

coordinates. Provide the missing link . . . One question leads to another. But are the questions adequate to what he seeks?" [GARY LAIN]

George Melly. *Don't Tell Sybil: An Intimate Memoir of E. L. T. Mesens.*

Atlas Press, 2014. 176 pp. Cloth: \$25.95.

"English Surrealism" may seem, like the "English Riviera" referred to in *Fawlty Towers*, a contradiction in terms. Still, George Melly's sprightly memoir foregrounds an experimental dimension in twentieth-century English life that is different from the declarative innovation of figures such as Henry Green, B. S. Johnson, and Ann Quin, yet charts its own path through perception and imagination, unimpeded by the conventionality represented in the title by Sybil, wife of Belgian-born artist and impresario E. L. T. (Édouard) Mesens and symbol of all that is safe and respectable. Melly, well known to the educated British public as a jazz musician, media personality, and charming gadfly, is the perfect mixture of insider and outsider needed to tell this tale. While this book is ostensibly a biography of E. L. T. Mesens, who in Melly's eyes set the tone for an incipient English Surrealist movement that never quite materialized, *Don't Tell Sybil*—like its cousins *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *The Quest for Corvo*—is, however, as much about Melly as it is about its putative subject, with Mesens proving to be a mask for Melly's comic self-discourse. If the true founders of English Surrealism might be said to be Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, Melly, through his winning and debonair portrait, conveys its spirit in whimsical if bittersweet honesty, as Mesens declines in a series of "aggressively clean white rooms" with a mournful insouciance at once his own and his chronicler's. Perhaps, we muse, England itself is so surreal it may not even need a declared surrealism. [NICHOLAS BIRNS]

Patrick Greaney. *Quotational Practices: Repeating the Future*

*in Contemporary Art.* Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2014. 240 pp. Paper: \$27.50.

What better genre to explore Patrick Greaney's *Quotational Practices* than the book review, which defines itself by interacting with preexisting texts. Gre-

aney's new book considers the aesthetic use of quotation in contemporary art and literature. Drawing from voices such as Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno, Greaney examines the "quotational works" of authors and artists Guy Debord, Marcel Broodthaers, Heimrad Bäcker, Sharon Hayes, Vanessa Place, and Glenn Ligon. In his masterful explication and translation of key works that rely on quoting other works, Greaney cracks open an unstable, uncomfortable place in which to evaluate the conflicting texts and contexts that form human history. In the study of the artistic and political role of quotation, the central question might not be whether the quotational author/artist constructs something new and original, but rather how quotation functions in the deconstruction of comfortable identities. Greaney explains that important contemporary artworks exist within and push against the historical contexts in which they surface and continue to resurface. In his analysis of Bäcker's 1986 book *transcript*, for example, Greaney shows how Bäcker, a member of the Hitler Youth and later of the Nazi Party, quotes National Socialist texts as a way of exposing and protesting a problematic past that he helped to create and dismantle. For Greaney, the aesthetic use of quotation, which involves repeating texts out of context in a fissured present, forces the quotational author/artist to disrupt prevailing binaries between original/unoriginal, individual/society, us/them, subject/object, gay and lesbian/queer, white/black, normal/abnormal, good/evil. This is the brave work of quotational art. It reproduces texts and dissolves contexts. It criticizes, eclipses, and rejects a linear view of history that precludes creativity, revealing the possibility of multiple futures that may, actually, have already happened.

[KAREN MAUK]

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