



JAN ŠVANKMAJER ON DREAMS

The purpose of my film “Something from Alice” is seemingly modest: to draw attention to dreams, which in contemporary civilization have ceased to count, and which society has dumped on the rubbish heap of our psyche. The latest significant scientific treatise on dreams, Freud’s “Interpretation of Dreams”, is over a hundred years old! But dreams and reality are actually the communicating vessels (to quote André Breton) of our lives. G. C. Lichtenberg wrote at the end of the 18th century: “Once again, I recommend dreams! We live and feel in a dream just as well as in our waking hours, and both the former and the latter are part of our existence. It is one of the advantages of man that he dreams and is aware of it. It has hardly truly been harnessed. A dream is a life which, added to the rest of our life, creates what we call a human life. Dreams slowly fade out upon our waking, and it is impossible to say when one starts and the other one ends.”

We have forgotten Lichtenberg’s recommendation and pay dearly for it. Dream, this natural well of imagination, is consistently buried, and the space left empty is occupied by the absurdity produced on a large scale by our “scientific rational systems.” If we do not begin once more to tell fairy tales and ghost stories before we go to sleep in the evening, and recount our dreams after we wake up in the morning, nothing can be expected of our current civilization.

Dreams are those parts of our lives where neither natural, nor social laws have any power over us. That explains the contemptuous attitude toward dreams on the one hand, as opposed to a desperate attempt on the other hand to rationalize dreams and their functions within “scientifically controlled systems.” In dreams, where the greater part of our personality takes control—that personality, which during our conscious state is drowned beneath the surface of the competitive crowd—we are at our own mercy, at the mercy of our own laws. And that is why even in our dreams we are not spared repression. A repression that we impose on ourselves. As a child during the war I used to be repeatedly chased by foreign soldiers in my dreams. I used to escape from them across the courtyards of the blocks of houses where we lived. And the following morning I would review my nocturnal dream-like flight from the balcony on the fourth floor overlooking the courtyard, and invent new variations of evasions for the next night. Thus equipped, I was able to expect my next harrowing dream calmly and with the realistic hope that I would succeed in escaping again. I mention this experience from my childhood because it could come in useful, if we reversed dreams into reality and vice-versa, thus creating a model of prevention against real repression.

From *Transmutation of the Senses*, Prague, 1994

“Devil’s Trill”

Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770), the famous Italian Baroque composer and violonist, had a dream that inspired his best known composition: a solo violin sonata of extreme technical difficulty, which Tartini named the “Devil’s Trill.” The story of this dream is told in an interview that Tartini gave to the French astronomer Jérôme Lalande a few years before his death, and it appears in Lalande’s book *Voyage d’un François en Italie* (1765–1766):

One night, in the year 1713, I dreamed I had made a pact with the devil for my soul. Everything went as I wished: my new servant anticipated my every desire. Among other things, I gave him my violin to see if he could play. How great was my astonishment on hearing a sonata so wonderful and so beautiful, played with such great art and intelligence, as I had never even conceived in my boldest flights of fantasy. I felt enraptured, transported, enchanted: my breath failed me, and—I awoke. I immediately grasped my violin in order to retain, in part at least, the impression of my dream. In vain! The music which I at this time composed is indeed the best that I ever wrote, and I still call it the “Devil’s Trill”, but the difference between it and that which so moved me is so great that I would have destroyed my instrument and have said farewell to music forever, if it had been possible for me to live without the enjoyment it affords me.



At the point in the third movement where the actual Devil’s trill begins, an annotation in the earliest printing says “the Devil at the foot of the bed.” That moment is captured in the above illustration by Louis-Leopold Boilly from 1824.

Escape from Egypt

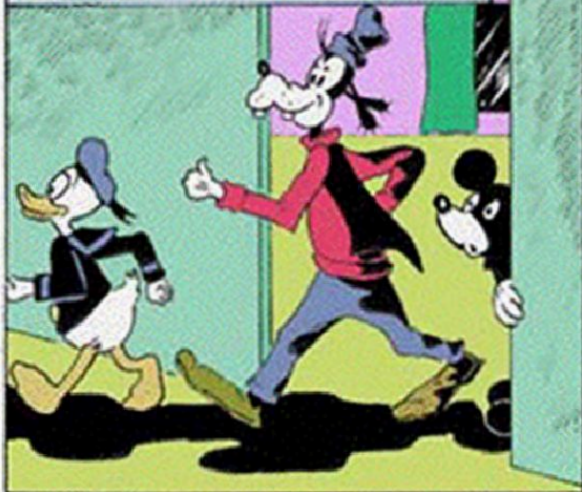
If *homo sapiens* is, according to currently accepted estimations, sixty thousand years old, we can compare chronologically his current situation with that of a sixty-year-old man, in terms of the duration of his waking, sleeping, and dreaming life. In general, specialists distinguish forty years of physical and mental activity, and twenty years of sleep, which is interrupted by five years of dreaming. This periodicity varies slightly in different individuals, while neither daydreaming, nor the capacity of remembering the dreams’ duration, is taken into account.

At the scale of the human species’ evolution in its present state, this division translates into a past of forty thousand years devoted mainly to the perception, treatment, and interpretation of information coming from the external world, as well as the creation of the necessary behaviors for the conservation of physical, individual and collective life, and a period of

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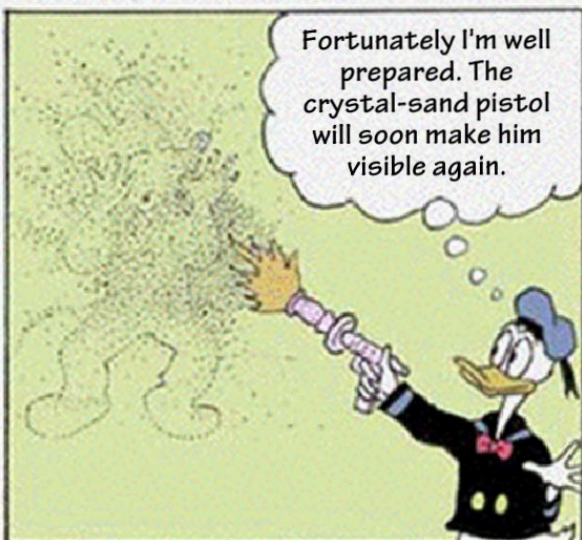
As the friends leave the room the shadows fall off from them...



Except for Mickey. He becomes invisible...

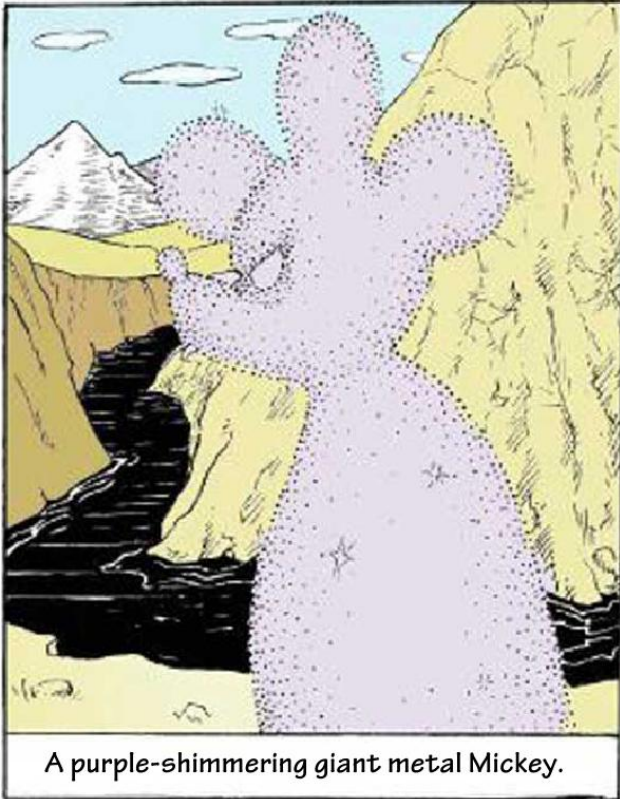


Fortunately I'm well prepared. The crystal-sand pistol will soon make him visible again.

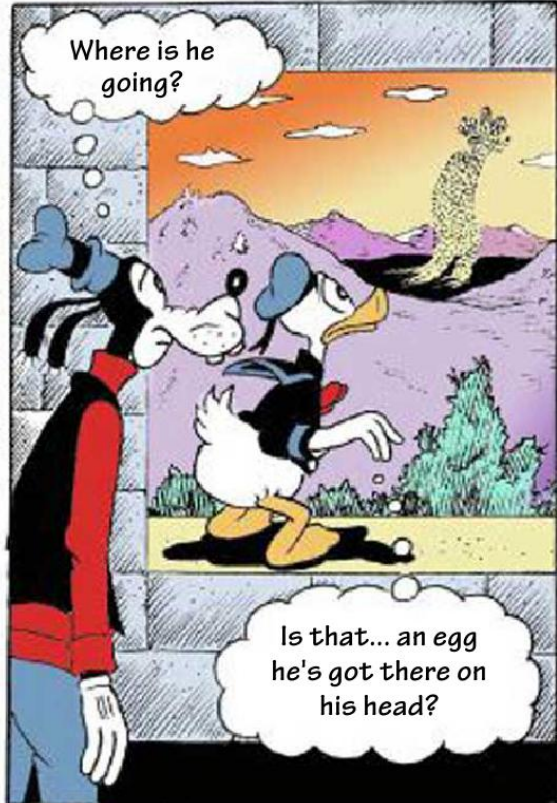


Visible - yes. But Mickey grows as well...



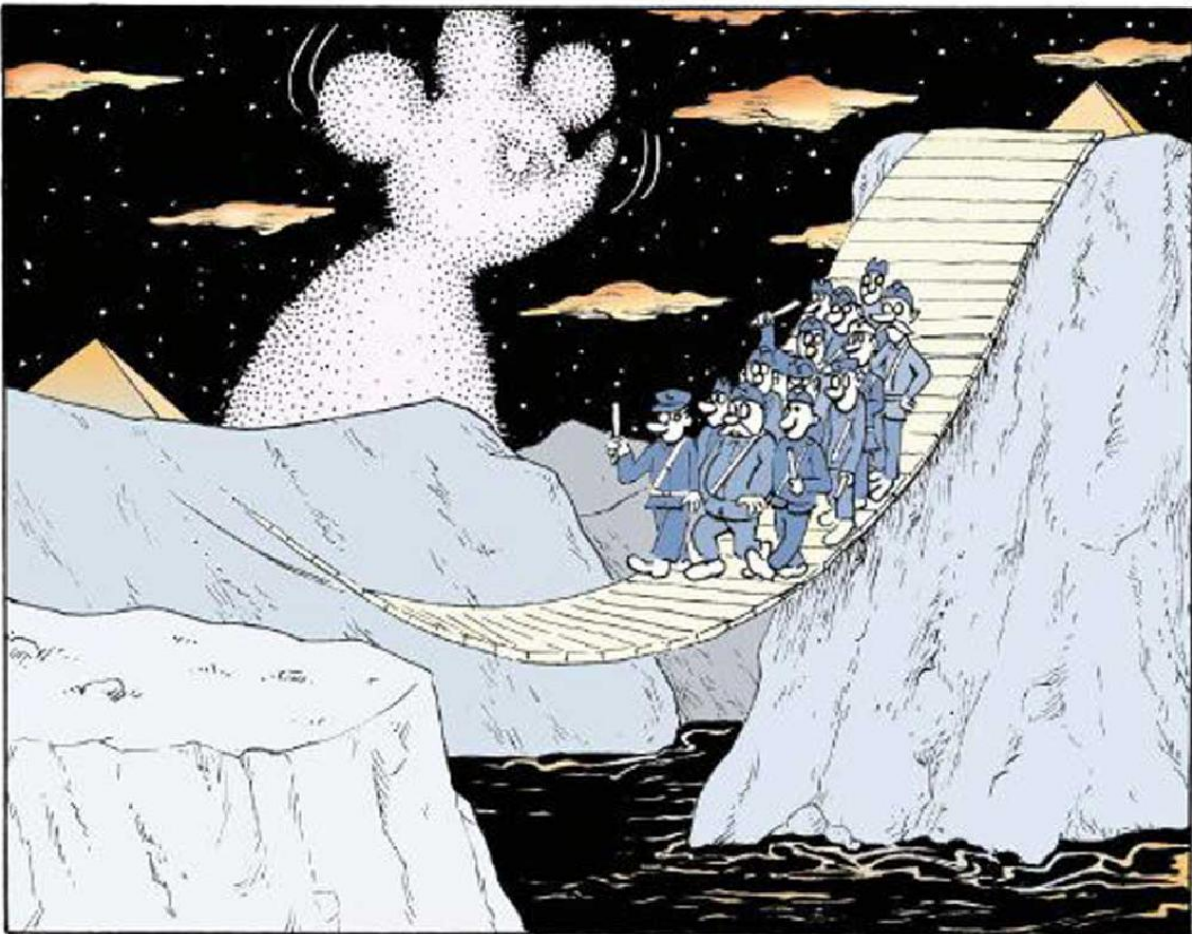


A purple-shimmering giant metal Mickey.



Where is he going?

Is that... an egg he's got there on his head?



From a Disney magazine seen in dream by Niklas Nenzén, dream from 1999

Dreaming of Duchamp

Conversing with Marcel Duchamp and telling him that Delacroix was staying in a N.Y.C. hotel – he did not believe it when a Parisian one was mentioned – something about wanting to obtain from Delacroix one of his handkerchiefs probably or possibly via Duchamp.

Thus the fact that Delacroix was alive in our contemporary scene taken for granted in the dream and just the locale the source of any doubt?

Evening of October 7, 68 before midnight Monday on couch (regular sleeping quarters Flushing)

first dream about Duchamp since his passing.

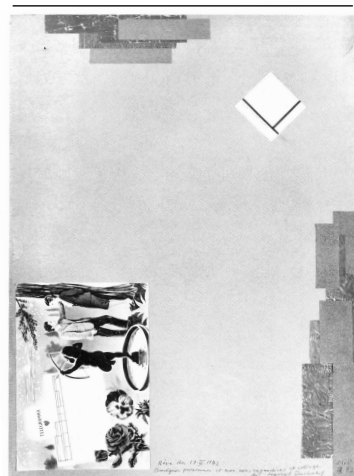
10/19/68 8:15 am Joseph Cornell

1955

One looks at an image like a relief carving (overdoor panel) by Marcel Duchamp. It's a big cardboard, showing the following: In the middle, a coat of arms with a bouquet of roses (Rose Selavy), held on the left and on the right by two foxes (Duchamp was a redhead).

I say: How strange, I've done something very similar, showing an image of the same size, which has in the middle a black coat of arms with a bouquet of lilies of the valley painted on it. The coat of arms was held by two black bears on each side.

Meret Oppenheim

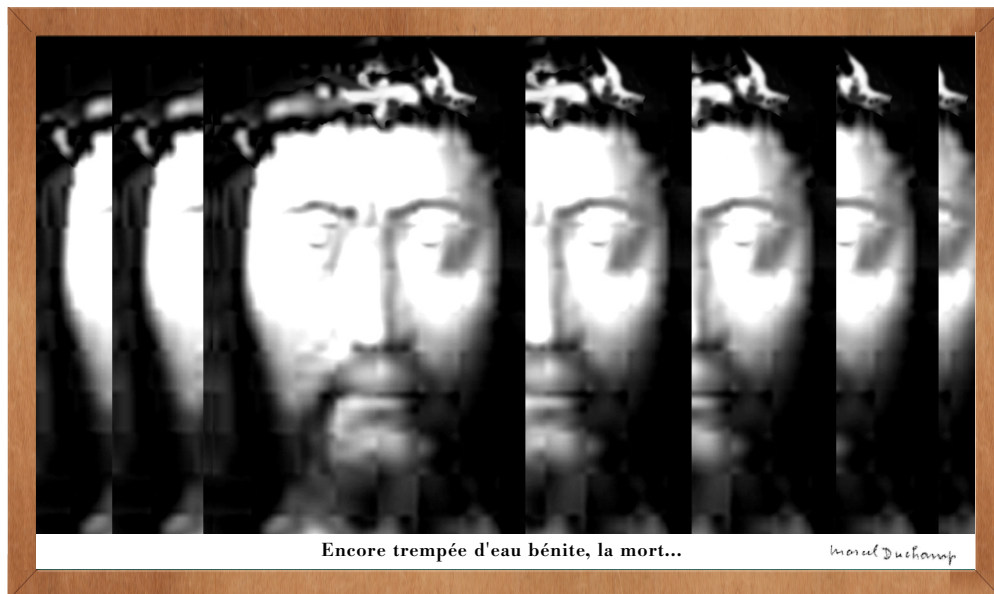


Dream of March 17, 1972

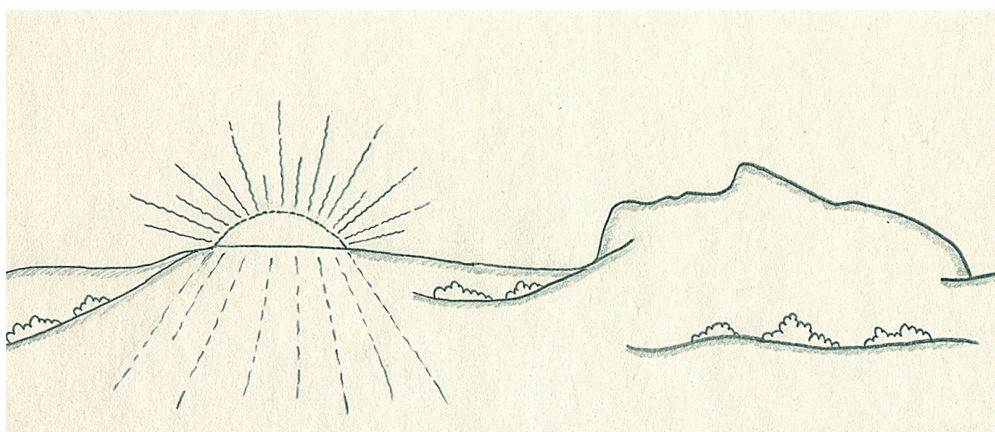
Some people and I were looking at this collage by Marcel Duchamp.

In the square above, one can read: "Ça continue" ("It goes on"). Exact reproduction, with the exception of the "love card", which was replaced by one found on the same day.

Meret Oppenheim



Work by Marcel Duchamp entitled *Still soaked in holy water, death...*
Bruno Jacobs, dream of June 3, 1998



Drawing of a rural landscape with a rising sun and Marcel Duchamp's profile
Bruno Jacobs, dream of January 31, 2003

Dream of February 19, 2013

On a beautiful spring day, in a flea market in the middle of the woods, I buy a book on Marcel Duchamp. The book is in big cardboard case and its text is bilingual, in French and English. Among the illustrations, photos and documents pertaining to Duchamp's life and work, there are other very diverse and surprising images and fragments of texts that would be more appropriate in a study of comparative mythology, or even in a collection of fairy tales. This whole set appears to me more disconcerting than seducing, under the cover of the trees' majestic foliage.

Guy Girard

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twenty thousand years without conscious contact with the visible universe. In this state, for at least five millennia, man witnessed and participated in the oneiric unfolding of innumerable scenes of his personal nocturnal theater. Therefore, a history, which claims to be "positive" but only shows interest in waking life events, ignores completely all dream events and the duration of an experience that is longer than ancient and modern civilizations, from Sumer and the advent of writing, until the present day.

René Alleau, from *La sortie d'Égypte* (in *La civilisation surréaliste*), 1976