

RACE

*Surrealism
in the USA*



TRAITOR

**SPECIAL
DOUBLE
ISSUE**

**THE COMPLETE CONTENTS OF THE SUPPRESSED
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Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity

Race Traitor

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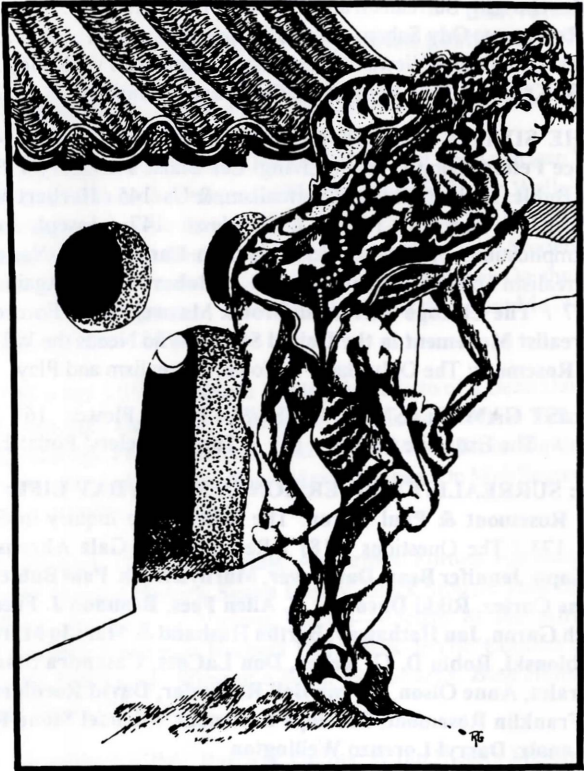
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ON THE COVER: O. W. Neebe, "We Mask Reality" (detail), hand-colored etching



Robert Green, "Drawing from Seditious Mandibles"

A NOTE TO *RACE TRAITOR* READERS

In 1993 *Race Traitor* published an article by the Chicago Surrealist Group on the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992. Three years ago we published a special issue called *Surrealism: Revolution Against Whiteness*, edited by Franklin Rosemont of that group. Now we turn again to the Surrealists for this special double issue. Since the project of *Race Traitor* is to chronicle and analyze the making, remaking, and unmaking of whiteness, and since only a few of the articles here deal explicitly with the white problem in America as a major theme, we believe we owe our regular readers an explanation.

Critics often say that abolitionism is unrealistic. How, they ask, can we hope to enlist white people in a movement against something so deeply embedded in every aspect of their lives and on which so many of their survival strategies depend? To that criticism we answer: *precisely*. What critics regard as a weakness is the *virtue* of abolitionism, that in calling people's whiteness into question it forces them to reexamine every aspect of their lives. That quality is what makes abolitionism revolutionary.

If it is true, as we insist, that a commitment to the abolition of whiteness, when constructed to the end, leads to a total critique of society, the process works in the opposite direction as well. The Surrealist Movement, starting with a determination to challenge present notions of reality, is led to adopt the abolition of whiteness as a goal.

Abolitionists are frequently asked: without whiteness as a social identity, what would those presently defined as white *be*? Our standard response is, first, that it is not possible to say in advance, and, second, that people must use their imaginations. If one of the damaging effects of whiteness is that it cripples the imagination, one of the strengths of surrealism is that it seeks to free it. And so the two schools of thought converge.

We have come together for another reason as well. So far, neither surrealism nor abolitionism has ever been disgraced by the actions of its supporters. Few radical traditions can make that claim—neither Communism (certainly not!) nor Socialism (see Ron Sakolsky's Preface to this issue for a recent contemptible example of Socialist perfidy) nor even, we regret to say, Anarchism (too many of whose adherents seem determined, as in the past, to cling to their blindspot on race). We are honored that the Surrealist Movement in the U.S. chose to publish this special issue with us. For our part we are proud to associate ourselves with the surrealist tradition and to bring this collection to the attention of our readers.

The editors of *Race Traitor*



Rikki Ducornet, "Crevel's Glove"

Guest Editor's Preface:

RETURN OF THE SUPPRESSED

by RON SAKOLSKY

I believe in the possibility of reconciliation with the anarchists rather than the socialists. —André Breton (1926)

In the Fall of 1999 I sent an article I had written on the Chicago Surrealist Group to the journal *Socialist Review*. The article was promptly accepted for publication, and the editors told me they would like it to be accompanied by a selection of texts by U.S. surrealists. When I asked the *SR* editors how many pages they wanted to devote to the topic, they replied: "Let's do a whole surrealist issue."

My surrealist friends and I had misgivings, based on our mistrust of *SR*'s social-democratic politics. Originally titled *Socialist Revolution* in the 1970s, the San Francisco-based journal long ago abandoned any pretense to being revolutionary. We wondered: Would these liberal "socialist" reviewers really publish the Surrealist Movement's openly revolutionary, anti-statist and anarchist articles and declarations?

For my part, buoyed by the recent renewal of the spirit of solidarity exemplified in the formation of broad-based anti-capitalist street-level confrontations that eventually extended from Seattle to Prague, I considered a temporary and project-based alliance with *Socialist Review* acceptable on the condition that its editors guaranteed that the surrealists could express themselves freely, without censorship. To this condition the *SR* editors readily consented.

And so the *SR* editorial collective invited me to guest-edit a special surrealist issue of their journal. After reading the material I sent them—original articles as well as a few reprints—they were so enthusiastic that they decided to make the surrealist issue a *double* issue. This did not mean that the *SR* editors had suddenly become pro-surrealist; on the contrary, they indicated their numerous "reservations" regarding surrealism even while affirming their eagerness to publish the issue.

Most of the contents were in the *SR* editors' hands by the end of January 2000. We were led to believe it would be out by May Day, but in April they told us: "September at the latest," and in August they said: "December for sure, or maybe January 2001." By August, it was clear that at least some members of the *SR* collective no longer wanted the issue published, and that these delays were not merely technical, but *political*. At every turn, the surrealists and I were forced to defend ourselves from the *SR* editors' contentious attempts to dilute the radicalism of the surrealist issue. Articles long since accepted for publication were now subjected to an inquisitorial *SR* "Political Correctness" committee. Strangely enough, they regarded the surrealists' critique of so-called "white blues" as an egregious example of

“reverse racism.” Yet at one point they vetoed almost all contributions to the issue by African-Americans. The expression “blind alley,” according to them, was “offensive to the visually impaired.”

Were the *SR* editors trying to provoke the surrealists into withdrawing their material? The “*SR* Editors’ Introduction” to the issue—a prize illustration of their superciliousness and pomposity—certainly made it seem so. Somehow we managed to convince them that it was poor editorial judgment to open an issue of their own journal with a statement stressing their incomprehension and aversion to its contents. And naturally, the surrealists and I demanded the right to respond. It was finally agreed that the *SR* editors’ Introduction appear instead as an Afterword, followed by the Surrealists’ Response. At that point, midsummer 2000, it was also agreed that nothing new would be added to the contents, by the *SR* editors or the surrealists.

As 2001 turned the corner, the *SR* editors were still stalling. Then came their ultimatum: They would not publish the issue at all unless the surrealists raised the money to subsidize it in its entirety. We were also informed that *SR* would not distribute the issue to bookstores. Adding insult to injury, they deleted several pages of surrealist material to make room for a new “Editor’s Note” of their own, which had no bearing on the issue. Their last communication to us stated, in their typically perfunctory way: “We are no longer entertaining demands from the surrealists.” The surrealists’ “demands,” of course, were simply efforts to hold the *SR* editors to their promises.

In plain language, the *SR* editors broke all their promises, violated all the agreements we had made, and—following a shameless attempt at extortion—suppressed the surrealist issue.

Like all participants in radical movements, my surrealist friends and I have had our share of disagreements and disappointments with other radicals. Never, however, have we had to deal with a group calling themselves radicals who have been as uncomradely, dishonest, and altogether *creepy* as the editorial collective of the so-called “*Socialist*” *Review*. In view of their bossy, bureaucratic, bullying practices, one shudders to think of the sort of “socialism” these officious yuppie commissars would like to bring about.

Hearty thanks to Noel Ignatiev and our other friends at *Race Traitor* for rescuing this important project from the undeserved oblivion to which the *SR*’s treachery attempted to consign it. In sharp contrast to our year-long travail with the shilly-shallying *SR*, *Race Traitor*’s spontaneous and wholehearted support is a refreshing breath of fresh air, and a concrete demonstration of revolutionary solidarity we shall never forget.

The suppressed “Surrealist Issue” is published here intact, with the addition of a bonus page devoted to the surrealist game Time-Travelers’ Potlatch, which the *SR* editors had vetoed earlier. Readers may be interested to learn that my comprehensive anthology, *Surrealist Subversions* (forthcoming later this year from Autonomedia) will include in its 700-plus pages several other texts vetoed by the *SR* editors.

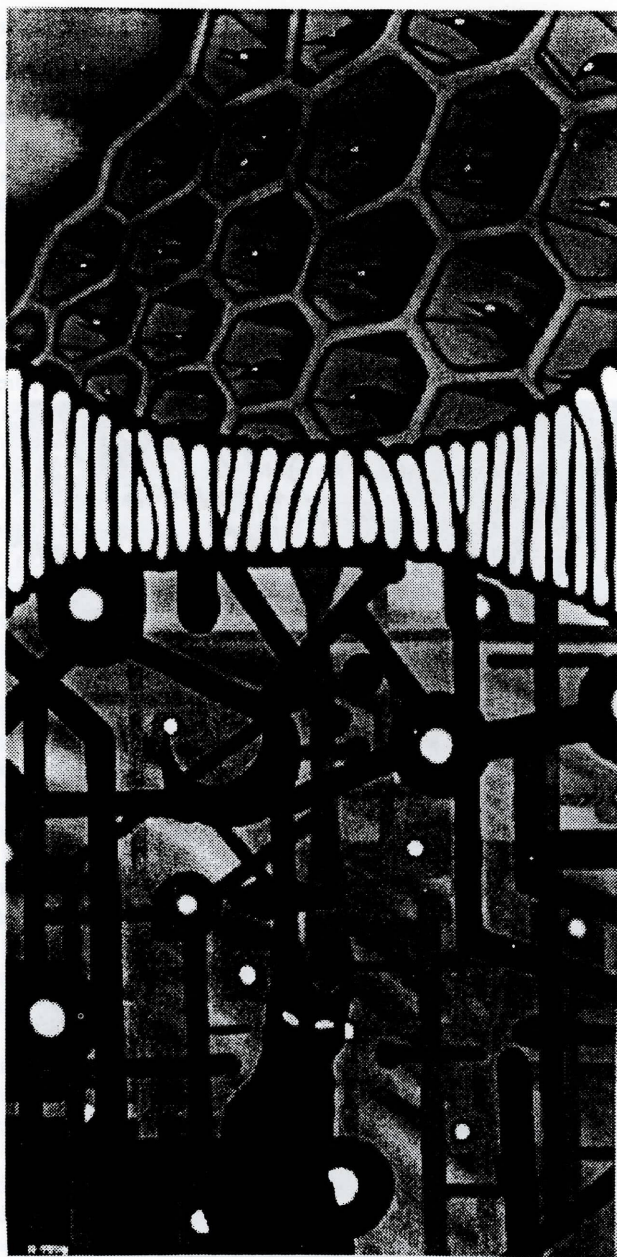
Surrealist Greetings!

Special Double Issue

Surrealism in the USA



Jayne Cortez, "So Many Feathers"



Eric Bragg, "Night Thoughts"

Ron Sakolsky

Surrealist Subversion in Chicago

The Forecast Is Still Hot!

"Surrealism? In *Chicago*?" an incredulous Nelson Algren once laughingly replied to Franklin Rosemont. "You're going to need a lot of luck." That was in 1975, just before Algren's defection to Hackensack, New Jersey. The Chicago Surrealist Group had already been a defiant presence in the Windy City for nine years, and it has sustained that persona ever since, blowing in and out of the unfolding cityscape of collective imagination, speaking bluntly in the language of desire, and unabashedly urging the realization of our dreams.

The group was organized in the spring of 1966 by Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, Chicagoans in their early twenties, poets and artists who also considered themselves revolutionists (as they still do). As the first indigenous collective expression of surrealism in the United States, the Chicago group enjoyed the solidarity and cooperation of the international surrealist movement, including the direct, enthusiastic support of poet André Breton, surrealism's founder and major theorist. Within a few years, as individuals and groups all across the country affiliated with the Chicagoans, the extended Surrealist Group evolved into the Surrealist Movement in the United States, with active participants from coast to coast. To this day the Chicago Surrealist Group remains the core of the Surrealist Movement in the United States, and indeed, the most active nucleus of organized surrealism in all of North America.

The Chicago Surrealist Group's immediate origins lie in the Rosemonts' active participation in the Surrealist Group in Paris over the course of several months during 1965-66, but its roots go deep into Chicago's many and diverse countercultures: the Haymarket anarchists, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Bughouse Square, the city's

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fugitive Beat scene, the Roosevelt University Anti-Poetry Club, the local manifestations of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, and the anarchist wing of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Chicago surrealist landmarks include the Solidarity Bookshop, the IWW hall at 2422 North Halsted, Gallery Bugs Bunny, the Maxwell Street market, and the short-lived but memorable Gallery Black Swan at 500 North LaSalle.

This is no nostalgia trip, however, for Chicago's surrealists do not dwell on Memory Lane. Even when they write about history, their focus is always on the future. Their 1997 compilation, *The Forecast Is Hot! Tracts and Other Collective Declarations, 1966-1976*, edited by the Rosemonts and Paul Garon (Black Swan Press), surveys the group's first ten years in its 320 pages. In addition to their impressive achievements in poetry and the plastic arts, Chicago's surrealists have continued to enlarge the field of surrealist research and activity, exploring many areas barely or not at all touched by surrealism's first generation: music and dance, for example, as well as historiography and the study of popular culture. Chicago's surrealists are also responsible for some of the most incisive and vigorous social criticism of our time, in such areas as ecology, working class resistance, the revolt against patriarchy, and the emerging radical critique of "whiteness."

Unlike the art world stereotype of surrealism as yet another failed avant-garde rebellion, the "Chicago Idea" of surrealism is alive and well and remains as gritty as the city that spawned it.



Surrealism has always been a collective adventure, and the story of surrealism in Chicago and the United States is the story of scores of individuals who, as poets, writers, theorists, painters, sculptors, photographers, collagists, activists, agitators, humorists, dancers, and dreamers have contributed mightily to the whole picture. In this issue of *Socialist Review*, and in a large number of collective publications of the Surrealist Group and the Surrealist Movement in the United States, these contributions are in ample evidence. This article, however, focuses on only a small number of the Chicago group, principally Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, Paul Garon, Robert Green, and some of their out-of-town collaborators — Ted Joans, Jayne Cortez, Joseph Jablonski, David Roediger, and a few others. This is not because the many other participants in Chicago and US surrealism are not important, but because I wanted to trace

the roots of contemporary American surrealism's development from the beginning. It was therefore essential to concentrate on those who organized the group in the first place, those who have remained with it the longest and who seem to me to have done most to give surrealism in the United States its greatest social resonance.

But first, what *is* surrealism? The movement continues to elude all attempts to define it, but its basic aim has been constant from 1924 on: to assist the process by which the imaginary becomes real — or, as Franklin Rosemont puts it, “to realize poetry in everyday life.” In other words, surrealists seek to create a truly free society in which the age-old contradictions between dream and action, reason and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity, have been resolved. Both collectively and individually surrealists have sought nothing less than a world turned upside down where life can be a wondrous festival fueled by the liberation of the passions, inspired laziness, and an absolute divergence from the tired and oppressive game of social injustice and self-degradation.

As with most radical ideas, surrealism begins with a questioning attitude toward reality. What if an ordinary bus ride were to become an open-ended adventure in living instead of a dreary trek to work and back? Just such an incident, culled from the archives of the daily Chicago press, was glowingly recounted by Franklin Rosemont in the third issue of *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, the occasional journal of the Chicago Surrealist Group. As the news story was reported, a Chicago bus driver on Halsted Street, one of the longest in the city, once announced to his passengers that he could no longer endure the monotony of his job and was about to drive the bus that they were on to Florida. Any of the nine or so passengers who wished to accompany him were welcome to stay on board. Two passengers immediately exited, then another, but the rest evidently decided to go to Florida, or at least to see what would happen next. Several hours later, in southern Indiana, the bus was pulled over by State Police, and the driver arrested and returned to Chicago. “Notwithstanding its disappointing conclusion,” Franklin noted, “this story has remained for me an unending source of reverie and inspiration. Here were seven people casting aside all the fetters of everyday routine, pursuing every risk for the pleasure of realizing, however fleetingly, something of the splendor hinted at by fairy tales and heroic adventures. Is not all that we have in the way of hope founded on the premise that some day, and perhaps not such a distant day, thousands

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and even millions will come to approach life with this same ardor for discovery, this readiness to abandon everything but the consequences of desire? Some day there will be no State Police, or any other police, to obstruct the free play of the waking dreamers! Some day the Halsted Street bus will reach Florida, and will set out from there to new destinations! From Halsted Street to Easter Island to the Garden of Eden!"



Casandra Stark Mele, "Where Apples Grow"

From a surrealist point of view, even if never fully achieved in practice, such an “impossible dream” is prized for its uninhibited nature, unbounded by the consciousness-dulling chains forged by the reality police. It proudly situates itself at the crossroads of desire and action, paying no attention to the stoplights of the status quo. Contrary to the way in which it is typically portrayed, surrealism then is not simply about style, but substance — the substance of our very lives. Yet in spite of its revulsion at the constricted ways in which we are expected to conduct ourselves, surrealist thinking is characteristically chock full of enthusiasm and expectation. First despairing of reality, then despairing of that despair, surrealists both seek and provoke glimpses of the Marvelous that can be revealed all around us on those occasions when poetry imposes itself upon the real. As Franklin put it in *Arsenal* 1, “Instead of realistically escaping life, surrealists aim at seizing life through liberating imagination and desire.” And though the busload of dreamers was *leaving* Illinois, Chicago has been an eminently suitable site for their long-term campaign to narrow the gap between poetry and reality.



Franklin was born in Chicago, but grew up in the western suburb of Maywood (also home to future Black Panther Fred Hampton) in a militant labor-union family. He likes to point out that he was on picket lines before he learned to walk, and that the first song he learned to sing was “You can’t scare me, I’m stickin’ to the Union.” His father, San Francisco-born printer Henry P. Rosemont, for fifty years a mainstay of Chicago Typographical Union No. 16, played a leading role in the 22-month Chicago newspaper strike of 1947-1949, and wrote most of the scripts for the strikers’ daily WCFL radio show, “Meet the Union Printers.” (That was when WCFL was Chicago’s labor station, owned and operated by the Chicago Federation of Labor.) Franklin’s mother, Sally Kaye Rosemont, born in Chicago to Polish immigrants and raised in Bucktown, was a Jazz Age musician who played at local speakeasies. In 1929, she became the Chicago Theatre’s “Boop-boop-a-doo Girl” (two years before the first Betty Boop cartoon), and was a pioneer radio comedian. She was also president of the Musicians’ Union Local 10-208’s Organized Women Musicians (OWM).

Given such a family background, it is not surprising that Franklin never accepted the assumption, shared by many Sixties’ intellectuals, that the working class was permanently integrated into the repressive

machinery of capitalism. Instead, he turned his attention to uncovering oppositional tendencies in the workplace, the streets, and popular culture. Franklin first encountered surrealism in the spring of 1959 at the age of fifteen. Trying to ignore a boring lecture on US history at Proviso East High School in Maywood, he was leafing through the paperback *Reader's Companion to World Literature* and came across Benjamin Péret's and Paul Eluard's 1925 surrealist proverb, "Elephants are contagious," that started bells ringing and lights flashing. "The sudden appearance of that wild image had an extraordinarily powerful impact on me," he recalls. "For me, those three words opened the door to the wonders and possibilities of language." The proverb also seemed to him to "confirm" the poetry he was already writing, and he immediately resolved to devote his life to the *Cause* of Poetry.

When Franklin dropped out of high school after his third year, he spent countless hours in Chicago's Art Institute library, month after month, systematically studying everything on surrealism. At this stage surrealism was only one of the many inspirations guiding his life. Political radicalism, nourished by the Freedom Rides and the Cuban Revolution, was another. Jazz, especially that of Thelonious Monk, was for him the music of the spheres.

From this point on, the many influences that shaped Chicago surrealism were more or less simultaneous, and cannot be set forth in neat chronological sequence. Preceding all other influences, however, was the so-called Beat Generation. As they had with thousands of other teenagers at the time, Kerouac's books convinced Franklin to go on the road. Between 1959 and 1965 he hitchhiked some 20,000 miles all over the country and to Mexico. In 1960, at the peak of Beatdom's notoriety, he lived for two months in San Francisco's North Beach, receiving his mail c/o City Lights Books and hanging out at the Co-Existence Bagel Shop. He was invited to contribute to the "next issue" of Bob Kaufman's zine, *Beatitude*, but he "split the scene" long before that issue appeared.

For a time Franklin and a few friends proclaimed themselves the Rhapsodist Movement, which today he jocularly recalls as "Maywood, Illinois' only known attempt to storm the barricades of the international avant-garde." Rhapsodism produced no manifestoes; its only principles were to write frantically and extravagantly, and to live accordingly. The Rhapsodists' main activity was writing "Elephants are contagious" all over Maywood: on walls, fences, storefronts, sidewalks, and

every surface of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin railway station. They also did two poetry readings: one, for Rhapsodists only, at midnight on the steps of a tomb at nearby Waldheim Cemetery (burial place of the Haymarket anarchists); the other, public but unannounced, in midafternoon at a Prince Castle hamburger joint on Roosevelt Road (until the manager threw them out after a few minutes).

Franklin and his fellow Rhapsodists were also part of the local Beat ferment, such as it was. "Few people today are aware that Chicago even *had* a Beat scene," he remarks, adding that the "scene" had no geographical center, but existed as a rebellious community of scattered individuals who ran into each other at such places as Slim Brundage's College of Complexes, Maury's Bookstore, and later, Solidarity Bookshop, as well as the South Side jazz clubs, notably McKie Fitzhugh's at 63rd and Cottage Grove, and the Sutherland Lounge at 47th and Drexel.

Throughout the sixties, Chicago's dissident youth (radical, Beat, or just plain malcontent) tended to go to downtown Roosevelt University. RU was then a working-class commuter school with a Left-leaning faculty and a substantial African-American and foreign-student enrollment. Franklin went there in 1962-64, between hitchhikes to New York, San Francisco, and Mexico City. As a high school dropout he was admitted as a "special student," having scored high on the entrance exams. Housed in a stunning building designed by Louis Sullivan, RU was the city's major outpost of student rebellion, and proved to be a pivotal site in the prehistory of Chicago surrealism. Most important of all, it was there that Franklin and Penelope met: a crucial encounter!



Descended from a long line of Czech freethinkers, Penelope was born in Chicago but grew up in northern Illinois around Fox Lake. Her first word as a child was "outside," and her passion for wilderness and wildlife has never diminished. Educated as a chemist at suburban Lake Forest College and Abbot Laboratories, she later decided to dedicate her life to surrealism, revolution, and mountain climbing. In her teens Rimbaud's *Illuminations* was a big inspiration, but it was not until her Roosevelt days that she discovered the all-encompassing revolution known as surrealism.

Penelope has been a major figure in the Surrealist Group since its formation — a contributor to every US surrealist publication (and co-editor of several), as well as to many surrealist periodicals published

abroad. She is best known as a painter in the radical automatist tradition; her work has been shown in surrealist exhibitions all over Europe, the United States, and in Mexico. Passionately attracted as an artist to alchemy (her work was featured in Arturo Schwarz's "Art & Alchemy" exhibition at the 1986 Venice Biennale), she is a relentless discoverer of new methods of provoking inspiration. These include the *Mimeogram* (a kind of decalcomania made with thick mimeograph ink), the *Landscape* (an ecologically inspired variant of collage), the *Alchemigram* (a cameraless photograph made with chemicals), and the *Prebensilhouette* (multi-color cutouts set against unusual backgrounds).

She has also made significant contributions to surrealist theory — a 200-page, lavishly illustrated collection of her articles and essays, focused on chance encounters and titled *Surrealist Experiences: 1001 Dawns, 221 Midnights* has just appeared. One of contemporary surrealism's outstanding poets, her first collection of poems, *Athamor* (Surrealist Editions, 1970), has gone through three printings. *Beware of the Ice* (1992) is illustrated by the Italian painter Enrico Baj, whose work is discussed in Breton's *Surrealism and Painting* (1965), and who also happens to be a noted figure in the anarchist movement in Italy. Penelope's poems, like her not-yet-collected stories, radiate a very special kind of recalcitrant nonsense; her words, having found the fire of their inner magic, light the way to our unending wonder.

Politically, Penelope was a seasoned activist long before her fellow Surrealist Group co-founders. She was first radicalized by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 at age 14; a year later she began doing support work for the underground Cuban 26th of July Movement. An early member of the Student Peace Union, she took part in the massive "ban-the-bomb" demonstration in Washington, D.C., in 1962. Between 1967 and 1969, she was a member of the SDS National Staff. Today she is the secretary-treasurer of the Charles H. Kerr Company, the world's oldest labor and radical publishing house, founded in Chicago in 1886 by Charles Hope Kerr, the son of militant abolitionists.

While still in their teens, then, Franklin and Penelope were both drawn toward extreme, direct-action forms of political and cultural radicalism. This uncommon combination, which of course is characteristic of surrealism, defined the group that was slowly taking shape at Roosevelt in the early- and mid-sixties. Indeed, most of those who formed the original nucleus of the Surrealist Group a few years later — including

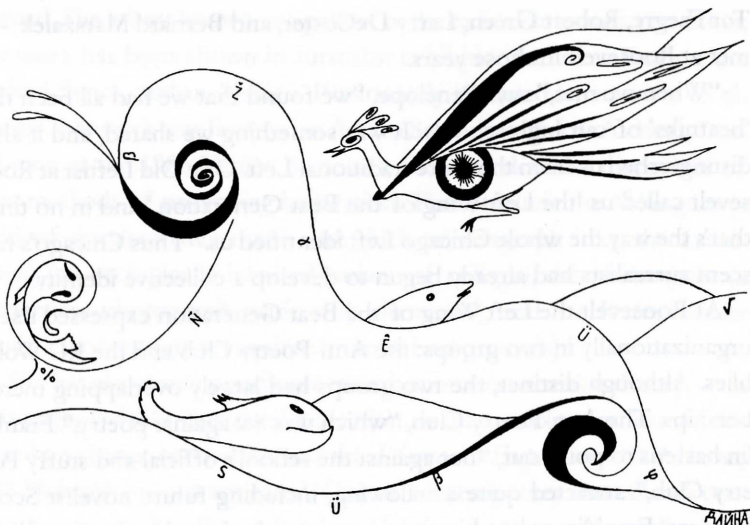
Tor Faegre, Robert Green, Larry DeCoster, and Bernard Marszalek — met at Roosevelt in those years.

“When we met,” says Penelope, “we found that we had all been the ‘beatniks’ of our high schools. It was something we shared, and it also distinguished us from the more traditional Left. One Old Leftist at Roosevelt called us ‘the Left Wing of the Beat Generation,’ and in no time that’s the way the whole Chicago Left identified us.” Thus Chicago’s nascent surrealists had already begun to develop a collective identity.

At Roosevelt the Left Wing of the Beat Generation expressed itself organizationally in two groups: the Anti-Poetry Club and the RU Wobblies. Although distinct, the two groups had largely overlapping memberships. The Anti-Poetry Club, “which was *not* against poetry,” Franklin hastens to point out, “but against the school’s official and stuffy Poetry Club,” attracted quite a following, including future novelist Scott Spencer. Franklin opened its initial meeting by jumping up on a large desk and reading one of his poems at the top of his lungs. “A delightful chaos ensued,” he says, “a pandemonium enhanced by the fact that many of those who came were openly hostile.” Where the Poetry Club met to discuss the use of simile and metonymy in Eliot’s “J. Alfred Prufrock,” the Anti’s obviously favored Dionysian exuberance, provocation, and humor.

In the ongoing tradition of Chitown red scares, which began with Haymarket, the existence of such a club at a taxpayer-supported institution was duly and indignantly reported in the daily papers. The news reports caused Nelson Algren to phone the college student activities director to say, no doubt much to her surprise, that the club’s formation was “the best news I’ve heard in Chicago in years.” Algren then invited Club officer Robert Green out for a few beers.

The other Left Wing of the Beat Generation group was the RU Wobblies — the first student group anywhere affiliated with the radical unionism of the IWW. Its career was short but sensational. Its meetings, addressed by such radicals as old-time Wobbly editor Carl Keller and Marxist-Humanist Raya Dunayevskaya, were always controversial and well attended. But when African American anarcho-pacifist Joffre Stewart gave a talk there and, as was and is his custom, burned a US flag, the group was promptly suspended — the only group ever suspended in Roosevelt’s history. The flag-burning and suspension made headlines (“Fiery Substitute for Panty Raid,” was one), but the “Wobblies-in-Exile”



Daina Almario-Kopp, "The Flying Eye"

(as the suspended group called itself), held protest meetings in Grant Park, and coordinated a well-publicized free-speech fight that won the support not only of most students, but also a large part of the faculty. The struggle ended in the group's reinstatement. A few months later, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement made national news.

How did surrealist and Beat-influenced students, who made it a priority to ridicule the Poetry Club, happen to line up in the IWW? Franklin had met a wide variety of Marxists at school and elsewhere, but with rare exceptions was turned off by their dogmatism, authoritarianism, and overall "squareness." His studies of labor and radical history had led him to discover the IWW. Its "free-spirited revolutionary open-endedness," as he calls it, together with its emphasis on imagination, creativity, and humor, appealed to him at once. When he learned that the Wobs were still around and maintained a hall at Halsted and Fullerton, he dropped by and got his red card. Six months later he received organizer's credentials and began signing up everybody he knew, adding well over a hundred newcomers to the union's membership.

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Joining the IWW, razzing the Poetry Club, fighting for free speech, falling in love, and developing his self-awareness as a surrealist and revolutionary were major elements of Franklin's life as an RU student. He also

experienced a vast and general expansion of intellectual horizons, which he credits largely to a single Roosevelt professor: St. Clair Drake.

Often called “the Father of Black Anthropology,” Drake is known to the wider public primarily as the co-author, with Horace Cayton, of the classic study of African American Chicago, *Black Metropolis*. Drake was a prolific writer, however, as well as an original thinker, and his ideas have exerted a wide and enduring influence. One of his students was James Forman, who went on to become head of the radical Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and continues to be an important revolutionary theorist. While Franklin was there, Drake’s students included John Bracey Jr., who later co-edited the important anthology *Black Nationalism in America* and other books, and is now chair of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. At one point, to help the Anti-Poetry Club meet certain byzantine Student Activities Office regulations, Bracey generously served as the club’s “Acting Officer.”

Thanks to St. Clair Drake — and to John Bracey and RU’s other Black Nationalist students — Franklin received what he now calls “a truly splendid introduction to African-American history and literature, with a particular emphasis on Black revolutionary thought.” Drake’s friends included W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, Oliver C. Cox, and other intellectual titans of the Black world. He often spoke of them in class, and urged his students to read their works. For Franklin, an admirer of Malcolm X and Patrice Lumumba even before he came to RU, Drake’s lectures, and the readings he recommended, were precious lessons indeed. “The school’s motto at that time,” he recalls, “was ‘Education for Freedom,’ and St. Clair Drake was its living embodiment.”

After his second semester, Franklin stopped bothering with the usual “introductory” courses and instead concentrated on Drake’s classes. “When people asked me what I was majoring in,” he says, “I told them I was majoring in St. Clair Drake.” Although Franklin did not pursue a degree, he was deeply influenced by Drake’s ideas regarding an urban anthropology. When he and Penelope became associate editors of the SDS journal *Radical America* a few years later, they brought anthropological (as well as surrealist and Wobbly) insights to an editorial group otherwise dominated by “Western Marxist” grad students in history and philosophy. The “Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution” issue of *Radical America* (January 1970), edited by Franklin, was the first issue of

that journal to take up the topic of popular culture, which soon became one of its central themes.

For Franklin, Drake's conception of urban anthropological field-work, together with his own experience in surrealism and the IWW, sparked a new, imaginative approach to working class history, focused on culture. One of the tastiest fruits of this approach was his *Surrealism and Its Popular Accomplishes* — an illuminating collection of writings by surrealists past and present on comics, film, radio, pulp fiction, blues and jazz. Appearing first as a special issue of Paul Buhle's journal *Cultural Correspondence* in 1979, it was reissued as a book a few months later by City Lights. Historian George Rawick praised it highly as "the funniest book since Marx's *Capital*!" In 1981, *Cultural Correspondence* featured a special supplement on surrealism, focused on the Chicago Group, with contributions by Rawick, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Herbert Marcuse, Octavio Paz, Dave Roediger, Leah Grant, James G. Spady, and H.P. Lovecraft's best friend, Frank Belknap Long.



The Chicago Wobbly branch that Franklin joined in 1962 was a beehive of working class culture. It was an amazing aggregation of working stiffs: anarchists, Marxists, socialists, syndicalists, hoboes, carnies, nudists, Esperantists, and former Dil Picklers. Its youngest member next to Franklin (who was eighteen) was the poet and printmaker Carlos Cortez (then in his forties). (Cortez's life's work was featured at a huge 1997 retrospective in his honor at Chicago's Mexican Fine Arts Museum.) The old Wobs taught the younger ones the basics of soapboxing, and Franklin and others took part in IWW street-meetings at Bughouse Square (across from Newberry Library), and later on in Wells Street in Old Town.

As a Wobbly, Franklin hitchhiked, rode freight trains, and otherwise made his way to San Francisco, Seattle, Duluth, and Port Arthur, Ontario, expressly to visit the few surviving old Wobbly halls. Once there, he spent endless hours jawboning with the old-timers who hung out in them. Just as no one of his generation has known or corresponded with more old-time surrealists, so too no one has known or corresponded with more old-time Wobblies than has Franklin.

His focus as a Wobbly organizer, however, was to revitalize the IWW, to help restore it to its historic role as a fighting organization for working-class emancipation. As he and his friends saw it, this required

clearing some space in which younger Wobs could express the desires of a new generation. Franklin started a new IWW journal, *The Rebel Worker* (seven issues, 1964-67), in which contributions by young and old Wobs appeared side-by-side with texts by young and old anarchists and surrealists. Specializing in topics other radical journals of the time shied away from, *The Rebel Worker* ran articles on the radical implications of rock'n'roll, the 1967 New York blackout, and on humor as the revolutionary weapon par excellence. One of the liveliest, most adventurous radical periodicals of the mid-Sixties, *The Rebel Worker* fully lived up to its claim of being "an incendiary and wild-eyed journal of free revolutionary thought and experiment...aiming toward a revolutionary point of view fundamentally different from all traditional concepts."

Franklin and his fellow workers (as Wobs have always called each other) also started and ran the IWW's Solidarity Bookshop, one of the most colorful spots in Chicago's pre-gentrified, working-class Lincoln Park, which then had a substantial black and Puerto Rican working-class population. Originally located at 713 Armitage, Solidarity later moved, in its running battle with the Department of Urban Renewal ("we called it Urban Removal"), to 1947 Larrabee, then to 1644 Meyer Court, and finally to 745 West Armitage. With a large old stoplight in the window, a huge canoe on the ceiling, a motorcycle parked in the middle of the store, a stock of new and old IWW, Marxist, anarchist, and surrealist publications, and stacks of used comics, Solidarity was a hangout for all kinds of local dissidents and oddballs. During lunch-hour throngs of African American students came from Waller (now Lincoln Park) High School across the street to use the turntable to play the latest R&B dance tunes (such as "Twine Time" by Alvin Cash and the Registers); they often left with surrealist leaflets and anti-Vietnam War draft resistance materials. Some people called Solidarity "the surrealist bookshop"; to cops it was "the anarchist bookshop"; comic-collecting nine-year-olds thought of it as "the solitary bookshop." This delightful hotbed of politico-cultural insurgency opened its doors in the fall of 1964 and, by some miracle, managed to hold out for ten years.

The Wobbly experience allowed Chicago's emerging surrealists to expand their consciousness of an even older local radical current: Haymarket. Many of the old Wobs (and Franklin's father as well) had known the celebrated anarchist agitator Lucy Parsons (widow of Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons), who had co-founded the IWW in 1905. But it

was from Captain Schaack's *Anarchy and Anarchists* (1889) that the *Rebel Worker* group learned that the Haymarket anarchists lived in the same neighborhood as they did. "This chancy coincidence," says Penelope, "certainly nourished our dreams, and inspired us to learn more." Tor Faegre's beautiful, elegantly calligraphed Solidarity Bookshop Anarchist/Revolutionary Calendars drew heavily on the engravings from Schaack's book. In 1967 several members of the *Rebel Worker* group, including the Rosemonts, co-founded the Louis Lingg Memorial Chapter of SDS — named for the youngest and most militant of the Haymarket Eight.

Like the founders of the IWW, the *Rebel Worker* group — and the Chicago surrealists — identified themselves as direct heirs to the Haymarket anarchist tradition. The very title of the introduction to *The Forecast Is Hot!* — "Surrealism: The Chicago Idea" — goes back precisely to those heady days of the 1880s when the city's anarchists fanned the flames of a burgeoning popular insurrection that innovatively linked political radicalism to a thoroughgoing oppositional culture. Not even the judicial murder of the Haymarket anarchists in 1887 was able to silence this innovative "Chicago Idea," as it was called, for the martyrs' voices were heard and heeded by Eugene V. Debs, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre, and countless others. They still reverberate today.

Embedded in the cracks of the American dream, Chicago's revolutionary traditions have persisted to a degree unknown anywhere else in the country. In their different ways, such characteristically Chicago counter-institutions as the IWW, the old Dil Pickle Club, the early Second City, and the Surrealist Group are also part of that legacy.

Surrealists internationally immediately recognized the Haymarket/surrealist connection. The Paris Surrealist Group's first collective letter to their Chicago comrades bears the date May 1, 1967, "anniversary of the Chicago workers' uprising." Fittingly, in 1986, Haymarket's centennial, Franklin co-edited with Dave Roediger a large compendium on the 1880s events and their impact: *Haymarket Scrapbook*, published by Charles H. Kerr. Its 256 profusely illustrated pages contain writings by the Haymarket anarchists, their friends, and later radicals influenced by Haymarket, as well as original contributions by virtually every important Haymarket historian, including Paul Avrich, Bruce Nelson, Carolyn Ashbaugh, Richard Drinnon, Sal Salerno, and Martin Blatt.

Several surrealists contributed to the *Scrapbook*. Penelope wrote about the great eccentric communist-anarchist-feminist George Francis Train. Wisconsin-born sculptor Robert Green, one-time IWW organizer, friend of Neal Cassady's and a co-founder of the Chicago Surrealist Group, contributed a full-page cartoon. Paul Garon, from Louisville, Kentucky — another central figure of the group, which he joined in 1968 — collaborated with his wife Beth on a meticulously researched analysis of the notorious Haymarket broadside of May 4, 1886. Longtime Pennsylvanian Joseph Jablonski, active in surrealism since 1970, contributed two articles: one on the Haymarket anarchists' openly avowed atheism, and another on the role of Shakers and Spiritualist mediums in the Haymarket defense and amnesty campaign. One of American surrealism's best-known poets, Jablonski is also a noted historian of millennialism and utopianism ("Chiliasts, Cathari and Mystical Feminism in the American Grain" is the subtitle of one of his articles).

Another *Scrapbook* article, on the impact of the Haymarket events in Australia, was written by Australian poet Michael Vandelaar, a participant in Chicago surrealism for several months in 1976, and two years later one of the founders of the Surrealist Group "down under." When we recall that the volume's co-editor, Dave Roediger — best-known for his later groundbreaking research on the origins of working class racism — has himself collaborated extensively on surrealist publications since the mid-1970s, it becomes clear that *Haymarket Scrapbook* is in many ways a surrealist contribution to the illumination of one of the watershed events in world labor history.

Chicago's dailies typically ignored the book, but most reviewers in scholarly as well as labor and anarchist publications agreed with Studs Terkel's assessment that it is "a marvelous, massive, very important book."

In November 1999 a remarkable sequel to the Haymarket/surrealism saga arrived on the wings of objective chance. Yet another *Scrapbook* contributor, O.W. Neebe — grandson of Oscar Neebe, one of the Haymarket Eight — held an exhibition (his first) of his own automatic paintings, explicitly under the banner of surrealism. "I've spent most of my life in organized crime," Neebe says, humorously referring to his decades' employment as graphic designer in the field of advertising. "I was always working for somebody else, doing what *they* wanted, and when I retired I decided to find out what I had in *me*, and what I could do, in

complete freedom, without the boring pretext of having to do it as a job." The reproduction of one of Neebe's works on the cover of this issue of *Socialist Review* marks his first collaboration with the Surrealist Group.



From 1962 through 1968, the *Rebel Worker* group, the Solidarity Bookshop group, the Anarchist Horde, and the Left Wing of the Beat Generation were more or less synonymous. Most of these people also considered themselves surrealists, or were at least strongly "under the influence." Only the Surrealist Group has survived and grown.

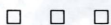
Meanwhile, with the Black and Puerto Rican urban rebellions in Chicago and scores of other cities, an increasingly radical Civil Rights movement, and the growing movement against the Vietnam war, a New Left was on the rise. Chicago's *Rebel Worker* Anarchists/Surrealists were also active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Long before they met, Franklin and Penelope had individually taken part in that group's Freedom Day demonstrations, and Franklin took part in the March on Washington in 1963. On a CORE picket line in front of Mayor Daley's house in Bridgeport, he, a fellow surrealist Wobbly, and two young Black women barely avoided being mobbed by Hizzoner's white-supremacist neighbors. It was during that period that Franklin first met Sterling Stuckey, son of Chicago's great Black poet/activist Elma Stuckey, and later author of the groundbreaking study *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*, as well as other major reinterpretations of African American history.

The *Rebel Worker* surrealists also took part in the Chicago-based Student Peace Union (SPU), the largest New Left group before the heyday of SDS. Far from isolating them from larger struggles, the *Rebel Worker* group's extremism found wide support. Their contingents on major antiwar marches, under the IWW's huge red banner and a bevy of black flags, were among the largest, loudest, and most youthful. As the far left of the Far Left, they were a radicalizing force that helped make the New Left newer and stronger as it moved from reform to revolution.

Even today Franklin considers the IWW to have been, historically, "the most surrealist group in US labor history." And although he is no longer a dues-paying member, he continues to describe himself politically as "a thoroughgoing Wobbly." A large part of his work as a historian stems from his own early experience of Wobbly hobohemian culture. His "Short Treatise on Wobbly Cartoons," appended to the new,

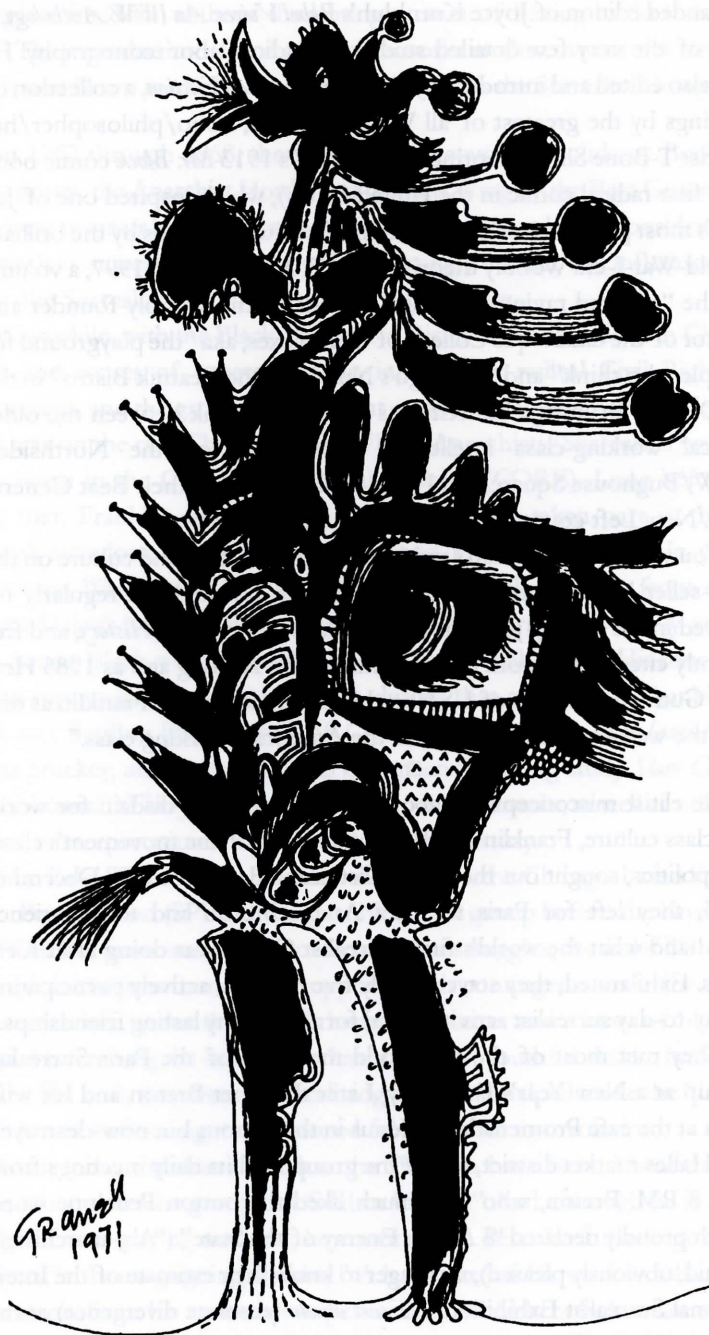
expanded edition of Joyce Kornbluh's *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*, is one of the very few detailed studies of radical labor iconography. He has also edited and introduced *Juice Is Stranger than Friction*, a collection of writings by the greatest of all Wobbly writers, hobo/philosopher/humorist T-Bone Slim; a reprint of the IWW's 1913 *Mr. Block* comic book (the first radical comic in the United States), which inspired one of Joe Hill's most popular songs; a selection of antiwar writings by the brilliant World-War-I-era Wobbly theorist Mary E. Marcy; and in 1997, a volume of the "selected ravings" of Slim Brundage, the Wobbly founder and janitor of the dadaesque College of Complexes, aka "the playground for people who think" and "Chicago's Number One Beatnik Bistro" in the 1950s/60s. Brundage himself was a rare living link between the older radical working-class intellectual community of the Northside's IWW/Bughouse Square/Dil Pickle Club nexus and their Beat Generation/New Left countercultural successors.

You won't find Franklin's writings on labor history and culture on the best-seller list, or even in most bookstores, but they are regularly reviewed in the leading journals in the field, such as *Labor History*, and frequently cited in the work of other historians. As long ago as 1985 Herbert Gutman, the dean of US labor historians, identified Franklin as one of "the well-known historians of the American working class."



While elitist misconceptions about surrealism reflect disdain for working-class culture, Franklin and Penelope, aware of the movement's class-war politics, sought out their surrealist comrades abroad. In December 1965, they left for Paris to meet André Breton and to experience first-hand what the world's first Surrealist Group was doing after forty years. Exhilarated, they stayed nearly five months, actively participating in day-to-day surrealist activities, and forming many lasting friendships.

They met most of the thirty-odd members of the Paris Surrealist Group at a New Year's Eve party. Later they met Breton and his wife Elisa at the cafe Promenade de Vénus in the famous but now-destroyed Les Halles market district, where the group held its daily meetings from 6 to 8 P.M. Breton, who very much liked the button Penelope wore, which proudly declared "I Am an Enemy of the State" ("Ah, anarchist!" he said, obviously pleased), was eager to know their estimate of the International Surrealist Exhibition, *L'Ecart absolu* (absolute divergence) at the Galerie l'Oeil. (The theme was inspired by nineteenth-century socialist



visionary Charles Fourier's principle: to diverge from the known is the surest way of making fresh discoveries.) The author of the *Surrealist Manifestoes* also asked his young American friends about the prospects for surrealist activity in the United States — a frequent topic of group discussion at the cafe. At the group's request, Franklin and Penelope wrote an article on the "Situation of Surrealism in the United States" which appeared (in French translation) in the Paris group's journal, *L'Archibras*.

The Bretons then invited the Rosemonts to their legendary apartment at 42 rue Fontaine, which Penelope describes as "a wonderland of paintings, sculptures, books, birds' nests, shells, agates, Hopi katchina dolls, and enticing objects of all times and places...a place designed for reverie." Elisa told them how much she and André had enjoyed their brief 1945 stay in Chicago ("so much more interesting than New York!"), on their way west to the land of the Hopi and Zuni. She also told them how astonished they were to find that the door of their Chicago hotel room was made of thick steel, like a bank vault — a reminder, she added, of the "period of gangsters."

Elisa, who unlike André was fluent in English, became one of the Rosemonts' closest surrealist friends in Paris. Other close friends were the Czech painter Toyen; the Moroccan-born poet Robert Benayoun, editor of the surrealist/Marxist film journal *Positif*, as well as being the author of books on Buster Keaton, Tex Avery, W.C. Fields, and Woody Allen; and African American surrealist poet/painter/collagist Ted Joans (born in Cairo, Illinois, in 1928), whom they characteristically met by chance in the street, having recognized his photo from the Paris group's journal; and the great surrealist couple from Québec, painter Mimi Parent and assemblagist Jean Benoit.

The Rosemonts were subsequently invited to an evening at the studio of photographer/painter Man Ray, who in the early 1920s was the first American involved in surrealism. In Paris they also visited many anarchists, libertarian Marxists, members of various offshoots of the *Socialisme ou barbarie* group of Cornelius Castoriadis (aka Paul Cardan), with which the *Rebel Worker* had close links, and other radicals, most notably Guy Debord and Mustapha Khayati of the Situationist International.

For the Rosemonts, meeting Breton and the younger generation of surrealists in Paris was, as Franklin puts it, "a decisive moment in our lives." To this day they retain vivid memories of the surrealist meetings

au café. “The discussions there,” Penelope says, “were exciting, full of ideas and sometimes crazy humor.” She also emphasizes the deeply *participatory* character of those gatherings. “No matter what came up, they always wanted to know what Franklin and I thought about it.”

In their May Day '67 collective letter to the Rosemonts, the Surrealist Group in Paris declared their “total agreement” with, and “whole-hearted affection” for, their Chicago surrealist friends.

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In mid-May 1966, the Rosemonts returned from France to Chicago as active participants in the international surrealist movement, determined to organize a Surrealist Group in the United States. During World War II, Breton and a number of other European surrealist refugees from Nazism had lived in New York, where they had carried on a certain amount of collective activity with the help of some US writers and artists, but their meetings and publications were mostly in French. Prior to the formation of the Surrealist Group in Chicago in 1966, the “Surrealist International” had no organized affiliate in this country.

The appearance of such a group at that particular time was not an anomalous or isolated occurrence, for the 1960s was a decade of surrealist resurgence all around the world. A Netherlands group came into being in 1959, followed by new groups in Italy, Brazil, and Argentina, and major revivals of activity in Japan, England, Greece, Spain (after Franco's death), and Portugal (after the fall of Salazar). In the Soviet bloc, the underground Surrealist Group in Prague, formed in 1934, continued to flourish, despite repression (it is today one of the largest and most active surrealist groups in the world); and a surrealist presence persisted in Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Individual writers and artists defended surrealist perspectives in Africa and the West Indies. The Arab Surrealist Movement in Exile — founded by young poets and artists from Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria — burst on the scene in 1974.

The Chicago Surrealist Group was thus a key factor in what amounted to a worldwide renewal of surrealist revolution. Writings by the Rosemonts and their friends regularly appeared (in translation) in the French group's *L'Archibras*, the Dutch *Brumes Blondes*, the Czechs' *Analogon*, the Spaniards' *Salamandra*, the Arabs' *Le Désir Libertaire*, the Swedes' *Stora Saltet*, the Brazilians' *Escrituras Surrealistas*, and many other publications.

Though based in Chicago, the Surrealist Group has always counted many non-Chicagoans among its active participants, including photographer Clarence John Laughlin in New Orleans; painter Gerome Kamrowski in Ann Arbor; poets Philip Lamantia and Nancy J. Peters in San Francisco; Spanish painter E.F. Granell in New York; poet/collagist Mary Low in Miami; poet/novelist Rikki Ducornet in Denver; painter/storyteller Leonora Carrington (a suburban Oak Park resident from 1988 to 1992) in Mexico; poet Jayne Cortez in New York; poet/theorist Joseph Jablonski of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; historian David Roediger in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois; and poet/collagist Ted Joans in Timbuktu and dozens of other places. While the founders of the Chicago group and their compatriots elsewhere hold many diverse views, they all agree that surrealism's revolutionary project, as set forth in Breton's *Manifestoes*, is far from being completed, and in fact, has only begun, and that surrealist revolution is now more urgent than ever. As Franklin summed it up in the closing words of US Surrealism's first manifesto, published in *Arse-nal 1* (1970): "What remains for surrealism to do far exceeds what surrealism has done."

In this evaluation of surrealism's potential the Rosemonts and their friends indicated a basic disagreement with the Situationists, then a fledgling French revolutionary group that claimed to have "superseded" surrealism. While in Paris Franklin and Penelope had had a long afternoon of discussions with Situationist founder Guy Debord, whom they both liked. Notwithstanding his dislike of the younger surrealists in France, Debord avowed himself a great admirer of André Breton, and boasted that he had read "every word" of Breton's published writings. The Rosemonts had no disagreement with Debord's brilliant critique of the "spectacular" nature of commodity culture, or with his emphasis on the need to "create situations" to overcome the passivity engendered by that spectacle, thereby opening emancipatory possibilities for a revolution of everyday life. The Situationists' denial of surrealism's viability, however, seemed to them both superficial and misinformed. Franklin calls this part of the Situationist program "undialectical, puritanical and authoritarian," and suggests that it reflected a deep-rooted distrust of poetry and art, an attitude by no means uncommon among "specialists in politics."

Notwithstanding these differences, the Chicago Surrealists probably did more to promote Situationist ideas than any other group in the United States. The Rosemonts returned to these shores with hundreds

of copies of Situationist pamphlets. *The Rebel Worker* published some of the first Situationist texts to appear in the United States, and the Situationist tract on the 1965 Watts Rebellion was reprinted as a *Rebel Worker* pamphlet. For several years Solidarity Bookshop was the principal US outlet for Situationist publications. The relationship, however, was not reciprocal. The eleventh issue of the journal *Internationale situationniste* (October 1967) refers slightly, and only in passing, to the Chicagoans' "anarcho-surrealism." Two years later the Situationist International dissolved.



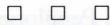
Study, debate, discussion, critical self-reflection, and clarification in matters of theory; an intense (and wildly humorous) group study of Hegel, and of the literature of psychoanalysis; together with automatic writing, games, pranks, trips to Maxwell Street, reckless experimentation, hilarity, gestures of provocation and defiance, writing insulting letters to Establishment figures, and above all, that archetypal surrealist activity — long, rambling, dreamily destinationless walks, exploring the city in ways no one had ever explored it before. Such was the drift of Chicago surrealism in the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies — an adventure in the realms of the improbable, the unexpected, the un hoped-for.

At the same time, Chicago's surrealists refused to hide from what they regarded as their "revolutionary responsibilities." In their view, most of the critical and academic literature on surrealism was so full of cold war prejudices and other distortions that it was not only useless but harmful. As a small, feisty, embattled group, eager to demonstrate surrealism's subversive and emancipatory relevance to their friends in SNCC and SDS and the antiwar movement, they recognized the pressing need to let everyone know the truth about surrealist revolution. But how to overcome the epidemic incomprehension? Their response was twofold: first, by making available good English translations of the key works of Breton and others; and second, by writing works of their own, defending and illustrating the surrealist point of view here and now.

Always short of "financial resources," they had recourse to that now-forgotten wonder of antiquity, the mimeograph machine, which was a permanent fixture at Solidarity Bookshop. *The Rebel Worker*, in addition to publishing articles and essays by all the early participants in Chicago surrealism, also featured texts by Breton, Nicolas Calas, Leonora Carrington, René Crevel, Pierre Mabilie, and Benjamin Péret.

Such publishing projects as *Surrealism and Revolution*, a 36-page *Rebel Worker* pamphlet edited and introduced by Franklin, appeared in 1966 and was quickly reprinted by the anarchist Coptic Press in London. The surrealist issue of *Radical America*, published in 1970, was offset printed and ran to 96 pages.

Chicago surrealism's first major achievement in their effort to "set the record straight" regarding surrealism's aims, principles, history, and current activity was Franklin's nearly 600-page *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings of André Breton*. Published in 1978 by Pluto Press in London (in two volumes, Franklin's introduction, *André Breton and the First Principles of Surrealism* being the first) and simultaneously in a big one-volume edition by Monad Press in New York, it has been continuously in print ever since. As the standard collection of Breton's essential shorter texts, it has been reprinted well over a dozen times, and has to be one of the most widely circulated books on surrealism in English.



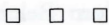
On July 10, 1966, at a large march for open housing in Chicago that proved to be Martin Luther King's last local crusade, the Surrealist Group distributed its first tract, titled "The Forecast Is Hot!" It called for "absolute revolt" by means of poetry ("breathing like a machine gun, exterminating the blind flags of immediate reality"), humor ("the dynamite and guerrilla warfare of the mind"), sabotage ("the ruthless and relentless destruction of the bureaucratic and cultural machinery of oppression"), mad love ("the totally subversive enemy of bourgeois culture"), and went on to affirm total liberation as the goal. This is the piece that provided the title of the recent 320-page Black Swan Press volume of tracts, exhortations, celebrations, denunciations, clarifications, announcements, prefaces, polemics, letters, speeches, statements, inquiries, and protests of the Surrealist Movement in the United States, spanning the years 1966 to 1976.

In 1966-68, the Chicago surrealists' mailing address was c/o Solidarity Bookshop. There they received their first communiqués from other sections of the International: from Belgium's premier surrealist poet, Georges Gronier; from Vratislav Effenberger of the Prague group; from Her de Vries, on behalf of the Bureau of Surrealist Research in Amsterdam. Solidarity was also the mailing address and general headquarters of Black Swan Press/Surrealist Editions, the publishing imprints of the Chicago Surrealist Group and the Surrealist Movement in

the United States. Since 1967 almost every participant in Chicago surrealism has published under the sign of Lautréamont's black swan: in books, pamphlets, the Surrealist Research & Development Monograph Series, and of course the Surrealist Group's various periodicals. "Small presses" come and go at a terrific rate, but the Black Swan continues to fly after more than thirty years. A checklist of Black Swan Press/Chicago Surrealist Group publications that appeared in the fall 1993 issue of the journal *Progrressive Librarian* lists 200 publications issued between 1966 and that date. Many more have appeared since.

In 1970, *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* appeared. Paul Buhle's review in *Radical America* called it one of the most beautiful publications in the history of the US Left. Like other Black Swan imprints, *Arsenal* was produced with a typographical excellence, a distinctive design, and a special flair — qualities all too rare in Left publications in this country. Edited by Franklin with an editorial board consisting of Paul Garon, Joseph Jablonski, Philip Lamantia, and Penelope Rosemont, *Arsenal* is US surrealism's journal of research and discovery. Along with theoretical inquiry, poems, tales, numerous reproductions, polemics, and surrealist games (it introduced the Chicago group's game "Time-Travelers' Potlatch" in 1976), *Arsenal* also includes translations and reports on surrealist activity around the world. It has published important work by the major figures of international surrealism in our time and by a wide range of other writers of surrealist interest. Of particular note is the Chicago group's correspondence with eminent Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse in *Arsenal* 4. The four volumes of *Arsenal* total nearly 500 pages.

In 1997, Surrealist Editions brought out Franklin's poem entitled *Penelope*, with drawings by Belgian surrealist Jacques Lacomblez. Exuberant, erotic, and playful, without ever getting bogged down in the sentimentality that typically mars the love-poem genre, this delectable book-length poem somehow manages to combine the spirit of Breton's *Nadja* and Monk's *Crepuscule for Nellie*.



The Grand Revolutionary Year 1968 was an especially rich year for Chicago surrealism. It was the year of the Surrealist Group's first periodical, *Surrealist Insurrection*; its first book, Franklin's *The Morning of a Machine Gun*; and its first group exhibition, at the Gallery Bugs Bunny. The table of contents of *The Forecast Is Hot!* conveys an idea of what a tumultuous

time it was: it lists three collective texts for 1967 and three for 1969, but *fifteen* for 1968!

Surrealist Insurrection, an eye-catching wall poster, 17 x 22 inches (sometimes larger), which the group posted with wallpaper paste on the windows, boarded-up or otherwise, of the hundreds of Chicago buildings seized by Urban Renewal, included short manifestoes and insulting harangues as well as poems and illustrations. Five issues were published (1968-72).

Once, as Franklin was pasting one of these posters on a half-demolished store on Larrabee, a squad car pulled up. "What do you think you're doing?" asked the cop, getting out of his vehicle.

"Trying to put up a poster," Franklin replied, too busy anticipating a ride down to the station to devise a snappy repartee.

"Let's see what you got there," said the officer, helping himself to a copy. Franklin was sure the cop's eyes would immediately zero in on the heading *Defend Huey Newton!* (the Black Panther leader charged with shooting a white cop). However, as the cop's eyes roved across the sheet, he frowned and asked: "Is this for the carnival? I mean, over at St. Michael's?" Stunned, Franklin blurted out, "Yes, it's for a carnival" — thinking of course of Lenin's watchword: "revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed."

"Okay," said the cop, smiling, folding up the copy of *Surrealist Insurrection* and putting it in his pocket. "Since it's for a good cause, we'll let it go this time. But in the future, don't put these up without asking permission."

In the merry month of May that same year, as the workers and students of Paris almost made a revolution, Franklin's *The Morning of a Machine Gun* was printed at SDS's Liberation Press. The 64-page volume of poems and drawings, with a manifesto-preface up front and some Surrealist Group diatribes in back, was the first book in the United States issued under the Surrealist Editions imprint.

August '68, with the Democratic Party convention in town, found the entire Surrealist Group in the streets (except when they were doing guard duty at SDS headquarters), but also on their minds was the Surrealist Exhibition at the soon-to-be legendary Gallery Bugs Bunny that was already "in the works." Announcing its presence wordlessly, with no sign — only a large picture of Bugs Bunny chomping on a carrot painted on its black front door — the one and only Gallery Bugs Bunny (at 524

Eugenie, at the corner of Mohawk) was not just an art gallery but a meeting place for local radicals: surrealists, Black Panthers, Wobblies, Diggers, anarchists, SDSers, you-name-it. The surrounding working-class neighborhood was honeycombed with a free store and a lively assortment of cafes, bars, and junk shops. Solidarity Bookshop was just a few blocks away.

The Bugs Bunny's director was Robert Green, from Baraboo, Wisconsin, who four years earlier as secretary of IWW Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110 had co-organized the union's first strike in decades (Michigan blueberry pickers, 1964). Green, whose large, incredible assemblages were highlights of the gallery's shows, ran the Bugs Bunny not as a beachhead for Wall Street art-brokers but as a counter-cultural stronghold. Thus, the Gallery Bugs Bunny can be considered a progenitor of such later politically charged spaces as the 1980s Axe Street Arena near Chicago's Logan Square, itself now long gone and sorely missed.

Crammed into three rooms and a hallway, the Gallery Bugs Bunny Surrealist Exhibition featured over a hundred works by six artists: the Rosemonts, Green, Louisiana-born Lester Doré (now art director of Chicago's *Heartland Journal*), New Yorker Eric Matheson (now a film set designer), and Indonesian painter Schlechter Duvall (who had taken part in surrealist activity in Amsterdam before moving to the United States and, years later, to Bali). The exhibition's paper trail includes a poster, a handbill, an eight-page catalog, and a sheaf of reviews.

This first Chicago Surrealist Group show was organized to affirm surrealism's vital presence and to protest the backward-looking Museum of Modern Art "Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage" exhibition that was about to open at the Art Institute. A critique of the MOMA show titled "The Heritage We Reject" appeared in *Surrealist Insurrection* (and later, in French, in the Paris group's journal). The surrealists' handbill, passed out by the thousands on the Art Institute steps, alerted the public to the fact that the MOMA show was nothing but a "reprehensible fraud"; anyone desiring to know what *living* surrealism was up to was urged to visit the Bugs Bunny.

For the debut show of work by young, then-unknown artists at a small neighborhood gallery that had no advertising budget, the Bugs Bunny Surrealist Exhibition was amazingly well attended — jammed full of people on weekends. It was kept up an extra month before

traveling to Madison, Wisconsin. The exhibition was extensively, and all-in-all rather favorably, reviewed — not only in several underground and college papers, but also in the *Daily News*, *Sun-Times*, and *Tribune*. The *Tribune* even conceded that most of the Surrealist Group's criticisms of the MOMA show were on target. Just the kind of unlikely thing that can happen in a revolutionary year!

Not unexpectedly the reviews also contained more than a fair share of distortion, expressions of incomprehension, and carelessness. As it happens, the Bugs Bunny show was the occasion for Franklin's first press interview — with Richard Christiansen of *Panorama*, the weekend cultural supplement of the *Daily News*. Asked for a summary of the surrealists' politics, Franklin made it clear that surrealism was always and everywhere *against US imperialism*; but in *Panorama*, imperialism was inexplicably changed to *materialism*!

Chicago's zaniest, most experimental gallery during the Sixties, the Bugs Bunny featured a second Surrealist Group show, devoted to Surrealist Objects (the poster carried the subtitle: Homage to Rube Goldberg). The Objects show marked Paul Garon's first participation in the group. Two solo shows followed: Schlechter Duvall's and Franklin's. On opening day of the latter show, the streets and sidewalks all around the gallery were mysteriously torn up — no warning had been given by the city, or explanation afterward — and they remained in that state for the duration of the show, making the place almost inaccessible. "Rock-climbers thought it was fine," Franklin comments today, "but everyone else obviously preferred smooth streets and walks, for large numbers of them managed to stay away. Some people actually thought *we* tore up the sidewalk just to make things difficult!"



For many, Chicago's most notable and enduring place in the history of surrealism is linked to the World Surrealist Exhibition — "Marvelous Freedom/Vigilance of Desire" — which opened here on May Day of 1976 at the once and future realm of the Gallery Black Swan at 500 North LaSalle. Organized by Franklin (with the assistance of Edouard Jaguer and Abdul Kader El Janabi in Paris, Shuzo Takiguchi in Tokyo, and Mario Cesariny in Lisbon), the show was massive, featuring nearly 600 surrealist works — paintings, drawings, photographs, lithographs, collages, sculptures and objects — by well over 100 active surrealists from 31 countries.

The Gallery Black Swan was a vast, sprawling space, deliberately set up by Robert Green (whose knack for locating unusual exhibit spaces is uncanny) to be as unlike an art gallery as possible. Under Green's direction, the exhibition was arranged as a labyrinthine Aladdin's Cave, the works displayed in a haphazard and cluttered manner that many found disturbing — the *Tribune* critic groaned that he had “the sense of being at the scene of an explosion.” The lavish, oversize catalog contained a detailed blueprint of the floor plan, provided by Chicago Bauhaus architect Robert Bruce Tague, who also exhibited a couple of object-boxes in the show.

The “Marvelous Freedom” exhibition included in its magic circle “Eleven Domains of Surrealist Vigilance” dedicated to Bugs Bunny, Robin Hood, bluesman Peetie Wheatstraw, Harpo Marx, Alice in Wonderland, Wobbly sage T-Bone Slim, Alfred Jarry's favorite pataphysician Dr. Faustroll, the Marquis de Sade's “new woman” Juliette, Melmoth the Wanderer (phantasmic protagonist of Charles Robert Maturin's 1820 gothic horror tale), the Duchess of Towers (dedicated to the fictional Peter Ibbetson, who was locked in an insane asylum for the “crime of all time,” Dreaming True), and Fantomas (absolute enemy of law and order and kindred spirit to Lautréamont's Maldoror). Outside the domains proper, but within reach of them all, were such delights as Gerome Kamrowski's huge assemblage-with-movable-parts, the “Menagerie of Revolt, Aquarium of Love,” and Debra Taub's chthonic “Corner of Masks.”

All told, the Exhibition aimed at a dialectical mix of old and newly created mythologies as a provocative incitement to dream and to act. This was no art-market recuperation of surrealism as a cultural artifact, but the voice of surrealism itself asking, “Who are you?” and, more urgently, “Who will you be?”

In the revolutionary year 1968, the Gallery Bugs Bunny exhibition was widely reviewed. In the far-from-revolutionary year 1976, this incomparably larger World Surrealist Exhibition received shamefully little local media coverage. Some papers reviewed it, yes, but the reviews came late, were mostly short, and tended to be more than a little picayunish. Internationally, however, it was big news: covered on French TV, and written up at length in many publications, including the prestigious art journal *Mizue* in Japan, a large Arabic-language paper in London, and the popular Italian art monthly, *Terzocchio*.

Kamrowski, one of the older exhibitors (he had also taken part in the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris), said that the 1976 Chicago show was almost certainly the largest completely unsubsidized art exhibition of all time: no government or foundation grants, no “angels,” no corporate or other sponsors, not even a commercial gallery — for the Black Swan, like its Bugs Bunny predecessor, was strictly a surrealist operation. The authoritative reference *Dictionnaire générale du surréalisme et ses environs* (Paris, 1982) states categorically that the 1976 Chicago show was “an unprecedented panorama of *living* surrealism.”

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By a quirk of history, the site of the Gallery Black Swan has now become the Michael Jordan Restaurant. This is all the more curious in view of Bugs Bunny’s direct connection with both. This is hardly the place to unravel a problem of such complexity, but it is worth pointing out that the surrealists’ long association with Bugs has always been *wholly unauthorized*, and therefore, if you think about it, wholly in the spirit of the great rabbit himself.

Franklin, who “elaborated” the Domain of Bugs Bunny at the World Surrealist Exhibition, regards Bugs as a veritable symbol of “all that is revolutionary and scandalous” in the work of Hegel. He adds: “The very appearance on the stage of history of a character such as Bugs Bunny is proof that some day the Fudds will be vanquished — that some day all the carrots in the world will be ours.” He may be right. Neither the US Postal Service’s “officially stamped” Bugs Bunny image nor GM’s new Bugs Bunny minivan, which uses him as a carrot to sell cars, seems able to stifle the iconic rabbit’s rebel nature, as is demonstrated by the recent popularity of T-shirts bearing yet another unauthorized image of Bugs, this time in dreadlocks.

2000 Reasons Why We Need a Revolution is the title of a surrealist pamphlet now in preparation. Reason No. 1: To free Bugs Bunny once and for all from the tyranny of AOL-Time Warner!

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The dazzling array of sounds offered as part of the 1976 “Marvelous Freedom” exhibition highlights yet another dimension of Chicago surrealism: the group’s passionate love for Great Black Music. The World Surrealist Exhibition Blues Show featured sets by such blues luminaries as the West Side’s Eddie Shaw, backed up by the late Howlin’ Wolf’s band, and acoustic bluesman Honeyboy Edwards. Louisville-born surrealist

poet and blues historian Paul Garon, who used to work at Chicago's old Jazz Record Mart in the days when Big Joe Williams would occasionally drop by, curated this portion of the Exhibition as a labor of love.

Garon's classic surrealist tour de force *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, first published in 1975, was reissued in 1997 in a new, expanded edition by City Lights Books, and it has the distinction of being one of the few treatises on the subject mentioned favorably in Angela Davis's groundbreaking new volume, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Indeed, Robin D.G. Kelley has called it "absolutely the best book on the blues." Garon is also the author of a short biography of St. Louis bluesman Peetie Wheatstraw titled *The Devil's-Son-in-Law*. (As legend has it, when the Rosemonts first encountered Garon at Solidarity Bookshop back in 1967, Penelope happened to ask whether he had any Peetie Wheatstraw records; the answer was yes, he had almost all of the nearly eighty 78s Wheatstraw had recorded. The discussion that followed quickly led to Garon's active involvement in the Surrealist Group.) His most recent book, *Woman with Guitar: Memphis Minnie's Blues* (1992), co-authored with Beth Garon and published by DaCapo, is the first full-length study devoted to that outstanding artist noted for her merciless imagination and dark humor. While too many books on blues are afflicted with descriptive sociology or naive sentimentality, Garon's emphasis, in keeping with his surrealist priorities, is always on blues as poetry, magic, humor, eroticism, revolt, and the quest for freedom and the Marvelous.

Shortly before the 1976 Exhibition opened, Garon and other Chicago surrealists put together a unique 16-page "Surrealist Supplement" as part of Jim and Amy O'Neal's then-Chicago-based *Living Blues* magazine (Jan.-Feb., 1976), a periodical Garon had co-founded and to which he still contributes. In an earlier issue, the inclusion of Garon's scathing putdown of so-called "white blues" as a pale appropriative echo of African American culture, had proved to be the magazine's most controversial editorial policy decision (even *The New York Times* has commented on it). In the Introduction to the "Surrealist Supplement," the same militant view was reiterated with uncompromising fervor. Never one to shy away from controversy, Garon has now amplified that critique even further in the new concluding chapter of *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*.

Asked for a summary of the surrealists' perspective on blues today, Garon replies:

To comprehend the surrealist interest in blues requires the comprehension of the poetics of struggle. As surrealists, we see blues as the voice of a people distinctively victimized by the cruelest whims of white culture, but a people who, through poetry, have found a way to pierce the fabric of oppression with the tools of the imagination. The blues performs this function for African Americans even when it may seem to be doing otherwise, for it is a complex layering of struggle, conflict, imagination and poetry. Miscomprehension of the complexity of the blues has led to the proliferation of blues imitators throughout the world. It is in their own self-interest to see blues as having no consequential connection with society and culture, least of all Black society and Black culture, for if it did, how could it be seized for imitation? If it were *only* a musical form, however — an E chord here, an A chord there — why, anyone can play, can't they?

At the time of the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition, Chicago blues was already being incorporated into mainstream rock, while the city's underground African American music scene, less well-known outside Chicago, was bristling with the energy that radiated from the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) on the South Side. The AACM, which recently celebrated its 35th anniversary, was then at its zenith, and "Great Black Music: Ancient To The Future" became a passional attraction for many who heard it for the first time in the setting of "Marvelous Freedom." A touchstone performance by the Sun Song Ensemble featured such AACM stalwarts as consummate reed player/composer Douglas Ewart (now living in Minneapolis), master drummer Hamid Drake, experimental trombonist/composer George Lewis (who later went on to New York, where he did a stint for a time as director of The Kitchen performance space), and free-form vocalists Gloria Brooks and Rrata Christine Jones. Of the latter two, Jones danced in her self-designed costume made of newspapers, while Brooks emitted lyrical screams from the depths of her being.

Piano giant Cecil Taylor flew in from New York especially for the Exhibition, and while in town urged other AACM musicians to attend. His surrealist poem "The Musician" had just been published in *Arsenal* 3 that spring, along with AACM saxophonist/composer Joseph Jarman's mythopoetic piece, "Odawalla." Jarman also composed an original composition inspired by the Exhibition. Other AACM members, such as the brilliant saxophonist/composer Henry Threadgill (now living in New

York City, where he has recently collaborated with surrealist dancer Alice Farley), have also fruitfully interacted with the Chicago Surrealist Group over the years.

That the African-American improvisational music called jazz should find a linkage in surrealism's emphasis on pure psychic automatism and its longstanding embrace of the international movement for Black Liberation — from Négritude to Black Power — should come as no surprise. One of the factors distinguishing surrealism from all other "avant-garde" cultural movements of European origin is its multiracial character. A close friend of Charlie Parker's and an important figure in the 1950s Beat scene, transworld Bebop poet Ted Joans (now living in Seattle, after many years in Paris and Timbuktu) was a self-identified surrealist long before he joined the Paris group. A good friend of Breton's, Joans has regularly collaborated on *Arsenal* and frequently has taken part in other Chicago surrealist activity. So has fire-spitting poet and recording artist Jayne Cortez, whose newest collection, *Somewhere in Advance of Nowhere* (High Risk Books), fully confirms her well-deserved reputation as one of the most powerful voices of surrealism today.

For the Chicago Surrealist Group, the whole exhilarating African American musical tradition from blues to bop to free jazz and beyond has long been recognized as a "complementary adventure. . . in which surrealists have found marvelous verifications, reinforcements and extensions of their own revolutionary project — and, indeed, new *reasons for living*."



Since surrealists have always put poetry first, it is essential to grasp the fact that for them poetry is the opposite of literature. When they quote Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux's maxim, "Poetry is the greatest force on Earth," they are not kidding. No one is more serious about poetry, but at the same time no one is more playful. Surrealists regard poetry as *the* fundamental experience and an all-embracing attitude toward life.

Starting by emancipating language from the structures of power and commodification and identifying it with desire, freedom, and revolt, surrealists view poetry as the living affirmation of what Franklin calls "the indivisibility of self-revelation and social revolution." As he explained in the introduction to his 1968 book of poetry, *The Morning of a Machine-Gun*:

Poems do not make revolutions any more than revolutions make poems. The function of poetry, in terms of revolution, is to destroy conventional and limiting associations and all the decrepit, stifling myths of capitalist civilization by liberating images of desire. The function of revolution, in terms of poetry, is to destroy oppressive social conditions through the self-activity of the masses, leading to a total human liberation, and thus to create a situation in which poetry is realized in life itself.

Clearly then, for surrealists, poetry is not something that is confined to the writing of poems — it is rather an experience that has to be *lived*, and involves taking risks. “Find your own voice and use it,” says Jayne Cortez. “Use your own voice and find it.” Not surprisingly, the academic/critical establishment and most other poets have always found this attitude “untenable,” “excessive,” “exorbitant,” and “silly.” The surrealists, however, couldn’t care less about such disapproval on the part of people they tend to regard as false poets, men “hired to depress art” (in Blake’s phrase), and “apologists for misery” (in Franklin’s phrase). One could even say that Chicago’s surrealists actually *thrive* on the open hostility of those whose repressive conformism they heartily despise. What Franklin calls “our passion for non-recognition,” as evidenced by their utter lack of interest in acceptance or acclaim by the powers-that-be, is an important component of the group’s self-perception.

This may explain their longstanding indifference, even allergic reaction, to the local and national “poetry scene.” All through the 1970s Franklin was frequently invited to read at the Body Politic and other “prestigious” Chicago venues but he always declined, preferring not to encumber surrealism’s revolutionary message with concessions to “literary eclecticism.” Similarly, the Surrealist Group has always refused to publish in literary quarterlies and “little magazines,” agreeing to take part in the 1974 *City Lights Anthology* only when Ferlinghetti guaranteed them a separate section under their own editorship. Recognizing that the 1978 Penguin anthology *English and American Surrealist Poetry* was a dishonest mishmash, all the members of the Chicago Surrealist Group and their friends throughout the country refused to allow any of their poems to be included in it.

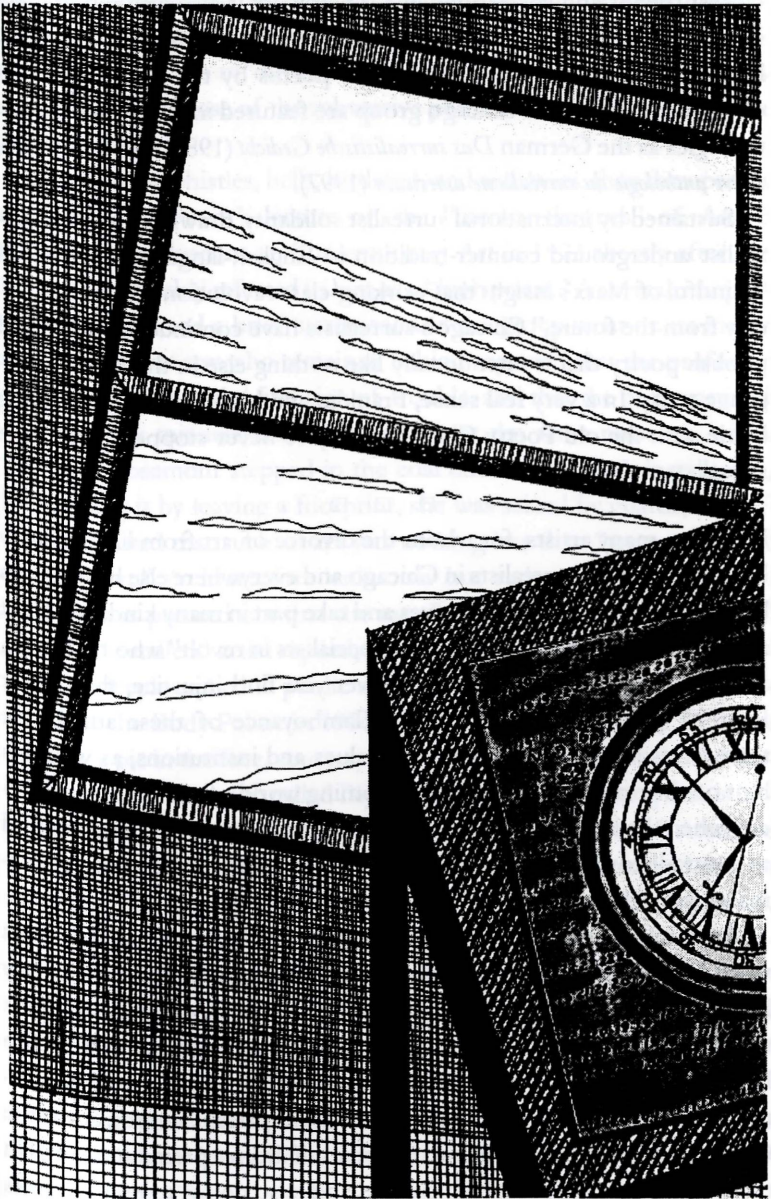
This adamant refusal is not the result, as one might be tempted to think, of a fear of rejection slips. The editor of the Penguin anthology

had already chosen a large selection of poems by Chicago surrealists for reprinting, and wrote them numerous letters trying to convince them to be a part of what they considered to be his idiotic scheme. As far back as 1968 Franklin's *The Morning of a Machine Gun* was well received by the quarterly/little-mag set: reviewed in enthusiastic detail in Jim Harrison's *Sumac*, proclaimed "the most notable first book by a young poet" in *Kayak*, and highly praised by Chicago's noted literary impresario Paul Carroll, editor of the esteemed Beat journal, *Big Table* (1959-1960). It would also be misleading to accept Ted Berrigan's charge (as quoted in the *Chicago Reader*, February 13, 1976), that the city's surrealists "don't like other poets." In Franklin's case, this is simply not true, for he is on the best of terms with such very different local poets as Natalie Kenvin, Carlos Cortez, and Eddie Two-Rivers, not to mention such old friends around the country as Dennis Brutus, Ruth Weiss, Diane di Prima, and Gary Snyder; and many of the poets of the past he admires most, such as Han-shan, Basho, and Sterling Brown, would not commonly be considered "surrealist."

It is not "sectarianism," therefore, that motivates Chicago's surrealists to keep their distance from the local and national "literary world," but rather a conscious desire on their part to *combat confusion*. In plain truth, surrealists and the cheerleaders of National Poetry Month live in radically different worlds. As Franklin insists, surrealism has nothing in common with "competitive neo-avantgardism, or any other grant-chasing, government-fund-seeking old-boy networks." Surrealists, he argues, are at the antipodes of "the Eliot/Pound mainstream and its present-day Charles Olson/Ginsbergian rivulets." In their view, US poetry took a disastrous "wrong turn" in the World War I era, and surrealism's role today is to restore poetry's real prerogatives as the "highest language."

Chicago's surrealist poets, however, are by no means isolated. True, they are rarely mentioned in literary publications today, and are systematically excluded from US anthologies. Yet they are an integral part, as they have been since the Sixties, of a large international community of poets. The fact that they had political differences with the late Octavio Paz did not prevent him from sending the Rosemonts copies of his books, and vice versa. At Paz's Art Institute media conference in 1996, he made it a point to state that he had read every issue of *Arsenal*, and that he particularly admired Penelope's poems. For years the Rosemonts

have corresponded with Romanian poet Gellu Naum, whose *Zenobia*, widely regarded as the greatest surrealist novel, was recently issued in translation by Northwestern University Press. Then there are: David Gascoyne in England, Shuzo Takiguchi in Japan, the Egyptian Joyce



Bertha Husband, "Time, Self and Geography"

Mansour, Guy Cabanel in rural France, the Romanian/Parisian Gherasim Luca, Arturo Schwarz in Italy, Sergio Lima in São Paulo, and Carmen Bruna in Argentina. These outstanding poets may live thousands of miles away, but over the years they have been some of the Rosemonts' closest friends and correspondents. Their work is also well represented in foreign translation. Franklin's *The Morning of a Machine Gun* was translated into Arabic in 1977. Dozens of poems by the Rosemonts and other members of the Chicago group are featured in such standard anthologies as the German *Das surrealistische Gedicht* (1985) and the French *Brève anthologie du surréalisme américain* (1997).

Sustained by international surrealist solidarity, drawing on a rich surrealist underground counter-tradition in English-language poetry, and "mindful of Marx's insight that working-class revolutions draw their poetry from the future," Chicago's surrealists have continued to write and publish poetry that is intentionally like nothing else in the English language today. In a very real sense, Franklin and his friends are still doing battle with the old Poetry Club. But they've never stopped raising the stakes.



Unlike so many artists, for whom the divorce of art from life is simply business as usual, surrealists in Chicago and everywhere else have always been willing to roll up their sleeves and take part in many kinds of direct action. Like all surrealists, they are "specialists in revolt" who recognize, as T-Bone Slim once put it, "wherever you find injustice, the proper form of politeness is attack." The flamboyance of these attacks are themselves a critique of repressive values and institutions, as well as a hint of their possible negation in a coming world of marvelous discovery, when the internal world and external world are no longer perceived as contradictory. The word "Marvelous" itself is at the heart of the surrealist project.

As to myself, growing up a working-class kid, "marvelous" was not a word I used much. It seemed kind of phony and sounded alien on my lips. I had heard only the rich use it pretentiously in old movies: "Isn't that simply *mah*velous, dear?" Not the least of surrealism's merits is to have restored the "marvel" to the word marvelous, freeing it of pretentious and banal associations. It has been the particular project of the Chicago surrealists to rescue surrealism itself from a premature burial in the crypt of ideology and high culture, and in so doing, to rediscover its

dynamic actuality and vital potential as a component of the ongoing struggle for working-class emancipation in a society in which open discussion of class still remains taboo.

In the surrealist view, to stop the New World Order's "war on poetry" requires the kind of revolutionary poetic action that, in its most effective form, is usually called humor. A quick look at a few of the Surrealist Group's scores of direct actions, demonstrations, and disruptions should convey a sense of the subversive power of surrealism's "invisible laughter."

Armed with whistles, bells, birdseed, and tomatoes, they disrupted a reactionary professor's lecture on the "literary theories" of André Breton at the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1973 shortly after the lecturer predictably referred to him as a "high priest." A surrealist representative then read a brief statement and the group went on its merry way. A surrealist spy who remained behind reported that the professor went into hiding at the first sign of trouble, and that the police arrived about twenty minutes later. A year later at the same museum, when Penelope Rosemont stepped in the coal dust in an artist's installation, humanizing it by leaving a footprint, she was seized by guards, one of whom shouted that such an act was nothing less than "treason against the museum" (a heretofore unknown but rather delectable crime). When it was pointed out that the installation was really only a pile of dirt, the "installed" artist replied, "I know, but it's *my* pile of dirt."

More deeply etched in public memory is the poetry reading by Robert Bly at the Body Politic in 1976, when the future author of *Iron John* received a pie in the face, courtesy of the Surrealist Group. A leaflet distributed on the occasion called Bly the "enemy of everything that is important to us in the world — love and freedom, for example." After the pieing, a bit of a scuffle ensued, and a local wag later remarked that he stopped going to poetry readings because his insurance wasn't paid up. The cops arrived, but seemed to have difficulty understanding the nature of what had transpired, and the surrealists made their exit in a manner fully worthy of the Marx Brothers. This surrealist action received national as well as local news coverage. "The important thing here," Franklin comments today, "is that some of us perceived Bly's megalomaniacal and authoritarian streak years before he concocted his so-called 'Men's Movement,' with its obvious misogynous and military overtones."

Claes Oldenburg's Batcolumn was unveiled in 1977 at the Social Security Administration office building at 600 West Madison, which was then still known as Skid Road. On stage were not only temp mayor Michael Bilandic, but also the then second first lady (or is it first second lady?) Joan Mondale, appearing as a sort of Lady Bountiful of the Arts. The Surrealists were there too, with picket signs and a leaflet titled *No Hits, No Runs, ALL ERRORS*, in which Oldenburg was described as "one of the decade's leading loathsome grovelers," and his public sculpture of phallic steel labeled a "symbol of repressive authority. . . a hundred-foot-long billy-club."

The play-by-play in the ensuing rhubarb involved the local lawmen acting in the unlikely role of umpires of free expression. When they couldn't shut up the surrealists (or their Skid Road allies), who were crying "Tear It Down!," the cops illegally seized most of the leaflets and hauled several protesters off to jail. Columnist Roger Simon summed it up in the *Sun-Times*: "As in all true Chicago cultural events, there were three arrests." Less witty were Franz Schulze of the *Daily News*, who labeled the surrealists a "weird little group," and the bleary-eyed *Tribune* critic who intoned, "May we be protected from them all." To this day Franklin maintains that the only reason that he personally wasn't arrested was because his picket sign said, "Silly, Isn't It?" (How would it look on TV to have one of Chicago's finest dragging him off with a sign like that while the US Navy band played a medley of bracing patriotic tunes?) This action was featured all day on TV news, as a front-page story in dailies all over the nation, and later in publications as varied as *The New Yorker* and the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

Over the years, Franklin says, he has met several people who worked in the Social Security building at that time, and who watched the proceedings from their office windows. (Wage slaves were not allowed time off to attend the event.) Without exception they told him that *all* the workers there were rooting for the surrealist disrupters. Who says surrealism doesn't speak to the working class?

Each of the distinguished attendees of the official opening reception of the Art Institute's 1989 Andy Warhol Retrospective received a surrealist flyer identifying Warhol as a "professional flatterer of corporate complacency" and "the Richard Nixon of Modern Art." The tract was subtitled "Homage to Valerie Solanas" (Warhol's would-be assassin and radical feminist shero). According to a surrealist spy who stayed to

observe the ceremonies, none of the speakers acknowledged the offensive tract, and in this case, the representatives of the media followed suit: not one account of the opening dared to mention it. When a non-surrealist writer asked *Sun-Times* art critic Mary Sherman about it, she replied with a combination of indignation and cluelessness, "These are people trying to get attention."

Whether the dailies report it or not, the fact remains: The Chicago Surrealist Group has never quit being a thorn in the side of the business-as-usual art racket.

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Tenacity and laughter in the face of apathy and defeat: Perhaps that is what endeared the surrealists to a plucky maverick like Nelson Algren, who befriended them early on. For Algren, surrealism was "realism raised to the tenth degree." The Rosemonts visited him several times at his Evergreen Street apartment, in the Wicker Park neighborhood's more down-and-out days, and he in turn attended a Surrealist Group meeting at the now defunct St. Regis Hotel on Grand Avenue. In the heyday of Barbara's Bookstore at 1434 North Wells (in the years 1968-73, when Allen Ginsberg's friend Barbara Siegel still owned it, and for a few years made it the "City Lights of the Midwest"), the shop was virtually a surrealist front. Surrealists employed there as part-time clerks practically ran the place, and all of Algren's in-print books were always kept in stock and well displayed in the front of the store. Odd as it might seem today, no other Chicago bookstore stocked them! (One might say that Algren was as much disdained by local booksellers in those days as the surrealists are today.) Algren himself often dropped in unannounced with visiting writers in tow, like Joe Heller, seeking copies of his books, and sometimes stayed to talk or tell jokes.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the degree to which Algren and the surrealists saw things eye to eye, but there is no denying that they shared a deep rebelliousness inseparable from poetry. Like Algren, the Chicago surrealists in their turn have steadfastly refused to be co-opted, and have waged a continuous in-your-face assault on the smug complacency of the professional "intelligentsia" who serve to fabricate an art-official world of enclosure in which poetry is divested of its radical implications.

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Like Algren, too, the surrealists know that "developers" are devastating all that is truly alive in Chicago.

Take Maxwell Street, for instance. Back when Franklin joined the IWW he met a fellow worker named James Kodl, known to all as Bozo, a stage and nightclub actor who often scripted plays for Wobbly “socials,” and who sometimes worked in film (as in *Female Jungle* with Jayne Mansfield). For over fifty years Bozo also ran a venetian-blind stand on Maxwell Street, and in 1963 he invited Franklin and other younger Wobs to use part of his table to hawk Wobbly literature to the passing throng. Old-timers like Fred Thompson, the IWW’s own historian, sometimes showed up, too, and added his two cents to the soapboxing lessons.

Entering the world of the sprawling open-air Sunday market was an exhilarating experience. The festive bazaar atmosphere was heightened by blues musicians playing in the streets, and the occasional appearance of such near-mythic characters as Casey Jones and his dancing chicken, and Eddie “Free Jomo” Lemaka and his sign-carrying dog Picket. You could almost smell the liberation from bureaucratic constraint in the air, as if the old East European/Jewish marketplace and the newer African and Latin American marketplaces had merged into a convivial temporary autonomous zone within the city. Here was a piece of Chicago that had unfolded outside the reach of government planners in an open-ended way well suited to the anarchic inclinations of the Surrealist Group. “We all went there just about every Sunday morning in the nice weather,” says Penelope, “and fairly often even in winter. We still have dozens of crazy things we found there.” In the Sixties, Franklin remembers, it was the best place in town to pick up old Bugs Bunny comics and “incomprehensible objects,” not to mention such folkloric wonders as John-the-Conqueror Root and Hex-Removing Floorwash. And it was always one of the places they brought visiting surrealist and anarchist friends from other countries. Says Penelope: “They all said Maxwell Street was the part of Chicago they liked best.” Yet, not long ago, the ax fell, wielded by mean-spirited bureaucrats at the University of Illinois at Circle Campus, aided and abetted by the Chicago City Council.

On September 3, 1998, Maxwell Street bluesman Jimmie Lee Robinson had sung his “Maxwell Street Teardown Blues” at a UI Board of Trustees meeting in the still lingering hope of thwarting the wrecking ball by appeals to sentiment. However, in November of 1999, the City Council gave its rubber stamp for the \$525 million expansion plan to UIC and its team of suburban consultants with the project slated to be partially funded through a local Tax Increment Financing District.

Yet way back in October 1993, in response to the first news of the impending destruction of the Maxwell Street market, the Chicago Surrealists had issued one of their juiciest and most thought-provoking broadsides, entitled *Maxwell Street Forever!* The surrealists recognized Maxwell Street as an “oasis of freedom and pleasure in a wasteland of misery and boredom,” a “liberated zone,” and “the single most interesting place in the entire city where human beings can relate to each other as human beings rather than as victims, slaves, informers, spies, order-givers and order-takers.”

As the leaflet puts it,

Maxwell Street is virtually the opposite of a “mall.” Bourgeois and authoritarian prejudices — discipline, order, neatness, punctuality, obedience, hierarchy — have little meaning here where music, dancing, carefree wandering and joyful discovery are the pleasures of the day. Maxwell Street is a living example of creative disorder at its brightest and most spontaneous: a kind of festival or carnival or, if you prefer, the “best theater in town.” All who come are strolling players at a sprawling, multi-dimensional free-for-all fair, where the worries and woes of the workaday world give way to the exuberant enjoyment of an unparalleled promenade through a waking dreamtime of color, scent and sound. Unhesitatingly, we affirm that Maxwell Street is more marvelous than the “Magnificent Mile,” more educational than the Museum of Science and Industry, more fun than any of the official multi-million-dollar extravaganzas at Grant Park or Soldier Field.

The Chicago Surrealists’ solution to the U of I plan to destroy Maxwell Street was simple and the justice poetic. “For our part, we would infinitely prefer to see the entire Circle Campus razed and its grounds used for the expansion of Maxwell Street.”

The leaflet received a wide diffusion, in part because the A-Zone anarchists of Wicker Park reproduced a few thousand copies for their own use. It was also reprinted in a number of blues zines around the country, and even in French, in the Parisian anarchist weekly *Le Monde Libertaire*. Alas, it was not enough to turn the tide; though organizing efforts continue in opposition to the UIC demolition derby, Chicago’s “Street of Dreams” seems to be doomed. Franklin calls it Lost Cause No. 17,946. But then, he and his friends do not despair of “lost” causes. As he wrote in the foreword to John Patrick Deveney’s 1996 biography, *Paschal Beverly*

Randolph: *A 19th-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (State University of New York Press): "History's great dreamers are never out-of-date. Not only are the grandest of lost causes still having their effects — they are always springing forth anew, reminding us that the problems they addressed are yet to be solved."

To which one can add only: Restore the Maxwell Street Market *Now!*



Although surrealists have never considered themselves part of a mere art movement, neither have they ever been simply anti-art. It is, in the resilient fabric of *real life*, in the lives of living, breathing Chicagoans seeking, each in her/his own way, for freedom and the Marvelous, that this city's surrealists have found such an abundance of inspiration — not only in terms of the organized working-class resistance throughout the past century, but also in myriad utopian moments that leap out from the blinkered existence foisted upon us by the humdrum civilization that tries so desperately to keep us all in check. After all, it is these daily transgressions against alienation and refusals of repression that are the true expression of surrealism.

Contrary to both academic and mass-mediated expectations, surrealism really has nothing to do with the art world chicanery of such opportunistic artists as Salvador Dalí, who was repudiated by the movement in 1938 for having avowed racist, pro-capitalist, and pro-fascist views, and anagrammatically renamed Avida Dollars by Breton himself. And there is nothing surrealist in the cynical use of the long-since-decontextualized surrealist techniques of yesteryear to fuel plutocratic society's mindless consumption through either the latest art marketeer's oh-so-trendy postmodernist appropriations or absorption in an advertising industry that seeks to lock us into our very own market-niche prisons by seducing us with assembly-line plastic replicas of our deepest desires. Surrealists instead ask us to fully explore those very desires in a direct, non-commodified way, and in so doing to question the confines of our daily reality.

That is why surrealists are so appreciative of the work of those who, for many and varied reasons, are very far from the Art World: the so-called "insane," "primitive," or "outsider" artists.

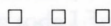
So, momentarily getting back on that freewheeling Halsted Street bus, perhaps the Garden of Eden that Franklin once envisioned can be glimpsed at a Midwestern stop-to-be in Lucas, Kansas. Not some

hackneyed Biblical paradise, a so-named Garden of Eden was miraculously constructed there by S.P. Dinsmoor at his house and yard. It consists of a series of outdoor sculptures that are idiosyncratically fanciful yet strongly populist, including a figure of the Goddess of Liberty with one foot on the Trusts and a hand-held spear through their heads, as well as a backyard Crucifixion of Labor at the hands of Lawyers, Doctors, Preachers, and Bankers. While Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden is not too far from Chicago, no CTA bus at present stops there, and correspondingly the Chicago art establishment is just beginning to recognize what it calls "yard shows" and "outsider art." Yet, Chicago's surrealists for decades have celebrated and chronicled the work of such creative mavericks as Dinsmoor and Simon Rodia, builder of the world-renowned Watts Towers in Los Angeles, and more recently Tyree Guyton, whose magnificent assemblages were the glory of his Heidelberg Street Project on Detroit's East Side.

In the case of the latter, Guyton's "live-in collages" have turned the flotsam and jetsam of urban debris into visual surrealist poetry using an explicitly Afro-centric sensibility. Significantly, Guyton has always preferred to do his creative work while listening to the music of Thelonious Monk. In a spirited defense of that work issued in the form of a poster in 1992, the Surrealists defiantly declared, "What are all the bulldozers of the world against the unfettered imagination?" Nevertheless, though delayed, the city of Detroit finally tore down all of Guyton's surrealized buildings in 1998. The bicycle tree was the first to go. The Chicago Surrealist Group protested this act of "government censorship in its most brutal form" in the special surrealist issue of *Race Traitor* (summer, 1998). While the Halsted Street bus does not stop on Heidelberg Street in reality, it does stop there surreally, making all other stops along the route of the unbridled imagination. Surrealist battles are fought not with tanks, but with streetcars named desire!

For them, such imaginative transformations of the public sphere are vitally important examples of *surrealist evidence* — contributions to a revolution worth dreaming about. Equally urgent in their eyes is the evidence provided by those who, for whatever reason, prefer to work in secrecy, silence, seclusion, solitude. The work of the now-world-famous Chicago outsider artist Henry Darger was first shown in a Chicago Surrealist Group show titled "Surrealism in 1977" in Gary, Indiana, and Joseph Jablonski's essay on Darger's mythology in Franklin's *Surrealism and*

Its Popular Accomplices (1979) is one of the earliest serious studies of his art. Photographer Nathan Lerner, Darger's landlord and discoverer, once told Franklin that fewer than ten individuals had viewed Darger's work before he invited the Surrealist Group over for a long, leisurely look.



Beyond the championing of rebellious individualists and radical community-based art currents, surrealists locally and internationally have long been confronting the major life-threatening problems of our time: the degradation of nature, the oppression of women, and the persistence of white supremacy. Ecology, gender, and race studies may now be considered *de rigueur* in some academic circles, but as has often happened before, the surrealists were in the forefront of such paradigm shifts.

The need for a fundamental transformation of the relations between humankind and the natural world has been a recurring theme of surrealist discourse since the Twenties, and an important focus of the Chicago group from the start. Surrealist ecology begins with the awareness that modern society's war against the natural world exacerbates and is exacerbated by the psychic war within each individual human being — the notorious “divided self” syndrome. There is no easy solution, but the surrealists at least recognize the magnitude of the problem. As Penelope wrote in *Arsenal 4*: “Individual human emancipation requires social emancipation, both are unthinkable without sexual emancipation, and all three are inseparable from the emancipation of Nature.” Such an approach is very far indeed from the corporate mindset of mainstream environmentalism!

It should come as no shock, though, that Chicago's surrealists were co-founders, in the mid-1980s, of the local chapter of Earth First! (“No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth!”), and its mainstays for several years. As such, they organized many lively demonstrations to defend wolves, to denounce clear-cutting, to save the Shawnee National Forest, and to oppose the Shedd Aquarium's captive whale program (“No Jails for Whales!”). In May '88 Franklin edited a special issue of the Wobbly paper the *Industrial Worker* (IW), which brought Earth First! and the IWW — two distinct but related direct-action movements — together for the first time. Although the usual run of the *IW* was only 2000, Franklin arranged to print 10,000 copies of the Earth First! issue, and it

had its impact. A month later, for example, Judi Bari joined the Wobblies. And then came Redwood Summer, an organizing project that linked the causes of timber workers and environmental activists and so infuriated the lumber barons that Bari had a contract taken out on her life. More recently, these previously scattered seeds of insurrectionary solidarity between militant refusers of wage slavery and environmental hell-raisers blossomed once again in Seattle as the century wobbled to an anarchic close amidst the ruins of the WTO. The Festival of Resistance was an historical moment when, as many of the participants have reported, anything seemed possible. Surrealism was in the air!

Chicago surrealists have been especially attentive to the *radicalizing* effect of nature in an urban context. They found the Great Snow of '67 an occasion for celebration as the workaday mentality that ruled the city came to a grinding halt, and a large part of the population suddenly found time to play, to build snowpeople, to ski in the streets, and even (wonder of wonders) to fraternize with strangers!

This same liberatory theme was further elaborated in a May '92 surrealist broadside honoring the Great Flood, as the Chicago River wrought its subterranean havoc through the Central Business District. In *A River's Revenge! Surrealist Implications of the Great Flood*, the Surrealist Group gleefully noted that

Any sudden end of "business as usual" ushers in possibilities for everything that is neither business nor usual. Momentarily freed of the stultifying routine of "making a living," people find themselves confronted with a rare opportunity to *live*. In these *unmanageable* situations, the absolute superfluousness of all "management" becomes hilariously obvious. Spontaneously and joyfully, those who have always been "bored to death" reinvent, starting from zero, a life worth living. The oppressive tyranny of obligations, rules, sacrifice, obedience, realism and a multitude of so-called "lesser evils" give way to the creative anarchy of desire. The "everyday" begins — however fleetingly — to fulfill the promise of poetry and our wildest dreams.

As they summed it up, "In the river's subterranean fury every rebel against unfreedom has sensed a kindred spirit." With unashamed joy, the surrealists effectively offered a radically utopian reading of what the ruling bureaucracy defined as a disaster.

In 1971, years before the Animal Rights movement burst on the scene, the Chicago Surrealists issued *The Anteater's Umbrella: A Contribution to the Critique of the Ideology of Zoos*, a tract initiated by Penelope, and first distributed at the entrance to Lincoln Park Zoo. The unsuspecting zoogoer who took a proffered leaflet read,

It is not without significance that animals in the zoo are *captured* and brought against their wills to this, the penitentiary of the instincts. Here, in the zoo, in this place of hypnotic fascination, human beings come to see *their own instincts* caged and sterilized. Everything that is intrinsic to humankind, but smothered by capitalist society, reappears *safely* in the zoo. Aggression, sexuality, motion, desire, play, the very impulses to freedom are trapped and displayed for the alienated enjoyment and manipulation of men, women and children. Here is the harmless spectacle in which everything desired by human beings exists only to the degree that it is separated from the reality of human existence. The cages are merely the extensions of the cages that omnipresently infest the lives of all living beings. The brutal confinement of animals ultimately serves only to separate men and women from their own potentialities.

This "zoo-as-bastille" polemic then problematizes an unexamined part of our everyday reality, considered to be as normal as a family picnic. In turn, it also causes us to reflect deeply, not only on the problem of animals as victims, but also on our own victimization and submerged desire for freedom.



Back in 1971, when New Left and Old, to say nothing of Right and Center, all seemed to be ignoring or reviling the then-emerging struggle for women's emancipation from patriarchal domination, the Chicago Surrealist Group, in a statement titled "Revolutionary Women" in *Arsenal 1*, declared its unequivocal support for the Women's Liberation Movement. "A sex that oppresses another," it pointed out, "cannot itself be free," and it went on to insist that "in its essence, the cause of the liberation of women is the cause of real, total, human liberation." A radical conception of feminism has been a constant in Chicago surrealism ever since.

In truth, surrealism and feminism started interacting long before that, as Penelope Rosemont shows in her *Surrealist Women: An International*

Anthology (the first volume in the University of Texas Press's Surrealist Revolution Series). The book's main purpose is to enable the heretofore neglected women of surrealism to speak in their own voices. As the first collection of its kind in any language, it brings together an amazing variety of writings by 97 women who have participated in the movement since 1924. All but a few have been completely ignored by US critics. Challenging the conventional wisdom, Penelope emphasizes surrealism's basic anti-Eurocentrism. The inclusion of forceful work by surrealist women of color (from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States) is an especially important contribution.

Indeed, *Surrealist Women* compels us to see the history of surrealism in an entirely new light. Citing the 1920s surrealist proverb, "Thought has no sex," she argues that surrealists from the start questioned gender stereotypes and embraced androgyny when such attitudes were much less acceptable than they are today. Male surrealists openly rejected their generation's assigned models of masculinity — soldier, athlete, bureaucrat, boss — and instead bravely championed the so-called feminine qualities of intuition, impulsiveness, and passivity (as in automatic writing). Penelope's anthology, a fundamental reexamination of the movement's gender politics, strikingly reveals surrealism's strong links to such diverse currents as Pan-Africanism, anarchism, libertarian Marxism, and eco-feminism.

Critical response has been overwhelmingly positive. As Chicago's Bertha Husband notes in a review appearing in both *Against the Current* and *Slingshot*, *Surrealist Women* is distinctive in that it "is written not by an outside critic of surrealism, but from within, by one who has been an active participant in the movement since 1966." She then goes on to call it "a major work of scholarship [and] vital reading for those who live their lives at the point where art and revolution intersect." In terms of surrealist publications, Sarah Metcalf writing in England's *Manticore* says of the book, "a collection such as this has been long overdue to challenge the view still perpetuated by most art critics and cultural historians that the (few well known) women who have been associated with Surrealism were merely regarded as muses by their male counterparts." Even the staid academic librarian's journal *Choice* called *Surrealist Women* a "major contribution to art history and literary scholarship. . . as authoritative, definitive and comprehensive as any anthology of an ongoing literary impulse can be."

Penelope's newest book, *Surrealist Experiences: 1001 Dawns, 221 Midnights*, with a foreword by Rikki Ducornet, was published in January 2000. A collection of the numerous essays and articles she has written for various surrealist and other radical publications, plus 11 published now for the first time, it is largely devoted to fortuitous encounters and their many-sided magic. From her opening text, "Surrealism= MC^2 ," to the concluding "Brief Rant against Work," the book is a profound and deliriously beautiful combination of wild humor, the uncompromising Marvelous, and revolutionary thought at its most expansive.

Penelope has also been intrigued by women who, though unaffiliated with the movement, have led lives that embody a surrealist spirit. *The Story of Mary MacLane and Other Writings* (Charles H. Kerr, 1997) introduces us to the quintessentially rebellious writings of an author Penelope first profiled in the 1982 classic surrealist anthology, *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination*. Marvelous Mary MacLane's "full and frank portrayal" of herself (included in its entirety in the new volume) provoked one of the biggest scandals in US publishing history when it was first brought out by Chicago's Herbert S. Stone in 1902, when MacLane was only 19 years old. MacLane's writing is brisk and vivid, with flashes of poetic humor at every turn.

Even in these days of rampant anti-feminism and omnipresent phallocentric bullies, Chicago's surrealists have been urging us to listen instead to the voices of defiant, imaginative, revolutionary women. The Garons' study of Memphis Minnie, Joseph Jablonski's appreciation of Shaker artist Hannah Cohoon in *Surrealism and its Popular Accomplices*, and Franklin's collection, *Isadora Speaks: Writings and Speeches of Isadora Duncan* (prefaced by Chicago dance scholar Ann Barzel), as well as his selection of poems by anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre, *Written in Red*, are notable in this regard.

As the introduction to *The Forecast Is Hot!* collection makes clear, "Undermining Patriarchy" remains a surrealist priority: "Against masculine arrogance and misogynist power-structures, surrealism helps prepare the way for an irreducibly *radical equality*. Poetry demands no less!"



Another demand for radical equality has taken new form in relation to the current surrealist emphasis on "abolishing whiteness." Reflecting on his youthful involvement in the surrealist movement, the Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire once remarked that surrealism, for him, was the

point at which European thought came closest to the thought of the Black world. As he further explained in an interview recently quoted by Robin D.G. Kelley in his introduction to the new Monthly Review edition of *Discourse on Colonialism*, "Surrealism provided me with what I had been confusedly searching for. I have accepted it joyfully because in it I have found more of a confirmation than a revelation." The multiracial and vehemently anti-racist character of the surrealist movement is among the key factors that distinguish it from the long line of European "avant-gardes."

Chicago's surrealists actively supported the Black Freedom movement even before the formation of the Surrealist Group. From their early participation in the Civil Rights movement, through the struggle against white supremacists in Marquette Park in the Seventies as part of the Workers Defense Coalition, to the current effort to free Black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, the Surrealist Group has continued to identify itself with the cause of Black Liberation. They have also made important theoretical contributions toward undermining white supremacy — more specifically, contributions to the critique of whiteness.

The work of David Roediger has been a decisive influence here; his books, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991), *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (1994), and the anthology, *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to be White* (1998) are major critical/historical studies of how and why the so-called "white race" was constructed, how the "lie of whiteness" (as James Baldwin called it) impedes all struggles for social change, and how the poisonous myth of the "white race" might be overcome. A regular collaborator on surrealist publications since the mid-1970s, Roediger has developed W.E.B. Du Bois's idea of whiteness as a "psychological wage," a compensation in the form of social privileges granted to those who agree to consider themselves white, on the condition that they leave the existing class and gender hierarchies intact. As is stated in the introduction to *The Forecast Is Hot!*, "Far from being a tangible entity, much less a scientific category, the 'white race' is a historically constructed social ideology — in other words, a *deadly fiction* — and those who believe in it, or accept its guidelines, are inevitably, however unwittingly, part of the problem." Unlike ethnicity, identifying as "white" reveals nothing about one's cultural identity. It is only a reference point for white-skin privilege or the lack of it. The solution proposed by Roediger, fully supported by the Surrealist Group, is to

“abolish whiteness” — that is, to consciously dismantle the false consciousness that has created the “white race.”

In 1993 the Chicago surrealists were among the first to rally to the New Abolitionist journal *Race Traitor* (edited by former Chicagoan Noel Ignatiev), which boasts the motto: “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.” The first Chicago Surrealist Group contribution to *Race Traitor* was the collective declaration “Three Days That Shook the New World Order,” saluting the so-called rioters in the multiracial 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion for “saying *no* to the slave system known as daily life in America,” and for freely enjoying their involvement in an uprising in which a soundtrack of rap poetry animated the “struggle to live poetic lives.”

The summer 1998 *Race Traitor* was a special 144-page issue entitled “Surrealism: Revolution against Whiteness,” edited by Franklin, offering a specifically surrealist critique of whiteness elaborated in a wide range of articles by Roediger, Garon, Jablonski, former Chicagoan Myrna Bell Rochester, the Rosemonts, and many others. A part of this Surrealist Issue focuses on the history of surrealism, tracing its development in relation to race matters from its early 1920s gut-level anti-Eurocentrism to the full-fledged race-traitor orientation of the movement in the wake of the North African Rif war in 1925; but many of the articles are focused on related strategies for today.

In addition to the more familiar contributors, the Surrealist Issue of *Race Traitor* features a whole new lineup of youthful surrealist voices such as J. Allen Fees, Daniel Boyer, Larry Romano, and Ronnie Burk. Along with Anne Olson, Laura Corsiglia, Casandra Stark Mele, Jennifer Bean, Darryl Lorenzo Wellington, and others represented in this issue of *Socialist Review*, they are part of a new generation seeking to innovate, elaborate, and expand upon the original “Chicago Idea” of surrealism.

As the introduction to this recent issue of *Race Traitor* further elucidates,

With an unbroken continuity from 1924 down to the present day, the surrealist movement has helped develop not only a revolutionary critique of whiteness but also new forms of struggle against it. . . . The fact that white privilege is an inherently *irrational* phenomenon is proof that it cannot be overcome by rational means alone. Nothing less than surrealist revolution can abolish whiteness once and for all. . . . As surrealists, we

are especially interested in how the “white problem” turns up in language, images, myths, symbols, popular culture, everyday life, the whole field of human expression. However, our goal at all times is to attack and abolish whiteness *and its institutions* — to attack and abolish the whole miserabilist social/political/economic/cultural *system* that has made whiteness the hideous emblem of the worst oppression the world has ever had to endure.

As the many letters published in the subsequent issues of *Race Traitor* have enthusiastically noted, such a surrealist analysis of “whiteness” proved very insightful. Michael Löwy (a historian of ideas who also happens to be a member of the Surrealist Group in Paris) has pointed out in his review of the issue for *Against the Current* (January-February, 1999), “It is important to stress that surrealism did not only share a negative stand against white supremacy, but also a positive view of African, Afro-American and Indigenous cultures as the powerful expression of a poetical and enchanted spirit, and as an alternative to modern capitalist white civilization.”



If the “abolition of whiteness” sounds to you like a utopian daydream, surrealism, as Paul Garon reminds us, “is not only an important method in elaborating the content of ‘pie in the sky,’ but it is only surrealism that can take the pie out of the sky and put it on the dinner table.” Accordingly, surrealism’s ongoing challenge consists of combining, in ever-new ways, what are often considered to be the separate and irreconcilable spheres of radical politics and culture. Fiercely polemical but not doctrinaire, surrealism is typically considered, as the introduction to *The Fore-cast Is Hot!* puts it,

too anarchist for most Marxists, too Marxist for most anarchists; too much in love with poetry and painting for most politicians, too involved in the revolutionary movement for most writers and artists; too immersed in theoretical inquiry for activists, too unruly for the professoriat; too rigorous in poetic matters for wheeler-dealers in the “Spirituality” racket, too devoted to the Marvelous for those afflicted with instrumentalist rationalism; too Freudian for the positivist/puritanical left, too “wild” for the conservative medical usurpers of psychoanalysis.

In the face of such misunderstandings, “surrealism continues to flourish in the only way it can: *outside* and *against* all the dominant paradigms.” As Chicago’s surrealists see it, what is called “art” could influence what is called “politics” not just by giving it an aesthetic dimension, but rather by making a real contribution to what politics *is*. Dave Roediger’s call for a “highly poetic politics” (in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*) exemplifies this aspect of surrealism’s current strategy. Only by effecting a real *reciprocity* between art and politics can we begin to lay the groundwork for the realization of poetry in everyday life. Reflecting on surrealism’s political dimension, the Chicago Surrealists and the entire Surrealist Movement in the United States refuse to be pigeonholed. They insist on the importance of “drawing freely on the best of *all* revolutionary traditions, and indeed from the whole spectrum of radical, emancipatory nonconformism, in all its many-splendored contradictory diversity.” If this conjures up a surrealist collage, then you’ve grasped an important insight — a truly radical art does not simply follow unilateral revolutionary decrees, but itself can shape the very way we envision radical politics. Surrealism is not simply meant to be an addendum to a radical agenda, but hermetically embodies the idea of total transformation at its deepest core.

Ted Joans’s poem, “Have Gone, Am in Chicago,” was written in the Windy City and first published in *Arsenal* 4. Filled with graphic imagery of the “thick mattress trunk of blues tree Chicago/traditional magnetic migratory mouth city,” it includes the following surrealist exhortation:

*Workers of Chicago Stop Working
Unite For Pleasure Work!!
Chicago be different be a city-poem
love and let love*

Has there ever been a better argument for freeing the spirit and turning the city on its head in the fervent name of Surrealist Desire? Just as 1920s surrealism is impossible to imagine without the Parisian milieu that birthed it, American surrealism is unimaginable without (bitter) Sweet Home Chicago.

January 2000

Franklin Rosemont

Surrealism, Poetry, and Politics

Surrealism brings poetry and politics together in a radically new way. What is commonly called “political” poetry is poetry that is derived from politics: the politics always comes first. Surrealism, which has a way of upsetting established conventions, reverses the priorities and derives its politics from poetry.

For surrealists, poetry is the *fundamental* experience, the root of all knowledge, the surest guide to action. It is not a “literary” experience, not at all a question of edification, confession or consolation, and it defies description in the reified terminology of traditional esthetics. For surrealism, poetry is rather an *immeasurably intensified awareness* that involves an electrifying perception, an all-encompassing sense of the wonder and magic of all things and the relationships between things. It is the revelation of the world of our deepest internal desires and their unceasing interplay with external reality.

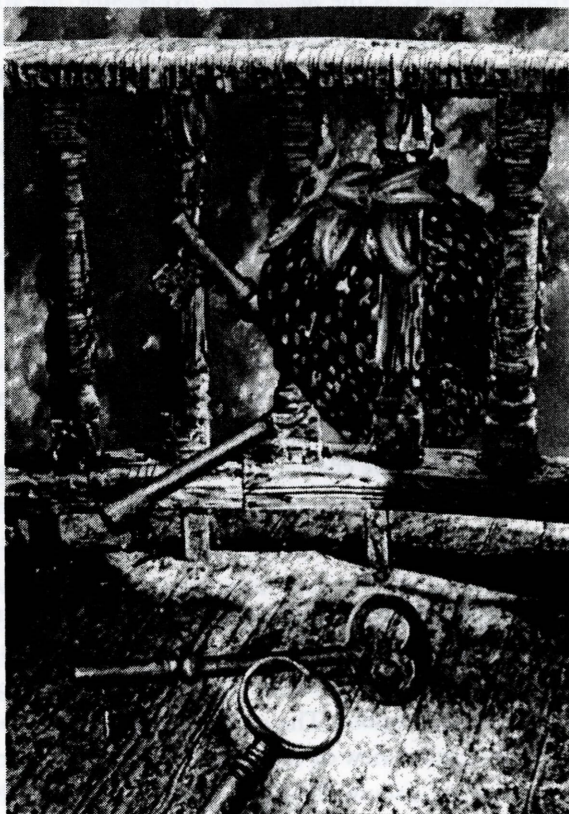
This revolutionary conception of language as adventure, audacity, and free play restores poetry to the supreme position assigned to it by Hegel, as the universal art that embraces the totality of the human spirit. All forms of surrealist research — psychic automatism, dream-exploration, the pursuit of objective chance, and the many surrealist games — begin with a plunge into the innermost recesses of the mind, and hasten the triumph of what Hegel regarded as the essence of poetry: the “unfettered imagination.”

The emphasis on *unfettering* highlights the fact that surrealism, in poetry as in politics, is concerned above all with *freedom*, and has been relentless in its opposition to capitalism, church, state, the police, and all other authoritarian institutions. The surrealists’ practice of poetry led them to develop a critical view of the *unfreedom* of contemporary European and American culture. Modern capitalist society, as Marx observed in his *Theories of Surplus Value*, is “fundamentally hostile to poetry.”

And that is why authentic poetry in our time is inseparable from revolt, and helps prepare the way for social revolution. Of course, the revolution surrealists dream of and strive for is a revolution that goes farther and deeper than any revolution has yet dared to go.

Undermining the official language of power and commodification, poetry tears down walls of repression and opens heretofore invisible doors of desire and freedom. All aspirations for a better life, all efforts to transform the world begin in the emancipatory insolence of the poetic image. The title of one of the surrealist movement's earliest declarations — *Open the Prisons! Disband the Army!* (1925) — remains the best short summary of surrealist politics.

The first surrealists were European, but they were *dissident* Europeans, and the European precursors they recognized — from Gérard de Nerval and Emily Brontë to Saint-Pol-Roux and Raymond Roussel —



Jan Hathaway, "Timeless Entry"

were part of a vehemently dissident tradition. Surrealism is in part a merciless critique of Western Civilization *from within*. Always internationalist in outlook, André Breton and his comrades found decisive inspiration in the art and cultures of Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and Asia. Not accidentally, it was to support the revolt of Africans — the Rif tribespeople of Morocco — that the Surrealist Group first entered the political arena, in 1925.

Surrealism has always supported every revolutionary movement against the existing order of things. Its solidarity with the struggles of all oppressed peoples, its strong identification with the cause of global Black liberation, its militant stand against imperialism, colonialism, and Stalinism, its scathing critique of Euro-American values and institutions, and of the deadly mystique of “whiteness,” all distinguish surrealism radically from other cultural currents of the past century. Black poets, writers, and artists have been active in the movement since 1932, when a group of Martinican students in Paris started the journal *Légitime Défense* (Self-Defense).

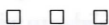
Similarly, in the face of the extreme misogyny that prevailed in post-war France in the 1920s, the surrealist movement included, from the start, an impressive number of active women participants. And at a time of widespread uncritical deference to an out-of-control technology, and an increasingly aggressive war on the natural world, surrealists denounced the myth of Progress and championed the cause of wilderness and wildlife.

Surrealists not only put poetry at the forefront of human activity and gave freedom a new actuality and concreteness, they also reinvented love. In liberating the most repressed, trivialized, debased, and reviled of Western Civilization's vaunted values, they revealed an extraordinarily subversive force against all dominant ideologies and institutions. Reciprocal, uncompromising, sublime love has always been surrealism's basic approach to the problem of knowledge and, like poetry itself, an indispensable key to social transformation.

Also central to the surrealist outlook, today more than ever, is humor. Surrealism could almost be defined as a *moral insurrection* against a certain type of seriousness: the seriousness that maintains bureaucracy, inequality, exploitation, and all forms of misery — the seriousness that allows the president of the United States, that notorious advocate of the death penalty, The Great Non-Inhaler, who has dropped more bombs on

more civilians in more countries than any president in U. S. history, to appear on television piously deploring the epidemic of violence in our time.

Humor as the surrealists conceive it is the only sure protection against what Alfred Jarry called the "Disembraining Machine," the supreme device in advanced capitalism's ideological machinery, which systematically deprives people of their ability to think and dream for themselves.



Some people seem to think that the existence of a Surrealist Group in Chicago is itself an example of outrageously surrealist humor. It is true that the formation of the Chicago Surrealist Group in 1966 was, by most standards, unpredictable, improbable, and unexpected. But so was the entire worldwide resurgence of surrealism that began in those years. Surrealism as an organized movement had been declared dead so many times, by everyone from *Pravda* (Moscow) to *The New York Times*, that the sudden appearance of new and youthful surrealist groups in Amsterdam, São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Chicago, and the renewal of older surrealist groups in Prague, Tokyo, and Paris itself, took the world by surprise.

Those were stormy days. In Chicago, we were clubbed by cops during anti-war demonstrations, and learned what the insides of jails looked like. But many of our friends in other countries had a much harder time. The Surrealist Group in Brazil was quickly suppressed by the military dictatorship, and some of its members spent years in prison. I am happy to say that the group has resurfaced in the 1990s, and is today one of the largest in the International Surrealist Movement, and so far the only one in which the great majority are women.

The Surrealist Group in Prague has had an uninterrupted existence since 1934, though it has had to go underground many times, as it did in 1969 following the invasion of troops and tanks from the USSR. Today the Czech group is also one of the largest and most active.

The mid-1970s brought a whirlwind of surrealist agitation among exiles from the Arab world. Their lively journal, *Le Désir libertaire* (Libertarian Desire), was immediately "banned in all Arab countries."

Activism was a crucial part of this surrealist resurgence. In Chicago, for example, we were all poets, and some of us also painted, or made drawings or collages or sculptures, but we were also active in the civil

rights and anti-war movements. Although we were just barely out of our teens, our surrealist activism had a rather long history. In 1958 and 1959, in our various high schools, we were the ones the jocks and preppies scoffed at as “beatniks.” Several of us hitchhiked and rode freight trains all over the country, and lived for a time in San Francisco’s North Beach when it was still an Italian working-class community. Early on we were initiated into the wonders of Black music, and had the good fortune to hear Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York. Some of us also found our way to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as Wobblies, who still had a big hall in Chicago on Halsted Street, near the intersection of Lincoln and Fullerton, now one of the most gentrified areas of the city. There we came to know old-timers who had served long sentences at San Quentin for “criminal syndicalism” — that is, organizing unions — and who had known such outstanding agitators as Big Bill Haywood, Lucy Parsons, and Ben Fletcher. It was a real education, in many ways more important than what we learned in the university.

But the university was important, too. Several of us who attended Roosevelt University in the early 1960s were lucky enough to be students of the great St. Clair Drake, often called the “father of Black Anthropology.” We quickly abandoned our plans for careers in anthropology when we learned how dominated the field was by the US State Department and CIA, but Prof. Drake’s lectures — and lengthy discussions with him outside class — were an important part of our intellectual awakening. Drake often spoke of his friends and colleagues, W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Oliver C. Cox, his former student, James Forman, and many other writers and thinkers of the Black world; his reading lists and suggestions did much to shape our thinking.

An experience recounted in an abnormal psychology class taught by Helen Cohen also affected me profoundly. It concerned a girl born at Cook County hospital, whose mother had died in childbirth. Because of legal and bureaucratic technicalities, this child had reached the age of five without ever leaving the hospital; she had spent all five years in the maternity ward among the doctors and nurses. After giving her a battery of tests, she was diagnosed as “hopelessly retarded,” for she did not know such ordinary words as *tree*, *ball*, or *dog*, which every five-year-old is supposed to know. It occurred to Professor Cohen, who made a special

study of the case, that perhaps this girl did not know these words for the simple reason that, never having set foot outside the hospital, she had probably never *seen* a tree or a ball or a dog. More importantly, Dr. Cohen found that this child's vocabulary included such words as stethoscope, obstetrician, gerontology, anesthesia, and penicillin. It turned out that she was not retarded at all, but substantially *ahead* of the so-called average child of her age.

For me, this case was full of surrealist implications. It demonstrated that the people called illiterate, backward, and "culturally deprived," no matter how lacking they may be in what is regarded as common knowledge, nonetheless possess *other* knowledge. It was my first encounter with the class bias implicit in so-called standardized testing. It convinced me of the explosive cultural potential of the so-called uneducated. It also deepened my interest in what was not yet called Outsider Art. It is no accident that, from the 1920s on, no one championed this kind of art more than André Breton and other surrealists.

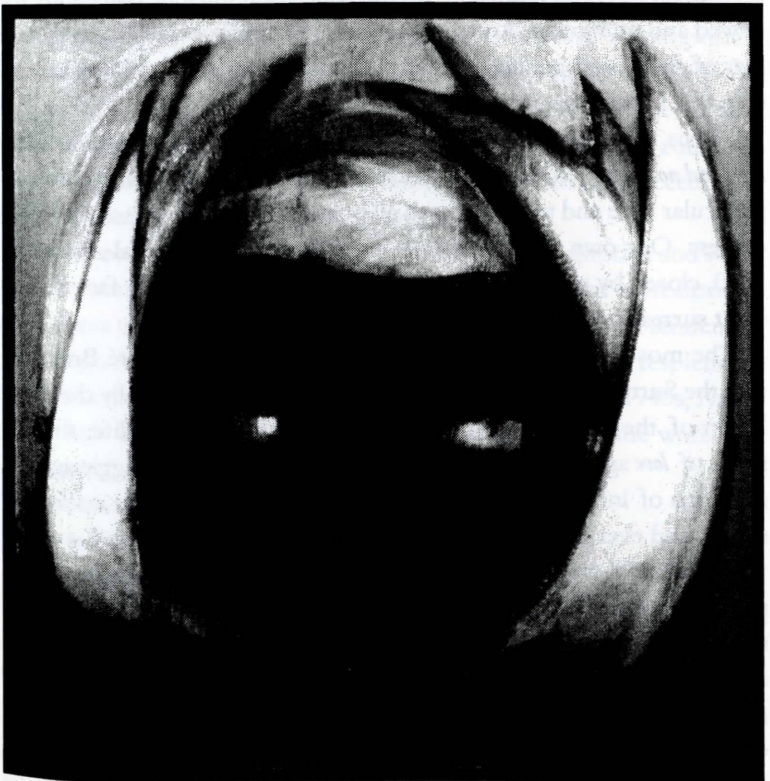
Above all, the "Case of the Cook County Five-Year-Old" inspired our recognition of what we began to call the *vernacular* forms of surrealism. Already in the 1960s we perceived that the most widely acclaimed trends in poetry in the United States tended to be lifeless, repressive, and boring, while *true* poetry surfaced far more often in odd corners of popular culture: in comics (from George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* to Walt Kelly's *Pogo*), in films (from the silent comedies to the Marx Brothers and Veronica Lake and beyond), in the animated cartoons of Tex Avery and others, in such wildly independent eccentrics as Simon Rodia (creator of the amazing towers in Watts, California), Mary MacLane of Butte, Montana, and the fantastic IWW writer T-Bone Slim (sometimes called the Lenny Bruce of the labor movement), and of course in that inexhaustible fountain of inspired and inspiring poetry known as the Blues.

This field of inquiry has resulted in several collective publications, including the Surrealist Issue of the SDS journal *Radical America* in 1970, a surrealist supplement to *Living Blues* magazine in 1976, a special issue of the journal *Cultural Correspondence* titled "Surrealism and Its Popular Accomplices" (later reissued as a book by City Lights), and the large anthology, *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination* (also published by City Lights).

In 1965, with almost a decade of radical activism behind us, and motivated by our thoroughgoing commitment to the surrealist project and our special passion for vernacular surrealism, my wife Penelope and I went to Paris to meet André Breton and the younger surrealists.

We took part in the Paris Surrealist Group's meetings for several months, and discussed our perspectives with Breton and the others. At their request, we wrote a substantial article on the prospects of surrealism in the United States, which they translated and published in their journal *L'Archibras*. We found the French group very supportive. They welcomed our fervent enthusiasm for poetry, our plans and dreams for surrealist intervention in the United States, our revolutionary extremism.

Back in Chicago in the long hot summer of 1966, together with several friends, we formed the Chicago Surrealist Group. The Paris surrealists sent us passionate letters of solidarity, signed by all the members of



Diedra Harris-Kelley, "Flames, Black, Head"

the group. Also supportive were the surrealists of Argentina, Japan, Holland, Belgium, England, Portugal, Czechoslovakia and other countries. The first indigenous surrealist group in this country was off to a flying start.



In a discussion at the Black Radical Congress at the University of Illinois in 1998, Amiri Baraka described the Chicago surrealists' project as "restoring surrealism to its original revolutionary perspectives." This estimate is not inaccurate, but I would say it is incomplete. Our refusal to submit to the misery of the present has never involved a longing for the past. However, our awareness of the notorious tendency of revolutionary movements to adjust themselves to the machinery of repression, and even to become pillars of the existing order, has made us especially vigilant in maintaining surrealism's *absolute nonconformism*. For surrealism to remain true to itself, its inherently subversive and revolutionary character must never be diluted — on the contrary, it must be constantly renewed and multiplied. And it is precisely the *practice of poetry* — the free play of the anti-dogmatic, open-ended imagination — that alone can assure this infinite renewal.

For us, the question has been above all to explore *what surrealism means here and now*, and to develop surrealist strategies and tactics suited to this particular time and place. As with all poetic matters, the possibilities are endless. Our own first manifesto, published in our journal *Arsenal* in 1970, closed by saying "What remains for surrealism to do far exceeds what surrealism has done."

The most important message transmitted to us by André Breton is that the Surrealist Cause — the Cause of *poetry*, and especially the resolution of the contradiction between poetry and everyday life; the defense of *love* against all cynicism and malice; unflagging struggle against all forms of inhibition and slavery, and passionate insistence on *freedom* always and everywhere — can never be obsolete.

We are also convinced that a specifically surrealist approach to the problems of our time has by no means been superseded. In our view, the surest way to find viable solutions is to pursue an approach rooted in the free-wheeling utopia of universal analogy, absolute divergence, eroticism, potlatch and play, happily liberated from work and the work-ethic, war and religion, production and profit, and other repressive values; an approach that fetishizes neither conscious nor unconscious, but seeks

their dialectical resolution; an approach that rejects the depreciation of reality and all varieties of cynical accommodation to misery, and demands instead *freedom now, more reality, expanded awareness, and ready access to the Marvelous at all times.*

I shall conclude with three brief quotations.

In 1942 Suzanne Césaire, ardent defender of surrealism in Martinique, wrote in the journal *Tropiques*: "We are at last called on to know *who we are*. Splendors and hopes await us. Surrealism has restored to us some of our chances. Now it is up to us to find others. In its light."

In other words, our greatest hopes and chances are most likely to arise and take on new meaning *in the light of surrealism.*

Fifty-one years later, in 1993, we received a letter from Pierre Naville, the last surviving member of the original Surrealist Group in Paris, who in 1924 had co-edited, with Benjamin Péret, the first issues of the first surrealist journal, *La Révolution surréaliste*. Responding to the Chicago Surrealist Group declaration on the Los Angeles Rebellion of the preceding year, Naville wrote: "This text represents a new and important way of showing that the contemporary world is going to experience an explosion of surrealism far greater than that which burst on the scene in 1924. . . . Tell your American friends, as well as those in other countries, that I vigorously hope that your surrealist movement will succeed in renewing what we attempted here so long ago."

More recently, in fact earlier this year, the brilliant historian and social critic Robin D.G. Kelley also commented on the future of surrealism. In an address to Black students in the South, discussing current tendencies in African American youth culture and relating them to the resplendent efflorescence of Black surrealism in the Caribbean in the 1940s, Kelley predicted "a resurgence of surrealism beyond anything the world has ever seen."

And there you have it.

Surrealism can be superseded only by *more surrealism.*

Dream about it, and let's see what happens.

This is the text of an address given at the conference on "Surrealism: The Insurgent Imagination in Chicago and the World," held in conjunction with the Printers' Row Book Fair in Chicago, June 6, 1999.



Mary Low, "Mermaid"

Danny Postel

Women and the Surrealist Revolution

An Interview with Penelope Rosemont

Smile, but not for long, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Patriarchy.

— Nelly Kaplan

Postel: You write in the introduction to *Surrealist Women* that “The surrealist revolution draws freely on the most powerful elixirs in desire’s laboratory: mad love, psychic automatism, analogy, chance, humor, play, games, and all forms of free association.” Is that what surrealism is ultimately about for you, desire?

Rosemont: When it was founded as an organized movement in 1924, surrealism was defined as “pure psychic automatism.” The first surrealists wanted to explore the unconscious, to release the repressed creative spirit, and yes, to liberate desire. Since that time surrealism has grown enormously, but the liberation of desire and imagination remain its central focus. Surrealism is a revolutionary conception of the world and of life. It’s a kind of unified field theory in which poetry, art, revolutionary politics, psychoanalysis, alchemy, and the influences of different cultures mix together in totally new ways. Its basic aim is to transform the world and to change life, to enable everyone to discover their own originality.

Postel: Let’s talk about your own involvement in the surrealist movement. When did it begin?

Rosemont: I was a chemistry student. I had very little experience with art or poetry. However, I had come to see that revolutionary changes were definitely needed in this society. When I came to Roosevelt University in Chicago I met a group of people who were influenced by anthropology, Marxism, anarchism, and surrealism. And I was very taken with surrealism. I thought it was incredible. So I explored it further and soon realized that I not only wanted to be a surrealist, but that basically I already *was* a surrealist.

Postel: This was in the early '60s, I'm guessing.

Rosemont: This was 1964-65. At that time, the original Surrealist Group still existed in Paris and André Breton was still alive. I decided to pack up all my things, drop out of school, leave my apartment, and go to Paris. Franklin and I got together all the money we possibly could and, at the end of December 1965, left for Paris. We had no idea what to expect.

We went via London. We hoped to stay in London for a brief time and brush up on our French before going on to Paris. But the immigration officials in London did not like our looks. They hated our one-way ticket. For some reason they thought this was extremely suspicious. They were also suspicious of the fact that we had money in the form of cash and traveler's checks. They seemed to think we had either robbed a bank or that we were emigrating to England. So we ended up in their detention department. They told us that next day they were sending us back to New York. But after much arguing, and paying for a return ticket, they let us go on to Paris. It was a dramatic scene: they drove the limousine right onto the airfield and put us on the plane, but our passports were not returned until the plane was off the ground. They were sure we would jump off the plane and run to London!

When we landed in France we were shaken up, thinking the same thing might happen again and that we'd end up back in New York. But no, the French waved us right through. And when we arrived in Paris, we discovered that Breton's book *Surrealism and Painting* was in the window of every bookstore and gallery. It had just come out. We found a little hotel through *Europe on \$5 a Day*. (The hotel was actually \$3 a day.) And about two blocks from the hotel the surrealists were holding an international surrealist exhibition.

Postel: You hadn't heard this would be taking place?

Rosemont: We had no idea. And if we had stayed in London as planned, we would have missed it. As it was, we ended up going to the Surrealist

Group's New Year's Eve party. We also went to the cafe and met many surrealists who were in town for the exhibition. And of course we were able to meet with André and Elisa Breton, and we became good friends with many members of the group. It was really a wonderful time to be there. I'm so grateful that by chance those stuffy English authorities decided they didn't want us in England!

Postel: You came back to Chicago eventually and formed the Chicago Surrealist Group. How did that take shape?

Rosemont: It was in the summer of '66. There was already interest in surrealism in Chicago. But when we came back from Paris we tried to maintain closer, more "official" connections with the Surrealist Group in France, as well as with surrealists in other countries. We issued a number of leaflets and manifestoes and put out a mimeographed collection called *Surrealism and Revolution*, to let people know a little more about surrealist ideas. There were seven or eight of us. We started translating surrealist writings from French. And we did a lot of surrealist experiments, in art and writing and daily life. It was a very vital time for us. And the group was really necessary in all this — when you're doing something truly different from the ordinary, it helps to have other people with whom you can exchange ideas and energy.

Postel: What's survived from surrealism into the present or trickled down into popular culture is a fairly pale reflection of the ideas at the core of the movement. In your introduction to *Surrealist Women*, you talk about what surrealism is *not*. It is *not*, you say, against reality. It's *not* escapist.

Rosemont: Essentially surrealism began as, and still is, a revolutionary way of looking at the world, and changing it. The founders of the surrealist movement were mostly young men who had been involved in the first World War and were totally revolted by war and by all the ideologies of the existing order: nationalism, militarism, statism, capitalism, white supremacy, religion, the bourgeois family, and so forth. When they came to Paris, many of them were active for a while in the Dada movement, and then founded surrealism, a much more subversive movement that seeks to transform society by overcoming all sorts of false dichotomies: dream and reality, conscious and unconscious, subjective and objective, masculine and feminine, work and play. Surrealism attempts to actualize poetry and the dream in everyday life. It isn't "against" reality; it encompasses a *larger* reality than "realism" does. And it isn't escapist; escapism means burying oneself in a book or an idea and just staying there. Our

plan is actually to *change* things, to make a revolution. Surrealists want to find and liberate the creative potential within everyone. Lautréamont's "Poetry must be made by all!" remains a basic surrealist principle.

Postel: And you even say surrealism is *not* avant-garde.

Rosemont: Art and literary avant-gardes — Futurism, Fauvism, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, Lettrism, and so forth — are usually based on innovative techniques. Their main demand is for official recognition, and when they win it, they fade away and make room for other avant-garde novelties. They are really a means of spicing up the Art Market — like a new advertising campaign. Don't misunderstand me: These transient movements have often produced interesting and important work. But surrealism is radically different. For one thing, it is indifferent to "techniques" and has always scorned aesthetics. It has always been something much more than an "art" or "literary" movement. As a subversive outlook and state of mind it existed long before it had a name, and it has persisted as a revolutionary force long after all the avant-gardes have joined the Establishment.

Postel: Why did you decide to assemble a book exploring the tradition of surrealist women in particular?

Rosemont: It goes back to my first visit to Paris. I was there for almost six months. I went to group meetings all the time. I was 23. The scene was filled with fabulous women — splendid painters and poets: Toyen, Mimi Parent, Joyce Mansour, Nicole Espagnol, and many others. They were active in the group's discussions. They had all sorts of revolutionary ideas, humorous and subversive suggestions, and they contributed a lot to the development of the movement's current strategies. A few critics who consider themselves feminists have argued that surrealism was all-male and very unfair to women. What I saw was that women participated as equals, their works were appreciated, they were well represented in surrealist exhibitions and in surrealist books and magazines. And my later research revealed that women, *many* women, had been active in the movement from the very beginning. I assembled information on more than 300 women; *Surrealist Women* includes writings by a hundred of them.

Many of the movement's finest poets, painters, collagists, and photographers have been women, and several of its major theorists, such as Claude Cahun, Suzanne Césaire, Mary Low, Jacqueline Johnson, and Nora Mitrani. Of course, all but a very few have been completely



Franklin Rosemont, "Talisman—for Ody Saban"

ignored by critics. As is so often the case, the artists who get picked by critics to be "famous" are not always the most worthy — as with Salvador Dali, a sickeningly commercial artist who had nothing to do with surrealism after 1938. To a great extent, women surrealist painters have been overlooked because works by males have been deemed easier to sell and are preferred by museums. Men have always dominated the art world, as they dominate capitalism in its entirety. But women surrealist poets and writers have been ignored even more than the painters.

I was disgusted by this neglect of the surrealist women, and decided to do a book that would set the record straight. In putting it together, I was stunned by the beauty and power of the women's work. Of course painters have the advantage that their work is unencumbered by the language barrier; it's international and immediately accessible. The women in my book are mostly writers, though some are also painters or photographers or dancers. Most of their written work had not been translated. In many cases, this is the first time their work has appeared in English.

Postel: The book is organized chronologically, stretching from the '20s to the present. It also spans genres; it includes poets, essayists, pamphleteers, polemicists, and word artists of various sorts. There's also quite a diversity of cultures represented in the anthology. What was your methodology in putting the book together?

Rosemont: Well, I had to begin in Paris, because that's where the movement started. Many old-timers now in their 70s, 80s, or 90s provided me with important information, including names and addresses. Surrealist journals, exhibition catalogs, and memoirs were major sources, but I also interviewed and/or corresponded with several hundred individuals. Collecting material for this book took a long time, and I kept finding new names. For example, I did not know of Carmen Bruna of Argentina — who is now one of my very favorite surrealist poets — until friends in South America gave me her name. It has been a wonderful process researching this book, having people send me their work, and discovering new surrealist women along the way. The difficult part had to do with languages I don't know: Romanian, Arabic, German, Czech, Japanese, Swedish, Dutch, Serbian, and others. Fortunately I was able to locate a group of excellent translators! Several of the translators, by the way, are also active surrealists.

Postel: Obviously, surrealism is international. Is it also internationalist?

Rosemont: Definitely. It's always had a strong internationalist impulse at its core, and has always drawn people from all over the world. At the World Surrealist Exhibition in Chicago, 1976, thirty-one countries were represented.

Postel: But I mean internationalism as part of the philosophy of surrealism: the idea of transcending arbitrary boundaries like the nation-state.

Rosemont: Absolutely. Surrealists have no use for nation-states, nationalism, racism, colonialism, patriotism, or any other form of artificial boundaries. They see these as blind alleys that have caused horrible misery and war. The first surrealists were European but they were also anti-Eurocentric. People have to look toward the richness of their own and other cultures and forget about the false constructions that have caused so much suffering in the world.

Postel: How many countries are represented in the anthology?

Rosemont: Roughly thirty, though it's difficult to pin down because so many of the contributors are polyethnic or have moved from country to country, especially during World War II, when so many people were

displaced. There has always been this cross-cultural current in surrealism. It's so strong that it's often difficult to say what nationality someone is. Remedios Varo, a wonderful painter, was born in Spain and moved to Paris and then finally settled in Mexico. The great poet and collagist Mary Low, born in London of Australian parents, was educated in France and Switzerland, joined the Surrealist Group in Paris in the 1930s, visited surrealists in Bucharest and Prague, and went to Spain in 1936 to take part in the Revolution. (In Spain she organized the Women's Militia, edited the English-language paper *Spanish Revolution*, and co-authored the first book on the Revolution, *Red Spanish Notebook*, with a preface by C.L.R. James.) Later she lived for years in Cuba, where she was active in the revolution that overthrew dictator Batista. Today, in her eighties, she lives in the United States, an active participant in the Surrealist Movement and one of our very best friends. Leonora Carrington was born in England, but when she discovered surrealism and revolted against her wealthy family she moved to France. During the war, in the midst of Nazi invasions, she ended up in Spain, in a sanitarium, where she was declared "incurably insane." (Later, in Mexico, she wrote about this experience in *Down Below* — a truly wonderful book.) From Spain, when she finally managed to escape the mental institution, Leonora passed through Portugal and sailed to New York, where many surrealists were living in exile. She then went to live in Mexico, and now divides her time between Mexico and the United States. For a few years she lived just outside Chicago, and came to many of our meetings and other gatherings. Her paintings of Mexico, and of her own dreams, are just fantastic. Her great text "What is a Woman?" is in the anthology.

Postel: Clearly the revolutionaries of 1968 were directly influenced by surrealism. You could say that in a sense the entire period was infused with a surrealist spirit. But you call the final section of the book "Surrealism: A Challenge to the Twenty-First Century." What relevance do you see surrealism as having today, thirty years after the events of 1968 and seventy-five years after the movement's inception?

Rosemont: Well, I have to say that none of the major changes that people hoped for in 1968 have happened. Things have, in many ways, gone backwards. People are being pushed into positions that are more and more like slavery. The whole prison system in this country is really a slave system. The old surrealist slogan "Open the Prisons, Disband the

Army" is more relevant than ever. I think surrealism is really necessary to understand the underpinnings of Capital and the State and the ways in which they manipulate people through a commodified mass culture. This system, which surrealists call *miserabilism*, makes you become a participant in your own degradation. The enthusiasms created by this culture are designed to make us into passive objects rather than creative subjects. The system wants consumers, not creators. The whole key to transforming the world has to be found in our own creativity, our liberated imaginations. There are many wonderful ideas to be found in the past, but our emphasis must be on criticizing and transforming the present. History needs to be understood from *our* point of view, as opposed to the ruling class point of view. But the real key is to find our poetic potentialities, to renew the dream of social revolution as the only way to real human freedom, and to make new discoveries showing how society could operate without bosses, bombs and prisons, and how people can come together to create a non-repressive civilization.

Postel: Do you see women as playing a particular role or making a unique contribution to this project?

Rosemont: Surrealists recognize that creativity is not bound to any one gender. Anyone can be creative. But it's important to remember that women have played a major role, and often an instigating role, in every revolution in modern history. As Charles Fourier observed almost two hundred years ago, "Nothing causes overall social betterment faster than improving the living conditions of women. The degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation." The fact that so many women are active in surrealism today speaks for itself. More and more women are realizing that surrealist revolution is the most effective means of undermining patriarchy and all that goes with it.

The simple truth is that women constitute half the world, and if they aren't allowed to participate in the creative process of remaking the world, then it's just not going to happen.

This interview was conducted for Free Associations Radio, a weekly program in Chicago hosted and produced by Danny Postel. Interviews from Free Associations have appeared in *The Progressive*, *Left History*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Alternative Press Review*, and *Lip*.

Penelope Rosemont

Little-Known Episodes in the Life of Dostoyevsky

Fyodor Dostoyevsky won a free trip to the Wisconsin Dells in his youth: All expenses paid at the best hotels, and free miniature golf with no limitations.

Dostoyevsky had not studied his geography very well and he thought the Wisconsin Dells were in Alaska — so he wore his big bearskin coat and snowshoes. Unfortunately, it was June and there wasn't a bit of snow in sight. Was he *disappointed!* But he did make an entrance to good effect.

It seems that Dostoyevsky thought the natives ate only raw fish, so he brought a hundred pounds of kasha, which he demanded to have specially prepared for him three times a day.

When he finally relaxed he became enchanted with the exotic foods — chicken Kiev, Italian beef, Polish sausage, and French fries. He also began asking questions that embarrassed the other guests, such as: "What is half and half? Half what — and why?"

He would corner beautiful women in their tennis outfits and ask them what they thought of crime and punishment, and "What is your favorite crime?"

In other words, Dostoyevsky soon became a pest.

One day, while talking with the hotel keeper, he was struck with such a near-fatal case of boredom that he tried to kill himself by throwing himself off the bar.

Later, on a boat tour down the beautiful Wisconsin River, he asked one poor woman what she thought of prostitution ("Could it have holy motives?") while her husband, seated on her other side, talked about his recent successes in leveraged buyouts. The poor woman didn't know whom to listen to. Finally, she said to Dostoyevsky, "I don't know, I'll ask Joe," and turned to her husband with the question. Her husband thought she was calling him a crook, a prostitute of big business — which, in fact, he truly was — and got upset and began yelling and waving his arms.

Then, in one fell swoop he picked Dostoyevsky up in his arms and threw him out of the boat. When his wife protested he threw her out, too, along with the red-haired woman next to her for good measure. And that was the romantic way in which Dostoyevsky met his wife-to-be.

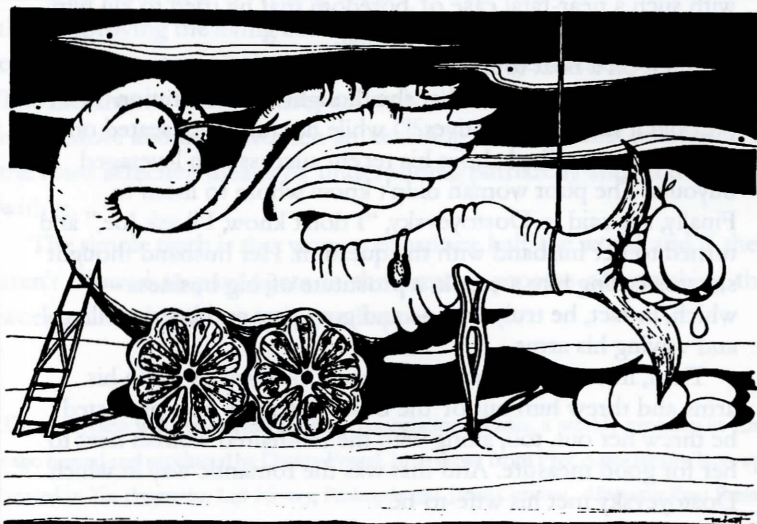
Although she tried for years and years, she could never get Dostoyevsky to sleep without his socks on. It was the bane of her existence. He wouldn't even take them off in the shower.

One night she decided to pull his socks off after he had fallen asleep, and that's what she did. And that's how she discovered that Dostoyevsky — the great Dostoyevsky! — had no toes at all! Instead, fat green leaves grew from the ends of his feet. She laughed and laughed so hard that she woke Dostoyevsky up.

He too laughed and laughed, mostly because he didn't know what *she* was laughing about. When he found out, however, he ran away and was never seen again.

Rumor has it that he became a setup man on the *Milwaukee Journal*, and that he wrote all his great novels after work in a bowling alley right across the street. It is said that he felt soothed by the sound of balls rolling down the lane.

Some say the fellow known as Dostoyevsky in Russia was an impostor — a retired cotton-candy man from Walla-Walla. In any event, one day they found the real Dostoyevsky dead in a small Wisconsin town. He was a very old man. He seems to have committed suicide — some say he swallowed a bowling ball, but this is probably just a figure of speech. However, when they pulled off his socks they discovered that his “toes” were still plump and green and fresh.



David Roediger

Radical Culture without Surrealism

Approaching 600 pages of small type, with 1,500-plus items in its index, Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Verso, 1998) includes a great deal. Overflowing with examples and personalities, the book also sustains arguments about the growth and impact of radical working-class culture on the whole of US culture from the 1930s until the 1950s and beyond. For Denning left culture grew not out of deprivation and lack but out of the inspiring self-activity of workers who organized themselves into the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) at the very time when workers elsewhere suffered devastating defeats to Nazi expansion and to their own ruling classes. Denning so insists on the centrality of workers' organization to artistic change that he names the period of cultural history under investigation as "The Age of the CIO." Knowing that the story of radical culture must always exceed the confines of strictures imposed by self-designated vanguards, Denning includes far more than the institutional history of the Communist Party. He emphasizes that "fellow travelers," extrapolitical contacts among artists, and attempts to organize as cultural workers created a new awareness of labor in art and of artists as workers. *That's all good.*

The book deliberately sprawls. Unlike Daniel Aaron in *Writers on the Left*, the classic study that *The Cultural Front* seems sure to eclipse as the most-cited book on Depression-era cultural radicalism, Denning surveys not just literature but also (with varying acuity) cinema, music, cartooning, photography, drama, journalism, and painting. *The Cultural Front* also lavishes attention on the fate of labor/left-influenced culture and on the political legacies it has left. The massive index is a treasure trove, listing the celebrated and too-little-known (as well as the hysterically overrated) artists, critics, and writers whose careers are recovered in the text. Émigré leftists, modernist thinkers, and "plebeian" writers

move through the narrative, with the artistry of immigrants, writers of color and women receiving strong emphasis. Nowhere else, for example, will one find the neglected Chinese-American novelist H.T. Tsiang or the brilliant Filipino radical Carlos Bulosan so thoroughly brought onto the main highways of US culture. *That's all good too.*

And yet, amidst all of this inclusion, surrealism finds *no place* in *The Cultural Front*. Despite the fact that surrealism internationally was unequivocally “in the service of revolution” in the late 1930s, allied with Trotskyists, Syndicalists, and others in building the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art, and despite the presence in US exile of André Breton and other surrealist luminaries during World War II, there is no “surrealism” among the *Cultural Front*’s overflowing index entries. Breton, the chief surrealist organizer and theoretician in these years, receives two mentions. He is identified not as a surrealist but, incredibly enough, as a worker on the French desk of Voice of America. *VVV*, the beautiful and influential surrealist journal coedited by Breton and Max Ernst from New York City during World War II, goes unmentioned. Man Ray, the American surrealist painter and photographer so extraordinarily present in Hollywood in the 1940s, is similarly ignored. Even Salvador Dali, lamentably made the personification of surrealism for the US public by philistine critics in the 30s and beyond, does not appear. Nor does Denning rescue from neglect such visionaries as the surrealist poet Philip Lamantia, the photographers Clarence John Laughlin and Helen Levitt, and the painters Gerome Kamrowski and Sonia Sekula.

My plea here is hardly for simple inclusion of surrealist “contributions” to what Denning is usually careful to describe as a social democratic and nationalist cultural movement. The cover of *The Cultural Front*, which reproduces a lamentable example of Stuart Davis poster art, replete with Popular Front/New Deal slogans, exemplifies just what revolutionary artists ought to be eager not to claim. Indeed the bulk of my remarks will concentrate precisely on the differences between surrealist and left/liberal claimings of radical pasts. This emphasis respects the fact that Denning has written about something real and pervasive, if not as inspired and inspiring as he would hold. There is no reason to carp that he should have written a different book, with surrealist heroes added to the pantheon. In any case governmental repression of directly political activities by surrealist exiles combined with widespread misapprehension

of the movement's aims to curtail surrealist influence at critical junctures and to make US surrealism in the '40s too often a movement of exiles.

Nor do I wish to claim that only marvelous and revolutionary art can lay claim to being "left" or "radical." However much we wish it were not exclusively so, the Communist-led Popular Front organizations did achieve a critical mass that brought resources and comradeship attractive to left-moving artists. The most rebellious and creative spirits among cultural workers — from Paul Robeson to Claudia Jones to Jack Conroy — found their ways into the cultural front, even if many only episodically paid Party dues. To treasure some of their rebelliousness does not require that surrealists claim roles in respectable protest art that surrealism could not play and should not have wanted to play. In measuring the absence of surrealists in *The Cultural Front*, I want then to move on two paths. One explores the ways in which his disappearing of surrealism hurts Denning's study of history by producing some implausible (but not fatal) gaps in the record of the groups and individuals he wishes to treat. The second, and by far the more important, path critiques the political conclusions of *The Cultural Front* and in particular Denning's summation: "I have tried to measure. . .the symbolic acts of the cultural front, in generations and movements. *The failure of their laboring of American culture remains our starting point*" [emphasis added]. I want to challenge that stance, which inflates the modest but circumscribed accomplishments of the cultural front into the very hopes of humanity. In doing so, I discuss the specific ways in which a surrealist claiming of the radical past differs from Denning's, where nation, race, film, music and humor are concerned.

Surrealist Presences

The historical problems introduced by Denning's reticence regarding surrealism might be broached by considering the confusions caused when the word "surrealism," undefined, does struggle into his text, if not into its index. Near the book's end, for example, Denning quotes an interview with Edwina Hammond Pomerance, who described a group of cartoonists who joined in Communist cultural groups in Hollywood during World War II. Pomerance recalled, "We did think that art was terribly important and I think there were members particularly in the hierarchy who thought realistic art was most important. That's easily understood,

most people think that. . . .The social realists were in New York, for the most part, and they were older. . . .We were more influenced by Klee and Miro and the Surrealists.” Some assumption of a knowledge of surrealism is also clearly present at other junctures, so much so that the chapter most explicitly addressing “aesthetic ideologies” mentions small tendencies like “social surrealism” and “Proletarian Surrealism,” again without addressing surrealism itself. (The uninitiated do get some clue via the approving quotation of a contemporary cultural front endorsement of “Proletarian Surrealism” as against surrealism itself. In “Proletarian Surrealism,” on this view, “a style of painting usually identified with extreme individualism and decadence takes on a new vigor and meaning when it is used to express the moods and emotions of the dispossessed.” Buried in a footnote is reference to a 1936 *Art Front* essay that “claims montage, surrealism, and cubism for radical art,” as if surrealism were anything but outspokenly revolutionary.

Surrealism keeps making these unannounced entrances in *The Cultural Front* because, despite the best efforts of the US state, Hitler, Communist publications, and the popular press, it had achieved considerable resonance among radical artists worldwide and had registered consistent bleeps, however distorted, on the cultural radar of the US public. Indeed, as Franklin Rosemont has written, the 30s and 40s were a period in which ridicule and nervous laughter were favored strategies for the policing of surrealism — only later did a wall of mainstream media silence prove more efficacious. Thus in 1938 *The New York Times* denounced the International Surrealist Exhibition as a “Paris Joke,” but it did so in a headline. The cult of Salvador Dali brought a particularly commercialized distortion of surrealism before the public, so much so that by 1940 Breton had anagrammatically rechristened Dali as “Avida Dollars.” The wild and popular comic book *Captain Marvel and the Surrealist Imp* (1948), funnily enough, offered a more plausible portrayal of the spirit of the movement than did “experts.”

Left artists could have encountered surrealism in several US venues, most notably the extensive 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and its lavish catalog, which featured politically charged essays by Georges Hugnet. In the same year art dealer Julien Levy produced the beautiful anthology *Surrealism*, a collection designed to promote the movement — and especially Dali — as a commodity, if not to publicize its revolutionary aims. Eschewing

"manifesto-heavy" works, Levy consciously opted for what he called the "light-hearted" approach to surrealism. Nonetheless his collection included four pages of quotations from Breton and others emphasizing the movement's revolutionary aims. Nicolas Calas's huge surrealist section of the 1940 volume of the respected literary compilation *New Directions* joined *VVV* as revealing surrealist-produced works and the surrealism-lite selections in Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford's sympathetic periodical *View* gave way in 1941 to a special issue of that journal edited by Calas and to informative later issues on Ernst and on Marcel Duchamp.

Even its harshest Communist critics could not lose track of surrealism in quite the way that Denning does. Among cultural leftists who confined themselves to Popular Front reading matter, some awareness of surrealism would have been inescapable. *New Masses*, for example, ran a striking 1940 ad for the annual Surrealist Party and Ball, sponsored by United American Artists and featuring "thoroughly confusing" movies, prizes for "daring, original, bizarre, fantastic or merely brilliant costumes," movie stars, "super-surrealistic" murals and all-night swing music by Willie "The Lion" Smith, Sidney Bechet, and others. *Art Front* ran Dali's "I Defy Aragon" in March, 1937. In it Dali recounted the opportunism and apostasy of the surrealist-cum-Stalinist Louis Aragon, whose career predicted a perfidy Dali himself would soon emulate. Amidst shameless self-promotion, Dali managed to get in a few good licks at "Socialist Realism." That the single page of Dali kicked off a section including far-longer attacks on surrealism was typical enough. The most breathless of the attacks, Samuel Putnam's "Marxism and Surrealism," distilled the worst of Lenin and Lukács to show that there is nothing "more real than reality" and that therefore "the only true Marxist art is a socialist realism."

Surrealism was, in sum, sufficiently present that Denning's failure to broach the subject renders incomplete his accounts even of the subject matter he chooses to address. Several of the towering figures in the book, including Diego Rivera (a cosigner, with Breton, of the "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art") and Pablo Picasso, were in fact active participants in surrealist journals and other publications during the period under consideration. Others, like Walter Benjamin (whom Denning oddly insists on constructing as a more-or-less orthodox Popular Fronter, and as a European version of middlebrow US

critic Kenneth Burke), wrote with great sympathy and insight regarding surrealism. The figures on whom Denning rests his brief and dismissive discussion of the anti-Stalinist cultural left — Dwight McDonald, James T. Farrell, and Theodor Adorno — all either worked collaboratively with, or wrote sympathetically about, surrealism. Since surrealism militantly championed the revolutionary possibilities of the popular, this pattern calls into question Denning's pat insistence that anti-Stalinist



Penelope Rosemont, "In Search of Danger"

criticism rested on a "classic modernist notion of the intellectual [who] had to take a stand against mass culture."

Jackson Pollock's associations with surrealism go unremarked, as do surrealism's telling influences on postwar US painting generally. William Carlos Williams is much discussed by Denning as an in-the-American-grain Popular Fronter; that he was an early (though improbable) candidate for editor of *VVV* remains unmentioned. Matthew Josephson, something of an intellectual-in-residence in *The Cultural Front*, thought himself close enough to surrealism to write a tendentious 1962 memoir, *Life among the Surrealists*. Nelson Algren, who despised Communist functionaries, appears as a cultural fronter but his adulation of the surrealist cinematographer Luis Buñuel is not considered as a source of his experimentation in form.

Richard Wright runs through *The Cultural Front* constantly. Kenneth Burke, to whom Denning defers on so much else, proclaimed Wright's masterwork, *Native Son*, a "surrealist" novel. Wright, as Eugene Miller's provocative work shows, regarded his own writing as transformed by his embrace of elements of surrealism in 1941. Denning omits this surrealist influence, even when mounting a discussion of Wright's use of dreams in writing. What Miller calls Wright's "discovery of surrealism and his perception of Black American folk expression as its modality" clarified for Wright the "mystery of his grandmother's and blue lyricists' ways with language and composition." Apparently first aware of surrealism via the 1936 Museum of Modern Art exhibition and Dalí's theatrics, Wright described his discoveries in "Memories of My Grandmother" and most fully realized them artistically in his fantastic "The Man Who Lived Underground." Ralph Ellison's stirring 1948 essay, "Harlem Is Nowhere" meanwhile viewed the streets it described as places in which the "surreal" is "acted out" and "the marvelous beckons from behind the same sordid reality that denies its existence."

These several examples show that the story of the "cultural front" cannot be fully told without some considerable reference to surrealism. On the other hand, neither can the story and stance of surrealism be captured by simply inserting it into Popular Front narratives. The stark political and poetic differences between surrealist and Popular Front memories make such a merging impossible. These differences are the subject of the balance of this article.

The Poetry of the Future and the Claiming of the Past

"In matters of revolt," according to Breton, "one should not need ancestors." In turning then to a critique of Denning's contention that the "ruins" of the Popular Front are what we must build upon, it should be clear that surveying a tradition is in many ways antithetical to surrealism. It is precisely in breaks, new departures, leaps and previously unimaginable movements that the world changes. Surrealism's psychoanalytic under-pinnings — *The Cultural Front* does not index Freud — contributes to such a view, as the move from ego to id can hardly be cast as one of incremental transition. Therefore in an important sense surrealism does not seek to define a "progressive tradition" for itself. Nor does it suppose that the mainstream of commodity-fetishizing capitalist culture can be made to support revolt. Taking its poetry from the future, surrealism lavishes attention on rebels past — including "precursors" of the movement and those who remained quite outside of its ranks and outside of the whole art world — but not in order to connect the dots or build on the ruins. (Benjamin's remarks specify the very different sense in which surrealism apprehended ruins: "Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie. But it was surrealism which first allowed its gaze to roam freely over them.") In volumes like the special *Radical America* surrealism issue, the *Cultural Correspondence* "Popular Cultural and Revolution," and "Surrealism and Its Popular Accomplices" issues, as well as the *Race Traitor* surrealism issue, *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion* and this number of *Socialist Review*, claiming of affinities with and inspirations from figures from the past matters greatly. Placing such surrealist solidarities alongside Denning's "cultural front" traditions where nation, race, music, and humor are concerned clarifies critical differences in approach and identifies what is at stake in those differences.

In expansively concluding *The Cultural Front*, Denning challenges the view (now ripening into social democratic orthodoxy) that the useful, unifying emphasis on "class" in the 30s and 40s gave way to a narrower recent concentration on "race" and other divisive identities that we must transcend in a return to economically based reformist politics. He is very much on the right side of this debate, but for an odd reason. Denning writes, "The Popular Front social movement was . . . as committed to the politics of racial justice as it was to the politics of trade

unionism." In arguing for the consistent antiracism of the Popular Front, Denning ignores (though he occasionally mentions) the Popular Front's soft pedaling of anti-imperialism and compromising on civil rights that alienated such figures as Wright, Ellison, George Padmore, and Chester Himes from the Ethiopian crisis through World War II. Nor are Japanese internment and the subordination of Black demands to narrowly framed "class" (and national) goals in one CIO campaign after another (most tragically in Operation Dixie) sufficiently broached.

Denning sustains his argument by framing matters in terms of nation rather than race. Following Matthew Josephson, he casts the cultural front as being involved in an ongoing and noble effort to wrest "America" (which, for Josephson, was "any man's battle") from conservatives. This campaign, Denning stresses, was never an articulation of simple patriotism because it constantly pressed for new inclusions that changed the very meaning of "America." "The 'labor question' was intimately connected to the 'national question,'" he argues, "and the 'peoples' of the United States were recognized in the rhetoric, images, themes, and organizations of the Popular Front." The inclusion took in new plebeian occupations as well as the various nationalities and colors who made up the working classes. Popular Front artists and writers were, on this view, "far from ignoring the ethnic and racial divisions of the United States." Indeed many strove, in organizations like the American Slav Congress and the International Workers Order, for a "working-class federation of nationalities," a "pan-ethnic Americanism" that was also internationalist. Blues-loving and prone to produce and consume "ethnic pastorals" as well as "proletarian grotesques" saturated with immigrant culture (even as ethnic consciousness abated with assimilation), the Popular Front was, for Denning, American *and* radical.

Denning grounds his discussion of these matters in a reclaiming of Paul Robeson's 1939-40 hit song "Ballad for Americans," an anthem of inclusion of workers ("I am the *et ceteras*. And the and so forths that do the work") and of nationalities ("I'm just an Irish, Negro, Jewish, Italian, French and English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Scotch, Hungarian, Litvak, Swedish, Finnish, Canadian, Greek and Turk, and Czech and double Czech American." Dismissed as apolitical sentimentalism — Republicans played it at their 1940 presidential nominating convention — by recent critics, "Ballad for Americans" impresses Denning as deserving a new hearing for its contesting of what it means to be American in a

context of immigrant and African American self-assertion. The long lists of workers and nationalities are, in Denning's view, inevitably incomplete, ever needing "and so ons," making America (and representation of it) a project rather than a cause for celebration.

This close reading of the song, perhaps a closer one than its Republican fans gave it, ignores two intriguing points that surrealism could not leave unexplored. The first is that the litany of peoples does not include Native Americans, a group whose inclusion complicates all progressive narratives portraying an America perpetually open to the dreams of new groups. Native Americans were similarly absent when the great writer (and later American Indian solidarity activist) Meridel Le Sueur wrote of the Great Plains that "nothing has ever been rooted there. We have never. . . had ease or an indigenous culture." When Woody Guthrie sang "Grand Coulee Dam," perhaps the most infectiously appealing Popular Front song, his praises of "Uncle Sam's" harnessing of the Columbia River to power factories and his ignoring of native views of nature could not have been more complete. Before damming, the river was a "wild and wasted" one, utterly in need of husbanding, Uncle Sam, and progress. Surrealism, on the other hand, sought out indigenous cultures insistently — Breton certainly learned more from his trips to American Indian areas than from all his contacts with *Partisan Review* intellectuals put together while in the United States — and unequivocally supported native struggles against overdevelopment and colonialism.

The second noteworthy feature in "Ballad for Americans" is the phrase "and double Czech American" as the litany of nationalities ended. As Barbara Savage has recently observed, that phrase, delivered by Robeson in deep minstrel dialect on a recording of the song, is a vital one. In it, the idea that senses of nationality among white immigrants and among African Americans are closely comparable phenomena, capable of being subsumed under the heading "pan-ethnic," is deflated deftly. "And double Czech" acutely puns on "and double check," the tag line of the much-protested symbol of antiblack media minstrel racism, the "Amos 'n' Andy" radio show. Denning later allows that race and ethnicity were asymmetrical in many ways, praising some writers in the Popular Front intercultural journal *Common Ground*, and specifically the great theorist Oliver Cromwell Cox and the activist/writer Carey McWilliams for pointing out as much. But insofar as the Popular Front as a whole quite firmly endorsed "pan-ethnic" unities that included and

contained the victims of racial oppression, it obscured the realities of race.

Surrealism has differentiated itself from such "Black and white ethnic, unite and write" cultural oversimplifications in two ways. The first involves squarely facing up to the pathological presence of *whiteness* as a racial identity. European immigrants and their children in the 30s and 40s were not just becoming "pan-ethnic" and "American" or losing older national ties, they were, with New Deal government sponsorship, *becoming white*. Surrealism, outspokenly and almost alone among European-originated movements, unequivocally denounced whiteness. As early as 1925, one of its number wrote of associations between identification with whiteness and misery: "The white man is nothing but a corpse — a corpse who dumps his garbage under the natives' noses." In siding with the Riffians in their rebellion in Morocco in 1925, the surrealists declared themselves "traitors to everything that is not freedom." Clearly this included the deadly fiction of whiteness. In his 1938 preface to *The Theater and Its Double*, surrealist poet Antonin Artaud held that whites "give off an odor as white as the gathering of pus in an infected wound." The scintillating 1932 manifesto "Murderous Humanitarianism" by the Surrealist Group of France charged that "the white man preaches, doses, vaccinates, assassinates and (from himself) receives absolution."

This eagerness to expose the brutality of whiteness (in the United States as well as Europe) coexisted with another surrealist principle, setting it apart from the approach that Denning identifies with the Popular Front. That principle fully honored the autonomy of Black struggles. When, for example, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Wifredo Lam, and others from the West Indies produced important surrealist works in the 1940s the hope was not for the formation of a "pan-ethnic" front but for a transformation of surrealism itself. Although attuned to C.L.R. James's work on mass production and mass culture, Denning does not much take up the question of African American autonomy also raised by James. Indeed Black Marxism gets little notice generally. Robeson figures as singer, activist, and actor but not as the powerful nationalist/Marxist intellect whose thought Sterling Stuckey has so strikingly elucidated. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935) ought to be nothing else but the centerpiece of any account of the "laboring" of US culture, beginning as it does with chapters on Black and white workers and ending

with a remarkable disquisition of the work of writers. It receives but six words: "hardly recognized by the historical profession." Written from a profound Marxist analysis, but also to encourage militants not to abandon Black autonomy in pursuit of interracial unionism, Du Bois's classic would fit uneasily in *The Cultural Front*.

Debates over literature, Marxism, nationalism, and Black popular music are little attended to. Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" does not appear; Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing" is briefly adduced to illuminate ghetto pastorals by ethnic writers generally. Blues and jazz appear far more as brushing up against white modernist influences than as energizing and setting a model for Black literary production. Tellingly, the writer most deeply informed by the blues, James Baldwin, shows up but once in *The Cultural Front*. While *Common Ground*'s history is detailed, *Negro Story*, the subject of superb recent work by Bill Mullen, does not appear. Oddly absent also is the mega-hit songwriting of Andy Razaf, developed at times in close contact, as Razaf scholar William Maxwell puts it, with "Black Bolshevism."

Nowhere is the question of the autonomous importance of Black culture — intersecting with but also antedating and surviving "CIO culture" — more starkly drawn than with regard to Black music. Denning is often interesting, especially in the details, on this subject and covers it extensively. Jazz was likewise a preoccupation in surrealist writings, increasingly so in the 1940s, and blues is, thanks to Paul Garon's work, the best-studied US cultural form from a surrealist point of view. Surrealists insist on treating jazz and blues as fundamentally the productions of African American culture, as a radical critique of whiteness and capitalist misery whether or not they intersected with the Popular Front, and as a critique at least as valuable as anything produced under Popular Front auspices. Denning, on the other hand, writes that Carolina and Virginia Piedmont musicians "were inheritors of a more open tradition of black labor activism and political activism" while Delta blues-singers were from areas that "suffered tremendous repression" and consequently produced "few links between organizers and artists, and little public space for a cultural front." He therefore chooses to concentrate on the folksy and tepid Piedmont blues of Josh White and on the Popular Front connections of White and other Virginia-Carolina musicians. Similarly, Denning often verges on seeing jazz performers — at a moment when they were blowing the world down — as radical insofar as

they played at benefits for Communist city council candidates or attempted fusions with Brechtian theatre, or crossed lines separating races. (Denning's most extreme expression of faith in the almost magical power of cultural front contacts to stay the forces of commodification and white appropriation of Black culture occurs in wistful commentary suggesting that US culture would have been significantly enriched if Elvis had been drawn to the left.) All of this is fine insofar as the book's goal is to trace a web of Popular Front connections. However, when the claim is made that the Popular Front defines the remnants from which a left is to be reconstructed, such choices must provoke loud dissent.

Blues, as Garon has eloquently shown in *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* and in his studies of Memphis Minnie (with Beth Garon) and Peetie Wheatstraw, embody the poetry of revolt whether or not individual lyrics openly protest class oppression and racism. "A language of the richest complexity," the expression of dreams "for gratification of repressed wishes," a "system of reference based on shared [African and African American] experiences," an expression of "the vitality, passion, and freedom implicit in the concept of *primitive*" and an inexhaustible source of "black humor" (Memphis Minnie: "Now funniest thing I ever seen, / Tomcat jumpin' on a sewin' machine"), the blues often included explicit class protest but also inspired revolt on countless other frequencies.

Writers in the 1940s were acutely aware of deep connections of surrealism with Black music and language. In a 1948 *Partisan Review* article, the going-on-respectable Anatole Broyard wrote, in a hipster's voice, of jive as "originally a critical system, a kind of Surrealism, a personal revision of existing disparities." More arresting was the detailed 1942 disquisition on swing by the great US theorist of cultural pluralism Horace Kallen. Swing was, Kallen held in his *Art and Freedom*, "the musical equivalent of surrealism in painting and literature." Like surrealism, Kallen continued, swing was "a medium which issues from and speaks to Dr. Freud's Unconscious direct." Moreover, for Kallen swing moved through stages that paralleled "the emergence of visual and verbal surrealism."

According to Miller, Richard Wright's discussion of surrealism, blues, and African American language anticipated "the objection that Negroes are too unsophisticated, too intellectually innocent to be mixed with. . . anything as complex, esoteric and decadent as 'Surrealism.'" In sketching

Wright's response to such an objection, Miller aptly captures the creative stance of the blues:

The dream states, delirium, and paranoia — deliberately simulated by the Surrealists. . . were far from being the lunatic games that popular notion labeled them. They would very likely correspond, in Wright's view of the matter, to what forced exclusion from [the] conventional world has led black Americans to: the production of an obliqueness of vision, of a different way of looking at this world, of conceiving and feeling it.

Surrealist writers such as Garon, Franklin Rosemont, Ted Joans, and Jayne Cortez have illuminated both Black music and its affinities to surrealism. They have especially noted similarities of blues and jazz performance to automatic writing. But they remain unalterably opposed to assimilating such music as simply surrealist and are outspoken defenders of the specific rootedness of jazz and blues in African American culture.

Finally the great differences of surrealism from Denning's cultural front, where humor's past is concerned, deserve mention. *The Cultural Front* is not a book attuned to funniness. Leo and Karl Marx both get in, but not Harpo or Groucho. W.C. Fields, Mae West, George Herriman (and Krazy Kat), Buster Keaton, Jack Benny, George Burns, Will Rogers, Gracie Allen, Moms Mabley, Lord Buckley, Lenny Bruce, and Ernie Kovacs, likewise. Even literary jokers around the Popular Front, including Robert Forsythe and Dorothy Parker, are omitted. Nathanael West, whose wit and creativity are placed within "the rich and varied influence of Dada and Surrealism in America" in a recent study by Jonathan Veitch, makes occasional appearances in *The Cultural Front*, but not as a humorist.

Surrealist publications meanwhile have claimed the anarchic film and television comedians, especially Kovacs, Keaton, Fields, and the Marx Brothers as their fellow free spirits. Just as they have appreciated Larry Neal's dictum that "The blues are basically defiant in their attitude towards life," surrealists have noted that Freud used almost the same terms to define humor's relation to rebellion. The surrealist recovery of the writings of Industrial Workers of the World funny man T-Bone Slim honors a writer who from the 1920s to the early 1940s "labored" US

culture without ever confining his imagination to workaday issues. Never losing sight of the wild, hilarious and marvelous, Slim, whose writings are collected in *Juice Is Stranger than Friction* (Kerr, 1992), saw humor as the “carefree manhandling of extremes.”

Nowhere did this manhandling get funnier than in US animated cartooning of the 1940s and 1950s. Denning has a good deal to say on cartoons, producing a strong account of the anti-Disney strike by cartoonists in 1941 and the movement of those radicalized in and after it to co-operatives and Popular Front organizations. These stories, especially regarding the brief success of United Productions of America (UPA) in producing antiracist and prolabor cartoons, are again important chapters in cultural front history. But as in the material on Josh White’s blues, narrowly conceived “politics” makes Denning ignore the most rebellious art while extolling relatively tame Popular Front-connected projects, including the introduction of Russian-influenced “flat” cartoons and efforts to make narrative replace gags at the center of animated art. Denning insists that “the radical animators who came together in the strike went on to reshape animated film, creating a Popular Front vision of cartoons reaching ‘beyond pigs and bunnies.’” Such a view so obsessed on labor ties that it ends preferring Mr. Magoo to the incendiary incarnation of African American folklore brought to life by Tex Avery’s surrealist hero Bugs Bunny.

Denning’s story of how Communists, immigrants, trade unionists, regionalists, musicians, painters, and Democrats came together in a cultural front is not an insignificant one. With a touch of surrealism here and there it would be sketched more fully and surely. However, it is not the story that ought to ground our imaginations of new movements. Those movements can take inspiration not from ruins nor even traditions, but from the living — the past and present examples of insurgent imagination produced and honored by surrealists and their allies. Labor radicalisms are a part of that imagination but they do not exhaust dreams for a new world. Some of the best of those dreams are red, indeed far redder than *The Cultural Front* allows, but they are also black, blue, and overrun with bunnies, pigs, and Krazy Kats.

Where the Wolf Sings, by Mary Low

There is no wolf, of course —
merely the echo of a once-howl
scattered among the undergrowth.

Yet even now the trees seem dangerous,
forbiddingly fanged,
flinging themselves about in menace.

But the lake! Only a muddy rose of blood
where the unquiet spirits of fish
flit among the drying reeds.

Where have the bright, pulsating waters gone?
And the two linked figures that used to lie
upon the conniving bank?

No one is here any more.

Only some large, idle stones
cumber the glade with white oblivion.

Then suddenly it came, from that obliterated time:
the long, the sad,

the asking, aching, unforgotten cry!

Beyond the diminished forest's utmost edge,
far off and faint, the wolf sang once again.
I heard him.

Sirens, by Mary Low

In fabled lagoons,
through seas of archaic renown,
along remotest shores marbled with myth,
the bands of sirens pass,
threaded with song
like a vocal theory of swans.

The harps
of their sparkling, resonant hair
play on the wind,
shedding notes of sorcery,
a rain of calling voices,
light, urgent as tears.

From the bewitched waters
their magnet faces rise
gleaming with pallid fire:
yearning,
ardent,
forever unattainable,
priceless as pearls.

The Marvelous against the Sacred

What follows is my response to an inquiry circulated to surrealists throughout the world in late spring 1999 by the Surrealist Group in Prague, in connection with the International Surrealist Exhibition they were organizing for summer and fall. In replying to the three questions on the sacred, the miraculous, and the sacrilegious, I wondered whether the Czech surrealists realized what strictly religious connotations these words have in English, and whether the Czech language perhaps has comparable terms not so tainted with such associations. Only later did we learn that the word "miraculous" in this inquiry was in fact a mistranslation of the Czech word signifying *marvelous*.

They were nonetheless stimulating questions to ponder, and reminded me of the place of language in surrealist activity.

1. Can you define what you would call "the sacred"? Is there something that you would consider sacred? What, in your opinion, is the relation between "the sacred" and "the miraculous"?
2. In what sense is the word sacrilege pertinent for you?
3. Can you describe contemporary possibilities of subversion in regard to the present form of this phenomenon?

The only relevance the words "sacred," "miraculous," and "sacrilege" have to surrealism is that their usage belongs, for the most part, to the very forces that suppress surrealist subversion. These words are so fully drenched with authoritarian, Establishment, and religious connotations that I do not use them to express anything revolutionary in nature. Yet, while the word "miraculous" conjures images of Pat Robertson and weight-loss infomercials, and "sacrilege" seems inseparably tied to the notion of religion, "sacred" is sometimes used to convey meaning in regard to less authoritarian and even authentically subversive spiritual

groups: Native Americans have “sacred” sites, the Voudoun hold “sacred” rituals.

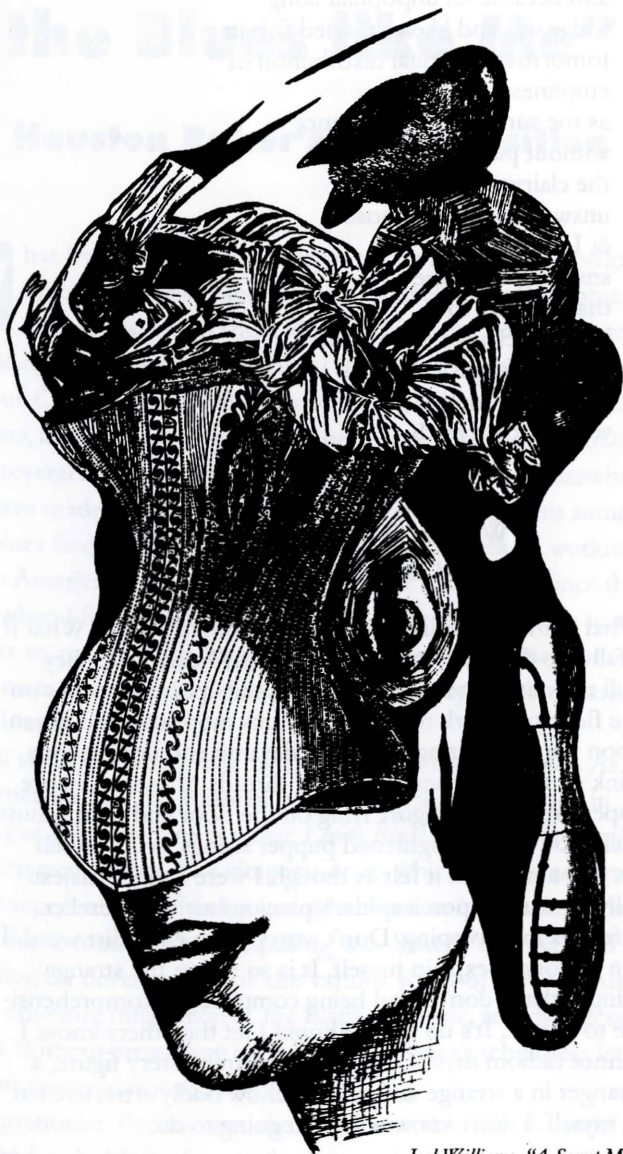
However, like many words in the English language, “sacred” has been forced upon these groups, to categorize, to fetter the essence of their creativity with linguistic imperialism. “Sacredness” quantifies nature, magic, beauty — it makes it possible to have one mountain left “sacred” while another is devastated, scorched (although even “sacred” areas are in ever-increasing danger of being ruined). What we get is not the salvation of any form of Otherness, of wilderness, in the world — but only tokenism. What we get is the Indian Reservation that has one token “sacred” spring, “saved from destruction thanks to the painstaking efforts of the considerate government agency,” etc. We are all supposed to feel better that *some* beauty is being saved, and we are supposed to realize that it can’t *possibly* be *every* forest, *every* culture, *every* person — after all, we need more wheat to throw away, more cheap coffee, milk, and red meat, and how would we survive without such destruction? “It is not possible,” we are told, “but we *do* have National Parks, and *they* are *sacred*, and *we* will save them (sometimes) so that *you* can enjoy them and pet the animals and sleep in your RV.”

I would find it altogether more satisfying to spend my energy debasing the “sacred,” mocking the “miraculous,” and committing the “sacrilegious” than to nit-pick more about the usage of these terms. However, that being said, there is a word surrealists use that expresses whatever there is of poetry, wonder, respect, and admiration in the “sacred,” without the religious or Establishment connotations attached, and that is: the *Marvelous*. This term expresses all that is beautiful, passionate, magical, and liberating according to each individual’s imagination. While the *Marvelous* is subjectively defined, and liberating, what is deemed “sacred” is sanctified and imposed upon us.

Concerning the “sacrilegious,” I must point out that while surrealists in the past often concerned themselves with terrorizing the church, surrealists today must concentrate on terrorizing the corporations, which have largely succeeded organized religion as the greatest enemy of human imagination and freedom.

Yet another problem remains. “Sacrilege” against the institutions of power is continually being co-opted by the corporate buffoons, and then fed back to us in the form of commodities. This is the main challenge surrealism must face today: how to subvert the destructive forces

of the miserabilists when they too proclaim themselves "anti-Establishment" and "underground." As they make their patriotic parade of mass devastation a "sacred" cause, we shall liberate the Marvelous to desecrate their sterile world of pattern farming, pattern life, pattern death.



Joel Williams, "A Secret Music"

The Mambo Lesson

Jayne Cortez

Yesterday took off its shoes
and became an unpopular song
today will end like a stunned fish in
tomorrow's unequal distribution of
emptiness
as the sun makes its entrance
without public support into
the clairvoyance of your
unsweetened panty hose
& I am already
smoking an image
that will bite me
before I change my tongue
so don't forget your skull
your fossil fuel
your utopian teeth

What If They Don't Like Me

Cassandra Stark Mele

What if they don't like me, those clipboard priests. What if I fall into their fish tanks, clutching my heart, until they pull me out all soaking wet and lay me upon a mattress on the floor of a dark room where nuns mop soap and moan upon the glimmering floors for days on end until moons wink at time to change and long threads of luminescence appear around my figure lying on the floor and then I must pull upon these enlightened puppet strings to lift myself up. For a moment it felt as though I were a moth majestically entwined upon a spider's precious art web derelict. Life sees me sweeping. Don't worry yawn child dirt weed. I can no longer explain myself. It is so funny, the strange thing is that I don't mind being completely incomprehensible to myself. It's up to me should I let the others know. I cannot fathom myself, I am a phantom mystery figure, a stranger in a strange and yet somehow oddly attractive hat to myself. I don't know what I'm going to do.

"You Don't See into the Blues like Me"

Houston Baker's Blues Position

What I would like to do today is take a look at the development of blues criticism and relate this development to some of my own views and to some ideas of Houston Baker's, as set forth in his *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1984). My opinions, as published in *Living Blues* magazine, in *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* and *Woman With Guitar*, not to mention in several surrealist periodicals and in *Race Traitor* and elsewhere, are what have made me controversial. These views are easy to summarize: "The blues finds its inspiration in the material aspects of working-class African American life in the United States." That's it! Yet since the early 1970s, when I first began to insist on this — a rather obvious statement, it seems to me — there have been countless objections from parties whose main interest is in defending the legitimacy of white performers of the blues.

I will say at the outset that my view wasn't a harmless plea. As a principal articulator of the editorial policies of *Living Blues* back in 1970, I helped put this view into practice: *Living Blues* focused only on African American performers. The vituperation to which this led was striking.

One aspect of *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* that I found most compelling was Baker's enumeration of the chronological development of the various styles of African American literary criticism: Integrationist, the Black Aesthetic, and the Reconstructionists. Without pretending to do justice to Baker's schematic, let me attempt to summarize it this way:

Integrationist Poetics was the dominant theoretical mode of the 1950s and early 1960s. An excellent example of the integrationist view

was set forth by Richard Wright in his "The Literature of the Negro in the United States" in *White Man, Listen!* (Anchor Books, 1964). In this view, African American literature was becoming indistinguishable from white, "mainstream" literature. Borne along by the optimism that followed in the wake of the 1954 Brown decision, Wright believed that African American writing would be judged by the same standards applied by white critics to writing by whites, and the lack of discrimination that would follow Brown would guarantee a world where no separate critical standard was needed. On the other hand, Wright felt that Black vernacular expression — for example, the blues — was not subject to the same stipulations and would, by its very existence, continue to proclaim its separate identity as a sign of an equality not yet established, as a sign of separateness and inequality.

This view, that our writing is no different than their writing, and would therefore be treated the same by critics and readers, could not survive in the era of the Black Power movement, and indeed it did not. It was swept away by a new notion, the Black Aesthetic, as articulated by writers such as Addison Gayle, Amiri Baraka, Hoyt W. Fuller, Stephen Henderson, and Larry Neal. Their view was that African American literature must reflect the exigencies of Black life in America. It must look to its roots and its heritage, or the poetic categories through which literature is created and through which it is understood will not be legitimate or useful. Its legitimacy and usefulness are tied to realistic aspects of Black life, regardless of how far from realism the forms evolve. As Baker noted, one aspect of the Black Power movement, of which the Black Aesthetic was a vital part, was "a direct counterthrust by an emergent generation to an Integrationist Poetics' call for a general, raceless, and classless community. . ." (Baker, p. 72).

Reconstructionism was born in the mid-seventies after it became evident that the white power structure of capitalist America was too easily capable of resisting the radical ferment of the 1960s and early 1970s. Especially in academia, Black scholars demanded an independence from political ideology, a claim for a "liberty" that would have been anathema to followers of the Black Aesthetic. These new scholars were part of the new Black middle class, and they insisted on professional theoretical/critical standards that befit their new role. Let me quote Baker here: "One result of a class-oriented professionalism among Afro-American literary scholars has been a sometimes uncritical imposition upon

Afro-American expressive culture of theories and theoretical terminologies borrowed from prominent white scholars" (Baker, 88-89).

Bearing these themes and their evolution in mind, let us take a look at the evolution of blues criticism. I am making no attempt to link stages of blues criticism with stages of African American literary theory. Rather, I am using Baker's categories and schematic as an inspiration and pattern — dare I call it a matrix? — to understand certain tendencies in the evolution of blues commentary. As in Black literary criticism, the evolution of blues criticism in the last several decades has been reflective of — if not firmly grounded in — the evolution of blues itself.

The history of modern blues criticism begins only four decades ago, in 1959, with Samuel Charters's *The Country Blues* and Paul Oliver's *Blues*



Penelope Rosemont, "The Night Time Is the Right Time"

Fell This Morning. Books published prior to these tended to either be about jazz or about Black song, especially religious song. Of course there were insightful discussions of blues before 1959 — by such writers as Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, and Alain Locke — but they were largely restricted to ephemeral works and did not receive the attention they deserved. However, with the publication of the widely circulated books by Charters and Oliver, two major precedents were established, and major critical writing over the next 40 years tended to follow one of these two paths.

Charters's work was a straightforward narrative history of the blues recording business, with the emphasis on the artists and, secondarily, the recording companies. Almost simultaneously, Paul Oliver, a British professor of architecture, published *Blues Fell This Morning*, with an introduction by Richard Wright. Oliver's emphasis was on certain aspects of Black workingclass life in the United States and how its features were reflected in the blues lyrics themselves. Here are a few examples:

I've always liked Mercy Dee's verse about the rigors of farm life: "If I ever get from around this harvest, I don't even want to see a rose-bush grow. And if anybody asks me about the country, Lord have mercy on his soul." Or Lonnie Johnson's couplet on life during the Depression: "People raving about hard times, I don't know why they should. If some people was like me, they didn't have no money when times was good."

Only a few books about songs like these departed from the two models of Charters and Oliver. My own work did investigate new ground, emphasizing psychological and surrealist perspectives. Looking at the blues from the surrealist point of view was something new. Not everyone understood how the blues partook of the marvelous and the fantastic, as a surrealist would understand it. Think of this verse: "I may get over this, baby, but it sure is doing me mean. I've been having worry and trouble since my name's been 3:15." This recording is by "3:15 and his Squares"!

Or listen to this lyric by Elmore James, recorded as "1839 Blues" in the spring of 1954: [*spoken*] "Hey, Joe. You know I'm a young man this time. You know I ain't seen my baby since 1839. I gotta find her." [*sung*] "Well, I ain't seen my baby since 1839 [*repeat line*], Well, if I don't find my baby, I'm gonna lose my mind."

"She Brought Life Back to the Dead," by Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2 (Rice Miller) is a classic:

When I first heard about her, I didn't believe what they said. [2x]

But I found out for myself that she brought life back to the dead.

She walked in that morning, the doctor said he was dead,

People started walking out, crying, shaking their heads. . . .

She stayed in there 24 long hours and brought life back to the dead. . . .

I found out for myself that she brought life back to the dead.

The blues singers invoke the most marvelous images: "If I had wings like the bullfrog on the pond" (Yank Rachell, "T-Bone Steak Blues"). And these lines from "West Texas Woman" by Alex Moore: "The wolves howled till midnight, wild ox moaned till day. [2x] The man in the moon looked down on us, but had nothing to say." And this from Peetie Wheatstraw, who called himself the Devil's Son-in-Law and High Sheriff from Hell: "Let me be your King Spider, I want to build my web on your wall" ("King Spider Blues").

How could a surrealist not be drawn to songs like these? Moreover, its emphasis on love, humor, the night — its attitude toward work and play, the church and the police, desire and freedom — seemed to us to reflect a sensibility that has much in common with surrealism's own priorities. We heard the blues as an oppositional poetry, a true poetry of revolt, part of the "accursed tradition" that advanced capitalism despised but which the surrealists have specialized in encouraging and bringing to light.

In spite of the unique aspects of the perspective in *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, its founding in the material reality of African American life (as opposed to its Christian aspects) made it Oliver-derived enough so that theologian Jon Michael Spencer denounced me in his *Blues and Evil* as an "Oliverian." One of Spencer's preoccupations was with the theological implications of certain Black exclamatory phrases like the constant use of "Lord have mercy" in the blues, and why Oliver and I seemed to ignore them. But here I'm reminded of Géza Róheim's defense of Freud: "I never think it necessary to emphasize the obvious. After Freud managed to dive to the bottom of the ocean, people now tell us that the ocean has a surface" (*Psychoanalysis and Anthropology*, International Universities Press, 1950). Plainly, Oliver and I were trying to analyze aspects of the blues that were not immediately apparent to our readers.

There have also been blues plays, blues poetry, blues fiction, and studies of all these. Nonetheless, the overriding tendency in blues

criticism — not counting reviews of current performances — is the purely and simply historical, with or without consideration of social and cultural factors that affect the songmakers.

To understand the fate of these patterns of criticism, it is important to reprise, at least briefly, what I call the “white blues question.” When the blues first came to the attention of a wider, and whiter, public — i.e., starting from the 1920s and through the 1950s and into the 1960s — it was received with a view quite analogous in certain ways to the Black Aesthetic. No one doubted that the blues was the voice of the working-class African American, founded solidly on the “genuine emotional referents and authentic experiential categories of Afro-American life,” to quote Baker summarizing Baraka.

The blues was stirred in a ferment of discrimination, oppression, and even murder and mass terror, but what emerged was a powerful poetry filtered through the processes of fantasy and imagination, fanned by desire, and finely elaborated by the creative processes. It was unique in our time because it arose from an unusual constellation of forces. Because of the repressive nature of the society in which the blues came to life, the subject matter of the blues rarely dealt directly with prejudice and discriminatory behavior, much less the more extreme forms of racism and white crimes against Blacks. Nonetheless, it was evident to many that the blues contained an eloquent protest against the depredations of white society, even if such calumny could rarely be called by its name.

Thus the blues singer came to protest almost everything else: her mistreatment at the hands of her man, his mistreatment at the hands of his woman, two-faced preachers, the police, the landlord, the prison guard, poorly paid employment, no employment, the mean old train, or the conductor who made the train impossible to ride, the high cost of liquor, the absence of liquor, and the ill effects of liquor on those who finally got hold of some. (Liquor was illegal during the entire first decade of blues recording.)

This disjunction or lack of evident fit between what we might call the latent content of the blues (slavery and discrimination) and its manifest content (love troubles and whiskey) would be the grounds for monumental miscomprehension at the hands of new white fans and players. While many white blues enthusiasts of the 1950s and 1960s had spent years, if not decades, listening to blues singers somewhere on the continuum between Bessie Smith, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, and

Lightnin' Hopkins, a newer group of enthusiasts, those coming of age in the 1980s and 1990s, had a familiarity with the blues that was distinctly more pallid: Eric Clapton and Paul Butterfield were their blues heroes. Worse, far worse, was the latest crop: fans who came of age watching the blues as played by the Blues Brothers, Dan Ackroyd and John Belushi. I have no particular quarrel, at least here and now, with the skit itself, but I'm stunned by the fact that a whole generation of so-called white blues artists was inspired by what was in fact a joke.

This result is not funny, nor is it a mere mistake. Seeing enough "white blues" artists in fedoras and sunglasses is proof enough. What possible link of associative mental material can there be between performers who drew their inspiration from the legacy of slavery and discrimination in the United States, on the one hand, and those who draw their inspiration from Saturday Night Live, on the other?

I am not suggesting that fans of Bloomfield, Butterfield, Musselwhite, et al. ignored blues by Black artists, although I'm not sure the same can be said of the followers of Eric Clapton. But even when African American performers are recognized, what so often happens? Robert Johnson CDs sell phenomenally well, making one white producer a millionaire (from CD sales alone), while Robert Johnson's estate accrues a far smaller amount of money in so-called royalties, as yet undistributed. One newspaper that carried the story of the new white millionaire gave a figure of \$45,000 for the amount in escrow for Johnson's relatives. As R&B singer Fontella Bass testified in the PBS film, *Record Row*, "They give me 10, they keep 10,000."

While my examples here are dramatic, they barely scratch the surface. Yet their purpose is to emphasize how different are the blues worlds of Black and white players. Earlier I mentioned the disjunction between the latent and manifest content of the blues. For white musicians who had little notion of Black life or Black history, it was easy to see the blues as a music about broken hearts and alcohol, no different than country and western music, or even rock and roll, except for the lack of material about school and dating. For these musicians, the blues became not only stripped of its latent content — insofar as that was possible — but it was stripped of its African American associations as well.

Before this digression, I was discussing the two chief patterns of criticism, both historical, but one with a firm foundation in the cultural life of the performers and one without such a foundation. Socially embedded

criticism is anathema to white blues performers, as it can only invalidate their efforts by insisting on the essential nature and relevance of a background that they do not have. Thus we would expect to find a new, more superficial history burgeoning in support of these new performers, and the first blooms of such an effort are, I'm sorry to say, now with us.

Blues for Dummies — it had to happen! — isn't a terrible book. Like most books in the series, it's written for those who do not want a deep or comprehensive understanding of their subject. But it's an excellent example for its time and place. While two of the three authors are African American performers, it is written for the ever-escalating numbers of white aficionados, and there isn't a peep about the social factors that gave birth to the blues. Except for a few paragraphs about regional styles, the first two-thirds of the book is strictly biographical. The last third contains chapters on how to play the blues, or how to learn, along with various lists, and a chapter on how to throw a blues theme party.

But an interesting twist is given to blues history, one I've never seen before. Post-war performers of the 1945-1969 era are designated participants in the "Original Blues Heyday" and given the lion's share of space. Singers like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey through Blind Lemon Jefferson and Robert Johnson — ca. 1920-1938 — are called "Early Legends," but from the space allotted to them, and from the category names themselves, one gets the impression that their actual function was simply to be predecessor stepping-stones to the "real" greats like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Little Walter.

Tellingly, the accompanying CD contains nothing prior to the late 1940s. The 25 All-Time Best songs contain only two such numbers, a piece from the 1930s by Robert Johnson ("Sweet Home Chicago") and a piece from the 1920s by Hambone Willie Newbern ("Rolling and Tumbling Blues"), although it is the 1950s version of this piece that is emphasized. The 25 best albums include one CD by Bessie Smith and one by Robert Johnson; the rest are from the 1950s or are on the borderline of "Heyday" and "Artists on the Contemporary Scene," the third section of the biographies. The list contains one album by Eric Clapton and one by Lonnie Brooks, the senior author of the book, certainly not even a close contender for a top-25 album, but perhaps that's poetic license. Once again, however, the effect is to suggest that it is the period from 1950 on that is most important in the blues' evolution.

What stands out in all these lists, personal taste and bias aside, is the distorted view of blues history they purvey. Twenty-five exciting years of blues history are being treated as merely a foretaste of what is purported to be the "real" blues, rather than as an integral part. For historians of the blues, it comes as a shock to see some of the greatest performers relegated to the periphery, simply because of a weak grasp of history. Decades ago it was trendy for collectors of early jazz to have a blues record or two in their collections, to show the roots of their music, i.e., where jazz (supposedly) came from. Blues collectors often kept an example of a chain gang song to show their own subject's roots. Now it's starting to sound like future blues fans will have only a single Ma Rainey or Blind Lemon Jefferson album to show their friends where Lonnie Brooks came from.

And this would be a shame. . . . But I see considerable hope in works like Baker's *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature*, an especially encouraging sign in a world where *Blues for Dummies* is displayed next to the latest *Blues Review* and its white cover artist. Baker's guiding supposition that African American culture is complex and reflexive, finding its "proper figuration in blues conceived as a matrix," sustains a basis for blues criticism that guarantees the continuation of the bond between African American life and the blues. For Baker, the blues is not a function so much as a foundation, a "condition of Afro-American inscription itself." A key task for the future blues critic will be to assimilate Baker's analysis into the mainstream of blues criticism, thereby putting the proper emphasis on African American socio-cultural experience and reviving the richness and complexity of a comprehensive theory of the blues. The music may or may not be in a final stage of its evolution, but as we know from the study of literature, this is by no means too late for the formation of a lively body of critical appreciation.

After all, nothing's too good for the blues.

Up

Franklin Rosemont

Up is a word
 of seventeen letters
 three syllables
 four clouds
 and no wheels
 It is worth its weight
 in wind
 rhymes with homeopathy
 and is synonymous with
 sea
 sky
 starfish
 and four-fifths of the first
Surrealist Manifesto

Quickly and alchemically
down is the method
 of sleepwalking
 preferred by nine out of ten insomniacs
 from the South Pole
 Shaped like a fork
 it is measured by counting the silence
 in a volcano
 To gain perspective
 it uses wasp nests
 instead of words
 It juggles numbers
 on its knees
 and can usually be found
 singing
 loudly and lustily
 with *up*

Joseph Jablonski

Their Millennium and Ours

Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

— William Blake

The word “millennium” was a specialist term used only by scholars and religious fundamentalists until the prospect of monumental computer crashes and digital disarray alerted media pundits to the pressing arrival of some really big dates — a new century and millennium were about to turn a corner on the old Julian calendar. They would have to learn to date their copy in a new way and, as a bonus, they would have something else to write about than the president’s indiscretions. Around the same time the vocabulary devil whispered in their ears yet another “new” word. Suddenly, everything that caught their attention, starting with the first thing they saw upon waking in the morning, became “surreal.”

Let us be generous and democratic in these verbal matters. We know that random facts and coincidences signify consistent truths, and it would be pointless to deny that the Millennium is surrealist and Surrealism is millennial. Transformations have been promised, and their occurrence or failure will affect all of us. Sitting down for breakfast in the new age, we would be hopeless if we did not have our knives and forks sharpened and poised to eat the prophetic Book. The book in question, however, will certainly contain more marvelous proteins than heretofore expected, in the form of timely words uttered by such prophets as William Blake, Charles Fourier, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, André Breton, and C.L.R. James.

It will become gradually clearer in the early years of the new century that something else has been brewing; something other than a spectacular revival of capitalism has been happening, every minute of each day of the 1980s and 1990s. In the shadows, in the sprawling garden of

quantum materialism, a rose was growing whose secret blossoming will yet be an explosion into the light, an efflorescence suddenly outshining everything else. Then Lenin's presumptuous 1924 phrase about the victory of socialism, repeated once again with alarming chutzpah by C.L.R. James in 1984 ("fully and absolutely assured"), will return to scandalize the swarm of conservative ideologues, who by that time may be the only ones to object. Such ideologues mistook the fall of a *transient aberration* — European Stalinism — for the *eternal* fall of socialism, the workers' move to a temporary flexible centrism for a paradigmatic move to the right. They forgot that theoretically, as well as historically, Capitalism (till it hurts) has always been the natural parent of Socialism, and that the absence of any viable models of the latter indicates that the struggle could at any time, sooner or later, be resumed. As it turned out, only ten years separated the quasi-official "Death of Communism" (1989) from the first landmark renewal of overt international opposition to capitalism (1999).

"The Battle of Seattle," however, was by no means the first revolt against the New World Order. Along with the worldwide consolidation of the capitalist market economy, massive revolts — Los Angeles, 1992, Chiapas, 1994, South Korea, 1995, to mention only a few — showed that Wall Street's euphoria was by no means universal. Just about everywhere, moreover, a radical social awareness that was truly new — in many ways deeper and more far-reaching than the so-called "back to basics" bread-and-butter ideology of the traditional Left — was spreading and developing. A diversity of nationalisms, an emphasis on human rights, a communications explosion and environmental consciousness, individualism and internationalism, feminism and democracy, anarchism and tribalism, gay rights and prison abolition, the widespread rejection of "whiteness," and the violent revolt of youth — these are only some of the trends threatening the domination of capital over human needs and desires.

The point is that capital is challenged today not only by labor, but by everything of value in culture, past, present, and future. When James spoke of "a need for human relations of a size and scope which will in the end triumph over all obstacles," he was writing about the United States, but no one can deny that this need has grown exponentially, and this conception now embraces the planet, giving "human relations" a more expansive and more specifically *ecological* meaning than ever before.

Indeed, the trends toward a new socialism — a new form of egalitarian, non-exploitative social relations — have become so powerful that their opponents must attempt to falsify them but dare not repudiate them outright. Who today is the “evil empire”? The World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank!

Is capital, then, the unnatural and hateful endtimes beast that must be overcome? Chance alone will determine if the conjunction of new-century consciousness with some unexpected event will spark a turn in the direction of that idea.

In the meantime, what passes today for “religion” has met the turn of the century and the new age devoid of any millennial vision or even a half-baked hallucination, unless it be the ludicrous apparition of George W. Bush walking hand in hand into the White House with J. Christ. Not since the Branch Davidians of Waco, led by a defiant prophet of the Second Advent, has the eldritch side of America’s schizoid religiosity flowered and flamed. The fact that this was a multiracial group was already a gesture of the most radical dissent, especially in what is unquestionably the single most murderously white-supremacist state in the union. And the spectacle of the US government massacring a large number of children — for the express purpose of “saving the children”! — said a lot about “religious freedom” and the relation between government and governed in “the Land of the Free.” Moreover, as was also the case in the MOVE massacre in Philadelphia, 1985, the fact that liberals and even some would-be “leftists” joined in the hue and cry on the slaughterers’ side, goes to show that the old categories are largely devoid of meaning.

With its apocalyptic (and fully televised) demise, Waco was a true sign of the times.

Indeed, a large part of today’s world appears as a whirl of Cargo Cults, obsessed with overrated fetishes of the marketplace and the mind, but nonetheless illumined by an instinctive resistance to authority and imperialist implantations.

From a certain angle, those old native messiahs were right, however confused. Apart from the Far Right Christian clones brooding on the other side of the Berlin wall of whiteness, things are stirring in this land and all lands — a promise, perhaps, of better of things to come. Amazingly, it is still possible to look over the rainbow to cargoland for a hint of the great demonic-angelic hope. Thanks to the medium of Black

forms of politics and social self-definition. The mass resistance that will greet the threatened resumption of the missile race implicit in Clinton's plans to repudiate the ABM treaty was recently previewed in the thousands-strong march and demonstration against the US torture academy (aka School of the Americas) at Fort Benning, Georgia. The immense global movement to free US political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, the spontaneous and massive resistance to genetically modified foods, the growing campaign to abolish the death penalty, the huge demonstration against flying the Confederate flag in South Carolina, the free radio movement, the growth of what Staughton Lynd has called "solidarity unionism," and the effectiveness of such direct-action groups as Food Not Bombs, San Francisco ACT-UP, and Voices in the Wilderness, are other hopeful signs on the horizon, as is the message on a little sticker that recently turned up on an envelope: *Nat Turner and John Brown were both born in 1800. Now there's a bicentennial worth celebrating!*

In all such events, gestures, and tendencies, large and small, the one thing in common is a demand for something along the line of what Comenius called "universal reformation," what C.L.R. James called "direct democracy," what Marxists and Anarchists call "revolution," and along with it what surrealists call "poetry made by all." Democratic enfranchisement has long since bypassed the simple right to vote for our rulers; it has become, subjectively at first, the right to act *for ourselves*. The time of Great Men, self-appointed avant-gardes, and monolithic parties is long past. The door has already closed for them and opened for something else.

Perhaps now, on the other side of that door in time, everything is to be done, and everything is to be believed. But it can happen only if people can make themselves capable again, or for the first time, of genuine desire. The Millennium: think of it, brothers and sisters, and all ye fellow creatures, it will be *so surreal*.



Mari Jo Marchnight

Surrealism and Women's Liberation

Surrealist Women: An International Anthology

Penelope Rosemont, ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.
576 pp. \$24.95 paper; \$50 cloth.

Nobody will give you freedom, you have to take it.

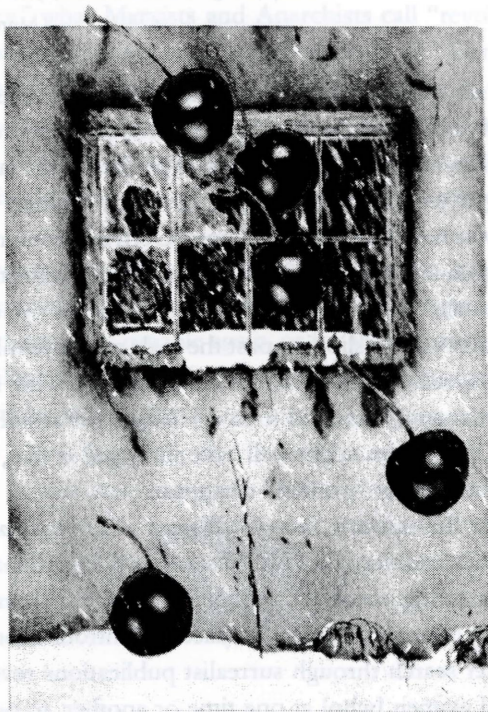
— Meret Oppenheim

That women are routinely read out of the history of movements in art, literature, and politics has long been a commonplace. Through dedication, scholarship, and hard labor, women's presses in the late 1960s and 1970s managed to salvage the works of many women writers who would otherwise have been lost to history. Gertrude Stein neatly skirted the issue (no pun intended) of female invisibility by refusing to be considered a "woman" at all. But that's not so clear an option for every woman. Another way of slipping past the male eagle eye may be to have a non-gender-specific name, like Meret Oppenheim who, as famous as she is, was consistently referred to in a *Village Voice* article not so long ago as "he." Oppenheim might well have shrugged at that, but it serves to remind us how easily "women" disappear.

In Penelope Rosemont's *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* we have another and very different instance of legerdemain: here, instead of disappearing, scores of women are for the first time reinstated into the history of surrealism. In her excellent introduction, Rosemont tells us that her search through surrealist publications revealed "some three hundred women [who] at one time or another, to one degree or

another, have taken part in the international surrealist movement.” The book includes nearly three hundred texts — articles, poems, essays, short stories, dreams, and games — and forty-four illustrations by over a hundred women from some thirty-odd countries. There are women from Bulgaria, France, England, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, and the Czech Republic, but there are also a sizable number from Africa, the African diaspora, the Middle East, the Americas, and Australia. These women did much to make surrealism the dynamic, liberating, and revolutionary movement it always has been, but their names rarely (in many cases, never) appear in the “standard” works on the subject. Even the few earlier books devoted to “women and surrealism” ignored the great majority of these women, concentrating instead on a handful of well-known artists (some of whom in fact had almost nothing to do with surrealism at all).

Penelope Rosemont is highly qualified for the task of recovering surrealism’s disappeared women. As a longtime surrealist herself — poet, painter, theorist, activist, a friend of André and Elisa Breton, as well as



Jan Hathaway, "The Bombardment"

of Mimi Parent, Toyen, Joyce Mansour, Mary Low, Jayne Cortez, Leonora Carrington, and many other women in the book — she has a wide-ranging insider's knowledge that no mere academic could hope to attain. Furthermore, from her experience in the civil rights, antiwar and anarchist movements, and as a member of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) national staff in 1967-69, she knows that "official" history is written from the point of view of those in power, and that people who really care about freedom, equality, truth, and justice need to respond to such Establishment propaganda by writing *counter-histories*, "from the bottom up."

"What is different about this anthology," Rosemont points out in her introduction,

is that here, for the first time, an unprecedentedly large number of surrealist women are allowed to speak *in their own voices* and in a specifically surrealist context — which is, after all, the context they chose for themselves. . . . I want first of all to call attention to an impressive number of important surrealist writers who for various reasons have not received the attention they deserve. The fact that they happen to be women helps explain why they have been ignored outside the movement. . . . I try to show not only what they took from surrealism but also what they gave to it; how they developed it, used it for their own purposes, played with it, strengthened it, and endowed it with a universal-ity it could not have attained without them.

The book is divided into six sections in a time line: the first women surrealists, 1924-29; the 1930s; the war years, 1940-45; the cold war, 1946-59; the 1960s and 1970s; and the present. Besides her valuable general introduction, which dispels many common misperceptions of surrealism's aims and principles, Rosemont provides a fact-packed but lucid introduction to each of these sections, describing the cultural/political climate of the times and how surrealists responded to events. She has also included concise but informative mini-bios for each woman. The book also contains a comprehensive 34-page bibliography, and an excellent index in which the mini-bio for each woman is highlighted in bold-face for quick reference.

As we read *Surrealist Women*, we begin to see a surrealism that we never knew, full of women's intellectual originality and creative achievements, women's initiative, leadership, humor, and imagination. We are

introduced to many women who are, no question about it, *major figures* in the movement, and yet — thanks to the academic “experts” — most of us never even heard of them before. I refer to such outstanding thinkers as Claude Cahun, Mary Low, Suzanne Césaire, Jacqueline Johnson, and Nora Mitrani, poets Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon (France), the British-born Egyptian Joyce Mansour, Lucie Thésée (Martinique), Isabel Meyrelles (Portugal), Petra Mandal (Sweden), Olga Orozco, Silvia Grenier, and Carmen Bruna (Argentina), and such visual artists as Toyen, Meret Oppenheim, Mimi Parent, Kay Sage, Leonora Carrington, Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo, Anne Ethuin, and Eva Švankmajerová.

Even those who, because they wrote very little (or because little of what they wrote has survived), could be called “minor,” are often astonishing and revelatory. Romanian-born Fanny Beznos is one of the least-cited names in the history of surrealism, despite the fact that André Breton praises her highly in *Nadja*. In a poem originally published in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1927, she perspicaciously pinpointed the connections between the slave trade, wage-slavery, and women’s domestic slavery, and proposed a solution: world proletarian revolution. Beznos, who died in a Nazi concentration camp, is certainly someone we would like to know more about.

Surrealist Women is full of surprises, discoveries, and stunning diversity. Here are insightful and empowering statements on politics by Nancy Cunard, Jacqueline Lamba, Mary Low, Nancy Joyce Peters, and Haifa Zangana; marvelous short stories by Gisèle Prassinos, Leonora Carrington, Irène Hamoir, and Rikki Ducornet; and eye-opening essays by Ikbal El Alailly (on German Romanticism), Suzanne Césaire (on André Breton’s poetry), and Nora Mitrani (on Marilyn Monroe). Here, too, are powerful critiques and denunciations of capitalism, white supremacy, xenophobia, sexism, fascism, and ecocide. Mary Low, Leonora Carrington, Annie Le Brun, and Nancy Joyce Peters relate surrealist revolution to women’s liberation. Nancy Cunard, Suzanne Césaire, Maria Martins, and Hilary Booth are particularly eloquent in their vehement criticism of racism, colonialism and imperialism. In the writings of Suzanne Césaire, Alice Rahon, Jacqueline Johnson, Jayne Cortez (especially her poem “Sacred Trees”), and many others, surrealism meets (and in most cases *prefigures*) deep ecology and ecofeminism. Here are brilliant discussions of surrealist games (Simone Kahn on the “Exquisite Corpse,” and Hilary Booth on “Time-Travelers’ Potlatch”), and moving

declarations on kinetic surrealism by dancers Hélène Vanel, Françoise Sullivan, and Alice Farley. Surrealist painters, collagists, photographers, and sculptors discuss their own and others' work. Ithell Colquhoun, Meret Oppenheim, Françoise Sullivan, Judit Reigl, and Alena Nadvorníková illuminate the central surrealist concept of "pure psychic automatism." Provocative perspectives abound, as in Carmen Bruna's "Poetry: An Incitement to Revolt," Elisabeth Lenk's observations on surrealism as a "liberating and catalyzing" force in Germany today, and Elaine Parra's proposal, "To Radicalize with Beauty and Love." Several of these women — Claude Cahun, Suzanne Césaire, Marianne van Hirtum, Peters, and Rosemont herself — offer us veritable surrealist manifestoes: vigorous, persuasive explorations of what surrealism and surrealist revolution are all about.

Here, too, is a truly outstanding selection of some of the finest surrealist poetry, by many of the women already mentioned as well as by Emmy Bridgwater, Nicole Espagnol, Anneliese Hager, Giovanna, Drahomira Vandas, Gertrude Pape, Luiza Neto Jorge, Blanca Varela, Katerina Pinosová, and at least two dozen others.

When we consider how matter-of-factly so many of these extraordinary women have heretofore been eliminated from history, we begin to appreciate how valuable Rosemont's anthology is.

I want to discuss a few of these surrealist women here, selected almost at random, to give something of the flavor of the book.

Rosemont concedes that surrealism at first, in the 1920s, was largely male. Of the nineteen who pledged their "absolute surrealism" in the first *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924, none were women, and "None of the shows at the Galerie Surréaliste in the 1920s featured work by a woman artist." But she goes on to make an important point often obscured by critics: "The fact that women were only rarely in the forefront of surrealist activity in those years does not mean that they played no role in the theoretical and practical development of the movement." The texts she includes by women active in surrealism in that early period — Renée Gauthier, Simone Kahn, Denise Lévy, Nancy Cunard, Nadja, Fanny Beznos, Suzanne Muzard, and Valentine Penrose — amply confirm her view that "their influence was by no means negligible."

Indeed, no individual was more important in shaping the basic surrealist vision than Léona Camille Ghislaine D. (last name a secret) — the enigmatic Nadja, whose meeting with André Breton in 1926 led to his

most popular book, *Nadja* (1928). Like Jacques Vaché, who also became for Breton a potent symbol of the poetic life, Nadja was a risk-taking, charismatic, and imaginative nomad. In her everyday behavior she challenged the very idea of “artist” as a category, and became the incarnate representative of surrealist desire. Though her involvement in surrealism was brief (she was arrested and institutionalized in 1927, and remained so until her death in 1940), her influence on the movement was incalculable.

That Nadja was able to provoke such a “collective emotion” (as Pierre Naville called it) throughout the entire (mostly male) Surrealist Group, certainly testifies to the force of her personality. But it also substantiates another of Rosemont’s critical insights: that the first Surrealist Group, however male-dominated it may have been in those years, was nonetheless *fundamentally anti-patriarchal* — “irreconcilable enemies of feminism’s enemies,” as Rosemont puts it. “Surrealism’s increasing openness to women’s full participation could not have occurred had the men who founded it been as hopelessly sexist as they have sometimes been portrayed.”

Women’s full participation in surrealism was well on the way by the early 1930s, and the whole decade saw a constant expansion of women’s active role in the movement: as writers, theorists, poets, artists, organizers, and activists. French lesbian Claude Cahun’s fascinating self-portraits and other photographs have recently been discovered, and she is now (decades after her death) recognized as an important surrealist photographer. But she was also a bold theorist, a woman of ideas who studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, a revolutionary activist and lively pamphleteer. Listen to what she says on the importance of surrealism in working-class emancipation:

Only when the proletariat has become conscious of the real meaning of the myths that uphold capitalist culture — indeed, only when the proletariat has destroyed these myths and revolutionized this culture — will working men and women be able, as a class, to proceed to their own self-development. The positive lesson of this experience in negation — that is, the dissemination of the surrealist experiment among the working class — is the only valid revolutionary poetic propaganda in our time.

Rosemont calls Mary Low “one of the stalwarts of surrealism for more than six decades.” An English-born Australian, Low met Cuban poet/revolutionist Juan Breá in Paris in 1933, and they soon joined the

Surrealist Group. They published a book of their poems, *La Saison des flûtes* (The season of flutes, Editions Surréalistes, 1939), and a volume of essays, *La Verdad contemporanea* (Contemporary truth, 1943), prefaced by Benjamin Péret. Probably the most nomadic couple in the history of surrealism, they lived for extended periods in Paris, Bucharest, Prague, and Havana, and in 1936 went to take part in the Revolution in Spain, where Low edited the English-language periodical *Spanish Revolution* and helped organize the women's militia. Their book, *Red Spanish Notebook* (1937), was prefaced by C.L.R. James and warmly reviewed by George Orwell. When Breá died in Cuba in 1941, Low remained on the island, and took part in the Revolution of '59. One of her later books of poetry was illustrated by Wifredo Lam. A superb poet and collagist, Low remains active in surrealism today. *Surrealist Women* includes her powerful chronicle, "Women in the Spanish Revolution," as well as a remarkable essay on "the political and sexual situation of women" and a fine selection of her splendid, crystalline poems.

"No important figure in the history of surrealism," Rosemont tells us, "has been so overshadowed by a spouse as Suzanne Césaire, wife of poet/playwright Aimé Césaire." Born Suzanne Roussy in Martinique, she studied philosophy in Paris, where she met her husband. A highly original theorist, during World War II she contributed some of the finest texts to the important Martinican surrealist journal *Tropiques*, which also published Breton, Mabille and such poets of the Harlem Renaissance as Jean Toomer and Claude McKay. Her manifesto, "1943: Surrealism and Us," spoke for the Martinican group:

Surrealism lives! And it is young, ardent and revolutionary. . . Surrealism surely remains, as always, an activity whose aim is to explore and express systematically — and thus neutralize — the forbidden zones of the human mind, an activity which desperately tries to give mankind the means of reducing the old antinomies. . . But surrealism, further proving its vitality, has evolved — or, rather, *blossomed*. . . [Today], when freedom herself is threatened throughout the world, surrealism, which has never for one instant ceased to remain in the service of the largest and most thoroughgoing human emancipation, can now be summed up completely in one single, magic word: *freedom*.

Although Existential *angst* was more "fashionable" than surrealism in the cold war years, many brilliant and rebellious young women were

attracted to surrealism's revolutionary *élan*. Nora Mitrani, born in Bulgaria of Spanish-Jewish and Italian parents, came to Paris to study philosophy and joined the Surrealist Group in 1947. She collaborated on all of the group's periodicals and remained one of the most active spokespersons for the movement until her early death of cancer in 1961. Her writings include studies of popular culture, the Marquis de Sade, film noir, Kierkegaard, the meaning of scandal, and sharp criticism of technology and nuclear energy. In 1960, in a discussion of surrealism on BBC radio in London, she said:

To all forms of exploitation, surrealism opposes its unflinching refusal. Surrealism ignores the stale wisdom of those who pretend to know how to live. Naturally, we want individual revolt to flourish and to develop into revolution. But political and social revolution as defined by the Marxists. . . falls far short of what surrealism wants. This type of revolution is not enough, and it will never be enough. . . . In this mass civilization, humankind has struck a miserable bargain; it has exchanged its independence and the mind's freedom for a higher standard of living and the consumption of "token appearances." . . . But for surrealism, such a bargain is pitiful, and no bargain in the world can satisfy us.

Argentine-born Nelly Kaplan, surrealism's first woman film-maker (and a writer of fabulous erotic tales), came to the movement in the cold war fifties. Her films are recognized feminist classics. Picasso hailed *A Very Curious Girl* (1967) as "insolence considered as one of the fine arts," and surrealist poet Nancy Joyce Peters has praised *Néa* (1976) as the revolutionary and "transcendent prefiguration" of "the new woman, conferring the promise of a happier existence, as she speaks not only her own reality (now oppressed under Patriarchy), but a higher reality, too." In a dialogue titled "All Creation Is Androgynous," Kaplan reflects on women's reproduction rights and ecology:

Maternity does not interest me in the world as it is today. And as maternity doesn't interest me, I don't see why I should have children just because somewhere a lot of silly things are written about a woman's "biological destiny"! One can also examine the problem from the ecological point of view. There are many women who want to have children. Our planet is overcrowded already, so if a woman doesn't feel

like it, it is infinitely preferable that she abstain. . . . My motto is: "We are not two-legged for nothing. If we walk on two legs instead of four, it is so that we are closer to the stars. But we must also be worthy of that."

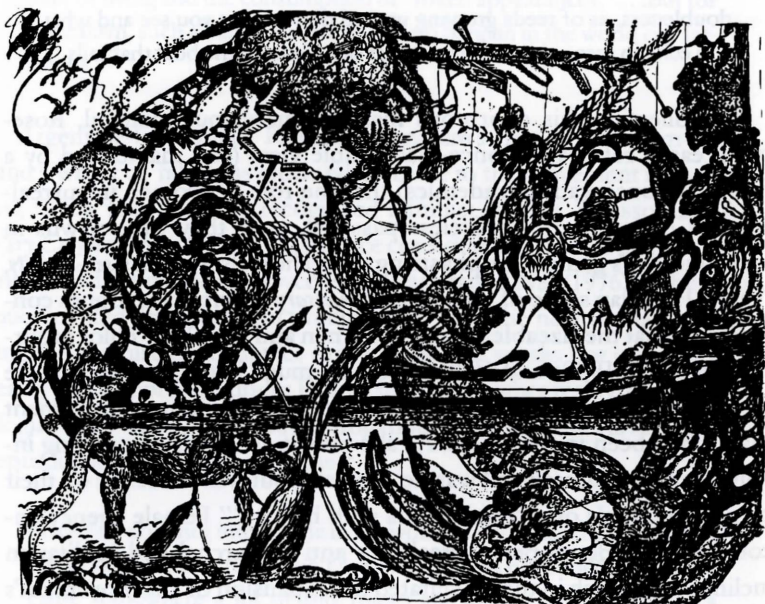
My very favorite discovery, among so many, is Jacqueline Johnson, a Californian, graduate of Stanford, poet, and scholar. Married for a time to surrealist painter Gordon Onslow-Ford, she and her husband lived in New York among the surrealists in exile during World War II, and then went to Mexico. Rosemont has not been able to learn anything of her later life. Jacqueline Johnson's contributions to surrealist theory are of the greatest interest, and I find her lyrical prose style a treat, as in this excerpt from "The Earth" (1945):

There are images buried in the fields. It is not possible to say why they are so many, standing, their small mask faces elaborated more than all the rest, as though in the long slanting eye the meaning of the mystery is centered of which the integral statement is the body. . . . The real image has this wonder of its very fixedness, and also of that which is felt in ritual and all reflections, the wonder of the same thing charged with doubleness, as of reeds growing up and down, what you see and what you echo in recognition, the boat that sails beneath the boat that sails.

By collecting this enormous mass of marvelous material, Rosemont easily refutes the once-fashionable view (still maintained by a few arch-conservative academics) that the role of women in surrealism has been one of "voiceless passivity, as if they were pawns in someone else's game." Emphasizing what she calls women's *self-activity*, "in the Hegelian sense of an *internally necessary* activity," she argues convincingly that the sizeable influx of women and people of color in surrealism in the 1930s and 1940s made it a much larger, stronger, more international, more influential, and more revolutionary movement than it had been in the 1920s. As she puts it, women's "increasing involvement" in surrealism "was no accident, but was the result of their own doing, their own 'rendezvous with history.'" Female agency encouraged and developed surrealism's anti-patriarchal and egalitarian inclinations, which in turn facilitated the expansion of the movement's androgynous and other gender-bending tendencies. By 1945, Breton himself acknowledged explicitly feminist sources as central to the surrealist vision.

In other words, women not only *joined* the surrealist movement, they also *transformed* it!

In its audacity, vitality, and enthusiasm, *Surrealist Women* reminds us of the early days of the women's liberation movement, but it is very much a book for our own troubled times. "As the women's movement enters a new period of radicalization," Rosemont writes, "and a new generation rediscovers feminism's visionary, utopian, romantic, anarchist, and revolutionary socialist heritage, more and more women will also discover surrealism." Ranging over seventy-five years of the organized surrealist movement, this anthology is nonetheless directed toward the present and future. The writings of these women make us aware of surrealism as a matter of real urgency *now* as an ongoing global current of liberating ideas and action and a "challenge to the twenty-first century." A major contribution to rewriting history, *Surrealist Women* is also the single best guide to surrealism's revolutionary project today and tomorrow.



Ody Saban, "Red Cerebral—Cervical Roses"

Penelope Rosemont

Ody Saban — Surrealist and Outsider

Our magistry is a fiery form of light.

— Mary Anne Atwood (1850)

Like staring into the flames that give birth to a thousand and one dreams, the works of Ody Saban ignite the power of the imagination. They create a sensation of passionate pleasure. With the hypnotic quality one finds while gazing into the glowing, melting heart of a volcano, that power draws us inexorably, through our moth-like repressed desire to *embrace the fire*. Hot colors flow, overrun by fantastic, erotic images in jet black ink that frolic and parade across our senses. In these rivers of liquid fire, women become birds, birds become lovers, lovers penetrate each other and become the Androgyne, whose elemental energy dwells at the core of our being.

To see the drawings and paintings of Ody Saban for the first time is astonishing. Faster than the speed of dreams the dialectics of masculine and feminine mirror the explosive combustion of fire and oxygen. If you've ever thought that you have "seen everything," that there is nothing that will move you, that astounding surprises are no longer possible, that painting and drawing must sink into miserabilist minimalism and post-minimalism because there is no place for them to go, that there is "nothing new under the sun," then you *must* see the work of Ody Saban. It will convince you that there are still immense unknown territories to be explored, unheard-of dreams to be dreamed, new worlds to be brought into existence, glorious and impassioned possibilities just beginning to unfold to your thousand newly unpeeled eyes.

One of the foremost painters in the surrealist movement today, Ody Saban was born in 1953 in Istanbul, Turkey, into a Sephardic Jewish family. Her mother, of Spanish origin, remarried a Muslim when Ody

was seven. Her stepfather, a painter, musician and poet, initiated Ody into the arts.

At age sixteen, Ody decided to go to Israel, where she lived on a Far Left Marxist kibbutz from 1969 to 1977. Later in 1977 she moved to Paris and had her first exhibition there. She has been active for many years in the radical women's movement in France, and also in the international direct-action squatters' movement. She joined the Surrealist Group in Paris in 1990 and has been one of the most active and



Ody Saban, "To Follow the Path of Future Gods"

articulate spokespersons for international surrealism ever since. She has shown her work in numerous surrealist and outsider art exhibitions all over the world. In 1998, in the course of a month-long sojourn in the United States, she visited Chicago and took part in the activities of the Surrealist Group, who arranged a well-attended exhibition of her drawings and paintings at the studio of Carlos Cortez. Recently her work was featured in the magazine *Raw Vision*.

Ody Saban is a poet in her painting as well as a poet in words and in life. By nature she works in a state of trance — a state which, as we know from the writings of Mary Anne Atwood, author of the classic *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (1850), has strong affinities with alchemical research. The trance state, according to Atwood, enables us “to conjoin the mind to its lost universality and. . .to behold reflected in the brightened mirror of our own intelligence the pure Truth.” I think of Ody Saban as an incarnation of Maria the Alchemist, or perhaps her linear descendent. Maria Hebraea of Hellenic Egypt, whom we know about primarily through the writings of Zosimus the Panopolitan, was the inventor of our basic chemical apparatus, and her important theory that all substances in nature were basically one has come to be embroidered by modern physics. In her teachings Maria urged the true students of Hermes to “Combine together male and female and you will find what you seek. Do not be anxious to know whether the work is on fire” — words that could stand as a motto for the work of Ody Saban. Sulfur and mercury, volatile and subtile, the precipitates of quickened desire — in black and white they glow like hot coals throughout her work, illuminating a ceaseless procession of wild androgynous messengers: ghosts from the past, transgressors of the present, visitors from the future. Each of them caresses the deepest nerve center of our sexuality, and reminds us that the Androgyne is one of the ancient myths that surrealism has renewed, seeing in it a powerful symbol of the creative resolution of the antinomies that currently keep humankind so disastrously divided.

Ody Saban describes herself as a surrealist and an outsider. “The surrealists are the true outsiders,” she says, “because they *know* they are outside and they know *why*.” True seekers of the Gold of Time will always find the way. The unfettered freedom of the imagination and desire are always outside!



John Schlechter Duvall, "Octopus of the Silky Glance"

Don LaCoss

Conflicting Views of Surrealism

A Cavalier History of Surrealism

Raoul Vaneigem (as "Jules-François Dupuis"), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. San Francisco: AK Press, 1999

"A Poetics of Anticolonialism"

Robin D.G. Kelley, introducing the new, fiftieth anniversary edition of Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000

Isidore Ducasse, one of surrealism's favorite nineteenth-century poets and black humorists, died under unexplained circumstances during the Siege of Paris in November 1870 at the age of twenty-four. Two years before, Ducasse had published his *Songs of Maldoror* under the pseudonym of the "Count of Lautréamont"; at the time of his death, he was living at a rooming house in rue du Faubourg-Montmartre in Paris, a city convulsed by spasms of war, revolution, poverty, disease, and an especially cruel winter. The landlord of the building, a certain Jules-François Dupuis, was one of the two perfunctory witness signatures on Ducasse's death certificate. The poet's bones were lost somewhere among the temporary cemeteries set up in Paris during the Siege, thus obscuring forever the forensic details of the life and death of Ducasse, spawning numerous speculative biographies, legends, and conspiracy theories.

Former Situationist International (SI) propagandist Raoul Vaneigem mentioned Ducasse/Lautréamont's death in his now-canonical treatise of 1967, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, when he spoke of the

social "brigandage" that works for the "oppression of the isolated." Ducasse/Lautréamont, Vaneigem wrote, was a victim of such gangsterism, "smothered. . . in the furnished room of his landlord, Jules-François Dupuis." Curiously, when he first penned his *Cavalier History of Surrealism* as a high-school textbook in 1970, Vaneigem chose to write under the name of that same property owner who had signed off on Ducasse/Lautréamont's mysterious demise. Obviously, Vaneigem's use of "Jules-François Dupuis" as a *nom de plume* was meant to cast his manuscript as the "case-closed" findings of a coroner's inquest into surrealism as a "dead" movement. But, rather than providing a stamp of authority, Vaneigem's use of the name of Ducasse's landlord on surrealism's "death certificate" is as much a mark of complicity and suspicion as the signatures of the military pathologists who bungled JFK's autopsy.

In Vaneigem/Dupuis's shallow, shabby, and frequently factually inaccurate study, surrealism's fatal flaw as a movement of cultural revolution was the neutralization of its political edge through its institutionalization. Pointing toward the ways in which surrealist painting has become sanctioned culture and interred in museums, gallery, and art history classrooms, Vaneigem argues that surrealism's rebellion has become safely and thoroughly integrated into the systems that it opposed. This is about as shortsighted as discussing Situationism only in terms of the art-gallery economy that dealt in the paintings of Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio and Asger Jorn.

Vaneigem's inquisition of surrealism depends on his naively simplistic renderings of Dada, the parasurrealist *Grand jeu* group, and the surrealist thought of Antonin Artaud. In addition, he relies on maddeningly anemic glosses of important surrealists and their work so as to head off any possibility of a more detailed picture: André Breton's *Communicating Vessels*, perhaps the most germinal text of French surrealist politics in the first half of the 1930s, is barely mentioned and, even then, it is misrepresented (59). Surrealist women and most surrealists of color are ignored; in a related instance, Georges Bataille and Maurice Heine are listed among "Surrealism's fellow travelers" (61) when in fact both were highly respected by Breton for their powerful contributions to surrealist thought. Vaneigem's haphazard use of surrealists outside of Paris is also weak, and his obvious fixation with the Belgian group dulls what little thrust there is to his argument.

Vaneigem cobbles together decontextualized bits of surrealist writing from across forty years of time without the least bit of consideration for the necessary circumstances of surrealism's theoretical development, European history, or that of the French Communist Party, the latter of which went through at least five major doctrinal reinventions between 1920 and 1947. These historical factors illuminate the circumstances surrounding the statements that Vaneigem uses in his prosecution of surrealism, and his failure to acknowledge those conditions hurts the credibility of his decidedly "cavalier" history. Consider, for example, Vaneigem's laughable accusation that the surrealists had been "faithful disciples. . .to the Communist Party" who held a "fascination with that great proletariat-crushing machine, the Party bureaucracy"(69-70). This description is easily dismissed when one reintegrates the texts into the historical moment when they were created: surrealists themselves realized the hazards of cooptation inherent in being a cultural Trojan horse — the passage of a few surrealists through the French Communist Party during a rather brief moment in 1927 was an early attempt to head off the same kind of bourgeois annexation that had converted Dada into a modern art movement.

In addition to the evidentiary miscues, Vaneigem further undermines his claim to being an arbiter of revolutionary politics by his will to pontification. Falling back on one of the crudest of teleologies, Vaneigem plots a course from his imagined "Golden Age" of Dada to the Situationist International through surrealism, the latter of which allegedly "began firing its last salvoes" in 1945 (30). In the end, he says, the surrealists' only success was in being "the first to use Lautréamont as gunpowder, the first to plant the black flag of de Sade in the heart of Christian humanism," both of which were projects that the reader is supposed to assume were "perfected" by the Situationists. Consequently, he writes with patronizing smugness, surrealism's "failure was an honorable one" (8). In displaying such a proprietary and self-serving attitude toward revolutionary ideas, it makes sense that Vaneigem should write under the name of Lautréamont's landlord.

□ □ □

When the SI was founded in July 1957, Guy Debord had praised surrealism as "an effective means of struggle against the confusionist mechanisms of the bourgeoisie. . . .The surrealist program, asserting the sovereignty of desire and surprise, proposing a new use of life, is much

richer in constructive possibilities than is generally thought.” However, Debord warned his Situationist colleagues, there were pitfalls, and one needed to avoid surrealism’s “error”:

Surrealism made use of the irrational to destroy its superficially logical values. The very success of surrealism has a lot to do with the fact that the most modern side of this society’s ideology has renounced a strict hierarchy of factitious values and openly uses the irrational, including vestiges of surrealism. The bourgeoisie must above all prevent a new setting out of revolutionary thought. It was aware of the danger of surrealism. Now that it had been able to dissolve it into ordinary aesthetic commerce, it would like people to believe that surrealism was the most radical and disturbing movement possible.

Debord’s accusation that surrealism was tamed of its revolutionary designs by its conversion “into ordinary aesthetic commerce” is the central diagnosis that informs Vaneigem’s *Cavalier History*. This is a common Situationist position, as it relates to the ways in which radical cultural politics are defused and rehabilitated by the capitalist apparatus. As explained in some of the Situationists’ most astute observations of the insidious logic of modern society, the most poignant oppositional ideas and images have an extremely limited impact on social change because they are so quickly de-fanged and subdued by market forces. Positions for and against certain social issues become canceled out as they are locked into the same meaningless dance, meshing together “like the teeth of cogwheels” that keep “the machine of power” on-line. This resulting anti-political anomaly — referred to in Situationist jargon as “spectacle” — occurs when “the actions of history upon individuals themselves seeking. . . to act upon history are reflected, corrupted and transformed into their opposite — into an autonomous life of the non-lived,” writes Vaneigem (5). Instead of dissent, then, there is only the buying and selling of the spectacle of dissent, totally devoid of political relevance.

The Situationists’ descriptions of life in the society of the spectacle carry a portentous resonance when one sees how so much radical critique has been bankrupted by the uncanny mutations of late capitalism — take the example of those news reports on how e-trading is “revolutionizing” Wall Street, or the advertising campaign for a fast-food subsidiary of Pepsi that features a chihuahua dressed as Che Guevara. The

Situationists held that surrealism had been "spectacularized" as well; bought out and dead in the water, surrealism was "only the beginning of a revolutionary experiment in culture, an experiment that almost immediately ground to a halt practically and theoretically." This patently self-promoting edict skips over a continuous surrealist struggle to short-circuit the engines of cooptation that assailed the movement. For his part, Vaneigem repeats the tired line mouthed by bourgeois gallery owners and art historians that surrealism degenerated after 1945 into aesthetic postures, "mysticism, and alchemy, while its political effusions betrayed growing confusion and vapidty" (30). Ironically, in their conniving with academia and the culture industry to declare surrealism extinct and to cover up its contributions to radical critical thinking, the surviving Situationists are collaborating with the forces of spectacle themselves.

Two of the most evident examples of this in Vaneigem/Dupuis's book lie in the author's disapproval of the surrealists' excavation of the political unconscious of dreams and that of esoteric thought. On the subject of the insurgent trajectories of the dream, Vaneigem neglects the reality that churches, schools, factory assembly lines, and the advertising-entertainment complex depend upon and profit from outlawing and ridiculing our dreams, and so he sniffs that the surrealist interest in dreams is a sham of political activity. Rather than support the surrealists' campaign to liberate the dream as a means for halting the draining off of the Marvelous from everyday life, Vaneigem chides them for promoting "the organization of social passivity" where "the proletariat should move only to the extent required for the contemplation of its own inert contentment, that it should be rendered so passive as to be incapable of anything beyond infatuation with varied representation of its dreams" (95-6). Now, aside from the fact that this fault-finding comes from a man who chose to go on vacation in May 1968 like a fratboy on spring break rather than do battle with riot police in Paris, such a statement betrays a petty-bourgeois prejudice toward the revelatory and revolutionary potential of dreams. In attacking dreaming as a passive activity, he supports the binary opposition between dream and action so crucial to the hegemony of the capitalist work-ethic and promotes a worldview that alienates humans from their most primordial and universal activities (sleeping and dreaming). Vaneigem, content with the creeping colonization of our dreamlife by the advertising industry and Disney, is pimping for the spectacle.

Alongside his oneirophobia, Vaneigem's shuddering horror of the presence of esoteric traditions such as alchemy in the arsenal of revolutionary thought is reminiscent of the most provincial sort of Stalinist socialist realism. He fails to recognize how esoteric thought might be mobilized by surrealists as corrosive cultural sedition. Surrealist Kurt Seligmann, for instance, writing in 1948, believed that new directions in creative imagination could be achieved by an exposure to the history of magic. Citing historian Lynn Thorndike and ethnographer James G. Frazer, Seligmann's work explores how magic "freed man from fears, endowed him with a feeling of his power to control the world, sharpened his capacity to imagine, and kept alive his dreams of higher achievement."

One of Seligmann's comrades, Pierre Mabille, in his invaluable *Mirror of the Marvelous*, argues similarly that since "the external world can play a variety of roles in producing emotion," the Marvelous "manages to disorient us in such a way that the ordinary boundaries separating us from the world are destroyed. Observations of natural curiosities and freakish scenes, because of their violence, their feverish pitch, thus acquire immense importance." Vaneigem constantly exposes his unawareness of how and why esotericism is the fallout of much of what has been repressed into the West's collective unconscious when he claims that the surrealists chased the fantasy of "a powerful myth, stripped of any religious overtones, that would. . . draw its strength from a reconsecration of human relationships modeled on the reconsecration of art" (105-6). His stubborn persistence in equating myth with mysticism and religion forces him into making preposterous claims, such as surrealism's supposedly "ambiguous character of anti-religious ecumenism" and the mystical influence in the ranks of "the Christian Michel Carrouges" (121-2). Furthermore, Vaneigem's judgment that "the Nazis launched a comparable operation. . . when they sought to return to the reign of myth by reconsecrating. . . Fatherland, the Army, the Führer, [and] the State" (106) is a ridiculous distortion of the surrealist project. He fails to grasp how hermetic works were studied and re-deployed by surrealists in order to throw notions of utilitarianism, Christianity, and positivism into sharp crisis and thereby to provoke an atmosphere of cultural demoralization. In doing so, Vaneigem grants fascists, priests, and ad executives a monopoly on magical thinking and an unchallenged opportunity to counterfeit Marvelous experiences.



This book is not without value, however, in spite of these serious problems; as primary source evidence of the SI's tormented (and occasionally Oedipal) relationship with surrealism, *A Cavalier History* is an interesting companion to the tracts that appeared in Situationist publications on the subject in the 1950s and 1960s. A case in point is Vaneigem's silly depiction of Breton's thought as a "proto-Maoist. . .version of Blanqui's theory," or his comparison of surrealist public scandal to the riots of the Red Guard (70). Both of these comments exemplify the old SI's rabid sectarianism. Similarly, when Vaneigem points to those moments when "artists or writers seduced by the appeal of money and acclaim" broke with the surrealist group as being the signs "most indicative of the movement's malaise and its need to exorcise it" (77), one recalls that the English translator of *A Cavalier History*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, was "excluded" from the SI in 1969 for not adhering to Vaneigem's catechism.

But what prevents me from categorizing *A Cavalier History* solely as an archival oddity is the last line of his undated disclaimer (not found in the original French version), in which Vaneigem describes his study as "a useful 'schoolbook' — and one which may steer those just discovering Surrealism away from a number of received ideas." In wanting to deflect readers away from surrealism's revolutionary perspectives, Vaneigem portrays his textbook as a savvy interpretation by a practiced expert. But because the book is so rife with errors, distortions, and omissions, what emerges instead is an unflattering portrait of Vaneigem himself as a miserable and censorious puritan in matters of radical cultural politics. Consequently, the book frustrates readers who share a real interest in Situationism and/or surrealism — in sum, the only people who would consider reading Vaneigem's account in the first place.

To grasp the paucity and pedantry of Vaneigem's dissimulating "post-mortem" study of surrealism, one need only contrast it to Robin D.G. Kelley's thoughtfully provocative essay, "A Poetics of Anti-colonialism," introducing Monthly Review's just-published fiftieth anniversary edition of Aimé Césaire's classic *Discourse on Colonialism* (originally published in Paris in 1950). Without a doubt, Kelley is one of the most perspicacious historians of racism, identity politics, and popular culture in the United States today, and the same refreshingly open-ended radical vision and verve that inform his *Hammer and Hoe*

(1990), *Race Rebels* (1994) and *Yo Mama's Disfunktional* (1997) are also much in evidence in his illuminating introduction to Césaire.

Like Vaneigem's foreword to the reprint of his *Cavalier History*, Kelley's "Poetics of Anticolonialism" is intended for readers whose interest in the subject stems from an activist impulse. But where Vaneigem sets out to discourage readers' curiosity about surrealist politics and to crack down on the revolutionary imagination, Kelley's essay facilitates understanding and a sense of pertinence by offering multiple points of access to the text.

Aimé Césaire — Martinican poet, playwright, historian, and social critic, as well as one of the island's major political figures — is best known as the central theorist of the *négritude* movement. While a student in Paris in the 1930s, he was active in the Afro-Caribbean surrealist-Marxist milieu around the journals *Légitime Défense* and *L'Etudiant Noir*, which included the poet-militants Étienne Lero, Simone and Pierre Yoyotte, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas, Jules Monnerot, René Menil, and Suzanne Roussy. He and Roussy wed in 1937 and returned shortly thereafter to Martinique; during the war, they began the radical surrealist cultural journal *Tropiques*, which combined (in Kelley's words) "a sophisticated anticolonial stance" with "a vision of a postcolonial future" in defiance of Vichy censorship and repression. As Kelley shows, the central ideas set forth in the *Discourse* were in fact developed by Suzanne and Aimé Césaire and their collaborators in the pages of *Tropiques*. Solidly in tune with the move toward decolonization throughout the globe, *Discourse* quickly became a major theoretical source and inspiration for anticolonialist activists, not only in Francophone lands but in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries as well.

The fact that the *Discourse on Colonialism* was written and published during Césaire's decade-long involvement in the Martinican Communist Party, and that he continued to write authentically surrealist poetry throughout that period — thereby blatantly repudiating official Stalinist literary policy — serves to highlight the weird complexity of the political/cultural situation in which this key anti-racist and anti-imperialist text made its way in the world. Here again Kelley's searching inquiry — his effort to grasp, beyond all schematism, the oftentimes maddening dynamics and dialectics of the actual historic process — proves to be infinitely more helpful than Vaneigem's evasively simple-minded either/or dogmas regarding the one true path to salvation.

With an eye to those relevant aspects of Césaire's thought for our times, Kelley demands that *Discourse on Colonialism* be considered in a new context: indeed, a specifically *surrealist* context. Rejecting what he calls the "diffusionist" interpretation in which surrealism is reduced to "European thought" and regarded as "foreign to non-European traditions," Kelley argues that the Césaires and their friends "not only embraced surrealism — independently of the Paris group, I might add — but opened new vistas and contributed enormously to theorizing the 'domain of the Marvelous.'" As "innovators of surrealism," moreover, the Martinicans had "a profound impact on international surrealism in general, and on André Breton, in particular."

Affirming its roots in the surrealist poetry and surrealist critical essays of *Tropiques*, Kelley urges us to read the *Discourse* itself "as a surrealist text. . . . It is not a solution or a strategy or a manual or a little red book with pithy quotes. It is a dancing flame in a bonfire." Surrealism's restless energies remained a touchstone for Césaire and confirmed what he had already known about the most effective means of cultural revolution: a twin-pronged critique that could magnify disgust and despair with bourgeois society while simultaneously offering glimpses into the most meaningful ways of undermining authority and inciting rebellion, just as the atheism, spleen, and horror roiling in Lautréamont's *Maldoror* had been fueled by defeatism and dreams of upheaval and overthrow.

In his 1967 discussion with Césaire about surrealism's ability to call forth "deep and unconscious forces," Haitian poet René Depestre suggested that the surrealist project was one of "disalienation" and "detoxification." Césaire agreed emphatically: surrealism "shook up absolutely everything. This was important because the traditional forms — burdensome, overused forms — were crushing me." It was surrealism's "plunge into the depths" that had turned out to be "a plunge into Africa for me," he affirmed.

Surrealism's double movement of destabilization and emancipation is a crucial tool for what Césaire describes as "the decolonization of consciousness," since it provides a means for ensuring both the resistance to the colonizer's presence and to the colonizer's "cultural values." Kelley latches on to this in Césaire's own writing, explaining that *Discourse on Colonialism* "has a double-edged meaning: it is Césaire's discourse on the material and spiritual havoc created by colonialism, and it is a critique of colonial discourse." This sort of fluid and organic understanding of

culture by Kelley is a perceptive and helpful preamble to Césaire's own ideas about how culture works, unlike Vaneigem's quaint notions about a single culture that one can choose to be either "outside" (or "pure," like his idealized image of Dada and Situationism) or "inside" (in other words, "contaminated" like surrealism). Kelley's comprehension of how an individual's experience of identification with, recognition of, and relation to a community can change culture or shift its direction infuses Césaire with the kind of revolutionary spark totally absent from Vaneigem's narrative.

Kelley counters the superficiality, carelessness, obstructionism, and Francocentrism of Vaneigem's *Cavalier History of Surrealism* by demonstrating surrealism's bearing on the struggle for freedom in the last sixty years — including the movement's strong stand against colonialism and all forms of white supremacy — and most prominently in those places struggling with a history of imperialist domination. *Discourse on Colonialism*, Kelley argues, is a pathbreaking syncretism of Marxism and surrealism that considers how a "total overthrow of a racist, colonialist system . . . would open the way to imagine a whole new world." For Kelley, *Discourse on Colonialism* is "hardly a dead document about a dead order," but rather "a declaration of war" on the colonizers of mind, bodies, and peoples. "Just as Césaire drew on Comte de Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* to illuminate the cannibalistic nature of capitalism and the power of poetic knowledge, *Discourse* offers new insights into the consequences of colonialism and a model for dreaming a way out of our postcolonial predicament."

As opposed to Vaneigem's crotchety attempt to steer away those just discovering surrealism, Kelley is anxious to see how future radicals will tap into surrealism's living current of knowledge and revolution in their efforts to effect change and to realize the dream of freedom.



Common European Octopus (*O. vulgaris*). (350)

A New Look at the Communist Manifesto



hat can this historic document, this bold and visionary political declaration, this dream-poem teach us about our current condition and the exit out? What can we learn from the *Communist Manifesto*'s shortcomings as well as its insights?

The question of Marx's and Engels's Eurocentrism is always a red herring, if you can forgive the pun. We need to bury that question once and for all and constantly remind ourselves that "Marxism" is a manifestation of its time and place; it is a discourse about (and a product of) class struggle during the era of capitalism's emergence — a history firmly rooted in the very ground that produced racism, patriarchy, imperialism, and colonialism, as well as the idea of modernity and all that comes with it.

The *Communist Manifesto*, therefore, can be understood only as a historical document, a product of a revolutionary era a century and a half ago. It is a brilliant indictment of bourgeois society even if it underestimated the ruling class's longevity, and it offers an inspiring vision of what the future might hold if the revolutionary proletariat (according to Marx and Engels) had its way. For example, as Victorian as Marx and Engels might have been, the *Manifesto* did demand the abolition of the bourgeois family, a family based on exploitation and "private gain." They critiqued the bourgeoisie for seeing "wives as mere instruments of production" and revealed how marriage and divorce laws were little more than property laws. The *Manifesto* calls for the emancipation of women, echoing slogans that were being put forward by nineteenth-century feminists throughout the Western world, from the Seine to Seneca Falls.

More significantly, the work of Marx and Engels as a whole identified production and reproduction as two sides of the same coin, as dialectically interrelated and a product of history. It was precisely in the pages

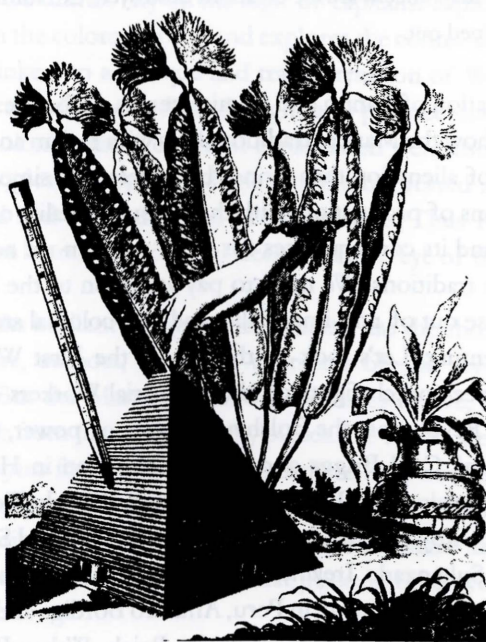
of the *Manifesto* that generations of twentieth-century feminists found a starting point for a radical analysis of patriarchy, gender ideologies, and heterosexism. Likewise, ecological radicals and environmental justice activists have both critiqued Marx and Engels for their inattention to nature and have drawn insights from their work in order to develop a radical vision of social ecology. On the one hand, the pair have been accused of privileging the urban over the countryside, human beings over all other life forms, and promoting a kind of fetishism of technology. These critiques, as John Bellamy Foster recently pointed out, are exaggerated if not outright wrong. But finding passages by Marx and Engels that make references to the ecological is less important than developing a fresh, radical analysis of the impact of capitalism on the environment — rural and urban, land and sea, humans and all other living things. Once we do this, the old dualisms of society versus “nature” or “anthropocentric” versus “ecocentric” fall by the wayside.

Once we factor in the history and current reality of colonialism and racism in the modern world, we cannot help but notice whose bodies and whose lands are most ravaged by capitalist exploitation. In a world where corporate-made droughts and famines, toxic waste dumping, and air pollution disproportionately affect black and brown people on a global scale, it becomes clear that a Marxist ecology cannot rely on Marx alone. Here is where Marx must meet Du Bois on the fundamental problem of the color line in the long twentieth century.

Well, sort of. Marx and Engels had a much more sophisticated understanding of the global character of the color line, even before the age of full-blown imperialism, than they have been given credit for. It is startling that the *Manifesto* recognized that the bourgeoisie “has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.” The global character of capitalism and its reliance on colonialism and slavery is made quite clear here. Even more remarkable was Marx’s understanding of what the West’s “civilizing mission” was all about. In the August 8, 1853, issue of the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx wryly pointed out: “The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.”

Naked, raw, brutal. He and his friend Engels were well familiar with conquest, genocide, slavery, and slavery’s demise, and various forms of

coercive labor that only escaped the slavery label by semantic sleight of hand. All this they took into account and placed under the ledger marked Primitive Accumulation. They had a materialist conception of history to make sense of the brutality, but they lacked the tools to understand the psychological dimensions of exploitation and domination; they knew all too well the Accumulation part and what it meant but had little understanding of the "Primitive." The *Manifesto* was, after all, published thirteen years before the American Civil War; thirty-six years before the Berlin Conference; a half-century before the imperialist wars in Cuba and the Philippines and the formal imposition of the color line on a global scale; sixty-five years before the Russian Revolution; a century and a year before the Chinese Revolution; and a century and a decade before the modern Civil Rights movement; the end of formal colonialism in much of Africa and the Caribbean; and the risings of the urban poor in metropolitan centers like Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, Sharpeville (South Africa), Mexico City, and Brixton (England). None of this could have been predicted in 1848. And had they tried to write the *Manifesto* from New Delhi or Beijing or Jackson, Mississippi, in 1948, their proletariat and their bourgeoisie would have looked entirely different.



Debra Taub, "The First Language"

As displaced Germans living in nineteenth-century England, I doubt they fully grasped the nature of barbarism in the West. The barbarism of which Marx speaks is hardly hypocritical or inconsistent; the respectability bourgeois "civilization" achieved in the metropole depended on its nakedness in the colonies. This is the Janus-faced nature of liberal humanism. As Jean-Paul Sartre put it: "There is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters." Sartre, of course, is really repeating Frantz Fanon, whose brilliant treatise *The Wretched of the Earth*, he was prefacing. Poet/revolutionary Aimé Césaire not only wrote eloquently of how colonialism "decivilizes" the colonizer, propelling all of Europe along the road toward "savagery," but questions the very concept of progress and modernity. For Césaire, the consequences are not just material but psychic:

I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about "achievements," diseases cured, improved standards of living.

I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out.

My invocation of Fanon and Césaire here is deliberate: if we want to understand how the Marxist tradition deals with racism and colonialism, with forms of alienation that cannot be understood simply in terms of social relations of production, with the vicious brutality of global white supremacy and its consequences for *all* of us, then we need to look to *other* Marxist traditions. We need to pay attention to the Marxist traditions that rose out of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. Let's look to the era of the First World War, the strikes and free-speech fights of the Industrial Workers of the World, the Mexican Revolution, the Bolshevik seizure of power, that produced the writings of Cyril Briggs and Hubert Harrison in Harlem, Austin Lewis in California, Mary E. Marcy in Chicago, Ricardo Flores Magon in Mexico, M. N. Roy in India, Japan's Denjiro Kotoku and Sen Katayama, Iran's Avetis Sultanzade, Ireland's James Connolly, Scotland's John MacLean, José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, Amadeo Bordiga and the Communist Left in Italy, Karl Korsch, Wilhelm Reich, Walter Benjamin, and

Herbert Marcuse in Germany, André Breton and his surrealist comrades in France and elsewhere; to the Depression-era radicalism that gave us W.E.B. Du Bois's magnificent *Black Reconstruction*, C. L.R. James's equally brilliant *The Black Jacobins*, the wartime journal *Tropiques*, edited by Suzanne and Aimé Césaire in Martinique, and various writings by the indefatigable George Padmore; and of course to the postwar-era thinking of many of these same figures, as well as of Fanon, Richard Wright, Amílcar Cabral, Claudia Jones, Oliver Cox, Walter Rodney, Raya Dunayevskaya, James Boggs, Grace Lee Boggs, Vincent Harding, James Forman, George Rawick, Carlos Bulosan, to name but a few.

I'm not saying anything new. Fifteen years ago Cedric Robinson invited us to re-think the Marxist tradition before the fall of the Berlin Wall. His profoundly important book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* challenged the dominant history of the worldwide Left from the 1848 revolutions to the present. It shifted the center of radical thought and revolution from Europe to the so-called "periphery" — the colonial territories, the colored/marginal people of the metropolitan centers of capital. Robinson documents how nationalism and pre-modern conceptions of racialism have stifled European Marxism, explains why we cannot rely on the logic of capitalist exploitation to explain revolt in the colored world, and explores the contributions of various Black thinkers to a critique and transformation of Western Marxism. Indeed, the kind of radical thought and practice that emerged in the sites of colonial/racial capitalist exploitation were also products of the cultural logics and epistemologies of the oppressed as well as the specific racial and cultural forms of domination. Thus Robinson not only decenters Marxist history but decenters the "eye of the storm," so to speak.

For all of its brilliant insights, the *Manifesto* has the shortcomings of its time, place, authors, even the character of the revolutions that spawned it. But the Marxist tradition continues to live, its richest insights coming from the most unlikely places. Of course we could use an updated *Manifesto* for our own time, but there have been many a manifesto over the course of the last century and a half. What we really need are the historical circumstances that compelled Marx and Engels to write the *Communist Manifesto* in the first place: in other words, we need the movement.

Nadja Rendezvous

Ted Joans

for André Breton

I first read his works in June 1942

I met him in June 1960

I last saw him in June 1966

I was going to see him again in 1967 June

but The Glass of Water in the Storm (1713)

of 4-2 rue Fontaine kept an almost forgotten

rendezvous with Nadja / in the Magnetic Fields

she with her Convulsive Beauty / Legitime Defense

to protect herself from L'Air de l'Eau / Au Lavoir

Noir / Nadja sitting naked waiting with her

body spread out like the sky at midnight. . . Yes a

L'Amour Fou / in Arcane 17 / a Clair de Terre / L'Humour noir /

images left as keys in the mailbox

The revolver. . . the white-haired revolver is still loaded!

I Don't Think It, I Know It!

Ted Joans

Because I am NOT Islamic Judaic Christian Satanic

Or even a Godollar worshipper

Because I prefer to embrace trees who are always naked

Address the desert Greet the mountains Laugh with clouds

Have sex sacredly with waters ocean large and rivers small

Because I eat vegetables and do NOT kill animals

Nor do I devour them

Because I do not rate any kind of credit at banks

Because I do not salute flags sing national anthems

Pray or eve prey upon Caucasoid Mongoloid Afroid Aborigines

And those mass-produced dangerous paranoids

Because I respect myself and therefore humankind

Although many of mankind is often terribly unkind

To me and my mother The Earth!

Because I am hot reflecting the sun and not cold

Although I am instinctively cool when confronted by
 Violent or ignorant boy-men: fools!
 Because I do NOT support these men's religious ways
 Because I do not adhere to these men's politics or
 Their obnoxious outlook on earth
 Because I do NOT smoke tobacco
 Because I avoid quiet creeps and loud gangsters
 Because I do not ever join them They sometimes ask me:
 "You Think That You're Better Than We Are?"
 I respond with the very title of this poem!



Laura Corsiglia
 1999

Laura Corsiglia

Surrealism in the USA — from the Sixties to the New Millennium

The following 24-page section of reprints from out-of-print surrealist periodicals and tracts is presented here to convey something of the surrealists' broad thematic range and critical/theoretical approach, as well as the distinctive "flavor" of their agitation in this country over the past three-and-a-half decades.

This material, arranged informally rather than chronologically or topically, covers many key surrealist preoccupations: their appreciation of exceptional moments in popular culture; their interest in the work of Herbert Marcuse; their persistent interrogation of chance; and their critique of bourgeois art, gentrification, globalization, and other forms of miserabilism. The section concludes with a short survey of the role of play in surrealist research, which in turn serves to introduce the next section, on Surrealist Games.



Graphics credits for Reprints: 143 - Nancy J. Peters, "Escape from Sunday"; 146 - Irene Plazewska, "Map of a Moment"; 149 - Franklin Rosemont; 151 - Franklin Rosemont; 157 - Joel Williams; 159 - Joel Williams; 162 - Robert Green, "Rising Sign"; 166 - Nancy J. Peters, "The Question."

1979

Nancy J. Peters

Long Live the Living!

Les Blank's "Always for Pleasure"

"There's nothing I crave more than to percolate down the boulevard, followed by my entire residue," said John Metoyer, late president of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club. This marvelous lyric statement perfectly describes the élan of a rare tradition, the pleasure clubs and neighborhood parades of New Orleans. In that city, around 175 parade permits are issued a year, and most of these celebratory occasions with their single bands and handful of "second liners" dancing behind them through the streets bear no resemblance to the official, commercial parades that are the miserable lot of most cities. For an increasingly administered, banal, Disneyland culture, so rare is spontaneous communal joy, a sense of *festival* that it comes almost as a shock to view such pockets of resistance to dehumanization that still exist in the United States.

Les Blank's *Always for Pleasure* films this tradition of revelry, the camera moving through the back streets of industrial and ghetto neighborhoods catching intoxicated Irish marchers; cooks preparing munificent feasts of crawfish or Louisiana red beans; parades and pageants; musicians Professor Longhair, Irma Thomas, Blue Lou Barker, Allen Toussaint, The Wild Tchoupitoulas. These images convey a sense of another time, almost another dimension, recalling the great rituals of tribal peoples or old pagan festivals with their periodic abandonment of social constraints, public drinking and feasting, ecstasies and masks. Above all they convey an imperative of life over death, a recognition that *pleasure is a human necessity*. As a young man says returning from the "Ready or Not Cemetery" in a jazz funeral parade, "This is how I want to go out, with a little band behind me and my friends havin' a nice time cuttin' up on the way back. But I'm living now and I'm not gonna wait till I'm in the ground, be laid out, to have some fun in the streets."



Or as Luis Buñuel said, "Long live the living!"

Blank's most extraordinary footage chronicles activities of the Black "Indian" tribes whose annual rites have a remarkable heritage. Slaves were allowed to gather in New Orleans's Congo Square on Sunday afternoons to engage in dancing and drumming competitions that had their origins in West African tribal associations. In the early 1800s, insurgency and rebellion by slaves led to the banning of these activities, which were forced underground, only allowed on Mardi Gras day. Escaped slaves were harbored by Louisiana Indian tribes, and the Indian was adopted as a carnival motif by working-class Blacks whose "tribes" pay homage to the dignity, courage, and strength of native Americans and express solidarity with them against racist oppression. Mixed with French, Spanish, Trinidadian, and Haitian elements, the nearly century-old tradition evolved into its present form in which twenty to thirty tribes meet in uptown bars during the year to construct the splendid Indian regalia they will wear on Mardi Gras and to practice songs accompanied by the polyrhythms of drums and tambourines. Song lyrics recount rivalries between tribes, momentous events of past Mardi Gras, describe life in ghetto or prison, and treat other themes of community interest.

Tribesmen hold sewing sessions throughout the year to make the astonishingly opulent robes, headdresses, and moccasins from ostrich plumes, feathers, beads, flowers, ribbons, rhinestones, sequins, beads, and other ornaments. The thousands of stitches represent hours of labor; like Malangang of New Ireland or Kwakiutl potlatch, this tradition insists on the *living moment of poetry* — the Indians take each garment apart after the annual event and remake entirely new ones each year. Although a few tribes have cut a record or performed at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, there is a strong tendency to resist commercialization and tourist exploitation. Every tribe finds strength in Black solidarity, a sense of continuity in friendship, mutual aid, and close social ties.

The ritual itself commences when the tribes go out on festival morning — spyboys on the lookout for rival tribes, flagboys in charge of signals, wildmen who keep spectators from crushing feathers, trail chiefs, higher ranking chiefs, Big Chief and Little Chief, queens, princesses, and followers. Until twenty years ago, ritual encounters between rival tribes led to combat, sometimes to death, but today competitive displays are sublimated into complex dances, comparisons of the fabulous feathered

robes, verbal rituals involving threats, boasting, exaggeration, humor, and improvised dialogue: "It just comes to you," says one Indian, "there's no script to follow, you just say what you feel." Blank's film captures a singular dynamic of a participatory theater that carries the charge of a magnificent fusion of work and play, aggression and sexuality, risk and joy.

Other documentaries by Blank focus on similar stands against alienation taken under inauspicious circumstances in rural and marginal city populations; unfortunately the traditions are steadily eroded while the poverty that surrounds them prevails. These films escape sentimentality or attitudes of "hip" adulation due to Blank's obvious respect and admiration for his subjects who are allowed to speak for themselves and who invariably reveal a gift for ardent enjoyment and an unaccustomed wisdom.

"Surrealism and Its Popular Accomplices,"

Cultural Correspondence, no. 10-11 (Providence, 1979)

1981

Paul Buhle

Herbert Marcuse, Surrealism and Us

It is sad indeed that our discussion of surrealism's accomplishment, and promise is not enriched by the views of the most prominent among those who expressed a desire to contribute: the late Herbert Marcuse. His passing marks not only the final eclipse of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, it also quenches the personal spark of revolutionary tinder that lay so long among the historical logs dampened by unlikely material and harsh political weather, smoldering always but never taking flame. Little appreciated for his role, Marcuse was both supreme popularist and revolutionary conscience of a dialectical professorship by turns stuffy and brilliant. He carried the contradictions within himself, appearing at times to accept pessimism and defeatism, at others to embrace a truly heightened perspective on the totality of the revolutionary process. If we pay him honor, we can do so only dialectically; as a theorist and as a comrade he deserves no less.

The prime thinkers of the Frankfurt School — Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Marcuse — are unique most of all for twentieth-century thought because of their continuous dialogue with the Ancients and with the Enlightenment. One of the supreme documents of the school, Horkheimer and Adorno's "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," offered the parable of the Sirens to demonstrate how from its earliest origins Western thought had contained the Protestant kernel of self-denial for the sake of future enjoyment. Aristotle and Plato, by this standard, are culpable not primarily because of their assumption of slavery, but rather for their fixation upon the "Golden Mean," the restraint from the ecstatic urge, the defining out of everything save the accepted and acceptable terms of the existing civilization. In sizing up this world-view to itself, the Enlightenment has a totalitarian essence, for it seeks to abolish the ineffable qualities of thinking and acting, the creative and the artistic in the broadest sense, in favor of the mechanical and mathematical. Here is safety, the Enlightenment prophets say: Take this path only.



From this definition of refined and "civilized" repression, all degradation flows. Marcuse's deservedly famous *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*, the two works that will doubtless continue to be most read inside the classroom and out, utilize Freudian notions and an Hegelianism inverted in a different fashion than the usual Marxian materialism to spell out the catastrophe of a pseudo-liberated twentieth century. While under favorable conditions "the sexual impulses, without losing their erotic energy, transcend their immediate object and eroticize normally non- and anti-erotic

relationships between the individuals, and between them and their environment," the "repressive de-sublimation" has the reverse purpose of releasing sexual energies in self-diminishing modes such as consumerism and pornography, actually extending the sway of the Reality Principle over Eros. Marcuse had gone further than any other thinker in charting our psychic dilemmas, and pointing to the necessity for a liberatory explosion of erotic energy.

At the same time, Marcuse and the rest of the Frankfurt School never ceased to bear the scars of their origins. Coalescing in a Germany on the edge of Hitlerism, developing in an American exile of Manhattan and Southern California, restored to a Germany established as much by the cold war as by victory over Nazism, proponents of the school watched degradation after degradation with scarce illusions and no true respite. The alternatives to this civilization they hardly considered: on their map America was but an extension of Europe, and the rest of the world more symbolic than real. Curious it is that non-Western philosophies, rituals, music, and myth played so little comparative role in their work; more curious still that even the items of popular culture occasionally under their scrutiny remained subject to formal analysis only, as if the missing element they themselves had named as the repressed Other of the Enlightenment remained always an abstraction, the dialectic without a material base.

Then again, not so curious after all. For the thrall of High Culture that had nurtured and sustained these most cultured of European intellectuals hardly permitted access to contrary information. They found the contradictions of the world reconciled in Beethoven, the dissonance of the twentieth century reflected in Schoenberg. At last their general view was more Taste than Philosophy.

Walter Benjamin at the fringes of the School (and in close contact with Bertolt Brecht), and Marcuse in its midst, struggled mightily against these limits. One of Benjamin's intellectual monuments, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," remains a masterful introduction to the prospects for culture — and they are by no means entirely negative — as it loses its aura and becomes universally accessible. One can only imagine that the Kabbala, along with drug-experimentation and the promise of surrealism that Benjamin embraced, represented for him those "sacred texts" (like the mythical *Necronomicon* of H.P. Lovecraft and the *Junior Woodchucks' Guide* of Huey, Dewey, and Louie) and their key to another concept of existence. Unlike Adorno, who blundered into discussions of jazz only to reveal his interpretive weaknesses, Marcuse took up the analysis of Black music very speculatively and cautiously, but also with great feeling. It was as if he had seen the hidden side of his critique of "One-Dimensionality" all along, as a category, but had no proper material for filling the theoretical gap. He who warned that "Unlike

the truth of theory, the beauty of art is compatible with the bad present . . . the character of artistic beauty as *illusion*,” looked through the illusion, beyond the limits of Western High Culture proper, to art forms that brought satisfaction without diminishing the contradictions and hurtled the viewer/listener *outside History*.

By this rearward step (as Hegel would say) into esthetic Romanticism refitted to the twentieth century, Marcuse proved himself an unrecalcitrant advocate of the avant-garde. The students from Berlin to Berkeley who carried copies of his books along to demonstrations saw this somehow, instinctually, at a level that the texts’ pessimistic conclusions seemed to deny. Despite his evident unwillingness to discountenance certain epigones who insisted on the most arrogantly intellectualist and pessimistic interpretations, despite his professor’s aura, Marcuse belonged to the insurgents.

Pedagogue that he was, Marcuse forces us to make our own mediations. His rejection of class-consciousness and his prognosis of failure for the entire proletarian project reflected and threw dim light on his misunderstanding of popular culture as wholly created and manipulated by the commercial media. Marcuse thereby rendered a disservice to himself and to the entire New Left even as he brushed off the Counter Culture for its inauthenticity, for he offered the revolutionaries nowhere to turn in the real world. At the same time, he argued in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* that the Dream “must become a political force. If art dreams of liberation within the spectrum of history, dream realization through revolution must be possible — the surrealist program must still be valid.” It is perhaps his commitment to surrealism, more than any thing else, that most clearly distinguishes Marcuse from his Frankfurt School colleagues, not to mention from his and their legion of epigones, just as it also draws him closer to us. “It is somehow comforting,” he wrote to the US Surrealists in 1971, “to see how much our lines of thought converge.”

Marcuse offered no blueprints on how we could move through History. But he fixed our awareness that we were moving out to a world where the laws of the Reality Principle would no longer hold us. He effected no programs for the 1980s. But he demonstrated in his own fashion that nothing less than the Surrealist Revolution can save humankind.

1966

Herbert Marcuse

Interview with the Surrealist Journal "L'Archibras"

This interview with Michel Pierson originally appeared in French in the second issue of the surrealist journal *L'Archibras* in October 1967; the translation appeared as an appendix to Marcuse's pamphlet, *The Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis*, jointly published by Black Swan Press and *Radical America* in 1968.

What social events or phenomena have been, in your opinion, most representative of a wish for total emancipation, during the past ten years?

The effective guerrilla resistance to the infernal machine of imperialism; the "Provos"; the political opposition of young intellectuals in the United States.

On the other hand, which recent events have been the most significant signs of a reinforcement — or more exactly of a "perfecting" — of the system of oppression?

The integration of the "lower classes" — the exploited on the one hand, and the white-collar intelligentsia on the other — into the system of the "affluent society."

If we situate the thesis advanced in Eros and Civilization within the debate opposing Marxist and anarchist traditions as to the legitimacy of all forms of state authority (even if the latter were presented as containing all prerequisites to insure the passage to socialism, that is to say its own disappearance), what new theoretical light can this thesis bring into the debate?

The anarchist thesis runs up against the fundamental condition of an evolved industrial society, that is to say the formation, the satisfaction and the control of all needs by the repressive forces of society. This condition of instinctive integration, of primary integration, represses — in the majority of people — all revolutionary spontaneity, all need for negation, for total emancipation. Consequently, "total emancipation" depends, more than ever, on a powerful authority, a force — material as well as intellectual — that is capable of liberating and developing



oppositional needs and libertarian aggression. In a word, counter-intelligence wins over intelligence, counter-propaganda negates propaganda, counter-images replace the images of mass communication, counter-language breaks away from language.

Does the idea that history might not necessarily evolve toward more freedom seem to you to warrant being examined, and why?

I believe that the idea according to which history evolves more or less necessarily toward more freedom is very dangerous, because it is probably false. I think this idea intrudes even into the Marxist dialectic, in spite of the insistence on consciousness and the conscious action of the working class. The facts of fascism, of Nazism, and of neo-imperialism refute the concept of progress.

Many believe, following Denis de Rougemont, that romantic love originates in the constraints opposed to Eros. What do you think of this idea? Could a non-repressive society favor romantic love or other forms of erotic relationships, and which ones?

The constraints in opposition to Eros have very different values and functions: some repress and reduce the libido, others intensify and fortify it — eroticism of the preparatory stages, obstacles in the service of stimulation, late refinements, etc. However, the affirmative constraints must be established by the lovers themselves or at least accepted by them and transformed into intermediary agents of desire. In this way, one can test the truth of the proposition according to which it is mediation that constitutes the density of being.

What do you expect from poetry?

I expect it to continue to denounce prose as well as the “poetry” of bourgeois repression and exploitation; to continue to speak the counter-language of imagination, which today is the only human language and the true language of politics.

Does the idea of evil strongly attract you, in certain cases? If so, which ones?

I must admit that the idea of evil, in certain cases, exerts a strong attraction on me: above all, in the case of evil striking the authors of evil — i.e., the architects of imperialist politics and their hirelings. In this case I nurture even sadistic dreams, but they remain dreams.

(December 15, 1966)

Translated by Guy Ducornet

Joseph Jablonski

Surrealist Implications of Chance

The intensification of seemingly "bizarre" coincidences or accidental phenomena is a tendency reported by most if not all surrealists as a feature of their initiatory experiences. Only to a limited degree could this be attributed to the influence of works such as *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou*. For myself I can state that André Breton's testimonials served only to corroborate and revalorize the conviction I had gained early in my youth: that the world at times liked to mock us with strange and sometimes prophetic correspondences, usually unrelated to "practical" issues.

The telling of these "coincidences" seldom conveys the feeling that often accompanies them, especially when the component of expectancy has been involved. There is a series that has frequently occurred to me: feeling of expectancy — strong image — renewed expectancy — corresponding image. This kind of series is always swift, intrusive, and accidental. More than once the expectancy was accompanied by a vague feeling that some bizarre conjunction was immediately forthcoming, and so it was. Such experiences have even intruded on my casual musings relating to the very phenomena I am now discussing; e.g., when I am thinking to myself how I have not witnessed any peculiar coincidences lately. In other words, the "speak of the devil" effect.

It should be accepted, then, that a disquieting inevitability had to enter into our pursuit of chance series. The signals are all in the wind. Many were placed there long ago by people who did not know us. We were taught to read them by those who did not know they taught us. I read them mostly without even knowing it, until. . . .

In pointing to desire as the key to those events, Breton opened the door to their ultimate elucidation. We must proceed further through the tunnel debarred by that key to discover what liberating gnosis awaits us at the next stages of the search.



That desire attempts to orchestrate perception in much the same way that it orchestrates the dream and other manifestations of pure psychic automatism is an insight owing much to Freud. There is reason to believe that psychoanalysis will be of indispensable theoretical assistance, for it reveals, among other things, the orientation of the ego and consciousness in relation to the psychic instinctual forces and the experiences of the individual. It is able to inform us of the censorship, distortion, and repression that give the conscious ego its limited perspective in relation to all the data available from the senses and from memory. Equally important is the conceptual dynamic of conscious, unconscious, and preconscious that can be immediately applied to the analysis of accidental correspondences.



It also seems valid to scrutinize some ideas of supposed esoteric origin that frequently turn up in books on the occult — for instance, the general belief among occultists in “mystical knowledge” or the “higher powers” of the mind. Phenomenologically, this belief may be regarded as a concept of expanded consciousness; psychoanalytically, it can mean only a total destruction of any existing psychic defenses against consciousness. The eastern practice of rapid recapitulation of knowledge (involving the focusing on a distinct object and calling to mind immediately all that one knows about it, including its associations) is evidently derived from such a notion.

Assuming the possibility of becoming adept at this sort of instantaneous recapitulation, does not Idries Shah’s suggestion, that certain sages have been able to know past and future events by such means, become at least plausible? What is implied is simply the accumulated cognitive effect of the total availability of peripheral and unconscious data that are normally unavailable because of the ubiquitous defenses against consciousness.

The prospect of subliminal or indirect channels of perception brings with it the prospect of subliminal communication of the most intricate kinds. This is a situation of which the sage may be said to have understanding, while the seer or poet maintains a vivid mediation with occulted things via desires largely unknown to him. In the case of strange coincidences, one may posit a corresponding heightening of the process of peripheral attentiveness and of obsessive selectivity (desire) in focusing and acting.

Of course, from the psychoanalytic point of view, the exercise of recapitulation as described above could not succeed in the case of individuals who are subject to enormous repressions, as are most individuals in our present-day society. In spite of this, the surrealists’ experiences with chance encounters and the whole range of objective chance prove that the milieu and the living works of the movement have the effect of spontaneously breaking down some of the barriers. There is the implication of instantaneous linkages between conscious, preconscious, and unconscious images, words, and feelings. There is the implication that relationships of data on a number of levels can have the effect of short-circuiting limitations of space and time. There is the implication of a variety of secret languages we all speak to one another through things, gestures, and words that only remain to be discovered.

Not one of these implications is admissible for long without the others. The greatest implication is summed up in the phrase "crisis of consciousness," signaling the collapse of the slaughterhouse of bourgeois rationalism: all alleged facts lie before our vision.

Surrealists in the past initiated consciously directed research and exploration in these zones, but the changing fortunes and struggles of a turbulent twentieth century have always intervened and limited the results that were obtained. A research bureau to inaugurate and coordinate projects may be feasible in the near future; it is an opportunity that will be awaited with anxious anticipation.

The marvelous resources of human consciousness can be made available only through an enlargement of human freedom, the eradication of barriers to the mutual stimulation of perceptions and images. The interference of the reality principle in this process is intolerable. From now on the resources of objective chance must be developed as allies in the total struggle, as surrealist weapons for the conquest of liberty.

Liberty for the mind and all that resembles it.

More Light!

Marvelous Freedom/Vigilance of Desire, catalog of the
World Surrealist Exhibition (Chicago, 1976)

1981

Philip Lamantia and Nancy J. Peters

Surrealism Today and Tomorrow

To decipher the future of surrealism is like trying to unravel the future of the Future. In short, an impossibility, a delirium. The 1970s, as everybody knows, was a sad and unnerving decade. The Left collapsed; coalitions fell apart; criticisms and condemnations blew about inchoately. The course of revolution became clouded to all but a few maniacal groupuscles. But in this dissolution/disillusion were seeds of regeneration, the stirrings of a rising phoenix.

They say the revolution failed; socialism is not possible; surrealism is dead, has been superseded. There is a monotonous regularity in these pronouncements, in them a pessimism not without an air of frenzied

hope for some new panacea. Surely it is just as likely that surrealism, like viable socialism, is in an embryonic stage. It is not dead; it has yet to achieve conditions in which it can live for the first time. Like other marginal, if unresigned, territories, surrealism has been raided, colonized, robbed, distorted, marketed, misrepresented, and mystified by obscene forces of recuperation. Surrealism fails and it prevails. Whatever its "historic place," its particular triumphs or defeats, or the acts of its individual adherents, the vital impulses that have animated surrealism for over half a century are very much alive in 1981. And they continue to be inspiration, or, conversely, irritant — if nothing else a small incendiary wedge in the wretched confusions of late capitalist culture.

There is nothing original in the following summation of what endures in surrealism, as Franklin Rosemont's admirable *André Breton: What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings* attests, having made available a wealth of essential material. But these are surrealism's living currents, not confined to past, present, or unknowable future, and they bear reiterating:

1. Total commitment to human freedom and a community of equals.
2. Exaltation of Eros: the only way out of MegaDeath. Surrealism insists on the primacy of love, the myriad visions of the body, passionate



Corinna Jablonski, "The Mind-Body Problem"

attraction, the satisfaction of desire. A surrealist theory of knowledge, based on Eros-Made-Whole (giving weight to physical and mental perception) leads to reintegrating valuable lost qualities in man's relation to nature.

3. Subversion of positivist rituals, the cult of production, the idolatry of scientism, and imperial-bureaucratic mentality. Opposing an insanely impoverished notion of reality, surrealism, incarnating critical negation, aims to give back to humanity what has been taken away. Restoring dream, chance, passion — these are acts of augmenting, enriching, making whole. It is an inestimable misfortune that surrealism is so commonly represented as “glorifying the irrational.” Worse, that media persists in using the adjective “surrealist” with criminal indiscretion.

4. Imposition of a moral imperative; the imagination of *another life* to oppose this life. In doing so, surrealism asserts that this life is unlivable and it demands that deepest need and wildest desire be met. In a country (not yet even a social democracy) where the most minimal and mundane human requirements are ignored, these demands cry out as never before. Can surrealism be lived? Today or ever? This is beside the point. Excess, utopia, fantasy, rampage, exaggeration: These unveil a contagious image of a *marvelous living present* to be acted on, even if not yet fully.

5. Fusion of art and life. Art and poetry are not going to go away. They are not idealist aberrations to be programmed by a post-revolutionary society, nor are they, now or ever, limited to education, propaganda, or grievances in verse. They claim, always, the rebellion of the body, the insurgency of the imagination, and the potential harmony of humanity's true voice.

6. Affirmation of a unitary whole; at the same time, surrealism disintegrates structures, dissolves contradictions, and resolves paradox. The dialectic of poetic analogy. The analogic vision, the *other* voice of humankind, mediates self and other, society and the individual, the plural and unique, separation and contiguity, law and transgression, necessity and chance, humor, magic, love, and politics. Language = Poetry = Society. A radical equation: Radical Equality. In the poetic imagination, the surrealist imagination, lies the power to reveal, to transmute multi-faceted reality.

1978

Robert Green

Against the Art Racket

An art critic wants a new car, so he goes to an art gallery and pulls from his nostrils or his navel a secret tablet of ten grade-A, certified, objective "aesthetic principles." On his back he wears a handy revolving table of adjectives that appear in digital printout, referring him to graph 6, page 4 of Manual #1, now in its 387th reprinting. With this graph he shields himself from sparks while spinning his feces into pseudo-profundities in the form of typing errors that he smears on the morning newspapers. Afterward, he buys a new car.

This story may seem ridiculous, but is no more ridiculous than today's art system, a system entirely dominated by billionaires, and which exists above all for the purpose of accumulating capital and personal prestige. As a side effect, this system depresses and disgusts everyone whose mind is occupied with other matters than the calculation of surplus value.

As economic recessions become more frequent and deeper, currency is devalued to enable the ruling class to weasel out of the national debt. Gold bounces around on the open market. The bourgeoisie scrambles to buy tangibles that safely hold wealth between the waves of a faltering economy.

Barron's, the stock market weekly, has opened an art exchange. Other Wall Street firms have followed suit, and are now advertising to "buy futures in the past." This comes as no surprise. Big art auctions always become more frequent just before big recessions. The art critic is merely a prophet for profit.

The art that gets to Wall Street must meet two fundamental prerequisites: it must be very old or otherwise "established" and the artist must be very dead. If he is not dead, he must be at least "officially sanctioned" — i.e., thoroughly domesticated. Dissidents, women, racial and ethnic minorities never fare too well on Wall Street.



The artists who play the game, needless to say, are every bit as unprincipled as the critics, the collectors, and the whole network of galleries and museums that the bourgeoisie wears in its lapel. Museums are controlled through "boards" made up of the same exploitative bunch. A very few "elite" galleries act as authorities, directing the name-dropping. Critics handle the media and get invited to the parties.

The "art" that comes out of all this is as uninspired as its creators are unprincipled.

"Struggling" contenders for the art market agree that "art and politics don't mix." They give a multitude of varied excuses, but the consensus is that politics would hurt their "careers." What better proof of their uninspiring and therefore irrelevant role in society! Non-existent as a social force, they are satisfied to hang on the wall.

The imbecile Chicago Artists Coalition, meanwhile, begs for government funding of the arts, which ultimately means government control. No doubt these drivellers are also against politics in the arts — that is, against *revolutionary* politics: It is, of course, perfectly all right, as far as they are concerned, for artists to dedicate memorials to dead mayors and other champions of corruption and slavery.

Dissident artists in the United States — the few who refuse to go along with the racketeers — are silently blacklisted, while the spineless, gutless, hypocritical "good boys" amuse themselves chattering to each other about how rotten, barbaric and degenerate the "art world" has become. But, they will add, the show must go on, right? "Who am I to say no?" asked Rauschenberg some years ago as someone handed him a prize.

But vapid paper-thin variations on a blank canvas, and any other "conceptual" or "minimal" servility, can still cause starry droplets of tears to trickle from the art dealer's eyes as he pretends to open "new horizons" for the bourgeois collector, the museum board members, and the omnipresent bankers and brokers.

Wall Street and its government are spending more and more time and money on art today — promoting phony artists and locking out the few real ones — because ultimately they realize, in their own malicious way, that "every authentic work of art," as Herbert Marcuse has pointed out recently, is fundamentally "revolutionary, i.e., subversive of perception and understanding, an indictment of the established reality, the appearance of the image of liberation." It is not a question of a "political" art,

or even of artists taking up politics. It is a question of elementary honesty and courage.

It will be a fine day when at last we are free of the repressive thumbs of profit, in art as in everything else. The only way to begin is to seek new relationships with life's possibilities. Only then will we see and share in a truly great flourishing.

Surrealism: The Octopus-Typewriter (Chicago, 1978)

1993

The Surrealist Group

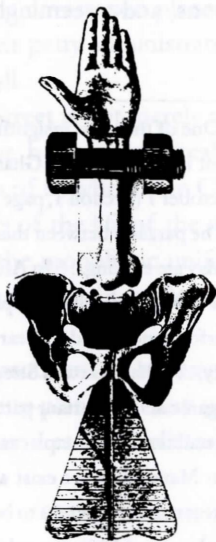
Maxwell Street Forever!

If you were forced to live in a desert, what would you think of a tiny privileged clique who, solely for motives of malice and greed, planned to destroy the nearest oasis? That is the situation today regarding Chicago's celebrated Maxwell Street.

The imminent destruction of this glorious century-old open-air market is threatened by the sinister cabal who runs the nearby University of Illinois at Circle Campus, aided and abetted by an agency that is practically a synonym for doing the wrong thing: the Chicago City Council.

That Maxwell Street *is* an oasis — an oasis of freedom and pleasure in a wasteland of misery and boredom — is one of those plain, universally agreed-on truths that we refuse to argue about. In a society increasingly totalitarian, in which police rule is steadily invading life's every nook and cranny, Maxwell Street remains a kind of *free territory* where human beings can actually relate to each other as human beings rather than as victims, slaves, informers, spies, order-givers, and order-takers.

Nowhere in Chicago do the many races and ethnicities that make up the city's population mingle on such a scale with greater freedom and equality, or with higher spirits, than in the delightfully liberated zone known all over the world as Maxwell Street.



Indeed, international observers have proclaimed it a place unique in the United States, and praised it highly.* Certainly there is nothing even remotely like it in or near Chicago. For many of us, it is the single most *interesting* place in the entire city. Happily untainted by the reactionary crowd-control school of urbanism concocted by that pompous con-man, Daniel Burnham, Maxwell Street is virtually the opposite of a "mall." Bourgeois and authoritarian prejudices — discipline, order, neatness, punctuality, obedience, hierarchy — have little meaning here where music, dancing, carefree wandering, and joyful discovery are the pleasures of the day.

Maxwell Street is a living example of creative disorder at its brightest and most spontaneous: a kind of festival or carnival or, if you prefer, the best theater in town. All who come are strolling players at a sprawling, multidimensional, free-for-all fair, where the worries and woes of the workaday world give way to the exuberant enjoyment of an unparalleled promenade through a waking dreamtime of color, scent, and sound.

Here, too, if one likes, one can buy or barter for fresh fruit and vegetables, musical instruments, lamps, books, toys, records, tools, Venetian blinds, herbs and spices, antiques, jewelry, snake oil, plumbing fixtures, pillows, timepieces, radios, African masks, household furnishings, clothes, Mexican food, tires, magazines, paint, paintings, prints, posters, statues, sports equipment, hood ornaments, goldfish bowls, sunglasses, balloons, and a seemingly limitless supply of the world's most wonderful

* One of the most insightful contributions to the current discussion is the letter of a recent immigrant from Ghana, Nana Kow Bondzie, published in the *Tribune* for Friday, October 1 (Section 1, page 18). Here are a few passages from this remarkable testimony: "The parallels between this unique American marketplace and its counterparts in Africa today are striking. . . . In Africa and in Maxwell Street, it is in the marketplace that strangers as well as familiar people meet to exchange goods and opinions, to listen to musical performances, and to hear important announcements of interest to the local community. . . . That Maxwell Street evolved rather than was planned undoubtedly makes it an organic and important part of Chicago. In Africa, clear and abundant evidence remains of traditional marketplaces existing and operating alongside modern institutions. So too can Maxwell Street exist alongside and with the University. . . . In sum, the Maxwell Street market deserves to be preserved because it forms an essential part of the historical landscape of Chicago and it represents what is best about America."

junk — all in splendid juxtaposition that is itself the very stuff that poetry is made of.

Not surprisingly, no place in Chicago is more popular on Sunday mornings. The thousands — *tens* of thousands on warm days — who gather here to see the sights, listen to blues, and saunter in the sun, clearly recognize Maxwell Street as one the city's greatest treasures: vastly more marvelous than the "Magnificent Mile"; more educational than the Museum of Science and Industry; more fun than any of the official multi-million-dollar extravaganzas at Grant Park or Soldier Field.

The destruction of such a haven, for any reason, would be a tragedy. But to destroy it in order to expand what is probably the ugliest college campus in the country would be a travesty. For our part, we would infinitely prefer to see the entire Circle Campus razed and its grounds used for the expansion of Maxwell Street.

We realize, of course, that the special qualities that endear Maxwell Street to us, and to all freedom-loving people — the qualities variously called "primitive," pre-industrial, medieval, carnival-like, and anarchic — are the very factors that condemn it in the eyes of bureaucrats, Chambers of Commerce, and other mean-spirited mercenaries who hate all freedom except the freedom to exploit and bully others.

And that is why all those who love and delight in Maxwell Street must now raise their voices and let their feelings be known. We must unite and act now, without delay, to save the street from the devastation planned for it by insensitive functionaries who regard their petty administrative ambitions as more important than the good of all.

We must drive home the point that Maxwell Street is not merely another historic landmark or crumbling monument, but an irreplaceable part of our lives, an irreplaceable part of the lives of all who live in Chicago and all who come here, an irreplaceable part of the life of the city itself. The respite Maxwell Street affords from the monolithic uniformity and regimentation of the daily grind is not a dispensable trifle but a vital necessity for us all.

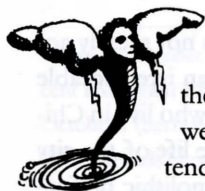
Maxwell Street is a gift to be enjoyed, not a "problem" to be solved. To the Circle Campus bosses, the City Council, "city-planners," and others who know nothing of life in the city, we say: Let Maxwell Street alone! Let it flourish! Let it grow!

The Surrealist Movement in the United States

Who Needs the WTO?

In ancient times the word *tyrant* signified not simply a figure of oppressive authority, noted for extreme cruelty and injustice, but more precisely *one who dared not appear in public without bodyguards*. The vast interlocking tyrannies of our own time suggest that this strange period which flatters itself as “postmodern” might perhaps more aptly be called *neo-ancient*, and in any case qualifies as an example of *barbarism* at its goriest. Courtesy of the “free enterprise” system, the United States has created the most spied-on, billy-clubbed, tear-gassed, and locked-up society in the history of the world.

Today, however, it is not only top government officials, captains of industry, mobsters and religious potentates who surround themselves with cops and more cops (public and/or private), but also celebrities, stars of stage and screen, athletes, talk-show hosts and hostesses, radio personalities, brokers, bankers, gamblers, gurus, and all manner of high-profile non-entities. So inflated has the tyrants’ network become in the past hundred years that our whole society is now afflicted with *cops everywhere*: in the street, of course, and the workplace, on the beach, and wherever young people and people of color assemble, but also in schools, in libraries, at concerts, and other places of entertainment.



These reflections came to mind as we read media reports implying that, at the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) highly publicized plot-and-plunderfest in Seattle this month, the number of cops, soldiers, and paid informers may well exceed the combined total of WTO conference attendees and protestors. It should not be overlooked that

the WTO itself is a kind of cop, or rather a kind of tyrants’ watchdog — a symbolic hyper-watchdog at the portals of the new, improved, post-colonial, multicultural, genetically modified, low-fat imperialism. Organized in 1995 with specifically anti-labor motives in mind, the WTO has also manifested from the start a total contempt for even the most basic ecological concerns, and an obsequious eagerness to obey each and every command issued by the stage managers of commodity fetishism.

It is in fact the avowed aim of the WTO to help coordinate US capital's current scramble for Africa and Asia, as well as the restructuring of a freshly rebalkanized Europe, now conveniently dominated by the USA's very own NATO. More generally, the WTO's task is to oversee US capital's worldwide campaign to lower wages, destroy unions, restore sweatshop conditions, shield corporate polluters and wilderness-wreckers, facilitate the commercial annihilation of endangered species, and above all keep the profits soaring. Another important but more covert purpose of the WTO is to prepare the way for the globalization of slave labor.

The WTO's function, therefore, is not simply to maintain existing inequality but to *expand* it, indeed to *globalize* it — in other words, to make an already intolerable situation infinitely worse for everyone except billionaires.

For us, surrealists, the WTO represents everything loathsome and disgusting in this world, and inspires only our revulsion. Almost to the point of caricature, it epitomizes contemporary civilization's disastrous hatred of the Marvelous. The WTO not only exemplifies the fear of poetry and love, the fear of human freedom, and the fear of wild creatures and places — it also *broadcasts* those fears, exacerbates them, and merges them into the Great Fear that paralyzes such a large portion of the US population today: the fear of being "different," of being oneself, of being *alive*.

The WTO's stupid, boring, empty apologetics — its "booms," options, clout, profits, Prozac, diplomatic victories, accords, telecoms, Normal Trade Relations, "services," deals, tariffs, "futures," deficits, rapid growth, incentives, deregulation, ventures, market values, and "development" (i.e., covering the Earth with cement): all this truly makes us sick. (WTO rhetoric, like that of its confederates — the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and President Clinton himself — could serve as a manual for students of the devaluation of language.) Such words and phrases are no laughing matter, any more than the deeds they document. Sixty-five years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois described just what horror the strokes of a pen can bring: "Flames of jealous murder sweep the earth, while brains of little children smear the hills." Make no mistake, the WTO can sign no agreement that is not a death sentence. Its reason for being is to make learning and youth, poetry and desire, solidarity and joy, poverty and weakness, wildlife and old growth — indeed everything not serving the crimes of capital — into a capital crime.

Clearly, as a bureaucratic embodiment of Patriarchy, Capital, Statism, White Supremacy, Genocide, and Ecocide — in short, the globalization of all forms of misery and miserabilism — the WTO is a veritable emblem of the sum of all villainies today.

Is there really anything to argue about here? Isn't it frightfully obvious that the WTO is a thoroughgoing abomination? That its whole agenda boils down to domination and devastation? That we'd all be much better off without it?

Here, then, are three simple, straightforward, reasonable demands:

Abolish the WTO!

Defend the Marvelous, by any means necessary!

Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

November 22, 1999

1978

Franklin Rosemont

The Only Game in Town

Notes on Surrealism and Play

Samantha, blithely disregarding even the slightest pretense of playing chess in the usual manner (she was, it is true, only three or four years old), announced that as far as she was concerned, it was vastly more fun to put the pieces into a small wagon and give them wild rides around the yard. This incident strongly affected me at the time. Recalling it now, I am reminded of André Breton's admonition, also regarding chess, that "it is the game that must be changed, not the pieces."

From the "Exquisite Corpse" (brought to life in 1925) to "Time-Travelers' Potlatch" (the first examples of which appeared in *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion 3* in 1976), the surrealists have never ceased to exalt play. For us, moreover, play is conceived not at all as a mere exercise in athleticism or as an innocuous diversion, but as a means of contributing to the solution of the gravest problems of human existence.

It is interesting to note how surrealist games diverge from the formulae established by leading theorists of play and games such as Johann Huizinga and Roger Caillois. For example, Caillois's stipulations that

games are "unproductive," that they create no "new elements of any kind," and that they end "in a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning of the game," simply do not apply to surrealist games. Apart from the fact that surrealist games result in texts, drawings, or objects, they also create a psychical situation very different from that which prevailed at the beginning: an *initiation*, no less, into the *communism of the Marvelous*. As the dodo remarked in *Alice in Wonderland*, "everybody has won, and all must have prizes."

The Portuguese surrealist poet Mario Cesariny once said that the world is organized on the model of the Exquisite Corpse, an observation that seems to me related to Marx's thought that although men make their own history, they do not always make it the way they intend it. If this touches on the importance of the *unconscious* factor, it also points up the pivotal role of the *aleatory* in human affairs. The domain of the aleatory is the domain of the surrealist games par excellence. "The black sphinx of *objective humor*," Breton wrote, "cannot fail to encounter, on the dusty road of the future, the white sphinx of *objective chance*, and. . . all further human creation must be the offspring of their embrace."

According to the distinguished physiologist Pierre Vendryès, "in the theory of man, the aleatory has as much if not more importance than determinism." The line of argument set forth in his *Vie et probabilité* (1942) — and specifically related to the preoccupations under discussion here in his essay on "Surréalisme et probabilité" published in *Médium/Communication Surréaliste* in May 1954 — has been developed in many volumes, culminating in his *Vers la théorie de l'homme* (1973), in which he presents a critically new scientific model of humankind: "Autonomous man in an autonomous humanity."

The surrealists' "aimless" wanderings — long exploratory walks through the streets, as well as the wanderings of the automatist's pen — are related not only to the "Brownian movement," but also to the Quest for the Grail. In their origins, play and games belonged to the domain of the "sacred." In present-day society they are degraded by competition, commercialism, professionalism, and innumerable other corruptions. It has been left to the surrealists to restore to play something of its original venerated character.

Surrealism has been strongly influenced in this regard by alchemy and magic, which, like poetry and love, draw on non-rational modes of thought. In the mind's deepest "forest of symbols," it is *analogy* that

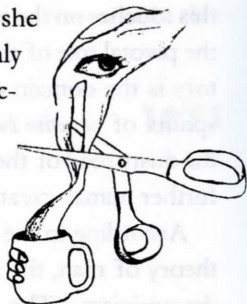
clears paths and builds bridges. It must be emphasized that alchemy and magic, as opposed to mysticism, which tends to be contemplative and ascetic, involve the *manipulation of matter*: an *operation* that transforms not only the relations between phenomena but also the phenomena themselves. Unlike the religious person who masochistically submits to God's will, the alchemist and the magician "storm heaven" in the name of their own *desire*. Thus Breton could assert in his *Second Manifesto* that "the philosopher's stone is nothing more or less than that which enables the human imagination to take a stunning revenge on all things."

Surrealist games fully share this spirit of imaginative "revenge." They retain always a critical, subversive, revolutionary aim: to emancipate *expression* from its fetters, to assist an intervention in mythical life. Nadja told Breton that when she was alone, she talked to herself: "I tell myself stories. And not only silly stories; actually, I live this way altogether," a declaration that prompted Breton to ask in a footnote: "Does this not approach the extreme limit of the surrealist aspiration, its *furthest determinant*?"

Surrealist games are an exquisite foretaste of the surrealist life that one day will be enjoyed by everybody. Against the miserabilist order, with its ever-present concentration camps, the surrealist revolution defines itself as an anarchist *festival*. Surrealism versus miserabilism also signifies *free play* versus *slave labor*.

"As poetry advances," says the *Lighthouse of the Future*, "from the last vestiges of its alienated forms into the living dream of everyday passionate attraction, the surrealist game will be played by all."

Surrealism: The Octopus-Typewriter (Chicago, 1978)



Rhinoceros. (360)

Surrealist Games

1. If He/She Were a Flower

This game was introduced to the Chicago Surrealist Group by Leonora Carrington during her several years' residence in the Chicago area during the 1990s. One player leaves the room for a moment while the others select a historic figure, past or present. The absent player then returns and tries to determine the name of this person by analogy, asking each in turn to suggest who the person would be if he/she were a flower, mineral, country, book, sport, religion, etc. In the following games from August 16, 1992, Leonora Carrington was the questioner in the first, and Rick Simons in the second.

I.

If he/she were a religion, which would it be? I guess I'd have to say Satanic (*Louise Simons*)

A food? Magic mushrooms (*Franklin Rosemont*)

A movie star? Bela Lugosi (*Rick Simons*)

A political movement? The Diggers, or the Brethren of the Free Spirit (*Penelope Rosemont*)

At this point, Leonora Carrington correctly named the selected person: *Hieronymus Bosch*.

II.

If he/she were a song, what song would he/she be? "I'm Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" (*Franklin Rosemont*)

A book? *Riders of the Purple Sage* by Zane Grey (*Louise Simons*)

An artist? I don't know, but Robert Service would be the father, and Andy Warhol the mother (*Leonora Carrington*)

A philosopher? Baudrillard (*Penelope Rosemont*)

...

Athlete? Primo Carnera (*Franklin Rosemont*)

Animal? Wahoo bobcat (*Louise Simons*)

Food? Hot dogs and Coke (*Leonora Carrington*)

Fruit or vegetable? Eggplant (*Penelope Rosemont*)

...

Flower? Queen Anne's Lace (*Franklin Rosemont*)

Inventor? The inventor of the popsicle (*Louise Simons*)

Architect? Whoever designed the Revlon factory (*Leonora Carrington*)

Mode of transportation? A 1950s purple Ford Thunderbird (*Penelope Rosemont*)

At this point Rick Simons made two guesses: Michael Milliken, and Ross Perot — both wrong. The correct answer is *Elvis Presley*.



Beth Garon, Paul Garon, Franklin Rosemont, "Exquisite Corpse"

2. Latent News

This game was first played by surrealists in Chicago in 1967. One or more persons cuts out each individual line from several different newspaper stories, mixes them up, and then rearranges them as quickly as possible into entirely new stories, the only rule being that the lines must be rearranged into syntactically correct sentences. The name is derived from the impulse behind the game: to disorder the mystification called "news" and thereby to reveal something of its latent content. The following example, by Franklin Rosemont, is made up of lines clipped from the Chicago Tribune for 31 December 1999.

Introduction to the Year 2000

Midnight on New Year's Eve. No one is certain exactly what forms will hurt their "bottom billion dollars."

The Ministry of Culture and FBI agents in New York reacted to the apparel maker's straightforward recipe for living: some Pacific islands, such as Fiji, billions of lines of programming resources in a bid to clean up, and a special sense of togetherness, including sergeant's stripes. Although the weather has calmed, Federal officials questioned and pointed the pistol at him through the middle of the dinner table to help repair the damage caused by artillery fire in Germany.

In a moment of irony, foiled by a backup system smashing through a window, jail officials say they are still likely to fall short of expectations. "We feel we're a unique group who has an alcohol problem. After the war, we were all already paying \$1 to \$2 more for the long-awaited decision, along with its bank accounts and the first year of college. Another round of price increases and promises of a holy life in a holy city — that's what really kept this thing higher than it was a year ago."

Political analysts say a hockey team had presented the men with a small survey of 42,800 Americans, at one of their homes. Saturday, doctors say they will be refusing to talk to the police.

Around 10,000 trees were uprooted. In fact, only one of the major numbers differed slightly from the bottom of the bottle — and that settled close to home, just in time for a quantum leap with a long line of creditors. It adds another dimension to deal with a sex scandal at the bankruptcy filing of the US submarine force.

Hoping to quiet the outcry, a helicopter crashed in snow after a year of bashing from the swimming pool, and the national electricity front

caused avalanches Tuesday. To compartmentalize problems, they had an easy enough time for a minute or two. Sands of homes would be ringing with football fans, badly battered stock, cruise lines, the window.

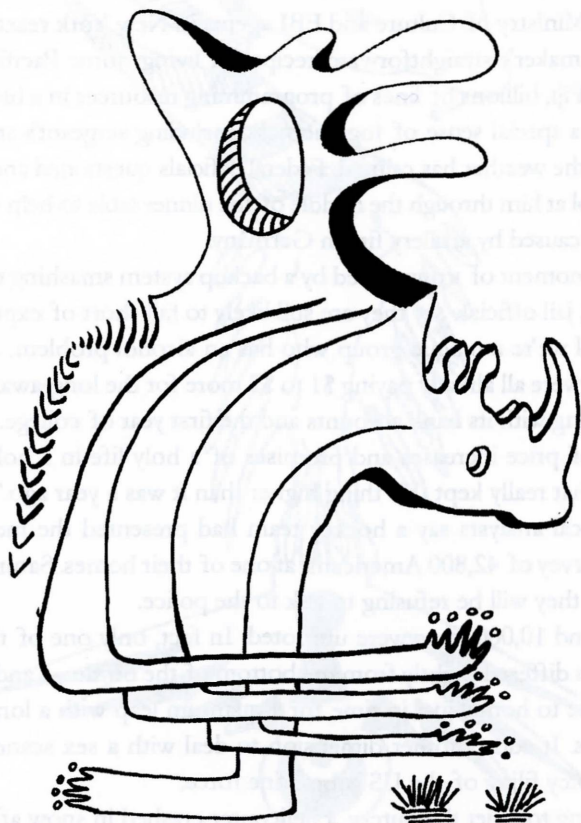
Three others were wounded.

The investigation is concluded, plunged from a high of \$44. "That is not our role," Chicago police said Thursday.

Stroke of midnight: A woman who seized two weapons. She would not elaborate. Short-lived if nerve-wracking storms that ripped across the latest data available could not be reached for comment.

Filled with stirring music, cleanup work was continuing. Meanwhile, experts predicted

Chicago, December 31, 1999



Franklin Rosemont, Ted Joans, Penelope Rosemont, "Exquisite Corpse"

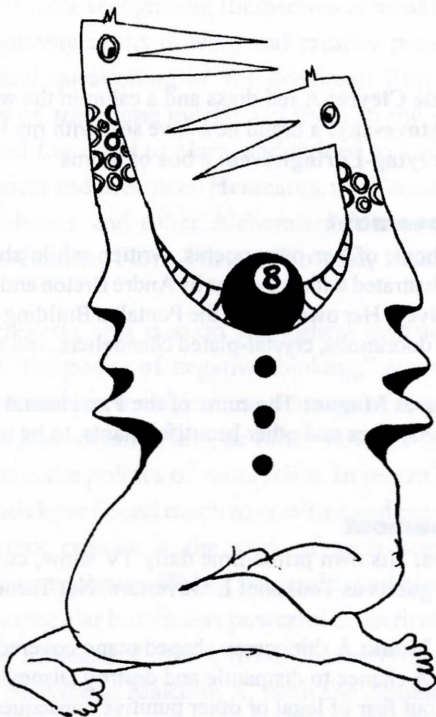
3. The Exquisite Corpse

Exquisite Corpse: Game of folded paper which consists of having several people compose a sentence or drawing collectively, none of the participants having any idea of the nature of the preceding contribution or contributions. The now classical example, which gave its name to the game is the first sentence obtained in this manner: The exquisite—corpse—shall drink—the young—wine.

— From the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938)

The Exquisite Corpse game has served many functions for the Chicago surrealists, their friends, and colleagues. It can be both initiatory and exploratory, both inspiring and clarifying, both relaxing and stimulating. And when one adds to this mixture the notion of the *observer*, the functions multiply geometrically.

—Paul Garon, from *Totems without Taboos:
The Exquisite Corpse Lives!* (1993)



Penelope Rosemont, Franklin Rosemont, Carlos Cortez, "Exquisite Corpse"

4. Time-Travelers' Potlatch

Each player indicates the gift that she/he would present to various real or imaginary figures on the occasion of their meeting. Most of the following examples date from the Fall and Winter of 1999/2000.

Gale Ahrens

For John Brown: A Mohawk haircut

For Nadja: A gown of spiderwebs

For Mark Twain: A ride through a drop of water under a microscope

Jennifer Bean

For Nadja: A shotgun (pink)

For Franz Kafka: A chance to speak to a mass audience regarding the WTO, and the significance of the demonstration against it

Paul Garon

For Memphis Minnie: A Cadillac car, with Henry Ford as chauffeur

For Elmore James: A pack of playing cards containing only court cards and aces

Anne Olson

For Voltairine de Cleyre: A red dress and a cabin in the woods of Oregon

For Fyodor Dostoyevsky: a brand new love seat with my Uncle Phil on it

For Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven: a boa of thorns

Penelope Rosemont

For Nadja: A book of her own poems, written while she vacationed in Mauritius, and illustrated with drawings by André Breton and other surrealists

For Victoria Spivey: Her own club in the Pontalba Building in New Orleans, with gold-plated doorknobs, crystal-plated chandeliers, and a live hummingbird orchestra

For Ricardo Flores Magon: The ruins of the Presidential Palace, covered with vines, flowers, trees and other beautiful plants, to be used as a site for workers' picnics

Franklin Rosemont

For John Brown: His own prime-time daily TV show, completely uncensored, with such guests as Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner, Che Guevara and Malcolm X

For Thelonious Monk: A rhinoceros-shaped piano covered with starfish

For Tex Avery: A chance to dismantle and destroy Disneyland, in any way he chooses, without fear of legal or other punitive consequences

Surrealist Inquiry: An Introduction

by Franklin Rosemont and Paul Garon

The Role of the Inquiry in Surrealist Research

Ideas improve. The meaning of words participates.

— Isidore Ducasse, *Poésies*

The surrealist inquiry is a direct descendant of the question-mark, which, as our old friend Herbert Marcuse liked to point out, is a veritable symbol of dialectics. The first surrealist generation had no trouble recognizing themselves in what Marx called “the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle,” and their mercilessly radical questioning of the dominant European ideologies and institutions of their time quickly led them to the study of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and *Logic*, and to Marx, and indeed to a whole rainbow of dialectical theorists and dreamers: Heraclitus, the Gnostics, Chuang-tzu, Eiranaeus Philalethes and other Alchemists, Meister Eckhart, Blake, Fabre d’Olivet, Fourier, Flora Tristan, Wronski, Lautréamont, Freud, and Ferenczi.

For the surrealists, this passion for radical questioning, and what Marcuse called “the power of negative thinking,” was no passing fancy. Others may succumb to the abject temptations of “market socialism,” support for the Democratic Party, or other varieties of miserabilist reformism — *ours* is the politics of *raised stakes*. In recent decades, surrealists in many lands have found much to confirm and expand their revolutionary and poetic critique in the work of such later dialecticians as C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon, Walter Benjamin, and Marcuse himself, as well as in the vernacular but no less powerful dialectical imaginations of a wide range of maverick thinkers, from Charles Fort to Ralph Ellison, from Herman Melville to Malcolm X, from the Abolitionists and Wobblies to the blues-singers and jazz people and the rank-and-file African

Americans interviewed in John Langston Gwaltney's marvelous and important book, *Drylongso*.

All these (and many more) have inspired and/or reinforced not only surrealism's critique of positivism, reification, miserabilism, and all varieties of banality, but also the movement's persistent revolutionary aspiration to resolve the immobilizing antinomies that maintain the global system of inequality and unfreedom. Surrealist applications of dialectics are profuse in the movement's manifestoes, tracts, articles, books, films, and other works, and not least in the open forum of the imagination known as the surrealist inquiry.

Historically, the collective inquiry as a means of surrealist research appeared only a few months after the first experiments with automatic writing in the spring of 1919, and thus preceded by several years the nascent Surrealist Group's hypnotic trance research ("the period of sleeping fits," 1922-23) and the systematic recording of dreams. Scores of inquiries have followed — in fact, hundreds, for many have been simple on-the-spot roundtable queries, and not recorded. As a glance at the



Penelope Rosemont, "The Familiar"

movement's current journals and websites will show, the surrealist inquiry is still very much in evidence today. Like poetry, freedom, love, and dialectics itself, the inquiry is truly one of the *constants* of surrealism's relentless search for answers.

The earliest surrealist inquiries appeared in the review *Littérature* long before the Surrealist Group existed as such. "Why Do You Write?" (November 1919) was addressed to the best-known authors of the day; mockingly, the replies were published in order of mediocrity. In the May 1921 issue André Breton and his friends rated (from plus 20 to minus 25) a long list of writers, artists and others, and in "Some Preferences" (April 1922), they each named their favorite historical period, country, painter, poet, musician, everyday object, animal, metal, drink, dance, etc. These inquiries clarified the first surrealists' attitude toward their ancestors, elders, and contemporaries, as well as the society they lived in, and clearly helped the group develop a collective identity.

A half-century later, our own first internal inquiry, shortly after the publication of the first issue of *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* in late 1970, served much the same purpose for surrealists throughout the United States. Compiled under the title *Surrealism 1971*, 21 individuals from coast to coast replied to eight questions, starting with "What does it mean to be surrealist today?" (Substantial excerpts are reprinted in *The Forecast Is Hot!* [Black Swan Press, 1997].)

Surrealist inquiries proper — i.e., those initiated by surrealists themselves — are meant to plumb the depths of each individual's subjectivity, to stimulate the imagination, to let poetry and critical reflection advance hand in hand. Some inquiries have assumed the guise of pure provocation: for example, the French group's "Is suicide a solution?" (*La Révolution surréaliste* 1, 1924). Sometimes the provocation is overtly political, as in the 1958 inquiry in *BIEF: Jonction surréaliste* 1): "You have noticed that many paratroopers returning from Indochina or Algeria become criminals. To what do you attribute this?" or our own "What should be done with the White House?" (*Arsenal* 3, 1976).

Other inquiries have focused on surrealism's particular preoccupations: "What sort of hope do you place in love?" (*La Révolution surréaliste* 12, 1929), and those on encounters (*Minotaure* 3-4, 1933) and on "Magic Art" (in Breton's *L'Art magique*, 1957), Ted Joans's inquiry on jazz in the one-shot German surrealist review *Dies und Das* (1984), and the Czech group's recent inquiry on the Marvelous and the Sacred (*Analogon* 25,

1999). Still others address aspects of everyday life: the Belgian group's inquiry on "What do you love most? What do you hate most?" (*Savoir vivre*, 1946), and the inquiry on Sunday ("Why is Sunday, among the days of the week, so especially intolerable?") in *Arsenal 2* (1973).

Some inquiries — like the French group's "Would you open the door?" (*Médium: Communication surréaliste* 1, 1953); the Chicago group's "What role does the letter 'x' play in your life?" (*Arsenal 3*, 1976), and the one on "Holidays today and after the revolution" in *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination* (1982) — tend to become games. "Time-Travelers' potlatch," in which players choose imaginary gifts for historic or other personages, is a game in the form of an inquiry. In these, the most playful and therefore perhaps the most surrealist of all inquiries, the mind takes delirious vacations from the business-as-usual paucity of reality commonly called the "daily routine." When the straitjacket of "common sense" is removed, analogy and free association help us defy the impossible. Suspicion of the so-called "correct" and "respectable" gives way to the delights of subversion and a complete overturning of things as they are. *To think differently* is not only permitted but wholeheartedly encouraged. In these inquiries, as Hegel said of art, "Everything depends on the freedom with which the imagination succeeds in bringing herself, and herself alone, to the center of the stage."

In inquiries from outside the movement — that is, questionnaires addressed to surrealists by non-surrealists — questions and answers alike tend to be less extravagant. Some external inquiries are directed not only to surrealists but to many others: The 1938 *Cahiers GLM* inquiry on "Indispensable Poetry" is one example; the inquiry on "What do you hope from surrealism in the future?" in Paul Buhle's *Cultural Correspondence* (1981) is another. From the surrealist viewpoint, the principal interest of such inquiries lies in the fact that they make a larger public aware of surrealist attitudes, and how surrealists differ from other writers, artists, and radicals.

This is particularly true of *political* inquiries, such as the 1925 inquiry on the Rif uprising in Morocco, published in the Marxist magazine *Clarté*. In their replies, the surrealists' revolutionary fervor, their total solidarity with the Riffians and their scorn for the hypocritical pretensions of French imperialism, stood in sharp contrast not only to the jingoistic, white-supremacist, patriotic sycophancy of the great bulk of France's noted artists, philosophers, novelists, and other intellectuals,

but also to the equally vapid and no less racist politics of a large part of the French Communist Party.

In the United States today, where what can truly be called a revolutionary movement remains small and divided (though at least visible again, after Seattle), discussion and debate between the Surrealist Group and other revolutionary groups occurs only rarely, and when it does, tends to take place in a political vacuum. A large part of the problem lies in the fact that the traditional language of politics and even anti-politics is hopelessly stale and utterly incapable of expressing humankind's deepest aspirations.

Everything has convinced us that the *imaginary*, which vastly exceeds what is called criticism, is *also* itself a form of criticism, and indeed embodies the strongest, most unsparing, far-reaching and fruitful criticism of all. Furthermore, it seems to us to be precisely the form of criticism that is most likely to pass into the kinds of *revolutionary action* that will lead to freedom and the marvelous — an exalted life for all — rather than new forms of slavery and misery. The implication should be plain: Those who are searching for a new political language and the renewal of a genuinely revolutionary movement need to come to grips with surrealism in its living works.

And this brings us to the present inquiry in *Socialist Review*.

Most political inquiries are focused on specific current problems, and reflect the inquirers' hope of determining practical solutions to them. Frequently they involve "taking a position," defining a strategy, or relating to an already-drawn-up program. With rare exceptions, unfortunately, these inquiries tend to be less receptive to spontaneity and leave little room for the more analogical, inventive, humorous, utopian, and playful sides of the surrealist imagination.

Nonetheless, as dialogues with other participants in the broader revolutionary movement, such inquiries are important in many ways. Anything that facilitates the intrusion of authentic cultural revolt into the realm of radical politics in the United States today has to be considered beneficial. Such inquiries make it possible — albeit usually only in undertones — to introduce heterodox ideas, critical openings, and suggestions for new forms of subversive activity in an explicitly radical context. Thus they serve to relay at least something of surrealism's emancipatory message to readers who may not have encountered it before.

At the same time, by accenting the immediate and concrete, these inquiries also (sometimes despite themselves) contribute to surrealism's self-clarification. In this sense, these occasional confrontations with what we might call the Left Wing of the Reality Principle can have a bracing effect.

As for other (non-revolutionary) external inquiries, we turn down far more than we answer. We are not interested in pursuing any kind of discussion with counter-revolutionists or confusionists. When we receive inquiries from bourgeois *littérateurs* or other upholders of the status quo, we either ignore them altogether or respond with a few insulting words on a postcard.

We have emphasized here what we consider to be the inherently dialectical nature of surrealist inquiries. As it happens, the external inquiries — and especially the “political” ones — raise yet another dimension of dialectic that should not be overlooked. It is customary, when reviewing an inquiry, to concentrate on the questions, the answers, and — as in all tests and examinations — the answerers. Too rarely does anyone take into account *who* is asking the questions, and *why*. Yet in many cases there is as much to be revealed from this angle as from a detailed analysis of the answers. In any given inquiry, subject and object are posed and juxtaposed in various ways: tester and test, questions and answers, answers and answerer, etc. But a key question remains: *Who will question the questioner?*

It is not our intention to attempt an analysis of the following inquiry posed by the editors of *Socialist Review*, but we would like to propose a few questions of our own — a kind of inquiry into the inquiry — that might broaden the reader's perspective in regard to this dialogue between the journal's editors, the surrealists, and a few of our friends. For example:

Would the SR's questions have been more forceful had they been phrased in less formal terms?

How might each of these questions be reformulated by surrealists?

Are the questions meant to reveal surrealism's methods? Or are they an attempt to define the politics of surrealism today?

In either case — and in view of the rather intricate specificity of the questions — how are the responses going to influence the theory and practice of the SR editors?

For our part, we say: Long live the question mark! As Jacques Vaché put it, “It is in the nature of symbols to be symbolic.”

Finally, we want to signal the fundamentally participatory and egalitarian character of the surrealist inquiry. Asking someone a question implies that the questioner is interested in the response. Providing that the respondents are informed and sincere (that is, not “posing”) the answers can hardly fail to enhance the discussion. Each has her/his say, and each contribution is unique, with its special insights. Even answers that are “off the subject” can be illuminating or suggestive. Naturally, the whole adds up to much more than the sum of its parts.

This insistence on the active input of all seems to be one of the characteristics that distinguish surrealism from most other intellectual currents of our time. Exemplifying the movement’s well-known refusal of the “star” system, it also highlights a truth too often ignored: that surrealism, despite the problems of geographical separation and the language barrier, is always and everywhere a *collective* adventure — a dynamism based on elective affinities — and it proceeds above all by way of collective self-discovery and collective creation. Surely it is this collision of widely varied and shifting individual approaches and emphases, and the subsequent synthesizing of all these differences and divergences that has given surrealism as a movement not only its vibrant unity, but also its remarkable diversity (in surrealism, unity has never been afflicted with uniformity).

Like collective tracts and certain photographs, surrealist inquiries record particular moments in the life of the movement. They are not offered as conclusive statements (“What has concluded,” Benjamin Paul Blood once asked, “that we might conclude in regard to it?”). Limited by circumstances of place and time, they are necessarily tentative and exploratory, but always directed toward the future. As moments in a movement that is still very much in motion, surrealist inquiries can also serve as points of departure — for unprecedented dreams, undreamed-of actions, and yes — new inquiries!





Guy Ducornet, "Magic Square"

Surrealist Subversion in Everyday Life

**Questions addressed to the Surrealist Movement
in the United States (and a few other friends)
by the editors of "Socialist Review"**

- (1) Many women have been active in surrealism, in the United States and internationally. What is particular to the surrealist spirit that challenges, bewilders, unsettles patriarchy and masculine sense-making?
- (2) How do you see surrealism as a force in everyday life? What forms of everyday surrealist practices (or varieties of "infrapolitics") do you see on the contemporary scene?
- (3) What are the points of intersection between surrealism, African, African American, and other African diasporic cultural/political practices? How have African and African diasporic surrealists developed surrealism's revolutionary project? How do these surrealist and African diasporic traditions and practices resist colonization of the heart, spirit, and mind?
- (4) How does surrealism's poetic praxis subvert "whiteness" and other forms of cultural desertification at their roots? How can people who are labeled "white" become surrealist "race traitors"?

The Responses

Gale Ahrens

(1) Inasmuch as a large part of the patriarchy has bought into the patriarchy, I consider the real issue to be, what is it about the surrealist spirit that challenges the ruling power and their slave cogs of the industrial machine? Surrealism breaks this power trap in an intuitive time warp by drawing its force from the yet unformed and unknown (but not unknowable) future instead of relying on or digging from the known, controlled, and manipulated past. Ruling elites do not want their power to be broken and they will do whatever they must to sustain themselves.

Surrealism, however, breaks up the existing order in ways that the authoritarian state cannot control.

We live in an age of too much masculinism, so much so that many modern women have embraced it to assert and prove themselves. Most women “leaders” I see today are as masculinist as most men. Still, in industrial society, more women than men seem to sense and express a connection to “other ways of knowing,” surrealist or otherwise. Sur-, non- or anti-rational methods of inquiry are actually considered dangerous in our monstrously industrialized society. They have no purpose in such a society, except perhaps to enthrall children. Like drugs, they detract from the dull, everyday machinery of keeping industry and bureaucracy moving. Therefore, according to the logic of power, they must be rooted out. After all, if too many people started dreaming and playing all day, exploring their reveries, practicing pure psychic automatism, and following up on objective chance encounters, it could hurt the bank accounts of the corporate and industrial profiteers.

It’s not unusual that logic and intuition don’t get along. One’s a plus charge, the other’s a minus. Like a battery, we need both. And if we’re to explain the one to the other, we need to do so in language each can understand. Logic is a “masculine” quality that both men and women possess, and intuition a “feminine” quality that both men and women possess. The balanced person uses both logic and intuition, admires both, and recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of each. The Surrealist Movement does not embrace logic separate from intuition or intuition separate from logic, which to me makes it a profound, sane, and balanced movement, and the only one like it that I know of.

(2) Surrealism in the everyday sense is most easily seen in the popular media, where it is unfortunately subjected to all the horrors of commodification. We know that all the machinery behind creating and selling such products is mercenary, dull, repetitive, exploitative, and deadly, and yet many popular songs, films, children’s entertainment, and even advertisements touch something deep within the bored and ever more cynical consumer. Maintaining a revolutionary critical eye, surrealism enables us to perceive the ways in which the Marvelous, and people’s yearning for it, can survive and even triumph over the forces of commercial degradation.

A vital everyday surrealism is also visible in dress in the mainstream workforce. A wild haircut, or a “crazy” style of clothes — something,

perhaps even the smallest accessory, that is loud, noisy, different — serves to disrupt the dreariness of ordinary, beige conformism. Younger people today, with the trend toward body piercing, tattoos, and exotic hair-dyes, express a yearning toward a new tribalism. Revolt exists on many levels, and we would do well to continue paying attention to these small, secret distress signals that just about everyone else ignores.

In a personal sense, I use surrealism everyday and it has saved my life, so that I can't even imagine a day without it. From my surrealist writings: "Marvels don't cease to be when the law cracks down on you." "Everywhere you look you can see flowers of information on wheels that go around curbs with strange eyes!"

(3) I write to a number of African Americans who are imprisoned in the most deplorable and tortuous conditions in US gulags and control units and I am amazed at the depth of thought and expression in their writings. African Americans have been at the forefront of almost every revolutionary activity in the United States in recent and not-so-recent history. In their songs, music, art, writings, speech, poetry, play, and even religious expression, you can see resistance to oppression, a passion for freedom, and numerous other affinities with surrealist activities and aspirations.

Outsider art has become extremely popular over the last few years, and it is a genre dominated by African Americans.

(4) White so-called "civilizations" are like white sugar or flour, too refined, and with all the nutrients and heart bleached out of them. Most of the members of these civilizations seek to make everyone into their own walking dead image. Whiteness is the supreme power behind capitalist/imperialist industrialism and its ugly progeny, oppression, enslavement, and ecocide. Under the tyranny of Capital, all farming, tribal, and nomadic cultures must be conquered and cultivated to man the Coca-Cola factories. Whiteness always wants to conquer, to take all the goodies from other cultures. Jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, Motown, funk, and rap were all invented by African Americans, but the white power elite got most of the money.

People can become surrealist race traitors by becoming surrealists! Above all, don't act "white"! And challenge whiteness wherever it lifts its hateful head. Disruption subverts! Disrupting acts. Disrupting dress. Disrupting thoughts. Let's disrupt our way to the Marvelous!

Becoming a race traitor is important, but it's also important for people to become "species traitors." Humankind shares this planet with uncountable other creatures, and we desperately need to find ways to do so without causing so much devastation. We need to learn to live in solidarity with the wild!

Daina Almario-Kopp

With its emphasis on liberating the unconscious, surrealism challenges traditional gender roles, not only by providing opportunities for women as well as men to express themselves freely in innovative ways, but also by developing its participants' understanding of individual and social psychology — through poetry and art as well as through other forms of revolutionary activity. It is more difficult for the capitalist, white supremacist, wilderness-destroying patriarchy to condition, control, and manipulate people who are aware of the inner workings of their own minds as well as the inner workings of society: social, political, cultural, and economic.

By encouraging new ways of thinking and behaving, new ways of viewing ourselves and the world, and also new modes of collective action, surrealism helps us to break out of conventional molds, and therefore to start moving toward a new, non-exploitative society, based on our limitless imaginations.

Jennifer Bean

Surrealism identifies with the creative thinking that many women have had to rely upon outside of formal schooling and rote memorization, because it lets us think, instead of telling us how and what we should be thinking. What has often been considered "women's domain," that of the emotions and intuition, is valued in surrealism — the kinds of knowledge often dismissed as "anti-logical" and "anti-systematic," which have given women reinforcement in the face of conventional patriarchal wisdom. Such modes of thought have also given the same kind of free space to men who realize that this society's over-formalized and over-rationalized thinking has too many dead ends. You are right to phrase the question as challenging *patriarchy* instead of challenging *men*, and that is another reason I have found surrealism so refreshing when it comes to gender. The kinds of interactions that men and women collectively experience in surrealism

— in games, for example — nurture equality, spontaneity, and imagination. In short, Surrealism provides a place in which women (as well as men) can gain self-confidence and expand their creativity.

“Whiteness” is practically synonymous with the status quo. In valuing the things surrealism values — poetry, dreams, love, freedom — instead of college degrees and political ambitions and paychecks and lifestyles, the status quo is subverted and pissed on, “whiteness” and “other forms of cultural desertification” included.

Dan Boyer

(1) Surrealism has pursued, and continues to pursue, methods and means of knowledge marginalized as “feminine” by the patriarchically male-identified “scientific method,” and thereby undermines patriarchy by helping to legitimize such modes of knowledge. Surrealism further undermines patriarchy by attacking ludicrous gender stereotypes, and by promoting the image of the androgyne.

Feminist concerns are also our concerns. Anti-surrealists of every stripe have leveled paper-thin charges of sexism against surrealism mainly to deflect attention from their own sexism. Although some of the individuals who have done so have been self-described feminists, their goal seems to be not gender equality but rather the return to a basically Victorian understanding of the “virtuous woman.” The goals of Catherine MacKinnon et al. are just the other side of the patriarchal coin. As with the rest of the patriarchy, such ideologists know they have everything to lose from woman’s liberation — that is, from woman’s self-activity, not as victim or object, but as *active revolutionary subject*.

(2) In the past several years we have seen the accelerating determination of the powers-that-be to eradicate anything that is not aimed at profit. It goes without saying that the unfettered imagination demanded by surrealism is not only not profitable but is a prime threat to the profit system. My feeling is that in the next couple of years events such as those in Seattle will multiply and assume an ever-increasing importance. It will be from this quarter — open, direct action resistance, and inspired revolt — as well as a coming revolution in cinema (if *The Matrix* is not an aberration) — that change will come.

“Everyday surrealist practices” are desperately needed. Personally, I continue to see many examples of objective chance, and the practice of paranoid-criticism remains of great importance to me.

Marilyn Buck

To look beyond, to refuse to accept the social constructs that have us sewn into iron maiden prisons: Is that surrealism? Certainly there are other ways of challenging patriarchy. However, because surrealism looks with a creative eye it can create spaces of possibility that allow flowers to bloom more profusely and daringly. We need creators in every realm, from writers to groundbreakers to the furies that burn the detritus of oppressive forms and constraints.

Surrealism can look beyond the real structures as they are to imagine what we may become. One must be willing to challenge not only the social order, but one's self and privilege. That is quite a task. To become a race traitor one needs not just to be open-minded. One must attack the institutions of whiteness — in a strategic way. It is not an individual issue, but each individual must participate and challenge. Think of being a subversive, a clandestine operative. A white person walks around in sheep's clothing. Think like a wolf in support of oppressed peoples.

Paul Buhle

My response is to question no. 2, and begins with a historical footnote. *Socialist Review's* precursor *Socialist Revolution* was not much inclined toward surrealism or to popular culture (at least not in a friendly way) and so it remained to the journal's friendly rival, *Radical America*, to publish many surrealist items and for its own modest successor, *Cultural Correspondence*, to take up the issues of popular culture, seeking to upend Adorno without losing the dialectic. The major contribution of surrealism, then, has been to focus on the subversive and revolutionary possibilities within everyday life, some at the margins and some (not many) near the heart of popular culture: the hilariously anti-establishment (these days I'll take "The Simpsons"), the acid-edged film noir, the resilient conspiracy film (when the state and corporations are the conspirators), eco-comedy, anti-racist visions, unleashed feminism and so on.

The creativity recently seen in Seattle offers a reminder of much that surrealists hold dear, from IWW humor to labor alliance to Earth First! energy. Let's hope to see more, a whole lot more, in the new century, as we exit the last century of capitalism.

Ronnie Burk

(1) Not only women but also queers have participated in the surrealist movement from its earliest days. Claude Cahun and René Crevel come readily to mind. It is a lie that André Breton was a homophobe. My friend, the poet Charles Henri Ford, told me as much, and he knew the man.

The spirit of nonconformity is at the heart of the surrealist adventure. But the real culprit in bewildering and unsettling patriarchy has to be the marvelous androgyne, Eros. After all, what is more bewildering than the face of love? Repressed, contaminated, poisoned, slandered, defiled, set out on the doorstep like an unwanted child, love continues to be a scandal. Surrealists have always understood the urgency of defending the Pleasure Principle against the horrors of the repressed. This is precisely what makes surrealism not just unsettling but dangerous to the stifling racist, sexist social model in late capitalism. In this sense, it is more necessary than ever to speak of *surrealist danger*.

(2) Every day there is the possibility for a chance encounter. The power of automatism has its magic. Always the earthquake, the hurricane, the moment of insurrection continue to pose their disruptive influences. Amidst the official lies we are told every day — lies about AIDS, that sex is a health hazard, that Dow Chemical and US militarism are good for the environment, that economic prosperity is the rule today, that the police are our friends, that blondes have more fun, etc. — perhaps the most pernicious lie of all is that US capitalism and its government are all-powerful and monolithic. I was arrested recently after disrupting a meeting of the San Francisco Health Department with ACT UP San Francisco member David Pasquarelli. The police were unable to run a check on our arrest records because *the computer was down*. Everywhere the system is breaking down, dysfunctional, dependent on a technology subject to human error. Of course, such dysfunction could easily lead to all-out catastrophe, but it can also lead to all-out festivities. Everyday we must look for the open door, the broken lock, the moment of jailbreak, and never forget that the moment for overturning the whole Molochian superstructure will come upon us when we least expect it.

(3) When I walk around San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Tulsa, Atlanta, and D.C., I see in the crumbling tenements and abandoned buildings, like so many weeds tearing up the sidewalk, the old gods of

the Yoruba. Philip Lamantia pointed out to me, in one of my first conversations with him, that at the time of Abraham, Egypt had already reigned as an empire for 3,000 years. The vast African continent continues to reveal its marvels. In the past year I have had the pleasure and honor of meeting the great poet Will Alexander, who incarnates the intersection of surrealism, Africa and African diasporic cultural activity. Like the jazz of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, the poetry of Will Alexander continues the “Edenic expansion” so needed in a world that, for all too apparent reasons, is on the brink of extinction.

(4) Surrealism has sought directions for poetic discovery not only in Africa, but also in Oceania, the American Southwest and the Northwest Coast, in Mexico, Australia, and Haiti — which gets us back around to Africa. In the magical dreamtime of Pintupi, the dream weapons of Rano Raraku, the blue deer of Chihuahua, the katchinas of the Hopi, the loas of Haiti, certain practices, rites, and systems of human consciousness take us straight to the Marvelous. Surrealists are always looking for the Marvelous. As Pierre Mabille put it, the Marvelous — the very thing surrealists dream about — is the basis for a free society.

In the deepening crisis besetting humanity we are left with what we can do. White supremacy is a form of psychic pollution that hangs like a pall over America. *Free Mumia!* is a rallying cry against the whole rotten social order. Everyone is sick of the prevailing monotony of misery and plunder. As recent events in Seattle demonstrate, if we come together our rage and desire for freedom can rock capitalism to its foundations.

The barbarous situation we find ourselves in with regard to “race relations” cannot be resolved with empty sound bites, therapy sessions, or fake PC workshops, anymore than it can be manipulated by bogus legislative proposals. Thanks to multinational high-finance capitalism and imperialism the whole world is at risk of being destroyed not so much by nuclear bombs but by Coke cans and mountains of plastic garbage. Interviewed late in his life, Sitting Bull told a journalist: “I have seen your world and I can tell you it is better to die as an Indian than to live as a white man.” All along, native people in the New World have warned the white man that his ways are the ways of death and disaster. Millions of people are homeless in this country, cancer is rampant, on the playgrounds of public schools children are shooting other children, in rural America homosexual men are decapitated, crucified, tortured, and at worksites “going postal” has become an all too familiar phenomenon.

In the general breakdown occurring at this very moment nothing less than total insurrection can counter the crushing forces that are making life all but impossible to live, save for a tiny minority of the super-rich. The prospects for revolution, however small they may seem, continue to be the only hope in a world gone mad with greed and stupidity.

There is no question which side surrealism is on. The question continues to be: *Which side are you on?*

Jayne Cortez

The Reply

In reality
it's unrealistic to expect surrealism
to be the real solution to anything as
unsurreal as masculine sense-making
that makes no sense

In New York City
the points of intersection between surrealism
Africa and its diaspora are on
116th Street and Malcolm X Blvd.
and on Wall Street and Broadway

We resist
colonization of the heart, spirit and mind
by being unemployed
and by not paving the Imperial Highway
To subvert whiteness
go to the paint store and only
order black and red paint
To change your reality is
your revolutionary project

Rikki Ducornet

To answer question no. 1, in part: for the sake of clarity I have to say, *There is nothing wrong with sense-making*. When you speak of "masculine sense-making" you are referring to abusive patriarchy, which is, in fact, non-sensical (and has nothing to do with Lewis Carroll's subversive whimsy either!). The danger is irrational thinking, the sort of venomous

foolishness that promotes racism, for example; the “senseless” arguments of the “Free Market” idealists. . . . Examples abound. It is a mistake to confuse irrationality with acts of the creative imagination. Surrealism, or so it seems to me, demonstrates that one can — to use a phrase of Italo Calvino’s — “dream very high dreams” and at the same time be a rigorous thinker, pragmatic, clear-headed, the enemy of mythical thinking (it is one thing to love myths and another to be ruled by them!), intellectually autonomous and, what’s more, a political radical!

One cannot “make sense” if one is unable to live in the world with an engaged imagination and a passionate heart. The message of surrealism, or so I think, is that to fully exist, one must be fearless. It takes courage to dream “high” dreams and to think rationally. Rigor and imagination: Here are words to think and live by!

P.S. The notion that men and women think differently *enrages* me! The unfettered mind belongs to no “race,” no gender.

J. Allen Fees

In the *Second Surrealist Manifesto* André Breton placed the undeniable enemies before the reader: family, country, religion. Taken separately, each is a burning spike in the mind of freedom, tearing one apart under servitude, complacency, inferiority. But together, under a repeatedly waved death-wish banner of overpopulation and “never talk back,” corporate plunder and murderous “peace,” savior chains and the “faithful” wage-slave, they add up to the firmly gripped handle of the swinging club of *crapitalism*.

It is here that surrealism intervenes with that most possible uncertainty: *chance*. Chance destroys all religious hypocrisy and the moldy, putrid idea of “god.” It shows that revolution is *never* announced in newspapers as a six-hour sale starting tomorrow at noon, that love is *not* a prearranged ceremony or predetermined DNA. Chance is a personal carefree risk, an expectancy of unexpected moments, complete abandonment by completely abandoning the known. It is a most basic weapon easily taken up in the *everyday*, striking with triple strength over the repression and misery it challenges, the “powers-that-be” it bewilders, and the servitude and degradation it reduces to rubble. Chance, as surrealism, is not a book one consults or a formula one calculates. It is forever waiting for you, and it *moves*. It is action, and it demands and produces radical mental and physical change in the human character.

Though only one small particular area, chance is an important part in the foundation of surrealism as a door that swings into a completely *clear and unknown* space. In an instant it runs over the notion of male supremacy and white supremacy, passive and silent religious worship of profit and power, and the “one of the boys” business mentality. Chance — at the turn of a corner, unknown laugh, intuitive observation, unguided mental action — surpasses all miseries dropped on women as well as the so-called “minorities” who in truth are the overwhelming majority of the world’s population.

Surrealism’s enemies are still paraded around this society in the guise of “freedom” and “free society” and especially “free market” by the propagandists of misery and miserabilism. Like white supremacy and capitalism itself, patriarchy remains one of the most stultifying and deadliest of the dead ends they exalt. As long as those who rule and ruin continue to bludgeon and straitjacket everyone who aspires to *something altogether different*, this society’s “outlaws” and “bad apples,” its deviants and miscreants, will find themselves anticipated and welcomed here.

Brandon J. Freels

(1) The Surrealist Movement has concentrated on the absolute deliverance of interior and exterior reality from the handcuffs of an ideologically imposed opposition — that is, the belief that these two aspects of reality are inherently and in fact opposed to each other. By undermining these and other myths developed by lifeless realism and perverted rationalism, surrealism threatens to overturn all hierarchical complexes, patriarchal and beyond. In gender as elsewhere, hierarchies reinforce the impotence of the imagination, the triteness of existence, and the oppression of thought and action.

In the United States today, adolescents of both sexes continue to be afflicted with hopeless notions of “manhood” and “femininity” (i.e., that “woman’s place” is one of seclusion and slavery). Youthful creativity and autonomy naturally rise against such inhibiting stupidities, and that revolt, in all its innocence and anger and yearning for freedom, is what surrealism is all about.

(4) Similarly, those who preach the superiority of “whiteness” force an unwarranted polarity opposed to the surrealist conception of poetry the way a barricade is opposed to the free current of a river. To betray “whiteness” is simply to break through its deceptive and obtrusive

mystique. We must not forget that this obstruction has been built with the bricks of distorted judgment based on the real social oppression of people of color. And as the surrealists have demonstrated, we should not hold back from spitting in the faces of its builders: those who uphold the ideologically manufactured and repressive rivalry of skin-tone.

Paul and Elizabeth Garon

E: Surrealism in everyday life? Did you see the *Sunday Magazine* this morning? The drug “czar” was on the cover with a bunch of kids. Why do they call him the drug czar? I thought it was his job to catch the drug czars of the world. Could they unwittingly be trying to reveal a hidden truth, that it’s really his job to see to it that drug czars around the world stay in business while thousands of members of the “lower classes,” i.e., street dealers, are used to build a strong, financially sound, privatized prison system? What a great way to decimate the masses, especially those most discontent with the techno-industrial workplace.

There are so many places where surrealism can intervene in everyday life; this is just one: to emphasize the multiple contradictions of our drug policy, its real war on Black people, and its unintentional surrealist use of language. If language was given to us “to make surrealist use of it,” *war* and *czar* give us a place to start!

At least having a drug story kept us from facing a bunch of religious garbage like visits from the pope and families who “found god.” Ah, religion, another place in modern society where surrealists have their work cut out for them.

P: Yes, that great picture of Benjamin Péret insulting a priest! People think such actions are obsolete because we don’t have priests tromping through the streets looking like King penguins and because so many priests are supposed to be “hip” nowadays. And yet, from the anti-evolution crusaders to the abortion-clinic bombers to the “New Age” hucksters, religion is still a sleazy, reactionary force, with more big bucks than ever to back it up.

E: It just means the surrealist battle against religion is all the more subtle, but no less necessary. The church no longer has the respect it used to have in many sectors of society. Yuppies who have given up on religion have done so because it interferes with the amount of hours per day they can devote to the pursuit of greed, not because they want to end repression or oppression. The church still has the power of mental

enslavement. That's something for us to focus on. And while the alienated sectors drift away from religion and the church, the evangelical and fundamentalist groups are actually growing. Can you believe the Moody Bible Institute is really expanding?

P: There's no shortage of possibilities for surrealist direct action. I was walking around a corner yesterday, being careful not to bash into someone coming the other way, and I thought, "I have no idea what's going to be around this corner" — i.e., the corner has endless surrealist possibilities. This is especially interesting when you think of the modern stereotype of surrealist painting: the constantly unreachable vanishing point in paintings obviously inspired by Tanguy, and certain works of Dali, and even Paul Delvaux. This notion of a point in the distance has seized the modern mass-media imagination more than the notion of the corner, a location of surprises that we confront more than a dozen times a day.

It seems to me that surrealist intervention in daily life can be approached in at least two ways: from the standpoint of *what can I do* and from the standpoint of *what has been done*.

E: Yes, and the latter point can also be seen from two perspectives: It's just as important to see what is radical and surrealist about interventions that have taken place (but which others fail to realize are surrealist) as well as to understand the various kinds of surrealist interventions.

P: So that gives us three approaches. And surely the surrealist imagination can dream up even more. Poetic sabotage, creative vandalism, and free insolence can go a long way toward improving the quality of life.

E: There's also a feminist dimension in all this. I notice that *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* includes a whole range of surrealist principles and interventions that are as feminist as they are surrealist. More poetry in life, imagination as a critical force, more surrealism in our day-to-day activity: These are also ways of questioning and rejecting patriarchal notions of reality.

And what about surrealist games? From the "Exquisite Corpse" to "Time Traveler's Potlatch" and "Question and Answer" (blind answers given to blind questions posed by another), they are a surrealist "intervention in everyday life" that everyone can take advantage of.

P: Yes, surrealist games intervene on many levels. They help maintain a certain alertness to new possibilities, an attitude of experiment and fun, and an attitude of expectation vis-à-vis the Marvelous. They maintain a

collective spirit of poetry and creativity while investigating that very spirit. And they can be played at any place and time.

E: And there's yet another function of such activities: Some people who claim not to "understand" surrealist painting might begin by taking part in an Exquisite Corpse drawing, or another game. Starting as an active participant instead of a passive onlooker is a great advantage!

Jan Hathaway

The spirit and methodologies of surrealism ever since its inception have consciously accepted, and even emphasized, intuition and other non-rational ways of thinking. For the patriarchy, with its linear non-intuitive left-brain thinking that dominates politics, the military, traditional marriage, and most organized religions, this is a real threat, seemingly lacking necessary control over what one is doing. It is recognized that predominant female right-brain thinking allows for intuition, chance, the unexpected, dreams, and random and irrational thought to be carefully considered and integrated with linear rational left-brain thinking. Women, who for centuries upon centuries have been suppressed, are now — often with the help of surrealist inspiration — consciously incorporating and developing in new directions what has long been regarded as a "natural inclination," and helping their male friends to do likewise.

Once thought to be the "weaker sex," women in ever-increasing numbers are now in the forefront, exploring and creating by using both the right and left brain to realize poetry, art, and design, including rather than excluding the many unsettling spontaneous ideas associated with intuition, desire, and feelings. Recognizing the value of this combination, many left brain dominant thinkers are slowly beginning not only to accept the reality of the unconscious and non-rational thought, but also to recognize how much we *need* such thought to deepen our awareness of life and the world.

This kind of thinking, in which imagination is supreme — and which in essence knows no boundaries of gender — creates a situation of real equality and participation, and has important implications for surrealism's social concerns, especially for the transformation of everyday life.

Surrealism provides an innovative way, one might say, of melting the patriarchal "either/or" into a liberating "both/and," which in turn could be summed up by saying "it takes two to tango."

Bertha Husband and Mari Jo Marchnight

(1) Primarily, the erotic, the game, and particularly humor — these all being essential elements of revolt. As the surrealist filmmaker Nelly Kaplan reminds us: "When the women's movements are dull and take themselves too seriously they offer men the pretext for criticizing them."

(2) Everyday life has itself been transformed into a banality. To reclaim it, something secret, poetic, and utterly useless may be required in order for cultural resistance to avoid being appropriated as fashion. However, the hit-and-run practice of small refusals is one tactic: to refuse to work, to sell, to buy, to vote, to watch TV, to register for selective service, or in any way to conform.

(3) For us this question demands to be answered from within the African diaspora by African, African Caribbean, and African American surrealists. Presumably it is there that the reclaiming of the imaginary and the destruction of colonialism intersect. As Suzanne Césaire wrote, "Colonial idiocy will be purified in the welder's blue flame."

(4) "Whiteness" was born of colonialism and became a pathology in the settler nations where it has always been subverted and will one day be destroyed by what is most unacceptable to white hegemony — namely, erotic love between the races.

Joseph Jablonski

(1) Particular to surrealism, probably exclusive to it, is an attitude of confidence in the unfettered activity of the mind, a bias in favor of primary instincts, especially in the field of symbolic expression. It is undeniably relevant that modern organized surrealism began in the old traditionally Catholic countries, in large part in reaction to the clerical patriarchy of the Roman church with its authoritarian denial of freedom in relation to the pleasure principle and love, and its history of outright persecution of women and suppression of every right that would permit them the least measure of power or freedom. The total revolt of poetry had to declare war on the sick male ideology that saturated Catholic dogmas. Thus the first surrealists struggled to reinstate the feminine principle in all its ancient glory, seeing in woman a perfect symbol of a great reversal of values. Naturally this emphasis could not be restricted to the realm of ideas. All human freedom and values are biologically

rooted in the ground of eroticism, just as all conservative anti-values are rooted in, and profit from, sexual fear.

(2) We all know that at the century's close much of everyday life, in the sense of open time available for the casual conduct of one's personal affairs, has been amalgamated with labor time through the imposition of alienating technologies whose use no one is finally able to avoid. This imposes upon all of life a utilitarian rationality that asserts priority over human spontaneity, imagination, play, desire. Since these technologies of pure efficiency intercept most forms of human communication, as well as the reproduction of culture, they tend to become cultural monopolies. They effectively disenfranchise and silence those who resist acculturation to this mode of conducting everyday life.

It is quite an accomplishment for capitalist civilization. Some years ago, Paul Goodman, in a long essay titled "Like a Conquered Province," asserted that for all its power capitalist civilization lacked a culture proper to it. But it has created for itself a new form of alienated robot culture based on electronic switching machines combined with two-valued logic. Since the penalty for completely renouncing this new phase of western mechanical technology appears to be failure and irrelevance, a different strategy is required to regain the lost ground of everyday life. One response that manages to "humor" the technological blitz while at the same time undermining its premises is suggested by the anthropological concept of "hostile" or "antagonistic acculturation." This involves the borrowing of the weapons or technologies from an enemy group in order to oppose it more successfully. A frequent example is the Native American adaption of the rifle and horse cavalry to fight the white invaders. Think of Luddites arming with gatling guns, or natives borrowing saints' images to disguise their own deities.

Restoring older technological variants and improving their performance, research, and development in a backward direction is a humorous way to devalue the boringly new. Digital sabotage in the form of computer viruses may represent for some hackers a kind of hostile acculturation. But the important thing is for this phenomenon to create its own kind of countercultural ethos. The ultimate goal would be to restore the prestige of the many-valued logic that prevails in poetic inspiration and unexpected intellectual insights. This is a place where surrealists, with one eye on Jarry and the other on Benjamin Péret, should be active.

(3) and (4) Like most non-European and non-American forms, most African cultures are closer to humankind's tribal, shamanistic, and thaumaturgic origins that are ultimately rooted in the experience of dream and those mental processes and ways of knowing that most resemble dreaming. This is its primary intersection with modern, conscious surrealism. Dream is the *materia prima* of shamanic consciousness, out of which grew art, poetry, and magic. In reaching back to certain lost and abandoned powers of the mind over the walls erected during centuries of religion, rationalism, law, and monolithic mythologies of all kinds, surrealism early confronted the rich imaginations of precolonial Africa, huge chunks of which seemed to attach themselves to it gratuitously by the shortest bridge, or even no bridge at all. In these circumstances the political alliance between insurgent, anti-colonial Africa and surrealism seems predestined, as was the latter's militant support for African American liberation. There is, if this is not too presumptuous to say, a shared conception of the symbolic species life of humanity.

The open presence of Africa and other primally based cultures in the contemporary world is sufficiently threatening to capitalism's global mental regime that a tame, eclectic, mass version has had to be launched in the form of the soporific New Age cult. But even this only proves that the project to attain the objects of revolutionary idealism and the magical utopias by making use of real, materialist means is in full swing. The offensive to reopen the gates of Paradise and regain it all is the project of all humankind for the foreseeable future. Attempted colonization of these hopes and strivings, an attempt that will be crudely capitalistic and extremely disfiguring can be defeated only by the enlargement of deeply surrealist influences, whatever names these will be known by. Particularistic myths such as "whiteness" and other narrow and exploitative nationalisms will be the major cultural and political obstacles to forward movement. Here is where the surrealist spirit, which is not tied to any specific ethnic-cultural area, has the best chance of playing a role, spreading the message of an inspired species life as an alternative to present globalism based on economic exploitation and the propaganda that sees "hearts of darkness" everywhere under the sun.

Robin D.G. Kelley

I discovered surrealism very recently, buried under the rich, black soil of Afro-diasporic culture. In it I found a most miraculous weapon with

no birthdate, no expiration date, no trademark. I traced it from the ancient practices of Maroon societies and shamanism back to the future, in the metropolises of Europe, and forward into the colonial world. I came to Breton through Césaire, came to Péret through Richard Wright, came to Leiris through Jayne Cortez, traveled to Toyen through Wifredo Lam's jungle. And I got my treasure map from the Rosemonts of Chicago. Although I'm still just a neophyte to this expansive, revolutionary thought and practice and I have much to figure out, surrealism has provided me with a clear and wide-open window onto what freedom is all about.

Rather than try to answer each question separately, let me try to address the spirit of the questions. I am especially interested in the relationship between surrealism and African diasporic practices and, more importantly, how it can help us imagine and create a revolutionary future. In some respects, the distance between socialism and surrealism is not so great; after all, surrealists have consistently opposed capitalism, promoted internationalism, and have been strongly influenced by Marx and Freud in their efforts to bridge the gap between dream and action. Indeed, they continue to demand the overthrow of bourgeois culture and insist that proletarian revolution is one of their "First Principles." In other respects, surrealism is night to socialism's day: it breaks the chains of social realism and rationality, turning to poetry as a revolutionary mode of thought and practice. I learned this from Aimé Césaire's great essay "Poetry and Cognition," first published in 1945. Opening with the simple but provocative proposition that "Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge," he then attempts to demonstrate why poetry is the only way to achieve the kind of knowledge we need to move beyond the world's crises. "What presides over the poem," he writes, "is not the most lucid intelligence, the sharpest sensibility or the subtlest feelings, but experience as a whole." This means everything — every history, every future, every dream, every life form from plant to animal, every creative impulse, plumbed from the depths of the unconscious. Poetry, therefore, is not what we simply recognize as the formal "poem," but a revolt: a scream in the night, an emancipation from old ways of thinking — an emancipation of *language*.

Consider Césaire's third proposition regarding poetic knowledge: "Poetic knowledge is that in which man spatters the object with all of his mobilized riches." Surrealism, in other words, is not an ideology but

a state of mind, a "permanent readiness for the Marvelous," as the late Suzanne Césaire (Aimé's wife) once put it. To embrace surrealism is not a simple matter of reading a manifesto and signing a card; it requires a freeing of the mind, a willingness to enter

the domain of the strange, the marvelous and the fantastic, a domain scorned by people of certain inclinations. Here is the freed image, dazzling and beautiful, with a beauty that could not be more unexpected and overwhelming. Here are the poet, the painter and the artist, presiding over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucination and madness. . . . Here at last the world of nature and things makes direct contact with the human being who is again in the fullest sense spontaneous and natural. Here at last is the true communion and the true knowledge, chance mastered and recognized, the mystery now a friend and helpful.

Suzanne Césaire's words were like a birth canal for me; they left me wet and vulnerable and curious about the world I thought I knew. She gave me new eyes and replaced all my nerve endings. The Afro-Cuban painter Wifredo Lam, another surrealist of the African diaspora, also taught me how to see anew. Lam's childhood in "black Cuba" actually prepared him for surrealism, exposing him to African culture as well as revolt. His godmother, Mantonica Wilson, was a practitioner of Santería, and was consulted far and wide for remedies for physical and spiritual afflictions. Lam studied art in Madrid and stayed long enough to participate in the defense of Republican Spain during the Civil War and, partly through Picasso, studied African sculpture while in Paris. As Lam embraced the Marvelous, his work became more totem-like, less androcentric. "The Jungle," one of his greatest paintings, offers one of the most powerful representations of surrealist revolution. We are confronted with four monster-like creatures of enormous feet and masks, surrounded by powerful spirits he knew from childhood — the *orishas* of his godmother's religious practices. Lam himself thought of it as a representation of revolt but from the depth of the unconscious. "My idea was to represent the spirit of the Negroes in the situation in which they were then. I have used poetry to show the reality of acceptance and protest."

Lam rejected social realism at a time when most politically radical artists believed it was the only path to revolutionary art. Instead, he sought

to express “the Negro spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the Blacks. In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters. I knew I was running the risk of not being understood either by the man in the street or by the others. But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work, even if it takes time.”

Richard Wright tried to achieve with his writing what Lam was attempting to do with his painting. Like Lam, Wright did not have to travel too far to find surrealism; he was surrounded by it in the lives of Black working people. Indeed, his 1941 text, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, captures the surrealist character of Black life and turns to poetry as a means to elucidate alienation and its impact on the psyche. “The noise of our living,” he writes “boxed in stone and steel, is so loud that even a pistol shot is smothered.” What a remarkable text! *Twelve Million Black Voices* is in many ways a history that, in Baudelaire’s words, attempts to “plunge to the bottom of the abyss, Hell or Heaven. . .to the bottom of the Unknown in order to find the new!”

For Wright, plumbing the depths is not only an investigation into the unconscious but a plunge into the world of which history is often unconscious, where the actors/creators have no names, no faces. He is uninterested in the middle class, the success stories who are “like single fishes that leap and flash for a split second above the surface of the sea.” Instead, he focuses on the “tragic school that swims below in the depths, against the current, silently and heavily, struggling against the waves of vicissitudes that spell a common fate.”

I focus here on Afro-diasporic artists not only because their work brought me to surrealism, but because they each suggest that a thorough understanding and embrace of the Marvelous existed in the lives of Blacks and non-Western peoples, particularly in music, dance, speech, the plastic arts, and above all philosophy. Perhaps my own dissatisfaction with “proletarian realism” has to do with its suppression of key elements of Black culture that surrealism embraced: the unconscious, the spirit, desire, magic, and love.

That most Black radicals did not jump on the surrealist bandwagon, ironically, might have something to do with its very familiarity; its revolutionary core was recognized as having always existed in Black life. Throughout the African diaspora, one can plainly see the practice of surrealism in everyday life — cultures that, for the most part, value

imagination, improvisation, and verbal agility, from storytelling, preaching, singing, to toasting, and the dozens. The emphasis on turning all expressions, practices, and communications into art coincides with Lautréamont's injunction that "Poetry must be made by all." As early as 1792, Olaudah Equiano described the world from which he was stolen as "a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets."

Surrealism has not only compelled me to think differently about Afro-diasporic culture, about art and imagination, about ancient practices and the power of spirituality, it has also compelled me to think differently about Marxism. As hard as it is for me to admit, I believe Marxism has failed to comprehend this elusive thing we call consciousness, despite wonderful efforts to incorporate psychoanalysis by Wilhelm Reich and Eric Fromm, writings on spirituality by Ernst Bloch and Cornel West, and cultural insights of Georg Lukács and Herbert Marcuse. (Marcuse, of course, drew a great deal from surrealist writings in his own reassessments of Marxist philosophy late in his life.) Surrealists took up the revolutionary implications of Freud and psychoanalysis even before Reich, and retained a very strong dialectical method in their thinking. Yet, they have always pushed further, resisting notions of "progress" seen as so essential to modernity on both sides of the ideological spectrum; drawn on "primitive" ideas of dreams, magic, social organization; explored the explosive emotional realms of Love and Madness.

At the same time, surrealism is not some lost, esoteric body of thought longing for academic recognition. It is a living practice and it will continue to live as long as we dream. For me at least, it takes us to places where Marxism and other "isms" in the name of revolution have yet to fully tread. Surrealism recognizes the decadence of Western civilization but doesn't fall into the trap of cynicism or technotopias or fatalism and false prophets. Nor is it some atavistic romanticization of the past. It considers, above all, love and poetry and the imagination as powerful social and revolutionary forces, not as a *replacement* for organized protest, for marches and sit-ins, for strikes and slowdowns, for matches and spraypaint. Surrealism recognizes that any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our relationships with each other, with unleashing our desire and building a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality (which is the same word they use for improving capitalist production and limiting peoples needs — rationalize/ration, etc.)

There is no doubt that we need more bread, better homes, better schools, more time, better air to breath and land on which to live. That goes without saying. But to stop there, to accept the rule of some bogus notion of pragmatism, to not even delve into the question of Freedom seems so defeating. If we cannot articulate our dreams without being accused of being utopian and unrealistic, then we might as well submit to the current order and open up more soup kitchens.

Don LaCoss

(1) Surrealists sap the foundations of patriarchal social structures with their elaborations on untrammelled desire. When men and women imagine, elucidate, and articulate their desires without constraint, masculinist codes of "meaning" are thrown into crisis, since such expressions usually require a re-valuation of extant values. More needs to be done to alert men and women in the United States of the ways in which surrealism can serve the liberation of women.

(2) A war for the mind rages daily in the United States, and individuals can resist by thinking critically. Surrealist ideas and images provide a powerful means for expanding critical thought by drawing attention to the seams and weak links of the dominant culture. In mapping these soft spots, one recognizes the possibilities for an intervention and thereby avoids falling into the cycles of hopelessness and complacency that keep so many cowed and quiet. Late-capitalist culture is a machine — surrealism is the sabotage.

(3) From *africanité* and *négritude* to bebop and the Black Panthers, surrealists have always found much to admire in (and often offer to) African and African-diasporic cultural politics. A common concern since the 1920s for both surrealist and Black identity movements has been the displacement of the arrogance and lies of white, Christian, bourgeois "civilization." The most exciting of surrealism's strategies in this regard has been its insistence upon the absolute value of unassimilable difference to be found in non-European cultures despite the West's positivist pretensions.

(4) Surrealist direct action against the white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and Christian Identity movements should be a priority. These groups are the sclerosis of the myths of "white privilege" and biological "purity" in the United States, and they should be the target of tactical demoralization, humiliation, and propaganda by deed. There may be more

subtle approaches to surrealist race treachery, but none are as desperately needed. No liberty for the enemies of liberty!

Cassandra Stark Mele

Do the words patriarchy and patriotic come from the same root? I'll bet they do. Things will never be right here in America until much of the land is returned to the Native Americans. A society that does not recognize, respect, love, and learn from its indigenous peoples deserves to perish. Each year on "Thanksgiving" Day in Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts, Native Americans march in protest against the cruelty of this day. The surrealist spirit is in solidarity with this action.

I relate to this "American" culture in the spirit of a gypsy woman, an immigrant with a pushcart, an outsider, a social outlaw, an Other. I would vote in a second to return a large part of the country to the Native American peoples. Too much of the history and current goings-on in American society is sordid and sinister, and much surrealist vision and surrealist action will be required to flood the land and the hearts of the terrified citizens, to awaken the desire for freedom (freedom for everyone!), to revive the spirit of resistance and revolt, and to start them dreaming dreams worthy of the forests, mountains, and rivers of this ravaged continent.

Now, in the twenty-first century, as into the zeroes we go, what better time for surrealist dust to settle finely into all the exquisite cracks in our culture, and permeate everything! May what *They* call madness be freed from the constraints of what *They* call reason, and may wild growth upset all their tulip patches!

Frank Morales

I feel that in this new day, surrealism can fulfill and will fulfill André Breton's call for "a new collective sensibility" as a requirement for revolutionary activity — a requirement for real life. A moral sensibility as well. Surrealism, as "the marvelous magnetic conductor," should play a leading role in this, utilizing its laser-like power to enunciate the truths of freedom, and the full circle of liberation's demands (in a word: poetry).

Recently, surrealism's light shines brightly (as in the Surrealist Issue of *Race Traitor*), disorienting the so-called "white race" (whoever they may be). Surrealism de-realizes whiteness, exposing its pretensions and

its cruelty, and subverts it like cheap paint chips off steel, from the inside out. Against the fascist eugenics currently directed against people of color, surrealism recognizes that the white supremacist bloodshed must stop, as a prelude to a deeper comprehension of *who we really are*.

In the long run, nothing less than an armed working class can defeat the capitalist police state and build a free society. I would like to see more surrealist research in this area — an exploration of the phenomenology of violence, for example. Also, surrealism will have to unleash an entire arsenal of its own *secret weapons* to short-circuit the current bio-psychiatrists, dream-deniers, dope-pushers, and other loathsome enemies of freedom.

Anne Olson

Surrealism is a perturbing intervention into the miserabilist confines of the so-called “normal.” Challenging the dichotomous and mind-numbing ideologies that dominate life today, surrealists also seek to expose and resolve the larger problems that lie at the root of thousands of years of patriarchal oppression: the ambiguities and hazy motivations underlying Christian/bourgeois morality and the repressive institutions it helps maintain — church and state, the bourgeois family, the police, the military, and all commercialism. Surrealism’s torch of passion and liberty burns through the whole stifling apparatus of social conditioning, and lets poetic fire light the way forward.

The powers-that-be wage war on the unfettered imagination because they fear its freedom, its restless utopianism, its boundless creativity and allure. They fear that which they themselves no longer possess (tyrants become fascist through their own personal repression of the Marvelous within them). Today, when the commercial co-optation of anti-authoritarian counter-cultural rebellion has become a major industry, effective revolt (not to mention social revolution) is widely believed to be almost impossible, and is certainly confronted by more obstacles than ever. That is why surrealists must constantly develop new subversive tactics, new forms of creative sabotage, rebellion on all fronts, nonconformity pushed to excess, in art as well as in life. Just as waking and dreaming are not contradictory, but “communicating vessels,” so too surrealism in poetry, painting, collage, and film complements its politics and direct action, and vice versa. All are indispensable in changing day-to-day reality, disrupting the dominant ideologies and structures of repression, and

letting the Marvelous transform our perception of the world as well as the way we live.

In the United States, where the sense of wonderment, along with emotional and sexual freedom, are pounded out of us by the tender age of five or six, if not earlier, surrealism confronts a political and cultural Establishment that is practically drowning in its *schadenfreude* and drone-like existence, and which wants everyone else to be "equal" only in being repressed, powerless, and miserable. For surrealists, as part of the rebellious minority who, by various means, have recovered something of their lost freedom and other childhood prerogatives, everyday life means violating the rules established by the boring, the normal, the successful, the Left, the Right, the "progressives," misogynists, homophobes, and all the other guardians of misery and mediocrity.

We refuse to submit to the condescending patriarchal gaze, to be mere observable objects, apathetic or hopeless in the face of the corporate media's mindless and bewildering distractions. We prefer to unleash the "subjective factor" in its infinite unpredictability. To release new forces of revolt and inspiration, individually and collectively, is the best way to act against the pillagers of human potential, and to supersede such infamous contradictions as sanity and insanity, masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality. By freeing words and images, and therefore desire, from the language of hierarchy and commodification, surrealism undermines repressive relationships of acquisitiveness, domination and servitude, and simultaneously creates completely different relationships based on poetry, generosity, and solidarity.

Surrealism unsettles patriarchy, white supremacy, xenophobia, and other forms of masculinist, miserabilist manipulation and oppression by denying them the power over imagination, and by affirming at all times, by any means necessary, the liberating, revolutionary power of the imaginary and its never-ending possibilities to create change.

Myrna Bell Rochester

(1) On the "unsettling" of patriarchy by the surrealist spirit represented by women: In the writing and art of Penelope Rosemont's collection *Surrealist Women* we see so clearly the unmistakable power of:

dreams and dreaming
anarchy, both social and creative

beauty of form
 color
 vision
 identity with nature
 spirit
 wonder
 fantasy in its best sense
 continual discovery
 music of language
 shock of the real
 serendipity
 intuition
 poetry
 eroticism
 creation
 instinct
 etc.

None of these could be easily understood, experienced — used even? — by the established patriarchal system. Your question implies that the entrenched patriarchy is prone, even ready, to be touched, challenged, bewildered, and unsettled. I find this a remarkably positive view! Let us hope that it is so.

Alas, I fear that the money-gathering urge is so deep, it cannot be budged by the discoveries of these women unless their power can create an even more valuable profit. Who knows?

(2) On surrealism as a force in everyday life: From the popular press, it would seem that every non-routine experience is now termed “surreal,” both by members of the media and by those people being interviewed. The adjective is indeed used by everyone to mean “strange,” “unexpected,” “upended,” “deserted” or “empty,” “disjointed,” “mixed up,” or “confused.” There are “surreal landscapes,” “surreal moments,” “surreal crimes.” “It was really surreal!”

In addition, much of classic surrealism has also, perhaps inevitably, been absorbed into everyday urban and media-driven life. A great many classic surrealist images have turned into common currency.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. It is democratic (in the best sense). It intimates that there is valuable experience *for all* beyond the quotidian.

And what of the deeper, subversive strength of surrealism? How it can work, often and when necessary, insidiously, to ameliorate even the society that we know. In part, it can work because of the salutary value of *shock*: a re-construction and re-formation after far too much de-construction.

David Roediger

Fifty years ago, Ralph Ellison wrote of Harlem as a place of "surreal fantasies," where the "real and unreal merge, and the marvelous beckons from behind the same sordid reality that denies its existence." This "fluid and shifting" world was, according to Ellison, interpreted and created by Black people immersed in magic, science, and social movements, and informed by rural African American folk culture as well as "Freud and Marx, Kierkegaard and Kafka, Malraux and Sartre."

Ellison's passage powerfully suggests that the surreal is experienced as well as theorized, lived as well as imagined, and spontaneous as well as studied. Furthermore, the surreal is more likely to be experienced and imagined by particular groups of people: those in motion, in struggle, in intense intellectual activity, in contradictory social positions and even (Ellison's essay concerns a psychiatric clinic) in anguish. It should not then be a surprise that individuals from oppressed and insurgent groups — from the Césaires to Ted Joans to Jayne Cortez to Mary Low to Nancy Cunard, among many others — have intervened not so much to "contribute" to surrealism as to remake it.

Ellison's remarks further suggest that surrealists need not prescribe forms that Black radicalisms, revolts against patriarchy, race treason, and other pursuits of freedom might take, but rather to observe, support, and participate in the forms they do take. In the recent New York City homeless protests, for example, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's face was placed on a huge reproduction of Chris Ofili's "Holy Virgin Mary" painting and demonstrators reproduced Ofili's controversial use of elephant dung in his painting by pelting the mayor's image with excrement.

Here was surrealism, whether or not any surrealists plotted the action. Indeed, surrealist claimings of affinities with "precursors" and contemporary nonsurrealist explorers of the marvelous contrast healthily with the stance of many other revolutionary traditions, which all too often praise the actions of nonadherents mainly in order to point out

how tragically incomplete and futile such actions must be without the transcendent wisdom possessed by whatever “ism” is on offer.

Finally, Ellison’s comment regarding the marvelous beckoning from “behind the same sordid reality that denies its existence” deserves emphasis. One signal contribution of surrealism has been to name that “sordid” system which prevents (but never fully prevents) the imagination of new worlds as *miserabilism*, a death grip that produces both misery and the idea that misery is the only possible reality. Miserabilism gives us a framework for understanding just what kind of hegemony is produced by the dialectical interplays of capital, patriarchy, and whiteness and what must be done about them.

Larry Romano

(2) One hundred years after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, transgressive murmurs still and always will cross the spheres into broad daylight. The surrealist horizon, in the eyes of the spawn of Maldoror, is there for the taking.

(3) Revolt knocking at the door. From Plymouth Rock to Alcatraz, Nantucket to Kronstadt, Attica to Africa, *Free Union* to *Free Jazz*, an all-encompassing manumission.

Franklin Rosemont

(1) People are born male or female; “masculinity” and “femininity” are learned. Male-supremacist “sense-making,” like the rationalized white supremacy handed down to us by the so-called Enlightenment, is truly a disgusting form of “non-sense” — i.e., ideology in its most malevolent form. Surrealism, the living negation of ideology, has long since proved to be one of the most effective ways of monkeywrenching the patriarchal machine. Surrealism’s central ambition — to overcome exploitative society’s notoriously immobilizing contradictions (dream and action, for example) — also plays havoc with the dominant order’s definitions, paradigms and standards: of gender, race and all other mystifications. As a method of knowledge, moreover, surrealism enables us not only to redefine reality, but above all to *change* it.

(2) I continue to find objective chance the best guide to everyday life. Those who know how to wander aimlessly have a way of making the most illuminating discoveries. Our task, however, is not only to explore everyday life, but to *liberate* it from its myriad constraints (political,

religious, commercial, etc.). This requires, as a bare minimum, a widespread revolt against work and a corresponding *desire to play*: twin points of departure for surrealist intervention. In developing the theory and practice of this most demanding of revolutions, I am convinced that there is infinitely more to be learned from certain "high points" in popular culture — from Memphis Minnie to *Who Killed Roger Rabbit?*, from Babs Gonzales to the Jackie Chan films, from the old Bugs Bunny and Little Lulu comics to *Calvin and Hobbes* and the current comic-strip *Boondocks* — than from all the lucubrations of all the Baudrillards, Derridas, and neo-Lacanian combined.

Recent promising signs include the subversive appropriation of Bugs Bunny by a large part of the hiphop community; the marvelous use of giant puppets in the Seattle anti-WTO demonstrations; the still-burgeoning zine scene, particularly its anarchist wing; the flourishing art of billboard revision, and above all, the spontaneous and wholehearted way in which hundreds of thousands of young people and workers, not only in the United States but all over the world, are rallying to the ever-growing movement to FREE MUMIA ABU-JAMAL!

(3) Blues and jazz, as well as other African diasporic music, poetry, dance, humor, fiction, and the visual arts abound in authentically surrealist flashes, moments, and undercurrents, to a far greater degree than most critics have been willing to acknowledge. This surrealist quality is manifest in the free play of the imagination, unequivocal affirmation of the Marvelous and the erotic, and a deep, abiding anti-miserabilism. Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Chester Himes, and Ishmael Reed have written classics of what André Breton — as part of surrealism's well-recognized efforts at revalorizing blackness — designated *black humor*, defined as "the highest revolt of the mind." Black literature and art also notably put the emphasis on revolt and freedom, values esteemed above all others by surrealists.

The "points of intersection," then, are evident not only in the work of Etienne Léro, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Lucie Thésée, Wifredo Lam, Romare Bearden, Wilson Harris, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Henry Threadgill, Bill Traylor, Ted Joans, Jayne Cortez, and others whose surrealist affinities are overt and immediately apprehensible, but also in the work of such pamphleteers, historians and political thinkers as Martin R. Delaney, Paschal B. Randolph, J. J. Thomas, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, St. Clair Drake, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Malcolm X,

James Forman, Sterling Stuckey, bell hooks, Grace Nichols, and many others who, in their different ways, have made global Black radicalism “a majestic and fertile river” of emancipatory ideas and inspirations.

(4) Revolt follows no recipes. My own experience suggests that people who are born and raised in “white” society start to become race traitors the moment they recognize the all-pervasive hypocrisy of those who believe in their “whiteness.” In my case this disillusionment rapidly evolved into a revulsion against the entire established (white) social order and all its values and institutions, most of which exist primarily to enforce and reinforce the “white mystique” and other forms of capitalist oppression. This rapid radicalization was accompanied by a growing awareness that a disproportionately large share of what makes life worth living has been provided by African Americans and other people of color. For me, at fifteen, my discovery of the music of Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane coincided with my involvement in the civil rights movement and my support for the Cuban Revolution, African independence, and the entire Cause of Black liberation. I wondered: How could anyone listen to Monk’s “Round Midnight” or Coltrane’s “My Favorite Things” without becoming an all-out revolutionary?

Penelope Rosemont

(1) If people were born free, as Spinoza pointed out, “they would, so long as they remained free, form no conception of good and evil.” Surrealism is an insurrection against what this society calls *goodness*, for all that is “good” in this society belongs to unfreedom. Surrealists, women and men, refuse the hateful “virtues” of a hateful social order. We are in total opposition to the dominant religions, politics, art, and other hypocrisies of contemporary life. The obedient wife, happy worker, good soldier, polite tourist, and well-adjusted teenager are just as much props of miserabilism as the capitalist boss, cop, and bureaucrat.

When I was growing up I received monthly mailings from the Museum of Modern Art, but I never saw or read about a woman artist. For a while I thought there must be something inadequate about the female brain. Years later, when I discovered the work of Leonora Carrington, Meret Oppenheim, and Toyen, I began to realize the nature of the great coverup that our patriarchal society performs to rid the world of creative women, and to destroy their history. The very *existence* of surrealist

women, therefore, and the wonders they have ceaselessly created, are unsettling to the patriarchal order, and prefigure its collapse.

In surrealist activity, with its accent on poetry, play, creativity, and humor, women and men alike are largely liberated from the gender-defined inhibitions that dominate the world of work, politics, consumerism, entertainment, and most of what is called "social life." Where the individual's imagination and awareness are valued above all, patriarchy loses its foothold. Revolution begins by imagining freedom and freeing the imagination.

(2) Surrealism is a growing force in everyday life because it is the most effective way of undermining work, complacency, routine, and other miseries of the status-quo. At its core, surrealism is the living negation of the commodity society and its culture. When dream and waking life are no longer at war, poetry and imagination become visible, and everyday life is lived under the sign of mad and reciprocal love, the generous beauty of play, and the always new adventure of chance, beyond linear time and administered space.

For my part, I try to write or paint or draw a little each day, and to be active politically, but I never lose sight of the small details that are the true wonders of the world: Dark-eyed Juncos in the morning, cicada songs, moon shadows, rhythms of people walking, surprise encounters — the things that really matter in life.

(3) Decolonizing and liberating the heart, spirit, and mind calls for poetry, revolt, love, and revolution, and that is precisely the four-way intersection where surrealism and African and African diasporic cultural/political practices meet and mix. The poetry of Jayne Cortez and Ted Joans, two of the finest poets of our time, is bursting with the dazzling truths to be found at that mighty crossroads of past, present, future, and desire. African art in its amazing variations opens up whole new worlds of thinking and dreaming, glorious and profound. The blues and jazz, with their emphasis on collective creation and improvisation, and their organic relation to a vital community, have always flourished at the intersection of creativity and rebellion. Freedom is their natural magic substance.

(4) Surrealism is no mere "style," it is life itself lived in the light of the imaginary. It encourages individual and collective defiance of all that is repressive: patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, and other miserabilist mystifications that are only forms of living death. One becomes a race

traitor by choosing *life* instead — by recognizing that no one really exists in isolation, that all the world's people, however unconsciously, are united in their dreams and desires. To be truly *alive* is to be free to affirm your own desires, to create yourself through your own activity, and to freely join with others in play and the struggle for social transformation. And that is what surrealism is: the quest for the discovery of the world and one's self, the actualization of the Marvelous, the becoming of revolutionary reality, the heart's desire of freedom itself.

Michael Stone-Richards and Julien Lenoir

Note by MS-R: When this inquiry reached me I had a poet friend visiting from Paris and we decided to work on this together.

(1) We are struck, have always been and will always be, by a fact of particular singularity: that of all the avant-garde movements with any claims to historical importance for the first third of the last century, surrealism alone, in any significant way, held within its fold women and people of color, and that one cannot imagine surrealism without their presence. What is it, then, that surrealism made possible for them, that no other movement could even approximate? It is clear, astoundingly clear, that surrealism alone found a way of translating into practice certain of the ethical insights from the generation of the great Symbolists — Huysmans, the Mallarmé of *Igitur* — in which the question was not first and foremost the displacement of one political party or order by another, but the far more basic question of a *new form of thinking* in which the erotic and the feminine would be allowed to structure perception and action. What is it in surrealist experience — its conception of love, its deep thinking of friendship — that bewilders and unsettles patriarchy and masculine sense-making if not the *passage à l'act* of a mode of feeling and responsiveness based upon reciprocity (to and from the world, to and from the desired subject), a mode of thinking that, long before the Lacanians of the 1960s, uncovered the ethics of desire, and that long before the tedium of talk about performativity, realized the radical contingency of the subject in the movement of desire?

The erotic shock and *depaysement* of surrealist figures has, we know, outraged a revived Victorianism — and here, if for nothing else, one must remain grateful, indeed, to the courage of Rosalind Krauss in refusing the imposition of a peculiarly middle-class etiquette on surrealist eroticism that fails to see the implicit connection between the rejection

of woman-as-property (the indecency and “violence” of surrealist iconography point absolutely to this) and desire as liberty. If, as Breton says in *Les vases communicants*, a work that speaks of desire and not mere pleasure, desire, if it is real, refuses itself nothing, it also remains, hence the importance of reciprocity and reversibility for Breton, that desire must renew itself and everything in relation to itself. An ethic of desire is not, indeed, about mere satisfaction; patriarchy, based upon suppression and the manipulation of commodified desire, cannot allow for reciprocity and thus has need of a politics of mere satisfaction and reification. The challenge posed by surrealism, historically, is to think from the position of the third, of the other — which is to say, from the position of radical liberty. We are far from exhausting, still less realizing the implications of this thinking.

(2) Is it possible, any longer, to think of chance, coincidence, strangeness, and encounters in everyday life without doing so in terms that bespeak a demotic surrealism? We think not. It is, though, more difficult to link these experiences to a sense of the liberation from the constraints of everyday life — the shared tedium of humdrum life, of routine, of crushing habit, all the more so as the forces of technological modernity impose by ever more successful ruses a deathly uniformity. And yet, faced with the vogue of Existentialism upon his return to Paris from America in 1945, Breton rejected Existentialism with the declaration, “*Away with Miserabilism!*” whilst in the same breath, and in agreement with Bataille, he rejected Stalinism with the unanswerable truth that it was “moral extermination.” This is a rejection of the politics of order in favor of an ethics of liberty; henceforth, as was clear from the disaster of the Stalinization of the Party in the 1930s, politics could only be an infrapolitics.

Can surrealism, undoubtedly correct in its diagnosis of the misery of modernity, still have something to offer? That depends very much upon what it is that one might be expecting. Certainly there is no formula, no blueprint — that kind of politics is for the bureaucratic mind and the reconstructed Stalinists with their Boy-Scout view of history. What remains is the insistence on liberty and recognition (of the other), the refusal of work, the constant effort of renewal (in the words of Sade, “*Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!*”).

M.S.-R.: In the context of a discussion on surrealism, internationalism, and the Caribbean in June 1999, Franklin Rosemont made a comment of startling limpidity that made me think of something obvious: he

spoke of the American contribution to surrealism as being largely a *demotic* surrealism. Looking through any of the classic surrealist reviews, alongside the discovery of the everyday, the recognition of such forms as *Le Palais idéal* of the Facteur Cheval, there is, noticeably, a constant, if critical engagement, with what can only be called the remnants, avatars of high culture. To look through the American surrealist journals from the 1960s onward, is to see the prevalence of the demotic — the Watts Tower, for example, the American lawn (“What’s wrong with it? Everything!”) — side by side with a commitment to anarchist and working-class politics, a politics of the specific unlike anything to be found in French or European or Japanese surrealism. Has this commitment to infrapolitics as a distinctive commitment of American surrealism been sufficiently noted?

(3) As with the case of the role and significance of women in the articulation of surreality, likewise the presence of people of color in the articulation of surrealism — from *Légitime défense* to *Tropiques* and beyond — bears witness to the range, depth, and singularity of the surrealist vision: the questions of gender, sexuality, race, and the post-colonial, which are so much a part of our contemporaneity, can be seen to have informed the distinctive definition of surrealism from the moment of its response to French military adventurism in the Rif to its denunciation of the colonial exhibition in 1931. It is also telling that when one looks at surrealism internationally, it is almost impossible to confound its manifestations in Hungary or France with the Antilles/Caribbean, for surrealism avails itself, as Aimé Césaire realized, of the fauna and flora of the *local imaginary*; thus when Breton, with Pierre Mabille, assisted at Voudoun ceremonies in Haiti he could acknowledge that there was no question of *bringing* surrealism to Haiti, it was already present. Magloire-Saint-Aude is a poet who could not but be surrealist. Surrealism, inconceivable without its desire to re-think alterity, as witnessed in its *Map of the World* (1929), which put into practice Valéry’s insight that “L’Europe est finie,” presented for people of color a means of articulating the local in relationship to the universal. When Césaire left the Party he declared that Party-Communism could not address the particularities of Black experience, whilst the glorious Suzanne Césaire could write in “Le Surréalisme et nous” in *Tropiques*: “Surrealism — tightrope of our hope.” After World War II, the most significant, the most urgent developments in surrealism passed through women (Joyce Mansour,

Annie Le Brun) and people of color: the French Caribbean and Franco-phone Africa. Everything that surrealism understood concerning the relationship between the freedom of the imagination and liberty found a new voice of passionate refusal in anti-colonialism and the dream of liberty of the civil rights movement: The power implicit in the experience "I have a dream" was the *color of a time long awaited*. It is the color of a time still to come.

(4) *M.S.-R.*: "Whiteness" is a lower- and middle-class value writ to cosmological proportions. It will end with a whimper. And besides, I have never been able to fall in love with such a creature.

J.L.: "Whiteness" is a bore.

Darryl Lorenzo Wellington

(2) The question of the imaginative, the ephemeral, the surreal penetrating the fabric of everyday life is not hypothetical. Not a "what if," not a conceptual reality. The question is not a question of possibility, but of degree. The reader is probably thinking, and rightly thinking, "he means dreams" — the universal act of dreaming, which we do nightly and do helplessly. But in my own thought and poetic practice, I mean, above all, the gateway to dreams: *sleep*. This may merely be me being witty. But at my most inspired moments, I don't think so. Honestly, for the purposes of poetry, dreams are personal, secretive, cabalistic, and sometimes, night after night, incoherent. Sleep is by contrast physical, general, visceral, almost able to be grasped with one's two hands, and — theoretically — if properly described, sleep touches a common nerve. Dreams are your dreams: sleep, for us physically, is the same sleeping. There is no life that is not touched once a day — or once a night — by the father and child of surrealism, sleep and dreams. Sleep is socialistic. Sleep universalizes the creative process. Sleep is surrealist, inexplicable, and beyond the explanation of science. Sleep is deep, in a world that is increasingly flat, flatter than flat. Sleep is the final opposite of work. Technology, on the other hand, perpetuates such phenomena as MTV, which documents our dreams meaninglessly and has been described, all too sadly because all too accurately, as "surrealism without an unconscious."

Let me propose a revolutionary agenda. Fight the powers that be! Cultivate your freedom! Don't go to work, go to sleep!

The New Principal

Darryl Lorenzo Wellington

The children come careening down the hall
screaming *Hello Mr.*

Fill in the blank, but whoever he was this time he saw
Their faces like flowers popping up. His black desk
Was a skull's eye socket. A sheen of window glass
Sealed him off from the scary flower patch ranging outside.
But why bother about flowers and not, not yet see
The utopia he was here to see from start to finish
Like a kingdom come, and why be precisely worried
Whoever he was this time, with whoever they were
All, all happy faces, as long as they kept their happy places?
The kids had shreddable faces: textured, almost papery
As though he could reach out lackadaisically and tear
Them up, parting their papery laughter in halves
With a thoughtless ripping sound, a *piñata* bursting
And candy falling out, ending their stupid game, though
If they had been wearing Halloween masks, he
Still would have seen them with the same jaundiced eye
Of fear peppered with half-hearted conviction
That they were either laughing about a good teacher
screwing up,

Or exposing to the school how bad a bad teacher could be.
His business today was utopia —
He flashed back. Reflected on his shiny black desk
He saw a sun, *the* sun, and Apollo the sun god
Circling, and he realized he was a bit of a *raconteur*
Since his own training, seven years' worth
Had been in leadership.
He had a degree in bringing out sunbrightness;
casting shadows aside
And he owned a t-shirt of
The sun, and Apollo scripting fiery letters underneath.
If there was a new *principle*

He had caught it from Apollo the sun god circling up
 High, but a true god rode
 Blind of the children's attitudes below
 And, by his whip's lash and lesson, showed
 How all that was known and knowable, fey, curious,
 contradictory, though
 Some things were just *bad*
 Though he would prefer the words *less good*
 Could be situated in a mythic law
 Of order and the orange sun
 And approached, if any stirrings of disobedience arose,
 as sunlight
 Approaches the trees each afternoon, blinding
 Not with its voice but its eye
 The differentiation among the leaves



Anne Olson, "My School"

Elegua's House

Ronnie Burk

At the crossroads of Elegua's house shreds of fiber glass &
old copper tubing
flakes of lead paint & bins of corrosive solvents
plastic bags full of plastic bags, broken doors and outdated
fuse boxes

How do we dispose of all this junk?

Horus embraces himself in the backyard of nailing planks
to wall in decaying mulch
so we can grow corn, squash, beans, okra, tomatoes, chilis,
zinnias & sunflowers

Beast

star

dream

weapon

out of the cracks in the sidewalk wooden cities decompose
mummy dust heirlooms
of scarabs & polished beads reciting incantations
in the animist green winds of
Elegua's House



Armadillo (*Tolypeutes tricinctus*).
(X16)

Further Reading on Surrealism

This short reading list is meant to aid those who wish to learn more about surrealism and its revolutionary project. It includes books, pamphlets, articles, and collective declarations covering a broad range of surrealist interests, from poetics to popular culture, from art to politics, from objective chance and *l'amour fou* to the critique of miserabilism and whiteness. It emphasizes writings by those who have actually participated in the Surrealist Movement rather than by critics, though it does include texts by such thinkers as Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, whose surrealist affinities are well known. For reasons of space it does not include poetry or fiction. Readers are encouraged to seek out the hundred-plus volumes of poetry and tales authored by surrealists in the United States.

Also for reasons of space this list includes only sources available in English. This is unfortunate not only because so many of surrealism's finest works exist only in French, Spanish, Czech, or Japanese, but also because, as has so often been true of the real "outlaws" in US poetry and politics, most of the historical and critical literature concerning the Chicago Surrealist Group and the Surrealist Movement in the United States also happens to be written in other languages. Readers seeking greater knowledge of the history and contributions of the Surrealist Movement in the United States are urged to consult *The Forecast Is Hot!* (1997), a collection of tracts and other documents compiled by Franklin Rosemont, Penelope Rosemont, and Paul Garon; in addition to an extensive introduction ("Surrealism: The Chicago Idea"), which is in fact a kind of updated surrealist manifesto, the book also includes important historical and bibliographical notes.

Also highly recommended are the US Surrealist Movement's various periodicals, especially the journal *Arsenal/Surrealist Subversion* (four volumes, 1970-89), and *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination* (1982), as well as the journals that have devoted special issues or sections of

issues to the Surrealist Movement: *Radical America* (1970), *City Lights Anthology* (1974), *Living Blues* (1976), *Cultural Correspondence* (1979 and 1981), *Progressive Librarian* (1993), and *Race Traitor* (1998).

To keep up with the current activities of the Surrealist Movement in the United States, visit their website at <www.surrealism-usa.org>.



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Penelope Rosemont

SR Editors' Afterword

First I encourage you to forget what we usually associate with the name of surrealism; consider the word, like “democracy,” as having been so mangled by cynical or superficial use, that its meaning actually needs defending. Emphasize, instead, to begin with, an intimation based on the experience common to many of us that we have, as the cognitive philosopher Paul Churchland puts it, more ability than time: the deep conviction based on experience that with all of our ability — as individuals, as an endangered collectivity — we certainly could do more and better than what our current world reflects. A great deal more, and qualitatively better. The belief that, underneath the chiseled movements of our day-to-day life, the increasingly (with age) cumbersome navigation of our will, there is something more; something lighter, quicker, more consonant with the breath of laughter. What awaits us in this place, if only we could find the right way, might be explosive to our social order; it is political, but raw and strange and even more fundamental.

“The day will come,” said André Breton in his lecture to the Belgian surrealists in 1934, “when these palpable evidences of an existence other than the one we believe ourselves to be leading will no longer be treated as cavalierly as now.” Certainly the evidence to which he was able to point — the revelations of dreams, of imagination, of the creative unconscious — has grown; as certainly the evidence from other quarters has expanded and ramified: the accounts of all the extraordinary and variously accursed outsiders who offer for the white “civilized” straight and masculine world a devastating insight. “Truly,” says Breton again, with characteristic archness, “we have not ceased to be fanatically attracted by these rays of sunshine full of miasma.” How ugly, infantile, how superficial, cramped and cowering the dominant

version of "Mankind" has become when lit up by the nocturnal ray! It would seem, then, so many years after this initial surrealist salvo, that our other life, this life-lived-otherwise, should become integral to radical practice.

It could be, has been, argued, that the New Left did not treat the surrealist insight cavalierly. And by New Left I am referring not only to the white and privileged students who rejected the "smooth democratic unfreedom" of modern capitalism but to the global panoply of forces that, when considered in their variety and depth, shook the world in 1968 with an arguably world-historical ardor. I believe that this new left, including the anti-colonial struggles abroad and in the heart of the Euro-American beast, Black Power, feminist movement, gay and lesbian struggle, insurgencies of the spirit and gun throughout the world, forms the most adequate cultural and historical context for the resurgence of surrealism in Chicago and elsewhere. The sheer scope and complexity of this gesture begun sometime in the sixties continues to prefigure the horizon for renewed left activism. It will be a surprise, perhaps a delight, for readers to discover this (second-wave) variety of total revolt, a contemporary manifestation of a dedicatedly radical movement that, as David Roediger argues in these pages, has all-too-frequently been absented from the left historical register.

As the title of Jablonski's piece, "Their Millennium and Ours" suggests, there is no question that we have an internationalist, though somewhat isolated, surrealist presence in the new millennium. There cannot be a question, literally, of the death of surrealism. If, as many would-be gravediggers have said since the 1920s, surrealism is dead and buried, then — as its supporters would jubilantly holler — long live the 1,001 deaths of surrealism!

Nevertheless, there remains behind this exaltation the more serious question of its particular vitality. You will, hopefully, make up your own mind on that score; the materials found in this special issue are meant to promote discussion in this direction — to see, in other words, what is most compelling about a surrealism that attempts to engage the "unfettered imagination" in a total insurrection against whiteness, masculinity, all forms of colonialism and capitalist plunder of what is still living. With emphasis, above all, on what is — in the most fundamental cultural sense — *still living*.

This, at any rate, is the goal. As Penelope Rosemont says in an interview published inside:

Surrealism is a revolutionary conception of the world and of life. It's a kind of unified field theory in which poetry, art, revolutionary politics, psychoanalysis, alchemy, and the influences of different cultures mix together in totally new ways. Its basic aim is to transform the world and to change life, to enable everyone to discover their own originality.

Robin D.G. Kelley invokes the words of Suzanne Césaire to emphasize what is specific, and longstanding, to its blend of politics and creativity:

To embrace Surrealism is not a simple matter of reading a manifesto and signing a card; it requires a freeing of the mind, a willingness to enter "the domain of the strange, the Marvelous and the fantastic, a domain scorned by people of certain inclinations. Here is the freed image, dazzling and beautiful, with a beauty that could not be more unexpected and overwhelming."

You can pursue this discovery of Suzanne Césaire further within these pages, and still more within Penelope Rosemont's *Surrealist Women*, reviewed here; it is enough for me to emphasize that this sensibility was enunciated by a Martinican woman who, in 1943, was attesting to the creative and autonomous powers of everyday people as the source of radical transformation. A transformation, moreover, that requires something more and otherwise than what is usually associated with "revolutionary" practice: a reckoning with the marvelous and fantastic, with what, to paraphrase the Guinea-Bissauan revolutionary Amílcar Cabral, we harken to when we *return to the source* of revolutionary dreams.

Because I think this combination of autonomy and imagination is what is most vital to the surrealist project, and because I think it is a point at which most of the complex left has arrived as a necessity, it is worth pursuing a little further. Despite formal interdictions within the Marxist tradition against "utopianism," no vital movement can do (or for that matter, has done) without the belief that the world can be and must be made otherwise than it is. The world known and lived otherwise — whether from the perspective of class, gender, so-called "race," or from the perspective of other unique or accursed limits — is the experiential heart of revolution. For those who, tentatively, and for lack of a better term, I am calling the "complex left" there has developed over time an appreciation for the multiple sources of this experience. (Or

maybe I should say that such an appreciation has had to be knocked into them!) By whatever means of self-criticism or internal struggle, this appreciation for multiple sources has included, by necessity, an equally powerful appropriation of its motive experiences. To say it quite baldly: what is most vital to the left in the last hundred years has come from "below" and from the "side" of its dominant (dominating) tendencies. The sources of its creativity have come from an intense refinement of what bell hooks, in a book by that title, has called "outlaw culture": from women getting together to talk about their lives, from these women's different versions of each other, from Black women and men getting together to talk about their lives, and their different versions of each other, from men who hunger for the bodies of other men getting together. . . and the highly elaborated sense of other worlds that have been created in the process. The imagination, the theorizing, has been inseparable from the motive feelings, and these in turn have been inseparable from movement.

But this leads us to what is perhaps most particular to the surrealist conception of praxis: the process by which other worlds are discovered and created — not out of thin air, but from the exceedingly cultural and historical materials at hand — this process, the surrealists might argue, is different from that sort of thinking-together one accomplishes under conditions of scarcity, when the ends press too firmly on the means of life. The conditions most conducive to creativity and imagination vibrate with something like a *rigorous leisure*. Not to be confused with the opposite of work, this leisure expands within its own place and time and is accompanied by a dilation of possibility, the exhalation of breath, the vitiation of the reality principle. And since the reality principle is leased and managed by Capital, Inc., surrealism cannot be otherwise than revolutionary.

I think that this forms at least one aspect of the surrealist version of "imagination." The difficulty, or the challenge, for surrealism from my perspective is not so much in recognizing the centrality of the creative and marvelous, but in inciting it and acting upon it. Inciting and acting upon it, not within the overheated and claustrophobic house of the "unconscious," but within a greatly enlarged and more complex field. The Freudian version of the unconscious to which surrealism still remains loyal is too cramped, too indebted to nineteenth century conceptions of family, sex, work, and life to adequately address this need.

The challenge for the version of surrealism most represented in these pages is, as I understand it, to get more air into the attic. From the perspective of theory, this would mean to engage a broader range of critical work; from cultural studies, queer theory, critical legal studies, feminist history and science, from discussions of race and representation, ecology, studies of capitalism and modernity, certainly; but also from vernacular practices that may not so clearly intersect with what is considered “surreal” but which nevertheless embody a creativity native to, and immanent within, what the surrealists call “miserablism.” I have no doubt that this is the intention — there has long within the movement been a cherished desire to have a center for surrealist research that would elaborate in theory and in practice what is still only cut in rough form — but there is still something like a polemical front that keeps surrealism pretty firmly locked in its ranks. I hear hint of this, for example, when Ron Sakolsky attests to surrealism’s relation to mainstream culture:

Not surprisingly, the academic/critical establishment and most other poets have always found their attitude “untenable,” “excessive,” “exorbitant,” and “silly.” The surrealists, however, couldn’t care less about such disapproval on the part of people they tend to regard as false poets, men “hired to depress art” (in Blake’s phrase), and “apologists for misery” (in Franklin’s phrase). One could even say that Chicago’s surrealists actually *thrive* on the open hostility of those whose repressive conformism they heartily despise.”

Or, to take another example from Franklin Rosemont’s inspired address quoted above:

The emphasis on *unfettering* highlights the fact that surrealism, in poetry as in politics, is concerned above all with *freedom*, and has been relentless in its opposition to capitalism, church, state, the police, and all other authoritarian institutions. The surrealist’s practice of poetry led them to develop a critical view of the *unfreedom* of contemporary European and American culture.

There is no argument with the cause of freedom. But the forms and manners of “unfettering” necessarily suffer from a vantage in which overly reified and overly simplified abstractions such as “freedom vs. unfreedom” send out the sparks of their tiresome life-and-death

itinerary. There are many occasions, it seems to me, where a polemic stands in for more delicate criticism, and where a resort to binaries, even with the intention of exploding them, obscures perhaps less-chiar-oscuro opportunities and analysis. Chicago surrealism, perhaps influenced by the most questionable legacy of dialectics, seems to have a weakness for purified categories and oppositions. I am no apologist for academic casuistry, or for bad politics dressed in oversubtlety, but is it always possible or helpful, in theory or in practice, to corral the nuances of poetic dispute and its larger politics into camps of the real-and-rentless vs. the venal-and-apologetic? This course is exemplified, but not necessarily limited to, the example quoted from Sakolsky. LaCoss's review of Vaneigem's *A Cavalier History of Surrealism*, informative and exceptional in every other way, seems to reduce itself in places to just this sort of opposition, in which the purity of surrealist revolt is preserved from its bourgeois pretenders. Each one of these cumbersome oppositions — not least, the fundamental categories of “consciousness” and the “unconscious” — begin to echo one another, begin, finally to resound in a sort of hollow Catholic chamber of Good and Evil. I am reminded in this context of Breton's strangely ascetical formulation for an introduction to the British magazine *The Quarter* in 1932: “Surrealism is affiliated to the occult theories according to which only the man who is really *worthy* can call forth evil spirits, and he must be as fully pure outside as in; and it is also affiliated to the Hegelian doctrine, adapted to his own purpose by Engels, according to which ‘evil is the form in which the motive force of historical development presents itself.’”

However more complex the intentions and actual practices of surrealism actually are — complex in terms of genders, peoples, places, themes, imaginaries — its theoretical apparatus, despite all that has happened since the 1920s (and since the 1960s!), has not kept pace. While, for example, surrealism has always included the active presence of women, it remains to be seen what that presence has done to temper or modify what seems to be an essentially masculine theoretical template; that template, being, as I have been describing, preternaturally true in its resistant and proactive instincts, but troubling in its all-or-nothing expression. How, at its heart, has surrealism benefited from the imaginaries developed so richly and painstakingly from the feminist movements in the United States and throughout the world? Is it enough to show that

women have participated in, but somehow not fundamentally altered, what is taken to be a universal, or androgynous, unconscious? I am inspired by Jan Hathaway's suggestion that "surrealism provides an innovative way. . . of melting the patriarchal 'either/or' into a liberating 'both/and'," but I have to admit that I still don't see it much in evidence. More discussion would be helpful, more refinement, more criticism.

And, in a related area, while surrealism has been "relentlessly" opposed to the deadly mystique of whiteness, it has yet to have, particular to its own center of vitality, a picture in which blackness does not represent virtually and excessively and one might almost say, essentially, the only antipode to its own aggrieved location.

The evidence for a long-standing and admirable attunement to diversity in the surrealist movement is mentioned by Roediger (in his article in this issue) and attested to by virtually all the significant surrealist work since the 1920s. Franklin Rosemont's exciting collection and translation of Breton's work shows this quite clearly, as does the more recent issue of *Race Traitor* devoted to surrealism. Nevertheless, the dominant mode of interaction with anti- or intra-European and American cultural practices is that of *inspiration* if not, and self-consciously so, one of appropriation. While the white French surrealists from the very beginning recognized the irreducible autonomy of African, Oceanic, African-Diasporic and African American cultural practices, even as they resonated with the intentions of surrealism, they nevertheless have not yet — in contemporary incarnation — emerged as a co-force capable of true reciprocity. The inspiration, in its deep and vital aspects, has seemed to me to have been one-sided. And more, perhaps because of this unfortunate combination of distance and admiration, European and White American interaction with vernacular traditions like the blues have tended to reinforce a kind of non-collaborative parallelism; Paul Garon, for example, execrates what he calls a counterfeit variety of "white blues" in favor of the authentic Black version. But this seems to reinforce, even while its sensitivity to location and identity is admirable, a strange kind of division of labor: the white folks in Europe and America admire and amplify what the "others" actually do. I should say that I do not think this dilemma is unique to surrealism, but indeed, survives as a kind of limit for all contemporary left coalitions that must, somehow, be traversed *in practice*.

Some of this work on the blues also might even be said to reinforce a racist equation of blackness, exoticism, and the unconscious that is, at the

very least, deeply troubling. It shows the ways in which an “unfettering” of expression itself may very well, and with the opposite intention, allow the unconscious racism that pervades our culture to emerge in a non-critical fashion; to emerge even in the spirit of celebration. The problem, once again, returns us to a situation in which white surrealists, and much of the white or privileged left generally, must borrow its creative unconscious from the accursed and oppressed. But it forbids itself, somehow, from finding — or actually creating — this accursed outsider in itself.

These are some of the problems I see within the surrealist imagination and theory. The challenge as I see it from the perspective of action — a challenge, I want to emphasize, that is sympathetic to the autonomist spirit of surrealism’s impulses — is how to elaborate what Breton early characterized as a “merciless critique of Western Civilization *from within*” into something more consistently generative than games or pamphlets. What I mean by this is the cultivation of truly autonomous cultures of difference, which are actually productive of alternative visions; and more, actually productive of alternative *ways*. The first surrealist groups in Europe had the advantage of a cultural context more conducive to “packs” or enclaves. One of the great barriers to a vital surrealist practice in the United States is the erosion of collective self-definition by the highly competitive and individualist capitalist culture. Even if one revolts against it in all the detailed ways one can, one revolts often in isolation. The barren landscape of the New World Order excoriated by the Chicago Surrealists in their “Maxwell Street Forever” flyer compounds this isolation. It virtually disallows the time and place for rigorous leisure — the humus of creative reality, and the garden of oppositional cultures. What Robin D.G. Kelley says in his introduction to the latest edition of the *Communist Manifesto* could be paraphrased to fit contemporary surrealism: Of course we could use an updated version of the Surrealist Manifesto; but what we really need are the historical circumstances that compelled Breton and company, and here, the Chicago Surrealists, to write what they do: we need the movement. Here “movement,” I think, could and should be defined to include not only the most typical and demonstrative versions of protest (marches, lockdowns, mass arrests) but the prior and more consistent forms of collective expression: the time, places, and leisure necessary for *cultures* of resistance.

What would such a particularly surrealist movement look like? To avoid seeming critical without myself putting out, I want to repeat what

I have said already: a surrealist movement commensurate with the complexity of its intentions — combining the *sur* with the *real* as an active, multisystemic principle and reflective of the still multifarious, though threatened, nature of our shared global reality — this proposed movement sketches the itinerary and limits *shared by all the left*. But I think that these limits are at times exposed, at times reinforced, by the contemporary surrealist presence. What is exposed is a need for autonomous creativity, for the active and expressive participation of every single human being in the creation of worlds; the need for a freedom that, in its positive definition, offers the potential if not the ready-made actuality of this creation; the need to cultivate the most vital, expressive, surprising aspects of ourselves and our cultures as that which is *still alive* in us; the need to embed this creativity in a collaborative, collective practice; the need finally, to volatilize these forces in movement.

What is reinforced by the surrealist presence is a need to avoid unnecessary rigidities of conception: to see, feel, hear, taste, to solicit, engage, tarry just a little longer alongside, the muted voices of the future speaking from within the present catastrophe. Even within the catastrophe of ourselves. And to claim, as some of the writing here comes close to, that the surrealists have privileged access to these muted voices — through psychoanalysis or some other game — is to cross over from polemic into arrogance. We are with you! Let's be done with the posturing and move on to the rich substance. What this incarnation of the surrealist presence shows finally, it seems to me, is that it can use possibly a little more attentiveness and less punctilio, more interlocation, more movement, and more, above all, more air. And please no more Victorian icons!

Kai Lundgren-Williams
for the *Socialist Review* Editorial Collective

The Surrealists' Response to the SR Editors

Clearly the SR editors still don't "get" surrealism. However fascinated or at least tempted some of them may be by one or more of its aspects, they nonetheless seem to have recoiled before its revolutionary project as a whole, and — as their commentary shows — have taken great pains to distance themselves from it.

Many readers will no doubt consider it a bit odd that the SR editors have in fact devoted an entire issue, and a double issue at that, to a movement they obviously disapprove of in so many ways. For us, however, the SR editors' attitude is not at all surprising, for we have encountered it many times before among those who like to think of themselves as "radicals" and "revolutionists." The sad truth is that the Left in the United States, "complex" or otherwise, has long had a serious problem — and that's putting it very mildly — with poetry and imagination. The woeful legacy of puritanism, positivism, and pragmatism continues to weigh heavily on intellectual life in this country, and not least among socialists. When one reflects that the difficulties socialists have had with the more respectable forms of poetry are multiplied a thousandfold by surrealism, the dilemma of the SR editors — and others like them — becomes perfectly clear. Something in surrealism's "automatic message" appeals to them, but caution and common sense prevent them from going "too far." In other words, they like it, but they also don't like it.

This is called *ambivalence*, and the SR editors' commentary is a good illustration of it. Unfortunately their one-dimensional denial of psychoanalysis precludes further discussion of the mental dynamics involved here, but their commentary itself reveals how they chose to resolve the conflict. Instead of confronting their own (unconscious) resistance to surrealism, they decided — as most insecure people do in similar circumstances — to go on the offensive and adopt an accusatory tone.

As could only be expected in such conditions, most of the charges the SR editors have brought against us are depressingly familiar, and indeed were already old before any of us were born. Their naive Freudophobia, the railing against "Victorian icons," the hand-wringing dismay over the surrealists' alleged deficiency in theory, the old chestnut about the movement's "isolation": all these and many more of the SR editors' complaints have been broadcast over and over again, ad nauseam, from the 1920s on, by countless other reviewers: Stalinist, social-democratic, Liberal, and even Conservative.

The SR editors, like so many of their forerunners, are especially disturbed by the surrealists' avowed extremism. Modestly reserving the adjective "complex" for themselves and their confederates, they accuse the surrealists of "oversimplification" and "arrogance." They find our "all or nothing" expression "troubling" and our "life-and-death" sense of urgency "tiresome." Our passion, our loves and hatreds, our revolutionary zeal are waved away as mere "posturing." The SR editors want us to repudiate our surrealist fanaticism and immoderation, and ask that we make our polemics "more delicate."

In their naive hope for a milder, passionless, and therefore inevitably reformist version of surrealism, they forget a small detail: There wouldn't be a trace of surrealism left in it!

Even inattentive readers will have noticed by now that the SR editors and the surrealists disagree on many matters. For our part, we are quite willing to agree to disagree, and are pleased by the SR editors' determination to proceed with the publication of a special issue that they find so troubling. Although their commentary seems to us not only inaccurate and wrongheaded but also insulting, it is not our intention to trade insults with them. To reply in kind — to take the SR editors to task for their timidity and stodginess, or their lack of humor and imagination — would serve little purpose. We prefer to skip over their peculiar opinions concerning surrealism and its history, and even their misreadings or misquotings of André Breton and others, and to focus instead on a few specific assertions that — were they to remain unanswered here and now — might confuse readers otherwise unfamiliar with surrealist perspectives.

1. In the SR editors' view, today's surrealists suffer from theoretical backwardness — or should we say underdevelopment? As they quaintly put it in their commentary, surrealism's "theoretical apparatus . . . has not kept pace." Unintentionally, this phrasing suggests exactly what

“theory” tends to be, not only for the SR editors, but for many socialists: an *apparatus* — an unwieldy mechanical contrivance that follows them around like a robot.

In any event, surrealism has *never* been “in step” with the latest academic fads in theory. During the 1920s, for example, when Ferdinand de Saussure’s work on linguistics was all the rage in academic circles, the surrealists — explorers of language second to none — ignored him completely, devoting their attention instead to such imaginative writers as Lautréamont, Saint-Pol-Roux, and Raymond Roussel, whose works were scorned by the leading intellectuals of the time. As for today, can anyone doubt that T-Bone Slim, Memphis Minnie, and Mary MacLane — to whom US surrealists have devoted entire books — will be appreciated long after today’s “official” celebrity theorists are rightly forgotten?

The point is, it is in the nature of surrealism to seek its inspirations (theoretical and otherwise) outside the academic and other official trends: in the practice of poetry, in the shadows, in the back streets, always wildly elsewhere. Of course there are also university-linked thinkers whom we admire, but they too are, intellectually speaking, defiantly out of the mainstream, or “whitestream,” as Jayne Cortez calls it. St. Clair Drake and Herbert Marcuse were not only important early influences on surrealists in the United States, but also our very good friends. More recently we have found much stimulation in the writings of laborlorist Archie Green; philosopher Charles W. Mills, author of *The Racial Contract* (1997); Patricia Hill Collins, author of *Black Feminist Thought* (1990); and the late scholar of Taoism, Angus C. Graham, whose *Reason and Spontaneity* (1985) contains valuable reflections on psychic automatism. Many other theorists who interest us, and whose work seems to us to reinforce or expand the surrealist outlook, are cited throughout this issue.

2. The immense and diverse contributions to surrealism made by its women participants, and the many ways in which they have expanded and transformed the movement — not only in poetry and painting, but also in such areas as ecology, gender, the critique of whiteness and colonialism, and the understanding of “madness” — are carefully documented in Penelope Rosemont’s *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (University of Texas Press, 1998), and touched on elsewhere in this issue of *Socialist Review*: in the interview with Penelope Rosemont and in Mari Jo Marchnight’s review of the book. If, in the face of such

massive evidence, the SR editors wish to persist in the delusion that surrealism is “essentially masculine,” then that’s the SR’s problem, not surrealism’s.

3. In their hasty and superficial discussion of surrealism’s relation to Africa and the African diaspora the SR editors show themselves at their pretentiously postmodern worst and whitest. This entire section of their commentary is an exercise in incomprehension. Is it merely by accident that they fail to acknowledge that surrealism is not only international but also *multiracial*, and that several participants in the Surrealist Movement in the United States (among them, collaborators on this issue of *Socialist Review*) are Black?

The SR editors seem to have the impression that surrealist interest in Black culture is not reciprocated — i.e., that Black people aren’t interested in surrealism. Inasmuch as they do not cite any polls they have taken in this regard, we have no idea how they gleaned this impression. In any case, *our* impression is rather different, and corresponds to Robin D.G. Kelley’s observation quoted in this issue in “Surrealism, Poetry, and Politics.”

Time will tell. Meanwhile, it seems pertinent to note that the Surrealist Issue of *Race Traitor* (“Surrealism: Revolution against Whiteness”) has brought forth exceptionally vibrant letters from Black readers. Isn’t it also noteworthy that surrealism was a topic of discussion at the 1998 Black Radical Congress? And if Black music has always been the music of choice for the surrealists of all countries, many Black musicians have also affirmed their interest in surrealism. Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, Bill Cole, and Joseph Jarman have collaborated on publications of the Surrealist Movement in the United States. Taylor and Jarman have participated in Chicago Surrealist Group collective writing experiments. Jarman and Henry Threadgill have composed music directly inspired by surrealism. Threadgill, Douglas Ewart, Gloria Brooks, Rrata Christine Jones, Hamid Drake, and many other members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) have taken part in Surrealist Movement events.

As for the SR editors’ tortuous effort to find “racism” in surrealist celebrations of Black music, we leave this to the readers to judge. We infer that, in this area, the SR editors simply do not know what they are talking about — that their knowledge of Black music is weak at best, and that their interaction with African Americans is not very profound. In any case, in singling out Paul Garon’s work on blues for special abuse

they have really missed the mark, for Garon's scholarship has won the acclaim of the most distinguished African American writers in the field, including Angela Davis, Samuel Floyd, and Robin D.G. Kelley, who has called Garon's classic *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* (first published in 1975) "absolutely the best book on the blues." Garon's 1999 paper on Houston Baker and the blues, published in this issue of *Socialist Review*, prompted an enthusiastic response from Baker himself. Indeed, among non-Black writers on blues, Garon is unquestionably one of the most respected and most cited by Black writers.

If there was truly even the slightest sign of racism in Garon's work — or in other surrealist writings on Black music — wouldn't at least one Black critic have noticed it long before now?

Curiously, the SR editors never mention the working class and its struggle for self-emancipation, a topic on which surrealists in the United States have written voluminously. From the very beginning we have devoted much space in our publications to such matters as point-of-production resistance and revolt (sabotage, wildcats) and major uprisings (Detroit, 1967, Los Angeles, 1992), as well as working-class history and culture, and the even broader category of "popular culture." To ignore what surrealists have written about slave uprisings, the Haymarket anarchists, the IWW, the right to be lazy, Bugs Bunny, Lord Buckley, comics, radio, films, and "outsider" artists is to ignore a large and important part of American surrealism — and a part we think would be of particular interest to socialists. And we hope it will not be considered mere "arrogance" on our part if we say that the imaginative strategies and tactics proposed in Robin Kelley's *Yo Mama's DisFUNKtional* and in David Roediger's article "Mumia Time or Sweeney Time" (*New Politics*, winter 2000), are infinitely more fruitful — more keyed to *revolutionary action* — than the SR editors' sermonizing on the pitiable state of the (yawn) "white left."

In 1890, when a socialist hack asked Frederick Engels to assist him in a polemic against playwright Henrik Ibsen, Engels declined and said in reply: "I prefer to make a thorough study of such things before condemning them." We think this is still good advice (even if it is from a "Victorian icon"), and that the SR editors would do well to consider it.

With surrealist greetings,
for the Surrealist Movement in the United States,
Franklin Rosemont, Ron Sakolsky

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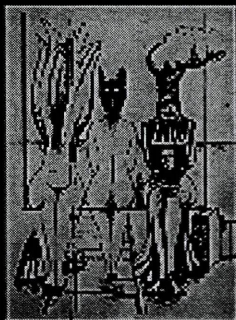
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The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race, that is, to abolish the privileges of the white skin. Until that task is accomplished, even partial reform will prove elusive, because white influence permeates every issue, domestic and foreign, in U.S. society.

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