

SURREALIST CHALLENGE

'Passion is man's faculties striving to attain their object' — Marx

Surrealism and proletarian revolution are mutually dependent, write the surrealists who have contributed this four-page supplement. Unless it is linked with the principle of the imagination, revolutionary politics can only be about some vague economic crisis. Similarly, unless actively committed to the revolutionary movement, the surrealist spirit languishes.



Montage by Clive Ball

Therefore the surrealists in England, at this moment re-grouping and re-activating, have contributed and financed this supplement to Socialist Challenge. We hope thereby to stimulate an important interchange of ideas. A surrealist review will shortly be available from us. Correspondence should be addressed to us c/o Socialist Challenge, 328/9 Upper Street, London N1 2XQ.

Surrealism and Revolution

By Franklin Rosemont

SURREALISM is typically defined in textbooks as 'a French literary and artistic school of the 1920's and 1930's'. Such a 'definition' tells us little, but its worst feature is that everything it does tell us is false. The truth is that surrealism has been from the start, and continues to be above all a **revolutionary** movement.

In one of our first tracts, dated 1925, we identified ourselves as 'specialists in revolt' — revolt against all repressive values and institutions. It is the aim of surrealism to reduce and ultimately to resolve the paralysing antinomies between dream and action, conscious and unconscious. Immeasurably exceeding the limits of what is usually regarded as art, the surrealist revolution demands the overturn of the existing order and the creation of a new society governed by the watchword: **To each according to her or his desire.**

The basic surrealist ambition was summed up by the movement's single most important precursor, Lautremont, in his celebrated battlecry 'Poetry must be made by all'. That is, the inspiration and exaltation heretofore regarded as the prerogative of poets and artists will become the acknowledged property of all.

As an organised movement, surrealism is active in dozens of countries — from Australia to Brazil, from Czechoslovakia to Japan, from Iraq to England and the USA; sometimes publicly, sometimes underground, but always and everywhere 'in the service of the revolution'.

It is hardly surprising then that textbooks and coffee-table art books falsify even the simplest facts about it, as they falsify everything that touches the heart of living reality.

The fact that the ideologies of advanced capitalism have made known their aversion to surrealism has not, however, sufficed to assure the movement a warm welcome among the diverse currents that define themselves as revolutionary. Indeed, even today, more than fifty years after its formation, the surrealist movement still encounters the gravest misunderstandings and not a little animosity among the many and varied left groups.

Outstanding individuals belonging to virtually every significant radical tendency have evidenced a fraternal attitude, and in some cases a profound sympathy for surrealist activity as a whole. But they remain exceptions; the rule is to give surrealism a cool reception, or to ignore it altogether. This deplorable attitude may be regarded as a symptom of the more general malaise affecting the left in our time, and from which it is now just slowly beginning to recover.

We who have taken up the surrealist cause are convinced that we are thereby hastening the overthrow of capitalism and the emancipation of the working class. We contend, too, that surrealist research and activity add appreciably to the arsenal of revolutionary thought and action, and that the steadily increasing supply of surrealist weapons deserves thoughtful consideration by the revolutionary movement as a whole.

What Marx's **Capital** brought to the critique of political economy, what Freud's **Interpretation of Dreams** brought to psychology, Andre Breton's **Surrealist Manifesto** (1924) brought to poetry: a return to fundamentals that was at the same time a dialectical advance that made all turning back impossible. Clearing away a vast accumulation of ideological mystifications, Breton restored to poetry its rightful hegemony over all creative activity. 'The imagination,' he wrote, 'is perhaps about to assert its rights.'

It was this thoroughgoing re-evaluation of poetry that brought the surrealists into the revolutionary workers' movement. The practice of poetry quickly permitted them to recognise that the contradiction between the limitless capacities of the mind and the misery of everyday life correspond to the contradiction between the productive forces and the bourgeois relations of production, which in turn is the basis of the irreconcilable antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie.

'The problem of social action,' Breton wrote, 'is only one of the forms of a more general problem which surrealism set out to deal with, and that is the **problem of human expression in all its forms.**' The surrealists were the first to recognise that the systematic degradation of language in capitalist society is a function of repression, using the term in both its political and psychological sense.

With our brutalised language, enslaved by the system of commodity fetishism, it is increasingly difficult for men and women to express their deepest aspirations. Inarticulate victims to false consciousness, whose real desires remain unconscious, are easy prey for ideologies wholly inimical to their genuine interests. To bring the repressed into consciousness, individually as well as socially, is thus a prime revolutionary task. And this requires, first of all, the **liberation of language** from the stranglehold of those who use it solely as a means of confusion and manipulation.

The liberation of language — and of all signs by which human communication is affected — is the point of departure for the surrealist revolution. Surrealist poems, paintings, sculptures and films disrupt the stifling conventions of the 'Reality Principle'. Surrealism tears away the words and images used by the class enemy to demoralise us; it subverts these words and images, reassembles them, and distorts them according to desire.

These poems, images and objects allow us to reach beyond the 'possible'. They exert a special and disquieting fascination. Precipitates of dreams, they inspire new kinds of **poetic action**, which in turn prefigures a new life: a surrealist life.

The struggle for what Philip Lamantia has called the 'disalienation of humanity with its language' is a crucial component of the more general struggle against what Breton designated **miserabilism**: the summation of all ideological excrescences of the 'accumulation of misery' that Marx correlated with the accumulation of capital. Tracing it historically as 'the offspring of the perfect coupling of those two vermin, Hitlerite fascism and Stalinism', Breton described its essence as the 'depreciation of reality in place of its exaltation'. Miserabilism is, in short, the rationalisation of human misery in the epoch of capitalist decline.

All forms of surrealist research — from automatic writing to the 'exquisite corpse' game, from collage to photomorph, from 'black' humour to the interrogation of objective chance — help destroy the network of miserabilist abstractions (God, family fatherland) used by the ruling class to divert the miserable from their misery. Against all varieties of miserabilism, surrealism champions the poetic Marvellous, the **imaginary** triumphantly tending towards realisation.

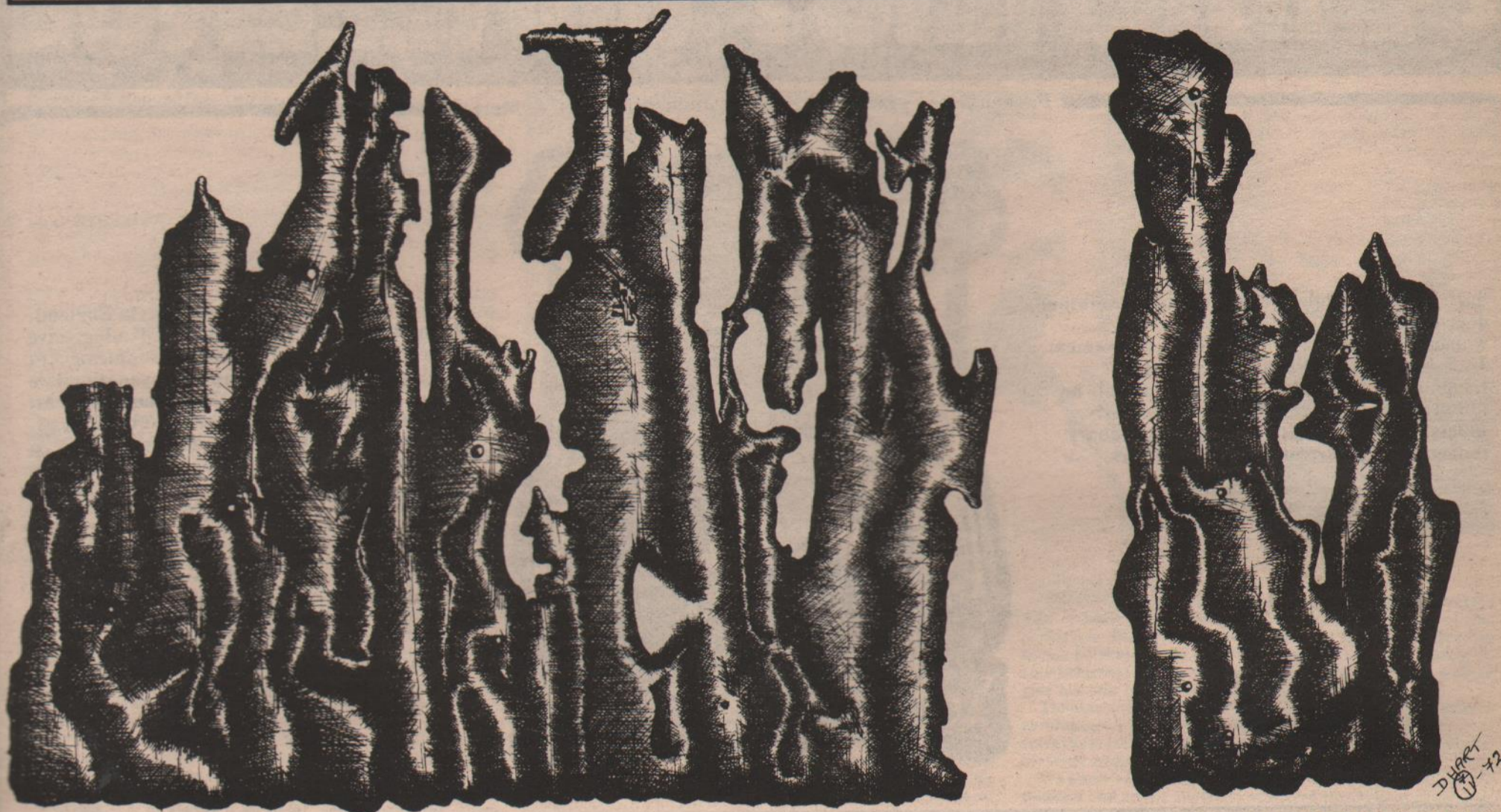
Against the exploitive and corrupted 'reason' of the bosses and bureaucrats, surrealism defends the sovereignty of desire. In concretising the irrational, surrealism reveals the decisive **breaking points** in the repressive edifice, thus helping to bring the crisis of consciousness — as well as the consciousness of crisis — into broad daylight.

Unlike ephemeral 'schools' such as futurism and dadaism, surrealism represents a historic achievement that is, in every sense, **epochal and global**. The surrealist revolution supersedes the alienated forms of 'art'. Poetry begins to pass over into everyday life, preparing the way for a non-repressive civilisation.

Shelley affirmed in his **Defence of Poetry** that 'in the infancy of society' — that is, in the epoch of primitive communism — 'every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry.' The surrealist evidence suggests that all will again be poets in the classless society of the future. Language, imagination, love and dreams — like the proletariat — have nothing to lose but their chains; they have a world to win.

Surrealist revolution unifies all efforts to vanquish the unliveable by realising the desirable. All revolutionaries may not consider themselves surrealists, but that does not alter this basic truth: All that is revolutionary is surrealist, and all that is surrealist is revolutionary.

The Surrealist Proposition



Drawing by Derek Hart

By Stephan Kukowski

SURREALISM is the articulation of the quest for freedom in its time. Its philosophical contribution is to develop to its fullest possible sense that word 'freedom'. Put most simply, we would say that a person is free when his or her inner world is in complete harmony with the 'outside' world; when there ceases to be any contradiction between 'desire' and 'reality'; when there is a complete reciprocation between the emotions and the perceptions. One might add that for the liberated person, there would be no difference between being awake, and being asleep.

Surrealism is in fundamental opposition to any dogmatic view of the world, since the basis for it is above all spontaneity. But our understanding of this is no mere reduction to artistic bohemianism: spontaneity is an expression of freedom, since it is the natural impulse from within towards action in the external world. Thus the two main interests of surrealism are 'automatism' and 'objective chance'.

'Automatism' means to behave, particularly through poetry, completely unhindered by the process of rationalisation. 'Automatic writing' is to write very quickly in such a way as to exclude as far as possible conscious thought.

'Objective chance' is the idea that the internal, pre-rational person is in complete harmony with the external world; that therefore in day-to-day events there is complete continuity between 'desire' and the outside world. Coincidence and chance are not understood as exceptions, but as the fundamental workings of the universe.

Both these areas of surrealist interest stress the basic unity of 'inside' and 'outside'. Superficially we may observe a wall in the middle of a field as being a barrier between two areas lying on either side of it; however, since the world is round, everything is on one side of the wall, and everything is on the other side too. Thus surrealism denies any absolute contradiction between 'subjective' and 'objective'. The total realisation of this supreme state of unity is what surrealism means by 'freedom'.

Desire is the impetus of the 'inner' for concretisation in the 'outer'. Thus the realisation of desire is freedom. Thus also, since 'love' is the concretisation of desire, since it is an 'internal' condition completed by its object, 'love' is synonymous with 'freedom': it is above all the spirit of mad love that permeates the surrealist project.

Surrealism, whose dual battle-cries are 'change life' and 'transform the world', does not of course attempt to re-fashion the universe in the 'mind over matter' sense; it does, however, aim to change utterly the way we understand that universe, and thereby the way that we experience it.

What distinguishes the surrealist aim of full realisation for men and women within the universe from that of other superficially similar schools of thought is surrealism's understanding that one's alienation from the world is based primarily on social causes. To the word 'freedom' we link the word 'emancipation'.

Thus surrealism is fundamentally different from, and opposed to, all the various forms of 'mysticism'.

The premises for surrealism, we must stress ever and again, are located on the level of science: that is, surrealism is not an

idealism opposed to 'reality' [it is interesting to note the confirmations that surrealism receives from the field of subatomic physics today!]: the essence of surrealism is dialectical materialism.

From all this it is obvious why surrealism has often stressed the importance of dreams [whose charged ambiguity highlights the impossibility of separating mind from matter, subjective from objective, the ideal from the real], automatism, and analogy [often practised through special surrealist games]. In the present context, it is worthwhile to again describe and discuss the last two areas mentioned, which are 'tools' readily available to anyone who wishes to explore the poetic depths.

To believe in the possibility of a future 'golden age' must be to believe that there is within us now the potential for such a state; it is to believe that at our core we remain free.

This state of freedom is a seedling, eternally searching for the light of day, growing long and thin inside us, so frantically that it can even choke itself. Alienation is this impulse for freedom frustrated by external 'reality' [and let us be clear here that we mean, in this context, not 'true reality' but the bourgeois 'reality principle', the reality of repressive social conditions]. The dream is evidence of this conflict of 'realities'.

What is crucial to note is that the dream is so easily forgotten and lost in our waking state, demonstrating the victory of the 'reality principle' over what we would call the 'pleasure principle' — that is, the impulse for happiness and harmony.

Our language exists within us as our dream-world does. Freud has shown that the 'plot' of a dream may hang upon a verbal pun; this suggests that at the core of our consciousness, there is no distinction made between the word and the object, between poetry and the world. [Herein lies the surrealist faith in poetry above all else].

As the dream comes to us, so does poetry. It is the working out of human problems at the deepest level, and it is the expression of our quest for freedom.

How to liberate — or make conscious — the dream? Automatic writing is a specific 'tool' that surrealism has to offer. Sit yourself down at a table with pen and paper, forget everything [especially 'literature'] and write — write so fast that you are unable to think, that all thought comes with the ink in the pen. Let the flood-gates burst! Write as if you are in the middle of a cold ocean, and the piece of paper is your life-raft! It is certainly possible to write poetry in this semi-conscious state.

What you have written on your page is very close to being a dream [it is bound to be flawed, of course, due to the imperfect conditions for this composition]; it is your inner thought — it is the world as it lies cradled within your mind. And it has one decisive advantage over the dream: it is in front of you, on the page; it is up to you to adapt your conscious behaviour to accommodate the lesson with which it speaks to you.

Because, although imperfectly, the dream is through automatic writing made more tangible, it is central to all surrealist activity: the principle of automatism, linked as it is with the principle of spontaneity, is the very heart of surrealism — it is the pump which keeps its life-blood circulation. [The

texts found elsewhere in this supplement were all written, to varying degrees of concentration, by the automatic technique.]

A note on analogy is also merited: Since surrealism proposes that there is a total harmony of the universe, that every aspect of reality is a part of every other aspect, the principle of analogy — that is to say, the understanding of correspondences between everything — is vitally important.

Thus any true answer is an answer to any question [hence the idea that to everything, poetry is an answer]. This principle is the basis of the surrealist game 'Question and Answer', a game whose achievements add up to a poetic encyclopaedia of the world.

Two people play it thus: one person asks a question, writing it down without telling the other person what that question is [although, for the sake of grammatical continuity, the question will probably state what kind of question it is]. The other person writes down his or her answer, entirely ignorant of what the question is. Then the two are put together. The following questions and answers were obtained in this manner.

Question and Answer

Where do monkeys find it difficult to breathe?
In the jaws of a dragon.

What is a man that answers every question 'No!'?
Varicose veins on a jelly fish.

Where does the white dove of peace reside?
Behind the counter of Barclays Bank.

When will I die?
After the moon falls into the duck's mouth.

Who is God?
A dog which bit me when I was young.

What are the Houses of Parliament?
Rabid fleas.

What is a priest?
A chain used in Roman sexual orgies.

Who is the most revolutionary of us all?
The Emperor of the Eskimos.

Where is never?
In a bottle of vitriolic acid.

Where is the queen's bed?
In a warehouse at the source of the Amazon.

What is regret?
A monastery.

What did they do with Lenin?
They swung him from side to side until he confessed.

Texts...

AT SIX thirteen a.m. on a Friday morning the blind man opened his big sky-blue eyes and saw the night, like a stone sunk at the bottom of a deep wishing-well. Feeling urgently the need for consultation and conversation, and selecting for this purpose his left hand, over which he pulled a glove made of the wool of coconuts, he walked down the long passage leading to an obstruction on the other side of which — the door of the palace — was the outside world.

The conversation was in full swing when suddenly and producing a sensation of chronic surprise lasting twenty minutes or more, he felt a softness like velvet, which seemed to be alive. At least, it seemed as if it once had been alive, perhaps an evening dress filled out by a young woman, her breast still warm and responsive in spite of a large hole in her throat. This bloody hole he had dreamed of, for several nights now, with the intensity and obsession which only blind men dream with. His companion was obsession, and it had taught him many things — to locate and enjoy immediately the very nipple of things.

A banjo began to play, making him restless to return to his old chicken farm, and making further conversation impossible.

But his hand was sticky with blood, and the fingers played on the strings of her heart with less than pluckiness. The tuning was all wrong — she was dead.

Day and night existed together for him. A dark room, a bright light, such as the ambiguity and the ease with which the flickering shadows created new visions on his closed eyes. What was the day, peeping through the closed curtains and waking him from his nightmares? Perhaps nothing more than white duck-feathers scattered on the wild and frightened waves of a black ocean.

He had dreamed that morning of a beautiful young woman with a bright chrome tap attached to her throat, to which men came and filled their tea cups with her blood. He had dreams of a wide-open mountain cavern, filled with strawberry jam, which men transferred with knives onto their pieces of buttered toast. He had dreamt of that woman at a banquet, singing while lying on the table as men ripped pieces of flesh from her, stripping her to the bone except that they left the breasts and vagina untouched. The rest vanished, until on the unspoiled white table-cloth laced with blood was a vagina, two breasts, and a mouth still singing its street-songs. His left hand was there, groping at the table cloth, wanting to wrap everything up in it, but unable so much as to see where it began and ended.

These dreams of his had prepared him for the discovery of her body in a velvet evening dress, somewhere in the palace, haunted by the stupid tunes of a banjo. How he had wanted to play with her! How incapable he had been!

The uncomfortable tickling at the end of his nose — it was a spider's web. Panic gripped him: where was the spider? Had he been caught in its web, or was that single threat too weak to hold him?

Struggled, he dangled at its end, by accident he almost hung himself on it — oh, that spiders could be so devious! This thread was like a thick iron chain, wound round him completely, and tightly, although he could not feel anything but the tickle on his nose and upper lip. This was the spider's cruel revenge, the fanatical envy for all things with wings. Because spiders cannot fly, they are masters of disguise, and they are masters at building traps. The blind man fears spiders more than most other people.

He forgot about the thread that held him, and walked away, back the way he had come — he left the dusty room, down the long passage and returned to his bed. There he lay and thought. What could he say about his own identity? If he met himself in his dreams, what greeting would he utter? 'Hello,' he would say, 'hello, man for whom day and night intermingle — man for whom there is no day and no night. Hello, blind man!'

Tomorrow, when he woke up, he would point his finger and say who had murdered his true love. He would meet that man, and would kill him. Perhaps he also would be killed. And perhaps he would exchange his useless eyes for some books, printed in braille, on the interpretation of dreams, and he could come to know himself a little better.

Whatever might happen tomorrow, tonight he would sleep, and create beauty like the woman in velvet evening dress, her face all covered in cobwebs... And he would make love to her, at last!

STEPHAN KUKOWSKI, 12.2.79.

THE OLD grin of the windows is the only pastime to send me completely crazy like an ink-viaduct. Spattered with the remains of a wholesome meal I go out and see that you are there, dancing on your crutches and holding close to your bells a pile of twigs. Send me another big french dog and I'll be on my way to the moon. Pausing only to be a bird, you who I love with your huge foghorn going off all the time waking the neighbours — why must we use a foghorn in bed? Because it is better that way with the walls closing in on the bed and the enemy infantry divisions trying to shell us.

All inaccurate the dead of the night is the time for polishing of your breasts. I am lying in a lake of wishes and you are dancing on a flood of gravel with a pontoon bridge stretching over your legs to carry the traffic which never stops. Then you will send me your heart's postcard again and not complain of the freezing wind in the bank.

She needed the car to get to her cliff face, an old sorely dealt pendulum for the washers that lie by their own baskets of grass.

Oh yes I see the sun is coming like a big telegraph pole into my eye the bus is pretending never to swerve the green dog attacks its own tail with hypocrisy never again will I put my head in Rodney's foghorn never again will I believe your story of TWO SEGREGATED BISHOPS FUCKING THEIR DEAD DOG.

I am not capstan lathe to be rented out to an old swaggering butcher. I am not a road hog to eat with spaghetti. Even if I were your dead horse-chestnut you could spare me a dover sole to dance with on the moon sliding floor.

A.C.

I WAS ill, lying diagonally across the river. Soldier ants were using me as a bridge, and my back was aching badly, producing memories of twisted chicken joints. I grasped the nearest branch, it was floating, my arm extended with it, down the waterfall. This collapsed the tension of the bridge, and there was a large stain-pool left. The current reversing goes round in a circle, slipping down plugholes, eddying into a toy globe mapped out into swaying African continents, which denied any annexe.

I welcome the transfer of your assets to my bank with a grilled message: this bank is dead. It is a corpse — no! a hyacinth sprouting downwards extending warm condolences to the peoples of the tribe, the plains Indians. However, its Indians do not inhabit the plain, but roam sporadically the jungle combing and recombining their hair.

The Third World War has broken out and despite the fact that I have been napalmed, I am still alive. I was equal to the challenge of burning seas, swimming underwater for long periods. The salty sea aids my black, ragged skin and the survivors gather on a wrecked ship. The atmosphere here is a positive one because no one knows what to do.

ANDREW WOODWARD

THERE WAS once a man who knew more about life than anybody's coffee grinder. But this had not always been the case. At the age of thirty-five, finding the years slipping by him, he sold some valuable research material to a competitor and blamed the mistake on a colleague. By forty he had given the managing director a heart attack and succeeded him as top boss. His children were very close to him.

He was a strong believer in the family. His children were very close to him, and not only because he handcuffed them to the dining-room table at mealtimes. He let his own outstanding success story speak for itself, and when his children seemed unwilling to listen, he beat them, for their own sake.

It was rumoured that he kept his widowed mother, of undesirably low social origins, locked in a room at the top of his house anaesthetised by alcohol and Wagner. He treated this rumour with the same contempt as he treated the demands of his workers for a toilet on the work premises. He was the only man I have met who could say: 'The family is the state at home,' without a trace of irony.

He was a man who lived always with the beast, but did not know it. When he felt its hairiness in bed beside him he took it for roughness in the sheets, and beat his wife until she changed them. When its shadow appeared behind him in the shaving mirror, he mistook it for a passing swallow. When on one occasion he paused to draw on a cigar, and found his teeth in the throat of an employee, he had a nervous breakdown. They said he worked much too hard for his own good.

While in hospital they X-rayed his brain and discovered that the grey matter in his head was in fact cement, slowly solidifying. He saw this as an omen, and after coming out of hospital he took over a concrete-mixing firm and did well out of it.

He was a man with only one dream, which occurred once yearly when his wife had done a cheese fondue for the board of directors, to soften them a little before they reconsidered his salary the next day. Somehow, the severed head of his predecessor was always found floating in the melted cheese. This disturbed him.

In this dream he was walking down a street, the sides of which were the legs of a woman he had met while on business in Paris. As he approached the end of the street he was the eye of a telescope watching a black hole sucking in a river of ecstatic suns. He entered the woman's vagina at a terrifying speed, leaving a small black silhouette the shape of himself. Inside the woman's womb he discovered a cold fried egg, which swelled to become an image of his face. He screamed. The scream broke through the skin of the womb like crocus-dagger and travelled upwards far into the night, then sprouted into a tulip looking downwards at the earth, spitting on yellow factories.

The earth, in its turn, was a bag of blood bursting in a shower of glass. Another scream shot along the streets and was a mycelium out of which street lamps grew on tall stalks. The lamps became the jaws of dinosaurs and began to eat the pedestrians and cars below, chewing them to dust, a fine dust which rained down on the head of the dreamer, choking him. He awoke screaming: 'It was just a dream. It was just a dream.'

The next day he went to work, sacked five hundred workers, sent ten final warnings to customers, and announced record profits for the company. He also made a mental note to buy his wife a coffee-grinder.

RICHARD HAWKINS

Open Letter to the Gardeners

My dear gardener,

When I last heard of you, you were building a huge field. Have you finished it yet? They say your busby does not fit very well. Last night I wanted to go for a walk through your gradens, but they were deep in mud, like paddy fields. I dream of your trees.

We both would prefer not to trim, but... Imagine only that my type-writer is blossoming, tending to shade me from the heat of the street. Again, no more compost of water coming from the hose, only a massive bunch of flowers.

A big fat duck is sitting on an azalea. You sit on the duck. My birdseed is falling around. Policemen graze like cows, their uniforms off, on the bonfire. In a shady section of the greenhouses, which drip with moisture and in which lovers roll about hotly, a coypu is preparing itself for the swimming race. Who will win? I, you, or the coypu?

Last night, I was sitting in my bug, wishing boats could have gardens or whole forests. They can? Then I shall store a spare jungle on my hat, and set off for Indonesia right away.

Yours, ADAM CZARNOWSKI

UNDER that cloud, a hen-coop. In the hen-coop, a baby screaming. Under the arch, a bishop running for his life; in front of the bishop, his life running away from him; behind the bishop, a bullet; behind the bullet, a freedom fighter; in front of the freedom fighter, a hole in the bishop's head; around the hole, a dead bishop; in front of his body a scented cathedral that is really trees lit by floodlights. We leave it. We put it into a bag, we have some tea, and discuss the day's activities.

R.H.

Comment on Sexism

SOME OF the automatic texts published here, especially that by Stephen Kukowski, contain extremely violent images of women.

They are fantasies of male aggression to women of a kind which are only too often played out in reality — in rape, woman battering, street attacks and murder. They are among the most humiliating and degrading images of women that bourgeois ideology conjures up.

Feminists have attacked such images — in art, advertising, and the media — as constituting an actual incitement to violence against women.

Strong views were expressed on this text in a discussion on the Editorial Board of Socialist Challenge. It was felt that images like this — that are clearly insulting and humiliating to women — should only be published in order to expose them; or as part of a debate on the value and role of these images in art — a debate to which we hope feminist artists would contribute.

It was decided to explain this position to the contributors, and ask them to withdraw the Kukowski text. They argued for the text and declined to withdraw it.

Insofar as this supplement is posed as a discussion of surrealism as a whole, and not of violent images of women in particular, some Editorial Board members felt that the piece should not be published at this time. To publish the text was to provide an 'art gallery' for degrading images of women — whether or not a critical editorial comment was appended.

The view of the majority of the Editorial Board was that a critical comment was more appropriate than deletion of the text.

Clearly socialists should not hesitate to examine such images for what they reveal about male attitudes and behaviour and the social forces that give rise to them. This was the verbal intention of the authors of the texts.

However, within the context of the texts, there is, in our view, no clear critique of the violent images presented. At best one might say the intention is ambiguous. In such a matter — of violence towards women — ambiguity is simply not enough. Criticism is an essential component.

SOCIALIST CHALLENGE EDITORIAL BOARD

THE REVOLUTIONARY attitude is based on intellectual and imaginative honesty. Automatic writing, the most radical attempt to understand an individual's latent reaction to the world in all its complexity, represents passion expressing itself at the level of the most fundamental honesty. It tends to reveal affirmation of life and extreme doubt operating in a passionate dialectic.

That certain images arising through the automatic method are 'ambiguous' is hardly surprising. Revolutionaries can hardly pretend to have every situation well worked out in advance; we cannot approach life with blue-prints for the future. Thus to regard automatic texts askance, seeking to measure their content by a priori assumptions, is clearly dishonest.

Having said this, we would contend that the images objected to by the Editorial Board of Socialist Challenge are not ambiguous in the sense that they might be sexist. The subject of one of them is indeed the problem of someone witnessing and recognising rape, being disgusted by it, and yet also being a part of that society within which it takes place.

The images occur in the context of a nightmare, and the pain which they express are an implicit criticism. With his severed left hand, the man attempts to 'wrap everything up' in the white sheet, but is 'unable so much as to see where it began and ended'. The ambivalence of his 'blindness' is an expression of the complexity of the problem as he faces it.

ROSAMUND SHAKESPEARE

Your Guarantee

This poem is sold by weight, not volume.
Packed as full as practicable
By modern automatic methods,
If it does not appear so when opened
It is because contents have settled
During mental transport and handling.

PAUL HAMMOND

Manifesto towards an Independent Revolutionary Art

By André Breton and Diego Rivera

Although Diego Rivera is one of the signers of the Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art, extracts of which are published here, it was actually written by Breton in collaboration with Trotsky. The circumstances in which it was written are described in Breton's 'Visit with Leon Trotsky'. Translated into many languages (it appeared in Russian in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*), the manifesto was widely published in the revolutionary press. It is dated 25 July 1938.

WE CAN say without exaggeration that never has civilisation been menaced so seriously as today. The Vandals, with instruments which were barbarous and comparatively ineffective, blotted out the culture of antiquity in one corner of Europe.

But today we see world civilisation, united in its historic destiny, reeling under the blows of reactionary forces armed with the entire arsenal of modern technology. We are by no means thinking only of the world war that draws near. Even in times of 'peace' the position of art and science has become absolutely intolerable.

In so far as it originates with an individual, in so far as it brings into play subjective talents to create something which brings about an objective enriching of culture, any philosophical, sociological, scientific or artistic discovery seems to be the fruit of a precious chance; that is to say, the manifestation, more or less spontaneous, of necessity.

Such creations cannot be slighted, whether from the standpoint of general knowledge (which interprets the existing world) or of revolutionary knowledge (which, the better to change the world, requires an exact analysis of the laws which govern its movement). Specifically, we cannot remain indifferent to the intellectual conditions under which creative activity takes place; nor should we fail to pay all respect to those particular laws which govern intellectual creation...

The regime of Hitler, now that it has rid Germany of all those artists whose work expressed the slightest sympathy for liberty, however superficial, has reduced those who still consent to take up pen or brush to the status of domestic servants of the regime, whose task it is to glorify it on order, according to the worst possible aesthetic conventions. If reports may be believed, it is the same in the Soviet Union, where Thermidorian reaction is now reaching its climax....

The repugnance which this shameful negation of principles of art inspires in the artistic world — a negation which even slave states have never dared to carry so far — should give rise to an active, uncompromising condemnation. The opposition of writers and artists is one of the forces which can usefully contribute to the discrediting and overthrow of regimes that are destroying, along with the right of the proletariat to aspire to a better world, every sentiment of nobility and even of human dignity.

The communist revolution is not afraid of art. It realises that the role of the artist in a decadent capitalist society is determined by the conflict between the individual and various social forms which are hostile to him (sic). This fact alone, in so far as he is conscious of it, makes the artist the natural ally of revolution.

The process of sublimation, which here comes into play and which psychoanalysis has analysed, tries to restore the broken equilibrium between the integral 'ego' and the outside elements it



ANDRE BRETON, DIEGO RIVERA and LEON TROTSKY

rejects. This restoration works to the advantage of the 'ideal of self', which marshals against the unbearable present reality all those powers of the interior world, of the 'id', which are common to all men and which are constantly flowering and developing.

The need for emancipation felt by the individual spirit has only to follow the natural course to be led to mingle its stream with this primeval necessity — the need for the emancipation of man...

In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint and must under no pretext allow itself to be placed under bonds. To those who urge us, whether for today or for tomorrow, to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal and we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula complete freedom for art.

We recognise, of course, that the revolutionary state has the right to defend itself against the counterattack of the bourgeoisie, even when this drapes itself in the flag of science or art. But there is an abyss between these enforced and temporary measures of revolutionary self-defence and the pretension to lay commands on intellectual creation.

If, for the better development of the forces of material production, the revolution must build a socialist regime with centralised control, to develop intellectual creation an anarchist regime of individual liberty should from the first be established. No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above! Only on a base of friendly cooperation, without constraint from outside, will it be possible for scholars and artists to carry out their tasks, which will be more far-reaching than ever before in history.

It should be clear by now that in defending freedom of thought we have no intention of justifying political indifference, and that it is far from our wish to revive a so-called pure art which generally serves the extremely impure ends of reaction. No, our conception of the role of art is too high to refuse it an influence on

the fate of society.

We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution. But the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely seeks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art...

The aim of this appeal is to find a common ground on which all revolutionary writers and artists may be reunited, the better to serve the revolution by their art and to defend the liberty of that art itself against the usurpers of the revolution...

We know very well that thousands on thousands of isolated thinkers and artists are today scattered throughout the world, their voices drowned out by the loud choruses of well-disciplined liars. Hundreds of small local magazines are trying to gather youthful forces about them, seeking new paths and not subsidies.

Every progressive tendency in art is destroyed by fascism as 'degenerate'. Every free creation is called 'fascist' by the Stalinists. Independent revolutionary art must now gather its forces for the struggle against reactionary persecution. It must proclaim aloud the right to exist. Such a union of forces is the aim of the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art which we believe it is now necessary to form.

We by no means insist on every idea put forth in this manifesto, which we ourselves consider only a first step in the direction. We urge every friend and defender of art, who cannot but realise the necessity for this appeal, to make himself heard at once....

Our aims:

The independence of art — for the revolution.
The revolution — for the complete liberation of art!

Books...

By Michael Richardson

AT A time when surrealism is at the height of academic interest, it is not surprising that the past decade has seen the publication of a proliferation of books on the subject. It is equally unsurprising to find that the majority of those books are marked by distortion, prejudice, and the need to reduce the totality of the surrealist argument to one or other of its component parts.

To help the reader through this minefield of academic literature here is a brief survey of some of the better and more easily available books in English.

The best general introduction to surrealism is Roger Cardinal's and Robert Short's *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation* [Studio Vista]. Dealing with particular themes and their evolution within surrealism, the authors present the surrealist proposition with lucidity and brevity; it is a book marked by its excellently chosen illustrations, as well as by the succinctness of the text.

Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism* [Pelican] is a more formal history of the movement until 1944. Written during the war, it remains today the standard history of that period. It provides a valuable chapter on the period leading up to the formation of the movement, and its extended accounts of the crisis points of surrealism's revolutionary politics are most acute.

This book can be especially recommended on account of its imaginative method: it is both precise, and lyrical. Although Nadeau's stance is objective, he does not speak with hindsight but rather expresses the ideas as they developed amongst a group of individuals active in the revolutionary movement. The

book also has an appendix giving a large number of manifestos and documents of the period.

Another easily available book is Patrick Waldberg's *Surrealism* [Thames and Hudson]. Although his introduction is jaundiced, it is useful for its selection of texts taken from surrealist reviews, as well as highlights from the manifestos and other important books, and an excellent selection of photographs.

Of the larger art-books, one of the best is Gaeton Picon's *Surrealism 1919-1939* [Macmillan]. It is a tribute to the spirit of surrealism as it manifested itself [mainly through visual art] between 1919 and 1939. One of its shortcomings is the usual one of narrowing the scope of the book to what happened in Paris; another, and again this applies to many similar such books, is the author's belief that surrealism effectively came to an end in 1939.

Malcolm Haslam goes even further; for him, the whole thing just disappeared off the face of the earth one fine day, without warning and leaving no further trace! His book *The Real World of the Surrealists* is stupid, gossipy and vulgar, and should certainly be avoided.

A useful book is Rene Passeron's *Encyclopedia of Surrealism* [Phaidon], which gives the lie to Picon's assertion of 'a lack of invention and imagination' after the war, containing as it does much interesting work from the later period. As a reference book, it is to be recommended; it gives a long introduction linking surrealist painting to other surrealist activities, followed by an encyclopedia of, first, artists seen as precursors of surrealism, and then of the surrealist painters themselves.

While we would take exception to some of the inclusions

[Chagall and Johns in particular], and some of its conclusions, this is a book which is overall a testimony to surrealism as a living tradition, particularly as represented in the visual arts.

Coming to the texts themselves, it is important first of all to warn readers away from English and American Surrealist Poetry [Penguin] edited by Edward Germain. Its introduction is riddled with prejudices and errors [many of them part of a long tradition of accumulated prejudices and errors], and the selection of poems leaves so much out and includes so little genuine surrealist poetry that it is simply not worth looking at.

Penguin Books did slightly redeem themselves by publishing Paul Knight's translation of Lautreamont's *Maldoror* [Penguin Classics], offering a good alternative to Lykiard's incompetent version of 'the desolate swamps of those sombre and poison-filled pages' by the single most important of surrealism's precursors. Indeed, this treacherous account of black life may be the best initiation for the reader to surrealist poetry, since there are at present very few good surrealist texts available in the English language.

One can recommend *The Custom House of Desire* [Syracuse University Press] edited by J.H. Matthews. This is a fine collection of surrealist short-stories; but as for an anthology of surrealist verse, there seems to be nothing available.

Finally, one of the most important books is, of course, André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* [Ann Arbor Press], and this is well augmented by a Pluto Press volume, *Selected Writings of André Breton*. This volume is edited by Franklin Rosemont, who has written [appearing as a separate volume, again by Pluto], as an introduction to it, *André Breton and the Fundamental Principles of Surrealism*.