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Therese Lichtenstein, *Twilight Visions: Surrealism and Paris*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press; Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts. 2009. ix + 208 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 US (cl). ISBN 978-0-520-26081-8.

Review by Amy Lyford, Occidental College.

This beautifully designed book was published to accompany the exhibition curated by Lichtenstein on behalf of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville, Tenn. Replete with a wide range of visual material – photographs, photomontages, books, journals, postcards, and illustrated magazines – *Twilight Visions* aims to speak about surrealism and photography to an audience of curious exhibition-goers and scholars of interwar French visual culture. Organized around the concept of twilight – a time of day that is both amorphous and transitional – the book's aims are made clear from the outset. By laying claim to twilight as a metaphor that links the essays and the images throughout the project, Lichtenstein cleverly situates the project as one invested in analyzing the liminal and the in-between.

The decision to frame a book on Surrealism and Paris using the idea of indeterminacy sets the project into a constellation of surrealist scholarship that has, over the last twenty years or so, worked to break down the binaries associated with western conceptions of reason (mind-body; public-private; subject-object; passive-active) that surrealist artists and writers hoped to upend during the interwar years. It is also clear, to this reader at least, that Lichtenstein's selection of twilight as a framing device for both book and exhibition suggests her own desire for a more evocative, uncertain approach to writing about surrealist cultural production. Just as twilight may obscure some things and bring others into view, so *Twilight Visions* has been written as a kind of collage made up of essays by a series of well-respected surrealist scholars, one which refrains from providing the last word on Surrealism and Paris.

As a book project, it attempts to historically situate Surrealist practice within the city of Paris, and it does so such that the movement and its varied social and political aims never quite come into hard-edged focus. The book's collage-like structure – a series of essays that remain disconnected from each other for the most part – and its interest in exploring, rather than capturing, the period in-between the first and second World Wars, suggests a deep understanding of the surrealist method itself. And for this, I applaud Lichtenstein and her collaborators for their effort to mirror in the structure of this book some of what the artists and writers they discuss aimed to do with their own work back in the 1920s and early 1930s. Twilight, as Lichtenstein reminds us in her Introduction, is a lens that exaggerates, and makes visible, the “process of metamorphosis” that marked the city of Paris during the interwar years. And in many ways the book helps us to understand that process of transformation by looking into new corners of the surrealist world, corners that each author included in the volume explore from their own disciplinary and conceptual perspectives.

Scholars of interwar culture, students of surrealism, and those interested in learning more about the cultural history of interwar Paris will find this book a helpful companion. Yet because the book aims to engage such a diversity of audiences, its refreshingly non-linear structure may be

off-putting to those hoping to use the book as a tool to grasp the complexity of surrealist Paris in short order. The book's surrealist-inspired structure is thus both a strength and a weakness, I would imagine, depending the reader. Regardless of one's needs as a reader, however, the book is written in an accessible, lively style that educates its readers about the key issues, themes, and debates in the cultural history of surrealism and surrealist visual practice, without hitting them over the head with jargon or long in-paragraph quotations from the usual theorists and surrealist scholars one might expect to find peppering a monograph aimed at a more purely academic audience. The notes provide a solid level of research-oriented detail to satisfy either a generalist sleuth or a curious undergraduate, and the inclusion of a number of primary sources make for a good, productive read. This is refreshing, and will make the book one that faculty teaching undergraduates might usefully adopt for their courses.

That said, the essays throughout the book reveal varied levels of interest in creating a kind of focused interpretive argument – something that a reader looking for a deeper engagement with the scholarly literature on surrealism might find frustrating. Lichtenstein's "The City in Twilight" suggests something of this effect, in that the essay (meant, it seems, to be an overview to set the stage for the rest of the essays in the book), is built out of small sections about "Photography and Surrealism," illustrated weekly magazines, photographic representations of monuments, or the work of Eugene Atget and Andre Breton, or surrealism and film. These sections introduce a productively broad range of enticing themes, images, and texts; and yet, each section is not as fully explored as one might wish. The essays that follow upon "The City in Twilight" tighten the aperture onto the surrealist project in Paris, focusing, in turn on "The Bureau of Surrealist Research" (by Julia Kelly), "Surrealist Exhibitions, Parisian Exhibitions" (by Colin Jones), and "Mythic Woman / Real Women: Embodying Desire in 1938" (by Whitney Chadwick).

The titles of these essays reveal the collage-like aesthetic of the project: each author dives into a specific nook or cranny within the larger surrealist project that Lichtenstein's survey of issues and themes may have (but not always) alluded to. Kelly's work on the Bureau of Surrealist Research, that pseudo-scientific research unit that inhabited a ninth arrondissement apartment for a short period of time in the mid-1920s, is one of the few accounts I can think of that explores the history and experimental agenda of the Bureau in English. Kelly's description of the archival and bureaucratic impulses of the Bureau help the reader to more clearly recognize how the group aimed to use the various discourses available to them from within the scientific and commercial realms of culture to their own surrealist ends; and her discussion of the surrealist object is helpful for those who might not have read as widely on this subject within the scholarly literature. Jones digs into the investment that so many of the participants in the surrealist project made in the production of exhibitions. Importantly, Jones historically contextualizes the surrealist exhibitions within a broader culture field running from the Great Exhibitions of the nineteenth century, to the important (and widely-discussed) 1925 *Exposition internationale des arts decoratifs et industriels moderne*. The ways that Jones sets the surrealist exhibitions in relief against the long and storied history of grand exhibitions within the city of Paris particularly captured my attention as a scholar, for this is the kind of work that displays an attentiveness to the specific historical and cultural references that the surrealists deployed in their effort to undermine traditional cultural practices. This is strong work.

Whitney Chadwick's essay, the last in the book, takes us from the world of exhibitions into the heart of feminist scholarship on surrealism – both in light of Chadwick's own position within the scholarly community as a path-breaking feminist scholar, and her investment in exploring exactly how, and why gender and identity politics were so central to (and remain so today within the field) surrealist practice. In Chadwick's essay, it seems to me, the promise of Lichtenstein's indeterminate structure and metaphor of liminality come to fruition. Chadwick's

interest in doubling, fragmentation, and photography help her to explore surrealist ambiguity by paying close, material attention to surrealist images. And it is here, it seems to me, that the book leads the reader back to the exhibition with which it has been paired. Not only does the reader learn, from Jones, and then Chadwick, about the history of the surrealist exhibition, but Chadwick's essay takes us quite directly from the infamous surrealist exhibition of 1938 to the kind of close, visual attention to photographs and paintings that an art historian might hope to engender in their readers.

While each essay in the book has an internal logic, the essays don't hang together conventionally, as a coherent whole. Rather, they appear as a collage of shifting glimpses at a diverse, complex surrealist project. The strengths of this approach are evident in the new terrain explored here around the Bureau of Surrealist Research's agenda; the history of the exhibition in France as a ground upon which the surrealists built their exhibition edifice; and the investigation of the in-between spaces of gender and surrealism which remain at the heart of the feminist scholarship on surrealism today. The effect of this approach to the book is twofold: we learn a great deal about surrealism, but in fragments; we find out about some of its little-known projects, as well as some of its lesser known (women) artists and writers. We also have access – through a series of interleaved photographs that appear between the different essays – to a wide variety of imagery that is suggestive of the kind of oblique juxtapositions that the surrealists themselves practices in order to catalyze new thoughts in their readers or viewers.

In these ways, the book creates a surrealist experience, if you will, through the process of reading and looking. While this fact is one of the things that I find most engaging about the book, it is also what makes it hard to follow the thread about “twilight” with which Lichtenstein stitched the book together at the beginning. Twilight, a liminal, crepuscular moment, is used to dramatize an exquisitely surrealist investment in ambiguity; yet the particular essays that Lichtenstein has assembled under the sign of twilight aren't quite able to demonstrate the full power of that amorphousness because the book, itself, staggers a bit under the weight of a non-expository approach to communication. Each essay, I'm suggesting, inhabits its own bounded space (the Bureau; the Exhibition; Feminist critical analysis of surrealism's project) without dissolving enough at the edges in order to intertwine itself with the pieces it encounters around it; thus the interpenetration of the texts which might literalize the twilight metaphor in the structure of the book itself never quite bleed together into a mysterious, fluid, whole.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Therese Lichtenstein, “The City in Twilight.”

Julia Kelly, “The Bureau of Surrealist Research.”

Colin Jones, “Surrealist Exhibitions, Parisian Expositions.”

Whitney Chadwick, “Mythic Woman / Real Women: Embodying Desire in 1938.”

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