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Blacker in Black: The Romanian Surrealist Group and Postwar Surrealism

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BLACKER IN BLACK:
THE ROMANIAN SURREALIST GROUP AND POSTWAR SURREALISM

Catherine Hansen

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Advisers: Efthymia Rentzou and David Bellos

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation concerns the Romanian surrealist group Infra Noir, whose five members were Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Dolfi Trost, Paul Păun, and Virgil Teodorescu. Active between 1940 and 1951, Infra Noir chose a perilous moment and setting to found a surrealist group. Surrealist ideas were unwelcome, to begin with, in a prewar Romania entranced by right-wing politics and philosophies, as well as in a postwar Romania remade in the image of Communism. Working within the dynamic of the Surrealist movement's troubled relationship to Marxism and political activism, and across national and linguistic borders, the Infra Noir group thought a great deal about ideology, myth, materiality, and revolution, as well as modes of collective action and daily comportment. Beginning with the magazines and ephemera of a Bucharest interwar avant-garde scene menaced by the rise of fascism, I follow the members of Infra Noir through the war, the postwar triumph of Stalinist rule in Romania and of Stalinist influence in France, the repercussions of these events among André Breton's French Surrealists, and the various forms of exile that followed for Luca, Naum, and the others. The dissertation examines Infra Noir's critical and aesthetic vocabulary and key concepts in order to arrive at an overarching argument. I show firstly that for Infra Noir, the main problem – which they call the "Obstacle" – is that selves and their societies tend to act as facing mirrors that endlessly reflect each other and hold each other in place, preventing truly revolutionary thoughts and actions from taking flight. There is no getting "above" or "outside" this situation, and any attempt to do so strengthens its grasp. I show, secondly, that the group's solution to this problem is a strategy of dialectical negation which they call "negation of negation." This strategy is manifest, for example, in Infra Noir's

theories of matter, object-relations and object-making, as well as in the idiosyncratically political meaning the group gives to the word "somnambulism," drawing on early psychiatric, occult, and surrealist discourses. Chapters One and Two are primarily literary-historical accounts of Infra Noir, focusing on Romania and France respectively; Chapters Three and Four are primarily critical-theoretical accounts of Infra Noir's work on objects and materiality, and on somnambulism.

Introduction

When the postwar Romanian Surrealist group joined ranks in the summer of 1947 with the Parisian Surrealists led by André Breton, its five members – Gherasim Luca (1913-1994), Dolfi Trost (1916-1966), Paul Păun (1915-1994), Virgil Teodorescu (1909-1987), and Gellu Naum (1915-2001) – had collectively engaged in the better half of a decade of surrealist activity in Bucharest. The Romanian group had been in correspondence with Breton already for a year, as the Parisians planned an international exhibition to take place in June 1947 at Galerie Maeght in Paris. Breton hoped through this exhibition not only to give Surrealism a new momentum and energy, but make the movement into the epicenter of a sweeping revitalization of reality amid the war's ruins. The Romanians, after a period of long isolation, were impatient to join the endeavor, and impatient also to intervene critically in its development.

Breton wrote, in the catalog associated with the 1947 exhibition, that the Romanians had formulated a new Surrealist *mot d'ordre*: "la connaissance par la méconnaissance." The Romanians' participation in this exhibition, however, was limited to a short catalog text titled "Le Sable nocturne," and it also marked a rare moment of reconciliation among its members, who had directed their manifestos as much against each other as against the malign forces of history. Soon afterward, the group splintered apart once again, under both internal and external pressures, and its members carried on their work alone or in unstable groups, dispersed between Romania, Israel, and France. And while the Romanian Surrealist group was enormously prolific, publishing dozens of major poetic and theoretical works between 1945 and 1947 alone, by the following

decade these texts were seldom read and difficult to find, and for a long time overlooked even among surrealists and historians of Surrealism.

The pages that follow are concerned with this body of work in both French and Romanian, and with the sometimes joined, sometimes schismatic itineraries of its authors. Focusing between the formation of the Romanian Surrealist group in 1940 and its final dissolution in 1951, this dissertation places the group's work in its multiple contexts, historical and textual, and shows how it altered them and was altered by them.

It is possible to treat the Romanian group, variously, as a single entity moving in historico-literary space; as a point of intersection for several very different careers and trajectories; or simply as the origin of a body of essays, tracts, opuscules and longer texts written mostly between 1941 and 1951. None of these schemes taken alone would be fully appropriate, but each is in its way essential to my account. For this reason, I take an approach to my topic that is both literary-historical and critical-theoretical.

To the degree that a story of Romanians and Surrealism – a surrealism of Franco-Romanian expression – remains to be told, this dissertation is a work of literary history. Many of the texts under discussion here are little known and less often commented upon, particularly in English, and require a careful reading that both takes into account the arguments, theories, and historical situations that they respond to and listens to the differences and dissent that they register. Moreover, since Infra Noir wrote from within and at the margins of both French and Romanian literary avant-garde traditions, any attempt to tell this story requires attention to the geographic and cultural fields of tension within which the group so uneasily moved. Its members made substantially different choices, to select one example, when it came to their language of expression and, in some

cases, their language of exile: Gherasim Luca famously called forth from French, his language of ambivalent adoption, a "bégaiement poétique" that spins itself into metamorphic fragments; Gellu Naum, on the other hand, fell out with his colleagues on several occasions over his refusal to write in French.

The story of Infra Noir also closely concerns the fate and the evolution of postwar Surrealism and its various entanglements, successors and rivals. It is nearly a commonplace that the real history of Surrealism ends before, if not well before, the Second World War. But the Romanian group forged itself in the flames of the war, and was shaken and shaped by the aftershocks, both material and ideological, of the immediate postwar. The questions it struggled with, on the eve of a new, Cold war as the Iron Curtain fell, were questions also faced by Breton and the Parisian surrealists, especially in their hostile encounters with oppositional groups (like the zealous, Stalinist Surréalistes-Révolutionnaires, a group composed of future members of Cobra, the College of Pataphysics, the OuLiPo, and the Situationist International). Infra Noir followed such events and rivalries with great attention, feeling they had much at stake therein, and like many others they contended over what it meant to be revolutionary amid the social and cultural upheavals following the war.

Despite its internal disagreements, the group – which appears in these pages under the name it eventually adopted, "Infra Noir" – carried out its efforts within a common current of thought and of sensibility, both poetic and theoretical, and as a collective it engaged with and critically reworked the French Surrealist thought, techniques, and methods that had initially inspired it. Insofar as the dissertation addresses itself to this aspect of the Infra Noir group, it is a critical and theoretical project, based on close

readings of key texts. It explores Infra Noir's take on Surrealist pursuits and concepts including the creation of surrealist objects, automatism, objective chance, revolutionary engagement, myth-making and myth-breaking, simulation, mediumship, and dreaming. Surrealism had always been understood by its practitioners as a state of mind and of being, a matter of comportment before and within the world, rather than as a school of literary or cultural creation. To speak of a poetics of Surrealism is to speak as much about language as about a "liberating life praxis"[1] – one, moreover, that opens up new modes of collective creation and collective action. Infra Noir actively sought new ways to embed surrealist theory and creativity within such a liberating life praxis. If, for this reason, one were to ask of this dissertation – as André Breton did of paintings – "sur quoi elle donne,"[2] it looks out upon a panoramic and multi-generic history of questioning and exploring the relationship between poetry and politics, art and revolution, and the reciprocal influence of formal-artistic experimentation and social-political experimentation. How can art, or an art of life, effect social change and how can't it? What were the ambitions and greater horizons of the various experiments carried out by this particular and rather marginal group, Infra Noir, in the postwar twilight of the "historical" and "revolutionary" avant-gardes?

In response to the conclusion of Breton's 1935 *Discours au Congrès des écrivains* ("'Transformer le monde,' a dit Marx; 'changer la vie,' a dit Rimbaud: ces deux mots d'ordre pour nous n'en font qu'un"),[3] Infra Noir made its own attempt to reconcile

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1 See Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 53.

2 "C'est ainsi qu'il m'est impossible de considérer un tableau autrement que comme une fenêtre dont mon premier souci est de savoir sur quoi *elle donne*, autrement dit si, d'où je suis, 'la vue este belle,' et je n'aime rien tant que ce qui s'étend devant moi *à perte de vue*." André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, in *Œuvres complètes IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 351.

3 André Breton, "Discours au Congrès des écrivains," in *Œuvres II* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 459.

Rimbaud and Marx, and also worked to change the terms of the problem. To this effect there are certain recurring concepts and ideas that appear throughout the dissertation, which keeps circling back upon them in order to clarify and deepen its arguments. There is, for example, what Luca and Trost refer to in their 1945 manifesto *Dialectique de la dialectique* as "le fonctionnement onirique dans la vie diurne,"[4] a means of working across the boundary between individual imagination and the "dreams" embedded in social causes. Infra Noir places great hope in the idea of a conscious and collective diurnal dreaming that allows one to act in special ways upon the world and be acted upon in turn. Breton once asked, in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, whether dreams could be applied to solve the fundamental problems of life – and indeed, for the Romanian group, the dream was not an escape from these problems but a means of deeper engagement with them.

Another concept that appears frequently is that of the "Obstacle." The word has a very specific meaning and function in Infra Noir texts – for example in Paul Păun's *Les Esprits animaux* (1947) and Gherasim Luca's appendix to his 1945 *Moartea moartă* (Death Dead)[5] – and I dignify it for this reason, throughout this dissertation, with a capital letter. The term "Obstacle" as it appears in these pages is, to a certain degree, an artifact of my scholarly encounter with the Romanian Surrealists; in discussions of certain texts and passages, I sometimes use this word when Infra Noir authors do not. In every case, however, it refers to the same problematic, one that greatly preoccupied the group. The Obstacle is, in its most basic meaning, the fact that the way things *are* not

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[4] Gherasim Luca and Dolfi Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique* (Bucharest: S. Surréalisme, 1945), 26. Gellu Naum, in various texts, tends to call it "diurnal oneirism."

[5] Paul Păun, *Les Esprits animaux* (Bucharest: La Collection surréaliste Infra-Noir, 1947) 3; Gherasim Luca, *Inventatorul iubirii: urmat de Parcurg imposibilul și de Moarta Moartă* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945), 115.

only conceals the way things *could* be, but conditions and contaminates any attempt toward imagining them otherwise, and toward actively changing them. The sinister message of the Obstacle is that one cannot change the world or life, because one is inescapably a part of it, and cannot see beyond its horizon. To put it another way, if the limitations and injustices of the present are a rotten branch, one cannot simply saw it off, because one is, in fact, sitting on it. In the chapters that follow, in Infra Noir's engagement for instance with Surrealist object-theory (Chapter Three) or with myth, both in its power and in its pitfalls (Chapter Two), the group retaliates against this logic, answering that it is *because* one is inescapably a part of the world that one can change it.

Throughout this dissertation, although the literary-historical and critical-theoretical approaches I have just outlined are interwoven, the first half of the dissertation leans more toward to the former, and the second half to the latter. This bipartite structure, among other things, is a way of addressing certain complications concerning Infra Noir's chronology and trajectory. "Infra-Noir" is the title of two back-to-back series of tracts published in 1947 by the Romanian group, including texts discussed in detail in the pages to follow.[6] Around September 1946, when the group held the exhibition *L'Infra-Noir* at the gallery Căminul Artei in Bucharest, it began signing its correspondence "Infra-Noir," and referring to itself by this name. Throughout this dissertation I refer to the Romanian Surrealist group as "Infra Noir," dropping the hyphen in order to distinguish the group itself from the publications and exhibitions that share this name. But using this name raises questions of the group's dates. The collaborators, for example, of the 1951 "Un

[6] These include Paul Păun's *Les Esprits animaux* and *La Conspiration du silence*, Dolfi Trost's *Le Même du même,* and Gherasim Luca's *Amphitrite*, as well other unpublished collective texts composed between 1946-47 that were meant to appear in the Infra-Noir series, including *L'Amour invisible*, *Les Noces phylogéniques*, and *Déclaration sur la portée exacte de l'outrance poétique*.

Objet, un signe" exhibition in Tel-Aviv (Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, and the artist Mirabelle Dors) called themselves "L'Infra-Noir" even after Dolfi Trost, Gellu Naum, and Virgil Teodorescu were no longer in the picture.[7] Even so, perhaps the name is all the more appropriate since, in place of proper starting and ending dates, Infra Noir instead casts lengthening (infra-black) shadows in two directions.

Though 1945 is arguably the group's starting date, since their first batch of major, pre-"Infra-Noir"-series publications appeared at this time, before 1945 the group had already spent five clandestine years of secret collaborations, games, tensions, and deliberations. Even before 1940, the year the group's five members first came together, they were experimenting individually with surrealist forms and ideas, or networking, in Luca and Naum's case, with surrealists in Paris. 1938 was the year Luca and Naum left for Paris, but before this, Naum was already publishing volumes of automatic poetry, and Luca and Păun had been influenced by Saşa Pană's surrealist-sympathizing magazine in Bucharest, *unu* (1928-1935).

Though 1947 is arguably the group's ending date, since its final batch of major publications appeared in this year, Luca and Trost left Romania for Israel in 1950 and until 1951 continued collaborating, with Păun's long-distance participation, on projects and experiments. After 1951, when these foundered on Luca and Trost's shattered friendship and Păun's failed attempts to leave Romania, and when the group can be said to have finally disbanded, both Luca and Trost in 1953 published major works that had taken root in Infra Noir's signature initiatives and concepts. And decades, even, after Luca's unofficial exclusion in 1952 from Breton's postwar surrealist group upon his

[7] Monique Yaari states that the actual title of this exhibition was *Surréalisme*, and "Un objet, un signe" the title of the exhibition invitation pamphlet. See "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence,'" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir un et multiple* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 180.

return to France, his work continued to circulate around ideas he had developed in Infra Noir.[8]

The four chapters of the dissertation are arranged in order to adequately cover all these aspects, periods, moments, and locations in the group's career, its prehistory and posthistory, and to work a necessary compromise between time and place. Chapter One, to begin with, devoted to Infra Noir's prehistory, takes place amid an interwar Bucharest avant-garde scene threatened and haunted by the rise of fascism, where the future members of Infra Noir first found their footing. I trace this avant-garde scene's reception of Surrealism, discussing the magazine *unu* and the foundation of the magazine *Alge* by Luca, Păun and others in 1930. I then follow the presence of Luca, Trost, and Păun in the embattled Communist press of the mid-to-late 30s and the ambivalent reaction of these three to Surrealism. They felt, like many other international latecomers to the movement, that it had essentially ended, after serving its purpose; but they still became involved, despite themselves, in the debates about Surrealism and Communism, art and the revolution, that so troubled the movement at this time. Ending with Luca and Naum's departure for France in 1938, the chapter focuses on a period roughly between 1928 and 1938.

The main goal of this first chapter is to show how the journals, manifestos, and constructive and destructive passions of the Romanian interwar avant-garde, and later the militant hopes of Communist journals like *Cuvântul Liber* (The Free Word), prepared the field for many of the critical and ideological positions later occupied by Infra Noir, and often defined the terms of its internal disagreements. One particular idea that gives this

[8] For more on Saşa Pană and *unu*, see Chapter One; for Luca and Trost in Israel, see Chapter Three and Afterword; for Luca's exclusion, see Chapters Two and Four.

Romanian chapter its broader arc is one that unites the literary-artistic with the proletarian avant-garde: the idea that one can and must be caught up to, or intimately in touch with, one's historical moment. History itself is conceptualized, by the writers discussed here, as having an immanent logic, or a driving rhythm, or an inner truth, and it is the artist's as much as the proletarian poet-activist's task to hear and follow it. In all this they are concerned with seeing the future behind the veil of the present. Luca, Păun, and the others believed that history itself has an avant-garde, which was occupied not only by proletarian workers and youth, but by technicians of the written word. This led them to feel that though Surrealism was already a thing of the past, it also held the seeds of the future. The final irony is that, as these seeds ripened for the future members of Infra Noir, the latter ended by becoming not timely but untimely, in their allegiance to a movement that in Romania was ultimately rejected by its major cultural-ideological currents: by the fascists along with radical-leftist avant-gardists before the war, and by the Stalinists of the postwar.

Chapter Two, devoted to Infra Noir's French history and post-history, moves its theater of operations for the most part to France, but brings with it many similar questions and concerns. It begins with Luca and Naum in Paris between 1938-40 and their departure in the summer of 1940 to form the Romanian Surrealist group, follows events and currents that took place alongside – and influenced – Infra Noir activity, and ends with Luca and Trost's separate arrival in 1952 in Paris, where Luca joined a group of ex-Surrealist dissidents and Trost briefly joined Breton's Surrealists. It thus focuses on a period roughly between 1938 and 1952. Since Infra Noir was present in (at a distance) and influenced by the struggles and events that defined Surrealism's wartime and

immediate postwar story, this second chapter widens its field to provide an account not only of Breton's group during this time, but of other related and rival groups, and in doing so outlines a kind of history-by-proxy of Infra Noir in France. One such group is Main à Plume, a prolific band of young French and Belgian surrealist aspirants roughly contemporary (1941-1945) to Infra Noir, whose ideas about history as a thing of destinies, hidden "determinants" and obscure purposes were marked by both their wartime experiences and their later Communist loyalties – as a part of Main à Plume's membership later went on to form the "Revolutionary-Surrealist" group.

Chapter Two also explores – through an account of the 1947 exhibition, its catalog, hostile reactions to it, and Infra Noir's participation in it – the relationship of postwar Surrealism to myth, and on an early-Cold War intellectual and political scene, of myth to ideology, false consciousness, and political repression. Throughout, one encounters, as in the first chapter, a desire to be "in touch" with history and in this way to more effectively take up Marx's and Rimbaud's challenge – to change the world and to change life. Some felt that one should do so by working with and alongside the myths that constitute social, political and cultural life; others felt that one should do so by undoing and destroying them.

Chapter Three, the first in the critical-theoretical half of the dissertation, concerns itself with Infra Noir's theorizations of and experimentations with the "object." The word refers not only to what is known as *l'objet surréaliste* – whether found, invented, or merely conceptualized – but also to objects that populate the everyday, as well as, more generally, to subject-object relations in Surrealism. The chapter begins with a discussion of the main concepts and reference points in this field, drawing out one in particular –

which, after Salvador Dalí, I have called the "act-object" – and elaborating what I have called an object-function, or object-position, in Surrealism and in Infra Noir Surrealism. This allows the chapter to show how the object, for both the latter, becomes an interface, or a communicating vessel, between an "interior," subjective world of desires and private mutinies, and an "exterior" objective world of realities to be changed, on both a personal and collective scale. I also show, in this chapter, how the Infra Noir object becomes a strategy for evading the logic of the Obstacle – how it works, in Paul Păun's words, to make the world permeable to the human, and the human to the world.[9]

Chapter Four sets out to define what the words "somnambulism" and "somnambulist" mean in Infra Noir texts – in which they appear so frequently and in so many contexts that, as much as the object, somnambulism appears to lie at the heart of the Romanian group's project, and of its version of Surrealism. I trace the fate of somnambulism and the evolution of its meaning from 18th-century accounts of natural sleepwalkers – who were thought to be acting out their dreams – through the advent of mesmerism and animal magnetism and finally to "artificial somnambulism," until in the 19th century it becomes a volatile mix of experimental psychiatry, class and gender tensions, and the occult. The Surrealist movement's encounter with somnambulism took place during the surrealist "période des sommeils" and in the birth of surrealist automatism; Infra Noir both inherits the discoveries of the early surrealists and gathers up all the tangled threads of history and meaning to outline its own version of somnambulism, which it often calls automatic action.

The central question of this fourth chapter is how and why, for Infra Noir, the somnambulist or automatic actor becomes a politically active figure. Infra Noir's political

[9] Paul Păun, *Les Esprits animaux* (Bucharest: Infra-Noir, 1947), 6.

theory of somnambulism returns once again, as I show, to the Obstacle. The Infra Noir somnambulist functions as he does because he is an equivocal and paradoxical being, sleeping with his eyes open, acting with his eyes closed.[10] He acts with his eyes closed because otherwise, according to the logic of the Obstacle, the manifest facts of the present will obstruct the possibilities of the future; he sleeps with his eyes open because otherwise his dreams and visions would be nothing more than a passive avoidance of difficult realities. The Infra Noir somnambulist does not withdraw from the world to dream, but dreams within and through the world.

Each of the four main chapters of this dissertation includes readings of primary Infra Noir texts which are increasingly less difficult to find, as the work of the Infra Noir group and of its individual members becomes more widely known and read. With some exceptions, these texts are available in university, national or institutional libraries in their original Romanian or French editions, in anthologies, and sometimes even in English translation (though others, including major theoretical works and manifestos, remain scattered in private collections, or survive only in single copies in archives.) The dissertation also relies heavily on correspondence among Infra Noir members and with their friends, much of which has been made widely available at the website of the Association Atelier André Breton, the publications of the research wing of the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris and the Bibliothèque Kandinsky's online library, and the publications of the Gellu Naum Foundation in Bucharest. Further correspondence is held at institutions like the Getty Research Institute in California or the Bibliothèque Littéraire

[10] "Dormir les yeux ouverts, agir les yeux fermées" is one of the chapter headings in surrealist veteran Sarane Alexandrian's *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), which also includes an appreciative account of the Infra Noir group's activity.

Jacques Doucet in Paris, which also has many unpublished Infra Noir collective texts in its Gherasim Luca archive.

Since I began work on this project in 2010, there has also been a relative profusion of major scholarly texts on Infra Noir, in French and Romanian: Monique Yaari's edited volume, *"Infra-noir" un et multiple: un groupe surréaliste entre Bucarest et Paris, 1945-1947* (2014); Michael Finkenthal's monograph *D. Trost: între realitatea visului şi visul ca realitate* (2013); and Iulian Toma's book on Luca, *Gherasim Luca, ou, L'intransigeante passion d'être* (2012).[11] These are added to what are already standard works of reference in Infra Noir scholarship including Rémy Laville's 1994 biography of Gellu Naum, and books on Luca by Dominique Carlat in 1998 and Petre Răileanu in 2004.[12] In the meantime, an increasing number of scholars and translators contribute to a growing body of work, in journals and conferences, on Infra Noir and its members. However, there is still no book-length single-authored work in any language that deals critically with the Infra Noir group and its various contexts as a whole. And in English, short of a number of fine translations with detailed introductions, there are no books at all devoted to Infra Noir or to any one of its members. In filling this gap, and in taking on a rich and voluminous body of work, I plot a productive critical itinerary through this collective oeuvre.

Each individual chapter of this dissertation, in addition, makes a different kind of contribution to the existing literature on Infra Noir. Chapter One, for example, in

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[11] Monique Yaari, *"Infra-noir" un et multiple: un groupe surréaliste entre Bucarest et Paris, 1945-1947* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014); Michael Finkenthal, *D. Trost: între realitatea visului şi visul ca realitate* (Between the Reality of the Dream and Dream as Reality) (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2013); Iulian Toma, *Gherasim Luca, ou, L'intransigeante passion d'être* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012).
[12] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum: poète roumain, prisonnier au château des aveugles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994); Dominique Carlat, *Gherasim Luca l'intempestif* (Paris: J. Corti, 1998); Petre Răileanu, *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: Oxus, 2004).

following each of the future members of Infra Noir through the Romanian interwar avant-garde scene and the political engagements of the 30s, holistically outlines the group's evolution toward its future surrealist positions. In the process I discuss articles and poems, particularly from *Cuvântul Liber* and similar journals, that appear nowhere else in the literature, and resonate fascinatingly with the group's postwar work.[13] Chapter Two, alongside its other concerns, uniquely proposes that the history and work of Infra Noir should be read alongside that of Main à Plume and its later incarnation as the Revolutionary-Surrealist group.[14] In this trajectory, interests that were close to Main à Plume's heart and which it shared with Infra Noir – including the object, dreams, automatism, and collectivity – meet the group's political commitments head on, throwing further light on both the prewar and postwar career of Infra Noir. This chapter is also unique in reconstructing a wartime and postwar overview of Infra Noir's positions alongside major events in the group's life, with special attention to the 1947 international exhibition, based on existing research, correspondence and documents.

Chapters Three and Four propose that the object and somnambulism are two central poles of interest for Infra Noir, and that many of the group's theoretical and practical efforts circulate around them. Both chapters, again, address the entire group rather than single members, and place their work on these two topics alongside that of the

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13 Răileanu's (2004) and Toma's (2012) books deal with the interwar avant-garde, but focus on Luca. Toma also addresses several of Luca's contributions to *Cuvântul Liber* and other journals, and in this, overlaps to a degree with my own discussions.

14 When it comes to Main à Plume and the Revolutionary-Surrealists, I rely primarily on Anne Vernay and Richard Walter, *La Main à Plume: Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2008) and Michel Fauré, *Histoire du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1982); "Pour un regroupement des Surréalistes en Belgique," Brussels, April 1947, and "Pour désequivoquer l'action des Surréalistes en France," 1947, both in the collection Collection "Miscellaneous papers of Surréalistes-Révolutionnaires 1944-1948," Getty Research Institute (1534-741). For the postwar history of Infra Noir I also rely on three works by Sarane Alexandrian: *Jacques Hérold: étude historique et critique* (Paris: Fall édition, 1995); *L'Aventure en soi: autobiographie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1990); and *L'Evolution de Ghérasim Luca à Paris* / *Evoluţia lui Ghérasim Luca la Paris* (Bucharest: ICARE, 2006).

"classical" French surrealists. While valuable work has already been done on the Infra Noir object,[15] my fourth chapter is the first to acknowledge, analyze and contextualize the central place of somnambulism in Infra Noir texts. Both the third and fourth chapters supplement their arguments, when necessary, with archival documents from the Doucet and Kandinsky libraries and elsewhere, some of which make no other appearance in the Infra Noir literature, others of which have never been carefully discussed.

If the Infra Noir group is recognized at all in the English-speaking world, it has tended to be because of Gherasim Luca's late fame as a French-language poet – with the distinctive poetic "stuttering" that he began to develop during his Infra Noir years – or because of the relationship of Luca's "non-Oedipal" philosophy to the work and thought of Gilles Deleuze, particularly Deleuze and Guattari's 1972 *L'Anti-Œdipe*. Since, in the pages that follow, I occasionally mention "non-Oedipus" and Luca's poetic style, though without addressing either in detail, I will briefly address them here, as well as refer the reader to voluminous and varied discussions elsewhere.[16]

Deleuze mentions Luca, as well as Trost, many times in his published texts, for example in an appendix to *L'Anti-Œdipe*, "Bilan-programme pour machines désirantes." Some time before this book's appearance, Deleuze sought Luca out, intrigued by a reference to a lost "non-Oedipal" manifesto, and much taken by the little of Luca's work

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[15] Apart from Toma's and others' observations, in English there is Krzysztof Fijalkowski's chaper on Luca in his 1990 doctoral thesis *The Surrealist Object: Proof, Pleasure and Reconciliation* (Univ. of East Anglia, Norwich).

[16] See for example a series of articles and a book by Paolo Scopelliti: "Sur la contribution du surréalisme à la schizo-analyse" (*Mélusine* 16: *Cultures-Contre-culture*. Paris: L'Age d'homme, 1997); "Encore sur l'apport du surréalisme à la schizo-analyse" (*Mélusine* 21: *Réalisme-surréalisme*. Paris: L'Age d'homme, 2001); *L'Influence du surréalisme sur la psychanalyse* (Paris: L'Age d'homme 2002). Carlat (1998) devotes much time and attention to Luca's philosophy of language and its relation to the non-Oedipal, and Toma contextualizes this relation within the whole timespan of Luca's work, working with archival material.

that he could find.[17] In 1972 the two were in correspondence, and Deleuze had come to visit Luca at least once at his "atelier." Draft letters to Deleuze in Luca's personal notes of the time refer to a "rencontre du Non et de l'Anti," and include copied-out passages from *L'Anti-Oedipe* with commentary.[18] What *L'Anti-Œdipe* has to say about the primacy of states and intensities, of virtualities of being and becoming, over fixed symbolic and psychological structures, indeed resonates with Luca's work from Infra Noir and beyond. This includes Luca's poetry, which is at once rigorously combinatorial and profoundly disjunctive, in its ordered chaos of phonemes, morphemes and syntagms. Deleuze later wrote that Luca:

> est un des plus grands poètes français, et de tous les temps. Il ne le doit certes pas à son origine roumaine, mais il se sert de cette origine pour faire bégayer le français en lui-même, avec lui-même, pour porter le bégaiement dans le langage lui-même, et non dans la parole. […] On n'a jamais atteint à une telle intensité dans la langue, à un tel usage intensif du langage."[19]

Luca's "Oedipus" is a convergence of familial and sociocultural power. It draws, of course, from the Oedipus complex in its Freudian elaboration, and abstracts from Freud's work certain clear positions of attack, but it is something more as well. Oedipus stands for memory, for the past in its determination of the present, for the trauma of birth and the fear of death that accompanies it; Oedipus is also castration, which for Luca is

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17 See Gilles Deleuze, "Lettres à Ghérasim Luca," in *Cahier critique de poésie* 17: *Dossier Paul Celan / Ghérasim Luca* (Marseille: Centre international de poésie, 2009).

18 Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (GL ms 188, orange notebook marked "été 72.") At one point Luca mentions, with characteristic wordplay, "la rencontre d'un jet (dé) et d'un jet (ail)," which is to say the initials GD and GL. Another notebook (GL ms 188, Green, 1973/1974) includes drafts of a letter to Deleuze about the non-oedipal manifesto. A "Premier manifeste non-oedipal" is listed as "à paraître" in the back of the first Romanian-language edition of *Inventatorul iubirii* (The Inventor of Love) in 1945. The epigraph of *Inventatorul* is a quoted line from this lost manifesto, supposed later to appear alongside a French edition of *Inventatorul* – of which there was none, in fact, until 1994. Luca tells Deleuze that the "essential" of "what remains" of the manifesto has been channeled into *Inventatorul* (GHL ms 188 Cahiers).

19 Gilles Deleuze, "Un Manifeste de moins," in *Superpositions* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979), 108-109.

everything that reduces an experiential or perceptual content to a fixed identity or significance. The repressive, castrating, censoring power of Oedipus resides not only in social categories, familial structures, and psychological classifications, but also in the biological determinations of the human being – the fact, for example, that there are supposed to be things called "men" and "women," and that certain behaviors are expected of each. Oedipus, finally, goes hand in hand with the Obstacle – which Luca also calls the "vicious circle" – since one's efforts to escape Oedipus are, for the most part, oedipal. Luca's "non-Oedipus" – who refuses to fix, in its ideological or sociocultural place, anything with which he comes into contact, or any gesture or habit associated with it – represents a strategy for evading the vicious circle, and this is what brings non-Oedipus close to Infra Noir's project as a whole, and particularly to its work on negation.

My title, *Blacker in Black* – drawn from Paul Celan's poem "Lob der Ferne" ("Praise of Distance," in Paul Felstiner's translation) – alludes not only to the name of the Romanian group, Infra Noir, but to the dissertation's central argument, which relies on the special sense that the group gives to the Hegelian-Marxist term "negation of negation." In using this term the group is inspired, for the most part, by Friedrich Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (as well as by Breton's rereading of Engels in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*). In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels describes the ways in which certain stages of historical or economic development, for example the rise of the capitalist mode of production, can create or contain the conditions for their own eventual undoing. Although each successive stage "negates" the previous one, the word negation does not imply a return to previous states, but rather a kind of spiraling motion where each negation and negation of that negation both surpasses and preserves (or sublates) what

has gone before. This is dialectical negation, where "each class of things […] has its appropriate form of being negated in such a way that it gives rise to a development." It is a very different thing from "simple" negation, which Engels compares to crushing an insect: a "no" that preempts the cycle of change and simply replaces a thing with its opposite, in this case life with not-life.[20]

I outlined, above, the Infra Noir concept of the Obstacle and the means of its undoing: the close interimplication of oppressive world and oppressed self prevents change; but this very interimplication is what allows it. By way of further explanation, for Infra Noir there are two ways of approaching the Obstacle. One is to perform a simple negation, saying "no" to the world's limits, pain and oppression, and turning away – whether into dream and reverie, blatant denial, or specious pleasures. But this form of negation prevents any further development, and preserves the vicious circle intact: all of one's escapist dreams and pleasures will still be poisoned and pinioned by the world they seek to escape. The other option is to perform a dialectical negation. It takes the "no" to the world of the Obstacle, and negates it. What results is not a yes to this world, but a yes-no that spirals deeper beneath it, the better to undermine it from the ground up. It

[20] Friedrich Engels, selections from *Anti-Dühring*, in Howard Selsam and Harry Martel, *Reader in Marxist Philosophy: From the Writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 136. It is these passages that Breton elaborates upon, wishing to expand their scope, in the *Second Manifesto*. Engels writes, for example: "I negate the sentence, the rose is a rose, when I say the rose is not a rose; and what do I get if I then negate the negation and say, but after all the rose is a rose?" The answer is nothing – since dialectical negation is not to be confused with a series of alternating simple negations (136). Breton writes that he wants to lure this rose "dans un mouvement profitable de contradictions, moins bénignes où elle soit successivement celle qui vient du jardin, celle qui tient une place singulière dans un rêve, celle impossible à distraire du 'bouquet optique,' celle qui peut changer totalement de propriétés en passant dans l'écriture automatique, celle qui n'a plus que ce que le peintre a bien voulu qu'elle garde de la rose dans un tableau surréaliste, et enfin celle, toute différente d'elle-même, qui retourne au jardin." *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 90. I discuss these passages in my article in *Dada/Surrealism* 20:1 (forthcoming, 2014), "Dialectical Despair." My account of non-Oedipality above also draws from my outline in this article.

takes Luca's vicious circle and short-circuits it, "exacerbating" it (as Luca likes to say) until it collapses upon itself.

What I seek above all to demonstrate in the pages that follow is that the project of the Infra Noir group is defined and given its impetus by this dynamic between the Obstacle and the various dialectical negations – negations of negation – that are possible with respect to it. Each chapter, alongside its other ambitions, thus returns to this dynamic and presents one or several of the many variations on it that Infra Noir develops. "Blacker in black am I more naked," Celan writes, "Apostate only am I true."[21] In a wartime and postwar world that seemed, to the Infra Noir group, irremediably dark, they sought an apostasy, a primal heresy, that might break them free of it, but found that the way out was, in fact, the way further in.

[21] "Schwärzer im Schwarz, bin ich nackter. / Abtrünnig erst bin ich treu." Paul Celan, "Lob der Ferne," in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001) 24-25.

Chapter One. Catching the Rhythm of History: Avant-Garde and Proletarian Beginnings

1. Surrealism on the Romanian Avant-Garde Scene

Somewhere in the first decade of the twentieth century, a curious story was making its rounds in the Bucharest bohème, a story of two shopkeepers named Algazy and Grummer. Algazy is a friendly old man with a silky beard "finely laid out upon a grilling rack screwed in placed under his chin and hemmed with barbed wire." In his free time he wanders rural villages collecting rags, battered oil cans and – his favorite snack – knucklebones. Grummer has a beak made of aromatic wood which he is constantly sharpening for nefarious purposes, and a "gray rubber bladder screwed onto his back, a little above his behind." One day, Grummer comes across a pile of poem-leftovers, which he sneaks home to eat. Catching him in the act, his colleague Algazy is horrified to find out that "everything that was still any good in literature had been consumed and digested," and eats Grummer's bladder in revenge. A battle ensues. Defeated, Grummer swears he will restore the literature, and vomits it all out. But Algazy is no longer interested in what is on offer, for Grummer's bladder has been fermenting in his belly, and it has begun "to awaken the tremors of the literature of the future." Each seeking the completion now denied them, the two devour each other to nothing.[1]

This story, among several others, was written by Demetru Demetrescu-Buzău, later known as Urmuz. Born in 1883, he wrote many of his strange little stories before

[1] Translated from Urmuz, *Pagini bizare* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1983). Excerpted from my translation of "Algazy and Grummer" in *Inventory* 5 (Fall 2014). All further translations from Romanian-language primary and secondary texts are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

1910. These were circulated and publicized by friends and admirers before being published for the first time in 1922 by the poet Tudor Arghezi. Arghezi's efforts soon brought Urmuz to the attention of the earliest Romanian avant-gardists in the early twenties, who were inspired by Futurism (which interested but did not greatly influence Urmuz), Constructivism, and soon by Dada. It is likely that Dada-founder Tristan Tzara was familiar with Urmuz's works before he left for Zürich, and the belated advent of Dada in Romanian avant-garde magazines, in turn, had the effect of triggering more interest in Urmuz. In November 1923, some months after the very young Surrealist movement around the journal *Littérature* violently divorced itself from Dada at a performance of Tzara's *Le Coeur à gaz*, Urmuz shot himself, on a street in Bucharest.

Urmuz presides over a damp, sordid, jerrybuilt and often cruel world where beings that conjoin human, animal and object still manage occasional glimpses of nirvana, where the absurd and paranatural are constructed from the leftovers and debris of everyday life, as well as of everyday language: clichés and tics, hoary metaphors, conventional wisdom and forms, the splendor of the arbitrary. The playwright Eugène Ionesco calls Urmuz a precursor "de la révolte littéraire universelle, un des prophètes de la dislocation des formes sociales, de la pensée et du langage." Critic Marin Mincu adds to this that Urmuz came to represent a limit-case, an absolute, for the Romanian avant-garde of the 20s and 30s, much as Lautréamont did in France – an "auto-negation of literature and a revolutionary opening toward an alternate representation of the *act of writing*."[2] In fact, the Romanian avant-garde scene – centered around journals like *Contimporanul* (1922-1932), *75HP* (1924), *Punct* (1924-1925) *Integral* (1925-1928), and

[2] Marin Mincu, introduction to *Avangarda literară românească* (Bucharest: Pontica, 2006), 19. Mincu cites Ionesco from *Les Lettres nouvelles*, January-February 1965.

unu (1928-1935) – constructed and built upon a powerful myth of Urmuz as a prophet "of the apocalypse of traditional forms of expression," as Promethean rebel, and as "pioneer-explorer of the unknown territories of the spirit."[3] As part of this myth, Urmuz is made into the forefather of a lineage that passes through Tristan Tzara and the Dada movement into Surrealism – both as a starting point for an autochthonous, autonomous Romanian Surrealism, and evidence for the chronological priority of the latter, its status as origin. In 1926, Ion Vinea – editor of the journal *Contimporanul* (The Contimporary) and co-founder of the Symbolist journal *Simbolul* (The Symbol) with Tzara in 1912 – says it outright: "Urmuz – Dada – Surrealism, three words that set down a bridge, decode a filiation, illuminate the origins of the world literary revolution beginning in 1919."[4] The critic and historian George Călinescu writes in 1941 that "Romanian Surrealism is, through Urmuz, anterior to the French and independent."[5] In his 1936 *Sadismul adevărului* (The Sadism of the Truth) largely devoted to Surrealism, Saşa Pană – who had been the directing editor of *unu*, an important representative of Surrealism in Romania – gives Urmuz a place of honor alongside Jacques Vaché, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud. He emphasizes the fact that Urmuz wrote his stories before 1912: "It should thus be retained that Urmuz's texts are anterior to the Dada movement. He is […] the ignored forerunner of the new literature."[6] Geo Bogza – who founded (and largely wrote)

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3 Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească şi complexul periferiei* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2007), 341. I spell "Contimporary" with an "i" to match the old-fashioned spelling of "Contimporanul" (rather than "Contemporanul") and to distinguish it from the earlier, more politically-oriented journal *Contemporanul* (1881-1891).

4 Cited in Ovidiu Morar, *Avatarurile suprarealismului românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 2003), 64.

5 Morar (66).

6 Saşa Pană, *Sadismul adevărului* (Bucharest: Editura Unu, 1936), 49.

the journal *Urmuz* in 1928 – goes so far as to compare him to Jesus Christ ("both lovers of the future, apostles of worlds that are to come.")[7]

The myth of Urmuz was crucial in the self-understanding and self-constitution of the Romanian literary avant-garde. Along with Tzara – who was present throughout avant-garde publications, though even his most sympathetic followers were often ambivalent about Dada[8] – Urmuz presented a perennial model, inspiring everything from direct imitation and pastiche to a generally rebellious attitude toward literary form and content, and toward "literature" as such. As Surrealism took flight in France, Urmuz's influence often ran in parallel with that of Breton's movement, and insofar as the incursions of surrealist ideas and literary techniques are discernable in Romania, it is often difficult to distinguish them from an ongoing engagement with this influence.[9]

What would become the Romanian interwar avant-garde first took vague shape amid echoes of the French Symbolist and Decadent movements, jumpstarted itself in 1922 with the journal *Contimporanul* and its dialogue with Constructivism and Futurism, and by the mid-twenties fanned out into a profusion of magazines. This avant-garde was, to a great extent, Jewish. Critic Ion Pop points out, as many others have, that there can be no history of the Romanian avant-garde or Romanian modernism (or indeed, Romanian Surrealism, three out of five members of the surrealist group of the forties being Jewish)

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[7] Morar (64). In the so-called thaw period in Romania after 1965 and also in the 80s, the myth of Urmuz was modified to elaborate his "folkloric" roots in the Romanian oral tradition, as part of a "protochronist" recuperation. The term "protochronism" refers specifically to finding Romanian folkloric or popular origins for cultural-artistic phenomena. See Cernat (357-363). After the "Stalinist parenthesis" of the 50s, Urmuz had already been recuperated as an "anti-bourgeois" writer (Cernat 357, 365).

[8] See for example Cernat, "Ion Vinea și Dadismul. Primuri ecouri Dada în România" in *Avangarda românească* (120-130).

[9] See for example Morar, "Urmuz-Tzara-Suprarealismul" in *Avatarurile* (63-89).

without taking the predominance of Jewish writers and artists into account.[10] Pop quotes writers who find, for example, in the Romanian Jewish modernist artist an aesthetic "sublimation" of sociocultural otherness, where modernist experiment becomes a form of freedom from civic restrictions and fettering clichés. Here Jewishness becomes a state of constant rupture with already-constituted systems and of rejection of cultural norms. Jewish artists and writers are "condemned to modernity," and condemned in particular in conservative Romanian society as propagandists of the new.[11]

What unites the Romanian avant-garde scene, aside from its myths of origin and its "modern" Jewishness, is the fact that it took shape in and through a series of interrelated and intercommunicating magazines. In many cases these were publications representing discrete groups, but the magazines were also nodes of free movement and exchange, with much of the same cast of writers, artists and visionaries circulating among them,[12] addressing their efforts to a great degree to each other. The forces generated by this constellation of magazines and ideas reverberated for the most part within the boundaries of the space of resistance – resistance to official culture and to high "literature," among other things – that it created within a largely hostile environment. What influence it had extended forward in time, to other generations of beleaguered avant-gardists, instead of in a wide radius to its contemporaries.

Finally, the Romanian interwar avant-garde was defined not only by its ambivalent but often passionate interest in other European avant-garde movements and

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[10] Ion Pop, *Introducere în avangarda literară românească* (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2007), 32.

[11] Ibid. (33). The critics Pop cites are Mihai Mândra and Dan Lungu.

[12] The magazines largely appeared in Bucharest, but also in cities like Craiova. For an overview, history, and mapping of the Romanian avant-garde see in particular Cernat, *Avangarda românească* (2007) and Pop, *Introducere* (2007).

currents, but by a steady push and pull with the Surrealist movement, alternating between rejection and embrace. The different magazines varied in their approach to Surrealism, and in pursuit of an account of the Romanian avant-garde's reception of Surrealism it is necessary to move frequently between magazines – in particular *Contimporanul, Punct, Integral,* and *unu*.

Surrealist themes, theories, techniques and keywords appear all throughout Romanian avant-garde publications, from *Contimporanul* up until Saşa Pană's magazine *unu*, founded in 1928. In 1924, for example, *Contimporanul* editor Ion Vinea defines poetry (in French) as the art of imposing "au prochain son délire." In 1925, Ion Călugăru published a text in *Integral* he called an "automatic psychism."[13] Moreover, a gradual evolution can be discerned, if never toward a formal endorsement of Surrealism, then at least toward a more and more generous incorporation of its methods and positions. The Romanian avant-gardists were also relatively well-informed, throughout this evolution, as to what was happening in France: many of the magazines, for example, had correspondents on the ground in Paris (like Benjamin Fondane, who was active among the Paris Surrealists from 1923 on, in his *Integral* column "Fenêtres sur l'Europe"). In the end, it was only the magazine *unu* – predominant on the avant-garde scene in the early 30s – whose sympathy with Breton's movement became more direct and sustained. But

[13] Ovidiu Morar (93) points out these last two examples in his discussion of Surrealist influence on the Romanian avant-garde scene. He also discusses Barbu Florian's "Surrealism in Cinematography" in the fourth issue of *Integral*, which included the cautious observation that while "to see the artwork as an outcome of dreaming […] is a heresy, the introduction of the dream as an element that enriches the means of expression, as a frequently dominant element in artistic composition, is a necessity." For Vinea, see "Puncte," in *Punct* 3 (December 1924); for Călugăru, "Prinț papal (psihism automat)" in *Integral* 1 (March 1925); for Florian, *Integral* 4 (June 1925). Morar also notes that although *Contimporanul* called itself "the organ of Romanian constructivism," beginning in late 1924, "Surrealist sympathies become, at least regarding literature, rather evident, as the review publishes poems by André Breton and salutes […] the appearance of Breton's first manifesto." Numbers 57-58 (April 1925) publish the Surrealists' "Déclaration du 27 janvier 1925," and number 66 (May 1926) is completely devoted to Surrealism.

even *unu* never programmatically subscribed to Surrealism, and began, at least, by following its predecessors in an enthusiastic syncretism, where Surrealism joined Futurism, Constructivism, Dada and other currents in the crucible of a modernist "synthesis."

The poet Ilarie Voronca – who was active and present throughout the entire development of the avant-garde scene– writes in *Punct* in 1925 that "Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, [have] all overflowed into the same brazen circle: SYNTHESIS."[14] By synthesis, Voronca means, first of all, that all the various disciplines of human inquiry, from laboratory science to painting and poetry, reflect and revitalize each other. Advances in science result in new "sensibilities" and new ways of "exteriorizing" these sensibilities; artists likewise become "unconscious researchers," anticipating scientific breakthroughs. This sociocultural unity is a kind of organic force beyond logic or concepts. For this reason art need not be intelligible or comprehensible to the masses, since it is more like a flint striking sparks than a message; its unintelligibility is the "resistance" that makes fire and light.[15] There is also the fact that, as Voronca explains, that all truly modern phenomena discover or create new syntheses. Einstein's theory of relativity, where energy and mass are equivalent and space and time become spacetime, is synthetic; the arts no longer "strew themselves into fragments" but move toward "plenitude," completion. Synthesis, finally, is also an "ism," the ultimate one: "all the endeavors of mankind today and for always, all the realizations in every influent domain

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[14] I am quoting in this instance from an English translation in Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 550. Ilarie Voronca, "Glasuri" (Voices), in *Punct* 8 (1925), also in Marin Mincu, *Avangarda literară românească* (519).

[15] Mincu (518).

[…] have fertilely cumulated in this art whose name we will shout out loud: SYNTHETISM."

One important forum for synthetism – a tendency and a credo that united the Romanian avant-garde as much as did the myth of Urmuz and the ongoing career of Tzara – was the journal *Integral*, a "journal of modern synthesis" founded in early 1925. Much of the content of *Integral* echoes the low key futurist-constructivism of *Contimporanul* (for a long time the *éminence grise* of the avant-garde scene), but the journal also interests itself in Surrealism, though often ambivalently.[16]

A manifesto in the first issue of *Integral* in March 1925 sets itself amid the frenetic rhythm of the city – saxophones, telegraphs, steamers, the "dance of machines" – where new "psychophysiologies" are growing. The city too is a part of "nature," understood here as a substrate for limitless invention, and it is this version of nature with which Integralist man must "integrate" himself.[17] Ion Pop finds in this manifesto and in *Integral* a "robot-portrait of the new Integralist militant" characterized by "the primacy of intellect over affect, the refusal of Romantic reverie and sentimentalism […] adhesion to a collective and anonymous ideal […] the search for a nonconventional and nonsymbolic 'primary expression.'"[18] The ideal of "collective anonymity" in matters of both artistic creation and social action remains important, as we will see, for the Romanian Surrealist group Infra Noir, and runs as a thread through their avant-garde roots to their version of

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16 Cernat writes, for example: "Preoccupied with integrating the manifestations of the avant-gardist spirit, *Integral* will prefer the "virile" dynamism of Futurism to the "Romantic-feminine" spirit of Surrealism, considered obsolete; thrown out by the front door, however, the latter enters through the window, the Marinettists Mihail Cosma (the future Claude Sernet) and Stephan Roll moving, along with Voronca, toward Surrealist imagism, at a time when they feel the need to curb the Fascist ideology of the Italian Futurists" (9).

17 Manifesto attributed to Ion Călugăru in Mincu (521-22). Published in *Integral* 1 (March 1925).

18 Ion Pop, *Introducere în avangarda literară românească* (60-61).

Surrealism. In *Integral* however, where Surrealism tends to be associated with "Romantic reverie and sentimentalism," the call for "collective anonymity" is a call to abandon the "corp(u)ses of schools and persons" and to merge with a collective imagination, among all the pulleys, pistons and valves of society: "caught up in the machinery, we live in, through, for it."[19] The Integralist collective-anonymous imagination-machine "synthesiz[es] the will to life of every time and place and the efforts of every modern praxis (*experiență*)."[20]

In the same first issue of *Integral*, Ilarie Voronca contributes an essay titled "Surrealism and Integralism."[21] He writes here that every epoch bears its own "style" heavily within it – like a social-historical groundwater that permeates and "fecundates" the style of the artist. The reason, for example, that the early twentieth century has seen such a great cloud of successive artistic "isms" is that this era itself is like a living being, shifting, seeking, and "pulsing"; artists' restless search for new forms is a reflection of this "style." The style of this era is also one of turning within and, like the early modern explorers, seeking new continents, new "Indias of the soul." Thus Surrealist artists too have sought to explore the dark continent of the unconscious (unconsciously reproducing, in their turn, the style of the era). But this is not enough, for the era demands the new, and the Surrealists have not produced anything new. Dreams, drugs and deliria are just a replay of Romanticism and Expressionism; the unconscious is no more than another name for every artist's disorderly fund of memories, sensations, and images; surrealist art

[19] "Caught in … for it" quotes from the English translation in Benson and Forgács (554).
[20] Mincu (522).
[21] *Integral* 1 (March 1925); in Mincu (523-25).

is little more than a stodgy plagiarism of Tzara and his "virile" Dada movement.[22] In an era of "synthesis" and "construction," Surrealism has become a movement of "disaggregation, "absence," and Romantic seasickness (while Integralism, in constrast, takes up the relay of Dada and Constructivism at their virile best). Thus Surrealism has lost touch with the "rhythm of the times" – a phrase that Romanian avant-gardists use as frequently as they do when, a decade later, they abandon the avant-garde, en masse, for engaged journalism in the service of the proletariat.

Integral contributor Mihail Cosma – later known as Claude Sernet, when in 1928 he became editor of the para-Surrealist journal *Discontinuité* with Arthur Adamov in Paris – associates "disaggregation" and "decomposition" not with Surrealism but with Futurism and Expressionism. Writing in *Integral* in 1925, he believes that these latter two are examples of the "old art," surpassed and subsumed within the "new art" of Integralism. The Integralists escape the "tyranny of logic and syntax" precisely to construct a new logic and syntax; steeped in visions of the future, they build it in "wood, word, sound, iron, color, sensation, idea," directly upon the canvas of the lived.[23] The main problem with Futurism, for Cosma, is that despite its "dynamism," it completely lacks the constructive principle of "associative dissociation" – which is to say "the

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22 Voronca makes a similar point in *Glasuri*: Surrealism is a "tardy reedition" of what Dada has already accomplished (Mincu 518). Ideas about Surrealism's tardiness or outmodedness, of course, were not invented by Romanian avant-gardists, and indeed were commonly aired in France around the time that Voronca and his colleagues were writing. Voronca, incidentally, notes in "Surrealism and Integralism" that if surrealists can re-label any past poet or artist they like as surrealist, then they might as well add Urmuz and Adrian Maniu (Mincu 524). Adrian Maniu (1891-1968) was a late Symbolist widely considered to be part of the Romanian pre-avant-garde along with Urmuz, the early Tzara, and Vinea.

23 Mihail Cosma, "De la futurism la integralism" (From Futurism to Integralism). *Integral* 6-7 (1925), in Mincu (531). *Integral* contributor Ion Călugăru writes, similarly that "constructive integralism" is "the objective and lucid construction of life." Ion Călugăru, "Precizări," in *Integral* 5 (July 1925). In French in Ion Pop ed., *La Réhabilitation du rêve: une anthologie de l'avant-garde roumaine* (Bucharest: EST, 2006), 153-54.

juxtaposition (*apropierea*) of distant and unrelated elements."[24] In 1925, Cosma was writing the year after the publication of the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* and the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*. The *Manifesto* had reproduced the following words of the poet Pierre Reverdy in 1918: "L'image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison, mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées. Plus les rapports des deux réalités rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l'image sera forte." The theory and practice of "associative dissociation" was, of course, of far-reaching consequence in Surrealist modes of creativity – and apparently, according to Cosma, it is Integralist par excellence. As Ion Pop comments, the "Reverdyan model" lends itself just as well to Integralist constructivism as it does to surrealist borrowings.[25] As for Surrealism itself, however, Cosma echoes Voronca: the movement is a "tardy" and old-hat glamorizing of the unconscious. "We thank Surrealism," he writes, "for its good intentions, and we absorb it into ourselves."[26]

In the fourth issue of *Integral*, also in 1925, Voronca descends into "the entrails of the epoch" to witness the birth of a new kind of poetry. Poetry no longer describes, but instead manipulates objective, "organic" elements, raw realities. It acts, instead of signifying. Every phrase is "luminous" and surprising, every poet is an explorer of that "meaning that must be perceived with the antennae of the whole being, beyond intelligence and logic." There will be no more "sterile comparisons" but instead "lightning-associations."[27] Voronca is here preparing the way for what could be called

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[24] Ibid. (529).
[25] Pop, *Introducere în avangarda literară românească* (93).
[26] Ibid. (530).
[27] Ilarie Voronca, "Cicatrizări. Poezia nouă" (Cicatrizations: the New Poetry). *Integral* 4 (June 1925), in Mincu (527).

the dominant poetic style of the journal *unu*: a lush imagism based on a Reverdyan-Surrealist-Integralist theory of poetic creation.

When in April 1928 Saşa Pană and his colleague Marcu Taingiu (known as Moldov) founded *unu*, which would run for 50 issues, they gathered contributors from the whole diverse Romanian avant-garde sphere: Voronca, Cosma, Călugăru, Tzara, Benjamin Fondane (or Fundoianu), Stephan Roll, and the painter Victor Brauner. Brauner had invented and championed, with Voronca, the art form of "pictopoetry" in the pages of *75HP* in October 1924. This group was joined by the likes of Geo Bogza (soon a powerful influence on the young Gherasim Luca and Paul Păun of the future Infra Noir group), Miron Radu Paraschivescu (a colleague of Luca and Păun in the 30s), Jules Perahim (who founded the magazine *Alge* with Luca and Aurel Baranga in late 1930) and Jacques Hérold (who would play a seemingly omnipresent part on the postwar French Surrealist scene). The magazine announced its devotion to the "literary avant-garde," and followed up with a manifesto that recalled the synthetist textual experiments of earlier periodicals:

> Reader, delouse your brain […] airplane / wireless telegraphy-radio / television / 75HP / Marinetti / Breton / Vinea […] yaaaay yaaaaaay yaaaaaaaay […] Brontosaurs / Huooooooooooo // the word combines / abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz […] Gutenberg you are risen").[28]

Throughout the run of *unu*, the enthusiasm in these last lines for the endless combinatorial possibilities of language translates into what could be called an *unu*-imagism, a "tropical overload" of disparate syntagmatic aggregates[29] that "give birth," as

[28] *unu* 1 (April 1928), 1. The line about delousing the brain ("Cetitor deparazitează-ți creierul") is a line taken from the single issue of *75HP* in 1924.

[29] The phrase "tropical overload" is frequently used by Morar to describe the poetry of contributors to *unu* (see for example Morar 156).

Pană later puts it, "to metaphors through the collision of different sensations […]. Reading them generates magical, ineffable states."[30] The language of the manifesto also confirms *unu*'s status, at least initially, as a "point of transition from a 'constructivism' already extended into the 'Integralist'/modern synthesis of the years immediately preceding, toward a still hesitant Surrealism." *Unu* at first, in fact, saw itself as an enlightened successor to *Integral*.[31]

The first few issues of *unu* are dominated by Urmuzian pastiches by Moldov, though issue 6 includes a short passage from Louis Aragon's *Traité du style* translated into Romanian.[32] The 11th issue in March 1929 is largely devoted to Victor Brauner, shortly before he left Bucharest to eventually join the Surrealist group in Paris. In the 12th issue in April, in between installments of Geo Bogza's notorious *Jurnal de sex* (Sex Journal) – which helped to earn Bogza jail time in the 30s after a series of trials for assaulting public morals – appears his "Crez" (Credo):

> […] I believe in the miracle of bare speech.
> I believe in the absurd. […]
> I believe in the aesthetic horizons opened by psychoanalysis.
> I believe in a finality whose forms are unimaginable, but with anticipatorily retroactive repercussions upon the contemporary soul.
> I believe in sex. […]
> I believe in dreams.
> I believe in a sexual vision of the entire living universe.[33]

To the same issue, Gheorghe Dinu (pen name Stephan Roll) contributed a manifesto-essay called "Aladdin's Lamp." Here he sets the *unu* group in lonely and haughty

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[30] Saşa Pană, *Sadismul* (118). In *unu* imagism the poem is, as Pop writes, "seen as a continuous imagistic flux, in perpetual metamorphosis" (133).

[31] See for example M.H. Maxy, "Contribuțiuni sumare la cunoașterea mișcării moderne dela noi," in *unu* 33 (February 1931).

[32] The passage is the one that begins: "Mon style est comme la nature ou plutôt réciproquement. Suivez-moi bien par ces ruissellements et ces roches. […] Là te guette un loup-garou de mousse, ici tu serais mangé par un champignon Minotaure. D'étranges lueurs errent un peu partout dans mes plaines. […]." Louis Aragon, *Traité du style* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

[33] Geo Bogza, "Crez," in *unu* 12 (April 1929), reproduced in Mincu (177).

isolation from an uncomprehending public, a group of "heretics" once again seeking new "Indias" of the soul. The unists have "joined [them]selves to a white magic, choosing an attitude of spontaneity without limits" as well as taking love as the cornerstone of their thought,[34] thus awakening to the "miracle" and following in the footsteps of Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Paul Eluard.

This text by Dinu, as well as Bogza's *Crez*, sets a direction for *unu*-style Surrealism, according to how *unu* understood Surrealism: an emphasis on "the total liberty of the imagination, panegyrics to dream, the liberation of poetic expression from logic, the poetic consideration of the word 'in itself,' […] the refusal of official recognition, eulogies to nonconformism and 'states of revolt.'"[35] Ion Pop feels that even if themes like "rupture with tradition, the anti-bourgeois revolt, radical innovation, and absolute open readiness (*disponibilitatea*) of the spirit" are frequently encountered in the general avant-garde milieu of the twenties, in *unu* they are gradually reworked along what it perceives to be Surrealist lines. The "real world" becomes too small, in Voronca's words, "for the creative and inventive possibilities we hold."[36] The unists soon begin calling themselves "definitive dreamers," and by 1930 *unu* has, in its own way, fully converted to Surrealism, with Pană proclaiming (in French) that "Nous ne sommes jamais

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34 Gheorghe Dinu, "Lampa lui Aladin," in *unu* 12 (April 1929), reproduced in Gabriela Duda ed., *Literatura românească de avangardă* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997), 76. The phrasing is "luându-ne ca atitudine spontaneitatea fără cadre întâi, apoi dragostea pentru un gând" (taking love for a thought, or love as thought).

35 Morar (115). *unu*'s stance against recognition within the circuits of accepted and acceptable culture will later move the unists to expel Ilarie Voronca and two others from their midst, Voronca for publishing a volume of poems with an official publishing house and later joining the Society of Romanian Writers.

36 Pop, *Introducere în avangarda literară românească* (88-89); Voronca, "'Poeme în aer liber' de Stephan Roll," in *unu* 13 (May 1929).

éveillés."[37] The citadine dynamism of the Integralist years had given way to a "lyricism of panic" and to convulsive beauty;[38] unism was now a "state of mind, like Surrealism."[39]

In 1930 Stephan Roll composed, at Saşa Pană's insistence, a volume of automatic writing, which Pană compares to Breton and Soupault's 1920 *Les Champs magnétiques*. Scrawling on paper used for wrapping whey cheese and *plăcintă*, Roll wrote "without erasing, without revising, authentic automatic writing." Pană adds that he too frequently did the same.[40] Pană also collaborated with Moldov on a "novel" called *Alfabet*, which devotes each of its sections to alliteration in – almost – one letter ("ability abandoned over an abject abyss like an abscess breaks the sky's abat-jour …").[41] Critic Ovidiu Morar comments that here "discourse auto-generates […] owing exclusively to the phonetic affinities of words, where each [word] summons the next, beyond the will of the one who writes/transcribes them"[42] – which suggests a kind of hybrid between automatic writing and constraint-based writing.

It was, once again, *unu*'s attitude toward poetic language and the image – aside from its collaborators' experiments in specifically Surrealist literary modes like automatic writing – that best characterizes its idiosyncratic Surrealism. Voronca's "Second Light: Between Me and Me" in issue 19 of *unu*, for example, is a kind of *unu*-imagist manifesto, calling for "the word to bend thought," to make it slide along a "milky way of images." But language is most often a "trap." Every new association between words, no matter

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[37] In *unu* 39 (October 1931), in the same issue for which he translates Breton's poem "L'Union libre." See Pop (88-89).
[38] For the reference to convulsive beauty – a term elaborated in André Breton's *L'Amour fou* – see Benjamin Fondane, *Réflexions sur le spectacle*, in *unu* 14 (June 1929), quoted in Pop, *Introducere* (17).
[39] Quoting Pană (cited in Pop, 88), in *Acvarium*, *unu* 39 (October 1931).
[40] Saşa Pană, *Născut în '02: Memorii, file de jurnal, evocări* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1973), 275. *Plăcintă* is a type of filled pastry.
[41] *unu* 28 (August 1930).
[42] Morar (28).

how creatively combined, becomes a new convention; shattering one formula births another, like the ghost of a victim, Voronca writes, haunting his murderer. Convention, a "forest of myths" mediated by language, so permeates the world that even when we close our eyelids, it continues to inform the world behind them. Even the intimate darkness of touch has "been issued a commission of military discipline," and has forgotten its full breadth. But soon, if one dares to keep one's eyes resolutely closed, "the waters of dream will flow in white torrents," carrying off all formulas and discipline over the precipice like "a shepherd's flocks caught in a storm," and language will remember its true nature, its native dynamism and its allegiance to the "revelatory" powers of chance.[43]

For Voronca, Urmuz is also an example to those, surrealists included, who wish to escape the trap of language, pass beyond the frontiers of literature, and understand that the beautiful is what "bursts forth from the unexpected, from new associations of ideas or of objects," perpetually resumed against encroaching habits of thought. One must, like Urmuz, transform the trap of language into the "miracle of writing." It is a miracle renewed every time thought, sliding over the sly mirror of language, trips over the mirror's irregularities, "as the hatchet deviates from its path, stumbling over the burls of a plank."[44]

Pană recounts that around the time of his and Roll's experiments with automatic and/or alliterative writing, there arrived at *unu*'s doors:

> a group of five enthusiastic young people with manuscripts fresh on the spit. In order not to appear as epigones annexed to us, because they were talented, daring and nonconformist, they were advised to produce and edit their own journal, and after they had asserted themselves through it, they would be invited into the pages

[43] Morar (117). For Voronca, see "A doua lumină: Între mine și mine," in *unu* 19 (November 1929), pp 1-3.
[44] Ibid., 1 (second column).

> of *unu*. After that, on September 13 [1930], the review *Alge* appeared, written by Aurel Baranga […] Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, and Sesto Pals."[45]

It was also in September 1930 that *unu* definitively broke off ties with its predecessors – particularly *Contimporanul*, still preeminent on the Romanian avant-garde scene. What motivated the break with *Contimporanul* was a certain stagnation and "bourgeois" regression perceived on the latter's part. It was also that the constructivist current that *Contimporanul* still represented was now "completely foreign to the present views of *unu*, which maintains a course completely severed from reality, completely beyond constructivist utilitarianism […], one that in the fountain of dreams troubles the waters of visions freed from any problems […] that are situated beyond the poem and its half-sleep."[46] This turn toward what the *unu* team felt to be more Surrealist values was what distinguished it most from the collectivist ideals and leftist politics of the early *Contimporanul*. It was also, ironically, what distinguished it most from the Parisian Surrealists themselves, who had just founded the magazine *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, and who would certainly have taken a dim view of dream-visions "completely severed" from daily and political realities. On the other hand, the short career of the new review *Alge* – "*unu*'s little surrealist hatchling"[47] – ran alongside yet another change of direction on *unu*'s part. This change amounted to a return to the problems "beyond the poem" that the unists had rejected in 1930. It had partly to do with the increasing influence of Geo Bogza both in the pages of *unu* and on the young *Alge* poets, and partly to do with the changing personal allegiances of certain unists, who by 1932 were pushing the magazine toward the political left and toward the social in

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[45] Saşa Pană, *Născut în '02* (289).
[46] Voronca, "Coliva lui moş Vinea" (Old Man Vinea's Koliva), *unu* 29 (Sept. 1930), in Mincu (535).
[47] Saşa Pană, *Născut în '02* (274).

general. In an additional irony, *unu*'s new militancy led some of the unists to finally reject Surrealism, as a form of glorified bourgeois woolgathering. Reality, it seems, lay elsewhere.

2. Geo Bogza's and *Alge*'s "Immediate" Life, and the Avant-garde Communist Turn

Writing for *unu* and other magazines in the early 30s, Geo Bogza was the most "insurgent" of the avant-gardists, and the second in line after Urmuz as "incontestable spiritual patron of the avant-garde." In his repeated attacks on "bourgeois morality in all its falsity" – particularly, in Bogza's words, bourgeois love – his poems are vengefully prosaic, sarcastic, and often wildly priapic.[48] He calls upon his readers to "vaccinate their souls with mud" – the only way to escape infection by the conventions and formulas of "society, family, calling, purpose."[49] To this effect he writes, for example in his 1928 "Eulogy to the Brothel":

> bodies come together without this act being preceded by a web of plans, calculations, balance sheets. During the act of love, one can exchange microbes, but there will never be an exchange of speculative thought, lying promises, and other baccili and diseases of the soul. […] The gonococci of moral blennorrhagia are excluded from the brothel […] where the unmercantilized spirit, disgusted by its experiences in a moldy cardboard society, can quench its thirst at will, like deer at a mountain spring."[50]

It was for such opinions and settings that in the 30s Bogza found himself under trial three times, and imprisoned twice.

Geo Bogza was younger than the other unists, and was different from them largely in his uncompromising realism. But the young poet's realism took the form of an obsession with the muck, the meat, and the casual violence of daily life, and the closer he managed to get to this reality, the stranger and more hallucinatory it became. His task was, having gained this intimate perspective, to "force reality beyond its limits," to

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[48] See Morar (119); for Bogza on bourgeois love see Pop (143) quoting Bogza's *Jurnalul de copilărie și adolescență* (Journal of Childhood and Adolescence).

[49] Quoted in Pop (143 and 145) from *Jurnalul* and from his *Piatra cubică* (Cubic Stone) in *Urmuz* 5 (June-July 1928).

[50] Geo Bogza, "Elogiul Bordelului," supplement to *Urmuz* 3 (June-July 1928).

"violate the real," to tear it into pieces.[51] In these attitudes, Bogza was immensely influential on the young poets of the new magazine *Alge*, including Gherasim Luca and Paul Păun. He influenced *Alge* particularly through two essays he published in *unu* in February and March 1931.

The first, "Creative Exasperation," sets a sharp divide between the domain of literature – born of "velleities," seeking comfort, determining everything in advance – and that of "permanent revolt," an "unfurling of pure force, born only from the inexorable necessity of reaction, in a tortured need to move, fleeing like those caught on fire."[52] Those in the latter camp are anti-writers – in the tradition, Bogza adds, of Jarry, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont. They are motivated not by the hope for a better world but by a need to escape this world and every other one. Their poetry is an act of panic, a desperate gasping for air. Their exasperation, in its "corrosive" and "delirious" lucidity, is a prosecution of all that exists and that doesn't, of everything both within and without the self, of everything that demands submission, and even of itself. In the process, the exasperated anti-writer is able, ever so slightly, to "enlarge" the world, and make room to breathe.

The second major *unu* essay was "The Rehabilitation of the Dream." Here Bogza imagines a new Saints calendar, where the saints are those who have done something objectively new in the world, in acts of true rupture with the given: the first person to go mad, the first to dream. When this first dreamer woke, writes Bogza, both sleeping and waking worlds must have seemed equally flimsy and arbitrary. He must have suspected, for the first time, that "*anything* might have occurred on this planet, that the present form

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51 Geo Bogza, *Jurnalul,* quoted in Pop, *Introducere* (143).
52 Geo Bogza, "Exasperarea Creatoare," in *unu* 33 (February 1931).

of life it sustains does not correspond to a determinate necessity but is just one accident among other infinite possibilities of becoming."[53] In this essay Bogza makes of dream not (or not only) fuel for creative expression, but a tool – more like a stick of dynamite than a pen or brush. In the problems it poses, dream is another form of "creative exasperation," for the basic stance the "Dream" and "Exasperation" essays have in common is that everything that is might as well not be, or could be otherwise.

For Bogza, there is nothing more subversive than dreaming. Dreams are like vengeful spirits that cruelly reverse the order of things: the mistress dreams her servant is beating her, the orthodox priest dreams of brothels. But the power of dream is corroded in a bourgeois society where, like love and poetry, it has suffered a gradual decadence. It has been cut down to the size of the shabby emotions and images of which the bourgeois mind is capable – even, Bogza makes clear, in the theories of Freud. The dream must thus be rehabilitated or, as he puts it, *electroplated*, to protect it as one does metal machine components from corrosion and abrasion, giving it a hardened sheen. "Vreau visul vis," he writes: "I want the *dream* dream," in all its purity and violence.[54]

Those few men and women on Bogza's Saints calendar who managed to change the world did so because they had what Bogza calls a "faculty of unknowing." Bogza explains that without it, "the simple knowledge of how things are will always work to the detriment of action."[55] This fact and this problem are a version of what the Romanian Surrealist group Infra Noir will later call the "Obstacle" (see Introduction), and they will elaborate various prophylactic measures to be taken against it. They will insist, for example, on the necessity of what they call *méconnaissance* – a variation on Bogza's

[53] Geo Bogza, "Reabilitarea visului," in *unu* 34 (March 1931).
[54] Ibid., third page.
[55] Ibid., fourth page.

"faculty of unknowing." Bogza also writes of blindness: what is "aberrant" with respect to accepted reality can only be realized when "with passion you begin to no longer know anything, and act blindfolded"[56] – and dream is what provides this necessary blindness. Infra Noir in the forties will find this blindness, among other things, in somnambulism – a complex concept that departs from the image of the sleepwalker, arms outstretched, acting out her dreams behind closed eyes, "aware of nothing except the image upon the vertex of the eye."[57] In and through the blind dreamer, the dream is, in Bogza's words, "the dynamo of an extraordinary action upon the outside."

The members of the *Alge* group who had knocked hopefully at *unu*'s doors had been creating monthly issues of their magazine for the better part of a year by the time Bogza published his "Dream" essay in *unu*. In the meantime, Bogza himself had authored on their behalf a collective "Profession of Faith" in May 1931. But in this first run of *Alge* (1930-1931),[58] the group adopted few clear positions. Although these (very) young poets and artists – all schoolmates, except for Păun who joined them in the 6th issue – gave the magazine a highly original format and typography, they had trouble breaking away from the "modèle de la revue *unu* dont il réitère, à une échelle réduite, les attitudes et les expériences artistiques."[59] With all its Reverdyan image-techniques, Futurist

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56 Ibid. The phrase is "cînd cu pasiune începi să nu mai ştii nimic şi acţioneze orbeşte." The word "orbeşte" can mean, like the English word "blindly," at random, without reflection, unconsciously or automatically, passionately or madly. I translate it as "blindfolded" with a certain image in mind: an emblematic photograph (probably 1939) of Infra Noir group member Gellu Naum blindfolded. There is a second photograph, with the same wall as backdrop, with Naum's eyes closed, recalling the photomontage by René Magritte for the last issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* in December 1929, showing members of the Surrealist group with their eyes closed. See *Athanor* 1/2004 (87) and *Athanor* 2/2008 (63).

57 Bogza, "Reabilitarea visului," fourth page.

58 The magazine had two runs, the first in seven numbers between September 1930 and July 1931, the second between March and May of 1933.

59 Iulian Toma, *Gherasim Luca, ou, l'intransigeante passion d'être* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 32-33. Petre Răileanu, who makes the same point, also detects vestiges of Symbolism (*Gherasim Luca*; Paris:

syntactic experiments, and Dadist mockery, the first series of *Alge* is the "cri indistinct" of those who are – as co-founder Aureliu Baranga remembers it – "young, exasperated and ablaze with fury," hating "with all [their] being the bourgeois state […], bourgeois love."[60] The title-design itself is a display of creative exasperation, where the word "Alge" appears to have been violently ejaculated onto the page. Amid Jules Perahim's uncanny and contorted linocuts, Gherasim Luca evokes his youthful fury over the domestic limits of everyday existence: "I rattled the bells of the objects in the house, I chewed at the walls."[61] The *Alge* group's manifesto – *Strigăt* (Shout), probably written by Luca – places the magazine's reader at the entrance of a stage performance, with the curtain about to rise. Those who join the audience will not simply spectate, but cross a bridge that collapses behind them, leaving no exit. They must learn to tear up "the roots of the past which, rotting within you, will cause you to rot."[62]

In his intervention in the *Alge* group in the form of a "Profession of Faith," Bogza furnishes them, once again, with a vision of youthful fury and exasperation, but also with a clear credo. Bogza laments that when minds come together, especially great ones, no authenticity of thought and expression is possible, for basic communication requires toning things down, finding a common denominator: Bogza compares it to cars having to dim their brights as they pass on the road. But he longs, still, for a "catastrophe of friendship," a blind head-on collision of merciless sincerity and direct truth, and he feels

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Oxus, 2004), 50. Morar compares Luca's early poetry in the first issues of *Alge* to that of Voronca and Pană (218).

60 Aureliu Baranga, *Jurnal de atelier* (1978), translated from Toma's French rendering (33).

61 Gherasim Luca, "Destăinuiri în ud" (Damp Confessions) in *Alge* 3 (November 1930). Sesto Pals observes in the second issue that Luca has "transformed himself […] into a staphylococcus, dividing himself every day – and he barks, swallowing the clarity of the sky"; and is then inspired to wonder why everyone must have five fingers on each hand, two eyes in their heads, and sleep every night ("Dragă Puiule," in *Alge* 2, October 1930).

62 *Strigăt,* in *Alge* 2 (October 1930).

that the *Alge* group has this potential. He has made, he writes, a test tube culture of their poems, and has found the fateful "bacillus" of uncompromising revolt: "your adolescence translates itself into gestures that obsess, like the pantomime of Grand Guignol actors, and directly upon my eye […] you incise its most hallucinatory episodes.[I love you.,,63] He goes on to give them some advice that will stick with them – at least with Luca and Păun – until and throughout the Infra Noir group's career in the forties and fifties: the greatest possible danger to them and to their poetry, he says, is their own names. At this moment since no one knows who they are, they have a "mobility of action" denied to those of whom much is expected by critics and the public, and who move with the paralyzed pudeur of "virgins." The daring mobility afforded by anonymity is something like the "faculty of unknowing" of which Bogza writes in the "Dream" essay; it unleashes a "torrent" that carries true images of one's inner being directly onto the written page and into the fabric of human interaction (it is like a car, one might add, that blinds all oncoming traffic with its high beams). You will be at "permanent war" with your names, Bogza writes. Your names can only make "contributions" to the system of existing values; while, anonymous, you – and we – can annihilate this system, in our "fierce" and powerful desire "for something else."[64]

In the issue of *Alge* after this call to arms – the last before a two-year hiatus – the magazine gives itself the subtitle "Dithyrambic Review," and the cover design changes to sober black, with the cursive title in white. The contributors are experimenting and coming into their own, though their models are still clear: Păun (in Morar's opinion, for example) tends toward "grotesque-absurd *calembours* versified Urmuz-style," Luca

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63 Geo Bogza, "Profesie de credința pentru grupul Alge," in *unu* 35 (May 1931), second page. The superscript indicates that the phrase "I love you" is a footnote in the article.
64 Bogza, "Profesie de credința," second page.

toward "terribilist, shocking" verse, after Bogza.[65] They do not stop signing their poems (though they continue to use a variety of pseudonyms), but they are certainly not promising to be prisoners of their good names and reputations, either. The title of Luca's poem "The Woman Domenica d'Aguistti," for example, invokes a celebrated prostitute – the trio of prostitute, beggar and dog being hallowed in Luca's early-30s poetry.[66] "In my temples a woman plays the piano," writes Luca, "white, without blood / with long arms that enter through / the piano and exit through the floor, through the ceiling." Other women "drink my brains / and collect the pieces of my skull / like pieces of bread"; later he has the bone of a dead woman in his mouth: "and I bite it, and I suck it […] / it is sweet, the woman's bone, and it hurts. / But the ghetto dogs – murderous – want to snatch my prey / and for this they drag my clothes, tear / my body."[67]

In October 1931, the *Alge* group took things much further. The Algists produced 13 copies of the one and only issue of the magazine *Pulă: Revista de pula moderna – organ universal* (Cock: The Modern Cock Review – Universal Organ.) Beside a full-length and stark naked photo of Gherasim Luca and Jules Perahim[68] appear poems whose folk-pastiches and malicious little rhymes are full of unprintable words. In the summer of 1933, the historian and politician Nicolae Iorga – "l'effigie même du nationalisme et du conservatisme culturel"[69] – got hold of *Pulă* and took the initiative to have the Algists

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65 Morar (109-110). "Terribilist" is a word that appears frequently in the Romanian-language critical literature around the Romanian avant-garde and the Alge and Infra Noir groups, and refers to a tendency to terrorize the reader with shocking and controversial content or form.

66 As Petre Răileanu points out in his book on Luca (51).

67 Gherasim Luca, "Femeia Domenica d'Aguistti," in *Alge* 6 (July 1931).

68 Igor Mocanu et. al.'s article "Gherasim Luca: Originile discursului performativ" (<http://igormocanu.wordpress.com/2014/03/23/gherasim-luca-originile-discursului-performativ/>, accessed June 2014) states that it is Gherasim Luca and Jules Perahim in the picture; in Iulian Toma's opinion, the two men in the nude photo are Luca and Paul Păun (34).

69 Toma (37). Michael Finkenthal, in his article "Ce s-a întîmplat cu 'algişti' în 1933?" (What happened with the Algists in 1933?), locates further details about the *Pulă* affair in Sesto Pals's correspondence,

tried and imprisoned for nine days. What happened was that, according to Algist Sesto Pals, they had sent one of the issues of the second series of *Alge* to Iorga (among others), and he had:

> underlined everything that could be considered pornographic or subversive […] and asked the Minister of the Interior to bring us under trial. It was in the period when N. Iorga also asked Geo Bogza to be brought under trial for *Invective Poem*. After a search and interrogation at my house […] I was taken together with Gherasim Luca, who had happened to be there, to the Prefect of Police, and we were thrown into a sordid vermineteria, and after two days in the morning we were transferred by paddy wagon to Văcărești prison, finding Paul Păun, Perahim, Aurel Baranga, and our typographer Bercovici already there. At Perahim's place they had also found some other material, a review printed in 13 copies, with the title *Pulă* […] over which a great fuss was made.[70]

Press coverage at the time portrays the young men as a "band of defilers of literature" and "pedlars of pornography."[71]

As the increasingly provocative Bogzian "exasperations" and defilements of literature continued with the *Alge* project, the more senior *unu* project continued alongside it. The members of the *Alge* group themselves published in *unu*, over 1931-32. Luca's early-1931 "Opening address for an exhibition of painting," for example, takes the same carnival-barker's tone as the *Alge* manifesto: "this man is strong like rock / […] this man is strong like Maciste / […] who has not seen him howling with the dogs by night?" Păun's "Epitaph for the Ox-Man" follows the life and death of a Minotaur-like being who attempts to make love with a female museum bust: "neither Moses / nor Jesus / nor Mohammed / welcomed me / the men and oxen / burned my body upon the earth / as they

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compares different versions of events, and closely elaborates on the political-economic backdrop. *Apostrof* 5 (288), 2014. Avant-garde historian Nicolae Țone wonders why there was so much time between the date on the cover of the magazine (October 1, 1931) and the date of the trial and arrest of the authors (August 1933). It is possible, he says, that the authors deliberately backdated *Pulă*, but he thinks it more likely that the document was not originally intended to scandalize Nicolae Iorga and other cultural or governing authorities, but to be seen by others in the Romanian avant-garde scene. See "Afacerea Alge," in *Aldebaran* (2-4) 1996, which also includes scans from *Pulă* itself.

70 Sesto Pals, *Omul ciudat* (Bucharest: Editura Vinea, 1998), 228.

71 Pană, *Născut în '02* (418).

would an ox / or a new / saint."[72] Over 1932, however, *unu* was also taking further and more dramatic steps toward a general change in orientation.

One essay that heralded this change was Miron Radu Paraschivescu's "Transfiguration of the Word," where he finds that the Romanian avant-garde movement has lost its way. In fact, in Romania and elsewhere, there really *is* no avant-garde – it's only the first symptom, the first tremor of a greater movement to come. This movement, arising in the Soviet east, will capture an "immanent" and materialist truth of history above its various accidents – a notion that Paraschivescu will share with Luca, Păun and Dolfi Trost when they begin writing for the Communist journals of the 30s – and face the smaller-scale and no-less urgent truths of social inequality.

The reason, for Paraschivescu, that the "avant-garde" art of the present seems so "compromised," so fragile, is that it has failed to accomplish this, and Surrealism is no exception. The "egocentrism" and "individualism" of the latter are, in the end, nothing more than Romanticism's second life. It is true that there is a necessity for "interior revolt" – a profound expression of the soul that erupts like "volcanic lava," erasing norms and limits in its path, in its "rage against oppression." But this "interior revolt" is not enough.[73] This lava, in each of its outpourings, must inevitably "crystallize," entering a phase of "theory" and of practical action. At least in the aesthetics of Surrealism, writes Paraschivescu, expressions of revolt find a certain "sensorial resonance" in the spectator who, by this fact alone, "will no longer be a spectator" but a participant. In the same way, the private revolts of individual expression must continue to flow constantly into

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[72] Gherasim Luca, "Cuvânt de deschidere la o expoziție de pictură," in *unu* 44 (April 1931); Paul Păun, "Epitaf pentru omul-bou," in *unu* 45 (May 1932).

[73] In the following chapter, we will see the postwar Stalinist "Revolutionary Surrealist" group accusing André Breton's surrealists of being satisfied with mere "interior revolt" when they should be unequivocally supporting the Communist Party.

"common expression," into the "collective creative spirit." At this point, however, it is no longer poetry, but a direct action upon the lived matter of social life.[74]

In the following number of *unu*, Gheorghe Dinu (who had rather recently signed wildly experimental poetry as Stephan Roll) published "Suggestions on the Eve of a Trial" – the title referring to Bogza who was under trial, once again, for assaulting public morals. Dinu uses Bogza's trial as an opportunity to clean house, and to give a new direction to the so-called avant-garde of which he has been an integral part. The "lava" evoked by Paraschivescu is now that of a subterranean power of a "permanent optimism" that resides in nature itself, constanting fermenting the future. In the present epoch of "total liquidation," this lava is constantly rising to the surface, and the "true avant-garde" will be those who ride the crest of this volcanic optimism: those with "an exact vision of social determinism," whose sails catch, from the USSR, "the breath of a formidable world in construction." The Surrealist group – who have turned out to be the last gasp and "debauch" of a decadent culture – certainly made attempts to catch the wind of the future, to see the truth of things, and to understand "the social phenomenon that enframes and represents the individual," but they never went all the way. They took pains to engage themselves in "social politics," but could not tear free of the past – a past in which Dinu locates "metaphysical effusions," the unconscious, and the search for a "nirvana named in turn suicide, literary sadism, psychic automatism." All the Surrealists – even Louis Aragon – have thus remained either willfully or unconsciously within an "artistic bourgeoisism," identified with the past and with "determinants" that purport to be

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[74] Miron Radu Paraschivescu, "Schimbarea la fața a cuvîntului," in *unu* 48 (October 1932); Mincu (555-557). Paraschivescu makes clear that poetry is always part of the domain of "interior revolt" and individual expression – to write poems *à thèse*, "rational" poems (and, though he doesn't say it, socialist realist poems) is to kill poetry (557).

psychological rather than, as they inevitably must be, socioeconomic. Breton, Dinu goes on, does not realize that his revolutionary principles "radically exclude" his surrealist poetry; Aragon does not realize that automatism is incompatible with "materialist and historical discernment." They both lack the ability to abnegate, to renounce, whereas the "true, the permanent avant-garde" has fully dispensed with "ivory tower masturbation," "mystical elucubration," "verbal effervescence," "Freud's diagnostic formulas," "ellipical, imagist" poetry, frenzied "spontaneity," and all "myths" and "systems."[75] In all this, in one gesture, Dinu is condemning the *unu* group in its past iterations and in its understanding of Surrealism; the Surrealist movement itself in the west; and the entire Romanian avant-garde.

Not long after Dinu tossed this grenade, *unu* came to an end, at issue 50 in 1935. Many factors contributed to this decision on Pană's part. There was the fact that *Contimporanul* editor Ion Vinea, who had taken the helm of the center-left magazine *Facla* in 1930, quite literally denounced him to the authorities in 1932. Vinea published a note, Pană recounts, "in which he draws the attention of the War Minister upon [Pană], 'both communist and medical corps lieutenant at the same time.'" This was at a time moreover when, in Pană's words, "the claws of fascism extended with increasing menace" over Romania. By disappearing, *unu* "kept its purity" and avoided compromise.[76] But *unu* had already been drifting, of course, from its initial moorings. In a menacing political environment, the unists "feel more and more overbearingly the impulse toward concrete action," which explains the enrollment of many of them in the Communist Party of Romania "and their insistent presence in the leftist publications of

[75] Gheorge Dinu, "Sugestii înaintea unui proces," in *unu* 49 (November 1942); Mincu (551-555). For the Revolutionary-Surrealists' relation to myth compared to that of Breton's postwar group, see Chapter Two.
[76] Pană, *Născut în '02* (386-87).

the time: *Azi*, *Şantier*, *Cuvântul Liber*, *Era Nouă, Reporter*, etc."[77] The poets of *unu* were losing interest, as Voronca put it, in "pair[ing] bizarre words."[78] They wanted poetry to overflow into life.

Bogza's influence was having a similar effect on the Algists, for their second series in 1933 was much different than their first. Toma comments that "les ponts avec le discours agencé par la prolifération des images semblent irrémédiablement rompus […] en faveur de l'expression directe, à la manière d'un reportage." He adds that this second series is also the first stage in the group's evolution toward more direct engagement in "la dynamique des conflits sociaux."[79] On the other hand, the field of this "reportage," when it is that of social conflict, frames this conflict on a micro scale, where the individual with his erotic passions and private torments looms large. 1933 was the year that Bogza published his collection *Invective Poem*, opening with "Preface to a Romance Novel." "You were written to me," it begins,

> not to my despair, not to my sadness / but to the true me, powerful – and without a drop of pity. / […] My blood and bones dictate to me what must be done […] Your feeble being was written to what is powerful in me / And you are the long-awaited prey that will fall between my claws […] I regard my sex, its savage erection; / It will pass between your suave thighs and leave unspeakable traces."[80]

In the same year Luca published his own *Roman de dragoste* (Romance Novel),[81] in which the narrator follows a "woman with the silky sex" and her sordid loves among dock porters and sanitary workers, as in despair he bays at the moon and runs naked in

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77 Morar (104). A new genre, encouraged by Bogza, had also gained ascendancy in *unu* over its earlier imagism, a "reportage-poetry" glorified for example in an article by Paul Sterian, "Aggressive poetry or, on the reportage-poem": "DOWN WITH POETRY! […] LET HIM COME, HE WITH A THOUSAND EYES, A THOUSAND EARS, A THOUSAND FEET, A THOUSAND TELEGRAMS, A THOUSAND QUILLS, A THOUSAND EXPRESSIONS, A THOUSAND PISTOLS, LET THE TRUE POET COME. LET HIM COME, THE REPORTER!" Paul Sterian, "Poezia agresivă sau despre poemul reportaj," in *unu* 35 (May 1931); Mincu (548-49).

78 Pop, *Introducere* (20).

79 Toma (38).

80 Geo Bogza, "Prefață la un roman de dragoste," in *Poemul Invectiva* (Bucharest: Unu, 1933), 7.

81 My translation of *Roman de dragoste* is available in *The American Reader* Vol. 2 (1), 2014.

the fields. The story is raw, blunt, and minimally punctuated, sweeping occasionally into eddies of restless delirium. As for Luca's poetry in *Alge* at this time, the language is more direct and plain than it was in the first series of *Alge*, but the radius of destruction of its "interior revolt" tends to be limited to the poet's immediate surroundings, and to his own body. In the poem "People are never right when they tell you good evening," Luca wanders, accompanied by a dog, "along damp and empty quays with knife in hand," alarming passerby. He writes:

> the play of the knife upon the flesh had begun just like that, by chance / […] the first chunk of meat, I threw it in a gutter / the street-sweepers gathering rags from the street took two more chunks of my meat / a housemaid with her basket also stepped on one chunk of meat / eventually the authorities showed up too / two sergeants collected the leavings and gathered them nicely in one place / I saw myself there and my tired smile / and my wet lips / […] I saw then how the cart came to pick me up / […].[82]

Luca soon turned his gaze from this intimate cataclysm further outward. In December 1933 he, Geo Bogza and other Algists published the sole issue of the magazine *Viaţa imediată* (Immediate Life).[83] Among Bogza's projects here, in this "resurrection of the avant-garde spirit," was to radically replace the still-persistent imagism of his *unu* colleagues with a "programmatically antipoetic and prosaic" poetry of authenticity.[84] But it was also more than this, as the centerpiece of *Viaţa imediată* shows – the manifesto "The Poetry We Want to Write," signed by Bogza, Luca, Păun and Perahim. Poetry, the authors begin, has become a "hermetic modernism," "egoistic" and sterile, caring only about problems of form and lyrical virtuosity; it is a poetry of high aesthetic ambitions

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82 Gherasim Luca, "Oamenii nu au niciodată dreptate când îţi spun bună-seara," in *Alge* II (1, March 1933), in Ion Pop ed., *Inventatorul iubirii şi alte scrieri* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2003), 71-72.
83 In 1932, Paul Eluard titled a collection of poems *La Vie immédiate*: a possible influence.
84 Pop (101-103).

that on the written page translate into "gibberish."[85] In short, despite the desire of so many Romanian avant-gardists to ride the crest of the epoch, their poetry has lost contact with life. In their need to innovate, they have lost sight of poetry's one real condition: a fierce "fury against oppression." It is not surprising that in this the authors echo Paraschivescu's "Transfiguration of the Word," since they write amid the same darkening political landscape and spectacle of everyday suffering.

Like the Integralists and Synthetists of the 20s, the authors of "The Poetry We Want to Write" desire a poetry that is for and of its time. But times are changing fast. In 1933, Hitler rose to dictatorial power in Germany; Romania was reeling from the worldwide economic depression, and moving from one political crisis to another. Amid an upsurge of nationalist and extreme-right ideologies, with their attendant and often violent anti-Semitism, the Legionaries of the Iron Guard – a fascist group distinguished by its Orthodox mysticism – had assassinated the Prime Minister, Ion G. Duca, in December 1933, the month that *Viața imediată* appeared.[86] The *Viața* manifesto's authors want to "capture in its savage, living state" the "tragic character" of this period, along with the "emotion that chokes us when we know ourselves contemporaries with millions of people exasperated by poverty and injustice."[87] Amid immense, "collective" tragedies, the so-called "tragedy of the self" with which the hermetic modernists are concerned should be ashamed to show its face. Instead poetry should be written for and to these

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[85] "Poezia pe care vrem să o facem," in Mincu (559). The manifesto includes the line: "We have been done for a long while with pure poetry, with hermetic poetry." There is another, later version of the manifesto in other anthologies, including Pop's *Réhabilitation* and Gabriela Duda's *Literatura românească de avangardă*. Among its many differences, it changes the line above to read: "We have been done for a long while with *the poetry of dreams*, with pure poetry, with hermetic poetry" (Duda, 89, italics added). It is significant that in the first version, dream is still compatible with the revolutionary passion for life and fury against injustice championed in the *Viața* manifesto.

[86] For a detailed account of the political and social context of the magazine's publication, see also Finkenthal, "Ce s-a întîmplat cu 'algişti' în 1933?".

[87] Mincu (559).

millions, by bringing it close to "the elementary aesthetics of life." It needs to become as simple as bread and water, composed of beauty and pain. It must rise from the "bloody, sweaty" soil of life like a tree, as life's complex means of expression, its hidden language. The manifesto authors are newly conscious, they feel, of the "historic role" that poetry plays, as potentially the "supreme means of expression." And if its role is the "clarification and description of forms of life," it is not just that poetry's subject matter must be life's everyday fabric, but that it must weave and reweave this fabric.

When the desiderata of the manifesto translate themselves into poems, however, they take a singular turn. Paul Păun's "Poem with Robison Crusoe" in *Viaţa* has the poet walking the streets and encountering society's humble and downtrodden "millions." And it soon becomes clear that the carnal and stridently erotic visions of the Algists have not subsided, but have continued to mingle with social subversion and revolutionary vision. The poet spies through the torn pants of a man carting wood "a dangling skin, pink and moist"; he observes that a group of ragged vagabonds, huddled together on cold nights, slip their hands "into the warmth under another's clothes […] and the day after their hands smelled like cheese barrels." In the 1945 tract that Luca published with Dolfi Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, the two write – somewhat perplexingly for many of their readers, then and today – of the "érotisation sans limites du prolétariat."[88] Păun's poem begins to unshadow the meaning of this phrase for Infra Noir, showing that the body beneath the clothes and the proletariat toiling behind the shiny façade of bourgeois culture are two aspects of the same revolutionary power, restrained and hidden but relentless. The poet speaks to those who toil and to their bodies – "starving, broken" – and promises them:

[88] Gherasim Luca and Dolfi Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique* (Bucharest: S Surréalisme, 1945), 18.

> I will undress respectable ladies / after I pluck them from their cars with two fingers / I will undress them and throw their panties into the Dâmbovița / so that you too, we too can see / the lightly powdered skin on their unworked bodies / […] and if you want / you can close your jaws under their arms and under their legs / yes, you can / they'll like it / and you can, along their lips, / run your whiskers smelling of tobacco and rain / you can gum at all their joints / you can prickle them with your cheeks and hair / they won't scream, the little sheep […].[89]

In *Viața imediată* Gherasim Luca as well directs his erotic-revolutionary exasperation against "respectable" women, or rather against Woman taken as emblem of the bourgeois status quo. The sufferings of the downtrodden and marginalized must be taken out, with malicious pleasure, directly upon her body, and the poetry of the revolutionary future must be etched into it. Luca writes, in the poem "Tragedies that Should Occur," that his fingers "have powerfully crushed the woman's white neck / as the old poets, in their habitual accesses of love for nature, clutched / the flowers – the sheep – the field and stars / the poets of today […] each have at home a woman's white neck that must be assassinated." Here, woman at once represents the "unworked" bourgeois body of Păun's poem; the poetry of the past, cloistered from the rhythms of the street and of history in an ivory tower of clichéd sentiment; and an object of an erotic passion that is confounded with the *Viața* manifesto's "fury against oppression." The poet walking along the street, Luca continues, is newly important and powerful, for the streets are full of well-dressed ladies as well as shiny store-windows, and the poet's pockets are full of rocks. These rocks are meant, it is implied, for the ladies as well as for the windows.[90]

At the end of this poem, Luca compares shattering vitrines to extinguishing stars. In a characteristically self-negating move, he then apologizes to his reader for this "star

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[89] In Sașa Pană ed., *Antologia literaturii române de avangardă* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1969).
[90] "Tragedii cari trebuie să se întâmple," *Viața imediată* 1 (December 1933); Mincu 369-370. There are similarities between the moves this poem makes and Marinetti's 1909 "Uccidiamo il Chiaro di Luna!" (Let's Kill the Moonlight!).

comparison," and asks the "poets of today" to shatter it – as they would a store window. He adds that while he, too once "went into ecstasies before flowering trees and swooned with every sunrise," today he is reformed. He makes the same confession in the poem "This is Just an Attempt," also in *Viața*. He begins with a series of *unu*-Reverdyan images, with shades of Breton's 1931 "L'Union libre": "Woman-piano, woman-mirror, woman-plum-brandy, woman-spring, woman for whom I wrote all my poems." But he then turns his aggression simultaneously upon her and upon this style of image-making: "Now, I stand at the window […] / my eyes high and far over the city to the blazing smokestacks of the factories / A great shame takes me when I think of all my poems written / to no purpose / along with a great desire to slap her in broad daylight, / my woman." Whatever relationship he might have had with her is now replaced by a "complicity" between him and the city with its vista of factories, an emphatically masculine city that is "filthy" as a porter (*hamal*). The form of poetry that he abandons, meanwhile, is feminized: it is a poetry of "hair and fesses and skirts and hysterias and jewelry." This list is placed alongside a list of bourgeois comforts – restaurants, fur-boutiques, theater halls – and then beside a list of nature's sentimental beauties: "Never more will I speak of stars, of trees, of the field, or of love / my single love starting today will be the porter / the porter, the city […]."[91] Thus once again, woman is at once the old poetry; the bourgeois world to be undermined and overturned; nature as poetic subject matter; and a fleshly body to be violated.

When they began contributing to communist and/or leftist journals like *Cuvântul Liber* (The Free Word) in 1934, Gherasim Luca and Paul Păun would be called proletarian poets by their colleagues. If the texts in *Viața* already consider themselves to

[91] Gherasim Luca, "Aceasta nu e decât o încercare," in *Inventatorul iubirii și alte scrieri* (92-93).

be proletarian poetry,[92] they also continue to answer to Geo Bogza's call for a creatively "exasperated" return to the physical matter and the desiring human bodies of authentic life. In *Viaţa*, this is both a return to a masculine body (Luca's city-as-porter, with its proud smokestacks) and a move away from a now-feminized, "bourgeois" Romanian avant-garde, including Surrealism. This very avant-garde, of course, had once unfavorably compared Surrealism to a more "virile" Integralism – in line with the Italian Futurists who had also imagined the past as feminine and the future as masculine.[93]

The Infra Noir group, in the forties, will continue this gender-inflected project, finding ways to lend a robust "activity" to the hitherto "passive" hysterias, hallucinations and dreams of Surrealism – as we will see for example with their theories of somnambulism. In a 1925 essay in the magazine *Punct*, Ilarie Voronca invited his fellow avant-gardists to "violate" and literally to "rape" the spectator, the reader.[94] In the forties, Infra Noir put forth a call similarly to violate a recalcitrant, reactionary, sleeping world. If a major facet of the Surrealist revolution was an exaltation of erotic love, this was also frequently conceived as erotic violence. Infra Noir also shared with the Romanian avant-gardists of the twenties an anxiety – on their own behalf, and on behalf of the Surrealist movement – about getting left behind in the past, about falling off the wave-crest of history and being swept into a backwater. For both, once again, the sentimental, hysterical, ivory-tower past is set against the virile future. Even when, as it sometimes

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92 *Viaţa imediată* also published – in translations that were collaborations between Luca and Virgil Teodorescu, under a pseudonym – selections from communist or proletarian writers. Toma lists Pär Lagerkvist, Julian Tuwim, Pierre Morhange, and Alexandr Fadeyev (38).

93 Marinetti writes in his 1920 "Against Feminine Luxury": "In the name of the great, virile, fecund, and genial future of Italy, we futurists condemn the spreading feminine idiocy and the devoted imbecility of males that together collaborate to develop feminine extravagance, prostitution, pederasty, and the sterility of the race." Cited in Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), 12.

94 Ilarie Voronca, "Glasuri" (Voices), in *Punct* 8 (1925), also in Mincu (519). The words are *violat*, *siluit*.

happens in Infra Noir texts, woman embodies at once the future, the revolution, and Bogza's "faculty of unknowing," the men of Infra Noir urge themselves to join with her, literally to become her, or at least to simulate becoming her – "absorbing" her just as the Integralists wanted to absorb Surrealism.

3. Poetry in the Service of the Revolution

Luca writes, in "This is Just an Attempt": "I am very lucid and lacking any poetic inspiration / far from me any trace of hallucination, access of nerves or grimacing in the mirror." As Luca and his colleagues begin their post-*Alge* career in class-conscious journalism and proletarian poetry in the early to mid thirties, they reinvent themselves once again, as lucid and level-headed members of the only true, the communist, avant-garde.

Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, and other Algists (Perahim, Bogza) all contributed to the journal *Cuvântul Liber* – the organ of Romanian communism since 1921 – as did former *unu* avant-gardists, like Dinu/Roll, Paraschivescu, and Voronca. Future Infra Noir member Naum had been writing for *Cuvântul* since 1931, under the pseudonym Ion Pavel, and it was Naum who first invited Luca, Păun, and Virgil Teodorescu to publish there.[1] In 1933, Naum had joined a clandestine Romanian Union of Communist Youth cell at his university, though without enrolling in the Party: "il vend des journaux éphémères, participe à la diffusion de tracts à la sortie des usines, tandis qu'un représentant du parti prononce des discours avant de s'enfuir à toutes jambes lorsque la police survient." In this milieu, he not only became acquainted with a young Nicolae Ceaușescu, but met with Luca and Păun under orders to make contact with "certains signataires des revues d'avant-garde et du parti communiste."[2] He and Virgil Teodorescu

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[1] "Gellu Naum: O biografie," in Simona Popescu ed., *Opere I, Poezii* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2011), 7-8. Future Infra Noir member Teodorescu, in August 1932, had founded the magazine *Liceu* ("virulent," Urmuz-inspired, and, of course, "terribilist," as Morar comments (112 and 238).)

[2] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum: poète roumain, prisonnier au château des aveugles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), (31-32).

soon became editors of the Communist Youth Union journal *Tânăra generație* (The Young Generation).

Luca and Păun debuted in *Cuvântul Liber* in September 1934 (Teodorescu had contributed some poems earlier, at Naum's invitation) as "the premier names in proletarian poetry" with – the editors state – their "sincerity of emotion and modernism of expression."[3] In this September issue, Păun speaks in the voice of the oppressed worker ready to rise up:

> My hands heavy as two pickaxes / never learned and don't know how to demolish a world. / My impoverished blood does not want to set the world on fire. / But the sky of the city is like a black water / and a powerful pestle in my chest / grinds out my life. / I am oppressed. / I want to be free.[4]

To the issue of the following month – after an article by Geo Bogza about the oil industry in Buștenari (with its oil wells that resemble a forest of conifers) – Păun contributed another poem, a letter from manufactory workers to their friends in prison. They observe that they all, convicts or not, are behind prison walls, and they listen to the thunder "as it rolled the whole sky round beneath it / and we thought: if we were free / we would be just as powerful."[5]

Both Luca and Păun also contributed articles, of opinion and appeal, to *Cuvântul Liber*. In December 1934, Luca for example addresses the problem of child labor. As if it weren't enough that "surplus value" is stolen from the "muscles and pockets" of workers, he writes, capitalism steals entire childhoods. Still reeling from the "cataclysm that is the first contact of the self with the world," the worker's child is thrown into the jaws of the

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[3] "Doi poeți tineri" (Two Young Poets), in *Cuvântul Liber* 43 (September 1, 1934).

[4] Paul Păun, "Poem de oprimat" (Poem of the Oppressed), in ibid. For a French translation of Luca's "Poemul oamenilor blânzi" (Le Poème des gens aimables), which accompanied Păun's poem, see Toma (110).

[5] Paul Păun, "Scrisoare într'un pachet cu alimente" (Letter in a Care Package), in *Cuvântul Liber* 50 (October 20, 1934).

factory, knowing no fairy tale except reality, where all the monsters are real as well. The child will soon realize that in fact, he is shouldering the bricks that build the great fairy tale of bourgeois life.[6] Luca and Păun devoted a great deal of space in *Cuvântul* to young laborers and to youth in general, and began contributing to a weekly rubric titled "The Problems of Youth." In his article "Working Youth," for example, Luca brings up the so-called "generational conflict" that is all the rage in Bucharest periodicals and salons, arguing that amid the working class, uniformly oppressed regardless of age or gender, there is no such conflict; it is native to the bourgeois sphere, and even there it is an illusion. For "the wide sphere of the bourgeoisie is an uninterrupted thread of ideas and beliefs, ideas that collide and repel each other […] an unending row of rooms and smaller rooms," each with its own sub-compartments. When the merchant's or minister's son returns from abroad with new ideas, revolutionary élan, and a library of anti-bourgeois books, he is only moving from one such room or compartment to another.[7] In another article, however, Luca draws a distinction between proletarian youth – who have left behind all "dogma" and "schematism" – and the proletarian old guard, who batten upon outdated formulas and catchwords, and who cannot make the "dangerous leaps" required by their historical moment. The youth understand that even Marxism must "surpass itself," that it must avoid becoming a "sterile" religion or a "continual trumpeting of certain known truths," and instead must adapt like a living organism to the "social

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6 Gherasim Luca, "Ucenici" (Child Laborers/Apprentices), reprinted in *Inventatorul iubirii și alte scrieri* (92-93). In a 1935 article on the same topic Luca goes into further detail on the lives of children in working families, whose education takes place not so much in the night schools they attend, half-asleep, after a backbreaking day at the factory, but in daily beatings, insults, and hunger ("Ucenicii, sau acei cari n'au dreptul să fie elevi de liceu," *Cuvântul Liber* 14, February 9, 1935).

7 Gherasim Luca, "Tineretul muncitor," in *Cuvântul Liber* 2 (November 10, 1934).

rhythm" of the times.[8] The following year in 1935, Luca locates a generational gap in the (literal) pages of history: youth must destroy and rewrite the history books of older generations, which crawl with heroes, generals, and captains of industry. If we are soon to participate in history ourselves, he writes, our history books must tell stories of the workers and peasants who turn the rich soil of history with their plows. And if the world needs idols and "myths," as Luca concedes, let these latter be at their center. All other myths must be unmasked and demolished.[9]

Păun also does battle with myth and bourgeois ideology on behalf of youth. In "The New Meaning of Adolescence" in 1934 for example, he attacks literature that portrays adolescents as entirely governed by their sexuality, seeing the world only from an "erotic" perspective. There appears to be a conspiracy to place adolescents "always naked and erect before the world" (one is reminded, in fact, of the erotic-revolutionary visions, not to mention naked photographs, of the *Alge* period). There is, in other words, a conspiracy to replace the "social" with the sexual – to take from youth its dangerous power of social revolt and social change.[10] Păun follows up on these observations in his 1935 "The Sexual Crisis," arguing that regardless of their class, youth everywhere suffer from the imposition of bourgeois sexual morality, which is linked to the institutions of private property, marriage and the family. Healthy social engagement is contingent upon healthy sexual expression, after the decidedly unprudish laws of nature – not the "falsified, demeaned, adulterated" love of the 1934 "Adolescence" article, but "another

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[8] Gherasim Luca, "Orientarea tineretului" (The Orientation of the Young), in *Cuvântul Liber* 3 (November 24, 1934).
[9] Gherasim Luca, "Tineretul în fața istoriei" (The Youth before History), in *Cuvântul Liber* 15 (February 6, 1935).
[10] Paul Păun, "Sensul nou al adolescenței" (The New Meaning of Adolescence), *Cuvântul Liber* 8 (December 29, 1934).

love," another sexuality.[11] By way of example, a 1935 poem by Păun finds in working-class love a revolutionary power of its own: "our strength and our love are without limits / […] afire with all the youth of the world."[12]

This youth, as Păun writes in "New Meaning," holds a natural power of "health" and "truth" that frightens the masters of the earth, who are forced in their fear to take refuge in "exasperation" – a word hitherto associated by Păun and by Luca with Bogzian creative authenticity – and the irrational. The latter is the subject of a 1935 article by Păun, also under the "Problems of Youth" rubric, where he deals with the glorification of the irrational by fascist and/or Nazi ideologues, including Alfred Rosenberg (who seems to have discovered, Păun wryly comments, that rationality is largely a sinister Jewish invention.) Against this "rehabilitation" of thoughtless impulse and rejection of "realist logic," youth must protect rationality, defined by Păun as an evolving effort to solve concrete problems like poverty.[13] Before their turn to proletarian journalism and poetry, Păun and his colleagues would, again, have associated words like "irrationality" more with Bogza's *unu* essays on dream and creative exasperation, with *unu* in its surrealist mode, or with the Surrealist movement in France. Now, they tended to associate them more with fascist ideology, in all its protean forms, and felt a strong need to defend rationality and reason against this ideology.

Luca and Păun were also sending work around this time to the magazine *Facla*

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11 Paul Păun, "Criza sexuală," *Cuvântul Liber* 14 (February 9, 1935). The title, he writes, is taken from a work by Wilhelm Reich, or rather from the French Communist Party's 1934 translation (*La Crise Sexuelle*) of Reich's 1930 *Geschlechtsreife, Enthaltsamkeit, Ehemoral: Eine Kritik der bürgerlichen Sexualreform* (Sexual Maturity, Abstinence, and Marital Fidelity). Păun writes that he derives from Reich the idea that since women are forced by bourgeois moral standards out of "sexual circulation," men have no sexual outlet that does not lead to neurosis or disease, and this makes them useless for social struggle.

12 Paul Păun, "Dragoste în bluze albastre" (Blue Collar Love), *Cuvântul Liber* 22 (April 5, 1935).

13 Paul Păun, "În fața iraționalului" (Facing the Irrational), *Cuvântul Liber* 16 (February 23, 1935).

(The Torch), which had contributed to the downfall of *unu*. In its pages Luca, for example, defends young actors exploited in the bourgeois theater and dreams of a new, "mass" theater free from all rules and open to the full flowering of proletarian energies; or he subjects ladies' charity associations to cutting sarcasm and quite characteristically compares the bourgeoisie itself to a "lady of respectability" (*cucoană*), as good and tender as a "piece of bread" soon to be savagely consumed by the starving masses. In the pages of *Facla* both Luca and Păun also attack the journal *Criterion*, which belonged to a group associated with the right-wing and anti-Semitic thinker Nae Ionescu and which featured, at least in Păun's sarcastic version, a theological debate about the Orthodox Church's probable views on beating Jews.[14]

Joining Luca and Păun in the pages of *Facla*, Dolfi Trost also makes an appearance, contributing mostly literary reviews. In a late-1934 issue, for example, he reviews a work by the poet Horia Ghiea, with whom he had collaborated the year before in Brăila on two poetry journals. Trost and Ghiea had written, in their journal-manifesto, that "we come without any recipe for new poetry and without literary techniques. We go forward with our eyes vacant, and our hearts in our open hands." Apparently, the manifesto also cited the words of Surrealist Phillipe Soupault: "on publie pour chercher

[14] For one account of this more complex debate, see Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography* Vol.1 (London: Harper & Row, 1981), 285. Gabriel Liiceanu writes: "Whereas most members were to embrace, however briefly, the ideals of the far-right organization the Iron Guard, the [*Criterion*] group included left-wing authors such as playwright and novelist Mihail Sebastian who was Jewish (but equally fascinated by Nae Ionescu.)" *The Păltiniș Diary* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), xv. The Criterion circle, more diverse than its leader's beliefs might suggest, also included Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, and Eugène Ionesco. For more on the relationship of these three, especially Eliade and Cioran, to fascism see Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: l'oubli du fascisme* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 2002). For the articles by Luca and Păun mentioned above see Luca, "Proletarizarea actorului tânăr," (*Facla*, 10/7/1934); Luca, "Filantropia teatrului popular" (*Facla*, 10/26/1934); Luca, "Prostia eroică" (*Facla*, 11/2/1934); and Păun, "Polemică ortodoxă" (*Facla*, 12/27/1934).

des hommes."[15] Trost may have been far from being a Surrealist in the mid-to-late thirties, but his warm interest in the movement likely predated his first critical articles devoted to it.

In April 1935, Miron Radu Paraschivescu published in *Cuvântul Liber* a review of an exhibition of paintings by Victor Brauner, at Bucharest's Mozart Gallery. Brauner had just returned from Paris after some years with the Surrealists, and he had brought back not only paintings but an entire surrealist library, as well as an insider's view on the movement. Gellu Naum – who had just been arrested for his involvement with the National Antifascist Committee, and jailed for three days – was among the Bucharestians who paid a visit to the exhibition. Naum recounts that at the time he had not been terribly interested in the doings of the local avant-garde, but that when he entered the empty exhibition hall he was nearly immobilized by what he saw, and declared to Brauner – the only other one present – that his new aspiration was to do in poetry what Brauner was doing on the canvas. With this first encounter, they became friends for life.[16] A year later, in January 1936, Naum published his first volume of automatic poetry, *Drumeţul incendiar* (The Incendiary Voyager), with three drawings by Brauner and with an epigraph from Benjamin Péret – "Le général nous a dit / Le doigt dans le trou du cul" – that suits its spirit of caustic revolt.[17] In its opening poem Naum writes:

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15 Quoted with commentary in Michael Finkenthal, *D. Trost: între realitatea visului şi visul ca realitate* (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2013), 48. See D. Trost, "Horia Ghica [*sic*]: Tentative (poeme)," in *Facla* (12/9/1934).

16 See *Poezii* (8).

17 A reviewer for the conservative journal *Neamul românesc* writes of *Drumeţul,* "Prepare your formaldehyde jars, a new monster has appeared" (*Poezii* 8). Laville indicates that Luca and Teodorescu also responded unfavorably: "Luca, circonspect, affirme du bout des doigts qu'il est fort dommage de faire du surréalisme, puisque c'est déjà dépassé. Teodorescu veut bien croire que Naum deviendra intéressant quand il aura ôté ses pieds du plat" (37). Virgil Teodorescu reviewed *Drumeţul* for the journal *Meridian*, which appeared in two series in 1934-38 and 1941-45, and which Pană calls "the last Romanian review to militate on the high barricades of autochthonous, interbellum avant-gardism" (*Născut în '02,* 613). Pană,

> Well anyway I will know how / to unstop my ears, so my fingers can whistle solo / (as boots have their ears to the sky) / to pull from my arse the butterflies and pipes of dream / […] I will know how to pull the suckers off my brain / to drain the putrid syrup of sweet verses / […] to wave my stinking socks by the gates of the Romanian Academy."[18]

Paraschivescu's reaction to Brauner's surrealist paintings, meanwhile, was much different. According to him, Brauner adheres to the "worn out" and "reactionary" formulas of a movement that history has left behind. Although his work laudably "negates" that of his Romanian peers, with their "comfortable and conformist" canvases, this mere refusal is not enough – it is "unintegrated into the social" and does not "concretize" the dialectics of history taking place around him, and in him.[19] Trost, writing in *Meridian* in 1937, might have agreed with Paraschivescu: the writer is able to "guide his work after historical necessity" precisely because he is "conscious of his interior mechanism." In other words, within the self's interior should be sought not dreams, visions and murmurs, but history; the door opening toward the inside leads back outside.[20]

1935, the year of Naum's encounter with Brauner and with Surrealism, was a prolific year for Luca and Păun in *Cuvântul Liber*, and for Trost to a lesser degree.[21] Luca

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Roll, Paraschivescu and others were joined by all five of the future Infra Noir members in its pages devoted not only to the struggle against fascism but, as a 1937 *Meridian* manifesto puts it, to "the beautiful."

[18] Gellu Naum, "Drumeţul incendiar," in *Drumeţul incendiar*, in *Poezii* (77). Brauner's line-drawings include a headless woman's torso and a man with a revolver for a head.

[19] Miron Radu Paraschivescu, "Expoziţia Victor Brauner," in *Cuvântul Liber* 24 (April 20, 1935).

[20] Trost, "Tradarea intelectualilor," *Meridian* 11 (1937), quoted in Morar (113).

[21] Trost revisits, for example, Thomas More's *Utopia*, sceptical about a society that works as a closed and implacable mechanism, with no room for the unforeseen ("Un Precursor: Thomas Morus," *Cuvântul Liber* 36, July 13, 1935). This issue features on its front page the June 1935 Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, in Paris. Mark Polizzotti writes that by the time of this Congress, "a vast undertaking involving prominent leftist writers from three continents, the Surrealists were viewed with such hostility that the organizers banned their participation outright. Enraged, Breton argued for inclusion, but the Soviet delegation dug in its heels. Only with the suicide of the Surrealist writer and PCF intimate René Crevel, who had labored desperately to bring the two sides together, did the Soviets relent – and, even then, the Surrealists were not given the stage until nearly midnight, after most of the audience had left. In the wake of this final rejection, and with signs of increasing Soviet repression visible to anyone who chose to see,

in particular devotes several articles to the topic of proletarian poetry,[22] arguing for example that the poet who places himself in isolation from social realities is still performing a social act, even a "militant" social act, since in the present historical context there is no neutral ground, only for and against. What Luca calls "pure poetry" is not in itself bad, but at this urgent historical moment it falls inexorably into "the service of the dominant class." Even certain modes of class-conscious or engaged poetry – and Luca gives "the Surrealists" as an example, perhaps referring to works like Louis Aragon's 1932 "Front rouge" – "inherit [the] traits and mirror [the] mentality" of the author's class origin, and this is enough to sustain the dominant class, "to be in its service."[23]

Then there are the so-called proletarian poems that still harbor a conservative attachment to outdated literary forms and techniques, and these are no better, for it is Luca's opinion that proletarian poets must keep abreast of the latest advances in poetry. And here is the twist: whether it be "pure poetry" that makes these advances, or socially engaged but bourgeois-minded poetry, or even poetry ultimately in the service of the dominant class, its technical investigations and discoveries must not be ignored by the true proletarian poet. This would amount to what Luca calls, in another 1935 article, a "simple" negation, as opposed to a "dialectical" negation-affirmation: a no-yes that both surpasses and absorbs the poetic innovation in question (just as, one might say, the Synthetists of the 20s sought to both absorb and "surpass" various currents of international modernism). Even uselessly hermetic poetry intended for "initiates" is

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Breton turned definitely against Stalin and joined the Trotskyist opposition." In *André Breton: Selections* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), 27.

[22] Iulian Toma discusses several of these 1935 articles on proletarian poetry in his book on Luca, and provides a history, and account of the problems associated with, the genre (see 106-119). He finds in Luca's texts of this period "l'affirmation d'une poésie militante, motivée par la dynamique même des réalités sociales, qui repose sur le postulat que la naissance de la société sans classes marquera aussi la fin de l'esthétique de la société bourgeoise fondée sur ce qu'on appellerait une métaphysique du beau" (116).

[23] Gherasim Luca, "Prezența poeziei" (The Presence of Poetry), *Cuvântul Liber* 17 (March 2, 1935).

valuable if it is poetry's "ultimul strigăt" (literally, its *dernier cri* – "Strigăt" (Shout) was the title of *Alge*'s opening manifesto). Whatever the case, being "aesthetically behind the times" can never be justified, particularly for the would-be revolutionary.[24] For when poetry dialectically sublates the innovations of the past and present, regardless of their ideological provenance, they remain powerfully "concentrated" within the poet, leading to new discoveries and to a closer "collaboration with history."[25]

Proletarian poetry that, as it so often does, features workers, factories and sirens is no better than poetry that features "stars and trees" – the topics that Luca renounces in *Viața imediată*. The true proletarian poet, with his finger on the pulse of the historical moment, knows that one must continue to pull up the roots of old forms, tropes, and concepts, or else one is only passing "from one room to another," just like the bourgeois youth in Luca's article above. He knows that what counts is "his intimate attitude," or in short, what counts is that he is revolutionary in his soul, his bones.[26] Luca even writes, at one point, that proletarian poetry is a "state of the spirit" – just as Surrealism often declared itself to be an *état d'esprit.*[27] In these texts Luca is pushing back against a proletarian-literary status quo that condemns poetry for being incomprehensible to the working masses, or insufficiently edifying, or with insufficient mention of workers and factories.

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[24] Gherasim Luca, "Poezia pentru inițiați" (Poetry for Initiates), *Cuvântul Liber* 19 (March 16, 1935).

[25] Gherasim Luca, "Cultură și poezie" (Culture and Poetry), *Cuvântul Liber* (June 2, 1935). Toma comments that in this essay Luca "délimite clairement sa conception esthétique d'un certain réductionnisme marxiste considérant l'œuvre sous le seul aspect du contenu idéologique." Instead, he develops proletarian poetry as "point de rencontre entre l'émergence d'une conscience de classe et la stabilisation d'une 'langue' conforme à ses nécessités d'expression" (124).

[26] Gherasim Luca, "Poezie de atmosferă" (The Poetry of Atmosphere), *Cuvântul Liber* 23 (April 13, 1935). This politics of attitude, of course, can easily lend itself to oppressive ideological surveillance, where states of the soul are indexed within a hermeneutics of suspicion.

[27] Gherasim Luca, "Sensul unei mișcări poetice" (The Meaning of a Poetic Movement), *Cuvântul Liber* (May 18, 1935).

Luca as well as Păun and Trost, very frequently in these pages, speak of hearing, catching, or entering the "rhythm" of history.[28] This is a thread that unifies their avant-garde, *unu*-influenced work of the early 30s, their journalism of the later 30s, and their Surrealism of the 40s. When Luca writes that "proletarian poetry justifies its place in culture and in a history of literature only when to its revolt […] it adds a language adequate to its [historical] moment,"[29] he places this poetry, whether deliberately or not, in continuity with the efforts of the Integralists of the 20s, who were after the same goal. And many of the theories and practices of the Infra Noir group – associated, for example, with the surrealist object – are guided by the idea that creating and engaging with objects in certain ways allows them to join forces with history's inner dynamism and its subterranean purposes, in order to escape the traps of harmful ideology or of the culture industry.[30] In the mid-to-late 30s, the desire of the future members of the Infra Noir group to acquire a history's-eye view of things is one to which their adherence to the Communist faith answers – since, for them, its doctrine holds the truth of history, its meaning and direction.

This desire, along with Luca's deliberations on proletarian poetry, also places the group within the context of 1930s debates in France and elsewhere on the relationship of Communism to literary-artistic practice. One of the big questions raised here – especially by Breton and the Surrealists, inspired by Trotsky – was whether it was possible to create

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[28] See for example Luca's "Denaturarea poeziei" (The Denaturation of Poetry, *Cuvântul Liber* 27, May 11 1935), where he also speaks of the "possibility of the poem's integration in the most living heart of concrete action, organized and universal"; his "Infilitrații" (Infiltrations), where his call to take the "rhythm and temperature" of one's time recalls Păun's call elsewhere to "palpate" it, like a doctor (*CL* 20, March 23, 1935). Păun himself writes what can only be called a love song to this historical rhythm, and to the "backwaters" and "entrails" of history ("Poemul vremii noastre turburi," *CL* 27, May 11, 1935).

[29] "Cultură și poezie," *Cuvântul Liber* (June 2, 1935).

[30] For this see Chapter Three.

a proletarian literature when, for example, such literature could only arise in a transitional moment on the way to a future society without classes, or when, more compellingly, the artist's efforts are always blinkered by the present, conditioned by his historical period and still mired in the bourgeois-capitalist order. In response to a 1928 *enquête* in the journal *Monde* about whether culture "puisse ou doive être le reflet des grands courants qui déterminent l'évolution économique et sociale de l'humanité," André Breton responded that to attempt to outline or defend a proletarian culture, "à une époque où nul ne saurait se réclamer de la culture prolétarienne, pour l'excellente raison que cette culture n'a pu encore être réalisée, même en régime prolétarien," would be profoundly misguided. In other words, to do so successfully would require prophesying the future.[31] Iulian Toma comments, reading Luca's *Cuvântul Liber* essays, that for Breton, to assume it is possible to grasp the elements of proletarian literature "à partir des prémisses intelligibles du présent, cela relève d'une conception bien peu dialectique de l'évolution des phénomènes de nature spirituelle."[32] Luca, as Toma argues, shares this conviction, and it is true that he and the other future members of Infra Noir, despite their preoccupation with capturing the rhythm and truth of history, remain ambivalent as to whether one can do so via the practice and promotion of proletarian culture – especially by means of an increasingly dogmatic socialist realism.

After the Second World War, on an intellectual scene dominated by Communist aspirations and anti-fascist zeal, similar issues were raised regarding the thorny problem

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31 See Breton, *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Œuvres complètes* I (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 805.

32 Toma (122). Toma also discusses the role of the novelist Emile Zola in these debates – referenced by both Luca and by Breton in the *Second Manifesto* – where his works are imagined by various Proletkultists to be the epic prefiguration of the proletarian literature of the future. In this regard, Communist writer Henri Barbusse imagines Zola's specialty to be an "art de synthèse" (Toma 120) – which echoes the ambitions of the Romanian interwar avant-garde.

of "means and ends." Here, the big question was whether revolutionary or utopian ends justify oppressive and violent means, and the various answers proposed tended to invoke the "truth" of history, and the status and accessibility of truth itself.[33] In a 1936 poem Paul Păun foreshadows these questions and answers, speaking once again in the voice of proletarian revolutionaries: "And we know: / the green along our path will be in flames/ we will destroy, we will kill / […] / We will blacken the earth./ […] We do not know if this is evil, / but the same as storms, as torrents / […] our powers unfurl over the world." Caught up, in other words, in the torrent of historical determinism, truth and justice, one's actions become as implacable and necessary as the clouds that carry storms, regardless of the collateral destruction.[34] This attitude is an excellent recipe – as the Infra Noir group later came to feel as the Iron Curtain fell in Romania – for politically motivated repression, purges, and censorship. Much of their project in the forties, nevertheless, was to continue to seek the truth of history, to seek an objective history's-eye-view, while avoiding what inevitably results when one human entity or another possesses this truth – either sterile ossification or bloody terror.

All this raises the question of what Luca, Păun and the others, as contributors to *Cuvântul Liber*, would have to say about the Infra Noir surrealist group which they all eventually joined. For a better idea, one can look more closely at what they have to say about Surrealism at this time, as they move gradually toward becoming Surrealists themselves. In one June 1935 article, Luca writes that the Surrealist movement takes a "double" aspect – as the "death rattle of a culture in extremis" and at the same time as a

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33 For this see Chapter Two.

34 See Paul Păun, "Morala din sânge" (The Morality of the Blood), *Cuvântul Liber* 48 (October 3, 1936). In another poem of 1936, the proletariat is infused with the powers of nature ("our soul grows from the earth"), here joined with those of history (in "Toate ne cheamă" "Everything Calls Us"). *Cuvântul Liber* 32, June 13, 1936).

radical opening to a new culture in embryo (none of which has anything to do with surrealist efforts in Romania, which Luca compares to a stylish cravate imported from abroad). It is for this reason that he defends the movement from Ilya Ehrenburg's accusations in the 1934 *Vus par un écrivain de l'URSS*, where Ehrenburg famously writes that "[l]es surréalistes veulent bien et du Hegel et du Marx et de la Révolution, mais ce qu'ils refusent c'est de travailler. Ils ont leurs occupations. Ils étudient, par exemple, la pédérastie et les rêves."[35] Luca dislikes Ehrenburg's mudslinging, especially at a time when refractory attitudes toward all that is "new and fresh," as Luca puts it, tend more to characterize rightists and fascists, and even more so because "it is forbidden to a dialectical spirit to laugh at even the most extraordinary and misunderstood inventions." The Surrealist movement, which Luca feels deserves an "ample and clarificatory study," is at the very least an organic and necessary part of literary-cultural history; its unique methods and theories are valuable not so much in themselves as because they have represented a possibility of "escape," a "bridge" to something else, a necessary element in a dialectical negation.[36]

What ended up, ultimately, being dialectically negated – not abandoned but absorbed and transcended – was Luca's adherence to the Communist political faith, and his commitment, such as it was, to proletarian poetry. On the one hand, in the mid-to-late

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[35] Quoted in Breton, "Du temps que les surréalistes avaient raison," *Œuvres II* (461). Ehrenburg even continues: "Ils mettent en avant un autre programme: l'onanisme, la pédérastie, le fétichisme, l'exhibitionnisme, et même la sodomie." These accusations provoked Breton, just before the 1935 Congrès Internationale pour la défense de la Culture" in Paris, to repeatedly slap Ehrenburg upon recognizing him in the street. Around this time, and less excessively, the former Surrealist Pierre Naville was also arguing disapprovingly that "Surrealist speculation about the mind at a time when it was conditioned by innumerable social factors all of which would be changed by the revolution, suggested that they believed in some form of spiritual liberation anterior to and independent of the abolition of bourgeois conditions of life." See Robert Short, "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," in Spiteri and LaCoss ed., *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 25.

[36] Gherasim Luca, "Constantin Micu: Sosirea lavelor" (Constantin Micu: the Rise of the Lava) *Cuvântul Liber* 33 (June 22, 1935), in *Inventorul iubirii și alte scrieri* (330-332).

30s there are Surrealism's inevitable associations (Luca mentions the movement's "condemnable outward appearance and preoccupations"[37]) with the same "dream and irreality," "shadows and mystery," "hypnotism," and in particular "mysticism" glorified by groups like Corneliu Codreanu's fascist Legionaries.[38] It seemed a much more urgent task to fight myths than to create and/or explore them. In the 40s, in fact, Luca's former Communist colleagues in Romania continued to feel this way, disgruntled at best by efforts like the myth-oriented *Le Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition. On the other hand, in his journalism Luca betrays an increasing frustration with what could only be called a lack of imagination on the part of both right and left. He writes in an article on Constantin Brâncuși in late 1937, for example, that in a Romania "hostile to a normal spiritual respiration," those with lungs that are "more powerful and more savage" have no choice but to leave; the country itself is a "fierce enemy of the liberty of creation," of everything that is "immense and unshackled" within the artist.[39] Romanian readers and writers have a great deal to learn, Luca feels, from someone like Lautréamont, whose *Poésies* Luca discusses in 1938 as part of *Reporter* magazine's weekly feature on under-appreciated poets – around the time of his departure for France as a kind of Communist cultural liaison.[40] Lautréamont – who had been appropriated by Surrealism as a founding father – raises "a troubling question mark, to which only avant-garde poets and people of

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[37] Ibid. (330).

[38] See Luca, "Garda de fier vechi" (Scrap-Iron Guard), *Reporter* 40 (December 12, 1937), in *Inventorul iubirii și alte scrieri* (350-53).

[39] Gherasim Luca, "Constantin Brâncuși," *Lumea Românească* (September 12, 1937), in *Inventorul iubirii și alte scrieri* (344-45).

[40] For this see Chapter Two. This appointment was also a means for Luca to urgently depart Romania: see Luca's notes between 1957-59 for an "Anthologie des poètes juifs de langue roumaine" (Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, 50466 GHL ms54): he writes to Mark Uveeler (who headed the cultural and education program of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany from 1956 on), that in January 1938, "date de l'arrivée au pouvoir du premier gouvernement anti-sémite Goga-Cuza [Octavian Goga and Alexandru C. Cuza], j'ai dû quitter la Roumanie en 24 heures par crainte de représailles pour mes articles anti-hitlériens" (quoted in Toma 43).

revolutionary culture have known how to daringly respond." Young writers who wish to create a poetry for and of their time must first pass through *Maldoror* and learn from it "unease, cruelty, aggressivity," swallow its "pill of revolt and poison." Like the Surrealist movement itself, *Maldoror* is a necessary stage in a dialectical negation, to be both surpassed and preserved like a memory of primeval revolt that sustains practical revolutionary action. This sustaining memory will prove to be powerful for Luca, and will keep drawing him back into its "diabolical" circle. This process will culminate with his highly Maldororian and wholly surrealist *Le Vampire passif,* begun upon his return from France in 1940 and published in 1945 – Luca's first published work in French, and his first published surrealist work. But even while still a proletarian poet and passionate Communist in 1930s Bucharest, Luca does not abandon his belief that any doctrine, no matter how right and good, must take careful account of its outside – of what exceeds it, or what is heretical with respect to it. One must never forget how to sift and unsettle doctrines or, as he puts it in one 1937 article, to "electrify" them, to replenish them with fresh air.[41]

In April 1935, two months before Luca's take on Ehrenburg and Surrealism in *Cuvântul Liber*, Dolfi Trost contributed an article titled "Surrealism" to *Rampa* magazine. Here Trost, like Luca, dismissively summarizes Romanian surrealist efforts,

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41 Gherasim Luca, "Tineretul patetic," *Reporter* 36 (September 14, 1937), in *Inventorul iubirii și alte scrieri* (346-47). In 1937, Luca also published a novel, *Fata Morgana*. Toma comments on this work: "En pleine période de 'floraison' du 'réalisme socialiste," cette œuvre, tout en préservant son filon révolutionnaire, emprunte non pas le trajet rectiligne indiqué et certifié par le parti, mais celui dessiné par les méandres de l'imagination, de la vision, de la voyance. Pour Luca, la réorganisation sociale relève non seulement d'une action sur la réalité immédiate, mais aussi du mirage, de la rêverie, du présage" (127-128). In this novel's compromise between the principles Luca supports in his journalism and those he will proclaim in the 40s, other critics find an ultimately untenable hybridity. Morar writes that although *Fata Morgana* is a *roman à thèse*, and "initially appears to follow the logic of the classic, 'realist' story, the narrated events rapidly transgress the laws of objective reality, sliding into the fantastic and absurd"; he thus finds it "unreadable" (220). Ion Pop finds the novel a "failure" for its unresolved tension between nuanced ideas about poetic language and poetic imagination, and rigid, wooden allegories (*Introducere* 202-203).

explaining that its proponents tend to confuse Surrealism with a vaguely-defined "modernism," and are mostly Dadaists at best. Surrealism itself, however, has the potential to "become one of the components of the art of tomorrow" – acting, as for Luca, as a necessary point of transition. The work Surrealism does, in fact, is not only "negative": its "abolition of inhibitions of all kinds which appear in current systems" has the effect of interweaving its discoveries inextricably with the realities of daily existence, allowing the unconscious to "nourish" conscious life. For this, Surrealism requires that one "transpose [one]self into its way of seeing," in a mode of reception that Trost calls *retrăire*: re-living. Its domain cannot be exclusively artistic, since the liberty it calls for is rather a "vital departure that requires of life and of art new senses, that requires of the quotidian new aspects." Its goal is to find a liberty that is not conditioned and pinioned by the past.[42]

In the following year, in the pages of *Cuvântul Liber* alongside Luca and Păun, Trost engages with the social and political problems of his moment as well as with their relation to artistic form and content. What is the relationship, he keeps asking, between the artist and the past, the artist and history, the artist and ideology? What liberty is possible for art, which respect to these things? In January 1936 Trost reviews a right-wing historical publication, composing a scathing synopsis of right-wing positions and phobias in Romania.[43] These tend to be seasoned with attacks on those responsible for the "new literature, which weakens national unity and introduces the seeds of dissolution."

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42 Trost, "Suprarealism," in *Rampa* (April 14, 1935).

43 The book is *The Dialectics of Nationalism* by Nicolae Roşu. Trost's synopsis includes "copious anti-Semitic diatribes," a general "butchering" of Marxism considered as an "Asiatic-Judaic" menace (alongside that of "Judaeo-Masonic" France), "attacks on parties that have sold themselves to the Jews," the sinister influence in Romania of Russia (where "the people eat children and the children eat dirt"), and accusations of ritual murder based on the Protocols of Zion.

But while in the West, "a dying class wants to believe that all mankind is dying," to the East a different perspective unfurls:

> there, where the primordial desiderata of man have been resolved, *there* there arises a new culture, amid which a new man arises, a truly new man, with other perspectives, with other knowledge, with a different appreciation of life – not that new man who is no more than a handpuppet in uniform, who in reality serves unknown overseers and a class in liquidation.[44]

Both to the West and to the East, the artist's work is "conditioned" by social-political factors beyond his control. But while the Western artist's constraints, determinants and "overseers" are unknown to him, the Eastern artist has come to a lucid, active consciousness of these factors. The artist is always free to imagine a world that belongs to no existing "human formula," and to desire a sort of "unfettered liberty." But this liberty can be no more than an illusion, for the artist, whether he is aware of it or not, has "breathed the atmosphere of his epoch, which presents all things to him not only in specific forms," but with "a hidden index of deformation," of refraction. Where he believes himself to be most free, in other words, is where his reality is most refracted by his social-political milieu. Therefore, Trost concludes, he must decide whether he belongs to the "old" or the "new" world, though he belongs to one of them even if he refuses this choice. There is no neutral position, no "third formula."[45]

In an article titled "Scepticism before the Revolution," Trost applies this observation to what is known as Pascal's wager. The philosopher Blaise Pascal had it that there is no neutral position between heaven and hell, and that one stands to lose everything by deciding that God does not exist, and to gain everything by deciding that he does. It is far better, therefore, to wager on the second option. In Trost's analogy, the

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[44] Trost, "Începe dreapta să aibe o doctrină?" (Is the Right beginning to have a doctrine?), in *Cuvântul Liber* (January 4, 1936). Trost's answer to this question is no.
[45] Trost, "Literatură" (Literature), *Cuvântul Liber* 34 (June 27, 1936).

place of God is held by the Communist revolution in the making. And whereas in Pascal's version, the wager on heaven is without real risk, in the great struggle between the revolutionary and the reactionary it is not, for as Trost writes, "he who wagers […] modifies his behavior with regard to those who do not wager." In other words, to wager on the Party plunges one into immediate action, alongside friends against a common enemy. Further, while Pascal's wager was aimed toward an audience of sceptics and doubters, in the present historical context such hangers-on and holders-back are always already "complicit" with the enemy, since there is no middle ground for the sceptic to stand on. Essentially, Trost is undermining the very possibility of reasoned doubt. For in the case that the Party's "monstrous and collective effort to transform the world […] were not an illusion," and were in fact "mankind's biggest ever collective effort to kill evil," then such doubt would be nothing more than "rebellion against the truth." The truth – and the truth of history itself – is now within grasp. And once one has the truth, there is no excuse for disagreement (and no excuse particularly, as Trost puts it, for "books of dreams").[46]

What becomes of Surrealist "liberty," of its "vital departure," in this context? In the 40s, as we will soon see, the Infra Noir surrealist group explicitly rejects the dichotomous logic that Trost outlines here, in the context both of postwar Surrealism's struggle against Stalinist currents both within and without, and of Romania's postwar conversion to what Trost later disgustedly calls "Sovietism." And even now, when Trost's powerful faith in the communist truth is at its height, this faith is tempered by his belief that something in art and literature remains irreducibly foreign to these Manichaean matters of good and evil. Trost is already perceptibly pushing back, as well, against the

[46] Trost, "Scepticismul în fața revoluției," *Cuvântul Liber* 42 (August 22, 1936).

idea that art, insofar as it seeks an intrinsic liberty, is "fleeing reality" and "contenting itself with stylistic exhibitions." As he writes in a 1937 article:

> to the objection that people perceive reality in a way distinguished by their belonging to a social class, one might oppose the existence of a wider framework where there is room enough for strictly individual manifestations. The artist fraternizes with the collective, and takes its pulse. But this auscultation does not exclude the existence of an irreducibly personal vision.[47]

This is for the most part because art, though it has the responsibility of both "mirroring" and supporting great social upheavals, does not merely "re-give" the world, but instead "re-lives" it. For this, the personal and subjective, the imagination and its incertitudes, are all required, and cannot be rejected as reactionary. The artist must indeed catch the rhythm of history, adhere to reality, join the struggle. But he must never "re-give" the forms and norms of the world, even if he is accused of being a "formalist." To support this conclusion, Trost returns once more to Surrealism, and in particular to the "outsider" André Breton (he uses the English word), who distinguishes between the "manifest" content and the "latent" content of an epoch.[48] Artworks that *re-give* reality founder in the manifest content of history, and those that *re-live* it derive power and integrity from

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47 Trost, "Atitudinea Realistă" (The Realist Attitude), *Lumea Românească* 123 (October 2, 1937). This position recalls that of Breton in the *Second Manifesto*: "Je ne crois pas à la possibilité d'existence actuelle d'une littérature ou d'un art exprimant les aspirations de la classe ouvrière […]. En période pré-révolutionnaire l'écrivain ou l'artiste, de formation nécessairement bourgeoise, est par définition inapte à les traduire. […] Il n'échappera […] au doute remarquable, inhérent aux moyens d'expression qui sont les siens, qui le force à considérer, en lui-même et pour lui seul, sous un angle très spécial l'œuvre qu'il se propse d'accomplir." *Œuvres* I (804-805).

48 See the editorial for the ninth issue (1936) of the Surrealist periodical *Minotaure*: "En présence d'une actualité de jour en jour de plus en plus dévorante et tout compte tenu des formes de notre périodicité nous croyons pouvoir dire que, fidèle à son titre même, *Minotaure* s'est proposé d'absorber et de dépasser en ce qu'elle a de toujours épisodique, cette actualité. Nous nous réclamons de cette opinion qu'on ne peut faire œuvre d'art ni même en dernier analyse, oeuvre utile en s'attachant à n'exprimer que le *contenu manifeste* d'une époque et que ce qu'importe par dessus tout est l'expression de son CONTENU LATENT." In "Limites non frontières du surréalisme," Breton makes this distinction between latent and manifest into an argument against socialist realism: "Nous contestons formellement qu'on puisse faire œuvre d'art […] en s'attachant à n'exprimer que le *contenu manifeste* d'une époque. Ce que, par contre, le surréalisme se propose est l'expression de son *contenu latente*" (*Œuvres* III, 665). "Limites" was widely published some months before Trost wrote "Atitudinea Realistă."

its latent content. In fact, Trost adds, "through a strange mechanism, precisely what was most 'latent,' most subterranean, most deeply stratified in an epoch, appear[s] in art." Thus the fact that "there exists no domain forbidden to the artist" is at once a danger and a blessing: in the dark and subterranean zones of lived history, the artist is exposed to its most sinister ideologies and myths, but its deepest truths are also revealed to him. There cannot be one without the other.[49]

The distinction between manifest and latent content in history also allows certain confusions and paradoxes to be cleared up, to a degree. Communist doctrine, as interpreted by Luca, Păun, and Trost, seems at the same time to urge that one regain or maintain contact with history, and to claim it is impossible to *lose* contact with history – in other words, that its ruthless "determinants" and hidden "indexes" of refraction always already circumscribe one's freedoms and hesitations. To plead for the autonomy of the lived and the personal in art is to ask whether there is any escape from history. But it could be that, for Trost at least, the manifest content of history is a kind of hologram produced by his "indexes" of distortion and refraction, and that by plunging down toward history's latent content – via art or otherwise – one can get behind or beneath the glittering, refracting surfaces, to that darker, more uncertain and perilous realm where illusions and ideologies are made and destroyed.

As for Paul Păun and his own gradual turn toward Surrealism, in 1939 he published a long poem, illustrated with gouaches by Perahim, whose title *Plămânul*

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[49] "Atitudinea Realistă." A month later Trost makes a similar point in an article for *Cuvântul Liber* ("Tovarășii de drum," November 7, 1937, translated by Toma): "Nous savons tous que le visage du monde ne pourra être changé qu'en vertu de nos certitudes sociales et politiques. Nous savons que c'est l'unique voie pour résoudre nos problèmes […] Mais si nous voulons connaître l'homme intégral, non seulement dans ses parties lumineuses, mais aussi dans ses zones obscures […] nous ne devons rejeter ni les thèses d'André Breton concernant la littérature prolétarienne, ni l'œuvre de Salvador Dalí ou de Giorgio de Chirico, parce que ce sont-là les témoignages de notre temps" (125).

sălbatec (Savage Lung) recalls the language of Luca's article on Brâncuși.[50] Păun had already begun to strike surrealist and Maldororian notes in his proletarian poetry (he had also translated a selection from Lautréamont for *Cuvântul Liber* in 1938), returning as well to the revolutionary-erotic violence of *Viața imediată*, and to the Bogzian theme of the dream as principle of action. His 1936 poem "The Morals of the Blood" calls out:

> People, / from us now, all is suspended, / from that vertigo of the blood / from the light of our dreams, / this all, which marries dream, will and fact./ […] There are songs of life and love of life / that like hearts beat in our flesh / filling us with dreams as with a luminous fog. / […] It is our blood that erupts over the cities / our blood that burns and drowns / our blood, poisonous […] / that menaces now / the troubled nights of the world.[51]

These notes are louder in *Plămânul,* a poem of a before and an after – of a passionate but self-involved adolescence, and an adulthood that has come, simultaneously, to social consciousness and to knowledge of the "bitter discipline of nature." Păun first evokes his adolescence in a "hymn to night":

> Night, my betrothed, / how great my love for your phantom light, / how great my love, in the liberty of your loneliness / for the rootless trees of delirium / […] You are sometimes that sad, interior light / when all things flow around me and leave thirsty, / when my brow breaks the surface of rounder hours, / more human […].[52]

His youth, dedicated to night and delirium, was the time to "populate the whole world with myself," the time to love women "as the assassin loves flesh and knives" – their scattered limbs literally becoming his "incendiary proclamations." In the drowned, mossy night-city of youth, he wanted "between men a peace formed of madness, a logic of dreams."[53] But it is to these early, immature dreams and revolts, the poet acknowledges, that he owes his adulthood, "my paths and the strong words / that severed me and brought

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[50] I refer here to the 1939 book version of the poem; its original publication was in the magazine *Azi* (7:32), 1938.
[51] Paul Păun, "Morala din sânge," *Cuvântul Liber* 48, October 3, 1936.
[52] Paul Păun, *Plămânul sălbatec* (Bucharest: I.E. Torouțiu, 1939), 8-9.
[53] Ibid. (25).

me among men," to a city that is no longer of watery dreams and night but of fire, racked by the "immanent revolution" of nature. Nature in *Plămânul* is a kind of underground reservoir into which everything flows at once: the energies of the collective (as opposed to those of the self); the memories and impulses of adolescent revolt and dream; the turbulence of sensation as interface with the present moment ("with your nerves external like a living shirt"); the truth and destiny of history; the iron laws of reality as well as its "dialectical flux and reflux," its chance and "happenstance." Flooding its spillways are all the "noirs déterminants extérieurs" – as Păun formulates it some years later – that govern and animate human life.[54] Păun's nature is red in tooth and claw – with "[its] monstrous, [its] intimate sides / and [its] nakedness." Its cruelty teaches the poet a cruelty that he soon turns against his teacher (who is also his mother): "you taught me how to stick a knife in your throat / if I want from you to flow / sun and rain for mankind."[55] For insofar as nature is female, the poet must both ravage and destroy her in her incarnation as Past, and become – or absorb – her in her incarnation as Future. The poet-become-nature then makes a "salto mortale toward reality": "with a more savage lung I return / full of the white wind of madness, / full of the swordblades of the mountains / full of the breath of millions of people / full of fists, / full of storm."[56] In this late apotheosis of the proletarian poem, the poet – like some latter-day avatar of Kali – rides the wavecrest of history. He has finally caught its ruthless, sanguine rhythm.

In 1945, five years after the return of Gherasim Luca and Gellu Naum to Bucharest from Paris and the formation of the Infra Noir surrealist group, Păun together with Naum and Virgil Teodorescu published the manifesto *Critica mizeriei* (Critique of

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[54] See Paul Păun, *Les Esprits animaux* (Bucharest: La collection surréaliste Infra-Noir, 1947), 4-5.
[55] Ibid. (26).
[56] *Plămânul* (34).

Poverty), calling for "THE PERMANENT EFFORT TOWARD THE LIBERATION OF HUMAN EXPRESSION IN ALL ITS FORMS, a liberation which cannot be conceived outside of the total liberation of mankind." The authors identify this permanent effort by now, of course, with the Surrealist movement. Surrealism must be defended not only from its small-minded critics (from whom the authors generously quote, after the model of the "Before and After" section of the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*), and from the police and the censors, but from traitorous and "confusionist" fellow-travelers, meaning the prewar Romanian "modernists" (the authors scare-quote the term) from the Integralists to *unu*. *Critica mizeriei* cuts itself off entirely from all those prewar modernists who have been "surprised to see that the Surrealist revolt goes beyond 'the poetic image'" – for their "merely formal, merely poetic preoccupation is indeed a unique product, characteristic of our avant-gardist movements." They owe their "reactionary" understanding of Surrealism to this formalist attitude, which sees in the movement only a "verbal revolution." In this regard the manifesto authors find Saşa Pană – the former editor of *unu* and (at least in the mid-thirties) the sole critical champion of Surrealism in Romania – particularly culpable, to the point of "nausea." They are incensed by Pană's 1936 *Sadismul adevărului* for many reasons, among them his assertion that "the political attitude of the Surrealists is one of those who are aloof. Politically speaking, they have remained poets."[57] The authors uphold, in response, the dialectical materialism of the *Second Manifesto* and of essays like Breton's 1937 "Limites non frontières du surréalisme."

In *Sadismul adevărului* – featured in the 10th issue (1937) of the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure* amid a photographic spread of international surrealist books and

[57] Quoted in *Critica mizeriei* (Bucharest: Colecția Suprarealistă, 1945), 10.

journals[58] – Pană nuances his positions with respect to Surrealism and politics somewhat more than the authors of *Critica mizeriei* give him credit for. He draws a distinction, for example, between the political and the "revolutionary" (as the Infra Noir group will later do)[59]: the surrealists "have not been contaminated by facile and falsely proletarian poetry. They make use of a spiritual inheritance transmitted like so many tools of technical research, applying them to a revolutionary activity, not to a political activity in compliance with some five-year plan." Moreover, despite the fact that this revolutionary activity, whatever it might be, is open only to "visionaries," Surrealism is revolutionary precisely because it tends toward "the destruction of myths," and as Pană makes clear, "present society has, for its foundation, myths." Thus to work within the domain of myth is to work socially, and to overturn myths is to set the wheel of revolution spinning. Pană continues:

> Only after an understanding has penetrated the blood of the masses of the frailty of myths – which first the Dadaists in Zurich, then immediately after them […] the Surrealists in France juggled as they would juggle objects that can be tossed, once broken, to the trashheap – can a new era arise.[60]

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[58] In September 1938 Pană received a letter from Paul Eluard: "Je connais depuis fort longtemps votre activité, je l'aprécie vivement et je m'excuse de ne pas vous avoir remercié plus tôt de votre beau livre: *Sadismul adevărului*, dont j'ai reproduit la couverture parmi d'autres documents dans n. 10 de la revue *Minotaure*" (Pană, *Născut în '02*, 581). Two years earlier in 1936 Pană had heard from Breton, after sending him a copy of *Sadismul* (I translate from Pană's Romanian rendition): "I have not lost hope that in October I will bring about the appearance of an international journal of Surrealism, for which I would have need of your collaboration. Is it possible? Would you be inclined to send me for the first number a general overview of the intellectual-artistic situation in Romania (from the Surrealist angle, of course?)" (*Născut* 581). After a later letter from Breton with a request for an article on the Surrealist movement in Romania, Pană muses: "But was there anything like that organized in Romania? Who is still beside me? C. Nisipeanu, Gellu Naum" (ibid. 537). Nisipeanu is among those Romanian surrealist-sympathizers later mocked in *Critica mizeriei* – where Naum, once considered by Pană one of the only true surrealists in Romania, now no longer considers Pană to be one.

[59] Toma, after hypothesizing that "la rupture des surréalistes avec les structures communistes officielles, en 1935, ait contribué dans une certaine mesure aux réserves des publicistes roumains [Luca and others] envers les thèses soviétiques et des mesures mises en place afin de combattre les écarts" (125), points out that they saw the necessity of dissociating "leur propre conception de l'art et de la littérature révolutionnaires de celle élaborée par les idéologues soviétiques."

[60] Pană, *Sadismul* (139-40). Pană goes on to quote from Claude Cahun's 1934 *Les Paris sont ouverts,* where she writes with regard to Breton's movement: "La leçon positive de cette expérience négative, c'est-à-dire sa transfusion dans le prolétariat, constitue la seule propagande poétique révolutionnaire valable."

By the time the Infra Noir group had taken shape, however – as the group prepared to join its efforts to the 1947 international surrealist exhibition devoted to myth – they had switched positions with Pană. Pană had become, from 1945 on, the editor of the literary magazine *Orizont* (Horizon) from which he would exclude the postwar Romanian surrealists on the grounds of insufficient class consciousness, political aloofness, ivory-tower privileging of poetic form over social content, and deafness to the rhythm of history. The five former proletarian poets and Communist journalists of Infra Noir, who had struggled against campaigns of vicious anti-Communist censorship in the late 30s, had now become Surrealists – the worst kind of apostasy in the new postwar order. For from the time the Red Army entered Romania in the summer of 1944, the Soviets began – at first gradually, then at a violent pace – to transform a society still caught between rural tradition and new capitalist growth into a totalitarian-utopian project, complete with five-year plans, nationalization, collectivization, party bureaucracy, and secret police and security forces. On the cultural plane, as Magda Cârneci writes, "il s'agit […] d'un modèle soviétique préétabli de déstructuration de la vie intellectuelle par la combinaison habile d'une propagande rhétorique […] avec des mesures fortes qui visent de plus en plus ouvertement l'intimidation et la terreur."[61] This model proceeds in stages: first the Party decides that art is an ideological weapon, an instrument in a struggle for power, and thus must submit totally to the needs of the Party; second, the state acquires a monopoly on creative manifestations and puts a mechanism in place to guide and control them; third, the Party chooses a single, Soviet-inspired, and obligatory aesthetic model – socialist realism – and declares cold-blooded war on

[61] Magda Cârneci, *Art et pouvoir en Roumanie, 1945-1989* (Paris: Harmattan, 2007), 18-19.

everything else.[62] What happened in Romania after the Second World War subsided was, in the words of Cârneci, the forced politicization of culture, where artistic and political facts could no longer be separated. Artists were now called to participate in the "ideological restructuration of consciousness."[63]

Former avant-gardists and Algists like Pană and Aurel Baranga, in the second half of the 40s, having repudiated their earlier creative efforts, now seemed to be competing in a race to the Party line. Many – though by no means all – appeared at first to be thriving in the new ideological environment. Ion Pop finds this, if anything, natural:

> the radicalization of the attitudes of these writers and artists, who had been promised, for the first time, the active realization of certain of [their] aspirations – aspirations toward identifying innovative experiments in the domain of [artistic] creation with transformative social praxis – appeared to be within the logic of things. With so many luminous horizons promised by a propaganda intensely sustained by the Soviet occupiers, accompanied by mystifications as to the realities [of life] in the USSR, but also under the influence of the struggle against the Nazist Hitlerism that had ruined Europe and carried out anti-Semitic genocide or against, in Romania, Legionary terrors, the avant-gardist writers of before could feel called to an unconditional adhesion, morally obliged to participate in the "great groundswell" that was transforming the world. Before such revolutionary élan, hyperbolized and mythicized by overwhelming propaganda, the great and small literary and artistic revolutions in which they had participated could move, indeed, to the background.[64]

With such high hopes, disillusion often followed. But the postwar Infra Noir group began its life already disillusioned with the new Soviet utopia being constructed in Romania. In the 30s, in *Cuvântul Liber* and other periodicals, the members of Infra Noir had seen the view from the wavecrest of history, its Communist avant-garde. Now, they were ready to

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[62] Ibid. (27), quoting from Igor Golomstock, *L'Art totalitaire* (Paris: Carré, 1991), 12-13.
[63] Ibid. (38). For another account of this ideological restructuration see for example Ana Selejan, *Trădarea intelectualilor: reeducare şi prigoană* (Sibiu: Cartea Românească, 2005) and Selejan, *România în timpul primului război cultural, 1944-1948* (Sibiu: Transpres, 1992).
[64] Ion Pop, "Din avangardă în ariergardă," in *Din avangardă spre ariergardă* (Bucharest: Editura Vinea, 2010), 210. The effects of the horrific legacy of genocide on the largely Jewish former interwar avant-garde should not be underestimated.

descend into history's deeper, darker, "latent" strata, where myths, dreams, truths and lies collide.

In order to do so, they would have to do the opposite of what they had heretofore aspired toward: become untimely. The literary critic Vladimir Streinu writes about them, in 1945:

> The painful sentiment, after reading our "Surrealists," comes […] from the backwardness in which the minds of these young people place themselves, at an age at which it would be normal to expect movements more synchronous [with the times], if not even more free, and even anticipations of the lyricism of the future. [They] […] please themselves with a literary anachronism, that today, when the instantaneity of links with the entire world raises all marginalized countries to the contemporary level, has become inconceivable.[65]

In 1931, Geo Bogza had insisted on a faculty of unknowing that is required both for creative and for social action. This could also be called a faculty of untimeliness – of un-seeing what *is*, so that what is *not* might be imagined. Bogza had written of acting blindfolded, literally with blind passion. The big problem is this: that all those in the thrall of the twentieth century's worst ideologies, its most unsavory myths and most blatant forms of false consciousness – including those who found in fascism a liberating unreason, and those who, at first, saw in the new Soviet order a radiant eschaton – were also acting in blindness, and they were blindest to the truth precisely at the moment they believed they had found it. For the Bogzian visionary (and later, for the Infra Noir somnambulist in Chapter Four) blindness is necessary to see beyond the lie of the given; but blindness also can lead directly into its jaws. Similarly, while to be "in touch" with one's historical moment is conceived as a kind of lucidity, to be a "product" of one's

[65] Vladimir Streinu, *Suprarealismul: Şcoală neliterară* (Surrealism: Unliterary School), quoted in Morar (8-9).

historical moment, which amounts to basically the same thing, is conceived as a kind of blindness.

Blind faith – like that of a sleepwalker, eyes closed and confidently placing one foot before the other – is thus a double-edged sword. On the eve of the Second World War, the members of Infra Noir, beginning with Naum and followed by Luca and then the others,[66] placed their faith in an untimely Surrealism – which was, to borrow the words of St. Paul, foolishness to their ambivalent prewar contemporaries, and a stumbling block for those marching toward the utopian future. In the following chapter, as Luca and Naum travel to Paris, soon to join the Surrealists, and then return to Bucharest two years later to start a surrealist group, they will continue to encounter problems of myth and of blindness, and continue to seek the rhythm of history, only to find that truth and lie are its beat and cross-beat.

[66] When Luca and Naum returned from Paris in 1940, Trost, Teodorescu, and Păun had already collaborated on a collection of short texts called *Diamantul conduce mâinile: texte oculare* (The Diamond Guides the Hands: Ocular Texts). They are scenes from a kind of oneiric theater, concentrated, in Teodorescu's words, "like homeopathic pills" (Virgil Teodorescu, *Armonia contrariilor* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1977). Quoted in Morar (216)). One such text, for example, reads: "The statue, gravid and full of hollows inhabited by lizards, has stopped on the bank of the lake. Pride prevents it from drowning in the water's green duckweeds. But it decides to enter the water. To the degree that it advances, the lake petrifies, surprising a flock of geese, which succumb to silence. The gravid statue disappears. The lizards however run madly upon the petrified surface." "Statuia seacă lacul" (The Statue Dries Up the Lake), reprinted in Saşa Pană, *Antologia literaturii române de avangardă* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1969).

Chapter Two. Infra Noir and the Surrealist Postwar

1. **Myth, Heresy, and the Surrealist Cold War**

The German occupation of Paris in the early summer of 1940 found Gellu Naum and Gherasim Luca alone and wandering the increasingly hostile streets of the city. Many of their friends, including the Romanian-born Victor Brauner and Jacques Hérold, were preparing to join the temporary surrealist community at Villa Air Bel in Marseilles, which took shape a matter of weeks after Luca and Naum left France for Romania. If the two had had the connections and the wherewithal to flee to the south of France, they might have ended up at Air Bel too, and their story would be a much different one.

Naum had been in Paris since the summer of 1938, researching a thesis in medieval philosophy at the Sorbonne at the encouragement of his friend and mentor Brauner. Luca had arrived at the beginning of that year, also with Brauner's help, just in time for the opening of the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition at the Galerie Beaux-Arts. Luca was representing the Romanian branch of the Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires (AEAR) in order to facilitate an exchange of "progressive" literature through translation and publishing arrangements; Brauner had planned for him to meet Louis Aragon, then overseeing the PCF newspaper *Ce Soir*. Perhaps because of the Aragon connection, the Paris surrealists, as well as Naum and his circle, at first held Luca at a distance for some time.[1]

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[1] See Iulian Toma, *Gherasim Luca ou L'intransigeante passion d'être* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 40-42, and Stelian Tănase, *Avangarda românească în arhivele Siguranței* (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), 85-93 and 188-189. Naum tells the interviewer Rémy Laville that while he himself was uninterested in political debates and in the PCF at this time (though he adheres "aux idées de la Fédération Internationale de l'Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant," or F.I.A.R.I., both anti-Stalinist and anti-Fascist) Luca had the reputation of

In Paris between 1938 and 1940 in any case, both Naum and Luca made friends among the surrealists (for example Pierre Mabille, Benjamin Péret, Arthur Adamov, and Camille Bryen, whose 1937 *L'Aventure des objets* may have influenced Luca's *Le Vampire passif*); made contact with Breton (Luca recounts a tongue-tied meeting outside the Gradiva gallery in 1938); tried their hand at writing in French (Naum's 1939 "L'Image présente à l'esprit" and Luca's unpublished *Les Poètes de vingt ans* in 1938); and experimented with surrealist games and other ritual practices. Brauner, steeped in occult, mesmerist and mystical traditions, deeply influenced the work and interests of the two young writers at this time.

The rising tide of the war put a stop to these activities, as friends and surrealists sought refuge or took up arms. Naum recounts a sense of rejection, "abandonment," anguish: "il n'y a plus que Luca pour partager ce quotidien déserté."[2] For lack of any other options, the two finally took a train to Venice just before Italy's declaration of war on France in the mid-summer of 1940. They arrived in Bucharest just before Ion Antonescu's National Legionary State took hold and the rule of the fascist Iron Guard began in September 1940. And by the time they arrived, they were both possessed by the idea of founding a Romanian Surrealist cell group. Given the practical realities in

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a "Stalinist" after working for *Cuvântul Liber* in Bucharest (Laville, *Gellu Naum: poète roumain, prisonnier au château des aveugles*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994, 41-42. See also Chapter One.) Toma questions this, saying that while Luca's links to the Party are undeniable, and prompted the Romanian secret police to follow his movements starting in 1937, Luca had problems with official Stalinist ideology, as well as with obeying Party "discipline." Toma was unable to find concrete evidence of Luca's 1938 involvement in *Ce Soir*. As for Luca's other activities at the time, one source refers to Luca's involvement in the 1938 Salon des Surindépendants in Paris (*Ghérasim Luca; Catti: Espace Sculfort.* Maubeuge: Idem plus arts, 2000, 25.) Monique Yaari notes that Luca was accompanied to Paris by his first wife, Annie Rasicovici. On the Stalinist question, she writes that on the whole Infra Noir group members' political engagement "a été refoulé par le cours que prit l'histoire sous Staline: les procès de Moscou en 1936, l'invasion de Finlande en 1939. A ce sujet, les récits recuillis et relatés par Micheline Catti, ainsi que les témoignages d'Annie Rasicovici […] et ceux de Réni Zaharia [Păun's wife], convergent. Lisant l'*Humanité* dans le train qui le conduisait à Paris, Luca se serait exclamé: 'Et c'est pour ça qu'on a risqué notre vie?'" See "Introduction" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple*, 23.

[2] Laville (46).

Bucharest, this was one of the most absurdly ambitious ideas they could have had. But they had each undergone a surrealist initiation in Paris, and though forced to leave that city, they were determined to bring something of its marvelous atmosphere back with them.

Luca, however, was immediately arrested at the border, more or less for being Jewish. He was soon released to join other Jewish citizens – a group increasingly overwhelmed, over the last decade, by assaults on their civil rights, a growing general hostility, and pogroms – on forced labor teams, clearing snow and debris from the streets, at least unless they could bribe their way into the possession of medical release papers. Luca recalls digging ditches at the Cotroceni-Poligon concentration camp, and later, gathering the dead after bombardments.[3] Naum, meanwhile, was mobilized in the country's north, though able to obtain frequent permission to visit family and friends in Bucharest. It was amid such conditions that Luca and Naum managed to draw together a small group of surrealist recruits: Virgil Teodorescu first, then Paul Păun, who drew in Dolfi Trost and Nadine Krainik.[4]

For Luca, Păun and Trost who were all three Jewish, their engagement with such a group was unquestionably illegal, and likely dangerous – partly because of anti-

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[3] Toma (45), quoting from materials at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (GHL ms54 50466). For the group's wartime activities see also Yaari, "Introduction: un et multiple au fil du temps," in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple*, 3.

[4] For this and other information about the period between 1940 and 1944, I draw on a series of interviews with Gellu Naum conducted by Rémy Laville and summarized in his *Gellu Naum.* For his account of Gherasim Luca's wartime trajectory, Petre Răileanu draws on the same source. Nadine Krainik was in many ways a central part of the group, but she contributed to none of its publications, designing only the cover for the manifesto *Critica Mizeriei* (1945). See Răileanu's *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: Oxus, 2004), 97. Michael Finkenthal points out in his monograph on Trost that while both Laville and Răileanu give the summer of 1940 as the date of Luca and Naum's arrival in Bucharest, Romanian secret police archives (gathered by Stelian Tănase in his 2008 *Avangarda românească în arhivele Siguranței*) have Luca in Bucharest in August 1939 (see Finkenthal, *D. Trost: între realitatea visului și visul ca realitate* (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2013), 41. Finkenthal also describes the difficult conditions facing the young Infra Noir group in his chapter "The War Years" (44-64).) Yaari also cites the 1939 date in her introductory essay to *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple*, 2.

conspiratorial laws that had crested a rising wave of virulent anti-Semitism as the fascist Iron Guard consolidated its power. What was worse, Luca and perhaps Păun would have had to wear red stars in addition to the yellow. Each member of the group had been involved to varying degrees with the illegal Romanian Communist Party, Communist youth groups, or Communist journals like *Cuvântul Liber*. Regardless of whether they had ever felt any admiration for Stalin's Russia – busy at the moment annexing and re-annexing parts of Romania – their prewar involvements, if they weren't careful, were sufficient to get them arrested and accused of espionage. In an additional irony, the beleaguered and still-clandestine RCP now considered them to be Trotskyists, which was grounds for exclusion from the very Party of which they were condemned for, or suspected of, being a part. Luca in particular had been denounced as a Trotskyist for modestly publicizing the 1938 French surrealist tract "Ni votre guerre ni votre paix." They were thus, as Petre Răileanu points out, doubly subversive: "la subversion de la subversion, voilà ce qui pourrait être un mot de Luca."[5] A group, then, of Jewish Trotskyist Surrealists in fascist wartime Romania. There could be no manifestos, no exhibitions. It could only be a Surrealism with the blinds drawn, one of secret meetings,

[5] *Gherasim Luca* (98). Răileanu even suspects that Infra Noir ruled out including certain interested parties in its circle – including Paul Celan and Isidore Isou – because of its strict Trotskyist outlook. Răileanu also mentions Jules Perahim as one who should by all rights have joined the Bucharest group but did not. Fearing the same dangers that this group faced, Perahim spent the war period in the Soviet Union (99). Celan arrived in Bucharest from Cernăuți, and began to attend Infra Noir gatherings, in the spring of 1945, when the group had already emerged into the open. Celan was also involved with a group surrounding the charismatic Nina Cassian, which took a ludic and less ideologically fraught approach to Surrealism. See Petre Solomon, "Paul Celan şi suprarealismul," in *Kulturlandschaft Bukowina: Studien zur deutschsprachigen Literatur des Buchenlandes nach 1918*, ed. Corbea and Astner (Iaşi: Editura Universității "Al. I. Cuza," 1990), 121.

secret codes, secret games.[6] It wasn't until the end of 1944 that the group began to emerge into daylight.

In 1940 and 1941 in the group's first two years, Luca worked on *Le Vampire passif* and Naum on *Medium* (both major works, discussed in Chapters Three and Four) but these would not be published for several years. Around this time, after the Iron Guard's failed revolt and its dissolution, Antonescu declared war on the Soviet Union in June 1941, and in the same month, over 13,000 Jewish Romanians died in the Iaşi pogrom and many others were deported. In 1944, after four years of clandestinity for Infra Noir, Allied forces bombarded Bucharest, and in August the Russians entered the city, relegalizing the Romanian Communist Party, and Romania declared war on Germany. Naum was redeployed in that year to guard German POWs being shipped out of Bucharest by triumphant Allied forces (while Păun became a POW camp medic), and in the fall of 1944 he published his volume of poems *Culoarul somnului* (The Corridor of Sleep). Like *Medium*, it reflected his days wandering the streets of ruined Bucharest. "The somnambulistic walk begins again," he writes, "on the fragile thread between dream and water / between death and waking / between memory and asphyxia."[7] In 1944 as well, Luca completed his *Quantitativement aimée*, a book-object layered with 944 metal pen nibs.[8] The trickle of works became a flood between 1945 and 1947, and in a series of

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6 Naum, via Laville, shares: "En attendant d'apparaître au grand jour, ils font des jeux, 'cadavres exquis' évidemment, ou 'théâtre simultané,' dont Luca est le maître, et qui consiste à improviser de façon délirante et parodique sur l'histoire de Roumanie ou sur les chefs-d'œuvre de la littérature mondiale" (52).

7 "Persistența flăcărilor" (The Persistence of the Flames), in Simona Popescu ed., *Gellu Naum I: Poezii* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2012), 149. This translation is mine, along with all further translations from Romanian unless otherwise indicated. See also Laville (69). In a letter to Brauner from June 1946, Naum writes that during this time he has been doing experiments with the "black egg" he describes in *Medium* (see Chapter Three). *Athanor* 2/2008, 27 June 1946 (39).

8 For an image of this rarest of rare books and an account of its content see Krzysztof Fijalkowski, "*La poésie sans language*: Ghérasim Luca, Visual Poet," in *Hyperion* Vol. VII No. 3 (Fall 2013), Ghérasim Luca Centenary Issue (23-24). One of Luca's personal notebooks from the early 70s (Doucet, GHL ms188)

exhibitions the group displayed these books as well as its drawings, its collages, and its found objects (in one case, oil lamps darkened in various suggestive ways by smoke). It may have been this sudden release of pent-up energy, this strange and abrupt freedom – but also the accumulated tensions and anxieties of wartime along with more personal and subterranean conflicts – that caused the group to come apart so quickly at the seams.[9]

The three years of the Bucharest group's clandestinity are, predictably, those about which least is known, but they are in a way a golden age, before its various schisms. They are also a period of gestation, after which Infra Noir surrealism appeared to emerge fully formed. This time of secrecy and isolation resulted in a branching of the evolutionary tree of Surrealism, something like a speciation event. On its Bucharest island, the Romanian group was taking Bretonian surrealism in inventive and, from the postwar Parisian point of view, occasionally disconcerting directions.

Infra Noir surrealism, then, began as a wartime surrealism. It took shape alongside other wartime surrealisms, other groups with which it was directly or indirectly connected. There were, for example, the surrealists including Brauner, Hérold, and André Breton who went to Marseilles; there were the surrealists, also including Breton, who took refuge in New York, and who returned in the mid-forties determined to revitalize the movement under the banner of the international *Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition. There were, finally, those who stayed put, like the French-Belgian Main à Plume group.

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reveals that he attempted to recover *Quantitativement* from a certain Mme Prodanoff who had bought it from an unknown person after it was left behind in Luca's flight from Bucharest in 1950.

9 For more on the group's early schism see below, as well as the last section of Chapter Three. It was also the case that, as Petre Solomon writes, printed criticisms of the Bucharest surrealist group and of Surrealism in general became more virulent, not less, during the period of "relative liberty" after August 1944 (Solomon 1990, 115; see also Chapter One). Solomon emphasizes the enormous ferment and confusion of those months, when the avant-garde came out of hiding, so to speak, all at once and everywhere new literary cenacles began to form.

The members of Main à Plume, whose theories and concerns are represented as well in the following two chapters, hailed in part from amid the prewar surrealists in France and Belgium, though many were too young to have had the chance to be part of it. Some, after their involvement in the French Resistance, later joined or rejoined Breton's group after the war. Others, as we will soon see, devoted themselves to attacking Breton's group in the name of Communist ideals, still others went on to found other groups and movements, and some did all three. Main à Plume's direct relations with Infra Noir were limited at best, but the two groups' trajectories, one in Bucharest and the other in Paris, run parallel in many ways. Like Infra Noir, the last the members of Main à Plume had heard on how to properly think and behave as a Surrealist was before Breton and others left Paris, or the continent, for the duration of the war. Like Infra Noir as well, Main à Plume was pulled between two opposing tendencies: first, to hold the flame of Surrealism aloft through the hell and high water of the war, staying faithful to Bretonian orthodoxy and avoiding all heretical deviations; second, as beacons of its truth and its becoming, to allow Surrealism room to grow and to strike out in new directions. As founding Main à Plume member Jean-François Chabrun comments, the prewar history of Surrealism "nous soulève et nous écrase à la fois."[10] As in Bucharest, moreover, the Parisian group had to face the worst of conditions for maintaining an active Surrealist group, under the threat of exposure, arrest, interrogation, even death, though with the

[10] Jean-François Chabrun, "Naissance de l'homme-objet" (*Transfusion du verbe*, 1941), in Anne Vernay and Richard Walter, *La Main à Plume: Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2008), 56. According to Gellu Naum himself, there was a certain ideological discipline imposed in the early Infra Noir group, based particularly on Breton's *Second Manifesto*; Naum became something of an authoritarian in these matters, a kind of deputy-Breton. Laville (49-51).

crucial difference that they were able to publish relatively frequently.[11] Finally, both the Main à Plume and Infra Noir groups began to fall apart almost simultaneously with the end of hostilities in Europe – almost as if wartime secrecy and solidarity were what had kept them together.

In what follows, Main à Plume's positions, reactions and theories can thus be profitably compared to those of Infra Noir – as its members or former members, for example, respond at length or give additional nuances to problems and events that concern the Romanian group. The present chapter addresses, in particular, what happened to Main à Plume after many of its members converted, quite suddenly after the War ended, to a brand of postwar Stalinism that firmly excluded many of the ideas and activities they had valued in wartime. This conversion set them intensely against Breton's postwar group and its renewed interest, especially in the 1947 international exhibition, in the power of myth, and resulted in the formation of a group known as the "Surréalistes Révolutionnaires." While members of Infra Noir were offered, on several occasions, the opportunity to intervene in all this, their position remained on the sidelines, as they interwove these events with their developing theories. The fact is that, although after the war France was not under direct Soviet control like Romania was, writers and intellectuals in the French immediate postwar were attracted to Stalinism for reasons similar to those of the former interwar avant-gardists in Romania. At this historical moment, international Communism seemed on the verge of actually transforming the

[11] Ironically, censorship and surveillance were not as much a problem in occupied Paris as they were in the "zone libre," and it was easier to get around German regulations than it was to get print authorizations from the Vichy authorities. But the surrealist life was still quite difficult. Historian of Surrealism Gérard Durozoi writes: "la Main à Plume a d'abord eu ce courage […] maintenir vivant le surréalisme dans les conditions sociales et politiques qui lui étaient les plus défavorables […]. Les membres de la Main à Plume y usèrent des faibles moyens qui restaient à leur disposition, ils durent ruser quotidiennement, tant pour vivre que pour publier, ils furent amenés à prendre des risques très réels." "Les Audaces de la Main à Plume," in Vernay and Walter, *La Main à Plume* (6).

world and life together, and the Party presented itself as the sole and resounding answer to the horrors of Fascist aggression, as well as to the capitalist influences of a rising American behemoth. Many were willing for these reasons – perhaps more than they would have been before the war – to ignore certain realities in the new Eastern bloc: surveillance, censorship, rigged trials, violent ideological intolerance. Those who would not ignore these things – André Breton, for one – tended to be marginalized. While the "Revolutionary Surrealists," as we will see, felt the need to defend the interests of the Party over those of the Surrealist movement, Breton and his postwar surrealists – as well as Infra Noir, much unlike their Romanian interwar avant-garde colleagues – were called to do the opposite. Both Breton's group and Infra Noir grew and evolved around this task of defending Surrealism from Party politics, though often in stumbling fashion.

Infra Noir members had been in contact with Victor Brauner since 1935 upon the latter's return from Paris to Bucharest, and with Jacques Hérold from around the same time. Both Brauner and Hérold had been involved in the interwar Romanian avant-garde scene as well as with the French Surrealist group, and both became increasingly involved in the activities of the Main à Plume group during the war. Infra Noir did not, despite this connection, manage to get hold of any actual Main à Plume publications until 1946, when the latter no longer existed. But Luca finds, in Main à Plume's August 1943 *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours*, "l'ancien esprit combatif du surréalisme dont on sentait vraiment [le] besoin."[12] And he immediately places this combative attitude in the context,

[12] See 1946 letter from Luca to Brauner, in *Victor Brauner, Écrits et Correspondances* (Morando and Patry, Centre Pompidou MNAM), 219. "Ghérasim Luca à Victor Brauner [Bucarest 1946], INV 8818-226." Luca asks that Brauner find a way to send him the first two collective "cahiers" of the Main à Plume group, both from 1941. *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours* was the title of the Main à Plume-helmed issue of *Cahiers de Poésie*, and included pieces by Noël Arnaud, Jacques Hérold, and Christian Dotremont. It should also be mentioned that the Romanian writer Benjamin Fondane (Fundoianu), active in the Bucharest

urgent at the time, of "le dilemme militer ou ne pas militer politiquement" – noting as he frequently does elsewhere that the sterile oscillation between these two poles should give way to a dialectical conciliation.

Rather than address this "dilemma" directly, both Infra Noir and Main à Plume groups' internecine struggles often centered around accusations of "mysticism," often considered synonymous with political agnosticism. These accusations frequently imitate the intransigent, merciless tone of prewar Surrealist group pronouncements, particularly of Breton's *Second Manifesto*, and betray a willingness to strain even the closest ties of friendship over perceived ideological missteps and divergences. This situation was perhaps exacerbated by wartime and immediate postwar conditions, where to choose one's friends carefully might be a matter of survival, and where one nervously waited for treasonous, fascist or counter-revolutionary agents to betray themselves in seemingly harmless slips of tongue or deed.

In the meantime, as it turned out, André Breton was traveling the length and breadth of the Americas, refining ideas that would unsettle and quite nearly traumatize some of those, especially in Main à Plume, who had vowed allegiance to him during wartime. Breton, then, was soon to expose himself to the same merciless attacks that his followers imagined he himself would launch upon his return.

The talk Breton gave at Yale at the end of 1942, "Situation du surréalisme entre les deux guerres," flung the door wide open to the new, young surrealists who were awaiting his return overseas; the movement, he says, powered by "le *génie* de la jeunesse," can only keep giving rise to more emancipatory versions of itself. It will

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avant-garde and often acting as a French-Romanian cultural liaison, collaborated with Jean Lescure's wartime journal *Messages* (for more on the latter, see below and also Chapter Three).

continue the search for a new language and a new knowledge, knowing that to better the world one has not only to work toward social justice but also "toucher à l'essence du Verbe" and keep alive "l'appetit d'une connaissance universelle à rédécouvrir."[13] But then, amid statements of the most unexceptionable surrealist desiderata, Breton launches a small grenade. It is possible to sin against liberty, he says, to break faith with it, and moreover, one does so by renouncing the kind of personal self-expression that takes place "hors des cadres stricts auxquels veut vous astreindre un 'parti,' ce parti fût-il à vos yeux celui de la liberté."[14] By the time that the surrealists of Main à Plume in occupied Paris read this talk, most had already joined the Communist Party of France, in a wave of conversions. The PCF was indeed, in their eyes, the party of liberty itself, and after the war, in a series of debates leading to the formation of the Surréalistes Révolutionnaires group, certain of them would have enormous trouble imagining any possible conflict between the needs of the Party and free, personal expression.

Breton's *Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non*, also written in 1942, felt to these newly-converted like an all-out assault. Under the name of "les Grands Transparents," Breton invents a fiction of beings that are to us what we might be to mites and mayflies, and of whom we are just as little aware, since they are camouflaged from our limited senses. Simultaneously, these "Grands Transparents" relativize the human world and deepen it: they put the pitiable struggles, party lines, and limited imaginations of the present human world into proper context, but also give a face and a mind, terrifying or benevolent, to the mysterious workings of chance. Breton seems

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[13] André Breton, "Situation du surréalisme entre les deux guerres: discours aux étudiants français de l'Université de Yale, 10 Décembre 1942," in *Œuvres complètes III*, ed. Etienne Alain-Hubert et al. (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 716 and 718.
[14] Ibid. (720).

to anticipate the un-nuanced, hostile reception this fiction found in Paris: nothing prevents him, he writes, "de laisser mon esprit vagabonder, sans prendre garde aux accusations de mysticisme dont on ne me fera pas grâce." The young surrealists and soon-to-be Surréalistes Révolutionnaires did, in fact, accuse him of mysticism, even though the staunchest of them could not have been entirely unaware that they were dealing with a heuristic or a didactic fiction, a tactical hypothesis. The Grand Transparents are "constructions poétiques" of the kind Breton once evoked in the pages of the Surrealist journal *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, addressed to those who, forgetting the fragility of human knowledge, pretend to know everything, "la bible d'une main et Lénine de l'autre."[15] It probably didn't help the situation that *Prolégomènes* launches a whole series of grenades, setting party politics against a steadfast "minority" that answers nay to every unanimous vote, crosses every party line, and maintains its own "système de coordonnées" and its own "instrument[s] de connaissance," according to circumstance. To censure this minority for doing so would be, Breton adds, like telling a carpenter that hammers are fundamentally unacceptable, since they cannot be used to saw a plank.[16]

In this immediate postwar context, the word "mysticism" was heavy ammunition. Even before the war ended, Raoul Ubac was excluded from the Main à Plume group on the grounds of his "mysticism." In an unforgivable article contribution to Jean Lescure's *Messages* magazine, Ubac had set the task of redirecting "l'expérience mystique" – understood as addressed toward a supernatural, occult world – and treating its methods of knowledge and its "states" instead as "une clé, permettant de réaliser l'homme dans sa

[15] See "L'Objet fantôme," in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 3 (1931), and *Œuvres III*, 7.
[16] *Œuvres III* (9).

totalité," dealing with their use-value rather than their truth-value. This sort of *détournement* was also part of the project of Breton's so-called mysticism in his wartime and postwar texts – the *Third Manifesto*, or *Arcane 17*. He had laid the foundation for this project long before the war, and even in the militant *Second Manifesto*, which his erstwhile followers tended to hold up as an example of his past and lost glory.[17] The Ubac affair crystallizes a conflict between militant intransigence and heuristic openness, between "efficacité" and "expérience," that soon took clearer shape in a series of raucous meetings conducted by former Main à Plume members and the future animators of Revolutionary-Surrealism in 1947. One of their tasks at this time was to ask themselves whether Surrealism could continue without Breton, who in their eyes had become a traitor to the very movement he had founded.

A startlingly short time before these meetings – which were intended in part to save Surrealism from Breton – the mission of the Main à Plume group had been to save Breton's Surrealism from the vicissitudes of history and war.[18] From the beginning these young surrealists seemed to be on track toward fulfilling Breton's call to arms in his talk

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17 In the *Second Manfesto* for example, Breton writes that Surrealists have every reason to begin "une reconnaissance sérieuse du côté de ces sciences […] aujourd'hui complètement décriées que sont l'astrologie […] la métapsychique." *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 128. The (later) passionately Stalinist Jean-François Chabrun had written in the early forties of "un effort constant et nécessaire de la pensée vers une connaissance magique […] à l'échelle d'une cosmogonie moderne décantée de tout souci divinatoire ou théosophique, vers une connaissance *immédiate* du réel." "Image-Image," in Vernay and Walter (2008), 88. For an account of the "incident Ubac" see Michel Fauré, *Histoire du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1982). Fauré quotes Chabrun on Ubac ("il faut neutraliser l'infection ou se tenir impitoyablement au fer rouge. Il n'y a pas à transiger avec la question religieuse") and comments: "Ce ton inquisiteur, style Comité de Salut Publique […] les membres de la Main à Plume l'ont certes hérité d'André Breton. […] Il anime aussi bien les publications que les correspondances ou les propos quotidiens, et J.-F. Chabrun et Noël Arnaud sont passés maîtres dans le maniement de cette prose terroriste" (197).

18 For a thorough history of the Main à Plume group, see Fauré, *Histoire du surréalisme sous l'Occupation*. Vernay and Walter's *Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* includes texts from each of the group's publications. The group's publications include a self-titled debut followed by *Géographie nocturne* and *Transfusion du verbe* in 1941, *La Conquête du monde par l'image* in 1942, *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours* in 1943.

at Yale. They wanted to breathe new life into the movement, in Breton's words, by working upon "l'essence du Verbe," as well as by rethinking collectivity, whether as collective aesthesis, poiesis, or praxis. Main à Plume member Jean-François Chabrun felt that the group's greatest innovation was to have formed "un noyau parfaitement homogène" of surrealist researchers and "ouvriers de la pensée" who had left behind their "petits talents personnels" along with any sense of personal or intellectual property.[19] In this way, they felt, they would revitalize automatic writing, and make poetry and the poetic image more dynamic and aggressive, "de négation en négation renaissant toujours."[20] The artistic impersonality they desired was grounded in what they saw as the impersonality of language, often conceived as unexplored combinatorial potentiality. The particular sort of *merveilleux* unique to language was its sly revelation, in Breton's words, of "toutes sortes de nouveaux moyens de se combiner," "bruissante à l'infini derrière et devant nous,"[21] and its powers were often merged with those of the unconscious and of chance. These visions are already part of a kind of repurposed mysticism – whether that of collectivity (absorption into a collective will), of language (its occult life and hidden potential), of chance (collective/societal transformation by

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19 Jean-François Chabrun, "La Situation poétique," in *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours* (Paris: Special issue of *Cahiers de Poésie*, August 1943), 5. See also Noël Arnaud in "L'Image dans la poésie collective," in Vernay and Walter (2008), 104, on the "personnalité écrasante acquise par plusieurs d'entre-nous." Member Christian Dotremont also writes that "l'anonymat est la grande hygiène." ("L'Avenir est membre du surréalisme: Extraits de la conférence donnée par Christian Dotremont à l'Université catholique de Louvain," in Vernay and Walter (2008), 173.)

20 See Arnaud, "L'Image dans la poésie collective" and "Crier=Créer"; Chabrun, "Naissance de l'homme-objet."

21 André Breton, "Le Merveilleux contre le mystère," in *Œuvres complètes III* (1999), 657; and Breton, "Le Message automatique," in *Œuvres complètes II* (1992), 387. Main à Plume member Christian Dotremont imagines, for example, a machine "qui mettrait noir sur blanc toutes les possibilités de rencontre des vingt-cinq lettres latines […] multipliées par toutes les possibilités de blancs entre elles, toutes les possibilités de suppression et de répétition des lettres." "L'Avenir est membre du surréalisme," in Vernay and Walter (2008), 171. Dotremont ("Lettres d'amour," in Vernay and Walter (2008), 199) also speaks of an "automatisme de la *matière poétique*"; one must "pénétrer le secret des lettres, ce secret tel qu'une peuplade mongole a l'alphabet pour dieu." For more on the Main à Plume and creative impersonality, see Chapter Three.

means of an "alchemical wedding" with chance), or even of science (Jacques Bureau's "Magie *étendue*, qui s'intégrerait sans peine dans une Physique *complète*," unafraid of epistemological anarchy).[22]

The Main à Plume group's thought-experiments in this respect were not unlike the "imaginary solutions" that were soon to inspire the Collège de 'Pataphysique, which Noël Arnaud joined in the early fifties. Main à Plume member Boris Rybak's invention, "Intraphysics," purported similarly to be a rigorous science of the imaginary, creating "des Idées au contenu irrationel qu'il dissèque ensuite; il étudie *ce qui aurait pu être* […] la concrétisation imageante de l'inimaginable."[23] Breton's "mystical" theory of the Grands Transparents above might then be called an intraphysical analysis of a potential reality – opening up a certain dimension to the movement of thought or desire. In this sense it would be something like Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of "initiation" and of the invisible in his 1964 *Le Visible et l'invisible*:

> Après la première vision, le premier contact, le premier plaisir, il y a initiation, c'est-à-dire, non pas position d'un contenu, mais ouverture d'une dimension qui ne pourra plus être refermée, établissement d'un niveau par rapport auquel désormais toute autre expérience sera repérée. L'idée de ce niveau, cette dimension, non pas donc un invisible de fait, comme un objet caché derrière un autre, et non pas un invisible absolu […] mais l'invisible *de* ce monde, celui qui l'habite, le soutient et le rend visible, sa possibilité intérieure et propre, l'Être de cet étant.[24]

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22 Jacques Bureau, "Morale des mots et des objets," in Vernay and Walter (2008), 66. For the Main à Plume's take on the relationship between magic and science see also Chabrun, "Situation de la poésie," in *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours*, and Gérard de Sède, in "Objectivité théorique et objectivité lyrique," in Vernay and Walter.

23 Boris Rybak, "Introduction au surréalisme scientifique ou naissance de l'intraphysique," Vernay and Walter (161). Rybak, in the 60s and 70s, later became a friend and collaborator of Gherasim Luca.

24 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible; suivi de notes de travail* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 198. This passage, in turn, recalls Dolfi Trost's "initiatique" realm of the invisible in his 1953 *Visible et invisible* – one of the Infra Noir group's last after-echoes – which lays out the revolutionary and epistemological necessity of a "manœuvre dans l'invisible, pour décider du visible" (Paris: Editions Arcanes, 1953), 12. Trost feels that what the nocturnal dream accomplishes in the "universe of determination," the "rêverie active" can do in the invisible realm; this is also a movement from "automatisme écrit" to "automatisme

The Main à Plume group's physics-magic, intraphysics and détourned mysticism are disciplines of the invisible – of the unknown-knowable that is liberated by the right *expérience*, and made into a dimension for thought and perception. No "object" of experience or perception, they believe, preexists, outlasts or transcends the conditions of one's encounter with it – to pretend otherwise would be idealism. At the same time, every field of experience contains an immanent yet concealed potential, that which in it is as-yet unencountered, which withdraws from existing modes of encounter, and which would only rise to reality within new modes of encounter. This potential is what Main à Plume member Christian Dotremont calls the "politique intérieure" of objects and spaces, the language they speak among themselves in a "vie-collectivement-intérieure."[25] Here, "political" power becomes the maneuver within the invisible that changes the structure of the visible. The "efficacy" for which Main à Plume members increasingly call is not solely an efficacy of political alliances and public engagement – it is an efficacy of the invisible that cannot be opposed to the mythic and the imaginary.

There exists a scholarly-historical commonplace about Surrealism's "turn to myth" after the war – especially with the 1947 international exhibition – according to which the movement volte-faces in a kind of half-defiant, half-traumatized escapism toward magic and the occult. But Main à Plume's (and also Infra Noir's) interest in metaphors, tool-concepts, attitudes and states derived from magic, mythic and even mystical traditions is in firm continuity, even in its most daring innovations, with prewar Surrealist theory and practice. If anything, it is only the external indices and pageantry of

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dialectiquement nié." For Infra Noir's treatment of dream, active reverie (or "automatic action") and the future of automatism, see Chapters Three and Four.

[25] Dotremont, "Vie de l'objet," 245. For more on Main à Plume and the object, see Chapter Three.

Surrealism's interests in this respect that changed after the war. I would even suggest that the myth of Surrealism's postwar "turn to myth" owes largely, as I hope to show, to a prevailing early-Cold-War Manichaeism that drew certain lines in the sand – for example between *efficacité* and *expérience*, between political-revolutionary and apolitical-reactionary, or between scientific and mystical thought. In this environment, a certain open, imaginative, heuristic (or what Breton above would call "minor") form of thinking and creating was forced to redefine and rename itself, between the Scylla of "mystico-bourgeois" escapism and the Charybdis of the party line. It thus became increasingly aware of itself as "myth": a holdall term for everything heretical with respect to the status quo, Communist or otherwise. "Myth" came to represent, as well, the possibility of revolutionary action and thought outside of party politics. But at the same time, it was a slippery terrain, for myth – in the form of ideology – could also be a trap, an instrument of oppression.

Something strange happened at around the time that most of the members of Main à Plume, between 1943 and 1944, converted to the Communist Party and headed toward forming the Revolutionary-Surrealist group. It was not at all that they suddenly "became" political – rather, it was that being political was coming to mean something very different than it had. Accusations began to be launched from all sides – from claims of Stalinist "opportunism" to Trotskyist "utopianism" and "lyric intellectuality."[26] There was a string of exclusions, demissions, and attempts at character assassination, and an eventually decisive turn against the mythic *connaissance magique* that had before defined the group's efforts. The surrealist literary form most characteristic of the frenetic period that followed the Main à Plume's final collapse in 1944 was the café meeting, of the most

[26] See Fauré (421).

dissonant and aggressive kind. These meetings were marked by the "angry Manichaeanism" widely noted in immediate postwar French intellectual life.[27] Something of the abruptness of the turn taken by many ex-Main à Plumers against their earlier positions is revealed in the case of the unrealized 1945 compilation *La Terre n'est pas une vallée de larmes*. Edited by Dotremont – Belgian founder of several surrealist and para-surrealist magazines, and of the group Cobra in 1948-49 – and Marcel Mariën – who had been involved in the prewar Belgian surrealist movement before joining Main à Plume – *La Terre* would have placed Breton's *Prolégomènes* (along with its "Grands Transparents") alongside texts by the same people who would call in 1946 for Breton's excommunication from the movement, partly on the basis of material in this very text.[28] Soon after the Surrealist leader's May 1946 return to Paris, Mariën himself writes furiously of Breton's "antistalinisme virulent," a bitter pill for those who breathe "au rhythme de Stalingrad."[29] Breton's interview with Jean Duché in *Figaro littéraire* in October 1946 only threw fuel on a fire that was already burning.

In 1946, Duché asks Breton how he feels about a recent motion of the Committee of Writers in Leningrad to exclude several prominent writers for "political failings." Breton responds, rather dangerously, that this motion represents a system of thought foreign to him, and that the Committee will have trouble concealing that the artist's right

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27 See Tony Judt in *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992), 35, and also further below. Dotremont, with reference to the café meetings, talks about an "esprit de tactique," a "patapensée," and "racontars, mythisation d'incidents, grossessements de détails, calomnies, tactiques, camouflages, doubles jeux (pris pour de la dialectique!)." Françoise Lalande, *Christian Dotremont l'inventeur de Cobra* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1998), 82-86. For this immediate postwar phase in French intellectual life and its "Manichaeanism" in relation to Surrealism, see also Alyce Mahon in the chapter "Postwar Paris and *Surrealism in 1947*" (*Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

28 For the history and context of its publication, see Xavier Canonne's preface to the reimpression of *La Terre* (Paris: Didier Devillez Éditeur, 1996).

29 From Mariën's introduction to Magritte's *Manifestes et autres écrits* (1972), quoted in Ibid.

of expression "se trouve frappé d'interdit." He even quotes from the text he wrote with Trotsky in 1938, *Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant*: state discipline, be it ever so revolutionary, must never impose itself on "intellectual creation."[30] Duché responds by asking whether Breton would defend liberty at any price whatsoever, even against a state that had realized the ultimate social revolution, and Breton (again, dangerously) aligns himself with Arthur Koestler's stance, in *Darkness at Noon*: the idea that the end (the successful revolution) justifies the means (repression of liberty) is "antidialectical par excellence" and demands the most categorical refusal. The "revolutionary surrealist" debates the following year, largely headed by the ex-Main à Plume Dotremont and Arnaud, will present these moments in the Duché interview as key evidence for Breton's anti-revolutionary defection.[31]

In the Duché interview, Breton – infuriating his revolutionary-surrealist prosecutors – also urges a special sort of communion with the world one lives in, "par les voies poétiques et, j'oserai dire, mythiques."[32] Only a year or two before, Main à Plume had deliberately explored what it saw as paths toward such a mythic communication and toward forms of engaged action outside the domain of party politics. Now, simply saying the word "mythic" could get one in trouble, and "poetry" itself had become suspect. How was it that in such a short time so many of the young wartime surrealists lost, apparently, their senses of humor (or *umour*)?

Even amid the ephemeral proliferation of Surrealist and *surréalisant* publications

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30 Breton, *Œuvres III*, 594-595.

31 The Belgian former surrealist Paul Nougé retorts to the Duché interview that the end does indeed justify the means, and that the virtue of this principle "éclate dans toutes les œuvres efficaces," dispels "les pires impératives esthétiques," and defends human liberty. See Nougé's introductory essay to the November 30-December 11 1946 Magritte exhibition catalog in Brussels, in Marcel Mariën ed, *L'Activité surréaliste en Belgique: 1924-1950* (Brussels: Lebeer Hossmann, 1979), 395-96.

32 Breton, *Œuvres III* (597).

in 1945-46 immediately after the dissolution of Main à Plume and preceding the appearance of the revolutionary-surrealist group, the tone of increasingly serious Communist-revolutionary militancy is tempered by a playful insouciance, by wordplay, mystifications, proto-pataphysical exercises. These publications, like Dotremont's short-lived *Le Salut public* in 1945, found a revolutionary efficacy particularly, for example, in language's freedom of play, in the "combinaisons imprévisibles"[33] believed to conceal the thought and the action of the future. To believe otherwise would be mysticism in the sense that Dotremont defines it in *Salut*: the propensity "à juger du réel suivant un tableau de Mendelejeff préétabli."[34] In these publications, the field of "expérience" – which comprises, experimentally and experientially, a work both upon words and upon material objects – cannot yet be cleanly separated from a larger social struggle leading to an eventual "révolution prolétarienne mondiale."[35] In the 1947 revolutionary-surrealist meetings, however, "expérience" becomes interchangeable with Surrealism itself, and thus reactionary.

The real beginning of the Surrealist Cold War – for this is what it was, with its café trials, angry Manichaeanism, Soviet-inspired wooden language, and preestablished table of elements – can probably be dated to the appearance of Christian Dotremont's manifesto "Le Surréalisme Révolutionnaire" in the third issue of the magazine *Les Deux Sœurs* in May 1947. Already in the second *Deux Sœurs* issue, however, one sensed change coming. Gherasim Luca, upon receiving a copy of this issue, felt confused by the abrupt contrast between a "conférence magnifique" by Dotremont in the first Main à Plume group publication (probably the essay "Pour et contre les apparences"), and a

[33] Paul Nougé, quoted in Mariën (396).
[34] Dotremont, "Le Surréalisme – Le Mysticisme," in *Le Salut public* (June 1945), Mariën (353).
[35] Marcel Mariën, "Géographie de la lumière," in *Le Salut public* (June 1945), Mariën (352).

"poème d'une tendance horrible" by the same in *Deux Soeurs* 2.[36] This poem was, most likely, "Rien de Communiste," which reads as follows:

> Il ne suffit pas de dire: "Je ne suis pas exis- / tentialiste" / pour n'être pas existentialiste. / Il ne suffit pas de n'être pas existentialiste / pour être des nôtres. / Bleus, jaunes ou noirs / nos ennemis portent l'uniforme de la réaction. / Et il suffit d'injurier bassement l'URSS / — au nom de marxisme! — / pour être parmi nos ennemis les ennemis de la / poésie pratique.[37]

As for Dotremont's "Surréalisme Révolutionnaire" manifesto, which set the field and terms for the revolutionary-surrealist debates later that year, it begins with a list of things that Surrealism is not, seeming to burn all possible bridges. Above all, it is not the "art d'injurier le Parti Communiste." Further:

> Il n'est pas la mise en rêve du marxisme, ni la mise en os du rêve. Il n'est pas la pure révolte intérieure, le sacrifice du réel, ni le goût du tract, le secret publicitaire. […] Il n'est pas la queue du romantisme, la tête de Dada, le fœtus de l'avenir […]. Il n'est pas le baiser du matérialisme à l'idéalisme, le flirt de l'efficacité avec la confidence.[38]

It is not even, Dotremont concludes, "la tentative de faire une armée rouge avec des mots écarlates." At this point his reader might urgently wonder what Surrealism is, in fact. The truth is, as Dotremont explains – more subtly than his "poème d'une tendance horrible" might suggest – that Surrealism navigates a set of formidably narrow straits: between the

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36 In a letter to Victor Brauner of September 28, 1946. Brauner, *Écrits* (224). Dotremont, it should be pointed out, between 1945 and 1946 lived briefly in Paris with Yves Bonnefoy, who was at the time running the *La Révolution la Nuit* group with Claude Tarnaud – later a close friend of Luca's. According to Jaguer, Nadine Kraïnik – at the time a crucial liaison between the Infra Noir group and Surrealist doings in Paris and Brussels – was also part of this small community, along with Brauner and Hérold. Luca writes to Brauner in 1946 of having received a letter from the *La Révolution* group (*Écrits* 219).

37 *Les Deux Sœurs*: *numéro spécial* (Paris: J.M. Place), 47.

38 Ibid., p.7 of third volume. Dotremont also quotes here (disparagingly) from Maurice Blanchot's "Quelques réflexions sur le surréalisme," published in *L'Arche* 8, August 1945, where what survives of Surrealism is no longer a school but a "state of mind." Blanchot writes here that "the most uncommitted literature is at the same time the most committed, because it knows that to claim to be free in a society that is not free is to accept responsibility for the constraints of that society and especially to accept the mystifications of the word "freedom" by which society hides its intentions. In summation, literature must have an efficacy and meaning that are extraliterary, that is, it must not renounce its literary means, and literature must be free, that is, committed. Perhaps, considering the force of these paradoxes, we will understand why surrealism is always of our time." ("Reflections on Surrealism," in *The Work of Fire*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Pr., 97).

danger of fleeing the world and that of being compromised by it; between true action and mere public activity; and more generally between "expérience" and "action." There is, between these last two, both an "abîme" and a "lien," and their relationship can be neither one of unproblematic continuity nor of full separation.

Communism, Dotremont continues, is action rationally directed toward the goal of the economic liberation of the proletariat. Surrealism (at least according to the present understanding of rationality) is anti-rationalist, and treats its experimental means as conditioned goals, way stations on the way to the total liberation of the individual. For this reason, Surrealism and Communism do not communicate. However, political action must always be able to see itself, virtually, from the perspective of "expérience," even though there can be no "expérience communiste"; and surrealist experiment must always be able to see itself from the perspective of immediate economic goals and of its own overdetermination by economic factors, even though there can be no full-fledged "surréalisme politique." Although surrealist experiment must consider itself absolutely free, it must at the same time consider its freedom limited, for experiment must always tend toward possible political action. It is true that the "objective" revolution begins with a "révolution intérieure," the proper domain of Surrealism: an oppressed worker, after all, does not act to free himself based on scientific observations about his social state but from a "conscience diffuse, mais charnelle, intime, poétique […] de son esclavage." But this "interior" is always already "déterminée de l'extérieur, d'abord par les conditions économiques." As Dotremont writes, "tous les tâtonnements, tous les écarts, tous les

excès qui viennent de la nature expérimentale du surréalisme ne peuvent être justifiés que par une sévère liaison objective avec les 'fins' révolutionnaires actuelles."[39]

Surrealism, as experiment in the laboratory sense, necessarily renounces its "efficacité immédiate" for the sake of a "tâtonnement" that leads in uncertain directions. However, the *comme si* that it can thereby explore – for Dotremont, a natural extension of the Surrealist mantra *beau comme*[40] – is still worth it. Dotremont's experimental *comme si* virtually realizes the end within the means, letting surrealists proceed as if "ils avaient pu réaliser *personnellement* la révolution, n'avaient plus à faire qu'à la résistance de leur pensée, de leurs moyens d'expression."[41] Moreover, the surrealist experimenter acts *as if* the elements and structures of his thought and imagination were not saturated with the very social-economic-cultural system he wishes to undermine (a situation that Infra Noir refers to, throughout these pages, as the Obstacle). The surrealist who thinks he can crush social oppression under the weight of his rich interior life or his experimental elaborations is clearly under an illusion. But this illusion, this as-if, is also necessary. For what the communists have forgotten, Dotremont explains, is the role of fantasy in revolutionary thought. He thrice repeats the words of Lenin: "Il s'agit de réaliser scrupuleusement notre fantaisie." These words, which appear in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), are a quotation from Dmitri Pisarev, in a passage concerning the relationship between fantasy and reality: the rift between the two "causes no harm if only the person

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[39] *Les Deux Sœurs*, 22 and 29 of third volume.

[40] For the Surrealists, the phrase "beau comme" came to stand for both analogical thought and for the formation of the Surrealist image and/or collage by exploiting "la rencontre fortuite de deux réalités distantes sur un plan non-convenant" (Max Ernst, *Au-delà de la peinture 1936,* in *Écritures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 253.) A passage from Lautréamont's *Maldoror* is the "original" of this surrealist mantra: a young man named Mervyn is "beau comme la rétractilité des serres des oiseaux rapaces; ou encore comme l'incertitude des mouvements musculaires dans les plaies des parties molles de la région cervicale postérieure […] et surtout comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie" (Sixth Canto, strophe 1).

[41] *Les Deux Sœurs*, 13 of third volume.

dreaming believes seriously in his dream […] and if […] he works conscientiously for the achievement of his fantasies."[42] When such fantasies manage to be realized, Dotremont adds, they must never stifle the creation of further fantasies.

With the shift from the *beau comme* of surrealist lyricism to the *comme si* of the surrealist laboratory, one arrives at what Dotremont calls "la mise en méthode de la liberté mentale," which is to provide an experimental "verification" of revolutionary theory and action.[43] Dotremont arrives here at the specific meaning of the word "expérience" in the revolutionary-surrealist debates to follow. On the one hand *expérience* is an intimate and "fleshly" counterpart to the objective observation of social facts – as with the worker's "diffuse, intimate" consciousness of his oppression. On the other hand it is an experimental, even pataphysical science that dips in both fantastic-utopian and practical-revolutionary currents. According to Dotremont the Surrealist experiential-experimental *comme si* must be, at the same time, rigorously disciplined and absolutely free. It can be used "frenetically," even deliriously, yet one must remain cautiously aware of its status as illusion, of the power of the illusions it combats, and of its position as means to an end. Surrealism, after the war, must be a discipline of freedom, suspended in a field of tension between artistic *délire* and unquestionable historical necessity, an "ordonnancement dialectique de la conscience poétique."[44]

The revolutionary-surrealists would soon put Dotremont's manifesto and his experimental discipline of freedom to some difficult questions. In what precise conditions and circumstances, they asked, must freedom be disciplined? When and how must

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[42] Vladimir I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement* ([Beijing]: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), 106.
[43] *Les Deux Sœurs*, 3 and 24 of third volume.
[44] Ibid., 26 of third volume.

expérience submit to the prerogatives of political action, and vice versa? Was there a way of distinguishing efficacious from inefficacious *expérience*, good from bad fantasies? Dotremont, in struggling as so many others had to disentangle the troubled relationship between artistic and political avant-gardes, created a hallowed space for fantasy and perhaps even for a kind of "mystical" or at least mythical thinking. His colleagues, however, soon condemned this kind of thinking in Breton and later, in the 1947 exhibition. They took particular issue with what Dotremont calls a "right to heresy."

One of the major declarations of the 1945 tract *Dialectique de la dialectique*, by Gherasim Luca and Dolfi Trost, was of Surrealism's right and duty to heresy, particularly with regard to itself. The movement was endangered by its own artistic mannerisms and theoretical tics, and of the fossilization of its discoveries and methods into a "politique culturelle," good only for anthologies and textbooks.[45] "Heresy" is an important word for the Infra Noir group in general, especially as it emerged from its isolation and worked toward participating in the 1947 international Surrealist exhibition. Luca imagined the exhibition installation as a "temple of heresy" – as a direct answer, in the form of an "enormous NO," to the threat of discipline (*ordine*), of cultural "fossilization," and of illusion in its oppressive aspect.[46] Such heresy necessarily takes on the mantle of all that is "undesirable," objectionable, or irrecuperable – be it Surrealism's cherished monsters like Lautréamont or Sade, or a flirtation with the movement's *bêtes noires* including idealism or mysticism. Trost and Luca call to include what is excluded, in particular what

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[45] Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique* (Bucharest: S. Surréalisme, 1945), 10-14.

[46] Letter from Luca to Naum, 24 August 1946, *Athanor* 2/2008, 35. Breton's November 1947 essay "Second Arche" – for the catalog of an international Surrealist exhibition in Prague's Topic Gallery, only a few months before the Communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia – echoes these words in stating that the artist's task can only be "d'opposer un NON irréductible à toutes les formules disciplinaires." The latter are nothing more than empty slogans and placeholders, "la survivance du signe à la chose signifiée" (*Œuvres II,* 762-63).

is perceived to be necessarily undesirable. Desire is compromised by what Infra Noir calls the Obstacle – a Mœbian inter-implication and mutual perpetuation of oppressive reality and oppressed psyche. The undesirable, in the form of heresy, can act as a kind of cauterizing agent against this contamination. Hence Infra Noir's call, in its very first letter to Breton in 1946, for "hérésie et hérésie d'hérésie."[47] Heresy as they understand it both undermines the old, "ossified" myths that structure action in the world, and contains in embryo the myths of a "future world."[48]

Heresy is that which, by definition, does not accept what is dogmatically accepted. Its nature is to overstep limits as soon as they are set down. But the postwar revolutionary-surrealist meetings, as well as Dotremont's manifesto, are largely about the limits of heresy, and how a heretic who has gone too far should be recognized, named, and understood.[49] Dotremont specifies in his manifesto, for example, that those surrealists who might claim a "droit à l'hérésie" with regard to the Communist Party had much better apply it to Surrealism itself, for the movement's own good.[50] Dotremont does not actually say that heresy against the Party is unthinkable. But his revolutionary ennobling of fantasy and experimental thought nonetheless includes a kind of backdoor for

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47 For this letter, see the "Lettres reçues au retour en France" page of <andrebreton.fr>, numbers 167-170.

48 Gellu Naum, letter of 27 June 1946 to Victor Brauner, in *Athanor* 2/2008, 41-43.

49 Infra Noir's schism of 1945 had to do, as well, with the limits of heresy. Naum, Păun and Teodorescu collaborated on the tract *Critica mizeriei* (Critique of Poverty), which borrows from Breton's *Second Manifesto* its virulent wit, intransigent declarations, theoretical slogans, and tone of aggrieved irony to accuse Luca and Trost of mysticism, obscurantism, and undialectical negationism. Strangely, although *Critica* accuses the two of "doing away with the class struggle simply by closing [their] eyes," Naum comments decades later that the tract's aggression was inspired by his being "cruelly bored by their increasingly theoretical, increasingly political activity" (*Despre interior-exterior: Gellu Naum în dialog cu Sanda Roșescu* (Piteşti: Paralela 45, 2003, 16). If this is true, it raises the fascinating possibility that *Critica mizeriei* is in part a pastiche – of prewar Surrealist schismatic-polemic-exclusionary modes of discourse. The 1945 schism also had a lot to do with language: Luca and Trost preferred to write in French, while Naum's insistence on writing in Romanian to some extent marginalized him within the group. It is symptomatic that *Critica* announces that Păun's *Spiritele animale* will soon appear in Romanian; in 1947 this work appeared as *Les Esprits animaux,* in French.

50 *Les Deux Sœurs*, 33 of third volume.

surveillance purposes – the possibility of censuring, or censoring, fantasy on the grounds that as a "means" it has lost sight of its practical revolutionary end. Now, as we turn to the revolutionary-surrealist debates, they in turn keep posing and reposing the problem that Dotremont attempts to solve in his manifesto: Lenin and his emphasis on fantasy aside, how far can poetry, imagination, myth – and heresy itself – go?

In early 1947, there were three distinct groups in play. The first was the group around Dotremont and Arnaud and other former Main à Plume members; the second was André Breton's rebooted surrealist group, still in development; and there was also a third, bringing René Magritte, Paul Nougé, Marcel Mariën and others under the banner of what they called "surréalisme en plein soleil." In April 1947, Dotremont and two colleagues sent a letter to representatives of all three groups, calling for a discussion of the relationship of Surrealism to Communism, in the face of an anti-communist "wave" unfurling over the world. Oddly enough, they also sent the letter to Infra Noir member Paul Păun in Bucharest, perhaps as representative of the Păun-Naum-Teodorescu faction that had attacked Luca and Trost in *Critica Mizeriei.* Only representatives from the Magritte and Arnaud-Dotremont groups attended the April 5th meeting that resulted.

The meeting minutes begin with nearly unanimous criticism of Breton's *Third Manifesto* and its Grands Transparents, and his politically indefensible interview with Jean Duché. But complications begin to arise as soon as participants raise the question of whether dissenting or independent currents, especially of the literary-artistic kind, can only be harmful to the Party's aims.[51] In later meetings, the Dotremont-Arnaud group

[51] "Pour un regroupement des Surréalistes en Belgique," Brussels, April 1947. Unpaginated (third leaf). Collection "Miscellaneous papers of Surréalistes-Révolutionnaires 1944-1948," Getty Research Institute 1534-741. For more on this meeting and those to follow see for example Françoise Lalande, *Christian Dotremont: l'inventeur de Cobra* (Paris: Stock, 1998, 94-95); Daniel Lançon, "Yves Bonnefoy (1946-

came to the unanimous position that while the Party must always reserve the right to censure surrealists for their experimental excesses, the latter must always be ready to leap to the Party's aid.[52] But for the time being, all kinds of opinions are given play. One of those present (Gabriel Picqueray) at the April 5 meeting states, for example, that the Communist Party is the only possible and viable movement of social emancipation, but goes on to call for the development of an "érotisme ambulatoire et délirant" – echoing the experiments in "ambulatory automatism" that interest Infra Noir[53] – which is difficult to imagine presenting before a Party committee. No one is quite satisfied, either with the meeting's concluding statement, although its constituent parts will become fixed slogans and watchwords in the debates to follow:

> LE GROUPE RECONNAIT LE PARTI COMMUNISTE COMME LA SEULE INSTANCE REVOLUTIONNAIRE. SUR LE PLAN DE L'EFFICACITE SOCIALE, IL ENTEND NE PAS FAIRE PUBLIQUEMENT ETAT D'EXPERIENCES SUSCEPTIBLES DE DEFORMER DANS L'ESPACE OU DANS LE TEMPS LES OBJECTIFS QUE S'ASSIGNE LA POLITIQUE REVOLUTIONNAIRE.[54]

Soon, two further meetings, on April 12 and 19, were called at the home of René Magritte. Magritte at the time was promoting his new Solar Surrealism, intended to raise *jouissance* over *connaissance* and to create works that, while resembling works of art, are actually new "sentiments" and new substrates for joy and pleasure.[55] The meetings at

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1950), surréalisme & périphérie" in Dumas and Piégay-Gros ed., *Territoires de la poésie contemporaine* (Paris: Champion, 2001, 83-102); Carole Reynaud Paligot, *Parcours politique des surréalistes*, chapter titled "Surréalisme révolutionnaire et Contre-groupe H" (Paris: CNRS, 1995).

52 Surrealist Henri Pastoureau, commenting in retrospect, calls this position "masochistic." "Le Surréalisme de l'après-guerre 1946-1950," in Henri Jones, *Le Surréalisme ignoré* (Montréal: Centre Éducatif et Culturel, 1969), 101.

53 "Pour un regroupement," fourth leaf. Infra Noir members were in correspondence with various members of the Dotremont-Arnaud group, and it is possible that discussions of somnambulistic "ambulatory" states were, so to speak, in the air.

54 "Pour un regroupement," fifth leaf.

55 See *Le Surréalisme en plein soleil* (Brussels: Lèvres Nues, 1974, unpag.) and Monday November 1946 letter to Nougé in *Lettres à Paul Nougé.* Solar Surrealism is against both the "magie inefficace" of the prewar surrealists, who attempt to crystallize the unknowable into "forces" and "êtres," and the "diamat" (dialectical materialism) of the communists, who are after an "objective" knowledge of the world's workings.

Magritte's place continued with discussions of the distinction or lack thereof between Surrealism and Communism, the social circumstances and determinants of artistic creation, and in one case how it would be impossible (this is Marcel Broodthaers) for a Trotskyist artist using surrealist methods to end up with a surrealist work of any kind. These meetings were also significant for the presence, if only indirect, of Infra Noir. Magritte makes clear that there is no longer any place for pessimism and "noirceur" in either Surrealism or Communism, and cannot stand the new title of the Romanian surrealist group's publication series – "L'Infra-noir." The meeting minutes have it as follows:

> [Magritte] y voit une surenchère; il dit que "Amphitrite" de Luca est illisible. Il y a eu entre les surréalistes roumains et lui une échange de lettres. Au conseil que leur donnait Magritte de "songer au soleil," ils ont répondu par une lettre violente, l'accusant d'être anti-dialectique etc.[56]

It is hard to say, pace Magritte's version above, who wrote the first hostile letter. According to Gherasim Luca, Infra Noir and Magritte had been corresponding since the end of the war in a purely informative way, until quite suddenly they received from him "une lettre injurieuse" stating that their new batch of publications "lui donne la nausée."[57] It did not take Infra Noir long to reply:

> Monsieur, Il y a erreur de votre part, nous n'avons jamais voulu jouer avec vous, mais il ne nous déplaît pas de vous déranger parfois dans les nouveaux sentiments que vous êtes en train de créer pour la société royale des beaux-arts et pour le secrétariat du ministère de l'instruction publique. INFRA-NOIR. P.S. — Midi,

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[56] "Pour un regroupement," unpag. (7). Dotremont arrives at Magritte's place at this point, just in time to comment that social criticism is necessarily "noir" by virtue of its object, and that absolute optimism has no place until the economic liberation of the proletariat is already realized.

[57] Letter to Victor Brauner of March 20, 1947 (Brauner, *Écrits*, 228). Magritte hated these materials so much that he sent them to Marcel Mariën, essentially begging that the latter launch a second missile at Infra Noir using his "vocabulaire truculent." Letter 214 in *La Destination: Lettres à Marcel Mariën (1937-1962)* (Brussels: Lèvres Nues, 1977), 239.

> soleil, pipi, joujoux, bonbons, — vraiment, Magritte, tu es plus bête que toi-même.[58]

The Dotremont-Arnaud and Magritte factions, despite their disagreements, never came to blows in quite this way, but neither were they able to meet their goal of creating a unified group. Some wanted to prioritize, for example, questions of eroticism, psychoanalysis, the surrealist object (to be "rehabilitated" from abstract art and "les mythes collectifs"), and linguistic experimentation,[59] but for others this was too much or not enough. By the meeting of May 31, 1947, there had been a final break between these two factions.

The May 31 meeting was called primarily in order to further discuss "les limites respectives du champ de l'action révolutionnaire et du champ de la recherche expérimentale," as well as the relationship between action and *expérience*. A solution had to be found that neither assimilated poetry and politics, nor simply chose one over the other.[60] The attendees had, then, to refine the conceptual poles of the problem – "la pratique révolutionnaire" (*efficacité*) and "la liberté expérimentale" (*expérience*). In the

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[58] Letter 219, ibid. (245). Morando and Patry (editors of the Brauner *Écrits* volume) think the "société royale des beaux-arts" comment arises from a humorless misunderstanding of the parodic "canulars" that Magritte and Mariën were writing at the time; these patronizing instincts are not shared by Monique Yaari, who points out not only that Infra Noir was not unfamiliar with the "canular" genre, but that there was in fact an exhibition in early 1947 at the Société Royale des Beaux-Arts de Verviers where lectures were given by "Hommes de Lettres de l'École Surréaliste" and by an art historian from the Ministry of Education, and where works from Magritte's "solar" period were displayed. Monique Yaari, "Le Groupe surréaliste de Bucarest entre Paris et Bruxelles, 1945-1947: une page d'histoire." in *Synergies Canada* no. 3 (2011). There is nothing in the group's letter about Magritte's position being undialectical – there could have been an additional letter, or Magritte may be thinking of a recent letter from Breton, who calls his theories "anti-dialectical and sewn with white thread besides" (Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 461.

[59] "Pour un regroupement," unpag. (13).

[60] "Pour désequivoquer l'action des Surréalistes en France," 1947. Collection "Miscellaneous papers of Surréalistes-Révolutionnaires 1944-1948," Getty Research Institute 1534-741 (1). This time, Gellu Naum instead of Paul Păun is being kept *au courant*. The meeting minutes state: "Ont été informées: Kundera Ludwick (Tchécoslowaquie), Asger Jorn (Danemark), Gellu Naum (Roumanie)" (2). Why were Naum and Păun, and not Luca and Trost, kept in the loop? Naum, Păun and Teodorescu's 1945 *Critica mizeriei*, accusing Luca and Trost of counter-revolutionary mysticism, was in Romanian, but the three might have corresponded privately and sympathetically with members of the Dotremont-Arnaud faction before and during the 1947 meetings.

process, tensions arose between one caucus around Arnaud and composed mostly of French writers and artists, and another, mostly Belgian caucus around Dotremont. The real sticking points had to do with why the Party seemed so wary of freedom of *expérience*, and why Surrealism, in its perpetual motion and becoming, should bend to the will of any political program at all.[61]

An odd question arises among those present at this May meeting: what if the Communist Party were to make a tactical decision to forbid its members any anti-clerical or anti-colonial demonstrations, or to rein in expressions and declarations of love? As Party members, what would everyone do? Answers vary. Jean-Louis Bédouin – later to join Breton's group from the late 40s on – feels he would follow the Party in all its tactical decisions, however uncomfortable. Artist Félix Labisse feels that Surrealism must always have the final word in these matters, since Surrealism is always revolutionary. Noël Arnaud says that artists should be absolutely free while they remain in their own sphere, and submissive to the powers that be if they choose to act in the political sphere. However, and perhaps inevitably, the latter keeps creeping into the former: Arnaud feels for example that not just the results but the individual stages of surrealist *expériences* should be submitted to scrutiny, since taken on their own they are often "contre-révolutionnaires"[62] or fall short of the goal of "revolutionary efficacy." But what, exactly, is revolutionary efficacy? Who has the right to decide at what moment a surrealist *expérience* is of disservice to the Party? Words like "efficacy" are becoming, over the course of these meetings, more like chess pieces than units of real meaning. Or rather,

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[61] Participant Fernand Leduc (a founding member of the Les Automatistes group in Quebec) states, for example, that art is revolutionary only if it is "en avance sur son temps, *monstrueuse* par conséquent." "Pour désequivoquer" (3).

[62] "Pour désequivoquer" (5).

they serve to indicate lines that cannot be crossed, or as indices of right thinking. For Bédouin for example, in a dig at Breton's Duché interview, efficacy means refusing to defend the likes of Arthur Koestler and his anti-USSR message; Leduc invokes a circular logic of authenticity, where no authentic *expérience* could ever harm authentic revolutionary action, and vice versa.

Those gathered at the May 31 meeting, nervous about the Party's probable reaction to their efforts, end by reading out two separate manifesto drafts. One, by the Arnaud caucus, will become the "Manifeste des Surréalistes Révolutionnaires en France" at the end of June 1947, and the other, by the Belgians, "Pas de quartiers dans la révolution," will be published on June 7th in the Belgian Communist journal *Le Drapeau Rouge*. Both documents begin with a sweeping vision of a postwar Europe still crawling with the ideologies and errors that precipitated its last crisis,[63] and both also use the device of footnoting the word "Surrealism," to distinguish the *soi-disant* Surrealism of the past from that of the urgent post-war present.[64] Both documents (like Luca and Trost in *Dialectique de la dialectique*) state that Surrealism has lost track of its real goals in a myopic fascination with its own peculiar methods and games. Both state that the movement's central misstep has been to lose sight of true "efficacité," of reality considered "historiquement," and of a living, breathing revolution – helmed by the Communist Party – that actually has hope of success. On the other hand however, both

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[63] The French manifesto sees parades of Gaullist centuria (Arnaud's original draft, found in the Getty Collection (1523-027), has *Sturmabteilung*) calling for the extermination of Moroccans, Algerians and Vietnamese, while the forces of liberty struggle to keep their "feux de position" alight.

[64] The French manifesto footnotes "Surrealism" twice, the first time calling it (despite Arnaud's desire not to directly attack Breton) "surréalisme tel qu'avec André Breton, de *granit* en *brumes*, il s'est finalement nié," the second time explaining that "il s'agit maintenant du surréalisme." The line about granite and mists refers to the opening lines of Breton's *Troisième manifeste*: "Sans doute y a-t-il trop de *nord* en moi pour que je sois jamais l'homme de la pleine adhésion. Ce nord, à mes yeux mêmes, comporte à la fois des fortifications naturelles de granit et de la brume" (*Œuvres III*, 5). The Belgians' footnote is more gentle: "Surrealism dans son ensemble, tel qu'il s'est plus ou moins identifié avec André Breton."

manifestos keep insisting on an irreducible separation between the domain of (Communist) efficacy and action, and that of (Surrealist) *expérience*. The French manifesto shouts: "il n'y a pas, IL NE PEUT Y AVOIR DU SURRÉALISME POLITIQUE. […] L'ACTION du communisme, de son parti, s'impose dans l'immédiat; l'EXPÉRIENCE surréaliste se déroule selon des normes qui lui sont propres."[65] The Belgians agree: "toute idée de *surréalisme politique* comme toute idée de *communisme en laboratoire*" must be eliminated.

At first glance it appears baffling, paradoxical: Surrealism is not political enough, but it can never be political. However what the two groups are saying, though indirectly, is that to allow for a political Surrealism – to allow, for example, that formal experimentations or Rimbaldian *dérèglements* of the senses can be immanently political – would be to give Surrealism too much autonomy and freedom with respect to the Party. Both the French and the Belgian manifestos culminate, in fact, with the exact language of the April 5 resolution above, coming down decisively on the side of Marx over Rimbaud: "LA RECONNAISSANCE DU PARTI COMMUNISTE COMME SEULE INSTANCE RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE."[66] Only weeks before, Arnaud had written that the "bouleversement" of one's "personnalité morale, affective" forms the necessary foundation for a society's lasting economic change.[67] Now, the Arnaud and Dotremont caucuses appear to be in agreement that this

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65 "Manifeste des Surréalistes Révolutionnaires en France," in collection "Internationale situationniste ephemera, 1947-1975" at Getty Research Library (1523-027), with Arnaud's draft notes (2).

66 "Manifeste des Surréalistes Révolutionnaires" (3) has it that "le parti communiste seul […] porte en lui les espoirs d'une transformation effective du monde, telle que le surréalisme l'a toujours voulue et proclamée comme la condition impérieuse d'un changement de la vie […]. […] de la nécessité d'une transformation des bases économiques de la société POUR changer la vie, il ne saurait y avoir d'autre conséquence que la reconnaissance du parti communiste comme seule instance révolutionnaire." "Pas de quartiers" has: "la plus simple honnêteté, servie pas la plus élémentaire lucidité, exige que nous, marxistes, parcourions [le chemin] jusqu'à son terme: *la reconnaissance du Parti Communiste comme la seule instance révolutionnaire*" (Mariën 408).

67 Letter included in "Pour désequivoquer" (1).

necessary foundation is the fierce defense of the Soviet state in all circumstances. Now, to condemn Stalinist excesses, or to take one's distance from the policies of the PCF, as Breton does, is to betray the revolution. For increasingly throughout these manifestos, meetings and debates, it is no longer a matter of politics or political choice but of truth. Once the truth has been found, the only acceptable freedom is the freedom to know the truth, to speak it, and to act in its name. Accordingly, the final line of the French manifesto calls for "liberté totale d'expérimentation pour les amis de la liberté." Since Breton has criticized the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, he is now, as everyone present unanimously allows, an enemy of liberty. How can someone who rejects the truth, even Breton, be trusted to be free?

Many of the textual and conceptual tensions and hesitations evident in the two manifestos concern how to distinguish the friends of liberty from its enemies.[68] What happens when the irresistable force of surrealist freedom meets the immovable object of revolutionary authority, or the irresistible progress of what participants call the "truth of history"? Here, at least, surrealist freedom rapidly loses ground. Although the French manifesto has it, for example, that surrealist *expérience* can predict or project "le style et l'éthique d'une société sans classes," it might also, in an "incomplete" state, be used "par des contre-révolutionnaires à des fins contre-révolutionnaires," and thus serve "les ennemis de la liberté."[69] *Expérience* is said to take place in a kind of "zone franche," beyond which it must submit to the laws of the "exterior." Thus it can only remain free only as long as it is closed off from this exterior – as in the ivory tower in which Breton

[68] Many of these hesitations are visible in Arnaud's draft for the French manifesto. While the final text, for example, urges the "adoption" of Party discipline, the original draft has "acceptation" crossed out and replaced with "soumission." In the concluding paragraph, the draft has "aide totale et inconditionnelle au Parti Communiste Français," and the final text has "aide positive."

[69] "Manifeste des Surréalistes Révolutionnaires" (4)

and his group are accused of living. Moreover, what escapes from this "interior" can be tolerated only when it is "incomplete," and when it has no real political significance. But this incompletion is precisely what makes it most vulnerable to the "enemies of liberty."[70] Thus the closed interior of *expérience* must also be surveilled, to prevent the infiltration of the enemies of liberty, and to make sure *expérience* does not forget its ultimately revolutionary duties. *Expérience* is nominally free, but every move it makes might betray hidden counter-revolutionary leanings. As the concepts the manifestos rely on continue to transform themselves, here and in further meetings, into reified ideological benchmarks – according to which individuals' loyalties can be measured and tested – the hermeneutics of suspicion reigns supreme. What individuals hold true about themselves and their loyalties, for example, has increasingly little to do with what they actually are (Hubert Juin, in the May 31 meeting, urges that it is quite possible to be a Trotskyist while believing oneself not to be). Moreover, it is increasingly the case that one cannot criticize aspects of a given political ideology or activity without immediately becoming its sworn enemy. It is nearly impossible, in this atmosphere, to question the attitudes of the PCF without tipping one's hand as a counter-revolutionary or a fascist sleeper agent. There is no neutral ground, only the acute edge where the slippery slopes of "for" and "against" meet.

Slavoj Zizek writes that "the reduction of antagonism to polarity is one of the most elementary ideological operations." The critical response should be to refuse this

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[70] See "Pas de quartiers" (Mariën 408). In any case, as the French and Belgian manifestos both state, the freedom of *expérience* is an illusion, for though it steps beyond the rational and the real, it continues to be determined and defined by the very "real" – the reign of bourgeois-capitalist society – that it challenges. In other words, there is no way past the "Obstacle" and its illusions, short of submitting to the Party. See Belgian manifesto in Mariën (407): "Alors qu'il fallait aller de l'irrationnel à la conscience, de la conscience à l'action, il a cru pouvoir disposer contre le monde capitaliste-rationnel-bourgeois d'un 'irrationnel pur,' sans voir que celui-ci était déterminé par celui-là."

polarity – to refuse the translation of antagonism (for example the struggle between revolutionary and reactionary) into a mutually exclusive for-and-against.[71] André Breton for one states, in the Duché interview and elsewhere, his unwillingness to take sides under such conditions. But in a June 6 meeting of the Dotremont and Arnaud groups, Breton's positions are forced into this for-and-against logic anyway. In a letter to the meeting participants, Breton had written the following:

> Si l' "équivoque," pour vous, tient au fait que la plupart des surréalistes font aujourd'hui défaut à l'action politique proprement dite, vous savez fort bien que ce n'est pas à eux que la responsabilité en incombe: c'est, d'une part à ceux qui ont *banni la libre discussion dans les organismes révolutionnaires*.[72]

When the June 6 group reads this letter aloud, Hubert Juin (who believes one can be a Trotskyist without knowing it) comments that in making this point about free discussion, Breton is clearly "taking sides" against the Party, since the Party could not possibly be suppressing free discussion.[73] It seems, once again, that to the extent that the Party has laid claim to the truth of things, dissent no longer has any use or meaning as content, and serves only as a symptom of a counter-revolutionary soul. The vision of authority and

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71 Slavoj Zizek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in Zizek ed., *Mapping Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1994), 23. See also the Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski's essay "In Praise of Inconsistency": inconsistency is "simply a refusal once and for all to choose beforehand between any values whatever which mutually exclude each other […]. Inconsistency is a constant effort to cheat life, which incessantly tries to place us before alternative doors, each of which is an entrance but through neither of which we can return." In *Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 7.

72 "Pour désequivoquer" Part 2 (2).

73 Ibid. (4). See also Breton's statement about "la calomnie" and the "suppression du témoignage humain" being among the Party's methods. Arnaud, Juin and others see here only a political "bias" and a partiality with regard to the problem of "la fin et [les] moyens" (Ibid. Part 2, 7). When Bédouin asks whether recent attacks on Breton in *Lettres Françaises* and *L'Humanité* are a form of calumny, he is accused of "solidarizing" with Breton. Judt's account of the thorny problems faced by postwar Communist-leaning intellectuals places all this in context: an atmosphere where "one could only criticize a position if one first shared it" (127). As Jean-Paul Sartre writes in "Le Fantôme de Staline": "Like it or not, the construction of socialism is privileged in that to understand it one must espouse its movement and adopt its goals; in a word, we judge what it does in the name of what it seeks and its means in the light of its ends; all other undertakings we assess in the light of what they refuse, neglect or deny" (Judt 128). As for means and ends, Sartre feels that it is wrong "to speak out against injustice in a Communist state" for to do so would be to provide ammunition against what is *in the long run* the cause of justice itself (123).

truth that creeps into the group's conversations is one of a regime where everything is permitted, but where everything also signifies. When it comes to the authority of the Communist truth over *expérience* – and over the things that one can and cannot write, think, or do – the group is reluctant to say outright that anything is forbidden. But a single word choice or careless gesture can arouse suspicion as to one's status as friend or enemy of liberty.

In the June 6 meeting, after making quick work of Breton's objections, the Arnaud-Dotremont group also reads aloud a letter from Yves Bonnefoy, in which he pleads that Surrealism's goal must not be to determine rights of authority or to foment suspicion, but to form a "dialectical complicity" between the freedom of *expérience* and revolutionary practice. It could not be otherwise for, as Bonnefoy rhetorically asks, "quelle activité de l'esprit peut se définir sans politique?"[74] The group is unmoved. Arnaud proposes at least discussing Bonnefoy's idea of dialectical complicity – a variation of which Dotremont, in fact, had urged in his manifesto – and even adds that the revolution might have need of "heretics" who "en cas de défaillances de l'instance révolutionnaire y suppléeraient." The group's reaction to this idea of necessary heresy is very curious. Here is how the June 6 meeting closes:

> Arnaud: Vous êtes donc d'accord, Juin, pour penser que cette hérésie est nécessaire?
> Juin: Elle est fatale, mais je la déplore alors que Bonnefoy l'approuve.
> *Les camarades la déplorent en général*.
> Arnaud: Donc, il faut lutter contre elle?
> Juin: Supprimer l'équivoque serait opter pour le surréalisme ou le communisme.[75]

During this June meeting, the participants were aware of the formation of a new group around Breton, who had been back in France for more than a year, and that this

[74] "Pour désequivoquer" Part 2 (12).
[75] Ibid. Part 2 (15).

group – also known as "Cause surréaliste"[76] – was planning to publish a manifesto, which they imagined would formally exclude all communists and disown the Party. When on June 21, 1947, a general assembly headed by Breton at the Place Blanche café adopted the manifesto *Rupture inaugurale*, the text's subtitle, stating its "attitude préjudicielle à l'égard de toute politique partisane," must have confirmed the Dotremont-Arnaud group's most gleeful fears. The manifesto begins with the observation that it has become impossible to criticize the Communist Party in any way without being ranked among counter-revolutionaries, class enemies and fascists. It responds by setting the Marxist tradition – which is on the side of "[les] revendications immédiates dans l'ordre de l'Esprit […] dans le domaine éthique" – against the present policies of the PCF.[77] With the publication of *Rupture inaugurale*, the Breton group and the Dotremont-Arnaud group of revolutionary-surrealists were now at war.

Rupture brings up a topic that, in the postwar French intellectual context, was a troubled and troubling one: the Moscow trials of 1936-38, as well as more recent news of Soviet oppression that had begun to filter into the West. In his account of this postwar scene, Tony Judt cites André Breton in particular as an unwavering critic of the Trials and other excesses, but for the most part French intellectuals were "psychologically unprepared for the onslaught of repression that hit Central and eastern Europe in the years 1947-54." This unpreparedness complicated their political and ideological positions as they ignored, explained or justified uncomfortable facts, invoking a "dialectic of history"

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[76] This name referred to a "secretariat surréaliste" who would be concerned with the archives of the movement and with liaisons with various international groups. Breton nominated Sarane Alexandrian, Georges Henein, and Henri Pastoureau for the secretariat. See Sarane Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi: autobiographie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1990), 207.

[77] *Rupture inaugurale* (Paris: Éditions Surréalistes, 1947), 5.

or the sacrifices to be made for great and beautiful ideas.[78] One of their stategies was what Judt calls the argument from history, encapsulated in philosopher Emmanuel Mounier's statement that "political justice is only possible in an affirmation of the final goal of history." The argument *against* the argument from history is encapsulated in Albert Camus's sharp rejoinder that this sense of "responsibility toward history dispenses one of responsibility toward human beings."[79]

Rupture inaugurale begins by agreeing with the terms of this conflict about means and ends, and about the truth and final direction of history: "le terme final de l'évolution historique, celui qui marquera la fin des malheurs de l'Esprit enfin victorieux de son passé, justifie, seul, les actes des hommes." However, the manifesto continues that history can only justify "means" that do not compromise "l'évolution de la loi morale." The direction and result of this evolution are no more determined in advance than that of history itself. Thus the "loi morale" can be transgressed, but only in any one of its fixed states. But what cannot be arrested under any pretext – even that of readying the great Proletarian Revolution – is the evolution of the moral law "dans le sens du progrès."[80] *Rupture* engages with the then-fashionable argument that, since our ethical choices in the present depend on the final outcome of History, which we cannot know in our present historical situatedness, we must take a gamble against the liberties and desires of individuals in the faith that this will be the means to a glorious end. But *Rupture* twists this argument to claim the primacy, at all costs, of these very liberties and desires, and reverses the meaning of its points of reference, like "loi morale" and "progrès." Whereas an apologist for Stalinism would use "loi morale" to refer to the fragile claims of human

78 Judt (102-13).
79 Ibid. (121-122).
80 *Rupture inaugurale* (7).

liberty and desire over those of revolutionary justice and discipline, and "progrès" for the strategic demands of Party activity, in *Rupture* the "loi morale" to be transgressed becomes the Party's demands for obedience, and "progrès" the larger goal of human freedom.

In intellectual France on the eve of the Cold War – when to appear "apolitical" was a liability to say the least, and when mawkish proclamations of eternal faith in the Party were often not enough to avoid being suspected of such – *Rupture* openly refuses to participate "à toute action politique qui devrait être immorale pour avoir l'air d'être efficace," adding that at present anything except a "sursis de décision" would be morally risky. The Breton group in fact, through *Rupture*, marginalizes itself in every way that counts in this time and context. But the Breton group feels that the very heresy that exposes it to attack protects its integrity. It believes that those who see Surrealism falling from the crest of the wave of history fail to see that, actually, the movement has only refused "à se renier au point de graviter aveuglément dans l'orbe du Parti Communiste."[81]

At the beginning of July 1947, Breton's group was in full swing, preparing for its *Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition that month. Soon after the vernissage, what was now the Revolutionary-Surrealist group led by Dotremont and Arnaud began launching its final set of sallies – before they and their accompanying periodical were shut down the following year by the Party itself, and their members either struck off in new directions or filtered quietly back to join the ranks of their erstwhile enemies. The revolutionary-surrealists signed their tract *La Cause est entendue* on the first of July, laying out six

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[81] Ibid. (12). Mahon quotes Breton on the party politics of this period: "The Stalinists, the only ones who had a strong organization during the clandestine period, had managed to fill almost all the key positions in publishing, the press, the radio, the art galleries, etc. […]. On an intellectual level, it goes without saying that it was vital to neutralize and silence those who were in a position to denounce such an operation" (113).

"theses" according to which the purpose of all artistic-creative experiment is, finally, myth-breaking rather than myth-building. Surrealism, they write, is defined by its opposition to myth, and it must use its methods, whatever these might be, to undo the very mechanism of myth's formation and functioning. The foundation of their programmatic optimism is that it is possible to stand at a vantage point outside of myth, where by myth they mean something close to ideology – covering not only Breton's Grands Transparents, the tropes, analogies and images of the esoteric tradition, and the sins, retributions and redemptions of the Judeo-Christian tradition along with its earthly infrastructure, but also capitalism, and the forms of false consciousness that uphold it. In the *La Cause* tract, although the details of future history cannot be known, the truth of history can, and this truth is immutable, an anchor amid a storm of myths. Even after the entire economic structure of society is overturned, the role of Surrealism will still be "l'extermination des résidues mythiques," preserving and upholding this truth. Though the authors still exalt the powers of poetry, it is difficult to extrapolate what poetry would look like in a mythless society. It is also difficult to say whether, in the "totale résolution du désir et de la nécessité" they envision, desire must trim itself in advance to the size of necessity, or whether necessity can be enlarged to make room for desire.

Breton, in the months leading up to the 1947 exhibition, feels that poetry, the imagination, and desire are all mythic: which is to say that they make and remake the armature of ideas, beliefs, and fictions that humans live by. For Breton this domain of myth includes the fanatical "cult" of Marx, with its martyrs, "pope rouge," and punishment of heresy.[82] And just as these revolutionary cultists believe that Party "discipline" is a means justified by a glorious end, the 1947 exhibition, Breton feels, is

[82] "Comète surréaliste," in *Œuvres III*, 757.

also a mythic means to the same end: human liberation. The "new myth" sought by Breton's group, however, has the distinction of being a myth that recognizes itself as such. For this reason, it has and recognizes its own power. Breton points out in his June 1947 essay "Comète surréaliste" that the 1947 exhibition organizers, in their interest in existing myths, are no more mystics or occultists than Breton and Paul Eluard were suffering from dementia praecox when they wrote their "Essais de simulation" in 1930, verbally simulating mental illness.[83] But neither are the exhibition's myths "mere" fictions. If myths, in the widest sense, are the constitutive matter of the social, cultural, and political world, then to create a myth is, at however small a scale, to reshape this matter, insofar as it is a function of "l'entendement humain." This is why both "changing life" and "transforming the world" are both mythic acts, on the same level playing field.[84] Further, Breton's comparison of the 1947 exhibition's mythmaking to simulation suggests that, just like simulation, myth is both real and unreal, and neither truth nor lie. The power of simulation and of myth to act – upon their creators, their audience, and upon the social community at large – is not dependent on these categories.[85] The *comme si* of Dotremont's original "Revolutionary Surrealist" manifesto is not dissimilar to this

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[83] Ibid. (758). The "Essais de simulation" were part of the book *L'Immaculée conception*. For more on the "Essais" and on simulation see also Chapter Three. The same goes for "initiation" as for the occult: Breton writes, "on serait impardonnable de prendre ici le mot 'initiation' au pied de la lettre; il n'a, bien entendu, dans notre esprit, qu'une valeur d'*indication*. Mais cette indication, *nous y tenons*, oui, nous avons la faiblesse d'y tenir à l'heure où la poésie et l'art aspirent un peu partout à rentrer dans le rang […] ."

[84] Breton: " […] j'estime que la situation actuelle du monde ne permet plus d'établir de hiérarchie entre les impératifs […] qui doivent être menés de front: aider […] à la libération sociale de l'homme, travailler sans répit au désencroûtement *intégrale* des mœurs, refaire l'entendement humain" (758).

[85] Political theorist and law professor Bernard Harcourt writes: "What we come to believe – so often, in reality, mere fiction and myth – takes on the character of truth and has real effects, tangible effects on our social and political condition. These beliefs, these human fabrications, are they simply illusions? Are they fantasies? […] Thinkers have proposed a range of theories and methods to emancipate us from these figments of our imagination. They have offered geneaologies and archaeologies, psychoanalysis, *Ideologiekritik*, poststructuralism and deconstruction […] their central point continues to resonate loudly today: our collective imagination has real effects on our social condition and on our politics." "On the American Paradox of *Laissez-Faire* and Mass Incarceration," in *Harvard Law Review* forum 54 (2012), 1.

understanding of mythmaking and simulation. Though gradually of course, among Dotremont's colleagues, another possibility had begun to creep in – that of the absence of myth, or of a vantage point beyond myth – and along with this possibility, the absolute exigencies of Party politics.[86]

When the 1947 international Surrealist exhibition opened at Galerie Maeght, the revolutionary-surrealists were quick to counter-attack. They produced, for example, a "Patalog" for the exhibition. The front cover of the *Patalog* pretends to reveal that Duchamp's famous latex breast cover for the *Le Surréalisme en 1947* catalog is actually part of a larger image in which André Breton, done up as a Orientalistically stylized slave dancer, parades with his single breast across a stage; coupling Breton and the "mysticism" of the exhibition with a stagy and vaguely eastern gender-bending is intended as the lowest of insults. A *Patalog* essay titled "En plein rideau" pastiches Breton's "Devant le rideau" essay from *Le Surréalisme en 1947* – the one that warmly salutes Infra Noir and its "connaissance par la méconnaissance." It places Breton's Surrealism within a "desperately useless" oppositional tradition that quails at facing the problem of capitalism and instead runs a relay of endless means without ends, or flees into the arms of Melusine, Charles Fourier, and Osiris. The *Patalog*'s pseudo-Breton writes, moreover, of a postwar Europe that finds its salvation in "les boîtes de boeuf américaines" that remind him of "les premières images que nous ramenons de notre plongée dans les eaux lactescentes du mythe." In this way the authors create a link

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[86] The Breton group's perspective on myth also brings the goals of the 1947 exhibition close to those of the Infra Noir group. The "Obstacle" is a complex of ruthlessly effective myths that define what one can and cannot do, be, and think, powerful enough that they even inform and regulate one's attempts to combat them. The "negation of negation," in this context, would be to turn back toward myth with one's own myths in hand, oppositing that poor simulation of life offered by one's oppressed condition with one's own, better simulations. See also Introduction.

between the "mysticism" of the exhibition and the recently implemented Marshall Plan, in which the United States under Truman both supplied material aid to, and assured its economic influence in, Western Europe.[87]

A later printed invitation to a revolutionary-surrealist conference – set up as a rival to the 1947 Surrealist exhibition and held in Brussels at the end of October – manages to triumphantly conclude that in surrealist *expérimentation* (which here replaces *expérience*), there is no dogma, and there is nothing forbidden: "il n'y a pas de problème sacré pour un marxiste."[88] The unintentional irony of this conclusion gives pause – for the revolutionary-surrealists had spent a great deal of time elaborating the types of thought and activity that were forbidden to devoted Party members. Impassioned for the sake of absolute human freedom, they had ended up with something decidedly other than freedom. But this is not to say that the Bretonian group, similarly impassioned, would

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[87] Arnaud and Dotremont, *Le Surréalisme en 947: patalogue officiel de l'Exposition internationale du surréalisme* (Paris: Groupe SR, 1947), unpaginated. A year after this "Patalog" appeared, the College de 'Pataphysique was founded; Arnaud joined the College in the early fifties. The *Patalog* authors probably found a useful oppositional energy in the pataphysics elaborated in Alfred Jarry's 1911 *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*, and borrowed its "pata" as a suffix – a suffix that forms a weird juncture between Arnaud's present Stalinism and his future pataphysical interests. The *Patalog* has nearly as many references to the Marshall Plan, shipments of canned beef, Truman and the United States as it does to alchemists, utopians, and occultists. The authors associate these former particularly with Frederick Kiesler, the American architect and artist – born, like Paul Celan, in Czernowitz (present-day Western Ukraine) – who designed the Salle des Superstitions for the 1947 exhibition. In their immense irritation with Kiesler, they fill the text with a delirious number of variations on his name (Friesler, Piesler, Griesler, Liesler …). As for Truman, see for example their "Pour une offensive de Style Henri II": "Nous appelons au combat pour la *Verdummung* absolue dont le Vénérable Président Truman a su dessiner le processus magnifiquement." *Verdummung* is among many other humorously misused German words in this essay. The revolutionary-surrealists also release a leaflet called "Les Grands Transparents" that interweaves lines from *Rupture*, from Charles de Gaulle's speech in Lille in June 1947 in support of the Gaullist Rassemblement du Peuple Français, and from an editorial that same month by Léon Blum responding to his excoriation at the hands of Party members over his questioning of dialectical materialism (see "Les Excommunications de M. Thorez," in *L'Œuvre de Léon Blum VI, 1, 1945-47* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1958), 83-85.) The leaflet's insinuation is that there is a right-wing Gaullism implicit in Breton's imagining of the Grands Transparents, since it is anti-materialist to imagine such things, and since De Gaulle himself is anti-materialist.

[88] *Invitation à la première Conférence internationale du surréalisme révolutionnaire* (Brussels, 1947), unpaginated.

entirely succeed either. In the 1947 exhibition and after, the Surrealist story of the fortunes and misfortunes of the right to heresy continues, as the boundaries of the forbidden continue to shift.

2. Myth and the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition

– If one is to continue to paint or write as the political trap seems to close upon him he must perhaps have the extremest faith in sheer possibility.
—R. Motherwell and H. Rosenberg, "The Question of What will Emerge is Left Open" (1947)

The Breton group's *Rupture inaugurale* manifesto points out that, though Surrealism is being accused from all sides of "mysticism" and neo-Romantic religiosity, it is actually the group's critics who speak endlessly of finding "redemption" from history in a self-sacrificing devotion to the Communist truth.[1] In the previous section, we followed the transformation of a group of surrealists into a group of Stalinist Party operatives. In their belief that they were finally standing on the right side of history and had located its truth, they ended by finally rejecting all the forms that Surrealist freedom of *expérience* could take, from Dotremont's experimental *comme si*, to the mythic "intraphysical" form of thinking that takes root in the invisible, to Breton's heretical, deliberately "minor" positioning. The present section focuses on the other side of the Surrealist Cold War. It is the side that embraced all these things, the one for which Infra Noir opted in its passionate participation in the *Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition – the side of myth.

The 1947 exhibition, as we have seen, opens at a peculiar moment in French intellectual and cultural history when – as the son of Maeght Gallery owner Aimé Maeght puts it – "everyone who was for the Communist Party was good and everyone who was against it was bad."[2] Breton composed his invitation to potential participants in January 1947, before the revolutionary-surrealists had really taken wing, but in the general postwar devastation and resulting political climate, he could not have been unaware of

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1 *Rupture* (13).
2 Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros* (116), citing an interview with Adrian Maeght.

the profound untimeliness of his vision. Rather than raising the curtain of myth to reveal truth, he would open the theater stage to the spectacle of myth itself.

The desire of the organizers was, as the young surrealist Sarane Alexandrian saw it, to engage visitors in an unprecedented intellectual adventure in which the power of myth was vibrantly participatory rather than static and stultifying.[3] Alexandrian describes an atmosphere of continual conflict and debate. Delegations to the preparatory meetings represented various countries (Egypt, Hungary, Japan) – a new phenomenon in surrealist exhibition. One meeting was devoted to the exhibition vitrine: Yves Bonnefoy wanted a firebrick kiln that kept a perpetual flame alight; Alexandrian wanted a living lion in a birdcage; Francis Bouvet wanted a whole frontage covered with sand, scattered with footprints and with "toutes sortes d'accessoires évoquant la recherche d'un trésor" – recalling the Infra Noir group's suggestion of a dark room devoted to a game of treasure-hunting in the dark that they called "Sable nocturne" (see Chapter Three).[4] Eventually, it was decided that a version of Victor Brauner's "Conglomeros" sculpture – three serpentine bodies with a single head – would appear there. Indeed, Brauner and fellow Romanian artist Jacques Hérold were very well represented in the exhibition, reflecting the deepening of their friendship and collaboration with Breton after the war. Brauner and Hérold were well placed to ensure a role for their Infra Noir friends in the exhibition, and perhaps to weave some of the latter's ideas into the planning of the event, if they had wished to do so. If Infra Noir did not participate in designing the exhibition's altars and niches, for example, this probably had more to do with the difficulty and delays of

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3 Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold: étude historique et critique* (Paris: Fall édition, 1995), 78.

4 Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (206). In early 1947, Infra Noir described the game of "Sable nocturne" in a letter to Breton. It is possible this letter was read at one of the Paris group's preparatory café meetings. As for the international delegations, Alexandrian does not list their individual contributions, though remembers "un branle-bas de combat continuel" (200).

correspondence, not to mention obtaining permission to travel West. Luca writes to Brauner in March 1947, "nous sommes presque affolés par le désir (ce n'est plus un désir, c'est un besoin élémentaire) de partir […]. Obtenir un passeport est un travail colossal. […] Obtenir le visa français est un autre obstacle."[5] And though the group's overseas correspondence increased in volume through 1946 and 1947, they still felt, and hated, their isolation. Their single contribution to the exhibition – a text for the catalog, also titled "Sable nocturne" – represented little of their initial ambition for the exhibition: a "salle de grande silence noir" peopled with mysterious objects and "objet-personnages" to be traversed blind, hands outstretched, in a state of constant curious encounter.[6] Still, this was the closest the group got to becoming an integral part of the Surrealist movement in France.

The international Surrealist exhibition at Galerie Maeght opened on the 7th of July. Marcel Duchamp was co-organizer of the exhibition with Breton, and worked on its design, and the architect Frederick Kiesler designed its "Salle des Superstitions." Arriving visitors faced a flight of 21 stairs – conceived and designed by Breton and Duchamp – made into the spines of 21 different books or authors. Each book or author corresponded, in turn, to one of the 21 Major Arcana in the Tarot deck. This staircase honored Surrealist mainstays like Lautréamont, whose complete works are assigned to the World Arcanum at the 21st step; Sade, with *Justine* as the Chariot Arcanum; and Baudelaire and Apollinaire. Jarry's *Ubu* is the Devil Arcanum; the enlightened madness of figures like Brisset, Hölderlin, Swedenborg, and Ferdinand Cheval is also represented on the 21 steps. Richard Lefebvre de Noëttes (appearing as the Strength Arcanum)

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[5] Brauner, *Écrits* (228), Letter of March 20, 1947.

[6] See for example a letter of March 12, 1947 from Luca to Brauner (Brauner, *Ecrits* 226). For more on the "Sable nocturne" catalog text, see Chapter Three.

believed that improvements in horse-harnessing had allowed ancient civilizations to dispense with systematic slavery – and perhaps represents the power of small changes to act as a lever for large ones. Charles Fourier's *Théorie des quatre mouvements* is the Star, the 17th Arcanum. The Moon, the 18th Arcanum, is a story by Xavier Forneret – the Romantic-era "homme noir" who slept in a coffin – titled "Et la lune donnait et la rosée tombait," a tale of mad, idolatrous, transfiguring love. Higher even than Fourier's utopia and the mad love of Romanticism *noir* is the 19th Arcanum, the Sun, represented by Marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys who wrote of the power to guide and control one's dreams, and of a lucid union of waking and sleep, external and internal, perception and representation.[7] Only the final unveiling of the apocalypse can follow (the *Book of Revelation*, corresponding to the Judgment Arcanum, the 20th), as revelation becomes revolution, opening out onto the new beginning of the World Arcanum.[8] The ascent of the 21 steps, then, is as much a journey outward toward a world to be changed as a journey inward.

Breton notes in his text of invitation to exhibition participants, without further explanation, that the Fool, traditionally numbered 0 in the Major Arcana and making them add up to 22, is missing from the exhibition staircase. It is possible that the Fool is meant to stand in for the visitor to the exhibition, insofar as the "Fool's Journey" traditionally refers to a passage through the sequence of Major Arcana, taken as a story of adventure. The Fool (in French, Fou) is "the self at the beginning of the journey, he is the

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[7] D'Hervey de Saint-Denys's 1867 book, titled *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger*, is extensively discussed in Breton's 1932 book *Les Vases communicants*.

[8] In their *Patalog*, the revolutionary-surrealists have their pastiche-Breton writing of confounding, "comme par un jeu d'épreuves dont nous trouvons aujourd'hui le filigrane encore et toujours inquiétant, la révélation avec la révolution. Il ne s'agissait que de deux lettres, mais leur persistance à brouiller […] le tarot ne laisse pas de me permettre d'entrevoir de quel mystérieux échanges […] est faite la pensée d'un homme."

fool who has lost his wits, the fool who has, with divine wisdom, abandoned them for something better."[9] In some images he stands at an ambiguous precipice, ready to fall out of the real, or into it. But the Fool might also be an artist, and perhaps also the yet-unworked medium that faces him. Occult historian Richard Cavendish writes of the Fool that, in his "divine folly" and clairvoyant blindness, he is "the Spirit of God about to descend into the nothing – falling from the cliff – at the beginning of creation. […] The Fool is the 0 which contains all things but is no-thing."[10] As a no-thing trembling on the verge of some-thing, the Fool card recalls the *tourbillon d'être*, also a *tourbillon vide*, imagined by Gherasim Luca throughout his poetic career. Luca writes in *Le Vampire passif*: "Nous tourbillonons dans un univers où il n'y a ni points de repères, ni formes, ni corps solides, où jusqu'aux premiers notions et aux premiers éléments rien ne s'est encore détaché du chaos, l'inconnu est complet."[11] This vision of a pre-creative chaos that is also creative potentiality is shared by several of the essays in the exhibition catalog.

It might also be ventured that the Fool is the subject facing "Leonardo's wall," an important concept in Surrealism. In a note in his *Treatise on Painting* titled "A way of developing and arousing the mind to various inventions," Leonardo da Vinci writes: "when you look at a wall spotted with stains […] you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes […] or again you may see battles and figures in action; or strange faces and costumes, and an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to

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[9] See David Conford, "The Tarot Fool," in Janik ed., *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art and History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 456, quoting Bill Butler in *The Definitive Tarot* (1975). A late 20th-century representation of the Fool shows him being beckoned to a rabbithole by a white rabbit.
[10] Cavendish, *The Black Arts* (New York: Putnam, 1967), 109.
[11] Luca, *Le Vampire passif* (76).

complete and well drawn forms."[12] Breton cites the *Treatise on Painting* in *L'Amour fou*, commenting that the lesson that Leonardo offers here "est loin d'être comprise. Tout le problème du passage de la subjectivité à l'objectivité y est implicitement résolu."[13] The Fool is easily the subject who wanders through Breton's *forêt d'indices* in *L'Amour fou*:[14] his stance before the wall, or the *forêt*, requires on one hand ignorance, passivity and *disponibilité*, but on the other, an active desire and wise discernment. Patterns are latent in the dense network of signifiers, but must be discovered or invented, or both at once – as with the reading of Tarot cards themselves, in their complex history and tropical overgrowth of symbolism. It may be, finally, that the function of assigning various Arcana to literary and philosophical works is not to invite careful exegesis – for example, comparing the classic images on the cards to passages in the works chosen – or even to invite a mutual semiotic enrichment of card and text, but precisely to create a *forêt d'indices*, a chaos of latent pattern and potential meaning, an entanglement of *déjà vu* and *jamais vu*, before which one must be both as ignorant and as wise, as blind and as lucid, as the Fool.

If this were the case, it would also apply to the planning of another part of the 1947 exhibition, the "Labyrinthe initiatique." After reaching the top of the stairs, one arrived in the Salle des Superstitions, with its dark walls, blue-green light, and interlocking curved planes. It was a dark space teeming with totems and taboos that, as Breton explains in his invitation, presented "les principales superstitions existantes" and

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[12] See Emma Dickens ed., *The Da Vinci Notebooks* (New York: Arcade Pub., 2006), 71.
[13] *L'Amour fou* (125-26). For the importance of the figure of Leonardo's Wall in Surrealism and in the Infra Noir group, see also Monique Yaari, "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence,'" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir," un et multiple*, 194-197.
[14] See also Chapter Three, and Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 22 and 126-27; also Rentzou's commentary in *Littérature malgré elle* (Paris: Association des amis de Pleine marge, 2010), 294-95.

obliged each visitor to "surmount" them before moving on.[15] Leaving this space, one passed through curtains of multicolored rain falling upon artificial moss and duckboards, passed a billiard table where two people were playing (the organizers named this billiard table an "Objet d'horreur"[16]), caught a brief, unspeakable glimpse of a Grand Transparent (designed by Jacques Hérold), and headed into the labyrinth. The "Labyrinthe initiatique" concealed twelve hollow niches or *alvéoles*, each containing an altar devoted to "un être, une catégorie d'êtres ou un objet SUSCEPTIBLE D'ÊTRE DOUÉ DE VIE MYTHIQUE" (in Breton's words) or which should be included in the "mythologie poétique des temps modernes" (in Alexandrian's).[17] Each contained several votive or intercessory objects, along with propitiatory offerings. The construction of each altar and *alvéole* was assigned to an artist (and during production, in most cases, to several) according to his or her predilections, and would be devoted to a selection of animals or plants (the gila monster and barrel cactus, the secretary bird, the star-nosed mole) people (Raymond Roussel), and fictional entities (including beings invented by Lautréamont, Jarry, Rimbaud, and Marcel Duchamp.

The first altar, for example, was devoted to "Le Tigre mondain," based on a story by Jean Ferry published in *Les Quatre vents* magazine in 1946. The story concerns a music hall number in which a tiger dressed as a dandy performs upright and arm in arm with a tamer. It is revealed that the one controlling the tiger is not the tamer but a man in

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15 For more on this see for example Mahon (118-119).

16 Alexandrian, *L'Aventure* (222). This description might have something to do with a vision of history as determined by dark, unknowable forces; or since Jacques Hérold's Grand Transparent sculpture, done in plaster, was visible from here, perhaps the billiard table was another figuration of these beings who, in their benevolence or malice, superintend this history.

17 Breton and Duchamp ed., *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Pierre à Feu/Maeght, 1947), 136; Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold* (79). Breton's invitation, reproduced in the catalog, also proposes a collectively executed frieze functioning as an "Ariadne's thread" between the altars (138). Infra Noir had suggested in their early 1947 letter to Breton that in the "salle du grand silence noir," the walls be painted, and that "ces peintures à même le mur devraient être ensuite détruites de par la démolition de l'edifice."

a neighboring stagebox, who is using his sheer willpower, like a mesmerist, to keep the tiger as docile and civilized as a marionnette. After the tiger is returned to its cage – a wild and powerful animal forced to dance like a vaudevillian – its desperate roars of rage and tragic humiliation are buried under happy music. The narrator notes that each time the act is repeated, "nous sommes dans un état d'équilibre affreusement instable, qu'un rien pourrait rompre."[18] This formidable power held in check within a nefarious yet fragile equilibrium of control could be taken from a scene on the eve of a revolution, where the tiger represents an oppressed people and the mesmerist its oppressors.

What complicates this would-be revolutionary reading is that, in addition to the artist-altar–alveolus pairing, each ensemble is linked to a sign of the Zodiac, to a mineral, and finally to a passage from the *Nuctemeron of Apollonius of Tyana*, which appeared as a supplement to Eliphas Lévi's *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* in 1855.[19] The meaning of "Nuctemeron," as Lévi explains, is "le jour de la nuit ou la nuit éclairée par le jour," a turn of phrase that echoes Surrealism's concern with the relationship between dreaming and waking life. The twelve "hours" of the text correspond to twelve stages of initiation, each governed by a group of *génies*, understood as "forces morales" or vertus personnifiées," and marking detailed substages of initiation.[20] The hour corresponding to "le Tigre mondain" is the first, where "dans l'unité, les démons chantent les louanges de Dieu, ils perdent leur malice et leur colère." For Lévi, the goal in this phase is to "tame"

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[18] In Marcel Jean, *Autobiographie du surréalisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 444). Benjamin Péret's suggestion for this altar was the following: "Le tigre mondain porte le monocle et regarde férocement une blouse de chirurgien portant des empreintes de mains ensanglantées." He proposes that its food-offering be copper sulfate (which in crystal form is called blue vitriol, or vitriol of Venus) covered with flies. See "Préparation de l'autel Tigre mondain" on <andrebreton.fr>.

[19] Lévi claims that the *Nuctemeron* is his French translation of a work reproduced in an 18th-century volume by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, after a Greek translation by Gilbert Gaulmin (in *De vita et morte Mosis*, 1629) of a lost Assyrian manuscript. This scrupulous documentation makes it seem *less* likely that Lévi did not invent it.

[20] Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* t.2 (Paris: Baillère, 1861), 385 and 391.

the evil passions, literally forcing Hell itself to praise God.[21] Perhaps then, the tiger represents the human evils overcome by postwar renewal, and its humiliation is a victory. But such speculations about what things represent is also beside the point. To the tangle of meanings and figures that might be extracted from Lévi are added the overwhelming interpretive possibilities associated with the Tiger's altar's stone and its sign – chrysoprase and Aries. To take only one, chrysoprase: "esteemed the perfect stone of dreams" in ancient times, when held in the mouth it frees one from punishment for sins; "it was a stone for the voyager on deep seas, a kindler of the imaginative faculties," and the stone of "rousing to action."[22] Once again, the exhibition-goer and reader of the catalog faces Leonardo's wall, its dense patterning concealing the figures one hasn't yet painted; or stands in the *forêt d'indices* where only a "délire d'interprétation" can lead the way ahead; or bends like a soothsayer over a chance arrangement of matter, seeing the myths of revolutions to come in scattered bones and stones. Some prophecies are self-fulfilling.

The exhibition's catalog, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, takes a copious number of approaches to the question of the past, future, use and misuse of myth. Benjamin Péret makes superstitions – even the ones about cats, ladders and salt – into an integral part of "une conscience poétique du monde qui constitue la base même de la pensée humaine."[23] For this reason, to invent new superstitions, as Péret suggests (proposing, for example, that saying "Quelle chaleur!" while dialing a number ensures someone will pick up) is to intervene deeply in the fabric of human thought and behavior. Victor Brauner follows up

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21 Ibid. (389).

22 Among many other sources on stone symbolism, see Isidore Kozminsky, *The Magic and Science of Jewels and Stones* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 168-69.

23 Benjamin Péret, "Le Sel répandu," in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (22).

with a series of "self-coronations": as keeper of the secret of "diabolic materialism," grand master of permanent exile, and "Prince de L'Infra Nuit." As Infra Noir frequently does, Brauner invokes the Spinozian concept of *natura naturans*, and evokes the laws of "correspondances libres et instantanées, du hasard et de l'imprévu" woven into the forest of signs, thereby to act upon human sensibility.[24] Henry Miller elaborates on how a modern myth – for example, that centered around Rimbaud – might function as a medium of transverbal human exchange. Maurice Nadeau, as if in response to the revolutionary-surrealists' materialist dogma, finds in Sade a materialism and mode of knowledge-production that places desire and imagination at its center. When it comes to any ostensibly materialist knowledge of nature, Nadeau asks – with Sade – "Qui sait s'il ne faut la dépasser beaucoup (la nature) pour entendre ce qu'elle veut nous dire."[25] The Surrealist group in London, like that in Romania, decries the dangers of the movement's worldwide recognition, and the surrealistic mannerisms and tics (also addressed in Jean Ferry's catalog contribution) that have taken hold within it. Rather than subordinate themselves to politics, literature and the arts must work alongside myth to "repassioner la vie."[26] Georges Henein, founder of the surrealist group Art et Liberté in Egypt – recently alarmed, incidentally, by what he perceived as the dark extremism of Gherasim Luca's proposals for "non-Oedipal" comportment[27] – imagines artworks that dissolve gradually into the fabric of everyday life, taking the form of a fragile "architecture" of gestures and rituals. The domain of Surrealism is this frail "domaine ingrat du comportement"

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24 Victor Brauner, "Proclamation," in ibid. (25).
25 Maurice Nadeau, "Sade, ou l'insurrection permanente," in ibid. (38).
26 "Déclaration du groupe surréaliste en Angleterre," in ibid. (47).
27 Sarane Alexandrian, *L'Evolution de Ghérasim Luca à Paris* / *Evoluția lui Ghérasim Luca la Paris* (Bucharest: ICARE, 2006), 7.

comprising both artistic and quotidian beauty, which must guard itself from swerving "aveuglément au noir."[28]

Arpad Mezei, part of the Surrealist group in Hungary, compares the conception of the word as sign, where the relationship between sound and sense is arbitrary, to that of the word as signification, where their relationship is analogical. The synthesis between the "objective" logic of the sign and the "subjective" logic of signification (a synthesis Mezei compares to wave-particle duality in "non-Newtonian" physics) results in "symbol": the transformation of private, subjective units of meaning into elements held in common by all. Myth for Mezei is an "interchangeability of reality and language" within a linguistic community founded on symbol.[29] For Yves Bonnefoy likewise, myth represents the possibility of freeing imaginative creation from the limits of canvas and page; the imaginary, and particularly the collective imaginary, must tend constantly to become real. Bonnefoy points out that this attitude remains fully materialist, if one first acknowledges that "la réalité est assez riche, épaisse pour donner forme à notre désir" in all its finest particularities. Hidden within this reality in a state of potential, there are more objects, and objects of desire, than we know. Thus the dialectical interplay between reality and desire recalls the active-passive creative experience of facing Leonardo's wall. Every new desire both creates a new object and revives "l'éxperience de l'obstacle," since any obstacle to desire is no more than the other side of desire's coin. There cannot be one without the other. Thus the imaginary, driven by desire, is not defined in opposition to social reality, but is this reality itself, in constant motion.[30] For the

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[28] Georges Henein, "Séance tenante," in *Surréalisme en 1947* (92).
[29] Arpad Mezei, "Liberté du langage," in ibid. (61).
[30] Yves Bonnefoy, "Donner à vivre," in ibid. (68). The term "obstacle," of course, recalls the Obstacle as defined by Infra Noir.

philosopher Jean Brun (whose "amour objectivé" recalls the "amour objectif" in Trost and Luca's *Dialectique de la dialectique*) reality is, to its foundation, relation. Surrealist analogical thought both acknowledges and participates in this fact. Sensation as act of relation, for example, is the moment when space – the array of presences and "membranes" presented by what is other than oneself – merges with time – in which "je prolifère en tant qu'autre" – to create a "new corporeity." Sensation itself becomes a mythic space of metamorphosis.[31]

Robert Lebel compares the money that circulates in the art world of the mid-century to the *mana* in the sacred art of the past; an artwork, along with its ostensibly aesthetic features, is sacred to the extent of its equivalence to a given amount of money. No amount of experimental innovation can free the artist from the "mysticism" of this modern *mana*, but only those things forbidden to him in his social role as *mana*-producer: self-effacement, "actes gratuits," and the pursuit of chance and marvelous *rencontre*.[32] Pierre Mabille, a close friend of both Naum and Luca before and after the war, goes on to address the postwar verbiage surrounding the problem of liberty, or rather its myth. Abstract principles like "liberté" tend to become like idols: "les idoles sont des dieux, incompréhensibles, éternels, à la fois présents et absents […] ils aiment le sang des hommes." As an alternative to such abstract idols Mabille suggests the principle of the absurd, represented by the god Mercury, the trickster, who is the ultimate friend of liberty.[33] Joë Bousquet follows up, in his "Vue d'outre-noir," with a vision of life and all that exists as a "scandal for reason," since there is nothing that Being excludes.[34] The

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31 Jean Brun, "Le Problème de la sensation et le surréalisme," ibid. (91).
32 Robert Lebel, "Au bas mot," ibid. (75).
33 Pierre Mabille, "Considérations mineures sur la liberté" (97).
34 Joë Bousquet, "Vue d'outre-noir," ibid. (98).

absurd, here, is this very variety and potential of being. Sarane Alexandrian then arrives to reflect, once again, on liberty, an abstract word that must be reinvested with the concrete, the sensuous, and the carnal. It is the poet's task to do so, for the poet stands at the avant-garde of the human, constantly initiating humanity in the mysteries of its own future, and of love free of all notions of sin or taboo. Only the poet knows, moreover, that mysticism has been turned from its true path by religion; the new mystic ecstasy will be the ecstasy of the flesh.[35] Nicolas Calas – as Mabille also does – writes of the Promethean hero, in his refusal to submit to laws, and in his trickery and penchant for theft. Again like Mabille, Calas discusses ideologies of homogeneous social solidarity in contrast to the myth of the hero who wants to "force" history's hand – the domain of the collective versus that of the individual. Against the "religious" virtues of the collectivization of the means of production, for example, there will always arise the individualist discipline of "magic": a heroic, "humanist" magic required when the exigencies of the collective transform liberty into terror.[36]

Several other essays place myth in light of rethinking or safeguarding humanist values and human liberty. One anonymous contributor finds that only the "ennemis de la liberté" feel at ease in speaking about liberty, or see in it purely a negation of various constraints. Liberty is "la somme de toutes les formes d'opposition possibles à toutes les possibilités de contraintes, passées, présentes et futures"[37] – an understanding of liberty that is still negative, but via a "negation of negation" that is nourished by and extends the possible. The philosopher Ferdinand Alquié follows up by comparing the projects of

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35 Alexandrian, "Amour, révolte et poésie," ibid. (100-102).
36 Nicolas Calas, "Révolte et liberté," ibid. (104).
37 "Certitudes sur la liberté," ibid. (123). Like other texts, this one compares postwar Communism to a religion, here to a "catholicisme au rabais."

Surrealism and of Existentialism with regard to their understanding of the place of the human in the world. Surrealism's humanism arises not from despair and resignation but from the act of creation, weaving around itself a world that is both human and strange, both intimate and alien, and is not afraid to stand with one foot on shaky philosophical territory to do so.

Still other catalog contributions, instead of reflecting on terms and meanings, set immediately about the task of myth-creation. Claude Tarnaud for example, shortly to begin a close and collaborative friendship with Gherasim Luca, elaborates the alchemical discipline of the "object-poem," with reference to the Egyptian resurrection ritual of the "passage through the skin" (also featured in Gellu Naum's 1948 *Calea Șearpelui*, The Path of the Snake).[38] The painters Henri and No Seigle elaborate a cult of the star-nosed mole and of the scorpion, which signifies "la puissance humaine" and the necessity of conquering or espousing destiny, like Calas's Promethean hero.

One perspective that many of the 1947 catalog essays share is what I would call a combinatorial, or a Lucretian vision of nature – including human nature and artistic creation. In this vision the world, or language, or social reality, is composed of building blocks or atoms that, for all their apparent solidity, can be recomposed or re-collaged.[39] The 1947 exhibition's approach of myth cannot be understood apart from its modified

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[38] See Preface in Simona Popescu ed., *Gellu Naum I: Poezii* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2011), 55. See also tenth chapter ("The Ritual of Rebirth") of Lewis Spence, *The Mysteries of Egypt* (London: Rider & Co., 1929), which relies on Alexandre Moret's *Mystères égyptiens* (Paris: A. Colin, 1913). Hungarian psychoanalyst Géza Roheim also mentions the ritual in *Animism, Magic and the Divine King* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1930); Breton writes in *L'Art magique* (1957) – recalling Gherasim Luca's parlance – that for Géza Roheim, "[…] le magicien est le type du psychisme 'sadique' […] un ithyphallisme sans fin, sans issue, qui fait tourner le monde autour de lui au lieu de chercher son épanouissement dans le principe de vie dominé par l'Œdipe-complexe" (*Œuvres IV,* 281).

[39] From Lucretius's atomic physics in *De rerum natura*. His doctrine of the "clinamen," or the erratic "swerving" of atoms, was picked up and modified by Alfred Jarry in *Dr. Faustroll,* and later by the College of 'Pataphysics and the group Oulipo.

Lucretianism. Pierre Demarne, for example, contributes an essay called "Suranalogie et pollen de surréalité," where he begins by gathering scholarly quotations suggesting that the prehistoric art of the Aurignacian or the Magdalenian periods passed through all the same phases of naturalism, expressionism and even modernism as in later human history. The paintings on cave walls contain both the present and the future of our art: "au domaine ahurissant des formes, au creuset des possibles, *le temps* n'existe pas."[40] Instead of a history of artistic forms, there is a given number of possible "combinations" of formal elements and impulses; it is only that sometimes, in this formal "loterie," the same number is drawn at distant points in history. This combinatorial vision encompasses not only artistic forms but also conceptual forms, and social forms. Surrealism's task (its "métascience du *comme*," in Demarne's words) must be to continually seek new ones – though they are not so much new as potential, like the images hidden in Leonardo's wall. Instead of seeing things according to a "mesology" – the science of the relationship between living beings and their natural or social milieu – Surrealism must practice "suranalogy," which is simply the art of playing upon the clavier of combinations.

Where Demarne sees combinations, Jules Monnerot sees numbers. For human beings, audible frequencies and visible colors correspond to fixed figures; beyond these limits one finds "l'échelle mathématiquement concevable de tout ce qui n'est pas perçu."[41] What one calls the real world is the function of a series of limits, or a series of imposed "choices" on a number line of possible frequencies along which reality is transmitted. It may be that we faintly perceive other "real worlds," but that such perceptions are those we most resist, those most "centrifuged" by the field of human

[40] Pierre Demarne, "Suranalogie et pollen de surréalité," ibid. (49).
[41] Jules Monnerot, "Contre la peur d'imaginer", ibid. (52).

attention. Moreover, in line with Breton's Grands Transparents, there is nothing to prevent beings invisible to our senses from inhabiting these other "real worlds," and there would be nothing in principle to prevent them from communicating with us, or vice versa. For Monnerot, the artistic imagination is a point of "rupture," transgressing limits: Bach's music, for example, might bear a "message involontaire" to an alien people whose language is based on music.

Hans Bellmer brings Demarne's combinations and Monnerot's numbers down into the realm of erotic desire and carnal materiality. Bellmer wishes to construct a "monstrueux dictionnaire des analogies-antagonismes" upon the scaffolding of the flesh, specifically upon that of a desired woman, now subject to "permutations," "algebra," and transsubstantiation. Myth here is a "practical fusion of the natural and the imagined." The pleasure it brings is a "jouissance de la multiplication du nombre."[42]

It seems that myth, in the exhibition of 1947, is not or not only a fixed set of beings and enduring stories; it is understood as the field of the possible itself, which extends over everyday human reality as much as over the hitherto "super"-natural (since, in these essays, everything that is possible is natural) and over artistic experiment. To act upon and within this field is to act socially.

According to Georges Bataille's short contribution to the exhibition catalog, the desiderata of the revolutionary-surrealists are already accomplished: both myth and the possibility of myth are undone, dried up, leaving an immense void. But at the same time, the Surrealists' visions of the possible and the potential are also accomplished: this void

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[42] Hans Bellmer, "L'Anatomie de l'amour," ibid. (108). The line "jouissance de la multiplication du nombre" is taken from Charles Baudelaire's *Journaux intimes*. Bellmer's description in this article of a woman mobile in space minus the factor of time recalls the "lithochronics" of Oscar Dominguez in the Main à Plume group (see Chapter Three).

opens out onto the infinite, for because all is empty, all is permitted. Myths, as innocently powerful as they are precarious, live in this medium, like translucent fish in water – with the "pâle transparence de la possibilité," like rivers under the sea.[43] Even the myth of the absence-of-myth, the very one being laid forth by Bataille, is a myth, yet another river in this sea. This fecundating void is also the home of mythmakers themselves: "Je ne suis donc plus Moi," Bataille writes, but an immeasurably joyful "absence de Moi." It recalls Paul Păun's joyful vision in *Les Esprits animaux* – discussed in the following chapter – where all things and selves are only modes or "cases" of the air, in constant amorous contact – a "traversée réciproque des fluides confondues."[44]

For André Breton, the 1947 exhibition is a Promethean act, and the condemnation of critics its inevitable vultures. Through the exhibition, he believes, Surrealism also makes "incursions" upon the future – though never deliberately and always, in a sense, transhistorically, as if it were a matter of generating one of Demarne's timeless combinations. Indeed, Breton refers in this context to "l'activité dite de cabale phonétique," in which the permutation of sounds corresponds to the infinite combinatorics of the Surrealist image.[45] It is possible with such visionary permutations – as with Monnerot's "centrifugation" of sensory data – that precisely that in them which resists present modes of human understanding is capable of reshaping the latter. In this sense – even in its most occult and esoteric leanings – the 1947 exhibition, once again,

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43 Bataille writes "comme les fleuves dans la mer." There are in fact underwater rivers and deep sea lakes – created for example by flows of hydrogen sulfide gas, or of denser, saltier water. Georges Bataille, "L'Absence de mythe," ibid. (65).

44 Paul Păun, *Les Esprits animaux* (Bucharest: Infra-Noir, 1947), 4-5.

45 "Devant" (18). With regard to Breton's mention of "cabale phonétique": in April 1947, Luca had sent and dedicated to Breton a copy of his tract in the Negația Negației series "Niciodată destul" (*Never enough*). It begins: "propopopopoporpor proporporporți porporțiporți …". The Infra-Noir series tract *Amphitrite*, containing Luca's famous "stuttering" poem *Passionément*, preceded it by only two months, and Breton most likely had access to a copy of this as well.

directly engages the social: the ensemble, in Breton's words, of past, present and possible "conduites individuelles et collectives," at exactly the juncture where the ethical, the imaginary, and the political meet. The exhibition, as Calas writes, leans on the past, in the name of the future, amid the peril of the present.[46]

Shortly before Breton composed the essay "Devant le rideau" that opens the 1947 catalog, he wrote a letter to the Infra Noir group in which he sang their praises: "le centre du monde a déménagé à Bucarest."[47] Later, in "Devant," Breton gives Surrealism's postwar *mot d'ordre* to Infra Noir – "la connaissance par la méconnaissance," a quotation from "Sable nocturne"[48] – and in the process, places their work in the conceptual context of the 1947 exhibition and of postwar Surrealism's central efforts. In the previous chapter we saw something of what *méconnaissance* meant for the young pre-Infra Noir poets of *Viața imediată,* influenced by Geo Bogza: a form of blindness that allows one to actively realize one's dream in the world. In the game of "Sable nocturne" Infra Noir finds this *méconnaissance*, this lucid misknowledge, in the dark revelations of touch; in the following chapter, it is required to approach the uncanny and monstrous objects that populate their world; in Chapter Four, in the form of Infra Noir "somnambulism," it becomes the very principle of political action. Here, in the 1947 exhibition and in its accompanying catalog, misknowledge or misrecognition is the stance one takes before Leonardo's wall, allowing images and unexpected "combinations" to take shape upon it. And myth itself – as we have encountered it in the exhibition and even among the disaffected writers and artists who went on to form the revolutionary-surrealist group – is

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[46] Calas, "Révolte et liberté," *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (104).
[47] Laville (80). The letter is now lost, or in a still-unexplored archive.
[48] André Breton, "Devant le rideau," ibid. (14). Breton's dialogue with Infra Noir in "Devant le rideau" is also discussed in Chapter Four.

a form of misknowledge, a form of knowing that swims between the waters of truth and lie. The Infra Noir group was not only directly present in the 1947 exhibition (in correspondence, proposals, texts, and furtive influences) but present in the sense that Infra Noir's deepest concerns are reflected and enriched within it. This is also the case for the tangled events surrounding Surrealism's postwar reboot – the warring tracts, the definitions and redefinitions, the arguments about the relationship between Communism and Surrealism and between truth and heresy. The following section provides a more sustained account of Infra Noir's presence on this scene, both direct and indirect.

While the previous chapter was mostly concerned Infra Noir's prehistory, this final section follows Infra Noir past its end, and into its afterlife. In the summer of 1947 in France, the Surrealists stand before a curtain. This curtain veils mystery: the mysteries of life, of the destiny and capacities of the human, and of the just-beyond that taunts the efforts of both scientists and alchemists. When the curtain rises, it rises upon a scene of experiment and experience governed by the imagination, of theatrical but dead-serious simulation, and of a revitalization of Surrealism as a whole. But for Infra Noir in 1947 – at the height of their modest influence within the movement and at the verge of being, so to speak, canonized by Breton – the curtain falls. Although some Infra Noir members continue their activity in Bucharest or in Israel, and hover around the Surrealist group in Paris in the early 50s and beyond, the story of Infra Noir Surrealism essentially ends with the *Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition. For the curtain that surrealists in both Romania and France face at this moment is also the Iron Curtain, falling slowly like a portcullis over the Infra Noir group and over Breton's efforts to jumpstart the postwar movement, and making its presence felt even at the movement's heart.

3. Infra Noir during and after the Surrealist Cold War

– Remember that I don't live *pro* and *con*, like in your trap. […] Remember that I am *outside*.
—Gellu Naum, *Zenobia*

When we left the story of Infra Noir, the group had just emerged from its years of clandestinity. In January 1945, the members of the group held two exhibitions in Bucharest: one at the Crețulescu gallery with drawings, collages, objects and books, the other, by Luca and Trost alone, at "Prometheus Hall" on Brezoianu street, called *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets.* In February, Paul Păun displayed his ink drawings at the same gallery. None of these three events required any official authorization to take place; the group enjoyed an immense freedom of movement relative to past years. But as the multiple exhibitions attest, Infra Noir had begun to tear itself apart as soon as it emerged into daylight. In March 1945, Gellu Naum – who had asked Victor Brauner to help him get a visa to move to Paris – writes of "the bad dream that has passed over the world," and adds:

> The "weakening of the mind," this general phenomenon of war, has not spared us either. I withstood it as well as I could, the quarrel among us (which here and there took a rather Balkanic aspect), lately addressing again the figurative, the non-figurative, things like that. The admirable Zola [Luca], Paul, and particularly Virgil [Teodorescu], each enormously changed as you know. Permanently haunted – the violence with which we shook each other probably owes only to the gravity of the moments we lived and the impossibility of leaving the least vulnerable point.[1]

Still, Naum discerns a general and increasingly tenacious "attack on the imaginary" on the Bucharest scene, and feels that Infra Noir must remain united against it, as a group of unrepentant "madmen" and "mystics."

[1] *Athanor* 1/2004, Gellu Naum to Victor Brauner, March 4, 1945 (55).

Over 1945, however, the group's internal struggles worsened. A faction comprising Naum, Teodorescu and Păun published the tract *Critica mizeriei* (see also Chapter One) in which they lash out both against the Bucharest literary world and against the other faction comprising Luca and Trost, who are accused precisely of being "mystics." Naum recounts of this period that the Marxist polemics hurled back and forth between factions were superficial, and that the real struggle was over the balance of theory and poetry in group tracts, of lived *expérience* and pragmatic efficacy.[2]

In the bitter winter of 1945-46, there was famine in Romania. Infra Noir colleague Nadine Krainik, who had a French passport, continued to facilitate exchanges of texts and letters between the group and surrealist France, a role also played by the publisher José Corti. In March 1946 Brauner wrote, full of optimism, to Naum that when Breton returned to France, "alors tout changera, il faut reprendre absolument tout et sur une base différente."[3] In April, Luca and the others heard that one of the best galleries in Bucharest at the time, Căminul Artei, might open its doors to the group later that year. Luca shared with Brauner that with this news, the two factions had "renounced all polemical activity" and "fractionism" and had decided to work together on this project (although Brauner seemed to have taken the charge of mysticism seriously, saying he was glad Luca and Trost were "no longer mystics.") The group dreamed of an international exhibition at Căminul Artei. Although this was logistically impossible, at the very least they hoped to avoid giving it a "national character" by including artists from outside Romania – namely

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[2] Laville (78). There were many more things at stake: the question, again, of whether to publish in French or Romanian (Luca calls Romanian a "horrible language" that he is forced to accept as a means of expression, while Naum feels that the "rational" French language destroys the soul of his poetry); the significance and transgressive potential of love; despair versus hope. Naum also remembers that Trost and Luca "s'insurgent" against Naum's Breton-inspired moral intransigence.

[3] *Athanor* 1/2004 (58).

Brauner – and to use the event to establish a "concrete and active" link with the French movement. Brauner never managed to send any work, and in the end the exhibition was limited to Infra Noir works.

In May 1946, Breton returned to France, and the following month made his first major appearance in a lecture-tribute to Antonin Artaud, which Infra Noir heard about from Brauner shortly thereafter. The Luca-Trost faction attempted to make contact with Breton in June, sending him their texts from 1945 with information about their exhibitions. Despite their desire to be recognized by him, in this letter Luca describes a certain pleasure in the fact that "no one is interested in us," given a continuing popular diffusion of Surrealism in the United States and France and curiosity about its techniques amid even the most "retrograde cultural milieux."[4] Despite preparations for the Căminul Artei exhibition in the fall, tensions and rancor hung, in Naum's words, "like an exasperating curse that makes any collective activity impossible."[5] It appears that Naum himself was still holding on (like many other wartime surrealists) to the intransigent positions of Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. He refused, for example, to sign a group letter (never sent) of "amical complicity" addressed to Artaud, who had been criticized in the *Second Manifesto*. Luca, on the other hand, was more curious about forms of Surrealism beyond the pale of orthodoxy. He asks in several letters, for example, for more information about Walter Paalen's magazine *Dyn* based in Mexico City: is it truly outside of Surrealism as some say, he wonders, or are its "esoteric" preoccupations close to Infra Noir's own "revolutionary" ones?

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[4] Brauner, *Écrits* (217-218)
[5] *Athanor* 2/2008 (40).

In August 1946, Infra Noir heard for the first time of the upcoming *Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition in Paris. Luca also began correspondence with Georges Henein (a selection from *Le Vampire passif* appeared in the Egyptian surrealist group's magazine *La Part du sable* the following year), and Trost with Jean Brun (who would contribute "Le Problème de la sensation et le surréalisme" to the 1947 catalog). Luca was wary about such networking, however, and felt it necessary "once and for all to create some order in this epistolary confusionism abroad." Luca was afraid, for example, that Infra Noir might end up featured, like items for sale, in some magazine survey of international surrealism, like René Renne and Claude Serbanne's "Surréalistes Étrangers" piece in *Cahiers du sud*: "a Saşapanist and itinerant-commercial report on cultural activity."[6] In a letter to Naum Luca mocks the publications and letter he received from the surrealist group known as Ra in Prague, who would soon join forces with the revolutionary-surrealists in 1948. Ironically, given the revolutionary-surrealists' positions, Ra represents for Luca "the much-awaited fusion between commerce and surreality" and everything that is "well-bred, hygienic, occidental."[7] In contrast Luca feels that Infra Noir is closer, at its best, to being a group of "romantic" revolutionaries – in deep communion with each other and with "that vast black interior that devours us" – who would never stoop to this "dubious artistic infra-anal and commercial correspondence."[8]

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[6] *Cahiers du sud* in fact featured Infra Noir excerpts some months later (see *Athanor* 2/2008, 27-18). Luca also comments to Henein that: "il faut trouver, forcer l'apparition d'un principe d'ubiquité poétique et agissante en état de synchroniser nos efforts. On parle trop favorablement du surréalisme ces dernières années dans toutes sortes de milieux culturels […]". See *Le Domaine poétique international du Surréalisme* (Paris: Le Puits de l'Hermite, n. 29-31, March 1978), "Trois lettres de Gherasim Luca à Georges Henein, 163-65. For more on Saşa Pană and his journal *unu*, see Chapter One.

[7] See *Athanor* 2/2008 (31). Luca wonders: "Could you tell me why a painting titled *Periphery* [….] costs 2500 Kčs and one titled *Junkers* only 600 Kčs? […] if the group of letters Kčs hadn't been […] in the promiscuous vicinity of the group of numbers 2500, I wouldn't have dared to make an association between the sly Kčs and its vulgar pecuniary significance."

[8] *Athanor* 2/2008 (34).

In September 1946, for the catalog of the Infra Noir exhibition at Căminul Artei, the group signed a collaborative, automatic text (Naum consented to sign as well, though he was not involved as an organizer), from which the titles of the exhibited works were extracted. Păun writes to Naum that "we've worked like madmen for the exhibition, it will be a very beautiful collective manifestation,"[9] their first real one after "two years of fratricidal struggle."[10] The catalog also includes an *enquête* with a single, page-length question, which Infra Noir hoped would provoke a wide array of responses, these to be published in a special bulletin (never to appear). "La poésie, l'amour, la révolution ne font qu'un," they begin. There is a woman who wanders, like a sleepwalker, the "couloirs flottants du devenir," but she slips beyond the grasp of any who approach her as "objet extérieur" – one must, instead, become like her, or *become* her. There have been anti-poetic and anti-revolutionary attempts to suppress this female phantom of the future, or to bind and bewitch her with "limites" like "littérature, philosophie, politique, religion." Thus what is needed is a counter-bewitchment, a *contre-envoûtement*, to awaken this woman, who is also the world itself.[11]

It is no surprise that politics appears within the list of "limits" to be surpassed. In a series of letters to Brauner, Luca writes at the time of the Căminul Artei opening that Surrealism appears to be caught within a "false dialectic: art-politics." The solution is not to choose one, but to reject the terms of the either-or choice altogether. It is unclear to what specific texts, positions or rumors Luca is responding, but the context is that of the tensions leading up to the revolutionary-surrealist meetings in 1947, and the question of

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[9] *Athanor* 2/2008 (38).
[10] Luca's words to Brauner, in *Écrits* (223).
[11] Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, and Trost, *L'Infra-Noir: Préliminaires à une intervention sur-thaumaturgique dans la conquête du désirable* (Bucharest: S. Surréalisme, 1946).

the proper "means" and specific "efficacity" of Surrealism. On behalf of Infra Noir, Luca adds:

> Changer le monde, oui, mais ne pas devenir nous mêmes victimes du donné. […] Subir passivement ou activement les pitoyables déterminantes historiques sans les surmonter simultanément me semble une contribution à la perpétuité de tout ce qui est. Tout ce qui n'est pas, tout ce qui sera, est déjà en nous. Ne pas désespérer de nos moyens. Les exaspérer, les rendre beaucoup plus effficaces, plus folles encore mais ne les pas trahir pour un pauvre résultat immédiat dans le voisinage.[12]

Where others see a choice between "art" and "politics," or at best an opportunity to reconcile or dialectically resolve them, Luca sees two sides of the same worthless coin. Art, as it functions within this problematic, is no more than cultural-commercial activity, and politics, no more than following Communist party directives – or rebuking any exercise of the imagination in the name of the socio-economic "historical determinants" of this exercise. Luca qualifies politics in this form as "stupide darwinisme," "positivisme rétrograde," "réalité superficielle," and "'matérialisme' privé de la quatrième dimension."[13] But there are other options, other understandings of art and politics. There is art, for example, understood as surrealist *expérience* and action, which Luca calls "la vitesse conquérante des démarches surréaliste dans le réel." And there is politics redefined as "le mouvement politique-expression-de-la-nécessité-de-délivrance-totale," which never accepts any "historical determinants" at face value, and which will find Surrealism "automatiquement et sans aucun effort dans son torrent." Luca acknowledges to Brauner that in the present Manichaean climate, his positions will seem like a sectarian move, but he also has faith that when Breton takes charge of the movement again and brings everything to rights with his charismatic "efficacité," Breton and Infra Noir will find themselves on the same side.

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[12] Letter of September 28, 1946, in *Écrits* (223-224).
[13] Undated letter of 1946, *Écrits* (219).

In October, Brauner writes to Luca of Breton's infamous interview with Jean Duché, and of the firestorm it set off. The following month, November 1946, Tristan Tzara arrived in Bucharest to give a talk at the Institut Français and to receive honors from the Society for Romanian Writers. Infra Noir's feelings, for the most part, were hostile (Luca writes, "il ne manquait que l'adhésion des surréalistes pour que ce patriarche puant jouisse d'un bonheur complet") though apparently one group member, likely Naum,[14] quietly visited Tzara at his hotel to announce an official visit for the following day. Instead of a visit, Infra Noir ended up sending Tzara "une lettre d'insultes (de dada à gaga)."[15] Around the time that Tzara was being honored as a theorist of engaged revolutionary literature, a committee of censorship was being put in place in Romania, requiring that every work be examined before publication. Naum's 1946 *Castelul orbilor* (The Castle of the Blind) was refused – and he responded by translating it into French and mailing it urgently to Breton, Benjamin Péret, Pierre Mabille and Simon Watson Taylor.[16] *Castelul* begins: "It is time to prepare ourselves, illuminati of the mad hope in a virginal openness (*disponibilitate*), free of any image, of any act […] for the solemn ceremonial of *heresy*." As Naum writes elsewhere, poetry "is incompatible with the most minimum of restrictions" and holds the "myth" of a world to come.[17] But over the following year, the walls continued to close in. Early in 1947, as if sensing their freedom about to evaporate, the group rapidly published two series of tracts in the Infra-

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[14] See letter from Naum to Brauner held at Bibliothèque Kandinsky (November 1946, Nau c3 8818.779): "I saw Tzara who talked to me about you. Ruins…sad!"

[15] *Écrits* (225). The talk Tzara gave was "Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre," which he translated into Romanian for the journal *Orizont* (3, February 1947). *Orizont* now harbored many former Romanian avant-gardists, including Saşa Pană and Ilarie Voronca, now turned to socialist realism. See Ovidiu Morar, *Avatarurile suprarealismului românesc* (Bucharest: Univers, 2003), 188. For more on the postwar situation in Romania, see Chapter One. "Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre" was the talk Tzara would give at the Sorbonne in March 1947, when it provoked a hostile confrontation with Breton.

[16] Laville (85).

[17] *Athanor* 2/2008 (41-42).

Noir series. Naum didn't contribute, but worked with Păun on a project for a review, to be called *Gradiva*. The project was rejected by the censors.

In November 1946, around the time of Tzara's Bucharest visit, Infra Noir sent its first group letter (missing Naum's signature) to Breton.[18] Like many of Infra Noir's missives, it seems to wish to say everything at once, as if they were not sure of being heard, or of being heard again. The letter takes up Infra Noir's critique from *Dialectique* about Surrealism's mannerisms and tics, feeling that the movement has forgotten about the power of desire and become more interested in cutting a fine figure in the world of politics and culture. Infra Noir is also aware, probably through Brauner, of discord among the surrealists resulting in the revolutionary-surrealist schism, and is alarmed that Surrealism might capitulate to the Communist Party's more properly "revolutionary" concerns with economic liberation – "le problème de la domination des forces matérielles, celles que la société nous oppose en premier lieu." As an alternative, the group looks wistfully back toward the mid-twenties when they feel that the work being done on objective chance (though it was not yet called this) was political to the highest degree. What they mean by "political" is to be firmly distinguished from the "politics" of the immediate postwar. When they call for a general "retreat" from all political activity, as in the 1947 tract *Rupture inaugurale*'s "apolitical" decision above, this is a retreat from limiting "means" that tend to become "ends" in themselves, imposing themselves as prison-like forms on a political movement – but it is not a retreat from action. In this letter Infra Noir proposes, instead of Party "politics," the "magie pratique" of a "collective and anonymous" objective chance and of an "automatisme magique de

[18] "Lettres reçues au retour en France" (andrebreton.fr). The pages of the online version of this letter are out of order, but the letter is complete.

l'action." Automatic action is a powerfully central concept for Infra Noir within its theory of somnambulism, and I discuss it in detail in Chapter Four. In the letter under discussion, automatic action is identified with what the group calls "sur-anarchisme," saying it is the sole political attitude compatible with Surrealism.

The fact that Surrealism feels pressured into a choice between a single Party and total political apathy – between the ostensibly mutually exclusive poles of engaged action and the useless accesses of "revolt" – is partly, Infra Noir goes on to say, the movement's own fault, a result of the "peu de l'efficacité" of its artistic activity. If the movement's methods are limited to a set of already-stale experimental mannerisms with no impact whatsoever upon mind or matter, then it needs a politically efficacious "complement" – and the only one now available is the Party. Thus there is a stalemate between an absolute but useless freedom with no grip upon reality, and the dictates of Party bureaucracy. Infra Noir is after a Surrealist *expérience* that requires no complement, having located, in its own plenitude, the efficacy of a politics by other means. If members of Infra Noir had been at the revolutionary-surrealist gatherings, as apparently they were invited to, and presented with the quandary around *expérience* and *efficacité*, they might have responded – what *expérience*? We have barely yet seen what *expérience* looks like.[19]

As far as anarchism is concerned, or Infra Noir's "sur-anarchism," the group is echoed by *Rupture inaugurale*, which suggests that its positions might find more sympathy among anarchists. As Carole R. Paligot points out, the anarchists were

[19] For these invitations to participate see Section 1, p.26 and note 60. Breton's June 1947 essay "Comète surréaliste," like Infra Noir's November 1946 letter, describes a world increasingly split into two "camps ennemis" prepared to wage total war. On one side, the incursion of capitalist relations into art is stifling creativity and forcing artists to endlessly repeat themselves; on the other, attempts at real artistic innovation are called counter-revolutionary. Surrealism's goal must be to shatter these constraints on both sides, letting the constant renewal of the arts follow the fluctuations of human desire (*Œuvres III*, 753-54).

unequivocally hostile to Stalinism, and this among other things drew Breton's group to them after the war. Reviews approving of Breton's much-maligned *Arcane 17* and *Third Manifesto* appeared in the anarchist journal *Le Libertaire* around this time, and in the same journal Breton wrote in 1952 that when "un idéal humain [le communisme] en arrive à ce comble de corruption, le seul remède est de se retremper dans le courant sensible où il a pris naissance, de *remonter aux principes* qui lui ont permis de se constituer." This upstream movement leads directly, he concludes, to anarchism.[20] On the other hand, what was at stake for the Romanians was not so much Surrealism's ties with actual anarchist movements as a specific mode of daily comportment condensed in the concept of automatic action, as well as the necessity of heresy. It is in their November 1946 letter to Breton, after all, that they call for a great international "Surrealist congress" in order to assure the widest possible audience to "hérésie, et hérésie d'hérésie."

The 1947 *Rupture inaugurale* manifesto was drafted and ratified by a "secretariat" composed of Henri Pastoureau, George Henein, and Sarane Alexandrian. The extent of collaboration in *Rupture*, however, was much greater than this. Alexandrian, recalling Surrealism's immediate postwar period before the 1947 exhibition, feels that the movement held enormous power and potential at this time – even before the exhibition, he insists, the group was overwhelmed by a tide of new,

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[20] Carole Reynaud Paligot, *Parcours politique des surréalistes* (Paris: CNRS, 1995, 161). On anarchism and Surrealism see also R.D. Sonn in *Sex, Violence and the Avant-Garde: Anarchism in Interwar France* (Univ. Park: Penn State Univ. Press, 2010), "The Anarchist Phase of Surrealism." Louis Aragon around the time of *La Révolution Surréaliste* was closer to the position of Infra Noir, especially in the conflation of political and sexual freedom in his 1922 *Libertinage*, where he writes that "if it were up to me everything which is opposed to love would be abolished. That's roughly what I mean when I claim to be an anarchist." Sonn adds that "the cults of direct action and sexual freedom […] made [the Surrealists] anarchists; their embrace of communism in the autumn of 1925 replaced their bohemian version of direct action with the communist theory of revolution and probably meant that liberty could no longer be associated with anything as subjective as love" (85). See also José Pierre, *Surréalisme et anarchie: les 'billets surréalistes' du Libertaire* (1983).

young hopefuls at its biweekly café meetings. It was this embarrassment of riches, he writes, that led Breton in May 1947 to call together a small group – Alexandrian, Yves Bonnefoy, and Claude Tarnaud – to create a questionnaire. It would be sent to all those who had expressed interest in Surrealist doings after the war, as well as to the tried and true, and its purpose would be to separate the wheat from the chaff – to locate those willing to represent and defend "absolute liberty."[21]

The other purpose of the questionnaire, however, was that the responses it received would be "extracted" for use in the composition of *Rupture*.[22] To this end the questionnaire touches, in some cases slyly, on some controversial matters. What do you expect, it asks, from Surrealism? In what domain should it act, and by what means? What is your position with regard to the revolutionary will to "change the world?" What value do you accord to literary or plastic expression? Finally, "Estimez-vous, sur le plan politique, que la fin justifie tous les moyens?" Gherasim Luca was among the recipients of the questionnaire, and Luca responded directly and at length to Alexandrian in mid-June.

The conclusion of *Rupture* speaks of the "forces" of which Surrealism has made itself both vessel and conducting rod. These forces:

> s'inscrivent en marge, elles participent des progrès des disciplines les plus avancées de notre temps auxquelles nous devons une géométrie non-euclidienne, une physique non-maxwellienne, une biologie non-pasteurienne, une mécanique non-newtonienne, — disciplines à leur tour solidaires d'une logique non-

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[21] *L'Aventure en soi* (231-32).

[22] See for example Pastoureau, *Le Surréalisme ignoré* (100). He doesn't specify how these responses were "extracted." The final signataries of *Rupture* include many of those who were or would soon become close to (or in correspondence with) members of Infra Noir: Brauner, Serge Bricianer, Jean Brun, Matta, Henein, Hérold, Nadine Krainik, Pierre Mabille, Francis Meunier, Stanislas Rodanski, Claude Tarnaud. In early 1947, Nadine Krainik was living in Vaucresson, where Bricianer's wealthy family (of Moldavian origin) had been installed until the crash of 1929. See <http://catalogue.gazette-drouot.com/ref/lot-ventes-aux-encheres.jsp?id=2364141.>

> aristotélicienne et de cette morale non-mosaïque en élaboration à laquelle nous en appelons impérieusement pour déjouer l'invivable.[23]

Two years earlier, the following passage had appeared in Luca and Trost's *Dialectique de la dialectique*:

> nous nous rendons compte que la position surréaliste est d'accord avec de nombreuses découvertes qui lui sont, apparemment, éloignées. Nous sommes, subjectivement-objectivement, d'accord avec les découvertes qui exercent sur nous une fascinante attraction, telles que la géometrie non-euclidienne, la quatrième dimension, les mouvements browniens, les quanta et l'espace-temps, de même que nous sommes partiellement d'accord avec la biologie non-pasteurienne, représentée par la position héraclitéenne de l'homéopathie.[24]

Infra Noir had sent *Dialectique* to Breton some time before the appearance of *Rupture* and worked to have it sent to others in Breton's postwar circle. It is likely that Alexandrian, who (along with Claude Tarnaud[25]) was an enthusiastic reader of the Infra Noir texts that had come through from Bucharest, deliberately included language from *Dialectique* in *Rupture*. It is unclear from Alexandrian's account whether the June letter from Luca, written several days after *Rupture* appeared, was Infra Noir's questionnaire response. If not, it is entirely possible that the actual Infra Noir response arrived earlier, and that it reprised language from *Dialectique*, later "extracted" for the manifesto.

Rupture, in several ways, pre-echoes the content of Luca's June letter. Here, Luca approves of the formation of the "Cause surréaliste" working group and archive, and expresses Infra Noir's desire to join forces with it. But although the "excellent" questionnaire has done a good job, Luca feels, of pinpointing the most urgent issues and

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[23] *Rupture* (13).

[24] *Dialectique* (29).

[25] The tracts in the Infra Noir series had been in circulation among Surrealists and para-Surrealists since 1945, and in 1947 Infra Noir was actively sending more recent texts to people all over the movement. Claude Tarnaud writes in the early 50s of "la belle messagère [Nadine Kraïnik] qui, en 1945, nous apportait de Roumanie les textes de Gherasim Luca et de ses camarades." See roneotyped draft of Tarnaud's *L'Aventure de la Marie-Jeanne ou le journal indien* held at Bibliothèque Kandinsky (TAR Ms2 8818.1139).

taking stock of the general situation, the Cause group needs to move quickly forward. There is too much confusion, too many solutions and schemes are in the air, and the group's position with regard to politics, for example, must be absolutely unanimous. Luca regrets that Alexandrian cannot read Romanian: his 1945 *Inventatorul iubirii* (The Inventor of Love) contains "un appareil théorique et *pratique* de délivrance TOTALITAIRE par l'amour,"[26] which leaps beyond both the "dilemmatic" world of binaries (freedom and repression, perception and representation, "amour unique et libertinage, la psychopathie sexuelle et la psychologie dite normale") and their various so-called reconciliations. This dilemmatic world, that of Zizek's "reduction of antagonism to polarity" and of all "systems" (Luca lists Marxism, Freudianism, Existentialism), is above all that of "l'invivable vie oedipienne." The only way to live in such a world is with a "*comportement* surréaliste poursuivi à outrance," a kind of *vie dans la vie* which Luca wishes, he writes, he could demonstrate in person. Alexandrian, a sympathetic reader of the Infra Noir texts that were available to him at the time, is the one who contributed the phrase "déjouer l'invivable" to the *Rupture* draft; the notion of the *invivable* or the *irréspirable*, along with that of a "vie dans la vie" (see Chapter 4) is frequently invoked in these texts.[27]

Infra Noir as a group had sent a second letter to Breton in early 1947, wondering at his silence. Breton had finally responded in early April, a few weeks after his hostile confrontation (Brauner and Hérold at his side) with Tristan Tzara at the latter's Sorbonne

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[26] Sarane Alexandrian, *L'Evolution de Ghérasim Luca* (10).

[27] See Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (216). Henein was inspired by this phrase to compose the eight final lines: "Il est l'heure de promouvoir un mythe nouveau propre à entraîner l'homme vers l'étape ultérieur de sa destination finale." This myth is a kind of action, a way of acting "sans aliéner l'acquis de la connaissance." Dream and revolution are meant to be co-conspirators: "Rêver la Révolution, ce n'est pas y renoncer, mais la faire doublement et sans réserves mentales."

lecture "Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre." The letter from Breton, Luca writes, "seduced us all," in its "appel à la confiance, à la réciprocité dans la confiance." In response to Breton's suggestion that "le centre du monde a déménagé à Bucarest," Infra Noir imagines that he and they together inhabit an imaginary East, united against the world: "la pureté de son regard, la pureté du nôtre ne forment maintenant qu'un seul tissu, imperméable à la bassesse occidentalement raffinée."[28] In April through June 1947, as in the West the revolutionary-surrealists held their café meetings and declared fealty to the PCF, and as the Cause secretariat composed its questionnaire, in Romania the iron portcullis was falling fast. The Bucharest journal *Secolul 20*, for example, published an editorial specifically against Infra Noir, and the journal *Scînteia*, associated with the Romanian Communist Party since the 30s and recently come out of hiding, condemned the *Secolul* article because "il a cité des noms qu'on ne doit plus citer."[29] The postwar "ideological restructuration of consciousness"[30] in Romania was in full swing, and though Infra Noir was not alone in being vilified or put on ideological trial, they were very conspicuous, as unrepentant surrealists, in their failure to get with the program. It is not just that they were not published (Saşa Pană, now editor of the journal *Orizont*, recalls that he refused to "open [its] pages to those I considered backward avant-gardists,"[31] namely Infra Noir) but that reviews of their texts, in the journals from which they were excluded, show that hostile eyes were on them. Infra Noir's positions were as untimely and for them, dangerous as they had been in the war years.

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[28] Letter from Luca to Brauner of April 8 1947, *Écrits* (229).

[29] Laville (90). Around the same time, Naum recounts, there appeared a tract called "The Putrefaction of Poetry or the Poetry of Putrefaction," which attacks everything that is not socialist realism or does not celebrate proletarian culture.

[30] Magda Cârneci, *Art et pouvoir en Roumanie, 1945-1989* (Paris: Harmattan, 2007), 38. See Chapter One.

[31] Saşa Pană, *Născut în '02: Memorii, file de jurnal, evocări* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1973), 657.

In May 1947 Infra Noir managed to publish the tract *Eloge de Malombra*, signed by all members, and inspired by the 1942 Italian film *Malombra*. The group loudly and desperately hails "la convulsion de la beauté […] la grâce de la vie, la médiumnité du geste […] la folie des sens […] le somnambulisme de la pensée […] le rêve vécu." They write of shadows that slash a grey monotonous daylight like a wound, of an air filled with "terrible," invisible animals, of the eventual triumph of "absolute love." Never before, they write, has the difficulty of lifting the revolution "à la hauteur de la poésie" been more staggering, yet more seductive – now, "avant que le rideau ne tombe."[32]

Two months later, as the group's "Sable nocturne" piece appeared in the *Surréalisme en 1947* catalog – no more than a trace of all their wildest ambitions for the exhibition and for the movement – correspondence abroad was becoming more dangerous. But the group did hear echoes of the 1947 exhibition in the Romanian press. Ovid Crohmălniceanu, for example – among those, with Saşa Pană, who warmly received Tzara upon his return to Romania – contributed an article on the exhibition to *Orizont* called "Surrealism, today, an ideological diversion." Crohmălniceanu writes that after the war Surrealism had to be "resurrected in order to be opposed to realist literature, to the literature of resistance. It is arisen that it might oppose itself – like existentialism – to Marxism. To this purpose, [all it needs is to] bear down upon the key of 'absolute liberty.'"[33]

In the winter of 1947-48, just before King Mihai I was forced to abdicate by Prime Minister Groza and Romanian Communist Party leader Gheorghiu-Dej, Naum

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[32] Luca, Naum, Păun, Teodorescu, Trost, *Eloge de Malombra*: *Cerne de l'amour absolu* (Bucharest: S Surréalisme, 1947), unpaginated.

[33] Quoted in Ion Pop, "Din avangardă în ariergardă," in *Din avangardă spre ariergardă* (Bucharest: Editura Vinea, 2010), 226. For the Tzara meeting see Nicolae Țone, "Afacerea Alge," in *Aldebaran* (2-4) 1996.

begged Brauner to help him obtain the documents and permissions necessary for a visa. Luca, Trost, Păun and Păun's wife did not bother with this but attempted to cross the border illegally, and failed.[34] Their first request to emigrate to Israel was also refused. Luca took on translating work, as Naum did in the fifties. Păun stopped writing and took up work at a newly nationalized medical clinic. Teodorescu got a job at the publishing house of the state, as head of the poetry section; the following year, accompanied by his PCR-activist wife, he would move to Prague and in his free time write (as Naum recalls) hymns to Stalin and proletarian poetry. In January 1948, Romania declared the dictatorship of the proletariat, became a USSR satellite, and carried out systemic purges in the military and bureaucracy. Naum wrote to assure Brauner that Brauner's family was safe: "not being landed proprietors, they have nothing really to trouble them." In the letter Naum switches to French to share that Brauner's efforts toward the visa have come to naught, then back to Romanian to share his singular response to hopeless conditions: "I am the only man on this planet who *sees* at this moment, Victor […] the miracle has become daily, Victor, it is a part of my every gesture," rivaling even the most exalted of Breton's prewar wanderings.[35]

Back in France with Breton's group, where Naum and the others wanted so desperately to be, the publisher Gaston Gallimard had proposed sponsoring a journal that might be a Surrealist counterweight to Jean-Paul Sartre's influential *Les Temps modernes*. Breton suggested the title *Supérieur inconnu*. This provoked conflict between

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34 Michael Finkenthal, quoting from Israel Chalfen's *Paul Celan: A Biography of his Youth* (Persea, 1991), adds that Paul Celan was also with these four at this doomed crossing. See "Note pentru o repoziționare a 'valului' suprarealist din România, 1945-48, I" in *Observator Cultural* 319 (May 26, 2011).

35 Letter of January 9, 1948, held at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Nau c7 8818.288). Naum adds that Freudian-style interpretations of his experiences might produce "Pastoureau, Alexandrian, Trost, but *not* the miracle." He also shares that he is still in close contact with Mabille.

the so-called traditionalists (Henri Pastoureau, Jean Ferry, Marcel Jean, Maurice Henry) who battened upon the intransigent principles of the *Second Manifesto*, considered themselves staunch atheist materialists, and found this title too religious-sounding; and the *novateurs* (Sarane Alexandrian, Claude Tarnaud, Victor Brauner, all Infra Noir friends and sympathizers), inspired by the open experimental attitude of the *Third Manifesto*. Alexandrian describes the program of the *novateurs*, infuriating to the traditionalists: "créer des mythes nouveaux, mépriser la politique, organiser la société selon les principes du fourièrisme, remplacer la religion par la philosophie occulte, contrôler l'automatisme créateur, pratiquer une morale relevant du dandysme."[36] Gallimard balked at the cost of carrying out the elaborate *maquette*, and at the obvious fault lines within the group – Breton, for example, wanted to include the Mauritian writer Malcolm de Chazal in the journal, but the latter's references to God, the soul, and spiritual life raised the hackles of the traditionalists. Gallimard withdrew his offer, and what Breton's group lost with this decision was not only an opportunity for a centralized venue with wide circulation – which might have drawn together the efforts of the various surrealist groups, both French and international, instead of scattering their work in the pages of journals that in France included *Combat* and *Le Libertaire.* The group had also lost its chance to take a stand for allowing (in Alexandrian's words) "une marge d'opinion contraire" to Surrealist group members and to those interested in, and interesting to, Surrealism.[37]

The *novateurs* decided, at this point, to finance their own journal, creatively overcoming their limited means, and asked Breton to keep the first issue a secret from the

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[36] Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold* (87). Alexandrian later resurrected *Supérieur Inconnu*, between 1995 and 2011.

[37] Alexandrian, *Jacques Hérold* (88); Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (237-238).

traditionalists. Its title, *Néon*, was a partial acronym for "N'être rien; Etre tout; Ouvrir l'être." The editors (Alexandrian, Jindrich Heisler, Jacques Hérold's wife Véra, Stanislas Rodanski, Tarnaud) opened their inaugural January 1948 issue with Breton's essay "Signe ascendant" and a manifesto by Alexandrian, "L'Economie poétique." Breton raises up analogical thought against metaphysics and mysticism, while Alexandrian sets up a distinction between a political economy concerned with the partition of possessible matter and a poetic economy concerned with the valorization of sensible matter. Since the realm of sensible matter greatly exceeds the bounds of practical, realist materialism, it calls for a "poetic materialism" to trace its interdependent networks of "êtres-objets" and "objets-êtres," and reforge them within a series of "situations ouvertes." The opening statement of *Néon* professes, meanwhile, an "amitié exaltante" beyond "ideas" and formal social groups. Such a society of friends can change the world by "projecting," to borrow Jacques Rancière's phrase, new partitions of the sensible – the editors write, "tout acte n'est valable qu'en fonction du SENSIBLE qu'il implique et qu'il projette."

In his *Néon* manifesto Alexandrian further sows the seeds of schism between traditionalists and *novateurs* by emphasizing the "revolutionary" value of female elegance, male dandyism, coquetry and *luxure*, along with deliberate self-contradiction. This was, of course, an untimely position to take in postwar intellectual France – comparable to that of Infra Noir, continuing to insist on dreams and automatism under the teeth of the Zhdanovist portcullis. Even the embattled postwar Surrealist group, forced despite itself to stand for a certain political reticence (if certainly not quietism), couldn't quite handle this degree of heresy, as we will see.

A month after *Néon*'s second number in February 1948, Benjamin Péret returned from Mexico. Alexandrian, at the time, was styling himself as Breton's "theoretical" spokesman, and was ambivalently supported by Breton in this role. He recalls that with Péret's arrival, the postwar French surrealist community began to patrol its borders more carefully. Certain individuals – Jules Monnerot for his "Gaullism," Léo Malet for writing detective novels – were pushed firmly away. Meanwhile, Victor Brauner further consolidated his position as a kind of occult anti-Breton, gathering in a nucleus of troubled surrealists who felt uncomfortable with constraints and exclusions. With Brauner as an alternate pole of attraction, a "counter-group" began to form – Alexandrian calls it "contre-groupe H." Several of those who became Gherasim Luca's close friends when he made it to Paris in 1952 – Serge Bricianer, Claude Tarnaud, Stanislas Rodanski – were drawn to the counter-group's anti-conformist attitude of "révolte pure," its open dandyism exalting a "beauté du geste," and its willingness to be "foncièrement apolitique." The group made its positions known in forums like the weekly journal *Arts*, butting horns with revolutionary-surrealists.[38]

For all this, however, in the counter-group's conviction that there was a social dimension to its activities and that this lay in the power of the imagination and in the creation of myths, it was more or less following the Breton group's party line. The traditionalists (though offended, to be sure, at being left out from the first two issues) and

[38] Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (263-81). For the revolutionary-surrealist presence in *Arts* see the rubric "Pour et Contre" (issue February 27, 1948, "Où se trouve l'art marxiste"; issue March 26 1948, "La Différence qu'il y a entre un surréaliste et un surréaliste-révolutionnaire.") In the February issue, René Passeron's words recall those of Luca and Păun in *Cuvântul Liber* (see Chapter One): the engagement of the communist artist is "le résultat d'une prise de conscience historique de laquelle aucun artiste lucide ne devrait pouvoir se passer. L'artiste ne peut être apolitique sans s'enfermer dans la tour d'ivoire de la mauvaise conscience."

the innovators managed to come together for the third *Néon* issue in May 1948. It seems that Brauner even planned to have Luca's poem "Passionnément" included in *Néon* – perhaps for the doomed fourth issue dedicated to "adventure" and adventurers.[39]

In October 1948, Breton's group established a permanent office at a gallery belonging to Nina Dausset on rue du Dragon in Paris – calling it La Dragonne. This office, called "Solution surréaliste," consisted of a pair of surrealists, alternating twice weekly, manning a register for welcoming the curious and for recording group events. La Dragonne even hosted a small October exhibition, organized by Breton, called "Le Cadavre exquis, son exaltation."[40] In the same month, Breton received a letter from Frederick Kiesler stating that the suicide of the artist Arshile Gorky in July was a result of Gorky's wife's affair with the artist Matta. Things moved quickly. By late October, the Breton group had formally excluded Matta for "disqualification intellectuelle et ignominie morale." Brauner refused to sign the exclusion, and so did Alexandrian, asking whether the group should have any say over personal love lives, or impose any standard of normativity on personal behavior.[41] Breton wrote Brauner in November telling him he must appear before the group on November 8 to give an account of himself. Alexandrian, Tarnaud, and Alain Jouffroy appeared instead to represent Brauner, but in the end found themselves excluded from Breton's group along with Brauner. One sticking point in their "trial" appeared to be the nature of love (Matta's affair was not love but "coucherie,"

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[39] See letter from Luca to Brauner of March 3, 1948, in *Écrits* (229). Luca also mentions in early 1947 that Brauner wanted to design a costume for reciting the poem. In this letter Luca is also trying to get help acquiring a passport and visa.

[40] A review of this exhibition appears in *Arts* (November 5, 1948). The reviewer comments: "On en retire un peu d'amertume et puis aussi une consolation, celle que l'artiste conscient nous donnera plus de chefs-d'œuvre que l'homme dont la 'cervelle d'or' s'éparpille en brumes subconscientes, aussi brillantes soient-elles."

[41] Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (294-295).

since he and Gorky's wife had known each other for many years, and real love is always a *coup de foudre*). But the conflict was also about what kind of discipline a collective could impose – in an echo of the Breton group's clash with the Stalinist revolutionary-surrealists the year before. The counter-group representatives asked whether they were allowed to dream without the group's permission, for example, and Péret responded: "Nous sommes ici pour rêver en commun."[42]

By November 1948, there had been a hostile takeover of *Néon,* and a new version had appeared. The title now stood for "Naviguer, Eveiller, Occulter"; the editorial committee of apolitical dandies and libertines had been replaced by Jean-Louis Bédouin (a participant in the revolutionary-surrealist meetings the year before), Pierre Demarne (who had written his combinatorial theory of Surrealism for the 1947 catalog), Jindrich Heisler (who had worked on the first version of *Néon*), Breton, and Péret. Two printed announcements of exclusion appeared together: Matta on the 26th of October, and on the 8th of November Brauner, Alexandrian, Jouffroy, Rodanski, Tarnaud, and Francis Bouvet – for "travail fractionnel." Strangely, Infra Noir co-conspirator Nadine Krainik's name appears among the signatures for both exclusions, suggesting that she might have been present throughout the drama and at the November inquisition.[43] As an ambitious

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[42] In Alexandrian's version of the story, Breton's behavior at the meeting was partly influenced by Péret (appearing here like an inquisitor), who didn't like that *Néon* hadn't gotten on board with the group's new interest in Garry Davis's world citizen movement, hadn't mentioned Trotsky at all, and had suppressed a poem by André Liberati devoted to Péret. This poem appeared in the refurbished, post-exclusion *Néon* 4 in November 1948 (295-99). Alexandrian feels that Breton was also jealous of the attentions given to Brauner as a pole of attraction to dissident surrealists. This explains his trial demeanor of a "fauve prêt à mordre." Alexandrian also recounts a troubling event in December: Jouffroy had been renting a room from a friend of Maurice Henry's. After Jouffroy's exclusion, Jean Schuster and others visited him to tell him to find a new place to live, and fast – but he had nowhere to go. Soon after that, Péret arrived with friends to try to physically force Jouffroy out – on his way to the apartment, Alexandrian saw Jouffroy vomiting out the window, with Péret looming behind him.

[43] Krainik also signed the tract "A la niche les glapisseurs de Dieu" in June 1948, and "Les Surréalistes à Garry Davis" in November 1948. The Breton online archive (among other letters received upon Breton's

Surrealist "vivandière" (as Brauner puts it in one letter), it would not have been in Krainik's interest to break with Breton out of loyalty to Brauner. Apparently, it was not in Jacques Hérold's interest either: Hérold chose Breton and, shockingly for Brauner, signed the exclusion. Brauner's friendship with both Hérold and Krainik essentially ended here.

Is it reasonable to think that the members of Infra Noir would have sided with Brauner, and become part of "counter-group H"? In a Romania already crawling with secret police, where everyone was watched and some disappeared without warning, Luca managed to receive the catalog of a December 1948 Brauner retrospective at the René Drouin gallery – for which Alexandrian had written an essay that doubled as an account of the counter-group's exclusion.[44] In a letter to Brauner in response, Luca feels that the break between Brauner and Breton is "one of the gravest poetic defeats of our miserable and antipoetic epoch," but adds that their separation cannot possibly be definitive, and that he has great confidence in them both.[45] In another letter Luca adds that this break is an "image" of the sufferings and contradictions of this postwar historical moment. In principle, Luca agrees that "épurations" might loosen and unburden the flight of a vital poetic movement, but "today, in its high crisis of efficacy […] in the total absence of an object and of a movement properly speaking, purges and administrative measures have themselves become the object of the movement."[46] Still, Luca cannot imagine that the

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return to France) also contains a postcard from her: on the front a red rose, on the back, "Depuis de longs jours je désire vous rencontrer."

[44] A review of the Brauner exhibition in *Arts* (December 24, 1948) is similar to Paraschivescu's Brauner review in 1935, stating that although the "ideas" represented by the painting are sadly outdated, it is indisputable that the man knows how to paint.

[45] In this letter, Breton is referred to as "Dédé." See letter of January 26, 1949, held at Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Luc c15 8818.239).

[46] Letter of February 23, 1949, at Kandinsky (Luc c16 8818.240).

"harmful influence" of Breton's present entourage will truly change him, nor that Breton would condition his friendly relations with the now-silenced Infra Noir upon their separation from Brauner. "[Breton] is a great heretic," writes Luca, "he is a heretic by definition, by vocation." All that can now be expected of Infra Noir is patient "neutrality" – a neutrality likely made possible by geographical distance.

Counter-group H had an opportunity perhaps to become an established dissident surrealist group, in the style of the dissidents around the journal *Documents* and Georges Bataille in 1929-30. But the counter-group quickly dissolved after their trial and exclusion, partly over resulting personal tensions. Breton's group in May 1949, in the meantime, lost its permanent seat at La Dragonne, since Nina Dausset, now back in Paris, took a dim view of Brauner's absence. From 1949 on, Alexandrian speaks of the counter-group's new identity as a "groupe infini" – a social formation that rejects the sectarian and ideological spirit, has no dogma but "universal curiosity," and instead of gathering around a small journal collaborates in already existing venues for wider diffusion. The "groupe infini" has no leaders except for temporary managers of group games and experiments, and its membership – including dissident surrealists of past, present, and future – is infinitely expandable.[47] Its goal is not to defend principles, Alexandrian explains, but to solve problems. For example, in early 1952, when Luca finally reached Paris, one issue up for discussion in the "groupe infini" was the question on an *enquête* Luca sent that year to surrealists everywhere. Titled "Le pouvoir à la chimère par le passage du dormeur au somnambule," the document asked what hope could be placed, at the present moment, in somnambulists and somnambulism. Luca received very little

[47] *Aventure* (318-321).

response, but he seemed amid the "groupe infini" to have found at least one sympathetic audience.[48]

In April 1949, Gherasim Luca had sent a letter from Bucharest to the New York gallerist and Surrealist fellow-traveler Julien Lévy, thanking him for a recent care package, but informing him that the efforts of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) on his behalf would no longer have much weight, since the Bucharest branch of the JDC was dissolved in that year.[49] In fact, Romanian government policy on the emigration of its Jewish population to Palestine, both before and after Israel's declaration of independence in May 1948, was vacillating and subject to multiple pressures from within and without. Up through 1947 and in line with general Soviet policy – which had to do with undermining the British Mandate and British-backed Arab League in Palestine – Romania freely tolerated both legal (and illegal) emigration. But in 1948, partly in response to waning Soviet interest in the matter, partly as a solution to tensions between ethnic Romanian and Jewish leaders in the Romanian government, emigration very nearly shut down. This was exactly at a time when 40% of the Jewish population – dispossessed and still economically ostracized – had no means of earning a livelihood. The sharpest emigration restrictions fell on skilled workers, engineers, and doctors (like Paul Păun). Throughout 1949, only 100 exit visas were issued per month. Then the winds shifted again, and in the spring of 1950, the doors opened wide: between 10,000 and 12,000 exit visas were issued per month. Historian Robert Levy writes:

> The numbers rapidly exceeded all expectations […]. The JDC files plainly reveal the extent of the exodus, which took the Israeli government completely by surprise. […]. In Craiova, 70 percent of the Jewish population applied […] and the city of Arad's entire Jewish population was reported to be leaving.

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[48] Ibid. (334). For this *enquête* and for somnambulism, see Chapter Four and Epilogue.
[49] Letter of April 27, 1949 at Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (Ms 50966).

> [Gheorghiu-Dej was] […] reportedly shocked and bewildered by the mounting exodus and promptly acted to impose restrictions.[50]

Gherasim Luca and Dolfi Trost departed Romania amid this very exodus.

By July 1950, Trost was writing to Breton from a camp somewhere in Israel, still waiting for Luca to arrive, and less certain that Păun could follow. If Păun was temporarily detained and hoped to come the following year, he would have been disappointed, since there was another crackdown on emigration after the great exodus of 1950, and by October 1951 no new visa applications were accepted. It wasn't until eleven years later that Păun arrived in Haifa. Trost was then the first to escape the nets of the "Sovietized" region; in his July letter he associates the regime in power with "the right deviation" – a term Stalin used to refer to a conciliationist approach to the class enemy – and keeps his faith in the Trotskyist "left opposition" and its doctrine of permanent revolution. He hints to Breton of the terrible struggles he and his friends faced, the censorship, the surveillance. It was dangerous, for example, for one's name to appear in Western publications, and Trost is happy that nothing of Infra Noir's work is mentioned in the special Surrealist number of *La Nef* in April 1950, *L'Almanach surréaliste du demi siècle*. It appears, in fact, that this was by arrangement, since in an October letter (after Luca's safe arrival), Trost refers obliquely to a silence established by common accord, and proposes it be lifted, with the condition that Păun be given the pseudonym Yvénez for his own safety.[51]

Breton responded quickly, encouraging Trost and his friends to join him in living for Surrealism's deepest convictions, without compromise. By this time Trost had arrived

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[50] Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001), 173-174.
[51] Letter of July 24, 1950, at Doucet (BAT 2189).

in Tel Aviv, but destitute and without any stable means of day-to-day survival, and was asking Breton to send him the official invitation required for a French visa, notarized by the Israeli Legation in Paris.[52] Still, after Luca arrived in Tel Aviv in October, both he and Trost were optimistic that the activity of Infra Noir could continue (minus Naum and Teodorescu, and with Păun long-distance), and that it could help to remedy the Surrealist movement's present malaise – its scissions, its lack of a journal.[53] Luca himself, in correspondence with Brauner, feels that despite the material difficulties of life in the new state of Israel, "les immenses virtualités poétiques que nous soutenons nous font surmonter presque somnambuliquement la dureté de ce détour israélien." He writes that he has spent the last three shipwrecked years as a "funambulist-somnambulist" guided by love, poetry, and the revolution – a revolution that has little to do with the "left opposition," for it will be Surrealism itself in pitched battle against the horror of "Sovietism." Whether they like it or not, he says, the members of Infra Noir are "specialists" in this genre of horror, and he adds, "je suis absolument certain que dans cette fin de civilisation que nous vivions tous, le monde occidental et surtout son centre spirituel qui est Paris a besoin de notre témoignage."[54]

A 1951 letter from Trost to Breton sums up the group's continuing work and its present priorities: experimental and theoretical work on love (and not just *amour unique* but *amour multiple*); the invention of new desires and the escape from the Oedipal unconscious; the "negation" of all political activity (along with a refusal of the "avant-garde" and of "culture"); Woman as catalyst for world transformation; long-forgotten scientific and para-scientific literature on artificial somnambulism, hysteria and

[52] Letter of September 6, 1950, at Doucet (BAT 2189).
[53] Letter of October 19, 1950, at Doucet (BAT 1033).
[54] Tel-Aviv 30 October 1950 Luc c17 8818.763. Kandinsky.

mediumship; deliria of interpretation, and objective chance in its links with automatism; object-creation; dreams in their manifest beauty and manipulability, and a love for everything that is *noir* and nocturnal. The group is unsure about Surrealism's recent rapprochement with anarchist groups, Trost adds, but it participated in the 1947 exhibition with great enthusiasm, and closely followed the activities of Cause and *Néon*. Although the "Marxist influence" on the group dwindled early on, it has struggled to internally resolve its materialist and idealist tendencies. Finally, the members are staunch Breton loyalists, across the disputes with the revolutionary-surrealists, and despite their dismay over the exclusion of Brauner and, more recently, the exclusion of Jacques Hérold.[55]

In fact, by the time of Trost's 1951 letter, Breton's group had already suffered another crisis. Breton had been forced – by Pastoureau, Maurice Henry, Marcel Jean, and others – to break off relations with Michel Carrouges, an admirer and collaborator who also happened to be Catholic and to edit a journal of the Dominican Order. Tracts and accusations flew, and Pastoureau and Patrick Waldberg ended up excluded from the Surrealist group. In the general fracas, Jacques Hérold was excluded too, in March 1951. Breton, if heretic he was, had committed the worst of all heresies, by suffering a Catholic in the surrealists' midst. The young surrealists that remained after this final purge were those responsible for giving Luca the cold shoulder when in 1952 he arrived in Paris ready to change the world and transform life at the heart of a vital and powerful movement. But Alexandrian believes, in fact – though this should be taken with some

[55] Letter written in mid to late 1951, attached to Breton's copy of "La Connaissance des temps" (on andrebreton.fr). In June 1951 Luca and Trost sent a letter ("Correspondance et texts," Salman Locker et. al. on andrebreton.fr) of "Adhésion à distance" in response to the furor surrounding the Carrouges-Pastoureau affair, restating their allegiance to the *Third Manifesto* and defending Breton's freedom "d'investigation dans l'inconnu" against "rationalisme" and "orthodoxie."

scepticism – that by 1952, Surrealism had succeeded in pushing aside all its real heretics, eccentrics and outliers, and that for this reason the movement that Luca (and Trost, who had broken with Luca by this time) dreamed of joining no longer existed as such.

It could probably be argued that with its series of missed chances, exclusions and schisms after the war, Surrealism had squandered something of the promise and energy of 1947. And though the movement's continuing presence and formidable influence in the latter half of the twentieth century, both in France and internationally, is indisputable, the movement in the specific form in which Infra Noir encountered it was now only an echo, a nostalgic absence. Infra Noir, it should be said, was no exception to the postwar (and prewar) surrealist pattern of schisms and exclusions, of personal disputes magnified and refracted by doctrinal and ideological ones, even of intolerance for heresy. Though their more direct encounter with "Sovietism" and their outsiders' distance gave them a unique perspective on what ailed Breton's group after the war, they were not immune from it. By the time what remained of Infra Noir reached the promised land of Surrealist Paris, the group itself was an absence – echoing loudly in Luca's *enquête* on somnambulists, more faintly in Trost's long works of 1953 and 1955, and fainter still but reborn in Luca's nascent career as a French-language poet, with *Héros-Limite* in 1953.

In any case, as Luca writes to Brauner in 1949, "tant que l'absence n'est qu'un aspect des présences, l'obstacle s'enfuit."[56] And in Luca's own words, as soon as he arrived in Paris and joined the "groupe infini," he became "surréaliste dans le non-surréalisme"[57] – just like all the other non-surrealists inspired in Surrealism's wake.

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[56] Letter of January 12, 1949, at Bibliothèque Kandinsky (Luc c14 8818.238).
[57] Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (325).

In the following chapter on the surrealist object and on Infra Noir object-practices and object-theories, the historical and political tensions that define the present chapter, though still present, fade somewhat into the background, or reappear in altered or sublimated form. But since the object was a central and defining concern for Infra Noir, the confrontation between *expérience* and *efficacité*, or theory and action, revolution and reaction, the truth of history and its myths and heresies, are channeled into the object, in its opaque materiality and its halo of concealed potential.

Chapter Three. Infra Noir and the Act-Object

– Choses: challenge leur choc, si tu oses!
—Michel Leiris, *Langage tangage*

– Nous pensons […] à tout ce qu'il y a d'invincible, d'inaltérable dans le noir et dans l'infra-noir de nos coeurs et dans celui des objets qui nous attendent dans le silence amoureux de la crainte.
—Infra Noir group letter to André Breton, November 1946

1. **Surrealist Objects and Act-Objects**

In an April 2013 talk, the inventor Jay Silver, speaking on behalf of a growing movement known as Maker culture, is overcome by a vision of the world in which objects no longer appear to human beings as static, eternal and immune to change, pillars of the status quo and of worldly power. Rather, the objects, and assemblages of objects, that surround us – "the way the world works" – must appear as entirely composed of daily human decisions, and thus malleable to further change. Silver demonstrates ways, for example, of "mashing" computers with the objects of daily life, so that any object can become an interface, or complete a "circuit" with another. These considerations soon lead him to some curious conclusions: with such tools in hand, he says, people are "going to be turning into agents of creative change, and governments will be crumbling […] ."[1]

This is a daring leap from playful individual practice to large-scale political change, and it recalls a move made by Surrealist leader André Breton in one of his first accounts of the surrealist object, the 1924 "Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité." Here Breton proposes recreating objects that appear in his dreams and putting them into

[1] "Jay Silver: Hack a banana, make a keyboard!" http://www.ted.com/talks/jay_silver_hack_a_banana_make_a_keyboard.html. Accessed 6/19/2013. As for turning objects into interfaces, see for example his explanation of how to turn two slices of pizza into slide projector controls, or the modified piano circuit he calls the MaKey MaKey.

general circulation. He wonders if by doing so, he might succeed in throwing discredit on the reasonable and familiar things that inhabit "the way the world works," hollowing out their authority from the inside.[2] Fellow surrealist Salvador Dalí feels likewise that one must allow such objects, like Silver's hybrid computers, to intervene directly in daily life, to "collide" with it.[3]

Surrealism's first manifesto presents the movement's aesthetics as one of circuit-building and short-circuiting. Breton writes that we habitually fail to understand what happens when two things – whether words, realities, or objects – meet: "C'est du rapprochement en quelque sorte fortuit des deux termes qu'a jailli une lumière particulière, *lumière de l'image* […]. La valeur de l'image dépend de la beauté de l'étincelle obtenue; elle est, par conséquent, fonction de la différence de potentiel entre les deux conducteurs."[4] The circuit dynamics that informed the developing aesthetics of the surrealist verbal and automatic image soon extended to the objects that surrealists made and manipulated. One "naïve" bit of reality meets another, and in the electric shock of their juxtaposition – compared, just as in the first surrealist manifesto, to an act of lovemaking – each passes from its "faux absolu" to a new absolute, "vrai et poétique."[5]

Breton presents desire as an inveterate, compulsive bricoleur, making assemblage after assemblage in search of its obscure object. Again and again two bodies, "frottés l'un contre l'autre, atteignent, par l'étincelle, à leur suprême unité dans le feu."[6] The flying sparks of surrealist play often appear to matter more than any durable, concrete result.

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2 André Breton, "Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité," in *Œuvres II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 277.
3 "Interprétation paranoïaque-critique de l'image obsédante 'L'Angélus' de Millet," *Minotaure Vol. 1 (1933)* (Arno: 1968), pp. 65-7 (66).
4 André Breton, "Manifest du surréalisme (1924)," in *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 49.
5 Max Ernst, *Au-delà de la peinture (1936)*, in *Écritures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 256.
6 André Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: Éditions des Cahiers libres, 1932), 129.

But in return, these acts of desire can be profoundly philosophical and critically interventive.[7] In "Peu de réalité" for example, Breton makes the point that, when it comes to language, what has already been said tends to conceal the sayable, what is already thought the thinkable, and it is the same for objects. Their existing configurations conceal their possible ones, and play or bricolage, whether with words or objects, is a kind of tarrying with the possible.[8]

This is part of the reason why surrealist calls for action upon and with objects are frequently so open-ended, and why they cannot be fully satisfied merely by perceiving, acquiring, or using the object in the usual ways. What results is what one could call a "doing-toward" or "doing-around" the object, working around the margins of its opacity as if searching for an entrance, attending upon it in whatever way it seems to require, dowsing for hidden springs in its depths or in one's own, or alternatively, arranging circuits, seeking the spark.

To do so, as surrealist object-theorists and object-makers hope, is to awaken dormant realities and watch for their emergent properties. Things are, in the words of John Frow, "always shadowed by the traces of virtual uses and the complicated circuits of knowledge, need and desire that map those virtualities."[9] Surrealists writing about objects – as well as about the things of the natural world – also invoke their "virtualities," the multiple shadows they cast. Gellu Naum of the Infra Noir group, working on his book

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7 This is the argument Louis Aragon makes about parlor tricks and fiddling with objects in "L'Ombre de l'inventeur," in Emmanuel Guigon ed., *L'Objet surréaliste* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2005), 44.

8 See the *Second Manifesto*: "… il fallait que le pensé succombât *enfin* sous le pensable." "Second manifeste du surréalisme (1930)," in *Manifestes*, 127. See also *L'Amour fou*: it would suffice to link "*n'importe quel* substantif à *n'importe quel* autre pour qu'un monde de représentations nouvelles surgisse aussitôt (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 116.

9 John Frow, "A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a Telegraph Pole," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 28 No. 1, *Things* (Autumn 2001), pp. 270-285 (284).

Medium in the early 40s upon his return from Paris, writes of "the objectival virtualities of all objects," revealed in certain forms of seeking and conscientious attention.[10] As these virtualities materialize, they reveal new facets of the human: Naum's Infra Noir colleague Gherasim Luca imagines, for example, a "spontaneous inversion" in which the contents of an object – say an orange – and those of the mind might exchange places, opening up a "simulation" of the orange's mental life that is nonetheless already contained in germ in the "infinite adventure of thought."[11] For Infra Noir, human and nonhuman things are "modes" of a common substance, or in the words of Jane Bennett, "conative, encounter-prone bodies," forming and unforming assemblages in a hybrid "agentic swarm," exchanging properties and functions.[12]

The conceptual boundaries of the "object," in the meantime, begin to seem exceedingly fluid and irregular. Breton addresses this very problem in 1935, in a lecture in Prague. Here he notes that the phrase *surrealist object* has come rather too tidily to refer to a "type de petite construction non sculpturale," among which the famously furry teaware, lobster-telephones, aphrodisiac vests, and metronomes fitted with eyes that have

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[10] Gellu Naum, *Medium,* in Simona Popescu ed., *Gellu Naum II: Proză* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2012), 90. All translations from Romanian to English are mine unless otherwise indicated. For the natural world see for example Roger Caillois, "La Mante religieuse," in *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 209. In a 1938 book that both admires and vigorously criticizes the Surrealists, Benjamin Fondane (in Romania known as Fundoianu) suggests: "il se peut que la réalité ne doive ainsi nommée que dans le bref instant où elle est vécue et saisie dans l'acte de participation-inspiration," or at the moment when latent realities become manifest in relation. *Faux traité d'esthétique: essai sur la crise de réalité* (Paris: Plasma, 1980), 108. Philosopher Graham Harman explains, similarly, that "reality is never fully deployed in relation." See *The Quadruple Object* (Washington DC: Zero Books, 2011), 39 and 69.

[11] *Un Lup văzut printr'o lupă* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945), 15-16. Aragon asks in "Une Vague de rêves" (1924), "Simuler une chose, est-ce autre chose que la penser?" *L'Œuvre poétique* tome 2, *1921-1925* (Paris: Livre club Diderot, 1974), 239.

[12] John Frow quotes Bruno Latour's radically evocative version of this argument: a speed bump is "full of engineers and chancellors and lawmakers, commingling their wills and their story lines with those of gravel, concrete, paint and standard calculations," where "some, though not all, of the characteristics of concrete become policemen, and some, though not all, of the characteristics of policemen become speed bumps" (279). For Jane Bennett see *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

made their way down to contemporary museums. But Breton explains that he is dealing with a domain much wider than this, even unmanageably so: what is the surrealist approach to the object in general, in its "sens philosophique le plus large"? This wider sense certainly includes material objects and things (tangible or intangible) present to the senses, but also events in time or material objects at a precise moment in time, entities in the imagination, entities present to the mind or the understanding, or anything toward which a subject might address itself.[13] We are dealing here, then, with no less a problem than the surrealist approach to the relation between subject and object – a relation that Surrealism notoriously wanted to dialectically collapse and surmount.

Any account of the object in Surrealism must then divide its attention between the particular and the general, between situating the surrealist object (the petite non-sculptural constructions) and profiling the surrealist situation of the object in its widest relational sense. Between these poles fall all the myriad iterations of the object in Surrealism and beyond, from the furniture of everyday life to the *objet trouvé*, from objects of modern manufacture to the ghostly debris of the past, from the neutral and nearly invisible to the vivid commodity fetish, material to immaterial, enormous to minute, occult mystery to material efficacy, and from theory to praxis. There is, additionally, the fact that the object in Surrealism is also a thing made not only of matter but of text, of explanations, manifestos and blueprints, a configuration of attitudes as

[13] André Breton, "Situation surréaliste de l'objet / Situation de l'objet surréaliste." I am working from Breton's own list: "cette table, la photographie que ce monsieur a dans la poche, un arbre à l'instant précis où il est foudroyé, une aurore boréale–entrons dans l'impossible–, un lion volant." *Œuvres II* (475). See also ibid., Note 1 to p. 484, quoting from Apollinaire's "L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes": no fact of nature is beneath the poet, from nebulae and crowds and oceans and nations to "une main qui fouille une poche, une allumette qui s'allume par le frottement, des cris d'animaux, l'odeur des jardins après la pluie, une flamme qui naît dans un foyer."

much as of atoms. To move forward, some kind of limiting principle is needed – some kind of definition, or logic of division, if only provisional.

One of the main goals of this chapter is to provide and to apply such a principle. First, however, I should state why one should do so at all, in relation to the Infra Noir group. The history and theory of the surrealist object – and via the object, theories and practices related to dreaming, simulation, and automatism – are central for Infra Noir, and are a focal point of their engagement with prewar French Surrealism and of their most manifest contributions to its corpus. The group, however, does not limit its concerns to surrealist objects but expands its scope to cover objects, physical matter, and subject-object relations in general, as in Breton's Prague lecture. Moreover, in the object and the surrealist object – not only for prewar Surrealism and Infra Noir but also for the wartime group Main à Plume – aesthetics, experiment, experience, and social praxis are inextricably linked.

My aim, then, is the following. First, beginning with Surrealism in the 30s and moving through the war and into the 40s, I would like to zero in on an object-function, or a series of effects, gestures, and impulses which create a kind of "object-position" that functions surreally, and by which a surreally-functioning object is recognized.[14] In order to do so, I will employ a concept that, at least in its original form, exists only on paper, in a letter from Dalí to Breton in 1933, but one that draws together certain crucial strands of surrealist object theory: the *acte-objet*. The act-object, as I will show, outlines a surrealist object-position that can be used to productively examine the work of the Infra Noir

[14] Effie Rentzou writes to similar effect in *Littérature malgré elle* (Paris: Association des amis de Pleine marge, 2010) that, rather than seek an "essence immuable" of Surrealism – as in Man Ray's imagined label of authenticity ("C'est un objet surréaliste") for certain objects – one must identify and trace "usages surréalistes qui, ensemble, forment l'identité surréaliste globale" (11).

surrealist group on the object – as well as on other concepts important to the group, like somnambulism and automatic action. Second, and in the process, I will discuss the relationship of French Surrealist and Infra Noir object-practice and object-theory to collectivity and to collective social action. Central in this will be an analogy between surrealist automatic writing and the "virtualities," bricolage, and "doing-toward" of surrealist object-practice. For Breton's group, for Main à Plume, and for Infra Noir, both object-practice and automatism work upon social matter by disarranging and rearranging its physical and conceptual syntax – in short, by rewriting it.

In his 1933 letter, Dalí sketches out for Breton an idiosyncractic history of the surrealist object: painters increasingly incorporate foreign materials and objects in their work – bits of newspaper or chair caning, for example – until eventually the canvas becomes a mere pretext or matrix for their inclusion and arrangement. Hanging heavily from the canvas as if from so many umbilical cords, soon they are delivered into the world, where surrealist technicians nurture them through various stages of development—a development that will culminate in a spectacular operatic *Gesamtkunstwerk*:

> une prochaine et grandiose actualité de l'opéra qui [….] n'est pas autre chose que l'utilisation irrationnelle aiguë des objets et des "êtres-objets" qui nous entourent, avec la confusion totale de tous les genres lyriques nous permettant aujourd'hui la véritable manifestation des "actes-objets" vitaux les plus démentiels qui vous permettront d'exprimer de la façon la plus complète toute "l'irrationalité concrète" et dynamique de la véritable "hystérie moderne et surréaliste."[15]

[15] "Lettre à André Breton, Paris 11 juin 1933," in *Oui: La Révolution paranoïaque-critique; L'Archangélisme scientifique* (Paris: Denoël, 2004), 218-219. Similarly in 1932, Dalí proposes the "*Examination of certain actions* liable owing to their irrationality to produce deep currents of demoralization," including this proposal in a survey of surrealist objects. See "The object as revealed in surrealist experiment," published in the Surrealist number of *This Quarter*, September 1932. In Guigon (69).

Dalí, who by this point has emerged as a great theorist of the surrealist object, finds its greatest potential in a complex performative act, a kind of demented opera. But how is it – given the ordinary understanding of an object as an element of a transitive act, as a thing to which something is done – that an act itself can be an object? The question is not only one of defining the *acte-objet,* but of defining the specificity of "objet," for Dalí and in Surrealism as a whole, such that it can be suffixed to acts and beings.

A first track to follow in search of further indications leads through surrealist discussions of dream and the act of dreaming. Among the objects Breton proposes publicly circulating, in the 1924 "Peu de réalité" essay, is one from his dream of a book that has, for a spine, a wooden gnome bearded in the Assyrian style, and black wool pages. To this book, however, Breton adds proposals for "des machines d'une construction très savante qui resteraient sans emploi […] des plans de villes immenses que […] nous nous sentirions à jamais incapables de fonder."[16] What, for Breton, binds the wide field covered by these unreadable books, bachelor machines, and utopian cities is their origin in dream. But more than this, here and elsewhere Breton lays the groundwork for interpreting and interacting with the waking world of quotidian objects as one would in a dream. Dream is made to enter life via the object, but also via the object waking life becomes dreamlike; and the terrain of this reciprocal trespass is a single, level field of being. Here there is a smooth continuum from the objects of dream, to the strange but demonstrably real ("l'agave […] le sphinx […] l'aptéryx […] une machine moderne à cercler les tonneaux"[17]), to ordinary things like tables, forks and pencils. All are equally worthy of rapt attention.

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[16] Breton, *Œuvres* II (277).
[17] André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, in *Œuvres IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 384.

What dream and nondream objects from the fork to the agave have in common, upon this level field, is their quality of being simply *given* to experience. Their acute otherness derives from an original intransitivity that undermines and frustrates the familiar transitivities of function (as in using a fork to eat) and of signification (as in dream interpretations, where cigars and boxes straightforwardly stand in for less innocent objects.) Surrealists have several shorthand terms for this quality, this intransitivity, one of which is "opacité," and they use this word to refer both to objects and the matter of which they are made.[18] Surrealist object-discourse is particularly troubled by opacity (Dalí, for example, evokes "un résidu ininterprétable […] une marge authentique et très vaste d'énigme," or an "impondérable objectif"), enough that surrealists repeatedly represent themselves as carrying out assaults upon it, or finding responses and solutions to it.[19] But what is most fascinating to the surrealists is that, given Breton's radical oneiric-ontological leveling, a phenomenon commonly considered to be intimately subjective and without any traction upon reality, like a dream, might throw up from its depths a thing partaking of the same opacity, the same objective imponderability and puissance, as this reality.

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[18] After World War II, in an essay directed in part against Surrealism, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that the poet's task is to have "Being sparkle as Being" and to restore "the strangeness and opacity of the world," where opacity is the impermeability, "extension," and "externality" of things, along with the "infinity of relations which they maintain with other things." Opacity is that which, in Being, "never quite allows itself to be *thought*." Ironically, here Sartre provides a good account of what the word meant to Surrealism (*What is Literature? and other essays,* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998, 27 and 106-108). Alternative but related concepts of opacity to be explored might include that of Emil Cioran, for whom it is a long-lost state of being and a kind of benediction ("Démission" (1949) in *Précis de décomposition*), or Baudrillard, for whom it is "la *contrainte totale du code* qui régit la valeur sociale" (quoted in Krzysztof Fijalkowski, *The Surrealist Object: Proof, Pleasure and Reconciliation* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of East Anglia, Norwich, 1990), 6. For more on the commodity see below.

[19] For both Dalí citations on this page see "La Conquête de l'irrationnel," in *Oui* (258-259). Breton, comparably, speaks of "cet in-objectif d'où jaillissent les objets comme des incidents" – describing Hermann Keyserling's metaphysics of pure intensity in "Légitime défense," *Œuvres II* (292). Foucault uses similar language in *Les Mots et les choses*: "ce fond jamais objectivable d'où viennent les objets à notre connaissance superficielle" (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 258.

Breton's leveling has certain consequences for both waking life and dream life. The things of dream, in Dalí's words, have or are capable of acquiring an "évidence objective" and "épaisseur persuasive," of materializing at ever higher resolutions. But the things of the exterior world, in turn, can now enter the interpretive regime of dream life: they can now reveal, for example, allusive and personal significances as well as traces of Freudian processes like displacement and condensation. They must be read, in short, as if they had been dreamed. This, in a sense, allows surrealists to have their cake and eat it too: the object, whether on this side or yonder of dream, maintains its dense opacity and intransitivity, but at the same time it becomes complexly legible.

Any theoretical boundary between dream and non-dream becomes, in this context, rather tenuous. However, the distinction is worth maintaining, for the reason that the passage from waking to dream and back stages, over and over, the undoing of the very givenness that they share. Each time, this transition makes manifest that what appears to be inalienably true might in fact not be, and that for every "given" there is an alternative. Thus in surrealist object-discourse the object, at the crossroads of dream and waking, becomes both the repository of "givenness" and the site of its undoing.

The word "objet," then, in surrealist discourse – its "object-position" – is informed by a complex intertwining of dreaming and waking states and behaviors, and in this way is also closely linked to other surrealist preoccupations that bridge these states, like the recording of "phrases de réveil," or hypnagogic visions.[20] More significantly for the *acte-objet*, surrealist objecthood is complicit with dream in its critical, transgressive relationship to the given.

[20] See, for this, the *First Manifesto* of Surrealism.

Dalí writes in 1932, in his essay "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment" for *This Quarter* magazine, that at the end of the "road to the object," as he calls it, we will be led "to regard the world of objects, the objective world, as the true and manifested content of a new dream." Such a waking dream, for Breton as well, would be the endgame of surrealist objectmaking: "l'objectivation de l'activité de rêve, son passage dans la réalité."[21] Describing this "road to the object," Dalí uses the same language of birth and delivery as he will in the 1933 Breton letter on the *acte-objet*, but here the history of the surrealist object finds its crowning moment not in an operatic extravaganza but in "simulation" – a practice recently elaborated in Breton and Paul Eluard's 1930 *L'Immaculée conception*, with its verbal simulations of mental illness. For Dalí, simulation in 1932 holds exactly the place that the *acte-objet* will fill in 1933. Could we conclude from this that Dalí conceives the act-object, in fact, *as* a kind of simulation? But what to make, additionally, of Dalí's statement that the act of simulation is where surrealist object-practices converge with automatism, liberating the latter? Could the *acte-objet* be described, for example, as a kind of object-oriented automatism, one that has diversified the simple pen and paper that mediate automatic writing to a wider range of tools?[22]

More than one of Dalí's interventions in the field of surrealist object-theory might best be understood as exercises in simulation. In "Apparitions aérodynamiques des

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21 "The Object as Revealed," Guigon (67); André Breton, *Peinture* (*Œuvres IV* 277).

22 In his study of the surrealist object Haim Finkelstein suggests that Dalí's "new dream" be compared to Breton's "rêve éveillé" discussed in *Les Vases communicants* – as well as in the following chapter. He also suggests that Dalí's simulation here is a "guided automatism" where, reaching beyond the verbal, automatism ceases to be passively receptive and becomes an active intervention in the concrete world of objects (*Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979, 34). In this way it rises to the level of what Dalí calls "concrete irrationality."

'Êtres-Objets,'"[23] for example – addressing the same "êtres-objets" mentioned in the 1933 letter to Breton – Dalí outlines what is not so much a new category of object as a new vision of space and the things in (or of) it. Space is a thick, fleshy, infinitely malleable and infinitely productive substance, and all objects and beings, along with the *êtres-objets* in question, are literally blackheads squeezed with indescribable satisfaction from its "very nose." As the "corps étranges de l'espace," they are produced by space, even made of it, but foreign to its all-permissive generality in their materialized particularity.[24] Dalí proposes a simulation of this promiscuous productivity of space, in the form of a melon-sized nose made of rubber which, upon squeezing, would burst forth with "des centaines de minuscules objets."

Dalí's way of imagining – or simulating – space as pure potential translates, into the realm of matter, certain surrealist convictions about language. Language, like Dalí's version of space, is infinitely permissive and recombinable, but the problem is that words tend to group themselves, as Breton puts it, "selon des affinités particulières, lesquelles ont généralement pour effet de leur faire recréer à chaque instant le monde sur son vieux modèle." If what has already been said – or thought, or made – conceals what *could* be said, thought or made, why not then, Breton asks, "brouiller l'ordre des mots," thus

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[23] Salvador Dalí, "Apparitions aérodynamiques des 'Êtres-Objets,'" *Minotaure* 6, Winter 1935 and Guigon (130-134). See also "Objets psycho-atmosphériques anamorphiques" (*SASDLR* 5, May 1933), where "technicians" contrive to place a photograph no one has seen of an object no one has seen inside an "informe" lump of iron. This "réel et véritable météore de l'imagination" simulates the "authentiquement inconnue" ("La Conquête de l'irrationnel," 259) of what might reach the earth from outer space, in all its concrete irrationality or objective perversity. In the words of Gaston Bachelard, it fulfills the "primordial function" of the real: "la conviction qu'une entité dépasse son donné immédiat […] la conviction que […] *l'on trouvera plus dans le réel caché que dans le donné immédiat*" (cited in Breton "Crise de l'objet," Guigon 359.) Rosalind Krauss, who also calls the psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic object a simulation, remarks in it an "a new order of the unseeable" (*Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 147).

[24] The *Minotaure* 6 (Winter 1935) version of this essay has a photo of an ordinary woman with her dog on a stoop with the caption "les corps étranges de l'espace," putting her on equal footing with her famous "être-objet" counterpart, the trembling elderly woman dressed as a toreador, with an omelette for a hat.

making room for new models of the world. He adds, slyly: "La médiocrité de notre univers ne dépend-elle pas essentiellement de notre pouvoir d'énonciation?"[25] Similarly the question Dalí is asking, with his "Êtres-Objets" essay, is why not "brouiller l'ordre des êtres," thus making room for new beings and objects. In this recombinatorial praxis, whether of words or things, simulation and automatism work hand in hand.

Effie Rentzou argues, for example, that Breton and Eluard's *L'Immaculée conception* makes the practice of simulation not only into a representational strategy and a poetics in embryo, but into a reviving transformation of written automatism. The automatism of *L'Immaculée conception*, understood as a vector for introducing new and hitherto excluded poetic modes and "reclassing" existing ones, is closely linked to the simulative mode. The latter, sidestepping the truth or falsity of the relation between language and reality, reveals that language creates "sa propre réalité-simulacre," beyond any dichotomy between copy and original. To exactly the extent that "la langue finalement crée la réalité" and founds the possibility of experiencing it, simulation might create a bridge between automatic writing and reality at large; for if language writes, or simulates, reality, then automatic writing can rewrite it, or resimulate it. And if the surrealist object is itself – as Rentzou adds – a representational practice in which simulation acts as fundamental principle, then perhaps this is because if objects, so to speak, form a lexicon of reality, then to create a new object, or object-simulacrum, is to revise and transform this lexicon. Simulation links both writing and object-making to the

[25] "Peu de réalité," *Oeuvres II* (276). See also Rentzou (219): in its simulative mode, "la poésie donnerait ainsi accès aux parties les plus éloignées de l'être, grâce aux inflexions infinies du langage."

intimate grammar and structure of reality – and perhaps this is what Dalí means, as well, by finding in simulation the convergence of automatic and object-centered practices.[26]

Just as one function of automatic writing, as simulation, is to force language to jump the tracks – towing reality inexorably along behind it – a complementary function of the surrealist object is to scramble the order of the things, substances, and half-materialized concepts that also compose reality.[27] The act of simulation, working upon words or matter, reveals the luxuriant promiscuity of Dalinian space and/or of language, bringing concealed virtualities into focus. It now seems, then, that the surrealist object-position is not only closely coupled to the dream and informed by the theory and practice of automatism, but is also a site of simulation as well as an element, a building block, of a simulative act.

In this context, Dalí in particular is exploring the possibility of "systematizing," as he puts it, automatism and other states that tend to be understood as primarily passive or receptive, making them directly active in the world. In the process, for Dalí, the world is transformed into a kind of waking dream, and simulation joins automatism to the object, "freeing" both. One stands here at the threshold of a revolution, where all these states and practices will be fused into a new poetic whole.

But this revolution soon takes a disquieting turn. As the world of objects falls into the dusk of waking dream, one is "seized with a new fear." It is a fear that arises "at the limit of the emerging cultivation of desire," where "we seem to be attracted by a new body, we perceive the existence of a thousand bodies of objects we feel we have

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[26] See Effie Rentzou, *Littérature malgré elle* (216-219). For observations on the surrealist "culte du langage," see for example the sections "Proverbes" and "Chansons" in part II of this book.
[27] Adorno writes, similarly, of the "possibility of which their reality has cheated […] objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one." From *Negative Dialectics*, quoted in Bennett (15).

forgotten." In each encounter between self and object, in each space of reciprocal communication, a phantasmal body, or second self, takes shape. "It may be asked," Dalí continues, "if what at the present moment haunts surrealism is not the possible body which can be incarnated in this communication. The way in which the new surrealist *fear* assumes the shape, the light and the appearance of the terrifying body of the 'objective self' compels us to think so."[28] The specter of the "objective self" haunting Surrealism is the possibility of discovering, in every object, a virtual self or uncanny double, in which one meets the object halfway on the plane of being, exchanging not only gazes but features and parts. The fear described by Dalí is the fear, in this meeting, of forgetting the self, of letting one's own boundaries dissolve.

Thus to the oneiric, automatic, and simulative modes of the surrealist object-position, we can add this new, fearful dimension. The object in Surrealism is quite frequently experienced as monstrous – as we will see in more detail below – and derives its monstrosity largely from the fact that it tends to draw in and transform any ostensible subject who approaches it. Roger Caillois's *Minotaure* essay "La Mante religieuse" (1934), for example, evokes a self that is not merely permeable to the world but keeps recognizing, desiring, and rejoining itself beyond its own boundaries, like drops of oil meeting and joining across the transparent medium of water. His essay of the following year, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie legendaire," links this state to a passage in Gustave Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874), where the ascetic in the desert longs to "be" matter — "pénétrer chaque atome, descendre jusqu'au fond de la matière." Saint Anthony, for Caillois, is responding to an ambivalent longing for a "mimétisme général" or "généralisation de l'espace aux dépens de l'individu" – as if the permissive fleshiness

[28] "The Object as Revealed," Guigon (68).

of space envisioned in Dalí's "Êtres-Objets" essay were to finally subsume and consume its progeny.[29]

The fearful aspect of the surrealist object-position, then, comprises an ambivalent mimetic or metamorphic desire, a desire to be, in Caillois's words, "semblable, non pas semblable à quelque chose, mais simplement semblable." In other words, if we follow Caillois, the phantasmatic objective self would be a simulacral state – a resemblance without original, an "effect" of resemblance.[30] For this reason, Dalí's threshold of fear and desire – the simulative capacity to be or become an object, or to dissolve into the space that constitutes it – is also one of creative opportunity.

The surrealist object, standing at the threshold of dream, works between the automatic and the simulacral, and also brings with it a threat of permeability, metamorphosis, and hybridity. The zone it governs is a slippery and shifting one, where the terms and concepts associated with it keep slipping aside to refer back to the others, like ice floes that dip and plunge. Then there is the Dalinian *acte-objet*, equally slippery, which can be understood, in its creative operatic extravagance, as an escalation or even collectivization of these qualities, since it is an event that requires a multitude to take

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[29] Significantly, the lure of this assimilation is particularly strong in the realm of aesthetic instinct: in a footnote to the essay, Caillois writes: *"Pour ma part, d'ailleurs, si l'on veut réduire l'instinct esthétique à une tendance de métamorphose en objet ou en espace, je ne m'y oppose pas.*" *Minotaure* no. 7, 1935 (5-10) 10. Caillois's italics.

[30] Ibid. 9. Compare also to Georges Bataille's definition of the "informe" in the Critical Dictionary supplement to the magazine *Documents*, and his line "Par contre affirmer que l'univers ne ressemble à rien et n'est qu'*informe* revient à dire que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un crachat" (*Œuvres complètes I: premiers écrits 1922-1940*; Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1970, 217). Rosalind Krauss finds an "obvious connection" between the "Mimétisme" essay and the *informe:* "What could be more formless than this spasm of nature in which boundaries are indeed broken and distinctions are truly blurred?" ("Corpus Delicti," *October* 33 (Summer 1985) pp. 31-72 (49-50)). For more on the "*effet* de ressemblance" and "image sans ressemblance," in the work of Deleuze and in relation to surrealist simulations, see Rentzou (216-219). Rentzou argues, as well, that the "possessions" invoked in *L'Immaculée conception* can refer both to a self-dispossession – an inhabitation by strange and foreign voices – and to "une possession complète de son esprit, de tous ces recoins oubliés de l'esprit que le surréalisme veut éveiller et qui auraient la capacité de reproduire toutes sortes de discours – et toutes sortes de réalité" (219). Thus the possessions represent both the loss of self and the mastery of this loss.

place. Dalí's waking dream, in the *acte-objet*, is a collective one, and its simulations are collaborative; if it calls forth a decentered, permeable, metamorphic actor to perform it, it calls many at once.

The collective dimension of the object can be understood from a number of angles. Johanna Malt, for example, shows how many of the surrealist object's developments were linked to the need to see what had been merely private or subjective in object-theory and object-practice as "dialectically engaged with the material world" – a need in keeping with the idea, shared by many revolutionary intellectuals in the 1930s, that one must – somehow, and urgently – reconcile the ivory tower of revolutionary thought and theory with the nitty-gritty of action on the streets.[31] Whereas the surrealist object began as a kind of Trojan horse for smuggling revolutionary contents into the high-walled city of accepted reality, an increasing weight was placed on its shoulders – including a pressure to develop its own political praxis. Part of Malt's project is to show how this political praxis, instead of being post-hoc or compensatory, is already embedded within surrealist object practice, allowing surrealist creations to be understood as "political in themselves," beyond the positions of individuals, or propagandistic content. Malt examines what allows the object to open both "downward into the unconscious and outward into history," linking the surrealist model of subjectivity to a world to be changed, the psychic to the social, isolated desire to collective history.[32] Other writers on Surrealism, exploring the collective dimensions of the object, have focused on the

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[31] *Obscure Objects of Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 90. See also Steven Harris (*Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)), according to whom the surrealist object emerges as a response to the difficult position of the Surrealists with respect to the materialist-idealist polarizations of the Parti Communiste Français. It is an "imaginary resolution" of the impasse the movement faced, caught between art and politics.

[32] *Obscure Objects of Desire* (1, 51). For more on surrealist formulations of collective political engagement, in the context of the Infra Noir group's theories of "automatic action," see Chapter Four.

presence of the object in surrealist exhibitions, particularly the 1938 international exhibition. With its overbearing ceiling of coal sacks, its street of mannequins, its furniture equipped with human limbs, and its near darkness, it was a total surrealist environment mediated and inhabited by objects, uniquely catalyzing their potential to inform and interfere with reality.[33]

For the moment I would like, however, to explore the surrealist imagination and practice of collectivity specifically through the lens of the object's relationship to language, which we have already begun to explore – adding a final nuance to our understanding of the surrealist object-position, and of the act-object, before moving forward.

In the 1933 Surrealist group experimental proceedings concerning the "connaissance irrationnelle des objets,"[34] the group chooses an object, for example a bit of pink velour, and poses questions to it, often simulating natural historical and even ethnographic modes of inquiry: is it diurnal or nocturnal? What is its sex? Does it metamorphose? What language does it speak? The group hopes that individuals' unpremeditated and "automatic" responses to these questions, both as means and as symptom of a profound shock of contact, will converge, so that an objective *connaissance* can be drawn from them. Here the collective, in other words, becomes an

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[33] For more on the 1938 exhibition, in its political engagement or as the apotheosis of the surrealist object, see "The 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme" in Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001); "Surrealist Politics of Exhibition" in Mileaf, *Please Touch* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2010); "Profane Illumination: the 1938 Surrealist Exhibition," in Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005); Elena Filipovic, "Surrealism in 1938: the Exhibition at War," in Spiteri and LaCoss, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

[34] The experiment appears to be based on one of Dalí's ideas, outlined in "The Object as Revealed" (Guigon 68), where it is called an "experiment regarding the irrational acquaintance of things." The later proceedings were published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* no. 6 (1933).

engine of objectivity.[35] In addition to this, however, and to the tentative exploration of object-oriented collective automatism, the "connaissance irrationnelle" experiments feature what one could call collective textual experimentation.

One of the clear goals of these proceedings is to transform subjective significance into collective significance, personal experience into a shared language. One might succeed, in this way, in realigning the grid of language upon the field of experience – in retextualizing reality. This is a process, of course, that occurs naturally, repeatedly, and on a historical scale; linguistic and socio-material changes instigate and reinforce each other, and together continually reweave the tapestry of the "objective." What the surrealists wish to do, however, is to accelerate or to game this process or at least, microcosmically, to simulate it.

In the group's attempts to place objects "dans toutes les situations possibles," there is also a combinatorial impulse that once more recalls Breton's invitation to "brouiller l'ordre" of words. The object becomes an element of syntax that, juxtaposed with other such elements, creates a field of meaning or electric charge that can be communicated and collectively felt. Such fields, again, already exist, since objects arranged within certain configurations uphold structures of sense, authority and action. The creation of new configurations – new circuits, or "champs de force," as Breton puts it – returns each of their elements to a "suite ininterrompue de *latences*"[36] and drafts an alternative text, so to speak, of reality. The "connaissance irrationnelle" experiments can

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[35] In the accompanying manifesto ("À propos de l'expérience portant sur la connaissance irrationnelle des objets") written by Arthur Harfaux and Maurice Henry, they indicate that the variables of the experiment, along with time, temperature, and location, include "le nombre des personnes présentes et le réseau de leurs états physiques et mentaux" (Guigon 101). They also mention certain "phénomènes de contagion" within the group, recalling the *Second Manifesto* where Breton suggests that Surrealists had achieved a "mise en commun" of thought in the course of their group games (*Manifestes*, 128).

[36] "Crise de l'objet," in Guigon (146).

be conceived as a collective groping toward just such an alternative text – written in a new language of objects, a new "objectivity," that requires the participation of the group to take shape.

As a concept, the "language of objects" takes many different forms in surrealist object-discourse. For example, it takes the form of the language of matter in general, or of the natural world. Rosalind Krauss famously writes that surreality is "nature convulsed into a kind of writing" and that what "unites *all* surrealist production is precisely this experience of nature as representation, physical matter as writing." The world itself engages in a kind of automatic writing, subsequently to be framed or object-ified by acts of surrealist attention.[37] In his *Traité du style*, Louis Aragon frames a fiction in which the textures and debris of nature form the elements of his textual style – a *style du dehors*: "elytres rompues, vieilles carapaces de crabes […] cocons, pollens."[38] Breton, in turn, suggests that what Hegel calls poetry's will to objectivity – its will to give to the "l'image présente à l'esprit" the precision of things directly sensed – might be the will literally to write with objects, using them as if they were words.[39]

Jacques Hérold, a key figure in both French and Romanian surrealist contexts, both expresses a desire to write with objects and urges the "reading" of objects:

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[37] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 113 and 115.

[38] But also "la ficelle et l'assiette, le pneumatique et le chiffon," for the things of nature have no privilege with respect to the "crumbs" of cities. Louis Aragon, *Traité du style* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 176-177. For *style du dehors* I am thinking of Foucault's term "la pensée du dehors," in his essay on Blanchot of the same title. First published in *Critique* 229 (1966).

[39] *Œuvres* II (477). He proposes incorporating in a poem "des objets usuels ou autres" (480), and will later explore this avenue in his postwar "poème-objets." See also Marco Ménégoz ("Nous pratiquerons la poésie avec les objets") in Michel Fauré, *Histoire du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Table Ronde, 1982), 384; and Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu ("if like a piece of cloth it were ripped into thousands of pieces, the poem would precipitate into thousands of objects"), in *Spectrul longevității; 122 de cadavre* (Bucharest: Colecția Suprarealistă, 1946), 53; and Fijalkowski, 165-166.

"lisez les objets à livre ouvert, à haute voix."[40] Objects and the matter of which they are composed can be, similarly "interrogated," as in the 1933 *connaissance irrationnelle* experiments. Max Ernst calls his practice of *frottage* an interrogation – a complex dialogue between the passive-receptive activity of taking rubbings and the active "paranoid" faculty of image recognition and creative development, informed by Dalí's theory of *paranoïa-critique.* Breton writes that such forays into the "language of objects," such acts of (re)textualization, "de par leur tendance même à s'imposer comme objectives, présentent un caractère bouleversant, révolutionnaire en ce sens qu'elles appellent impérieusement, dans la réalité extérieure, quelque chose qui leur réponde."[41] He calls such interventive acts a "travail de regroupement" that, even when performed singly, are always of collective import.[42]

Breton and others compare the flying sparks of surrealist circuit-building and image-making to acts of lovemaking between objects. But in Breton's 1922 essay "Les Mots sans rides," it is words that make love. After WWII, Breton reflects that it is around the early 20s, amid the young Surrealist group's explorations of automatic writing, that "le tout […] a été de se convaincre qu'on avait mis la main sur la 'matière première' (au sens alchimique) du langage" – "quelque chose," he later specifies, "comme le langage à

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40 "L'Œuf obéissant. L'Œuf désobéissant," in Breton and Duchamp ed., *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Pierre à Feu/Maeght, 1947), 85.

41 "Situation surréaliste," in *Œuvres II* (496). These lines reappeared in 1938 as part of the definition of "Peinture" in Breton and Eluard ed., *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: J. Corti, 1991), 20. *Paranoïa-critique* is a "méthode spontanée de *connaissance irrationnelle*" which has "la troublante particularité de rendre valable [l'idée obsédante] pour les autres." See the definition written by Dalí in the *Dictionnaire* (20); and "L'Ane pourri," in *SASDLR* 1 (1930). Breton calls the 1933 experiments an exemplarily collective form of *paranoïa-critique* (*Œuvres II* 256). As for Ernst, he writes of *frottage* and "interrogation" in *Au-delà de la peinture*.

42 "Situation surréaliste de l'objet": it is only in the "travail de regroupement de ces éléments désorganisés [*restes visuels*] que s'exprime à la fois, en ce qu'elle a d'individuel et de collectif, leur revendication" (*Œuvres II* 491).

l'état brut."[43] One of the things that early Surrealism inherited from the Symbolist and the Decadent movements, in fact, was a vision of language as a kind of matter. Writers appeared as *sertisseurs* and *émailleurs* – gemsetters and enamelers – seeking the impersonality of crystalline form or of the artisanal *objet de luxe*. What was most radical and new in word-working was figured as material or objectual, and this emergent materiality of language also encoded a desire to write from a place beyond the Romantic lyrical subject, or in the later case of Surrealism, outside the conscious, reason-bound self.

Now, with the rise of the surrealist object, what was most radical and new about the object was frequently figured as language, as an incipient textuality. But in this reversal from the matter of language to the language of matter, the emergent textuality of objects similarly encoded a desire to write, to paint, or to act impersonally, from a position outside the individual ego, beyond such obsolete notions as personal genius or inspired authorship. If the impersonality of language is figured as material, the impersonality of matter is figured as textual.[44]

Impersonality, here, does not have merely to do with the results of individual acts of writing or object-making. As we will see below with the French-Belgian wartime para-surrealist group Main à Plume (also discussed in Chapters Two and Four) and with the

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43 André Breton, "Du surréalisme en ses œuvres vives," in *Œuvres IV* (20). Breton's later addition is from the essay as it appeared in *Médium* (no. 4, January 1955) See p.1214 of the *Œuvres IV* volume. Compare the notion of "le langage à l'état brut" to Foucault's "l'être du language" in *Les Mots et les choses*. Compare also Symbolist *sertisseurs* and *émailleurs* to Aragon's "Je suis le bijoutier des matières déchues, le sertisseur des déchets sans emploi" in *Traité du style* (176).

44 In Tristan Tzara's early works it is the very density and opacity of matter that makes it speak. See "Note sur la poésie": "N'est-elle pas dense et sûre la matière dans sa pureté? Sous l'écorce des arbres abattus, je cherche la peinture des choses à venir." *Œuvres complètes Tome I* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 403 and 405. For Sartre, a 20th century "crisis" of language and of "depersonalization" made words strange, something like surrealist objects: "they became things themselves, or rather the black heart of things." So at the kernel of the object's opacity is the strangeness of language, but likewise the strangeness of words derives from their thing-ness (*What is Literature?* 32).

Infra Noir group, words like "impersonal" and "anonymous" encode ambitions toward large-scale social change, as well as the hope that surrealist group practices might act directly upon the fabric of lived reality. In its core practice Surrealism aims, as Rentzou writes, to confront a whole social imaginary, an existing system of social significations, with an alternative imaginary, an alternative system. The work surrealists do upon language, for example, is a work directly upon the social imaginary, and thus is fundamentally a political act: "ce sont des significations imaginaires sociales qui constituent le noyau révolutionnaire du surréalisme."[45] The analogy that we have been considering between automatic writing and surrealist object practice holds not only in their capacity to "brouiller l'ordre" and allow the new to crystallize, but also in that both are believed to open onto an "anonymous" sphere that is, as surrealists in the Infra Noir and Main à Plume groups in particular feel, exactly where the collective and political rewriting of the imaginary occurs. This analogy also enables us to imagine, as with Dalí, an object-oriented automatism: a kind of automatic writing with objects, using bits and pieces of social reality as its basic unit. The surrealist practice, acute yet open-ended, of "doing-toward" can be taken as an automatism that plays with the "virtualities" of objects, resituating and retextualizing them, making them available to oneself and to others in new ways. Generalized and made collective, such a practice would indeed be nothing less, to return to Dalí's *acte-objet*, than "the true and manifested content of a new dream," dreamed in common.[46]

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[45] Rentzou (120, 124).

[46] On doing-toward, see also Iulian Toma writing on Gherasim Luca: "Le désir non-œdipien, s'il tend vers les objets, s'il va à leur rencontre, il n'y cherche […] rien de précis, il n'opère aucun investissement particulier; c'est une poussée sans *but* […] ou bien […] ses buts sont infinis, en perpétuelle métamorphose." *Gherasim Luca, ou, L'Intransigeante passion d'être* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 204.

In his text "Rêve expérimental," Tristan Tzara dreams of a joyous and absolute forgetting where, caught up in a "manie d'action" without predetermined goal, every man and woman will give in to "les multiples glissements dont l'homme, ce désir en marche, sera l'objet assoiffé et infiniment transformable."[47] Here, forgetting figures the social generalization, the collectivization, of surrealist retextualizing practices, both linguistic and objectual. Automatism is a form of forgetting, and so is dreaming, playing, simulating; the siren-call of the "objective self" is a call to forgetfulness. Because – for Breton, Dalí, Tzara, and Infra Noir – what has already been thought so aggressively obscures the thinkable, what has been made the makeable, what has been written the writeable, forgetting must also be aggressive. The aggressive forgetfulness of the Surrealist object-position scrambles and perturbs the order of things, reducing it to the constitutive elements by which it may be reordered.

For the 1936 "Exposition surréaliste d'objets" at the Charles Ratton gallery in Paris, Breton contributed a short text to the exhibition catalog in which he watches the "train fantôme du Devenir" passing swiftly by, at its windows a procession of being-objects and object-beings, agglomerates of people and things natural and manufactured, all to the rhythm of a "rire panique." The exhibition of objects appears, in this essay, as a delirious proliferation of *objets-êtres* and *êtres-objets* across the ontological landscape.[48]

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[47] Tristan Tzara, "Rêve expérimental" in *Œuvres complètes Tome III* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), p. 25. One is reminded of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, where the epidemic Dionysian excitement of the tragic chorus lets one "see oneself transformed before one's own eyes and to begin to act as if one had actually entered into another body." *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (2000, Modern Library) 63-64. Another point of comparison is Antonin Artaud's 1938 *Le Théâtre et son double*: the theater must be "une sorte de création totale, où il ne reste plus à l'homme que de reprendre sa place entre les rêves et les événements." Paris: Gallimard, 1964, 131. It destroys false "shadows" but opens the way for new ones.

[48] *Exposition surréaliste d'objets du 22 au 29 mai 1936, chez Charles Ratton*. Reprinted in *Œuvres IV* (690-692). The section on the "monstrous object" below will further address the role of hybrids and other machinic, objectual and animal variations on the human in Surrealism, as well as their role as immanent critique, in Hal Foster's words, of the regime of commodification to which human beings and bodies are

Like Breton's phantom train, Dalí's *acte-objet* – where metamorphic, simulacral, and oneiric rewritings of the social imaginary take place on an operatic scale – exists only on paper. The *acte-objet* is a momentary convergence of Dalí's, and Surrealism's, most urgent interests concerning the surreally situated object. And regardless of its provenance, the idea of the collective *acte-objet*, as I will continue to show, is present in the rumbling bass register of surrealist object discourse, both in the 30s and in wartime and the immediate postwar.

subject under industrialized capitalism. In Foster's argument, artists "assume[ ] the trauma of mechanization and commodification in order to double it, to expose it […] to deploy its psychophysical effects against the very order that produced them." *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 129.

2. **The Act-Object and the Obstacle**

In the winter of 1945-46, before Breton's return from wartime exile in the West, René Magritte organized an exhibition called "Surréalisme" (of "tableaux, dessins, collages, objets, photos et textes") at the La Boétie gallery in Brussels. For the exhibition catalog, Magritte's colleague Marcel Mariën compiles various text-fragments for a "portrait moral" of Surrealism, and closes the text with a statement of position: Surrealism must, he writes, constantly question itself and undermine its own habits and tics, for the sake of a "déploiement d'une audace brute et insatiable qui tâche à nous rapprocher de l'anonymat objectif des choses." There will be a new "homme sans nom," and his actions must be as anonymous as the concrete things among which he works.[1]

The word "anonymous" had become something of a buzzword for Main à Plume, in which Mariën had been involved until its dissolution in 1944-45. It would be just as important for the Infra Noir group, which shared colleagues, wartime hardships, and certain influences and obsessions with Main à Plume.[2] Anonymity, especially in its relation to collectivity and object-theory, is one of the pivots around which both Main à Plume and Infra Noir turn, between the overwhelming influence of the prewar surrealists and what they perceive to be the future direction of the surrealist movement.

The important contributions of Main à Plume to surrealist object theory and practice have remained for the most part unexplored. Krzysztof Fijalkowski explains that after the object's golden age in the 30s, culminating with the 1938 international exhibition, only marginal and "vestigial" groups like Main à Plume or Infra Noir set the

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[1] Marcel Mariën, *L'Activité surréaliste en Belgique (1924-1950)* (Brussels: Lebeer Hossmann, 1979), 362.
[2] For more on the influences and interferences between the Main à Plume and Infra Noir groups, see Chapter Two.

object high on their agenda.[3] I explain my reasons for dealing with the former here as follows. First of all, even before Main à Plume was torn apart by competing Stalinist, Trotskyist, and non-aligned factions – by Bretonian surrealists, anti-Bretonian post-surrealists, and everything in between – the object became the terrain of ideological warfare, especially while the group prepared its doomed 1944 *L'Objet* volume. New pressures were brought to bear on concepts that were already fraught and ambiguous; some ideas came newly to the fore, others fell by the wayside.[4] I would like to explore some of the ways in which certain fields of surrealist object-inquiry evolve in this atmosphere: from dream, the "language" of matter and the "objective self," to chance and magic. More importantly though, understanding the evolution of these domains of object theory and practice, particularly in relation to "anonymity" and collectivity, will be crucial for understanding the Infra Noir group's object practices, as well as their ideas about somnambulism and automatic action discussed in the following chapter.

From 1941 on, the Main à Plume group vigorously continues prewar experimentation on emergent and alternative textualities of the object, and emergent

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3 Fijalkowski (272). Alyce Mahon also discusses Main à Plume in *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros* (in her second chapter, "Surrealism and World War II.") During the turbulent postwar revolutionary-surrealist meetings (see Chapter Two), the object remained, for the most part uncontroversially, on the agenda; at least in the beginning, experiments were to be carried out as part of a "rehabilitation" of the object that would also be a rehabilitation of the quotidian. In August 1949, the Belgian subgroup within the Cobra collective, a number of whom had been Main à Plume members and "surréalistes révolutionnaires," organized *L'Objet à travers les ages* at the Palais de Beaux-Arts in Brussels, and displayed a series of "simple, anti-aesthetic objects." The exhibition prospectus states that desire, curiosity and open experimentation have come together to present "quelques objets réalistes mis dans des situations délicates, c'est-à-dire surréalistes," objects that no longer "function" but enter freely into everyday life. See *Le Petit Cobra. Bulletin International d'informations artistiques* 4 (Winter 50-51). In facsimile edition of *Cobra* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1980), unpaginated.

4 These uncertainties are evident, for example, in the group *enquête* concerning the nature of the object: for Maurice Blanchard the object is any element within the subject-object system that constitutes the real; for Edouard Jaguer, the object is any projection of human desire; for Roger Brielle it is a place where intensely opposing forces crystallize into unity; for Jean-François Chabrun it is anything that mediately satisfies a desire that cannot be immediately satisfied. For these answers see Fauré, 381-387 and Vernay and Walter ed., *La Main à Plume: Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Syllepse, 2008, 222-225).

objectualities of text. There is for Main à Plume a "language of objects," both to be read and to be written, allowing objects both to speak and be spoken to, that can put "en transe les tables, les cuillers, les nappes, qui les [jette] dans les douleurs de l'accouchement," and that allows them to "trace their poem upon the world."[5] Christian Dotremont (later to join the revolutionary-surrealists, and then to found the group Cobra) imagines that certain combinations of objects might be directly mappable onto the rules of language: there are pairs of objects that are synonyms and antonyms (sugar and saccharine, sugar and salt), homonyms (two 45 year-old Parisian dentists), and clichés (a mantel and a vase).[6] For the group in general, the objectual and verbal realms remain separate but gravitationally tied, and what is most compelling is what happens in their space of mutual attraction. It is as if there were some imponderable, infra-thin space between the two, where objects can be written and words can be held in the hand. The group's intense concern with "objectivation" (central group member Noël Arnaud writes that the group's *raison d'être* is its "volonté d'objectivation à outrance"[7]) is largely focused upon this between-space of materialization and textualization.

Objectivation is the process by which what is dreamed, imaged or imagined becomes literally material; or by which what is not yet materially imaginable is made so; or by which something enters a collective discourse or system of social significance and acts therein. But if we follow Main à Plume member Jacques Bureau, objectivation is

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5 See Jacques Bureau, "Morale des mots et des objets," *Main à Plume* (66); Arnaud, "Crier=créer" in *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours* (special issue of *Cahiers de poésie* 4-5, 1943), 29; and the wartime review *Messages* headed by Jean Lescure (like Arnaud, later a member of the group Oulipo) (Fauré 108). Arnaud's tables and spoons provoked some mirth in the press of the time (Fauré 314). Bureau wrote something similar: "un langage à faire sonner seules les pendules, à faire boîter les chaises, à effrayer les enfants, et qui ne ressortit ni de la grammaire ni du manuel de physique" (*MAP* 66).

6 Christian Dotremont, "Vie de l'objet" in *MAP* (246).

7 "L'Avenir du surréalisme," *MAP* (280).

nothing less than magic, both in "l'expérimentation sur la puissance objectivante du mot" and, from the other side, "la recherche du 'langage' des objets." Like automatic writing once was, Bureau's "magic" is a new species of textuality "*en dehors des lois du langage*," but one that can only exist in that between-space between words and things, harnessing their "savage" energies.[8]

The Main à Plume group's frank, programmatic insistence on magic belies some of its members' Stalinist materialism later on. On the other hand, for Main à Plume in wartime and beyond, it is increasingly the word "mysticism" along with, of course, "idealism," that bears the weight of everything Surrealists stand against. Mysticism stands for "fumées […] musiques et […] promesses" and the "paradis chrétien," the old "ombres connues"; and it is actually the weighting of "mysticism" with all these inimical qualities that allows what they call "magic" to be firmly, safely materialist, becoming a kind of science of objectivation.[9]

Along with object-language relations and a repurposed magic, Main à Plume also places great emphasis on chance. Chance is explored, as automatism was, as a mode of access to all that is not a result of individual will or subjective self-expression in the act of creation; both chance and automatism, for Main à Plume, govern a complex poetics of the impersonal. In the 1943 Main à Plume publication *Le Surréalisme encore et toujours*, Noël Arnaud explains that what appears to be personal choice in artistic creation is actually necessity in disguise – an affirmation of the existing order of things – whereas what appears in the guise of arbitrary necessity, for example the intervention of blind

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[8] "Morale," *MAP* 63 and 66.

[9] See Arnaud in "L'Image dans la poésie collective" (*MAP* 103) and in "Il faut que l'homme mange ses mots," in Marcel Mariën ed., *La Terre n'est pas une vallée de larmes* (Brussels: Éditions "La Boetie," 1945), 53.

mechanism or the incursions of chance, is actually the highest freedom, an exalted forgetting of whatever temporary configurations reality has seen fit to form. Mechanisms of creation that harness chance act as a prophylactic against ostensibly personal choices or "inspirations": Arnaud exults, "le mécanisme est maître."[10] Chance and constraint, for Main à Plume, stand on the side of the object, so to speak, against the subject.

Chance and constraint can also be applied *to* the object. Like the participants in the *connaissance irrationnelle* experiments, Main à Plume practices what one could call an Oulipianism of the object, in which one imposes arbitrary (but freeing) constraints on objects – "false" situations, strange uses, inappropriate interrogations – imagining that doing so makes them, like words or like Lucretian atoms, rewritable or recombinable. The hope is that such activity, carried out collectively, might culminate with a massive "Poème de Personne, écrit sur le monde par l'ensemble des choses, à l'usage de tous les êtres."[11] For Main à Plume it is not just, however, that object-experimentation has an ecstatic, collective *acte-objet* as its horizon. It is also that true chance, treated as a synonym for pure automatism, has the power to transform collective creative activity into

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10 "Crier=créer," 28. One cannot help but think here of the group Oulipo's famous critique of Surrealism: that the absolute freedom the latter seeks is no more than a slavery to laws – unconscious constraints – of which it is ignorant (Raymond Queneau's version of this critique appears in "Qu'est-ce que l'art?" in *Volontés* 3, 20 February 1938). One purpose of Oulipian constraint will be to free artistic creation from the trap of the personal individual and his unconscious (social, historical, autobiographical, stylistic) determinants. This critique closely recalls the Marxist critic's classic take on Surrealism: that it had no business speculating on the mind when the latter was "conditioned by innumerable social factors all of which would be changed by the revolution" (Robert Short, paraphrasing Pierre Naville, in "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36," in Spiteri and LaCoss ed., *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 25).) The unconscious constraints of the Oulipian critique here become socioeconomic constraints. The Oulipian project of fighting constraint with further constraint, moreover, recalls Infra Noir's artistic-political strategy of the "negation of negation."

11 Bureau, "Morale," *MAP* 67. Bureau writes of the necessity "d'observer la réaction de l'objet placé dans une situation fausse vis-à-vis d'un autre objet, ou notre réaction devant un objet placé dans une situation fausse vis-à-vis de nous" (ibid., 65). For similar visions among Main à Plume members, see for example Marc Patin's "amour charnel et magnifique de tous les êtres, tous les jours," which he felt should replace written poetry (Fauré 122); Michel Tapié who imagined a kind of revived, classical epic, collectively lived (ibid.); and Marcel Mariën's massively social "rêve ordonné" (in "Les Marches de l'été," MAP 124).

an immaculate conception, free of the original sin of subjectivity. Arnaud recounts, for example, the heady atmosphere of a group writing session in which a nameless collective being begins to take shape amid the participants, an "être collectif crée-créateur" that births forth a "poème-force, commun dénominateur du hasard." Arnaud continues: "un être pourrait sortir de nous qui ne nous appartiendrait plus, auquel nous appartiendrions et qui nous ferait taire. Qui nous ferait agir." He calls this form of action a "state of grace," and even permits himself to speak literally of salvation: "nous étions pour quelques instants […] *sauvés*."[12] It is, essentially, a salvation of the subject by the object. To achieve Mariën's "l'anonymat objectif des choses" is to achieve sanctification.

As Main à Plume texts repeatedly make objects the enigmatic avatars of a sanctified and newly-empowered anonymity, there arises what can only be called a mysticism of the object, in which one seeks fusion with or absorption into it – an accession to the objective. The object's ever-hidden "intimacy" is first posited then immediately forbidden, infinitely desirable but always just out of reach, as the asymptotic limit of any activity, imaginative or otherwise, with regard to the object.[13] For Main à Plume, speaking of this "opacity" of the object is also an oblique way of speaking about or redefining the subject. The opaque object is an emblem of the group's insistence on the objective virtualities of the human and of its search for escape routes from the self, facilitated by the impersonal forces of chance. To merge with the object is to rejoin the

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12 Arnaud, "L'Image," in *MAP* 103-104. Group member Jean-François Chabrun, in "Naissance de l'homme objet," also speaks of an "état de grace" to be obtained in this way. See also Breton in *L'Amour fou* and *Arcane 17*, where the possible reconciliation of natural with human necessities is the possibility of an "état de grace."

13 See for example Marcel Mariën, "Traité non scientifique de la quatrième dimension," in *MAP* (226-227). Every object has a fourth dimension, that of the "image" or "surface." No matter how one breaks, perforates or flenses the object, its "véritable profondeur" can never be reached, only a series of new images, new surfaces: "jamais contact brut de matières, fusion parfaite, mélange absolu." This inaccessible interior thus becomes the domain par excellence of the imagination.

"objective self." Theirs is a hybrid, materialist mysticism that longs for concrete substance and presence and shies from the scent of idealized abstraction.

The prewar topoi of the dream-object, the objective self, and the *acte-objet* intertwine closely in Main à Plume object theory. To explain, we can begin with Main à Plume member Jean-François Chabrun's essay "Naissance de l'homme-objet" (1941). I dream or daydream, he writes, that I am or am becoming a certain object. But this act of imagined identification is no mere reverie: it marks "une étape capitale dans la développement de l'Action."[14] What, however, is this Action, capital A, and what does it have to do with confounding oneself with an object in a dream?

Just as in the 30s, for Main à Plume objects are the privileged building blocks of dreams (Arnaud says objects speak "le patois du rêve"[15]) and the dream is a special point of interface between human and object. But the dream's greatest importance to Main à Plume is as a means of access to a state of grace within "l'anonymat objectif des choses." Chabrun for example sets forth two poles or modalities between which the human being oscillates: the pole of the subject is diurnal, the cloudless realm of reason and rationality; the pole of the object is nocturnal, the trackless realm of dream and unreason. Within the nocturnal realm of the object, it is possible to escape beyond one's own limits, into another body, an objective self. Chabrun calls this other self the "homme-objet." The dreaming subject, at a certain depth in the labyrinth, discovers itself to be a dreamed object; in fact for Chabrun the dream's primordial function is to facilitate this discovery,

[14] Jean-François Chabrun, "Naissance de l'homme-objet," in *MAP* (51).
[15] "Petite recette pour aller plus loin," in *MAP* (76).

leading finally to a vast and generalized "*Einfühlung*"[16] where the *homme-objet* swims in a universe of object-selves.

The *homme-objet* of course, under various names and formulations, is a central figure in the Main à Plume group as a whole. Dotremont writes that the phrase "L'homme est un objet" should be written upon the pediment of Surrealism – man first fell from grace, he adds, in his attempt to subtract himself from the world of objects.[17] The object – and the human being, insofar as he can recover his objecthood – is a thing of "absolute unpredetermined liberty" under the pure, blind sway of chance, of a "combat de possibles, un jeu entre nécessités." Our so-called human liberties, on the other hand, are blighted by sociocultural tics, motheaten myths, unexamined beliefs – unconscious constraints, in short. Dotremont explains that what one experiences as "interior liberty" for the most part only adds "quelques barreaux à sa cage." The absolute freedom of the object is not only an escape from the weight of "personality," but represents a freedom from ideology itself.

Arnaud writes in 1945 that it is up to Surrealism now to blaze a trail into the heart of the object: "il lui faut fouiller jusqu'à la moelle la réalité […] plus riche d'avenir et de hasard que cette accumulation de mystère sur quelques particularités psychiques."[18] A shining exemplar of this revitalized Surrealism is, for Arnaud, the poetry of Benjamin Péret. In Péret's work, Arnaud points out, there are no people at all:

> Vous ne voyez pas l'homme, c'est qu'il est partout, fondu dans son univers quotidien, animé par le flux et le reflux de la matière puissant de toutes les forces

[16] "Naissance," *MAP* (51). This is the word from which we acquired the English word "empathy," a literal "feeling-into."
[17] In "Vie de l'objet," *MAP* (240).
[18] "Il faut que l'homme mange ses mots" in *La terre* (53).

> dont il n'était jusque-là que le jouet hagard et pénitent. […] il a cessé de heurter le monde comme le papillon le lampe […] il est entré enfin dans la réalité souveraine.[19]

What Arnaud imagines here is as much a mastery of nature as it is an escape from ideology. But it might also be an escape from history, or rather from the crushing sense of responsibility before history and from the endless search for its "truth" – a burden that, after the Second World War and the daily perils of Resistance, will grow no lighter. As far as mankind can plunge into the flux of matter and the sovereign automatism of the universe, it will be liberated, Arnaud writes, from "le souci de son destin." If indeed surreality is the world convulsed into automatic writing,[20] then the ambition of Dotremont and Arnaud, it seems, is to rejoin this world, to beatifically drown in it. Only then will it be possible truly, and freely, to act.

This is the greater framework – the "ampleur cosmique," to use Arnaud's words – within which Main à Plume's rapprochement with the object must be considered. The problem is that at first this attitude seems a great deal like a desire to escape into sweet oblivion, like a relinquishment of all efforts to "transform the world," in surrealist parlance. The "action" described by Chabrun, Dotremont and Arnaud at first appears more like simply going with the flow, and letting the world drift where it will. This is not, however, how Main à Plume sees it. In fact, man as becoming-object – clothed in the dark forces of the marvelous and of dream, appearing as Dalí's objective self or *être-*

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19 "L'Avenir du surréalisme," *MAP* (281).

20 Here see also *Littérature malgré elle*, where Rentzou reads the *informe* (in Bataille's famous definition) as the automatic writing of the universe itself: "L'écriture automatique *est* la transcription de la réalité, elle est la trace de cette réalité d'une manière indexicale." Thus "la surréalité est créée au fur et à mesure de l'énonciation" and, Rentzou comments, we now find ourselves again "en plein domaine de la simulation" (329-330).

objet, Mariën's "homme sans nom," Dotremont and Chabrun's *homme-objet* – is uniquely empowered to act directly upon and within the world.

How, exactly, does this work? Take, for example, the various disciplines of the self or of self-overcoming that Main à Plume proposes. There is Jacques Bureau's "Le Clou" essay, which describes his several-day apprenticeship to a single rusty nail, a discipline of stubbornly sustained, but open and innocent attention to this object. Such practices work within the dialectical and borderless "clearing" (Dotremont's word, using the English) that forms between the attentive self and the object. This "clearing" is a marvelous space of terrors and surprises, one that draws the attentive self into the network of relations and assemblages that form between objects, a space teeming with forces, potentials and transformations.[21] In this way, acts of sustained attention to a given object inevitably provoke one to new and even revolutionary behaviors, desires and modes of being, which can now make their advent in the world. It is necessary first, however, to become a stranger to oneself.

Insofar as one manages to enter the "moelle" of objects, writes Arnaud, they enter one in turn, literally replacing one's soul: "bien plus que cette 'âme' héritée d'un Dieu […] nous sommes plein de ce qui reste extérieur à nous."[22] And thus if one dared, one could give objects the power to change "constamment et immédiatement notre vie, notre cœur, nos goûts, nos aptitudes," and to act as extra sense organs, mediators of the as-yet

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[21] For the "clearing" see Dotremont, "Vie de l'objet," *MAP* (240). Dotremont's project of the "rehabilitation" of everyday life, taken up in the revolutionary-surrealist group and in Cobra, is also a practice of attention – especially as he explains it in the single issue of the journal *Le Suractuel* that he launched in 1946. Bureau's "Le Clou" is found in *MAP* (252-54). See also Pierre Mabille, *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962, p. 32) for a description of the marvelous within dialectical subject-object relations.

[22] "Il faut que l'homme…" in *La Terre* (54).

inexpressible, unthinkable and infeasible.[23] It is this that will make Chabrun's "Action" possible: in becoming objects, body and soul, and refurbishing our outmoded physical and metaphysical anatomies, we turn back toward the world, to rediscover and to change it.

No one in the Main à Plume group, and no surrealist, would disagree that the subject and its objects are always, already, deeply entwined. Surrealist René Crevel for example sees subject and object as facing mirrors, forming between them a "pont de reflets" and of mutual metamorphic reshaping.[24] The problem is that, for Crevel, in the present order of the world, these two mirrors for the most part *fail* to transform and free each other, and instead hold each other in miserable place, each reflecting the other's paralysis, the other's fixed and dreary identity. It is the limitations of the self, in its standard, oppressed and (as Gherasim Luca would say) Oedipal configuration, that paralyze any real worldly change; likewise and in parallel, the existing arrangement of things in the world confines and stunts the spirit, limiting one's ability to imagine it otherwise, or to act in defiance. This vicious circle is what the Infra Noir group calls the Obstacle, within which the subject as we know it is written, etched, and determined by the social, ideological, economic world it lives in. Any action it attempts, any movement it makes, will unwittingly reproduce this world in miniature – just as with the unconscious contraints lamented above by Main à Plume. This situation is precisely what prevents the real "Action" for which Chabrun longs.

Johanna Malt remarks, with reference to Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, that if "subjectivity itself is socially constructed," then the very artistic gestures – and gestures

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[23] "Petite recette," *MAP* (76).

[24] René Crevel, "Nouvelles vues sur Dalí et l'obscurantisme," in *L'Esprit contre la raison* (Paris: Tchou, 1969), 95-96.

of interventive action – that appear to be founded in individual liberty are in fact where social determinants most intrude. It is the same, Malt goes on to argue, with the surrealist object as it faces off with the commodity and the commodity fetish. It cannot escape their influence, and in trying to do so it would err only further into their grasp. Malt shows, however, that surrealist objects instead "present themselves as implicated in these forces, simultaneously acknowledging the truth and inhabiting their necessary, fetishistic fictions" – and that it is precisely thus that they wield their critical power.[25] Hal Foster makes a similar point in his account of surrealist experiment as immanent societal critique: surrealist creations can "confront the mechanical commodified world only *because they are already inscribed within it:* only from there can this world be *détourné*."[26] This is also Infra Noir's argument with respect to the Obstacle. If the inter-implication of revolt-against-society and society itself is what makes the vicious circle so formidable, this is also what might disarm it. For if there is such an inter-implication, in which one's actions are always-already *engagés*, then the "non-Oedipal" revolutionary does not stand somewhere on the sidelines crying out his opposition, but is already in the game, right at the very heart of reality.[27] To deny one's intimate connection with the present state of things is, paradoxically, to give in to it. For as soon as one decisively separates the desiring, dreaming subject from the recalcitrant, oppressive object, the best

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[25] Malt (94 and 209).

[26] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 151. See also Fijalkowski: if objects are "the foundations of the hegemony of the real," then to propose them as an oppositional strategy is to turn the thing opposed against itself. It is the very embeddedness of the object within this hegemony that gives it its sharp critical potential (8 and 93).

[27] For Luca and the non-Oedipal, see Introduction; for further accounts of Luca's non-Oedipal theories, see for example Petre Răileanu, "L'Anti-Œdipe: 'Vivre sans initiale'" in *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: Oxus, 2004); Dominique Carlat, "Non-Œdipe ou l'invention de soi" in *Gherasim Luca l'intempestif*; and Iulian Toma, "Au-delà d' 'Oedipe'?" in *L'Intransigeante passion d'être*. A version of this argument relating non-Oedipality to the Obstacle appears in my article in *Dada/Surrealism* (20/1, 2014).

the former can do is turn back into its own interiority, to the Romantic *fumées* and *promesses* disparaged by Main à Plume.

What if, then, the only way of transforming the existing system of objects were to enter it *as* an object, and work from within? It is a peculiar idea. But it appears that Chabrun's *homme-objet* can Act, with a capital A – can intervene effectively in the world – precisely because he has learned to be an object, plunged into "l'anonymat objectif des choses." His acts, one might say, have become *actes-objets.* He does not flee from ideology and from the burden of history, but faces them head on.

The Infra Noir group, whose object theories and practices I will now discuss in detail, share many of Main à Plume's theoretical problems and practical struggles, just as both groups inherit and rework the prewar heritage of surrealist object experimentation, with its distinctive vocabulary and fixations. The Infra Noir group's explorations of simulation, automatism, and even collective act-objects also have, as their horizon, the problem of engaged, worldly action.

3. **Infra Noir Objects and Act-Objects**

In the summer of 1951 in Tel-Aviv, after the friendship between Gherasim Luca and Dolfi Trost had irrevocably shattered in the aftermath of their escape from Communist Romania, Luca worked with an artist named Mirabelle Dors who had accompanied him to Israel, and long distance with Paul Păun who was still in Bucharest, to hold an exhibition titled "Un Objet, un signe." The exhibition's accompanying leaflet rehearses the major themes of Infra Noir object theory, as we will encounter it below. The object was central to Infra Noir, it seems, even as the group finally dissolved.[1]

Even before the Luca-Trost break, Infra Noir's last manifestation as a coherent group (though diminished, without Naum or Teodorescu) was also to a great extent about objects. In March 1951 the group held an event that it called a "sur-international mental rendez-vous." The idea was that Luca and Trost in Israel, Păun in Bucharest, and Breton in Paris would utilize a form of telepathy – filtered through the surrealist theory of objective chance – and literally meet, as Luca puts it, on the sur-international plane of "dream, ubiquity and flight." Between 6 and 7pm Paris time (8 and 9pm Tel Aviv and Bucharest time) each would engage in a performance, experiment or experience, defying now-uncrossable national borders and distances to mentally commune thereby.[2]

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[1] For the break between Luca and Trost and more on their time in Israel, see Epilogue. For the exhibition leaflet, see Luca archives at Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (GHL Pp 11). Even at the height of their conflict, the object makes its appearance: Luca writes to Breton that Trost has become the enemy of everything concerning "infra-noir" methods of object-experimentation (Doucet, BRT. e. 1061), even though a year earlier Trost had written to Breton of his interest in creating objects for the purpose of transforming written/graphic automatism into "l'automatisme dans la vie" ("Activité du groupe surréaliste," found on <andrebreton.fr>).

[2] None of the notes or contributions Breton might have made for the event are extant, and the extent of his (indisputable) participation is not clear from available correspondence or from the detailed reports Infra Noir sent him. However, Luca's contribution quotes a fragment of a letter from Breton concerning the

To the archive of this event Paul Păun contributes a write-up, accompanied by diagrams, of an experiment that takes place in a solitary room at a table, an experiment whose stated purpose is to alleviate a private suffering. On the table before him are seven objects which he must move, like chess pieces, with deliberate and weighty gestures, so that "leur modalité particulière de délimiter l'espace (et aussi leurs propres forces réciproquement renforcées) aient, sur un milieu à ce moment des plus constrictifs" – Bucharest, perhaps, under the new government's cultural crackdown – "l'influence dégageante qui était alors nécessaire à la réspiration normale de mon esprit."[3] Among these objects, able to conduct currents of desire and longing, are two types. The first type is what Păun calls "active and mobile," and includes a kaleidoscope, a lance-shaped piece of gypsum, the detached ocular mechanism of a doll, and an armless, headless female bust. The second type is what he calls "fixed," or alternatively "hostile witnesses," and comprises instruments of measurement: a watch, a compass, and a thermometer.

Each chess-movement has a meaning. To slide the bust toward the kaleidoscope is a "manifestly amorous" gesture; to "promenade" the menacing gypsum over the table is to understake a "seduction." Each new constellation of objects, moreover, brings Păun closer to an arrangement that will produce the desired electric current and have the

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event: "Pourvu que les allées et venues si hostiles des promeneurs du dimanche n'y mettent pas de trop grand obstacle matériel […]." (<andrebreton.fr>). Monique Yaari reveals that this March rendez-vous was actually the second of two. The first – in which Breton was not involved – took place on February 1, 1951, and was considered a success insofar as "les gestes synchrones des trois acteurs se font écho et ils peuvent donc considéer que la communication est passée et que la psyché a prévalu sur les obstacles physiques et situationnels." Păun remembers the March rendez-vous, on the other hand, as a comparative failure. See "Introduction: un et multiple au fil du temps" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 11-13. Gherasim Luca was to carry out similar experiments with Claude Tarnaud in the early 50s; these are described in Tarnaud's *L'Aventure de la Marie-Jeanne* (Paris: L'Écart absolu, 2000). Fauré (177) describes an occasion during the war when Camille Bryen and Jean-François Chabrun experiment with writing collective poems by correspondence. Those separated by war and circumstance could sit down at precisely the same hour and contribute lines whose order of appearance in the text were decided in advance. Fauré comments that the "poème à distance […] tient plus de la télépathie […] que du hasard."

[3] Letter dated "Le 18 Mars 1951," unpaginated. <andrebreton.fr>.

desired, though obscure, effect upon him. He compares this current to a wave that, as it rises, tosses and humbles the "hostile witnesses." Finally, each new diagrammatic arrangement has a hybrid function: it is a scene for contemplation or spur to meditation, but also a living tableau, an instant in a drama, and a kind of haptic-spiritual interface. More creatively, one might call his experiment a spiritual chiropractics, or an object-mediated psychoanalysis. Păun acts upon the objects and they act upon him in turn, across the distance that separates animate being from inanimate object, physical geometry from the geometry of emotion.

Păun's attempt to sound (and ideally to alter) his own dispositions and states by means of a kind of bricolage, or remapping, of object-relations recalls Breton's 1928 *Nadja*, which places equal emphasis on "la rencontre de certaines dispositions de choses" and "les dispositions d'un esprit à l'égard de certaines choses."[4] The simultaneously textual, self-analytical, and divinatory manipulations of objects in Breton's *L'Amour fou* – discussed below – fall within the same category. Păun's contribution to the sur-international rendezvous, however, can also be approached as an *acte-objet*. It is a drama in which slyly sentient being-objects also function as prolongations of the self and its troubled emotions. It simulates, using objects, the resolution of a problem otherwise intractable; it is a simulation, I would add, of a direct action upon Păun's stifling, constricted environment.[5] These are features, along with its strong currents of eroticism, that Păun's action has in common with Infra Noir's several other object-actions, also elaborated further below. For Infra Noir, staged interactions between objects, humans,

[4] *Nadja* (16).

[5] Fascinatingly, the final arrangement of objects that represents the overcoming of his pain is that of two triangles overlapping, with objects as their vertices. One points up, the other down, so that they might form a six-pointed star.

and everything in between simulate a direct, surgical work upon human mores and social and material realities – where the erotic in particular is lent a metamorphic, combinatorial energy that powers this action. Such stagings are, at the furthest reach of their ambition, a microcosm of the interdependent surrealist tasks of transforming the world and changing life.[6]

The Infra Noir group's engagements with the object, in general, stand at a crossroads of influence, including that of Breton and his group in the 30s, the Main à Plume group, and some of the Romanian *surréalisant* or proto-surrealist writers encountered in Chapter One. There is, in fact, a genealogy of the surrealist object – and perhaps of the *être-objet* – that twists through the Romanian avant-garde scene. Urmuz – whose powerful influence in the avant-garde of the twenties, thirties and beyond we have witnessed – populates his texts with parahuman characters composed of bits of clothing and debris, sewer gratings, dead insects, and piano lids. The objects that accompany them are trussed up into elaborate, half-metaphysical contraptions that take on a kind of sentience. In Urmuz's work and in the imitations he inspired, the boundaries between human, animal and object fall into ruin.[7] There is also Geo Bogza, the guru-figure who encouraged in his collaborators a cult of the material and corporeal, and the introduction at any price – in critic Marin Mincu's words – "of reality into literature, without conventions, without selection, and above all without prettifying." Bogza's interest lay in

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[6] Cf. once again Breton's 1935 "Position politique du surréalisme": "'Transformer le monde,' a dit Marx; 'changer la vie,' a dit Rimbaud: ces deux mots d'ordre pour nous n'en font qu'un." See also Rentzou on the "objectification du mot" produced in pornographic literature, which she compares to surrealist texts in which, for example, "les mots dans l'écriture automatique font exister la surréalité, les 'cadavres exquis' matérialisent en mots le hasard objectif, les mots-valises sont à mettre sur le même plan que les objets surréalistes" (303). Rentzou places this within the context of a surrealist "politicization of the erotic" effected via a valorization of corporeity (266-68).

[7] See Urmuz, *Pagini bizare*, Saşa Pană ed. (Bucharest: Minerva, 1970).

a sur-reality truer than mere oneiric or hallucinatory phenomena – in the "delirious, tragic" dimension of everyday life, utterly unsublimated.[8]

Finally, there is Max Blecher, whom we have not yet encountered, and his *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* (Events in Immediate Irreality, 1935). In 1933, Blecher had already made his single contribution to the French Surrealist corpus, appearing in the issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* that featured the *connaissance irrationnelle* experiments.[9] Significantly, Blecher writes about his encounter with Surrealism to Saşa Pană, who had overseen the publication of *unu* between 1928 and 1932. For Blecher, "the ideal of writing would be […] the transposing into literature of the high tension that emerges from the painting of Salvador Dalí […] this cold dementia, perfectly legible."[10] Indeed, the savage, predatory objects of *Întâmplări* are the vehicles of an objectivation – for Blecher, Dalinian par excellence – of hallucinatory visions. *Întâmplări* features a series of what Blecher calls crises of "susceptibility," where objects, domestic or otherwise, are seized with a kind of hysterical ecstasy that takes him up in its current and transforms him: he is linked to them with "invisible anastomoses that ma[k]e of me an object in the room like all the others," grafted into their reality as an organ is grafted into a body.[11] This is what he calls their "ferocity" or "tyranny." *Întâmplări* is

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[8] Marin Mincu, "Introducere în avangarda literară românească," in *Avangarda literară românească* (Bucharest: Pontica, 2006), 43-44.

[9] In fact, his very short text "L'Inextricable position" appears on the facing page immediately after the Harfaux-Henry manifesto accompanying the experiments. Critic Radu Ţeposu writes that in Blecher's work is found an equivalent to this *connaissance irrationnelle,* which Ţeposu calls "critical oneirism": a kind of cold, rigorous irrationality similar to Dalí's "concrete" irrationality and to the systematizing tendencies of paranoia-critique. See the introductory essay ("În căutarea identităţii pierdute") to *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* (Bucharest: Editura Vinea, 1999), 13.

[10] Max Blecher, *Întâmplări* (396-97). This volume includes a section of Blecher's correspondence. Saşa Pană also registers the rise of the object in France in his 1936 *Sadismul adevărului* (Bucharest: Editura Unu, 1936), 139. He looks to Hegel, Dalí, and the journal *Minotaure* for his account. Pană, *unu*, Urmuz, and Bogza are all discussed in Chapter One.

[11] *Întâmplări* (46-47).

very much, in fact, like a novelization of Dalí's objective self. Everything that surrounds Blecher invades him, since the matter that composes him composes everything else as well. He writes of "brute matter," taking the form of "trees, of houses and of stones […] in each corner the lava of matter had come from the ground, freezing in the empty air." In this sense his vision of matter is allied to Dalí's vision in the "Êtres-objets" essay above.

Though there were indeed local currents that might have steered Infra Noir toward its intense interest in the object, what was to be most decisive was the fact that Surrealism captured the group's enthusiasm just as the object was reaching its high tide in France. Luca first reached Paris at the beginning of 1938 (followed by Naum that summer), as the 1938 international surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Beaux-Arts was taking place.[12] Moreover, the enormous impact of Breton's *L'Amour fou* (1937) was still resounding down the corridors of surrealist thought; the book describes the workings of a strange phenomenon called objective chance, where objects are lightning conductors for nocturnal forces that traverse and transform the self. During the 30s, peaking right before the war, the deepest and most inchoate desires of the Surrealist movement had coalesced in the object. It is not surprising that Luca and Naum, who in 1938-1940 were cultivating surrealist friendships and and catching up on surrealist publications, would begin working on their definitive treatments of the object – Luca's *Le Vampire passif* and Naum's *Medium*, both belatedly published in 1945 – immediately after their return to Romania. In the pages that follow, I will take a closer look at aspects of these two works, alongside other Infra Noir treatments and stagings of the object, as well as provide an outline of the

[12] Luca went for different reasons than Naum, but both were encouraged by Victor Brauner to do so. For more on Luca and Naum in Paris in 1938-40, see Chapter Two.

group's "object-position" in general, and draw some conclusions about its relationship to worldly action.

Naum's *Medium* states that it addresses itself to a select group: to those who talk in their sleep "with the most ferocious lucidity"; to somnambulists; to those who "make love with fiery desperation" or who "sleep on their feet, leaning on the door, one hand indicating a precise point, right in front of them, where something must happen."[13] The book comprises philosophical exploration, autobiographical account, manifesto-like exhortation, and experimental instructions. A central and complex episode in *Medium* takes the form of this last: one must empty a small egg, paint it black, and fix it with a wire to a small panel. It is now an *aparat* – an apparatus or device. One is then to stare with increasing intensity at this egg-*aparat*, until several things happen. First, the black egg will "force" states of half-sleep or waking reverie, a compromise between dream and reality. Second, one will become aware of the presence of "phantoms," as well as of the true nature of a diverse and sinister cast of objects: some vampiric or "lycanthropic," others talismanic or hypnotic, others "ephialtic."[14]

Personal relationships with these objects are to be actively sought, and the search is mutual. "The object," Naum writes, "waits for and searches for us with the same torturous ardor with which we wait and search, without knowing for *what* until the

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13 *Medium* (80).

14 Ibid. (150-51). See below for a discussion of the lycanthropic and the ephialtic object, and of "monstrous" objects in general. Naum takes notes as he roams the city of Bucharest under the influence of the black egg, which read like dream notations, and are analyzed in the same way. Naum's egg-*aparat* to some degree recalls a piece by Marcel Duchamp titled "A regarder d'un oeil, de près, pendant presqu'une heure" (1918). The gallery label text at Moma explains that following the instructions and "peering through the convex lens embedded in the work's glass […] would have a hallucinatory effect, the view being dwarfed, flipped, and otherwise distorted. Meanwhile the viewer patiently following the title's instruction is him- or herself put on display for anyone else walking by" (see www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78993). An article by Donald Shambroom in the Duchamp studies journal *Tout-Fait* (Vol. 1 Issue 2, May 2000) explains that "A regarder" is in dialogue with discussions of optics and painting in Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting*.

moment of encounter."[15] Naum describes his attempts, by sheer force of desire, to provoke such moments of encounter – though never in a form that could be anticipated in advance. Such an anticipation or foreclosure could only be another mask of the "castration complex" which cripples the "precise, ferocious and primordial demoniality" of objects. What Naum is after is "the true howl of the object in its ample and luminous presence […] its fantastic adaptation to the hollow of the palm that knows how to hold it."[16] He wants to help the object to recover, from the reifying slough of habit and familiarity, the sharp bite of its otherness.

One of the models Naum uses to develop this idea of mutual search, attraction and adaptation in *Medium* is what he calls crystallization. Every object, every person, forms part of a potential crystal (*cristal*). A crystal is the result of a meeting of two human or objectual elements (*elemente*), the consummation of a whole "mineralogy" of waiting and encounter. Each crystal is made up of an object-element that makes its gradual approach, slowly metamorphosing into the form in which it will insinuate itself into one's consciousness; and a subject-element, whose interior world has been transforming itself in response to the object's distant call – a solvent of desire and anticipation, waiting for the object-solute. When the two elements finally meet, the seam of their joining is the crystal. There is more than one kind of crystallization, as Naum explains. One is slow and "mineral," the other is sudden and "exuberant."[17] The latter is much like the process of

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[15] Ibid. (90).

[16] See Ibid. (90 and 112).

[17] "…una lentă, asemănătoare cristalizării minerale, şi cealaltă exuberantă, o cristalizare subită, cristalizarea momentului formării obiectului, a întâlnirii în care cele două elemente, lumea interioră şi cea exterioară, ambele minerale, se neagă pe ele însele pentru a se realiză în obiect " (91). (One slow, like a mineral crystalization, and the other exuberant, a sudden crystalization, a crystalization of the moment of the object's formation, of the meeting in which the two elements, the interior world and the exterior, both mineral, each negate themselves to realize themselves in the object.) Although Naum says that "every object, every personage" *is* a crystal, he also adds that the "crystallic" is only one aspect of the object. For

condensation described in Breton's *Les Vases communicants*, where a dream magnifies and theatricizes what would otherwise be a slow process of desire, summarizing it in a "succint, brilliantly concrete and ultra-objective form."[18]

Naum identifies the term "element" in his crystallography of the object with a Hegelian term he translates as *loc*, literally place or *locus*.[19] This element or *loc* refers to each of the two halves of the fateful meeting, the *rencontre*, that results in a crystal: the exterior, "objective" element, and the interior, "subjective" one, each navigating the twisting passages of the world on the way to its destined partner. The term also refers to the moment in time and space that this happens. The element-*loc* cannot be known or pinned down in any way before this encounter, before it becomes "objectivated" in a relationship with its other half. The "plastic virtuosity" and ever-withdrawing reality of the element can only be fleetingly glimpsed. Naum cannot even predict the final form he himself will take in the encounter, for during the game of waiting, "I myself am an element, an unknown."[20]

André Breton's *L'Amour fou* includes what in Surrealism amounts to the canonical treatment of the crystal, where he as well has recourse to Hegel. Breton introduces something called the *figure*, "au sens hégélien de mécanisme matériel de

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example, it is the negation of the "gelatinous" aspect of the object, which becomes dominant in times when mankind starts to question the validity of his knowledge of "so-called reality in which he moves with an automaton's precision, knowing the label of each viscous mass and its utility as something that goes without saying" (91). See also Trost's *Visible et invisible*, where every object has an "other" or double, a "cristal fuyant" or "rêve arrêté" (Paris: Éditions Arcanes, 1953), 81-83.

[18] Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (57-58).

[19] Ibid. (92). The *loc* is "the moment of reality in which time, succession and space in the sense of contiguity form an identity in order to force the appearance of the emblem, the sign, the object." It is difficult to say which of Hegel's terms Naum is referring to here, since Naum often plays fast and loose with his philosophy, but it is very likely Ground (*Grund*). In Hegel the term *Grund* is used in many ways, including to describe the moments (*Momente*) of development of a thing and its relation to its properties. Note that Naum also uses the term "moments" (*momente*).

[20] Ibid. (91).

l'individualité." He comments that "le lieu même où la 'figure' […] par-delà le magnétisme atteint sa réalité est par excellence le cristal."[21] Jean-Michel Rabaté finds the source of these terms – figure, magnetism, crystal – in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, and completes Breton's definition: figure is the "material mechanism of individuality through which form manifests itself spontaneously."[22] Rabaté explains that in Hegel the evolution of emergent form into the crystal includes several stages, which Hegel calls magnetism, electricity, and chemical process. Magnetism, the first stage, is a kind of Brownian drift where elements are drawn together without yet forming unities, while in the fixed finality of the crystal, elements have transformed each other to form an entirely new entity, dialectically reconciling attractive (magnetic) and repulsive (electric) forces.

Whether or not Naum worked from these same passages in *Philosophy of Nature* – entirely possible, given his philosophical training, not to mention his particular interest in Hegel and Breton – Naum's phase in which two elements are drawn vaguely together by an incipient form, in a "vast night illuminated only by the faint flickers of encounter," works in a way similar to Hegel's magnetic phase. For Naum, however, the erratic force that governs the drift of the elements is desire, which often "forces us to perform acts whose irrationality dazzles us, guides us with delirious precision to the least-expected, least-known place, the magnificent locus of the object's apparition." The element, again, is not only a component of an emergent *rencontre* or crystal but a *locus* or form of space: a nocturnal space of plasticity, touch and fleeting contiguity. It is, at the same time, an as-yet unencountered partner-element, and the ground or basic condition of possibility that allows it to enter into relation with another element.

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21 Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 18.
22 Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Ghosts of Modernity* (Gainesville: Florida Univ. Press, 1996), 56.

Naum presents the moment of crystallization as a kind of *salto mortale* where the two elements ecstatically lose themselves and surrender to metamorphosis. Rimbaud's "Je est un autre," Naum writes, is an expression of agonized longing for this moment; Maldoror's exercises in body modification ("on doit laisser pousser ses ongles pendant quinze jours") are an ascetic preparation for it.[23] Naum also figures the two elements, as they journey toward each other, as facing mirrors, and moreover as "active" facing mirrors. The figure of "active" facing mirrors is, again, one that René Crevel uses to describe subject-object relations, where "le pont des reflets qui fait la navette du sujet à l'objet permet au premier de métamorphoser le second pour, à son tour, se métamorphoser lui-même de la métamorphose dont il est l'auteur."[24] Between them, reality is rendered unto its becoming, "déstinée à se se dépasser sans cesse elle-même," the self learns to "sortir de lui-même," and subject and object "prolong" themselves in each other.

Breton himself, in *L'Amour fou*, compares reciprocal love to a "dispositif de miroirs." In Effie Rentzou's reading, this seals the parallel between the crystal as it appears in Breton's text and the erotic dimension of beauty: in both, there is a "répétition des reflets qui peuvent s'étendre à l'infini, mais un infini délimité dans la figure unique de l'être aimé ou du minéral."[25] It is a reading that works both for Crevel, with his frequently carnal and erotic theory of object-relations, and for Naum, for whom the

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23 *Medium* (quotations from Rimbaud and Lautréamont on 91 and 95).

24 Crevel, "Nouvelles vues," 95-96. He continues, writing about Dalí: "Il n'y a pas un caillou, pas un brin d'herbe, pas une tasse […] qui ne se prolonge en échos solaires sur le non moins solaire et très activement réflecteur écran de la vie mentale." Naum mentions Crevel frequently in *Medium*, and many of Crevel's positions in "Nouvelles vues" resonate deeply with those of the Infra Noir group, particularly Luca's. Crevel writes, for example, of forbidden "chemins charnels" by which man "se doit non seulement de créer des choses nouvelles mais aussi de se recréer, lui-même, homme nouveau parmi des choses nouvelles" (92).

25 Rentzou, *Littérature malgré elle* (298).

rencontre of the elements, and object-relations in general, are heavily inflected with eroticism. In Rentzou's account, the Hegelian "figure" is the principle that divides the pair "erotique-voilée" in Breton's definition of convulsive beauty, linked respectively with the crystal (*erotique*) and with the coral or *madrepore* (*voilée*) which hesitates so suggestively between the organic and inorganic. The crystal fully reveals its "figure" in its "correspondance absolue entre sa structure interne et son apparence externe," and thus is "la forme objective par excellence"; the coral, in its hesitations, lacks this correspondence, evades the "figure," and thus is "la forme subjective paradigmatique."[26] The two working together, as erotic-veiled beauty, reconcile the hidden and apparent, sameness and difference, subjective and objective. In Naum, a similar dynamic is at work, but all within the single process he calls crystallization. Its slow beginnings, in the uncertain magnetic-mineralogy of mutually seeking elements – elusive, phantomlike, almost within reach – correspond, perhaps, to the *voilée*. Its culmination, the moment of crystalline objectivation (*obiectivare*), is also an ecstatic fulfillment of erotic desire.

L'Amour fou gives an "éloge du cristal" that makes of the crystal a master lesson in artistic creation. In praising "la dureté, la rigidité, la régularité, la lustre sur toutes ses faces extérieures, intérieures," Breton is also outlining a dichotomy between art-making as willed and voluntary artistic perfection, and art-making as "l'action spontanée." But not in the way one might think. For Breton the crystal is not a figure of the work of the

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[26] Ibid. (298). The crystal – along with the "precipitate," insofar as chemical precipitation produces crystals – is a figure dear to Breton, and increasingly to Surrealism as a whole, from the movement's beginnings. Even before, the crystal was a charged and overdetermined trope among the *fin-de*-siècle Symbolists and Decadents. See on this point Pascaline Mourier-Casile, *De la chimère à la merveille* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1986), 277-78. Mourier-Casile locates the difference between pre- and post-Surrealist crystals in their relation to "le monde dit objectif": for the writers of the *fin-de-siècle*, it represented a pure and unpolluted subjective or artistic universe, free of the world, whereas for the Surrealists it came to represent an "ouverture sur la réalité objective." I would suggest, rather, that just as for Naum, it is a complex figure – among so many others in Surrealism – of the reconciliation of subjective and objective universes.

artisan, who gradually chips away a block of stone to conform it to his genius. Instead, it is something like the poetic image that emerges spontaneously in automatic writing.[27] Such images are always in excess of the personally expected or willed, much like those objects, the *trouvailles*, that seem to appear in the world in direct response to one's inchoate desires, like a "merveilleux précipité du désir."[28] These *trouvailles* share with the dream, in turn, a certain catalyzing role, an ability to liberate one from the "scrupules affectifs paralysants" which arrest the process of artistic creation. The automatic image lends the work of art a transpersonal, even impersonal, but perfect "unité organique"[29] – an organicity that would be impossible to effect consciously or voluntarily.

In a 1955 essay, Breton borrows a passage from the German art historian Ernst Grosse to describe the surpassing of the artisan's laborious and methodical *travail*, in an idea that "se précipite plutôt instantanément dans l'âme de l'artiste […] comme se précipitent les cristaux autour d'un bâtonnet plongé dans une solution saturée de sel."[30] Thomas Mann's 1947 *Doktor Faustus* uses this same figure – that of crystalline structures that gather around a baton in a salt-saturated solution – to evoke the consummate artistic work, one that in its authentic act of expression can "break through the age itself" and bring about the advent of the truly new. What characterizes such structures is that that the inorganic process of crystal formation can simulate organic forms: the "osmotic vegetation" that results is a kind of inorganic organicity. It is much as Hegel describes in *Philosophy of Nature*, where "the form that deploys itself in

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[27] *L'Amour fou* (17 and 21).
[28] Ibid. (21). See also *Peinture,* in *Œuvres IV* (692): "tout épave à portée de nos mains doit être considérée comme un précipité de notre désir."
[29] Ibid. (44-45).
[30] Quoted in Mourier-Casile (283-84). From Ernst Grosse, *Le Lavis en Extrême Orient*, borrowed for a 1955 article on the painter Jean Degottex, "L'Epée dans les nuages, Degottex," later reprinted in *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* (1965).

crystallization […] moves marvelously in purely mechanical productions [manifest as] an organic and organizing effect."[31] In *Faustus* however, the composer Adrian Leverkühn learns that he can achieve such an authentic spontaneity only via a deal with the Devil – a deal that, ironically, would also be tantamount to an "annunciation," or again an *immaculée conception*, allowing an act of artistic creation impossibily free of the original sin of subjectivity.[32]

It is something like what Main à Plume longed for above, where the exalted impersonality of chance, or fusion into a collective subject, or metamorphosis into an object, held the promise of a state of grace in which one could override the ideological, historical and unconscious determinants of the subject in order to act and create in a truly free and spontaneous way.[33] The ostensibly "unfree" inorganicity of chance, mechanism or the object-world could simulate the organic – or rather, make possible a simulation of subjectivity, a simulation that, along with disrupting the relation between representation and reality, could disrupt the relation between subject and society. The image of the precipitative formation of the crystal participates in this dialectics of freedom and constraint, surrender and resistance – as do each of the elements of the complex dialogue

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31 Quoted in Rabaté (57).

32 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: the life of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn as told by a friend* (New York: Vintage International, 1999), 258. It is also interesting to note that Leverkühn's final composition, *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*, carries out brilliantly "the dialectic process by which strictest constraint is reversed into the free language of emotion, by which freedom is born out of constraint" (510).

33 The Main à Plume group also heavily theorized the crystal. Oscar Dominguez, for example, imagines a crystallographic discipline called "lithochronics": starting with a given object – say an African lion – he arrives at "l'ensemble formé par tous les points du lion à tous ses instants et dans toutes ses positions." And if, he adds, "nous traçons ensuite la surface enveloppante, nous obtiendrons un *sur-lion enveloppant* doué de caractéristiques morphologiques extrêmement délicates et nuancées […] *mouvement à l'état solide* par cristallisation […] de l'objet replacé ainsi au cœur même de sa dialectique fondamentale." Most significantly, such lithochronic crystals can also form between two separate objects, allowing for a crystallography of encounter (see "La Pétrification du temps," in *MAP*, 119). Jacques Hérold also goes through a phase of obsession with crystalline forms in his work; see for example his text "Points-feu" in *MAP* 154-55.

between crystal and coral in *L'Amour fou*. Coral is a living thing – spineless and somewhat *informe* – that secrets an inanimate calcium carbonate skeleton that, in turn, mimics a variety of animate forms; a crystal is a thing that, in its very lifeless regularity, its inorganic automatism, simulates the most exuberant freedoms of the spirit.

What is crystal-like, similarly, about the erotic *rencontres* between self and object described in *Medium* is that the self must, through various preparatory rituals, gestures and attitudes, give itself over to the emergent form that is in the process of objectivation. Insofar as it loses itself, it gains the object – or rather, insofar as the self gives into a desire for the object which is no longer its own desire, but belongs to and derives from the crystal still taking shape. Any action it undertakes is likewise directed from afar by this crystal – both constrained by its form and freed by its objective self-determination.

Infra Noir group member Paul Păun also elaborates a model of encounter with the object that functions in ways similar to Naum's crystals, and that helps illuminate how the group conceives of action, both creative and quotidian, in its relation to the object. In a small tract called *La Conspiration du silence* (1947),[34] Păun explains that there is a *brouillard* – a mist or fog – that is always with him. It entirely guides his movements, filling him with calm and confidence, and also literally "sifts" or sieves the world that meets his senses. Its phantomatic presence – partly interior, partly exterior – both shadows and surpasses his personal desire, drawing it beyond itself, "faisant reculer à

[34] Published in April 1947 in Bucharest, as part of the series "La Collection surréaliste Infra-Noir." Its title might be inspired by a passage in *Les Vases communicants*, where Breton wonders how one might "discipline" the dream so that "l'élément affectif qui préside à sa formation ne se trouve pas détourné de l'objet auquel s'est attaché un charme particulier durant la veille. Qui s'est jamais trouvé dans le case d'aimer n'a pu se défendre de déplorer la *conspiration de silence* et de nuit qui se fait en rêve autour de l'être cher…" (11). My italics.

perte de vue le centre de sa gravité affective."[35] And since desire is, in this way, shifted to a place outside him, "melted and vaporized" within the world at large, it no longer makes sense to speak of "his" desires, fears or even acts. "Sans siège," they are no longer the feelings of any individual at all, and are as mysterious to him as the most opaque, hermetic object. Once estranged, however, they can often return to inhabit him temporarily, and indeed he feels himself "peuplé et surpeuplé d'une multitude illimité de pulsions" for which he is now no more than a "lieu de rencontre." He is the locus where his foggy "poetic double," the *brouillard*, meets "les propositions extérieures des objets, des mots et du hasard"; an empty place of relation between an ever-shifting desire-without-subject and the various scintillating facets and latencies of objects.[36] And what results is what he calls a miracle: an "immaculée conception" of desire.[37] Desire, in other words, free of human subjectivity.

Further along, Păun refigures the *brouillard* as a "dur métal luisant" that takes the impossible shape of a single mirror that is concave on both sides. Păun invokes concave mirror optics – with its rays of projection and virtual or inverted images – to create a complex variation on Naum's (and Crevel's, and Breton's) facing mirrors. Situated just *en-deçà* of himself, Păun projects virtual images of his desire into the world of objects, and these objects project their own images right back, into the space that once contained him. Later, he refigures the *brouillard* once again as a series of spheres or "ballons aériens" that surround every thing and person and allow them to act, as it were, beyond their own boundaries, giving them a "présence à distance" as they touch and merge. From

[35] Paul Păun, *La Conspiration du silence* (Bucharest: Infra-Noir, 1947), 2.
[36] Ibid. (3)
[37] Ibid. (5)

vague mist to polished metal mirror to aerial sphere, what Păun describes in each case is a structure of encounter or relation, a "pays de la forme des rencontres."

We also find mention of a "brouillard" in Breton's *Les Vases communicants*, except that here it is exactly what disables the state that Păun's *brouillard* enables: a perception and experience of the "tissu capillaire" that exists between interior and exterior, dreaming and waking worlds. In opposition to this benighting fog, Breton imagines a whirlwind of beings and things, with man at its center, "à jamais immobile au centre du tourbillon." This central figure is "le médiateur par excellence," much like Păun's absent locus of exchange. Each time that man the whirlwind-mediator sleeps and dreams, he plunges again into "[le] sein même de cette nuit surabondamment peuplée dans laquelle tous, êtres comme objets, sont lui-même, participent obligatoirement de son être éternel, tombant avec la pierre, volant avec l'oiseau."[38] Păun's *brouillard* is like Breton's *tourbillon* in that it is only visible with one's "paupières allongées," as in a state of sleep or half-sleep, and also in that it represents a vivifying, stone-like descent or bird-like ascent into the matter and multitude of the world.

For Păun, those who fully live within the *brouillard* and are thus baptized into the world of objects are guided by a secret "destin." He imagines this world as a teeming sea, where matter with its "reptilian movements," as well as humans "en tant qu'objets" are all made of the same substance, like bubbles tossed upon the wave-crests of a pullulating infinity of forms.[39] Păun's "destin" – alternatively, "sur-determinism" – allows one to navigate this sea, following its hidden currents. But, just as for Naum with his emergent

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[38] *Les Vases communicants* (162).

[39] For a similar vision, see philosopher Graham Harman in *The Quadruple Object*: "If we imagine the universe as an ocean, it would be an ocean without a floor, but with a turbulent surface of objects and nothing but empty sky above" (113).

crystal-forms, certain practices and attitudes are required in order to discern this *destin* – a practice above all, Păun feels, of automatism.

Păun compares the present state of automatic writing and automatic practices in Surrealism to the body of a dreamer. This body is, it is true, receptive to outside influences and quick to incorporate passing stimuli and sensations, like cold, or indigestion, or loud noise, into the dream's narrative. But the dreaming body, for the most part, does not get up and walk – it does not carry out any actions beside lying in bed.[40] Thus automatism must pass on to its next stage, which Păun variously calls "sur-automatism," "living automatism," and finally "automatic action." This new automatism appears here, in fact, something like sleepwalking, in which one is guided through the night by the images and desires of dream, and is able to see, with the sleepwalker's clairvoyance, the hand of *destin*. The Infra Noir group's ideas about automatic action and somnambulism are complex, and will be treated in depth in the following chapter. For the time being though, Păun simply evokes a scene in which the old automatism plunges into the seething, foaming sea of objects, *rencontres* and pure chance (*hasard*) and arises from it transformed into "living automatism." (One often has the impression in this text, as with Main à Plume, of reading an obscure scripture in which object is sacrament and the objective realm is divine Pleroma.)[41] To summarize: Paul Păun's account of the structure

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[40] Trost also writes of a physical or organic unconscious that permits the dreamer to bring his desires into interaction with outside objects, stimuli, and certain "loi[s] d'urgence," like the need to urinate (*Visible et invisible*, 61). Compare also to Hans Bellmer's "physical unconscious" (in Foster 120).

[41] Another thing *La Conspiration* has in common with other Surrealist and particularly Main à Plume object-texts is an encoding of the desire for intimate contact with objects as a seductively impersonal language concealed within them. Objects conceal a "langage secret des influences catégoriques indéniables," a "langage objectif du silence universel." Whereas ordinary, self-expressive language is caught in the logic of the "double," shuttling obsessively and fruitlessly between self and world, subject and object, Păun's silent language of objects is the language of the "triple." The triple – a concept that Luca and Trost also use frequently, in similarly weighted fashion – is literally "made of objects," and its form is "la forme volante de nos rencontres."

of encounter between self and object is the *brouillard*, in parallel with Naum's crystallography. Păun also imagines a special guiding fate that reigns over the object-world, and to which one has access via this *brouillard* and via automatism. This automatism, however, is oriented not toward the depths of the mind but toward the depth and profusion of the object-world. Finally, both the *brouillard* and this special form of automatism demand a thorough transformation, object-ification, even total loss, of the self.

Păun had already taken up some of these themes in his tract *Esprits animaux*, published a few months earlier. *Esprits* is much darker in tone than *Conspiration*. "Tous nous est pris et volé," Păun writes, and everywhere "la bassesse humaine [est] toute-puissante." Everything is poisoned by the Obstacle, even the facing mirrors, which no longer figure a marvelous fusional exchange but rather that fact that "chacun de ses [the Obstacle's] membres vérifie l'autre et en est vérifié."[42]

The *brouillard*, in turn, is in this text directly identified with the Obstacle itself. Its function here is to suggest that desire itself is pinioned, withered by the programmatic smallness of life as we know it, and that thus impoverished it can no longer desire anything but what it already sees before it, in this way inexorably ratifying the latter.[43] The very "tissu capillaire" between interior and exterior described by Breton becomes a sinister trap, making it impossible to change the foundations of a society in which one is already fatally meshed, sharing its very blood. In dealing with the Obstacle, the Infra

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[42] Paul Păun, *Les Esprits animaux* (Bucharest: La Collection surréaliste Infra-Noir, 1947) 3.

[43] A variation on this paragraph appears in my "Dialectical Despair" (*Dada/Surrealism* 20/1, 2014). See also Trost's use of these terms in *Visible et invisible*, speaking of those alienated from themselves and history and finding no bridge between thought and action: "Les êtres ne vivent, passé un certain degré de brouillard historique, que malgré eux, entourés d'une vaste conspiration qui les maintient comme une marchandise d'échange" (54).

Noir group's questions about the possibility of action become most acute: it could be said that Infra Noir's central question is whether an act of revolt against society is possible at all, when the latter creates the very conditions of possibility for such acts. In this particular case, Păun makes a move characteristic of the group, as we have seen to some extent above: he indicates that the very "unity" of self and society, the very density of the capillary tissue is what, in the right circumstances, can give interventive action its efficacy.

Păun proposes, as well, what he calls an "extravasion délirante" – extravasion being a medical term for the leaking of fluids from capillaries and other vessels to the surrounding tissue or organs. In fact, this "extravasion" amounts to a liberating translation of the Obstacle's fatal interlinking of oppressed self and oppressive world into the terms outlined in *Conspiration* above, with its game of fog and mirrors. All selves and objects are only modes or "cases" of the same teeming substance, allowing for a constant amorous contact between all these modes, a "traversée réciproque des fluides confondues" and the "perte de tout droit d'identité de toute chose."[44] This loss of identity is the key difference from the situation presided over by the Obstacle, where every person and thing must carry "ses papiers sur son visage comme le sourire de sa mort prévisible." Păun calls instead for the place of the human, its subject- (or object-) position, to be open: "sans haut et sans bas, ouverte." His "extravasion" is a spilling into this open place, to join the silent ontological ballet of objects and their fluid traversals.

[44] *Esprits* (4-5). It is, Păun recognizes, a fairly Spinozian vision, and in fact he uses Spinoza's term "nature naturée" (*natura naturata*) for the "conditions concrètes qui nous ont été faites en ce moment par la société des hommes."

Once again, Păun's sur-determinism – here called "fatalisme libre"[45] – governs this open realm, which has little to do with the personalities and intentions of individuals. Just as for Dotremont above, this realm is under the sway of blind, sovereign chance. For Păun this "extra-human" domain is not some other world – it is the same world, but differently encountered, not as a subject but this time as an object. For yet again, it is to be understood that an ostensibly free subject cannot change the world but only endlessly reproduce it, like a mirror facing another mirror; one's freest acts of self-expression are only "l'expression de l'oppression."[46] But the inorganic-organicity of the *homme-objet*, to use the Main à Plume term, is empowered to draw the things around it into its fluxual rhythm, which is also that of sur-determinism as a whole, creating new assemblages and setting them in motion. The motive principle is, once again, automatism, but a different automatism: no longer a subjective "sonde" of a sub-conscious but an objectivating "flèche" aimed toward a cosmic "sur-conscious."

Like others in the Infra-Noir group, Păun uses many complex or idiosyncratically repurposed terms – the fog and mirrors, the extravasions, sur-determinism, surautomatism and the sur-conscious, even crystals[47] – as well as a writing style that is often compressed, oracular, and oblique. But these words and concepts tend to appear consistently across Infra Noir texts, where they are continually reworked and given new momentum. Surautomatism and the surconscious are examples, along with the overcharged term "action" and the idea of a vast, "extra-human" object-universe whose dark forces must be reckoned with or channeled.

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[45] Ibid. (4).

[46] Ibid. (5).

[47] In one of the more obscure passages of *Esprits animaux*, he writes of "la tâche thaumaturgique la plus complète qui puisse être conçue: la cristallisation secondaire, selon le plan de l'amour qui nous traverse, de tout aspect et de toute relation rencontrant le fleuve passif de nos actes" (6).

Dolfi Trost's version of surautomatism is particularly useful for understanding the Infra Noir group's positions, in that it rearticulates this concept within a theory of visual art practice and of language. Trost's 1945 *Le Profil navigable*, for example, distinguishes between "plastic" and "aplastic" methods of painting. Plastic painting represents recognizable objects, and is planned before its execution, with ample room for the painter to intervene "ideologically, aesthetically, consciously." It is, in other words, "voluntary" art, and its result is called a pictorial image. Aplastic painting creates "object-concepts," using newly invented and rigorous methods that exclude voluntary interventions from the outset, usually by incorporating chance, and its result is also called a sign-image.

It appears that for Trost surrealist objects are divided along the same plastic-aplastic lines, according to the degree of personal will or voluntary intervention in their creation or discovery – and that only the aplastic, involuntary object-sign can be defended as revolutionary.[48] Trost explains that objects that cannot be interpreted with the aid of existing "concepts" inevitably generate new concepts. It is thus that "la réalité inventée force la réalité existante" – the new object "forces" the appearance of these new forms of thought. However, only an object that was, in its creation, genuinely free of intentional, "voluntary" meaning can be uninterpretable, and work in this way.[49]

The only way to create such an object – an emissary from the future, commanding new forms and pathways of thought – is to learn to lose control, to learn to create

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[48] Trost, *Le Profil navigable: négation concrète de la peinture* (Bucharest: Editions de l'Oubli, 1945), 18. Defining aplastic painting, Trost references "Leonardo's wall," which I address below and in Chapter Two.

[49] See also Breton's critique, in 1932, of Dalí's newly-invented *objets à fonctionnement symbolique* which, in their clear intention to produce a sexually-charged significance, choke off the field of interpretation available to objects whose meanings are less determined in advance. In "L'Objet fantôme" (*SASDLR* 3, p.22), later incorporated into *Les Vases communicants*. Compare also to above: Trost's "invented realities" are something like the acts of retextualization that in Breton's words, "de par leur tendance même à s'imposer comme objectives […] appellent impérieusement, dans la réalité extérieure, quelque chose qui leur réponde."

involuntarily, with the help of chance, automatism, or some combination thereof. Surautomatism, as Trost conceives it, is exactly this combination – an automatism enhanced and purified by the systematic incorporation of chance-based procedures. And as Păun does, Trost frames surautomatism as a graduation from personal to impersonal, interior to exterior, and in Trost's case from "désir figuré" to "intervention absurde dans le mécanisme de la causalité universelle."[50] In the field of visual art, surautomatism allows one to create "scandalously incomprehensible" graphic objects that can even take on an aura of fearful cosmic mystery.[51]

Words are different, however. Trost feels that their ineluctably intelligible nature prevents them from bringing the new into existence. Automatic writing, he argues, was doomed in advance, for the reason that words too easily channel preformed associations of ideas. He calls these associations and "conscious" interventions "traces mnésiques" – traces of memory – which is the same term he uses for the bits of regressive or repressive diurnal reality that sneak into a dream and interrupt its pure current. These mnesic traces infiltrate the automatic flow by literally latching onto words, or rather to their natural intelligibility, like viruses do with human cells. For this reason, Trost feels, no activity that uses language can ever be purely involuntary, and there cannot be a "surautomatic writing."[52]

It is possible, however, for written automatism to make a dialectical leap. Translating itself into the realm of daily action it can become – like Păun's living automatism – a "rêverie active," yet another variation on Infra Noir's concept of

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[50] This wording is from *La Connaissance des temps: avec un frontispice et sept pantographies* (Bucharest: Surréalisme, 1946), unpaginated.
[51] *Profil* (32).
[52] Ibid. (31).

automatic action. Guided by this new automatism, one will no longer create "productive" but instead "gratuitous" relations between things – juxtaposing objects and beings in ways that make no sense from the perspective of the existing structure of society.[53] At any moment, Trost urges, such gratuitous activities can take a "massive form," resulting in a kind of living, collective collage-work.[54] All the aplastic methods Trost discusses in *Le Profil navigable* are perceived as generalizable in this way as modes of engagement with the world, each capable of taking a collective, revolutionary form. In collage-making, desire rearranges the world in search of its best incarnation; automatic "graphism" opens the door of blind chance to let the unknown come surging in; surautomatism in general is conceived as a world-immersed, object-oriented automatic writing.

The potentially large scale of all these activities brings them into relation with what Trost, like Păun, calls *destin*. Trost believes that humankind is separated from its *destin* for the same reason that the pleasure principle is no longer commensurate with the reality principle, and interior is separated from exterior, dream from waking life, and thought from action. An original wholeness has been lost. Trost's later works, for example *Visible et invisible* (1953), are largely a struggle with this loss, with the "problem of thought and action," and an attempt to envision how these might be brought back into a working whole. Trost's *destin* represents the possibility that thought might, so to speak, rejoin the world, recovering something like animal instinct – or perhaps objectal instinct? – in which freedom can no longer be distinguished from necessity. As we have

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53 Trost writes elsewhere that "c'est par des rencontres fortuites que se manifeste […] l'activité onirique dans la vie diurne." *Vision dans le cristal: oniromancie obsessionnelle* (Bucharest: Editions de l'Oubli, 1945), 62.

54 For this see also *Visible et invisible* (Paris: Editions Arcanes, 1953), 21.

seen, Păun invents for this purpose a "fatalisme libre," and a surautomatism that issues from a sur-conscious dispersed within the cosmos.

Trost, as well, writes of a sur-conscious whose cosmic vastness is dimly anticipated by the subconscious, and which "rejoins cosmology," finding there "les moyens de l'épanchement du songe dans la vie" as well as the "transmission réciproque de la pensée dans l'action."[55] What Trost means by cosmology and the cosmic is, on the one hand, the literal universe: galaxies and gas clouds, black holes and distant stars, along with the fact that "we are the inhabitants of a *planet* and […] live literally in the sky." But he is also referring to something he calls the "donnée cosmologique," which is simply the strange fact that everything *exists*. It is an experience of existence that both familiar and everyday, and wrenchingly alien. He redefines the uncanny, in fact, as "la rencontre fortuite d'un objet familier avec la charge cosmique qu'il reflète."[56] Objects, indeed, are a fundamental part of Trost's cosmic vision: he feels that beneath the tarnish of habit, use, ideology and degraded forms of desire, the object is as coldblooded and uncanny as cosmic space itself. This is why, along with dreaming, object-experimentation can rehearse and replay a drama of reconciliation between self and cosmos, humankind and its *destin*, and thought and action. The stakes are very high.

Trost proposes many different types of experiment for awakening or channeling the cosmic-oneiric charge that objects contain. He attempts to use objects, for example, to affect the content of dreams, or tries his hand at "psychometry," where he holds an object to his forehead, empties his mind of all thought, and waits for the object to speak of itself,

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[55] *Visible et invisible* (55 and 27).
[56] Ibid. (53). I also discuss Trost's "cosmology" in my introduction to an abridged translation of *Visible et invisible* in *ARTMargins* (June-October 2012, Vol. 1 Issue 2-3).

or of him.[57] In *L'Amour fou*, André Breton sets a precedent – followed by Trost, by Gellu Naum in *Medium*, and by other Infra Noir members – for flirting with mediumship and/or magic in his manipulations of objects. As Naum so often does, Breton speaks of "forcing" the marvelous to appear: "Comment ne pas espérer faire surgir à volonté la bête aux yeux de prodiges, comment supporter l'idée que […] elle ne peut être forcée dans sa retraite? C'est toute la quesiton des *appâts*."[58] It's a matter, in other words, of setting bait and laying traps for the marvelous – a tactic that combines the hunter's active stance with a passively receptive one. Breton performs, for example, rituals of summoning and divination: waiting for a woman to appear, he opens and closes doors, or opens pages of books at random for information about her, or arranges playing cards, or manipulates an "objet d'envoûtement" to gain insight about her.[59]

In a key passage, Breton explains:

> Le plus frappant est qu'une activité de ce genre qui, pour être, nécessite l'acception sans réserves d'une passivité plus ou moins durable, bien loin de se limiter au monde sensible, ait pu gagner en profondeur le monde moral […] L'homme saura se diriger le jour où comme le peintre il acceptera de reproduire sans y rien changer ce qu'un écran approprié peut lui livre à l'avance de ses actes.

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[57] As for dreams, Trost's experimental results have it for example that after exposure to a "graphomania" – a word invented by Gherasim Luca to refer to a semi-automatic message scrawled during an *in extremis* state, and treated here as an object among others – one immediately begins dreaming of revolutions. The practice of graphomania is defined and demonstrated in Luca, *Moartea moartă* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945), where he writes them during a series of (simulated?) suicide attempts. Psychometry is a term coined by the American physiologist and spiritualist Joseph Rodes Buchanan and elaborated in his 1893 *Manual of Psychometry*. For Trost's version, see *Visible et invisible* (84).

[58] *L'Amour fou* (22). Naum describes similar rituals to force "destin" (like Păun and Trost he uses this word frequently) to show its hand. These often resemble magic spells. In *Medium* Naum writes: "I broke the bread in two, I filled two glasses with wine" (noting that he adds a few drops of his blood), "I made the invocations according to the strictest ritual and I awaited the appearance of my predestined one [*predestinata*]" (71). For Romanian traditional love spells intended to act upon one's *ursitul* or *ursita* – fated love partner – see Sanda Golopenția-Eretescu's *Desire Machines: a Romanian Love Charms Database* (Bucharest: The Publishing House of The Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1998). Luca's 1941 manuscript *A Oniriza lumea* (see below) is also largely about setting traps for the unknown via certain kinds of action, especially "senseless" actions, for example waiting on a certain street at 5pm sharp.

[59] *L'Amour fou* (23-24).

> Cet écran existe. Toute vie comporte de ces ensembles homogènes de faits d'aspect lezardé, nuageux, que chacun n'a qu'à considérer fixement pour lire dans son propre avenir. Qu'il entre dans le tourbillon […].[60]

The *écran* to which Breton refers, with its "lezardé, nuageux" appearance, is also another way of referring to what is known among surrealists as "Leonardo's wall." This is shorthand for a passage in Leonardo da Vinci's 16th-century *Treatise on Painting* where students are urged to study an old wall and copy the forms that seem to emerge from its cracks and stains, in a dialogue between chance and imagination.[61] Breton's theory of convulsive beauty finds its paragon here upon Leonardo's wall, if we follow Effie Rentzou's argument. Beauty is a "transformation de la réalité en un système de signes – la 'forêt d'indices' – qui s'offrent au déchiffrement." This transformation is effected by desire – a desire to know, to have, to meet – and for this reason Surrealist beauty, which both gives sense to signs and organizes them into semiotic fields, is also "une sorte de mouvement, qui émeut et qui met en action."[62] And in fact, Leonardo's wall for Breton is not so much a lesson in art as a lesson in life, directed toward the "monde moral." It is about how to behave in the world, and why; and it is a lesson about passive acceptance that is also, paradoxically, an active precipitation of the future.

Objects placed in certain arrangements can function as an *écran*, but a sequence of acts – like opening and closing doors – can also be an *écran*, providing a key to further action. Breton writes:

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[60] Ibid. (126-27).

[61] See also Chapter Two.

[62] *Littérature malgré elle* (294-95). See also Monique Yaari in "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence,'" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple* (194-196) for excerpts from Păun's personal notebooks on Leonardo's wall. For him the wall represents the transformation of a "modèle intérieur" into a "modèle ultérieur."

> Encore une fois les actes eux-mêmes, les actes à accomplir se détacheront impérativement du bloc des actes accomplis du jour où l'on se sera mis en posture de considérer ce bloc, comme celui d'un mur ou d'un nuage, avec *indifférence*.[63]

This passage from *L'Amour fou*, alongside the one above, seems to indicate that the final horizon of object-experimentation and object-mediated activity is in fact that of action, in its practical, creative, deontological and fateful incarnations. Objects – or a series of acts that, taken as a "bloc," become a kind of object – can allow one to pose and answer fundamental questions: What can I do and what *should* I do? What would I do if I knew the overall shape of my fate? What does my place in history require of me?

These were questions asked by the interwar Romanian modernists, in their desire to be at the avant-garde not only of artistic experiment but of their historical moment; they were asked by Infra Noir members in their incarnation as young Communist journalists, as Romania spiraled toward fascism; they were asked during the Second World War by the members of Main à Plume, fighting in the Resistance while seeking an immanent and materialist truth in the depths of objects, beyond the reach of ideologies; they were asked, finally, by the ex-surrealist revolutionaries and postwar public thinkers who sought the "truth of history" in order to join forces with it. Infra Noir's turn toward the object, likewise, is motivated in large part by a deep questioning not only of the relationship between the artist and ideology, but between the artist and history understood as a kind of force or destiny. Concepts like Păun's *brouillard* (as much as Breton's *nuage*) and like sur-determinism and the sur-conscious (as much as Breton's rituals and *objets d'envoûtement*), and projects like Păun's game of high-stakes chess in the sur-international mental rendezvous, seek an interface between the interior of the self and this "exterior" force or destiny, mediated by the object – where, in Malt's words above,

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[63] *L'Amour fou* (129).

"downward into the unconscious" leads "outward into history." And just as for Păun's "open" *homme-objet*, Naum's crystalline human "element," and Trost's surautomatism, Breton's "indifference" is about learning to lose control. One leaves behind one's various subject-positions to take up an object-position, carried on the wavecrest of history.

Just as personal engagements with objects open toward a wider domain of decision and action, collective engagements with objects open out onto collective action. The Infra Noir group felt this quite strongly, and this another reason why, like the Main à Plume group, they remained closely concerned with the object from their uncertain beginnings until the bitter end. It is time then to take a close look at several of the group's more collective object-related texts and events – of which the sur-international mental rendezvous is one – and continue to draw together some of the themes we have explored in their individual works.

4. Invisible Love, the Sea Goddess, and the Night Sand

In 1946 in Bucharest, Infra Noir – with the apparent exception of Naum – worked on a tract intended for their "Infra-Noir" series but never published, a script for a play called *L'Amour invisible*. Its cast of characters includes figures from the Surrealist canon as well as a number of somnambulists, vampires and doppelgängers.[64] Together they perform a slow, dreamlike orgy assisted by objects like eggs and chairs, sponges, candles, scissors and matches. While an earlier draft of the play is more explicit ("Don Juan pose une de ses mains sur le sexe d'Aurélia et l'autre sur le sexe de Des Esseintes […]"), a corrected draft replaces "sexe" with words like "éponge" and further emphasizes the role of objects in the drama. Aurélia gropes blindly across the room touching various objects, each time intensely aroused; La Somnambule picks up invisible objects and guesses their names, which are those of "erogeneous zones"; Le Vampire covers a woman's body with various objects in a movement described as "rapid and illegible writing."

The idea of a sexually-charged group event comprising objects, *êtres-objets*, and everything in between is frequently manifest in Luca's work, for example in imaginary theatrical stagings like the 1947 *Amphitrite.* Here the movements of the beings onstage become "objets-mouvements," as with radiant contentment they suck on the legs of a chair or try to capture floating forks and other "aphrodisiac objects." There is perhaps no existing surrealist coinage to describe these beings, who include "La Fameuse tendance

[64] Marin Mincu publishes an early draft of this text from his personal archive in *Avangarda literară românească* (495-96), and gives the authors as Păun, Teodorescu, and Trost. The Doucet library in Paris has another draft that Luca was in the process of correcting and modifying. Between the drafts the cast includes Hervey (perhaps Hervey de Saint-Denis whose manipulations of his dream life interested Breton in *Les Vases communicants*); Malombra, the eponymous heroine of two Italian films in 1917 and 1942, both based on the 1881 Gothic novel of hysteria and possession by Antonio Fogazzaro, and the subject of Infra Noir's collective tract *Eloge de Malombra*; Aurélia, from Nerval; Des Esseintes from Huysmans's *A Rebours*; Bex from Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*; Nadja, from Breton's book, and others.

de réconciliation de l'eau avec le feu," "La Fonction coméstible du rêve," and even "l'Impulsion vers les grottes, travestie en Ce qui est toujours gazeux" – each emitting terrifying cries and passing around secret messages.[65] Luca will write elsewhere that what concerns him in such dramas is a purely relational space where beings and things furtively and suddenly meet and part, and where there are no characters but instead simple nodes: of vertigo, exclamation, potential, energy.[66] In this space of ecstatic forgetting, they are faceted surfaces that interact within the promiscuous and erotic ontology of the *acte-objet* – the "vast night illuminated only by the faint flickers of encounter" evoked by Naum in his crystallography.

A final Infra Noir group experiment falls within a similar vision of the *acte-objet*. In the summer of 1946, Luca wrote to Naum that he had heard, from Victor Brauner, of the planning of a huge surrealist exhibition. Conceived as a "temple of liberty and heresy," it would permit the collective, anonymous construction (Luca enthusiastically underlines "collective" and "anonymous") of a "new vision of a new and unknown space." Brauner had asked Luca whether the Infra Noir group, recently riven by discord once again, could be reunited to discuss a possible contribution to what would eventually become the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.[67] Within the month the "coryphaei," as Luca puts it, had assembled. Păun proposed:

> the collaborative construction of an object or of a certain number of objects in which automatism and chance would intervene not only in the process of elaboration but in their ulterior diffusion. The revelations, analytical observations

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[65] Gherasim Luca, *Amphitrite: mouvements sur-thaumaturgique et non-oedipiens* (Bucharest: Infra-Noir, 1947), 5. His 1938 text "Ocean" in Romanian (Doucet, 50412 GHL ms 1) is a similar scenario involving a woman and objects.

[66] Doucet (GHL ms 188). A navy blue spiral notebook dated 1959.

[67] For correspondence see *Athanor: Caietele Fundației Gellu Naum* 2 (2008), letter of "mid-August, 46," pp. 25-30 (26). For more on the exhibition, see previous chapter.

> and unforeseen impressions that would follow during this communal elaboration and this diffusion of the objects in the exterior world would accompany, in the form of a text, the maquettes (of the objects) that we would then send. These maquettes (eventually enlarged at the site) […] will appear on the walls of "heresy."[68]

It didn't matter, Luca adds, if these objects appeared in the exhibition or not: simply creating and sending them would allow for a much-needed public and cohesive manifestation as well as a glimpse of "still unexplored shreds of reality."

By March 1947, Brauner hadn't yet sent the participation form for the exhibition to be filled out and signed. Luca, instead of pursuing Păun's idea, had settled on a proposal for creating:

> une salle obscure (d'une obscurité absolue) peuplée de formes d'un prononcé caractère érotique et de matériaux fétichistes divers, (parfum, cheveux, soie, etc.) salle que l'on parcourait les bras en avant, tout en rencontrant les espaces durs, les concrétions aphrodisiaques et mystérieuses de ces formes et tout en les explorant à la recherche des surprises de toucher. C'est un des jeux que nous faisions nous-mêmes avec des objets-personnages vivants (hommes et femmes) –, il se nommait: le sable nocturne.[69]

A few days later the group received a radiogram from Jacques Hérold officially inviting them to participate in the exhibition catalog, and they sent the text that would become "Sable nocturne," along with a still-hopeful proposal for a dark room full of objects; the text that appeared finally in the catalog was originally intended as a marginal note to this proposal.[70] The room as they conceived it never, of course, materialized. But the text – signed, as so rarely happened, by all five members of the group – hints at what might have been. "Sable nocturne" was almost certainly written incorporating automatic techniques, giving it the form of a *cadavre exquis*. This gives it a somewhat oracular

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[68] Ibid. (32-33), "Bucharest 24 August 45," with editorial note that this date is an error for 1946.
[69] In *Victor Brauner: Ecrits et correspondances 1938-1948* (Paris: Institut national d'histoire d'art, 2005), 226-227. Letter titled "Gherasim Luca à Victor Brauner / Bucarest, 12 mars 1947."
[70] Ibid. (227). "Gherasim Luca à Victor Brauner / Bucarest, 20 mars 1947."

character – scattered with programmatic declarations – that makes it unique among the essays in the lengthy exhibition catalog.

In the game of Night Sand, objects in the dark room become "unstable concretions" that, meeting the groping hand, merge with it to form new "amorous concretions." In this way the unknown itself can "pénétrer physiquement (matériellement) vos corps […] l'inconnu en grains de sable sous la peau transparente."[71] The body, meeting the object, forms a temporary hybrid whose skin encompasses both. Body and object are thus "passionately" freed from "les formes imposés par le donné insupportable de tout objet extérieur," a category that includes the body itself. The *jouissance* of every contact is that of metamorphosis. This ecstatic freedom is figured in terms of the opening of doors: doors within objects open upon a thousand "couloirs denses et diffus," while a willingness to find knowledge in ignorance and darkness – in *méconnaissance* – opens all the doors of the body. The tips of the fingers – the "eyelids of total vision" – traverse the object as if it were the body of a loved one and put desire into "hysterical" contact with its infinite possibilities for becoming. Touch, in its hysterical but inspired blindness, plays the role of automatism, chance and *destin* in this act-object, or rather of surautomatism, which is all three at once. Surautomatism here is the delirious logic that governs all the "accidents" of matter and relation: "accidents dont le destin ne cesse de nous enivrer, de nous lubrifier, accidents égaux à la nécessité, égaux aux mouvements." The text closes with "surautomatic" descriptions of sixteen "objects" encountered in the night sand, evoking the "indescribable debauch that takes place each

[71] "Sable" (57). This part of the text, with its vultures of flame and vultures of water, was probably written by Naum. For another reading of the "Sable nocturne" text in the context of the catalog and the exhibition, see Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, "'Le Sable nocturne': point aveugle du livre *Le Surréalisme en 1947*," in Yaari ed., *'Infra Noir,' un et multiple*. For Chénieux-Gendron, the "night sand" is nothing less than "matière informe" that awaits new materializations (233).

night at 11" between all the "nameless" and "savage" objects in the dark. Here the objects become indistinguishable from spaces as well as from movements and acts of sensation: there is an "immense cristal […] sur le visage d'une plume"; a "couloir vertigineux surpris dans une lumière succulente au fond du sein"; but also "les gestes secrets de l'hystérie" and "la respiration se doublant, se triplant et devenant aveugle."

Naum's crystals, Păun's *brouillard*, Trost's and Păun's surautomatism and sur-conscious all double as theories of the embodied self making contact with the object-world. But they also represent a number of ways of rethinking and engaging with the Obstacle, whether it takes the shape of unconscious constraints upon the creative act, or of the protean power of ideology. Each of these approaches attempts, for this purpose, to replace a subject-position with an object-position – Naum's element, Păun's empty but teeming locus, Trost's aplasticity, the dark spaces of touch in "Sable nocturne." In doing so they open onto the space of the collective act-objet.

Infra Noir relies on and refines work done by the surrealists before the war on the relations between objects and dreams, simulations, and collective-performative action; their own work also incorporates a powerful erotic element that corresponds to the group's call, in one of its manifestos, for an *amour objectif*. Love, along with with the discovery of "nouvelles possibilités érotiques," is made to be "notre principale méthode de connaissance et d'action."[72] However, the amorous (or erotic, or sexual) dimension of the object for Infra Noir is deeply entwined with what I call its monstrous aspect – the subject of the next section. It is an aspect we have already encountered, for example, with Dalí's objective self, and in Max Blecher's crises. Among its many roles and meanings,

[72] Gherasim Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique* (Bucharest: S. Surréalisme, 1945), 18.

the object also calls forth a fear of the dark[73] – a fear, mingled with desire, that the distinction between inner and outer, object and self, might suddenly fail. The Infra Noir group navigates constantly between this fear and this desire.

[73] Caillois writes: "L'emprise magique […] de la nuit et de l'obscurité, la *peur dans le noir* a sans doute […] ses racines dans le péril où elle met l'opposition de l'organisme et du milieu […]. Alors que l'espace clair s'efface devant la matérialité des objets, l'obscurité […] touche directement l'individu, l'enveloppe, le pénètre et même passe au travers; ainsi le moi est *perméable* pour l'obscurité tandis qu'il ne l'est pas pour la lumière" (*Mimétisme* 9).

5. **Monstrous Objects and Monstrous Act-Objects**

It is strange and rather extraordinary that during and after the Second World War, the monstrous, predatory object would gain such ascendancy in surrealist object-theory. With regard to the link between the surrealist object-position, the monstrous object, and this specific historical moment, there are many avenues to explore. For example, in the case of Main à Plume, the monstrous object might be an alternate formulation of the concept of the *homme-objet*, described above. The young Marco Ménégoz made a contribution to Main à Plume's abandoned *L'Objet* issue in 1944 (the year he was shot by the Germans in the Fontainebleau forest), an essay called "Du hasard à l'objet," in which he writes that objects:

> prend place dans la chair et dans le cerveau, pour mener loin de leurs cadres conventionnels la sexualité et la démence. Les objets nous font rentrer parmi eux. […] La sexualité, lyrique par excellence, se hausse d'un degré, se dépouille de la sentimentalité, frise le sadisme.[1]

Ménégoz goes on to explain that, after humans made the fatal mistake of raising themselves above the world of objects, maintaining their supremacy by straitjacketing "les objets usuels" within their habitual uses, these objects have finally turned on us, as in a return of the repressed. The only thing now is to give in to their advances, and be transformed once again into "l'homme concret." The latter, like the *homme-objet*, escapes from a paralyzing self-consciousness in order to act "en harmonie" with nature in its immanent logic. Thus the mediation of objects – here figured as violently sexual – wrests humans free from their errors, their false consciousness, the subjective distortions of

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[1] Fauré (391). For a similar vision of objects see René Crevel, whose work influenced Infra Noir members: "Donc plus de housses sur les objets, ni de capote anglaise sur les idées. Ils bandent et craquent les préservatifs […] Aujourd'hui, s'il est affirmé que les objets bandent, ce n'est point caprice métaphorique. Et ils ne bandent pas dans le vide. Ils se caressent, se sucent, s'enfilent, ils font l'amour, quoi! ces objets surréalistes […]." *L'Esprit contre la raison* (70).

vision that lead (for example) to war and aggression, and plunges them in the flow of a *destin* and of a "poésie vécue" in which the truth of nature and the truth of history are indistinguishable.[2]

For Jacques Bureau, similarly, daily objects have become our slyest enemies because we have attempted to entower ourselves above them, or pin them within unjustly unreciprocal relations. Now, "ils nous saisissent à la gorge en pleine innocence, au moment de notre plus grand candeur" – former companions, now wearing the conspirator's "cagoule."[3] Monstrous objects also work within the anti-personal, anti-self-expressive polemics that Main à Plume shares with Infra Noir. Like Bureau, the painter Roger Brielle evokes a world of predatory household objects: armchairs that snap at one's ankles in the night or sneak up on one in the woods. The artist in particular must be advised to tread softly, for he is the intruder: "Confonds-toi avec la rainure du parquet, le pli du rideau, la fleur du papier […] rends-toi complètement invisible […]. Et si tu n'est pas mort, raconte ce que tu as vu." For Brielle, this amounts to a command to the artist to leave behind his personal neuroses and torments, and all subjective-expressive tics, in the act of representing the world.[4] It may also be that to make the object monstrous is a critical move that highlights the ungraspable and unpredictable nature of the objects that

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[2] Ibid. (385 and 392). It might be argued that this aspect of the monstrous object and of the wartime surrealist object in general – in which the direction and final ends of history becomes conceptually tangled with the basic nature and logic of the world – brings it nearer simultaneously to fascist ideologies and to Soviet communist ideologies.

[3] "Morale," in *MAP* (65).

[4] "Notes sur la représentation," in *MAP* (230). Brielle places his painter in a rather vulnerable position with respect to objects: "il prend un verre qui se brise dans sa main, un couteau qui le coupe, une corde qui l'étrangle, il ouvre une porte qui donne sur un couloir sans fin" (232). In this he echoes long passages describing the monstrous object in Naum's *Medium* (discussed below) as well as the doors and stairways in Luca's work (also below). For dangerous domestic objects, see also the 1936 (n.1-2) issue of the magazine *Cahiers d'Art* devoted to the surrealist object. Breton's article "Crise de l'objet" appears here, as well as Marcel Jean's "Arrivée de la belle époque," where objects' intimate participation in our lives is what gives them both a sexual and monstrous aspect, and Claude Cahun's "Prenez garde aux objets domestiques," where objects "nous parleraient mieux encore si nous pouvions y toucher et dans l'obscurité."

make up reality, leaving space for a sur-real or sur-rational understanding of them. Fijalkowski, for example, reads surrealist object theory alongside Clément Rosset's *L'Objet singulier*, where the sentiment of the real is at once the most banal and quotidian of experiences, and the least – just as peremptory as it is enigmatic. Rosset writes that "l'autre qui fait peur n'est pas l'inconnu, mais le connu en tant qu'autre. L'objet terrifiant est alors le réel en personne."[5]

One can also read monstrous objects as a response to the Second World War as a "catastrophe" – in Rosset's sense, when an irruption of reality causes an ensemble of apparently solid representations to crumble. The members of Main à Plume and of Infra Noir were living through one of the great catastrophes of history; their experiments and theories can be understood as simulative encounters with new, bitter and terrifying realities, hollowing out an aesthetics of catastrophe within the most innocuous of objects. And the longing for a monstrous transformation into an *homme-objet* might, once again, be understood as a desire to ride or merge with the wave crashing over history, rather than simply drown.

Finally, the monstrous object could be seen as a means of engagement, critical or otherwise, with the commodity. The dozen or so years after the end of WWII witness the advent of a "société de l'objet" (in the words of historian Pierre Jouin).[6] In a society that was increasingly one of mass consumption and production, surrealists might well have suspected that their theories of the object as cipher of latent desire and of future potential had come better to describe the world of advertising, for example, than a subversive way of being and doing. It might become increasingly difficult to distinguish the ormulu clock

[5] Clément Rosset, *L'Objet singulier* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979), 39-40.
[6] See Pierre Jouin, *Une Liberté toute neuve … Culture de masse et esthétique nouvelle dans la France des années 50* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1995), 25-32.

on the mantelpiece, as an accretion of a social and consumerist imaginary, from a Bretonian "precipitate" of desire; to decipher the "language" of objects might be no more than to plunge headfirst into the roar of mass culture and into all the myths that yoke consumers to what they consume.

The members of Main à Plume – like surrealist canaries in the coal mine – announce, indeed, that they are entering a new "ère des objets,"[7] and that something must be done about it. They attempt to rethink the object in relation to currency, for example, and words like "product" begin to appear frequently in their texts. Jean-François Chabrun coins the phrase "l'objet-monnaie" to refer to an economy of exchange between self and other, a common denominator or universal solvent of communication.[8] All this raises the question of the extent to which a deliberate transposition or repurposing of commodity logic still fatally participates in it. This is a question the Infra Noir group struggled to answer in the form of the Obstacle, and a question extensively discussed in the critical literature on Surrealism in relation to the fetish. In this context, the allegiances of certain key concepts begin to be uncertain. The concept of opacity (discussed above), for example, might express a desire to return to "real" matter when objects are being dematerialized into commodity fetishes, or might amount to no more than a glorification of the hermetic surface of the commodity itself, its mystificatory masking of the human labor that gave it form. Even the *acte-objet* might be another term for an alienated

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[7] Arnaud, "Petite recette," *MAP* (76).

[8] For "product" see for example Gérard de Sède, who writes that the "product" is a truly surrealist object, and that a revision of Surrealism must be attempted on its basis ("Aperçu d'une encyclopédie surréaliste de l'objet," *MAP* 217). Boris Rybak defines "product" in relation to anabolism, the process by which an organism transforms nutritive matter into complex organic structures (in "Enquête sur l'objet," *MAP* 225). For "l'objet-monnaie," see Fauré (400).

nightmare consisting of "social relations between things" and "objective relations between persons," to borrow Marx's words.

Giorgio Agamben outlines a genealogy of the monstrous object in late modernity that oddly resonates with the surrealist examples we have discussed:

> objects lose their innocence and rebel with a kind of deliberate perfidy. They attempt to evade their uses, they become animated with human feelings and intentions, they become discontented and lazy. The eye is not surprised to discover them in lecherous attitudes.[9]

This "phantasmagorical conspiracy" is actually the result of one thing: a bad conscience about the commodification of objects. "The degeneration implicit in the transformation of the artisanal object into the mass-produced article is constantly manifest to modern man in the loss of his own self-possession with respect to things"; the menace of these objects arises from our refusal to acknowledge this degradation. Long forgotten and rendered *unheimlich*, they now arise to seek revenge.[10]

Curiously, objects cannot be "redeemed" from their monstrous degeneration unless we ourselves, their companions, become objects. As an example of becoming an object, Agamben offers the dandy. The dandy makes himself a kind of "living corpse, constantly tending toward an *other*, a creature essentially nonhuman and anti-human […] the artist now puts on the inhuman mask of the commodity." The dandy takes alienation and self-dispossession to their limit, using their own momentum against them: Agamben calls this the "appropriation of unreality." The object meanwhile, attaining the status of

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[9] Giorgio Agamben, "Beau Brummel; or, the Appropriation of Unreality," in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), 47.
[10] Ibid. Agamben traces this bad conscience through Grandville's illustrated *Petites misères de la vie humaine* in 1843, through Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Odradek in Kafka's *Cares of a Family Man*, and the Angel of the Odd in Poe's story of the same title.

"absolute commodification," can push its degradation to such an extreme pitch that the latter cancels itself out.[11]

In Agamben's account, it appears that the object's monstrosity figures both its commodity status and something prior to or concealed behind the commodity. Agamben's voice enters a distinctly Bretonian register as he evokes a topology of object-relations found "on this side of objects and beyond the human in a zone that is no longer objective or subjective, neither personal or impersonal, neither material nor immaterial, but where we find ourselves suddenly facing these apparently so simple unknowns: the human, the thing."[12] The desire of the Main à Plume and Infra Noir groups to tarry with monstrosity, disguising pleasure with exaggerated silent-screen horror, bears witness to this vacillating status of the monstrous object, not to mention an ambivalence toward the commodity or toward the Real. As they seek to articulate the relationship between human and thing, the monstrous object stands in both for resistance to change and for the resistance that *changes*; as that in which the Obstacle makes itself visible, or as the Obstacle's undoing within this very visibility (in the same way that a wall implies that something might be beyond it, or that a command implies the possibility of disobedience). In what follows, we will examine the monsters in the Infra Noir group's object-discourse, and explore how they negotiate these shifting zones. More importantly, we will explore how these monsters relate – via their erotic charge and sexual undercurrents – to the possibility of action and resistance in the world of the Obstacle.

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11 Ibid. (50). Others who have attempted or theorized this appropriation of unreality include, according to Agamben, Jarry's Dr. Faustroll and Jarry himself, Apollinaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Adrian Leverkühn from *Doktor Faustus*, and Paul Celan in *Meridian*. See also "Baudelaire and the Absolute Commodity," in *Stanzas* (42). Hal Foster is close to Agamben in figuring the commodified object as an uncanny, living-dead double of the human; if the trauma of the becoming-commodity of the body is both "repeated" and "détourned" within surrealist discourses of becoming-animal (135), I would add that the same goes for discourses of becoming-object or becoming-monster.

12 In his essay "The Toy Fairy," in *Stanzas* (59).

The last extant issue of the surrealist journal *Minotaure* was the double number 12-13, published in May 1939. Gellu Naum recounts that in the same year, Victor Brauner and Naum visited Breton twice in his apartment at 42 rue Fontaine, where Breton was preparing the next issue, whose overarching theme would be the Devil, and which he would be forced to abandon. As Naum remembers it, Breton asked the two for their advice, and Naum proposed an article on the "démonologie de l'objet," illustrated by Brauner.[13] In June 1939, Brauner did indeed write to Breton that he and Naum were about to complete a text whose theme happened to eerily coincide with Breton's recent plans for *Minotaure* – a text involving apparitions of the Devil within or via objects, along with entities ("lycanthropic" and "ephialtic" objects – see below) that would later feature in Naum's *Medium*. In this letter, Brauner reminds Breton who Naum is, and promises that, as Breton has asked, he will mention nothing to Naum of a possible collaboration with Breton until the time comes. In July the latter responds:

> Je maintiens ma proposition d'un numéro satanique de *Minotaure* mais je suis sans réponse de Skira et j'entends parler d'un échec total du 12-13. Nous en reparlerons bientôt. Reçu hier de sa part un cahier de poèmes de Gellu Naum. Je lui écrirai prochainement.[14]

In the meantime, before leaving Paris in the summer of 1940, Naum created "L'Image présente à l'esprit," a collection of images cut from a magazine feature, with an additional illustration by Jacques Hérold. "L'Image" is a drama between a guinea pig and a vampire bat trapped together in a cage, captioned by Naum to tell a story in which the

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[13] Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum: poète roumain, prisonnier au château des aveugles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 42. For Brauner letter to Breton, see Doucet BRT 233, "Vendredi June 1939". Brauner will soon afterward describe his preoccupations in the wartime surrealist magazine *VVV* ("Du Fantastique" in issue 1, 1942) as centering around a "monde inconnu […] peuplé de somnambules, incubes, succubes, lycanthropes, éphialtes, fantômes, spectres, sorcières, voyantes, médiums."

[14] Letter available online at <http://bibliothequekandinsky.centrepompidou.fr/>. Dated July 19, 1939 (BRE c4 8818.60).

guinea pig alternates between submission to a presence now familiar to it, and sheer panic.[15] In Naum's short introduction to this text, the "image present to the mind" itself becomes a vampire: it sucks "avec une férocité généreuse la subjectivité devenant par une merveilleuse métamorphose en elle-même vampire objectif." The image is a *corps étrange*, a fragment of objectivity lodged within the subject, and this objectivity is a vampiric force that, feeding upon its host, transforms it into an object. Ordinary objects are no safer ("Les objets nous sucent les yeux") and it is never clear whether one should submit to these familiar presences, or panic.

Incidentally, during the war Main à Plume as well would entertain the idea of a vampiric theory of the image. For Arnaud, for example, the image is either a successful or a failed vampire. To the extent it remains within the "prison" of personality and the subject, it is doomed to feed on itself, but in the free night air of the objective and impersonal, it can sip from all sources: "elle ne peut évoluer qu'à travers des sangs insoupçonnés."[16] Main à Plume member Léo Malet, bisecting images with mirrors to create new ones, has it that what is vampiric is precisely the act of simultaneous division and reunion that forms these images. His "superbe vampire négatif" is thus a "trait d'union, fantôme d'attente," waiting to sever and to bind in one fell swoop.[17] Main à Plume's collective imagination – like Infra Noir's – is full of dialectical vampires, vampires of negation, of sublation and of objectivation. They appear in the dialectical

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[15] In *Athanor* 1 (2004), 63-68.The title is a phrase taken from Breton's "Situation surréaliste de l'objet," in the context of poetry's will to objectivate "la représentation intérieure […] l'image présente à l'esprit." *Œuvres II* (477).

[16] "L'Image," in *MAP* (108).

[17] Léo Malet, "La Clé," in *MAP* (99). Mirrors, of course, are vampiric objects for this reason. Malet shows how a mirror can transform an image of a woman's shoe: reflecting the heel-side upon itself, it reveals a flayed body. See also "Vie et survie du vampire (fragment)," in *MAP* (150).

clearing between subject and object, and in the darkness of touch and of sexuality, where the supernatural and the marvelous take root.

Naum began writing *Medium* shortly after his return to Romania in 1940. The book includes a catalog and behavioral study of the demoniacal object, describing:

> the hallucinatory persistence of the aggressivity of objects, the avidly succubal character of gloves, of hats, of chairs, of glasses, the vampirism of whetstones, of cameras that suck images […] the vampiric lycanthropism of moneyboxes in the forms of animals […] gaslamps, with their calm vampirism, that suck in our shadows, the asphyxiating comfort of heavy counterpanes that weigh on our chests like the purest succubi, the lucid game of houses that shut their doors after us […] the subtle vampirism of the manicure scissors that draw out blood drop by drop, the strangling hands of a heavy collar […] the presence of fingers on the hand […] display with undreamed of abundance, with a superb exemplificatory tenacity, the demoniac aspect of the object.

All of *Medium*'s succubi, incubi, vampires and lycanthropes including, apparently, parts of one's own body (the fingers on the hand), are subtypes of what Naum calls the "ephialtic object," where ephialtism is "hermaphroditic demoniality that is convertible into spectres or objects."[18] In his gloss on the term "ephialtic" Naum relies heavily, though silently, on Emile Laurent and Paul Nagour's 1902 *L'Occultisme et l'amour*.[19] Naum also means his ephialtes to be the objectual equivalent of the demonic figures described by the likes of Johann Weyer in *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563) or witch and

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[18] *Medium* (129-130). In certain homeopathic manuals, which Infra Noir members seem to have avidly read, *ephialte* is a synonym for *oneirodynia gravans* (as opposed to *oneirodynia activa*, another term for somnambulism), an "oppression" of the chest during sleep, often accompanied by visions. See for example Erastus Edgerton Marcy (1868), *The Homeopathic Theory and Practice of Medicine*: "Ephialtes was so called from the belief of the ancients, that a demon leaped upon the breast and prevented its expansion to draw in the breath. […] Some nervous or indisposed persons are oppressed during sleep with a heavy pressing sensation on the chest […]. Some hear singing in the ears and see spectres before the eyes." (453). Common causes include acid indigestion.

[19] Paris: Vigot frères (1902). Translated into English as *Magica Sexualis* in 1934 and 1966. See p.12: mentions of Cteis, libational vessels, columns of Boaz, etc. are identical between Naum and Laurent/Nagour. Naum also has unattributed direct quotes from Jean Bodin, *Le Fléau des démons et sorciers* (1616, p. 216). The prolific Émile Laurent also wrote on criminal anthropology, neurasthenia, "educative gymnastics," *L'Amour morbide* (Société d'éditions scientifiques, 1895), *Sadisme et masochisme* (Vigot frères, 1903), hermaphroditism, "infantile criminality," addiction to nicotine, fetishism, *La Poésie décadente devant la science psychiatrique* (A. Maloine, 1897), thieves' argot, duels, "pulmonary hysteria," gynecomastia, and impressions of a trip to Egypt and Syria.

werewolf hunter Henri Boguet in *Discours des sorciers* (1602). In the latter the Devil himself, master of simulacra, often takes the form of nocturnal visitors: deceiving a husband, for example, by taking his wife's place in bed when she has gone to a witches' sabbat. In this context Naum uses the word "demoniality" (*demonialitatea*) not simply to indicate demonic status, but with reference to Ludovico Maria Sinistrari's definition of the term, in *De la démonialité et des animaux incubes et succubes* (1876), as the sin of sexual intercourse between humans and demons. The ephialtic object is a fundamentally sexual object, and if Naum frequently understands human-object relations in terms of an aggressive sexuality, the object is often the aggressor.

The aggressive ephialtism of the object appears in two spatiotemporal forms: coyly restrained (*reținut*) and "exuberant," recalling the "exuberant" phase of Naum's crystallography. Coy ephialtes are those that appear harmless but are actually lying in wait, ready to launch depth charges into the psyche or introduce their sinister purposes into human actions: examples include "a fixed window that looks out upon another window, an immobile ashtray, a coffin, a fastened button."[20] Exuberant ephialtes are best represented by "lycanthropic" objects, defined as any object closely resembling an animal – often only upon close observation. These objects also exhibit a "lycanthropic" sexuality which Naum compares to a story mentioned (he claims) by the 16th-century political philosopher and demonologist Jean Bodin. The story is of a certain king named "Caian" who would transform himself "into all kinds of animals," find females of the kind, "'puis coucha avesques elles charnellement.'" In fact, in order to tell this tale Naum has deliberatedly and apocryphally brought together two unrelated passages from Bodin,

[20] *Medium* (130).

molding his medieval demonology to fit *Medium*'s delirious objectual-animal fantasy of metamorphosis.[21]

Another important figure in *Medium* is the object as succubus: a compactly multivalent figure that links sexual attraction with dreamstates and the marvelous, infusing each with the black aura of the forbidden. The succubus is also, most importantly, a "synthetic" figure that presides over juxtapositions and fusions; its function, like the image, is that of a *trait d'union*, no less between objects than between objects and selves.[22] The abrupt but intimate relationship between a finger and the knife that slices it is a succubal one. But Naum is also struck to see the "sureness with which some objects […] hasten to enter others," like shoetrees within shoes. No use pointing out that shoetrees fit into shoes because they were invented to do so: Naum treats the relationship between them as fortuitous, even predatory, as if it were a case of mimicry among insects. The human world of manufacture and profit, Naum suggests, may very well be a mere epiphenomenon of a primary network of relations between objects that call each other into being, or that use the world of commodities as a parasitic *Ephialtes* wasp might lay its eggs within the body of a helpless host.

Demoniality, in the lycanthropic, vampiric or succubal forms Naum elaborates, is a protean, metamorphic force that works against any act of definitive naming or form-

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[21] See Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Anvers: Arnould Coninx, 1593). In the passage about "Cayan Roy de Bulgarie" Bodin simply says that he "se tournoit en toutes sortes de bestes" (170). The passage that begins "puis coucha […]" refers, much later, to the story of Jeanne Hervillier. Hervillier's mother had presented her to the Devil who had taken the form of a tall man in black on a black horse, and who "coucha auec elle charnellement, en la mesme sorte & maniere que font les hommes auec les femmes, horsmis que la semence estoit froide" (270).

[22] I borrow this phrase from Christian Dotremont: "Je me garde bien sûr d'être presbyte vis-à-vis des relations entre objets: je veux voir *tous* les fils invisibles qui les lie à *tous*, que les fils soient longs ou courts. Et je ne trouve nullement moins légitime de visibiliser, par l'image, le trait d'union latent entre deux objets." From "Notes techniques sur l'image dite surréaliste," quoted in Anne Vernay, "La Main à plume et la peinture," *MAP* (306).

giving, the latter being a kind of "castration." Raising demons, whether or not they take the form of objects, is all about the "terror of mysterious presences that begin to emerge into clarity, forced by the magic wand of waiting, of searching." If Main à Plume member Noël Arnaud writes that "à force d'écouter, on vous parle," then Naum might answer that "à force d'attendre, on vous attend," and with a vengeance.[23] The object "howls out its demoniality" for those who know how to listen and to wait, without anticipating or foreclosing what is to come.

In *Medium*, Naum tells the story of visiting a friend in an institution – "always dreaming," he adds. "They all said he was crazy." The friend has made a "decoration" – a powderbox lid with pictures stuck to it – to which he is very attached. Naum proposes to his Infra Noir colleagues that they make similar "decorations" to offer to each other, that these swap meets take place on a semi-regular basis, and that they dress their best each time, as when receiving military honors.[24] Gherasim Luca tells the same story in his 1945 *Le Vampire passif*, on which he began work around the same time as Naum began *Medium*. Luca then proclaims the invention of a new type of surrealist object: "la confection de ces décorations coïncide avec l'apparition du premier objet objectivement offert (O. O. O.)."[25] For Luca, this act of "decoration" is a minimal pretext for a structure of exchange that would be ruined by any existing standard of exchange, as in wedding gifts or romantic offerings. The bare act of giving someone an object that one has

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[23] Arnaud, "Créer" (29).

[24] *Medium* (149).

[25] Gherasim Luca, *Le Vampire passif*: *avec une introduction sur l'objet objectivement offert* (Paris: José Corti, 2001), 7-8. Sarane Alexandrian adds (*Le Surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 255) that they would pronounce long commendatory speeches on these occasions. Luca will later claim in *Parcurg imposibilul* (see below) that in *Le Vampire passif* neither he nor his objects had quite broken free of the Oedipal state, and that in the new objects presented in *Parcurg*, though a certain Oedipally limited sexual symbolism persists, their "manifest content refuses to be exhausted by a translation reducible to two or three initial complexes" (54). There is also that, in the meantime, he claims he has managed to present an O.O.O. to the Devil himself, signing a blood pact …

constructed, Luca writes, plays the same role as an external stimulus or fragment of diurnal memory in a dream, which the dream collages with other bits and pieces into a new configuration. With the O.O.O., the dreamlike configuration is made up of the relationships that the exchanged objects create between individuals – equivocal, often violent, and erotically super-saturated. Introducing the structure of the dream directly into reality, these objects create, as Luca repeatedly states in this text and elsewhere, an active, "somnambulistic" mode of the collective unconscious.

In the famous episode of the *objets trouvés* and the Saint-Ouen flea market in *L'Amour fou*, Breton emphasizes that he and Giacometti make their object-discoveries together, and that they experience a kind of "sympathie" or linking of wills that allows one individual to enter the forcefield of another's desire. Breton adds, most importantly, that in the case of a *trouvaille à deux*, two people simply walking near each other can form a kind of desire-machine, "une seule machine à influence *amorcée*" – acting, like in Breton's arrangements of objects above, as an *appât* for that wild yet skittish beast, the marvelous. The call of the object-to-be-found turns the two men and their respective desires and preoccupations, like "brusques condensations atmosphériques," into electric conductors.[26] This sort of collective desire-machine is close to what Luca envisions with his network of objectively offered objects. But Luca's version is greatly extended, and his multiplication of objects and recipients elaborates an entire erotic economy where the whole range of the libido prolongs itself in the material world.[27]

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[26] *L'Amour fou* (45-46). See also Hal Foster, who points out that the dream-objects that Breton proposes circulating in "Peu de réalité" are first seen as gifts, and indicates, with reference to Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don* (1925), that such a mode of exchange offers a rare escape from commodity logic. Foster (266); note to p. 128.

[27] Dominique Carlat argues that in Breton's binary model, "centré sur la seule communauté de deux amis, sa 'théorie' […] privilégie les relations inter-individuelles et néglige […] le domaine sociale, régi par la loi

Luca exuberantly develops certain aspects of Breton's influential work, unfurling flowers that in *L'Amour fou* remain demurely folded. Breton's text does not entirely exclude the possibility, for example, of veiled erotic exchanges between the two human elements of the *trouvaille à deux*,[28] but in *Le Vampire passif* these are decidedly unveiled, and the objects join in as well. The objects that Luca and Victor Brauner offer to each other, for example, are attempts at seduction as well as a "proposition symbolique de masturbation mutuelle," which the objects themselves demonstrate, "se masturb[a]nt réciproquement."[29] Participants exchange male members in the disguise of objects which can be used to attract ("je refusais d'offrir à un homme un sexe qui attire vers lui toutes les femmes") or threaten ("s'il prend mes femmes, son sexe va se casser") or foresee the future or – like objects used in black magic – injure, or even kill.[30] Objects are capable of castrating their recipients, but also of facilitating an "échange permanent de sperme."

Luca's oeuvre presents numerous examples of erotic-collective object exchange. It could, in fact, be called one of his favored genres. *Un Lup văzut printr'o lupă* (A Wolf Seen Through a Loupe, 1945) features, for example, a "systematic simulation" involving kleptomania and "kleptobjects." At the moment that Luca gives a woman his snotty

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des grands nombres." In *Gherasim Luca l'intempestif* (Paris: José Corti, 1998, 141), Carlat asks whether in these limited circumstances the *trouvaille* and the workings of objective chance could bear anything but a metaphorical relation to revolutionary discourse. The *trouvaille à deux*, he concludes, is a missed opportunity for an *objet objectivement offert*, which modifies the individual's "insertion" into collective symbolic circulation (142). See also Luca and Trost's *Dialectique de la dialectique*, where chance must be objectivated "d'une manière ininterrompue" and obliged to renounce "son caractère de rareté provenant de la découverte de l'objet trouvé" (22).

[28] The fact that, if the Cinderella-spoon is eventually identified with a male sexual organ, Breton and Giacometti are wandering together as a primed desiring machine in search of, essentially, a penis, appears to leave this door at least slightly ajar – despite Breton's probable rejection of any such reading. But see also Breton's 1947 contribution to the *Da Costa Encyclopédique* project: "Évagination: Les actions de l'homme sont des désirs, des intentions, d'avoir des rapports sexuels plus ou moins nombreux à des vitesses plus ou moins grandes, avec des êtres vivants et objets" (*Œuvres III*, 965).

[29] *Vampire* (27).

[30] For the first two parenthetical quotes, ibid. (17-18); for injury, maiming, and killing see for example the episode of the seamstress (26) and of Brauner's father (29).

handkerchief, and "in return" steals some of her money (and her lipstick), these items ostensibly gain a meaning, value and erotic energy that eclipse all existing forms of the latter.[31] Another text, *Les Noces phylogéniques*, written in collaboration with Paul Păun and Trost in 1947, makes use of the animal world for similar purposes. The three authors set themselves entirely against mankind as a category, not to mention his paltry conjugal arrangements. Modifying passages from a book on the nuptial behavior of animals from diverse phyla, they stage twenty-four scenes to be "played" and interpreted by willing men and women, "partisans d'une action amoureuse."[32] In fact, the nouns *homme* and *femme* persist throughout the vignettes, which largely involve envelopment, absorption, consumption, exchanges of fluids and parts, and entanglings of multiple arms and sexes. The "woman's" bony spur injects the "man's" thigh with aphrodisiac ichors, or the two spin a silk thread between them across which they balance like tightrope walkers, or they offer and force-feed each other spermathecae and oothecae, recalling the object-offerings of *Le Vampire passif*. There is great emphasis on both organic and inorganic props and prostheses. In *A Oniriza lumea* (Oneiricize the World, 1941),[33] which Luca was working on around the same time as *Le Vampire passif*, an obscure and sinister drama unfolds in the giving, receiving, and thieving of objects. Every object-related act creates a forcefield that keeps drawing in new participants; the hidden virtualities of objects inhabit unwitting

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31 *Lup* (101-102).

32 *Les Noces Phylogéniques*, at Doucet (50428 GHLms16). A first draft describes these actions as "automatic," while Luca's edits instead suggest something along the lines of a solemn, sacred ritual. The authors claim that these stagings have, in fact, already successfully taken place. The text was sent to André Breton in May 1947, shortly before the opening of the 1947 exhibition, with a letter in which they express their regret at not being able to more fully participate. See <http://catalogue.gazette-drouot.com/ref/lot-ventes-aux-encheres.jsp?id=2364141.> The full text is reproduced in *Fusées* 7 (Paris: Editions Carte Blanche, 2003) in a "Dossier Gherasim Luca."

33 Titled in French, it is included in lists of soon-to-be-published works in the back or front pages of some of Luca's published tracts. Partially translated into French in Toma, from the manuscript at Doucet (50414 GHL ms3). Unpaginated. Luca writes in *Parcurg imposibilul* that *A Oniriza lumea* is a continuation of the "researches" begun in *Le Vampire passif*.

passersby like dybbuks. If in this text Luca sees himself as a kind of "electron" or Lucretian atom among others – objects, states, plants, planets – these other "electrons" frequently band together to take the ghostly form of monsters or men, the better to intervene in Luca's life.

It is in *Le Vampire passif*, however, that Luca follows the object to its most dizzying and occult depths, and where the erotic object of exchange becomes most clearly monstrous – or as Naum might put it, demoniac.[34] As one might guess, the preferred figure of monstrosity here is the vampire, a guise that both objects and Luca himself inhabit in turn. In this context I would like to take a close look at the following passage:

> Je ferme les yeux, actif comme les vampires, je les ouvre en dedans, passif comme les vampires, et entre le sang qui arrive, celui qui part et celui qui se trouvait déjà en moi se produit un échange d'images comme un engagement de poignards. Maintenant je peux manger un piano, je peux fusiller une table, je peux aspirer un escalier. Toutes les extrémités de mon corps ont des orifices par où sortent les squelettes du piano, de la table, de l'escalier et pour la première fois ces objets usuels, donc inexistants, existent.[35]

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[34] *Le Vampire passif* has many intertexts (Lautréamont, Sade, Huysmans, Dalí, Breton). There is also Camille Bryen, part of Luca and Naum's Paris circle in 1938-39, who wrote his *L'Aventure des objets* in 1937. This book has in common with Luca's work a repurposing of psychoanalysis, a crusade against "castration" of all kinds as well as against death, object-construction as transferral of dream states into daily, collective reality, and a strong corporeal-sexual emphasis: "le personnage humain est le témoin effrayé de la libération de son sexe: libération exécutée dans le sperme et le sang." Bryen describes, among objects, "contacts de champs magnétiques […] que l'on peut revêtir enfin de toutes les chairs." (Paris: J. Corti, 1937), 9 and 14. Luca's commentators have a variety of theories on the significance of the vampire in his work. Carlat references an analysis of Lautréamont where the vampire "dérobe les signes pour les piller et les gaspiller, les dilapider"; he is a master of sleight of hand, "l'art de passer d'un signe à l'autre." Carlat also adds that Jewish Romanians were well accustomed to the figure of vampire in which "l'antisémitisme avait trouvé […] l'une de ses images les plus violentes pour manifester sa haine, projeter la monstruosité sur son objet et nourrir ainsi ses fantasmes." Luca's avatar would then be an aggressive détournement of this term of aggression. See *L'Intempestif* (144 and 174). The members of Infra Noir themselves say very little about the relationship of their vampires to fictional-folkloric perceptions of a Romanian vampire tradition; a more proximate source for the Infra Noir vampire, even more than a general Surrealist interest in such figures, might be Victor Brauner. See for example his notebooks from 1941 which describe the "Femme de Ma Noce Chimique […] mon admirable VAMPIRE PASSIVE" (along with a series of metaphysically significant *objets trouvés*). (Brauner, *Écrits,* 53). An image of this female passive vampire appears in Didier Semin ed., *Victor Brauner: dans les collections du MNAM*-CCI (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996), 100.

[35] *Vampire* (50).

Here, the vampire's active posture faces outward toward the world but, counterintuitively, with eyes closed. In this way his figure converges with that of the sleepwalker, whose blind, uncanny sense of direction is enshrined in popular imagery. The moment the vampire closes his eyes, as well, he actively draws in the substance – the blood – of the objects around him or rather, that in them which corresponds or responds to his desire, just as sleepwalkers are said to be acting out their dreams or desires upon their surroundings. The willfully blind yet active moment of vampirism is also that of puncturing the outer shells that disguise objects as things of habit and daily use.

The vampire's passive posture is open-eyed, insofar as seeing is a passive reception of exterior facts, but open-eyed in the other, interior direction, as if he could see inside his own body. Between the side of him that faces outward and the side that faces inward, there is a very delicate threshold, the finest of lines between the moment of active taking and the moment of passive receiving. Passively the vampire watches the substance he has taken from objects, now inside him and animating him from within. Their blood is both his and not his; he consumes it to live, but he is also made up entirely of it. He is the active principle to match the passivity of the objects that await his ministrations, but he is the passive principle to match their quickening activity within him. As with Arnaud and Malet above, he is also a principle of image-formation, caught between the image-flow that arrives in him unbidden and that which, in him, structures these images and creates their conditions of possibility.[36] Luca's vampire is thus an adept of Leonardo's wall, upon

[36] One of the objects Luca constructed and photographed, titled "Pouvoirs latents considérés comme possibilités," features a toy mouse (or perhaps guinea pig) inside a cage posed atop a collage composed of fragments of the human body. Inside the cage is a long talon. The arrangement recalls the one in Naum's "L'Image présente à l'esprit," with its guinea pig and vampire bat. We can most likely see these two creations as arising from a shared discussion about the image, the vampire as liminal being, and the relation between perception and representation.

which active precipitation is indistinguishable from passive acceptance, perception from representation – and a figure par excellence of a surrealist automatist poetics in which action merges with passion, the force that instigates with the instrument that registers. The vampire inhabits the organic-inorganic, subjective-objective space of the crystal, and as a sleepwalker – like those we will encounter in the following chapter – he walks a tightrope of dialectical tensions.

Between the blood that leaves one "body" and the blood that enters another, there is a point difficult to determine at which a property – in the sense of both a possession and a quality – changes hands. Rather than properties however, Luca writes of "zones" – "les zones qui traversent mon être," zones which are "génitales et prégénitales, érotiques et criminelles, noires, féroces, sataniques."[37] This black ferocity is at the same time his own and that of the objects he encounters. Luca-as-vampire describes himself, indeed, as a crossroads of forces, flows and energies.

The effect that all this has is that reality loses its character as obstacle to the free circulation of desire. Reality is now available, to return to Dalí's words, for "l'utilisation irrationnelle aiguë des objets et des 'êtres-objets' qui nous entourent" – or in Luca's words in the passage above, for inhaling pianos, eating staircases. To merely climb a staircase or play a piano would be, of course, to force these objects to present themselves as evidence for a static and unchanging reality, denying them their true potential and closing one's ears to their "demoniac" howl. In a world where pianos are only played, the vampire could not thrive. He is a creature of the marvelous "clearing" between subject

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[37] *Vampire* (55). See also Chapter Four for a possible link between these "zones" and the medical-experimental texts on somnambulism that the members of Infra Noir avidly read. Compare also to the "body without organs" as it appears in Deleuze and Guattari's *L'Anti-Œdipe*, "traversed by axes and gradients, by poles and potentials, by thresholds and zones" (Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 21).

and object. Like Malet's vampire he is a *trait d'union* that both severs and binds, cuts and joins; like Naum's succubus he is a figure of synthesis, fusion, and the spark of the image. All along, *he* was the shadowy figure standing over Lautréamont's dissection table:

> À une autre table d'opération, près de la fenêtre dont les rideaux levés laissent pénétrer les rayons de la lune, le beau, le silencieux vampire. Vêtu d'un habit, les lèvres collées sur un cou dénudé comme un oiseau, il ressemble maintenant à un joueur de flûte exécutant sur des instruments vivants les pulsations du sang.[38]

He presides over the crystal of the *rencontre*; uniting himself to the world with his blood, he is the communicating vessel, in the flesh.

In *Le Vampire passif*, objects frequently break free of the one engaged in their creation and exchange, using him or her as a "médiateur spectateur-acteur" who plays both active and passive roles at once in the elaboration of the *acte-objet*. Here it is not simply that, as Rimbaud writes, "on me pense," but that, in Luca's version, "cet autre qui me pense sorte de moi-même et paraisse devant moi d'une façon concrète et sensible comme tout autre objet extérieur." The object, in order to construct itself and draw other objects into its black ritual orbit, "ordonne et dispose, se servant de nous comme [des] automates qui exécutent dans un sommeil somnambulique des mouvements sans doute nécessaires mais tout-à-fait contraires."[39] Both Luca and Naum write of making themselves a "somnambulistic" substrate for the development of the object's natural or

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[38] Ibid. (53).

[39] See ibid. 44, and 84-85. Noting that Luca's *poupée*-object titled "La Lettre L," intended for André Breton, begins to speak, "à murmurer entre moi et Breton une langue magique et noire, si près du rêve," Carlat writes: "C'est parce qu'une telle abolition, un tel 'raptus', de la subjectivité sont engagés par l'objet que son murmure est nommé 'langue noire,'" for it is a kind of commerce with one's own death, and with one's own "altérité intérieure," as well as with another person. Any sort of fetishistic possession, Carlat adds, is now a dispossession (147). Incidentally the "murmure" that is audible, for Breton, in the act of automatic writing is understood as the voice of language itself, as a reservoir of potentiality (on this see Sarane Alexandrian's "La Psychanalyse et le rêve," in Saporta and Béhar ed., *André Breton, ou, Le surréalisme, même* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1988), 156.

monstrous potential, and while Naum often figures this process as a crystallization or as an encounter with a succubus, for Luca as we have seen it is a kind of active-passive vampirism. The vampire doubles as the *somnambule*.

Luca advances through what was once, in *L'Amour fou*, a forest of *indices* and is now a "forest of objects," where he finds "le front taché de sang […] mes vêtements, ma peau, mes muscles, mes ailes, déchirés par leurs angles agressifs."[40] Winged, already half-demon himself, he can enter the forest of objects without taking fear, but they spur him to further transformation as they wound him, in lines (for example, "mes ongles sont dix couteaux d'acier") closely recalling Lautréamont's *Maldoror*. These same rapacious nails are thinned "jusqu'au fil qui nous accroche aux objets et aux ombres,"[41] for his monstrosity is both what links him to objects and what subjects him to them. That which is monstrous in him both allows and causes him to resemble these objects, both in action and appearance. In the 1945 text *Parcurg imposibilul* (I Roam the Impossible, 1945),[42] for example, Luca and his objects inhabit a "demoniacal atmosphere" in which both parties are endlessly decomposable and recomposable beyond even the "protonic" level. To truly face this fact is to go mad, to disintegrate, to grow wings and claws, to lose one's soul.

On the one hand, Luca writes that all the "poisons froids" within himself are what make him resemble the "infernal objet" before him; the communicating vessels themselves are poisoned, and the poison rises to equal levels in each of its vessels,

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[40] Ibid. (60).

[41] Ibid. (58).

[42] Accompanied by images of "five non-oedipal objects." It appears in the same 1945 volume with *Inventatorul iubirii* (The Inventor of Love) and *Moartea moartă* (Death Dead). Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945.

whatever the shape or volume.[43] On the other hand, this venomous intimacy with the object gives him the same power that poetry and dreams have to recombine the pieces of reality at will, to "offer the object to other objects." All the objects in the world from watches to whales to cathedrals are now so many "fils" that can be endlessly woven and rewoven to make new ones; his own body, the palm of his hand for example, has now become an "écran" on which destiny and desire can be read.

He now has the power, in other words, to "transform the world" (in Breton's words from 1935) and to Act (in Chabrun's) but the price is that he must be forever self-estranged. Luca, in fact, has his own version of the *homme-objet*, one who must wear his own body like a man-suit, like a "chemise de veines et d'artères."[44] There is no longer any image of the human or even of the biological human body to which he conforms. Instead objects, organs, functions or capabilities graft themselves upon him briefly, then dissolve to be replaced by others. He walks the streets wearing on his back a pipe organ whose keys are pressed by vultures and bats, or wearing lungs pinned to his chest like a medal, or wearing a tree or a third eye on his forehead.[45] Luca's rejection of the "fixed" and "rudimentary" biology of the human is inseparable from his developing "non-Oedipal" theory and life-philosophy.[46] In fact, a central definition of non-Oedipality, for Luca, is this very rejection, which results in something not unlike an "appropriation of

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[43] *Vampire* (64).

[44] For offering objects to other objects, ibid. (44). For "fils" see ibid. (54); for the "écran" and shirt of veins see 45 and 41.

[45] *Lup* (7). Here he recalls, again, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, where the presiding voice declares: "Sur ma nuque, comme sur un fumier, pousse un énorme champignon, aux pédoncules ombellifères. […] Mes pieds ont pris racine dans le sol et composent, jusqu'à mon ventre, une sorte de végétation vivace […] qui ne dérive pas encore de la plante, et qui n'est plus de la chair." What was once his (or its) body is home to toads, chameleons, hedgehogs, and jellyfish who have come to replace the organs and parts (*Chant quatrième* of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970, 151-52).

[46] *Inventatorul* (14). A version of the following paragraph appears in my "Dialectical Despair" (*Dada/Surrealism* 20/1, 2014).

unreality" in Agamben's sense. Non-Oedipality also entails a changed relationship to the word "I." The "I" that Luca's non-Oedipus utters is so multiple and attracts so many predicates and attributes as to be meaningless according to ordinary standards. This non-Oedipal body and non-Oedipal "I" compose the "subject" that complements Luca's monstrous objects and the new regime of object relations he calls for. When it comes to objects, there can be no revolution unless every action, however minute or ordinary, is revolutionary, torn apart and reinvented: combing one's hair, eating with a fork. The predatory ferocity and "inhuman" hybridity of non-Oedipus is the minimum needed to attain escape velocity from the Oedipal prison. But again, it makes the non-Oedipal being constantly prey to the ferocity of objects: the eye that sees and the thing that is seen are like "two ravenous wolves" tearing at each other.[47]

It sounds a bit strange, but in this way Luca figures the interdependence of the two Surrealist goals of "transforming the world" and "changing life" as a kind of mutual lycanthropy, more generally a reciprocal predation. And in Luca's work the malleability, the susceptibility of the world to monstrous transformation often takes the form of a distinctly gothic atmospherics: the non-Oedipal monster and the monstrous object co-inhabit a shadowy, labyrinthine world of hidden doors and mechanisms. In *Le Vampire passif*, Luca and his objects sleepwalk "arm in arm" through a kind of spider-infested castle-museum. Trap-doors and windows, dark corridors, subterranean tunnels, springs that open secret panels or set dark devices in motion, all appear throughout Luca's work on the object, and dovetail closely with his other concerns. A landscape, for example, opens suddenly in a pair of sandals "like a door." Given to him as a gift by a woman, the sandals suddenly begin to breathe, dream, writhe, go mad beneath his feet. They become

[47] *Lup* (82 and 31).

riddled with long corridors, with trap-doors both terrifying and seductive; they become literal gothic castles, "these castle-sandals […] magnetic, subterranean."[48] I touch a fork, Luca writes elsewhere,

> and unleash a whole network of possibilities, a very complicated machine is put in motion as if the fork were a factory of questions, impulses and spectres, inside it a door opens toward a corridor […] another door leads to a window or the bottom of a well.[49]

He locates "the strictly forbidden entrance of these dentures, the back-door exit of the window or the servant's staircase leading into stones." Look, he adds, how many possibilities there are of doing "exactly the opposite of everything imposed on us."[50]

The metaphor of the button or the switch that pops open secret doors and wall-panels is as highly charged for Luca as that of the door. The following passage from Breton's *Nadja* echoes loudly in Luca's work:

> Il se peut que la vie demande à être déchiffrée comme un cryptogramme. Des escaliers secrets, des cadres dont les tableaux glissent rapidement et disparaissent […] des boutons sur lesquels on fait très indirectement pression et qui provoquent le déplacement en hauteur, en longueur, de toute une salle et le plus rapide changement de décor: il est permis de concevoir la plus grande aventure de l'esprit comme un voyage de ce genre au paradis des pièges.[51]

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[48] See *Lup* 35-36, 84, 86, and 101; for sandals, *A Oniriza lumea* (unpaginated.) The sandals also gain a kind of prophetic density: Luca is convinced that if he knew the number of hammer blows it took to make the heel, he would know how many days he had left on earth.

[49] *Lup* (53). I also discussed Luca's doors, dark corridors, and panels, alongside Main à Plume's predatory furniture, in a talk titled "Monstrous Objects" at a 2012 graduate student conference at the University of Ontario.

[50] *Lup* (55) and *Inventatorul* (19). For Breton windows often function, like Luca's doors, as an index of the marvelous. He writes for example in *L'Amour fou*: "Je t'aime jusqu'à me perdre dans l'illusion qu'une fenêtre est pratiquée dans un pétale du datura trop opaque ou trop transparente" (111). In an essay on the paintings of Victor Brauner, he muses that "entre les corps et les objets les intervalles mêmes sont mal surveillés, il tend à s'y ouvre des fenêtres." ("Victor Brauner, entre chien et loup," *Oeuvres IV*, 499). In *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, he writes: "il m'est impossible de considérer un tableau autrement que comme une fenêtre dont mon premier souci est de savoir sur quoi *elle donne*" (*Oeuvres IV*, 351). Along Luca's lines see also Virgil Teodorescu in *Blănurile oceanelor* (The Furs of the Oceans, 1945): "Objects will assume their lost signification / The aggressive revolutionary face / That they have in them like a hidden trapdoor" (Mincu, 469).

[51] *Nadja* (133).

For Luca, anything at all can become a *bouton*: in *A Oniriza lumea* he wonders for example whether, if he touches a certain object, a door will open somewhere far away, or if all the lights will go off in the city of Bucharest. Any two distant things or events can be linked via this causal device, just as, for Breton and his group, the word *comme* is a hallowed device of juxtaposition in the construction of surrealist images. Luca's lover has a fever, he writes, because he opened a book about whales to the 57th page; he dreams of the sea because he is wearing black pajamas; it is 5pm because he is wearing gloves; the World War at his doorstep continues because he keeps looking in the mirror. Between the "button" and the phenomenon linked to it lies a potentially vast field of action and consequence in which each small event becomes a message and each of his acts and gestures a response to it. Whatever enters this field, much as upon Breton's *écran* in *L'Amour fou*, gains at once a decipherability and a content to be deciphered. And as with *L'Amour fou* it is the desiring self, or desire itself, that pushes the fateful button, that sets out the *appât* – or whose teeth, perhaps, make the first puncture – actively inaugurating the flow of signs and portents, which it then passively receives and interprets. Luca writes in *Lup* of "this inhuman and counterhuman world being born around me, almost without my will (I did nothing but utter a formula, press a button, I'm nothing but a snowball in the avalanche of determinants)."[52] He has only, as it were, dipped a baton into a salt-saturated solution, and watched the crystals form.

In Breton's "paradis de pièges" in *Nadja*, the textuality of decipherment is linked to the spatiality of corridors and stairways. Likewise in *L'Amour fou* as we have seen, the act of projecting and interpreting upon an *écran* opens out into three dimensions, to the "monde moral" and the world of actions. Luca takes what had begun in *L'Amour fou* as a

[52] *Lup* (96).

forest of signs, of *indices*, and transforms them into a "forêt d'objets," and then into a forest of acts. The unpublished collective manifesto "Déclaration sur la portée exacte de l'outrance poétique," for example, compares the practice of "automatic action" to a "forêt de gestes." As his career progresses of course, Luca wanders once more into the forest of signs, from physical to verbal objects.[53] He composes the "stuttering," combinatorial, anagrammatic, pulsing and searching poetry for which he is increasingly known as a French-language poet. But as Luca repeatedly makes clear, "celui qui ouvre le mot ouvre la matière" – in other words, the poem is the key to the various hidden doors into reality, and has as its goal "la transmutation du réel."[54] Or as Naum writes, while "in the limitless prolixity of the Word lie all the hopes of thought," at the same time this poetic thought is aligned with "the hope of the object in its frenetic unfolding in all directions."[55] The prolixity of the Word and the hope of the object constantly refer back to each other. Luca's unpublished 1940 text *Anatomia literii* (Anatomy of Letters) develops a parallel between objects – which, once given names, functions and definitions, become obstacles to desire – and the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, trapped within fixed words. To clear a path for desire to act in the world, one must free both letters and objects at once, unleashing them upon a single plane where they meet and part, forming and reforming assemblages and acts, "crystals" and "precipitations." This is why the presiding figure of the text is Breton's *écran*, and why the text's epigraphic opening invokes the "lettres phosphorescentes […] lettres de *désir*" decipherable upon it. These phosphorescent

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53 The reference to "verbal objects" is Fijalkowski's, who observes a progressive "rarefaction" of the concrete object in favor of the objectivating powers and material latencies of language (270-71).
54 Serge Bricianer, "Le Poème s'éclipse devant ses conséquences: Gherasim Luca par Serge Bricianer," in *Oiseau-tempête* 4 (1998), 29-33.
55 Letter to Victor Brauner of June 27, 1946. In *Athanor* 2 (41-42.)

letters are also objects, and also acts, all found in a state of potentiality or virtuality upon the *écran* whose substance is the possible itself.

It makes perfect sense, then, that one of Luca's signature genres is the cubomania. Luca coined the word "cubomania" in the mid-40s to refer to the practice of slicing a found image into a grid of equally-sized squares, then rearranging the squares. In the catalog for the January 1945 exhibition that he did with Trost, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets* (Sala Brezoianu, Bucharest), Luca specifies that his cubomanias also function as a model of comportment within the world, and returns to the theme of "living" collage that also appears in Trost's work:

> […] choissisez trois chaises, deux chapeaux, quelques pierres ou parapluies, plusieurs arbres, trois femmes nues et cinq très habillées, soixante hommes, quelques maisons, des voitures […]. Coupez tout en petits morceaux […] et mélangez les bien dans une grande place de la ville. Reconstituez d'après les lois du hasard ou de votre caprice et vous obtiendrez un paysage, un objet ou une très belle femme inconnue or reconnue, la femme et la paysage de vos désirs.[56]

As for the woman that appears here amid the ruined and reconstituted landscape, Luca explains (in a letter to Brauner the following year) that his idea is to transform the feminine object of his love from "tout fait" to an "objet à faire, refaire, à tout faire."[57] What this means is to carry out a cubomania upon her body and being, paying no mind to her "côtés biologiques, apparemment fixes et infranchissables." In the meantime he is himself "a monstrous lover in love with a monstrous, unnatural, inhuman woman," and

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[56] Gherasim Luca and Trost, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets* (Bucharest: Independența, 1945), unpaginated. O.O.O.s are also featured in this catalog, as well as well as non-Oedipal "objets construits à distance à l'aide d'un medium." The titles of the displayed works also form significant texts in themselves, evoking something in between science projects, sleight-of-hand tricks, pataphysics and magic. Completing the picture is a selection of thaumatropes, phenakisticopes and praxinoscopes. The catalog also lists a series of "cubomanic" behaviors, which includes fetishism and touching objects in the dark.

[57] Letter of 1946, in Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances* (220-221). This ambition brings Luca's project close to that of Hans Bellmer in works like *La Poupée* (1935) and "L'Anatomie de l'amour" (which appeared in the catalog for the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*), as well as to Brauner in his series "Anatomie du désir" (1935-1938). See *Victor Brauner: dans les collections du MNAM*, 63-66).

what's more, he is made even less human by her. It is woman's task to teach man – that "Occidental fetish" – to disappear, entering the "mineral, vegetable" realm and becoming a "gaming-table of the elements," and empty, rapturous locus of endless encounter.[58]

For Luca, woman symbolizes, enacts, and incarnates this exit from the human order, and ultimately from the Obstacle itself. She is the ultimate monstrous object; her special power to make her partner more inhuman derives from her status, in effect, as a living emissary from the object-world.[59] Finally, regardless of the fact that in the above cubomanic *acte-objet* sixteen men participate alongside the clothed and unclothed women (as if these were two different species), the construction of the Ultimate Woman – interchangeable as she is with landscape or with object – is the point of the exercise. A process that might otherwise keep expanding into the world at large is resolved into a single feminine body, albeit composed, like a bride of Frankenstein, of heterogeneous matter. For Infra Noir as a whole, moreover, a much-desired trans- or post-human accession to the world of objects is too often figured as a physical violation of a female body – one way, one supposes, of conceptualizing "l'unité de l'action et de la passion."[60]

Around the time of the Brezoianu exhibition of cubomanias and objects, Naum, Păun, and Virgil Teodorescu signed their tract *Critica mizeriei* (Critique of Poverty), the one that accused Luca and Trost, among other things, of "mysticism."[61] Although they do not state it directly, the "mysticism" that they refer to here belongs to (for them) a

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58 *Inventatorul* (26-32).

59 This is precisely her role in Trost's *Visible et Invisible*, where Woman (capital W) appears as the Object par excellence and as the "jeune fille-femme […] réplique ready-made et trouvée du monde extérieur (27-28).

60 The phrase is Păun's, in *Esprits* (7). Here he calls his readers to wake up a sleeping, stultified planet Earth: "Frappons-là dans le sexe!"; "Violons la belle aveugle!"

61 Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, and Virgil Teodorescu, *Critica mizeriei* (Bucharest: Colecția Suprarealistă, 1945), 6. For more on this tract see Chapters One and Two; for the significance of the term "mysticism" in this context, see Chapter Two.

particularly irritating passage from Luca's *Lup*: "What sick mind, what loathsome, ironic brain," Luca asks, could identify love with "this occasional, partial, amputated, episodic, superficial, spermatozoidal and sentimental preoccupation that is physical love between woman and man within the human species?" Naum et al.'s citation ends here, but Luca continues:

> If what people call love is the meeting of two stupid hearts and two rudimentary sexes […] I prefer on my part to open the dictionary at random and say horse in place of their love, fork in place of their death, burnt sugar in place of their liberty, peeler in place of their embraces, threshing machine or sphere or trigonometry in place of anything that concerns them.[62]

Naum et al. condemn Luca for this attitude, and place themselves, they add, alongside both André Breton and Karl Marx in their affirmation of standard heterosexual lovemaking.

It is clear that in Infra Noir texts (recalling, for example, the "demoniality" of Naum's *Medium*), experiments with unexplored sexualities are frequently found side by side with a retrenchment of existing modes of sexual and/or interpersonal relation. Luca's "très belle femme inconnue," at the same time, enlarges the meaning of "woman" (and of "man") via the incursion of a literal pan-demonium of objects, and diminishes the metamorphic power of the object to the limited scope of masculine heterosexual desire. Talking about objects permits Infra Noir to talk about love, sex and eroticism in daring ways, but also leaves room for their ambivalence. At one moment, the object is a solid confirmation of deeply-held prejudices, and at the next, it is the Other itself, the always-just-beyond, continuously demanding that one think or act otherwise.

Luca's unpublished 1945 text "Androïde contre androgyne" features lovers who

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[62] *Lup* (80). The dispute about love between Luca's and Naum's factions is also discussed in my article in *Dada/Surrealism* (2014).

wear *loups* – masquerade half-masks that prevent their resolution into predetermined persons or things, but that are also a mark of their wolfish monstrosity, and that like a jeweler's loupe alter their vision. The text also calls these lovers diamonds, or crystals, and their act of lovemaking is called a "systematic" simulation. "Androïde contre androgyne" stages an encounter between the logic of the double – a twoness that seeks oneness, figured as two lines joined by a third to form a closed triangle – and that of the "triple," figured by an open "Y." In the triple, a concept that appears throughout Infra Noir texts, the unity of the triangle becomes a simple bifurcation, open to further bifurcations.[63] In its potential for endless elaboration, the Y represents for Luca several processes at once. Just as poetry once opened itself out toward written automatism, now love will open out toward surautomatism, here called "surautomatisme de l'action" – a variation on the Infra Noir "somnambulism" discussed the following chapter. Likewise, the fantasy of a paradisal union between subject and object, following the logic of the double and of the "androgyne," now makes way for the android, the incarnation of the triple: "il transforme la forme humaine en informe, en objet en plein formation, effervescent, libre, indiscernable." Thus the triple transforms, all at once, the object, the human body, love, and worldly action.

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[63] Manuscript found at Doucet (50425 GHL ms13), also quoted in Toma (204). See Monique Yaari, "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence,'" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir un et multiple* (186) for an account of Păun's use of a loupe in his artmaking to obtain effects of "fibres fines, réseaux, lacis, tissages, nuages." See also Naum's late book *Zenobia*, where the woman of the title is compared to a *lupă* – a loupe. In a letter to Victor Brauner written from Jaffa (1951, Doucet GHL ms188), Luca proposes that the painter find him a woman in Paris willing to lie down at a certain hour wearing nothing but a *loup*, with parts of her body doused in various perfumes. The idea is that, thousands of miles away, Luca will be able to smell her with his "monstrous" nostrils (compare to the sur-international rendez-vous a month earlier). Their proposed olfactory joining across space is characterized as both a monstrous and an "androidal" act. The word "androïde" also has a specific meaning in the domain of practical magic: androids were "des automates auxquels leurs auteurs avaient, par un procédé secret, donné l'intelligence et la parole. Le plus célèbre est la fameux androïde d'Albert-le-Grand qui […] discutait un point de théologie avec saint Thomas d'Aquin." From Paul Nougé's 1938 "Notes sur la magie" (Brussels: Les Lèvres Nues, 1972). Unpaginated.

In the space governed by the triple, only monsters, androids and *êtres-objets* can freely move, exchanging blood, members, parts and properties with everything around them. In Luca's vision, "I witness the monstrous pairing of objects with the feeling of participating as spectator-actor […]. I listen to the passionate howls that atoms communicate to me, I plunge in my teeth, drawing blood from wood, stone, paper, rags, I myself a rag among these objects of flesh." He walks – erect, priapic – among them as their breathing accelerates with passion, and presides over their lovemaking, "capital orgy on the margins of love, at the borders of dream." This is *amorul scăpat din închisoarea umană, amorul ieşit din om* (love freed from its human prison, love outside the human.)[64] Letters, objects and corporeal fragments rise in a whirlwind over the ruins of the double, "les ruines de l'ombre, de l'ombre projetée sur un mur."[65] The logic of the double would have it that wall and shadow, image and projection screen, must be utopically and androgynically reconciled. Luca has it instead that they remain in mutually transformative dialogue, mutual negation, and negation of negation, once again like facing "active" mirrors.

Luca warns in "Androïde contre androgyne": "Et surtout ne dévoilez pas la belle inconnue. Car une fois dévoilée, elle n'est plus celle qui était à dévoiler." The question he is asking is, how does one talk about or approach the unknown without resolving it into the known? As a form of response to this question, we have been seeing – on the part of Infra Noir, along with Main à Plume and others – what looks like a project of "destroy[ing] the boundary between the body and the world of objects," to borrow the words of Theodor Adorno. But Adorno adds that this particular Surrealist project tends to

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[64] *Lup* (49-52), in "Te iubesc." Published as "Je t'aime" on December 7, 1964 in the Surrealist magazine *La Brêche – action surréaliste* – Luca's first appearance in a surrealist journal.
[65] "Androïde contre androgyne," unpaginated manuscript.

turn against itself, for "the more subjectivity renounces its right over the world of objects, aggressively announcing the supremacy of that world, the more willing it is to accept at the same time the traditionally established form of the world of objects."[66] Thus the question about the unknown is also a question about the Obstacle: how does one fight it without reinforcing its grip?

Adorno elsewhere wonders whether – at least in the specific case of the commodity object – it might be possible to "appropriat[e] the fetishization of commodities" for oneself: "everything must metamorphose into a thing in order to break the catastrophic spell of things"[67] In this reversal that recalls Agamben's move above, it may be that the key is to continue assaulting the boundary between the body and the world of objects, but to refuse to renounce one's rights over this world, continuing to act both within and against it.

In *Medium*, Gellu Naum channels these issues through his various monsters. He imagines, for example, "that sirens can sing us their most phenomenal melodies without that so tempting danger of shipwreck, that vampires can be observed […] without giving them the smallest drop of blood."[68] What is at stake here, again, is whether one can approach the monstrous, the *belle inconnue*, or the Other in general, without "castrating" it with names and familiar concepts, and/or turning it into mere literature. In the meantime there is the danger, from the other side, of renouncing one's rights – of disappearing into that other, becoming a mute and passive part of it. The question is whether it is possible to truly hear the voice of the siren without spiraling into the abyss; it is one of how to dream and imagine while remaining rooted in the objective, material

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[66] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 51n.
[67] Theodor Adorno, "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in *Prisms* (London: Spearman 1967), 233.
[68] *Medium* (89).

world; how to approach the blunt reality of the object while continuing to imagine and to dream; how to approach the "belle inconnue" which is also the promise of the future, of a revolution in thought and life, without stifling it with the known and the present; and finally, how to struggle against the known and the present while remaining in closest intimacy with it.

For Infra Noir, the greatest hope lay in what they called "somnambulism" and specifically in "automatic action," which maintains the delicate balance between action and passion that is required on this shifting territory. This is the subject of the next chapter. In the meantime the present chapter ends with a pair of sailors: Homer's Ulysses and Melville's Captain Ahab. In the version recounted by Maurice Blanchot, Ulysses faced with the sirens wants to "play safely with unreal (inspired) powers." By tying himself to the mast, he keeps real and imaginary, interior and exterior, self and other, firmly separate. Ahab leaves these distinctions behind, but only by giving in to his own monstrous siren, who tows him down into the ocean's deep. Ulysses masters the song of the sirens, but fails to really hear it; the moment he possesses it as a nameable, personal experience, it is lost to him. Ahab hears the song in every fiber, but he will not survive to tell any tales. Infra Noir might reread this story to say that both the "active" subject-position – represented by Ulysses – and the "passive" object-position – represented by Ahab – fail on their own. Neither the deaf and blind "mastery" of the sovereign subject, nor shipwreck on the ecstatic shores of the object, will suffice. But somewhere between, beneath or above these two options, is the possibility of a pure encounter with the other, the revolutionary future, the outside.[69]

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[69] "La Rencontre de l'imaginaire" (1954). In English as "Encountering the Imaginary" in *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 5-7.

Luca's "belle inconnue" is a siren. She is many other things: a monstrous female counterpart to all the monstrous bodies he inhabits; a new language of objects, letters, *lettres-objets* and *êtres-objets*; an embodiment of sensual, prophetic madness; or as in "Androïde contre androgyne," the Triple, the Other, the Always Elsewhere. How does one, he asks, capture such a being, defined precisely as what is always beyond capture? How does one avoid being blinded by the known in one's search for the unknown? In response, in this latter text, Luca enigmatically describes a "wolf of the forest" – a *loup* – standing fascinated before a masquerade mask – another *loup*. The monster facing the simulacrum: "somnambules, rêveurs en action" – objects that act.

Together, they form the monstrous and simulacral body of the objective self. Like Breton's *écran*, this "object-position" is an interface between active and passive, Ulysses and Ahab, known and unknown. An interstitial body, it lives in the space of erotic *rencontre* where atoms and letters recombine, and plays upon the stage of the *acte-objet*.

Chapter Four. Infra Noir, Somnambulism, and Automatic Action

–A somnambulist walking upon the roofs has a sacred right not to be called by his name.
— Friedrich Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, 1880.

1. A Dream Walking: What is Somnambulism?

Since leaving Paris in 1940 in the shadow of German occupation, Gherasim Luca had longed intensely to return. But upon his arrival in France in 1952, he met with painful rejection. Luca's friend Sarane Alexandrian recounts that, though André Breton liked Luca's work a great deal, many of Breton's newer colleagues (Jean Schuster and José Pierre among them) joining him at weekly Surrealist café meetings did not. Alexandrian claims that Trost, who had arrived in Paris shortly before Luca and after a violent personal conflict between the two, "s'était présenté comme le véritable fondateur du groupe surréaliste roumain […] de ce fait Luca passa pour un intrus." It is for this reason, he adds, with Schuster at the helm of *Médium* (1952-53) and *Le Surréalisme, même* (1956-59) that Luca appears nowhere in these surrealist magazines.[1] In August 1953, Luca writes to Breton as a warm but distant friend. Since arriving in Paris, he says, everything has conspired against their finally meeting face to face, a fact directly connected, he feels, to the malefic forces holding humankind in slavery, as well as to

[1] Sarane Alexandrian, *L'Évolution de Ghérasim Luca à Paris / Evoluția lui Gherasim Luca la Paris* (Bucharest: Vinea/ICARE, 2006), 14. Trost, on the other hand, shows up here and there in the productions and games of the Breton group in 1952 and 1953. See also Epilogue.

events that Luca only alludes to: a mysterious document circulated in the Surrealist group, for example, full of calumnious information concerning Luca's private life.[2]

Almost immediately after his arrival in Paris, Luca had sent out a call for action to the members of Breton's group but also to others surreally inclined, scattered across the map. Urgently underlined capital letters across the top of this missive read: "Le pouvoir à la chimère par le passage du dormeur au somnambule. Êtes-vous prêt à engager votre vie dans cette voie?" A paragraph below explains that those who have made their catabasis in search of the "real functioning" of thought – as the first manifesto of Surrealism urged in 1924 – now carry within them "la virtualité d'une démarche dirigée vers les mobiles du geste," which is to say the potential to discover the "fonctionnement réel de l'action." Luca suggests, in other words, not only that it is possible to map the workings of the mind as it is surreally understood, examined, and manipulated onto the movements of the body, but that the destiny of automatic writing is to transition into a kind of automatic action. The key figure here is the somnambulist – the *somnambule*. In fact, for Luca the question boils down to the following: What hope can we place, at this time, in somnambulists?

This question seems to have stunned even Luca's more sympathetic correspondents into silence (if it did not simply perplex them, or fail to interest them at all); he received only one or two responses. After a time, he addressed a longer message to certain of his would-be interlocutors, where he admitted that there might be some confusion as to the definition of "somnambulist." This was a fairly safe bet: even placing aside Luca's unique approach to the phenomenon, and that of the Infra Noir group as a

[2] Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (BRT e. 1064). If this document did exist, it was probably linked to personal conflicts between Trost, Luca, and the artist Mirabelle Dors. The three had worked together in Jaffa before arriving in Paris. See also Epilogue.

whole, "somnambulism" is a word that has filled many, widely different functions over the course of its history.

One tends to think first of literal sleep-walking; the imagery and popular lore surrounding this troubling but common phenomenon had already been centuries in the making. The general outline of this body of lore is expertly drawn in a short cartoon called "Sleepy Time Donald" released by Walt Disney in May 1947 – a very prolific year, incidentally, for Infra Noir. Donald Duck rises from his bed with eyes closed and hands forward. His sleepwalking state affords him a kind of sixth sense with respect to his surroundings, and he is able to coherently interact with others both verbally and physically, but he can still comically mistake a boot, for example, for his hat. Significantly – though at the risk of travestying Disney – his first act is to locate the bedroom of the nearest sleeping female, much to her initial terror. She eventually agrees to play along with the nighttime "date" he proposes, but is continually startled by his mild attempts upon her virtue. Later, playing on the familiar image of the sleepwalker balancing along rooftops, blind but far more surefooted than when awake, Donald walks straight up the sides of buildings, even upside down on ceilings and ledges, tracing an alternative, Escher-like topography of the sleeping town.[3] Though in cartoons the laws of physics tend in any case to be flexible, these scenes also illustrate how closely "natural somnambulism" or sleepwalking had come to be associated with a range of other states that pushed the limits of human potential – from clairvoyant "magnetic sleep" and "artificial somnambulism" in the 18th century to hypnosis, hysteria and even ritual magic in the 19th.

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[3] In the same vein see also the comic book "Bugs Bunny Sleepwalking Sleuth" (New York: Dell, 1949) and the Popeye cartoon "A Dream Walking" (Fleischer Studios, 1934) where characters perform a sleepwalking ballet on the beams of a building in construction.

At the close of the 18th century, natural sleepwalking is understood as a state governed primarily by the imagination. The imagination allows the sleepwalker essentially to simulate the senses, like sight, that are unavailable to him. Once the imagination's "attention" is directed toward surrounding objects, it can incorporate them into this simulation. This imagination-perception is often far more nuanced and accurate than ordinary perception, but is also influenced both by dream-like images and by impulses and facts remembered from the waking state. In sleepwalking, the imagination thus creates a kind of alternative interface with material reality, in which the somnambulist continues to act upon this reality while seeing it as other than it is.[4] It is around this time in the late 18th century that, as historian Henri Ellenberger writes, sleepwalking "became the focal point of all discussions of imagination," as stories proliferated of sleepwalkers walking on the rooftops "whose lives were endangered if they were suddenly called by their names and wakened."[5]

Sleepwalking, over time, comes to stand not only for the powers of the imagination but for a kind of intuitive, even ecstatic knowledge, beyond ordinary waking consciousness.[6] The sleepwalker also eventually becomes, in the words of an early 19th century medical encyclopedia, "a dreamer who is able to act his dreams." Sleepwalkers' essential difference from ordinary dreamers, however, is that while the latter exist in an "ideal world," the former "are conversant with actually existing and material objects."

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4 See for example *Encyclopædia Britannica* Vol. 17 (1797), third edition. Entry "Sleepwalkers," under SLEEP (534-37).

5 Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: the History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 112.

6 The Romanian writer Max Blecher (see also Chapter Three), in *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* (Bucharest: Editura Vinea, 1999), describes a circus spectator who leaps the barrier and climbs a tower of tables and chairs that an acrobat has just performed on, "drunk with a kind of equilibrial expertise, replete with unconsciousness" (103). But when this sublime unconsciousness suddenly leaves him, he has to be helped down. The narrator of *Întâmplări* longs on many occasions for just such a state of oblivious confidence – of perfect somnambulist balance.

Within this atmosphere of waking dream, talk of imagination gives way to talk of desire. What bears no relation to the somnambulist's desire essentially ceases to exist, while what he does desire now exists more fully. Desire becomes, just as for the imagination, a new interface between mind and reality.[7]

Several important events have occurred, and are still in process, in between late 18th- and early 19th-century accounts of natural somnambulism. To begin with: Alexandre J. F. Bertrand's influential *Traité du Somnambulisme* (1823) comments on the curious but well-documented fact that, while upon awakening, sleepwalkers do not remember any of their activities or newly acquired abilities, upon their return to the somnambulistic state with its total forgetfulness of waking life, all these earlier nighttime memories flood back in. "Somnambulism," Bertrand writes, "thus constitutes really a new life, returning at unequal intervals, connected together by a new species of memory."[8] Bertrand and many others marvel that the diurnal self appears to be doubled by an other, nocturnal self, to be revealed and explored within certain exceptional states. What is happening, in other words, is that the self has begun to split in two – in a process of mitosis that will culminate with the Freudian unconscious at the turn of the century.

The memory-related phenomena associated with natural sleepwalking were not alone, of course, in inspiring this gradual conceptual mitosis. It is also of central importance that for researchers like Bertrand, the word "somnambulism" no longer refers simply to the phenomenon of sleepwalking. Bertrand, for one, is an adept in the growing disciplines of mesmerism and of animal magnetism, and readily distinguishes natural

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[7] *Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine,* Vol. 4 (1835). Entry "Somnambulism and Animal Magnetism" (22). It might be objected that these desires tend to be fairly conservative: sleepwalking servants carry on with their scouring and needlework, clerks carry on with their rows of figures, vicars carry on writing sermons.
[8] Quoted in ibid. (22).

sleepwalking from a certain "artificial somnambulism" more akin to magnetic and mesmeric states – a variation on somnambulism that was, for early spelunkers of the human mind like Bertrand, a new and fairly astounding discovery.

In the 1770s, Franz Anton Mesmer had discovered the existence of animal magnetism, and of a vital fluid that traverses all things and can be directed or redirected, intensified or slackened, by individuals of sufficient will and focus of attention. An early disciple of Mesmer writes that since this universal fluid is what causes all celestial as well as earthly bodies to act and impress themselves upon each other, animal magnetism is precisely man's faculty of being "susceptible of all these relations."[9] It is what, in general, governs the degree of susceptibility to relation, to impression, and to the "intensity of the action exercised over us" by external objects – just as telescopes, microscopes and jeweler's loupes do for the eyes. In the words of another disciple, the vital fluid is a "feu élémentaire […] une substance extrêmement subtile et élastique"; it is not only the chain that unites all being but that by which "tous les agrégats se composent." As a direct point of contact between the immaterial soul and physical action, inner being and the outside word, the vital fluid is something like a hybrid "âme matérielle."[10] It is also energized by human will and desire: "sachez vouloir" is one motto accredited by his French followers to Mesmer.

As the vital fluid circulates in the human body, it often meets obstacles or blockages. It is one of the tasks of the mesmerist-magnetist to bring on a "crisis" or "revolution" whose result is, "by an increase of the motion of the force, attention, and action of the magnetic fluid, to disperse the obstacles which oppose the circulation, to

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[9] *Animal Magnetism and Somnambulism*, by the Somnambule Adolphe Didier (London: T.C. Newby, 1856), 50.
[10] A.-A. Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* (London: 1786), 1.

dissolve and evacuate the atoms which formed them, and to reestablish the harmony and equilibrium of all the parts of the body."[11] This "crisis" tends to produce convulsions, paroxysms, "evacuations," or even states of strange lethargy in the magnetized subject.

A decade after the advent of animal magnetism, A.M.J. de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur, made a discovery that changed everything. Puységur, attempting to "magnetize" a young man in his service, saw that he displayed none of the traditional symptoms of the crisis. Rather, writes Ellenberger, "he fell into a strange kind of sleep in which he seemed to be more awake and aware than in his normal waking state." He had no memory of this state upon awakening.[12] Puységur at first called this state, following Mesmer, the "perfect crisis," and later, noting its apparently close relationship to natural sleepwalking, called it artificial somnambulism. Ellenberger comments, "we can hardly realize today how incredible and fantastic Puységur's assertion must have seemed to his contemporaries, that somnambulism could be induced and stopped artificially almost at will and used in the investigation of the most hidden secrets of the human mind."[13] Artificial somnambulism shared certain qualities with natural sleepwalking: a kind of consciousness in between sleep and waking, partaking of both and limited to neither; a certain suggestibility readily associated with the state of what we now call hypnosis; an obliviousness to the outside world combined with a clairvoyance that allows interaction with this world.

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[11] Ibid. (58-59).
[12] Ellenberger (71).
[13] Ibid. (112).

The two somnambulisms also shared a "state-dependent" or "punctuated" memory.[14] An artificial somnambulist, like the natural kind, often displays an altered personality or a changed set of abilities and concerns, but forgets these utterly in the waking state, only to take up their thread again without hesitation upon returning to the magnetized state. The waking self in turn, unaware that anything at all has occurred, will take up its activities as if there had been no interruption, continuing a sentence begun while awake, for example. Once again, the self is riven between two poles, one with its seeming rationality and stability, the other with its echoing and unknowable depths. This was a profoundly disruptive idea with regard both to personal identity and to social norms. This second self, some suspected, was "a reflection of our true being," a "naked soul [that] could be as poetically brutal as it was poetically intellectual," and that might dangerously break free into the public sphere.[15]

Psycho-physiological experimenter Henri-Étienne Beaunis writes on somnambulistic phenomena in 1886:

> On connaît les dragages faits dans ces derniers temps par les naturalistes pour étudier le fond de la mer; on jette la sonde et on ramène à bord des échantillons qui nous font connaître ce qu'est la vie animale dans les profondeurs de l'Océan. Ici n'en est-il pas de même? On jette, pour ainsi dire, la sonde dans les profondeurs de l'âme humaine et on ramène des phrases, des idées, des sentiments qui vous font pénétrer dans les dessous de la vie morale, dans ce qu'il y a en nous de plus secret et de plus mystérieux.[16]

There is, Beaunis continues, an "être virtuel" that lies at the benthic depths of the human,

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[14] "State-dependent" is Gauld's term in *History of Hypnotism* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992). "Punctuated memory" belongs to Henri-Étienne Beaunis in *Le Somnambulisme provoqué* (Paris: Baillière, 1887).

[15] Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul*: *A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2003), 21.

[16] Beaunis (197-198). Incidentally, for an account of the mysteriously populated depths of the sea as a metaphor in Surrealism's relationship to the unconscious, see Pascaline Mourier-Casile, "Du pagure à l'agate," in *André Breton ou Le surréalisme même*, ed. Saporta and Béhar (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1988), 141-153.

and that can, at any moment, rise up "à nu dans toute sa sincérité." Beaunis emphasizes the ease and rapidity of transition between "la vie ordinaire" and "la vie somnambulique" – and in a way that recalls the theory and thematics of "shock" that will link modernist aesthetics to urban modernity, he speculates that what provokes such a transition is "un choc inattendu," an "arrêt […] comme on arrête brusquement au passage un individu qui court ou une pierre qui tombe."[17]

In all the controversies and experiments surrounding both natural and artificial somnambulism, a history of the unconscious and of the split subject emerges that is inseparable from the history of the term "somnambulism."[18] Via Puységur and his successors moreover, the figure of the *somnambule* joins the imageries and popular mythologies of natural sleepwalking to the rise and fall of mesmerism and animal magnetism. This makes the *somnambule* a rather complex entity. The somnambulist on the rooftops, the somnambulist in the hands of the mesmerists and magnetizers, and – with the rise of clinical psychiatry – the hypnotized patient in the hands of the psychiatrist, and even the hysteric on theatrical display, across many efforts toward categorization and recategorization, can never quite be separated. This is particularly the case with the *somnambule* as he or she appears in Infra Noir texts.

Amid all this, the somnambulist also wanders – eyes closed and hands outstretched, to be sure – across the European cultural and artistic landscape. In German Romanticism, speculations on somnambulism develop into "a full-blown counter-metaphysics directed wholesale against Enlightenment rationalism." The daylight self, stultified by the senses, is asleep to the truths of the spirit, while the nocturnal, dreaming

[17] Beaunis (117, 230-231).

[18] See for example Ellenberger: "The first dynamic psychiatry evolved around one particular condition: spontaneous somnambulism, and its artificially induced counterpart, hypnosis" (121).

self is truly awake, directly linked by ley-lines to profoundest reality, both material and immaterial.[19] In the somnambulist, these two selves collide: the night-world of poetry, prophecy and dream can now walk abroad. Somnambulists also found a place amid the magicians and mystics of the French *fin de siècle* esoteric and occult revival, where theories circulated freely between occult and scientific-psychiatric circles. Éliphas Lévi, influential occultist and author of *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, offers advice for communicating with the sidereal forms of the dead:

> pour voir ces formes étranges, il faut se mettre dans un état exceptionnel, qui tient du sommeil et de la mort, c'est-à-dire qu'il faut se magnétiser soi-même et arriver à une sorte de somnambulisme lucide et éveillé. La nécromancie obtient donc des résultats réels, et les évocations de la magie peuvent produire des visions véritables.[20]

After artificial somnambulism was taken up, then abandoned, by the European scientific establishment within the space of a few decades, it first joined forces with the wave of séances and table turnings in the mid-19th century, and then was rehabilitated under a parade of new names as the 20th century unfurled. Alongside the rise of Freudian psychoanalysis, it became a mainstay of the French bohemian underworld. Historian John Monroe writes, "doctors and aristocrats continued to pursue their experiments [in mesmerist somnambulism] but increasingly found their ranks swelled with journalists, Romantic Socialists, literary writers, and visionary working-class autodidacts." The somnambulists who navigated the currents of Mesmer's universal vital fluid became

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[19] See Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 263.

[20] *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, 2nd edition, Vol. 1 (Paris: Baillière, 1861), 263-64. Lévi describes how, attempting to invoke Apollonius of Tyana in this state, he hears a strange "interior voice" or "interior echo," a *bouche d'ombre* which might be that of Apollonius, of his own unconscious mind, or some unholy mingling of the two made possible by somnambulism. Paolo Scopelliti also makes the point that, from animal magnetism to hypnosis to hysteria, the *fin de siècle* "new magic" often welcomed and incorporated somnambulist phenomena (*L'Influence du surréalisme sur la psychanalyse* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 2002), 209). André Saturnin Morin explains in *Du magnétisme et des sciences occultes* (Paris: Baillière, 1860) that magnetism is a latter-day manifestation of the very dominance of mind over matter sought historically by magicians and sorcerors (9).

more confident, claiming to manipulate inanimate objects near and distant as well as their own physiological interiors. They stood, some believed, at the dawn of a new "humanitarian revolution" after the terrible revolutionary disappointments of 1848, and would soon consecrate the union of Romantic Socialism with the dark otherworldly forces that they represented and channeled.[21]

Artificial somnambulists were famous for their ability to diagnose their own illnesses or those of others. They had a kind of "toucher intérieur" in direct contact with all parts of their bodies, and which also let them feel exterior bodies and things as if from the inside.[22] This clairtactility is also what allowed the somnambulist to "feel" the will of the mesmerist, as if it were an animal stirring in his hands – an idea that helped to explain the apparent mind-reading or paranatural rapport between the master *magnétiseur* and his *somnambule*. The two figures were like communicating vessels where, as the "intensity of the universal fluid" rises in the first, it must also in the second.[23] Even in the ostensibly more respectable field of clinical hypnosis, the hypnotized patient was commonly said to be so deeply linked to the hypnotist as essentially to be reading his mind, and to respond to no one except him. And just as mesmerists had been delighted by the power of their will and desire over their clients, clinicians were delighted with the power of post-hypnotic suggestion and with the theatrical "tableaux" of strange behaviors they could orchestrate thereby.

The marvelous and mysterious heart of such relationships was the somnambulist's "susceptibility" or "suggestibility," or what surrealists might have called his *disponibilité*.

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21 Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), 70-74. See Monroe also for the connection of the table-turning vogue to dreams of the transcendent power of human solidarity.

22 Montravel (50).

23 See ibid. (77 and 40).

The natural sleepwalker on the rooftops was able, through his power of imagination, to create coherent images of external reality from fragmentary, half-conscious impressions. The suggestibility of the artificial somnambulist, on the other hand, lay in the fact that if the magnetizer or hypnotist made an assertion, this assertion tended to become true for the former – everything from "your right arm is stiff as a board" to "after waking, you will only see the color red." The suggestible somnambulist could also, in the words of Beaunis, "receive" *acts*: Beaunis recounts suggesting to one patient, for example, that "trois minutes après son réveil, elle ira embrasser une petite paysanne qu'elle voit pour la première fois."[24] Beaunis is struck by the complexity of these acts, some apparently requiring careful cogitation and reflection. "Receiving" both assertion and act, the somnambulist acts out hallucinations, images and fictions, caught in an *idée fixe* that Beaunis compares to muscle contraction.[25] If the union of act and hallucination is something like a dream then, as Beaunis reflects, what he is doing is literally handing out dreams to his patients.

These dreams are quite special. Beaunis writes that, in a state of somnambulism, dreams have "la vivacité et la netteté des objets réels," but are also more coherent and rationally organized than ordinary dreams. What's more, even the strangest images and ideas, "les plus bizarres et les plus fantastiques," can attain this coherence, this quotidian solidity. What Beaunis finds is his most rewarding pursuit is his own creative participation in these objective dreams, these realities in formation. He frequently figures the somnambulist as a kind of blank canvas or page for his fanciful suggestions, which the canvas itself actively elaborates upon in turn. The clinician's least word sets in

[24] Beaunis (122).
[25] Ibid. (121, 132).

motion a mechanism that spins a series of images, discourses and deeds. It is an artist's fantasy of a constant, productive dialogue with his material medium.[26]

Again, experimenters like Beaunis frequently speak of the "tableaux," "scenes" or "spectacles" they create with the help of their somnambulists. But where Beaunis is particularly interesting is in what one could call his aesthetics of the somnambulist image. He recounts, for example, giving two mutually exclusive suggestions to his patient, just as a surrealist might juxtapose unrelated words or objects, and watching the conflict play out in the latter's body and mind.[27] Beaunis goes on to imagine the great potential variety of such "images": "on conçoit quelles combinaisons d'expériences, quelles scènes singulières de toute nature on peut imaginer […] on entre là dans le domaine du merveilleux et pourtant ce merveilleux n'est que la réalité."[28]

In 1887, the year that Beaunis published these observations and experiments in his *Le Somnambulisme provoqué*, Henri Bourru and Ferdinand Burot published a set of experimental results and theories with the title *La Suggestion mentale et l'action à distance des substances toxiques et médicamenteuses*. This work was avidly read by the Infra Noir group (along with other works concerning animal magnetism, somnambulism, and related phenomena), and directly discussed in Paul Păun's 1947 *La Conspiration du silence*.[29] Starting with patients of heightened nervous sensitivity, Bourru and Burot take stoppered bottles and opaque, hermetically sealed packets of a whole pharmacopeia of substances and, essentially, promenade them in the general vicinity of their patients –

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[26] Ibid. (149, 210, 212).
[27] Ibid. (151-157).
[28] Ibid. (178). See also 168-169 for Beaunis's attempt to create a faithful "calque" of the hallucinations and images by having the patient draw what he sees without modifying or correcting. His results are inconclusive and "informe," but does end up with a kind of Gestalt theory of hallucinatory perception.
[29] For a discussion of *La Conspiration du silence* in the context of theories of the (surrealist) object in the Infra Noir group, see Chapter Three.

who neither touch, taste, or smell them, nor even know what they are. The patients then display startling reactions: their skin blisters or bruises, they vomit or faint, or they have vivid hallucinations which they begin helplessly enacting. Regardless of the known properties of the substance involved, it is difficult to predict its "action at a distance." Laurel water (a distillation of cherry laurel leaves containing prussic acid) produces a highly theatrical "extase religieuse"; essences of lavender and anise produce "des grands mouvements avec hallucinations tristes" (for example a vision of acrobats that he or she seeks fruitlessly to imitate, or of an invisible object just beyond the grasp.) Valerian transforms one patient into a cat, stalking insects and arching his back when the good doctors bark at him.[30] Bourru and Burot typically characterize these dramas and transformations as theatrical "tableaux," and like Beaunis they cannot keep from interfering backstage. In the middle of a scene, they will slip a new substance into the room, and watch the cat kneel before the Virgin, or the landscape shift from Elysian field to desert.[31]

Across all these orchestrations, the "mouvements passionels" of the patient – first slow and undulating then sharp and convulsive, like those of the women of Gherasim Luca's staged scenes in *Amphitrite* and other texts[32] – show a perfect concordance, a synthesizing power that forms a small but coherent dream-reality from fragmentary impulses and sensations. The acute and paranatural sensitivity of the patient's body also prompts Bourru and Burot to speak of "zones" that cross this body, zones of potential behavior and being, or outlines of virtual selves (*êtres virtuels*, in Beaunis's words).

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30 Henri Bourru and Ferdinand Burot, *La Suggestion mentale et l'action à distance des substances toxiques et médicamenteuses* (Paris: Baillière, 1887), 60-61, 102.
31 Ibid. (82, 108).
32 For *Amphitrite* see also Chapter Three. In the very similar *Ocean* (1938), dedicated to Nadine Krainik, the woman's movements also alternative between slow and convulsive (Doucet 50412 GHL ms1).

Might it also be, they wonder, that every body has a magnetic-electric "zone" of impressionability surrounding it? This zone would be traversed by "lignes de force" in which an object or substance might become entangled, producing a "perturbation des courants."[33] The "zone" would be a place of mixing and merging between the self and what is outside it – "car toute est vibratoire," they muse; all bodies, human and non, are composed of billions of tiny bodies in a state of constant movement, meeting and parting.[34] What results, incarnated par excellence in the somnambulist, is a kind of convulsive, hallucinatory theater, a suite of automatic actions performed by an *être-objet*. Păun's theory of swarming clouds and haloes in *Conspiration* find an anticipatory echo in Bourru and Burot; and the slow hypnotic tableaux envisioned by Luca, along with his "zones qui traversent mon être" like passing electrical storms in *Le Vampire passif* and other works,[35] find a decisive influence in this experimental text and others of its genre.

The Infra Noir group's ideas about automatism and "surautomatism," as well, were guided and inspired by the body of scientific and para-scientific texts on somnambulism that were available to them. A question that frequently arises in the work of Bourru and Burot, Beaunis and others, for example, is that of the extent, power, and implications of automatism in the somnambulistic state.[36] Beaunis, experimenting with a form of post-hypnotic suggestion, observes that the acts of those under suggestion often insist on continuing themselves regardless of the will or desire of the patient. He asks a

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33 Bourru and Burot (69, 252-253).

34 Ibid. (214-216).

35 See also Chapter Three.

36 Pierre Janet in *L'Automatisme psychologique* (1889) observes in his patients and *somnambules* states ranging from simple absent-mindedness to "absence automatisms" resulting from epilepsy, cases of multiple personality, and post-hypnotic suggestion. There has been some controversy over the influence on the young Breton of this text, in comparison to that of Freud. See for example Marguerite Bonnet in *André Breton: naissance de l'aventure surréaliste* (Paris: Corti, 1975).

patient, "Vous voyez bien que vous tournez les mains?" Yes, she pleads, "arrêtez-les moi."[37] But what is more troubling is when the patient believes that she herself wills these things. It is not simply that an idea "surgit instantanément dans l'esprit et fatalement se réalise en acte," but that the patient believes she was free and could have acted otherwise. Beaunis concludes that "nous pouvons donc nous croire libres et ne pas l'être."[38] Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault, founder of the Nancy School of hypnotherapy, writes that post-hypnotic suggestion "parait au sujet venir de son propre fond, tandis que pourtant, sous l'empire de la détermination qu'on lui a fait prendre, il marche au but avec la fatalité d'une pierre qui tombe."[39]

We have already encountered, in Infra Noir texts and in the work of Main à Plume and others, a longing to rejoin and participate in the sovereign automatism or "surautomatism" of the object-world – to be animated by "noirs déterminants extérieurs," like the laws that govern falling stones, beyond both the human and the societies humans make. But this longing had little to do with a mere relinquishment of will. In paradoxical phrases like "fatalisme libre,"[40] it was a matter, instead, of reversing passion (in its sense both as the opposite of "action" and as erotic abandon) into power. To recall Noël Arnaud's words, the wartime surrealists wanted to be "animé par le flux et reflux de la matière puissant de toutes les forces dont il n'était jusque-là que le jouet hagard et pénitent."[41] The post-subjective and/or post-human polemics of Main à Plume and Infra Noir worked as a strategic positioning against the "déterminants" coming both from

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[37] Beaunis (125).
[38] Ibid. (136, 183).
[39] In Liébeault, *Du sommeil et des états analogues* (Paris: Masson, 1866), 155.
[40] The phrases "noirs déterminants extérieurs" and "fatalisme libre" are Paul Păun's in *Les Esprits animaux* (Bucharest: La Collection surréaliste Infra-Noir, 1947), 4-5. See also Chapter Two.
[41] "L'Avenir du surréalisme," in Vernay and Walter ed., *La Main à Plume: Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation* (Paris: Syllepse, 2008), 281.

below, from the unconscious, and above, from society. And as the hermetic philosophers would have it, "as above, so below": the ostensibly free and conscious self is in fact directed by hidden and ineluctable mechanisms, not only those of the unconscious, but of the unconscious as backchannel for ideology and false consciousness. The wartime surrealists' object-theories and object-mysticism were artillery on the battleground of the ideological subject – in the sense of both subjection to ideology, and of certain ideologies of subjectivity. Their ambitions of accession to the realm of objects and objectivity were simultaneously an escape to an outside, and a militant volte-face in which one fights the Obstacle (to use the Infra Noir expression) on its own terms and in its innermost precincts. The very momentum of the Obstacle could be used to throw it off balance – though never without risk or difficulty.

The post-hypnotic patient, on the other hand, seems to be entirely a plaything of the hypnotist's will. And artificial somnambulism in general – as a concept and metaphor relied upon to a great degree and in myriad ways by Infra Noir – might appear at first to be the worst kind of trap. The somnambulist believes herself to be acting according to her free will, but in fact the clinician or hypnotist is fatally determining everything from above to below, from her basic gestures to her desires and her perception of reality. It may be however that for Infra Noir, to redefine somnambulism as a revolutionary mode of being and acting is to make a move similar to the one they made with objects and *homme-objets*. It may be, in other words, that to deliberately re-inhabit or redirect the somnambulist's automatistic unfreedom is to "détourn" the operations of false consciousness.[42] In this case the somnambulist's greatest weakness – suggestibility –

[42] Compare, for example, to Malt (*Obscure Objects of Desire*), Foster (*Compulsive Beauty*) and others as cited in Chapter Three, where the surrealist object "détourns" the logic of commodity fetishism. This sort

could also be her greatest strength. The somnambulist's suggestibility lets her be more blindly led, but it also lets her imagine and live the world other than as it is. It is a freedom, of course – if freedom it is – that comes with great risk.

Many 19th-century experimenters who worked with somnambulists felt that their powers of self-determination might be greater than suspected – that it was fundamentally the somnambulist's choice, for example, to enter and leave this state, to obey suggestions or not to obey.[43] Others observed fierce struggles of will between the hypnotist-clinician and the patient, as well as complex forms of resistance on the part of the latter.[44] There also appeared forms of somnambulistic automatism that baffled and fascinated researchers accustomed to predictable and easily distinguishable cycles of "sleep" and awakening – states of complex compromise between voluntary and involuntary. Beaunis, for example, writes of an "état de veille somnambulique," identical to the normal waking state except that the patient remains highly suggestible, lapsing into automatic

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of *détournement* is the operative logic of Infra Noir's negation of negation in the form of "la connaissance par la méconnaissance" and its relationship to myth and mythmaking, where myth is taken at once as socially constitutive fiction, as ideology in general, and as imaginative image-making (see Chapter Two). Althusser's 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" uses the word *méconnaissance* to refer to the misrecognition of ideological representations and structurations, where what is misrecognized as freedom is actually ideological determination. It is this form of *méconnaissance*, as well, that Infra wants to turn against itself; see also discussions of the Obstacle in other chapters.

43 See for example William Baker Fahnestock in *Statuvolism, or artificial somnambulism* (Chicago: Religio-philosophical Publishing House,1871) writing on *somnus a voluntate* (77-80). Fahnestock writes: "All that is necessary is to establish the *belief* that an operator has complete control over him, and that he must sympathise with him when asleep, and the operator will have this power over him; but, let the same subject know the facts, before he enters the state, and the operator will soon find that his powers are airy nothings, and that he was before only obeyed, because the subject blindly consented. […] I am sorry that I am obliged to rob the many scientific gentlemen who are engaged in this science of their imaginary powers, but it is high time that the veil should be drawn." Montravel also allows for a kind of self-determination in comparing the *somnambule* both to a machine and to an animal: "la bête ne peut pas plus se tromper dans son instinct, qu'une roue ne peut s'empêcher de tourner, lorsqu'une fois le mouvement lui a été donné. L'animal n'ayant pas la faculté du choix, n'a pas même la liberté d'errer" (57). The object-position of "fatalisme libre" sought by the wartime surrealist groups functions in a way similar to animal instinct and even machinic determinism here.

44 For example, Beaunis (190). See also Andreas Mayer, *Sites of the Unconscious: Hypnosis and the Emergence of the Psychoanalytic Setting* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013), 66.

movements and hallucinations at the behest of the clinician.[45] To describe this "état vraiment bizarre," with its glaringly contradictory pairing of *veille* with *somnambulique*, Beaunis also cites terms borrowed from fellow experimenters: "condition prime" or "condition seconde"; "fascination" or "charme"; "coma vigil" and "somno-vigil."[46] Henri Ellenberger, discussing scientific and experimental reactions to this phenomenon, mentions the "ecstatic vision" of James Cowles Prichard's *A Treatise on Insanity* (1837): "a kind of intensive daydream in a person who, to all outward appearance, is living a normal life, so that the strangest interferences occur between normal life and daydreams."[47] He also mentions other coinages including "vigilambulism," "suggestion à l'état de veille," and "ambulatory automatism."

This last term – "automatisme ambulatoire" – appears with some frequency in Infra Noir texts. Gherasim Luca's *Parcurg imposibilul* (I Roam the Impossible, 1945) for example describes a "lover-medium […] whose somnambulistic and devoted love causes her to perceive, in advance of my own thought processes, the messages addressed to me from the depth of my being." He "transmits" or emanates to her, from a distance, "a series of actions which she executes in a state of ambulatory automatism."[48] In Luca's

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[45] Beaunis cites the work of Hippolyte Bernheim and Jules Liégeois of the Nancy School on the same phenomenon. Liégeois writes of a patient in a state of *veille somnambulique*: "Il ne présente pas la moindre apparence de sommeil; il a les yeux ouverts, les mouvements aisés; il parle, marche, agit comme tout le monde, il prend part à la conversation, répond aux objections, les discute, a souvent des réparties heureuses; il semble être dans un état absolument normal, excepté sur le seul point où porte la prohibition de l'expérimentateur" (Beaunis 158-61). Beaunis also mentions the work of J. Stanley Grimes, which refers this liminal phenomenon to the field of "electro-biology," and William B. Carpenter's *Mental Physiology* (1874) which calls it the "biological state" or "induced reverie."

[46] "Condition prime" and "condition seconde" are from Jules Liégeois and Eugène Azam (see Beaunis 161); "charme" is A.-A. Liébault's term (164-65); "coma vigil" and "somno-vigil" are attributed to unnamed "médecins" (166). "The Somnambule" Adolphe Didier, cited above in relation to mesmerism, seems to have experienced a similar condition with his "semi-ecstatic state" (Didier 96).

[47] Ellenberger (123). Oddly enough, Ellenberger cites André Breton's 1932 *Les Vases communicants* as a literary-artistic treatment of the *veille somnambulique* phenomenon (124).

[48] *Inventatorul iubirii* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945), 55-57; translation in Julian and Laura Semilian, *Inventor of Love* (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009), 37. *Inventatorul* also mentions an

Moartea moartă (Death Dead, 1945), *automatism ambulatoriu* appears alongside dreams, drugs, and catalepsy as one of many "cohabitations of man with his shadow."[49] During Infra Noir's sur-international mental rendezvous of 1951 (see Chapter Three), Luca wanders in a "délire ambulatoire" through the village of Tel-Arish near Jaffa. Gellu Naum as well describes his wanderings and discoveries, recorded in *Medium* (1945) and *Zenobia* (1985), as an "ambulatory automatism."[50]

In the medical literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term "ambulatory automatism" most often refers to an "awake" and non-hypnotized form of somnambulism. Jean-Martin Charcot, who coined the term, uses it to refer to the condition of *vagabondage*: a "secondary" state in which an automatism of the body takes over and leads the vagabond on a forgetful wandering far from his familiar surroundings. This is the state to which Pierre Janet also refers with his "état second": a condition "in which movement and forgetfulness of self operated together," or "a moving sleep of the body forgetting itself and reacting to an impulsive and 'primordial' abandon to distance and wandering."[51] But Charcot was engaging with an entire history and discourse

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unpublished manuscript that develops a "somnambulistic method of objectanalysis" – objectanalysis being defined in Luca and Trost's *Dialectique de la dialectique* as an "interprétation de quelques objets dans un état de léger somnambulisme provoqué par eux" (Bucharest: S. Surréalisme, 1945), 28.

[49] *Inventatorul* (90).

[50] Naum writes in a letter to Guy Malouvier (12 December 1976): "Tout au long des années, j'ai erré, poussé par une espèce d'automatisme ambulatoire, sur les lieux où se trouvaient antiques habitats que je découvrais avec une facilité étonnante. Un beau jour, par exemple, j'ai pris une motte de terre, en disant à celle qui m'accompagnait: voice une idole […] j'ai trouvé à l'intérieur de la motte une idole du néolithique moyen, tenant un doigt sur sa bouche." Malouvier, "Gellu Naum et le surréalisme roumain," in *Le Domaine poétique international du Surréalisme* (Paris: Le Puits de l'Hermite, n. 29-31, March 1978), 158-160.

[51] Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 129. Physician André Pitres writes in 1891: "By the term ambulatory automatism is understood a pathological syndrome appearing in the form of intermittent attacks during which the patient, carried away by an irresistible impulse, leaves his home and makes an excursion […] justified by no reasonable motive. The attack ended, the subject unexpectedly finds himself on an unknown road or in a strange town." Quoted in Ian Hacking, "*Automatisme Ambulatoire*: Fugue, Hysteria, and Gender at the Turn of the Century." In Mark S. Micale ed., *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 125.

associated with the word *vagabondage*, from the age of "pilgrims, troubadors, jugglers and knights-errant" to early 19th-century penal law, where it became, in historian Matt Matsuda's words, "an odd crime of negativity, of not having, of not doing." Without fixed address or profession, vagabonds slipped free of territory, identity, history and conscience, living "a sort of transgressive reality."[52] According to philosopher of science Ian Hacking, there was a specific historical period in France – 1887-1909 to be exact – where *vagabondage* was experienced as an acute social problem, and where vagabonds shuttled between the concern of doctors and the sanctions of the police. Hacking also explores the currents of class, gender and ethnicity channeled by the figure of the vagabond. Vagabond-*fugueurs* tended to be men, first of all, and they tended to be "solid artisans or honest men of the laboring classes." *Vagabondage* was also strongly associated with Jewishness, and woodcuts of the Wandering Jew appear in medical tracts on the subject. Hacking goes on to comment: "Hysteria has been called the body language of female powerlessness. Fugue was a body language of male powerlessness."[53] Vagabondage was a site of competing discourses: the medical one, in which the vagabond is lost both on the map and to himself, forgetful and confused; and the potentially criminal one, which allows for a certain defiant self-determination on the vagabond's part.

A recent reader of Carl Einstein – who was involved in Georges Bataille's dissident surrealist *Documents* group between 1929-1930 – locates the term "visionary ecstasy" in Einstein's conceptual vocabulary, and argues that he borrowed it from James

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[52] Matsuda (128-129).

[53] Hacking (125 and 133). See also Jean-Claude Beaune, *Le Vagabond et la machine: essai sur l'automatisme ambulatoire* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1983).

Cowles Prichard's *Treatise on Insanity*. This intermediate sleeping-waking state akin to ambulatory automatism is, for Einstein:

> structurally homologous with the origin of any serious project of revolt. Whether in art, poetry, or politics proper, it always takes an "ecstatic" state – a momentary suspension of selfhood and its certainties about the given world and its own place in it – in order to imagine a new counter-world that might displace it.[54]

A revolutionary theory of somnambulism or of ambulatory automatism – or, though it sounds strange, a political theory of sleepwalking – would not be difficult to elaborate, at least on this basis. In the literature on natural somnambulism, desire and imagination were said to remake the world, at least on a personal level. Even hypnotic suggestion, conceived by the likes of Beaunis as "handing out" dreams and sequences of actions or organizing tableaux, could be reworked as a kind of revolutionary proselytizing: "after waking," the clinician might say, "you will see only the new world to come." At the time of the French Revolution, mesmerism for example had already formed a basis for exploiting and/or reforming the link between individual minds and bodies and larger political institutions. Writing on "mesmerism as a radical political theory," Robert Darnton examines the ideas of Mesmer-disciple Nicolas Bergasse, for whom individual mesmerist treatments, overcoming "obstacles" to the vital fluid in the human body, could lead on a larger scale to massive political change. If, as Bergasse writes, changes in one's

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[54] Sebastian Zeidler, "Form as Revolt: Carl Einstein's Philosophy of the Real and the Work of Paul Klee," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* No. 57/58, Spring/Autumn 2010 (260). Zeidler also rehearses elements of Einstein's political ontology, with reference to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, that recall Infra Noir's account of the negation of negation and the Obstacle. In the mere act of negation, as a "lone, individual self that exists over against" the world, any "visionary ecstasy" will be contaminated by that founding, self-centered stance (260). One way of both expressing and circumventing this problem is through irony and through "ontological bracketing devices" and "parodistic simulations" (261). In the ironic stance, "the lone, vital self considers himself too different from what he takes to be 'reason's' thoroughly standardized world to be reconciled with it. On the other hand, *and for this very reason*, he is yet also too similar to 'reason' to be reconciled with the world of his own inner vision in turn. The reactive assertion of the self over against the given world is repeated in reverse as the alienation of the self from the new counter-world of his own imagination." In Luca, this unsettled in-between-ness is manifest particularly in the use and extensive theorization of simulacra.

"physical constitution" inevitably bring changes in one's "moral constitution," then to produce physical changes through mesmerism can, individual by individual, swing the moral compass of an entire nation, which will then cease to tolerate the "yoke of the institutions that govern [it]."[55]

At the intersection of psychological and political discourses, the somnambulist remains a Janus-like figure. At the end of the 19th century, when "somnambulism" had long become the new mesmerism, sociologist Gabriel Tarde published his *Laws of Imitation* (1890), according to which the act of imitating others forms the basic fabric of society. Here Tarde states: "Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism, or suggestion." The social bond, reduced to a simple rapport between one person and another, is exactly realized by "hypnotism and somnambulism." In a model like this, where somnambulism is an immanent social force, one can imagine it to work within a more collective dynamic,[56] as a kind of collective generation and bodying-forth of social-cultural myth. The somnambulist might even be said to project his vision, his "myth," outward, by interacting with the collective world, in a network of open social exchange and influence. But in this somnambulist model, who are the hypnotists? Who has the power to invent and impose social myths? In this regard, and again in the late 19th century, the psychiatrist and anthropologist Enrico Morselli, considering phenomena of suggestibility, links the circus hypnotism of the showman known as Donato (mentioned,

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55 Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), 112, 120, 124. Darnton notes how Bergasse's acquaintance, Jean-Louis Carra, found an example of "political somnambulism" in the visit of Lycurgus of Sparta to the Delphic Oracle (108).

56 As Christian Borch does when he links Tarde's theories to imitative-suggestive phenomena within crowds. *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 54. Carl Einstein also reflected a great deal, as did others in the *Documents* group, upon the relationship between myth and collectivity; he felt that they had ceased to work productively together, with the first replaced by capitalist or Soviet-style standardization, and the second replaced by fanciful subjective mythmaking, or helpless private "revolts" (Zeidler 262).

incidentally, by Breton in his 1924 "Entrée de médiums") to a "political crisis at the heart of Europe," a "crisis of the rational subject, now crushed by a strong determinism that invalidated the free will. Performances like Donato's showed how flimsy individual autonomy could be and how vulnerable the personality was to control by a stronger agency." For Morselli, "psychology had become a source of political power. Henceforth, domination was cast as a form of suggestion."[57]

A society's myths can be oppressive and destructive, but as far as Infra Noir is concerned, they can also be creatively revitalizing. The somnambulist as a political entity can stand in for both those benighted by the worst of such myths and collective hallucinations, and for those – insofar as somnambulistic states can be self-determined and self-governed – who attempt to replace these myths with better ones. By the time the somnambulist wanders, with blind and uncanny instinct, into the tracts and manifestos of the Infra Noir group, he (or she) is, as I have noted, a complex, even overburdened figure. The somnambulist is a natural sleepwalker, a mesmerized seer, a hypnotized patient, the vessel of a paradoxical waking dream, a forgetful, anonymous vagabond, a socially transgressive vagrant, and a figure who both passively channels social myths and ideologies, and potentially, interferes productively in them. The words of mesmerists, hypnotists, experimental magicians, utopian revolutionaries, clinicians and sociologists

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[57] Morselli cited in Joan Ramon Resina, "From Crowd Psychology to Racial Hygiene: The Medicalization of Reaction and the New Spain," in Schnapp and Tiews ed., *Crowds* (Stanford, 2006), 228. See also Siegfried Kracauer's 1947 reading of the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in his *From Caligari to Hitler*. For Kracauer the film gravitates between two poles, of which the first is Authority or Tyranny, represented by Caligari who is also a "premonition of Hitler […] in the sense that he uses hypnotic power to force his will upon his tool," the somnambulist Cesare, foreshadowing Hitler's "manipulation of the soul […] on a gigantic scale." Opposing the pole of tyranny is a freedom that partakes of anarchy, chaos, and ungoverned desire. The film, in this way, "exposes the soul wavering between tyranny and chaos" (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947, 72-74). Kracauer also reads the titular vampire of Murnau's *Nosferatu* as a tyrant-figure (79). One might say, instead, that the living-dead vampire, both compelled by his nature and freed by his desire, is as equivocal as the somnambulist – hovering between being a simple tool of evil and a self-governed, (politically) creative actor.

alike resonate with the deepest preoccupations of the Infra Noir group. And while the somnambulistic state, as a rallying concept for the group's revolutionary hopes, remains ambiguous and problematic, it also leaves room for a negotiation between freedom and compulsion, self-determination and heteronomy, action and passion.

2. Somnambulism, Early Surrealism, and Simulation

Writing on the Surrealist movement, Paolo Scopelliti suggests that in the late twenties and throughout the thirties the Surrealists were looking into the Freudo-Marxist possibility of an "inconscient *fonction* des rapports sociaux," alongside a current of social thought that both recognized and explored "l'existence d'un *rapport de cause à effet* entre l'organisation de la société et la structuration de l'appareil psychique et pulsionnel."[1] Scopelliti cites, for example, parts of Breton's *Les Vases communicants* (1932), as well as Tristan Tzara's "Essai sur la situation de la poésie" (1931). But Tzara's essay explores not so much a cause-and-effect relationship between the unconscious and social relations as a method of breaking free of this relationship. Tzara distinguishes poetry as means-of-expression, which he associates with a "pensé dirigé," from poetry as activity-of-the-spirit, associated with a "pensé non-dirigé." Tzara argues that while consciously directed poetry-expression can do no more than poorly conceal its determination by reigning ideologies or class antagonisms, poetry-activity can escape such determinations: "les influences du milieu ambiant sur la poésie ont été réduites dans la mesure où le poème a cessé d'être exclusivement un moyen d'expression." Moreover, eventually this undetermined, undirected and automatic poetry-activity will become massively collective. While poetry-expression is "negated" by poetry-activity, the latter is negated in turn: from this "*négation de la négation* doit naître une nouvelle poésie, élevée à une puissance qu'on ne saurait trouver que sur le plan psychique de la collectivité." In

[1] Paolo Scopelliti, *L'Influence du surréalisme sur la psychanalyse* (Lausanne: L'Age de l'homme, 2005), 128-29. For this current of social thought Scopelliti cites Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, Edward Sapir and Bronislaw Malinowski, relying on Henri Béhar's "Le Freudo-marxisme des surréalistes" (in *Les Enfants perdus: Essai sur l'avant-garde* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 2002).

this collective automatic action, one recalls the ecstatically forgetful "manie d'action" of Tzara's "Rêve expérimental."[2]

It is significant that Scopelliti would read Tzara's essay alongside the postwar work of Infra Noir member Dolfi Trost on dreams, schizophrenia, and the revolutionary valorization of the involuntary (both in thought and action) – finding there specifically a conception of simulation as "une technique liée à l'évolution sociale: Agis comme si."[3] Simulation, with its link to automatism and the "non-dirigé," was an important component of the dreamlike collective *acte-objet* discussed in the previous chapter. In the present context, both the natural sleepwalker and the "artificial" somnambulist can be said, in a basic way, to act "comme si," the first walking the contours of his dreaming imagination, the second obeying the *ainsi soit-il* of the clinician or mesmerist. Scopelliti, however, also refers to a "simulated somnambulism" in the earliest Surrealist group experiments in mediumship – those recounted, for example, in Breton's "Entrée des médiums."[4] It would make sense, then, to provide a summary both of the place of

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[2] Tristan Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, Tome V (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), 23. For "Rêve expérimental" see Chapter Two.

[3] Scopelliti (144). In fact, in this passage Scopelliti is selectively quoting from *Visible et invisible*'s fragmentary, footnoted paratexts (see ex. p. 51), many involving a delirious young woman named X, and in most cases bearing only a lightly associative relation to the argument of the main body. But his observation is not inconsistent with what Trost wants to get across. For more on Trost's thought see Chapter Three, as well as Michael Finkenthal's *D. Trost: între realitatea visului și visul ca realitate* (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2013).

[4] Scopelliti (53). "Simulated" in this context means, of course, not that it is "faked," but that it blurs the very boundary between real and fake, between reality and representation. For a discussion of simulation see also Chapter Three. Scopelliti is quoting the psychoanalyst A.-L.-M. Hesnard in *L'Inconscient* (1923): "Hesnard sera persuadé que l'automatisme surréaliste est réellement en mesure de reproduire un état de somnambulisme, aussi bien simulé que spontané." Scopelliti also argues that the Surrealists' seances were inspired by a "conception de l'hystérie inspirée de [Joseph] Babinski […] ce dernier opposait à Charcot sa propre 'conception moderne' de l'hystérie, structurée comme un 'délire d'expression' et gérée par une 'fausse simulation'" (36). Other clinicians theorized a "potentialité inconsciente de simulation" (69) akin to auto-suggestion. All this plays into Scopelliti's argument that the Infra Noir group was experimenting with an unconscious conceived not as depth but as shifting surface.

simulation in somnambulistic experiment, and of the Surrealists' activities during the so-called "période des sommeils," in 1922-23, before the movement's first manifesto.

Doctors and experimenters dealing with somnambulists could not avoid facing the problem of simulation, both conscious and unconscious. Whether the hysterical or hypnotized patient divined the doctor's wishes and strove to gratify them, or whether he or she resented the doctor's authority and strove to undermine it, experimenters were never quite sure how sincere their patients' performances were – in short, whether the results they were obtaining were "real." Ellenberger quotes one Belgian doctor who writes that, "if you want to be duped, then experiment with hysterical patients."[5] Beaunis takes refuge in the fact that it is "impossible" to simulate changes in heart rate, exorbitis or flushing of the skin; Bourru and Burot fight off suspicions of a "dissimulation morbide" by assuring themselves that the subject "réagit d'une façon automatique, silencieuse, comme s'il s'agissait de simples actions réflexes sans la moindre participation de la conscience." In their case the patient's conscious (or empowered) participation in the proceedings would cast doubt on the entire enterprise.[6]

As for the Surrealists, each of the several origin stories for the group's trance experiments in the early twenties has its variation on the truth of the proceedings and on

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[5] Ellenberger (172).

[6] Beaunis (44, 70); Bourru and Burot (90). In his article "Becoming Machine: Surrealist Automatism and Some Contemporary Instances" (*Tate Papers* 18, November 8, 2012), David Lomas follows the rise of the "graphic method" in the scientific study of living organisms, which sought to transform dynamic, unpredictable forces into objective "traces" of physiological processes, as in myography or sphygmography. When the field of psychiatry picked up on this method, it served as insurance against simulation and/or human error in experiments with hysterics or with shell-shocked war veterans. What was desired, in fact, was a "paradoxical exclusion of the subject […] from the scientific investigation of that subject's own subjectivity." It is Lomas's suggestion that the early Surrealists were not only inspired by this particular technology of objectivity, but inherited its paradoxical attitude toward the subject.

their relationship to simulation. René Crevel writes, in "La Période des sommeils,"[7] that a woman invited him to visit her mother, "un puits de théosophie et de sciences occultes," along with another woman who called herself Madame Dante. The four joined hands around a table in the dining room where, soon, "ma tête prit plaisir à s'incliner sur le bois. J'étais endormis." He soon told Breton about this experience, and together with friends they decided to repeat the experiment over the course of many séances, where he, Robert Desnos and others were delighted to hear repeated back to them the words they spoke or wrote in their state of sleep. Crevel notes that it would be pointless to try to "tracer les limites de ses propres états" or to raise the question of sincerity or authenticity in this (or in any other) situation, though he adds that he had been thinking of titling his essay "Du sommeil à la simulation," and that he and Desnos, rivals in "médiumnité," had quite soon begun to mistrust each other's motives. Regardless, Crevel feels that in discussions of authenticity and simulation there is always a danger of an analytical "idolatry" that attempts to maintain an untenable distinction between the realm of dream and the realm of "action" – as well as between conscious, voluntary states and unconscious, involuntary ones.

Louis Aragon's version of the story in "Une Vague de rêves" tells how Crevel meets a woman at the seaside who teaches him a "sommeil hypnotique particulier, qui ressemble plutôt à l'état somnambulique." His surrealist friends soon find that their experiments with somnambulism begin to interfere with their lives, as the words they emit while "sleeping" appear to bring about certain coincidences, and even "illusions

[7] Published in *This Quarter*, September 1932 (V. 5 No. 1) as "The Period of Sleeping Fits," and appearing as "La Période des sommeils" in *L'Esprit contre la raison*.

collectives."[8] But, Aragon asks, are they really illusions? Aragon prefaces his story, after all, with the argument that the real "n'est qu'un rapport comme un autre, que l'essence des choses n'est aucunement liée à leur réalité, qu'il y a d'autres rapports que le réel que l'esprit peut saisir."[9] When it comes to the problem of sincerity or authenticity in the group's séances, Aragon responds: "Simuler une chose, est-ce autre chose que la penser? Et ce qui est pensé, est." Simulation is a relation among others – the "relations" of the real, of chance, dream and illusion – and is both parallel to and intertwined with them. To attempt a distinction between simulated and authentic somnambulism would be to beg the question in favor of the "reality-relation." Aragon recounts, in any case, the rigorous physical consequences of extended periods of somnambulism, simulated or not: weight loss, wracked nerves, attacks with knives. As with the hypnotist-clinician who announces to his patient that her arm has been burned, and watches the welts rise of their own accord, the somnambulist state undermines distinctions between physical and mental, just as between representation and reality. The word tends to become flesh. Aragon, moreover, feels that belief is an essential component of somnambulistic phenomena: for the Surrealists, "la croyance au sommeil" is what abolishes the "faisceau de censures qui entravent l'esprit."[10]

The scenes evoked by Crevel, Aragon, and especially in Breton's "Entrée des Médiums" in some ways recall a visit to a psychic medium in which participants seek information about their present decisions and future deeds, but they also recall personal exchanges between hypnotist-clinicians and patients, though there is no central doctor-figure, and though the individual "sommeils" partake of a certain creative self-

[8] Louis Aragon, *Une Vague de rêves* (Paris: Seghers, 2006), 20-21.
[9] Ibid. (12)
[10] Ibid. (22)

determination.[11] The group's reenactments or indeed its simulations use a verbal and gestural vocabulary that consciously derives, in turn, from the spiritist séance, from stage hypnotism, and from the clinical literature on "états de somnambulisme."[12] In the Surrealist séances "somnambulism" as a term and field of experiment preserves its complex history and multiple meanings, including that of classical sleepwalking on the rooftops ("Que vouliez-vous donc me dire, hommes dans l'éloignement, criant la main en porte-voix, riant des gestes du dormeur?")[13] as well as fascination, in the words of Beaunis and Liébeault above, with the "pierre qui tombe," with states of unconscious thing-like-ness. In "Vague de rêves" Aragon writes, "La pierre dans le gouffre ne connaît que son accéleration, ne la connaît pas à vrai dire. Il faut voir l'homme en proie à ses miroirs, s'écriant avec l'accent pathétique de son théâtre: Que devenir? Comme s'il avait le choix."[14] Breton feels, in "Entrée des médiums," that the decidedly un-stone-like incursions of "éléments conscients," the pathetic theatricality of any "volonté humaine, littéraire, bien déterminée," would remove all interest from the séances.[15] The stone that falls is indeterminate where it counts (in other words, not subject to the "determinacies" and tics that human-ness shares with literariness) but also determinate where it counts (in other words, unassociated with the vagaries of subjective will.) In its determinate-

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11 Scopelliti makes a comparison to the clinical scene: "En effet, 'Entrée des médiums' peut se lire comme un *interrogatoire médical* authentique. … - *Quel âge avez-vous? – Sais pas. – Comment vous appelez-vous? – Je ne sais pas*" (52).

12 This is a phrase Sarane Alexandrian uses for the phenomena of the "période des sommeils." He also theorizes, though, that the Surrealist sleepers only attained a "trance moyenne," and not a "somnambulisme complet." Alexandrian traces the evolution of automatic writing and of the theory of pure psychic automatism through a "thèse occulte" (the experiments of Puységur, Frederic Myers, and Théodore Flournoy and Hélène Smith with her "rêves somnambuliques"), an "antithèse scientifique" (Azam, Janet, and others) and a "synthèse poétique," which is automatism freed from its supernatural and scientific garments, and which has greater potential for collective engagement. See *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 91-98, 121-124.

13 "Vague de rêves" (35).

14 Ibid. (33)

15 *Œuvres I* (275).

indeterminate *fatalisme libre*, the stone is a figure for the somnambulist himself, but also for the equivocal status of simulation.

Throughout these séances the young Surrealist movement also places emphasis on its existing concerns – the literary potential of automatic writing, the kinship of somnambulist phenomena to dream (Aragon writes that Desnos-as-medium has learned to "dream without sleeping"), and the surrealist realm of what will later be called the "magique-circonstantielle." Aragon evokes, for example, "des présages par-dessus des tous, des visions au fond de mares d'encre, dans la poussière du café, des migrations d'oiseaux."[16] Finally, an expansion to the collective sphere tends to lie on the horizon of the group's discoveries. Aragon speaks for example of "surréalismes collectifs" which might persuade "un peuple entier à croire à des miracles."[17]

The Infra Noir group, decades later, will definitively exit the closed precincts of the private hypnosis session and of the group séance. When Infra Noir talks about and experiments with somnambulism – under the names, for example, of "automatic action" or "ambulatory automatism" – it looks much more like a fugue state, a wandering. This has the result of making somnambulism, for them, a more immediate revolutionary-political strategy, as we will continue to see, and might play other roles as well. One reader of early Surrealism notes for example that, although surrealists outlined a "prototype" for linking hysteria to political revolution, there was also a more immediate gender politics to be negotiated within the group: hysteria is strongly associated with female sexuality, and within the "homosocial realm," men who "felt themselves to be

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16 "Vague de rêves" (25). Alexandrian argues that for the early Surrealists the category of dream widens to comprise not just sleeping dreams and waking reveries, but somnambulistic phenomena, projects for the future, and group games. He also argues that the *sommeils* allowed for a crucial link between dreaming and automatic writing (10).

17 "Vague de rêves" (23).

potentially 'hysterical' became terrified of appearing unmanly to themselves and their compatriots."[18] They needed a form of distancing, which they could achieve for example by highlighting the simulative aspect of their hysteria-inspired automatism, and thus by bringing its "active" dimension to the fore. I would hypothesize that Infra Noir, as well, seeks to reclaim the "manliness" of somnambulism by making it worldly and world-oriented, more assertive than reactive, in line with the *vagabondage* and fugue states more associated with masculine madness.[19]

Whatever the case, Infra Noir's somnambulism can be understood as a "negation of negation" in several possible senses: as a "masculine" recuperation of the negation of societal constraints and gender roles performed by hysterical femininity; as a simulacrum that inverts fiction's primary negation of truth into something beyond and between both categories[20]; and as a practice that inverts somnambulism's primary negation of the autonomous and freely willing individual into something that is, they hope, beyond and between the categories of active and passive, interior and exterior, private dream and public undertaking.

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18 Justin Vicari, *Mad Muses and the Early Surrealists* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2012), 27.

19 Breton and Aragon perform a similar modification of hysteria in "Le Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie" (1928): "L'hystérie est un état mental […] se caractérisant par la subversion des rapports qui s'établissent entre le sujet et le monde moral duquel il croit pratiquement relever […]. L'hystérie n'est pas un phénomène pathologique et peut, à tous égards, être considérée comme un moyen suprême d'expression." In *La Révolution surréaliste* No. 11, March 15, 1928.

20 I also have in mind here a passage from Alain Badiou's book on Deleuze: "For the automaton, who has realized the giving up of all interiority, *there is only the outside* […]. The outside cannot be confused with anything so commonplace as a sort of external world. The automaton […] is a simulacrum that is without any relation to other simulacra. It is, *itself*, the pure assumption of the outside" (*Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000), 85). Interestingly as well, Maurice Blanchot's essay "Rêver, écrire" on Michel Leiris depicts a dreaming self that recalls the theories of simulacra explored in the previous chapter: the dreamer is a figure of pure Resemblance, of the Similar, an anonymous being released from selfhood on the "enigmatic bail of semblance," that can't be its own subject, can't enter further into itself. "Là où je rêve, cela veille." In Michel Leiris, *Nights as Day, Days as Night* (Hygiene, CO: Eridanos Press, 1987), xxvii.

3. Automatic Action: *Le passage du dormeur au somnambule*

We can now return, somewhat better informed, to Luca's 1952 missive to the Surrealist movement – "Le pouvoir à la chimère" – to his "fonctionnement réel de l'action," and to his question of what hope can be placed in somnambulists. To one of his intended respondents Luca later acknowledges, taking a defensive tone, that the word *somnambule* might have certain "clinical" associations, but that these have little to do with his vision. Infra Noir has returned somnambulism, so to speak, to the classical sleepwalker on the rooftops. It is a public yet still solitary act, where the primary relationship is not between patient and doctor but between somnambulist and the world at large. Luca compares Infra Noir's somnambulists, as well, to funambulists: tightrope walkers. Both figures find themselves "*objectivement* dans un état de sécurité sans fissure."[1] This might be because sleepwalkers, according to popular wisdom, have a mystically infallible sense of space and balance, and in popular imagery like the cartoons mentioned above, are deftly immune to various dangers. But Luca explains that both roof-walkers and tightrope-walkers are also beyond the reach of what he calls the "double mécanique répressive." This can only be a reference to the two interlocking halves, the vicious circle, of the Obstacle: the socially-imposed limitations of the self, and the aggregate of limited selves who constrain society within its present configuration. The tightrope walker, with his perfect balance, falls into neither side of this trap, and the

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1 *Fusées* no. 7 (2003), "Dossier Ghérasim Luca" (125-126). Although the present discussion focuses on the somnambulist rather than the "chimera," the latter is also an important entity in Infra Noir texts. See Paul Păun's *La Conspiration du silence* (1947), where the chimera offers and contains an "au-delà matériel": see also Yaari, "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence'" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014) 174-75, and Yaari, "Paul Paon's Sur-Surreal Chimera," in *Utopian Studies* 5:1 (1994).

somnambulist maintains such perfect equipoise between inner dreaming self and exterior lived world that these are no longer mutually limiting, but mutually liberating.

Luca's unnamed correspondent – most likely a Surrealist or associated with the movement – seems to have sidestepped the questions on Luca's *enquête* and to have responded instead with a skeptical personal letter of explanation. The correspondent appears to have taken the proposal of somnambulism as a poetic and "political" solution (for this is how Luca sees it) quite literally. "Vous craignez," Luca summarizes, "que le risque de ne plus vous appartenir puisse vous entraîner à des actes dangereux ou simplement déplaisants." But it is precisely the opposite that one should fear, he argues: belonging to oneself, and therefore either belonging to others, or subjugating them.

By way of explanation: three of Luca's former Infra Noir colleagues – Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, Virgil Teodorescu – were still in the Romanian People's Republic, facing a choice between living in fear and hardship and giving in, to some degree, to the new cultural and political order. In the meantime in France's intellectual world, where Marxists were coping with (or ignoring) troubling news of repression coming from Central and Eastern Europe, there was an almost hysterically Stalinist atmosphere, where even the lightest of criticisms of the Party might bring accusations and repercussions.[2] In both these contexts, Luca feels that it is precisely "le révolutionnaire de type réveillé (le rationaliste) qui peut nous entraîner dans des actions dangereuses, auto-punitives,

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[2] Tony Judt writes: "France had the second-largest Communist party in the free world (after Italy), and one of the most Stalinized. […] Indeed, there was something almost ludicrously imitative about the PCF's practices in those years." Those inevitably marginalized from Party politics "were accused of deviations similar to those of the East European victims (Titoism, nationalism, indiscipline, and on on), and in at least one instance even subjected to a private "Moscow trial" in Paris. *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992), 111. Postwar Surrealism's participation in and response to this situation is discussed in Chapter Two. Luca also references the acute "ends and means" debate that took place both among Surrealists and in the cultural/intellectual sphere at large (see, again, Chapter Two).

déformantes, vaines et misérables." As Luca later expresses to Breton, politics of the "rational" type have proved fatally disappointing, for the rational revolutionary creates and belongs to a world of "volition." This "volition" is not to be identified with "volonté": will and desire are not to be abandoned (as Luca's correspondent, for one, seems to think), since they are a necessary motive force in somnambulism. It is simply that they must not be corseted within any political groupthink, or within anything taken as, in itself, right, good and efficacious.

"L'efficacité" – in Chapter Two – was a kind of talisman-word among the secessionist "revolutionary-surrealists" of the immediate postwar. Classically Surrealist desiderata were aligned with "expérience"; "action" and "efficacité" were aligned with party discipline; and both were opposed to personalism, individualism, and "mysticism." In this context, the word "efficacy" became a near-synonym for worldly revolutionary action as such. None of this escapes Infra Noir, and when Luca assures his correspondent that somnambulism is of the purest efficacy (rather than, for example, a kind of "expérience"), it is this very face-off between "revolutionary" and Bretonian Surrealism that he has in mind. Luca has little interest, he later tells Breton, in "eroticizing" or "occulting" Surrealism's means of worldly intervention. What he wants is, on a very basic level, something that had proved largely impracticable in the 30s – a reconciliation of Surrealism's political and its poetic aims. His goal, as he explains to Breton, is to plunge straight into direct action without sacrificing the things that Surrealism holds dear: the marvelous, *humour*, chance. Though on the other hand, neither do the rational criteria of "direct action" remain entirely intact. The coming-to-knowledge that usually sets the

revolutionary on his path is replaced by *méconnaissance*, and action becomes a series of irrational, automatic, poetic, ritual and unexpected "gestes."

Luca's somnambulistic *geste* partakes of both politics and myth – myth not only as social ideology, but also in the sense evoked by the imageries of initiation that fed the 1947 Surrealist exhibition at Galerie Maeght. Luca's "passage de la pensée automatique au geste mythique," shifting somnambulism from the private séance to the public sphere, aims at the creation of an "être collectif" whose powers are both mythopoetic and viably revolutionary. These powers are also firmly corporeal, rooted in the marrow and motion of daily life. If there is a collective somnambulist *acte-objet* – to borrow from the language of the previous chapter – then it is composed of individual bodies, each engaged in "le fonctionnement réel de ses gestes," or each, like an atom, following its own trajectory but at the same time contributing to a material whole. And if early Surrealism's encounter with somnambulism leads it mainly toward a theory and practice of automatic writing, Infra Noir refocuses its gaze on the sleepwalker on the rooftops and the *fugueur* roaming the world, blind but sure, each "mett[ant] son corps dans le jeu de mots en liberté."[3] The word – in its incarnation both as early avant-garde *parole in libertà* and as motive substance of automatic writing – takes form and walks.

It is impossible to do justice to Infra Noir's work on language, dreams, objects, monstrosity, or revolutionary action without reference to their theory of somnambulism. For Infra Noir, for example, the Lucretian drifting of atoms and words in liberty is already a kind of somnambulism; exchanges and *rencontres* of objects provoke somnambulistic states; the group's "sur-international mental rendezvous" places its

[3] In these four paragraphs, I read, together, Luca's 1952 followup to his *enquête* and his explanatory letter in 1953 to André Breton. The first is found in *Fusées* 7, cited above, and the second ("Paris le 23 août 1953") is found at Doucet (BRT e. 1064).

participants in a state of "somnambulistic and automatic" passivity.[4] And while somnambulism, once again, can be taken as a kind of passive receptivity akin to the hypnotized patient's suggestibility and highly sensitive responses to faint or fragmentary stimuli, it also tends to contain an active potential. Luca for example imagines, to this effect, a quietly growing plant that contains, in embryo, a wolf. In fact, for Luca the somnambulist can be a wolflike, predatory being, ranked among ghosts (*stafii*), vampires, and succubi, and when he imagines himself as a somnambulist, he tends to invoke sensationalized cases of sleepwalkers committing murder or suicide.[5] Characteristically, he also compares the state of dreamsleep to the ring of fire at a black mass which both allows the demon's appearance and constrains its movements; when the somnambulist walks abroad, this barrier falls.[6]

Infra Noir somnambulism can stand in as well for a generally poetic mode of being and consciousness. Trost writes in *Le Même du même* (1947) that "la mode poétique" admits and promotes the fundamental unity of mental activity between waking life and dream, and thus is a "somnambulisme conscient,"[7] a kind of "veille somnambulique" as above. Somnambulism is also a point of interface with what Trost and others in the group call *destin* (discussed in the previous chapter): in the tract *Dialectique de la dialectique* (1945) for example, Surrealism is urged to attain "l'assurance qui rapelle les voyages des somnambules vers l'intérieur de leur propre

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[4] See Luca, *A Oniriza lumea* (unpaginated manuscript, 1941); Luca, *Le Vampire passif*: *avec une introduction sur l'objet objectivement offert* (Paris: José Corti, 2001), 45 and 85; also a letter inviting Breton to participate in the sur-international rendezvous (Doucet BAT c 1060), January 27, 1951.

[5] *Un Lup văzut printr'o lupă* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945), 43-44, and *Oniriza*. See as well *Lup* (82): "Din fundul beznei în care mă mişc ca un somnambul şi ca un lup […]" (from the deepest darkness where I move like a somnambulist and like a wolf…).

[6] "Ce diable n'aura plus besoin de la conspiration d'un cercle pour se manifester. Pour se vivre soi-même, l'homme ne se réfugiera plus dans le sommeil comme dans un cercle de feu; il passera dans le sommeil comme il passe dans l'état de veille" (*Le Vampire passif*, 55).

[7] *Même du même* (Bucharest: Infra Noir, 1947), 7.

mystère, identifié un instant au destin secret de l'humanité."[8] The somnambulist's sense for *destin* is much like the uncanny sense of certitude, of space and balance, that keeps sleepwalkers from falling from the rooftops. Trost expands upon this in *Vision dans le cristal* (1945):

> En parfait équilibre, sur le bord du toit, le somnambule endormi dans la vie diurne, vérifie pour la première fois le fonctionnement réel de la pensée avec une certitude inconsciente dans laquelle la réalité intérieure et la réalité extérieure se soutiennent réciproquement par une relation objectivement révolutionnaire, et dans laquelle l'action et la théorie se vérifient incessamment d'après les rigoureuses lois du matérialisme scientifique. O somnambules![9]

Trost's somnambulist traces the very line of dialectical interplay between interior and exterior realities that is traced by *destin*, toward a revolutionary future he projects before him like a dream image.

In walking the "unsure and intentionally rickety bridges," as Luca puts it, that link one lived phenomenon to another, the somnambulist is simultaneously retracing and spinning, like a web, the image of this revolutionary future. His balance is dependent on maintaining his in-between state, the tension between the delicacy of his trajectory and the certitude of his vision.[10] If he fully sleeps, or fully wakes, he falls. Luca himself adds that there is nothing better to oppose, with more dialectical violence, to Lenin's term "opium of the people" than the somnambulist as "hallucinatory device placed in the service of the revolution."[11] Infra Noir somnambulism is, once again, directly political, alongside all its other meanings.

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[8] *Dialectique de la dialectique* (30).

[9] Trost, *Vision dans le cristal* (Bucharest: Editions de l'Oubli, 1945), 60-61.

[10] See *Lup* (16) for the fragile bridges and the "plimbar[e] somnambulic[ă]" [somnambulistic stroll] that traverses them with a "natural and unnatural sureness."

[11] Ibid: "[…] decât acest produs halucinatoriu pus în slujba revoluției" (17).

But it is political in a very particular sense. In a 1951 letter to Breton that summarizes Infra Noir's activities and interests (also discussed in Chapter Two), Trost mentions the "développement des états somnambuliques," but also claims a "négation de toute activité politique ou de collaboration avec les éléments non-surréalistes." This negative attitude was a matter of necessity in the tense and politically/culturally repressive situation in Romania. It also speaks both to the group's particular disillusionments and to its awareness of the struggles Breton's group had faced in the 30s and the immediate postwar, with regard to its political alignment and efficacy.[12] But somnambulism appears here, as well, as a kind of alternative to the political *within* the political, an anti-political politics that takes over and operates within the latter's space of action. Already in 1946, Infra Noir's first letter as a group to Breton speaks of a "crisis" and a "désarroi" in the Surrealist movement, and proposes understanding somnambulistic automatic action (in the 1951 letter, "l'automatisme magique de l'action") as a "sur-anarchism" that is the only political attitude now compatible with Surrealism. This, they believe, will render unnecessary any choice between political alliances, especially since such a choice would only be compensatory for insufficiently collective, objective and/or automatic activities on the part of the Surrealists.[13]

Somnambulistic phenomena fall, for Infra Noir, into three major categories. Of the first, automatic action, I provide an account in the rest of the present section. The second two – waking dream (as encapsulated in Luca and Trost's phrase "le fonctionnement onirique dans la vie diurne"), and objective chance – are the subject of the closing section of this chapter. It is with this triad that the Infra Noir group's politics

[12] Letter available on the archival site <andrebreton.fr>.
[13] Letter of November 1946, on <andrebreton.fr>. These arguments about "sur-anarchism" and "compensation" are also discussed in Chapter Two.

comes together into a whole – or rather, not so much its politics as its theory of action and of change, and of somnambulism as a mode of resistance to power, rather than compliance. Infra Noir's "Obstacle," as well – as we have seen it emerge in various epistemological, ideological, or poetological forms,[14] as a problem of doing and of changing – is an additional crucial component of Infra Noir's theory of somnambulism.

Both Trost's 1951 letter and the group's 1946 letter bear witness to the fact that Infra Noir had come to think about the political in terms of the Obstacle: the viciously circular, mutually reinforcing link between a regressive, oppressive social reality and the psychosomatic dispositions of individuals. The problem, as Luca puts it in *Inventatorul iubirii* (The Inventor of Love), is this: for all one talks of reconciling interior and exterior realities, waking and dreaming life, this is beside the point, for they are *already* reconciled. Our "little eternal desires, our eternal and darling little subversive ideas"[15] are already in perfect, mirror-like accord with the society they pretend to undermine, since the latter forms their conditions of emergence. This society can allow them to take flight, so to speak, because it has already clipped their wings. Thus any such flight, any mere "negation" of these conditions – in dreams or utopian reverie, in solitary bitterness, even perhaps in gloriously destructive avant-garde attempts to *épater les bourgeois* – has the effect of reentrenching them. It would be the equivalent of simply closing one's eyes, and dreaming beautiful dreams. Even eyes open, things are not much better: there is a choice between simply giving in (if you can't beat them, join them), or continuing to suffer life as a series of insults to one's freedom and imagination. The "open-eyed" revolutionary

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14 As for the last, see for example Naum: "I have in me," he writes in *Medium*, "the profound sadness of poets who, their whole lives […] broke their backs trying to not make literature, and to the end, leafing through their hundred or so pages, they discovered they'd made nothing but literature." In Simona Popescu ed., *Gellu Naum II: Proză* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2012), 75.

15 *Inventatorul iubirii* (23).

that Luca evokes above (with his "dangerous, auto-punitive, deformative" activities) represents the despair that this choice brings. The only answer to this despair is, as Infra Noir never tires of saying, a negation of negation: a moment in a continuous process of sublation by which every determinate state contains the embryo of what will succeed or abolish it. "Every class of things," explains Engels in *Anti-Dühring* (1877), "has its appropriate form of being negated in such a way that it gives rise to a development."[16] A thing arises, is negated, then is negated again – but this is not a circular return to the same, but a spiralling expansion onto another plane, a development into the unknown.

When it comes to the relation, as Infra Noir sees it, between interior life and exterior life, the negation of negation takes the form of a "yes" – an acceptance of the prior reconciliation of interior and exterior in the Obstacle – that is also a "no" – a re-negotiation of their intimacy, or a re-reconciliation. For this to work, the yes and the no must remain in constant tension, and this is precisely the tightrope walked by the Infra Noir's somnambulist-funambulist, between helpless open-eyed despair and useless closed-eyed delirium. In the very apposite words of Sarane Alexandrian, the somnambulist's solution and his *mot d'ordre* is "dormir les yeux ouverts, agir les yeux fermées."[17] The somnambulist dreams awake, and acts out his dreams.

In 1947, Infra Noir (probably Luca, Trost and Păun) composed a collective text intended for the "Infra-Noir" tract series but never published. The text, titled "Déclaration sur la portée exacte de l'outrance poétique," presently exists in several typewritten

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16 Friedrich Engels, "The Negation of the Negation." *Reader in Marxist Philosophy: From the Writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin* (New York: Intl. Publishers, 1963), 133-137. See also Introduction. Incidentally, Infra Noir named one of their published tract series Negația Negației (negation of negation). A version of this argument about Infra Noir, the Obstacle, and negation of negation appears in my article in *Dada/Surrealism* (V.20 No. 1, 2014).

17 This is one of the chapter headings in Alexandrian's *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

copies, each page marked "L'Infra-Noir," and a draft (or redraft) handwritten by Luca, in an envelope marked "Texte collectif en Roumanie" at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet.[18] It is possible that this "Déclaration" fell victim to increasingly strict postwar censorship in Romania. Luca's response, above, to his hesitant correspondent over the "passage du dormeur au somnambule" quotes this Declaration at length (calling it "Déclaration de l'Infra Noir"), while the Declaration in turn refers to the same "passage du dormeur." A part of the Declaration appears in a letter from Luca to Breton from Jaffa in 1951 (after Luca's final break with Trost), and the same part appears in the tract accompanying the 1951 "Un Objet, un signe" exhibition in collaboration with Păun and Mirabelle Dors in Tel Aviv. Everything points to the great importance of this manifesto for the group, and not only for what it has to say about somnambulism.

In this Declaration, the group depicts itself standing before a "paralyzed" world, trapped in the vicious circle of the Obstacle, where a systematic disparity between desire and the objects of desire makes life suffocating, unlivable. What characterizes this paralyzed world is a confrontation between the "règne de la nécessité" and the "règne de la liberté." There exist certain types of action ("certains moments de l'amour […] les relations fantomatiques des rares amitiés inspirantes de nos jours") that transgress the dominant configurations of the reign of necessity. These acts always take place within an

[18] (50430 GHL ms18); the library dates this text in 1947. Iulian Toma in *Gherasim Luca ou L'intransigeante passion d'être* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012, 217) quotes from the "Déclaration" while discussing the relationship between automatism and chance in Infra Noir. André Breton may have received a copy before 1958, when it was included with a packet of 17 typescripts sent to him for his perusal and correction: see <http://catalogue.gazette-drouot.com/ref/lot-ventes-aux-encheres.jsp?id=2990743>. These were most likely sent by Luca, whose name appears at the head of the auction description. Other texts in the packet included "L'Amour invisible," "Les Noces phylogéniques," and "Androïde contre androgyne" (see Chapter Three), and two sections of Trost's *Visible et invisible*. One of the texts in the packet is by Paul Păun, and titled "Les Pouvoirs à la chimère" (11 pages, with corrections by Breton). I have not seen this text mentioned elsewhere, either by Infra Noir or by its scholars, and thus far I have been unable to track it down.

unstable equilibrium between two hybrid elements, "la substance de notre esprit" and "les esprits de nos corps"; the authors compare their interaction to the "micro-matter" of quantum mechanics. Within this uncertain space of quantum reciprocity, the transgressive actions the authors invoke can be incessantly "provoked" and heightened. But it is not entirely up to such individual (or collective) actions to undermine the reign of necessity. What is required is also an attitude of "active" waiting, of the kind evoked in Gellu Naum's crystallography of desire and in other Infra Noir tracts (see Chapter Three) – a passive expectation that actively precipitates.

The Surrealist movement, says the "Déclaration," must now scour the dross from its "antennae" and actively await the appearance of the "nova" – a word that Trost, for one, uses frequently in his 1953 *Visible et invisible*. Its meaning comprises not only newness as such (as in the Latin *novus*) but the appearance of a star made newly visible, immensely brighter as a result of runaway nuclear fusion on its surface. Trost defines the nova, in *Visible et invisible*, as "la disparition de tout conditionnement du but de l'existence humaine" – or in an early draft of this text, "la disparition de toute infra-structure" – and its "dépassement dans l'incorporation poétique de la vie,"[19] as the reign of necessity crumbles. Again, what hastens the appearance of the *nova* is the very act of expecting it, of waiting for it. What will remain after the explosion of the nova is a counter-nature, or in the Declaration's Spinozian language, a "counter-*natura-naturata*." The Declaration then follows the astronomical figure of the nova with a botanical one. The new counter-nature will be presided over by "La Grande Sensitive" – the popular name for a tropical, sharp-spined, aggressively invasive variant of the sensitive-plant, whose leaves respond dramatically to touch and close to "sleep" at night. The sensitive

[19] See *Visible et invisible* (23) as well as "L'Âge de la rêverie," available at <andrebreton.fr>.

plant had long been a Romantic symbol of human capacities for empathy and susceptibility. With the "Grande Sensitive," passive shifts to active, or rather, passivity takes a combatively active form. This is also the case in the first paragraphs of the "Déclaration," where the group calls to transform the eye – which passively sees and subjectively registers – into an aggressive "oeil-griffe." In this way they indicate that the realities of subjective perception must become projective, violently tearing the fabric of the given realities they encounter.[20] In a third metaphor that follows the nova and the Grande Sensitive, the authors then compare themselves to modified seismographs: instruments of passive recording that, unlike the surrealists described as "modestes appareils enregistreurs" in Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, must themselves provoke, or provoke in the very act of recording, "les beaux séismes." In all these figures, passion becomes action.

Then comes the passage that Infra Noir members repeatedly re-quote across various letters, tracts, and manifestoes:

> L'automatisme, notre premier saut inaltérable, gracé à l'état de son premier jet, il nous appartient d'en faire éclater la trajectoire, en commençant par son passage de l'interne à l'externe, de la sonde à la flèche, de l'investigation à l'instigation, de la pensée à l'action. Nous déclarons ouverte l'époque brillante et grandiose de l'action automatique.[21]

To begin with, in Breton's *First Manifesto*, the "premier jet" of automatism is something upon which the critical spirit bears no judgment, a font and a force that knows no reticence and "qui soit aussi exactement que possible la *pensée parlée*." It announces

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[20] This image recalls a series of paintings and drawings created by Victor Brauner – a mentor for Infra Noir members from the 30s in Bucharest onward – in which the eyes of human or human-like figures are replaced by horns or projecting pseudopods. See for example "Sur le motif" (1937) where these projections are holding paintbrushes, and painting; see also "Légèrement chaude" (1937) and a drawing for an illustration of Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1938).

[21] This passage is also cited in full by Iulian Toma (217).

itself with a phrase or sentence that "viendra toute seule […] une phrase étrangère à notre pensée consciente qui ne demande qu'à s'extérioriser."[22] The "premier jet" is the very promise – perhaps of necessity unfulfillable – of automatic writing, insofar as the latter requires no concomitant or subsequent correction or repression – no "travail automatique," to use Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron's words.[23] It is this quality, and this promise, that Infra Noir is aiming at when it evokes the "real functioning of thought," and which it seeks to transfer bodily into the realm of action.

If the trend of Surrealist automatism was indeed, as the years passed, toward its literarization or lyricization,[24] Infra Noir wants to reverse this process – to locate a pre-literary headspring which might remain uncontaminated by the "l'esprit critique" of the subject (whether engaged in "literary" production or otherwise) and thus by the Obstacle which speaks inexorably through the latter. It is true that using automatism to prospect for new "lyrical values" could be construed as just the sort of active, or activated, passivity that Infra Noir is calling for, with its earthquake-producing seismographs, predatory sensitive-plants, and *oeil-griffes*. It is particularly so if we consider, with Effie Rentzou, that automatic writing – like the proverb-form as a Surrealist genre – is a way of thinking about "l'objectivation du discours à travers l'objectivation du sujet énonçant: 'pensée parlée' par le subconscient pour l'automatisme, anonymat d'un *doxa* pour le

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22 André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 33 and 41.

23 See Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, "Jeu de l'incipit et travail de correction dans l'écriture automatique. L'exemple de *L'Immaculée conception*," in *Une Pelle au vent dans les sables du rêve. Les écritures automatiques*. Berranger and Murat ed. (Lyon: Presses universitares de Lyon, 1992), 125-44.

24 As Effie Rentzou argues in *Littérature malgré elle*: "On constate ici le développement du concept de l'automatisme qui, partant de l'idée de la 'dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale' du premier *Manifeste*, est reconfiguré dans le *Second Manifeste* en terms littéraires plus conventionnels: à présent il est question de 'valeurs lyriques.' Ce déplacement de l'automatisme vers le domaine esthétique, voire poétique, montre bien sa littérarisation progressive au sein même du surréalisme." (Paris: Pleine marge, 2010), 213.

proverbe."[25] Rentzou compares those who utter proverbs to mediums who speak with the voice of an other, though the former speak in the multiple voice of the "anonymat collectif de parole populaire." She argues that Surrealists rewrote and repackaged proverbs for the same reason that they created surrealist objects, which is to say that both proverb and object are "manipulations" of things that are "marquées par l'anonymat collectif," whether of that popular speech or mass production, and that are now "détournées pour souligner une subjectivité éclatante et subversive." What the Bretonian surrealists are after with automatic writing, proverb manipulation, object-making and also their interest in myth (taken as "le passage du sujet à l'objet") appears to be exactly the sort of paradoxical compromise that appeals to Infra Noir: "une parole objectivée qui porte, intacte, la marque du sujet."[26] What these activities have in common is that they aim to interfere with the social construction of reality, with how humans conceptually and materially organize the world; and in some cases they share with mediumship a necessary passivity or receptivity, a kind of passive praxis. The story Infra Noir is telling with its plants, machines and aggressive anatomies is, in some ways, that of a subject making itself a vessel for an "objective" message or process that still bears the mark of the former's desire or revolutionary will.

Infra Noir, however, appears to find Bretonian automatic writing insufficiently objective, in the sense that the subject still has too much room to interfere with the "inépuisable murmure" of Breton's first manifesto; and insufficiently objectivating, in the sense that it lacks an immediately corporeal, embodied manifestation.[27] The way one

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[25] Ibid. (162).
[26] Ibid. (167).
[27] For the reference to the *First Manifesto* see *Manifeste du surréalisme*: "Fiez-vous au caractère inépuisable du murmure" (41-42).

speaks about the world, and the objects one uses in it, both construct and preserve this world – but as Infra Noir urges, so does the way physical bodies move through it, both forging and retracing its permissible paths. When the group declares above that automatism's "sonde" must become a "flèche," this is not only a move, as before, from personal psychology and self-expression to the anonymous collective, from "l'esprit critique du sujet" (which can only be a hapless reflection of the Obstacle) to a kind of pure mediumship, but also, once more, from the linguistic to the corporeal.

In the Infra Noir Declaration, the field par excellence of automatic action is objective chance. In *L'Amour fou*, Breton defines chance first as "la rencontre d'une causalité externe et d'une finalité interne," later as "la forme de manifestation de la nécessité extérieure qui se fraie un chemin dans l'inconscient humain."[28] Readers of Breton and Surrealism have provided various interpretations of these lines and of their implications. Rosalind Krauss explains that objective chance is the process by which "the subject's unconscious thoughts will operate upon reality, recutting it to the measure of their desires." It is also the "seemingly happenstance return of this now refashioned world in the form of a revelation that will, like the message in a bottle, announce to the subject the hitherto buried nature of these phantasms."[29] Hal Foster goes further, treating objective chance as a "defensive projection" of psychic compulsion, trauma and lack onto the world. It is a "'hysterical' confusion between internal impulse and external sign," where phenomena believed to take place outside the self are taking place, fatally, within it.[30] On the other hand, such internal, "psychic" impulses can be taken to be as

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[28] Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 28 and 31.
[29] Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 172.
[30] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 30. Peter Bürger finds the misrecognition not in the psychoanalytical but in the ideological domain. The problem with attempting to

impersonal and "external" as the exterior world itself. In *L'Amour fou*, Breton marvels at "quelles précautions et quelles ruses le désir, à la recherche de son objet, apporte à louvoyer dans les eaux pré-conscientes et, cet objet découvert, de quels moyens […] il dispose pour le faire connaître par la conscience."[31] To a certain degree, desire is given the agency here, rather than the subject of desire; and as we will see below, Infra Noir will take this further, showing how the workings of desire in objective chance ignore any distinction between interior and exterior.

Objective chance, according to the Infra Noir Declaration, must be revised and surpassed, "par des stimulations irrésistibles, par sa multiplication expansive." It must become even more "objective," which is to say more corporeal, and corporeally mediated. The authors write that a "comportement automatique au milieu des faits du hasard" is "la seule pensée devenue corps par sa fonction." This corporeal mediation will allow objective chance to be what it is meant to be: an actual "reply" (*réplique*) from the exterior world to the self. The Declaration, which identifies this "reply" with the *nova*, anticipates the peculiar language of Trost's *Invisible et invisible*, where the "réponse" or the "réplique exotérique" is the reward for finding the right tightrope-balance between "un nouveau masque de la loi biblique" – likely a reference to the righteous excesses of Party discipline – and "une renaissance de l'aventure littéraire," referring at once to the personal, the self-expressive, the culturally commercial, and to the undialectical, "simple"

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find an "objective meaning" in "chance constellations of objects and events" is that in fact there can be no meaning independent of a "human communications nexus." And since this latter realm of meaning-production is perceived as entirely monopolized by bourgeois means-end rationality, the only solution is either "regression to a passive attitude of expectation," or to (impossibly) project meaning beyond the reach of the social. Thus "paradoxically, chance, which subjects man to the totally heteronomous, can […] seem a symbol of freedom." *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 66.

[31] *L'Amour fou* (37).

negations of private revolt.[32] This reply would be something like the violent reaction that rewards a chemist's tireless adjustments of amounts, compounds, and balances.

Objective chance, as the Infra Noir Declaration sees it, is preparatory of this chemical, or fusional, reaction, and is its anticipatory echo. A chemist's or physicist's laboratory is an even more appropriate metaphor, given that the Declaration states that objective chance must be aggressively gamed – that the formerly rare and fortuitous "accord entre la causalité extérieure et la nécessité interne" must be continuously provoked, like sparking wires, by a force of "invention dévorante." And it is precisely the automatic, somnambulist body walking the streets and the rooftops that is capable of doing so. The Declaration explains, "nous mettons à la base de toute efficacité" – again, in a deliberate reference to practical and directly political action – "les échanges réciproques de l'action automatique et du hasard effréné."[33] On a practical level, these reciprocal exchanges often take the form of "absurdes imprudences," "actes insolites," and visits to "parages inconnus," where any sense of precaution and careful strategy must be replaced by "la sécurité […] de la funambule sur la corde flottante" and by the uncanny confidence of the sleepwalker. There is, necessarily, an abyss beneath him. But

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[32] Trost, *Visible et invisible* (23). The difference with *Visible et invisible* is that here the "réplique exotérique" is only given to certain kinds of authentic collective action, representing a step up from "une simple collection de forces groupées autour de certains principes." The Main à Plume group placed similar requirements on collectivity, especially with regard to automatism. There is a distinction between "composite" automatisms where an effect of depersonalization is created by the forced conjunction of several "individual" automatisms, and a true fusion or "osmose" (Bureau, "Morale des mots et des objets," in Vernay et al., 61). What Trost is after is something like a combination of automatism, collective depersonalization, and chance.

[33] With Trost in *Visible et invisible*, things become more complex still. Trost describes exchanges of "forces" that are similar, in their "magnetic" workings, to the vital fluid of the mesmerists. Objective chance, in its various *rencontres*, prepares for the *sur-rencontre*, which is the encounter with the "réplique" and the "transmission réciproque de la pensée dans l'action." At this point, the "réplique" also becomes identified with Trost's "jeune fille-femme, réplique ready-made et trouvée du monde extérieur," who is at once the mystery of the world itself, the power of love, an androgyne in whom diurnal and nocturnal, self and world are conjoined, a Sophia-figure, a clairvoyant medium and magnetized somnambulist, and a "brillante machine érotique" (27-29).

his very confidence invites the world, seen as a whirlwind of chance events, to favorably respond, seeming to guide the sleepwalker's steps.[34] In *L'Amour fou*, as we saw in Chapter Three, Breton writes of a "forêt d'indices," and of an *écran* upon which, like Leonardo's cracked and mottled wall, the act of perception and pattern-recognition is also an act of creation. For Breton, to modify the words of *L'Amour fou*, to desire *is* to precipitate.[35] In the Declaration, when the somnambulist enters the *forêt d'indices*, he responds with his own "forêt de gestes," which follows the same logic of desire and precipitation. The authors write:

> Ainsi dans le domaine de la connaissance […] les mêmes précautions d'oubli doivent être prises qui nous rendent perméables [aux] irruptions automatiques et aux messages du hasard. La méconnaissance déborde la connaissance, elle dirige le feu dans la forêt des gestes.

This "forêt des gestes" is nothing other than somnambulistic automatic action. The somnambulist performs a translation of the forest of signs into the forest of *gestes*, so that the acts of interpreting, desiring and precipitating play out not upon the *écran* of Leonardo's Wall but between the human body and the bodies that surround it, becoming a corporeal trajectory. What the authors might also be indicating with this suggestive phrase is that while surrealist desire interprets a sensory field that it convulses into signs and wonders, the Infra Noir somnambulist reverses these positions. Now, the surrealist body itself becomes a "forest" of signs to be interpreted, so to speak, by the world around it, and the world is forced to re-interpret or transform itself in and by this act.

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[34] For an extended exploration of the world's favorable "response" to somnambulist confidence, see Gellu Naum's novel *Zenobia*. For example: "I would clearly see to what extent the objects or the people were in connection to my states, I would acknowledge the at least unconscious power of objects and people to answer those states. […] I tried not to disturb the law [of it], to keep myself receptive [*disponibil*] to its movements." James Brook and Sasha Vlad transl. (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1995), 81-82.

[35] "Le délire d'interprétation ne commence qu'où l'homme mal préparé prend peur dans cette *forêt d'indices*." This forest is composed of "toute perception enregistrée de la manière la plus involontaire." Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 22. For Leonardo's Wall, see Chapter Three as well as *L'Amour fou* (125-26). For "merveilleux précipité du désir" see ibid. (21).

The key moves and concepts of Infra Noir surrealism, especially as they apply to somnambulism, appear in the Declaration in concentrated and promiscuously interconnected form. There is, for example, an evocation of myth as a powerfully collective and objectivating force: the Infra Noir somnambulist theatrically plays out, directly upon the stage of "action," the scenes of a "mythe impérieux." The group also references, as Luca does in his explanations of Infra Noir somnambulism to Breton and others, the problem of "means and ends" that troubled French intellectual society at the onset of the Cold War (see Chapter Two). The Declaration presents automatic action as a dialectical surpassing of this problem since, the authors claim, automatic action makes means and ends indistinguishable. This is because the somnambulist, seeing his revolutionary dream before him, acts it out with confident finesse as if it were real (he has "la faculté de réagir devant l'image onirique"[36]), and in this way his "means" simultaneously imply and create his "ends," at least on this individual scale.

Finally, in the Declaration Infra Noir also emphasizes the role of the feminine, of Woman as a category, and of erotic love in its theory of somnambulistic action. Infra Noir texts are populated with plenty of female somnambulists, but – as I suggest above – somnambulism often functions as a masculine recuperation of a passive, mediumistic or hysterical receptivity that is regarded as feminine. For Infra Noir, the manifestation of femininity that accompanies this masculine somnambulism is most often the exterior world itself, whether in its stultified inertia or in its pliability to the workings of automatism and chance. To Infra Noir automatic actors, the world, "par des superbes fissures, nous permet d'aperçevoir sa beauté passive, ses zones d'appel vulnérables." Men, with "tout la force projective de leurs yeux," or of their *oeil-griffes*, simultaneously

[36] Trost, *Visible et invisible* (62).

see and violate the world's "vierges espaces," populating them with "material visions." Woman here is a kind of endlessly fecund space. She is also the ultimate Object. Luca and Trost have it in *Dialectique de la dialectique* that a new "amour objectif," beyond any existing "social, medical and psychological" forms and labels for loving relationships, is a means of action of the most "efficacious" kind. In this they are echoed by the philosopher Jean Brun, with whom Infra Noir was in contact in the mid-40s. Brun writes in his contribution to the catalog accompanying the international *Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition that transfiguring love for another person, which he calls "amour objectivé," is the ideal means of mystical fusion with the world and the objects in it, "comme [on] pénètre la femme qu'[on] aime."[37] Likewise in the Declaration, automatic action links Infra Noir's notion of objective love to precisely this fantasy, one of "pénétration universelle." Here, woman-as-world becomes a "gigantesque objet" who, initially unwilling yet soon enthralled, "accepts" the revolution.

Surrealism's programmatic embrace of love is both a rhetorical and a political project. It is rhetorical in that it seeks to intensify communication between individuals, and it is political insofar as it aims to work within this communicative-seductive rapport to modify and replace systems of social values. And both the rhetoric and the politics of Surrealist love address themselves to the body: to an individual, physical body that participates in the formation of meaning and affect as well as in the reception of amorous-rhetorical overtures, and to the social body.[38] Love and the erotic are, in

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[37] "Le Problème de la sensation et le surréalisme," 91. For their contact, see letter from Trost to Breton titled "Activité du groupe surréaliste de Bucarest (1940-1950)," on <andrebreton.fr>. For more on the exhibition and the catalog, see Chapter Two.

[38] This is Rentzou's argument in *Littérature* (261-67). One might make the case that the orality and the Lucretian whirlwind of words/atoms in Luca's *Héros-Limite* (1953) and later texts were the ultimate

Surrealism, a conscious and programmatic principle of action both corporeal and social, and Infra Noir fully inherits it in this form. Automatic action, in particular, is all about the "erotisation manifeste du monde."[39] But what this also means, in Infra Noir's case, is that any doubts they have about the revolutionary efficacy of their methods are easily coded as sexual frustration, and revolutionary success as vengeful sexual conquest.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that when Infra Noir political-erotic somnambulism succeeds – in moments of great interpersonal and/or revolutionary exaltation – it is understood that close friendships between men are as much the inspiration as heterosexual "mad love." We encountered something of this with the "masturbation mutuelle" and symbolic exchanges of male members in the previous chapter. These events can be understood as constituting somnambulistic relationships between men. In Luca's work in particular, when a somnambulistic relationship between men is fully consummated, a flow of spoken language results, something like the "échange permanent de sperme" brought about by object-exchange in *Le Vampire passif*. In *Vampire* Luca also creates an object intended for André Breton that begins "à murmurer entre moi et Breton une langue magique et noire, si près du rêve et d'une langue fondamentale," lasting several days and provoking conflict with Luca's female companion. Similarly, after the 1951 sur-international rendezvous, Luca writes to Breton of wandering the streets of Jaffa in a state of automatic action, with the latter's image glowing brightly in his mind. Under Breton's spell, automatic thought and automatic

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destination of his understanding of automatic action. Rentzou compares the proverb in its socially-destined orality to automatism in its tendency to "verser la poésie dans le vécu," and vice versa (162).

[39] Letter from Luca to Victor Brauner, November 1946, originally in Romanian. In *Victor Brauner: Ecrits et correspondances 1938-1948* (Paris: Institut national d'histoire d'art, 2005), 225. Recall also the stagings of revolutionary-sexual conquest in the poems of *Viața imediată* and other interwar Romanian journals, discussed in Chapter One.

action are perfectly united, and Luca spontaneously begins spinning and stuttering out words in the light of a streetlamp, words to which it would not be difficult, if one wished, to lend an erotic meaning: "il est tout près, il est prêt, il le prennent [*sic*] et me le prête, ils prennent le temps, prennent le temps, le temps est près, tout près de mes dents, je le prétends, je prétends le temps, tout est prêt: le près, le lointaine et leur printemps."[40]

Whatever the nature of such exchanges, and wherever along the continuum of love and friendship or of verbal exchange and physical violence they fall, what they have in common is that they create the conditions of a special kind of life – of what Infra Noir, both in its individual and collaborative texts, calls a "vie dans la vie." Each member feels, in his own way, that life as it is offered is frankly unlivable – *invivable*. Paul Păun describes it as *unbreathable*, and the goal of automatic action for Păun is to give its practitioner space to take a few short breaths. The Infra Noir Declaration compares this life-within-life to the rigor, isolation and marvelous expectations of a "séance médiumnique." But only to a degree, for there are no walls separating these marvels from the bright world outside. There is only a kind of infra-thin membrane, the barest margin of difference between this life and the "vraie vie" that can be lived within it, like its invisibly beating heart – as thin as what separates simulacra from realities, or as the closed eyelids that separate the somnambulist's dreams from the waking city he wanders.

[40] For these passages see *Le Vampire passif* (23) and materials available on <andrebreton.fr.>

4. Somnambulism as Waking Dream and as Objective Chance

André Breton's introductory essay for the *Surréalisme en 1947* catalog, "Devant le rideau," is in intense dialogue with the internal and external debates that troubled wartime and postwar surrealists. It is also in dialogue with the work and ideas of the Infra Noir group, as set forth in their correspondence with him and in the texts they sent him. Breton writes, for example, of lending oneself to a "grande désorientation," but one that, unlike in the game of blind man's bluff, is not limited to a single closed space. Such a visionary, open disorientation, without the least "point de repère," is for Breton comparable to the Surrealist attitude toward the blank, yet-unwritten page. It is here and in this context that Breton approvingly quotes the Infra Noir group's *mot d'ordre* which, he says, must remain Surrealism's as well: "la connaissance par la méconnaissance."[1] And he does not stop there, going on to explain that the great disorientation of *méconnaissance* can manifest itself as "écriture automatique véridique," and equally as "une action," perhaps of limited scope, but still capable of breaking free of the most powerful utilitarian, rational, aesthetic and moral constraints.[2] Such an act, which Breton also calls a "true dream," would begin with "le refus catégorique des conditions de vie et de pensée faites à l'homme au milieu du vingtième siècle," and could only be carried out "au prix d'une *ascèse*." Might this ascesis be something like a *vie dans la vie* – as with a practitioner of Zen who, having attained enlightenment, simply goes on drawing water and hewing wood as before? Would it be more like the euphoric but often agonized and

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1 "Devant le rideau," in Breton and Duchamp ed., *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Pierre à Feu, Maeght, 1947), 15. "Selon l'heureuse formule de nos amis de Bucarest, la connaissance par la méconnaissance demeure le grand mot d'ordre surréaliste." This "formule" is a quotation from "Le Sable nocturne" in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. See also Chapter Two for *méconnaissance* and the 1947 exhibition.
2 Ibid. (15-16).

precarious ascesis of Luca's non-Oedipus,[3] or again, the ascesis of the tightrope walker in his balance and focus?

Whatever the case, and regardless of whether Breton is here reflecting upon Infra Noir's theory of automatic action, one of the immediate applications of this ascesis is to a problem related to dreaming. Infra Noir would call it a problem of dream's relation to the Obstacle. Something can still be recovered, Breton writes, of the original grandeur and potential of the human act of dreaming. But the problem is that for the most part (as Breton quotes Thomas de Quincey at length, though selectively):

> L'homme qui parle de bœufs probablement rêvera de bœufs. Et la condition humaine, qui tient la grande majorité de nos semblables sous le joug d'une expérience journalière incompatible avec une grande élévation de pensée, stérilise bien souvent nos rêves, rendant leur pouvoir reproducteur inapte à toutes espèce de grandeur […]. Parmi toutes les facultés qui, chez l'homme, ont à souffrir aujourd'hui de la vie trop intense des instincts sociaux, il n'en est pas une qui souffre davantage que la faculté de rêver.[4]

Breton comments on this passage that, in an era when most dreams tend to be of oxen, revolutionary social thought has forgotten that it begins as a waking dream (*rêve éveillé*); socialism itself has sought to eliminate such useless luxuries as dreams from human life. The crucial point, however, is that dreaming by itself is not enough, since dreamers live in and are shaped by a world that limits the dream's scope. And in this compact statement, immediately after handing the Surrealist movement's *mot d'ordre* to Infra Noir, it is difficult not to see a response to the group's work on dream up to this moment, in texts like Luca's *Le Vampire passif*, Trost's *Vision dans le cristal: oniromancie obsessionnelle* (1945), and *Dialectique de la dialectique* by the two together.[5]

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[3] For Luca's "non-Oedipus" see Introduction as well as Chapter Three, Section 2, note 26.

[4] Ibid. (16)

[5] These three texts were all published in 1945, and Breton had copies of all three of these works in his archive. His copy of *Le Vampire passif* contains two group letters to him, both from 1946. The group

These works themselves are, of course, in close dialogue with the positions of Breton and of the Surrealist movement thus far. Their originalities lie in their programmatic or practical responses to problems raised by Breton and others, as well as in their particular emphases. Trost's book-length *Vision dans le cristal* comprises several linked theoretical essays on dreams – and dreams in Surrealism – as well as dream transcriptions, of which seven are interpreted according to a peculiar method:

> Comme dans l'analyse, je reprenais chaque phrase symptomatique, mais au lieu de la mettre en association mnésique d'idées, j'ouvrais au hasard, à l'aide d'un couteau, un manuel de pathologique érotique, en considérant le texte qui me tombait sous les yeux comme interprétant la phrase lue auparavant.[6]

In one of the theoretical sections of this volume, Trost argues in classic Surrealist fashion for a unified mental substance responsible for diurnal thought, dream and madness, where any distinction between them is a result of both social and psychological limitations and habits. The dream is able, ideally, to allow this substance to freely function, cleansed of these limitations. But Trost places greatest emphasis on the fact that, as he puts it, one must locate "l'opposition théorique rêve-réalité dans l'intérieur même de l'activité onirique."[7] What he means by this is that dreams are easily invaded and impeded by traces of a repressive social reality, and that the battle between this reality and the purity

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tended to send him copies of their works enclosed with their letters, so it is likely that Breton received *Vision* and *Dialectique* before 1947. As for the other works where the dream-waking relation is discussed: *Inventatorul iubirii* (1945) did not appear in French translation until the 1990s; Trost's *Le Même du même* appeared in 1947 and the online Breton archive doesn't hold a copy; and Trost's *Visible et invisible* appeared in 1953. Of course, Breton and Infra Noir did not hold a monopoly on the idea of the waking or "experimental" dream as parallel or alternative to the practice of automatic writing, nor on the idea that the power of dreams was sapped by the dreamer's entanglement in his oppressive/oppressed society. In Tristan Tzara's "Essai sur la situation de la poésie" (*SASDLR* 1931, no.3) for example, dream-images often reflect an "alienated" social life (*Oeuvres complètes* t. 5. Paris: Flammarion, 1991, 26). In *Grains et issues* in 1935 (see "Rêve expérimental") this reflection of a "vie sociale aliénée" becomes an "automatism" that resides in the subconscious of the poet, and which must be overcome (*Œuvres complètes* vol. 3, 103). The so-called "experimental dream" is capable of this overcoming, but only to the extent that it is not "uniquement soumis à la volonté du poète." As in Infra Noir's automatic action, "l'activité délirante se substitue consciemment à l'inspiration poétique."

6 *Vision* (14).

7 Ibid. (48).

of the dream takes place on the terrain of the dream itself. On this terrain, the most powerful and subversive desires tend to be censored *not* by a protective mechanism belonging to the psyche, but by the psyche's various internalizations of social "determinants." A genuine desire, for example, might be forced to appear in the guise of a "reactionary" image. Processes like transference, displacement and symbolic sublimation are now, in an inversion of the old psychoanalytical narrative, the tools the dream uses to protect itself from such hostile images.

We must surpass, Trost writes, "l'état actuel du rêve."[8] Like Breton in *Les Vases communicants*, Trost wonders about the possibilities for "guiding" dreams, enhancing their ability to actively alter rather than passively accept the various realities that dreams base themselves on. He also feels that dream must overcome its status as simple, mirror-like negation of these realities, which has the effect of preserving the latter: "Le rêve connu s'oppose, il est vrai, à la réalité diurne-régressive, mais dans les limites assignées par celle-ci."[9] As one possible solution to this problem, Trost considers cases where one dreams that one is dreaming, a phenomenon that Breton also discusses in *Vases*. One function of the dream-within-a-dream can be, as Trost notes, "censural" – perhaps drawing from Breton's observation that its goal is to remove from one part of the dream "son caractère de réalité trop authentique."[10] But Trost wonders whether it might be understood instead as a complex negation, a kind of dialectical nesting. Trost proposes, for example, taking the world exterior to the dream as already being a "nightmare" – an

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[8] Ibid. (60).

[9] Ibid. (43). Examples of reactionary residues in dreams (or *mécanique*, *mnésique* "clichés-souvenirs") include "les noms de rues, des visages stupides, des scènes castrantes" (64). The key, Trost writes later, is to avoid "les rêves parentaux, alimentaires, filiaux, professionels et intestinaux. Par contre, nous avons accepté les rêves d'amour, d'habillement, de vol et de voyage" (80).

[10] *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: Éditions des Cahiers libres, 1932), 70.

unreal, oppressive diminution of a truer, freer life-world. Those living within this "nightmare," in turn, dream: but this dream is either a too-literal representation of the nightmare or, what amounts to the same thing, a simple negation of it, tending to preserve its oppressive qualities. The dream-within-a-dream is a negation of that negation which, rather than circling back to the reality-nightmare, spirals up to link directly back to the truer life, the *vraie vie*. Or rather, like the "vie dans la vie" above, it is a simulation (or re-simulation) of reality that unsettles the dream-reality dichotomy. Breton, in *Vases*, similarly finds in the dream-within-a-dream a "véritable *dialectisation* de la pensée de rêve"; the dream represents itself to itself, reproducing the dream-reality split within its own boundaries, and thus allows desire to find its realization where it might otherwise be blocked by memories and remembered truths that are foreign to this desire.[11]

Thus when Trost and Luca proclaim in *Dialectique de la dialectique* that the Infra Noir group is seeking "le fonctionnement onirique dans la vie diurne,"[12] they are not saying that whatever is dreamlike about dreams must somehow be transferred into life. They are saying rather that what is most dreamlike about dream is precisely what is most vibrantly alive in life, and that, though both dream and life must struggle with the Obstacle on their own terrain, it is the same struggle. "Le fonctionnement onirique dans la vie diurne" is fundamentally the same phenomenon as what Trost calls the "rêve à fonctionnement onirique."[13] They are both forms that freedom from the Obstacle might take. And if the somnambulist appears with such frequency and centrality in these arguments, it is because in the somnambulist these two aspects of the same freedom – nocturnal and diurnal – are for Infra Noir emblematically reunited.

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[11] Ibid. (71).
[12] *Dialectique* (26).
[13] *Vision* (68).

Gherasim Luca acknowledges, in *Le Vampire passif*, that in seeking to entangle dream with waking life the French Surrealists have made great leaps toward "somnambulistic" freedom. But he feels that they have done so only on a personal, one-by-one basis. On the collective level, they remain within the nightmare and the dreams that reflect it.[14] Luca explores various ways of dealing with this problem – for example, the creation of a community of erotically-charged object construction and exchange. Within such a community, the relations established between its members are founded "sur un inconscient collectif actif," which he compares to a collective dream. For all those involved in exchanging *objets objectivement offerts* (O.O.O.), this "inconscient collectif actif" can be directly infused into "les relations diurnes et directes entre les hommes, relations qui […] se montreraient aussi subversives, étranges et révélatrices que celles du rêve."[15] The oneiric drama of desire seeking its fulfillment through the material and symbolic manipulation of materials from waking life is played out with each object made and given – and just as in the dream as described by Trost, the O.O.O. wages a struggle with the Obstacle and must constantly evade its "censorship." But more importantly, Luca's "collective-active unconscious" and/or collective waking dream represents a close entanglement of the phenomena of objective chance and somnambulism, as well as a theory of collectivity in which they are mutually dependent.

In the first place, says Luca, everyone dreams, or is capable of dreaming. Somnambulism can recreate this natural commonality upon the waking stage, thus "completing" the dream. In the process, somnambulism becomes collective. Objective chance in turn, classically a phenomenon experienced during the waking state – though

[14] *Vampire* (47).
[15] Ibid. (9).

often using fragments and indications from dreams in its elaboration – is here remade as a collective waking dream as well, experienced via somnambulistic states. Objective chance in this way becomes collective. Luca writes that in the case of the O.O.O., the object both harnesses and enhances objective chance as a "dynamic" and a "dramatic" force – partaking, respectively, of clairvoyant ambulatory automatism and of theatrical simulation. It does so by completely changing the nature of interpersonal relations, making them "la manifestation somnambulique d'un inconscient collectif en état de veille complétant sa manifestation nocturne."[16]

Objective chance as it is elaborated in Bretonian Surrealism is already to some degree collective, since it is literally composed of encounters: between one person and another, a person and an object, an object and a sign. This is also, for Infra Noir, what objective chance already has in common with dreaming: "C'est par des rencontres fortuites que se manifeste […] l'activité onirique dans la vie diurne."[17] Thus to multiply the possibilities for encounter by increasing the number of elements involved – people, objects – simultaneously intensifies the workings of objective chance and enhances its potential for collectivity. Luca explains, for example, that the search for an *objet trouvé* destined to be offered to another person multiplies "les causalités externes et imprime au hasard objectif le rhythme des nécessités intérieures," including libidinous impulses or feelings of love or hate. If Luca feels that, in searching for or creating an offered object, such interpersonal impulses "force" chance to fall in line with them it is likely because, to a degree, objective chance is composed of objects just as it is of encounters – objects are its corporeal presence in space. At the same time these objects in all their variety are the

[16] Ibid. (11).
[17] *Vision* (62).

"equivalents" or prolongations of drives, emotions and passions.[18]

The "triple" – a native Infra Noir concept we encountered in Chapter Three – is also "faite l'objets, de formes," and is complexly twined with objective chance. Paul Păun's account of the triple, somnambulism and objective chance in *Le Conspiration du silence* begins with the prone body of the hysteric, passive, her "corps animal" exquisitely receptive to all stimuli and suggestions. He compares this hysterical body to automatism as it has been practiced thus far in the Surrealist movement. Now is the time, however, for automatism to be joined with objective chance. Their union will result in a tranformation of both: the former is upgraded to "surautomatism," and as for the latter, "il n'y a plus d'obstacle réel l'opposant à la rencontre toujours imprévisible, toujours possible dans des conditions imprévues […] à l'union du hasard et du désir dans les actes sans limites."[19] In other words, in this particular version, objective chance, in its union of desire and act, is upgraded to automatic action, which Păun also calls "automatisme vivant." Automatic action is what objective chance becomes, in fact, for a self who forgets itself, who has no past, facing ever forward "comme les bras des aveugles," with no "fixation affective" on any of its deeds or experiences. Within this selfless subject of a transformed objective chance, there is an "*immaculée conception* du désir" – a desire free, to recall the last chapter's discussion, of the original sin of subjectivity. Objective chance as automatic action is driven by the constant forming and reforming of *rencontres*, of constantly bifurcating unities – by the triple, whose emblem is a bifurcation: the "Y."

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[18] *Vampire* (11-12).

[19] Paul Păun, *La Conspiration du silence* (Bucharest: Infra-Noir, 1947), 5. In *Esprits animaux*, to describe this process, he writes that automatism's "sonde" must become a "flèche" (5) – wording repeated in the Infra Noir Declaration.

Păun writes, in *Les Esprits animaux*, that there is no need of "une autre politique que celle du hasard objectif."[20] Here, politics means primarily the possibility and praxis of large-scale social change, of an alteration of the interhuman fabric. This is also the case when Păun says that automatic action is "l'aboutissement le plus éloigné de ce que nous pouvons imaginer comme pratique révolutionnaire."[21] Păun makes sure his reader understands, though, that the politics of objective chance and of automatic action requires self-loss, and a certain kind of blindness. In a "perte d'identité de toute chose" lies the means of "l'alchimie politique de notre temps." The words do not yet exist, he writes, to describe the nature of the action that will open the floodgates of change, except that it is a "passion active," as with the seismographs and *oeil-griffes* above, as well as an "aveuglement systématique" comparable to the uncanny blindness of the somnambulist, who feels his way forward with his "bras sans visage." This anonymous, faceless, but highly attuned blindness is necessary, since it allows a freedom from "les partielles lumières du donné, du déjà-vu théorique et politique." In essence, it fights blindness with blindness, since these givens and déjà-vus conceal what is possible and jamais-vu. This is its "dialectics of despair," its negation of negation.[22]

In Infra Noir's texts and correspondence, again and again, the phrase "anonymous and collective" appears as a talismanic emblem of the group's highest poetic and political

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[20] *Esprits* (6).

[21] *Conspiration* (5).

[22] *Esprits* (6). Also see the "active-passive" figure described in Breton's *Arcane 17*: "Peut-être n'est-il donné à un homme d'agir sur la sensibilité des autres hommes pour la modeler, l'élargir qu'à la condition de s'offrir lui-même en holocauste à toutes les puissances éparses dans l'âme de son temps. […] C'est en ce sens que cet homme est […] par un mystérieux décret de ces puissances, il *doit* être tout à la fois leur victime et leur dispensateur. Ainsi en va-t-il nécessairement d'un certain goût de la liberté humaine qui, appelé à étendre même en d'infimes proportions le champ de réceptivité de tous, attire sur un seul toutes les consequences funestes de l'immodération. La liberté ne consent à caresser un peu la terre qu'eu égard à ceux qui n'ont pas su, ou ont mal su vivre, pour l'avoir aimée *à la folie*." (*Œuvres III,* 43). The flag this figure carries, in *Arcane*, is both the red flag of creation and the black, anarchic flag of destruction.

ambition. Gherasim Luca, for example, writes of the 1947 Surrealist exhibition at Galerie Maeght as an opportunity to "undertake a *collective and anonymous* work." In a letter to Victor Brauner in the same month, the value of the exhibition's project of "planting a knife in the back of the déjà-vu" lies in its "caractère collectif et ANONYME à la façon des grandes époques de la négation."[23] This is what will allow it to contribute to the creation of "un énorme mythe synthétique de la sensibilité moderne," to replace the myths of personal inspiration and artistic genius. As for the latter two, around this time Luca in particular seems to have felt a pressure to give way to a "murderous avalanche of invitations to notoriety […] and to cultural fossilization," which only an enormous "NO" could answer.[24] As the group explains in a November 1946 letter to Breton, automatic action is itself a form of "no," a resounding answer to the careerism, the "masters," personalities and "deliberate" artistry that are undermining Surrealism from the inside.[25] On the other hand, automatic action is also a step toward "la liberté de l'imagination *individuelle* en contact permanent avec les fulgurantes nécessités universelles."[26] This phrasing is, essentially, a variation on Breton's definition of objective chance above, where internal "finality" or the unconscious entangles with external necessity. But what is the status of the "individual" imagination in "collective-anonymous" action? And in Infra Noir's politics of objective chance, what form can the first half of Breton's definition take – internal finality, the human unconscious, the imagination, desire – when interiority and the individual in their familiar forms have been rejected? For this is what Păun does above, and this is what Infra Noir's collective somnambulism, in its various

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[23] *Athanor* 2/2008 (26), Letter to Brauner of August 1946; Brauner, *Écrits* (222-223), letter of 23 August 1946. See also Chapter Three.
[24] *Athanor* 2/2008 (35). Letter to Naum of August 1946.
[25] Available on <andrebreton.fr>. Naum's signature not present.
[26] Brauner, *Écrits* (222-223). Italics mine.

forms, aims toward. How exactly does Infra Noir conceive of the revolutionary practice they advocate to Breton, "le pratique obstinée et aveugle, *anonyme* et *collectif* du hasard objectif"?[27]

For Breton after all, the workings of objective chance are to a great extent personal. The inner and outer forces at work may threaten to exceed and overpower the conscious, desiring subject, but the latter is still present, inquiring as to what he can know, what he ought to do, and what he can hope for. It is the desiring subject whose "active passion" creates a field of interpretation, or an *écran*, and simultaneously describes and constructs the meanings that take shape upon it – the premonitions, coincidences, suggestive and treacherous facts, and signs taken for wonders. On the other hand, Breton lends a certain agency to desire itself, over that of the subject who is its seat. He calls for a willingness to become a kind of abstract embodiment of *disponibilité*, wandering "à la rencontre de tout," and freeing desire from the too-personal considerations that might bind it.[28] Similarly, when the interviewer André Parinaud asks Breton in 1952 to explain the Surrealist group's interest in chance and coincidence, Breton says that objective chance is nothing other than "le lieu géométrique de ces coïncidences" – a geometry that, in its close networking of exterior and interior events, ignores the boundary between the two.[29]

What I believe is that Infra Noir's collective-anonymous theory of objective chance maintains an interiority as a necessary counterpart to the magic-circumstantial

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[27] Letter of November 1946, <andrebreton.fr>.
[28] See *L'Amour fou* (37-39).
[29] See *Œuvres III, Entretiens radiophoniques X* (515).

arrangement of exterior events,[30] but it is an interiority of a special kind. It is an interiority that is empty – which is to say, unanchored to any fixed or essential selfhood, whether understood as a conscious humanist self or as an unconscious Freudian self. It is an interiority that is at the same time full, even teeming – with desires, drives and dreams. Recall, from the previous chapter, the *brouillard* described by Păun, which shifts his desires and even his acts to a place just shy of his corporeal and psychic boundaries. These desires and acts are "sans siège," but they can return to roost in the empty locus of *rencontre* and relation that would otherwise be his "self," a locus that is "peuplé et surpeuplé d'une multitude illimité de pulsions."[31] In Păun's vision, desire is not necessarily personal, and moreover it is possible, impersonally, to rehearse all the signs and gestures of the personal. Infra Noir's approach to objective chance, like its theories of the object and of somnambulism, traces the outline of this impersonal desire and this "other" interiority, in both its emptiness and plenitude.[32]

Space and its relational geometries appears for Infra Noir to replace psychic or psychoanalytic interiority, allowing for a collective-anonymous network of

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[30] See also Rentzou on the relationship between objective chance and the "magique-circonstantielle" mode of convulsive beauty in *L'Amour fou*: "la part de la coïncidence est toujours présente, mais la nécessité interne, le désir, qui semble l'appeler, y apporte la composante magique. Un certain besoin extérieur – 'circonstantiel' – exige une intervention qui est plus que satisfaite par une solution qui le dépasse en révélant d'autres possibilités – 'magique.' La synthèse dialectique entre les deux donne le hasard objectif" (296-97).

[31] *Conspiration* (2-3).

[32] Gilles Deleuze stages a confrontation between the model of desire central to Hal Foster's reading of objective chance above and the model that animates Infra Noir's somnambulistic objective chance. Whenever desire is seen as a "bridge between a subject and an object," desire appears as lack, accompanied by "the holy castration, the split subject, the death drive." Rather, he and Guattari see desire as "criss-crossed by particles and fluxes which break free from objects and subjects […] strictly immanent to a plane which it does not pre-exist, to a plane which must be constructed, where particles are emitted and fluxes combine. […] Far from presupposing a subject, desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power of saying 'I.' Far from directing itself toward an object, desire can only be reached at the point where someone no longer searches for or grasps an object any more than he grasps himself as a subject." Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2007), 89.

somnambulistic action. What matters here most is posture and gesture. It is no accident that the group's calls for anonymous-collectivity are most urgent in the months preceding the 1947 exhibition and the installation, so they hoped, of a new kind of collective "space" that would set the conditions for "une sensibilité tout à fait autre."[33] The goal of somnambulistic automatic action is not only to be inhabited by space (as in Caillois's *psychasthénie legendaire*), but to "determine, torment, open" space, and thus to modify its power over sensibility, in a constant feedback loop. To return to Breton, the task of the poet – the poet being the agent of social change par excellence – is not only to reconcile action and dream but to remind us that we ourselves are "un lieu indéfiniment perfectible de résolution et d'écho."[34]

For Infra Noir, somnambulism – which comprises dreamstates and channels the workings of chance – is a complex network between a world of facts, objects, relations and forces, and an entity (or rather, a locus) who is a perfect simulacrum of a person. As in the *somnambulisme à l'état de veille* of the late 19th century, the somnambulist's eyes are wide open, and he speaks and acts normally, but behind this façade he is traversed and animated by, and participates in, these relations and forces. He is like the artwork as Adorno evokes it in *Aesthetic Theory*, a thing of the "redeemed world [where] everything would be as it is and yet wholly other."[35] Infra Noir's sleepwalkers, impersonal persons, are also the component elements of an anonymous revolutionary collective in the service of desire.

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33 Brauner, *Écrits* (222-223). Letter of 23 August 1946.

34 *Vases* (170-71). For "psychasthénie legendaire" see Chapter Three. For tormenting and opening space, see the tract "Un Objet, un signe" accompanying Luca, Dors and Păun's 1951 Tel Aviv exhibition of the same name. Doucet (GHL Pp 11).

35 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), 6.

Infra Noir elaborates its politics in relying heavily on the somnambulist as a conceptual tool, and a slippery one at that. In somnambulism the group attempts to solve many problems at once: that of the relationship between necessity and freedom, or as a corollary, between social "determinants" and artistic creation, between the Obstacle and desire, between the blindness that leads human societies into catastrophe and atrocity and the blindness that lets them clairvoyantly see a better alternative, beyond or beside it. The somnambulist is a figure by which such opposed poles – along with those of sleep and waking, passion and action – instead of reaching synthesis or a middle ground, remain in dialectical flux, each pole finding both its undoing and its realization in the other.

Epilogue

Post-Noir: the End of the Romanian Surrealist Group

In early 1951, things were starting to look up in the Southern Levant. Dolfi Trost and Gherasim Luca had moved to Jaffa in the new state of Israel, and were increasingly delighted by the uncanniness of daily intimacy with its narrow streets and secrets. At every turn and every sudden view of the sea, life and the yet-unknown presented itself anew, both perilous and exciting. Their faith in automatic action and "somnambulistic" active-passivity as forms of revolutionary intervention was still strong.[1]

But by the summer, the story of the new, post-Romanian Infra Noir group had already ended. It is unclear what exactly happened. In August 1951, Trost writes to Breton:

> Étant donné que mon ancien ami Ghérasim Luca a pris une position absolument opposé à mes thèses, qui a culminé par une attaque physique lâche contre moi, je tiens à vous informer qu'après cette aggression, je le considère actuellement comme un contre-révolutionnaire. Tous les textes qui portaient notre signature ensemble, deviennent par là même, caducs.[2]

Shortly thereafter, Luca also writes to Breton, explaining that Paul Păun has woven for Luca – in a *tour de force* of infra-black magic – an enveloping cloak made of friendship. This magic spell, he continues, is not solely to protect Luca from Trost, who despite himself has become the blind instrument of the malefic forces of the times, but to protect the "we" of Infra Noir and its message of deliverance.

Whatever did occur, it was shortly after the sur-international rendez-vous. In

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[1] See letter from Luca to Breton of January, 27 1951, at Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (BAT c. 1060).

[2] "Correspondance et textes; Salmon Locker, dit Ghérasim Luca, Paul Päun, Dolfi Trost," on <andrebreton.fr>.

Luca's version, Trost had committed an act of sabotage, which lay in transforming Surrealism's high-yielding, dialectical version of pessimism and despair – its strategy of negation of negation – into a kind of existentialist *nausée*. He had abandoned the dialectical negation of the world of the Obstacle for simple negation, infra-*noir* for merely *noir*. (The nitty-gritty details, Luca implies, are too horrible to share.)[3]

Two more letters reached Breton in October and November of 1951. The first was from Trost, anxious that Breton's silence meant the latter had taken sides in the dispute; Trost adds that, although the short-lived French surrealist journal *L'Age du Cinéma* had asked to republish the collective Infra Noir tract *Eloge de Malombra*, doing so would create a grave misunderstanding by implying that something like the Romanian Surrealist group still existed.[4] The second, from Luca, is also disquieted by Breton's silence, but Luca also had better things to worry about, since at that moment he was waiting on only one more document to arrive before he could receive his French entry visa and his passport. In this letter he also informs Breton that the objects described in the poem "Héros-limite" (published in the volume *Héros-limite* in 1953 by François Di Dio) will soon be tossed, before Luca leaves for France, into the Mediterranean off the coast of Jaffa. Indeed, one day with great ceremony, these sixteen metal sheets, punctured with so many holes as to be nearly diaphanous – things made of nothings, plenitudes of void – sank to join all the bronze-age shipwrecks of the Levantine littoral. Luca dedicated this action to a scene in Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*, where an individual

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[3] Monique Yaari suggests that Trost's act of sabotage might have occurred *during* the March rendez-vous. It was not only that he was accompanied at the proceedings, according to Păun's recollection, by "une présence féminine imprévue et apparemment inopportune," but that he was impatient with the acts of "mediumnity" required, and criticized the Surrealist underpinnings of the project in favor of what he called a "pensée qui se retourne sur ell-même." See "Introduction: un et multiple au fil du temps," in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir un et multiple* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 12-13.

[4] Doucet library, letter of October 30, 1951 (BRT e. 1061).

named Fluxier creates "several blue lozenges, which, when tossed into the currents [of the river], would create a variety of distinct and fleeting images on the water's surface."[5]

On March 9, 1952, Luca arrived in France. Trost had already been there for some time, and as Sarane Alexandrian remembers it, Trost had had time to turn key members of the Breton group against Luca. Luca arrived with the artist Mirabelle Dors, who in Israel had collaborated with him in the creation of objects (for example the Gigeresque "Dialogue entre Cataphore et le Triple" held by the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, made partly of plant material like bark and needles) and exhibitions ("Un Objet, un signe," opening in December 1951 at Mikra Studio, Tel Aviv).[6] In Paris Luca and Mirabelle moved in temporarily with the artist Jacques Hérold. Another artist, Béatrice de la Sablière, had also been living at Hérold's place since 1947, along with the surrealist poet Stanislas Rodanski. Dors and Luca broke up soon thereafter; Dors began a relationship with surrealist Maurice Rapin, and Luca with Béatrice de la Sablière. The two began to collaborate extensively on illustrated poetic booklets and other works.

It is around this moment that Trost's name began appearing among the participants in Surrealist group café games and other endeavors. One group game, in April and May 1952, required that each participant to state which animal certain famous writers would correspond to. For Rimbaud for example, Trost answers "papillon tête de

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[5] Raymond Roussel, *Impressions of Africa*. Trans. Mark Polizzotti (Champaign, Ill.: Dalkey Archive, 2011), 268. There are also scenes in this book where a character named Fogar enters a somnambulistic sleep that allows him to dive underwater for long periods discovering phantasmagoria of strange animals, or that enables a strange white plant to rearrange its atoms to form a series of tableaux telling a tale of doomed love – alternating with a menacing image of a wolf, labeled with the Latin LUPUS. For the metal sheets and Roussel, see letter to Breton of November 9, 1951 at Doucet (BAT c. 1062). In 1912, Marcel Duchamp, Guillaume Apollinaire, Francis Picabia, and Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia attended a staging of *Impressions d'Afrique*; Duchamp was particularly impressed and influenced by this event.

[6] Going from Gellu Naum's recollection (Laville, *Gellu Naum* (1994, 79)), Mirabelle Dors had already been Luca's companion in Bucharest, and had accompanied him to Israel.

mort."[7] Others present at this collaborative menagerie – whose purpose is difficult to imagine – included the editorial committee at *L'Age du Cinéma* (Georges Goldfayn, Ado Kyrou); veterans of the Surrealist postwar (Jean Schuster, Jean-Louis Bédouin, Jindrich Heisler); and prewar (Benjamin Péret, Breton himself); those who would play a central role in the Surrealist group in the 50s and 60s (Nora Mitrani, Toyen, Gérard Legrand); and one or two who later became closer to Luca (Michel Zimbacca). After the menagerie, Trost's name appears only in the catalog for a Toyen exhibition in May 1953 at the surrealist-run gallery L'Etoile Scellée.[8]

At some point in 1953, when Trost published his book *Visible et invisible* – gathering disparate material he had worked on over several years – he wrote to Breton that the book was an attempt at "objectivation de mon isolement actuel."[9] Was he being pushed, or had he already been pushed away from the Surrealist group? If so, it must have happened later in the year, since in March 1953 before the Toyen exhibition, he appears in a group picture (titled "Le Groupe Surréaliste en 1953") at the Café de la Place Blanche.[10]

In 1955, Trost published *Librement mécanique*, the story of a woman he had met in a "ville d'exil" – likely Jaffa, though he doesn't say. It is a story of mystic initiation,

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[7] In other iterations, Nerval is an owl, Jarry a bee, Mallarmé a scarab beetle, Roussel a polar bear, and so forth. See "Si c'était un animal?" in *Les Jeux surréalistes. Mars 1921-septembre 1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 122-141.

[8] See "Exposition Toyen" in José Pierre, *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives 1940-1969* (Paris: Terrain Vague, 1982), 129-30. The cover shows a pair of folded hands written over with texts by Jean-Pierre Duprey, Breton, Heisler, Schuster, Péret and Trost. Trost writes: "L'image rêvée lui offrirait à son tour cette unique paire de gants blancs que l'initié ne pouvait donner qu'une seule fois dans sa vie, à celle qu'il estimait le plus."

[9] Undated letter included with a copy of *Visible et invisible*, on <andrebreton.fr>.

[10] Photo on <andrebreton.fr>. This and another 1953 group photograph with Trost are at Bibliothèque Kandinsky, BRE 1850 [Boîte Breton]. Greek Surrealist Nanos Valaoritis remembers that "when I got to Paris in 1954 and 1956 Trost had fallen into disrepute […] it involved dark infighting in Romanian groups." Personal correspondence by email, August 22, 2012.

obsessive love, and the myriad pains of separation. Trost writes, in this work dedicated to Breton, that he would prefer forgetting to "cette cicatrisation où finalement l'hostilité l'emporte et qui montre que tout grand amour n'est qu'une forme de haine […] parce qu'il exprime la recherche éperdue du contraire, tout en envisageant sa destruction simultanée."[11] Mirabelle Dors later reproduced a handwritten letter she had received from Trost after what she calls his "rupture" with Breton, during or after March 1954:

> Chère Mirabelle, Comme je "liquide" tout mon matériel "surréaliste," je te donne ces images que j'ai collectionnées dans le temps. Peut-être y en a-t-il qui intéressent Rapin ou toi-même. Bonjour, Trost.[12]

Dors notes that a large number of surrealists broke with Breton over the publication of a "Manifeste du Tachisme" on March 1, 1954 – a piece by the art critic Charles Estienne in the journal *Combat* called "Une Révolution, le tachisme." Her implication is that Trost was also caught up in these events.

The first number of the postwar Surrealist journal *Médium* in November 1952 had announced the opening of the L'Etoile Scellée gallery in Saint-Germain-des-Près, and in a group show on December 5, 1952, Breton generously included works by surrealists old and new, excluded and non – including Trost and Mirabelle Dors.[13] Trost, like all the others in the Infra Noir group, had long experimented with the visual and plastic arts, interweaving these experiments – in "entoptic graphomania" and other methods[14] – with

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11 Trost, *Librement mécanique*, with the following notice: "Ce volume se trouve en dépôt au "Minotaure." Paris, 6 rue des Beaux-Arts, 1955." (35).

12 Mirabelle Dors and Maurice Rapin, *Suite extraite d'une suite* (Paris: NSCBE, 1980), unpaginated.

13 Robert Lebel writes that Breton, "avec la courtoisie parfaite d'un maître de maison qui pratique l'oubli des différends et même des injures," had placed these artists side by side in a kind of symbolic reconciliation, with "Brauner près de Troost [*sic*] et Duprey, Fernandez près de Toyen et Mirabelle d'Ors [*sic*]." Robert Lebel, *Premier bilan de l'art actuel* (Paris: Le Soleil Noir, 1953), 96.

14 For entoptic graphomania see *Vision dans le cristal: oniromancie obsessionnelle* (Bucharest: Editions de l'Oubli, 1945). Examples of other visual and plastic experiments, along of course with object-making, are found throughout the available Infra Noir literature, but Yaari's 2014 edited volume *Infra Noir, un et multiple* highlights the extraliterary work of each of the group's members.

his theoretical work. In the early 50s, Trost created a number of paintings, and it was likely his paintings, in an abstract and even tachiste style, that were exhibited at L'Etoile Scellée.[15] In March 1953, Breton organized another exhibition at L'Etoile where he decided to include some abstract artists recommended by Estienne, and the two of them envisioned a fusion of surrealist and abstract desiderata that would be called *abstraction lyrique*, or alternatively, Tachisme. A year later in the *Combat* article, Estienne recalls: "exposent donc chez les surréalistes (grand scandale) quatre hérétiques abstraits ou semi-figuratifs." This "scandal," also called the "querelle du Tachisme," entailed the departure from the surrealist group of Dors and Rapin among others.[16] Whatever Trost's involvement and opinions in all this, he left France for the United States in 1956, leaving his Surrealist past entirely behind. Some sources say he spent the rest of his life, until 1966, in self-imposed solitude in New York, others say it was Chicago.[17]

As for Gherasim Luca – who may have seen Trost again in New York in 1961[18] – he stayed in Paris, and though estranged from the Surrealist group proper, he

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15 For tachisme see for example his painting "L'Angoisse cosmique" (1952) on <andrebreton.fr>.

16 See Renée Mabin, "La Galerie à L'Etoile Scellée," in *Le Surréalisme en héritage: les avant-gardes après 1945*, ed. Olivier Penot-Lacassagne and Emmanuel Rubio (Paris: L'Age d'homme, 2008); and Sarane Alexandrian, *L'Art surréaliste* (Paris: F. Hazan, 1969), Chapter 11. Even before this though, Dors felt that the Place Blanche group had suddenly grown hostile toward her: in a letter to Breton from November 1953, she asks him to explain to her why this is. She also thanks Breton and Elisa for intervening decisively in her life at a time in 1952 – her breakup with Luca? – when her solitude and "anguish" were overwhelming. (Doucet, BRT 256).

17 Michael Finkenthal quotes Trost's friend Stefan Baciu who says he died a "mystic, converted to Catholicism," in Chicago; but also notes that Trost's niece Margalit Nudelman, who currently lives in Israel, remembers that the final letters from Trost reached the family from New York. See *D. Trost*: *Între realitatea visului şi visul ca realitate* (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2013), 7; see also Finkenthal, "Note pentru o repoziționare a 'valului' suprarealist din România, 1945-48, I" in *Observator Cultural* 319 (May 26, 2011). According to recent research, Trost left for the United States accompanied by his wife of Argentinian origin, Rachel, on the ship S.S. America, and arrived in New York on January 17, 1956. See Yaari, "Introduction," in *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple* (16-17).

18 Paolo Scopelliti – without naming his source – states that when Luca was introduced, by Jean-Jacques Lebel, to Félix Guattari at a New York poetry festival around the group Domaine Poétique (which also included Brion Gysin and Jean-Clarence Lambert), he had just been reunited with Trost. Scopelliti, *L'Influence du surréalisme sur la psychanalyse* (Paris: L'Age d'homme, 2002), 152.

continuously embarked on collaborations with surrealists and former surrealists. In 1956 he made plans for a magazine, which would have included articles by Michel Leiris (on "amorous initiation" in Africa), Mircea Eliade (on maquillage, disguise, and sacred vestments in the Far East), Jean Genet, and Eugène Ionesco, and stories on fetishism, Sacher-Masoch, costume balls, cross-dressing, and metamorphosis and vampires in the animal world (with a reprint of Luca, Păun and Trost's *Les Noces phylogéniques*).[19] Luca later became involved with groups including Domaine Poétique and Fluxus, while experimenting in many media and refining his poetics. Widespread recognition, whether he liked it or not, came for Luca's work relatively late in his life, and has grown in leaps since his death in 1994.

Paul Păun finally arrived in Israel in 1966, where he continued a career as a physician, and as a poet and an artist – exhibiting his work several times in Paris. In 1972 he published a book begun in 1953, in very limited circulation. Titled *La Rose parallèle*, it is described by Păun's niece Monique Yaari as "une sorte d'autobiographie intellectuelle et d'art poétique personnel." Păun passed away in Haifa in 1994.[20] Virgil Teodorescu, after enthusiastically publishing poetry after the specifications of the Romanian Communist regime during the 50s – Naum even recalls that he became "friend

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19 "Projet de revue abandoné," Doucet (50465 GHL ms53).

20 See Yaari, "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence,'" in *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple* (154). For more on Păun's life and work, pre-, during and post-Infra Noir, see several articles by Monique Yaari ("L'Estétique et la morale 'Parallèles' de Paul Paon" in *Revue des lettres modernes* 898-903 (1989) pp. 113-122; "Paul Paon, entre deux langues" in *Pleine Marge* 36 (December 2002), pp. 87-110; "Paul Paon's Sur-surreal Chimera," in *Utopian Studies* 5:1 (1994) pp. 108-12; and "Paul Păun" in Stern and Van Voolen ed., *From Dada to Surrealism* (Amsterdam: Joods Historisch Museum (2011-2012), pp. 138-39, as well as Michael Finkenthal, "Note pentru o repoziționare a 'valului' suprarealist din România, 1945-1948 (II)," in *Observatorul Cultural* 577 (June 2011); and Geo Şerban, "Cînd Paul Păun descoperea avangarda," in *Observatorul Cultural* 565 (March 2011). In 1961 apparently, Păun had made it out of Romania and to Milan, Italy, but with a precarious visa situation. Luca did his best through intermediaries to get him safely settled in Milan and eventually to get him to Paris – finding it unthinkable that Păun might have to fall back on Israel – but his efforts failed. See draft letters in Doucet (GHL ms188) in a tan "Herakles" notebook belonging to Luca.

and cantor" to Elena Ceaușescu[21] – later returned, to a degree, to his earlier Surrealism. In 1977 he published a volume of essays in which he states that Surrealism remains necessary, since "the infamous wall of routine, utilitarianism and conformism, which isolates man from the real world, has its own tireless masons."[22] Gellu Naum himself, in 1952, published two Proletkultist children's books, which he later renounced. One of them, *Tabăra din munți* (The Campground in the Mountains) – with an epigraph from the socialist realist writer Maxim Gorky – is a story about boys in the Soviet Young Pioneer Organization. Naum's deep surrealist convictions were kept far underground until 1968 when, during a period of relative ideological thaw in Romania, he brought out a book of surrealist poetry that gathered the work of decades, including unpublished texts from his Infra Noir period, that had long simmered in the crucible of isolation and repression – *Athanor*.[23]

Infra Noir, as a group, was over and done with by the end of 1951, or rather it dispersed more rapidly and more permanently than it had before. What, during its short life, did it accomplish? And what does one accomplish by tracing its history or unearthing, reading, translating and explicating the texts it produced? One could for example seek to discern some hidden, diffuse influence that Infra Noir, like dark matter, had upon those around it. Whatever influence it did have, indeed, remains elusive and

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21 In Rémy Laville, *Gellu Naum: poète roumain, prisonnier au château des aveugles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 92.

22 Virgil Teodorescu, *Armonia contrariilor* (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1977), quoted in Ovidiu Morar, *Avatarurile suprarealismului românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Univers, 2003), 21. See also Teodorescu's 1984 volume of surrealist poetry – *Un Ocean devorat de licheni* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească) – illustrated with 6 "stilomancies" (an inking technique practiced by Trost in the 40s), and including work from his Infra Noir period.

23 For more on Naum's life and work see, of course, Laville's 1994 book as well as the essays and chronologies in *Gellu Naum I: Poezii* and *Gellu Naum II: Proză*, edited by Simona Popescu (Bucharest: Polirom, 2011) and the essays and archival materials in the three volumes of *Athanor*, the journal of the Gellu Naum Foundation.

subterranean. But rather than finding direct lines from one discrete event, group, or text to another, one instead tends to find a dense proliferation of events, groups, and texts within a common substrate – a common historical situation, a common exasperation, and a common set of urgent issues and interests – forming something like Breton's *forêt d'indices*. What matters here in any case is not so much a story about originalities, discoveries, or new perspectives – one that would furnish, for example, a missing piece in a narrative about the avant-garde and politics – but rather how one group among many reacted to situations, problems, and paradoxes that also both inspired and thwarted its better and less known contemporaries.

Some of these problems and paradoxes are not irrelevant to us now. The Obstacle so frequently evoked by Infra Noir, for example, is a way of thinking about the inertia of the status quo. An immense body moving in a given direction – say, for example, the sum of global capitalist relations, or one of its more local eddies – tends to keep doing so, and to simply crush or absorb whatever tries intervening. Infra Noir's Obstacle also has a lot to do with the power and the fragility of the critical or resistant imagination. When existing forms of critical thinking or resistance have lost their efficacy, can they only be reinvented or revived, or is it possible to create something totally new from the exhausted materials at hand? Finally, Infra Noir concerns itself a great deal with "revolutionary despair" – with the sense of helplessness or of untimeliness that can overwhelm those who want to change the world or change life. How can this despair be remade as a principle of action, rather than paralysis?

It is true that, faced with these problems, Infra Noir arrived at some peculiar solutions. Touching objects in a dark room – staring at them in order to enter trance states

– creating small, delirious gift economies – rewriting the rules of dream interpretation – sleepwalking in the streets? How does that help, exactly? One of the overarching purposes of this dissertation has been to respond to this question, or to show how Infra Noir would have responded, remaining mostly within the bounds of the surrealist movement and surrealist discourse. But what about beyond this pale, or in a more contemporary setting? Even if today one were to revive such practices and experiments and call them forms of "resistance" or "subversion" or "critical experiment," one is already awash in resistances, subversions, and radical critiques, grand gestures that mysteriously leave everything intact after the dust has settled, and forms of negation that have lost their power – partly as a result of the institutionalization, bureaucratization, or commodification of the sorts of activity that to the surrealists and their heirs still seemed fresh and strange. One faces what Alain Badiou, in a 2007 interview in *Critical Inquiry*, calls a "crisis of negation."

Infra Noir, in its time, faced what it probably felt to be a crisis of negation, and attempted to activate a new kind of negation in response. Badiou's project, in 2007, is not unlike theirs. Insisting that a real politics of emancipation is still possible, Badiou distinguishes the "concrete politics" and disciplinary organizations of 20th-century Marxism from Communism, which stands for "a principle of existence […] entirely 'subtracted' from the crushing weight of the relations of power and wealth and therefore another distribution of human activity."[24] After the failure and "exhaustion" of the model of the Leninist avant-garde party, which spectacularly succeeded in taking power but not in wisely exercising it, "nowhere does a 'taking power' in the insurrectional sense seem possible today. We should search for a new form." And not merely a destructive or

[24] Interview available at http://www.lacan.com/baddiscipline.html.

antagonistic form, Badiou adds, but something "subtracted" – once again – from the State and its powers and disciplines. Whatever this new form of efficacy turns out to be, it will require much experiment (and experience) to take shape, and it will run on a new, hybrid form of negation. This new form of negation is not merely "negative" or destructive and not merely "subtractive" but partakes of both, to create an "immanent but differentiated space" for itself. It is:

> no longer dependent on the dominant laws of the political reality of a situation. It is irreducible, however, to the destruction of these laws as well. A subtraction might leave the laws of the situation still being in place. What subtraction does is bring about a point of autonomy. It's a negation, but it cannot be identified with the properly destructive part of negation. […] Our problem today is that the destructive part of negation is no longer, in and of itself, capable of producing the new. We need an "originary subtraction" capable of creating a new space of independence and autonomy from the dominant laws of the situation. A subtraction, therefore, is neither derived from nor a consequence of destruction as such.[25]

Infra Noir's answer to its "crisis of negation" and Badiou's answer, though different, are not incommensurable, since they rise from the same substrate: the history of Marxist thought, the Communist tradition in Europe and its various translations into action (including art), and the great "contestatory movements" of the 20th century. It is also true that Infra Noir seeks a certain "point of autonomy" within the existing order, but one that remains immanent to it, and that also maintains a slow-burning spark of destructive force. In this quest, anything goes as long as it works. If the old forms of action, discourse, and collectivity, the old visions of revolution, are no longer effective, then anything that might allow one to imagine new ones – to imagine what doesn't yet exist in any form – is admissible. This is the place where Infra Noir's methods and ambition, as we have seen,

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[25] Ibid. Unpaginated (webpage). On "subtraction" see also Jonathan P. Eburne, "'Comme une érosion unique': les provocations d'Infra-noir" in Yaari ed., *"Infra-Noir" un et multiple* (42). Eburne finds in Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille Plateaux* a description of a "soustraction créatrice" that he argues is employed by Infra Noir as a means of realizing the possible.

join those of Surrealism as a whole. The idea is to engage in an activity, like automatic writing or like object-oriented experiments, that might throw out new combinations from the great fund of the possible, whether this "possible" be located in language or in the matter that makes up one's daily world. Infra Noir and the surrealists ask: what is language capable of saying that we haven't yet allowed it to? What configurations can the world form that we haven't yet been able to envision? What are single and collective bodies capable of doing that they haven't yet tried? What difference is concealed within the same?

***Phases*, Gherasim Luca, and the Infra Blanc Revolution**

From 1955, around the time Trost left France, Luca began publishing with the magazine *Phases*, edited by Edouard Jaguer – who had been involved with Main à Plume, the Revolutionary-Surrealists, and later Cobra. Contributors included members or former members of all three of these groups, along with former and present surrealists, some from Alexandrian's "groupe infini" (see Chapter Two).

From its beginning in 1954, *Phases* immediately began weighing in on the debates that had once more riven Breton's Surrealist group. Jaguer asks in an editorial, for example, what use formal experimentation can have – including the "automatismes d'école" of lyrical abstraction, art informel or tachisme, which he feels have taken on a dictatorial preeminence – without a moral and revolutionary "source éclairante"? Such experimentation is only a means to an end, that end being the "transfiguration" of reality. When means become ends in themselves, automatism becomes a mere "simulacre de liberté," comparable to what happened when the most glowing ambitions of socialism concluded in Stalin's "horreur concentrationnaire."[26]

Phases ran its first series between 1954 and 1967, and its second – after the death of André Breton in 1966, after the events of May '68, and just before Jean Schuster declared the formal end of the "historical" Surrealist movement in October 1969 – between 1969 and 1975. Holding exhibitions and collaborating with sister journals on an international scale, *Phases* was something in between a magazine and a movement, and in many ways paralleled and later continued the project of Surrealism. Many surrealists, in fact, joined the *Phases* team immediately after Schuster's declaration. Avoiding

[26] Edouard Jaguer, "Remise en question," in *Phases* 3 (first series), November 1956 (5-6).

manifestos, ideologies, and grand theories, *Phases* was open and "mobile" (like the mobiles of Alexander Calder, Jaguer specifies).[27] However, the *Phases* magazine-movement also came to consciously represent a form of creation that could be revolutionary while remaining politically unaffiliated. It sought an anti-political politics, as in Infra Noir's theories of automatic action. *Phases* also stood, from the beginning, for the power of the imaginary within social action and change. Jaguer writes that without the constant inflow of imagination, revolutions can only devolve into stifling "systems." *Phases* was after a precarious equilibrium between "l'espace formel traditionnel et un espace révolutionnaire de filiation onirique où la recréation de la réalité procède d'un mouvement dialectique, dans lequel contemplation et action ("contemplaction," dirait Matta) forment la crête d'une même vague."[28] The magazine-movement thus promoted a certain oneiric activism, and a "création offensive" accompanied by a search for "le merveilleux en filigrane derrière l'opacité quotidienne."[29] As the sixties wore on, *Phases* went to war against the conservative and "reactionary" in the disguise of formal-technological innovation – particularly against a new "capitalist realism" where art derived its methods from the avant-garde but kept one eye on the market. It continued Surrealism's quest for the *merveilleux* in the service of a revolutionary "art-activité de l'esprit."[30]

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[27] Edouard Jaguer, "Accent circonspect," in *Phases* 9 (first series), April 1964 (13).
[28] Edouard Jaguer, "La Face inconnue de la terre," in *Phases* 5/6 (first series), January 1960 (6). In his book *L'Aventure en soi*, Sarane Alexandrian attributes the word "contemplaction" to Claude Tarnaud, friend of Luca (as was Matta) and member of the "groupe infini." Tarnaud defined contemplaction as "l'action soeur du rêve." Alexandrian, *L'Aventure en soi* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1990), 289.
[29] Jaguer, "Accent circonspect" (64).
[30] Edouard Jaguer, "Couleur du temps, forme du désir," in *Phases* 10 (first series), September 1965 (25). "Art-activité de l'esprit" is a phrase used by Tristan Tzara in his 1931 "Essai sur la situation de la poésie."

The *Phases* magazine-movement – one of Surrealism's afterlives – eventually became one of the Infra Noir group's afterlives as well – and not only because Luca frequently appeared in its pages.

In the editorial of the first issue of the second run of *Phases* in 1969, Jaguer recounts being criticized by voices from the left over the magazine's unseemly concern with dreams and poetry when instead urgent political action was needed. Jaguer retorts that "la politique est, ou devrait être, un poème qui s'écrit avec des hommes au lieu des mots." He goes on to explain that during May '68, "une façon nouvelle avait inopinément surgi d'éveiller les hommes à l'Histoire, de la leur donner à modeler *expérimentalement*" – and this is nothing other than poetry as Jaguer defines it, and a kind of dreaming as well.[31] In a 1968 tract, the *Phases* group had equated revolution with a "rêve éveillé." Jaguer defines this waking dream, against the grain, as an "*éveil absolu* dont la lumière infra-blanche nimbait les journées de mai 1968 à Paris, rendant *méconnaissable* la topographie familière."[32] Referring deliberately by antithesis, with "infra-blanche," to the Infra Noir group of the forties, Jaguer also alludes to the phrase that André Breton chose, quoting from the Infra Noir group text "Le Sable nocturne," to inaugurate the 1947 international surrealist exhibition: "la connaissance par la méconnaissance." Lest any doubt remain, Jaguer chooses in this same editorial to inaugurate the second series of the magazine by quoting at length from a text he composed in 1952, and which he claims served as "base de discussion pour la détermination des *courants* essentiels" of the *Phases* group. This text is none other than Jaguer's response to the typewritten

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31 Edouard Jaguer, "Modulation d'amplitude," in *Phases* 1 (second series), May 1969 (4).

32 Jaguer, "Modulation d'amplitude" (8). Italics are Jaguer's. In language that recalls Luca's, Jaguer writes here that the dream is a "réalité de transition," an "articulation majeure *entre deux réalités*," as between "le réel-proie au réel-vampire."

questionnaire that Gherasim Luca sent far and wide upon his arrival in Paris in 1952: "Le Pouvoir à la chimère par la passage du dormeur au somnambule," which Jaguer quotes in full.[33]

Jaguer's reprinted 1952 response begins: "Il est assez enthousiasmant de poser comme un *lourd* sommeil la vie pseudo-sociale qui nous est impartie, et de lui opposer un nouvel *éveil* à promouvoir, riche de toutes les combinaisons neuves qui nous sont dès maintenant révélées […] par le poème, le toile peinte." The work of art – the physical artwork, the working process that gives rise to it, and the further work upon the world that it urges – should be a thing of both pleasure and power. It should overflow the boundaries not only of political systems and religious doctrines, but of organized groups, even those seeking a certain "point de l'esprit" where art and life converge. Jaguer thus acknowledges the need for a "style de démarche nouveau, orienté vers cette 'action' dont vous parlez […] et dont je veux croire que nous détenions la virtualité, perdue dans ses haies et ses broussailles momentanément verbales ou plastiques." This would be a direct projection of desire, delirium, and "cartographies hypniques" into a sensorial and sensual space. For Jaguer, all this translates into the conviction on the part of *Phases* that "l'art est la continuation de la révolution politique par d'autres moyens."[34]

The following issue of *Phases* in May 1970 is devoted in part to the Romanian avant-garde of the 20s and 30s, with texts by Saşa Pană and Stefan Roll (Gheorghe Dinu), and includes a short note on and poems and prose-selections by Gellu Naum. In

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[33] Ibid. (9). Luca wrote to Breton in the summer of 1952 that he had received "aucune réponse de la part de nos amis du café auxquels j'avais individuellement envoyé l'objet de mon 'enquête.' Leur silence unanime me semble inamical et bizarre. […] Quant aux 'surréalistes' qui se trouvent en dehors du café, sauf quelques rares exceptions, ils m'ont répondu dans un esprit autre que celui qui nous anime." See *Fusées* no. 7 (2003), "Dossier Ghérasim Luca" (127). Jaguer must have been one of these exceptions.
[34] Ibid. (9).

November 1975, above a color reproduction of a painting by the former Algist Jules Perahim, "Oiseaux possibles," appears a quotation from Paul Păun's 1947 *La Conspiration du silence*: "Il faut *aérifier* la vie." On the preceding page, Jaguer writes in his editorial piece that in Bucharest in 1945, "les recherches 'a-plastiques' du poète Trost […] étaient indéniablement des oeuvres 'informelles' avant la lettre."[35] This was at a time, it must be emphasized, when Infra Noir and its ideas had elsewhere fallen into almost total obscurity.

It could be argued that Jaguer, in his response to Luca's somnambulism *enquête*, misread its meaning. In Jaguer's version, the social-cultural-political world that we inhabit is a heavy sleep, and the "combinaisons neuves" revealed by poetry and art herald a new waking. But the Infra Noir somnambulist is somewhat stranger and more complicated than this, as we have seen. The world, for example, could equally be figured as trapped in a sterile, oppressive waking, and sleep as giving rise to vivifying new dreams. Neither version is exactly right, which is why the somnambulist's state in between sleep and waking, in a kind of waking dream, is required.

To an early issue of *Phases* in 1957, Luca contributed a text called "L'Echelle." It is a pata-philosophical prose poem, for lack of a concise term, recalling the half-material, half-ineffable visions of mystics. The famous arrow paradox of Zeno of Elea is embodied, for example, as a female somnambulist, rigid as a plank and balanced between two chairs ("points d'appui: front et orteils,") and the river of Heraclitus, the river one cannot step in twice, becomes aggressively anthropomorphic, gaining human arms and legs. In the drama that follows, where the quintessence of motionlessness (Zeno's arrow)

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[35] Edouard Jaguer, "La Nappe phréatique des années 50," in *Phases* 5 (second series), November 1975 (16). For Trost's "research" see for example *Le Profil navigable: négation concrète de la peinture* (Bucharest: Editions de l'Oubli, 1945), and Chapter Three.

meets the quintessence of motion (the Heraclitean river), the world, in its "indissoluble unité," undergoes "l'enrichissante et cruelle épreuve du multiple." The text continues:

> [Le courant] creuse maintenant son lit nuptial dans la direction de la flèche et c'est le moment où l'homme passe […] du côté de sa virtualité, chimère en avant, c'est le moment des grands jeux solennels, des actions-contemplations, des mouvements volatils […] le vrai point de départ de cette cérémonie irrationnelle et préparatoire: égarement, contorsions, tourbillons, montée et descente, frottement, raréfaction, attirance, ralentissement, évanouissement et accéleration, vol, fuite et détente, attente et précipitation, nage, rage, cristallisation, spasme et caresse, illumination […] constituent la matière première d'une liberté totale et seconde qu'une diffuse distribution des gestes au hasard des corps n'empêche pas de rendre à la révolution rituelle et éternelle la seule forme de rigueur susceptible de lui assurer une réelle prise de pouvoir.[36]

Though it does not announce itself to be so, "L'Echelle" is a description of the Infra Noir somnambulist. "Power to the chimera," Luca had written in 1952, as well as to the great cloud of "virtualities" that possesses the oneiric activist, and the *forêt de gestes* that transfixes his dreaming, desiring body. The Infra Noir somnambulist wakes into sleep and falls asleep into waking; and Luca, characteristically, continues piling up the paradoxes, antitheses, and hybrid resolutions – motionlessness and motion, contemplation and action, chimera as monster and chimera as fantastic vision. Here for example, one takes power by letting go entirely of power, becoming an empty locus of pulses and impulses, risings and fallings. Passion becomes action. The somnambulist's sight, an infrablack that absorbs and transforms all light and lucidity, is *égarement*, *tourbillon*, and *méconnaissance* – which, in the 1947 exhibition catalog, Breton called a "true dream." And the somnambulist's blindness is not a blithe evasion of the world, but a way of spiraling deeper into and beneath it, hollowing out channels for the multiple in its airless unicity; it is an infrawhite that absorbs and transforms all darkness.

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[36] Gherasim Luca, "L'Echelle," in *Phases* 4 (first series), 1957, unpaginated.

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