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From the Invisible Object to the Void: An Examination of Surrealism and the Lacanian Real

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by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History and Visual Culture at Lindenwood University

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FROM THE INVISIBLE OBJECT TO THE VOID: AN EXAMINATION OF SURREALISM AND THE LACANIAN REAL

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ABSTRACT

FROM THE INVISIBLE OBJECT TO THE VOID: AN EXAMINATION OF SURREALISM AND THE LACANIAN REAL

Isabela Fernandes Pinheiro, Master of Art History and Visual Culture

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Johnathan Walz

The sculpture *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object* by the Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti is one of his most iconic artworks, occupying a critical place within his oeuvre, as it is the last so called Surrealist work. This sculpture greatly excited the Surrealist group, who took it as a model of the found object, one of the artistic methods that the movement employed. However, after creating *Hands Holding the Void*, Giacometti abandoned Surrealism and began to make his works from live models, while remaining committed to his artistic question about representing what he was seeing. This sculpture points to something enigmatic in Giacometti's *oeuvre*, as well as to a pivotal element of Surrealism. Since its creation by the young French poet André Breton, Surrealism has been defined as an artistic movement associated with love, freedom, and liberty. However, its aesthetics, experimentations, and artistic objects are frequently integrated with attributes related to the development of the traumatic, the fragmented, and the lack, and the artists were attracted to work with repetition, transcendence, and paradoxes that created instability, uncanny, and anguish. From a reading of Surrealism interconnected psychoanalytic theory and taking as a guide the sculpture of Giacometti, this work investigates an articulation between Surrealism and the notion of Real, proposed by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and argues that Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void* assumes the paradox between the object and the void, the presence and the absence, exploiting this ambivalence and acting as a veil that veils but at the same time reveal the Real. Ultimately, the sculpture reflects the Surrealist task of dealing with the impossible.

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André Breton: What is your atelier?
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"Le Dialogue en 1934" (Écrits)

Introduction

The sculpture *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object* (Figure 1), which the Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti (1901 – 1966) created in 1934, is considered one of his major works.[1] This artwork, which critics have regarded as "Janus-like," a "destinal object" radically separated in two, is treated as a turning point in the artist's career, marking his transition from the Surrealist movement to working from live models in his later career.[2] This change in Giacometti's artmaking assures a central position for *The Invisible Object* in the artist's *oeuvre*.

The sculpture consists of a haunting, mysterious nude figure. It represents a life-size woman, but it is not a literal image of a female figure. It is possible to recognize the sculpture's gender especially by its breasts. Attached to a board, the figure stands up, with a thin body and arms, insect-like legs, and knees half-bent. The upper part of her body is supported by a frame in the back, while the lower part is supported by the rectangular board. In front of the figure's torso, both hands are held together, gesturing as if it was holding an object, something that the viewer does not see. The hands are positioned right in front of her breasts, holding this invisible object, one that does not exist. The hands are holding nothing, the void (Figure 2), as the title suggests. Besides the woman, at the right hip height, there's a mysterious bird head (Figure 3). Finally, there is the sculpture's head, which is the most enigmatic aspect of this work for Giacometti. The head has a flat shape, and two wheel forms

[1] This sculpture was known by two names: *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object*, which denounces the complex character of this artwork. In French, when spoken aloud, *Hands Holding the Void* can be said *Mains tenant le vide* or *Maintenant le vide*, which means *Now the Void* or, suggesting another meaning to the work's title. In this paper, I'll refer to this artwork sometimes by only one of its titles *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object*, for a didactic purpose only.

[2] Janus is a Roman mythology figure and is considered the God of the beginnings, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, and ending; Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Cube and The Face: Around a Sculpture by Alberto Giacometti*, ed. Mira Fleischer and Elena Vogman (Switzerland: Diaphanes, 2015), 52.

create the figure's eyes; one seems intact and the other broken (Figure 4). [3] The sculpture's gaze, which appears to be a dead gaze, captures the spectator's attention, causing an aesthetic and intellectual dissonance.

This sculpture is indisputably part of Giacometti's Surrealist work. Even the artist, who later repudiated his Surrealist objects, acknowledged that this piece was one of his works that clearly involved the Surrealistic atmosphere. And undoubtedly, it utterly fascinated the Surrealists. For the group, *Hands Holding the Void* was the perfect example of the found object (*objet trouvé),* part of the art movement's techniques - the objective chance, in which a random, real, tangible object that the artist finds seemingly by accident. For these artists, finding an object had the same function as a dream, revealing something unknown about the subject to himself that leads to an insight, and to a source of artistic inspiration. In this sense, *Hands Holding the Void* became an emblematic Surrealist artwork that illustrated the "fundamental crisis of the object" that was part of the poetic language of Surrealist art and philosophy.[4] Surrealist objects, which were the "oneiric object, the object functioning symbolically, the real and virtual object, the moving but silent object, the phantom object, the found object, etc.," were part of the group's indispensable artistic investigations and techniques.[5]

After the creation of the *Invisible Object*, the young French poet and the Surrealist leader André Breton (1896 – 1966) reinforced the catalytic role of objective chance in Giacometti's sculpture, favoring Surrealism, its techniques, and the artist as a member of the movement. This can be seen in two of Breton's books, *Mad Love* and *What is Surrealism?* In addition to illustrating the Surrealist's object search and art, Giacometti's sculpture was

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[3] Yves Bonnefoy, *Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of His Work* (France: Flammarion, 2006), 226.

[4] André Breton, *What is Surrealism?,* Ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 138.

[5] Breton, *What is Surrealism?,* 138.

completely aligned with the aesthetic effect typical of the movement. Its paradoxical characteristics that play with presence and absence, completeness and lack, human and ghostly form, and its mortified look are responsible for creating a specific aesthetic effect, an enigma, an uncanniness critical to Surrealism.

During the twentieth century, the avant-garde movements advocated for a revolution of the spirit, which sought to overturn traditional bourgeois notions of art. Until then, art was created by suppressing what could not appear, the obscene and the sexual, in order to elevate the work of art to a state of nobility. In this context, the Surrealists engaged in researching and producing new content from a gap of conscience, irrationality, and spontaneity. But in their commitment to another side of reality, to its expansion and unification, the Surrealists included madness, dreams, the immoral, and the contingency into art.

To research Surrealism is to accept an invitation toward the absurd. Antagonism towards the Surrealist project is a fundamental part of its constitution, but it also raises numerous questions. In the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, published in 1924, Breton defined Surrealism as the experience of psychic automatism and the *impensé* (unthought).[6] A critique of rationality and the removal of beauty from the side of logic characterized the Surrealist debut on the Parisian artistic scene. The work with dreams that Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) developed was taken by Surrealists for the movement's foundation as a *modus operandi* for their artistic procedures. Moreover, Surrealism and psychoanalysis contain overlapping areas of interest: dreams, fantasies, and sexuality; interest in women and madness; and the reflection on the uncanny, alterity, and intersubjectivity. In addition, Surrealists incorporated psychoanalytic terms into their own critical discourses, terms such as repression, sublimation, and fetishism. During the period in which the "First

[6] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, transl. Richard Seaver; Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1969), 26.

Surrealist Manifesto" was influential, Surrealists launched themselves into the experiences of automatic writing, dream narratives, hypnotic sleep, objective chance, collage, and convulsive beauty. In the *Second Surrealist Manifesto,* published in 1930, Breton emphasized the political character of the movement and placed it in the interaction between the contradictions of the internal domains and external reality in a dialectical relationship.[7] In this second moment, life and death, past and future, high and low are no longer understood as contradictory, and the Surrealist act consisted of the search for the fixed point between these opposites so that there is no more oscillation between the poles.

From its origins, Surrealism defined itself as an artistic movement associated with love, freedom, and liberty. However, its aesthetics and artistic experimentations and creations are frequently integrated with attributes related to the development of the oneiric, the fragmented, the obscene, and the lack, provoking an effect of dread, horror, and uncanny. The art history field is extremely interested in the concept of the uncanny and its effects on Surrealist art. Nonetheless, taking the uncanny as an aesthetic effect, that Freud proposed in *Das Unheimlich* (*The Uncanny*) in 1919, the uncanny is on the spectator's side and not on the artist's or the artistic creation's side. Thus, taking a step further and analyzing the psychoanalytical concept of the Real that the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) proposed, this thesis argues that from the point of view of artistic production, what is at stake in Surrealism, ultimately, is the notion of the Real. So, it is in the domain of the ethics of psychoanalysis that this master's thesis is situated. With Lacan's *das Ding* (the Thing), the psychoanalyst proposed the idea that the lack does not refer to something that was once lost, but fundamentally refers to the condition of the possibility of desire itself. That means that lack of an object, a void, has to exist so that the subject can desire. The path that Freud

[7] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 123-124.

proposed for psychoanalysis, and later supported by Lacan, moves forward from this structural lack. Such a lack, a hole, is situated at the heart of the ethics of psychoanalysis.

From a reading of Surrealism interconnected with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, this thesis will seek to reflect on the Surrealist project, which, from 19240 through the 1930s, André Breton proposed. Surrealism denounces and reinforces the impossible, an unease resulting from this impossible. Thus, Surrealism subverts tradition and criticizes realism. It abandons natural representation and mimesis, and incorporates in its works the unthinkable, everyday objects, and repetition. It flirts with and values the enigmatic and the bewilderment provoked in the spectator, the unpredictable, the unspeakable, and invites the artist to work from his own uniqueness. The Real and Surrealism propose an ethics based on the impossible and not on the ideal that takes desire into account.

Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* is the chief object of investigation in this research. In this sense, this thesis assesses Giacometti's sculpture seeking to emphasize and illustrate how the Real is present within Surrealism. The importance of this sculpture in Giacometti's *oeuvre* (as his last Surrealist work) and for Surrealism (as the model of how to employ one of its major artistic techniques) provides the foundation to assess this artwork in order to study Surrealism. The sculpture serves as a case study to illustrate how this psychoanalytical concept supports research on and understanding of this avant-garde movement. Finally, I will argue that for Giacometti, the void presented and represented by the invisible object in this sculpture denounced the encounter with the Real in Lacanian terms. The void was a mark of his singularity, a void that embodies the lack of the Real. The hands which hold the absence create the opposite effect, that is, a game of presence and absence of the object in the work, that denounces the human fundamental lack. Here, the absence of the object is marked as a trace, from the title of the work to its iconographic representation. Besides that, Giacometti's experience with Surrealist art led him, ultimately,

to break with the movement. Surrealism did not address his artistic question, but on the contrary, reinforced the impossible.

It is essential to highlight that this thesis is not tentative in applying psychoanalysis to Surrealism or Giacometti's art. As Lacan once said, psychoanalysis is only applied as a treatment in the proper sense of the term. What this thesis proposes is to experiment, to rehearse some possible paths of dialogue between art and psychoanalysis. But this is proposed without fear of recognizing the rupture that is being made within the Surrealism movement and artworks, and Giacometti's *oeuvre*. This thesis is actually a matter of showing something from the art field that can be taught, an artist's knowledge that teaches other fields, in this case, psychoanalysis; our purpose is to listen to artists, as did Freud. This thesis also does not intend to position Surrealism at the service of psychoanalysis. Surrealism is not a tributary to psychoanalysis, nor is it exclusive to it. But surrealism is one of the nodal points of art and psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis is one of Surrealism's sources and relationship modes.

Literature Review

This following Literature Review is structured in two different sections: the first focused on providing a brief history of Surrealism intertwined with its relationship with psychoanalysis. Considering this thesis's hypothesis, I am taking the uncanny as a strategic starting point since this concept, which Freud developed, serves as an epistemological rupture that is of interest here given its intimate theoretical connection with the death drive, jouissance, and the Real. The second section investigates the existing interpretations of Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void (The Invisible Object)*.

Much has been researched and written about the history of Surrealism in art history. Many scholars centered their research on the relationship between Surrealism and psychoanalysis, given the interest of the artistic school in Freudian ideas, focusing on mainly the encounters and disagreements among them through Breton's and Dalí's meeting with Freud, and later between Dalí and Lacan (and the notion of paranoia, which is explicitly a common point between these areas). Within this field of research, psychoanalysis lends its help as an auxiliary discipline, mainly due to the expressive interest of the Surrealists. Many historians and art critics engender their research and theories about art, including Surrealism, taking psychoanalysis as an interpretive theory. In relation to psychoanalysis, the concept of the uncanny (*das unheimlich*), which Freud developed in 1919, receives special attention. Considered the greatest contribution to the field of aesthetics in the 20th century, it is probably Freud's most renowned book in art and literature. This is also a key concept that traversed diverse fields, further marking a turning point in Freud's thinking.[8]

The concept of the uncanny in art has been widely discussed, and avant-garde groups have used it as a guide for their artistic productions. The psychoanalytical theory impacted

[8] Sigmund Freud, *O Infamiliar (The Uncanny)*, ed. Ernani Chaves, trans. Pedro Heliodoro Tavares (Brazil: Editora Autêntica, 2019), 116.

the artistic *milieu*, and the Surrealists were one of the most significant investigators of this relationship. My argument takes the uncanny as its starting point, not just because it is a term that comes from the psychoanalytic field, which is this thesis's primary research method, but also because the uncanny points to the fundamental concept that will be worked on in this paper, which Freud developed later, the death drive (which will unfold in the concepts of jouissance and Real in the Lacanian work).

In the 1990s, in his book *Compulsive Beauty,* the American art critic Hal Foster rethinks Surrealism in psychoanalytical terms, proposing an innovative view within the art history field regarding this movement. He argues that the anxious ambiguity that produces the effects of the uncanny is widely found in Surrealist art. For art critics, the uncanny concept best encapsulates Surrealism, "the principle of order that clarifies the disorder of surrealism."[9]

Foster discusses the uncanny in Freudian terms, that is, a content, a repressed material that returns from the repressed and disrupts aesthetic norms and social order. For Foster, the Surrealists were "drawn to the return of the repressed, but they also seek to redirect this return to critical ends."[10] In this sense, Foster does not explore the uncanny in iconographic terms, but historically and critically, and as intrinsic to the core of the movement, as well as the basis for their marvelous category, experiments, methods, their notions of beauty, paranoia projections, and symptoms. In fact, the concept of the marvelous is the central motif that led Surrealists to involve the uncanny. And, if the uncanny is related to the return of the repressed involving a personal trauma, then trauma informs Surrealist art.

Foster found support for his argument in Freudian theory in the book the *Uncanny* (1919), in which Freud defines the uncanny as a paradox and the ambivalence between the

[9] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) xviii.
[10] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, xvii.

known and the repressed. However, Surrealist artists often resisted the uncanny, despite their attraction to it (they searched for the point between contradictions, such as life and death, fantasy and reality), because this would conflict with their premises of love and liberation.

Furthermore, Foster discusses in his book that Surrealism revolves around the return of the repressed, oscillating between two primal fantasies within the uncanny structure: the maternal plenitude and the paternal punishment. Therefore, Surrealism works over the artist's individual traumatic experiences and subjective fantasies. For art critics, "surrealism works to restage these fantasies to disrupt the structures of subjectivity and representation that are largely rooted there."[11] Thus, Foster argues that primal fantasies is what is at stake in the art of three Surrealist artists: Giorgio de Chirico, Max Erst, and Alberto Giacometti.[12] Respectively, the author suggests that the seduction fantasy of de Chirico has a castrative aspect, the primal scene of Ernst has a seductive side, and the castration fantasy in Giacometti has an intrauterine desire. To arrive at these hypotheses, Foster analyzed the artists' cultural production (de Chirico's paintings, Ernst's collages, and Giacometti's statues) and writings. These traumatic fantasies appear in these artists' artworks; they recur in an uncanny appearance in their respective oeuvres. Finally, Foster presents an innovative theory of Surrealism, and he connects Surrealism with the uncanny – the return of the repressed – through the exploration of specific primal fantasies in the oeuvres of three particular Surrealist artists.

The art historian Scott Freer researched the Belgian Surrealist artist René Magritte's art. In his article "Magritte: The Uncanny Sublime," Freer argues that Magritte visualizes an aesthetic of the uncanny sublime by sustaining a tense dynamic between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown. Magritte sustains an art between tense opposites that

[11] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 193.

[12] Freud defined three primal fantasies: that of seduction, the primal scene (when the child witnesses' parental sex), and that of castration.

positioned his art neither in the tradition nor in the depth of the sublime. This means that the uncanny, prominent in Surrealist poetics, is conspicuous in Magritte's art. According to Freer, Magritte was not trying to deconstruct the sacred aspect of art, but he was investigating the absolute truth positioning the uncanny in the tense dynamic between the visible and the invisible, in a post-religious context. For the author, initially, Magritte used the uncanny as a technique, which Breton proposed in Surrealism, disarranging the viewer's perception of reality by privileging the unconscious. Furthermore, according to the author, the Surrealists translated the uncanny experience, which is a psychological source of trauma, of trouble, into the marvelous. Freer argues that "inspired by Freud's studies and re-awakening echoes of a primitive mentality, Breton used the uncanny dream as a template to disrupt our habitual mental perception of reality."[13] Breton encouraged and praised this sense of the marvelous category as modern sensibility and aesthetic value.

Moreover, Freer argues that Breton's found objects, the objective chance, are "inert but indeterminate, hence alive with associative and interpretative qualities," which means, associated with one's subjectivity.[14]

In the *Second Surrealist Manifesto,* Breton attributed a "neo-Hegelian aesthetic" to the uncanny effect by "juxtaposing the familiar (thesis) with the unfamiliar (antithesis) to create a new perception (synthesis) of reality."[15] This logic can be noticed in the objective chance, for example, in which one random object is taken out of its original context, and put in a new one, creating a new poetic, a new synthesis.

In the book, *Formless: A User's Guide,* which was created as the product of the exhibition *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi* in Paris, in 1996, the American art critic and historian

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[13] Scott Freer, "Magritte: The Uncanny Sublime," *Literature and Theology,* Vol. 27, No. 3 (2013): 333, accessed September 5, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23926909

[14] Scott Freer, "Magritte: The Uncanny Sublime," 333.

[15] Freer, 333.

Rosalind Krauss wrote a dictionary *critique,* an entry, entitled “Uncanny,” to discuss how the Surrealists manipulated the uncanny quality of photographs. Krauss relied on this psychoanalytical text, quoting and referencing Freud several times. She takes up E.F Hoffman's short story "The Sandman," which Freud discussed in 1919, to punctuate the uncanny effect that the automaton, represented in the German tale by a doll, explores. Through analyzing the German Surrealist sculptor Hans Bellmer’s (1902-1975) photographs of his dolls, Krauss argues that the repertoire of Surrealist photography incorporates the effects of trauma as well as producing traumatic effects. Bellmer’s dolls are generally deformed (with no arms, with a pneumatic torso, etc.) and frequently photographed in familiar domestic spaces. The double effect that Freud described (the double is a striking point of the uncanny, that has relations of the double with images, such as in a mirror, or shadow, for example) is used by the artist in his arrangement of a double pair of legs joined together at the hip and then organized into symmetrical patterns. For Krauss, signifiers such as the “traumatic,” “nonsymbolizable,” “madness,” and “evidence of death” are related to the uncanny.[16] Still, concerning the uncanny effect, Krauss suggests that Breton’s notion of objective chance is connected with Lacan’s concepts of *tuché* and *automaton,* which are Lacanian concepts related to the compulsion repetition and the Real, questioning whether the encounter with the object might be a mere accident. With the support of psychoanalytical theory, Krauss suggests that the “chance” is connected to the compulsion to repeat. That is, an object that seemed to be found accidentally is actually associated with psychic determinism. As Breton was only interested in the casual and spontaneous encounter with the object, he masked the *automaton* (the network of signifiers that work as a sort of engine of

[16] Rosalind Krauss. “Uncanny.” In Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 193.

repetition, insisting on the repetition, emphasizing the unconscious determinism, that is, nothing is the result of chance).

The Brazilian art curator Paulo Reis proposed in his curatorial research for the exhibition "*Estranhamento*" (Uncanniness), which the cultural institution *Itaú Cultural* sponsored between 2001 and 2003, claims that Surrealists' experiences suggested another logic that pointed to the idea of the uncanny. Dreams, delusions, hallucinations, vertigo, and associations revealed, for their artists, a hidden reality, even subterranean, inside the reality they lived. Surrealism creates strangeness by changing objects from their natural or original places - like an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table (as the ultimate Surrealist quote suggests); and by employing techniques and experimentations, such as the frottage, the paranoid-critical method, collages, and *cadavre exquis*, among many others, that created unlikely and often outlandish works. Furthermore, the curator argues that the concept of uncanny is connected to the idea of changing positions in a semantic field because what changes places gains another meaning and loses its original meaning, seen, for example, in Duchamp's ready-mades or the Surrealist's objects. From an artistic perspective, the uncanny changes the perspective of our gaze, indicating other points of view in the apprehension of the world.

The scholar Elizabeth Wright discussed the concept presenting it in Freudian terms, that is, associated with the return of the repressed generating dread and horror. For Wright, in Surrealism, the uncanny should be understood beyond Freudian theory, otherwise, there is the risk of missing the peculiarity of the movement. In the art movement, the uncanny challenges the representation modes, attributing construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction characteristics to the artistic object instead of making it descriptive or representative. Moreover, the author argues that the uncanny is responsible for the shock effect that Surrealist art provokes. The group adopted the uncanny strategy in poetry and visual art

through the “juxtaposed patterns of discontinuity.” In Surrealist art, the elements and objects are chosen and placed carefully to create the effect of discontinuity, and strangeness generating the sense of “where have I seen this before,” that is familiar (heimlich), but as the element is displaced, it provokes the uncanny effect (unheimlich).

The German philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) argues in his essay “Rückblickend auf den Surrealismus” (*Looking Back on Surrealism*) that Surrealists took objects out of their familiar contexts; furthermore, he proposes that, in their art, the Surrealists broke apart and rearranged images, but they did not, in fact, deconstruct reality.. In the Surrealists' world, elements are replaced by others that, unusually, refer to the strange, or in Freudian terms, to the uncanny.

In the psychoanalytical field, publications about Surrealism and the uncanny are scarce, and there are few relevant materials that contribute to the panorama proposed. The Brazilian psychologists Capelozza and Campos are interested in Surrealism because this is the artistic movement that makes explicit the art field encounter with psychoanalysis. For these authors, the uncanny is created in Surrealist art through the dissolution of the opposition between fantasy and reality. This effect shares with the unconscious the continuity between the real and the fantasy. Notably, the uncanny is an effect that surprises the spectator, who expects reality and is faced with the revival of childhood complexes and primitive beliefs and fantasies, which can emerge before the Surrealist works. What surprises and amazes the spectator is something that should have remained repressed but returned in the form of an impression. In this sense, the uncanny not only refers to the artist’s unconscious, but it is also an important effect in the production of the aesthetic experience, summoning the spectator’s unconscious.

For the psychologists Gomes and Prudente, within Surrealism, the works of the Spanish artist Salvador Dalí point to something from the unconscious due to the elements

present in his canvases and also, due to the sensation that such arouses in whoever encounters them. To address this discussion, the authors use the concepts of real and uncanny. For these authors, Dalí's artworks provoked unknown sensations in the viewer, a kind of strangeness and repulse. This happened because of the repression of sexual drives. When the spectator is before one of Dalí's art, unconscious elements come to full consciousness, causing the uncanny feeling.

a. Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void* or the *Invisible Object*

Alberto Giacometti occupies a singular position in the modern European artistic scene, intriguing and summoning artists, writers, art critics, thinkers, and philosophes to reflect on art and the process of artmaking. His artworks and artistic research evoke questions, and an artistic crisis in Giacometti himself, who transitioned from "a Surrealist artist probing sculpture's ambivalent relationship to the everyday object, [to] an Existentialist sculptor invested in phenomenological experience."[17] Krauss argues in her review of the exhibition *Alberto Giacometti* at the MoMA (October, 2001 to January, 2002.) that Giacometti is known for his "bipartite division of the oeuvre." For the art critic, his work changed so expressively over the years that it is possible to identify a Surrealist Giacometti and the Sartrerian Giacometti. Before 1935, critics associated Giacometti's artwork with the Surrealism movement, and after 1935, with Existentialist philosophy. The fundamental contrast between Giacometti's two phases resides in the fact that in the mid-1930s, the artist began to work from live models instead of using the Surrealist's techniques. [18]

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[17] Joanna Fiduccia, *Hollow Man: Alberto Giacometti and the Crisis of the Monument, 1935–45* (doctor's thesis, University of California, 2017), 2.

[18] Rosalind Krauss, "Alberto Giacometti: Museum of Modern Art," ArtForum 40, (2001): 113, accessed October 13, 202 https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/200110/alberto-giacometti-1945; For more sources on Giacometti's biography, see Arthur Danto, "Sculpting the Soul," The Nation (New York, NY) Dec. 3, 2001; Patrick Elliot, "Alberto Giacometti: An Introduction," in *Alberto Giacometti*, 1901-1966 (Scotland: Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 1996); James Lord, Giacometti: A Biography (New York: Doubleday, 1965); Yves Bonnefoy, Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of His Work (France: Flammarion, 2006); David Sylvester, Looking at Giacometti, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994).

Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object* is a widely discussed work in art history. The contradictory nature, the supernatural, and the phantasmatic impression of this life-size figure may produce anxiety in the viewer. The figure looks directly at the spectator with a startled look and empty hands. The enigmatic theme itself generates discomfort. The metaphysical opposition between being and nothingness causes a tension that contributes to the sculpture's phenomenological effects on viewers. The most enigmatic part of *The Invisible Object* has always been its head. Initially, Giacometti had created it as a naturalistic head, which Cubism inspired, but later, he decided to change it. But then, the artist started to face difficulties with it and could not create the sculpture's head. For Breton, the head was related to a "sentimental uncertainty, a resistance that Giacometti had to overcome, and this occurred through the intercession of a found object: a metal half-mask."[19]

In one of his most emblematic books, *Mad Love*, the French poet and Surrealist leader André Breton commented on the episode where he and Giacometti went to the *Saint-Ouen* flea market in 1934 and recounted the exact moment of objective chance when Giacometti found the mask that inspired him to create the head of *The Invisible Object*. The men thought that they had found a German mask for saber fencing, which was decisive in inspiring the creation of the statue's head. In fact, the mask helped Giacometti resolve his indecision on this portion of the sculpture.

Breton mentioned that since Giacometti started to create this sculpture, he was interested in it because he "considered [it] the very emanation of the desire to love and to be loved."[20] *Hands Holding the Void* configured the perfect example of a found object, which, according to Breton, employed desire in the search for an object, and once the object was

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[19] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty,* 37.

[20] André Breton, *Mad Love*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 26.

discovered, it meant that some unconscious content could be revealed. Furthermore, Breton remembered a reflection he did on objective chance indicating that the activity of finding an object served the same purpose as the dream, freeing the subject from affective scruples, making the subject understand the obstacle he should overcome, and comforting him. In this sense, Giacometti's sculpture precisely demonstrated the catalyzing role of the found object. Moreover, this event reinforced not only the Surrealist method in vogue at the time but also Giacometti's filiation into the movement.

Another interesting aspect that Breton explored briefly in this book was how the hands, the central element of this sculpture, lost their potential when Giacometti lowered them, showing the figure's breasts. For Breton, the consequence of this action was the "disappearance of the invisible but present object."[21] Having the hands positioned right in front of the breasts was a crucial element of this artwork.

Considering the event that Breton described, Hal Foster believed *The Invisible Object* was Giacometti's unconscious product and revealed his fantasies and psychic conflicts. The art critic discussed that the Surrealists were obsessed with the traumatic scenes of primal fantasies. Following this rationale, in Giacometti's case, what would be at stake is the castration fantasy. Foster states that this artwork provides a perfect example of the search for the lost object, a model for the objective chance. Here, the author proposed a strict connection between the chance, and the Freudian concept of the return of the repressed and the compulsion to repeat, which are central to Foster's thesis, which "is a surrealist quest par excellence."[22] In this sense, *Hands Holding the Void* would be related to Giacometti's subject conflicts, symbolizing his personal anxieties and frustrations materialized in the sculpture's hands. [23]

[21] Breton, *Mad Love*, 26.
[22] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 36.
[23] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 59.

Furthermore, Foster argued in another essay, “An Art of Missing Parts,” that the hands of this artwork, which are holding the invisible object, produce the opposite effect by marking the absence of the object – an aesthetic paradox is produced. Based on Freudian theory, Foster suggested that what was at stake in this sculpture was the very first lost object that one will try to re-find forever in life, which is the female’s (mother’s) breast.[24] The female breast is precisely the body part focused in *Hands Holding the Void*. Nevertheless, Foster suggests that Giacometti was fascinated with enigma, desire, and seduction.

In the article “La présence active du vide: "L'Objet invisible" de Giacometti,” Valéry Hugotte argued that *The Invisible Object* led Giacometti to work from the live model again because it revived an old artistic question, the question of seeing and representing. In this sense, the invisible object is purely an artistic question. The void between the hands is the most critical aspect of this work, and according to Hugotte, it represents a presence that only exists due to its absence. Thus, the female figure gathers everything together in the intensity of its desire. This is the meaning of the dialogue that Breton proposed with this sculpture in *Mad Love* (Breton analyzed the statue as the emanation of the desire to love and to be loved in search of its real human object). So, for Hugotte, this statue is a work that represents the desire, the desire of desire, awakening the desire in the other, in the viewer. Briefing analyzing the figure’s eyes, Hugotte argued that this double gaze marked by distinct eye shapes suggests the presence of death, something that deeply marked Giacometti’s life.

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[24] Hal Foster, *An Art of Missing Part* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 137 – 138.

According to psychoanalytical theories, “the breast is our first sexual object, it is also our first lost object. Again, though need can be satisfied, desire cannot be, and in this desire the, breast appears lost to the infant. It can hallucinate the breast (in desire begins fantasy and vice versa) or find a substitute (what is the thumb, or the pacifier, but the breast in disguise, in displacement?). On the one hand, then, "the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it’s on the other hand, this refining is forever a seeking: the object cannot be regained because it is fantasmatic, and desire cannot be satisfied because it is defined in lack. This is the paradoxical formula of the realism as well: a lost object, it is never recovered but forever sought; always a substitute, it drives on its own search.”

Furthermore, according to the author, this work and its imperious and pleading hands have a Surrealist aura in terms of form and concept. But also, it is the origin of Giacometti's artworks developed in his mature phase after breaking with Surrealism, especially his emphasis on the hands. Thus, the more Giacometti tended to a more familiar reality as part of his scientific research, and the more effectively he approached it, the more the abyss widened between his engagement in Surrealism and his artistic production. This, too, was brutally revealed to him, in 1934, at the hands of the statue that summoned him to share his quest and invited him to merge with her.[25] Thus, for Hugotte, this work is a tragedy foretold. Finally, Giacometti's work is not just one that calls or questions the gaze; it is also one of those rare and authentically modern works in which the gaze itself is at the center of the questioning.

In an interview for the art critic and curator David Sylvester in 1965, Giacometti stated that the Surrealist atmosphere influenced him during the period in which *The Invisible Object* was created. Interestingly, even recognizing that the sculpture was created in a Surrealist career moment, Giacometti challenged the method of objective chance, suggesting that the Surrealist's notions of accidental and automatic did not actually work. He said: "In the first place, I never have believed in chance, either then or now. I don't know what the words mean. And in the constructions, I made there was no chance – or at any rate I didn't accept it."[26] The artist argued that he no longer understood several of the Surrealists' methods, and that nobody worked as automatically as Breton did. For Giacometti, what brought the Surrealists together was more politically connected than artistically. In this sense, for the artist, the statue seemed to have addressed his artistic purposes at the time (to create a

[25] Valéry Hugotte, "La présence active du vide : "L'Objet invisible" de Giacometti," *Esprit*, No. 189 (2) (Février 1993): 63, accessed September 7, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24275650.

[26] David Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 143.

statue precisely the way he pictured it in his head) without any myth connected to it, without any thought that all is lost or inspired by a moment of chance.

However, Sylvester himself offered an interpretation of the sculpture. He suggested that the ambivalence contained in *Hands Holding the Void*, the tension between the opposites, life and death, presence and absence, represents the sculptor's personal anxieties. Moreover, the void between the hands is being offered to the viewer as the viewer's eyes move around the sculpture's components, especially the figure's dead gaze. Sylvester reinforces the episode in which Giacometti and Breton found the object (each man found one object), indicating a strong bond between them – which was broken after Giacometti started to work from life.

For the French art critic and philosopher Didi-Huberman, the hands configure the central point of this work. For the critic, this was part of Giacometti's strategy to carry the spectator's gaze towards the void between the figure's hand. He argued that "if the 'invisible object' was an object, something or someone, Giacometti would not have neglected to give it a figural representation in one way or another (allegorically, for example)."[27] This means that there are two contradictory objects presented in Giacometti's work, an object presented as invisible, that is, the artist framed the absence. Thus, the void is not a sign of privation but a "structure of overdetermination"[28]

According to Didi-Huberman, the void in *Hands Holding the Void* is related to an inner void, and he tried to name the loss evoked. Here, the critic proposed a complex discussion about the cube in Giacometti's *oeuvre*, which, in summary, points to an object, *par excellence*, as an interior dimension.

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[27] Didi-Huberman, *The Cube and The Face: Around a Sculpture by Alberto Giacometti*, 54.

[28] Didi-Huberman, 54-55.

Furthermore, the critic discussed the sculpture as a symbolic reference to the artist's father's death. He argued that the artwork is close to a funerary statue from the Solomon Islands, which Giacometti saw at the Ethnographic Museum of Basel. Using a bird as a funerary symbol suggests that "the *Invisible Object* placed its defective nature in a dialectics of *mourning*."[29]

The French poet and philosopher Yves Bonnefoy tried to understand *Hands Holding the Void* without Breton's interpretation. For Bonnefoy, this work has an oneiric nature (referring to dreams, fantasies, and conflicts), and it represents a product of Giacometti's unconscious. To start his interpretation, Bonnefoy highlighted the effect that the artwork's material created (the first version was made of plaster), giving the sculpture its supernatural, deadly, and ghostly impression and existence. Then, he compared the sculpture with Florentine Cimabue's *The Virgin and Child in Majesty surrounded by Six Angels* in the Louvre, which Giacometti had seen before, and which he loved. Bonnefoy discussed in his extensive biography of Alberto Giacometti, *Alberto Giacometti: A Biography of His Work*, how both figures are similar in iconography terms, particularly the hands and the throne. The sculpture's figure recalls the Madonna of the Italian *trecento*; the only element missing in Giacometti's work is the child, but one could imagine having the child there, in front of the breasts, in front of the body, which Bonnefoy described as nude, but virginal. Thus, the author assigned the void to the role of the child. The child is present and absent between the female figure's hands, and in Bonnefoy's opinion, this indicated the inner truth of this artwork, an Oedipal interpretation of the sculpture, discussing Giacometti's relationship with his mother, which was intense and complex. Giacometti's mother, Annetta, expected something more than extraordinary from him; she expected the impossible from him. The invisible object in this context is a junction of Giacometti's children's fantasies, dreams, and

[29] Didi-Huberman, 58.

nightmares. Bonnefoy recalled Breton's note when he said that Giacometti lowered the statue's hands, losing the absent but present object and its effect, pointing, according to Bonnefoy's interpretation, to the fact that a mother can both raise and destroy her child.

Bonnefoy concluded his interpretation of *Hands Holding the Void by* challenging Breton's interpretation, how he tried to favor Surrealism (settling as the example of an objective chance), and Giacometti's infiltration of this artistic movement through this sculpture.

Moreover, Richard Stamelman, in his article "The Art of the Void: Alberto Giacometti and the Poets of 'L'Ephémère'" discussed the relevance of the void present in Giacometti's oeuvre, starting from the poem that Bonnefoy wrote and the text Du Bouchet published in 1967 called *L'Ephémère* (*The Ephemeral*), devoted to Giacometti. *The Invisible Object* was the poem's main inspiration. According to Stamelman, the focus of this statue is "the immaterial and ubiquitous presence of the forces of death and nothingness which exist in the world but have no precise, concrete formulation, no reality that can be represented other than by an invisibility or an absence."[30] The figure's body, the expression on her face, the manner her knees are bent, all aspects of this work point to the "terrifying nature of the unknown and unseen object."[31] All the visible signs and elements of this statue point to invisibility. For the author, Giacometti's sculpture frames the enigma of absence, valuing the void, creating a paradoxical effect on it, and giving it a tangible form. Based on Bonnefoy's ideas of *The Invisible Object*, Stamelman argued that this artwork represents the idea of *L'Etranger* (the foreign) and the awareness of death and fear that follows homelessness.

[30] Richard Stamelman, "The Art of the Void: Alberto Giacometti and the Poets of 'L'Ephémère,'" *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 22, No. 4, The Poet as Art Critic (Winter, 1982), 19, accessed September 12, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26283959.

[31] Richard Stamelman, "The Art of the Void: Alberto Giacometti and the Poets of 'L'Ephémère,'" 19.

With all its paradoxes, *The Invisible Object* marked a shift in Giacometti's artmaking process, from memory to live model, from object sculpture to human figure sculpture, and from a Surrealist Giacometti to an existentialist one. After breaking with the Surrealist group, Giacometti became close friends with the famous French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. The philosopher had the opportunity to write about *Hands Holding the Void* in 1948 for Giacometti's exhibition organized at Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. For that occasion, Sartre wrote an essay entitled *The Search for the Absolute*, which was the preface of the exhibition catalog. There, Sartre stated that the plaster was the best material Giacometti could possibly have used in his search for the absolute and to create the paradox between the being and the nothing and the existing possibilities. Sartre argues that plaster is a spiritual, weightless, and moldable material; however, it is also the most fragile, ephemeral, and least eternal. The material is very close to the human experience. Sartre interpreted *Hands Holding the Void* with an existentialist lens and proposed that Giacometti's ideas were clearly existential.

b. Literature Review Analysis

It is interesting to observe that the understanding of the uncanny in the literature review, which emphasized mainly scholars and theorists from the art history field, is that of a quality of the artistic object, and not as a quality of feeling, an effect on the spectator, that Freud proposed. The art field understands the uncanny as an artistic technique, an intention of the artist, and a characteristic of the object. This is a different understanding from what psychoanalysis originally proposed, which takes the uncanny as an effect on the viewer that occurs from the return of certain repressed content. Within the repertoire of surrealist art, many works conjure the effects of the uncanny. Different scholars discuss how surrealist artists could incorporate principles that allow their work to promote an uncanny effect. Furthermore, several pieces from the surrealist movement share this uncanny effect.

In *The Uncanny*, Freud discussed that the psychoanalyst rarely feels compelled to research the topic of aesthetics but occasionally takes an interest in some particular topic.[32] These conditions may help explain why it was challenging to find a few relevant references that focused on this thesis's primary subject of interest.

Overall, the first section of this Literature Review shows that surrealism is widely associated aesthetically with the uncanny and that the artists' part of this artistic school used it as a strategy to rupture traditional and aesthetic requirements, as part of its revolutionary character, and to promote a specific effect that was part of the movement's purpose. The search for new formal parameters and the valorization of the irrational, of the unconscious favors and strengthens the exploration of new aesthetic precepts and artistic logic, among them the uncanny. There is no disagreement between the authors regarding the uncanny qualification of surrealist works. Critics, scholars, and art historians presented greater dialogue with Freud's work, although many understand the uncanny from the point of view of the art object.

Regarding Alberto Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void (The Invisible Object)*, many scholars and theorists discussed and interpreted this sculpture considering a psychoanalytical viewpoint, indicating a connection with the artist's unconscious and subjectivity. However, it is important to emphasize that Giacometti never offered any information that would indicate the relationship of this sculpture with his inner life. Surrealists worked with tension and paradox as an artistic value, and this ambivalence can also be noticed in Giacometti's sculpture and also in his relationship with surrealism. Through the different references presented, it is possible to note that *The Invisible Object* is a complex and contradictory artwork. Several authors see this sculpture as uncanny, as it

[32] Freud, *O Infamiliar (The Uncanny)*, 29.

promotes a certain strangeness, discomfort, and mystery in the spectator and even the artist himself.

While psychoanalysis was employed mostly as a theory of the object and an interpretative method for analyzing the artist's unconscious, nothing was discussed about the possible insights that sculpture and its ambivalent character enables about the human experience, and about a knowledge, this one unconscious, that the artist has about the rawest aspect human circumstances and a condition of how to address, through art, these questions.

Research Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative approach to visual art and to written texts. Its objective is to demonstrate through Alberto Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void* how Surrealism is related to the psychoanalytical concept of the Real that the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan developed, especially when considering the sphere of artistic production. In this sense, psychoanalytical theory is dominant in this thesis. Starting from the construction of a methodological proposal that approximates these two tense fields of art and psychoanalysis, this thesis relies on the development of a relationship established between methodologies in Art History and Psychoanalysis founded on the connections between psychoanalysis and art in the paths of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

Twentieth-century art and Freudian psychoanalytic theory were created in the same era. Since then, approximation and tensions have haunted their relationship to each other.[33] In psychoanalysis, Freud resorted to the analysis of works of art and concerned himself with phenomena related to them throughout the elaboration of psychoanalytic theory. Art provided the creator of psychoanalysis metaphors for the psychic processes encountered in his clinical practice, such as infantile sexuality, narcissism, and fantasy, as well as being used as a reference in several texts, such as *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910) and *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914). Freud used art, sometimes interpreting artworks and artists, sometimes affirming that there is in the artist himself an enigmatic knowledge, which anticipates the discoveries of psychoanalysis. Freud thereby positioned knowledge on the side of psychoanalysis. Conversely, Lacan established his position through a contextualized reading of artworks with the development of the psychoanalytic theory itself. In this sense, it is possible to find in Freud and Lacan's work the idea that art is a testimony of the

[33] Tania Rivera, *Arte e Psicanálise* (Art and Psychonalayis), (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2002), 7.

unconscious and not an illustration of it. From a Lacanian perspective, such arguments build a parallel between art and psychoanalysis through the notion of Real approaching art through the enigmatic, that which cannot be shown and that which points to a singularity of the artist. This is the methodological approach addressed in this current discussion of the work of Alberto Giacometti and Surrealism.

For the art history field, why is the relationship with psychoanalysis interesting? Psychoanalysis is used as an epistemology centered on the notion of the subject and a critical device to investigate the object of study of Art History. Artists, art historians, and critics have been interested in psychoanalysis since its inception. As an example, I can mention Breton and his interest in the psychoanalytic technique of free association (which invites the patient to speak whatever comes to mind, without judgment) for the development of psychic automatism, one of the fundamental artistic methods of Surrealism. Furthermore, the art historian and critic Hal Foster relies on various psychoanalytical notions that often guide his discussions, as we see the importance of *das unheimlich* (uncanny) for thinking about Surrealism in his book *Compulsive Beauty* (1993) or the notion of the Real in *The Return of the Real* (2014). Some other theorists, such as Rosalind Krauss, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Jacques Rancière, appropriate concepts from psychoanalysis in their reflections in the field of art.

In a 2007 interview for the "Revista de História da Arte" from the Institute of Art History of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Universidade Nova in Lisbon, Portugal, the French philosopher Hubert Damisch said that we should keep questioning ourselves about what art is every time we are before an artwork.[34] Moreover, for Damisch, art transforms, and its transforming character questions a universal art history while

[34] Joana Cunha Leal, "Entrevista com Hubert Damisch" (Interview with Hubert Damisch), *Revista de História da Arte*, 3, (2007): 7-18, accessed September 9, 2022, http://hdl.handle.net/10362/12466.

indicating something singular in each artwork. This singular radical, this emphasis on singularity, which Damisch indicated, is the most significant contribution of psychoanalysis to the arts field. If the issue of uniqueness defines the psychoanalytical clinic and research, taking each work of art or artist one by one, singularly, is how psychoanalysis can be included in the field of the arts. For each work and artist, art must be rethought, and it is necessary to remain open to this attitude. In this sense, it is critical to remained open to reflect about how psychoanalytic concepts allows thinking about the artwork discussed in this thesis.

This remainder of this study is organized into two parts. The first section consists of a theoretical trajectory. I outline psychoanalytical concepts that are going to be fundamental for the readers to understand the thesis proposed, such as the concept of the death drive in Freud and the theoretical developments that Lacan made later, such as the *objet petit a*, the Real, and jouissance. This is written directly and succinctly, providing the necessary knowledge for readers who are not from the field of psychoanalysis to understand the discussion proposed in this thesis.

The second part of my thesis consists of a brief discussion about Surrealism, emphasizing the importance of automatism and objective chance, which are notions that define the Surrealist project and are at the center of the group's artistic production. These two procedures are intimately connected with psychoanalytical methods and theories. Freudian's free association inspired automatism, although its aim was purely artistic, and the objective change suggests a theoretical relation with the repetition compulsion. Following this discussion, I analyze the Surrealist sculpture *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object* by Alberto Giacometti, seeking to connect and emphasize the theoretical discussion proposed in the first part of the thesis. Moreover, a psychoanalytical analysis is also applied in this portion of the thesis, intending to address the theoretical discussion of the first part of the paper, that is, indicating how the real is a concept intrinsic to Surrealism.

Furthermore, my usage of psychoanalysis in this thesis is both critical and clinical. This means that I do not apply psychoanalysis to Surrealism or to Giacometti's life and art, but that I consider the singularity of the movement, the artist, and the artwork. This is the psychoanalytical practice's major contribution to research method of this thesis. Finally, this is a theoretical thesis directed toward developing a new theory.

Results

I. Essential Psychoanalysis Concepts

Considering the research methodology chosen for this thesis, and given its approach to the psychoanalytic field, it is necessary to outline some concepts that are critical for this work, and that will guide the following proposed discussions about Giacometti's *The Invisible Object* and Surrealism. My discussion of the relationship between Surrealism and Giacometti's sculpture with the notion of the Lacanian Real is based on psychoanalytical rhetoric. For the sake of clarity, it is fundamental to delimit some psychoanalytical concepts that will drive this investigation: the Freudian notion of the uncanny and the death drive, the Lacanian jouissance, *das Ding* (the Thing) and *objet petit a*, and finally, the Real.

We all know that the work of art is, "traditionally," an object of investigation in the field of art and not in psychoanalysis. However, considering the analyzed context and the proposed work methodology, I approach some concepts and reflections that psychoanalysis proposed, particularly those by Freud and Lacan. At the same time that conceptualizing some notions from another field can present itself as a challenge, given its density and technicality, approaching such definitions has become fundamental for developing an open and sensitive proposal to the questions that Surrealism and Giacometti's sculpture ask.

The psychoanalytic concepts circumscribed here are presented in a summarized and concise way. My objective is to provide a broadening of the approach to the articulations between art and psychoanalysis, especially regarding the central issue at stake in this thesis.

a. From the uncanny to the death drive in Freud

For the Literature Review, I was unable to find any peer-reviewed references that dealt specifically with the relationship between Surrealism and the Lacanian Real or the jouissance or Giacometti's *The Invisible Object* with this same concept. Therefore, I adopted as a strategy to start my own research through the 'word-concept' of the uncanny, a notion

that in Freud announces the development of the death drive, and, which later, in Lacan's interpretation of Freud's work, serves as a basis for the concepts of jouissance and the Real.

In 1919, Freud wrote the book *Das Unheimlich*.[35] This critical text marks a prelude to his theory of the death drive since it is possible to find essential elements that led Freud to fully articulate the concept of the death drive one year later, in 1920.[36] Freud understood the *unheimlich* as an aesthetic concept, but the aesthetic for the psychoanalyst is described as the "quality of our feeling."[37] It is not related strictly to the theory of beauty. In this essay, Freud reflects on the reasons why the field of aesthetic neglects the *unheimlich*, as opposed to what happens to the concept of beauty, which receives wide attention.

In Freud's conception, the *unheimlich* is related to the return of the repressed, which leads the subject to feel strangeness, anxiety, and angst through the fruition of an artwork (but also in other life experiences that are not related to the artistic field). *Unheimlich* is a

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[35] Due to the impossibility of defining descriptively and conceptually what *Das Unheimlich* means, instead of forcing a translation of the term from German to English, popularly translated as 'uncanny,' I have adopted as a strategy to use and maintain the metapsychological and semantic complicity of the term.

[36] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, transl. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), XVIII-XIX.

It is known that Freud was working on both "The Uncanny" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" concurrently. Central ideas to the death drive are already visible in the first article, although the conceptual definition of the death drive only appeared in chapter 6, added to the manuscript in 1920. In the editor's note: "Freud had begun working on a first draft of Beyond the Pleasure Principle in March 1919, and he reported the draft as finished in the following May. During the same month he was completing his paper on 'The Uncanny (1919A), which includes a paragraph setting out much of the gist of the present work in a few sentences. In this paragraph he refers to the 'compulsion to repeat as a phenomenon exhibited in the behavior of children and in psychoanalytic treatment; he suggests that this compulsion is something derived from the most intimate nature of the instincts; and he declares that it is powerful enough to disregard the pleasure principle. (...) There is, however, no allusion to the 'death instincts". He adds that he has already completed a detailed exposition of the subject. The paper on 'The Uncanny' containing this summary was published in the autumn of 1919. But Freud held back Beyond the Pleasure Principle for another year. In the early part of 1920, he was once more at work on it, and now, for the first time apparently, there is a reference to the 'death instincts' in a letter to Eitingon of February 20. He was still revising the work in May and June, and it was finally completed by the middle of July 1920;" Freud's 1919 and 1920 essays are contemporary to the foundation of Surrealism and arose in the same context. They were all influenced by the consequences of the deployment of the First World War (1914-1919) and the atmosphere surrounding Europe during these years.

[37] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 144.

paradoxical notion; it is everything that should have remained secret and hidden but has still somehow appeared. Therefore, the uncanny is a category that opened a new perspective for thinking about art that is not under the primacy of beauty, in a traditional sense. Thus, Freud's aesthetic investigation came from the terrifying or what "evokes fear and dread."[38] For the psychoanalyst, the anguish here is endowed with an aesthetic nucleus, "which allows us to distinguish the 'uncanny' within the field of the frightening."[39]

For the psychoanalyst, the *unheimlich* is thus a feeling associated with a repression that has been revived, making the subject anxious about this ambiguous phenomenon, once known but repressed, once familiar but now unfamiliar. What characterizes the *unheimlich* is, therefore, this closeness and familiarity allied to the occult. There is only *unheimlich* if there is repetition; in other words, the *unheimlich* is something that returns, something that repeats itself, but at the same time presents itself as different.[40]

The sense of uncanniness arises from that which is both fearful and terrifying. About that, Freud argued: "There is no doubt that this [*unheimlich*] belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread. It is equally beyond doubt that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general."[41]

The *unheimlich* poses the question of ambivalence from the etymological question of the term. The most popular translations in French, English, and Spanish of the German term fail to recapitulate the principal reference to the familiar, to the known (*heim*, literally translated as 'homely' in English), which defines and limits the notion of the term. However, the negative prefix *un* in German provides the idea of something that is not familiar,

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[38] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 144.

[39] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 144.

[40] Luiz A. Garcia-Roza, *Acaso e Repetição em Psicanálise – Uma Introdução à Teoria das Pulsões.* (Chance and Repetition in Psychoanalysis – An Introduction to the Theory of Drives), (Brazil: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1993), 24.

[41] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 144.

unfamiliar, or unknown. The paradoxical game proposed from the word's etymology also appears as an essential resource for the experience and sensation of the *unheimlich*.

Another critical element that Freud addresses in this essay connected with the *unheimlich* feeling is the idea of the double, that of "constant recurrence of the same thing."[42] The double effect is a source of ambivalence, and it is not only fundamental, but it is at stake in this psychoanalytical construct. Freud articulates dualism consistently as a tension of oppositions, such as life and death, animated and inanimate, and reality and fantasy. Ultimately, the double effect reveals the fear of castration. This notion refers to the compulsion to repeat (the original term in German is *Wiederholungszwang*), the central character of the idea of the death drive, which Freud developed for the first time in *Das Unheimlich.* Notably, the notion of the death drive was not proposed in this book and was more effectively articulated in the book published in 1920. The repetition of compulsion brings at its core the unpleasant sensation of an experience that generates suffering in the subject but simultaneously generates some satisfaction beyond pleasure. That is, there is a tendency of the subject to expose himself again and again to a distressing or painful situation, creating a feeling of both displeasure and pleasure.

In 1920, Freud published the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, considered by many the most crucial book in Freudian theory. Here, Freud proposed two innovations in psychoanalytical theory: an in-depth formulation of the concept of compulsive repetition and the death drive (the original term in German is *Todestrieb*). The first is related to an unconscious repetition that brings both suffering and satisfaction to the subject; and the second brings the subject to a "life of inorganic substance."[43] According to Freud, the death drive manifests in the psyche as a tendency toward the inorganic state, the self-destruction,

[42] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 159.
[43] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond Pleasure Principle*, 55.

and eliminating any psychic tension. The construction of this concept took place through the observation of clinical phenomena. Such phenomena were mainly the repetition of traumatic dreams, repetition in transference, and childish play. The psychoanalyst realized from his clinical observations that his patients often repeated situations that did not include any apparent possibility of pleasure. The content of what was repeated was essentially marked by the deepest displeasure. Even when these experiences had been lived before, they could not be related to any pleasurable experience. Still, even without providing any kind of pleasure to the subject, these phenomena were reproduced "under the pressure of a compulsion."[44] Thus, repetition was the foundation for conceptualizing the death drive. The question that guided Freud in the face of the issues that he observed in the phenomena described was how it was possible that situations whose content is eminently unpleasant for the subject can be repeated continuously.[45]

This notion of the death drive was influenced by the concept of compulsive repetition, which Freud "discovered" while caring for veterans who would repeat their painful and traumatic battlefield experiences through dreams, in direct contradiction to the primacy of the pleasure principle.[46] The compulsive repetition configures a central aspect of the death drive. It brings at its core the unpleasant sensation of an experience that generates suffering in the subject but simultaneously causes satisfaction beyond the limits of the pleasure principle. In other words, life events are perceived as disturbing to the psychic balance; thus, it is up to the death drive to recover this lost balance. The death drive's conservative nature and its tendency to return to the inorganic state are characteristic; "the aim of all life is death," as

[44] Freud, *Beyond Pleasure Principle*, 15.

[45] Marco Antônio Coutinho Jorge, *Fundamentos da Psicanálise I* (Psychoanalysis Fundamentals I), (Brazil: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1998), 61.

[46] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, xviii-xix.
The pleasure principle is the subject's tendency to be directed toward immediate drive satisfaction and an immediate relief from pain or discomfort.

Freud argued.[47] Thus, if every living being emerged from the non-living being, the death drive indicates the return to this previous state. Furthermore, according to Freud's drive dualism, in opposition to the death drive, there is the life drive. The death and life drives are not in opposition as they may sound; however, the purpose of the life drive is not to avoid death but to avoid that it happens in an unnatural way. The conservative, restitutive character of the drive is intimately related to its repetitive aspect, that is, it is the conservative character that emanates the tendency of compulsive repetition.

Later, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan not only defined repetition as one of the four main psychoanalytical concepts in his *Seminar 11 – The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* but also developed the concept of the jouissance from Freud's death drive.

b. The jouissance paradox and *das Ding* (the Thing)

Lacan gave another name to Freud's death drive: jouissance. Following the ideas proposed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the notion of the jouissance refers to the deadly vector intrinsic to every subject. There is a thrust-to-jouissance, a propulsion towards death within the human experience, that aims to zero out inner tensions absolutely.[48]

The notion of jouissance within Lacan's *oeuvre* is extensive and heterogenic.[49] Its development changed and transformed along with his work, and it served different propositions in Lacan's teaching. Thus, it could be an entire thesis itself. In this sense, I will

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[47] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 32.

[48] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1991), 80.

Lacan, in his reading of Freud's death drive, stated that in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, the psychoanalyst was not talking about the death of living beings in a biological notion but rather of "human experience, human interchange, intersubjectivity", for there is something that Freud observes in man that man constrains him to step out of the limits of life.

[49] Christian Dunker, *O Cálculo Neurótico do Gozo* (Brazil: Zagodoni, 2020), 65.

focus on providing a brief conceptualization of the jouissance that addresses the need of this thesis.

The term jouissance comes from the French *jouir*, and it means 'to benefit from,' 'to profit from, or 'to enjoy'[50] Distinctly from the word enjoy (*plaisir* in French), jouissance indicates the point beyond enjoyment that always has a deadly reference, a paradoxical pleasure, reaching an almost intolerable level of psychic excitation.[51] While in enjoyment, the pleasure follows the pleasure principle, that is, the law of homeostasis and the lowest possible level of psychic tension, the subject's enjoyment is limited. On the other hand, the jouissance transgresses this functioning, going beyond the pleasure principle. Jouissance brings unconscious satisfaction to the subject, even though it brings with it a perception of conscious unpleasure.[52]

In his *oeuvre*, Freud already distinguished the jouissance from enjoyment through adoption of two different German terms: *Lust*, when he meant enjoyment, desire, pleasure, and *Genuss*, for jouissance. However, Freud did not conceptualize the jouissance, but he defined its sphere, situated beyond the pleasure principle, in which manifest pleasure in pain and repetitive phenomena that refer to the death drive. It was only in Lacan that the death drive was redefined as the jouissance, which insists on repeating the unconscious signifying chain. Thus, although the idea of jouissance commonly refers to enjoyment, it actually comes into association with notions such as displeasure, pain, and disgust.[53]

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[50] Jouissance is understood both in legal terms of rights and property and sexual orgasm.

[51] Elizabeth Roudinesco and Michael Plon, *Dicionário de Psicanálise* (Psychoanalysis Dictionaire), (Brazil: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1998), 299.

The distinction between enjoyment and *jouissance* was impossible to be established in the English language until 1988, after the adoption of the term *jouissance* in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

[52] There is a fundamental distinction between satisfaction and pleasure in psychoanalysis. Both pleasure and displeasure. Both pleasure and displeasure can lead to satisfaction for the subject. Something that is consciously perceived as pleasure or displeasure can lead to unconscious satisfaction.

[53] Patrick Valas, *As Dimensões do Gozo* (Brazil: Jorge Zahar, 2001), 35.

Lacan started to conceptualize jouissance in his *Seminar 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, defining it as the subject's most strange and intimate aspect, and which is situated in the Real.[54] At the same time that the subject searches for absolute satisfaction through the lost object, named *das Ding*, he must retreat from this deadly object, since the absolute jouissance represents the abolishment or dissolution of the subject.

What is *das Ding*? This German term means 'the Thing,' and it consists of the object of the death drive, an object that would provide absolute jouissance if it could be reached. Every human being believes that, once upon a time, full satisfaction was achieved, in a sort of mystic satisfaction experience that took place when the baby withdrew from displeasure through the encounter with the object that relieves his tensions (such as the maternal breast in the very first breastfeeding) and, thus, gives him pleasure. This dynamic configures our first psychic memory of satisfaction. Therefore, what every human believes is that once he had access to *das Ding* (the Thing), and from there, he is thrown into the search for the reencounter of this object, even though he had never possessed it truly - it is a fantasy. In this sense, "the object is by nature a refound object."[55] *Das Ding* is this lost object which is supposed to have been the first object of satisfaction. The lost object guides the search for satisfaction, and it is around the lost object that the psychic apparatus organizes itself. However, it is clear that there is no such object as such, and, if there were, it would be damaged, since the subject is only constituted in the lack. It is from this lost object scenario that the subject is thrown into life.

Das Ding is what resists any attempt at signification or representation; it is the void. It is, in its essence, irreducible to an image or a signifier; it evokes a lack. *Das Ding* is, so to

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[54] The Real, which will be coved further in detail, is part of Lacan's topology together with the Symbolic and the Imaginary. This triad together represents the Borromean knot, Lacan's structure of the subject's psychic.

[55] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1992), 118.

speak, the very inexistence of the object. It is this lack that keeps desire alive, and it is that which the subject will have to deal throughout his existence. Thereby, the basis of the desire is constituted in a simple formulation: for the subject to desire, there must be a lack. The desire is related to the castration, to the lack, because its condition is the loss of the object.

The primordial object is really forever lost. This lack is not a consequence of the loss of a real object, which would have been a source of satisfaction for the subject. Rather, it is because another object takes the place of this lack without bringing to the subject the ideal satisfaction, that nostalgia for the object lost at the origin is generated. *Das Ding* comes instead as the first ever lost object, which the subject, in his desiring quest, seeks to find, from coordinates of pleasure or displeasure, registered in the unconscious. In place of the inaccessible *das Ding*, the subject only finds substitutive objects, which are the objects of fantasy, which mask the dimension of *das Ding*. This emptiness at the center of the subject's system, this loss, results a posteriori from the constitution of the psychic apparatus. If *das Ding* were achieved, it would be a place of suffering and desolation for the subject, because *das Ding* is determined as an empty place.[56]

The incessant search for this lost, impossible object marks the insistence of the compulsive repetition. The repetition of compulsion forces the subject to reproduce acts, ideas, thoughts, or dreams that, in their origin, were generators of suffering, and that retained this painful character. For Lacan, this unconscious mechanism does not consist of the repetition in the meaning of identical, but the repetition of a movement, the search for *das Ding*. Examples of this sort of repetition include, for example, when one watches a play or reads a book. This very first impressions of these lived experiences will not be achieved again, even if the play is watched again or the book is reread. Another example is a person

[56] Marco Antônio Coutinho Jorge, *Fundamentos da Psicanálise II* (Psychoanalysis Fundamentals II), (Brazil: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2010), 142.

with a ‘broken picker’ for choosing partners. Thus, in psychoanalytical terms, it is impossible to claim that pure chance exists.

Thus, so far, I have conceptualized jouissance as a paradoxical experience of pleasure and displeasure, in which an experience leads to a kind of satisfaction through suffering, or pleasure through pain. Within this context, *das Ding* reveals itself as the forever lost object that could provide to the subject absolute jouissance, and that launches the subject into a repetition compulsion, in search of the impossible. However, *das Ding* is the point of emptiness, of the void, where other objects are placed, and also the necessary fundamental lack that installs the desire.

Furthermore, in *Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan postulates that “all art is charactered by a certain mode of organization around this emptiness.”[57] This means that art, while covering the void that *das Ding* makes apparent, simultaneously reveals the void. In this paradoxical game, art appeases and points to the void. Among the examples that Lacan cites is the anamorphism present in Holbein’s painting of *The Ambassadors*. Lacan said:

> (…) at the feet of one of the two men, who is just as well built as you or I, you will see an enigmatic form stretched out on the ground. It looks roughly like fried eggs. If you place yourself at a certain angle from which the painting itself disappears in all its relief by reason of the converging lines of its perspective, you will see a death's head appear, the sign of the classic theme of vanitas.[58]

Still, in *Book VII*, Lacan discusses the ambiguous character of the death drive. In addition to the dimension of the destruction that is inherent to it, there is also another dimension, the will to restart, to create from nothing. Lacan's reasoning implies that, for there to be creation, it is necessary to attain the point of nothingness from which all creation is possible. The psychoanalyst named this notion creation *ex-nihilo*. Lacan conceives the death drive as “creationist,” in the same way that, in its tendency towards absolute zeroing out of

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[57] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 130.
[58] Lacan, *Book VII*, 135.

tension, it is equally promoting the search and creation of something radically new. The death drive thus also expresses, for Lacan, the search for a radical creation that starts from scratch and draws all its strength from there.[59] Thereby, in the death drive, ambiguity exists as a destructive character, but equally creative. Nevertheless, importantly, to create space for something new one has to consent with the lack, give up the jouissance and sustain an ethical position, that is, the desire.

To conclude this brief explanation of the jouissance and *das Ding*: the death drive wants *das Ding*, but it only receives substitute objects, known in Lacanian theory as *objet petit a*. Every day, this vector rules human life; it seeks to obtain an absolute satisfaction, impossible to be achieved. This is the drama, if not the tragedy, of human existence.[60]

c. The *Objet Petit a*

Freud's elaboration of sexuality starts from a premise that Lacan rescued: at the heart of human sexuality is a lack of the object.[61] To this lack, Lacan gave the name of *objet petit a*, or *objet a* (the first letter of the French word *autre*, meaning 'other'), which is the drive's object. In the *Seminar 11 – The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan stated about the *objet a* that "this object, which is in fact simply the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied, Freud tells us, by any object, and whose agency we know only in the form of the lost object, the *petit* a." [62]

The *objet a* is a missing object, or, in Freud's theory, for whom the encounter with the object is always a reencounter, it is a lost object that the subject seeks to find. However, the object *a* is not a concrete object, but an object that does not exist. For Lacan, the object *a* is the Object-Cause of Desire. Desire is always the desire for something that is missing and thus

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[59] Coutinho Jorge, *Fundamentos da Psicanálise II*, 137.
[60] Coutinho Jorge, *Fundamentos da Psicanálise II*, 134.
[61] Coutinho Jorge, *Fundamentos da Psicanálise I*, 139.
[62] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book XI – The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1992), 130.

involves a constant search for the missing object. This means that the object *a* functions as the engine of the structure of desire, that sets desire in motion. In order for the desire to exist, the object needs to be perpetually absent and inaccessible: it has to lack.

Lacan placed the *objet a* at the center of the Borromean knot, where the three orders (real, symbolic, and imaginary) all intersect. Time and space do not permit a full exploration of all the complexity of this positioning of the *objet a*. Therefore, in what follow I will focus on the dimension that matters most in this thesis, which is its Real. Within the real, the object *a* was pointed at *das Ding*, *das Ding*, the impossible object. Thus, the *objet a* as the Object-Cause of Desire while *das Ding* is the fundamental lost object. If analyzed quickly and superficially, there may be confusion between these two psychoanalytic concepts. Lacan proposed a fundamental distinction between them, which is the possibility to differentiate the lost object of the human species and the lost object of the history of each subject. The *objet a* is comprehended as the lost object of the history of each subject, and it can be found in the successive substitute objects that the subject finds for himself. Nevertheless, in these re-encounters, beyond the encounter with a special object since this is the object that induces desire, the subject will always inevitably come across the lost Thing of the human species, which means that it is always, in the reunions with the object, of the repetition of a missed encounter with the real.[63]

Another important distinction between the two terms helps to demystify an oedipalized reading of psychoanalysis that the maternal breast would be *das Ding*. In fact, the maternal object can function for the subject as if it were the lost object by presenting itself as the first object that occupies this place. However, the lost maternal breast is not in itself the impossible object that is characteristic of *das Ding*.

[63] Coutinho Jorge, *Fundamentos da Psicanálise I*, 142.

Because of this impossible reference, the human being is doomed to dissatisfaction, or to the satisfaction that is always partial, since *objet a* promotes some kind of satisfaction, a satisfaction that is not-all, to use the Lacanian term. In other words, *objet a* is responsible for the foundation of desire, which leads the subject incessantly to the attempt to reach the forever lost object and the long-awaited satisfaction. In the absence of this object, the satisfaction of desire is impossible, and it is this impossibility that guarantees the persistence of the movement of desire, the foundation of human existence. What the drive truly wants is the impossible, *das Ding*, but what it receives is *objet a*, which provides it a momentary satisfaction.

Das Ding can be more clearly understood as universal object loss, such as incest, for example, which is a condition imposed on all human beings. O*bjet a* also has its names, which vary from subject to subject, such as the object of art for a collector, bringing an example within the art field. Or it is the desire to eat a certain food, which is satisfied from the moment someone orders it.

Summarizing the construction that I have made so far, *objet a* is related to the foundation of human existence and sexuality through lack. One of the elements that compose sexuality is the drive. O*bjet a* is linked to the drive, providing always partial satisfaction. In this thesis, I made a cut focusing only on the Freudian concept of the death drive. In Lacan, the death drive led to the development of the notion of jouissance, which has *das Ding* as its nucleus. *Das Ding* is also the real character of *objet a* in the Borromean node. While the *objet a* is related to the forever lost object that persuades the subject's desire in the search and to reencounter with the object, *das Ding* is related to the impossible, to the emptiness, the void, that which resists a signifier.

d. The Real in Lacan

During Lacan's teaching, his conception of Real changed radically. I will follow the development of the Real from the 1960s onwards when the French psychoanalyst used it to reformulate his understanding of the relationship between the three psychic orders – Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. The statute of the Real in late Lacan is inseparable from the understanding of the role of fantasy, *objet petit a,* jouissance, and psychic trauma. Within the Real, there is the subject's psychic reality, that is, the unconscious desires, fantasies, and the leftovers (which are inaccessible to any subjective thought).

Psychic trauma is not necessarily something that happens to a person in social reality, but rather a psychical event.[64] The concept of trauma indicates that the subject has a certain blockage or fixation that prevents the process of signification and elaboration. A traumatic memory, for example, is fixed in a person's mind, causing him intense mental disturbance and suffering. No matter how he tries to signify and express this memory, it keeps returning and repeating the suffering indefinitely. For Lacan, the notion that trauma is real, that is, it generates a feeling of pain or angst in the subject in social reality, insofar as it remains unsymbolizable.

The experience of trauma reveals how the Real can never be completely processed symbolically. It is impossible to symbolize the thoughts or suffering in language. There is always something left over. In other words, there is always a residue that cannot be transformed through language. It is this residue, this excess, that Lacan named the Real. The psychoanalyst emphasized the impossibility of the encounter with the Real: "the Real is the

[64] Reality, Real, and psychic reality are three different notions. While reality is related to the exterior, material reality, shared socially between people, psychic reality is a term adopted by psychoanalysis to designate a subject's form of existence that is interior, distinguished from material reality. In turn, the Real that Lacan developed in his *oeuvre* refers to as a psychic instance part of the subject's psychic order, together with the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

impossible."[65] For Lacan, the Real is associated with the death drive and jouissance. The Real has a core, which is impenetrable, beyond any interpretation, a nucleus that misses all the representations, images, words, signifiers, and language. Nothing can fill this gap. This core is *das Ding*.

In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book XI - The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan referred to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and approached the Real in terms of compulsion and repetition. The French psychoanalyst distinguished two different aspects of repetition: first, the Symbolic, which depends on the compulsion of signifiers (automaton), and the Real, which is the interruption of the automaton by a traumatic encounter that the subject is unable to cope with (*tuché*). Generated by the Real of trauma, the lack of symbolization perpetuates repition. As Lacan stated, the Real is "something that always returns to the same place."[66]

If Freud located the trauma within the scope of the death drive, Lacan conceptualizes it as the Real and impossible to symbolize. Thus, the Real is defined as what escapes the symbolic, it can be neither spoken nor written. In this manner, it is related to the impossible, defined as that which never ceases to be written. Names for the Real include death and the encounter with sexuality.

Lacan retakes a Freudian formulation to show the different ways in which the subject can position himself around *das Ding*'s emptiness. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud argued: "It might be maintained that a case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art, that an obsessional neurosis is a caricature of a religion and that a paranoic delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system."[67] Lacan resumed his considerations about the nature of neuroses and

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[65] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book XVII – The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2007), 143.

[66] Lacan, *Book VII*, 75.

[67] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 85.

discussed that religion is a way of circumventing *das Ding* that preserves its mythical place, in the form of something mysterious that must be kept at a distance, avoiding the emptiness; philosophy, which Lacan replaced with science, denies the existence of *das Ding* in a process that would resemble foreclosure, in such a way that it seeks to unravel at all costs the empty object. Finally, art is a way of circling *das Ding* that recreates an object-centered state. It exposes the void from another object that is arranged in that place. Lacan supports the idea that in artistic creation, the subject does not avoid the emptiness of *das Ding*. While science or religion fill this void with the authoritarianism of their discourses, art captures the object insofar as it does not deny *das Ding*. This means that it is in the art that the missing object – *objet a* – can exist. Art places emptiness at the center of creation, and it is with it that the artist works. Ultimately, the artwork builds a significant border around this empty place that is also defined as real. Therefore, art is a form of circumscription of *das Ding*. It is, above all, an indication of the Real or, according to Lacan, an object created around the void. This means that the artist does not erase *das Ding*: he keeps it at the center of his creation.

Lacan argued in the *Book VII* that "neither science nor religion is of a kind to save *das Ding* or to give it to us,"[68] which leads to deduction that only art allows an explanation of *das Ding*, as it not only maintains the void at its center but also does so from an object that can be put in that place. From there, Lacan argues that sublimation is a form of organization of the void, that is, to create a border around the vortex of the Real. Art effectively manages to elevate an object to the dignity of *das Ding*, as the paradigmatic definition of sublimation in Lacanian theory suggests. Sublimation is a destiny of the drive, and it refers to an object that "may fill the function that enables it not to avoid *das Ding* as signifier, but to represent it."[69] With the emptiness of *Das Ding*, sublimation becomes a powerful formulation for thinking

[68] Lacan, *Book VII*, 134.
[69] Lacan, *Book VII*, 119.

about art and the artistic. Based on Lacan's formulation, it is understood that through sublimation, the object is given dignity. The worthy object, the work of art, is ethical due to its opacity as a worthy thing that goes beyond mere representation because sublimation is not simply the creation around the void, but it also requires that the artists make it explicit. In its way of apprehending the object, art brings out the hole of *das Ding*, the uncanny, the more intimate stranger. Lacan quotes Picasso to illustrate his understanding of art's relationship to *das Ding*.

> You cannot fail to see that in the celebrated expression of Picasso, "I do not seek, I find," that it is the finding (*trouver*), the *trobar* of the Provençal troubadours and the *trouvères*, and of all the schools of rhetoric, that takes precedence over the seeking. Obviously, what is found is sought, but sought in the paths of the signifier. Now this search is in a way an antipsychic search that by its place and function is beyond the pleasure principle.[70]

In our psychoanalytic formulation, Lacan re-read and further developed the Freudian notion of the death drive as jouissance. This Lacanian term proposes a contradiction, the pleasure that a subject obtains from suffering. Compulsive repetition is a key feature of jouissance. Nevertheless, what is repeated? It is the search for *das Ding*, the core of the Real, the forever lost object, the 'no-thing'. However, *das Ding* is empty, thus, impossible. So, what the human drive, the death drive (the drive that I am focusing on here), wants is *das Ding*, but it only receives substitute objects, *objet petit a*, which causes a partial and momentary satisfaction.

How to think, then, about the relationship with art and, more specifically, with Surrealism, on the question of the object as elevated to the dignity of the unrepresentable, of what is lacking, what is excluded? Or what is always beyond, that is, without buffering the lack or avoiding it by the signifier? With the delineation of these psychoanalytical concepts, I investigate now how the ambiguity that the void presents in the hands of Giacometti's *Hands*

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[70] Lacan, *Book VII*, 118-119.

Holding by Void operates as a veil that hides and reveals *Das Ding*. From the Surrealist technique of the found object, used in the creation of the sculpture, and relationship of this technique with another key method of movement, the automatism, it is possible to understand how the surrealists placed the Real at the center of their art.

II. A Reading of Surrealism with Psychoanalysis

Modern art has as its fundamental characteristic, despite the singularity of each artistic movement and artist grouped within this category, the rupture with all previous and traditional notions of art and art institutions, including established aesthetic values. Influenced by technological advancements and the new urban lifestyle, the modernist movements broke with traditional art forms of expression, sometimes fascinated by the emerging culture of the early 20th century, others criticizing and repudiating it.[71]

After the First World War (1914-1918), in favor of a new aesthetic canon, affirmed by a strong denial of all the current parameters and the search for a revolutionary expression, the avant-garde movements of the time became interested in such psychological concepts as the spontaneous and the irrational. In this context, artists turned their attention to non-Western art, madness, and subjectivity. Within this context, Surrealism was born. Surrealism was an avant-garde movement, and a reflection and a consequence of the spirit of modern times. Its foundation coincides with the end of World War I, and the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945) marked its end.[72] It is heir to previous avant-gardes, such as Cubism, Futurism, and, mainly, Dadaism.

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[71] Peter Collier and Judy Davies, *Modernism and the European Unconscious,* Ed. Peter Collier and Judy Davies (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 13.

[72] David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: OUP Oxford, 2004), 1.

In 1924, the French poet André Breton issued the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, the document which officially inaugurated Surrealism as an artistic movement. Responsible for the presentation and theoretical conception of the *Manifesto*, Breton became the group's undisputed leader for the next decades and the voice that determined the Surrealists' values, who could contribute to the movement, and ultimately, who was or was not a Surrealist. The French writer Guillaume Apollinaire, who died in 1918, coined the word "Surealism." In the poet's honor, André Breton adopted the term to name the art movement.[73] In the beginning, Surrealism was a literary movement, a group of poets and writers, "*des specialists du langue*."[74] The *First Surrealist Manifesto* was essentially directed at contemporary poets. Later, as the 1920s progressed, visual artists were welcomed to the group, attracted by the intellectual movement and the idea of a '*peinture poésie*,' the painted poetry. Important artists joined the group at this moment, such as Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico, and René Magritte.

Despite the official birth of Surrealism dating to 1924, the first evidence of the movement appeared even before World War I, during the encounter between Breton and the French artist Jacques Pierre Vaché (1895-1919) in 1916 in Nantes, France, at a neurological center, where Breton was assigned as a medical intern and Vaché was a patient.[75] However it was only later, after Breton's contact with the neurologist Pierre Janet (1859-1947) and Freud's ideas, that Surrealism's key notions were developed.

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[73] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 24.
"In homage to Guillaume Apollinaire, who had just died and who, on several occasions, seemed to us to have followed a discipline of this kind, without however having sacrificed to it any mediocre literary means, Soupault and I baptized the new mode of pure expression which we had at our disposal and which we wished to pass on to. our friends, by the name of SURREALISM."

[74] Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1964), 14.

[75] Pierre Vaché was a French writer and draftsman, whose only written work was a series of letters, some texts, and drawings. He is known for his enormous influence on Surrealism. His enigmatic death helped make him one of Surrealism's most influential figures.

In 1916, Breton was a clinic psychiatrist of the Second Army at *Saint-Dizier*, France. There, he worked with the French psychiatrist Raoul Leroy (1869-1941), a former assistant to Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), where he treated war casualties.[76] Later, in 1917, Breton interned under the French neurologist Joseph Babinski (1857-1932), another former assistant to Charcot, at a military hospital named *Val-de-Grâce* (where he met the French poet Louis Aragon, another medical student). In these institutions, treatment techniques included free association and dream interpretation, psychoanalytical methods that inspired Breton to create the first notions of Surrealism and its methods. Furthermore, in this period, the poet became interested in the discourse of the mad and the discourse of psychiatry, which led him to discover Freud's work indirectly through the French physician Emmanuel Régis' books, *Précis de Psychiatrie* and *La Psychanalyse*.[77]

During his medical experience, Breton attended war victims and cared for a soldier "who believed that the war was fake, with the wounded made up cosmetically and the dead-on loan from medical schools."[78] This soldier recreated his battlefield experience through delirium. It is likely that his experience in the war was so traumatizing that he invented a reality to make it bearable. Breton was impressed with the patient's delusional arguments, which demonstrated a particular logic. The French poet noticed the existence of "a psychic (sur)reality on the basis of the *délires aigus* of the soldiers under care there (i.e., symptoms of

[76] Jean-Martin Charcot was a French neurologist, and he was known for being the father of modern neurology. He became famous for his work with hysteria in the *Salpêtriére* School. Freud studied with Charcot during the early stages of his career.

[77] Lúcia Grossi dos Santos. "A Experiência Surrealista da Linguagem," *Ágora*, 2, (2002): 232-233. https://www.scielo.br/j/agora/a/ZV3ztgfyXzsPTHDz89RkjMm/?lang=pt; Breton could only read Freud's works directly later after they were translated from German to French. By the time the *First Surrealist Manifesto* was published, Freud had two works translated into French, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Breton and his Surrealist's companions rapidly absorbed and incorporated Freud's ideas into their artwork. The poet became a great admirer of psychoanalysis. However, a meeting between Breton and Freud in Vienna in 1921 clearly established that Freud had little sympathy for such artistic adaptations of his therapeutic techniques.

[78] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 1.

shock, of traumatic neurosis, of scenes of death compulsively restaged.)."[79] Breton's experience in the psychiatric hospital caused important consequences for his thinking. Thus, from a real clinical experience, Breton conceived a 'surreality'.[80] This episode speaks of trauma, and compulsive repetition, and denounces the deadly nature part of the art movement that Breton introduced. Therefore, the war trauma and the clinical observations of the repetitive death scenes that war soldiers experienced were fundamental for Breton (and for Freud, who was also interested in the war's subjective effects). Nevertheless, the methods employed at the psychiatric hospital inspired the critical devices that the Surrealists later developed. With that, it is possible to conclude that the conditions for the creation of Surrealism were already present before 1924, since Breton's psychiatric experience and his encounter with the repetition compulsion, pointing to the predominance of jouissance. In the same way that psychoanalysis was fundamental to inspiring Surrealism's basis, the art movement had great importance in paving the way for psychoanalysis to enter France.[81]

In the *First Surrealist Manifesto*, Breton strongly positioned himself in opposition to the repression undertaken against the individual in modern society. He criticized the predominance of utilitarian reason over imagination and the scarcity of dreams and desires. The processes of repression are attributed here, in part, to positivist education, the appreciation of rationality and logic, and the predominance of materialism in science and philosophy. In literature, Breton criticized realism and its tendency to provide detailed descriptions of scenes, actions, and characters' moods. So, Breton was proposing to overcome rationality and an appreciation of the unconscious. In short, Surrealism had been Breton's

[79] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 1.

[80] Elizabeth Roudinesco. *História da Psicanálise na França: A Batalha dos Cem Anos (History of Psychoanalysis in France: The Hundred Years' Battle)*. Trans.Vera Ribeiro, Vol 2 (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Zahar, 1988), 37.

[81] Elizabeth Roudinesco, *História da Psicanálise na França: A Batalha dos Cem Anos*, 17 – 26.

weapon against positivism, his form to combat 'bourgeois rationality.'[82] For him, combining reality and dream was necessary to achieve absolute reality, a surreality. A particular method, named automatism, would eventually attain this surreality. . In the 1924 *Manifesto*, Breton defined Surrealism in a dictionary with a philosophical definition, positioning automatism as the movement's core practice, and virtually as a synonym of Surrealism:

> SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner-the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.
>
> ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. The following have performed acts of ABSOLUTE SURREALISM: Messrs. Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Eluard, Gerard, Limbour, Malkine, Morise, Naville, Noll, Peret, Picon, Soupault, Vitrac.[83]

In this first phase of Surrealism, the artists launched themselves into experiences of automatic writing, dream narratives, and hypnotic sleep. Within this context, automatism became an essential mechanism for the Surrealist project to overcome the opposition between a world of fantasy and the real one. Surrealist artistic research centered on looking for content that would oppose the rational, logical, and intentional, aiming for an art free of the aesthetic requirements of the time. Automatism was a method used to facilitate access to the uncontrolled outpouring of unconscious thought. To practice this technique, the artist should write whatever came to mind, unimpeded, freely, similar to Freud's free association, the only rule present in the psychoanalytic clinic.[84] However, importantly, Breton did not adopt the

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[82] Roslind Krauss, *Caminhos da Escultura Moderna* (Passages in Modern Sculpture), trans. Júlio Fisher (Brazil: Martins Fontes, 1998), 171.

[83] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 26.

[84] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 126. Free association is a method developed by the psychoanalyst to access the patient's unconscious during a psychoanalytical treatment. This technique is the royal road to the unconscious by inviting the patient to communicate every idea or thought that occurred to them. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the book that marks the psychoanalysis birth, Freud explained the procedure for the process of associative narration of a patient's dream, in order to

technique of free association exactly as Freud recommended. A critical difference lies in the purpose of the two methods; Breton was not trying to develop a psychological treatment or cure technique, but he had artistic intentions. The poet was proposing the use of automatism in the purest and authentic condition by lowering oneself to the detriment of a higher language expression, as a new relationship between the writer and the language.

In the 1930s, the movement attracted several newcomers, such as Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, and Alberto Giacometti. New techniques were created, such as Dali's paranoiac delirium of interpretation and the cult of the Surrealist object, usually an object found through objective chance. The publication of the *Second Manifesto of* Surrealism in 1930 marked this new phase in Surrealism; it proposed a change in philosophical direction. A few years before, in 1927, the desire to break more with bourgeois values led Breton to approach the revolutionary ideas of the October revolution, as the Bolshevik Revolution (1917-1923) is known. In the same year, he joined the French Communist Party. Previously, the emphasis within the movement tended to be on the contents of the mind, or what Breton termed an interior model. Now, the emphasis was placed on the interaction between the interior realm and external reality, in a dialectical relationship, influenced by the thought of the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770 –1831). This new orientation had repercussions on visual production.[85]

Aligned with this new proposal, the art movement entered in what Breton called, at the conference in Brussels on July 1st, 1934, "the fundamental crisis of the object."[86] At this

understand and interpret the latent meaning of dreams: "It is necessary to insist explicitly on his renouncing all criticism of the thoughts that he perceives. We, therefore, tell him that the success of the psychoanalysis depends on his noticing and reporting whatever comes into his head and not being misled, for instance, into suppressing an idea because it strikes him as unimportant or irrelevant or because it seems to him meaningless. He must adopt a completely impartial attitude to what occurs to him, since it is precisely his critical attitude which is responsible for his being unable, in the ordinary course of things, to achieve the desired unraveling of his dream or obsessional idea or whatever it may be."

[85] Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*, 40.

[86] Breton, *What is Surrealism?*, 138.

moment, the Surrealists' experiments were focused on the artist's relationship with the object and the way that the movement represented an object in general. Once again, they were interested and looking for a form of access to the innermost domains of the mind. Moreover, Breton stated in this conference that in order to "understand the [surrealist] movement, it is indispensable to focus one's attention on this point [that is, on the surrealist object]."[87] That means that if one wants to comprehend Surrealism, it is necessary to understand Surrealist object research. The importance of the Surrealist object as a method but also to define the Surrealist movement was again reinforced in a conference paper delivered in Prague on March 29, 1935. Breton's speech expressed repeatedly the need to define the object in general through the voice of Surrealism, and that a Surrealist object needs the adjective Surrealist to be defined as one. Although the poet has not offered a precise definition of the Surrealist object, he indicated some critical elements that enabled the understanding of his vision of this method. The Surrealist object was inserted in a Hegelian dialectic form, insofar as it focused between the sensible and the rational; the spiritual and the irrational; the interior and the exterior; symbolic and concrete, making a synthesis.

The Surreal is experienced in the objective chance as a startling intuition, a sudden awareness of mysterious forces in one's life, as in the case of a curious coincidence or the chance discovery of a fascinating object. The Surrealist object can be any object chosen that the artist chooses; the object performs a symbolic function that corresponds to the artist's erotic fantasies and desires. The Surrealist object removes the object from its original context and launches it into other contexts and unusual relationships, attributing to it the condition of a work of art. Quoting the Surrealist Spanish artist Salvador Dalí (1904 – 1989), who systematized the Surrealist object, Breton said that the object requires a minimum of mechanical function since it is based on representations associated with the realization of

[87] Breton, *What is Surrealism?*, 138.

unconscious acts. Thus, the Surrealists understood these objects as a way to access the unconscious. The Surrealist object considered the object in its various forms, such as the readymade, the dream object, and the found object (*objet trouvê*), and it is the latter, that is, the found object, that is of primary concern in this thesis.

By assuming psychoanalysis as a method of analysis and reading of Surrealism, it is possible to create a parallel between the Surrealist object and the compulsion to repeat. If, for psychoanalysis, chance does not exist, and the unconscious determines all human experience, and taking the notions that Freud and Lacan proposed as discussed earlier, the objective chance employs the search, not for any random object, but the lost object, that impossible object, the encounter with which is always a reencounter. Thus, the found object has its roots connected to jouissance, insofar as it is a lost object that is forever sought after, in eternal repetition. Here, there is a paradoxical matter in relation to the object, which is momentarily found in different objects (the drive is only partially satisfied, as I described earlier), but at the same time launches the subject on a new search. Thus, the found objet is a rediscovery of a fantasmatic object of a Real lack. In other words, as the desire cannot be satisfied, since it is defined in the lack, the subject is thrown eternally in search of something that does not exist. The Surrealist found object is, ultimately, a lost object. The object indicates the coordinates of desire, as well as structures each subject's mode of jouissance. This ordering aims to cover up precisely the point of the void, this impossibility on which desire and jouissance are articulated.

If it is possible to locate something that points to the Freudian death drive since the conception of Surrealism, the found object brings jouissance back to the center of the artistic movement. Jouissance has a Janus-like character, that is, a duality marked by the opposites of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Jouissance is the great index to the Real, it is where the excess, the nameless, the traumatic, the source of the origin of anguish can be found. The

Real has a structure of repetition, it always comes back to the same place. Behind this logic is the reencounter, surprise, and uncanny. This is what is at stake in the found object.

This Janus-like character of the found object fascinated Breton. In *Mad Love*, the poet stated that "chance is the form making manifest the exterior necessity which traces its path in the human unconscious."[88] Chance for Surrealism summarizes an external causality and an internal finality. There is a synthesis here, a meeting of opposites, an external and internal fusion, and a unity is formed. Moreover, he argued: "The finding of an object serves here exactly the same purpose as the dream, in the sense that it frees the individual from paralyzing affective scruples, comforts him and makes him understand that the obstacle he might have thought unsurmountable is cleared."[89] The found object was then associated with dreams, explored through automatism, wherein an unconscious psychic conflict is manifested, and such a found object helps the artist to resolve his issue. In this sense, for Breton, the found object was a synthesis to be achieved through Surrealist art: through the movement of desire in search of the lost object, a catharsis is attained.

If, for Breton, the found object was always turned towards the positive, marking a surprise, a chance, which addressed an individual need, it is because, for Surrealism, desire was one of the main drivers of the movement. But what Surrealism failed to name, despite flirting directly with it, was the lack, a necessary condition for the desire to exist. Surrealism proposed the "desire as excess," but what they found was the "desire as lack;" that is, there is something about jouissance that is not dialectical with desire, that does not fit perfectly into this relationship between love and desire. And so, jouissance is the greatest testimony to the Real. This ambiguous character of Surrealism and the practice of its members ultimately point to the Real.

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[88] André Breton, *Mad Love*, 23.
[89] André Breton, *Mad Love*, 32.

The art historian Fiona Bradley locates the beginning of the history of the Surrealist object with the Swiss sculptor, Alberto Giacometti.[90] In *Mad Love*, Breton commented on the episode where Giacometti and himself went to the Saint-Ouen flea market in 1934 and revealed the exact moment of objective chance when the sculptor found a mask (Figure 7) that inspired him to create the head of *The Invisible Object*. About that story, Breton wrote:

> The first one of them [object] that really attracted us, drawing us as something we had never seen, was a half mask of metal striking in its rigidity as well as in its forceful adaptation to a necessity unknown to us. The first bizarre idea we had was that of being in the presence of a highly evolved descendant of the helmet, letting itself be drawn into a flirtation with the velvet mask (…) Although the remarkably definitive character of this object [mask] seemed to escape the merchant who urged us to buy it, suggesting we paint it in a bright color and use it as a lantern, Giacometti, usually very detached when it came to any thought of possessing such an object, put it down regretfully, seemed as we walked along to entertain some fear about its next destination, and finally retraced his steps to acquire it.[91]

The men thought they had found a German fencing mask, but it actually was a prototype for a mask used by the Medical Corps during the First World War. According to Breton, it helped Giacometti overcome his difficulty in realizing the sculpture's head and finishing the sculpture. Thus, Giacometti's statue served as inspiration for Breton, demonstrating its catalyzing role.

The catalyzing role that the mask found by chance plays in Giacometti's sculpture, pointing to something in the order of desire and lack, and to an idea beyond the fulfillment given the reunion with the missing object, indicates its central aspect that points to jouissance; that is, there is an excess, a point beyond the pleasure principle. In the next chapter, I will analyze Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void* from the point of view of the Real and evaluate what is at stake in this sculpture.

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[90] Fiona Bradley, *Surrealism* (UK: The Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42-43.
[91] Breton, *Mad Love*, 28 – 29.

III. An analysis of *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object* touched by the Real

Giacometti's art starts from an artistic question, a question that moves the artist throughout his life: the representation of what he sees. Michel Leiris, in the introduction to *Écrits* by Giacometti, characterizes the Swiss artist as someone engaged, who embodied his art and his question. At first, Giacometti thought he could copy everything that he saw; all was possible in drawing or in sculpture. The artist sought to create his work from what was presented to him: a life model or an image that presented itself entirely ready-made in his mind. Thus, his work faced the question of observation, looking, seeing, and the possibility of apprehending this visible world in its entirety. His work, therefore, is the result of intense research, and it proposed to give destiny to his artistic question, blurring the limits of art and becoming his existential question, his gear. About his vision of sculpture, his main media, Giacometti wrote:

> No sculpture ever dethrones any other. A sculpture is not an object, it is an interrogation, a question, an answer. It cannot be finished or perfect. The question does not arise not even. For Michelangelo, with the Pietà Rondanini, his last sculpture, everything begins again. And for a thousand years Michelangelo could have continued to carve Pietàs without repeating himself, without returning to back, never finishing anything, always going further. Rodin too.[92]

For Giacometti, a sculpture was not just an object, but an infinite and imperfect question and a reply, that is, there is always something to be improved, added, reworked, and restarted. From this writing by the artist, it is possible to notice already something that points to an impossible in Giacometti's work, an endless and eternal. His starting point was his

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[92] Alberto Giacometti, *Écrits* (Writings), ed. Mary Lisa Palmer and François Chaussende (Paris: Editions Hermann, 2001), 79-80.

"Aucune sculpture ne détrône jamais aucune autre. Une sculpture n'est pas un objet, elle est une interrogation, une question, une réponse. Elle ne peut être ni finie ni parfaite. La question ne se pose même pas. Pour Michel-Ange, avec la Pietà Rondanini, sa dernière sculpture, tout recommence. Et pendant mille ans Michel-Ange aurait pu continuer à sculpter des Pietà sans se répéter, sans revenir en arrière, sans jamais rien finir, allant toujours plus loin. Rodin aussi."

observation of the world and his work was concrete projections of what appeared to him. About this matter of representing or creating an artwork precisely as seen, Lacan's discussion in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan – Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* is of interest:

> [I]s the end of art imitation or non-imitation? Does art imitate what it represents? (…) If art imitates, it is shadow of a shadow, imitation of an imitation. You can, therefore, see the vanity of the work of art, of the work of the brush. That's a trap one must not enter. Of course, works of art imitate the objects they represent, but their end is certainly not to represent them. In offering the imitation of an object, they make something different out of that object. Thus they only pretend to imitate. The object is established in a certain relationship to the Thing [*das* Ding] and is intended to encircle and to render both present and absent.[93]

Starting from this idea that Lacan proposed, the impossibility of the art object to imitate exactly what it represents is made abundantly clear. These circumstances occur because, between the lived life and the artwork created, there is a rupture, a rupture that is given by the mark of language. So, in seeking to imitate, or copy an object, the artist creates something else, another object and meaning, he creates a work of art, and this creates something that relates to the Real, that encircles *das Ding* (and loses the contact with the object that it tried to represent). Giacometti tried to reproduce in his art an illustration of the world as it came to his mind, to imitate an object or an image that already existed, a Surreal representation, since, according to Lacan, "everything that exists is already no more than an imitation of a more-than-real, of a Surreal."[94] But this representation is on the order of the impossible; that is, it is impossible to represent things exactly as they exist, and that's how art presented itself to Giacometti. In the artist's artistic proposal, the impossible is the starting point. The lack is given from the beginning. Giacometti's work attests to *das Ding*'s precise presentation of this impossibility.

The void is a constant presence in Giacometti's work. It appears in the different moments of the Swiss artist's work, in the standing elongated and thin figures (artwork for which he is

[93] Lacan, *Book VII*, 141.
[94] Lacan, *Book VII*, 141.

best known); it energizes the heads and the busts; and the portraits drawn and scratched without contours. The American novelist James Lord, Giacometti's friend and biographer, posed for the artist and commented in his book *A Giacometti Portrait* on the relationship between artist and model, and the impasses and difficulties the Giacometti face in the realization of Lord's portrait. The writer was able to witness countless times in the same session that Giacometti undid everything he had done and started over from scratch. Thus, it is understood that the void is not only a trait of his works but also a mark of his artistic creation and question. "*Tout me dépasse et m'étonne*," said Giacometti, delighted and horrified in the face of the abyss of life.[95] Sartre once said that Giacometti '*voit le vide partout*' ("he sees the void everywhere").[96] Jacques Dupin, in the introduction he wrote to Giacometti's *Écrits*, refers to the void in the artist's work as an active presence, a force of life, an effervescence, and a restorative principle:

> Giacometti said it, named it, went over it word by word and line by line, as if giving only one meaning to his vision of things and to the spirit of the times, and at every moment suffered and enjoyed... She [the void's presence] is the acid that eats away at the body of sculptures and the strength upward which makes them spring from the base. She is what gives each written sentence tension, breathing, doubtful vigor and movement of its infinite openness...[97]

Giacometti became interested in Surrealism at a very specific moment in his career. His entry into the movement coincides with the moment he gave up producing from the living model, seeking to understand what he saw in reality versus the impossibility of representation. During the time when he was part of the artistic movement, the artist created his works from memory and believed they were a projection of his inner experiences and desires, thematizing his questions from these objects in which he incarnated a certain thought

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[95] Giacometti, *Écrits*, 275.

In English, Giacometti's sentence can be translated as "Everything surpasses and astonishes me."

[96] Stamelman, 20.

[97] Jacques Dupin, introduction to *Écrits*, ed. Mary Lisa Palmer and François Chaussende (Paris: Editions Hermann, 2001), xxv.

about the impossible. His Surrealist trajectory occurred because of his inquiries regarding looking and representation, but in an adapted manner to fit the Surrealist project, even though the artist never stopped doing new experimentations even during this phase, and had shown signs of his loss of interest in Surrealism by mid-1930s. During his participation in the Surrealist group, Giacometti referred to his works as projections and sought to materialize them in the objective and external world. Giacometti dedicated himself to the maturing of the movement and employed the artistic techniques and methods that it codified. His production turned to the creation of works that ended up becoming the paradigm of Surrealist sculpture, that is, a Surrealist sculpture *par excellence*.

Born from a romantic crisis, and seen as a symptom of it, *The Invisible Object* defines a before and an after in Giacometti's art and career. The sculpture is a turning point in his career, and it materializes the transition in Giacometti's art, his excommunication from Surrealism, and a shift from conceptual seeing to visual seeing.[98] The sculpture was created in a context where Giacometti had assumed a vanguard position and was highly involved with Surrealism. This work is enigmatic, both in its creation and aesthetically speaking. It represents a female figure, profoundly strange. From its double title, *Hands Holding the Void* or *The Invisible Object*, something important is pointed out, there is an invisible at stake, something that is lacking. The invisible object is not there for the spectator to see. But it's not that the object is unavailable. If there were an object, Giacometti would have represented it. The fact is, there isn't. But the lack of this object is marked. The invisible object appears to show that there is a void at play, a void that the sculpture's hands seem to indicate with a kind of mime. There is a game of presence and absence in the work. The spectator's gaze is

[98] Richard Bell, "Giacometti's Art as a Judgment on Culture," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Winter, 1989, Vol. 47, No. 1, (1989): 16, accessed September 3, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/431989.

directed towards the hands of the figure, its central aspect. The hands disorient the viewer, who does not know what they mean.

The work of Giacometti attests to *das Ding* not only through the void, which is notably exposed to the viewer, but also by the presence of a common object, transplanted from everyday life to the work of art (the German mask found in the flea market that served as an inspiration for the figure's head), producing an uncanny effect. In the enigmatic process of creating this work, the artistic question of Giacometti is related to the production of what appears already in his mind's eye, his difficulty in molding the sculpture's head, and the use of the Surrealist technique, the found object, that places chance at its core— or, following my line of thinking, the repetition as an unconscious mechanism. It is of interest here, reflecting along with the Lacanian theory, that if *das Ding* is, by nature, always veiled, the refinding of the object is represented by something else, that is, by another object.[99] So, this leads to the proposal that, moved by his difficulty in completing the work, Giacometti found the mask, but that act, in fact, reveals itself as a rediscovery via an object, indicating something that points beyond the pleasure principle, or, that is, jouissance. In creating the sculpture, what Giacometti did was not avoid *das Ding* as a signifier, but instead he represented it.

The Invisible Object thematizes the invisible, the impossible to be seen, which makes Giacometti reveal to the world something that is literally invisible, excluded from the signifying chain, and that points to the Real. There is a kind of anamorphosis in *The Invisible Object*, as also found in Holbein's *Ambassadors*, that, through the use of illusion, transforms the space of the work, supporting a hidden reality which involves *das Ding*. Giacometti makes the world confront the void, the impossible, the Real. Nevertheless, if the artist needs the work to show the spectators the marvelous present in *das Ding*, this can only be because Giacometti himself knows, somehow, the effects of this ungraspable, unthinkable that

[99] Lacan, *Book VII*, 118.

touches the human being. Giacometti's sculpture discusses the invisible and the ungraspable. The lacking object, *das Ding* object, which is at stake in *Hands Holding the Void*, indicates and provokes to think about the depth of the artist's question. In this territory of uncertainties, in this illuminated void that opens up the possibility of unfolding and the impossibility of meaning, there is also have the marked presence of the lack. The void is the void, and thus, unrepresentable and unnamable. No signifier will address the impossible, no name will completely symbolize it. Thus, the sculpture shows and denounces the precarious place of being, its hole, what is leftover, excess: its limit with the Real. Furthermore, it is like the void left by the *Invisible Object* alters the hands, interweaving and disarticulating all things in the preparation of new articulations. As in the ethics of psychoanalysis, which Lacan proposed Lacan, the lack, which the void mobilizes, is the structuring condition of desire, creating a movement and a search for meaning.

For Breton, the fascinating character of *The Invisible Object* consisted precisely of its encircling and denouncing of the void. The work demonstrated the potential of the Surrealist movement, which proposed to accuse the void by pointing to the impossible, to the Real, a move that causes anguish, but which also teaches the subject to desire. For Breton, the dual condition of *das Ding* (fundamental void and cause-of-desire) seems to be related to the paradox, key to the Surrealist project since the *First Manifesto*. In this sense, Giacometti's art, in some way, extols Surrealism. Given the importance and its centrality within Surrealism, *The Invisible Object* shows that what attracted the Surrealists was something that operates in the works that never stabilize the artists, something of the Real that insists on returning through blurring, undoing, escaping, forsaking, and reducing. The Real has a repetition structure, which means it always returns to the same place. This is what is behind the logic of the Surrealists' encounters, surprises, chances, and the unpredictable. This is what is at stake in the objective chance, specifically in the found object. Consequently,

Surrealism proposes an ethics based on the Real and not on the ideal that takes desire into account. There is a kind of know-how with the Real in Surrealist art – the Surrealist artist touched something that was beyond the object, he touched the unspeakable, the incomprehensible. Thus, the artist surprises with his art insofar as he produces something with a touch of the Real; but this only happens when the Real touches the artist himself. Within Surrealism, there is an artistic work through jouissance, the re-establishment of the impossible, of the absolute. Surrealism proposes this work with the Real not only through its formal aesthetics but also through its research, experimentation, and techniques employed. Therefore, it is possible to say that *The Invisible Object* consists of a Surrealist act.

During his Surrealist period, Giacometti relied on Surrealist methods and propositions; however, at the same time, his art showed its uniqueness, not only through its form but especially regarding its themes. In 1935, after the competition of *The Invisible Object*, Giacometti broke with Surrealism. This work was psychologically difficult for him. From this moment on, he was determined to take his own course, and to face the question of observation in his artwork, working compulsively with life model. After he abandoned Surrealism, his art acquired the characteristics that are most commonly associated with his style: the minimized and elongated human forms. For Breton, the resumption of production and studies with models was outdated, it seemed like a betrayal of the Surrealist cause; it was a return to reactionary conceptions of art. However, Surrealism did not address Giacometti's questions; on the contrary, it denounces or reinforces the impossibility within his art, it generated in the Swiss artist a malaise resulting from the impossible. Giacometti left behind the Surrealist spirit and altered his artistic procedures in search of his fundamental question, to represent what is presented to him – the question of the impossibility of representation, of the unrepresentable, exploring philosophical questions about the human condition and existence.

Conclusion

Both Surrealism's artistic poetic path and the scientific path of psychoanalysis were concerned with the revolutionary potential of the unconscious. They both reflected on and built methods with the purpose of overcoming the barriers of reason. In Surrealism, techniques that aimed for that purpose included psychic automatism, objective chance, and the found object; in psychoanalysis, there is the method of free association, compulsive repetition, and *objet petit a*. Both the artistic movement and Freudian discovery subverted the meanings of images that were presented to consciousness, and they constitute a form of treatment of the Real.

Hands Holding the Void or *The Invisible Object* is an artwork that created a significant impact, allowing us to apprehend Surrealism and understand a significant moment of the Swiss artist's trajectory. The centrality of this sculpture is thus given to Surrealism because Breton took it as the model for the found object, a critical Surrealist method used to overcome the object crisis and uncover the artist's unconscious. Differently put, the found object was a revelatory product of objective chance and was, therefore, similar to the work with dreams and psychic automatism. This technique was key during the Surrealism foundation, as I have discussed, and it revealed something of the subject's inner in the external world, denouncing and operating through opposition and between desire and lack, rationality and subjective, chance and determinism. Although these techniques do not exhaust all the Surrealist experiments that the group invented (which include, for example, the readymade, the collage, the exquisite corpse, etc.), I have demonstrated how these two methods are intrinsic to the roots of Surrealism, and how they are indispensable to understand and define a Surrealist pure art. The relevance attributed to automatism and found object is so great that these methods are part of Surrealism's creation and development as an art movement, present in both the Manifestos and other crucial documents, sometimes woven

into the very definition of Surrealism. On the other hand, for Giacometti, this work marked a turning point in his career, his break with the avant-garde movements in vogue at the beginning of the 20th century, and it gave contour and shape to his artistic inquiry, the question of seeing and representing, which was, in fact, his question of life.

Taking psychoanalysis as a method of work and field of dialogue, it is possible to understand that art operates as a veil, which both veils and denounces the void of *das Ding*. Such void, which is the mark of *das Ding*, here is taken as the impossibility of finding a symbolic or pictorial representation that accounts for the radical singularity of unconscious contents. Thus, the invisible object is synonymous with loss, which is, at the same time, the possible condition for desire. That means that because there's something lacking, one can desire. But there is always something beyond the object of desire, something that escapes and that does not coincide with it. This is because this object that was lost no longer exists and, in fact, never existed. From this matter, each subject will establish their uniqueness and their relationship with language. Differently put, in the place where there was or would be an object, the void appears and there is no universal solution for this human condition. So, with the void left by what was there (but, once more, never really was), each subject is individually summoned to create his singularity and encircle this void. This is the nameless and impossible void that is at stake in Lacan's Real, which demands a sort of construction from the subject, and which, according to our hypothesis, was intrinsic; there was know-how of the Real within the Surrealist movement.

The Invisible Object is an enigmatic artwork for the viewer but also for Giacometti. It discloses his "fascination with enigma and desire - with the enigma of desire, the desire in enigma," which, according to psychoanalytical ethics, comprises the lack, or, writing differently, starts from the lacking condition.[100] The void that the figure's hands indicate is

[100] Foster, *An Art of Missing Parts*, 141.

related to the loss of the object, the impossibility of it, and paradoxically, to the possibility of recovering it, even if fancifully (through *objet petit a*). What Giacometti's work evokes here is precisely the impossibility of the lost object to be regained, of the void filled: with its cupped hands and blank stare, this feminine figure shapes 'the invisible object' in its very absence.[101] Giacometti gave a destiny to the ambivalence present within the condition of the Real. Thus, *The Invisible Object* not only assumes the paradox between the object and the void, the presence and the absence, but the artist addressed and exploited this ambivalence; he made the object both present and absent, assuming the impossibility of retrieving the lost object, *das Ding*, and its very existence in the nothingness, 'no-thing' will ever complete the forever lost object. In the last instance, this artwork provides "an awareness of art as an answer to nothingness," acting as a veil that veils but at the same time reveal the Real.[102] The sculpture reflects the Surrealist artist's task of dealing with this impossible.

Giacometti's question revolves around the impossibility of representing what is seen, in short, the impossible. Nonetheless, he could not represent what he saw, because there was nothing to be effectively seen. Deep down, what exists is a hole with the ghostly articulation that overlaps it. His question indicated to the Real since it pointed to a structuring question of the subject with his objects. The presence of the invisible object is synonymous with the lack itself. From the moment the invisible object is announced and presented, it is no longer missing. The work brings the viewer closer to its hole, to a constitutive furrow, showing the literal loss, which is at the same time hidden by the illusion that the hands, which encircle the void, create. The work explores the limit between the risk of the object disappearing because it appears too much. The whole is nothing. The void, the hole, opens up a dimension of

[101] Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 138.
[102] Bonnefoy, 240.

otherness, of the singular, of difference. With the cut, the hole, and the void, the impossible of the Real is dealt with.

Surrealism's openness to investigations and analysis is irreducible, as is that of psychoanalysis because there is always ‘some-thing’ that escapes significance. They are not completely interpretable. Therefore, art helps to surround, border, and delimit everything that forms part of the Real: it is disconnected, with no significance articulation; it is not elaborate, and it is found with the symbolic in the space of art.[103] Surrealism is an aesthetics of the void, a possessor of know-how with the Real, and this is what Giacometti's sculpture offered to the artist and the spectators.

[103] Laura Belén Arias, “¿Qué hay de real en el arte?” *El Gran Otro*, 13 (2008), accessed October 16, 2022, http://elgranotro.com/jacques-lacan-arte/

Figures

Figure 1. Alberto Giacometti, *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object),* 1934-1935, Bronze, 60 x 12 x 9 1/2 in. (152.4 x 30.5 x 24.1 cm), Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, USA.

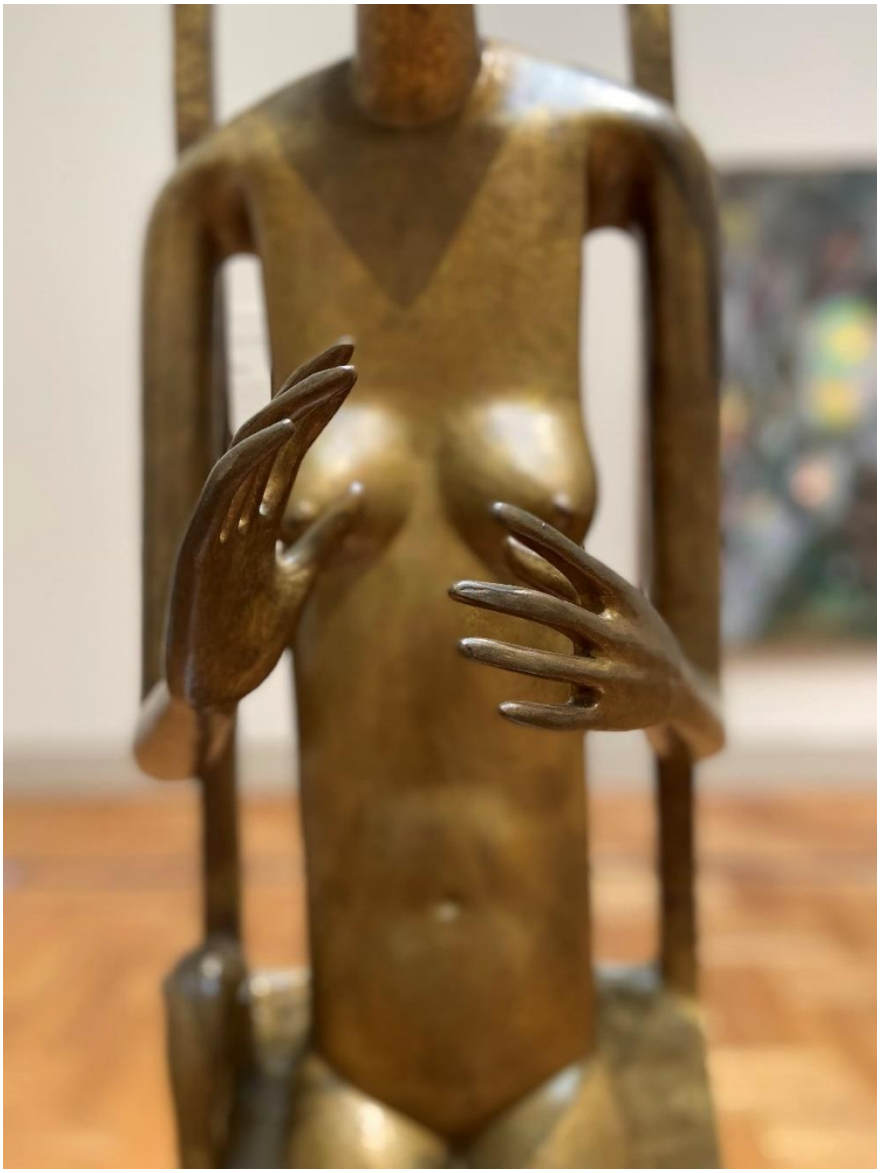

Figure 2. Detail of the hands holding the void in *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* by Alberto Giacometti, Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, USA.

Figure 3. Detail of the bird's head in *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* by Alberto Giacometti, Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, USA.

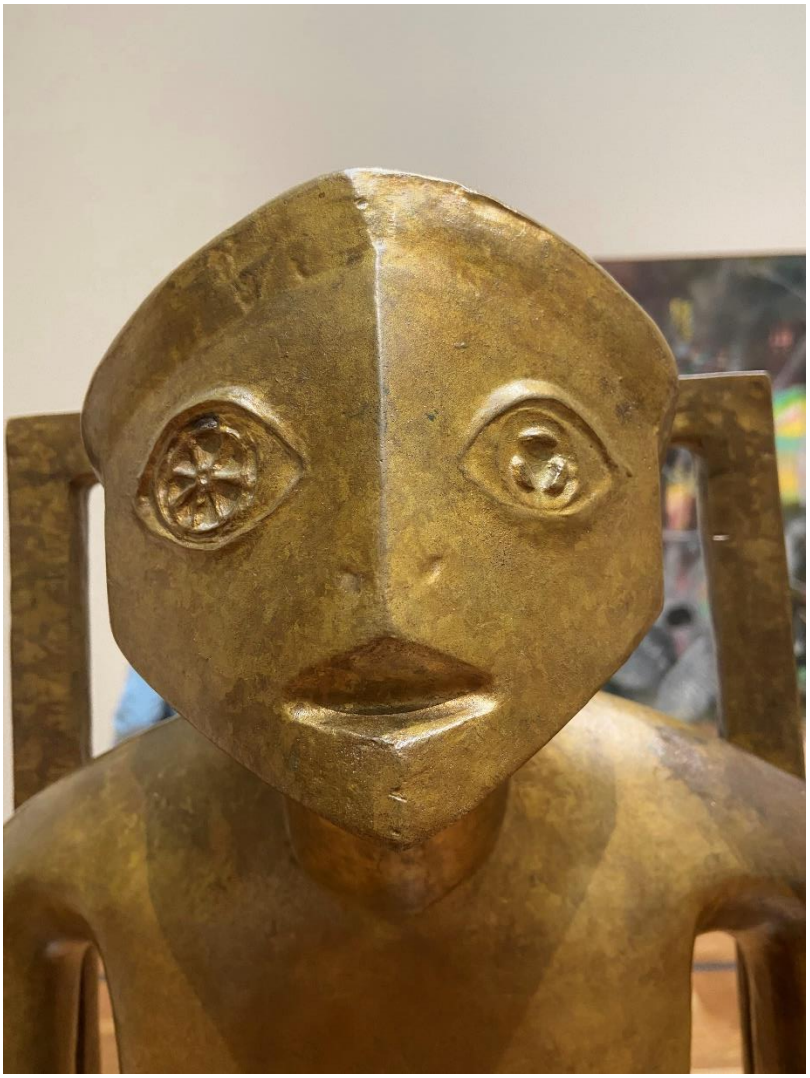

Figure 4. Detail of the head with the two eyes made of wheels in *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* by Alberto Giacometti, Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, USA.

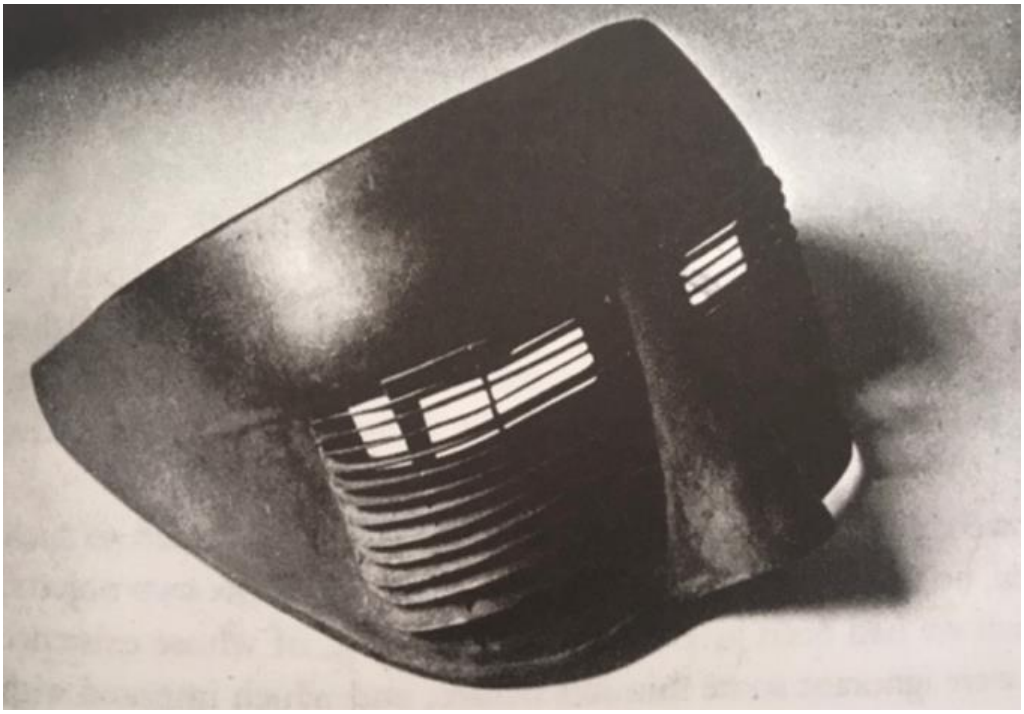

Figure 5. Man Ray, *A Highly Evolved Descendent of The Helmet*, 1934, Photograph, A.D.A.G.P., Paris, V.A.G.A., New York, 1986.

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Appendix

Hands Holding the Void: An artwork part of the Saint Louis Art Museum Collection

As part of this thesis, I conducted research in the Saint Louis Art Museum's archives, a museum located in St. Louis, Missouri. The information presented here is part of the museum's archive on Giacometti's *The Invisible Object*, and they focus on historical aspects regarding the purchase of the sculpture, its provenance, and the communication of the work in the museum and the institution's bulletin.

The original Giacometti's *Hands Holding the Void,* created in 1934, was made of plaster, one of Giacometti's most used materials for sculptures. Known as Giacometti's first example of a human figure, the sculpture today is part of the Yale University Art Gallery collection. Later, between 1934 and 1935, Giacometti created a series of six bronze casts of *Hands Holding the Void.* For this thesis, I have chosen to discuss one of the six replicas currently displayed in the Saint Louis Art Museum. *Hands Holding the Void* has been part of the museum's permanent collection since 1966, and it is exhibited in the Surrealists' gallery in the museum, next to works from Max Ernst and De Chirico. This was the first Giacometti work acquired by the museum and bought with Friend funds.

Besides the original plaster sculpture, Giacometti created bronze casts of this work, but only three of them have the bird head attached to the left side of it. What attracts one's attention is that Giacometti removed the bird head from the three post-war casts. The St. Louis Art Museum has the first bronze cast (no. 1/6), created before the Second World War, with the bird head.[104]

[104] The other replicas belong to Harry W. Anderson (a private collection in California), the Gallery of Art, Gianni Agnelli (a private collection in Italy), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Fondation Maeght (France).

The sculpture owned by the St. Louis Art Museum is made of bronze and has the following dimensions: 60 x 12 x 9 1/2 in. (152.4 x 30.5 x 24.1 cm). The work is unsigned. However, there are some inscriptions: on the back of the lower base: "Alberto Giacometti / 1935," on the top base at the back: "No. 1//6," and on the back of the lower base at the right: "*Alexis Rudier / Fondeur Paris.*" [105] In the museum's *provenance* documents, there's a note mentioning that in 1948 Giacometti listed his early works, including *Hands Holding the Void*, and the location of each bronze cast.

The museum provided a brief description of the sculpture:

> An elongated female figure perches precariously on a flattened high-backed chair or throne. The figure's heels seem to be slightly raised as if she is on tiptoe. A thin block rests upright on her feet, leaning against her shins. Her buttocks rest on the shallow seat, which is pitched forward at a sharp angle. The figure has an extremely long torso with a defined navel and breasts positioned well below the high stooped shoulders. Her skinny arms are bent at the elbow, and her hands are held up before the breasts, the spindly fingers cupped as if holding something. The insectoid head is distinguished by two large eyes, one with a wheel pattern, another with an indeterminate tripartite pattern. Two shallow dimples for nostrils and a triangular gouge for a mouth. Near the level of the seat, a shape, perhaps a bird head, is attached to the chair. On either side of this head are a slit and a knob.[106]

The museum's label text attached to the sculpture in 2007 indicated the sculpture's title *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object),* and further said:

> Gazing into the distance with mouth open in wonder, a female figure leans forward while her long, nervous fingers encircle an empty space. Her vulnerable face evokes a sense of psychological alienation. Alberto Giacometti joined the Surrealist movement in the 1920s. Poet André Breton, leader of the Parisian Surrealists, described this work as "an emanation of the desire to love and be loved in quest of the true human object and in all the agony of its quest.[107]

In the *St. Louis Art Museum Bulletin* of 1967, the mystery about this sculpture is put to the spectators: "The sculpture poses enigmatic questions. Why is the bird form attached to

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[105] Many of the bronze casts of "Hands Holding the Void" were made in 1935.

[106] Saint Louis Art Museum Catalog Record, 217:1966, Saint Louis Art Museum, St Louis, MO.

[107] St Saint Louis Art Museum Catalog Record, 217:1966, Saint Louis Art Museum, St Louis, MO.

the cross piece of the cage-seat? Why is the slab resting against her legs? Is it placed there to contrast with the space or invisible object which she holds?" [108]

[108] City Art Museum of Saint Louis Bulletin. "Recent Acquisitions." St Louis: St Louis Art Museum, 2, no. 5, 1967, 1-2.