surrealism, cinema, and the search for a new myth

KRISTOFFER NOHEDEN

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the summer of 1947, André Breton organized the large exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* at the Galerie Maeght in Paris.[1] The exhibition was designed as an initiatory journey, which indicated that surrealism had developed a range of new interests during the war. Entering, visitors ascended a staircase, the steps of which were painted to look like the spines of books favoured by the surrealists, each coupled with a tarot card. A stroll through the Chamber of Superstitions led them past a black lake and an imposing totem figure. Then, the Rain Room played at cleansing them from the very superstitions they had just confronted, with artificial rain falling over vegetally sprawling sculptures and trickling down into basins of earth, a signal of growth and rebirth. The exhibition culminated with the Labyrinth of Initiation, in which twelve octagonal niches each contained an altar dedicated to "haloed beings or objects" that were "gifted with a potential for mythological life."[2] On their way through these trials, the visitors encountered artworks by almost one hundred artists from twenty-four different countries, including Argentina, Haiti, Egypt, Denmark, and Romania. Turning to the exhibition catalogue, the curious visitor found declarations of intent by Breton, essays by Georges Bataille, Pierre Mabille, and Victor Brauner, and a poem by Aimé Césaire. Breton indeed conceived *Le Surréalisme en 1947* as a manifestation of surrealism's international scope and continued cohesion after the ravages of the war. But this was not a mere reiteration of previous accomplishments. He also intended the exhibition to mark a

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certain *dépassement*, a change in direction, for the movement towards the search for a new myth.[3]

In his writings surrounding the exhibition, Breton was strategically evasive about the appearance and nature of such a new myth. But as this description of the exhibition suggests, he expected to locate it at the intersection of occultism, "primitive" thought, ancient mythology, and surrealism's very own tradition of visionary writers, artists, and thinkers. The surrealist search for a new myth, then, was far from a simple restoration of myths from the past. It was combinatory and profoundly modern even as it looked to arcane knowledge, and continued the longstanding surrealist practice of making playful juxtapositions intended to create new, blistering connections. It was less an invention of a new doctrine than a cultivation of a new sensibility permeated with magic. Yet, the playfulness and, as Breton put it, "enlightened doubt" that went into the search also had an emphatically serious side. The surrealists, in desperation, invested the new myth with their hopes of healing the world after the ravages of the recently ended war.[4]

Film played a small but significant role in these new pursuits. The haloed objects occupying the altars at *Le Surréalisme en 1947* had a prominent position as harbingers of the new myth. Among them was one single but significant reference to film. The very last altar in the Labyrinth of Initiation was occupied by the Czech artist Toyen's installation *The Window of Magna Sed Apta*, which was dedicated to the American director Henry Hathaway's 1935 film *Peter Ibbetson*.[5] A decade earlier, Breton had lauded *Peter Ibbetson* for its depiction of *amour fou*, a mad love that defied all boundaries, in a move characteristic of the enthusiastic surrealist response to commercial cinema.[6] The Hathaway film's presence at *Le Surréalisme en 1947* suggests that the surrealists now considered cinema to also be an intrinsic part of their search for a new myth. The exhibition, then, inserted the surrealist engagement with cinema in a new context, littered with references to myth and magic, and framed as an esoteric passage of initiation. A few years later, Breton's essay "As in a Wood" emphasized the connection between cinema and surrealism's new orientation. In it, Breton describes film as "the only absolutely modern mystery," and praises it for its capacity to activate "the mechanism of correspondences."[7] Through allusions to ritual and occultism, he then connects the surrealist reception of film with the framework of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and inscribes the medium in a broader reformulation of surrealist poetics.

This book examines the connection between cinema and surrealism's turn to myth and magic as a persistent element in surrealist film production in the post-war era. Much has been written about the interwar surrealist production and reception of film, in particular Luis Buñuel's and Salvador Dalí's two pioneering films, *Un chien andalou* (1929) and *L'âge d'or* (1930). Post-war surrealism, however, is largely uncharted territory in film studies, despite the fact that the surrealists continued both to be enamoured with film and to produce their own films. Among the few exceptions that look beyond interwar France are J.H. Matthews's *Surrealism and Film*, Michael Richardson's *Surrealism and Cinema*, and Paul Hammond's anthology of surrealist writings on film, *The Shadow and Its Shadow*. But this overly narrow understanding of surrealism is hardly limited to film studies. Alyce Mahon describes the dominant art historical conception of surrealism's history as "a neat cycle, with the movement emerging out of the ashes of World War I, taking a key role in French culture by the mid-1930s, suffering a gradual decline with the outbreak of World War II, and ultimately dying after the war."[8] But, as Mahon remarks, "to neglect the years after the displacement of Surrealism from Paris in 1939 is to deny Surrealism its full history and cultural impact."[9] While surrealism has exerted an undeniable and pervasive influence on twentieth-century visual, intellectual, and popular culture, the organized movement's further development has then been oddly obscured by restrictive scholarly and critical delimitations. That includes surrealism's post-war change in direction, which also entangles the movement in broader questions about the relation between radical culture and occultism, initiation, and the political power of myth. Mahon's own monograph, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, significantly expands the understanding of the surrealist movement beyond the interwar period. So do such works as Gérard Durozoi's *History of the Surrealist Movement*, Michael Löwy's *Morning Star*, Tessel Bauduin's *Surrealism and the Occult*, and Gavin Parkinson's *Futures of Surrealism*. I draw on these tendencies in surrealism scholarship across the disciplines in charting the surrealist film's turn to myth and magic.

Surrealism and Cinema After the War

The main focus in this book is the Danish surrealist artist Wilhelm Freddie's two experimental short films *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* (*Det definitive afslag på anmodningen om et kys*, 1949)

and *Eaten Horizons* (*Spiste horisonter*, 1950), made in collaboration with Jørgen Roos; the documentary film *L'Invention du monde* (1953), directed by Jean-Louis Bédouin and Michel Zimbacca, with a narrative written by the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret; the feature films of the writer and director Nelly Kaplan, with a particular focus on *A Very Curious Girl* (*La Fiancée du pirate,* 1969) and *Néa* (1976); and the films of the Czech surrealist director, animator, and artist Jan Švankmajer, with a particular focus on *The Flat* (*Byt*, 1968), *Down to the Cellar* (*Do pivnice*, 1983), and *Lunacy* (*Šileni*, 2005). Freddie's films and *L'Invention du monde* were made in the years following *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, while Kaplan's and Švankmajer's works were made in the face of crucial further changes in surrealism. The films span different formats, including the experimental short film, the documentary, the feature film, and stop-motion animation. They all, however, relate clearly to the revised aims of surrealism that Breton set the movement on during and after World War II, and they contribute to, and intervene in, the attempts at forming a new myth.

Surrealism scholar Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron points out that "[i]t is a perilous enterprise to try to separate the history of the Surrealist movement from an elucidation of its major intellectual points."[10] I seek to expand the understanding of surrealist cinema by relating parts of its post-war production to precisely those intellectual points that led up to and were formulated in relation to *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. However, just as the surrealist interest in myth and magic has been little explored, its meaning and ramifications are contested.[11] Therefore, I also seek to contribute to the broader understanding of surrealism's call for a new myth. To these ends, I draw on a wide range of primary sources, including surrealist art, literature, and other writings, documentation of exhibitions and exhibition catalogues, and published interviews. I also do close readings of surrealist writings on myth and magic. I pay particular attention to many of André Breton's works that are seldom referenced in film studies, but I also discuss writings by many lesser-known surrealists. Constructing a broad context for the films in this manner allows me to detect the traces that the change in direction has left on them.

Approaching surrealism in this way calls for a shift in the signposts that stake out the borders and centres of surrealist activity. After World War II, Buñuel is not necessarily the central surrealist film director. Breton and Bataille cannot be considered the polar opposites that they are so often construed as.[12] Césaire and his fellow Martinican writers

had contributed significantly to surrealism and altered its often contested relation to the non-European other.[13] Esoterically inclined surrealists such as the artist Victor Brauner and the writer Pierre Mabille are as important for this era's art and thought as Salvador Dalí and Louis Aragon were for the interwar period. In line with how the 1947 exhibition foregrounded the international multiplicity of its contributors, the post-war period saw an ever-increasing diversity in surrealism, including an increased participation of women in the movement.[14]

Like so many surrealists, the filmmakers under discussion here are also erudite theorists. If large parts of the book set out to delineate their engagement with surrealism and interpret their films' engagement with myth in relation to them, I do not, however, mean to suggest that the filmmakers' intentions exhaust the meaning of these rich films. Examining how the directors' attempts at rendering art mythical and magical take expression in practice, I also acknowledge that this practice overspills the boundaries set out in theoretical statements. The films do not, then, merely tautologically illustrate or exemplify ideas in surrealist "theory." They are active contributions to and developments of surrealist myth and magic, alternately strengthening and disrupting its tenets. I consider the films, then, to work in line with contemporary notions that cinema can function as a kind of thought.[15] But surrealism calls for a more sustained engagement with the primacy of the unconscious and the imagination in such film-thinking than contemporary theory tends to allow for. Hence, I turn to the philosopher of science and the imagination Gaston Bachelard in order to emphasize the role of the vivid and unpredictable life of the imagination in surrealist film-thinking. In an important essay, Bachelard stresses that there is primarily a poetic genesis for even such a seemingly doctrine-driven work as Honoré de Balzac's Swedenborgian novel *Séraphîta* (1855). For Bachelard, poetry, in the broadest sense, can never be reduced to an illustration of ideas. Instead, he considers the poetic image to be "privileged in that it acts as both an image and an idea," and talks about it in terms of "an image-thought or thought-image."[16] Similarly, the films that I discuss here need to be seen as poetic contributions to the search for a new myth, results of a thinking imagination rather than an application or expression of pre-formed ideas.[17] Adapting Bachelard's thought to film theory, then, I consider these surrealist films to be examples of "an imagination that thinks."[18] In that respect they are able, even obliged, to think in different ways about the matters at hand than discursive language allows. They strive

to create new myths, rather than simply illustrating preconceived ideas about myth.

This book, then, is about surrealism as much as it is about cinema. It argues that the change in direction towards myth and magic provides an illuminating context for parts of surrealist cinema. It is interdisciplinary and intermedial, and situates post-war surrealist cinema in a context of surrealist thought and practice, and examines how film, in turn, contributes to that context. *Le Surréalisme en 1947* recurs as a point of reference throughout the book, the centre of a labyrinth into which I place the films.

For an Expanded History of Surrealist Cinema

Linking surrealist film with the development of post-war surrealism opens up new perspectives on the history of surrealist cinema. In a 2008 article, Ian Christie poses the pointed question, "why the historiography of avant-garde film [has] remained even more conventional than that of mainstream cinema."[19] This tendency is particularly striking when it comes to the historiography of the surrealist film. A foundational problem here appears to be a general scholarly uncertainty about the definition and historical demarcations of surrealism as a phenomenon spanning visual, literary, and intellectual culture. Although a narrow understanding of surrealism is prevalent across the disciplines, film scholarship tends to take an even more limited view of surrealism. The predominant tendency has long been to posit surrealist film production to have taken place between 1928 and 1930, ranging from Germaine Dulac's Artaud-penned *La Coquille et le clergyman* (1928) to Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou* and *L'âge d'or*.[20] Sometimes the discussion includes examples on the verge of Dada and surrealism, such as René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924) and Man Ray's *Emak-Bakia* (1926); sometimes it extends to Luis Buñuel's 1933 documentary film *Land without Bread* (*Las Hurdes*).[21] It also tends to encompass the early surrealist reception of film, as well as the widespread surrealist practice of writing film scripts that were never intended to be realized.[22]

Such delimitations make sense if surrealism is understood as belonging solely to the interwar avant-garde period. But as an increasing number of scholars in other fields have realized, an essential part of surrealism's character is its steadfast refusal to be contained by conventional historical and aesthetic definitions. Herein lies also its appeal as an

idiosyncratic object of study. This fundamental idiosyncrasy also pertains to the surrealist film's resistance to being pinned down by labels such as avant-garde or experimental. One crucial reason why film studies has much to gain from looking to the art historical and intellectual development of surrealism is the fact that a focus on stylistic traits will not allow us to identify, and even less make sense of, the multiform films that have emerged out of the movement. Much as surrealist art veers between the figurative and the non-figurative, between painting, collage, sculpture, and assemblage, and much as surrealist writings encompass poetry, short stories, novels, and essays, so the surrealist film needs to be seen as a constantly mutating beast that alternates between short film, documentary, and feature film, and may employ collage techniques and animation as well as deceptively straightforward narratives.

Some exceptions to the dominant treatment of surrealist cinema have surfaced over the years. The surrealist critic and filmmaker Ado Kyrou wrote *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* as a wildly inclusive overview based on the assumption that cinema is surrealist by its very nature.[23] Paul Hammond's *The Shadow and Its Shadow* anthologizes surrealist writings on the cinema, from the 1920s and well into the post-war period. Two comprehensive studies of surrealism and cinema bring an even wider historical perspective. J.H. Matthews's *Surrealism and Film* and Michael Richardson's *Surrealism and Cinema* both discuss the surrealist reception of popular cinema, the earliest surrealist attempts at making film, and the continued incursions into filmmaking by surrealists and those in the movement's vicinity. Since Matthews's and Richardson's respective studies seek to trace the engagement between surrealism and cinema in its entirety, they have limited space to establish connections between the individual films and surrealism in a larger but more specific scope. I take the opposite approach, but what I need to sacrifice in scope, I hope to make up for in depth.

The task of writing a definite history of surrealist cinema, then, remains outside the scope of this book. What I can do, however, is provide an outline of what an extended, yet stringently defined, history of the surrealist film may look like. In contrast to the dominant notion that Luis Buñuel's and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* and *L'âge d'or* were the only true surrealist films, a considerably more heterogeneous lineage of surrealist cinema can be discerned.

In brief, such an expanded history of surrealist cinema may look something like this. Already the interwar era is more complex than has often

been recognized, and is far from limited to Dulac, Buñuel and Dalí, and Man Ray. In France, the brothers Jacques and Pierre Prévert together made the short surrealist comedy *L'affaire est dans le sac* (1932); the former, a one-time surrealist poet, would then go on to script several of Marcel Carné's defining films within poetic realism, permeated with a lingering surrealist sensibility.[24] The biologist Jean Painlevé made a long series of animal documentaries that often testify to his proximity to surrealism, including *The Octopus* (*Le pieuvre*, 1927), *The Seahorse* (*L'hippocampe*, 1933), and *The Vampire* (*Le vampire*, 1945).[25] Jacques-Bernard Brunius directed a number of documentaries, of which at least *Les Violons d'Ingres* (1939) was explicitly connected with his surrealist activities.[26] Brussels was an early centre of organized surrealism outside France, and the movement's activities extended into cinema.[27] In Belgium, Henri Storck, later a renowned documentary filmmaker, directed the experimental short film *Pour vos beaux yeux* (1929), about a man's obsession with a glass eye and the oneiric drift this launches him into. The surrealist cult of the fictional arch-criminal Fantômas, both in Souvestre's and Allain's co-written novels and Louis Feuillade's serial film adaptations (1913–1914), enacts a readily apparent influence on two other little explored Belgian surrealist films.[28] The French poet Georges Hugnet wrote the script for the Belgian Henri d'Ursel's only short film *La Perle* (1929), in which an erotically infused and dreamlike narrative is interspersed with black-clad and masked Fantômas-like figures who climb house facades and stalk deserted corridors.[29] The Belgian poet Ernst Moerman directed the silent short film *Monsieur Fantômas* (1936) as a more whimsical extension of Feuillade's morbid tales.[30] Moerman makes visual references to the paintings of the Belgian surrealist René Magritte, while Fantômas's uncanny powers of disguise and disappearance take on a more explicitly surrealist slant: the police closing in on him from all sides, a cut replaces Fantômas with a double bass. In the USA, the artist Joseph Cornell made the short film *Rose Hobart* (1936) by creatively editing together shots and scenes from a film featuring the eponymous actress in new constellations, intensifying the drama and affect while eliminating linear narrative. Among his many other, often unfinished, film projects, *Jack's Dream* (1939) creates an uncanny, surrealist atmosphere of childish wonder permeated with dread.[31]

World War II forced many surrealists into exile, not least to the USA, and so rendered surrealist film production even more erratic than it had been before. But in New York in 1943, Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Man

Ray contributed one sequence each to Hans Richter's omnibus film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947). Richter's project also featured two sequences by the American sculptor Alexander Calder, who exhibited with the surrealists on several occasions, and the interaction between exiled surrealists and American avant-garde artists and filmmakers left an enduring legacy.[32] The American avant-garde films that are arguably closest to surrealism are those of Maya Deren, in particular *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), *At Land* (1944), and the unfinished *Witch's Cradle* (1944), which incorporates elements of Duchamp's design from the 1942 New York exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*.[33] Yet, Deren's own misgivings about considering her films in relation to surrealism speaks to the movement's fraught status in an American art and film climate often all too ready to dismiss its influence.

The post-war era, in sharp contrast to its oft-neglected status, saw an unsurpassed surrealist engagement with cinema.[34] New participants in the reformed Paris group, including Robert Benayoun and Ado Kyrou, founded the journal *L'Âge du Cinéma* in 1951. Its six issues ushered in a lively new strain of surrealist film reception, which, after its demise, largely continued in the French film journal *Positif*, founded in 1952.[35] Kyrou's and Benayoun's inclusive appreciation of everything from Italian peplum films, British Hammer horror, and soft-core pornography, to art cinema auteurs like Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais, arguably prefigures such later developments as "paracinema" and cult fandom, albeit rooted in a more discerning surrealist vigilance for the poetic charge to be found in what society at large deems to be rubble.[36] Surrealist film critics also coined the influential term *film noir* to describe a particular strain of American crime films.[37] Despite the lasting and varied impression that post-war surrealism has left on film culture, the surrealist engagement with cinema in this period has largely languished in obscurity. This is at least partly due to a critical and scholarly bias towards the surrealists' rivals in the *nouvelle vague* and their *Cahiers du Cinéma*, but the more precise mechanisms behind this silence are still to be explored.[38]

Surrealist film production in the post-war era is equally lively. Freddie made his two short films, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons*, in Copenhagen in 1949 and 1950.[39] The surrealist writer Jean Ferry wrote the screenplay for Henri-Georges Clouzot's feature film *Manon* (1949), a classic of *amour fou* made in the context of a commercial feature film format. In 1951, the Paris surrealists Georges

Goldfayn and Jindrich Heisler made the first instalment of an intended series of *Revues Surréalistes*, edited together from found material. The film appears to be lost, and Heisler's death precluded its projected successors from being completed.[40] Soon after that, the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret, a member of Breton's group since its Dada days, wrote the narration for the two documentary short films *L'Invention du monde* and *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*, directed by the young surrealist newcomers Jean-Louis Bédouin and Michel Zimbacca. In 1960, the Belgian surrealist Marcel Mariën made the anticlerical short film *L'Imitation du cinéma* on a shoestring budget.[41]

Following a number of short films, including the documentary *Palais Idéal* (1958) and the Maupassant adaptation *La Chevelure* (1961), the critic Kyrou directed a few features, including an adaptation of Matthew Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk* (*Le Moïne*, 1971), from a screenplay by Luis Buñuel. Indeed, in the decades to follow, several surrealists turned to the feature film format. They were largely inspired by Buñuel's successful incorporation of his surrealist legacy in feature films such as the Mexican *Los Olvidados* (1950) and *The Exterminating Angel* (*El ángel exterminador*, 1962), and his return to filmmaking in Europe in the 1960s, which spawned such remarkable films as *Viridiana* (1960), *Belle de Jour* (1967), and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (*Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie*, 1972).[42] Kyrou's colleague Benayoun directed the two feature films, *Paris Does Not Exist* (*Paris n'existe pas*, 1969) and *Serious as Pleasure* (*Sérieux comme le plaisir*, 1975), the former featuring time travel in a decidedly quotidian environment, the latter a road movie centring around a *ménage à trois*.[43] In the vicinity of the movement, Nelly Kaplan made her feature film debut with *A Very Curious Girl*. Further at the fringes of surrealism, Fernando Arrabal and Alejandro Jodorowsky formed the oppositional Panique movement with Roland Topor and directed several features each, including Arrabal's *Viva la muerte* (1971) and Jodorowsky's *El Topo* (1970); Topor's novel *Le locataire chimérique* (1964) was adapted by Roman Polanski as *The Tenant* (1976). In the early to mid-1970s, the now former surrealist Jean Ferry contributed three screenplays to the Belgian director Harry Kümel, of which the vampire film *Daughters of Darkness* (*Les Lèvres rouges*, 1971) and the mythological mystery *Malpertuis* (1973) stand as lingering testaments to his surrealist past.[44]

As vibrant as the 1960s and 1970s were, surrealist film history does not end there. In Czechoslovakia, Jan Švankmajer has directed over

thirty short and feature films since 1964, and has worked in the context of organized surrealism since he joined the Czechoslovak surrealist group in 1971. Švankmajer's fellow surrealist David Jarab has also directed two feature films, *Vaterland—A Hunting Diary* (*Vaterland—Lovecký deník*, 2004) and *Head—Hands—Heart* (*Hlava ruce srdce*, 2010).[45] And the Czech surrealist artist and alchemy scholar Martin Stejskal has experimented with digital animation and image morphing. While Stejskal's experiments have never been officially released, extracts from them have been displayed at exhibitions.[46] Other surrealists have also made films on a smaller scale. In Sweden, the poet Emma Lundenmark directed the short film *Bockgränd* (*Buck Alley*, 2003). In Canada, Alexandre Fatta has made a number of short collage films, including *A Silly Accident* (*Un bête accident*, 2013).

The history of surrealist cinema as I sketch it here, then, oscillates between small-scale, low- or no-budget short films, and commercially distributed feature films. Even in narrowing the scope down to films and filmmakers that are markedly affected by the surrealist change in direction towards myth and magic, the stylistic heterogeneity implied in this overview largely remains.

The Search for a New Myth

The films that I discuss in the chapters to follow, then, emerged out of a lively and dynamic surrealist film culture, but, more specifically, they are also products of surrealism's change in direction towards the search for a new myth. But what is surrealism's new myth? Announcing the idea, Breton emphasized the fact that surrealism was not vain enough to believe that it could introduce an entire new mythology. Instead, the surrealists frequently asserted the open-ended character of their mythical pursuits. *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and other contemporaneous surrealist activities were meant to "sketch the outline of what such a myth might be—a sort of mental 'parade' before the real show."[47] In their films, Wilhelm Freddie, Jean-Louis Bédouin and Michel Zimbacca with Benjamin Péret, Nelly Kaplan, and Jan Švankmajer all continue this attempt to outline a new myth, asserting its contingence upon changing historical circumstances while retaining many recurring points of reference. Prominent among these is surrealism's intensified engagement with magic and occultism, as indicated by *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, often refracted through a persistent interest in "primitive" thought and cultures.

At the exhibition, these strategies were readily apparent in the design of the altars in the Labyrinth of Initiation. Modelled on pagan cults, the altars were collaborative efforts that incorporated imaginative votive offerings thought out by Péret and references to the signs of the zodiac, and were dedicated to works or figures from within surrealism or the larger surrealist tradition.[48] A ritualistic ambience enveloped these sacred sites that were dedicated to elements from the art and writings of such surrealist luminaries as Lautréamont, Max Ernst, and Alfred Jarry. At *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, then, the new myth was outlined as a nexus or meeting point of disparate images and streams of thought, predicated upon the logic of collage and assemblage, and executed in a collaborative manner. What better medium to continue the investigation into its contours than film, a fundamentally collaborative art form with a propensity for montage and an attendant capacity to join together things otherwise far removed? Before delving deeper into how surrealist films do that, however, it is necessary to examine some further facets of surrealism's engagement with myth and its interest in magic and occultism.

Surrealism's attraction to myth calls for an expanded understanding of the movement's scope and ambitions. Michael Löwy defines surrealism as "an attempt to reestablish the 'enchanted' dimensions at the core of human existence—poetry, passion, mad love, imagination, magic, myth, the marvelous, dreams, revolt, utopian ideals—which have been eradicated by this civilization and its values."[49] These concerns come to the fore with the post-war change in direction, as Breton reformulates many surrealist practices in terms that are resonant with myth and magic. Following the war, he defines surrealist poetry as something akin to an occult operation, considers surrealist games to be bound up with both ludics and the esoteric notion of correspondences, posits chance occurrences to be an "everyday magic," and claims surrealism to be the culmination of a repressed counter-tradition of magic art.[50] Continuing surrealism's search for alternatives to a culture marked by the repression of play and poetry, magic and imagination, the new myth crystallized around such occult and ludic elements.

From the time of the movement's inception and until today, many surrealists have taken an interest in myths from around the world.[51] But where does surrealism's interest in myth spring from? Surrealism's early attraction to ancient and non-Western mythology was intimately bound up with the movement's appreciation and appropriation of so called

"primitive" art. In his 1948 essay "The Moral Meaning of Sociology," Georges Bataille comments that artists in the interwar era

> were tempted to assimilate their work to the collective creation of exotic peoples. In particular, myths, analogous in certain respects to dreams, cannot be entirely separated from recent poetic findings. It is true that a modern poem has none of the meaning of a myth, but a myth sometimes has the same attraction as a modern poem.[52]

If myth is similar to dreams and poetry, then, it too can reveal facets of the exterior world that are obscured by modern humanity's instrumental, utilitarian relation with its surroundings. The surrealists found support for their detection of this similarity in the findings of psychoanalysis, and so myth fit with surrealism's early preoccupations.[53] As Bataille points out, the surrealist interest in "primitive" art and myth also stemmed from their purported integration in a collective environment, which meant that they acted as "a manifestation of a collective being superior to the individual and named society."[54] Myth, then, worked as a model for the surrealists' own attempts to escape the confines of art as a solitary pursuit of aesthetic worth, while it also revealed other ways of relating to the world and indicated how creation could work as a force of societal cohesion.[55]

While the surrealist outline of a new myth draws in part on ancient mythology, it diverges from conventional definitions of mythology. In the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's definition, myths provide explanations of the surrounding world and strengthen tradition by anchoring it in narratives about primordial events.[56] As indicated, surrealism's approach to myth is not so much narrative as combinatory, relying on the associative powers of strong imagery and allusions to the surrealist tradition. Rather than being directed towards primordial happenings, surrealism's new myth is also profoundly modern. Here, too, it builds on earlier surrealist thought on myth. Throughout the interwar era, Breton and other surrealists returned to notions of a "modern mythology" and a "collective mythology." In a 1920 essay, Breton stresses the need to abstain from simple restorations of earlier myths. Instead, he calls for the imagery of the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico to occupy the position that the Sphinx had in ancient mythology.[57] Already here, creatures born out of the imagination of surrealism's elective affinities take precedence

over the numinous beings from old myths. Louis Aragon similarly saw a modern mythology arise in the tension between the surface of contemporary Paris with its arcades and neon signs and the insight that they harbour ancient depths.[58] Breton and Aragon both evade nostalgia in favour of injecting modernity with archaic energies and arcane meaning. During the tremors of the coming war, the surrealists found a new sense of gravity in the idea of a modern mythology. In his 1935 declaration "Political Position of Surrealism," Breton declares that his "preoccupation over the past ten years" has led him to "reconcile Surrealism as a *method of creating a collective myth* with the much more general movement involving the liberation of man."[59] Art and poetry are replete with myths, but surrealism, he claims, would prove to have the ability to transform these personal myths of artists into new collective myths. Envisioning a transposition of the "climate" of surrealist art and poetry to reality, Breton suggests that the surrealist myth would be able to enact a thorough transformation of the world.[60] Again, what better medium to illustrate and enact such a transformation of the world than film, with its capacity to faithfully capture pieces of reality only to transform them through editing and effects?

The notion of a new myth arose during the war. Breton introduced the idea in his 1942 "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not," in which he hopes that it will be capable of "fostering the society that we judge to be desirable."[61] Then, in *Arcanum 17*, Breton expanded on his conception of a new myth. Interweaving ancient myths, the occult content dormant in the poetry of surrealist forerunners Gérard de Nerval, Charles Baudelaire, and Arthur Rimbaud, and nineteenth-century occultist Eliphas Lévi's description of magic initiation, he conceives of the new myth as a potent counter-force against the Christian myth that has repressed vital knowledge about the world.[62] The need to challenge the foundations of Christian-capitalist civilization was indeed so pressing that Breton, in conjunction with *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, explains that the search for a new myth is bound up with the question of whether humanity, on the brink of extinction, can be saved. The initiatory design of the exhibition was accordingly intended to be a "guideline" that could introduce humanity to a more desirable society.[63]

Initiation indeed emerges as a key surrealist concern around this time. As studied by anthropologists and historians of religion, initiation recurs throughout many cultural contexts and historical epochs. Initiation is frequently predicated upon trials meant to induce a symbolic death

followed by a rebirth, accompanied by a profound ontological transformation of the initiate.[64] In his 1940 book *Mirror of the Marvelous*, the surrealist doctor and writer Pierre Mabille indicates that initiation may be a central element in surrealism's transformation of the world. Expanding the surrealist notion of the marvellous to encompass myths, magical incantations, romantic prose, and gothic novels, Mabille draws attention to the patterns of initiatory trials that recur through narratives and imagery of the marvellous.[65] As *Arcanum 17* suggests, Breton conceives of initiation in both mythological and esoteric terms. Like Mabille before him, he appeals to the myth of Osiris, the Egyptian god whose body was dismembered and strewn across the land before being reconstituted by Isis. Breton proceeds to reference the nineteenth-century occultist Eliphas Lévi's description of an esoteric initiation ritual, which culminates when a veiled priest whispers the words "Osiris is a black god" into the ear of the initiate.[66] Osiris's dismemberment mirrors Breton's own inner turmoil as well as the laceration of the world effected not just by the ongoing war, but the disasters brought about by capitalism and Christianity, and their attendant disenchantment of the world.[67] For Breton, then, the war constituted a symbolic death, a disintegration of the orderly self-image of a presumably rational society, and the trope of initiation offered a way of conceiving a healing rebirth informed by surrealist values, now themselves transformed under the aegis of the arcane lore of myth and occultism. The initiatory structure of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* was meant to contribute to the exhibition's function as a "force of magnetization and cohesion," which would channel what Breton saw as the epoch's fragmented collective desire and let it converge "toward a single point where a new myth awaits us."[68] If humanity were to be saved, the surrealist myth was the beacon that needed to be followed through the daunting labyrinth of a shattered post-war existence.

But while the surrealists saw fit to restore certain forms of knowledge and experiences repressed or forgotten, they never lost sight of the contemporaneity of the new myth. In the 1947 collective tract "Inaugural Rupture," the French surrealists argue that "the will to myth," along with core surrealist notions such as black humour and objective chance, "participate in the progress of the most advanced disciplines of our time thanks to which we have non-Euclidian geometry, non-Maxwellian physics, non-Pasteurian biology, non-Newtonian mechanics, disciplines in their turn united with a non-Aristotelian logic and of that non-Moses morality."[69] Myth, then, is posited to be a progressive force of upheaval

at the forefront of human advances.[70] As these examples suggest, there is a productive tension in surrealism's preoccupation with myth between historical progress and timelessness, the modern and the arcane, which the film medium is well suited to exploit and intensify.

Occult Transformations

As part of its transformation under the influence of surrealism's change in direction, surrealist cinema underwent a marked change. Occult rituals, initiatory trials, and tropes of alchemical transmutation recur in the postwar surrealist film. Much as with myth, surrealism evidenced an interest in occultism early on.[71] In the second surrealist manifesto, Breton goes so far as to call for "the profound, the veritable occultation of surrealism."[72] Drawing an analogy between the surrealists' efforts at transforming the everyday and the alchemists' search for the philosopher's stone, he situates surrealism as part of a lineage of accursed thought; like the alchemists, the surrealists sought a transformation of the world that refused to bow to the dictates of instrumental reason.[73] In a 1950 interview, however, Breton concedes that for all the second manifesto's references to alchemy, astrology, and the occult, "twenty years ago I had only a premonition of this."[74] Further readings in occultism in combination with the agonizing experience of the war, it would seem, had lent him a deeper understanding. Recent research on Arthur Rimbaud, Charles, and Gérard de Nerval had also revealed that these surrealist predecessors were all profoundly influenced by esoteric currents.[75] Breton was swift to extend such an esoteric poetics to the film medium. In "As in a Wood," he glosses Baudelaire's conflation of occultism and poetry as he lauds film for its capacity to trigger "the mechanism of correspondences."[76] I will return to film's magical poetics after a brief detour through occult territory.

In their contributions to the search for a new myth, then, surrealist films frequently evoke magic and occultism. Both are slippery terms, and in particular the latter is largely uncharted terrain in cinema studies. Magic has been used to designate a wide range of phenomena, from ideas of "natural magic," through ceremonial rites, to the practices of "primitive" cultures.[77] Closer to cinema studies, there is also the practice of illusionistic stage magic, which was transferred to film in Georges Méliès's pioneering works.[78] Scholars have problematized the notion of magic for its lack of specificity. Surrealism, however, tends to embrace the multiplicity of the concept, and its constructions of magic draw

in equal measure on occultism, ethnographic definitions of "primitive" magic, and Sigmund Freud's claim that art originated in magic.[79] Occultism, in its turn, is a heterogeneous current, and belongs to the larger field of Western esotericism. The latter is an umbrella term used in scholarship to designate a wide variety of currents that are heterodox in relation to mainstream religion, also including hermeticism, alchemy, astrology—and magic.[80] In *Surrealism and the Occult*, Tessel Bauduin traces Breton's esoteric influences from the 1920s to the late 1950s, and concludes that much of his esoteric knowledge was mediated via romantic literature and scholarship.[81] But, as Bauduin also contends, Breton never tried to hide the fact that he maintained a certain distance in relation to esotericism. In *Conversations*, he declares that with regard to esotericism, as in all other areas, it cannot be a question of "fideism" or conversion on the part of surrealism.[82] Much as with mythology, then, the surrealists subsumed esotericism and magic under their own aims.

Esotericism scholar Wouter Hanegraaff argues that Western esotericism is above all defined by its status as the other of respectable thought and conventional religion, and that it is accordingly "rejected knowledge."[83] Surrealism's appeal to magic tends to emphasize its position of alterity in relation to the mainstream of modern Western thought. In conjunction with *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Breton approvingly quotes the early anthropologist James G. Frazer in support of magic, which "has contributed to emancipate mankind from the thralldom of tradition and to elevate them into a larger, freer life, with a broader outlook on the world."[84] Here, he also taps into the overall sense that the occult may be revolutionary since it opposes the reigning order and, as Marco Pasi describes it, offers "sometimes radically alternative ways of conceiving society, politics, and the self."[85] Another magical influence on the formulation of the new myth was the French occultist Eliphas Lévi. Lévi constructed his occultism through connections between magic, the Kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, and the tarot, and, as Hanegraaff puts it, worked with "scattered and chaotic fragments of learning but somehow managed to create something new and quite original out of it."[86] There is more than a passing resemblance between Lévi's syntheses of wildly divergent traditions into a new key to unlock the universe, and surrealism's attempts at constructing a new myth intended to purge the world of dominant values and effect a healing under the sign of a recovery of repressed knowledge.[87] The method of choice for both Lévi and the surrealists in constructing new forms of knowledge is analogy.

For post-war surrealism, new knowledge of the world depends upon a short-circuiting of rationality and logics, in favour of analogies and correspondences.[88] Analogy came to the fore in Breton's thought during and after the war. In an essay on the Brazilian sculptor María Martins, Breton writes of the importance of "[a]nalogical thought, officially abandoned since the 'Renaissance'." In relation to the painter Arshile Gorky, he posits analogy to be the "key to this mental prison," meaning the state of the contemporary West, in its capacity for "free and limitless play."[89] Analogical thought and a relation of correspondences between different parts of the universe is one of the four constituent parts of historian Antoine Faivre's definition of esotericism, along with a conception of a living nature, the imagination's creation and interpretation of hieroglyphically dense images, and an experience of transmutation.[90] While its usefulness as a general definition of esotericism has been contested, Faivre's typology does much to indicate how esotericism informs many of surrealism's central post-war preoccupations.[91] In their attempts at reconstructing and re-enchanting the world, then, the surrealists found vital means in this occult heritage, and they were particularly enthralled by its close connection to poetry. Much as romantic and symbolist poets embraced esoteric sources in their quest for a poetry that functioned as "symbolic knowledge and the key to an analogical world," the surrealists considered poetic analogy to be a potent magical antidote to the ruinous state of the world, fraught with an intuitive and revelatory knowledge.[92] Much like occultists, surrealists believe that myth and poetry, conceived as magic, are not merely fanciful embellishments, but rather reveal facets of the world which reason alone cannot discover.[93] This property was also extended to film.

Analogy and the Poetics of Cinema

Ever since the first surrealist manifesto, surrealism has given a privileged place to the poetic image.[94] For surrealism, however, the poetic image needs to be understood in a generalized sense, equally applicable to film and art as to writing. Breton initially defines the workings of the poetic image by way of radicalizing the poet Pierre Reverdy's notion that the image is born from "a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities"; the greater the distance, "the stronger the image will be."[95] For the surrealists, the resultant image creates a poetic "spark" through its bypassing of habitual perception. In *Beyond Painting*, Max Ernst extends

this surrealist poetics to encompass any collision of otherwise distant phenomena, whether in collage, painting, or film.[96] Linda Williams traces the imagery in surrealist cinema to the movement's early formulations of the poetic image, but she also asserts that film had a profound influence on the initial conception of the surrealist image.[97] As Williams puts it, Reverdy's definition of the image "looks to the cinema's power to combine elements of concrete reality."[98] Surrealism's definition of the image, then, constitutes a generalized poetics, practised across art forms and media. As Williams suggests, there are nevertheless inevitable medium-specific conditions for this poetics. Breton himself touches on those when he discusses cinema in terms of his post-war reformulation of poetics.

Breton increasingly came to value the poetic image to the extent that it worked according to analogy. In the 1948 essay "Ascendant Sign," he states that in its short-circuiting of causality, analogy creates a flare that reveals the world to be a network of relations. Thus providing "flashes from the lost mirror," analogy gives an insight into the interconnectedness of all things, a sensibility and knowledge otherwise banished from Western civilization, in which "the primordial links are broken."[99] This notion of the image as a condensed harbinger of meaning resonates with esotericism, which, as Andreas Kilcher points out, "works openly and affirmatively with literary (aesthetical, rhetorical, *poetological*) methods [and] lends an epistemological function to similes, parables, metaphors, images, etc."[100] Intermedial analogy, then, encapsulates many of the hopes that Breton expressed in relation to the new myth. It fosters a new sensibility that can counter destructive fragmentation. It condenses the rejected knowledge feeding into the new myth into an intense flare of light.

In "As in a Wood," Breton writes that film has the capacity to provide "an Opening Key" to a deeper, experiential knowledge by uniting day and a mystical night.[101] For Breton, film's capacity to trigger correspondences then depends on its capacity to unite opposites. But he does not expand on the more specific ways in which films forge these connections. He is similarly vague about how cinema pertains to magic when he mentions a handful of films, including F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (*Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* 1922), in his late monograph *L'art magique*.[102] Tom Gunning, however, conveys how *Nosferatu* may pertain precisely to Breton's understanding of a magic art of analogies and correspondences, when he describes how "Murnau uses complex

and highly symbolic intercutting […] to create a series of magically interlocking events carried by sinister correspondences and analogies."[103] For Gunning, Murnau's editing points to an influence from German romantic *Naturphilosophie*, which "conceived of Nature not as inert material but as an organic entity shot through and enlivened by a system of correspondences and metaphors," an example of what Faivre describes as the esoteric conception of a "living nature."[104] As Breton implies and Gunning demonstrates, editing and montage facilitate film to restore those primordial links that Breton considers to be broken.

Film, then, emerges as a potent magical medium through its propensity for an analogical poetics that can ostensibly reveal obscured facets of the world. But mythical and esoteric imagery and narratives add other facets to the surrealist film's outlining of a new myth. Constructing assemblages of new myths through these components, film also contributes a vital experiential and sensory aspect to this search, which again emphasizes its mediation between the modern and the arcane.

Film and Experience

Breton's definition of the analogical image in terms of a sudden flare of light indicates that the knowledge it transmits is of an experiential kind, leaping out of causality to briefly illuminate reality in a way that reveals hidden connections, an otherwise obscured totality.[105] The connections Breton makes in "As in a Wood" between a cosmic Opening Key and film editing also points to the fact that surrealism's engagement with myth and the rejected knowledge of esotericism is bound up with a wider dialectic between the archaic and the modern. Breton's understanding of cinema can be related to Gunning's remark that "the historical genesis of the light play of cinema derives from an intersection between a Renaissance preoccupation with the magical power of images […] and a secular discovery of the processes of light and vision."[106] Gunning considers this intersection to be an "extraordinary confluence of an ancient magical imagistic tradition and a nascent scientific enlightenment," and hence it oscillates between enchantment and disenchantment, constituting a form of magic that is painfully aware of its own artificial status.[107] In connecting the mechanical reproduction of the film medium with repressed modes of being designated as magic, post-war surrealism can be related to Walter Benjamin's ruminations about technology and experience.

Surrealism and Benjamin shared the goal of seeking to abolish, as Margaret Cohen puts it, "the modern alienation of the senses."[108] The attempt to liberate and expand sensory experience is a little recognized undercurrent in surrealism overall, but it is a central component in the movement's search for a new myth and its employment of an analogical poetics that moves the spectator to new conceptions of the world. In *Cinema and Experience*, Miriam Hansen describes how Benjamin considered that the alienation of the senses in modernity "can be undone only on the terrain of technology itself, by means of new media of reproduction that allow for a collective and playful [...] innervation."[109] In his essay "Surrealism", Benjamin postulates that surrealism has a particular potential to effect such an innervation, one that is furthermore bound up with its intense imagery. Benjamin asserts that surrealism's "profane illumination" can "initiate us" into a particular "image sphere," which facilitates a technological interpenetration of "body and image," in which "revolutionary tension" and "collective bodily innervation" intermingle.[110] Here, he places surrealism at the forefront of his struggles with coming to terms with the conditions for experience in a technological modernity.[111] Breton's proposition that the film medium is particularly apt at triggering the mechanism of correspondences would seem to pertain to precisely such a means of using technology in order to enable the kind of experience that this very same technology has repressed. Ultimately, then, surrealism's new myth is not just meant to foster a new kind of society. It also seeks to shape a new sensorium.

In this pursuit, surrealism attempts to transcend instrumental vision. Martin Jay contends that, in contrast to the prevailing critique of ocularcentrism in twentieth-century French thought, surrealism seeks to cultivate a different kind of seeing, rather than to critique seeing in itself.[112] Diverging from the iconoclastic tendencies in Western culture, from religious to political thought, surrealists have indeed always valorized the image, mental as well as visual.[113] Surrealism, then, does not denigrate vision as such, but rather reacts against its instrumental use in Western modernity. While dominant Western culture considers vision to be objective, precise, and impersonal, art historian James Elkins writes, it is in fact "caught up in the threads of the unconscious," and bound up with affect, desire, and imagination.[114] The frequent Western connection of seeing with the bright light of reason has a counterpart in the entanglement of vision with the nightside of the unconscious and its alterations of that which is seen.[115] Surrealism is ultimately in pursuit of a form

of seeing that it believes has become all but extinct in Western society, and which "does not coincide with what is *objectively visible*." Instead, as Breton describes it in relation to Antonin Artaud, this kind of seeing transgresses the taboo of crossing over to the other side of the looking glass.[116] In a 1947 essay about the painter Roberto Matta, Breton brings further perspectives to the entanglement of seeing not only with the unconscious but with the other senses. He speculates that surrealist painting tends to go beyond vision and the purely optical, and bring "various other senses [...] into play."[117] At this juncture, Breton includes "divination" among these senses, and so associates the multisensory experience of surrealist artwork with occult knowledge.[118] In the postwar era, surrealist innervation, then, is aimed at creating a sensorium that is increasingly bound up with esoteric thought, and this entails "a certain perception of the links connecting humanity to the universe."[119] Such experiences are what Breton wanted surrealism to translate into, but also generate from, the analogically dictated poetic image, the moving form of which is a potential purveyor of a resolution of magic and modernity.

Surrealism's evocation of multisensory experience in the cinema at once resonates with and troubles current film theoretical approaches to the embodied film experience. Vivian Sobchack has demonstrated that all film spectators are virtual synaesthetes and experience film with all the senses.[120] Following her, Jennifer Barker, Martine Beugnet, and Laura Marks have elaborated different ways in which the experience of watching a film engages larger parts of the sensory apparatus.[121] However, these theories of the multisensory film experience do not tend to factor in the imagination, at least not in its creative, analogical capacity. An analysis of multisensory and embodied experience in surrealist cinema, then, calls for a complement to these productive theories. Here, I again turn to Gaston Bachelard, but this time to his five volumes on the "material imagination," or "the imagination of matter." In these books, Bachelard reads poetry, alchemical texts, philosophy, and surrealist writings, and examines how they convey the imagination to be an active, creative faculty that mediates between humans and the material world. In Bachelard's estimation, the strongest poetic images also tend to go beyond the sense that is most immediately engaged and, by way of the imagination, activate the other senses.[122] Bachelard's writings resonate with surrealism's poetics and its interest in esotericism, but his work also asserts that the imagination tends towards the creation of what he calls an "instantaneous mythology" or a "spontaneous mythology."[123]

Bachelard, then, contributes an understanding of not only the imagination's crucial role in the embodied experience of surrealist cinema, but also the connections between the surrealist new myth, the senses, and poetic experiences of the world. Here, innervation and initiation commingle.

Outline of the Book

The following two chapters consider films from the years immediately following *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, all of which are under the immediate influence of the change in direction set out in the exhibition. Chapter 4 takes a leap forward in time to the years surrounding and following the dissolution of organized surrealism in France. Chapter 5 examines the context of Czechoslovak surrealism, which builds on and negotiates the tenets set out by Breton.

Chapter 2 discusses Wilhelm Freddie's films in relation to the artist's "esoteric period," which was triggered by his participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Most critics and scholars have tended to either neglect or ridicule Freddie's esoteric period.[124] Freddie's two films are however striking examples of the permutations of the surrealist short film in the post-war era. I discuss the films by placing them in the context of Freddie's work in other art forms and his proximity to surrealism's turn to myth and magic. In his films, I argue, Freddie both supplements and contradicts Breton's, and his own, formulations of the new myth. Chapter 3 delves into the question of the role of pre-existing myths in surrealism's search for a new myth, in relation to the documentary film *L'Invention du monde*. The chapter situates the film as part of a heterogeneous surrealist documentary tradition. It also discusses the problem of surrealist primitivism, not least in relation the tension between its scriptwriter Péret's expositions on the connection between the "primitive" mind and surrealism, and the positive reception of his ideas among the Caribbean surrealists. The chapter delves deeper into Pierre Mabille's writings, and discusses how their focus on initiation feeds into *L'Invention du monde*. Chapter 4 discusses the films of Nelly Kaplan with a particular focus on her feature films *A Very Curious Girl* and *Néa*. Kaplan weaves her narratives of revolt around an intertextual set of references to the surrealist tradition that makes them approach the 1947 strategy of positing fictional figures as beings with a potential for mythological life. She also counters the surrealist idealization of woman by

anchoring her protagonists, often portrayed as witches, in the struggle against patriarchy and repression. Kaplan made her first films at a time when there was a minor but tangible wave of surrealist feature films, and her use of deceptively conventional narratives are an integral part of her approach to surrealist myth as a force of radical societal transformation. Chapter 5 examines Jan Švankmajer's films. Frequently employing animation, Švankmajer has created a strong sense of personal mythology, coalescing around childhood memories, literary references, a fundamental belief in the imagination, and various forms of esotericism. I examine the ways in which this may be transformed and take expressions that resemble the collective type of myth that *Le Surréalisme en 1947* set out to locate. The chapter builds on close readings of primary sources, based on which I discuss the particular conditions for myth and magic within Czechoslovak surrealism.

Notes

1. The following description of the exhibition is based on Breton, "Projet initial," 135–138; Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 118–132; Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 466–472; Kraus, "Breton Duchamp Kiesler"; Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, 341–344; Pierre, "Le Surréalisme en 1947," 283–288.
2. Breton, "Surrealist Comet" (1947), in *Free Rein*, 95, italics removed; "susceptible d'être doué de vie mythique," Breton, "Projet initial," 136, capitals removed.
3. Breton, "Projet initial," 135.
4. Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 96, italics removed.
5. See Srp, *Toyen*, 196–197.
6. See Breton, *Mad Love*, 128; Hammond, "Available Light," 32–34.
7. Breton, "As in a Wood" (1951), in *Free Rein*, 240.
8. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 11.
9. Ibid., 12.
10. Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 29.
11. I discuss this in greater depth later in the introduction.
12. See Richardson, "Introduction," in Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, 5–6; Alexandrian, *Le Surréalisme et le rêve*, 456. Scholars frequently construct a dualism between the supposed "mainstream" surrealism of Breton and the "dissident" surrealism of Bataille, with poststructuralist favour falling on the latter. The most influential work in this respect is Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*. Although Breton and Bataille mobilized

two opposing camps around the time of Breton's second manifesto, the notion of an absolute opposition between them was already simplified in the context of the interwar period. In 1935 and 1936, Bataille and Breton joined forces in the short lived political initiative Contre-Attaque, and from then on they appear to have followed each other's activities with a sense of distanced admiration.

13. See Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow*; Rosemont and Kelley, *Black, Brown & Beige*; Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 84.
14. The exhibition catalogue prominently lists the participants and the countries represented on consecutive pages. See Breton and Duchamp, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, 8–9.
15. See Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*; Frampton, *Filmosophy.*
16. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 128; *The Flame of a Candle*, 15.
17. Bachelard, "*Séraphîta*" (1955), in *The Right to Dream*, 105–108.
18. Ibid., 111.
19. Christie, "Histories of the Future," 6.
20. For Dulac's film and surrealism, see Flitterman-Lewis, "The Image and the Spark."
21. See Kuenzli, *Dada and Surrealist Cinema*; Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage*; Fotiade, "The Untamed Eye," and "The Slit Eye, the Scorpion and the Sign of the Cross"; Short, *The Age of Gold*; Moïne, "From Surrealist Cinema to Surrealism in Cinema," 101–102. For the position of Man Ray's and Clair's films between Dada and surrealism, see Christie, "French Avant-Garde Film in the Twenties," 43.
22. The surrealist reception of film has been anthologized in Hammond, *The Shadow and Its Shadow*, and, together with many other contemporary writings on film, in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 2 vols. For surrealist film scripts, see Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 51–76.
23. Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*, 13.
24. See Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, 48–50; Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 46–47.
25. See Bellows, McDougall, and Berg, *Science Is Fiction*; Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 83–86; Gaycken, "Surrealist Contagion."
26. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 108–114.
27. For Belgian surrealism, see Canonne, *Surrealism in Belgium*; Allmer and van Gelder, *Collective Inventions.*
28. For Fantômas and surrealism, see Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 21–26; Walz, *Pulp Surrealism*, 70–75.
29. See the entry for "Cinéma," in Biro and Passeron, *Dictionnaire général du surréalisme et de ses environs*, 93–94.
30. See Canonne, *Surrealism in Belgium*, 163–164.

31. See Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 69–70. While Cornell never joined organized surrealism, he contributed to surrealist exhibitions and publications over the course of several years. See Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 157–159.
32. For the surrealists' broader interaction with and influence on the American artistic avant-garde, see Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*; Tashjan, *A Boatload of Madmen*.
33. See Keller, "Frustrated Climaxes," 91–93. See also Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 11.
34. See Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 520–525.
35. See Hammond, "Available Light", 35–36.
36. Ibid., 26–27. For paracinema and cult fandom see Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy"; Hawkins, *Cutting Edge*.
37. Naremore, *More than Night*, 18–22; Hammond, "Available Light," 34; see also Borde and Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir*.
38. See Hammond, "Available Light," 36–37; Vincendeau, "Introduction," 2–3, 15; Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes," 183–184.
39. See Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 119–122; Richardson, "The Density of a Smile." As the next chapter shows, Freddie also lived in Stockholm at the time.
40. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 115–116.
41. Canonne, *Surrealism in Belgium*, 155–161; Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 122–129.
42. For Buñuel's relation with surrealism during his extended sojourn in commercial Mexican cinema, see Acevedo-Muños, *Bunñuel and Mexico*.
43. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 129–137. For *Paris n'existe pas*, see also Parkinson, *Futures of Surrealism*, 183–186; Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 129–137; Bouyxou, *La science-fiction au cinéma*, 358–360.
44. See Mathijs, "Les lèvres rouges/Daughters of Darkness"; Soren, *Unreal Reality*.
45. See Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema*, 186.
46. I saw excerpts of Stejskal's films at the Prague surrealist exhibition *Other Air* in early 2012.
47. Breton, "Before the Curtain" (1947), in *Free Rein*, 87.
48. Breton, "Projet initial"; Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 126.
49. Löwy, *Morning Star*, 1.
50. Breton, "On Surrealism in Its Living Works" (1955), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, "L'un dans l'autre" (1954) and "Magie quotidienne" (1955), in *Perspective Cavalière*; *L'art magique*. See also Parkinson, *Futures of Surrealism*, 106–110.

51. Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting, 1929–1939; Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*.
52. Bataille, "The Moral Meaning of Sociology" (1948), in *The Absence of Myth*, 104.
53. See Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," 541ff; see also Golan, "Mise en suspense de l'incredulité," 353.
54. Bataille, "The Moral Meaning of Sociology," 104.
55. For the intersection of the surrealist interest in "primitive" art and the surrealists' criticism of aesthetics, see Falasca-Zamponi, *Rethinking the Political*, 92–93. In 1945, Jules Monnerot pointed to the affinities between surrealism and "primitive" thought; see Monnerot, *La Poésie moderne et le sacré*.
56. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, 119–122.
57. Breton, "Giorgio de Chirico" (1926), in *The Lost Steps*, 66. Breton writes about de Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio in similar terms some 20 years later. See Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, 287.
58. Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, 14–15.
59. Breton, "Political Position of Surrealism" (1935), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 210.
60. Ibid., 210, 230–233.
61. Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not" (1942), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 287–288.
62. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 115–119.
63. Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 94, 96.
64. See Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation*.
65. Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation."
66. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 118. The reference is to Lévi, *Magic*, 46.
67. For surrealism and disenchantment, see Löwy, *Morning Star*, 1–2, 37.
68. Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 92.
69. Acker, "Inaugural Rupture" (1947), in *Surrealism Against the Current*, 48.
70. See also Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science*, 111.
71. See Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 61ff.
72. Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1930), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 178.
73. Ibid., 174.
74. Breton, *Conversations*, 229.
75. Ibid.
76. Breton, "As in a Wood," 240.
77. For an overview, see Pasi, "Magic."
78. For cinema, film theory, and magic, see Moore, *Savage Theory*.
79. Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," 544.
80. See ibid., 336–340. Henceforth, I will simply use the term esotericism.

81. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 12–15, 27.
82. Breton, *Conversations*, 229.
83. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 152, 230, 233–239.
84. Breton, "Before the Curtain," 85.
85. Pasi, "Coming Forth by Night," 105–106.
86. Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah," 119. See also Hanegraaff, "The Notion of 'Occult Sciences' in the Wake of the Enlightenment."
87. Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah," 120.
88. See Löwy, *Morning Star*, 38.
89. Breton, "Maria" (1947), 319, "Arshile Gorky" (1945), 200, both in *Surrealism and Painting.*
90. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 10–14.
91. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 5.
92. McCalla, "'Eternal Sun' /'Black Sun'," 3; Breton, "Ascendant Sign."
93. Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," 377.
94. See Chéniuex-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 60–70.
95. Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 20.
96. See Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, 29.
97. Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 3–13. See also Everett, "Screen as Threshold," 143–144.
98. Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 5, 13.
99. Breton, "Ascendant Sign," 104–105.
100. Kilcher, "Seven Epistemological Theses on Esotericism," 147.
101. Breton, "As in a Wood," 238, 240.
102. Breton, *L'art magique*, 248.
103. Gunning, "To Scan a Ghost," 95.
104. Ibid., 96; Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 11.
105. Breton, "Ascendant Sign," 104–105.
106. Gunning, "'Animated Pictures'," 102.
107. Ibid. See also Gunning, "The Long and the Short of It," 28.
108. Cohen, "The Art of Profane Illumination," 47.
109. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 80.
110. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 192.
111. See also Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, 187–188.
112. Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 236–238.
113. For discussions of the iconoclastic and iconophobic tendencies in Western culture, see Hanegraaff, "The Trouble with Images," 116–120; Mitchell, *Iconology*, 196–208; Koch, "Mimesis and *Bilderverbot*."
114. Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 11–12.
115. Compare this with Widding, *Blick och blindhet*, 62–64, 79–81.

116. Breton, "A Tribute to Antonin Artaud" (1946), in *Free Rein*, 79.
117. Breton, "Three Years Ago …" (1947), in *Surrealism and Painting*, 193.
118. Ibid.
119. Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 170.
120. See Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, especially the chapter "What My Fingers Knew."
121. See Barker, *The Tactile Eye*; Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*; Marks, *The Skin of the Film*.
122. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 60.
123. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 144, 150.
124. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 139.

CHAPTER 2

The Artist-Magician as Filmmaker: Wilhelm Freddie's Films and the New Myth

A woman's tongue cavorts against the backdrop of a painted landscape. A hand draws a mysterious symbol in a puddle of blood, before two men proceed to dig into the insides of a naked woman. A loaf of bread appears, disappears, and then splits open in half. The Danish artist Wilhelm Freddie made the two bewildering short films *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* together with the filmmaker Jørgen Roos in 1949 and 1950. Freddie's sudden foray into film followed upon his participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, which had such a strong effect on him that he entered an "esoteric period." In the talk "Why Do I Paint?," which he gave on Danish radio in 1950, Freddie situates his films, alongside his paintings and sculptures, amid his aims of creating a form of art with mythological life.[1] Freddie only produced five minutes of film, but their imagery, at once playful and opaque, is fraught with occultism and ritual and evokes the surrealist search for a new myth like few others. Like Max Ernst before him, Freddie assumes the role of a magician wielding powers of transformation through art, but this artist-magician is arguably at his most powerful when making films.[2]

This chapter examines Freddie's films in relation to his participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and the rarely discussed 1949 exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation* in Stockholm, as well as his radio talk "Why Do I Paint?" and an evocative poetic commentary that he published to accompany *Eaten Horizons*.[3] Some suggestive claims that Breton made around the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* are particularly telling for

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how Freddie decided to approach myth and magic in his films. In the catalogue essay "Surrealist Comet," Breton states that surrealism pursues "[i]nitiation by means of poetry and art," and in "Fronton-Virage," he writes of his ambition to explore the unity of the pursuits of high magic and high poetry.[4] *Eaten Horizons*, film and commentary together, pursues similar connections between art and initiation, poetry and magic, here extended to a rare interchange between moving images and verbal poetry. Freddie's films also point to the experiential aspect of surrealist magic art, and indicate how the new myth as it takes shape in film seeks to foster a certain sensibility.

These surrealist ideas about magic, myth, and art, however, do not provide a definite key for interpreting Freddie's films. Some of the things that appear to be enigmatic about his films can be deciphered by placing them in this context, but their esoteric allusions are no mere puzzles to be solved. In that sense, Freddie's films are similar to the writings of those poets whose esoteric leanings were so important for Breton's conviction that there is an intimate link between poetry and occultism. Literary scholar Albert Béguin remarks that the surrealist forerunner Gérard de Nerval's poetry does not simply constitute versified descriptions of esoteric symbolism. While the magic that Nerval creates relies heavily on the presence of alchemy and the tarot, it ultimately exceeds them. Hence, in Béguin's view, commentaries that use these elements as a basis for interpretation "*explain* nothing."[5] As Béguin writes, references to alchemy are not what make poetry alchemical, as it were. It is rather the very poetic process that works as a transmutation, since it changes reality by charging it with symbolic meaning.[6] Gaston Bachelard writes about the symbolists' ambition to rekindle the symbol and its connection with occultism: "One of the characteristics of the symbol situated thus on the terrain of occultism is its ambivalence. […] Evidently symbolic powers, occult powers and poetic powers stem from the same source, rise from the same depths."[7] Surrealist evocations of occultism rely on a similar transmutation of reality enacted by the interpretative impulse triggered by confounding imagery. Freddie explores this connection with characteristic irreverence, visually in *Eaten Horizons*, verbally in his written commentary; together, they heighten this interplay by connecting visual and verbal images, and letting them generate new meaning between them.

Wilhelm Freddie and the Surrealist Short Film

Freddie's work in film began in 1947, when Jørgen Roos approached him with a request for collaborating on a film.[8] Over the following five years, Freddie completed a number of film scripts.[9] Two of them were made into films, while the others joined the fertile surrealist tradition of unrealized film scenarios. Freddie's forays into film took place some fifteen years after he had established himself as a painter, and they are intimately related to his activities as an artist working not only with paintings but with sculptures, objects, and photography.[10]

Born in 1909, Freddie was drawn to surrealism in the early 1930s, a time when Wilhelm Bjerke-Petersen and his journal *Linien* were the most important mediators of knowledge on surrealism in Denmark.[11] Freddie soon established himself as one of Denmark's most prominent modernist artists, and, in line with surrealism's overall scandalous nature in the interwar period, his work seemed to effortlessly provoke outrage.[12] In a 1935 review, the Swedish artist Gösta Adrian-Nilsson described Freddie as "a fanatic, an anarchist, with bombs in his pocket."[13] Freddie seems to have embraced these conceptions throughout his career. In a 1946 letter to his friend Steen Colding, about the consternated reactions of a gallery owner faced with his work, he gleefully exclaims, "long live the anarchist-pornographic revolution."[14] By that point, Freddie's propensity for using erotic motifs in his art had generated much hostility. One of Freddie's contributions to the 1936 surrealist exhibition in London, the painting *Psychophotographic Phenomenon: The Fallen of the World War* (1936), did not make it past Customs, due to its perceived pornographic content.[15] In Denmark, his object *Sexparalysappeal* (1936) was confiscated for similar reasons.[16] Freddie also employed his erotomania against the threat of burgeoning Nazism. His painting *Meditation on the Anti-Nazi Love* (1936) displays a contorted and naked couple who embrace in the lower right hand corner, while a Hitler-like figure stands pompously far off in the background of the vast surrounding landscape.[17] The Danish establishment considered Freddie's surrealist critique of Nazism a nuisance. Come the German invasion of Denmark, the hostilities escalated and eventually led to outright threats on Freddie's life.[18] In 1944, the situation had become so dire that he had to escape to Sweden with his wife and son. They eventually ended up in Stockholm, where Freddie gained support from friends and gallery owners.[19] Between the end of the war and 1950, Freddie divided

his time between Stockholm and Copenhagen. During these prolific years, he turned to the film medium, contributed to *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and co-organized *Surrealistisk manifestation*.[20] As he entered his self-proclaimed esoteric period in conjunction with the 1947 exhibition, Freddie's motifs and thought underwent marked changes. If his paintings were now shorter on explicitly political satire, he adhered to surrealism's attempts to reconsider radical politics in a freethinking manner, riddled with a more timeless and anarchistic utopianism and receptive to myth and magic.[21] At the same time, Freddie's irreverent eroticism and oppositional black humour remained intact. All this is also evident in his films.[22]

Freddie and Roos made *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* under sparse conditions in Freddie's apartment in Copenhagen.[23] At Roos's suggestion, they based the film on Freddie's 1940 artwork of the same title.[24] Freddie's original mixed-media work consists of a wooden panel, on which five circles in a row depict a woman's red lips opening, then closing, in an exaggerated and contorted manner, against a succession of backgrounds of shifting natural scenery. A remediation of sorts, then, the film version of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* is just under one and a half minutes long. Its first part replicates the visual motif of the original work. A woman's painted lips are shown against a stylized landscape in a close-up that is masked to the shape of a circle. The film intercuts still images of collages, where photographs of the lips are pasted onto a painted background, with moving images, where the mouth protrudes from a hole in an organic-looking surrounding material. Still and moving lips alike twist into a series of grimaces, and the mouth opens up like a fleshy cavity in the scenery. The second sequence consists of a single take that shows Freddie's own moustached face in an extreme close-up. He looks nervous and highly strung, and his eyes dart maniacally, almost rotating in their sockets. An off-screen blood-curdling scream and what sounds like swear words in Danish can be heard, and then the film is over.

Eaten Horizons was made under better conditions than the first film, since the production company Cimbria Films in Copenhagen put their studio and materials at Freddie and Roos's disposal.[25] At three and a half minutes, the film is more narratively complex and technically advanced than its predecessor. Freddie and Roos now utilize camera movement, cross-cutting, interior and exterior locations, optical printing, and even a brief sequence of stop-motion animation. The scenography may be

sparse, but the film is dense with poetic juxtapositions, bodily and material transformations, and a playful but convoluted symbolism, of both esoteric and mock-religious gravity. The soundtrack, too, is more complex than in the preceding film. Its jarring sounds, including occasional bursts of music, alternately work with and disrupt the rich visuals. Groaning and chanting voices intermittently contribute to create a ritualistic atmosphere, but their grainy and thick sonority render it impossible to make out more than a few specific words.

The credits announce that *Eaten Horizons* is "a film about love and its annihilation in complete happiness." The film is divided into two sections. Following the credits, it opens on a medium close-up of a woman with her arms stretched out, fettered to a wall with strips of paper or cloth. In a close-up, a hand with a crayfish and a moon painted on it traces two circles and a triangle in a puddle of glistening black fluid, before wiping them out. The second sequence of the film is more eventful. A dissolve leads to a room with two filthy-looking men, seated and talking to each other. One of them raises a glass containing an unspecified drink. The camera tilts and reveals that the other man has one bare, and dirty, foot placed on a loaf of bread lying on the floor. In a centred close-up, a sharp light illuminates the bread until, suddenly, it disappears, leaving the man's foot suspended in mid-air. Another dissolve transports the camera to an empty street, where a cut reveals a broad, dark, tripartite door, stained with a fluid that the commentary reveals to be dog piss.[26] The door is ajar, and the camera pans slowly to the right. In the darkness inside, the bread lies illuminated on the floor. A cut follows to the bread lying on an ornate silver platter, before another cut shows it between the breasts of a naked woman, her torso shown at an angle. With the camera placed in the position of her head, two illuminated white rectangles appear over her raised knees. Next, the two men approach the woman and remove the bread from her chest. They roll her over onto her stomach, and proceed to lift a surgically precise rectangle of skin from her back. Underneath it, a close-up shows that a substance that resembles lava, excrement, or mincemeat bubbles. Using teaspoons, the two men solemnly eat the substance. When they have finished, one of the men pulls up his right sleeve and reaches down into the hole in the woman's back, from which he pulls out the loaf of bread. A jarring cut follows to what looks like a narrow white room or the inside of a box. A ball bounces frantically, and suddenly photographs of faces of several children appear, pasted to the side and back walls. After a fade to

black, the loaf of bread comes into view through a dissolve. Stop-motion animated, it rotates slightly jerkily in a medium close-up; after a cut to an extreme close-up, it opens in half, and the substance from the woman's back pours out of it.

As these descriptions suggest, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* are enigmatic films. To begin with, they can be related to a heterogeneous lineage of surrealist short films from the 1920s onwards, including Man Ray's *L'étoile de mer* (1928), Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou*, Ernst Moerman's *Monsieur Fantômas*, Marcel Mariën's *L'Imitiation du cinéma*, and Ado Kyrou's *La Chevelure*. As varied as they are, all of these films, too, were made on shoestring budgets, within or in the vicinity of the surrealist movement, and with seeming disregard for wider commercial, artistic, and avant-garde expectations. Freddie's films above all conjure up an uneasy eroticism. Desire and its frustrations and transformations are central in Buñuel and Dalí's canonized films. It extends throughout Moerman's evocation of Fantômas's frustrated pursuit of his object of desire. Desire also permeates Kyrou's depiction of a man obsessed by the long head hair that he finds, a fetishist enthralled by the metonymic residue of an imagined Eros. Like Mariën's blasphemous and playful *L'Imitiation du cinéma*, Freddie's films are also disruptive, sacrificing the sort of skilled montage employed by Buñuel, even at his most disorienting, for a disjunctive poetics. Like Mariën, Freddie also accentuates the female body and, in the case of *Eaten Horizons*, links it to a reimagined religious ritual. Crucially, the films mentioned all feature prominently struggles of desire against the order of law, society, or religion. Freddie's films, however, do not work through such oppositions. There are no police, priests, or patriarchs blocking the flows of desire in them. His films rather appear to be ritualistic conjurations of desire, albeit with ambiguous outcomes.

Freddie's films have much in common with the prevalent eroticism in his art.[27] *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* also resonate with Freddie's persistent tendency to depict bodies that transform and intermingle with matter and the surrounding world, as it takes expression in paintings such as *The King of Kings* (1934), *Venetian Portrait* (1942), and *Thalia and Telephonia* (1942). The films, then, do not so much mark a break with as a transformation of themes and topics that had preoccupied Freddie and other surrealists in the interwar era. They inhabit a landscape of ambivalent and often uncanny desire, where bodies act, transform, and want in defiance

of natural and societal limitations, which can bring to mind such other surrealist eroticists as Georges Bataille, Hans Bellmer, Mimi Parent, and Toyen.

The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss is short on narrative content. Its connection of the female mouth and the background scenery postulates a relation between the female body and the changing seasons, but it does little to suggest the specific nature of this connection. And is Freddie's face that of a man driven to a horrible deed because he is unable to accept the woman's rejection of his desire? Or is he in fact the one who rejects the woman, terrified by the unpredictable will of the lips and tongue, frightened by their lack of recognition of the divide between the human and nature? In this chapter, I will suggest some venues for interpretation of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* that do not so much attempt to affix narrative as symbolic, esoteric, and poetic meaning to this brief film.

There is more of a narrative progression in *Eaten Horizons*. The ritual in the first section seems to be directed towards unlocking the mysterious events that unfold. The opening of the woman's eyes signifies an awakening of impulses that play out later. The second section makes the spectator the witness of another ritual: the movements and the subsequent disappearance of the loaf of bread, which is followed by its reappearance when the two men discover it deep inside the woman's body. Freddie's commentary calls the woman's breasts a "dock for my, oh so heavy, bread-ship," and hence makes it abundantly clear that the bread, not so subtly phallic in shape, signifies both the male member and male desire.[28] The disappearance of the bread appears to refer to the subtitle's "annihilation of love" in "the absolute happiness" of the sexual climax—the *petite mort* is troubling, and the recovery of the male drive is construed as a rather complicated affair. The sudden cut to a cramped space in which a ball bounces around and the faces of small children appear, seems like an absurd reference to conception: the ball configured as sperm riotously trying to find its way through a cramped space, and eventually causing the appearance of an imposing number of children. The final shot of the loaf of bread revolving and opening so that the lava, excrement, or meat from inside the woman pours out may signal either a revelation of the inmost nature of desire, or its unexpected transformation after the experience of absolute happiness.

This interpretation appears reasonable in the light of such paratexts as the film's credits and Freddie's written commentary. But if it seems

somewhat hollow, that is likely because it does not consider the film's relation with Freddie's esoteric period. Freddie's films may appear narratively thin, but their imagery, their character of mysterious ritual, and the relations they establish between the body and the surrounding world need to be related to surrealism's overall turn to myth and magic. *Eaten Horizons*, in particular, benefits from an interpretation of certain of the first sequence's iconographic elements from the perspective of surrealism's immersion in esotericism. While the second section is even more convoluted, it can be partly understood in relation to surrealism's application of alchemy as a poetics of transmutation. *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* alike can furthermore be discussed in the light of Freddie's and surrealism's professed ambition to restore the magic dimension in art, in which experiential aspects come to the fore.

Freddie's Esoteric Period: Connections and Transformations

In his radio talk "Why Do I Paint?" Freddie situates his films directly in the context of surrealism's search for a new myth:

> Recently I have turned my attention to more esoteric phenomena. In my paintings, sculptures and films made with Jørgen Roos I have concentrated my efforts on creating an organism which is receptive to mythological life.[29]

Indeed, *Le Surréalisme en 1947* had such an impact on Freddie that it transformed his work over the following years. It started when, in the spring of 1947, he received a letter of invitation from Breton to participate in the exhibition. In the letter, Breton describes the aims of the exhibition to draw up the contours of a new myth, but he also provides a detailed outline of its execution and its structure as a passage of initiation.[30] Freddie was particularly enthused with the plan for twelve altars dedicated to mythological beings, and he swiftly responded with a suggestion for a design for the sixth altar, with the theme of the Secretary Bird. But Freddie's reply apparently went missing and never reached Breton; instead, the altar was claimed by the Romanian artist Victor Brauner, and Freddie had to settle for contributing a few paintings to the exhibition.[31] Attending *Le Surréalisme en 1947* in the summer, the

Danish artist struck up friendships with Brauner and his fellow Romanian exile Jacques Hérold. It was this multiple exposure to surrealism's turn to myth and magic that made Freddie enter his esoteric period.[32] Mythological and magical references had been present in Freddie's art before, but now he underwent a marked change in style and a veritable influx of esoteric and mythological allusions and motifs can be seen in his paintings and objects.[33] A decade earlier, Freddie had already considered some of his objects to have a magic effect, but now he was, in Læssøe's words, "under the influence of such initiatory religious directions or forms of thought as astrology and alchemy."[34] "Why Do I Paint?" indicates that Freddie also adopted the surrealist conviction that a new myth was a necessary means to heal a war-torn society.

Freddie started to work in cinema under the spell of these intoxicating ideas. His films are not only the earliest but also the most direct examples of the influence of post-war surrealism's reorientation on film. Freddie, like most other surrealists, approaches esotericism as a form of rejected knowledge that cannot simply be recovered, but needs to be exposed to an incessant drive towards playful poeticizing. Wifredo Lam's altar to *The Hair of Falmer* is especially telling for the strategies the surrealists employed to inspirit art with magic. Dedicated to a gruesome passage in Lautréamont's *The Songs of Maldoror* (1869), the altar is dominated by a frazzled mass of hair that hangs over four symmetrically arranged plastic female breasts and two mannequin's hands sporting long knives.[35] Behind this arrangement is a cross turned upside down, and on the altar, votive gifts and surrealist food offerings are laid out.[36] The altar intermingles Lam's Afro-Cuban heritage, his interest in vodun, and his adherence to surrealism and its tradition.[37] Lam's evocation of black magic and cruelty is executed in line with a surrealist poetics where myth and magic are close to play.[38] The result is not so much syncretic as it is a creation of a ludic, hybrid magic.[39] Freddie's films work according to a similar logic.

Significant, too, are the two altars for which Victor Brauner contributed the main elements. The aforementioned altar to the Secretary Bird is dominated by Brauner's painting *The Lovers (Messengers of the Number)* (1947), which combines two figures from the Major Arcana of the tarot deck, The Magician and The High Priestess, with references to the personal mythologies of Max Ernst and André Breton. Hence, Brauner turns these tarot figures into mythical surrealist beings, emblems of the surrealist thinker and artist as magicians and keepers of

unusual knowledge.[40] Brauner's other altar was dedicated to his own object *The Wolf-Table* (1947), in which the head, tail, and scrotum of a fox are affixed to a wooden table. Dialectically, and with a savage humour, unsettling received distinctions between life and matter, the domesticated and the wild, the *heimisch* and the *unheimlich*, nature and culture, *The Wolf-Table* is a pre-eminent example of surrealist magic art, and it parallels the brute corporeality and unabashed humour that Freddie brought to his own monstrous inventions. It executes its magic through embodiment and the chilling, marvellous *frisson* of unlikely juxtapositions. Brauner's artistic development also provides an illuminating context for Freddie's approach to esotericism.[41] Brauner failed to escape France during the war, and fled to the countryside, where, separated from most of his group of artists and writers, he paralleled Breton's immersion an ocean away in magic and alchemy, myth and "primitive" art. Didier Semin describes how Brauner, much like Breton, perceived "alchemy and magic as a protection against the hazards of the time," and saw the need for a magical rebirth of a society torn asunder by the elevated values of presumed progress and rationalism.[42] His paintings were increasingly populated with figures and symbols with esoteric and mythological significance, which he exposed to a specifically surrealist poetics. Motifs from various myths, the tarot, and alchemy transform in idiosyncratic tableaux, which act as peeks into potential new myths in gestation.[43] Brauner's works, then, exemplify two strategies for the creation of magic art: the incorporation of esoteric references in art, and the use of transformation, corporeality, and juxtaposition in order to trigger an embodied and savage form of experiential magic.

Similar impulses can be seen in Freddie's art from his esoteric period. He, too, incorporated alchemical and astrological iconography in his art, as well as in his films. According to Læssøe, alchemy interested Freddie mainly as "a form of mental room of fantastic otherness."[44] That is an apt description for both Freddie's films and many of his paintings from his esoteric period. In line with Brauner's approach, Freddie exposes his esoteric allusions to a surrealist poetics of transformation and juxtaposition and lets them form cornerstones in a personal mythology. In his films and paintings alike, esotericism germinates within an atmosphere that is often permeated with erotomania. In his painting *Trauma* (1948), an animalistic, hieratic hybrid figure sports an erect penis, painfully incongruent in a tableaux of angular shapes and twisted body parts. In *The Blood Pocket* (1947), a face that is equally redolent of "primitive"

masks and dystopian angularity extends a long slithering tongue towards a vaginal shape seemingly carved out in stone. Freddie also inscribes the paintings from his esoteric period with enigmatic signs and symbols, equally reminiscent of occultism and vodun.[45] Under the influence of his newfound friends Brauner and Hérold, as well as several of the other artists and thinkers who participated in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Freddie explored new means to create a myth-generating form of magic art. In *Eaten Horizons*, these strategies can be discerned in the way in which esoteric symbols give way to a corporeal ritual in which a loaf of bread becomes a magical object in a development that playfully veers between the sacred and the profane.

Surrealistisk Manifestation and "Why Do I Paint?"

In March 1949, Freddie asserted the place of film in his new pursuits, as he set out to explore the magical capacity of art further in a collective forum. Together with the Swedish artist Gösta Kriland, of the surrealist-oriented Imaginisterna artist group, and in collaboration with the exiled Estonian-born poet and critic Ilmar Laaban, he arranged the exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation* at Expo Aleby, the gallery wing of Anders Aleby's Antikvariat, a second-hand bookshop in central Stockholm.[46] Among the participating artists were Freddie's friends Brauner and Hérold, the surrealists Jean Arp, Max Ernst, and Yves Tanguy, and the Imaginisterna members C.O. Hultén, Max Walter Svanberg, and Gudrun Åhlberg-Kriland. *Surrealistisk manifestation* was indebted to the ideas espoused in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and the exhibition had an extended focus on the magical qualities of the object.[47] The exhibition design was inevitably less elaborate than Breton's, Duchamp's, and Friedrich Kiesler's at the Galerie Maeght, and the number of contributing artists was diminutive, but the organizers managed to squeeze a large assortment of surrealist artworks in different media into the cramped space.[48] *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* premiered in conjunction with the exhibition, and was hence posited to be directly connected with its aims.

Technical and spatial constraints, however, meant that it was not possible to screen film in the gallery space. The organizers' search for an appropriate venue for the premiere of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* is in itself revealing for post-war surrealism's continuity with earlier surrealist convictions. Freddie and Kriland first turned

to the Spegeln cinema as a potential venue, but they elected to look elsewhere when the owner demanded that the film be introduced by "some know-it-all."[49] Instead, they chose to show the film at the nearby Maxim, where it was given a slot in the middle of the evening's usual programme. "It felt a bit solemn," Kriland, in retrospect, describes the world premiere of the short film.[50] The audience did not share his experience. The majority were there for what Kriland describes as Maxim's usual repertoire of "kiss kiss, bang bang."[51] Their reaction to the less than two minutes of surrealist film seems to have been a mixture of bewilderment and hostility.[52] The choice of venue and the reason for opting out of Spegeln, though, signal the persistent surrealist tendency to avoid the sites of the intellectual establishment. The fleapits and popular films have always been the surrealist choice over official art spaces and self-consciously artistic cinema, from the formative years before the movement's gestation, to 1949 Stockholm and beyond.[53] The context of the exhibition, however, locates the film among those mythically and magically charged objects that Freddie and Kriland sought to explore. The impetus behind them was delineated in the exhibition catalogue.

The slim catalogue for *Surrealistisk manifestation* features a programmatic essay by Ilmar Laaban, in which he explains surrealism's post-war position. Laaban situates the entire exhibition in the context of the movement's change in direction, and delineates the surrealist ambition to create a myth as a reaction against the bankruptcy of Christianity and the dried-out, destructive myths of Western society.[54] He also discusses a related change in the function of the surrealist object. The symbolically functioning object of the 1930s has now been replaced with the magically functioning object, Laaban explains, and the latter is meant to transmit a psychical energy that allows it to interfere in the relationship between the human and the world.[55] To this end, he relates surrealism's pursuit of magic art with "primitive" art forms with a magical purpose, but he is careful to distinguish surrealism from the aesthetic primitivism that was prominent at the time. In contrast to that kind of art, surrealism, according to Laaban, simply looks to already existing solutions to the problem of a magically and mythically functioning art.[56] Hence, presumably, Freddie's and Kriland's own appeal to the idea of the "totem" in their collaborative work *Erotototemistic Object* (1949), which was on display at the exhibition. In a later text, Laaban reminisces about the time of *Surrealistisk manifestation*, and recalls that Freddie was the driving force behind the understanding of the magical object that he espoused.

Laaban's argument, even if differing in its "entirely tensely militant approach" in his own opinion, is indeed similar to Freddie's slightly later declaration of intent in "Why Do I Paint?"[57]

In the radio essay, Freddie explicates some of the more profound implications of surrealism's mythological direction and frames it as part of an alternative art history centred around magic. Freddie introduces his talk with the incantation "Puba, Puba, Puba, see the marvellous …," words that are repeated almost verbatim from his written commentary for *Eaten Horizons*.[58] He explains that he is currently engaged with "creating an organism which is receptive to mythological life," a process in which the magic properties of art are central.[59] Freddie delineates a development of such magic and mythological art. In Paul Gauguin's paintings, Freddie claims colour to have a magical value that emanates from the artworks' experiential dimensions.[60] In the German romantic painter Arnold Böcklin's work, he considers the strong evocation of nature to be no mere imitation, but a "nature cult."[61] And he claims that Vincent Van Gogh's "fevered visions" put him in contact with those forces of nature that can seize and move humans.[62] It is the task of bringing these very forces into the light that the surrealists are presented with, according to Freddie. But it is not enough to recover them. The surrealists need to direct them and put them at the service of a more wholesome society, one that has the presumed potential to cure modern humanity's rootlessness by providing an intimate contact with the world through the channelling of its desires.[63] Revolutionary politics and "the modern picture of the world" can be joined, Freddie hopes, in "a myth that will replace the doomed myths by which contemporary man lives, and which threaten to destroy him."[64] He finds a vital means towards this goal in occultism. Immersion in "occult sciences such as alchemy, magic, and astrology which were earlier regarded as superstitions" has provided the surrealists with "an insight into the great interconnectedness of things, just as psychological studies of the magical spells and rituals of certain historical and primitive tribes have revealed their common nature and made them accessible paths into the depths of the soul."[65] If Western society is to change, Freddie considers this needs to be enacted by way of a turn to esoteric and "primitive" experience and knowledge.

Freddie's appeal to esotericism is formulated in general terms, but he explains its function and purpose in surrealism with a rare clarity. Esotericism, here, foremost pertains to the recovery of a worldview structured by correspondences, and this is bound up with rituals in

"primitive" societies. "Why Do I Paint?" points towards some of the different facets of myth and magic in Freddie's thought at the time. The "nature cult" and those "fevered visions" that Freddie mentions pertain to a form of intuitive, experiential magic, ostensibly capable of enabling access to otherwise hidden "forces of nature." Freddie's view that esotericism provides insights into the "great interconnectedness of things" is close to Breton's valorization of analogy in "Ascendant Sign." Recall that Breton in that text considers analogy to provide "glimpses from the lost mirror," the flare of light from which reveals the world to be a vast network where otherwise distant things are connected. For Freddie, these two aspects of magic are united in the fact that they provide access to the detection and experience of correspondences.

The Definite Rejection of the Request for a Kiss has a direct connection with surrealism's search for a new myth and magic art through its inclusion in *Surrealistisk manifestation*, while *Eaten Horizons* shows the strongest iconographic and thematic evidence of this development. Both films, however, evince a tangible ritualistic atmosphere, which can be related to Freddie's attempted evocation of an experiential magic, or what we might call an auratic dimension. Freddie's work in cinema, then, draws attention to several neglected aspects of surrealist practice in general and surrealist cinema in particular.

The World and the Senses

There was a vital sensory aspect to the magical objects on display at *Surrealistisk manifestation*. Freddie and Kriland's "fetish" *Erototemistic Object* was constructed as a materialization of desire, provided with two rudimentary hands that signal its coming-to-life through a promise or threat of tactile interaction—a poke, touch, or an embrace—with the spectator.[66] *Erotototemistic Object* hence positions itself as an interaction between the human body and the surrounding world. This both imposing and alluring feature draws attention to the strong corporeality that runs through much of Freddie's work. The object also points to one way in which *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* extends the exploration of the magic object to the film medium. Freddie's films, indeed, continue on this bewildering road, at once royal and gravelly, closing up on the spectator with an inappropriate proximity.

The female lips in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* evoke Man Ray's imposing painting *Observatory Time: The Lovers* (1932–1934),

which depicts Lee Miller's lips, huge and painted in red, hovering in the starry night sky.[67] The ritualized female body, in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, and its conflation with the seasons, also recall certain of Man Ray's photographs. The treatment of the nude female body in *Eaten Horizons* as an altar of sorts may remind the spectator of Man Ray photographs like *The Prayer* (1930), in which a kneeling woman photographed from behind at a high angle splays her fingers across her naked buttocks, and *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade* (1933), in which the contours of an inverted cross are placed over a photograph of a naked behind. Yet, in line with his esoteric period, Freddie brings a whole other range of ritualistic qualities to his films. These transport them beyond the ambivalent coupling of cult and suggested destruction of woman conjured through Man Ray's references to Sade, and instead make them approach a much more complicated cult of nature, the human, and the world in attempts at invoking an intimate interrelation between them. Here, then, the connection between the body, the senses, and the seasons resonates more with Freddie's search for myth than one might at first assume.

The female tongue in the first section of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* contorts in a way that is clearly obscene, not only because it breaks with social decorum, but also for its violent yet vulnerable assertiveness. If it is not outright pornographic, it points to the strong presence of eroticism in the film. The senses and the relation between the human body and the environment play central parts here. The mouth threatens to emerge from the screen much as it protrudes from the shifting seasons of the landscape. The gymnastics of the isolated mouth also provokes a strong sense of bodily discomfort and transgression. The aggressive movements of the soft flesh and the exposed brittle teeth render it equally violent and vulnerable. Here, Freddie appears close to Bataille's subversive analysis of the residues of fierce animality that come out in certain expressions of the human mouth, otherwise tamed by civilization.[68] Bataille's ruminations on the mouth were published in *Documents*, and were illustrated with a photograph by Jacques-André Boiffard of an extreme close-up of a wide open woman's mouth, her tongue moving, which is both intrusive and inappropriately tangibly corporeal, much like the mouth in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*.[69] Where the extended hands of the *Erotototemistic Object* reach out towards the spectator, the mouth, here, is simultaneously inviting and offputting. It exposes too much, at the same time as it seems to lure the spectator in.

But there is also a dimension of magic to this assertive corporeality. Læssøe points out that much as in Freddie's earlier, scandalous works, the sexual connotations that persist throughout his esoteric period can be presumed to shock the spectator. Hence, they contribute to establish an interplay between the spectator's sensibility, including that of his or her nether bodily regions, and what Læssøe calls the "not so fictitious 'life'" of the artwork.[70] He relates this to Freddie's own retrospective statements about his scandalous object *Sexparalysappeal*: "I sought to create a 'divine image', a magical sexual ritual. In other words a magical operation."[71] Pornographic art like *Sexparalysappeal*, Læssøe states, shrinks the distance between subject and object in its direct effect on the spectator's body.[72] In this respect, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* situate themselves alongside *Sexparalysappeal*. Læssøe contends that divine and magical images participate in what they depict in a different way from ordinary paintings and sculptures, and he comes to the blasphemous conclusion that this means that their function is closer to that of "pornographic images than with what is conventionally understood as art."[73] Hence, if *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* depicts a dissolution, no matter how troubling, of the chasm between human and nature, its strong sense of intrusive corporeality can be taken to bridge the gap between film and spectator. A magic dimension of art is thus ostensibly recovered, one that depends both on what is depicted and the reciprocal relation that the film establishes with the spectator.

The film's references to the senses and the connection of human body and surrounding world indicate that the film relates to the notion of correspondences, in both its symbolic and sensory capacity, as well as to an embodied dissolution of the divide between subject and object. The original artwork for *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* already suggests that there is a connection between the disembodied mouth and the background of changing natural scenery. Remediating the artwork into a film, Freddie adds a close-up of his own face to the work's visual make-up, but structures it into two tableaux following upon one another. He does then not utilize what Breton perceived to be the film medium's privileged capacity to suggest correspondences through the editing together of spatially or temporally distant images. Instead, he lets the movements of the tongue and the temporal unfolding of the seasonal changes anchor the body and the surrounding world in a rhythmic

relationship. In that way, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* nevertheless suggests a magical connection, a correspondence, between the rhythms of the body and those of nature. The connection of night and day that Breton makes central for cinema's potential for uniting opposites is here supplemented with a more diverse chain of changes.[74] *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* approaches the notion, so prevalent in esotericism, that there is a bond between microcosm and macrocosm, which means that they are intimately connected and affect one another. But if there is such a bond in Freddie's film, it appears to be far from harmonious. The grotesque nature of the mouth combined with the alterations between moving images and inserted collages undercut any tendencies towards an unequivocally benign relationship between the human and the natural world.

There is a productive insight to be gleaned, here, that the human and nature are in a combined state of reciprocity and alterity to one another. This insight can be related to Walter Benjamin's definition of the auratic experience of nature returning the gaze, of being at once distant and near. Ascribing a gaze to nature and the surrounding world means to assign to it a set of characteristics that are beyond human domination and rational understanding. In that sense, the aura is antithetical to positivist knowledge about nature and the instrumental use and exploitation of it. Freddie plays at this ability to return the gaze through the way that he merges the human and the landscape. If a gaze is returned, though, it is not ocular, but a recognition expressed through the gymnastics of tongue and mouth, threatening to break through the screen.

Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences," so important for both Benjamin and the surrealists, pertains to similar notions.[75] Informed by Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, Baudelaire describes an increasingly rare experience of reality, in which the senses and the surrounding world interact and reverberate in ever-expanding networks of meaning, manifesting what Freddie calls the "great interconnectedness of things."[76] In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin discusses correspondences as the record of an experience that includes ritual elements.[77] As Löwy puts it, correspondences hence work as "a reference to a primitive, edenic age in which authentic experience still existed and in which ritual and festivities allowed for a fusion between the past of the individual and the collective past."[78] These elements of ritual, then, stand in contrast to the collapse of experience that Baudelaire witnessed

in modernity, and to which Benjamin considered his poetry to be such a forceful reaction.[79] The potential for productive experience that he detected in surrealism's profane illumination rested largely on what he perceived as its ability to effect an innervation through its merging of image and body, which in the post-war period takes on a more explicit ritualistic dimension.[80] With its darkly humorous confusion of the human and the world, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* resonates with Benjamin's idea of surrealism's profane illumination, which "describes the merging of the self with the world through a dialectical intoxication that is both terrifying and exhilarating."[81] Surrealists have indeed long conceived of the imagination as a means to blur the distinction between subject and object, to, in the words of Aimé Césaire, resolve "the antinomy of self and other and that of the Ego and the World."[82] *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* can, then, be seen as a playful depiction of an auratic intermingling of the human and the world as well as an invocation of multisensory correspondences and the ritualistic nature of the art that contains them, much as Freddie's propensity for an experiential magic suggests. But in line with Benjamin's insistence on the necessity for artificiality and technological intervention to facilitate such experiences in modernity, if there is an element of experiential magic in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, it relies on the disjunctive, bodily, and uncomfortable way in which the film suggests its correspondences.

If the film also ought to be considered an intervention in mythological life, the myth it gives rise to could possibly be one of a more intimate relation between the human and the world, as suggested by Freddie's belief that esotericism reveals the interconnectedness of all things. The drama of the cosmos and the everyday that plays out in the film, however, does not replicate Freddie's holistic view of the surrealist myth, as he explicates it in "Why Do I Paint?" If there is a myth at work in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, it is shattered and shattering, but from the shards a new image of the world may possibly arise. The relation that *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* posits between the human and the world is fraught with a dark eroticism and a black humour, the roots of which seem to stretch down into the murkier waters of the unconscious. This is even more pronounced in *Eaten Horizons.*

Occult Iconography and Perverted Poetry

In "Why Do I Paint?," Freddie proclaims: "I want to be a priest in a temple in which there is no altar, no god, no sinners and no saints, but where the gospel will be a constant proclamation of the divine in man."[83] The surrealist film critic Robert Benayoun describes *Eaten Horizons* as an "operation of high magic, a sublime rite of which Freddie has made himself the masked priest."[84] Much as in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, there is a tangible ritualistic atmosphere in *Eaten Horizons*. The enigma shrouding the film emanates from Freddie's irreverent play with religious as well as esoteric allusions; the effect is a taunting one, of meaning at once profound and silly, and the spectator may experience its core as constantly slipping away, impossible to grasp—or possibly as non-existent. Michael Richardson positions both Freddie's films in relation to the overarching themes of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and concludes that they draw on myths of renewal and are ultimately about regeneration.[85] However, the films do not necessarily embody this benign goal in any direct manner. They rather contribute to the development of the surrealist relation to myth and magic by intervening in the conceptions about them, not merely illustrating them.

The first sequence in *Eaten Horizons* employs occult iconography in its conjuring of a mysterious ritual. The editing, cutting between the decorated hand that draws a circle in the black fluid and the woman who is opening her eyes, creates a link between these two sequences, so that the actions of the hand seem to be what causes the woman's eyes to open. This first sequence is visually sparse, but contains two specific esoteric references. Earlier scholarship on *Eaten Horizons* has neglected to identify these iconographic elements. Læssøe and Richardson simply describe the geometrical patterns drawn in the fluid without considering their meaning, and the latter refers to the signs drawn on the hand as a scorpion and "a kind of sun."[86] These symbols, however, carry a meaning that is both specific and expansive, allusive and evanescent.

The Magic Circle

In his commentary, Freddie describes the geometrical pattern that takes shape in the puddle of black liquid as "the magic sign, which is the picture of torture—and of delight."[87] Similar geometrical figures feature prominently in Freddie's paintings during his esoteric period. Laaban

suggests that their function is to focus and intensify the artworks' magical and erotic energies.[88] This purpose rhymes well with the erotic ritual that is *Eaten Horizons.* But here, the "lethal geometry" of Freddie's figures does not just act as an agent of concentration of desire.[89] As Freddie's description of the pattern as a "magic sign" suggests, it is also a more specific esoteric reference. Its nature can be gleaned by turning to the occultist Eliphas Lévi.[90] The "magic sign" in *Eaten Horizons* strongly resembles an illustration of a Goetic magic circle in Lévi's book *Transcendental Magic*.[91] The version of the Goetic circle depicted in *Eaten Horizons* is stylized and simplified in comparison with Lévi's illustration, but it retains the central feature of two circles enclosing a triangle. Freddie's written commentary supports the identification of the geometrical pattern as a Goetic magic circle. The Goetic magic circle is intended to enable the magician to call on demons, and the demons catalogued in the *Goetia* all have specific capacities that can be drawn on.[92] Following his reference to the symbol as a magic sign, Freddie evokes "BAEL, ASTAROTH, FORAS!" Richardson claims that Freddie calls on pre-Christian fertility gods, but the iconographic and textual context indicates that he rather invokes demons.[93] For while Bael and Astaroth are the names of two Canaanite gods of fertility, they are also prominent names in demonology, and so is Foras, or Forras. Taking all three names into account, it seems evident that Freddie is appealing to them in their demonic guise. Hence, in *Eaten Horizons*, the magic circle appears to be meant to call forth the demons listed in the commentary.

Freddie, however, is not likely to have intended this ritual to actually help him enlist the aid of demons. Instead, his reference to Goetic magic fills a more polyvalent function. Benjamin places surrealism in a lineage, prefigured by Rimbaud's Satanism and Russian anarchism, of revolutionary appeals to evil employed as insulation against "all moralizing dilettantism."[94] As if heeding Benjamin, in *Mad Love* Breton writes that "the exalted representation of an innate 'evil' will retain the greatest revolutionary value," a belief presumably shared by Man Ray when he placed the contours of an inverted cross over a behind in *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade*.[95] Freddie, thus, is not the only esoterically inclined surrealist to have ventured into the area of demonology or black magic. Two further examples, Max Ernst and the Romanian writer Ghérasim Luca, can illuminate the import of Freddie's references to demons.

Ernst employs illustrations of some of the numerous demons found in the *Goetia* on a couple of occasions. He culled these images from Collin de

Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal*, which Louis Le Breton illustrated with grotesque and humorous woodcuts of the demons, which are often human-animal hybrids. For the cover of an issue of *View* magazine dedicated to Ernst in 1942, he incorporated Le Breton's illustration of the demon Buer, who has the head of a lion and five goat legs forming a swirling wheel behind its body.[96] In his autobiographical notes in the same issue, Ernst uses an illustration of the demon Stolas, a long-legged crowned owl who is a prince in hell, thus forming a suggestive reference to his totemistic identification with birds and esoteric interests in one fell swoop. For Ernst, these demons stand as personal totems, markers of an identification with evil against the repressive anti-myth directing the disastrous events of the time. Tearing down the old constructions in order to erect new ones, the maligned forces of darkness become his allies in a playful construction of a new myth to counter the old ones.

Ghérasim Luca's essay *The Passive Vampire* (1945) is another surrealist appeal to demonic forces. As Krzysztof Fijalkowski puts it, *The Passive Vampire* takes the shape of "an extended meditation on the self and the object, with its relations to chance, desire, and magic."[97] That magic is often black. In a frenzied litany, Luca calls on a host of demons in a way that recalls Freddie's appeal to "BAEL! ASTAROTH! FORAS!":

> The dreamer, the lover, the revolutionary are all unknowingly committing demonic acts. For, whatever your name: Sammael, Phiton, Asmodeus, Lucifer, Belial, Beelzebub, Satan, we shall only recognize you, O Demon, in our valid actions and ideas.[98]

Dreamer, lover, and revolutionary: such is the self-identification of most surrealists. Luca, then, like Ernst, draws on these forces in order to mobilize surrealist powers against the disenchanted and repressive present. In a debased civilization, Ernst and Luca imply, all acts of the imagination take the side of "evil." Indeed, Luca considers truth-seekers of all kinds, whether workers, poets, or thinkers, to "carry on the magician's work."[99] Luca, however, insists on the demonic aspects of this operation. For him, allegiance to magic also means that, "Every dream, every act of love, every riot is a black mass."[100] But surrealism is equally concerned with the relation of this "evil" to the recovery of the rejected knowledge found in esotericism, conceived as a source of inspiration for a more integral outlook on the world. The satanic currents that these surrealists tap into, then, act as shorthand for the overall surrealist appeal to esotericism

for its poetic visualization of hidden relations in the world, but with the added *frisson* brought by blasphemy and the call for demons. With its ritualistic atmosphere and allusions to black magic, *Eaten Horizons* appears as a black mass of the sort Luca calls for, something that José Pierre touches upon when he detects "a provocative and blasphemous analogy between the body of the beloved woman" and the body of Christ in transubstantiation.[101]

Luca and Freddie do not merely have their references to black magic in common. What Fijalkowski describes as Luca's "insistence on the materialization of desire and the absorption of objects in a physical act of the denial of antinomies (conscious/unconscious, internal/external, reality/desire)" could almost be a description of what transpires in *Eaten Horizons*.[102] The resemblances between *Eaten Horizons* and *The Passive Vampire* may not be a coincidence. Despite the small edition it was printed in, and its subsequent obscurity, *The Passive Vampire* "circulated with a degree of freedom" in the post-war French surrealist milieu.[103] Freddie could have been introduced to the ideas in it, if not the text itself, by some of his surrealist friends in Paris around the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. The polyglot Ilmar Laaban may also have been familiar with *The Passive Vampire*: parts of his declaration in the *Surrealistisk manifestation* catalogue of the magical functioning of the object bear striking resemblances to Luca's "investigation of objects as magical agents."[104]

Luca's lyrical discussion of a new function of the object charged with a playful form of black magic, then, helps elucidate Freddie's references to demons. It can also shed light on some of Freddie's connections between black magic, eroticism, and language. Through delirious associations, Luca finds that, given the right conditions, the object begins to "murmur a black-magical language […] one that was very close to dream and to primordial language."[105] Luca connects black magic not only with the object, but also with the surrealist interest in dream and attraction to the notion of a magic ur-language. Conceptions of such a linguistic magic recur throughout Breton's post-war writings, where they are intimately related to the romantic-occultist notion of language that works directly, magically, on reality.[106] Breton's valorization of analogy, his interest in alchemy, and his inquests into the relation between magic and poetry all coalesce around this goal.

Much as in *The Passive Vampire*, the black magic in *Eaten Horizons*, then, is bound up with both eroticism and language. The commentary

extends the playfulness inherent in Freddie's references to Goetic magic through a bawdy conflation of ritual and sex, of esotericism and eroticism. This further relates *Eaten Horizons* to both Luca's poetics and a broader surrealist interest in the materiality of language, and the potential for esoteric-poetic meaning to arise from linguistic manipulation.

The Hermetic Cabala

In Freddie's commentary for *Eaten Horizons*, the film's ritualistic elements collide with barely veiled erotic imagery of a knowingly crude kind. The written commentary complements the film's visuals in ways that seem more like poetic interpretation and extrapolation than anything else. The commentary is not a conventional film script, nor is it a simple description of what the film shows. Instead, Freddie uses deliberately ambiguous poetic images in the form of analogies, similes, and metaphors in order to bring out, emphasize, and play with both the ritualistic and erotic aspects of the film. This poetics is also informed by magic, not just in terms of the repertoire of motifs that the commentary invokes, but also in its play with double meanings of words and the images they recall. The double images, esoteric allusions, and play with words contribute to suggest a deeper conflation of the erotic and the esoteric in *Eaten Horizons.*

Double or multiple meanings have been a staple feature in surrealism, from all forms of wordplay to the visual images produced by Salvador Dalí's method of paranoia-criticism.[107] Such imagery points to the instability of the ordinary, and the potential to reveal unexpected and enchanting meaning from within the quotidian, exploding dulled everyday perception. But as Benjamin points out, the surrealists' play with words is also a way of recovering a linguistic magic.[108] An early and significant example of this magical quality of wordplay can be found in Michel Leiris's 1925 "Glossary." Criticizing etymological definitions of words, Leiris proposes that dissecting words and considering their malleability with regard to "associations of sounds, forms, and ideas" can change language into an oracle and enable us to discover its hidden qualities and secrets.[109] With the increased surrealist interest in esotericism, this magical quality of poetry took on further significance. In "Fronton-Virage," Breton writes of his attempts to "formulate a law proclaiming the deep unity of the pursuits of high magic and of what I am not afraid to call high poetry."[110] Such a statement should not be taken to imply

that there is an absolute identity between magic and poetry, but rather that there is a dynamic interplay between them, one feeding into the other; if there is a unity, it is in their shared revelation of hidden correspondences, and concurrent capacity to, as the surrealists learned from Rimbaud, "change life," as if by the waving of a magician's wand. Breton's ambition, then, is an extension of the longstanding surrealist belief in the necessity to revitalize language in order for it to be able to uncover new aspects of the world and humanity's relation with its surroundings.[111] The artist-magician and the poet-magician equally strive to find the keys to an analogical world.

Visual and literary images fuse in several surrealist artworks, but Freddie's *Eaten Horizons* indicates a largely untapped capacity for the moving image and the literary image to cross-pollinate and produce new offspring, traversing the resulting whole like rowdy homunculi springing from the linguistic alchemist's laboratory.

In "Fronton-Virage," Breton elucidates the writings of Raymond Roussel from the perspective of esoteric linguistics. A contemporary of the early surrealists, the novelist and playwright Roussel kept his distance from the movement and instead took his place as one of those "surrealists despite themselves" that comprise such a large part of the surrealist tradition.[112] Roussel's novels *Impressions of Africa* (1910) and *Locus Solus* (1914) are intricate language machineries that generate fantastic events steeped in barely sublimated personal obsessions.[113] In his posthumously published *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, Roussel reveals that he created his bewildering fiction with the aid of an idiosyncratic method based on likeness in sound between words with different meanings. Roussel located an alternative meaning in phrases, for instance by changing just one of the letters in the original, and then let the narrative grow out of the tension between the original and the permutated phrases.[114] Not content with this key to Roussel's linguistic mystery, Breton remained convinced that Roussel's writings held an even deeper secret. In "Fronton-Virage," he seeks out encoded alchemical messages and structures in Roussel's work, inspired in particular by the pseudonymous alchemist Fulcanelli's definition of the "phonetic cabala."[115]

Fulcanelli describes the phonetic cabala as an ancient method of using assonance or homophony to veil the esoteric meaning of a word or expression; these messages are then hidden in plain sight, as it were, innocuous to the average reader but fraught with higher meaning for the initiate.[116] This makes the phonetic cabala similar to alchemy, the

enigmatic imagery of which simultaneously conceals and reveals.[117] Fulcanelli relates the phonetic cabala, also known as the hermetic cabala, the language of birds, or the green language, to *argot*, in other words slang. In *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (1926), he extends the hermeneutics of the phonetic cabala to an interpretation of symbols in gothic cathedrals, in which he reveals the co-existence of pagan and alchemical images with Christian iconography. Smuggled into the cathedrals in this way, these officially banished images signify a subversive undercurrent, a repository of rejected knowledge, in the midst of official cultural history. Fulcanelli claims that the very *art gothique* style of the cathedrals in question is significant in this respect. When pronounced, *art gothique* sounds like *argotique*, and is hence, for Fulcanelli, intimately related to the argot of the green language. Much like Leiris, then, Fulcanelli opposes the etymological scrutinizing of conventional linguists, instead privileging those "less superficial authors" who have pointed out the similarity between the words "gothic" and "goetic"—as in the magic Freddie alludes to.[118] Fulcanelli's inventive construction of connections against the grain of aesthetic and naturalistic conventions is similar to surrealism's construction of a contrary tradition. Such a manoeuvre, relating an art-historical current to slang and magic, also says something about Fulcanelli's joyously playful conflation of high and low, sacred and profane, base and refined. Here, the "high" in magic and poetry that Breton seeks does not designate any ascension from the base, but rather indicates their convoluted and co-dependent co-existence.

Likewise, Freddie's written commentary is hardly "high" poetry in any sense, much as he gleefully appeals to demonology rather than to "high" magic. Freddie also takes a knowingly humorous stance towards the imagery he employs. This is reflected in the fact that his high-strung tone appropriates the "initiatic style" of many alchemical manuscripts, which, writes alchemy scholar Lawrence Principe, is characterized by the fact that "the author writes in a self-consciously grand manner, speaking as the master of a closed circle and addressing his readers as postulants."[119] Freddie's commentary, much like many of the iconographic meanings that Fulcanelli reveals, also revels in the interplay of the base and the refined. And similarly to Breton's analysis of Roussel's way of disguising alchemical meaning in the seemingly trivial or fantastic, Freddie veils the erotic in the esoteric, and the other way around, in ways that work as much through imagistic similarity as through homophony or assonance. Freddie's written commentary, then, creates poetic images

that confound and create meaning in ways that can be unpacked according to Fulcanelli's broader hermeneutics. Here, Freddie is also close in approach to Breton's surrealist application of the phonetic cabala as a more general veiling of esoteric content, as in his detection of allusions to alchemically meaningful numbers in Roussel's writings.[120]

On, then, to an examination of some examples of the hermetic cabala as it takes shape in Freddie's commentary to *Eaten Horizons*. A self-explanatory simile can be found in Freddie's explicit description of the naked woman as "an alter [sic] of desire," which pertains to the broader surrealist tendency to treat the female body as an altar. Some of the other literary images are shamelessly obvious, even as they take the shape of metaphors. Freddie's description of the woman's breasts as a port for his "bread-ship" matches the film's imagery of the woman lying down with the loaf of bread between her breasts. The phallic shape of the loaf of bread is here directly equated with the orator's penis. The imagery becomes more complex when Freddie describes iron-clad boots rattling, before: "The chosen one of the night enters with purple-coloured steps into the great room, where the navel is the light in the ceiling, and bread does not stand the light." Through such images, Freddie approaches crucial aspects of the surrealist interest in the connection between language and esotericism, but he does so in a way that is considerably more humorous than solemn. The synesthetic image "purple-coloured steps" brings together ceremonial significance with bawdy humour. Purple is commonly associated with ceremonial magic—but it is also the colour of the erect glans. The steps associated with purple are then, at one and the same time, those of the cloaked initiates entering the ceremonial room, and the male member approaching a whole other sort of metaphorical chamber. For if the great room has a navel, this is not merely a surrealist metaphor for a skylight, but also a literal reference that designates the room a stomach, or, rather, a conflation of the woman's sexual organs and her insides. This interpretation is lent credence by the following paragraph, which states that "the prayer that is uttered is the prayer of a red-hot sword," an unmistakable evocation of a phallic shape driven by sexually aroused eagerness to the point of violence. Freddie's employment of such analogical associations approaches the *double entendre*. They cloak the erotic in the esoteric, and vice versa.

Such an insight into the interrelatedness of the high and the low through unabashedly base analogies makes *Eaten Horizons* appear as a cunningly corporeal take on the hermetic motto, "as above, so below."

It also rhymes well with the American surrealist Franklin Rosemont's remark on the esoteric meaning of wordplay. In an essay on the writer T-Bone Slim's elastic employment of language in the service of puns, he comments:

> We may thus reinterpret Shakespeare's celebrated remark about puns being the lowest form of wit: In the light of Fulcanelli and T-Bone Slim, it would seem that "lowest" here means *deepest*—that is, that word-play penetrates to the *physical* foundations of language. The embarrasment [sic] provoked by puns in "polite" society suggests that they do indeed touch something vital and hidden, as has been amply shown, of course, by psychoanalysis.[121]

In the linguistic transmutations of the phonetic cabala, then, above and below, in all their senses, are no longer antinomies, but interrelated. Low wordplay becomes high magic; the embarrassing baseness of language corresponds with the lower bodily stratum; that which ought to be hidden is brought into the light. The disorienting and enchanting quality of correspondences here assumes a base corporeality. If Baudelaire's "Correspondences" establishes an analogical relation between trees and the pillars of temples, *Eaten Horizons* erects a male member beside them. Freddie, likewise, shows the erotic underbelly of ceremonial esotericism, the lively unconscious of its solemn repertoire, as it were.[122] This approach is an integral part of the surrealist poetics in *Eaten Horizons*, where the "below" of the desiring and opened body is put in reverberating contact with the "above" of high magic.

The Alchemical Imagination

There is a similar carnivalesque dialectic of the base and refined in the visual imagery in *Eaten Horizons*. It can be seen in the lingering close-up of a dirty foot that rests upon a loaf of bread and the brief view of a piss-stained wall outside the gate that leads to the chamber in which the events in the second section of *Eaten Horizons* appear to take place. But it can also be located in a more dynamic fashion in the dislocations and transformations of the loaf of bread in the film. While Freddie's commentary posits the bread to be a metaphor for the male member, in the film its meaning is less stable. Richardson points out that there is a constant play between inside and outside, of the body and the bread alike, in the film.[123] These dynamic operations place the film in the region

of what Gaston Bachelard calls the material imagination. In *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Bachelard describes the dialectic between inside and outside as a fundamental operation within the alchemical imagination. He claims that alchemy often sets to turn substances inside out, and hence: "If you can put the inside on the outside and [the] outside on the inside, says the alchemist, you are a true master."[124] Considering the value placed on alchemy in surrealism at the time, it does not seem far-fetched to detect an alchemical poetics in *Eaten Horizons*, which complements the film's parallels with the hermetic cabala. But it needs to be noted that it is hardly any direct depiction of alchemy that takes place here. For the surrealists, alchemy is not just a set of frivolous imagery to be raided, but, as Bachelard also argues, a potent stimulant of the imagination.[125]

In *Eaten Horizons*, Freddie indeed seems to enact an alchemical process that is in line with his poetics of eroticism, the transmutational goal of which remains unclear. Considered from the perspective of Bachelard's ruminations on the alchemical imagination, however, the mystifying adventures of the loaf of bread take on an added significance. In several instances in *Eaten Horizons*, the bread is illuminated by a bright white light, directed exclusively towards it. This whiteness can be interpreted as a reference to a potential alchemical process. If so, the bread in the film is an enigmatic substance exposed to the first stage of alchemical putrefaction, or *nigredo*. At first, it is caught under a dirty foot and then constantly displaced in the dark interior of a mysterious chamber, but it has a potential for alchemical whitening, the intermediate *albedo* stage where matter is refined. The alchemical soul thus engaged is also bound up with another important observation that Bachelard makes about the alchemical imagination: "When matter is still black, we already imagine, or foretell, a bright whitening."[126]

Bachelard detects an alchemical imagination in the baking of bread, where it guides and structures an intensified appreciation of and intimate proximity to matter.[127] Bread, then, is a highly alchemical food, "a substance composed of three elements: earth, water, and air. It awaits the fourth: fire."[128] He even compares the working of yeast on bread with the swelling of a belly.[129] Since the bread in *Eaten Horizons* is recovered from the woman's body in the regions of her stomach, Bachelard's metaphor points to a metonymic relation between the bread and the body in the film. These material allusions to alchemy can be seen as evidence of a longing for participation in the world in its vivid materiality.[130]

Conceptions of participation point to the capacity for the imagination to afford a more intimate, or magical, relation with the world. That may sound all too bright and benevolent when compared with Freddie's noted emphasis on base corporeality and materiality. But Bachelard's glowing valorization of the material imagination as a path towards love of, and intimacy with, the world in its materiality also leaves room for an insight into the necessary dialectics of the base and refined. He points out that the alchemical "image of material sublimation" points in two directions, and does not so much dissolve but encompass opposites: it is at once rising and descending, a depiction of transformation as well as preservation.[131]

Bachelard's delineation of the imagination's conception of alchemy, then, rhymes well with the process that the bread is exposed to in *Eaten Horizons*: at once dark and white, it ultimately opens in order to spill out the same matter that was found in the woman's body. Thus transformed and preserved at the same time, the loaf of bread becomes a mystifying materialization of a surrealist conception of alchemy as a process bound up with corporeal desire and the imagination's transformation of material reality. Indeed, for Bachelard, the material imagination is intimately bound up with the experience of correspondences: "*Baudelairean correspondences* are based on a profound harmony among material substances. They bring into being one of the greatest *chemistries* of sensations [...]. A Baudelairean correspondence is a powerful locus of the material imagination. At this locus, all 'imaginary substances' commingle and fertilize one another's metaphors."[132] As such, the material imagination acts as a generator of sorts of what Benjamin calls the aura. In *Eaten Horizons*, the aura emerges as an affective, re-enchanting shock even as the film is deeply engaged in modernist disruption and dislocation. If *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* pertains to a sense of disjunctive correspondences between the human and the world, in *Eaten Horizons* the remnants of ritual that Benjamin discerns in correspondences are directed towards a more complex and fluid evocation of what Freddie refers to as the esoteric insight into "the great interconnectedness of all things."

Much like *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, *Eaten Horizons* draws on erotic energies in order to create a corporeal magic art. But here, it largely takes expression through analogically functioning images with esoteric connotations. Surrealists have indeed always valued, and actively brought out, the fantastic and humorous aspects of esoteric

imagery, as evidenced by the playful transformations occult symbols are made to undergo in the works of artists like Brauner, Carrington, and Ernst. Freddie subscribes to a similar attitude in his use of esoteric elements. The priest Freddie aspired to be in relation to his art, then, turns out to rather be a trickster in obscenely purple garb. As much should probably be expected from a surrealist who cheerfully hailed "the anarchist-pornographic revolution."

The Tarot and the *Vis Imaginativa*

The symbol drawn on the hand in *Eaten Horizons* is not just ritualistically connected with the ominous magic circle. By way of the alchemical imagination, it is also connected with the whitening of the bread. Conceived as a reference to the alchemical *albedo* stage, the whitening of the bread alludes to alchemy's philosophical mercury, which in turn is related to the feminine moon. These features are interconnected. As mentioned, earlier scholars have claimed that the two signs drawn on the hand in the first sequence in *Eaten Horizons* are a scorpion and a sun.[133] Upon closer inspection, however, the stylized animal cannot reasonably be a scorpion, since it lacks a tail. It looks more like a crayfish. With that in mind, the "sun" accompanying the crayfish is more likely to be a depiction of a moon. For the crayfish is a central element in the tarot card the Moon, at the bottom of which it crawls out of murky waters, while the moon itself is often depicted with prominent rays similar to those that emanate from the celestial body on the hand in *Eaten Horizons*. Together, the two signs on the hand form a reference to the eighteenth card in the tarot's Major Arcana. Freddie's commentary once again supports this interpretation, since he writes that the ritual enacted by the tarot-painted hand refers to an act of bringing the woman closer to the moon. The whitening of the bread may be understood to be an outcome of this conjuring of the feminine powers of the moon.

In the occultist Arthur Edward Waite's description, the Moon card signifies the life of the imagination as it is set apart from the guiding spirit.[134] The crayfish is central here: it scuttles up from the dank waters as a manifestation of unleashed unconscious forces that threaten to destroy order and reason. The moon itself symbolizes mere reflected light, as opposed to the sun's own luminosity. In Lévi's occultism, the Moon card and the Goetic magic circle pertain to similar dark forces. If the transgressive elements in *Eaten Horizons*—such as the act of love

depicted as a cannibalistic rite—result from the initial ritual, they draw on the forces symbolized by the Moon card and the magic circle. That would indicate that Freddie employs his esoteric references irreverently, in defiance of the tenets of Lévi's occultism. For Lévi, the imagination needs to be guarded to ensure that it does not call forth disastrous elements: "To preserve ourselves against evil influences, the first condition is therefore to forbid excitement to the imagination," he writes.[135] It is easy to see why a mischievous surrealist like Freddie, indeed surrealism overall, would turn the signifiers of an excited imagination against such a strict doctrine. But Freddie's appeal to demons and the Moon card does not just oppose Lévi's metaphysical distinction between good and evil forms of imagination. It also means that *Eaten Horizons* departs from the ideals put forward by both Breton and Freddie himself, and so relates in an uneasy and troubling way to the surrealist search for a new myth. This difference is notable when comparing the reference to the Moon card in *Eaten Horizons* with other surrealist uses of the tarot from the time.

The staircase in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* that paired twenty-one cards from the tarot's Major Arcana with spines of books grafted esoteric symbolism to surrealist precursors like Baudelaire and Sade, as well as more recent discoveries in the form of Swedenborg and Johann Valentin Andreae, the presumed author of the Rosicrucian alchemical manuscript *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*. The tarot, here, imparted a sense of the occult and of initiatory progress to the very edifice of surrealism. But surrealists have also employed the tarot to more specific symbolic ends, which seem to clash with Freddie's call on the demonic. Breton's *Arcanum 17*, his most sustained probing of the ideas that would feed into *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, refers to the seventeenth card in the Major Arcana, the Star card, which depicts a woman standing with one foot in the water and one on land, pouring the contents of two jugs into the water and onto land, respectively. In Breton's interpretation, the Star signifies replenishment and rebirth, and he connects it with Victor Hugo's valorization of Lucifer.[136] Rather than evoking Lucifer for his demonic qualities, however, Breton now appeals to him in his guise as the morning star, whose light designates a revolt guided by a black luminosity to counter the all too bright sheen of the Enlightenment. The Star card, then, becomes the radiant centre around which Breton weaves his construction of a counter-myth.[137] Against salvation and resurrection bound for a heavenly realm, he posits rebirth as an outcome of an initiatory transformation of being. Osiris, the Egyptian god who was torn

apart, put together, and related with the seasonal rhythms of the Nile land's black soil, counters the Western tradition of transcendence emanating from Christ. Another example is Victor Brauner's 1947 painting, *The Surrealist*. Brauner here transforms the Magician, the first card of the Major Arcana, into a figure embodying the ideals of the surrealist artist as a magician of sorts. In art historian Daniel Zamani's interpretation, Brauner's *Surrealist* is "an almost utopian display of cosmic harmony."[138] Brauner's interest in the tarot then emerges as a similarly benign vehicle for reintegration in the aftermath of the war.

Freddie's use of the tarot in *Eaten Horizons*, then, diverges considerably from Breton's and Brauner's references to the tarot. Yet, it would be too easy to claim that Freddie thereby constitutes an example of an unwitting discrepancy between surrealist ideals and practice. Surrealist films, poems, or plastic works are not meant to tautologically illustrate or represent ideals put forth in theoretical texts. They need to be seen as experimental interventions in a given field of ideas, stimulating interpretations and new thought rather than conforming to preconceived notions. As W.J.T. Mitchell points out, poetic images, whether literary, still, or moving, cannot be reduced to ideas—they exceed discursive thinking.[139] Or as the symbologist René Alleau puts it, poetic images cannot be reduced to *logos*, or rationalist discourse.[140] Considered as an intervention in the surrealist search for a new myth, *Eaten Horizons* then needs to be experienced in its ritualistic totality. It is also this experiential aspect that places it in the broader position of magic art. Marcel Mauss describes how the magical properties of an object are bound up with an element in them that "plays the role of a sort of embryonic myth or rite."[141]

Much like the altars at *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, then, *Eaten Horizons* is lent its mythical potential through the interplay of polyvalent meaning, which emanates from its combination of a skeletal, enigmatic narrative and rich imagery, condensed into a dynamic symbolism. Alleau defines the symbolic function as inseparable from the non-rational and "non-human powers to which myths and rites link the human being, reunifying *anthropos* and cosmos by the power of the logos that here is not *language*, but *verb* and *speech* resurrected (re-created) beyond the cultural and social sense of the words of the tribe."[142] For Alleau, when the symbolizing powers of the imagination are free from being reduced to utilitarian, doctrinaire purposes, they exceed rationalism in an analogically associative plenitude of contradictory affects and meanings, linking

the human to the flows of life and extrahuman creativity in an immanent universe.

Eaten Horizons does not, then, so much contradict as intervene in the surrealist probing of a new myth. For if the film negates Lévi's caution against excitement of the imagination, it evokes a reintegrating surrealist myth. Its seemingly fraught relation with the immediate post-war surrealist ideas of art as a means towards a utopian rebirth, then, appears to be a more complicated proposition. Some aspects of this problem can be elucidated by turning to surrealism's relation to the esoteric notion of the *vis imaginativa*. As Antoine Faivre explains, the *vis imaginativa* can be "understood as an ability to act upon Nature," and the term hence designates the esoteric understanding of the imagination as being capable of altering the world by creating new conceptualizations of it.[143] Faivre discusses the Renaissance physician and esotericist Paracelsus's notion of the imagination in terms that are illuminating for surrealism's affinities with esotericism:

> Desire and thought incarnate in the image which, once formed, serves as a mold for the soul that pours itself into it, which manifests itself in it. *The imagination functions as a seed*; the images that our soul produces are not the simple modification of this soul, but body, incarnation, thought, and will; they become autonomous and then develop according to their own laws, like the children that we conceive. To conceive is to engender; every concept is organic […].[144]

A few years after *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Breton conceived the workings of all surrealist acts of the imagination in similarly organic terms. Surrealist creation, he claims in "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," is equivalent to the occult operation in which "the name must germinate."[145] Yet, Faivre finds the connections between surrealism and esotericism contradictory. On the one hand, he contends that surrealism compares favourably with the *vis imaginativa* when considering Breton's notion that "the imaginary is that which tends to become real," and his belief that analogy can restore lost connections with the world. But on the other hand, Faivre points out that surrealism's lack of grounding in a fixed religious myth puts it at a critical distance from the esoteric view of the imagination. The esotericists Faivre references, much like Lévi, adhere to an idiosyncratic interpretation of Christianity, and they distinguish between two kinds of imagination: "the true, creative in the noble

sense, which creates works but can also call forth things magically, and the false, the inauthentic and sterile that is sometimes capable of begetting real and concrete monsters."[146] While the esoteric *vis imaginativa* lauds the creative and magical potential of the imagination, it also builds on deeply ingrained Western fears of its negative powers.[147] In line with Lévi's urge for caution, the imagination ought then not to be liberated, but constrained and cultivated according to moral dictates.

The surrealist attitude is, however, more complicated than Faivre's demarcation suggests. Breton makes it abundantly clear in "Ascendant Sign" that he considers poetic analogy an ethical means to strive for increased well-being and a more constructive relation with the surrounding world.[148] While Faivre is right in claiming that surrealism lacks grounding in a pre-established myth, the new myth it sought to cultivate is nevertheless founded on strong ethical convictions. The surrealist myth can be posited as a counter-moral that seeks to dispense with religious morality in order to create what the 1947 tract "Inaugural Rupture" describes as a "non-Moses morality," or what Breton suggests is an ethics arising out of an imaginative and intimate interaction with the surrounding world.[149] This moral underpinning to the surrealist new myth is apparent in *Arcanum 17*, in which Breton pleas for a reversal of the poles of Western culture, as means to locate some form of hope for humanity.[150] With that said, surrealism does also have a gleeful penchant for calling forth monsters through the imagination. Consider the assemblage of piano and rotting donkeys and priests that forms one of the centrepieces in *Un chien andalou*, the animal-headed creatures that enchant and disrupt Max Ernst's collages, or Hans Bellmer's libidinal reconfigurations of the body in the various iterations of his uncanny *Doll*. Alongside Freddie's films, these examples suggest that the surrealist liberation of the imagination is integral and transcends the distinction between the monstrous and the marvellous—here, the monstrous is the marvellous. That did not stop with the horrors of the war, no matter how much the surrealists sought to direct healing powers through the attempt to form a new myth. Even if the surrealists believed the new myth to be a possible way towards a renewal and rebirth under the sign of more wholesome values, they nevertheless perceived it was necessary to give the imagination free rein. Even the imagination's monstrous products could contribute to the new myth. To reiterate, it is imperative to distinguish between programmatic expressions of the intended effect of the new myth, and the artistic investigations of its "contours."

What kind of new myth, then, might take shape in *Eaten Horizons*? The meeting of the tarot Moon card and the Goetic magic circle suggests that it is a myth of the unfettered imagination, but one that is fraught with ritual and magic, not to mention eroticism. The ritualized drawing of the magic circle appears to awaken something in the fettered woman. The connection between the first and the second sequence in the film is, then, presumably precisely this awakening of an unfettered Eros, and the ritualistic atmosphere of a mythically secluded space in the second sequence appears to be a consequence of the unfettering that precedes it. Hence, the myth is also that of an Eros unrestrained by the laws of time and space, and even the boundaries of the body. There is a cruelty at work here, too, a fascination with sexual transgression, that aligns the film with the surrealist cult of the Marquis de Sade. One sign of surrealism's persistent interest in Sade is the fact that his novel *The 120 Days of Sodom* was one of the books in the tarot staircase at *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Thus, even the exhibition that is the most direct manifestation of surrealism's wish to mend the ravages of the war through a more benign rebirth recognizes the fundamental necessity to allow the freedom to imagine the most monstrous acts.

In the wake of the postmodern re-evaluation of surrealism, such monstrous expressions have often been considered evidence of artists being closer in spirit to the "dissident" surrealists around Georges Bataille than the "mainstream" surrealists gravitating around Breton.[151] But such a dualism is both ahistorical and simplified. It is ahistorical, since it is based on a development that took place in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Bataille and Breton raged against each other in pamphlets and manifestoes. By the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Bataille and Breton had been reconciled. If they continued to disagree intensely with each other on certain points, they would also be preoccupied with many similar questions.[152] The dualism of Bataille and Breton is simplistic because it interprets the surrealist watchwords "love, liberty, and poetry" all too literally.[153] Again, such ideals should not be confused with a proscriptive statement about the "content" of surrealist films, artworks, or writings. Nor should it be taken to imply that the surrealists did not recognize the necessity of acknowledging and drawing on the darker undercurrents of desire.[154] In his *Conversations* with André Parinaud, Breton clarifies that the surrealist exaltation of love always recognizes the necessary dialectic between purity and perversion, and that "it's this dialectical process that made Sade's genius shine for them like a black sun."[155] If love were only

to stay in the high domains, Breton says, it would become "rarefied." He continues:

> Such a flame's admirable, blinding light must not be allowed to conceal what it feeds on, the deep mine shafts criss-crossed by hellish currents, which nonetheless permit us to extract its substance—a substance that must continue to fuel this flame if we don't want it to go out. It's because Surrealism started from this viewpoint that it has made such an effort to lift the taboos that bar us from freely treating the sexual world, and *all* of the sexual world, perversions included [...].[156]

In the light of Breton's statement, then, *Eaten Horizons* may be construed as a myth of the unfettered imagination and its relationship with eroticism, which it fuels by imagining new constellations of desire. But the surrealist new myth does not merely work through such narrative crystallizations. It is also intended to foster a certain sensibility; the rebirth the surrealists sought for society was meant to liberate analogical thinking. For surrealism, though, the poetic experience has primacy over doctrine, and it is rather an experiential magic that is at stake than an initiation into a "form of thought."[157]

To this end, Freddie's approach to the tarot is significant. If his ritualized evocation of the monstrous imagination signified by the Moon card goes against the grain of Lévi's occultism, this also rhymes well with the surrealist artist and esotericism expert Kurt Seligmann's criticism of the occultist appropriation of the tarot. Seligmann considers the attempt to tie the tarot to an "esoteric doctrine" to be outright "antitarotic," since the occultists "lack a virtue found in some Tarot cards, namely humour and irony."[158] Seligmann's analysis of the function of the tarot is pertinent in this context:

> The Tarot figures are stereotypes; but what they suggest is in constant flux. They do not express or lead to an established doctrine. On the contrary, they liberate us from such bonds. [...] they free faculties in us which are suppressed by conventions and daily routine. They stimulate a creative power which appeals to the artist. They are the "poetry made by all" of the surrealist postulate.[159]

In line with Seligmann's definition, Freddie plays dialectically on the tarot card's symbolic value in order to generate a myth of the unfettered surrealist imagination. But the playful and oblique fashion in which he

references the Moon card also dissociates it from programmatic, doctrinaire meaning, much like his references to the magic circle and his playful approach to ceremonial magic. It does not necessarily need to be decoded in order to communicate, but may as well stimulate the spectator's imagination. The symbolic meaning here is further destabilized in this manner through the editing, the pace and connections of which places it in a disorienting relationship with the Goetic magic circle, with the fettered female body, and with the abrupt transition to the stylistically more diverse and over-determined second sequence.

Freddie's use of the tarot can then be summed up as one where it is simultaneously valorized for its analogical stimulation of the imagination and for its potential to act as an open symbolism, as it were, that can suggest a dynamic framework for a new myth. This argument once again draws attention to the fact that Freddie's films relate to the new myth in a dual manner. They are suggestive of its symbolic functioning, and can hence be seen as seeds of myths of a more integrated human relation with the world, of a counter-force against Christian-capitalist repression, and of the unfettered imagination's absolute freedom to transform the world. But they also point towards its complementary function as a catalyst of experiential magic, and thus strive towards the function of triggering correspondences and enable a more intimate experience of the surrounding world, beyond the chasm yawning between subject and object that Freddie and other surrealists perceived as a characteristic of Western modernity. In this, much like Freddie's radio talk, his films suggest that surrealism tries to recover "participation." In Wouter Hanegraaff's revision of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's concept, participation signifies a perennial capacity for analogical thinking and the experience of a deeper unity with the surrounding world. For Hanegraaff, this would explain how "magic" can survive in a supposedly disenchanted modernity, in which not even the practitioners of magic disavow positivist causality.[160] Significantly, Hanegraaff points out that contemporary magical practice "reflects a deep-seated feeling that, somehow, the language of myth and poetry is more than just beautiful, but must convey something about the real nature of the world."[161] Surrealism sought precisely such a function for myth, and in Freddie's films this ambition takes a convoluted expression, which nevertheless points to both the narrative function of myth and to its underlying function of restoring a lost sensibility, of fostering a new sensorium in which perception and the imagination are intertwined.

The Afterlife of the New Myth

Freddie's participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* launched him into his esoteric period and transformed his view of art as well as of society. The idea, fostered by the exhibition, that art can have the function of magic and stimulate the emergence of new myths stayed with him long after he considered his esoteric period to have ended.[162] Læssøe quotes two interviews from 1963, in which Freddie sticks closely to the surrealist ideals of creating a new social myth and of the artwork as a carrier of magic energies that can intervene in the relationship between the human and the world.[163] As late as 1984, Freddie related that he was "still pre-occupied by—esoteric phenomena. That is to say, things that lie on the other side of reason. When I think of the Cabalist texts it is as if—when you penetrate deeply into them—they turn out to be a negotiable path to the deepest layers in man."[164] A telling example of the entwinement of esotericism and Freddie's construction of an identity as artist-magician can be found in an untitled collage from 1959. In it, he combines two photographs of himself, one of his head and shoulders and the other of his legs, so that the torso vanishes and his body appears to be just head, shoulders, legs, and feet. On his feet and shins are drawn geometrical symbols, a waning moon, and a dot. Karen Westphal Eriksen describes the figure as "a subtle, armless mythical creature" and Freddie "as a magician or alchemist with esoteric signs on his feet and a third eye in his forehead."[165]

It is hard not to relate this self-mythologization to Freddie's earlier positing of his films as interventions in the surrealist search for a new myth informed by recovered esoteric knowledge. With *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons*, Freddie temporarily substituted film camera and celluloid for paint and canvas, but he used them to enact a similar alchemical operation, where reality is transformed by the imagination and forms magical objects. The films' magical effect may not have been strong enough for them to replace the old societal foundations with a new myth. Nonetheless, they stand as vibrant film examples of a period in surrealism that may have been marginalized, but still resonates within surrealist practice up to the present.

Freddie shared the experience of exile with a number of surrealists of different nationalities. Like so many of them, it was precisely during such a period of upheaval and unrest that he became particularly receptive to myth and esotericism. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron provides some

productive suggestions as to how the experience of exile may play a part in such a development. She argues that exile was not merely an exterior voyage for the surrealists during the war, but that it also had a strong interior component, which means that it can be likened to an initiatory passage.[166] The next chapter, too, treats films that were made in direct extension of the central themes of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, but it puts greater emphasis on the transformations that the movement underwent as a consequence of these experiences of exile, and draws attention to the significant influx of non-Western participants in the movement.

Notes

1. Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 248.
2. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 2.
3. Freddie's written commentary was first published in Danish in the Swedish film journal *Biografbladet*, as a supplement to an essay on the film by Steen Colding. See Colding, "Spiste horisonter," 49. Freddie's text was reprinted, accompanied by an English translation, in the 1962 volume *Wilhelm Freddie*. See Freddie, "Eaten Horizons."
4. Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 96; Breton, "Fronton-Virage," 185.
5. Béguin, "Poetry and Occultism," 20.
6. Ibid. See also Eliade, *The Quest*, 123.
7. Bachelard, "Victor-Emile Michelet" (1954), in *The Right to Dream*, 143.
8. Raben-Skov, Rung, and Aagesen, "Biography," 219; Krarup and Nørrested, *Eksperimentalfilm i Danmark*, 25–28.
9. Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 138–140.
10. For overviews, see Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*; Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye"; Schmidt, *Wilhelm Freddie – den evige oprører*.
11. Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 123–131.
12. See Caws, "Againstness Wins out"; Bolt, "Freddie's Avant-Garde Strategies"; Pierre, "Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l'humour noir."
13. "en fanatiker, en anarkist, med bomber i fickan." Adrian-Nilsson, "Kubism–Surrealism," 17. Three decades later, Edouard Jaguer praised Freddie for his continued insolence. See Jaguer, "Chocken från den elektriska bågens pilar," 4–5.
14. Raben-Skov, Rung, and Aagesen, "Biography," 219.
15. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 69; Bolt, "Freddie's Avant-Garde Strategies," 130.
16. See Gade, "All That We Do Not Know," 114–116.
17. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 69–70.
18. Ibid., 118–120.

19. See ibid., 126–137; Schmidt, *Wilhelm Freddie – den evige oprører*, 38–41.
20. See Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 33–34; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 139–175.
21. See Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 95–96. See also LaCoss, "Attacks of the Fantastic."
22. See Pierre, "Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l'humour noir," 25–29.
23. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
24. Raben-Skov, Rung, and Aagesen, "Biography," 219.
25. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
26. Freddie, "Eaten Horizons."
27. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
28. Freddie, "Eaten Horizons."
29. Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 248.
30. Parts of the letter are published in Breton, "Projet initial." For the letter in its entirety, see Breton, "Lettre d'invitations aux participants" (1947), André Breton archive, http://www.andrebreton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100837330.
31. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 141.
32. See ibid., 139ff.
33. Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 33; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 143.
34. "påvirket af sådanne indviede trosretninger og tankesystemer, som blandt andet udgjordes af astrologien og alkymien." Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 139.
35. For a discussion of Lam's altar, see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 126.
36. See Péret, "Une contribution," 139–140.
37. See also Pierre Mabille's discussion of Lam's painting *The Jungle* (1943); Mabille, "The Jungle."
38. Compare this with the assertion that religion was born out of play in Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 14.
39. See Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 89–90; Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 126.
40. Warlick, "Surrealism and Alchemy," 167. To Warlick's analysis, I would like to add a significant detail: the bird-headed High Priestess figure's open tome displays a pair of scissors, which point to Ernst's status as the prime exponent of collage for surrealist purposes. Here, his famed utilization of destructive cutting in the service of a surrealist poetics is rendered mythical by insertion in the holy book held by the surrealist High Priestess. As such, Brauner's painting adds new and subtle layers to the mythologization of surrealism and of the surrealist artist's harnessing of magical powers of creation, transmutation, and revelation.
41. Raben-Skov, "Biografi," in *Freddie*, 95.
42. Semin, "Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Movement," 38.

43. Ibid., 38–39; Montagne, "The Myth of the Double."
44. "en slags mentalt rum af fantastisk andethed." Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 146.
45. Ibid.
46. See Holten, *Surrealismen i svensk konst*, 126–128. For overviews of Imaginisterna, see Holten, *Surrealismen i svensk konst*, 125–165; Mezei, "Imaginisterna," 11–15; Millroth, *CO Hultén*, 46–49.
47. Two texts in the exhibition catalogue discuss the surrealist myth to come. See Laaban, n.t.; Hellman, n.t.
48. For a more extensive discussion of the exhibition, see Noheden, "Expo Aleby, 1949."
49. "någon förståsigpåare." Kriland, "Oprør," 32.
50. "Det kändes litet högtidligt." Ibid.
51. "pang-pang och puss-puss." Ibid., 33.
52. Ibid., 32.
53. See Breton, "As in a Wood," 238–239; Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*, 100; Hammond, "Available Light," 6; Wimmer, "The French Reception of British Cinema," 167, 172.
54. Laaban, n.t., n.p.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. "i det spänt militantas tecken." Laaban, "Den tidige Freddie," 11.
58. Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 244.
59. Ibid., 248.
60. Ibid., 244
61. Ibid., 245.
62. Ibid., 244.
63. Ibid., 246.
64. Ibid., 246–247.
65. Ibid., 248.
66. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 156.
67. Ibid., 159.
68. Bataille, "Mouth" (1930), in *Visions of Excess*, 59–60.
69. See Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, 232.
70. "ikke så fiktive 'liv'." Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 167.
71. "Jeg ønskede at skabe et 'gudebillede', en magisk seksuel ritus. Med andre ord en magisk operation." Quoted in ibid., 75.
72. Ibid.
73. "pornografiske billede end med hvad man traditionelt forstår ved kunst." Ibid.
74. See Breton, "As in a Wood," 238.
75. See Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 181.

76. See Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, 180–181.
77. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 181.
78. Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 13.
79. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 181.
80. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 192.
81. Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 154.
82. Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge," 140.
83. Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 244.
84. "opération magique supérieur, d'un rite sublime dont Freddie s'est fait l'officiant masqué." Benayoun, "Une boulimie de l'absolu," 73.
85. Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 147.
86. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 160–162; Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 144.
87. All quotes and references to the written commentary are to Freddie, "Eaten Horizons."
88. Laaban, "Den tidige Freddie," 9.
89. "livsfarliga geometri." Ibid., 11.
90. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 183–184.
91. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 299. A similar magic circle, here described as a "triangle of the pacts," is also reproduced in another of the surrealists' sources of knowledge of occultism; see Grillot de Givry, *Witchcraft, Alchemy, and Magic*, 106. For the surrealists' familiarity with this book, see Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 94.
92. *The Goetia*, 27–66.
93. Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 145.
94. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 186–188, quote on 187.
95. Breton, *Mad Love*, 95.
96. See Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 10.
97. Fijalkowski, "From Sorcery to Silence," 627.
98. Luca, *The Passive Vampire*, 93.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. "une analogie provocante et sacrilège entre le corps de la femme aimée." Pierre, "Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l'humour noir," 29.
102. Fijalkowski, "From Sorcery to Silence," 627.
103. Ibid., 626n5.
104. Ibid., 634.
105. Luca, *The Passive Vampire*, 44.
106. See Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton*, 120–121.
107. See Balakian, *Surrealism*, 146.
108. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 184.
109. Leiris, "Glossary: My Glosses Ossuary" (1925), in *Brisées*, 3–4.

110. Breton, “Fronton-Virage,” 185.
111. Compare this with Breton’s declaration that “language has been given to man so that he may make Surrealist use of it,” in Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 32.
112. See ibid., 26–27.
113. See Ford, *Raymond Roussel and the Republic of Dreams.*
114. Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 3–44.
115. Breton, “Fronton-Virage,” 188ff.
116. See Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère de Cathédrales*, 42.
117. Principe, *Secrets of Alchemy*, 143–144.
118. Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*, 42.
119. Principe, *Secrets of Alchemy*, 45.
120. Breton, “Fronton-Virage,” 191–195.
121. Rosemont, “T-Bone Slim and the Phonetic Cabala,” 23.
122. As Wouter Hanegraaff and Jeffrey Kripal point out, esotericism and eroticism are also often conflated in the public imagination, due to their shared nature of secrecy, and these associations sometimes correspond to actual erotic components of esoteric practice and theory. See Kripal and Hanegraaff, “Introduction.” Freddie, then, plays on these associations, but the imagery in his commentary also pertains to the surrealists’ ever-present emphasis on desire.
123. Richardson, “The Density of a Smile,” 146.
124. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 16.
125. Ibid.
126. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 265.
127. Ibid.
128. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 65.
129. Ibid., 66.
130. Ibid., 251.
131. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 264.
132. Ibid., 50.
133. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 162; Richardson, “The Density of a Smile,” 144. Læssøe only mentions the scorpion.
134. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*, 70.
135. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 333.
136. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 131–132
137. Ibid., 109–121, 161–163.
138. Zamani, “The Magician Triumphant,” 108.
139. Mitchell, *Iconology*, 41–42.
140. Alleau, *The Primal Force in Symbol*, 41.
141. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 127. See also Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*, 129ff.

142. Alleau, *The Primal Force in Symbol*, 50.
143. Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 99.
144. Ibid., 103. My italics.
145. Breton, "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," 299. Italics removed.
146. Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 124.
147. See Huet, *Monstrous Imagination.*
148. Breton, "Ascendant Sign," 107.
149. Acker, "Inaugural Rupture," 48.
150. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 80–81.
151. For a discussion of Freddie and Bataille, see Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 45–55.
152. See Richardson, "Introduction," in Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, 1–3.
153. See Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 16.
154. See Le Brun, "Desire," 308.
155. Breton, *Conversations*, 111.
156. Ibid.
157. Compare this with Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 11–15.
158. Seligmann, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion*, 391.
159. Ibid.
160. See Breton, "On Magic Art," 293–294; Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science*, 63–66.
161. Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," 377.
162. Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye!," 33, 35.
163. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 203.
164. Quoted in Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye!," 35.
165. Eriksen, "Freddie and Photography," 172.
166. Chénieux-Gendron, "Surrealists in Exile," 439.

CHAPTER 3

Initiation into the New Myth: Primitivism and Poetics in the Surrealist Documentary Film

"The circle of fire in which scorpions kill themselves animates Nature. It is the wheel of life eternally turning. Mankind, 'those whose desires are shaped by the heavens,' consult it for life and immortality."[1] The opening voice-over in the documentary film *L'Invention du monde* is accompanied by black-and-white imagery of violent solar flares. It soon fades into a close-up of an intricate pattern, which depicts elements from Egyptian cosmology adorning a wooden plate. From there on, the images fade swiftly into one another. They shift between representations, both moving and still, of natural scenery—earth dried out and cracked by exposure to the sun, the folds of a seabed shaped by the unrelenting motions of the ocean—and depictions of animals painted on or carved into rock faces, of less naturalistic creatures called forth from the depths of stones, and a whole array of objects and figures charged with symbolic, mythical, and magical meaning. The narration initially appears to be almost as mercurial as the visual flux. It is read by nine different voices, and the plurality emphasizes the shifting facets of the myths that are unfolding. But eventually a thematic structure takes shape. By fixing the image of his prey in stone, man affirms his power, one narrator relates early on, as rock carvings of animals flit past. More than an urge towards taming the world, these depictions, the film suggests, are evidence of humanity's ability to refigure its image of nature and the world according to its own desire. Man "transposes the universe into a world of signs and symbols that establish a direct link between himself and the unknown powers that he wishes to appease," through myths, images,

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and artefacts. In this way, humanity makes the world habitable. Through the depiction of numerous ordeals, these myths, the film claims, also serve to award insight into the mysteries of life and death. Here, the interrelation between reality and the products of the human imagination is playfully explored. This invention of the world is construed as a multi-faceted magic.

L'Invention du monde was an unusual collaboration, conceived in the midst of the Paris surrealist group's post-war activities and filmed between 1950 and 1953. The film was directed by the surrealist newcomers Jean-Louis Bédouin and Michel Zimbacca, with a script by the first-generation surrealist poet Benjamin Péret. Their work together also spawned the companion short film, *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*. Other members of the surrealist group were also involved in the production of the films. Jean Schuster and Georges Goldfayn worked as assistants, while André Breton, Man Ray, and Jean-Jacques Brunius provided the filmmakers with access to objects and documents from their collections, as did surrealist associate Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Much like Wilhelm Freddie's films, *L'Invention du monde* and *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé* are under the spell of the search for a new myth, and in particular the role of magic and marvellous renewal in surrealism's change in direction. In *L'Invention du monde*, a collage-like juxtaposition of images of "primitive" objects and artworks are overlaid with Péret's narration, which interweaves extracts of various myths with explication on the human imagination's crucial role in rendering the world meaningful. *L'Invention du monde,* then, uses an array of myths and a dizzying constellation of "primitive" art to explore myth's function of giving renewed meaning to the world. In the form of an essayistic documentary, the film builds on interwar surrealism's interaction with ethnography and its lively appreciation, exhibition, and theorization of "primitive" art, which it turned against the strictures of Western aesthetics and societal organization. In line with post-war surrealism's changing priorities, *L'Invention du monde*, however, redirects these preoccupations and mobilizes them into a visual and verbal constellation of a "new myth" charged with esoteric undercurrents. The film, then, seems to strive towards the 1947 ambition to "giv[e] shape to a few *haloed beings or objects*," bound up with a kaleidoscopic synthesis of myths with an initiatic significance.[2]

L'Invention du monde above all depends on the presumed force and importance of non-Western art and objects in its construction of myth.

That calls for further attention to the crucial role played by "primitive" art and anthropological notions of magic in the surrealist change in direction. As it is manifested in Bédouin and Zimbacca's two films, the tentative surrealist myth appears to be inseparable from the movement's primitivist leanings. The surrealist fascination with the "primitive," however, diverges sharply from that of many other modernist and avant-garde movements.[3] It is not least complicated by the fact that it is intimately bound up with the surrealists' anti-colonial activities.[4] The surrealist attitude towards the "primitive" was also undergoing significant transformations in this era, as a result of several surrealists' experience of forced exile, as well as the increased participation of non-Western, non-white people in the movement.[5] *L'Invention du monde* can be said to exemplify Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's contention that the exchange between the West and its others has always gone in both directions, thus undermining simplistic aesthetic as well as intellectual divisions and hierarchies.[6]

This chapter traces the manifestations of surrealist myth and magic in *L'Invention du monde*, with a view to its twin *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*. The question of primitivism and the exchange with surrealism's non-Western others underlies much of the chapter. While this is not the place for a definite discussion of these complex issues, I seek to address them in a way that provides a useful context for the films. The films' status as documentaries and their position in the Paris surrealist group's engagement with film at the time is also significant for their treatment of these topics. The films' relation to and invocation of magic takes shape through its proximity to surrealist notions of the magic inherent in the "primitive" artworks and myths that they feature. But they also evoke magic as an effect of the juxtaposition of different imagery, verbal references to myth, and music, in which montage takes on the character of correspondences. Finally, their narratives adhere to the marvellous conceived as a realm of mythical and initiatic significance, fraught with a capacity for magical transformation of the world.

Reconfiguring the Past

As largely collective efforts, *L'Invention du monde* and *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé* are, in the first instance, products of the environment of the Paris surrealist group. The films are also directly rooted in Péret's investigations into the poetic nature and function of myth and

image-making, which took shape during his extended stays in first Brazil in the 1920s and then Mexico during World War II.[7] Initially renowned for his automatic writing, Péret was now a fervent contributor to surrealism's explorations of the links between the marvellous, myth, and "primitive" thought. His inquests into myth both drew on and fed into Pierre Mabille's esoteric-mythological redefinition of the marvellous and Breton's attempts to outline a new myth. Péret's contributions to *Le Surréalisme en 1947* are also informed by his thought on the workings of myth. He suggested several unorthodox ideas for the votive offerings and nourishment placed at the altars in the exhibition, affording a surrealist twist to the pagan predecessors they were modelled on.[8] He also contributed the essay "Le sel répandu" to the exhibition catalogue, in which he suggests a number of new superstitions to replace the old ones, which Péret contends are too often informed by Christian morals. His new superstitions are blasphemous, blackly humorous, and directed against the police, the Church, and other pillars of the social order: "If you see a flag, turn away and spit to conjure the bad omen"; "When you go past a police station, sneeze loudly to avoid misfortune"; "Nailing consecrated wafers to the bathroom walls should bring good luck."[9]

Péret's narration for *L'Invention du monde*, however, invents new myths in a different way. Stitching together extracts from his extensive research into myth, Péret employs a combinatory method that is similar to the 1947 outline of a new myth conducted through constellations of shards and fragments. The film both narrates and reflects upon this new intertextual myth. Péret's approach to myth is also an extension of his theoretical writings on the marvellous.[10] His programmatic essay, "Magic: The Flesh and Blood of Poetry," is central among these. It was first published as a pamphlet titled *La Parole est à Péret* in 1943, but was always intended to be the preface to a large anthology of American myths, which was only published posthumously in 1960.[11] In it, Péret argues that there is a profound similarity between surrealism and "primitive" thinking, since they are united in a poetic, as opposed to rational-scientific, comprehension of the world.[12] "Primitive" art of the kind on display in *L'Invention du monde* filled a similar function for Péret. Kent Dickson points out that, for Péret, indigenous American art functioned "as documents of culture analogous to the myths he was then collecting."[13] These objects functioned as documents of an approach to art charged with myth and magic, while at the same time

re-enchanting in their alterity.[14] Myth, "primitive" objects, and surrealism, here, all stand as examples of the marvellous, and Péret claims that such true poetry, whatever historical and formal expression it takes, is rooted in magic.[15] "Magic: The Flesh and Blood of Poetry," as well as writings on similar themes by Péret, contain the germs that developed into the ever-swirling constellation of myths and images in *L'Invention du monde*.[16] Péret's position on these issues intersects with the ideas that fed into *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, but his research into myth and his ruminations on "primitive" thought are also part of the longstanding surrealist interaction with ethnography. As such, it shows how the post-war surrealist change in direction also entailed a reformulation and new conception of interests that had been central for the movement during the interwar period.

Surrealism is never explicitly mentioned in *L'Invention du monde*, but its focus on the imagination's interaction with the world roots the film in a surrealist outlook. That is apparent, too, when the narration, anachronistically, proclaims spirits and gods to be "forces of your unconscious, with which you have peopled the world." The film's invocation of a poetic spark that flits from object to object, region to region also recalls Breton's formulation in the 1948 essay "The Lamp in the Clock" that:

> A beam of light remained, moving from the lid of a sarcophagus to a Peruvian pot, to a tablet from Easter Island, keeping alive the idea that the *spirit* that animated those civilizations one after another is to some extent shielded from the process of destruction that keeps piling material ruins behind us.[17]

Breton wrote "The Lamp in the Clock" in despair over the destruction wrought by humanity, and he detects a glimmer of hope in the idea that a poetic spirit, no matter how occulted it is in the present, still lingers alive somewhere.

The critique put forth in surrealist writings from this time mirrors surrealism's early vehement view that "[w]herever Western civilisation reigns, all human attachment but that motivated by self-interest has ceased."[18] Breton laments the fact that "the primordial links are broken," Mabille sees humanity's estrangement from the world as a consequence of the stranglehold that religion and convention holds on the marvellous, while Péret denigrates "demythologization" and the

one-dimensional privileging of reason for separating humanity from fuller relations with the world.[19] But at this juncture, the surrealist reaction against such a crisis is more suffused than ever with a conviction that it can be countered with mythical and magical approaches. Breton asserts that the primordial links can be restored through poetic analogy, with its capacity to give "brief flashes from the lost mirror."[20] Mabille considers the marvellous an ever-present possibility to be uncovered and grasped.[21] For Péret, the rule of reason needs to be overthrown, and unconscious and conscious thought be reintegrated in order for Western moderns to once again establish that poetic understanding of the world that he detects in the myths and art of "primitive" people.[22] Surrealism, then, turns to repressed and arcane knowledge in order to find ways in which to resuscitate poetry in a disenchanted civilization. Here, the movement adheres to a radical romantic strategy of taking a detour to the past on the way to a utopian future, intended not so much to "to re-create what had been lost, but to gain an insight into it."[23]

L'Invention du monde exemplifies a similar strategy to synthesize fragments of the past into a multifaceted evocation of the surrealist marvellous in its guise of a force of renewal with a presumed utopian potential. J.H. Matthews suggests that, ultimately, *L'Invention du monde* is about the surrealist hope of creating a better, more liveable, world through the active interplay of the imagination and external reality, as it takes shape in myths and symbols.[24] The co-director Jean-Louis Bédouin considers the film's main merit the fact that it manifests "the relationship between surrealist thought and 'the vision of the world of so-called "un-civilized" or "primitive" peoples'."[25] He explains that *L'Invention du monde* did not have a conventional script. Instead, the interplay between the images was structured associatively and analogically, presumably in the editing phase. Hence, Matthews writes, "we are invited to participate in the analogical play in which surrealist poets so often ask us to join." He considers these aims to both undermine the stability of human perception of the quotidian, and to unveil a vision of the world hidden from the eyes of Western moderns.[26] The film's overarching strategies for stimulating such new experiential structures depend on a creative configuration of documents, from images of objects through collected myths to field recordings. *L'Invention du monde* is indeed part of the longstanding surrealist tendency towards documentary depictions that has found expression both in and outside film, often in relation to ethnography.

Surrealism and Documentary Film

L'Invention du monde continued the surrealist search for myth in a context of resurgent cinephilia. In 1951, members of the new generation of French surrealists launched the film journal *L'Âge du cinéma*. Surrealists were a steady presence at the Paris Cinémathèque, which had been established by Henri Langlois together with the surrealist associate Georges Franju.[27] It was at the Cinémathèque that *L'Invention du monde* had its premiere in March 1953. In sharp contrast to the lowly position that surrealism holds in film-history accounts of the immediate post-war period, representatives of the movement were then highly active in the French film climate. *L'Invention du monde* also indicates that the surrealist engagement with film fed into the developments of the documentary to an extent that has rarely been noted in film scholarship.

Surrealism's interest in ethnography is an example of the movement's penchant for found material that documents instances of otherness. But surrealism also has an overall documentary streak, which is so prevalent that it has made some scholars consider documentary to be a defining feature of the movement. Photography scholar Ian Walker even claims that "Surrealist art aspires to the condition of documentary."[28] If this sounds drastic, Walker points out that a central aim in the movement's early years was to document the unexpected aspects of contemporary life, and he even claims that "we might think of the activity of Surrealist artists not so much as creation but observation, and, whether they are watching the unravelling of their internal unconscious or the intricate patternings of the exterior world, what's important is that these observations achieve the status of objective documentation."[29] The famous sleep sessions, dream transcripts, pursuits of the *objet trouvé*, and even the defining experiments with automatic writing can be considered documents of that nocturnal realm of the unconscious and the imagination that surrealism finds to be dangerously eclipsed by instrumental rationalism. Early surrealist literary works like Aragon's *Paris Peasant* and Breton's *Nadja*, too, are documentary depictions of sorts, of strolls through the labyrinthine modern metropolis with its arcades and neon signs, shabby hotels and busy cafés, chance encounters and, notoriously, madwomen.[30] *Nadja* also includes documentary photography, by Jacques-André Boiffard, a strategy that allowed Breton to elide those tedious literary descriptions of external reality that irked him so.[31] Walker elaborates on the surrealist fascination with the documentary nature of photography:

> if the power of the camera could be harnessed to record, not only the stolid surface of reality, but also the more obscure relationships that connect within it, the results could be worth more than any number of imagined scenarios. Photography could anchor the surreal in the real, and our common belief in the actuality of the image exploited to convince us that this surreality was also irrefutable.[32]

The ability to let the surreal emerge out of the real was, in fact, one of the qualities for which the early surrealists lauded cinema.[33] This quality, then, is not merely bound up with the documentary, but also with the general dialectic between reality and the imagination that surrealism was so invested in establishing. The kind of documents that the surrealists sought were multivalent and bound up with desire and dreams, and were ripe for, even ideally stimulants of, creative and imaginative interpretation. In later chapters, I return to these questions in the context of the surrealists' investigations into sexuality, and in their many theoretical and practical elaborations of interpreting material reality, human-made as well as natural, by means of the delirious, analogical imagination.

In the context of cinema, surrealism has had a considerable impact on the development of the documentary. Surrealist documentary film is nevertheless a largely neglected area, with Luis Buñuel's third film *Land without Bread* often considered the "only true example of a surrealist documentary [film]," when, in fact, there is a whole, albeit scattered and heterogeneous, tradition of documentary films made by participants in, or filmmakers close to, the surrealist movement.[34] A surrealist perspective on the richness and strangeness of reality approached in novel ways can be traced from documentary pioneers like Joris Ivens and Jean Vigo to later filmmakers like Georges Franju, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Jean Rouch, and Les Blank.[35] *L'Invention du monde* also draws attention to the fact that surrealism has left its mark on many documentaries with an ethnographic or essayistic bent.

Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé was originally intended to constitute the final part of *L'Invention du monde*, but it ultimately ended up as a separate film. This sequence, relying on material culled from the *Codex Borgia*, was filmed in colour, and was hence incongruent with the black-and-white footage in the rest of the film. But the directors felt that it was incongruous for other reasons, too. In a notice grafted on to the end of the DVD edition of *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*, Michel Zimbacca states that the fact that the film was construed as a documentary

contrasted with "the interpretative approach" of *L'Invention du monde*. Such a demarcation seems unnecessarily restrictive. The surrealist film critic Ado Kyrou claims that Zimbacca, Bédouin, and Péret invented a new documentary genre with the film, which he calls "*le documentaire sensible*," a designation meant to emphasize the poetic method by which the makers structured the film.[36] Indeed, more than anything, *L'Invention du monde* stands as a film example of surrealism's well-known method of transforming "found" material through analogical, poetic juxtaposition, which is otherwise most obviously displayed within the domains of collage and objects.[37] But the film's employment of fragmentation does not necessarily contradict its documentary status. Such modernist techniques, as Bill Nichols argues, were a constitutive element in the formation of the documentary genre.[38]

L'Invention du monde can indeed also be related to some of the experimental tendencies in the French *court métrage* film at the time. Elena Kassel von Siambani relates that several filmmakers in the early post-war period employed the *court métrage* format in an exploratory fashion, and considered them as "essays" that could take documentary, fictional, or animated form.[39] Many of them even blurred the distinctions between the documentary and the personal and poetic, a development that in itself may owe more than a passing debt to earlier surrealist documentary strategies.[40] *L'Invention du monde* then built on and expanded upon the surrealist documentary tradition in a cinematographic context that was particularly geared towards experimentation with "music, sound and commentary."[41] The employment in *L'Invention du monde* of field recordings of music, of several narrating voices, and of a blend of still and moving images in a strangely kinetic montage, are all methods that can be related to the stylistic explorations of the more adventurous makers of *court métrage*.[42] This is also suggested by the context in which the film was shown at the Paris Cinémathèque. *L'Invention du monde* was part of a film programme that included such experimental short films as Alain Resnais's *Guernica* (1950), an extract from Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished footage from Mexico, Margot Benaceraff's *Reveron* (1952), and Henri Storck's *The World of Paul Delvaux* (*Le Monde du Paul Delvaux*, 1946).[43] In moves similar to the methods in *L'Invention du monde*, Resnais's *Guernica* brings a poetic intensity to Picasso's tormented painting, and Eisenstein explores Mexico with a wide-eyed fascination. Still, unlike Storck's film about the Belgian surrealist Delvaux's art, *L'Invention du monde* does not dwell on the origin or maker of the artworks. Rather, it

encourages the spectator's active interpretation and associations through the juxtaposition of the artworks and the narration. And while the voice-over directs the spectator's attention towards the magical and mythical aspects of the imagery, its verbal plurality and lack of a subjective centre estranges the film from the subjective point of view associated with the essay film.[44] But no matter how much *L'Invention du monde* struggles against generic definition, the poeticizing attitude towards reality that permeates the film is of the kind that has been considered one of surrealism's main contributions to the documentary tradition.[45]

Ethnography, Surrealism, and Cinema

Surrealist documentary films frequently combine striving towards documentation with a perspective on otherness inspired by ethnography. At the same time, they often transgress ethnography's borders and rationale. Critics have long found *Land without Bread* particularly irksome in this respect. Buñuel's film depicts the misery and poverty in the Spanish mountain region Las Hurdes with a notable lack of humanism and compassion. While scholars still disagree about the film's aims and possible merits, it seems clear that it is partly a subversive undermining of ethnography's truth claims about the other, a critique that Buñuel brings home with the sort of cruelty and black humour that made him slit an eye in *Un chien andalou* and depict the shooting of a child in *L'âge d'or*.[46] Bédouin and Zimbacca, too, take a distanced stance in relation to ethnography, but they replace Buñuel's black humour and deliberate transgressiveness with a focus on the benevolent function of myth. In the essay "Lumière de l'image," the directors state that they made *L'Invention du monde* without regard for aesthetic norms and "the latest cry in ethnography."[47] Yet, *L'Invention du monde* is clearly entangled in contemporary ethnography, since it was made with the support of the newly refurbished Musée de l'Homme in Paris. What the directors' statement points towards is, then, rather the fact that the surrealist relation with ethnography has tended to be simultaneously intimate and adversarial.

The initial contact between surrealism and ethnography in interwar France grew out of what Jean Jamin describes as French ethnography's left-leaning project to further understanding of the other. As part of this pursuit, ethnographers sought out contacts and collaborators in other spheres, including the artistic avant-gardes.[48] The surrealists,

in their turn, conceived of ethnography as a way of acquiring knowledge about different ways of thinking and being in the world that ultimately serve as a means of finding parallels to their own pursuits.[49] However, they approached the discipline with both caution and irreverence. Ethnographic scholarship and surrealism were at their closest during the late 1920s and the 1930s, as seen most clearly in the journals *Documents* (1929–30) and *Minotaure* (1933–39). *Documents*, edited by Georges Bataille, juxtaposed ethnography with writings on art, secret languages, and sacrificial practices, which it conceived as the dark core of otherness.[50] *Minotaure*, edited by André Breton in collaboration with a host of other surrealists, combined writings on automatism and gothic novels, Pierre Mabille's reading of Lautréamont's horoscope and Brassaï's photographs of night-time Paris, found involuntary sculptures and "the night-side of nature," with a recurring focus on ethnography and mythology.[51] Issue 2–3 of the journal was dedicated to the Dakar–Djibouti expedition, led by Marcel Griaule with the former member of the surrealist group Michel Leiris as collector and cataloguer. Griaule's stark photographs and extensive descriptions of the expedition and the customs and objects it encountered filled the pages, along with Leiris's self-reflexive and self-loathing notes on the exhibition's collecting practices. In *Minotaure*, ethnography and mythology, on the one hand, and the other subjects covered, on the other, transformed each other.[52]

Surrealism's interaction with ethnography continued to evolve throughout the war and into the post-war period to a greater extent than has often been acknowledged. The wartime surrealist journal *VVV* (1942–1944) featured contributions from ethnographers Claude Lévi-Strauss, Alfred Métraux, and William Seabrook. Ethnography was also employed by the Martinican surrealists in order to radically question the foundations and presumed supremacy of Western civilization.[53] Mabille collaborated with Haitian intellectuals in establishing the Bureau d'Ethnologie in Haiti, and upon his return to France after the war, he lectured at the École d'Anthropologie.[54] At the same time, James G. Frazer's anthropological classic *The Golden Bough* was featured in the tarot-themed staircase in *Le Surréalisme en* 1947. When Breton quotes Frazer in support of magic in the catalogue essay "Behind the Curtain," he does so for the way that Frazer argues that magic has shown a world beyond the confines of tradition. By then, many of Frazer's contentions had been brought into question. The surrealist appreciation of Frazer's writings, then, is based on a selective reading of them, intent on those

points that serve to strengthen surrealism's own view of myth and magic, and their capacity to act as means of resistance to an oppressive Western culture.[55]

This continuing intersection of surrealism and ethnography has been largely eclipsed by James Clifford's influential concept of "ethnographic surrealism."[56] In Clifford's definition, ethnographic surrealism is a normative concept, essentially based on his reading of the "dissident" *Documents* as a self-reflexive, relativizing project that sought to undermine the very possibility of gaining knowledge of the other.[57] In contrast, he finds the "mainstream surrealist" *Minotaure* to have been compromised by surrealism's interest in "the mythic or psychoanalytic unconscious."[58] For Clifford, then, ethnographic surrealism rather designates a critical but fleeting moment in the development of ethnography, than the empirical intersection of surrealism and ethnography. Rather than marking a diminished interaction with ethnography, as Clifford would have it, the post-*Documents* era saw a qualitative change in it, which was ultimately marked by the movement's wartime and post-war approach to myth.[59] As indicated, an appropriation of ethnographic material was central for surrealism's radicalized critique of Western civilization and its attempts to construct an alternative to it by turning to "primitive" cultures, poetry, and esotericism in its search for a new myth.[60] The development sketched here indicates that there is a persistent influence of ethnography on surrealism's explorations of the symbolic and social function of myth, in which they borrow freely from historical examples but take the liberty of transforming them at will. This all points to the fact that an "ethnographic surrealism" attuned to the post-war change in direction takes shape in the writings and practice of a wide range of surrealists. This formation of ethnographic surrealism is the context from which *L'Invention du monde* emerges.

L'Invention du monde, then, exemplifies how a reconfigured ethnographic surrealism may take expression in the cinema, beyond Buñuel's outrageous sarcasm and with respect to surrealism's development in the post-war period. The film looks to ethnography in ways that are bound up with the broader surrealist reformulations of ethnography, and as such it also clings to the untimely appreciation of academically outdated anthropological perspectives, in a way that may explain the directors' stated disregard for ethnographic trends.

L'Invention du monde is also part of a broader current of documentary films that engage with ethnography in ways that draw on surrealism.

These films tend to direct this intersection towards topics that frequently resonate with the surrealist investigation into myth, and which are often intertextual and allusive in their approach to other cultures.

The pioneering ethnographic film director Jean Rouch was drawn to his vocation by a surrealist insight.[61] Catching sight of a window display of *Minotaure*, Rouch detected similarities between the reproductions on the outspread pages of de Chirico's painting *The Red Tower* (1913) and Griaule's photographs of the African Dogon people, precisely the sort of poetic intercultural connection the surrealists themselves were prone to make.[62] Rather than limit himself to interwar interactions between surrealism and ethnography, Rouch was also particularly affected by surrealism's search for a new myth.[63] Perspectives informed by surrealism have frequently been translated into his films. In his controversial *The Mad Masters* (*Les Maîtres fous*, 1955), Rouch films a violent possession ritual, and argues that it is a benign, healthy safety valve, a way of collectively directing unconscious energies towards purging the trauma of colonial repression.[64] Rouch's conclusion resonates with both *L'Invention du monde* and *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*, where the mythical relations between the human and the world are understood as a communal treatment of trauma conducted through an affirmation of the imagination. The similarities suggest that the surrealist search for kinship in the "primitive" has deep-seated parallels with Rouch's considerably more conscientious ethnographic explorations.

Two decades earlier, Henri Storck made *Easter Island* (*L'Île de Pâques*, 1935), a film that pertains to other issues related to "primitive" art and surrealist myth. Storck was close to the Belgian surrealists, and he directed the film based on footage filmed by members of an expedition led by Alfred Métraux, one of the ethnographers that would subsequently contribute to *VVV*. In *Easter Island*, Storck combines a celebration of the island's indigenous art with a scathing critique of the colonial interventions in island life.[65] Easter Island, or Rapa Nui, has long held a special place in the surrealist imagination. In 1929, the tiny and isolated Polynesian island was magnified to an enormous size in the "Surrealist Map of the World," where countries and continents, in clear defiance of the inflated self-image of the colonial powers, were allowed to assume a size that corresponded to the attraction they held for the surrealists.[66] This alteration of the representation of the world, where revolutionary desire and poetic imagination trump colonial power, in itself has a myth-generating power. The unmistakable Easter Island *moai*

statues people Max Ernst's collage novel *Une Semaine de bonté* (1934), and crop up in paintings by André Masson.[67] They haunted and exhilarated the surrealist imagination in equal measure. The sheer size of the *moai* had long made their construction and erection a mystery in itself, and combined with the charge their enigmatic appearance held for the surrealists, they took on something akin to evidence of the imagination's victory over common-sense reality.[68] The fascination with Rapa Nui is still evident in *L'Invention du monde* two decades later. A *moai* is among the first man-made artefacts on display in the film, evidently a manifestation of the marvellous even as it lies collapsed against a grassy knoll.

The surrealists did not, however, restrict their search for such resounding otherness to geographically distant places. Similar concerns can be detected in surrealist documentaries focused on Western phenomena. In *Les Violons d'Ingres*, Jacques-Bernard Brunius investigates examples of a surrealist sensibility located in creations that are generally considered to lack artistic value as well as utilitarian purpose.[69] Among these is the Palais Idéal constructed by the French postman Ferdinand Cheval. *Le facteur* Cheval has long been lauded within surrealism for his "ideal palace," which he built according to a design manifested to him in a dream. Requiring enormous labour over a timespan of many years and lacking any apparent use value, Cheval's ideal palace towered as a monument to the imagination. In "The Automatic Message," Breton frames the postman as a creator of mediumistic sculpture on an unprecedented scale.[70] Cheval, then, transformed visions presumably arising from the unconscious into material fact, hence incarnating the marvellous in reality and turning subjective experience into objective fact. And in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, one of the steps in the tarot-themed staircase was adorned with the spine of an imaginary biography of his life, so that Cheval was incorporated into the search for a new myth. Cheval is also the topic of Ado Kyrou's short film *Palais idéal* (1958). Here, the narration comprises extracts from Cheval's own notes and diaries, and situates the postman as an unwitting, and therefore all the more important, forerunner in the surrealist struggle to overturn the utilitarian and repressive ideals of Western civilization. For the surrealists, then, Cheval's palace and the Easter Island *moai* alike become rationality-defying examples of the revenge of the imagination on demands for usefulness. In other words, they approach the status of possible mythical figures of the sort that was probed in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. This means that they stand as potential "means of initiating the spectator into a world liberated from

the reality-principle," as Mahon describes the wider surrealist pursuit.[71] These films can then be said to pertain to similar ambitions as those informing *L'Invention du monde*, albeit conceptualized on a considerably smaller scale.

L'Invention du monde can also be compared with Alain Resnais and Chris Marker's 1953 essay film *Statues Also Die* (*Les Statues meurent aussi*), to the extent that the two films virtually appear to be in dialogue. Commissioned by the journal *Présence Africaine*, Resnais and Marker's film is a critical examination of the effects of colonialism and Western commerce on African art.[72] The title's dying statues are explained by way of the opening remark: "When men die, they enter into history. When statues die, they enter into the realm of art." Torn from their original context and exhibited in Western museums, African "statues" are perceived as merely picturesque and exotic by spectators seeking the mild thrill of tamed otherness. In fact, though, the narration proclaims, African art "is the sign of a lost unity where art was a guarantee of the agreement between man and the world." In other words, the artworks are postulated to have had a magical function in their original context, charged with the power of myths that mediate between the human and the world according to a very different logic than either Western representational or abstract art. The film then posits the notion that African art is part of a societal totality, a context without which it loses its vital life force.

L'Invention du monde is something of a poetic explication of similar questions, a lyrical twin to the poetic but argument-driven *Statues Also Die*. But there are significant differences between the films. *Statues Also Die* incorporates a contemporary social perspective in order to not just critique the removal of African art from its context, but to also demonstrate the negative effects of Western exploitation in Africa. *L'Invention du monde* is a more implicit example of surrealist anti-colonialism, and it focuses almost exclusively on American and Oceanic art, with just a few objects from the African continent. The film, more pressingly, seems to suggest that there may indeed be some kind of continued life for these displaced artworks after all. Its reply to Resnais and Marker's indictment of dying statues is not a reassurance that these will blissfully live on in collections, but that they can live on despite being displaced. This conviction relies on both surrealist notions of the qualities inherent in the "primitive" art on display, and on particular means for poeticizing and revitalizing it, which can be related to surrealist exhibition strategies

predicated upon a poetics of uncovering analogies through collision and juxtaposition. There is, then, a dual magic art at work in *L'Invention du monde*: the art on display holds a function of magic for the surrealists, and this is further augmented by the film's dizzying montage.

Anti-colonialism, Magic, and the Exhibition of "Primitive" Art

From a still image of an Easter Island *moai* to a vibrant gathering of Hopi Kachina dolls, *L'Invention du monde* takes the spectator on a disorienting journey lined with statues, objects, and artefacts of non-Western origin. Its collage-like combination of narrated mythological extracts with a rapid montage of moving and still images functions as a way to revive the statues by synthesizing them into a tentative surrealist myth, a bricolage-like manifestation of the imagination's luminous and central role in bringing meaning to the world. Besides such grand ambitions, however, the statues are also given a form of life through more modest formal means. The still images are frequently rendered more dynamic and lively by simple effects, such as zooms in or out. The objects depicted in them are sometimes lit in a dramatic fashion, which suggests an inner life and a connection with the environment. The transition between images is often executed through dissolves rather than cuts, which not only emphasizes the connection between the images by drawing out similarities in shape or iconography, but also, combined with the movement created by the slow zooms, creates an impression of overall movement. While still photographs dominate the shots, among them are also brief sequences of moving images compiled from ethnographic films; in some other shots, objects are set in motion through animation. A particularly significant transition occurs between a female figure and an inserted sequence showing a woman walking. Here, movement is used to stress the film's presumed inspiriting of life into the artworks depicted. One cut, and a statue has regained life.

The film's use of indigenous and prehistoric art aligns it with the interwar surrealist reception and exhibition of "primitive" art, but *L'Invention du monde* redirects these preoccupations in line with the search for a new myth. Tribal objects and art had played a significant role in surrealist exhibitions ever since the mid-1920s, as one facet of the surrealist search for expressions beyond the genealogy of the Greek

civilization that had for so long been considered the cradle of culture.[73] While scholars tend to fault surrealism for its exoticist appreciation of the “primitive,” there was a definite element of anticolonial activism to the incorporation of non-Western art in surrealist exhibitions. The surrealists were also well aware of the problems inherent in the Western appropriation of art from the colonies. A 1931 tract protesting against the French Colonial Exhibition indicates a nuanced view of what displaying the art of the colonized entails:

> Yet just as the opponents of nationalism have the duty to defend the nationalism of oppressed peoples, so the opponents of that art which is the fruit of the capitalist economy also have the duty to place the arts of the oppressed peoples dialectically in opposition to it. […] the items in question [those exhibited at the Colonial Exhibition] were the rarest and oldest artistic artefacts known in these areas, objects which had been violently torn from those who made them and which a European government, as paradoxical as it may seem, has not been afraid to present as an advert for its own methods of colonisation.[74]

The surrealists, then, dialectically perceived their own exhibition of “primitive” art as a weapon against the colonial power’s proud use of such artworks as emblems of its own malicious deeds. One way in which the surrealists charged the art in such a doubly oppositional fashion was by destabilizing displays of it. As an example, consider the French surrealists’ participation in the 1931 *The Truth of the Colonies.* This anticolonial exhibition was organized by a left-wing coalition to counter the Colonial Exhibition, an unabashed celebration of France’s colonial prowess, against which the tract quoted was also directed.[75] Among the surrealists’ contributions was a display of “European fetishes.” There, a statuette of a begging African child in tatters along with missionary material signified the colonial reification of the other, and showed that the West, too, had its “fetishes,” something otherwise smugly projected onto those colonized.[76] As Janine Mileaf points out, the black humour in evidence at the exhibition has not been to the liking of all scholarly commentators, some of whom have considered the use of parody to have “merely reproduced the paradigms of cultural imperialism.”[77] Mileaf, however, argues that a detailed look at the surrealist contribution reveals that “the surrealists used comparison and dissimilarity to jolt viewers into political awareness and action. Dissonance, rather than assimilation,

resulted from the educational displays at *The Truth on the Colonies.* No viewer could leave the exhibition with the impression of harmony existing between France and its colonies."[78]

The surrealists used similar poetic juxtapositions in their own exhibitions, but then rather in order to make new meaning appear. For instance, Yves Tanguy "juxtaposed his paintings with objects from the Americas" at the Galérie Surréaliste in 1927.[79] And in 1936, at *Exposition surréaliste d'objets*, a large exhibition of surrealist objects at the Galérie Ratton in Paris, "primitive" art found its place alongside objects made by surrealists, readymades, found objects, natural objects, and mathematical models, to name but a few of the categories deployed in this exploration of the typology, poetics, and potential of the object.[80] Indeed, in the essay "Crisis of the Object," Breton points out that: "The objects brought together in this way have one thing in common: they derive from the objects which surround us but succeed in achieving a separate identity simply through a *change of role.*"[81] The plenitude of objects on display at the Galérie Ratton also indicates that the "primitive" artworks were not included merely by merit of their presumed inherent exoticness. They were rather treated in a way that was similar to that of the occidental mathematical models, which were supposed to be given meaning by the interpretative activity of the observer. Such interventions were also aided by Breton, who, as Gavin Parkinson puts it, provided the models with "'poetic' titles to indicate hidden depths behind their visible, prosaic aspect."[82] Some of these titles served to bring out a similarity between the mathematical models and "primitive" objects, notably in a "mask-like, Picasso-esque object with wire attachments."[83] Another model was "accidentally shaped as a cultish gathering," and one was "thorny, toylike."[84] Much as the readymade, here exemplified by Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914), "was turned away from its manifest function," the overall context provoked the viewer to find latent meaning in mathematical models and "primitive" art alike.[85] Juxtaposed with "primitive" art, the mathematical models were estranged and re-enchanted, their mutual reflection of each other suggesting unknown archaic depths and possibly a new science to come. Science was then rendered a fossil of sorts, while "primitive" art was placed in the position of illuminating the future, in an interplay between the archaic and the modern, the primordial and the utopian, that prefigures *L'Invention du monde.*

Following the war, Breton conceived of such an illumination as a characteristic of the “haloed objects” that were fraught with the potential for a new myth. In *Le Surréalisme en* 1947, the surrealist development towards a conception of the magical object is primarily manifested in the pagan altars in the Labyrinth of Initiation.[86] The depiction of non-Western art in *L’Invention du monde* needs to be seen as an extension of these ideas about the object as a carrier of mythical and magical energies. In its focus on ancient myth and art relating to it, the film reconfigures the interwar exhibition of “primitive” art in line with concerns closer to the post-war focus on myth and magic. A decade earlier, the 1942 New York exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, curated by Breton and Duchamp, had tentatively prefigured this change. There, “primitive” art was displayed alongside that of the surrealists, in order to, as Susan Power puts it, “establish analogies between the Native American objects and their own anti-national politics and poetics of consciousness.”[87] But the exhibition was also a tentative step towards the exploration of the new myth, which Breton announced his search for in “Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not.” Now, he explored it in a more playful and poetic manner in a section of the exhibition catalogue that he called “On the Survival of Certain Myths and on Some Other Myths in Growth or Formation.”[88] *First Papers of Surrealism*, then, is an intimation of the importance that the surrealists saw in the intersection of myth, magic, and selectively appropriated and interpreted elements from “primitive” art and thought.

In a 1948 essay on Oceanic art, Breton further asserts the importance of “primitive” art for surrealism’s overall aims. He claims that “[t]he surrealist adventure, at the outset, is inseparable from the seduction, the fascination” that this art had exerted on them.[89] Here, then, he displaces the centrality of the discovery of the unconscious, psychoanalysis, and the savage writings of Lautréamont in surrealism’s narrative of its genesis, by insisting on a more plural foundation for the movement, one in which the “primitive” radiates just as strongly. For Breton, this art ranks as “the greatest effort ever to account for the interpenetration of mind and matter, to overcome the dualism of perception and representation, not to stop at the bark but return to the sap.”[90] Hence, he compares Oceanic art and the surrealist struggle against realism and its accomplices.[91] But Breton also explicitly aligns Oceanic art with the search for a new myth, as he compares it with “those *haloed* objects by which we are enthralled.”[92]

Péret, too, ruminated on the qualities of non-Western art. In his "Notes on Pre-Columbian Art," he proposes that "primitive" art belongs to a whole other register than the Western ideal of art as "'a disinterested activity of the mind' directed towards the creation of beauty," as defined by Greco-Roman and classicist standards.[93] Instead, he asserts that the experience of these works is that of an "affective shock," a definition that links it with the surrealist notion of "convulsive beauty."[94] Péret is well aware that some of the affective appeal of "primitive" art may be a consequence of the fact that it appears to be unfamiliar and, literally, strange to the surrealists. But by way of his attribution of this appeal to the mentioned distance between "primitive" art and classicist standards, Péret posits these objects and images to be part of what in retrospect appears as a counter-tradition, which ultimately leads to surrealism.[95] If Oceanic and pre-Columbian art signifies such a radical divergence from the norms of Western aesthetics, it is little wonder that surrealists tend to detect a continued life in them even in collections. Animated and agitated through filmic means in *L'Invention du monde*, the objects do appear surprisingly lively. Indeed, in contrast to the criticism levelled by *Les Statues meurent aussi* against the exhibition of African art, *L'Invention du monde* brackets any such concerns. It zooms in on the works' presumed magical qualities in order to seek a counter-ideal to disenchanted Western aesthetics. If art, here, is conceived to approach a function of magic, it does so through wild displacements and a strategic disregard for cultural specificity.

The surrealist appetite for the "primitive" may hence appear to be one-sided, but the very unpredictable life that the displaced statues are animated into is significant in another respect. In *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, Sally Price writes that: "The assumption that Primitives are so fear-ridden that they cannot engage in 'whimsical' artistic creativity has the effect of diminishing the complex humanity of these artists who […] are absolutely as disposed as [Alexander] Calder to the full range of thoughts and emotions that bring out the lighter side of the human comedy."[96] Similar effects have frequently been achieved by the use of stark lighting and ominous angles in still photographic reproductions of "primitive" objects.[97] In *L'Invention du monde*, in contrast, the objects filmed appear in all their wide-ranged expressiveness, enhanced by the playfulness in the mythic narration that accompanies them. Some objects in the film are certainly made ominous through photographic techniques, but far from all of them are treated this way. The artworks

are rather displayed as being permeated with all manner of emotional charges, and they are created with a wide variety of expressive means, of which "whimsy" is a prominent component. An Aztec crystal skull grins mischievously. A Colombian stone figure gives a deliciously devious smile. And drawn with white lines on rocks, the Easter Island bird god Make-Make makes his playful hybrid presence felt. Trickster figures, the transformative force of love, and the potential for revolt against both fear and social ills are all brought forward in these figures. The assumption that Price criticizes is thereby alien to *L'Invention du monde*, where "primitive" art and myth is valorized for its active reflection on the surrounding world and exactly those symbolizing and poeticizing capacities surrealism deems the West to be lacking in. Again, surrealist primitivism, as it appears here, is multifaceted and extends beyond any simple definitions of the concept. Here, it is also strategically employed to explore magic as an alternative to ingrained Western notions of art. The modern film medium brings its own sense of recovered magic to these proceedings.

Poetics of the *Wunderkammer*

In its dizzying juxtaposition of art, myths, and sounds, *L'Invention du monde* approaches the logic of the *Wunderkammer*, or the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities, reconfigured through moving images with sound. The figure of the *Wunderkammer* has been applied to the design of the Ratton exhibition as well as the layout of Breton's studio at 42 Rue Fontaine in Paris, due to their mutual disregard for positivist classifications of the abundant material they contained.[98] A search for analogical similarity rather than identity is the method of choice in both. Such a worldview of correspondences and dynamic interconnectedness was intrinsic to the time of the historical *Wunderkammer*, but in the disenchanted twentieth century it needed to be provoked, and in these instances it takes the shape of an active search for sensibilities not just lost but actively rejected.[99] *L'Invention du monde* reinvigorates a similar poetics of analogically associative constellations of found wonders both man-made and natural.

Claude Lévi-Strauss compared Renaissance esotericists and the "savage mind" due to their propensity to perceive the world as ordered by correspondences.[100] This connection is particularly telling for surrealism's continued valorization of the "primitive" in the post-war era, as it immersed itself in esotericism. Among Breton's dense displays of his

ever-shifting art collection, Adamowicz describes how "[t]he male figure in de Chirico's painting with its closed eyes interacts with the opening and closing eyes of the British Columbian transformation mask," and makes the studio akin to "an active collage space."[101] While Breton's studio may appear ephemeral in comparison with more public surrealist activities, this observation points to the fact that in surrealism, such analogical arrangements of objects and artworks are considered to liberate them from habitual perception. Energized, they can instead take part in new constellations and create new forms of poetic meaning, closer to the rejected knowledge of esotericism and cultures with different viewpoints than those of rationalist Western modernity.[102] If such intercultural juxtapositions are no doubt based on an "inappropriate" disregard for, or perhaps rather bracketing of, cultural specificity, Roger Cardinal suggests that surrealist comparisons across cultures can be considered "political gestures, expressions of a generous solidarity with marginalized creators across the world."[103] Such political gestures are in themselves generative of myth, since they point towards a utopia where surrealist and "primitive" art exist on an equal footing, nurturing one another with classicist-defying energy.

In *L'Invention du monde*, correspondences between different images and artworks occur on numerous occasions. Similarities in shape and form dictate the editing when an Egyptian carving dissolves into a pattern painted on a rock. Iconographical similarities, in turn, are brought out when a zoom in on a bull traced in clay dissolves into a close-up of an animal resembling a crocodile, which zooms out to reveal that it is surrounded by other organic shapes. A zoom in on the aforementioned collapsed *moai* similarly dissolves into a receding close-up of a huge Columbian statue of a rotund head, surrounded by vegetation as if it emerges out of the ground. Later, several trickster-like faces, featured on statues or in the guise of masks, follow in rapid succession. The recurring figure of the snake is traced through its manifestations in clay tablets, painted on wood, or in the shape of a two-headed sculpture, images of which similarly dissolve into each other. These are just a few examples that indicate that the entire imagery of the film can be construed as a prolonged attempt at inciting correspondences, a visual counterpart to the polyphony of the choir-like narration.

It was at the time of the making of *L'Invention du monde* that Breton lauded cinema precisely for its ability to trigger the mechanism of correspondences.[104] Extending the reformulation of surrealist poetics in the

essay "Ascendant Sign," Breton posits the poetic image to work through analogy and so illuminate "an infinitely richer network of relations," which is related to "the age-old conviction that [...] there is not a single being or natural phenomenon that does not carry a message to be deciphered by us."[105] This conviction, Breton claims, "was at the heart of most cosmogonies [but] has been replaced by a numb and stupefied apathy."[106] Such an expanded surrealist poetics was not restricted to the literary poetic image, but can be applied to other spheres as well—the *Wunderkammer*, for example, which embodies an analogical arrangement of artefacts that rests on principles entirely different to the identity relations of positivist science.[107]

For Breton, the film medium has a particular ability to connect opposites through montage, and thus provide an "opening key" to the world—in particular a key of the kind that can unlock otherwise obscured meaning through the sudden light of the image.[108] The idea that montage can have a form of magical effect is, however, not new. Rachel Moore describes how Sergei Eisenstein realized that metaphor and metonymy were rooted in magic.[109] When montage establishes a link between two things based on their likeness or substitutes the whole for the part, it then works according to a logic of magic rather than instrumental causality. Unlike Eisenstein's montage, *L'Invention du monde* does not set up any dialectically working didactic metaphors or dramatic metonymies. Instead, it utilizes analogical similarity and synecdoche, the magical trope of *pars pro toto*, the part for the whole, in order to suggest similarities that connect culturally and historically vastly different artworks in a potentially ever-expanding network of correspondences.[110] In "As in a Wood," Breton is mainly referring to narrative fiction film. *L'Invention du monde*, then under production, nevertheless appears to confirm his lingering faith in cinema. In light of these examples of Breton's explication of analogy and its application, the analogical method behind *L'Invention du monde* can be seen as a way to stimulate the active interpretation of the myths and artworks in the film, in order to grasp qualities that cannot be exhausted by conventional taxonomies or typologies. In the talk "Surrealist Situation of the Object," Breton ruminates further about surrealist strategies for exhibiting quotidian and exotic objects, and emphasizes the fact that in order to fulfil the old surrealist goal of what Rimbaud called "the systematic derangement of all the senses [...] we must not hesitate to *bewilder sensation*."[111] Cinema, with its propensity for effecting disorientation and connecting the

daytime to a mystical Night, as Breton would later put it, would seem to be particularly well suited to living up to this ambition.[112]

In *L'Invention du monde*, sound also plays into this process. Part of the film's soundtrack is composed of geographically and musically diverse field recordings. These contribute a disorienting cacophony, an effect presumably similar to that achieved by the rowdy acoustic environment in the 1947 exhibition. There, noise served to further distance the exhibition from the conventions of disinterested exhibition viewing, and to bring out its opposition to Western art conventions.[113] In *L'Invention du monde*, the field recordings anchor the film in a fluid domain of indecisive otherness, while they add to the spectator's disorientation. This, too, contributes to the film's appearance as drastically dissimilar to art documentaries with a more educational purpose. The spectator is addressed affectively, poetically, and possibly magically rather than rationally. Despite the pronounced literary tone of the narration, it is, then, as if the film seeks to estrange itself from its own reliance on the collection of ethnographic materials.

L'Invention du monde, then, amplifies the meaning of the ethnographic materials through *dépaysement*, a disorientation following the rapid rearrangement of the imagery, and lets the depicted objects speak, no matter how dizzily, to each other and to the spectator. Hence, the presumed continued life of the "statues" after their displacement to museums and collections is established through aural assaults and the creation of new and unexpected connections between them. To the extent that these connections are forged as a form of esoteric and poetic correspondences, they arguably serve to recharge objects that were presumably once part of a magical totality with some of that force the collections have drained them of. While ethnographic objects have been considered ripe with surrealist potential in themselves, when they are placed in unexpected combinations with one another, with surrealist works, or with found objects, they are perceived to act as catalysts for a poetic spark that illuminates the ever-receding depths of this play between alterity and similarity, and suggests further avenues for exploring it.

Here, Bédouin and Zimbacca also appear to draw on the methods of one of surrealism's primitivist precursors, something that the film obliquely signals when, at one point in *L'Invention du monde*, a single work of Western origin appears. Paul Gauguin's painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1898), depicting a

Polynesian scene, is filmed, the camera lingering on details and cutting to different close-ups. The combinatory images in Gauguin's Polynesian works are "fictions," Kirk Varnedoe points out, "partly factual, partly hypothetical constructions intended to evoke the truths of imagination, and to heighten questions rather than resolve them. Those who read detailed meanings into their iconographies, like those who dismiss those iconographies as hopelessly muddled fantasies, take the works too literally."[114] The juxtaposition of different images in *L'Invention du monde* may ultimately be taken to work according to a logic similar to Gauguin's. The film strives to transmit a more intuitive insight into the interconnectedness of myths and artworks, drawing out their poetic commonalities while also refusing to subsume them under universal fact. Such an intuitive and non-discursive truth, again, is very different from factual truth claims. Rather than being rational propositions about factual relations, the film's imagery and soundtrack draw out such "truths of the imagination." *L'Invention du monde* indeed suggests that cinema is one particularly potent venue in which to reshape such a sensibility according to modern conditions that are in tune with what Benjamin described as the surrealist capacity for innervation.[115] For here, the film medium is used to effect not just a perceptual *dépaysement*, but, arguably, an embodied experience of the chaotic totality invoked by technologically suggested correspondences.

The Marvellous and the New Myth

The narration of *L'Invention du monde* takes the shape of an initiatory journey through the luminous and perilous realm of the marvellous. Uncovering such a veiled, or esoteric, pattern in the film suggests that it is in complicity with the 1947 ambition to initiate the spectator into the surrealist myth.

Here, the film also pertains to the wartime and post-war reformulations of the marvellous, in particular as it takes shape in the writings of Péret and Mabille. The marvellous occupies a central position within surrealism, but it is often vaguely defined. In the first surrealist manifesto, Breton exclaims that "only the marvelous is beautiful."[116] He locates the marvellous in certain literary works, such as Matthew G. Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk* (1796); ultimately, it stands as a "sort of general revelation" effected by certain images and symbols.[117] In *Le Merveilleux*, Mabille provides the more concise definition that the marvellous is the

"conjunction of desire and external reality," which means that it signifies the intermingling of mind and matter, with occult overtones.[118] Péret, though, stubbornly refuses to define the term: "I shall do nothing of the sort!" he exclaims, and instead proceeds to evoke its character through descriptions akin to the overwhelming poetic images found in his own poetry.[119] Péret's imagery suggests that the marvellous is actually the capacity of the imagination to interpret and transform the surrounding world. Accordingly, he states that the marvellous "is, or rather it should be, life itself."[120] The marvellous can then be understood as the generalized surrealist experience of reality as something more than what meets the eye, or the intrusion of the imaginary in the everyday. This experience relies on the imagination's capacity for interpreting and poeticizing the surrounding world, which can, among other things, lead it to detect those correspondences between otherwise separate phenomena that Breton praises in "Ascendant Sign" and "As in a Wood." The marvellous is hence a foundation of sorts of surrealism, which can also be located in poetry, literature, and myths, to the extent that they reveal the imagination's interaction with reality.

Mabille's definition of the marvellous in *Mirror of the Marvelous* and *Le Merveilleux* is unprecedented in its range and scope. A polymath who had been an adept of the occultist Pierre Piobb, Mabille's thought prefigures several of the concerns that Breton engaged with in formulating a change of direction for surrealism.[121] In *Mirror of the Marvelous*, Mabille suggests that there are profound similarities between surrealism and mythology, and he extends these parallels to also encompass esoteric texts, gothic novels, and magical incantations. Mabille claims that the particular poetry that can be found on the manifest level in popular expressions like folklore and myths show that the marvellous is an inherent feature of storytelling before it is turned into either religious morality or high culture, or in other words, before it is made utilitarian. In these popular manifestations, Mabille considers the marvellous to act as a sort of reservoir of poetic knowledge that can be turned against the strictures of classicism and Christianity, against conventional morals, and against demands of good taste and moralistic utility in storytelling.[122] His book appears to be a far-reaching effort to mobilize strategies of re-enchantment and spiritual growth from several different sources, an approach that is itself part of the analogical search for correspondences that constitutes such a large part of the movement's more direct practices.[123] Mabille's writings on the marvellous are, then, in tune with

what the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz describes as surrealism's "ruptures with the central Western tradition."[124] They also resonate with photography scholar David Bate's claim that the early surrealist appeal to the Orient can be seen "as a kind of counter-hegemonic intervention, to invoke those 'other "denied" knowledges' that [Homi] Bhabha claims disrupt the authority of Western culture."[125] Here, then, appears an often neglected critical aspect of the surrealist ambition to tease out the points of contact with "primitive" thought and modern poetry, not least a central aim of *L'Invention du monde*.

Péret's "Magic," however, is a less subtle example of surrealism's persistent primitivism. Modernity, for him, has all but lost touch with poetic relations with the world. Péret refers to Charles Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) for its image of the worker completely subsumed under the mechanical rhythm of his daily toil in the Fordist factory. Not only do the mechanical movements invade his body, Péret comments, but the labour robs him completely of every capacity for poetic expression, not least since his masters have also reduced his language to the most basic utility.[126] Péret sees Chaplin's film as a potent criticism of such mechanization. But had he not been vocally pessimistic about commercial cinema, he may also have been able to consider *Modern Times* as something more than an illustration of the trappings of industrialized modernity.[127] For Walter Benjamin, Chaplin's films exemplified a way of not only criticizing but actively countering mechanization with the innervation effected by a liberating play with the habits enforced by modern life.[128] As suggested, in its editing *L'Invention du monde* constitutes one such attempt at stimulating a freer, associative experience.

Barring such insights in the potential of technological reproduction, in "Magic" Péret turns to the "primitive" for an alternative to the reifying rationalization that Chaplin depicts. "Primitive" people's myths and their overall poetic comprehension of the world, he argues, let them penetrate life and nature to a much greater extent than the book-learned, modern Western scientist.[129] While the marvellous can potentially be found everywhere, for those willing to encounter it, present-day society has relegated it to its furthest margins, where only "accursed" poets dare to tread.[130] Indeed, surrealism, for Péret, marks the reinvigoration of the marvellous, and acts as an antidote to the "demythologization" of the world.[131] But he does not consider surrealism to be a simple abandonment of reason or a "return" to a primordial state. Instead, he explains the operation in dialectical terms, and is arguing for a reconciliation of

"pre-rational" and "rational" forms of thought.[132] Ultimately, what is at stake for Péret is to "break down the artificial opposition created by sectarian minds on either side of the barricade [...] between poetic thought (qualified as pre-logical) and logical thought, between rational and irrational thought."[133] He then interrogates myths in the hope of finding a solution to the surrealist ambition to dissolve antinomies in order to establish a more integral relation between the mind and the world.[134] It is precisely this ambition that translates into *L'Invention du monde* and its probing of the relation between mind and matter, manifested in myth and artworks alike.

In his essay "Thought Is One and Indivisible" Péret discusses this issue in terms of the need to reunite reason and intuition. This can implicitly be understood as the dialectical *Aufhebung* following what Péret discusses as the Enlightenment's successful dethroning of religion, and its regrettable replacement of it with an equally reductive and repressive reason.[135] As part of this overarching argument, however, Péret also states that "the explanations which primitive man gives of the world, himself, and Nature are products of pure imagination in which the part of conscious thought is nil or almost so."[136] Here, it seems that he conflates his dialectical argument with an evolutionist understanding of "primitive" thought, redolent of outdated anthropological perspectives.[137] Péret's view of the "savage" is, however, not as simple as it may sound, for he considers the dualistic "priest" of post-Enlightenment modernity a savage, too.[138] "Savages," then, are those that adhere to a stymied, one-sided thinking of whatever mark, but at least the "primitive" ones have the redeeming quality of access to myth. Against these dualistic priests, Péret posits the poet, the sorcerer, and the madman.[139] Péret's writings indicate that much like the medieval sorcerer, who undermined the strictures of society and religion, surrealism adheres to magic understood as a synthesis of human knowledge and a libertarian and poetic alternative to repressive social and religious institutions. This self-proclaimed marginalization is also an integral part of surrealism's experience of an affinity with colonized people and their art.

Péret's lingering residues of colonial thinking aside, his poetry and theoretical writings combined, in the words of Timothy Gerhard, challenged "the exoticism and scientific surety of the early twentieth century" and led the reader "away from the confining strictures of French nationalism and imperialism."[140] Surrealism's valorization of the marvellous and that which transgresses the borders of Western civilization also proved

attractive for a number of radically anticolonial non-Western poets, artists, and thinkers. As early as the 1930s, some young Martinicans studying in Paris had published a sole issue of the journal *Légitime Défense*, in which they sided with surrealism against colonialism.[141] During World War II, the French surrealists developed close connections with the Martinican poets who produced the journal *Tropiques* (1941–1945). Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, René Ménil, and their collaborators shared an interest in ethnography, philosophy, art, and Marxism. Apart from the latter, strictly forbidden under the Vichy regime, these were just some of the subjects that infused their journal.[142] En route to New York from war-stricken France, Breton made an unplanned visit to Martinique and struck up a close friendship with the Césaires.[143] Following that meeting, surrealism assumed a central place in *Tropiques.*[144] Surrealism strengthened and validated the Martinicans' own misapprehensions about both Western civilization and the literary ideals and linguistic norms that the colonial regime enforced upon them. In tune with, and contributing to, the movement's increased focus on myth, magic, and the marvellous, these Caribbean surrealists found a sense of liberation in surrealism's acknowledgment of traditions that mirrored their own heritage, but which were rejected by Western culture at large.[145] Ménil, for instance, wrote the incisive essay "Introduction to the Marvellous." Paralleling Mabille and Péret, he states that "[m]ankind's task can only consist in trying to integrate the marvellous into real life," since life is worth nothing "[s]o long as myth is unable to inscribe itself into every banality."[146] And in an exalted, manifesto-like call for a "Caribbean Civilization," against the repressive practices of the colonial West, Aimé Césaire claims that "[t]he true manifestation of civilization is myth"; that "[w]e have lost the meaning of the symbol. The literal has devoured our world"; and that "[t]he most vital thing is to re-establish a personal, fresh, compelling, magical contact with things."[147]

Aimé and Suzanne Césaire showed their support for Péret's "Magic" by co-signing its first publication as a pamphlet.[148] The anti-colonialist potential they, along with the Cuban-born painter Wifredo Lam, found in the text resided to a large extent in the fact that the marvellous, in its unification of myth and poetry, acted as a counter-force against the Western literary standards they perceived to be one of the weapons of the colonial oppressors. Indeed, the Martinican surrealists appear to have contributed as much to surrealism as surrealism brought to them. Mabille, for example, incorporates a poem by Césaire in *Le Merveilleux*,

as part of his continued attempts to define the terrain of the marvellous.[149] And Césaire's and Ménil's statements could just as well have concerned the aims of *L'Invention du monde*, which construes myth as a way towards a deepened symbolic and magical knowledge of the world, ultimately serving as an exploration of the conditions for the marvellous in the everyday. This affinity further suggests that the concerns behind *L'Invention du monde* are not simply the product of an exoticizing gaze at the myths and art of the other. Its search for the marvellous is also a way of countering wider Western conventions, and as such is in tune with the pursuit of the Caribbean surrealists. The support that Péret, Mabille, and Breton received from non-European anti-colonial thinkers suggests that, at least at this time in history, their appeal to a common reservoir of the marvellous hidden somewhere beneath the grandiose rubble of a self-proclaimed enlightened civilization was also a source of potential renewal and liberation beyond the confines of the West.

L'Invention du monde appears as a way of incarnating the marvellous in the present through the explication of myth effected by a film-specific method of visual association and juxtaposition. In the film, the status of the marvellous as counter-poetics is also enhanced by the multitude of voices that comprises the narration. Its explication of the functions of myth is interjected with dramatized passages read by children, women, and men, something that not only subverts the documentary "voice of god" convention, but also canonical standards and their insistence on the unified, orderly voice of the stable bourgeois self. Here, a manifold stream of myths forms a counter-narrative, and the multitude of voices that this emanates from emphasizes that it is meant to function as a veritable choir of vivid counter-knowledge. Replacing the established dogmas of religions and science, the marvellous appears as surrealism's utopian way of resolving the problems plaguing the modern human. That leads on to Mabille's writings on the marvellous, which synthesize various currents of rejected knowledge to form a vision of magical renewal expressed as a utopian force to counter the destruction of the times.[150]

Initiation into the Marvellous

A narrative takes shape in *L'Invention du monde*, through the interplay of extracts from different myths. While the entire film rests on juxtaposition and a multiplicity of images and myths, it also strives for a new kind

of unity through the connection of these multi-coloured shards. This is most apparent in the narration, which blends exposition on humanity's situation in the world and the function of myth with references to and dialogues inspired by specific myths. This combination does not, however, merely serve to give a poetic rendition of myth and the imagination. The spectator is rather dragged along on an erratic journey through the mysteries of the world and the elements, where she or he witnesses a passage into death followed by a rebirth. The narration, then, is in itself structured as a myth and an initiatory passage. Its depiction of a journey through the marvellous appears to be indebted to Mabille's ideas in *Mirror of the Marvelous* and *Le Merveilleux*. The marvellous, here, designates an initiatory journey through a landscape that is as perilous as it is enchanted.[151]

Mabille distinguishes between a popular, or exoteric, and a hidden, or esoteric, side of the marvellous. Myths and other manifestations of the marvellous speak to its audience's longing for "a world custom-built according to their desires"; hence the function of the marvellous as a popular counter-force against both religious and formal conventions.[152] In Mabille's definition, myths and esoteric texts that manifest the marvellous are, however, also united in their more or less veiled initiatory patterns. While the marvellous speaks powerfully to the unconscious of all those who do not have the time or means to penetrate its secrets, their esoteric side only becomes fully apparent to initiates.[153] While the marvellous can serve as a vital source of inspiration for everyone, then, it is only those initiated into it who are able to clearly perceive its function as a transmitter of a particular form of knowledge. Here, Mabille's thought has some similarities with the historian of religion Mircea Eliade's writings on initiation in modernity. Eliade dryly states that in the West, initiation in the strict sense disappeared long ago, but he also contends that the experience of initiation is persistent, and that an initiatory structure is transferred into a number of literary narratives. Initiation has been transformed from a conscious practice to an unconscious awareness of its scenarios and symbols.[154] Eliade mainly takes an interest in these unconscious manifestations of initiation for their indications of the continued relevance of the sacred for a presumably profane society. Mabille's preoccupation has other purposes. His uncovering of an esoteric side to the marvellous is intimately connected with the presumed outcome of any successful initiation, namely an ontological transformation or, to put it in other words, a transmutation of life. Mabille often approaches the idea of

the esoteric marvellous as a repository of rejected knowledge, particularly when he describes the diminished insights into its initiatory structure in the contemporary world and bemoans the disappearance of a succession of men who held "the true keys to the marvellous."[155]

Ultimately, for those prepared to penetrate its secret, the marvellous is a life-altering search for a different form of knowledge, for "[t]heir desire is to rip away the veil that hides from them the total reality of an incomprehensible universe."[156] Accordingly, Mabille writes that "[a] book on the marvelous ought to be an initiation tract," but that this is impossible to accomplish; instead, he more humbly proposes some directions for ways into the marvellous.[157] These directions lead the reader through a topography that is as perilous as it is awe-inspiring. *Mirror of the Marvelous* is divided into sections entitled "Creation," "The Destruction of the World," "Crossing through the Elements," "Crossing through Death," "The Marvelous Voyage," "Predestination," and "In Quest of the Grail," each of which is concerned with the most significant trials on the way to the marvellous, and Mabille brings in a vast range of myths, rituals, incantations, and literature in support of his argument. Examples of the marvellous as a narrative effect, these tales also serve to delineate the marvellous as a very real passage, in line with Mabille's monist conviction that products of the imagination have the same ontological reality as material objects. The desired transformation requires both "an outward conquest of nature and a constant inward searching,"[158] and takes the form of a perilous journey that "goes from the depths of the abyss to sheer peaks."[159] Hence, there is a price to be paid, an intense discomfort and ontological dissolution, for the increased knowledge brought by a journey into the marvellous.

L'Invention du monde, too, takes on the appearance of a tract on or explication of the marvellous. Much like Mabille's work, it uses excerpts from various sources to weave its inquest into the nature of myth. In contrast to Mabille's synthesizing investigation, the narration in *L'Invention du monde* rather takes the shape of a long poem than an argument. It is, however, possible to delineate a structure and some narrative elements in it. *L'Invention du monde* starts with the narration providing a general insight into humanity's way of relating to the surrounding world by transferring it to myth and symbol, art and artefact. Hence, the world becomes peopled by the forces of the unconscious. Troubled by the uncertainty of his origin, the human interrogates his totem animal, but every answer merely leads to further questions. The

narration dramatizes these existential ponderings: "Human face, ask yourself: are you the virile source of life? Are you the fountain of being?" While many myths may provide unequivocal answers to the question of origin, the narration continues, the question of earthly destiny, of life and death remains, and so the film sets out on an examination of how these questions can be treated. Visually, these questions are also reflected upon through the depiction of Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* As the painting's title suggests, Gauguin's primitivist depiction of a scene of melancholy otherness rhymes with the film's inquest in the overcoming of existential terror. A dialogue between a man and a woman addresses the experience of duality, which is further thematized through a discussion of the elements and animals. Especially important are the snake and the bird, the former signifying earth and the latter air. The plumed serpent god Quetzalcoatl appears as the unification of opposites, since he is bird and snake, and hence earth and air, night and day, in one.

Quetzalcoatl also appears in *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*. The companion film is a retelling of a single myth rather than an explication of the nature of myth. There is, however, a theme of rebirth and renewal, of replenishment of life and human faculties, in both films. In *L'Invention du monde*, the descent into the underworld, and the attendant confrontation with mortality and the disintegration of the self, is posited as a necessary stage in the abolishment of dualities and the unification of opposites. The centrality of mythological-magical rebirth is even more apparent in *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé*. The introductory commentary celebrates the Aztec myth of the feathered serpent god for being "one of the most exciting interpretations of nature and man ever left by a great civilization." Quetzalcoatl, "the deity of death and rebirth," descends into the underworld to renew his sacrifice, and the ashes from his incinerated body are "scattered in all directions by the snakes of wind." He goes through many ordeals, and finally manages to renew the world by sacrificing "the black sun of the underworld," and offering his heart to the coming day. Having accomplished this, Quetzalcoatl throws himself into the fire only to rise as the sun, the god of which he has become. He is, however, also the morning star, and so embodies the unification of opposites: as snake and bird, he symbolizes both earth and air, and as sun and star, he symbolizes day and night. In *L'Invention du monde*, too, the feathered serpent dies and is reborn, and so the myth is claimed to dissolve fear of death. In that way, it brings

peace to man, and he can finally discover love and overcome duality through his union with his opposite.

Mabille addresses the topic of symbolic death and rebirth in the section "Crossing through Death" in *Mirror of the Marvelous*. Mabille draws a parallel between the Egyptian Osiris myth and a Masonic initiation ritual, pointing to the fact that symbolic death conceived as an initiation is an age-old theme that recurs in myth, "primitive" cultural practices, and esoteric societies alike. But these concerns with initiation and rebirth not only parallel Mabille's concerns in *Mirror of the Marvelous*. They also align the film with the aims of *Le Surréalisme en* 1947.[160] Recall how the exhibition sought to initiate the spectator into surrealism, as a means of affording a form of rebirth intended to lead to a magical renewal of society.

Writing in exile in Mexico in August 1944, Mabille had every reason to despair about the faith of humanity, but he found some hope in the marvellous. It was in this spirit that he wrote *Le Merveilleux*, as something of an afterthought to *Mirror of the Marvelous*. Mabille ends the short book by declaring that the marvellous is a "force of renewal," which acts as "a true fraternity through the universal language of genuine poetry and art."[161] This makes the marvellous "the only reality able to preserve hope in mankind and the future."[162] To the extent that *L'Invention du monde* can be considered a veiled journey through the esoteric side of the marvellous, the film can be understood as a continued inquest into the conditions for such an initiatory renewal. This is not to suggest that the film conveys an actual initiatory experience. Rather, it is a playful approach to ideas of initiation and magical rebirth that, much like the 1947 exhibition, suggests that the tentative new myth of surrealism is a route towards a necessary renewal of a war-torn society, which needs to be reconsidered in its very foundations.

Reinventing the World

A certain primitivism underlies *L'Invention du monde* in its incorporation of "primitive" art as well as its narrative, which alternates excerpts of myths with commentary about them. There is, however, a complexity to this surrealist primitivism, which takes shape through its entwinement with the movement's anti-colonialism, as well as the film's techniques—visual, aural, and verbal—of disorientation. Indeed, its primitivism forms a vital part of the new myth that the film attempts to outline. Catherine

Russell distinguishes between different forms of primitivism, in a way that is illuminating for *L'Invention du monde*. Amid all its problematic features, she writes, "'the myth of primitivism' also has a utopian aspect and represents a progressive impulse of modernism insofar as it challenges the norms of industrialized society. If postcolonial theory has focused on the ideological effects of primitivism, the avant-garde has been preoccupied with the latter, progressive impulse."[163] This utopian dimension is apparent in *L'Invention du monde*, which asserts that the imagination and myth are transformative forces capable of dissolving antinomies and making the world a meaningful and enchanted place. It also points to the fact that in surrealism, the notion of all sorts of "primitive"—Western as well as non-Western—knowledge has been a potent mythological tool in itself. Recall Mabille's belief in the positive force of "primitive" folklore and art in its ability to loosen up the classicist and religious obsession with formalism and morals. As such, this mythologization of the "primitive" is far from one-dimensional, and rather serves to show the potential for also locating radical alterity within the West.

While *L'Invention du monde* has barely registered in the histories of surrealism and surrealist cinema, the notion of an imaginary invention of the world fraught with utopian hope persisted. In 1960, the French surrealists were planning an exhibition in New York. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* took place at D'Arcy Galleries, and as a genealogical chart included in the exhibition catalogue shows, it inscribed surrealism further in a historical lineage of myths, magicians, and visionaries both fictional and actual.[164] Documents in the André Breton archive reveal, however, that José Pierre outlined an initial plan for the exhibition, according to which it was meant to have the theme "The Invention of the World or the Reinvention of the World," and was to gravitate around "primitive" art, magic, and ritual.[165] Pierre's notes for the exhibition suggest that it should be based on the idea that "all surrealist works propose (against scientific rationalism) *a poetic hypothesis* regarding the meaning of the universe, and of its origin and future."[166] It is here, Pierre states, that surrealism approaches the experience and spirit of "primitive" people. One section of the exhibition was also to be devoted to the three questions: "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?," similar to the title of the very Gauguin painting that flits by in *L'Invention du monde* and that assumes a shadowy but central position in the wider inquiries pursued by post-war surrealism, including Breton's *L'art magique*, in which the writer lauded Gauguin

for the fact that “magic is everywhere” in his art.[167] These exhibition plans, never realized, provide a glimpse into the afterlife of *L’Invention du monde*, and point to the vivid surrealist belief that the world needs to be invented anew according to the dictates of a new myth.

Such inventions and reinventions of the world take entirely other, yet just as marvellous, expressions in Nelly Kaplan’s feature films, which are the topic of the next chapter.

Notes

1. The quotes from *L’Invention du monde* and *Quetzalcoatl, le serpent emplumé* are taken from the English DVD subtitles, translated by Kenneth Cox. The French script is included in the book *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* that the DVD accompanies. See Péret, “Commentaire de ‘L’Invention du monde’.”
2. Breton, “Surrealist Comet,” 95.
3. For a contested overview, see Rubin, *“Primitivism” in 20th Century Art*.
4. Rosemont and Kelley, *Black, Brown & Beige*, 3.
5. See Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow*; Rosemont and Kelley, *Black, Brown & Beige*.
6. Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 294.
7. Ginway, “Surrealist Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism”; Gerhard, “Wild Dreams of a New Beginning.”
8. See Péret, “Une contribution,” 139–140.
9. Péret, “Le sel répandu,” 24. Excerpts translated in Jean, *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, 425, here slightly modified.
10. See Costich, *The Poetry of Change*, 177ff.
11. See Péret, *Anthologie des mythes, légendes et contes populaires d’Amérique*. Péret’s own essay is expanded here into Péret, “Introduction.”
12. Péret, “Magic,” 90–91.
13. Dickson, “Making the Stone Speak,” 69.
14. Ibid., 68–69.
15. Péret, “Magic,” 98.
16. See e.g. Péret, “The Remembrance of Things to Come,” “Thought Is One and Indivisible” (1944), and “Notes on Pre-Columbian Art” (1947), in *A Menagerie in Revolt*.
17. Breton, “The Lamp in the Clock,” 108.
18. Altman, “The Revolution First and Always,” 95.
19. Breton, “Ascendant Sign,” 105; Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 14; Péret, “Magic,” 90ff.
20. Breton, “Ascendant Sign,” 105.

21. Mabille, *Le Merveilleux*, 53.
22. Péret, “Thought Is One and Indivisible,” 32, “Magic,” 89–90.
23. Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, 240; Löwy, “Walter Benjamin and Surrealism,” 19; Richardson, “Introduction,” in Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, 14.
24. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 116–118.
25. Quoted in ibid., 117.
26. Ibid.
27. Interview with Michel Zimbacca on the *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* DVD.
28. Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 23.
29. Ibid., 11.
30. Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 77.
31. See Breton, “Surrealist Manifesto,” 7–8. See also Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*, 256ff.
32. Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 11.
33. See e.g. Goudal, “Surrealism and Cinema,” 87–88; Brunius, “Crossing the Bridge,” 101–102; Artaud, “Cinema and Reality,” 410–412.
34. Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 28.
35. See Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 77; Hodsdon, “Surrealist Documentary.”
36. Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*, 217. Italics removed.
37. For surrealist collage, see Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*.
38. Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde,” 582–583. For a radically different approach to the roots and origin of the documentary film, see Musser, “Problems in Historiography.”
39. Kassel Siambani, “*Le groupe des Trente*,” 180.
40. Ibid., 183.
41. Ibid., 180.
42. See also Smith, “Moving Pictures.”
43. See Lecomte, “‘L’Invention du monde’ en son temps,” 50, and the extracts from the Cinématheque programme in Zimbacca, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma*, 67.
44. See Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, 1ff.
45. Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde,” 596; Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 77–78.
46. See e.g. Sobchack, “Synthetic Vision”; Conley, “Documentary Surrealism”; Lastra, “Why Is This Absurd Picture Here?”; Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 79–83.
47. “dernier cri de l’ethnographie.” Bédouin and Zimbacca, “Lumière de l’image,” 9.

48. Jamin, "On the Human Condition of 'Minotaure'," 82.
49. Ibid., 81.
50. Jamin, "Anxious Science," 87, 90, quote on 87; Leiris, "From the Impossible Bataille to the Impossible *Documents*" (1963), in *Brisées*, 241–247. See also Ades and Fraser, *Undercover Surrealism*.
51. Mabille, "Le ciel du Lautréamont" (1939), in *Traversées de nuit*. For Brassaï's contributions to *Minotaure*, see Conley, "Modernist Primitivism in 1933"; Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 144–167.
52. See Conley, "Modernist Primitivism in 1933," 130–131.
53. See Kullberg, *The Poetics of Ethnography in Martinican Narratives*, 28–30. For an example, see Césaire, "Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations" (1941), in *The Great Camouflage*.
54. Richardson, "Introduction," in *Refusal of the Shadow*, 20; de Heusch, "Pierre Mabille, Michel Leiris anthropologues," 399; Dash, "*Le Je de l'autre*," 88; Laville, *Pierre Mabille*, 68.
55. Breton, "Before the Curtain," 85.
56. See Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in *The Predicament of Culture*.
57. For an incisive critique of Clifford's understanding of surrealism, see Richardson, "An Encounter Between Wise Men and Cyclops Women," 61–66.
58. Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 134.
59. It can however be noted that the post-war era also saw a more straightforward collaboration between the surrealist Nicolas Calas and the ethnographer Margaret Mead. In 1953, they co-edited a comprehensive anthology of anthropological and proto-anthropological writings from antiquity to the present. See Mead and Calas, *Primitive Heritage*.
60. See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 83–84. For more on the surrealists' activities in New York, see Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 391–413; Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*; Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen*; Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 450–82. For a description and discussion of *VVV*, see Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, 376–381
61. For Rouch, see Henley, *The Adventure of the Real*; Feld, *Ciné-Ethnography*; Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot*.
62. Henley, *The Adventure of the Real*, 19–20.
63. Rouch, "Ciné-Anthropology," 152.
64. For an anthropological perspective on the film, see Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot*, 145–160.
65. Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 83.
66. See Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 13–14.

67. One section in Ernst's collage novel has Easter Island as its theme. See Ernst, *Une Semaine de bonté*, 165–176.
68. See Kjellgren, *Splendid Isolation*, 11ff.
69. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 108–109; Hodsdon, "Surrealist Documentary."
70. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 134. See also Breton, "Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 261.
71. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 16.
72. See Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, 22–23.
73. Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 132; *Surrealism and Non-Western Art*; Stich, *Anxious Visions*, 17–19. Breton, later in life, came to oppose Latin civilization all the more vehemently, instead lauding the repressed heritage of the Celts. See Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 554–556.
74. Tanguy, "First Appraisal of the Colonial Exhibition," 186.
75. See Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 126–133.
76. Ibid., 119ff; Blake, "The Truth About the Colonies, 1931"; Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 71.
77. See e.g. Blake, "The Truth About the Colonies, 1931," 55; Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 133.
78. Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 133.
79. Ibid., 132.
80. See Breton, "Crisis of the Object" (1936), in *Surrealism and Painting*; Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art*, 140–150.
81. Breton, "Crisis of the Object," 280.
82. Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science*, 73.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., 77.
85. Conley, "Sleeping Gods in Surrealist Collections," 10.
86. See Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 96; Péret, "Une Contribution," 139–140.
87. Power, "Bound Objects and Blurry Boundaries," 100.
88. For a description and interpretation, see Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition*, 53–60.
89. Breton, "Oceania," 172.
90. Ibid.
91. Breton discusses the problems of the presumed dichotomy between realism and abstraction, and the surrealist position on these issues, in "Surrealist Comet," 88–93.
92. Breton, "Oceania," 174.
93. Péret, "Notes on Pre-Columbian Art," 66.
94. Ibid., 67.
95. Ibid., 68–69.

96. Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 42–43.
97. Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art, and the Modernist Lens*, 6.
98. Madeline, "The Crisis of the Object/Objects in Crisis," 170–171; Le Brun, *The Reality Overload*, 20–21.
99. See Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 203–205.
100. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 42.
101. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, 43–44.
102. Compare this with Conley, "Sleeping Gods in Surrealist Collections," 11–13.
103. Cardinal, "André Masson and Automatic Drawing," 89.
104. Breton, "As in a Wood," 240.
105. Breton, "Ascendant Sign," 104.
106. Ibid., 104–105.
107. Le Brun, *The Reality Overload*, 20–22.
108. Breton, "As in a Wood," 238, 240.
109. Moore, *Savage Theory*, 74.
110. See Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 79–80.
111. Breton, "Surrealist Situation of the Object," 263.
112. Breton, "As in a Wood," 238.
113. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 140.
114. Varnedoe, "Gauguin," in *"Primitvism" in 20th Century Art*, 195.
115. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 192.
116. Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 14.
117. Ibid., 14–16, quote on 16.
118. "la conjonction du désir et de la réalité extérieure." Mabille, *Le Merveilleux*, 41.
119. Péret, "Magic," 92.
120. Ibid., 94.
121. See Alexandrian, *Le Surréalisme et le rêve*, 444; Pierre, "André Breton and/or 'Minotaure'," 118; for an extended discussion, see also Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation," 50–53. For more on Mabille's influence on surrealism, see Breton, "Drawbridges."
122. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 31.
123. See Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender," 105.
124. "Interview: Octavio Paz," 38. See also Paz, *Children of the Mire*.
125. Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, 134.
126. Péret, "Magic," 90.
127. Péret, "Against Commercial Cinema."
128. See Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 193.
129. Péret, "Magic," 91
130. Ibid., 98.

131. Ibid., 90.
132. See also Gerhard, "Wild Dreams of a New Beginning," 79.
133. Péret, "Magic," 91.
134. See Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," 123–124.
135. Péret, "Thought Is One and Indivisible," 25–26.
136. Péret, "Magic," 92.
137. See Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason'," 121.
138. Péret, "Magic," 91.
139. Ibid., 98–99.
140. Gerhard, "Wild Dreams of a New Beginning," 85.
141. See Richardson, "Introduction," in *Refusal of the Shadow*, 4–6; Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 166.
142. Kullberg, *The Poetics of Ethnography in Martinican Narratives*, 21–23. See also Ménil, "For a Critical Reading of *Tropiques*," 69–70.
143. See Breton, *Martinique*; Rosemont and Kelley, *Black, Brown & Beige*, 61–65.
144. Britton, "How to Be Primitive," 169.
145. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 169–170.
146. Ménil, "Introduction to the Marvellous," 94–95. See also Burns, *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze*, 27–67.
147. Césaire, "Calling the Magician," 120–121.
148. Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 409. See also Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 84.
149. Mabille, *Le Merveilleux*, 38–39.
150. The discussion of Mabille in this chapter parallels that in Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation."
151. See also Mabille, "Surrealism," 86.
152. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 4.
153. Ibid., 18–19.
154. Eliade, "Initiation and the Modern World," in *The Quest*, 126.
155. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 18.
156. Ibid., 3.
157. Ibid., 18.
158. Ibid., 17.
159. Ibid., 105.
160. I develop this argument more extensively in Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation," 62–63.
161. "force de renouvellement," "une fraternité vraie qui a sa langue universelle dans la poésie et l'art véritable." Mabille, *Le Merveilleux*, 53.
162. "la seule réalité qui conserve l'espoir en l'homme et en l'avenir." Ibid.
163. Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 35–36.
164. See *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain*, 5.

165. Pierre, "L'Invention du monde (ou:) la réinvention du monde," André Breton archive, http://www.andrebreton.fr/work/56600100009890 (Accessed 30 April 2015).
166. "Chaque œuvre surréaliste propose (contre le rationalisme scientifique) *une hypothèse poétique* quant au sens de l'universe, à son origine et à son dévenir." Pierre, "L'Invention du monde ou la réinvention du monde," http://www.andrebreton.fr/file/161826/plain (Accessed 30 April 2015).
167. "la magie est partout." Breton, *L'art magique*, 235.

CHAPTER 4

Surrealism Is What Will Be: Nelly Kaplan's Myths of Revenge

"No, no and NO." Black letters scream out an unequivocal message against a red background on a poster on the wall in Marie's home. She is the protagonist of Nelly Kaplan's first feature film, *A Very Curious Girl*. In an oft-quoted statement, Pablo Picasso praised the film as "insolence raised to a fine art."[1] Marie's poster and Picasso's comment both indicate how Kaplan invokes a sense of revolt with a deceptively light touch. Kaplan has a pronounced allegiance to surrealism, but her films tend to be characterized by comparatively conventional narratives and a decidedly non-experimental style, and may at first glance seem far removed from the films discussed in the preceding chapters. With a deliberately unassuming style strongly redolent of Luis Buñuel's late films, she tends to incorporate plenty of references to the popular film genres of which the surrealists were enamoured. Her films, then, are fraught with elements from comedy, soft-core pornography, and horror. Kaplan's films are also firmly ensconced in surrealism's post-war concerns, with frequent allusions to esoteric imagery and the surrealist tradition. Her prevalent references to surrealism make the movement assume a mythical status and function as an agent of radical change, which throws Kaplan's diegetic worlds into a state of upheaval. Altogether, her films contribute in a particular way to the surrealist search for a new myth.

Scholarship on Kaplan's films has mainly recognized her as a pioneering female filmmaker.[2] But while several scholars also acknowledge her close connection with surrealism, some of them have found this

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proximity puzzling in the light of her films' focus on female liberation.[3] Such interpretations, however, tend to be based on a historically limited understanding of surrealism as an exclusively male, misogynistic movement. In her 1998 overview *Surrealist Women*, Penelope Rosemont demonstrates that women participated in surrealism from the very beginning, and that an ever larger number of women have been active participants in the movement throughout the years. Rosemont contends that surrealism's violent criticism of the institutions of family, country, and religion, as well as traditional male values, makes it a natural ally of the cause of female liberation.[4] Katharine Conley also points out that the way in which surrealism paved the way for a more inclusive view of art, obliterating the Western canon, "contributed to a climate of challenge to the patriarchy."[5] She detects an intimate affinity between Breton's questioning of male values and central feminist concerns in the 1970s, as well as between surrealist writers and feminist writing practices, from Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* and beyond.[6] Surrealism's radical criticism of the foundations of Western society, along with its post-war privileging of myth, magic, and ritualized eroticism, indeed resounds in Kaplan's films.[7] In the following, I place her films in the more specific context of surrealism's post-war change in direction and increased diversity in terms of gender and sexual orientation. I also examine how, in her surrealist depictions of revolt against patriarchy, Kaplan references and revises earlier surrealist conceptions of woman as witch and sorceress into a self-reflexive counter-myth. Kaplan's oft-professed wish to avenge millennia of oppression, then, finds expression in her films not in spite of her adherence to surrealism, but through it.[8]

Kaplan's films can be understood as attempts to construct new myths that can be related back to many of the preoccupations surrounding *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. But they are also marked by the development surrealism underwent during the decade and a half that passed between *L'Invention du monde* and her debut feature film. In 1959, Breton and Marcel Duchamp organized the large *Exhibition inteRnatiOnal du Surréalisme*, or *EROS* for short, at the Galérie Daniel Cordier in Paris. Here, the surrealists inserted eroticism into a ritualistic context, much as they had done with myth in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.[9] Following *EROS*, *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* was mounted in New York. Among the contributing artists to this lesser-known exhibition were such luminaries of surrealist magic art as Victor Brauner, Leonora Carrington, Wilhelm Freddie, and Wifredo Lam.[10] If *EROS*

indicated that there was a renewed surrealist faith in the revolutionary force of eros, *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* testifies to the fact that myth and magic were still viable surrealist concerns as the movement entered the 1960s.[11] Both of these surrealist directions make themselves felt in Kaplan's films: eroticism and magic are intrinsic and entwined components in her creation of a surrealist myth directed against repression and oppression.

Nelly Kaplan and the Crisis of French Surrealism

Nelly Kaplan's path towards surrealism and filmmaking started with a rupture. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Russian Jewish parents, Kaplan left for France in 1953, straying off the path to the conventional life that her parents had set out for her. She had been an avid cinemagoer from an early age, and had been particularly enthralled by Hollywood films. In Paris, she first supported herself by writing about film for Argentinean newspapers. Eventually, she got to know the film director Abel Gance and so found her way to making films. Gance had been on the fringes of the impressionistic film avant-garde in the 1920s, and was one of the foremost pioneers to expand cinema beyond its technical and temporal conventions. His most notable contribution in this respect was the seven-hour epic *Napoléon* (1927), which was meant to be projected on three adjacent screens. By the 1950s, Gance's star had faded, but his ambitions were as grand as ever. Kaplan started working as his assistant and would remain in that position for ten years, on films such as *Magirama* (1956) and *Austerlitz* (1960). During this period, she also became close friends with several first-generation surrealists, present or former, including André Breton, André Masson, and Philippe Soupault, as well as younger contributors to the movement, such as the writer André Pieyre de Mandiargues. [12] In the 1920s, the surrealists had vehemently attacked Gance for his artistic pretensions. Now, Breton was sufficiently taken by *Magirama* to laud Gance in *L'art magique*, where he presents the director, alongside Josef von Sternberg and Orson Welles, as one of the filmmakers whose works exemplify the recovery of magic art in modernity.[13] Gance and Kaplan also published their film script "Le Royaume de la terre" as a supplement to the second issue of the surrealist journal *Le Surréalisme, même* in 1957. Kaplan, then, contributed to the belated reconciliation of the surrealists and one of the representatives of the 1920s French film avant-garde.[14]

During the time that she worked with Gance, Kaplan also started to direct her own films. She initially made a string of artist documentaries with a decidedly surrealist flavour. The first of these was *Gustave Moreau* (1961), for which she brought the camera with her into the Moreau museum in Paris. The often desolate museum was one of Breton's favourite haunts, and the symbolist Moreau was another one of those artists he valorized for the resuscitation of magic in art.[15] Breton contributes a passage to the voice-over for the film, which alters between male and female tones of voice in order to emphasize Moreau's sense of divided self.[16] This assertion of gender ambivalence is imbricated in surrealism's quest for dissolving dualities, but also more specifically associated with Breton's increasing fascination with the "primordial androgyne" at the time, and Kaplan's own firm conviction that art ought to be fundamentally androgynous.[17] *Dessins et merveilles* (*Designs and Marvels*, 1966), about Victor Hugo's drawings, and *La Nouvelle orangerie* (1966), about the art collection in the eponymous building, are also shot through with references to surrealism. The former quotes Breton's first manifesto: "Hugo is surrealist when he is not stupid." The latter closes by claiming that these artworks appeal to "the eye in its savage state," an explicit allusion to Breton's "Surrealism and Painting." Kaplan's other art documentaries include *À la source, la femme aimée* (*At the Source, the Beloved Woman*, 1965), about André Masson's erotic drawings, and *Le regard Picasso* (*Picasso's Look*, 1967), about Picasso's art.[18] *À la source, la femme aimée* invites the spectator into Masson's polymorphously perverse universe, in which humans, vegetables, and animals engage in constant metamorphoses and contorted cavorting. As such, the film is an intimation of sorts of the overflowing eros Kaplan evokes in her feature films. Two years after *Le regard Picasso*, Kaplan made *A Very Curious Girl*. She subsequently directed four more feature films, *Papa, les petits bateaux (Papa, the Little Boats,* 1973), *Néa* (1976), *Charles et Lucie* (1979), and *Plaisir d'amour* (*The Pleasure of Love*, 1991), as well as the TV film *Pattes de velours* (*Soft Paws*, 1987).[19] Much like her short films, Kaplan's feature films are marked by her surrealist tastes and her proximity to the movement's conceptions and ideals, to the extent that it often assumes a mythological position.

Kaplan's debut as a feature filmmaker coincided with a turbulent time for organized surrealism. When Breton died in 1966, the French faction of the movement was left in a state of disarray.[20] The Paris group was briefly energized again by the events leading up to May 1968, a time that

was infused with the spirit of surrealism's call for a thorough transformation of everyday life.[21] The failure of the 1968 revolt, however, intensified the group's crisis. In March 1969, forty-five years after the first surrealist manifesto had signalled the movement's inception, twenty-seven members of the group signed the declaration "Sas" and announced that group activity was suspended.[22] In September that year, Jean Schuster published the statement "The Fourth Chant" in *Le Monde*. In it, Schuster distinguishes between surrealism considered as "an ontological component of the human mind, its eternal counter-current […] and the historically determined movement."[23] The latter, he announced, was now dead. But surrealism was not so easily terminated. Surrealist activity had spread throughout the world ever since the 1920s, and the numerous groups outside France did not feel obliged to follow creeds stemming from Paris. Several of the Paris surrealists also refused to agree to the termination of collective activity, and instead formed new, if comparatively little known, constellations.[24] Kaplan, too, was undeterred in her allegiance to surrealism. She had never joined the group, but had acted in the vicinity of the movement for several years.[25] After Schuster's dissolution, Kaplan, like many of the group members, continued on an independent trajectory that adhered strongly to surrealism and its tradition.[26]

Two of Kaplan's essays are telling for how she positions her films in relation to surrealism. In her brief and lyrical 1965 essay "Enough or Still More," she posits that there is a fundamental unity of surrealism and cinema, and writes that: "The adventure of cinema (from Latin *adventurus*: what must happen) will be convulsive: surrealism. Or it will not be at all."[27] Much like the surrealist film critic Ado Kyrou, then, Kaplan manifests an exalted belief in cinema's capacity to incarnate adventure.[28] She also inscribes film in a wider surrealist tradition, since, in a condensed form, she connects cinema with Breton's appeal to convulsive beauty in *Nadja*.[29] A more oblique reference to surrealism can be detected in her expression of this surrealist potential as "what must happen," which echoes the 1947 tract "Inaugural Rupture" that defines surrealism as "what will be." In that way, Kaplan signals a continued belief in the historical necessity of surrealism's attempted dissolution of antinomies and incarnation of the marvellous in everyday life.[30] Kaplan's 1964 essay "Au repas des guerrières" continues instilling hope in the intersection of surrealism and film, and calls for a surrealist eroticism in the cinema. While Kaplan contends that the film medium has already performed miracles, she dreams of the day in which we can see "the sight

of a beautiful young man captured by a heterosexual camera."[31] Kaplan, however, takes care to point out that she not only envisions an inversion of gender roles, but instead alludes to Rimbaud as she puts her hopes in a future female seer engaged in "discovering *the unknown*, expressing that 'other' eroticism still so badly, so infrequently represented on the screen."[32] Film, then, has the potential to reveal other facets of the world through imaginative depictions of eroticism. Kaplan ends the brief essay with a rousing call for erotic action: "Since you have only your chains to lose and a whole, sensory world to win, erotics of all countries, unite!"[33]

Condensed and allusive as they are, these two texts appear to be something like programmatic statements for Kaplan's own feature film-making to come. In line with her belief in the profound unity of surrealism and cinema, her films invoke surrealism as something of a transformative force of necessity. *A Very Curious Girl* and *Néa* depict diegetic worlds saturated with surrealist myth. Her practice as a female filmmaker is also directed towards depicting eroticism from the other side, but hers is a female perspective that is intimately bound up with the transformative view of life and the world that the surrealists inherited from Rimbaud. In *Néa*, she explicitly thematizes this notion of the woman eroticist as a seer whose work has the power to transform the world. In both *A Very Curious Girl* and *Néa*, Kaplan self-reflexively realizes her conviction that cinema is a thoroughly surrealist medium, and she does this through narratives that are permeated with references to both surrealism and the wider current of the marvellous.

It may be pertinent with a brief summary of *A Very Curious Girl* and *Néa*. *A Very Curious Girl* is set in a fictive French village. Marie and her mother are outcasts, nomads who occupy a run-down shed in the woods outside the village. They work for miniscule pay for the landowner Irène, who also exploits Marie's services sexually. At the start of the film, Marie's mother has just died after having been hit by a car. No one in the village assumes any responsibility. The priest tries to convince her of the need for a proper Christian burial, but Marie retorts that her mother "spat on you and your God." Instead, she purchases wine and cigarettes for the wake. A few curious men from the village show up at Marie's shed, and she plies them with wine into assisting her with the burial. Drunk, the men start to show that they all covet her. Having realized that she wields a certain power over the men, she starts to charge for the sexual services that they have forced her to provide them with. Developing a penchant for manipulating the men, Marie constantly raises her prices, aggravating

the men. She invests in a tape recorder, which she conceals and uses to record her clients' frequently confessional conversations with her. Having upset the fragile order in the village sufficiently, she decides to enact her revenge. Entering the church during service on a Sunday, she places the tape recorder out of reach on a high shelf and leaves as it starts playing back her recordings of illicit conversations. Chaos erupts as the villagers' secrets are exposed. Marie leaves the church and strolls joyously whistling down a country road, away from the village.

Néa is a loose adaptation of one of Emmanuelle Arsan's *Emmanuelle* novels. Arsan's only demand was allegedly that Kaplan should retain the young age of the protagonist as well as her means of revenge.[34] Indeed, much like *A Very Curious Girl*, *Néa* focuses on a young woman. At sixteen, however, Sibylle is younger than Marie, and she does not grow up on the margins of society, but at its very centre, in an upper-class family in Switzerland. Despite her stodgy father's fierce attempts to discipline the family into normality, below the surface they are less than conventional. Sibylle's mother has an affair with her husband's live-in sister. And Sibylle herself is obsessed with her ambition to become a great writer of erotica. Caught shoplifting erotic literature in a bookstore, she boasts to the owner Axel Thorpe that her own writing is just as good as the works she has stolen. Challenged to prove it, she starts writing in her room, a cluttered chamber reminiscent of a magician's lair, which she shares with her cat, Cumes. At first, Sibylle writes with seeming effortlessness. But eventually, she realizes that she needs to be initiated into lovemaking if she is to complete her novel, and she persuades the middle-aged Axel to aid her. Once they have made love, she sits down and fills page after page with writing, completing her novel in one session. Axel is enthralled by the result and agrees to publish the novel, *NÉA*. But since Sibylle is underage, she has to agree to remain anonymous; Axel also requires the temporary termination of their relationship. The novel is published to great commercial success and considerable outrage. It is lauded on television, while masses of people take to the street and demonstrate against its obscenity. But Sibylle finds out that Axel is having an affair with her conventional sister, and starts plotting an elaborate revenge upon him. When he visits her family at a ski resort, she frames him for rape, having scratched herself bloody and smeared semen collected from a boy her own age over herself. Axel escapes and is forced to live on the run. When he returns furious one day, Sibylle, having had her revenge, embraces him, and they are reunited in a surrealist *amour fou*. Meanwhile, her family has read her novel, without knowing

that she wrote it. Its daring erotic depictions aid them in rethinking their own situation, and her mother and aunt finally abandon Sibylle's father in order to pursue their own relationship. *NÉA*, then, leads to dramatic upheaval and change, societal as well as personal.

A Very Curious Girl and *Néa* depict female acts of revolt against a repressive, patriarchal order. Both the films appear to construct surrealist myths. This is apparent in Kaplan's frequent references to the surrealist tradition, but also in her tendency to depict her protagonists as witches or sorceresses, whose association with magic constitutes a notable part of their anti-patriarchal prowess. Here, Kaplan's unassuming style and references to popular genres are, much like her depictions of female revolt and liberation, intimately fused with her creation of a diegetic world teeming with allusions to surrealism.

The Marvellous Is Popular

Through her use of the feature-film format, Kaplan aligns her filmmaking with other tendencies in the surrealist film at the time. She also employs the narrative feature film as an efficient way of saturating her films with the marvellous in a way that bridges them with her writings. The centrality of the intersection of film and the marvellous for Kaplan is indicated by her 1971 "ciné-roman" *Le Collier de Ptyx*. The book has an epigraph taken from Pierre Mabille's *Mirror of the Marvelous*, which proclaims that the marvellous is a revolutionary force that provides humans with the power to triumph over the laws of the universe.[35] Mabille's ruminations on the marvellous also seem to inform Kaplan's films. This is most apparent in the way that she refrains from realism in favour of both settings and characters of a more mythical provenance. Kaplan herself states that *A Very Curious Girl* is marked by "the forceful intrusion of the Marvelous."[36] This can be seen in the film's depiction of the village as a place secluded from the surrounding world, where the inhabitants appear to be stuck in a state almost outside time. They are ostensibly governed by charitable Christian morals, but they shamelessly exploit Marie and her mother as cheap labour. Living in a shack outside the village, Marie is in a position of ambivalent marginality; close to nature and animals, she draws her powers from what appears to be a pagan understanding and experience of the world. Money and morals carry different charges for her than for the villagers. She embodies the potential for marvellous revenge on the repressive order, and she does this primarily by being portrayed as a witch of sorts.

Néa is even more fraught with the surrealist marvellous than *A Very Curious Girl*. Kaplan clearly signals that *Néa* takes place in a landscape of surrealist myth, since the door to Sibylle's chambers is adorned with a luminous quote from Breton's *Mad Love*: "On the side of the abyss, made of philosopher's stone, the starry castle opens."[37] Inside, a poster from a Moreau exhibition hangs on a wall. In another room, a magnified photograph of Rimbaud can be seen. The film combines such allusions to surrealism and its tradition with an almost overt fairy-tale structure.[38] Here, too, the settings are important. Sibylle is shown, at night, rowing a boat over the black lake to Axel's castle-like, gothic mansion. Mabille comments that "castles surrounded by deep moats […] possess […] the power of magic circles. As soon as the drawbridge, that fragile link to humanity, goes up, a closed and marvelous universe is created. Crossing water gives the one who succeeds the feeling that he has passed through a trial."[39] The castle in itself is depicted as an enchanted and uncanny place in *Néa*, replete with hidden passages and layers of repressed memories. In that sense, the film points to a central element in the surrealist fascination with the gothic. In "Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism," Breton writes that the castles in gothic novels appear to be particularly privileged "observatories of the inner sky."[40] For Breton, the castle is bound up with what he considers to be the gothic novel's similarities with surrealism's attempts at "elaborating a collective myth."[41] Here, in labyrinthine corridors, "beings of pure *temptation*" appear, manifestations of the latent content of the period that constitutes the prime matter for a new myth.[42] In *Néa*, then, Axel's castle appears as both a locus for the marvellous, and as an allusion to gothic depictions of the castle as a place for the disorienting burrowing and violent manifestation of desire. Such a triumph of desire and the imagination over the dreary circumstances of everyday consensus reality is also central to the way in which Mabille describes the journey through the marvellous.

Kaplan's adherence to the marvellous has caused some confusion and consternation among critics and scholars. While Kaplan has been lauded as a pioneering female filmmaker, her stylistic and narrative choices diverge considerably from the expectations of what "political" film ought to look like. Ian Christie describes how, post 1968, "'form' came to be regarded as intrinsically political," and so a climate emerged that was "informed by a revived Brechtianism."[43] A 1972 review of *A Very Curious Girl* objects to the film's happy ending in telling terms. Brenda Roman writes that "one almost wishes for a Brechtian epilogue

[…] which would say that while this is a fine ending for a farce, in real life […] Mary would be reduced to servitude again, her rebellion crushed."[44] In 2006, Geetha Ramanathan still finds it puzzling that most of *A Very Curious Girl* "is shot in mainstream style," and contends that only the "few surrealist" elements diverge from this.[45] Such criticisms indicate the strong legacy of what Robert Stam describes as a hyper-Brechtian ideal of "stripping away of all the layers of dominant cinema's taken-for-granted pleasures," which ultimately "betrays a puritanical distaste for pleasure itself."[46] Other critics have been less hostile to pleasure and more receptive to Kaplan's unabashed depictions of mythical female victories over patriarchy. B. Ruby Rich describes how Kaplan showed up at the Knokke-Heist EXPMNTL festival as "a forbidden figure from the kingdom of narrative (tsk, tsk, so commercial) visiting the cloistered monks of the avant-garde," and that "Kaplan was unconcerned with avant-garde purity, and she was fun," evidently a liberating experience in a context of stern avant-garde aesthetics.[47] Rich also calls *Néa* "one of the first feminist pro-pornography statements, a wonderfully heretical film."[48] Rich's laudatory description, as well as Roman's critique, calls attention to the fact that Kaplan's films carve out an oppositional space and that they refuse to accept the tenets of political aesthetics as described by Christie and Stam. Kaplan's films, then, also trouble what Miriam Hansen describes as the ingrained binary of modernist and popular cinema, established and held onto by filmmakers and theorists alike,[49] taking an idiosyncratic stance in relation to the popular. It would be a mistake to divorce her unassuming style and incorporation of genre conventions from her adherence to surrealism. The intersection of what Ramanathan calls "mainstream style," popular elements, and Kaplan's sense of the marvellous is instead significant for her construction of surrealist myth. This aspect of her films can also be related to surrealism's longstanding contrary stance towards the art film and the cinematic avant-garde. As Christie puts it, the French history of the avant-garde "had been complicated by the emergence of Surrealism in the 1920s as a polemically *anti*-avant-garde movement."[50] Against the impressionistic avant-garde and its aims of making cinema a respectable art form, the surrealists posited their own film history, which heeded what they perceived to be the medium's liberating lack of cultural baggage and propensity for the marvellous. By the time of the postwar period, this search for the marvellous is as evident as ever in Ado Kyrou's *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*. His surrealist film history originates

with Georges Méliès, continues with Louis Feuillade, and takes in the scattered examples of surrealist film production, "before turning again to popular cinema […] for sources of the 'marvellous'."[51] Kyrou values cinematic sensation, spectacular thrills, and mad love, and so looks to Italian peplum films, soft-core pornography, horror, and Hollywood comedy in his search for alternatives to the Cocteaus and Bressons that he despised so much.[52] In the essay "Romantisme et cinéma," published in the inaugural issue of *L'âge du cinéma*, Kyrou salutes films that dare approach the unknown, that give free rein to the most intense feelings, from love to revenge, and that do this under the flag of liberty and revolt.[53] Here, a surrealist cinema of unbridled sensation and perilous pleasure takes shape. These boundless hopes for what cinema may be informed both surrealist film criticism and filmmaking over the following two decades.

The Formation of the Surrealist Feature Film

Kaplan's early work as a filmmaker and critic took place during an eventful time in French film, which was marked not least by the emergence of the *nouvelle vague*. The years leading up to Kaplan's incursions into the feature film saw ongoing struggles between surrealist and *nouvelle vague* filmmakers and critics, with Robert Benayoun a particularly fierce critic of the latter.[54] The surrealists may have reconciled themselves with their old enemy Gance, but these struggles demonstrate a continued surrealist attempt to stake out a counter-film history, in which sensation, horror, and the poetry of the popular are privileged over both presumed quality and ideological positioning. Paul Hammond points out that while Benayoun and the film journal *Positif*, which was home to many surrealist critics, promoted political analysis, they avoided any political or moral puritanism, instead favouring a more imaginative critique that was receptive to the joys and thrills of popular culture.[55] Indeed, even as the Paris surrealists staged the exhibition *L'Ecart absolu* in 1965 as a protest against the consumer society and the increased presence of technology in everyday life, they kept to their strategy of discriminating between the commercial status of entertainment films and their poetic charge.[56] They privileged the active strategies of the spectator seeking the gold of poetry in popular films over ideologically motivated attempts at expelling the spectator from the film.[57]

Do these struggles resound in surrealist film productions from this era? It is at least tempting to draw such a conclusion. The 1960s saw a

veritable flourishing of surrealist film production, with, on the one hand, short films by Marcel Mariën, Ado Kyrou, and Jan Švankmajer, and, on the other, a large number of feature films. Several of the latter contain prominent genre elements. Of course, the incorporation of popular elements is in itself nothing new when it comes to surrealist cinema. *Un chien andalou* draws on slapstick comedy, and *L'âge d'or* can, as Dudley Andrew points out, be considered to largely be a parade of attractions, looking back to the mode of early film.[58] But the relation of these pioneering surrealist films to popular modes and influences is disorienting, constantly undermining their narrative, spatial, and temporal coherence. In contrast, many of the later surrealist feature films construct more conventionally coherent narratives, in which they then incorporate genre elements. Benayoun made two comedy-tinged feature films, with the time-travel fantasy *Paris Does Not Exist* and the road movie *Serious as Pleasure*, in vocal opposition to the pretensions of contemporary art filmmakers.[59] Among the lesser-known surrealist feature films from the era, Kyrou's 1972 *The Monk* is an adaptation of Matthew G. Lewis's gothic novel, so lauded by the surrealists, with a script by Buñuel and his collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière. Gothic, too, were the former surrealist Jean Ferry's collaborations with the Belgian director Harry Kümel on the vampire film *Daughters of Darkness* and the intricate mythological fantasy *Malpertuis*. In Poland, Wojciech Has directed the labyrinthine *The Saragossa Manuscript* (*Rekopis znaleziony w Saragossie*, 1965), an adaptation of Jan Potocki's long-lost gothic novel that had been discovered by Roger Caillois, replete with Kabbalists and thwarted desire, and narrated in a deviously humorous tone. Transposing the surrealist feature film to a more explicitly erotic hinterland, the Polish-born director Walerian Borowczyk adapted works by the surrealist writer André Pieyre de Mandiargues in such films as *Immoral Tales* (*Contes immoraux*, 1974) and *The Margin* (*La marge*, 1976), and conjured up an at once oneiric and frenzied eroticism in *The Beast* (*La bête*, 1975) and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osborne* (*Docteur Jekyll et les femmes*, 1981). In these surrealist features, comedy, the gothic, and eroticism are ways of suggesting a world replete with unacknowledged desires, ambivalent promises of adventures capable of opening up in the midst of the everyday.

Buñuel's shadow looms as large as ever over these films, but at this point his late feature films exert the greatest influence. In exile in Mexico during the 1940s and 1950s, Buñuel had to resign himself to working within the confines of commercial cinema. Many of his Mexican films

were made strictly for hire, while others were lauded as returns to the surrealist form, such as *Los Olvidados* and *Nazarin* (1959).[60] When Buñuel returned to making films in Europe, he retained many of the approaches he had been forced to adopt while working in the Mexican film industry, and he elevated his seemingly unassuming style into a devious signature.[61] There is little by way of stylistic experimentation in his late work, even as the narratives in films like *The Milky Way* (*La voie lactée*, 1969), *Belle de Jour*, and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* dissolve the borders between dream and waking, past and present, and imagination and reality. Buñuel's stylistic simplicity appeared eminently well suited to surrealism's lingering suspicion of self-consciously artistic ambitions and political preaching in the cinema, since surrealist feature films all adhere to a comparatively limited stylistic range, whether depicting time travel or tragic vampires.

There is, however, one significant difference between Buñuel and the other surrealist feature-film makers. Once he was free from the constraints of the Mexican film industry, Buñuel evaded explicit genre elements. Kyrou and Kümel, in contrast, made films that can best be described as surrealist horror, while Kaplan, incorporating elements of comedy and soft-core pornography, strives for a popular appeal to her films.[62] It is as if here, the elements favoured in the surrealist reception of cinema and those foregrounded in the surrealist production of cinema have approached one another in a more seamless way than before. In one sense, this proximity to genre can be understood as an obstinate way of finding an alternative route to those taken by the art film and the political film as they were discussed and produced at the time.[63] The example of Kümel is telling. His turn to the vampire film with *Daughters of Darkness* was a protest against the Belgian establishment's privileging of the quality art film and its opposition to genre cinema.[64] In a deliberately perverse move, he based the film on the myth of the blood-drinking countess Elizabeth Bathory, and combined it with elements from Sheridan Le Fanu's horror novella *Carmilla* (1872). Casting the art-film icon Delphine Seyrig, known for her role in Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* (*L'année dernière à Marienbad*, 1960) as the film's glacial and cruel vampire countess, Kümel further collided with the worlds of genre and art in ways that went against official expectations of good taste and ignored the hyper-Brechtian suspicion of pleasure. Such approaches contribute to the attempts in this period to sketch out a surrealist film in which sensation and the marvellous are posited as potent political means in themselves.

Much like Kyrou and Benayoun, Kaplan opposes the overly serious art-film tradition, and prefers the pleasures of popular culture. Her privileging of the marvellous over Brechtian or realist depictions is in evidence in her statement that: “When I tell stories I prefer to avoid neo-realism, because you can be much more universal through myth.”[65] A vital part of the way in which a surrealist myth takes shape in Kaplan’s films is their adherence to a counter-tradition of critical but enchanted filmmaking. Kaplan’s evocation of the marvellous stems both from her tendency to use certain privileged settings, allusions, and figures in her films, and from her characteristic way of negotiating between popular elements and surrealist tastes.[66] Here, she seems to infuse Kyrou’s laudatory statement that “the marvellous is popular” with a complex understanding of the marvellous as Mabille delineates it.[67] And in Kaplan’s films, Kyrou’s vague exclamation that cinema is “the new myth of mankind” is likewise complemented with an adherence to Breton’s definition of the new myth in its complexity.[68]

This is not to imply that Kaplan’s films are devoid of critique, but rather that her critical stance cannot be separated from her films’ tendencies towards unabashedly happy endings and their appeal to popular pleasures. More than anything, Kaplan’s proximity to the surrealist marvellous can be seen in the way that she depicts the events unfolding as the fulfilment of a destiny, as it were. Here, her films can be compared with Mabille’s notion that “[t]he marvelous stays perfectly in tune with the inner necessity of our desires and the ultimate necessity of the universe,” even as this entails the former transgressing the very laws of the latter.[69] For Kaplan, this mechanism is intimately bound up with her employment of elements of popular culture in her films. Consider again her use of gothic elements. For Breton, the gothic novel enacts an unprecedented revenge of the pleasure principle upon the reality principle.[70] In Kaplan’s films, this victory is frequently thematized in the way in which narrative pleasure and the overcoming of repressive circumstances are intimately entwined, as in a wish-fulfilment fantasy tinged with radical revolt.

Inverting the Poles

Much as *Le Surréalisme en 1947* sought to outline a new myth through intricate references to surrealists and their forebears, Kaplan self-consciously positions her films, more or less explicitly, as parts of the vast

intertextual web that makes up surrealism and its conception of a tradition. *A Very Curious Girl* and *Néa* both cast their protagonists as witches or sorceresses. *Néa* gives a clear indication that the witches in Kaplan's films are based on a mythical understanding of historical witches rather than on any examples of actual contemporary witchcraft. When Sibylle is plotting her revenge on Axel, she can be seen reading the French historian Jules Michelet's polemical 1862 book *La Sorcière*. Michelet sought to write a counter-history in which he described the witch as a necessary counter-force against a Christian order based on the hope that nature will disappear and that life will be extinguished.[71] Hence, he makes the witch, and her cohort Satan, emblematic for a close proximity to nature, posited against the Christian focus on the afterlife. *La Sorcière* was instrumental to the surrealists' understanding of the witch as an embodiment of female powers of magic, proximity to nature, and resistance to Christianity. Michelet's claim that witches were frequently young and beautiful made the witch a particularly potent personification of the intersection of femininity and magic for the surrealists.[72]

Kaplan, too, draws on this symbolic and mythical power of the witch, and her protagonists are indeed young and portrayed as desirable. In her films, the witch embodies a resistance to those very edifices of Western civilization that surrealism sought to replace with a new myth. Löwy describes surrealism's efforts as a reaction against the disenchantment process, which condemned magic and first replaced it with the sanctified reign of religion, before industrialist civilization definitely eradicated everything that "could not be calculated, quantified, or turned into merchandise."[73] He contends that the witch-hunts were the outcome of a more general persecution of "everything that tries to escape the rigid and narrow-minded confines of use value."[74] Kaplan's construction of surrealist myth plays on surrealism's incorporation of the rejected knowledge of esotericism and magic in order to construct radically enchanted alternatives to the narrow focus on use value, something that is reinforced by her recurring allusions to the tarot, divination, and witchcraft.[75] For Kaplan, however, the witch is also a potent figure of revolt against the male oppression of women. In this employment of the witch, she draws on, but also problematizes, nuances, and revises, surrealist notions of woman as sorceress.

The first story in Kaplan's collection *Le Réservoir des sens* (1966) is a potent example of her strategies for reclaiming notions of woman as a liminal creature, endowed with access to the night side of nature.

"Prenez garde à la Panthère" is narrated from the point of view of a woman who sometimes turns into a panther. Residing in a tower and guarded by the Little Red Man, she was born of a woman burned at the stake and a man shot dead in the woods after having torn twenty people to death with his claws. One particular night, she can no longer abstain from descending to the ground, and, walking through a park, she comes upon a man to whom she is immediately drawn. As they engage in sex, she transforms into her animal form, intoxicated by the man's body. She claws him severely and only spares his life because, unlike other people, he shows no fear of her. In film, the theme of the woman turned lethal feline recurs in the two versions of *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942; Paul Schrader, 1982), but it is also related to other conceptions of the female as a dangerously seductive predator or monster.[76] Kaplan's version of this myth is telling for how she adapts, plays with, and inverts such misogynous narratives, now gleefully depicting the monstrous woman tearing asunder male bodies and male reign alike. *Le Réservoir des sens* contains plenty of similar subversions. Kaplan retells the story of Jesus and Judas as a homoerotic narrative of repressed lust and misguided betrayal. She tells of a future matriarchal society in which men are used for sexual pleasure by inebriated women. And she depicts how a necrophile makes love to a recently deceased woman, with little sexual experience when alive, with such intensity that she comes back to life. Kaplan narrates these events, however, with a lightness of touch and a blackness of humour that emphasize that vengeance, in order to be worthwhile, needs to be exquisitely and cruelly pleasurable. In Kaplan's subversions of the patriarchal order, rage is intertwined with desire.

Kaplan's depiction of her protagonists as witches can be related to Breton's *Arcanum 17*, in which he argues passionately for the liberation of women, postulating that this would thoroughly change Western society for the better.[77] He also proposes that masculine society has run its course. Since ostensibly male values were responsible for leading the world towards the brink of destruction, he thinks it time to start privileging what Western society construed as female qualities, including magic, intuition, nurture, and closeness to nature.[78] Hence, in *Arcanum 17*, Breton envisions that the new myth would replace scientism with magic, instrumental reason with poetic intuition, salvation with rebirth. He finds additional support for his view of female powers of magic and regeneration in the writings of Eliphas Lévi.[79] Breton's reversal of the gendered cultural poles is not founded on an essentialist understanding

of what they entail.[80] Yet, for all his remarkably sophisticated propositions on the many dimensions of male oppression of women, *Arcanum 17* is still marked by an idealizing view of woman. Several female surrealists have, however, brought further nuance to these questions, and engaged them in dialogue with feminist struggles.[81]

Kaplan's films and writings share Breton's valorization of the witch as a figure of revolt against Christian norms, but they also diverge from his benevolent view of female magic. Kaplan's protagonists are associated with nature and magic, but she complements Breton's wartime view of the healing aspects of this female magic with her insistence on the need for female revenge on male oppression. She replaces the life-giving woman of the tarot Star card with the more malevolent figure of the witch, which she makes integral to her criticism of the injustices suffered by women throughout history. Claire Johnston points out that "the surrealists created their own kind of mythology of women" who were "seen to embody magical powers," and concedes that Kaplan shares this myth, but differs in that "she poses the woman as subject."[82] Lenuta Giukin similarly remarks that "Kaplan attempts to change the existing myth and rewrite it from a feminine perspective."[83] It would be a simplification to claim that all male surrealists let women remain objects, as Johnston suggests. But it is certainly true that Kaplan imbues the surrealist myth of woman with a keener anchoring in feminist struggles. Kaplan indeed joins a wider rank of female surrealists who have sought to reclaim surrealist femininity by creating their own images of and myths about it.

A Digression on Leonora Carrington

There is a photograph of Leonora Carrington in New York around 1942.[84] The exiled English artist and writer is leaning against the wall in a sparsely furnished room, gazing into the camera. Next to her, a broom stands against the table. Seated there is the Chilean painter Roberto Matta, but he is almost entirely obscured from view. Instead, Carrington's shock of black hair and her commanding look dominate the photograph. In the foreground, a cat peers up at the camera, as if doubling Carrington's gaze. The photograph's composition and sense of movement make it appear to have been shot spontaneously, as if the photographer had just opened the door and snapped it on the threshold to the room. As such, the photograph has a deceptive character of an unfiltered peek into Carrington's domestic everyday life.

A closer look seems to reveal a self-conscious and premeditated fashioning of identity on Carrington's behalf. At the time of the photograph, Carrington had only recently emerged from an episode of severe mental illness, and was struggling with the horrors of the experience.[85] She would go on to work them through in her autobiographical account *Down Below* (1944), written at the instigation of Pierre Mabille. In his *Anthology of Black Humor*, Breton relates Carrington's personality and appearance to Michelet's definition of the witch as being gifted with "the illuminism of lucid madness" and a youth and beauty that flies in the face of Christian conceptions of the witch's ugly demeanour.[86] For Breton, Carrington's bout of mental illness gave her access to privileged experiences, and her paintings were henceforth "the most laden with the modern 'marvelous'" and "penetrated by an occult light."[87] But as Carrington herself shows in *Down Below*, there was hardly anything lucid about her madness. While she did find that it harboured an occult "Knowledge," she only extracted this gnosis at a great cost.[88] She was also decidedly uncomfortable with being perceived as a beautiful young woman, a merely exterior designation that did not match her inner turmoil. In a letter to her French publisher Henri Parisot, she protests that "I am no longer the Ravishing young girl […] I am an old lady who has lived a lot and *I have changed*."[89]

The black cat and the broom are of course the key attributes of popular conceptions of the witch. Their presence in the New York photograph of Carrington can be seen as a way for her to position herself as a witch in partial defiance of male surrealist conceptions of the female as a magical "child-woman."[90] The image also appears almost as the harrowed photographic twin of Carrington's famous self-portrait *Inn of the Dawn Horse* (1937–38). There she portrays herself as a sorceress seated in an upper-class interior, in which she commands a hyena. The painting depicts a room that appears mythical and timeless, at once imprisoning the artist and feeding into her magic capacities, and for all its ambivalence it exudes a definite atmosphere of enchantment. In contrast, the New York photograph at first appears decidedly disenchanted. An onlooker aware of Carrington's personal history may be tempted to see her dishevelled appearance as a sign of drab reality having caught up with the elaborate, fairy tale-like fantasies of the painter prodigy seemingly drunk on her own gifts a few years earlier. Yet, such an Icarian interpretation would be all too hasty. The painting's depiction of communication with an animal is replicated in the photograph, even though it may be a

fortuitous accident that Carrington and the cat are synchronized in their gazes. The photograph may give the impression of being a peek into the sparsely furnished everyday environment of the exiled artist, now old beyond her years and having paid the price for her luminous imagination. But Carrington's association of herself with the cat and the broom points to her continued view of herself as closely allied with magic and animals.[91] So do many of her activities in New York, where she contributed to the investigations into myth and magic in the journal *VVV* and the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*.[92] May Carrington and Matta in fact have been at work on the "non-Euclidean tarot," designs for which they published in *VVV*? Either way, this photograph indicates something of how Carrington's embrace of the status of a witch was now more firmly grounded in her own experience of disarray. The room, clearly domestic, also reflects a reclamation of presumably female space, a strategy that was to have repercussions in much of Carrington's later work, in which she connects alchemy and magic with the kitchen.[93]

Witches Against Patriarchy

The photograph of Leonora Carrington may appear tangential in relation to films made a few decades later. But it pertains to many of the most central issues that Nelly Kaplan actualizes in her mythologization of the witch, and her attendant tendency to depict a female proximity to animals and nature. In his statement that Carrington embodies Michelet's definition of the witch as a beautiful woman with access to states of lucid madness, Breton can certainly be considered intrusive, projecting his own ideals upon experiences he had never been forced to live through. Carrington's and Kaplan's own practice and writings negotiate and revise such projections in order to articulate strategies for resistance. Mahon describes how Carrington "drew on personal, private experiences," but did so in dialogue with surrealism.[94] She found strength in its call for a new myth, which opened up for an alignment of alchemy, magic, and a nascent feminist radicalism in the arts, something that resonates with Kaplan's own position as a pioneering female filmmaker drawing on the legacy of surrealist myth and magic.[95]

Kaplan herself is forward about her protagonists' status as witches. She comments that Marie in *A Very Curious Girl* "*knows* things, because she's a witch. [...] She knows magic things."[96] Marie's status as a witch takes many expressions, frequently with a symbolic charge against Christianity.[97]

In one of the first lines of dialogue in the film, she is told that she is "a witch, just like your mother." She refuses to give her mother a Christian burial and tells the villagers and the local priest that "she spat on you and your God." Before she is about to bury her mother in the forest instead, Marie undergoes a ritual transformation into a more pronounced witch-like creature. She reddens her cheeks with the juice of raspberries and blackens her eyebrows and eyelashes with the charcoal from a match, as if signalling her distance from society and its consumer products, and reverting to a *bricoleur*-like instinct of making use of what is at hand. Kaplan herself comments that the burial is indeed meant to appear like a witch's Sabbath.[98] Marie also has a goat as a companion, an animal traditionally associated with pagan proximity to nature and its unruly forces, personified by Pan, and subsequently with the devil. The oppositional nature of Marie's relation with the goat is made clear by the villagers' hatred of the animal. Their rage culminates when the postman shoots the tethered goat. Marie, however, insists on her association with the goat and takes to wearing a necklace with a pendant showing a goat's head in profile.

In *Néa*, a bemused Axel comments that Sibylle is a witch. She, too, is depicted as being in close touch with nature and animals. Her name alludes to the ancient oracular Sibylle, and together with her cat, Cumes, their names reference the "Sibylle de Cumes," the Sibylle in Cumes. The cat Cumes is also depicted as something of Sibylle's familiar spirit. Their deep and intimate bond is emphasized in a scene in which Sibylle masturbates before setting out to write erotica. The masturbating Sibylle is crosscut with close-ups of the cat, and when she climaxes he, too, appears to feel pleasure. The shots of Sibylle are composed in a painterly manner, the soft lighting embedding her in the folds in the heavy drapes in her chamber, as if emphasizing her unity with her magical surroundings. Sibylle is then inscribed in an ancient, mythical tradition of female magic and mystery, as Michelet defined it, close to the forces of nature and in alliance with the animal kingdom.[99]

Kaplan also builds her myths around the theme of female revenge on a society in which women "have been kicked for forty thousand years."[100] In her films, this oppression of women is shown to be coupled with a hatred of the imagination, eroticism, and the marvellous. Prominent and spiteful male characters such as the postman in *A Very Curious Girl* and Sibylle's father in *Néa* personify this convergence. Marie's status as a witch, and her attendant alliance with a satanic nature, emphasizes her position as an outsider, but also charges it with a potent sense of resistance against this oppression and the dominant mores.

One aspect of this resistance can be seen in the way Marie spends the money she earns from selling her sexual services to the villagers. She adorns her austere cabin with a bricolage-like selection of trinkets and objects. Here, modern consumer goods become constituent parts of what ultimately takes on the appearance of something close to a *Wunderkammer* of kitsch. In an interview, Kaplan relates that while Marie is at first "very fascinated by all the objects of consumption," she comes to realize that this does not mean anything and that her pairing of different objects liberates them from "their 'logical' utilisation."[101] Kaplan then transforms the utilitarian objects that surround the inhabitants of Western civilization into a surrealist assemblage, an act of alchemy that turns the base material of consumer objects into non-utilitarian poetry.

Turning her sexuality into a weapon against the stuffy order, Marie's waste of the money she earns is a particularly provocative gesture towards the villagers. She does not use their hard-earned money in a rational fashion, in order to raise her own standards of living or to accumulate a fortune. Her wasteful actions here instead recall Georges Bataille's idea of expenditure.[102] For Bataille, Western modernity is in a process in which earlier epochs' dialectic of work and excess, accumulation and waste, have been supplanted by a homogenization, in which only the value of work and accumulation are recognized.[103] When communal rituals of excess and waste are replaced with a constant striving for accumulation, Bataille stipulates, social cohesion dissolves. Against this process, he posits what he calls a heterology, a recuperation of elements expulsed by "homogeneous" society, including body fluids, extreme emotions, and non-utilitarian activities, from games to waste.[104] By wasting her money on useless things, Marie is seen to transgress a taboo of the small society that has so exploited her.

In *A Very Curious Girl*, magic is added to this transgressive behaviour. One scene in the film encapsulates Kaplan's depictions of the triumph of the witch. Before Marie enacts her revenge on the villagers, she sets her own cabin on fire. In close-up facing the camera, Marie watches as the cabin burns, and the flames soon rise between her and the camera. Kaplan explains that this shot from the point of view of the fire had a specific purpose: "What I wanted to show is that the Witch is not burnt–she dominates the fire, and she will burn everything around her."[105] This inversion of the historical circumstances of the witch-hunts is telling for how Kaplan carves out a counter-myth by giving the witch a positive function and allowing her to emerge victorious. Again, her depiction of

Marie is largely in line with Michelet's revisionary take on the witch. In *Néa*, Kaplan emphasizes the connection of the witch and fire by associating Sibylle with fire throughout the film. When Axel first calls Sibylle a witch and when they first make love, they are bathed in the warm glow of a fireplace. Later, frustrated by Axel's evasive behaviour, Sibylle enlists fire for more malicious ends. Axel has told her that they can only be intimate again once the snow has melted from the nearby chapel. In defiance of the season, Sibylle casts a wicked glance at the building and it bursts into roaring flames.

A Very Curious Girl and *Néa*, along with the short stories in *Le Réservoir des Sens*, indicate that Kaplan frequently reworks ingrained myths into counter-myths. As Per Faxneld shows, some feminists have reclaimed and subverted misogynous Christian myths in order to construct liberatory counter-myths, often with recourse to a positive revaluation of Satan as liberator of women from the stranglehold of the old patriarchal Christian God.[106] Kaplan's counter-myths are not exclusively anchored in Christian myths, but many of them are directed against the complex of Christianity and capitalism that surrealism has turned so forcefully against in its criticism of Western civilization. Kaplan's focus, however, is more frequently and pointedly against the male oppression of women that is so foundational for Western society. A telling example of this strategy can be seen in *Charles et Lucie*. Having been robbed of all their belongings, the unfortunate protagonists wake up naked under a tree. Chris Holmlund describes how "In an obviously feminist reversal of the Adam and Eve story, a serpent watches overhead as […] Charles/Adam thoughtfully hands the famished Lucie/Eve the apple. Instead of doom and exile, however, his gesture now portends contrition and consideration."[107] Kaplan here executes a characteristically sly critique of religious conventions and repression of women. But I disagree with Holmlund's assertion that she tends to execute this criticism in an inoffensive manner. Kaplan may have a lightness of touch, but that does not preclude her films from having a diabolical bite.

Kaplan's use of the witch as an emblem of revenge does much to indicate how her films contribute to the surrealist new myth by nuancing and revising male surrealist notions of women. Kaplan's reasoning about her films and their relation to morals and the symbolic underpinning of society comes close to the surrealist hope for the functioning of the new myth as the basis for a new form of society, devoid of what post-war surrealism considers to be Christianity's suppression of vital knowledge

about and more intimate experiences of the world.[108] As Kaplan puts it in relation to *A Very Curious Girl*: "The important thing is to keep away the sentiment of sin, the sentiment of punishment that every film made by men wanted to tell us about: whores have to be thrown away by society, or have to repent!"[109] The witch, then, not only stands for the revenge of repressed nature and female force on a patriarchal reign, but is also connected by Kaplan with the persecuted figure of the prostitute or, in the case of *Néa*, the pornographer. While decisively incarnated in flesh, the resulting, intertextually charged, characters appear as something akin to those "haloed beings" that occupied the altars in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Recall, also, the discussion in connection with Wilhelm Freddie about surrealism's appeal to satanic and demonic forces and black magic, and their subversive effect in a society still tied to Christian mores. In the light of this, Kaplan's counter-myths can be seen as satirical inversions. Like Breton in *Arcanum 17*, they stretch out to encompass a wider surrealist evocation of rejected knowledge that can ultimately be placed at the service of a vibrant new myth. But now, this new myth is shorn of some of its idealization of women, and instead gives free rein to the witch driven by howling yet humorous rage, lighting a gigantic bonfire.

Investigating Sex, Becoming a Seer

Eroticism is central for Kaplan's surrealist questioning of ingrained power relations and the patriarchal oppression of women. Her most extended and complex take on eroticism is *Néa*. The film ties in with different surrealist conceptions and conceptualizations of sexuality. Kaplan displays her untimely surrealist belief in the transformative, shattering, and sacred character of love. But *Néa* also draws attention to the necessity to take into account the changing view of sexuality in surrealism between the movement's early years and the *EROS* exhibition and onwards. Several critics have condemned the heterosexist and masculinist stances of the early surrealist positions on sexuality, without giving due recognition to the more complex notions that emerged over time.[110] Come the *EROS* exhibition, not only had several female surrealists—notably Claude Cahun, Toyen, Joyce Mansour, and Leonora Carrington—long since explicitly addressed questions of female emancipation and sexuality. They had also depicted sexuality and femininity, in poetry, painting, and theoretical texts, in ways that both troubled

ideas of fixed gender and enacted descents into the darker recesses of the unconscious on a par with the macabre sexuality on display in so much work by male surrealists. Kaplan's work needs to be seen as a continuation of this development.

The intersection of eroticism and surrealist myth in *Néa* is already present in the film's epigraph by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier: "Attractions are proportionate to destinies." Fourier's words seem to encapsulate the narrative about a love affair that goes through a painful crisis only to be resumed all the more intensely. In *Néa*, Kaplan depicts a wide range of figures and phenomena with a particular status within surrealism: mad love, a young witch, a castle, and an overall topography of the marvellous. But she also makes eroticism central to her narrative, in a way that can be related to surrealist conceptions of sexuality ranging from the notorious late 1920s and early 1930s researches into sexuality up to the ritualized notion of eroticism in *EROS*. In Kaplan's films this theme of surrealist sexuality fuses with her narratives of female and societal emancipation, conceived as a myth of the victory of the marvellous over oppression. Most pointedly, the young protagonist Sibylle's incursions into visionary erotic writing and the massive popular success of her novel encapsulate Kaplan's own dreams of a form of surrealist cinema with both popular appeal and powers of societal upheaval.

When, in her essay "Au repas des guerrières," Kaplan envisions a future in which the film camera will be as likely to capture "a beautiful young man" as it is to lovingly caress a woman, she stresses that she is not after a simple reversal of roles. Instead, she suffuses her hopes of an expanded eroticism in cinema with a surrealist ideal of the female filmmaker as a "seer."[111] Sibylle seems to embody Kaplan's envisioning of a female eroticist-seer, following Rimbaud's visionary proclamations. Sibylle's last name, Ashby, emphasizes this connection, since she shares it with the mysterious Léonie Aubois d'Ashby, in Rimbaud's poem "Devotions" in *Illuminations*.[112] Kaplan has used the name Léonie d'Ashby for fictional characters in her work on other occasions, but it is particularly resonant in the context of *Néa*, conceived both as a depiction of the female seer and an example of a continued search for a new myth.[113] Indeed, Breton dedicated an altar in the 1947 exhibition to the "Sister" Léonie Aubois d'Ashby, whom he perceived as "one of the most mysterious figures encountered" in *Illuminations*.[114]

Kaplan also mythologizes herself in her films and writing, often with a self-reflexive humour. In *Charles et Lucie*, Kaplan, credited as Belen,

performs the part of the diviner Nostradama, who gets to declare Kaplan's own surrealist misgivings about a modernity that has given up on dreams and the marvellous. She laments her contemporaries' lack of imagination:

> Fortune-telling is no longer what it used to be. Before, people came to me so that I could open the doors to the marvellous for them. I was the intermediary between their dreams and reality. I taught them to follow their intuition. Now the only things they ask me are, "Will I win at bingo, at the races, the lottery? Will I inherit? When? How much?" Great dreams are gone.[115]

Here, Kaplan imbues her work with a sense of untimely clairvoyance, while feminizing the great male prophet Nostradamus. Casting herself as a fortune teller, replete with colourful garb and crystal ball, she also imbues her diegesis with some of the less tasteful attributes of the popular conceptions of magic, infusing it with a sense of spiritualist mediumship and showmanship.

A scene in *Néa* implicitly places both Sibylle and Kaplan in a surrealist canon of visionary writers. When Sibylle is caught shoplifting erotic books in Axel Thorpe's bookstore, she states with characteristic self-confidence that she writes just as good erotica as the Marquis de Sade, Guillaume Apollinaire, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Pierre Louÿs, Emmanuelle Arsan—and Belen. Sade, Apollinaire, and Louÿs are prominent names in a tradition of black and macabre eroticism that appealed to the surrealists. Mandiargues wrote several erotic novels, participated in surrealism, and was a close friend of Kaplan's. Arsan, of course, is the author of the novel that *Néa* is loosely based upon, and the reference to Arsan appears to be Kaplan's way of acknowledging that her importance is on a par with the male writers privileged in the surrealist tradition. Belen, finally, is the pseudonym that Kaplan used when she published her earliest fiction. Through this enumeration of erotic authors, then, Kaplan inscribes both Arsan and herself in a form of subterranean surrealist current of erotic writers. Ten years earlier, Kaplan had similarly boldly positioned herself alongside a number of writers from the surrealist canon in her collection of short stories, *Le Réservoir des sens*. In it, quotes from Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Apollinaire, and Baudelaire crop up as epigraphs for many of the stories. In that way, she simultaneously embraces the surrealist tradition, and shows that it needs to be revised in

terms of gender by fearlessly placing herself in the midst of its canonical writers. This approach is central to Kaplan's overall attitude towards surrealism, which is informed by a devout allegiance to its goals and principles, but also an adamant sense that some of their elements need to be stretched and modified in order to accommodate the perspectives of female participants.

Sibylle's vocation as a writer of pornography is intimately connected with her status as a witch: eroticism is conceived as a ritual and wielded as a form of magic. This intersection can be discerned in the different ways of seeing that are so prominently depicted in the film, and that pertain to central surrealist notions of sexuality, the nature of vision, and of poetry as a magical transformation of reality, configured through a visionary use of language. Sibylle displays an inventive spirit in her search for inspiration for her pursuits as an erotic writer. She steals pornographic literature and reads it in her chambers. She spies on members of her family when they indulge in sexual acts. And she masturbates in order to engender the appropriate state of mind for writing. But while Mimi Parent provides the surrealist definition of masturbation as "the hand in the service of the imagination," the act does not stir Sibylle's erotic imagination intensely enough.[116] It is not until she convinces the older Axel Thorpe to have sex with her that she fully liberates her pornographic imagination. Sibylle pleads desperately with Alex to make love to her, so that she, as she puts it herself, can go from being a *voyeuse* to a *voyant*, from a voyeur to a seer. Having accomplished her goal, she finishes her novel in one single sitting, filling page after page with writing. Her investigations into sex and the writing of her novel can be seen as conceptualizations of two different ways of seeing: first, an investigative and distanced kind of seeing, and then the sort of visionary seeing, the importance of which was declared by Rimbaud. The idea of the poet as a seer complements ordinary vision with a seeing that is affective, magical, and imaginative.

Surrealism has nevertheless also held fast to the importance of rational investigations. It simply does not want to stop at them. When Sibylle investigates sexuality, she observes her family members in the midst of different sexual acts. Kaplan depicts these scenes of voyeurism as a literal unveiling of the secrets of sex: when Sibylle happens upon her mother and aunt in bed, she first sees them through flimsy, semi-transparent curtains. Parting the veil, she observes them with investigative candour. But Sibylle also takes a humorously depicted distanced stance when she

is conducting her observations. Notepad in hand, she puts her glasses on and looks pensively at the proceedings, a wry smile on her lips. Only when she inadvertently sees Axel and her conformist sister have sex does she remove her glasses, emphasizing the fact that she feels betrayed by the act. In these scenes, Sibylle conducts systematic and seemingly rational investigations into sexuality, which, albeit fictional, point to another facet of surrealism's documentary ambitions, and bring to mind the early surrealist researches into sexuality.

Between 1928 and 1932, the Paris surrealists conducted a number of discussions about sexuality. The first two of these were published in *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 11 in 1928. The rest remained unpublished until José Pierre compiled and edited them into one volume. In these discussions, the surrealists speak candidly about sex and sexual experiences, probing eroticism for secrets but unsure of what they were hoping to find. Few women participated in the discussions, and in the second session, Breton launches into a tirade of homophobic statements.[117] Yet, as Amy Lyford points out, the changing constellations of surrealists that were engaged in these investigations are hardly homogeneous, and they cannot be said to present any form of monolithic understanding of sex, and even less an official surrealist position on the topic. Man Ray and Louis Aragon, for instance, consider homosexuality as legitimate an orientation as any other, and the latter speaks out fiercely against Breton's insistence that there is such a thing as a "normal man."[118] They also discuss masturbation, sexual positions, the female orgasm, and frequency of ejaculation with a candour that is still striking. These early surrealist investigations into sexuality, then, constituted an attempt at looking unflinchingly at human sexuality, ostensibly without religious or moralistic censorship. They are nevertheless, and unavoidably so, marred by the participants' own prejudices and inclinations.

Several decades later in *Néa*, Kaplan can be said both to depict Sibylle as continuing these investigations into sex, with all their aspirations towards gathering a wide spectrum of knowledge, and to transform them. As a female filmmaker and writer in the vicinity of organized surrealism, Kaplan was part of the influx of female surrealists who had come onto the scene since the investigations into sex. The changes these, and the times, brought with them are, not least, in evidence in the 1959–1960 *EROS* exhibition. While Kaplan espouses an explicitly heterosexual vision for cinematic eroticism, the inclusion of homosexual love in *Néa*, and its eventual liberation from the mores of

the nuclear family, indicates that she is also seeking a more inclusive approach to sexuality. If Sibylle seems to continue the surrealist investigations into sex, the attitude towards eroticism in *Néa* also needs to be seen in the light of the considerably broader spectrum of sexuality manifested in the *EROS* exhibition.

EROS points to some little-discussed aspects of surrealism's development in relation to sexuality. In his introduction to the exhibition, Breton quotes *Emmanuelle* in favourable terms, stating that: "'The only art which measures up to man and space, the only one capable of leading him beyond the stars […] is erotism'."[119] Hence, Breton finds an elective affinity of sorts in Emmanuelle Arsan, whose novels would become significant for a new liberated attitude to eroticism. Significantly, he also connects Arsan's writings with a post-war surrealist aspiration for an experience of the interconnectedness found in a romantic-esoteric living nature. Indeed, *EROS* conducted a "subversion of traditional, patriarchal, rational society."[120] The exhibition poster featured a photograph of Mimi Parent's object *Masculine-Féminine* (1959). Consisting of a black jacket and a white shirt with a tie made of blonde hair, the object has been described as "sexually suggestive, but also macabre."[121] It suggests a blurring of the gender binary, with the wavy female hair substituting for the strict male tie, but it also carries a threat of strangulation: uncannily vivid, the hair might just come to life and asphyxiate its wearer. Gender troubling is also present in the photographer and painter Pierre Molinier's self-portraits and depictions of demonic women, examples of which were included in the exhibition.[122] Molinier's work became a strong presence in surrealism around this time, and his paintings and photographs invoke gender dysphoria and a shattered identity, the artist tending to depict multiple images of himself, scantily dressed in women's clothing. Molinier's photographs and paintings were also charged with what Breton describes as a strong current of magic.[123] With age, even the homophobe of the late 1920s and early 1930s appears to have developed a more inclusive and accepting view of sexual diversity.

The exhibition itself took a poetic and ritualistic approach to eroticism. Parts of Duchamp's elaborate exhibition design were meant to evoke the interior of the female sex, and Radovan Ivšić compiled a soundtrack of moans and sighs that further contributed to an atmosphere of disorienting eroticism.[124] Striking combinations of artworks, such as Alberto Giacometti's sculpture *Invisible Object* (1934) and Robert Rauschenberg's "combine" *Bed* (1955), forged new connections

between different expressions of eroticism in art. Parent only joined the surrealist group amid their preparations for the exhibition, but exerted a decisive influence upon it. Her contributions include a "grotto" of sexual fetishes, which incorporated both female and male artists' evocations of sexuality by way of objects ostensibly charged with erotic and unconscious energies. Mahon describes it as "the ultimate feminine, uncanny space," which "allowed the female spectator to re-enter her own mythological self, the feminine body which patriarchy had confiscated from her," but she also points out that it ultimately "conformed to Parent's non-essentialist vision of eroticism as the domain of men and women alike."[125] Altogether, these aspects of the exhibition suggest that if a few decades earlier, some surrealists expressed a conflicted but narrow-minded view of sexuality, by the time of *EROS*, surrealism approached eroticism as a much more inclusive, yet also fundamentally troubling and shattering phenomenon.

EROS also placed eroticism within an esoteric and ritualistic framework. The exhibition catalogue features a "Lexique succinct de l'érotisme" ("Brief Erotic Lexicon"), which further indicates that the exhibition conceived of human sexuality as characterized by a greater multiplicity. The dictionary has entries for the occultist Lotus de Païni and the sex magician Beverly Randolph, as well as for Aleister Crowley, notorious for his transgressive practice of sex Magick, and René Schwaller de Lubicz, an Egyptologist and esotericist, whom Breton also quotes in his introduction to the exhibition.[126] The new surrealist conception of eroticism, then, reinforced its intimate bond with esotericism, ritual, and the belief in the possibility of magical transformations of both the self and the world.

Compared with this multiplicity of Sadean and esoteric desires, Kaplan's films may appear to be positively restrictive and inhibited. But their tidy surface only cursorily veils their darker undercurrents, and Kaplan's self-professed heterosexual focus does not preclude her from drawing on other sexualities in her scheme of liberation. Where the earlier surrealist discussions about sexuality led to heated debates about homosexuality, Sibylle observes heterosexual and lesbian sex with the same mock-scientific detached curiosity. And one outcome of Sibylle's novel *NÉA* is in fact a radical disruption of heterosexual conventions. While Sibylle herself is reunited with Axel in heterosexual love, her mother and aunt finally break free from Sibylle's dominating father and make their relationship public.

Much as is the case with the original surrealist researches, Sibylle's investigations into sex do not merely serve to document human sexual behaviour. The earlier surrealist investigations were bound up with the larger project of unfettering the unconscious, and of showing the force and multiplicity of currents of desire. For Sibylle, though, it is above all a matter of finding aids for her pornographic writing. But this writing is in itself mythologized in the film, and emerges as a consequence of a ritualized approach to sex which is in tune with the sensibility informing *EROS*. Sibylle's insight into the necessity to experience love in order to write about it in a way that, as she boasts, can rival Sade, Mandiargues, and Apollinaire, has the initial outcome of a bout of automatic writing, in which she completes an entire novel in one fell swoop. Now, her earlier, stinted attempts at writing are replaced with writing as an outcome of the capacity to "throw open the floodgates" that Breton describes as the intended outcome of surrealist automatism.[127] Here, Kaplan slyly reverses early male surrealist views of woman as muse, as Axel assumes a muse-like position for Sibylle.[128] Kaplan's depiction of this intense writing is, however, deceptively calm and controlled. Sibylle is shown seated on the floor and leaning on the bed, clad only in trousers, a bemused look on her face as she writes. Through simple fades, Kaplan shows the pages filling the room. In sharp contrast to the opening of the floodgates that Sibylle seemingly experiences, the style and atmosphere in the scene is strikingly soothing and oneiric. Furthermore, Sibylle's writing can hardly take the form of automatism as it appears in, for example, Breton and Soupault's collaborative *The Magnetic Fields* (1920). The result of Sibylle's writing is a novel that is evidently captivating enough to become a bestseller—hardly the province of automatism. Instead, Kaplan alludes to surrealist automatism as a way of inserting Sibylle in a surrealist lineage, a further means of mythologizing both her protagonist and surrealism.

Once Sibylle completes her novel with such sudden ease, she has transformed her rational investigations into sexuality into something else. She has become a seer. The American surrealist Nancy Joyce Peters describes how Kaplan gives us "the first shadowing outlines of a new worldview, one originating in woman's *look*."[129] When Kaplan alludes to Rimbaud in her call for a visionary female eroticism, she calls upon one of the surrealist precursors that had been profoundly influenced by esotericism. In *L'art magique*, Breton mentions the profound influence that Eliphas Lévi had exerted upon Rimbaud.[130] The surrealists had intuited such connections from the movement's very beginning.

Rimbaud's notion of an "alchemy of the word" was important for the early surrealist interest in alchemy, and laid the foundations for the surrealist understanding of language and poetry as a magical transformation of reality. A central aspect of this transformative poetics was Rimbaud's notion of the poet as a seer, a *voyant*, as he expressed it in two famous letters.[131] For Rimbaud, this kind of seeing is the result of a "long, gigantic and rational *derangement* of *all the senses*."[132] Rimbaud relates the idea of the poet as seer back to romanticism and Baudelaire, and lets it signify a reaching for the unknown, a perilous journey that may be compared with Mabille's description of the trials of the marvellous. When Kaplan references Rimbaud, she does not merely look to him for the connection between this form of seeing and its capacity to depict the kind of other eroticism that she writes about.[133] She also connects her dream of a time when it is natural for women to be at the helm of film production with Rimbaud's envisioning of a future "[w]hen the endless servitude of woman is broken, when she lives for and by herself" and she, too, will become a poet.[134]

For Rimbaud, "all forms of love, suffering, and madness" are favourable conditions for the poet to experience in order to emerge as a seer.[135] With *Néa*, Kaplan can be said to depict and mythologize this process. *Néa* is not just a surrealist film, but also, and emphatically, a film about surrealism. In that sense it can be said to join the many heavily intertextual surrealist theoretical texts and exhibitions that double back on themselves in their construction of a tradition. In *Néa*, Rimbaud's aim to "change life" through poetry is incarnated in the novel *NÉA*, a work of popular fiction. But the depiction of Sibylle as a seer also positions her as a fictional fulfilment of sorts of Kaplan's own hopes for a visionary female eroticism. It is, then, possible to discern a close proximity between Kaplan's goals of creating a form of female pornography and her depiction of Sibylle's accomplishments. Again, Kaplan, as it were, uses Sibylle as a "haloed being" with a potential for the kind of mythical life that she seeks for her own creations.

Hence, *Néa* exemplifies both Kaplan's hopes for a day when a woman's heterosexual camera gaze can linger over the body of a young man, and the visionary transformation of sexual repression and patriarchal oppression into a narrative that is ripe with erotic possibilities of different constellations. Significantly, Rimbaud formulated his revolutionary ideas of poetry under the influence of Michelet's revisions of the status of magic and witchcraft as progressive forces of liberation from religious repression

and one-sided elevation of the good and reasonable. He also considered magic to have been one of the ways of effecting the deregulation of all the senses.[136] Becoming a seer, then, is intimately bound up with not just the transformative power of poetry, but also the toppling of the received order of things through recourse to the "rejected knowledge" of magic and alchemy, and, not least, an emphasis on their anti-patriarchal prowess. These, furthermore, are both close to and divergent from Breton's emancipatory view of women in *Arcanum 17*. In *Néa*, Sibylle may appear to embody the "child-woman" that Breton lauds, but Kaplan gives the notion an unruly and mischievous twist, far from idealization but considerably closer to an embodied mythologization of female revolt.

Magical Transformation

Like Wilhelm Freddie's films, Kaplan's works exemplify the surrealist conviction that it is necessary to recognize the dark undercurrents of love and eroticism. But where *Eaten Horizons* delves into the darkly demonic recesses of the sexual imagination, Kaplan's films, saturated with witches and vengeance as they are, also display an allegiance to the complementary side of the surrealist understanding of love and *amour fou*. For all the surrealists' investigations into sexuality and depictions of an often dark and obsessive eroticism, the movement has never simply been intent on liberating desire or propagating free love.[137] This only becomes clearer in the context of the *EROS* exhibition, in spite of Breton's favourable reference to Arsan's tales of sexual liberation. While the catalogue's succinct erotic lexicon affirmed a greater variety in human sexuality than the old investigations into sex, and while the Marquis de Sade and other transgressive eroticists were as prominently positioned there as ever, the exhibition also sought to recover an attitude to eroticism and love of necessity fraught with secrecy, ambivalence, and even a sense of the sacred.[138] Much as *Le Surréalisme en 1947* coupled the search for a new myth with esotericism and initiation, *EROS* posits the necessity for a certain occultation of eroticism, displaying it as a ritualistic affair. Like the lovers in *L'âge d'or*, love and eroticism may very well need to tumble around in the mud at times, just as they feed on those "hellish undercurrents" that Sade was so adept at tapping into. Yet, for the surrealists, this recognition does not undermine, but rather strengthen, the conviction that love and eroticism are also "valuable, honorable, thrilling, and not to be debased," as Beverle Houston puts it in a review of *Néa*.[139]

A few years after *EROS*, Breton remarked that sexual freedom needs to be complemented by "initiation," again emphasizing the character of ritual and the sacred in the surrealist conception of eroticism.[140] Considered from the perspective of post-war surrealism, initiation does indeed emerge as a central feature of Kaplan's films. *A Very Curious Girl*, *Néa*, and *Charles et Lucie* all end with deeply transformative change under the banner of eroticism and mad love. Having overcome severe trials, the protagonists manage to break free of their chains and embrace a world of plenitude and freedom. Kaplan's films, then, pertain to the notion of initiation through art and poetry that surrealism lauded around the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.[141] Indeed, Kaplan herself appears to hope that her films will work as something akin to an initiation, since she wishes "that the spectator will come out different than he was when he went in."[142] Kaplan's films then appear to be intended to initiate the spectator into the myth that she weaves around surrealism's transformative powers.

Kaplan's tendency towards a surrealist idea of initiation through and into the marvellous also has ramifications for the issue of aesthetics and politics. In stark contrast with the tenets of Brechtian film politics, Kaplan channels desire and the marvellous, wrought out of stylistically unassuming material, as a force of revolt. Kaplan's surrealist revolt is not least evident in her insistence on avoiding the sort of defeatist Brechtian ending called for by contemporary critics faced with *A Very Curious Girl*.[143] The unapologetic pleasure inherent in Kaplan's magical willing of change appears as a distinctly surrealist attempt at articulating another form of resistance through art. Annie Le Brun criticizes Brechtian *Verfremdung* effects in a way that is illuminating for Kaplan's embrace of the pleasure of depicting successful revolts. What, Le Brun asks, "is Brechtian distancing, if not an ideological distortion that blocks off every exit, petrifies action and coagulates the flow of language?"[144] Against this, she posits the Marquis de Sade, who "oversteps all ideological categories and at the same time enriches language, accelerating and freeing it, prompting us to reconsider men and things in the true unlimited perspective of universal change."[145] Kaplan does something similar to Sade as Le Brun interprets his works. She avoids treating fiction primarily as a vehicle of ideological doctrine, and instead lets it express desire and revolt in a way that explodes conventions. Again, she refuses to submit to the expectations surrounding the "political" use of art, opting for a playfulness that is not merely joyous but also accommodates revenge and retaliation.

Similar standpoints recur throughout the history of surrealism, from the first manifesto's insistence on freedom from all moral and aesthetic concerns to later statements about refusing to submit to the dictates of "political" art, not least in the context of the French post-war climate's demands for "committed" literature.[146] Kaplan directly connects such appeals to freedom with her construction of a surrealist myth. In *Néa*, as if creating what Walter Benjamin calls a "wish-image," she lets an erotic novel with popular appeal topple sexual and societal mores, much as she seems to wish that her own films will be able to do. As Buck-Morss puts it, wish-images are "less pre-visions of postrevolutionary society than the necessary pro-visions for radical social practice. […] Wish images 'innervate' the 'technical organ of the collective', supplying it with nerve stimulation that prompts revolutionary action."[147] With *Néa*, Kaplan creates such a wish-image within a film that may be stylistically conventional, but which harbours an aesthetic and political complexity that resonates with Benjamin's own negotiations between art and entertainment.

The magical force that Kaplan ascribes to these wish-images is encapsulated in a scene in *Néa*. Sibylle's novel having been published to great commercial success, a copy of it is passed around in her class. While the teacher pontificates about mathematics, Sibylle's peers laugh excitedly at passages in the novel. When it reaches the hands of its anonymous author, the teacher is finally alerted to the commotion. She asks Sibylle to hand the book over and sets it on fire with a sneer of loathing. The book bursts into flames with an exaggerated roar. Here, Kaplan demonstrates its explosive potential by making the book supernaturally flammable. The witch's magical association with fire is transferred to the book she has illicitly written. There is a further aspect to these wish-images in *Néa*. Whereas Marie in *A Very Curious Girl* superbly enacts her revenge, it is conceived in order to liberate herself. In contrast, Sibylle's novel and rebellious behaviour have both personal and societal effects. If the former indicates the magical power of the witch conceived as a surrealist myth, the latter shows its extended potential as a haloed being whose actions radiate social change.

Kaplan's films also speak to the broader surrealist struggle of reconciling the need for social change with the tendency towards occult practice. For Mabille, the marvellous is the "science of the people," and he connects it with Lautréamont's motto that "poetry should be made by all."[148] But, as we have seen, he also detects a kernel of esoteric secrecy in the marvellous, which is the key to its radical potential as transmitter

of rejected knowledge. Overall, surrealism has struggled with the "unresolvable paradox" of striving for broad social change and the realization that its operations require a degree of organizational occultation.[149] This tension within surrealism troubled Georges Bataille. Writing after World War II, Bataille looked back on his experiences with the Collège de Sociologie and Acéphale with a certain disdain. He was both intrigued by and sceptical about surrealism's similar ambitions of creating myth. This ambivalence is reflected in his enigmatic essay "The Absence of Myth" in the catalogue for *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.[150] Richardson relates how Bataille, following the war, found it necessary for surrealism to

> re-create the notion of ritual in a society within which the value it represented (that is, the value of community) has been destroyed by the ideology of Christianity, which was the basis of capitalism. The problem for surrealism is that there is no possibility of imbuing any such ritual with meaning. No ritual could go beyond the immediate context of its performance. […] any possible surrealist ritual could only be impotent, since no one outside the surrealist circle could believe in it.[141]

The circumstances surrounding *Le Surréalisme en 1947* appear to support Bataille's claim. *Le Surréalisme en 1947* attracted a large number of visitors, but as the reception of the exhibition indicates, this was rather due to its perceived character of intriguing spectacle than related to any transformative force it may have had.[152] With its depiction of a work of erotic automatic writing that gains popular success and has radical repercussions throughout society, *Néa* takes the form of an imaginary solution to the problems Bataille detected in surrealism's attempts at instilling a new myth. Three decades after *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, *Néa* draws on the "latent content" of the era of sexual liberation in order to narrate a tale of eroticism and love conceived as mythical forces. Much as eroticism was no longer a strictly personal and secretive affair at this point in history, so *Néa* shows how the surrealist myth breaks through the barrier of secrecy and permeates society, but also that this very act re-sacralizes love and sex, and reinstills an occult dimension to them. The result may ultimately be closer to personal wish-fulfilment than an actually functioning myth, but it is telling for Kaplan's adherence to a surrealist worldview, and for how she imbues it with a desire that is strong enough for it to be willed into existence. Significantly, Kaplan's reassessment and elaboration of surrealist conceptions of women and witches constitute another

intervention in and contribution to the continued search for a new myth. Here, her negotiation between surrealist tastes and popular appeal also mark a new development in the surrealist film.

The next chapter traces other developments of myth and magic in surrealist film from the 1960s onwards, now marked by the considerably different conditions of Stalinist Czechoslovakia.

Notes

1. Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 95.
2. See Holmlund, "The Eyes of Nelly Kaplan"; Giukin, "Demystification and Webtopia in the Films of Nelly Kaplan"; Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs*.
3. See e.g. Johnston, *Notes on Women's Cinema*, 14; Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs*, 32.
4. Rosemont, *Surrealist Women*, xliv.
5. Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 25. See also LaCoss, "Hysterical Freedom," 40.
6. Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 22, 24.
7. See Giukin, "Demystification and Webtopia in the Films of Nelly Kaplan."
8. Kaplan, "All Creation is Androgynous," 301.
9. For overviews of *EROS*, see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 143–171; Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 587–592. For the exhibition's ritualistic approach to eroticism, see Richardson, "Seductions of the Impossible," 384–385.
10. See the exhibition catalogue, *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain*.
11. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 21.
12. For Kaplan's friendship with Breton, see Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 529–530.
13. Breton, *L'art magique*, 248.
14. See also Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 93–94.
15. Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind*, 18; Breton, *L'art magique*, 229–232. See also Breton, "Gustave Moreau" (1961), in *Surrealism and Painting*, 363–366.
16. See Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 94.
17. Breton, "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," 300–302; Kaplan, "All Creation Is Androgynous," 301.
18. For descriptions and discussions of Kaplan's documentaries, see Colaux, *Nelly Kaplan*, 120–129; Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 94.

19. For an overview of Kaplan's films, see Holmlund, "The Eyes of Nelly Kaplan."
20. See Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 635–636; Richardson and Fijalkowski, "Introduction," 16–17.
21. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 209–215; Richardson and Fijalkowski, "Introduction," 14–17; Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 639–640; Rosemont, *Surrealist Women*, 285–289.
22. See Richardson and Fijalkowski, "Introduction," 198.
23. Schuster, "The Fourth Chant," 201.
24. See Richardson and Fijalkowski, "Introduction," 17; Löwy, *Morning Star*, 107–116.
25. See Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 94.
26. See Forshage, "Raseriet, uttåget ur Egypten och det kejsaren tillhör," 66–67.
27. Kaplan, "Enough, or Still More," 50.
28. See Kyrou, "Romantisme et cinéma."
29. Breton, *Nadja*, 160.
30. Acker, "Inaugural Rupture," 48. Capitalization removed.
31. Kaplan, "Au repas des guerrières," 200.
32. Ibid. Italics removed.
33. Ibid., 201.
34. Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 98.
35. Kaplan, *Le Collier de Ptyx*, 7. The reference is to Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 33.
36. Quoted in Giukin, "Demystification and Webtopia in the Films of Nelly Kaplan," 102.
37. Breton, *Mad Love*, 97.
38. Houston, "*Néa*," 47.
39. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 111.
40. Breton, "Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism," 15.
41. Ibid., 14–15. Italics removed.
42. Ibid., 14.
43. Christie, "Histories of the Future," 9.
44. Roman, "Dirty Mary," 69.
45. Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs*, 36.
46. Stam, *Keywords in Subversive Film/Media Aesthetics*, 121–122.
47. Rich, *Chick Flicks*, 157.
48. Ibid.
49. Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses," 64.
50. Christie, "Histories of the Future," 9.
51. Ibid.

52. Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*, 100.
53. Kyrou, "Romantisme et cinéma," 6.
54. See Hammond, "Available Light," 34–36; Vincendeau, "Introduction," 2–3, 15; Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes."
55. Hammond, "Available Light," 36. See also Ciment, "For Your Pleasure," 10.
56. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 177–193.
57. See Hammond, "Available Light," 29–30.
58. See Andrew, "*L'âge d'or* and the Eroticism of the Spirit," 112; see also Weiss, "The Rhetoric of Interruption," 168–169.
59. See the interview with Benayoun in Bouyxou, *La science-fiction au cinéma*, 426–427. For *Paris n'existe pas*, see also Parkinson, *Futures of Surrealism*, 183–186; Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 129–137; Bouyxou, *La science-fiction au cinéma*, 358–360.
60. For Buñuel's Mexican films and their relation to genre and popular cinema, see Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico*.
61. See Wood, *Belle de Jour*, 8–10; Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 151–153.
62. Holmlund, "The Eyes of Nelly Kaplan," 364. See also Elley, "Hiding It under a Bushel," 24; Johnston, *Notes on Women's Cinema*, 14; Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 106.
63. For an overview, see Kovács, *Screening Modernism*.
64. See Mathijs, "Les lèvres rouges/Daughters of Darkness," 100–101; Soren, *Unreal Reality*, 25.
65. "Nelly Kaplan: Interviewed by Barbara Halpern Martineau," 16.
66. It can be noted that popular culture was elevated to a mythological position in the 1976 international surrealist exhibition *Marvelous Freedom, Vigilance of Desire* in Chicago. Bugs Bunny, Fantômas, and Melmoth the Wanderer were among the figures that "possessed […] in the voodoo or shamanist sense" eleven different domains of surrealist vigilance. See *Marvelous Freedom, Vigilance of Desire*, 4.
67. "le merveilleux est populaire." Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*, 100.
68. "le nouveau mythe de l'homme." Ibid., 304. See also Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 522.
69. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 44.
70. Breton, "Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism," 14.
71. Michelet, *La Sorcière*, 20.
72. See Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, 335.
73. Löwy, *Morning Star*, 37.
74. Ibid.
75. See Giukin, "Demystification and Webtopia in the Films of Nelly Kaplan," 109–110.
76. See Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*.

77. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 78ff.
78. Ibid. See also Conley, *Automatic Woman*, xiv.
79. See Shillitoe and Morrison, "Editor's Introduction," 25.
80. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 18–19.
81. See Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 138.
82. Johnston, "Nelly Kaplan," 14.
83. Giukin, "Demystification and Webtopia in the Films of Nelly Kaplan," 102.
84. The photograph can be seen at http://paulmcrandle.tumblr.com/post/66456576570/leonora-carrington-at-her-50-morton-street-home-in (accessed 31 March 2015).
85. See Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation."
86. Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, 335.
87. Ibid., 336.
88. Carrington, *Down Below* (1944), in *The House of Fear*, 163.
89. Quoted in Eburne *Surrealism and the Art of Crime*, 217; see also Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 51. For the full letter, see Carrington, "Lettre à Henri Parisot," 73.
90. See Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 35, 37.
91. See also Aberth, "Leonora Carrington and the Art of Invocation."
92. See Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation," 47–49.
93. See Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 57ff; Chadwick, "El Mundo Mágico," 13–14.
94. Mahon, "She Who Revealed," 149.
95. For other examples of female surrealists' use of myth, esotericism, and references to nature, see Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. See also Morrisson, "Ithell Colquhoun and Occult Surrealism in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain and Ireland."
96. "Nelly Kaplan: Interviewed by Barbara Halpern Martineau," 18.
97. See also Kay, "The Revenge of Pirate Jenny," 47.
98. "Nelly Kaplan: Interviewed by Barbara Halpern Martineau," 17.
99. See Michelet, *La Sorcière*, 2ff.
100. "Nelly Kaplan: Interviewed by Barbara Halpern Martineau," 20.
101. Ibid., 21.
102. See Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933), in *Visions of Excess*, 116–129.
103. See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 37ff.
104. Ibid.
105. "Nelly Kaplan: Interviewed by Barbara Halpern Martineau," 21.
106. Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism*, 31–37.
107. Holmlund, "The Eyes of Nelly Kaplan," 358.
108. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 115–119.

109. "Nelly Kaplan: Interviewed by Barbara Halpern Martineau," 18.
110. For a discussion, see Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 127–128.
111. Kaplan, "Au repas des guerrières," 200.
112. Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, 349.
113. Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 101.
114. See Breton, "Caught in the Act" (1949), in *Free Rein*, 131.
115. Translated in Holmlund, "The Eyes of Nelly Kaplan," 365–366.
116. "La main au service de l'imagination." "Lexique succinct de l'érotisme," 132.
117. See Pierre, *Investigating Sex*, 27–28.
118. Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 146.
119. Breton, "Introduction to the International Surrealist Exhibition" (1959), in *Surrealism and Painting*, 382.
120. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 168.
121. Ibid., 152.
122. Ibid., 162–163; see also Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art*, 220–222.
123. See Breton, "Pierre Molinier" (1956), in *Surrealism and Painting*, 245–248.
124. See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 159–160; Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp*, 100ff.
125. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 163.
126. "Lexique succinct de l'érotisme," 124, 138. Breton, "Introduction to the International Surrealist Exhibition," 380–381. For surrealism and Schwaller de Lubicz, see Maher, "Luxor, Endlessness and the Continuous Key."
127. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 130.
128. Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 25ff.
129. Peters, "Nelly Kaplan's *Néa*," 356.
130. Breton, *L'art magique*, 35. See also Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 119.
131. Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, 371–381.
132. Ibid., 377.
133. Kaplan, "Au repas des guerrières," 200.
134. Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, 379.
135. Ibid., 377.
136. Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 159–160.
137. Richardson, "Seductions of the Impossible," 378ff.
138. See Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 128.
139. Houston, "*Néa*," 46.
140. See Breton, "This Is the Price" (1964), in *Surrealism and Painting*, 408.
141. Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 96.
142. Giukin, "Demystification and Webtopia in the Films of Nelly Kaplan," 107–108.

143. Roman, "Dirty Mary," 69.
144. Le Brun, *Sade, a Sudden Abyss*, 130.
145. Ibid.
146. Breton, "Second Ark," 100.
147. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 117.
148. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 26, 21.
149. Richardson, "Sociology on a Razor's Edge," 32.
150. See Bataille, "The Absence of Myth" (1947), in *The Absence of Myth*.
151. Richardson, "Introduction," in Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, 14
152. See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 139–140.

CHAPTER 5

Magic Art and Minor Myths: Jan Švankmajer's Transmutation of Material Reality

The artist, filmmaker, and animator Jan Švankmajer considers surrealism to be "a magical outlook on life and the world."[1] This magical outlook first took shape under repressive conditions, which lent a new acuteness to surrealism's attempts at instilling alternatives to Western civilization, and it informs the most distinctive and multifaceted oeuvre in the history of surrealist cinema. Švankmajer has made over thirty films, from his debut with the puppet short film *The Last Trick* (*Poslední trik pana Schwarcewalldea a pana Edgara*) in 1964 to his most recent feature, 2010s *Surviving Life: Theory and Practice* (*Přežít svůj život* [*teorie a praxe*]). His films evince many parallels with the earlier examples discussed in this book. They can be related to the corporeality and playful allusions to esotericism found in Freddie's films, to the *Wunderkammer*-like displacement of positivist order and the primitivist appeal for art to take on the function of myth in *L'Invention du monde*, and to Nelly Kaplan's incarnation of the surrealist marvellous in a diegetic world saturated with surrealist myth. But Švankmajer's short films also look back to the earliest examples of surrealist cinema, as they employ similar techniques of disabling causality and undermining spatial and temporal coherence to those of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí in *Un chien andalou*.[2] Švankmajer's feature films, meanwhile, much like Kaplan's, indicate a debt to late Buñuel. The associative narrative in *Conspirators of Pleasure* (*Spiklenci slasti* 1996) resembles the disruptive structure in Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (*Le Fantôme de la liberté* 1974). Likewise, the co-existence of different historical epochs in *Lunacy* recalls

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Buñuel's surrealist picaresque film *The Milky Way*. Švankmajer, however, combines the heritage from Buñuel with methods that are influenced by his work in puppet theatre and animation.

Myth and magic are central in Švankmajer's conception of art and film. Striving to displace art from aesthetic pursuits, he seeks to restore it "to practical life, as a tool of everyday rituals and the expressive medium of myth."[3] To this end, he proclaims that he uses "animation as a magical operation."[4] Švankmajer also frequently alludes to alchemy and notions of "primitive" magic, which converge in a hybrid conception of magic configured as a general resistance to disenchantment and the repression of the imagination.[5] As a member of the Czechoslovak, now Czech-Slovak, surrealist group, Švankmajer has also placed an ever stronger emphasis on analogical thought and the imagination's active interpretation of reality, thus building on and developing some of the key strands in surrealism's change in direction following the war.

Švankmajer and his late wife and frequent collaborator Eva Švankmajerova joined the Czechoslovak surrealist group in Prague in 1971. The Czechoslovak historical, cultural, and political context has also shaped Švankmajer's work in various ways. The Prague surrealists questioned Breton's insistence on myth and magic, and considered it too lofty in its utopianism. A central component in Czechoslovak surrealism has instead been a reformulation of Dalí's notion of concrete irrationality, which has been used as a means to locate poetry directly in material reality.[6] If Švankmajer's films are diverse in style, technique, and narrative, most of them are characterized by their attentiveness to the raw materiality of the everyday world, something that is often heightened by their combination of stop-motion animation and live action. The dialectical and humorous interaction of these two elements serves to create a highly tactile fictional universe, in which everyday reality is constantly undermined by the tricks played by objects and environments given unpredictable life and transforming into new shapes. His is a poetics of destruction, reconfiguration, and resultant transformation with frequent alchemical connotations. In Švankmajer's work, the French surrealists' utopian hope in myth is then tempered by a cynical and sarcastic outlook, at the same time as the films are replete with references to alchemy and esotericism. Spanning several decades, Švankmajer's films have been made under changing historical conditions, but there is a constant in his opposition to Western civilization. Here I focus on how this opposition feeds into his films' propensity towards myth and magic.

This chapter considers how a number of Švankmajer's films negotiate between the Czech-Slovak privileging of concrete irrationality, and his own interests in myth and magic. The chapter has a particular focus on his 1983 short film *Down to the Cellar*, in which a girl encounters fleeing potatoes, a man resting on a bed of coal, and a woman mixing coal dust and eggs into a black dough. The film evokes the tactile properties of these phenomena as they are played out in the half-illuminated depths of a cellar in an apartment house. *Down to the Cellar* can also be related back to both Švankmajer's earlier and later films. Like many of his earlier films, it plays out a drama of the human caught in the grip of a material world suddenly rendered unpredictable and animate. It can also be seen as a direct precursor of his first feature film *Alice* (*Něco z Alenky* 1987), a loose adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). And like most of Švankmajer's films, *Down to the Cellar* can be productively related to his prolific activities in other art forms, such as assemblages and collages in which the natural world is reconfigured according to the dictates of an inventive imagination. If *Down to the Cellar* fuses reality and the imagination in a way that recalls both dream logic and a child's flights of fancy, it does so with a tangible materiality, which invites the spectator's own imagination into the equation. *Down to the Cellar* is also an example of Švankmajer's deliberate use of tactility, and indicates that this is part of his poetics of an intimate interaction between everyday material reality, the senses, and the surrealist imagination. Švankmajer's combination of esotericism, materiality, and sensory foregrounding places his work in the region of what Gaston Bachelard calls the material imagination. Bachelard's writings aid me in teasing out a tendency in Švankmajer's films towards creating what I would like to call minor myths.

Jan Švankmajer and Surrealist Animation

Švankmajer's films are intertwined with his work in other art forms as well as in puppet theatre. Initially a student of fine art, Švankmajer first came to film when he worked with puppetry on Emil Radok's short film *Johanes Doktor Faust* (1958).[7] Several of his films, including *The Last Trick* and *Don Juan* (*Don Šajn*, 1970), feature puppetry, and in others his manipulation of objects owes much to the Czech tradition of puppet theatre. The director himself considers his 1968 short film *The Garden* (*Zahrada*), to be his first surrealist film, but several of his earlier films

bear witness to the impact surrealism had on him long before that. Two films in particular appear almost as embryos of things to come. *Historia Naturae, Suita* (1967) is a frantic and sarcastic natural history, which sees taxidermied animals and other natural objects being brought to life and parading in mischievous defiance of taxonomic order, while *The Flat* (*Byt*, 1968) is a claustrophobic depiction of a flat in which everyday things come to bewildering life. The first film critically, and with a wild sense of humour, collides modern scientism with the cabinet of curiosities and its worldview of intricate correspondences, a contrast that would increasingly inform Švankmajer's films and other works.[8] *Historia Naturae, Suita* and *The Flat* also animate otherwise inert things in order to undermine their received order and function. Such inspiriting of life in the seemingly innocuous everyday paraphernalia is a persistent feature of Švankmajer's films. Subverting utilitarianism and habitual conceptions, it makes room for a both playful and menacing form of magic.

Soon after Švankmajer and Švankmajerova joined the surrealist group, the Czechoslovakian regime became increasingly authoritarian, and came down hard on any cultural activities that could be considered oppositional.[9] Working in animated film, an ostensibly harmless expression, Švankmajer was able to make his work public to a greater extent than the other surrealists. Even so, his freedom of expression was limited, and some of his films were censored or "locked away in the vaults."[10] In 1972, the authorities detected what they thought was a veiled criticism of the state in Švankmajer's unauthorized post-production changes to *Leonardo's Diary* (*Leonarduv deník*).[11] Švankmajer was consequently banned from directing films for several years, and had to interrupt the making of *The Castle of Otranto* (*Otrantský zámek*), which was only completed in 1979. When he was allowed to resume making films, he was at first only allowed to direct adaptations based on classic literature. Literature had always fed into his films, and now he took the opportunity to make the idiosyncratic Edgar Allan Poe adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher* (*Zánik domu Usherů*, 1980). Once he was allowed to work on his own scripts again, he made *Down to the Cellar* in 1983. The hardships continued, however. Švankmajer's first feature film *Alice* was denied state finance, and he was only able to complete it with money from abroad.[12] Since making *Food* (*Jídlo*) in 1992, Švankmajer has only directed feature films, including *Faust* (*Lekce Faust*, 1994) and *Little Otik* (*Otesánek*, 2001), apart from the examples already mentioned. He has compared the difficulty of financing his films in a market

economy with the repression and censorship he encountered during Stalinism.[13]

Švankmajer's renowned use of animation is largely informed by his work in puppet theatre, and shows traces of earlier Czechoslovak animators, including the puppetry of Jiří Trnka.[14] But his films also form part of an erratic lineage of animation in surrealist cinema, of which there are traces in some of the films discussed earlier in this book. Wilhelm Freddie uses stop-motion animation in a brief sequence in *Eaten Horizons*, when he depicts a loaf of bread opening up and spilling its meaty content. Jean-Louis Bédouin and Michel Zimbacca occasionally employ cut-out animation in *L'Invention du monde*, in order to make objects traverse the screen. Švankmajer's approach to animation is, however, considerably more refined and extensive than these examples, and he has closer affinities with two Polish filmmakers.[15]

Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica never participated in surrealism, but were close to its poetics and spirit. They made five short films together in the late 1950s.[16] The best known is *House* (*Dom*, 1958), which blends cut-out animation, live action, found footage, and stop-motion, with a surrealist sense of mischief and humour. A sequence in which a head of human hair explores its surroundings, moving about much like a slithering octopus, renders the everyday uncanny in a way that is similar to what Švankmajer would later prove so adept at achieving. As Borowczyk and Lenica went their separate ways to make films on their own, they refined their use of surrealist animation. Lenica's *Labirynt* (1963) is a surrealist fantasy in which a winged man enters a crepuscular city constructed out of hand-coloured photographs. Cut-out animated animals haunt the environs, and the result is much as if one of Max Ernst's breakneck collage novels had come to whimsical life. But Lenica's unabashed playfulness and insertion of hybrid animals into an urban environment also resonate with some recurring tendencies in Švankmajer's films. Borowczyk, for his part, evidences a sensibility that is close to Švankmajer in his black humour, his propensity for playing with encyclopaedias and taxonomies, and, above all, his way of animating objects. Moving to France, Borowczyk developed the methods employed in *House* further in the Chris Marker collaboration *Les Astronautes* (1959). In other films, he turned to stop-motion animation. *Renaissance* (1963) prefigures the at once dreary and humorous world conjured in some of Švankmajer's short films from the late 1960s, such as *The Flat* and *A Quiet Week in the House* (*Tichý týden v dom*, 1969).

Here, Borowczyk shows the destroyed interior of a chamber reconstruct itself in minute detail. The room harbours a saxophone, a family photograph, and a doll that slowly put themselves back together and resume tidy positions. Once the whole is reconstructed, a hand grenade appears. Moments later, everything explodes, the room reduced to its initial chaos. Borowczyk, it seems, takes equal delight in the constructive and destructive phases of these events. The sheer perversity of minutely reconstructing the room, only to lay it to waste, mirrors Švankmajer's black humour and penchant for destruction. But, equally in tune with the Czech animator's sensibility, Borowczyk also pays breathless attention to the secret life of objects, to their innermost workings.[17]

Švankmajer is, then, part of an inventive undercurrent of surrealist animated film, but he has an idiosyncratic approach to the film medium. Besides his work in film, Švankmajer is a prolific artist, making collages, assemblages, and mediumistic drawings. Indeed, despite his extensive film production, he insists that he has never considered himself a filmmaker.[18] He claims to rather see himself as a "poet," regardless of the medium, since: "There's only one poetry, and whichever tools or methods you use, poetics is all one."[19] Indeed, meetings between Švankmajer's different practices are frequent. He has used many of his objects as props in films, while several film props have had an afterlife as artworks. He has exhibited imagery from *Surviving Life: Theory and Practice* as collages.[20] He has published fragments of unrealized film scripts in journals and exhibition catalogues.[21] Švankmajer then constantly realizes the idea of a generalized poetics in his practice. His films are part of an intermedial and intertextual web consisting of his work in other media, his frequent allusions to the surrealist tradition and personal favourites like Poe and Carroll, and the activities of the Czech-Slovak surrealist group.

Czech-Slovak Surrealism

Švankmajer considers his films and art to be part of his larger violent criticism of Western civilization. There is a core of magic, here, as can be seen in a typically acerbic statement by the director:

> To go back to nature! And to do so, mankind would have to give up some of civilisation's "achievements": technology will be for nothing, science again will revert to magic, and art will come down from the pedestal of

> aesthetics and the gilded haunts of mass entertainment, and will return to where it originally came from: to practical life, as a tool of everyday rituals and the expressive medium of myth.[22]

Švankmajer, then, envisions a new social organization, in which surrealist conceptions of myth and magic occupy central positions, not unlike Breton's notion that a new myth could provide a structure to uphold society. The context of Czechoslovak surrealism, however, brings new inflections to the treatment of myth and magic in Švankmajer's films and art.

Surrealism in Czechoslovakia has a long history.[23] A surrealist group was established in Prague as early as 1934, at first centred around Vitězslav Nezval and Karel Teige, and with Toyen, Jindřich Heisler, and Jindřich Styrsky among its members. In 1935, André Breton and Paul Éluard visited the newly founded Prague group and held well-attended lectures.[24] During the war, group members Toyen and Heisler escaped to Paris. Toyen became a vital presence in the post-war group, while Heisler's many contributions include transposing parts of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* to Prague, where it was shown under the title *Mezinarodni Surrealismus*, or "international surrealism."[25] The contact between the groups had continued reverberations. During the brief period of political thaw around 1968, the Czechoslovak and French surrealists co-wrote the tract, "The Platform of Prague," in which they discussed what they perceived to be surrealism's most pressing challenges.[26] Soon after its completion, the political repression in Czechoslovakia was resumed, and the tract was published without its Czechoslovak co-authors' signatures. Not long after that, the Paris group was dissolved and the Czechoslovak group had a temporary hiatus.

When Švankmajer joined the Prague group it had recently resumed its activities.[27] Now, the group entered a phase of uninterrupted activity that has persisted into the present, despite the fact that the regime forced the group into a secret underground existence. While they were long unable to make any official appearances, the group members devoted themselves to clandestine activities, including games, art, and theoretical investigations. They frequently compiled their writings in small samizdat editions; occasionally, they were able to publish some texts and participate in exhibitions through their contacts with international surrealists.[28] They also kept in touch with some of the French surrealists who sought new forums for activity in the wake of the dissolution of the Paris

group. Among many other collaborations, in 1976 the Czechoslovak and French surrealists issued the comprehensive anthology *La Civilisation surréaliste*, edited by Vincent Bounoure, with contributions by, among others, Švankmajer, Effenberger, and René Alleau. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Czechoslovak group emerged into the open, and immediately assumed a prominent visibility. They swiftly relaunched their journal *Analogon*, which had previously come out in a single issue in 1969.[29] They also arranged numerous exhibitions.[30] Most recently, the 2012 exhibition *Other Air* summarized the group's activities between 1991 and 2011 and its relationship with international surrealism.[31] It did so in a strikingly visible fashion, in stark contrast with all the years spent underground. At The Old Town Hall, in the middle of Prague's busy Old Town, a wide range of participants from the international surrealist movement exhibited some 400 artworks in different media, a striking assertion of the continued vitality of surrealism and the diversity of its expressions. Švankmajer contributed a wide range of objects, assemblages, and collages to *Other Air*. Among the works were also a selection of clips from his films, interspersed with digital animations by Martin Stejskal. Hence, film was integrated into this display of the heterogeneous expressions of contemporary surrealism.

Concrete Irrationality

If *Other Air* demonstrates how the Czechoslovak surrealists have developed their thought in relation to international surrealism, their extended periods of isolation and the attendant cultural conditions have led them to approach many central surrealist issues from new angles. Many of these have repercussions in Švankmajer's films, and pertain to how he negotiates between materiality and myth. When Breton announced a change in direction for surrealism towards myth and magic, the Czechoslovak surrealists set out on a different path. The repression and poverty in the Czechoslovak post-war situation was instrumental to their direction. Fijalkowski remarks that the Czechoslovak surrealists found it difficult to adhere to the French post-war privileging of the marvellous and myth, since they felt that it was "out of kilter with their own experience."[32] The group's main theorist, Vratislav Effenberger, was particularly critical of Breton's utopian *Arcanum 17*, which he considered to be a retreat from surrealism to romanticism.[33] Effenberger instead construed surrealism as a form of constructive cynicism, directed towards

depicting a "raw and cruel reality."[34] In the same spirit, he replaced Breton's watchwords "love, liberty, and poetry" with a critical examination, a "negation of negation," of surrealism's major tenets, and sought to direct them towards a more specific practice.[35] Gone, then, are Breton's therapeutic formulations of an "ascendant sign," in favour of a creative confrontation of the misery of everyday reality.[36]

To this end, the Czechoslovak surrealists revitalized Salvador Dalí's notion of concrete irrationality.[37] Dalí conceived of concrete irrationality in the early 1930s, as a means to radically rethink surrealist activity. In contrast to what he called the general irrationality that was an outcome of the passive states of automatism and the dream, Dalí posited concrete irrationality as a way of anchoring a more specific surrealist practice actively in material reality.[38] This, he claimed, could be achieved by applying his method of paranoia-criticism, a wilful simulation of paranoid interpretation intended to render the surrounding world into a space frantically charged with symbolic meaning.[39] For the Czechoslovak surrealists, concrete irrationality similarly functioned as a potent means to direct surrealist attention to the surrounding material reality. It had such ramifications for their thought and practice that František Dryje considers concrete irrationality to be one of their "distinctive acquisitions."[40] The concept is particularly telling for the Czechoslovak surrealists' urgent conviction that surrealism ought to grow out of the concrete materiality of the surrounding world.[41]

Dryje opposes concrete irrationality to what he calls Breton's "uncritical utopianism."[42] In the 1969 declaration "The Possible Against the Current," the Czechoslovak surrealists caution against precisely the utopianism that fed into *Arcanum 17* and *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. They argue that utopianism contains the irrational in a festival-like delimited exuberance, and against such restrictions of utopian energies they posit the "rational and irrational constituents of *absolute real life*."[43] Effenberger was, again, instrumental in formulating these concerns. But what may appear to be a definite break with Breton's search for a new myth, is in fact a more multifaceted development. The Czechoslovak surrealists' adoption of concrete irrationality can more productively be understood, in line with Dalí's original ambitions, to primarily bring an added specificity and an increased material grounding to surrealism. As Švankmajer's work suggests, such specificity and material grounding does not necessarily preclude an engagement with myth and magic. It may instead facilitate new directions for it.

Indeed, nested in the Czechoslovak surrealists' reformulations of surrealist practice is a prevailing insight into the need for myth and utopia. Effenberger himself writes about Breton's post-war development in sympathetic terms, and states that "the need for a new humanist synthesis and integration […] can seem to have too romantic and utopian contours only from the perspective of vulgar practicism."[44] Elsewhere, he writes with approval of the new myth as a means of "opposition against the whole of rationalist civilization."[45] Again, Effenberger's criticism appears to be founded more on Breton's lack of elaboration of what the surrealist new myth entails, than on the question of a new myth in itself.[46] The Czechoslovak surrealists, then, sought to distinguish strategies for constructing a utopia that does not succumb to a romantic enchantment alien to their own circumstances, and which manages to avoid the ideological distortion of Marxism that led to the Stalinist society in which they were trapped. The challenge for the Czechoslovak surrealists was to evade "vulgar practicism," and to locate splinters of utopian hope in the brutal reality that surrounded them by exposing it to the work of the surrealist imagination.

Under the guise of concrete irrationality, the Czechoslovak surrealists reconsidered the marvellous and made it contingent on the detection of fissures and overlooked details in the raw and unfiltered everyday.[47] This had direct consequences for their artistic practice. The constant state of crisis and absurdity that the world around them was in made Effenberger consider it "enough to point a camera at the world's irrational forms to provoke an eruption of its 'objective humour'."[48] Hence, documentary photography became prevalent in Czechoslovak post-war surrealism.[49] Emila Medková's work exemplifies this development, as she made a transition from elaborately staged photographs to straight photography, conceived as a documentation of the concrete poetry that lay dormant in the ravaged surroundings, merely waiting to be teased out by the camera.[50] She framed grains, cracks, and patterns in a way that suggested new shapes and was intended to stimulate the imagination to seek out new meaning in the everyday.

Švankmajer's attentiveness to everyday materiality with all its wear and tear means that his films have similarities with the documentary photography of Medková and others. In line with the explorations of concrete irrationality, Švankmajer's films have a firm emphasis on material reality, but they also wilfully transform it. His employment of concrete irrationality is apparent in his penchant for a certain gritty realism that belies his

emphasis on the imagination. In his “Decalogue” of ten points for filmmaking, he emphasizes the importance of material veracity since it makes the fantastic appear more credible.[51] Accordingly, he wants his films to look “like records of reality,” and would like his viewers to believe that they have just watched a documentary.[52] “Only then,” he says, “are they able to fulfil their subversive mission.”[53] From early shorts like *The Flat* and *A Quiet Week in the House* to later works like *Food* and *Little Otik*, Švankmajer’s films frequently take place in nondescript environments: regular houses, restaurants, and other everyday milieus. Here, it is as if the quotidian environment itself brings forth the odd creatures of the imagination that suddenly cavort in it and transform it.

Švankmajer’s documentary ambitions and his emphasis on unvarnished everyday materiality can be related to Effenberger’s insistence on the need for surrealism to emerge from “raw and cruel reality” and “absolute real life.” But where Effenberger posits the documentary mode as sufficient for the triggering of analogically functioning poetry in the everyday, Švankmajer, as an animator and director of fiction films, uses documentary veracity as a mere starting point. His films do not just suggest the transformation of the scenery depicted, but actively bring it about. Editing and animation are the most apparent factors here. While Švankmajer’s films are stylistically and technically diverse, they tend to use jarring montage techniques that are far removed from realist aesthetics as it has been understood from André Bazin onwards.[54] Švankmajer alternates centred, tableaux-like shots with extreme close-ups, draws attention to the film tricks he employs by sudden cuts, and in many of his feature films he creates a polyphonic style through the insertion of animated sequences that break the narrative flow. The documentary qualities he refers to, then, are mainly limited to the attention he draws to the surfaces and materiality of objects and environments, as well as the settings of the films. Within these settings he enacts transformations that make objects and non-human beings assume agency as if germinating from the soil of this unvarnished reality. From the ragged taxidermied animals that cavort so frantically in *Historia Naturae, Suita*, to the putrefying apples and hay-spilling toys in *Jabberwocky* (*Žvahlav aneb šatičky slaměného Huberta*, 1971), to the scruffy procession of assemblages in *Alice*, the life of these objects is messy and material.

These transformations indicate that Švankmajer transforms the material according to a surrealist poetics of juxtaposition and metamorphoses. Underlying them, however, is also a strong sense of personal mythology.

Personal Mythology

The Czechoslovak surrealists' theoretical pursuits include an exploration of the connections between myth and the imagination. In the 1970s, they explored the phenomenology of the imagination, directing parts of their research towards its "critical and integrating myth-creating functions."[55] Recall that the notion that myth has similarities with surrealist poetry was one aspect of the movement's early interest in myth. In the post-war era, Breton returns to this argument in "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," in which he proclaims that the alchemical *prima materia* of language that the surrealists discovered through automatism can be found in the same place as that in which "myths take wing."[56] Effenberger also echoes Breton's essay when he writes about "those very quintessential tendencies of the human spirit, from which myths have originated from time immemorial."[57]

Myth has indeed been a preoccupation of several Czechoslovak surrealist artists. The works of Roman Erben, Karol Baron, and Martin Stejskal have been described as attempts "to explore a modern mythology."[58] Kateřina Piňosová has been said to create "mischievous creatures of the mind […] functioning like defiant totems of a personal mythology," with themes that are "mythic, dreamlike, fairytale or perhaps legendary and shamanic."[59] And Švankmajer has created an elaborate personal mythology, while his creative engagement with matter tends towards what Gaston Bachelard calls a spontaneous mythology. If the Czechoslovak surrealists, then, did not so much evade myth as explore it in ways informed by their search for specificity, a considerably more "minor" and grounded attitude to myth can be detected in their theory and practice. The minor aspect of these myths can be understood as symptomatic of what Jean-François Lyotard described as the distrust of "grand narratives" in the postmodern condition, something that appears to have been even more urgent in a Czechoslovakia faced with the totalitarian narrative of communism.[60] The minor myths created by Czechoslovakian and Czech surrealists are accordingly formulated more along the lines of cultivating a sensibility than of fostering a society, thus to some extent splintering Breton's hopes for the new myth as an overarching transformation of society.

Throughout his work in different media, Švankmajer develops a constantly transforming yet distinctly recognizable universe. Much like Max Ernst, with his alchemical iconography and his bird alter ego Loplop,

Leonora Carrington, with her esoteric rituals and underground goddesses, and Victor Brauner, with his mythical doubles and ruined eyes, Švankmajer creates a personal mythology out of biographical references and personal preoccupations, intermingled with allusions to esotericism and alchemy, myth, and magic. And like Nelly Kaplan, Švankmajer alludes to the surrealist tradition, even as he reformulates it in the light of his own interests and obsessions.

A telling example of Švankmajer's construction of a personal mythology can be found in *The Flat*. Gripped by despair, its trapped protagonist chops a door to pieces with an axe, and a cut to a close-up of the wall behind it reveals that several names are inscribed there. Among them are "S. Dalí," "B. Péret," and "Rudolf II." Two well-known surrealists here meet with Rudolf II, the King of Bohemia 1575–1612, whose court in Prague employed both alchemists and the mannerist painter Arcimboldo, while the king himself also constructed a number of *Wunderkammer*.[61] Dalí and Péret are of particular importance for Švankmajer, while alchemy, Arcimboldo, and the *Wunderkammer* are recurring references throughout his works.[62] A close-up to another part of the wall shows a heart with "E.S.," "J.S.," and "V.S." carved into it. These are the initials of Eva Švankmajerova, Jan Švankmajer, and one of their children. A brief glimpse then inscribes Švankmajer in a resonant tradition, and so the director draws out the contours of a personal mythology.

Švankmajer further fuses his own work with that of his predecessors through adaptations of literary sources. The Faust legend is a recurring reference in his work, to the extent that it assumes a position of myth, something that is most prominent in his own *Faust*.[63] Švankmajer also considers himself to have created a myth around Poe.[64] For him, Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which he adapted into a short film, mythically encapsulates the doomed state of Western civilization.[65] *The Pit, the Pendulum, and Hope* (*Kyvadlo, jáma a naděje*, 1983) fuses Poe with Villiers de l'Isle Adam, while *Lunacy* is based on no less than two Poe stories, "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" and "The Premature Burial." The latter film also incorporates extended quotes from the writings of the Marquis de Sade, and even incarnates Sade himself in the character of the Marquis. Švankmajer also returns to Lewis Carroll time and again. Carroll's writings are the source material for both *Jabberwocky* and *Alice*. The blonde girl protagonists in *Down to the Cellar* and *Little Otik* also incarnate the inquisitive and adventurous nature of the Alice figure, leading them to journeys through

the marvellous, and weaving further threads in the director's personal mythology.[66] Švankmajer's reliance on these source texts, however, trouble conventional notions of "adaptation." He claims to most often work from his own memories of the source material, rather than directly from the works.[67] On their way to the screen, all his adaptations have then been filtered through his own sensibility and fermented among his own obsessions.

Puppetry is another prominent element in Švankmajer's personal mythology. He has continued to create puppets both for his films and as artworks, and claims that he treats some of them as his own personal Golems, construed as magical protections against reality.[68] Švankmajer's comparison, here, of his own art with the resonant esoteric tradition of Prague—as depicted so vividly in Gustav Meyrink's novel *The Golem* (1914)—points to the fact that he considers the inspiriting of life in inert objects to be an act of magic.[69] Švankmajer's intimate knowledge of Prague, which Breton described as "the magic capital of old Europe," enables him to detect its many layers of magical and alchemical practice, sediment of rejected knowledge that rises to the surface for the onlooker with trained eyes.[70] His incorporation of Prague's esoteric topography is one further aspect of the personal mythology he has cultivated over several decades of often intersecting work in a number of art forms.[70] Thus construed as magical acts, Švankmajer's employment of puppets and use of animation is configured as a direct intervention of the imagination in reality.

Švankmajer's personal mythology also utilizes these references as building blocks for something that takes the form of more collective myths in gestation. His use of found material and his allusive methods for constructing his personal mythology have much in common with Fijalkowski's description of Jindřich Heisler's "essentially *bricolage* practice": "make do with what's at hand; locate its secrets and know how to keep and exploit them at the same time; build fragments into a new myth of the world."[72] Lévi-Strauss indeed compares bricolage and myth with artistic methods and approaches.[73] Švankmajer's bricolage practices appear as methods of creating new spontaneous myths out of the debris of a doomed civilization. In works like his playful collage mock-encyclopaedia *Švank-Meyers Bilderlexikon* (1972–), his many assemblages of taxidermied animal parts, found objects, and everyday paraphernalia, and his imaginative adaptations of fragments of literary source materials into personal film scripts, Švankmajer's methods place his artworks

under the signs of play, desire, and magic. These operations displace the source material in order to liberate it from repressive demands for utility and redirect it towards the creation of minor myths. In his films, Švankmajer adds the multivalent "magic" of animation and montage to these strategies.

This work depends on the imagination's intrusion into and transformation of everyday material reality.[74] "Imagination, imagination, imagination …," he writes in his "Decalogue," before insisting that it is the imagination, and not work, that makes us human.[75] Švankmajer's poetics, his interest in alchemy and esotericism, and his fascination for materiality and experiments in tactility all pertain to his ambition to mend the rift between human and world, subject and object, through the restitution of the "magic" he considers to be inherent in the surrealist imagination. In his view, the magical faculty of the imagination lies dormant, "and from time to time the irrational fire of the uncontrolled imagination flares forth and the magical world shines in all its 'convulsive' beauty."[76] Like Bachelard, he has a romantic conviction that the imagination is an incomparably creative faculty, resident in the realm of "primitive" thought, alchemy, and myth, and in opposition to positivist science.[77]

Much like both Breton and Freddie, Švankmajer also constructs an alternative art history in which art and magic originally were one; in his view, their separation eventually made art "end up as a servant of the ideologies of totalitarian systems, or take upon itself the deplorable role of commodity produced for the art market."[78] As a reaction to this process, he states that surrealism attempts "to restore the 'magical dignity' of art."[79] As noted in conjunction with Freddie's films, some surrealists considered the post-war era to be the time for the magically functioning object. These objects have an emphasis on tactile, auratic, and analogically associative qualities. They often allude to primitivist notions of the object as totem or fetish. If *L'Invention du monde* sought to inspirit a new form of life in the "primitive" objects it juxtaposed, Švankmajer's films employ animation and the active alteration of found objects to afford them his version of an at once ghostly and excessive life force.

Švankmajer's ambition to reinstate art to its function of myth and magic, connected to ritual and everyday life, is precisely in tune with the aims formulated in relation to *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. But his films can also be considered contributions to a new form of surrealist myth, one that combines these "minor" and personal aspects with a collective

nature, something that again is similar to what Breton sought out in "The Political Position of Surrealism," and would refine in his delineation of the new myth in the years leading up to *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.

The Fetish Against Western Civilization

Švankmajer's pursuit of the restoration of art to a condition of magic is expressed in many different ways in his art and films. Animation is central here, as a modern way to exert magical influence over inert matter. But these processes also work through transmedial constructions of assemblages and alterations of found objects. Benjamin Péret suggested a similar practice for the votive offerings laid out on the altars in the Labyrinth of Initiation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Eschewing their traditional appearance, Péret proposed surrealist reconfigurations of these sacred objects. Through striking combinations or simple alterations of objects and substances, he imagined offerings in the form of mouldy consecrated hosts, and a large star-shaped plate on which fake spiders floated in milk.[80] This kind of surrealist "magic through juxtaposition" is often at work in Švankmajer's objects as well as in his films, something that further points to their intricate connection of surrealist poetics, primitivism, and esotericism. This magic figures in particular as a creative work with matter.

Švankmajer often works with things that are in a state of deterioration, from decaying animal parts to broken household objects. At other times, he actively corrodes matter. His *The End of Civilization?* cycle of objects is a case in point. He created these objects by submerging things—shoes and slippers in *The End of Civilization*; arms of mannequins and mittens in *The End of Civilization? II*—in the thermal springs of the Czech town Karlovy Vary. Exposed to a process of rapid deterioration, these everyday objects gained a dull bronze-coloured patina. Tidily arranged and placed under glass, they take on the appearance of mock-archaeological findings. Indeed, Švankmajer gleefully considers his sedimented objects to be a creation of "fossil[s] of this fucked-up civilization," a premature inkling of its seemingly inevitable demise.[81] But these artworks are not merely a form of cynical divination. They also appear as an attempt at a magical willing of the end of civilization, in which the deterioration of its utilitarian products brings it to the alchemical *nigredo* phase of dissolution. If allusions to alchemical putrefaction can frequently be detected in Švankmajer's objects, it spills into his films,

too. Among the many imaginative props in *Alice* is a pair of black men's shoes hermetically sealed in a glass vessel, seemingly oozing and breaking down. Exhibiting this object outside the film, Švankmajer named it *Putrefaction*. These magical manoeuvres are, again, more of a negation than the sort of constructive poetics Breton privileged in his post-war thought. Dormant in such a destructiveness, however, is the promise of a more fruitful restoration. Both alchemy and many mythological cosmologies, after all, require the intermittent destruction of matter and the world for a renewal to come about.[82] If *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, born out of the shock and destruction of World War II, emphasized the renewal that follows destruction, Švankmajer seems drawn to the breakdown of matter characteristic of *nigredo*.

In his attempts to recover a magic quality in art, Švankmajer has turned to the idea of the "fetish." "Fetish" was the word colonialists used to designate the presumed cult value and utter alterity of indigenous objects in relation to European artistic, religious, or utilitarian objects.[83] On the one hand, Švankmajer's references to his own art as fetishes is a transmogrification of these negative connotations, and is part of his attempt to liberate art from the stranglehold of European conventions.[84] On the other hand, his interest in the idea of the fetish is concretely related to his collection of African masks and statuettes. He started to make his own fetishes with inspiration from ritual practices in Gabon, Congo, and Cameroon.[85] Švankmajer's references to non-Western art in his works are indeed considerably more specific than those of most surrealists. However, his ambition to create fetishes does not stop at the objects that he explicitly frames as fetishes, but extends to all of his objects, which he conceives as "magic talismans."[86] As Dryje puts it, Švankmajer makes objects "with full consciousness of their original 'fetishistic', which is to say of their mytho-magical, correspondences."[87] Švankmajer's references to his objects as fetishes are, then, a modern play with a problematic concept, utilized for its connection to the idea of art as magic rather than as an object for aesthetic contemplation.[88] The film medium has given him the opportunity to further nuance his employment of the notion of fetish.

The 2005 film *Lunacy*, in particular, depicts a subversive process that also reflects Švankmajer's creation of fetishes. *Lunacy* is centred around the question of the ideal organization of society, and when he was present at a screening at Göteborg Film Festival in 2006, Švankmajer explained that the film was a reaction against the changing conditions of

Stalinism and the market economy that he had lived through. He suggested that the failure of both Marxism and the market means that the time is ripe for the world to be organized according to surrealism. If the film does not propose anything like a model of a surrealist organization of society, it nevertheless invokes a surrealist myth of sorts. The film opens with Švankmajer, standing against a white background, introducing *Lunacy* with a brief monologue, in which he explains that the film can be seen as "an infantile tribute to Edgar Allan Poe, from whom I borrowed a number of motifs, and to the Marquis de Sade, to whom the film owes its blasphemy and subversiveness." *Lunacy* is then placed squarely in the realm of Švankmajer's personal mythology. *Lunacy* also pertains to both Švankmajer's material magic and his creation of minor myths. One scene brings together Sade and Švankmajer's creation of "fetishes" in a blasphemous way that is telling for the director's attempts to replace the myths of Western civilization with new magical foundations.

The Marquis hammers nails into a life-sized crucifix in the basement of his mansion. The Christ that hangs on this cross is spotted and dirty, its surface cracked in places. Christ has been endowed with a large phallus that sticks right out from his groin. The nails protrude in clusters from the crucifix. Hammering, the Marquis recites a blasphemous passage from Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795), which condemns Christ as the source of all of humanity's sufferings, and he promises that, were Christ there now, he would make sure that the nails were hammered into his flesh with even greater force. The scene depicts what Švankmajer describes as a black mass.[89] Below the Marquis and the crucifix, five participants share a luxurious chocolate cake in the shape of a cross. Hazy close-ups on the cake and the mouth of a female participant emphasize the gluttony, as one more element counteracting Christian austerity. In another part of the ritual, a male participant paints inverted crosses on the backs and buttocks of three naked women, before the Marquis sprinkles consecrated hosts over them. At the culmination of the mass, the Marquis clothes himself in an ecclesiastical robe, a section on the front of which is covered by a collage of pornographic photographs, before he crowns his outfit by putting on a wooden mask endowed with two horns and a frazzled beard. Georges Bataille describes how the black mass was construed as a parody of the Christian rite, an inversion of the dominant good that charged it with a force that was more structurally than metaphysically evil.[90] In *Lunacy*, too, the Marquis

revels in blasphemy and adorns himself with satanic regalia in a way that seems more directed against the reviled Christ than towards invoking any actual satanic powers. In line with similar motifs in Freddie's and Kaplan's films, the scene is then a play with demonic and satanic symbolism. The black mass here is also prefigured by a less elaborate, and more private, black mass that takes place in *Conspirators of Pleasure*, with an additional reference to vodun. Indeed, Sade is facetiously listed as one of the "technical advisors" in that film's credits. Such intertextual continuities between films contribute to Švankmajer's construction of a personal mythology.

The depiction of a black mass in *Lunacy* is also fraught with references to the wider surrealist tradition. The Marquis's monologue anchors the scene's blasphemies in the surrealist reception of the violently atheistic libertine. *Lunacy* can then be related to *L'âge d'or*, in which a scene shows a Christ-like figure disappearing into a castle full of orgies in an allusion to Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The inverted crosses painted on naked female bodies recall Man Ray's *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade*. And the scene's combination of pagan mask and erotic ritual brings to mind the Canadian surrealist Jean Benoît's 1959 "Execution of the Marquise de Sade's Testament," a performance that acted as the unofficial opening of the surrealist *EROS* exhibition in Paris.[91] In the home of the surrealist poet Joyce Mansour, Benoît brandished an elaborate costume, complete with a pointy mask that intermingled features from "primitive" cultures with Sadean references. Undressing, Benoît revealed his skin to be decorated with intricate, "tribal" markings; he also sported a massively enlarged penis enveloped in a wooden case. The ritual culminated with Benoît branding himself with a red-hot iron that spelled out "SADE."[92] The black mass in *Lunacy*, then, interweaves Švankmajer's personal mythology with elements from the surrealist tradition. In that way, it arguably creates a more collectively valid myth intended to counter the still prevalent grip of Christianity on Western civilization. Breton did something similar in *Arcanum 17*, in which he writes about Lucifer as the bringer of a light of revolt and renewal. But the black mass in *Lunacy* rather revels in blasphemy as an act of black humour and subversion. Much like Freddie's *Eaten Horizons*, *Lunacy* employs these elements as components of a surrealist myth centred on a ritual unfettering of desire.

A more complex operation, however, also takes place in *Lunacy*, since the nail-riddled Christ can be related to Švankmajer's practice of creating

fetishes. Some of these appropriate the African Bakongo people's nkisi nkondi figures, sometimes called nail fetishes or vengeance fetishes. Their most striking feature is the large number of nails and metal blades inserted in them, and the coarse ropes they are often bound with. Large parts of the Christ figure's entire body are riddled with nails. They protrude from his arms, torso, face, and engorged member. Christ's body is also bound with ropes. The resulting object then alludes to the construction of nkisi, and Christ is transformed into a fetish.[93] This simple act turns one of the central symbols of Western self-identification as good and progressive into what the Western world perceived to signify darkness, backwardness, and superstition, ideas that were used to legitimize colonialism with its slavery and genocide. The Christ figure's prominent phallus is significant here. On the one hand, it is part of the blasphemy that permeates the scene. But on the other, it is entangled in a more sophisticated countering of Western standards. Western colonialists were known to be disturbed by the exposed genitals of some "primitive" artefacts, and in many instances they eliminated the provocation by castrating the offending figures.[94] The void between the legs of, say, a Rapa Nui birdman figure, a *tangata manu*, is at once metaphoric for the disempowerment of an entire people, and a synecdoche of the physical mutilation enacted upon it. The Christ figure's phallus in *Lunacy* stands as an affront to such prudery and the repressive violence that is its other face. Christ's cock, here, can then be construed as a blatant poke in the eye of Western civilization, rupturing its self-image.

In this brief scene, then, Švankmajer enacts a complex yet blatantly brusque inversion of Western standards in order to carve out a counter-myth. It also turns Christ into a figure of magic, and can hence be understood as a way of regaining the marvellous from what Mabille perceived to be its crippling appropriation by religion.[95] Ethnographer Marcel Mauss considered magic to be a disruptive force that breaks open tradition, thus inverting and complicating the culturally biased understanding of magic as conservative and merely repetitive of primordial myths.[96] In line with Mauss's understanding of magic as a countering of tradition, the Christ-fetish can be said to disrupt ingrained categories in ways both violent and subtle. Much as the Paris surrealists made a display of "European fetishes" in the 1931 anticolonial exhibition, *Lunacy* enacts a complex yet base inversion when the Christ figure is turned into a priapic nail fetish. This counter-myth in the form of a fetish does not merely counter the religious icon but implicitly posits a ritual anchoring of art in the everyday.

Magic Animation

The black mass in *Lunacy* culminates with animated pieces of flesh cracking the side of Christ, before spastically wriggling out of the hole. The point where the crucified Christ is often wounded by a spear is now ruptured from inside by an excess of carnal life. Throughout *Lunacy*, the narrative is interspersed with similar sequences, in which pieces of meat and animals' eyes and tongues cavort wildly with the aid of stop-motion animation and accompanied by a circus-like melody. Earlier in the film, an inserted sequence shows a bust of the Venus de Milo, in which slabs of meat suddenly force their way through the eye sockets, the nose, the mouth, and the nipples. Thus is a piece of esteemed art heritage turned into a trickster-like figure, seemingly sticking her tongue out at the Western civilization that has assumed her native ancient Greece to be its own cradle. Here, too, magic replaces aesthetics. The operation is symbolic, but it is also fuelled by animation.

For Švankmajer, "Animation is magic and the animator is a shaman. Apparently, our ancestors were able to bring inanimate natural objects to life through the magical power of their minds. We need technology to make this possible."[97] Animation hence serves to breathe magical life into otherwise inert things and beings. Accordingly, Švankmajer believes, "the word 'animation' comes from the word 'animism'."[98] In an act of phonetic cabala, Švankmajer creatively constructs a new etymology, relating animation to the ethnographic notion of animism ascribed to "primitive" religions that perceive the world to be inspirited by invisible entities. Even if half in jest, he then adopts a view of magic as an intervention in physical reality. The conviction that animation is magic can then be related to, on the one hand, both vernacular and scholarly views of special effects, and cinema overall, as magic, and, on the other, Švankmajer's own primitivist and esoteric leanings with their adherent conceptions of magic.

Švankmajer's experiments with animation as magic hark back to the old illusionist stage magic that Georges Méliès transposed into cinema, and which the early surrealists found so enchanting.[99] Much like Méliès, Švankmajer came to cinema from the theatre rather than from film school.[100] Like Méliès, Švankmajer also combines the extra-cinematic heritage of stage wonders with a plethora of medium-specific techniques.[101] Both directors use special effects to trick the eye, to suspend the rules and regulations that dictate the function of bodies and objects alike. But

unlike Méliès who, in line with the ideals of the theatre he came from, did his utmost to conceal the cuts that created his illusions, Švankmajer enacts his magic with a knowingly jarring discrepancy between live-action shots and animated sequences.[102] Švankmajer is also more interested in "brute reality" than the representational illusion of much Czech animation, which can be seen in his use of close-ups and the emphasis they place on material imperfections that pierce the filmic illusion.[103]

Švankmajer's style also looks back to the jolt of the inserted attraction in early cinema.[104] In *Conspirators of Pleasure*, there are abrupt transitions between a live-action shot, in which a character puts on a mask in the shape of a cock's head, and the sequences in which his animated counterpart runs around in agitation, flapping the large wings he has affixed to his arms and defying the laws of gravity by jumping impossibly high into the air. Likewise, in *Virile Games* (*Mužné hry*, 1988) a football-watching couch potato stuffs himself with sugar-sprinkled cookies. In order to emphasize his gluttony, Švankmajer cuts to a shot where the figure's mouth, now placed in a clay-modelled head, extends to suprahuman proportions through the disruptive magic of animation. In these examples, the attention to material imperfections and the lack of smooth transitions between live action and animation point to a seeming conflict between the ostensible realism with which Švankmajer seeks to anchor his films in the real world, and the transformations of that reality enacted through the magic means of cinema. Again, his films negotiate the tenets of concrete irrationality.

Méliès is one of the few film-related examples of magic art that Breton references in *L'art magique*. Breton detects participation in magic in Méliès's films, and considers the director to have incited a neglected lineage of magic art in cinema.[105] If Švankmajer's animation takes the position of one potential facet of the *magie retrouvée* that Breton calls for, it revels in the violent intrusion of the imagination into a surrounding reality faithfully captured by the camera.[106] The attention Švankmajer draws to the artificial quality of his restitution of magic can also be related to his statement that animation substitutes for an old shamanistic ability to bring life to inert matter. His films then pertain to the tension Gunning describes in the magic of cinema between "an ancient magical imagistic tradition" and scientific disenchantment.[107] But if, here, the belief in illusionistic magic is shattered, through the cracks there may possibly emerge a magic art that is in tune with the capacity for collective innervation that Walter Benjamin detected in surrealism.

Švankmajer's creation of surrealist objects exemplifies his "rebellion against utilitarianism."[108] In his films and thought, there are shades of Mabille's definition of the marvellous as an element that predates utilitarian functions, whether they be artistic ambition and convention or religious morality.[109] Švankmajer often uses stop-motion animation to give these objects life, and hence to turn the utilitarian into the marvellous. In *Down to the Cellar*, such a transformation takes place when shoes grow teeth and start to snap at a piece of bread. In *Alice*, a whole parade of objects and hybrid creatures come to life in the underworld. These scenes transform raw matter into vivid spectacles of the imagination. Švankmajer's propensity for animating everyday objects disturbs the borders between the animate and the inanimate. In *The Flat*, objects come to life in front of the flat's only human inhabitant. When he turns on the faucet, it produces a large rock which breaks the pot underneath. When he sits down to eat, his glass of beer alternately shrinks and grows in his hand; when he finally brings it to his lips it is the size of a mere thimble. His spoon turns out to be perforated, and the soup he tries to consume passes right through it. The egg in front of him appears to be unbreakable. When he throws it at the wall in anger, the wall, suddenly suspiciously soft, swallows the egg and closes over it, through the magic of clay animation.

The Flat also draws further attention to the ambivalence inherent in Švankmajer's approach to magic and its mythical qualities. The film is steeped in the frustration of living in a totalitarian state in which everything works against the individual.[110] An allusion to Franz Kafka emphasizes this fact, but it also points to the need to look beyond the surface theme of existential trappings. When the protagonist adds his name to the wall in the cabinet, it spells out Josef. Much like the persecuted Josef K. in *The Trial*, Josef in *The Flat* is caught in a situation without escape, and the objects in his flat are part of the intricate machinery that counteracts him. But while there is a near-existentialist sense of anguish in the film, *The Flat* is ultimately closer in spirit to the earlier surrealist reception of Kafka. In his *Anthology of Black Humor*, Breton writes that, more than anyone else, Kafka has managed to "innervate objects with his own sensibility," a contention that resonates with the obtrusive yet magically charged objects in *The Flat*.[111] In *Literature and Evil*, Bataille detects a joyous revolt in Kafka's writings, an embrace of "evil" directed against the "good" of an oppressive order.[112] Breton's notion of black humour and Bataille's concept of evil both pertain to a refusal to surrender to despair, but

to redirect it as a critical force riddled with gallows laughter and ambivalent anguish. Seen from these perspectives, the machinations that take place in *The Flat* cannot be reduced to components of an existentialist allegory. No matter how sombre the outcome of *The Flat* may appear, the film's animation of everyday things suggests a magical life of the material world beyond the control of repressive powers. In *Alice* and *Down to the Cellar*, the unpredictable life of the material world is, similarly, simultaneously enchanting and threatening. This ambivalence is characteristic of Švankmajer's films, which are never far from an ingrained cynicism that sometimes leads to outright pessimism. But if his films preclude outright utopianism, his undermining of the utilitarian function of things nevertheless suggests a possible resuscitation of magic as a playful and mythical alternative to a disenchanted and dispirited civilization.

A New Myth of Dethroned Humanity

There is a striking connection between Švankmajer's use of animation and one of the more neglected facets of Breton's utopian discussions of the new myth. In the *Other Air* catalogue, Švankmajer writes that, "utopia—as a product of the omnipotence of desire—strives for its own realisation. Therein lies the force of every utopia. It should be added: an unpredictable force."[113] The surrealist conception of the omnipotence of desire, then, seems to hold the promise that utopia is always on the cusp of being grasped through the workings of the imagination. In the same catalogue, Bruno Solarik further details the Czech-Slovak surrealist view of utopia and its relation with practice, artistic and otherwise: "Surrealist utopia is not a mere hoping in the improbably [sic], but it is the real work with the impossible. In concrete practice, *utopia* becomes a *realistic* standpoint that grips reality and which is gripped by reality, in the sense of the rhythmical automatism of a rock, tree or a man."[114] Solarik here alludes to the fourth book of Lautréamont's *The Songs of Maldoror*, which opens with the declaration: "A man, a stone, or a tree is going to begin this fourth song."[115] Aligning the notion of concrete utopianism with one of the pillars of the surrealist tradition, Solarik reinforces its status as an integral element of a surrealist myth.

Ascribing automatism not only to a human, but to a rock and a tree, also entails a levelling of hierarchies in the natural world. This operation resonates with Švankmajer's inspiriting of life, agency, and creativity into

objects and non-human beings. It also recalls Breton's "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not," in which he proclaims: "Man is perhaps not the center, the cynosure of the universe."[116] Breton proceeds to quote a particularly haunting fragment by Novalis, which declares that humans are animals who live, as parasites, inside a greater animal. By way of the German romantic, he presents a critical view of the minor importance of the human in the face of both the familiar and unknown sides of the natural world. It is in light of this recognition of the diminutive position of the human that Breton suggests the Great Transparent Ones as harbingers of a new myth.[117] Being, as Solarik puts it, "gripped by reality" as it is manifested in the automatism of the natural world, entails a similar realization of the decentring of the human. This allusion has ramifications for Švankmajer's tendency to bring agency to the non-human world through animation, and it then also aligns his methods with an often-overlooked aspect of the surrealist myth: its questioning of human exceptionalism. Švankmajer's animation of the inert world can be seen to channel what he calls the "unpredictable force" of surrealist utopia. Divested of their position as the crown of creation with its implications of all-knowing mastery of the world, humans are free to participate in a world that now communicates on the shared plane of rhythmical automatism. In line with romantic beliefs, a poetic rather than instrumental relation to nature can also serve to estrange it in order to re-enchant it. In Švankmajer's films, this double move of estrangement and re-enchantment extends to the entire material world.[118]

In his novel *Henry von Ofterdingen* (1802), Novalis mentions a lost state "when the power of poetry was so in tune with nature that wild animals could be tamed and even stones could be drawn into dance-like movement."[119] Švankmajer frequently seems to strive to recover such a state. In *Lunacy*, animated slabs of meat are engaged in a grotesque but vivid dance that blurs the line between dead matter and organic life. In *Jabberwocky*, the world in miniature that is a child's playroom comes alive with uncanny results. And in *Conspirators of Pleasure*, the sheer force of desire animates erotic instruments into rolling over the body of their creator. However, in their way of giving unwieldy life to the world of things, Švankmajer's films are also frequently close to the sort of savage animality that Bachelard detected in Lautréamont.[120] Theirs is a poetics of muscular twitches that instils his films with a savage and mordant disdain for the human.[121] Now reconceptualized by Švankmajer as an

animist and shaman, the figure of the surrealist artist-magician is posited to not just possess the key to an analogical world, but also to be able to level the hierarchies in nature. Thus, the demiurge-like director engenders a surrealist utopia in which the imagination may animate every grain of matter regardless of its providence and provenance.

Švankmajer's lament for an original shamanistic animism mirrors Novalis's and Breton's respective nostalgia for a lost link between the human and the surrounding world. Animation, here, is a form of re-enchantment through technology, a reversal of modernity's disenchantment through its own products. It points to Švankmajer's close relation to surrealism's self-understanding, as Breton expresses it in *L'art magique*, as the most recent point in a line of magic art and experience that connects what Lévi-Strauss calls "the savage mind," hermetism, Renaissance thought, and romanticism.[122] Placed at the culmination of this line, Švankmajer's animation also pertains to the deregulation of the senses that was so central to Breton's late valorization of cinema as the place where "the only *absolutely modern* mystery is being celebrated."[123] Indeed, Švankmajer's employment of animation is based on a disorienting breakdown of categories, and attendant new syntheses, not only between objects and beings but within them: in his films, unpredictable life is breathed into everyday things as well as assemblages in which animal parts and objects are fused. They are less tamed, as Novalis envisions, than trickster-like. Vivid examples can be seen in the manoeuvres of animated meat in *Lunacy*, in the riotous romp of taxidermied animals in *Historia Naturae, Suita*, and in the conflict between two Arcimboldoesque figures made up of waste material in *Dimensions of Dialogue* (*Možnosti dialogu*, 1982). Again, Švankmajer evades lofty idealism for an intervention in the messy life of concrete matter. By bringing his own sarcastic sensibility to bear on this decentring of the human, he is nevertheless close to Breton's central hopes of the new myth's capacity to foster a new sensibility in which the world is understood as a corresponding whole, where life is not hierarchical but interconnected. In Švankmajer's films, minor materiality may substitute for grand transparency. But his employment of animation as a magical operation that destabilizes the human domination and definition of the surrounding world is similar to Breton's attempt at replacing dominant values with a surrealist myth that thrives on the dynamic flux of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, all of which the human now participates in rather than dominates.[124]

Here, Švankmajer's films approach the realm of classical mythology with its incessant metamorphoses that blur the lines not only between the human, the animal, and the vegetable, but also between living beings and things. Pierre Mabille includes an excerpt from an Egyptian tale, "The Story of the Two Brothers," in *Mirror of the Marvelous*. In this tale, a man wills himself to be transformed into a bull. When the bull is sacrificed, two drops of his blood fertilize the soil and two persea trees spring up; when they are cut down to be turned into furniture, a splinter flies into the air, enters the mouth of a woman, and impregnates her.[125] Mabille's interpretation of the tale as an example of the marvellous further demonstrates the kinship between Švankmajer and myth, conceived not as the learned retelling of pre-existing narrative patterns, but as a novel engendering crafted from the materials that present themselves in the here and now. Here, Švankmajer's approach resonates with Bachelard's preference for poetically felt myth over the literary repetition of learned mythology.[126]

As indicated by *The Flat*, there is also a darker side to Švankmajer's decentring of the human. Švankmajer not only occasionally substitutes models for actors, but also uses pixilation in order to make the actors themselves appear stop-motion animated.[127] In his 1992 short film *Food*, two men sit down at a table and struggle with being served breakfast. Švankmajer renders the two actors jerky through the use of pixilation; this jerkiness is enhanced by the editing, which switches between static two-shots of the men seated on either side of the table and rapid extreme close-ups of their faces. These seemingly mechanistic characters are further dehumanized when it transpires that they are both, in fact, anthropomorphic vending machines that dispense foodstuffs. Here, it is not the revenge of the natural world that justly robs the human of its privileged position, but the nascent market economy that reifies human relations and bodies.[128] These bodies, however, can be liberated through stimulation of the imaginative qualities of the senses. At least Švankmajer's experiments with tactility suggest as much.

Experiments in Tactility

"Close your eyes so that you might see," Švankmajer's *Alice* declares. This seeming paradox is, as Dryje puts it, "an exhortation to dream."[129] It also points towards Švankmajer's attempts to circumvent ocularcentrism, and can be related to his extensive experiments with tactility in art

during the 1970s, through which he managed to show that the imagination extends to the sense of touch. Miriam Hansen suggests that classical Hollywood cinema contributed to the creation of a new sensorium.[130] Švankmajer's films can be said to be engaged in a similar pursuit of cultivating the senses in new ways, but now towards a sensorium in which the imagination actively transforms the perception of the world, directed towards a liberation of the senses from their reduction to utilitarian means.[131]

A detour to *Le Surréalisme en 1947* is necessary in order to underline the importance of Švankmajer's multisensory poetics in the context of surrealist myth and magic. References to the senses and embodied experience were prevalent within the environment of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and mark out one little explored aspect of both the exhibition and surrealism's change in direction. Marcel Duchamp's and Enrico Donati's cover for the exhibition catalogue posits an intrusive erotics of surrealist spectatorship.[132] They adorned the first run of copies with a foam rubber breast.[133] Here, "proper" aesthetic distance dissolves as the spectator is drawn inappropriately close to the object, the doubly vulgar—in the sense that it is a mass produced object in the shape of a body part meant to stay hidden—replica of a woman's breast, captioned with the imperative "*Prière de toucher*!" ("Please Touch!")[134] The catalogue itself includes the Romanian surrealist group's collective contribution "Le Sable nocturne." The essay is an exposition of the game of the same name, which is based on an exploration of touch and the imagination, and hence prefigures Švankmajer's experiments by more than two decades.[135]

The centrality of multisensory experience for the exhibition can be further seen in Toyen's altar to Henry Hathaway's film *Peter Ibbetson* and Jacques Hérold's altar to the Great Transparents. Toyen's altar features two hands that emerge from a folding screen. Not only entwined but actually penetrating each other, they stand as evidence of a mythologized conception of love as a force that is intensely physical, but also able to overcome the limitations and borders of the material world and the body, exposed to such torturous trials in *Peter Ibbetson*. The body is here transformed and transcended by the imagination; touch is not just a physical faculty, but a sign and instrument of higher union and experience. Hérold's sculpture, the most prominent aspect of his altar, foregrounds the senses by giving the imposing figure an ear, an eye, and a nose fastened to one of the sharply angular sections on its stomach. The sculpture also has three hands, their palms facing towards the spectator,

as if to emphasize a grasping form of touch that is similar to, yet other than, that of humans. Mahon interprets the sculpture's dispersed sense organs as indications of a problematic shattering of the subject in the wake of the war.[136] But while the surrealists certainly strove for a reintegrating rebirth as an antidote to such splittings, they did not necessarily conceive of a disorientation of the senses, like that suggested by Hérold's sculpture, as problematic in itself. As Breton's essay "As in a Wood" makes clear, post-war surrealism still ascribed a positive value to disordered experience and the temporary shattering of subjective unity.[137] Hérold's sculpture, then, can be seen as pointing towards a simultaneous *dérèglement* and foregrounding of the senses, shattering them in order to recombine and recalibrate them to facilitate new experiences. The altar specifically dedicated to what was construed as the harbinger of the new myth is also highly bound up with multisensory experience of a bewildering but enchanting kind.

The exhibition environment also strove to foster a different kind of sensorium. At the top of the tarot staircase, a small revolving lighthouse swept the space with light, as if embodying the surrealist conviction that the all-penetrating bright light of Enlightenment clarity needs to be complemented with the re-enchanting light of myth and the imagination.[138] The curtain of rain in the Rain Room may have designated a ritual purification, but it also brought a messy materiality to the gallery, introducing humidity into the exhibition space.[139] In the Labyrinth of Initiation, a bell rang, sabotaging any chance of contemplative stillness for the visitor.[140] The sacred forms germinating on the altars, then, did so in an atmosphere that was playfully disruptive. The exhibition is also said to have been badly lit, making it more difficult to conduct a distanced critical examination of the works on display, instead forcing the visitor into physical proximity with its large array of presentational forms.[141] Péret also made some sensorily suggestive contributions to the food offerings at the altars. Among these were tobacco blended with salt and vanilla, copper sulphate covered with flies, and a great crystal glass filled with engine oil.[142] In making these categories collide, Péret provokes the imagination into attempting to make out the taste, smell, and feel of these substances. Hence, the exhibition appears to have striven for an integration of the imagination and the senses, stimulated in many different ways.

Švankmajer's tactile experiments pertain to these examples from *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Bruno Solarik calls his work with tactility one

aspect of the surrealists' "anti-crusade" against civilisation.[143] They build on a critical view of the privileged position of vision in Western culture, and they can be seen as relating to a similar insight into the need for an embodied, multisensory, and experiential element in art that strives towards the condition of myth and magic. But they are also in line with the overall aims of concrete irrationality, more specific and precise, not to mention empirically grounded.

Švankmajer turned to explorations of tactility in art when he was banned from filmmaking following the controversy over *Leonardo's Diary* in 1972. Švankmajer reacted against the fact that Western modernity had reduced touch to crude utilitarian means. In contrast, he sought to direct tactility towards dissolving the descriptive registering of which sight is so often the hallmark.[144] Švankmajer's critique of ocularcentrism is close to positions found in film studies, anthropology, and critical theory.[145] But he diverges from the latter in considering touch to be not only a neglected complement to sight, but also a vehicle for the analogical imagination as a way of transforming the world. His playful text "The Magic Ritual of Tactile Inauguration" ends with the optimistic statement that: "Because touch, freed from its practical contexts and constantly realised as an experience […] begins to speak with the voice of a poet."[146] Švankmajer then frames his conception of the embodied imagination as a magical, ritualistic, and initiatory operation, in line with the insertion of the senses in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.

Švankmajer conducted his tactile experiments in a collective setting, which often incorporated the games that the group and their friends from other surrealist groups conducted in the 1970s.[147] Švankmajer used sculptures, portraits, objects, collages, and even poems as the basis for exploring touch in its capacities as both an epistemological tool and as a stimulant for the imagination.[148] Through enquiries based on these tactile works, he found that touch can activate the imagination in ways that trigger analogical associations that diverge from the habitual stimulus of purely visual sensations. Švankmajer collected the results of the games, answers to the inquiries, and reproductions of tactile artworks in the book *Hmat a imaginace*, which was first issued in a samizdat edition in 1983 and then published officially in 1994; an English translation, *Touching and Imagining*, followed in 2013. In *Touching and Imagining*, Švankmajer builds his investigation into the tactile imagination on insights gleaned from psychoanalysis and phenomenology, and a number

of literary and artistic sources, including Arthur Rimbaud, Edgar Allan Poe, and F.T. Marinetti's early writings on "tactilism."[149] The book also references a surrealist strain of tactile art, including Duchamp's cover for the *Le Surréalisme en 1947* catalogue, the frenzied groping of breasts and buttocks in *Un chien andalou*, and Méret Oppenheim's fur-lined cup and saucer, *Déjeuner en fourrure* (1936). Oppenheim's object is an intricate example of a surrealist play with sense impressions and their crossings and confusions. Elisabeth Mansén describes how Oppenheim's object provokes revolting associations by stimulating the onlooker to imagine the feeling of one's tongue against the fur, and that its "daring juxtaposition of nature and culture, animal and human, ancient and modern, questions our entire civilization."[150] *Déjeuner en fourrure* turns objects of utility into disturbing interventions in the ordered life of civilization, bringing an unseemly animality and tactility into contact with the human subject. Oppenheim, then, prefigures Švankmajer's methods of bringing the animal and the man-made together in objects and assemblages. Indeed, Švankmajer created a tribute to Oppenheim's later object *The Couple* (1959), an assisted readymade of "a pair of worn brown leather boots attached at the toes," which was first shown as part of Mimi Parent's grotto of fetishes at the *EROS* exhibition.[151] Švankmajer's response is titled *Eva's Shoes (Tribute to Meret Oppenheim*) (2008), and consists of a pair of women's black leather shoes, the front half of which turns into pieces of wood ending with a slice of agate, here separated rather than attached at the toes.

Švankmajer at first thought that it would be paradoxical to try to transfer tactility from the direct experience of objects and artworks to the second-hand experience of film.[152] But reading Merleau-Ponty, he became convinced "that sight is capable, to a greater or smaller extent, depending on individuals, to transfer tactile sensations in a mediated way."[153] Švankmajer's conviction that touch can be mediated via vision would later find support in film theory. Like Švankmajer, Vivian Sobchack largely builds on Merleau-Ponty's discovery that the senses are not discrete, but interrelated. While the sense impressions effected by the multisensory film experience are not identical with actual ones, they nonetheless constitute "a *real* sensual experience."[154] Švankmajer's films, indeed, indicate that Sobchack's insight that "we are, in fact, all synaesthetes—and thus seeing a movie can also be an experience of touching, tasting, and smelling it" is just as valid for surrealist cinema as for the more realist films on which she builds her theory.[155]

The first film in which Švankmajer incorporated his tactile findings was the Poe adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The director was especially inclined to employ tactile images after he realized the importance of touch in Poe's writings in general and this story in particular.[156] The film is made without actors, and instead expresses the tortured mood of Poe's story through matter that is made to undergo agonizing transformations. Here, and in his next film *Dimensions of Dialogue*, Švankmajer utilizes a method he calls gestural sculpture, which he conceives of as a direct imprint of emotions on clay.[157] But Švankmajer's ways of conjuring tactility are diverse, and not always intentional. Indeed, he has said that his tactile research made him aware of how important touch had always been for him.[158] While there is an increased emphasis on tactile images in his films in the years directly following the tactile experiments, his ability to bring out the coarse materiality of objects and things can also be seen in both earlier and later films.[159] There are moments of heightened tactility in early films such as *J S Bach—Fantasy in G Minor* (*J S Bach—Fantasia g-moll*, 1965), *Historia Naturae, Suita*, and *The Flat*. And when Švankmajer ceased to actively apply tactile methods to his films, they still abound with the sort of images that invite the viewer's touch, from the putrefying objects in *Alice* to the animated animal tongues in *Lunacy*, writhing, muscular, and slimy to the touch. These tactile, tangibly material qualities are further enhanced by his recurring use of extreme close-ups of body parts, objects, and surfaces, a stylistic device that emphasizes textures and materiality.

Analogy and Interpretation

Švankmajer's emphasis on the essential value of sense impressions for the imagination is in line with the Prague group's overall conviction of the need for surrealism to confront a stagnant historical present by taking root in raw, brute reality.[160] But as I have sought to demonstrate, his films contribute a dimension of playful magic, ranging from animation to fetish making and alchemical allusions, to the explorations of concrete irrationality. Here, surrealism's esoterically inclined privileging of analogy is central. The Czechoslovak surrealists have stressed the importance of analogical thinking in their theoretical elaboration of interpretation, and Švankmajer is emphatic in his belief in the need to restore analogical thinking.[161] In an interview, he elaborates on his view of analogy and its profound importance for surrealism:

> Our rationalistic civilisation is founded on the conceptual principle of identity. Analogy is natural to primitive cultures and, of course, to young children, because by means of analogy they broaden the horizons of their knowledge. It is only thanks to analogies that they are able to create the kind of concept of the world (world view) that has been natural to man since the beginning of time. In every circumstance man wants to know the answers to all questions—to live within a concept. By means of analogy a child adds other objects and things that resemble each other in some aspect of their existence to what it knows (and can name). So on a certain level of understanding they reach the same analogical sac: thunder, drum, cannon, or penis, worm, snake, fish. Such understanding does not, of course, disappear with the rationalism of older age, it is only suppressed into the unconscious from whence it continues to function by means of symbols or poetic images.[162]

Surrealist art, Švankmajer suggests in another interview, is based on seeing reality precisely as such a set of symbols and images, otherwise relegated to the unconscious. These, he claims, require active interpretation, and so turn the spectator into a co-creator of the artwork.[163] Against the positivist identity principle with its "objectivistically static world outlook," active interpretation as Effenberger describes it works according to a process of analogical association in which impressions of concrete reality are "molten in the furnace of imagination."[164] Dictated by analogy, the resulting symbol or poetic image—whether visual or in writing—establishes new and unexpected relations between diverse phenomena. In "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," Breton elucidates the operations of the imagination when it is liberated from utilitarian concerns by analogy and set upon playfully interpreting the world. Here, he states that the surrealist attitude to nature is dictated by its perception of it as a poetic image, and that this makes us realize

> that "everything above is like everything below" and everything inside is like everything outside. The world thereupon seems to be like a cryptogram which remains indecipherable only so long as one is not thoroughly familiar with the gymnastics that permit one to pass at will from one piece of apparatus to another.[165]

The clash of distant phenomena in the surrealist poetic image thus amounts to a revelation of the world in its heterogeneous unity, an attempt to create a totality that does not dissolve differences—a

central argument already in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism "—but contains them in an ever-expanding, intricate network of correspondences.[166] By way of his allusion to the hermetic motto "as above, so below," Breton relates the surrealist interpretation of reality to esotericism. Again, surrealism aligns itself with a long line of interpretative practices, in which magic and esotericism are fundamental components. Interpretation is fundamental for romantic poetics, which posits that an artwork only acquires significance in its meeting with a reader or spectator.[167] Interpretation can be related to methods of divination, from the ancient reading of entrails through astrology to the tarot.[168] It is the foundation of what Roger Caillois calls "the writing of stones," his radical notion that nature is constantly engaged in aesthetic activities that humans rather interpret and elaborate upon than generate.[169] And Dalí conceived of concrete irrationality as the wilful simulation of an over-active interpretation of the surrounding world.

Švankmajer's many allusions to alchemy, magic, and premodern thought indicate that this esoteric aspect of interpretation underlies his understanding of the workings of the surrealist imagination. While Švankmajer is just as insistent as Effenberger on using reality as a basis for interpretation, in his view the "furnace" of the imagination is decidedly an alchemical one—an athanor. Here, Švankmajer is particularly close to Max Ernst's connection of alchemy and the surrealist image.[170] In his programmatic essay *Beyond Painting*, Ernst describes collage as "something like the alchemy of the visual image."[171] But this visual alchemy, Ernst emphasizes, is not primarily a matter of gluing pieces of paper together. It pertains to all juxtapositions of incongruous things, and he likens this poetics to an alchemical transmutation.[14] Ernst also extended this alchemical poetics to the active interpretation of the material world, something that informed his invention of frottage, a method that uses patterns transferred from objects and surfaces as prime matter from which the imagination derives new images.[172] Much as Ernst transforms the patterns transferred from base matter into new visions, Švankmajer lets the fantastic events in his films develop out of analogical associations and transformations of everyday matter and environments.

Švankmajer extends this alchemy of the visual image to assemblages, objects, and cinema. Like Ernst, he makes the influence and importance of alchemy for his work explicit by references to its imagery, alembics,

and tools. Both artists also search in the unwanted rubble and detritus of civilization for the prime matter to be transmuted. Ernst located his in nineteenth-century engravings, junkyard finds, wood grains, and other seemingly unremarkable sources, which he transformed into collage novels of surrealist melodrama, enchanting imaginary landscapes, and theriomorphic sculptures. Švankmajer uses household objects, cracked china, and the surface of metal as prime matter for his alchemical work. Marked by the cynical Czech-Slovak approach to the marvellous, however, he keeps his collages and assemblages more firmly grounded in the matter from which they arise, as in the case of his *The End of Civilization?* cycle. It is as if, in one sense, they never leave the initial stage of putrefaction. These works would then seem to exemplify the contention that ever since romanticism, much artistic engagement with alchemy has been marked by a tendency to confuse the means and the ends in alchemy, sticking to the night of decomposition and never attaining the light of transmutation.[173] But in another sense, simply by bringing the remnants of a voracious civilization to this very stage of dissolution, Švankmajer transmutes it, since he enacts what Breton called "a change of role" in connection with the surrealist object.[174] Such a change of role breaks with utilitarian purposes, but also with the identity principle. Torn from their original context, corroded, or juxtaposed with other things, these originally utilitarian objects enter the sphere of analogical associations, here explicitly posited as a realm of magic.

While Švankmajer has distanced himself from Breton's lyrical and ascendant view of the poetic image, his valorizing statements about analogy suggest that he nevertheless shares much of Breton's belief in their prophetic and therapeutic properties.[175] The Czech surrealist artist and theorist Alena Nádvorníková also echoes Breton's conviction that analogical thinking can change not only our perception of the world, but also the human relation with it, so that "every individual will be a creative mirror of the universe."[176] The combination of these notions points to the intimate, dynamic, and organic interdependence of reality, interpretation, and the imagination in Švankmajer's films. According to this poetics, the imagination is not merely anchored in reality: its products germinate in its potent soil. The cracks and fissures in the Czechoslovak everyday are not merely ripe for interpretation, but are slips through which life engendered by the active imagination can grow.

The Imagination of Touch

Down to the Cellar demonstrates how new images germinate out of material reality through analogical associations. Here, the "documentary" qualities Švankmajer seeks in his films are readily apparent. The camera lingers on dirty pipes and probes its way into the shady dwellings of a cellar, with a restless attentiveness to the dusty materiality of the surroundings. Then, things start to transform. Shoes in storage become snarling beasts. In one of the storage spaces, a man lies down on a bed of coal; in another, a woman mixes coal dust and eggs together into a grey, viscous dough. Material reality is both transformed by the intrusion of the imagination and rendered tangible for the senses. The camera moves with a sense of curiosity over the quotidian environments, which appear somewhat estranged even before the metamorphoses begin. When the girl walks down the stairs, this estrangement is evoked through the use of low camera angles and centred compositions. Her first steps through the cellar are shown from a point of view that probes the obscure and narrow pathway and lingers on the dusty pipes. The worn-down brick walls shrouded in darkness are almost there to the touch, something that is enhanced by the frequent use of extreme close-ups. The way the woman stirs eggs and coal dust together invites the imagination into the tactile images: the spectator may never have experienced a mixture of this sort, but it is easy to imagine the feeling of the sticky raw eggs when they blend with the dry coal dust. Sound is highly important in creating an embodied experience of the cellar. There is the sound of dripping water and a constant scraping noise in the background. When the camera lingers on dirty pipes it is accompanied by a loud noise of flushing water. When the shoes fight for the piece of bread, the sound of growling animals can be heard on the soundtrack. These are some of the means by which Švankmajer creates a surrealist tactility, which not only lets us experience the touch of things we would never have encountered in real life, but may also trigger further analogical associations of the kind that structure the dream logic of the film.

The cellar in *Down to the Cellar* is teeming with the life of objects. Švankmajer claims that he believes certain objects to be charged with events from the past, and that we need to learn to listen to them; this is one of many convictions he derives from his interest in esotericism.[177] Film theorist Laura Marks writes about the tactile quality of objects in a way that is similar to Švankmajer's reasoning. She claims that the object

becomes auratic, in Walter Benjamin's parlance, through its capacity to remind onlookers of the past, of situations or phenomena buried deep down and brought to the surface through the violent mechanism of involuntary recollection.[178] Benjamin believed that "objects retain something of the gaze that has rested on them."[179] In *Down to the Cellar*, Švankmajer's use of the child's perspective effects something similar to this auratic experience of objects charged with a secret inner life, capable of jogging uncanny associations. Through the eyes of the child, the world becomes strange and the objects in it are once again permeated with a threatening sense of mystery, so that the cellar itself turns into a mythical underworld. For Marks, the aura gives the object an almost physical presence that transforms it from something purely visual, and renders it tactile.[180] Benjamin located the key to reconciling the aura and modern mechanical reproduction in the "profane illumination" of surrealism.[181] Surrealists have indeed embraced the notion of the aura and its ramifications in no uncertain terms. In the collective 1987 statement "Hermetic Bird," Švankmajer joined forces with surrealists from Paris, Prague, Buenos Aires, London, and New York, in a tract that argued that surrealism is in fact "an obstinate attempt to re-establish the magical aura of art as one could still find it in the so-called primitive societies or in the esoteric (hermetic) tradition."[182] Again, this international gathering of surrealists explicitly points out that surrealism seeks to recover a form of art that is bound up with ritual and initiation. In Marks's and Švankmajer's understanding, the aura also invites a sense of touch that can act as a counter-force to Western civilization's emphasis on vision.

For Marks, tactile epistemologies in moving images also rely on mimesis.[183] Mimesis constitutes an unexpected link between Marks, Benjamin, and surrealism. As a concept, mimesis is deeply rooted in the Western philosophical tradition, and it is most often used to designate the faithful depiction of reality, or what for a couple of centuries has gone under the rubric of realism. But there is also a counter-tradition of mimesis in which it rather designates an embodied and imaginative relationship with matter and the world. Marks, then, uses mimesis to describe how film and spectatorship work in tandem to bring the spectator closer to the phenomena depicted, and she does this by referring to a counter-canon of thought on mimesis, which can also aid in elucidating how Švankmajer's films evoke their tactile properties against Western standards.

In “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” Caillois, writing as a young surrealist, postulates that certain forms of insect mimicry indicate that mimicry is not so much the defence mechanism it is generally thought to be, but rather evidence of a desire to melt into one’s surroundings.[184] He provides the haunting example of leaf insects who start eating from each other, since the leaves they mimic form their very own sustenance.[185] For Caillois, this suggests that nature has a propensity for a dark form of anti-utilitarian poetry, here manifested through an uncanny mimesis. For Caillois, then, mimesis does not merely signify copying or direct resemblance. It stands for a form of analogical behaviour and creativity inherent in nature, one that reverberates in the alternately darkly destructive and subversively creative behaviour of beings and things in Švankmajer’s films. Other parts of the mimetic countercanon are closely related to the notion of “mimetic sympathy,” or magic that acts by establishing metaphorical or analogical similarities with that which it is intended to work upon.[186]

Benjamin was preoccupied with such questions, and his approach signals his lasting proximity to surrealist thought. In his essay “On the Mimetic Faculty,” he defines mimesis through examples of both modern phenomena, such as a child acting like an airplane, and ancient ones, such as the reading of entrails and the interpretation of the night sky.[187] The reading of entrails rests on the belief that nature is full of messages to be deciphered, and so latches onto the esoteric notion of the Book of Nature. Astrology posits a relation between the stars and events on Earth, in line with the hermetic conviction that there is an interrelation between microcosm and macrocosm. Mimesis in this account, then, has little to do with aesthetics, and even less with its use in the realist tradition.[188] Instead, it is a way of locating meaning in both the most minute details and the grandest things in the surrounding world, and of establishing relations between these distant phenomena. Surrealism has picked up on many instances of such interpretative traditions, and the Czechoslovak surrealists have intensified surrealist practice informed by them.

Mimesis is also, as Miriam Hansen defines it, “a relational practice” and “a mode of access to the world involving sensuous, somatic, and tactile, that is, embodied, forms of perception and cognition; a noncoercive engagement with the other that resists dualistic conceptions of subject and object.”[189] Benjamin’s equation of the mimetic faculty with auratic analogies and correspondences, with magic and interpretation, is

also remarkably in tune with surrealist poetics and its will towards the re-enchantment of the world.[190] For Benjamin, similarity emerges "like a flash," a formulation that echoes Breton's notion of the spark created by the poetic image.[191] Here, mimesis seems to facilitate a poetic and embodied experience of the interconnectedness of a world whose fissures are intimately captured by the film camera. In modernity, Benjamin claims, the mimetic faculty has waned, so that "[t]he perceived world (*Merkwelt*) of modern human beings seems to contain infinitely fewer of those magical correspondences than the world of the ancient people or even of primitive peoples."[192] He did not, however, believe that the mimetic faculty had disappeared altogether, but that it had been transformed through technology. The mimetic capacities of film rest "less on the principle of sameness […] than on their ability to render the familiar strange, to store and reveal similarities that are 'nonsensuous', not otherwise visible to the human eye."[193] It can certainly be argued that Švankmajer's minute attention to the life of the most seemingly insignificant material phenomena in *Down to the Cellar* lives up to this hope for the modern mimetic faculty.

Švankmajer's ambition to restore analogical thinking, together with his unabashed fascination with magic and premodern ways of relating to the world, nonetheless means that he appears intent on restoring something more akin to the premodern mimetic faculty, bound up with a relation with the world that is associative and interpretative. The embodied and tactile shape that surrealism takes in Švankmajer's films as well as in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, then, does not merely relate to the restitution of the aura. It can more specifically be seen as a way to restore the mimetic faculty. It is this ancient way of interpreting the world and establishing a new, contradictory totality that surrealism strives for in its attempts to find the keys to decipher the cryptogram that is the world.[194] As indicated by his comments on how technology has substituted for shamanistic powers of animating inert things, Švankmajer is acutely aware that such a direct restoration is impossible to achieve. His elaborate appeal to the senses beyond their numbed, instrumental employment through the film medium's neglected tactile potential pertains to Benjamin's notion that auratic and mimetic experience cannot be restored except by recourse to the very technology that depleted experience to begin with.[195] Švankmajer's tactile films may, then, be related to Benjamin's hope that surrealism might effect a collective bodily innervation precisely through its interpenetration of image and

body, imagination and matter.[196] His work with tactility can thus be seen as part of a dialectical move towards a new synthesis of the ancient and the modern versions of the mimetic faculty.

The romantic core to Švankmajer's view of the primacy of the imagination is apparent in his notion that tactilism could aid in overcoming the gap between subject and object.[197] As indicated, Švankmajer's project of exploring tactility as a means of dissolving the subject and object divide has parallels with *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and can be related to surrealism's broader attempts to create a new mythical sensibility, shedding Western civilization's emphasis on vision at the same time as it seeks to restore lost qualities of ritual and magic. Here, the artwork or film draws the spectator close through its sensory qualities, and its treatment of matter simultaneously engages the imagination, a mimetic practice that can be related to Benjamin's thought about the possibility of re-establishing "the connection between imagination and physical innervation that in bourgeois culture has been snapped apart."[198] Radicalizing this notion, Švankmajer conceives of his work with tactility as a "transmutation of the senses," an alchemical refinement that turns the base material of sense impression into the gold of the luminous imagination.[199]

Again, Švankmajer approaches questions that are integral to Breton's announcement of a surrealist change in direction, but with a considerably more pronounced precision and specificity. The result is an equally desperate search for bodily re-enchantment and an embodied imagination in the face of the horrors of the development of Western civilization. A new myth, it seems, calls for a new sensorium, which couples sense impressions with the analogical imagination. The polyvalent fetish appears to be the surrealist vehicle of choice to transform this sensorium. But there is a difference between its manifestation in the form of playful altar installations at *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and in the way that Švankmajer enlivens everyday reality by the modern magic of moving images. Breton considered the latter particularly privileged in its propensity to trigger correspondences by connecting night and day. Several of Švankmajer's films indicate that the magician presiding over the moving image also has the capacity to transform the everyday into a dynamic theatre of unconscious energies, now undermining humanity, now enchanting it with displays of the primacy of the imagination over material reality. This display points to a subject–object relation that is not merely determined by the machine's power to effect a sliding in the workings of human perception, but complements it

with a restoration of an ambivalent magic.[200] It conveys new experiential insights into the secret workings of matter, connecting the human mind with stones, skulls, and imaginary beings.

Minor Myths of Matter

Švankmajer's creative film work on matter transforms autobiography and personal mythology into more specific and minor versions of surrealism's new myth. Two aspects of this relation take particular expression in *Down to the Cellar*: the film's proximity to what Gaston Bachelard calls the material imagination, and its initiatory structure. *Down to the Cellar* is relevant to many of the points made throughout this chapter. The decentring of the human recurs here, as the surrounding world assumes life and agency. Švankmajer also gives his personal mythology a more collective inflection in the film, fusing childhood memories and literary allusions with his creative work on matter. The resulting surprising transformations exemplify the material imagination's propensity for creating myths. The film's setting, its prominent materiality, and the eruptions of the imagination are all ways that Švankmajer creates material, minor myths, the structure of which can be traced back to the initiatory outline of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.

Švankmajer and Bachelard have similar views of the fundamental importance of the imagination. Švankmajer elaborates on Western society's disdain for the imagination: "It is understandable that the magical world of imagination is hated by civilization and that it seeks to suppress it through repression, because the magical world is fed by the pleasure principle, whereas the rational world of civilization is the product of the principle of reality."[201] Bachelard describes his work on the material imagination as an attempt "to restore the imagination to its primary place in human affairs."[202] Much as Švankmajer criticizes Western civilization for its repression of analogical thinking to the unconscious, Bachelard considers the material imagination to be a residue of an old propensity for analogical thinking, to the extent that he calls it the unconscious of modern scientific thought.[203] Hence, the material imagination demonstrates that there is an "alchemist in the engineer."[204] In contrast to scientific thought, the material imagination is not applied but strictly anti-utilitarian. Accordingly, Bachelard dismisses the hypothesis that the constellations were named in order to aid navigation. For him, any utilitarian uses of such prescientific ways of understanding the world

have to come after their construction, a mere side effect of the imagination's desire to infer meaning to the world.[205] Bachelard's positing of a dynamic interpretation of the world that results from the imagination's active intrusion in it chimes well with Švankmajer's, and surrealism's, wish to render the world meaningful through poetic interpretation. It seems, then, that it is in fact the alchemist within the engineer that is the contemporary human that Švankmajer aspires to let loose.

Like Švankmajer, Bachelard believes the creative and analogical imagination to be intimately related to prescientific thought, and not least alchemy.[206] This type of thought, for Bachelard, enables a more intimate relationship with the material world, one that is not structured by scientific fact but by poetic conceptions and imaginative participation. Bachelard's phenomenology of the imagination also rests on an interrelation between the imagination and material reality, in line with Švankmajer's creative transformations of the everyday. Bachelard, too, favours images that have a multisensory impact, so that the ideal image should seduce us through all our senses and even lead us away from the sense that is most obviously engaged.[207] In the resulting "realism of the imaginary," subject and object are united, and the human is reintegrated with the world.[208] This proximity of subject and object goes against the grain of Western philosophy, but Bachelard found support for it in a heterodox body of knowledge culled from phenomenology, romanticism, and alchemy.[209] These references are, incidentally, fundamental to Švankmajer's thought and practice. While Bachelard's philosophy of the imagination shares the anti-Cartesianism of much of embodied film theory, it can provide a much-needed complement to its often restricted view of the imagination.[210] Most importantly, Bachelard's writings on the imagination also point further to the connection between the surrealist new myth and the tendencies towards a new sensorium that I have discerned in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* as well as both Freddie's and Švankmajer's films.

Švankmajer's use of stop-motion animation is a productive instance of the material imagination as it takes shape in film. Stop-motion can make the most unusual, otherwise inert things come alive, but it also means that more undifferentiated matter—dirt, clay, coal—can transform into different shapes, on the verge of new and unexpected metamorphoses. In their use of stop-motion, Švankmajer's films often recall Bachelard's assertion of the dynamic character of the material imagination, conceived as a kneading of matter into new and ever-transforming shapes.[211]

For Bachelard, the ancient notion of the four elements, while banished from scientific understanding, still has a privileged place in the material imagination. Fire, water, air, and earth are so potent, indeed, that he calls them veritable "hormones of the imagination," and he contends that the very awareness of the elements is enough to incite hordes of new images.[212] Švankmajer's films, with their constant transformations of the material world in all its messy life, resonate particularly with Bachelard's notion that: "In the realm of the imagination everything comes to life: matter is not inert [...]. For one who loves the substances of the material world, simply to name them is already to have begun to work on them."[213] In Švankmajer's case, naming needs to be replaced with filming, but the process is the same. If Bachelard privileges the literary image, his analysis of the multiplying properties of the imagination is also strikingly close to W. J. T. Mitchell's notion that images, whatever the medium, "paradoxically unleash a multitude of images, the plague of fantasies."[214]

Down to the Cellar had its impetus in the collective game "The Morphology of Fear," which prompted Švankmajer to plumb his childhood memories for the terror of having to descend into the cellar to fetch coal or potatoes. But the film is anything but a straightforward autobiographical account. Rather, it uses autobiography as another form of prime matter for the transmutation enacted by the creative imagination. The murky, enclosed cellar contrasts sharply with the bright staircase above ground. In their own ways, both are threatening spaces, but the cellar is also the realm of dream logic and the fantastic, and with them events that have no place in the light of day. Bachelard points out that the cellar tends to be "the region of symbols of the unconscious," something that is readily apparent in *Down to the Cellar*.[215] This is further emphasized by the black cat that deviously seems to lead the girl's way down there, since the black cat is a frequent symbol of the unconscious in Švankmajer's films.[216] In this case, the cat also takes the position of a diabolical version of the white rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*, a figure that would later take on a sinister quality in Švankmajer's *Alice*. Indeed, already the protagonist's blonde looks together with the fact that she descends into a mysterious underworld alludes to Carroll's Alice. Švankmajer also lets his protagonist endure ordeals that exemplify several of his narrative as well as stylistic techniques for letting dream logic and the imagination intrude into settings characterized by their quotidian materiality. If *Down to the*

Cellar grows out of the horror of having to enter the unpredictable world below, the challenge turns into fear-tinged wonder.

The material imagination tends to be a domain of such sensibilities. In *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Bachelard demonstrates that it evidences an ambivalence towards the cellar.[217] In Bachelard's writings, the cellar is closely related to the element of earth, as a manifestation of the archetypal image of the cave. In *Down to the Cellar*, the cellar is in itself charged with an imaginative force that makes it into a particularly potent, modern example of this archetype. Bachelard shows how the cave is often displayed as a simultaneously threatening and comforting place, a locus for nightmares as well as warm reveries.[218] Švankmajer unleashes a series of images that are also related to the element earth. The scattered earth on the floor, the pieces of coal in the man's bed and the woman's kitchen, the potatoes that grow underground and are kept in the doubly dark interior of the cellar and the closed casket, are all manifestations of the imagination of earth. The hormonal abilities that Bachelard ascribes to the element are displayed in the unlikely transformations of matter, substitutions of things, and collisions of substances that take place. Here, *Down to the Cellar* enacts something akin to Bachelard's privileged "magic of metamorphosis in the abrupt emergence of a poetic image."[219] Švankmajer, then, also enhances the propensity for analogical associations by actively transforming matter itself into the kind of images that Breton describes as "flashes from the lost mirror," clashing and uniting separate phenomena as they create a poetic spark. In *Down to the Cellar*, this kind of merging of distant things can be seen in the absurd cakes baked with coal and eggs, and the bed that is made with coal instead of a mattress and a blanket. Seen through the perspective of the imagination of matter, *Down to the Cellar* nevertheless shows that the analogies so valued by Švankmajer not only work through the poetic images or the fantastic depictions of, for instance, shoes that suddenly have mouths, but also through the very locations and the matter of the everyday as it is estranged and enchanted.

As Švankmajer has pointed out, there are culturally specific inflections related to the layout of the cellar in *Down to the Cellar*, as well as the central place that coal occupies in it. Bachelard, too, describes his memories of going down into the cellar in culturally and biographically specific terms. For him, the entrance is a trap door, a black hole in the floor, and the walls down below are black, too. In Bachelard's reminiscences, it is not potatoes that are to be fetched, but cool wine.[220] Yet,

the material imagination encompasses a row of different conceptions of this underground space, as indicated by Bachelard's likening of the cellar to the archetypal cave. Švankmajer relates that while the specific layout of the cellar in his film is intimately tied to his childhood memories of the house he grew up in, he experienced the same fear and unease when, as an adult, he accompanied a friend to the cellar in his modern apartment building.[221] Švankmajer's material imagination, then, bridges biographical and cultural specificity, and a more universal dimension of the descent into the frightening underworld.[222] Hence, he again approaches Breton's notion that the personal mythology of surrealist artists has the potential to be transformed into collective myths.[223]

There is a more specific mythological factor at play in *Down to the Cellar*, too. A minor myth arises from Švankmajer's work on the materiality of the cellar. Bachelard considers the inward-turned eye of reverie and the imagination to be able to not only facilitate a more intimate relation with the material world, but also to create a form of spontaneous mythology. In his last book *The Flame of a Candle*, he invokes the dormant potential of the dreamer's introspection: "Mythologists have taught us to read the dramas of light in the spectacles of the sky. But in the dreamer's cell, familiar objects become myths of the universe."[224] For Bachelard, myth is immanent in matter, a quality just waiting to be drawn out by the poet or dreamer. About this spontaneous mythology he writes: "I have no hesitation in designating as legends even the most private and personal reveries."[225] Viewed as an instance of Bachelard's spontaneous mythology, *Down to the Cellar* is a mythical narrative about the secret life of objects and humans, as it plays out on the other side of the looking glass.[226] But a more specific myth takes shape amidst these events, and it can be discerned in the way that the woman by the stove mixes coal dust and eggs together to form a dough. She shapes lumps of the dough into round patties and puts them on a tray, before baking them in the oven. When they are finished, she dumps them into a basket, from which she in turn gathers new pieces of coal to heat the oven with. Here, an irrational cycle takes shape in which lumps of coal are fashioned simply in order to facilitate the making of new lumps of coal.

Bachelard believes that what he calls the spontaneous imagination is able to produce a form of fresh and partial mythologies out of its engagement with matter.[227] In line with this, the depiction of coal in *Down to the Cellar* can be understood as a minor, material myth about the origin of coal lumps. This myth grows out of the image of the cellar,

but arises through the generation of new images adhering to the element of earth. In contrast to the scientific understanding of the world, Bachelard writes that "symbols require a different focusing of our understanding. Myths require objects to be explained by the world. A being's becoming must be explained by 'life, the tomb, and resurrection'."[228] There is then a further particular mythical relevance in what may seem to be the pointless circular nature of the life of coal in the film. *Down to the Cellar* functions as a myth in gestation, a minor myth that germinates in the fertile soil of the material imagination. For the film explains the origin of coal in a way that facilitates an unconscious conception of the rhythms of life and death, and the blurry borders between the animate and the inanimate. Bachelard distinguishes between the literary appeal to academic mythology, as cultured learning, and the poetic use of mythological motifs that are allowed to retain their unconscious charge. When learned mythology overtakes poetry, it lacks the life of the true poetic image, in which the myth is made to live since its unconscious content reverberates in it.[229] "There is a sort of *instantaneous* mythology at work in the contemplations of poets, in dreamers about to recount their visions," Bachelard writes.[230] From this point of view, Švankmajer employs the child's perspective on the world to full effect, and this seems to ensure that the film evades the trap of learning over poetry. For what does the myth about the creation of coal relate to if not a child's attempt to understand the bewildering mechanisms of the world? In this shedding of adult rationality, the film's depiction of the origins of coal also conveys an insight into the secret life of matter that makes little rational sense but speaks in the non-discursive language of a material magic art.

In *Water and Dreams*, Bachelard explains that his preference for the genesis of myth in the imaginative speculations about the life of matter over learned mythology depends on the specific nature of these imaginative speculations, which he believes provides a more living myth than the general character of learned mythology.[231] Here, too, there is a particular resonance with Švankmajer's rootedness in Czechoslovak surrealism's call for surrealism to engage with the specifics of the material present. In *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Bachelard writes that "[t]o appreciate myth, with its deep oneiric resonance, is a task for which scholars preoccupied with rational signification are ill-prepared,"[232] which means that "perhaps we would be better off if, instead of listening to mythologists who know, we listened to mythologists who reimagine."[233] Švankmajer shows how a surrealist new myth of the world may be engendered

through the specific work with everyday matter, conducted by someone who appears as a Bachelardian mythologist who reimagines. Hence, *Down to the Cellar* shows how he, if possibly unwittingly, reconciles the tenets of concrete irrationality with Breton's reorientation of surrealism towards myth and magic in the formation of a new myth.

What is most important in *Down to the Cellar*, then, is not the minor mythical narrative in itself. Where Breton sought a new myth that could foster new and more productive human relations with the world, Švankmajer rather fosters a mythical sensibility, one that facilitates a more intimate experience of the world. Ultimately, Bachelard believes that the material imagination facilitates participation; he sums it up succinctly when he states that "material reveries root us in the universe."[234] The resulting "dynamic participation in the life of the universe within us and without us […] yields up the elements of a new everyday mythology" that is "capable of generating essential metaphors."[235] Once constituted, then, the minor myths of matter may aid in generating a poetical understanding of and relationship to the surrounding world. Is that not, in fact, precisely what Breton sought with which to counter dominant Western rationality and religion when he grappled with the new myth?

Initiation: The World as a Cabinet of Curiosities

In his diary from the making of *Faust*, Švankmajer explains his rationale behind the film's ending in esoteric terms. He filmed three different versions of the end: in the first, the devil puppet is seated in a car; in the second, the devil puppet and an angel puppet are sitting in the car; in the third, the car is empty. Švankmajer settled for the last of these versions, but not in the spirit of demystification. Rather, he considered that this would "best express that initial Nothing of the ancient philosophers," and proceeds to relate how Egyptian initiates would proclaim that "Osiris is the black god."[236] Here, then, Švankmajer again emphasizes that his penchant for destruction is predicated upon occult conceptions. Alluding to the same narrative of symbolic death and rebirth as Breton in *Arcanum 17*, he also points to the importance of initiation in his poetics, an element that traverses his work in film, assemblage, and exhibition design.

Down to the Cellar also relates to the initiatory structure that was so important for *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Indeed, if the actual myth about the origin of coal taking shape here is decidedly minor, the main aspect

of *Down to the Cellar* may be the myth's and the film's respective initiatory structures. In *Touching and Imagining*, Švankmajer describes his memories of having to go down into the cellar: "Every time I descended there for coal or for potatoes, I identified with Orpheus."[237] Here, then, Švankmajer relates the experiences that went into the making of *Down to the Cellar* to the mytheme of a descent into the underworld. This, too, pertains to Bachelard's understanding of a spontaneous mythology, which may be related to ancient myths and archetypes but recalls them in novel ways, more dependent on the free play of the imagination than on erudition. Bachelard points out that there is a conflation of the descent and the labyrinth in Gérard de Nerval's initiatory classic *Aurélia* (1855):

> in the last lines of *Aurélia* an explicit comparison is made between the dream of the labyrinth and the description of a descent into hell. This comparison has, with the new knowledge of oneiric psychology, become a familiar one to psychoanalysts and proves in effect that "the descent into hell" is a *psychological* event, a psychic reality that is normally attached to the unconscious. Beneath the tall psychic house, there is a labyrinth in us that leads to our hell […].[238]

Down to the Cellar is a journey down to and through this labyrinth, but it partly transforms the fear that the protagonist encounters. Dryje considers that the choice of a little girl as the protagonist in the film relies on the fact that she is endowed with "the force of imagination, which is a strength and advantage of children's perception, of the magical unity of world and thought."[239] The descent into the underworld, here, becomes an initiation into the active, living, and dynamic symbol and myth. Bachelard, for one, writes about how a descent into the cellar can render the world into a place where everything is a symbol.[240]

Such a symbolization is an important feature of Švankmajer's fascination with the *Wunderkammer*, a fascination so intense that he has devoted considerable time to transforming a castle outside Prague into his very own cabinet of curiosities. The cabinet of curiosities consists of wildly diverse objects, which together suggest correspondences between different registers of the world: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human made. In Švankmajer's view, it maps the magical world by collecting evidence about it. This he considers to be the primordial view of the world, which civilization eventually repressed and "shunted [it] aside and into the junkyard of superstitions."[241] This worldview, however, resurfaces

at different intervals. The imagery and philosophy of alchemy in the Renaissance was bound up with a worldview based on correspondences between the microcosmos and the macrocosmos.[242] In *The Dwellings of the Philosophers*, Fulcanelli describes how the Renaissance folk mentality was ripe with fascination with all forms of wordplay and symbolic disguises, which took expression in the prevalence of "picturesque riddles" both on shop signs and in heraldry.[243] Švankmajer's interest in the *Wunderkammer* and alchemy are united by the fact that they depend on this magical worldview, both in its reliance on correspondences and the need for active interpretation of its imagery: the objects collected in a cabinet of curiosities and the imagery in alchemy can provoke the mind to forge new, incandescent links between otherwise distant phenomena. For Švankmajer, the *Wunderkammer* goes beyond scientific classification and instead presents "collections of 'materialized' artefacts of the imaginative spirit that are arranged through the principle of analogy."[244] It turns the world into a dynamic, multivalent symbol. This quality makes the *Wunderkammer* fundamentally and ontologically different from other exhibition and collection strategies. In contrast to the edified visitor to a museum, he considers that "[t]he visitor to a cabinet of curiosities should leave having been *metamorphosed*, *born again*, for they have undergone an initiation ritual."[245]

Down to the Cellar, then, exemplifies the surrealist method of transforming the world into a cryptogram to be deciphered, and further indicates the intimate bond between post-war surrealism's poetics and esoteric strategies for reading the Book of Nature, perceived as a forest of signs to be decoded through a panoply of interpretative methods.[246] The film can be said to display an initiation of the kind that Švankmajer discusses, and itself strive towards the status of a cabinet of curiosities. A descent into the underworld, the film presents an initiatory journey through the mythical space of the surrealist imagination, here manifested as a catalogue of tactile oddities.

Consider, again, Breton's 1947 essay on Matta. In it, he posits the painter's recent change in style as a consequence of his having experienced a profound laceration of the self, which in turn allowed him to give expression to the world's state of laceration. But for Breton, Matta's paintings also harbour some hope, which he posits as the outcome of an "intimate experience of resurrection."[247] There is an oblique connection, here, between Matta's work, Breton's allusion to resurrection in *Arcanum 17*, and the initiatory structure of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*,

which can further be related to *Down to the Cellar*. Breton also discerns an important upheaval in sensory experience in Matta's work, which he extends to surrealist painting in general. The elision of conventional perspective in surrealist painting, Breton contends, allows it to escape the confines of purely optical perception, and instead let the other senses come into play. Among these, he numbers "the more or less vanished sense of divination."[248] Here, then, multisensory experience is connected with initiation. Informed by Švankmajer's tactile experiments, *Down to the Cellar* encapsulates something similar, but dictated in part by the demarcations and concerns that are specific to Czech-Slovak surrealism and its particular concerns with the world in its materiality.

Down to the Cellar, then, indicates both the proximity between Švankmajer's practice and esoteric as well as ancient means of approaching and creating myth, and his way of rendering the new myth more specific, grounded, and sensorily tangible. Creating subversive fetishes, decentring the human and undermining anthropocentrism, creating minor myths about matter, and turning the world into a cryptogram and a cabinet of curiosities, Švankmajer displays a multifaceted approach to the new myth. The new myth, here, is dank and devious, but it is luminous with the workings of an imagination attuned to the inner life of things and the elements.

Notes

1. López Caballero, "Jan Švankmajer," 187.
2. See Adamowicz, *Un Chien Andalou*, 32–36.
3. Quoted in Solarik, "The Walking Abyss," 5.
4. Švankmajer, "Decalogue," 462.
5. See Effenberger, "Švankmajer on *The Fall of the House of Usher*," 36
6. See Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 91.
7. For an extensive biographical background, see Schmitt and Dryje, *Dimensions of Dialogue*.
8. See "Jan Švankmajer in Conversation with Gerald A. Matt," 184.
9. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 18–19.
10. Hames, "Interview with Jan Švankmajer," 107–108.
11. Schmitt, "Detailed Biography with Commentary (II)," 129–131.
12. Bouteillet and Heck, "Interview with Jan Švankmajer," 68.

13. Massoni and Schmitt, “Švankmajer,” 58. For a discussion of the changing conditions of Czechoslovak filmmaking, see Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave*, 221–223.
14. Owen, “Motion without Escape,” 48.
15. See ibid.
16. Giżycki, “The ‘Red Wall of Surrealism’,” 40–41.
17. See also Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 108–109.
18. See “After Revolution, the Shit!”
19. Ibid.
20. Švankmajer, *Survivre à sa vie*.
21. See e.g. Švankmajer, “Escape from Depression.”
22. Quoted in Solarik, “The Walking Abyss,” 5.
23. For the history of surrealism in Czechoslovakia, see Bydzovská, “Against the Current”; Srp and Bydzovská, “Hinter den Augen”; Šmejkal, “En Tchécoslovaquie,” 237–243; Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*; “Anthology of Czech and Slovak Surrealism.”
24. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 10.
25. Toman, “The Hope of Fire, the Freedom of Dreams,” 18.
26. Audoin, “The Platform of Prague.”
27. Dryje, “Formative Meetings,” 10–11.
28. See Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 23.
29. Massoni and Schmitt, “Švankmajer,” 57. See also Fijalkowski and Richardson, “Years of Long Days,” 25.
30. An overview of their activities was presented at the retrospective exhibition *Invention, Imagination, Interpretation* in Swansea in 1998. Artworks, poetry, and theoretical writings are presented in the exhibition catalogue; see *Invention, Imagination, Interpretation*.
31. The exhibition catalogue contains a large selection of reproductions of art and selections of writings by the Czech-Slovak surrealists and the other contributors to the exhibition; see Solarik and Dryje, *Other Air*.
32. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 91.
33. Dryje, “Editorial: 1981–1989,” ii.
34. Effenberger, “The Raw Cruelty of Life and the Cynicism of Fantasy,” 444.
35. See Dryje, “Vratislav Effenberger.”
36. Compare this with Breton, “Ascendant Sign,” 107.
37. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 91.

38. Dalí, “New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View” (1933), in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, 258–259. See also Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí’s Art and Writing, 1927–1942*, 186.
39. See also Dalí, “The Conquest of the Irrational” (1935), in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, 262–272.
40. Dryje, “Let’s All Move One Place on,” 134.
41. During World War II, the Romanian surrealists had similarly called for surrealism to secure its critical potential, and to focus its attention on the raw matter of everyday life. See Luca and Trost, “Dialectics of the Dialectic.”
42. Dryje, “Let’s All Move One Place on,” 134.
43. Dvorský, “The Possible Against the Current,” 69.
44. Effenberger, “Variants, Constants and Dominants of Surrealism” [part 1], xxxii.
45. Effenberger quoted in Dryje, “Editorial: 1976–1980,” ii–iii.
46. Effenberger quoted in ibid; see also Effenberger, “Variants, Constants and Dominants of Surrealism” [part 2], xxi.
47. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 91.
48. Ibid., 113.
49. See ibid., 3–4.
50. See ibid., 113–114.
51. Švankmajer, “Decalogue,” 462.
52. Solarik and Dryje, *Other Air*, 40; Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 23.
53. Solarik and Dryje, *Other Air*, 40.
54. See Morgan, “Bazin, Ontology and Realist Aesthetics,” and “Bazin’s Modernism”; Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* For a critical discussion of the prevalent definitions of realism in cinema, see Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, 10–17.
55. Dryje, “Editorial: 1976–1980,” ii; The Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia, “The Platform of Prague Twenty Years on,” 89.
56. Breton, “On Surrealism in Its Living Works,” 299.
57. Effenberger, “Variants, Constants and Dominants of Surrealism” [part 1], xxx.
58. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 17.
59. Ibid., 25; Dryje, “Let’s All Move One Place on,” 138.
60. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition.*
61. Godwin, “Rudolf II of Habsburg.”
62. See O’Pray, “Jan Švankmajer,” 42ff.
63. Schmitt, “Jan Švankmajer and Johanes Doktor Faust by Emil Radok,” 56.

64. Effenberger, “Švankmajer on *The Fall of the House of Usher*,” 33.
65. See Schmitt, “Detailed Biography with Commentary (II),” 167–168.
66. See “Švankmajer on Alice,” 51–53
67. Hames, Peter, “Interview with Jan Švankmajer,” 121, 135.
68. See Švankmajer, “Masks and Puppets,” 42.
69. Breton, “Surrealist Situation of the Object,” 255. For surrealism and Prague, see Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century.*
70. See Stejskal, *Praga Hermetica*, and *The Secrets of Magic Prague*.
71. See Petek, “The Death and Rebirth of Surrealism in Bohemia,” 84–85; Sorfa, “Architorture,” 102–103; Uhde, “Jan Švankmajer,” 64–68.
72. Fijalkowski, Richardson, and Walker, *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia*, 86.
73. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 29–30.
74. It can be noted that Breton, too, insisted on surrealism’s need to take root in material reality. See e.g. Breton, *Communicating Vessels*, 86. See also the discussion in Noheden, “The Imagination of Touch.”
75. Švankmajer, “Decalogue” 462–463.
76. Švankmajer, “Cabinet of Curiosities,” 185.
77. See Higonnet, “Bachelard and the Romantic Imagination,” 26–28.
78. Solarik and Dryje, *Other Air*, 39.
79. Ibid.
80. Péret, “Une contribution,” 139.
81. Švankmajer, “On the Authenticity of Art,” 482.
82. See Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 78.
83. For an overview of the conceptions of the fetish, see Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, 1.”
84. My reference to transmogrification here is done in the spirit of Stam, *Keywords in Subversive Film/Media Aesthetics*, 145–146.
85. Schmitt, “Detailed Biography with Commentary (III),” 386.
86. Schmitt, “Detailed Biography with Commentary (III),” 386.
87. Dryje, “Let’s All Move One Place on,” 135.
88. See Švankmajer, “Fetish,” 38.
89. “The Making of *Lunacy*,” DVD feature.
90. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, 58–60.
91. Richardson, “Seductions of the Impossible,” 384–385. See also Breton, “The Grand Ceremonial Restored to Us at Last by Jean Benoît” (1962), in *Surrealism and Painting*, 386–390.
92. See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 158.
93. See also Schmitt, “Detailed Biography with Commentary (III),” 407.
94. See Kjellgren, *Splendid Isolation*, 47.
95. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 29–30.
96. Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*, 130.

97. López Caballero, "Jan Švankmajer," 188.
98. Ibid.
99. See Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema*, 20.
100. Ibid., 126.
101. See Ezra, *Georges Méliès*, 3–5.
102. Gunning, "'Primitive' Cinema," 6, 10.
103. Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave*, 193.
104. Compare this with Hansen, "The Mass-Production of the Senses"; Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction."
105. Breton, *L'Art magique*, 248.
106. Compare this with Ward, "Dark Intervals, Mechanics and Magic," 96–97.
107. Gunning, "'Animated Pictures'," 102.
108. See Hames, "Interview with Jan Švankmajer," 118.
109. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 28–30.
110. See Schmitt, "Detailed Biography with Commentary (I)," 89–90.
111. Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, 262.
112. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, 3–4, 140–141.
113. Solarik and Dryje, *Other Air*, 67.
114. Ibid.
115. Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, 147.
116. Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not," 293.
117. Ibid., 293–294.
118. See Stone, "Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature," 6; Harrison, *Forests*, 181–183.
119. Kuzniar, "A Higher Language," 430. The reference is to Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, 32–33.
120. Bachelard, *Lautréamont*.
121. Thacker, "Apophatic Animality," 84.
122. See Breton, *L'art magique*, 241–244.
123. Breton, "As in a Wood," 237. See also Breton, *L'art magique*, 248.
124. Compare this with Rentzou, "*Minotaure*," 34–35.
125. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 152–153.
126. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 153.
127. See Ivins-Hulley, "A Universe of Boundaries," 268.
128. See Wells, "Body Consciousness in the Films of Jan Švankmajer," 183–184.
129. Quoted in Dryje, "The Force of Imagination," 156.
130. Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses," 70.
131. See Švankmajer, "The Magic Ritual of Tactile Inauguration," 43.

132. See Kelly, "'Prière de frôler'," 79–80. Similar strategies were employed in the 1959–1960 *EROS* exhibition, in which the "*mise-en-scène* denied any safe distance between the spectator and the erotic" (Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 152–154).
133. See Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp*, 69–71.
134. See Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 137. The foam-rubber breast proved to be fragile, and few complete copies of this edition of the catalogue survive.
135. See Fijalkowski, "From Sorcery to Silence," 626.
136. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 124–126.
137. Breton, "As in a Wood," 237–239.
138. See Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art*, 190; Hammond, "Available Light," 1–2.
139. See Taylor, "'Don't Forget I Come from the Tropics'," 86.
140. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 168–169.
141. Similar obstructions met the visitor to the 1938 international surrealist exhibition. See Breton, "Before the Curtain," 80–81; Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 43.
142. Péret, "Une contribution," 139–140.
143. Solarik, "The Walking Abyss," 5.
144. Švankmajer, "J.E. Kostelec," 71.
145. See Marks, *The Skin of the Film*; Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship*; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*.
146. Švankmajer, "The Magic Ritual of Tactile Inauguration," 43.
147. Fijalkowski, "Invention, Imagination, Interpretation," 6–7.
148. Vasseleu, "Tactile Animation," 144.
149. Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*. For an extended discussion of the book, see Vasseleu, "Tactile Animation," 144–148.
150. Mansén, "Fingertip Knowledge," 6.
151. Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 162.
152. Hames, "Interview with Jan Švankmajer," 117–118.
153. Quoted in Stehlíková, "Tangible Territory," 127.
154. Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 76.
155. Ibid., 70.
156. Vasseleu, "Tactile Animation," 150. See also Weston, "'Down to the Cellar'," 15.
157. Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 149.
158. Švankmajer quoted in Stehlíková, "Tangible Territory," 127.
159. See Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave*, 196.
160. See Effenberger, "The Raw Cruelty of Life and the Cynicism of Fantasy," 439.

161. Effenberger, "Interpretation as Creative Activity," n.p; Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave*, 215.
162. Effenberger, "Švankmajer on *The Fall of the House of Usher*," 36.
163. Brooke, "Free Radical."
164. Effenberger, "Interpretation as Creative Activity," n.p.
165. Breton, "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," 303.
166. Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," 123–124.
167. See Kuzniar, "Reassessing Romantic Reflexivity – The Case of Novalis," 82.
168. See Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 336; Alleau, *The Primal Force in Symbol.*
169. Caillois, *The Writing of Stones*; see also Caillois, "Generalized Esthetics."
170. Ernst himself considered that he had prefigured concrete irrationality with his own theories of the image; see Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, 15. Chénieux-Gendron, however, draws attention to some vital distinctions between their respective approaches; see Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, 174.
171. Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, 21.
172. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 84.
173. See Bonardel, "Alchemical Esotericism and the Hermeneutics of Culture," 82–83.
174. Breton, "Crisis of the Object," 280. Italics removed.
175. Kral, "Questions to Jan Švankmajer," 26.
176. Nádvorníková, "Surrealist Cognition," xiv.
177. See Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 149–151.
178. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 81.
179. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 188.
180. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 140.
181. Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience," 192–194.
182. Bounoure, "Hermetic Bird," 79.
183. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 138.
184. See Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis," 74.
185. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" (1935), in *The Edge of Surrealism*, 97.
186. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 84.
187. Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 336.
188. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 147.
189. Ibid. Italics removed.
190. Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 334. See also Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 267.
191. Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," 335.
192. Benjamin, "The Doctrine of the Similar," 66.
193. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 155.

194. Breton, "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," 303.
195. See Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 139, 146–147.
196. Benjamin, "Surrealism," 192. See also Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 140.
197. Fijalkowski, "Invention, Imagination, Interpretation," 7; Hanegraaff, "Romanticism and the Esoteric Connection," 250–251.
198. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 270.
199. Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 151.
200. See Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 24.
201. Švankmajer, "Cabinet of Curiosities," 185.
202. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 48.
203. Effenberger, "Švankmajer on *The Fall of the House of Usher*," 36; Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 10.
204. Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 4.
205. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 175–177.
206. See Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 236–237.
207. Ibid., 60.
208. Ibid., 66.
209. Stroud, "Foreword," vii.
210. See Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 15; Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 179ff.
211. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 73.
212. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 11.
213. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 41.
214. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 68.
215. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 76. See also Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 18ff.
216. Metcalf, "Black Cats Are Our Unconscious," 58.
217. See Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 78.
218. Ibid., 133–153.
219. Kearney, "Bachelard and the Epiphanic Instant," 41. See also Bachelard, *Intuition of the Instant*.
220. See Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 78.
221. Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 73–74.
222. For a discussion of the tension between the universal and the culturally specific in Švankmajer's films, see Petek, "The Death and Rebirth of Surrealism in Bohemia."
223. Breton, "The Political Position of Surrealism," 210, 230–233.
224. Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*, 17.
225. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 150.
226. Compare this with Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 6–7.
227. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 192.
228. Ibid., 131.

229. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 37–41, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 127–129.
230. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 144.
231. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 153.
232. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 127.
233. Ibid., 125.
234. Ibid., 201.
235. Ibid., 282.
236. Švankmajer, *Švankmajer's Faust*, xi.
237. Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 73.
238. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 170.
239. Dryje, "The Force of Imagination," 174.
240. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 90–91.
241. Švankmajer, "Cabinet of Curiosities," 185.
242. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 203.
243. Fulcanelli, *Dwellings of the Philosophers.*
244. Švankmajer, "Cabinet of Curiosities," 185.
245. Ibid., 186.
246. See Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 25.
247. Breton, "Three Years Ago …," 191.
248. Ibid., 193.

CHAPTER 6

Concluding Remarks

Le Surréalisme en 1947 took the visitor on an initiatory journey lined with surrealist objects and images, ostensibly charged with magic and a capacity to generate new myths. The surrealist new myth remained in the tentative form of an outline, a mental parade, and the real show that André Breton hoped for never took place. Yet, this book shows that the change in direction that *Le Surréalisme en 1947* staked out has had a lingering effect on surrealism, not least in cinema. The surrealist post-war immersion in myth and magic resounds throughout the films and thought of Wilhelm Freddie, Jean-Louis Bédouin and Michel Zimbacca with Benjamin Péret, Nelly Kaplan, and Jan Švankmajer—much as it does in the surrealist art, writings, and exhibitions that form a rich context for the films. The often neglected development of post-war surrealism towards myth and magic has, then, had shifting but readily apparent repercussions for surrealist film production.

Le Surréalisme en 1947 recurs throughout this book. Like the exhibition, the films relate to the surrealist new myth in a polyvalent, probing, and playful fashion, marked by shifting historical and cultural conditions as well as by different artistic sensibilities. Breton's investment in the new myth was unavoidably and indubitably shaped by the events of World War II. Hence his incorporation of mythological and esoteric narratives and rituals that pertained to a healing rebirth outside the Christian tradition that the surrealists abhorred. Other surrealists have different priorities, and surrealist cinema displays a broader arsenal of myths and esoteric themes. Freddie evinces a fascination with black magic that flies

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in the face of the benevolent hope that Breton placed in esoteric symbolism. Bédouin, Zimbacca, and Péret focus exclusively on pre-existing myths. Kaplan negotiates and revises Breton's idealizing view of woman. Švankmajer, finally, is anxious to escape any overarching mythical narratives, instead favouring the enactment of a creative transformation of everyday material reality that results in minor myths. Their films also testify to the fact that the new myth has remained in an embryonic and dynamic state. Yet, they all pertain to the cultivation of a new sensibility, in a way that creatively extends Breton's post-war thought and the concerns that went into the 1947 exhibition. The films are poetic rather than discursive interventions in surrealism's attempt to locate and sound the latent content of a turbulent and shifting post-war society. Through the work of what Gaston Bachelard calls "an imagination that thinks," these films all grapple with the central question of rendering a shattered and oppressive world meaningful. By drawing on the rejected knowledge of esotericism, the magic and ritualistic qualities of art, and the poetics of analogy, these surrealist films are, then, active contributions to the surrealist search for myth.

As this book shows, the new myth is a combinatory practice, more of a cluster of symbols, fragments of narratives, and elements of rejected knowledge, than any attempt at creating a fixed and stable mythology. It relates to primitivism, magic, alchemy, initiation, analogies and correspondences, embodied experience, and the senses. The films evoke these tendencies, if in different measures. Freddie's films sketch out a new myth through their appeal to the unfettered imagination and the dark undercurrents of eroticism, in which esoteric symbolism and embodied experience are intertwined. The references to the tarot Moon card and the Goetic magic circle in *Eaten Horizons* point to the fact that Freddie here ventures into darker and more destructive territory than that which Breton sought out. Yet, he draws on what surrealists have described as the power of "evil" symbolism in a society still under the spell of the "good" of the Christianity that they perceived to be largely responsible for the disasters of the two world wars. In Kaplan's films, this appeal to "evil" forces gravitates around her depiction of her protagonists as witches. In that way, she constructs counter-myths against patriarchal mores, as part of her attempts to redirect the surrealist myth in a way that contributes to female emancipation. Švankmajer continues the construction of counter-myths in his transformation of Christ into a "vengeance fetish" in *Lunacy*. But he also draws on a less explicit poetics of

transmutation in order to fashion surrealist poetry out of the base material of everyday reality, and uncovers what Gaston Bachelard calls a "spontaneous mythology." Here, the imagination of the senses and an alchemical poetics can be related to the new myth's envisioned function as a harbinger of new experiential structures and a poetic and more intimate relationship with the surrounding world. *L'Invention du monde* stands out since it rather plumbs the non-Western world for myths, fragments of which it assembles in order to edify the contemporary world. Significantly, its construction of an initiatory journey, much like Mabille's *Mirror of the Marvelous*, comprises extracts from myths collaged into a new narrative. The specifically surrealist inflection of the film can be discerned in its extraction of an initiatory pattern from the fragmentation and juxtaposition of pre-existing myths.

Innervation and Initiation

The surrealist search for myth in the film medium has a particular potential to contribute to what Walter Benjamin calls surrealism's propensity for collective bodily innervation. Viewed from that perspective, these surrealist films are entangled in a wider negotiation of myth and magic in modernity. Much like the Romantics and Baudelaire before them, and Benjamin alongside them, the surrealists recognize that it is impossible to simply restore older systems of myth and magical experiences of the surrounding world. This problem has particular aesthetic ramifications. Bemoaning a lost totality, the romantics privileged the fragment, as an intimation of what could be. Baudelaire preferred the artificial over the natural, in recognition of the fact that positivist modernity had rendered nature mute.[1] Once, humanity had experienced nature as distanced and mysterious, yet alive and enticing. Humans had participated in its life by projecting their imagination, through myth and ritual, onto nature. With Enlightenment reason and positivist knowledge, however, humanity shrank the older distance—nature was now an object to be studied and mastered—while simultaneously creating a new gap. Devoid of mythical underpinnings, nature became dull and estranged. It was disenchanted. This development, Robert Pogue Harrison notes, lies behind Baudelaire's disdain for unadorned nature.[2] Now flat, dull, and mute, nature no longer returns the human gaze. It lacks the capacity to give rise to the experience of correspondences, the meaningful interconnectedness of all things. As Bachelard shows, the identity principle of

positivist science has replaced the analogical principle of pre-scientific thought, poetry myth, and dreams, so necessary for a sense of participation in the world. As noted, surrealists of all stripes have bemoaned this development. Aimé Césaire writes that "the literal has taken over the world" and that "we have lost touch with the meaning of symbol;" Breton claims that "the primordial links are broken;" Jan Švankmajer returns time and again to the notion that the identity principle has repressed symbol making into the unconscious, from whence it erupts in surrealist activity.

If there is a seeming paradox in the fact that the mechanical reproduction of film proved to be so fertile for the surrealists' probing of new myths, it is a paradox that can be related back to Benjamin's interwar ruminations. These surrealist films arguably execute a dialectical reconciliation of what Benjamin describes as the aura's ritual grounding and its depletion by way of mechanical reproduction. They direct the film medium's conditions of reproduction towards a recapitulation of the aura, by way of its insertion in the ritualistic context that is the cinema, a place that Breton after all likened to a church and considered to be the place for the only modern mystery. For Benjamin, the very technology that had caused the destruction of auratic experience was indeed also the most potent weapon against the depletion of experience. When Breton lauds the film medium for its unrivalled capacity to trigger the mechanism of correspondences, he inadvertently latches onto Benjamin's understanding of the relation between technology and magical, or auratic, experience, as one in which film may bring to life new rituals, ripe with the potential of innervation.

Breton, and much of surrealism with him, was nevertheless deeply sceptical of advances in technology. In the interwar era, the surrealists had embraced the advances made by modern physics, but in the aftermath of the World War II, in the shadow of the Cold War, and with the threat of the atom bomb, the French surrealists in particular assumed a decidedly negative stance towards science.[3] In the interviews collected in *Conversations*, Breton's scepticism against science extends to technology, including new media technology, which he dismisses offhand.[4] The fact that he still detected such a potential for magic in film may seem like a contradiction, but Benjamin's analysis of the complex conditions for experience in a technologized modernity indicates that Breton is not without predecessors. Miriam Hansen points out that Benjamin's "philosophy of technology is inseparable from his critique of the ideology of

progress."[5] The surrealists directed the "absolutely modern" medium of cinema against blind ideologies of progress in a complex way that resonates with Benjamin. The technologically effected disorientation that Breton valorizes in the cinema appears to point to a shared conviction with Benjamin that, as Hansen puts it, it is impossible to "conceive of a restoration of the instinctual power of the senses and their integrity that would not take into account the extent to which technology has already become part of the human bodily sensorium."[6] It is, then, vital to recognize that the human experiential register has been effected thoroughly if a restoration of auratic experience can at all be conceived as a viable option. Benjamin's conviction that "there is no strategy for preventing humanity's self-destruction in which technology would not play an essential role" also pertains to how cinema could potentially form part of the answer to Breton's desperate question around the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*: "How can man be saved?"

The 1947 exhibition's focus on initiation recurs throughout post-war surrealist cinema. But whereas Breton was careful to point out that he referred to initiation in terms of a metaphorical "guideline," other surrealists have been more receptive to the notion of initiation as an ontological transformation. In post-war surrealist cinema there are intimations that the innervation Benjamin discusses also pertains precisely to an initiation, at least in the sense of an experiential as opposed to a doctrinaire category. There is indeed a connection with this Benjamin-derived perspective and Mabille's esoteric redefinition of the marvellous. In *Mirror of the Marvelous*, Mabille writes that the marvellous is effected through a "shock" that re-establishes more profound human connections with the surrounding world.[7] When the surrealists turned to esotericism as an alternative to orthodox thought and scientism, they also sought new ways to cultivate a new sensorium that would enable a multisensory experience of correspondences. Hence, what Benjamin understood to be a restoration of experience can be understood as an initiation into a new sensibility, a new sensorium, and a perception of an analogical interconnectedness that breaks with the identity principle of positivist rationalism. This book, then, points to some ways in which surrealism has used the technological medium of film in order to give rise to an experience of correspondences and with it an intimation of interconnectedness and of the world that exceeds discursive propositions. Here, outlines of new myths shimmer on the screen.

Notes

1. See Harrison, *Forests*. See also Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” 31ff.
2. Harrison, *Forests*.
3. See Bédouin, “Expose the Physicists, Empty the Laboratories!,” 164–165.
4. Breton, *Conversations*.
5. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 146.
6. Ibid.
7. Mabille, *Mirror of the Marvelous*, 45.

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