

SURREALIST NONSENSE AS A GENRE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2013

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

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For the Surrealists, nonsense was a means of transcending a hierarchical reality; rather than being an absence of sense, nonsense became a frustration of constructed expectations about sense. The layered meanings of a word or image in Surrealism generate a world in which no hierarchy or dichotomies exist but rather one where each word and image bears equal weight. The purpose of this dissertation is to answer the question: in what ways might we consider Surrealist's nonsense a genre. Since Freud, psychoanalysis has been the frame of reference to distinguish the conscious from the unconscious, common sense from nonsense. This dissertation departs from a dichotomous discourse and explores the nonsensical aspect in Robert Desnos' writings and avant-garde films in relation to Jungian 's theory and Taoism. Ultimately for Desnos, Jung, Avant-garde filmmakers, and Taoists, action free of preconceived ideas grew to be the aspired mode of being-in-the-world, that which enables us to transcend ourselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, mentor, and friend Professor Mary Ann Caws without whom this dissertation would have never seen the light of day. I am indebted to her for her exhilarating enthusiasm, insightful comments, motivation, one-of-a-kind voice, and infinite attentiveness to every spectrum of life. Mary Ann Caws' boundless generosity and incommensurable kindness during these years is a true inspiration as a scholar and person. I would have never imagined that buying my very first Gallimard Desnos pocket book of poetry could have led me to meeting such an extraordinary and genuine individual.

I would also like to thank the rest of my committee: Professor Giancarlo Lombardi and Professor Jerry Carlson, for their encouragement and wisdom in keeping the steady flow of writing. I am most grateful for their trust, patience, and loyal attitude.

Much thanks goes out to Barbara Pospisil, our Assistant Program Officer in the Comparative Literature department, for her constant dedication and diligence.

I would like to thank my partner Daniel Chung, for his inestimable and persistent commitment during the process that knew no boundaries for the past few years. I am grateful for our conversations about Surrealism and nonsense that sprang up spontaneously throughout, from our morning walks to rooftop stargazing.

I want to also thank my friends who have helped me to stay focused all of these years and brought cheer to doubtful times.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, René and Micheline, and my beloved sister, Renée Marie.

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Prologue

The purpose of this dissertation is to raise the following question: in what ways, if at all, might we consider Surrealist Nonsense a genre? Genre classification typically provides organizational categories, an easy way to differentiate between works in the same medium based on accepted standards. To frame Surrealist Nonsense, something so adamantly opposed to conventional techniques, within a genre can alter the view that nonsense is without meaning, as well as broaden the term genre to something less predictable and more of a gateway to challenging thoughts. If Surrealist Nonsense can be considered a genre, something usually reserved for sense, both will be acknowledged as related parts of a whole.

Taoism is a philosophical approach that embraces the unity of things and will be used to stress the value in seeing beyond outward discrepancies to an underlying harmony. Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* is a work at the center of this exploration and heavily influenced Carl Jung's psychoanalytical insights and methods, also relevant here. Along with them, the Dada and Surrealist artists, Robert Desnos in particular, and avant-garde filmmakers, who burst forth in the early twentieth century with energetic works of chance, movement, and awareness, will also aid in untangling the tensions seen in dichotomies. The techniques employed by the Surrealists and the Taoists were focused on overcoming duality to achieve unity. However, this survey is not to imply that the Surrealists were Taoists in the strict sense of the word. There are major differences between the two, one of which being tension - while the Surrealists indulged in tension, the Taoist goal is to seek harmony. Nevertheless, on a deeper level of connectedness, the two disciplines share a common ground; they both teach that all worldviews are essentially constructed. Man's experience of reality is ultimately the experience of a mind and its

perceptions. They both valorize slippage and relativism. Spiritually and in everyday life, Taoism and Surrealism attempt to overturn the common order of things.

This dissertation explores the question of Surrealist Nonsense as a genre by referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of phenomenology and the concept of perception according to Taoism. In taking these seemingly disparate notions and bringing together their deeper similarities, the thematic elements therein illustrate their shared, unconventional techniques: a fragmentation toward unity – an approach that will be shown to exist in several artists and across several mediums. Jung, Merleau-Ponty, the Surrealists, and Taoists valued all ideas with the same weight, seeing how things fit within a unified whole. This uncommon mode of being is of utmost significance in exploring nonsense as a genre because nonsense, instead of being something written off as foolishness, then transforms from the absence of sense to a form of sense less easily categorized.

Chapter One: Nonsense

“Un moine vint, dit-on, trouver le sage Chou-Chan et lui demanda: je vous en prie, jouez-moi donc un air sur une harpe sans cordes. Chou-Chan se tut un bref instant et dit ‘Est-ce que tu l’entends?’ - ‘Non, je ne l’entends pas.’ - ‘Et pourquoi,’ dit le maitre, ‘ne l’as-tu pas demandé plus fort?’ (It is said that a monk came and asked the master Chou-Chan to play music with a harp without strings. Chou-chan at first remained silent and said ‘Do you hear it?’ - ‘No, I do not’ - ‘And why,’ replied the master, ‘did not you ask loud enough?’)¹

1. History of Nonsense

On a public radio broadcast (KPFA California) in 1960, Alan Watts asked the following question: “Why do we love nonsense so much?” The answer to his inquiry resides in the desire to make sense of what is not easily comprehended. Our very human nature strives for meaning, for significance, so that we can understand why we are here. We believe that life ought to have a purpose and that we are here to carry on a mission, but we often forget that the true meaning of life as explained by God in the *Book of Job* is purposeless. God removes Job’s burden when He makes him realize that he must accept that not everything in life has to be understood. Life as a journey is nothing but a riddle.

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”... [Job replied]

“I know that thou can do every thing, and that no purpose of *Yours* can be withheld from You...Therefore have I uttered that I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

“Listen please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’”

“I have hear of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You.

“Therefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes.”²

¹ Robert Benayoun, *Le nonsense*. Balland, 1977, p.11.

² King James Bible, *The Book of Job*, chapters 38 and 42. The Gideons International, p. 368-371.

In *The Defendant*, G. K. Chesterton argues that great literature has always been an allegorical view of the whole universe. He asserts that *The Iliad* is only great because all life is a battle, the *Odyssey* because all life is a journey, and the *Book of Job* because all life is a riddle. If, therefore, nonsense is really to be the literature of the future, it must have its own version of the Cosmos to offer; the world must not only be tragic, romantic, and religious, it also must be nonsensical. Chesterton argues:

“...we fancy that nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper.”³

In fact, everything has another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. The answer to Watts’ question is apparent in our desire to make sense out of nonsense, because the lack of sense might reveal the existence of neuroses. What satisfies is to find meaning behind words, thoughts, and actions when, for a Zen poet, life is purposeless.

In Watts’ deathbed poem, he said, “From the bathtub to the bathtub, I have uttered stuff and nonsense: the bathtub in which the baby is washed at birth, and the bathtub in which the corpse is washed before burying. All the time between it, I was going jackidy jack.”⁴ The above Zen apologue demonstrates that nonsense cannot solely be viewed as being just deprived of sense or logic. Noam Chomsky’s sentence produced in 1957, “the colorless green ideas sleep furiously” is grammatically acceptable but without meaning. The Zen monk’s dissatisfaction brings forth the idea that nonsense requires the ability to mutate from both sides, from making sense to none; almost moving like an hourglass. Like in an hourglass, once the sand reaches the bottom, the count stops. If one sees from only one side, the play ends. That account resembles a

³ G.K. Chesterton, *The Defense of Nonsense*. The Defendant p. 446.

⁴ Alan Watts, *Limits of Language*. <http://deoxy.org/watts.htm>.

scene from Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) when Ferdinand (Jean-Paul Belmondo) crosses a man in the harbor (Raymond Devos) who sings Meredith Wilson's tune "'Til There was You," in French "Est-ce que vous m'aimez? (do you love me?)". He asks Ferdinand if he can hear the tune that he hears ("that tune, right there. You don't hear it?"). Ferdinand replies that he does not and ends it by calling the man crazy. Again here, the relationship between sense and nonsense reveals nonsensical situations as only defined as such when set alongside sense; Ferdinand symbolizes the real, the logical side, while the other man can be perceived as being unreasonable and nonsensical. In every case, nonsense depends upon an assumption of sense. Without sense there is no nonsense and vice versa.

A. Definition

Nonsense is usually difficult to define and delimit, but the Oxford English Dictionary presents the meaning as "that which makes no sense", which clearly indicates its dependency on the very tangible characteristic of sense. Then, from a literary viewpoint, nonsense denotes "verse or other writing intended to be amusing by virtue of its absurd or whimsical language", such as nonsense poetry. Before nonsense became a literary form, it has long been valuable to children or the common man. For that reason, nonsense can mean different things to different people. While some philosophers argue that nonsense shows the limit of rational knowledge, storytellers and poets beguile their audience with riddles and rhymes. Neither side looks to the other as complementary, as an enrichment or enlightenment; in fact, they only participate in widening the gap between what is frivolous or not and between rationality and irrationality: dividing, not unifying. In *The Language of Nonsense in Alice*, Jacqueline Flesher argues that, "Nonsense bears the stamp of paradox. The two terms of the paradox are order and disorder.

Order is generally created by language, disorder by reference,”⁵ which Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) explains by pointing out that between words and reality are thoughts and what leads to nonsense is playing with thoughts rather than words.

When speaking about language, philosopher and linguist Ludwig Wittgenstein finds himself concerned with the concept of nonsense. In the *Tractatus*, he defines nonsense as a combination of words that cannot possibly be understood, because “no sense can be derived” (*Tractatus* 4.461). He believed that the “limits of the knowable world and the limits of language both of what can be said and what can be thought, and therefore all that can be said to exist.”⁶ On the other hand, in *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, Wim Tigges affirms nonsense is not senseless, but that it presents double-sense or double talk: “Nonsense, like all poetry, has something to do with both kinds of arranging, of making sense, but, unlike conventional verse, its first allegiance is to rhyme rather than reason.” (19-20) Nonsense is thought of as something negative because it lacks sense, and by sense, it is what seems logical to the brain. We recognize what an apple and grape are because we can touch, taste, and see them, but *grapple*, word portmanteau, does not make sense and takes on a different meaning.

The Surrealists, the inheritors of nineteenth century nonsense, wanted to put logic to sleep and allow the liberated brain to create meaning out of automatic writing or free association. They invented a game called *The Exquisite Corpse*, in which each writes on a sheet of paper a word, making sure the other players cannot see. The paper is folded to conceal each word, and only at the end, can the resulting sentence be read. The game acquired its name from the first sentence obtained this way: “The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine.”⁷ This playful way

⁵ Jacqueline Flesher, “The Language of Nonsense in Alice”, *Yale French Studies*, No 43, 1969 p. 128.

⁶ Quoted in Justus Hartnack, *Wittgenstein and Modern Philosophy*, trans. Maurice Cranston (New York University Press, 1965), p. 38.

⁷ Alastair Brotchie, *Surrealist Games*. Edited by Mel Gooding. Shambala Redstone Editions, Boston, 2001.

of approaching what is seen or experienced is evidence that as much sense can be created from nonsense as there is nonsense in sense.

In *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*, Susan Stewart takes an inter-textual approach to defining nonsense, which according to her, operates strictly on the borderline between order and disorder. She refers to nonsense as standing:

“...in contrast to the reasonable, positive, contextualized, and ‘natural’ world of sense as the arbitrary, the random, the inconsequential, the merely cultural. While sense is sensory, tangible, real, nonsense is a ‘game of vapours’, unrealizable, a temporary illusion. While sense is ‘common’ and ‘down to earth’ nonsense is ‘perfect’, ‘pure’, an untouched surface of meaning whose every gesture is reflexive”⁸.

Stewart argues that nonsense always refers back to a sense that cannot be assumed and in her essay she is concerned with the transformation of common sense into nonsense, and nonsense into sense. Stewart also adds that,

“Nonsense operates by means of split consciousness, as split characterizing any act of meta-communication. The reflexivity of nonsense breaks open the pervasiveness of common sense. The transformed aspects of common sense are ‘brought to light,’ made relative to one another or to other domains of reality. In this way their ideological nature - their position as ‘mere opinion’ - is foregrounded. While realism takes part in the ideology of common sense, attaching itself metonymically and smoothing over the sense of attachment, nonsense bares the ideological nature of common sense, showing common sense’s precarious situation - rooted in culture and not in nature. Common sense, which throughout everyday life is assumed to be something natural, given, and universal and thereby characteristic of a pervasive world view, becomes, when juxtaposed through nonsense with alternative conceptions of order, as only partial reality, ideology.”⁹

For Stewart, common sense represents the real world while nonsense reduces its meaning to nothing, mostly because of its contextual constraints. At first, nonsense creates a multiplicity of meanings and then reduces them to nothing. In her approach to nonsense, Stewart focuses on the ludic aspect of language, on the play or shift between the world of everyday life and of fiction. She sees nonsense as a “critical device” which brings to light the precarious nature of common

⁸ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49-50.

sense, since it is rooted in culture and subject to change based on worldview, order, and hierarchy found in the reality of social life. Nonsense is seen to have no direction and bear no apparent purpose. In contrast, common sense obeys certain rules of everyday conduct and seems to aim at something more natural, given, and thus, universal.

Nonetheless, Robert Benayoun refers to nonsense as more complex than the absence of meaning, and rather as a frustration of expectations about sense. He argues,

“...ce que ne possède pas le nonsense, en définitive, c’est la Raison, ou ce qu’on nomme Sens Commun. Ne cherchant pas à discerner le vrai du faux, mais bien à les confondre, le nonsense évite soigneusement la méthode discursive et échelonne ses jugements suivant un order parfaitement arbitraire. Ce qui ne l’empêche nullement de disposer d’une logique particulière.”¹⁰

Benayoun’s definition of nonsense pertains to the world of poetry where nonsense is another sense, such as touch, hearing, or smell, and because that new sense is deprived of apparent logic, it invites an exploration of the other side of sense:

“... à voir... la fumée descendre au lieu de monter, une figue manger par un âne, et le lointain se confondre avec le contigu... [cette contradiction] c’est amener le contraste salutaire qui au-dessus de l’ombre, apporte la lumière, c’est réaliser par l’ambivalence des objets eux-mêmes, la synthèse, donc la désintégration de l’univers entier.”¹¹

Nonsense procures a world where nothing is fixed in advance and therefore everything is to be created and mastered. In *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, Wim Tigges claims that nonsense is not a universe of things, but of words and ways of using them and since play consists of establishing mastery over something, by analogy, nonsense can be seen as an attempt at mastering language. According to him, nonsense also allows for the expression of “total poetry”

¹⁰ Robert Benayoun, *Le nonsense*. Ballad, 1977, p. 14. [...in fact what nonsense lacks is reasoning or what we also call common sense. Not trying to distinguish what is true from what is false, but rather melding one with the other, nonsense carefully avoids the Cartesian method and disperses its senses according to an order perfectly arbitrary, which does not prevent it from being logical at all].

¹¹ Ibid., p. 26 [...to see.. smoke descending rather than ascending, a donkey eating a fig, and the distance to merge with the contiguous one.... [this contradiction] is to bring the salutary contrast above the shade, brings light, it is to realize through the ambivalence of objects themselves the synthesis, thus the disintegration of the entire universe.]

and “nonsense is ‘a world of words come to life’, which does not so much antagonize the real world... [but] which sometimes even questions the reality of the real world itself.”¹²

B. Forms of Nonsense

But what are the forms of nonsense? In her essay, Stewart considers particular operations by which nonsense is created, choosing five activities used: 1) reversals and inversions, 2) play with boundaries, 3) play with infinity, 4) arrangement and rearrangement, and 5) simultaneity. She focuses on how to go about making things work, and how meaning is assembled from a set of common elements, then disassembled and reassembled.

I. Reversal and inversion

In language, the reversal is a particular threat to hierarchy and direction. Often defined in reality or everyday life as moving toward a goal or, at the very least, going onward, the reversal implies that life is seen as going nowhere. The reversal reminds that if in everyday life it is felt that getting somewhere is occurring, the reverse implies that it is not. Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), well known for his fantasy novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), as well as his innovative and unconventional use of language, created a Victorian world of nonsense, referred to by Emile Cammaerts as a genre “Dreamland.”¹³ His view of nonsense was to create a unified sense of its form and function. Carroll’s tentative title before *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was “Alice Among the Elves”, suggesting that Carroll himself must have sensed his departure from his contemporaries and the Victorian tradition. Carroll’s book shows evidence that he rejected the conventional approach of favoring reason and morals over imagination and dream structure. Carroll did not want to instruct children in morals and religion to prepare them for a righteous adulthood; instead, he poked fun at this discourse by

¹² Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Nonsense*. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1988, p. 25.

¹³ Emile Cammaerts, *The Poetry of Nonsense* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1926), p. 32.

depriving it of a realistic framework. The character of Alice departs from the usual portrayal of a Victorian girl heroine, who was often virtuous or forced to be righteous; Alice is neither naughty nor nice, but is always curious and bewildered by her surroundings. Like her readers, Alice is puzzled and surprised in a world aptly called 'Wonderland', one made up of contradictions, jokes, anxiety, puns, puzzles, riddles, arbitrary rules. Alice's frustrations are the result of the system of language she knows and which clashes with the language she finds in Wonderland.

In chapter VII, the Mad Hatter asks Alice during the mad tea party if she has solved the riddle. Alice replies, "No, I give it up... What's the answer?" The Hatter informs her he does not know before Alice angrily adds, "I think you might do something better with the time... than wasting it in taking riddles that have no answers."¹⁴ Alice's use of language is based on logic. A riddle should imply an answer; if not, then it is a waste of time to ponder something that does not exist. For the Hatter, a riddle is just another conundrum for amusement. Carroll presents two opposing ways of looking at what reality can offer. Later during the tea party, the March Hare asks Alice if she wants more tea. To his request, she replies that she has had none and thus cannot take more. The March Hare answers, "You mean you can't take less... it's very easy to take more than nothing." Alice is left without argument. In *The Nonsense Literature of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll*, Susan Ede argues that, Alice "uses language to 'deaden' her world, to provide a false stability and order. The March Hare and the Hatter challenge the desensitizing, though Alice never understands the true nature of their attack."¹⁵ When Alice does not allow herself to play the game in Wonderland, she applies learned rules from the world she comes from, which are the rules of logic. It is not that she purposely 'deadens' her reality but she does not have the tools to see otherwise and refuses to take part of this Wonderland. The first time she

¹⁴ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Bantam Classic Book, New York, 1981, p. 56.

¹⁵ Lisa Susan Ede, *The Nonsense Literature of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll*. The Ohio State of University, 1975, p. 100.

enters the new world of Wonderland; she anticipates what is to come. After having drunk and eaten the cake that shrink her, she cries “Curiouser and curiouser!” and Carroll justifies her bad English by writing, “She was so much surprised, that for a moment she quite forgot how to speak good English.”¹⁶ However in a moment of madness, she feels more herself, a child making mistakes in learning grammar rules. She forgets that ‘more’ should precede a two-syllable adjective but instead adds the suffix ‘-er’ to it. Jean-Jacques Lecercle affirms that Alice explores the rules of language and even simplifies them, making them easier to learn. He believes that her attitude is in fact the normal attitude of a child “...who systematizes the rules she learns, and derives ‘goed’ from go by analogy, until she is made to realize the unfortunate existence of exceptions. [For him] Alice’s is an infantile linguistic theory”¹⁷. The same Alice who in chapter one, *Down the Rabbit-Hole*, pondered the usefulness of a book with no pictures or conversations.

In addition, the notion of play is introduced in Sewell’s *The Field of Nonsense*. She puts forth the belief that play-behavior in nonsense is a paradox in communication: for example, one is fighting and yet one is not. “Such a paradox, too, is the possibility of alternative domains of reality. The procedures by which the schizophrenic or aphasiac fails to make sense are often the same procedures by which others succeed in making nonsense, in both cases illustrating an inability to distinguish between a hierarchy of messages and contexts.”¹⁸ For Sewell, nonsense is a logical game between order and disorder. The Wonderland that Alice finds herself in is a world where nonsense, “is not a universe of things but of words and ways of using them, plus a certain amount of pictorial illustration. Since play consists in establishing mastery over something, nonsense is to be seen as an attempt at mastering language, since language and numbers are the

¹⁶ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Bantam Classic Book, New York, 1981, p. 8.

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The institutions of Victorian Nonsense*. Routledge, 1994, p. 54.

¹⁸ Wim Tigges *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1988, p. 34.

chief sources of mental playthings”¹⁹. Lecerle further argues that nonsense “...is not merely concerned with language, but also functions as meta-language - it dwells within the paradoxical necessity and the impossibility of a meta-language for natural languages.”²⁰ He adds that *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is full of meta-linguistic incidents. In chapter VI, *Pig and Pepper*, Alice meets the Cheshire cat in the woods and to its question “Did you say ‘pig’ or ‘fig’?” Alice replies ‘pig’. This time she knows the answer, unlike the first chapter, wherein she asked herself repeatedly to the point of confusing herself: “Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats? Do bats eat cats?”²¹ Alice turns ‘cats’ into ‘bats’ like the cat turns ‘pig’ into ‘fig’. The Cheshire cat and Alice play with words, but Alice plays with words “in a dreamy sort of way” not paying attention to what she is saying, while the Cheshire cat intentionally drives Alice ‘mad’ in a world of madness. It might have succeeded since Alice does not seem to be bewildered by the fact that the Cheshire cat can disappear and appear as it pleases. But the fact that a cat can grin seems to unsettle her. Has Alice gone mad? For Sewell, the language played with *In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is very real and concrete. On the other hand, for Stewart language is nonmaterial and has no effect on reality,

“...it is often a forum for exercises in reversibility. We can see this exercise not only in discourse that is taken back, but also in several speech play forms that readily demonstrate their ability to turn back on themselves to proceed ambivalently in either of two directions. The reversals of these texts are “internal” to the text, that is, they involve a reversal of features present in the text. For example, “The goose that stepped into the elevator and got peopled is an example of an animal/human inversion that is effected on the linguistic level by the false linguistic analogy of goose: people: and goosed: peopled.”²²

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁰ Jean-Jacques Lecerle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The institutions of Victorian Nonsense*. Routledge, 1994, p. 35.

²¹ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Bantam Classic Book, New York, 1981, p. 4.

²² Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 66.

To come back to the previous example about Alice and the Cheshire Cat, it does not really matter whether Alice answers ‘pig’ or ‘fig’ and if ‘cats eats bats’ or ‘bats eats cats’. Whatever the answer is does not affect the story’s meaning, and thus the inversion can go in either direction.

Furthermore, the most perfect linguistic reversal is perhaps the palindrome, which has the ability to flip the word backwards, as its etymological definition, *palindromos* in Greek, “running back”, and is defined as a word, verse, or nonsense that reads the same backwards or forwards. The palindrome can work on the lexical level as in mum, Anna, deed, *anana*, Madam, and mirror words such as drab/bard, Dog/God, reward/drawer. Palindrome can work on the level of a sentence, as in “Madam I’m Adam”, “Able Was I Ere I saw Elba”, or on the level of an entire poem, like that of the thirteenth century poet Baudoin de Condé,

**“Amours est vie glorieuse,
Tenir fait ordre gracieuse
Maintenir veult courtoises mours
Mours courtoises veult maintenir
Glorieuse vie est amours.”²³**

Stewart states, “nonsense of poetry takes the traditional division between content and form (technique), with its hierarchical weighing of content over form, and inverts statuses to present form over content... [it] is not properly ungrammatical. Nonsense results from the juxtaposition of incongruities, from the preservation of form at the expense of content. The result is a dispersal of any univocal meaning.”²⁴ For Stewart, thoughts in nonsense poetry support the form and rhyme instead of the other way around. The nonsense verse of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll is not properly ungrammatical, but an example of inversion of form over content. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll’s fondness for language takes on an even larger role than in

²³ Ibid. p. 27, [Love is a glorious life, Loving is gracious disposition. Keeping woes is courteous manners. Courteous manners are to keep. Glorious life is love.]

²⁴ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 76.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Alice discusses poetry and the meaning of words with Humpty Dumpty. She flatters Humpty Dumpty for his wit and way of explaining words, asking him to shed some light on *Jabberwocky*. She starts reciting it,

*“Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.”*²⁵

Humpty Dumpty interrupts her there to explain the few words that he already has difficulty grasping and says to her:

“‘Brillig’ means four o’ clock in the afternoon--the time when you begin broiling things for dinner... ‘slithy’ means ‘lithe and slimy.’ ‘Lithe’ is the same as ‘active.’ You see it’s like a portmanteau--there are two meanings packed up into one word... ‘toves’ are something like badgers—they’re something like lizards--and they’re something like corkscrews... ‘gyre’ is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To ‘gimble’ is to make holes like a gimlet... ‘the wabe’ is the grass-plot round a sun-dial... It’s called ‘wabe,’ you know, because it goes a long way before it, and long way behind it... then, ‘mimsy’ is ‘flimsy and miserable’ (there’s another portmanteau for you). And a ‘borogove’ is a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round--something like a live mop... a ‘rath’ is a sort of green pig: but ‘mome’ I’m not certain about. I think it’s short for ‘from home’--meaning that they’d lost their way, you know ‘outgribing’ is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle: however, you’ll hear it done, maybe--down in the wood yonder--and, when you’ve once heard it, you’ll be quite content” (Through the looking-glass 179-181).

Unfortunately, this is where Humpty Dumpty, and Carroll, ends the interpretation. The first and most basic technique used is that all of Carroll’s manufactured words look as if they could be real. The vowel and the consonant combinations appear true, genuine, and are easily pronounced, like ‘mome’ a substitute for ‘from home’. Prior to Carroll, Edward Lear (1812-1888) published *A Book of Nonsense* in 1846 and in it masters the sound of words both real and imaginary, such as the word “immoderate”, where Lear creates a new word out of two other words *moderate* and *immediate*. Lear clearly deconstructs the rules of language, inventing new

²⁵ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*. Bantam Dell, New York, 1981, p. 179.

words, which in spite of their lack of meaning make sense in the context of the poem and drawing that accompany the verse.

“There was an Old Man of the South,
Who had an immoderate mouth;
But in swallowing a dish, that was quite full of fish,
He was choked, that Old Man of the South.” (Lear 48).

Carroll has also borrowed Lear’s use of language to write *Jabberwocky* (1855). In “The Owl and The Pussy-Cat”, Lear invents a new word ‘runcible’ for the sake of sound rather than meaning: “They dined on mince, and slices of quince, Which they ate on a runcible spoon”²⁶ - a nonsensical word without real meaning. Both authors make the real seem unreal and the unreal seem real simply by blending the two worlds of reality and imagination. It is this blurry line between the believable and unbelievable that Carroll and Lear explore this unique fantasy world where reality is part of the imagined one. In conjunction, reversing phonemes also performs another method of inversion. In France this form of phonemic inversion known as *contrepèterie* (spoonerism) was very popular in the mid-nineteenth century. At first for Stewart, nonsense, with its embrace of play and paradox is a critical activity. In *Curiosités littéraires*, Ludovic Lalanne, defines it as substituting a letter of a word to change its meaning. Here are a few examples taken from Tabourot:

<i>Un sot pale.</i>	<i>Il tiendra une vache.</i>
<i>Un pot sale.</i>	<i>Il viendra une tache.</i>
<i>Elle lit son prix.</i>	<i>Il le dit à deux fames.</i>
<i>Elle prit son fils.</i>	<i>Il le fit à deux dames.</i> ²⁷

²⁶ Edward Lear, “The Owl and The Pussy-Cat” *So Much Nonsense*. The Bodleian Library, 2007, III.

²⁷ Ludovic Lalanne, *Curiosités Littéraires*. Paulin, Paris, 1845, p. 32, [a pale idiot- dirty pot, He’ll hold a cow- he will hold a task, She reads her price- She took her son, He tells it to two women- He did it to two women.]

In the above examples, the reversibility creates and juxtaposes two distant realities where the text becomes an object that can be arranged and rearranged. It also shows that language is slippery and meaning can easily disappear to form another.

But then nonsense is perceived as a device. Stewart adds that:

“nonsense often involves a demystification, a stripping, of metaphor of the type...has to do with the resonance of the unconscious it is nonsense that restores metaphor to consciousness by exposing it as a device, a formal procedure for making new meaning. Again, what is made manifest through nonsense is form, procedure. When nonsense is engaged in reversing the metaphorical and the literal, or the literal and the metaphorical, it is concerned with exploring the procedures by which the two domains are articulated. This is particularly apparent in the reversals of performance levels characterizing many metariddles, metajokes and catch tales”²⁸

Making the unsaid “said” is another way for nonsense to make the metaphorical literal, for this gesture is an articulation of the very procedures by which metaphors come to be. Nonsense operates by which a riddle question is turned into an ordinary discourse question, or a joke into an unremarkable true story. It is both a transformation from one domain to another and an articulation of the boundary between the two. The focus of attention is this boundary between talk and performance, and it is neither the metaphorical nor the literal meaning of the discourse so much as the shape of the discourse, the procedures by which the boundary is maintained.

II. Play With Boundaries

For Stewart, while reversal and inversions are procedures that define relationships between categories, the second type of nonsense operation explores the activity of making itself. Nonsense plays with the boundaries of discourse: misdirection, play with a surplus of signification, which has the intention of distancing readers from signification and reality. They present texts that are split or doubled so that comments, corrections, and new meanings are imposed onto the original text, thus creating a new one during the process of reading “...until the

²⁸ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 89.

moment of closure, where the reader must reconstruct and realign his interpretation to take account of the gestalt produced by both texts.”²⁹ Misdirection has to do with a shifting of boundaries. In chapter one of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice introduces what is to follow as being a story with pictures and conversations. She does not see how a book without any of these additions can be useful. Carroll’s story is a book of nonsense, which presents nonsense as the art of conversation. Right from the beginning, Alice speaks aloud as if she wants to engage in a conversation with herself in this new environment in order to better understand what she is experiencing. She is not sure who she is, for she has changed so much since falling into the rabbit hole. She has physically shrunk and grown so that it became difficult for her to know herself. In chapter five, when she talks to the caterpillar she adds, ‘...I am not myself... I am afraid I can’t put it more clearly... for I can’t understand myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.”³⁰ This chapter ends with Alice not knowing what she is going to be from one minute to the next. This is something Carroll-esque about meaning. Language is mutable and changes forms as it moves from reader to reader. Nonsense problematizes the meaning of language through the misdirection of its meaning. Stewart reiterates that nonsense manifests aspects of the unconscious. It undermines the idea of something left unsaid. In his writings, Carroll attempts to say everything and nonsense takes control of reality. “It bears the threat of the self-generating, self-perpetuating machine.”³¹ According to Stewart, to engage in nonsense is also to engage in an exploration into the nature of the transition between sense and nonsense. In light of defining Surrealism, André Breton’s (1896-1968) language concurs with Stewart’s affirmation. “The forms of Surrealist language

²⁹ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 97.

³⁰ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Bantam Classic Book, New York, 1981, p. 34.

³¹ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 89.

adapt themselves best to dialogue [similar to nonsense]. Here, two thoughts confront each other; while one is being delivered, the other is busy with it; but how is it busy with?”³²

In addition for Stewart, misdirection depends upon an excess of meaning, “an extension as well as a realignment of meaning”. Because a text has multiple interpretations, it appears as an enigma, a puzzle from which an interpretation will be worked. In written discourse, there is a distance between author and audience that checks to some degree the arbitrary power of the puzzler. But in face-to-face communication, this power can be taken full advantage of. Thus, a wide variety of riddles will manipulate the expectations the audience has regarding interpretive boundaries. Many of these involve a play on words that shifts the boundary of the enigma to another universe of discourse. Carroll was a master of these types of puzzles, which are solved through word play. In *Puzzles from Wonderland*, he poses a problem:

“I.
Dreaming of apples on a wall,
And dreaming often, dear,
I dreamed that, if I counted all,
—How many would appear?”³³

Stewart argues that significance is derived from the activities of interpretation. Thus it is interpretation that makes “the arbitrary non-arbitrary”. She writes:

“the problem of arbitrariness is a problem of causality...we may believe language to be ‘arbitrary’ in that there is no natural relation between the sign and what it signifies... [The] play between the arbitrary and the non-arbitrary is brought out in the speech play form known as ‘echo verse.’ In echo verse what is by nature an arbitrary, yet predictable, answer - the echo - is transformed into a non-arbitrary and not predicted answer. When we expect repetition without significance, we are surprised by a significance that denies its status as a mere echo.”³⁴

³² André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. The University of Michigan, 1969, p. 34.

³³ Lewis Carroll, *Puzzles from Wonderland*. England, 1870, <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/112/poems-puzzles-and-stories-of-lewis-carroll/4951/puzzles-from-wonderland>.

³⁴ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 97-98.

Breton suggested in his first 1924 manifesto that the Surrealists make use of this type of verse, but without the repetition, and in the use of “echolalia”:

“Q. How are you? A. You.
Q. What is your name? A. Forty-five houses.”³⁵

Moreover, the excess of significance in written discourse are the acrostic and the calligram, both forms adding another dimension to the poem through the process of reading. In these poems, the temporal act of reading is redirected into a spatial act of perception. In calligrams, the words visually express the words’ meanings. Guillaume Apollinaire was a famous calligram writer and the Eiffel Tower is one example from *Calligrammes*. The spatial revelation will occur only when the reader redirects his or her attention away from the horizontally printed lines of words on the page. The poems *Heart* and *Mirror* are the prime examples of Apollinaire’s calligrams [Fig. 1]. With the acrostic, the direction of reading is undermined. The reader becomes aware of alternative directions of signification on the page. The acrostic can work by means of the initial letter of each line, which was the favored method of much of Carroll’s acrostic verse. On the last page of *Through the Looking Glass*, A BOAT beneath a sunny sky, Carroll spells out Alice full name with the seven three verse stanza, Alice Pleasance Liddell [Fig. 2].

III. Play With Infinity

If language remains the prime place to exemplify nonsense, play theory has also shown great interest in nonsense. As observed in modern literature, the basic dichotomies involved in nonsense separate illusion from reality, disorder from order, fantasy from logic, imagination from reason, childhood from adulthood. Play theory provides a useful model to clarify how this dialectic functions in nonsense. In *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan Huizinga presented play as “...a

³⁵ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. The University of Michigan, 1969, p. 34.

voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and space, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having an aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary life’.”³⁶ Huizinga reevaluated the notion and significance of play and argued that the most appropriate definition for man is *homo ludens* (Man the player) rather than *homo sapiens* (Wise Man). Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* allowed a shift to take place so the world of nonsense was not only an affair of mere child’s play but also a serious cultural and literary phenomenon. Play is highly rewarding and frees the players from reality. It provides the illusion of freedom for play’s sake, where the players are tied to the game with the string of timelessness. Stewart reiterates that the player’s consciousness becomes part of a variety of ‘other worlds’, which is to her, more apparent in the theory of Eugen Fink, German philosopher who described play as “not for the sake of a final goal [but rather as resembling] an oasis of happiness that we happen upon in the desert of our Tantalus-like seeing and pursuit of happiness.”³⁷ The nature of this play world is significant since it produces “...an enigmatic realm that is not nothing, and yet is nothing real.”³⁸

Plato used the allegory of the cave to show that the shadows on the cave’s walls appeared to its people more real than the real objects outside the cave, blurring the vision between what is real and not. Such images are both real and unreal. The reflection of a tree onto the surface of water is a real reflection of the tree but the reflected image only exists as a result of the reflection of light and not in physical reality. According to Fink, “The ontic illusion (mirror images and the like) is more than a simple analogon of the play word—in fact, most of the time it occurs as a

³⁶ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play Element of Culture* .Boston: Beacon Press, 1950, p. 28.

³⁷ Eugen Fink, “The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play” in *Game, Play, Literature*, ed. Ehrmann, p. 21.

³⁸ Eugen Fink, “The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an ontology of play,” *Yale French Series*, 41 (1968), p. 23.

structural element of the play word itself.”³⁹ For Lear and Carroll, the use of mirror images exemplifies Fink’s theory in such a way that the world of nonsense does constitute a play world. Nonsense operates according to its own rules and to enter that world requires an attempt to abandon oneself to the pleasure of the game. In nonsense, the satisfaction of such commitment is represented in the sway between conscious and unconscious or thus represented in the complete lack of inhibitions. Therefore, play can be viewed both as an exploration (of personal freedom) or a disavowal (keeping reality intact). Nonsense maintains a tension between the two, taking this traditional division between content and form and inverting them so the form precedes content. In *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*, Susan Stewart argues, “The nonsense verse in Lear and Carroll resulted from the juxtaposition of incongruities, from the preservation of form over content. The result is a dispersal on any univocal meaning.”⁴⁰ This dualistic view of play as being 1) unreal, and concurrently, 2) seemingly real, Stewart further adds, “Just as play with boundaries of discourse events involves a transformation of members’ expectations regarding the horizon of the situation, so play with infinity involves a transformation of another aspect of members’ expectations - their sense of events as characterized by distinguishable beginnings and endings.”⁴¹ In literature, realism is characterized by the beginnings and endings of action within an hour, a day, a week, a month or year. To move away from that construct, to cut everyday life from fiction, is to move toward what Stewart called ‘play time’. She investigated four forms of play in the making of nonsense. They are: a) repetition, b) nesting, c) circularity and d) serializing.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁰ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 76.

⁴¹ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979, p. 116.

a. Repetition

Stewart affirms that repetition can only happen in the realm of everyday life and for repetition to happen, it relies on the fact that it must exist or not exist, further adding that “repetition is itself an event, a ‘third event’, which is limited to the domain of fictions. Because context is always ongoing in social life, repetition can never ‘take place’; for it to ‘take place’ is for it to take up new quantities of space and time that make it no longer a repetition” (Stewart 120). We can say that something might happen again but it will never be in an identical context.

b. Nesting

To illustrate nesting, Stewart uses the example of Chinese boxes containing within them other boxes. In reality, they are contentless; there is nothing there but other boxes. They are the illustration of what nesting reveals; what is within the frame:

“...a fundamental problem of the notion of framing, and metacommunication... a problem of logical types and the paradox it bears of container and contained, form as content and content as form... Content appears as another occasion for interpretation, a character whose passage must be taken up in the next story, a double who splits into an infinity of doubles, who dissolves into the boundary of his being” (Stewart 129).

c. Circularity

While in nesting a story dissolves into an infinity of other stories, in circularity, a story can dissolve into an infinity of digressions and returns, but they both provide “methods for extending discourse by means of what Viktor Shklovsky called ‘closed form,’ that is, beginning and ending of the same motif, while ‘inside,’ other stories can be told” (Stewart 129). One of the most pervasive examples of circularity is found in the organization of nature divided into four seasons, which always return to the same cycle. For Stewart, circularity is implicit in the reversibility and repetition of play, which favors the object itself rather than the end if it is to return to the same point of departure. She asserts, “Circularity is the shape of play, an activity

centered in itself that is both repeatable and reversible. One can continue in the circle in the same direction or turn and go the other way around... The circle confronts us not only in the form of a paradox, but with the form of all paradoxes- a quality of limitedness and limitlessness ‘all at once.’” (Stewart 133). The play with infinity through these two methods of nesting and circularity tends to lead to nonsense, “...for the focus has turned to pure form and the self-perpetuation of counting for counting’s sake” (Stewart 134).

d. Serializing

As opposed to seasons, which provide us with a circular infinity, numbers provide us with “paradigms of linear infinity”⁴².

C. Historical Background of Nonsense

In order to discuss this first nonsense operation, we might consider culture as a set of ways to organize experience. In other words, culture is an outcome of interactions that members see as orderly, rule-governed, productive processes. It is during economic recession that the most nonsensical literary works were published. In 1846, Lear wrote the *Book of Nonsense* followed by Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865, and Jary *Docteur Faustroll* (1911), and the Marx Brothers’ films between 1929-49. In *Le nonsense*, Robert Benayoun establishes a close link between nonsense and economic repression. Nonsense seems to manifest itself in times of historical and social changes provoked by social injustice and inflation when “...la pesanteur des iniquités vitales libèrent les esprits du sens de gravité”⁴³ [...the weight of the vital inequalities free the mind from the sense of gravity]. For instance, the industrialization and advent of technologies such as photography and cinema have undoubtedly marked Victorian England (1832-1901). Surrealism was also born in a period of economic tension and social upheavals.

⁴² Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, p. 134.

⁴³ Robert Benayoun, *Le nonsense*. Balland, 1977, p. 11

Nonsense reached its peak in the 1920s, especially with the American crash in 1929, where the antidote to an absurd situation was the absurd itself. The Dadaists and Surrealists shared Carroll's nonsensical worldview in which nonsense is concerned with miscommunication that disclosed hidden meaning. The problem of miscommunication is central to the nonsense of Lear and Carroll for they both play with man's mishandling of language. The concern with language is one of the major links between Victorian nonsense and Modern Art. In an article discussing the relationship between Carroll's nonsense and modern literature, Michael Holquist asserts,

“...the most distinctive feature of modern literature... [shows] the attempt of an author to insure through the structure of his work that the work could be perceived only as what it was, and not some other thing; the attempt to create an immaculate fiction, a fiction that resists the attempts of reader, and especially those readers who write criticism, to turn it into an allegory, a system equitable which already existing systems in the non-fictional world.”⁴⁴

As a result of this enthusiasm, style has become, for much of modern literature, the subject. The Surrealists took nonsense seriously, for nonsense utilizes many themes and techniques common to eminent art forms at the time. They exposed people to a truer picture of the world, making the invisible visible. For that effect, nonsense represents the need for attention and concern. Foster Leonard adds, “The Cabaret Voltaire group were attempting to restore primitive freshness to an art soiled and banalized by the contemporary society and machine progress which had led to war. They looked to new media in all the arts- in one sphere they turned to collage, in another they turned to nonsense, to nursery rhyme and soon to absolute sound.”⁴⁵ The most famous case of literary nonsense is Carroll's fantasy novels. This period also bore witness to an intense gap between modernism and imagination, which becomes apparent in Alice's world where the art of imagination coexists with reality, two things the Surrealists grew very good at bringing together.

⁴⁴ Michael Holquist, “What is a Boojum?: Nonsense and Modernism,” *Yale French Studies*, 43 (1969), p. 147.

⁴⁵ Leonard Foster, *Poetry of Significant Nonsense: An Inaugural Lecture*. Cambridge University Press, 1962, p. 28.

D. Influences of Nonsense

The Dadaists and Surrealists produced great bodies of work that were essential to inverting the categories and hierarchies of ordinary language and its world, including poetry as a genre. According to Breton, the constraint of art and ordinary language is “the worst of conventions because it imposes upon us the use of formulas and verbal associations which do not belong to us, which embody next to nothing of our true natures; the very meaning of words are fixed and unchangeable only because of an abuse of power by the collectivity.”⁴⁶ The Surrealists’ mission was to reinvent the world in every lyric movement. Hugo Ball wrote that the program of Dada was to “contradict existing world orders...”⁴⁷. He rejected understanding reality from one point of view and embraced a union of all things. The Surrealists sought to invert the laws of poetry as well as the laws of ordinary language. “Traditionally, poetry has depended upon inspiration available to a select few and upon taming the subconscious into a logical form. They offered a poetry of continuous, total poetry of process, a poetry that would never be finished, a poetry liberated from the spatial, temporal, and causal constraints of logic.”⁴⁸

Unlike the nineteenth-century nonsense poets, the verse of the Surrealists depended much more upon the logic of talk than the logic of rhyme. At the same time, this verse rejected and inverted the ordinary language within the logic of talk. Breton wrote in his first manifesto in 1924: “Words and groups of words, which follow one another, manifest among themselves the greatest solidarity. It is not up to me to favor one group over the other. It is up to a miraculous equivalent to intervene - and intervene it does.”⁴⁹ Following the first manifesto *Soluble Fish*, an automatic text, begins Breton’s definition of language within a narrative of interferences, “On

⁴⁶ Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. G.K. Hall & Co., Boston, 1981, p. xxxiv-xxxv.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 51.

⁴⁸ Michel Beaujour *Game, Play, Literature*. Ehrmann, 1971, p. 77.

⁴⁹ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. University of Michigan, 1972, p. 30.

the edge of the clouds a woman stands, on the edge of the islands a woman stands as grape clusters... having caught her in my arms, all rustling. I place my lips on her throat without a word, what happened next escapes me almost entirely.”⁵⁰

Many modern writers and artists view language as neither a reality nor a representation of reality, but a distortion of it. Modernity in Western literature refers to a movement that thrived in the first four decades of the twentieth century. The period of Modernism is characterized by a non-narrative mode of expression, underscoring a reaction against Romanticism and Realism. Although, prior to Modernists, Carroll’s nonsensical stories were among the first non-teaching, non-moralizing texts aimed at children. Carroll, whom Breton admired, often played with contradictions and reversals arising from language and swayed the argument from being nonsensical to sensical, pointing riddles out to readers, who thus curious, would persevere with solving them. At the beginning of *Nadja*, Breton, ‘Pope of Surrealism’ pays tribute to Carroll’s witty “Who Am I?” referring to Alice’s wonder (Breton 11). Breton also upends the question that being implies no longer being who he used to be. He impersonates ghosts and for him this question means much more “than it says, makes [him], still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what [he] must have ceased to be in order to who [he is]” (Breton 11). Even though that question has always haunted man, it would certainly be interesting to set that question back into Carroll’s Victorian time and Breton’s avant-garde scene in Europe.

2. Surrealist Nonsense

Surrealism is an artistic movement born in 1924 and owes its name to French poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who in 1917 used the term 'sur-réaliste' to describe a form of expression

⁵⁰ André Breton, “Soluble Fish”, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. University of Michigan, 1972, p. 53-54.

that surpasses realism. Breton wrote his first manifesto of Surrealism in 1924, putting forth language experiments. Surrealism developed in Paris and the city soon became a magnet for international artists. Surrealists rooted their beliefs in a revolt and aversion to World War I and its aftermath. However, Dada preceded and laid the foundation for Surrealism. Both Surrealists and Dadaists preferred chance, play, and the subconscious to counterbalance the rational in everyday life. For the movements, the imagination itself was what counted artistically, and not the resulting artifact. The Surrealist movement unleashed a revolution in human experience, a liberation of the individual from the domination of the rational in matters personal, cultural, and social. The works of Sigmund Freud on free association, dream analysis, desire, and the subconscious were very significant for the Surrealists: they sought to honor the artistic works of Freud's psychoanalytic theories. Max Ernst used 'frottage' and 'collage', Man Ray developed his 'Rayographs', Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí created symbolic images composed of disparate and unexpected elements. And while the painting of René Magritte also contained dreamlike images, comparisons with the oeuvre of Miró or Dalí remain difficult. Magritte's *objets bouleversants* provoke unease and even terror. For H. J Matthews, Surrealism does not look to external reality to authenticate the pictorial or verbal images. "If we may speak of the Surrealist image as offering a mirror reflection, then this can only be a reflection caught in a mirror turned to face the poet's imagination and to exclude the world about him. The very first thing a Surrealist image does is make this clear to us."⁵¹

A. Beneath Surrealist Nonsense

Writers like Carroll and Lear investigated the tension between logic and fantasy, self and other, order and disorder. The dominant idea in Surrealist imagery is the concept of fragmenting forms. Beginning in France in the 1920s, as an extension of Dadaism and social discontent

⁵¹ J.H Matthews, *The Imagery of Surrealism*. Syracuse University Press, 1977, p. 46.

following World War I, the movement also found great inspiration in the works of Sigmund Freud who scrutinized the realm of the unconscious and dreams. Through the unconscious, dreams, and imagination, the Surrealists sought a higher reality to free the psyche from its bondage to reason, conventional mores, and aesthetics. “Surrealism, such as [Breton conceives] of it, asserts... complete nonconformism” (*Manifestoes of Surrealism* 47). In 1924, Breton strove to overcome this dialectical relationship and asserted in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this *surreality* that I am going...” (MS 14). The First Manifesto was indebted to Freudian theories to overthrow rationalism in favor of the unconscious mind through dreams and automatic writing or a so-called “language of the soul”. In *Histoire du Surrealisme*, Maurice Nadeau asserts, “...les surrealistes ne sont ni des politiques, ni des savants, ni des philosophes, et fort peu des médecins. Ce sont des poètes, des spécialistes du langage, et c’est à lui qu’ils vont s’attaquer.”⁵². Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), a Dada and Surrealist artist, also known as Rrose Sélavy (or R. Mutt as signed on his *Fountain* - 1917), was obsessed with language and the question of language. In “Duchamp and language”, David Antin asserts:

“the relation between fresh widow and french window is not a relation of meaning but a relation of phonology or spelling and the only other relation that these words seem to have to each other is that they both are meaningful entities in the English language and the word we come back to that what is it, it is an intermedial piece consisting of a physical construction locked between two linguistic ones.”⁵³

These two words ‘fresh’ and ‘french’ sound different only from the presence of the ‘n’. Unlike their predecessors, the Dadaists and Surrealists played with ordinary language, inverting the rules

⁵² Pierre Nadeau, *L’histoire du Surrealisme*. 1964, p. 17. [“The Surrealists are no politicians, no scientists, no philosophers, and certainly not doctors. They are poets, specialists of language, and it is language itself that they are attacking.”]

⁵³ Anne D’Harnoncourt, *MARCEL DUCHAMP*. Prestel Pub 1989, p. 104.

of poetic form. While for Carroll, nonsense reflected a tension between the individual and society, for the Surrealists nonsense showed conflict within the individual, where the conflict is more internal than external. “Their inversion of lyric discourse thus went one step further than those inversions performed by the nineteenth nonsense writers. Dada and Surrealism celebrated a poetics of contradiction on the levels of form and content.”⁵⁴ In *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Breton defines language as being “...given to man so that he may make Surrealist use of it.”⁵⁵

In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud dedicated a chapter to establishing a close relationship between jokes and dreams, and thus the unconscious. His investigation of jokes gave him the occasion to think of dreams. He argues, “The task of dream formation is above all to overcome the inhibition from censorship, and it is precisely this task which is solved by the displacements of physical energy within the material of dream-thoughts...the techniques of jokes indicate the same processes that are known to us as peculiarities of the dream-work”⁵⁶ and the most striking of which are “condensation, displacement and indirect representation.”⁵⁷ Thus, the concomitant of the condensations, which occurs in both [jokes and dreams] – is a result of the process of condensation. This origin also accounts for the special character of brevity in jokes, a difficult to define, but striking one. Examples of condensation for Freud are multiple usage of the same material, play upon words, and similarity of sound. Freud then shows that jokes manifest both pleasure and unconscious thoughts. Displacements “in the dream work point to the operation of the censorship of conscious thinking, and accordingly, when we come across

⁵⁴ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and literature*. John Hopkins University Press, (1989), p. 77.

⁵⁵ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1960, p. 204.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

displacement among the techniques of jokes, we shall be inclined to suppose that an inhibitory force plays a part in the formation of jokes as well.”⁵⁸

Moreover, he further adds that nonsense or:

“...absurdity, which appears so often in dreams and has brought them into so much undeserved contempt, never arises by chance through the ideational elements being jumbled together, but can always be shown to have been admitted by the dream-work intentionally and to be designed to represent embittered criticism and contemptuous contradiction in the dream-thoughts. Thus the absurdity in the content of the dream takes the place of the judgment ‘this is a piece of nonsense’ in the dream-thoughts... that nonsense in jokes is made to serve the same aims of representation. We know that a senseless façade to a joke is particularly well suited to increase the hearer’s expenditure and so to raise the quota liberated for discharge by laughing.”⁵⁹

In *Anthology of Black Humor*, Breton devotes one chapter to Lewis Carroll. Breton affirms that:

“le non-sens chez Lewis Carroll tire son importance du fait qu’il constitue pour lui la solution vitale d’une contradiction profonde entre l’acceptation de la loi et l’exercice de la raison d’une part ; d’autre part, entre la conscience poétique aigüe et les rigoureux devoirs professionnels. Le propre de cette solution subjective est de se doubler d’une solution subjective, d’ordre poétique précisément : l’esprit, mis en présence de toute espèce de difficulté, peut trouver une issue idéale dans l’absurde.”⁶⁰

Breton sees nonsense as a manifestation of a mysterious realm in which children live in, and thanks to their imagination, are free from socially constructed images imposed through language.

He further adds, “Le jeu de l’enfance, comme moyen perdu de conciliation entre l’action et la reverie en vue de la satisfaction organique, à commencer par le simple <jeu de mots>, se trouve de la sorte réhabilité et dignifié.”⁶¹

In his First Manifesto, Breton defines imagination as having no bounds and only during childhood can one be excited about that tangible freedom: “Beloved imagination, what I most

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 212.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 217-18.

⁶⁰ André Breton, *L’Anthologie de l’Humour noir*. p. 140 [Translation “what makes nonsense for Lewis Carroll so important is that on one hand, it constitutes a vital solution to a profound contradiction between the acceptance of the law and the presence of reason, and on the other hand between sharp poetic consciousness and the rigorous professional duties. The characteristic of this subjective solution is precisely to double itself, subjectivity of a poetical order: the spirit, brought into presence of difficulty the mind can find an ideal outcome in the absurd.”]

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 142 [“The child’s game, as a lost means of reconciling action with reverie to an organic satisfaction, to start with the simple word play, finds itself sort of rehabilitated and dignified.”]

like in you is your unsparing quality” (Breton MS 4). Breton concludes by saying that, “tous ceux qui garderont le sense de la révolte reconnaîtront en Lewis Carroll leur premier maître d’école buissonnière.”⁶² Shortly after publishing his first Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, Breton, with the help of Pierre Naville and Benjamin Péret, brought to light his first inaugural issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, a scandalous and provocative journal. The title of the first issue called for a redefinition of the declaration of human rights. What was necessary for Breton ‘to change life’ was ‘to change sight’ (“changer la vue = changer la vie”). To change the perception of reality one usually sees using the automatic psyche to reveal another point of view.

Octavio Paz (1914-1995) defined the Surrealist movement as a movement of liberation, a return to the beginning of the beginnings. The Surrealists use language as a way of rediscovering its innocence and the foundation of human order, which was achieved through psychic automatism, denying the role of reason in the process of creating art. In *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Breton defines psychic automatism as “the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (Breton MS 26). When discussing the avant-garde from a chronological standpoint, it seems logical to begin with Futurism and end with Surrealism. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s innovations to poetry generated the greatest changes in the use of language by disallowing conjugation, connection, and conjunctions. As E. San Juan pointed out in his article on *Antonio Gramsci on Surrealism and Avant-Garde*, “the purpose of writing becomes not communication but illumination, even self-illumination, with the emphasis on the experience itself rather than on any of the forms of ... communicating it.”⁶³ The Surrealists were doing exactly what they had

⁶² Ibid., p. 142 [“All of those who keep the sense of revolt will recognize in Lewis Carroll their first schoolmaster in playing hooky.”]

⁶³ E San Juan *Antonio Gramsci on Surrealism and Avant-Garde*. The Journal of Aesthetic Education - Volume 37, Number 2, Summer 2003, p. 34.

planned linguistically, changing language by way of shifting logic. A French poet, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), once said about Surrealism “it was a weapon that exploded the French language. It shook up absolutely everything... a process of disalienation”. The Surrealist enterprise was to destroy bourgeois morality and class inequalities, and to uphold the freedom of imagination through the use of automatic writing and painting.

B. Nonsense in Art

Lear and Carroll entertained the idea that nonsense can be part of everyday life and seen from a non-logical system, instead of an arrangement of events in which each is essential to the other. Their use of nonsense in contrast to sense or common sense demonstrated that looking at things in only one way was systematically chosen. Against a myopic view of the world, nonsense in literature, art, and film sought to show itself as a transaction, as a relationship between each event allowing the audience to change the sensory experience. The first art movement to be discussed in terms of absurdity, nonsense, and anti-art is Dada, born and launched at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916. In his 1918 manifesto, Tristan Tzara deems ‘dada’ meant nothing although the word is more connotative than denotative. In his 1920 historical sketch of Dada, Richard Huelsenbeck, German poet, asserts that the word Dada has the “...ability to hypnotize, by guiding the vulgar to ideas and things which none of the originators has thought of...”⁶⁴ Because Dada has no explicit meaning, it generates many more interpretations and evocative connotations. The Dadaists embraced that it referred to the double affirmation in Russian of the word da (dada/yesyes), in French ‘dada’ alludes to horse or hobby, and the sound *da* in Buddhist philosophy alludes to the entire universe as meaning “da, da, da... that, that, that... ten thousand

⁶⁴ Leah Dickerman *DADA*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2006. Quoting Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant Dada: A History of Dadaism* in *Motherwell Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 31.

functions, ten thousand things, or suchness, or we are all suchness”⁶⁵ Alan Watts compares this notion of ‘suchness’ to the whole world as an on/off system consisting of what we see and what we do not. The word dada resembles Watts’ system in that it provides us (paintings, dance, films, etc.) with a tool to see what we normally would not, to bring closer, as Breton said, two distant realities side by side.

The prime example of how Dada sought to bring together a more primitive state with modern society is found in dance. The first was held at the Cabaret Voltaire in May 24, 1916 where dancers wore masks that Marcel Janco designed out of primal material such as cardboard and newspapers. [Fig. 3] Hugo Ball even thought during the performance that he felt transported “to the primal core...[and for him] the effacement of modern individuality in donning the masks allowed expression of greater historical consciousness - the truth about the times generally repressed... a physical mask with primitive antecedents could supercede that modern psychic mask of social convention, and allow access to that place, bordering, in which ‘barriers are down.’”⁶⁶ Dada spectacles often used costumes and masks inspired by tribes from Africa or Oceania, the so-called ‘primitive’, and by wearing a mask, dancing, and chanting the actors were able to communicate directly with the audience, freeing themselves of social constraints and inhibitions. Rudolph von Laban was one of the pioneers in modern dance to foster a new direction toward experimental dance within Dada, and his interest for primitive ritual and non-narrative forms shaped his new definition of dance:

“Laban suggested that dance provided access to subrational layers on consciousness... [he] spoke of his interest in the dances of dervishes seen in his youth ‘who perform their prayers not in words, but in body movements and especially endless turnings... at first

⁶⁵ Alan Watts, *Eastern Wisdom, Modern Life: Collected Talks: 1960-1969*. New World Library, 1994, p. 153. Watts even goes on saying that the first sound that a baby makes is da-da when it comes into the world and it looks around and says *da, da, da*, that, that, that, and fathers flatter themselves because they think that their baby is saying ‘da-da’ for ‘daddy’.

⁶⁶ Lea Dickerman, *Dada*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2006, p. 33.

sight, [they are] completely incomprehensible, even repulsive in the wild whirling which goes on till the dancers froth at the mouth. It all seems quite mad to us, but it is probably in the madness that the sense lies.”⁶⁷[Fig. 4]

The leading Dada artist Hugo Ball incorporated Laban’s new trend into his own experiments with sound poetry, where sound and rhythm prevail over content, even though the at times uncomfortable, dervish-like poems favored interpretations of “direct corporeal stimulation” over the intellectual one forging “a nonlinguistic emotional conduit of expression.”⁶⁸ In *Karawane* (Caravan), Ball breaks language down into abstract syllables and letters to construct meaningless thoughts. By destroying language, sound poetry offers another way to experience the poem with the body rather than the mind, which like with the dance performance was seen as nonsensical.

Karawane

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla
grossiga m'pfa habla horem
egiga goramen
higo bloiko russula huju
hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
blago bung blago bung
bosso fataka
ü üü ü
schampa wulla wussa olobo
hej tatta gorem
eschige zunbada
wulubu ssubudu uluwu ssubudu
tumba ba-umf
kusa gauma
ba – umf⁶⁹

Another significant Dada artist whose works introduced visual signs of disorder into an orderly system was Jean Arp. He used chance as a way to introduce irregularity the same way

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 36.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 36.

⁶⁹ Hugo Ball, “Karawane” *Six Sound Poems*. http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/sound/ball_hugo/Ball-Hugo_Karawane-Trio-Ex-Voco.mp3

that Janco and Ball did, where random and accidental events allow the artist to let go of the controlling conscious mind to access the “subrational”. For Arp:

“Dada was against mechanization of the world. Our African evening was simply a protest against the rationalization of man. My gouaches, reliefs, plastics were an attempt to teach man what he had forgotten - to dream with the eyes open... The important thing about Dada, it seems to me, is that the Dadaists despised what is commonly regarded as art, but put the whole universe on the lofty throne of art.”⁷⁰

He declared that everything could be seen as art, the whole earth was art. When Arp began his series of collages, he was striving for perfection. He cut the paper for his collage with extreme precision and smoothed them with a special sandpaper to keep the edge of the paper uniform. He later learned by accident that this perfection was not only representing the fullness of life, but also its end, and by introducing the aspect of chance, accident, and fortuitous combination in his collages, he conjured the death of his work of art by focusing on what really happens to individuals. He started tearing the paper instead of cutting them neatly with scissors and used these “papiers déchirés” (torn papers) in his collages [Fig. 5]. He also tore up some drawings and smeared ink over them. He claimed that his new process made his art more authentic and noted that, “I had accepted the transience, the dribbling away, the brevity, the impermanence, the fading, the withering, the spookishness of our existence. Not only had I accepted it, I had even welcomed transience into my work as it was coming into being.”⁷¹ Richard Huelsenbeck, friend, Dada writer, and drummer, spoke of Arp with heartfelt kindness, and said Arp’s nobility and his pure approach to art and life made it difficult for him to produce vulgarity in his works like other Dada artists. Instead the playfulness is striking in Arp’s works. The collages of 1916 known as *Elementary Composition (According to the laws of Chance)* exhibit how chance played a key role in the genesis of Arp’s new work. Herbert Read, the English poet and critic, established a

⁷⁰ Jean Arp, looking, *Arp*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1958, p. 13.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.15.

strong connection between Arp's concept of chance and the *I Ching* (or *Book of Changes*), which is later discussed in relation to Carl Jung's synchronicity. To consult the *I Ching*, participants throw a set of 3 coins at random, from which they draw a pattern of head and tails. Then, they are directed to a particular section of the book denoting that pattern. In the making of his collages Arp seems to have adopted a similar experimentation within the same medium as a new form of production.

Marcel Duchamp was another Dada artist who found a way to let chance and humor infect his work. In *Les chants de Maldoror*, Comte de Lautréamont wrote, "...comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie."⁷² Duchamp's manipulation of chance has a profound philosophical content, which materializes itself in the game. He often explores and enhances the ambiguity of reality through verbal puns in language (*Rose Sélavy*) and visual tricks. Duchamp's tendency toward the irrational and his beliefs are akin to Zen Buddhism. Even if accustomed to feeling safe in observations of relationships and the rational mind, Buddhism urges one to leap out of this comfort zone by asking questions that cannot be answered rationally. As Duchamp noted, "there is no solution, because there is no problem." Like Arp, Duchamp discovered that when the mind was able to change, it was then possible to live beyond the rational world, wholly, in a world that includes irrationality. One example is to think about the urinal called *Fountain* (1917) that Duchamp offered to the bourgeois art world as a way to negate art itself. Duchamp understood well enough that using objects like bicycle wheels, bottle racks, or combs broke down the tacit boundaries of the aesthetic world.

⁷² Comte de Lautréamont, "Les Chants de Maldoror". *Oeuvres Complètes*. Garnier-Flammarion, 1969, Chant Sixième, I, p. 234 [Beautiful as the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an dissecting table.]

For Duchamp, these readymades [Fig. 6] were a defense against personal fixity. Readymades were therefore a way to preserve an undefined, fluid existence, in contrast to that of the conventional artist, whose presence in a series of works could be recognized by new elements of style. With a respect for tradition and a sense for experimentation, he continued to open new horizons and spaces in art. Duchamp's readymades represent his method of destroying known assumptions about art. Jasper Johns, the American contemporary artist declared that Duchamp "wanted to kill art (for myself) but his persistent attempts to destroy frames of reference altered our thinking, established new units of thought, a new thought for that object."⁷³ The *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) is the first readymade to demonstrate Duchamp's idea that art can be found everywhere, in the most common object. His uncluttered vision and unlocked creative potential enabled him to see what perhaps a more rational mind cannot.

In 1958, Man Ray also experimented with a playful transformation of ordinary objects. With *Pain Peint* (painted bread) the artist plays on homophones in the French title and induces the sound of the siren of the French fire truck driving through the streets. Man Ray wanted to recapture the sound and incorporate it into the loaf of painted bread. Duchamp often used wordplays by combining both visual and aural versions of the same image. In a lovely example, he draws a rebus in 1925 for one of his homonymic puns, *nous nous cajolions* (we were coaxing one another)⁷⁴. Here, he breaks this full phrase (we were coaxing one another) into two visual parts; first, *nounou* (for nanny in French with same pronunciation as *nous nous*), and then, followed by the *cage aux lions*, (the lion's cage pronounced exactly as *cajolions*). [Fig. 7] Man Ray's objects clearly owe a debt to Duchamp's readymades. Another example is *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919) when Duchamp drew a moustache on the Mona Lisa and called it L.H.O.O.Q

⁷³ Jasper Johns, *Marcel Duchamp*. The Museum Of Modern Art, New York, 1989, p. 204.

⁷⁴ Anne D'Harnoncourt, *Marcel Duchamp*. Prestel Pub, New York, 1989, p. 298.

phonetically saying “*elle a chaud au cul*” - in slang “to be horny”. He did not alter the Mona Lisa, he just created a new painting and context. Allan Kaprow argues that Duchamp’s

“...verbal-visual play, perhaps born of mixed skepticism and dandyism, confronted a romantic tradition of high, often tragic, seriousness in art-making. Humor was superficial... Wit, from Duchamp’s perspective, is the condition and consequence of keen thought. If you see things clearly, really clearly, you’ve got to laugh because nothing’s been accomplished. There is a zen story about one of the great patriarchs who was asked what it felt like to be enlightened. His answer was, ‘found out that I was just as miserable as ever’”⁷⁵

Duchamp designs systems so that choice is no longer an expression of the ego, for he sees detachment as the greatest human virtue. Seeking to distance himself from his own fantasies, Duchamp sought a means of converting pathos into pleasure and emotion into thought.

“His mechanism of conversion was a strange one, but essentially it consisted of inventing a ‘displacement of game’ that would project conflicts and distill excitements into surrogate objects and constructs without whose existence his mental equilibrium might not have been sustained... Duchamp created an art of nonsense that ‘hygienically’ freed his mind from all those capsizing factors, which had previously haunted him as a Laforguian sad young man.”⁷⁶

Nonsense in Duchamp’s art relied on juxtaposition and superimposition.

However, in the prologue to his book *Anatomy of My Universe*, André Masson (1896 - 1987), French Surrealist artist, affirms that true reality for him is found in the process of creation. “I know that I am surrounded by the Irrational. I let my reason go as far as it can. It traverses the court of objects and reaches finally the wasteland of infinite desolation; it is a truly human place which creates its own time.”⁷⁷ The Surrealist image presupposes a meaning that escapes a logical gloss while at the same time taking roots in it and using its own tools to break free. Masson’s universe mirrors French poet Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960) for whom “the image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less

⁷⁵ Allan Kaprow, *Marcel Duchamp*. The Museum Of Modern Art, New York, 1989, p. 204-05.

⁷⁶ Lawrence D. Steefel, Jr., *Marcel Duchamp*. The Museum Of Modern Art, New York, 1989, p. 70.

⁷⁷ André Masson, *Anatomy of My Universe*, mentioned in J.H Matthews *The Imagery Of Surrealism*, Syracuse University Press, 1977, p. 59.

distant realities.”⁷⁸ Reverdy’s conception of Surrealism reflects both the spirit of Surrealism and its method. Surrealists championed the theory of rapprochement, or a bringing together, of words and forms, encouraging artists to transform what was incompatible into compatibility.

C. Nonsense in Surrealist Writings

Futurism sought to bridge the gap between art and life and to bring aesthetic innovation into the real world. This synergy enabled artists to incorporate intuition and chance into the process, along with the desire to reconcile life and performance. Life was to be changed through art and art was to become a form of life. In his *Futurist Manifesto*, Marinetti described the way to be taken in regards to language as a destruction of grammar and rules in general. Speed and analogy replaced metaphor and cliché. In *The Art of Noises*, Luigi Russolo argues that,

“Vowels represent sound in language, while consonants clearly represent noise... By making use of noise we hear the entire value of noise onomatopoeias, they revealed all the enormous importance of this element of language, which had previously remained the slave of vowels. For centuries, poets did not know how to make use of this very effective source of expression in language.”⁷⁹

In *The Imagery of Surrealism*, J. H Matthews asserts that rationality is the Surrealists’ *bête noire* and incorporating automatic writing and painting into their language was a way to reject the rational, which limits communication. For all Surrealists, poetry challenges rationality and “...with it, the society in which rational processes find encouragement. In consequence, poetry is revolutionary to the extent that departure from rational norms implies criticism of society’s usages, laws and regulations.”⁸⁰ Surrealism aimed to expand the mental experience, the rational mind. After reading the first manifesto of Surrealism, Breton introduced *Poisson soluble (Soluble Fish)* not because he was born under the sign of Pisces, but because he believed there is nothing

⁷⁸ Pierre Reverdy in Breton’s *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor Paperback, 1972, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Luigi Russolo *The Art of Noises*. Translated from the Italian with an Introduction by Barclay Brown. Pendragon Press, 1986, p. 56-57.

⁸⁰ J.H. Matthews *The Imagery Of Surrealism*. Syracuse University Press, 1977, p.16.

more soluble than man's mind, soluble to his thoughts. H. J Matthews further adds, "The title [itself] leads the mind to the brink of the impossible and then entices it over the edge, causing a vertiginous fall into the inconceivable. Now the imagination takes over to operate where reason can no longer function, except negatively."⁸¹ As the famous American writer, poet and cartoonist, Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss) said, "I like nonsense [because] it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living. It's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope, which is what I do, and that enables you to laugh at life's realities."⁸² The nonsense of Dr. Seuss functions in a manner similar to the historical avant-garde's use of nonsense and the irrational: the devices render the work both complicit with and critical of the world it is written in. If children learn structures of power as they acquire language, then deconstructing language can have a liberating effect - a potential challenge to the hierarchy language bears. The Surrealists encouraged readers to subvert dominant modes of society. In this sense, Surrealist books go beyond the conventional definition of nonsense literature, which uses absurdity to reveal reality as a construct, but less frequently indicts society at large.

While institutionalized at Rodez, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) undertook a number of translations of Lewis Carroll's works. The one discussed below is the translation and annotated version of chapter six from *Through The Looking Glass*. Carroll's and Artaud's texts reiterate the fundamental idea that nonsense, far from being an absence of sense, goes in multiple directions. For readers, nonsense enhances the field of sense. Interestingly enough, in French the word 'sense' also means *direction*. It adds to the corporality of the word, a sense of becoming through space. However, the most striking difference between Carroll's and Artaud's versions can be found in the story of the sea and its fish. While for Carroll Humpty Dumpty's poem focuses on

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁸² As quoted in *Wisdom for the Soul: Five Millennia of Prescriptions for Spiritual Healing*, 2006 by Larry Chang, p. 376.

the surface of the sea and its fish, Artaud dives beneath the surface to discuss human suffering.

He added to Carroll's poem

“Alors j’ai écarté la mer
Pour les mieux fixer au visage
Et leur ai redit mon message:
“Vaut-il mieux être que d’obéir?”⁸³

Then the second half of the poem takes another direction:

“...L’obéissant ne souffre pas.

C’est à celui qui est à savoir
Pourquoi l’obéissance entière
Est ce qui n’a jamais souffert

... Dieu seul est ce qui n’obéit pas
Tous les autres êtres ne sont pas
Encore, et ils souffrent.

... L’être est celui qui s’imagine ...
Être assez pour se dispenser
D’apprendre ce que veut la mer...

- Mais tout petit poisson le sait!”⁸⁴

In *L’arve et l’Aume: Tentative anti-grammaticale contre Lewis Carroll*, Artaud offered a translation in which words are less interesting in meaning but more affecting to the listener. For that reason, Artaud added physicality to his words. The conversation between Alice and Humpty Dumpty moved Artaud’s aspect of nonsense deeper, and questioning through the story of the sea and the fish the sense of self split between being and doing. For Artaud, language must be broken in order to touch life. Being is repetition and overcomes the obstacle of being in the world. Artaud considered his translation of Humpty Dumpty to be more original than the original

⁸³ Antonin Artaud, “Adaptations de Lewis Carroll”. *Artaud Oeuvres*. Quarto Callimard, 2004, p. 925. [So I removed the sea. To better stare at them. I told them again my message: Is it better to be than to obey?]

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 926. [Obedience does not suffer. It’s to the one to know. Why complete obedience Is that which has never suffered... God is only that which never obeys. All other beings are not. Yet, and they suffer... Being is the one who imagines oneself. Being enough dispense oneself. To learn what the sea wants... But every fish knows that!]

of Carroll. In post-scriptum, Artaud states that Carroll's poem reminded him about the themes that are dear to his writings: "...living and being, doing and thinking, matter and soul, body and mind."⁸⁵ In defining the dualism in these pairs, Artaud rejected the rationalization of consciousness of the Western societies, and turned to Eastern Philosophy for answers. In the third issue of *The Surrealist Revolution* (April 15, 1925), Artaud praised the Eastern religion for its grasp of the active powers of thought, and addressed a letter to The Dalai Lama, the Spiritual leader of Buddhism "...fais-nous un esprit tout tourné vers ces cimes parfaites où l'Esprit de l'Homme ne souffre plus. Fais-nous un Esprit sans habitudes, un esprit gelé dans l'Esprit, ou un Esprit avec des habitudes plus pures," [guide our spirit toward those perfect summits where the Man's spirit no longer suffers. Free our Spirit from habits, a frozen mind in Spirit, or a Spirit with purer habits]. Artaud sought to fuse the ancient East with twentieth century Paris, but more practically, to apply Buddhism to lead him out of the world of suffering. For Artaud, living felt like imprisonment and it is easy to understand his affinity to Buddhism, for which the loss of the self is liberating. What Eastern Philosophy offered Artaud was a possibility to achieve a state free from conflict or duality. The story of the fish seems to point to Artaud's own suffering, and by transcending reality like Buddhism advocates, man will escape the suffering of his body. In their art, writing, and lives, the Surrealists celebrated and attempted to liberate the self.

Furthermore, to add to Artaud's aversion to dualism, in the *Secret Art of Artaud*, Jacques Derrida picked up on the term *subjectile*, which Artaud used when discussing art. One meaning of this term is the surface, the paper on which the drawing is done, its material support. But it also refers to the act itself, 'the jetée' or movement by which the drawing is rapidly executed, a projectile thrown into the world. The movement is a movement of ideas. The *subjectile* is then potentially a surface on which consciousness reflects itself and a part of the body, which has

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 927.

been expelled; 'neither object nor subject'. According to Derrida, the *subjectile* fosters the idea of subjectivity, and Artaud takes possession of the *subjectile* and effectively determines the subjectivity of himself. Derrida wrote, "*Subjectile*, the word or the thing, can take the place of the subject or the object - being neither one nor the other ...Subjectile is what to be called...what have any meaning for what is between this or that, whatever it is?"⁸⁶. The idea of duality and its transcendence is at the center of the endeavor of achieving unity for the Surrealists and the Taoists. For Artaud and the Surrealists, the East remained an idealized counterpoint to the West. Breton and Artaud often invoked the ways of the East as an answer to the meaninglessness of life in the aftermath of World War I. The theme of juxtaposition of opposites, prevalent in both Taoism and Surrealism, is essentially related to the concept of duality and transcendence. The bringing together of seeming opposites is intended, rather than emphasizing their incompatibility, to expose the limited nature of language presenting them as such. The following chapter highlights the role of Taoism in Surrealism and affirms the similarities that exist between them.

⁸⁶ Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin *The Secret Art of Artaud*. Translated and prefaced by Mary Ann Caws. MIT Press Cambridge, London, England, 1998, p. 43-49.

Chapter two: Philosophical Approaches

“Our relationship to the world, as it is untiringly enunciated within us, is not a thing which can be any further clarified by analysis; philosophy can only place it once more before our eyes and present it for our ratification... When an event is considered at close quarters, at the moment when it is lived through, everything seems subject to chance: one man’s ambition, some lucky encounter, some local circumstance or other appears to have been decisive. But chance happenings offset each other, and facts in their multiplicity coalesce and show up a certain way of taking a stand in relation to the human situation.”⁸⁷

“‘The Tao, said Lao Tzu, is like water; it seeks the lowly level which men abhor.’ And while we are busy trying to add cubits to our stature so that we may reach up to heaven, we forget that we are getting no nearer to it and no further away. For ‘the kingdom of heaven is within you.’”⁸⁸

In his preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the role of philosophy is to awaken a sense of awareness about ourselves within a particular context so to envision a world of interconnectedness where events depend on, and are triggered by, one another. Merleau-Ponty forces readers to see themselves as part of the world perceived and not as isolated events. He blends perspectives together and juxtaposes perceptions from which meanings emerge. The philosophy of Taoism shares this approach. According to Alan Watts, philosopher and scholar of Western and Eastern religion, Taoism is a mode of existence, accepting the tendencies of nature. It is a life philosophy, wisdom acquired by observing the flow of natural events. Another important similarity is that for both ways of thinking the background of experience guides every conscious action; the world is a field of perception, and human consciousness assigns meaning to it. People and their perceptions are inseparable. While

⁸⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2008, xx-xxi.

⁸⁸ Alan Watts, *Become What You are*. Shambala Publications, Inc. 1995, Mark Watts, p. 70.

Merleau-Ponty calls these perceptions consciousness, Watts names it awareness, but both imply a direct relationship with the environment. The assertions of Taoism have been perceived by some as similar to solipsism, or the view that nothing exists apart from the mind or self. Under this definition, the subject plays an integral role in the world he finds himself in. The discussion of solipsism is mentioned in the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein establishes a clear separation between logicism and mysticism. Wittgenstein sets himself apart from solipsists, as he believes the self is nothing and does not directly participate in the world. From the self's point of view, the world is left limited because the self does not belong to the world but is rather outside it.

In *Wittgenstein's Tractatus and the Modern Arts*, John Bramann claims that what is important for solipsism is that there is no boundary between the world and other worlds. The oneness of this world bears compatibility with Taoism but not with Wittgenstein's view of the self as separate from the world. Merleau-Ponty suggests that communication uses syntax and rules of a known language but also a "speaking subject with a certain style of being and with the 'world' at which he directs his aim."⁸⁹ The benefit of phenomenology is to unite subjectivity and objectivity with Lao Tzu's notion of the world as described in the *Tao Te Ching*, poem LIV:

“What is firmly rooted cannot be pulled out;
What is tightly held in the arms will not slip loose;
Through this the offering of sacrifice by descendants
will never come to an end.
Cultivate it in your person
And its virtue will be genuine;
Cultivate it in the family
And its virtue will be more than sufficient;
Cultivate it in the hamlet
And its virtue will endure;
Cultivate it in the state
And its virtue will abound;
Cultivate it in the empire
And its virtue will be pervasive.

⁸⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The body as Expression, and Speech”, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2008, p. 213.

Hence look at the person through the person; look at the family through the family; look at the hamlet through the hamlet; look at the state through the state; look at the empire through the empire.

How do I know that the Empire is like that? By means of this.”⁹⁰

In his poem, Lao Tzu points out that one seeks the truth or understands reality by integrating all life experiences into one, avoiding a linear interpretation. Life is not causal; it resists cause and effect to embrace the meaningful coincidences that any given moment presents.

This chapter investigates the resemblances and points of departure between specific examples of Western and Eastern thought and the impact that both approaches have in shaping our experiences of reality and thus ourselves. This investigation is the necessary tool to juxtapose Desnos’ nonsensical poetry with Lao Tzu’s view of the universe so that a kinship between the Surrealists and the Taoists can be established and asserted.

1. Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*

Lao Tzu encapsulates the classic thought of Taoism. His works have numerous translations, well over thirty in English alone. He was a contemporary of Confucius (551-479 BCE) and Gautama Buddha and best known as the author of the *Tao Te Ching*. Though the identities of its authors have been contested throughout history, it is believed that he was not the only writer of the book, but rather one of several teachers that compiled it. However, to this day, he is credited. A central figure of Chinese traditions and considered the founder of Taoism, *Lao Tzu* or *Laozi* is a respectable title: *Lao* (老) meaning “old” and *Zi* (子) translated from the pinyin into simplified Chinese into *Tsu* for “master”. Today in Mandarin the name for “teacher” *Laoshi* (老师) derives from Lao Tzu’s name. Lao Tzu teaches the school of the Way, *Daojiao* (道教). Taoism is the Way to become one with the Tao, in harmony with nature, *satori* in Japanese.

⁹⁰ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, p. 61.

Unlike Western philosophy, Taoism is interested in intuitive wisdom rather than rational knowledge. It recognizes the limitations and relativity of the rational mind. Taoism is liberation from the rational. Its philosophy cultivates intuition, simplicity, spontaneity, and the path (Tao). It is by paying attention to nature that the Taoists came to realize transformation and change were intrinsic parts of reality. The Tao goes with nature or “the Way of Nature”. In Chinese, “nature” is pronounced “zìrán” (自然) meaning “of itself so” or “what happens of itself”; in other words, what is self-moving. Watts argues that the principle of nature is associated with biology and not machinery. He uses the examples of hair growing by itself and a heart beating by itself, the Tao representing an involuntary harmony.

For the Eastern mind the word “nature” has special meaning. The Taoists perceive all changes in nature as phenomena of a dynamic interplay between the polar opposites of *yin* (female) and *yang* (male), or *Yinyán* (阴阳), and believe that pairs of opposites are in fact linked to one another. *Yin* and *yang* express the contrasting aspects and balanced interrelationships of everything that exists. They have no fixed definition, which makes them virtually untranslatable. Taoism can only be understood by keeping pace with life, by a complete affirmation and acceptance of transformation and continuous change. Everything rises mutually and can only be experienced because of its polar opposite, as well as its independence. Conversely, for the rational mind, the idea of implicit unity of all opposites can be difficult to accept, since contrary values are rarely seen as parts of the same whole. In the West, the universe is thought of in Aristotelian or Newtonian ways: the world is separate and follows a mechanical model. Rational thinking is derived from the experience of an object or event and the intellect discriminates, divides, compares, measures, and categorizes. This division locks the Western mind in a dichotomy while the Eastern mind goes beyond the polar opposites to enlightenment. This world

of opposites is relative and thus not real. It is where a linear structure is made explicit through the use of language, as opposed to the world of nature, which is multidimensional and complex with no straight lines. Things do not happen in sequences, but all together.

Although there are many ways to interpret the thought of the Tao, one of which is an attempt to emphasize the mystery of the *Tao Te Ching*. But, what this chapter aspires to preserving is the mundane feature of Lao Tzu's philosophy – a practical and everyday method of experiencing the world.

A. Definition of *Tao Te Ching*

The *Tao Te Ching* is an anthology of eighty-one poems divided in two books, which contain key concepts of various schools of the Warring States period of ancient China (481-403 BC). In "The Finger and the Moon", Watts defines the Tao as pointing to 1) one's true self, 2) the eternal now, 3) the nonverbal world, and 4) the infinite and ineffable, but ends by saying that this definition of the Tao is not really helpful and offers his readers a better answer. "When Joshu asked his teacher Nansen, 'What is the Tao, the Way?' Nansen replied 'Your everyday mind is the Tao.'"⁹¹ However, the supreme definition of Tao lies in the first poem of Lao Tzu's work:

"The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.
The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of myriads creature.
Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe
its secrets;
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to
observe its manifestations.
These two are the same
But diverge in name as they issue forth.
Being the same they are called mysteries,
Mystery upon mystery -

⁹¹ Alan Watts, *Become What You are*. Shambala Publications, Inc. 1995, Mark Watts, p. 12.

The gateway of the manifold secrets.”⁹²

Lao Tzu defines the Tao as nameless, going beyond distinctions and transcending language, a definition held throughout the *Tao Te Ching*. Taoists believe that the Tao that can be described is not the eternal Tao. Although, Tao is not the name of this infinite thing, it is a tool used to talk about and attempt to understand it. The philosophy of Taoism deeply emphasizes the balance between human awareness and the essence of being part of a whole. Watts concisely describes Taoism, revealing its essence within a frame of sense and nonsense: “I prefer not to translate the word Tao at all because to us Tao is a sort of nonsense syllable - the unity that underlies the opposites.”⁹³ Those who follow the Tao are observant of others and aware of their surroundings. Here, the self merges with all “the myriads of creature” and places itself beyond perception and conception; to perceive without being subjectively involved and thus united with the Tao. In the Tao the greatest form is formless. Lao Tzu wants readers to see that the true value and essence of things, the Tao, can only be attained by an emptied mind. Lao Tzu conceives the Tao as being the One, the source of all created things. In poem XVI, he argues,

“...The myriad creatures all rise together
And I watch their return
The teeming creatures
All return to their separate roots.
Returning to one’s roots is known as stillness.
This is what is meant by returning to one’s destiny.
Returning to one’s destiny is known as constant...”⁹⁴

The “root” is understood to be infinite, as every finite thing derived from it. The need to return to the root is never stated explicitly in the *Tao Te Ching*, but perhaps because it is implicit that things must return when they die. The Tao surrounds everything and gives life since the formless

⁹² Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, I, p. 5.

⁹³ Alan Watts, *What is Tao?* New World Library, 2000, p. 38.

⁹⁴ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, XVI, p. 20.

Tao gives rise to other things: “The way is for ever nameless... The way is to the world as the River and the Sea are to rivulets and streams.”⁹⁵

Secondly, the infinite Tao brings harmony. In poem XLII, Lao Tzu asserts, “The way begets one, one begets two, two begets three, three begets the myriad of creatures. The myriad creatures carry on their backs the yin and embrace in their arms the yang and are the blending of the generative forces of the two.”⁹⁶ This passage addresses the interconnectedness of feeling and events in a whole via a unity of the two. The process of unifying does not result from exclusion but rather from integrating differences. For instance, one in this context is not a separate two but rather viewed as being both “one” and “two” together or “one-in-two” or “two-in-one”. Moreover the Tao, or the absolute infinite, is said to be hidden: “Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there, Yet use will never drain it”⁹⁷ and be boundless:

“...The great square has no corners.”
The great vessel takes long to complete;
The great note is rarefied in sound;
The great image has no shape.
The way conceals itself in being nameless.
It is the way alone that excels in bestowing and in
accomplishing.”⁹⁸

The way is not only concealed but also incomprehensible, “long to complete”, “rarefied in sound”, “no shape”, and “nameless”. Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture bears resemblance to the teachings of Lao Tzu, for he understood that the Tao exists by and through itself. What is essential to his works is the idea that space and emptiness are the foundation of his constructions.

The Tao may be transmitted but it cannot receive. It can be attained but it cannot be sensed:

“...Dimly visible, it cannot be named
And returns to that which is without substance.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Book One, XXXII, p. 37.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Book Two, XLII, p. 47.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Book One, VI, p. 10.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Book Two, XLI, p.48.

This is called the shape that has no shape,
The image that is without substance.
This is called indistinct and shadowy.
Go up to it and you will not see its head;
Follow behind it and you will not see its rear.
Hold fast to the way of antiquity
In order to keep in control the realm of today.
The ability to know the beginning of antiquity
Is called the thread running through the way.”⁹⁹

We are finite, so the infinite can only be known indirectly. Words do not exist to communicate that vision exactly and knowledge is only acquired through this “thread running through the way.” In Taoism, a model for a Taoist to follow is a baby, for it embodies the ideals Taoists desire. Lao Tzu iterates,

“One who possesses virtue in abundance is comparable to a new born babe:
Poisonous insects will not sting it;
Ferocious animals will not pounce on it;
Predatory birds will not swoop down on it.
Its bones are weak and its sinews supple yet its hold is firm.
It does not know of the union of male and female yet...”¹⁰⁰

The image of the newborn child demonstrates the third aspect of the Tao, which is that the infinite cannot be known through intelligence. If one wants to know Tao, one must let go of prior knowledge, prior experiences, “... Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets; But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.” (*Tao Te Ching* I) To begin the exploration of Taoism, Lao Tzu suggests readers rid themselves of expectations and pay close attention to the new environment, values, and concepts. All beings are part of the Tao and the accumulation of ideas and constructs in the human mind can be a hindrance to interaction with the Tao. Thus, creative non-action, or *wuwei* (无为) as Watts defines it: *wu* as “does not exist” and *wei* “purpose”, translated as “not doing, not acting or not forcing”. One of Taoism’s most important concepts is *wuwei* (sometimes translated as “non-

⁹⁹ Ibid., Book One, XIV, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Book Two, LV, p. 62.

doing” or “non-action”). A better way to think of it, however, is as a paradoxical “Action of non-action.” *Wuwei* refers to the cultivation of a state of being in which our actions are quite effortlessly in alignment with the ebb and flow of the elemental cycles of the natural world. It is a kind of “going with the flow” that is characterized by great ease and awareness, in which - without even trying - we’re able to respond perfectly to whatever situations arise. For Watts, *wuwei* is to act in accordance with the pattern of things in nature. Knowledge can only obstruct in following the Tao. For if in following the Tao the self gets smaller, everything one learns with the intellect forces one backwards. A baby does not know much yet, so he may be small with ease. Lao Tzu affirms, “...Thus what we gain is Something, yet it’s by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use,”(Lao Tzu XI) and that “in the pursuit of learning one knows more every day; in the pursuit of the way one does less every day. One does less and less until one does nothing at all, and when one does nothing at all there is nothing that is undone. It is always thought not meddling that the empire is won.” (Lao Tzu XLVIII) For Taoists, tuning into the Tao is to integrate a sense of being and knowing so that perceiving and knowing are not solely confined behind the eyes, but happening all together: natural world, mind and living being.

The knower, or knowing self, becomes part of the representation of this knowing field. Watts draws on the analogy of the central and peripheral visions. He claims that the Western Civilization has learned to specialize, to focus on the central vision or what he also calls the “spot light” over many fields. The price of this is in ignorance of everything outside its field, ignorance of the peripheral vision or so-called “flood light”. Watts argues that usually the “spot light” consciousness, the “ego”, ignores the floodlight. We identify with the spot light consciousness, while the flood light consciousness is undervalued. We see without noticing the background and are unaware of the vast extent of our being. Under the superficial self there is an

unknown self, and the more we are aware of it, the more we see our relatedness to the natural world. For Watts, the *Tao Te Ching* is not trying to give ideas about it, but build awareness of life around you, to actively live it instead of being a mere spectator:

“A symphony is not explained by a mathematical analysis of its notes... and no one has ever understood the wonder of a bird on the wing by stuffing it and putting it in a glass case. To understand these things, you must live and move with them, as they are alive. The same is true of the universe: no account of intellectual analysis will explain it, for philosophy and science can only reveal its mechanism, never its meaning or, as the Chinese say, its Tao. ‘What is the Tao?’ Zen master answers, ‘Usual life is the Very Tao.’”¹⁰¹

This concurs with Lao Tzu: “To use words but rarely is to be natural.”¹⁰²

Furthermore, the Taoists value “being” over logic and reason. Because they concentrate on the experience of enlightenment, they are less interested in interpreting experience. In the *Tao of Physics*, physicist Fritjof Capra gives a well-known Zen phrase: “The instant you speak about a thing you miss the mark.”¹⁷ This echoes Louis Armstrong’s response to the question asked of him “what is jazz?” For him, asking the question confirms a rational approach to understanding jazz. Since Descartes’ famous sentence “cogito ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am), the common Western line of thought equated identity with the mind instead of the whole being, most people then seeing themselves as isolated egos existing “trapped in a bag of skin.” The Tao views the world and its people more organically and values the intuitive process of knowing that is twofold: 1) relative and 2) limitless, where the world grows people as an apple tree grows apples.

Finally, the fourth aspect of the Tao is it is read like a riddle, mystery upon mystery.

According to the *Tao Te Ching*,

“The spirit of the valley never dies.
This is called the mysterious female.
The gateway of the mysterious female.

¹⁰¹ Alan Watts, *Become What You are*. Shambala Publications, Inc.. Mark Watts, 1995, p. 61-62.

¹⁰² Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book One, XXIII, p. 28.

¹⁷ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*. Shambala Publications, Inc., 2010, p. 34.

Is called the root of heaven and earth.
Dimly visible, it seems as if It were there,
Yet use will never drain it.”¹⁰³

The Tao is mysterious because it is unknowable, unseen; Taoists embrace mystery, confusion, and misunderstanding, because to them, life is a game, and games are not fun without both the possibility of winning and the equal possibility of losing. Mystery is what makes games fun, and to Taoists, mystery is what makes life fun. The natural world is not to be comprehended and so the universe is still a great threat to most and a mystery. In the *Tao te Ching*, the Taoists retain their basic innate fear. As Lao Tzu notes, “they were careful, as someone crossing an iced-over stream,” yet “receptive as a valley, clear as a glass of water.” They balance fear with curiosity to seek the true potential of existence. They look within themselves and see all they do not understand, and prefer it that way. Because they are centered in the Tao, they need not worry about that which they do not understand. In the first poem of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu insists on the aspect of mystery found in the wholeness of the “one”: “Being the same they are called Mysteries, [and because the world is made of a myriad of creatures it is] mystery upon mystery. The gateway of the manifold secrets.”¹⁰⁴ In poem LVV, Lao Tzu adds, “...Always to know the models is known as mysterious virtue. Mysterious virtue is profound and far-reaching.”¹⁰⁵ Lao Tzu’s sense of mystery within mystery yields a truer picture of reality. Reality is interchangeable with mystery. This exploration of the Tao in investigating Surrealist Nonsense sets in motion the quintessential elements of the Tao found in the work of Desnos and the avant-garde filmmakers.

B. Fundamentals of the *Tao Te ching*

The four quintessential traits that the Taoists and Surrealists possess and that will be considered are: 1) automatic spontaneity, 2) chance, 3) non-dualism, and 4) marginality.

¹⁷ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book One, VI, p. 10.

¹⁸ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book One, I, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Book Two, LXV, p. 72.

1. Automatic Spontaneity

Taoism is concerned with the immateriality of the world. The Taoists see the world as an organism constantly morphing with its environment. Throughout the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu insists the Tao is not to be found outside life itself, but quite the contrary; the Way is imbued in every living thing. His view of the world is opposed to the mechanistic concept of a world driven by reason, preferring the world of Tao, mystery as the hidden force behind reality. The Tao makes clear that the two myths under which we live fail to add up. According to Watts, the Western man is faced with either believing that the world is an artifact like a carpenter table or a clay figurine, or since the eighteenth century with the advent of science, that the world is the result of an accident. In both cases, the world presented is by essence foreign and while man became more and more rational he had to conquer this external world with which he perceived nothing in common. The Tao counters these two myths because nature for the Tao happens of itself and is formless. The Way, or the natural world, is spontaneous and bears an automatism. In the Tao, an intelligent organism cannot come out of an unintelligent universe. In poem LXVII, Lao Tzu maintains, “the whole world says that my way is vast and resembles nothing. It is because it is vast that it resembles nothing. If it resembled anything, it would, long before now, have become small.”¹⁰⁶ This quote reiterates that language and common sense resist the shaping of a form and imposed rules, while nonsense can be seen as the word shaping itself or as a way of resisting a system of code; thus, using nature as model to make nonsense more natural than sense itself. As Watts concludes, sense is a construction of our own mind, something we impose on the world because we populate language with “numerous ghosts.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Book Two, LXLVII, p. 74.

2. Chance

The focus of Taoism is the individual in nature rather than the individual in society. It holds that the goal of life for each individual is to find one's own personal adjustment to the rhythm of the natural world, to follow the Way of the universe. The *Tao Te Ching* points to an underlying mystery and simplicity that challenges the foundations of 'common sense'. Lao Tzu's use of paradoxes might be disconcerting in starting the Taoist philosophy. In fact, the Taoist world-view can feel like nonsense because they produce each other and the solution is the problem. Also, the concept of negation in Taoist philosophy is based on a system of complements and the concept of emptiness and formlessness as ways to negotiate reality, which can counteract with the more rational mind. This idea is quintessential to the Eastern philosophy, which is set to be enigmatic rather than offering answers, as poem XL exemplifies:

“Turning back is how the way moves;
Weakness is the means the way employs,
The myriad creatures in the world are born from Something,
and Something from Nothing.”¹⁰⁷

In addition, in poem XLVII, Lao-Tzu writes, “...I am not meddlesome and the people prosper of themselves. I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block.”¹⁰⁸ Action leads one away from the Tao. Those who do not pursue goals but let themselves be guided will find the Tao. One does not gain knowledge by actively looking for it. If inaction leads to the Tao, which is wisdom, chance is therefore pivotal. The metaphor of the uncarved block is reminiscent of the simplicity in oneness found in the Tao. The plain wood is simple, pure, and whole. When one truly becomes an uncarved block of wood, one also becomes part of the myriad of things, everything, the Tao. Chance, an uncarved block of wood, has broken free from the boundaries of the critical mind. But more importantly, good fortune itself is

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Book Two, XL, p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Book Two, LVII, p. 64.

formless and described as coming from its counterpart. In LVVIII Lao Tzu affirms, “It is on disaster that good fortune perches; it is beneath good fortune that disaster crouches.”¹⁰⁹ Because there is no separation in the world of Tao, chance and misfortune are one, and it is left to the one who experiences the event to turn chance into disaster or misfortune into gold. Once again, one cannot separate oneself from something which one is not a part of initially. It is also by way of chance that one de-familiarizes oneself with the past. Since Tao is formless, limitless, and undefined, because it is always in constant flux, doing and undoing, chance allows participation in the process of flowing energies. The following chapter touches upon how the Surrealists typified chance in paintings, collages, and writings (as shown in *The Exquisite Corpse*).

3. Non-dualism

The next point to discuss in relation to the key precepts of Taoism is the non-dualistic view of the world. In his discussion about the self and other, Watts discusses polarity and polar thinking as the key to understanding that our identity is more than the skin-encapsulated ego. Polar thinking is the crux. “On the one hand, dualism is the essential tool for making the jump from feeling yourself to be something merely in this universe, and on the other hand, that you are this universe, focused and acting in that particular way that we call the human individual.”¹¹⁰ All the paradoxes used in the Tao are polarity thinking. So because of defining a position in opposition to another, it enables knowledge and can apply to every field of life. There are all sorts of schools of thought, and some disagree with each other, they debate with each other, but this fosters a deepening of one’s own thoughts. In the Tao the “in” goes with the “out”, the object with the space. In the poem II of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu avows,

“The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful,
yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the good

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Book Two, LVIII, p. 65.

¹¹⁰ Alan Watts, http://deoxy.org/w_self.htm, part 3 of 3.

as the good, yet this is only the bad.
Thus Something and Nothing produce each other;
The difficult and the easy complement each other;
The long and the short offset each other;
The high and the low incline towards each other;
Note and sound harmonize with each other
Before and after follow each other...¹¹¹

Lao Tzu reveals that the opposites are abstract concepts belonging to the realm of thought, and thus are relative. The very act of focusing on one particular aspect creates its opposite. Capra suggests that mysticism transcends this realm of intellectual concepts and "...in transcending it become aware of the relativity and polar relationship of all opposites... The awareness that all opposites are polar, thus a unity, is seen as one of the highest aims of man in the spiritual traditions of the East."¹¹² He then establishes resemblance between the reality of Eastern mystics and the reality of the atomic physicist that transcends the framework of opposites. He quotes J. R. Oppenheimer who wrote an essay in *Physics in the Twentieth Century*, "If we ask for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say 'no'."¹¹³ This connection becomes clear that the physicists and the mystics adopt a special way of thinking where the mind is not fixed in the rigid framework of logic, but keeps moving and changing its viewpoint. Capra alleges that in atomic physics, for example, they are now applying the particle and the wave concept to describe matter. He says, "we have learned how to play with the two pictures, switching from one to the other and back, in order to cope with the atomic reality. This is precisely the way in which the Eastern mystics think when they try to interpret their

¹¹¹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book One, II, p. 6.

¹¹² Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*. Shambala Publications Inc., 2010, p.150.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

experience of a reality beyond opposites.”¹¹⁴ In broadening the realm of possibilities, these examples of transcending the dualistic view of logic illustrate possible sources of inspiration for the Surrealists and their artistic methods.

In his lecture on the Self and Other, Watts demonstrates this point using the explanation of the sutra sixth patriarch. He says, “If they ask you a question about something sacred, give them an answer in terms of the secular. If they ask about the secular, give them an answer in terms of the sacred. So if somebody says ‘What is buddha?’ say ‘This saucepan holds about a quart.’ If they ask you about a saucepan, you say ‘Why is my hand so much like the buddha’s hand?’” For Lao Tzu that polarity amounts still to one, “Thus a thing is sometimes added to by being diminished and diminished by being added to.”¹¹⁵ A perception of the world is an experience of filtered through one’s knowledge and past, so sensations of anything other than ourselves are absent, because whatever we know is translated via the body’s sensations. For that reason, the *Tao Te Ching* encourages its followers to forsake language since it forms the walls of imprisonment: “Much speech leads inevitably to silence. Better to hold fast to the void.”¹¹⁶ The Taoists are aware of the fact that all verbal descriptions of reality are inaccurate and incomplete, often limiting or compartmentalizing things. Thus they made frequent use of paradoxes in the *Tao Te Ching* to expose the incompleteness that rises from language. Body and space are related to one another like head and tail of a coin. Watts refers to our being in the world as playing a game of hide and seek, either we see or not, the world is either visible or invisible. The flickering flame of a candle or “the complex undulation of the universe” might remind us of Richter’s *Rhythmus 2*, and Eggeling’s *Symphony Diagonal*. An image for these avant-garde filmmakers verifies another one, and so forth, until it creates continuity. Their playfulness also mirrors Lao

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

¹¹⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, I, p. 49.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., Book One, V, p. 9.

Tzu's philosophy, for existence is basically playful, not going anywhere, and best understood, as Watts puts it, with the analogy of music. In music, the composer does not make the end of the composition the point of composition. Like dancing, the point of the dance is not to arrive at a particular point. If we catch sight of existence as musical and not serious in nature, we can look upon creatures as games with different patterns and rhythms, for existence is spontaneous. That spontaneity sends us back to the notion of *wuwei*. Trying to fall asleep interferes with sleeping. The *Tao Te Ching* urges us to act less desperately to arrive at our ends. Capra further adds, "The direct experience of reality transcends the realm of thought and language, and since all mysticism is based on such a direct experience, everything that is said about it can only be partly true."¹¹⁷

Watts defines language as notations following a personal pattern:

"That is to say the notation of language, the notation of written letters, the notation of numbers, the notation of algebraic symbols, any kind of notation you want to think of. Musical notes--they do the same thing. And you notice what you can notate, and that is what is notable, noteworthy, because we observe and become aware consciously only of those things that we consider important. And what do you consider important? Well, that depends on your hobby."¹¹⁸

Conscious observation of the world by the use of spotlight vision limits what is experienced.

4. Marginality

The next point to investigate is the marginal character of the Tao, which enabled the Taoists to change their level of magnification; equanimity as a way to broaden perception of the world. Lao Tzu achieves this result by using seemingly nonsensical enigmas that are meant to allow the reader to realize the limitations of logic and reasoning. These conundrums cannot be answered by thinking. Like the Gestalt psychology, the *Tao Te Ching* insists on the mutual interdependence of figure and background in every aspect of life and thought; so that the voluntary and the involuntary, knowing and the known, birth and decay, good and evil, outline

¹¹⁷ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*. Shambala Publications, Inc., 2010, p. 43.

¹¹⁸ Alan Watts, http://deoxy.org/w_self.htm, part 3 of 3.

and inline, self and other, solid and space, motion and rest, light and darkness, are seen as aspects of a single and perfect process. Watts further points out “The implication of this may be that there is nothing in life to be gained or attained that is not already here and now”¹¹⁹. This attention to marginal ideas is again seen in the work of the Surrealists, bringing often-ignored aspects of the collective unconscious to the forefront.

Eastern philosophy, such as Taoism and Buddhism, fascinates Westerners because its teaching method is quite unlike any other philosophy. It has no dogma, requires no particular belief, and neither deals in abstractions nor plays on morality. All and nothing, Taoism deals with reality - the universe - as it is, and not as it desired to be. The heart of Taoism is not an idea but an experience, and that experience as it happens sets one free from ideas. As Watts claims,

“Certainly, you can still use them, but you no longer take them seriously. Picture yourself, then, as a person very earnestly concerned with making sense of life, of a world involving intense pleasure and appalling pain, and trying to understand how and why there is this weird sensation called “myself” in the middle of it all. You have heard that there is a great master, a sage, who can give you the answer; not in terms of some fancy theory, but the thing itself, so that you will never feel the same again and that sensation called “myself” will have been turned upside down and inside out.”¹²⁰

Similarly, the Surrealists traded imposed aesthetic judgments and expectations for less predictable encounters with their work.

5. Hidden Reality

Taoism teaches that the distinction between self and universe is arbitrary, merely a habit of perception and an artifact of language. This view identifies the oneness of self and universe as the ultimate reality. For a Taoist and a phenomenologist, this would not necessarily imply that one’s mind is all that exists, as with solipsism, but rather that the ‘external’ universe is only ever experienced through the mind of the individual. For Lao Tzu, openness to the Tao/“Way” is key:

¹¹⁹ Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography*. New World Library, 2007, p. 345.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

“I know not its name. So I style it ‘Way’... Hence the way is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; and the king is also great. With the realm there are four things that are great, and the king counts as one. Man models himself on Earth, Earth on heaven, Heaven on the Way, and the Way on that which is naturally so.”¹²¹ Similarly, Merleau-Ponty perceives a world of synthesis where dichotomies are manifestations of intertwined relationships. In the chapter on freedom, he states, “My life must have a significance which I do not constitute; there must strictly speaking be an intersubjectivity; each one of us must be both anonymous in the sense of absolutely individual, and anonymous in the sense of absolutely general. Our being in the world, is the concrete bearer of this double anonymity.”¹²² He concludes by stating, “The natural world... insolubly an unmatched individual and a significance” (Merleau-Ponty 523). Correspondingly in *Tao Te Ching*, twenty five hundred years earlier, Lao Tzu stated, “The whole world says that my way is vast and resembles nothing. It is because it is vast that it resembles anything, it would, long before now, have become small.”¹²³ It is because nothing determines man from outside that we belong, as Merleau-Ponty concludes in *Phenomenology of Perception*, to the world. Jung’s ideas about individuation and personality correspond to this reciprocal balance between the internal and external, providing the connections necessary to bridge these theories, as well as lead into the impact of psychotherapy on the Surrealists.

2. Carl Gustav Jung’s *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*

Like Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1960) proposed the existence of a conscious and unconscious mind, a model psychologists frequently symbolize as an iceberg. The part of the iceberg above the surface of the water is seen as the conscious mind. Consciousness is

¹²¹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, XXV, p. 30.

¹²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Freedom” *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2008, p. 521.

¹²³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, LXVII, p. 74.

the part of the mind we know directly; it is thought, emotion, sense, and perception. Through conscious activity, the person becomes an individual. It's the part of the mind that we "live in" most of the time, and contains information in our immediate awareness. Below the level of the conscious mind, the majority of the iceberg, is what Sigmund Freud would call the unconscious, and what Jung would call the "personal unconscious." Here we find thoughts, feelings, urges and other information that is difficult to bring to consciousness. Jung believed in the existence of the unconscious, however, unlike Freud, the unconscious is not seen as animalistic, instinctual, or sexual; he perceives it as more spiritual. What really distinguished Jung from Freud are his differing views on dreams. In his autobiography Jung writes:

"I was never able to agree with Freud that the dream is a façade behind which its meaning lies hidden - a meaning already known but maliciously, so to speak, withheld from consciousness. To me dreams are part of nature, which harbors no intention to deceive, but expresses something as best it can. These forms of life, too, have no wish to deceive our eyes, but we may deceive ourselves because our eyes are shortsighted. Or we hear amiss because our ears are rather deaf - but it is not our ears that wish to deceive us... I knew no reasons for the assumption that the tricks of consciousness can be extended to the natural processes of the unconscious."¹²⁴

For Jung, dreams are a way of communicating and acquainting yourself with the unconscious. Dreams are not attempts to conceal your true feelings from the waking mind, but rather are a window to the unconscious. They serve as guide for the waking self to achieve wholeness. Since dreams are a way of communicating with the unconscious, Jung believed that dream images reveal something about ourselves, our relationships with others, and situations in our waking life. Jung asserts that, "The unconscious helps by communicating things to us, or making figurative allusions. It has other ways, too, of informing us of things, which by all logic we could not possibly know. Consider synchronistic phenomena, premonitions, and dreams that come true."¹²⁵ Jung defines the unconscious as knowing more than consciousness but "it is knowledge of a

¹²⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. Fontana Press, 1995, p. 185.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

special sort, knowledge in eternity, usually without reference to the here and now, not couched in language of the intellect.”¹²⁶ He also characterizes consciousness as being very much like perception and subject to conditions and limitations, evocative of Watt’s metaphor of “spotlight vision” used by the rational mind. The conscious mind only pays attention to what is graspable of the unconscious since the latter is “an irrepresentable totality of all subliminal psychic factors, a ‘total vision’ in *potentia*.”¹²⁷ Jung affirms, “The world of consciousness is a world full of restrictions, of walls blocking the way. It is of necessity one sided, because of the nature of consciousness itself.”¹²⁸ Jung firmly believes that the splitting up into single units, dualities, its fragmentary character is of the essence of consciousness. Although the great difference between the Eastern and the Western mind is while the West seeks to rise above the world, the Eastern mind seeks deepening and turns back towards the maternal depths of Nature.

Jung also accepts as true that the dream’s manifest content is just as significant and revealing as the latent content. Jung’s method of dream interpretation places more responsibility on the dreamer, usually offering a practical solution to an everyday problem. The meaning of dreams is a personal judgment and is up to interpretation. Whatever interpretation intuitively feels right is most significant and more important than what someone else thinks or believes.

Jung views the ego as the sense of self and how one portrays oneself to the world. Part of Jung’s theory is that all things can be viewed as paired opposites: good/evil, male/female, or love/hate. So working in opposition to the ego, is the ‘counter ego’ or what he refers to as *the shadow*. The shadow represents the rejected aspects not acknowledged. The shadow is more primitive, somewhat uncultured, and a little awkward. Jung considers the ego as the central

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 343.

¹²⁷ Carl Gustav Jung, “Foreword to Introduction to Zen Buddhism”, *Psychology and Religion: East and West*. Volume II of the Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Translated by R.F. C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 551.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 550

organizing principle of consciousness. In his autobiography, Jung writes, “I was concerned with the interplay between conscious and unconscious, with the development of consciousness from the unconscious, and with the impact of the great personality, the inner man, upon the life of every individual.”¹²⁹ What is fascinating about Jung is his idea that the unconscious process could be supra individual or “collective”, represented by archetypal wisdom from which individuality can flower instead of being forcibly dragged up by the superego. For Watts, “It seems obvious that we should inherit the formative processes of the psyche just as we inherit those of the body, and that they should, at least initially, be as unconscious to us as our genes. Indeed, the genes and the collective unconscious may be the same process described from two different viewpoints.”¹³⁰ Again a parallel with scientific thinking arises as an appropriate metaphor for the discovery and bridging of the world, inside and out.

A. Jung’s Collective Unconscious

Jung’s collective unconscious is indebted to interpreting literature and mythology. In studying different cultures, Jung was amazed by the universality of many themes, patterns, stories, and images that he found in the dreams of his patients. From these stories, Jung developed a theory of the collective unconscious and the archetypes. He describes it this way,

“Our souls as well as our bodies are composed of individual elements which were all already present in the ranks of our ancestors. The “newness” in the individual psyche is an independent varied recombination of age-old components. Body and soul therefore have an intensely historical character and find no proper place in what is new, in things that have just come into being. That is to say, our ancestral components are only partly at home in such things.”¹³¹

The collective unconscious is different from the personal unconscious since it is inherited. According to Jung, material in the collective unconscious never came from a current

¹²⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. Fontana Press, 1995, p. 248.

¹³⁰ Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography*. New World Library, 2007, p. 331.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

environment. It is the part of the mind that is received as part of humanity, a collective accumulation; the mind is pre-figured by evolution just as the body. For Jung, the individual is linked to the past of the whole species and the long stretch of evolution of the organism, and thus has placed the psyche within the evolutionary process. All share it, and the Surrealists made sure to utilize dreams and cultural and human touchstones in their works to retain the familiar in their outrageously new forms.

Moreover, in *Psychology and Religion: East and West*, Jung asserts that the Universal Mind is without form and since we cannot attribute any particular form to the unconscious, the unconscious is the source of all forms; "...it is the birthplace of thought-forms... belongs to no time in particular... [and is] seemingly eternal"¹³² We find similar descriptions in the *Tao Te Ching* in which Lao Tzu defines the "Way" as being eternal and formless. The Taoists conceived a reality in which nothing is distinct and thus the whole is one, and "... the peculiar experience of oneness derives from the subliminal awareness of all-contamination in the unconscious."¹³³ By this process of transcending the experience of reality, not only do they gain access to the "one mind", but also give themselves the perfect tool for self-liberation. As seen previously in the *Tao Te Ching*, the positive and negative principles are united in one and the same figure. Where there is faith, there is doubt; where there is morality, there is temptation; where there is high, there is low; a cosmic principle that follows the yin and yang. For Lao Tzu, self-liberation is achieved by detaching oneself from a world of polarities. By this method the state of unconsciousness is felt as one, timeless and indefinite. In the West, however, the unconscious is considered to be "a fantastic irreality" and not "seeing reality or seeing of one mind". For the Western mind it is

¹³² Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation", *Psychology and Religion: East and West*. Volume II of the Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Translated by R.F. C. Hull. Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 782.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

inconceivable to equate the “self” with a spiritual force since the sense of self derives from separation from the world, and thus, the other. Once that is done, we categorize and label things and events to accentuate our intrinsic sense of separation. The “self” consists of a person’s conscious and unconscious aspects, their personality, cognitions, thoughts and feelings. In *Chiasm: The Intertwining*, Merleau-Ponty argues that we see the world and we are seen by the world; one cannot separate one from the other. We see because we can be seen and we exist in this chiasmatic state, this in-between place. Nonsensical Surrealist poetry and avant-garde films allow us a connection to the whole for they offer a non-dualistic vision of the world, juxtaposing the many layers together. The meaning of nonsense is to gain control of our awareness, while ridding ourselves of the restrictive ego.

B. Process of Individuation

Jung created this term to describe the process of becoming aware of oneself, of one’s make-up, and the way to discover one’s true and inner self.

“I realize that the unconscious is a process, and that the psyche is transformed or developed by the relationship of the ego to the contents of the unconscious. In collective life it has left its deposit principally in the various religious systems and their changing symbols. Through the study of these collective transformation processes and through understanding of alchemical symbolism I arrived at the central concept of my psychology: the process of individuation.”¹³⁴

In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu also refers to the idea of exploring the unconscious to address the issue of the Shadow, what has been repressed by the ego. Like Jung who believed that the modern world does not provide enough opportunity to experience the archetypes of the unconscious; Lao Tzu encourages readers to embrace the dark side. Only then is awareness of the inner-self possible.

“In his every movement a man of great virtue
Follows the way and the way only.

¹³⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. Fontana Press, 1995, p. 235.

As a thing the way is
Shadowy, indistinct.
Indistinct and shadowy,
Yet within it is a substance
Dim and dark,
Yet within its is an essence.
This essence is quite genuine”¹³⁵

For as long as mankind has existed, Man has been fascinated with the question of “Who am I?” There is no simple answer, but Jung’s individuation process provides guidelines. The ego is the center of consciousness, but it is not the foundation. It is rather a function that allows distinguishing ourselves from others. It is a structure that orders psychological qualities to make sense of behaviors and actions. On the other hand, the self is a higher order than the ego. The self is the essence, and it encompasses the conscious, the unconscious, and the ego. It is the central archetype in the collective unconscious and represents the archetype of order, organization and unity. It unifies the personality. The self, according to Jung, is not a kind of universal consciousness; it is rather an awareness of unique nature and intimate connection with all life. This life is not only human but also animal, plant, and mineral: the entire cosmos. It gives a sense of ‘unity’, an acceptance of reality as it is and not as one might think one wants it to be. For Watts, the sense of “self” can only be felt in relation to, and in contrast with, the “other”: “In the same way, I am what I am only in relation to what everything else is. The Japanese call this *ji-ji-mu-ge*, which means every thing-event (*ji*) and every other thing-event there is no (*mu*) barrier (*ge*). Each implies all, and all implies each.”¹³⁶ The self is a goal of life, because it is the complete expression of the highest unity, called individuality; unity attains through a process of individuation and it begins with becoming conscious of the persona (the mask taken on in everyday life). Following that stage is to become conscious of the shadow (the repressed

¹³⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book One, XXI, p. 26.

¹³⁶ Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography*. New World Library, 2007, p. 267-8.

characteristics of the ego); finally, the anima (the inner female in each man, or the animus, the inner male in each woman). Then the image of the old wise man, or the old wise mother appears, after which the experience of the self happens. The process of individuation is not easy because the rational mind has difficulty with the concept of paradoxes. Nevertheless, it is necessary to accept the superior and the inferior, the rational and the irrational, order and chaos, light and darkness, yin and yang.

For Jung, Tao, the true spirit of the East, coincides with the process of individuation. In *Jung, the Tao, and the Classic Change*, Stephen Karcher states that Jung sees the East as a philosopher's stone and that is "the catalyst through which changes take place. It is at the bottom of the spiritual change we are passing through and out of its depths new spiritual forms will arise."¹³⁷ In his *Collected Works*, Volume VII, Jung defines the Tao as an irrational union of opposites and the most legitimate fulfillment of the meaning of an individual life. Karcher declares, "it signifies the emergence of a new center of personality no longer the ego, a point half way between conscious and unconscious. It is a new equilibrium, a new center of the whole personality, a new and most solid foundation."¹³⁸ Tao is a method of uniting what is separated, the separation of consciousness and life; it is the realization of the opposite hidden in the unconscious. For Jung, the purpose of the self is to become a single, homogeneous being. In that process, Tao can be considered a metaphor for the self. Through Tao, Jung's concept of self is more understandable. There is no barrier between the self and the universe, but rather it is one and the same. All things have the same essential self and thus are essentially related.

¹³⁷ Stephen Karcher, "Jung, the Tao and the Classic of Change". *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 38, No.4., Winter 1999, p. 287-88.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

C. Jung and Lao Tzu

Richard Wilhelm was one of the first in the West to realize the value of Chinese thinking and introduced Jung to Eastern philosophy in the mid 1920s, after having translated the *I-Ching* in 1913 and in 1928 the *Secret of the Golden Flower*. Jung prefaced Wilhelm's translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, a book that assisted him in bridging psychological understandings between the East and West. These two works created a strong connection between two ways of perceiving the self. That encounter with Wilhelm led Jung to envision similarities between the concept of the self and the Tao; for Lao Tzu and Jung, it raises the question of unity. A vital aspect of Jung's work touches upon one's view of the world and the relations between psychology and religion. The *Tao Te Ching* expresses the idea that the self and the world are interconnected and presents the cosmogony of the world. Everything and everyone takes its source as the Tao. Jungian psychology stresses the existence of a conflict of opposites, or *enantiodromia* ("running contrariwise")¹³⁹. This is a term Heraclitus used to describe the process of eternal flux. The opposites are at war with each other, but in this conflict there is harmony, for both positive and negative need one another. Jung based his theory of compensation on this principle, claiming that the conscious attitude at times must be balanced by gaining awareness of certain unconscious processes. According to Jung, "Just as all energy proceeds from opposition, so the psyche too possesses its inner polarity, this being the indispensable prerequisite for its aliveness, as Heraclitus realized long ago."¹⁴⁰ For instance, all men have a female element, *the anima*, abiding in their unconscious minds. Similarly, all women have an unconscious male element *the animus*. If one set of characteristics is dominant, the opposite will manifest itself in dreams, hinting at how the conscious attitude can be adjusted to restore balance to the psyche. In

¹³⁹ William D. Geoghegan, "The Complementary of Yin and Yang", *Jung's Psychology as A Spiritual Practice and Way of Life*. University Press of America, 2002, p. 68.

¹⁴⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. Fontana Press, 1995, p. 384.

the *Tao Te Ching*, the forces of yin and yang work similarly to illustrate the principle of unity and the paradoxical concept of complementarity. Nobel Laureate Niels Bohr uses the symbol of the yin and yang, principle of complements, *contraria sunt complementa*, ‘contraries are complementary.’ [Fig. 9] But as William Geoghegan points out, the similarity between the anima and animus and the yin and yang was not a matter of gender for Lao Tzu, but the issue was rather of Being and Non-Being as expressed in poem XI: “Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.”¹⁴¹ Martin Heidegger brilliantly illustrates the complementary nature of opposites achieving unity with an example in *The Thing*. He writes:

“How does the jug’s void hold? It holds by taking what is pouring in. It holds by keeping and rating what it took in. The void holds in a twofold manner: taking and keeping. The word ‘hold’ is therefore ambiguous. Nevertheless, the taking of what is poured in and the keeping of what was poured belong together. But their unity is determined by the outpouring for which the jug is fitted as a jug. The twofold holding of the void rests on the outpouring. In the outpouring, the holding is authentically how it is. To pour from the jug is to give. The holding of the vessel occurs in the giving of the outpouring. Holding needs the void as that which holds. The nature of the holding void is gathered in the giving.”¹⁴²

In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu uses the metaphor of the uncarved wood in poem XXVIII,”

“Know the male
But keep to the role of the female
And be a ravine to the empire,
Then the constant virtue will not desert you
And you will again return to being a babe.
...
And you will return to being uncarved block
When the uncarved block shatters it becomes vessels. The sage makes use of these and
becomes the lord over the officials.
Hence the greatest cutting
Does not sever.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, XI, p. 15.

¹⁴² Martin Heidegger, “The Thing”, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Perennial Classics, 2001, p. 169.

¹⁴³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, XXVIII, p. 33.

When we talk about the connection between Taoism and Jung, the principle of synchronicity comes to mind and resembles the kind of multiple interdependencies that are characteristic to Taoism. This involves the notion of “mutual arising” encompassing a holistic rather than linear explanation for every event. Jung defines synchronicity as meaningful coincidence, as a non-linear principle of understanding. The non-causality is Tao and thus synchronicity. Karsher gives an example of someone standing on the seashore looking at the waves washing out an old shoe. He points out, “... a good Westerner will comment ‘Nonsense!’ The Chinese gentleman besides [him] says ‘what does it mean that these things occur together?’”¹⁴⁴ Jung also believes that space and time are elastic in the psyche and only become fixed in consciousness. Synchronicity asserts that the terms of a meaningful coincidence are connected by simultaneity of meaning: “It is the continuous creation of a pattern that exists from all eternity.”¹⁴⁵ In “Meaning, Meditation, and Synchronicity in Taoism and Jung”, Geoghegan believes that “complementarity and synchronicity are closely related to our familiar principles of self-realization and integrated wholeness”. Following Hegel’s principle he later adds, “at the end of the day, we cannot maintain any view of the Self or of the World that presupposes absolute divisions or absolute oppositions. There is a primordial, underlying unity that must always be recognized.”¹⁴⁶ This idea of interdependent existence is also found in the *Tao Te Ching* through the process of non-action, *wuwei*. Lao Tzu writes, “...I know the benefit of resorting to no action. The teaching that uses no words, the benefit of resorting to no action, these are beyond the understanding of all but a very few in the world.”¹⁴⁷ Both synchronicity and *wuwei* inform us

¹⁴⁴ Stephen Karcher, “Jung, the Tao and the Classic of Change”. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 38, No.4., Winter 1999, p. 289.

¹⁴⁵ Karcher quoting Jung from *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*. Vol. 8, § 921, 1952 in “Jung, the Tao and the Classic of Change”. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 38, No.4, Winter 1999, p. 290.

¹⁴⁶ William D. Geoghegan, “Meaning, Meditation, and Synchronicity in Taoism and Jung”, *Jung’s Psychology as A Spiritual Practice and Way of Life*. University Press of America, 2002, p. 77.

¹⁴⁷ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, p. 50.

that our minds affect our bodies and our bodies affect our minds. Thus, whatever we do affects our perception of the world, and that perception affects the world of every living organism. Jung's concept of synchronicity is the belief in the ultimate "oneness" of the universe. Jung was convinced that synchronistic events reveal an underlying unity of mind and matter, subjective and objective realities. When an archetype is activated by an emotionally charged event (such as tragedy), says Jung, other related events tend to orbit around it. In this way the archetypes become a doorway to the experience of meaningful (and often insightful) coincidence. Geoghegan also advances that Jung explicitly identifies the Self with Tao and the center. He writes, "Erich Neumann, whom Jung regarded as the most able of his disciples, refers to the individuation process as something transcending both introversion and extroversion (those two fundamental personality orientations which Jung identified), which Neumann classed most aptly 'centroversion,' turning to the center which is the Self or the Tao."¹⁴⁸

To conclude, Watts firmly believes that Jung was the one leading psychotherapist who, in his time, took a positive, intelligent attitude toward religion and mythology, and realized, with some important reservations, what could be learned from Eastern spirituality. Jung ends his *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* highlighting Lao Tzu's conundrum,

"'All are clear, I alone am clouded,' he is expressing what I now feel in advanced old age. Lao-Tzu is the example of a man with superior insight who has seen and experienced worth and worthlessness, and who at the end of his life desires to return into his own being, into the eternal unknowable meaning... The more uncertain I have felt about myself, the more there has grown up in me a feeling of kinship with all things. In fact it seems to me as if that alienation which so long separated me from the world has become transferred into my own inner world, and has revealed to me an unexpected unfamiliarity with myself."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ William D. Geoghegan, "Meaning, Meditation, and Synchronicity in Taoism and Jung", *Jung's Psychology as A Spiritual Practice and Way of Life*. University Press of America, 2002, p. 78.

¹⁴⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. Fontana Press, 1995, p. 393.

Categorization and analysis hinder connecting to this world; and thus trying to fit these artificial constructs creates alienation. Jung's works and Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* predominantly share the concept of transcendence, Jung's second aspect of individuation. Transcendence is to unify the self's archetypes. Jung came to face that the individual self is a manifestation of a larger non-personal one, since the self and the world are not separate. This basic understanding is still foreign to most. Jung writes,

“The mythic needs of the Occidental call for an evolutionary cosmogony with a beginning and a goal. The Occidental rebels against a cosmogony with a beginning and mere end, just as he cannot accept the idea of a static, self-contained, eternal cycle of events. The Oriental, on the other hand, seems able to come to terms with this idea. Apparently there is no unanimous feeling about the nature of the world... To Western man the meaninglessness of the merely static universe is unbearable. He must assume that it has meaning. The Oriental does not need to make this assumption; rather, he himself embodies it. Whereas the Occidental feels the need to complete the meaning of the world, the Oriental strives for the fulfillment of meaning in man, stripping the world and existence from himself”¹⁵⁰

Bringing the two to a psychological level and affirming the unity and coherence of both, Jung continues, “I would say both are right. Western man seems predominantly extroverted, Eastern man predominantly introverted. The former projects the meaning and considers that it exists in objects; the latter feels the meaning in himself. But the meaning is both without and within.”¹⁵¹

The superficial separation amidst introverts, extroverts, objects, the internal world collapses in favor of an all-encompassing unity.

For Jung, the meaning of his life can also be explained with paradoxes the way Lao Tzu wrote the *Tao Te Ching*. He utters that, “The meaning of my existence is that life has addressed a question to me. Or, conversely, I myself am a question which is addressed to the world, and I must communicate my answer for otherwise I am dependent upon the world's answer. That is a

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.,p. 349.

suprapersonal life task, which I accomplish only by effort and with difficulty.”¹⁵² The interesting parallel between Taoism and Jung teaches the importance of crossing boundaries in daily life. Geoghegan calls crossing boundaries a “cross fertilization process” and uses the metaphor of marriage to powerfully present Taoism and Jung’s analogies. It goes,

“I have also come to think about marriage as a symbolic reality in three respects: (1) covenantal, (2) sacramental, and (3) transcendental...The covenantal dimension is expressed in the marriage vow: ‘To have and to hold...for better, for worse, till death do us part, according to God’s Holy Ordinance...’ That is the covenant. It is a publicly given vow. Now that covenant is also a sacrament. A sacrament... defines ... [as] ‘an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.’”¹⁵³

Jung was ever thankful to his friend Richard Wilhelm for having introduced him to Taoism and the *I Ching or the Book of Changes*. In May 1930 Jung gave a eulogy for his friend, saying that he kindled a light that was one of the most significant of his life. Wilhelm enabled him to make unprecedented connections between the Tao and psychological methods, and to establish a creative relationship between the *I Ching* and the unconscious. The texts, with their sixty-four *gua* or hexagrams are associated with the figure as a whole, and each figure expresses a situation of the self, and “the self invariably expresses a situation in which the ego is contained, a circumambient atmosphere in which synchronistic phenomena occur.”¹⁵⁴ 3000 - 5000 years ago, the ancient Chinese produced a system, the *I Ching*, in which the energy flow of Tao, chance, and change are reflected and predictive of life situations. In the preface to the *I Ching*, translated by Wilhelm, Jung writes,

“The *I Ching* does not offer itself with proofs and results; it does not vaunt itself, nor is it easy to approach. Like a part of nature, it waits until it’s discovered. It offers neither facts nor power, but for lovers of self-knowledge, of wisdom – if there be such – it seems to be the right book. To one person its spirit appears as clear as day; to another, shadowy as

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 350.

¹⁵³ William D. Geoghegan, “Meaning, Meditation, and Synchronicity in Taoism and Jung”, *Jung’s Psychology as A Spiritual Practice and Way of Life*. University Press of America, 2002, p. 85-6.

¹⁵⁴ Karcher quoting Jung from *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*. Vol. 9ii, § 257, 1951 in “Jung, the Tao and the Classic of Change”. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 38, No.4, Winter 1999, p. 292.

twilight; to a third, dark as night. He who is not pleased by it does not have to use it, and he who is against it is not obliged to find it true. Let it go forth into the work for the benefit of those who can discern its meaning.”¹⁵⁵

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

The following work in question is as opaque as the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching*, not because of its aphoristic style and paradoxes, but rather for its use of his unorthodox argument. Bryan Magee declares without any shadow of a doubt that the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world were Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). Wittgenstein studied logic in England under Russell who influenced him a great deal, precisely his book *The Principles of Mathematics*. Wittgenstein gave up studying mechanical engineering, devoted his time to the foundations of mathematics, leading him to question the relationship between mathematics and the world. Then, much later, he raised the question on the correlation between language and the world in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1918). Thirty-five years later, his second and last book *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) was published, which repudiated his earlier work *Tractatus* and abandoned the idea that language gave a picture of the world. In this later work, he corrected his mistake and affirmed that language is not a picture at all but an instrument or is composed of language games. However, both works emphasize the idea that language limits the perception of the world. For Magee, this is a rather unique phenomenon in the history of philosophy. He presents Wittgenstein as a philosopher of genius producing two different and incompatible philosophies each of which decisively influenced a whole generation. In the course of looking into Surrealist nonsense as a genre, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* lends itself to aim at showing language as not only attached to the object it represents but also interdependent with its context. Wittgenstein’s

¹⁵⁵ Carl. Gustav Jung “Foreward” of Richard Wilhelm’s *The I Ching: The Book of Change*. Bollingen Series XIX, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. xxxix.

approach to language in the *Tractatus* is as enigmatic as the *Tao Te Ching*, for its meaning remains obscure and implicit; or perhaps, as he asserted, all the propositions in *Tractatus* are nonsense, since according to him, most important in philosophy is not what is said, but rather what it cannot articulate. This section on the *Tractatus* analyzes the role of nonsensical propositions as ways to formulate unspeakable truths, something both Wittgenstein and the Taoists explicitly state exists, the former calling it nonsense, whereas Taoists named it the Tao.

A. Definition

Tractatus presents its readers an important view on how words picture the world by the configuration of names attached to every object. Wittgenstein believed there is no knowledge outside the mind, that there is no distinction between solipsism and realism that can be properly expressed in language. For him, language is first and foremost a representational system. It is with language that “we picture facts to ourselves” (Wittgenstein 2.1) and “the picture is a model of reality” (Wittgenstein 2.14). As mathematics and logic dictate, if the picture is a fact, this equation leads immediately to a notion of units; let’s call them words because as stipulated in *Tractatus*, words stand for the objects: “A name means an object. The object is its meaning.” (Wittgenstein 3.203) As objects are linked in the world to form facts, the words are linked in language to form propositions. A sentence is meaningful if and only if it is a fact that corresponds to a possible fact in the world. It can be proven true if it corresponds to an actual fact. “What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it - correctly or incorrectly in the way it does, is its pictorial form.” (Wittgenstein 2.17) For Wittgenstein’s picture theory of language, his propositions are pictures for they contain “the form and not the content, if its sense.” (Wittgenstein 3.13) Wittgenstein used the word “picture” to illustrate his theory of meaning to draw special attention to the visual analogy precisely because the

propositions are themselves facts, not mental representations. A sign has no meaning independent of its use. Wittgenstein criticizes Russell's *Theory of Types* because it endows signs themselves with meaning (3.331). Words have no inherent meaning, but depend largely on the context in which they appear. If these words appear out of context, they become meaningless.

British philosopher Anthony Quinton describes Wittgenstein's voice in the *Tractatus* as "a voice speaking out of a world wind" and as having a literary quality in spite of format. The book is written in brief paragraphs numbered according to an elaborate system of divisions and subdivisions. Neither the connection between these different propositions, nor their explicit meanings is obvious. Wittgenstein wrote in a way very much like Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching*. Both men saw themselves behind the writings and both writings are charged with a haunting ability to stay in the mind of the reader. He opens *Tractatus* with "The world is all that is the case" (Wittgenstein 1) and ends it with "what we cannot speak about pass over in silence." (Wittgenstein 7). *Tractatus* unravels the relationship between language and the world, what can be said about it, and what can only be shown. In the introduction of the *Tractatus*, Russell insists on four fundamental points that are 1) psychological, 2) philosophical, 3) empirical, and 4) logical, to elucidate Wittgenstein's work. He writes,

"...First, there is the problem what actually occurs in our minds when we use language with the intention of meaning something by it... Secondly, there is the problem as to what is the relation subsisting between thoughts, words, or sentences, and that which they refer to or mean... Thirdly, there is the problem of using sentences so as to convey truth rather than falsehood... Fourthly, there is the question: what relation must one fact (such as a sentence) have to another in order to be *capable* of being a symbol for that other?"¹⁵⁶

For the purpose of investigating *Tractatus* to answer the question of nonsense in Surrealism, close attention will be paid to the logical, psychological, and philosophical views of *Tractatus*.

¹⁵⁶ Bertrand Russell, "Introduction" of *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2008, xi.

1. Logic

A very important aspect of the *Tractatus* is the conception of logic in relation to language. For Wittgenstein, logic regulates language, leaving no room for illogical, nonsensical sign formations. The entire function of language is to have meaning and it only fulfills this function as it approaches ideal language. Wittgenstein argues that language has a logical arrangement attached to it, a structure that provides the limits of what can be said meaningfully, and therefore the limits of what can be thought. Logic is the condition of language. Aimin Shen points out that in the *Tractatus*, actual sense refers to truth or falsity, but not both, relative to a state of affairs. Logical sense refers to truth and falsity, both possibilities in a logical space; and nonsense refers to metaphysics and mysticism, which are beyond the boundaries of logic. In discussing thoughts, Wittgenstein says that thoughts must share a logical form with propositions and with reality in order to reflect them. He is not talking about the content of thoughts and how they work or where they come from. In doing so, he is saying only that they must adhere to the same logical form as everything else. In addition, propositions are thoughts in a communicable form. Propositions, thoughts, logical pictures, and facts all share a common logical form. We know that a certain proposition expresses a certain thought, and that thought is a logical picture of a certain fact, because of this shared form. The Taoist view is that the form is both everywhere and nowhere. Therefore, an investigation of strict logical priority should be taken metaphorically rather than literally. Shen adds, “The Taoists see the origin of things, of the ultimate condition of all the conditioned, and of the farthest point of mind in its analysis of its own limit.”¹⁵⁷ Wittgenstein talks in terms of “elucidations” while the Taoists speak of “enlightenment”.

¹⁵⁷ Aimin Shen, *Transcendental Philosophy in Taoism, Kant, and Wittgenstein*. Southern Illinois University, 2000, p. 23.

According to Wittgenstein, a contradiction is not a violation of the laws of logic; rather, it is the outer limit of what can be expressed, just as tautology is the inner limit. “It is raining and it is not raining” may be contradictory, but for Wittgenstein, we do not need laws to tell us what is logical and what is not. Everything that can be said is logical and whatever is not logical cannot. The most striking metaphor to illustrate the philosopher’s viewpoint on logic can be found in the following proposition,

“The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it... They have no subject matter. They presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions sense, and that is their connection with the world. It is clear that something about the world must be indicated by the fact that certain combinations of symbols - whose essence involves the possession of a determinate character - are tautologies. This contains the decisive point. We have said that some things are arbitrary in the symbols that we use and that some things are not. In logic it’s only the latter that express; but that means that logic is not a field in which we express what we wish with the help of signs, but rather one in which the nature of the absolutely necessary signs speaks for itself.”¹⁵⁸

The metaphor of scaffolding brings to light four principal aspects of Wittgenstein's conception of logic. First, scaffolding is a framework structure of joints. Similarly, logic does not consist of propositions with a sense, but only provides a framework within which propositions with a sense may fit. Second, this framework is used to construct meaning, just as logic provides a framework within which the substantial facts about the world may fit. Third, logic and the world share a logical form, but the content (as opposed to the form) of facts themselves has no analogue in logic. Fourth, scaffolding is only a tool used in construction: a sturdy and complete building has no need of scaffolding. We do not need logic or philosophy when language is functioning normally. These tools are only needed to provide clarity when language misfires.

As seen earlier, language has to fit the world to be plausible; names correlate with objects, but the function of language is more than that and Wittgenstein arrives at the conclusion

¹⁵⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2008 p. 76.

that his view of the world is based on his limitation of language. Our attitude toward the world shapes the world we live in, and this generalization of the world that shapes the world constitutes philosophical investigations. He adds, “Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it - logical form. In order to be able to represent logical form, we should have to be able to station ourselves with propositions somewhere outside logic, that is to say outside the world.” (Wittgenstein 4.12) According to Wittgenstein’s principle, what is beyond propositional language cannot be represented by propositional language. Anything we say about what is beyond, therefore, becomes nonsense. Furthermore, in *Wittgenstein’s Tractatus and the Modern Arts*, Jorn K. Bramann claims the Wittgenstein’s world is subject to the laws of logic. His use of calculus demonstrates that there is no connection between facts. Wittgenstein describes a world “of randomly combined, but basically isolated facts [and disregards the] restrictive order of ordinary reality... [which is] also [subjected] to those of causality, gravity and so forth” (Bramann 83).

Contrary to logical sense in *Tractatus*, the reason for a proposition to be nonsensical is that it lies in the fact that the proposition is outside the possibility of truth and falsity. As Shen proposes, “the nonsensical is beyond the measuring of logic sense and the measured of actual sense. Therefore nonsense is beyond the boundary of a propositional language.”¹⁵⁹ For Wittgenstein, nonsense refers to metaphysics or mysticism. As expressed at the end of *Tractatus*, what you cannot say is nonsensical:

“my propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb up beyond them, (he must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

¹⁵⁹ Aimin Shen, *Transcendental Philosophy in Taoism, Kant, and Wittgenstein*. Southern Illinois University, 2000, p. 23.

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world alright.”
(Wittgenstein 6.54)

Wittgenstein urges his readers to realize the nonsensicalness of what has been said in his book and that many remarks in the book, i.e. those “talking” about the formal or necessary features of language or of the world, are nonsense. To illustrate his point, Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of the ladder that needs to be thrown away. The book as the ladder is nothing but nonsense because it does not demonstrate anything; in order to demonstrate something it must be something else.

For Oskari Kuusela, nonsense is a matter of some of our signs failing to symbolize, or more precisely, of our failing to employ our words in a meaningful way. She argues, “a sign combined with other signs either symbolizes or not, but there are no illogical combinations of symbols that constitute impossible, illegitimate symbols with a nonsensical sense, as it were.”¹⁶⁰

Combining signs in illogical ways results in a failure to symbolize anything, and examples of such cases are not symbols. Contrary to this interpretation, Kuusela continues:

“Conant’s method of the *Tractatus* and the method of philosophy in general, as conceived by the *Tractatus*, is therapeutic: philosophy attempts to cure us from the temptation to put forward philosophical doctrines by showing that (and how) such attempts lead to nonsense. Or as Conant puts it: ‘...the aim of Tractarian elucidation is to reveal (through the employment of mere nonsense) that what appears to be substantial nonsense is mere nonsense’ where substantial nonsense would serve the ‘conferral of insight into inexpressible features of reality’ I will call this method “elucidation- with-nonsense”¹⁶¹

Nonsense is not thought to bring to view any philosophical truths. It is meant to make manifest its own nonsensicalness and that of seeming philosophical doctrines. This way the book aims to change the way philosophy is conceived. There is nothing in the propositions that can be understood. However, one can understand the frame of mind that would be necessary to think that these propositions make sense. The question remains though, how can we even make use of

¹⁶⁰ Oskari Kuusela, “Nonsense Clarification in the *Tractatus*: Resolute and Ineffability Readings and the *Tractatus*’ Failure”. Academy of Finland, 2006, p. 37.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Wittgenstein's distinction between sense and nonsense if the propositions in which he lays out this distinction are themselves nonsensical?

2. Psychology

Wittgenstein also claims that mathematics can be derived from the successive application of logical operations and that the laws of science are neither logical laws nor empirical observations but rather interpretive methods. In discussing thoughts, Wittgenstein is not making any psychological claims. Throughout the *Tractatus* he keeps well away from both psychology and epistemology; he is interested in how things are, not in how they are perceived.

Contrary to Wittgenstein's view, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty envisions consciousness, the world, and the human body as a perceiving thing, intricately intertwined and "communing with" one another. He develops the concept of the body-subject as an alternative to the Cartesian "cogito". This distinction is especially important because Merleau-Ponty rejects the Cartesian idea that the world is a mere extension of the mind, instead insisting on the idea that without the body man would not be able to perceive or express anything. Objects are that upon which our body has a grip (*une prise*), while the grip itself is a function of the connectivity between the external world and the body. The object of perception is imminently tied to its background, and thus is constantly becoming as well as tied to the present. Through being involved in the world (being-in-the-world) the perceiver experiences all the object's perspectives from all the things that surround it, as well as the potential perspectives that the object itself has upon these things. Each object is a "mirror of all others". Our perception of the object through all perspectives is an ambiguous perception because bodily involvement with things is impermanent and indefinite, encountering meaningful things in an open-ended world.

This disparity between Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty is foundational for the interpretation of Desnos and avant-garde films, which seek to abolish rules similar to Wittgenstein's.

At this point, however, there is no clear distinction between solipsism and pure realism, the doctrine that there are in fact people and objects in the world in the way common intuition entails. The solipsist's idea of a self is not something that can be expressed, nor does it rule out any factual statements that can be made about the world. The solipsist and the realist might think they are disagreeing, but any disagreement they can state will be in the form of pseudo-propositions that try to make unsay-able claims about the nature of the self or the world. Wittgenstein is not trying to show the solipsist is wrong so much as that the distinction between solipsism and realism is artificial to the extent that either position can be stated without nonsense; they are the same.

Wittgenstein defines the metaphysical subject as the "philosophical self" and distinguishes it from the human body and the soul as treated by psychology. He says,

"Thus there really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way. What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that the world is my word. The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world - not a part of it." (Wittgenstein 5.641)

He is primarily reacting here against the claim that subject A is held in a relationship with a proposition P. According to Wittgenstein, no such unified "self" exists such that it can hold the place of an object in a proposition. Rather, the soul is a composite of thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. Thus, when talking about a person's beliefs, analyzing this proposition as existing between the belief and a unified consciousness should be avoided. Rather, it can be analyzed using Wittgenstein's picture theory, as existing between the belief as it is expressed and the belief as it

appears in this composite consciousness. Effectively, Wittgenstein is denying that there is a self that is distinct from the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs that constitute it.

3. Philosophy

In relation to philosophy, nonsense is not thought to bring to view any philosophical truths. Quite the contrary, Wittgenstein believes that philosophy casts a shadow on language. *Tractatus* is meant to make manifest its own nonsensicalness and that of seeming philosophical doctrines. He strongly agrees that there is no such philosophical problem; philosophy is an activity and thus is not a body of thought. Philosophy strives for the essence of meaning, but for Wittgenstein, there is no such a thing. The book aims to change the way we conceive of philosophy. Wittgenstein proposes that philosophy has no propositions. Properly speaking, philosophy is the activity of clarifying language, and the correct method in philosophy is to remain silent and only speak up to correct people who misuse language. The limits of language for Wittgenstein are the limits of philosophy. Much of philosophy involves attempts to say intelligently what cannot be said: “what can we say at all can be said clearly,” he argues. Anything beyond that—religion, ethics, aesthetics, the mystical—cannot be discussed. They are not in themselves nonsensical, but any statement about them must be. He wrote in the preface: “The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).”

Wittgenstein says, “if there were a law of causality, it might be put in the following way: There are laws of nature.” (6.36) He is telling us that the law of causality amounts to nothing more than a belief that things happen for a reason. The laws of nature exist to tell us just that:

there are regularities in nature, and nothing happens without a reason. That is why Wittgenstein does not call causality a law, but rather “the form of a law”. (6.32) Accepting causality is necessary to explain natural phenomena in terms of laws. When thinking of the law of causality either as a logical law or as something discovered in experience, it is a delusion. In both cases we would be making the mistake of reifying causality, of thinking of it as a “thing” that has some sort of being. Causality has no being, either as a necessary part of logical form, nor as a binding force at work upon nature. Rather, it is a tool we bring to bear on nature in order to understand its regularities with greater clarity. The reification of causality and other natural laws leads to thinking that modern science can fully explain the world, that fundamental truths about the workings of the world have been identified, when in fact it is simply a developed framework within which the workings of the world can be thought about. This framework may in many ways be more powerful than superstition, but they work according to the same principle: both scientific laws and superstition provide explanations for why things happen the way they do. In both cases, however, the explanations themselves are not found in nature, but are found in the framework we adopt. We should note that Wittgenstein is not anti-scientific; he is not telling us that scientific truths are useless or simply matters of convention. He is simply suggesting that the laws we use to explain natural phenomena are not themselves things that we have discovered experimentally. Perhaps a better term to explain Wittgenstein's position would be “anti-scientistic”: he is skeptical about the power of science to provide answers to the fundamental questions it claims to have settled.

The concluding remarks of the *Tractatus* are by far the most controversial. How are we to understand the *Tractatus* in light of Wittgenstein's claim that what he has said is nonsense? In his introduction, Russell voices the understandable sentiment that, “after all, Mr. Wittgenstein

manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the skeptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole.” (xxi) Propositions such as “the world is all that is the case” or “the world is the totality of facts, not of things” are nonsense, because they say things about the world as a whole when all that can be talked about are itemized facts within the world. The *Tractatus* speaks of things that cannot be said, but can only be shown.

If language is a game, this inquiry is to analyze the written and visual languages that disrupt the rules of the game. Upsetting the rules might result in presenting one with many more possibilities, as in chess, which does not solely depend on the rules but also on the opponent’s behavior during the game. There is a fundamental distinction between grammatical rules and laws obtained from observation. Wittgenstein saw rules of language as the means by which experience is organized. Merleau-Ponty made a similar attempt of clarifying the task of the philosopher while remaining ambiguous. For Wittgenstein, what cannot be spoken should stay unsaid, while for Merleau-Ponty, the unfinished nature of the process must be accepted. In spite of their analogous query, they diverge in the view of themselves in the world. Logic and existence are to Wittgenstein’s discourse what movement and essence are to Merleau-Ponty, both shaping the world they perceive. The main difference is that while Merleau-Ponty accepts the ever-changing facet of the world, Wittgenstein cannot talk about any aspects of the world which he can not see or explain, since in accordance with his philosophy they would be false: “The facts in logical space are the world” (Wittgenstein 1.13).

B. *Tractatus* and *Tao Te Ching*

Although the basic philosophies of Lao Tzu and Wittgenstein are quite different, they are nevertheless similar in that each believes the world to be the way it is because of how it is

thought and perceived to be. They also share a comparable way of presenting their argument using paradoxes and short aphoristic sentences to give readers the necessary instruments to change their self-perceptions, the world, and thus, the relationship between them. Wittgenstein considers human limitation to be primarily the direct influence of language. He believes that language imprisons us: “The limits of my language means the limits of my world.”¹⁶² Since Wittgenstein has already asserted that only propositions that depict facts in the world have meaning, he concludes that all the propositions in the *Tractatus* are meaningless.

The first two lines of *Tao Te Ching* “The way that can be spoken of. Is not the constant way” (Lao Tzu I) resemble Wittgenstein’s last sentence of the *Tractatus* “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein 7). For the Taoists, the Tao or the ‘way’ was more than the right way of life within human society; it is the way in which the universe worked. ‘The inexpressible Tao’ is that which makes all things possible. By naming it Tao, we place the Tao in space-time, so that the Tao becomes ‘the expressible Tao’. For Taoists, to go beyond unity is the only way to reach ‘the inexpressible Tao’. For Aimin Shen, “we have to transcend logical sense and actual sense in order to see the world as a whole. To transcend both senses is to reach the boundary of nonsense. Despite the different terminologies employed by Wittgenstein and Lao Tzu the conceptions of nonsense and of ‘the inexpressible Tao’ are fundamentally equivalent” (Shen 166). In conjunction, the proposition 6.54 in the *Tractatus*, which precedes the last one, seems pertinent to the question of the self and the world; it encapsulates Wittgenstein’s method. He takes the metaphor of climbing up the ladder to reiterate the fact that once we have read *Tractatus* as being “nonsensical” it is impossible then to go back down the ladder and so it should be thrown away. He believes that readers will perceive a proper vision of the world.

¹⁶² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, Routledge Classics, 2008, p. 68.

Tractatus has a metaphysical effect indeed, not only on readers but the philosopher himself, who still sees himself outside the world.

In addition, the Taoists' worldview shares strong affinities with Merleau-Ponty's: "There is a world', or rather; 'There is the world'; I can never completely account for this ever-reiterated assertion in my life" (Merleau-Ponty xix). The mobile character of phenomenology represents the innermost nature of the movement. In Taoism, the nothing is not one of two poles (as yin and yang). Lao Tzu writes, "The way is empty, yet use will not drain it" (Lao Tzu IV). Tao may be transmitted but cannot be received. It can be attained but not seen. Tao exists by and through itself. For Merleau-Ponty, the nothing is the functional place of a transformation. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he shows that dualism needs to be discarded in favor of a more primal and accurate understanding of human existence and perception. He characterizes phenomenology as a bi-directional movement: it is both a turning away from the world and a return to it. On one hand, it aims at describing experiences regardless of their casual origin; on the other, phenomenology tries to understand the relationship between experience and the world. He argues that phenomenology is a way of moving or a method: "phenomenology can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that is existed as a movement before arriving awareness of itself as philosophy" (Merleau-Ponty viii). This resonates with the *Tao Te Ching*, "The way is forever nameless... The way is to the world as the River and the Sea are to rivulets and streams" (Lao Tzu XXXII). Merleau-Ponty and Lao Tzu both highlight the fact that conventional, categorical ways of seeing and framing the world fall short in terms of the Surrealist quest for surfacing that which is hidden.

The interesting aspects of these schools of thought are most significant in the reading of Desnos' works and avant-garde films from the ideas that they share: paradoxical and nonsensical

elements, chance, and freedom. Ultimately for Desnos, avant-garde filmmakers, Jung, and Taoists, freedom is a mode of being-in-the-world, which enables transcendence, namely of egos. Man Ray's *Etoile de mer* (1926) exemplifies the idea that meaning does not only depend on the words, but how the words interact with the environment or with the 'I' (*je*) and thus the 'I' with the world. Man Ray heard Desnos' poem and used in his film what he heard when Desnos read it. It clearly reiterates what Breton said in *Les mots sans rides*, that the expression of an idea depends as much on the appearance of the words as on their meanings. In *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*, Johanna Maltt claims that for Breton language is not subjugated to thought but generates it, and in turn, language is conducive to the world it finds itself in. Moreover, because of their corporality and malleable morphology, words and visual images emblemize the material world. The multiple meanings of a word or an image generate a world in which no hierarchy and no contrary exists, a world where every word and image has equal weight, in line with the Tao.

Chapter three covers how for Robert Desnos "the process of understanding language in a corporeal sense happens in the mouth, in the air of a breath, of a voice."¹⁶³ Desnos' poems highlighted the human voice. In *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life*, Katherine Conley quotes French poet, René Plantier, who observes that Surrealists "represent the daily work of the modern poet. Their double meanings are only fully realized when spoken by an animate body. Desnos, in other words, both embodies Surrealism and creates a 'body' of language connected to the body - a corpus that is a corps - requiring the participatory activity of speaking, laughing, listening."¹⁶⁴ If language is the agent of transformation in Surrealism, as Mary Ann Caws argues, then Desnos is that agent's representative. The most extensive as well as

¹⁶³ Conley, Katherine *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life*. University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 35.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

interesting comparison between nonsense and Surrealism, Carroll's nonsense in particular, is made by Stern who elaborates on three methods the Surrealists applied in common with Carroll: 1) the use of material offered by dreams and madness, 2) automatic composition, and 3) the probing of language and logic, space and time. It is really no more than to say that arbitrariness and incongruity are procedures that Surrealists, and especially Desnos, shared with nonsense. Gilles Deleuze pointed at the 'sous-sens', which must be distinguished from the 'non-sens' of the surface. In Desnos, the 'sub-sense' is the ultimate significance of a text or the painting.

The main purpose of Surrealism was to free the unconscious from the control of reason. The Surrealists conducted most of these automatic activities through the medium of hypnotic sleep, from which Breton derived his definition of Surrealism. To him, Desnos was the purest of all the Surrealist practitioners. The results of these sessions resulted in revealing hidden identities and thus threatened the visible ones in showing that nothing is ever fixed, but constantly evolving. Another example of this malleable reality is the already-discussed work of Marcel Duchamp's: *Fountain* (1917), the concept of *Readymade* or *found art*. Duchamp made use of existing objects, here the urinal, which he slightly tilted, changing its original context, name, and use. The fountain, found now in a museum, is a replica of Duchamp's original, which was lost. By renaming it, by conceptualizing it, Duchamp made another significant meaning disappear to the benefit of nonsense or a never before considered sense.

Chapter 3: Surrealist Nonsense in Robert Desnos

“I dream of inside and outside, top and bottom, here and there, today and tomorrow. And inside, outside, top, bottom, here, there, today, tomorrow mingle, interweave, dissolve. The lifting of borders is the way that leads to the essential.”¹⁶⁵

Arthur Rimbaud influenced many poets and writers - Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, Patti Smith - and most importantly, the Surrealists, who saw in him a precursor of the movement. In *La lettre du voyant*, Rimbaud gives a new definition of poet, embraced by the Surrealists,

“Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que les quintessences.”¹⁶⁶

Robert Desnos bore a resemblance to Rimbaud. Both poets came from bourgeois families and left comfortable lives to experience the delights of a nonconformist, antisocial lifestyle. Rimbaud wrote jokingly, “ce qui fait ma supériorité, c'est que je n'ai pas de Coeur” (“What makes me superior is that I have no heart”)¹⁶⁷ Desnos shared this rejection of conformity and asserted in his work “...complete non conformism... so that there can be no questions of translating [Surrealism]... Surrealism is the ‘invisible ray’, which will one day enable us to win out over our opponents.”¹⁶⁸ In *Robert Desnos: Son Oeuvre dans l' 'éclairage de Arthur Rimbaud et Guillaume Apollinaire*, Laure Laborie makes clear that both shared a love for words and neologism and excelled in the disorganization of language.

¹⁶⁵ Jean Arp, “Elemente”, *Gesammelte Gedichte II*, 1949, p. 79-80.

¹⁶⁶ Arthur Rimbaud, “Lettre à un voyant” written May 15, 1871 to Paul Demeny. [“The poet makes himself visible through a long, endless and rational disturbance of all senses. All the forms of love, pain, and folly; he, himself is seeking, he exhausts all poisons in him, to keep only the quintessence.”]

¹⁶⁷ Arthur Rimbaud, in Laure Laborie’s *Robert Desnos: Son oeuvre dans l' 'éclairage de Arthur Rimbaud et Guillaume Apollinaire*. Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1973, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor Paperback, 1972, p. 47.

Jean Arp insisted on the idea of dissolution - destruction to oppose the model of order, which sought to limit the imagination, contrary to the continuous changes achieved in altering a work over and over. Speaking of unexpected results, André Breton in *Les mots sans rides*, credits Rimbaud without naming him, for having stirred the order of things in language by assigning a color to the five vowels of the alphabet. Rimbaud, however, altered the original order from A, E, I, O, U to A, E, I, U, O. *Voyelles* (Vowels) is perhaps Rimbaud most well known poem.

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes:
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombinent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfes d'ombre ; E, candeur des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes;

U, cycles, vibrations divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges:
- O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux! (*Voyelles*, Arthur Rimbaud 1854-1891).

(A Black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
Which buzz around cruel smells,

Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapors and of tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
In anger or in the raptures of penitence;

U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas,
The peace of pastures dotted with animals, the peace of the furrows
Which alchemy prints on broad studious foreheads;

O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds,
Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels:

O the Omega, the violet ray of Her Eyes.)” (Oliver Bernard: Arthur Rimbaud, Collected Poems, 1962)

From the first vowel, A (alpha), to the last, O (Omega), the system is perfect. The vowels are capitalized and detached from the word “*Vowels*”, as if they were incantations. Furthermore, it does not matter whether or not the A be black or blue. Rimbaud plays with the letters to show their diversity. The reading of the text becomes pluralistic where the words evoke more images than usual, and a new world comes into motion. “The mysterious origins” (*Les naissances latentes*) are to come and become through the constant movement of words and images. Rimbaud matches five colors to five vowels. Many scholars have analyzed Rimbaud’s choice in relation to specific theories when in fact his choice represents an arbitrary act. The color for each vowel is on a whim, without logic. The importance is not the color, but what the vowel represents and becomes through this alchemical process; “A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies - which buzz around cruel smells”; “Gulfs of shadow; E, witness of vapors and of tents”; “I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips”; “U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas”; “O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds”. The words and letters become sound objects whose purpose is to evoke a multitude of others. Rimbaud, through his colorful alphabet, creates a poetic world where the words play with meaning. Rimbaud’s style is lucid and rich and *Vowels* is a pivotal poem. Breton saw in Rimbaud a revolutionary who endeavored to upset the rules of what is expected of language and set forth the engine of the Surrealist revolution. He adds,

“ C’est en assignant une couleur aux voyelles que pour la première fois, de façon consciente et en acceptant d’en supporter les conséquences, on détourna le mot de son devoir de signifier. Il naquit ce jour-là à une existence concrète, comme on ne lui en avait pas encore supposée. Rien ne sert de discuter de l’exactitude du phénomène de l’audition colorée, sur lequel je n’ai garde de m’appuyer. Ce qui m’importe, c’est que l’alarme est donnée et que désormais il semble imprudent de spéculer sur l’innocence des mots... Le sens des mots ne va pas sans mélange et l’on n’est pas près de déterminer dans quelle

mesure le sens figuré agit progressivement sur le sens propre, à chaque variation de celui-ci devant correspondre une variation de celui-là.”¹⁶⁹

In *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Maurice Nadeau cites the Declaration of January 27th, 1925 that outlined the Surrealists’ intentions, and among them, four clearly illustrate how Surrealism ought to treat language, especially Robert Desnos. Nadeau writes,

“...2° Le surréalisme n’est pas un moyen d’expression nouveau ou plus facile ni même une métaphysique de la poésie. Il est un moyen de libération totale de l’esprit et de tout ce qui lui ressemble. 3° Nous sommes bien décidés à faire une Révolution. 4° Nous avons accolé le mot surréalisme au mot de Révolution uniquement pour montrer le caractère désintéressé, détaché et même tout à fait désespéré de cette révolution. 5° Nous ne prétendons rien changer aux erreurs des hommes mais nous pensons bien leur démontrer la fragilité de leurs pensées, et sur quelles assises mouvantes, sur quelles caves, ils ont fixé leurs tremblantes maisons.”¹⁷⁰

In this passage, it is evident that the spirit and guidelines of Surrealism are present in the poetry of Robert Desnos, who freed words from conventional ties, played with the meaning of words so more meanings could arise from these permutations, and by doing so, showed readers what is read, seen or felt might only be one fragment of a reality yet to be perceived elsewhere. It is by following the legacy of Rimbaud and the Manifestoes of Surrealism that Desnos’ nonsensical texts will be investigated.

¹⁶⁹ André Breton, *Les pas perdus*. Editions Gallimard, 1969, p. 132. [“It’s by assigning a color to vowels for the first time, consciously and by accepting its consequences, that we divert the word from its duty of signifier. It was then born into a concrete existence, like never envisioned before. There is no point in discussing the accuracy of the phenomenon of colored hearing, on which I do not dare to lean. What matters to me is that the alarm is given and now it seems unwise to speculate on the innocence of words... The meaning of words does not go without being unadulterated and we are hardly near determining to what extent the figurative meaning acts gradually on the meaning itself, to each variation of the latter corresponds another of the former.”]

¹⁷⁰ Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme*. Editions du Seuil, 1964, p. 69. [“Surrealism is not a new or an easier means of expression or not even a metaphysic of poetry. It’s a means of total liberation of the mind and of all that resembles it. We are determined to start a revolution. We attached the word surrealism to the word of revolution to solely show the disinterested, detached and even quite heroic nature of this revolution. We do not presume to change anything to man’s mistakes but we intend to show them how fragile their thoughts are, and on what shifting foundations, and on what cellars they built their shaking homes.”]

1. Robert Desnos: Wayfarer

Robert Desnos was born on July 4, 1900 in Paris and lived most of his life in the Old Saint Martin quarter, a neighborhood that attracted many artists like Gérard de Nerval, Victor Hugo, Rimbaud, and other magicians and alchemists which shaped Desnos' sensibility for words and imagination. Mary Ann Caws calls him "The Poet-Adventurer" with humanistic and journalistic attitudes, which show the two opposed scopes of his writing. In *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*, Caws provides her readers with a blend of these two attitudes. Focusing on the notions of movement, myth, and voyage, seemingly connected through the concepts of language and of love, she shares Breton's admiration for Desnos, at least during their great Surrealist period (1924-1930) together,

"Of all the poets of the Surrealist period, Desnos shows the greatest involvement in the question of language, the most intense preoccupation with his own poetic voice – thus, a constant meta-textual reference which is of special appeal to contemporary poetics."¹⁷¹

This aspect of Desnos' poetry lends itself to analysis, specifically linguistic and philosophical. Desnos was always fascinated with words and alchemy. At the age of sixteen, he transcribed his dreams and once involved in the Surrealist movement, he excelled in verbal experiments and automatic writing. During the period of hypnotic sleep, he outbid everyone, even Marcel Duchamp, whom he admired. One of his word games is *Rrose Sélavy*, (Eros: c'est la vie) Duchamp's alter ego. In 1930, Desnos published *Rrose Sélavy* (1922-1923) in *Corps et biens*. Here are a few of what Breton called *calembours* (puns), which were not added to *Corps et biens*, "Robert Delaunay: de l'eau naît, gare à l'hammeçon... Pourquoi le problème de la vie est-il en proie des vis blames?"¹⁷² When Desnos met Breton in 1921, the mutual admiration was short lived and by 1923 their friendship began to deteriorate. Desnos did not want to limit

¹⁷¹ Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1977, p. 2.

¹⁷² Robert desnos, "Rose Sélavy" Desnos. Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 147. ("Robert Delaunay: from water is born, watch the bait... Why is the problem of life subject to pale screws?")

himself solely to the Surrealist quest but also to venture into new territory. In 1923, he began working as a journalist in *La Vie Moderne*, *Paris-Journal*, *Paris-Soir*. The rift between Desnos and Breton became really apparent by 1927. By then, Desnos became more and more involved in his new journalistic style and on February 21st, 1928 he embarked on *Espagne* to Havana as a journalist to cover the 7th Latin American press congress. There in Cuba, Desnos fell in love with the beauty of the country and its people, who were fighting for their independence. It is also there that he developed an interest in Cuban music. Desnos left Havana in March 1928, clandestinely taking his friend, Alejo Carpentier, himself a musicologist. From that point on, his poetry was infused with obsessive rhythms, forcing readers to no longer read or speak his poetry but sing it. From 1932 to 1939, this new passion for aural sound and music compelled him to write radio advertising for “Paul Deharme in *Information et Publicité*, doing what he called another sort of poetry.”¹⁷³ Working for the radio, he sought to throw himself “passionately into the almost mathematical, yet intuitive work of adapting words to music, of fabricating sentences, proverbs and mottos for advertising, the primary exigency of this work being a return to the people’s taste in the way of rhyme.”¹⁷⁴ Breton always considered the term journalism loaded with negative connotation as it only concerns itself with superficial and trite events at the expense of the essential and the poetic. For Desnos, however, the most mundane events of daily life were what mattered most. In *The Second Manifesto* (1926) Breton writes about Desnos,

“...we are forced to say to Robert Desnos that, as we no longer expect anything whatsoever from him, we have no choice but to free him from any commitments he may have made in the past with us. I must confess that it saddens me... Desnos played an essential, and unforgettable, role in the evolution of Surrealism, and the present moment is probably more ill chosen than any other to deny it... The newspaper is an ogre that kills all who make it live.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*. University of Massachusetts press, 1977, p. 9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Mary Ann Caws quoting Desnos, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. University of Michigan, 1969, p.165-67.

By the time the war broke out and put an end to his work for the radio, he went back to writing poetry. Desnos was arrested in February 1944. When the Gestapo came to pick him up, he gave his wife Yuki his parker, a cherished pen that a dear friend Fréjaville had given him during his Havana trip. He told her “Garde-le moi, chérie, je reviendrai le chercher. (Keep it for me, love, I will be back for it)” Desnos remained in prison at Fresnes before being sent to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. He died on June 8, 1945 of typhoid fever. Desnos is a writer whose journey was, at least early in his career, an inner one, and his evolution displays an obsession with shifting meanings, words, images, reinvention, starting everyday anew.

2. Poetry as Game

When discussing the avant-garde from a chronological standpoint, it can begin with Futurism and end with Surrealism. Marinetti’s innovations to poetry generated great transformations in the use of language by forbidding conjugation, connection, conjunctions. As E. San Juan pointed out in his article *Antonio Gramsci on Surrealism and Avant-Garde*, “the purpose of writing becomes not communication but illumination, even self-illumination, with the emphasis on the experience itself rather than on any of the forms of... communicating it.”¹⁷⁶ The Surrealists did exactly what they had planned linguistically, changing language by shifting logic. They sought to destroy bourgeois morality and class inequalities, uphold the freedom of imagination through the use of automatic writing and painting. “It was a weapon that exploded the French language. It shook up absolutely everything... a process of disalienation”. Earlier, Marinetti valorized the materialization of intuition and perception in his manifesto. The *Futurist Manifesto* by Marinetti was one of the first documents to celebrate the automobile as an object of

¹⁷⁶ Antonio Gramsci *Surrealism and the Avant-Garde*. Journal of Aesthetic Education, V 37 n2, Summer 2003, p. 34

beauty and to cite speed and acceleration as aesthetic elements. “We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed.”¹⁷⁷ The theme of the machine and technology were not new to Marinetti but his method of molding these themes into modern poetical form was a novelty, which he called *Words-in-Freedom* (*parole in libertà*). *Words-in-Freedom* were essentially an attempt to liberate the sounds of poetry from the restrictions of syntax and grammar. His primary tool was onomatopoeia. The noise of machine guns, bombs, and shrapnel became new words in the poetical vocabulary.

In *The Futurist Movement*, Marjorie Perloff affirms that what the poet fears most is arrest, the end of the journey, and for Desnos, “one perception must immediately lead to a further perception ... [so that] the poem becomes an arena in action.”¹⁷⁸ Originally, Marinetti intended to call this new artistic movement *Electricismo* or *Dinamismo* to highlight that literature at that time in Italy should reflect the impact that steam engines, automobiles, airplanes, electricity, and telephones have on art. This energy enables artists to integrate 1) intuition as a natural process and 2) chance as artistic process, with the simultaneous desire to reconcile life and performance. Futurism sought to bridge the gap between art and life and to bring aesthetic innovation to the real world. Life was to be changed through art, and art was to become a form of life. Marinetti trail-blazed the road to be taken in regards to language:

“We have to destroy syntax, to scatter nouns at random, even as they come to mind... Every noun must have its double... the noun has to be followed, without use of conjunctions, by that noun to which it is linked by analogy. Perception through analogy/speed... Abolish punctuation as well... Analogy, an ever-widening of analogies. In language, we must therefore rid ourselves of everything containing stereotyped images and colorless metaphors, which means just about everything... There are no categories of images, noble or crude or commonplace, eccentric or natural... Chain of analogies it

¹⁷⁷ F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*. Edited By Günter Berghaus. Translated by Doug Thompson. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006, p. 128.

¹⁷⁸ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 23-4.

evokes... tight network of images or analogies [in other words] Maximum of disorder.”¹⁷⁹

In *The Art of Noises*, Luigi Russolo argues that, “Vowels represent sound in language, while consonants clearly represent noise... By making use of noise we hear the entire value of noise onomatopoeias, they revealed all the enormous importance of this element of language, which had previously remained the slave of vowels.” (Russolo 56-7) For the Futurists, the free word, the consonants representing noise, was finally adopted for its own sake; and like music, it served to multiply the elements of expression and emotion. Robert Desnos’ poetry combined both 1) the quest for the rare word and 2) just the words themselves to be hurled straight at the reader’s face. Desnos’ earlier writings reflected Marinetti’s concept of speed, noise, and fragmentation, and his following works, *Rrose Sélavy* (Eros It’s life), *L’Aumonyne* (Homonym) and *Language Cuit* (Cooked Language) - all published in 1923 and later collected in *Corps et Biens* in 1930 - united Marinetti’s legacy with Lewis Carroll’s nonsense poetry. The Futurists and a few Surrealists wanted to set language free from convention and grammatical ties. Desnos’ *Rrose Sélavy* questioned the function of language through its slippage, its flexibility; it is a succession of 150 unordered statements, which almost prevent the reader from catching his breath. These consecutive sentences on the page create a certain speed, which free the text from grammatical and spatial rules. In *Rrose Sélavy*, a majority of these assertions are based on a vertical mirror image, where the end of the sentence more or less reflects the beginning: “the deformation, insofar as it yields a different perception form the original one, occasionally reveals a serious concern beyond the anagrams, the interior rhymes, and the homonymic play.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*. Edited By Günter Berghaus. Translated by Doug Thompson. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006, p. 112-13.

¹⁸⁰ Mary Ann Caws *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*. University Of Massachusetts Press, 1977, p. 59.

Desnos' sentences grow beyond the control of the poet, shifting the focus from the author's voice to the game itself. Caws claims that in Desnos, "There is a parallel breaking-down of the logical patterns and habits of looking, so that, even the shapes of letters can take on a profile of primary importance regardless of content."¹⁸¹ In her extensive and elaborate book, *Robert Desnos or L'exploration des limites*, Marie-Claire Dumas gives homage to not only the poet but also to his poetical language still unknown in 1974. According to her the Desnosian's exploration never seems to end because of the complex quality of the poet and the perpetual movement found in his writing. She argues,

Rose Sélavy met la langue en équation selon une algèbre linguistique que Saussure n'aurait peut-être pas reniée, *L'Aumonyme* pousse son extrême conséquence un processus de convertibilité d'un énoncé en un autre énoncé – l'horlorime en étant la parfaite manifestation - et fait éclater les cloisonnements entre modes d'expression - à la frontière du rebus - enfin *Language Cuit* questionne la langue sur son pouvoir significatif non plus, comme *Rose Sélavy*, en la détournant de sa préoccupation de signifier, mais au contraire en usant, perturbant, redoublant les expressions les plus figées de la langue."¹⁸²

Likewise, written in 1953, and added to the Manifestoes of Surrealism, Breton asserts that,

The decisive act of Surrealism was to show that they flow along continuously... It is no longer a question of making the free association of ideas serve the elaboration of a literary work that tends to outdo preceding works by its daring, but at the same time is a work whose recourse to polyphonic, polysemantic, and other inspirations presupposes a constant return to the arbitrary. The whole point, for Surrealism, was to convince ourselves that we had got our hands on the "prime matter" (in the alchemical sense) of language... in other words, rather than go back from the thing signified to the sign that lives on after it (which moreover, would prove to be impossible), it is better to go back in one leap to the birth of that which signifies."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁸² Marie-Claire Dumas, "Désordre Formel", *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 300. ["*Rose Sélavy* transforms language into algebra that even Saussure would not have denied, *L'aumonyme* pushes its extreme consequence, a process of convertibility of one statement into another- the holorhyme being its perfect manifestation - and shatters the boundaries between modes of expression - to the limit of a rebus – finally *Language Cuit* (Cooked Language) questions the signifying power of language, not like *Rose Sélavy*, by diverting it from its signifier, but rather by using, disturbing, redoubling the most congealed expressions of language."]

¹⁸³ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 298-99.

The Surrealist attitude toward language manifested in the flux of words set free, resisting the logical rules of grammar and syntax. Breton believed that Surrealist writing was more about the process, playing with words the way an alchemist plays with prime matter, than the found object after such an operation. In the essay *Les mots sans rides* (*The Unwrinkled Words*) taken from *Les pas perdus* (*The Lost Footsteps*) written in 1924, Breton talks about the importance of wordplay: "Nous sommes plusieurs à y attacher une importance extreme."¹⁸⁴ The six wordplays of Rose Sélavy published in the last issue of *Littérature* crystallized the seriousness of this technique. Desnos under hypnosis was the only one to communicate and play these linguistic games with Duchamp. Breton called them "*Cirque cerebral*" (Cerebral Circus) and for him the process of playing the words involved lovemaking more than game-playing: "Les mots du reste ont fini de jouer. Les mots font l'amour."¹⁸⁵ This game or love-making allowed the Surrealists to go deeper into the essence of words, something logic and common sense limit by staying on the surface of language, by imposing what makes sense on the reader.

In *L'esprit contre la raison* (1927), René Crevel, Surrealist poet, brought forth the idea that the Surrealist mind sought to turn against rationality, which was generally seen as the highest quality of the human mind. He quotes Breton who published in *Légitime défense*,

"Il ne s'agit pas du tout pour nous de réveiller les mots, de les soumettre à une savante manipulation pour les faire servir à la création d'un style aussi intéressant qu'on voudra. Constaté que les mots sont la matière première du style est à peine plus ingénieux que présenter les lettres comme base de l'alphabet. Les mots sont en effet bien autre chose et ils sont même peut-être tout."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ André Breton, "Les mots sans rides", *Les pas perdus*. Editions Gallimard, 1924, p. 134. ["Many of us attach an extreme importance to it."]

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.134. ["The words stopped playing. They make love."]

¹⁸⁶ André Breton, *Défense Légitime* in *L'Esprit contre la Raison* by René Crevel. *Cahiers du Sud*, Marseille, 1927. ["Our intention is not to wake up the words, to subject them to a clever manipulation so that they serve the creation of style as interesting as one will; not at all. To admit that the words are the raw material of a style is more ingenious than just presenting the letters as a basis of the alphabet. The words are indeed more than this and perhaps everything."]

The language that Desnos makes use of, is the one as Breton describes it, freed from reason but instead gifted with glamour which only refers to language itself, escaping meaning altogether. In “Désordre formel”, Dumas affirms that, “...des courts-circuits de l’automatisme au jeu délibéré sur la manière verbale- leur objectif ne fait pas de doute: amener la langue à ce point où la signification est perpétuellement fuyante et où les mots trament entre eux d’imprévisibles et péremptoires associations.”¹⁸⁷

A. Wordplay and Pun

For most Surrealists, language sought to set itself free from linguistic and grammatical ties. Desnos’ *Rose Sélavy* questions the function of language and its slippage. Marie Claire Dumas asserts without a doubt that Desnos’ objective was to bring language to a place where meaning is continuously elusive and where words weave together unpredictable and compelling associations. Through this experiment, language no longer appears as a perfectly controlled tool, an engine of pre-existing thought, but rather an autonomous body which forces a question of language itself. *Rose Sélavy* epitomizes this interrogation, “**Mots, êtes-vous des mythes et pareils au myrtes des morts?**”¹⁸⁸ Desnos plays with the words, transforming myths into myrtles, words of legendary tales into evergreen trees. Through this process of reading *mythes* and *myrtes* and *mots* and *morts* are interchangeable, perpetually moving from one condition to the other. The ancient tales are reborn not only through the telling of the myth but also through the imagery of the evergreen trees. For Desnos, writing was a game which, according to Dumas, is neither slow

¹⁸⁷Marie-Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 300, [“...from the short circuits of automatic writing to the willful game on the verbal expression - let’s be clear that their objective is to bring language to a point where meaning is continuously elusive and where words weave together unpredictable and compelling associations.”]

¹⁸⁸Robert Desnos, “Rose Sélavy” *Corps et Biens* (1930). Quarto Gallimard, 1999, 509, p. 107, [“Words, are you myths and like myrtle of the dead?”]

nor suspended, but in constant flux “là est son bon plaisir.”¹⁸⁹ *Rrose Sélavy*’s succession of unordered statements focus on rhythm, movement, and congruence:

“*Ô mon crane étoile de nacre qui s’étiole.*”¹⁹⁰
*Passez-moi mon arc berbère, dit le monarque barbare.*¹⁹¹

...
Rrose Sélavy connaît bien le **marchand du sel.**¹⁹²
Au paradis des diamants les carats sont des amants et la spirale est en crystal.”¹⁹³

The final word of the first line “*étiole*” draws the readers’ eyes back to “*étoile*” thus doubling the reading for a moment, a perfect example of the poetics of the double take, as Conley puts it; the words must be consistently reread to be fully appreciated. Then, another spoonerism that acknowledges the true author of *Rrose Sélavy*: “*Rrose Sélavy connaît bien le marchand de sel*” (*Rrose Sélavy* knows the merchant of salt well). The “merchant of salt” read with rearranged syllables yields a homonym of Marcel Duchamp. Years later, Michel Leiris commented on his own word game poems, partly inspired by Desnos, in that they made the reader “feel the voice in the writing” because of their “sonorous and phonetic basis”, especially because the lines are better grasped spoken aloud. Conley adds that, “Their repetitions resemble each other but not completely – the way Duchamp as *Sélavy* looks almost but not entirely like a woman - stimulate the eye as much as the ear in a game that challenges the reader to untangle a coherent meaning from them.”¹⁹⁴ Who is *Rrose Sélavy*? And if *Rrose Sélavy* knows well Marcel Duchamp, we can also affirm that *Rrose Sélavy* knows her/himself well. What Desnos does is give Duchamp his feminine double. Dumas even argues that in playing with language Desnos gives to his poem a

¹⁸⁹ Marie-Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 301.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Desnos, “*Rrose Sélavy*” *Corps et Biens* (1930). Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 502, [“Oh my skull, mother of pearl which fades out”]

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 11, p. 502 [“Pass me my Berber arch, says the barbarian monarch.”]

¹⁹² Ibid., 13, p. 503 [“Eros it’s life knows well the Salt man.”]

¹⁹³ Ibid., 56, p. 506 [“In the paradise of diamonds the carats are lovers and the spiral is made of crystal.”]

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

sense of Oedipal tragedy. According to her, he gets rid of Marcel Duchamp/Laios, partner of Rose Sélavy/Jocaste, and by these word games steps into Oedipus' shoes, subverting parental influences. For Desnos, Rose Sélavy remains "un être de langage"¹⁹⁵.

Dumas typifies Desnos' language as being, "a perpetual slippage of the signification that defined the thought outside its enunciation"¹⁹⁶. *Contrepèterie* (spoonerism) is a word play in which corresponding phonemes or syllables in a phrase are swapped to create a new one. Often, this new phrase presents a radical, and sometimes indecent, meaning masked by the apparent innocence of the initial phrase. The language no longer appears to be perfectly controlled by the poet and, if a discourse is taking place, the readers do not know who is talking. Desnos' use of language seems to be a response to André Breton's proclamation that "...the mediocrity of our time is essentially based on our ability to not enunciate what we see." Furthermore, by rearranging letters and words, new meanings are born only to disappear for another one. Many Surrealist texts showed great evidence of verbal and metaphoric play where the meaning of the text reproduces itself in the act of reading. In doing so, Desnos simultaneously produces another reality. Dumas calls Desnos' playfulness of language a way for the poet to constantly resist the single meaning of the poem; instead the meaning always seems to flee its own sentence. Caws adds, Desnos' technique can be found in the binary relationship of progression and negation:

"[The progression] would include various forms of intensification and fusion, of metamorphosis and modulation, of expansion and aggrandizement. The negative current would include various forms of separation and paralysis - by shattering, delay, halting, diffusion - and various forms of discomfort inflected on the reader - by deflection, incompleteness, and deflation, and by a series of distancing techniques, all of which work against the positive current. Finally, as the content is self-denying and our involvement is refused, it is the form of the language itself, which holds us"¹⁹⁷.

¹⁹⁵ Marie-Claire Dumas, "Désordre Formel", *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 306, ["a being of language"]

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 301.

¹⁹⁷ Mary Ann Caws *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*. University Of Massachusetts Press, 1977, p. 55.

For Marinetti, freedom of words equated to freedom of images and analogies as seen in Desnos' poem *Mes amis*. By discovering new associations between seemingly opposed things, the reader is in turn inspired to change. For instance, in the poem *Rose Sélavy, etc...* from *L'Aumonyme* (1923), Desnos frequently forces the attention to an unexpected angle of vision as if his obsession with *Rose Sélavy* must extend to the reader.

“ <i>Rose Sélavy, etc...</i>	(Eros it's life)
Rose Aiselle a vît	(Rose Aiselle lived)
Rr'ose, essaie là, vi.	(Eros tries there, lives)
Rôts et sel à vie.	(Burps or Main course and salt for life) Ambiguous
Rose S, L have I.	(Rose S, L has I)
Rosée, c'est la vie.	(Dawn, it' life)
Rose scella vît.	(Eros sealed lived)
Rose sella vît.	(Eros sella lived) plays on the sound <i>c est la</i>
Rose sait la vie.	(Eros knows life)
Rose, est-ce, hélas vie?	(Rose, is it life then?)
Rose aise hélà vît” (Desnos 509).	(Eros eases lived there) play on the sound again
Rose est-ce aile, est-ce elle?	(Eros is it this wing? Is this opinion)
est celle AVIS	

In *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life*, Katherine Conley gives a very detailed account of Marcel Duchamp's pseudonym. In October 1922 some word games were published as one-liners in *Littérature*, the anti-literary Dada journal co-edited by Breton, Soupault, and Aragon. These word games were attributed to 'Rose Sélavy' but written by Marcel Duchamp. In his biography of Duchamp, Calvin Tomkins explains that “Rose Sélavy sprang full-grown from the mind of Marcel Duchamp during the late summer or early fall of 1920” and quotes from an interview with Duchamp: “it was not to change my identity”, he once said, “but to have two identities.” His first thought had been to choose a Jewish name to subvert his Catholic background. “But then the idea jumped at me, why not a female name? Much better than to change religion would be to change sex.”¹⁹⁸ Katharine Conley conveys the idea that

¹⁹⁸ Katharine Conley, *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life*. University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 26.

Desnos' identity game may be read through Arthur Rimbaud's formula for expressing the self objectively through poetic language - his celebrated declaration that "I is an other" (je est un autre), which may be seen as an unconscious animation of what Richard Stamelman calls "a striving of selves within the self". Desnos' concern in enacting multiple personae and identities in a staging of selves has to do with the referentiality of language itself.¹⁹⁹

The wordplay of Desnos' title, *Rrose Sélavy* announces the nature of the text that follows because the name in the title "looks like" something different than it "sounds like". As in Duchamp's games with the name Rrose Sélavy (he signed plastic works with this pseudonym as well) and in Man Ray's photographs, both verbal and visual elements are at play, although in the Desnos text the focus is more clearly on the verbal. The name looks like a woman's ordinary name (Rose is a common French name), but the doubling of the letter r (which is unusual in Duchamp's writing of the name, particularly when first using it), when pronounced aloud, with the R of "Rose" doubling itself as it rolls off the glottis at the back of the mouth, yields a phrase with a legible meaning: *éros c'est la vie* (*Eros is life*) - love is life. Thus, a name (Rrose Sélavy) that has no real signified in language, except through the allusion and illusion of a pun, and which therefore circulates opaquely within the economy of communication, finds its opacity partly effaced and becomes something else - a message, a phrase, a meaningful expression. Like an experience of the "double take" when one looks once then twice at something to verify a perception, the experience of seeing Duchamp as Sélavy compels the spectator to take another, second look. Similarly, the double take experience of understanding the punned, masked meaning of the name Rrose Sélavy comes only after hearing it spoken aloud. These repetitions and successions of *Rrose Sélavy* take on different forms so that the meaning of these two words

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

are expanded while at the same distancing themselves from their origin. In this poem, the transfer of our attention onto the decomposed words creates movement. In his manifesto, Marinetti talked about how once words were set free, the poet's imagination was permitted to make connections with things that have no apparent connection, without using "*conductive wires*", but rather "*condensed Words-in-Freedom*".²⁰⁰ Again, as in *Rose Sélavy*, freedom of words equates to freedom of images and analogies. By discovering new analogies between things distant from, and seemingly opposed to, each other, a deeper appreciation for them forms.

Desnos found inspiration in Duchamp, who also played with language. The strength of Duchamp's verbal games is certainly their rigor, but more precisely their approximation that nothing can really mean anything from a linguistic viewpoint. These games can only be meaningful from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Dumas says, "Rose Sélavy trouve qu'un incesticide doit coucher avec sa mère avant de la tuer; les punaises sont de rigueur."²⁰¹ This affirms, with regard to verbal play, what separates Desnos from Duchamp: economy of words. Desnos prefers prodigality, and in response to Duchamp's vague approximation, he systematically chooses an explanation of the game that legitimizes and strips part of its mystery. Dumas further asserts,

Rose Sélavy peut se manifester comme un médiateur hypnotique entre Duchamp et lui [Desnos], elle est et reste un être de langage. Rose Sélavy est le symbole même du verbe libre ; c'est elle qui <dérise> les mots, c'est elle qui préside à la profération des jeux linguistiques et c'est dans l'espace qu'ils créent qu'elle acquiert son statut. Rose Sélavy n'est rien d'autre que les mots faisant l'amour; il ne faut d'ailleurs pas l'interroger

²⁰⁰ F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*. Edited By Günter Berghaus. Translated by Doug Thompson. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006, p. 123.

²⁰¹ Marie Claire Dumas, "Désordre Formel", *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites*. Edition Klincksieck, 1980, p. 305. ["Rose Sélavy thinks that an incesticide [combination of insect/incest] must sleep with its mother before killing her."]

longtemps pour qu'elle avoue que dans son verbe meme se trouve inscrit cette dimension du désir : Rose Sélavy = Éros c'est la vie."²⁰²

Conley further argues that Desnos' wordplay *Rose Sélavy* has no real signified except through the illusion and allusion of the pun. When words meet randomly on the page they generate meanings of their own, propelled not by logic but by the unconscious mind and the collision of words. In such a game, language has a propensity to be rearranged and reassembled. The first attempt was produced by Desnos, orally, while entranced in Breton's apartment, in response to Picabia's demand that he, Desnos, make a "Rose Sélavy-style poem": "Dans un temple en stuc de pomme le Pasteur distillait le suc des spaumes" (in a temple of apple stucco, the pastor distilled the sap of psalms). As is phonetically evident, the complex rearrangement of syllables – "stuc" morphing into "suc", "pomme" into "spaumes", and so on - discloses Desnos' gift for phonetic homonym."²⁰³ Other such one-line automatic verses were produced orally or in writing, like the wonderfully symmetric "le Temps est un aigle agile dans un temple" (Time is an agile eagle in a temple). It demonstrates Desnos' method of substituting one for the other, at either end of the poetic line, words or syllables that resemble each other, thus creating anagrammatic poems. Conley continues:

"Here the X shape of the chiasmic structure turns of the assonances of the paired words at the center of the line, *aigle* and *agile*. From these two words, waves of the poems' sounds move outward like ripples from a stone falling into a water, thus emphasizing the visually motivated, mirror-effect of the two substantives temps et temple. The sounds and structure work in tandem to suggest at once the fluidity of time - most certainly an experience of temporality characteristics of the automatic experience - and the primacy in the twentieth century of what is unquestionably a cult of chronological time."²⁰⁴

²⁰² Ibid., p. 307. ["Rose Sélavy can serve as a hypnotic mediator [between Duchamp and Desnos, she is and remains a being of language. Rose Sélavy is the true symbol of the verb freedom; she unwrinkles/brightens words, she presides over the uttering of language games and it is in the space that they create their status. Rose Sélavy is nothing other than the words making love; it does not take her long to admit her very same verb encapsulates this dimension of desire: Rose Sélavy = Eros is life."]

²⁰³ Katharine Conley, *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life*. University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 31.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 31

Desnos juxtaposes two distant conceptions of time and space, being both real and ephemeral; something ever gained and lost at the same time.

A second reading of this line may also presuppose a mistake on the reader's part. Another possible reading of this short poem focuses on the exchange of two spatially allied semantic pairings, *temps aigle* (eagle time) and *agile temple* (*agile temple*), for *eagle temple* and *agile time*. For Conley:

“This exchange resists assigning hierarchy to one combination of syllables over another, a resistance further underscored by the ways in which these pairings may be interpreted. For, even though the transposed combinations, *eagle temple* and *agile time*, might seem the more logical of the two pairings because of the nobility of the eagle and the flexible nature of time as experience in dreams, the strength of this transposed reading is counteracted by the order of the first reading, that is, *eagle time*, *agile temple*. In a work “under” a woman's name and yet signed or authorized by a man, these competing readings, which stand up to one another and emphatically transgress meaning itself, highlight the way language speaks in gender-neutral voice.”²⁰⁵

What these short poems exemplify is a level of intelligibility; they explore and test the limits of that quintessentially Surrealist in-between state, in which meaning and incoherence touch what Garber calls “the space of possibility”, and they make those limits visible. Conley really goes in detail, defining them as inhabiting and casting light upon the in-between, the space between sense and non-sense. She writes,

“They highlight, as art historian Heinrich Wölfflin observed about the baroque, “the relation of oscillating balance”. They play the role of a baroque fulcrum between two meanings, two word identities, in the way that Duchamp, crossed-dressed as *Sélavy*, is both one and the other, a man and a woman, in a game in which each half of the double ego pokes fun at the other. They resist categorization and mastery.”²⁰⁶

Unlike in *Rose Sélavy* where words mirror each other, words in *L'Aumonyme* (The Homonym, 1923) and *Language Cuit*, according to Dumas, “words bounce back, mate, free and

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 32

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

transform themselves until they lose their substance”²⁰⁷ In this short poem from *L’Aumonyne*, Desnos again enters headlong into this verbal tour de force:

“21 heures le 26-11-22
En attendant
En nattant l’attente
sous quelle tente
Mes tantes
ont-elles engendrée
les neveux silencieux
que nul ne veut sous les cieux
appeler ses cousins
en nattant les cheveux du silence
six lances
percent mes pensées en attendant”²⁰⁸

The words of the first line of the poem phonetically echo the second line. The last word of the third line “tente” bounces the reader back to the last word of the previous line. All through the poem Desnos plays with homonyms so that he creates “...des agglutissements de mots qui ne trouvent d’autre raison d’être à leur union que leur parenté de consonne initiale.”²⁰⁹ In 1923, Breton declared, “Poetry? It is not where we believe it is. It exists outside the words, style, etc.”²¹⁰ Desnos envisioned Surrealism to be the vehicle necessary for the poets to free language and the imagination from conventions. In a 1923 letter, he urged poets to write as quickly as possible without worrying about sense, syntax, spelling and punctuation. Automatic writing, a free-associative, stream-of-consciousness style, gave the Surrealists exactly this.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 60 “... obligent les mots à rebondir, à s’accoupler et se déprendre, à se transformer jusqu’à perdre toute substance;”

²⁰⁸ Robert Desnos, “*L’Aumonyne*” *Corps et Biens* (1930). Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 514 [A rough translation almost impossible for the play on words: While waiting/pleating the wait/Under which tent? My aunts/have given birth/to the silent nephews/that nobody wants under the heaven/call his cousins/pleating hair of silence/six spears/pierce my thought while waiting.]

²⁰⁹ Marie Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites*. Edition Klincksieck, 1980, p. 60 [“pilings up of words which can only find a reason to be in the union of the kinship of the initial consonant.”]

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 60 [André Breton in his article *Clairement* “La poésie? Elle n’est pas où on la croit. Elle existe en dehors des mots, du style, etc.”]

Similarly, a revolutionary aspect of Marinetti's use of language is found in his definition of noise. Vowels represent sound, while consonants represent noise. According to Luigi Russolo, "in the Futurist free words, the consonant representing noise is finally adopted for its own sake; and like music, it serves to multiply the elements of expression and emotion." (Russolo 56-7) For Marinetti, noise was the result of a friction or collision of words, which resembled the noise of the machine. In *Words-in-Freedom*, Marinetti introduces a new numerical sensitivity to language placing numbers chosen intuitively at the center of a word. "[He articulates] the thickness, the prominence, and the volume of the things that the word must express...The arrangement of +++++ has the purpose of bundling similar (equal) sensations together, for example 'The honey-like smell of plague sweat + the stink of ammonia etc.'" (Marinetti 142). He substitutes the lyricism of poetry with geometrical, mechanical and numerical sensibility of *Words-in-Freedom*. *Corps et Biens* includes poems that were written during Desnos' collaboration with the Surrealists between 1922 and 1923, first published in *Littérature*, a period when Desnos displayed verbal prowess in his writings and incorporated numbers into his poetry to reinforce the abstract simplicity of both systems of language: numbers being impersonal and words the opposite. Marinetti and Desnos aimed at showing that even though numbers have no direct meaning, they are nevertheless pleasing to the ear and eye within poetry. The poem:

Art rythmé; tic
Lit temps nie

exemplified Marinetti's numerical sensitivity. Desnos combined numbers with words so that the poem became a riddle. What distinguished Desnos from Marinetti though is that Desnos did not seem to choose numbers whimsically, but instead relying sound common to words and numbers to establish a connection, such as the pronunciation of *inde oeuf* resembles *un deux*. Although the definition of *inde oeuf* is nonexistent, it is meaningful in terms of sound. Readers are encouraged

to equate words to letters, numbers, and musical notes, and discover they are translating more than reading. The letters FMRFIJ have to be at first separated into groups of three, and the sound for FMR becomes “éphémère” (ephemeral) and FIJ, figé (congealed). For Dumas, the wordplay results in: “éphémère effigie”. Desnos gives the impression that numbers are equally as important as words, “Inde oeuf” for “un deux” (one two) followed by number three “Troie”, four “qu’âtre (quatre), five, six “siens... sise”, “...cet etui pour le 9” - here the sound of the two words “cet” et “etui” resembles the sound of 7 (sept) and 8 (huit) in French which is then followed by 9 and so on. Then, the poet abandons the arithmetic to mesh the sounds of words with those of numbers: “rosée rose si 12”, in which the number twelve in French is pronounced *douze* referring to a near analogous *douce* (gentle pink dew), the “z” sound approximated for “s”.

The following lines mirror the same linguistic game “navigateurs traversez les 2-3” (sailors, cross the strait) but in French the strait is pronounced “détroit”, or as Desnos writes it, “2-3” or “deux-trois”. Another mirroring game is the following line where “à toute 8-S” has to read first from left to right “à toute” and then right to left “S-huit” and read this way the sentence makes sense again “à toute suite” (“at once”). By the end of the poem, the game reaches its pinnacle where loves multiply and numbers double into “divine” - “10, 20”, dix-vingt (10-20) is also “2, 20” deux-vingt phonetically “devin” (voyant). Dumas argues that Desnos, in playing with language, attempts to erase the difficulties language presents, and by combining numbers, letters, and musical notes, the poet converts the non-linguistic into a linguistic system where the notes are not harmonious and the numbers do not amount to any sums, “l’arithmétique et la musique deviennent lexique”²¹¹. Desnos’ poetry requires not only the poet to be fully present during the creative process, but the readers are solicited to play an active role in finding sense,

²¹¹ Marie-Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites*. Edition Klincksieck, 1980, p. 334, [“the arithmetic and music become linguistic.”]

not in meaning, but in the arrangement between words, numbers, and notes. Caws further asserts Desnos always believed that only the poet could be free, not the form, and his poems are clearly a manifestation of the poet's freedom.

In addition, the numerical sensitivity bridges words and numbers while remaining slightly distorted or displaced. Another example in *L'Aumonyme* can be found in the following poem, which demonstrates two series of sounds that operate in a symmetrical, dualistic relationship:

*Un à un
les huns
passent l'Aisne
Nos aines confondent nos haines,
Henri Heine
un à un
les huns
deviennent des nains
Perdez-vous dans l'Ain
Et non dans l'Aisne"* (Desnos 519).

In this poem dedicated to Jacques Baron, Desnos played with the sounds: 1) "Un" and 2) "Aisne". Dumas asserts that these 2 sets of sounds introduce themselves as 1) masculine (Huns/Un/nains/Ain/Hein) and 2) feminine (Aisne/aines/haines/heine) (Dumas 332), which brings a grammatical suggestion to the text. She maintains that Desnos ultimately aimed at dispossessing signifiers from signified to liberate words from any linguistic system. A word on its own does not mean anything until it is placed in a sentence, wherein it acquires its sense, or in Desnos' case, its double-sense. The words are subject to slight alteration, displacement, when *Un* becomes *Aisne* and "nos aines" (our oldest) are mistaken for "nos haines" (our hatred). Here the meaning of the words is jumbled and only interpretation and connection of the words matters. Desnos scrutinized the signifiers and signified not to reinvent a new language, lexicon, or grammar, but to explore the limits of language. The signifiers are stripped of their signified, and

constitute therefore a new poetical practice Desnos named “pur jeu formel”²¹². In *The Field of Nonsense*, E. Sewell opposes the view that nonsense creates disorder out of order, as in dreams. She points out that syntax and grammar are not disordered, but only reference is. Nonsense is in fact created by the mind’s tendency towards order, and so order is the principle of organization in Nonsense. Nonsense is a game between order and disorder, a tension between the two. Sewell first stated that nonsense verse is too precise to be akin to poetry, then later modified this by remarking that nonsense adds an element of incongruity to poetry’s precision. Nonsense is a-logical and complementary to common sense rather than to sense.

Nonsense is not senseless, but it presents double-sense or double talk: “Nonsense, like all poetry, has something to do with both kinds of arranging, of making sense, but, unlike conventional verse, its first allegiance is to rhyme rather than reason...The strength of nonsense poetry is its tidy self-consistency and its independence from referents.”²¹³ Wim Tigges adds that the field of nonsense is dependent on its relationship to the system of other constituents. Meaning in nonsense is quintessential to the field it constructs. The difference between nonsense and gibberish is that nonsense is a system that can be learned, which also explains why it is highly abstract. The absurd is basically a play with order and disorder. Nonsense is a play with order only. It contrasts one system of order with another. Finally, “Victorian nonsense is more than a mere game. It is not the nonsense that is a denial of sense, but that which enables the construction of non-nonsense.”²¹⁴ For Desnos, the game was twofold: one, it embraced the traditional uses of language, and two, it deviated from language’s mundanity. The systematic disorder can only find its place in the rational use of language itself. By so doing, the words, according to Dumas, regain a ‘*nouvelle jeunesse*’, a new youth or energy; liberating the signifier

²¹² Ibid., p. 334, [“genuine systematic game”]

²¹³ Wim Tigges *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Editions Rodopi B.V Amsterdam© 1988, p. 20.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

from its signified while at the same time imposing its rules of the homonymic game onto the poet. *L'Aumonyme* is another example of Desnos' exploration of the homophonic equivalence, which generates heterogenic meanings where the phonic repetition produces others (Dumas 337). What prevailed for Desnos was the sound. The poems in *Corps et Biens* reiterate the dicey dimension of wordplay and Dumas adds "to rid the discourse of its rules, one runs the risk of losing oneself; the verbal disorder has for counterpart the mental disorder; the proliferation of systems of meanings (notes, numbers, letters) which are close to aphasic state (aphasia)"²¹⁵. Desnos' intention was to deconstruct the preconceived idea that language is a system of set rules adequate to each thought, to show that the harmony of this system of rules was in fact fragile: *Rose Sélavy* made significant connections between words no one would have suspected and Desnos offered a mathematics of the linguistic game.

B. Optical Verbal Play

The concept of fragmentation is prevalent in Desnos' poetry. Very influenced by the Cubist movement, he used the idea of collage to directly incorporate the concept of modernity. Marinetti's fragmented and disjointed writing made direct reference to the idea of progress, and more explicitly, the machine. In her preface of *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre and The Language of Rupture*, Perloff argues that collage combines "an actual fragment of the referent thus forcing the reader or viewer to consider the inter-play between preexisting message or material and the new artistic composition that results from the graft."²¹⁶ If collage (montage, assemblage, construction) calls into question the representability of the sign, Marinetti's manifesto, artist's book, and performance do the same for the stability of the

²¹⁵ Marie-Claire Dumas, "Désordre Formel", *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 337.

²¹⁶ Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, University of Chicago Press, 2003, xxxvi.

language barrier between artist and audience. In Desnos, words and images collide and take on hybrid forms. Words and images coexist to relay an energy or dynamic. They create a form, electric and modern. Through word and image interactions in writing, theater, cinema and ads, both Futurists and Surrealists turned their theories into practice, toward the continuation of a culture of fragments. For instance, in Desnos' *Corps et Biens*, the word *Aumonyme* is the rewriting of Homonym, which represents a linguistic transformation; *aumonyme* is the equivalent to l'automobile/femme (car/woman) and of image to *l'être hybride* (hybrid being), which encompasses both, *l'un dans l'autre* (one in the other) at which une *Sirène-Anémone* (Mermaid-Anemone), *Siramour* (femme-language) is born to reign over the imagination of the poet (Dumas 331). For Desnos, fragmentation provided a way to break from the traditional mode of artistic representation. What fragmentation does is force the reader to seek wholeness. It is the gap, the trace, and the absence that fascinates. In *The Culture of Fragments*, Clara Orban asserts that, "Between words and images, two distinct representational modes, lies a void, which can provide an interesting project of study" (Orban 13). For both Desnos and Marinetti, the discourse of the fragment, via the fragmentation of logic, spoke directly to their marginalization and rejection of conventional art form. The gap between word and image symbolizes the separation between themselves as artists and the larger 'mainstream' community. Even though both contemplated the void, Marinetti glorified the fragment while Desnos bridged the gap between fragments and the whole. He gave several meanings to words by playing with their homonyms and disembodiment. In *L'Aumonyme*, *p'oasis* establishes how Desnos fragments language into homonyms. Conley points out that P'oasis derives from *poésie* (poetry); this neologism implies the rebirth or the refreshing of poetry combining *poésie* et *oasis* (poetry and oasis) but also p'oasis makes reference to *Peau-Asie* (skin-Asia), an article written by Roger Vitrac in

Littérature number 9, preceding the one where Desnos publishes *L'Aumonyme*. *P'oasis* reiterates the dicey dimension of the language game Dumas defines as “à perdre les règles du discours on risque de se perdre soi-même; le désordre verbal a pour envers le désordre mental; la prolifération des systèmes de signification ... est peut-être proche de l'aphasie”²¹⁷.

The title echoes the word *poesie* (poetry) and *oasis* (oasis), a place where the poet can quench his thirst and creative process. Although the poem shows that the act does not come without frustration - “*les mots sont nos esclaves*” (words are our slaves) - words are subjected to the power of our thoughts, “*je vois les pensées oderer les mots*” (I see thoughts embalming words). Then, Desnos visually decomposes words in a minimalist way, using capital letters; *pensées* (thoughts) becomes *Pan C*, *crânes cassés* (broken skulls) - *KC*, *mains décédées* (dead hands) - *DCD*, and so forth. While reading Desnos' poems, the reader must deconstruct and stitch back together the pieces to make sense of the reading. But in the process of deciphering, the reader proceeds in a state of wonder and emerges empowered. Desnos, like Marinetti, is convinced that “poetry must be a continuous stream of new images, without which it is nothing more than anemia”²¹⁸ (Marinetti 109). In his manifesto, Marinetti declared that along with speed the seeming disconnect between words and images acts as a balance “between the physical, intellectual, and emotional... stretched between two opposite magnetic poles. Multiple and simultaneous consciousness in the same individual.” (Marinetti 212).

In addition, Dumas argues that *L'Aumonyme* in fact epitomizes generalized rhymes, the progressive discourse which reflects itself as it moves forward to again abandon its signified:

²¹⁷ Marie-Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 337, [“to rid the discourse of its rules, one runs the risk to lose oneself; the verbal disorder has for counterpart the mental disorder; the proliferation of systems of meanings... is close to the aphasic state.”]

²¹⁸ F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*. Edited By Günter Berghaus. Translated by Doug Thompson. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006, p. 109.

“Dans Rose Sélavy le sens court toujours le risque de ne pas constituer, dans le jeu des quatre mots qui se trouvent affrontés, dans *L'Aumonyme*, le sens surabonde et, en se multipliant, manifeste son incertitude. D'un côté, ce qui menace c'est le manqué de sens que "l'expansion tend à masquer, de l'autre c'est l'excès de sens que le texte, débordant et redondant, produit par accumulation. Manquant ou surabondant, le sens fait problème.”²¹⁹

L'Aumonyme calls attention to the relationship between several objects. The homonymy implies a relationship between at least two words, which cannot be distinguished either phonetically or graphically. Thus, homonymy in language generates confusion and that is what Desnos is paying attention to. Dumas argues, “Autant le phénomène d'analogie maintient la différence dans la mise en rapport, autant l'assimilation ici produite tourne à l'effacement des limites, au glissement de l'un dans l'autre”²²⁰. One of Desnos most original poems is *Elégant cantique de Salomé Salomon* in which he distills the sounds of the poem into two consonants. Each line of the poem alternates between the alliterations of “m” and “n”:

“...Mon mal meurt mais mes mains miment
 Noeuds, nerfs non anneaux. Nul nord
 Même amour mol? mames, mord
 Nus nénéés noone ni Nine.

...

Aime haine
 et n'aime
 haine aime
 aimai ne

MN

NM

NM

MN”²²¹ (Desnos 531).

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 335, [“The expansion tends to mask, on the other hand it is the excess of meaning that the text overflowing and redundant produces by accumulation. Missing or excessive, sense generates problem.”]

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 327, [“As much as the phenomenon of analogy maintains the difference in the ratio as just as so the produced assimilation here turns to erase its limits while producing the slippage from one into the other.”]

²²¹ Robert Desnos, “*Elégant cantique de Salomé Salomon*” from *Language Cuit* (1923) in *Corps et Biens* (1930). Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 531 [“My hurt dies but my hands mime/Knots, nerves non rings. No north/ Even feeble love? Moms, bit/ nun naked bosom neither Nine... Love hate/ And love/hate love/love not/LH/HL/LH/HL”]

Desnos exploits the nature of words, which are altered when read aloud and the reading of the poem becomes more about the dance between the “m” and “n” sounds than meaning. The last four lines of the poem indicate that Desnos’ main purpose was to arrive at a condensed poetic elixir in which the elements of love (aime – M) and hate (haine – N) battle, as the poem’s title alludes to. Dumas concurs, saying that the title mirrors the ambiguity that Salomé felt towards her victim, John The Baptist, torn between two inseparable spectrums of love and hatred, adding further that “le jeu de l’amour et de la haine qui se tisse dans l’histoire de Salomé tient dans le jeu de deux phonèmes.”²²² In this poem, Desnos disregarded the obvious reading and meaning in favor of a subtler one found in the game of alliteration. However, this game only makes sense in French since it loses its sound in translation. Sense is transient and contingent to a moment in time and space. Artaud argued,

“Tout vrai sentiment est en réalité intraduisible. L’exprimer c’est le trahir. Mais le traduire c’est le dissimuler. L’expression vraie cache ce qu’elle manifeste. Elle oppose l’esprit au vide réel de la nature, en créant par réaction une sorte de plein dans la pensée. Ou, si l’on préfère, par rapport à la manifestation illusion de la nature elle crée un vide dans la pensée. Tout sentiment puissant provoque en nous l’idée du vide. Et le langage clair qui empêche ce vide, empêche aussi la poésie d’apparaître dans la pensée. C’est pourquoi une image, une allégorie, une figure qui masque ce qu’elle voudrait révéler ont plus de signification pour l’esprit que les claretés apportées par les analyses de la parole”²²³

In *The Secret Art of Artaud*, Jacques Derrida asserted that the word *subjectile* is not to be translated; “...it will never cross the border of the French language. Besides, a subjectile, that is to say the support, the surface or the material, the unique body of the work in its first event, at its

²²² Marie-Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites*. Edition Klincksieck, 1980, p. 342, [“The game of love and hate woven in the story of Salome lies in the word game of two phonemes”]

²²³ Antonin Artaud “Le théâtre et son double” *Artaud Oeuvres*. Quarto Gallimard, 2004, p. 547. [Any real sentiment is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is to hide it. The true expression conceals what it manifests. It pits the mind against the real void of nature, by creating in response a kind of fullness in thought. Or, if one prefers, in regards to the illusory manifestation of nature it creates a vacuum in the mind. Every powerful feeling arouses in us the idea of emptiness. The clarity of language that prevents this void, also prevents poetry to appear in the mind. This is why an image, an allegory, a figure that masks what it would want to reveal, are more meaningful to the mind than the interpretations of the speech.]

moment of birth, which cannot be repeated, which is as distinct from the form as from the meaning and the representation, here again defies translation. It will never be transported into another language.” (p. 45) Derrida envisions Artaud’s work as a means of discussing the dislocation of language and meaning through the merging of word and sign as in *Rrose Sélavy*. If it is untranslatable, then where is the sense? Derrida decomposed ‘*Forcené*’ into:

“...for, fort, force, fors, and né, letting all the words in or, hors, sort incubate in it, ... [he] thought it was limited to its adjectival usage as past particle... You can’t *forcener un subjectile* in French without forcing the grammar of the word at the same time. *La forcbenerie* or *le forcènement*, the act or the state of the *forcené*, consists simply, and intransitively, in *forcener* or in *se forcerner*, that is to say, losing your reason, more exactly, your sense, in finding yourself hors sense, without sense (*fors* and *sen*).²²⁴

The subjectile is in between, the realm of both and neither, or as Derrida defined it, “It remains thus between sense and nonsense, outside of sense.”²²⁵

The earlier poem *Chanson de chasse* really epitomizes Desnos’ affinity for the manipulation of words to uphold a phonetic game. This poem is a tongue twister of “ch” and “ss” favoring again only sound since meaning is suggestive at best. “La chasseresse sans chance, de son sein choie son sang sur ces chasselas...”²²⁶ Another original poem that relies entirely on sound is *L’asile ami*. Desnos constructed his poem using the seven-note diatonic musical scale *do-ré-mi-fa-sol-la-si*. The title is a composition of la-si-la-mi. The poet put together musical syllables to illustrate the idea of his poem, which is “...l’art est facile à dorer.”²²⁷ Desnos combines here la-ré-fa-si-la-do-ré. His mastery of language reveals that art is not only easily turned into gold (“à dorer”) but also equally loved (“adorer”). The poem is followed by a musical

²²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Secret Art of Artaud*. Translated and prefaced by Mary Ann Caws. MIT Press Cambridge, London, England, 1998, p. 48.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²²⁶ Robert Desnos, “*Chanson de chasse*” from *Language Cuit* (1923) in *Corps et Biens* (1930). Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 530 [“The huntress without luck, from her bosom flows blood on these Chasselas...”]

²²⁷ Robert Desnos, “*L’asile ami*” from *Language Cuit* (1923) in *Corps et Biens* (1930). Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 534.

partition and leaves the reader to wonder whether the notes amount to a harmonious piece of music [Fig. 8]. Its most essential characteristic is it represents an unresolved tension, a balance between presence and absence of meaning. Tigges includes that “The unresolved tension because of the tension between presence and absence of meaning, any suggestion of an emotion is at the same time withdrawn, so that puzzlement is all that remains.”²²⁸

C. Grammar as Game

Moving along with the features of nonsense in Desnos is his playful character. The particular nature of play is considered to be vital for nonsense. It is not just that the game of nonsense has its own rules and laws, but it adheres to self-appointed rules. It is not as Deleuze puts it, a ‘pure game’, a game without rules, but rather as Tigges articulates it: “the simultaneous presence and absence of rules, the feeling that arbitrary rules are meticulously adhered to, but might be abandoned at any moment, is one ever-present aspect of the balance of meaning and non-meaning which is an equally essential characteristic.”²²⁹ Desnos’ successful linguistic experimentation can also be found in the poem “Au mocassin le verbe” taken from *Language Cuit*. Desnos permutes the verbal forms to derail the meaning. The intransitive verbs become transitive, “tu me suicides... je te mourrai”²³⁰, the impersonal ones become personal “...je neigerai sur sa bouche et je pleuvrai sans doute”, and the lack of agreement between the subject and its verb, “je connaissons for **je** connaîtrai, nous aimez for **nous** aimons” and “et s’écoulerai cette larme/ s’écoulerait **cette larme...**” As Dumas points out in *Désordre Formel*, this discordance between subject and verb was already perpetrated in a previous poem *A présent*, in which Desnos purposely alienated the subject from the verb by distorting the conjugation,

²²⁸ Wim Tigges *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Editions Rodopi B.V Amsterdam© 1988, p. 52.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 45-55

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 344, [“to kill oneself becomes you suicide me, to die becomes I shall die you, it will show/I shall snow, it will rain/ I will rain, it’s getting late/ I am getting late/ It’s beautiful weather/ I am beautiful weather, I will know/we’ll know, We love”]

making it impossible for the reader to comprehend the poem. Desnos offered readers nonsense and lack of intelligibility. She adds, “Ce qui se montre ici, c’est qu’une seule perturbation dans la syntaxe (qui fonde la production du sens) rend à jamais incertain, voire inaccessible.”²³¹ The most significant of all poems, which seems to batter the syntax of the verb, is *Idéal Maîtresse* (Ideal Mistress). Desnos replaces the verb with a noun, “je mauve... je cristal à pleine ciel-je...qui fleuve... il serrure...tu pitchpin...je me chaise...etc.”²³² For Caws, Desnos’ linguistic game intensifies the perception. She asserts, “This is the standard of much Surrealist poetic, grammatically sure and capable infinite expansion...”²³³ As opposed to *A présent* and *Mocassin du verbe*, readers can still arrive at a meaning, though *Ideal Maîtresse* does not offer one imposed by the poet. Instead, Desnos transports readers to a realm where verbs no longer dictate actions, deprived of their function since Desnos favors nouns. What is left is a succession of evocations, because nouns, unlike verbs, do not impose, but rather induce. For instance, *a feast* has less power than the action of feasting.

What Desnos produced when discarding the verb’s function is a series of juxtapositions of nouns that resemble Marcel Duchamp’s Cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase*. That form of Cubism is called analytic Cubism and Desnos breaks language down into pieces to involve readers in piecing together the whole. Moreover, Desnos’ definition of poetry alludes to Jean Paulhan’s, for whom poetry contains “un mystère insaisissable” (an elusive mystery). Desnos’ poetry is clear and obscure at the same time, banal and inconceivable, mystifying and engaging. The poet’s use of language plays on two elements: the opacity of the text that resists a

²³¹ Ibid., p. 344, [“What we see here, is that a single permutation of syntax (which produces meaning) makes sense for ever uncertain or unavailable.”]

²³² Robert Desnos, “L’idéal maîtresse”, *Corps et Biens*, Gallimard, p. 530. [“... Dans l’escalier je la rencontrai. Je mauve me dit-elle et tandis que moi-même je cristal à pleine ciel-je à son regard qui fleuve vers moi. Or, il serrure et, maîtresse! Tu pitchpin qu’a joli vase je me chaise si les chemins tombreaux.”](In the staircase, I met her. I mauve she said and while I crystal ... her gaze rivers towards me...he locks ...]

²³³ Mary Ann Caws *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*. University Of Massachussetts Press, 1977, p. 62.

surface understanding and the idea that one contextual association can shed light on something at first hidden. The Surrealist attitude toward language cultivated ambiguities for their own sake to liberate mental processes from traditional logic and for their role in the expansion of the poetic framework and the word. Breton's famous essay *Les mots sans rides* declares the extreme seriousness of word play: "Words have finished playing. They are making love.' This game is neither trivial nor superficial. It is not to be considered exterior to the real business of poetry: a certain kind of poetic depth depends on fact upon the fullest use of linguistic potentiality"²³⁴ Language creates fantasy rather than representing it; it is the absurd, a nonsensical reality verbally represented. Here too, the notion of balance, or of paradox, must be introduced. This is where the aesthetic quality of nonsense lies. Wordplay is not the aim but the initiator of Desnos' poems. As long as this is realized, one can say the word has precedence over reality in nonsense. Desnos was a master of word games and according to Breton spoke "Surrealist at will."²³⁵ Also, according to Tigges, associating game and words together points toward a mastery of language:

"Nonsense is not a universe of things but of words and ways of using them, plus a certain amount of pictorial illustration. Since plays consists in establishing mastery over something, nonsense is to be seen as an attempt at mastering language, since language and numbers are the chiefs sources of mental playthings."²³⁶

Desnos was vital to finding the true essence of Surrealist language.

Furthermore, Caws suggests that the most striking device in poetry, and in this case in Desnos' writing, is the play "of the repeated element against its own variants."²³⁷ In view of the lexical nature of nonsense in Desnos' poetry, 1) mirroring is often played when the letters are reversed or mirrored, such as in *Rrose Sélavy*, 2) spoonerism or pun when Desnos displays a clever play with letters and or sounds in *Language Cuit*, 3) imprecision found in the surplus of

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

²³⁵ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. University of Michigan, 1969, p. 29.

²³⁶ Wim Tigges *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Editions Rodopi B.V Amsterdam, 1988, p. 13.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

meaning achieved through riddles, rebus and *L'Aumonyne* being the best example, and last but not the least, 4) neologism that has the advantage of not having connotations or associations attached to it; it could be all meanings or none. The moment of play becomes a movement of infinite regression. "Play time is paradoxical. Like play, the play of nonsense is reflection and self-perpetuation. A nonsensical series is a series without cause and effect."²³⁸

At the center of this exploration of Robert Desnos' poetry, I have established a connection between game and language, between nonsense and sense. Spoonerisms are deliberate plays on words whose consonants, vowels, and syllables are rearranged to name something else, while still making reference to the original expression. For instance, the expression "a crushing blow" becomes "a blushing crow." The Surrealists desired disorientation, but in Desnos' case this disorientation is just a re-orientation through language.

The theory of automatism dominated Surrealist art in the twenties. Breton gave it a central role and it became Desnos' main concern in writing, cutting out the control of reason from the creative process. Imagination trumped reason or any moral concern. Breton defined it as: "Psychic Automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic and moral concern."²³⁹ The three collections of poems, *Rose Sélavy*, *L'Aumonyme*, *Language cuit* written between 1922 and 1923 played with language on several levels, each illuminating the thought process of the author. By playing with the sound and the syntax of language, Desnos deconstructed the signifier. The goal of his unorthodox use of language was to play with words'

²³⁸ Wim Tigges *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Editions Rodopi B.V Amsterdam, p. 58.

²³⁹ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 26.

plasticity so that meaning was diverted from sense. Dumas calls it “un jeu surréel de la langue” a surreal game of language,

“... qui à la fois reconnaît les usages traditionnels mais, en même temps, les dévie de leur routine. Ce que manifeste le ‘désordre formel’ c’est qu’il trouve sa place dans l’ordre même de la langue, c’est qu’il est une des virtualités de la langue que l’usage tend à éliminer mais que rien, sinon le poids de l’habitude, n’empêche de mobiliser.”²⁴⁰

The playful poetic activity so often ascribed to Desnos is an exploration Desnos was indeed the master of: the ‘word-mirror’, transformational game play in language and with images. For Conley, the lines of text and images together produce a creative process where form emerges from formlessness, according to the rules for automatism spelled out in Breton’s *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. It called for opening the mind and allowing unconscious thoughts to flow onto paper. Conley defines Desnos as a person embodying an essential duality. She says that Desnos, “...was at once the voice of pure psychic automatism, as his entranced proclamations during the period of hypnotic sleeps attest.”²⁴¹ If language is a game, then I would like to analyze the written and visual languages that disrupt the rules of the game. Upsetting the rules can present one with many more possibilities, as in the game of chess, which does not solely depend on the rules but also on the opponent’s behavior.

Leiris dedicates *Glossaire j’y serre mes gloses* to Robert Desnos, arranging new definitions of words by alphabetical order. *Abîme - vie secrète des amibes* (Abyss - secret life of amoebae). *Anagramme – arène, gamme, rame; mare de marges et de ramages*. (Anagram - arena, range, row, pond of margins and warblings). By just rearranging letters, new words are born, a technique also used in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* to suggest to viewers what the

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. [“who acknowledges the conventional uses but, at the same time, deviates from its custom. What ‘formal disorder’ manifests is that it finds its place in the very same order of language, it’s one of the linguistic virtualities that the use tends to eliminate but nothing, that the weight of habit prevents from mobilizing.”]

²⁴¹ Katharine Conley, *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvelous in Everyday Life*. University of Nebraska Press, 2003, p. 20.

character *Marianne* really is. She is *amer* (bitter), *mer* (sea), *art* (art) and *arme* (weapon), representing all of that. Words for Desnos had plastic properties and he used them to create a three-dimensional world. Words can make love when they have double meanings. Out of one come two, which together engender a kind of play, of lovemaking, which give birth to multiple readings. In the opening to his essay on eroticism, *De l'érotisme*, Desnos links love with language as an infinitely maneuverable and protean substance:

“Love and Poetry have the privilege of being able to name human beings and everything related to them: for anyone who forgoes the triviality of the majority words are more malleable than wax. Despite their living bony edges and the wounds that may be incurred by clumsy handling of them. There is not a single one that may not be decomposed into the dust of the working gears of watch, more precise and more fragile than the gears of a chronometer. For those who can master words, the dragons of the secret entryways will be frozen at their lookout posts and the best-armed fortresses will be more welcoming than the wind-mills of commonplaces.”²⁴²

In this passage, words are compared to wax - malleable, tangible matter, which may be shaped by human hands - indicating Desnos' approach.

Surrealism adds to reality an expression of the subconscious, which can only be effected by putting aside the presence of reason. Sewell distinguishes nonsense from Surrealism by pointing at the latter's attempt to suppress any conscious control of the mind's flow of images, and Steward mentions the arbitrariness of Surrealist art, also quoting Breton's unambiguous definition. However for Tigges, the Surrealists “made the simultaneous convergence of disparity into a conscious poetic principle, which is seen as an element which they share with nonsense writers; so is the fact that Surrealism itself can be seen as splitting into a pun, or being the answer to riddle.”²⁴³ Benayoun states that one can discern the nonsense in Desnos, Arp, Soupault, Picabia, and many others, but maintains that nonsense is an essential ingredient of Surrealism.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 35.

²⁴³ Wim Tigges *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*. Editions Rodopi B.V Amsterdam, 1988, p.116-17.

Nonsense in Surrealism was to transcend reality and reintegrate man with his universe in practical ways. The Surrealists' subversion was far more explicit than the nonsense writers.

In the following chapter, just as Dadaism and Surrealism were considered “anti-art”, the European avant-garde films of the 1920s and 1930s are renowned for their opposition to mainstream cinema, and are understood as a reaction to Realism. They were concerned with abstraction, improvisational free-flowing image making, the interplay between image and text, and experiencing art in the moment. These filmmakers shared with the Surrealists a sense of outside-ness because of their lack of narrative coherence. Viewers of these films are displaced and asked to make sense of moving images, which are involved in a different filmic language. The idea for the Surrealist filmmakers was to dissolve the shape of reality and create images free of assumptions and beliefs, again influenced by Freud, who advocated the reading of the unconscious without the policing role of the conscious mind. Michael O'Pray defines them as “irrational expressions of a subjectivity” from both the viewer and the filmmaker.

What must be concluded in these first three chapters is that Surrealist Nonsense is not *a priori* meaningless. Nonsense does not describe an absurd world or events, nor does it demonstrate the unreliability of language. In nonsense, language as such is dominant; it works on the assumption that the word is autonomous and demonstrates this by creating a reality with language rather than representing a reality. In Desnos' writings there is also an undeniable sense of eroticism in his use of spoonerism. It is this creative use of language that makes nonsense effective and aesthetically pleasing because it is seen through the lense of the game and thus of generating pleasure: *Rrose Sélavy* or *eros; c'est la vie!*

Lastly, chapter four will clearly demonstrate the importance of cinema in Surrealism as a medium for experimental art in the field of nonsense since “...it has no sense, that can only be

because we have failed to give a meaning to some of its constituents” (Wittgenstein 5.4733 48). Nonsense for the Surrealists was not meant to separate, but rather transcend, reality and reintegrate man with the universe. In *Dada and Surrealist Film*, specifically the article “Slit Screen”, David Wills argues that in the Surrealist image there is a relation of rupture and absence before the image becomes problematic. In this fragmentation “sense fails to operate normally both with respect to the ‘real’ referent and also with respect to the diegetic referent” (Wills 95). Duchamp’s *Anemic Cinema* makes the abstract character of the film problematic while representing a series of verbal puns by rejecting the formal language. The anagram of the title *Anemic and Cinema* (cinema being weak) as well as its content, a series of spirals intercalated by nine alternative verbal puns epitomized transcendental representation.

Chapter 4: Nonsense in Dada and Surrealist Films

“What we ask of cinema is the impossible, it is the unexpected, the dream, the surprise, the lyricism that erases the baseness in souls and hurls them enthusiastically onto the barricades and into adventure; what we ask of the cinema is what love and life have refused us, it is mystery, it is the miracle.”²⁴⁴

“The true is not encrusted in the living persons and real objects you use. It is an air of truth that their images take on when you set them together in a certain order. *Vice versa*, the air of truth their images take on when you set them together in a certain order confers on these persons and objects of reality.”²⁴⁵

For André Bazin (1918-1958), the pre-eminent French film critic of the 20th century, cinema was fundamentally to duplicate reality as a realist medium. What Dadaist and Surrealist artists strove for, however, grew from an interest in finding new ways to experience seeing a film in a darkened public room. They were looking to consciously bring the dream state to the level of the waking one. The essence of avant-garde films was to create a relationship between the audience and the screen. For the Surrealists, going to the cinema was a ritual experience. The mystery was kept locked in these dark rooms.

In “Ontology of the Photographic Image”, Bazin argued that plastic arts are obsessed with realism and these realistic tendencies were shaping western paintings and photography. The originality of a photograph lies in its essential objectiveness: there is no intentional agent intervening in the process of the duplication of reality. In this sense, the absence of a narrator makes photography what it is. He asserts, “The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint. Wherefore, photography actually contributes

²⁴⁴ Steven Kovács quoting Robert Desnos in *From Enchantment to Rage: The story of Surrealist Cinema*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 62.

²⁴⁵ Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*. Green Integer Books, 1997, p. 80-81.

something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it”²⁴⁶ Bazin talked about two art movements towards the end of the essay and of course finds both of them inferior to photography. One is Impressionist Realism (which adds movement as something essential to human experience and perception) and the other is Surrealism. Now, it is evident that Bazin favored the objective representation of reality. On Surrealism, Bazin wrote:

“The Surrealists had an inkling of this when they looked to the photographic plate to provide them with their monstrosities and for this reason: the Surrealist does not consider his aesthetic purpose and the mechanical effect of the image on our imaginations as things apart. For him, the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tends to disappear. Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image. Hence photography ranks high in the order of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact. The fact that Surrealist painting combines tricks of visual deception with meticulous attention to detail substantiates this.”²⁴⁷

Moreover, Bazin gives three kinds of realism that cinema provides us: one is ontological realism - realism is itself an ontological claim and it is an intuitive and established philosophical position; the other two, namely dramatic and psychological realism, are a bit different since they introduce relations between the subject and object.

Although, in his second volume *What is cinema?*, Bazin seems to have revised his position on cinema, adding,

“...realism in art can only be achieved one way - through artifice... We would define as ‘realist’, then, all narrative means tending to an added measure of reality to the screen. Reality is not to be taken quantitatively. The same event, the same object, can be represented in various ways. Each representation discards or retains various of the qualities that permit us to recognize the object on the screen. Each introduces for didactic or aesthetic reasons, abstractions that operate more or less corrosively and thus do not permit the original to subsist in its entirety. At the conclusion of this inevitable and necessary ‘chemical’ action, for the initial reality there has been substituted an illusion of reality composed of a complex of abstraction (black and white, plane surfaced), of conventions (the rules of montage, for example), and of authentic reality. It is a necessary illusion but it quickly induces a loss of awareness of the reality itself, which becomes identified in the mind of the spectator with its cinematographic representation. As for

²⁴⁶ André Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image”. *What is Cinema?* Translated by Hugh Gray and foreworded by Jean Renoir and Dudley Andrew. University of California Press, Volume 1, 2005, p. 15.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15-16.

the filmmaker, the moment he has secured this unwitting complicity of the public, he is increasingly tempted to ignore reality. From habit and laziness he reaches the point when he himself is no longer able to tell where lies begin and end. There could never be any question of calling him a liar because his art consists in lying. He is just no longer in control of his art. He is its dupe, and hence he is held back from any further conquest of reality.²⁴⁸

That presupposes that the real is genuine and true. But the avant-gardes rejected this hierarchical relationship between the two. Avant-garde films are to be seen as a relationship between things, and this way it resembles the quintessential concept behind Eastern philosophy, which favors flux to inertia, impermanence to absolutes, flexibility to rigidity. Avant-garde artists sought to be simultaneously directly and indirectly involved in a collective, creative process.

In *Creative Evolution*, Henri Bergson's theories of duration and simultaneity left their marks on Cubism, which found in film an effective mode for his conception of fluid time and the perception of form. His notion of "what is real is the continual change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition," was extended to the mind of the modern man who fused the immediate past with an awareness of the instant present and the anticipation of the immediate future into a working perception of knowledge. The work of art is a snapshot of that moment, of morphing into something else, so well illustrated by poetry and film. For the French poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire, the aim of cinema was to show the viewer "la vérité plastique sous toutes ses formes" (The visual truth in all its forms). It was during World War I and soon after that French avant-garde artists and intellectuals discovered film. The Surrealists loved cinema and that love started first and foremost with the movie theater itself. Inside, the luminous screen was floating in absolute darkness and enabled them to unite reality and dream. Cinema was the revelation that allowed the Surrealists to access another reality. In *Salles de Cinéma*, written in

²⁴⁸ André Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image". *What is Cinema?* Translated by Hugh Gray and foreworded by François Truffaut and Dudley Andrew and University of California Press, Volume 2, 2005, p. 27.

1928 in the newspaper *Le Soir*, Robert Desnos described the movie theater as being a place “where everything there appears underwater, dim and unreal.”²⁴⁹ Desnos spoke passionately of movie theaters in Paris, especially the old “salle Montmartre” that Guillaume Apollinaire attended too. Desnos preferred to watch films in this movie theater because of its charming old look with its old seats that howl when you sit and its heavy iron beams crisscrossing the ceiling. Desnos was very specific in choosing the movie theater he attended because it was inconceivable to separate the film from its place. Since cinema is a popular art, it must return to the popular quarters of the city. In “Papa d’un jour,” Desnos further adds, “C’est désormais les cinémas de quartier que je fréquente Charlot y est chez lui”²⁵⁰ In contrast, Andre Breton’s love for cinema was rooted in chance. In *Nadja*, he confessed entering movie theaters without knowing anything about the film or the actors. He even recalled times when Jacques Vaché and he would turn the movie theater into their kitchen “...opening cans, slicing breads, uncorking bottles, and talking in ordinary tones... to the great amazement of the spectators, who dared not say a word.”²⁵¹

The experimental or avant-garde cinema distinguished itself from the mainstream industry because the films were short, produced with outside funds, and with the aim to undercut conventions of narrative filmmaking. Experimental films were an extension of art. A few artists believed that since film was a visual art like painting, its purest form would be abstract. After World War I, film ideas were very much in the air. In 1920 Paris, Tristan Tzara wrote a book illustrated by Jean Arp, *Cinéma Calendrier du coeur abstrait maisons*, in which he saw film as a mirror of the absurd. In 1919 New York, the Dada poet Elsa Baroness von Freytag-Lorinhoven entitled a poem “Moving Pictures and Prayer” unleashing vivid cinematic images. That same year in Berlin, Raoul Hausmann’s cover to the first issue of *Der Dada* was a photomontage with

²⁴⁹ Robert Desnos, “Salles de Cinéma” *Les Rayons et Les Ombres: Cinéma*. Editions Gallimard, 1992, p. 123

²⁵⁰ Ibid., “Papa d’un jour”, p.174 [“The neighborhood movie theaters where I go are now Charlot’s home”]

²⁵¹ André Breton, *Nadja*. Grove Press Inc., 1960, p. 37.

the title *Synthetisches Cino der Malerei*. German artist George Grosz made drawings of Charlie Chaplin, while artist John Heartfield composed collages alluding to American movies and even containing bits of filmstrips. And of course, in 1919, Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling developed a language of forms that soon led them to film. Man Ray's *Retour à la raison* (*Return to Reason*, 1923) is a kinetic extension of these photographs. It is no surprise that the Surrealists became fascinated by film. Louis Aragon's first poem (1918) was about Chaplin; Philippe Soupault's first writings on film appeared the same year in SIC (Sounds-Ideas-Colors); and in 1920, the painter/poet Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes composed a film scenario, *The Eight Days of the Week*, an uncanny, disjointed narrative more Surrealist than Dada in form and feeling.

Virtually all avant-garde filmmakers of the twenties, especially in Paris, came from painting and literature. Léger, Man Ray, Duchamp, Picabia, Survage, Hans Richter, Eggeling and other painters either made films, wrote about them, or both. René Clair, Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, Marcel l'Herbier, Louis Delluc were all established writers before they turned to filmmaking. Robert Desnos, Blaise Cendrars, Philippe Soupault, Antonin Artaud, and Jean Cocteau wrote for and about cinema and its evocative powers. But the true Surrealist filmmakers were Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dalí, most well known for *Un chien andalou* (1929). The Surrealists favored marginal films to classics because of their reputation and attitude. They were attracted to the subversive aspects of those films. However, when discussing Surrealist cinema, it seems reasonable to first situate it in relation to its predecessor: Dada.

1. Dada Films

Dada was a movement that attracted artists troubled by the meaningless loss of life in World War I. Under the leadership of Tristan Tzara, Dadaist art flourished between 1910 and

early 1920. It was during a Dada event, “La soirée du coeur à Barbe” that Richter and Man Ray’s films were shown, the latter making *Retour à la raison* within the twenty-four hours preceding its premiere. What dominates these films is pure cinema and Impressionism. The Impressionist movement believed cinema was an art form that created an experience, which led to emotions for the spectator. Cinema was evocative and suggestive, seen as fleeting impressions on the screen complemented by rhythm. Hans Richter, who studied art, joined the Dada group in Switzerland, including Viking Eggeling. Both artists were fascinated with the idea of using art as a universal means of spiritual communication. They worked on scrolls - long strips of paper containing series of drawings - and wanted to transform them into moving images to render a sort of visual music. Richter managed to make three short films, the *Rhythmus* series from 1921, 1923, and 1925. When Eggeling met Erna Niemeyer, he created *Diagonal-symphonie* (1924).

A. Hans Richter (1888-1976)

German painter Hans Richter found true inspiration in Cubism. In 1952, he says he was:

“Influenced by Cubism and its search for structure, but not satisfied with what it offered, I found myself between 1913-1918 increasingly faced with the conflict of suppressing spontaneous expression in order to gain an objective understanding of a fundamental principle with which I could control the ‘heap of fragments’ inherited from the Cubists. Thus, I gradually lost interest in the subject – in any subject – and focused instead on the positive-negative (white-black) opposition, which at least gave me a working hypothesis whereby I could organize the relationship of one part of a painting to the other.”²⁵²

Leopold Survage (1879-1968), Cubist painter, settled in Paris in 1908, worked as a piano tuner, and painted. He also made substantial progress toward the creation of a painting-in-motion using film. His first film *Le Rythme Coloré* (Colored Rhythm, 1913) was about three minutes long, required two-to-three thousand drawings, and was conceived as a series of separate sequences, each a clearly defined and self-contained set of abstract forms in movement. The war intervened

²⁵² Hans Richter, “Easel-Scroll-Film”, *Magazine of Art*, No. 45 (February 1952), p. 82

and prevented its completion. All that remains today are seventy-one gouache drawings, fifty-nine of which at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and represent 5 different sequences for the film, and the remaining twelve at the Cinémathèque Française represent the other sequence. Hans Richter came to film through painting the same way that Survage came to paint through music. Like Survage, Richter used Cubist techniques to articulate the canvas surface with rhythms. Like the subject of his paintings - musicians - *Rhythmus 21* (1921) was fundamentally a music-related play of black and white shapes and forms on the screen. In *Cubist Cinema*, Standish D. Lawder argues “Richter was less interested in the psychology of his sitter than in exploring a contrapuntal figure-ground relationship in which measured areas of contrasting black and white alternated in their pictorial function of defining form and space.”²⁵³ Richter’s first scroll *Preludium* (1919) was equally abstract but less controlled and favored intuition to theory. Richter’s first film *Rhythmus 21* (1921) owes its kinetic composition of rectangular forms of black, grey, and white to *Preludium*.

Rhythmus 21 is generally considered the first abstract film. It opens with the screen divided into large, interacting, black and white shapes: a black screen covered with two white rectangles sliding from either side, a white screen splits in the middle to reveal a black background, a white square in the center of a black screen advances and recedes, expanding and diminishing in size. What Lawder remarks about Richter’s film is that at any given moment these spatial relationships are purposefully ambiguous and constantly changing. Which forms are foreground figures, and which are background elements? The pieces dissolve into one another. As one form swells to the foreground, another sinks into the distance, others merge and overlap. No single form moves in isolation. What viewers retain is that the movement of the forms is intrinsically linked with movement elsewhere on the screen. Richter even pointed out that

²⁵³ Standish D. Lawder, *Cubist Cinema*. New York University Press, 1975, p. 37

Rhythmus 21 was “...not definite, regular succession in time or space, but the unity binding all parts into a whole.”²⁵⁴ Richter created a work based on rhythm, using static and bipolar structures to exemplify motion. He used similar techniques as Desnos, who turned the linguistic rules of language upside down to create another nonsensical reality. The film is largely composed of squares and rectangles moving back and forth into screen space. At times, three to five squares and rectangles are moving (sometimes overlapping) at different rates and times to create a complex movement of visual counterpoint. It is clearly about the movement, not the form - a film that challenges the linguistic capacity in describing it. The choice of words commits to an ontology of the film - that is, what kinds of things does it involve? How to describe what is seen?

Richter deconstructed the idea of the screen, which usually serves as a window through which viewers perceive an illusion of space and time. By contrast, in *Rhythmus 21*, it is the forms that activate the screen. Thus, for Lawder:

“...forms, like those of an abstract painting, seem to have no physical extension except on the screen, nor do we sense their lateral extension beyond the limits of the screen as is usually the case in images created by camera vision. The film is a totally self-contained kinetic composition of pure plastic forms.”²⁵⁵

In Richter’s film, the relationship between positions of moving shapes is perceived, a kind of rhythm that epitomizes experimental films devoted to representing motion as an illusory act. In *Avant-garde film: Forms, Themes and Passions*, Michael O’Pray proclaims, “Much of what counts as avant-garde here rests on a thorough-going experimentalism in relation to how film can manipulate perception. Much of its results are related to our normal optical responses and

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 49-50.

prejudices.”²⁵⁶ Richter fits this description fully and spent the following five years making three additional abstract films *Rhythmus 23* (1923), *Rhythmus 25* (1925) and *Filmstudie* (1926).

B. Viking Eggeling (1880-1925)

Viking Eggeling was a Swedish avant-garde artist and filmmaker involved in the Dada movement, and along with Richter, was a pioneer in experimental cinema and visual music. His film *Diagonal-Symphonie* (1924) is his most representative abstract film. Eggeling’s scroll *Horizontal-Vertical Mass* (1919) displays powerful repetitive lines from the beginning to the end of the scroll. Unlike Richter, and with the help of his girlfriend at the time, Erna Niemyer-Soupault (later the wife of the Surrealist poet Philippe Soupault), he integrated his first drawing scroll in his first film *Diagonal-Symphonie*. *Diagonal-Symphonie* is very much like a moving drawing. Like Richter, one motif follows another, performing a mechanical dance, as one grows the other shrinks. The complex compositions of curved and straight lines respond to one another in a rhythm. He creates a dialogue with lines going left, right, diagonally, and then, he introduces a curve amongst the rectilinear lines. He plays vertical lines against horizontal, small and intricate activities against bold, simple gestures. Once done, each line, each form serves a functional, pictorial purpose. Each gesture is countered or answered by another within this all-embracing system. Lawder emphasizes that the importance is:

“...the objectively analyzed movement rather than expressiveness, on the surface patterning of lines into clearly defined movements controlled by a mechanical, almost metronomic tempo. The spatial complexities and ambiguities of Richter’s film are almost non-existent here, even when, as in *Rhythmus 21*, pieces of negative film are inserted for contrapuntal effect. Above all, a sober clarity of rhythm articulation remains the most pronounced quality of the film.”²⁵⁷

Eggeling’s notion of counterpoint of linear elements, which he called *Generalbass der Malerei*, had obvious affinities with Richter’s attempts at contrasting positive and negative space in the

²⁵⁶ Michael O’Pray, *Avant-garde film: Forms, Themes and Passions*. Wallflower, 2003, p. 14.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

black and white areas of his *Dada-Köpfe*. Both collaborated and shared common interests, although while Richter was interested in the interplay of surfaces, Eggeling's principal concern was with line. In *Dada-Monograph of a Movement*, Richter recalls,

“For both of us, music became the model. In musical counterpoint, we found a principal, which fitted our philosophy: every action produces a corresponding reaction. This, is the contrapuntal fugue, we found the appropriate system, a dynamic and polar arrangement of opposing energies, and in this model we saw an image of life itself: one thing growing, another declining, in a creative marriage of contrast and analogy. Month after month, we studied and compared our analytical drawings made on hundreds of little sheets of paper, until eventually we came to look at them as living beings which grew, declined, changed, disappeared - and then were reborn...”²⁵⁸

Both of their films embody the concept of pure cinema as an independent art. Because of their abstract forms of geometric meticulousness these films are quite certainly original works and still stand today as the beginning of seeing new possibilities in cinema.

C. Walter Ruttmann (1887-1941)

Before becoming a practitioner of experimental film in Germany, Walter Ruttmann studied architecture and painting and worked as a graphic designer. Like Richter and Eggeling, his first short films are unique experiments with forms, color, and rhythm. The symphonic documentary *Berlin, die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) is one of the most famous silent classics, the travelogue *Melodie der Welt* (1929) became the first German sound feature film. His first film though was *Lichtspiel Opus 1* (1921), followed by three other shorts, *Opus 2* (1922), *Opus 3* (1924) and *Opus 4* (1925). As with Richter and Eggeling, Ruttmann found music quintessential to his creative process. With the radio play *Weekend*, Ruttmann created the first “sound film without images” while his short *In der Nacht* (1931) transformed music to images. Ruttmann broke new ground in avant-grade art and music. *Lichtspiel Opus 1* was one of the first color films ever produced during a time when filmmakers were firmly rooted in a black and white creative

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 64. Lawder quoting Hans Richter in Willy Verkauf *Dada-Monograph of a Movement*, Teufen, Switzerland, 1957.

process. The addition of color in his animation had a powerful impact on the rhythm of forms on-screen as well as the soundtrack. In general, tension is embodied in the use of warm colors (orange, red, yellow), while cool colors (blue, purple) depict relaxation. Ruttmann's films bear a definite expressiveness in his manipulation of the formal elements of shape and movement, whereas for Richter, films suggest a purely formal meaning. Ruttmann's films have fluidity, sensuousness, and dramatic rhythm, utilizing different elliptical shapes to convey different musical moods. The artist uses traversing, undulating, pyramid, and fish-like motifs to depict the dynamism within the melodic soundtrack. Each of these motifs accentuates the music. For instance, the angular characteristic of the pyramid shape increases the strident crispness of the melody while the more organic shapes pair with a more soothing rhythm. In addition, Ruttmann shows, near the end of *Opus 1*, a silhouette of a red pendulum swinging from left to right against a black screen, providing the tempo of the music itself. Ruttmann's films bore a different sensibility than Richter's and Eggeling's. O'Pray further describes his cinema as having moved beyond the experimental form: "No longer is there the strong feeling of experimentation but instead a fully developed aesthetic of urgent expressive power."²⁵⁹ Ruttmann is at once more sophisticated in technique and creative expression, with a sensual, at times almost erotic, pulsation of curved forms voluptuously ballooning in and out of the frame.

D. Fernand Léger (1881-1955)

The war had a profound impact on the French painter, sculptor, and filmmaker Fernand Léger, changing his perception of the world almost overnight. To that effect, Léger translated modernity into visual art and used the city and its people as a blank canvas. In his series of paintings *La Ville* (1919), Léger played with cinematic techniques such as editing, juxtaposition,

²⁵⁹ Michael O'Pray, *Avant-garde film: Forms, Themes and Passions*. Wallflower, 2003, p. 17.

the close-up, and isolation of images to represent the city and its life. In *Cubist Cinema*, Lawder concurred by saying that, "...pulsating energies of modern life, its rhythms and its forms, even its flashes of amusing incongruity...[his] film is a spectacle in constant movement, infused with presence of modern machinery in motion rushing pell-mell from and to nowhere"²⁶⁰. In light of this series, it was apparent that Léger would turn to cinema. Inspired by Blaise Cendrars to work on film, Léger with the collaboration of Dudley Murphy, made *Ballet mécanique* (1924), which encompassed aesthetics of both painting and cinema. Murphy recounts, "the premise of the film was based on a belief that surprise and rhythm would make a pure film without drawing on any of the other arts, such as writing, painting, acting."²⁶¹ They were attempting a pure film, although for Man Ray "pure film" meant to also try out viewers' patience. Léger saw his film as:

"A series of fragments, ciné-poem with a certain optical sequence to make up a whole that still remains a fragment. Just as one can much better appreciate the abstract beauty in a fragment of a classical work than its entirety, so this film tries to indicate the essentials in its contemporary cinematography."²⁶²

Ballet mécanique is never a linear narrative. It's rather experienced through pure visuals, long or short in duration, quick and slow in rhythm, and constantly inter-cutting or interacting with other images and movements; all of these account for the richness and vitality of the film. In 1924, Léger talked about how he organized his film:

"The film is divided into seven vertical parts. (Close-up, without depth, active surfaces) which go from slow motion to extreme speed. Each of the parts has its own unity due to the similarity of clusters of object-image, which are visually alike or the same material. That was the goal of construction and it prevents the fragmentation of the film. To assure variety in each part they are crossed by horizontal penetrations of visually similar forms (color). From one end to the other the film sustains an arithmetical law that is rather precise, as precise as possible (number, speed, time). An object is projected at the rhythm

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 167

²⁶¹ Judy Freeman, "Léger Ballet mécanique", *Dada and Surrealist Film*, edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli. The MIT Press edition, 2001, p. 31.

²⁶² Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?", *Dada and Surrealist Film*, edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli. The MIT Press edition, 2001, p. 32. Taken from Fernand Léger in Frank Stauffacher, *Art in Cinema*. San Francisco Museum of Art. 1957, p. 53

of: 6 images a second for 30 seconds, 3 images a second for 20 seconds, 10 images a second for 15 seconds. We persist up to the point where the eye and the mind of the spectator can't take it any more. We exhaust its visual power at the very moment when it becomes unbearable."²⁶³

Léger's notes concur with Man Ray and are valuable to understanding the construction of the film, which was designed to generate tension through speed and movement. He treated cinematic images similarly to Desnos who created a new way of using language in *L'Aumonyme*, juxtaposing words with numbers to create riddles, rebuses, and discomfort for readers. He too exhausted the patience of his readers and also the limits of language. In both cases, the film and the text appear perplexing at times, beckoning a deeper exploration.

Furthermore, Léger made use of a marionette, perhaps a reference to theater, as a reconstituted Charlie Chaplin ("Charlot") at the beginning and end of the film. The puppet's jumpy, repetitive movements resemble those of other shots: a woman on a swing and one smelling flowers in the garden. Leger's rapid editing fuses swinging Christmas ornaments, saucepan covers, pumping pistons, and sheet metal. What interested Léger most in film were the relations between rhythmic images, not the scenario. The effect of a hat alternating with legs, ornaments, shoes, triangles, circles, a pearl necklace, and words opened more avenues for Léger to explore than painting, but its impact on the audience was somehow unsettling. He argues, "We persist up to the point when the eye and spirit of the spectator will no longer accept. At first, the audience being amazed and then feeling uneasy. We drain out of it every bit of its value as a spectacle up to the moment when it becomes insupportable."²⁶⁴ In addition, as in Richter and Eggeling, Léger plays with rapidly moving white circles and triangles against a black background. The rhythm of movement springs out of his paintings, a staccato-mechanized pulse,

²⁶³ Standish D. Lawder, *Cubist Cinema*. New York University Press, 1975, p. 131.

²⁶⁴ Fernand Léger, "Film by Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy, Musical Synchronism by George Antheil," *Litte Review* (Autumn-Winter 1925-25): 42-44.

and abrupt shifts of accents, constantly in motion. “There is no dissolves, fade-in or fade-out transitions, wipes, or iris shots - all of these more fluid transpositions from one shot to another Léger must have detested as much as he did the frothy imprecision of impressionist painting.”²⁶⁵ Interestingly enough, the movement in cinema really started with still images as seen in Richter, Eggeling, Léger, and Duchamp, and talking about rhythm in cinema might seem difficult to describe on the page with tangible words.

However, in an essay written in 1923, the theorist Léon Moussinac (1890-1964) wrote, “Cinema has an interior rhythm, that of the image, and an exterior rhythm, between the images; that means they are created by the order of succession of the images and their fixed durations.”²⁶⁶ In Léger, we find both; the interior rhythm from the camera recording the physical movement of things within its field of vision, while the exterior rhythm of the film is generated by the pace and editing, created in the cutting room with scissors, film cement, and, most importantly, a feeling for visual rhythms, the cinematic choreography of images brought to life through editing alone. The film resembles machinery in motion, which mirror man in motion. The images in each shot cue the next: a man at the top of the chute, the chute guiding his descent, the street and marching feet, and so forth. Lawder argues that *Ballet mécanique* embodied a new concept of filmic expression, disregarding narrative interest in favor of the visual rhythms created by the action and interaction of graphically expressive images. Richter was very impressed by Léger’s film and in his next film he incorporated Léger’s eye for using the camera to extract images from the physical actuality of the world.

²⁶⁵ Standish D. Lawder, *Cubist Cinema*. New York University Press, 1975, p. 141.

²⁶⁶ Léon Moussinac, “Théorie de cinéma”, *Cinéa* 95 (July 1, 1923):9-12.

E. Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)

For the last section on Dada films, it seems appropriate to introduce French artist Marcel Duchamp as the perfect transition to Surrealist films since he was associated with both the Dadaist and Surrealist movements. Duchamp moved away from abstract painting to experiment with readymades and kinetic sculptures. He stated he was indebted to Jules-Etienne Marey's multiple-exposure photographs of men in motion when making *Nude Descending the Staircase*. Later in the twenties, Man Ray also paid homage to Marey in *Emak Bakia* (1926) by including in his film a brief motion study of a leaping man. For Marey, cinematography was a research tool that enabled him to capture and analyze patterns of movement normally imperceptible to the human eye. His many inventions in rapid-fire photography led to the development, around 1890, of a motion picture camera, a device that henceforth became increasingly necessary to the activities of the institutional scientific cinematography after Marey's death 1904. As mentioned earlier, the idea of movement was also rendered in paintings through Cubism. Pablo Picasso was the one to have contemplated the idea of using film for the representation of movement. He thought to use a method, which has been used in animated cartoons, by painting various pictures on a transparent material and showing them through a projector.

With the help of Man Ray, Duchamp made his first and only film in 1926, *Anémic Cinéma*. It displayed nine black cardboard revolving disks with sentences of French puns in white letters. The movie opens with the shape of a triangle made out of the title itself, in white letters on black screen, reproducing the reflection of 'cinéma' in the mirror, to show that 'anémic' is a near reversal of the word 'cinéma'. The disks alternate with 10 other optically patterned disks, to create a hypnotic effect on the audience reading spinning puns and alliterations such as, "esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis" or "Bains de

gros thé pour grains de beauté sans trop de bengué.” Here in the film, the desire develops into simply read the pun before the image disappears. The viewers are then caught up in decoding the words while being hypnotized by the rotation of the image. In his first collaboration with Man Ray, Duchamp made poetry and humor visible on-screen. He signed the film “éros c’est la vie”, a pun in itself: “Eros is life”. Duchamp called *Anémic Cinéma* “kinetic paintings”, and like his readymades, had an indifference to aesthetics. Dalia Judovitz argues that his indifference:

“...reflects his rejection of the logical oppositions that underline the very notion of difference... Indifference thus comes to mean an activity and an operation upon objects and contexts marked by the oppositional difference of vision and discourse. In an even more radical sense, Duchamp also rejects the difference made by vision, insofar as vision is equated metaphysically with knowledge, sexuality and power. Duchamp moves away both in painting and cinema from an ‘eros of vision’ to ‘eros c’est la vie’”²⁶⁷

Akin to the Dada films at the time, *Anémic cinéma*’s effort was to destabilize the position of the viewers not only graphically (with the juxtaposition of the linear title and the series of spirals) but also linguistically (the puns). The uneasiness of the film is further intensified by the hypnotic quality of the spiraling images. While watching the film, viewers are compelled to physically move to read the words written on the spiraling “roto-reliefs”. Duchamp’s film feels like a vertiginous fall into what Dalia Judovitz has called the ‘fourth dimension’ and what René Clair called a ‘conceptual space’, which emerges from the *Anémic cinéma* as both optical and linguistic plays. Duchamp produces a new conceptual space, questioning the problem of perspective between the subject and the object, the viewer and the moving images. The viewer cannot escape the desire to decipher the verbal puns in motion whose process transforms the image into sound via the bias of phonetics. Duchamp disrupts the idea of language as being a coherent system and it is this incoherency that he finds profoundly human. Similarly, the French

²⁶⁷ Dalia Judovitz, “Anemic Vision in Duchamp: Cinema as Readymade”, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, 46-57.

Filmmaker Germaine Dulac observed, “The cinema can certainly tell a story, but one mustn’t forget that the story is nothing, the story is a surface... the art of the screen is the palpable rendering of the depth which extends beneath this surface: the musical ineffable... Visual impact is ephemeral, it’s an impact you receive which suggests a thousand thoughts.”²⁶⁸ Duchamp’s idea of cinema is also found in Antonin Artaud’s definition, in which new associations of images and ideas emerge from the collision of forms, objects, and movements. Duchamp applies in his artforms Artaud’s motto “briser le langage pour toucher la vie” (breaking language to touch life). Cinema for them is not about representation anymore, but rather to present the unrepresentable.

2. Surrealist Films

Surrealism resembles Dada in many ways, but especially in its disdain for orthodox aesthetic traditions. Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870, alias Isidore-Lucien Ducasse) influenced the Surrealists a great deal, writing in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, “Beautiful as the unexpected meeting, on dissection table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella.” From that moment, Breton conceived a reality and sought to plunge into the unconscious mind. The Surrealists incorporated chance with the incoherent narrative of dreams, utilizing images and words without the censoring process of the conscious mind. Unlike Dada films that displayed chaotic assemblage, rhythm, and sometimes humor, Surrealist films were more interested in revealing a disturbing aspect of film. Surrealist cinema compiled the principles of Surrealism: irrationality, automatism, psychological and dramatic sequences without apparent logic, and complete disregard for conventional storytelling. The period of active interest in making Surrealist films coincided with the most active phase of Surrealism. The immediate post-WWI

²⁶⁸ Germaine Dulac, “La musique du silence”, *Cinégraphie* 5 1928, p. 78 quoted by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, “The Image and the Spark; Dulac and Artaud Reviewed”, *Dada and Surrealist film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli. The MIT Press, 2001, p. 114.

years were the period of formation for the literary group that Breton directed from 1923 to 1930. The Surrealists objected to banal content and conventional narratives, but they too were concerned with the subject matter in the manifestos and literary work of the time.

Cinema, rather than being another representation of reality itself, lies on the edge of two distant realities; a place Breton coined the ‘supreme point’ where dream and reality coexist side by side. Bringing dream to the level of reality, the Surrealists established a conductive wire between the screen and the audience so that the other could be perceived as another form of the ‘I’ and ultimately experience an unknown understanding of themselves. Cinema rationalized in a way the dream or the unconscious. Films were not meant to digest repressed emotions experienced in everyday life; they recreated the dream on the collective screen as to relive it. The Avant-garde films produced a reality of their own. As Michael Richardson maintains, Méliès was important to Surrealist cinema and might be considered “...the initiator of a cinema of marvelous.”²⁶⁹ He further adds that comparing Méliès to the brothers Lumière:

“lies not in an opposition between realism and the fantastic but in one between a view of film as a replication of the world that serves scientific classification of it which was Lumière’s starting point and one that sees film as having its own reality founded in a materiality of form serving its own purposes (which is where Méliès was coming from). This may represent a certain opposition between positivism and magic: for Lumière the camera was essentially a recording instrument; for Méliès, it was a magic apparatus for playing with the marvelous. Rather than assuming one or the other side of these different conceptions of cinema, we ought to see Surrealism as collapsing such distinctions.”²⁷⁰

The Surrealists nurtured in Méliès his sense of the marvelous. “The marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful” (Manifestoes of Surrealism 14). For Breton the marvelous is not a state, nor is it something outside of or opposed to reality, but rather a vehicle through which reality is perceived, while reconciling the real with the imaginary.

²⁶⁹ Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and cinema* Surrealism. Berg, 2006, p. 19.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 26.

Surrealist cinema offered the closest representation of a dream at the time. Dreams were one of the major interests, areas of research, and metaphors for the Surrealists mainly because they were the most readily available manifestations of the unconscious. The Surrealists found in nonsensical texts and films the most inspiring tool to “transform the world” and “to change life”. For Desnos, dreams were the manifestation of a higher reality. The ambition of the Surrealist filmmakers was to emphasize the interpretation of dreams and reality, and moreover to construct a dream that nothing will explain, modestly created for the beauty of a solely gratuitous, oneiric quality. In *Surrealism and Cinema*, Jean Goudal claims that cinema can encapsulate a mystical fusion of the real and the dream. For Breton too, dreams were superior to reality because the mind of a dreaming man is fully satisfied by whatever happens. Goudal answers Breton:

“[the images] surging into our imagination have an anemic, pale color which by contrast makes the vigor and relief of real images stand out... [w]hen we sleep our senses are idle, or rather their solicitations do not cross the threshold of consciousness and, the reducing contrast no longer existing, the imaginary succession of images monopolizes the foreground; as nothing contradicts them we believe in their actual existence”²⁷¹

Awake, we imagine the real and the imaginary all at once; while asleep, we only imagine the possible. The main Surrealist filmmakers chosen for this section - Man Ray, René Clair, Germaine Dulac, and Luis Buñuel - all share a common love for the nonsensical aspect found in the dream and the non-narrative story.

A. Man Ray (1890-1976)

It was Duchamp who introduced Man Ray to the Dadaists and Tristan Tzara. Tzara printed the name of Man Ray as a producer of a Dada film on a program entitled *Le Coeur à barbe*, forcing him to make his first three minute film, *Le retour à la raison* (*Return to Reason*) within twenty-four hours in 1923. Man Ray’s second film in 1926, *Emak Bakia* (meaning: don’t

²⁷¹ Jean Goudal, “Surrealism and Cinema”. *The Shadow & Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*. Edited, translated and Introduced by Paul Hammond. City Light Books, 2000, p. 87.

bother me, in Basque) is an extension of *Le Retour à la raison*. The film reveals the tension between chance and purpose characteristic of the Surrealist movement. Man Ray argues:

“It is not an abstract film or a storyteller; its reasons for being are its inventions of light-forms and movements, while the more objective parts interrupt the monotony of abstract inventions or serve as punctuation. Anyone who can sit through an hour’s projection of a film in which sixty percent of the actions progress in and out of doorways and in inaudible conversation, is asked to give twenty minutes of attention to a more or less logical sequence of ideas without any pretension or revolutionizing the film industry.”²⁷²

Man Ray indeed incorporated images from his first film into *Emak Bakia*: the nocturnal city, the sprinkling salts, the nails. However, in his sixteen-minute film, Man Ray celebrated the cinematic apparatus. Early in the film, the audience is aware that it is Man Ray, the filmmaker, holding the camera. He animates his earlier photographic work: “Rayographs” obtained by sprinkling salt, thumbtacks, nails on a strip of celluloid before exposing them to light to capture negative imprints of the objects. One minute into the film, the only word makes its appearance on-screen covered by smoke, which makes it difficult to read: *Dancer or Danger*, creating an ambiguous reality. All through the film Man Ray punctuates the nocturnal city with sparks of light from the merry-go-round. In *Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos and Man Ray’s L’étoile de Mer*, Inez Hedges calls Man Ray’s first film “the near perfect example of artist ‘bricolage’”²⁷³.

In addition, André Breton pointed out in *As in a Wood*, “We saw cinema, then, such as it was a lyrical substance simply begging to be haunted in en masse, with the aid of chance. I think that what we valued most in it to the point of taking no interest in anything else was its power to

²⁷² Steven Kovács, *From Enchantment to Rage: The story of Surrealist Cinema*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 133.

²⁷³ Inez Hedges, “Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos and Man Ray’s *L’étoile de Mer*”. *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 99.

disorient.”²⁷⁴ *Emak Bakia* is a vivid example of the way chance and disorientation were harnessed by Surrealist filmmakers. Man Ray’s method of shooting was acknowledged as random: “all the films, [he has] made have been improvisations. [He] did not write scenarios. It was an automatic cinema.”²⁷⁵ Man Ray’s belief in chance as an omnipresent force was demonstrated early in *Emak Bakia*, in which he used dice dancing among geometric forms, disjoined and joined again.

Surrealist poets came under the spell of moving pictures and thus belong to the first generation that had movies as part of everyday life. Among them, Robert Desnos once said about his generation: “We had just been born... An impatient desire of love, revolt and the sublime tormented us... For us and only us had the Lumière brothers invented the cinema. There we were at home. That darkness was the darkness of our rooms before going to sleep. Perhaps the screen could match our dreams.”²⁷⁶ It was Desnos who promoted the cinema both as a critic and as a scriptwriter. In 1928, one of these poems became the source of Man Ray's film, *L'Etoile de Mer* (Starfish). This collaboration for Desnos and Man Ray was a way to combine a reality where dream and life were inseparable on the screen, as in the world of Lewis Carroll. Man Ray’s films bear witness to Desnos’ eccentric description of the real, which traced back to his own words, “when I close my eyes a marvelous world... opens for me. It does not disappear when I open them. Dear double life! When I talk like everybody else, I also talk to fabulous creatures. They

²⁷⁴ André Breton, “As in a Wood”, *The Shadow & Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*. Edited, translated and Introduced by Paul Hammond. City Light Books, 2000, p. 73.

²⁷⁵ Steven Kovács, *From Enchantment to Rage: The story of Surrealist Cinema*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 124.

²⁷⁶ Steven Kovács quoting Robert Desnos in *From Enchantment to Rage: The story of Surrealist Cinema*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 15.

believe me to be here and calm; I am also elsewhere, in disrupted regions unknown by all.”²⁷⁷
Desnos lived in the realm between reality and the imagination, often finding an area of overlap.

In *L'Etoile de Mer*, Man Ray sculpts Desnos' poem into visual rhymes and rhythms. The fluid, atmospheric quality of the film is a result of shooting through a pane of obscuring glass. The oscillation between hazy and sharp vision clearly conveys the oneiric atmosphere of the poem. The film portrays three characters, Man Ray's mistress - Kiki, a man, and another man, played by Desnos himself, making a short appearance at the end. The film presents not a story, but a succession of actions, themes, and motifs. Man Ray opens the film with a shot of a rotating starfish. The narrative of *L'Etoile de mer* is placed between the opaque shot of an oval glass and a clear one, which ascribes to the film a quasi-imaginary quality. The sense of mystery in *L'Etoile de mer* is rendered through the unfolding of the movie; unlike in *Emak Bakia*, mystery was present in the awakening of the woman. Mystery is portrayed through the use of the gelatin filter, which creates a cloudy effect, and in doing so Man Ray gives the scene an air of unreality. Also, the man mysteriously examines the starfish in his own room and opens wide a series of segments that revolve around his search for mysterious love. In *Crossing the Bridge*, Albert Valentin argues that cinema “is the least realistic of the arts, since film, like dream, chooses some gestures, defers or enlarges them, eliminates others, travels many hours, days in a blink of an eye, speeds up or slows down, stops and goes backwards. Because of these above reasons, cinema always represents distant and distinct from ‘temporal and spatial reality.’”²⁷⁸ Furthermore, if we agree with Goudal who sees language as the foremost element of a logical thread, then the image contributes to or embellishes this thread. However, in Man Ray's films, something special occurs: the image exists outside of and separate from the screen story or logic.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷⁸ Albert Valentin, “*Crossing the bridge*”, *The Shadow & Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*. Edited, translated and Introduced by Paul Hammond. City Light Books, 2000, p. 101.

Man Ray's third significant film, *Le Mystère du château de Dés* (1929), is a hauntingly evocative poem to the transitory nature of life and a reminder of the role chance plays. Not only does the film include memorable Surrealist touches (the opening shot of dice in a mannequin's wooden hands, everyone in the film wears a stocking mask, etc.), it also adds thought-provoking, poetic observations. Man Ray's film is a profoundly spiritual work, in which the spectator is as much a participant as the masked actors themselves. Man Ray collected dice and stockings as accessories for the mystery of his movie. It is the shape of the cubic chateau that inspired Man Ray, as well as the thought of Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard*. In the poem, Mallarmé attempts to portray chance as the force that even the poet cannot dominate. "It was one the freest structures and the only one in which the visual impact of the words on the page (their placement as well as the type) was utilized to support the total poetic effect"²⁷⁹. The motif of dice is present and carefully placed among other geometric figures in the shape of a castle, which are regulated by this omnipresent and yet silent music. One of the dice disappears while the other is split in half, later rejoined. The presence of these dice is not as clear as the two white dice among other objects in an earlier shot. Instead, the cube is a clear die revolving, absorbing and reflecting light, possibly to convey the idea that chance appears and disappears.

Even the action of the characters takes place in the context of chance from beginning to end. A couple rolls the dice at the end to decide whether or not they will stay or leave. Four figures are introduced rolling dice. For both Mallarmé and Man Ray, chance is a universal force that manifests itself everywhere. Man Ray's film uses chance in an ultimately playful way, which proves to be different from Mallarmé. In *Igitur*, the poet argues,

"...chance denied with the aid of an anachronism, a character as a supreme incarnation of this race - who feels in himself, thanks to the absurd, the existence of the Absolute, has

²⁷⁹Steven Kovács quoting Robert Desnos in *From Enchantment to Rage: The story of Surrealist Cinema*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 131.

only forgotten human speech within the book of spells, and the thought in a luminary one announcing this negation of chance, the other dream where it has arrived. The character who, believing in the existence of the sole Absolute, imagines he is everywhere in a dream... finds the act useless, for there is and is not chance - he reduces chance to the infinite - which, he says, must exist somewhere²⁸⁰

Le mystère du château de dés, begins with coupled questions: 'on part?' (we leave?) and 'on ne part pas?' (we stay?). Two men throw the dice to let chance decide whether or not they should go or not, and where? Then, the dice have chosen and 'les portes de Paris s'ouvrent sur l'inconnu' (the doors open on the unknown) towards the 'prestigieux comme marqué par le sceau d'un étrange destin un château' (the prestigious as marked by the strange destiny a castle). Facing Man Ray's film, viewers find themselves as intruders as the camera enters the interior of the house. They pass from one room to another, contemplating works of art, searching for someone, but 'personne, personne, PERSONNE!' (no one, no one, NO ONE). The captions echo the emptiness of the house. 'Où sommes-nous?' (where are we?), 'un coup de dé n'abolira jamais le hasard' (a throw of dice will never abolish chance), 'existe t-il les fantômes d'action? ...des fantômes de nos actions passées? Les minutes vécues ne laissent-elles pas des traces concrètes dans l'air et sur la terre?' (Do action ghosts exist? Ghosts of our past actions? Do the minutes lived set down behind tangible traces on earth and in the air?) The answer, according to Man Ray, is that everything left behind is fluid, lying in the element of water, and as shown in the film in the pool. From these sets of questions, Man Ray moves his viewers to the swimming pool. Cinema has moved from its origin to a '[Pisciné]ma'.

A couple arrives, find two dice on the ground ask the following questions: "restèrent? Où ne restèrent pas?" (Stay? Or not stay?) Once again, fate has spoken and they stay. Man Ray ends his movie by showing these bodies frozen in time and space like the statues to their side. The movie ends the way it began, with the hand of a mannequin holding two dice. Shaking the "dés"

²⁸⁰ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected poetry and prose*. New Directions, 1982, p. 101.

will propel each individual into facing their “destin” - the words “dés” already contained in “destin”. Man Ray exposes the negative to turn them into white statues in the dark background of night. Man Ray depicts a mystical atmosphere that can only be present in a dream and the film. Far away in Paris, two men wearing stocking masks throw dice and decide to set out on their journey. They drive across open French countryside and arrive at the house. The building is totally deserted, yet, in a forgotten corner, four young people, also wearing stocking masks, are throwing dice. They decide to play in the swimming pool. They amuse themselves for what seems like an eternity but they are soon gone. *Le mystère du château de dés* is based on ‘la partie’ – or the action of playing a game – where life is a game and everyone is a participant.

B. René Clair (1898- 1981)

René Clair’s first film was *Entr’acte* (1924). From the first image, the expectations of a linear and conventional cinematic experience are dashed. The movie opens with Francis Picabia firing a cannonball and then the film rewinds backward and in slow-motion. The audience is immediately alerted they are in avant-garde territory. The following eighteen minutes of the film is a disjointed succession of sequences of Paris, balloons dressed as dolls whose heads are inflated and deflated, a ballerina dancing on a glass floor shot from underneath, a dance of lights in and out of focus in darkness, a carnival shooting gallery, Duchamp and Man Ray playing chess on the roof of a building where the chess board is superimposed with a scene from the street of Paris, and to top it all off, a funeral sequence in slow motion, people bouncing off the ground as they follow the hearse. The movie speeds up and the camera often takes a first-person perspective, especially at the end, during the chase. Though seemingly nonsensical sequences, they are full of humor and visually remarkable.

Without a doubt, Clair's film consists of a series of comical gags: Picabia watering the chess board that Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp are playing; a dancing ballerina filmed from underneath, revealing her under garments; a magician climbing out of a coffin; and a magic wand making everyone, even the magician, disappear. In *Entr'acte*, Clair uses nearly all the innovative cinematic techniques and tricks, such as long shot, close-up, fade-in, fragmentary panning shot, low angle, superimposition, transformation, dissolves, jump cuts, fast and slow speed, and alternative perspectives to emphasize the cinematic apparatus itself, as opposed to the story. Through the last sequence, humor is at the center of the screen. There, a man leaps through a piece of paper onto which the word 'end' is written. He falls down and his head is on the ground; his head is then kicked by a pedestrian, which propels him backward through the paper again and the tear disappears. The word 'end' is reconstructed. The end of the film reveals the illusory character of cinema through its unconventional motion and free associations.

C. Germaine Dulac (1882-1942)

One of Germaine Dulac's most famous works is *La Coquille et le clergyman* (*The Seashell and the Clergyman*, 1928). *La Coquille et le clergyman*, widely regarded by critics as the first Surrealist film, provoked a controversy that still remains. As it was present with experimental films, its reputation overshadows its content. The film is so enigmatic that it indeed seems meaningless. If there is a meaning, it is dubious and objectionable. Artaud collaborated with Dulac on the script. It has been said that Buñuel had watched *The Seashell and The Clergyman* as he worked on his *Un Chien Andalou* (*Andalusian Dog*, 1928). It is no coincidence that both films share similar cinematic devices. In both films, the notion of time is disrupted and the images on-screen unfold like the fabric of a dream with the intention to visually shock viewers. In this respect, the purpose of the infamous eye slitting in *Un Chien Andalou* is

comparable with the exposure of the woman's breasts in *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. Artaud believed that his film "...was indeed the first movie of its kind, a forerunner... In all fairness, the critics, if there are any left around, should recognize the relationship of all these films and say that they all descend from *The Shell and the Clergyman*, but without [its] spirit... which they all failed to recapture."²⁸¹ Dulac's film, like her predecessors and the Surrealists, plunged viewers into an unstable landscape where the image cannot be trusted. She treated the images in the same fashion that Desnos used language in *Rose Sélavy*, *Language Cuit* or *L'Aumonyme*. The Surrealists were fond of building bridges between distant realities and the result is a complex, multi-layered film or poem, linguistically unstable; the images dissolve into one another to propel the audience to a state of subconsciousness. Artaud's aim was clear and he stated, "...situations which emerge from the simple collision of objects, forms, repulsions and attractions. It does not separate itself from life but returns to the primitive order of things."²⁸² For example, the image of the woman, as the priest's object of desire is presented ethereally - a ghost-like figure appearing and disappearing throughout the film including a chase scene where her body is distorted, stretched, and deformed. In Artaud's original scenario, these distortions were to be even more horrific than the images in the final film: "...now with an enormous swollen cheek, now putting out her tongue which stretches into infinity and onto which the clergyman hangs as if it were a rope. Now with her chest horribly puffed out."²⁸³

The images in Dulac's film have the potentiality to vanish, expand, and mutate. Again, Dulac's aesthetics transpose the juxtaposition of incongruous images and concepts so dear to the Surrealists in order to make visible the working of the subconscious mind. *The Seashell and the*

²⁸¹ Antonin Artaud in Alain Virmaux, "Artaud and Film", translated by Simone Sanzenbach, *Tulane Drama Review*, 11.1 (Fall 1966), p. 159.

²⁸² Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works: Volume Three*, Paule Thévenin (Ed.), translated by Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), p.17.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Clergyman does not tell a story, but develops a series of states of mind, just as one thought derives from another, without needing to reproduce a logical sequence of events. From the clash of objects and gestures, true psychic situations are derived, and from these, rational thinking, trapped, can only seek a subtle escape. However, the profane material of avant-garde artists always stirred emotions and during the premiere of Dulac's film on January 1928, a chaotic riot disrupted the viewing of *La Coquille et le Clergyman*. Ink has been spilled on the possibility that the riot began with a dispute between Artaud and Dulac regarding the fact that Dulac kept Artaud in the dark while filming and editing. In *The Image and the Spark*, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis argues that Dulac conceived a film resembling a dream-like state: a succession of chaos representing the irrational flow of the dream itself. "On the other hand, Artaud wanted to create the impact of the dream instead of simply reproducing its irrationality. For him, then, the representation of a "dream-state," in which the spectator's involvement was one of active participation, was the primary aim of his scenario."²⁸⁴

D. Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)

In 1928, another quintessential Surrealist film made its debut, *Un chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*) by Spanish artist Luis Buñuel in collaboration with the Surrealist painter Salvador Dalí, who worked as an assistant for Jean Epstein. The film is primarily concerned with two lovers who quarrel but what makes it impossible to follow the narrative is the discontinuity of space and time that punctuate the film. It begins with a simple title card: "Once upon a time..." - a comforting phrase, but Buñuel's use of it here is both ironic and, in hindsight, profoundly disturbing. From this beginning, we are launched into one of the most celebrated and discussed scenes in all of cinema. A man, none other than Buñuel himself, is seen sharpening a razor and

²⁸⁴ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "The Image and the Spark: Dulac and Artaud Reviewed", in Rudolf E. Kuenzli, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1996, p. 117

testing the blade on his own thumb. He steps out on the balcony, a cigarette in his mouth, and looks at the moon. We are shown the face of a woman, her eyes fixed on us, the audience. A thin cloud crosses the moon halfway just as Buñuel cuts to a close-up of the woman's eye, the razor blade slicing through it. With this single shot, Buñuel sets the tone of the film. What spectators are going to see is not only an attack on good taste but also an attack on how one sees. Buñuel, like his predecessors Richter and Eggeling, tried spectators' patience not with a reproduction of formal rhythm but with disgust and disturbance.

The first time we see the man, he seems to be wearing a woman's garment riding a bicycle down the street. For no reason, he collapses and the woman takes from him his outfit and a strange box. Then, the man reappears standing in a room, staring at his hand. There is a hole in his palm like the stigmata of Christ, ants swarming from the wound. From a close-up of the man's mutilated hand, we spring into a series of dissolves - the hand dissolves into a close-up of a woman's hairy armpit which dissolves to a shot of a sea urchin which dissolves to an iris-out from a close-up of the top of a woman's head. The movie treats shots as pure objects deprived of any signified meaning and reflects the Surrealist idea of automatic writing. What one sees on-screen is the flesh and blood of the *Exquisite Cadaver*. This movie ought not to be understood but felt. The strangeness of the juxtaposition of images seems to be much less so than the characters' reactions in such situations. They do not seem affected the same way the spectators are. On the contrary, the actors express feelings that they feel for one another in a very realistic manner regardless of their surroundings' peculiarity. However, viewers are perplexed because of the contradiction between the image and the language of the image. Buñuel and Dali transpose a view of cinema not as reality but a representation of reality where time and space are deprived of markers. The film clearly indicates the illusory aspect of cinema and with it comes the enigmatic

sense of the movie, embodied by the presence of a box throughout the film. Why the box? Why these stripes? *Un Chien Andalou* is mysterious because it does not conceal anything, instead emulating a false reality by juxtaposing the improbable. The spectators are lost and the lack of coherence between each sequence is reinforced by Buñuel's random interjection of title cards: "Eight years later..." and "Three in the morning..." This movie is not merely to shock, but also to disrupt people with a clear conscience. In Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*, the artist's sole objects are light and shadow in the juxtaposition of volume and geometric form. There, everything is dehumanized. In *Un Chien Andalou* that very same sense of dehumanization is seen in the presence of the box between the shots, somehow linking the narrative together. But it is also what art does best, which is reflect an idea of truth and encourage a range of interpretations. In spite of the attempted Surrealist connections, it is however very difficult to decode Buñuel's film.

The Surrealists were taken with everyday objects that they then elevated into something superior. Duchamp and Man Ray turned simple 'objet trouvé' (found object) into 'objet d'art' (object of art). Predating the Surrealists, Léger's second part of *Ballet mécanique* animated ordinary objects into images of aesthetic beauty. Sheets of corrugated metal, kitchen funnels, fluted gelatin molds, other culinary utensils, all lose their primary identity to become marvelous items moving on the screen. The Dada and Surrealist filmmakers were first and foremost interested in the idea of experimenting with the moving image using disjointed images, non-narrative, incongruity, and humor. About cinema Artaud wrote, "for the Surrealists, it was above all the cinema that possessed the uncanny ability to penetrate the surface of the world and encapsulate in moments of shocking in-sight the nature of the physical and sensual universe."²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works: Volume Three*, Paule Thévenin (Ed.), translated by Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), p. 21.

Evidently, the filmmakers mentioned significantly deviated from the conventional notion of film. Rather, they conceived a cinematic experience capable of transcending illusion and acting directly upon (and altering) the viewer's perception of material reality. The alternate realities they envisioned inhabited the subconscious mind. They perceived representation to be the result of a translation, the mental and artistic process that turns "uncooked thought" (to play on Desnos' *Cooked Language*) into art.

3. Beneath Cinematic Nonsense

"What is film but an act of seeing that makes itself seen and when in a movie theater we perceive a film as sensible; the film and us are immersed in the same world and 'in the activity of visual being'"²⁸⁶. What we see on the screen (either abstract or realistic) is the intended perception of another experience (of the filmmaker absent on the screen, yet present). What might be invisible or absent visually might be present in perception in the act of seeing. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of the lamp that he sees and experiences. He does not see the back of the lamp and yet his perception of the lamp encompasses the hidden side. It is present in its way like the filmmaker is present in the mental vicinity of the viewer in the theater. Then, perception is understood as a reference to a whole; this is not presence and absence set in opposition, but rather one in the other, *'l'un dans l'autre'* as Breton said, for we simultaneously express our perception of that experience. Vivian Sobchack sees eye-to-eye with Breton and Merleau-Ponty; in *The Address to the Eye*, she writes, "the visible always articulates itself as partially latent and partially unresolved. Correlatively, the invisible does not conceal everything from vision, it reveals itself as an active pressure upon vision and the visible... Thus, existence disallows

²⁸⁶ Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 8.

absolute ‘edges’ to visual experience.”²⁸⁷ When looking at the avant-garde films of the twenties, one cannot help thinking about what the eyes cannot see and yet know is there.

It is established that for the avant-garde artists the camera is to showcase that in fact cinema is not real life, but rather a flux between the real and the imaginary. At the turn of the century the blurry vision of the two was not as subtle as it is shown in contemporary films where viewers might find themselves struggling to identify each. The Dadaists and Surrealists disrupted the notion of time, abruptly juxtaposing images and unconventionally deconstructing any sense of logic. All these digressions were visible on-screen. Suture became a dominant theory in film studies, imposing onto the images a linguistic system of signs (composed of signifier and signified). Kaja Silverman’s article “On suture” seems a bit inadequate when defining the cinematic language of the avant-garde films. She borrows Jacques-Alain Miller’s (disciple of Jacques Lacan) definition of suture as a way to bring sequence together. He says,

“Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse... it figures there is the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension - the general relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking - the place-of.”²⁸⁸

Suture is more than just the way images are connected. It is also the space between the images that signifies too. Take for instance the two scenes in a film that occur in different settings with different characters, where the moment between them is blank, with no apparent connection. The audience is thrown out of the narrative. The avant-garde films, because of their lack of narrative, or out of sequence narrative, abrupt juxtapositions, and disruption of time and space, constantly force the audience to orient themselves around the following questions: What is happening? Where am I? Who am I? This engenders a state of anxiety in viewers, the so-called anxiety of

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 295.

²⁸⁸ Kaja Silverman *From The Subject of Semiotics; On Suture*. Film Theory and Criticism. Edited by Leo Barudy and Marshall Cohen. Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 137.

suture. Silverman adds, "...the viewing subject becomes aware of the limitations on what it sees - aware, that is of an absent field. At this point shot 1 becomes a signifier of that absent field, and *jouissance* gives way to unpleasure."²⁸⁹ For Silverman,

"Cinematic suture is thus largely synonymous with the operations of classic narrative, operations which include a wide variety of editing, lighting, compositional, and other formal elements, but within which the values of absence and lack always play a center role. Those values not only activate the viewer's desire and transform one shot into a signifier for the next, but serve to deflect attention away from the level of enunciation to that of the fiction"²⁹⁰

Suture, though, implies intentions that differ from the Surrealist and Dada films.

A. Disorientation/Subconscious

As we have seen earlier, the Surrealist films grew out of the model of the dream, which was the medium in the 1920s and 1930s. They escape the verbal landscape and the rational in search of freedom of expression. For Artaud, Desnos, and Buñuel, the model of the dream is essential to the development of a Surrealist film practice. However, among themselves, there exist some differences. Desnos is striving for the "wish-fulfilling content of amour fou"²⁹¹ and perceives film like a dream reversing expectations of the real world by presenting the accomplishment of the most secret desires for passion and adventure. Artaud stresses the structural and formal resemblance between film and dream, basing his theory of Surrealist cinema on the exploitation of the film's ability "to imitate the special language of the dream"²⁹². In his quest for the absolute, Desnos associates cinema with intoxication and therefore as being the "most powerful of all cerebral drugs: the dual scenario develops in an atmosphere superior to

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 146.

²⁹¹ Williams, Linda, *Figures of Desire: A theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981, p. 26.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 26.

opium's while, participating in two discourses, facts and gestures are suddenly illumined as dazzling points of contact.”²⁹³

In the avant-garde films is found a sympathetic and compatible cinematic analogue to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. They offer a phenomenology on celluloid, recognizing the vital importance of perception and its function as the locus of meaning that can be taken from the world. Merleau-Ponty describes the phenomenological project as a philosophy that puts essences back into existence and does not attempt to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any other starting point than that of their ‘facticity’. Rather, meaning emerges for us as a direct result of our fundamental state of being-in-the-world. It is our always embodied and irreducibly involved relationship with the world that allows for the phenomena, which we perceive to have meaning for us. There is only one world, the world of phenomenal experience, a world that is, for Merleau-Ponty and Avant-garde filmmakers, essentially opaque and ambiguous. Merleau-Ponty gives the metaphor of the color red in the carpet in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and affirms that the color is perceived as such only in relation to the shadow and light around it.

These films also resist the arbitrary aspect of language because the understanding of the world comes from the interaction one has with the world, not from how the world appears. They further echo Merleau-Ponty who believes, “the first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world”²⁹⁴ All advocate the importance of presenting phenomena from a first-person perspective of the subject. The body cannot be objectified; to do so would be to separate it from the mind. The mind and body work as one. Merleau-Ponty argues that mental experience, which seems to be internal, is expressed externally in actions. In *The Eye and the Mind*, Merleau-Ponty insists on the idea that without the

²⁹³ Robert Desnos, “Eroticism”, *The Shadow & Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*. Edited, translated by Paul Hammond. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000, p. 195.

²⁹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. Routledge Classics, 2002, p. 3.

body man would not be able to either perceive or feel. It is within the physicality of the body that man is able to express emotions or ideas. His perception of the embodied experience becomes evident for Richter's audience. Richter confessed in his self-portrait that often Dada films were trying to test the spectators' patience, mostly through the consistent repetitions in their films. In *Rhythmus 21*, Richter focuses on the temporality of the cinematic experience by emphasizing movement and the shifting of elements on-screen. The film consists of a continuous and repetitive flow of black rectangles on a white screen and white squares on a black screen that move forward, backward, vertically, and horizontally across the screen. Each form grows, breaks apart, and is joined again together. The film never seems to go in one direction or the other. In so doing, Richter was able to concentrate on the arrangement of the essential elements of cinema: movement and light. The film's effect is to produce a cinematic illusion of depth, where Richter creates a precise rhythm with the movement of these shapes and suggests binary connections through opposites: black/white, left/right, top/bottom and creates visual associations with geometric patterns. When watching, perception and sensation combine to work as one.

In *Diagonal Symphony*, Victor Eggeling also stresses movement over expression of what the lines are for. *Diagonal Symphony* is made out of paper cutouts and tin foil figures, photographed a frame at a time. He created shapes and patterns that look like musical instruments, music lines, and machine parts. White, delicate, abstract figures move on a black background, metronomically. The gradual appearance and disappearance of the pictures was accomplished by means of tinfoil screens, which were moved so as to cover and uncover the drawings. The ambiguities and opacity of Richter's films are here absent in Eggeling's film, because the motion picture follows one mechanical and dimensional movement. The effect of the film is centered on the language of motion. All the moving pictures in the film are drawings by

Eggeling using black ink on white paper. What we see on-screen is white figures on a black background, which is actually the negative. In *Ballet mécanique*, the scene of the washerwoman going up and down the stairs resembles the repetition of forms also found in the films of Richter and Eggeling. Leger further affirms, that “the particular interest of the film is centered upon the importance which we give to the fixed image, to its arithmetical, automatic projection... Slowed down or accelerated”²⁹⁵. The repetitions have an effect on the eye and mind of the viewers of overloading images to the point that the viewer can no longer passively accept the movement of pictures. These filmmakers intended to simultaneously amaze viewers and make them uneasy. They definitely challenge the audience by these successive changes on-screen.

In *Anémic Cinéma* (1926), Marcel Duchamp arrived at a similar aim by figuratively and physically destabilizing the viewer in his position before the screen. The film is a series of “rotoreliefs” mounted and rotated on a spiraling wheel, making it near impossible for the viewer to read the puns written upon them. In order to read them, the viewer must move physically (bending his head to the right or left) to follow the circular movement. Dalia Judovitz suggests that, “the rotary disk, rather than acting as a screen, mimics the shape of the eye. The illusion is reinforced by the fact that the rotoreliefs alternate by moving in opposite directions and by the fact that a flickering light constantly interferes with the legibility of the verbal puns, creating the effect of natural blinking”²⁹⁶. The picture presents the viewer with what Octavio Paz called “vertigo of delay”²⁹⁷ rather than the vertigo of acceleration in Richter and Eggeling’s films. Duchamp affirms, “Physically - the eye is the sense of the perspective and, because of this,

²⁹⁵ Judi Freeman, “Bridging Purism and Surrealism: The Origins and Production of Fernand Léger’s Ballet mécanique”, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 38.

²⁹⁶ Dalia Judovitz, “Anemic Cinema in Duchamp: Cinema as Readymade”, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 51.

²⁹⁷ Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare*. Seaver Books, 1978. p. 2

perspectivity resembles a color, which, like color is also not controllable by touching it”²⁹⁸. For Duchamp the eye has both 1) the possibility to acquire meaning through perspective and 2) to create optic illusion, thus obscuring meaning. Judovitz concludes, “the roto-reliefs in movement stage an object of perception... at the same time that they simulate the subjective position, imitating the eye of the viewer... [the film] enacts the poetic transition between the subject and the object... [where] the eye is serving as generator of both cognitive meaning and perception”²⁹⁹

The films of Richter, Eggeling, Man Ray, Léger and Duchamp serve as screens themselves to bring into being Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the embodied perception. These films illustrate what Merleau-Ponty calls “chiasmus” a place “...which separates and reunites, which sustains every cohesion”³⁰⁰. The camera is the perfect apparatus for such filmmakers to question perception and the ambiguity of reality. The phenomenological approach confronts the dualistic theory, which divides the film experience between the viewing subject and an object perceived. Phenomenology sees the film experience as interplay of subject-object. “Merleau-Ponty’s existential embodiment is to assess film, both in terms of placement in the life-world and displacement in the aesthetic world. In practice, both phases merge”³⁰¹. This ‘depaysement’ or disorientation was a typical element in Surrealist and visual art; “The Surrealists were more concerned in the structure of the dream rather than in its content. Since the dreams consist of the disruption of one level of discourse by another... the Surrealist practice with respect to film was to imitate... displacement processes.”³⁰². In *Communicating Vessels*, Breton employs dream as a means to access the unconscious, considering it both as a source for their texts and as formal

²⁹⁸ Dalia Judovitz, “Anemic Cinema in Duchamp: Cinema as Readymade”, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 15.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁰⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind* p. 187

³⁰¹ Spencer Shaw, *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze*. McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers. 2008, p. 23.

³⁰² Williams, Linda, *Figures of Desire: A theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981, p. 32.

means of expression. Breton also accepts the Freudian interpretation of the unconscious as revealed in dreams. The Surrealists' attraction to the image is inseparably linked with the Freudian notion that the image-presentation of dreams is a psychic shortcut to the satisfaction of desire. On one hand, "The Surrealist film means the simple possession of a love-object"³⁰³; on the other, we can also say "by imitating the discourse of the unconscious on the screen, Surrealists' films have the paradoxical effect of making the spectator more conscious of the process that produces desire."³⁰⁴ Both dream and film project a desire that is not there. As Lacan points out, it is a desire that is never satisfied, a so-called "fantasy of the other"³⁰⁵. The Surrealists' desire was to eliminate time and transform reality according to the forms of our desire, following what Karl Marx said 'transform the world', adding Rimbaud's transformation to it 'change life'.

As in an omnipresent dream, the artists were haunted by images of searching and finding, of veiling and revealing, of presence and absence, where boundaries between real and unreal can no longer be distinguished, only perceived erroneously as contradictions. Breton's "sublime point" was the place at which a unity could be achieved, but it was admittedly elusive, despite being a primary focus: "No, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point"³⁰⁶. If the goal was fusion, the process of reaching that goal implied a consciousness of the barrier between the self and the other, the inner and outer worlds. Jennifer Mundy talks about these barriers as being "very fine, even at the limit permeable" (Mundy 31) and claims that for Breton they are 'capillary tissue', separating the two realms. The Surrealist activities were to remove the

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 218.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 210.

³⁰⁶ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor Paperback. The University of Michigan, 1972, p. 123-24.

obstacles between the desiring self and the object of its desire. For psychoanalysis, the proximity between film and dream is essential because film interpretation is seen as a sort of Freudian dream interpretation. Almost half a century after the work of Rudolf Arnheim, psychoanalytical film theory is still struggling to explain the ways in which unconscious elements obstruct the reception of films and to understand how films spark unconscious or irrational processes. This approach can be understood as diametrically opposed to that of cognitive science which is also interested in how spectators make sense of and respond to films, but which observes the viewer's conscious processing of films. The primary mode of the filmic experience, in Surrealist theory, is discovery and uncovering - to discover aspects of reality that are re-presented through the film. Hence, Surrealism shares many of the presuppositions of phenomenology regarding reality and its representation and perception; for example, Surrealist theory presupposes the "intentionality" of perception and expression in the act of re-presentation. Moreover, in Surrealism, this process of discovery is inordinately visual, entailing complex relationships between the perceiving "eye" and the perceiving "I." The playful punning of Surrealist film theory (as well as semiotic film theory) with the eye and I, with visual perception and subjectivity, resonates with phenomenological embodied perception.

In contrast, the task of cognitive film theory is to examine how the perception of the film relates to the perception of the viewers. The cognitive approach was introduced in the mid-late 1980. David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* developed a new method for film study using "...models of rationality and practical problem-solving. When Bordwell writes of the schemas, inferences, hypotheses, and assumptions used in film viewing, he assumes the spectator engaging in goal-directed, primarily non-conscious procedures to make sense of film

narratives.”³⁰⁷ Bordwell’s approach is that it assumed spectators make sense of films in many of the same ways that people make sense of the real world. Cognitive theory today is interested in how spectators make sense of and respond to films and together with “...the textual structures and techniques that give rise to spectatorial activity and response.”³⁰⁸ Noël Carroll has also been interested in filmic perception and narrative comprehension, but Carroll’s interest extends to the spectators’ motivations and emotions, and to what makes the movies such a widespread and intense experience for people worldwide.

Cognitive film theory argues that in responding to films, thinking and feeling are intimately related. For the avant-garde filmmakers, the experience of the film was not to be either thought out or felt through. Their films were about a movement of ideas on-screen. Their films were formless, like flowing water. To have a form is to have a preconception about the future and thus to be less in the present moment. The goal for the avant-garde filmmakers was to surprise the spectator into surrendering to chance. In regard to the spectatorial mode, the avant-garde filmmakers shared views similar to Taoists, which lead to a type of realization in which the individual is not only assumed to exist, but is also required to be autonomous and separate from what is seen. The lack of identification reinforces the illusion that the self exists in some definitive form.

Viewing the film as formless can in a sense be seen as an aspect of integration in the shared universe. To define Dada, Breton declared, “Dada is a state of mind” or as Picabia said, “cinema is but an evocation as rapid as the thought of the brain.” Avant-garde filmmakers resisted a language of reason, because according to them, the understanding of the world comes not from how the world looks to a person but from the interaction that one has with the world.

³⁰⁷ Carl Plantinga “Cognitive Film Theory: An Insider’s Appraisal”. *Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 12, n° 2, 2002, p. 21.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23

They showed the audience how to look at a work of art without necessarily having to name or understand it with words, but rather to exchange or experience visual thinking itself. For them, thought is energy, what avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage called “sparkling of the synapses” or “light in the brain”. Because films are made of light, they established a correlation between light in film and light that triggers the brain in reality. They are “light-events” and these light-events can be passed on to viewers to experience what has inspired filmmakers. Brakhage wrote:

“Art is the expression of the internal physiology of the artist. It’s that at scratch: the individual expression that can be attended by a person learning himself sing and feeling his heartbeat... it begins with and comes to this: a man attending his physiology and making an expression out of it. I think the first expression was some creature beating his chest to give out with the heartbeat, and then the feet danced, so the feet were expressing the heartbeat, and then the heartbeat was heard more complexly, and that made possible a greater variety of rhythms. Anyone who attends his own heartbeat can find the source of all rhythmic structures. And then there were pictures in the eyes. There was experience and there were memories and the memories came up and made a picture and there were things crucial to the picture, and they made of it a hieroglyph, and writing started there. And I think, at heart, that all art is today as it was then: man is supposed to be a million years old”³⁰⁹.

Dadaists share many of the presuppositions of phenomenology regarding reality, its representation, and perception; for example, the “intentionality” of perception and expression in the act of re-presentation. This process of discovery is inordinately visual, entailing complex relationships between the perceiving “eye” and the perceiving “I.” The playful punning of eye and I with visual perception and subjectivity resonates with phenomenological embodied perception. The body for Merleau-Ponty is much more than just an entity to be treated as an inert object whose behavior is to be explained exhaustively in terms of science as a “second order expression of the world”. But neither is it a pure, transparent subject. The body must be seen as a “conscious subject” situated in the perceptual milieu. The situation the body-subject finds itself thrown into is one of constant change. The world we encounter in perception is a “lived

³⁰⁹ Stan Brakhage *Metaphors on Vision*. Film Culture, 1963, p. 124.

experience”. The body-subject is that which makes possible lived experience, that through which we perceive, feel and act. According to Merleau-Ponty, there is a logic of the world to which the body conforms. He refers to this as “the pre-objective realm”. A thing is “internally taken by us, reconstituted and experienced by us insofar as it is bound up with a world, the basic structures of which we carry with us, and of which it is merely one of the many possible concrete forms.”³¹⁰. Phenomenology is primarily concerned with human experience and perception is the background of this. The world is a field for perception and consciousness assigns meanings to it, preventing a separation of people from what they perceive. Bodily experience is an ambiguous mode of existence because the idea of the body cannot be separated from the experience of the body and because mind and body cannot be separated as subject and object. The mind and body each have their own being, and the perceptions of the body influence what is perceived by the mind. Similarly, in Dadaist approaches to film, non-narrative and minimalist narrative structures enable the representation of reality, and also a means of undermining social structures of reality.

B. Mystery: Metaphysical Being

Artaud thought of cinema as being mysterious. He believes that “in the cinema, I have always distinguished a quality peculiar to the secret movement and matter of images. The cinema has an unexpected and mysterious side that we find in no other form of art.”³¹¹ For a film to come into being, the filmmaker has to cut, select, splice or discard images. As a result of these operations the audience perceives what the filmmaker had intended them to perceive and not what the filmmaker saw through the lens at the time he filmed it. “The focus on the principle of montage problematizes the relationship between object of perception and the subject of

³¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. Routledge Classics, 2002, pt II, 3.

³¹¹ Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works: Volume Three*, Paule Thévenin (Ed.), translated by Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), p. 65.

perception. Montage does not allow for a coherent perspective in which the subject is in control”³¹² says Anton Kaes in his article “Verfremdend als Verfahren: Film and Dada”. The hallucinatory quality of most of these films is to reinforce the subjectivity of the filmmaker. In *Emak Bakia* (1926), Man Ray offers a series of black and white images, flashing flakes, dancing pins, flowers in the field, lights from a carousel moving slower than the pins, a sign broadcasting the day’s news, vertical beams of light spinning from slow to fast, a glass dancing slowly. The images become more abstract, more erratic, and finally we see a woman’s eye between a car’s headlights, which reminds us of the superimposed eye of the filmmaker on the camera looking at us while Man Ray himself is filming *Emak Bakia*. But the intoxicating moving picture reaches its peak when the motion of the camera becomes circular above the crashing waves on the shore. All together, these disjointed images or discontinuous and unrelated events are part of that film or one dream. Kuenzli affirms that, “Dada filmmakers redefine the relation of part to whole, the relation of part to part. It is the cut, the montage principle that makes the energy in the system visible and active. Dada’s machines use the contradictions and frictions in the system to remain non-mimetic”³¹³. Kuenzli speaks about Dada films as offering “a certain physicality and body-presence of the first cinema audiences ... [which represents] the Dada element in film.”³¹⁴

Like photography, cinema was commonly understood in realist terms as a means of accurately capturing an objective world. Dada, however, focused on and experimented with the complex ways in which this realism could be simultaneously strengthened and subverted through editing to create multi-layered realities. Multiplicity and ambiguity, including multiple potential meanings, lack of narrative closure, and perceived untaken paths, intentionally elicit an active

³¹² Thomas Elsaesser, “Dada/Cinema?”, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 16.

³¹³ Thomas Elsaesser, “Dada/Cinema”, *Dada and Surrealist Film*. Edited Rudolf E. Kuenzli, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2001, p. 25.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

response from the spectator. This active participation in the creation of filmic meaning can affect the narrative structure. Take for instance the participation of the spectator in *Ballet Mécanique* (1926) by Fernand Léger. The film is a collage of swinging chrome balls, the gears of machines, dancing bottles, rotating disks juxtaposed with a woman's lips and eyes. But what about this single bird? After 2 minutes in the film, a bird appears and is never seen again, unlike the other, repetitive sequences of the film. We see geometric forms plunge into one another, numbers appear, steel objects, spheres, reflections of the camera itself, spinning/gyrating/undulating surfaces of ordinary objects transformed by the mechanical process of film. By isolating the flying bird in this succession of mechanical realities, Léger conveys the idea that the viewer is not seeing a different reality that opened itself to them thanks to the camera, a nature of reality they would be unable to see with the naked eye. The bird appearing and disappearing is a reminder of the imposed perception onto the viewer. Once again, the film reiterates that film is not about emotions but motion, in which beginning and ending are one (like a dot).

The film ends the way it begins with the image of the woman, but no longer on the swing. She is standing, smelling flowers. For Merleau-Ponty:

“the real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgment before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination. Perception is not a science of the world. It is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object... it is [rather] the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions.” (Merleau-Ponty xii)

Unlike the ruptures experienced in Richter, Eggeling, and Duchamp's films through the obsessive repetitions of seemingly similar images forcing a being-in-the-world, *Ballet Mécanique* and *Emak Bakia* encourage the participation of the spectator. Like the filmmaker shooting, the spectators have no direct experience of the phenomena until the projector expresses them on the screen. Sobchack affirms that, “the projector is the expressive mechanism of

cinematic technology, not its perceptive mechanism... although its function enables perception as expression... the camera is a perceptive mechanism... [that] enables perception as expression”³¹⁵. The spectators see through the projector an embodiment relation that enables them to see slow or fast motion as visible, in a way, which was invisible to the filmmaker at the time of filming. The camera is only used to realize his perceptive intention. Again returning to the things themselves (film/filmmaker/camera/spectator/projector) is going back to the way in which we experience the world. For Merleau-Ponty, there is no “inner realm” of pure subjectivity. The “I” can only exist in relation to a situation, to the world of things or people.

In sum, Merleau-Ponty extends Heidegger's notion of human reality as Being-in-the-World. He does this via an extended exploration of a paradox of human vision, which is 1) to see those things that make up the world, and 2) to see ourselves in the world. In other words, the body that sees also sees itself. Having made the point that vision and movement are linked by means of the body, Merleau-Ponty goes on to investigate the “enigma” that the human body “simultaneously sees and is seen”. The human body is an object in the world that experiences itself as itself, and at the same time, as a part of the world of things that are not it. In touching my hand, I am both touching and being touched. Yet, both sides of this experience are mine. For Merleau-Ponty, our bodies, far from limiting in encounters with the world, simultaneously give access to what senses perceive and link to the entire universe of human perception. This reflexivity leads to an ambiguity of vision. Merleau-Ponty examines this and its embodiment in the practice of film/perception. The visible world and the world in which we move are intertwined. He argues vision and movement are united in a body that moves-and-sees as part of one complete process, any theory that separates representational minds and represented objects

³¹⁵ Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 189.

will not allow an understanding of the nature of actual experience in the world. Merleau-Ponty is absolutely unwilling to provide simplifications. He believes the world of human experience is filled with ambiguity. Reality, as we know it, is indefinite. Thus, to describe it “clearly” is to describe it in terms that express its multiple aspects. He adds, “we must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive.”³¹⁶

Dada films and the screen testify to the facticity that exists in the world, since “all consciousness is the consciousness of something... that inner perception is impossible without outer perception that the world, as a collection of connected phenomena, is anticipated in the consciousness of my unity, and is the means in which whereby I come into being as a consciousness”³¹⁷. Léger opens and ends *Ballet mécanique* with a cutout Cubist portrait of Charlie Chaplin. The image of the dismembered/Cubist-like Charlie Chaplin celebrates the true nature of not only Dada films but also Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy: motion itself (with its visibility and invisibility) where attention is not brought to spoken language but to the motion or fluxus of an embodied presence in-the-world.

Films provide the necessary tool to navigate these fields of appearances and reality. For phenomenology, 1) there are no “mere” appearances, and nothing is “just” an appearance. Appearances are real; they belong to being: “Phenomenology allows us to recognize and to restore the world that seemed to have been lost where we were locked into our own internal world”³¹⁸; and 2) phenomenology argues that “Presentations and absences are exquisitely interwoven, and phenomenology helps us to think about them.”³¹⁹ In doing so, artists challenge the notion of coherence and ask a reconstruction of either the poem or image with the playfulness

³¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. Routledge Classics, 2002, p. xix.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 15.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

of a game, which entails risk, fear, uncertainty, and pleasure. Not only does the poem risk nonsense, but it also offers the reader no assurances as it erodes the comparative safety of reason.

The same experience takes place while viewing a film. In a talk at a film showing October 15, 1943, at the American Contemporary Gallery, Hollywood, Man Ray said:

“To sum up, as far as the cinema is concerned, the worst films I have seen, that is, those that put me to sleep, contain ten or fifteen minutes that are wonderful. In the same way, I may add that the best films I have seen contain only ten or fifteen minutes that are worthwhile. Which in no way discourages me or makes me a pessimist. I do believe that the movies will become a great art one day, when the production of the film will really be in the hands of one mastermind.”

The artful mixing of the real and the unreal, the actual and the fictitious, resulted in the making of such Surrealist films by Man Ray. Kovács claims that, “Man Ray's contribution to the Surrealist film may be best characterized as haphazard”³²⁰. This statement could not be truer in light of *Le mystère du château de Dés*, which reveals that life should not be about what you see, but how you perceive it - with musical images. Man Ray played a significant role in the realization of the Surrealists' dreams for the cinema, his films randomly turning the image into an ‘automatic cinema’ while bringing viewers or dreamers in and out of a state of consciousness. Existence is possible through the body and consciousness is not just locked up inside the mind. To the same extent, when defining poetry and poetics, Jean Cocteau says, “Poetry is the production of the unconscious... [while]...the poetic is conscious. They stand back to back, and a great number of excursions into the poetic contain not the slightest poetry. On the other hand there are realistic ventures which radiate a poetry that bathes them in phosphorescent light.”³²¹

To conclude, Breton's quote encompasses the essence of the discussion:

³²⁰ Steven Kovács quoting Robert Desnos in *From Enchantment to Rage: The story of Surrealist Cinema*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 151.

³²¹ Cocteau, Jean *The Art of Cinema: A collection of Cocteau's writings on film*. Translated by Robin Buss. Edited by André Bernard & Claude Gauteur. Published by Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., 2001, p. 39.

“Surrealism, as many of us had conceived of it for years, should not be considered as extant except in the a priori nonspecialization of its effort. I hope it will be considered as having tried nothing better than to cast a conductive wire between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness, the assurance of knowledge and of love, of life and life and the revolution, and so on.” (Breton CV 86)

What more conducive than the silver screen, where dreams and elements of reality perform a perpetual and enchanting dance in the intimacy of the theater’s darkness! For Breton, everything is equally true and real. “Everything is possible”: this is the credo of cinema, and because its techniques express a virtual reality, it no longer functions as a category opposed to reality: the representation and the represented become identical. Everything is equally true and real, or false and unreal; this is what a sequence of images in the cinema teaches viewers. Modernism in cinema utilizes abstraction to view a rather distorted side of reality. O’Pray argues that abstractions raised the crucial matter of meaning. These avant-garde filmmakers found a way to counter the representational quality by exploiting rapid montage, repetition, superimposition, and manipulation of time to question the nature of reality as embodied in film fictions. The sense of irrationalism found in art in the early 1920s stood for the liberation of the unconscious to transform the conscious being. The avant-garde was also understood as being against realism while emulating life, because of its equanimity - a quality not always apparent in real life. However, going against a reality or way of representing the real does not necessarily mean irrationality. Deprived of judgment, it might just be the other side of the same coin. Thus, cinematic nonsense shares the same sense of outsidership or marginality that Desnos felt when experimenting with language in his poetry. For the Surrealists, cinema is poetry and they were the poets of its [he]art. The following chapter discusses the interconnectedness between two distant realities or the “supreme point”, as Breton called it, where they meet. In the light of

twentieth century Western philosophy and the late fourth century Eastern philosophy Taoism, two distant philosophies in time and space will be shown to share similar ideas of perception.

Chapter Five: Surrealist Nonsense as a Genre

“J’aime calculer lentement, lentement, lentement mais faux. J’aime les calculs faux car ils donnent des résultants plus justes” (I like to calculate slowly, slowly but wrongly. I like to calculate wrong so the results can be right) (Jean Arp, *Le Nonsense*, 194).

“Cabanne: André Breton said that you were the most intelligent of the twentieth century. To you, what is intelligence?”

Duchamp: ... the word intelligence is the most elastic one can invent. There is a logical or Cartesian form of intelligence, but I think Breton meant to say something else. He envisaged, from the Surrealist point of view, a freer form of the problem; for him, intelligence was in some way the penetration of what the average normal man finds incompressible or difficult to understand. There is something like an explosion in the meaning of certain words: they are a greater value than their meaning in the dictionary.³²²

The above dialogue between Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp testifies to the Surrealists’ unorthodox way of viewing language. André Breton, Francis Picabia, and Robert Desnos, to name a few, were fond of deconstructing the common usage of words. Marcel Duchamp championed this play on words and his craftsmanship carried over to his alter ego “Rose Sélavy” (*Eros c’est la vie*). At first glance, it might appear the Surrealists used language following Wittgenstein’s definition of language: “a theory of picture” of meaning, in a world where all propositions represent “a picture that is a fact” (Wittgenstein 2.141) and each picture is linked to one another to form a world of reality since “a picture...[depicts] any reality whose form it has.” (Wittgenstein 2.171). “The world is a totality of facts.” (Wittgenstein 1.1) Following Wittgenstein’s argument, it appears that “Rose Sélavy” depicts her pictorial form that

³²² Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Translated by Ron Padgett. Da Capo Press, London, 1979, p. 16.

is Marcel Duchamp disguised. Unlike Wittgenstein who restricted reality to two alternatives, fact (yes) or not (no), the Surrealists integrated both answers “yes” and “no”, leaving “the logical scaffolding” behind to its writer: Wittgenstein.

The Surrealists’ view of language is somehow more organic, while Wittgenstein’s system of numerical divisions and subdivisions in *Tractatus* systematically obscures the broader picture. For the Surrealists, words breath, live, and even “make love”, to borrow André Breton’s expression. The Surrealists chose to play with language because they saw in words a great potentiality to expand the representation of reality. For them, words were transformable, connected to another, and not merely to agree or disagree with what they represent as in the *Tractatus*, but to integrate and juxtapose distant meanings in one “proposition”. Wittgenstein’s limits of language, and thus the limits of his world, were for the Surrealists nothing but starting points for expansion. Yet, both the Surrealists and Wittgenstein insisted on the extraordinary aspect of language. When the latter sought to explain that the understanding of language resides in the sentence, the former suggested the meaning could be elsewhere.

Wittgenstein argues that nonsense only provides the answer that there is no answer, since it merely reflects tensions and leaves them unresolved. In the *Tractatus* he states that the propositions in the *Tractatus* are all “nonsensical” since they do not offer solutions. It is the elucidation Wittgenstein is most importantly bringing to the table. His contemporary, Duchamp, goes further though in saying, “il n’y a pas de solution parce qu’il n’y a pas de problème” (there is no solution because there is no problem). The categorization of action or thought most of the time leads to a narrowing of its casual relation. Nonsense removes this myopic view on language to broaden the picture of the world. Can nonsense be just double sense or triple sense and so on? Do these multiple meanings and interpretations really lead to a deeper unity and fuller

understanding of the world? Nonsense may in fact have meaning. Is it possible to derive genre from a set of works that set out to explicitly defy categorization?

This chapter investigates the essence of the question raised herein: whether Surrealist nonsense can be considered as a genre. The word ‘genre’ is derived from the Latin “genus” meaning “kind”, “class”, or “sort”. Although it is difficult to fully define genre, genre considerations are some of the most important and useful elements in helping a reader read certain books (drama, fiction, comedy), an audience to watch a film, or to group specific paintings (Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, etc.). In that regard, a genre sets expectations for any given audience. It helps heighten the enjoyment of the reader, because it tells what to expect when picking up a mystery or science fiction novel, but it can also serve as a limiting description of a work that thinks outside of these boundaries. To answer the question whether or not Surrealist Nonsense could be considered a genre, one might consider the term ‘genre’ as a flexible one. The concepts of ‘sense’ and ‘genre’ convey a very finite perception of what is to be expected and taken from what they introduce. On the other hand, ‘nonsense’ and ‘non-genre’, like the so-called ‘mainstream’, are less distinguishable. When talking about nonsense or non-genre people have an idea of what it might mean, but cannot formulate exactly what it entails. If Surrealist Nonsense could be viewed as a genre, it would not be to reiterate some intrinsic definition but rather its transient nature.

Surrealist Nonsense as a genre can be looked at as an exploration of what an open-minded audience can achieve by not letting the limits of a particular genre dictate the experience. On the contrary, Surrealist Nonsense as a genre can facilitate the audience’s expectations, while also integrating in its experience what was rejected at first for failing to exemplify the categorization. Surrealist Nonsense as a genre could be seen thus as a phenomenon constantly

changing and adapting its own rules. This view is directly drawn from the Taoist focus on flux and immateriality and that is found in the nonsensical use of words in Desnos' writings. The reading of the *Tao Te Ching* is highly relevant in understanding Desnos' word plays and nonsense for they share three main elements: 1) non-dualism, 2) flux, and 3) absence of selfhood, each a step in approaching the world with openness.

1. Surrealist Nonsense Toward Unity

The Dream

Dreams were the central subject matter for the Surrealists, because dreams bypass the control of reason. The unconscious is the common denominator of dreams and Surrealism, among these other common features: the unreal, unfamiliar, encoded, mysterious. While awake, dreams often appear as nonsensical because of their inconsequential, incoherent qualities; they are the remainders of memories, while when sleeping, dreamers are fully satisfied. Dreams can also be seen as analogous to automatic writing. In *Anatomy of Nonsense*, Wim Tigges concurs with Elizabeth Sewell who distinguishes nonsense from Surrealism by pointing out that dreaming is an attempt to suppress any conscious control of the mind. For Breton, the dream is not a manifestation of a denied reality but a continuity of the waking life, and thus cannot be considered nonsense. Dreams provide another layer or angle of the reality perceived. The more realities experienced either in the waking or sleeping life, the more aware one can be about the inner self; and a dream conveys a sense of reality beneath the surface through its formal language and subject matter. In *Communicating Vessels* (1931), Breton adds:

“The debate seems to me to find its center in this thought of Pascal: ‘Except for faith, no one can be certain of waking or sleeping; given that during sleep we no less firmly believe ourselves to be waking than effectively waking... So that half of life passing away in sleep by own avowal... who knows if other sleep slightly different from the first,

from which we wake when we think we are sleeping? This reasoning, to be valid, would require first of all in its alternation that if we think we are waking when sleep, then waking, we should think ourselves asleep, and this last illusion is most exceptional.”³²³

Dream and reality are one and same world, communicating between each other like a conductive wire. As suggested by Breton’s title *Communicating Vessels*, the mind and world are not separate, conversing directly without the constraints of logic and convention that, for Breton, drastically limit the imagination. He also adds that at the center of these two distant realms lies the ‘point sublime’ (sublime point), and defines his role in Surrealism as having tried nothing better than to cast a conductive wire between the far too remote worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, and the revolution.

Early in the *First Manifesto*, Breton asserts, “I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this surreality that I am going.”³²⁴ He later added he sought to eliminate binary oppositions, which led to a search for this surreality, otherwise called ‘a point sublime’:

“Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions.”³²⁵

Breton concluded by saying that it would be absurd to solely define Surrealism in terms of binary oppositions, but rather should include the certain point he refers to, the sublime point, “where constructions and destruction can no longer be brandished one against the other”³²⁶. The dream for the Surrealists had a paradoxical quality: it demolishes the sense of reality for the dreamer while simultaneously creating a new one in which the conscious and unconscious dance in

³²³ André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*. University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 186-87.

³²⁴ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor Paperback, 1972, p. 14.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123-24.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

freedom. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron argues, “The dream is a point of re-actualization and of affective resource, in its latent rather than manifest content. But the word with which Breton refers to oneiric activity is not ‘unconscious’ but ‘imagined’. Through dreams, Breton writes, we must attempt ‘the increasingly necessary conversion... of the imagined to the lived or more precisely, what we are to live.’”³²⁷ This was in opposition to the theories of Sigmund Freud, who regarded the dream and its symbolic language in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) as symptoms of the dynamic unconscious.

A. Desnos’ Way

Surrealists’ use of movement revolutionized language. Breton considered Lewis Carroll (among others - Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Rimbaud) a revolutionary precursor of language who had the “...need to counteract ruthlessly the depreciation of language”³²⁸. Dreams became a tool for them to free language from social constraints, taking an important place in Desnos’ writing and epitomizing the Bretonian desire of fusing the real with the imagined. Very popular among the Surrealists, Desnos was particularly fond of “hypnotic slumbers” - sleepwalking experiments with the intention of freeing the participant’s unconscious, opening to pure automatic creativity. Marie-Claire Dumas asserts that in *Aumonyme* Desnos plays with language on two fronts: first, he manipulates with homonyms and nonsense. In *Language Cuit*, he transforms common known expressions or clichés into sentences more evocative. The release from repetition and cliché was a primary goal of Surrealism in its search for a new collective language, one of equanimity via a liberation of words. Language moving away from rationality gives equal weight to words. An example of this can be found in *L’Aumonyme*, a poem dedicated to Marcel Duchamp. Desnos writes:

³²⁷ Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, quoting André Breton from *Communicating Vessels*, p. 10-11 in *Surrealism*. Translated by Vivian Folkenflik, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990, p. 118.

³²⁸ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor Paperback, 1972, p. 297.

“Mes chants sont si peu **méchants!**
 Ils ne vont pas jusqu’à **Longchamp**
 Ils meurent avant d’atteindre **les champs**
 Où les boeufs s’ent vont **l’échant**
les astres
Désastres”³²⁹

The phrase “mes chants” (my songs) phonetically mirrors the adjective “méchants” (mean); “Longchamp” (horserace track) with “les chants” (the songs) and “l’échant” (licking), and “les astres” (the stars) with “désastres” (disaster) - assembled together in such a way that Desnos warps the meaning of the sentence. Dumas describes this disorder in language, or “tourniquet étourdissant” (dazing swivel), in which words sharing similar sounds can pile up, forcing the poetic discourse to either precipitate or close in on itself. Poetry then becomes more a “...tissu sonore” (sound fabric) than literary. The most colorful one is Desnos playing with his friends’ names, turning them into drawings embodying his wordplays. He decomposes Desnos into “d’aine os” (groin and bone), Picabia into “Pis qu’habit à” (udder lives at), Eluard into “*aile ou art?*” (wing or art?), Apollinaire using English words “*apple in air*”, Réverdy “*rêve et redis!*” (dream and tell again!), Mallarmé “*Mâle armé*” (arme male backward) (Fig. 16). Dumas illustrates another example of the slippage of common sense in the title of *L’aumonyme* in which Desnos combines “*l’aumône*” (alms) and “*l’homonyme*” (homonym) with “*l’aumonyme*”. Moreover, his poetry validates Harvey Cheung’s affirmation: “Surrealism [or Taoism] is machinery for integration, it is also, in the same impulse, or perhaps from another point of view, a machinery for negating... ready made orders, [and] denying the pertinence of codes”³³⁰. Desnos attached sense and nonsense together to bridge the realms of reality and imagination where meanings do not contradict but add to one another. Desnos inquired into whether reality or

³²⁹ Robert Desnos, “L’Aumonyme, À Marcel Duchamp”. *Desnos Oeuvres*. Quarto Gallimard, Paris, 1999, p. 171.

³³⁰ Cheung, p. 176.

imagination is truer. Incapable of answering objectively, accepting them in total equanimity results from first having seen what might not be true. No one meaning in particular prevails.

Looking at something with a microscope, the naked eye, or a telescope, one might ask which is more correct. They are all correct, but each conveys something different. A conflicting situation might appear harmonious for some and a harmonious one conflicting for others. Subject and background are related to one another like back and front. Watts talks about one being exclusively defined as a flash of consciousness but rather appearing much more than that, because like life, language might encapsulate an immense pattern of complexity: “A complex undulation of the universe”. *L’Aumonyme* serves as the type of model Watts is referring to:

“En attendant Breton
En nattant l’attente
Sous quelle tente?
Nos tantes...”³³¹

Desnos takes the verb “en attendant” (while waiting) and transforms it into “en nattant” (braiding), but each beginning of the sentence echoes another, like the end of the second “l’attente” (the wait) mirrors phonetically the last word of the third verse “tente” (tent). Desnos’ undulation of language through the repetition of similar sounds in different words has the effect of expanding the imagery of each line, and thus the content of the poem itself. This technique is used several times in Desnos’ poetry, most significantly in *Language Cuit* “Le Bonbon” (1923):

“Je je suis suis le le roi roi
des Montagnes
J’ai de la beaux beaux bobos beaux beaux yeux
Il faut une chaleur chaleur

J’ai nez
J’ai doigt doigt doigt doigt doigt à à
chaque main main

³³¹ Desnos, *L’Aumonyme*, p. 169

j'ai dent dent dent dent dent dent dent
 dent dent dent dent dent dent dent dent
 dent dent dent dent dent dent dent dent
 dent dent dent dent dent dent dent dent
 dent dent dent dent
 Tu tu me me fais fais souffrir
 mais peu m'importe m'importe
 La la porte porte³³²

This time, the expansion of imagery is done using stuttering as opposed to echoing sounds. For Desnos, what governed the poem is not lyricism but nonsensical repetition, creating a kind of stutter, depriving the poem of logic, and supplementing it with madness. Desnos' deliberate disordering and interconnecting of words illustrates the Surrealists' aim to disturb the substance of language, forcing them to give away their secrets, as Breton said, or "...to betray their mysterious commerce outside sense."³³³

In *Le Génie sans Miroir* (1924), Desnos comments on a poem very close to his, written by a young, mad Polish woman named Anne-Ilda Salon who died in an asylum. She wrote:

"Je, je suis suis le le roi roi
 des Montagnes
 J'aime les seins seins et les doigts
 Doigts, doigts, doigts, doigts
 De ma maîtresse
 Amour vers vers qui languissent mes
 pensées, pensées pensées pensées pensées pensées pensées
 Le sire de Coucy Coucy
 c'est c'est moi
 Mais l'amour
 L'amour on en fit de la salade
 Pour les salades on fit des salads d'amour
 pour les salades
 On fit on fit bien des éclairs pour
 rien rien en vain

³³² Robert Desnos, *Oeuvres*. P. 532-33. [The Candy: I I am am the the king king/ of mountains/ I have beauty beauty beaubeau beautiful eyes/it's hot/ I have a nose/ I have a finger finger finger finger finger at/ each hand hand/ I have a tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth/ tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth/ tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth tooth/ tooth tooth tooth tooth/You you make make me me suffer/ but I don't mind don't mind/the the door door.]

³³³ André Breton, *Conversation with Nadeau*, 2eme disque 4:47

celui qui que rien rien
Il fait une chaleur chaleur”³³⁴

Desnos adds that her name Anne-Ilda Salon is almost the anagram of Anna de Nouill(e)s and in response to her nonsensical poem writes,

“Le mécanisme cérébral est ici d’une étonnante variété. En apparence l’auteur se borne à répéter plusieurs fois de suite le même mot. Le premier vers est un bégaiement. Au troisième et au quatrième, même procédé mais combien différent dans l’application; seins est répété deux fois et doigts cinq fois. Il semble que des mots jaillissent les uns et la gorge de cette maîtresse inconnue. Pas d’épithètes insuffisantes. La phrase est devenue femme. Plus loin, sept fois de suite mot pensées, 7, chiffre fatidique qui avec 13 se rencontrent dans la plupart des productions d’Anna Ilda. Cette fois la phrase est une invocation mystique. A la ligne suivante, nouveau changement de personnalité, la poétesse fait un mot d’esprit: le sire de Coucy Coucy. Mot d’esprit dont le sel échappera aux calicots mais dont le charme ne saurait laisser indifférents ceux que touche la poésie. Puis l’humour l’emporte et le poème se termine par une figure grammaticale audacieuse, le substantif étant pris pur qualificatif de lui même.”³³⁵

Desnos’ critique of her poem allows readers to also comprehend his earlier poem “Le Bonbon” mimicked in Anna Ilda Salon’s poem. He starts by saying that repetition is “a cerebral mechanism” that creates the poem in its totality. Desnos tells readers how to make sense of her text and urges them to look for word play, rebus, and contrepétie. “Le mot d’esprit” eludes the workings of the unconscious. Desnos challenges readers who have to set themselves on the same level of the poet to understand the contortions of his language: a tour de force that is not rendered through automatic writing but because of an elaborate control of the poet over words. The

³³⁴ Robert Desnos, *Oeuvres*, p. 225. Poem of Anna Ilda Salon. [‘I I am am the the king king/ of Mountains/ I love the breasts breasts and fingers/fingers fingers fingers fingers/ of my mistress/ Love towards towards which languish my/thoughts thoughts thoughts thoughts thoughts thoughts thoughts/ Sire of Coucy/ it’s it’s me/But love/made salad out of love/For salads we made love salads/ for salads/ we made we made few lightening for/ nothing nothing in vain/ one who that nothing nothing/it’s hot hot.’]

³³⁵ Robert Desnos, “Le Génie Sans Miroir”, *Desnos Oeuvres*. Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 225. [“The cerebral mechanism here is of an amazing variety. The author apparently contents himself to repeating several times the same word. The first verse is a stutter. Third and fourth, same process but how different in the use; breasts is repeated twice and fingers five times. It seems that words spout out hands and throat this unknown mistress. No insufficient epithets. The sentence became a woman. Further word thoughts is written seven times in a row, 7 fateful number, and with number 13 occur in most of Anna Ilda’s writings. This time the sentence is a mystical invocation. In the next line, new change of personality; the poet makes a joke: the Sire of Coucy Coucy. Joke whose salt will escape the banners but whose charm cannot leave indifferent those who touch poetry. Then humor prevails and the poem ends with a bold grammatical form, the noun being mistaken for the adjective of itself.”]

repetition of words in “Le Bonbon” creates a ghost effect on the poem, as in a dream, keeping the reader far from the true meaning of the poem, the repetitive sound carrying them away from the concreteness of language. Desnos’ language play questions the mental state of the poet through his critique of Anna-Ilda Salon whose madness resembles Desnos’ dizziness. Desnos explored and made visible an alternate reality. He believed the role of the artist is to communicate the existence of that reality to others.

Like the Taoists, Desnos considered the world of appearances to be illusory, translating his interest in immaterial reality into artistic word games via his rejection of common sense or language. In view of language, what is unreasonable for people is called nonsense, while the Surrealists and Taoists called it a greater state of consciousness or awareness. “In the pursuit of learning, every day something is added. In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped.”³³⁶ This implies that knowledge impedes following the Tao. For, if in following the Tao you unlearn imposed societal habits, it is then desirable to strive for a state of unknowing, close to that of the newborn baby.

B. Avant-Garde Nonsense

The rapidly growing cinema of the 1920s provided an opportunity for anyone looking to harness its persuasive powers to reach a vast number of people. It affected people on a subconscious level, crossing the strange divide between the screen and audience to blend the real and unreal. In this respect, cinema is analogous to dreams. The Surrealist perspective on film was governed by the fundamental understanding that what happened on-screen was not real, and yet it seemed real as within a dream. Surrealists tried to create films, such as Man Ray’s *Emak Bakia*, *Étoile de mer*, *Les Mystères du château de dé*. Artaud asserts, “Si le cinéma n’est pas fait pour traduire les rêves ou tout ce qui dans la vie éveillé s’apparente au domaine des rêves, le

³³⁶ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D. C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book Two, XLVIII, p. 22.

cinema n'existe pas."³³⁷ This simple illusion gave the screen a fantastic potential to subvert what the audience perceived as real. As explained in chapter three, Man Ray's films appeared as dream-like realities: the picture on-screen oscillating between real and not real, as hypnotic as Richter's and Eggeling's films. Moreover, by placing tacks, nails, and iron filings on the filmstrip, Man Ray expanded the idea of the camera-less film and asserted instead the quality of print photographs, creating a series of black and white shapes abstracted from the naturalist rendering of traditional cinema. The cinema offered awakened dreams to the audience as an extension of their imagination, dream and reality as interchangeable.

Phenomenology is a significant movement in philosophy because it deals with the question of reality, and thus appearances. Both appearance and reality are treated as phenomena of consciousness. Appearances may be true or false, and may or may not be the same as reality. The false appearance of a perceptual object may conceal its true reality. However, the actual appearance of a perceptual object may also manifest the object's true reality. Thus, phenomenology is concerned both with appearance as a perceptual phenomenon and with reality as a perceptual phenomenon. So, how pertinent is phenomenology in regards to cinema, wherein the shadows on the screen represent the perceptions of the filmmaker and the audience being as real as the world we live in, a reflection of an internal world? Films provide the necessary tool to navigate these fields of appearances and reality. Sokolowski argues, "Presentations and absences are exquisitely interwoven, and phenomenology helps us to think about them" (Sokolowski 15).

Jean Goudal's celebration of the cinema went:

"Entrons dans une salle où la pellicule perforée grésille dans l'obscurité. Dès l'entrée, notre regard est guidé par le faisceau lumineux vers l'écran où, deux heures durant, il restera fixé. La vie de la rue n'existe plus. Nos affaires s'évanouissent, nos voisins disparaissent. Notre corps lui-même subit une sorte de dépersonnalisation temporaire qui

³³⁷ Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*. Gallimard, Paris, 1961, p. 81. ["If cinema is not made to translate dreams or everything that in life is related to dreams, cinema does not exist."]

lui ôte le sentiment de sa propre existence. Nous ne sommes que des yeux rivés à 10 m2 de toile blanche.”³³⁸

Goudal found films resembled dreams, although in a dream the viewer is totally satisfied, not knowing he is cut from the world outside. For lapses of time, dream and reality are reunited even if the film does not make sense or tell a story: the state of the marvelous in equanimity.

Although the film *Un Chien Andalou* had the powerful effect of shocking the audience with the scene of slicing a woman’s eye, albeit another illusion, the cinema remained a dream. To manifest the dream-like effect in his films, Man Ray covered his lens with gelatin to create strange, blurry effects in *L’Etoile de mer*. The pictures in his films are memorable, yet fleeting, and difficult for the audience to discern the story, similar to waking from a dream. The avant-garde cinema disrupted conventional and moral conditioning.

“L’homme ne s’intéresse qu’à ce qui lui ressemble. Je m’intéresse à mes rêves, malgré leur incohérence, parce qu’ils viennent de moi, parce que je leur trouve une qualité particulière tenant sans doute à ce que j’y reconnais des éléments de ma vie passée, mais arbitrairement assemblés... Un point de départ légitime du Surréalisme est cette observation que tout ce qui sort un cerveau, serait-ce sans formule logique, révèle inmanquablement la singularité de ce cerveau. L’homme garde sa personnalité même et peut-être surtout) dans ses productions les plus spontanées... Il est vrai que nous nous heurtons ici à une sérieuse difficulté. Dans l’état actuel du cinéma, un film n’a pas un auteur, il en a deux, trois, cinquante... Au cours d’une collaboration aussi multiple, l’œuvre ne risque-t-il pas de perdre cette qualité pénétrante qu’elle devait à l’individualité de l’auteur à la singularité à la conception première.”³³⁹

³³⁸ Jean Goudal, “Surréalisme et Cinéma”. *Les Surréalistes et le Cinéma*. Ed. Alain et Odette Virmaux. Seghers, Paris, 1976, 308. [“Upon entry, a light beam guided our eyes to the screen where it will stay still there for two hours. The street’s life does no longer exist. Our affairs vanish; our neighbors disappear. Our body itself undergoes a sort of temporary depersonalization that takes away the feeling of its proper existence. We are only riveted eye 10 m2 from the silver lining.”]

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 314. [“The man is only interested in what looks resembles. I am interested in my dreams, despite their incoherence, because they come from within, because I find in them a special quality probably because I recognize in them some elements of my past life, but arbitrarily assembled... a legitimate starting point of Surrealism is this observation that anything that is coming out of the mind, is without any logic, inevitably reveals the uniqueness of this brain. Man keeps his personality and even perhaps especially) in his most spontaneous... It is true that we are facing a serious problem here. In the current state of cinema, film has no author, two, three, fifty... In a collaboration as multiple work does he not risk losing this penetrating quality that it was the individuality of the author to the singularity in the first design.”]

C. “The Sublime Point”

There is a shared element between Surrealism and Taoism - to transcend the world of opposites and subject-object separation. This goal allows both paths to come into contact with true Being and Reality. Whereas Taoism involves a rigorous practice under a master’s guidance, Surrealism articulates a personal path of being in the world that can find its own way. Both share the same vision of breaking self-limiting boundaries of a rational mind to attain holistic mindfulness. Reality lies beyond the restrictions of everyday life. For the Tao, working on conscious awareness transforms one’s relationship to the world and reality as a whole. For Desnos, the path is one through liberation of language, which no longer defines him in the world, and is also a springboard for readers toward self-awareness and integrity of thought. Desnos’ writing personifies living the paradoxical unity found in the Tao. In “Désordre formel”, Dumas states, “...des courts-circuits de l’automatisme au jeu délibéré sur la manière verbale- leur objectif ne fait pas de doute: amener la langue à ce point où la signification est perpétuellement fuyante et où les mots trament entre eux d’imprévisibles et péremptoires associations.”³⁴⁰

Lao Tzu says “...these two are the same. But diverge in name as they issue forth.”³⁴¹ The perfect one coexists in an apparent duality, where opposites are simply judgments made by the mind. The Tao is heaven and earth, and also of the multiplicity of finite things. It sustains and nurtures all things without discrimination, bringing each to its own perfection, doing everything that needs to be done. Because the action or doing of the Tao is “zìrán” (自然), natural and spontaneous without any set purpose or preference, it is referred to as “wu-wei”, or “non doing”. Problems arise when people have desires and discriminate between things, thus only seeing the

³⁴⁰Marie Claire Dumas, “Désordre Formel”, *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 300, [“...from the short circuits of automatic writing to the willful game on the verbal expression - let’s be clear that their objective is to bring language to a point where meaning is continuously elusive and where words weave together unpredictable and compelling associations.”]

³⁴¹Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D. C. Lau. Penguin Books, 1963, Book One , I, p. 5.

varying manifestations of the Tao, and not the underlying unity of the Tao itself. Typically, yang values are preferred and prioritized over yin - male over female, active over passive, hardness over fluidity and flexibility, and so on. The world is judged according to preferred values and forced into conformity, seeking to promote things that are liked and eliminate those not. The more sophisticated the discrimination, and therefore the social, moral code and political strategies, the more the values are relied upon, instead of the innate “te” or virtue. The prime example of this mistaken approach is Confucianism. The *Tao Te Ching* overcomes this understanding of things in several ways: firstly, it states that opposing values are interdependent or mutually arising - one cannot have one without the other; secondly, partly in an attempt to redress the balance, it identifies the Tao with yin qualities; thirdly, it criticizes the ultimate usefulness and applicability of intellectual knowledge and language, the two things most necessary to maintaining a discriminatory viewpoint; fourthly, it diminishes the differences between things and values by asserting their unity in the Tao.

Lao Tzu opens the *Tao Te Ching* elucidating dualistic distinctions between beauty and ugliness, good and bad, something and nothing, life and death, as relative constructs: “...These two are the same / But diverge in name as they issue forth. Being the same they are called mysteries”³⁴². In *Soluble Fish*, Breton arrives at a similar conclusion, “In time there is neither right or left, this is the moral of the journey. The two speeding cars - green and white and red and black - wiped each other out, and since that time, dead or alive, I get my bearings only temporarily”³⁴³. It seems that from a fragmented point of view, the artist wishes to regain wholeness. Following this path of opposites, in his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton adds, “Just as in the physical world, a short circuit occurs when the two ‘poles’ of a machine are joined

³⁴² Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D. C. Lau, Penguin Books, 1963, Book One, I, p. 5.

³⁴³ André Breton, “Soluble Fish”, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor paperback, 1972, p. 95.

by a conductor of little or no resistance. In poetry and in painting, Surrealism has done everything it can and more to increase these short circuits”³⁴⁴. Breton admits the intentions and methods he applies to reach his ends: a breaking down of conventions to unveil the underlying unsaid. Taoists and Surrealists grasped the world as it was, free of the burden of preconceived ideas. Dreams, automatic writing, and painting were means to Surrealist ends. On the legacy of Surrealism, Breton wrote, “The whole point for Surrealism was to convince ourselves that we had got our hands on the ‘prime matter’ (in the alchemical sense) of language.”³⁴⁵

2. Surrealist Nonsense Toward Flux

Nonsense

In the 1925 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Francis Gérard gave a very poetical definition of automatic writing:

“L’exercice de l’écriture automatique fait subir au sujet un ensemble de sensations et d’émotions qui distinguent absolument cet état de celui que provoque tout autre ordre d’écriture...[l’auteur] se laisse glisser dans le flux rapide et ininterrompu de l’automatisme, l’indifférence absolue à tout ce qui l’entoure le gagne rapidement le plonge dans une somnolence agréable qui l’écarte de plus en plus de la réalité extérieure et interpose entre elle et lui une brume particulièrement douce à l’esprit, cependant que certaines sensations inconnues prennent une acuité et une lucidité extraordinaires.”³⁴⁶

For Gérard, automatic writing expanded the sensations of writers, opened their sensations and under its influence, transported them to a higher state of creativity where imagination knows no boundaries or censorship by the rational mind. The other definition of automatic writing is more scientific: a type of writing that reproduces the content of the subconscious without the direct

³⁴⁴ Ibid., “Second Manifesto”, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor paperback, 1972, p. 161.

³⁴⁵ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor paperback, 1972, p. 299.

³⁴⁶ Francis Gérard, “L’état Surréaliste”. *La Révolution Surréaliste*. No 1, 1er Décembre 1924, p. 29. [“The practice of automatic writing makes its subject feel a series of sensations and emotions that absolutely distinguish this state from that which caused by any writing styles ... [the author] let himself slide in the rapid and uninterrupted flow of automatism, the absolute indifference that surrounds him quickly takes over plunging him into a pleasant drowsiness which increasingly deviates him from external reality and place between him and it a particularly gentle mist for the mind, while some unknown sensations take an extraordinary sharpness and clarity.”]

awareness of consciousness. Automatism came as a result of the discovery of psychoanalysis. Breton practiced Freudian techniques of free association on shell-shocked troops during World War I. What interested the Surrealists in this process was not just the individual psyche but also the forces independent of themselves. However, they grew weary of Freud's systematization of the irrational. In 1920, Breton and Philippe Soupault produced their first Surrealist automatic text, *Magnetic Fields*, written on the premise that the speed of writing was equivalent to the speed of thought. Writing rapidly with no defined ideas where the poet became "... simple receptacles of so many echoes, *modes recording instruments*"³⁴⁷. *Soluble Fish* is nothing but an accumulation of these recordings:

Plain rain is divine; that is why when storms shake their great ornaments over us, and throw us their purse, we make a vague gesture of revolt, which is comparable only to a rustle of leaves in a forest. I saw great lords with jabots of rain pass by on horseback one day, and I am the one who welcomed them at the Good Inn. There is yellow rain, whose raindrops as large as our heads of hair fall straight down on the fire and put it out, and black rain that streams down our window panes with terrifying courtesy, but let us not forget that plain rain is divine."³⁴⁸

Moreover, for Aragon, an automatic phrase first proposed a rhythm, then made an image, or made sense. For Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, "...this image or this sense is then assumed as such, and developed in a combination in which consciousness takes its full place."³⁴⁹ For Breton automatic writing was ultimately looking for a democratization of language; in 1924, he said: "that these remarkably autonomous phrases were accompanied by a faint visual representation". In 1933, he corrected his saying and affirmed that they sometimes addressed only the inner ear, and were characterized by 'an absence of sound', without 'any kind of visual or other representation'. The interplay of the auditory and visual seems to be peculiar to the experimenter, as Breton himself emphasized, calling on each person to make repeated experiments to establish

³⁴⁷ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor paperback, 1972, p. 27-28.

³⁴⁸ André Breton, "Soluble Fish", *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor paperback, 1972, p. 74-75.

³⁴⁹ Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, p. 52.

a statistically wider basis for an opinion. In Breton's own case, the process of hearing a phrase sometimes transformed itself into a visual hallucination. As a poet, Breton established a "hierarchy in favor of verbal inspiration."³⁵⁰ Breton's goal was to let the "spoken thought" express itself "as closely as possible" and to show a "unique concern for the authenticity".

In addition, automatic writing became part of the Surrealist repertoire of games, and *le Cadavre exquis* (exquisite cadaver) is a prime example of an activity that was ideal for the Surrealists. In 1932, in *Les Vases Communicants* (Communicating Vessels), Breton set the rules of the game, "*Le Cadavre exquis*, which consists of having three people in succession draw the constitutive parts of figure without the second being able to see the work of the first, or the third the collaboration of the first and second."³⁵¹ Automatic writing was nearing its peak, a collaborative, surprising game. "After that, we knew where to get it, and it goes without saying that we had no interest in reproducing it to the point of satiety; this is said for the benefit of those who are surprised that among us the practice of automatic writing was abandoned so quickly"³⁵². The detachment from reason automatic writing requires was even applied to the process of automatism from the Surrealists' point of view whose condition was also to be detached.

In all the automatic games with language's natural tendency toward set rules, the result is a new, illogical juxtaposition giving the reader fun and a sense of surprise, expressing itself either as humor or poetic beauty. Surrealist poetry thus provided liberation from a world created by daily habit. It did not, however, provide a fantasy escape-world with which to replace it. It

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁵¹ André Breton, *Communicating Vessels*. Translated by Mary Ann Caws, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, p. 42. Note the game of the Exquisite Corpse (*cadavre exquis*) is played with a piece of paper folded by each player so that the next player cannot see what the preceding one put upon it; it may be done either with a drawing or with words. For a drawing, ordinarily, the first player draws the head; the second the neck; the third, the body; the fourth, the legs; and the last, the feet. For the verbal game, the first player puts down, for example (in English) an adjective and the second a noun (these are reversed in French); the third supplies a verb, and so on, depending on how many players there are. In the first such game played among the Surrealists, the resulting sentence read "The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine" (*Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau*): hence the name.

³⁵² André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor paperback, 1972, p. 299.

depends on the very familiarity of everyday language and experiences for the effect of surprise. It did not fully destroy or renounce normal reality or the normal linguistic code: these remained at all times as a memory. Surrealist poetry utilized nonsense to bring the reader its new images. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp talks about the letters of the Mona Lisa “L.H.O.O.Q” and said that they have only a significant meaning phonetically. Duchamp was fond of this kind of game because of its possibilities. “By simply reading the letters in French, even in any language, some astonishing things happen. Reading the letters is very amusing.”³⁵³ He also mentions how he came about Rose Sélavy: the double ‘r’ from Picabia’s painting, “*Oeil cacodylate*” (Fig.16)(1921) on which Duchamp signed “Pi Qu’habilla Rose Sélavy”, meaning phonetically, *Picabia arrosez la vie* (to toast to life). What Duchamp was attracted by was the second ‘r’ of the word “*arroser*”³⁵⁴, plus he loved playing with words. *Fresh Widow* (1920) is another example where Duchamp substituted “French” for “Fresh” (meaning, smart) and “Window” for widow” (Fig. 17). Ultimately, the role of automatic writing was to unify the experimenter’s unconscious and consciousness. The relationship between mental image and a text is not a direct relationship.

A. Desnos’ Fluidity

Through the use of nonsensical poetry, Desnos rid himself of preconceived ideas from learned knowledge. This endless process of undoing what was acquired allowed a flux of knowledge resembling imaginal cells, or those responsible for metamorphosis. Marie-Claire Dumas calls Desnos “le poète parlant” (the poet who speaks) to besiege people’s senses just like Artaud. Desnos’ use of language resists any stationary state. The words do more than make love; they are constantly morphing into something new. For Desnos, freedom of words equated to

³⁵³ Pierre Cabanne *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Translated by Ron Padgett. Da Capo Press, p. 63.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

freedom of being. By discovering new associations between things at first glance opposed to each other, the reader is in turn inspired to change. René Daumal was a spiritual Surrealist who transformed the mundane elements of reality into the state of the marvelous, except his process more directly incorporated his knowledge of Eastern religion. Daumal believed that the reality and the meaning of the world came to us at every moment. As Roger Shattuck argues in his introduction of *Mount Analogue*, Daumal understood at an early stage that "...the basic act of consciousness is a negation, a dissociation of the I from the exterior world of not-I. Meaningful perception reduces and redefines the I, withdraws it from the world into an increasingly strict identity or subjectivity"³⁵⁵.

Artaud shared Breton's and Desnos' views on Surrealist language, more organic and favoring active participation and performance. According to Bettina Knapp, it was essential for Artaud to seek unity, although he could not reach that state without first destroying the material evidence, the body. Artaud turned to the East to assist his search for that wholeness. Artaud's theatrical concept reflected his need to restore harmony between his unsteady inner and outer selves. Knapp argues, "...metaphysical drama advocated by Artaud would deal with the eternal conflict between man and natural forces. He rejected the Occidental theatre's stress on intellectual understanding, on psychology (character study), on didacticism. He looked to the Oriental theatre for guidance."³⁵⁶ Plays on words share a kinship with automatic writing for they both attempt to extend to discourse as a whole. Surrealism's aim was in a sense to 'rewrite' the French language itself. This idea governs and unites Surrealist poetry, from the automatic writing of *Magnetic Fields* and *Soluble Fish* to the reorganization of grammar and vocabulary found in

³⁵⁵ Roger Shattuck, Introduction, *Mount Analogue*. Translated and introduced by Roger Shattuck. Shambala, Boston, 1986, p. 17.

³⁵⁶ Bettina Knapp, *Antonin Artaud: Man of Vision*. Swallow Press, 1980 p. 199.

Desnos' *Langage cuit* and Leiris' *Glossaire j'y serre mes gloses*. Every fixed form in language became a target; the reader's expectations of logic and semantics were systematically disrupted.

Words are part of language and a byproduct of social convention and shared meaning. The concept of automatic writing, painting, or free association in poetry and cinema invites chance to play a part in the representation of the whole, made of what cannot be predicted or foreseen. Chance proves itself a reliable instrument for rocking social change at the point where its foundations sink into rationality. It becomes an unparalleled means by which players in full possession of their faculties can fruitfully unite in producing images that, in strangeness, compete with those inspired by insanity. In other words, chance is the preeminent Surrealist agent of revelation. Among the sane, it serves as a perfectly valid substitute for the state of grace that certain poets find in their insanity. Language expands worlds as much as it limits. Desnos expanded the world through nonsense, by creating a constant short-circuit or motion between two distant realities: inertia and motion. For Marie-Claire Dumas, this is neither slow nor suspended, but in constant flux "là est son bon plaisir."³⁵⁷ *Rose Sélavy's* succession of unordered statements focus on rhythm, movement, and congruence:

"1. *Dans un temple en stuc de pomme le Pasteur distillait le suc des psaumes.*
... (In a temple covered of **apple stucco**, the pastor distilled the **sap of psalms**)
4. La solution d'un **sage** est-elle la pollution d'un **page**?
(Is the **solution** of the wise, the **pollution** of a page)
13. **Rose Sélavy** connaît bien le **marchand du sel**.
29. **Ha! meurs**, amour!
(ha! die, love!)
42. **P. Éluard**: le poète **élu des draps**
(*P. Éluard*: the poet elected from cloths)
149. *Jeux de mots, jets mous.*
(*Word games, gentile streams*)"³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Marie Claire Dumas, "Désordre Formel", *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites*. Editions Klincksieck, 1980, p. 301.

³⁵⁸ Robert Desnos, *Oeuvres*, Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 502-509.

All the hundred-fifty statements in *Rose Sélavy* exemplify Desnos' games and follow Arthur Rimbaud's expressions of self (objectively) through poetic nonsense. He said, "Je est un autre" (I is another), what Katharine Conley sees as "an unconscious animation of what Richard Stamelman calls "a stirring of selves within the self"³⁵⁹ The wordplay of Desnos' title "*Rose Sélavy*" set readers to expect what is to follow, a different look and sound. In the poem, Desnos matches Duchamp's love for games, resembling Duchamp's thoughts on chess:

"The pieces are not pretty in themselves, any more than is the form of the game, but what is pretty - if the word pretty can be used - is the movement. Well, it is mechanical, the way, for example, a Calder is mechanical. In chess there are some extremely beautiful things in the domain of movement, but not in the visual domain. It's the imagining of the movement or the gesture that makes the beauty, in this case."³⁶⁰

In Desnos' *Rose Sélavy*, movement brings sense to the nonsensical statements, which are more than puns or the switching of letters or syllables. They represent the gratuitous play of forms Desnos imagined. The words are making love and Desnos renders this union through the kind of "double take" that forces readers to take another look. The meaning that Desnos' game generates is a meaning of its own, rendered not through logical linguistics but by the unconscious of the poet and the collision of words on the page; for instance, "*stuc de pommes*" and "*suc de psalmes*"; "*sage*" and "*page*"; "*solution*" and "*pollution*"; "*Rose Sélavy*" and "*marchand de sel*" (for Marcel Duchamp); "*Ha meurs*" and "*amour*"; "*P. Éluard*" and "*élu draps*" (draps read backward); "*Jeux de mots*" and "*jets mous*". The words for Desnos had both a plasticity and fluid characteristic. In his hands, words were so malleable that they took any shape the poet wanted. In this process of transformation, through word games, puns, and spoonerism, linguistic or grammatical rules were reduced to dust. What are left are words on the page for the pleasure of

³⁵⁹ Katharine Conley, Robert Desnos, *Surrealism and the Marvelous in Everyday*. University of Nebraska, 2003, p. 29. Quoting Stamelmannin (Rimbaud: 345, p. 20).

³⁶⁰ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p. 18-9.

the reader who witness the Desnos gift for phonetic homonym. With Desnos, this pleasure even intensifies once read aloud.

Desnos, agent of transformation might also be called agent of synchronicity, the term coined by Carl Gustav Jung to describe “temporally coincident occurrences of acausal events.” The idea of synchronicity is that the conceptual relationship of minds, defined by the relationship between ideas, is intricately structured in its own logical way and gives rise to relationships that have little to do with causality. Instead, causal relationships are understood as simultaneous. For Jung, synchronous events revealed an underlying pattern encompassing the system of synchronicity: “acausal connecting principle”. Jung understood many experiences perceived as coincidences were not due to chance, but were instead manifestations of analogous invisible events. On the basis of his work with patients, Jung said that synchronicity was more likely to occur when in a highly charged state of emotional and mental awareness - when the “archetypes,” universal images underlying human behaviors, were activated. Lewis Carroll’s “Wool and Water”, in *Through The looking Glass*, offers readers an example of synchronicity with the exchange between the Queen and Alice. After their discussion about whether or not it is a day for jam because it followed “yesterday jam” and precedes “tomorrow jam” Alice says:

- “- I don’t understand you... It’s dreadfully confusing!
- That’s the effect of living backwards...
- I never heard of such a thing!
- But there is a great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways
- I’m sure mine only works one way... I can’t remember things before they happen.
- It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards
- What sort of things do you remember best? Alice ventured to ask
- Oh, things that happened the week after next”³⁶¹

Alice finds out the best memory of the queen takes place in the future. For the Queen, Alice’s memories work backwards in spite of being linear and logical (from the past), while for the

³⁶¹ Lewis Carroll, “Wool and Water”, *Through the Looking-Glass*. Bantam Classic, p. 164.

Queen events are rooted in the present or in the world of synchronicity. Desnos' *Rose Sélavy* explores this world of synchronicity where events coexist side by side without the divisions of time. Conley concurs with Garber who calls this space of synchronicity, "space of possibility". She argues "that space of 'in-between' state in which meaning and incoherence touch... and they make those limits visible. They inhabit and cast light upon the in-between, the space between sense and non-sense."³⁶² Desnos' *Rose Sélavy* sways between words and shadow of the words, which cannot be perceived on the page: that movement is synchronistic in its multiplicity.

Nonsense is an intellectual phenomenon, rather than an emotional one. It is and remains a game. It restores metaphor to consciousness by exposing it as a device (the game), a formal procedure for making new meaning. Again, what is made manifest through nonsense is form and procedure. When nonsense is engaged in reversing the metaphorical and the literal, or the literal and the metaphorical, it is concerned with exploring the procedures by which the two domains are articulated. It emphasized language as a system transcending not simply the individual subject's normal consciousness, but also his experience and indeed the experience of humanity as a whole.

B. Avant-Garde Motion

The Surrealists did not attempt to confine their ideas to celluloid; they were faced with the inevitable contradictions of trying to create the unknowable, the personal, and the intangible. The challenge was thus to develop a cinema which might function in the imagination of its audience as much as on the screen. The avant-garde filmmakers at the beginning of the 20th century might have claimed to be representative of a certain experimental cinema that embraced simultaneity, movement, and rhythm. Abstraction was possible where geometric forms and

³⁶² Catharine Conley, Robert Desnos, *Surrealism and the Marvelous in Everyday*. University of Nebraska, 2003, p. 34.

choreography allowed artists to keep a distinct distance between fixed meaning and interpretation, always shifting in appearance and rejecting inertia or immobility.

René Clair's *Entr'acte* is an example of playful nonsense. The film is an attack on viewers' perceptions because of its rapid editing, out of focus imagery, exaggerated camera movements (both slow and fast), and optical effects (superimposition and dissolves). It is a true Dada experience. The film opens with Erik Satie and Francis Picabia near a canon ball jumping up and down in slow motion, and then moving backward still in slow motion, then it cuts to a rooftop where Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray are playing chess. Clair's syntax of nonsensical images challenges audience expectations, as well as their sense of the unexpected. What can be understood of the many transformations: a ballerina into a bearded man, a legless man suddenly gaining mobility, or deflated head balloons on the train? The avant-garde filmmakers saw in film an opportunity to assault mainstream film, to ridicule characters, plot, and setting. Everything can be laughed at and not taken seriously. Meaning is tricky to pin down in the film because of its vertiginous, anarchic feel, the slow and rapid motion, the dream-like pictures of the paper boat floating over the city or the city fading into the chess game of Duchamp and Man Ray.

The movements depicted in the film are based on the movement within the frame and the sense of movement in the flow from shot to shot. The viewer feels the movement and becomes part of it and of the film itself, especially near the end of the film with the chase; the hearse going uphill; the upside down rooftop trees; and the ballerina filmed from below. The images make the audience experience a sense of unpredictable movement, thus forcing viewers to change their level of magnification. About *Entr'acte* Desnos writes, "Une formule nouvelle de cinema ... Film comique... c'est aussi un film lyrique... intrigue comique... l'esprit suit le

chemin du merveilleux du rêve... [il] est le plus beau film de l'année."³⁶³ Man Ray's *Emak Bakia* also favored movement and speed over form and content, as opposed to *Retour à la raison*, still a confrontational film, more interested in shapes and light filmed like hanging sculptures instead of moving subjects. Yet, whether moving or still, the avant-garde films included the audience as participants in a universe of variability and adaptation.

Desnos' concern for the greater development of cinema is matched by a desire for film to be crafted in isolation, where the commercial realities of the industry are forgotten and the will of the filmmaker is respected as that of the writer by demanding that they are granted freedom to work outside of the established field. The avant-garde filmmakers were always resistant to the mainstream and favored new ground. This kind of modernism is something both Apollinaire and Desnos had in common. In "Cinéma d'avant-garde" Desnos argues that Surrealist filmmakers did not have the attention to create something new for the sake of novelty but were rather following a deeper path which to materialize needed a new mode of expression. He writes:

"... il ne s'agissait pas de créer une oeuvre d'art ou une esthétique nouvelle mais d'obéir à des mouvements profonds, originaux et, par suite, nécessitant une forme nouvelle."³⁶⁴

C. Impermanence

In this section of chapter five, flux in Desnos' nonsensical writing contradicts Wittgenstein's view on language as the limit of his world. For Desnos, language is abysmal and always changes if free from reason. Furthermore, if one pictures oneself in a world where rules and laws do not exist, then one can change the perception of underlying reason for regulation and the organizations controlling society. When shifting one's viewpoint to an untethered one, reason

³⁶³ Robert Desnos, "Entr'acte", *Rayons et les ombres cinema*. Gallimard, 1992, p. 49 ["A new formula of cinema is rather rare... [Entr'acte is] a funny movie... it's also a lyrical film... a comic plot... the mind follows the path of the marvel in the dream... [it] is the most beautiful film of the year."]

³⁶⁴ Robert Desnos, "Cinéma d'avant-garde". *Les Rayons et les Ombres: Cinéma*. Gallimard, Paris, 1990, p. 188. ["...it was not about to create a work of art or a new aesthetic but rather to obey to profound movements, original and, consequently, requiring a new form"]

ceases to dominate. By acting as dictated by the ego, living following this principle of no rules, an environment is created wherein a personal responsibility to the whole is felt. In Desnos' wordplay, language no longer appears to be perfectly controlled by the poet and this is not a byproduct, but rather a goal. Desnos' use of language seems to be a response to Breton's claim: "...the mediocrity of our time is essentially based on our ability to not enunciate what we see." Rearranging letters and words to generate new meanings that appear and disappear for others is just one example of many of Surrealist texts that showed evidence of verbal and metaphoric play where the meaning of the text reproduces itself in the act of reading. In doing so, Desnos produces a sense of instability. Dumas calls Desnos' playfulness of language a way for the poet to relentlessly resist the single meaning of a poem; instead the meaning flees its own sentence.

The Tao and water are synonymous according to the teachings of Lao Tzu. One is water and water is one: "The way is to the world as the River and the Sea are to rivulets and streams."³⁶⁵ The first nine months of conception are spent in amniotic fluid. One lives in and is nourished by water flowing as one. Moreover the body is made up of 75 percent of water and the brain is 85 percent. The Tao asks one to see the parallels between oneself and the naturally flowing energy that allows life's sustenance. Live as water lives, since one is water, to let one's thoughts move smoothly in accordance with the nature of all things. Lao Tzu says, "Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way."³⁶⁶ Breton used the metaphor of water and fish many times to explore the idea of solubility in man's mind. Breton believed man has the ability to change his mind and that there is nothing more soluble than the

³⁶⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Book One, XXXII, p. 37.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

mind of man. Moreover, written in 1953 and added to the Manifestoes of Surrealism, Breton declares:

The decisive act of Surrealism was to show that they flow along continuously... It is no longer a question of making the free association of ideas serve for the elaboration of a literary work that tends to outdo preceding works by its daring, but at the same time is a work whose recourse to polyphonic, polysemantic, and other inspirations presupposes a constant return to the arbitrary. The whole point, for Surrealism, was to convince ourselves that we had got our hands on the “prime matter” (in the alchemical sense) of language... in other words, rather than go back from the thing signified to the sign that lives on after it (which moreover, would prove to be impossible), it is better to go back in one leap to the birth of that which signifies.”³⁶⁷

Often in his lectures, Watts have described the universe as a dance of energies vibrating at many frequencies that merge, flow and part from ripples, tides, currents and whirlpools. They unite and dissolve into each other so that they can become the bodies of consciousness. By changing one’s thoughts, one changes life, and by doing so realizes that one does not have to go anywhere to know the world because one already knows. Lao Tzu says, “Without stirring abroad, one can know the whole world”³⁶⁸. No amount of trying or striving will make any difference, for the heart operates by its natural connection to the Tao: “Identifies without having to see, accomplishes without having to act.”³⁶⁹ A clinging to knowledge and reason makes way for a cherishing of the brief moment of the now, so well captured by Desnos, the avant-garde films, and the Tao.

3. Surrealist Nonsense Towards Selflessness

A. Spiritual Nonsense

Out of all the Surrealists, Joán Miró and André Masson were prompted to produce dream paintings. The graphic world that Masson created is the universe and resembles the process of

³⁶⁷ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. The University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 298-99.

³⁶⁸ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Book Two, XLVII, p. 54.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XLVII, p. 54.

“dream-including hallucination”. For Masson, dreams are not to counteract desires deadened from inaction. He strongly disagreed with Friedrich Nietzsche who perceived dreams as a way to “compensate, in a certain measure for the starvation of our instincts during the day... [while for Masson] They give life to what is cold and abstract in our waking thought... I know that I am surrounded by the Irrational. I let my reason go as far as it can. It traverses the court of objects and reaches finally a waste-land of infinite desolation; it is a truly human place, which creates its own Time.”³⁷⁰ Jean Hans Arp was another Surrealist, although later departing the movement, to reject the logic and rationality of his time. Affected by the brutality of European warfare, Arp declared, “The Chaos of our era is the result of that overestimating of reason... [the Surrealists] were seeking an elementary art to cure man... modern times with their sciences and technologies have consecrated men to megalomania... they rejected all mimesis and description, giving free rein to the Elementary and the Spontaneous.”³⁷¹ His series of collages ‘arranged according to the laws of chance’ championed the fundamental aspects of Surrealist art and also the most ancient books in Zen Buddhism, the *I-Ching* (Book of Changes). Arp’s techniques were used by the Surrealists in their investigation of chance in the game Exquisite Cadaver. The composition depends upon chance, random accident, highly improvisational execution, hoping to attain freedom from the past and the limitations forced upon the imagination by the conscious mind. The random, communal characteristics of the game valued non-authorship, as well as the infinite combinations that could be generated.

³⁷⁰ André Masson, Prologue, *Anatomy of my Universe*. New York Curt Valentin, 1943, p. III. Masson even explains how he had a conversation with his friend about the philosophies of Heraclitus (his favorite philosopher) and Husserl, and the following night this dream occurred. “A bed of grass surrounded on all sides by a brook of very pure water, but singular in that far from being immobile as it should be according to the laws of nature, it was, on the contrary, rapid stream. It was evident that this deep green, but perfectly static rectangle represented the doctrine of Husserl and that the brook, impetuous like a river swollen by the melting snows, was the symbol of Heraclitus who remains me the essential philosopher. All this corresponded to my thoughts of the evening before, but it was my dream which gave a body to what my reflection had debated abstractly the preceding day.”

³⁷¹ Roger Lipsey, quoting Jean Arp in *The Spirituel in Twentieth-Century Art*. Dover Publications, 2004, p. 119.

Arp's art is an attempt to resist direct, authorial composition and subjectivity. Other Surrealist artists, such as Joan Miró, André Masson and Marcel Duchamp also experimented with this procedure. The nature of their work shows they were preoccupied with chance as an artistic principle. Herbert Read draws a strong connection between Arp's discovery of chance and the *I Ching*: "to consult the Book of Change... the consultant throws a bundle of yarrow sticks of varying lengths or three coins at random, and is directed to a particular part and section of the Book by the position into which the sticks or the coin fall"³⁷². An interest in Asian philosophies was not uncommon among some avant-garde artists at the turn of the century. Tristan Tzara even claimed that Dada was "the return to a quasi-Buddhist religion of indifference."³⁷³ Arp suggested that during World War I, Duchamp, Picabia, Schwitters, and he "were the first to invert and disseminate these games of wisdom and clairvoyance" that, according to him, were played by the Chinese several thousand years ago. They were particularly attracted to Taoism. In the 1920 *Dada Almanach*, Richard Huelsenbeck wrote, "Dada is the American side of Buddhism," and that "it raves because it knows how to be silent, it acts as it's in a state of rest."³⁷⁴ In "André Masson and Automatic Drawing," Roger Cardinal brings attention to the fact that André Masson was introduced to Taoism and Zen Buddhism in 1930, when he met Japanese writer Kuni Matsuo, who introduced him to Zen and Oriental art. Upon his friend's suggestion the artist abandoned "...the superficial intellection in order to draw upon deeper, transpersonal resources. 'One must create an emptiness within oneself.'"³⁷⁵ Masson

³⁷² Erik Robertston, Arp, Painter, Poet and Sculptor. p. 49-50.

³⁷³ Jacquelyn Baas quoting Tristan Tzara "Speech to the Weimar Constructivist Congress" (1924) from Richard Sheppard "Dada and Mysticism: Influence and Affinities" in *Dada Spectrum: The Dialectics of Revolt*, ed. Stephen C. Foster and Rudolf E. Kuenzli, Iowa University Press, 1979, p. 98 in her book on *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 126

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 126.

³⁷⁵ Roger Cardinal, "André Masson and automatic drawing", *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*. New York University Press, 1997, p. 88.

understood the important discovery that emptiness is not negative, but “fullness, the plenitude of a being divested of all mental deviation”.³⁷⁶

In *Buddha Mind In Contemporary Art*, Jacquelynn Baas speculates that Duchamp’s contact with Asian culture could have started as early as 1908-11 when he was in his early twenties, and could have seen the collections of Buddhist art in Paris at the Musée Guimet. She also guesses that he must have attended lectures there by the French Buddhologist, Alfred Foucher. In an exchange of letters between Duchamp and Katherine Dreier, she notes, “For if one accepts the Chinese interpretation of art - that only that is art which inspires and releases the energy of the soul - then the tree takes on a new significance.” Although not written by Duchamp, it was posted in his studio “to transform the significance of language from words into signs, into visual expression of the word, similar to the ideogram of the Chinese Language.”³⁷⁷

Arp is probably the Dada artist most closely associated to spirituality. He simplified his art throughout his life to arrive at what was essential. Although for Willem de Kooning, it seems to be the natural process of growing older: “it seems like a lot of artists, when they get older, they get simpler.”³⁷⁸ Jean Cathelin describes Arp’s *The Torses* to be the genuine manifestation of his spiritual quest: “esprit et matière sont tout un”³⁷⁹ (spirit and matter are one). Arp fuses what is human with the cosmos, believing in Einstein’s theory that matter is endowed with energy, one comes from the other. Cathelin eloquently articulates Arp’s quest:

“Par là, Arp préface au XXI^e siècle. On reconnaîtra un jour qu’il fut le précurseur d’un art interplanétaire par lequel, tout orgueil renoncé, nos descendants se situeront par rapport à l’ensemble des choses existantes ou latentes, dans cette galaxie comme dans d’autres. Dans le cadre de cette humilité grandiose, les nombrils de Arp, les formtes

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 88. André Masson *La mémoire du monde*, p. 142. Cardinal’s article “The Later Works of Wols, Abstraction, Transparency, Tao,” in Peter Inch, ed., *Circus Wols* (Todmorden:1987), pp. 33-44 makes a parallel case for seeing Wols’s non-referential ink-drawings in much the same Taoist or Zen like-spirit.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

³⁷⁸ Willem De Kooning, “Summer Monologue”, 1959.

³⁷⁹ Jean Cathelin, *Arp*. Le musée de poche, Paris, 1959, p. 30. (my translation)

gestatives, apparaîtront comme des signes aussi significatifs que les trois cheveux par lesquels Bouddha appelle ses disciples à la vocation de l'Espace, ce paradis qu'est la Nature perçue dans sa totalité. Cette perception nul ne tente de nous la communiquer plus que Arp."³⁸⁰

Desnos' nonsense was another significant forerunner of the twenty-first century the way Arp was. Many Surrealists followed the metaphysical footsteps of Duchamp and Arp in their pursuit of self-erasure, the unconscious, and fragmentation toward unity; they found themselves inspired by spiritual forces and energy. In the 1920s and 30s, a few Surrealists were attracted by distant values of theology to broaden the ominous worldview in post-WWI Europe. The Surrealist playwright and founder of The Theatre of Cruelty Antonin Artaud (friend of Desnos), along with Desnos, took part in the denunciation of the West and condemned "the impoverished and debased material values of European education and 'falseness' of Christianity. Desnos protested the Westernization of the world" (Bate 129). Artaud even published a letter to the Dalai Lama in the third issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (April 1925) pleading for alternatives. Artaud says, "Nous sommes très très fidèles serviteurs, ô Grand Lama, donne-nous, adresse-nous tes lumières, dans un langage que nos esprits contaminés d'Européens puissent comprendre, et au besoin, change-nous notre Esprit, fais-nous un esprit tout tourné vers ces cimes parfaites où l'Esprit de l'Homme ne souffre plus."³⁸¹ In the same issue of the Surrealist Revolution other artists were denouncing the European materialism, scientific rationalism, and adoration of the ego of the time:

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 37. ["Thereby Arp's preface to the twenty first century. One day, we will recognize that he was the precursor of an interplanetary art, by which all price is renounced, our children will station themselves in relation to existing and latent things, in this galaxy or others. As part of this magnificent humility, Arp's navels, the gestating forms, will appear as significant as the three hair strings that Buddha uses to introduce his disciples to the vocation of Space, this paradise that is Nature perceived as one. This perception no one tries to communicate more than Arp."]

³⁸¹ Antonin Artaud, "Adresse au Dalai-Lama", *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 3, Avril 1925, p. 17. ["We are your dear loyal servants, O Great Lama, enlighten us, in a language that our contaminated European mind can understand, and if necessary, change our spirit, turn our spirit towards ideal summits, where the spirit of Mankind no longer suffers"]

“L’Europe logique écrase l’Esprit sans fin entre les marteaux de deux termes, elle ouvre et ferme l’esprit. Mais maintenant l’étranglement est à son comble, il y a trop longtemps que nous patissons sous le harnais. L’esprit est plus grand que l’esprit, les métamorphoses de la vie sont multiples. Comme vous, nous repoussons le progrès: Venez jetez bas nos maisons.”³⁸²

When Wittgenstein was writing the *Tractatus*, insisting on the logical form of language, the Surrealists in France were rejecting the oppressive weight of reason over man’s speech. It is interesting to note that Carl Jung also found himself attracted by other modes of thinking, particularly that offered by the *I Ching*. Harold Coward states that “Taoism... provided the fundamental formative influence in Jung’s developing notion of ‘the self’... indirectly through synchronicity which [depended] directly on the Taoist Chinese text of the *I Ching*”³⁸³. Jung’s complex notion of self bound together the inner psyche with the external world. He was the first to introduce the terms ‘introvert’ and ‘extrovert’; in establishing personality types, Jung showed that an individual is determined by personality type, in relation to the surrounding world. According to Coward, Jung pondered the following issue: “how one could find a unity in which these opposite personality types would be balanced and their narrowness transcended.”³⁸⁴

B. Integration in Desnos

Surrealism therefore presents itself to us as a machine for integration - having refused the cultural divisions discussed, even the division of true and false, that have been the basis of Western language since the 10th century’s industrial and scientific revolutions. This movement of integration implies a reversal in the manifestation of a marginalized function both in social life and in literary and philosophical tradition. Imagination takes a leading role in Surrealism. For the

³⁸² Ibid., p. 22. [“European Logic endlessly crushes the spirit of mankind in its anvil. It opens and closes the mind. But now the entanglement is at its height, we have been suffering under its harness for too long. The spirit is greater than the mind, the metamorphoses of life are manifold. Like you, we reject progress. Come and tear down our houses.”]

³⁸³ Harrold Coward, “Taoism and Jung: Synchronicity and the self”. *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 1996, p. 477. (477-495).

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 478.

Surrealists and Taoists, there is no meaning, but instead an organic language whose interconnectedness dissolves the sense of self, and thus the ego.

In “André Breton ou la recherché du commencement” Octavio Paz reinforces the idea of natural language: “Attraction and repulsion between syllables and words are no different from what they are between stars and bodies. Nature is language, and language the double of nature. To rediscover natural language is to return to nature, before the Fall and before history: poetry is testimony of the first innocence.”³⁸⁵ Desnos used nonsense to come back to that state of innocence, free from societal obligations, as the child is. Lao Tzu also commands the quality of a child, free from rules and organizations, is keener to follow the Tao because of his innocence. Desnos’ “Au mocassin le verbe” reiterates the idea that for both Taoists and Surrealists, to rescind control is the path to oneness or selflessness. The poem’s meaning is beyond contradiction and wordplay, instead disorienting and alienating readers because the forms of the verbs do not match their subjects: “je connaîtrons/ je pleuvrai/ je fais tard/ je fais beau” (I we shall know/I shall rain/I am getting late/ I am a nice day.”³⁸⁶ In *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*, Mary Ann Caws suggests the verbal transformation personifies the shared responsibility of the two protagonists in the poem. Although at the same time, Desnos asks his readers to participate in the story. The readers find themselves in the dream state where what is necessary is not to understand the poem but to feel the love that the two characters have for one another. The displacement is a combination of several associated ideas in one single dream representation. For Michel Carrouges this disorder of sense always manifests itself because of its contrary, sense and

³⁸⁵ Octavio Paz, “André Breton ou la recherché du commencement”, *L’Arc*, 1967, no. 32 (George Bataille)

³⁸⁶ Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Voice of Robert Desnos*. University of Massachusetts, 1977, p. 62. Mary Ann Caws’ translation “Put the verb to the Mocassin – You suicide me, so docilely/ I shall die you nevertheless one day. I we shall know this ideal woman and slowly I shall snow upon her mouth. And I shall doubtless rain even if I am getting late, even if I am a nice day/ We you love us so little our eyes and I this tear will fall in ruin without rason of course and without sadness. Without.”

nonsense that are dictated by reason, but once this disorder is channeled towards its goal, it becomes voyeuristic. For him, Surrealism proposed nothing less than to unify the voice of the poet with the spiritual one. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron additionally suggests that the absence of meaning can also be seen in “the practice of exhibiting as equivalent the two sides of things and of manifesting the plurality of meanings of signs: as if one had to show that meaning could be transparent, or that things and signs had the same value as their opposites.”³⁸⁷ Such enterprise that Desnos and the avant-garde filmmakers undertook.

C. Cinema as Mirror

As a critic and cinephile, Desnos was not only fascinated by the silence, darkness, and mysticism of the movie theater, but also by the lyrical and spontaneous poetry that he recognized in films. The language of choice in Surrealist texts praising cinema is often vague, taking care to express the sublime and the profound effect, similar to the Tao that remains unnamed. The sense of selflessness found in the avant-garde is transposed in avant-garde films where the audience is rapturous in the marvelous sense of mystery that the films offered. In 1922, Desnos wrote:

“Ce que nous demandons au cinéma, c’est l’impossible, c’est l’inattendu, le rêve, la surprise, le lyrisme qui effacent les bassesses dans les âmes et les précipitent enthousiastes aux barricades et dans les aventures; ce que nous demandons au cinéma c’est ce que l’amour et la vie nous refusent, c’est le mystère, c’est le miracle.”³⁸⁸

When the language is constantly decentralized as in the poems of Desnos, there is a risk of loss or, by extension, of death. However, death should not be taken in the literal sense but rather as the necessary step towards rebirth into selflessness: harmony. When one looks at the film, one does not look at it as being ‘dead’ in spite of the cuts and the discarded images. In Man Ray’s

³⁸⁷ Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*. Translated by Vivian Folkenflik, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990.

³⁸⁸ Robert Desnos, “Mystère du cinéma”, *Les Rayons et les Ombres: Cinéma*. Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p. 96. [“what we expect from cinema, is the impossible, the unexpected, the dream, the surprise, the lyricism that erase lowness in the souls and sends them enthusiastically to the barricades and adventures; what we ask of cinema is what love and life deny us, it’s the mystery, it’s the miracle.”]

L'Étoile de mer and *Le mystère du château de dé*, the quest of the ideal is central to both films: the ideal woman or man, the ideal experience. The mystery in Man Ray's films serves as a bridge between the waking and sleeping state. However, Man Ray is likely to say that mystery is not something out of reach and rather found imbedded in reality, requiring awareness to see that the mysterious links to a much greater form of mystery. Lao Tzu says the Tao is mystery upon mystery, for one's goal is not to understand but to let go of one's reason. In *Sorcellerie et Cinéma*, Artaud wrote:

“Le cinema brut, et pris tel qu'il s'est, dans l'abstrait, degage un peu de cette atmosphere de transe éminemment favorable à cerraïne revelations... Voilà pourquoi le cinema me semble surtout fait pour exprimer les choses de la pensée, l'intérieur de la conscience, et pas tellement par le jeu des images que par quelque chose de plus imponderable qui nous les restitute avec leur matière directe, sans interpositions, sans representations.”³⁸⁹

Breton speaks of a “surdépaysement” of the film where there is a dialogue about reality and fantasy between the screen and its viewers. Breton described the Surrealist movement as a renewal in the arts, literature, and paintings, and that simultaneity showed evidence that separation should be looked at as an action of integration rather than exclusivity. Like the alchemists whose quest to reach a perfect realm or object, the Surrealists' search was to bring the two seemingly opposed realms into a single “point sublime”. André Breton recognized that Surrealism, along with its new philosophy, did not solely break away from the rational, but also was part of a renewal of Romanticism and its value of imagination and the Occult. It is interesting how Surrealism was a movement that knew how to integrate the old with the new, using the old to feed the creativity of the modern artists. In 1945, Breton stood by his original definition from the Second Manifesto, and reiterated with even more conviction to insist on the

³⁸⁹ Antonin Artaud, *OC*, III, p. 80. [“Raw cinema and taken as it, in abstract, emerged a little from this state of trance eminently favorable to certain revelations ... That's why I think cinema is mainly to express things of thought, the interior of consciousness, and not so much by the play of images by imponderable something more which gives their direct matter back to us, without interpositions, without representations.”]

‘point sublime’ and on the Surrealist’s task to bring humanity there. Carrouges even admits that one should not look at the ‘point sublime’ as a theoretical point, but instead look at it as:

“un point reel, vraiment surréel et central, situé à la fois dans la réalité subjective de la conscience et dans l’univers extérieur. En un mot, c’est le foyer vivant de la totalité du monde. En lui, il n’est plus possible de percevoir les diverses formes de l’être comme des réalités essentiellement hétérogènes. Ce n’est pas un point théorique, mais un champ surhumain qui ne sera pas toujours inaccessible à l’exploitation par l’homme.”³⁹⁰

Breton agrees that Surrealism ought to bring together two distant realities (reality and dream) to coexist in one but this revolution is both external and internal, and in that it coincides with a universal interaction explained in Taoism, the *Tao Te Ching* being based on the idea of oneness.

D. Oneness

An important focus will be bringing to light the intersections between Surrealism and Taoism. In his *Collected Works*, Jung said that he was attracted by the idea that Tao manifests as a fundamental pair of opposites, *yin* and *yang*. The goal for a Taoist is to live in harmony where “man is a reconciler of the opposites.”³⁹¹ Harvey Cheung establishes resemblance between Surrealism and Taoism in their transience of meanings. In his article on *Surrealism, Taoism and Zen: A Modernist Reading*, he signals a thematic connection between Eastern thought and Surrealism. In quoting Mary Ann Caws’ *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*, he argues:

“The shared goal of Romanticism, Surrealism, Taoism and Zen is to privilege, or to work toward, an integration where distinctions previously existed by emphasizing ‘spontaneity (automatism, chance, revelations of language and experience, refusal of the logical straightjacket...) and moral commitment...[to]... revolt against bourgeois and literary modes.’ The far-reaching motive here is the search for a higher truth beyond the social truths of distinction and divisionism which are, in the end, relative truths in a system

³⁹⁰ Michel Carrouges, André Breton et les données fondamentales du surréalisme. Gallimard, 1950, p. 23. [“A real point, really surreal and central, located both in the subjective reality of consciousness and in the external world. In one word, it is the living home of the entire world. In it, it is no longer possible to perceive the various forms of being as realities essentially heterogeneous. This is not a theoretical point, but a superhuman field that will not always be inaccessible to man’s exploitation.”]

³⁹¹ Carl G. Jung. *Collected Works*, p. 216-17.

which depends on the creation, and subsequent negation, of the “other” for its own veracity; hence the notion of spontaneous writing”³⁹²

For Cheung, reacting against the repressive nature of the rational, “Taoist and Surrealist methodologies confront existing distinctions that arbitrarily privilege some aspects of reality while rejecting others”³⁹³ The main goal for both Taoists and Surrealists is to discard limiting definitions. In *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*, Caws suggests, “...Surrealist writing in general is characterized by its basic double center - reality and dream, presence and absence, identity and distance... unity and multiplicity, continuity and discontinuity... mobility and immobility, clarity and obscurity.”³⁹⁴ The new alchemy that Surrealism has invented through language used man’s subjectivity as raw material. Surrealism favors disintegration not to seek nothingness, but rather to advance towards a point of synthesis. That disintegration is not an end in itself but the beginning of the preparing step. Concurrently, Carrouges adds: “La condition sine qua non de la reintegration de l ‘homme au point supreme du cosmos c’est la désintégration totale au préalable de la condition humaine présente.”³⁹⁵

Perhaps the most peculiar aspect of Tao is that it itself can change. It is true of the Tao both as a metaphysical principle and as an individual path. Unlike the changeless absolute of many pre-existing systems, the Tao is essentially a principle of change. What is more elusive than water? Perhaps dreams and both elements are associated with Surrealism and the *Tao Te Ching*. The world as an illusion is an intrinsic part of the Taoist worldview and ambiguous: ambiguity is also found in the *Soluble Fish*, Breton’s automatic writing. The incongruity of the title lies in the fact that a fish cannot be soluble until the readers realize that the fish in question

³⁹² Harvey Cheung, “Surrealism, Taoism and Zen: A Modernist Reading”. *Modernity in East-West Literary Criticism*. Edited by Yoshinobu Hakutani, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001, p. 173-74.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

³⁹⁴ Mary Ann Caws, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism* p. 19.

³⁹⁵ Michel Carrouges, *André Breton et les données du surréalisme*. Editions Gallimard, 1950, p. 98. [“The essential condition for the reintegration of man to the supreme point of the cosmos is the total disintegration of the human condition beforehand.”]

is none other than Breton born under the astrological sign of Pisces. Then, the substitution of “fish” with Breton makes sense, because according to the Surrealists, nothing is more soluble than the mind, like the Taoist who has the greatest potential to change, like water, like flux.

The Surrealists found themselves as inspired as Jung by the ideas of the East to serve their movement. In the third publication of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1925) Breton and his friends defined the activity of the movement as revolutionary in the sense that they were there to disturb the preconceived ideas to free man’s mind and it is applicable at every level of humanity. Artaud wrote, “Cette révolution vise à une dévalorisation générale des valeurs, à la dépréciation de l’esprit, à la déminéralisation de l’évidence, à une confusion absolue et renouvelée des langues, au dénivellement de la pensée.”³⁹⁶ Similarly to Lao Tzu who does not offer solutions in the *Tao Te Ching*, Surrealists did not propose any; both can be seen more as a state of mind or being more than anything else. Breton and other Surrealists applied to their mode of destruction Marx and Rimbaud’s motto “transform the world” by changing your life at the very core of language to convert reality. Anger and sincerity took precedence over concern of poetic images. Thus, for Desnos, revolution is synonymous with hope and change. He wrote it makes me,

“...espérer la disparition des canailles qui encombrant la vie... Les grandes Révolutions naissent de la reconnaissance d’un principe unique: celui de la liberté absolue sera le mobile de la prochaine. Toutes ces libertés individuelles se heurteront. Par sélection naturelle l’humanité décroîtra jusqu’au jour où, délivrée de ses parasites, elle pourra se dire qu’il existe des questions autrement importantes que la culture des céréales. Qu’il est temps enfin de s’occuper de l’éternité.”³⁹⁷

396 Antonin Artaud, “L’activité du Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes”, *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 3, Avril 1925, p. 31. This revolution is a general debasement of values, depreciation of the mind, demineralization of the obvious, an absolute and renewed confusion of language and unevenness of thought. (my translation).

³⁹⁷ Robert Desnos “La RÉVOLUTION c’est-à-dire LA TERREUR”. *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 3, Avril 1925, p. 26-27. “... expect the disappearance of scoundrels cluttering life ... The great revolutions arise from the recognition of a single principle: that of absolute freedom will be coming next. All these individual freedoms will clash. Humanity, by natural selection, will decrease until, delivered of its parasites, it may be said that there are other more important issues than of cereal crop. It is finally time to attend to eternity. (my translation).

The mobile reciprocity between life and art found in Surrealism coincides with the principles of change in Taoism. Compared with Western philosophies, Taoism offers a more fluid idea of consciousness and a different concept of human nature. Jung coined the term synchronicity to describe the potential connection between the inner and outer realms. The *I Ching* offered Jung techniques for contemplating these relationships. Coward reiterates:

“synchronicity is the idea that a person is a participant in and meaningfully related to the acausal patterning of events in nature... What is clear is that Jung became quite sure that the multiplicity of the empirical world rests on an underlying unity. It is this underlying unity that gives opposites such as inner versus outer, psychic versus physical, and spiritual versus worldly the potential to become linked in meaningful acausal synchronic experiences.” (Coward 482).

It is the influence of the *I Ching* and his concept of synchronicity that led Jung to shape his notion of the self, which is non-linear, circular with a center. Jung’s views evoke both Merleau-Ponty and the Surrealists, each transforming reality to reach unified thematic and practical aims.

In *Buddhist Elements in Dada*, Ko Won succeeds in stating the resemblance between Dada and Buddhism, one that applies to Taoism and Surrealism. He argues:

“...‘Dada asserts and negates all... Dada finds the self in all... All is not two... All is seen in all.’ Though Buddhism and Taoism are not to be equated, just as the Dada and Surrealist movements were distinct, the denial of dualism is clear; here, assertion is equated with negation. Underlying the idea is, it seems, the Buddhist doctrine of anātman (in Sanskrit, amattā in Pali) or no self, no soul, which professes that all things, including self, are without permanence, constantly in change, and there is no separate self, whether as body or soul, sense or consciousness”³⁹⁸.

In the Buddhist view, everything is in fact selfless, mere illusion, and therefore the world is empty. In Tristan Tzara’s words, ‘Everything you look at is false.’ This sort of existential approach may also be close to the Taoist philosophy of *yu* (being) and *wu* (nonbeing): being is nonbeing, nonbeing comes from being, and being in turn comes from nonbeing, with *yin* and *yang* interacting all the time. For Won, Tzara’s equation of opposites illustrated in his 1918

³⁹⁸ Ko Won, p. 35.

manifesto typifies the Eastern belief: “order = disorder; I = not I; affirmation = negation”(Won 35). Won confirms that the universes of Tao and Surrealism have commingled and produced a new and changing model for poetry. When Breton and the other Surrealists left the Dada movement to form Surrealism, they carried over Tzara’s attitude of glorifying the ‘insolite’, or unusual in everyday life, instead of seeking to destroy society. As Duchamp stated, ‘the artist, is always esoteric... [and as he once wrote to his brother-in-law, the artist Jean Crotti] being esoteric is the only salvation.’³⁹⁹

While Taoism is a philosophical way of life and Surrealism is an aesthetic movement with no other aspiration than to attain the marvelous, the two seemingly opposed intentions share the same ultimate goal: to unify the many in one. Cheung’s and Won’s views, along with fellow Surrealists poets, are important in establishing the fundamental goal of Taoism and Surrealism: to achieve harmony in life. The Surrealists aspire to the union of contradictions, or the unity of existence, the oneness between the essence and the object, between the external world and inner knowledge. Carrouges brilliantly describes it as “Au fur et à mesure que l’on pénètre plus profondément dans le surréalisme, on s’aperçoit que l’hermétisme en est la Pierre d’angle et qu’il en inspire les conceptions fondamentales... La notion de point supreme est la Pierre d’angle fondamentale de la cosmologie surréaliste, elle est le foyer du réel et du surnaturel et elle vient de l’ésotérisme.” (Carrouges 22)

Interestingly enough, scientists, Bruce Lipton in particular, have introduced what they call “imaginal cells”, as referred to earlier: new cells that spring forth from the old. Borrowing from the butterfly analogy, the caterpillar enters the cocoon to become a larva, and within that state, the imaginal cells become food for the organism so that the other cells can materialize. Crisis ignites evolution. The cultural creativity of the Surrealists was like the imaginal cells,

³⁹⁹ Jacquelynn Bass, p. 129.

feeding off of the old to create a vision of the new and ultimately transform it. "...The two are the same/ But diverge in name as they issue forth. Being the same they are called mysteries, /Mysteries upon mysteries - The gateway of the manifold secrets."⁴⁰⁰. The cells do not fight the current situation, attempting to return into caterpillar form; instead, they create a new world from their inherent (not programmed) beliefs and help bridge the divide between one system and a new cycle in the evolutionary path.

Echoing Breton's own words:

"As for the core of the problem, which is that of the relationship between the human mind and the sensory world, Surrealism is here of the same mind as such thinkers as Louis-Claude de Saint Martin and Schopenhauer, in the sense that it believes, as they did, that we must seek to understand nature through ourselves and not ourselves through nature... and be in a position to embrace all the structure of the world, manifested or not. It alone provides the thread that can put us back on the road of Gnosis as knowledge of suprasensible reality, 'invisibly visible in an eternal mystery.'"⁴⁰¹

The main preoccupation for the Surrealists was to stimulate a world to no longer find it alienating. Their techniques were necessary tools to get to "...à une nouvelle déclaration des droits de l'homme"⁴⁰² To paraphrase a saying taken from *Cadavre exquis*, "what is absence? Calm, limpid water, a moving mirror..."⁴⁰³ To render what cannot be perceived on the level of clear fluidity. Through simplicity, self-realization is achieved. Lao Tzu's poem XIV talks about tapping into the invisible, the untouchable, immeasurable force that enables one to gain harmony that comes with being connected to the oneness, and harmony is your ultimate objective to live a spirited life. To learn to abandon the ego: "...returns to that which is without substance. This is called the shape that has no shape."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Book one, I, p. 5

⁴⁰¹ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 303-304.

⁴⁰² André Breton, Cover of *La Révolution Surréaliste*. No. 1, 15 Décembre 1924.

⁴⁰³ Alastair Brotchie, *Surrealist Games*. Shambala Redstone Editions, 2001, p. 27.

⁴⁰⁴ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Book One, XIV, p. 18.

Furthermore, by changing one's thoughts, one can harmonize with the Tao and in the process realize that what one called reality is in fact an illusion. The Tao and Surrealists' works force one to look beyond what seems true and clarify previously limited views. Both present the world differently and work is done when one lightens up internally and lets oneself be moved along with the ceaseless Tao, rather than by setting goals or meeting standards set by others. As thought changes from a position dictated by the ego to one that transcends it, practical choices can have room for integrating chance, spontaneity, and surprise. The Tao is empty and limitless and cannot be constrained, quantified, and measured. The fourth poem invites one to consider rearranging thoughts about identity: "...Blunt the sharpness; Untangle the knots; Soften the glare; Let your wheels move only along old ruts. Darkly visible, it only seems as if it were there..."⁴⁰⁵ Doing so, one cultivates an awareness of the infinite aspect of self as the way to tap into the limitless source of creative energy. Lao Tzu believed that Tao is empty, yet full of every created thing: "The way is empty, yet use will not drain it. Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad creatures." (Lao Tzu, IV) The inner emptiness of an object is a central idea to Lao Tzu:

"Thirty spokes share one hub; Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the cart. Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room. Thus what we gain is Something." (Lao Tzu XI)

The Tao is not to the finite world. It is not seen, touched, heard, smelled, or tasted. Yet, everything in the universe comes out of it.

This dissertation explores the question of Surrealist Nonsense as a genre by referring to the theory in relation to Surrealism and Taoism. In taking these superficially disparate notions and bringing together their deeper similarities, the thematic elements illustrate their shared, unconventional techniques: a fragmentation toward unity, flux, and selflessness. The examined

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., IV, p. 8.

texts, those that present a nonsensical approach to language and images instead focus on the opacity, trueness, and displacement of the content. Jungian ideas of the self and his approach to exploring the unconscious bear several useful parallels to the Surrealists and Taoists, unraveling the unknown areas of the mind by dissecting dreams - seeming nonsense. Jung, Merleau-Ponty, the Surrealists, and Taoists valued ideas with similar weight, enjoying seeing things fit within a unified whole and opposing the ritual of rejecting the “other”. This shared approach is of utmost importance in exploring nonsense as a genre because nonsense, instead of being something written off as foolishness, transforms from the absence of sense to a new kind sense with characteristics all its own. Legitimizing nonsense can help get to a fuller view of reality.

The significant number of Surrealists who experimented with the film scenario - a number which included even Andre Breton – is, with the limited number who actually made films, a misleading indication of how closely involved Surrealists were with the film industry. While a passion for cinema motivated considerable projects, such as Philippe Soupault’s cinematographic poems and the scenarios of Desnos and Picabia, their work would demonstrate an intention to subvert the processes of popular cinema. “Film for the Surrealists would surpass its theatrical frame and pursue a new conception of representation, where its appeal to the imagination, its sense of erratic movement, and its fragmentation of reality gave the viewer an intensified experience of the simultaneous flux of life.”⁴⁰⁶

Taoism is most relevant to this study of Surrealist Nonsense because it teaches beyond mind, beyond concepts, beyond categories to arrive at pure spontaneity of the here and now, the impermanence of things, and being one with the universe, transcending the ego. Taoism and Surrealism share a similar path toward transformation of the self, which opens a new relationship to the world beyond representational or objectifying thinking. Both were designed to lead outside

⁴⁰⁶ Abel, Richard *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*, Princeton University Press, 1984. p. 261.

the limits of the mind, conventional language, and ego to a state of transcending representations, concepts, and intellectual categories. The context of the Tao is the result of deep meditation upon the nature of human perception and understanding in its most absolute, subjective reality. Breton's soluble mind is as ephemeral and everlasting as the Tao. In light of Taoism, nonsense is nothing but a type of sense in disguise or an element of the Tao that makes one see what cannot be otherwise seen. It magnifies the level of perception, like a microscope does for cellular material: witnessing conflict and harmony as the basis of life. Once the place of unity is achieved, separation becomes obsolete. "After all everything is beautiful. You only have to take an interest in things, to see their beauty... after all things are just what they are. A face is a face. Plates are plates... and life is life."⁴⁰⁷ In another film, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, Jean-Luc Godard informs his audience that to live and to think cannot be distinguished. The Tao also encourages people to break free from the rational construct of thought since it prevents living in the state of oneness. Godard's voiceover in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* recalls Lao Tzu's beliefs: awareness without the involvement of the ego, stripping the self of judgmental bias:

"...since my thoughts divide as much as unite, and my words unite by what they express and isolate by what they omit, since a wide gulf separates my subjective certainty of myself from the objective truth others have of me, since I constantly end up guilty even though I feel innocent, since every moment changes my daily life. Since I always fail to communicate, to understand, to love and be loved and every failure deepens my solitude, since I cannot escape the objectivity crushing me nor the subjectivity expelling me, since I cannot rise to a state of being, nor collapse into nothingness, I have to listen, more than ever; I have to look around me at the world, my fellow creature, my brother. The world alone... say that the limits of language are the world's limits, that the limits of my language are my world's limits, and that when I speak, I limit the world, I finish it."⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa Vie*, Anna.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

Epilogue

Why make a case for Surrealist Nonsense as a potential genre? To refer to Surrealist Nonsense as a genre is to imply a repetition of elements, which describe it as a genre, and it is because these commonalities, such as the unconscious, flux, chance, and impermanence, follow the principle of this particular genre that it can be catalogued. The texts and films surveyed in this dissertation are true expressions of the movement and of Surrealist Nonsense that aims at fusing dichotomies for the sake of unity. As with the Tao - a path that widens as it is followed - once established in genre, prior attributes of fixity, limitation, and myopia open up to a much broader picture of the world that facilitates a negotiation between readers and texts, cultures and texts, readers and cultures, and thus, genres among genres. After all, reality has no genres, only the arts, and as art brings people closer to reality, the genre constructs that once helped provide gateways and structures for new modes of thought and being can become obstacles to integration.

Genre, however, finds its *raison d'être* in that 1) it has a name, since it represents a group of specific markers that qualify it and 2) because the very same markers that create it can be identified solely in relation to the genre they are referring to. The relation that exists between genre and its contents is a dynamic one. The reason for genre is that it facilitates and guides viewers while at the same time setting expectations for them. Genre is useful in grouping works together that share similar elements or ideas. It simplifies, but at the same complicates, the audience's relationship with its experience. Genre has the potential to expand the content of its categories by either adding, contrasting, or comparing the groups that constitute it. However, the other side of the coin, is that it can alienate viewers who trap themselves in abiding to a

particular genre because of the familiarity it offers. Usefulness of the genre does not reside in the genre itself but in the audience's relationship with the genre. It is practical only if the limits of the genre are recognized as limiting and not as an all-inclusive answer. Additionally, genre can legitimize certain ideas and techniques, almost serving as a stamp of approval for warranting inclusion.

So, while genre can assist in broader exposure and confirmation, ultimately, it serves its purpose best as a portal - precisely why the ideas of Surrealist Nonsense would benefit from such classification. Surrealist Nonsense is discernible enough for the initiated, but for those coming new to the content and form, it can be disorienting. Being classed as a genre would supply a navigating influence. The dichotomous character of genre is not foreign to the world of the Taoist, however - wherein the dualistic character of the high and low, full and empty are not mutually exclusive but rather inclusive. In the Tao, things happen and flow simultaneously, a theory that Carl Jung referred to as synchronicity or "meaningful coincidence". The limitless, senseless, and formlessness of the Tao reiterates the idea that meaning can be found in the mystery and ambiguity of the whole, rather than in conventional norms. It is because of its latent character that it enables clarification because it seems obscure at first. The flow between the two can only invigorate if it happens simultaneously.

Why then does this study merge several supposedly conflicted terms into one: Taoism, formless and senseless, with Surrealist Nonsense, free flowing and absurd, topped off by genre, authoritative and confined? In reply, the aim is not so much to establish connections between binary visions as simply manifesting what already is and coexists in harmony. Surrealist Nonsense as a genre brings flexibility and practicality, essential conditions in expanding interpretation of artistic endeavors, to genre as rigid arbiter of content. In "The World is an

Artichoke”, Italo Calvino declares “The world’s reality presents itself to our eyes as multiple, prickly, and as densely superimposed layers. Like an artichoke.”⁴⁰⁹ Surrealist Nonsense as a genre could serve as an “never-ending artichoke”, giving viewers the possibility to continuously unpeel literary or artistic works. The quintessential nature of this genre is paradoxically fluid and introduces an alternative, less judgmental way of journeying through the world.

⁴⁰⁹ Italo Calvino, *Why Read The Classics*. Tr. Martin McLaughlin. Vintage Books, New York, 2000, p. 197.

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