

a communication from the surrealist group in Stockholm

VOICES OF THE HELL CHOIR

Aspects of contemporary surrealist activity, its modes of rhetoric and its ludicism

The history of the postbretonian surrealist movement disenvelops through historical contingencies and particular conditions which are partly common for surrealism on the whole and partly particular for the different cultural/ regional contexts.

It seems like the least common denominator of most contemporary activities is an on-going playing/ experimentation and critical/poetological/methodological/political discussion. In addition to this, greater or smaller effort is made in a spectrum of other activities, which are still rather fundamental but still more or less optional in each different context. They are * critical positioning visavis contemporary art, literature, science, politics etc * organisational questions/ democracy/ securing information availability/ updating absent members, * international contacts/ discussions/ collaborations/ initiatives, * investigating, evoking, evaluating and/or defending surrealist (and pre- and parasurrealist) traditions, * keeping contacts/ collaborating with progressive political and artistic forces on the home ground, * endless walking/ *dérive*/ urban exploration/ mingling with the underground, * keeping each other updated in the fields of everyone's individual creativity, * publications, * public performances, poetry readings, exhibitions, concerts, soirées, etc, * political initiatives, all kinds of sabotage, agitation, leaflet distributing, disturbing or obstructing normal order, detourning the urban environment, etc. The list could be made longer or shorter. Most groups will spend time with a lot of these but not all.

But international communication does not regularly account for all of this, and a lot of it is usually very difficult to see in groups elsewhere. It's very much channeled through a certain rhetoric, which may seem to dominate the external picture of the group. This rhetoric apparently usually conforms to one of three preponderances; a propagandistic mode, a subjectivistic mode, or an analytical mode. Each of them can be important part of an integrated surrealist project, and each can become more or less sterile when overemphasized or exclusive. It seems like the ludic sphere, and the determination to give the ludic activities their rightful central place, can offer cures for such imbalances or at least the arena for such a cure.

I will discuss these rhetorical modes, and it is important to remember that I am trying to discuss them as objective modes, and not the communicational strategies of specific groups. Each group will be able to draw upon the different modes and employ them for different purposes, typically in different textual genres, but it's quite evident that for each group one rhetoric mode appears to dominate their output, or at least that part of the output which is internationally available, giving each group a sort of "strategical image" in relation to the other groups. In spite of this objectivity ambition, some critical remarks on specific examples have been grouped under the relevant headings.

Admittedly, these rhetorical modes are not only all useful in different circumstances, they also provide a lot of the obvious objective differences between groups. Thus they should not be evaluated in terms of some being legitimate and some not, regardless of whether in order to disregard certain groups as pseudosurrealists or revisionists, or to complacently regret the lack of spontaneous affinity with some. Our solidarity should be solid enough to span over these differences and be able to recognise them among the conditions for communication, but also a continuous topic for any kind of critical discussion between us. Thus, the intention is to pinpoint some of the obvious pitfalls of each mode and some issues that need to be discussed; that is, to provide some input to a multilateral critical discussion on concrete topics within the movement; not to slander or point out anyone specifically, perhaps this time not even to consciously provoke... Unfortunately, in the Stockholm group we have given priority to other things than international communication for many years now (to an extent that at least I deeply regret), but it turned out that only very few were inclined to respond to our international letter of January 2004 at all. Recently, at least two new contacts were surprised that we were still active, having heard the opposite from the

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french group. So, we haven't had any substantial correspondence with the french for some years, but as far as we know we have been sending each other the usual amount of polite, impersonal, forwarded information and similar, that could be considered the pessimistic baseline of international communication. (The fact that the rumour of our death has been spread by other sources and in other fora too is a partly amusing and partly frustrating but perhaps not too interesting issue.) Several times the idea has been proposed by different groups to perhaps collect that kind of general information (with a dose of sifting) into regular reports from each group, and some groups have occasionally tried it as well, but the lack of response (and sometimes the considerable effort of editing it or agreeing on it?) has made this mere occasional outbursts. Then a lot of discussion will go on between individuals who have developed particular bilateral discussions, and a lot of discussion will go on between those who have the time to hang out on internet forums and bomb mailinglists on a regular basis – a lot of time will certainly be needed, not only to formulate your own ideas and keep defending them against all kinds of misunderstandings, but even more to sift the gems of serious discussion from the piles of mere frustration, ignorance, personal contradictions, personal opinions and other personal expositions. Sometimes ludic invitations and more anecdotal or subjective questionnaires have it easier to produce substantial response, but for a long time we have been feeling that even though such initiatives are generally important to promote, they do also feel a little "loosely hanging" and possibly even having a false ring IF we are not able to discuss critical issues, our fundamental commitments and strategical choices, similarities and differences in these, simultaneously.

The propagandistic mode of surrealism is one of the strongest elements in postbretonian surrealism. It contains hyperradicalism, aggressivity and rash theoretical simplifications. Actually it seems to have borrowed very much of its rhetorics from Vaneigem, whose situationist agitation in itself is little more than a populist-light-surrealism. In reintegrating that part of the situationist arsenal into surrealism along with the other, more interesting parts, we have definitely bought back our own pig in mutilated form with a large loss. This tendency might have been there in at least some tracts of earlier surrealism too (from 27/1 1925 onwards), but far less before the 60's, far less before Breton's death and before the general leftist upheaval of the late 60's widely disseminated the situationists', Marcuse's and others' simplified or simplifiable theories.

If for a moment we don't refrain from invoking cultural stereotypes this strategy could be considered an americanisation of surrealism, integrating into surrealism elements of the loudmouthed, shallow, un-selfcritical voluntarism typical for the american *stereotype*. But even though several american surrealist groups have been active in employing this rhetorical mode for a long time, it must be noted that: * they are certainly not alone in the world in doing that, * they have also carried the banner of a (necessary but admirable) antiamericanism, and * that from an analytical perspective it would seem highly unsatisfactory to refer to such stereotypes and not look for specific historical explanations.

One such is obviously available, to the extent that the death of Breton did put the surrealist movement in a sort of legitimacy crisis. With Breton as the living embodiment of the heritage, there was never a doubt (at least not internally) who was the carriers of the torch, but without him, there were definitely a lot of different ideas around regarding how to carry on, and who was the more legitimate, the truer to the spirit, etc. In some cases it was a matter of conflict between different alternatives as to how to proceed, in other cases it was more about how to establish a sense of exclusive authenticity without there being anyone around with the authority to entrust you with that. Not unexpectedly this rhetoric is common in new/young groups who are eager to establish their right of speaking in the name of surrealism and claiming its whole heritage in spite of their own lack of experience and "credentials". Aggressivity and "raptured selfconfidence" (as a swedish tract actually proclaimed) is certainly a rational strategy in that context, even where it is also one potentially destructively dominating over other modes in the surrealist activity, and one leading to a number of fatal oversimplifications in the general outlook.

Common flaws intimately intertwined with this rhetoric is of course the general tendency to see things in black and white, including putting a totally unproblematised faith in individual creativity and urge for freedom, in for example eroticism, desire and/or love, and more generally in a given spectrum of valueladen concepts, and a corresponding unproblematised belief in the intelligent design of the conspiracy of all kinds of domination, sometimes even a general depreciation of objective reality as such, and also including the grotesque overevaluation of the revelatory nature of one's own creative and critical work, as well as the identifying of one's own activity/ rhetoric as a sufficient lithmus paper – so

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that anyone attracted to one's ranting is better than others, while everybody repelled by it thereby proves themselves to be objective enemies of surrealism without any significant contributions or opinions to make. The mechanisms of recuperation are often imagined as a conscious conspiracy of silence and active marginalisation against living surrealism and its revolutionary aspirations. It tends to fuel a practical focus of speaking a lot more *about* surrealism than speaking surrealism, and so *merely defending rather than inventing* surrealism.

So, in this mode there exists an obsession with legitimacy as the "true voice of surrealism" versus everybody else who represent falsaria, and an aggressive selfdefence versus all of these. In fact, most inaugural declarations of new surrealist groups starts with (and sometimes spend most of the text with) complaining over the general contemporary misunderstanding of what surrealism is, instead of presenting what their specific visions/ contributions/ sensibilities might be. This is a bit selfcontradictory; of all the things the surrealist project might consist of, the task of correcting misapprehensions of surrealism cannot be considered a CENTRAL issue if the grand revolutionary and creative ambitions are not chimerical.

Art and literature history and criticism (both academic and popular) presents surrealism as if it was a movement and/or style in art and literature. Not surprising, because otherwise they would have no reason to talk about it all, since a surrealist project grasped in its entirety goes way beyond their jurisdiction. If they would grasp it they would be less likely to be content with being historians och critics within art and literature, but even if they were, it would still be the artistic or literary output of surrealism which would be most relevant for them to discuss within their professional field. So what? And then they often do not take a big interest in contemporary surrealist activities, and often deny it in any way they can. But what we do is in no way aimed at getting confirmation and good grades from them, in fact it's only good if we can pursue the core of our activities in peace from the public eye, and only intervene in the public sphere when we choose to do so ourselves from particular strategic angles, without illusions of being fairly represented, isn't it?

Then furthermore, a lot of people present their creative output on the internet, some in local low-brow art events, some in advertising, some in official art. In all these places, some people call their work surrealist without knowing too much of the history or theory of surrealism. For most, the association will be very shallow or arbitrary. A lot of them won't produce works that are of any interest whatsoever for us. Some of them will, more or less independently of how much they actually knew about surrealism.

All these people, employing the term surrealism in the sense that makes it meaningful for their own activity, will often be way off mark and part of objective recuperation – but objective recuperation will work regardless of how we judge single voices. Apart from errors of historical facts (which may not be our task to correct) it will always be only inner criteria that draws the line between relevant and irrelevant conceptions of (comments on, contributions to) surrealism. Anything officially represented in the consensus knowledge of present society is objectively a part of its ideology. In my opinion, the only thing that would make it matter what the marketeers of that ideology say about surrealism is whether it might scare off people that could make substantial contributions to it. And certainly, most people could probably make such contributions under very radicalised circumstances. But probably not at present. We have no interest in followers. In the present, surrealism is factually (and has no particular reason to regret it) a minority endeavour, carried on by those who are interested/energetic enough to have found it and found a way to practice it by inner necessity. To some people, the particular spark of imagination and reenchantment and diehard curiosity towards all kinds of marginal phenomena of objective reality, and/or the desire for revolt against the narrow concepts of rationality, sociality and life on the whole, will be something they recognise in surrealism from their own insatiable thirst; and these persons will probably find this to a larger extent in an academic book of surrealist paintings than in a tract yelling at misunderstandings (exemplifying the notion of the two-way working of recuperation; a ricochet). They will probably not trust the contemporary surrealists of being the foremost fighters for freedom, imagination and love simply on our word for it; they will expect to find it manifested in remarkable works and remarkable investigations.

So why don't we just step down from this struggle over who's a surrealist and who's not. For historical purposes we'll only need a technical definition (like the one Penelope Rosemont elaborates in her *Surrealist Women*), and for practical contemporary purposes it will suffice for each group to choose with whom it wants to collaborate and with whom not! The only substantial way of establishing surrealism as a presence in its totality in the relevant sectors/ substructures of present society is through the

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sincereness, energy and intelligence of ones own activities. The only substantial way of establishing oneself within surrealism is by contributing innovation and poetry, sincere critical questions and suggestions. Polemics over legitimacy, over rights to designations, are rather uninteresting even where the causes may be entirely just.

For the sake of comprehensiveness, let's recognise at this point all the merits of polemical aggressivity as well; inherently, it 1) serves to scare off a substantial lot of polite or recuperative interest or pseudointerest (along with some of the serious interest, for sure), 2) serves to potentially radicalise exchanges of ideas and courses of events as mere provocation, and 3) serves to remind of the fundamental radicality of surrealism and the necessity of "absolute divergence" (which of course, must be reinvented in each specific connection and never relied upon as mere safe abstentionism from risktaking), and furthermore 4) can be simply really fun. Not inherently but historically it has also been the preferred forum for * assessment of the potential of real insurrections/ dynamical courses of events (very much in the tradition of the situationists), * critical use of (and thus not only traditional allegiance to) the theories of Marx and Freud.

So, of course it's not wrong with a good rant now and then, but let's try to focus a little more on true enemies and a little less on harmless and uninteresting academics, journalists and home artists, and let's not confuse this ranting with the core issues of surrealist activity.

Several groups in their rhetoric instead utilise a subjectivistic mode, work hard to emphasize the poetic aspect of surrealism through suggestion and invocation, through poetic visions, personal mythologies and radical subjectivity, and through more or less mystification. Within this rhetoric there is sometimes a tendency to regard either or both the propagandistic and the analytical efforts as degrading or compromised. There is very little conscious concern about the reader, and instead the heroic ambition of trying to express ones sensibility in its full content at any price.

In a sense the latter is the mechanism of poetic communication. However within this mode it is also often establishes a notion of the fragility of the poetic, thus regarding the propagandistic and even more the analytical mode not only inadequate but actually dangerous. The individual creativity and the surrealist tradition are cared for like precious gems, evoked and hailed, and exposed mostly in *safe* connections (own, more or less slick, journals and other highbrow peaceful fora); never questioned, confronted, scrutinised. This type of defensiveness was a major conflict line in that old polemic between the french and the swedish group over "The scream in the sack". The original tract was an attempt at stating the direction of the swedish group in clearest possible terms. Guy Girard responded with sharp criticism and seemed to mean that this attempt was 1) necessarily destined to fail to convey anything of the spirit of surrealism and 2) actually contrary to and dangerous to its ambitions. It turned out to be an issue of controversy even within the swedish group; we all agreed for sure that surrealism and poetry in general in a sense is about expressing that which is not yet intelligible, a sort of utopian communication, a way of letting the irreducible speak without compromise. This is one thing. We can never reduce poetry to formulae, and have no ambition of doing so. On the other hand, simple logic tells us that poetry cannot be IDENTICAL with surrealist activity or surrealism on the whole (neither as a movement nor as a spirit). Real existing surrealism is rather a cluster of activities/attitudes celebrating poetry, cultivating poetry, investigating poetry and confronting poetry in various constellations and with various methodologies. (Oops, now we're getting into those tricky spheres of semantics where Guy was actually able to snub us effectively when we had said surrealist tradition was a collection of themes, which is obviously wrong, and so we corrected it into saying that it is the spirit uniting these themes). Anyway, about the real activities of surrealism, it is definitely a matter of choice at any time whether to speak in a suggestive/invokative, "poetic", more or less mystifying and/or unintelligible way OR an intelligible way. It's possible that a lot of important information gets lost in the concentration of these circumstances into simple sentences, but the majority of the swedish group thought, and still thinks, that it's at least worth a try.

The individual sensibilities and the nonconditional importance given to these by a very general surrealist attitude are often, within this rhetoric, stressed to the point of denying surrealism its current historic particulars, the set of standpoints and themes reached through the historical experience so far. This type of rhetoric appears to be most common in countries where organised surrealism has had a very long presence, and there may be a wide variety of positions more or less derived from surrealism. To prove in this situation that one's own brand of surrealism is the true one could perhaps best be argued through the objective historical organisational/personal continuity with the bretonian movement and its

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accumulated plethora of themes, and not with any particular characteristics of the direction of that surrealism? (On the other hand, the close ties with the rest of the international movement is an alternative legitimating factor, but this was clearly more relevant in the 80s before information technology made it easy for any homegrown artist to take part in an international movement...)

A small amount of mystification can be poetically fruitful in creating uncertainty about certain things taken for granted; but any larger amount of mystification is always manipulative, charlatanic and/or selfdeceiving. (It is necessary to keep in my mind the distinction between mystification and mystery. There is a very real sense of mystery in the world which it is a fundamental tenet of surrealism to recognise. But not only to recognise, but also to investigate, experiment and play with it. The sense of mystery, wherever it is essential, withstands that. It does not require pious carefulness, avoiding all risk-taking and all questioning.) The "poetic" rhetoric, and the attitudes of those who employ it, frequently are overprotective concerning the individual visions so as to not really contribute them to interfertilisation, to collective ludicity, collective intelligence, collective critique, instead admiring them from outside as reified exhibition items on pedestals. This protection of the individual imagination as if it was an endangered animal could in a sense be considered contrary to the methodology and spirit of surrealism, in which collectivity, play and experimentation are fundamental tenets.

Nevertheless, this subjectivistic mode is of course also a greenhouse for real poetic discoveries in the subjective sphere, and is capable of conveying a particular coherence and intensity both collectively and individually. Surrealism would be a lot less convincing if it wasn't for the some classic cases of creators having fearlessly cultivated their personal mythologies and imaginary universa; often these have become part of our collective experience.

In fact, the propagandistic and the subjectivistic modes both tend to evoke a kind of *infallibility* of surrealism, though very differently phrased. If in both ways it is important to state that surrealism has the solution to all problems and that there are no problems within surrealism, in the propagandistic mode this may appear like a strategical point of strengthening one's argument by not admitting any weaknesses, in the subjectivistic mode it would be more of explicitly actually putting one's whole faith in the possibility of miraculous solution to everything in this sphere. In a sense this contains the fundamental mechanisms of mystification. As long as one speaks "vaguely", in the sense of ambiguously, prophetically, rich in images and adjectives, mythological markers and bold arrogance/ selfreliance, in a way the solution to all problems will probably lie within this. This is true not only for surrealism but also for astrology and all kinds of religious prophecies. It is only when this is boiled down to less ambiguous sentences that start ruling out things and not only suggesting infinite possibilities that it will be part of a theoretical framework which can actually unambiguously forward our knowledge on our means and of the landscape we are acting in.

It also makes it a lot easier to agree between groups, whenever communication is reduced to mutual hailing some basic concepts, ranting about some others, allowing everybody to address them as themes in games, polemics and poetry any way they like, never really asking what someone else actually means by them, never asking for clarification, never exposing differences, weaknesses, totally new areas of investigation or even of agreement...

This is one of the most important factors in the evident lack of theoretical progress in surrealism in general after the second world war, and also the failure to rally to any newer more radical movement as Breton proclaimed; since a mutually agreed vague surrealism indeed infinitely contains the solutions to all problems there is no need to look for any new developments or new insights, and since a vague surrealism is *absolutely* radical there can not logically be any movement more radical. Surrealism keeps containing the most radical possibilities in every single field, and all of those who actually try to formulate actual theories or new strategies within specialised fields will always have the disadvantage of being particular and not drawing upon a poetic totality framework, so they can easily be dismissed as sterile academics or activists, and whatever is useful in their theories (if it becomes too evident that there is something at all) can always be claimed to have been present in surrealism all the time anyway. Yes, in a sense it was probably there, quite implicitly and undevelopedly. In the same sense it was probably present in Nostradamus's prophecies as well. In a sense, it's somewhat embarrassing to see how much homage is still payed to authors of classical great theoretical breakthroughs like Freud, Marx and Hegel, occasionally also to Böhme, Dee, Swedenborg, Darwin, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Fourier, Tristan, Kropotkin, Sade etc, while almost no attention at all is the payed to those who scrutinise and forward, synthesise or parallel, their ideas in our own times. A lot of surrealists actually take pride in maintaining their distance

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to various currents like contemporary hermetism, natural science, feminism, any strand of poststructuralism, cultural studies, queer theory etc, just because these are not surrealism. No, obviously they're not, but whoever allows them a serious study might find out that they may have a lot to teach us in spite of that and partly even because of that.

There is of course a certain danger of blindness in evaluating the analytical mode of rhetoric within a predominantly analytical/ critical/ objectivistic framework such as the present. But the analytical is very much capable of biting its own tail, and a number of difficulties or dangers with it are easy to point out from within.

First of all, the simple fact that this a dominating mode of speech in several fora outside surrealism, and for several participants in surrealism thus prepares the ground for their desertation into for example academia. And like all other established rhetorical modes, it often degrades into a means for itself, into habit and complacency. It may breed the regressive pleasure of being able to "crush" others' positions and initiatives; actually we are surrounded by examples of how the exertion of this critical assault not only is a forum of a certain pathetic selfreassuring sadism but also an excuse never to really consider anything apart from the already known, so typical in many marxist and situationist-inspired intellectuals, as well as in more or less intelligence-aristocratic supposedly apolitical critics of art and literature etc. Then the lust for selfcriticism and critical scrutiny and "updating" of our heritage often connected with this mode may be blinded by superficial fashions and insignificant spectacular phenomena, thus potentially disrupting internal coherence and becoming severely eclecticist.

From psychological, democratical and group-dynamical perspective too strong an emphasis on the critical will inevitably turn out to be psychologically restrictive for a lot of people with insufficient selfconfidence, creating an atmosphere where ever fewer people take initiatives, and those supposedly fragile themes (emotional or poetical) take an ever-decreasing place. Even if surrealism on the whole is non-utilistic and therefore spurns effectivity and rapidity, an overcritical attitude may serve to slow down output to virtually nothing, which is not necessarily bad in itself except for that one of the things thus strangled is external communication and communication within international surrealism.

Even if it can't be properly accounted for in an analytical context, there is of course also a critique of the analytical perspective from the viewpoint of "pure" sensibility and emotion – it may often FEEL like it misses the point.

The groups and individuals that have been stressing the analytical rhetoric, often have been active in countries where surrealism failed to establish itself as an organised movement during classic times. The present agents in these countries thus may find it natural to ask themselves how this came about; if there are any particular discrepancy in the conditions visavis other countries. Those questions are very interesting. Potentially they are also quite misleading if they tend to overemphasize dissimilarities between national cultures in modern capitalist countries, and refer to national characters as explanations. With or without theoretical arguments they may lead to decreasing interest, decreasing communication and decreasing solidarity with other surrealist groups. In the worst case they may even end up in seeing a need to develop separate national surrealisms.

The games of surrealism inherently counters a lot of the restraints and dangers in each of these rhetoric modes. Playing brings about collectivity as such, openness towards intersubjective phenomena, at the same time a recognition and a surpassing of the specific conditions brought in by the individual. At least ideally games provide confrontation with the truly unexpected, with entirely new possibilities, and with a new intersubjective subjectivity and communication, and thus elements of a new sense of civilisation. All of this is from a methodological perspective. In fact it is also an important experience in the ludic sphere that the results of our games often turn out unfortituous and predictable. Sometimes it will do little else than create a superficial feeling of solidarity, or confirm the individual's personal directions, or, which is more interesting to note here, reinforce the dominant rhetorical mode of the group, integrating that rhetoric already in the design of the game.

There are polemical games: which merely in a playful way pay homage to our basic concepts or our heroes, or derides/ridicules central concepts of miserabilism or certain classic enemies or politicians etc (examples would be either the typical or just the uninspired rounds of for example Time-Travellers Potlatch, Ouvrez-vous, For/Against, etc, and a lot of uninspired individual contributions to all kinds of games). Such games are, I would say, not surrealist games in a strong sense, in that they do not

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employ any actual creativity, do not let the unknown play any part, do not create any particular ambiances or any new knowledge.

The way of playing that corresponds to the largest degree with the subjectivistic mode is mythologising games, functioning though gathering any objects or themes and by any ludic means integrating and cultivating them in a poetical or mythological framework, creating as endresults potentially fruitful ambiances, not the least for the purpose of creating a sense of belonging, cohesion and personal meaning. In that, this mode can be referred to as a quasi-religious mode. It tends to partly collectivise the individual emotional response and develop the shared mythology. A lot of these themes, like central concepts (love, desire, marvellous, night etc) and major sources of inspiration (lautreámont, marx, hegel, freud, breton etc) will then confuse the spectators (and some of the participants) by appearing to be analytical concepts and tools, while they are actually filling the function of mere mythological signs.

The reverted mirror image of that mode would be the objectivistic stance connected with the analytical mode of rhetoric. This will take as its starting point any objectively given phenomena (including as a subclass subjective fantasies!), gather and develop these by experimental/aleatory means (including subjective associations), and then collectively interpret them within an analytical framework. The endresult will there typically consist of the new aspects and new possibilities revealed by the specific chance constellations, which may be called a quasi-scientific mode. It tends to focus on the poetical-epistemological potentialities, the new knowledge objectively produced by the ludic and intersubjective development of the arbitrary distribution of meaningful elements.

In spite of the different games' firm basis in either mode, they do (more than anything else) still retain the potential of superceding their limitations, merging and producing genuine novelties on either level.

The crisis of legitimacy for postbretonian surrealism remains and does not remain an issue.

In a sense the easiest way to motivate continued surrealist activity is that it is a timeless endeavour. It corresponds with or innermost desires and critiques, and we feel affinities with the surrealist tradition, and so we go on forever whatever happens. In a sense, this is hopefully a part of the driving force for several of us, but note that it is perfectly compatible with for example a Schuster's view of the surrealist movement being objectively dead while the surrealist spirit survives eternally, or for the other hand any wellmeaning cultural snob seeing surrealism as a perpetual reminder of the imaginative sources in art and literature.

So, on the other hand, surrealism still claims to be a progressive movement, some kind of a contemporary force, a historical agent, the present face of a specific real historical movement.

Surrealism has definitely developed before. Early 20's surrealism differs from late 20's surrealism differs from middle 30's surrealism etc in themes, in methodology and in strategy. At least from the second world war on, we see that a lot of the development of surrealism takes place partly outside surrealism or in undercurrents of surrealism (but probably before that as well, with for instance Bataille's circle and Le Grand Jeu), while an "official surrealism" was actually constructed not only by art and literature historians but actually by the french group themselves, most obviously in choosing to organise the great all-integrating partly-retrospective timeless 1947 exhibition instead of (as another suggestion at the time was) organising a conference for surrealists to develop the movement's direction based on a confrontation and comparison of the very different experiences made during the war. In a sense, surrealism as a unified historical agent died exactly there, where for the first time the forum for coordinating/accumulating surrealist experience chose to develop not the sum and its implications but actually something *else* than the combined individual energies/ experiences, actually thus creating this ghost (or if you will spectacle) of "official surrealism". The major tracts of the late 40's focused on RE-instating timeless themes of anti-colonialist freedom, anti-stalinist freedom, anti-religious freedom, and very consciously did not adress themes or experiences made during the war years (the journals of the same period do contain more than usual of occult-mediumistic themes and display some new artistic themes, but in the spirit of additions rather than developments).

This is NOT to say that the surrealist movement nor the french surrealist group died or reverted at that point. I'm only saying that from 1947 on the surrealist movement was definitely DIVIDED and without a historical focal point. The french group and Breton himself kept up an admirable organisational, creative and critical output and represent the single most important activity center throughout that period, but that is as one group among others, with its specific limitations, rather than a coordination center, focal point or something like that. In a sense, surrealism became "timeless" in 1947

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because it became infinitely inclusive, came to consist of the total sum of themes, works and activities that had ever been a part of it, in an indiscriminately accumulative way, instead of moving forward through new discoveries superseding and changing the meaning of the older ones, that is, without historical breaks, without coupure, without aufhebung. So the legitimacy crisis of postbretonian surrealism is actually a problem for the whole postwar period, it was just that the inspiring living presence of Breton made a lot of people unaware of the fact for a few decades until he died. (We were very happy to find this course shift acknowledged and emphasised in Michael Richardson's and Krzysztof Fijalkowski's anthology "Surrealism against the Current".)

And what then are the objective advances of surrealism after Breton's death? First of all, I don't know if it's needed or not to point that the term "advance" is intended as "irreversible development" (and not necessarily "progress for the better", whatever that would mean). Contemporary surrealism in a sense only consists of a very wide spectrum, but for those who have chosen to link up with each other in an organisational/activist framework (what we like to refer to as a movement) there may still be some themes and some experiences that are shared. Well, we'd probably need nothing less than an international conference to establish that, but my suggestions are:

* A more effective and more explicit network structure, due to two mutually reinforcing factors:

a) Changed communication infrastructure, to which the movement has only partially responded but that partial response is still sufficient to alter our organisational framework, with in several sectors a far more effective networking, new transversal alliances, etc

b) Recognition of the lack of an organisational center and the need to base collaborations on voluntariness and mutual interest, thus creating a non-hierarchical free-association-based structure (and if you will, democratic and anarchic).

* reintegration of "parasurrealist" traditions; most notably the situationist movement and the work of Bataille and his circle, but also Cobra, various groups of Phases and a number of individual artists and writers. However the experiences of several other such efforts remain for the movement to suck up; for example Mass-Observation.

* a hardcore insistence on the ludic as the core of surrealist collectivity and surrealist experience

* a renewed focus on urbanism and walking, partly inspired by the reintegration of situationist psychogeography. (there have been tendencies to forward surrealist focus on rural and natural environments as well, but these have been much more isolated, and usually mere minor parts of more generally focused interests in either geography, biology or so-called "ecological awareness").

* a successive (but still far from fulfilled) re-abandonment of official culture. In a way this was the starting point of surrealism, but rather soon the antagonism softened, and it was for many decades (and sometimes still is) nothing out of the ordinary to have members "double-organised" contributing more or less the same type of the work to the art market, literature market or academia on the one hand and to the surrealist movement on the other hand. Of course this involves partly tricky questions about the nature of work, and about the ability of poetry to function even in coopted settings, where different groups and different individuals will keep assessing the priorities differently. What I'm suggesting here is merely that after Breton's death the pendulum has been on a backstroke, with more new surrealists keeping the distance to official culture than striving for recognition and market shares...

* a recognition/appreciation of the surrealist aspects of popular culture, which of course was partly present for a long time, but first made an irreducible part of the surrealist sphere of interest by the comprehensive investigation and agitation by the Chicago group in the 60s and 70s.

* Music, a sphere made impossible to keep dismissing with a lazy quote of de Chirico's and Breton's (partial) lack of interest, by the number, scope and frenzy of surrealist interventions and investigations in recent decades. These concern the surrealist aspects of popular music (part of the previous point), to a lesser but still significant extent the surrealist inspiration of many 20th century composers, but most of all, the musicking of surrealists themselves including emphasizing the analogies between automatism and musical improvisation, between musical and poetical communication, etc. (Apparently, the partly analogous field of dance remains a minor topic)

* Politics. Most surrealist groups have made some bad experiences in this field and ended up in defending the good old baseline of emphasizing the politically revolutionary aspect of surrealism together with the movement's autonomy visavis all purely political revolutionary organisations, and the freedom to associate with such in a non-sectarian manner to a lesser or greater degree in accordance with one's own assessments of present necessities. A lot of us have also seen the old quarrel between the two classically

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available alternatives of anarchism and trotskyism as totally fruitless and these alternatives in themselves clearly insufficient or even entirely outdated, and that a non-sectarian revolutionary attitude today must include an openness towards new means of struggle and more recent original theories.

* Critique of the image. Again partly as a result of the reintegration of situationist critique, but also as a part of the general retreat from official culture and a direct response to the present overflow of all kinds of imagery stemming from the commercial sphere but effectively colonising larger part of the mind and the social; several groups (but not all) have been emphasising the need for vigilance and suspiciousness in this area and the futility of merely contributing to this flow as if nothing happened.

Some of these may not be part of the development of surrealism on the whole but belong to only certain cultural contexts, while on the other hand there may be things which I have omitted, either simply not being able to discern them or believing them to be confined to only certain cultural contexts while they are actually better regarded as parts of the development of surrealism on the whole.

Some controversial issues require more international discussion; I did put the critique of the image on the list because it appeared to be a dynamic force that united several points of activity a few years ago, but the discussion appeared to halt prematurely, just like the discussion over religion and notions of sacredness at the same time, which was perhaps even less conclusive but partly recently made topic by Ducornet's initiative of reissuing the 1948 antireligious tract. At the same time, there is a whole field of "antiergic (or even profane) mysticist" practices paralleling and even tangential surrealism focus on the imagination which is largely unexplored by the movement. I'm sure there are individuals in the movement who are more oriented than others in this and have suggestions for what currents and writers of recent or contemporary occultism/magic, unorthodox psychoanalysis/ psychology etc that are more worthy of studying than others.

The attitudes towards science remain to be thoroughly discussed. There are two types of questions there. First the fascinating perspective on reality and the immense number of startling discoveries and poetic details made available in, for example, particle dynamics, spacetime theory and the whole of quantum physics, scientific cosmology and astronomy in general, meteorology, systems ecology and microbiology, evolutionary theory and genetics, plate tectonics and geomorphology, quaternary geology and palaeoecology, cladistics and probability theory, cybernetics and general linguistics, etc (as I'm personally able to gather many examples only from the biological and geological fields and not other ones, I'll leave that for some other occasion). All fascinating, but also partly coming into conflict with convictions held dear in the surrealist tradition.

Second the focus on methodology and epistemology. How many remember today that the surrealist watchword *coupure* is actually Bachelard's description of the leap from prejudice to scientific thinking? Actually there is so much to gain in adopting the methodological stance; to design ones projects specifically to be able to give results regardless of ones prejudices, to always ask how things can be known and investigated rather than if they feel true or false, to abandon faith and custom to be able to identify anything novel, unexpected, counterintuitive etc. In a sense this has always been a part of the core of surrealism, but there is very often a distinct sloppiness in methodology, a tendency to stop halfway and jump to conclusions from there, very often in order to artistically or literarily exploit the investigation and then leave it behind. I'm not saying we should all become scientists (though it would be fun!), simply that there is a lot to gain from straightening up the methodology and pose epistemological questions.

The nature of the traditional allegiance to hegelian philosophy and freudian psychology (despite their continuing relevance!) and the superficial rejection of the whole poststructuralist sphere (despite its many deep flaws!) is something that seems partly shaky and demands a critical discussion in the movement, also being the perhaps most concrete aspect of an the apparent lagging behind in theoretical issues. Antihumanism is actually one of the most radical pillars of modern poetry on the whole, present in surrealist ludic/collective/"mediumistic" practices but very often discussed on only the most shallow of levels or even denied; it remains a critical issue for the surrealists to develop a relevant understanding of specifically in this period. Issues posed by for instance feminism and queer theory, of intergender power relations, microlevel democracy and social domination issues on the whole, have certainly advanced and reshaped the movement during the period, but in these issues the surrealist movement very often seem to be lagging a little bit behind society in general, in spite of having some extremely radical perspectives to offer; why it is so certainly demands a discussion. Partly this overlaps with the necessity to refocus on eroticism and its potential and pitfalls in present society where the

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configuration and role of sexuality is partly much different from in the days of classic surrealism. We could also need some fresh perspectives on the surrealist notion of love.

In all these questions surrealism should have something to say, and possibly a lot of us would be capable of reaching some common understanding of the present necessities. In several of them there appeared to be a broader discussion on its way a few years ago. The difficulties at the time of organising the publication of the international surrealist bulletin seemed to postpone the discussions. (Of course it's possible that the discussion kept on, only we were much out of circulation; in that case, we'd be happy to see the developments!) Anyway, during the years, digital communication has become increasingly available and reliable, so we should be able to carry on a serious discussion more swiftly now, shouldn't we?

Mattias Forshage

(thoroughly discussed and largely approved (but not necessarily in its entirety) by the Stockholm surrealist group and also incorporating important comments from Merl Storr of the SLAG group)