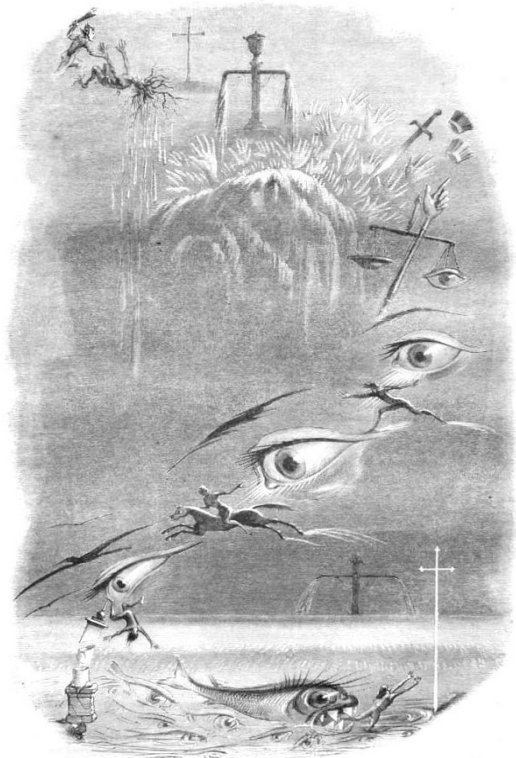


Georges Sebbag

## The Animated Painting of the Surrealist Dreamer (IV)

In 1844, in *Un Autre monde* [Another World], subtitled *Transformations, visions, incarnations, ascensions, locomotions, explorations, pérégrinations, excursions, stations, cosmogonies, fantasmagories, rêveries, folâtreries, facéties, lubies / Métamorphoses, métempsycoses, apotheoses et autres choses* [Transformations, Visions, Incarnations, Ascensions, Locomotions, Explorations, Peregrinations, Excursions, Stations, Cosmogonies, Phantasmagorias, Reveries, Frolics, Jests, Whims / Metamorphoses, Metempsychoses, Apotheoses, and Other Things], the illustrator J.J. Grandville invented the philosophy of disguise. As he saw it, the universe is a puppet theatre, an opera house, a vast music hall in which, onstage as in the stalls, the animal parodies the human, the human apes the vegetal, the vegetal plays god, god has something of the puppet, the puppet

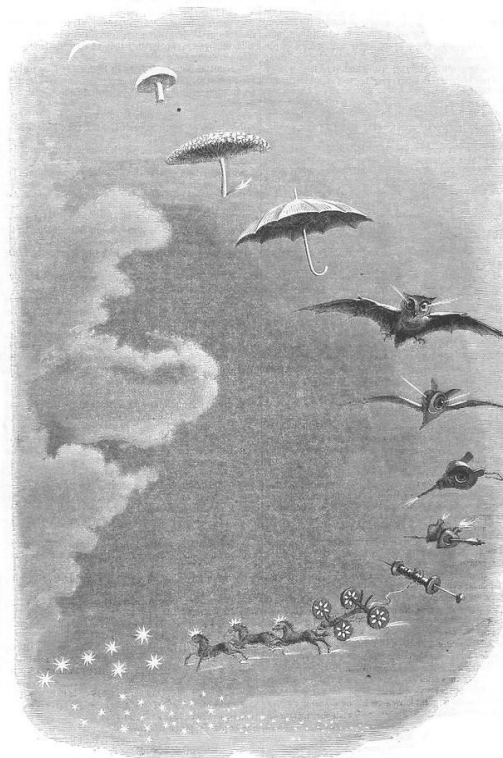


J.J. Grandville, *Nocturnal Visions and Transformations*

mimes the artist, the artist takes himself for an instrument, and so on. Grandville urges the Hegelian philosophy of history to give way to a philosophy of imitation, a society of the spectacle, a fierce battle between disguises and doubles, animate and inanimate objects, living and imaginary creatures. It is known that Walter Benjamin related the jests and whims of Grandville to the wonderland of the universal exhibitions and to commodity fetishism. In actuality, the illustrator from Nancy had merely to draw on the dramaturgy of the dream image. Grandville, illustrator of *La Musique animée* [Animated Music] and of *Les Fleurs animées* [Animated Flowers], is the first painter of the *animated images* of the dream. He is also the painter of the metamorphoses of the imagination, of the transmutation of the species, and of the philosophy of disguise. Freud will claim that the dream is the *disguise* of an unconscious desire.

Which mischief-maker leads the dance? The illustrator or the writer?

The pencil or the pen? Grandville's images or the text by Taxile Delord? That is the question posed in the introduction to *Un autre monde*. For Grandville, the answer is not in doubt. Image, pencil and illustrator open the ball and give the signal for the waltz or the roundelay of words to begin. The draftsman is no longer the simple illustrator of a sacrosanct text, he is the one who inspires it. Henceforth, he will take the lead and make his presence felt. By means of maps, emblems, figures, symbols, enigmas, rebuses, signs, posters, labels, portraits, landscapes and other kinds of framings he will allow a new connecting thread to unwind, he will sustain a different mode and rhythm of reading. Such, moreover, is the teaching of the dream, in which words count for very little with regard to the dramaturgy of the images. Such will be the preconception of the comic strip and the cartoon film. Such will be the perspective of film editing, in which sight competes on an equal footing with hearing. Abandoning his role as a cartoonist, Grandville goes where his fancy takes him, floating on the wings of fantasy. Imagination guides understanding. It even paves the way to intriguing metaphysical speculations.



J.J. Grandville, *A Stroll in the Sky*

Shortly before his death, which occurred on March 17, 1847, Grandville sent two drawings to the illustrated magazine *Le Magasin pittoresque* [The Picturesque Magazine], two *animated* drawings, so to speak, because they are clearly based on the transformation of an initial object and have to be looked at in a dynamic descending line. The first, *Visions et transformations nocturnes* [Nocturnal Visions and Transformations] (a *wayside cross* is transformed into a *fountain*, which metamorphoses into a judge's *cap* and the *scales of justice*) or *Crime et expiation* [Crime and Atonement] (a huge, terrifying eye pursues a murderer) is akin to a nightmare. The second, *Promenade dans le ciel* [A Stroll in the Sky], not unlike a reverie, describes a cascade of transformations in the firmament: a crescent moon, humble cryptogram, umbelliferous plant, parasol, bat, winged bellows, bellows, bobbin with a skein of thread, four-wheeled cart pulled by three fiery steeds, canopy of stars.

(continued on page 4)

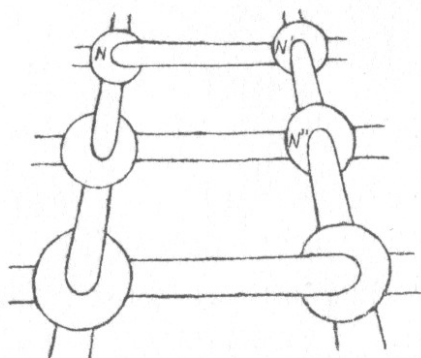
# André Breton

## Oneiric Fullfilment and Genesis of an Animated Picture

I am at my friend Oscar Dominguez, in the morning. With my back turned to the window, I watch him paint. He is happy to be able to devote himself entirely, for the time being, to this activity: his girlfriend let him engage in it without further concern, as long as his military service lasts; once he has completed the desired paintings (?) it will be time to move on, if necessary, to something else.

\*

I am very much interested in the progress of the present painting, and that is due to the fact that it appears to my eyes to spring from a completely new conception that is overwhelming. I expect a pattern of trees nested within one another to be repeated up to the edges of the canvas—on it, the knots N, N', N''... are, for the moment, six in number. When I focus on them, I note that each of these knots is actually the rear end of a lion (N is that of a lion lying in the direction N' N', N' that of a lion lying in the direction N'' N', etc.). Each lion is frantically licking the sex of the neighboring lion (a female sex, although they are lions and not lionesses). Perhaps the words “oral pleasure” are pronounced in one of the corners of the room. The posteriors and sexual parts of the lions are violently colored, like those of cynocephali. Red and yellow dominate,



and the colors are distributed in concentric circles starting from the sex in the following order: poppy, pink, light yellow. The admirable thing is that, as Dominguez makes them appear, the lions immediately perform “in reality” the aforesaid operation, so that the canvas comes more and more alive. By the combined effect of the painting and the action of the lions, each lion's behind identifies gradually with the sun. Under my amazed eyes unfolds an aurora borealis.



\*

(Here, unfortunately, an important gap, judging by the very real regret of forgetting upon awakening. This gap obliges me to relate the end of the dream only to commit it to memory.) Dominguez continues to paint, but

in a darker room (I cannot say if it is later, or if we are in a different place). He must have found a mechanical means of executing his lion-trees, a means capable of eliminating all effort and allowing him, in particular, to obtain easily the desirable intensity of N, N', etc. To that end he carries fire (*I do not know upon waking by which means*) and, taking his time and turning his back to me, drops this blue-green fire (similar to the molten glass that glassmakers pick up at the end of a blowpipe) in a kind of very shallow rectangular vat, a simple depression rather in the floor, that occupies about a quarter of the room. The work then continues without its help. Very seduced at first by the ingenuity of this method, I begin to worry. This fire, that seemed to me to be able to extinguish itself by touching the ground, has the tendency more and more to persist, and burns deeper. After having fought it distractedly, I decide to throw on it the contents of several jugs of water. As I bring the second and the third of these jugs, I see that Dominguez has disappeared into the vat and I answer someone who asks me (?) that he is “lost” (this answer, intended specifically to create a pathetic situation, I am not fooled by formulating it and take it tragically only when it is pronounced). I then realize that everything [is] incandescent inside the vat: how to drown it in water? I manage to mechanically pour all the available water on it, but to no avail. My first concern, which was reasonable, gives way to a hasty panic to run downstairs (we are at one of the top floors of the house). As I rush out, my wife, stupefied, stops me: “Wait, you forget your little girl!” I take the child with me. Downstairs there are many people, like on the platform of a train station. Someone wants to know the causes of the disaster: I assure him that they will be impossible to discover. There is now a circle of fire to cross; I hold the little girl in my arms, after having for a moment the right arm passed between her legs (she is smaller than in reality and wears a white dress). I ask the doctor (?) what to do and I fear that the flesh of the child can withstand the burns less than mine. But this doctor seems especially concerned about whether I have other children. I listen impatiently (his attitude, when waking up, evokes for me that of a customs officer). He tells me that Léon Blum was there a few moments ago and he couldn't have gone far. I try to see him and, if at all possible, talk to him.

Waking up (*February 7, 1937, 3:05 a.m., immediate notation*).

### **In a Field of Fire, from the Knotted Tree to the Aurora Borealis by Way of a Grid of Fellating Lions**

*I had gone to bed earlier than usual, having experienced a start of intoxication caused by the state of disrepair of the stovepipe in my workshop. A few days before, given the prolonged absence of the repairmen, I admit that I had yielded to the deplorable impulse of tightening around this pipe a strip of cloth that covered the most visible cracks. On the evening of February 5, a friend of mine (X of Communicating Vessels) had suddenly burst out laughing as she discovered this derisory dressing near the ceiling. The next day, the day before the dream, my wife and I noticed that a smear was spreading rapidly and simulated to perfection a stain of blood gradually imbibing the gauze.*

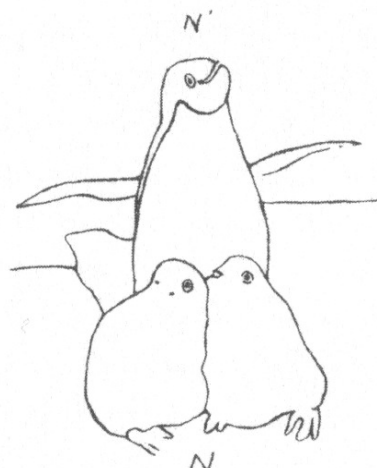
*It seems interesting to me, thus updating these fundamental data (whose sexual content is quite transparent), to reveal some of the elements with which they will combine to provide the frame of my dream. In particular, the richness and variety of the interpretations that give themselves freer*

course deserve, on their own, to hold attention. The admiration experienced by the dreamer for the spectacle that is offered to him, the very wonder that seizes him at one point of its unfolding (and whose preceding objective relation cannot pretend to give an idea) would suffice to make us admit that we are here in a good position to grasp on the spot the process of poetic or artistic creation as we conceive it in surrealism, to distinguish in it what pertains to eroticism and what pertains to psychology—that is, what is function of desire and what is function of knowledge.

The stovepipe, with its wounds concealed by a cloth, obviously provides the first elements—tree and knot—of the painting. If it is Dominguez who in the dream is responsible for executing this painting, it is first of all because he showed, in the preceding months, a predilection for this metallic form: the empty sardine can, open or half-open by means of a key, that appears insistently in his paintings and objects and which key symbolically coincides with that of the stove. It is also because, by identifying him one day with a tree of his country, I nicknamed him the “dragon tree of the Canaries.” I tried to show, in *Mad Love*, the precise place where he is from, that magical valley of Orotava guarded by the largest dragon tree in the world (like a princess guarded by a dragon): “The immense tree, that plunges its roots in prehistory, throws into the day, that the appearance of man has not yet spoiled, its impeccable trunk that bursts sharply in oblique trunks, according to a perfectly regular radiation.” (This rectitude and this symmetry find their equivalent in the trees’ image.) “He keeps intact,” I continue, “with all its strength those still alive shadows among us, that are of the kings of the Jurassic fauna, whose traces are found as soon as we scrutinize the human libido.”

Through an image discovered a few days earlier in a Hachette publication on birds—the photograph of a penguin between its cubs, that imperiously suggests the idea of an erect male sex—operates the substitution of lions for the trees that uses, on the one hand, the knowledge of the fact that Dominguez painted before a bull-lion, and on the other hand the imperishable memory that I kept of a lions’ coitus that I witnessed during a visit to the Zoological Garden of Antwerp (how to forget the splendid spasm of the wounded lioness, to the unimaginable cry of which responded a single roar coming from all the surrounding cages?). The particular activity of the lions in the dream is probably caused by the replacement of the word Antwerp [Anvers] by its homophobic counterpart [envers —“reverse”]. I think, in fact, that crayfish move backwards, that is in reverse, and I remember writing in response to a dare, in the countryside a few months ago, a “sonnet” entitled *Crayfish Fishing*, the first tercet of which still stays in my memory:

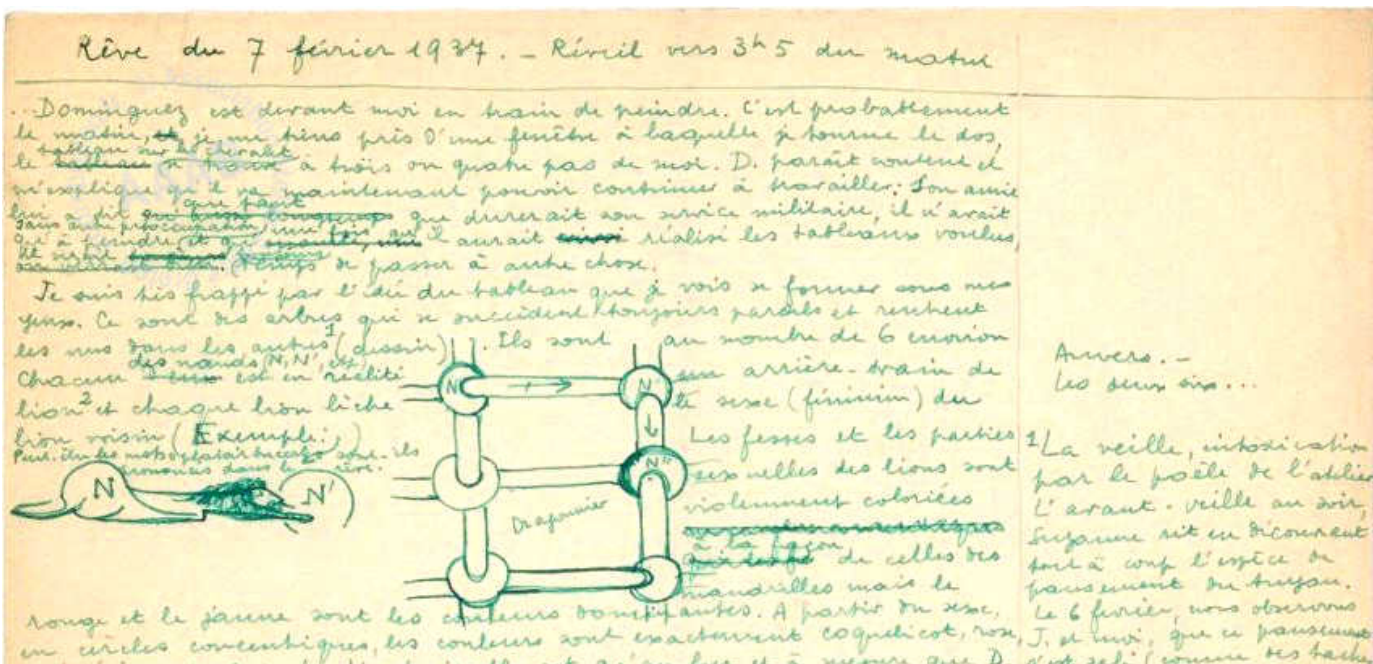
The child under the dew with the good dart that licks him  
Sees the dawning of two sixes sleeping head to tail  
From the depths of time appears the true Blue Knight



The second of these verses, where we find the number 6 of the dream, obviously describes the graphic emblem under which the astrological sign of cancer (or crayfish) appears, and that lends itself to an easy assimilation with a well-known erotic symbol. Actually, I have been thinking for a long time to realize what appeared to me as a very enigmatic “proverb-object” conceived from the precept “Do not put the cart in front of the horse”: it would entail the harnessing of two crayfish at a cart of their scale and naturally placing the cart in front of the crayfish (remembering to turn the cart around).

Independently of the sun’s astrological home for the sign of Leo, the transition from lion to sun is provided by the posterior illumination of the lion (borrowed from the sun-worshipping cynocephalus in Egyptian belief). I must also point out that the colors of the aurora borealis which had been, as for many others, a subject of exaltation in my childhood, was singularly revived for me, on February 5, by reading this confession of Lichtenberg: “Autobiography: Do not forget that once I wrote the question “What is the aurora borealis?” and slipped it into Graupner’s attic, addressed thus: “To an angel,” and I came back the next morning looking timidly for my note. Oh, how I wish a joker would have answered it!”

Published in *Cahiers GLM* no. 7, “Trajectory of the Dream,” March 1938  
(Translated by Sasha Vlad)



Manuscript fragment of André Breton’s dream of February 7, 1937

It is curious to note that three weeks before his death André Breton did a series of *animated* or *automatic* drawings keeping to the same principle of an initial object, the difference being that the surrealist stresses, in his meandering line, the continuity of the mark-making. In Grandville as in Breton the previous shape serves as a dynamic, analogous motif to the one that follows. Let's take the drawing that Breton captioned with the composite word *Cerisesmanègetourellelangoustepiège* [Cherriesmerrygo-roundturretlobstertrap]: 1. The triangle of two *cerises* (cherries) linked by their stalks gives rise to the cone of a *manège* (merry-go-round); 2. The turning of the merry-go-round metamorphoses into a *tourelle* (turret of a tank); 3. The gun turret engenders a *langouste* (lobster) with two long antennae; 4. The whole sweep of these is transformed into a *piège* (trap) with toothed jaws.



*Cerisesmanègetourellelangoustepiège*

St. Cinq la Popie, 9 septembre 1966  
43.

*Cerisesmanègetourellelangoustepiège*

André Breton, drawing of September 9, 1966

Like some naturalist of the Transformist school, Grandville did his utmost to draw the genesis of the species and the mutation of forms. He allowed himself to transform the forms he was drawing in accordance with his reveries and his imagination. Furthermore, on two occasions, Hervey de Saint-Denys remarked that Grandville was aware of the “capricious mutations” of dreams because he had sketched “a graduated series of silhouettes beginning with that of a female dancer and ending with that of wildly moving bobbin.” This drawing in fact forms part of “The Metamorphoses of Sleep” chapter of *Un Autre monde*. Two different studies for it exist. The first gets under way with the bird: a hovering bird → flying bow with quiver → *bilboquet* (cup-and-ball game) → vase with flower → expansion of the vase and metamorphosis of the *belle-de-nuit* (four o'clock flower) into a *belle-de-jour* (convolvulus) → woman in a summer dress with elegant gait → diaphanous woman → shell → trumpet → snake. The second study inverts the order of the transformations and speeds up their shift from one to the other: woman in ball gown → flower in a vase → *bilboquet* → bow → carrier pigeon → ship's anchor → mobile cross → leap with the help of a rope → flight from a charging bull.

### Surrealist Animated Painting

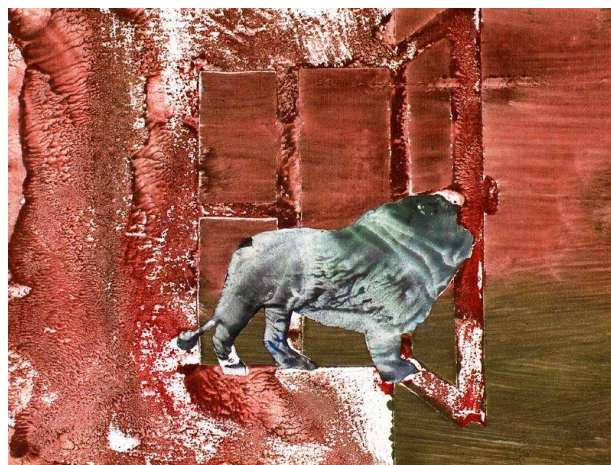
In *La Peinture animée* [Animated Painting], an unpublished text from 1936, Breton considers the contraction and dilatation of time in the cinema and in painting. The fast motions and crazy metamorphoses of cartoon films does not dissolve time. On the contrary, “the ephemeral, from its birth to its death, serves as a fixed star.” In fact, Breton discovers in theoretically evanescent precipitates like the cartoon, surrealist collage and automatic writing a single substantial *durée*, or duration, at odds with all deformation and all destruction. Seeing in the inventions of photography, film or the cartoon an immense challenge issued to painting and to poetry, Breton takes it upon himself to animate a series of images, to concretise the object of his desire, to reveal an exemplary automatic *durée* and, in a nutshell, to mimic the metamorphoses of the dream à la Grandville: “From now on, it is understood that pianos can be made to laugh or cry, logs in the hearth made to make way, by splitting, to an Inquisitor's triangular cowl imprinted with a heart, which will continue to get closer until it becomes a field of oats, etc.” (Breton, 1936, 1255).



J.J. Grandville, *Hovering Bird*

The following year Breton will use “animated painting” on two occasions. In the photomontage on black humour, two of the four images identifying Lichtenberg depict a brightly burning alchemist's oven and “an Inquisitor's triangular cowl imprinted with a heart.” But it is above all in the dream of February 7, 1937 that a painting is to be animated before Breton's eyes. In actual fact, the Surrealist dreamer observes Oscar Dominguez painting a grid pattern of trees on a canvas, or more precisely a series of lions perfectly interlocking with one another, each knot or junction representing a lion's hindquarters: “Each lion is frantically licking the sex of the neighbouring lion (a female sex, although they are lions and not lionesses).” The admirable thing is that “the picture is increasingly animated,” as the lions lick each other and the artist from the Canary Islands paints the erogenous zones in violent colours. Next, each lion rump painted by Dominguez is transformed into a sun: “before my wonderstruck eyes an aurora borealis unfolds.” (Breton, 1937, 1215-16). The conflagration does not end there. Dominguez, who executes his trees/lions with the help of a new process based on fire, disappears in a molten vat. Breton and his little girl only just escape the flames.

In this dream, Dominguez, the “dragon tree of the Canaries,” animates a grid of fellating-lions that metamorphoses into an aurora borealis on his canvas. The painter transforms his atelier into a film studio and an alchemist's laboratory. From this atelier of “animated painting” there will soon emerge decalcomanias like *Le Lion, la fenêtre* [The Lion, the Window] and lithochronic paintings like *Souvenir de l'avenir* [Memento of the Future] or *Cimetière d'éléphants* [Elephants' Graveyard].



Oscar Dominguez, *The Lion, the Window*, 1936  
(to be continued)