

# Surre(gion)alist Manifesto

Max Cafard

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## Dedication

“Here we cast anchor in rich earth.”

—Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto* (1918)

For our Mother the Earth, we set sail on Celestial Ships. Anchored in Erda, we ride the wind. For Gaia, we take flight, spreading terrifying Cafardic wings. No longer trembling at the emasculating, defeminizing sound: the Name of the Father. We re-member Mama. Papa dis-membered Mama. We now re-call the suppressed Names of the Mother. Anamnesis for anonymous Manna. A surre(gion)al celebration, a Mani festival for Mama Earth. This is dedicated to the One we love. For the One Big Mother, in her thousand forms, here it is: the Mama Manifesto (1989)

## Principia Logica

Breton said “we are still living under the reign of logic.” Today this is true more than ever. Indeed, we are now living under the Acid Rain of Logic. The question is: which Logic?

There are Logics and there are Logics. EcoLogics, Geo-Logics, Psycho-Logics, Mytho-Logics, Ethno-Logics, Socio-Logics, Astro-Logics, CosmoLogics, Onto-Logics, Physio-Logics, Bio-Logics, Zoo-Logics, et cetera.

Yet, all of these are transformed into subsets of the one universal Techno-Logic. Techno-Logic, the death of Truth. Techno-Logic, the enshrinement of Truth. The burying of Truth under a crushing burden—under a Wealth of Knowledge.

Authentic knowing requires the “search for Truth,” the pursuit of Truth, the chasing after Truth, the hunger and thirst for Truth, the following of Truth along all her devious paths of Logic, through her labyrinths of the Logics. It means climbing logical mountains, plunging to logical ocean bottoms, traversing an infinitude of unparalleled planes. The search for Truth means always allowing her escape.

## Scrambling the Cosmic Egg

“The Region regions” said Heidegger the Egg-Hider, hiding his eggs. Edelweiss and Eselscheisse! Scion of a Scheiss-ridden race! Shyster Lawyer of Being! The “Region” does not “region.” It’s exactly the reverse. (For the Time Being).

Where is the Region, anyway? For every Logic there is a Region. To mention those of particular importance to us, the Surre(gion)alists: Ecoregions, Georegions, Psychoregions, Mythoregions, Ethnoregions, Socioregions, and Bioregions.

This is no joke! We are Bioregionalists only if we are Regionalists. And once we begin to think Regions, we discover a vast multiplicity. Of Regionalisms and Regions, of Regions within Regions, and Regionalisms within Regionalisms. Thus, Surre(gion)alism.

Regions are inclusive. They have no borders, no boundaries, no frontiers, no State Lines. Though Regionalists are marginal, Regions have no margins. Regions are traversed by a multitude of lines, folds, ridges, seams, pleats. But all lines are included, none exclude. Regions are bodies. Interpenetrating bodies, Interpenetrating bodies in semi-simultaneous spaces. (Like Strangers in the Night).

Region is origin. It is our place of origin. Where all continues to originate. Origination is perpetual motion. Reinhabitation means reorigination. We return to our roots for nourishment. Without that return, we wither and die. We follow our roots and find them to extend ever deeper, and ever outward. They form an infinite web, so all-encompassing that uprooting becomes impossible and unthinkable, deracination irrational.

Regions are multiple and arbitrary. Technoregionalism says, in a Techno-Logical rage for definition, that when less than 90% of the species of one area are present in another area, then each is a separate Bioregion. How Techno-Logical! How Scientific! Or so it sounds. For such a definition is entirely self-annihilating, and absurd in its very technicality. This is, of course, its beauty. It is entirely valid, if taken as part of the Science and Logic of the Absurd. An infinite number of Regions can be defined by such criteria. Occasionally the Region will run after a stray organism (calculator in hand). This is a hallucinogenic Logic. (Though it is seldom taken in this way—even in small doses).

The Region always suffers the danger of capture by Techno-Logic. But Science can also be captured by the Aesthetic. Thales, the first metaphysician and scientist, said “All is Water,” and thus became the first humorist, also. And Technics can also be captured by Erotics. Fourier proposed a “New Amorous Order” in his Phalansteries, based on Technics as Utopian Technique.

## Off Center

The Region is the end of Centrism. Centrism is an obsession. Perhaps there’s nothing wrong with obsessions, as long as we know that we’re obsessed. Take, for example, Mr. Alan Fairweather, whose entire life revolves around his obsession with, study of, and consumption of potatoes. In Mr. Fairweather’s words, “I suppose you could say I have a potato-centric view of the world.” (Newsweek, 5/30/88) But centrists are seldom so healthy.

Anthropo-centrism has been our world-champion Centrism. It’s come close to K.O.ing the Earth (a T.K.O.—a Technical Knock-Out). But it’s long been on the ropes. Astro-Logic knocked Anthropos off Cosmic center. Bio-Logic knocked him off Planetary center. Psycho-Logic even knocked him off Ego center. And Techno-Logic itself melts him into air. We hardly need any post-structuralist Post-Logic to “de-center” the vapor that remains.

But do we need a new Centrism to replace the moribund one? Some suggest “Bio-centrism.” This one will surely win if beetles and algae are given the vote. In a Bio-centric world, the undisputed center of “North America” is somewhere in the Achafalaya Basin. Probably in Grosse Tete (day gone gat a beeg had don dare, yeah!). A magnificent idea, and absolutely true, but for an entirely different reason. Bio-centrism is the ecological variant of capitalist rationality. Quantity and accumulation are what count. But Biomass instead of Bucks.

Ecocentrism, which may be the ultimate Centrism, has strange, surre(gion)alist implications of its own. On being asked the meaning of the term, a prominent ecocentrist replied that it means that “everything is central.” The final truth of Centrism: all is central and thus nothing is central. The ecocentrist definitely has surre(gion)alist potential!

Decentering is inevitable today. But there are many species of decentering. Some are regionalist, other profoundly anti-regionalist. Some creative, others nihilistic and conservative (preserving the civilized path of Progress: annihilation, dissolution, evisceration, evacuation).

Capitalism abolishes Centrism. A European travels to some anti-center of Late Capitalism perhaps Houston or Los Angeles. Accustomed to town squares, Cathedrals, remnants of city walls, historical sites, signs indicating the geomythical center (Centre Ville, Centro Ciudad, etc.), this voyager asks, “Which way is the Center?” What answer is possible? The hapless explorer is offered a myriad of decentered centers—every mall and shopping center in the vast urban sprawl. The Megalopolis is the economic triumph of decentering. Its reality flows—not like a river,

but like Capital. It seeks, monster-like, hydra-like, only to grow, and never to return to its source. To grow and to consume, endlessly.

Regionalist anti-centrism is of a different quality. We surre(gion)alists proclaim an end to Centrism, but we seek to create and recreate a multitude of centers. Because there is no one Center (the Patriarchal God, the Authoritarian State, the Ineluctable Bottom Line), imaginative centers can proliferate. The human spirit has always found the center of the universe in places of significance. Indeed, any place can be the center. Such centers are centers of spiritual intensity, foci for the convergence of realities: The Altar. The Hearth. The Communal fire. The Town Square. The Sacred Mountain. The Clock at Holmes. (Note for extra-Mesechabeans: On the Clock, see J.K. Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*).

Only someone really desperate, or, perhaps, inordinately hurried, would suggest as the center of the universe la Gare de Perpignan. Or was there a hidden, anti-subversive Grand Central Station in the Dalian mind?

## **Beyond Civilization**

For the Region, there is no State—no State lines. The State is a parasitical growth on the Region, something exterior, hostile, threatening. It has no life of its own, but drains vitality from the living Community. It has rightly been called the “cold monster” that steals even our words, and claims to speak for us. The State is inherently genocidal. It murders all that it cannot assimilate. What is left after this Pyrric and Vampiric act is only a State apparatus, the State Machine. (Even the old “political machine” had to die—for not being mechanical enough, and perhaps for being too political, too Regional, for the age of “total administration”). The State is the March of the God of Power on Earth, its History, the Cunning of Instrumental Reason. Regional politics do not take place in Washington, Moscow and other “seats of power.” Regional power does not “sit”; it flows everywhere. Through watersheds and bloodstreams. Through nervous systems and food chains. The Regions are everywhere & nowhere. We are all illegals. We are natives and we are restless. We have no country; we live in the country. We are off the Inter-State. The Region is against the Regime—any Regime. Regions are anarchic.

For the Region, there is no Church. There is no upper-case R Religion, because there are as many religions as there are Regions. Heresy is the norm. There is no monopoly on the holy. There is no spiritual capital or spiritual capitol. All Regions are all spiritual, and for regionalism all realms are sacred. Regionalism abolishes both Theism and Atheism. Theism: the Idea that there is only one God—the God of Power, and that all must believe in Him. Atheism: the equal and opposite absurdity that this same God is the only One truly worthy of disbelief. Civilization’s imaginary has been bound to monotheisms, and replacements for monotheisms. Regionalism breaks the bonds and erases the line between the sacred and the profane. All busses go to Grace Land. Nothing is beyond the pale. Regions are of the land, of the lands: pagan, paysan. The Regions give birth to a multitude of rites and rituals, a sacral of sites and cycles. The spirit of the Region is inspired, enlightened. By feu follet, Will o’ the Wisp. By inner lights and outer. The spirit of the Region is the Free Spirit. To be in touch with the Spirits of the Place, the local Gods, is to have Tongues of Fire, to regain the stolen power of speech.

For the Region, there is no Race. Miscegenation is the rule. The Ten Thousand Races were born from from the Ten Thousand Places, and they have multiplied to ten thousand times ten thousand. Those of us raised in a racial caste system were taught as children how to treat people of “the opposite race.” But now the die is cast; the castes have died. Now we know there are no opposite sexes, much less opposite races. Nature just passes and repasses. Its all Mardi Gras. Under the mask, a mask. Ethnicity, like ethos, thrives on the play of difference. Enjoy the play! For the ideology of race, the play’s a dismal tragedy. All is reduced to dull sameness and demonic otherness. True, paranoia has its own peculiar excitements, but misses the stimulation of subtle variation, texture, multiplicity, quality. Ethnoregionalism. The topography of culture. The Carnival of culture.

For the Region, there is no Patriarchy. The Region is feminine. And at the same time, androgynous. The One gave birth to the Two, and the Two to the Ten Thousand Things. The Mother is both Mother and Father. As Genesis explains, quite clearly, our Primal Ancestor was an androgynous being, who was later divided into male and female. For the Region, there remain no clear lines: paternity is not established. The family is extended, the tribe all-inclusive. The Region, like the Tao, is vague. Mountains and valleys flow into one another.

Streams and rivers flow into one another. The maternal blood flows through the Region. But sometimes the blood boils. As modern “Man” is beginning to learn: it’s not nice to rape Mother Nature! The kindly Maiden Aunt Nature of the Audubon Society, the jelly-breasted, non-judgmental Momma Nature of the New Age, transforms herself into the Badass Goddess, the Angry Warrior Woman Nature, Vagina Dentata, the electrifying Shakti. Just when you think you’ve had her, Man she gets you where it hurts!

For the Region, there is no Capital. There is no bottom line. All is recycled. Everything returns to the top, recirculates, and the bottom falls out. Life is uneconomical, inefficient. All economic rationality is ecological irrationality. The nature of nature is to waste, to spend foolishly, to squander. Capital requires scarce resources, but the Region is superabundance and has no resources. Only sources and the return to sources. Regions bankrupt the economic, they rupture, they break the bank, they overflow their banks. Regions are in balance, and need no balance sheets. Capital has already rendered its judgment on the Earth: the rich abundance of Life—the Bio-Logical, Ethno-Logical, and Psycho-Logical Wealth that is the legacy of eons of evolution—is not cost effective.

For the Earth to live, Capital must die.

## **Anti-Theses on Regionalism**

Regions are wild. For State and Capital, wilderness means wasteland. They look upon the wild with cruel and rapacious eye. They hunger to rape and plunder the wild. They yearn to subdue, control, exploit—kill all that lives freely. The antithesis of the wild is the domesticated—controlled for the ends of power. The same forces that seek to destroy wild nature, destroy wild mind. (See Gary Snyder’s “Good, Wild, Sacred”). Out of ancient forests and ancient communities, they produce tree farms & suburbia (tree farms, the suburbia of trees; suburbia, the tree farm of humanity).

The Region, like the Tao, is vague. The “obscure object of desire.” The object of desire is always obscure. Bunuel’s famed object may be obscure in a special sense, but all objects of desire are vague, ambiguous, obscure. The system of domination attempts to make them more definite, more definable. By identifying objects of domination. By subordinating desire to an authoritarian code. By seeking to capture desire and then to direct it and channel in accordance with the demands of Power. Our challenge: To get beyond our bondage to this Desire Project. To reach the Elysian Fields of the liberated imagination. Where there are (contrary to rumor) no Poles, but only a meeting of the Antipodes.

Regionalists inhabit Regions. They are in fact, creatures of habit, unpredictable though their habits may be. They are what they do, and they do it in that familiar, indefinable place: their Region. Regionalists almost dwell in Regions, and in fact, once did completely, until dwelling became so heavily laden with layers of mystique that their dwellings sank out of sight. (Especially true of swampy regions like the Mesechabe Delta).

Regions are not systems. Systems are dead, mechanistic, and usable. Systems thinking is only the most advanced, and most mystified variety of instrumental rationality. Regions are incomprehensible and priceless. They are not systematic. They are not systemic. They are living and imaginary, and therefore surpass all system. Some Regions have systems, as persons have systems, but they cannot be reduced to one or more of those systems.

Regions are not World Class. The Political Insect (my apologies to all authentic insects) can think of no greater compliment to pay to the community than to call it World Class. It becomes World Class when it is filled with World Class Attractions: when all its living local and regional realities are murdered and replaced by World Class plastic imitations, to attract swarms of World Class Economic Insects who occasionally venture out from their sterile World Class Hotels and Convention Centers and dispense World Class Dollars to the embalmed natives. Regions are not World Class. The Bomb is World Class. McDonalds is World Class. Henry Kissinger is World Class. The Greenhouse Effect is World Class. Auschwitz is World Class. The Capitalist Class is World Class. Regions are not World Class.

Regions follow Geo-Logic, and move in GeoLogical time. Regions are served on plates. They are flowing, floating islands upon islands. (Follow my Drift?) Occasionally the Earth reminds us that from its point of view Geology is Destiny. That mountains and valleys are like waves on the sea. The restoration of Geo-Logic relativizes the pseudo-politics and pseudo-economics of all systems of Power. True Eco-Logic and Eco-Nomics cannot be upset by even the

most powerful earthquake. But the myth that nature can be dominated lives on. Still the Army Corps of Engineers battles to control the course of the Mesechabe. But in a few years the Great River will have its way—with a vengeance. Still the Power Companies build their Nuclear plants along the River. They forget that a century ago the earth shook violently, the Mesechabe flowed North, and that a small Mesechabean Atlantis lies beneath the waters.

## The Waste Land

What hath civilization wrought? Vespucciland has already made the Mighty Mesechabe its sewer [Capitalist Sewer-regionalism], it has sent us garbage barges, and now it sends its wastes to the Delta in trains! Post-modern politics becomes auto-critique. Never before has there been a political cause celebre like the “poo-poo choo-choo” presently incensing Mesechabean citizens. Indeed, the Mesechabeans would like to cast some aspersions on our bene-factors (doers of their noble duty), who seek to transform our Mesechabe Delta, the Ravine of the World, into a veritable Sierra Merdre.

Outside the Region, all is excrement, all is waste, all is garbage. Capital and State are outside the cycles, outside the self-renewing Whole. Their Logic is accumulation, the Eternal Non-Return, the non-returnable bottleneck of being. They have accumulated much, and alas, it's all Poo Poo.

Where is Reality today? When the corporate polluters spew poison into rivers and streams, direct actionists seal the pipes. The reality police are called out: The poisoners are protected; the protectors imprisoned. “This is not poison...This is not a pipe...” When reality is the Waste Land, we must just say no to Reality. Surre(gion)al surreality is elsewhere.

“Is There a Pataphysician in the House?”

Regionalists are Pataphysicians. Jarry, the founder of the Science of Pataphysics, made an inestimable contribution to regionalist thinking in his invention/discovery of Pataphysics. Pataphysics, he says “will be above all the science of the particular, even though it is said that the only science is that of the general. It will study the laws governing exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be seen, and which perhaps should be seen, in the place of the traditional one, the laws which it is believed have been discovered in the traditional universe being also correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones, or in any case of accidental phenomena which, since they are at bottom only unexceptional exceptions, do not even possess the attraction of singularity.”

Pataphysics helps us recollect the oft-forgotten Truth that the Universe is itself the Great Exception—to the everyday ordinary course of Non-Being. Regions are, of course, entirely exceptional exceptions even to themselves. Regionalists are exceptional people and should therefore, like Regions, be treated entirely differently.

Heraclitus discovered 2500 years ago that Reality is always what it is not, and that it is always strange. As he put it, “if one does not expect the unexpected, one will not find it out, since it is not to be searched out, and difficult to compass.” (Fragment 18) Regions are where the unexpected always takes place. However mightily one struggles not to think some troubling thought, it is impossible to keep it out of consciousness—out of ones Psychoregion. Thoughts such as: “The Marquise was out for the Count”; or “He rode off into the sunset on his pet pony, Trotsky.”

## Green Politics: Militants Vs. Mirlitons

We need a Green Politics that is a Politics of the Regions, and thus, a Politics of the Imagination. The old politics is dead—the politics of the State, of bureaucracy, of economism, of technocracy. It is overwhelmingly powerful, but it is dead. Burying it is another matter. It buries us. Poor old Krushchev said to the Capitalists: we will bury you. They are burying him and everyone else instead—in garbage. The old politics is a politics of plastic on asphalt. The politics of the inorganic, the politics of disorientation, of placelessness, the politics of necrophilia.

The Wobblies, the most radical of American labor movements (the only labor movement to appeal to hobos and surrealists) said it was “creating the new world within the shell of the old.” Today, the old one is an even more dried-out shell than ever. It's time to begin growing a new world! This is the meaning of “Green Politics.” But sometimes

it seems that what passes for “Green Politics” follows the slogan: “creating the new world by boring from within.” True, the old world must die, but we certainly cannot bore it to death.

Green Politics must become the Politics of the Regions—all the Regions, from the celestial to the subterranean. Let the next Gathering of the Greens conduct all its business in poetry. This will forshadow the day when America will be Green. Even better, the day when for a small fee we do an international name exchange and America becomes a large frozen island, while Green Land extends from sea to shining sea. The day when Green Politics rules. The day when the President pantomimes the Inaugural Address and sings the State of the Union in falsetto. The day when the Supreme Court sits naked in powered wigs and hands down rulings in Pig Latin. The day when the Congress throws a multi-party and dances all the Laws out of existence.

Our symbol—one of the thousand symbols of our polysymbolica—is the Sacred Mirliton. The Chayote. Chayotli. *Secium edule*. The Mirliton (regional pronunciation: “Melia-tawn”): in the subtropics, the regionalist plant par excellence. Spreading everywhere, covering all, trespassing all boundaries, respecting no lines of property. Greening promiscuously, abundantly, indiscriminantly. Equally green on the either side of the fence. Offering its fruit to all, in limitless profusion. Green Politics, the Politics of the Mirliton. The Mirliton against the militant, the mechanical person. The Mirliton against the military-industrial complex, the mechanical state. Green vs. Machine.

Green Politics is the Politics of Langiappe. “Langiappe” for us Mesechabeans signifies something extra, neither bought nor sold, freely given, weighed only on the human scale, a symbolic exchange, a tangible expression of the intangible, the non-instrumental, the non-fungible, of the communal, of the common wealth. A vague memory of the Gift. A token of the backwardness, the peripherality, the atavism of certain strange and remote ethnoregions—likethe Mesechabe Delta. Green Politics is the Politics of Lagniappe: it “decrees the End of Money.” It looks to the day when we are no longer held symbolic hostages by the Signs of the Dollar. The day when All is Langiappe. And to the night also!

## The Lesson of Gumbo

“It is of the nature of the Louisianian to create Order through Anarchy: This is the lesson of Gumbo; this is the lesson of Jazz.”—Lafcadio Bocage, *Cahiers du Mouvement Anarchiste Creole* (trans., M. Cafard) What is true in our mysterious Delta region can, in its own way, be true anywhere. Let us never forget the words of the wise Mesechabean.

## Ghosts Along the Mesechabe

A phantom is haunting Europa. Breton stated it well: “The earth, draped in its verdant cloak, makes as little impression upon me as a ghost.” What he missed was the greatness of the impression. For what makes more impression on us than does a ghost—and is so resolutely evaded, except in our dreams? We are like ghosts, Ghosts along the Mesechabe. Haunted by the Earth. When we are nowhere, existence is elsewhere. The Region is the elsewhere of civilization.

Max Cafard, *Roi des Coeurs Creoles*, is on leave from the Asylum. French Leave, no doubt. He has received temporary asylum on Vile de la Nouvelle Orleans—a Floating Island somewhere in what some call “A Dream State.” Of “The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto,” he says: “This is a regionly text.”

## Sidebar

“What happens when you mix bioregionalism, the Green Movement, anarchism, surrealism and social ecology together in a beautifully designed and printed magazine? You get *Mesechabe*.” So goes the subscription card in one of my favorite publications, the formerly bioregionalist (now surregionalist) magazine from New Orleans. The text above is an example of the kind of work offered by *Mesechabe*, which also regularly includes poetry by Andrei Codrescu, Ed Sanders, Donna Glee Williams, Dennis Formento, Allen Ginsberg and others. Among recent articles

are one on David Duke's sex manuals, the Lakota declaration of independence from the U.S., Max Cafard's hilarious treatment of xian fundamentalist televangelism, "Cults of Consumption," Mardi Gras ethnography, our friends Doug I mrie and Michael William's translation of Breton's "The Lighthouse," and more. Handsomely illustrated, it is printed on an appealing, off-white or pastel recycled paper stock. I recommend it highly. Subscriptions are \$12/year from *Mesechabe*, 7725 Cohn Street, Mesechabe Bioregion, New Orleans LA 70118.

—G.B.

*FE Note:* The preceding article was typeset and designed by Freddie Baer, our friend and comrade in San Francisco. The marvelous graphics, while beautiful to the eye, disguise that they are each intricate collages rather than a compilation of images from several sources. Her work here is so finely executed that one fears the immense amount of work that went into each of them will go unrealized and appear as single woodcuts.

Other examples of Freddie's striking work may be found in the collection, *Ecstatic Incisions: The Collages of Freddie Baer*, available from FE Books, \$12.

# fifth Estate

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