First Manifesto of Surrealism - 1924

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Preface

Such is the belief in life, in the most precarious aspects of life, by which is meant real life, that in the end belief is lost. Man, that inveterate dreamer, more and more discontented day by day with his fate, orbits with difficulty around the objects he has been led to make use of, those which indifference has handed him, or his own efforts, almost always his efforts, since he has consented to labour, at least he has not been averse to chancing his luck (what he calls his luck!). A vast modesty is now his lot: he knows what women he has had, what foolish affairs he has been involved in; riches or poverty are nothing to him, he remains in this respect a new-born babe, and as for the consent of his moral conscience, I admit that he does very well without it. If he retains any degree of lucidity, he can do no more than turn to his childhood, which ruined as it has been by his teachers' pains, seems to him nonetheless full of charm. There, the absence of all familiar constraint, furnishes him with a perspective of several lives lived simultaneously; he becomes rooted in this illusion; he no longer wishes to know anything beyond the momentary and extreme facility of everything. Each morning, children set off without concern. Everything is near, the worst material circumstances are fine. The woods are black or white, one will never need to sleep again.

But it is true we would never dare venture so far, it is not merely a question of distance. Menace accumulates, one yields, one abandons a part of the terrain to be conquered. That same imagination that knows no limits, is never permitted to be exercised except according to arbitrary laws of utility; it is incapable of assuming this inferior role for long, and at about the age of twenty, prefers, in general, to abandon Man to his unilluminated destiny.

Let him try, later, now and then, to collect himself, having felt himself little by little losing all reason to live, incapable as he has become of rising to the heights of an exceptional situation such as love, and he will hardly succeed. That is because, from now on, he belongs body and soul to an imperious practical necessity, of which one must never lose sight. His gestures will lose all their expansiveness, his ideas all their grandeur. In what happens to him or might happen, he will perceive only what relates such events to a host of similar events, events in which he has not taken part, waste events. Rather, he will assess them with regard to some one of

those events, more reassuring in its outcome than the rest. On no account, will he consider them as offering him salvation.

Dear imagination, what I love most about you, is your unforgiving nature.

The only mark of freedom is whatever still exalts me. I believe it right to maintain forever, our oldest human fanaticism. Indeed that reflects my sole legitimate aspiration. Amidst all the shame we are heir to, it is well to recognize that the widest freedom of spirit remains to us. It is up to us not to abuse it in any serious manner. To make a slave of the imagination, even though what is vulgarly called happiness is at stake, is to fail profoundly to do justice to one's deepest self. Only imagination realises the possible in me, and it is enough to lift for a moment the dreadful proscription; enough also for me to abandon myself to it, without fear of error (as if one could be any more in error). Where does error begin, and security end for the spirit? Is not the possibility of error, for the spirit, rather a circumstance conducive to its well-being?

Madness remains, 'the madness one locks away' as has been so aptly said. That madness or another…Everyone knows, in fact, that the mad owe their incarceration to a number of legally reprehensible actions, and that were it not for those actions, their liberty (or what we see as their liberty) would not be at risk. They may be, in some measure, victims of their imagination, I am prepared to concede that, in the way that it induces them not to observe certain rules, without which the species feels threatened, which it pays us all to be aware of. But the profound indifference they show for the judgement we pass on them, and even the various punishments inflicted on them, allows us to suppose that they derive great solace from imagination, that they enjoy their delirium enough to endure the fact that it is only of value to themselves. And, indeed, hallucinations, illusions etc, are no slight source of pleasure. The most well-ordered sensuality partakes of it, and I know there are many evenings when I would gladly tame that pretty hand which in the last pages of Taine's *L'Intelligence,* indulges in some curious misdeeds. The confidences of the mad, I could pass my whole life inspiring them. They are a scrupulously honest tribe, whose innocence has no peer but my own. Columbus ought to have taken madmen with him to discover America. And see how that folly has gained substance, and endured.

It is not the fear of foolishness that compels us to leave the banner of imagination furled.

The case against the realist position needs to be considered, after considering the materialist position. The latter, more poetic however than the former, admittedly implies on the part of a Man, a monstrous pride, but not a new and more complete degeneration. It should be seen, above all, as a welcome reaction against certain ridiculous spiritualist tendencies. Ultimately, it is not incompatible with a certain nobility of thought.

The realistic position, in contrast, inspired by positivism, from Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, appears to me to be totally hostile to all intellectual and moral progress. It horrifies me, since it arises from mediocrity, hatred and dull conceit. It is what engenders all the ridiculous books, and insulting plays of our day. It feeds on newspaper articles, and holds back science and art, while applying itself to flattering the lowest tastes of its readers; clarity bordering on stupidity, the life lived by dogs. The activity of the best minds is affected by it, the law of the lowest common denominator imposes itself on them, in the end, as on the others. One amusing result of this state of things, in literature for example, is the vast quantity of novels. Each brings its little measure of ‘observation’. Feeling in need of a purge, Paul Valéry recently suggested the compilation of an anthology of as great a number as possible of opening passages from novels, hoping much from the ensuing bouts of insanity. The most famous of authors would be included. Such an idea reflects honour on Paul Valéry who, some time ago, on the subject of novels, assured me that, as far as he was concerned, he would continue to refrain from writing: The Marquise went out at five. But has he kept his word?

If the declarative style, pure and simple, of which the sentence just offered is an example, is almost the rule in novels, it is because, as one must recognise, the authors’ ambition is quite limited. The circumstantial, needlessly specific, nature of their respective writings, leads me to think they are amusing themselves at my expense. They spare me not a single one of their issues of characterisation: will he be fair-haired, what will he be called, will we encounter him in summer? So many questions, resolved once and for all, haphazardly; the only power of choice I am left with is to close the book, which I take care to do at about the first page. And the descriptions! Nothing can be compared to their vacuity; it is nothing but the superimposition of images from a catalogue, the author employs them more

and more readily, he seizes the opportunity to slip me postcards, he tries to make me fall in step with him in public places:

'The small room into which the young man was shown was decorated with yellow wallpaper: there were geraniums and muslin curtains in the windows; the setting sun cast a harsh light over all…There was nothing special about the chamber. The furniture, of yellow wood, was all quite old. A sofa with a tall curved back, an oval table opposite the sofa, a dressing table and mirror set against the overmantel, chairs against the walls, two or three etchings of little value, representing German girls holding birds in their hands – amounted to all the furniture.' (*Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment*)

I am in no mood to admit, even for a moment, that the mind welcomes such motifs. It may be argued that this childish description has its place, and that at this point in the novel the author has his reasons for burdening me with it, but he is wasting his time since I avoid entering his room. The idleness, the fatigue of others does not interest me. I have too fragile a notion of life's continuity to equate my moments of depression and weakness with my best. I prefer one to be silent, when one ceases to feel. Understand that I am not condemning lack of originality for its lack of originality. I simply say that I take no notice of the empty hours of life, and that it may be an unworthy action for any man to crystallise out those which seem so to him. Allow me to ignore that description of a room, along with a host of others.

Whoa, I'm into psychology, a subject about which I'll take care not to jest.

The author seizes on a character, and, this being granted, makes the hero wander about the world. Whatever occurs, this hero, whose actions and reactions are admirably predictable, must not disturb, despite seeming to be about to do so, the calculations of which he is the object. The seas of life can appear to raise him, toss him about, and sink him again, he will always revert to that pre-formed human type. A simple game of chess which I am wholly disinterested in, Man, in whatever form, being a mediocre adversary. What I can't bear are those wretched debates over this or that move, which have no bearing on winning or losing. And if the game's not worth the candle, if objective reason serves so terribly, as it does, whoever summons it, is it not right to avoid such categories?

‘Diversity is as broad as all the tones of voice, manners of walking, coughing, blowing one’s nose, sneezing….(Pascal, *Pensées*, *B114*)

If a bunch of grapes contains no two alike, why do you need me to describe this grape among others, among all others, to make a grape worth eating? Our brains are dulled by this incurable mania for reducing the unknown to the known, to the classifiable. The desire for analysis wins out over feeling. It results in lengthy statements whose persuasive force derives from their very strangeness, and only impress the reader by recourse to an abstract vocabulary, which is moreover quite ill-defined. If the general ideas proposed for discussion by philosophy to date signalled thereby their definitive incursion in a wider domain, I would be the first to rejoice. But till now it has been mere sophisticated banter; the flashes of wit, and other mannerisms vie in hiding from us true thought in search of itself, instead of focusing on achieving success. It seems to me that every action carries within itself its own justification, at least for one who has had the capacity to commit it, that it is endowed with a radiant power which the slightest gloss is certain to enfeeble. Because of the latter, it even, in some sense, ceases to exist. Nothing is gained by being thus singled out. Stendhal’s heroes are subject to their author’s appraisal, a more or less happy one, which adds nothing to their glory. Where we truly rediscover them, is where Stendhal lost sight of them.

We are still living under the rule of logic, that, of course, is what I am driving at. But in our day, logical procedures are only applicable in solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism still in fashion only allows us to consider facts directly related to our own experience. The aims of logic, in contrast, escape us. Pointless to add that our very experience finds itself limited. It paces about in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to free it. It leans, it too, on immediate utility, and is guarded by common sense. Under the flag of civilisation, accompanied by the pretext of progress, we have managed to banish from the spirit everything that might rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, fancy, forbidding any kind of research into the truth which does not conform to accepted practice. It was by pure chance, it seems, that a part of our mental world, and to my mind the most important, with which we pretended to be no longer concerned, was recently brought back to light.

We must give thanks to Freud for his discoveries. On the basis of his research, a current of opinion is at last flowing, by means of which the

explorer of humanity will be able to push his investigations much further, authorised as he will be to take account of more than merely superficial realities. Imagination may be on the point of re-asserting its rights. If the depths of our spirits contain strange forces capable of supplementing those on the surface, or waging victorious war against them, there is every reason to seize on them, seize on them and then, if needs be, submit them to the control of reason. Analysts themselves have everything to gain from it. But it is worth noting that the means of conducting such an enterprise is not defined *a priori*, that until further notice, it can be taken to be the province of poets as well as scientists, and that its success will not depend upon the paths, more or less capricious, which are followed.

Very rightly, Freud applied his critical faculties to dreams. It is unacceptable, indeed, that this considerable part of psychic activity (since, from the birth to death of human beings at least, thought presents no solution to continuity: the sum of the dream moments, from a temporal viewpoint, and considering only pure dream in sleep, being in no way inferior to the sum of moments of reality, or to be precise, waking moments) has still received so little attention. The vast difference in importance, in weight, that the ordinary observer grants to events while awake and asleep, has always astonished me. It is because human beings, when they cease to sleep, are above all the playthings of memory, and memory in its normal state takes pleasure in re-tracing the events of dreams only feebly, depriving the latter of all real importance, and distancing the sole determinant from the point where it thinks, several hours later, that it was left: a solid hope, a going concern. It has the illusion of continuing something worthwhile. Dream finds itself reduced to a parenthesis, like the night. And, in general, delivers as little information as night does. This curious state of affairs seems to me to call for certain reflections:

1. Within the bounds in which they operate (or are thought to operate), dreams, to all appearances, are continuous and show signs of order. Memory alone arrogates to itself the right to recall excerpts, to ignore transitions, and to represent it to us rather as a series of dreams than the dream itself. By the same token, we possess at any moment only a single distinct configuration of reality, whose coordination is a matter of will. (Account must be taken of the depth of the dream. For the most part I retain only what I can glean from its most superficial layers. What I delight

in contemplating most about a dream is whatever sinks back beneath the surface when awake, all I have forgotten concerning my previous day's activities, dark leaves, dense branches. In reality, similarly, I prefer to fall.) What is worth noting, is that nothing permits us to infer a more profound dissipation of the constituent elements of dream. I regret having to speak according to a formula which excludes dream, in principle. When will there be sleeping logicians, sleeping philosophers! I would like to sleep, to surrender myself to the dreamers, as I deliver myself to those who read to me, eyes wide open; to cease from imposing, in this realm, the conscious rhythm of my thoughts. My dream last night, perhaps it continues that of the preceding night, and will in turn be continued the following night, with exemplary rigour. It's quite possible, as they say. And since there is not the slightest proof that, in doing so, the 'reality' which preoccupies me still exists in the dream state, failing to sink back behind memory, why should I not accord dream what I occasionally refuse reality, that quality of certainty in itself, which, in its own domain of time, is free from exposure to my repudiation? Why should I not expect more from dream-signs than I expect from a degree of consciousness daily more acute? Can the dream not also be applied to the solution of life's fundamental questions? Are they the same questions in one case as the other, and are those questions already there in dream? Is the dream any less subject to sanctions than the rest? I age, and more than that reality to which I believe myself subject, it is perhaps the dream, the indifference I show towards it, which ages me.

2. I return, once more, to the state of being awake. I am obliged to consider it as a phenomenon due to interference. Not only does the mind display, in this state, a strange tendency towards disorientation (a tale of lapses and errors of all sorts the secret of which is beginning to be revealed) but what is more it seems that when the mind is functioning normally it does no more than respond to suggestions which come to it from the depths of that night to which I commend it. However well balanced it is, its equilibrium is a relative one. It scarcely dares to express itself, and, when it does, limits itself to verifying that some idea, some female has made an impression on it. What impression, it would be quite incapable of saying, showing by that the measure of its subjectivity, no more. This idea, or female, troubles it, inducing it to be less strict. It has the effect of separating it, for a moment, from its solvent, and depositing it over the heavens, as the lovely precipitate that it can become, that it is.

When all else fails, it calls upon chance, a divinity more obscure even than the others, to whom it attributes its distraction. Who can say that the angle at which this idea which stirs it is presented, what it loves in that woman's eye, is not precisely what ties it to dream, binds it to the data which through its own fault it has lost? And if things were otherwise, what might it not be capable of? I would like to grant it the key to this passage.

3. The spirit of the man who dreams is quite content with what happens to him. The agonising question of possibility is no longer posed. Kill, fly faster, love to your heart's content. And if you die, are you not certain of waking among the dead? Let yourself be led, events will not allow you to defer them. You have no name. The easiness of it all is inestimable.

What reason, I ask, a reason so much greater than that other, confers the natural quality on dream, makes me welcome unreservedly a host of episodes whose strangeness would confound me as I write? And yet I can believe my own eyes, and ears; the great day has arrived, the beast has spoken.

If Man's awakening is harder, if it breaks the spell too abruptly, it is because he has been led to accept an impoverished idea of expiation.

4. From the moment it is subjected to methodical investigation, when by means yet to be determined, we succeed in accounting for dream in its entirety (and that presupposes a discipline in the use of memory spanning generations; but let us start all the same by registering the salient facts) when the curve of its graph will progress with unparalleled regularity and amplitude, we may hope that mysteries which are no such thing will give way to the great Mystery. I believe in the future resolution of these two states, seemingly so contradictory, of dream and reality, in a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, so to speak. That is the quest I am about, certain not to find it, but too heedless of death not to weigh a little the joys of its possession.

They say that every evening, before he slept, Saint-Pol-Roux (the Symbolist poet) used to have posted on the door of his manor house at Camaret, a notice which read: POET AT WORK.

There is a great deal more to be said, but in passing I simply wished to touch on a subject which would alone necessitate a long, altogether more rigorous, discussion: I will return to it. At this point, it was my intention to do justice to that hatred of the marvellous which rages in certain

individuals, to that ridicule beneath which they would like to bury it. Let's not beat about the bush: the marvellous is always beautiful, everything marvellous is beautiful, only the marvellous could be beautiful.

In the realm of literature, the marvellous alone is capable of making fertile those works which belong to a lesser genre such as the novel, everything in general that involves storytelling. Lewis's *The Monk* bears admirable witness to this. A breath of the marvellous animates it throughout. Long before the author has delivered his characters from all temporal constraint, one feels them ready to act with unprecedented pride. That passion for eternity that stirs them incessantly lends an unforgettable intensity to their torments and mine. I mean that the book, from beginning to end, and in the purest way, exalts only that part of the spirit which aspires to quit the ground; and that stripped of an insignificant portion of its novelistic plot, belonging to its period, it constitutes a model of accuracy and innocent grandeur. (What is admirable about fantasy is that nothing fantastic remains, there is only the real) It seems to me that no one has bettered it, and that the character of Matilda in particular is the most moving creation that one could credit to the figurative mode in literature. She is less a character than a continual temptation. And if a character is not a temptation, what is? An extreme temptation, she. The 'nothing is impossible to he who dares' is in *The Monk* given its full and convincing measure. Ghosts play a logical role in it, since the critical mind does not seize on them to contest their being. Likewise Ambrosio's punishment is treated in a legitimate way, since it is ultimately accepted by the critical mind as a natural denouement.

It may seem arbitrary for me to propose this example, when discussing the marvellous, from which the literature of the North and Oriental literature has borrowed time and again, without mentioning the truly religious literature of every land. It is simply that most of the examples those literatures might furnish me with are tainted by puerility, for the sole reason that they are addressed to children. At an early age children are weaned on the marvellous, and later, fail to retain sufficient virginity of mind to really enjoy *Cinderella*. Charming as the stories may be, adults would consider it demeaning to nourish themselves on fairy-tales, and I would agree they are not suitable for them. The web of adorable unrealities requires to be spun a little more finely, the older we get, and one

is left waiting for that species of spider…But the faculties do not change radically. Fear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for the extravagant, are devices which we will never summon in vain. There are stories to be written for grown-ups, stories as yet quite rare.

The marvellous is not the same in all ages; it participates obscurely in some kind of general revelation of which only the particulars reach us: romantic ruins, the modern mannequin or any other symbol capable of stirring the human sensibility for any length of time. In those appurtenances that make us smile, there is forever revealed an incurable human restlessness, and that is why I take them into consideration, why I judge them inseparable from certain products of genius, which are painfully affected by them more than others. They are Villon's gibbets, Racine's Greeks, Baudelaire's couches. They coincide with an eclipse of taste which I am made to endure, I whose idea of taste is a large stain. Amidst the bad taste of my age, I force myself to go further than anyone else. It is I, If I had lived in 1820, I 'the blood-stained nun', I, who would not have refrained from that banal and deceitful 'let us dissimulate' of which the parodic J.P.R Cuisin speaks, I who would have revelled, I, in gigantic metaphors, as they say, in all the phases of the 'Silvered Disc'.

For now, I think of a castle, of which at least half is not necessarily in ruins; the castle belongs to me, I picture it in a rural setting not far from Paris. The outbuildings are endless, and as for the interior, it has been utterly restored, in a manner that leaves nothing to be desired in the way of comfort. There are autos parked near the door, cloaked by the shadows of trees. A few of my friends are installed on the premises: there is Louis Aragon departing; he only has time to wave to you; Philippe Soupault rises with the stars and Paul Éluard, our mighty Éluard, has not yet returned. There are Robert Desnos and Roger Vitrac, out in the park, deciphering an old edict on duelling; Georges Auric, Jean Paulhan; Max Morise, who rows so well, and Benjamin Péret, occupied with his equations of birds; and Joseph Delteil; and Jean Carrive; and Georges Limbour, and Georges Limbour (there is a whole hedge of Georges Limbour); and Marcel Noll; there is T. Fraenkel gesturing to us from his captive balloon, Georges Malkine, Antonin Artaud, Francis Gérard, Pierre Naville, J.-A. Boiffard, then Jacques Baron and his brother, both of them handsome and cordial, and so many others too, and what ravishing women. These young men, how could one refuse them a thing, their wishes are, as to wealth,

commands. Francis Picabia is about to visit, and last week, in the hall of mirrors we received a certain Marcel Duchamp previously unknown to us. Picasso hunts in the neighbourhood. The spirit of demoralisation has taken up residence in the castle, and we have to deal with it whenever there is a question of relating to our peers, but the doors are always open and one does not commence by 'thanking' the world, you know. Moreover, the solitude is vast, we don't often encounter one another. Then isn't the essential thing that we are masters of ourselves, and masters of women, and of love too?

I will be convicted of poetic deceit: everyone will go about saying I live on the Rue Fontaine, and they won't swallow that tale. So what! Are they so sure that the castle to which I invite them is only a phantom? What if the castle exists! My guests are there to prove it; their fancy is the luminous road that leads there. It is really our fantasies we inhabit, when we are there. And how could what one person does bother another, there, in the refuge of sentimental pursuit and occasional meeting?

Man proposes and disposes. It falls to him alone to belong to himself completely, that is to maintain the host of his desires, daily more formidable, in a state of anarchy. Poetry teaches him to do so. It bears within itself a perfect compensation for the miseries we endure. It can also be a means of organisation, if ever under the influence of a less intimate disappointment we choose to take it quite seriously. The time is coming when it will decree an end to money and itself will break heaven's bread for the earth! There will still be gatherings in public squares, and movements in which you never dared hope to take part. Farewell to absurd choice, dreams of the abyss, rivalries, endless patience, the flight of the seasons, the artificial ordering of ideas, the balustrade of danger, the time for everything! Only let us take pains to practice poetry. Does it not fall to us, who are already living, to try to make that which we propose for our much wider field of enquiry, prevail?

It is irrelevant whether there is a degree of disproportion between this defence and the illustration of it that follows. It was a matter of returning to the sources of poetic imagination, and what's more, of staying there. Not that I pretend to have done so. It would be to take a great deal on oneself to wish to establish oneself in those remote regions where everything at first appears so troublesome, all the more so if you wish to lead someone else there. Besides, one is never quite sure of really being there. If you are taking all that trouble, you are also tempted to stop elsewhere. The fact remains that an arrow now points in the direction of those regions, and that to attain the true goal only depends on the traveller's powers of endurance.

We know, more or less, the road travelled. I was careful to relate, in an analysis of the case of Robert Desnos, entitled: *THE ENTRANCE OF THE MEDIUMS* (*ENTRÉE DES MÉDIUMS*, *Littérature, nouvelle série no. 6 November 1, 1922*) that I had been 'led to focus my attention on more or less partial phrases which, in complete solitude, on the verge of sleep, become perceptible to the mind without being able to discover in them any prior intention.' I had at that time attempted the poetic venture with minimum risk, that is my aspirations were the same as today, but I trusted in tardiness of elaboration, to protect me from useless proximity, a proximity of which I wholly disapproved. In that lay a modesty of thought of which some vestiges remain. At the end of my life, I will doubtless manage with difficulty to speak as others do, apologising for my voice and paucity of gesture. The virtue of speech (and writing, moreover) seemed to me to spring from the ability to contract in a striking way the exposition (since such it was) of a small number of facts, poetic or otherwise, of which I made myself the subject. I concluded that Rimbaud proceeded no differently. I composed, with a concern for variation which merited more, the last poems of *Pawn-Shop* (*Mont de piété, 1919*), that is I managed to derive incredible benefit from the blank lines of that book. Those lines were the eye, closed to the operations of thought that I believed I should hide from my readers. That was not deceit on my part, but a delight in shocking them. I achieved the illusion of potential complicity, which I had more and more difficulty in relinquishing. I had begun to cherish words immoderately for they space they admit around them, for their tangencies with a host of other words I did not utter. The poem *BLACK-FOREST* derives

from precisely this state of mind. It took me six months to write and take my word for it I did not leave off for a single day. But you will understand that it stemmed rather from my self-esteem at that time, I love these foolish confessions. At that time, Cubist pseudo-poetry was trying to gain a hearing, but it had emerged helpless from Picasso's brain and as far as I was concerned I was thought to be as dull as ditchwater (I still am). I suspected, moreover, that from the poetic point of view I had taken a wrong turning, but I hedged my bets the best I could, defying lyricism with a barrage of definitions and formulae (the phenomenon of Dada was soon to appear) and pretending to be searching for an application of poetry to advertising (I claimed that the world would end, not with a good book, but a brilliant advertisement for heaven or hell).

In those days, a man, at least as boring as I, Pierre Reverdy, wrote:
The image is a pure creation of the mind.
It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less remote realities.
The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is remote and true, the stronger the image – the greater its emotive power and poetic reality….etc. (*Nord-Sud, March 1918*)

These words, however Sibylline to the uninitiated, were extremely revealing and I meditated on them for a long while. But the image eluded me. Reverdy's aesthetic, an aesthetic totally a *posteriori*, led me to mistake effects for causes. It was amidst all this that I was driven to renounce my point of view, irrevocably.

One evening then, before falling asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word, but distinct however from the sound of any voice, a quite bizarre phrase which came to me without bearing any trace of the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I found myself involved at that time, a phrase which seemed to me insistent, a phrase, dare I say it, that came knocking at the window. I took swift note of it, and prepared to move on, when its organic nature struck me. Truly the phrase astonished me; I have unfortunately been unable to recapture it precisely even today; but it was something like: 'There is a man sliced in two by the window', but it suffered no ambiguity, accompanied as it was by a faint visual representation of a man walking, severed half-way up by a window at right angles to the axis of his body.

(Were I a painter, this visual image would no doubt have seemed more important to me than the other. It was indeed my prior predisposition which decided the issue. Since that day, I have had occasion to focus my attention at will on similar apparitions, and I know they are just as clear as auditory phenomena. With a pencil and a sheet of blank paper to hand, I could easily trace their outlines. Here again it is not a matter of depicting but merely tracing. In this way I could reproduce a tree, a wave, a musical instrument, a host of things, of which I am currently incapable of achieving even the roughest sketch. I would dive in, convinced of finding my way through a maze of lines which at first sight seemed to be heading nowhere. Then on opening my eyes I would gain the intense impression of something 'previously unseen'. The proof of what I am saying has been demonstrated many times by Robert Desnos: to convince oneself, one has simply to leaf through the pages of issue *36* of *Feuilles libres* which contains several of his drawings, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Man Died This Morning* etc., which were accepted by that journal as the drawings of a madman and published as such).

Without question, what offered itself was a simple presentation in space of a man leaning from a window. But the window having followed the man's movements, I realised that I was dealing with an image of a sufficiently rare kind, and I could think of nothing but how to incorporate it among my materials for poetic construction. I had no sooner accorded it this place however than it was succeeded by an almost continuous succession of phrases, scarcely less surprising, and leaving me with an impression of gratuitousness such that the control I had exercised over myself up till then seemed illusory and all I could think of was putting an end to the interminable quarrel taking place within me. (Knut Hamson attributes this kind of revelation of which I was the recipient as deriving from hunger, and he may be right, since it is true I did not eat every day during that period of my life. Certainly the manifestations he describes are clearly the same:

'The next day I woke early. It was still dark. My eyes had been open a long while when I heard a clock in the apartment above strike five. I wanted to go back to sleep but could not. I was wide awake and a host of thoughts flooded through my mind. Suddenly a few choice fragments came to mind, perfectly suitable for use in a rough draft, or to be serialised; instantly I found, quite by chance, lovely phrases such as I had never

conceived. I repeated them to myself slowly, word by word; they were excellent. And still more followed. I rose and snatched a pencil and paper from the table behind my bed. It as a though an artery had burst inside me, one word followed another, found its correct position, adapted itself to the context, scene piled on scene, events unfolded, one vessel after another bubbled in my mind, and I was enjoying myself immensely. Thoughts came so swiftly and flowed so copiously that a whole host of subtle details escaped me, because my pencil could not keep up with them, and yet I went as fast as I could, my hand in continual motion, not losing an instant. The sentences continued to well up within me; I was pregnant with my subject.'

Apollinaire claimed that Chirico's first paintings were created under the influence of cenesthetic disorder (migraine, colic, etc.)

Totally preoccupied with Freud as I then was and familiar with his methods of investigation which I had some slight occasion to practice on patients during the war, I resolved to obtain from myself what one tries to obtain from others, namely a monologue delivered as rapidly as possible, on which the critical mind of the subject is unable to pass judgement, unembarrassed consequently by reticence, comprising, as precisely as possible, spoken thought. It appeared to me, , and still does – the manner in which the phrase about the man sliced in two came to me bears witness to it – that the speed of thought is no greater than that of speech, and does not necessarily defy capture in language, nor even the flow of the pen. It was in this frame of mind that Philippe Soupault, to whom I had confided these initial conclusions, and I, undertook to blacken some paper, with a laudable disdain for what might ensue of a literary nature. Ease of execution achieved the rest. At the end of the first day, we were able to read through fifty or so pages obtained in this manner, and began comparing our results. All in all, Soupault's pages and mine were remarkably analogous: the same poor construction, similar deficiencies, but also, on both our parts, the impression of extraordinary eloquence, much emotion, a considerable selection of images of a quality such that we would not have been capable of creating a single one in longhand, a very special quality of the picturesque and, here and there, a certain piquant buffoonery. The only apparent difference between our two texts seemed to me to derive in essence from our respective temperaments, Soupault's being less static than

mine, and if I allow myself this mild criticism, from the fact that he had committed the error of placing at the top of certain pages, and no doubt in a spirit of mystification, a few words by way of title. I must, on the other hand, do him justice, in that he was constantly, and forcefully, opposed to the least re-touching, the least correction, of any passage of this kind which appeared at all ill-conceived. In that, he was indeed absolutely right. (I believe, more and more, in the infallibility of my thoughts with respect to myself, and that is more than reasonable. Nevertheless, with this thought-writing, where one is at the mercy of the first distraction from outside, 'ebullitions' may occur. It would be inexcusable to pretend otherwise. Thought, by definition, is overpowering, and incapable of detecting itself in an error. The blame for such obvious weaknesses must be placed on suggestions that reach it from outside.) It is, in fact, very difficult to assess the various elements present at their true value, one might even say it is impossible to appreciate them at first reading. On writing them, these elements are, to all appearances, as strange to you as to others, and naturally you are wary of them. Poetically speaking, they strike you above all by a high degree of instantaneous absurdity, the quality of this absurdity, on closer examination, being to make room for everything admissible, legitimate in the world: the disclosure of a certain number of properties and facts no less objective, in the end, than all the rest.

In homage to Guillaume Apollinaire, who recently died, and who, on several occasions, seemed to us to pursue a discipline of this kind, without however having relinquished in doing so an indifferent literary method, Soupault and I designated the new mode of pure expression we had adopted and whose benefit we wished to bestow on our friends, by the name of SURREALISM. I see no point now in dwelling on the word, the meaning we have given it having generally prevailed over the that of Apollinaire. To bestow a yet more appropriate title on it, we could no doubt have appropriated the word SUPERNATURALISM, employed by Gérard de Nerval in the dedication to his *Girls of Fire* (*Filles du feu, 1854*) and also by Thomas Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (*Book III, Chapter VIII, 'Natural Supernaturalism'*). It seems, in fact, that Nerval possessed to a marvellous degree that spirit with which we claim kinship. Apollinaire, having possessed, in contrast, only the letter, as yet imperfect, of Surrealism, and having shown himself powerless to give the theoretical insight into it which

we possess. Here are two passages by Nerval which seem particularly significant in this regard:

'I will explain to you, my dear Dumas, the phenomenon of which you spoke earlier. There are, you know, certain story-tellers who cannot invent without identifying with their imaginary characters. You may recall how convincingly our old friend Nodier told us of his misfortune in being guillotined during the Revolution; we were so convinced by it, we asked him how he had managed to set his head back on his neck again.'

'…And since you have been imprudent enough to have quoted one of the sonnets composed in this SUPERNATURALISTIC reverie, as the Germans say, you will have to hear them all. You will find them at the end of this volume. They are scarcely more obscure than Hegel's metaphysics or Swedenborg's *MEMORABILIA* (*1766*), and would lose their charm if explained, if the latter were possible, at least concede the value of the expression…' (See also the term *idéoréalisme* in Saint-Pol-Roux)

It is dishonest in the extreme to dispute our right to employ the word SURREALISM in the quite specific sense that we understand it, since it is clear that before us the word lacked currency. I therefore define it once and for all:

SURREALISM, n. m. Pure psychic automatism by means of which one intends to express, either verbally, or in writing, or in any other manner, the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, free of any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected association, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to the destruction of all other psychic mechanisms completely, and to the replacement of them with itself, in solving the principal problems of life. The following have performed acts of ABSOLUTE SURREALISM, Messrs. Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Éluard, Gérard, Limbour, Malkine, Morise, Naville, Noll, Péret, Picon, Soupault, Vitrac.

They appear, to date, to be the only ones, and there would be no question of error in this were it not for the fascinating case of Isidore Ducasse, about whom I lack data. And of course, a fair number of poets

might pass for Surrealists, if one considers their works superficially, beginning with Dante, and in his finer moments, Shakespeare. In the course of various attempts at reducing to its basic principles, what by an abuse of confidence, is called genius, I have in the end found nothing that can be attributed to any other process.

Young's *Night Thoughts* are surrealist from end to end; unfortunately a clergyman speaks, a bad clergyman, no doubt, but still a clergyman.

Swift is surrealist in spitefulness.
De Sade is surrealist in sadism.
Chateaubriand is surrealist in exoticism.
Constant is surrealist in politics.
Hugo is surrealist when he is not being stupid.
Desbordes-Valmour is surrealist in love.
Bertrand is surrealist in the past.
Rabbe is surrealist in death.
Poe is surrealist in adventure.
Baudelaire is surrealist in morality.
Rimbaud is surrealist in his way of life, and elsewhere.
Mallarmé is surrealist in his confidences.
Jarry is surrealist in absinthe.
Nouveau is surrealist in the kiss.
Saint-Pol-Roux is surrealist in symbolism.
Fargue is surrealist in atmosphere.
Vaché is surrealist within me.
Reverdy is surrealist at home.
Saint-John Perse is surrealist at a distance.
Roussel is surrealist in the anecdote.
Etc.

They are not always surrealist, I would stress, In that, I discern in each of them a certain number of preconceived ideas to which – quite naively! – they clung. They clung to them because they failed to hear the surrealist voice, the one that continues to preach at the hour of death and above the storm, because they would not simply serve to orchestrate the marvellous score. They were instruments, too full of pride, and that is why

they failed to produce harmonious sound at all times. (I might say the same of a number of philosophers and artists, including, among the latter, Ucello among the old masters, and in the modern era Seurat, Gustave Moreau, Matisse, in *La Musique* of 1939 for example, Braque, Duchamp, Picabia, Chirico, so admirable for so long, Klee, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and one very close to us, André Masson.)

But we, who are free from any attempt to filter, who in our works have made ourselves silent receptacles filled with echoes, modest recording instruments who are not hypnotised by the designs we trace, perhaps we serve a yet nobler cause. So we render with integrity the 'talent' lent to us. You may as well talk to me of the talent of that platinum ruler, that mirror that door, or the sky above.

We have no talent: ask Philippe Soupault:

'Anatomical products and cheap housing will destroy the greatest cities.'

Ask Roger Vitrac:

'No sooner had I summoned the marble-admiral than he pirouetted on his heels like a horse rearing at the pole star and showed me in the plane of his bicorn hat a region where I ought to spend my life.'

Ask Paul Éluard:

'It is an old tale I recount, a famous poem I re-read: I am leaning against a wall, with greening ears and scorched lips.'

Ask Max Morise:

'The cave-bear and his friend the bittern, the vol-au-vent and the wind his valet, the Lord Chancellor with his Lady, the scare-crow for sparrows and the sparrow his accomplice, the test-tube and his daughter the needle, the carnivore and his brother the carnival, the road-sweeper and his monocle, the Mississippi and its little dog, the coral and its jug of milk, the Miracle and its good Lord, have simply to disappear from the surface of the sea.'

Ask Joseph Delteil:

'Alas! I believe in the virtue of birds. And it only takes a feather for me to die laughing.'

Ask Louis Aragon:

'During a break in the party, while the players were gathering around a bowl of flaming punch, I asked the tree whether it still had its red ribbon.'

And ask me, who could not prevent myself writing the disturbing serpentine lines of this preface.

Ask Robert Desnos, he who more than any of us, perhaps, is closest to the surrealist truth, he who, in his still unpublished works, NOUVELLES HÉBRIDES, DÉSORDRE FORMEL, DEUIL POUR DEUIL (*New Hebrides 1922*, *illustrated by Miró 1974, Formal Disorder 1922/23*, *Grief for Grief 1924*) and in the course of the numerous experiments he has lent himself to, has fully justified the hopes I placed in surrealism and leads me to hope for much more yet. Desnos now speaks surrealist at will. The prodigious agility with which he follows his thought orally is worth as much to us as the pleasure we derived from splendid speeches now lost, Desnos having better things to do than preserve them. He reads himself like an open book and does nothing to retain the pages, which fly off in the windy wake of his life.

Secrets of the Magical Surrealist Art

- Written surrealist composition, or first and last draft

Have writing materials brought, once you are settled in a place as favourable as possible for focusing the mind on itself. Put yourself in the most passive, or receptive, state you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and those of others. Tell yourself repeatedly that literature is one of the saddest roads leading to everything. Write swiftly with no preconceived subject, swiftly enough that you cannot retain it, and are not tempted to re-read. The first sentence will arise spontaneously, it being the case in truth that each second there is a sentence, unknown to our conscious thought, which only asks to be externalised. It is quite difficult to make pronouncements about the next sentence; it no doubt participates in both our conscious activity and the other kind, if you agree that the fact of having written the first entails a minimum of perception. That should matter little to you, however; and in that resides, to a large extent, the interest of the surrealist game. It is still the case that punctuation definitely runs counter to the absolute continuity of flow which concerns us, although it may seem as necessary as the distribution of nodes on a vibrating string. Continue for as long as you wish. Trust in the inexhaustible nature of that murmuring. If silence threatens to establish itself, if you have committed an error: an error, let us say, of inattention, break off without hesitation with a more than obvious blank line. Following a word whose origin seems suspect to you, place some letter, the letter ‘l’ for example, the letter ‘l’ every time, and recall the arbitrary by making this letter the initial one of the very next word.

- How not to be bored in company

This is extremely difficult. Never be at home to anyone, and occasionally when some irrelevance has broken the injunction, interrupting you in the full flow of surrealist activity, your arms crossed, say: ‘It’s no matter, there are doubtless better things to do or not do. Life’s interests can’t sustain themselves. Simplicity, what’s going on within me is still tiresome!’ or some such revolting banality.

- How to make speeches

Put your name on the list, on the eve of election, in the first country which considers it worthwhile proceeding with such public consultations. Each of us has the makings of an orator: the multicoloured loincloths, the glass baubles of words. Through surrealism one will surprise despair in all its poverty. One night on some public platform, all by oneself, one will carve up eternal heaven, that rich carcase. One will promise so much and perform so little that it will be a wonder. To the demands of an entire people one will concede a partial and ludicrous ballot. One will join together the most intractable of enemies in a secret yearning, which will blow nations apart. And one will achieve this merely by allowing oneself to be elevated by the vast word which melts with pity and spins with hatred. Incapable of failure, one will triumph among failures. One will be truly elect and the loveliest women will love one with all-consuming passion.

- How to write false novels

Whoever you are, if your spirit moves you, burn a few laurel leaves, and without needing to fan the meagre flame, you'll begin writing a novel. Surrealism permits it; you have only to position the needle marked 'Fair' at 'Action' and the game will begin. Here are some characters varying widely in appearance: their names in your writing can be simply capital letters, and they will conduct themselves as easily with respect to active verbs as does the personal pronoun 'it' towards words like: 'rains', 'is', 'must' etc. They will order them about, so to speak, and whenever observation, reflection and the power of generalisation prove of no assistance to you, be assured they will credit you with a thousand intentions you never had. Thus endowed with a small number of physical and moral characteristics, these beings, who in truth owe so little to you, will no longer depart from a fixed mode of conduct with which you no longer need to occupy yourself. A plot, appearing more or less skilful, will result from this, justifying point by point the moving or reassuring denouement about which you care not a jot. Your false novel will simulate a true novel to a marvellous degree; you will become rich and all will agree that you have 'something in your belly', since it is there as well that this something is located.

Of course, by an analogous method, and provided you ignore what you review, you can devote yourself successfully to false criticism.

- How to catch the eye of a woman you pass in the street

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……..

- <u>Against death</u>

Surrealism will introduce you to death which is a secret society. It will glove your hand, burying within it the profound M with which the word Memory starts. Do not forget to make proper arrangements for your will: personally, I ask to be conducted to the cemetery in a removal van. Let my friends destroy every last copy of my *Discourse on the Paucity of Reality*. (*Discours sur le Peu de Réalité 1927*)

Language has been given to Man so that he can make surrealist use of it. To the extent that he is required to make himself understood, he manages to express himself more or less, and by so doing to accomplish various functions from among those most vulgar. To speak, to read a letter presents little real difficulty to him, provided that, in so doing, he does not set a goal beyond the average, that is, provided he limits himself to conversing (for the pleasure of conversing) with someone. He is not worried about the forthcoming words, nor of the sentence beyond that which he utters. To a very simple question, he will be capable of giving a point-blank response. In the absence of tics contracted through dealings with others, he can pronounce spontaneously on a small number of subjects; he has no need to 'think long and hard before speaking' nor to formulate anything at all in advance. Who could convince him that this power of making a first draft will only do him a disservice if he chooses to establish more delicate relations? There is nothing about which he should refuse to speak, to write in abundance. To listen to oneself, to read oneself only has the effect of suspending the workings of the occult, that admirable resource. I am in no hurry to comprehend myself (Enough! I shall always comprehend myself). If such and such a sentence of mine causes me a momentary disappointment, I trust in the next sentence to right its wrongs, I refrain from beginning it over again or polishing it. Only the merest loss of impetus might prove fatal to me. Words, groups of words which succeed one another display the greatest solidarity among themselves. It is not for me to favour these at the expense of others. It is for a miraculous compensation mechanism to intervene – and intervene it does.

Not only does this free flow of language which I seek to render forever valid, which seems to me to adapt itself to all the circumstances of life, not only does this language fail to deprive me of any of my resources,

but it grants me further an extraordinary lucidity, and in the area I least expected. I shall even go so far as to state that it instructs me and, indeed, it has happened on occasions that I have employed surreally words whose meaning I have forgotten. I was able to verify subsequently that the way in which I had used them corresponded exactly to their definitions. That would lead one to believe that we do not 'learn', that we only ever 're-learn'. There are happy turns of phrase that I have thus become familiar with. And I say nothing of the poetic consciousness of objects I have been able to acquire through spiritual contact with them a thousand times repeated.

However it is to dialogue that the forms of surrealist language are best adapted. Here, two thoughts confront one another; while one is being delivered, the other is occupied with it, but how is it so occupied? To suppose that it incorporates it within itself would be to admit that for a while it is possible for it to feed entirely on the other thought, which is highly improbable. And in fact the attention it pays is purely external; it only has time to accept or reject, generally reject, with all the consideration a man can summon. This mode of language moreover does not allow the depths of a subject to be plumbed. My attention, prey to a demand which it cannot with decency refuse, treats the opposing thought as an enemy; in ordinary conversation, it always almost 'picks up' on the words, the figures of speech employed; it places me in a good position to employ them in my reply while altering them. This is true to such a degree that in certain pathological mental states where sensory disorders occupy the patient's whole attention, the latter, while continuing to reply to questions posed, will seize on the last word spoken in his presence, or the last fragment of some surrealist phrase a trace of which he finds in his mind:

'How old are you? – You' (Echolalia)

'What is your name? – Forty-five houses.' (Ganser syndrome, or a reply that is beside the point.)

There is no conversation in which something of this disorder does not appear. The effort of socialising which dictates it and the considerable practice we have at it are the only things which allow us to conceal it temporarily. It is also the great weakness of a book that it is in a constant battle with its finest, by which I mean its most exacting, readers. In the short dialogue I improvised above, between doctor and madman, moreover, it is the latter who has the upper hand. Since, by his replies, he impresses

himself on the examining doctor's attention – and because he is not the one who is asking the questions. Is that to say that at that moment his power of thought is stronger? Perhaps. He is free to take no more account of his age and name.

Poetic surrealism, to which I am dedicating this study, has applied itself to date in re-establishing dialogue in accord with absolute truth, by freeing the two speakers from the obligations of polite behaviour. Each of them simply pursues his soliloquy, without trying to derive any particular dialectical pleasure and without imposing on his neighbour in any way. The statements made are not, as is usually the case, aimed at developing a thesis, however slight, they are as disinterested as possible. As for the reply they elicit, it is in principle totally indifferent to the self-esteem of the person speaking. The words, the images are only so many spring-boards for the mind of the listener. This is the way in which, in *Magnetic Fields* (*Les Champs magnétiques,1919*), the first purely surrealist work, the pages grouped together under the title *Barriers* (*Barrières*) should be construed, pages in which Soupault and I show ourselves as impartial interlocutors.

Surrealism does not allow those who devote themselves to it to abandon it when they please. Everything suggests that it acts on the mind as drugs do; like them it creates a certain state of dependence and can drive Man to terrible acts of rebellion. It is also, if you like, an artificial paradise and the taste one acquires for it comes within the scope of Baudelaire's criticism, under the same headings as drugs do. As does the analysis of the mysterious effects and special pleasures it can engender – in many respects surrealism presents itself as a new vice which it seems need not be restricted to only a few; like hashish it has the power to satisfy all tastes – place for such an analysis must necessarily be found in the present study.

1. It is true of surrealist images as it is of those engendered by opium that Man does not evoke them, but that they 'offer themselves to him, spontaneously, despotically. He cannot dispel them; for the will is powerless, and no longer governs the faculties.' (Baudelaire) It remains to be seen whether images can ever be 'evoked'. If, as I do, one accepts Reverdy's definition, it does not seem possible to conjoin of one's own volition what he terms 'two distant realities'. The conjunction is made or

not made, that is all. For my part, I refuse to believe, in the most formal; way, that in Reverdy's work images such as:

In the stream there is a song that flows

or:

Day unfolded like a white tablecloth

or:

The world returns to a sack

reveal the slightest degree of premeditation. It is false, in my opinion, to pretend that 'the mind has grasped the relationship' between the two realities before it. Firstly, it has not grasped anything consciously. It is the juxtaposition of two terms, in some fortuitous manner, that has emitted a certain light, the light of the image, to which we show ourselves to be infinitely sensitive. The value of the image depends on the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference in potential between the two conductors. When a difference barely exists as in a comparison (note the image in the work of Jules Renard) no spark is produced. Now it is not in man's power, to my mind, to effect the conjunction of two far distant realities. The principle of association of ideas, such as we conceive it, militates against it. Or else we would be forced to revert to an elliptical art, which Reverdy deplores as I do. We are obliged then to admit that the two terms of the image are not deduced one from another by the mind in order to conjure a spark, that they are simultaneous products of the activity I term surrealist reason limiting itself to noting and appreciating the luminous phenomenon.

And just as the length of the spark increases to the extent it does when traversing rarefied gases, the surrealist atmosphere created by automatic writing, which I desire to place within reach of everyone, is especially conducive to the production of the most beautiful images. One might even say that, in this vertiginous race, the images appear, as the mind's sole means of steering. The mind, little by little, becomes convinced of the supreme reality of these images. At first confining itself to submitting to them, it soon perceives that they stimulate its powers of reason, increasing its knowledge accordingly. It becomes conscious of limitless expanses where its desires are made manifest, where for and against are constantly diminished, where its obscurity does not betray it. It goes onward, borne by these images which delight it, which scarcely leave

time to cool the fire in its fingers. It is the most beautiful night of all, the night of the lightning-flash: day, compared to it, is night.

The innumerable types of surrealist image call for classification, a task which I do not propose to attempt here. To group them according to their specific affinities would take me too far afield; what I want to take account of, essentially, is their common virtue. The most powerful, for me, I must reveal, is that which presents the greatest degree of arbitrariness; that which takes the longest to translate into everyday language, either because it contains an immense amount of apparent contradiction; or because one of its terms is strangely hidden; or because proclaiming its sensational nature, it has the appearance of ending weakly (abruptly reducing the angle of its compass); or because it derives from itself a ridiculous formal justification; or because it is of a hallucinatory nature; or because it gives a mask of the concrete to the abstract in a very natural manner; or, conversely, because it implies the negation of some elementary physical property; or because it provokes laughter. Here, in order, are a few examples:

The ruby of Champagne. (Lautréamont)

Lovely as the law of arrested development of the breast in adults whose propensity to growth is not in proportion to the quantity of molecules the organism assimilates. (Lautréamont)

A church stood there brilliant as a bell. (Philippe Soupault)

In Rrose Sélavy's sleep a dwarf risen from a well comes to eat her bread at night. (Robert Desnos)

On the bridge the dew with a she-cat's head rocks itself to sleep. (André Breton)

A little to the left, in my divined firmament, I see – but it is doubtless only a mist of blood and murder – the frosted gleam of freedom's disturbances. (Louis Aragon)

In the blazing forest,

The lions were cool. (Roger Vitrac)

The colour of a woman's stockings is not necessarily in the likeness of her eyes, which led a philosopher whom it is useless to name to declare: 'Cephalopods have more reasons to hate progress than quadrupeds.' (Max Morise)

Whether we like it or not, there is enough there to satisfy several of the mind's demands. All these images seem to testify that the mind is ripe

for something more than the benign joys it commonly accords itself. This is the only means it has to turn the ideal quantity of events it is charged with to its own advantage. (Let us not forget that, according to Novalis' formula, 'there is a series of events which runs parallel to real events. Men and circumstances commonly modify the ideal train of circumstances, so that it appears imperfect, and their consequences are equally imperfect. So it was with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism we got Lutheranism.') These images show the mind the extent to which it usually dissipates itself and the disadvantages that it thus incurs. It's no bad thing that the images ultimately disconcert it, since to disconcert the mind is to place it in the wrong. The sentences I cited provide amply for this. But the mind that savours them draws from them the conviction that it is on the right track; by itself, it is incapable of convicting itself of quibbling; it has nothing to fear anyway since it bids fair to encompass everything.

2. The mind which plunges into surrealism relives with exaltation the best part of its childhood. For such a mind, it is a little like the conviction with which a person drowning reviews, in less than a moment, all the insuperable events of his life. You will say that is not very encouraging. But I have no intention of encouraging those who tell me so. From childhood memories and a few others emerges a feeling of being un-preoccupied and subsequently of being delinquent, which I regard as the most fecund that exists. It is childhood perhaps which comes closest to 'real life'; childhood beyond which Man has, apart from his passport, only a few complimentary tickets at his disposal; childhood where everything nevertheless conspires to bring about his possession of himself, efficiently and without risk. Thanks to surrealism, it seems those opportunities return. It is as if one were still running towards one's salvation, or perdition. One revisits, in the shadows, a precious terror. Thank God, it's only Purgatory. We traverse, with a shudder, what the occultists call dangerous territory. I arouse the monsters lurking in my wake; they are not as yet ill-intentioned towards me, and I am not lost, since I fear them. Here are 'the elephants with the heads of women and the lions flying' that used to make Soupault and I tremble to encounter, here is 'the soluble fish' that still frightens me a good deal. SOLUBLE FISH, am I not the soluble fish, I was born under the sign of the Fish, and man is soluble in his thought! The fauna and flora of surrealism go un-avowed.

3. I do not believe in the imminent establishment of a surrealist model. The common characteristics of all the texts of the genre, among them those I have just cited, and many others that might yield us a logical analysis and a strict grammatical analysis, do not preclude the specific evolution of surrealist prose in time. Following on from a number of essays I have offered in this vein over the past five years and which I am indulgent enough as to consider extremely disordered for the most part, the little stories which comprise the balance of this volume furnish me with glaring proof. I do not judge them, because of that, any more worthy or worthless, in demonstrating for the reader the benefits that the surrealist contribution is liable to effect in his consciousness.

Surrealist methods moreover, demand to be elaborated. Everything is suitable for obtaining the immediacy desired from certain associations. The glued paper employed by Picasso and Braque has the same value as the introduction of a commonplace into a literary work of the purest style. It is even permitted to employ the title POEM for what we obtain from as gratuitous a collection as possible (observe, if you will, the syntax) of headlines and fragments of headlines snipped from newspapers:

POEM
A burst of laughter
Of sapphire in the island of Ceylon
The most beautiful straws
HAVE A FADED COLOUR
BENEATH THE BOLTS
On an isolated farm
FROM DAY TO DAY
worsens
the pleasant
A driveable track
leads you to the edge of the unknown
the café
preaches for its saint
THE DAILY ARTISAN OF YOUR BEAUTY
MADAME
a pair
of silk stockings

is not
A leap in the void
A STAG
Love above all
Everything could be arranged so well
PARIS IS A LARGE VILLAGE
Watch out for
The fire that covers
THE PRAYER
Of fine weather
Know that
the ultra-violet rays
have finished their task
Short and sweet
THE FIRST BLANK NEWSPAPER
OF CHANCE
Red will be
The wandering singer
WHERE IS HE?
in the memory
in his house
AT THE SUITOR'S BALL
I do
as I dance
What one did, what one is going to do

And one could offer many more examples. Theatre, philosophy, science, criticism would all find themselves there. I hasten to add that the surrealist techniques of the future do not concern me.

Far more serious it seems to me (Whatever reservations I may be permitted to harbour concerning responsibility in general and the medico-legal considerations which determine an individual's degree of responsibility – complete responsibility, irresponsibility, limited responsibility – however hard it is for me to accept the principle of any kind of responsibility, I would like to know how the first punishable offences, the surrealist character of which will be clearly apparent, will be judged. Will the accused by acquitted, or will he merely be given the benefit of the doubt because of extenuating circumstances? It is a pity that

violation of the laws governing the Press is today barely acted against, for if that were not the case, we would soon see a trial of this kind: the accused has published a book which has outraged public decency. Several of his 'highly respected and honourable' fellow citizens have lodged a complaint against him, and he is also charged with libel and slander. There are also many other charges against him, such as insulting and defaming the army, inciting to murder, rape, etc. The accused, moreover, hastens to agree with his accusers in 'stigmatizing' most of the ideas expressed. His sole defence lies in claiming that he does not view himself as the author of the book, the said book being no more nor less than a surrealist concoction which precludes any question of merit or lack of it on the part of the person who signs it; further, that he has merely transcribed the document without offering any opinion on it, and that the text under accusation is at least as foreign to him as to the presiding judge. What is true for the publication of a book will also hold true for a whole host of other acts, as soon as surrealist methods begin to enjoy widespread favour. When that occurs, a new morality must be substituted for that prevailing, which is the source of all our trials and tribulations.) far more serious, and I have intimated it often enough, are the applications of surrealism to action. Certainly, I do not believe in the prophetic power of the surrealist word. 'It is oracular what I say' (Rimbaud: *Une Saison en Enfer: Mauvais Sang*): yes, just as you wish, but what is the nature of this oracle? (And yet, AND YET….We absolutely ought to get to the bottom of this. Today, June 8th, 1924, at one o'clock, the voice whispered to me: 'Béthune, Béthune.' What did that mean? I have never been to Béthune, and have only the foggiest notion where it is located on the map of France. Béthune evokes nothing for me, not even a scene from The Three Musketeers. I ought to have left for Béthune, where there was someone awaiting me perhaps; that would have been simply too obvious. Someone told me they once read in a book by Chesterton of a detective who, in order to find someone he is searching for in a certain city, merely scoured the houses, from roof to cellar, whose exteriors seemed abnormal to him in some way, if only in some slight detail. That method is as good as any other. Similarly, in 1919, Soupault entered any number of impossible buildings to ask the concierge whether Philippe Soupault lived there. He would not have been surprised, I suspect, by an affirmative. He would have gone and knocked on his door.) The piety of Man does not fool me. The surrealist voice that shook Cumae,

Dodona and Delphi was nothing more than the voice which dictates to me my less irate speeches. My time ought not to be its time, why should it help me to resolve the childish problem of my destiny? I pretend, unfortunately, to act in a world where, in order to take account of its suggestions, I would be obliged to resort to two sorts of interpreter, one to translate its utterances for me, the other, impossible to find, to impress on others whatever understanding I had of those utterances. This world in which I endure what I endure (do not go and look), this modern world, well, what the devil do you want me to do with it? Perhaps the surrealist voice will fall silent, I no longer try to keep track of the vanished. I will not pursue, however briefly, the marvellously detailed account of my years and days. I will be like Nijinksi, who was taken last year to the Russian ballet, and could not comprehend what spectacle he was viewing. I will be alone, quite alone in myself, indifferent to all the world's ballets. What I have done, or not done, I leave to you.

And, since then, I have exhibited a passion for treating scientific reverie with indulgence, so unseemly in the final analysis in every respect. Radio? Fine. Syphilis? If you like. Photography? I don't see why not. Cinema? Bravo, for darkened rooms. War? Gave us a good laugh. The telephone? Hello, yes. Youth? Charming white hairs. Try to make me say thank you: 'Thank you.' Thank you… If the populace hold in high esteem what properly speaking may be termed laboratory experiments, it is because they have led to the development of some machine, the discovery of some serum, in which the populace see themselves directly involved. They are certain that all this is designed to improve their lot. I don't know what humanitarian aims are involved in the scientific ideal, but it does not seem to me that it constitutes any great kindness. I speak, you understand, of true scientists and not those of all kinds who popularise it by means of patents. I believe, in this domain as in any other, in the pure surrealist joy of the man who warned of the repeated failure of others, refuses to confess himself beaten, sets off from wherever he chooses, by any other road than a rational one, and arrives where he can. Such and such an image, with which he judges it opportune to mark his progress, and which perhaps may bring him public recognition, I must confess, is in itself a matter of indifference to me. No more does the material which he is obliged to encumber himself with: his glass tubes, or my metallic feathers…As to his method, I credit it with as much worth as my own. I have seen the discoverer of the cutaneous

plantar reflex at work; he manipulated his subjects without respite, it was much more than an ‘examination’ he undertook, it was obvious that he followed no set plan. Here and there, he formulated a remark, distantly, without setting down his needle to do so; and while his hammer tapped away continuously. He left to others the futile task of treating the sick. He was devoted to his sacred fever.

Surrealism, such as I envisage it, declares our absolute non-conformity clearly enough that there can be no question of bringing it before the court, at the trial of the real world, as a witness for the defence. It would, on the contrary, only serve to justify the utter state of absent-mindedness that we hope truly to achieve here below. Kant’s distraction with respect to woman, Pasteur’s distraction ‘with grapes’, Curie’s distraction regarding vehicles, are in this respect profoundly symptomatic. This world is only relatively-speaking in tune with thought, and incidents of this kind are only episodes, till now the most notable, in a war of independence in which I have the glory of participating. Surrealism is the ‘invisible ray’ which will one day allow us to gain the upper hand over our adversaries. ‘You no longer quiver, carcase.’ This summer the roses are blue; the wood is of glass. The earth draped in its verdure has as much effect on me as a ghost. It is living and ceasing to live which are imaginary solutions. Existence is elsewhere.