

# Toward A Surrealist Re-Enchantment of the World

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Anarchy and surrealism have had many enchanting encounters over the years, and the convivial nature of their ongoing interplay is easy to understand. Much like anarchists, surrealists are dissatisfied with the impoverished version of reality that governs our relationship to the world and to one another.

Neither anarchy nor surrealism proposes escapism as the solution to the limits imposed by reality. Consequently, surrealism's clarion call for a re-enchantment of the world is not about escaping reality. Instead, surrealism seeks to expand, deepen, diversify and enrich reality. In the process of abolishing the artificial dichotomy between dream and reality, surrealism searches for the conjunction between the two at which lies the dazzling realm of the Marvelous.

According to our old *Fifth Estate* friend, Don LaCoss, "Le Merveilleux" is that exploding skyrocket of perception that rakes the consciousness like a fork of lightning ripping apart a nighttime sky, bathing the most ordinary things in a hard glow that illuminates hitherto unseen features that are surprising, strange, and impossibly beautiful."

With this explosive vision of the Marvelous in mind, surrealism's irreverent call for re-enchantment can be grasped in the light of its radically romantic critique of capitalist modernism. For surrealists, a poetic receptiveness to the Marvelous allows for access to more exalted versions of reality than the miserabilist one that rules our lives in the smart utopia of certainty upon which technocratic capitalism is predicated.

In simultaneously representing the imaginary and the real, the Marvelous reveals a contradiction in the real that has radical implications.

Since the commonsensical notion of the real excludes the non-rational from its analytical framework, surrealism ventures beyond our acculturated patterns of rationality into the more unpredictable affective terrain of unconscious desire. It is in this unmapped territory that what has "realistically" been considered impossible can be reimagined as possible.

Rather than merely seeking a fantastic transcendence of the mundane or idealizing a realpolitik seizure of state power, surrealism demands an open-ended approach for breaking through the constraints of everyday life in the pursuit of a far-reaching and multi-pronged transformation of the world.

Surrealism does not aspire to being an avant garde movement within the confined space of the art world. Instead, it ventures beyond the constraints of artistic and political forms of vanguardism in moving toward a pluri-verse in which, to quote Isadore Ducasse (aka the Comte de Lautréamont), "Poetry is made by all."

In the name of such a communism of genius, surrealism has always sought the radical reintegration of art and life. In contrast to the hierarchy of genius, surrealist experimental practices such as automatism and collage can allow anyone to pick the lock to the tollgate that has been erected between art and life because the insubordinate nature of these revelatory practices does not rely on convoluted notions of individual genius.

In the context of a radical unfettering from received notions of reality, what surrealists refer to as automatism is not merely an emblematic artistic technique, but a subversive one. As with automatism, collage shares a disdain for the dull algorithmic rationality of what surrealist thinker Annie Le Brun has called the "reality overload," and

instead embraces the fluidity of the dream that is marked by constantly shifting reference points that are open to creative re-contextualization.

While surrealism's emphasis on the spontaneous spirit of intuition does not preclude rational interpretation of the latent content that objective chance reveals, such processes often most fruitfully occur after the initial intuitive insight has been achieved. Rather than aiming to make art revolutionary in the heavy-handed manner of the Stalinist commissars who designed the procrustean bed of socialist realism, surrealism has always sought to understand and build upon the revolutionary nature of art by drawing upon its rebellious Luciferian sensibility.

Enter Charles Fourier. Surrealist progenitor André Breton's passionate attraction to the latter's early 19<sup>th</sup> century utopianism was expressed at length in his philosophical poem, *Ode to Charles Fourier*. The book-length poem was written by the exiled surrealist in 1945 at the close of World War II. It is Breton's homage to Fourier as the great poet of "Harmonian" re-enchantment.

Breton had become familiar with what he called Fourier's incandescent ideas during his wartime sojourn to the southwestern United States when in exile from France during the Nazi occupation. Breton's travels in Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico were motivated by what he referred to as his "intense interest" in the cultural practices of the Pueblo Indians (particularly the Hopi) which dovetailed with his desire to create new and emancipatory "collective myths" in the post-war period. For reading material during the journey, he brought along a newly discovered five-volume set of Fourier's complete works.

Like the surrealists, Fourier saw desire and imagination as pivotal forces in the process of transformation. Because of Breton's emphasis upon the poetic nature of the "utopian tension" between dream and reality, he posited that revolt in its deepest manifestation could be understood as poetry by other means.

While the utopian dimension of surrealism can be too easily dismissed as a romantically escapist return to the past, it can more accurately be understood as embodying a proclivity for "that which will become real" in the context of the movement's emphasis on the subversive power of utopian thinking to envision, speculate upon, and point towards an inspiring vision of the "not yet". Instead of treating Fourier in a strictly literal sense, the surrealists have always valued the irreverent poetic truth of his utopian credo of "absolute divergence" in their attempts at liberating the imagination from what Breton had described in his *Ode* as "the greyness of ideas and aspirations."

From an anarchist perspective, the socialist nature of Fourier's concept of freedom can be sympathetically understood as being of the wildest and most colorful libertarian variety. What attracted Breton to the playful essence at the heart of the communal harmony sought by Fourier is precisely that it did not involve any rigid utopian blueprint.

The basis of Fourier's utopian vision was not restricted to reversing the objectively oppressive conditions of the proletariat in the capitalist system of production. He envisioned an expansive utopian process that relied upon the autonomous confluence of "elective affinities" through which desire and pleasure would act as locomotive forces in mounting a rebellious refusal of imprisonment within the larger capitalist construction of reality itself.

It is with this visceral challenge to consensus reality in mind that Fourier's utopian thinking can be understood not as an apolitical detour from revolutionary praxis, but as a road sign pointing toward the glittering intersection of anarchy and surrealism.

As Marie-Dominique Massoni, an active participant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Paris Surrealist Group and veteran of the May '68 uprising in Paris, has explained, "In opposition to instrumental reason, the surrealists emphasize the imagination; against scientific demonstration they affirm the magic moment of poetic evidence, the metaphor whose secret networks encourage the quest for 'the gold of time,' as opposed to the finite gold of profit-seekers caught in the vicious circle of materialism. 'Change life!' does not imply that 'true life' is elsewhere or that it existed in humanity's Golden Age. There is no surrealist nostalgia for a mythical past. True life, as the surrealists understand it, is a genuine possibility that awaits its historical chance."

With these watchwords in mind, even and especially in these most dystopian of times, surrealists fervently continue to seek nothing less than the re-enchantment of the world.

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