1 ‘The dung beetle’s snowball’: the philosophic narcissism of Claude Cahun’s essay-poetry

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Published in Paris, 1930, Claude Cahun’s *Aveux non avenus* is a work ‘virtually entirely dedicated to the word adventure’,[1] although given that it took a decade to write (1919–29) it is also an evidential text of re-fashioning, of cancellations and additions. Translated as *Disavowals, or Cancelled Confessions*,[2] it breaks ostensibly with traditions of autobiography or confessional writing through experimentation with form on the one hand, and a deliberately misleading and forking investigation of the self on the other. It is an expansive collection of writings – poems, diary entries, notes on dreams and nightmares, Socratic dialogue, mini-essays on modern politics, gender, love, and human avarice. Cahun did not believe that the hallowed and fetishised form of autobiographical writing could constitute a life lived. As Jennifer L. Shaw argues, ‘it would be wrong to interpret her work as a reflection of her biography. Personal experience informs it, but it is complex, referential, paradoxical and often ironic. Even her most directly political writings never sit still for the reader’.[3] Consequently, rather than providing a series of chronological self-portraits,[4] *Disavowals* dwells on absences and illusions, splitting and multiplication, hunting down ‘[t]he void bang in the middle’ of the self.[5] In so doing, Cahun addresses and challenges fear by fidgeting, leaping, and galloping over extensive ground and numerous stylistic and thematic regions. What is astonishing in this spatio-temporal feat is the book’s depth, which at no point is compromised by its breadth. *Disavowals* is an intensely profound work that rewards the reader with a tender lyricism, supported with sharp philosophical observation. This chapter explores the potential impact of Cahun’s radical politics for the reader in the twenty-first century. It considers the manifold ways in which *Disavowals*, in particular, keeps reinventing itself. The text, illustrated with

striking, provocative photomontages, never stops. Its 'prismatic'[6] narcissism and labyrinthine turns beg the reader to begin again, to trace a different path through the ideas, and to draw new conclusions.

Born Lucie Renée Mathilde Schwob in Nantes, France, the niece of Symbolist writer Marcel Schwob, Cahun begins publishing with a new name that reflects a gender-neutral identity, and establishes a perspective from which to interrogate and play with fixed ideas of the feminism.[7] Cahun's ambivalence regarding the socio-hegemonic lay lines determining gender is frequently humorously rendered: 'Shuffle the cards. Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me.'[8] Aided in areas of design and image reproduction by stepsister Marcel Moore (née Suzanne Malherbe – the two become life-long lovers, friends, and intimate collaborators), Cahun categorised *Disavowals* as 'a psychological and moral experiment'.[9] As Shaw details, the book was originally published in an edition of 500 copies, and copies of photographs documenting its launch at the Librarie José Cortí in Paris are kept in the Cahun archive at the Jersey Heritage Trust. Shaw notes how reproductions of the photomontages from the book shared window space with Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929) and the magazine *Bifur*.[10] Much has been written on Cahun's gender, the use of masks and costume, and the direct strategy of polymorphous performance in their work, to which this chapter is indebted.[11] Departing from these intriguing aspects of performance and self-fashioning, this chapter prioritises instead Cahun's *textual* politics. It considers what the meandering word-paths, the returns and repetitions of moral, ethical, social and sexual politics might tell us about a distinct form of poetics that eschews shame or embarrassment and enacts a deeply philosophical dialogue on selfhood as well as on contemporary European society. In particular it draws upon the affective shifts that proliferate in and between the words and layers of ideas, and which ask the reader to reflect upon life not as a fixed subject, but as a conduit of knowledge, desire,

passion and argument. Ultimately, Cahun's is a poetics that is political, didactic, elusive, funny, and intensely affecting. The questions they create are not simply about male, female, lesbian, androgynous, transvestite subjects and positions, but articulate the burgeoning axes of difference that exist between human subjects, other human subjects and the world.

Disavowals offers a radical sexual/textual politics[12] born out of a fierce intellectual engagement with modernist form and its predecessors (Classicism, Romanticism, Symbolism). It shares the spirit of the modernist poem, which, according to Toril Moi is characterised by 'its abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and apparent lack of logical construction … [the] kind of writing in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have managed to break through the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning'.[13] This is not to say that *Disavowals* is devoid of reason – quite the contrary – but that the thread of reasoning often breaks to enjoy digressive and experimental ideas, which may or may not cohere and coalesce. Cahun asks the reader to face not only her own perceived lack but, more widely, to consider the often invisible and indeterminate aspects at the heart of modern existence. This is clearly outlined towards the end of *Disavowals*, in Chapter IX (subtitled 'We get the god we deserve, unfortunately for us'), in the interlude 'Snowball'. They write:

> A rolling stone gathers no moss, but covers the original form in clay where gravel sticks, debris, so well bound together by the movement, so thoroughly incorporated, that its form is no longer visible, nor its point of origin. The dung beetle's snowball grows fatter, hardens, suffices to set off an avalanche. Whoever wishes to strip his soul bare must expect to see the dubious amalgam completely fall apart in his hands.

> This surgical blade with which analysis or religion arms us against ourselves will it encounter an ivory core – or just rubbish, rubbish, piles of rubbish all the way into its unrecognisable centre, dust swept along the wind?[14]

Cahun's tongue-in-cheek word play takes the concept of the uprooted, shifting stone and reveals its paradoxical nature. Fantasised in this verse as being pure (as snow), precious and strong (as ivory) with an original core value, the stone (human) in its modern setting can only gather debris, growing fat (greed and lack of rigour) and becoming unrecognisable. When subjected to interrogation and moral questioning, Cahun asks whether this boulder of excrement will only reveal layer upon layer of rubbish, its value scattering in veils of indiscernible dust upon the wind, with no residual aura. A damning portrait of the modern human reimagined as a dung-beetle's ball, Cahun highlights the Sisyphean task of attempting to negotiate selfhood in an era of increasingly consumer-driven culture, where often narrow definitions of gender were reproduced in advertising, popular entertainment, and art. The jarring juxtaposition of satire and melancholy, of purity and filth, rapid movement and slow amalgamation, solid and ephemeral forms, is exemplary of their ability to unpick social reality at its seams. For Cahun, nothing is fixed, nothing is certain, and if we stare hard enough in the mirror, the world, its history, and its rules begin to unravel. Whether the writing is a response to consumer capitalism, discoveries in sexology, a questionnaire posed in *Minotaure* by the surrealists,[15] or interrogating classical narratives on femininity, Cahun's rapier wit and refreshing honesty shatter preconceptions of what it is to be a modernist woman writer, just as their photographic oeuvre challenges the oft-discussed misogyny of surrealist artists who favour women as muses. As Elza Adamowicz reminds us: 'The medium of photomontage undoes specularity by fabricating an open, unresolved, and composite self'; this surfeit of faces, Adamowicz wryly observes, is Cahun's 'femme 100 têtes': 'less the hapless, headless

female body of a Max Ernst than the hundred-headed body of the empowered female subject'.[16]

Disavowals is a textual collage that offers the antidote to the dung-beetle's snowball, where the 'void bang in the middle' of self, and by extension, society, is replaced by an aura, returned to us through Cahun's surgical knife – literally and emotionally cutting. Slips and shards of objects, snippets of dialogue, and re-workings of mythical tales fan out in generous abundance. Where the dung-beetle's ball is comprised of sedimented, cloying layers, Cahun's textual layers free the source materials from any binding context, reinvesting them with new potential and encouraging new associations and emotions to emerge for the reader. Walter Benjamin valued the work of surrealists at a time when the mass reproduction of cultural objects threatened a loss of aura, or uniqueness: 'Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its *likeness*, its reproduction.'[17] Benjamin's consideration of an elimination or 'withering' of 'aura' in early twentieth century culture finds that 'authentic' existence has been supplanted by 'a plurality of copies' whereby a work of art, or an object, ceases to 'transmit' 'its testimony to the history [and tradition] it has experienced'.[18] Cahun understood the need to mobilise the modes of production available to them – illustration, photography, poetry, performance, sculpture, critical writing, photomontage – in order to re-conduct aura back to the public through a polysemic mode of address. In other words, the traditions and histories of their references to classical and popular culture when juxtaposed into a poetic counterpoint retain the authenticity (Benjamin's 'aura') of their origins because they have been revivified through Cahun's artistry and politicised perspective. In the essay 'Prenez garde aux objets domestiques' written for *Cahiers d'Art*, a companion piece to their contribution to the 1936 'Surrealist Exhibition of Objects' at the Charles Ratton Gallery in London, Cahun reveals a democratic, surrealist approach to modernity:

I insist on the primordial truth: one must oneself discover, manipulate, tame, and construct irrational objects to be able to appreciate the particular or general value of those displayed here. That is why, in certain respects, manual laborers may be in a better position than intellectuals to understand them, were it not for the fact that the whole of capitalist society – communist propaganda included – diverts them from doing so. And that is why you are beginning to dig into your pockets, and perhaps to empty them out on the table.[19]

Here we must begin with ourselves, the objects in our pockets and littered about our houses, the natural objects that form backdrops to our daily routines. These sentiments find an earlier release through the creative practice enacted in *Disavowals*, an indirect and surrealist approach to modern, capitalist life. On the dust jacket for the Tate edition of *Disavowals*, Dawn Ades declares Cahun 'a major surrealist writer and radical theorist of sexuality', and to this I would add philosopher: 'For myself I'm interested in making the game more complicated. Those who live by the tongue have discovered a way of talking that replaces action, that's even more simple – and less compromising.'[20] Complexity is precisely how Cahun manages to weave poetry and philosophy into searching, essayistic treatises, which, as I will demonstrate, push at the boundaries between the disciplines of poetry, art history, theory, and philosophy.

At the very end of *Disavowals*, Cahun writes the words:

Dear Strangers, keep your distance: I have only you in the world.

'And me? What about me? …' someone shouts: myself.

My beautiful future, the unhoped for reserve, comes to me.

> Present already past, you who evade me, one moment more respite…
>
> Provided that it's not too late.[21]

It is all too easy to read oneself into the gaps in this free verse, the self and the other locked into the crucial moment of a promised alignment that may already have passed. The giddy vertigo of a spatio-temporal tension in which past selves and future selves dance at arm's length is an acute realisation of the idea of potential. Potential is always ahead, something to come, but the desire for it is ever present. These ideas chime with the rather low-grade photograph of a dirt road with a vanishing horizon that accompanies the table of contents directly following this verse at the end of *Disavowals*. The photograph acts as a coda, or a return, to the opening sentence: 'The invisible adventure.'[22] The words quoted above discuss an adventure into the self, which is poised on the point of becoming both in and against the ebb of time, an idea that is doubled in the photograph where the self in human form is replaced by the horizon, the gaze fixed on a landscape devoid of human presence. The image is suggestive of movement passed; it bears the traces of prior journeys etched in white over the charcoal surface of the road. It also evokes potential movement towards a future, where the cropped perspective – entering the path *in medias res* – urges the viewer forward towards the horizon, towards the 'invisible adventure'. It is interesting as a metaphorical image in that it replaces the reflective surface required of Narcissus with the horizon – centripetal introspection to centrifugal potential. Roger Cardinal has remarked of Cahun's landscape photographs (numerous examples of which were taken on Jersey) that they are shot 'as if the edge of the land were a zone especially conducive to transformation, a place where known things yield readily to a thrilling differentness, an enthralling indecisiveness of polymorphousness'.[23] The photograph is a contemplative image in that it seems to index Cahun's detailed philosophical adventures into the self, but then leaves the body behind,

leading forwards into thought abstracted. The monochrome reproduction of the view lends a rather sombre tone, and coupled with Cahun's refrain, 'Provided that it's not too late', encourages introspective reflection that cleverly incorporates the previous pages back upon itself. In Chapter II, for example, we might fold the following words back into the photograph: 'It's all about converging lines. They don't meet for long. Where they stop is arbitrary. Continue to bring these lines to life, each in its own direction: you will correctly call them divergent.'[24] The relationship between image and text is always taut and philosophical, regardless of whether it is comedic, dramatic, or dark. Here it manages to evoke invisibility, what is felt, but not necessarily present, or what is fantasised and fleeting. By careful design, the original dust jacket of the 1933 edition wraps this philosophical working through of the visible and invisible, with *calligrammes*[25] of the book's title – the front cover arranged as a crossroads (the starting point) and the back arranged in the form of a circular clock with a minute and second hand, seeming to expand the words 'Provided that it's not too late'.

French writer Pierre Mac Orlan's essays on photography and the '*fantastique social*' or social fantastic, ruminate on the camera's ability to condense the mood and preoccupations of an epoch. He argues that 'the mystery that emanates from certain sights, certain people, and certain objects does not spring just from the power of revelation that a human brain can possess'[26] but is *witnessed* through the camera lens. We know that the camera held important sway for Cahun, providing testimony for the enactments of self. The camera both machine and audience, realised ideas based in a love of theatre, classical myth, and literature, as well as developing elements of surrealist practice such as the privileging of chance and the radical power of unexpected juxtaposition. An amateur photographer (evidence in the Jersey Heritage Trust archive shows that photographs were sent away and developed commercially rather than processed in a personal darkroom), Cahun used the camera as an intermediary in order for multiple real and fantasised identities to proliferate. As

Agnès Lhermitte notes regarding *Disavowals*, 'the interior space of Claude Cahun is constructed in the text through juxtaposition and superimposition of diverse angles of viewing, a prismatic vision', and the photomontages contribute 'the merciless mental exploration that cut Cahun's body into tiny pieces'.[27] Mac Orlan, a fan of Marcel Schwob and frequent visitor to the salons of Montmartre and its spectacles, seems to nurture a predilection for nightlife and its phantasmagoric allure, focusing more closely on the milieu of Cahun's mise-en-scène. In his preface to the first French edition of *Disavowals*, he seems to align Cahun's spirit with the spirit of Parisian nightlife that is so dramatically rendered in photographer Eugène Atget's ghostly nightscapes of the city. He imagines Cahun as a wanderer of the night: 'This night broods over a strange congress of sometimes tender, sometimes furious forms and ideas. A philosophical orchestra plays discreetly. At dawn, all of this disappears.'[28] Undeniably evocative, Mac Orlan's romantic imagining of Cahun as barely-human *flâneuse*[29] fails to apprehend the solidity of the ideas accompanying these migratory adventures. Cahun is not interested in revealing the mysterious elements of life that Mac Orlan discusses in 'Élements de fantastique social' (1929) per se, but in capturing acts of transformation and recording the relationship between self and other, where other is by turns one's own psyche, the exterior environment, one's lover (who sometimes assists in the taking of the photograph or is imagined in interior dialogue), or a fictional figure drawn from long ago. Nevertheless, Mac Orlan's description of *Disavowals* as a containing a series of 'poem-essays' or 'essay-poems' is evocative, revealing a deeper connection with the philosophical direction of Cahun's mysterious twists and turns. He writes:

> *The sum total of poem-essays and essay-poems* contained in this publication … is the equivalent of the more or less regulation 300 pages of an adventure novel … Ideas trace elegant parabolas to end in a tragic unfolding, *exploding without a sound*. … The

> characters that evolve in this funeral procession are not exactly phantoms. More exactly, *these are apparitions whose weight, nonetheless, can be calculated*, who cannot evade the touch of a hand.[30]

Despite its moments of romantic hyperbole, Mac Orlan's overall verdict on *Disavowals* understands the temerity with which Cahun writes, and highlights the text's conscious difficulty, an observation many scholars have echoed in their own reactions to it; Kate Kline, for example, refers to 'the erratic, confused, and confusing rhythm of the text', that nevertheless 'convincingly communicates the incoherence of reality'.[31] Mac Orlan's is an intimate and intellectual engagement with the writing, keenly picking out the emotional and affective, as well as the critical and narrative strategies deployed by Cahun. But it is the almost casual mention of 'poem-essays and essay-poems' ('*poème-essais et essai-poèmes*' in the original) that stopped me in my tracks. To my mind Mac Orlan's compound nouns encapsulate perfectly the poetic and philosophical tension that courses through *Disavowals*, moving unceasingly back and forth between the condensation of personal sensory intensities and more sprawling, investigatory prose linked to socio-political and cultural aspects of early twentieth-century life. Here, Mac Orlan alludes to the Symbolist conceit of the melancholy heart which could be said to correspond to Cahun's frustration and bitterness in negotiating life with love, particularly in Chapter III, where a long-form poem entitled 'Morose Delights' ribbons through various acts of voyeurism and physical involvement with lovers:

> From now on one will ponder
> whether morose delight,
> passed through the sieve of time
> isn't preferable to pleasure.

> It is the juice of it,
>
> the corrupted liquid
>
> concentrated, purified,
>
> stronger and more lasting.[32]

A poetic treatise on memory and forgetting, 'Morose Delights' speaks of the maturation of pain over time, and the role of art in immortalising a favourable view of love (classical statues serve as key examples) that serves to aid in forgetting and prepares one to repeat the process over again. But Cahun's reflective moroseness shifts to something more intense in the following chapter (IV), where it reflects on how art can also obfuscate and conceal:

> Where love is concerned, it's up close that illusion corrupts our senses.
>
> In direct proportion to the distance he puts between himself and his beloved, the lover's thoughts circle love's fantasy, getting smaller and smaller – centre at last, stand still.
>
> And his thoughts see that there is nothing, that they were moving round a void, that they exist alone.[33]

Here Cahun crafts a baroque conceit of decorative illusion, or *engaño* – deceit, *trompe l'oeil*, trickery – that proliferates in layers around the void, which in turn represents a fear of emptiness, nothingness, the *horror vacui*. In this particular passage, Cahun investigates the traps of love, the suffering entailed therein, and the pleasurable humiliation in deceit. The surface, like Cahun's layered selves in the 'ludicrous merry-go-round'[34] of repeated encounters with the mirror, is illusory: a 'baroque exhibitionism'[35] that is tethered to the anxiety, not of existing at the margins, but of not existing at all. The acute fear of illusory

reality here extends to the human figure, the couple. I read this passage as a moment of impasse, where the philosophical enquiry into the idea that one *is not seen* by the world results in a fleeting illusion of self in love. This is not, of course, simply about love, it is also about the fear of a version of the world that does not accept the fantasies of its subjects, of a society that fails to recognise the power in them.

Mac Orlan's allusion, above, to Cahun's proliferating ideas (and selves) as a series of apparitions is unusual in that it unexpectedly attributes weight and measure to a phenomenon (the apparition) which is associated with palimpsestic weightlessness. He reinforces the concept of the poem-essay/essay-poem by measuring Cahun's writing in terms of its power to impress upon the reader. He hereby lays claim to a kind of writing, an essayism, which weighs and measures ideas through experiment and repetition. The etymology of the essay or *essai* dates to the twelfth-century Vulgar Latin base *exagium*, meaning a weighing, or weight, and the verb *exigere*, to try, test, examine. Contemporary usage derives from the Middle French usage of *essai*, furthered by Michel de Montaigne's collected work *Essais* (commencing in 1572). The essay is not about the conclusion, the definitive, or the exhaustion of its subjects; rather it is more often determined by digression, tangential experiment and multiple, intertextual references and forking paths. It is thought in becoming – beginning, repeating, trying, failing – levelled against an implied other, audience or reader. Brian Dillon, in his self-reflexive long-form essay *Essayism*, describes how the essay performs 'a combination of exactitude and evasion. A form that would instruct, seduce, and mystify in equal measure'. He urges his reader to '[i]magine a type of writing so hard to define its very name should be something like an effort, an attempt, a trial. … Imagine what it might rescue from disaster and achieve at the levels of form, style, texture and therefore, at the level of thought'.[36] Throughout *Disavowals,* the Cahun-character, seemingly determined by their corporeal body, searches for weight and for meaning in mirrors and in dreams; Cahun

the philosopher-poet/poet-philosopher weighs the world in spite of 'the horror of the unknown' and the internal fear that '[m]y thoughts were not strong enough'.[37] The slippage between the self as a part of an objective reality and the self as an abstract concept is noted in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, whereby '[t]o touch *oneself*, to see *oneself* accordingly – is not to apprehend oneself as an object, it is to be open to oneself, destined to oneself (narcissism)'.[38] Cahun's *Disavowals* attempts to – *essaie de* – touch the centre, the core of selfhood, but gestures towards something in the invisible, the vanishing horizon. This is no less real than the self in the mirror, or the troubling limbs or bodily appearance of which they are so critical in *Disavowals.* Deeply philosophical, Cahun's text – which, we should recall, was begun in 1919 – tests out Merleau-Ponty before *The Visible and the Invisible* is even written. Both clearly obsessed with the same issues, Cahun's philosophical journey nevertheless has more at stake because it is written from a socialised female perspective that is desperate to step outside these constraints. Extension from the body through the mind is as Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, H.D., Gertrude Stein, Simone de Beauvoir and others proved, essential to really see oneself. Cahun tempers a detailed, meandering prose with affective, emotional verse. The result is enlivening and dynamic, the poetry seemingly, like the photomontages and Cahun's wider photographic oeuvre, punctuating the flow at particularly introspective moments of jealousy, anxiety, lust, or fear.

Mac Orlan skillfully avoids privileging essays over poems or vice versa by inserting a hyphen to denote equity between the two modes of expression. Similar checks and balances arise between the fields of poetry and philosophy, framed through aesthetic and literary studies. For centuries, for example, literature has produced poet-philosophers such as Titus Lucretius Carus (99–c. 55BC) Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (1772–1801, known by his penname Novalis), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1782–1822), Paul Éluard (1895–1952) or Audre Lorde (1934–92). In his consideration of the use-value of poetry for

the discipline of philosophy, Peter Lamarque muses on the ways in which the complexity of poetry (especially modernist poetry) opens up space for philosophical enquiry: 'in poetry we attend to the finegrainedness of language, its textures and intricacies, its opacity; in conveying thought-processes, and we find value in the experience that it affords'.[39] Equally, philosophers borrow from poetic tradition to condense complex ideas into compelling images; it is simply not the case that philosophy elucidates while poetry obfuscates – modern philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–92) or Hélène Cixous (b.1937) have shown how poetry enters the discourse of philosophy. In the case of the latter, it has been argued that her philosophical rigour sometimes takes 'the parameters of thinking and writing' to their 'outer edges', while 'her approach signals a productive exchange with that which escapes the binds of logocentric discourse'.[40] Cahun's fierce ripostes and philosophical rigour in the modern(ist) epoch determine the parameters for self-fashioning, but importantly also define the parameters for what constitutes as avant-garde, or new, which includes essayistic poetry illuminating the strictures of gender denominations. As Mina Loy writes: 'Poetry is prose bewitched, a music made of visual thoughts, the sound of an idea.'[41] Cixous in interview remarked that '[f]or me, theory does not come before, to inspire, it does not precede, does not dictate, but rather it is a consequence of my text, which is at its origin philosophico-poetical, and it is a consequence in the form of compromise or urgent necessity'.[42] It is important for Cahun that the 'urgent necessity' to communicate may take various forms, not only poetry and philosophy, but also the essayistic and journalistic. And although Cahun's views on lesbianism, femininity, masculinity, eroticism, or politics may seem very direct and unabashed, even to the twenty-first century reader, it is via the 'indirect' means of modern art and writing that their audience is hoped to reflect more deeply.

Cahun's first published book of essay-poetry *Vues et visions*, printed in the literary magazine *Mercure de France*, 1919, is a doubled narrative of prose poems illustrated

beautifully by Moore. Tirza True Latimer has observed how even from this early publication, Cahun combines '*views*' – real places in space and time visited while holidaying with Moore (in Le Croisic) – with the mythical *visions* of classical antiquity (Rome). Taking a Sapphic turn, Latimer explains that '[t]he adoption of antiquity as a point of reference, while, redolent of mainstream high culture and the interwar *rappel à l'ordre*, would also have resonated within Paris's gay subcultures'.[43] Moore's illustrations of nude women in classical and modern styles frame Cahun's paired verses. Something similar is enacted much later, in 1951, in the poem-collage-novel written and illustrated by Valentine Penrose (née Boué), *Dons des féminines* (Gifts of the Feminine), which imagines the travels of Rubia and María Élona based on Penrose's intimate affair with Alice Rahon (albeit with Rahon's role imagined and not materialised in the same manner as Cahun and Moore's). Such important texts as *Vues et visions* and *Dons des féminines* demonstrate the collaborative creative labour of a lesbian poetics, which re-invents male-dominated terrain (André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Max Ernst's collage novels, Georgio de Chirico's modern imagining of antiquity) through adventure and travel. This intimate, yet direct form of address is unapologetic in its show of love, of contrastive moods signalled in the real and the utopian spaces, and uncompromising in its inventive, and what Latimer terms 'covert', deployment of form[44]. Shaw reads into the book a 'female, lesbian counterpart to the "Greek love" evoked by the Uranian poets', referenced in Cahun's unpublished 'Jeux uraniens' ('Uranian Games', aka 'Amor Amicitiae', begun in 1913),[45] which attempts to push lesbianism out of the shadows into the light beyond the divisive lines segregating same-sex love towards a perfect love.[46] This utopian image corresponds to the episode in Plato's *Symposium* where Aristophanes recounts the mythical story of love and sexual difference. Platonic love exists in perfect symmetry represented in the figure of the androgyne – the third sex – where female and male attributes unite into a whole. After the splitting of the androgyne into male and female halves (socialised love), it remained

possible, according to Aristophanes, for non-heterosexual love to develop in same-sex directions:

> such a nature is prone to love and ready to return love, always embracing that which is akin to him. And when one of them meets with his other half, the actual half of himself… the pair are lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy, and one will not be out of the other's sight, as I may say, even for a moment: these are the people who pass their whole lives together; yet they could not explain what they desire of one another.[47]

'Amor Amicitiae' is dedicated 'À RM [Renée Mathilde] son ami Claude Cahun' and is structured as a dialogue between the lover 'l'aimé' and the friend 'l'ami', representing the instinctual lust and philosophical[48] journey of Sapphic love, where male and female attributes shift according to mood and perception. The dialogue evokes the rhythm of falling (in love and friendship with the other), a kind of spherical movement into which the subjects of love are interpellated, by turns mortal and imaginary:

> C'est le monde renversé: tu m'as jeté à terre […] Les yeux levés au ciel […] Comprenez donc enfin où votre divinité réside? Est-ce dans le sillon, le vent, la mer, ou plutôt dans l'art d'une symphonie humaine? Pourquoi vouloir excepter l'humanité seule de l'ordre universel? Ami, chacun porte sa nature en soi et ne songe qu'à la combattre.[49]

The battle to which Cahun returns again and again is with oneself as much as against society; their essayistic poetry here enacts a constant, and positive, back-and-forth within a cellular, elliptical movement that contains self and lover, male and female, playing also with the trope

of the 'mannish' lesbian. Both 'Amor Amicitiae' and *Vues et visions* adopt dialogue as a literary form through which the subject's inner voice (usually identifying as male) is imagined in the form of the lover, as well as in the form of abstract Nature. The final refrain of *Vues et visions* repeats across both real and imagined spaces (Le Croisic and Rome), the text spanning the double page layout, but with a deliberate shift in gender from 'ami' to 'amie': 'La douleur se calme et se change en un battement d'ailes qui se raientit et s'efface. Ingrat, je vais quitter cette ami/amie qui me chante et me berce et m'endort' ('The pain subsides and changes into a beat of the wings that slows down and fades away. Ingrate, I will leave this friend who sings to me, rocks me and sends me to sleep').[50] Cahun's spatio-temporal imagining, their elliptical working out, is not purely utopian in its realisation, but returns to the Cahun-character who is unable (yet) to fully succumb to pleasure ('Ingrat'/'ungrateful') because they are still tied to the experience of suffering; the verse imagines love fading into a slow beat, carried by a pair of wings. Platonic love, like self-love, is potentiality, energy, 'le feu de l'action' ('the fire of the action'),[51] but pain, lack of action, is still able to hamper or destroy it.

Cahun's involvement in the Parisian surrealist avant-garde, particularly in writings such as the essay 'Les Paris sont ouverts' ('Place Your Bets') which appeared in the February 1933 issue of the Association des écrivains et Artistes révolutionaires (AEAR, Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers) and was dedicated to Leon Trotsky.[52] Cahun had been introduced to Breton in 1932 by Jacques Viot and contributed to Bataille and Breton's *Contre-Attaque* (1935–6); they were friends with Breton and Jacqueline Lamba, Robert Desnos and Tristan Tzara. Later in the unpublished text 'Confidences au miroir' (1945–6) they recall the power of surrealism around the time of the Paris group's ideological struggles with the Parti communiste français (PCF, French Communist Party). This particular free-form essay charts Cahun's increasing engagement with anti-bourgeois, anti-fascist ideologies, but it also weaves in drifting thoughts about the value of art, fame, Réne Crevel's tragic suicide, a

friendship with Henri Michaux, among other concerns.[53] It is an entirely different kind of writing to *Disavowals*, less poetic although still brimming with literary references, more a dialogue between certainty and uncertainty – an essay or treatise *on* poetry. But despite their obvious fit with surrealism in terms of its radicality and non-conformism, Cahun never followed any group or faction to the letter, instead following their own instinctual paths. Michael Löwy distinguishes, Cahun as 'an individualist and libertarian character … could not accept the authoritarian Marxism represented by the leadership of A.E.A.R.' nor Louis Aragon's sympathising with Stalinist Communism,[54] which is when, like Breton (who was also expelled from the group), they seek inspiration in Trotsky. There is a direct link between the ideas in 'Les Paris' and 'Prenez garde', which called for a democratisation of art, and willingness to make irrationality and incongruity part of everyday praxis. In 'Les Paris' Cahun's poetics shifts to provocation, extending beyond the figure of the couple and gender politics (which, it should be noted, are still very much evident in all their work) towards a new focus: how to reach a reading public, and promote revolutionary spirit through words on a page. This is, of course, a complex question perennially levelled at artists, and asked of surrealism in particular, given its insistence on a revolutionary poetics. In Breton's words:

> the independence of art – for the revolution
> the revolution – for the liberation of art once and for all[55]

For Breton and others, surrealism *is* revolution, and where Cahun saw this fail in Aragon's allegiance with Communism, they believed sufficiently to push for their own categorisation of what it meant to be revolutionary as an artist – '*l'action indirecte*' ('indirect action'). Poetry should not be propaganda, argues Cahun. Propaganda is a direct form of poetry (song verses, popular metre) hi-jacked for jingoistic, nationalistic and populist forms of persuasion. As it

lacks subtlety, Cahun continues – their voice seemingly rallying against the forces of state marketing and capitalist advertising – this kind of blunt address cannot win over the masses; indirect poetry on the other hand requires people to think, and only by thinking can true change, and revolution, be achieved. This is an example of how Cahun deliberately incorporates gaps, ellipses or obfuscation into their writing with the purpose of encouraging the reader's active participation:

> It's done by starting it up and then letting it break down. That obliges the reader to take a step further than he wants to by himself. The exits have been blocked, but you leave him the trouble of opening the front door. Let him desire, says Breton.[56]

Suggestive of finding one's way in a labyrinth, the path towards meaning is embedded in the desire to move away from the self, away from a clear path. To 'let' the reader desire is to deliberately create uncertainty, often the result of provocation, titillation, and lack designed in the verse. To open Cahun's 'front door' is to submit to a challenge, one that for this reader forcibly unblocks any limits imposed by expectation. Cahun understood the value of shock when unleashed upon a society cowed by shame and guilt, and their accounts of desire are also carnal and unapologetic: 'poetry … seems undeniably an inherent need of human, and even of animal, nature, a need undoubtedly linked to sex instinct … a constant bundle of changing relationships between poetic and social evolution'.[57] The first part of 'Les Paris' is subtitled 'La poésie garde son secret' ('Poetry Keeps Its Secret'), and indeed I feel that where photography has exposed Cahun's complex relationship with real and ontological selves, poetry is Cahun's secret, passionate, weapon: 'Poems cannot be called "revolutionary" or "not revolutionary" except insofar as, in their very inmost selves, they represent the people, the poets who created them. All poetry is poetry of circumstance. … poets in their own way act

upon people's sensibility. Their attack is more cunning: but even their most oblique blows can be fatal.'[58] Cahun alludes here to the instinctive and uncensored aspects of poetic writing, as well as to the deliberation and cunning involved in addressing a reader. Poetry allows Cahun's innermost thoughts to materialise, which, as in their photographs, condenses such a wealth of material in its references and emotional swells that it is not immediately accessible and requires excavation, opening up a dialogue with the reader. The way in which they describe this creative process might arise out of surrealist chance – circumstance – but it is designed to be clever, wilfully difficult and misleading in order to catch the reader off guard. This is not automatism, as the decade it took to develop *Disavowals* clearly demonstrates, but a critical practice predicated on layers, repetition, and by turns reasoned and aesthetically overloaded language. In the essay-poem 'Chanson sauvage' ('Wild Song') published in *Mercure de France* in 1921, Cahun demonstrates how early on in their career as a writer a rebellious Dada spirit anticipated complex theoretical philosophies: 'Vers mon Verbe de révolte, à chaque mot rétif, vers le désordre defensive de mon esprit, pour que tu ordonnes ses gestes barbares' (Towards my Word of revolt, to every stubborn word, towards the defensive disorder of my mind, so that you order its barbarous gestures).[59] What would much later become the bedrock of poststructuralist theory – the study of thinking through language in order to challenge any notion of meaning or truth as closed, or fixed, thereby embracing the instabilities and gaps in systems of knowledge – was already in evidence in their essay-poems written about commodity capitalism, homosexuality, and the power of artistic revolt. In the dialogic verse of this 'song', the other – 'mon enfant' – is characterised as fearless, smiling, and with disarming confidence, while the speaker is rebellious, cynical, and abrasive. Whether 'mon enfant' is a lover or part of the speaker's extended self, the structures of difference – the refusal to cement identity in a single likeness of the self but in a series of human and non-human entities – produce an essayism that is marked by the poetic refrain of an eternal return

back to the self. Each return is predicated on difference, on a shift, a new layer, a new twist of perspective. Cahun is most revolutionary in turning the binary into the sphere – in other words, in opening up for the reader a space (the song is set against a vast sea, and a city, which flaps wings fashioned from rows of factories) where flux, rebellion, but also Platonic love, undermine grand narratives of order. Later this is romantically reimagined as 'Pink magic' in *Disavowals*.[60] Cahun's secret is that poetry can be abstract and difficult, while also adopting an intimate and philosophical lyricism.

What I mean to say here, is that Cahun negotiates, and constantly re-defines, the meaning of revolution and of self-hood through permeable frameworks of difference, rather than likeness, as I also underline in relation to the concept of Benjaminian aura, above. What is revealed in mirrors, behind reflections, or between objects, relies on a friction, a gap, or fissure, in order to re-evaluate and expand their ideas. What Jacques Derrida would later cleverly term as *différance,* a linguistic term that assumes irreducibility as the genesis for any modern analysis of logocentrism, seems relevant (in spite of its lack of discourse on gender specifically) in relation to Cahun's own linguistic fashioning of modern, (gender) neutral philosophy. Derrida proposes that one can only know 'where "we" are' if we start from the 'concept of *play*': 'announcing, on the eve of philosophy and beyond it, the unity of chance and necessity of calculations without end'.[61] Cahun's *post-scriptum* to 'Les Paris' insists that debates on poetry remain open, and (in line with surrealism) emphasises that play and creativity supersede any goal of fixed meaning. In Chapter I of *Disavowals* an image of the soul as collage (the invisible, irreducible reimagined as an object) reveals a propensity of poststructuralist dissection *avant la lettre*: 'Indiscreet and brutal, I enjoy looking at what's underneath the crossed-out bits of my soul. Ill-advised intentions have been revised there, become dormant; others have materialized in their place.'[62] Arguably, their approach to writing, as well as photography, is incredibly sophisticated and ahead of its time. Poetry,

Cahun suggests, is a form of short cut which is capable of generating intensity such as that associated with extreme suffering or sexual love, and which 'intervenes' in the indirect knowledge of the universe generated by philosophical thought or enquiry.[63] It is clear that indirect action must involve both philosophical and poetic discourse. Mac Orlan's description of *Disavowals* as a collection of 'poèmes-essais' or 'essais-poèmes' is therefore relevant across Cahun's oeuvre. Stopping short before a full-blown philosophical treatise emerges, nevertheless their writing tends towards the meandering, indirect probing of philosophical thought often found in shorter essay forms. As Dillon notes regarding an essayistic writing practice: 'It seems quite clear to me now that all my escape routes, actual and textual, were leading me back to where I began.'[64] The love of repetition finds purchase here, as well as in the repetitive rhymes and refrains of their verse. The two, as Mac Orlan's hyphen insists, are inseparable, just as Cahun and their Cahun-character. What makes Cahun's writing unique is how their dialogic self-fashioning – a kind of ekphrasistic self-portraiture – by turn smoothens and deliberately raises up the join between the essay and the poem. At nodal points in *Disavowals* – punctuated by ellipses and broken into stanzas by the graphic stars, hearts and eyes printed in the original manuscript – the poetic and the essayistic meet, before separating again. Sometimes this is supposed to be jarring, as in the metamorphic leap between objective and subjective perspective, vernacular and ancient descriptions of love, or in this surrealist image:

> – He suffered with daring; he died without complaint… (I am a masochist and I screamed so loudly with joy that your feeble human ears couldn't hear a thing.)
>
>
>
> Guillotine window.

> A sheet of glass. Where shall I put the silver? Here or there; in front or behind the window?[65]

And at other times this shift is seamless, such as the rapid interchangeability between 'I' and 'God' and 'You'. Whether held in a close-up or at a distance, speaking from behind or in front of the mirroring glass, the subject of the shifting portrait plays with the reader, acutely aware of their craft and mode of address. For Michel Beaujour the self-portrait is a 'complex literary type' that asserts the subject's 'absolute difference' to the world; and the writer of the self-portrait, he continues, 'is unhoused from the start', marginalised in their exteriority, locked into the mirrors of a memory archive refashioned as conceptual discourse.[66] His is a rather bleak summation of portraiture, where polymorphous and fantastic facets of the subject belie a dispossessed self. But within these traps of self-fashioning is also something new that resists:

> There is no self-portrait that is not at grips with the thing or res: the commonplace. The self-portrait ineluctably sets itself up as topography or description, a scanning and destruction of places, which implies a rhetorical, mythological, and encyclopedic horizon. This amounts to saying that the self-portrait is always absolutely modern. The place, the stupidities, which the subject can utilize as his foils, as his dialectical raw material show him at grips with the Other who haunts him and from whom he tries to escape – that encyclopedia is constantly modified even if only superficially, according to fashionable ideologies and local traditions.[67]

This description helpfully outlines the dialogic and dialectical process of condensation in Cahun's essay-poetry, all of which, of course, does not occlude Cahun's photographs from the

poetic. A photograph fixes the subject, whether already still, or in frozen motion, and the version of the subject is held by the viewer's gaze to be hunted down. The poet does not show him or herself so clearly, but presents abstracted thoughts, which may coalesce into a readable 'image' or escape into the following sentence, snaking in and between the synapses. Often Cahun, the subject of a portrait, places their body within or alongside forms of nature, abstracted or occluded. They can be found – arms protruding from a rocky boulder (*Je tends les bras*, 1932) – as a doubly exposed image of body placed against rock, a naked version of Aristophanes' androgyne on the sand, umbilically bound by seaweed, or framed by the exotic Jersey Island fronds of St. Brelade's Bay (c. 1939). In 'Self Portrait crouched naked in a rock pool' (date unknown) Cahun is positioned between two rocky formations, crouched looking over their left shoulder obliquely into the still water. The water is dark and flat, while the protruding rock and Cahun's body are exposed in strong white light. The swimming cap on their head creates an optical illusion, seemingly cast in porcelain, turning Cahun into a shelled creature, with a protected head and fleshy body. The body is twisted slightly, showing sinewy musculature, and nothing in the portrait signals comfort or ease. Unlike the more deliberately narcissistic portraits where reflection or doubling is heightened, here the viewer in indirectly steered away from reading any fixity into the composition. The eye roves among the bleached-out parts of the image, the body opens the door to a poetic verse in which all that is usually protected – by clothes, by socialisation, by categorisation – has been exposed. The image appeals to nature, to a wild and strangely erotic and tender form. Cahun's profile turns aslant from the viewer, refusing to be caught and fixed. They are not female, their vagina likened to a sea creature, but they *are* sea creature. The effect is one of slippage rather than performance or staging, and this is what makes it poetic; the environment is condensed within the self, and the self is folded within the environment. Increasingly through the 1930s, Cahun's photographs posit the expansion of the self within the wider frame of Nature, and the

Cahun-character becomes smaller, more distant, at times melding with or disappearing into the landscape that surrounds them. In *Disavowals*, this diminishing figure reflects on power beyond the self: 'Metaphysical cowardice. You've had enough of the sky above your head, and the wind of vertigo bends your knees. In such a state, you don't give a damn about truth, about the earth . . . it is enough to reassure you that the lookout calls from the crow's nest: Horizon!.'[68] The answers are not to be found in gods, or in Nature, when all that exists or matters is I, a narcissism that, unlike that of the ill-fated Narcissus who 'didn't know how to go beyond appearances', attempts to find self-love. It can be said that the essay-poems/poem-essays in *Disavowals* fill in some of the gaps created by Cahun's photographic images, but any presumed 'evidence' of an expanded thought process in their writing actually brings with it more questions than it answers. This is comically illustrated in a section entitled 'I am in training, don't kiss me' clearly referencing Cahun's most iconic self-portrait, which ends inevitably with a 'who knows?'[69]

In conclusion, Cahun devised many routes via which to follow their 'invisible adventure' and these are inexhaustible, not simply due to the volume of permutations by which one can apprehend the ideas, but inexhaustible meaning indefatigable – bursting with energy. Clearly inspirational to the twenty-first century reader interested in gender politics, Cahun's prolific oeuvre also opens the reader up to new ideas on class politics, aesthetics, and consumer culture. Their work has inspired further dialogue in works such as Barbara Hammer's film *Lover Other: The Story of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore* (2006) – a quasi-documentary on Cahun and Moore's lives – and Sarah Pucill's films *Magic Mirror* (2013) and *Confessions to the Mirror* (2016) – which dialogically expand *Disavowals* and 'Confidences au miroir' through moving images. For Pucill, a visual artist, Cahun's multiplicity opens up possibilities for authorship – 'a theorist before her time': 'I see her as a writer and a thinker. She saw herself as Cassandra because what she was saying had to do

with the future. She's responding to Freud's theories of narcissism from a female queer point of view.'[70] In *Magic Mirror*, Cahun remains for Pucill an active participant in a dialogue on the genre of autobiography, thereby never becoming the objective study of the documentary. In the recent exhibition *Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun: Behind the Mask Another Mask* at the National Portrait Gallery in London (2017), Turner Prize-winning artist Wearing's self-portraits are brought together with Cahun's for the first time, curated by Sarah Howgate. *Behind the Mask Another Mask* sees Wearing explore her own practice through Cahun's performance portraits, enacting a 'spiritual camaraderie'.[71] As well as these explorations through visual art, writer Rupert Thompson's novel *Never Anyone But You* (2018)[72] experiments with a somewhat voyeuristic fan-fiction that imagines Cahun's life, drawn heavily from their self-portraits. Each of these examples evinces a love affair with Cahun's work, and like Cahun who applies their creativity with and against others – whether Moore, Judith, Echo, Narcissus, Gide, Havelock Ellis – each writer and artist holds up *Disavowals* or the self-portraits as mirrors, to *see differently*. In our present moment, modes of writing and creative expression have become more hybrid, ever searching for a means to face the void in our time, to reflect the world back in provocative and authentic work. Auto-fiction, auto-theory, film-philosophy, and scholarship in interdisciplinary fields such as the medical humanities, history of the emotions, or psycho-geography are just a few examples of the interpenetration of form and approach in recent art and literary trends. Many of these impulses for intermedial work can be traced in Cahun's essay-poems and poem-essays, which 'exceed' the 'passage from symbolism to surrealism' and anticipate 'the most advanced preoccupations of our times'.[73] Many of the conundrums faced by Cahun in the early twentieth century exist today, and their deliberate motion to refute and refuse and categorisation or fixity serves as inspiration at times when autonomy, aura or affect seem compromised. 'No point in making

myself comfortable' writes Cahun, wryly, as we return to the beginning (p.1).[74] Their legacy is the key to thinking otherwise.

[1] Pierre Mac Orlan, Preface to *Aveux non avenus*, p. XXIV. Reprinted in Jennifer Mundy, 'Introduction', in Claude Cahun, *Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions*, trans. Susan de Muth (1930. London: Tate Publishing, 2007), p. vii.

[2] Jennifer L. Shaw brilliantly suggests that the title could also be read phonetically as '*Veux non à Venus*' or 'Wish no to Venus', which could be seen as 'rejecting the mainstream constructions of femininity, beauty and love associated with the ideal emblematized by the goddess Venus', thereby launching 'a critique of idealization'. Jennifer L. Shaw, *Reading Claude Cahun's Disavowals* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 105.

[3] Jennifer L. Shaw, *Exist Otherwise: The Life and Works of Claude Cahun* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), p. 9.

[4] Debates regarding Cahun's photographic oeuvre have explored the genesis of their 'self-portraits'. The issue of whether the photographs where Cahun takes up the position of sitter are self-portraits – clearly costumed and staged according to their personal, philosophical views on identity – or portraits taken by Marcel Moore in collaboration – Moore's shadow falls across some of the shots – has been of interest to scholars. See, for example, James Stevenson, 'Claude Cahun: An Analysis of Her Photographic Technique', in Louise Downie (ed.), *Don't Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, (London and Jersey: Tate Publishing and Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006), pp. 46–55, and Tirza True Latimer, 'Claude Cahun's Mirror in the Lens,' *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, 18:1 (2011), pp. 19–23.

[5] Cahun, *Disavowals*, 2. All references are to this edition and will be inserted in the text.

[6] Agnès Lhermitte, 'Postscript: Some Brief Observations', in Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. xxii.

[7] To date critical responses to Cahun's work have tended to deploy the female pronouns she/her. However, given Cahun's deliberate move to identify as gender neutral there is a strong case to use the pronouns they/them. Given the defiant and determined attitude to unpick social fixity regarding gender norms which manifests in Cahun's writing, as well as the overt and confrontational photographic portraits that refuse to align with an idea of birth sex, this chapter takes the decision to engage with this fluidity by assigning the neutral pronouns. Intentionally, this is also designed to underline the underlying philosophical and critical elements of their work. Cahun's work is essential to any study of feminist modernisms and women's writing, and in using these pronouns the feminist work is not diminished or evaded; rather it continues Virginia Woolf's work in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928)

where a utopian dream of freedom and multiplicity is achieved by disregarding and expanding parameters and boundaries designed to fix sex and gender. Ultimately, as Cahun's biographer François Leperlier has noted, they take 'sexual "indeterminateness" to the limit'. François Leperlier, *Mise en scène: Claude Cahun, Tacita Dean, Ginia Nimarkoh*, trans. Simon Pleasance (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1994), p. 20.

[8] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 151.

[9] Letter to Adrienne Monnier, 20 June 1928. Quoted in Mundy, 'Introduction', p. 117.

[10] The only publication of Cahun's (self) portraits during their lifetime was *Frontière humaine* for *Bifur*,5 Special Issue, [1928], 1939, about which Katherine Conley has written in her article 'Claude Cahun's Iconic Heads: from "The Sadistic Judith" to Human Frontier', *Papers of Surrealism*, 2, (Summer 2004), pp. 1–23.

[11] See e.g. François Leperlier, *Mise en scène*; François Leperlier (ed.), *Claude Cahun: Écrits* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 2002); Elza Adamowicz, '"Sous ce masque, un autre masque": Claude Cahun's Photomontages', in Kathryn Banks and Joseph Harris (eds), *Exposure: Revealing Bodies, Unveiling Representations* (Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang, 2004); Conley, 'Claude Cahun's Iconic Heads'; Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Downie (ed.), *Don't Kiss* Me; Carolyn Topdjian, 'Shape-Shifting Beauty: The Body, Gender and Subjectivity in the Photographs of Claude Cahun', *Resources for Feminist Research*, 32:3–4 (2007); Lizzie Thynne, 'Indirect Action: Politics and the Subversion of Identity in Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's Resistance to the Occupation of Jersey', *Papers of Surrealism*, 8 (Spring 2010); Emily Apter, 'Towards a Unisex Erotics: Claude Cahun and Geometric Modernism', in Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller (eds), *Modernist Eroticisms: European Literature after Sexology* (London: Palgrave, 2012), among many others.

[12] *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* is the title of feminist theorist Toril Moi's influential 1985 book (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[13] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.11.

[14] Cahun, *Disavowals*, pp. 194–5.

[15] See 'Réponse à L'enquête: "Quelle a été la rencontre capital de votre vie?"', *Minotaure*, 3–4 (December 1933). Reprinted in Mary Ann Caws (ed.), *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 143.

[16] Adamowicz, '"Sous ce masque, un autre masque"', p. 58, p. 51.

[17] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zorn (1955. London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 217; emphasis added.

[18] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', p. 215.

[19] Claude Cahun, 'Beware of Domestic Objects', trans. Guy Ducornet, in Penelope Rosemont (ed.), *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), p. 60. Cahun contributed three objects to the exhibition, since lost, including *Un air de famille* and the arresting sculpture now known as 'Object'. see Jill Shaw, 'Notable Acquisitions at the Art Institute of Chicago', *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 35:2 (2009), pp. 70–1.

[20] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 149.

[21] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 204.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 1.

[23] Roger Cardinal, 'The Imaging of Magic', in *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism,* ed. Patricia Allmer (Munich: Prestel, 2009), p. 38.

[24] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 28.

[25] After Guillaume Apollinaire's book of free verse typographical poems titled *Calligrammes: Poèmes de la Paix et de la Guerre* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1918).

[26] Pierre Mac Orlan, 'Elements of A Social Fantastic' (1929), in Christopher Phillips (ed.), *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), pp. 31–3.

[27] Lhermitte, 'Postscript', pp. xxi-xxii.

[28] Mac Orlan, 'Preface', p. xxvi.

[29] See Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuese: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016). In this important re-positing of the turn-of-the-century art of *flânerie*, or aimlessly wandering, Elkin takes the 'male privilege' assigned to this activity – epitomised in the works of writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Louis Aragon, Georges Bataille, and André Breton – and reassesses the act of wandering the streets through her own experiences, as well as those expressed in the works of female writers and filmmakers.

[30] Pierre Mac Orlan, 'Preface', pp. xxiv–xxvi; emphasis added.

[31] Katy Kline, 'In Or Out Of The Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman', in Shelley Rice (ed.), *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren, Cindy Sherman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 74.

[32] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 39.

[33] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 76.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 1.

[35] Leperlier, *Mise en scène*, p. 20.

[36] Brian Dillon, *Essayism* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), p. 12.

[37] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 78.

[38] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 249. Merleau-Ponty was working on this unfinished manuscript when he died, and it was first published posthumously under the title *Le Visible et l'invisible* in 1964.

[39] Peter Lamarque, 'Semantic-Finegrainedness and Poetic Value', in John Gibson (ed.), *The Philosophy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 36.

[40] Anthea Buys and Stefan Polatinsky, 'The Provocation of Hélène Cixous: Philosophy in Poetic Overflow', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 42:4 (December 2009), p. 80.

[41] Mina Loy, 'Modern Poetry' (1923), in Roger L. Conover (ed.), *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc., 1997), pp. 157–61.

[42] Kathleen O'Grady, 'Guardian of Language: An Interview with Hélène Cixous', *Women's Education des femmes*, 12:4 (Winter 1996–7), p.7.

[43] Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart*, p. 77.

[44] *Ibid*., p.81.

[45] Claude Cahun, 'Amor amicitiae', in François Leperlier (ed.), *Claude Cahun: Écrits* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 2002), pp. 487–95.

[46] Shaw, *Exist Otherwise*, p. 41.

[47] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, *Project Gutenberg*, www.gutenberg.org/files/1600/1600-h/1600-h.htm, pp. 105–6.

[48] Plato's 'yet they could not explain' tallies with Cahun's essayistic drive here: the will to explain, to find answers is always present.

[49] Cahun, 'Amor Amicitiae', p. 490, p. 493.

[50] Cahun, *Vues et visions*, in Leperlier (ed.), *Écrits*, pp. 120-1.

[51] Cahun, 'Amor Amicitiae', p. 494.

[52] The essay was expanded and re-published by José Corti in May 1934.

[53] See Claude Cahun, 'Confidences au Miroir', in Leperlier (ed.), *Écrits*, pp. 571–624.

[54] Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 67.

[55] André Breton (co-written by Leon Trotsky and co-signed by Diego Rivera), 'Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art' (1938), in André Breton, *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 30–3.

[56] Claude Cahun, 'Place Your Bets', qtd in Thynne, 'Indirect Action', p. 4.

[57] Claude Cahun, 'Poetry Keeps Its Secret' (an extract from 'Place Your Bets'), trans. Guy Ducornet, in Rosemont (ed.), *Surrealist Women*, p. 54.

[58] Cahun, 'Poetry Keeps Its Secret', in Rosemont (ed.), *Surrealist Women*, p. 54.

[59] Claude Cahun, 'Chanson sauvage' (1921), in Leperlier (ed.), *Écrits*, pp. 460–1. 'Chanson sauvage' was originally published in *Le Mercure de France*, a journal for which Cahun wrote between 1914 and 1927.

[60] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 102.

[61] Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (1972. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 7.

[62] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 6.

[63] Cahun, 'Les Paris', in Leperlier (ed.), *Écrits*, p. 32.

[64] Dillon, *Essayism*, p. 93.

[65] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 25.

[66] Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, trans. Yara Milos (New York and London: New York University Press, 1991), p. 25, p. 5, p. 18.

[67] *Ibid*., pp.15–16.

[68] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 184.

[69] *Ibid*., p. 185.

[70] 'Sarah Pucill/Magic Mirror: Interviewed by Anna McNay', *Photomonitor* (May 2014), www.photomonitor.co.uk/2014/05/magic-mirror/, accessed 2 June 2014.

[71] Gillian Wearing and Sarah Howgate, 'Gillian Wearing in conversation with Sarah Howgate', in *Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun*: *Behind the Mask Another Mask* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2017), p.171.

[72] Rupert Thomson, *Never Anyone But You* (Toronto: Corsair, 2018).

[73] François Leperlier, 'Afterword', trans. Susan de Muth, in Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 215.

[74] Cahun, *Disavowals*, p. 1.