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Supernatural Beings, Shamans, and Dream-Places: Jules Monnerot and the Native American Touchstones of Surrealism's Mythological Realignment, 1939–1945

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Abstract
By 1942, a considerable number of the Parisian surrealist group had resettled in the U. S. after having fled the conflict in Europe. Though sometimes regarded as a hiatus in surrealist activities, or in some accounts even the death-knell of Surrealism, this period of American exile represents a phase of almost frenetic artistic invention and intellectual exploration. In 1945, as the war drew to a close and the surrealists were preparing for their return to Europe, the Martiniquais sociologist Jules Monnerot published a book entitled La Poésie moderne et le Sacré. Despite being written at one remove from the surrealists' activities in America, with little to no knowledge of their various travels and encounters, Monnerot's book provided an incisive account of the conceptual and philosophical resonances between Surrealism and Native American culture. The book was received by the surrealists with critical acclaim at the time, but since then has largely disappeared from view. In the context of growing scholarly interest in the surrealists' conception of myth, this article seeks to revive La Poésie moderne et le Sacré as one of the key points of reference of 1940s Surrealism, and as compelling evidence for the unique significance of America as the site of its mythological reinvention. Surrealism's American encounter directly overlapped with the emergence of the new literary genre of the Native American autobiography, heralded by the proximate publications of Black Elk Speaks (1932) and Sun Chief (1942). Where both these books testified to the singular importance of myth as a means of psychological introspection and worldly self-determination, they are invoked here as a means of illuminating the conceptual developments of wartime Surrealism in the context of the group's search for a "new myth."

Keywords: Surrealism / Native American / Myth / André Breton / Jules Monnerot

Our streets and our public places, our statues, squares, and metros can all have, like the dream-places, the sacred hills, the elected places where the Indian awaits a revelation, a sense more or less charged with destiny.

—Jules Monnerot, La Poésie moderne et le sacré (1945)

Exactly what the surrealists saw in the prospect of their wartime refuge in North America seems to be up for debate. Of the numerous members of the group who left Europe for the United States between 1940 and 1942, one would be hard-pressed to single out any of them whose principal reasons were anything other than circumstance. And yet, the urgency of the evacuation, and certain members' (André Breton's) maladaptation to life in New York, have often led historians to overlook the already-close affinity between Surrealism and North American culture, rendering it little more than a footnote in narratives of this unplanned phase of the movement.

In her seminal book, Surrealism in Exile, Martica Sawin described the surrealists arriving into a "land without myth," and commonly experiencing a "sense of dislocation": "deprived of the reminders of shared myths and symbols of historical continuity woven into the fabric of European cities" (Sawin 150). It is this apparent absence of myth, in Sawin's account, that motivated Breton's search for a "new myth" whilst the group was in New York in the early 1940s. Yet this account does not seem to do justice to the very prominent presence of North American culture within this mythological reinvention of Surrealism, which can be traced through a whole constellation of literary works that span the group's American resettlement.

At precisely the moment that the surrealists came over from Europe, in the early years of the Second World War, North America was in the throes of a radical re-evaluation of the depth and richness of its native mythological traditions (Fig. 1; Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Edward S. Curtis, Prayer to the Mystery (Oglala Sioux man), 1907, photographic print. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D. C.. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-69325.
Source: Library of Congress

Fig. 2. Unknown photographer, An old Hopi house, Walpi, Arizona, c.1921, photographic print. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D. C.. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-102176. Source: Library of Congress

The revolution had started in 1932 with the publication of Black Elk Speaks; the autobiography of the Oglala Lakota healer Black Elk (1863–1950), transcribed and edited by John G. Neihardt. The book tells the story of Black Elk's lifelong struggle to interpret and implement the redemptive visions he had experienced as a child; a spiritual quest to guide and save his people which is repeatedly and consistently undermined over the course of the book by the flat rejection of this native cosmogony by Western settlers and the U. S. government, who, enthused by gold deposits in the Black Hills of South Dakota, proceeded to betray their previous treaties and legislature, encroach upon Oglala Lakota lands, and forego diplomacy altogether by attacking and forcibly displacing the local population through a military campaign tantamount to a thinly veiled genocide grounded in (and institutionally "justified" in terms of) the inhumane and ecologically irreverent logic of capitalism. This tragic narrative of the willful destruction of Native American culture was compounded ten years later by the publication of Sun Chief (1942); the autobiography of Hopi chief Don C. Talayesva (1890–1976) of Oraibi and Moenkopi, edited by Leo W. Simmons. In Sun Chief, Talayesva tells his story of a hybrid existence, caught between the ancient cultural traditions he was born into and the "antelope" powers he was born with, on the one hand, and the "modernity" being imposed on him by the missionaries and local authorities, on the other; a contest within which it is unquestionably the harsh impositions of state bureaucracy, and the shallow opportunism of an accelerating tourism industry, which appear the more misguided. The fact that the surrealists arrived in America at the interstices of these landmark publications is extremely significant within the context of this article. While the group would go on to praise Sun Chief specifically in BIEF: Jonction surréaliste when it was translated into French in 1959 as Soleil Hopi, their actual presence in America during this period of re-evaluation seems to have a more general significance: designating them as inhabitants, if not fellow architects, of this zeitgeist, which should encourage us to more closely analyze their participation in this period of reinvigorated engagement with Native American culture.

The surrealists' interest in Native American culture had its origins much earlier within the movement. As Elizabeth Cowling has demonstrated, various members of the group were collecting artefacts from across North America—principally the Pacific Northwest coast, Alaska, and the Pueblos of the Southwest—throughout the 1920s and 1930s. On the back of this, she argues, "the wartime period merely marks the broadening and deepening of the Surrealists' knowledge and understanding of American tribal art" (485). Given the already intensive interest in North American culture demonstrated by the likes of André Breton, Paul Éluard, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Robert Lebel, and Kurt Seligmann long

before the outbreak of war in 1939, it seems difficult to believe that the surrealists themselves would have concurred with the prevailing assessment of them entering a "land without myth" during their American exile. Even excepting this historic interest in "American tribal art," come the 1940s there was even greater incentive for an in-depth exploration of Native American culture, since by then the surrealists were becoming increasingly interested in mythology.

As Gavin Parkinson has outlined, the surrealist project for a "new myth" had first been suggested in 1937 with "Breton's call in 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism' for a 'collective myth appropriate to our period,' by which he meant an extended analogy…that illustrated at one representational remove the subterranean, latent emotions of the period" (Parkinson 20). Subsequently, in his 1942 "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto" published in VVV, Breton devised a more specific mythological narrative in the form of "The Great Invisibles," which he set out as follows:

> Man is perhaps not the centre, the focal point of the universe. One may go so far as to believe that there exists above him on the animal level, beings whose behaviour is as alien to him as his own must be to the mayfly or the whale…In considering perturbations of the cyclone type, in the face of which man is powerless to be anything other than the victim or witness, or those of the war type, about which notoriously insufficient versions have been advanced, it will not be impossible…to approach rendering a likeness of the structure and complexion of such hypothetical beings, which manifest themselves obscurely to us in fear and the feeling of chance. (Breton, Oeuvres 14)

As Parkinson notes, this "new myth" was clearly very appealing within the immediate context of the war, "in the sense that it reflects…the spectacle of humanity at the time as a helpless creature in the hands of an apparently greater power" (Parkinson 20). But as I will go on to argue, the surrealists' indebtedness to Native American mythology ran much deeper than specific symbolic content. Although in the respects outlined above the symbolism of Surrealism's "new myth" had been hand-picked to be "appropriate to its period" (as a vehicle of socio-political dissent), the surrealists recognized that what the period demanded above all else was for the phenomenological machinery of mythology to be set in motion on a global scale. In the discussion that follows it will be demonstrated how Surrealism came to align itself with diverse mythological worldviews, which were appreciated as technical models for how to mobilize alternative symbolic and ethical paradigms in the midst of the directional crises facing world civilization.

It was the more systemic lessons about the central role of myth within human civilization that the surrealists gleaned from Native America. And it is in these terms—as blueprints for a life steeped in myth, and documents of the importance of mythology in facilitating

psychological introspection and worldly self-determination—that the outsider voices of Black Elk and Talayesva enjoin with Surrealism's wartime quest for a "new myth." As the group's collective statement inside the cover page of the First Papers of Surrealism catalogue of 1942 confirmed: "Surrealism is only trying to rejoin the most durable traditions of mankind," by following "primitive peoples" to "beyond what is conventionally and arbitrarily called the 'real.'" (Breton, First 1)

Perhaps surprisingly, the most insightful account of the conceptual resonances between Surrealism and Native American culture is not to be found within the writings of any of the "exiled" surrealists who were actually in the U.S. during the War, but in the work of the Martiniquais writer and sociologist Jules Monnerot. Monnerot had become known to the French surrealists through his incendiary anti-colonial writings in the pseudo-surrealist journal Légitime défense in 1932, and in 1933 he subsequently became a contributor to the group's main periodical of the day, Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution. Following this, his involvement with Breton's circle waned, and in 1938 he helped Breton's intellectual peer and one-time rival Georges Bataille to found the Collège de Sociologie, which sought to surpass the surrealists' hackneyed rehashing of Freudian psychoanalysis, and seek out new, less introspective channels for transforming society. Given this background, it must have come as some surprise to the surrealists when, in 1945, Monnerot published a book entitled La Poésie moderne et le Sacré, which took Bretonian Surrealism as its central point of reference. Amongst other less prominent themes, Monnerot's now largely forgotten writings in La Poésie moderne et le Sacré represent the first and last in-depth theoretical analysis of the intersection between Surrealism and Native American culture. Indeed, Monnerot's observations of Surrealism are so thorough here, and the book so ambitious in its conceptual advancement of the movement's core principles, that it might be regarded as a piece of first-wave scholarship, which holds its own against some of the best contemporary academic appraisals today. Sadly, but understandably, Monnerot's intellectual reputation has suffered as a result of his later career within the National Front from the 1960s onwards, many years after his involvement with the surrealists. This paper deals with an altogether different chapter of Monnerot's life, set apart from his subsequent political career.

Breton was aware of La Poésie moderne et le Sacré from the moment it was published, and he was extremely enthusiastic about its assessment of the movement, praising it on no less than three separate occasions in interviews between 1945 and 1946. In an interview with René Bélance in an issue of Haïti-Journal in December 1945, Breton hailed Monnerot's account of the affinity between "primitive" and "surrealist" thought as being "absolutely convincing" (Breton, Oeuvres 586). In an interview for Jeunes Antilles published in Martinique in March 1946, he once again referred to Monnerot's "beautiful book" and pointed to his discussion of "the unusual," which "sets perfectly in light the relation which unites the primitive and the surrealist on this point" (Breton, Oeuvres 170). Finally, in an interview with Jean Duché published in Le Littéraire back in Paris in October 1946, he more specifically referred to Monnerot's account of "the affinities

between surrealist thought and [American] Indian thought," which permits access to "a new system of knowledge and relations" (Breton, Oeuvres 594). Bataille also greatly admired Monnerot's book, and gave it a sparkling review in the journal Combat in 1945, describing how—in equating "surrealist endeavour" to "religious endeavour"—it had managed to release the movement from "the paltry sequence of literary history," and presented Surrealism in its true colors: as a historically transcendent intellectual position, preoccupied with questioning "[h]ow man reacts to his unexplained situation in the world, and how he can justify his presence and being" (Bataille 52–53). All given, La Poésie moderne et le Sacré can be appreciated as a highly provocative text, dealing with an array of issues that both Breton and Bataille—the two most important theoretical arbiters of Surrealism—praised. Over the rest of this article I will use Monnerot's intricate analysis to help retrace Surrealism's often overlooked affinity with Native American culture, in the absence of any comparable book-length exploration of this topic from within the surrealist group itself.

In Nouveau Monde et Nouveau Mythe (2007), Fabrice Flahutez provides a more comprehensive historical account of Surrealism's American encounter and the mythological turn that it inspired. Although his research does not specifically deal with the particulars of Monnerot's work (mentioning it by name only once), the book's wider discussion strikes upon certain key concepts which help to provisionally situate the discussion in La Poésie moderne et le Sacré. In the first place, Flahutez introduces the surrealists' wartime conception of a correspondence between dreaming and a kind of journeying into new worlds outside of the self. Secondly, he discusses the group's wartime conception of the artist and the poet as visionaries who possess special powers which enable them to make these mythological journeys. And thirdly, he discusses the surrealists' recognition of the role of certain intercessors—supernatural beings, or spirit guides—in integrating this mythological realm with everyday life. These three aspects of Surrealism's mythological reinvention were directly inspired by Native American culture, as Monnerot assiduously detailed at the time; and they are clearly visible in both Black Elk and Sun Chief.

Between Dreams and "Dream-Places"

> Descartes, in a famous passage, opposed waking to the phantoms of the dream…Primitives and surrealists would recuse such a decree, disposed as they are to searching on the other side of the dream for a functional equivalent to the power of classical metaphysics recognised as reason. (Monnerot 118)

The "modern poetry" that Monnerot referred to in the title of La Poésie moderne et le Sacré was more specifically surrealist poetry. As such, there is an emphasis from the outset on modern poetry's association with, and origins in, the dream. For Monnerot, it was this singular interest in the dream that drew Surrealism close to certain "primitive" societies, "who hold the revelations of the dream in such high esteem that, sometimes, the life and death of the group or the individual depend on them" (110).

Though he acknowledges that Breton and the surrealists have repeatedly called for "the reintegration and the return of the dream in life" in their explorations of the works of Sigmund Freud, for Monnerot, the Native American is the only figure who can teach Surrealism the true extent of dream and reality's integration (109):

> "There is no separation, or heterogeneity between the supernatural and the natural (the real and the surreal). No hiatus. It is a continuum"; one believes one is hearing André Breton: it is an ethnographer who tells us of the Saulteaux Indians. (109–10)

Monnerot describes in colorful detail the coextensivity of waking life and dream, perception and imagination, reality and surreality in such societies; dichotomies which, not being distinguished, perfectly coalesce into the "continuum" of their mythological worldview:

> Through lack of suffering like us the implacable totalitarian dictatorship of the everyday, the "primitives" openly recognise the possibility and the reality of an other experience which is not for them outlawed or exterminated. Instead of there being an exclusion of the surreal by the everyday, there is a continuity between the one and the other…And if one distinguishes and if it is necessary to distinguish the two experiences, it is immediately added that the one bathes in the other, as if these people were living on the incessantly mobile line of intersection between two realms…as beings at one moment marine and in another moment aerial, without ceasing to be themselves (because air and water, themselves mobile, endlessly alternate in the milieu of their becoming) at once in two worlds at the same time, head in the one, body in the other. Thus for these savages…Dreams, myths, visions provoked or not, strange phenomena, coincidences, "objective chances," presages, miracles, encounters, testify to other presences, and to the presence of the "other." (106–107).

Monnerot argued that Surrealism's "doctrinal" origins had thus far prevented the group from surpassing the categorical distinctions engrained in Freudian psychoanalysis, which imply a discreet distinction between the unconscious and conscious dimensions of human existence. To the psychoanalyst, he explained, the "primitive" is inept, deemed incapable of distinguishing "between the reality which sits behind this illusion [of the dream]...and the mechanism of this illusion" (116). In the face of such narrow-mindedness, Monnerot concluded outright that "the surrealist point of view is not compatible with that of the psychologists," and suggested that it needed to be recodified (117).

This idea of a coextensivity with these "other" realms—denied from the scientific viewpoint of psychoanalysis—was neatly bound up within the notion of invisibility that sat at the heart of Breton's myth of "The Great Invisibles." The metaphor of invisibility effectively relocated the (otherwise distant and distinct) phantasms of dreams and visions within the everyday; adjacent to the "real" in time and space, only awaiting their unveiling and discovery. Like the Saulteaux and other tribes, the surrealists recognized that an acceptance of the dream as the weft to the warp of conscious perception, interwoven in the fabric of lived experience, was a crucial prerequisite for constructing and inhabiting a mythological worldview. From the movement's origins, something resembling this idea had already existed within Surrealism, as connected to the group's stated ambition to unify the "interior" and "exterior" reality, stated in the First Manifesto:

> If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them. (Breton, Manifestoes 10)

Yet Monnerot's analysis ultimately took surrealist discourse far beyond its founding hypotheses in the course of establishing its affinity with Native American culture.

One of the most curious sections of La Poésie moderne et le Sacré is the elaborate theoretical explication of "dream-places." On the back of his more familiar discussion of dreams impinging on waking life, Monnerot's analysis takes a surprising turn where he suggests that the mythological universe of the Native Americans presupposes the existence of certain sacred "dream-places," which are occupied as vividly and tangibly in dreams as they are in life, and which thereby come to serve as veritable fonts of myth; as portals which sustain this exchange between waking and dreaming, and which establish common experiences between dreamers from which they can derive a shared mythology:

> Sacred hills, clearings in the light of the moon, undergrowth at midday, beaches, tombs carved into rock, pillared rooms, labyrinths without end…these oneiric places (and as many others), are they able to be common places, linked together by people who have seen?…For diverse kinds of "primitives," the "country of dreams," the "land of treasures," exists. (115–16)

Such "dream-places" are readily identifiable in Black Elk Speaks and Sun Chief. For the Oglala Lakota the sacred tree, or tree of life, falls in this category; and for Black Elk personally, the tepee of his ancestors—encountered in his vision as a giant flaming rainbow tepee—became one of these defined and identifiable "dream-places." For Talayesva and the Hopi it is the San Francisco peaks which simultaneously exist for them as a real geographical location, the winter residence of their Kachina gods, and the most potent and meaningful setting for their dreams.

Once again, Monnerot posits that Surrealism is uniquely equipped to appreciate this notion of "dream-places." In his extended list of potential "dream-places," he also includes "public places, palaces, towns, ports" (115), and elsewhere "statues, squares, and metros" (151). He is variously invoking the urban landmarks of Surrealism here (Fig. 3), as celebrated in Louis Aragon's Paris Peasant (1926) and Breton's Nadja (1928); and seems to be more specifically invoking the features of those surrealist cityscapes by Giorgio de Chirico and Paul Delvaux, which have the spectral specificity of a memory not merely recalled but revisited.

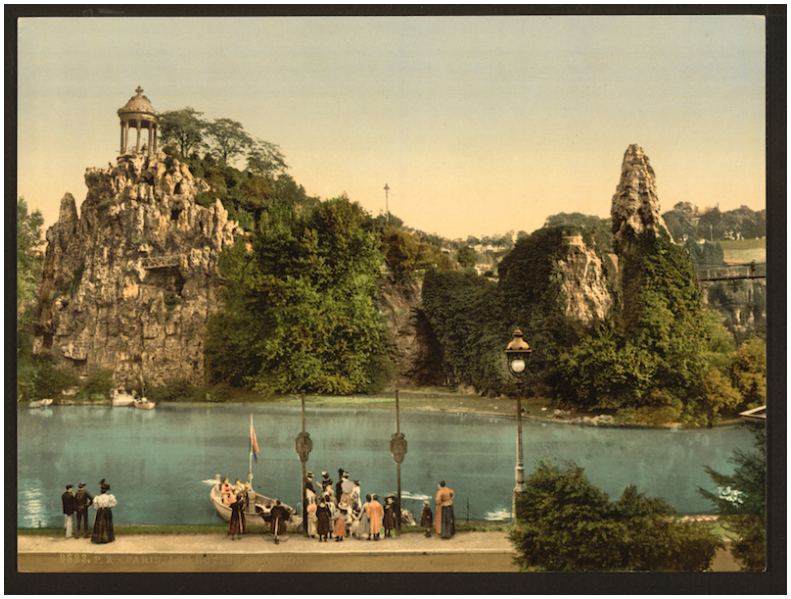

Fig. 3. Unknown photographer, [Parc des] Buttes-Chaumont, Paris, France, c.1890-1900, photochrom print. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D. C.. Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-ppmsc-05211. Source: Library of Congress

Works like de Chirico's Italian Piazza (1912) and The Red Tower (1913), or Delvaux's Dawn of the Town (1940) and Lunar City (1944), offer vivid surrealist figurations of this phenomenon of the "dream-place," as the principal territory and seat of mythology. In the context of the group's American exile, it is unquestionably Ernst's wartime landscapes that possess the "sacred" character of these intermediary "dream-places."

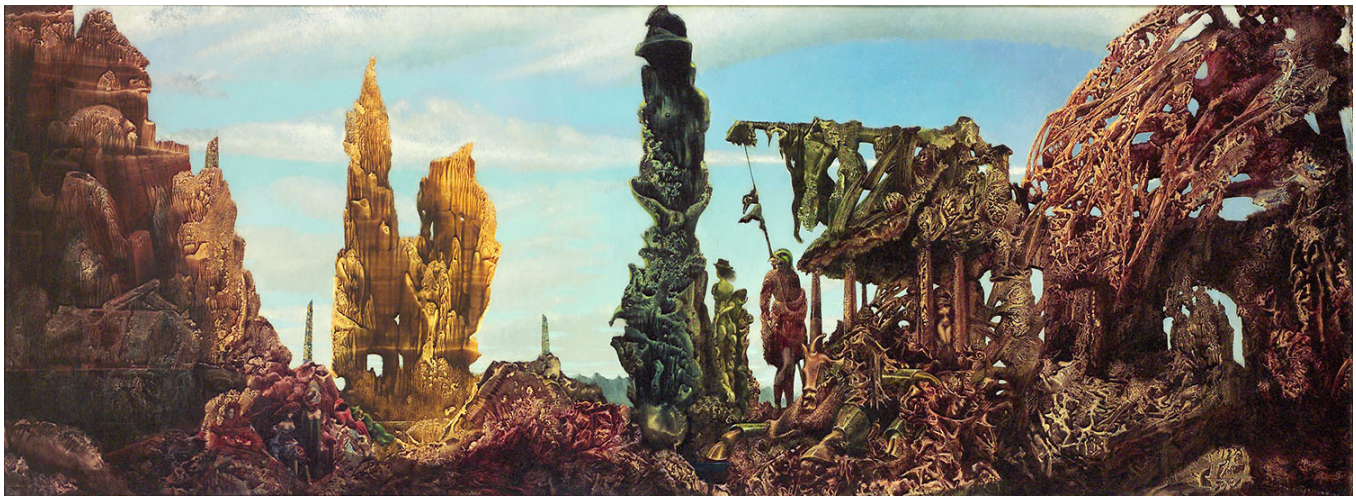

Fig. 4. Max Ernst, Europe after the Rain, 1940-1942, oil on canvas, 54.8 x 147.8 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1942.281. Photo: Allen Philips \ Wadsworth Atheneum.

In works such as Napoleon in the Wilderness (1941) and Europe after the Rain (1940–1942) (Fig. 4), Ernst captured the American continent through the uncanny haze of a dream; a dream rendered doubly uncanny by these works' subtle evocation of events and places from European history, with landscapes curiously reminiscent of the stalagmite-like pinnacles of the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont (surely one of the surrealists' most "sacred" sites): revisited here from a distance, as if via a dream. (In Aragon's Paris Peasant, the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont had originally been reconceived of for Surrealism in precisely these equivocal terms of a "dream-place": entered by Aragon, Breton and Marcel Noll in the dead of night—when they might otherwise have been dreaming—and subsequently experienced as at once familiar and unfamiliar, natural and supernatural, real and imagined.)

There is compelling anecdotal evidence of Ernst's personal appreciation of this concept of "dream-places." Sawin notes how "[i]n his memoirs Jimmy [Ernst] described his father's amazement as he recognized in those rock formations one of the invented landscapes from a painting he had done when he was still in the Ardèche" (173). And it is worth noting that fellow surrealist painter Wolfgang Paalen described his almost identical experience during his own North American travels in 1939, of entering a forest in British Columbia and

having the overwhelming sensation of having been there before, seemingly from "visiting" the same landscape in the process of creating his fumage paintings of the late 1930s (Browne 8–9).

Taking a step back from Monnerot's discussion, it becomes clear that the "dream-places" of Native American mythology responded to certain urgent questions that had been banging at the door of surrealist discourse for some time. Where Monnerot asks—

> Could I ever, before another being, all possibility of reciprocal suggestion aside (there lies the difficulty), discover that our dreams coincide? Are there some dream-places which are the same for a plurality of beings? (115)

—it becomes clear that he is effectively extending Breton's investigations into the dimensions of dreams in The Communicating Vessels, where he asked "what happens to time, space, and the causality principle in the dream?" (9), and where he began to interrogate the Freudian supposition "that 'psychic reality' is just a form of particular existence that must not be confused with 'material reality'" (13). Crucially, Monnerot's addendum gives expression to the new notion, which Breton came to adopt during the war, that the significance of the dream might be social, and mythological, rather than personal, and limited.

In the Footsteps of the Shaman

"Throughout the area of the plains Indians," Monnerot explains, "there are men who see visions 'for others'" (111); and within these societies "individual revelation inserts itself as is into the social order" (113). In these terms, La Poésie moderne et le Sacré presents the hypothesis that "[t]he dream guarantees myth" (114):

> The authentic meaning of myth is experienced as the most interior of initiations, the real experience privileged by the dream. Without this experience, this peril and this contact, the legendary tale would risk remaining dead letters. (114)

Accordingly, the constant stoking of this oneiric life-force of mythology, and the telling of its existence, requires certain able adventurers. And in Native American culture, as in so many parts of the world, it is the shaman who bears responsibility for navigating the dream "so that the key to the myth can be set in play" (114).

In his autobiography, Black Elk tells of his realization at a very young age that he possessed such powers, which enabled him to journey into the spirit world coterminous with the dream:

> When we had camped again, I was lying in our tepee and my mother and father were sitting beside me. I could see out through the opening and there two men were coming from the clouds, headfirst like arrows slanting down…Each now carried a long spear, and from the points of these a jagged lightning flashed…Then they turned and left the ground like arrows slanting upwards from the bow. When I got up to follow, my legs did not hurt me any more and I was very light. I went outside the tepee, and yonder where the men with flaming spears were going, a little cloud was coming very fast. It came and stooped and took me and turned back to where it came from, flying fast. And when I looked down I could see my mother and my father yonder, and I felt sorry to be leaving them.
>
> Then there was nothing but the air and the swiftness of the little cloud that bore me and those two men still leading up to where white clouds were piled like mountains on a wide blue plain, and in them thunder beings lived and leaped and flashed. (Neihardt 14)

This is the beginning of "The Great Vision" which determined his lifelong quest to rejuvenate the Sioux Nation in the name of the Grandfathers, which he later relays to his people. Throughout the book, Black Elk's visions consistently feature a similar crossing of thresholds, or journeying over frontiers. During his stay in Paris—after traveling to New York, London and Manchester with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show—he had another vision in which he was able to journey all the way back to the Black Hills after crossing over into the spirit world:

> As we sat there, I looked up at the roof and it seemed to be moving. The house was going around up at the top, and stretching upward as it went around. I could see that we were all rising fast with the whole house, and it was turning around as it 'rose. Then a cloud was coming down as we 'rose, and suddenly I was on it and the other people in the house were falling back away from me.
>
> Then I was alone on this cloud, and it was going fast. I clung to it hard, because I was afraid I might fall off...Then I began to recognize the country below me. I saw the Missouri River. Then I saw far off the Black Hills and the center of the world where the spirits had taken me in my great vision. (Neihardt 141)

Had the surrealists known of Black Elk's journeys into the spirit world, they would surely have been enthused by this particular vision, which—in connecting the Sioux spirit world to their familiar Paris—testified to the universal accessibility of such phenomena.

There are grounds for direct comparisons between certain surrealists and the figure of the shaman. In her famous 1939 Portrait of Max Ernst, for example, Leonora Carrington deliberately encouraged the comparison of Ernst with a shaman: depicting him striding out into his own arctic "dream-place," wearing a majestic fur coat, metamorphosing into some kind of fish or whale. The specific choice of a polar environment seems to be a direct nod towards the Eskimo territories of Alaska and its rich history of shamanic tradition. Meanwhile, Ernst's impending animal transformation consolidates the reputation he had already established for himself as a shapeshifter through tales of his bird-man alter-ego Loplop (often referred to as his totem, but also a body Ernst implies he occasionally occupied through a druid-like transfiguration). Within the immediate context of the group's American exile, however, the most compelling case for surrealist artists identifying with the otherworldly journeying of the shaman came through the renewed appreciation of the "dreamscapes" that the group was famed for.

Flahutez describes Breton's preoccupation at this time with the idea of "the artist who possesses visionary power," and the precedent of Native American visionaries sat closely behind this analogy (33):

> For the indian, this adventure outside of the tangible world permits man to reconstitute the harmony beyond the imbalance in order to recover peace and serenity in the everyday universe. This appeal of the indians' gift of second sight already manifest itself in the paintings and drawings of [Roberto] Matta when he arrived in the United States. (Flahutez 31-2)

The strange, atmospheric physics of works such as Matta's Black Virtue of 1943 not only evoke the distant depths of interstellar space, but also suggest travel through it, such as in the vortex-like descent conjured in the left-hand portion of the canvas. Beyond Matta, Yves Tanguy was also accredited with traveling beyond the perceptible world into "worlds distant in time and space" in his wartime paintings (Flahutez 304). And similarly, the eerie, floating viewpoint of works such as Palace of Windowed Rocks of 1942 (Fig. 5) suggests a flight into an alternative universe, similar to that experienced by Black Elk in his Great Vision.

Fig. 5. Yves Tanguy, Le palais aux rochers de fenêtres, 1942, oil on canvas, 163 x 132 cm. Paris, Centre Pompidou – Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de creation industrielle. Photo: © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI. © ADAGP, Paris.

Elsewhere, shamanic journeying was vividly described in surrealist literature during the war. In June 1943, Benjamin Péret published an essay in the American magazine View entitled "Magic: The Flesh and Blood of Poetry." The essay anticipated the stirrings of a theoretical discussion of magic within surrealist discourse, and from the very outset, it linked magic to the world of "primitive" or "savage" man (44). Péret petitioned for the revival of "primitive thought," where he mourned the deterioration of the essential role of poetry in everyday life; arguing that poetry "irrevocably loses its meaning" for the working

man in modern industrialized society (44). Meanwhile, he saw that in other corners of the world "the savage remains a poet" (44). Seeking to integrate himself with this "poetic" worldview, Péret took inspiration from Hopi culture. And in a remarkable passage, he presented the Hopi Kachina doll as embodying a meditative gateway into shamanic journeying, where he ventured into the crenelated head of a Kachina:

> Sometimes the dolls of the Hopi Indians of New Mexico have heads which represent, schematically, a medieval castle. I shall try to enter this castle. There are no doors; the ramparts have the thickness of a thousand centuries. It is not in ruins, as you might think...Now that I butt my head against the ramparts...They open like high grasses giving way to the passage of a wild beast. Then, by some phenomenon of osmosis, I find myself inside, emitting rays of the Aurora Borealis. Glittering armour, standing guard in the hall like a row of mountain peaks eternally covered with snow, salute me with raised fists whose fingers shed a continual flux of birds. (44)

Across the wartime works of Matta, Tanguy and Péret, there seems to be a new recognition that Surrealism and Native American societies were commonly premised upon "the power of being transported...of losing ('but truly loosing') the distinction between the subjective and the objective, the interior and the exterior, of knowing and of being" (Monnerot 157). But as Monnerot also outlined, in Native American culture this "privileged experience" most often involved the accompanying presence of certain other beings, which would also come to play a crucial role in Surrealism's mythological reinvention (155).

Guardian Spirits

Over the course of La Poésie moderne et le Sacré, Monnerot attests to the prevalence of "guardian spirits"—who often take the form of animals—as intercessors who help to reveal and structure the diverse mythological cosmogonies of North America:

> Among the Indians of the plains, it is via the dream and the vision that they individually acquire their "supernatural" protector-being, their "guardian spirit." (Monnerot 110)

> At the center of the religion of the Crow Indians, says Lowie, is not the cult of such and such sacred being, but the privileged experience...This is the fixed point around which gravitate a plurality of surreal beings, and without which they would not exist. (Monnerot 155)

> On the Northwest coast, among the Kwakiutl, the "guardian spirits" remain reclusive during the profane summer, appearing only in winter, the season of secrets. It is then that they come into their own and transmit what they have revealed in the course of visions to the interior of the clan. (Monnerot 111)

Monnerot's explanation of the consistency of these phenomena at first appears somewhat complicated, where he surmises that: "[t]here is a dream-life, comprised of the sites of the dream, and this dream-life, these places of the dream, participate in a dream-time, in which there is otherwise a total vacancy of distinctions of space and time, or at least an elasticity, an imprecision in the limits" (117). Yet his discussion on this point rests upon a relatively simple premise: that the characters and places encountered in the dream constitute a parallel universe of sorts, which, though by no means regulated by time, demonstrates a continuity, a permanence that survives and endures our temporality. This is what he refers to as "dream-time," inhabited by beings possessed of "dream-life," whose continuity—palpable in the dream—guarantees any given mythological cosmogony's continued relevance. It is this assumed simultaneity with a living mythological realm, whereby the shaman or chief believes he is going through life "with the totemic ancestor of his clan," which ultimately accounts for myth's immediacy to everyday life, and for its structuring influence upon it (Monnerot 118).

This notion of contiguity between day-to-day life and mythological "dream-life" is clearly inscribed in Breton's legend of "The Great Invisibles," wherein his calculated designation that these invisible beings exist "above [humanity] on the animal level" insists upon their supernatural existence alongside the perceptible realm. The wartime works of Matta, populated by strange one-eyed monsters, are often invoked as illustrative examples of the "beings" Breton described in "The Great Invisibles." However, where a visual description of these beings is lacking entirely from Breton's account (if one could even be possible for invisible entities), it seems that these paintings' most meaningful point of comparison with Breton's description of a surrealist cosmogony is their collective substantiation of a sense of process and continuity, which heightens the sense of them occupying a "dream-time" simultaneous with everyday life. Strung between works such as A Grave Situation (Fig. 6), Être Avec, and Chamboles les amoureuses (all from 1946) Matta conjures a rounded picture of the ongoing existence of these supernatural beings—as documented

across various scenes from their "daily life"—which renders their presence all the more credible, and their mythological significance all the more pressing.

Fig. 6. Matta (Roberto Matta Echaurren), A Grave Situation, 1946, oil on canvas, 139.7 × 195.9 cm. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of the Mary and Earle Ludgin Collection, 1998.30. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

It is precisely the relativity of their existence that consolidates the reputation of such mythological beings as guardian spirits, as intercessors capable of interfacing with everyday life. Such interfacing is vividly described in Sun Chief, where the "dream-time" of the Hopi's Kachina pantheon is seamlessly interwoven with everyday existence:

> I was sitting in the door of the third story of my house, removing my shoes, when my Guardian Spirit suddenly appeared and told me to follow him. I replaced my shoes quickly and followed about fifty steps behind my Guide. He led me past the old stone church and disappeared over the southeast edge of the mesa. When I overtook him on the lower shelf near a shrine, he said, "Step on this water shield with me and prepare for a ride."...We stepped upon the plaque, and each of us seized a propeller stick tipped with a prayer feather. The shield arose and floated with us northeast like a cloud, moving over desert and high mesas. Finally my Guide said, "I am taking you to the secret meeting place of the underworld people. Perhaps you will recognize some old friends. Remember that I am your Guardian Spirit. Don't be afraid, for I will protect you." (Simmons 342–43)

As with Talayesva's spectrally present Guardian Spirit, the "beings" of Surrealism's mythological reinvention were also attributed with a parallelism that guaranteed their ability to intervene within day-to-day life. As Flahutez summarizes, "This other world which runs through the work of Tanguy, of Matta and of Breton during the 1940s is…a sort of new dimension, peopled with beings which interact with the living, the world and nature" (Flahutez 68).

The Value and Valences of Myth

Towards the end of the World War II, and during the postwar period, Breton went on to develop a theoretical case for the relevance of myth that was much more closely invested in literature than praxis. In Arcanum 17 (1945), which he wrote in 1944 while visiting the Gaspé Peninsula on Canada's eastern seaboard, he conceived of myth as a means of reinscribing the symbolic superstructure of the world. While anthropologists tended to reduce mythological beliefs to a set of discrete signs pertaining to ergonomic or practical necessity, Breton argued that the sheer complexity of mythological belief systems indicates that they are in fact geared towards symbolic fluidity, and the potential therein for reinventing the world:

> It's painful to observe how…the lofty interpretations that directed ancient beliefs have been systematically reduced to the letter of their contents…Thus the Philistine is satisfied to learn that Hopi ceremonies, exceptionally varied and requiring the intervention of the maximum number of supernatural beings the imagination can furnish faces and distinct attributes for, are intended more or less to lure every possible protection for the crops these Indian tribes cultivate, first among which is corn…Who will accept that such elaborate constructs can be resolved and more or less exhausted by the analysis of the need to deify rain and other fertilizing elements required by arid lands? More inspiring and dignifying to the mind is the viewpoint of the mythographers themselves which emphasizes that in order for a myth to be viable, it must satisfy a number of meanings at once. (Breton, Arcanum 115–16)

This notion of the malleable, "poetic" qualities of myth accounts for the group's subsequent explorations of mythological themes in Le Surréalisme en 1947, which included a polymorphous pantheon of surrealist deities inspired by "[American] indian or vodou examples" (Breton, "Projet" 136). In his essay "Ascendant Sign," which was published in the new surrealist periodical Néon in January 1948, Breton went so far as to

conceive of analogy and metaphor—the poetic trains of thought universally responsible for the blossoming of mythological belief systems—as humanity's principal means of "'transforming' the world" (Breton, Free 105).

And yet, this grand (and compelling) theory of the revolutionary power of myth, which spans much of Breton's postwar writings, has tended to obscure the fact that during the war myth was not merely a theoretical exercise, but temporarily became the very lifeblood of the movement. Through various forms of contact with the history and living remnants of Native American culture, the exiled surrealists became increasingly predisposed to living mythologically. This is what Monnerot took pains to demonstrate in La Poésie moderne et le Sacré, by framing the mythological encounter with Native America as by far the most formative experience of their American exile. What was not explained in Breton's or the wider group's collective writings on myth was how to access and occupy a mythological worldview. Monnerot responded to this aporia with a veritable instruction manual: where, through an array of highly original comparisons, he demonstrated how the surrealists were ideally placed to emulate the Native American's exemplary encounters with shamans, guardian beings and dream-places in pursuit of a mythological existence. And it is in this light that Monnerot's work should be recognized as a crucial formulation of Surrealism's wartime appeal to myth: as a surrealist-backed User's Guide to what he termed Native America's "declaration of the rights of the dream" (109).

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