



FIGURE 2 Cover of Germaine Krull, *Métal* (Paris: Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, 1928). Collotype, sheet: 11½ × 8¾ in. (29 × 22.5 cm). J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

1 Montage

Germaine Krull's *Métal*

Germaine Krull's groundbreaking 1928 album, *Métal*, was published to great acclaim at the end of 1928 (figure 2).¹ The volume begins with a puzzle. In its opening image we gaze up at a tall cylinder bristling with wires and round balls, from a worm's-eye view (figure 3). Krull seems to have aimed her camera at a vertiginous angle upward and to the right. We are immediately disoriented. Are we viewing a ship's smokestack? The radio-transmitting tower at the top of the Eiffel Tower? A factory? In fact, this image comes from a ship in the port of Toulon, but we would never know it from the photograph.² Krull's dynamic composition of steel cylinders, wires, balls, and a flag seems to lack a clear meaning. A very close inspection reveals that some of those "balls" are actually humans: five people stand at the top of the tower, looking directly down at us. A woman on the right appears to be smiling, and her companion on the far right is clearly waving his right arm directly at the photographer. Therefore, the image is not as alienating as it might appear at first; we are meant to interact with the experience of this industrial object, and with this first photograph.

Métal is Germaine Krull's most important publication. One of a number of foreign-born photographers

who revolutionized photography and photobook publishing in interwar France, Krull was born in 1897 on the German–Polish border; she studied photography in Munich, worked in Berlin and the Netherlands in the early and mid-1920s, and came to Paris in 1926. Through her connections with the German, Dutch, and Parisian avant-gardes, she became one of the most important photojournalists and art photographers of the 1920s. During the decade when she lived in Paris, from 1926 to 1936, she published seven books, of which the first, and the most famous, is *Métal*. Her other volumes include travel books on all regions of France, including Paris and Marseille, and, in 1931, a detective "photo-roman" with Georges Simenon that will be discussed in Chapter 2.³ *Métal*, an avant-garde amalgam of her commercial work for industry, her photojournalism, and her experimental images, is the French incarnation of the German New Vision. It served as a template for a number of montage-based books in the late 1920s and beyond.

As the first of sixty-four seemingly disconnected industrial abstractions, the introductory image in *Métal* gives us fragmented clues to Krull's intentions throughout the project, and to the set of bookmaking ideas that



FIGURE 47 Plate 43, Bijou, from Brassai, *Paris de nuit* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1932). Gravure, page: 10 × 7½ in. (25 × 19.3 cm).

The photograph hints at the invisible happenings inside.

Prostitutes are another Miller-esque group much in evidence in *Paris de nuit*. Brassai's imagery in *Voluptés de Paris* and his work for the pornographic publisher Vidal in *Paris Magazine* provide clear visual evidence that his photographic eye did wander below the line of polite behavior, even if—as he insisted—he never actually visited brothels with Miller. *Paris de nuit* contains only one photograph of conventional lovers on a park bench, with Frank Dobo and Janet Fukushima posed as the lovers. Instead, Brassai concentrates on the commercial love industry.⁷⁵

Like the other working-class figures in *Paris de nuit*, prostitutes lived in central Paris and often frequented the areas around Les Halles. In a Brassai image taken on corner of the rue Quincampoix near the Boulevard de Sébastopol, we see a woman in stark silhouette (plate 30; see figure 39). We can pick out all the idiosyncrasies of her garb and posture: her exaggerated heels, the trim of her coat silhouetted against the light, her curved back as she clasps her bag. She stands straight and free of any support, reinforcing Brassai's depiction of her as a strong, solid,

independent figure: lonely perhaps, but neither titillating nor pitiful like her earlier counterparts. Her placement under a cheese shop sign reading "fromage" humorously and obscenely equates her profession with the other trades of the market quarter, all concerned with bodily needs, the *ravitaillement de Paris* (belly of Paris).⁷⁶ The long shadow cast by her silhouette, running parallel to the impenetrable black shadow of the wall, recalls the lurid shadows cast in Josef von Sternberg's 1932 film, *The Blue Angel*, starring Marlene Dietrich.⁷⁷

The most famous prostitute in *Paris de nuit* is Bijou, the seventy-year-old Montmartre prostitute who seems like a character right out of *Tropic of Cancer* (plate 43; figure 47). The original negative allows us to see how skillfully Brassai cropped his plate: he isolates her by excluding the empty seat that might allow us to imagine a companion for her. He also crops out the large mirrors that show one front-facing man and one profiled man behind her.⁷⁸ The caption places Bijou safely in an unreal literary realm "out of one of Baudelaire's most night-marish pages." Bijou, however, was a real person, and Brassai's photograph captures her physical presence with uncompromising attention to all her physical detail. As she sits at a café table, we see her varicose-veined legs under the table, bound into tight shoes and bordered by the spangled hem of her dress. Multiple veils surround her grotesquely powdered face; her neck, wrists, and fingers are overloaded with flashy jewelry. Yet for all her grotesque trappings, Bijou retains a heroic stance, which Brassai emphasizes in his portrait.⁷⁹

Brassai also studied a different member of the Parisian underworld, the clochard, one whom the Surrealists ignored but Miller celebrated with gusto. In plate 18, we see a group under a bridge (see figure 35, right). The caption reads, "Under one of the Seine bridges some of the city's down-and-outs sit by an al-fresco fireside."⁸⁰ This caption reflects the picturesque *petits métiers* tradition that includes hobos and beggars, and the French words refer to the popular song "Sous les ponts de Paris." Brassai's photographic portrait, however, presents a much darker and less picturesque statement. Only the bridge's black arches are visible; the street and quays are blocked out. But the trash can fire (the *feu de fortune*) warming the three clochards glows brightly white—Brassai suggests a metaphor for Heaven and Hell. He clearly prefers the Inferno: the bridge's arch encloses the figures like a domed stage set, and the trees on the right create bars like a balcony



FIGURE 48 Plate 61, Raggicker, from Brassai, *Paris de nuit* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1932). Gravure, page: 10 × 7½ in. (25 × 19.3 cm).

67). We see only a booted foot and leg, and the large drum itself; the rest of the sculpture is hidden by debris and an industrial truck that hauls it away. A workman's head peers above the drum, cunningly providing a disembodied and anatomically impossible reconstructed body. Cocteau suggests that the drum is the still-beating heart of an unnamed French combatant: "This murdered drummer did not know the shock of battle or stakes through his boots. But his drum knew how to defend his flesh and still beats the charge."³¹

The book's second plate, "Orphelin" continues the analogy of an innocent combatant. A winsome sculpture of a young boy sits atop a metal beam, surrounded by disembodied hands, urns, and chains, against an industrial backdrop. His nose is broken (plate 2; figure 68). Cocteau exaggerates his losses in a philosophical lament: "This young orphan of the exodus has not just lost his family and his home. He has lost his époque. On this railway tie he refuses to look at a universe of machines that he cannot comprehend at all. He does not wish for powder or bullets. He has a thorn in his foot."³² In referring to a lost époque, Cocteau references two intertwined losses—the loss of the French culture that has been swept away by the German occupation, and the loss of the Machine Age of the 1920s, which this young figure can no longer even fathom (it would have been so long ago, before the dark decade of the 1930s, that this metaphorical young boy would not have been born yet). Whether or not this sculpture actually has a thorn, it refers to *Spinario*, or *Il Fedele* (Boy with Thorn), a Hellenistic bronze of about 100 BCE much copied in the Renaissance and after. Not only the pose but the allegorical story depicted are relevant here. The title *Il Fedele* refers to a popular but invented anecdote meant to give the sculpture a civic message: supposedly it commemorated the loyal service of a small boy who ran to deliver a message to the Roman Senate and stopped to pull out a thorn from his foot only after its delivery. Napoleon confiscated this bronze from the Capitoline Museums, and it was later returned to Rome—another reference to the French international exchange of culture and power during wars, though Cocteau may not have meant to carry the analogy as far as this.

The writer, however, was not shy in invoking Roman analogies to refer to the loss of the French Republic. Plate 3 depicts a toppled statue of which we see only a boot and the bottom of the plinth with the word

"république" (see figure 60). The foreground is dominated by a disembodied boot rendered white by ash, corrosion, or the patina of age; presumably the rest of this figure has been buried or crushed. In the background, on the rails, we see a blurry sculptural group of workers wrestling a bull, all frozen in place on their bronze plinth. Cocteau's caption returns to Rome: "White boot. Is it a pedestal or a coffin? A Roman soldier guards the rails from which a white boot bears witness to great atomic catastrophes."³³ For Cocteau, catastrophe has a double meaning, the loss of the republic—at the very introduction of the book—and a secondary catastrophe of the atomic bombs, which will be addressed later.

FROM "STATUOMANIA" TO SMELTER

A second major theme of *La mort et les statues* is the fate of the actual statues themselves, which is a much more complicated story than it first appears. These statues are important symbols of the French Republic, but they also carry the loaded shadows of an enormous efflorescence of late nineteenth-century municipal sculpture that was both lauded and reviled as "statuomania." A critic writing for the *Gazette des beaux-arts* in 1974 tells us that Paris had only eleven statues of "great men" in 1870. They multiplied over the next thirty years: thirty-four statues (including Voltaire, Charlemagne, and Jeanne d'Arc) from 1870 to 1890, twenty-three from 1880 to 1890, thirty-four from 1890 to 1900, and fifty-one more from 1900 to 1910.³⁴ Most of the statues melted down in 1941 and 1942 were these late nineteenth-century additions to the public art of Paris.

In a shift from the Enlightenment ideals of the eighteenth century, these new monuments presented figures who seemed to have an affinity for what historian Daniel Sherman has called "the superior progress of an unshackled, newly free people, in which the talents of the individual reflected the liberty of all, not the glory of a ruler or a dynasty." New monuments were erected to scientists, doctors, composers, philosophers, and French Revolutionary figures such as the Marquis de Condorcet and Jean-Paul Marat, as well as figures from the Third Republic (Léon Gambetta, Victor Hugo, and others). Symbolic homages to the republic included Jules Dalou's *Triumph of the Republic* in the Place de la Nation and Léopold Morice's *République*, among others. Many in the press complained that these new statues were of lesser quality than earlier public art, and "statuomania" was widely ridiculed: the painter Edgar



FIGURE 68 Plate 2, *Orphelin*, from Pierre Jahan, *La mort et les statues* (Paris: du Compas, 1946). Gravure, page: 13¼ × 10¼ in. (33.7 × 25.8 cm).



FIGURE 90 Cover by Henri Matisse of Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952). Gravure, 14½ × 10¾ in. (37 × 27.4 cm).

but, by its conspicuous absence in his great book, he is also commenting on the demise of French imperialism. In a decade of crisis for French national identity, the photographer places French culture at the center of the world.

The first image in the book is, indeed, about as quintessentially French as it could be, captioned “Joinville-le-Pont, near Paris, 1938. A bridal pair at a café on the Marne which is part bistro, part garden. The two were here for the entire afternoon with a full wedding party which included uncles, aunts, and small children of the family” (plate 1; figure 91).² The viewer is immediately lifted up by the diagonal rise of the bride’s swing, her joyous laugh, and the corresponding smile on her groom’s face. Against this moment and the freedom of her body in space we sense the solidity of family members in the background. Taken together, the individuality, joy, and communal family structure of this couple reaffirm French independence after the war through the language of French humanist photography, for which Cartier-Bresson is the most prominent spokesman. More than that, the image

displays both his compositional balance and his spontaneity, marking him as a master of photographic style, and the photograph introduces us to the grand themes that Cartier-Bresson will address in this book.

The photograph has a larger cultural meaning, as well. It is aggressively European, as befits the first section of this book, with its concentration on European (“Occidental”) culture. By opening with an image from 1938, taken just before the war, he reminds us of the French *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* that had been lost during the four years of the occupation, and reinforces the power of its recovery after the war’s end and at a time when French colonies were becoming independent. We assume a Catholic ceremony from the bride’s white dress, and we participate actively in the scene, almost getting ready to push her back on the swing. In 1938, at the time the photo was taken, this bride did not yet have the right to vote in France, but by the book’s 1952 publication, she would have become a full active member of French society (women’s suffrage was granted in France in 1944, after the liberation of Paris). The first half of *Images à la sauvette* is all about “us,” the European and French “us” that had been under siege during the war and was now liberated to express its freedom and democratic vision. As we will see, the progression of the images in this half of the book continues to explore these themes.

The second half of *Images à la sauvette*, the “Oriental” half, begins with a similar image of two women, but although they are likewise clad in white, these women are faceless, the photo joyless and static (plate 64; figure 92). Captioned “Western Pakistan, 1948. Two ladies in purdah at a bazaar where war surplus parachutes are being sold for clothing material,” the photo frames the women from the back, rendering them doubly faceless by the back view and the fact that they are hidden in head-to-toe coverings. This is opposite in spirit and style to the white wedding gown and appealing, laughing face in the European photo. The Pakistani women are surrounded on either side by long, white lengths of knotted parachute cloth, a wartime material that physically recalls the recent strife. In fact, Cartier-Bresson has framed four “ladies in purdah,” two standing and two hanging from hooks in the market. The turbaned market vendor is half-hidden behind the platform; he does not interact with us or with his two female customers, and visually he seems to have four bolts of white cloth for sale, the lines and weight of each dragging downward.



FIGURE 91 Plate 1, *Joinville-le-Pont, near Paris, 1938*, from Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Images à la sauvette* (Paris: Verve, 1952). Gravure, page: 14 × 10¾ in. (37 × 27.4 cm).



FIGURE 134 Plates 102 and 103, *The Dance in Brooklyn*, from William Klein, *Life Is Good and Good for You in New York: Trance Witness Revels* (Paris: du Seuil, 1956).
Gravure, spread: 10 × 17 in. (27.5 × 43 cm).