1. **Man Ray**
Échiquier surréaliste, 1934

Man Ray's *Surrealist Chessboard*

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MAN RAY'S portrait photographs of well-known individuals, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrate a combination of directness and sensitivity to the sitter's personality and vocation. In 1934, the Dada/Surrealist multimedia artist created a collage resembling a reduced chessboard, later entitled *Échiquier surréaliste* [Surrealist Chessboard, fig. 1], using photographs he had taken between 1929 and 1934 of twenty leading male artists and writers of the Surrealist movement. This essay traces probable sources for Man Ray's photocollage, comparing it with other collective montages of the Surrealists, and contrasting the high mental activity of chess/artistic production with the Surrealist preoccupation with the unconscious. This study is followed by a brief unfolding of the chess-related works by Surrealists included in the Fundació Joan Miró exhibition, demonstrating the relationship between the plastic-artistic and intellectual aspects of the game.

Materially demonstrating a spiritual bond between the figures, five rows of four tightly framed head shots arranged with alternating light and dark backgrounds suggest a chessboard. Featured from left to right, from top to bottom, are: André Breton (original photograph 1930), Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí (1929), Hans Arp (1930), Yves Tanguy (1929), René Char (1930), René Crevel (1930), Paul Éluard (1933), Giorgio de Chirico (1925), Alberto Giacometti (1932), Tristan Tzara (1934), Pablo Picasso, René Magritte (1930), Victor Brauner (1930), Benjamin Péret, Gui Rosey, Joan Miró (1934), E. L. T. Mesens, Georges Hugnet (1934) and Man Ray (1930). Man Ray positions himself in the lower right corner as a kind of double signature, including a camera in the solarized self-portrait, making his creative role and authorship explicit. To provide a more close-up image of each protagonist, in most cases Man Ray cropped the original portrait he had created, in one case even removing Éluard out of a double portrait with Breton, to focus on the Surrealist leader.

The photocollage was reproduced in a cleaned-up version without Man Ray's handwritten measurements and notes ('CARREFOUR encadrer toutes les têtes d'un filet') as page 32 bis in the *Petite anthologie poétique du surréalisme* [Small Poetic Anthology of Surrealism], published in 1934 by Éditions Jeanne Bucher with an introduction by Georges Hugnet, texts by Breton, Char, Crevel, and Dalí, and illustrations by Arp, Brauner, de Chirico, Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Ernst, Giacometti, Valentine Hugo, Magritte, Man Ray, Miró, Picasso and Tanguy.[1] The miniature shots of the Surrealists collaged as a chessboard refer obliquely to Nadar's (Félix Tournachon) rogues' gallery of painters and fashion models.[2] More specifically, however, the collage appears to hark back to Magritte's 1929 photomontage portraying sixteen contributors to the December 1929 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*. While Man Ray's *Échiquier surréaliste* portrays the chosen Surrealists as active and confident, most gazing directly at him, metaphorically ready for the next 'move', Magritte renders his subjects passive or introverted, in a dream state or hypnotic trance.

Hidden Woman: Magritte's Influence on Man Ray?

In 1925 Magritte co-operated the magazines *Aesophage* and *Marie*, together with Mesens, Jean Arp, Francis Picabia, Kurt Schwitters, Tzara and Man Ray. However, 1929 was Magritte's most productive year of collaboration with the Surrealists while living in Paris. André Breton and Louis Aragon served as editors for a special issue of the Belgian periodical *Variétés*, titled *Le Surréalisme en 1929*, which included two paintings and a drawing by Magritte. He was also among the artists and writers invited to respond to a questionnaire issued by Breton and Aragon concerning collective political action, and at the end of the year the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* published four contributions by Magritte, including his article 'Les Mots et les images' [Words and Images] in the final issue.

2. **René Magritte**
La Femme cachée, 1929

The photomontage, reproduced on a page of the twelfth and last issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, depicts a communion of fifteen members of the Surrealist group (Maxime Alexandre, Aragon, Breton, Luis Buñuel, Jean Caupenne, Dalí, Éluard, Ernst, Marcel Fourrier, Camille Goemans, Magritte, Paul Nougé, Georges Sadoul, Tanguy, André Thirion, Albert Valentin; many were members of the Belgian Surrealist group), with their eyes closed, arranged around a female nude, a reproduction of Magritte's 1929 painting *La Femme cachée* [The Hidden Woman; fig. 2]. Above the nude we read the words 'je ne vois pas' (I do not see), and below her the phrase continues 'cachée dans la forêt' (hidden in the forest). The figure of Magritte's nude serves as a stand-in for the word 'woman', completing the phrase 'I do not see the woman hidden in the forest'. This congregation of males exhibiting somnambulistic eroticism in the presence of an 'unseen' female nude was set in the midst of texts recording responses to a questionnaire: 'What is love?' The montage appears in a magazine issue containing the *Second manifeste du surréalisme* [Second Surrealist Manifesto; cat. no. 25], a polemical blast against Surrealist renegades, and, according to art historian Jack Spector, 'Breton and his faithful fraternity, grouped as in an altarpiece, present a phalanx of dreamers to confront the hostile world of the prosaic and disloyal.'[3] They present themselves to Magritte in a passive, vulnerable state, somewhat like the nude, who partially hides herself in a *Venus pudica* pose.

Magritte's 1929 montage was seemingly inspired by another group photomontage published in the December 1924 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which also brought together a group of Surrealist male artists around the image of woman, this time a political criminal. Spector underscores the mental amorous quest of this type of montage, noting, 'In most of these group portraits, the woman absent among the photographed onlookers (or rather "nonlookers"), occupied a central position as an erotically magnetic icon – an object for the male gaze.... The closed eyes of these men are seeing the nude – and beyond the nude – with the open "eyes" of the imagination.'[4] They seem to be practicing psychic automatism, entering a state between wakefulness and sleep, following Breton's goal of heeding the 'voices …

of our own unconscious',[5] attempting to relinquish the conscious control of the mind – the critical faculties of logic, aesthetics or morality.

'Woman is the being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light in our dreams'

In 1923, the anarchist Germaine Berton shot and killed Marius Plateau, a conservative French political leader and a member of the extreme right-wing organization/publication *L'Action française*. Berton had attempted to murder other right-wing leaders, but she succeeded in killing Plateau having secured an interview with him. After shooting him a number of times, she then turned the gun on herself but was stopped before shooting. Berton was tried and acquitted on the grounds of temporary insanity. Berton poisoned herself in November 1924, and one month later, in December 1924, she was portrayed in a montage apparently created by Louis Aragon and Pierre Naville for the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*. At the centre of a page, Berton is framed by twenty-eight portraits of Surrealist group members and 'honorary members' such as Sigmund Freud, mostly photographed by Man Ray [fig. 3]. Their eyes are wide open, as in the photocollage Man Ray would create ten years later. In his book *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, David Bate describes the 1924 montage as a kind of 'funerary monument in which they are the bearers of her [Berton's] image'. Additionally, Bate clarifies that what pervaded this issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* was the question 'Is suicide a solution?' and notes Louis Aragon's text extolling Berton's admirable act of defiance and suicide. In Bate's view, the Surrealists implicitly gave their masculine approval and glorified Berton for her extreme act of revolutionary violence and suicide. At the bottom of the montage, French symbolist Charles Baudelaire is quoted: 'La femme est l'être qui projette la plus grande ombre ou la plus grande lumière dans nos rêves' (Woman is the being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light in our dreams). Thus Berton 'provided the surrealists with an allegorical or "emblematic" image for liberating the darkness (and light) of dreams.' The montage merges death and love, murder and suicide, and reveals political affiliations of the Surrealist group.[6]

3. **Louis Aragon and Pierre Naville (photographs taken by Man Ray)**
Germaine Berton framed by twenty-eight portraits of Surrealist group members, 1924

'Laboratory of Ideas': Interactions Around the Chessboard

From the twenties and through the forties and beyond, the chessboard served as a locus for Surrealist creativity or, in Crotti's words, a 'laboratory of ideas' [cat. no. 9]. As the faces come alive, rising off *Échiquier surréaliste*, we move into the performative realm, an interactive spectacle in which many of the movement's members participated – a domain which offered a socially acceptable space for ingenuity, competition and conflict.

A summary examination of chess-related works by Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and other Surrealists in the Fundació Joan Miró's exhibition includes Duchamp's readymade *Trébuchet* [Trap; cat. no. 11], a coat stand

rendered useless. According to scholar-poet-dealer Arturo Schwarz, *Trébuchet* is an example of what Duchamp called a 'three-dimensional pun'.[7] The chess term *trébuchet*, meaning 'snare', consists of offering a pawn with the hope that the opponent will 'stumble' over it. Purposely displaced from its original function when nailed to the floor, *Trébuchet* physically and mentally trips up the viewer.[8] Art historian David Joselit explains *Trébuchet*'s relationship to chess in the following manner: '[It embodies] the migration of the game, in the guise of a trap, into the realm of everyday life. Chess therefore meets art ... by its projection outward into the realm of the readymade.'[9] The original *Trébuchet* was photographed by the French avant-garde author Henri-Pierre Roché in Duchamp's studio at 33 West 67th Street in New York in 1917–18, alongside a 1916 version of another readymade, *Roue de bicyclette* [Bicycle Wheel].

Marcel Duchamp's brothers Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Jacques Villon taught him chess when he was thirteen. From 1910, regular Sunday games were held by the Puteaux group of Cubist artists to which his brothers belonged (see *La Partie d'échecs* [The Chess Game; cat. no. 6], depicting Duchamp's brothers intently engaged in a game of chess, their wives relaxing in a lush garden setting). When Duchamp moved to New York in 1916, he became a central figure in the late-night chess sessions at the salon of art collector and critic Walter Arensberg. Duchamp was enamoured with chess and considered it the perfect art form, since it engaged the conceptual, or what he called 'grey matter', rather than being primarily 'retinal'. By 1918 Duchamp was living in Buenos Aires and, in addition to being occupied with preparations for his magnum opus *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* [The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even], also known as *Le Grand Verre* [The Large Glass],[10] he devoted more and more time to chess, and even designed a set of actual chessmen in cooperation with a local craftsman. 'I have thrown myself into the game of chess, I belong to the local club, and, out of twenty-four hours in a day, I spend a good number there,' Duchamp wrote in 1919.[11]

Upon moving back to New York in 1920, he became a member of the Marshall Chess Club on West 4th Street, and between 1923 and 1925 Duchamp played in several competitive chess tournaments against some of the finest players in the world, winning the Chess Championship of Haute Normandie in 1924. Duchamp was pronounced a Chess Master by the French Chess Federation in 1925, the same year he designed the poster for the French Chess Championship in Nice [cat. no. 21]. 'The poster featured what appeared to be a random array of cubes falling against the backdrop of a king's crown (viewed from the top of a chess piece)', describes Duchamp scholar Francis Naumann. The image must have appeared bewildering to the average chess player, for the cubes were seen as the flat squares of a chessboard mysteriously energized into three-dimensional space (curiously resembling a diagram used to explain the phenomenon of the fourth dimension).[12]

Man Ray learned the intricacies of chess under the tutelage of his long-time friend and artistic collaborator Marcel Duchamp at the Marshall Chess Club. Unlike Duchamp who devoted an increasing amount of time to the game and even published a book on the theory of endgames, Man Ray found interest in the forms and in the design aspect of the game. Comparing his involvement with chess to that of Duchamp, Man Ray wrote, 'Chess occupied him [Duchamp] more and more; he spent much time studying the game and frequenting the chess world. I remained a third-rate player – a wood pusher. My interest was directed toward designing new forms for chess pieces, of not much interest to players but to me a fertile field for invention.'[13] According to Man Ray scholar Wendy Grossman, the artist 'mined chess for the aesthetic possibilities of chance discovery,

evoking its forms as poetic analogy for similarities between the game and life.... An integral component of this project was the construction of his own persona as a "player""[14] ('Le Roi est à moi…', in Man Ray's 1962 poem 'Échecs' [Chess; cat. no. 50]). Geometric objects found scattered around Man Ray's New York studio inspired the pieces he created for his first chess set in 1920. Here, a pyramid became a king, a cone transformed into a queen, and a violin scroll functioned as a knight. For the spherical pawn, Man Ray beheaded a standard Staunton pawn and enlarged the now disembodied spherical crest to the same height as the rook.[15] Duchamp and Man Ray can be seen in a brief scene playing chess (before the jet of a water cannon washed the pieces off the board) in René Clair's 1924 film *Entr'acte* [cat. no. 32].

In 1932, Duchamp co-wrote and designed a book on endgame strategy titled *L'opposition et les cases conjuguées sont réconciliées* [*Opposition and Sister Squares Reconciled*; cat. no. 24], in collaboration with Vitaly Halberstadt (1903–1967), a Russian-born chess player living in Paris, against whom Duchamp had competed in various tournaments throughout the twenties. Naumann clarified the book's argument: 'When the kings and pawns remain on a board at the end of a game, it is often critical which king moves first, and to what square it moves.... When one king gives way to a key square, the opposing king is said "to have the opposition". Adjacent squares to which they move are called "sister squares". What Duchamp and Halberstadt's book proved is that opposition and sister squares are different ways of addressing the same issue (they called the clarification that reconciled the difference between the two, "heterodox opposition").'[16]

In January 1945, at the invitation of New York gallerist Julian Levy, Man Ray, Max Ernst [cat. no. 47], Marcel Duchamp, Yves Tanguy, Alexander Calder [cat. no. 48], Isamu Noguchi [cat. no. 49], John Cage and others participated in an exhibition, *The Imagery of Chess*. Artist and curator Larry List clarifies that the proposition was 'alluring to Duchamp and the Surrealists because it offered a challenge that was both dynamic and contradictory: create a beautiful, functional design for a social activity that essentially had no function.'[17] For the occasion, Man Ray designed an updated version of his 1920 chess set, and had it turned in wood by a California craftsman (a third chess set and a chessboard followed in 1962, a slight modification of the 1945 design). With the participation of thirty-two artists (to match sixteen pieces to a side on a chessboard), the exhibition was launched with a game organized by Duchamp, in which an acknowledged chess master, George Koltanowski, played blindfolded against seven artists concurrently, beating all of them except the architect Frederick Kiesler, who battled the maestro to a draw. Duchamp's submission was *Échiquier de poche* [Pocket Chess Set; cat. no. 56], a portable chess set, suitable to a wartime exilic existence. Whereas in the 1943 version the pieces were held to the board by a pin set into each square, in the 1961–64 version of *Échiquier de poche*, Duchamp magnetized the chessmen to the board.

In his later years, Duchamp combined his interest in chess with his artistic activities on a number of public occasions. At the opening of the 1963 Duchamp retrospective at the Pasadena Museum of Art, *Time* magazine sent Los Angeles-based photographer Julian Wasser to photograph the seventy-six-year-old Duchamp in a chess game against twenty-year-old Eve Babitz (nude and dressed), a friend of the show's curator, Walter Hopps [cat. no. 62]. Wasser and Duchamp significantly staged this game in front of Duchamp's *Large Glass*, with its discrete domains of the Bride and the Bachelors. According to Duchamp scholar Bradley Bailey, 'The brilliance of this photograph lies in the fact that it incorporates three of the major themes of Duchamp's art and life in a single image: art, eroticism, and strategy.'[18]

In 1965, Duchamp organized the exhibition *Hommage à Caissa* at the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in

New York. For this occasion, he created an assisted readymade, *Hommage à Caissa* [Hommage to Caissa; cat. no. 66], composed of a wooden chessboard covered in artificial leather silk-screened with alternating white and green squares; a functional board but for the lack of pieces. The projected edition of thirty signed and numbered chessboards (ten were actually issued) were destined to be issued and sold to benefit the Marcel Duchamp Fund of the American Chess Foundation. In order to encourage his artist friends to participate, Duchamp gave them each an example of his own engraving, *Les Joueurs d'échecs* [The Chess Players], created after his drawing of 1911 (see related painting of 1910, *La Partie d'échecs* [cat. no. 6]).

Just before his death, another chess-related performance took place in an auditorium at Ryerson Polytechnic in Toronto in 1968 between Duchamp and the composer John Cage [cat. no. 71]. The chessboard, wired to both light and sound sensors, functioned as a musical instrument corresponding to the moves of each player, creating a musical composition Cage titled *Reunion*.

Duchamp loved the complexity and potentiality of the game, and, as he stated in an interview, chess was a constant in his life, connected to his (passing) interest in mathematics. He was drawn to the logic and mechanics of chess: 'the pieces move, interact, destroy each other. They're in constant motion and that's what attracts me. Chess figures placed in a passive position have no visual or aesthetic appeal. It's the possible movements that can be played from that position that make it more or less beautiful.… It does tend to act like a drug.... If you start playing chess when you are young, you'll grow old and die playing chess. It's a passion that's not easily... [Interviewer:] "You'll take it to your grave?" Absolutely.'[19]

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1. For a listing of contributions to the anthology, see http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2016/bibliotheque-r-bl-dada-surrealisme-pf1623/lot.349.html.

2. Merry A. Foresta, *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, exhib. cat. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 323.

3. Jack J. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919–1939: The Gold of Time* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 173.

4. Ibid., pp. 171, 173.

5. André Breton, 'The Mediums Enter', in *The Lost Steps*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 91; originally published in French as 'Entrée des mediums', in *Les Pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924).

6. David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 46–53.

7. Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Harry N. Abrams; London: Thames & Hudson, 1969, 1970 [2nd edn.]; New York: Delano Greenidge; London: Thames & Hudson, 1998 [3rd rev. and exp. edn.), p. 655.

8. In 1953, Duchamp described this readymade in the following manner to Harriet Janis: 'A real coat hanger that I wanted sometime to put on the wall and hang my things on but I never did come to that – so it was on the floor and I would kick it every minute, every time I went out – I got crazy about it and I said the Hell with it, if it wants to stay there and bore me, I'll nail it down… and then the association with the Readymade came and it was that'. Ibid.

9. David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910–1941* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 160.

10. See Bradley Bailey's article demonstrating the role of chess in the formation of the largest and most complex project of Duchamp's early career, *The Large Glass*: Bradley Bailey, 'The Bachelors: Pawns in Duchamp's Great Game', *Tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* 1, no. 3 (December 2000), http://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_3/Articles/bailey/bailey.html.

11. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 101.

12. Francis M. Naumann, 'Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Chess', in Bradley Bailey et al., *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Chess* (New York: Readymade Press, 2009), p. 41.

13. Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, 1988, p. 186.

14. Wendy Grossman, 'Man Ray's Endgame and Other Modernist Gambits', in *The Art of the Project: Projects and Experiments in Modern French Culture*, ed. Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), p. 33.

15. See Wendy A. Grossman, 'The Philosopher and the Merchant: Play Is the Thing', in *Man Ray: Human Equations; A Journey from Mathematics to Shakespeare*, ed. Wendy Grossman and Edouard Sebline, exhib. cat. The Phillips Collection, Washington DC; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2014), pp. 42–43.

16. Naumann, 'Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Chess', pp. 45–46.

17. Ibid., p. 61.

18. Bradley Bailey, 'Passionate Pastimes: Duchamp, Chess, and the Large Glass', in Bailey et al., *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Chess*, p. 4.

19. Marcel Duchamp, in *Jeu d'échecs avec Marcel Duchamp* (film), dir. Jean-Marie Drot (Paris: Radio Télévision Française, ORTF, 1964).