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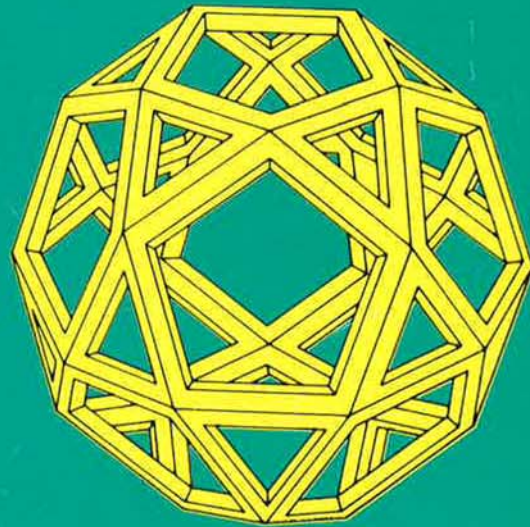
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ART HISTORY

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Rue de L'Epicerie, Rouen 1898 by Camille Pissarro
Illustrated alongside a photograph of the same scene
in an article on Pissarro by John Rewald, *APOLLO* November 1992.

**The November issue of *APOLLO* was a special issue on Camille Pissarro.
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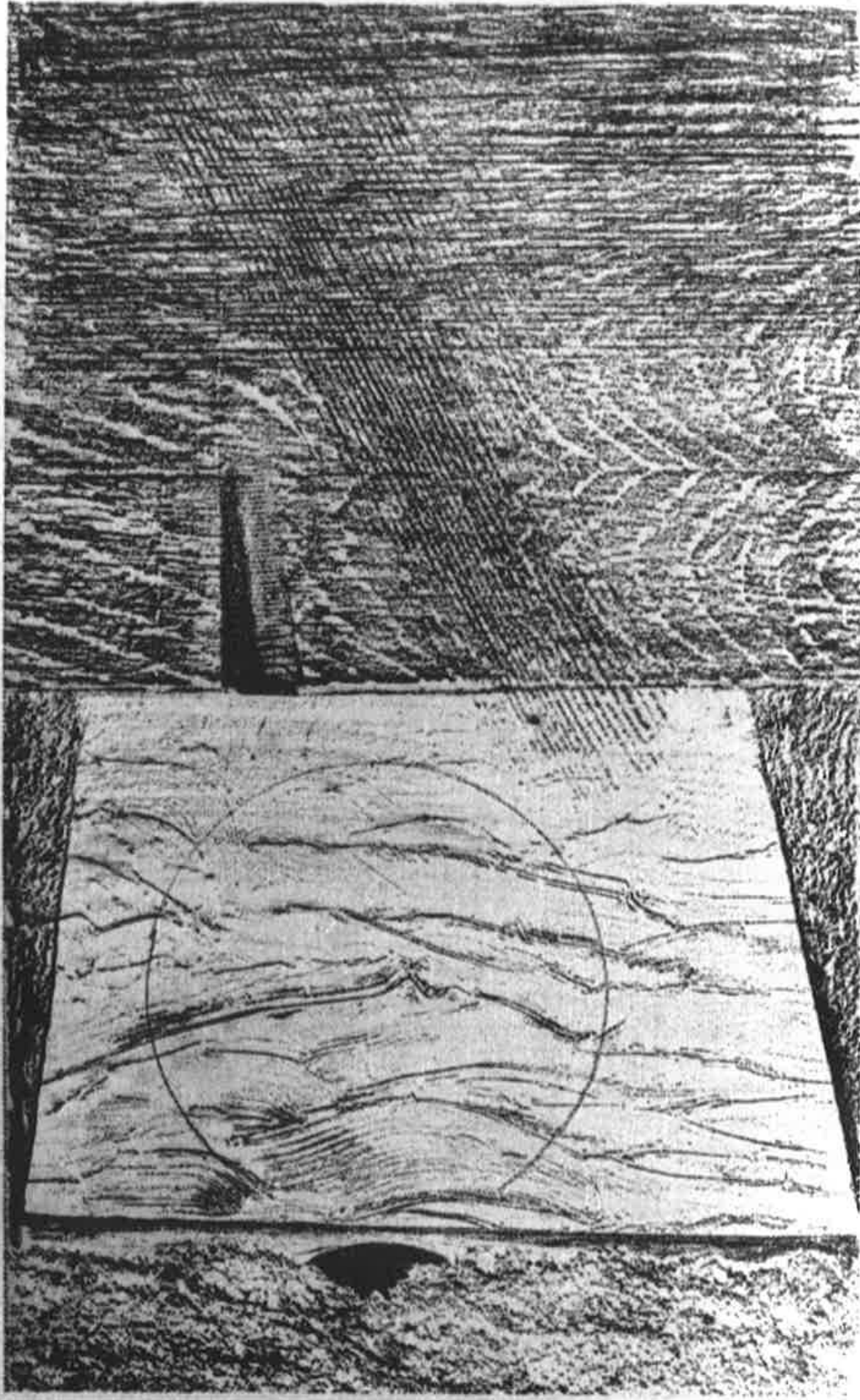
ZEUXIS'S GRAPES, NOVALIS'S FOSSILS, FREUD'S FLOWERS: MAX ERNST'S NATURAL HISTORY

ELIZABETH LEGGE

In the summer of 1925 Max Ernst began to make frottages — images produced by rubbing a pencil on paper over a textured surface. The following year, thirty-four of these were reproduced by photogravure in a limited edition portfolio, *Histoire naturelle*. The hundreds of frottages that Ernst had made served him as natural specimens to be selected and classified. Turning over the plates of *Histoire naturelle* the viewer is also provoked to act as natural historian, trying to reinvent the taxonomy implicit in the title. There are sequences of plates in the work — cosmological, botanical, mythological and so on — that imply an overall sequence;¹ but individual images interrupt, calling into question any predictable serial enterprise.

Frottage is ordinarily an amusement of children, and Ernst meant it as a deliberate technical atavism. It responded to the new surrealist call for automatism in visual art, a step away from the vestigial 'technique' required by oil painting or the precise assemblage required by collage. Given the simplicity of its means, *Histoire naturelle* raises questions about large issues, including the conventions of representing nature in art, and the problem of taxonomy, which itself poses the larger question of the nature of knowledge (of nature).

The first plate of *Histoire naturelle*, *La mer et la pluie* (Plate 77) is a *tabula rasa* that induces a number of things. Its title indicates the waters of primeval creation — Ernst 'invented' frottage on a rainy day beside the sea. It poses the alchemical problem of squaring the circle (flooding being a starting point of the process). It functions as a typical cosmological emblem (Plate 78), introducing the universal scope of a natural history, promising order and closure. It suggests Kant's investigations of the nature of knowledge of the phenomenal world, in which mathematical figures represent space and time, the *a priori* universal forms of perception.² The configuration also calls up the initial mark of the creator on matter: Blake's 'Ancient of Days' inscribing the circle of creation on the unformed deep, or Newton with compasses, the very type of the scientist imposing law on nature. The hand holding compasses is also a traditional printer's emblem, situating *Histoire naturelle* as a portfolio of prints, although frottage is printmaking in only the remotest sense, denying all the status of technical skill implicit in the craftsman's



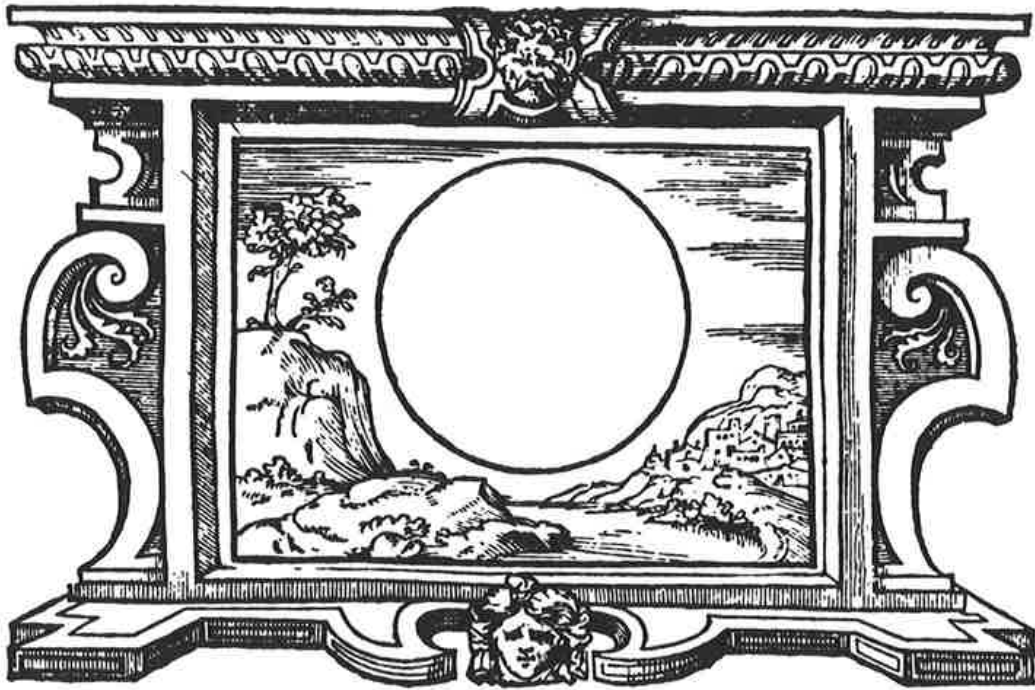
77 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate one: *La Mer et la pluie*, 1925. Frottage. S/M 790

mark.³ Finally, this initial plate refers to art. Read as an easel holding a canvas, it looks forward to the series in which Ernst's alter-ego Loplop 'presents' easel images. The circle invokes the story told by Vasari of Giotto's virtuosic freehand drawing of a simple 'O'.

When Max Ernst sorted through his frottages to compose a natural history, he took into account the existing models for such a complex enterprise. There were, for example, emblematic 'natural history' books, poets' work illustrated by artists (the *Histoires naturelles* of Renard and Toulouse-Lautrec, or, more immediately, Apollinaire and Dufy's *Bestiaire, ou cortège d'Orphée*). Ernst, who had collaborated with Paul Eluard on *Répétitions* and *Malheurs des immortels*, is artist to his own poet in *Histoire naturelle*. *Histoire naturelle* also raises the precedent of the encyclopedia: the great eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie*, whose plates enchanted him, resonates in Ernst's project. The scientific interests of several of his favourite poets — Goethe, Novalis — also come into play. Ernst assumes a pedigree of German intellectual history when he turns to natural history.

Several texts will be proposed here, as transparencies through which *Histoire naturelle* may be seen, or opacities through which it (as something tactile) may be forced. Probably the first model for his natural history is the discipline of natural history itself. By the time of Ernst's childhood classical natural history, the arrangement of things by reference to visual resemblances and differences, had become the popularized domain of the amateur, absorbed into the public institutions of botanical garden, nature park, natural science museum, schoolchild's herbarium or mineral collection. His hometown Brühl had a nature park; Cologne had a famous botanical garden and natural science museum.⁴ Max Ernst's Wilhelminian father who, usefully, is made by Max Ernst to stand for a whole range of outmoded attitudes in art and in pedagogy, advocated nature walks and collections — beetles, minerals, butterflies, herbaria — probably with an eye to the theological potential of observing God's works. The fruits of this observation are to be found in Philipp Ernst's careful botanical sketches and rose-bowered madonnas.⁵ The nature study of his childhood, a reflection of his didactic father's disposition toward nature, is of some relevance to Ernst's formulation of his own natural history. His automatist frottage method of learning nature, like the preternatural hybrids of his collage, is the antithesis of orderly collection and sorting of natural evidence. The natural history collector lies behind the (suitably) petrified butterflies presented by Ernst's alter-ego, Loplop (*Main humaine et papillons pétrifiées* (S/M 1779)). Ernst's own metamorphic shellflowers of the later 1920s, at once hailstone, shell, butterfly, fishbone and flower, are an antidote.

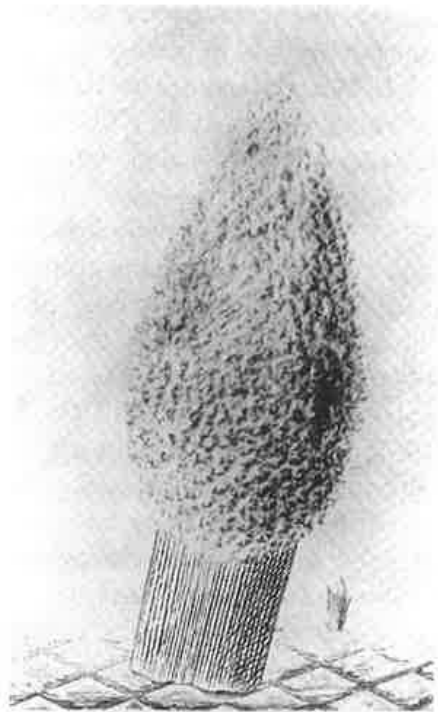
What positive models, rather than cautionary examples, were there for Ernst's 'science'? Max Ernst may have seen and been inspired by Paul Klee's collections of natural specimens and curiosities, which provoked imaginative association rather than rigorous organization.⁶ In the *First Surrealist Manifesto* Breton had affirmed the right of poetical modes of investigation to take their place beside the 'scientific', and he would often reaffirm the value of automatism as a mode of scientific 'knowing', praising his teacher Babinski's unpreconceived experimental methods, 'Kant's absentmindedness about women, Pasteur's absentmindedness about "grapes", Curie's absentmindedness about vehicles . . .'.⁷ For the surrealist, science is just another set of descriptions, not a privileged relation to reality. As



78 Theodorus Beza, Emblem 1, *Icones*, Geneva, 1580



79 Andrea Alciati, 'Zypresse', in Jeremias Held, *Liber Emblematum d. Andreae Alciati* ..., Frankfurt-am-Main, p. 1566



80 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 9, *Le Fascinant Cyprès* (S/M 798)

Aragon observed in *Une Vague de rêves*: 'the real is a relation like any other . . . there are other relations beside reality, which the mind is capable of grasping and which also are primary, like chance, illusion, the fantastic, the dream.'⁸

Ernst proposes optional ways of knowing, rather than apodictic facts and identities. He goes back to the pre-classical natural history, to Albertus Magnus and Pliny, in which every object was presented with its intrinsic lore, myths, magical and curative properties. In Alciatus's sixteenth-century emblem book, for example, we are told that the cypress symbolizes the ruler who treats his subjects equally (Plate 79). There is also a moral tag: although lovely, the tree can bear no wholesome fruit.⁹ The cryptic titles of Ernst's plates may be read as compressions of this lost emblematic lore — the 'fascinating' of *Le Fascinant Cyprès* (Plate 80).

Ernst, who was fascinated by the illustrations of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, may have held it in mind when he turned to his own classification of nature; especially the famous 'Agnus Scythicus' entry, in which Diderot calls into question the whole matter of 'authorities', by whose sanction information becomes knowledge. Diderot enumerates the supposed fantastical properties of this mythical plant (seeds the size of melons, resemblance to a lamb, gastronomic appeal to wolves). As encyclopedist, Diderot-as-authority warns the reader against belief in authorities who simply echo one another's errors, whose 'evidence' may be hearsay.¹⁰ Max Ernst, whose botanical figures are often ambiguously anthropomorphic (as, for example, *Le Start du chataîgnier* (S/M 803) in which a bunch of grapes becomes a bush and a squirrel), inverts this advice in his encyclopedic project, generating his own fabulous authority.

Histoire naturelle, for which Hans Arp wrote an introduction, is, in part, Ernst's dialogue with Arp's enchanted vocabulary of natural transformation and interchangeable identity.¹¹ An old friend and collaborator, Arp had moved to Paris and participated in the first surrealist exhibition in 1925. Ernst's interest in undermining the authority of the encyclopedia is related to his friend Arp's ongoing effort to restore the universe to its proper lack of hierarchy and category. Arp's famous poem *Kaspar ist tot* is a lament for 'Kaspar', a kind of god enmeshed with nature as a 'watery chain attached to a hot whirlwind', an Orpheus or Pan who can 'entice idyllic deer out of the petrified paper box'. His namesake 'Caspar', however, is remote from classical myths: he is a stock character of puppet theatre, who outwits authority figures by behaving absurdly, and by hitting them on the head — perhaps the origin of Arp's 'heiliger bim bam'. As Arp's poem wonders 'who's going to chase away the . . . devil', the Caspar plays usually end with the line, 'He hits him [the police, death, the devil] and gives chase.' When Death tries to force-march Caspar by counting, '1, 2, 3, . . .', Caspar outwits him by simply continuing to count. This is a clue perhaps to Arp's own use of exasperating arithmetic; he claimed, for example, to have evaded military service by fooling with the official form (adding up the numbers of his birthdate).

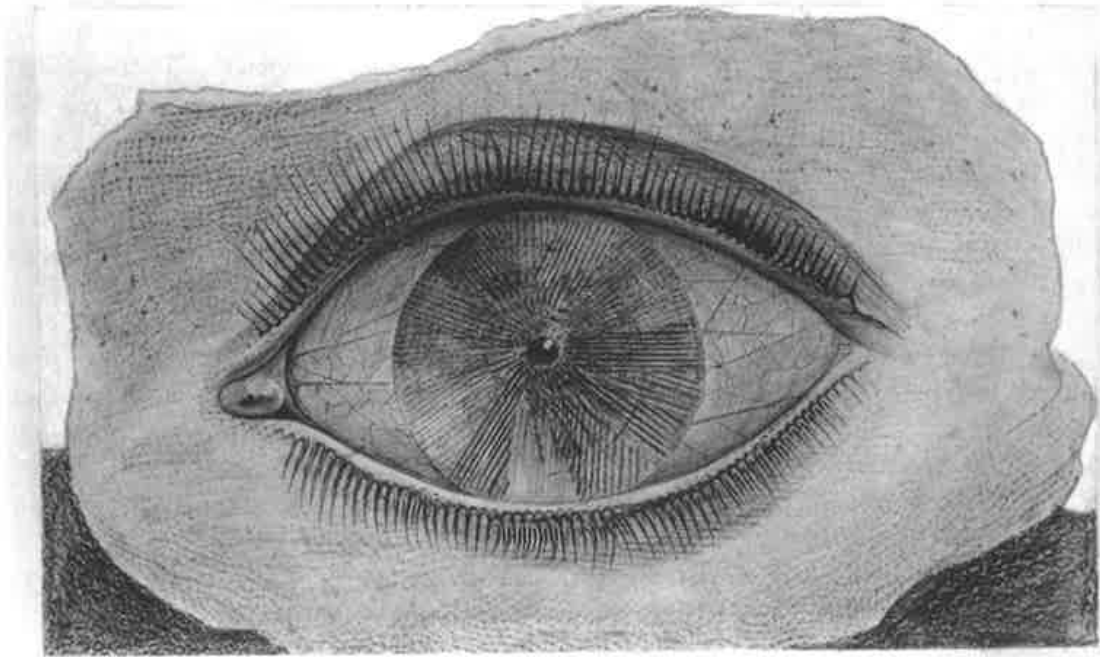
Ernst had mimicked Arp's whimsy and irony in his poem *Arp* (1921). The accompanying illustration *Microgramme Arp 1 : 25.000* (S/M 408) is the germ of what would become Ernst's natural history. Like other overpaintings of the period, it capitalizes on the fact that the source images are taken from a commercial catalogue. Things ordered according to the particular requirements of selling are recognized by Ernst as being inherently parodic of higher scientific categories, and are

overpainted to establish further arbitrary relations and categories. A catalogue of teaching aids, the *Lehrmittelkatalog*, inspired many of Ernst's early paintings. The classroom posters advertised in it are wildly varied examples of classifications (of the animal kingdom, of teeth, of diphthongs, of historical paintings, of first-aid techniques), so there is a further incongruous level of classification within classification. Arp's cautionary observation at the beginning of his introduction to *Histoire naturelle* draws mocking attention to the rigour and redundancy of scientific and academic procedure: 'this introduction contains the pseudo-introduction the original the variant of the original the pseudo-original the apocrypha and the incorporation of all these texts. . . .'¹²

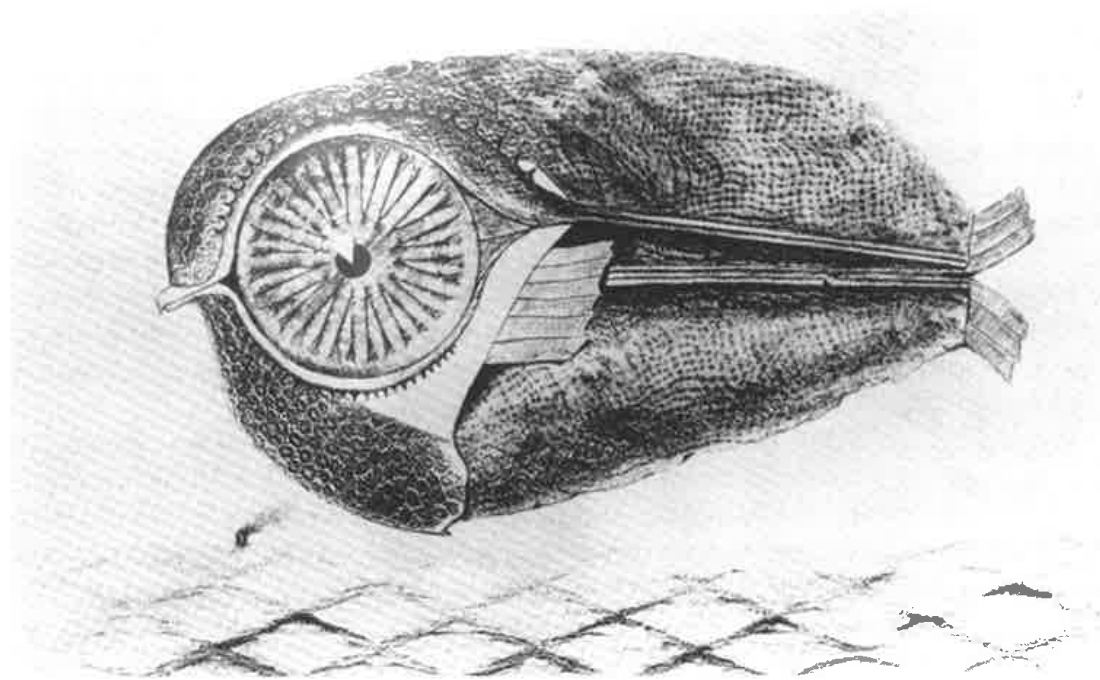
Ernst's homage to Arp in *Histoire naturelle* may extend to a shared interest in the writings of the German mystic Jacob Böhme, who took alchemy for his metaphor of divine creation and human self-knowledge, and which functions as one of the interleaved intertexts for *Histoire naturelle*.¹³ Two of its images, *La Roue de la lumière* and *L'Évadé* (Plates 81 and 82) represent the disembodied eye. This can be taken as a reference to contemporary surrealist concern with automatism in art to which Ernst's development of frottage was a response. 'L'oeil existe à l'état sauvage' announces Breton at the beginning of his consideration of the problem, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, in which he renews his call for automatism, and offers the 'interior model' as the solution for the artist who would be Rimbaudian *voyant*. In *Histoire naturelle* Ernst takes up Breton's rejection of art that imitates external nature, proposing instead nature as an extended hallucination: the eye is the model of the interior model.¹⁴ Böhme's account of the relations between human and divine creation also operates in these images of the eye.

'Sophia', the heavenly female principle who functions as God's imagination is described by Böhme as an eye visualizing the natural world for the introspective (concave mirror) divinity. (One of the attractions of Hegel for André Breton was that he followed Böhme in having the absolute think only through the phenomenal world.¹⁵) Assuming this role of 'imager' of nature is crucial to Ernst's enterprise in *Histoire naturelle*. A shard that is both eye and leaf, *La Roue de la lumière* is a concise statement of just such a fusion of envisioned and actual nature. The mystical eye of Böhme's Sophia here meets the carnal eye of Gala Eluard, whose eyes had been the obsessive, recurrent subject of a number of drawings, a synecdoche of Ernst's obsession with her. So Ernst's personification of the 'divine' imagination as Sophia-as-Gala, is made acceptably surrealist in its emphasis on the human and erotic.

In the next plate, *L'Évadé*, the condensed identity of leaf and eye further incorporates a bird's head, a motif of recurring totemic importance in Ernst's work. This overdetermined figure may be read not only from left to right as a bird's head, but also, from right to left, as a bird in flight, or a fish. The flying bird is an alchemical symbol of transformed matter, and the fish is surely Breton's automatist poet as 'poisson soluble', a reference to the alchemical stage of the dissolution of bodies in mercury water. (If *Histoire naturelle* can be sorted into an overall pattern, as a whole it may be read as the alchemical transmutation of base material — the straw, leather, bread, and wood that is rubbed.¹⁶) Finally, in *Système de monnaie solaire* (SM 820), a celestial system of Gala's eyes is substituted for the skeins of eyes in Böhme's emblemata. In these eyes lurk the budding celestial systems and embryonic forms that Sophia 'sees' on behalf of the creator.



81 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle 29, La Roue de la lumière* (S/M 818)



82 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle 30, L'Évadé* (S/M 819)

There is also a correspondence between these eye images and the emblems in 'Horapollo', known perhaps to Ernst as a student of art history: Dürer had produced drawings for a number of the Horapollo hieroglyphics. Horapollo's texts proposed meanings for Egyptian hieroglyphics, and many of the images — disembodied finger, ear, hand, bloodshot eye or tongue floating over, or embedded in, the landscape, the headless walking man, and, above all, one or a pair of eyes floating in the sky (Plate 83) — have surrealist possibilities: one thinks of the enormous floating mouth in Man Ray's *The Lovers or Observatories* (1932–4). In 1925 Ernst made several 'portraits' of Gala based on a Man Ray photograph, as giant eyes taking their place amidst cosmic spheres and fragments (*Femme visible* S/M 787, and *Portrait de Gala*, S/M 788).¹⁷ These resonate in the *Histoire naturelle* eyes.

The wheel and double wheel of Ernst's cosmological plates also resonate with Böhmanian imagery (plates 84 and 85): '... the forms of nature are awakened, and are as a turning wheel', or, 'it is the severing, viz. of light and darkness from one another, the breaking wheel. ...'¹⁸ The wheel represents divine duality, a fire that both illuminates and devours, a circular force of anxiety. This dynamic and unstable configuration of divine desire is in turn realized in physical nature: the worm, or menacing throat, or abyss, lurks in the harmonious garden. Ernst, self-declared persecutor and lover of nature, would assume this struggle with nature's duality.¹⁹

In 1932 Ernst gave a retrospective account of his invention of frottage on a rainy day in the summer of 1925, which conveys the way in which he wanted it to be taken.²⁰ We are told that his eye was attracted to deeply grooved patterns of floorboards: rubbing a pencil on paper over the boards caused him to hallucinate multiple images in rapid succession. He then enhanced and modified the rubbings to 'fix' the images (in the way that Breton had described the surrealist artist as 'fixer' of an image). The rubbing intensified the hallucinations (that occurred with the 'persistence and rapidity characteristic of erotic memories'), and the images finally drawn represented the 'original cause of the obsession'. In this account Ernst presents frottage as the kind of obsessive act described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, by which the prohibition of sexual 'touching' is displaced into impersonal things.

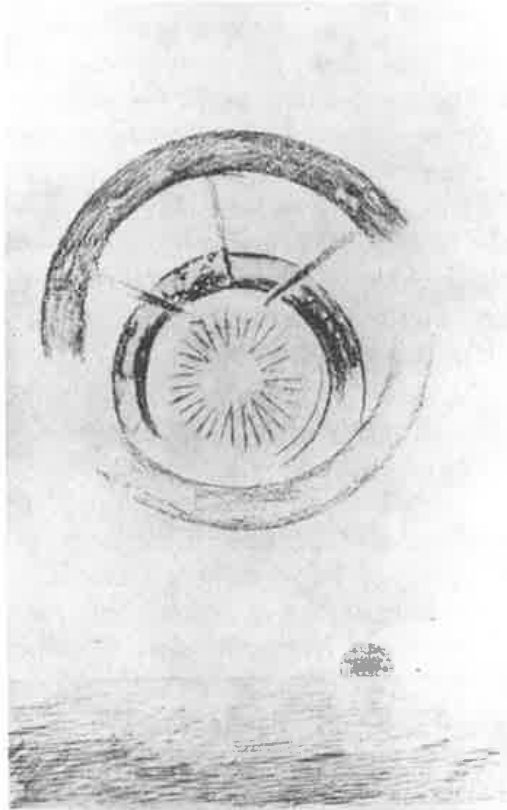
In fact, Ernst had produced frottage images before that summer day in 1925; but what is true of his account is that it was then that he discovered frottage as a means of resolving the delicate problem of being 'automatist', both systematic and unpreconceived in his making of images. Ernst suggests that frottage is not exactly the representation of a prior, realized, mental image, as a painting might recall a dream, but is the product of its own rubbed transcription, a manual hallucination drawn out by motor memory.

However, it is in the writing of the poet Novalis, held in lasting esteem, as much as Freud, by Arp and Ernst that the automatist model for *Histoire naturelle* is to be found: both in its technique, and in the association of that technique with its particular subject matter — nature. Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Novices of Saïs* are parables of the reassessment of the human relationship to nature: nature is an encyclopedic index of the mind, and knowledge of nature is knowledge of the self.²¹

Histoire naturelle also takes up Novalis's speculative project for an encyclopedia, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*. Its gnomic fragments proposed a comprehensive investiga-



83 '... Dieu voit, considère & cognoit toutes choses', in Horapollo, *Ori Apollinis Niliaci* ..., Paris, 1574, p. 104



84 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 2, *Un Coup d'oeil* (S/M 791)



85 Emblem from Jacob Böhme (in *Sämtliche Schriften*, Stuttgart, 1960, vol. 4)

tion of all systems of knowledge — algebra, equations, proportions, similarities, equivalences, the operations of the sciences on one another — designed to demonstrate their coherence and unity: 'All knowledge constitutes a single book.'²² Topics proposed for the encyclopedia include not only the fields of mathematics and science, but also all aspects of art and image-making: perspective, classical art, heraldry, animal paintings, the boundaries of painting and sculpture, and the relationship of each to the 'ideal', classical art, the imitation of nature. The origin and nature of images is an important part of Novalis's study: he envisioned art and science each taking up where the other left off, in a continual encyclopedic enterprise.²³ This is borne out by Ernst's *Histoire naturelle*.

Above all, Novalis privileges the power of the imagination. He takes mathematics as a paradigm of knowledge, and as a critique of the merely empirical: mathematical representations are not copies of something, nor do they correlate to observable objects, but are images constructed from abstract concepts.²⁴ The first plate of *Histoire naturelle* (plate 77) may be taken as Ernst's reassertion of this mathematical model for the imagination's making of signs.

In his poetic discourses, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Novices of Saïs*, Novalis describes the methodical way in which an aspiring student of nature must concentrate his perceptions, in terms uncannily predictive of surrealist automatism. Novalis envisions a final stage in which the imagination takes over perception: ultimately the senses become organs that act on external reality, directed by the hallucinations and vision of the mind. The novice learns to generate hallucinations at will, giving rise to 'delicate, abrupt movements of a coloured pencil, or strange contractions and figurations of an elastic liquid'.²⁵ (Many of the original frottages for *Histoire naturelle* have subtle colour.) These figurations are 'refractions of the self' induced in surrounding nature. So, in one way, Ernst plays the initiate in *Histoire naturelle*, learning to hallucinate, rather than see or imitate, nature. As Ernst later phrased it, he learned to 'force inspiration'. The trick, Novalis says, is to learn continuously to engage in this free play of thought whilst carrying on the everyday business of the senses; living, then, in an intensified state between the two worlds of hallucination and reality, so that the outer world becomes 'transparent' to the mind.²⁶ This condition would resonate, for Ernst, with Breton's ambition to combine the states of dream and waking in a surrealist state.

Novalis also describes the nature visionary's ability to confuse and intermingle the identities of stars, men, stones, beasts, clouds and plants.²⁷ Such punning of identity runs through *Histoire naturelle* as leaf, head and tree echo one another. In this, there is an analogy to archaic systems of classification based on coincidental resemblance, such as Robinet's comparisons of mineral forms with human organs and features, or della Porta's comparisons of human physiognomy to animals, and to shells.²⁸ Ernst's mutually echoing and mutating series of images in *Histoire naturelle* also reflects Novalis's comparative study of the analogies, identities, similarities and interactions of signs, in which linguistic signs are not different from other signs: 'black chalk, colours, strokes, words, are true elements, like mathematical lines and planes.' All signs could be reduced to basic abstract units, to act in combinations, in analogy to the abstract equations of mathematics or music.²⁹

Novalis's initiate can produce compositions without any prior external 'real'

impression, so that nature can be truly *imagined*: a project that would conform to the surrealist proposition of the 'interior model'. In Novalis's speculative nature-thinking imagined worlds become real, providing the 'future natural geographer' with the bearings for his 'great map of nature'. This is of a piece with the automatist poet of *The First Surrealist Manifesto*, a fearless explorer of the dangerous landscapes, the unspeakable flora and fauna, of the unconscious.³⁰

The *Novices of Saïs* is an extended debate about possible ways of regaining a direct relationship with nature. For Novalis (unsurprisingly) it is the *poet*, more than the artist or scientist, who is most able to decode the magical cipher-writing at the heart of things. In his conception of a lost natural language, Novalis had been influenced by Böhme, who was in turn influenced by Paracelsus; and it may be said that Ernst continues in that German philosophical tradition, but, as a surrealist, purifies it of any transcendental taint. For Böhme, man is the 'book' of the universe, given appropriate magical powers to expand the repertoire of creation. Inherent in each natural thing is its signature, an absolute concordance of outer form and inner mark. The sympathetic interpreter will be able to strike the signature of any natural thing to make it sound with the note appropriate to its properties.³¹ Ernst's rubbing may be taken as a percussive sounding, or decoding equivalent of Paracelsus's divine finger inscribing hieroglyphs in the 'book of nature'.³² Novalis in turn proposed the recuperation of the lost original natural language, in which things had an absolute identity with their names. There is, in the relation of cryptic title to image in *Histoire naturelle*, a suggestion of this sort of magical recuperative nomination: 'éclairs au-dessous de quatorze ans', 'pain vacciné', 'origine de la pendule'.

Ernst was aware of the investigations of language in the work of his friends the poet Paul Eluard, and the linguist Jean Paulhan. He was also probably aware, through his university study of the psychology of speech, of the arguments surrounding the notion of a lost original, mimetic language. In all of these linguistic arguments about original language is a concern for the degree to which it may have been physically descriptive, gestural, and, generally, hieroglyphic rather than alphabetic in its written form. In *Histoire naturelle* Ernst addresses the commonplace of nature as a book, by making nature, literally, a book — or, at least, a portfolio. With an eye to theories of the origins of language, his readings of the linguistic theory of Bühler and Wundt, Ernst takes up from the tantalizing mysticism of Paracelsus, Böhme, the Cologne magus Albertus Magnus and Novalis, the possibility of an hieroglyphic language encoded in physical objects, and overlays it with the problem of scientific classification which perpetually defers identity by comparison and differentiation. By assembling hieroglyphs (the frottages) rather than physical objects themselves, Ernst also links *Histoire naturelle* to the linguistic discussions of Paulhan and Eluard: the problem of representation by art and language, and the contrary possibility that any such a natural language might be absolutely unimitative, and arbitrary.³³

In imagining rather than copying nature in *Histoire naturelle* Ernst assumes the role of Novalis's *poet*. For Novalis the artist is a mere describer of nature, a status deplored by Ernst and his surrealist peers. Nevertheless, Ernst's imagined natural forms have to function convincingly in the continuum of the real (as Arp wanted his works to take their place in nature). So Ernst is led to matters of art and

representation. *Histoire naturelle* is also about knowing oneself as an artist, and knowing what kind of artist.

In 1925 Max Morise and Pierre Naville had questioned the possibility of there ever being a truly automatist visual art, and the period of *Histoire naturelle* is the time of Breton's increasing consideration of the relationship of surrealism and painting, in which the nature of perception itself, hallucination, and illusion are paramount.³⁴ In *Histoire naturelle*, there is a level on which Ernst addresses the conventions of Western art for creating an illusion of the real. He refers to light and shadow, effects of gravity, vanishing-point perspective and so on, so that while the images refer to optical illusion they do not add up to one.

Jean Paulhan, whose ideas had been important to Paul Eluard and of interest to Max Ernst in the early 1920s, had written about the commonly held conviction that signs represent ideas or things, a delusion as convincing as *optical illusion*. Paulhan's criticism of the notion of mimetic signs played a role in Ernst's painting *Au rendez-vous des amis* in 1922, and in *Histoire naturelle* he continues this investigation, referring to the devices of optical illusion as a way of discrediting them. Paulhan had argued that things could be said to issue from words and to illustrate them, rather than vice versa; and, in *Histoire naturelle*, the natural world issues from signs.³⁵

Max Ernst gave his first indirect account of frottage in 1927, in a dream published in *La Révolution surréaliste*. He would later describe this dream as an hallucination brought on by a childhood fever.³⁶ It is, roughly, a comic enactment of a Freudian child's sexual trauma, in which sexual activity turns into artistic activity. His father takes a 'big pencil' made of 'some soft material' from his trousers, which turns into a whip as he draws horrible images on the garish fake mahogany headboard: a caricature of frottage as hallucinatory image-making. That it is a crude *imitation* of woodgrain that is whipped by the father may be read as a pointed contrast to the deeply textured real wood of the son's frottage. *Les Coups de fouet ou ficelles de lave* (*Histoire naturelle*, plate 11, S/M 800) draws attention to this connection. Further, imitation woodgrain requires a modicum of technique on someone's part to achieve its illusion of a real wood surface. Its shoddy craft is a caricature of the mimetic artist's technique. The cubist work of Picasso and Braque had established the precedent of faked woodgrain, the decorator's comb, to similar ends, and Ernst's use of woodgrain in *Histoire naturelle* is also a dialogue with cubist games of illusion and representation; here, woodgrain is about art.

Art as imitation of nature is the crux of another of Ernst's anecdotes involving his father and wood. Philipp Ernst chopped down a tree so that the landscape would conform to the painting in which he had been first obliged to eliminate the tree for the sake of the composition. The story is a *reductio ad absurdum*, as Ernst's father is caught running back and forth between garden and picture, natural theology (faithful imitation of sacred nature), and academic precept (landscape as alteration and refinement of nature): 'a picture that is not the faithful reproduction of the model commits a venial sin: it lies.' Ernst concludes that he, 'little Max', set out in his own modest way to rectify the reciprocal relations between art and nature, painter and model.³⁷ In his gnomic introduction to *Histoire naturelle* Arp observes that 'one cannot consume one's father except *slice by slice*, impossible to finish him off in one solitary picnic' — a tidy version of the primal crime described in *Totem*

and *Taboo*, the Oedipal son consuming his father.³⁸ In the successive plates of *Histoire naturelle*, inspired by woodgrain, Ernst unchops his father's tree, slice by slice.

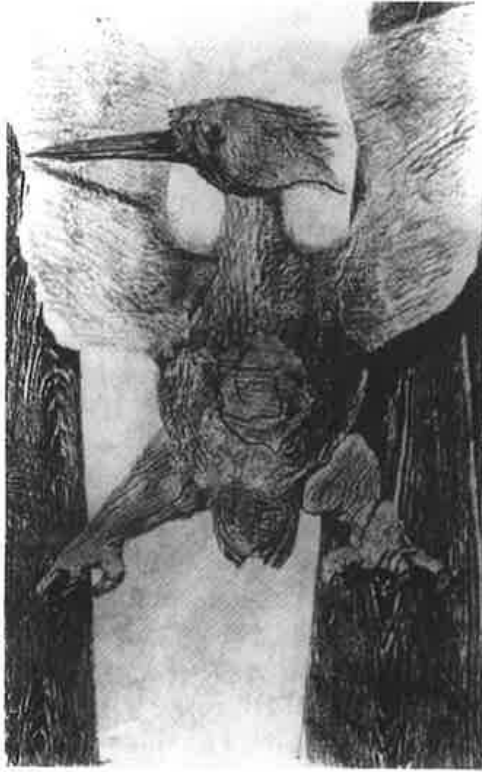
The hallucinatory woodgrain that recurs throughout *Histoire naturelle* brings up the relations of painter and model in another way, because of the fundamental association of woodgrain with *trompe l'oeil*. The irregular pattern of wood is one of the most convincing descriptive surfaces, and it is a standby of *trompe l'oeil* painting, establishing an apparent reality that serves as an alibi for the rest of the picture, guaranteeing the optical illusion. A common *trompe l'oeil* subject, for example, is a game bird slung in front of a wooden background (Plates 86 and 87). The motif of the bird dangling by its strung-up claws may inform Ernst's title, *L'Origine de la pendule*. There is a relationship between *Histoire naturelle* and *trompe l'oeil* images, however opposed their end effects, and because of them. *Trompe l'oeil* relies on the semblance of tactile surfaces, housed in shallow controlled spaces — boxes, cabinets, picture frames — for creating a simulacrum of the real. Frottage exploits the tactile for a related purpose. Carrying on a venerable tradition of architectural decoration, Max Ernst had already experimented with illusionism in his Eluard house murals in 1923, putting a *trompe l'oeil* door in the bedroom.³⁹ The vocabulary of *trompe l'oeil* would prove critical to surrealist discussion of hallucinated reality, and to the simulations of leaf vein and woodgrain of *Histoire naturelle* that reappear, with varicosed intensity, in many of Magritte's paintings.

The woodgrain in Ernst's frottage functions perplexingly. The images do not correlate the textures of the frottaged material with the things depicted, with the notable exception of the wooden floorboards, which are presented in their actual scale, as themselves (Plate 88). It is as if the boards are a slice of the 'real', an embodiment of *trompe l'oeil* verisimilitude, intended to keep the viewer confused about the distinctions between the optical and the real. Ernst has to manoeuvre between his rejection of any illusionist depiction of the real, and the necessity of making his frottage somehow represent itself as a reality.

Constructing the image so that it appears to involve layers of paper or wood laid parallel to the picture plane is another device of *trompe l'oeil*, teasing the viewer into reading the actual picture surface as a continuation of the depicted surfaces within the painting: it is all false, or it is all real. Prints or paintings are often included within a *trompe l'oeil* for the same reason, as the pictures within the picture are read as real, or the actual picture is taken as another illusion. Ernst adapted this device for his own non *trompe l'oeil* ends in his frottage portrait of the Eluards (Plates 89 and 90). In *Histoire naturelle* he establishes a device that would be put through many turns by Magritte, when he apparently 'rips' a leaf out of the paper on which it is actually depicted (Plate 91). *La Palette de César* plays on our belief in the reality of the paper underlying the image we are looking at and holding.

André Breton, explaining why he took over as editor of *La Révolution surréaliste*, had written, in July 1925:

The sin — if sin there was — was when the mind grasped, or thought it grasped, the apple of clarity. Above the apple there trembled a clearer leaf, of pure shadow. What was this leaf? The masterpieces of literature have nothing to say on this point; but we surrealists could speak of it without qualms.⁴⁰



86 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 26, *Origine de la pendule* (S/M 815)



87 J.-J. Bachelier, *Le Canard mort*, eighteenth century



88 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 21, *Rasant les murs* (S/M 810)



89 Jean Cousteau, untitled *trompe l'oeil*, eighteenth century

As in *L'Évadé* and *La Roue de la lumière* Ernst presents Breton with the 'savage' eye of a truly surrealist art, in *La Palette de César* he gives the very image of automatist reality, the paradoxical clarity of the leaf in question, a *frottaged* pure 'shadow'.

An important section of the eponymous natural history of Pliny deals with the origins and nature of illusion in art. From Pliny to Vasari, and on through the nineteenth century, academic art made caricatural in Philipp Ernst, runs the notion of art as an essential copy of the real. The crux of Pliny's account is the story of Zeuxis's grapes, painted so convincingly that birds flew to peck at them. However, in competition, Zeuxis's grapes were defeated by Parhassius's curtain, so apparently real that Zeuxis tried to pull it aside to see what was painted behind it.

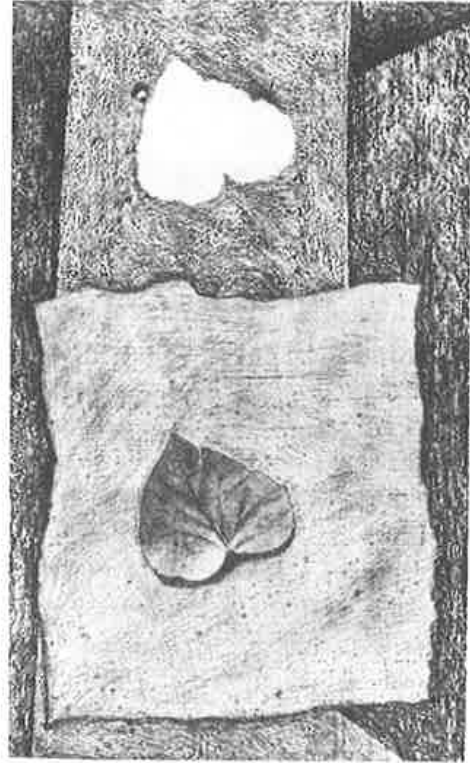
From this story of competitive virtuosity, Zeuxis's grapes have, so to speak, been a gauntlet thrown down for artists in the western tradition (Plate 92).⁴¹ In the grapes, nature meets culture. One way or another, imitation of the natural world has to be taken into account. In the case of frottage as evidence of the image-making capacity of the unconscious, it is important that the image seem real in some way, but not as a consistent optical illusion. Ernst takes up the grapes for his own polemical reasons, in *L'Idole* (Plate 93). Together with *La Palette de César*, *L'Idole* forms an 'art' subsection of *Histoire naturelle*, the equivalent of the extended section in Pliny's *Natural History* on the development of art — a legitimate consideration of the natural historian. The 'idol' of the title makes sense as a reference to the grapes of Zeuxis, paragon of mimesis. The shallowness of the space and the apparent half-emergence of the grapes from the surface of the picture give an impression of the grapes coming into being, rather than existing in a fully realized optical illusion, a tactile 'reality' substituted for a visual deception. As an automatist Zeuxis, Ernst makes grapes the model of the *inner* model. These frottage grapes confirm imagined, rather than imitated, ones.⁴² In a further incident recounted by Pliny, Zeuxis tries, and fails, to frighten off the birds attracted by the grapes, by adding the painting of a child. In Ernst's *Les Épouvantails* (*Histoire naturelle*, plate 80, S/M 802) the scarecrow may be the grape cluster of mimesis itself; something, in his opinion, that should frighten birds, or artists.

Ernst's 'idol' of pictorial illusion is appropriately housed in a box-like diminution of vanishing-point perspective, which is also the shallow cupboard of *trompe l'oeil*, or the natural-history 'cabinet' (Plate 94). Natural history and curiosity cabinets are a common traditional subject of *trompe l'oeil*. In them, natural objects have been made cultural, by being collected, displayed, embalmed, or reproduced as art. Coral, shell, scarab, skull, insect and bird take their place beside mirror, print and drawing, displayed against the deceptive woodgrain of cabinet. In *Histoire naturelle* Ernst's frottages as art take their place in the natural history cabinet for which they provide the woodgrain.

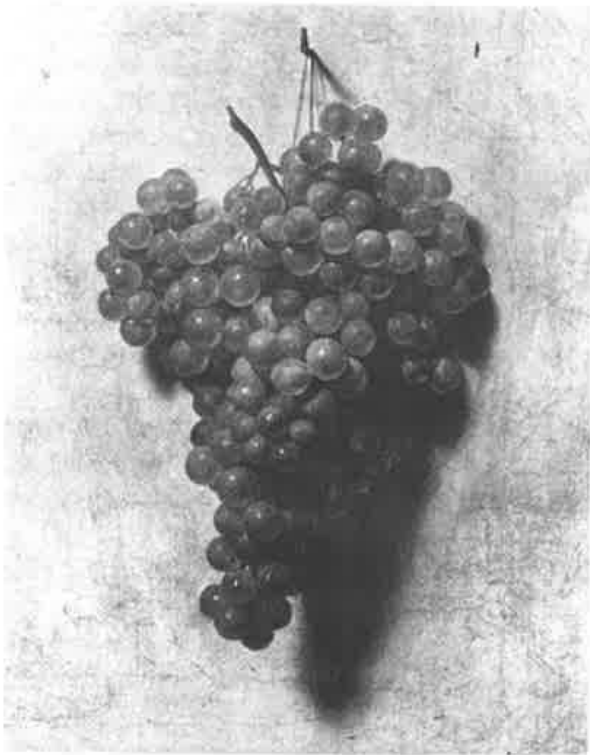
Although he does not do so in *Histoire naturelle* itself, Ernst occasionally sets conventional illusionistic representations of fruit against the frottage, so that the visual and tactile cast doubt on each other. The optically convincing botanical-type illustrations consequently appear less materially real than the frottage elements against which they are placed. In an important collage of 1924, *Zwei Trauben* (S/M 770), Ernst heightens the optical illusion by adding deep shadows, so that the two grapes seem to float in front of the frottaged background. In *Pomme visible* (S/M 774) Breton's 'apple of clarity', illusionistically rounded by light and shadow, is



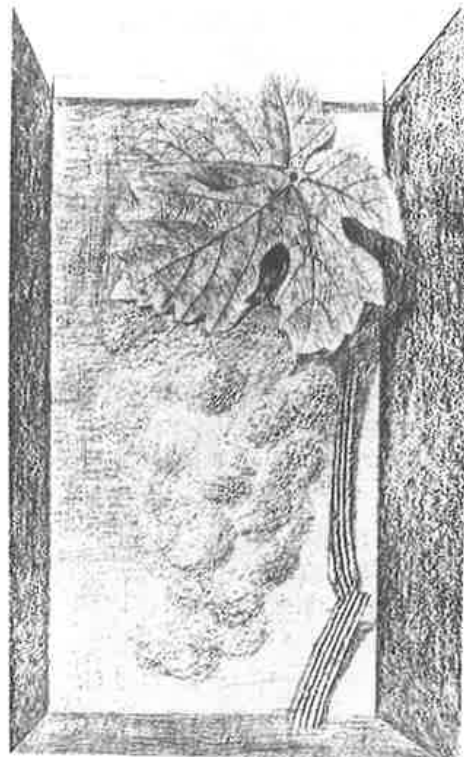
90 Max Ernst, *Paul and Gala Eluard*, illustration *Les Dessous d'une vie*, frottage, 1926 (S/M 1063)



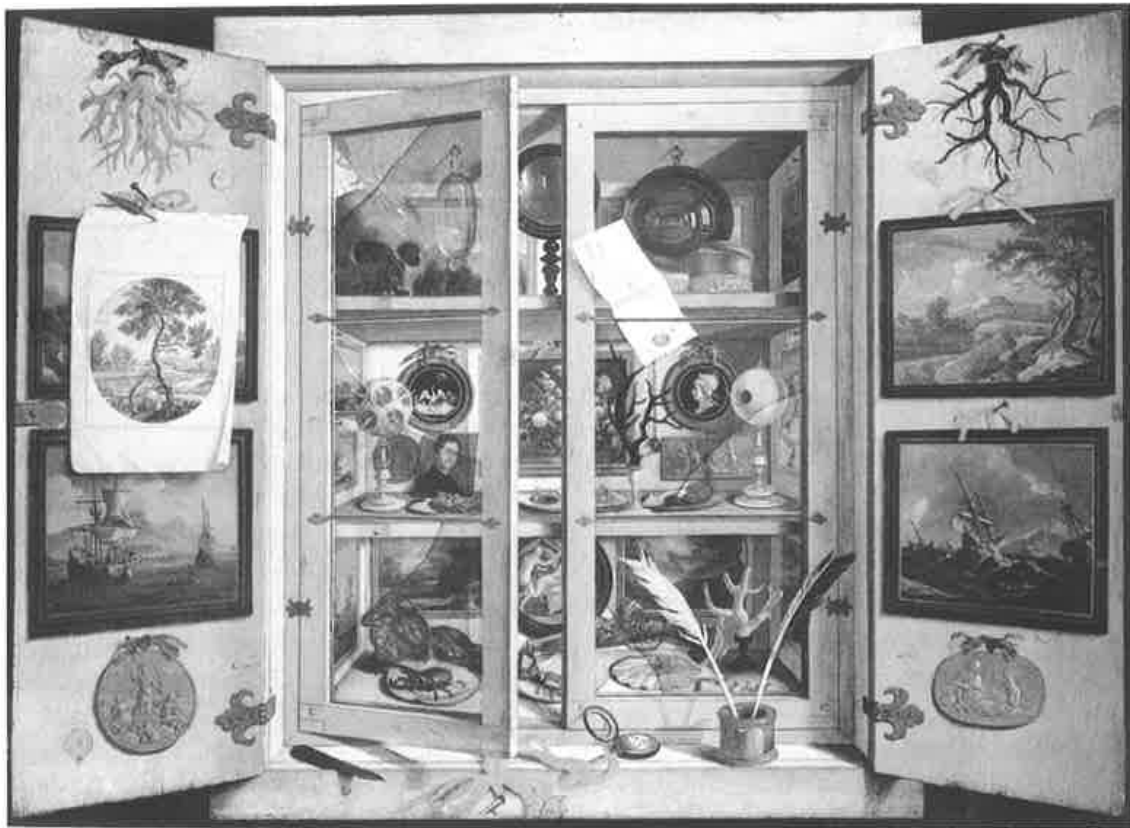
91 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 20, *Palette de César* (S/M 809)



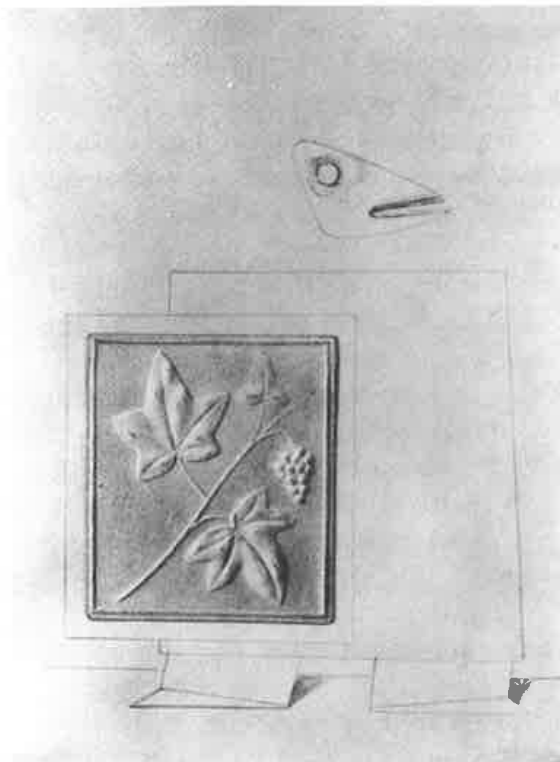
92 Louis-Leopold Boilly (1761–1845), *Grappe de raisin en trompe-l'oeil*, oil on canvas



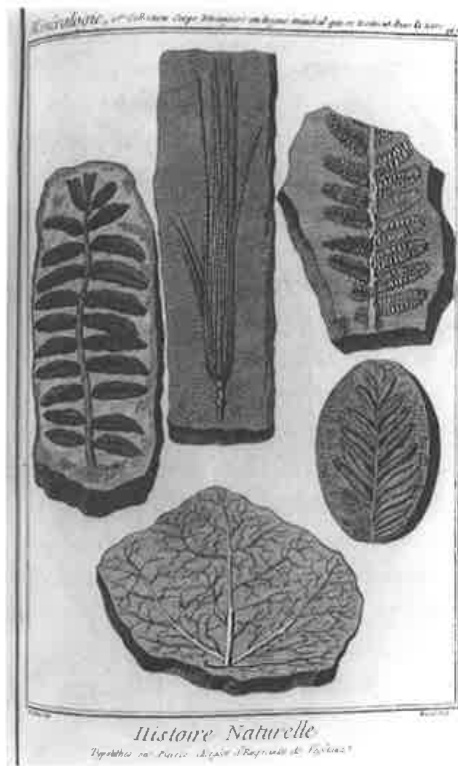
93 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 19, *L'Idole* (S/M 808)



94 Domenico Remps, *Cabinet of Curiosities*, seventeenth century



95 Max Ernst, *Loplop présente une grappe de raisin*, 1931, collage, pencil and coloured motif (S/M 1762)



96 Diderot and d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Paris, 1751. Vol 6, plate 14, *Histoire naturelle*, 'Fossile'

cast into doubt by its 'shadow' — a flat, torn-out, densely textured frottage pear.

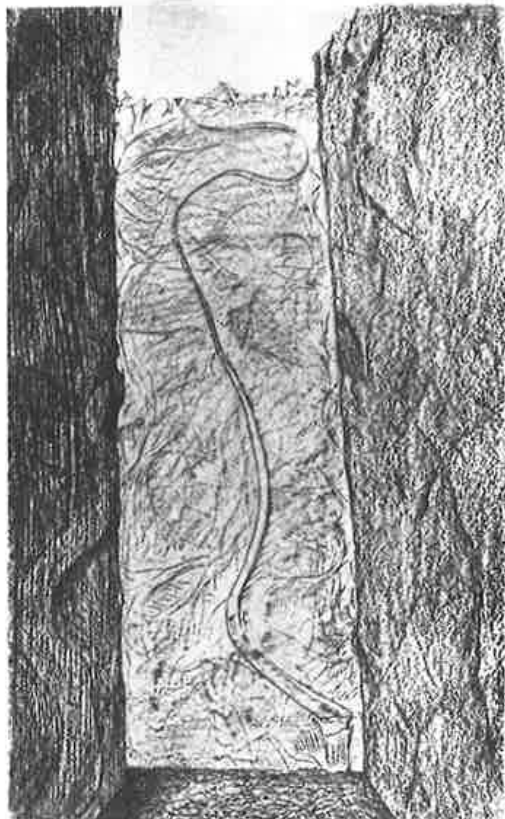
Grapes recur in Ernst's work of 1925 (S/M 940 and 941). In *L'As du pique* (S/M 781) grapes hang against a floating scroll that gathers into folds of cloth — a remnant of Parhassius's curtain? The subject comes up again in a collage illustration for Eluard's tellingly named *A l'intérieur de la vue*, 1931 (S/M 1818). Here, an illusionist bunch of grapes are conjured not from imitation of something visible and exterior, but from the *interior* of sight. Finally, a barely delineated Loplop presents the fully realized grapes (coloured and in relief) as *art* (Plate 95).

If wood conjures up optical illusion, it also signifies time, as its grain (like the strata of minerals and other natural objects) is an index of the passage of time. From the time of Cuvier, any natural artefact could be projected outward through nature, as one bone gives evidence of the whole skeleton, and thence, all the skeletons of comparative anatomy. Barbara Stafford has drawn attention to the travel and natural history writing of the nineteenth century, in which going up close to things, into their textures and strata, is a metaphor of travelling into the past, and, equally, of spanning great and remote distances. In *Histoire naturelle*, Ernst is an armchair Humboldt, geographer of the 'interior model', surveying apparently prehistoric space and time. Images with horizon lines like *Les Pampas* (*Histoire naturelle*, plate 73, S/M 795) achieve a disorienting instability of distance and scale, characteristic of explorer's illustrations of newly discovered terrain, whose properties and distances are not fully understood.⁴³

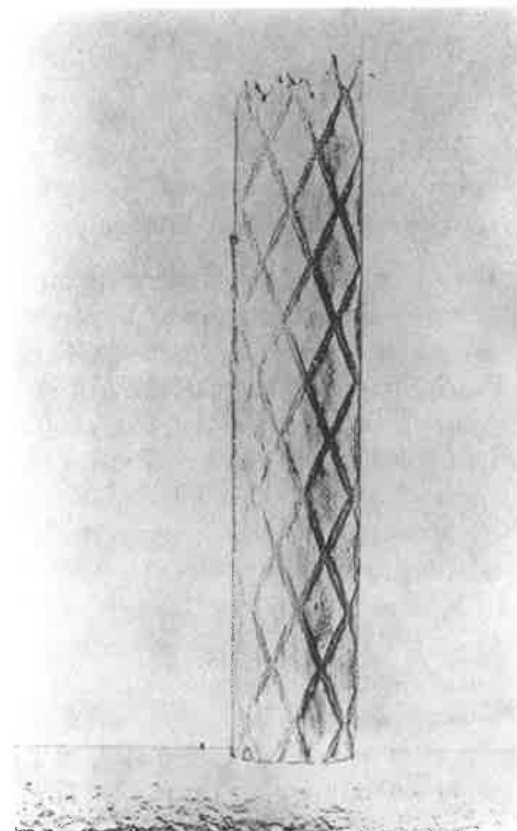
In two successive *Histoire naturelle* images, *Il tombera loin d'ici* (Plate 98) and *Les Fausses Positions* (S/M 797), fossil palms elide vast time and vast space. The analogy between making a perceptual leap into prehistoric time and making a leap into one's own unconscious (primitive) mind, is also at work here. Following the work of Buffon, natural forms were also considered 'archives', repositories of historical time. Novalis describes fossils and rock strata as alternates of the historian's artefacts and books, and his analogy between petrified natural ruins and the architectural ruins of human history may be found in Ernst's recurring forests and cities.

The unclear edges of the 'botanical' images in *Histoire naturelle*, the unidentifiable *Les Cicatrices*, are the textures of the fossil rather than the natural object itself (Plate 99 and *Les Cicatrices*, S/M 854): Novalis's 'ideal fossil, plant and animal paintings' perhaps, or fossil as 'philosopher's stone . . . mathematical and artistic stone'.⁴⁴ The fossil also well serves the figuration of that repressed unconscious cause that, according to Ernst, provoked each frottage image and is represented in it.⁴⁵ It could also be said that the actual frottages of *Histoire naturelle* are analagous to fossils, as the mineralized (graphite) record of the lost (rubbed) object (Plates 96 and 97).

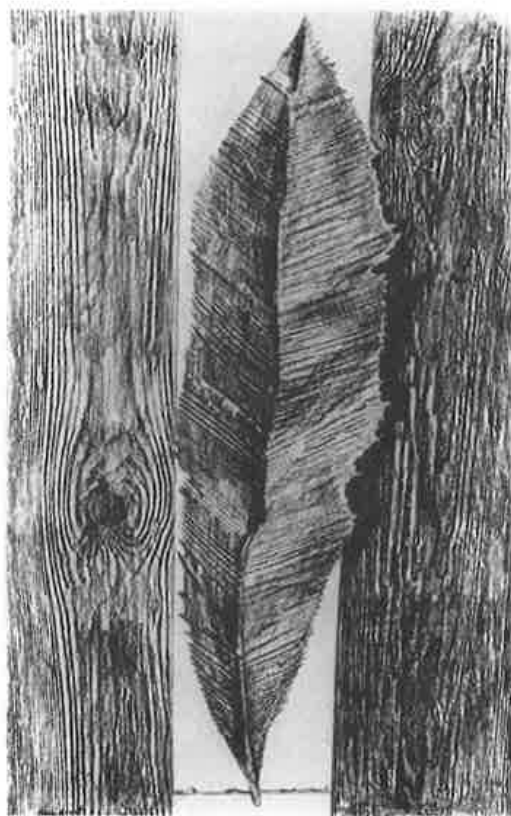
Fossils were long regarded as vestiges of extinct monstrous species; or, alternatively, as Hegel described them, as dream-like anticipations of things that had never been alive.⁴⁶ The dinosaur-like 'sphinx' in *Histoire naturelle* similarly signifies both primeval mythic traces in the unconscious mind and the capacity to envision new species of things.⁴⁷ Goethe, another poet of enduring importance to Ernst, was prompted by his meditations on an ancient palm tree to his theory of the 'Urpflanze'. This hypothesized ancestral plant is the model and key by which one could go on and on indefinitely inventing plants, 'which, even though they do not exist, might exist, not just picturesque and poetic shadows or semblances, but possessing the quality of inner truth and necessity'. Goethe also discussed the



97 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 15, *Les Cicatrices*, (S/M 804)



98 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 7, *Il tombera loin d'ici* (S/M 796)



99 Max Ernst, *Histoire naturelle*, plate 18, *Les Moeurs des feuilles* (S/M 807)

protean 'leaf' which can:

... conceal and reveal itself in all forms. Forward and backward, the plant is always only *leaf*, so inseparably united with the future germ that we cannot imagine one without the other.⁴⁸

These primal types, discerned by sifting the multiplicity of natural forms, are borne out by the botanical images of *Histoire naturelle* which propose one recurrent identity: the erect leaf is the tree, is the plant, is the head, and so on (plate 99).

Fossils, suggested by the textures of the frottages, allow a *secular* reading of nature (as evidence of time and history), rather than its theological reading (as a revelation of divine immanence). The nature theology of Ernst's childhood is reversed in *Histoire naturelle*. The act of its making, of making nature into history, is also an act of petrifying or fossilizing; so the woodgrain of the floorboards that first incited Ernst's natural history, gives rise to the recurring 'petrified forests' of his other work.

In *Histoire naturelle*, the 'planches', the floorboards, are also, by pun, the 'plates' on which the frottages are reproduced. The 'planche' of the floor is also a drawing board, a 'planche à dessin'.⁴⁹ In the frottage *La Forêt est une planche* (S/M 850), Ernst redoubles the pun: the forest is a plate, and it is the floorboard that was rubbed to produce it. These running puns on 'planche' lead to a final proposal for an intertext, full of puns, for *Histoire naturelle*.

There is a curious relationship between Ernst's frottaged natural history-as-hallucination, and a dream of Freud's in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 'The Dream of the Botanical Monograph'. Freud's dream is also a link with his childhood, as Max Ernst's *Histoire naturelle* goes back to the schoolchild's collection and classification. The dream content is repeated twice in the text:

I had written a monograph on an (unspecified) genus of plant. The book lay before me and I was at the moment turning over a folded coloured plate. Bound up in the copy there was a dried specimen of a plant.⁵⁰

Freud offers his dream as a particularly rich example of the chaining of ideas in the unconscious; and it is in the unconscious that Ernst locates his frottage images.

Freud's dream focuses on two 'nodal points': the book (or monograph), and 'botany'. The associations Freud maps out include: cocaine used as an anaesthetic, eye surgery, blindness, women and flowers. Events of psychic stress — Freud's concern about his relationship with his wife, his career, his finances — are displaced into the act of *seeing a book*. The imagery of seeing also involves the impending blindness of his father, which prompts Freud to imagine a scenario in which he, Freud, might have to have eye surgery. Here, the blinding of the father and son, the cutting of the eye, obviously resonates with the central Freudian mythology of the Oedipus complex and the blinding of Oedipus, and might be connected loosely to Ernst's 1921 collage painting, *Oedipus Rex* (S/M 496). Further, considering the relevance of the *Encyclopédie* to *Histoire naturelle*, it is interesting to consider that the one plate illustrating surgical technique shows, with an enlarged detail, the cutting of an open eye: an image that resonates from Ernst's *Oedipus Rex* into Dali and Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. The *Encyclopédie* plate may be added to the associations raised for Ernst by Freud's 'botanical monograph' dream, although, in *Histoire naturelle* itself, the eyes are unmolested.

The dream material also involves a conversation about 'favourite hobbies', which leads Freud to think of his own favourite 'flower', the artichoke, which he associates with Italy. In his murals for the Eluard house at Eaubonne, *Au premier mot limpide* (S/M 641) and *Histoire naturelle* (S/M 640), Ernst too had made the association between Italy (Pompeian wall paintings) and artichokes. Freud also goes back to a childhood scene, in which he and his sister pulled to pieces an illustrated travel book, as one pulls leaves off an artichoke. Freud recalled the happiness of this incident, his only *plastic* memory of that stage of childhood. The leaves of the book, by punning dream association, become the leaves of the artichoke. The 'dried specimen of a plant' is related to an episode of Freud's schooldays, the cleaning of an herbarium infected by bookworms. Freud's dream also involves his failure to identify a specific species of plant in an examination, his lack of aptitude for botany, and his consequent neglect of that science.

A whole constellation of meanings loosely connect Freud's dream to Ernst's *Histoire naturelle* project: the notion of a botanical monograph, which is also a collection of plates from a travel book to be taken apart (the *Histoire naturelle* plates are loose); the symbolism of artichokes; the general relationship of the present to a childhood incident involving one's father; the relationship of the present dream to childhood experiences with botanical specimens and herbaria.

The botanical monograph is further associated by Freud with the very book in which it is written up as a dream: *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud recalls that before *The Interpretation of Dreams* was finished his friend Fliess had written, 'I am very much occupied with your dream book. I see it lying finished before me and I see myself turning over its pages.' Ernst would appreciate this association of a botanical book with the key psychoanalytic work for interpreting the meanings of imagery from the unconscious, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Certainly, *Histoire naturelle* functions as Ernst's analogous exploration of the unconscious, presented in the form of a 'book'.

Freud also relates the 'folded coloured plate' of the botanical monograph to his love of expensive books, and to his own lack of facility in drawing the illustrations for his published papers. Let us imagine that Ernst, in preparing a *de luxe* edition of prints in the *Histoire naturelle*, is preparing something like the expensive books Freud wished for, and is at the same time paying homage to Freud's very lack of artistic technique, for frottage was meant to be the negation of artistic technique. The *Histoire naturelle* frottages function as automatist illustrations of the unconscious mind that should accompany Freud's work on dreams. If Ernst offers Freud the failed artist and failed botanist the illustrations he could not draw himself, and the art edition of the kind he loved but could not afford, it is a way of pleasing this alternative 'father' (who had provided the analysis necessary for destroying the father); and, at the same time, of situating *Histoire naturelle* on the level of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. *Histoire naturelle* provides the fulfilment of Freud's favourite hobbies, both of which he found too expensive to indulge: books and artichokes. Like the book and the artichoke, Ernst's *Histoire Naturelle* may be taken apart, plate by plate.⁵¹ The procedure of ripping books of course applies to Ernst's work in a larger sense — the books and illustrated journals torn for his collages.⁵²

As *Histoire naturelle* interacts with Freud's dream of the botanical monograph, we are in another realm of time: the time that links the unconscious, full of childhood

memory, to present activities. Since the technique of frottage was designed to unlock the unconscious, it is a descent into that past. The textures of the rubbed paper function as fossilized marks of time. Primeval time, locked in nature, is made to stand for the unconscious as a repository of time and memory.

Interestingly, Freud makes an analogy between activities in the *motor* realm and *psychic* activities. Physical hobbies, he points out, are displacements of emotionally significant material into neutral physical activity. Similarly, in the psychic realm, things which are intensely charged with meaning — childhood memories and fears — are displaced into the images of emotionally neutral things and events. It can be argued that Ernst's rubbing, designed to provoke the emergence of material from the unconscious, like the cutting of his collage, functions as such a displacing motor activity, a Freudian 'hobby'.⁵³

Central to this whole complex of image associations is the punning of ripping things apart, 'leaf by leaf', in which the 'leaves' of a book are confused with the leaves of the botanical specimen, and an artichoke. The German word 'Blätter' equally may mean 'prints', 'plates' or sheets of paper; and all of these puns operate in *Histoire naturelle*, which may be taken apart, plate by plate, leaf by leaf. This also leads back to the image of nature as a book, as described, for example, by Paracelsus: 'He who wishes to explore nature must tread her books with his feet . . . This is the Codex Naturae, thus must its leaves be turned.'⁵⁴ When Arp, who also read Paracelsus, writes in his introduction to *Histoire naturelle* that, 'you see that one cannot consume one's father except *slice by slice*, impossible to finish him off in one solitary picnic', he combines the leaves of the book of nature with a tidy version of the primal crime. As in Freud's botanical monograph dream, we are led from ripping things up to the relationship with the father.

Leaves had another paternal association for Ernst. In his autobiographical account he recounts the overwhelming fascination he felt as a child for his father's painting of the *Monk of Heisterbach*, in which each individual leaf was detailed with a 'meticulous, (almost) demoniacal attention, each closed up in its own singularity, and subsumed, nevertheless, in a communal beech forest'. Ernst identified his ambivalent response to the picture both with a romantic pleasure in the vastness of nature, and the claustrophobic anxiety of a prisoner. His mesmerized reaction to the leaves becomes curiosity about a book: the Monk of Heisterbach is so deeply plunged into a book, that 'he is barely there, so to speak . . . Nothing left but this book, what it contains, a secret, a nothing.'⁵⁵

Here we come back to books: the monk's book, Paracelsus's, Böhme's, and Novalis's 'book of nature', the encyclopedic book, Freud's dream book, Max Ernst's *Histoire naturelle*. In Ernst's book, nature is subject to human action and imagination, and arises out of them. Here he anticipates the surrealist attention to the Lenin and Kojève-critiqued Hegel of the 1930s, proposing a dialectical relationship of nature and human history. Ernst would work out this theme in his multitude of landscape paintings: the culturally infiltrated gardens, petrified and ossified forests, vegetation-eroded cities, are themselves infiltrated by the contemporary debates about Hegel.⁵⁶

In *Histoire naturelle*'s succession of tactile but often illegible identities, Ernst assiduously reveals the complex and shifting correlations of things and their description, of things and their appearance, of things and their classification, by

camouflage: one resemblance conceals another. By displacing the visible appearance of things into their approximate, rubbed edges — seeing in the manner of the blind — Ernst makes frottage a metaphor for identity in Breton's dangerous territories of the unconscious. Finally, what Max Ernst seems to have discovered in *his* book, is that there is nothing natural about a natural history.

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NOTES

This paper was first delivered as a lecture at the Courtauld Institute, London, in February 1991. Works by Ernst not illustrated are identified by their number in Werner Spies, Günther Metken and Sigrid Metken, *Max Ernst: Oeuvre Katalog*, 4 vols. Cologne: DuMont, 1975–9.

- 1 See Werner Spies, *Frottagen*, Stuttgart, 1986.
- 2 Ernst had read some Kant as a student of philosophy at the University of Bonn (see Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, translation John William Gabriel, New York, 1991, p. 257, n. 110).
- 3 See Louis-Catherine Silvestre, *Marques typographiques ou recueil des monogrammes* . . . , Paris, 1853–67, vol. 1, plates 350 and 351, and vol. 2, plates 865, 1014 and 1120.
- 4 See Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Tavistock, 1982, pp. 132–3. Cologne had a famous natural history museum with collections of crystals, minerals, corals, stuffed animals and birds, and so on. See Martin Schwarzbach (ed.), *Naturwissenschaften und Naturwissenschaftler in Köln zwischen der alten und der neuen Universität, 1798–1919*, Cologne, 1985.
- 5 Some of Philipp Ernst's work is reproduced in *Max Ernst in Köln: Die rheinische Kunstszene bis 1922*, Cologne, 1980, p. 54.
- 6 For Klee's botany see Richard Verdi, *Klee and Nature*, London, 1984, pp. 216–20.
- 7 'La distraction de la femme chez Kant, la distraction "des raisins" chez Pasteur, la distraction des véhicules chez Curie, sont à cet égard profondément symptomatiques', *Manifeste*, Paris, 1924, p. 73. Ernst illustrates this point in 'Pasteur in his laboratory' in *La Femme cent têtes* (S/M 1541), in which a distracted Pasteur, haunted by women and spectres, is quite unlike official photographs of him at work with a microscope to be found in the publications of the Pasteur centenary in 1922.
- 8 Louis Aragon, *Une Vague de rêves*, Paris, 1924, quoted by Breton in *What is Surrealism?*, p. 126.
- 9 Andrea Alciati, 'Zypressen', in Jeremias Held, *Liber Emblematum d. Andreae Alciati* . . . , Frankfurt-am-Main, 1566.
- 10 Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Paris, 1751, vol. 1, p. 180.
- 11 Arp's introduction to *Histoire naturelle* was published as a surrealist text in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 7, June 1926. See Herbert Read, *Arp*, London, 1968, p. 24; and Ernest Mandron, *Marionettes, Guignols*, Paris, n.d.
- 12 'Cette introduction contient la pseudointroduction l'original les variantes de l'original le pseudooriginal ainsi que les variantes de pseudooriginal les apocryphes et l'incorporation de tous ces textes . . .' *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912–1947*, New York, 1948, p. 38.
- 13 See Richard Dohl, *Das Literarische Werk Hans Arp, 1903–1930*, Stuttgart, Motzlerche, 1967, 48–9. Böhme's 'signatures' lie behind Arp's lament in *The Bird Plus Three*, 'who's going to explain to us the monograms in the stars'.
- 14 See Jennifer Mundy's extended study of Breton's essay and the conditions of surrealist art, 'Surrealism and Painting: Describing the Imaginary', *Art History*, vol. 10, no. 4, December 1987, pp. 492–508.
- 15 The erratically allegorical eponymous heroine of Ernst's 1928 collage novel, *La Femme cent têtes*, is identified with Sophia in one of her personifications, as 'l'oeil sans yeux, la femme cent têtes'.
- 16 The intertwined birds and horses of *Histoire naturelle, Les Diamants conjugaux* (S/M 814) and *l'Étalon et la fiancée du vent* (S/M 822), refer to the sexual union of opposites in the alchemical process.
- 17 In Horapollo, a pair of (crocodile) eyes floating over a landscape signifies 'birth'; a single eye — as in Ernst's *L'Évadé* — signifies 'God'. Ernst could have seen the Horapollo emblems in a nineteenth-century, or other, edition. Some Horapollo emblems of eyes, and Dürer's illustrations (although not the two emblems mentioned here) were published in Ludwig Volkmann, *Bilderschriften der Renaissance*, Leipzig, 1923.
- 18 This wheel, as a snake or dragon biting its tail,

- is a figuration of the 'ur-form' underlying all creation, relevant to the occult cosmogonies of Böhme, Paracelsus, Hermes Trismegistus, Swedenborg, and on to Goethe, and others of interest to Ernst and the surrealists. See Maurice Tuchman, 'Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art', *The Spiritual in Art, 1890–1985*, exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum, 1986, p. 21; Jacob Böhme, *The Signature of All Things*, London, 1922, pp. 24 and 223.
- 19 Just as Ernst indicates the duality of his own operations on nature (as Pan/Papou, lover of nature, and Prometheus, torturer of nature, *Écritures*, Paris, 1970, p. 268), Böhme described the necessary duality of man's relationship to the natural world: brutality and domination versus illuminating veneration. This duality permeates the thought of Novalis and Hegel. The latter property is associated with woman, personified as Eve, Sophia, and by the Virgin Mary. Ernst, in taking up the 'Adamic' human task of completing creation in *Histoire naturelle*, uses symbolic Eve as his final image (plate 34, *Eve, la seule qui nous reste*, S/M 823).
 - 20 'Inspiration to Order', *This Quarter*, no. 5, September 1932, pp. 79–85; also in 'Histoire d'une histoire naturelle', in 'Au delà de la peinture', *Cahiers d'art*, no. 6–7, October 1936, 149–184.
 - 21 The surrealists' interest in Swedenborg's and Fludd's cosmologies was similarly based on the representation of man as the microcosm of nature: a metaphor that allowed them to excise the divine from the equation. See Breton, *What is Surrealism?*, p. 193.
 - 22 Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, in Richard Samuel, H.-J. Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (eds.), *Schriften*, vol. 3, Stuttgart, 1968, p. 280 and p. 365. See Walter Moser, *Romantisme et crises de la modernité: Poésie et encyclopédie dans la Brouillon de Novalis*, Longueuil, Québec, 1989.
 - 23 'ENC[YCLOPAEDISTIK], Wo Eine Kunst und Wissenschaft nicht weiter kann, beschränkt ist, da fängt die Andre an und so fort', *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, p. 258.
 - 24 John Neubauer, *Novalis*, Boston, 1980, p. 53.
 - 25 Novalis, *Novices of Saïs*, translation Ralph Manheim, New York, 1949, p. 75. A passage in *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* also relates to Ernst's *frottage* technique: 'Der Lehrling darf noch nicht raisonniren. Erst muß er mechanisch fertig werden, dann kann er anfangen nachzudenken und nach Einsicht und Anordnung des Gelernten streben', *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, vol. 3, p. 245.
 - 26 *Novices of Saïs*, pp. 75–77. Transparency is Novalis's recurring metaphor for the relation of the mind to nature; it lies behind Ernst's 1956 introduction to the 'inédits' of *Histoire naturelle*: 'En se dégageant de son opacité, l'univers tend à se confondre avec l'homme', *Écritures*, op. cit., p. 330.
 - 27 *Novices of Saïs*, op. cit., p. 9.
 - 28 Giambattista della Porta, *Della Fisionomia dell'Uomo*, Naples, 1610; Jean-Baptiste Robinet, *Vues philosophiques de la gradation naturelle des formes de l'être*, Amsterdam, 1768.
 - 29 'Schwarze Kreide, Farben, Striche, Worte sind ächte elemente, wie mathematische Linien und Flächen', *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, op. cit., p. 244.
 - 30 'La faune et la flore du surréalisme sont inavouables', *Manifeste*, p. 64.
 - 31 The Adamic gift of 'naming' is related to the recognition of the inherent signature in things. Cornelius Agrippa, whose name appears on the 1923 'Erutaretil' list of admired authors in *Littérature* (new series no. 4–5, October 1923, pp. 24–5) and who, with Albertus Magnus, is recognized by Ernst as a fellow magus from Cologne (*Max Ernst through the Eyes of Poets, View Magazine*, special issue, 1942), describes the image as an intensified arrangement of figures designed to call out their celestial force: 'On dit que la puissance des enchantemens & des poèmes est si grande, qu'on croit qu'ils peuvent renverser toute la nature' (*La Philosophie occulte de Henricus Cornelii Agrippa*, translated by A. Levasseur, vol. 1., La Haye, 1727, p. 202, and p. 197, 'De la vertu des noms propres').
 - 32 It is a commonplace to describe nature as a 'book', (Plotinus, Dante, Bacon, Shakespeare, and, for Paracelsus, a book to be trodden with one's feet) or a hieroglyphic text to be read and deciphered (Böhme, Novalis). See Barbara Stafford, *Voyage into Substance*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981, p. 285.
 - 33 For Ernst's interest in Paulhanian theories of language and representation, see Elizabeth Legge, 'Posing Questions: Max Ernst's *Au rendez-vous des amis*', *Art History*, vol. 10, June 1987, 227–43. From his university study with Karl Bühler Ernst was probably aware of general theories of the origins of language and nomination, such as Wilhelm Wundt's 'Die Geberde Sprache', in *Völkerpsychologie*, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1900, I, chapter 2; or Max Müller's *Nouvelles Leçons sur la science du langage*, Paris, 1867. On Paulhan and non-imitative language, see Thomas Ferenczi, 'Jean Paulhan et la linguistique moderne', *Nouvelle Revue française*, no. 197, 1 May 1969, pp. 800–813.
 - 34 See Mundy, 'Surrealism and painting: Describing the Imaginary'.
 - 35 See Jean Paulhan, 'Optique du langage, ou si les mots sont des métaphores usées', *Nouvelle Revue française*, no. 14, 1920, 442–6; 'Si les mots sont des signes, ou Jacob Cow le pirate', *Littérature*, no. 14, June 1920, pp. 5–6; *Littérature*, no. 15, July–August 1920, pp. 15–17; and *Littérature*, no. 16, September–October 1920, pp. 33–5.
 - 36 *Écritures*, op. cit., pp. 237–8.
 - 37 'Un tableau qui n'est pas la reproduction

- veridique du modèle commet un péché véniel: il ment,' *Ecritures*, op. cit., p. 16. In 'Les Mystères de la forêt', *Minolaure*, no. 5, February 1934, Ernst returns to wood-chopping: "Que font les forêts? ... Elles attendent le tailleur." (*Ecritures*, op. cit., p. 222.)
- 38 'vous voyez donc qu'on ne consomme monsieur son père que tranche par tranche. Impossible d'en finir en un seul déjeuner sur l'herbe ...' *On My Way*, p. 86.
- 39 Photograph in Béatrice Blavier, 'Max Ernst: Murals for the Home of Paul and Gala Eluard, Eaubonne, 1923' (unpublished M.A. thesis, Rice University, Houston, 1985).
- 40 'Si péché il y eut, c'est quand l'esprit saisit ou crut saisir la pomme de la "clarté". Au-dessus de la pomme tremblait une feuille plus claire, de pur ombrage. Quelle était donc cette feuille? C'est ce sur quoi tous les chefs-d'oeuvre littéraires se taisaient. C'est ce que nous, surréalistes, nous pourrions dire sans nous gêner', 'Pourquoi je prends la direction de *La Révolution surréaliste*', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 4, 15 July 1925. *La Palette de César*, and the many positive/negative doubled frottage images it anticipates, can be read in terms of the incipient surrealist fascination with Hegel, especially the concept of Nature as the negative of the Idea, the Idea being external to itself. See Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, edited and translated by K.J. Petry, London, 1970, vol. 1, p. 211.
- 41 See Stephen Bann, *The True Vine*, Cambridge, 1989.
- 42 The grapes may also bear traces of Ernst's study of Kant, for whom 'fine' art is distinguished by the fact that it is intuitively achieved by genius, not following definable rules. Thus the work of fine art is the product of genius, and is necessarily exemplary, a model for other works. Ernst might offer the grapes as Kant's, as well as Zeuxis's, exemplary work.
- 43 See Stafford on the complications of representing landscapes not seen before. The great German explorer Humboldt's *Kosmos* was an effort to encapsulate the universe in a comprehensive single volume, a masterpiece of nineteenth-century natural history and natural theology. Although it was immediately superseded by Darwin, because of that it survived in popularity in Catholic Germany. One could speculate that it was part of Philipp Ernst's arsenal of natural-historian-as-theologian, and that Humboldt's mapping of ocean currents, fault lines and lines of magnetic force survives in Ernst's many 'gulfstreams' and 'earthquakes'.
- 44 'Artistik. Idealische Fossilien und Pflanzenmahlerey — Idealische Teirbildnerey ...', and 'Stein in Potenzen — spezifisch verschiedne Fossilien — dem Grad nach verschiedne Steine. Wenn man einen philosophischen Stein hat, so hat man auch wohl einen mathematischen und artistischen Stein? ...' *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, op. cit., p. 272 and p. 258.
- 45 *Ecritures*, op. cit., pp. 242–3.
- 46 See Georges Cuvier, *Theory of the Earth*, translation, Robert Kerr, Edinburgh, 1813, pp. 73–5; Gregory Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, London, 1965, p. 155.
- 47 The sphinx of *L'Écurie du sphinx*, plate 27, *Histoire naturelle* (S/M 816) is a monstrous version of the alchemical rebis/bird and may refer to the pre-scientific natural histories of Pliny or Albertus Magnus, in which fabulous beasts assume an equal footing. The armoured and grotesquely huge physiognomies revealed by microscopic examinations of fleas and lice in the plates of the *Encyclopédie* (vol. 6, plate 85) resonate in other frottage insect-like horse-sphinxes (S/M 912 and 915): new species envisioned by radically altered scale.
- 48 Rudolf Magnus, *Goethe as Scientist*, translated by Heinz Norder, New York, 1961, pp. 44–5; first published as *Goethe als Naturforscher*, Leipzig, 1906. Klee was also interested in Goethe's theory of the 'Urpflanze' and 'Essay on the Metamorphosis of Plants', in which manifold natural things are traced back to one simple general principle; hence, the importance of analogies between dissimilar things (Verdi, pp. 220–1).
- 49 *Ecritures*, op. cit., p. 221: 'Qu'est-ce qu'une forêt? Un insecte merveilleux. Une planche à dessin.'
- 50 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 5 of James Strachey (ed.), Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, London, 1953–1974.
- 51 Freud's wishful books have expensive coloured illustrations. Although the plates of *Histoire naturelle* are not coloured, the original frottages often are.
- 52 I am grateful to Dr M.E. Warlick for her observation that the Cologne 'Lehrmittel' catalogue was the original 'book with coloured illustrations' to be torn apart by Ernst. She has also suggested that the artichokes in Ernst's *Dada Gaugin* may allude to Freud's dream. Ernst may also have been quoting de Chirico's painting, another association of artichokes and Italy (and Dionysian mysteries).
- 53 Freud's account of the repressed sexual cause of the 'obsessional' or 'symptomatic' act in *Totem and Taboo* is later exploited by Ernst in his account of the mechanism of frottage, *Ecritures*, op. cit., pp. 242–3.
- 54 Quoted in Stafford, op. cit., p. 381.
- 55 'Les feuilles de hêtre peintes, toutes, avec une application méticuleuse (presque) démoniaque, chacune enfermée dans sa singularité (propre), et soumise pourtant à une communauté hêtre-forêt. Plongé dans son livre: le moine. Si

MAX ERNST'S NATURAL HISTORY

profondément que c'est à peine s'il est encore là, pour ainsi dire. Ne reste que le livre, ce qu'il contient, un secret, un rien.' *Ecritures*, op. cit., p. 15.

56 Lenin and Engels criticized Hegel's failure to

allow nature a dialectic; Bataille drew attention to this problem, in a 1932 essay with Raymond Queneau in *La Critique sociale*, no. 5, March 1932, pp. 209-14.



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