What Is Surrealism?

This was the title of a lecture given in Brussels on 1 June 1934, at a public meeting organised by the Belgian surrealists, and issued as a pamphlet immediately afterwards. A slightly abridged English translation, supplemented by excerpts from other writings by Breton, was published by Faber & Faber (London, 1936). What Is Surrealism? *remains an unsurpassed presentation of the movement's origins, early development and general orientation.*

Comrades:

The activity of our surrealist comrades in Belgium is closely allied with our own activity, and I am happy to be in their company this evening. Magritte, Mesens, Nougé, Scutenaire and Souris are among those whose revolutionary will – outside of all consideration of their agreement or disagreement with us on particular points – has been for us in Paris a constant reason for thinking that the surrealist project, beyond the limitations of space and time, can contribute to the efficacious reunification of all those *who do not despair of the transformation of the world and who wish this transformation to be as radical as possible.*

At the beginning of the war of 1870 (he was to die four months later, aged twenty-four), the author of *Les Chants de Maldoror* and of *Poésies* Isidore Ducasse, better known by the name of comte de Lautréamont, whose thought has been of the very greatest help and encouragement to my friends and myself throughout the fifteen years during which we have succeeded in carrying on a common activity, made the following remark, among many others which were to electrify us fifty years later: 'At the time of this writing, new tremors are running through the intellectual atmosphere; one needs only the courage to face them.'

1868–75. It is impossible, looking back upon the past, to perceive an epoch so *poetically* rich, so victorious, so revolutionary, so charged with distant meaning, as that which stretches from the separate publication of the first canto of *Maldoror* to the insertion in a letter to Ernest Delahaye of Rimbaud's last poem, 'Rêve', which has not so far been included in his *Complete Works*. It is not an idle hope to wish to see the works of Lautréamont and Rimbaud restored to their correct historical background: the coming and the immediate results of the war of 1870. Other and analogous cataclysms could not have failed to rise out of that military and social cataclysm whose final episode was to be the atrocious crushing of the Paris Commune; the

last in date caught many of us at the very age when Lautréamont and Rimbaud found themselves thrown into the preceding one, and by way of revenge has had as its consequence – and this is the new and important fact – the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution.

I should say that to people socially and politically uneducated as we then were – we who, on the one hand, came for the most part from the petit bourgeoisie, and, on the other, were all by inclination possessed of the desire to intervene on the artistic plane – the days of October, which only the passing of the years and the subsequent appearance of a large number of works within the reach of all were fully to illumine, could not there and then have appeared to turn so decisive a page in history. We were, I repeat, ill prepared and ill informed. Above all, we were preoccupied with a campaign of systematic refusal, exasperated by the conditions under which, in such an age, we were forced to live. But our refusal did not stop there; it was insatiable and knew no bounds. Apart from the incredible stupidity of the arguments which attempted to legitimise our participation in such an enterprise as the war, whose issue left us completely indifferent, this refusal was directed – and, having been brought up in such a school, we are not capable of *changing* so much that it is no longer so directed – against the whole series of intellectual, moral and social obligations that continually and from all sides weigh down on man and crush him. Intellectually, it was vulgar rationalism and chop logic that more than anything else caused our horror and our destructive impulse. Morally, it was all duties: religious, civic, and of the family. Socially, it was work. Did not Rimbaud say: 'Never will I work, O torrents of flame!' and also: 'The hand that writes is worth the hand that ploughs! What a century of hands! I shall never lift my hand!'

The more I think about it, the more certain I become that nothing was to our minds worth saving, unless it was – unless it was, at last, 'l'amour la poésie', to take the bright and trembling title of one of Paul Eluard's books; 'l'amour la poésie' considered as inseparable in their essence and as the sole good. Between the negation of this good, a negation brought to its climax by the war, and its full and total affirmation ('Poetry must be made by all, not by one'), the field was not, to our minds, open to anything but a revolution truly extended into all domains, improbably radical, to the highest degree impractical, and tragically destroying within itself the whole time the feeling that it brought with it both of desirability and of absurdity.

No doubt many of you would put this down to a certain youthful exaltation and to the general savagery of the time; I must, however, insist on this attitude of ours, common to particular men and manifesting itself at periods nearly half a century distant from each other. I should affirm that in ignorance of this attitude one could form no idea of what surrealism really

stands for. This attitude alone can account, and quite adequately, for all the excesses which may be attributed to us but which cannot be deplored unless one gratuitously supposes that we could have started from any other point. The ill-sounding remarks that are imputed to us, the so-called inconsiderate attacks, the insults, the quarrels, the scandals – all the things that we are so much reproached with – turned up on the same road as the surrealist poems. From the beginning, the surrealist attitude has had that in common with Lautréamont and Rimbaud which once and for all binds our lot to theirs, and that is wartime *defeatism*.

I am not afraid to say that this *defeatism* seems to me more relevant than ever. 'New tremors are running through the intellectual atmosphere; one needs only the courage to face them.' They are, in fact, *always* running through the intellectual atmosphere. The problem of their propagation and interpretation remains the same and, as far as we are concerned, remains to be solved. But, paraphrasing Lautréamont, I cannot refrain from adding that old and mortal shivers are trying, at the hour in which I speak, to substitute themselves for those which are the very shivers of knowledge and of life. Those old shivers come to announce a frightful disease, a disease inevitably followed by denial of all rights; one needs only the courage to face them also. This disease is called fascism.

Let us be careful, today, not to underestimate the peril: The shadow has greatly advanced over Europe recently. Hitler, Dolfuss and Mussolini have either drowned in blood or subjected to corporal humiliation everything that formed the effort of generations straining towards a more tolerable and more worthy form of existence. The other day I noticed on the front page of a Paris newspaper a photograph of the surroundings of the Lambrechies mine on the day after the catastrophe. This photograph illustrated an article titled, in quotation marks, 'Only Our Chagrin Remains'. On the same page was another photograph – this one of the unemployed of your country standing in front of a hovel in the Parisian 'poor zone' – with the caption *Poverty is not a crime*. 'How delightful!' I said to myself, glancing from one picture to the other. Thus the bourgeois public in France is able to console itself with the knowledge that the miners of your country were not necessarily criminals just because they got themselves killed for 35 francs a day. And doubtless the miners, our comrades, will be happy to learn that the committee of the Belgian Coal Association intends to postpone till the day after tomorrow the application of the wage cut set for 20 May. In capitalist society, hypocrisy and cynicism have now lost all sense of proportion and are becoming more outrageous every day. Without making exaggerated sacrifices to humanitarianism, which always involve impossible reconciliations and truces to the advantage of the stronger, I should say that thought cannot in

this atmosphere contemplate the exterior world without immediately shuddering. Everything we know about fascism shows that it is precisely the confirmation of this state of affairs, aggravated to its uttermost by the lasting resignation that it seeks to obtain from those who suffer. Is not the evident role of fascism to re-establish for the time being the tottering supremacy of finance capital? Such a role is of itself sufficient to make it deserving of all our hatred. We continue to consider this feigned resignation as one of the greatest evils that can be inflicted on beings of our kind; and those who would inflict it deserve, in our opinion, to be beaten like dogs. Yet it is impossible to conceal the fact that this immense danger is there, lurking at our doors, that it has made its appearance within our walls, and that it would be pure byzantinism to dispute too long, as in Germany, over the choice of the barrier to be set up against it, when all the while, *under several aspects,* it is creeping nearer and nearer to us.

In the course of taking various steps with a view to contributing, in so far as I am capable, to the organisation in Paris of the anti-fascist struggle, I have noticed that already a certain doubt has crept into the intellectual circles of the left as to the possibility of successfully combating fascism, a doubt which has unfortunately infected even those elements whom one might have thought it possible to rely on and who had come to the fore in this struggle. Some of these have even begun to make excuses for the loss of the battle. Such dispositions are so dismaying to me that I would not care to be speaking here without first making clear my position in relation to them, or without anticipating a whole series of remarks that are to follow, affirming that today, more than ever, the *liberation of the mind,* the express aim of surrealism, demands as a primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, the *liberation of man,* which implies that we must struggle against our fetters with all the energy of despair; that today more than ever the surrealists rely entirely, for the bringing about of human liberation, on the proletarian revolution.

I feel free to turn now to the object of this pamphlet, which is to attempt an explanation of what surrealism is. A certain immediate ambiguity contained in the word *surrealism* is capable, in fact, of leading one to suppose that it designates I know not what transcendental attitude, when on the contrary it expresses – and always has expressed for us – a desire to deepen the foundations of the real; to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses. The whole evolution of surrealism, from its origins to the present day, which I will now attempt to retrace, shows that our unceasing wish, growing more and more urgent from day to day, has been at all costs to avoid considering a system of thought as a refuge; to pursue our investigations with eyes wide

open to the external consequences; and to assure ourselves that the results of these investigations would be capable of facing the *breath of the street*. At the limits, for many years past – or, more exactly, since the conclusion of what one may term the purely *intuitive* epoch of surrealism (1919–25) – at the limits, I say, we have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming *one*. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism: interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction (and in this contradiction we see the very cause of man's unhappiness, but also the source of his movement), we have assigned ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on every possible occasion, of refusing to allow the pre-eminence of the one over the other, yet not of acting on the one and on the other *both at once*, for that would be to suppose that they are less apart from each other than they are (and I believe that those who pretend they are acting on both simultaneously either are deceiving us or are a prey to a disquieting illusion); of acting on these two realities not both at once, then, but one after the other, in a systematic manner, allowing us to observe their reciprocal attraction and interpenetration and to give this interplay of forces all the extension necessary for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same.

As I have just mentioned in passing, I consider that one can distinguish two epochs in the surrealist movement, of equal duration, from its origins (1919, year of the publication of *Les Champs magnétiques*) until today – a purely *intuitive* epoch and a *reasoning* epoch. The first can summarily be characterised by the belief, expressed during this time, in the omnipotence of thought, considered capable of freeing itself by means of its own resources. This belief witnesses to a prevailing view that I took on today as being extremely mistaken, the view that *thought is supreme over matter*. The definition of surrealism that has passed into the dictionary, a definition taken from the *Manifesto* of 1924, takes account only of this entirely idealist disposition and (for voluntary reasons of simplification and amplification destined, in my mind, to influence the future of this definition) does so in terms that suggest that I deceived myself at the time in advocating use of an automatic thought not only removed from all control exercised by reason but also disengaged from '*all aesthetic or moral preoccupations*'. It should at least have said *conscious* aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

During the period under review, in the absence, of course, of all seriously discouraging exterior events, surrealist activity remained strictly confined to its first theoretical premises, continuing all the while to be the vehicle of that total nonconformism which, as we have seen, was the binding feature in the coming together of those who took part in it, and the cause,

during the first few years after the war, of an uninterrupted series of adhesions. No coherent political or social attitude, however, made its appearance till 1925; that is to say (and it is important to stress this), till the outbreak of the Moroccan war, which, re-arousing our particular hostility to the way armed conflicts affect man, placed suddenly before us the necessity of making a public protest. The protest, which, under the title *Revolution Now and Forever!* (October 1925), joined the names of the surrealists proper to those of thirty other intellectuals, was doubtless rather confused ideologically; it none the less marked the breaking away from a whole way of thinking; it none the less created a precedent that was to determine the whole future direction of the movement. Surrealist activity, faced with a brutal, revolting, *unthinkable* fact, was forced to ask itself what were its proper resources and to determine their *limits*; it was forced to adopt a precise attitude, exterior to itself, in order to continue to face whatever exceeded these limits.

Surrealist activity at that moment entered into its *reasoning* phase. It suddenly experienced the necessity of crossing over the gap that separates absolute idealism from dialectical materialism. This necessity made its appearance in so urgent a manner that we had to consider the problem in the clearest possible light, with the result that for some months we devoted our entire attention to the means of bringing about this change of front once and for all. If I do not today feel any retrospective embarrassment in explaining this change, that is because it seems to me quite natural that surrealist thought, before coming to rest in dialectical materialism and insisting, as today, on the *supremacy of matter over mind*, should have been condemned to pass, in a few years, through the whole historic development of modern thought. It came *normally* to Marx through Hegel, just as it had come *normally* to Hegel through Berkeley and Hume. These latter influences offer a certain particularity in that, contrary to certain poetic influences undergone in the same way and accommodated to those of the French materialists of the eighteenth century, they yielded a residuum of *practical action*. Trying to hide these influences would be contrary to my desire to show that surrealism has not been drawn up as an abstract system, that is to say, safeguarded against all contradictions. It is my desire also to show how surrealist activity, driven, as I have said, to ask itself what were its proper resources, had in some way or another to *reflect on itself* its realisation, in 1925, of its relative inadequacy; how surrealist activity had to cease being content with the results (automatic texts, recital of dreams, improvised speeches, spontaneous poems, drawings and actions) which it had originally planned; and how it came to consider these first results as being simply so much *material*, starting from which the problem of knowledge inevitably arose again under quite a new form.

As a *living* movement – that is to say, a movement undergoing a constant process of becoming and, what is more, solidly relying on concrete facts – surrealism has brought together and is still bringing together diverse temperaments individually obeying or resisting a variety of dispositions. The determinant of their enduring or short-lived adherence is to be considered not as a blind concession to an inert stock of ideas held in common, but as a continuous sequence of acts which, propelling the doer to more or less distant points, forces him for each fresh start to return to the same starting line. These exercises not being without peril, one man may break a limb or – for which there is no precedent – his head, and another may peaceably submerge himself in a quagmire or report himself dying of fatigue. Unable as yet to treat itself to an ambulance, surrealism simply leaves these individuals by the wayside. Those who continue in the ranks are aware, of course, of the casualties left behind them. But what of it? The essential is always to look ahead, to remain sure that one has not forfeited the burning desire for beauty, truth and justice, toilingly to go onward towards the discovery, one by one, of *fresh landscapes*, and to continue doing so indefinitely and without coercion to the end, that others may afterwards travel the same spiritual road, *unhindered and in all security*. Penetration, to be sure, has not been as deep as one would have wished. Poetically speaking, a few wild (or shall we say charming?) beasts, whose cries fill the air and bar access to a domain as yet only surmised, are still far from being exorcised. But, for all that, the piercing of the thicket would have proceeded less tortuously, and those who are doing the pioneering would have acquitted themselves with unabating tenacity in the service of the cause, if a change had not taken place between the beginning and the end of the spectacle which they provide for themselves and would be glad to provide for others.

In 1934, more than ever, surrealism owes it to itself to defend the postulate of the necessity of change. It is amusing, indeed, to see how the more spiteful and silly of our adversaries affect to triumph whenever they stumble on some old statement we may have made which now sounds more or less discordant in the midst of others intended to render our present conduct comprehensible. This insidious manoeuvre, which is calculated to cast a doubt on our good faith or at least on the genuineness of our principles, can easily be defeated. The development of surrealism throughout the decade of its existence is, we take it, a function of the unrolling of historical realities as these may be speeded up in the period of relief between the conclusion of a peace and the fresh outbreak of war. It is also a function of the process of seeking after new values in order to confirm or invalidate existing ones.

The fact that certain of the first participants in surrealist activity have thrown in the sponge and have been discarded has brought about the

retiring from circulation of some ways of thinking and the putting into circulation of others in which there were implicit certain general dissents on the one hand and certain general assents on the other. Hence it is that this activity has been fashioned by events. At this moment, contrary to current biased rumour according to which surrealism itself is supposed, in its cruelty of disposition, to have sacrificed nearly all the blood first vivifying it, it is heartening to be able to point out that it never has ceased to avail itself of the perfect teamwork of René Crevel, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Benjamin Péret, Man Ray, Tristan Tzara and the present writer, all of whom can attest that from the inception of the movement – which is also the date of our own enlistment in it – until now, the initial principle of their covenant never has been violated. If there have occurred differences on some points, it was essentially within the rhythmic scope of the integral whole, in itself a least disputable element of objective value.

The others, they whom we no longer meet – can they say as much? They cannot, for the simple reason that since they separated from us they have been incapable of achieving a single concerted action that had any definite form of its own, and they have confined themselves, instead, to a reaction against surrealism with the greatest waste to themselves – a fate always overtaking those who go back on their past. The history of their apostasy and denials ultimately will be read into the great limbo of human failings, without profit to any observer – ideal yesterday, but real today – who, called on to make a pronouncement, will decide whether it was they or we who brought the more appreciable efforts to bear on a rational solution of the many problems surrealism has propounded.

Although there can be no question here of going through the history of the surrealist movement – its history has been told many times and sometimes told fairly well; moreover, I prefer to pass on as quickly as possible to the exposition of its present attitude – I think I ought briefly to recall, for the benefit of those of you who were unaware of the fact, that before the surrealist movement, properly so called, there doubtless existed, among the founders of the movement and others who later rallied round it, very active dispositions, not merely dissenting but also antagonistic, which between 1915 and 1920 were willing to enroll themselves under the sign of Dada. Postwar disorder, a state of mind essentially anarchic that guided that cycle's many manifestations, a deliberate refusal to judge – for lack, it was said, of criteria – the actual qualifications of individuals, and, perhaps, in the last analysis, a certain spirit of negation which was making itself conspicuous, had brought about a dissolution of the group (which one might say, from its dispersed and heterogeneous character, was inchoate), whose germinating force has nevertheless been decisive and, by the general consent of present-day critics, has

greatly influenced the course of ideas. It may be proper before passing rapidly over this period, as I must, to apportion by far the handsomest share to Marcel Duchamp (canvases and the large glass still to be seen in New York), to Francis Picabia (reviews *291* and *391*), Jacques Vaché (*Lettres de Guerre*) and Tristan Tzara (*Twenty-five Poems, Dada Manifesto 1918*).

Strangely enough, it was around a discovery of language that there was seeking to organise itself in 1920 what – as yet on a basis of confidential exchange – assumed the name of *surrealism,* a word fallen from the lips of Apollinaire, which we had diverted from the rather general and very confusing connotation he had given it. What was at first no more than a new method of poetic writing broke away, after several years, from the much-too-general theses which had come to be expounded in the *Surrealist Manifesto* and *Soluble Fish* (1924), the *Second Manifesto* adding others, whereby the whole was raised to a vaster ideological plane. So there had to be revision.

In an article, 'Enter the Mediums', published in the review *Littérature* (1922), reprinted in *Les Pas perdus* (1924) and subsequently in the *Surrealist Manifesto,* I explained the circumstance that had originally put my friends and myself on the track of the surrealist activity we still follow and for which we are hopeful of gaining ever more numerous new adherents in order to extend it further than we have so far succeeded in doing. The article reads:

'It was in 1919, in complete solitude and at the approach of sleep, that my attention was arrested by sentences, more or less complete, which became perceptible to my mind without my being able to discover (even by meticulous analysis) any possible previous volitional effort. One evening in particular, as I was about to fall asleep, I became aware of a sentence articulated clearly to a point excluding all possibility of alteration and stripped of all quality of vocal sound; a curious sort of sentence which came to me bearing – in sober truth – not a trace of any relation whatever to any incidents I may at that time have been involved in; an insistent sentence, it seemed to me; a sentence, I might say, that *knocked at the window.*

'I was prepared to divert my attention from it when the organic character of the sentence detained me. I was really bewildered. Unfortunately, I am unable at this distance to remember the exact sentence, but it ran something like this: "A man is cut in half by the window." What made it clearer was the fact that it was accompanied by a feeble visual representation of a man in the process of walking, but cloven, at half his height, by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body. Definitely, there was the form, re-erected against space, of a man leaning out of a window. But, with the window following the man's locomotion, I understood that I was dealing with an image of great rarity. Instantly the idea came to me of using it as material for poetic construction. I no sooner had invested it with that quality than it had given

place to a succession of all but intermittent sentences which left me no less astonished, but in a state, I would say, of extreme detachment.

'Preoccupied as I still was with Freud, and familiar with his methods of investigation, which I had practised occasionally on the sick during the war, I resolved to obtain for myself what one seeks to obtain from patients, namely a monologue poured out as rapidly as possible, over which the subject's critical faculty has no control – the subject himself throwing reticence to the winds – and which as much as possible represents *spoken thought.* It seemed and still seems to me that the speed of thought is no greater than that of words, and hence does not exceed the flow of either tongue or pen.

'It was in such circumstances that with Philippe Soupault, to whom I had told my first ideas on the subject, I began to cover sheets of paper with writing, feeling a praiseworthy contempt for whatever the literary result might be. Ease of achievement brought about the rest. By the end of the first day of the experiment we were able to read to each other about fifty pages obtained in this manner and to compare the results we had achieved. The likeness was, on the whole, striking. There were similar faults of construction, the same hesitant manner, and also, in both cases, an illusion of extraordinary verve, much emotion, a considerable assortment of images of a quality such as we should never have been able to obtain in the normal way of writing, a very special sense of the picturesque, and, here and there, a few pieces of out-and-out buffoonery.

'The only differences presented by our two texts appeared, to me, to be attributable essentially to our respective temperaments (Soupault's being less static than mine) and, if he will allow me to make this slight criticism, to his having scattered various words about at the top of certain pages, doubtless in a spirit of mystification, under the guise of titles. I must give him credit, on the other hand, for always forcibly opposing the least correction of any passage that did not seem to me to be quite the thing. In that he was most certainly right.

'It is of course difficult in these cases to appreciate, at their just value, the various elements in the result obtained; one may even say that it is entirely impossible to appreciate them at a first reading. To you who may be writing them these elements are, in appearance, *as strange as to anyone else,* and you are yourself naturally distrustful of them. Poetically speaking, they are distinguished chiefly by a very high degree of *immediate absurdity,* the peculiar quality of that absurdity being, on close examination, their yielding to whatever is most admissible and legitimate in the world: divulging of a given number of facts and properties on the whole not less objectionable than the others.'

The word *surrealism* having thereupon become descriptive of the *generalisable* undertaking to which we had devoted ourselves, I thought it indispensable, in the *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), to define this word once and for all:

'SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real functioning of thought. The dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

'ENCYCL. *Philos.* Surrealism rests in the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association neglected heretofore; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin, definitively, all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in the solution of the principal problems of life. The following have professed *absolute surrealism*: Messrs. Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Eluard, Gérard, Limbour, Malkine, Morise, Naville, Noll, Péret, Picon, Soupault, Vitrac.

'These till now appear to be the only ones, and there would have been no doubt on that score were it not for the strange case of Isidore Ducasse, of whose extraliterary career I lack all data. Were one to consider their output only superficially, a good number of poets might well have passed for surrealists, beginning with Dante and including Shakespeare at his best. *In the course of many attempts I have made towards an analysis of what, under false pretences, is called genius, I have found nothing that could in the end be attributed to any other process than this.*'

There followed an enumeration that will gain, I think, by being clearly set out thus:

'Young's *Night-Thoughts* are surrealist from cover to cover. Unfortunately, it is a priest who speaks; a bad priest, to be sure, yet a priest.

Heraclitus is surrealist in dialectic.
Lully is surrealist in definition.
Flamel is surrealist in the night of gold.
Swift is surrealist in malice.
Sade is surrealist in sadism.
Carrier is surrealist in drowning.
Monk Lewis is surrealist in the beauty of evil.
Achim von Arnim is surrealist absolutely, in space and time.
Rabbe is surrealist in death.
Baudelaire is surrealist in morals.
Rimbaud is surrealist in life and elsewhere.
Hervey Saint-Denys is surrealist in the directed dream.
Carroll is surrealist in nonsense.
Huysmans is surrealist in pessimism.
Seurat is surrealist in design.

Picasso is surrealist in cubism.
Vaché is surrealist in me.
Roussel is surrealist in anecdote. Etc.

'They were not always surrealists – on this I insist – inasmuch as one can distinguish in each of them a number of preconceived notions to which they very naively held. And they held to them because they had not heard the *surrealist voice*, the voice that exhorts on the eve of death and in the roaring storm, and because they were unwilling to devote themselves simply to orchestrating the marvellous score. They were proud instruments; hence the sounds they produced were not always harmonious.

'We, on the contrary, who have not given ourselves to processes of filtering, who through the medium of our work have been content to be the silent receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments* not hypnotised by the patterns they trace – perhaps we are serving a much nobler cause. We honestly give back, thus, the "talent" lent to us. Tell me of the "talent" of this yard of platinum, of this mirror, of this door and of this sky, if you wish.

'We have no talent . . .'

The *Manifesto* also contained a certain number of practical recipes under the heading 'Secrets of Magic Surrealist Art', such as the following:

'Written Surrealist Composition or First and Last Draft'

'Having settled down in some spot most conducive to the mind's concentration upon itself, order writing material to be brought to you. Let your state of mind be as passive and receptive as possible. Forget your genius and talents as well as the genius and talents of others. Repeat to yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads, leading everywhere. Write quickly, without any previously chosen subject; quickly enough not to dwell on, and not to be tempted to read over, what you have written. The first sentence will come of itself; this is self-evidently true, because there is never a moment that some sentence alien to our conscious thought does not clamour for externalisation. It is rather difficult to speak of the sentence to follow; it doubtless partakes at the same time of our conscious activity and the other sentence, if it is conceded that the writing of the first sentence involved a minimum of perception. But that should in the long run matter little, because therein lies precisely the greatest interest in the surrealist game. Punctuation, of course, necessarily hinders the stream of absolute continuity which preoccupies us . . . Trust in the inexhaustible character of the whisper. If silence threatens, because you have made a mistake, a mistake, let us say, of inattention, break off unhesitatingly the line that has become too lucid. After the

word whose origin seems suspect you should place a letter, any letter, *l* for example, always the letter *l*, and restore the arbitrary by making that letter the first of the word to follow.'

I shall pass over the more or less correlated considerations which the *Manifesto* discussed in their bearing on the possibilities of plastic expression in surrealism. These considerations did not assume a relatively dogmatic turn with me till afterwards in *Surrealism and Painting* (1928).

I believe the real interest of the *Manifesto* – there was no lack of people who were good enough to concede interest, for which no particular credit is due me, because I have no more than given expression to sentiments shared with present and former friends – rests only subordinately on the formula given above. It rather confirms a *turn of thought* which, for good or ill, is peculiarly distinctive of our time. The defence originally attempted of that turn of thought still seems valid to me:

'We still live under the reign of logic . . . But the methods of logic are applied nowadays only to the resolution of problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism which remains the fashion permits consideration only of those facts strictly relevant to our experience. Logical ends, on the other hand, escape us. Needless to say that even experience has had limits assigned to it. It revolves in a cage from which it becomes more and more difficult to release it. Even experience is dependent on immediate utility, and common sense is its keeper. Under colour of civilisation, under the pretext of progress, all that rightly or wrongly may be regarded as fantasy or superstition has been banished from the mind, all uncustomary searching after truth has been proscribed. It is only by what seems pure chance that there has recently been brought to light an aspect of mental life – to my belief by far the most important – with which it was supposed we no longer had any concern. Credit for these discoveries must go to Freud. A current of opinion is forming, based on these discoveries, that will enable the explorer of the human mind to continue his investigations, justified as he will be in taking into account more than mere summary realities. The imagination is perhaps about to reclaim its rights. If the depths of our minds harbour strange forces capable of increasing those on the surface, or of successfully contending with them, then it is entirely in our interest to canalise them, to canalise them first in order to submit them later, if necessary, to the control of reason. The analysts themselves have everything to gain by such a procedure. But it should be observed that there are no means designed *a priori* for the bringing about of such an enterprise; that until the coming of the new order it might just as well be considered the affair of poets and scientists, and that its success will not depend on the more or less capricious means that will be employed.

'I am resolved to deal severely with that *hatred of the marvellous* which is so rampant among certain people, that ridicule to which they are so eager to expose it. Let us speak plainly: The marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful; indeed, nothing but the marvellous is beautiful.

'What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer a fantastic; there is only the real.

'Interesting in a different way from the future of surrealist techniques (theatrical, philosophical, scientific, critical) appears to me the application of surrealism to action. Whatever reservations I might be inclined to make with regard to responsibility in general, I should quite particularly like to know how the first misdemeanours whose surrealist character is indubitable will be *judged*. When surrealist methods extend from writing to action, there certainly will arise the need of a new morality to take the place of the current one, the cause of all our woes.'

The *Surrealist Manifesto* has improved on Rimbaud's principle that the poet must become a *seer*. Man in general is going to be summoned to manifest through life those *new sentiments* which the gift of vision will so suddenly have placed within his reach:

'Surrealism, as I envisage it, asserts our absolute *nonconformism* so clearly that there can be no question of claiming it as witness when the real world comes up for trial. On the contrary, it can but testify to the complete state of distraction which we hope to attain here below. Kant distracted by women, Pasteur distracted by "grapes", Curie distracted by vehicles, are profoundly symptomatic in this regard. The world is only very relatively proportionate to thought, and incidents of this kind are only the most striking episodes of a war of independence in which I glory in taking part. Surrealism is the "invisible ray" that shall enable us one day to triumph over our enemies. "You tremble no more, carcass." This summer the roses are blue; the wood is made of glass. The earth wrapped in its foliage has as little effect on me as a ghost. Living and ceasing to live are imaginary solutions. Existence lies elsewhere.'

Surrealism then was securing expression in all its purity and force. The freedom it possesses is a perfect freedom in the sense that it recognises no limitations exterior to itself. As was said on the cover of the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 'It is necessary to draw up a new Declaration of the Rights of Man.' The concept of surreality, concerning which quarrels have been sought with us repeatedly and which it was attemp-

ted to turn into a metaphysical or mystic rope to be placed afterwards around our necks, no longer lends itself to misconstruction, for nowhere does it declare itself opposed to the need for the transformation of the world, which henceforth, in fact, will more and more definitely yield to it.

As I said in the *Manifesto*:

'I believe in the future resolution of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, of *surreality*, so to speak. I look forward to its consummation, certain that I shall never share in it but too indifferent to my death not to taste, at least slightly, the joys of such possession.'

Aragon expressed himself in very much the same way in *Une Vague de rêves* (1924):

'It should be understood that the real is a relation like any other; the essence of things is by no means linked to their reality, there are other relations besides reality, which the mind is capable of grasping and which also are primary, like chance, illusion, the fantastic, the dream. These various groups are united and brought into harmony in one single order, surreality. . . . This surreality – a relation in which all notions are merged together – is the common horizon of religions, magic, poetry, intoxications, and of all life that is lowly – that trembling honeysuckle you deem sufficient to populate the sky with for us.'

And René Crevel, in *L'Esprit contre la raison* (1928):

'The poet does not put the wild animals to sleep in order to play the tamer, but, the cages wide open, the keys thrown to the winds, he journeys forth, a traveller who thinks not of himself but of the voyage, of dream beaches, forests of hands, soul-endowed animals, all undeniable surreality.'

I was to sum up the idea in these terms in *Surrealism and Painting* (1928):

'All that I love, all that I think and feel inclines me towards a particular philosophy of immanence according to which surreality will reside in reality itself and will be neither superior nor exterior to it. And conversely, because the container shall be also the contained. One might almost say that it will be a communicating vessel placed between the container and the contained. That is to say, I resist with all my strength temptations which, in painting and literature, might have the immediate tendency to withdraw thought from life as well as place life under the aegis of thought.'

After years of endeavour and perplexities, when a variety of opinions had disputed among themselves the direction of the craft in which a number of persons of unequal ability and varying powers of resistance had originally embarked together, the surrealist idea recovered in the *Second Manifesto* all the brilliance of which events had vainly conspired to despoil it.

It should be emphasised that the first *Manifesto* of 1924 did no more than sum up the conclusions we had drawn during what one may call the *heroic epoch* of surrealism, which stretches from 1919 to 1923. The concerted elaboration of the first automatic texts and our excited reading of them, the first results obtained by Max Ernst in the domain of *collage* and of painting, the practice of surrealist 'speaking' during the hypnotic experiments introduced among us by René Crevel and repeated every evening for over a year, incontrovertibly mark the decisive stages of surrealist exploration during this first phase. Afterwards up till the taking into account of the social aspect of the problem around 1925 (though not formally sanctioned until 1930), surrealism began to find itself a prey to characteristic wranglings. These wranglings account very clearly for the expulsion orders and tickets-of-leave which, as we went along, we had to deal out to certain of our companions of the first hour and the second. Some have concluded from this, quite gratuitously, that we are apt to overemphasise *personal questions*.

During the last ten years, surrealism has been obliged to defend itself almost unceasingly against deviations to the right and to the left. On the one hand we have had to struggle against the will of those who would maintain surrealism on a purely speculative level and treasonably transfer it onto an artistic and literary plane (Artaud, Desnos, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Vitrac) at the cost of all the hope for subversion we have placed in it; on the other, against the will of those who would place it on a purely practical basis, susceptible at any moment to being sacrificed to an ill-conceived political militancy (Naville, Aragon) – at the cost, this time, of what constitutes the originality and reality of its researches; at the cost of the autonomous risk that it has to run. Agitated though it was, the epoch that separates the two *Manifestoes* was none the less a rich one, in that it saw the publication of so many works in which the vital principles of surrealism were amply explained. It suffices to recall particularly *Le Paysan de Paris* and *Traité du style* by Aragon, *L'Esprit contre la raison* and *Etes-vous fous* by René Crevel, *Deuil pour deuil* by Desnos, *Capitale de la douleur* and *L'Amour la poésie* by Eluard, *La Femme 100 têtes* by Ernst, *La Révolution et les intellectuels* by Naville, *Le Grand Jeu* by Péret, and my own *Nadja*. The poetic activity of Tzara, although claiming until 1930 no connection with surrealism, is in perfect accord with ours.

We were forced to agree with Pierre Naville when he wrote:

> Surrealism is at the crossroads of several thought movements. We assume that it affirms the possibility of a certain steady downward readjustment of the mind's rational (and not simply conscious) activity towards more absolutely *coherent* thought, irrespective of what direction that thought may take; that is to say, that it proposes,

> or would at least like to propose, a new solution of all problems but chiefly moral. In that sense, indeed, it is epoch-making. That is why one may express the essential characteristic of surrealism by saying that it seeks to calculate the quotient of the unconscious by the conscious.

It should be pointed out that in a number of declarations in *La Révolution et les intellectuels. Que peuvent faire les surréalistes?* (1926), the same author demonstrated the utter vanity of intellectual bickerings in the face of the human exploitation which results from the wage system. Those declarations gave rise among us to considerable anxiety, and, attempting for the first time to justify surrealism's social implications, I desired to clear up the matter once and for all in *Légitime Défense*. This pamphlet set out to demonstrate that there is no fundamental antinomy in the basis of surrealist thought.

In reality, we are faced with two problems, one of which is the problem raised, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by the discovery of the relations between the conscious and the unconscious. That was how the problem chose to present itself to us. We were the first to apply to its resolution a particular method, which we have not ceased to consider both the most suitable and the most likely to be brought to perfection; there is no reason why we should renounce it. The other problem facing us is that of the social action we should pursue. We maintain that this action has its own method in dialectical materialism, and we can all the less afford to ignore this action when, I repeat, we hold the liberation of man to be the *sine qua non* of the *liberation of the mind*, and we can expect this liberation of man to result only from the proletarian revolution.

The two problems are essentially distinct, and we deplore their becoming confused because they are not recognised as such. There is good reason, then, to take a stand against all attempts to weld them together and, more especially, against the urge to abandon all such researches as ours in order to devote ourselves to the poetry and art of propaganda. Surrealism, which has been the object of brutal and repeated summonses in this respect, now feels the need of making some kind of counterattack. Let me recall the fact that its very definition holds that it must escape, in its written manifestations, or any others, from all *control* exercised by reason. Apart from the puerility of wishing to bring a supposedly marxist control to bear on the immediate aspect of such manifestations, this control cannot be envisaged in *principle*. And how ill-boding does this distrust seem when it comes from men who proclaim themselves marxists, possessed not only of a strict line in revolutionary matters but also of marvellously open minds and insatiable curiosity!

This brings us to the eve of the *Second Manifesto*. These objections had to be put to an end, and for that purpose it was essential that we should proceed to liquidate certain individualist elements among us, more or less openly hostile to one another, whose intentions did not, in the final analysis, appear as irreproachable, nor their motives as disinterested, as might have been wished. An important part of the work was devoted to a statement of the reasons which led surrealism to dispense for the future with certain collaborators. It was attempted, on the same occasion, to complete the specific method of creation proposed six years earlier, and, as thoroughly as possible, to set surrealist ideas in order.

'In spite of the particular courses followed by former or present adherents of surrealism, everyone must admit that the drift of surrealism has always and chiefly been towards a general and emphatic *crisis in consciousness* and that only the extent to which this is or is not accomplished can decide the historical success or failure of the movement.

'From the intellectual point of view, it was and still is a question of exposing by every available means, and to learn at all costs to identify, the factitious character of the old antinomies hypocritically calculated to hinder any unusual agitation on the part of man, were it only a faint understanding of the means at his disposal and to inspire him to free himself somewhat from the universal fetters. The horror of death, the pantomime of the beyond, the shipwreck of the most beautiful reason in sleep, the overpowering curtain of the future, the towers of Babel, the mirrors of inconstancy, the insuperable silver wall splashed with brains, all these startling images of human catastrophe are perhaps, after all, no more than images.

'Everything leads to the belief that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, are not perceived as contradictions. It would be vain to attribute to surrealism any other motive than the hope of determining this point. It is clear, moreover, that it would be absurd to ascribe to surrealism either a purely destructive or a purely constructive character – the point at issue being precisely this: that construction and destruction can no longer be brandished against each other. It becomes clear also that surrealism is not at all interested in taking into account what passes alongside it under the guise of art or even antiart; of philosophy or antiphilosophy; of anything, in a word, that has not for its ultimate end the conversion of being into a jewel, internal and unseeing, with a soul that is neither of ice nor of fire. What, indeed, could they expect of surrealism, who are still anxious about the position they may occupy *in the world*? On this mental plane from which one may for oneself alone embark on the perilous, but, we think, supreme reconnaissance – on this

plane the footsteps of those who come or go are no longer of any importance, because these steps occur in a region where, by definition, surrealism possesses no listening ear. It is not desirable that surrealism should be dependent on the whim of this or that group of persons. If it declares itself capable of uprooting thought from an increasingly cruel serfdom, of bringing it back to the path of total comprehension, of restoring to it its original purity, it is indeed no more than right that it should be judged only by what it has done and by what it has still to do in the fulfilment of its promise.

'While surrealism undertakes particularly the critical investigation of the notions of reality and unreality, reason and unreason, reflection and impulse, knowledge and "fatal" ignorance, utility and uselessness, it shares with historical materialism an analogous tendency in that it assumes as its point of departure the "colossal abortion" of the Hegelian system. I do not see how limits, those for instance of the economic framework, can be assigned to the exercise of a thought which is definitely adapted to negation and the negation of negation. How could one accept the fact that the dialectical method is to be applied validly only to the solution of social problems? It is the whole ambition of surrealism to supply it with not at all conflicting possibilities of application in the most immediate conscious domain. I really cannot see, a few narrow-minded revolutionaries notwithstanding, why we should abstain from taking up the problems of love, of dreaming, of madness, of art and of religion, so long as we consider these problems from the same angle as they; that is, the angle of the revolution. And I have no hesitation in saying that nothing systematic had been done in this direction before surrealism; and for us also, at the point where we found it, *the dialectical method in its Hegelian form was inapplicable.* For us, moreover, it was imperative to have done with idealism proper, and our creation of the word "surrealism" is enough to show that this was so, as it is to show the need for us – to use Engels's example – of going beyond the childish development: "The rose is a rose. The rose is not a rose. And yet the rose is a rose." Nevertheless – if I may say so parenthetically – we had to set "the rose" in a profitable movement of less innocuous contradictions, a movement in which the rose is successively the rose out of the garden, the rose which holds a singular place in a dream, the rose which it is impossible to extract from "the optical bouquet", the rose which may completely change its properties by passing into automatic writing, the rose which retains only what the painter has allowed it to retain of a rose in a surrealist painting, and finally the rose, quite different from itself, which goes back into the garden. This is a long way from any idealist standpoint, and we should not even bother to disclaim an idealist view if we

did not continue to suffer the attacks of vulgar materialism. These attacks emanate both from those who, out of low conservatism, oppose the investigation of the relation of thought to matter, and from those who, through a poorly understood revolutionary sectarianism, and while ignoring the whole of what is being asked of them, confuse this vulgar materialism with the materialism which Engels recognised as essentially different and defined as being primarily an *intuition of the world* that had to put itself to the test and be realised. "In the course of the development of philosophy, idealism became untenable and was contradicted by modern materialism. The latter is the negation of the negation and is not simply the old materialism restored: to the enduring foundations of this old materialism it adds the whole of what has been thought in philosophy and natural science throughout an evolution of two thousand years, and adds too the product of this long history itself." We also intend to place ourselves at a point of departure at which, for us, philosophy is *outclassed.* In this I believe we are at one with all those for whom reality has not only a theoretical importance, for whom it is a question of life and death to appeal passionately, as Feuerbach insisted, to this reality. *We* so appeal by committing ourselves totally, without reservation, to the principle of historical materialism; *he* so appealed by casting in the face of the astounded intellectual world the idea that "man is what he eats" and that there would be better prospects of success if the people were better fed, specifically if they were given peas instead of potatoes.

'It was to be expected that surrealism should manifest itself in the midst of, and perhaps at the price of, an uninterrupted succession of falterings, zigzags and defections, which constantly exact rediscussion of its original premises; i.e., it is called back to the initial principle of its activity and at the same time is subject to the interrogation of the fickle tomorrow when the heart's feeling may have waxed or waned. I have to admit that everything has not been done to bring this undertaking to a successful conclusion, if only because we have not taken full advantage of the means which have been defined as specifically ours, and have not fully tested the methods of investigation recommended at the very beginning of the movement. I insist, as I have already said, that the problem of social action is only one form of a more general problem with which surrealism is concerned, and this problem is *the problem of human expression in all its forms.* Whoever speaks of expression speaks, to begin with, of language. It is not surprising, therefore, that surrealism in the beginning should have situated itself almost entirely on the plane of language, nor that it should return to that plane, after some incursion or other, as if for the pleasure of travelling in conquered territory.

Nothing, indeed, can prevent the territory from being conquered to a great extent. The hordes of words that were literally unloosed, and to which Dada and surrealism deliberately opened the doors, are not, whatever anyone thinks, words that vainly withdraw. They will penetrate – at leisure, but certainly – the idiotic little towns of that literature which is still taught and, easily failing to distinguish between the poor and the rich sections, they will capture a good number of turrets. In the belief that poetry alone so far is all that has been seriously shaken by us, the inhabitants are not really on their guard; they are building, here and there, a few unimportant ramparts. There is a pretence that it has not been noticed how much the logical mechanism of the sentence is proving more and more incapable, by itself, of giving man the emotive shock that really gives some value to his life. On the other hand, the productions of this activity, spontaneous or *more* spontaneous, direct or *more* direct, such as surrealism is providing in ever greater numbers, in the form of books, pictures and films – these which man first looked upon with amazement he is now placing about the home, and it is to these productions that, more or less timorously, he is committing the task of revolutionising his ways of feeling. When I say "man" that man, no doubt, is not yet every man, and he must be allowed "time" to become every man. But note how admirably and perversely a small number of entirely modern works have found their way into public consciousness – works of which the least that can be said is that they are pervaded by a particularly insalubrious atmosphere: Baudelaire, Rimbaud (despite the reservations I have made), Huysmans and Lautréamont – to mention only poetry. Let us not be afraid of making a law unto ourselves of this insalubrity. We want it to be impossible to say that we have not done everything to annihilate that foolish illusion of happiness and *good understanding* which it will be the glory of the nineteenth century to have exposed. Truly we have not ceased to be fanatically attracted by these rays of sunshine full of miasma. But at this moment, when the public authorities in France are preparing a grotesque celebration of the centenary of romanticism, we for our part say that this romanticism – of which we are quite ready to appear historically today as the tail, though in that case *an excessively prehensile tail* – this romanticism is, we say, in its very essence in 1930 the negation of these authorities and this celebration. We say that for romanticism to be a hundred years old is for it to be young, and that what has wrongly been called its heroic period can pass no longer for anything but the wailings of a being who is only now beginning to make known its wants through us. And finally we say that if it should be held that all that was thought before this infant – all that was thought "classically" – was good, then incontestably he wants *nothing but evil*.'

These considerations preface the critical examination of the changes and alterations which the most typical forms of surrealist expression have undergone in the course of time. This has been, as it happens, nothing less than a *rallying back to principles*:

'It is, as I was beginning to say above, regrettable that more systematic and sustained efforts, such as surrealism has constantly called for, have not been supplied in the way of automatic writing and accounts of dreams. In spite of the way in which we have consistently included material of this sort in surrealist publications, and the remarkable place they occupy in certain works, it has to be admitted that sometimes their interest in such a context has been slight, or that they rather give the effect of being "virtuoso pieces". The presence in these items of an evident pattern also has greatly hampered the species of conversion we had hoped to bring about through them. The blame lies in the excessive negligence of most of the authors of these texts, who were generally content to let their pens run over the paper without observing in the least what was at the time going on inside themselves – this duplication being nevertheless easier to seize and more interesting to consider than that of reflective writing – or else they put together more or less arbitrary dream-elements intended to set forth their picturesqueness rather than to make visible usefully how they had come about. Such confusion of course nullifies any benefit that might be obtained from this sort of operation. Indeed, the great value of these operations for surrealism lies in the possibility they have of yielding to the reader particular logical expanses, more precisely those in which the logical faculty, which is exercised in everything and for everything in consciousness, does not act. What am I saying! Not only do these logical expanses remain unexplored, but, further, we remain as little informed as ever regarding the origin of the *voice* which it is open to each of us to hear and which speaks to us, in the most singular fashion, of something different from what we believe we are thinking, sometimes becoming solemn when we are most light-hearted, or speaking nonsense when we are wretched.

'Nobody expressing himself does more than take advantage of a very obscure possibility of conciliation between what he knew he had to say and what on the same subject he didn't know he had to say and yet has said. The most rigorous line of thought is unable to forgo this assistance, undesirable though it is from the standpoint of rigour. Truly, the idea gets torpedoed in the heart of the sentence enunciating it, even when this sentence escapes having any charming liberty taken with its meaning. Dadaism aimed especially at calling attention to the torpedoing. By appealing to automatism,

as is well known, surrealism sets out to prevent the torpedoing of some vessel or other: something like a phantom ship. (Some people have tried to make use of this image against me, but, overused as it may be, I find it good, and I use it again.)

'There is no need to indulge in subtleties; inspiration is familiar enough. And there can be no mistake: It is inspiration which has supplied the supreme need of expression in all times and in all places. A common remark is that inspiration either *is* or is not, and when it is not, nothing summoned to replace it by the human skill which interest obliterates, by the discursive intelligence or by the talent acquired with labour, can make up in us for the lack of it. We recognise it easily by the way it takes complete possession of the mind, so that for long periods when any problem is set we are momentarily prevented from being the playthings of one rational solution rather than another, and by that kind of short-circuit which it sets up between a given idea and what answers to it (in writing, for example), just as, in the physical world, the short-circuit occurs when the two "poles" of the machine are linked by a conductor having little or no resistance. In poetry and in painting, surrealism has done everything it could to increase the number of the short-circuits. It aims now and will always aim in the future towards the artificial reproduction of that ideal moment in which a man who is prey to a particular emotion is suddenly caught up by "the stronger than himself" and thrust, despite his bodily inertia, into immortality. If he were then lucid and awake, he would emerge from that predicament in terror. The important thing is that he should not be free to come out, that he should go on talking all the time the mysterious ringing is going on: indeed, the fact that he ceases to belong to himself is the very reason he belongs to us. Provided that these products of psychic activity are as much as possible distracted from the will to express, as much as possible lightened of ideas of responsibility ever ready to act as brakes, and as much as possible kept independent of all that is not the passive life of the intelligence, these products – dreams and automatic writing – have the following advantages: They alone furnish the material for appreciating elements of grand style to a body of criticism which in the artistic domain is strangely disabled; they permit a general reclassification of lyrical values; and they offer a key to go on opening indefinitely that box of never-ending drawers called man, and so dissuade him from making an about-turn for reasons of self-preservation on those occasions in the dark when he runs into the doors – locked from outside – of the beyond, of reality, of reason, of genius and of love. The day will come 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. It will then seem surprising that, having been as close to *truth* as we are, we in general should have taken care to provide ourselves with some literary alibi or other instead of plunging into the water though ignorant of swimming, and instead of going into the fire though not believing in the phoenix, in order to attain this truth.'

Some of you may be perhaps astonished, by the way, to find me dealing thus with automatic texts and accounts of dreams:

'If I insist so much on the value of the two operations, it is not because to me they seem to constitute in themselves alone the intellectual panacea, but because for the practised observer they lend themselves less than any others to confusion or trickery and also because they are the best that have been found to invest man with a valid sense of his resources. It goes without saying that the conditions imposed on us by life make it impossible for such an apparently unmotivated exercise of thought to go on uninterruptedly. Those who have yielded themselves up to it unreservedly, however far some may later have fallen, will one day turn out not to have been quite vainly projected into such a complete *internal enchantment*. In comparison with this enchantment, a return to any premeditated activity of the mind, however it may appeal to the majority of their contemporaries, will in their eyes provide but a poor spectacle.

'These very direct means, means which are, let us say it again, open to all, means which we persist in putting forward as soon as the question is no longer essentially one of producing works of art but of lighting up the unrevealed and yet revealable part of our being in which all the beauty, all the love and all the virtue with which we scarcely credit ourselves are shining intensely – these immediate means are not the only ones. Notably, it seems that now there is much to be expected of certain methods of pure deception, the application of which to art and life would have the effect of fixing attention neither on the real nor on the imaginary, but on, so to speak, the *other side of the real*. It is easy to imagine novels which cannot end, as there are problems which remain unsolved. When, however, will we have the novel in which the characters, having been abundantly defined with a minimum of particularities, will act in an altogether foreseeable way in view of an unforeseen result? And, inversely, the novel in which psychology will not hastily perform its great but futile duties at the expense of the characters and events but will really *hold* between two blades a fraction of a second, to surprise there the germs of incidents? This other novel in which the verisimilitude of the scenery will for the first time fail to hide from us the strange symbolic life that even the most definite and most common objects lead in dreams? The novel, again, in which the construction will be quite simple but in which a kidnapping will be described with the words for fatigue, a storm described with precision, but

happily, etc.? Whoever believes with us that it is time to have done with the provoking insanities of "realism" will have no difficulty in adding to these proposals for himself.'

From 1930 until today the history of surrealism is that of successful efforts to restore to it its proper *becoming* by gradually removing from it every trace both of political opportunism and of artistic opportunism. The review *La Révolution Surréaliste* (12 issues) has been succeeded by another, *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (6 issues). Owing particularly to influences brought to bear by new elements, surrealist experimentation, which had for too long been erratic, has been unreservedly resumed; its perspectives and its aims have been made perfectly clear; I may say that it has not ceased to be carried on in a continuous and enthusiastic manner. This experimenting has regained momentum under the master impulse given to it by Salvador Dali, whose exceptional interior 'boiling' has been, during the whole of this period, an invaluable ferment for surrealism. As Guy Mangeot has very rightly pointed out in his *History of Surrealism*, published recently by René Henriquez, Dali has endowed surrealism with an instrument of primary importance, specifically the paranoiac-critical method, which has immediately shown itself capable of being applied with equal success to painting, poetry, the cinema; to the construction of typical surrealist objects, to fashions, to sculpture and even, if necessary, to all manner of exegesis.

He first announced his convictions to us in *La Femme visible* (1930):

'I believe the moment is at hand when, by a paranoiac and active effort of the mind, it will be possible (simultaneously with automatism and other passive states) to systematise confusion and thus to help discredit completely the world of reality.'

In order to cut short all possible misunderstandings, it should perhaps be said: *immediate* reality.

'Paranoia uses the external world in order to assert its dominating idea and has the disturbing characteristic of making others accept this idea's reality. The reality of the external world is used for illustration and proof, and so comes to serve the reality of one's mind.'

In the special 'Surrealist Intervention' number of *Documents 34*, under the title 'Philosophic Provocations', Dali undertakes today to give his thought a didactic turn. All uncertainty as to his real intentions seems to me to be swept away by these definitions:

'*Paranoia:* Delirium of interpretation bearing a systematic structure.

'*Paranoiac-critical activity:* Spontaneous method of "*irrational knowledge*" based on the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.

'*Painting:* Handmade colour "photography" of "concrete irrationality" and of the imaginative world in general.

'*Sculpture:* Modelling by hand of "concrete irrationality" and of the imaginative world in general.

'Etc. . . .'

In order to form a concise idea of Dali's undertaking, one must take into account the property of *uninterrupted becoming* of any object of paranoiac activity, in other words of the ultra-confusing activity rising out of the obsessing idea. This uninterrupted becoming allows the paranoiac who is their witness to consider the images of the external world unstable and transitory, or suspect; and what is so disturbing is that he is able to make other people believe in the reality of his impressions. One aspect, for instance, of the *multiple* image occupying our attention being a putrefied donkey, the 'cruel' putrefaction of the donkey can be considered as 'the hard and blinding flash of new gems'. Here we find ourselves confronted by a new affirmation, accompanied by formal proofs, of the *omnipotence of desire*, which has remained, since the beginning, surrealism's sole act of faith. At the point where surrealism has taken up the problem, its only guide has been Rimbaud's sibylline pronouncement: 'I say that one must be a seer, one must make oneself a seer.' As you know, this was Rimbaud's only means of reaching the *unknown*. Surrealism can flatter itself today that it has discovered and rendered practicable many other ways leading to the unknown. The abandonment to verbal or graphic impulses and the resort to paranoiac-critical activity are not the only ones, and one may say that, during the last four years of surrealist activity, the many others that have made their appearance allow us to affirm that the automatism from which we started and to which we have unfailingly returned does in fact constitute the *crossroads* where these various paths meet. Among those we have partly explored, and on which we are only just beginning to see ahead, I should single out the simulation of mental diseases (acute mania, general paralysis, dementia praecox), which Paul Eluard and I practiced in *The Immaculate Conception* (1930), undertaking to prove that the normal man can have access to the provisorily condemned places of the human mind; the manufacture of objects functioning symbolically, started in 1931 by the very particular and quite new emotion aroused by Giacometti's object 'The Hour of Traces'; the analysis of the interpenetration of the states of sleep and waking, tending to make them depend entirely on one another and even condition one another in certain affective states, which I undertook in *The Communicating Vessels*; and finally, the

taking into consideration of the recent researches of the Marburg school (to which I drew attention in an article published in *Minotaure*, 'The Automatic Message') whose aim is to cultivate the remarkable sensorial dispositions of children, enabling them to change any object whatever, into no matter what, simply by looking at it fixedly.

Nothing could be more coherent, more systematic or more richly yielding of results, than this last phase of surrealist activity, which has seen the production of two films by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'or*; the poems of René Char; *L'Homme approximatif*, *où boivent les loups* and *L'Antitête* by Tristan Tzara; *Le Clavecin de Diderot* and *Les Pieds dans le plat* by René Crevel; *La Vie immédiate* by Eluard; the very precious *visual* commentaries by Valentine Hugo on the works of Arnim and Rimbaud; the most intense part of the work of Yves Tanguy; the inspired sculpture of Alberto Giacometti; the coming together of Georges Hugnet, Gui Rosey, Pierre Yoyotte, Roger Caillois, Victor Brauner and Balthus. Never has so precise a common will united us. I think I can most clearly express this will by saying that today it applies itself to '*bring about the state where the distinction between the subjective and the objective loses its necessity and its value*'.

Surrealism, starting fifteen years ago with a discovery that seemed to involve poetic language exclusively, has spread like wildfire in pursuing its course, not only in art but in life. It has provoked new states of consciousness and overthrown the walls beyond which it was immemorially supposed to be impossible to see; it has – as is being more and more generally recognised – modified the sensibility, and taken a decisive step towards the unification of the personality, which it found threatened by an ever more profound dissociation. Without attempting to judge what direction it will ultimately take, for the lands it fertilises as it flows are those of surprise itself, I should like to draw your attention to the fact that its most recent advance is producing a *fundamental crisis of the object*. It is essentially on the *object* that surrealism has thrown most light in recent years. Only the very close examination of the many recent speculations to which the object has publicly given rise (the oneiric object, the object functioning symbolically, the real and virtual object, the moving but silent object, the phantom object, the found object, etc.) can give one a proper grasp of the experiments that surrealism is engaged in now. To continue to understand the movement, it is indispensable to focus one's attention on this point.

I must crave your indulgence for speaking so technically, *from the inside*. But there could be no thought of concealing any aspect of the persuasions to which surrealism has been and is still exposed. I say that there exists a lyrical element that conditions *for one part* the psychological and moral structure of human society, which has conditioned it at all times and will continue to condition it. This lyrical element has till now, even in spite of them, remained the fact and *the sole fact* of specialists. In the state of extreme tension to which class antagonisms have led the society to which we belong and which we tend with all our strength to reject, it is natural and it is *fated* that this solicitation should continue, that it should assume for us a thousand faces, imploring, tempting and eager by turns. It is not within our power, it would be unworthy of our historic role to give way to this solicitation. By surrealism we intend to account for nothing less than the manner in which it is possible today to make use of the magnificent and overwhelming *spiritual legacy* that has been handed down to us. We have accepted this legacy from the past, and surrealism can well say that the use to which it has been put has been to turn it to the overthrow of capitalist society. I consider that for that purpose it was and is still necessary for us to stand where we are; to guard against breaking the thread of our researches; and to continue these researches, not as literary men and artists, certainly, but rather as chemists and as technicians of the various other categories.

To pass on to the poetry and art called (doubtless in anticipation) *proletarian*: No. The forces which we have been able to bring together, and which for fifteen years we never have found lacking, have arrived at a particular point of application: it is not a question of knowing whether this point of application is the best but simply of pointing out that the application of our forces at this point has given us up to an activity that has proved itself valuable and fruitful at the plane on which it was undertaken and also has been of a kind to engage us more and more on the revolutionary plane. It is essential to realise that no other activity could have produced such rich results; nor could any other activity have been so effective in combatting the present form of society. On that point we have history on our side.

A comrade, Claude Cahun, in a striking pamphlet recently published, *Les Paris sont ouverts*, which attempts to predict the future of poetry by taking account both of its own laws and of the social bases of its existence, takes Aragon to task for the lack of rigour in his present position. (I do not think anyone can dispute the fact that Aragon's poetry has perceptibly weakened since he abandoned surrealism and undertook to place himself *directly* at the service of the proletarian cause, which leads one to suppose that such an undertaking has defeated him and is proportionately more or less unfavourable to the revolution.) The irrefutable conclusions

drawn in this pamphlet corroborate and strengthen those that I formulated in *Misère de la Poésie* (1932) with regard to the impossibility of resolving as elementarily as Aragon has tried to do the conflict between man's conscious thought and his lyrical expression, a conflict sufficient to impassion to the highest degree the poetic drama in which we are the actors. It is of particular interest that the author of *Les Paris sont ouverts* has taken the opportunity of expressing himself from the 'historic' point of view. His appreciation is as follows:

'The Dadaist-surrealist experiment having proved, for France and perhaps for Europe, incontestably the most revolutionary experiment in poetry, in that it has tended to destroy all the myths about art that for centuries had permitted the ideological as well as economic exploitation of painting, sculpture, literature, etc. (e.g. the *frottages* of Max Ernst, which, among other things, have been able to upset the scale of values of art critics and experts, values based chiefly on technical perfection, personal touch and the lastingness of the materials employed), this experiment can and should serve the cause of the liberation of the proletariat. It is only when the proletariat have become aware of the myths on which capitalist culture depends, when they have become aware of what these myths and this culture mean for them and have destroyed them, that they will be able to proceed to their own proper development. The positive lesson of this negating experiment – that is to say, its transfusion among the proletariat – constitutes the only valid revolutionary poetic propaganda.'

Surrealism could not ask for anything better. Once the cause of the movement is understood, there is perhaps some hope that, on the plane of revolutionary militancy proper, our turbulence, our small capacity for adaptation, till now, to the necessary rules of a party (which certain people have thought proper to call our 'Blanquism'), may be excused. It is only too certain that an activity such as ours cannot, because of its particularisation, be pursued within the limits of any one of the existing revolutionary organisations: it would be forced to come to a halt on the very threshold of that organisation. If we are agreed that such an activity has above all tended to *detach* the intellectual creator from the illusions with which bourgeois society has sought to surround him, I for my part can only see in that tendency added reason for carrying on with our activity.

None the less, the right that we demand and our desire to make use of it depend, as I said at the beginning, on our remaining able to continue our investigations without having to reckon, as for the last few months we have had to do, with a sudden attack from the forces of criminal imbecility. Let it be clearly understood that for us, as surrealists, the interests of thought cannot cease to go hand in hand with the interests of the working class, and

that all attacks on freedom, all interference with the emancipation of the working class and all armed attacks on it cannot fail to be considered by us as attacks on thought as well.

I repeat: The danger is far from having been removed. The surrealists cannot be accused of having been slow to recognise the fact, when, on the very day after the first fascist *coup* in France, it was they among the intellectual circles who had the honour of taking the initiative in sending out a *Call to Struggle*. This appeared on 10 February 1934, with twenty-four signatures. You may rest assured, comrades, that they will not confine themselves, that they have not confined themselves, to this single act.

Interview with 'Halo-Noviny'

Halo-Noviny *was the 'organ of workers' unity', a marxist review published in Prague, where Breton and Paul Eluard collaborated with the Czech surrealists in the spring of 1935 on a major International Surrealist Exhibition. 'The two greatest poets of present-day France', as they were described by* Rude Pravo, *the Czech Communist daily, gave a series of lectures and poetry readings and helped prepare an* International Surrealist Bulletin. *This interview (dated April 1935) was soon reprinted in* Position Politique du surréalisme.

What will the next activity of surrealism consist of?

This activity, on the poetic, artistic and experimental levels, will pursue its natural development, continuing to tend towards the dialectical resolution of the old antinomies: action and dream, logical necessity and natural necessity, objectivity and subjectivity, etc. It is important to emphasise that we propose, in the coming period, to concentrate more on the objectification and internationalisation of surrealist ideas. After leaving Prague, where Paul Eluard and I have been able to assure ourselves that the surrealist group is working with us in complete philosophical and political agreement, I will hold a conference in Zurich. At the end of April we will go to the Canary Islands, where several conferences and an exhibition have been arranged. In Paris, at the beginning of June, will begin *a systematic cycle of conferences on the most recent positions of surrealism.* If, indeed, the original course of surrealism has become fairly well known, by contrast there is lacking a sufficiently clear idea of the latest stages of our movement. We are particularly preoccupied today with advancing surrealism as a method of knowledge developing in the framework of dialectical materialism in applica-