish relatives (Cahun) with whom I felt more affinity."[93] The removal of Schwob from her name was an attempt to distance herself from her family's status within the French literary world and to disengage herself from them so that her own writing career would not benefit from their success.[94] On an emotional level, the "affinity" that Cahun felt would have been specifically for her grandmother who partially raised her; Cahun was in fact her grandmother's maiden name.[95] Cahun is the French form of Cohen—one of the most recognizably Jewish names—a name that "identifies its bearer as belonging to the rabbinical class among Jews."[96] It is important to note that Cahun was not brought up Jewish, so the taking of this name was not motivated by religious reasons. On the one hand this adoption of such an undeniably Jewish name was a brave move considering the heightened anti-Semitic climate of France,[97] but I would also argue that this was a specifically *feminist* move as well. In rejecting the name Schwob, this act becomes a rebellion against paternity, that is, against the name of the father.

In her discussion of Rivie□□re's theory of femininity as a masquerade, Butler notes the way in which Rivie□□re's argument is rooted in theories of aggression and conflict, namely the rivalry with the father. Butler explains that Rivie□□re's "rivalry with the father is not over the mother, as one might expect, but over the place of the

[93] Claude Cahun, "Letter to Paul Levy," 1950. Quoted in Bailey and Thynne 136.

[94] Jennifer Mundy, introduction, *Disavowals*, by Claude Cahun, trans. Susan de Muth (London: Tate, 2007) note 4, 216.

[95] Bailey and Thynne 136.

[96] Krauss 42.

[97] Anti-Semitism ran rampant through France throughout Cahun's entire life; the Dreyfus affair began in 1894, the year that Cahun was born. During the second examination of the Dreyfus affair in 1906, Cahun was sent to school in England for two years to escape the anti-Semitic climate of France (von Oehsen 10).

father in public discourse as speaker, lecturer, writer—that is, a user of signs rather than a sign-object."[98] Rivie□□re's notion of rivalry with the father is especially significant in relation to Cahun's paternal heritage—both her father and uncle were not only privileged users of signs, but also powerful literary figures. For Cahun, it seems as if the trouble with the father was less about a rivalry with him and more about a removal of him. She literally erases the father (*her father*) in her replacement of the name Schwob for Cahun. She does not bother to engage in a struggle over the position of the father as an active user of signs, of language; she displaces him altogether, most significantly, through the name of the (grand) mother, Cahun.

This specific displacement is enacted in a set of portraits taken by Cahun between 1919 and 1920. In this 1919 photograph of Cahun, she appears in profile with a shaved head wearing masculine attire (figure 12). This image is analogous to another photograph taken by Cahun shortly afterward in 1920; although in this photograph the sitter was her father, Maurice Schwob, posed in exactly the same position as Cahun in the corresponding 1919 photograph (figure 13). Through the profile shot, Cahun seems to consciously expose the striking likeness between herself and her father in this set of images. Because the photo of Cahun predates the photo of her father, Cahun challenges the notion of inheritance as she reverses a traditional patrilinear reading, making it appear as though her father resembles *her* rather than the other way around. In these images Cahun removes her father as predecessor, supplanting him visually, in much the same way that she refuses to inherit his name—Schwob.[99]

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[98] Butler 65-6.

[99] This set of images has alternately been read as Cahun playing with representations of Jewishness as otherness (see Chadwick, "Claude Cahun" 149-54) and as a critique of the conventions of

When Cahun and Moore left Paris for the Island of Jersey in 1937 they re-adopted the names "Lucy Schwob" and "Suzanne Malherbe," respectively. At this point their given names took on the function of a pseudonym, or more accurately a *nom de guerre* that was meant to disguise their subversive resistance activities carried out in protest against the Nazi Occupation.[100] In reverting to their given names, Lucy and Suzanne, they were known by all as the "Schwob sisters," a cover for their true relationship which allowed them to live an eccentric yet quiet and secluded existence. It was between the years of 1940 and 1944 that they adopted yet another *singular* name. This persona was a fictitious anti-Nazi German officer whom Cahun and Moore called *der Soldat ohne Namen*, "The Soldier with No Name," and it became their instrument to attempt to inspire mutiny among the German troops by distributing anti-Nazi propaganda leaflets and pamphlets. In 1945, after the liberation of the Island, Moore was interviewed for a local newspaper and described their motivations behind this campaign: "We always listened to the BBC and any other news we could get which was not tainted by...propaganda, and it made us perfectly sick to hear the news put out by Radio Paris, so we decided to run a news service of our own for the benefit of the German troops."[101] Their actions made it seem as if there was a large resistance campaign taking place within the ranks of the German troops, and did not reveal that this was the work of two middle-aged "sisters."

They came up with a dangerous albeit ingenious way to distribute their messages to the German soldiers, placing notes inside of cigarette packs and writing slogans such

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Victorian portraiture in which the profile shot was ultimately reserved for distinguished males (see Bailey and Thynne 136-37).

[100] Doy 88.

[101] From an interview with Moore in the *Jersey Evening Post*, 30 June 1945, p.4. Quoted in Claire Follain, "Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe – *Résistantes*" *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie (London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006) 83.

as "Down With Hitler" on coins with nail polish which they would then leave in the arcades for the soldiers to find, and they did this all the while under the guise—and signature—of "The Soldier with No Name."[102] Because their house was located directly next to the cemetery in which the fallen German soldiers were buried, Cahun and Moore were in a unique position; during the funeral ceremonies they deposited notes in the German staff cars which were parked outside of their home.[103] The production of these notes was a collaborative effort that utilized both Cahun and Moore's individual skills. Because Moore was fluent in German she was able to translate the news that they heard on the BBC from English to German at which point Cahun would transfer into various literary formats such as verse or conversation; Moore would often illustrate these tracts graphically as well.[104]

It was in this way that Cahun and Moore put into practice the ideas which Cahun outlined in *Les Paris sont ouverts*, that is, political activism through indirect action. By depositing their various notes and messages they believed that they could in effect incite a rebellion amongst the *real* German soldiers. Cahun and Moore would urge the recipients of their notes to continue to circulate them with the words *Bitte verbreiten*, a way of asking the soldiers to please pass the message along.[105] This "indirect" method was apparently effective; upon their arrest in 1944 Cahun and Moore were informed that 350—approximately only one-seventh of the total amount—of their notes had been confiscated from all over the Island, whereas they had only distributed them at the capital, St. Helier. This meant that the soldiers who were finding their notes were

[102] Doy 115.
[103] Follain 85.
[104] Follain 84.
[105] Follain 85.

actually passing them on.[106] During their imprisonment, Cahun and Moore befriended some of the German soldiers who had been imprisoned for desertion or mutiny, many of whom claimed "The Soldier with No Name" to be the motivating force behind their own actions.[107]

Claire Follain, who has extensively researched Cahun and Moore's lives and resistance activities during the Occupation, observes that through "The Soldier with No Name," Cahun and Moore "transformed themselves from middle aged women into a resistant young soldier—their newly embodied third identity crossing boundaries of gender, nationality and class."[108] Cahun wrote later in life about this time: "Normally I lived my Cahun identity but I went as Lucy Schwob, therefore unrecognizable."[109] A passport photo dating from around 1936, taken just before Cahun and Moore made the move from Paris to Jersey, illustrates the way in which Claude Cahun *became* Lucy Schwob (figure 14). The appearance of Lucy Schwob departed drastically from the often unconventional appearance of Claude Cahun, who was known to shave her head or dye her cropped hair unnatural colors.[110] In this photo Lucy Schwob appears very ordinary, conventional, and proper. Although this photo was not taken by either Moore or Cahun, Gen Doy, in her recent book, *Claude Cahun: a Sensual Politics of Photography*, argues that this is nevertheless a highly constructed image; Cahun was in essence "play[ing] the part of herself" in order to fly under the radar.[111] This outwardly unassuming photograph is then just as much of a masquerade as the earlier self-portrait images. The double

[106] Follain 85.
[107] Follain 92.
[108] Bailey and Thynne 140.
[109] Claude Cahun, "Le Muet dans la Mèlée." Quoted in Bailey and Thynne 141.
[110] Cole 347.
[111] Doy 83.

disguise or double displacement of identity through first, the names Lucy and Suzanne, and second, the singular "Soldier with No Name" functioned as a means to complicate the discovery of Cahun and Moore's activities.

It has been recognized that the later work of Cahun, particularly the images produced after the two were living on the Island of Jersey, are in some ways more conventional than the earlier work. Katy Kline writes of this period that "the most radical part of her work was over."[112] While the images themselves may have become less aesthetically radical in terms of challenging representations of gender, on another level the most radical part of Cahun and Moore's work was just beginning, this next phase being one that truly melded art and life through political activism. After four years of resistance activities against the Nazi Occupation, Cahun and Moore were finally caught in 1944 and sent to prison with a death sentence on their heads.[113] They anticipated that they would probably be arrested at some point, which is why they never ventured out to distribute their notes without carrying a lethal dose of sleeping pills with them. They had assumed the arrest would happen while they were in the act, so they were unprepared when the officers came to search their house on July 25, 1944.[114] Though they had vowed to each other that in the case of arrest they would commit suicide, fearing deportation to concentration camps, their (multiple) attempts did not quite pan out, so instead they decided to continue to carry on their resistance activities from inside the prison walls.[115] The guise of Lucy and Suzanne was a successful strategy and had apparently worked for four years, even during their imprisonment they never gave away

[112] Kline 76.
[113] Follain 83.
[114] Follain 86.
[115] Follain 88.

the secret of their true relationship and continued to be known as sisters. Their death sentences were ultimately revoked, but for the nine months of their imprisonment, execution was a constant threat.[116] The Liberation came to the Island in May of 1945 upon which time Cahun and Moore were released, but both the imprisonment and her suicide attempts left Cahun's already fragile health in even worse condition, ultimately leading to her premature death in 1954.[117]

The concept of an unstable identity is in fact the lynchpin that ultimately holds together not only all of Cahun's creative and political engagements, but her very existence as well. It is perhaps her lifelong investment in this very notion that actually plunged her into obscurity in the first place. Because this was not merely a theoretical position for Cahun, but a lived condition, she had in fact decentered her own identity to such an extent that, for contemporary viewers, it became nearly unrecoverable. One of the very real reasons that Cahun was missing for decades was because she made locating her identity problematic and virtually impossible. With the changing of pseudonyms, from Lucy Schwob to Daniel Douglas to Claude Courlis to Claude Cahun and finally back to Lucy Schwob, it became nearly impossible to credit her work to any one person, and so she was in a very real sense lost. Given the fact that Cahun was opposed to the elite status assigned to the role of the artist, through her Marxist affiliations, one wonders if the confusion and misunderstandings caused by these name changes alone might have been welcomed or even anticipated by her. The unfolding of the rediscovery of Cahun—both her work and biography—poignantly illustrates one of the most crucial aspects of her entire production: the mutable, mobile self.

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[116] Follain 89.
[117] Follain 94.

Authorship becomes an increasingly complex issue in the case of Cahun when we take the role of Moore into account. Collaboration is a difficult subject to deal with because it challenges accepted notions of authorship and thus the construction of power as well. Doy makes the argument that on a certain level it does not matter who the operator of the camera is because it is in fact always Cahun who is constructing the image through the action and posing of her own face and body.[118] In this sense, Doy maintains that as long as Cahun is aware of the camera then she is in control of the outcome of the image, claiming that "Cahun is always ready for the camera and conscious of it when it arrives; ready for the look."[119] The "look" that Doy identifies in the portraits of Cahun is immediately discernible; it is that unflinching, static gaze that Cahun directs unwaveringly into the camera lens. However this assertion is not entirely unproblematic and cannot be applied universally to all of Cahun's images. Cahun's "look" has more commonly been understood as a confrontational expression, most recently acknowledged as conspiratorial in nature—a private exchange between her and Moore, a gesture that acknowledges Moore as co-author. In contrast, we do not understand the images of Moore as having been constructed in this way; Moore is never considered to be the author of the photographs in which she appears. For instance, in the set of mirror portraits (figures 1 and 2), the image of Moore is always considered to be a portrait of Marcel Moore by Claude Cahun, not a self-portrait *by* Moore.

Doy uses the example of Cahun's passport photo (figure 14), made by an anonymous, unnamed photographer, to argue that Cahun is the master of her own image. In this isolated instance authorship is easily accounted for, but to carry this approach over

[118] Doy articulates this claim on the basis that images of Cahun exist on a kind of continuum in which Cahun is always constructing her own image to a greater or lesser degree (Doy 19, 81-85).

[119] Doy 19.

into an all-encompassing level (and I do not think that this is necessarily what Doy suggests we should do) could become problematic. It would be to commit a disservice to the images as well as their production to assume that all of the images are this unequivocally autonomous. If we begin to assume that every single photograph of Cahun is constructed solely by her, regardless of whoever might be behind the camera, this seems to be yet another way of understanding Claude Cahun as a singular artist. Although we will probably never know which particular images were physically taken by Moore, it should be emphasized that it is her role as viewer—the "eye" that sees, to reference Cahun's drawing—which is indispensable to the construction of the images. In many cases, even if it is thought that Cahun is posing/constructing herself for the camera, the identity of the operator of the camera does matter to a certain extent, specifically when it is suspected to be Moore. Moore is also the one intended person aside from Cahun herself who will see and handle these images, so in a sense it is always her eyes that Cahun is posing for. Because Moore was an equal partner and collaborator with whom Cahun deeply identified, her *presence* matters. It is necessary to factor Moore in as a co-author for her role as an active, if unseen, audience for Cahun.

At this point it is useful to turn to the ideas about authorship put forth by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, who both argue that there should be a redefinition of the function of the author. When Barthes declares the "death of the author" he is in fact declaring the death of a system which is organized around the author as an ideological figure of authority. This declaration was precipitated by the tendency to use the author to characterize the way in which a work will be understood. For example, any textual analysis will concentrate on examining the work only inasmuch as it refers back to the

author. Foucault calls this the "author-function" meaning that the author offers the conditions under which the work would be rendered true. [120] Barthes argues that "[t]o give the text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."[121] The author functions as a box which is placed around the work to contain and legitimize the meaning of the work solely in terms of the author as a person. Foucault echoes this position, explaining that the author's "name seems always to present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being."[122] One of the ways in which the limitations associated with the author-function are imposed upon Cahun and Moore is through the category of Self-Portraiture which has been forced upon their work. By referring to an image as a self-portrait, it is automatically assumed that the image was made by only one person, and moreover that this singular self is the subject of the portrait. This conception of authorship is highly problematic because these images were made by two authors and present not a singular self, but rather a series of shifting identities.

Barthes uses a filial metaphor to describe the way in which the work comes to signify the author—the relationship of a father to his child—to explain this phenomenon: "the author is thought to nourish his book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it…as a father to his child."[123] This metaphor clearly establishes both the paternal and patriarchal character of authorship. In this view, the author, who is assumed to be male, takes on the role of an ideological figure in the sense that *he* provides a kind of regulating principle of explanation and a structure for interpretation of

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[120] Foucault 148.

[121] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1979) 174.

[122] Foucault 157.

[123] Barthes, "Death" 145.

the work. Barthes' metaphor can be applied in a very *literal* way to Cahun's set of portraits of herself and her father (figures 12 and 13); in Cahun's construction she precedes her father, disrupting the linearity of paternity that ordinarily should proceed from father to daughter. This disruption in paternal order also happens in Cahun's removal of the paternal name, Schwob. Cahun and Moore, in their collaborative authorship of the self-portrait images, similarly disrupt the linearity of the author-function by refusing to construct the images in such a way that would ultimately lead back to a stable self, or a single author.

Up until this point I have been arguing that Cahun and Moore's model of authorship is in agreement with Barthes and Foucault's re-conceptualization of the role of the author. However, it becomes more complicated when we consider the other half of Barthes's formulation; along with the redefinition of the author, Barthes also establishes a need to distinguish the idea of a work from that of a text. A text is not necessarily bound by medium; it can take virtually any form, including, but not limited to literary, visual, or theatrical material. In his essay "From Work To Text," Barthes states that the crucial difference between the two is that "the Text is approached and experienced in relation to the sign, the work closes on a signified."[124] The final signified of the work is ultimately understood to *be* the author. Work is not just one piece, but is the total body of work made up of many separate texts, generally linked together because they have the same author. Work is therefore the ultimate product of the author with the author as its final signified, while the text can exist on its own, without closure and ultimately without an author. The text is not a concrete object but rather a continuous field of discourse

[124] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1979) 75.

without a beginning or an end. Because I am arguing that we understand Cahun and Moore's work as a totality, it would seem that I am advocating an interpretation based on "work," and in some ways, I am. However, I support this position not to narrow the interpretations of their work, but to counteract the implications of "text" based readings which, as will be seen, can be equally limiting.

With the displacement of the author from the center of the text, the reader is allowed a more privileged position. It is through the text that reading and writing become linked together in a signifying process, which like the text, Barthes claims "…practices the infinite deferral of the signified."[125] By this, Barthes is referring to the reader of the text who is now responsible for the proliferation of meaning, whereas before the author had functioned as a prevention of such a proliferation. The reader achieves this through the interpretation of the text. "Every text," Barthes argues, "being in itself the intertext of another text," which allows the reading of text to become more like playing.[126] It is not only the reader who is now allowed to play, the text itself is *already* in play and, as Barthes maintains "the reader himself [or herself] plays twice over: playing the text as one would play a game."[127] This idea of playing requires the reader to not only interpret, but also to re-write the text, to become in a sense a co-author, a collaborator. The work of the author becomes no more important than the work of the reader; they are essentially doing the same thing. The origin of the work can never be situated nor can the work ever close because this is an ever-continual process; it is the infinite deferral of the signified. In essence the text asks for an active role in the reader and, in so doing, the distance that the author-function had created between reading and writing is dissolved.

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[125] Barthes, "From" 78.
[126] Barthes, "From" 79.
[127] Barthes, "From" 79.

This concept is highly relevant to the specific case of Cahun and Moore who are simultaneously both "reader" and "writer" not only in a *theoretical* sense but in reality, as collaborators. Moore is implicated in the entire process of Cahun's image-making. Even when Cahun is posing herself in front of the camera, she is not only in front of the objective camera lens, but also in front of the subjective eyes of Moore. Along with Cahun herself, Moore was the primary "reader" of these "texts." She is a participant who plays an active role in the writing, reading and often re-writing of the image as text. Cahun and Moore's collaboration should not be seen only as two people working simultaneously on the same project, but as partners engaged in a symbiotic working relationship in which their professional creative activities cannot truly be separated from their shared personal life. This would seem to be at odds with Barthes who wants to eliminate or discard biography and other similar hypostases in order to enable the proliferation of meaning, but in fact it is this model of authorship enacted by Cahun and Moore that seems to be closer to what Barthes advocates. In the self-portrait images as well as in the anti-autobiography, *Aveux non avenus*, the self or the author—the "authentic" or original identity of Cahun as the subject—is similarly deferred.

Foucault insists that the space left empty after the disappearance, or *death* of the author, can be filled with something else; he writes "we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers."[128] Foucault recognizes that the displacement of the author is not enough and that the author-function will merely be replaced by another system of constraint. He explains that:

[128] Foucault 145.

> as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner the fiction and its polysemic texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint—one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or perhaps, experienced.[129]

Foucault calls this new system of constraint the "subject-function."[130] When Barthes emphasized the need for a mutation from a work to a text this carried with it the mutation of the author-function to the subject-function, suggesting that the subject-function is ultimately linked to the reader. Just as the author-function is a mode of legitimation that places the power over the text into the hands of the author, the subject-function is similarly a mode of legitimation, which also implies an exchange of power. When Foucault raises the possible questions that may be associated with the subject-function, the implication of power can be sensed: "What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate and who can appropriate it for himself?"[131] Stating that the discourse *can* be appropriated suggests that one, or a system as Foucault claims, can assume possession of it and may manipulate it for his or her own use; one can have power over the discourse in precisely the same way that the author assumed power over the discourse in the author-function.

Cahun and Moore as co-authors and collaborators illustrate simultaneously both the success and demise of Barthes' notion of the "death of the author." On the one hand, by utilizing a collaborative mode of authorship, Cahun and Moore announce Barthes's death of the author—the system in which the author functions as a force of constraint. But they also enable us to see the other side of the author-function, that is, its mutation

[129] Foucault 160.
[130] Foucault 160.
[131] Foucault 160.

into the subject-function in which the reader is then capable of imposing a similar mode of constraint or authority. We can see how the subject-function operates specifically in the case of Cahun when we examine the response to the rediscovery of her work in the late 1980s. In retrospect, we can see the ways in which the readers of the newly rediscovered corpus of Cahun's images answered Foucault's questions associated with the subject-function: "How can it circulate and who can appropriate it for himself?"[132] For example, it is the subject-function that enabled an image such as Cahun's mirror portrait (figure 1) to be equated with a similar photograph, *Untitled Film Still # 2* (figure 15) by Cindy Sherman, which was made fifty years later and was part of a vastly different project.[133] The discourse surrounding Cahun's work was indeed circulated and appropriated according to the needs of the postmodern world, which was eager to make Cahun's images fit conveniently into a discourse of postmodern feminist art. Presently, Cahun's work seems to exist in two distinct contexts specifically because of the appropriation of the discourse that occurred in the late 1980s.

It was the reading of Cahun's work as "text" that allowed postmodern scholars to reassign the photographs of Cahun to the tradition of Self-Portraiture while disassociating the images from the context of their collaborative production. This "text" based reading had the effect of limiting, perhaps inadvertently, the interpretations that could be applied to the images. If it seems I suggest a more "work" oriented reading it is not because I disagree with Barthes and Foucault—I agree that using the author as a means of legitimation can have a detrimental effect on the interpretation of their work—but rather that their ideas cannot necessarily be applied universally. Cahun and Moore's

[132] Foucault 160.
[133] Kline 69-70.

circumstances are exceptional because they, like Barthes and Foucault, recognized the causal relationship that is often drawn between an author and their work, and sought to disrupt it themselves. Therefore, we do not need to disable the author-function or assert the death of the author in Cahun and Moore's work because it was the complication of this very notion that was central to their practice. Cahun and Moore challenged they way in which the meaning of work is formed around the author through the creation of a series of unstable identities evoked by their various pseudonyms as well as their collaborative authorship. In the next chapter, I will examine the presence of this concept of an unstable identity in Cahun's literary and theatrical work which coincided with and influenced the production of the self-portrait images.

CHAPTER 3:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE "SELF-PORTRAITS" AND THE THEATRICAL AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES OF CLAUDE CAHUN AND MARCEL MOORE

The role that performance played in Cahun and Moore's body of work is an unmistakably recurring theme, although it recurs in different forms. Whether their mise-en-scene was happening on an actual stage or through the staging of a photograph, there is always an element of theatricality at play in their constructions and deconstructions of identity. The performances Cahun enacts, in both her theatrical and collaborative photographic work, present an innovative means of confronting various aspects of identity, including but not limited to the often-discussed realms of gender and sexuality. Cahun's recognition of the subversive potential of performance came early in her career, and was specifically developed through her involvement with Moore. Throughout the 1910s, shortly after they met, Cahun and Moore began to rehearse and hold private performances in what they called their "bedroom carnival" which they then captured and recorded through photography.[134] Some of Cahun and Moore's earliest extant images, dating from 1914, appear to have been created in domestic settings such as the bedroom, which implicates their relationship as lovers as a major factor in their artistic partnership.

The medium of photography was particularly conducive to this kind of practice of performative self-documentation. Blessing writes: "Experimentation and theatrical performance for the camera were fostered by the ease of photographic production."[135] The relatively low cost of photographic portraiture enabled women in particular to create

[134] Latimer, "Acting Out" 58.

[135] Jennifer Blessing, "Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography" *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography*, ed. Jennifer Blessing (New York: Guggenheim Museum Press, 1997) 55.

images of themselves outside of the tradition of painted portraiture.[136] Alice Austen, an American photographer working in the Victorian period, utilized a method of photographing herself akin to Cahun and Moore's idea of the "bedroom carnival" in that the photographic performances she enacted were of a private and at times playful nature.[137] Austen's photograph entitled *Julia Martin, Julia Bredt and Self Dressed Up as Men, 4:40 pm, Thursday, October 15th, 1891* is an example of the way in which photography offered women an opportunity to escape the confining roles, and clothing, of conventional femininity (figure 16). The women in this photograph are not merely cross-dressed, they are performing, and perhaps parodying, the role of men through the use exaggerated gestures, posturing, and false moustaches; Austen, the figure on the left, even holds a cigarette as a sign of masculine behavior. This particular photograph is perhaps more light heartened than most of Cahun and Moore's images, but it nevertheless illustrates women's use of photography to perform alternate identities.

In one such image by Cahun and Moore dating from 1915, Cahun is photographed as part of a subtly yet elaborately staged scene which is structured around Cahun with the book *L'image de la femme* (figure 17). *L'image de la femme* is an 1889 double volume work by Armand Dayot which features exposés on renowned women throughout history accompanied by engraved illustrations. Cahun, appearing quite adolescent despite the fact that she would have been twenty-one years old in this photo, sits at a desk like a student while pouring over these massive volumes, apparently studying up on the women who have come before her, who have been represented by Dayot in this book as stereotypical clichés. The two key elements that describe this scene as being staged are

[136] Blessing, "Rrose" 54.
[137] Blessing, "Rrose" 54-55.

the deliberately positioned spine of the second volume and the presence of the box camera which appears on the desk to the left of Cahun. Both volumes are stacked one on top of the other; the one Cahun is immersed in is open, resting on top of the second closed volume whose spine faces outward, directly at the camera lens so that the title is readable by the viewer. On the significance of the presence of the camera, Latimer writes: "At Cahun's elbow, a box camera—emblem of representational agency (and perhaps a figure for the eye of Moore within this photograph)—counteracts the mind-numbing effect of the feminine stereotypes that permeated the visual and literary culture of their era."[138] The function of the camera is then doubled, used as both a stand-in for Moore, but also as a means to take *L'image de la femme* out of the realm of male control towards the creation of a new image of woman.

This particular representation of the female subject is one which not only goes beyond the idealized image of femininity, but rather attacks it through an ironically constructed image of Cahun as woman. In this scene, Cahun and Moore manage to turn the book, and its male-endorsed image of woman, against itself. With this reversal, they also challenge the male gaze by returning it with their own (female) gaze, while simultaneously creating their own representation of women's subjectivity. The inclusion of the camera establishes an empowered image of woman as a person who can be represented while simultaneously retaining her own agency. Through her possession of the camera in this photograph, Cahun has the ability to represent rather than merely be represented; this dual capability made possible by the equality which is the foundation of both Cahun and Moore's collaborative authorship as well as their romantic partnership. Furthermore, if this image is understood as a product of Cahun and Moore's "bedroom

[138] Latimer, "Acting Out" 58.

carnival"—with its references to their *lesbian* bedroom—then this image may also read as representing the desire to look at images of women.

In the *L'image de la femme* photograph, Cahun and Moore essentially write a new script for themselves as young women, one which allows them to question, specifically through the medium of photography, the authority with which women have been portrayed in the minds of men throughout history. This image also uniquely prefigures Cahun's 1925 text, "Héroïnes" in which she will systematically deconstruct and rewrite the narratives of famous women taken from diverse biblical, classical, and fictional historical sources.[139] Katharine Conley, in her essay on Cahun's "Héroïnes," identifies the women that Cahun portrays as "counter-archival" because they posit "counter-examples to stereotypical myths of feminine behavior" and "trouble culturally established norms."[140] For example, in her story "Eve, the Too Credulous," Cahun transplants Eve from Biblical Eden to modern-day postwar France. She is portrayed as a housewife, who, bombarded with a series of advertisements, chooses to spend the "pocket money" that Adam gave her on the affordable apple whose ad promises: "You must be completely satisfied, or your money will be cheerfully returned to you."[141] Cahun creates "counter-archival" narratives for each of her heroines through a series of fifteen monologues. In each story, the characters are depicted in rebellion against the very roles that mythologized them.[142] The message at the core of "Héroïnes" is then highly analogous to the meaning behind the *L'image de la femme* photo, in their similar endeavor to break the

[139] The heroines that Cahun writes about are diverse, ranging from the Biblical characters of Judith and Delilah, to Homer's Penelope and Helen, to the fairytale characters Cinderella and Beauty (of "Beauty and the Beast").

[140] Katharine Conley, "Claude Cahun's Counter-Archival Héroïnes" *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie (London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust) 24.

[141] Cahun, "Héroïnes" 44.

[142] Conley 31.

chain of misogyny and challenge the stereotypical roles that have been laid out for women, specifically by men.

As Cahun and Moore developed their practice throughout the following decade, their involvement with the theater was taken out of the "bedroom" and escalated to a more professional and public level. From 1923 to 1929, Cahun and Moore were deeply involved with the *Théâtre Esotérique*;[143] Cahun was an actor while Moore was both an illustrator and costume designer.[144] Nearing the close of this decade both Cahun and Moore joined *Le Plateau*, a little-known theater company directed by the writer Pierre Albert-Birot, which lasted only one season. Albert-Birot recruited Cahun and Moore among a handful of others who had been formerly involved in the "theatrical margins" of Paris.[145] The mask was an integral part of Albert-Birot's vision, for he was greatly indebted to both Chinese and Japanese theater; Latimer relates the way in which Albert-Birot "instructed his actors to paint their faces into characterless masks and trained them to strip their lines to the essence."[146] The notion of artifice—anti-naturalism—was at the heart of experimental, avant-garde theater of this time period. Cahun's self-portrait images from this time were uniquely informed by the anti-naturalistic usage of masks that were characteristic of theater and puppetry.[147] These were markers of artificially interchangeable identities, or identities which were not otherwise attached to the subjectivity of the actor. As a result, many of the images that are commonly referred to as aggressively confrontational self-portraits are actually snapshots (most likely taken by

[143] von Oehsen 14
[144] Latimer, "Acting Out" 60.
[145] Latimer, "Acting Out" 64.
[146] Latimer, "Acting Out" 64-65.
[147] Miranda Welby-Everard, "Imaging the Actor: the Theatre of Claude Cahun" *Oxford Art Journal* 29.1 (2006) 3.

Moore) from Cahun's theatrical performances, under the influence of Albert-Birot's dramatic principles. In one 1928 photograph, Cahun is dressed in a cloak with various masks attached to it, her face and head fully covered by a mask and wig (figure 18). Her identity is completely obscured; there is absolutely nothing in the photograph itself that refers back to Cahun as being the person underneath the costume. Although this photograph was not taken in conjunction with any particular "role" that Cahun played during her involvement with the theater, it nevertheless illustrates the alignment of her and Moore's photographic work with theatrical principles, such as artificiality and masking.

Cahun portrayed a total of three characters during the season that she spent with Albert-Birot at *Le Plateau*. In 1929, Cahun played the roles of "Le Monsieur" (the Man) in *Banlieue* (*Suburbs*), "Le Diable" (the Devil) in *Le Mystère d'Adam* (*The Mystery of Adam*) and, "Elle" in *Barbe Bleue* (*Blue Beard*).[148] Elle was a classic *femme-enfant* which is one of the major male Surrealist ideals of femininity as passive, mysterious, and erotic.[149] However, Cahun did not portray Elle as passive, she was a resistant "child-bride" with a deep repulsion for her husband, Blue Beard; she was considered "frigid," warding off any sexual advances made by her husband.[150] In one of the few essays written specifically about Cahun's activity as an actor, Miranda Welby-Everard writes: "it is ironic that with the recent focus upon Cahun's lesbianism the implications of Mrs. Barbe Bleue have been overlooked."[151] Welby-Everard argues that Cahun had apparently held a special affinity for this character, feeling somehow connected to Elle in her

[148] Welby-Everard 4.
[149] Solomon-Godeau 111.
[150] Welby-Everard 16.
[151] Welby-Everard 16.

resistance to a male threat,[152] or perhaps more accurately, patriarchal institutions. One of the reasons Welby-Everard aligns Cahun with Elle is due to the sheer quantity of extant "Elle" images, showing Cahun as Elle in various poses (figure 19).[153] Her dedication to Elle did not go unnoticed; Albert-Birot unabashedly praised her performance and commitment when he wrote that:

> [T]he role enveloped her, and the direction I devised for her was in perfect harmony with both her physical and moral nature. For two months, leaving behind all her personal activities, she devoted her whole intellect and all her energy to this part…giving a performance accurate in the minutest of detail and in perfect sympathy with my play.[154]

There are moments such as this when it seems as though we are in some way lifting a mask off of Cahun. However, Albert-Birot's statement should not be misconstrued as an indication that there was a quality belonging to the character of Elle which was also an inherent characteristic of Cahun's "true" identity. Her portrayal of Elle was specifically disconnected from any kind of natural or emotional performance; it was Cahun's dehumanization of Elle that Albert-Birot praised. While it is interesting to speak of Cahun's investment in Elle as indicative of her own sexuality, this image cannot solely be understood as an attempt on the part of Cahun to represent herself, under the guise of Elle, as a lesbian. Whenever this type of reading is applied to Cahun's images there always a rebuttal; in this case it is located within the image of Cahun as Elle. In this photograph of Cahun costumed as Elle in a long, corseted dress, she appears in a rigid, somewhat awkward stance, her white-painted face and body frozen; she stares unflinching and emotionless into the camera lens. She is seen in this image to evoke the

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[152] Welby-Everard 17.
[153] Welby-Everard 17.
[154] Pierre Albert-Birot, "Duex Mots" *Le Plateau programme-revue 2*, 18. Quoted in Welby-Everard 16.

idea of the human puppet—the non-human, deathlike, anti-naturalistic ideal of the avant-garde actor, who in the words of Albert-Birot, must never forget "that [s]he is on the stage."[155] Her portrayal of Elle is yet another instance in which Cahun denies any kind of performance as natural or innate. Instead, her attachment to the character of Elle seems to be further evidence of Cahun's consciousness of a pluralistic identity. For Cahun, an identification with a specific character does not necessarily transfer into an assumption of that identity. Though it is tempting to be able to catch a glimpse of the "real" Cahun in Elle, she was in essence playing a role that was no more or less representative of an authentic identity than the roles of the Man or the Devil. Again, there is no singular, stable "Claude" to be found.

In order to assess the way Cahun might have viewed her creative activities, it will be useful to turn to an article on her that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1929, just before the publication of *Aveux non avenus*, entitled "Who's Who Abroad: Lucie Schwob:"

> Radical daughters of conservative families always present an interesting study. One such is Lucie Schwob…. She has broken away from practically every precept of a good French bourgeois family, but the results have been worthwhile…. Lucie Schwob showed her first independence of thought in a volume of poems published at sixteen years of age, called *Vues et Visions*…. We find the *Mercure de France* publishing a series of short sketches, cynical and paradoxical, called *Héroïnes*, in which the motives of great women of history…are pitilessly exposed…. This year will see the publication of a volume of prose poems on which Mlle. Schwob has been long at work, called *Aveux non Avenus* or in English, *Denials*. The volume will probably be illustrated with some extraordinary photographic studies of the author by the artist Moore, her half-sister, who has illustrated her earlier works. A very serious literary work of another type is the translation of Havelock Ellis' *The Task of Social Hygiene*, one volume of which has already been published by the *Mercure de France* and the second of which will shortly appear….

[155] Pierre Albert-Birot, "L'art dramatique" *Le Plateau programme-revue 1*, 7. Quoted in Welby-Everard 16.

> Because practically every branch of art interests her, last year Mlle. Schwob played three roles with a small advanced group of Parisian players. In addition she writes music, and does some clever drawing which shows individuality, though she is untaught.[156]

Given Cahun's present superstardom in the contemporary art world, this article may appear peculiar in some ways—specifically in regard to Cahun's aptitude for "clever drawing"—but it can be an incredibly useful tool by which to gauge Cahun's own concept of the work she was doing. Because it was most likely Cahun who would have been supplying the information for this article, it becomes very telling. According to this article, Cahun seemed to have valued her role as a writer and her role as an actor and her (mysteriously unexamined) role as a composer *over* her role as an artist. It seems quite perplexing that on Cahun's list of interests, visual art is referenced last, as if it might not even be worth mentioning. These peculiarities may even be seen as a kind of ruse, part of Cahun's project of refusing to reveal any singular identity. Regardless of the truth or falsity of the information contained in it, this article nevertheless illuminates the way in which Cahun's theatrical and literary activity developed alongside her and Moore's photographic work—with a very specific and overt emphasis on their interdisciplinary approach.

To better situate Cahun's writing amid her other creative activities I will turn to her major literary work, *Aveux non avenus*. The text of Cahun's *Aveux non avenus* was largely written between the years of 1919 and 1925, with a final section completed or at least added in 1928 before its publication in 1930.[157] This ten-year period coincided with all of her theatrical work as well as the production of a vast amount of self-portrait

[156] Golda M. Goldman, "Who's Who Abroad: Lucie Schwob" *Chicago Tribune* 28 Dec. 1929, European ed.: 4. Reproduced in Downie 226.

[157] Mundy xi.

images, many of which are referenced in the accompanying eleven photomontages that preface each chapter of the book. The photomontages were made by Moore during the final stages of the completion of the text, between the years of 1929-30.[158] It is generally understood to be a fictitious, quasi-autobiographical work, a form of anti-autobiography.[159] *Aveux non avenus* is an incredibly daring and innovative literary venture, but is also intentionally difficult and challenging to read. Jennifer Shaw, in her essay on the collaborative *Aveux non avenus* photomontages, explains that "the revelations in the text…are interspersed with self-canceling dialogues, aphorisms, and other language games that warn the reader to be wary of placing too much stock in the 'I' of the text as a source of truth."[160] The one certainty that is immediately apparent is that it is not a book belonging to any specific genre. *Aveux non avenus* resists categorization because it is, at best, an amalgam or montage of various textual forms including, but not limited to: prose, poetry, philosophical musings, fictitious writings, fables, aphorisms, remembered dreams, and pieces of letters.

The title, *Aveux non avenus* embodies a conscious linguistic awkwardness in French which in turn makes for an even more difficult English translation.[161] When *aveux*, meaning "avowals" is combined with *non avenus* which means "void" or "not happened" the effect is a rather confusing one, intentionally signifying the element of contradiction which is in turn dispersed throughout the text itself. The title has been variously translated as "Unavowed Confessions," "Cancelled Confessions," "Denials" and "Disavowals." The translation *Unavowed Confessions* appeared in a relatively early

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[158] Jennifer Shaw, "Narcissus and the Magic Mirror" *Don't Kiss Me: the Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, ed. Louise Downie (London: Aperture/Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006) 33.

[159] Latimer, "Entre Nous" 199.

[160] Shaw, "Singular Plural" 156.

[161] Susan de Muth, translator's note, *Disavowals*, by Claude Cahun (London: Tate, 2007) xix.

1992 article in *Artforum* following the rediscovery of Cahun's work.[162] *Denials* is a translation that most likely comes directly from Cahun.[163] Interestingly, the title of the 2007 English translation is a combination of two separate titles: *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions*, as if unable, by the very nature of the words chosen by Cahun, to reach a suitable definition.[164] For Latimer, *non* in the title is the word that unhinges the text from the subjectivity of the author: "that 'no' at the intersection of the book's title turns the tables on a confessional tradition whose viability rests on the word of the author. 'No' is not just an act of refusal but an affirmation of something else, the 'not that,' the unnamed, the effort to undo and therefore do differently."[165] It is this kind of "undoing" that is integral to Cahun's anti-autobiography; it is a dismantling of the genre "autobiography" itself.

Although it is not labeled as such, the first two pages of *Aveux non avenus* which appear under the heading "The invisible adventure" serve as what may be thought of as an a kind of introduction to the book; appearing after the frontispiece but before the beginning of Chapter 1. Cahun writes: "To those who know nothing of the steps, obstacles and enormous chasms I've leapt over—and I've revealed none of it—this all must seem the most ludicrous merry-go-round. Should I then burden myself with all the paraphernalia of facts, stones, cords deliberately cut, precipices…it doesn't interest me at all."[166] In the very first pages, Cahun puts into motion a problematization of truth and the notion of self-portrayal, undoing the presumed relationship that autobiography imposes

[162] Lichtenstein 64.

[163] "Denials" is the translation that appears in Goldman's article in the *Chicago Tribune*; it seems most likely that Cahun herself supplied this translation when being interviewed for this article.

[164] The full title is *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions*.

[165] Latimer, "Entre Nous" 211.

[166] Cahun, *Disavowals* 1.

between the text and the subjectivity of the author. Cahun lets it be known to the reader upfront that her life's story, the events which have led up to this point, will not be revealed in what follows. She has no desire to make it easier on the reader, or herself for that matter, by providing such information or following a conventional autobiographical format. The facts, quite simply, do not interest her.

In *Aveux non avenus* Cahun writes: "Individualism? Narcissism? Certainly. My best characteristic, the one and only intentional fidelity I am capable of. You don't care? I'm lying anyway: I scatter myself too widely for that."[167] This statement embodies the notion of contradiction—the canceling of her confessions—that is carried out throughout the entire book. She claims to be something only to deny it; she insists that she is narcissistic, but then immediately tells us that that was a lie. Narcissism is a recurring motif throughout *Aveux non avenus*, but the theme of Narcissus is approached in a deconstructive way. Shaw makes clear the fact that in Cahun and Moore's interrogation of narcissism, "they attempted to explore and ultimately rewrite its meanings, and with them the oppressive notion about artistic creativity, femininity and sexuality associated with the myth of Narcissus and the discourse of narcissism in general."[168] They envisioned what Cahun refers to as a "neo-narcissism" in which "the silvering of mirrors thickens. No longer absolute, but agreeably relative…with the sound of broken glass the reflection shatters…'Mirror,' 'fix,' these words have no place here."[169] This "neo-narcissism" marks the impossibility of absolute self-knowledge. Latimer links this aspect

[167] Cahun, *Disavowals* 9.
[168] Shaw, "Narcissus" 35.
[169] Cahun, *Disavowals* 32-33.

of Cahun and Moore's *Aveux non avenus* to the Surrealist project of "discrediting Enlightenment paradigms of thought, including monolithic constructions of the self."[170]

Where one might expect to find an explanation or key to deciphering the photomontages in the accompanying text of *Aveux non avenus*, the unknowable is only further manifested by the opaqueness of the writing itself. In *M.R.M. (Sex)*, the photomontage that prefaces Chapter 5 (figure 20), Cahun writes in the upper-left-hand corner: "Here the executioner takes on the airs of a victim. But you know what to believe. Claude."[171] If the "you" she addresses is presumed to be the reader, then it would have been known to Cahun that at this point—mid-way through the book—the reader would not know what to believe at all. The multiplication of the layers of meaning becomes highly ambiguous, each layer always seeming to fold back on itself, especially when we begin to recognize the use of repeated images of Cahun both within a single photomontage, but also between multiple photomontages as well.

In comparison to the photomontage work being done by Cahun and Moore's German contemporary, Hannah Höch, the *Aveux non avenus* photomontages are both similar and different. Berlin Dadaist Hannah Höch produced over eighty photomontages during the Weimar years (1918-1933). While Höch's photomontages utilize the same kinds of disjuncture in scale and identity that Cahun and Moore use, this rupture in Höch is specifically related to a kind of nonsynchonism characteristic of allegory.[172] These photomontages become, or are inherently, allegorical because they are required to be read through an interpretation of multiple layers of meaning generated by the process of

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[170] Latimer, "Looking" 134.

[171] Olivia Lahs-Gonzales, "Defining Eye/Defining I: Women Photographers of the 20th Century" *Defining Eye: Women Photographers of the 20th Century* (St. Louis Art Museum, 1997) 107.

[172] Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: the Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 37.

montage itself. In photomontage, images are literally ripped out of their context and displaced into a new one, creating multiple fragmentary layers which then must be read through one another. Höch's photomontages are specifically related to a discussion of the social and political conditions of the Weimar Republic. As Maud Lavin points out in her book, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: the Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, Höch uses images of women as "allegorical signifiers of female liberation and anarcho-communist revolution."[173] It is in this way that allegory implies a shared knowledge between author and audience; this shared knowledge would have been an understanding of the common experience of modernity, including the evolving gender roles specific to life in the Weimar Republic.[174] The images of women used by Höch were taken primarily from print media such as magazines and newspapers. The mass media of Weimar consumer culture brought with it contradictory messages about women as both commodities as well as empowered consumers. Höch treats the image of the New Woman in mass culture with a form of utopianism, which Lavin asserts "requires our sensitivity to a historically specific spectator, the meanings she would perceive, and to utopias, desires, and fears time-bound to Weimar Germany."[175]

The fragmentation in the *Aveux non avenus* photomontages involves the same kind of technical use that Höch employs, but the content is altogether different. For example, in Höch's well-known photomontage, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (1919-20) she incorporates a wide range of materials arranged in elaborate juxtapositions of image and text (figure 21). Where Höch uses pre-contextualized images from the mass media, Moore and Cahun use

[173] Lavin 23.
[174] Lavin 24.
[175] Lavin 46.

images that ultimately come from their own production. The image of Cahun is the raw material from which their photomontages are derived—these images come from a presumably private archive of collaboratively constructed photographs and not, as in the case of Höch, from the public domain of print media. Herein lies the major difference between Cahun and Moore's use of photomontage and the way in which it was used by their contemporaries, specifically by Höch who was both a fellow New Woman and purveyor of photomontage. Where Höch's use of montage depended upon a knowing audience, Moore and Cahun create their photomontages with the assumption and prerequisite of a completely *un*knowing audience. The necessity of an unknowing audience is evident in the fact that the prior, private context for the images used in the photomontages was strictly classified, confidential information to be shared only between the makers. Höch was borrowing and extracting images from a known source and while the layering of meaning may be quite complicated, it always remains at least intelligible, if only through the audience's ability of recognition.

Not only does *Aveux non avenus* refer to the self-portrait images through the photomontages with which they are essentially composed, but the visual elements within the layout of the text itself include various symbols that refer also to the portraits. One photo that specifically relates to these symbols is Cahun and Moore's 1927 *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* where Cahun appears as a weight lifter; her face is made-up with hearts painted on her cheeks and the words "I AM IN TRAINING DON'T KISS ME" spelled out across her chest (figure 22). Elements of the face—eyes, lips, hearts—are repeated throughout the text in graphic form, punctuating the writing (figures 23 and 24). These symbols serve to break up the text, interrupting the ability to read subsequent passages in a

straightforward narrative or linear fashion. These symbols also recall the eye and mouth images that stood for Moore and Cahun respectively in Cahun's early 1909 drawing, *LSM* (figure 11).

The 1928 photograph, *Untitled (Self-Portrait with Mirror)* (figure 1) which shows Cahun standing before the mirror in her checkered jacket, not looking into the glass but directly at the camera, has become one of the most well-known images of Cahun. This image is perhaps more explicitly connected to *Aveux non avenus* than most of the other photographs. Unlike many of the photos taken of Cahun, this portrait was actually meant to be seen by the public. Photographs taken in June of 1930 reveal that this image was enlarged and matted to be included in the publishers' display window for the launch of *Aveux non avenus*.[176] This has led Latimer to refer to this particular image as Cahun's "author portrait."[177] The inclusion of the "author portrait" in this display provides evidence that Cahun apparently understood this photograph of her to be in some way connected to the *Aveux non avenus* project. For Cahun to choose this particular image out of the plethora of self images which were available to her at this point, demonstrates that she had understood the meaning of this particular image to be analogous to the meaning behind *Aveux non avenus*.

My argument is that the connection between the book and this particular image of Cahun is in the ability of both to present a critique of self-portraiture. What is established in this photograph is a self that refuses to confirm an identity by meeting the gaze of her mirror image. If the book was meant to be a disavowed confession then this image becomes an unconfirmed reflection, a rejection of the stability of the reflected self. When

[176] Downie 176.
[177] Latimer, "Looking" 134.

she is looking into the camera lens, she is indeed looking at Moore, but at the same time she is also looking away from the mirror. As the two "Claudes" look away from each other it is as if they almost begin to look like two different people—the mirror image does not correspond to the person in front of it. Latimer states that in this image, Cahun "maintains both a literal and symbolic distance from her proper reflection."[178] The "author portrait" shares with the rest of Cahun's self-portrait images this kind of distancing, maybe not from a physical mirror, but from the idea of a unified self. All of these images were made not only by Cahun but were the result of collaboration, a mode of authorship that has in all other arenas never sought to refer to or disclose a self, but rather functioned as a challenge to and critique of the authority of conventions.

In 1950, twenty years after the publication of *Aveux non avenus*, Cahun wrote in a personal letter about the hopes she once had for the book: "In vain, in *Disavowals* I tried—through black humor, provocation, defiance—to shake my contemporaries out of their blissful conformism, their *complacency*…. Ostracism was more or less the general response."[179] The book was not met with any kind of critical acclaim and certainly did not have the impact she had hoped for. Cahun's would-be publisher, Adrienne Monnier, had originally advised Cahun to write a "confessional" type of autobiographical work, but when the book became more of a *critique* of the autobiographical tradition, this brought their transaction to a halt.[180] Adrienne Monnier and her partner Sylvia Beach were bookshop owners and publishers whom Cahun turned to in search of support for her project. Because Cahun was unwavering in her stance against her book becoming an

[178] Latimer, "Looking" 135
[179] Claude Cahun, "Letter to Paul Levy" 3 July 1950. Quoted in Mundy xvi.
[180] Mundy xii.

autobiography she never did gain Monnier's support.[181] In a 1926 letter written to Monnier in the late stages of completing the book, Cahun indicates this conflict of interest:

> You have told me write a confession because you know only too well that this is currently the only literary task that might seem to me first and foremost realizable where I feel at ease, permit myself a direct link, contact with the real world, with the facts…. But I believe I have understood what sort and what form you mean this confession (in short: without any cheating of any sort)…. Don't get your hopes up.[182]

This letter hints at either an inability or an unwillingness to engage such a project when Cahun warns "don't get your hopes up." Her tone seems to make clear that she holds such ideas with a certain amount of contempt, establishing a sense of distaste for the kind of directness, reality, and truth that would be involved in a confessional-type project. Similarly, Latimer understands Cahun's statement to imply: "the format that Monnier had recommended must have seemed impossibly burdened with both gendered connotations and testimonial truth-claims."[183] It is specifically the kind of authority that is invested in the literary tradition of autobiography that Cahun was continually trying to oppose, challenge, and ultimately.

If Cahun was adamant at this time that her writing should not be classified as autobiographical then it seems not a far step away to argue that she would not have considered the photographs of her to be self-portraits. The self-portrait is the visual analog to the autobiography—both being authoritarian legacies into which Cahun did not want to insert herself. This stance should be seen as more than just a refusal of categorization. It is a negation of the category through a very specific affirmation, an

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[181] Mundy xiii.

[182] Letter from Lucie Schwob to Adrienne Monnier, Paris, 23 July 1926. Fonds Adrienne Monnier, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, MS 8718 B' I 11. Quoted in Mundy xii.

[183] Latimer, "Acting Out" 66.

affirmation of the opposite, the *anti*—a practice of undoing, a dismantling of the authority with which this tradition portrays the self.

On a conceptual basis, *Aveux non avenus* perhaps bears more resemblance to the *Critical Dictionary* which appeared in the magazine *Documents* founded by Bataille in 1929. The *Critical Dictionary* embodied the formation of a paradoxical non-philosophy which in essence functions as a critique of the dictionary itself. This document was compiled by an unknown number of collaborators for the purpose of introducing a subjectivity that challenges the homogeneity of systems of knowledge. For the entry of the word "Formless," Bataille writes: "A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meanings of words but their tasks. In this way *formless* is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify...."[184] This entry forms the meaning at the core of *Critical Dictionary* which involves a dialectic process of negation and affirmation.[185] The *Critical Dictionary* is an anti-dictionary in the same way that *Aveux non avenus* is an anti-autobiography. What makes *Aveux non avenus* an anti-autobiography is that it is a critique of the genre itself, just as the *Critical Dictionary* is a critique of the dictionary. The critique is, on the one hand, of the format that autobiography and the dictionary follow, but also more importantly, of the authority that is invested in these manifestations of knowledge. In both cases, they do not seek to be included within their respective genres; rather, they attempt to deconstruct those categories through critique. It would not suffice to say that Cahun and Moore merely expanded on the notion of what may be considered a self-portrait any more than *Aveux non avenus* is an attempt to stretch the boundaries of autobiography. There is a similar

[184] Georges Bataille, ed., *Encyclopedia Acephalica* (London: Atlas Press, 1995) 51.
[185] Bataille 23.

dislocation that takes place between image and meaning in Cahun and Moore's photographic work. In Bataille's definition of "Formless," the word does not designate meaning, but rather becomes an action. It is my argument that the self-portrait images perform the *action* of deconstruction, a critique that I refer to as a practice in anti self-portraiture, which I consider to be analogous to the function of Cahun's anti-autobiography as well as Bataille's *Critical Dictionary*.

Cahun and Moore's collaborative self-portrait images elude any kind of general categorization belonging neither to the tradition of straight "Portraiture" nor of "Self-Portraiture." They occupy a realm that is in between; they are portraits that refer to the self, but do not represent it. They deconstruct gender and identity, and while they do show a kind of multiplicity in identity through endless guises, it is done in way that challenges the authoritative "I." I use the term anti self-portraiture not in an attempt to categorize, but as a description of what the images *do*. Part of what these images do is undermine the tradition—a male tradition—that insists on a kind of Cartesian self-knowledge. These images do not simply ask in what ways we might expand the boundaries of self-portraiture to include them any more than *Aveux non avenus* seeks to be included in the autobiographical tradition. In both cases, they function to deconstruct and undo the authority presumed to be inherent to those categories.

CONCLUSION

Today the performative nature of photography and gender, as well as the staging of the self, are well-worn themes, but in the context of the 1920s and '30s these were radical if not revolutionary principles. Chadwick asserts that Cahun's photographic images "comprise one of the century's first coherent bodies of work by a woman artist to call into question the very possibility of a unified self."[186] However, it is not only in Cahun's photographic work that she puts forth the notion of identity as fluid and unfixed. This is a common thread in the totality of Cahun's work. Doy reminds us that "Cahun is not solely a photographer, but a creative person who makes/takes photographs in conjunction with other activities."[187] Now that we are beginning to know more about Cahun and her various engagements there seems to be no reason that these other undertakings should continue to be kept separate. All of Cahun and Moore's activities—be they political, photographic, literary or theatrical—each uniquely inform one another and should rightfully be considered as part of the same project. The tendency to view Cahun and Moore's work through one particular lens has become the norm; for example, when discussing their photographic work, the literary work often gets overlooked. Cahun and Moore's individual activities are often kept in isolation from each other, but in doing this we run the risk of marginalizing other very relevant aspects of their creative production.[188]

If we are to consider Cahun and Moore's entire creative production as a *whole*, the concept of an anti self-portraiture is one that parallels the theatrical and literary

[186] Chadwick, "How" 19.
[187] Doy 3.
[188] Doy 8.

activity concurrent with the production of many of these self-portrait images. Cahun's work in avant-garde theater between the years of 1923 and 1929 embodied the notion of anti-naturalism; the performances were not an attempt to convince the audience that what was being portrayed was in any way real, rather the purpose was to blatantly expose the artifice of the actor, thus overturning the expectations of the audience. Similarly in "Héroïnes," Cahun rewrites the scripts of historical women in order to challenge our perceptions of them, urging us to understand them in a way that opposes what tradition has taught us. Perhaps most compelling is *Aveux non avenus* which refuses to follow the tradition of autobiographical writing, calling the very genre itself into question. All of these activities occurred alongside the production of the now famous self-portrait images, meaning that they all developed and evolved in tandem.

One of the major purposes of this thesis has been to propose an alternative to understanding Cahun and Moore's images outside of the domain of traditional Self-Portraiture. I have discussed the reception of their work in order to demonstrate how limited, and at times ahistorical, the discourse surrounding their work has been. This thesis has also attempted to situate their self-portrait images within the context of the rest of their work, which was informed by their involvement with the Surrealists and the sociopolitical climate in which they lived. Their practice was very much contingent upon their own milieu. The contextualization of their work has been in many ways central to this thesis. A major part of this contextualization has been an examination of the model of collaborative authorship that Cahun and Moore practiced through the creation of their photographic work, a contributing factor which prevents us from reading their work solely in terms of Self-Portraiture.

In all of Cahun and Moore's creative activities, from the taking of pseudonyms and their model of collaborative authorship to their various literary and theatrical endeavors, there is always present an underlying critique that challenges tradition and convention. I propose that this notion of critique is also at the heart of Cahun and Moore's photographic work; thus the images that have come to be known as self-portraits are not self-portraits at all, but might better be understood as a critique of the genre of self-portraiture. I put forth the concept of "anti self-portraiture" not as a category that defines the work, but rather, as a practice of critique that the work *enacts*. However, I do not suggest this as a singular or exhaustive way of understanding Cahun and Moore's images; I use anti-self-portraiture as a way to open up, rather than to close the discussion of their work.

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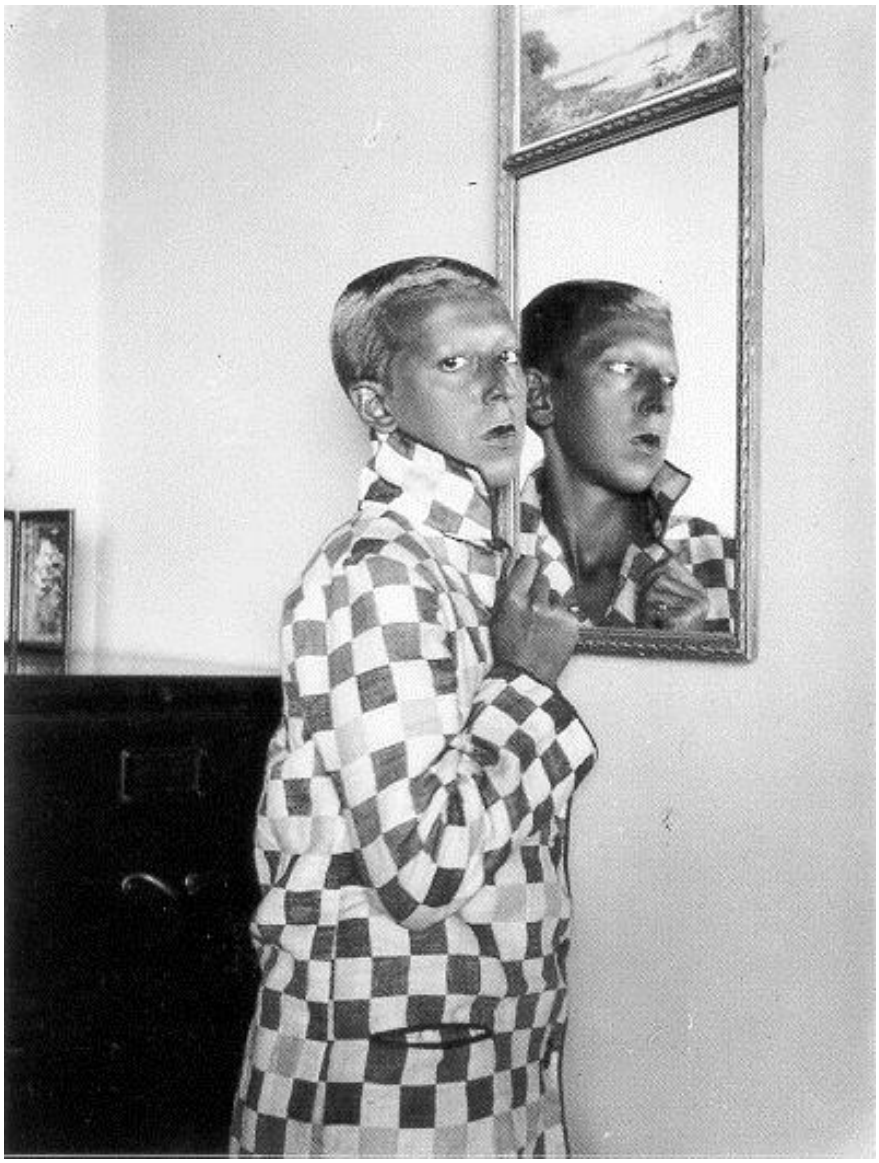
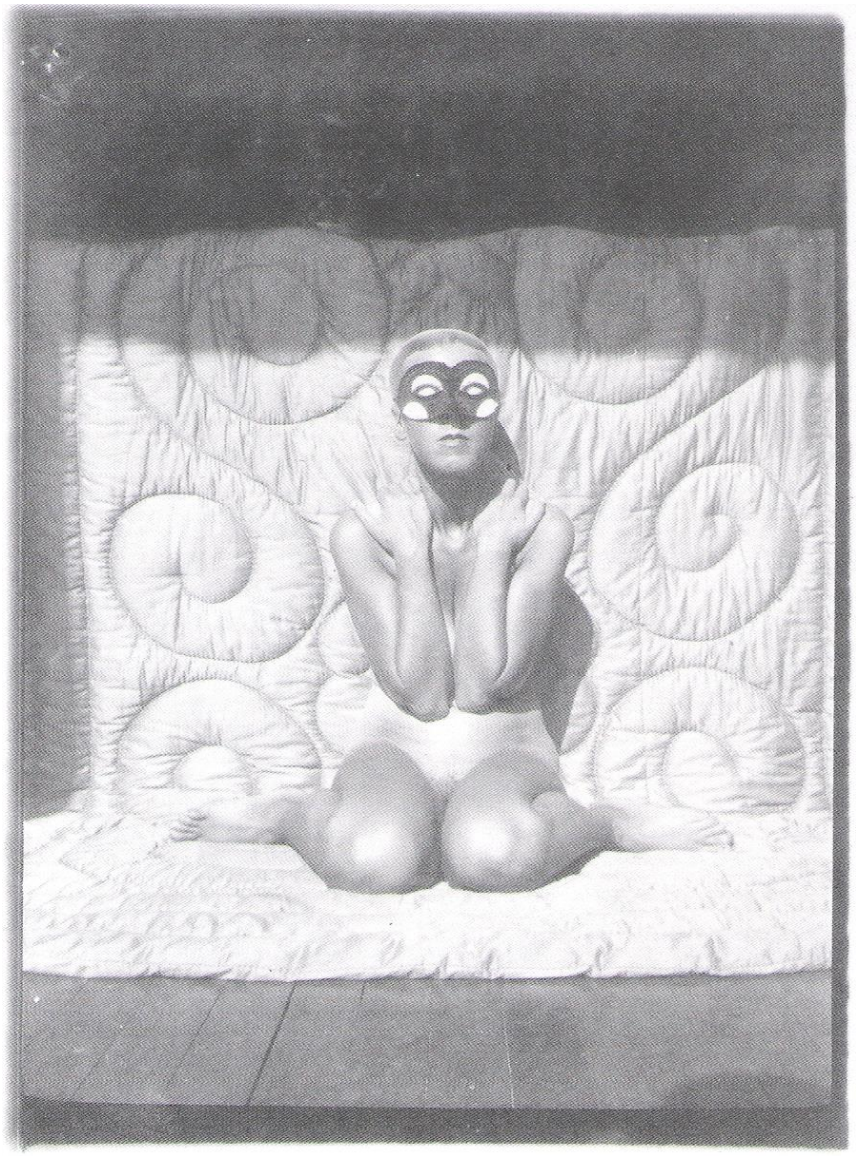
Illustrations



1. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Self-Portrait with Mirror)*, 1928.

2. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Marcel Moore)*, 1928.



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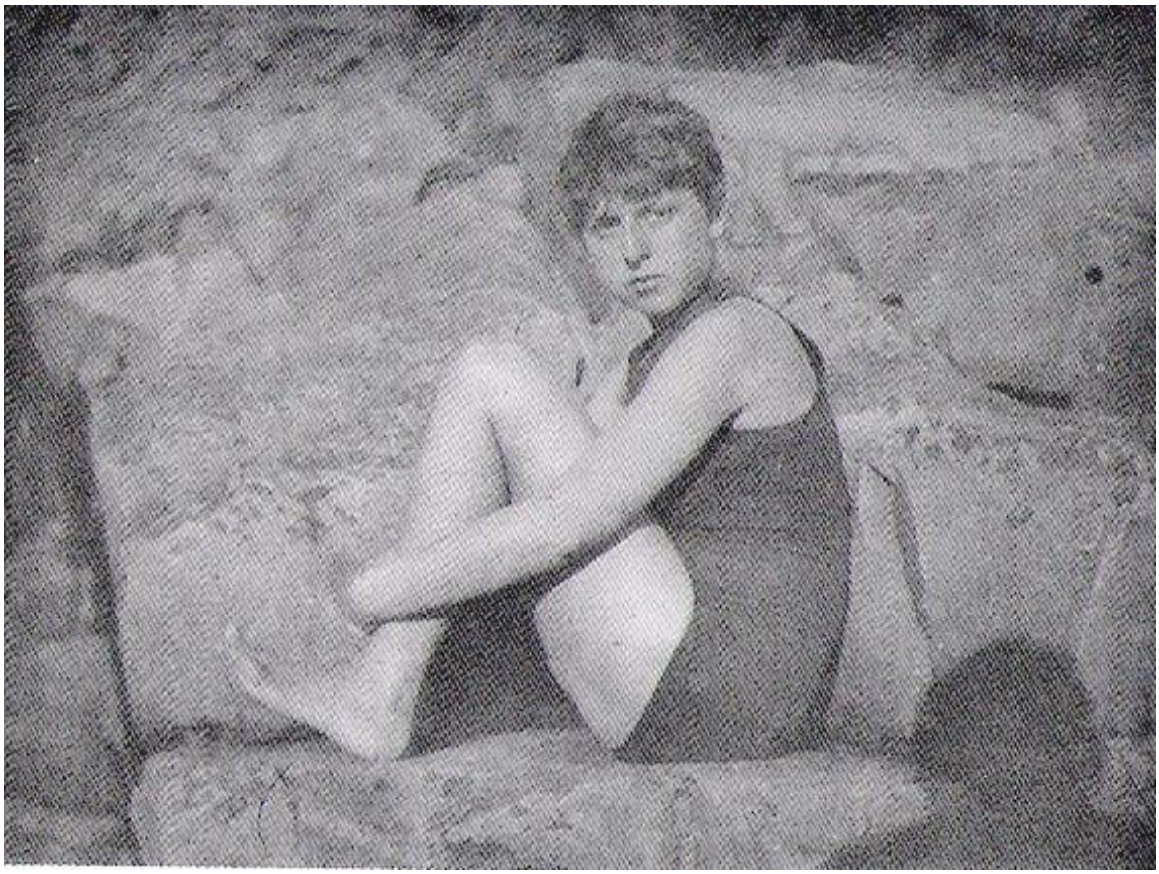
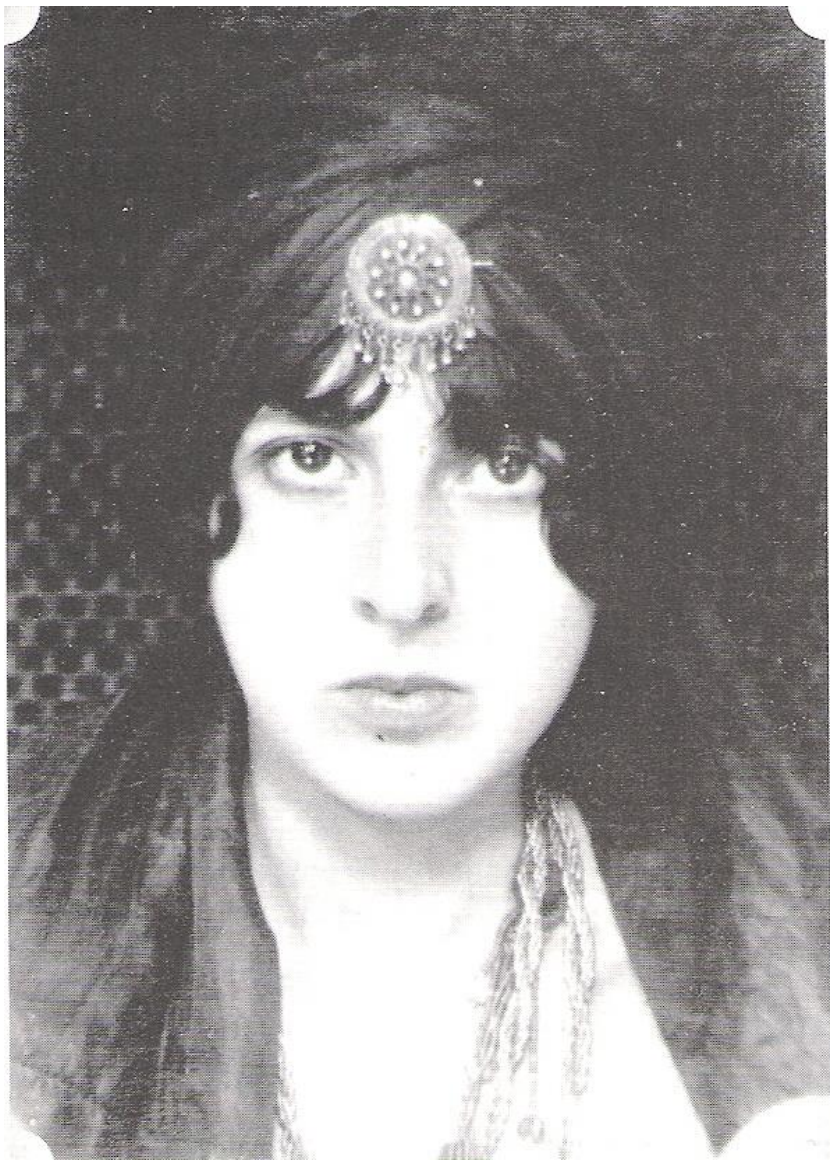


4. Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Claude Cahun)*, ca. 1915.

5. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1920.

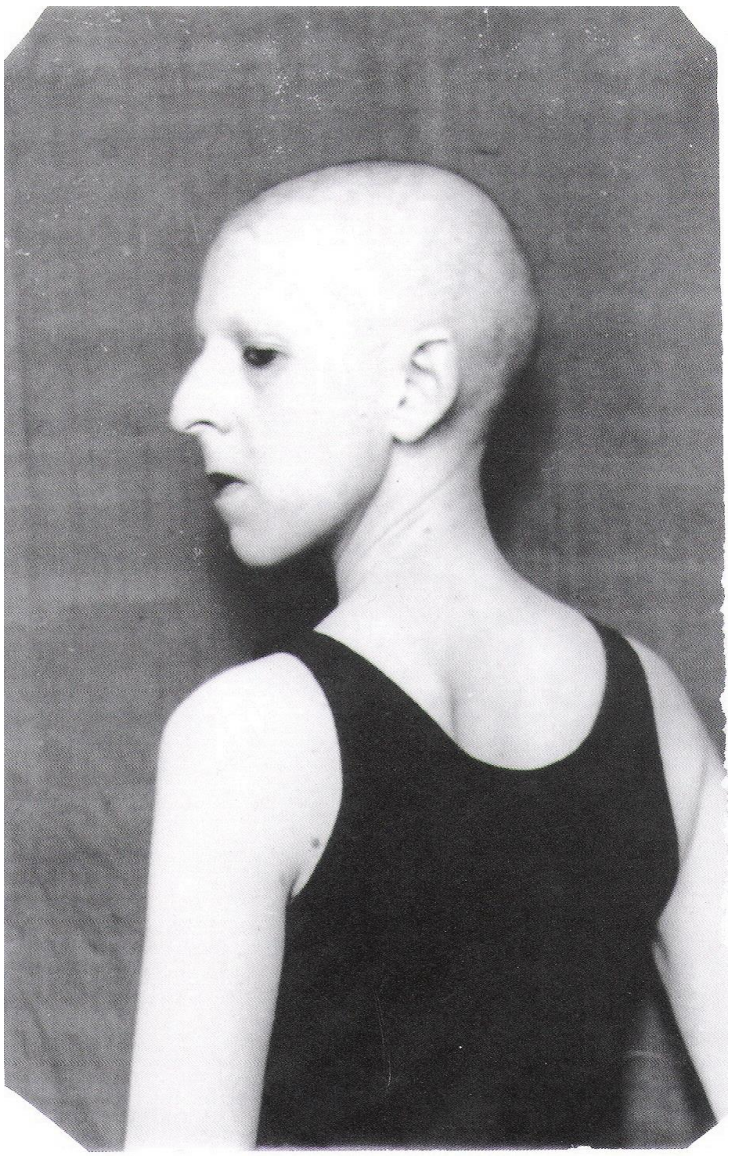


6. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, ca. 1911.

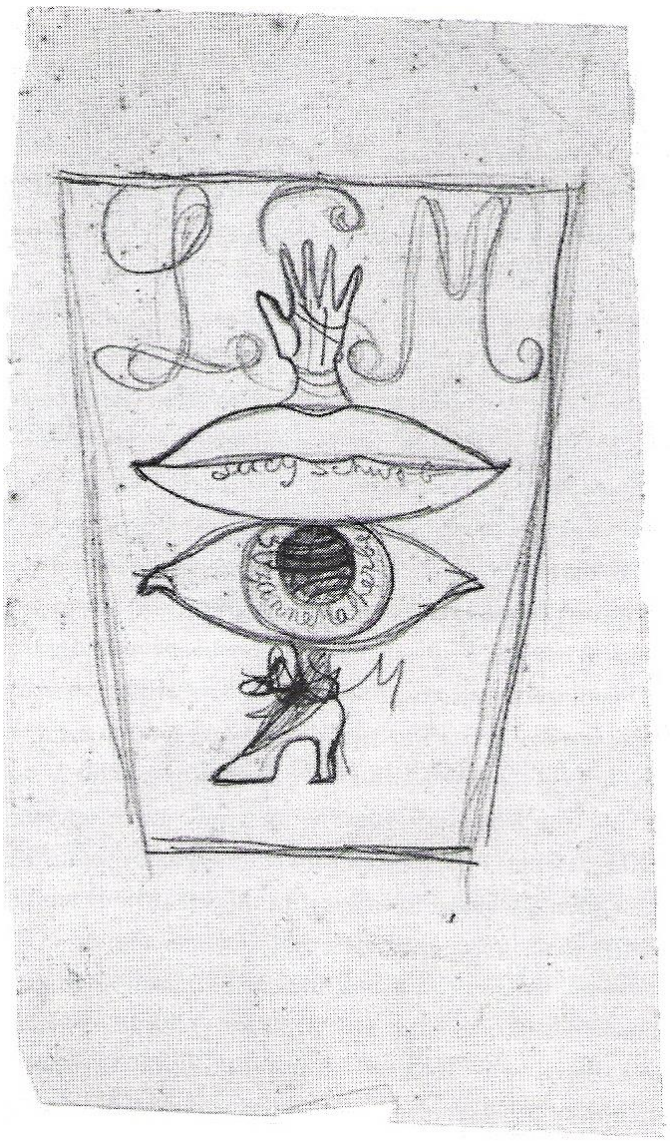
7. Photographer Unknown, *Clèo de Merode*, ca. 1902.

8. Romaine Brooks, *Self-Portrait*, 1923.

9. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1921.



10. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1920.



11. Claude Cahun, *LSM*, 1909.

12. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1919.

13. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Maurice Schwob)*, 1920.

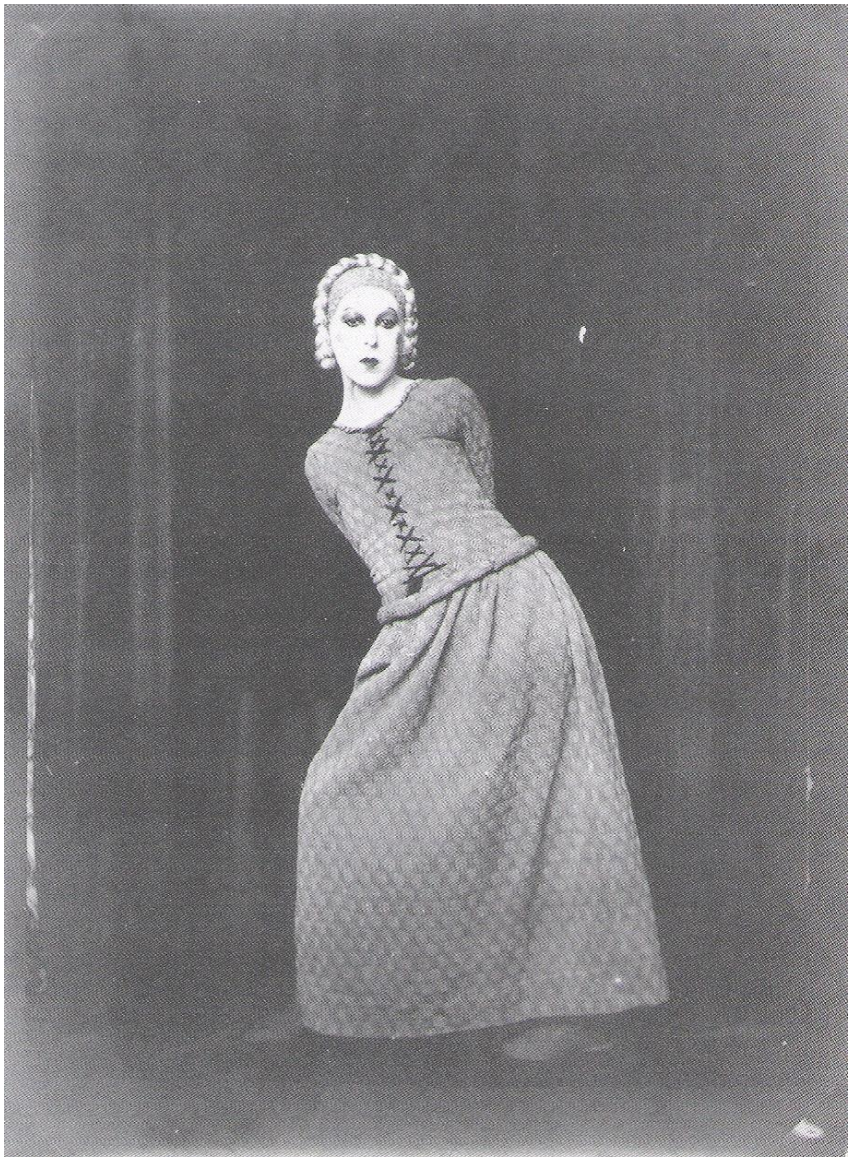
14. Photographer Unknown, *"Passport" Photo of Claude Cahun*, ca. 1936.

15. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 2*, 1977.

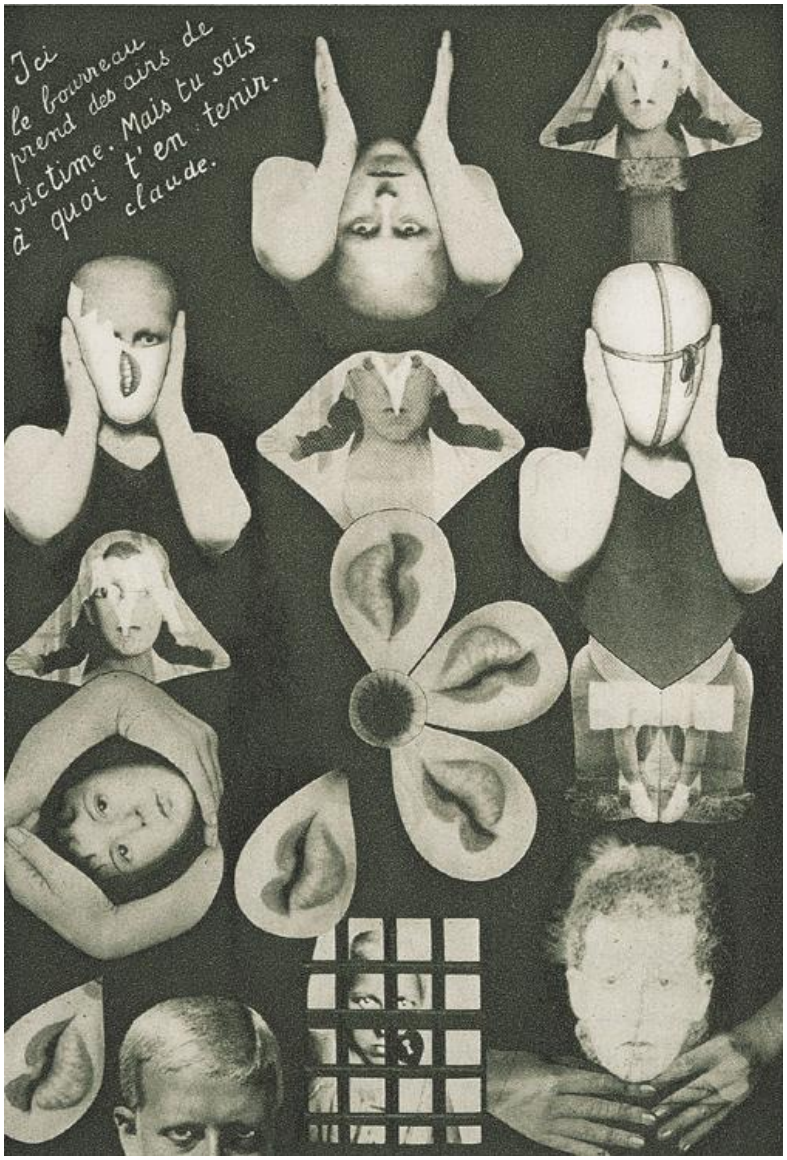
16. Alice Austen, *Julia Martin, Julia Bredt and Self Dressed Up as Men, 4:40 pm, Thursday, October 15th, 1891*, 1891.

17. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Claude Cahun with* L'image de la femme), 1915.

18. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1928.



19. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Claude Cahun as Elle in* Barbe bleue), 1929.



20. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *M.R.M. (Sex)*, 1930.

21. Hannah Höch, *Cut With the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919-20.

22. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, 1927.

SINGULAR PLURAL

Us.

'Nothing can separate us.'

Declarations of love: sincere lies! (If you don't agree to play the fool every now and again, as often as I want you to, give up all thoughts of marrying stamens and thorns. The magic rose will be for others!...)

In the final reckoning we are forced to rely on the unknown, with a great algebraic X.

♥

Pink magic.

Absolute egoism is a safety device. I will often return to it. But with these games I intend to lead lovers into treacherous harmonies, to the perilous pact of those who go about in pairs.

Love. The act itself is the creation of the flesh – flash of heat, a star so brief there's no time to formulate a wish, we're scarcely sure we even glimpsed it – but everything that engenders it, everything it implies, all the good old theatre wires, are the creation of the mind.

The actor can make use of his partner, better: his enemy, as of himself; and it will be reciprocated.

But as soon as they have become one, in order to carry on the struggle and to be able to carry on provoking each other, they

102 —

23. Claude Cahun, page 102 of *Disavowals*, 1930.

their words. Destruction itself waits in suspense. My hair, my nails stop growing. The dead surely have some obscure belief.

I am in training, don't kiss me.

If ever it happens that I believe in a god outside myself, at certain times it seems to me that he has got the upper hand: having eternity before him. With his means at their disposal any murderer, innocent, prostitute, the bottom of their class, the lowest of men, could equal him, could easily topple him from his throne... yes, saved from the intolerable distractions of misery, love, illnesses, and at the same time allowed to take my time, I'd feel like his equal...

And maybe He wouldn't be much of a match for me, who knows?

Self-development.

I would never wish to worry myself, burden myself with anything else. Alas! We can only chase that hare by pursuing all the others at the same time.[148]

Litmus paper

We should mistrust the blue reactions of the soul. If it's easier to agree on negations that doesn't lead very far. The enemies of our enemies are not our friends.

It would be better to admit that all beings are, in one way or another, incompatible. This doesn't prevent negotiation, nor even the meeting and amalgamation of the powers that you know, living proofs. If the destroyer has his wiles, have no doubt that the creator has his.

I would like to add a sentence but cannot do so out loud. Let each of my adversaries approach: I will whisper it in his ear.

— 185

24. Claude Cahun, page 185 of *Disavowals*, 1930.