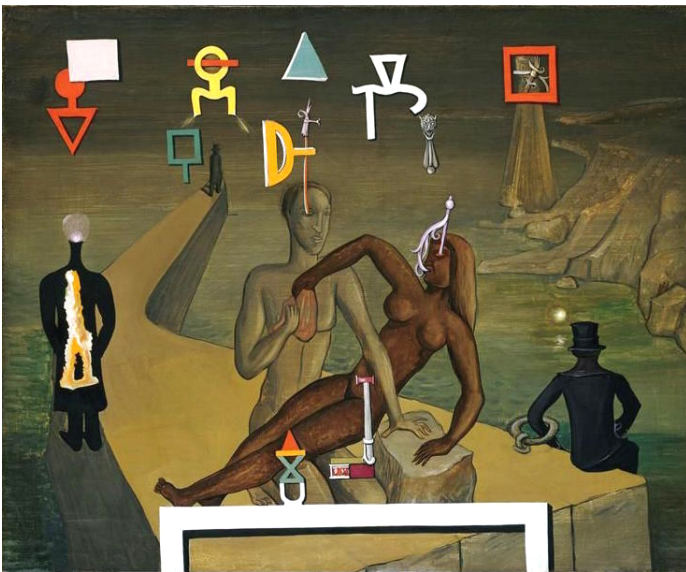


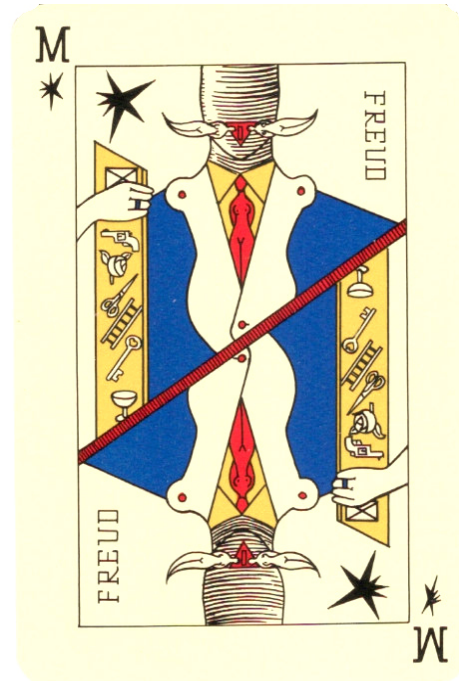
Georges Sebbag

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

It is not enough to say that Surrealist painting is collage-based and that it proceeds from the dream and automatism. It is necessary to show that it is an *animated painting* that follows in the wake of the metamorphoses drawn by Grandville. Each artist animates a series of images in the trajectory of his or her dreams. Facteur Cheval trudges along untiringly in order to construct a lithochronic palace with staircase and niches. Amidst a virgin forest Douanier Rousseau plants a nymph on a divan and a woman snake-charmer. Giorgio de Chirico maps the metaphysical city of Turin in which the Mole Antonelliana rises to the height of “the purity of a dream.” Self-hypnosis guaranteed: in the film *Anemic Cinema* Duchamp uncoils *contrepèteries*, erotic metatheses, on spinning spirals. With his scissors, brushes, collages and frottages, Max Ernst makes “a locomotive arrive on canvas” and “projects before our eyes the most captivating film in the world” (Breton, 1921, 61). Joan Miro flies over different lands while setting decoys from his flying trapeze. In Masson, the volcanic eruption of automatism petrifies the final erotic spasm of the sleeping Gradiva. Another dream of stone: Tanguy travels across interminable beaches where the remains of the palace of memory break the surface. Thanks to his key of dreams, Magritte activates a revolving curtain in which words are constantly out of sync with images. Night having fallen, Toyen impregnates her canvas with a tightrope-sleepwalker balancing on the tip of a *cerise mule*. Identified with Victor Hugo in Breton’s dreams, Victor Brauner dots his premonitory visions with cabbalistic signs. Delvaux’s cloned naked woman exhibits steadfast indifference, whatever her position. In Remedios Varo, the shadow of a she-werewolf is seated in an armchair. Psychological morphologies and flowing sperm dampen Matta’s bed sheets. A ballerina-fish glides around Štyrský’s aquarium of dreams.

Victor Brauner, *Mediterranean Landscape*, 1932

Animated drawings and photographs parade before our eyes in *Nadja*. During their wanderings the camera accompanies Nadja and André to the café and the restaurant. Even before their first encounter in the street the décor of the dream or of the film is already in place. Many a shot and sequence has been filmed, as different photographs attest: the Hôtel des

Oscar Dominguez, *Freud* (from *The Game of Marseille* playing cards), 1941

Grands Hommes, the statue of Étienne Dolet, Paul Éluard, a slumbering Desnos, the Porte Saint-Denis, the sign for BOIS-CHARBONS [firewood and coal], *L'Étreinte de la pieuvre* [The Grip of the Octopus], the L'Humanité bookshop, etc. To repeat, Aragon and Breton dream night and day and are awake day and night. *Le Paysan de Paris* [Paris Peasant] and *Nadja* are documentaries that are tantamount to a dream. The surrealists internalised the cinematic process which transforms fiction into document and document into fiction. What is surrealism? A dream, a dream narrative, a film, an album of photos, a poem, a collage, a painting in which animated images and automatic *durées* blossom forth.

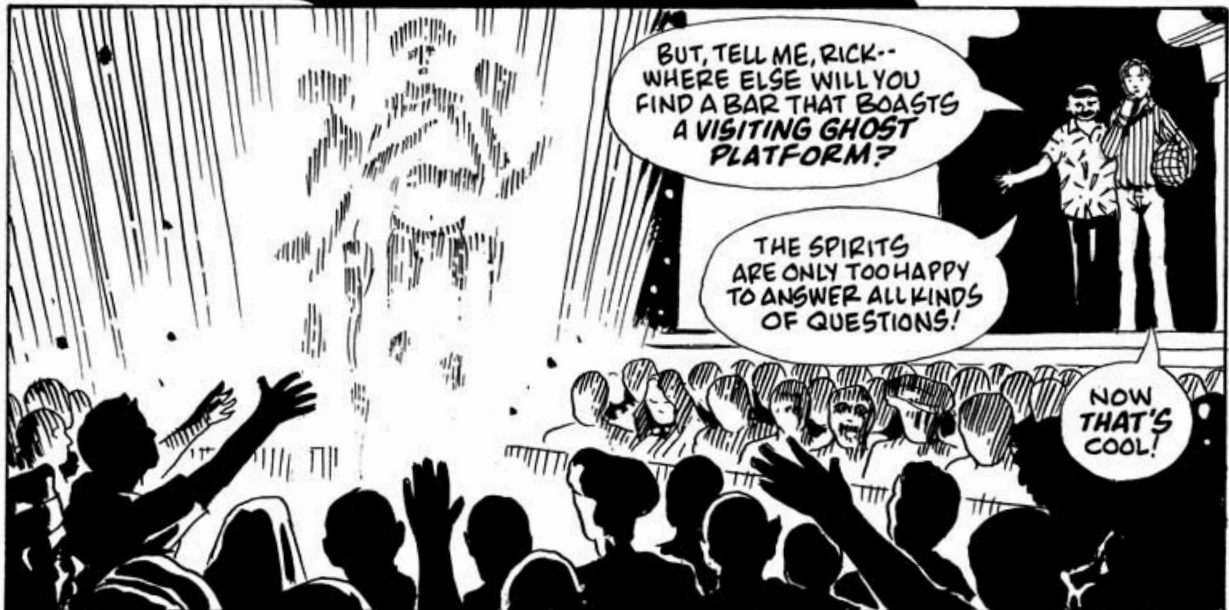
In photographic terms the photomaton from automatic photo booths are just as striking as the rayograms of Man Ray or the petrifications and *brûlages* of Raoul Ubac. The photographisms of Jindřich Heisler rival the night visions of Brassai. The documentary shots of Atget, Boiffard and Lotar are as just disturbing as the self-portraits of Claude Cahun or the missing objects revealed by Paul Nougé.

In *It's a Bird* (1930), the film by Charley Bowers and Harold Muller, animated creatures and objects rub shoulders with live characters; a metal-loving exotic bird is captured; fed on car bodies, it will lay an egg from which a life-sized automobile will hatch. Bowers is a worthy heir to Grandville. When Breton discovers the irresistible concatenations of these animated images, he will see in them a high point of cinema, humour and the dream: “But it’s in 1937, in *It's a Bird*, that we were first projected, our eyes opened to the prosaically sensorial distinction of the real and the fabulous, to the very heart of the black star.” (*Minotaure* 10, Winter 1937).

In the *Anthologie de l'humour noir* [Anthology of Black Humour] Breton will say that the euphoria of Nietzsche’s last letter of January 6, 1889 “flares in a black star in the enigmatic *Astu*, which is a counterpart to *Baou!* in Rimbaud’s poem ‘Dévotion’ [Devotion].” In 1941, in Marseille, the Surrealists come up with a new deck of playing cards reflecting their four main preoccupations: Love, Dream, Revolution and Knowledge; the Dream having for its emblem the Black Star and being represented by the Genius Lautréamont, the Siren Alice and the Magus Freud.

(continued on page 4)

# DIGITAL DREAMS





Rick Veitch, two dream comics, undated

(DIGITAL DREAMS continued on page 4)

(DIGITAL DREAMS continued from page 3)



Petra Mandal, *Surrealist group 7 fingers*, oneiric object, 1990

I have got a ring in the shape of a thumb bent at a right angle on the thumb of my left hand. The ring is a facsimile of the finger it is on. Still dreaming. I wonder about it.



Václav Švankmajer, *Dream about a ring*, 2011

(continued from page 1)

*The Black Star* is a phrase or an image having a power of deflagration and evocation. Breton associates it with *It's a Bird, Astu, Baou* and *Dream*. Firstly, emanations, explosions of Rimbaud: Breton who considers "Rêve" [Dream], Rimbaud's last poem, to be his "poetic and spiritual testament," will erect an altar to Léonie Auboiss d'Ashby (associated with the word *Baou* in "Dévotion") in the 1947 International Exhibition of Surrealism. Secondly, Nietzsche's collapse: in his final letter Nietzsche celebrates the Mole Antonelliana while identifying himself with the architect Alessandro Antonelli, who has just died; for an emblem, Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical painting will have the Mole Antonelliana, glorified in such pictures as *La Pureté d'un rêve* [The Purity of a Dream], *La Nostalgie de l'infini* [Nostalgia of the Infinite] or *L'Énigme de la fatalité* [The Enigma of Fate]. Thirdly, the mutation of a bird in Grandville (hovering bird → bow → *bilboquet* → vase with flower → woman → shell → trumpet → snake) and Bowers (bird, swallower of a slide trombone as well as bits of scrapped



Giorgio De Chirico, *The Enigma of Fate*, 1914

cars → new-laid egg → egg heated on a stove → fast-motion manufacture of an automobile).

\* \* \*

To all the expressions and manifestations of Surrealism—collages, automatic texts, dream narratives, manifestoes, tracts, drawings, paintings, photos, objects, magazines, exhibitions—one could apply the same generating and driving principle, that of the animated images of the dream. Following the impetus of Grandville, the surrealists devote themselves to the image and affirm the dynamic of the dream, the continuity of psychic life. Challenging logical thought, the order of the world and linear time, they surprise themselves when cutting up images, twisting words, sticking the bits back together. Playing at the *exquisite corpse* of desire and chance, they discover the automatism of writing, of painting and of *durée* [duration]. The artist who responds to the necessity of the *animated painting* of the dream and the free, disinterested play of thought will go by the name of Surrealist.

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