

# **Discerning a Surrealist Cinema**

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**Abstract** (not to exceed 200 words - any continuation sheets must contain the author's full name and full title of the thesis):

*La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1929), *Un chien andalou* (1929) and *L'Age d'or* (1930) are three films that have gained worldwide recognition as being the most salient examples of Surrealist expression in film. While a number of other examples arguably do exist, the limited nature of the Surrealist film programme is well documented. This thesis does not seek to conduct a survey of the Surrealist claims of these films, but to challenge the notion that such a discernable body or genre of films might even exist. By comparing the films' status with regard to André Breton's original conception of 'Surrealism', Chapter One introduces the debate surrounding authorship and intention which is so central to any discussion of Surrealism in film. Chapter Two focuses on the seminal theories of Antonin Artaud, and the way in which these theories might be applied to the cinema. Artaud's individual ambition for a film project presents a different conception of cinema as at once seen and unseen. By way of Benjamin Fondane's plans for a cinema that existed solely on paper, Chapter Three continues this re-examination of the Surrealist project by proposing that the limited number of recognisably 'Surrealist' films does not indicate a failure.

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# Chapter One: Surrealism and Cinema

## Introduction

In this thesis I will be approaching 'Surrealist cinema' with cautious steps, understanding that such an undertaking will require clear reasoning and close scrutiny. The classification of film by genre is a subject which is known to invite debate, and this is especially so where those films might be considered 'avant-garde' or 'experimental'. My attempts to explain the place of Surrealism within the broader studies of European film innovation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are more often than not frustrated by the reality that the Surrealists did not produce an easily discernible body of work which typifies a particular style or technique. As Moine and Taminiaux argue in their 2006 study, the genrification of Surrealist film is not so much a project for the scholar of Surrealism, or for the scholar of film studies, but for the idealistic completist who allows Surrealism to be 'simplified and institutionalized'.<sup>1</sup> Aside from the complexity of genrification, the most apparent problem facing such an academic is the paucity of films which one might classify as Surrealist - surely the most basic requirement of their indexation. In this sense, discerning a 'cinema' which represents an artistic movement comes with its own specific difficulties. For my part, an epistemological exercise of identifying Surrealist films depends entirely on how one attributes authority to the various conflicting opinions. For example, should the final definition of a 'Surrealist film' be down to the film's director, producer, writer or audience? Should this be judged by the aggregate assessment of the world's film critics or by those most closely and personally connected to Surrealism? To a large extent, the answers to these questions remain debateable and lead to more questions. My resolution is simply that to conduct any sort of study that seeks to identify and classify, one must make clear that the findings of the study are entirely subject to *the terms of that study*.

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<sup>1</sup> Raphaëlle Moine and Pierre Taminiaux, 'From Surrealist Cinema to Surrealism in Cinema: Does a Surrealist Genre Exist in Film?', *Yale French Studies*, 109 (2006), 114.

Hence, it is important to elaborate on the problem that terminology poses to my study. Firstly and perhaps most easily overlooked is the use of the term 'Surrealist' itself. Philippe Soupault and André Breton's 1920 collaboration *Les Champs Magnétiques*<sup>2</sup> is often considered to be the first Surrealist work,<sup>3</sup> but it was only once Breton had completed his Surrealist manifesto in 1924 that 'Surrealism drafted itself an official birth certificate.'<sup>4</sup> Settling on an end date for Surrealism is an even more uncertain task – whether one chooses to limit a study to the beginning or end of the Second World War, André Breton's death in 1966, the formal disbanding of Surrealism in 1969, or not at all, any of these proposals could be justified. Certainly, Breton's statement that 'one cannot ascribe an end to it any more than one can pinpoint its beginning'<sup>5</sup> was intended to underline Surrealism's eternal relevance. The 1924 manifesto set out the key principles upon which Surrealism would be founded: the reconciliation of the dream and reality, the celebration of the marvellous, elevation of automatic and base human responses, and revolt against bourgeois constructions of society.<sup>6</sup> Surrealist work would go on to take the form of polemical articles, poems, plays, paintings and performances, but Breton's manifesto - and its 1929 revision<sup>7</sup> - would be the reference point by which all production could be judged. With such a definite model added to the huge wealth of primary and critical material from which to draw, establishing the Surrealist value of a film might appear a straightforward task. However, Surrealism's aims were far broader than artistic or political commentary. As 'automatisme psychique pur',<sup>8</sup> Surrealism had its sights on a philosophical or psychological revolution which would supersede questions of aesthetic innovation – probably the most popular gauge by which films are judged. Nevertheless, the fertile ground of the movement, which officially

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<sup>2</sup> André Breton, *Œuvres Complètes, T. I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 51-105. All subsequent quotations are from the same edition, which will henceforth be abbreviated to *OC: I*.

<sup>3</sup> An idea confirmed by Breton himself to be true, 'without a doubt'. André Breton and André Parinaud, *Conversations: the autobiography of surrealism*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1993), 43.

<sup>4</sup> As agreed by interviewer and interviewee. Breton and Parinaud, 71.

<sup>5</sup> Breton and Parinaud, 238.

<sup>6</sup> See *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton, *OC: I*, 309-346.

<sup>7</sup> *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton, *OC: I*, 775-828.

<sup>8</sup> André Breton, *OC: I*, 328.

spanned over 40 years, had a huge influence on both popular and avant-garde cinema, in a way which might easily mislead as to its intentions. The huge influence of Surrealism has gone beyond the arts, too, in a way which has led to the term 'surreal' (small s) becoming a popular one for describing anything off-beat, avant-garde or bizarre.<sup>9</sup> Clearly this misunderstanding can be allowed for when attempting to identify a 'Surrealist cinema', but it does not preclude its mistaken use by others, nor does it negate the new sense of 'surreal' being used to describe certain films. Hence it needs to be recognised that a film could be described as either Surrealist or surreal, or both, independently. Either way, the distinction is an important one to make.

For a film to be identified as Surrealist, then, is not necessarily dependent on it being strange or surreal, nor on it being identified specifically with the Surrealist movement, its subsidiary groups or practitioners, self-identified or otherwise, but on the relation it bears to Surrealism as a concept. While Surrealism's relationship with film did engender an aesthetic movement of sorts,<sup>10</sup> one must recognise that such a contribution to cinema was an influence for others more than it was a singular conception in itself. The evidence for this lies in the small number of films made by the Surrealists and the unfortunate abundance of cases where avant-gardism or experimentalism might be erroneously interpreted as Surrealism. The status of a Surrealist work thus needs to be clarified when we are considering what has been achieved. Whether this takes the form of 'film' or 'cinema', as far as I am concerned this potential terminological banana skin is a matter of preference rather than technicality. For the purposes of clarity, I would propose that 'film' relates to a single composition and 'cinema' relates to a body of compositions, but the two words can be interchanged when discussing film production in general. Similarly, in its adjectival form I generally prefer to use 'filmic' rather than 'cinematic', because it resists any grander connotations of artistry and relates solely to work in celluloid. My study will not take in such discussions as the true value

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<sup>9</sup> A point made with regard to existing literature on the subject in Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (New York: Berg, 2006), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Moine and Taminiaux, 104.

or use of cinema, but seek only to answer the question: Is it possible to discern a cinema which is truly Surrealist?

## Literature review

Central to my intentions in this thesis is a reappraisal of the notion that ‘Surrealist cinema’ exists as an established school of ideas. Films as violent, iconic and memorable as Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí’s *Un chien andalou* (1929) may have encouraged the canonisation of Surrealist film, but the contemporary writings of those involved with the Paris group who took credit for that work imply a passion for the cinema rather than a passion for making films. Paul Hammond’s eminent 1978 work *The Shadow and Its Shadow*<sup>11</sup> demonstrates a romantic - or even Romantic - connection between the Surrealists and the cinema, where the appeal of the big screen represented a ‘rebirth of mythology’,<sup>12</sup> all over again. The cinema was a world which existed only through imaginary connections, and this was its magic. For the audience, the reality of a filmed production project being projected for entertainment was easily forgotten. The Surrealist belief was that this process in fact belonged to them. Jean Goudal’s celebration of the cinema in 1925 was driven by an appreciation of it as an intensely private viewing experience. He writes:

Entrons dans une salle où la pellicule perforée grésille dans l’obscurité. Dès l’entrée, notre regard est guidé par le faisceau lumineux vers l’écran où, deux heures durant, il restera fixé. La vie de la rue n’existe plus. Nos affaires s’évanouissent, nos voisins disparaissent. Notre corps lui-même subit une sorte de dépersonnalisation temporaire qui lui ôte le sentiment de sa propre existence. Nous ne sommes que deux yeux rivés à 10 m2 de toile blanche.<sup>13</sup>

By drawing together the writings of many Surrealists and Surrealist-sympathisers on the subject, Hammond creates the impression of a literary and artistic avant-garde with a fascination for cinema, rather than a group interested in film innovation. The cinema was more than ‘une photographie perfectionnée’;<sup>14</sup> it was a powerful tool of catharsis, of unlocking emotion by movement and light and, above all, illusion. Linda Williams recognises

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Hammond, ed. *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, quoted in Paul Hammond *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema*, ed. Second Edition (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Goudal, ‘Surréalisme et Cinéma’ *Les Surréalistes et Le Cinéma*, ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux (Paris : Seghers, 1976), 308.

<sup>14</sup> Goudal, 305.

that what interests Goudal is 'more the resemblance between the film and the dream *in language* than *in content*,<sup>15</sup> and it is from this perspective that one must be wary of those studies which focus on a Surrealist visual aesthetic in film above any other consideration. Such a distinction is important when one thinks about how 'Surrealist cinema' might be defined, and where the limits of that definition might lie.

The most comprehensive and thoughtful studies of the Surrealists' engagement with the cinema include both the critical and the practical responses of the movement. While Hammond's work, which has now seen three editions, is an invaluable resource to the Anglo-Saxon scholar, it does not attempt to represent the actual work of the Surrealists in film-making. This is perhaps indicative of a relationship where the cinema was more easily confined to a fantasy or ideal than tackled as an applied project, something to write about but not practise, but the films themselves cannot be ignored – they are appended for reference purposes.<sup>16</sup> Hammond labels this list strictly as 'Films Made by Surrealists',<sup>17</sup> but the writings of Philippe Soupault,<sup>18</sup> Luis Buñuel,<sup>19</sup> André Breton,<sup>20</sup> and others included in Hammond's compilation indicate clearly that this list should not be considered the totality of Surrealism on film. The reason for this is the Surrealists' critical penchant for 'des films le plus souvent involontairement sublimes, des films méprisés par la critique, taxés de crétinisme ou d'infantilisme par les défenseurs du rationnel',<sup>21</sup> or put a more succinctly, 'les «mauvais» films'.<sup>22</sup> The belief that Surrealism could be achieved by accident or found in the most unlikely places is something which is largely ignored by those scholars who choose to centre their study of Surrealism in cinema on the films rather than the theories. As time has gone by, perhaps the canonisation of films such as the aforementioned *Un chien andalou*, as

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<sup>15</sup> Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 18 (emphasis is the author's).

<sup>16</sup> Hammond, 229-233.

<sup>17</sup> Hammond, 229.

<sup>18</sup> Hammond, 60-61.

<sup>19</sup> Hammond, 64-65.

<sup>20</sup> Hammond, 80-85.

<sup>21</sup> Ado Kyrou, *Surréalisme au cinéma* (extract), *Les Surréalistes et Le Cinéma*, ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 326.

<sup>22</sup> Kyrou, 328.

well as Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1929) and Buñuel's *L'Age d'or* (1930), has encouraged this approach, since it is more recent publications including Robert Short's *The Age of Gold*<sup>23</sup> and Harper and Stone's *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film*<sup>24</sup> which are guilty of this. The critical work of the Surrealists remains a thoroughly important part of any attempt to understand what they hoped to achieve in cinema, including the work of those who made no impact upon celluloid. As I will go on to show later in this thesis, the names of the likes of Antonin Artaud, Philippe Soupault and Benjamin Fondane are sometimes overlooked due to their limited work in actual film.

The more studied approach of J. H. Matthews,<sup>25</sup> Alain and Odette Virmaux,<sup>26</sup> Linda Williams and Steven Kovacs<sup>27</sup> has provided my work with a strong basis of analysis which incorporates the historical context of Surrealism, its theories of film, and its representation in film, without ever assuming the definition of 'Surrealist film' to be a certainty. This lack of certainty, or rather, a healthy level of scrutiny, is a feature of these works when they manage to avoid slipping into eulogy. However, I have found that such a fault as the 'overabundance of love' towards Surrealism, of which Linda Williams warns, does not necessarily preclude a text from being informative to my study.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Paul Hammond's contribution to the body of texts that I have consulted is a collection of writings by individuals who more often than not were somehow connected to André Breton's Surrealist group, and their support for their cohorts is evident. While these texts are clearly liable to bias, the tastes and interests of the Surrealists are a useful guide to the scholar since they hint at both a cinema that might have been and the reasons why it was never achieved. For a study such as mine, which seeks to evaluate the position of cinema within the thinking of the Surrealists, these personal statements are perhaps even more useful than objective analysis. Ultimately, the authority of

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Short, ed. *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema* (London: Creation Books, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Graeme Harper and Rob Stone, eds. *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film* (London: Wallflower, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (University of Michigan Press, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Alain and Odette Virmaux, ed. *Les Surréalistes et le Cinéma* (Paris: Seghers, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of the Surrealist Cinema* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980).

<sup>28</sup> Williams, xi.

figures such as Soupault, Brunius and Buñuel to talk about Surrealism in film is undeniable, despite their vested interest, due to their close association with original Surrealist ideology.

Regarding work which seeks to connect *Surrealism itself* and film, rather than the Surrealists and film innovation, or the Surrealists and the cinema experience, only a few scholars have attempted such a difficult task. Essentially, this is because a rejection of the film aesthetic which we associate with Surrealism comes with the pressure of being able to articulate exactly what is and what is not Surrealist in film. Inez Hedges' *Languages of Revolt* is an important resource, for its analysis of form and metaphor in the films of Buñuel, and for continuing the work begun by Williams and Matthews in their attempts to marry the Surrealists' filmic output with Surrealist ideology.<sup>29</sup> Despite their admirable work in this direction, Michael Richardson is of the belief that a fundamental misunderstanding of Surrealism impedes the credibility of much of the work done since.<sup>30</sup> While Richardson places his trust in an impressive list of personal contacts with a connection to 1920s Surrealism,<sup>31</sup> clearly those academics he criticises have chosen to place their trust in the rather more impersonal practices of comparison and interpretation. The debate about how one ought to attribute authority in these cases emerges as a problem for which there may not be an answer, since there are a number of different approaches in evidence. My own approach will be to seek to expand upon existing literature by paying close attention to the various ways 'Surrealist cinema' might be interpreted and represented. It is my belief that the Surrealist approach to cinema was to challenge ideas of representation and spectatorship, so that perhaps what we regard as 'cinema' might be changed, thereby giving rise to a *hidden* cinema that has yet to be fully documented.

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<sup>29</sup> Inez Hedges, *Languages of Revolt: Dada and surrealist literature and film* (Duke University Press, 1983).

<sup>30</sup> Richardson, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Richardson, 14.

## Identifying Surrealist Film

To begin with I will turn my attention to the films which have achieved the questionable status of being contenders for inclusion in a 'Surrealist cinema'. In 1938 André Breton published his *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme*,<sup>32</sup> which included a short but authoritative list of 'principaux films surréalistes': Man Ray's *Emak Bakia* (1926), Man Ray and Robert Desnos' *L'Etoile de mer* (1928), Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1925), Georges Hugnet's *La Perle* (1929), Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929) and Buñuel's *L'Age d'or* (1930).<sup>33</sup> The function of this entry in Breton's dictionary may have been to cement these films' status as Surrealist works, but his selection still raises some questions. When viewed in comparison with the other films, Duchamp's film stands out as being primarily concerned with form, detachment and illusion, frustrating the spectator in a way which aligns the work more with Dada than with Surrealism. Discussing the dividing lines between the film-expressions of these two avant-garde movements, Rudolf E. Kuenzli imagines that the Dada label is something 'with which Duchamp would probably not have quarreled, if he had not balked at calling it a film at all'.<sup>34</sup> Man Ray was similarly reluctant to accept his forays into celluloid as anything other than experimentation, and had no desire to take up the mantle as a director of Surrealist film.<sup>35</sup> The fact that his first film, *Retour à la Raison* (1923), was made specifically for the purposes of a Dada soirée serves to demonstrate how the crossing of the divide which Kuenzli struggles to articulate may have been less a betrayal of one film ideology for another than a general disregard for either one. It becomes clear that if Breton considered a 'Surrealist cinema' to exist, it was not with the agreement of all its included directors.

Conversely, while Breton's list has some questionable inclusions, it has some even more conspicuous omissions. For Ramona Fotiade, Francis Picabia and René Clair's *Entr'acte*

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<sup>32</sup> Breton, OC: I, 785-862.

<sup>33</sup> Breton, OC: I, 811.

<sup>34</sup> Rudolf E. Kuenzli ed. *Dada and Surrealist Film* (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987), 15.

<sup>35</sup> Matthews, 82.

(1924) offended due to its connection with the Instantanist movement which rejected Breton's Surrealism, rather than due to a lack of Surrealist content, which is most certainly not the case.<sup>36</sup> For similar reasons, Germaine Dulac's attachment to aestheticist theories of film meant that her work could not be included, despite the evident connection between *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1929) – based on a scenario by Antonin Artaud – and other Surrealist films. An impassioned resistance amongst the Surrealists to Jean Cocteau's *Sang d'un poète* (1930) could also be put down to political reasons, its representation of Surrealist themes being so complete in fact that Cocteau might have been considered the 'cinéaste surréaliste par excellence',<sup>37</sup> even if this was never his intention.<sup>38</sup> While such a claim remains debateable, it serves to illustrate how the label of 'Surrealist' was one which was fiercely defended, even sometimes from potential allies. Described as a director working at the 'jonction cinématographique entre le dadaïsme et le surréalisme',<sup>39</sup> Man Ray's example is an interesting one because his stance was always outside of such distinctions, yet his films are unquestionably influenced by Surrealism. His experimentation was not subject to an aesthetic ideology as was that of Germaine Dulac and Jean Epstein, neither did he represent a public departure from the faith as did Picabia or Cocteau, so he was deemed acceptable as a representative of Surrealism. In this sense, our own authority to determine which films were and were not Surrealist is undermined by the history of the movement's own selections, something which provoked Man Ray to observe that 'it was not sufficient to call a work Surrealist. One had to collaborate closely and obtain a stamp of approval'.<sup>40</sup>

The variety of films which might fall under the 'Surrealist' umbrella is noticeably broad, and, Breton's list being so short, one wonders where the films went which fitted in between them. Certainly there are links between the films which can be made. For example, Robert Desnos and Man Ray's collaborative work *L'Etoile de Mer* shares *La Coquille et le Clergyman's* use

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<sup>36</sup> Ramona Fotiade, 'The Untamed Eye: Surrealism and Film Theory', *Screen*, 36:4 (1995), 400.

<sup>37</sup> Virmaux, 36.

<sup>38</sup> So claims Steven Kovacs, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ado Kyrou, quoted in Virmaux, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Man Ray, quoted in Fotiade, 400.

of photographic distortions, but this connection is one which discredits *L'Etoile de mer's* Surrealist claims rather than strengthens those of *La Coquille*, especially as the more universally accepted *Un chien andalou* and *L'Age d'or* signal a preference for pro-filmic effects.<sup>41</sup> However, there is also a shared Surrealist sensibility between the two films, as they foreground the rich ambiguity of the images showcased before the audience, presenting a challenge to our immediate interpretations of reality and significance. This attention to the symbolic image is something that, as Matthews observes, the two films also have in common with *Un chien andalou*, standing as 'a statement of faith in irrational imagery as more promising than rational imagery'.<sup>42</sup> It is also worth noting how these symbols align in their significance – it is easy to see how the sea urchin in *Un chien andalou*, the sea shell in *La Coquille* and the star fish in *L'Etoile de mer* might all represent the privileged 'trouvaille',<sup>43</sup> ejected from the mysterious rolling source of the ocean as they are. The unknowable origins of these objects and the camera's strange preoccupation with them are instantly reminiscent of 'those frightening images encountered in dreams which oppress the dreamer without specifying anything concrete'.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the use of such aquatic imagery in *L'Etoile de mer* lends itself to the same alchemical reading that Artaud encouraged in his scenario for *La Coquille*, the images forming and reforming in a mysterious, quasi-prophetic manner.<sup>45</sup>

This kind of fixation, which the camera necessarily dictates, is a convenient method of expressing the Surrealist idea of desire. Short of being a cinema about objects, something which connects Surrealist films is a focus on *objectification*. The problem with such a programme however is the risk it runs of developing into a recognisable – and imitable – aesthetic. Easier than recognising a tendency to objectify in these films is recognising a tendency to privilege the same objects. Such voyeuristic materialisation would hardly be

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<sup>41</sup> See Williams, 49, for a discussion of Metz's theory on the difference between pro-filmic and cinematographic effects in relation to these films.

<sup>42</sup> Matthews, 90.

<sup>43</sup> André Breton, *Œuvres Complètes, T. II*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 682.

<sup>44</sup> Kovacs, 59.

<sup>45</sup> For a more detailed and informed reading of the alchemical symbols which feature in *L'Etoile de mer*, see Inez Hedges, 'Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos's and Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer*', *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1987), 99-109.

difficult to replicate, and one wonders whether a sexualised depiction of the ambiguous object is enough for a film to be recognised as 'Surrealist'. Such a theme recurs in the continued work of Luis Buñuel, for example, in the guise of an unopened box here,<sup>46</sup> the back of a playing card there,<sup>47</sup> and yet none of his considerable body of work may be included in the Surrealist oeuvre proper beyond 1933, which marked his conscious break from the movement. Yet Buñuel never saw his position within Breton's Surrealist circle as anything more than as a contributor, claiming that his own work merely converged with that of the Surrealists.<sup>48</sup> Despite the evident current of Surrealism that runs through the films of Man Ray – including another notable film somewhat erroneously omitted from Breton's list, *Le Mystère du Château de Dés* (1929) – it must be conceded that his explicitly neutral stance discourages the label of 'Surrealist director'.

From this perspective, there is no reason to assume that a certain aesthetic belongs to Surrealism any more than it does to the individuals that brought it recognition. In *Un chien andalou*, the eye, the ants, the priests, the donkeys, the piano and the beach are all examples of images often associated with Salvador Dalí as an individual, since they recur in his paintings. The dream sequence which he constructed for Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) is recognisably that of Dalí, and yet no one would suggest that the film is a Surrealist work, or even that Hitchcock sought to include a sequence that was explicitly Surrealist. Instead I would suggest that the resemblance that one Surrealist film might have to another could be the product of a shared taste or interest rather than an overarching film ideology. Undoubtedly, Dalí's interest in dreams and Freudian psychology fitted the subject matter of *Spellbound*, independently of any attachment to Surrealism. When it comes to visual parallels, one only needs to look as far as Hugnet's *La Perle*, where the thieves are dressed in all-black suits that pay direct homage to those of Louis Feuillade's crime serial *Les Vampires* (1915), which the Surrealists so frequently praised. The significance of this

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<sup>46</sup> Luis Buñuel, *Belle de Jour* (1967).

<sup>47</sup> Luis Buñuel, *Viridiana* (1961).

<sup>48</sup> Luis Buñuel, *Mon dernier soupir* (Paris: Ramsey, 2006), 127.

reference is to observe how the links between Breton's 'films surréalistes' might not only be found between those particular films, but between a great many films and influences, determined by both individuals and groups. Alain Virmaux's concession that 'il était inévitable que l'œuvre de chacun portât quelques traces des trouvailles de tous'<sup>49</sup> may serve to explain how a familiar aesthetic could develop in Surrealist film without this being necessarily part of a conscious group project. In other words, recognising the mark of Surrealism in film, either as a direct or indirect influence, is a far easier task than actually determining Surrealist intentions.

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<sup>49</sup> Virmaux, 50.

## The Surrealist film project

While political posturing and aesthetic purism might have been central to Breton's limited take on Surrealism's limited film expression, this is not to say that his examples give a clear picture of what a Surrealist film might look like. I have already asked the question of how one might go about defining 'Surrealist film', but I would extend this now to asking whether this is indeed an achievable project at all. As a collective, the Surrealists sought to express their ideology by a variety of means, but it must be said that their use of film did not achieve any definitive measure of success – most often, only three properly Surrealist films are said to have been made: *Un chien andalou*, *L'Age d'or* and *La Coquille et le Clergyman*,<sup>50</sup> while only two of these featured in Breton's list. However, as I will show in my second and third chapters, one might consider that the completion of films was only one way in which Surrealists expressed their passion for cinema. In fact, I will argue with this thesis that the opposite might be true, that the real innovation of Surrealist cinema was to not to make films at all. Certainly the films were never intended to be considered entertainment and the Surrealists could never be considered to have pursued commercial success. After its first screening, Luis Buñuel was indignant that anyone could have enjoyed *Un chien andalou* who truly understood it, denouncing 'cette foule imbécile qui a trouvé beau ou poétique ce qui, au fond, n'est qu'un désespéré, un passionné appel au meurtre'.<sup>51</sup> Neither was *L'Age d'or* seen by the Surrealists as something to admire, described as 'un des programmes maxima de revendications qui se soient proposés à la conscience humaine jusqu'à ce jour'.<sup>52</sup> While Buñuel mocked the label of success that had been attributed to his first film, this second quotation reveals how his work was not without ambition, but sought to challenge its audience. Today this notion seems strange, but the idea that a film's intention

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Virmaux, 'Un maigre bilan', *Les Surréalistes et le Cinéma*, 38.

<sup>51</sup> Accredited to 'L.B.' (Luis Buñuel) in The Surrealist group, 'Un chien andalou', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 12, 15 December 1929 : 34. 'La Révolution Surréaliste', *Mélusine*, comp. Sophie Béhar [online] (2009) at: [http://melusine.univ-paris3.fr/Revolution\\_surrealiste/Revol\\_surr\\_12.htm](http://melusine.univ-paris3.fr/Revolution_surrealiste/Revol_surr_12.htm) accessed: 09/09/11.

<sup>52</sup> The Surrealist group, 'Manifeste Surréaliste: L'Age d'or', *Les Surréalistes et Le Cinéma*, ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 180.

could be to assault and abuse its audience was no less strange for audiences at this time. In fact, such an intention can be traced within the avant-garde from the early experiments in abstracted form by the likes of Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, right through to the modern challenges of extreme psychological violence explored by directors such as Lars Von Trier and Gaspar Noé. In each of these cases, shock and disruption are used to pursue new perspectives on reality, something which interested the Surrealists and particularly Antonin Artaud, and something demonstrated memorably by the slicing of the eyeball in the prologue to *Un chien andalou*.

Such violent disregard for society's morals in film is easily denounced as mere provocation. Following its première, *L'Age d'or* was banned from cinema screens for almost 50 years and so perhaps we can judge this to be the indicator of success after all. However, the question remains as to whether or not such provocation was truly a Surrealist goal. André Breton may have described the simplest Surrealist act as 'revolvers aux poings, à descendre dans la rue et à tirer au hasard, tant qu'on peut, dans la foule',<sup>53</sup> but to interpret this as a call for violent atrocities is to overlook Breton's implication that Surrealism has no focus, no method to its madness. In fact, morality had no place in Surrealism as long as it had no place in dreams – the *Révolution Surréaliste* states clearly: 'On vit, on meurt. Quelle est la part de la volonté en tout cela ? Il semble qu'on se tue comme on rêve.'<sup>54</sup> This sort of amoral defiance was exactly what Antonin Artaud saw as valuable in cinema and, as I shall illuminate in the next chapter, where it really held its power. The experience of the cinema was seen by the Surrealists as an opportunity less to be witness to film than to be changed by it. Louis Aragon's optimism for such a cinema was evident:

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<sup>53</sup> Breton, *OC: I*, 783.

<sup>54</sup> The Surrealist group, 'Enquête', *La Révolution surréaliste*, 1, 1st December 1924 : 2. 'La Révolution Surréaliste', *Mélusine*, comp. Sophie Béhar [online] (2009) at: [http://melusine.univ-paris3.fr/Revolutions\\_surrealiste/Revol\\_surr\\_1.htm](http://melusine.univ-paris3.fr/Revolutions_surrealiste/Revol_surr_1.htm) accessed: 15/09/11.

Don't be afraid to offend the public who have indulged you up to now. I know those to whom this task falls must expect incomprehension, scorn, hatred. But that should not put them off. What a beautiful thing a film barracked by the crowd is! I have only ever heard the public *laugh* at the cinema. It is time someone slapped the public's face to see if it has blood under its skin.<sup>55</sup>

Hence it is possible to expect a defining characteristic of a Surrealist cinema to be its ability to deny assumptions and to challenge expectations. The real purpose of such a cinema would not be to satisfy categorisation but to break down the moral barriers that an audience brought with them to the auditorium. In this sense, the Surrealist success of *L'Age d'or* was not the fact that it was banned, but the outrage that it achieved and that led to it being withdrawn from distribution. The outpouring of hatred for the film was so violent that, as Steven Kovacs reports, it was denounced by the press as 'bolshevik excrement', 'poisoning' and 'Satanic',<sup>56</sup> but this only fuelled the Surrealists' belief that it had exposed 'a society in decomposition which tries to survive by using preachers and policemen as their only means of support'.<sup>57</sup> Such political motivation would attract many of the Surrealists to Communism, but it was also an integral part of what Surrealism itself was designed to achieve. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis describes how this approach to film 'used structures of aggression to engage a reordering of perceptions of the viewer, and with that the subsequent questioning of established systems of meaning'.<sup>58</sup> The Surrealist perspective on film was governed by the fundamental understanding that what happened on screen was not real, and yet it seemed real. This simple illusion endowed the screen with fantastic potential to subvert that which the audience perceived as real by invoking as strong a reaction as possible, be that confusion, disgust, humour, or anger. The irony of any such reaction was that it would only ever be in response to fictional events – no woman ever has her eye cut in half, no man ever guns down his son with a rifle.

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<sup>55</sup> Louis Aragon, 'On Décor', *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), 59 (emphasis is the author's).

<sup>56</sup> All Kovacs, 240.

<sup>57</sup> Kovacs, 241.

<sup>58</sup> Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'The Image and the Spark: Dulac and Artaud Reviewed' *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987), 115.

This challenge to society's automatic responses was a function of cinema that the Surrealists praised as capable of unlocking the unconscious. In a sense, what distinguished their view of cinema from the contemporary avant-garde was a celebration of the effect of not knowing. A perfect illustration of this is the British Board of Film Censors' reaction to *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, which they deemed in 1927 to be 'so cryptic as to be almost meaningless. If there is a meaning it is doubtless objectionable.'<sup>59</sup> Aside from the apparent snobbery, the fact that the perceived lack of meaning could offend rather than simply irritate is revealing of how Surrealist film sought to affect its audience. The latent danger in *La Coquille* was that it might expose or inspire ideas which were as yet inconceivable. In this sense, any film which might have the same effect was celebrated by the Surrealists. As has been well-documented, their passion for the most popular Hollywood productions seems to defy taste, and yet it was precisely for these films' ability to grab the attention of the masses that the Surrealists took an interest.<sup>60</sup> Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes makes the point clearly when he asserts that Surrealism is most affectively employed 'dans des films d'envergure dont l'apparence elle-même n'a rien d'insolite.'<sup>61</sup> Of these films, no genre was off-limit. The Surrealist sense of the 'la merveille'<sup>62</sup> which they pursued in cinema could be found 'caché[e] [...] sous les apparences burlesques, comiques ou horrifiantes dont la foule fait ses délices.'<sup>63</sup> Perhaps it was the fun of spotting examples of such hidden beauty, or perhaps it was merely the fun of the movies, but the Surrealist passion for the cinema cannot be denied. Its capacity to transport the audience to a new plane of thought was powerful enough to warrant its exploration by the artistic avant-garde, and yet they took their seats as members of that same audience.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Kovacs, 164.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, J. H. Matthews, 'Surrealism and the Commercial Cinema', *Surrealism and Film* (University of Michigan Press, 1971), 11-50.

<sup>61</sup> Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, 'Printemps, Surréalisme et Cinéma' *Les Surréalistes et le Cinéma*, ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux (Paris : Seghers, 1976), 297.

<sup>62</sup> André Breton, *Œuvres Complètes, T. III*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 902.

<sup>63</sup> Ribemont-Dessaignes, 296.

The rapidly growing cinema of the 1920s provided an opportunity for anyone who might harness its persuasive powers to reach a vast number of people. At its most potent, the cinema could even affect people on a subconscious level, crossing the strange divide between the screen and the audience to become at once real and unreal. In this respect the cinema might perform the same function as that of a dream. Certain of this idea, Antonin Artaud asserts: 'si le cinéma n'est pas fait pour traduire les rêves ou tout ce qui dans la vie éveillée s'apparente au domaine des rêves, le cinéma n'existe pas.'<sup>64</sup> However, it was not the cinema's place to replicate a dream or to present the dreams of someone else, but to translate the experience of dreaming to the screen, such that cinema became the dream. The important connection between dream and film is one which determined the aesthetic of Surrealist film to a large extent,<sup>65</sup> but it also determined the narrative logic (of lack thereof) of those films. Man Ray covered his lens in gelatine to create the strange blurry images of *L'Etoile de mer* which instantly evoke the qualities of a dream or fantasy, yet it is the mysterious interaction of characters and objects which suggest a hidden significance. Just as in a dream, the images are at once memorable and difficult to discern or interpret. In fact it is this resistance to waking logic that defines the Surrealist idea of film – it was an alternative to the ordered processes of structured society. Indeed, Luis Buñuel tells us that the images of *Un chien andalou* were taken from his own dreams and chosen specifically for their resistance to interpretation.<sup>66</sup> The fact that they might be interpreted is significant too: if we treat the images as if they were those of a dream, then our connection with the dream world is compounded further. The dream is no longer confined to our sleeping minds, but projected in full view. Buñuel's treatment of the dream in film is a study in itself, but it is representative of a Surrealist perspective on cinema as a gateway to the interior landscapes

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<sup>64</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes, T. III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 81.

<sup>65</sup> As Linda Williams recognises; 14.

<sup>66</sup> Buñuel, 125.

of its audience's minds. Hence Buñuel's film was not considered an end in itself, but a means by which the Surrealists might 'ouvrir toutes les portes à l'irrationnel.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Buñuel, 125.

## Conclusions

The most important element in Surrealist film then remains how it is seen. My contention is that while this most apparently applies to the concepts of objectification and watching – by way of the camera’s eye – it also applies to our expectations of how it might be defined. In the case of *Un chien andalou*, we are encouraged from the start to see things with ‘a new eye’<sup>68</sup>. The film’s remaining action continues in haphazard fashion, showcasing elements of comedy, sexual fantasy, androgyny, violence, love, tragedy, travel, life and death. However, while the film seems to have a lot to say, the most important theme which emerges from the mire is the incomprehensibility of all life when it is put together in this way. Surrealist film’s prestige therefore is mocked before it has even been established, and, like the depiction of Rome being built of the soiled ground in *L’Age d’or*, the achievements of the Surrealists in film are exposed as being built on a muddy foundation. Instead, the value of the cinema was in the experience of watching, its inspiration was derived on a personal basis. Even for its adherents, the cinema of the Surrealists existed solely ‘de l’écran à moi.’<sup>69</sup> J. H. Matthews’ belief that Surrealist desires for film were realised is based only on the understanding that one is willing to seek out Surrealism in unlikely places.<sup>70</sup> Such an approach however relies upon a certain degree of sympathy for Surrealism not just from its audience but from its film-makers. As with the case of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, separating the personal projects from those of the Surrealist collective is not a straightforward task, and is not something which should be underestimated. The reality of the limited remit of ‘Surrealist film’ is a stark reminder that the convergence of Surrealism and film is something that not everyone will consider worthwhile pondering. After all, Breton’s list of ‘films surréalistes’ was written retrospectively, and one wonders what the purpose of such a debateable list might have been.

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<sup>68</sup> Philippe Soupault quoted in Matthews, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Kyrou, 328.

<sup>70</sup> Matthews, 18.

The alternative is to relinquish oneself to an unconscious response. As 'one of the determining elements of Surrealism'<sup>71</sup>, such a policy returns the agency to the Surrealists whose passion for cinema was based upon its ability to disrupt our moral conditioning. While Jean Goudal's belief in the cinema carried him into the auditorium, the poetry which the Surrealists really sought was always to be found by accident. Robert Desnos' optimism is apparent when he says:

Ce que nous demandons au cinéma, c'est l'impossible, c'est l'inattendu, le rêve, la surprise, le lyrisme qui effacent les bassesses dans les âmes et les précipitent enthousiastes aux barricades et dans les aventures; ce que nous demandons au cinéma c'est ce que l'amour et la vie nous refusent, c'est le mystère, c'est le miracle.<sup>72</sup>

Far from being an ill-conceived project, the cinema of the Surrealists existed on a different plane to that of their contemporaries in the avant-garde. Their passion for the cinema, as exemplified by Desnos, did not always take the form of a concerted effort to produce films, nor even necessarily to watch them, but to take something from them. The cinema was not so much something to create as something to make use of; it was a 'window' or 'threshold'<sup>73</sup> to enlightenment. Where the Surrealists did attempt to confine their ideas to celluloid, they were faced with the inevitable contradictions of trying to create the unknowable, the personal and the inchoate. The challenge was thus to develop a cinema which might function in the imagination of its audience as much as on screen.

As I have discussed in this chapter, discerning a precise representation of Surrealism in film may be an impossible task, but that does not take away its power or its significance for cinema. In the following two chapters I will expand upon how a 'Surrealist cinema' might yet be imagined, starting with the case study of an individual who conceived of cinema in an original way that might support such a theory. The Surrealist relationship with cinema may

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<sup>71</sup> Richardson, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Desnos, 'Mystères du Cinéma' (1927) *Les Rayons et les Ombres: Cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 96.

<sup>73</sup> For both, see Wendy Everett, 'Screen as threshold: the disorientating topographies of surrealist film', *Screen*, 39:2 (1998), 141-152.

be marked by a sense of loss, but by providing examples of how this loss was articulated in the work of Antonin Artaud and the literary avant-garde of the late 1920s, I will present the argument that a new form of cinema was in fact achieved.

## Chapter Two: Antonin Artaud and the Cinema

The contribution of Antonin Artaud to our understanding of cinema in the context of Surrealism is significant, not just in terms of his writings on the subject but in the way that his complex relationship with the screen can illuminate some of the key issues at hand. This said, Artaud's example is hardly indicative of the Surrealist group as a whole – whatever that might be – and in fact his fierce individualism represents a conscious division between his ideas and those of others. His expulsion from Breton's original Surrealist group at the end of 1926 came before *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, before *Un chien andalou*, before the talkie era, and before the majority of Artaud's scenarios and film writings. Artaud's association with the cinema also reached beyond the theoretical level to a relatively successful career as a screen actor lasting around 20 years and including memorable performances in such masterpieces as Carl Theodore Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and Abel Gance's *Napoléon Bonaparte* (1935). On screen Artaud had an undeniable presence, but off screen his position within film history, and certainly its theory, is too often neglected. He is often regarded as the initiator of surrealist cinema but I would argue that this is not a label which fits comfortably with Artaud's wider ambitions for his film work. Besides, I have already discussed how the existence of such an œuvre as 'Surrealist cinema' is highly debateable. Specifically, the connection between *La Coquille* and the more universally recognised Surrealist films which followed it is based upon themes, ideas and individuals rather than an overarching rhetoric or theory-base, and, coupled with Artaud's excluded status, its description as a Surrealist work at all is tenuous. This is a subject I will revisit later in this thesis.

As much as 'Artaud envisaged a Surrealist cinema without the Surrealists',<sup>74</sup> his own particular brand of cinema would share something in common with the rest of his work: it was essentially envisaged as a profoundly personal project. His work as an actor, a theorist and an artist would dovetail to conceive of a single statement on the act of creative

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<sup>74</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (Faber and Faber, 1993), 31.

expression. The role of the screen in this model ought to be considered of special significance because it presented Artaud with an opportunity for a kind of reflection in very real terms, his likeness and actions repeated endlessly before a willing audience long after his death. My choice of the word 'screen' here is deliberate, offering contrasting connotations of both a blank canvas and something used to disguise reality. A further point of interest is the dynamic between Artaud the exhibitionist and Artaud the cynic, and this is something I will be exploring. The dilemma of where the cinema ought to fit into a study of Artaud's work, and how his relationship with the screen might illuminate his general philosophy, is what this chapter will confront. The simple problem of the creation of art vs. its reception is one that must include the cinema, whether or not it can be accepted as an art, above all precisely *because* of this doubt. My reasoning follows that the failure of existing literature to examine Artaud's relationship with film closely is also a failure to fully explore the nature of his dissociation with the Surrealists first, accepted artistic society second, and finally canonical film studies today.

## Studying Artaud and Cinema

The general exclusion of Artaud from the canon of film criticism is not a wholly unjustified one. Overall, his writings on the cinema account for a single volume of a collected works which exceeds 25 volumes in the French language, and much of them are correspondence rather than polemic. Elsewhere there are a small number of short essays including 'Le cinéma et l'Abstraction',<sup>75</sup> 'Sorcellerie et Cinéma'<sup>76</sup> and 'La Vieillesse précoce du Cinéma'<sup>77</sup> which constitute the sum of Artaud's discussion of the merits and, inevitably, the restrictions of the medium. Aside from these interesting diversions into what is evidently not one of his primary concerns, Artaud's real contribution to film studies are the seven completed film scenarios which begin the volume. While I have suggested that Artaud ought not to be considered as important a part of the development of the theory of film as of the philosophy of artistic practice in general, it is in these scenarios that we find an enlightening document on how visuality in the cinema might be represented in literary form. The debate on whether or not the film scenario as a genre might be considered cinematic in itself is something else which deserves greater attention; hence this will be the subject of the chapter following this one. Importantly, the original scenario for *La Coquille et le Clergyman* is included in the collection, providing a valuable opportunity for comparison both with Germaine Dulac's film and with Artaud's other scenarios.

Work on the specific subject of Artaud and film is in short supply, perhaps due to the limited primary source material on offer for study. Artaud's writings do include references to films made by his contemporaries, including Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang du poète* [sic] (1930) and Luis Buñuel's *L'Age d'or* (1930),<sup>78</sup> his own film acting career,<sup>79</sup> and the films in which he had

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<sup>75</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 75. All subsequent quotations are from the same edition, which will henceforth be abbreviated to *OC: III*.

<sup>76</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 79.

<sup>77</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 95.

<sup>78</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 270.

<sup>79</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 108.

hoped to play a bigger part, namely Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (1928)<sup>80</sup> and of course Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1928). He also makes brief reference to the films of Malec, Chaplin<sup>81</sup> and the Marx brothers,<sup>82</sup> and admits a certain admiration for German cinema.<sup>83</sup> With these exceptions, Artaud displays no real developed interest in contemporary film, despite hinting at a working knowledge of its financial and commercial realities<sup>84</sup> and ultimately this will have discouraged scholars from taking his engagement with it seriously.

I would argue that Artaud's consideration of the cinema was never anything but serious, and his scenarios provide sufficient proof of that. Indeed, Mary Helen Kolisnyk's essay<sup>85</sup> on the effect of doubling in *La Coquille et le Clergyman* provides sufficient reason to believe that film held the potential to be more than a new medium for Artaud to work in: it could be a method of extending his serious programme of a theatre of cruelty. This seriousness is well-understood by Francis Vanoye, who explores the possibility of a 'cinema of cruelty' in Edward Scheer's *Antonin Artaud: a Critical Reader*,<sup>86</sup> although such a project comes up against inevitable and unassailable obstacles. To apply Artaud's conception of cruelty to the screen wholesale is simply to misunderstand how it works. The very immediate and visceral nature of the theatre, where the live performance forces an instant association of the audience with the actors on stage, cannot be replicated by screening a recorded performance. Furthermore, Artaud's distrust of the 'sentiments décoratifs et vains, d'activités sans but, uniquement vouées à l'agrément et au pittoresque'<sup>87</sup> which had corrupted contemporary theatre meant that to present a performance via a shiny, modern projector

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<sup>80</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 134.

<sup>81</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 23.

<sup>82</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. IV*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 165. All subsequent quotations are from the same edition, which will henceforth be abbreviated to *OC: IV*.

<sup>83</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 112.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Artaud's letters to Mme. Yvonne Allendy on the subject of producing his scenario 'Le Maître de Ballantrae'. Artaud, *OC: III*, 162-173.

<sup>85</sup> Mary Helen Kolisnyk, 'Surrealism, Surrepetition: Artaud's Doubles' *October*, 64, Spring 1993, 78-90.

<sup>86</sup> Francis Vanoye, 'Cinemas of cruelty?', trans. Edward Scheer *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, ed. Edward Scheer (London: Routledge, 2004), 178-183.

<sup>87</sup> Artaud, *OC: IV*, 138.

would risk diluting his dramatic vision. The conflict between Dulac and Artaud over the production of *La Coquille et le Clergyman* is evidence that authorship too was of paramount importance to Artaud's work, preventing cruelty from ever really being considered a legitimate possibility in anyone but Artaud's own hands. This is a fact that Vanoye is hesitant to admit, but rightly acknowledges: 'we have to assume an element of betrayal in evoking the possibility of a cinema of cruelty, unless it becomes a featureless generic category'.<sup>88</sup> Hence the findings of Vanoye's study prove interesting but ultimately academic.

*La Coquille*, as the only tangible product of Artaud's flirtation with film, draws the majority of the scholarly attention in this field. The aforementioned work by Alain Virmaux,<sup>89</sup> Paul Hammond,<sup>90</sup> Steven Kovacs,<sup>91</sup> Linda Williams<sup>92</sup> and Inez Hedges<sup>93</sup> provides valuable material on the subject of film work by the surrealists that includes an evaluation of Artaud's role. The disruption at the first screening of *La Coquille* at the Studio d'Ursulines in Paris in the February of 1928 produced a notorious event where an unruly audience – which included Breton, Aragon and many other Surrealists – cemented the reputation of the film as an important one in the history of Surrealism. Four years later, Artaud would claim *La Coquille* as the very first Surrealist film, from which all later examples had stemmed.<sup>94</sup> His inclusion in the study of the subject of Surrealist-made film is therefore not only justified, but central to the problem of discerning a Surrealist cinema, at least by his own estimation – one must not forget that Artaud had been officially expelled from the surrealist group by this time. As an individual, the extent to which his vision corresponded with that of Germaine Dulac

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<sup>88</sup> Vanoye, 180.

<sup>89</sup> See: Alain Virmaux, 'Artaud and Film', trans. Simone Sanzenbach *The Tulane Drama Review*, 11:1, Autumn 1966, 154-165, and 'La tentation du cinéma chez les poètes au temps du surréalisme, d'Artaud à Supervielle', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, 20:20, 1968, 257-274.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Hammond, ed. *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991).

<sup>91</sup> Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of the Surrealist Cinema* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980).

<sup>92</sup> Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (University of Illinois, 1981).

<sup>93</sup> Inez Hedges, *Languages of Revolt: Dada and surrealist literature and film* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1983).

<sup>94</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 270.

has been well-evaluated by Naomi Greene,<sup>95</sup> Sandy Flitterman-Lewis<sup>96</sup> and other aforementioned scholars, coming to the common conclusion that Artaud's limited involvement with the film-making process is not an indication of a lack of ability or faith on his part. The contest for authorship of *La Coquille* also benefits from attention here. For Greene, the primary issue was a 'fundamental difference between Artaud's esthetic of cruelty (or the surrealist desire to shock) and the estheticizing tendency of Dulac',<sup>97</sup> not an interest in film.

Artaud's direct involvement with the cinema may then have been restricted to a small number of essays and scenarios, but I will argue that the reason for this is not so much rooted in a distaste for cinema as it was in a resistance to representational form in general. However, the current work on Artaud generally covers already well-trodden ground, rightly taking the themes of Artaud's theatrical legacy, his relationship with Surrealism and his philosophical musings as priority over his influence in film. The exception to this rule is where the theme of Surrealism in cinema has arisen, where Artaud is difficult to ignore. Ramona Fotiade has written on Artaud's work in scenarios<sup>98</sup> and Stephen Barber on his inter-medial experimentation,<sup>99</sup> but elsewhere more than a passing reference to *La Coquille* or its writer is surprisingly rare, even where the film is accepted as one of the first Surrealist films. A focus on individuals such as Dalí or Buñuel may be an easier option, but a tendency to expand upon the spread of Surrealist film at an international level – in the cases of Michael Richardson,<sup>100</sup> Graeme Harper<sup>101</sup> and Neil Coombs<sup>102</sup> – is no more justified than a study devoted to Robert Desnos or Jean Vigo. This is not to say that the work which follows this trend is without merit, and certainly surrealist influence resounds today beyond western-Europe, but their proximity to golden-age Surrealism and its manifestos is less than equal to

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<sup>95</sup> Naomi Greene, 'Artaud and Film: A Reconsideration' *Cinema Journal*, 23:4, Summer 1984, 28-40.

<sup>96</sup> Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'The Image and the Spark: Dulac and Artaud Reviewed', *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987), 112.

<sup>97</sup> Greene, 35.

<sup>98</sup> Ramona Fotiade, 'The Untamed eye: surrealism and film theory' *Screen*, 36:4, 1995, 394-407.

<sup>99</sup> Stephen Barber, *The Screaming Body: Antonin Artaud – Film Projects, Drawings and Sound Recordings* (University of California: Creation, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (New York: Berg, 2006).

<sup>101</sup> Graeme Harper and Rob Stone eds. *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film* (London: Wallflower, 2007).

<sup>102</sup> Neil Coombs, *Studying Surrealist and Fantasy Cinema* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2008).

that of some of the more peripheral figures of the 1920s and 1930s. Ultimately, the centrality of *La Coquille* and the importance of Artaud in Breton's original Surrealist group leave his work somewhat under-represented in the most recent resurgence of interest in the subject of Surrealism in film.

## Cruelty and the cinema

The starting point for this study must be the project that preceded and outlasted Antonin Artaud's engagement with film: his theatre. The production of an alternative reality on stage was for Artaud a means of regenerating life and liberating the world from society's conventions. The language of theatre could be based purely upon images and actions, sounds and gestures, abandoning for a short time the world in which it was forced to perform. The actor then became more than a clown or impersonator and took on the role of the alchemist – using what already existed to produce entirely original material. It must be understood therefore that Artaud's theatre was much less for entertainment than it was an important process of dispensing with existing language and society for the pursuit of meaning in its rawest, truest state. Artaud's method for achieving such an abstract goal was 'cruelty'. This is not cruelty in the sense that we understand it, but a forced purging of base human emotion and reflex. The preamble to one of his film scenarios, *La Révolte du boucher*, explains what this meant: 'érotisme, cruauté, gout de sang, recherche de la violence, obsession de l'horrible, dissolution des valeurs morales, hypocrisie sociale, mensonges, faux témoignage, perversité, etc., etc.'<sup>103</sup> A denial of the accepted moral obligations of the day allowed Artaud to conceive of cruelty less as an act against a fellow human being and more as a progressive treatment of catharsis. Shock was seen as a symptom of a mind which had been liberated from society's constructions. For this reason, for Artaud the illusion of the cinema was its most important facet – if an audience was prepared to sit and spectate a crime, then they must be forced to realize their complicity with its most horrible consequences. As much as the purpose of cruelty was to wrench base reactions from its audience, Jacques Derrida makes clear that this must not be at the cost of alienating the audience: 'Alienation only consecrates... the non-participation of spectators... in the creative act, in the irruptive force fissuring the space of the stage'.<sup>104</sup> It is therefore

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<sup>103</sup> Artaud, *OC:III*, 46

<sup>104</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The theatre of cruelty and the closure of representation' *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, ed. Edward Scheer (London: Routledge, 2004), 40.

only the close association of the audience with the acts of violence, hypocrisy, etc. that creates the necessary shock. In theatre, the consequences of such an affective programme were always at risk of being undermined by the insistence of reality, of the simple truth that before the audience were mere actors playing parts. Film retained the power to bypass such logic, presenting a world so distant from reality that it could easily be in another time, space or dimension. Artaud writes, 'cette sorte de puissance virtuelle des images va chercher dans le fond de l'esprit des possibilités à ce jour inutilisées'.<sup>105</sup> This made cinema a potentially powerful weapon that could well serve Artaud's subversive project.

Cruelty in itself, however, is a different matter. In Artaud's words, cruelty can be defined as 'tout ce qui agit'.<sup>106</sup> This very simplified idea can easily be expanded to include what have become some of the most common dramatic devices: shock, anticipation, disgust, fear, anger, or the evocation of these emotions in the audience. The ability to interrupt the disbelief of the audience is not restricted to the stage-play, but it is Artaud's central concern that the audience should be deeply affected in the most personal manner by what is essentially a false version of reality. This assault confronts the very limits of both what the audience must choose to withstand, and what the theatre is capable of. Action therefore becomes in essence the ability to affect a spectator; the means of doing so remains a question to be answered.

Perhaps the impression one gets is that Artaud is a little cruel in the original sense, but his philosophy of theatre is only an extension of the *Surrealist* desire to extend the alternative reality of the uninhibited dream-world into our construction of society. Artaud tells us that his theatre is capable of freeing 'en lui cette liberté magique du songe, qu'il ne peut reconnaître qu'empreinte de terreur et de cruauté'<sup>107</sup> but it could be argued that this technique is employed liberally throughout current cinema. Aside from the gory and violent films which show disregard for conventional morality, narrative logic, permanence or the audience's

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<sup>105</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 80.

<sup>106</sup> Artaud, *OC: IV*, 102

<sup>107</sup> Artaud, *OC: IV*, 103.

expectations in any respect might feature an element of Artaudian cruelty – the long list of such films compiled by Francis Vanoye<sup>108</sup> is testament to this suggestion. However, Vanoye's investigation into a 'cinema of cruelty' is checked by the concession that, to an extent, the very nature of cinema goes against what Artaud hoped to achieve with theatre. While a certain disregard for evil or violence could be identified as Artaudian, more important to the achievement of cruelty is a desire in the filmmaker to affect an audience to the point of sub-conscious reaction, superseding that of the Ego. In this sense, the *jouissance*<sup>109</sup> or satisfaction achieved comes from an appeal by the film to immorality or amorality, separate from our society-influenced responses. For Vanoye, one must look for an 'excess of dream, of crime, of savagery, of terror, of energy, of nothingness, unbounded'.<sup>110</sup> Such excess necessarily pushes the frontiers of experimental cinema to their absolute limits, but it must be recognised that this will still not achieve the same level of intensity as a live performance. As an example, no matter how brutal or realistic it might appear blood on screen will never be as arresting as blood on stage. Furthermore, these characteristics hardly draw a distinct line between what are and what are not examples of Artaudian cruelty in film, and when we consider the logistical reality of modern film-making, the achievement of such abstract poetry seems like a rather vague target to aim for.

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<sup>108</sup> Vanoye, 182.

<sup>109</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris : Seuil, 1973).

<sup>110</sup> Vanoye, 181.

## Artaud's language

As an actor, Antonin Artaud was a devoted but flawed performer. Remarkable for his intense style, he was judged to be wholly inappropriate for many of the film roles for which he was considered. Hence, Artaud was cast in peripheral parts. Nevertheless, in films such as Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Argent* (1928) or G. W. Pabst's *L'Opéra de Quat'Sous* (1931) he remained a ghostly presence, notable for providing a foreboding gothic tone. In this capacity, Artaud's involvement in the processes of cinema was limited by his own ability rather than a reluctance to accept it as a viable medium. However, as an actor Artaud perceived his role as far greater than that to which he was restricted on screen. His project was to deconstruct traditional conceptions of representation, not just in theatre, but in writing, in poetry and in expression of all kinds.

The paucity of the total of Artaud's writing on film represents as appropriately as anything what Stephen Barber calls 'the void'<sup>111</sup> in Artaud's work. It is Artaud's vision of representation which essentially inhibits the image from being truly embodied on screen, canvas, or any other backdrop, creating an object of loss. Instead, Artaud sought to bypass language in its signifying sense altogether, eliminating the perceived loss which affects all representative form, and reducing the drama to its most physical, rudimentary origins. In order to do this, meaning would be conveyed by a new kind of purely 'material language' and 'express everything through the body, through gesture and movement'.<sup>112</sup> While there is no obstacle to the actors' performances being regarded from the perspective of a cinema auditorium rather than from a theatre stall, the burgeoning film industry of the late 1920s was quickly developing its own formalized codes and practices, which formed a new language for Artaud to break down, this time based on composition, editing and mise-en-scène. In addition to the advent of synchronized sound in the movies, the language of film would become an obstacle not only to the avant-garde film-makers who saw the medium's greatest power in its ability to

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<sup>111</sup> Barber, *Blows and Bombs*, 13-43.

<sup>112</sup> Both Greene, 30.

disorient and dislocate, but to Artaud's broader programme for a theatre of immediacy and provocation. Artaud does not rule out the use of words or sounds in cinema, but only ever as part of a general onslaught of noise and image. In fact, his innovation in this respect must be recognised, where both noise and silence were carefully considered in his scenarios.<sup>113</sup> However, his strong resistance to any form of representation which relied upon association caused him to reject without hesitation the notion of appealing to people through recognised channels. In fact, he sought an experience where the audience, 'placé au milieu de l'action, est enveloppé et sillonné par elle.'<sup>114</sup> It becomes clear that Artaud's desire to rupture the ethics of Brechtian separation of performance and audience might have its limitations in live theatre, but for recorded film this would present a much greater challenge.

It is impossible to consider the propositions of Antonin Artaud for a revelatory cinema which pierces the 'écorce à la vie'<sup>115</sup> or 'le derme de la réalité'<sup>116</sup> without being reminded of one of the most abrupt and shocking of all film moments: the slicing of the eye in *Un chien andalou*. It encourages us to see, with new eyes, all that proceeds from that act of violent rupture; it is a moment both profoundly visceral and defiant; it is the *révolution surréaliste tout court*. From Artaud's perspective it also meant a denial of the corrupting mediators through which we access an idea – the images are to be received not via a lens but by cutting through our eyes directly into our brains. In 'Sorcellerie et Cinéma', Artaud tells us:

Le cinéma brut, et pris tel qu'il est, dans l'abstrait, dégage un peu de cette atmosphère de transe éminemment favorable à certaines révélations [...] Voilà pourquoi le cinéma me semble surtout fait pour exprimer les choses de la pensée, l'intérieur de la conscience, et pas tellement par le jeu des images que par quelque chose de plus impondérable qui nous les restitue avec leur matière directe, sans interpositions, sans représentations.<sup>117</sup>

Artaud's fear that actors on screen might generate sympathy or even empathy amongst their audience was merely an extension of his anxieties about theatre. The actor's role in his mind

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<sup>113</sup> Denis Hollier, 'The death of paper, part two: Artaud's sound system', *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, ed. Edward Scheer (London: Routledge, 2004), 161.

<sup>114</sup> Artaud, *OC: IV*, 115.

<sup>115</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 81.

<sup>116</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 23.

<sup>117</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 80.

was that of the poet whose work is not in one medium or another but in tumultuous expression itself. As an actor himself, Artaud was the embodiment of his theories on art and poetry. He saw his lifelong association with mental institutions as an extension of his conflict with the systems and constructions of general society, which inhibited his poetic work through language. His pursuit of expression in its simplest and most unfettered form was always overshadowed by the very words he used. The great potential of cinema for Artaud was its ability to express unorganised, unchecked images and take no responsibility for its consequences – something arguably achieved by Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou*.

Also essential to Artaud's concept was that the actor refuse to be a 'mere recording instrument',<sup>118</sup> projecting the words of others. This statement comes in direct challenge to Breton's original call for the Surrealist to adopt just such an attitude, where to be 'les sourds réceptacles'<sup>119</sup> meant allowing one's thoughts to manifest themselves with no concern for pre-constructed representational form. Artaud's challenge is evidence of his desire to create purely original material, but also an indication of his tendency to purposely separate himself from others. The difference between the two positions is not instantly apparent, both Breton and Artaud seeking to do away with the restrictive forms of accepted artistic practice. Where Artaud's perspective broke away from that of Breton's Surrealists was in his focus on dramatics as a profound method of reconstructing reality. Breton believed the creative act to be 'an impediment to the objective transcription of reality',<sup>120</sup> and fully understood Artaud's frustration, but was all too willing to embrace poetry, politics and general posturing as a means of achieving his ends. For Artaud, the stakes were far too high to be so engaged with the contemporary scene; the actor was uniquely capable of creating 'all that is not born yet, can still be born.'<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Virmaux, 'Artaud and Film', 165.

<sup>119</sup> André Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes, T.I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 330.

<sup>120</sup> Malcolm Turvey, *The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-Garde Film of the 1920s* (MIT Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>121</sup> Virmaux, 'Artaud and Film', 165.

With the consequences of the artist's actions being so serious, the medial response to creative expression was secondary to the action itself. The position Artaud took with regard to his work was of a deeply personal nature, such that we can interpret his treatment of theatre or cinema or drama in general as part of a greater struggle with the limitations imposed upon the artist. With this in mind, where cinema ceases to be a viable means for expression is only where other media fall down: all forms of representation are subject to loss. In Artaud's mind, this loss was a cause of great suffering to the artist, literally tearing him apart. His unique interpretation of the life and work of Vincent Van Gogh found parallels in the two men's lives, depicting the 'boucher roux'<sup>122</sup> as a similarly misunderstood soul. Also referred to as the 'suicidé de la société',<sup>123</sup> Van Gogh was for Artaud the victim of a torment which affects all artists whose available media fail to truly represent their ideas. Indeed, according to Artaud the mental condition from which Van Gogh suffered, and upon which historians have mused since the artist's death, was representation itself, not madness. In painting Van Gogh found a means of expression, and yet in recording that expression on canvas it was taken from him; the moment of pure creation had passed and with it the truth of that action. The brutality of such a separation was real too: this was how Artaud explained Van Gogh's mutilation of his own ear. Importantly, the interpretation presents painting in a similar sense to cinema in that its achievements are undermined by recording and repetition, and the inevitable loss is unbearable. For Derrida, this would result in only one outcome:

This is how things appear: theatrical representation is finite, and leaves behind it, behind its actual presence, no trace, no object to carry it off. It is neither a book nor a work [nor a painting, nor a film], but an energy, and in this sense it is the *only* art of life.<sup>124</sup>

The prodigious poetic ambition of Artaud was mirrored by the Surrealists' desire to see film break down established codes and expectations, but they were to reach similar conclusions. Alain Virmaux, as a scholar of the Surrealist engagement with cinema, documents how the

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<sup>122</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. XIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 59. All subsequent quotations are from the same edition, which will henceforth be abbreviated to *OC: XIII*.

<sup>123</sup> Artaud, *OC: XIII*, 23.

<sup>124</sup> Derrida, 43 (the emphasis and insert are mine).

onset of the talkie age of cinema represented a poetic failure to fully realise the magic of silent film, where the unfulfilled optimism for the medium compounded the sense of regret amongst poets.<sup>125</sup> The pain felt in dealing with this Freudian 'lost object' is expressed in a general *amertume*<sup>126</sup>, or bitterness, in Breton and the Surrealists towards the cinema, in mourning what might have been. In his article 'La Vieillesse précoce du Cinéma', Artaud denounces contemporary cinema as commercial folly, while romanticising the 'poésie inconsciente et spontanée des images'<sup>127</sup> which existed before sound. On a particularly sour note he says: 'La poésie donc qui ne peut se dégager de tout cela n'est qu'une poésie éventuelle, la poésie de ce qui pourrait être'.<sup>128</sup>

The emphasis here on modernism is apparent; potential poetry is far from satisfactory and all must serve the needs of the modern man. As such, cinema fell into the trap of delivering only what the public wanted, not what it *needed*, thus condemning poetic achievement to serving the whims of others. Artaud's egoism, as represented by this turn away from cinema, prevented him from readily accepting the canonisation of his work - surely the dilemma which faces all artists. Even his association with the work of celebrated directors became a source of regret for him, announcing of cinema in 1932: 'On n'y peut travailler sans honte'.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Surrealism's attractions were too open to the masses, and indeed the Surrealists' association with the Communist party is testament to this commitment. Artaud's resistance was fuelled by the insistence that his vision alone remained pure: 'Je place au-dessus de toute nécessité réelle les exigences logiques de ma propre réalité [...] Il n'y a pas de discipline à laquelle je me sente forcé de soumettre'.<sup>130</sup> The revolution therefore, if there was to be one, would have to be one which satisfied and convinced him above all else.

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<sup>125</sup> See Virmaux, 'La Tentation du cinéma'.

<sup>126</sup> Alain and Odette Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le Cinéma* (Paris : Seghers, 1976), 8.

<sup>127</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 98.

<sup>128</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 99.

<sup>129</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 302.

<sup>130</sup> Antonin Artaud *Oeuvres Complètes, T. I* (Paris : Gallimard, 1956), 289. All subsequent quotations are from the same edition, which will henceforth be abbreviated to *OC: I*.

Everything else was a mere 'bluff Surréaliste'.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps the necessarily collaborative nature of film-making was beyond what such a fierce individualist could stand.

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<sup>131</sup> Artaud, *OC: I*, 289.

## ***La Coquille et le Clergyman***

Our understanding of to whom exactly Antonin Artaud referred when he spoke of serving the modern man<sup>132</sup> becomes apparent: not the proletariat, not the public, not an audience, but himself. His denunciation of the cinema carries the slight suggestion that cinema has let us, or him, down. Certainly it is true that cinema failed to live up to his expectations. Having written a number of film scenarios demonstrating the same characteristics as his theatre – the weight of destiny, poetic suffering, and violent challenge to the audience – it was only *La Coquille et le Clergyman* that ever made it into production. For someone with so clear an idea of what he wanted to achieve with cinema, Artaud's disappointment must have been pronounced for him to have rejected it so completely. Before such a time, he wrote: 'Quand la saveur de l'art se sera alliée en proportion suffisante à l'ingrédient psychique qu'il détient, il laissera loin derrière le théâtre que nous reléguerons à l'armoire aux souvenirs.'<sup>133</sup> The confidence with which Artaud denounced theatre suggests a faith in a conception of cinema 'plus excitant que le phosphore, plus captivant que l'amour',<sup>134</sup> but also a belief that the cinema could fully represent his ideas.

The filming of his scenario *La Coquille et le Clergyman* was a task entrusted to prominent avant-garde director Germaine Dulac, whose theoretical development of Impressionist techniques in cinema would foreground the 'inner life made perceptible by images.'<sup>135</sup> This was, after all, the 'entire art of cinema'.<sup>136</sup> Her work produced by popular account the very first Surrealist film, predating the more famous *Un chien andalou* by a year. The interior landscapes of *La Coquille* are instantly recognisable as those of the mind of its protagonist: dark, unformed, labyrinthine. Within them are played out scenes of Buñuellian *amour fou* –

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<sup>132</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 99.

<sup>133</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 74.

<sup>134</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 73.

<sup>135</sup> Germaine Dulac, 'The Expressive Techniques of the Cinema' (1924), trans. Stuart Liebman *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939. Volume I: 1907-1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton University Press, 1988), 310.

<sup>136</sup> Dulac, 310.

the foremost motivator of Surrealist expression; that which 'domine de la profondeur du vent, du puits de diamant, les constructions de l'esprit et la logique de la chair'<sup>137</sup>

Initially respectful of Dulac's pedigree and attention to the power of the image, upon viewing the finished film, Artaud became fiercely opposed to his work's interpretation. His grievance was based primarily upon the suggestion that the narrative was the dream of its protagonist, a mere fantasy of hidden desires and codified images. For Artaud, to make this claim was to deny the point of the play: the pursuit of desire itself. The clergyman was not within a dream, but within the '*mécanique d'un rêve*'.<sup>138</sup> The fulfilment of his desires was not to be pursued in the secret world of sleep, but defined by its real yet elusory nature. Where a clear line was drawn between the real and the fantasy in Dulac's 1923 film *La Souriante Madame Beudet*, the world of *La Coquille* was smoky and mysterious, the lines not so clearly defined. And yet, in its completed form, Artaud's scenario ceased to be that which he had imagined – it was, quite literally, a projection of his desires onto someone else.

Contrary to the view held by many of the film's critics, and by the attendees of that first screening, one suspects that the hope Artaud held for cinema might not have been defeated by Dulac's misinterpretation of the script, but by her seizing of control from him. Reflecting the alchemical processes of the clergyman, the desire that Artaud harboured for creative freedom was frustrated by a director whose own agenda superseded his own. The supremely personal vision of the dream remained an obstacle to achieving a representation on screen which would have the same effect not only for both writer and director, but for an entire paying audience. Despite dismissing it as a temporary one, Jean Goudal clearly identified this dual problem in 1925:

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<sup>137</sup> The Surrealist Group, 'Manifeste Surréaliste: L'Age d'or', *Les Surréalistes et Le Cinéma*, ed. Virmaux, A. & O. (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 184.

<sup>138</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 77 (emphasis is the author's).

L'homme ne s'intéresse qu'à ce qui lui ressemble. Je m'intéresse à mes rêves, malgré leur incohérence, parce qu'ils viennent de moi, parce que je leur trouve une qualité particulière, tenant sans doute à ce que j'y reconnais des éléments de *ma* vie passée, mais arbitrairement assemblés. [...] Un point de départ légitime du surréalisme est cette observation que tout ce qui sort d'un cerveau, serait-ce sans formule logique, révèle inmanquablement la singularité de ce cerveau. L'homme garde sa personnalité même (et peut-être surtout) dans ses productions les plus spontanées. [...] Il est vrai que nous nous heurtons ici à une sérieuse difficulté. Dans l'état actuel du cinéma, un film n'a pas un auteur, il en a deux, trois, dix, cinquante. [...] Au cours d'une collaboration aussi multiple, l'œuvre ne risque-t-il pas de perdre cette qualité pénétrante qu'elle devait à l'individualité de l'auteur à la singularité à la conception première ?<sup>139</sup>

Having already discussed Artaud's feared of a loss of self through his work, one can understand how the experience of *La Coquille* might embody such a detachment, precisely as foreseen by Goudal. Furthermore, if Surrealist film aimed to confront its audience with 'the uncanny impression that the projected images are self-generated',<sup>140</sup> Dulac's film inevitably failed the Surrealists by restricting Artaud's involvement. The argument that Artaud achieved expression of his own artistic constraints in the film is given additional support when we consider that he also felt aggrieved not to have been cast as the clergyman himself. Certainly the parallels between the two men are not hard to see – even the woman pursued by the clergyman was played by Artaud's real-life love interest. Again, cinema proves to be an emblem of Artaud's poetic loss, where his vision is distorted by the means by which it must be realised. Whether or not the film could have been made along guidelines set out more strictly by its author, or whether Artaud might have been satisfied by any interpretation that utilised third-party input remains impossible to answer. Linda Williams' argument that Artaud's 'recourse in film arises out of the basic sense that our situation *in* language prevents us from ever in any essential way being ourselves *through* language'<sup>141</sup> has a particular resonance with regard to his own role on the production of this film. The reality of film-making presented Artaud with a choice: either he would have to make

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<sup>139</sup> Jean Goudal, 'Surréalisme et Cinéma', *Les Surréalistes et le Cinéma*, ed. Virmaux, A. and O. (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 314.

<sup>140</sup> Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'Surrealist Cinema: Politics, History and the Language of Dreams' *American Imago*, 50: 4, Winter 1993, 442.

<sup>141</sup> Williams, 31 (emphasis is the author's).

concessions to his personal vision, or he would have to abandon the language of film to those who trusted its representational powers.

However, the prevailing interest in Artaud's work is in his interrogation of the limits of the expressive capacity of language, and to this end, the failure of his cinema project is valuable in itself. The existence of two versions of *La Coquille*, one which follows Artaud's original narrative and one re-ordered 'mis-splice',<sup>142</sup> is one such peculiarity which reflects the kind of deconstruction of images and emphasis on multiplicity of meaning that characterises Artaud's assault on ordinary representation. In fact, it could be said that the result of such dissonance between writer and director, scenario and film, was to fulfil Artaud's desire for a 'large, multi-voiced performance' rather than 'a single, lyrical object'.<sup>143</sup> In his article 'Les Souffrances du «Dubbing»',<sup>144</sup> Artaud deplores how dubbing erodes the agency of the actor by re-appropriating the spoken word to a mediating translator. This insistence on the primal, elemental action of creative expression may account for why he failed to achieve requisite control of *La Coquille*. His dissociation from the production process, his absence from the film itself, the subsequent re-ordering and distribution of the film, and hence his omission from canonical studies have all contributed to creating a film with inherent and unique dualities. The reality of the film is both an ode to Surrealism and a suppression of it; a triumph of fantasy film and an exercise in manipulation. It is every bit the achievement for which Artaud strove, and yet it was taken from him. As Mary Helen Kolisnyk puts it, 'the Surrealism of *The Seashell and the Clergyman* lies in its refusal to remain itself.'<sup>145</sup> In other words, it seems that where cinema let Artaud down was in its recorded, transmuted nature, but where it succeeded was in accurately portraying the misdirection of ideas which he so impossibly sought to reify.

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<sup>142</sup> Kolisnyk, 85.

<sup>143</sup> Susan Sontag, ed. *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, (University of California Press, 1988), xxx.

<sup>144</sup> Artaud, *OC: III*, 100.

<sup>145</sup> Kolisnyk, 85.

## Conclusions

To conclude then we could suggest that a solution to Artaud's film ambition would have been the kind of autocratic auteurism which would emerge in directors of following generations,<sup>146</sup> but it is my suspicion that this would still prove an insufficient measure of control. Artaud's disappointment with cinema is indicative of much wider issues from which all artists suffer, in relation to the unavoidable contrivances of and challenges to pure personal or collective expression. Whether or not one accepts his theories on the threat representation poses to the original concept, the rupture between Artaud's intentions and his tangible filmic output is evident. Such a separation is indicative of an artist whose personal afflictions may have been the greatest obstacle to fulfilling his proposed project. On a more practical level, both the theatre and the cinema were subject to the reality of commercial sustainability and even enterprise. The influence of the theatre of cruelty as a concept has been significant, but in real terms remains 'an impossible theatre – vital for the purity of inspiration which it generated, but hopelessly vague and metaphorical in its detail'.<sup>147</sup> Where cruelty found its way into cinema was less as a result of Artaud's interest in the new medium, and more as a result of the development of visual technique. Germaine Dulac's interpretation of his scenario for *La Coquille et le Clergyman* pursued an Impressionist aesthetic, which, while deviating from Artaud's intentions, undoubtedly introduced Surrealism to the screen and inspired further exploration of the theme of desire in the work of both the Surrealists and Artaud. Aside from Surrealist sensibilities, the experience of *La Coquille* defined Artaud's difficult relationship with film, while providing us with a textured work of dualities which could be used to define Artaud's wider struggles with representation.

Artaud's adherence to alchemical reasoning attributed a spiritual and profoundly personal significance to the creative process, one which threatened to derail his projects not only in

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<sup>146</sup> Francois Truffaut's (1932-1984) insistence on the prerogative of the auteur, for example, is documented in Edward Buscombe 'Ideas of Authorship' *Theories of Authorship: a Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge, 1981), 22-33.

<sup>147</sup> Barber, *Blows and Bombs*, 44.

cinema but also in theatre and poetry. His ambition therefore demonstrates an extension of the Surrealist desire to 'exprimer [...] le fonctionnement réel de la pensée'<sup>148</sup> to a form of theatre which exhibits psychological states in as physical and visceral a sense as possible. Loss is evident here both as the subject matter of Artaud's work, and in the failed realisation of that work, but is a central theme of the Surrealist project. The attraction to alternate realities and their use in re-evaluating the processes of constructed society and its attitudes to art were crucially important both to Artaud and the Surrealists. Cinema held the potential for expressing such alternate realities and a form of poetry hitherto only suppressed by filmmakers, but ultimately it was Artaud's grounding in the potential rather than the reality of filmmaking that ruined any chance of satisfaction. For Alain Virmaux, 'Artaud's world, on the stage and on screen, seems indeed to be essentially poetic',<sup>149</sup> and my thoughts tend towards the same conclusion. While it is the theme of loss which defines Artaud's conception of cinema, in more concrete terms one could describe his theories as simply unfeasible. The utter hopelessness of Artaud's project and the fundamentally abstract vision through which it was conceived are best summed up by Linda Williams when she writes how, in all the work that he did, 'what Artaud wanted was a language that would not only express, but also – impossibly – be the flesh and blood of his thought'.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Breton, 328.

<sup>149</sup> Virmaux, *Artaud and Film*, 165.

<sup>150</sup> Williams, 20.

### Chapter Three: Surrealist Cinema on Paper

The notion of a Surrealist cinema is both open-ended, due to the vast number of films directly and indirectly indebted to the ideas of Surrealism, and foreclosed, due to the limited number of films actually produced by Surrealists. My contention in this final chapter is that our definition of a Surrealist cinema might not be restricted to these parameters, but might be extended beyond the limits of actual film stock. Where films might be argued to be Surrealist or Surrealist-inspired, or simply rather to share Surrealist sensibilities or themes is a point of discussion which could continue ad infinitum. In the interests of a more productive study, I propose to reject such debates in favour of assessing how the Surrealist idea of cinema might be better represented by its literary expression, both in review and in creative processes. As 'the powerful evocator',<sup>151</sup> film was to Louis Aragon more than something upon which to inscribe the ideas of the Surrealist group. It was something magical which deserved attention in its own right. Film was less a product than a synthesis of image, movement and experience. He tells us: 'We must open our eyes in front of the screen, we must analyse the feeling that transports us, reason it out to discover the cause of that sublimation of ourselves.'<sup>152</sup> This perspective is an original one, because it situates the work of the artist in the reception of the film rather than in its production. Hence I believe there is reason to suspect that the cinema of the Surrealists was a project not confined to producing films – something which, as we have seen, was liable to disappoint - but a project open to replicating the qualities of films through a variety of alternative, associated means. While painting or sculpture might have reproduced the visual cues of the cinema – as in the work of Dalí<sup>153</sup> or Magritte,<sup>154</sup> for example – capturing the sense of movement and shifting tones of a film required a multilayered, poetic approach.

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<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Paul Hammond, ed. *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writing on the Cinema*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), 56.

<sup>152</sup> Hammond, 56.

<sup>153</sup> See Candice Black, 'Paralyzing Fantasy: Dalí and Film', *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*, ed. Short, R. (London: Creation Books, 2003), 165-174.

The reality of working in film as a medium confronted the artists of the late 1920s with a number of obstacles, as evinced clearly by the case of Antonin Artaud. His derisory remarks towards the commercialisation of cinema towards the end of his life were founded upon the fundamental incompatibility of the elevated aspirations of an artist with the practical elements of film-making. Where Germaine Dulac succeeded with *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1928) was in the focus of her desire to produce a film which explored the capabilities of the medium; her project was that of a dedicated film innovator. In contrast, the connection between a love of cinema and artistic endeavour was less than clear for the French avant-garde artists who pondered its use. Film always came with the risk that, like Artaud, their ideas might be diluted or misdirected. Artaud wrote that *La Coquille*, 'avant d'être un film, est un effort ou une *idée*<sup>155</sup> and, following its mishandling by Dulac, he returned it to this state by publishing his own original scenario later that year for all to see in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*.<sup>156</sup> In this way the scenario proved to be the means of controlling and preserving an original sense of the film, such that it might never be lost. A follower of the work of Artaud, Benjamin Fondane, whose work also overlapped with that of the Surrealists, proposed a novel solution: the deliberately un-filmable film. Artaud's own belief that the psychological aspects of Dulac's cinema were far better suited to literature than to film<sup>157</sup> demonstrates how Fondane's call for '*scénarii [sic] intournables*' may have appealed to the artist who was distrustful of the technical medium. With their film industry in decline following the war, French film executives were less and less likely to accept the abstract ideas of imaginative writers, when their focus would necessarily be on the commercial aspect of their production.<sup>158</sup> From this perspective, writing proved to be a convenient alternative to filming; not a rejection of the cinema outright, but a less compromising form in which to channel its magic.

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<sup>154</sup> See Robert Short, 'Magritte and the Cinema', *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*, ed. Levy, S. (Keele University Press, 1997), 95-108.

<sup>155</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. III* (Paris : Gallimard, 1961) 77 (emphasis is the author's).

<sup>156</sup> Alain and Odette Virmaux, *Un genre nouveau: le ciné-roman* (Paris: Edelig, 1983), 47.

<sup>157</sup> Virmaux, 19.

<sup>158</sup> Richard Abel, 'Exploring the Discursive Field of the Surrealist Scenario Text' *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Kuënzli, R. E. (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1987), 60.

The place of writing in the discussion of Surrealist cinema is a slightly contentious point. While the Surrealists were known for their cinephilia, providing plenty of reviews of a wide variety of contemporary films, I would not argue that this constitutes a form of film project in itself. However, the creative genre of the film script/scenario is one which raises a number of questions regarding a desire for involvement or production of films which may never have been fulfilled. In this line of enquiry, one wonders whether Surrealist cinema was in fact an incomplete project or something which was somehow lost. In addition this chapter will look at how Surrealism might be represented in cinema in ways which one might not expect and explore the possibility that, rather than being relatively disengaged from cinema, the Surrealists were in fact aware of all its forms. The fact that no film could ever be made without the right backing would have inevitably prevented many would-be film-makers from taking their ideas to the screen. However, this does not mean that the written word could not make a valuable contribution to a more nuanced film project. In his essay on cine-poetics, Christophe Wall-Romana<sup>159</sup> suggests that the poets who embraced the film scenario form during this period would only have done so in the hope that those scenarios might be taken up by film studios. In this chapter, I will evaluate this suggestion by examining a number of such scenarios, as written by Surrealists, for their inherent value to the study of a Surrealist cinema. Where the work of Antonin Artaud and Benjamin Fondane challenged the very limits of representation, their contemporaries revelled in the cinema as a radical new influence on all expressive media. With this in mind, I will discuss the cinematography of the written word in order to throw new light on my central problem of discerning a Surrealist cinema.

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<sup>159</sup> Christophe Wall-Romana, 'Mallarmé's Cinepoetics: The Poem Uncoiled by the Cinématographe, 1893-98', *PMLA*, 120:1, January 2005, 128-147.

## Documenting the Surrealist Film Text

Richard Abel's article 'Exploring the Discursive Field of the Surrealist Scenario Text', which appears in Rudolf Kuenzli's collection of essays relating to Dada and Surrealist exploration of film,<sup>160</sup> provides deep and essential context to the period in which the Surrealists engaged with the film scenario form. Abel speaks with authority when he dispels some of the misconceptions that surround Surrealism and film – namely, that the Surrealists were resistant to cinema,<sup>161</sup> that the publication of film scenarios was an exclusively literary affair<sup>162</sup> and that the format was more or less an invention of the Surrealists.<sup>163</sup> These assertions are well supported by Abel's comprehensive documentation of the contemporary trends in film writing, criticism and theory in *French Cinema: the First Wave, 1915-1929*<sup>164</sup> and *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939*,<sup>165</sup> volumes 1 and 2. What Abel is not, however, is a Surrealist sympathiser, and this comes across when he distances himself creditably from the subject matter. As a historian, he is content to point out that the scenarios of Artaud, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Picabia were not 'the anomalous, autonomous objects they are still taken for'<sup>166</sup> but were heavily indebted to the work of a few innovators almost a whole decade previously. However, I consider his equally dismissive attitude to the 'un-filmable' scenarios of Fondane to be less justified, since in contextualising this as 'the most likely outcome'<sup>167</sup> he ignores Fondane's explicit intention that the scenarios *should not* be filmed, whether or not the financial climate was conducive to this result.

In researching the subject, it emerged that Abel's study dedicated to the Surrealist scenario text is in fact the only one of its kind. Furthermore, where written expression with regard to Surrealist film is given privileged status, it is often brief and epistemological. A good example

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<sup>160</sup> Rudolf E. Kuenzli, *Dada and Surrealist Film* (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1987).

<sup>161</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 60.

<sup>162</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 61.

<sup>163</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 66.

<sup>164</sup> Richard Abel, *French Cinema: the First Wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>165</sup> Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939, Volume I: 1907-1929* (Princeton University Press, 1988a) and *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939, Volume II: 1929-1939*, (Princeton University Press, 1988b).

<sup>166</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 66.

<sup>167</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 67.

is in Kuenzli's introduction,<sup>168</sup> where he recognises that 'the fluidity of Breton and Soupault's *Les Champs Magnétiques* (1920) is certainly related to the flowing images of the cinema',<sup>169</sup> and includes in his book the first publication of Robert Desnos' and Man Ray's manuscript for *L'Etoile de Mer* (1928), complete with notes, original musical notations and translation. However, it is difficult to see this appendix as little more than the token addition of what is an exclusive publication to his book, especially where Inez Hedges' notes focus more on the authorial debate than on the importance of the text itself. Moreover, Kuenzli's statement that '[the Surrealists'] own film scripts and writings on cinema rather called for a new genre of films that would reproduce the world of dreams'<sup>170</sup> is indicative of a tendency in work on the subject to overlook the agency of the texts themselves, choosing only to imagine the films they might have become. Such is the case in the various works on the relationship between Surrealism and film which I have mentioned in the previous chapters. Hence, my approach will use Benjamin Fondane's determination for a kind of cinema which operated solely through words to assess the value of a sample of Surrealist film texts with regards to how they *themselves* might represent a significant element of a Surrealist cinema. The study will incorporate how the scenarios represent Surrealist themes, how they relate to actual films, and most importantly, how far they should be regarded as valuable works of cinema, independent of completed film work.

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<sup>168</sup> Kuenzli, 1-12.

<sup>169</sup> Kuenzli, 9.

<sup>170</sup> Kuenzli, 9.

## The Poetry of Film

In December 1917, at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Paris, Guillaume Apollinaire issued a challenge to his fellow poets: embrace the cinema and find ways to make use of it. The celebrated avant-garde writer was convinced that the new medium held unprecedented potential, not just for the screen but for all modes of artistic creativity. As far as he was concerned, the 'nouveaux moyens d'expression qui ajoutent à l'art le mouvement'<sup>171</sup> had redrawn the lines of what the artist could achieve. It is important to note that, from his perspective, it was not that movement itself *was* the art, but that movement *had been added* to art. This distinction demonstrates how film might be viewed at this time not as an end in itself but as a tool at the disposal of the artist. Apollinaire's huge optimism was shared by a number of Surrealists who were keen to take up his challenge. For example, Philippe Soupault's thoughts were published, alongside a first attempt at scenario-writing, the following January:

Already, the richness of this new art is apparent to those who know how to see. Its power is tremendous since it reverses all natural laws: it ignores space and time; it upsets gravity, ballistics, biology, etc. . . . Its eye is more patient, more penetrating more precise. Thus the future belongs to the creator, the poet, who makes use of this hitherto neglected power and richness; for a new servant is available to his imagination.<sup>172</sup>

Along with Blaise Cendrars and Louis Aragon,<sup>173</sup> Soupault was a writer whose interest in the cinema did not manifest itself in film-production but in the inspiration it provided for the written word. Realising the potential of the medium then was not a challenge which necessitated work in film, but might be achieved by translating its qualities into 'cinematographic poems'. The cinema may have seen a reduction in the number of French productions due to the costs of war, but by 1917 an influx of American-made movies meant

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<sup>171</sup> Quoted in Wall-Romana, 142.

<sup>172</sup> Philippe Soupault, 'Note I on the Cinema', *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939, Volume I: 1907-1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton University Press, 1988a), 143.

<sup>173</sup> Philippe Soupault, *Ecrits de cinéma : 1918-1931* ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux (Cher: Ramsay, 1979).

that the industry was continuing to gather pace as a truly international, lucrative business.<sup>174</sup> The survival of some of the most popular French serials like *Fantômas* (1913-1914), *Les Vampires* (1915) and the *Judex* films (1916, 1917) as made by Louis Feuillade and promoted by Léon Gaumont, also contributed to the rise of popular cinema in France.<sup>175</sup> While it is fair to deduce that the decline of French commercial cinema after 1914 likely contributed to a turn towards independently financed, experimental productions, it would be inaccurate to depict Apollinaire's rally as a significant moment in the development of cinema itself. Instead, Apollinaire ought to be considered as an enthusiast whose literary pedigree at the time inspired a generation of artists in France to incorporate the cinema into its work. Film-making was a slow, expensive process, but it remained a symbol of post-war modernism, described by writer Léon Moussinac as 'an art which will be the expression – bold, powerful, original – of the ideal of the new age.'<sup>176</sup> A writer and poet, Apollinaire's 'vibrant interest in movies'<sup>177</sup> is represented today by a catalogue of writings which include reviews, novels, articles, poems, scenarios and even an incomplete project to direct a film.<sup>178</sup> As Richard Abel documents, the rapid growth of popular interest in the cinema extended to a large number of writers who had already found success in the industry, which encouraged others to attempt to do the same.<sup>179</sup> Thus, the door was firmly open for the literary talents of the day to develop a place within the cinema for themselves.

The poetic possibilities of the cinema too were proven by the onset of the 1920s. Experiments in montage and lighting by the likes of Jean Epstein and Jean Grémillon operated entirely outside of the popular cinematic canon, preferring to develop the techniques and technology associated with the modern invention. Indeed, Léger's *Ballet mécanique* (1924) pursued an aesthetic which intentionally attributed a lyricism to the

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<sup>174</sup> Michael Temple and Michael Witt, eds. *The French Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2004) 13.

<sup>175</sup> Temple and Witt, 14.

<sup>176</sup> Abel, *French Cinema: the First Wave*, 244.

<sup>177</sup> Steven Kovacs, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of the Surrealist Cinema* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980), 24.

<sup>178</sup> Kovacs, 24. This project was a collaboration with André Billy to film his original scenario 'La Bréhatine'.

<sup>179</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 59.

functions of the camera, or what Louis Delluc called ‘the modern enchantment of metallurgy’.<sup>180</sup> Impressionism and Expressionism were artistic terms that quickly found their way into the lexicon of film technique, such that the avant-garde of film-making at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century might lay claim to having extended their meaning. Certainly film affixed an original aspect to an art project by encouraging simultaneity, movement and pacing. The work of the German school of experimental animation in this respect was well-recognised in France during this period, Walter Ruttmann being an example of one such practitioner, and one who collaborated with Soupault to film two of his scenarios (which, unfortunately, have since been lost).<sup>181</sup> Abstraction too was possible, where geometric configurations and choreography allowed film to keep a distinct distance from fixed meaning or interpretation, always shifting its appearance. Thus poetry seemed tentatively achievable in celluloid. So began an artistic endeavour based entirely in image.<sup>182</sup>

For the Surrealists, however, there was a more important function to cinema which separated poetry from art. In 1929, reflecting upon the successes of Surrealist film over the previous few years, Robert Desnos was keen to make the distinction:

Lorsque René Clair et Francis Picabia réalisèrent *Entr’acte*, Man Ray *L’Etoile de mer* et Buñuel son admirable *Chien andalou* [sic], il ne s’agissait pas de créer une œuvre d’art ou une esthétique nouvelle mais d’obéir à des mouvements profonds, originaux et, par suite, nécessitant une forme nouvelle.<sup>183</sup>

Of course, Desnos’ own role is underplayed here – he collaborated with Ray and provided the scenario for *L’Etoile de mer*, even if the exact extent to which he was the author of the work remains debateable.<sup>184</sup> As a critic and cinephile, Desnos had a fascination for the

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<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Kovacs, 29.

<sup>181</sup> Kovacs, 33.

<sup>182</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), 43.

<sup>183</sup> Robert Desnos, ‘Cinéma d’avant-garde’, *Les Rayons et les Ombres: Cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 188.

<sup>184</sup> See Inez Hedges, ‘Robert Desnos’s and Man Ray’s Manuscript Scenario for *L’Etoile de mer*’, *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Robert E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1987), 207-219.

cinema which outlasted the majority of his fellow Surrealists into the mid- to late 1920s.<sup>185</sup> This fascination was not only for the cinema experience – the silence, the darkness, the mysticism of the cinema auditorium – but for the lyrical and ‘spontaneous poetry’<sup>186</sup> which he recognised in films. It seems important, as with the distinction between art and poetry, to separate these two attractions of the cinema for the Surrealists. The language of choice in Surrealist texts praising the cinema is often deliberately vague, taking care to express the sublime and profound effect it has on an audience. Even where the cinema itself is considered to be a significant source of interest, such as in André Breton’s *Comme dans un bois*,<sup>187</sup> the praise that the Surrealists reserved for the actual films tends to relate to qualities which do not depend upon the techniques of production or presentation. Instead, Breton speaks of the ‘sur-dépaysment’<sup>188</sup> of the film, where there is a dialogue about reality and fantasy between the screen and its viewer. In these terms, it is not hard to perceive that this mixture of order and disorder might have been achievable by alternative means. The idea of such a composition was tied to the nature of its effect rather than the means by which it was achieved. Hence, J.H. Matthews suggests that ‘interpretation becomes more a creative act than an evaluative one... surrealism is less a style or a method than a state of mind which the film provides the occasion for externalizing’.<sup>189</sup> Breton considered the experience of the cinema to be ‘*magnétisant*’,<sup>190</sup> and it is significant that the example he goes on to provide is *Nadja* – a semi-fictional account of a woman encountered by the narrator roaming the streets of Paris, written by Breton in 1928. The magical sense of purpose which drives *Nadja*’s meanderings is a source of fascination for the narrator, whose suspicions about the woman’s mental health only serve to intrigue him as he follows her around the city. The theme of the mysterious romantic infatuation and of the heroine as the symbol of this

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<sup>185</sup> Kovacs, 48.

<sup>186</sup> Kovacs, 51.

<sup>187</sup> André Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. III*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 902. All subsequent quotations are from the same edition, which will henceforth be abbreviated to *OC: III*.

<sup>188</sup> Breton, *OC: III*, 906.

<sup>189</sup> J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (University of Michigan Press, 1971), 2.

<sup>190</sup> Breton, *OC: III*, 903 (emphasis is the author’s).

hypnotic desire, or *amour fou*,<sup>191</sup> is a prevalent one in Surrealist texts. Certainly it features as a central theme in the film work of Luis Buñuel, whose scandalous *Un chien andalou* would appear less than a year later. The significance of *Nadja* for Breton's perspective on film is that it remains less a book about an individual than one about the individual's power to subvert and elevate the banalities of everyday city life into something magical. As much as the cinema was the site of this alchemy, it was the transformative power of the film as text which captured Breton's imagination.

However, *Nadja* also serves as an example of the multi-directional nature of the Surrealist text. Included in its pages are scattered photographs of Paris locations, portraits, sketches, notes, newspaper clippings and paintings. The purpose of this is not always clear – they often appear to be arbitrary diversions, inclusions for nothing more than added interest. Above all, the effect is subjective. Like the automatic writing of his 1920 work *Les Champs Magnétiques*, co-authored by Philippe Soupault, the disregard for coherent narrative or focussed detail in *Nadja* is in fact a statement of anti-literary expression, and a challenge to the reader to contrive their own meaning. In order to achieve any kind of 'automatisme psychique pur',<sup>192</sup> the expectations of the reader ought to be shattered at any given opportunity. Indeed, Surrealist poet Pierre Reverdy saw the primary value of cinema in its ability to engender this surprise, to promote 'the concrete juxtaposition of distant realities.'<sup>193</sup> Of course, automatism was not just necessary for the Surrealists in their own working methods, but in the response the work was to receive. As Inez Hedges tells us: 'Literary and linguistic conventions produce "default assignments"... Works in which these default assignments are consistently violated demand considerable cognitive activity on the part of their perceivers.'<sup>194</sup> This kind of 'frame-breaking'<sup>195</sup> purpose of film from the Surrealist

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<sup>191</sup> André Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. II*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 677.

<sup>192</sup> André Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes, T. I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 328.

<sup>193</sup> Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>194</sup> Inez Hedges, *Languages of Revolt: Dada and surrealist literature and film* (Duke University Press, 1983) 38.

<sup>195</sup> Hedges, *Languages of Revolt*, 39.

perspective would never limit its remit to the fast-developing conventions of the early film industry. This is not to say that the cinema was seen as incapable of invoking the required response in an audience, but that the very nature of the Surrealists' interest in the cinema was such that any proposed film project would have to communicate in its own language, disregarding expectations. Like *Nadja*, which rejected the idea of a novel and presented a text which privileged image almost as much as prose, the value of cinema lay in its capacity for communicating in thoroughly subjective terms. As much as the written word was vulnerable to the inherent dangers of academic scrutiny and canonisation, one can view *Nadja* as evidence that André Breton did not view this special quality to be at any greater risk on paper than on screen. Writing then – while not 'literature' and definitely not 'the novel' – represented an alternative means of achieving an effect similar to that of the cinema, as long as it refused to adhere to a standard format upon which the reader might imprint his or her own expectations. The text may not be film, but it could perhaps retain an element of the filmic, or the '*cinématique*'.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Michel Murat, comp. *Les poètes surréalistes et leur rapport au cinéma dans les années Vingt* (Université de Paris IV, Sorbonne, 2004), 77.

## The Film Scenario

A proven interest in the cinema and a desire to harness its faculties does not necessarily bring together film-makers and poets, but at this point a problem emerges in discerning the precise dividing lines between the projects of different individuals. It must be acknowledged that those writers who embraced the cinema, even with vigour, may not have had a single conception of the purpose of their work. Most strikingly, the overriding cinephilia in the writings of the Surrealists does not relate to a cohesive strategy for making use of film in the way that Apollinaire had encouraged. While *Nadja* demonstrates a post-literary awareness of the cinema, and an admiration for its ability to inspire and motivate an audience, one must question whether this was a primary concern of its writer. Another Surrealist novel which refused to be referred to as a novel, at least at first publication, was Louis Aragon's *Anicet, ou le panorama* (1921).<sup>197</sup> Here, Aragon's respect for the cinema is even more evident than in *Nadja*, where the two main characters discuss films at length, before they themselves become part of one. The resemblance of the two men to Louis Aragon and André Breton is thinly veiled, adding another dimension to their fantasy of the cinema.<sup>198</sup> For the Surrealists, this confusion of reality and fiction was a precious quality of the cinema, but one wonders, does that mean that they sought to be a part of it? Clearly, Aragon sought to incorporate the cinema into his work. *Anicet* acted 'à la fois comme appropriation des codes cinématographiques et récréation romanesque',<sup>199</sup> but perhaps this indicates a desire less to develop something which we might call a cinema, and more to develop an entirely new, hybrid format.

The first publication of a film scenario in France came in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in November 1919, entitled *Donogoo-Tonka*, by Jules Romains,<sup>200</sup> and it began a trend which would allow aspiring screen writers to display their talents for film-makers to assess. This

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<sup>197</sup> Murat, 70.

<sup>198</sup> Kovacs, 34.

<sup>199</sup> Murat, 74.

<sup>200</sup> Abel, *French Cinema : The First Wave*, 245.

way, a writer might be able to force their way into the industry by virtue of the response they receive from their readers. The *Donogoo-Tonka* text would be taken up for a theatre production by Louis Jouvet in 1930, and then made into a film in 1935, although Romains reportedly disavowed the latter interpretation.<sup>201</sup> The mishandling, or rather, re-interpretation of the poet's work points towards a more practical purpose for the publication of scenarios: to preserve the authorial intentions. Here we see that identifying the particular vision of a single artist is important, not just for understanding the text, but for making judgements on how far they could be said to have contributed to a wider project.

The popularity of the 'film raconté' form, published in French newspapers from 1915 onwards, was widely recognised as a novel means of learning the synopsis of a film before viewing it, but the cost of this was a dilution of the film's achievements, whether in its final form or as an idea. Abel tells us that, 'inextricably bound up with a particular film text, the "*film raconté*" tended to subdue and stabilize the film's sequence of images and close off its meaning.'<sup>202</sup> Hence, the publication of a scenario in its original form represented the only way that a writer could be sure that their work would retain all its nuances, whether or not the text made it into production. As we have already seen with the case of Artaud and *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, even this posed a risk to the purity of the author's original conception. The practice of publishing a scenario in retrospect, in order to regain control of a text once it had already been filmed, was one supported by Louis Delluc, whose opposition to the film raconté format was founded on a support for the agency of the writer.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Delluc's advice that the scenarios be published without illustration was intended to elevate the value of the text itself, in lieu of any visual interpretation.<sup>204</sup>

An instructive counterpoint to the practical aspect of publishing scenarios is the way that the texts themselves might function. After all, the literary avant-garde may have had an interest

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<sup>201</sup> Virmaux, *Un genre nouveau*, 105.

<sup>202</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 63 (italics are the author's).

<sup>203</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 61.

<sup>204</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 61.

in having their work made into film, but their business was the creative act of writing, not film-preparation. In this respect, the intentions of the writer seem to be central to the question of whether or not the Surrealist scenario texts can be considered part of a general Surrealist cinema. Apollinaire's 1917 scenario, *La Bréhatine*, credited by Linda Williams as 'the first scenario written by an important modern writer'<sup>205</sup> was written 'for an actual producer within an established industry',<sup>206</sup> and reflects the popular contemporary taste for romantic melodramas. Williams' observations suggest that, despite his outwardly artistic agenda, Apollinaire's intention was always to write for the screen and for the public. As early as 1917, the commercial potential of a good scenario appears to have been a consideration of the writer. In contrast, the cinema which Robert Desnos imagined was experimental and free from censorship of any kind. More pertinently, his personal vision for the cinema of 1923 showed a clear disregard for its audience and focussed on the achievements of the film-maker. He asks:

Le peintre et l'écrivain purent se consacrer dans l'obscurité à des tâches supérieures. Le cinégraphiste [sic] ne pourra-t-il jamais s'évader de la prison des préjugés ? Le cinéma mourra-t-il faute de ces excentriques en qui je persiste à voir les seuls génies?<sup>207</sup>

Desnos' concern for the greater development of cinema here is matched by a desire for the film to be crafted in isolation, where the commercial realities of the industry are forgotten and the will of the film-maker is as respected as that of the scenario-writer. This vision for a cinema links the roles of the painter, the writer and the film-maker by demanding that they are granted the freedom to work outside of the established divisions which hold them to recognised, separate forms. These contrasting views are of course only those of the avant-garde, whose preference would always be to resist the mainstream and to favour new ground. This kind of modernism is something which both Apollinaire and Desnos had in common. The commercial reality of cinema made harsh critics of those producers and

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<sup>205</sup> Williams, 7.

<sup>206</sup> Williams, 7.

<sup>207</sup> Robert Desnos, 'Le Rêve et le Cinéma', *Les Rayons et les Ombres: Cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 33.

financers who might approve a scenario for filming. *La Bréhatine* was, for all Apollinaire's intentions, an ambitious scenario which never saw further development. A 'minimum of dialogue, terse images, abrupt ellipses, [and] interpolated shots'<sup>208</sup> explains this outcome, since it rendered the text too great a risk to investors, and Apollinaire would be frustrated in his efforts as a writer for the screen. This kind of experience was representative not only of an industry in decline with respect to the rapid growth of American cinema, but also of a lack of interest at this time in film with a focus on poetry and art. For much the same reason, scenarios by the prominent avant-garde poets Jules Romains and Blaise Cendrars were similarly rejected.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 60.

<sup>209</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 60.

## The *Scénarii Intournables*

In spite of such set-backs, the scenario form remained a fertile ground for Surrealist writers to explore. If a scenario was taken up for production then it had achieved its purpose, but the proliferation of unfilmed scenarios suggests that the form held an attraction aside from that as a stepping stone to celluloid. Around 1921, Alain and Odette Virmaux document a divergence in the function of such a text between, on one hand, the scenarios which eschewed the technical directions of those intended for filming in favour of fostering a poetic, hybrid 'genre bâtard',<sup>210</sup> and on the other hand, the scenarios which incorporated detailed director's notes and demonstrated an understanding of what was required of a scenario for it to be filmed.<sup>211</sup> While the true purpose of this latter form is contested, Virmaux and Virmaux assert that texts such as Cendrars' *La Perle fiévreuse* (1921-22) were so precise in their technical directions as to be virtually complete cinematic works in themselves, if not entirely ready for screen.<sup>212</sup> Hence the poetic film text, whether bound to be realised as a film or not, might function as a strong indication of the direction an imagined film might take. By making use of their readers' increasing familiarity with the conventions of the cinema, the scenario writers were able to build the idea of a film without the text ever truly being either a blueprint for filming or a literary composition.<sup>213</sup> Unique in the respect that it existed only in relation to an understanding of another medium altogether, this fluid written form had no set rules, and hence went by numerous different names, each acknowledging an element of the text's visual or graphical outlook alongside its fundamentally literary basis.

However, in the face of such proficient creativity was the inescapable reality that the film scenario was inextricably tied to film itself. As much as a text might be centred on its poetic function, its use of visuality would always be secondary to the actual images it evoked; its cuts never as arresting as actual film montage. In this way, the poetic film text relied upon

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<sup>210</sup> Virmaux, *Un genre nouveau*, 13.

<sup>211</sup> Virmaux, *Un genre nouveau*, 30.

<sup>212</sup> Virmaux, *Un genre nouveau*, 29.

<sup>213</sup> Abel, 'Exploring', 65.

the cinema to provide examples of the sort of effects that the writer sought to evoke. In other words, this written form was only ever an approximation of the cinema that already existed. For the Surrealists, this pivotal problem was of little consequence for the simple reason that their interest was not in the cinema's capacity to show actual images, but to plant those images into the mind of the audience. The purpose of a Surrealist cinema was less to create a visual *display* than it was to create a visual *effect*. This idea negates the necessity of a film for representing previously conceived ideas, and proposes an alternative cinema, where the 'film itself [is] considered as an image-generating process of unconscious thought.'<sup>214</sup> Francis Picabia was convinced that the scenario could provide the same stimulus to the imagination of an audience as any film. In 1928, he footnoted the publication of his scenario with the statement: 'Je demande à chacun de mes lecteurs de mettre en scène, de tourner pour lui-même sur l'écran de son imagination, écran véritablement magique, incomparablement supérieur au pauvre calicot blanc et noir des cinémas'.<sup>215</sup> His belief that the function of cinema might be achieved, even improved upon, by the written scenario is not only an assertion of the value of a literary cinema, but a complete rejection of film. Therefore, while the written form might never have been capable of fully reproducing the visuality of film, perhaps it was its reliance on the subjective processes of the imagination which endowed it with a special quality from which film was precluded. Indeed, it was this facet to the poetic written form which existing cinema had wholly ignored.

Such a conclusion was made by Benjamin Fondane, whose pursuit of poetic expression led him to question the representative capacity of film. His development of the scenario text as a replacement for film demonstrates a position comparable to that of Picabia, as the action of his narrative 'exists as events in the reader's mind'.<sup>216</sup> As Ramona Fotiade demonstrates, the direction of Fondane's work also converged here with that of Antonin Artaud, the two men sharing a common disregard for 'the presumed correspondence between the dream

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<sup>214</sup> Williams, 51.

<sup>215</sup> Virmaux, *Un genre nouveau*, 39.

<sup>216</sup> Peter Christensen, 'Benjamin Fondane's "Scenarii intournables"' *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuënzli (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1987), 73.

image and the film image, grounded in specular illusion'.<sup>217</sup> For Fondane, the cinema as it existed was little more than a means of deceit. Hence, the cinema was to represent an impossible ideal which the audience could not imagine for themselves. This separation was felt most acutely by the onset of the 'talkie', where recorded sound and recorded image were synchronised so as to appear one and the same. As with Artaud's reverence for silent film,<sup>218</sup> Fondane would promote the absolute silence of the written word as an alternative to the false articulation proposed by the speaking pictures. The scenario thus enabled a denial of cinema's latest deceit, 'replacing rather than merely interrupting speech'.<sup>219</sup> The Surrealist position was to confront Hollywood's increasing influence over the public's viewing habits by disrupting the processes of identification and expectation. Towards the end of a period of fervent scenario-writing, as Fondane and Artaud balked at the supposed representative qualities of a medium based on reproduction and spectacle, so the Surrealists turned on their audiences. Philippe Soupault writes scathingly in 1930: 'Ils sont venus dans ce cinéma pour voir. Ils *voient* et sont satisfaits.'<sup>220</sup> Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* would be the ultimate expression of this attitude of contempt for the audience, almost in revolt of the cinema within which it found itself.

Fondane's work in what he termed 'cine-poetry'<sup>221</sup> was defined by a determination to subvert the reader's association of what they were reading with what they knew about the cinema. Fondane's project was not to produce material which operated in complete isolation of the cinema, but to use the reader's expectations to expose the weaknesses of a medium which encouraged false connections to be made. The function of the scenario form was to develop a poetry of repeated frustration, where 'the apparent continuity of the numbered, sequenced shots [...] is in fact a parody of film convention, tempting the reader to make connections

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<sup>217</sup> Ramona Fotiade, 'Pictures of the mind: Artaud and Fondane's Silent Cinema', *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality*, ed. Silvano Levy (Keele University Press, 1997), 110.

<sup>218</sup> See: Antonin Artaud, 'Les Souffrances du « Dubbing »', *OC : III*, 100.

<sup>219</sup> Fotiade, 117.

<sup>220</sup> Soupault, *Écrits de cinéma*, 62 (emphasis is the author's).

<sup>221</sup> Wall-Romana, 142.

which may or may not exist.<sup>222</sup> Thus the film scenario appears to be employed in a way which denies its status as a literary form, using its constructed nature to baffle the reader's expectations and challenge the value of general fixed representative form, in exactly the same manner as *Un chien andalou*. The importance of the idea of 'unfilmable film' to the discernment of a Surrealist cinema is evident, since it encourages a re-imagining of life that purposely evades the established codes of representation which only serve to represent 'a false reality'.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Fotiade, 119.

<sup>223</sup> Christensen, 73.

## Conclusions

The literary expression of the Surrealist interest in cinema was in fact anti-literary in its conception. While it may have begun in part as a popular means of imagining a cinema yet to be produced, the central process of imagining proved to be more important to the Surrealists than the realisation of the hope for filmic representation. The significant number of Surrealists who experimented with the film scenario form – a number which included even André Breton<sup>224</sup> – is, as with the limited number who actually made films, a misleading indication of how closely involved the Surrealists were with the film industry. While a passion for cinema motivated considerable writing projects such as Philippe Soupault's 'cinematographic poems', and the scenarios of Robert Desnos and Francis Picabia, their work would demonstrate an intention to subvert the processes of popular cinema. Cinema was to be celebrated as a modern sensation, but this did not foreclose its use in literature, as it was embraced as 'a potentially new cultural force to revive, or simply replace, the moribund visual and literary forms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>225</sup> Film for the Surrealists would surpass its theatrical frame and pursue a new conception of representation, where its appeal to the imagination, its sense of erratic movement, and its 'fragmentation of reality gave the viewer an intensified experience of the simultaneous flux of life.'<sup>226</sup>

The Surrealist notion of a cinema may have had limited representation in film, but the argument of Benjamin Fondane and Antonin Artaud was that representation was actually impossible as long as film was received in its expected form. Whether or not Fondane's scenarios were in fact unfilmable is the subject of another study since it remains an unanswered question, but it was his idea that a scenario might be written with the expressed intention that it never be filmed that makes the important distinction between a cinema which accepts the limits of representation and a cinema that does not. J.H. Matthews is supportive of this position when he states that 'a script can remain interesting and instructive only so

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<sup>224</sup> Wall-Romana, 143.

<sup>225</sup> Temple and Witt, 14.

<sup>226</sup> Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave*, 261.

long as it promises to draw us as far as possible in the direction of liberation.<sup>227</sup> The implication here is not that the scenario text might be limited in its ability to serve Surrealism's ends, but that an adherence to any established mode, including film, is a denial of the principle of automatic thought. The value of the written form for a Surrealist cinema is thus in its ability to break out of the walls of the cinema auditorium to produce imagery which exists only in the imagination of the reader as an 'unconsciously composed metaphor'.<sup>228</sup> Understanding the importance of response and liberation to Surrealism, the scenario text both expands and redefines what we might understand a Surrealist cinema to be.

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<sup>227</sup> Matthews, 76.

<sup>228</sup> John Kenneth Hyde, *Benjamin Fondane: A Presentation of His Life and Works* (Geneva: Droz, 1971), 80.

## Conclusion

Surrealism has proved to be an immense inspiration to film-makers, both in terms of an aesthetic founded on chance and shock, and in terms of its iconic imagery. The silent cinema which prevailed in the days of its inception presented Surrealism with an opportunity for expression that could surpass codified language, surpass literary materialism and, potentially, surpass conscious reception altogether. I would argue that by recognising such a tantalising prospect the Surrealists' interaction with film possessed a unique edge: a desire to see a cinema which would affect their audience in hitherto unknown capacities. While those films which attempted to do so are well-known, even canonised as such, I have attempted to demonstrate how this objective did not necessitate actual film-making, but might be achieved by alternative means. In any sense, the Surrealists were film-lovers – not just film-makers but film critics and connoisseurs. After flirting with a film project of his own, in 1930 Philippe Soupault resigned himself to the role of mere cinephile: 'Il s'agit, en 1930, de se laisser aller à l'enthousiasme et d'admirer sans analyser.'<sup>229</sup> Hence it becomes clear that while a complete Surrealist film project may be impossible to discern, this does not preclude a very serious interest in the function of the cinema. In any discussion of a 'Surrealist cinema' the question of authorship must come into consideration because, while a certain 'eternal Surrealism' might provide a base from which build an idea of a film project, it is the 'historical Surrealism' which limits any argument to the realities of what the Surrealists themselves sought to achieve.<sup>230</sup> Ultimately, the optimism that the Surrealists maintained for cinema was to be overtaken by a sense that it would never live up to their expectations, that it was incapable of projecting their thoughts and ideas. Where the reasons for this might seem circumstantial, André Breton is more philosophical: 'J'ai plus confiance dans ce moment, actuel, de ma pensée que dans tout ce qu'on tentera de faire signifier à une œuvre

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<sup>229</sup> Philippe Soupault, *Ecrits de cinéma: 1918-1931*, ed. Alain & Odette Virmaux (Cher: Ramsay, 1979), 176.

<sup>230</sup> This distinction is made in André Breton, 'Le Surréalisme et la Peinture' (1928), *Œuvres Complètes, T. IV*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris : Gallimard, 2008), 349-408, where both forms are attributed significance. The terms used to denote the forms are taken from Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (New York: Berg, 2006), 4.

achevée'.<sup>231</sup> The Surrealists failed to harness the cinema to their thoughts, but it is fair to say that this was an impossible hope from the start.

However, there is no denying the work that remains. Far from being the failure many lament it to be, the cinema which the Surrealists imagined was a unique creation which existed as much in the minds of its adherents as in its iconic images. Their sheer enthusiasm for the revelatory qualities of the entire movie-going experience is in abundant evidence, represented, as asserts Wendy Everett, throughout their 'poems, novels, paintings and scenarios'.<sup>232</sup> Yet the attentive scholar of Surrealist works will know that such a straightforward conception of representation and medial difference is in fact antithetical to the movement's processes, and as such I would argue that, rather than act as inspiration for work in other forms, a 'Surrealist cinema' might *include* such a variety of work. Certainly when one considers Antonin Artaud's theories of loss, or Benjamin Fondane's theories of film-writing, it seems legitimate to claim the written word as part of a grander conception of 'cinema' which not only stepped out of the screen into the auditorium, but out of the auditorium and into the world. Everett's continued discussion of the cinema screen as merely a 'threshold' to more profound discoveries reveals the centrality of the spectator to a range of Surrealist works, in different medial forms, which all foreground the 'constant exchange [...] between external and internal worlds'.<sup>233</sup> This original perspective on the cinema returns the agency to the Surrealists who, while producing relatively few films, were the authors of a thoroughly modern cinema whilst sat in their auditorium seats.

Dada film and Surrealist film have proved notoriously difficult to distinguish and separate,<sup>234</sup> but only so far as how their products represent their intrinsic ideologies, or not. While Dada's film expression was stuttered and experimental, the Surrealist desire to release the automatic responses of the unconscious mind bore a special consideration for the

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<sup>231</sup> André Breton, *Œuvres Complètes, T. I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 783.

<sup>232</sup> Wendy Everett, 'Screen as threshold: the disorientating topographies of surrealist film', *Screen*, 39:2, 1998, 142.

<sup>233</sup> Everett, 143.

<sup>234</sup> See Thomas Elsaesser, 'Dada/Cinema?', *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis, Locker and Owens, 1987), 13-27.

communicative capacity of language. Frequently attributed to Dada, Fernand Léger's mechanical, jarring film *Ballet mécanique* (1924) does not belong to Surrealism, its initial title-card boasting it to be 'le premier film *sans scénario*'. Such a pronouncement, like the title-card which claims Germaine Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman* to be 'un rêve d'Antonin Artaud', attaches far too much importance to the image, and offends the Surrealist commitment to the 'fonctionnement réel de la pensée.'<sup>235</sup> Since perfect representation would remain a myth, Surrealism happily employed any means necessary to achieve its ends, and held no private privilege for one medium or another. Pierre Naville's 1925 declaration that 'il n'y a pas de peinture surréaliste'<sup>236</sup> was no more a denial of painting than Soupault's spectatorship was a denial of cinema, but an expression of the pre-eminence of Surrealist reality over its expression. Naville goes on: 'Mais il y a des spectacles. La mémoire et le plaisir des yeux: voilà toute l'esthétique.'<sup>237</sup> Thus cinema was to be lived and experienced, imagined and reformed. Any recognisable aesthetic which emanated from Surrealist work was negligible, secondary to 'le merveilleux, l'agencement des éléments fortuits.'<sup>238</sup> Therefore, discerning a 'Surrealist cinema' entails conceding that our definition of 'cinema' might need to be expanded, taking in films from their imagined beginnings, to the cinema screen and beyond, to the responses they engender. This expansion is precisely what the Surrealists pioneered, and it is their cinema.

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<sup>235</sup> André Breton, *Œuvres Complètes, T. I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 328.

<sup>236</sup> Accredited to Pierre Naville, The Surrealist group, 'Beaux Arts', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 3, 15 April 1925: 27. 'La Révolution Surréaliste', *Mélusine*, comp. Sophie Béhar [online] (2009) at: [http://melusine.univ-paris3.fr/Revolution\\_surrealiste/Revol\\_surr\\_3.htm](http://melusine.univ-paris3.fr/Revolution_surrealiste/Revol_surr_3.htm) accessed: 15/09/11.

Subsequent quotations are from the same source and web address.

<sup>237</sup> The Surrealist group, 27.

<sup>238</sup> The Surrealist group, 27.

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	<i>L'Age d'or</i> (1930)
	<i>Viridiana</i> (1961)
	<i>Belle de Jour</i> (1967)
Jean Cocteau,	<i>Le Sang d'un poète</i> (1930)
Marcel Duchamp,	<i>Anémic Cinéma</i> (1925)
Carl Theodore Dreyer,	
	<i>The Passion of Joan of Arc</i> (1928)
Germaine Dulac,	<i>La Souriante Madame Beudet</i> (1923)
	<i>La Coquille et le Clergyman</i> (1928)
Jean Epstein,	<i>La Chute de la Maison Usher</i> (1928)
Louis Feuillade,	<i>Fantômas</i> (Serial, 1913-14)
	<i>Les Vampires</i> (Serial, 1915)
	<i>Judex</i> (Serial, 1916)
	<i>La Nouvelle Mission de Judex</i> (Serial, 1917)
Abel Gance,	<i>Napoléon Bonaparte</i> (1935)
Marcel L'Herbier,	<i>L'Argent</i> (1928)
Alfred Hitchcock,	<i>Spellbound</i> (1945)
Georges Hugnet,	<i>La Perle</i> (1929)
Fernand Léger,	<i>Ballet mécanique</i> (1924)
G. W. Pabst,	<i>L'Opéra de Quat'Sous</i> (1931)
Francis Picabia,	<i>Entracte</i> (1924)
Man Ray	<i>Retour à la Raison</i> (1923)
	<i>Emak Bakia</i> (1926)
	<i>L'Etoile de mer</i> (1928)
	<i>Le Mystère du Château de Dés</i> (1929)