

El único punto de resistencia: *Cultural, Linguistic and Medial Transgressions in the Surrealist Journal VVV*

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In January 1942, André Breton, by then exiled to New York, confided to his friend Benjamin Péret in Mexico that he was about to create a new surrealist periodical. In the midst of World War II, he intended to establish a “network of correspondents” across those parts of the world that were “still habitable.”<sup>1</sup> He wanted it to be multilingual, in French, English and Spanish, and to traverse all the Americas—the Latin and Central American countries as well as the Caribbean Islands and the United States.<sup>2</sup> The first number of the journal *VVV* was published in the same year in New York. It was directed by David Hare and edited by Breton, Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp. Between 1942 and 1944, four issues appeared, the second one as a double number.

The journal has often been related to the difficulty of exile and displacement, the disorientation of Surrealism during the war, and even to a certain disillusionment of the movement. This is best expressed in Breton’s *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism, or Else* which appeared in the first issue of *VVV* and—considering the title’s appendix—seems like a rather wary attempt to revive the surrealist revolution in the years of exile. However, a closer look at *VVV*’s pages reveals that its aesthetic and revolutionary program also marks a peak in the history of surrealist periodicals. Like no other surrealist journal, it clings to an audacious experimentalism: by including pages with cut-outs, paper embossing and three-dimensional elements applied to them, and in inviting readers to participate in haptic experiences and challenges to their perception. Such is the case of Frederick Kiesler’s *Twin-Touch-Test*, which lets the reader sensually examine a wire inserted in the back cover of *VVV*’s double number of 1943. Like no other surrealist journal, *VVV* embraces multilingualism and, as Breton envisaged it, publishes contributions in English, French as well as Spanish. However, as I will demonstrate with the example of

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the Peruvian section and the “Letter from Chile” in *VVV*’s double number, the periodical also plays performatively with fortuitous language choices and translations, and thus confuses the connection between language and nationality. And, to make a third point: like no other surrealist journal, *VVV* reaches out globally to consolidate its voices of resistance. The journal connects American writers such as William Carlos Williams, Lionel Abel and William Seabrook with the French anthropologists Alfred Métraux and Claude Lévi-Strauss. It pairs contributions by the American photographer Irving Penn and the British-Mexican surrealist Leonora Carrington with George Henein’s writings from Cairo and the French poetry of Valentine Penrose, who writes from Britain. In the context of global resistance, my analysis focuses on a sequence in the fourth issue, which contains contributions by the Antillean poet Aimé Césaire, the Brazilian sculptor Maria Martins, and the Cuban artist Wifredo Lam that reflect on the anti-colonial resistance of Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean syncretism. Cross-cultural mobility can thus be considered as a major characteristic of the journal’s “cultural formation,” a concept Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker borrow from Raymond Williams in order to describe the common artistic and sociopolitical interest of modernist magazines.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, transculturality is a sign of *VVV*’s endeavor to create a decentered and multidirectional platform for global Surrealism that withstands the totalitarian control dominating so many parts of the world during this time. With its ambition to achieve a triple victory (“VVV”) over the destructive, enslaving, and regressive dynamics controlling mankind, the journal mobilizes—once again and more radically than before—the revolutionary potential of the surrealist vision. In this context the journal engages its readers to practice a “total view” that unsettles reality by unfolding the illogical, mysterious and unfathomable forces underneath the reign of reason. I will demonstrate that *VVV* triggers this “total view” through surrealist strategies of medial, linguistic and cultural transgression that are meant to create a global space of resistance against totalitarianism.

### ***VVV*’s Manifesto**

When the French surrealists arrived in the United States in the early 1940s, they were not readily accepted in New York’s art scene. According to Werner Spies, the American Abstract Artists (AAA) group, founded in 1935, was particularly critical of the figurative tendencies of surrealist art.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the editors might even have chosen the triple V of the title to create a counter movement to AAA. But the French surrealists also struggled with someone from their own ranks, Salvador Dalí. By 1939 at the very latest, when the latter designed the pavilion *The Dream of Venus* at the New York World Fair, Dalí’s art had become famous in the United States. This also meant commercial success, which was a thorn in the side of many of his former surrealist colleagues who had collaborated with him in the previous decade in the French journal *Minotaure*, published between 1933 and 1939.

Breton gave him the nickname *Avida Dollars* and in an interview for the surrealist number of *View* he complains about Dalí's "sensational publicity" and a "stagnated" Surrealism that had reduced itself to pleasantries and thus lost its revolutionary persistence.<sup>5</sup> Hence, against the "popular" version of Dalí's Surrealism, Breton wanted to spread the "authentic" voice of the surrealist revolution.<sup>6</sup> In this context, even *VVV*'s playful experimentalism has to be understood as part of a revolutionary concern which is stated in the form of a manifesto at the beginning of each number.

The manifesto is placed in each number on the first page above the table of contents. It appears in the form of a framed chart. On its left side, the letters V, double V, and triple V are put underneath each other as in a column. Text blocks on the right side explain what they stand for. The abbreviation is explained twice. In the first part, the single V represents a commitment, "a vow—and energy—to return to a habitable and conceivable world" which encompasses a victory over the regressive and totalitarian forces that enslave mankind. A "double Victory" is achieved if this fight leads to the "emancipation" and "liberation" of the human spirit. The triple V claims an active revolutionary demeanor dedicated to these two aims, the defeat of repression and the liberation of the spirit.

Many scholars have associated the journal's title with Winston Churchill's *V for Victory* slogan, with which he declared his intention to defeat the Germans during World War II. Terri Geis argues further that *VVV* signals solidarity with the "Double V" campaign proclaimed in February 1942 by James Thompson in the African-American newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*. In the context of World War II and the Civil Rights Movement this campaign not only claimed freedom and democracy "abroad"; rather, it protested racism and discrimination "at home."<sup>7</sup> If the journal's title alludes to both campaigns, it does so by amplifying their message, because it adds a third V to their program. The triple V plays an important role in communicating the journal's political message to the world, as well as its transgressive strategies.

These transgressive strategies are reflected in the second part of the manifesto in which the V stands not only for "Victory" but also for "View." The manifesto declares that a fundamental change of perspective is required in order to defeat slavery and oppression. In the manifesto's second part, the single V represents a perspective on the external world and its "conscious surface." The double V reveals the interior view—"the View inside us"—which penetrates the unconscious. Both perspectives, external and internal, are synthesized by the triple V that brings about a different "reality principle," and which overcomes the contradiction between the conscious and the unconscious world. This reality can only be discovered by the unfolding of a "total view," which is stated as the crucial aspiration of *VVV*'s manifesto. This conception is comparable to Breton's notion of an "absolute reality" that fuses the states of dream and rationality into a broader understanding of reality, a claim he makes in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924.<sup>8</sup> The idea of such a

total view, however, stresses vision as holding the potential to achieve the surrealist revolution. In this context, *VVV*'s manifesto uses the metaphor of the “veil,” which is highlighted by capital letters as a key concept of its artistic and visual practice. This radical change of perspective, which is capable of looking “beneath the VEIL of happenings,” thus relies on the process of disguising reality’s surface and revealing what is hidden behind it. In this framework, the totality *VVV* claims for itself is clearly opposed to a homogenizing and totalizing vision. I would like to discuss how, on the contrary, it is designed to multiply perceptions and meanings as a form of resistance against the totalitarian regimes of its time.

*VVV* has often been criticized for being incoherent and without direction, especially by Wolfgang Paalen who published the journal *Dyn* during the same period in Mexico.<sup>9</sup> However, considered in the light of *VVV*'s manifesto, incoherence and heterogeneity seem to be inevitable constituents of the journal’s aesthetics and politics. These qualities are also evidence of the widening scope of surrealism and the diversification of the movement, as Geis maintains.<sup>10</sup> In various letters to Benjamin Péret, Breton emphasizes that an innovative and visionary spirit, accepting of contradictory points of view, not necessarily always surrealist, was essential for the orientation he wanted this journal to undertake.<sup>11</sup> One consequence of this opening up was that contributions to *VVV* like those of the Austrian-American artist Frederick Kiesler—an artist aesthetically closer to abstract art than to surrealism—effectively participated in the unfolding of the sort of “total view” described in the manifesto.

### Medial Transgression

*VVV* competed in New York with the journal *Viem*, which was edited by Charles Henry Ford and relied on the participation of a similar group of artists and writers. However, compared to its rival, the “handsomely produced” issues of *VVV* catch the reader’s eye.<sup>12</sup> *VVV* is not simply a print product but a work of art in itself. It contains perforated and embossed prints as well as color prints which are pasted manually on the page. Some pages can be folded open, others have cut-outs, peepholes or moveable paper elements attached to them. In terms of these haptic characteristics, the journal anticipates the “tactile turn” of the surrealist exhibition practice that characterized the 1942 New York exhibition “First Papers of Surrealism.”<sup>13</sup> The tactile quality of *VVV*'s pages activate the reader to participate in its ludic experiments. On the one hand, the journal explores the limits and potentials of the print medium; on the other, it plays with its readers—or viewers—and their perceptions, as surrealist journals typically do. But the ‘haptic’ contributions to *VVV* go a step further by interactively involving them, thus transforming them into creators. This interaction is most ingeniously achieved by the objects that are placed on the journal’s pages. Most of these elements are provided by Frederick Kiesler,

**Twin-Touch-Test**

*By Kiesler*

Place your hands on top of either side of the wire screen; run both hands simultaneously gently down, fingers and palms remaining in close contact.



Repeat  
and  
Repeat  
until you  
can answer  
the following  
question:

*Is it an  
unusual  
feeling  
of  
touch?*

If so,  
can you write  
an analysis of  
your experience  
in no more than  
one hundred  
words.  
Give also your  
explanation of  
the phenomenon.

• If you have not a large sheet of chicken wire approximately two by two feet—you can use for the test the back cover of this copy.  
• Put the magazine flat on a table, lift back-cover into vertical position, join hands on both sides of wire-screen, fingertips touching each other and slide gently along screen towards you.  
• Repeat experiment ad libitum.  
• This also applies to a team of two persons:  
a) Put magazine flat on table  
b) lift back-cover vertically  
c) both persons stand or sit next to each other  
d) the one at the left holds the bulk of magazine tightly down on the table  
e) the person to the right grips the edge of the cover firmly  
f) the two remaining hands now join across the wire-screen, fingertips touching  
g) proceed as indicated above

**Five Prizes**

*will be given for the best solutions:  
each one a full year's subscription of VVV*

**CUT OFF** this coupon and mail it with your address to: **before July First 1943**  
Room 3308, 10 East 40th Street, New York City

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Fig. 1. Frederick Kiesler, *Twin Touch Test*, *VVV* 2-3 (1943) © 2019 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation

who also designed Peggy Guggenheim's "Art of this Century Gallery." The back cover of *VVV*'s double number (no. 2-3, 1943) includes a cut-out over which a wire is spanned. Kiesler calls this object "Wire Screen" and explains on the issue's last page how to handle it by inviting readers to participate in a *Twin-Touch-Test* (Fig. 1):

Place your hands on top of either side of the wire screen; run both hands simultaneously gently down, fingers and palms remaining in close contact.

Repeat and Repeat until you can answer the following question:

*Is it an unusual feeling of touch?*

If so, can you write an analysis of your experience in no more than one hundred words. Give also your explanation of the phenomenon.

More detailed information is given in an instruction manual on the bottom of the



page. This states that the test can be performed with any kind of chicken wire or with the one inserted in the back cover. The latter has to be lifted into a vertical position with the hands placed on each side of the wire. It further declares that the test can be continued “ad libitum” and that it is also possible to perform it in a group of two persons.

The page is laid out with the text set around a photograph that illustrates the “wire-experiment” in surrealist fashion. It depicts the blurred image of a woman whose eyes are closed while her hands are placed on a wire. When the page is turned, thus closing the issue of the journal, the image of the woman becomes hidden by the back cover, except for her hands that—observed through the spanned wire of the cut-out—appear as though raised in prayer. A part of the text that states “Five prizes” may also be read. The readers must turn the back cover page to discover that the award of “a full year’s subscription of *VVV*” will be given to the best “solutions.” The bottom of the page even contains a coupon that can be used for submitting the answer.

The layout of the *Twin Touch Test* obviously alludes to American advertising culture, which it then undermines with absurd instructions and blurred photography. Kiesler’s interactive game also refers to the journal’s seriality since it creates the expectation that the readers’s answers will be published in the following number. But are “solutions” to the *Twin-Touch-Test* really desired or even awarded? Moreover, the journal’s transgressive experiment mobilizes readers to participate in the experiment, but also plays with their perceptions. From inside the journal, the cut-out opens up the view to the exterior world, but this view is disturbed by the wire (Fig. 2).<sup>14</sup> The view from the outside is confused by seeing the wire twice: inserted as an object and represented as an image on the photograph. By reflecting its materiality and transgressing its status as medium, above all by inserting an object in the back cover, *VVV* provokes and destabilizes the reader’s perception of what is inside and outside, behind and in front of them. This disorienting technique thus works on the reader’s capacity to evolve a “total view,” as stated in *VVV*’s manifesto. It is a view that dismantles the surface of appearances by continuously looking behind, beneath, and beyond them in order to create other realities. At the same time, this surrealist strategy implies that there is no certainty for the readers to “really” discover what lies underneath the surface, because they will be confronted with something opaque, unrecognizable, or illusory, as in the case of the image of the wire seen through the “real” wire.

A similar strategy is at work in Marcel Duchamp’s *Genre Allegory* in the fourth issue of *VVV* (1944). Dawn Ades considers its “absolute unexpectedness” to be central to the journal’s visual aesthetics.<sup>15</sup> It also contains a cut-out area on the page, which forms the head of George Washington framing a black and white print of a cloth with iodine-colored red stripes and golden stars pasted on it (Fig. 3). With its stars and stripes the print clearly refers to the American flag; yet



Fig. 2. Frederick Kiesler, *Twin Touch Test*, “The Wire Screen,” *VVV* 2-3 (1943) © 2019 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation

considering its materiality, it appears to be a broken image of American nationality, since the red stripes seem to be soaked with blood. By pairing this image with George Washington’s head, Duchamp subverts national icons and alludes to the dark and violent side of American history, especially with regard to slavery. *Genre Allegory* was originally designed as a cover for *Vogue*, where it was rejected because “Duchamp’s version of the stars and stripes was too reminiscent of a blood-stained bandage.”<sup>16</sup> As in the case of Kiesler’s “Wire Screen,” a visual strategy of confusion is achieved in *Genre Allegory* not only by the cut-out that couples the image of George Washington with that of the American flag,<sup>17</sup> but also by the manipulation of the page. It is by turning the page and touching the print of the iodine-stained cloth that the reader gets the whole picture of *Genre Allegory*: she discovers that the flag is not a collage but a color print on embossed paper that gives an illusion of three-dimensionality (Fig. 4). Moreover, this technique is best discovered by turning the page once more and looking at the back of the embossed print, where the title



Fig.3. Marcel Duchamp, *Genre Allegory*, “George Washington’s head,” *VVV* 4 (1944) © Association Marcel Duchamp / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

of the work is indicated. The structure of the paper draws wavy lines and stars on the white page and thus transforms *Genre Allegory* into yet another artwork. Again, readers must look ahead, look beyond the first page, to discover that their initial perception has been undermined. But they will also discover new appearances and creations. Duchamp’s contribution to *VVV* thus turns the simple activity of reading into a surrealist strategy of transgression that questions reality’s reliability—because the readers will find out that there is always more to discover.

Kiesler’s *Design Correlation* also challenges the reader’s perception (Fig. 5).<sup>18</sup> This visual artwork turns into an object by means of two paper grommets that are applied on the page with a punched rivet. Breton’s head and signature are printed on these elements, which, if moved together, form a circle that is reminiscent of a camera lens. By separating the paper elements from each other they open up a peephole through which a photo of Breton’s atelier becomes visible. The grommets are placed on a “black oval punctuated by reflective circles.”<sup>19</sup> If the reader looks at the page in a horizontal position, this oval appears to resemble the back of a



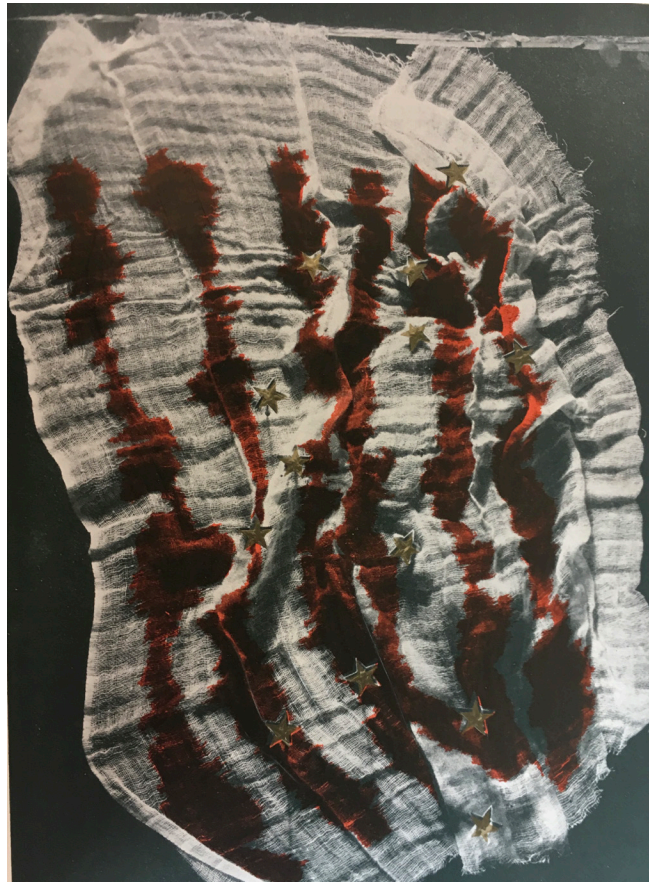


Fig.4. Marcel Duchamp, *Genre Allegory*, “Stars and Stripes,” *VVV* 4 (1944) © Association Marcel Duchamp / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

head. Regarded vertically—in the normal position of an opened book—the whole arrangement resembles an eye, with the blue, round paper elements forming the iris that covers the image of Breton’s workshop. As a symbol for his creative and intellectual activity, this place is literally hidden *inside the eye*. Kiesler’s *Design Correlation* thus refers to the manifesto’s claim to “turn the eye toward the interior world” in order to discover the unconscious and unfathomable forces of creativity. For the readers of *VVV* this “look inside” can be unveiled only if they decouple the grommets. Thus, *Design Correlation* best exemplifies how *VVV*’s visual strategies engage its readers in reflecting upon their own perception, literally opening it up to different realities that lie underneath the surface.

The medial transgressions in *VVV* confuse background and foreground, inside and outside, appearance and illusion. Thus, they resist any closure: every touching, turning, and unfolding of a page conceals images and reveals new ones. The reader’s participation in these haptic and tactile experiments inevitably leads

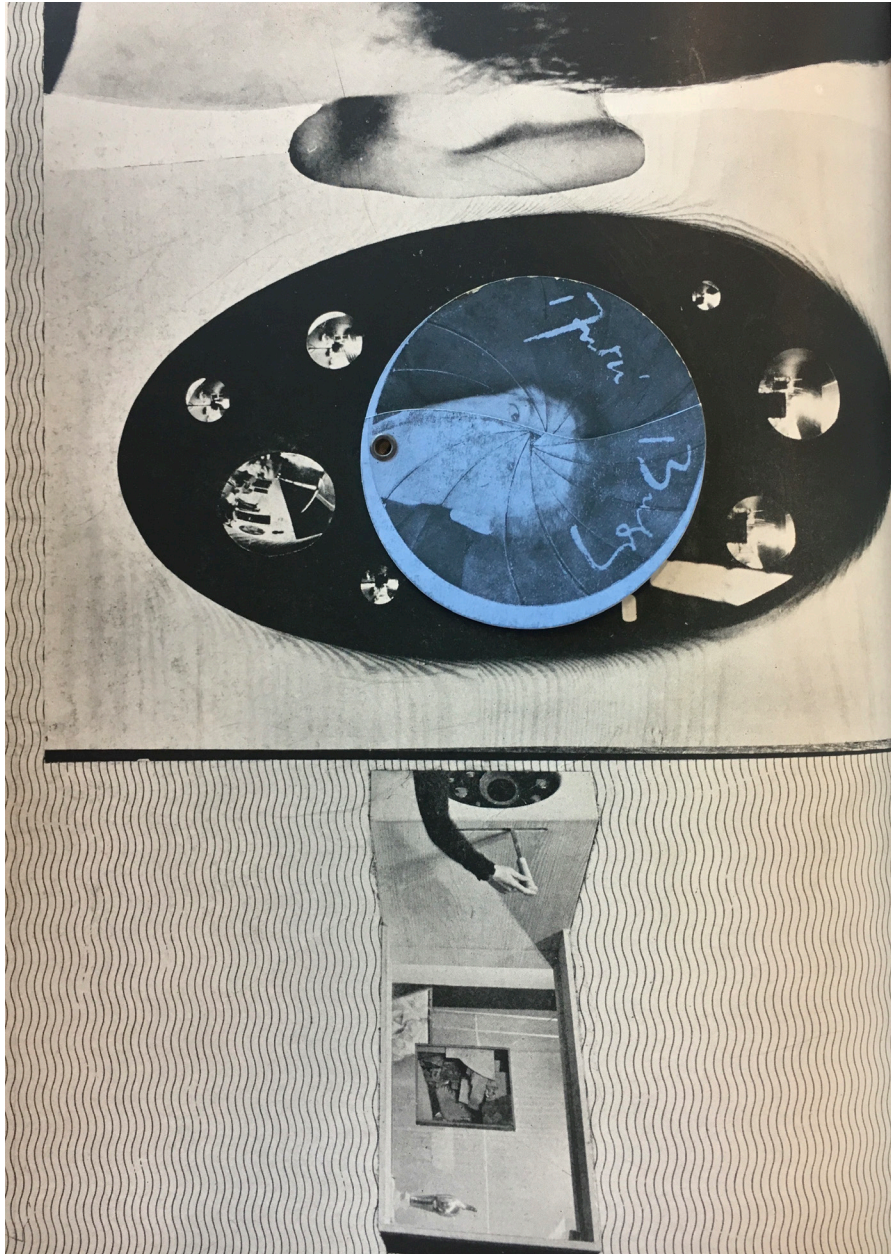


Fig.5. Frederick Kiesler, *Design Correlation, VVV 2-3* (1943) © 2019 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation

them to change their perspective as they themselves become creators of new images. Contrary to absolute truths propagated by totalitarian regimes in the 1940s, *VVV* challenges the stability of any fixed perception or recognition. The journal triggers a surrealist point of view of reality that constantly undermines, transforms, and reinvents it. By taking its readers along to “come in and play” the journal stresses the revolutionary potential of the manifesto’s “total view.”

### Linguistic Transgression

The surrealist strategy of transgression also concerns the choice of publishing *VVV* in three languages. As already mentioned, it was Breton’s intention to include contributions in English, French and Spanish. This multilingualism distinguishes *VVV* from other surrealist journals, such as Charles Henry Ford’s *Vien*, in which all texts are translated into English, as well as Wolfgang Paalen’s *Dyn*, which, despite being published in Mexico, is only bilingual, English and French. *VVV*’s multilingualism demonstrates the periodical’s transversality and its editors’ endeavor to reach out to the Americas in order to create a transnational network of surrealist resistance. In the context of exile, it can also be assumed that the editors—Breton especially—refused to assimilate Surrealism to any hegemonic cultural or geographic context and instead regarded displacement as an essential condition of global surrealism. Hence, language choice and translation practice in *VVV* are part of the journal’s playful venture and are at the same time political questions.<sup>20</sup>

The double number of 1943 begins with a surrealist calendar, which comprises twelve pages. Each page contains one month’s sheet, including drawings and/or hand-written entries.<sup>21</sup> The latter seem to be part of *VVV*’s handmade and interactive practices that invite readers to fill in their own appointments and projects on the calendar’s pages, which, due to its generous layout, offers them a lot of blank space. The periodical’s globality is indicated by the stamps that decorate each calendar sheet. They have different origins, such as from Spain (January), Mexico (February), Portugal (May), Congo (June), New Zealand (November) or Martinique (December). But internationality is also indicated by the three different languages of the entries. Although three different sets of handwriting can be identified—very probably those of Leonora Carrington, Roberto Matta and Charles Duits, who are also the three artists involved in an esoteric game which directly follows the calendar—there is no correlation between them and the language choice in each case. The same author, apparently Leonora Carrington, notes “ne pas ouvrir” (“do not open”) or “dernière limite” (“last limit”) in French, as well as “Get the rocking horse repaired with velvet” in English.<sup>22</sup> Other French entries, most likely by Duits, state commonplace actions like “changer taies” (“change tires”) as well as mysterious notes like “taureau par les cornes” (“bull by the horns”). A remark on October 29, probably Matta’s, states in Spanish: “comprarme el canasto verde” (“buy the green basket”). The calendar displays the surrealist gusto for collective games and



authorship.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it shows that multilingualism is not only a sign for the journal's international scope, but part of its surrealist play, as the different languages, seemingly arbitrarily applied, add to the confusing effect of the calendar entries that are undermined by enigmatic, irrational messages.

A bewildering effect is also accomplished by *VVV*'s practice of translation. In the first number, Breton's "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism, or Else" is published both in English and French. However, there is no English translation of his speech on the situation of Surrealism between the wars ("Situation du Surréalisme entre les Deux Guerres"), which he presented to the students of the French Department at Yale University and which appears in the second issue.<sup>24</sup> Is this practice a sign of anti-Americanism, for which *VVV* is often reproached?<sup>25</sup> Even David Hare—who became the periodical's director because the French exiles needed someone of American citizenship to represent them—later complained that Breton was using the journal mainly "as an outlet for French writing in exile."<sup>26</sup>

In regard to *VVV*'s multilingualism, however, Hare's judgment does not hold true, since the journal is dominated neither by French nor by English texts; it also publishes contributions in Spanish. By integrating the texts of Latin American writers in their original language, *VVV*'s editors position themselves against any kind of hegemony in stating a political message. In the second number, the surrealist group Mandrágora publishes a "Letter from Chile" in which the Chilean authors Braulio Arenas, Jorge Cáceres and Enrique Gómez-Correa recount their surrealist activities between July 1938 and September 1942.<sup>27</sup> Contrary to the English title, the timeline and the introductory letter by Arenas are in Spanish, and the text remains unreadable for an English or French speaking audience.

The Chilean group embraces aspects of abysmal desire and dark poetry in their version of surrealism. In their manifesto "Mandrágora poesía negra" ("Mandrake Black Poetry") they consider madness, chaos, and terror to be forces that lead to the liberation of the human spirit.<sup>28</sup> Their poetic aspiration consists in creating a dark version of surrealist ideas such as *amour fou* and *convulsive beauty*. This adaptation is also implied in the title they chose for their group, which refers to the mandrake, a mysterious plant that belongs to the nightshade family and is said to possess magical qualities. Mandrágora's revolt was directed against the bourgeois conservatism of the Chilean literary and cultural environment in particular. In the timeline they publish in *VVV* they provide a record of their publications and exhibitions as well as their rebellious actions, which caused polemics and controversies in the intellectual milieu of Santiago de Chile. A climax of their revolt occurred in July 1940 when they disturbed a ceremony in which the national poet Pablo Neruda was giving a speech at the occasion of his nomination as consul of Mexico. Neruda was the group's elected enemy, not just because they disliked his poetry, but also because of his political orientation in the Spanish Civil War, where he sided with Stalinism.<sup>29</sup>



By presenting a detailed timeline of their projects in *VVV*, the authors of the Mandrágora group want to demonstrate their “passion” for surrealist thought and action, which they consider the high point of resistance—“el único punto de resistencia”—for Chile and for the entire world. Therefore, they articulate their willingness to overcome national interests and join “international surrealism.”<sup>30</sup> With the inclusion of Mandrágora’s account of their surrealist rebellion in Chile, *VVV* shows that Surrealism reaches out to the southernmost point of the Latin American continent and relies on a global resistance that does not conform to any hegemonic national, linguistic or cultural center.

Moreover, the journal’s strategy is to confuse boundaries between languages through incoherent translation practices. Contrary to his letter, in which Arenas addresses Breton in Spanish, his poem “The Mystery of the Yellow Room” appears in English. It is placed between the Spanish texts of his Chilean colleagues Cásares and Gómez-Correa without any further explanation as to its status as an original or a translated text. The Peruvian section in *VVV*’s second issue, which intends to make the readers familiar with the country’s “modern literary tendencies”, is also characterized by a bewildering multilingualism. It is introduced by Víctor Llona, a figure prone to create linguistic confusion: born in Peru, he grew up in the United States and studied in France to become a translator of anglophone literature into French.<sup>31</sup> His Hispanic name is thus misleading because Spanish is not a language he worked with professionally. Llona’s transculturality is comparable to those of the two poets Xavier Abril and Juan Ríos. “Despite their foreign educational background,” Llona considers them to be “essentially Peruvian.”<sup>32</sup> Before the Spanish Civil War, Abril lived for several years in Spain and then moved to Paris. Ríos is a bilingual writer in French and Spanish. For this reason, Llona presents him “as one of nature’s oddities,” which is almost an ironic remark, given the fact that all Peruvians of the section—including Llona himself—are multilingual migrant authors. Consequently, Llona’s introduction to the section is presented in English, Abril’s sonnets are published in Spanish and Ríos’s two prose texts in French and Spanish. Surprisingly though, the title above Ríos’s texts indicates that both are extracts from the same work, *Lunatic Asylum*. Why would a bilingual author, who writes parts of the same book in Spanish and French, chose an English title for his work? Did the author or someone else translate the title or even the extracts from one language to the other? Again, the multilingualism of these unexpected language choices contradict a common relationship between language and nationality, confusing and causing a baffling effect on the reader.

Incoherent translation practices, illogical language choices and an aleatory mixture of different languages insinuate that *VVV*’s editors are experimenting with the surrealist technique of automatism, as if language choice itself derived from the unconscious and was thus out of their control. Péret reproaches Breton that *VVV* communicates in different languages.<sup>33</sup> However, this is precisely what the journal

aspires to do in the most literal sense. Randomly changing and switching between languages is thus another surrealist strategy of standing up to totalitarian regimes' ambitions of achieving "global hegemony" by controlling people's thoughts and actions—something Breton warns against in his essay "Situation du Surréalisme entre les Deux Guerres."<sup>34</sup> In order to remain out of totalitarian reach, *VVV* plays strategically with a chaotic confusion of languages and translations.

### Cultural Transgression

*VVV*'s inclusion of French, American, and Hispano-American writers testifies to its "transcultural formation" in Brooker and Thacker's sense. Ethnographic contributions are more evidence of its cross-cultural perspective. The outreach to anthropology became an integral part of surrealist periodicals from the late 1920s onwards, e.g., in *Documents* (1929-1934), founded by Georges Bataille, and *Minotaure* (1933-1939). In *VVV*, "ethnographic Surrealism" is introduced by French anthropologists Alfréd Métraux, who later specialized in the research of Haitian voodoo culture, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, with whom Breton became acquainted on his transatlantic passage into exile.<sup>35</sup> With the example of two statues from the Easter Islands made of tree-bark, exhibited at the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, Métraux reflects on death cults. Lévi-Strauss contributes "Indian Cosmetics," a text which would later become part of his famous ethnographic travelogue *Tristes Tropiques (A World on the Wane)*.<sup>36</sup> His contribution studies the Kaduveo Indians' millenary tradition of body art in the Brazilian State Matto Grosso, and the difficulty for Western scholars to decipher its enigmatic patterns. The graphic art of these tattoos has a "magical appeal" to the author, who assumes it signifies erotic power. Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that these tattoos are not "primitive" but rather complex "meditated art, almost codified in its means of expression and its repertory of themes."<sup>37</sup> The secret language of indigenous body art is an appealing topic for *VVV*'s revolutionary endeavor of disguising reality by bringing mysteries to the surface.

In the search for enigmatic cultural expression *VVV* also turns to syncretic practices that emerged in Brazil and the Caribbean throughout the history of slavery. With the contributions of the Cuban painter Wifredo Lam, the Brazilian sculptor María Martins, and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, *VVV* moves beyond ethnography and gives voice to artists who inherited this history. Césaire and Breton became friends in 1941, when the latter disembarked on Martinique for several weeks on his way to New York. The intense exchange between the poets found expression in Breton's regular contributions to the surrealist periodical *Tropiques*, founded by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire and René Ménil, and published from 1941 through 1945. Vice versa, each number of *VVV* includes poems by Césaire.<sup>38</sup> The last issue also contains a full-page photograph of Césaire, in which he stands in front of Fort Saint-Louis in Fort-de-France, which "historically served as the central point

of defense for the French colony.”<sup>39</sup> His white suit seems to explicitly accentuate the poet’s blackness.<sup>40</sup> The portrait fills an entire page and stresses *VVV*’s solidarity with the fight against the legacy of slavery, not only in the context of the antiracist “Double-V” campaign in the United States but also with regard to the anticolonial struggle against the oppression and voicelessness of Black people everywhere, an objective which lies at the heart of Césaire’s concept of *Négritude*. Geis emphasizes the importance of a sequence in the fourth issue of *VVV* dedicated to “the connections between historic slave uprisings and religions” in the Americas.<sup>41</sup> These syncretic practices implied the release of irrational and supernatural forces and were, then, especially appealing to *VVV*’s endeavor to create a global platform of surrealist resistance against totalitarian control.

This sequence in *VVV*’s fourth issue begins with Maria Martins’ sculpture *Macumba*, which alludes to the Afro-Brazilian ritual of Candomblé by showing the sacred dance of two female figures. Accompanied by a drummer, they contact the Orisha gods through a trance state.<sup>42</sup> A photo of her sculpture is placed alongside Aimé Césaire’s poem “Batouque,” which similarly refers to the sacred practices of Candomblé. Césaire’s surrealist affinity is expressed in such recurring motifs as “desire,” “trance,” and “phantasms.” In the context of Afro-Brazilian rituals, these examples refer to the presence of sacred, supernatural forces that may be reached by an irrational state of mind. Lilyan Kesteloot has compared this poem to a “feast of marvelous madness” as it poetically reproduces the dancing and drumming ritual in anaphoric verses, a rhythmic language and in the semantics of eroticism.<sup>43</sup> Both moments, the memory of the slaves’ oppression as well as the orgiastic release from suffering, are expressed in the poem:

batouque of rotted eyes  
 batouque of molasses eyes [...]
 batouque of a doleful sea encrusted with islands  
 [...]
 batouque of hands  
 batouque of breasts  
 batouque of the seven beheadly sins  
 batouque of the sex with a bird-like peck a fish-like flight  
 [...]
 batouque of the princess with thighs like the Congo  
 like Borneo  
 like Caracas.<sup>44</sup>

Césaire creates an epiphany of liberty in his poem that triumphs over the oppression of slavery. In the ritualistic moment reality is overruled by the power of irrationality and frenzy. The poem’s constant references to a future world that will be unified



Fig.6. Artist Portrait of Wifredo Lam in front of *La Jungle*, *VVV* 2-3 (1943) © SDO Wifredo Lam, Paris

by this power, and even its references to specific places like Africa, Indonesia and Venezuela, turn “Batouque” into a global hymn of liberation. Cultural transgression is not only implicated in the poem’s depiction of the syncretic practices of Candomblé that reach from Africa to Brazil, but also, as Geis remarks, in the fact that Césaire is not initiated into Afro-Brazilian spirituality. Thus, his appropriation of Candomblé is purely imaginative.<sup>45</sup>

Lam’s experiments with the aesthetics of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería were also imaginary, as he did not practice it personally. His painting *La Jungle*—with the title in French in the *VVV* caption—concludes the Caribbean-Brazilian sequence in *VVV*. It is remarkable that the editors decided to reproduce *La Jungle* within a portrait of the painter sitting in front of his studio in Havana (Fig. 6). The photographs of Césaire and Lam stand out because they are the only artist portraits in the journal. However, in contrast to Césaire’s blackness, Lam’s racial identity is not easily recognizable. Although he was celebrated by the European avant-garde—above all by Picasso—for his Africanness, *VVV*’s editors select a picture in which the multiethnicity of the artist, whose father was a Chinese immigrant to Cuba and whose mother was of Spanish and African descent, is clearly visible.<sup>46</sup>



The impossibility of relating Lam's portrait to clear-cut categories of racial and cultural identity is also underscored by his painting, which is crowded with transcultural references. The artist integrates syncretic elements of Afro-Cuban Santería, which, similar to Candomblé, consists of hybrid practices and devotional figures symbolizing Catholicism and African religions at the same time; the most famous figure in Santería is Saint Barbara, who is the powerful god of thunder and lightning Changó. But in *La Jungle* hybridity can also be observed stylistically, because Lam adopts Cubism and fuses it with a Caribbean colorfulness and the sensual representation of body parts such as breasts, full lips and voluminous backsides. The hybridity of style and form was one reason why the painting provoked strong reactions when it was first exhibited at the New York Gallery Pierre Matisse in 1943.<sup>47</sup> By including a depiction of a transcultural artist who amalgamates Cubist, Caribbean and African forms and style, *VVV* marks its revolutionary and provocative activities. But Lam's cultural transgressions also contribute to the periodical's unfolding of a "total view" in the simultaneous process of concealing and unveiling. Considering the painting's depiction of Santería, Lam follows the irrational laws of the jungle because he does not merely represent symbols of Afro-Cuban spirituality, but renders them opaque as he constantly transforms them and thus plays with their appearance and realness.<sup>48</sup> In this fashion, he makes Santería's strategies of resistance aesthetically productive. Like the Afro-Cuban religion that worships Catholic Saints who, beneath the surface, are African Gods, Lam imaginatively reinvents the African masks or symbols of Santería. Historically, the secret illegibility of religious symbols was a tactic by which African slaves resisted the hegemony of the European colonizers in the Caribbean. By including Lam's *La Jungle*, *VVV* alludes to these veiled practices of resistance, associating them with its revolutionary program to evolve a "total view" of reality capable of looking "beneath the VEIL of happenings" as a means of resistance. This "total view" is also a global one. It connects Surrealism in exile with the transatlantic history of slavery and thus mobilizes the subversive potential of a radical change of perspective against a world characterized by the destructive forces of fascism and totalitarianism.

The transnationality of Surrealism reaches a peak with *VVV* that is closely related to a traumatic moment of globalization determined by war, exile, and displacement. In context, the periodical's revolutionary project consists of its embrace of medial, linguistic and cultural transgression as a surrealist means of global resistance. As claimed in the manifesto, *VVV* invites its readers to practice a "total view" that counters totalitarian domination by discovering the inaccessible and uncontrollable forces lying beneath the surface of happenings and appearances.

The performative play in *VVV* with the periodical's status as print medium presents a form of transgression that presents readers with manipulated pages containing cut-outs or applied three-dimensional elements. Kiesler's and Duchamp's contributions reflect on the magazine's materiality and interactively ask readers to

participate in the project of constant visual illusion, thus unsettling and altering perspectives of reality. The touching and turning of pages, as well as of looking through its peepholes, is thus part of the journal's revolutionary endeavor to unleash a total view that consistently looks beyond appearances to discover different realities beyond them.

The journal also undermines monolingual conventions of literary magazines, confronting readers with a bewildering multilingualism determined by aleatory language choices and illogical translation practices. By publishing the "Letter from Chile" in Spanish, and presenting its Peruvian section in English, French, and Spanish, *VVV* demonstrates its transnationality and turns displacement into a strategy that refuses to adopt a specific hegemonic cultural context. The strategy of irrational language confusion is above all a means for global Surrealism to oppose the hegemonic controls of totalitarianism, pushing language out of rational control in order to place it out of reach of dictatorial discourse.

Multilingualism is also intertwined with the journal's mission of "transcultural formation." *VVV* proclaims solidarity with parts of the world marked by the oppressive history of slavery, especially the Americas and the Caribbean, where this history led to syncretic practices that defied colonial domination. Aimé Césaire's, Wifredo Lam's, and Maria Martins's aesthetic reproductions and even reinventions of Candomblé and Santería underline the mystery and secrecy of these practices, but importantly also reflect the journal's revolutionary program of unveiling what is underneath the surface.

Surrealism's total view turns out to be the opposite of a totalitarian view which brutally forces its vision on the world and its order. The medial, linguistic and cultural transgressions the journal relies upon are thus a revolutionary means to make the world habitable again, through a radical change of perception and perspective that opens to new realities. The surrealist world view proclaimed by *VVV* thus becomes "el único punto de resistencia de que pueda vanagloriarse el mundo": the last point of resistance upon which the world may rely.

- 1 André Breton and Benjamin Péret, *Correspondance (1920-1959)*, ed. Gérard Roche (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 108, my translation.
- 2 Breton and Péret, *Correspondance*, 106.
- 3 The authors consider the term “cultural formation” a convincing concept for periodical studies because it describes “a formal or informal association of individuals engaged in some nature of cultural production which in turn sets them in different relations with broader trends in society”. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, “General Introduction,” in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 1, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18. They borrow the term from Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana Press, 1981).
- 4 “The complexity of contents by the Europeans provokes vehement contestations, especially by the group of abstract artists that was formed in 1935 under the label American Abstract Artists.” (“[L]a complexité des contenus dont sont porteurs les Européens suscite des ripostes véhéments, notamment de la part des artistes abstraits réunis dès 1935 sous le label American Abstract Artists”). Werner Spies, “Introduction”, in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Werner Spies (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2002), 37. For further reflections on these encounters see Stamatina Dimakopoulou, “Europe in America: Remapping Broken Cultural Lines: *View* (1940-7) and *VVV* (1942-4),” in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), 737-758.
- 5 Charles Henry Ford, “Interview with André Breton,” *View* 7-8 (October-November 1941): 2. The interview also contains Breton’s public denunciations of excluded members such as Louis Aragon, Giorgio de Chirico, Robert Desnos and Paul Éluard. At the same time, he praises those who represent truthful Surrealism, such as André Masson, Yves Tanguy, Victor Brauner, Leonora Carrington and Kay Sage. This style is typical for Breton and his striving for control over the surrealist canon.
- 6 See Julia Pine, “Anti-Surrealist Cross-Word Puzzles. Breton, Dalí and Print in Wartime America,” *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 1 (2007): 1-29. The author presents a detailed analysis of the antagonistic relationship between Breton and Dalí in the years of World War II.
- 7 Terri Geis, “Great Impulses and New Paths: *VVV*, Surrealism and the Black Atlantic,” *Miranda* 14 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.9847>.
- 8 “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.” André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.
- 9 See Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 347. Paalen introduces his project with a “Farewell to Surrealism” in the first number of *Dyn*, although his journal features the main interests and issues of surrealist periodicals throughout.
- 10 Geis, “Great Impulses,” 2.
- 11 In a letter from January 4, 1942, he states: “This periodical will be based, as much as possible, on the spirit of invention” (“Cette revue, autant que possible, s’appuiera sur l’esprit d’invention.”) A week later, on January 10, he writes: “It won’t be a surrealist periodical but a periodical open to those who are committed to what we will seek in the future. [...] In *VVV* contradictory points of view can be openly expressed (“Ce ne sera une revue surréaliste mais une revue ouverte à tous ceux qui peuvent avoir à cœur ce dont on voudra demain [...]. Dans *VVV* pourront donc s’exprimer librement des points de vue contradictoires.”). Breton and Péret, *Correspondance*, 106, 114, my translation.
- 12 Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile*, 212.
- 13 Erin McClenathan, “Displaced Maneuvers: Tactile Surrealism in *VVV*’s Handheld Cinema,” *The Space Between: Literature and Culture 1914-1945* 14 (2018), accessed June 18, 2020, [http://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-space-between-literature-and-culture-1914-1945/vol14\\_2018/mcclenathan](http://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-space-between-literature-and-culture-1914-1945/vol14_2018/mcclenathan).
- 14 McClenathan analyzes the journal’s haptic experiments also in the context of exile, in which, according to the author, they “convey the desperate longing for contact that had come to sustain the

movement as never before.” McClenathan, “Displaced Maneuvers.”

15 Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 379.

16 Ibid. The original three-dimensional version of Duchamp’s *Genre Allegory* is part of the Centre Pompidou collection. The materials used are stained gauze, cotton, gouache and golden paper as well as nails. It is placed in a wooden box with a glass cover.

Marcel Duchamp, “Allégorie de Genre,” accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cXbkp4/rqGebEk>.

17 Looked at through the cut-out in the other reading direction from back to front, the head of George Washington is laid over Roberto Matta’s triptych *Prince of the Blood*.

18 There are two parts of *Design Correlation* in *VVV*. I will only refer to the one in *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 78-79. For a detailed analysis of the other part in *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 76-77, see McClenathan, “Displaced Maneuvers”.

19 McClenathan, “Displaced Maneuvers”.

20 In his correspondence with Péret, Breton stresses the “necessity of not overtly treating any political or religious problem” (“nécessité de ne traiter de front aucun problème politique ou religieux”). Breton and Péret, *Correspondances*, 106, my translation.

21 *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 2-13.

22 This identification can be assumed because the rocking horse plays an important role in Carrington’s work; see her self-portrait *Inn of the Dawn House* of 1936, in which the rocking horse appears on the wall. The painting is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

23 See Gérard Durozoi, “Les revues surréalistes: Paris-New York, autrement,” in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Werner Spies (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2002), 346.

24 André Breton’s “Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism, or Else”—in the French original it says “or Not” (“ou non”)—is illustrated by Matta. A translator cannot be identified as only the initials N.G. are given. *VVV* 1 (1942): 18-26. His “Situation du Surréalisme entre les Deux Guerres” is illustrated by Max Ernst, *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 44-53.

25 Durozoi, “Les revues surréalistes,” 347.

26 David Hare cited in Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen. Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde 1920–1950* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 211.

27 *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 124-126.

28 Braulio Arenas, Jorge Cásares, and Enrique Gómez-Correa, “Mandrágora poesía negra,” *Mandrágora* 1 (1938): 1-4.

29 There was an ongoing conflict in Chile between the poets who followed Vicente Huidobro and those who favored Neruda. The Mandrágora group eventually took sides with Huidobro, although with his anthology *Residencia en la Tierra* (*Residence on Earth*) published in 1936, Neruda was the first Chilean poet who adopted Surrealism. The authors of Mandrágora even accused Neruda of having stolen money from a fundraising project for children affected by the Spanish Civil War. It was collected by the *Alianza de Intelectuales en Chile*, an association of which Neruda was the leader. For a more detailed account, see Melanie Nicholson’s chapter “Neruda and Anti-Neruda: Chile’s Mandrágora Poets”, in her monograph *Surrealism in Latin American Literature. Searching for Breton’s Ghost* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 59-75.

30 “At this present moment [...] we surpass our national position in order to adhere enthusiastically to the international position of Surrealism.” (“A la hora presente [...] superamos nuestra posición nacional y adherimos con entusiasmo a la posición internacional del surrealismo.”) *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 125, my translation.

31 Llona translated Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway’s short stories and essays by Ezra Pound. A complete list of his French translations can be found on *Bibliothèque Nationale de*



France Data, "Victor Llona (1886-1953) – traducteur," accessed June 18, 2020, <https://data.bnf.fr/fr/documents-by-rdt/12738654/680/page1>.

32 *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 130.

33 Péret's critique on the first issue is mainly directed against the heterogeneity of the contributions. In a letter from June 8, 1942, he writes to Breton: "This journal is like a conversation between people who do not speak the same language." ("Cette revue est un peu comme une conversation de gens ne parlant pas la même langue.") Breton and Péret, *Correspondance*, 168, my translation.

34 Breton, "Situation du Surréalisme," p. 45.

35 "Ethnographic Surrealism" is a concept by James Clifford that describes the affinities between ethnology and Surrealism in the 1930s, especially with respect to the perception of reality as different. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1981): 539-564.

*Tristes Tropiques* contains some interesting details on the surrealists' passage from Marseille to Martinique, which by then was also under the occupation of the Vichy regime. They were not well treated and were even interned upon their arrival on the Antillean island. Lévi-Strauss, who escaped from Europe because he was Jewish, followed an invitation to become a fellow at the *New School for Social Research*, a program for European intellectuals endangered by the Nazi occupation, which was initiated by the Rockefeller Foundation. Métraux, who was by then already in New York, had established the connection. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955), 16-24. For the English translation, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *A World on the Wane*, trans. John Russell (University of Michigan: Criterion Books, 1961).

36 Alfred Métraux, "Note sur Deux Images en Tapa de l'Île de Paques," *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 40-41; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Indian Cosmetics," *VVV* 1 (1942): 33-35. Lévi-Strauss's "Indian Cosmetics" is one of the very few cases in *VVV* in which the full name of the translator appears. In this case it is Patricia Blanc.

37 Lévi-Strauss, "Indian Cosmetics," 35.

38 *VVV* 1 (1942) publishes Césaire's "Conquête de l'aube" ("Conquest at Dawn"): 39-41. The double number contains three poems, "Annonciation," "Tam-Tam 1," dedicated to Breton, and "Tam-Tam 2," dedicated to Péret, *VVV* 2-3 (1943): 132. The fourth issue includes "Batouque," *VVV* 4 (1944): 22-26. All of Césaire's poems in *VVV* will later be part of his anthology *Les Armes Miraculeuses* (*Miraculous Weapons*), first published in 1946.

39 Geis, "Great Impulses," 6.

40 Breton's fascination for Césaire's poetry is very much related to his Blackness, which also becomes clear in his famous foreword to Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, "The Great Black Poet," in which he repeats several times his amazement that "it is a black poet" who is able to produce such powerful lyrics. The essay was originally published in the Martinican journal *Tropiques*. André Breton, "Martinique charmeuse de serpents. Un grand poète noir," *Tropiques* 11 (May 1944): 119-126. It is translated in Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), ix-xx.

41 Geis, "Great Impulses," 7.

42 Geis maintains that Macumba is often applied interchangeably with Candomblé. Geis, "Great Impulses," 7. For a more detailed account of Maria Martins, see Terri Geis, "'My Goddesses and my Monsters': Maria Martins and Surrealism in the 1940s," in *Surrealism in Latin America. Vivísimo Muerto*, ed. Dawn Ades, Rita Eder and Graciela Speranza (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute Publications, 2012), 143-157.

43 Lilyan Kesteloot, "Première Lecture d'un Poème de Césaire, 'Batouque.'" *Études littéraires* 6, no. 1 (April 1973): 58, <https://doi.org/10.7202/500267ar>.

44 Original: "batouque des yeux pourris / batouque des yeux de mélasse / [...] batouque de mer dolente encroûtée d'îles / [...] batouque des mains / batouque des seins en furie des lianes et de

forêt vierge / batouque des sept péchés décapités / batouque du sexe au baiser d'oiseau à la fuite de poissons / [...] batouque de la princesse aux cuisses du Congo / de Bornéo / de Caracas", *VVV* 4 (1944): 23-25. The English translation is taken from Aimé Césaire, "Batouque," in *The Collected Poetry of Aimé Césaire*, bilingual version, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 146-153. In the 1970 edition of *Les Armes Miraculeuses*, Césaire replaced Caracas by Casamance, a region in the South of Senegal. Kesteloot maintains that this Africanization was actually not necessary. Kesteloot, "Première Lecture," 64. 45 Geis, "Great Impulses," 7.

46 Picasso, when he first saw Lam's paintings in Paris in the beginning of the 1940s exclaimed: "He has the right to [painting like] that, he is Black!" Picasso cited in Catherine David, "El Monte y el Mundo," in *Wifredo Lam: The EY Exhibition*, ed. Catherine David (London: Tate Modern Publishing, 2016), 17. For an excellent discussion of the way the European avant-garde imposed an African identity on Lam who "was only one quarter black" see Michele Greet, "Inventing Wifredo Lam: The Parisian Avant-Garde's Primitivist Fixation," *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture* 5 (2003), accessed January 12, 2019,

[http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/Issue\\_5/Michele\\_Greet/MicheleGreet.html](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_5/Michele_Greet/MicheleGreet.html).

47 Michel Carassou maintains that *La Jungle* provoked an enormous scandal but assured the painter's consecration. Michel Carassou, "La Jungle," in *Dictionnaire Général du Surréalisme et de ses Environs*, ed. Adam Biro and René Passeron (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 228. In 1944 the painting was bought by James Johnson Sweeney for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) where it hung for many years in the corridor on the way to the wardrobe, as if it was too "suspect" to be placed in the halls of the permanent collection. See David, "El Monte," 19.

48 This poetic quality of Lam's paintings has been underscored by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who emphasizes that Lam neither depicts classical motifs of European art history nor typical symbols of Afro-Cuban spirituality in his paintings, but always transformations of them. Fernando Ortiz, "Wifredo Lam and his Work as seen by Famous Critics," in *Wifredo Lam: The EY Exhibition*, ed. Catherine David (London: Tate Modern Publishing, 2016), 181.