Whitney Chadwick, ed., *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press 1998).

Amidst the many recent publications on the theme of Surrealism and women is Whitney Chadwick's latest endeavor, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*. The new anthology includes seven authors' essays, which expand on the subject Chadwick first legitimized in 1985 in her landmark book, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*.[1] *Mirror Images* is a project with ambitious goals, not all of which are achieved. The book, which also serves as the counterpart to a traveling MIT exhibition, considers the similarities and differences between historic Surrealist women artists and subsequent generations of women who employ Surrealist strategies, such as masquerade, displacement, doubling, and fragmentation. Chadwick argues that throughout the thirties and forties, women artists associated with the Surrealist movement, such as Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, and Claude Cahun, produced a unique body of self-portraits unparalleled in work by men. To counter the sometimes misogynist, fetishistic representations of women by male Surrealists, these female artists turned to their own subjectivity and explored "the female body as a site of conflicting desires and femininity as a taut web of social expectations, historical assumptions, and ideological constructions." (viii-ix) Chadwick claims that these self-portraits challenged conventional modes of representing the female body and female subjectivity and significantly affected the work of contemporary artists including Cindy Sherman, Francesca Woodman, Kiki Smith, Louise Bourgeois, Yayoi Kusama and Ana Mendieta, who have used self-portraiture to explore social constructions of gender and sexuality. Overall, *Mirror Images* focuses more on the relationships between historic female Surrealists and later generations of female artists than on historic Surrealism itself. With the exception of several essays, it largely fails to elucidate the precise historical conditions that enabled the neo-Surrealist work to emerge.

In the first chapter, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation," Chadwick approaches the question of intergenerational relationships between artists, organizing the chapter into three fluid thematic sections: Self as Other, Self as Body, and Self as Masquerade or Absence. The first and strongest section addresses how the historic Surrealists, Dorothea Tanning, Leonor Fini, and Remedios Varo, used the self-portrait to divert the voyeuristic gaze and to represent themselves in resistance to dominant cultural constructions of femininity. Rather than deploying the mirror to portray woman's narcissistic identification with her reflected image, these artists used it to unleash various forces such as dreams, the unconscious, and the irrational.

The second part of the chapter considers images of "embodied femininity" that women Surrealists left as their legacy to contemporary female artists. Chadwick argues that artists such as Kahlo, Tanning, and Cahun utilized incoherence, disjunction, and fragmentation of their own bodies to destabilize the representation of gender and sexual identity.

Unfortunately, Chadwick makes troublesome historical generalizations about contemporary artists and their distinctive artistic practices. For instance, she groups the work of Louise Bourgeois, Yayoi Kusama, and Eva Hesse, claiming that together their work was "part of a wider rejection of minimalist geometries" (18) These artists, however, did not reject Minimalism completely. Chadwick overlooks the fact that, although each of these artists *did* favor referential forms and materials that alluded to bodily forms, Kusama and Hesse, for example, were deeply engaged in what we now characterize as Minimalist practices. Between 1958 and 1961, Kusama created minimal monochrome paintings, and even her subsequent phallic, metaphorical furniture reveals key characteristics of Minimalist sculpture such as wholeness, repetition, and the crucial relationship between viewer and object. When Kusama was working in the early sixties, the category "Minimalism" did not exist yet and on numerous occasions she exhibited with Minimalists such as Donald Judd. Judd not only was her trusted friend, but also cited her work as an example of the Specific Object, a concept that formed the theoretical basis of his own practice.[2] Hesse, too, carried on a complicated dialogue with Minimalism. Like her friends Carl André and Sol LeWitt, Hesse also used industrially produced materials, the grid, seriality, and repetition. Clearly, the relationships between Kusama, Hesse, and the Minimalists are more complex than Chadwick allows and these precise relationships are tied to a rich history, barely alluded to here, which concerns the re-emergence of Surrealism as a formal option for New York artists during the early sixties. How these artists mediated and reinterpreted historic Surrealism through their own work is an important question that remains to be clarified.

My other complaint about this section is that it suffers from a rushed pace, which manifests itself in the curt discussion of artists from the eighties such as Kiki Smith, Annette Messager, and Rona Pondick, whose individual connections to historic Surrealism remain vague. Chadwick makes flagrant generalizations without clear references to individual works or convincing explanations of how they relate to their historic Surrealist predecessors. For instance, she claims Smith's sculptures both "manifest hidden markings of the feminine" and recall the Surrealist *informe*, but Chadwick never elaborates precisely what these complicated concepts are or how they materialize in each of the artist's works. It remains unclear how Smith's neatly cast wax female bodies

exemplify either the *informe* or a Surrealist aesthetic.

Dickran Tashjian's essay, "'Vous Pour Moi?': Marcel Duchamp and Transgender Coupling," suggests that Surrealist female artists, such as Oppenheim, Cahun, and Kahlo, used the concept of the conflict-ridden androgynous hermaphrodite as a means to destabilize and rebel against standard idealized representations of women. Tashjian claims that subsequent artists such as Joseph Cornell and Yayoi Kusama built on the example of Duchamp, Rrose Selavy, and the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven who challenged the conventions of self-representation by undermining the notion of a self built on fixed gender distinctions. Tashjian argues that Cornell embarked on a Duchampian project to create androgynous, idealized self-representations that eventually became hermaphroditic. He traces this androgyny from Lee Miller's photographic portraits of Cornell (early 1930s), to Cornell's collage of Hedy Lamarr that superimposed her face on a Giorgione painting of a male youth's body (1941), to Cornell's sexual coupling with Kusama (1960s), and finally to Duane Michals' photographic series of Cornell (1972), which Cornell directed. Tashjian concludes that Cornell represented himself as a hermaphrodite, a chaotic combination of male and female, and while this reading is persuasive it leaves me wondering why Cornell's relationship with Kusama was specifically hermaphroditic, or how it was different from any other heterosexual coupling. Finally, the most important question that remains is how Cornell's performative self-representations specifically relate to those of historic Surrealism.

Katy Kline explores the question of Claude Cahun's androgynous self-portraits in her essay, "In or Out of the Picture: Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman." I found Kline's essay the most focused, convincingly argued, and historically precise one in the book. She carefully considers the superficial similarities between Sherman's postmodern photographs and Cahun's Surrealist self-portraits, claiming that Cahun's photographs must be understood in relation to the historic moment in which they were produced as well as to Sherman's later works. Kline argues that despite their obvious likeness, Cahun's and Sherman's photographs are quite distinct and each of the artists' works relate to Surrealism in different ways. Cahun's photos are spare, black-and-white, and intimate in scale while Sherman's are exaggerated in size, color, and theatricality. Kline suggests that the most important distinction between Cahun and Sherman lies in their degree of participation in or removal from the world they represent.

In her self-portrait series from the 1920s, Kline argues, Cahun inhabits various guises of femininity and masculinity that reveal the multiple, complex components of her individuality. Kline compares one of Cahun's self-portraits from 1928, in which she stands before a mirror and acknowledges the

viewer/outside world, to Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #2*. Sherman's photograph denies the spectator's gaze because the towel-clad figure stands in a bathroom wholly absorbed in her mirrored reflection. Kline goes on to demonstrate how Cahun's self-portraits were one site in which she played out different versions of her own identity early in life. In 1917, the artist changed her name from Lucie Schwob to the gender-neutral Claude Cahun. In 1918, she daringly published an article identifying a specific instance of public paranoia about homosexuality; and in the early 1920s she began to live with her partner in an open lesbian relationship. Finally, in 1929, Cahun translated some of the writings of Havelock Ellis, who wrote a controversial theory on human sexuality, which posited the possibility of a third sex that unified male and female traits. For Kline, Cahun's photographs use strategies of photographic Surrealism such as defamiliarizing or doubling the figure and these tactics suggest the possibility of multiple, mutable identities. Rather than locating herself in indeterminate interior spaces as she did in the 1920s, Cahun's photographs from the 1930s show the artist outside in enigmatic architectural and garden-like settings. These photographs display Cahun horizontally and from above, characteristics which Rosalind Krauss has noted in relation to Sherman's centerfold and disaster series from the 1980s. Krauss aligns these techniques with Bataille's notion of the base, what is vile and below the surface, and Kline similarly suggests that this concept informs Cahun's bizarre portraits from this period. Ultimately, Kline concludes that while Sherman posits the possibility of multiple identities, she distances herself from the photographs. In contrast, Cahun's androgyny — her embodiment of multiple genders — was "personal, political, and performed," an integral part of her self-exploration and definition. (79)

Salomen Grimberg's essay, "Frida Kahlo: Self as End," also addresses the personal, biographical experiences of an artist who frequently has been mythologized over the past decade. Using Kahlo's diary as evidence, Grimberg contends that her self-portraits directly reflect her biographical experiences and physical and emotional weaknesses: "Frida Kahlo realized early that her life was torn between chaos and order, and she felt helpless in the face of these opposing forces. This struggle, which haunted Kahlo until her death, appears as the common denominator of her art." (83) Grimberg believes that Kahlo fought to "sustain a sense of self" and that the best way to understand her work is through "self-psychology," which Freudian psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut, has used to analyze developmental personality disorders. Grimberg provides no explanation why this method is appropriate for a discussion of Kahlo's work, except for the insinuation that her fragmented sense of self constituted a personality disorder.

This underlying assumption is problematic because it perpetuates the treatment of Kahlo as Other. Focusing only on her troubled mental state displaces the artist from the realm of history into that of pathology and minimizes the magnitude of her aesthetic contributions.[3] This ahistorical approach does a great disservice to Kahlo's work, which deserves to be considered in relation to the rich history of Mexican painting, to male and female Surrealist self-portraiture, and to her contemporaries working in similar modes and techniques. The method employed to understand Kahlo's paintings inevitably devolves into unconvincing psycho-babble, which all but ignores the actual works. Nowhere does Grimberg acknowledge that, rather than being unmediated reflections of the artists psyche, the paintings are carefully constructed *representations* replete with a unique formal language. Additionally, Kahlo's relationship to Surrealism, which arguably is an important concern given the parameters of the book, is not considered in this essay nor is the question of how her work squares with other Surrealist women artists who used the self-portrait to investigate the unconscious.

I had hoped Dawn Ades' essay, "Orbits of the Savage Moon: Surrealism and the Representation of the Female Subject in Mexico and Postwar Paris," would expand on some of the art historical considerations that Grimberg's essay ignored, but it does not. Ades' essay attempts to cover too much ground, collapsing two separate inquiries — how women Surrealists represented female subjectivity in either Paris or Mexico — into one disorganized mass of unrelated fragments. Ades seeks to explore the similarities and differences in the work of Paris-centered postwar Surrealist women artists and writers, who revealed the dissolution of identity and the repudiation of national cultural identity, and Mexican artists, such as Frida Kahlo and Maria Izquierdo, who tried to establish their identities in relation to Mexican history and culture. While the introduction seems straightforward, the remainder of the text is difficult to follow, with many unclear generalizations not substantiated by the works. Ades argues that, although Kahlo and Izquierdo first worked without knowledge of the Paris-based Surrealist movement, both met Breton (and Izquierdo also met Artaud) in 1938. Ades never investigates whether or not this new knowledge of the Surrealists somehow affected Kahlo's or Izquierdo's subsequent work and, although she describes how these artists' engaged the questions of national identity and female subjectivity in their paintings, she never clearly explains what was specifically Surreal about them. For instance, Ades claims, "[Kahlo's] self-portraits challenge the privileges of so-called reality," but she does not clarify what these privileges are, what constitutes "reality," or how the works challenge it. (108)

Similar problems exist in the exhausting discussion of postwar Parisian writers and artists whom Ades indiscriminately and ahistorically associates with a massive array of theorists including de Beauvoir, Barthes, Lacan, Rimbaud, Derrida, Rivière, and even the artist Carolee Schneemann. According to Ades, poet Joyce Mansour and writer Nora Mitrani filtered their atypical representations of female subjectivity through a knowledge of French feminism, specifically de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. However, Ades does not illustrate what aspects of de Beauvoir each of these artists embraced or transformed, except for the opaque comment that their work, which was published in Surrealist journals, often "struggled against oppressive modes of sexual recognition to assert desire on their own terms." (111) Ades' essay does not carefully consider the formal elements of the Surrealist works discussed. Instead, her approach exemplifies what Yves-Alain Bois has called, "theoreticism," the swift and unscrupulous application of post-structuralist theories to objects, without sufficiently understanding the complexity of either the theories or the objects themselves.[4]

Susan Rubin Suleiman's "Dialogue and Double Allegiance: Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde," a well-focused, thought-provoking piece, raises the question of a critic's active interpretive dialogue with her material. She contemplates the relationship between two contemporary female artists, Cindy Sherman and Francesca Woodman, and the Surrealist avant-garde photographer, Hans Bellmer. Suleiman argues that we can read women artists' work in the context of their male predecessors, illuminating the new work and shedding fresh light on the old. She proposes that it is the critic's responsibility to stage a (Bakhtinian) dialogue, which she calls double-allegiance, that involves both an active engagement with and response to the precursor's work. Suleiman claims that the contemporary artists who trace connections to the Surrealists share some of their aspirations even while criticizing them on other grounds. In her examples, Suleiman suggests that Sherman and Woodman not only drew on the formal experiments of male avant-garde predecessors, but also on later feminist critiques of dominant sexual ideologies. The first section on Sherman and Bellmer is more convincing than the one on Woodman, which forces superficial connections between Woodman, Magritte, and Bellmer. In the Sherman section, Suleiman considers Bellmer's sadistic, female-gendered, manipulated dolls, which "produce an instability of meaning by juxtaposing or alternating contradictory or ambiguous signifieds." (137) She views Sherman's sex pictures series as an homage to and revision of Bellmer's dolls. Taking into consideration Hal Foster's and Rosalind Krauss' readings of this work, Suleiman concludes that, rather than inviting male desire

through the use of feminine and youthful traits, as Bellmer does in many of his photographs, the truncated object in Sherman's *Untitled #263* (1992) easily frustrates a desiring gaze because it appears definitively androgynous, replete with both mature male and female genitalia. Suleiman argues that while Sherman makes clear reference to Bellmer's work, her transformation approaches parody, making an objectifying gaze impossible.

The final essay in the book, Helaine Posner's "The Self and the World: Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman," considers how three contemporary artists build on the examples of first generation Surrealists, situating their bodies and identities somewhere between exposure and disguise and engaging themselves in subtle and dynamic physical exchanges with the built or natural environment. Posner links this contradictory tendency to the multifaceted ambivalence characteristic of historic Surrealism. She argues that since Freud provided useful tools to investigate the unconscious for historic Surrealists, his psychoanalytic writings on ego boundaries may be useful in understanding Kusama's, Mendieta's, and Woodman's work. This deduction is logical and would be an apt method to consider these artists' works; however, Posner quotes a weighty passage of Freud's, cited by the neo-Freudian, Norman Brown. Her subsequent use of Freud stems from Brown's analysis and the many differences between these two psychoanalysts are never elaborated. Posner argues that the mechanisms of projection and introjection (also never explained) allow for dynamic exchanges between the self and the environment. Her discussion of boundaries concludes with a Brown excerpt, which argues that in psychosis the boundaries (between self and world, reality and fantasy, etc.) dissolve into an inseparable complex. The Brown passage, along with a concluding comparison that likens Woodman's identity to that of the mad Victorian woman's in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," suggests that Posner understands each of these female artists in terms of psychosis, a dangerous, regressive assumption given that the term "madness" frequently has been applied to women both to identify them as Other and to fix them in an inferior position to men in the social order.[5]

Posner uses the notion of psychosis as a transition into Kusama's work, which often has been reduced to a reflection of her psychological disorders.[6] According to Posner and other critics with this view, Kusama's use of obsessive repetition and accumulation in her work "is rooted in her disease and conditions of her life."(160) This reading perpetuates psychobiographical approaches to her art and ahistorically distances Kusama's formal method from the neo-avant-garde milieu she worked within during the sixties. The same holds true for Posner's treatment of Ana Mendieta and Francesca Woodman. She views

Mendieta's art in terms of her "troubled history" — her traumatic uprootedness from Cuba and her desire to reunite repeatedly with her homeland through art works. Posner understands the photographs of Woodman, who killed herself in 1981 at age twenty-two, in terms of depression, isolation, and death. The few comparisons she makes between these artists' works and those of historic Surrealists are superficial and unsatisfying. She compares Woodman's self-portraits to Bourgeois' *femme-maison* series and to Surrealist reconceptualizations of the human figure. While the latter comparison may have proved fruitful, Posner never analyzes the relationships between Woodman and Surrealist photographers. As in Chadwick's essay and much of the book, Posner leaves the reader with the substantial task of uncovering the specific historical conditions on his/her own. Overall, *Mirror Images* raises more questions than it answers. While it succeeds in demonstrating the validity of exploring the legacy of historic Surrealism in the postwar era, much work remains to be done, which would delineate more carefully the historical circumstances surrounding the postwar artists' work.

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[1] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston 1985). Other books on this subject include: *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge, Mass. 1991); Robert J. Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary 1995), and *La Femme et le surréalisme*, ed. Erika Billeter and Jose Pierre (Lausanne 1987).

[2] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook*, 8, (1965), 74-82.

[3] Anne Wagner has written on the problematic pathologization of female artists, specifically with regard to Eva Hesse, in her article, "Another Hesse," *October*, 69, (Summer 1994), 49-84 and in her more recent book, *Three Artists (Three Women)* (Berkeley 1996).

[4] Yves-Alain Bois, "Introduction: Resisting Blackmail," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass 1990), xii-xiii.

[5] Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (London 1991), 11-12.

[6] In fact, Posner's account relies on the paradigmatic essay of this kind, Alexandra Munroe's "Obsession, Fantasy and Outrage: The Art of Yayoi Kusama," in *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, ed. Bhupendra Karia (New York 1990). For the most recent essay that criticizes this approach to Kusama's work, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of it in relation to the neo-avant-garde context in New York during the sixties, see Lynn Zelevansky, "Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York," in *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* (Los Angeles 1998), 10-33.