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The Language of Surrealism

Peter Stockwell

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The Language of Surrealism

Peter Stockwell

Series Editors

Rocío Montoro and Paul Simpson



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This one's for Edith

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Series Editors' Note

Language, Style and Literature is a series of books in literary stylistics, where stylistics is understood as a form of literary study that is embedded in, and conducted through, contemporary models of language and linguistics. The books in the series focus either on the language of a major author or on a major literary development. What the various volumes share is an interest in rigorous and informative treatments of particular writers, genres or literary periods as well as in the key linguistic-stylistic tropes that mark distinct periods in literary history.

In many respects, *The Language of Surrealism* is an excellent curtain-raiser to this new series. Stockwell's survey of the Surrealist movement is methodical, eclectic and extremely well-researched – making it an essential resource for those interested in the development of this art form into, and through, late Modernity. Very much the embodiment of the spirit of the series, *The Language of Surrealism* employs a range of linguistic and cognitive-poetic models in its exploration of both the verbal and pictorial forms of surrealist art. Stockwell also deals deftly with the 'multi-modal' features of surrealist expression, and while his central focus on language and stylistic composition is sustained throughout, he never loses sight both of the artistic milieu and of the historical context in which surrealist art was shaped and disseminated. Another key feature of the book is the way it aligns its own approach (where appropriate) with those of literary and art critics, and sometimes with the surrealist artists themselves. Rather than criticise these writers for their perhaps overly impressionistic approach to textual understanding, Stockwell works hard to synthesise his own cognitive-poetic approach with theirs, most notably in his explication of core surrealist techniques such as automaticity, dissonance and collage.

Lucid and accessible, Peter Stockwell's book is an authoritative and ground-breaking study. It is moreover an excellent exemplar of the stylistic method at work, not least because of the way in which it extends the boundaries of the discipline, opening up the field to new scholars and researchers. In sum, we are convinced that *The Language of Surrealism* will become a key resource in contemporary literary stylistics as well as in critical and creative explorations of surrealist art.

Liverpool and Granada

July 2016

Dr Rocío Montoro and Professor Paul Simpson

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

I have been trying to write this book for the last 20 years, and every time it was started, it turned into a different book. I have finally caught and landed it, but I could not have done so without a great deal of support and encouragement. Two decades of people are too many to thank individually, but I would particularly like to single out a few groups. Firstly, Paul Simpson and Rocío Montoro have been wise guiding lights, and found the best place for the book. Secondly, I have benefited both by specific advice and by the fruitful ambience created by my literary linguistic colleagues and literary researchers at Nottingham, in particular Violeta Sotirova, Michaela Mahlberg, Ron Carter, John McRae, Katie Wales, Matt Green, and Nathan Waddell. I am also indebted to the brilliant collective thinking of the members past and present of the Cognitive Poetics Research Group: Alice Bell, Isabelle van der Bom, Joe Bray, Sam Browse, Richard Finn, Joanna Gavins, Alison Gibbons, Sarah Jackson, Andi Macrae, Jess Norledge, Dave Peplow, and Sara Whiteley. The book would have been impossible without the love and support of Joanna, and without the constant reminders by Ada and Edith that all children are surreal at heart.

Parts of [Chapter 1](#) appeared, in an earlier form, in ‘The surrealist experiments with language’ in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (eds Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale, Routledge, 2012), and have been revised and expanded here. A preliminary version of the analysis in [Chapter 5](#) appeared in the ‘Sur(real) stylistics’ chapter in *Contextualised Stylistics* (eds Tony Bex, Michael Burke, and Peter Stockwell, Rodopi, 2000). Other parts of the discussion have formed elements of talks I have given most recently at the University of Malta, University Paul Valéry Montpellier, Free University Berlin, UBC Vancouver, University of Vienna, City University of Hong Kong, Carlsberg Academy Copenhagen, University of Lyon III, and at the British Council in Barcelona. I would like to thank the staff and students of these institutions, and of course my own students at the University of Nottingham, for sharing their thinking.

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It is not an easy task to trace the copyright holders of surrealist works that were often only printed on flyers and leaflets – ephemera created by writers who did not believe in conventional property ownership, and dispersed in the chaos of war. The author would particularly like to thank the following for permission to reproduce texts in this book:

Mary Ann Caws for the translation of Alice Paalen's 'A woman who was beautiful',
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Translations of other surrealist texts into English are my own, except where stated otherwise.

Part I

Delineating Surrealism

I Origins and Histories

Finding the edges of surrealism

Surrealism as a concept, as a programme, as a movement, as a practice, as a set of people, as a collection of techniques, and as a moment in art history causes all sorts of difficulties. Firstly, it is a translated word from the French 'surréalisme'. Though in English it popularly appears as a synonym for *unreal* or *incredible*, in fact the 'sur' preposition in French is generally used to signify *on*, *on top of*, *at the point of*, or *above*. So 'surrealism' in English might best be thought of as *super-realism* or *hyper-realism* or *heightened realism*, perhaps, or even *real realism*. Yet this sense of the term is then directly at odds with the everyday usage.

The word 'Surréalisme' was coined in 1917 by Guillaume Apollinaire in the new preface to his play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*, written in 1903), performed on Sunday 24 June in the tiny Salle Maubel in Montmartre, Paris. Nowadays the word itself is generally applied to a movement in art history from the interwar period (1917–1940), and there have been numerous surrealist groups and artworks appearing in the years since then. Surrealism can either be regarded as dwindling in force as a result of the Second World War, or alternatively as being highly influential through the art of the 1950s and particularly the psychedelic and pop art of the 1960s and later. Its end can be dated to the death of André Breton in 1966 and the European uprisings in 1968, or to the death of Salvador Dalí and the fall of the Berlin Wall, both in 1989. Or it can be regarded as having been transformed into later art movements such as Situationism in the 1960s, or the Eastern European Orange Alternative in the 1980s, or in fact as having never ended at all. Its influence can be seen in Latin American magical realism, and in postmodernism in general. So there is also a problem of historical definition and delineation.

The principal figures in surrealism of the core interwar years wrote many aggressive and assertive polemics about what surrealism is or should be, and then also published retrospective views revising their earlier positions. Further, not all of these statements are consistent with each other, and the surrealist groups were often typified by their factionalism and infighting: Dalí, for example, whom many regard as a prototypical surrealist figure, was thrown out of the surrealist group in 1934, and yet regarded himself as a surrealist for the rest of his life (*'Le Surréalisme, c'est moi'* – I am surrealism! – see Cevasco 1971: 13). So there is not even any agreement among its key practitioners and proponents as to what surrealism is.

Surrealism can be regarded as having its original core in Paris, but it rapidly became international, and those different geographical groups took on national and cultural

flavours that became distinct. The surrealism of Paris was not quite the surrealism of Madrid or Barcelona; different from the surrealism of Berlin, Zurich and Vienna; distinct again from the surrealism of London or New York or Buenos Aires or Santiago or Tokyo, or Birmingham or Liverpool, or San Francisco, for example. So there is a difficulty in identifying which surrealism we should regard as the most characteristic.

Furthermore, this internationalism entailed a crossing of languages within surrealism. Surrealist writing can be found especially and originally in French, Spanish, German, Catalan, and English, and also in translations across and between these languages. Within English, there are British, North American, and Australian flavours, and within the United States there are New York and West Coast cultural varieties. Surrealism in Spanish varies between its Castilian roots and Latin American expansion, and Mexican surrealism is not the same as in Chile, or Argentina, or even in Brazilian Portuguese (see Nicholson 2013). Surrealism is also strongly represented in Italian, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Russian, and Japanese. Furthermore, this global diffusion has not been evenly distributed: surrealism came relatively late in the 1930s to the English language; there was a burgeoning surrealist project in Arabic from the 1970s; and a current, post-Cultural Revolution and 21st-century interest in surrealism has emerged in China. So we have a problem of international variation and change in pinning down surrealism linguistically and culturally.

Surrealism might be seen as the original and best model of a modern art movement. It was political, polemical, and aggressive. Its practitioners were highly self-aware and conscious of themselves as a movement. There was a membership, and a definite sense of inclusion and vehement exclusion. The surrealists organised their own exhibitions and events, many of which have become legendary and notorious, countercultural and shocking. No artistic movement before it had been quite so programmatic, overtly politically committed, or internationalist. Subsequent art movements have all – to some degree and more or less deliberately – taken their cue from surrealism. Over the course of the 20th century, it became the very image of the avant-garde. In short, surrealism is difficult to define because it has become so mythologised and appropriated.

Lastly, surrealism has perhaps been the most multimodal of art movements. There are surrealist paintings, sculptures, pottery, machines, plays, films, video installations, poems, novels, performances, happenings, events, lectures, dance, architecture, garden design, furniture design, jewellery, couture, coiffure, body art, textiles, and music. Each of these modes has their characteristic features, their types and registers and conventions and cultural meanings. The surrealism in them is surrealist in different ways, and the question of form in each case needs to be resolved differently and appropriately to the mode in question. So we have a big problem of definition of the object itself.

It might seem as if the task for a systematic account of surrealism is thus too expansive to attempt. What we need at this initial point is a manageable outline of the object of investigation, and a resolution of some of the difficulties I have begun to set out above. To start with, then, this is a book about the *language* of surrealism. That remit ties us

down primarily to textual examples of surrealist literature. We have an advantage here in that early surrealist activity was highly textually based. Though the popular sense of surrealism is perhaps focused on the paintings of Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and others, in fact it was surrealist writing that played the largest part in early surrealist activity. 'Before being a movement in art, Surrealism was a literary movement' (Caws 2006: 189). Surrealist literary work was a feature both of publication and performance, and early surrealist 'experiments' emphasised the primacy of writing. In defining surrealism, André Breton (1969: 27) insists on the process 'by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought'. Notice here that textuality is the first realisation of surrealism that springs to his mind, before he adds 'or in any other manner'. For the surrealists, the main theoretical object that demonstrated the functioning of thought was 'the surreal image' - an abstract, non-artistic, natural phenomenon that might emerge from the subconscious mind or by accident. This surreal object might then be expressed in a variety of modes (painting, sculpture, film, or writing, and so on) but it was the abstract image that was primary. The mode in which the surreal image was manifested was almost an accident of the particular circumstances of its production and realisation in the world.

In this spirit, I have largely set aside the complex issue of how surrealist works might be translated from one language to another. Just as a surreal image can be rendered as a painting or a poem, so a surreal impact can be explored regardless of the language of the writing. For this reason, I explore the stylistics of surrealist writing in English, and translations from other languages into English by both surrealists and other translators, without worrying too much about the theory of translation that underlies these transformative realisations. I largely adopt the practical principle common both to surrealism and stylistics of disregarding authorial intention or origination: so the text in translation is a text just like any other, if only with a peculiar history of creation (though see [Chapter 2](#) for a further discussion).

To this extent, it almost doesn't matter which mode of surrealist manifestation we delineate for exploration, since the modal accidents by which the surreal image is realised as writing or painting or film (or Catalan or English) are secondary to the surreal object itself, in surrealist thinking. A surrealist book on the language of surrealism would begin in this spirit, I think. However, this book is not itself surrealist by commitment nor spirit. The approach I adopt draws on modern stylistics - the application of our current best knowledge of language and mind to the exploration of literary works and reading. The aim of this book is a rigorous and analytical stylistic account of surrealist literature in English. To some extent, this objective itself is contrary to the spirit of surrealism. Surrealists would scorn as 'academicism' my attempt to offer a critical and analytical view of the field. They would not regard it as literary criticism nor art criticism because surrealism was not meant to be literary, nor artistic, nor aesthetic in any way. They would reject my application of linguistics and cognitive science as irredeemably positivist and empirical - too rooted in the so-called real world of bourgeois liberalism, scientism, and capitalist values.

However, just as the surrealists aimed to apply their own best current knowledge of language, ideology, and psychology to culture, so we must recognise that many of their framing assumptions and thinking about language and mind can now be seen demonstrably to have been mistaken (see [Chapter 3](#)). This is not to diminish the impact of surrealism in history, but it means that we can explore the nature and impact of surrealism with the benefit of a modern stylistic capability. This book examines surrealism through a literary stylistic lens. There are two aspects to this. The first and largest part of the book ('Writing Surrealism') is an exploration of the textuality and texture of surrealist writing: how it works as a technique, and how it generates the effects in readers that can be observed or reported. The second, associated part directly picks up this affective dimension ('Reading Surrealism'), with a consideration of surrealism as an ideological enterprise, viewed from our current perspective and knowledge of linguistics and cognition. In short, how can we evaluate surrealism and surrealist thinking from the advantageous viewpoint of our current scientific understanding?

The emphasis will mainly be on surrealism from the interwar years, the period of what might be termed 'high surrealism' or its 'heroic period' (Caws 2006: 196). This is partly a practical limitation and partly a recognition that there is something prototypical about this period of surrealist output. Later manifestations and applications of surrealism tend to be variations on this theme, and though they are culturally flavoured and locally distinctive, there remains, I think, an essential set of key features that can be usefully explored and analysed specifically. My intention is not to universalise surrealism, nor render surrealist writing as a reductive pattern nor set of rules; in fact, this is the danger if you read every surrealist text simply as a mere example of surrealism. Instead, I want to vivify, through stylistic analysis, the singular, unique, and richly particular texture of every encounter with a surrealist literary object.

Emergence and diffusion

In order to understand why surrealism is so important and worthy of a systematic stylistic study, it is necessary to place it into its historical context. Since we are looking back at the movement from the vantage point of the present – and perhaps in a surrealist spirit itself – it makes most sense to begin a brief history with the latest influences of surrealism, and outline its effects backwards to its origins and emergence. In [Chapter 2](#), I revisit the central interwar history of the surrealists in more detail. First, though, here is a very brief reverse history.

Surrealism in the post-war period

Surrealism was initially an anarcho-communist and psychoanalytical cultural movement that aimed to draw together writers, artists, and thinkers with the aim of transforming society, culture, and individual perception. The surrealists were revolutionaries. More broadly, surrealism has become a touchstone and almost infinite source of creative inspiration for popular culture since 1945. Though there have been identifiable peaks of vivid surrealist influence around the 1960s and in the early 21st century, the

influence has been persistent across time and pervasive across all media. In Britain alone, the Beatles and the Mersey poets, *The Goon Show* and *Monty Python* all variously featured semantic dissonances, nonsense, dreamlike sequences, and other patterns that were identifiably derived from early surrealist writing, as well as multimodal audio innovations.

In 1967, the Beatles song ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’, written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, began: ‘Picture yourself in a boat on a river. With tangerine trees and marmalade skies. Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly. A girl with kaleidoscope eyes.’ The same year, and also originating from Liverpool, the poetry collection *The Mersey Sound* was published, with Brian Patten’s lines:

I created for myself
a creature to tell the time by
– & on the lawns of her tongue
flowers grew

(Henri, McGough, Patten 1967: 112)

In 1965, Bob Dylan released ‘Mr. Tambourine Man’, with the lines:

Then take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind
Down the foggy ruins of time, far past the frozen leaves
The haunted, frightened trees, out to the windy beach
Far from the twisted reach of crazy sorrow.

Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free
Silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sands
With all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves
Let me forget about today until tomorrow.

In 1956, the following lyrics, written by Spike Milligan for the BBC radio series *The Goon Show*, were broadcast on BBC radio:

There’s a song that I recall
My mother sang to me.
She sang it as she tucked me in
When I was ninety-three.

Ying tong ying tong
Ying tong ying tong
Ying tong iddle I po,
Ying tong ying tong
Ying tong ying tong
Ying tong iddle I po iddle I po

In 1973, the song appeared on a record, with ‘I’m walking backwards for Christmas’, also by Milligan, on the B-side. That same year, the BBC aired a sketch ‘The man who says

words in the wrong order' on *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (with Michael Palin and John Cleese). Here is an excerpt:

- Thripshaw:* But recently you have been having this problem with your word order.
Burrows: Well, absolutely, and what makes it worse, sometimes at the end of a sentence I'll come out with the wrong fusebox.
Thripshaw: Fusebox?
Burrows: And the thing about saying the wrong word is a) I don't notice it, and b) sometimes orange water given bucket of plaster.
Thripshaw: Yes, tell me more about your problem.
Burrows: Well as I say, you'd just be talking and out'll pudenda the wrong word and ashtray's your uncle. So I'm really strawberry about it.

Additionally, the television show featured animations and visual sequences that were direct imitations of Dalí paintings in conception.

More recently, British comics Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer have mined surrealism throughout all their work:

What the returning Shooting Stars [TV show] lacks in novelty, it makes up for in undiminished surrealism. Tonight's guests include Ricky Wilson from the Kaiser Chiefs and Jack Dee ('Your face is like an abandoned walnut. Like a doomed horse'), but it's the enduring madness of the hosts that entertains. Within mere moments, Vic has arrested a jazz pancake and shot it with a clarinet. Even regulars Ulrika Jonsson and drumming baby George Dawes (Matt Lucas) look surprised.

(Television review in the *Guardian*, 2 September 2009)

Billboard cigarette advertisements, especially from the 1970s, drew heavily on surrealist dissonant images in order to be striking without making any claims about the value or health risks of the product. The derivation became even more widespread in the 1990s in television commercials, with the bicycling fish advertising Guinness, the invisible orange man for Tango, or the bottles of Absolut Vodka in a Miró dreamscape and transparent Smirnoff bottles that revealed a hallucinatory world.

All of these display various patterns of surrealist technique. And though they have appropriated some aspects of surrealist style, of course it is immediately apparent that they share surrealism's original revolutionary ideology to a lesser or minimal extent; advertising as the rhetoric of capitalist consumerism is very far from the communism of early surrealism. Nevertheless, the residual effects of forms of subversion are persistent, even in these contexts. I will explore these ideas in more detail in Part IV of this book. More pertinently here,

surrealism has been increasingly recognized throughout the world as a forerunner and catalyst of many of the most daring and creative developments in contemporary culture and politics. However, surrealism's current viability – as a continuing current of ideas and as a living and organized movement – is a question that most critics and historians have chosen to ignore. Surrealism has been pronounced dead so many times

(André Breton told an audience of US college students in 1942 that its obituaries had appeared just about every month since the movement began) that few writers have bothered to look at the plentiful evidence of its present-day vitality.

This favoring of the past over the present is part of the *modus operandi* of the disciplines which thus far have taken surrealism as a field of study. It is no secret that art criticism, art history, and museum curatorship have generally been bastions of social conservatism. Those whose job it is to preserve and protect the traditions of the status quo prefer to look on surrealism as a dead cultural artifact. *Living* surrealism remains an embarrassing problem, an irritating nuisance that they prefer to ignore.

(Rosemont 1998: 383)

The book in which this quotation appears presents over 300 examples of surrealist writing by women across 28 countries from the 1920s to the 1990s. The two volumes edited by Richardson (1993, 1994) trace surrealist poetry and prose well into the late 20th century. Surrealism by the turn of the millennium had diffused across the world, with numerous surrealist groups in existence, as well as individual writers insisting on their identity as surrealists proper. These are the neo-surrealists.

At the same time, a surrealist influence in technique can be also seen directly in a great deal of post-war and contemporary writing, to the point at which picking out specific examples simply serves as a reminder of countless others who have been influenced by surrealism. Landmarks of modern literature from *Howl* to *Naked Lunch*, from *Riddley Walker* to the poetry of James Tate, from Borges to Pynchon, and many more – all owe particular stylistic patterns to surrealist writing. Though, in this book, I concentrate on interwar surrealism, some of this later work will be briefly considered in Part IV. Surrealism itself remains a rich and living activity, and this is even more extensively true of surrealist style, considered outside the ideological parameters of card-carrying neo-surrealist writers.

Surrealism between the wars

The key historical, ‘heroic’ period of surrealism, however, is usually located in the years between 1917 and 1940. Within this span, we can even define further moments, with a pivotal instant in 1924:

- 1938: the final high-point of the large *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris.
- 1936: the formation of a British surrealist group and the staging of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London.
- 1930–33: the publication of the journal *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*.
- 1929: the final issue of the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* which featured the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, and the screening of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí’s short film *Un Chien Andalou*.
- 1925: the first surrealist exhibition *La Peinture Surrealiste* in Paris, and the establishment of a surrealist group in Brussels.

- 1924: the publication of the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, written by André Breton and the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* that same year, and the establishment of the *Bureau of Surrealist Research (Centrale Surréaliste)* offices in Paris.
- 1920: the publication of *Les Champs Magnétiques* by Breton and Philippe Soupault.
- 1917–1924: the emergence and separation of surrealism from Dada (see section below).

In that 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton offers a definition, in his words, ‘once and for all’:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy.* Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.

(Breton 1969: 27)

Of course, Breton’s definition here is ironic and mischievous: he is parodying the sort of scientific description that he wants to undermine. What appears in the form and register of a definitive dictionary definition, and is even introduced as such, occurs not at the beginning of the manifesto but almost exactly in the middle, framed on both sides by a rambling discussion and freewheeling musings that are the exact opposite in tone of the quotation extracted here.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on ‘belief’ and the commitment to objectives and principles are characteristic of surrealism in its mature, post-Dada phase. There is a clear objective: one of rising above any mere aesthetic or moral concern in order to arrive at the truth of things. There is a strong commitment to the actual, to the material reality of the world, but it is a sense of the real that does not set psychic and perceptive aspects of life apart from the tangible objects of our world. Instead, pure psychic experience is the most real and actual raw truth, for the surrealists. Since culture, capitalism, society, and history conspired to distort this truth, the task of the surrealists as they saw it was to disrupt and fracture this illusion back to the raw reality of things.

The project was revolutionary in every sense. The re-evaluation of Enlightenment rationalism, and of the grand narratives of science and civilised culture, set the scene for later, postmodernist theorising of language and history. The belief in a radical re-evaluation of society through the medium of an artistic movement is a precursor to the idealistic phases of the political and social revolutions of the 20th century, from the 1920s soviets, to the uprisings against them in the 1950s, to the hippy idealism of the 1960s, and the liberating and virtually uncontrollable popular diversity of the multi-modal internet. The emphasis on psychological reality is a precursor to the intellectual

revolutions in mind that characterise the cognitive turn in philosophy, arts, humanities, and linguistics as we move through the 21st century.

In the 1920s, however, there was already a tension between the artisanal concerns of the proletariat and what might appear to be the indulgent activities of poets and artists: it was a tension that led to several breakaways, expulsions, and arguments between the surrealist group in Paris and the communist party. The evasion of the realm of the purely aesthetic was a key principle for surrealism, aimed at avoiding this dilettante and patronising path:

Surrealism, as an organised movement, was born of a far-reaching operation having to do with language. In this regard it cannot be repeated too often that in the minds of their authors the products of free association or automatic writing that Surrealism brought forth in the beginning had nothing to do with any aesthetic criterion.

(Breton 1969: 297)

Breton goes on here (in his 1953 retrospective *On Surrealism and its Living Works*) to point out the difference between surrealist experimental writing and that of, for example, James Joyce, e e cummings, and Henri Michaux: their techniques aimed at the imitation of life, and thus remained within the framework of ‘art’, which Breton scornfully derides as the domain of ‘lettrism’. By contrast, the surrealists had freed themselves from such constraints because ‘we had got our hands on the “prime matter” (in the alchemical sense) of language’ (Breton 1969: 299).

The experimental nature of surrealism for the surrealists can be seen in the establishment in 1924 of the *Bureau of Surrealist Research* in Paris, from where the first of 12 issues of the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* was published in December of that year. Both the experimental and the revolutionary ethos were captured in the content of the magazine, and also after factional splits in 1929 by the title of Breton’s successor journal, *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*. The first publication, in particular, adopted a pseudoscientific register (the typeface and the cover were even modelled on the scientific journal *Nature*) similar to that found in Breton’s dictionary and the encyclopaedia-styled definitions quoted above, with content that was immediately scandalously anti-government, anti-clerical, and anti-art.

Between 1924 and the end of the 1930s, the surrealist group around Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Louis Aragon expanded to include dozens of artists, writers, and thinkers, including Antonin Artaud, Hans Arp, Salvador Dalí, Giorgio de Chirico, Robert Desnos, Gala Éluard, Paul Éluard, Max Ernst, André Masson, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneau, Man Ray, Yves Tanguy, Tristan Tzara, and Roger Vitrac. Different members had different levels of commitment to the group, of course, and some left (de Chirico in 1928) or were ejected (like Dalí) for transgressing against the stated principles of the group.

Dada and presurrealism

Surrealism itself developed out of Dada, a movement that is often treated as a separate precursor to surrealism, but is perhaps more properly regarded simply as surrealism’s adolescent and immature self. The founding of Dada can be traced to the opening on

1 February 1916 of the 'Cabaret Voltaire', a regular evening of literary performance in a down-at-heel bar in Zurich, aimed at increasing the sales of beer and sausages. Actor and writer Hugo Ball and his partner poet Emmy Hennings established the event which quickly attracted a regular and international circle of writers, artists, and performers: Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, Richard Huelsenbeck, and others, and the evening became scandalously notorious and popular very quickly.

A typical evening might include the performance of poems and songs, both original compositions and existing works; often several would be recited at high volume simultaneously, and with the asynchronised accompaniment of drums, rattles, or other semi-musical noises. Dada activities included performances of 'exotic' African and African-American music, regarded as authentically 'primitive', and jazz. Children's rhymes and songs, and the work of writers from earlier ages commonly judged as visionaries, mystics, and madmen would also feature. In all of these sources, Dada identified a literary culture undistorted by the trappings of Western bourgeois rationalism and civilised sensibility.

Ball himself developed 'phonetic poetry', or 'sound poems', in which the soundscape of the performance itself took priority over any meaningful or signifying content. His original *Phonetic Poem* (1917) runs as follows:

Karawane
 jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
 grossiga m'pfa habla horem
 égiga goramen
 higo bloiko russulla huju
 hollaka hollala
 anlogo bung
 blago bung
 blago bung
 bosso fataka
 ü üü ü
 schampa wulla wussa ólobo
 hej tatta gôrem
 eschige zunbada
 wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
 tumba ba- umf
 kusagauma
 ba - umf

(Hugo Ball, reproduced in Richter 1964: 8)

Though there are few recognisable words of any single language here, there is a sense that some of the distinctive sound patterns associated with the phonological systems of different particular languages can be discerned. 'Karawane', 'bambla', 'm'pfa', and 'ólobo' sound like African languages; 'grossiga' and 'eschige' could be Germanic; 'jolifanto', 'blago', and 'bosso' are Romance, perhaps Spanish or Italian; 'habla horem' might be Yiddish or even Arabic; 'higo' has an Oriental, possibly Japanese tone; 'bloiko russulla' is possibly Slavic;

though all of these associations are subjective and tenuous. The multiple repetitions of syllables and even full words and phrases suggest a systematic underlying grammar and coherence that is associative and suggestive rather than material. The repetitions of words ('blago bung') and phonemes (what we might in a more conventional text call alliteration) suggest a chanting or musical rhythm. In the printed version of this on a flyer for distribution, each line appears in a different font, further signalling the cultural blending of origins, and diminishing symbolically the dominance of any one source.

Such chaotic activities acquired the name of 'Dada', a word that cannot be definitively sourced. It has variously been attributed to the ironic reiteration of 'yes' ('da, da') in Slavic languages; it is the German for both an idiot and the sound a baby makes; it is the French for a rocking horse; it is the English childish form for 'daddy'; it is capitalised as 'Dada'; it must always appear uncapitalised as 'dada'; Dadaism should never be suffixed with '-ist' or '-ism'. All of these contrary etymologies can be regarded as equal distractions ridiculing the scientist's or historian's tendency to categorise and classify. Dada resists classification: it is the anti-X, where X is whatever you can think it is. Surrealism is often represented as the reaction to Romanticism, but on a longer timescale it owes perhaps more to Dada's energy as a counter-Enlightenment phenomenon. Rationalism, logic, and clarity were illusive and distorting consequences of capitalist industrialisation, the same forces which were at that very moment responsible for slaughtering millions in the trenches a few hundred miles to the north.

Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts. While the guns rumbled in the distance, we sang, painted, made collages and wrote poems with all our might. We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell. We had a dim premonition that power-mad gangsters would one day use art itself as a way of deadening men's minds.

(Hans Arp, translated in Richter 1964: 25)

The tone here is not of art as a distraction nor as escapism but as a fully engaged commitment, a direct reaction and corrective to the corrupt misdirection of capitalism and modernity. When Dada and later surrealist artists depicted human bodies as machines, or faces and the internal workings of heads as mechanical clockworks, the assertion was that they were showing something literal, not a metaphor or poetic affectation.

Dada was reactive, instinctive, and aimed directly at the associations, emotions, and visceral senses below the level of consciousness. As it evolved into surrealism, the work became more constructively framed, more shaped by principle, and more explicitly aimed at uncovering the unconscious mind and speaking to and from it. Into the 1920s, those who had been associated with Dada and who now travelled as surrealists explicitly began to express themselves in their public pronouncements in the language of revolutionary socialism and the emerging language of psychoanalysis. When the war ended in 1918, most returned to their own countries. In particular, Dada activities in Paris began to formalise around André Breton, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault. Though Dada had its statements of purpose, they were largely extensions of

the artistic anti-art ethos of Dada itself; by contrast, surrealism excelled in the production of manifestoes, pamphlets, essays, and debates.

Before Dada, precursors and fellow-travellers were identified by the later surrealists. Breton's encyclopaedic definition quoted above is followed in the *Manifesto* by a list of writers whom he sees as proto-surrealists: Shakespeare 'in his finer moments', Swift when he is being malicious, Poe in his adventurousness, Baudelaire in his morality, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Reverdy, and others. For Breton, it is clear that literature and writing are in practice the key mode of surrealism, even though the surrealists in general rejected the identification of surrealism with any single means or mode of expression. Dada began as a literary evening, and surrealism too progressed especially in its early years as an articulation of a revolution in *writing*.

The historian of surrealism Sarane Alexandrian (1985) identifies three types of painters who can be regarded as pre-surrealist. Firstly, visionary artists such as Uccello, Bosch, Durer, van Gogh, Seurat, and Munch; secondly the 'primitive' art evident in African masks or Native American ritual clothing and implements or the Easter Island heads; and lastly the psycho-pathological art of psychic mediums, and the mentally ill and deranged. We can adapt these categories for writing to see pre-surrealistic elements or impulses in, for example, William Blake's visionary poetry, or the nightmarish passages in Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Raven', or John Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', or Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, or the hallucinatory qualities of Alfred Tennyson's 'The Lotus Eaters'. Magoun and Mustanoja (1975) make the case for the proto-surrealism of Chaucer's 'House of Fame' (from 1379), and Burke (1966: 201–22) similarly argues for Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' from 1813 as a pre-surrealist work. It is clear from these and many other possible examples that surrealism – at least in technique and impact – did not arise in a vacuum. In spite of the surrealists' rejection of conventional aesthetics, readers were already, to an extent, primed to accept dissonance, mysticism, and hallucinatory alterity as a pleasurable experience.

Similarly, the encounter of a Western or ethnic European audience with 'primitive' art certainly presupposes a Eurocentric ethnic view (including North American settlers with a European ethnicity). African or indigenous North American religious, cultural, and even literary artefacts are perceived relatively as alien, unfamiliar, and exotic. Such objects – commonplace to their original users – become mysterious, strange, and challenging to an audience from a different culture. In the literary domain, we can see earlier writing that presents such 'otherness' as being pre-surrealist in effect. Translations of oriental poetry, for example, travelogues, fantastical tales of exaggerated and actual lands, and even early 19th-century science fiction and gothic writing might be considered pre-surrealist for this reason. Literature emerging out of a European colonial and imperial context might not be regarded as surrealist because of its ideology, but would certainly have pre-surrealist elements of orientalism.

The final category of psycho-pathological literature could certainly overlap with hallucinatory dream-visions. The nonsense poetry of Edward Lear and the wonderland prose of Lewis Carroll would fall into this type. Children's nursery rhymes, in which the original satirical or social reference has been lost, might be seen as being similarly undistorted by capitalist and Western cultural impositions.

The surrealists themselves identified particular immediate precursors whom they admired, and excused their bourgeois-ness on the basis that they were simply born too early to benefit from the enlightenment of surrealism. Arthur Rimbaud, in particular, was regarded as ‘Surrealist before the word was invented or became a movement’ (Varèse 1957: ix), as was his partner Paul Verlaine and many other Symbolist poets. The other biggest influences that were to shape surrealism were the works of the 19th-century philosophers Karl Marx and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the early 20th-century psychologist Sigmund Freud. Indeed, surrealism itself might be seen as an intellectual programme to assimilate Marxism and psychoanalysis into a single revolutionary and revelatory system. This integration was not available to the pre-surrealists, of course, and much of the later neo-surrealism has largely moved beyond this objective of the early years.

Key features of surrealism addressed in this book

In his *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, David Gascoyne (1935) denies that there is a ‘recipe’ for surrealist output. Even though Breton (1969: 29–32) appears to set out ‘Secrets of the Magical Surrealist Art’, Gascoyne (1935: 59) points out that both the tone of this subheading and the instructions that follow it are somewhat tongue-in-cheek and ‘should not be taken too seriously’. The surrealists regarded their texts, paintings, films, sculptures, and other outputs as artefacts of their surreal researches, and so they were not to be analysed for their aesthetic qualities.

In this respect, you might think that this book is an illegitimate enterprise. Certainly it is the main reason why *The Language of Surrealism* is not itself a surrealist book. Nevertheless, as I stated at the beginning, surrealism is as accessible to stylistic analysis as any sort of literary text, even though such an approach would be condemned by the surrealists as ‘academicism’ (Richter 1964: 194). Literary surrealism is written in language, and all such discourse is amenable to linguistic analysis. Furthermore, such a stylistic analysis can tell us a great deal about how those surrealist texts operate effectively as literary works, and we can also begin to account for the actual effects of surrealist encounters on readers.

In the following chapters, I explore key technical patterns evident in the output of the surrealists. I divide the analysis into two parts. In ‘Writing Surrealism’ (Part II), I adopt a quite traditional stylistic approach and consider the three key textual devices of surrealist writing: *automaticity* (Chapter 4), *dissonance* (Chapter 5), and *collage* (Chapter 6). In ‘Reading Surrealism’ (Part III), I take a more cognitive poetic view, which involves drawing in an additional perspective from cognitive science. In doing so, I am able to consider analytically some of the actual readerly effects in reading surrealist literature: how coherence and confusion operate (Chapter 7), how the ambient experience of surrealism is effected (Chapter 8), and how surrealist immersion actually works (Chapter 9).

The first method that Breton (1969: 29) describes is the first method of both Dada and surrealism: *automatism*. In early experiments, the author tries to empty his or her mind

of any preconceptions or conscious images or ideas in order to allow as direct a passage to unconscious intuition as possible. The object was then to write down this stream of images and propositions as fast and unthinkingly as possible. Pure automatism should not involve any editing, redrafting, or even semi-conscious shaping of the material as it pours from the pen. The idea is that the writer should be as surprised by the output as anyone else.

This *free association* is what distinguishes psychic automatism from the ‘stream-of-consciousness’ technique in contemporary modernist writers like James Joyce, according to Breton (1969: 298–9). The difference lies in the presence of a sense of wilful imitation (on the part of the artist) as opposed to the absence of any wilful intentionality (on the part of the surrealist experimental researcher). Gascoyne (1935: 94) characterises these early experiments as belonging to the ‘passive or subjective’ phase of research, in which he includes psychic ‘automatism, spontaneous and “pure” poetry, and the idea of the synonymy of poetry and dream.’

It quickly became obvious, however, that such absolutely free association was almost impossible to sustain. Marcel Duchamp aimed at a similar effacement of intention in his ‘ready-mades’ – accidentally found objects that were then placed into exhibitions and galleries (his 1917 upturned urinal, entitled *Fountain*, is the most famous of many such recontextualisations that persist as installations in art to the present day). This literal self-effacement aimed at the evasion of aesthetics:

A point that I want very much to establish is that the choice of these ‘ready-mades’ was never dictated by aesthetic selection. The choice was based on a reaction of *visual* indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste ... in fact a complete anaesthesia.

(Marcel Duchamp quoted in Young 1981: 26)

However, Duchamp abandoned the attempt at automatism when he realised that one part of his mind was surreptitiously shaping what he was writing and making. In 1962 he wrote to Hans Richter, ‘When I discovered ready-mades I thought to discourage aesthetics. In Neo-Dada [the New Realism and Pop Art of the 1960s] they have taken my ready-mades and found aesthetic beauty in them’ (Richter 1964: 207–8).

Other methods for the effacement of intention were inherited from the Dada tradition: clipping words at random from newspapers, picking words at random from a hat, nominating page numbers from a dictionary, and other means were used to bypass the wilful, artistic shaping of the text in order for it to be a genuine surreal object. Later in surrealism, the practice of *chainpoems* became the principal method of authorial evasion. Here, different lines were written by different writers, often without sight of the previous contributions. Alternatively, lines were written separately and then randomly assembled and published. Or a line was written a word at a time, with the syntactic category (article, adjective, noun, verb, article, adjective, noun) specified, such as ‘The winged vapour seduces the locked bird,’ ‘A corset in July is worth a horde of rats,’ ‘Faithful as a boneless cat’ (reported by Gascoyne 1935: 66). Issues 9 and 10 of *La Révolution Sur-réaliste* in October 1927 introduced these techniques with many examples of its product.

One of the first such poetic lines (*'Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau'*: The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine) gave its name to the activity.

Such assembled works represent the later, more actively participatory phase of surrealism. This was to make a virtue out of the necessity recognised by Duchamp and others that intention – even unconscious wilfulness – was impossible to evade. Instead, the surrealists shifted the workings of intention to a sort of transcendental quality of the actual world: phenomena that you perceive as pointedly coincidental, serendipitous, ironically juxtaposed, or poignantly, comically, or tragically accidental were in fact evidence of the *objective chance* by which you were seeing the genuine workings of the world untrammelled by your bourgeois rationalist delusions. Just as Freudian 'slips of the tongue' afforded access to unconscious desires, so the objective chance of the world of experience presented the viewer with access to the world's heightened realism.

Automatic writing is no more than the re-introduction of objective chance into language, whereas objective chance is the automatic writing of fate in seemingly raw facts.
(Carrouges 1968: 272)

The early ready-mades and anti-art objects gradually gave way to these more considered and crafted forms. The technique of *collage* can be seen as a prototypical surrealist method in that it brings together separate elements by objective chance. Chainpoems are examples of the collage technique, and in a related way so are the clippings of newspapers, posters, and flyers assembled by artists like Kurt Schwitters, whose objects stand as a blend of literary text and art object. Unusual collocations of words, phrases, registers, or textual layout were all examples of the collage technique in the service of objective chance. These issues are addressed in [Chapter 6](#).

The surrealists' commitment to the literal in their conception of objective chance encompassed both their stylistic experiments and their perception of reality. In 1938, the Spanish surrealist Óscar Domínguez threw a glass and blinded fellow artist Victor Brauner. However, seven years earlier, Brauner had painted a self-portrait in which he is shown blinded by an object with a letter 'D' on it. Such connections were grasped by the surrealists as empirical evidence of underlying patterns in the mechanics of reality.

In order actively to participate in and record such experiences and events, the *paranoiac-critical method* was developed, largely in the hands of Salvador Dalí. That which the rational world calls 'paranoia' is actually an unconscious linkage of aspects of life that are not rationally connected but which are surreally connected. Dalí's method, enthusiastically endorsed by Breton, was to place two or more objects in deliberate *dissonance* with each other. His most famous surreal object is perhaps the *Lobster Telephone*, which demonstrates one outcome of the method. In this surreal object, a standard black working 1930s Bakelite telephone has a realistic plaster lobster in place of the handset.

It is clear that the dissonant collocation is an extension of the collage technique. Gascoyne (1935: 59) describes this method as 'the fusion of two mutually distinct realities'. The *Lobster Telephone* is an example of a semantic anomaly in our rational world, which would be expressed linguistically as a xenonym (the opposite of a synonym); in a surreal perception, the synonymy and naturalness of the object would be understood in a

sudden, shocking moment, which Breton (1991) termed ‘convulsive beauty’. The final line of his 1928 novel *Nadja* reads: ‘Beauty will be convulsive or it will not be at all.’ It is clear from this formulation not only that surrealism has an aesthetics and an ethics, but that they are collapsed together. Furthermore, the moment of surreal consciousness is a one-off moment of shock: it cannot be repeated with the same surreal object or image. The *Lobster Telephone*, the dissonant xenonymy of accidents in a chainpoem, the urinal in the art gallery, and the sound poem at a literary evening are all only singularly convulsive. Just as with Duchamp’s realisation that his objects could only convulse the viewer once, Hans Richter (1964: 208) records a talk given by Roger Shattuck in which he points out that a work of art (a Picasso or a Cézanne) can be appreciated repeatedly, indeed it gains in the process of appreciation. Dada and surrealist objects, however, become only ordinary objects once they have been beheld; ‘the (anti-) artistic value they used to possess has gone back to zero.’

I am not entirely sure that this is absolutely true. It may be the case that surrealist objects – such as poems and novels – cease to be ideologically surrealist after their initial moment of convulsive beauty, and thereafter become art objects (contrary to surrealist intentions). However, I do not think their value even as instruments of cognitive dissonance and disturbance returns altogether to zero. Not only do the activities of re-reading and systematic analysis increase the sense of richness of those objects, but in the process new, more subtle, and ever-more surprising effects are brought above the level of consciousness. I have seen Dalí’s *Lobster Telephone* several times, and it retains its oddity – it does not become less odd on reflection. It increases its humorous effect every time I think of it, and the fact that Dalí set the lobster’s penis in the mouthpiece position does not become less disturbing the more you think about using the telephone as an actual telephone.

The dissonance of convulsive beauty is enacted each time you read a surrealist text. The surrealists would have it that their work is the depiction of thought rather than the communication of thoughts, but as readers we find it almost impossible not to treat the language we encounter as communicative. It is the readerly attempt to resolve this mismatch between appearance and content that generates the convulsive moment, and I think that the ever-closer stylistic attention to it offered in the chapters that follow simply reiterates and renews that sensation. I have argued elsewhere (Stockwell 2009a) that literary emotion is not fake emotion or fictional emotion, but real emotion that is simply understood to have a literary motivation, and this argument applies also to the re-enactments that are real surreal experiences. The aim of this book is not to dissect the inert body of surrealism but to enhance our understanding and experience of it.

2 Lives and Minds

Biography, history, culture

The focus of this book is on the period of high surrealism, drawn roughly from 1919 to 1945, from the end of Dada up to the catastrophic culminating moment of Nazism in Europe. Surrealism is an interwar movement not simply chronologically but also in essence: it was created out of wartime experiences along an axis from Zurich to Paris that paralleled the Western front of what was called at the time the Great War. It soon became apparent that the 1920s and 1930s were not years at peace but a hiatus in the long European conflict that was to reach its apocalyptic height in the Second World War. Though it has its precursors, and though it has since been globally influential, high surrealism was defined and shaped by the events and culture of the years between the wars.

Surrealism's historical moment has been mythologised and romanticised, not least by the surrealists themselves. It is easy to do. The movement's main actors were deliberately aggressive, antagonistic, and forceful; their actions were designed to provoke authority, aggravate other artists, and inflame popular opinion. Anecdotes of surrealist activities have a high jaw-dropping tellability factor. Many of the surrealists became key figures in the intellectual and artistic culture of the Western world for the core part of the 20th century (André Breton, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró); others faded and died poignant deaths like Robert Desnos revising his love poems in Theresienstadt concentration camp, or led lives of crazy comedy like Salvador Dalí, or fought in the French resistance through the war like Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard.

The mythology of surrealism is also helped by being richly multimodal in form. Though initially an experiment in spoken and written language, surrealism is probably most well known today as a fine-art movement centred around its paintings and sculptures. In cultural studies terms, surrealism has an extremely strong visual brand, not only restricted to the paintings of René Magritte, Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, Picasso, Miró, and Dalí, but extending into the photography of Lee Miller, Méret Oppenheim, and Man Ray, and the cinema of Luis Buñuel. It is visually striking and pervasive, and has become so established as a paradigm of visual alternativity that almost any non-naturalistic figurative painting is popularly labelled as surrealist, whether its artist articulates an influence or not.

The interwar moment of high surrealism also places it at a pivotal point in modern history. It was a response to the First World War and a reaction to the 19th century forces of imperialism and capitalism and industrialisation and the mechanisation of human life. It raised new questions about art and culture that the long tail of Romanticism had not addressed. It took the best recent knowledge about psychology, mind, and

consciousness and combined it with the most powerful explanatory account of political economy in Marxism. It rejected bourgeois values in favour of demotic experience, and allied itself with working-class revolutionary and reformist movements across the world. Surrealism was absolutely of its time.

However, surrealist writing remains as striking and challenging as it did when it first appeared. Although the movement can certainly be locally historicised, the textual content of the writing maintains its strange impact across the decades. Though there are cultural references, allusions and tones in the writing, for the most part it is not tied down to specific political characters or events, nor particular cultural citations – surrealist texts themselves remain equally as difficult to the cultural historian as to the casual reader. The texts themselves (aside from the framing ideologies and anecdotes around their composition) remain relatively timeless, compared with many other literary works of the past. Surrealist mythology was enhanced by drawing on cultural tropes that were often mythological themselves (see Cardinal 2004), so the sense of an artistic movement out of time is further reinforced.

The inclination to historicise surrealism as a primary interpretative strategy is understandable, and not simply because historiography has become the paradigm of mainstream literary cultural studies. Faced with the confusions and multiplication of meanings in a typical surrealist text, the easiest course for resolving a reading is to frame the text as an example of surrealism, and then talk about the cultural context rather than the exemplar itself. This strategic framing is as true of scholarly criticism as it is of my own students' first encounters with surrealist writing: they have no means of making sense of the text and want to resolve this anomaly by understanding the motivations of the writer and the conditions of production.

The vast majority of literary criticism on surrealism concerns itself either with the sources and influential precursors of surrealism (classic works include Gascoyne 1935, Balakian 1967, Rubin 1968, Tashjian 1975, Short 1980, and Young 1981), or with the explicit politics of surrealism (mainly in work by the surrealists themselves, such as Read 1936, Gascoyne 1935, Richter 1964, Breton 1972), or with the biographies of individual surrealists and their circles. The biographical impulse seems to be stronger with surrealist scholarship than with other literary periods. Perhaps this is because the surrealist writers were especially and strikingly interesting; perhaps because their historical moment is so recent that a great deal of archival material remains extant and accessible in the form of manuscripts, magazines, letters, exhibition catalogues, and – for the first time and unlike previous artistic movements – photographs. Perhaps it arises from a sense that the surrealist experiments and their research activities were collaborative and social, and so it is felt that the group relationships are significant and worth investigating. Perhaps, in fact, the biographical impulse arises as a natural readerly reaction when faced with a set of texts in which authorship, authority, authenticity, intention, consciousness, and deliberateness are all explicitly called into question.

Whatever the various reasons, many of the classic works of surrealist scholarship take a biographical perspective as their governing organising principle, and this approach inevitably affects the interpretative line taken by the scholar as well (see, for example, the seminal studies by Read 1936, Motherwell 1951, Waldberg 1965, and Balakian 1970).

André Breton, in particular, as the leading figure of surrealism and its main polemicist, historian, and curator, has been biographised repeatedly: for example, by Balakian (1971), Browder (1967), Matthews (1967, 1986), Caws (1966, 1971), Legrand (1976), Guerlac (2000), Mauriac (2004), and Polizzoti (2008). Ruth Brandon's (1999) survey of high surrealism is entitled *Surreal Lives*, and Michel Remy's (1999) *Surrealism in Britain* is organised by individual named writers.

The biographical approach offers a great deal of rich context but the products of surrealism (the paintings, objects, poems, and other texts) remain relatively untreated. They serve as illustrative evidence for the cultural analysis, like artefacts that, pieced together, build up a greater, contextualised picture of a moment in history. It could even be argued that any attempt to analyse, interpret, or account for the textual mechanics of such works is somehow itself inimical to the spirit of surrealism, and therefore to be avoided.

For all of these reasons, surrealism presents several problematic questions for literary stylistics – the particular approach on which this book and this series of books is based. Firstly, the discipline of stylistics has traditionally focused on textual patterning in preference to historical and cultural context, though in practice stylistics has never been exclusively formalist. Secondly, one of the main achievements of stylistics over the last few decades has been in developing a robust account of literary meaning, yet meaningfulness is a problematic notion in surrealist writing. Thirdly, stylisticians remain exceptionally wary of biographical criticism, and have been so since the arguments put forward by Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954a, 1954b) and other New Critics, who themselves were reacting to the highly biographised and theoretically naïve criticism of their own day. Authorial intention, in particular, remains excluded from mainstream stylistic accounts.

In fact, the book *The Language of Surrealism* appears at a time in which the stylistic account of literature is experiencing a great deal of innovation along each of these fronts. With one or two very early and deliberately provocative exceptions (such as Halliday 1964, Sinclair 1966), stylistics has never exclusively focused on text-immanent patterns, but has always considered stylistic choice alongside matters of interpretation. Over the course of its history, stylistics has developed an increasingly contextualising analytical toolkit, drawing firstly on pragmatics and sociolinguistics, and then on a broad applied linguistics that placed ideology and perspective at the heart of the analysis (see the examples of stylistic practice collected in Carter and Stockwell (2008) for a sense of the historical development of the discipline). In much of the early work of stylisticians such as Fowler (1981) and Widdowson (1975), issues of culture and ideology were often to the fore, and the linguistic analysis was placed in the service of the interpretative and contextual framing.

In other words, there is nothing in stylistics itself that would preclude the historical or cultural framing that typifies the literary critical treatment of surrealism. Indeed, there is a thread within the discipline that applies stylistics as the means of illuminating historical literary analysis in a holistic way (see, for example, Sotirova 2013, 2014). This latter work remains resolutely text focused, but proceeds in recognition of the fact that literary works arise from historical moments, are shaped by them, and – crucially – these facts are often known by readers and influence their readings. In short, it is as partial to

disregard the culture of composition as it is to evade matters of textuality. The analysis of surrealism that follows in this book will inevitably incline towards the textual patterning of the works, but I will not neglect the history, culture, and humanity that are invoked by them.

The second difficulty for stylistics is more particular to the exploration at hand: surrealist texts in most cases seem to aim at a multiplication or complexity of meaning, to the point at which any single meaning or the possibility of meaningfulness itself comes into question. For a discipline founded on the analysis of how interpretative meaning can be rendered from textual patterns, this is potentially a problem. Linguistics itself is a discipline that is fundamentally social-scientific: it aims to discover the general principles of normativity that can be succinctly articulated as the 'rules' of a language. Much grammatical work in linguistics has relied on the notion of syntactic well-formedness, and much work on discourse analysis presumes a textual cohesion and coherence as the basis for investigation. Clearly, normativity, well-formedness, and coherence are not concepts that sit easily as fundamental presumptions when it comes to the exploration of surrealism.

For most of its recent history, stylistics has drawn paradigmatically on a systemic-functional model of language (rather than, for example, a generativist or structuralist approach). From Halliday's (1971) account of a William Golding character's mentally limited viewpoint to Simpson's (1993) account of transitivity to revisit that analysis and explore a Hemingway text, the functional approach to linguistics has provided a rich source of analytical tools. It has served stylistics well, to the point at which we can confidently claim that the literary linguistic account of meaning in literature is highly developed, rich, and subtle.

However, this analytical focus on meaningfulness has entailed a consequent relative neglect of aspects of literary reading other than meaning, and these aspects are important for surrealist poetics. For example, the aesthetic dimension of literature, in the sense of its emotional content and impact, its experiential value, and its fundamental non-semantic feeling, is a difficult set of phenomena for a text-focused stylistics to capture or articulate. It is especially difficult for a functional linguistic model to capture with any subtlety, other than to recognise crudely that aesthetics is a function of literary text. More recent cognitive poetic developments within stylistics have drawn by contrast on cognitive linguistic approaches to grammar and discourse (see Stockwell 2009a, Harrison et al. 2014), in order to address matters of readerly experience. Stylistics is moving from text and textuality to texture, in this regard. Furthermore, stylisticians and narratologists working in similar traditions have increasingly developed analytical tools for exploring the ethics of literary production. Phelan (2004, 2005), Jeffries (2010), and Stockwell (2013) have all in different ways drawn on narratology, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics in order to investigate the ideological and political positioning of authors, literary texts, and readers.

In my comments above, it is apparent that there has been a consistent and increasingly developing interest in the reader and reading from a stylistics perspective. This represents a recognition over the years that readerly effects, generated by the literary work, are also the proper ground of stylistic analysis. A tradition drawing on psychology

and psycholinguistics has developed (see Bortolussi and Dixon 2003, Miall 2006, van Peer 2008) with a strong empirical dimension that offers systematic reader-response evidence not just for interpretative meanings but for readerly feelings, emotions, and other affective responses. The increased explicit interest by stylisticians in readers is consonant with the emergence of their interest in aesthetics, not as a prescription of art criticism but as a descriptive matter of readerly feeling and effect.

This brings us to the third potential difficulty for a stylistics of surrealism, mentioned above: the problem of authorial intention. There is very much a mismatch between those critical practices that focus on the biographies of individual writers and the avowed ideology of surrealism itself that was largely concerned not to identify with the great tradition of literary art. Artistry and aesthetics, and the whole culture of taste and *belles lettres*, amounted only to so much egotism. Though individual membership of the surrealist circle was important, and the writings of the surrealists are full of name-checks of their fellows, the works themselves often appear to diminish or destroy any notion of individual artistic creativity or traditional literary genius. In the practices of automaticity (explored in Chapter 4), writing demonstrated access to the unconscious mind, rather than the conscious mind of social convention, civility, politeness, and urbane regulation. Collage, and other techniques adapted from painting into literature (as explored in Chapter 6), served to separate the literary object from any single, identifiable creative imagination. Collective writing, in the form of chainpoems and other surrealist games, aimed at breaking the link between textual output and a single authorial motivation.

It could be suggested that an analytical approach like stylistics that eschews biography might in fact be perfectly suited to these circumstances. However, the place of authorial intention in stylistic practice has not been simple or straightforward. Wales (2014: 55) comments on the centrality of stylistic *choice* as a long-standing concept in the discipline, and notes that ‘style itself is commonly seen as a choice of form (“manner”) to express content (“matter”)’ (Wales 2014: 169). This traditional stylistic formulation presents choice as a determining factor for textual patterning, but of course there is an obvious implicit presupposition of authorial agency involved in the word ‘choice’. Furthermore, there is often also an implicit appeal in all stylistic studies that suggests that the analytical conclusions represent something demonstrably valid about the literary value of the work under investigation. And stylistics is presented as a means of literary ‘appreciation’ (in both the critical and enhancing senses). Leech and Short’s canonical stylistics text, *Style in Fiction*, begins,

An earlier book in this [stylistics] series [...] was written with the aim of showing the student of English that examining the language of a literary text can be a means to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the writer’s artistic achievement. The present book is written with the same aim in mind, this time taking prose fiction, not poetry, as the object of study.

(Leech and Short 2006: 1)

There is an explicit indication, here, of writerly creativity, and an evaluative function that places stylistics firmly alongside literary criticism of a traditional sort.

The difficulty stylistics has with authorial intention arises from the virtually telepathic sense that much biographism seems to claim. It was a very simplistic notion of the confessional or personal reading of a literary work, characteristic of the literary scholarship of their time, against which Wimsatt and Beardsley and their colleagues were reacting. And although it is true that a strong element of biographism clearly still exists in scholarly practice (and often at odds with their theoretical statements), the framing of biographism within historical cultural studies is more complex than the situation at the beginning of the last century. Irvin (2006) makes a distinction between a crude *intentionalism*, as practised in earlier times, and *conventionalism*, in which the linguistic and social rules of a particular known culture at a particular known moment of the text's composition are brought to bear. Conventionalism underlies literary cultural studies and historiography and is presented as being more theoretically sophisticated than crude intentionalist biographism, but – Irvin argues – the irony is that conventionalism excludes any sense of intention altogether. Conventionalism and intentionalism mutually exclude important aspects of the other, as part of the desire for historicists defending their conventionalism to avoid what they see as a naïve intentionalism.

What we can certainly say, however, is that non-scholarly readers articulate their readings often in terms of the intentions and motivations that they impute to authors, and one of the fundamental principles of stylistics is that we should be as descriptive of everyday language practices as possible: so we have to encompass this deflected authorial intention as part of the discipline. Sotirova (2014) quotes Herman's (2008: 237) view that 'humans approach one another [...] as intentional systems, that is as constellations of actions whose behavior can be explained and predicted by [a] method of attributing beliefs, desires and rational acumen'. She notes that as descriptive stylisticians 'we have to accept as natural the human propensity to attribute meaningful intentions to any piece of language, including written and literary language [...]. It is, then, possible to integrate authorial intention in the interpretation of literary texts while also retaining the rigour of a linguistic analysis' (Sotirova 2014: 137). Irvin (2006) arrives at a similar conclusion, which she terms *hypothetical intentionalism*: it is part of critical practice to account for the reader's imagined idealisation of an author, gathered from the textual patterns as well as any other communicative evidence that the reader possesses. In consequence, and as I have argued and illustrated elsewhere (Stockwell 2015), an imagined authorial intention can be located as a model within the reader, and explored systematically in cognitive poetic terms. It relies on our understanding of how a reader engages in *mind-modelling* the authorial voice.

Mind-modelling (also, more passively, called 'mind-reading': Zunshine 2006, Vermeule 2010) is a cognitive poetic term referring to the natural, everyday ability to run a 'Theory of Mind' assumption about another person's status as a person, and then fill that mental model out with presumptions about belief, perspective, intended actions, motivations, memories, outlook, and so on (Stockwell 2009a, Stockwell and Mahlberg 2015). We engage in exactly the same process with fictional characters, and with imagined authors, as we deploy in everyday experience. The mechanisms of mind-modelling, then, are the basis for how literary characterisation works, but they are also the same basis for how readers relate to authors – and furthermore, how a reader's notion of a

particular author will influence an individual reading of a specific text. At the end of this chapter, I will present a stylistic account of a particular surrealist poem that integrates the text with the life and time of the writer. In the following section, firstly, I outline the significance of the connections, relationships, and associations between the lives of the surrealists.

Writers of high surrealism

Most of the texts explored in *The Language of Surrealism* are the key writings that have been regarded in retrospect as the most significant literary works of the movement. The surrealists themselves might contest the distinction between surrealist literature and surrealist polemic, denying that their 'literary' works count as literature at all. Their conception of their own surrealist 'research' might rather be that the polemic is theory and the literature is data. Nevertheless, the identification of surrealist writing as a literary genre is one that is now common and widespread, and we can tell the story of surrealism through its works and personalities. In doing so, we can square the circle between surrealist ideology (that attacked the notion of authority, authenticity, and authorial literary genius) and surrealist practices (which were often highly focused on personalities, identities, and individual allegiances). We can do this consistently within a stylistically focused perspective if we emphasise the *text-driven* nature of mind-modelling, as briefly sketched and illustrated in a close analysis of a poem by Emmy Bridgwater at the end of this chapter.

Throughout this book there will be, of course, an emphasis on the textuality of the surrealist writings, but the aim throughout will be not simply towards a linguistic description, but in pursuit of a contextualised stylistics. In other words, the stylistic analysis will appear not simply as a means of treating the literary works as data for an exposition of matters of language, but rather with the aim of representing a linguistically rigorous literary criticism. The approach, specifically, will be cognitive poetic in orientation: focused on readerly effects, responses, and perceptions as analysable using our best current understanding of language and mind (Stockwell 2002). As well as the textual patterning of surrealism, then, I will be exploring the *texture* (Stockwell 2009a) of surrealism – the readerly experience and resonance of the movement. It is in this sense (as justified earlier in this chapter) that I take what might be called a readerly stance on authorial positioning and cultural context. This will allow me to focus on the textual patterns of the writing, and the textural effects on a reader, without neglecting the historical moment of culture and composition that is part of the meaning and significance of surrealism.

In the next chapter, I will consider the surrealists' own understanding of language, meaning, and communicative effects, both in their own historically situated terms and in the retrospective light of our modern understanding of language and mind. For now, here is a principal cast list of writers who, collectively, form the source material and the social and intellectual background to the works of high surrealism considered in this book.

The pre-surrealists

Firstly, there is a group of those who might be considered as precursors to surrealism, both in immediate terms as participants in Dada, and as proto-surrealists from previous ages. Many precursors from William Blake to Edgar Allen Poe, from Emily Brontë to Lewis Carroll have been cited, not least by the surrealists themselves. However, there is a difference between on the one hand groups of writers that the surrealists admired and those who might be regarded as consistently concerned with dreams and the marvellous, and on the other hand those who were directly influential and markedly surrealist in technique, attitude, or actual intention. Among the latter group are precursors such as the following.

- Isidore-Lucien Ducasse, who called himself Comte de Lautréamont, was a poet who died aged 24 in 1870. The surreal and violent images of his 'Chants de Maldoror' (1869) were cited approvingly by many of the surrealists.
- Stéphane Mallarmé was a 19th-century Symbolist poet admired by the surrealists not only for his striking images but also for the prominence of complex, multi-layered sound-patterning and puns in his poetry.
- Arthur Rimbaud was a 19th-century poet admired as much for his tempestuous life as his work. His intense and ultimately violent affair with the symbolist poet Paul Verlaine, his preoccupation with beauty and disgust, and his striking and vivid disjunctive expressions placed him in the forefront of surrealist consciousness.
- Saint-Pol Roux was a follower of the Symbolist Mallarmé, and was a poet and dramatist. He died after his manuscripts were destroyed in a fire after an attack by a drunken German soldier in 1940, and was raised to surrealist martyrdom in a tract by Louis Aragon on his 'assassination'.
- Raymond Roussel was a poet, novelist, playwright, and travel writer whose pre-First World War work was admired by the surrealists. In particular, he would generate texts by setting himself disjunctive rules for creating odd phrases, often starting with puns and other sound-effects, and then freewheeling by association in the manner of automatic writing.

Secondly, those artists and writers who participated in Dada around the end of the First World War can be regarded as the direct ancestors of surrealism. Though many Dada artists became surrealists, the following either remained Dada in essence, or are still more closely associated with that brief moment in history.

- Marcel Duchamp is regarded as the central figure in Dada, especially for his painting and sculpture, but unquestionably his statements and manifestoes were highly influential on surrealist practices.
- Hugo Ball founded the Dada Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916, and developed many of the key practical elements that the surrealists would later adopt as their own. He then converted to Catholicism and was not involved in surrealism at all. He died in 1927.

- Tristan Tzara was a poet and performance artist who defended Dada against early surrealism, but then joined the movement, working on the magazine *Littérature*. He fought for the resistance during the Second World War, became a member of the French National Assembly, and by then had moved away from surrealism.
- Hans Arp was a painter, poet, and sculptor from Alsace: he called himself 'Hans' in German but 'Jean Arp' in French. A founder of Dada, he was briefly involved with surrealism, but left to form an Abstractionist movement and work on the magazine *transition*.
- Richard Huelsenbeck was a poet and writer who brought the Cabaret Voltaire principles to form a Dada group in Berlin. He fled Nazism to the United States in 1936, where (as Charles Hulbeck) he became a psychoanalyst.
- Kurt Schwitters is mainly known for his artworks, principally collages, though he was also a writer, and of course many of his collages include scraps of text and so can be regarded as multimodal. He was associated with Dada in Berlin, though he called his own collaging practice *Merz* (and the word itself is a cut-up remnant of 'Kommerz' - *commerce*); it subsequently became the title of his own idiosyncratic journal, and Schwitters remained apart from both Dada and surrealism.

The surrealists around Paris

André Breton was the main organising force behind surrealism; it is hard to imagine it existing at all without his influence. Surrealism emerged out of Dada in the hands of the three friends Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault. Aragon was a poet and novelist, and probably the most committed communist of the group. Soupault co-authored, with Breton, the first example of extended automatic writing, the anti-novel *Les Champs Magnétiques* (1924). Around them in Paris in the 1920s they gathered a core group of writers, including the poet Paul Eluard and his wife Helena Diakonova, whom he called Gala (she was to leave him years later to marry Salvador Dalí, and Eluard went on to marry Maria 'Nusch' Benz, a surrealist performer and artist). Other writers of the core group included Robert Desnos; the writer, actor, and director Antonin Artaud; the poet Benjamin Péret; and the writers Michel Leiris and René Crevel. In 1923 Crevel was excluded from the group by Breton because of his homosexuality. Leiris had a public argument with Breton in 1929, and spent the rest of his life as an art critic and ethnographer.

Pierre Reverdy was highly influential early in the period of high surrealism. His poems in *Les Epaves du Ciel* ('The Wrecks of Heaven,' 1924) placed him at the centre of surrealist activity. Soon afterwards, he burned his manuscripts publicly and converted to Catholicism. His affair with the designer Coco Chanel led to a lifelong friendship. Simone Kahn was Breton's first wife, and was one of the core surrealist group: one of her automatic texts appeared in the first issue of the magazine *La Révolution Surréaliste*. The painter, sculptor, and poet Max Ernst was a friend, moving in 1922 from Cologne to Paris to live with the Eluards. Méret Oppenheim was a Swiss artist and photographer who allied herself with surrealism in 1932 and became a member of its inner circle.

The Romanian sculptor and poet Victor Brauner was a regular visitor to the surrealists in Paris. The French painter and poet Francis Picabia was closely associated with Dada,

became briefly but intensely involved with surrealism from 1920 to 1924, and then broke away and returned to figurative painting. Lee Miller was an American photographer who arrived in Paris in 1929 to work with the surrealist artist and photographer Man Ray, and they became lovers and collaborators. She maintained close friendships with Pablo Picasso, Paul Eluard, and the filmmaker Jean Cocteau. Cocteau was closely associated with surrealism, but denied any involvement. The Spanish painter and poet Picasso was a central member of the surrealist movement, though perhaps his writing is more surrealist than many of his cubist and later primitivist paintings and sculptures.

Other artists associated with high surrealism include the playwright and poet Roger Vitrac, who fell out with Breton in 1929; the poet Jacques Prévert, who later became a more realist film writer; the photographer, poet, and painter Dora Maar, who was introduced in Paris to Picasso by Eluard in 1936 – she became Picasso's lover and model, close friends with Gala Eluard, and later wrote poetry and exhibited her photographs, especially of Picasso's paintings in progress. Others who came later to surrealism include the Austrian-Mexican painter, sculptor, and writer Wolfgang Paalen, who joined the surrealists in 1935. He married the French-Mexican surrealist poet Alice Rahon in 1934, and together they travelled to Mexico with Breton and his second wife Jacqueline, where they met the painter Frida Kahlo, whom Breton regarded as a surrealist because of the dreamlike quality of her painting, though she rejected the label.

Many of these personalities regarded themselves multiply as writers, painters, sculptors, photographers, and performers. Other surrealists tended to be regarded primarily as painters, and there were a great many who moved in the same circles, with a focus on Paris. The Argentine painter Leonor Fini arrived in Paris in 1935 and became friends with Breton, Eluard, Ernst, and Picasso. Other artists associated with surrealism included the Catalan painter Joan Miró, who joined the group in 1924. The French painter Yves Tanguy was brought to surrealism by Jacques Prévert in the same year; he married the American surrealist painter Kay Sage in 1940. The painter André Masson was an intense advocate of automatic drawing through the 1920s, but left the surrealist group at the end of the decade. The Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti became the foremost surrealist sculptor after his arrival in Paris in 1923, until he was thrown out in 1935 for turning to realism. The Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico had been a hero of the surrealists in the early period, and associated himself with them in Paris in 1924, but the link ended acrimoniously a couple of years later. The Catalan painter and performer Salvador Dalí is popularly regarded as the best example of a surrealist, though in fact he did not join the group in Paris officially until 1929 and was expelled after a surrealist trial in 1934 for apologising for a surrealist act and refusing explicitly to denounce fascism. In spite of this, he appeared at the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936, and other approved events, until he was finally expelled in 1939 for self-aggrandisement and commercialism. Dalí had collaborated with the filmmaker Luis Buñuel on the film *Un Chien Andalou*; they later fell out politically while writing the film *L'Age d'Or*, which caused riots at its screenings and was withdrawn in 1934 and not shown again until 1979.

The Swiss painter Paul Klee was admired by the surrealists, and even used some of their techniques, though his influences and associations were highly eclectic. The Spaniard

Óscar Domínguez was friends with Tanguy and Picasso in Paris, and joined formally in 1933. Paul Delvaux and René Magritte were painters and Belgian surrealists. Magritte's paintings and commentaries, in particular, have become widely known around the world, and include some iconic images of surrealism.

British surrealists

Valentine Boué was a poet and artist who married the English poet and historian Roland Penrose, and together they joined the surrealist group in Paris in 1925. After the war and their divorce, she lived with her former husband and his new wife, Lee Miller. Roland Penrose was instrumental in taking ideas from the Paris surrealists back to London, where he co-organised the International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936. Other co-organisers included the art critic Herbert Read; the poet, novelist, and later academic Hugh Sykes Davies; the poet David Gascoyne; and the Belgian artist and writer E.L.T. Mesens, who became the leader of the London Surrealist Group. Mesens conducted a long-running feud with the surrealist Toni del Renzio, a friend of Benjamin Péret, and a descendant of the royal Russian Romanovs. Del Renzio had an intense affair with the surrealist writer and painter, Emmy Bridgwater (see the end of this chapter), and later married another, Ithell Colquhoun. Colquhoun was thrown out of the London Surrealist Group when she sided with del Renzio against Mesens in 1940. The poet, painter, and novelist Leonora Carrington was introduced to surrealism by Herbert Read, met Max Ernst after the London exhibition, and moved in with him in Paris. Eileen Agar studied art in Paris in 1928, and joined the surrealists; she was a member of the London group from 1934. She was one of the few women to exhibit at the London exhibition in 1936, along with Edith Rimmington and Grace Pailthorpe. Pailthorpe married the surrealist artist Reuben Mednikoff in 1935 and they researched the psychology of automatism, leaving the surrealist group in 1939. Other fellow-travellers with the British surrealists included the poets Ruthven Todd, Dylan Thomas, Humphrey Jennings, and Roger Roughton.

It should be apparent from this breathless tour of friendships, alliances, entries, and exits that surrealism was enormously fluid and protean. The experience of being associated with the surrealists was intense, and the scrutiny of the fellow-surrealists was constant and unremitting. Breton set himself up as the arbiter of membership of the Paris group, and also had a huge influence on the self-proclaimed surrealist groups in other cities across Europe and then more internationally. Even those associated with the core group were not immune from violent arguments with Breton and others.

Commitments to communism and Marxist ideology were examined and graded at surrealist meetings and in the pages of tracts, flyers, leaflets, and several different magazines and journals, some of them very short-lived. Attitudes to fascism were laid bare. Indications of a leaning towards self-promotion, commercialism, and egotism were punished. Those considered to be the enemies of surrealism were heckled, attacked in pamphlets, and even physically assaulted. Though Paris was certainly at the centre of the movement, the 1930s represent the first great decade of easy international travel, and surrealism spread across the globe rapidly. Though Breton and his close associates retained their position as key arbiters of the surrealist spirit, surrealism rapidly became

extremely diverse, and took on national and regional flavours wherever it settled. The intricacies of relationships among the surrealists testify to a movement in the two decades between the wars that was both intense, incestuous, and constrained by surrealist standards while also claiming to be unregulated, uncivilised, and free. Given this diversity and cultural context, we could almost speak of the period of *surrealisms* occurring in different individuals' lives, rather than a single movement.

Mind-modelling a surrealist

Emmy Bridgwater was inspired by surrealism after attending the International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in London in 1936. From her home in Birmingham, her contact with other surrealists led, during and after the war, to a recognised Birmingham Surrealist Group, along with painters Conroy Maddox, William Gear, Oscar Mellor, John Melville, and his brother the journalist and art critic Robert Melville, poets Henry Reed and Stuart Gilbert, and later the painter and anthropologist Desmond Morris, and the jazz musician George Melly. She joined the British Surrealist Group in 1940, around the time of a brief affair with its leader Toni del Renzio and a long and close friendship with surrealist Edith Rimmington. Bridgwater is today most well-known as a painter, though her poetry appeared in surrealist magazines of the late 1930s and 1940s such as *Fulcrum*, the *London Bulletin* and the single issue of *Arson*. Her writing has never been collected, and she is often overlooked as a surrealist writer in favour of her male counterparts, but here is an example:

Closing Time

So comes the flame out of the serpent's mouth
 So plucks the bloom, the red-tipped fingered hand.
 So, as the clock goes round and round and round
 So turns again the record of the sound.

Repeat the space where swallows try their turns
 Reveal the place where ants begin to crawl,
 Remove the time when rain begins to drip,
 Re-seal it all

(Emmy Bridgwater, written 1941, published in Remy 2013: 49)

Bridgwater's paintings often show desolate landscapes with both geometrical and organic forms, similar to Dalí or de Chirico in some respects, though without their neatness of line. This perhaps reflects Bridgwater's early use of automatism in her technique (see [Chapter 4](#)), especially in her pen and ink drawings. Some of her poetry is also apparently automatic in this way, though the poem quoted above seems much more restrained and crafted. She largely disappeared from public life in 1952 to care for her mother and sister in Stratford-upon-Avon, taking up collage again for a decade or so in the 1970s. She died in 1999.

Bridgwater's poetry has never been extensively studied (nor even published widely). Work on her is mainly concerned with her paintings and drawings, and mainly in exhibition catalogues (such as Rüll 2000); otherwise there are brief notes and sketches that mention her writing in surveys of British surrealists (such as in Oldfield 2003: 164–5, or Remy 2013). Comments on the poetry are largely a means of echoing observations about her painting. Biographies begin by reporting her lower-middle-class background as the provincial daughter of an accountant father and Methodist mother, comfortable in the leafy Edgbaston suburb, before education at Oxford and training at art school and as a secretary. However, Bridgwater seems to me a significant figure in English surrealism. The Birmingham group regarded themselves as being more attuned to the original continental European tradition of surrealism (following the manifestoes and statements of André Breton) than what Conroy Maddox scorned as those who, attracted by the large 1936 London exhibition, had become 'surrealists almost overnight' (quoted in Levy 2003: 40). Bridgwater kept out of this controversy, which declined during the war anyway as surrealist activity in London diminished and degenerated into a fight for leadership between del Renzio and E.L.T. Mesens. Birmingham remained consistently aligned with European surrealism. Neither Bridgwater nor Edith Rimmington, nor in fact any of the female members of the London collective, signed the group's letters, statements, or manifestoes that differentiated the London group from surrealism in general (Libmann 2003: 165).

Although the women artists in Britain never formulated a joint counter-policy or constituted a collective counter-force to the dominant male Surrealists, they did produce in their very diverse work what amounted to a counter-culture, one in which seriousness was not altogether outlawed. Instead of their male counterparts' indulgent fantasies of 'Mad Love' [the title of Breton's anti-novel ...], they resorted to asexual imagery, distancing themselves from the risk of mere objectification as women and creating instead a kaleidoscopic image of women also alienated, but alienated with a difference. As [surrealist artist and photographer] Eileen Agar said, they felt themselves to be a minority within a minority, taking 'deviance as a principle of creativity'.

(Libmann 2003: 166)

It seems to me plausible in this brief history and commentary that Bridgwater's formative contact with surrealism can be understood as being decentred in a variety of interacting ways: Birmingham not London, England not France, female not male, and quite prepared not to let the programmatic commitment to surrealist politics come before family care and responsibility. It would be naïve to 'read off' this biographical sketch against one of her poems, but there is a sense, I think, that my mental model of Emmy Bridgwater is a readerly factor in my experience of 'Closing time' reproduced above.

The biographical details given here are pretty much all that is publicly and easily accessible about Emmy Bridgwater. You can view her paintings and drawings either online or at Birmingham museums or in the collection of Jeffrey Sherwin. Some of her poems appear in Michel Remy's (2013) anthology, *On the Thirteenth Stroke of Midnight: Surrealist Poetry in Britain*. There is a sepia photograph of her as a young woman, generally available but unsourced. And that is about it. Unless you are a scholar of British

surrealism, or met Bridgwater or one of her friends when she was alive, these details constitute any model of the author that you could construct. The generation of surrealists working in the 1930s have passed on.

When it comes to a reading of 'Closing time' above, a blend of all of these factors has undoubtedly affected my experience of the poem. Firstly, I am conscious of not thinking of it as a poem, but rather less specifically as a text. Identifying the author of a piece of writing as a surrealist seems to have the consequence of adopting a surrealist readerly stance, and so the usual unthinking and default assumptions about lyric poetry, lyricism itself, and the close and irresistible connections between a poetic persona subjectivity and the authorial subjectivity all come into play; at the same time, they are raised as problematic issues. The multiple possible schematic fields for the titular phrase 'closing time' are immediately apparent (closing time of a pub, shop, or office; an ending more generally and abstractly; or a sense in which time itself is closed), but also foregrounded is the factor of multiplicity of meaning itself. These possibilities are unlikely to be simultaneous and equal: my own first association is with the closing time of a pub or restaurant. I suspect that in a non-surrealist poem, this prototypical evocation would be strongly primary, and there would be no further search for other polyvalences. However, the surrealist authorial model that I'm running allows for a relatively greater prominence for the other meanings, and also lends them greater texture. For example, the sense of an ending is here not apocalyptic but instead gentle and melancholy, not a bang but a whimper: I think this is an effect of gentle and quiet associations of 'closing' (rather than 'shutting', say, or 'ending', 'finishing', 'terminating', and so on). (This more prolonged semantic sense in 'closing' is a consequence of the sequential scanning in the semantic profiling of the word (Langacker 1987: 248).) The last possibility – that it is time itself that is in the process of being closed – is perhaps only evoked by a literalisation of the metaphor of closing. Such literalisations are a major technique of surrealism (and also, incidentally, of science fiction: see Stockwell 2002a).

This melancholy tone seems to me to affect my reading of the rest of the poem too, and here I am sure that my sense of Bridgwater's life is also conditioning my response. It is almost impossible, I think, once you see that the text was written in 1941, not to imagine an all-consuming context of Britain at war that must condition almost any reading of it. The violent images (flames and bloodied hands), the sense of an inexorability to history (the clock going round), and the 1940s cultural British positioning (differently, the record-player and the rain) can all be read consistently within this framing. The first stanza seems to me resignedly melancholic, and evokes for me a sense of a reporting observer. This is, clearly, an effect of the repeated 'So', a conjunction which combines a sense of plain descriptiveness (=just so) and consequentiality (=so then).

Interpretations that simply would not occur in a non-surreal framing come to mind. In particular, a plain reading of the second line ('So plucks the bloom, the red-tipped fingered hand') as a subject-verb reversal (*The red-tipped fingered hand plucks the bloom*) switches in my mind to an appositional reading (*The bloom, the red-tipped fingered hand*) in which the hand appears as a flower, the fingers as petals, the flower red: a surrealist image. The verb 'plucks' then assumes the status of an intransitive verb, as if the bloom itself has done the plucking. In any case, throughout the stanza it is the inanimate

objects which are animated (the flame comes, the bloom plucks, the clock goes, the record turns), and human agency is disembodied or marginalised.

The consistent iambic pentameter of the whole first stanza can be read as reinforcing the regular and inexorable iterations of the content. The metrical form serves to place emphasis on the content words over the connectives and articles, apart from the stress that falls twice on the preposition 'of' ('out of the serpent's mouth' and 'record of the sound'). Again drawing on Langacker's (1987) framework, the sense of motion that the preposition *of* typically conveys is further intensified in this way. Only 'tipped' in 'red-tipped' does not receive iambic stress, thus emphasising the redness over the smallness of the tips, and assisting the appositional surrealist identification of the bloom and the fingers mentioned above.

The second stanza shifts in tone markedly. In my mind it moves from resigned melancholy to a grim determination. The recursive element is maintained from the first stanza, with the continuing strong iambic pentameter again sustaining the stresses on the semantic content words, over the first three lines. The subtle assonance of the first stanza is replaced with a more prominent alliteration in the first line, on /p/, /s/ and /t/: 'Repeat the space where swallows try their turns.' Thereafter there is a morphological repetition of 'Re-' at the beginning of each line (and the first line prefigures this with 'Repeat'). Of course it is the imperative form that mainly conveys the tonal shift to a stoical determination, and the instructed action increases in agency with each step: 'Repeat' an existing element, 'Reveal' something already there, actively but negatively 'Remove' something, actively and definitely 'seal' it up again.

The punctuation develops across the poem. The first two occurrences of 'So' in the first stanza convey description (*just so*), but the comma after the third 'So' renders the last two lines with a consequential significance: *Therefore, as the clock goes, so then also turns the record*. The first stanza ends with a closing full-stop. Ironically, the whole poem 'Closing time' ends with the second stanza without a full-stop, and with a line that is truncated in its metrical length: 'Re-seal it all'. Although the action is definite, reflexive and closed off, it seems (to me) as if there is an unspoken consequence to come, that is being gestured towards but not articulated.

A stylistician could not help but notice the parallelisms across the stanzas. The flaming serpent of the first line is a dragon in the air, the same space where swallows fly. The delicacy of the fingertips points to the place where ants crawl. The clock occupies the line in the first stanza that parallels time in the same line in the second stanza. It is hard not to notice the cycling back and forth between continuity and disjunction that also underlies many of the stylistic observations above. Even the title compresses continuity in the verb-form of 'Closing' with non-continuity in the semantic sense of a time of ending.

It is hard not to read the poem as imagining an aerial battle and its effects and consequences: spitfires, gloved hands, bloody violence, grieving flowers, instruments and dials, tight aerial turns, the view of tiny people like ants below, bombs, death raining down from above. All of this is an effect of the date of composition: '1941'. It is also hard not to attribute affective feelings to an authorial model: in other words, to feel that the readerly response is an actual empathetic response to another's feelings. 'Re-seal it all'

is not a rejection of the world just described, but a repression of its horror, and a determined resistance to its effects. In all of this, the authorial mind that is being modelled and the poetic voice and the lyrical viewpoint all seem (to me) to be of a piece: I call it Emmy Bridgwater. I am simultaneously generating 'Bridgwater' and using her as a heuristic for my interpretation. Although a historically located reading as in these last comments is plausible, the framing model of 'Bridgwater' as a surrealist means that my reading experience does not have the same texture as would a similar wartime poem: I have in mind W.B. Yeats' 'An Irish airman foresees his death' (1919), or the contemporary 'High flight' by John Gillespie Magee (1941). These are very different texts from Bridgwater's, and one of the main differences is the non-surrealist readerly stance that almost anyone would take in relation to them. 'Closing time' is less definitely 'about' the war, and is more ambivalent, paradoxical, perhaps universal, and, I think, more resonant as a piece of surrealism.

My argument here is that stylistic analysis is not inimical to biography. In some cases, a reader's sense of a strong biographical or cultural context is an inescapable part of a reading to the extent that a stylistician could not possibly ignore its effects. That said, and though biography, culture, and the context of creativity will all feature throughout this book, the objective is not really to produce historicised interpretations – new readings of surrealist works. Offering to resolve surrealist writing by proffering an interpretation largely misses the point of surrealism. The central concern is to present an account of *how* surrealism works, as a means of understanding its significance and persisting power.

3 Language in Surrealist Thought

Language and linguistics

Surrealism arose in Western Europe at a moment in history that was pivotal and convulsive in different ways. The First World War, the Marxist revolution in Russia, mass education, the first elements of state welfare, the rise of trade unionism into political party representation, moves towards women's suffrage, the final consolidations of European colonial empires, the development of wireless radio technology, the rise of cinema, powered flight, the factory assembly line, the shift from horse-power to motorised vehicle – all of these formed the social background to the first few decades of the new century. Whatever their participants' geographical origins, surrealism was also an urban phenomenon, and the culture of Paris, Berlin, Zurich, Madrid, and London was modern, technologically advanced, and thoroughly industrialised. From a historical perspective, in order to understand how surrealism foregrounded abnormality, irrationality, and the marvellous, it would be important to understand what in their surroundings was regarded as normal and current. Such a dense cultural description is larger than the scope of this book, but here in this chapter I would like to consider more specifically what was the surrealists' contemporary thinking on the study of language.

It is difficult, from our vantage point a century later, and with the benefit of the whole of modern linguistics between us, to imagine how the surrealists viewed language. This is even more difficult to disentangle because some of the notions about language and thought that were encouraged and promoted by the surrealists and their successors and associates have in fact had a large influence on subsequent critical theoretical ideas about language as well. To start with, we must rewind to the origins of surrealism and look at the linguistic landscape.

A few years before the Cabaret Voltaire opened in Zurich, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure was delivering his lectures 170 miles away in Geneva. In the academic years beginning 1906, 1908, and 1910, de Saussure gave three sets of lectures in which he brought together the latest developments in the study of language as a scientific system. Notes of the talks were collected, edited, and published posthumously in 1916 by the linguists Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Reidlinger (de Saussure 1916, English translation 1983), based largely on notes taken by Reidlinger and other students. The *Cours de Linguistique Générale* ('Course in General Linguistics') is widely regarded as the foundational text of the discipline of modern linguistics, and as the source for much of the theorising of language in the 20th century. In spite of this direct and wide-ranging later influence, it is probably not reasonable to imagine that any of the surrealists were

aware of de Saussure's work in particular. Breton, Eluard, Tzara, and their contemporaries were well-read in the arts and literature, and were regarded as literary critics by others in French society. But the academic study of language as exemplified by de Saussure was scholastic and somewhat esoteric: certainly too specialised for general public consumption. Though the *Cours* was published in Paris, it seems that its initial influence was felt towards the east, in the work of the Russians of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (Roman Jakobson, Filip Fortunatov, Boris Tomashevsky) and the Saint Petersburg OPOJAZ group (*Obščestvo izučenija Poëtičeskogo Jazyka*, 'Society for the Study of Poetic Language' – Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yuri Tynianov), both active from 1915 until the end of the 1920s. Jakobson was also later a member of the Prague School of linguistics, alongside others such as Vilém Mathesius, Jan Mukařovský, and René Wellek.

The key innovation that de Saussure articulated was essentially a revision of a theory of reference. The simplest and most traditional concept of reference is that a word refers to an object, entity, or idea in the world. Even where the referent is an abstraction ('freedom'), an imagined object ('unicorn'), or a process ('running up a hill'), the act of reference relies on the objective notion existing first as a notion and then the word is used to label it and refer to it subsequently. Language, in this perspective, is essentially a system for labelling reality (extended to include fictional and imagined objects). However, de Saussure presented the argument that language consists of *signs*. A sign has two essential aspects: the *signifier* (the actual phonetic realisation, or its spelled appearance) and the *signified* (what it seems to refer to). Crucially, de Saussure described the relationship of signifier to signified as an *arbitrary* one. In other words, there was no essential, natural, or concrete relationship between the sound or shape of a word and its referent: this can be seen in the fact that different languages invoke the same referent with different words (there is nothing dog-like about *dog*, *chien*, *hund*, *cane*, *kalb*, *gou*, *sobaka*, *inja*, *inu*, *kelev*, and so on around the world's languages). Furthermore, different languages seem to 'carve up' reality in different ways: one language might have one word to cover what in another language might be several different objects (colour terms seem pertinent here, with Italian *blu* and *azzurro* differentiating merely shades of blueness in English). Languages thus rely on relationships of meanings that are not valid with reference to an external reality; in other words, meaning in language is relative to itself. That means that language systems are culturally circumscribed.

A distinction is also made between the language system in general (*langue*) and the actual utterances of individuals in communication (their *parole*). Language is culturally defined and socially constrained, but individuals have to learn those constraints in order to become competent language-users. The signs that an individual uses are drawn from and are combined with other signs, all of which are defined not by their essences but by their relationships with each other. Meaning is arbitrary at the level of the sign, but oppositional and relativised at all the higher systemic levels of language. Therefore, as de Saussure (1916) goes on to argue, every sign takes its meaning from its structural oppositional relation to other signs and combinations.

Initially influential in the East, the 1920s influence of de Saussure's book was only felt in Western Europe because it was later promoted especially by Charles Bally, who succeeded de Saussure as professor of linguistics in Geneva. It is clear from a review of the

second edition of Bally's *Traité de Stylistique* ('Treatise on Stylistics', 1920) that Saussurean notions of linguistics were, however, beginning to be influential at least in academic circles (see Müller 1922), and possibly more generally. De Saussure's *Cours* also collected many notions that had been developing over the previous decades, moving language study on from philology and the neogrammarians (both of which were focused on historical language change) towards what was to become structuralist linguistics. The principal shift in linguistics as a scholarly discipline between the 19th and 20th centuries was thus from the diachronic study of language (historical manuscripts, and the rules of sound-changes) to a synchronic study of language choice (as in Bally's sense of 'stylistics'). A surrealist would have had little interest in the dry rule-systems of philology; indeed, the scientific idea that language-change could be reduced to formulae and that language was regular and rule-governed would have been appalling. However, the new notions that language patterning was a matter of creative choice, that the surface appearance of words was arbitrary, that meaning depended on chance, and that there was a difference between the conscious world of utterances and the underlying unconscious world of meanings were all ideas that would appeal very much to the surrealist sensibility.

However, the basic education in language for a French schoolboy of the turn of the century would have revolved around classical grammar and its correlates in the French language. The rules of French were taught as a set of prescriptions, and exemplified by texts from the masters of French literature. As Kramsch and Kramsch (2000: 593) point out, literature was a main feature of language education in the early part of the 20th century in the Western world. The study of literature was inseparable from the study of language: good style and well-formedness would go hand in hand, and to be literate in European societies in the 1920s was to be well-read. The emphasis throughout the Third Republic (1871 to 1940) was on the secularisation of the state; the Jules Ferry laws (after 1882) gradually removed religious elements from school instruction and defunded religious schools; the laws of 1905 finalised the absolute separation of church and state. As a result, the French school curriculum became more standardised, and the French language taught for its stability (fixed by the Académie Française) and literary expression. The centralisation of French society which had been continuing under a range of different rulers from the monarchy to Napoleon and their successors throughout the 19th century served to emphasise the standard, fixed, and monologic status of standard French. It was against this conservative educational background that the new post-war ideas about language would have seemed so revolutionary and liberating. In broad literary development, too, French poetry (as much as and perhaps even more than in English) was still characterised in the late 19th century mainly by a close adherence to formal structures and genre patterns. The literary Modernism that spread in the early 20th century was characterised by a fracturing and liberation of strict formal patterns. In other words, many of the key ideas manifest in the emergence of Saussurean linguistics can also be seen to have been – as it were – in the aether for a Western European intellectual in the 1920s.

Much of the philosophy, analysis, and discussion of 'Language' since the early 20th century has treated language as an abstraction. The use of the word *language* as the topic, subject, theme, or even as the agent of a sentence is a feature of writing from the last

hundred years or so. In earlier periods, matters of language are much more likely to be referenced by talking specifically about 'grammar' or 'dialect', or by rendering *language* more concretely as part of a partitive expression, such as 'the use of language,' 'the grammar of language,' 'the sounds of language' and so on. (A simple but crude search of a corpus like Google Books using the Brigham Young corpus linguistic tool shows the shift from relatively concrete to relatively abstract usage across the turn of 1900: see <http://googlebooks.byu.edu/>). Even the earlier use of the plural 'languages' refers most often to foreign languages as objects, rather than to the notion of *language* as an abstracted concept.

The moment of this shift can be identified to the first half of the 20th century, and the confluence of a range of interests to focus on language itself. These interests occurred in philosophy, in the rise of the social sciences, in the development of modern linguistics as a discipline, the emergence of critical theory, and in the history of art, particularly literary Modernism. Surrealism itself occurs at this transitional point, so that the views of the surrealists blend both the former and the new perspectives on the nature of language. Although different surrealists had diverse positions, and in spite of all the manifestoes and statements such that much of surrealist theory of language is practised rather than declared explicitly, it is still possible to produce a general sketch of surrealist thinking on language.

The key concepts are as follows:

- Language is a medium providing access to the unconscious mind.
- Language has a connected double function: it operates in the everyday waking world and it operates in the inner world of dream, the irrational, and the marvellous.
- Studying language is an exploratory method for studying the unconscious; so studying language has an indirect research function for human experience.
- Language offers an active participation in the unconscious mind rather than a passive observation or description of it.
- The term *language* covers both the materiality of lexicogrammar, registers, literary genres, and different languages as well as the abstract notion of the system of verbal representation.
- Language is not arbitrary, but motivated.
- Language is not conventionally symbolic but is iconic of embodied and psychic experience.
- Language is shared and collective rather than individual; for an individual it is interpersonal and dialogic; even on an internal mental level it is socially conditioned.
- Stylistic patterning and lyricism are by-products of the articulation of the surreal image: surrealists aim not for conventional beauty but for convulsive, striking, unfamiliar beauty.
- Dream and everyday life are driven by desire, and since language is the conduit for communicating between dream and materiality, so language is characterised by desire.

I have presented these points in a roughly consequential order, and they are expressed in current rather than contemporary terms. I will discuss them in more detail in the rest of this chapter. Firstly, covering the first four of the key perspectives above, I consider

the surrealist view of language and mind. Secondly, I go on to evaluate the surrealists' view of language and the contemporary state of language study, with the benefit of the hindsight provided by the current field of linguistics.

Consciousness and the unconscious

Consciousness refers both to the feeling of living identity and selfhood, as well as a secondary and later notion of explicit awareness. The correlation of consciousness with awareness arose with the development of the idea of the *unconscious* aspect of the mind. Adapted from Friedrich Schelling's notion of *Unbewusste* by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817), the unconscious mind was the place where all human mental aspects below the level of awareness were held. Items that a person is unaware of fall into the two categories of the unknown (and therefore irrelevant) and the much more interesting known, or intuitive, or imagined material that is part of the person's experience, but remains below the level of conscious awareness. Throughout the 19th century, the double value of the notion of consciousness as identity and awareness became widespread in the emerging field of psychology; the two aspects became so blurred that *consciousness* was and remains popularly viewed as the single notion of self-awareness. However, the term itself was also transformed and popularised following the work of Sigmund Freud, particularly in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), and in a 1915 paper 'The unconscious' (Freud 1997, 2014, 2005, respectively).

Freud presents the unconscious as a repository of things which are held in mind but are deliberately repressed from conscious awareness. This includes animalistic intuitions, urges, appetites and bodily drives (the *id*), and all of the memories, thoughts, and represented experiences that for various reasons the *superego* part of the mind has rendered unaware to the individual. The *id* is permanently inaccessible deep in the unconscious mind, but the *superego* governs the repression and release of all elements of conscience from the unconscious to the pre-conscious and the conscious levels of awareness. Items which were repressed by the *superego* can be brought to conscious awareness by various techniques in Freudian psychoanalysis such as dream interpretation, meditation, free verbal association, slips of the tongue, accidents of action, and behaviour, and can also be revealed by other methods such as artistic expression, hypnosis, and activities such as social and sexual deviance and transgression, personality shifts, neuroses, and mental illnesses of various types.

The Freudian concepts of consciousness and the unconscious were directly influential on the surrealists. André Breton had observed psychoanalytical techniques firsthand as a medical student in the psychiatric wards of military hospitals during the First World War. He met Freud in 1921 and engaged in an odd correspondence in 1932 (collected at the end of his 1955 *Communicating Vessels*: Breton 1990: 149–55), in which Freud appears rather mystified at Breton's uses of his work. The surrealists mainly talk about the unconscious as a single, inchoate domain: they generally do not subdivide it analytically – indeed, it would be unsurrealist to do so. The surrealist unconscious is the place

of dreams, intuitions, socially repressed urges, drives, and opinions; it is pre-moral, unregulated, uncivilised, and irrational. Viewed from the perspective of everyday experience, the unconscious is marvellous.

Given this understanding, it is clear that the surrealists' sense of the unconscious is a blend of the latest Freudian research and the older, more popular senses of the unconscious mind. The strong linguistic element in Freudian psychoanalysis (popularly, the 'talking cure': Freud 1995: 9) can also be directly discerned in the surrealists' interest in automatic writing (see Chapter 4 for a detailed account) and in the use of verbal art as a major product of surrealist activity. Along with Freud, the surrealists also regarded the unconscious as a definite object. In most pre-Freudian psychology, the unconscious is simply the absence of conscious knowledge, and is thus by definition simply negational and unanalysable. Drawing on Freudian ideas, by contrast the surrealist unconscious is a real psychic location (this is not contradictory, from a surrealist perspective). It is a place where the pre-verbal, pre-pictorial, pre-plastic, pre-eventful surreal image is to be found.

The task of surrealist research is to render that psychic surreal image in the materiality of the everyday world. This manifestation can be in speech or writing, painting, sculpture, or object, drama, film, architecture, or theatrical event, and so on. It would not be entirely true to say that the particular nature of the technique did not matter: each surrealist manifestation needed to be taken seriously, and the texture of its form was as much an inseparable part of the core of the surreal image as its conceptual content. However, the particular realisation was irrelevant as far as the fact of the basic transformative process was concerned. Surrealistic activity offered direct access to the unconscious mind.

This access was necessarily active, rather than being any sort of adoption of an observing poetic consciousness.

Essential to active participation in surrealism is the belief that communication is valuable above all for what it says. However, a surrealist who falls victim to egotism tends to stress more and more how he communicates. Emphasizing the attractiveness of presentation over content, he gradually abandons the surrealist position. [...]

Surrealists not only scorn compromise with aestheticism; they actually fear it
(Matthews 1986: 240)

As Matthews here suggests, the active engagement in the language of the unconscious mind is motivated by the act of communication. There is a temptation to treat the different individual products of surrealism (a poem, a sculpture, a painting) as merely an exemplar of surrealism in general, and in the process neglect the affecting value and force of the object itself. The vast majority of critical analysis of surrealist output has a tendency towards this fault: the object itself is disregarded in favour of an abstract or generic discussion. In fact, the concrete object that realises the idealised surreal image is crucial as a single part of an act of communication. The reason the surrealists 'fear' aestheticism (in Matthews' phrase) is that the treatment of a surrealist painting as art or a surrealist poem as literature strips it of its essential surrealism. Viewing the surrealist as an artist rather than a researcher of the unconscious mind frames their language simply as decorative and themselves as egotists. (As mentioned in Chapter 2, Tristan

Tzara, Salvador Dalí, Henry Moore, René Magritte, and others were at different times expelled from the group for just this reason.)

Surrealism was an act of revolutionary communication because it aimed to be a conduit between reality and dream, the rational and the marvellous, the conscious and the unconscious mind. This communication was not primarily artistic but social, economic, and political in aspiration. Breton moves to close his 1955 book *Communicating Vessels* with a vision of the post-revolutionary future:

It is from poets, in spite of everything over the centuries, that it is possible to receive and permitted to expect the impulses that may succeed in restoring man to the heart of the universe, extracting him for a second from his debilitating adventure and reminding him that he is, for every pain and every joy exterior to himself, an indefinitely perfectible place of resolution and resonance.

The poet to come will surmount the depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream. He will hold out the magnificent fruit of the tree with those entwined roots and will know how to persuade those who taste of it that it has nothing bitter about it. Carried along on the wave of his epoch, he will assume for the first time, free from anguish, the reception and transmission of all the appeals pressing toward him from the depth of ages.

(Breton 1990: 146–7)

Breton places the writer as the medium for this revolutionary transformation. He ends the book a few sentences later by envisioning a moment in which action and dream are no longer regarded as separate parts of consciousness, mentally hidden in an interior darkness, but are instead viewed as equally familiar and accessible by all people:

They will already be outside, mingled with everyone else in full sunlight, and will cast no more complicitous or intimate a look than others do at truth itself when it comes to shake out, at their dark window, its hair streaming with light.

(Breton 1990: 148)

The revolutionary spirit of surrealism is captured in this perspective. Sometimes – not least by the communists of the 1930s – surrealism was accused of bourgeois obscurantism, of being concerned with art rather than proletarian economics and liberation. It was an accusation that the surrealists vehemently rejected, arguing that theirs was a liberation *equally* as much of the socioeconomic conditions of the body as of the spirit and the unconscious life. And they rejected the presumed distinction between body and mind.

[T]he imaginary dream world for Breton not only offers the possibility of being attuned to our experience of the world but it also gives us a ‘duty to live’ in the fullest way possible, combining material (use value) and ideal (exchange value) forms of experience. For Breton desire, equally driving both dream and everyday life, is the hinge between individual and collective experience and signals a rapprochement between Freud and Marx that stresses the affective dimension of political and poetic life.

(Groth and Lusty 2013: 134)

Desire, in surrealist thinking, means not only sexual and bodily desire but also the motivating and aspiring drive towards the liberation of the unconscious mind. Desire is what motivates the use of language as the communicative act. Again, no distinction is made between body and mind, in the surrealist perspective on desire, and language again is the medium through which the distinction can be collapsed.

The exploratory function of language is captured in Breton's (1969: 32) famous declaration from the first *Manifesto*: 'Language has been given to man that he may make surrealist use of it.' He goes on to emphasise the ordinary communicative function of everyday discourse: in other words, he insists that the surrealist use of language also encompasses its everyday capacity rather than excluding it. However, the main feature of everyday language that Breton (1969: 33–4) dwells on here is its unplanned potential: 'He is not worried about the words that are going to come, nor about the sentence which will follow after the sentence he is just completing.' This teleological capacity means that language use is always 'unrestricted... [and able] to adapt itself to all of life's circumstances.' His conclusion is that '[t]he forms of Surrealist language adapt themselves best to dialogue' (Breton 1969: 34).

Many of these surrealist views on language have been misrepresented and misunderstood over the course of the hundred years between us: language as access to the unconscious; language as the means of resolving the distinction between the unconscious and the conscious mind; language as a means of definite reference and concrete affective action; language as uniting body and mind, material and spiritual; language as a motivating force for the personal and the social; language as communication not solipsism; language as an engagement with the world not a retreat from it; language with a definite message and communicative value not a flimsy freeplay of meaning for frivolous aesthetic or egotistic purposes.

A significant source of later misunderstanding of the surrealists' practices can be identified in the early work of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Later to become friends with Breton and Dalí, and for a time Picasso's personal therapist, Lacan served as the early conduit between Freudian psychoanalytical ideas and the surrealists. He translated Freud's work, and discussed it at surrealist meetings in Paris. His 1932 doctoral thesis, *Paranoid Psychosis and Its Relations to the Personality*, was warmly received particularly by Breton. Dalí reviewed and discussed its findings in the first issue of the surrealist-sympathetic journal *Minotaure* the following year, where Lacan was interviewed by Dalí and René Crevel. Lacan's early theorising of paranoia was to influence Dalí's development of his paranoiac-critical method (see Chapter 7), and Dalí's work in return influenced Lacan's later understanding of the arbitrariness of linguistic discourse (see Arrivé 1992).

It is around Lacan's understanding of de Saussure's notion of the arbitrariness of the sign that a confluence of confusion can be discerned – leading to mistakes that have affected later views of the surrealists' understanding of language. To recap, de Saussure identified the linguistic sign as a composition of signifier (verbal token) and signified (concept), and noted the arbitrariness of the sign–signifier relationship at a basic level. Constantinidou (2012) points out Lacan's misreading of Saussurean arbitrariness both in its sense and scope. Firstly, he illegitimately extends arbitrariness beyond phonological

and morphological levels to include every aspect of language and discourse. Secondly, he disregards de Saussure's composite notion of the sign, taking the two integral aspects of signifier and signified as oppositional facets. Worse still, he privileges the signifier over the signified, essentially rewriting Saussurean linguistics into a travesty of the original, in his formulation 'S/s.' Here, priority is given to the (capitalised) signifier.

Thus, signification moved from the Saussurean sign to the Lacanian signifier, which, although homonymous to the one described in Saussure, has the privilege of partaking in the process of signification through its connection with its own kind. Within the framework of Lacan's theory, the signified moved to the background, and the quest for meaning rested within the realm of the signifier.

(Constantinidou 2012: 239)

This move was made by Lacan in his work in the 1950s (see Lacan 2007), and long after the dispersal of high surrealism. However, Lacan's revisionism has had a profound effect on our view of surrealism in two ways. Firstly, Lacan's close association with early surrealism has entangled his later view of language with theirs. Secondly, the Lacanian privileging of the domain of the signifier was enormously influential on a range of critical theories about language, including many post-structuralist perspectives which locate meaning purely within the rhetorical domain, or even, relativistically, denying the possibility of any stability of meaningfulness at all. Such perspectives focus on the freeplay of meaning, on a relativism of meaning and effect, on a reification of discourse above all else, and on a methodology that has generally remained ignorant of more recent and contemporary advances in the field of linguistics itself. The problem with all such approaches, then, is that they are either based on a misreading of Saussurean linguistics, or on an illegitimate and ill-conceived extension of the notion of arbitrariness, or they correctly adapt de Saussure but unfortunately in an area in which recent modern linguistics is proving him to be wrong. We now know that arbitrariness is not as important in language as other factors such as iconicity, functionality, and cognitive embodiment (which are discussed in the course of this book).

Whether you adopt a functionalist or cognitivist (or even purely formalist) perspective on language, there is a general consensus across modern linguistics that the statements about language that emerged within post-structuralism are fundamentally in error. A functionalist approach would emphasise the fact that most levels of language are multifaceted, and most levels are functionally, not arbitrarily driven:

Saussure took the sign as the organising concept for linguistic structure, using it to express the conventional nature of language in the phrase 'l'arbitraire du signe.' This has the effect of highlighting what is, in fact, the one point of arbitrariness in the system, namely the phonological shape of words, and hence allows the non-arbitrariness of the rest to emerge with greater clarity. An example of something that is distinctly non-arbitrary is the way different kinds of meaning in language are expressed by different kinds of grammatical structure, as appears when linguistic structure is interpreted in functional terms.

(Halliday 2006: 113)

The associated approach of *functional sentence perspective* (see Firbas 1992), as developed by the Prague School of post-Saussureans in the 1950s, similarly demonstrated how presentational structure in language mirrors perceptual, conceptual, and functional structure. To give a simple example, a syntactic order in which the topic, agent, and prime mover of an event is lexicalised at the beginning of the sentence and is thus foregrounded and made grammatically active is in an iconic relationship with the actual event which is being represented: the syntactic form, in this case, is motivated and functional rather than arbitrary. A cognitivist approach would similarly emphasise the motivated and embodied nature of linguistic expressions, identifying the conceptual matches between forms and structures of expression (see Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Langacker 2008: this is the approach largely adopted in Chapters 7, 8, and 9).

In consequence, much of the critical work on surrealism is framed within a later understanding of language which has been heavily influenced by this post-Lacanian, post-structuralist tradition. By contrast, it seems to me that the original surrealist view of language in the 1920s and 1930s was in fact and in many respects rather conservative. Although some of the Saussurean innovations in linguistic theory were in the air at the time, and there is no question that the perception of language and mind was very much a central preoccupation, both the contemporary stated theories and – perhaps more importantly – the practices of the surrealists can be understood better in light of this fact. The surrealists were trying to apply their best contemporary understanding of language and mind to their work. As I will argue, the rejection of much post-structuralist error in modern linguistics means that our current best understanding of language and mind marks in many respects a return to several of the same notions employed by the surrealists.

Meaning and communication

Language, for the surrealists, was not an object in its own right (not a realm of signifiers, as later critical theories would have it), but was a medium of communication. Communicativeness was central to the surrealist use of language in automatic writing. In this, their view of language was expansive: it was not restricted to dictionary word choice and syntax alone (as later formalist linguistics would have it) but encompassed intention, imagination, creativity, culture, and audience effects. The early 20th-century sense of *language* included what we might later consider to be part of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, as well as literary and artistic expression. Their view of language was not only wide-ranging in this respect, but was also highly material. In other words, it was not common in that period to think of *Language* as an abstract and idealised system, but rather as a very concrete and utilisable matter of individual expression, political rhetoric, and social discourse. Words had a tangibility, both as speech-sounds (which for the first time could be recorded in material form on a disc gramophone) and in terms of their observable effects on an audience. When Breton (1969: 34) described surrealist language as a 'dialogue', it was the communicative aspect that he was foregrounding, and

the output of automatic writing and speech had an observable and tangible effect on the other people in the room.

The surrealist preoccupation with consciousness and the unconscious mind does not entail solipsism: this in itself was to be condemned as egotistical. Instead, the surrealist use of language is emphatically shared and collective. There was no sense of the later 20th-century notion that language in general was arbitrary. For the surrealists – as for just about everyone outside scholarly linguistics at the time – language was referential. The object that words and syntax referenced, for the surrealists, included both the external reality of the waking world as well as, and equally, the marvellous objects of the unconscious mind. Though the surrealists admired many Symbolist poets, we should not let the use of strongly emblematic metaphors in Symbolism distract us from the fact that the surrealists rejected Symbolism precisely because the symbolic codes it often rested on were conventional and bourgeois in nature. Symbolism presupposes an identity mapping between the highly imagistic writing and the particular metaphorical concept intended and framed by the poet. Understanding Symbolism required access to shared cultural values, and in this respect it was inimical to surrealism. By contrast, metaphors, like everything in surrealism, should be taken seriously. Taking metaphors seriously can only be accomplished if the referring expressions have a referential function to an object in mind.

This is the sense in which what we might call the surrealist theory of language can be regarded as conservative in nature. It is, then, at odds with much of the theory of language of the later 20th century. Looked at from our own vantage point, however, we might in fact regard the surrealists' theory of language as also in other respects being significantly ahead of its time. There are marked correlations and alignments between their view of language and our current best understanding of language and mind in modern linguistics. We now know that the arbitrariness feature of language is only one aspect of its system, and is not even the most important feature when it comes to meaningfulness and aesthetic effect. The functionality and iconicity of expressions are far more significant. Specifically, there are several foundational aspects of current cognitive linguistics that have identifiable correlates in the surrealist thinking about language.

A large amount of surrealist textual output was collaborative, or the recorded product of group activities. Even writing that was the work of a single mind has a communicative intent and framing, and was thus part of Breton's *dialogic* sense. Surrealist poetry, for example, was not published to be admired for its ornamentation, skilful phrasing, or aesthetic quality; instead it was the occasion for a reader to recapitulate the writer's accessing of the unconscious mind that motivated the writing. Linguistic articulation, in this view, serves as the conduit for transporting the reader into the surrealist landscape. The current accounts of readerly transportation, absorption in a text, and immersion in that world (see, for example, Gerrig 1993, Ryan 2001, Troscianko 2012) all offer a modern means of understanding that which the surrealists speculated on intuitively.

For the surrealists, for example, language is not conventionally symbolic but is iconic of embodied and psychic experience. This prefigures the current notion of

cognitive embodiment, which asserts that the human bodily condition and environment motivate linguistic patterns. To give some very simple examples, basic lexical terms within semantic domains tend to be basic and most used because they reference a human-scale or human utility. Or, particular patterns of syntax manipulate the agency, action, and apparent wilfulness of inanimate and abstract objects because it is easier for us to personify our understanding. Or, certain common basic human experiences of motion, grasping, growing, containment, or journeying are used as the sources for difficult concepts such as time, thinking, superiority, categorisation, or life, in metaphorical usage (see Lakoff 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Evans 2006, Geeraerts and Cuyckens 2010).

Cognitive linguistics also takes an instrumental view of the unconscious, drawing not on Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis but on neuroscience and psycholinguistic evidence. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Gibbs (2006) point out that although much of our linguistic processing occurs below the level of conscious awareness, there is no question that this subconscious or unconscious activity has a significant effect on the interpretation of meaning and the experiential feeling of communication. They describe the ‘cognitive unconscious’:

[M]ost of our thought is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of conscious awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too quickly to be focused on.

[...] Cognitive scientists have shown experimentally that to understand even the simplest utterance, we must perform [a number of ...] incredibly complex forms of thought automatically and without noticeable effort below the level of consciousness. It is not merely that we do not notice these processes; rather, they are inaccessible to conscious awareness and control.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 10–11)

These processes – and their effects – however, are accessible and explorable by analytical empirical and stylistic means, and this is the basis of the approach taken in this book. In other applications of cognitive linguistics, Hart (2010, 2014), for example, sets out the ways in which ideological and political uses of language have powerful effects below the level of everyday conscious awareness, and are thus effective strategies for institutional power over common people. In the literary domain, Stockwell (2009a) traces the subliminal but real emotional and dispositional effects in readers of subtle stylistic patterns in literary texts. These and many other works of current applied linguistics take a view of the tangible efficacy of language use on both material culture and the experiencing mind that would be theoretically recognisable to the early surrealists.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) begin their philosophical statement of cognitive science with a threefold declaration, almost like a manifesto:

The mind is inherently embodied.
Thought is mostly unconscious.
Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 3)

They go on immediately to set out what they call ‘changes in our understanding of reason.’ The last three of the points they make could almost be taken from a tract by Breton:

- Reason is not completely conscious, but mostly unconscious.
- Reason is not purely literal, but largely metaphorical and imaginative.
- Reason is not dispassionate, but emotionally engaged.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 4)

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, reason exists both in the conscious and unconscious realms, and the means of accessing it is through experimental methods and linguistic theory. Matthews (1991) sets out a subtle view of the surrealists’ positioning of rationality:

From the outset, the surrealists drew a distinction between the language of prose (identified in Breton’s parlance as ‘the language of immediate exchange’) and the language of poetic communication. The constituent elements of both languages being the same – words of interpretable meaning – the important difference lay in the motivation underlying their disposition on the page: meaning rationally communicable, in the first language; meaning poetically revealed / discovered, in the second. It was, the surrealists contended, simply a matter of deciding where exactly rationality had its place in the communicative act and to which mode of communication it rightfully belonged. Surrealists never belittled rationality as such. Yet they concurred in regarding the contribution it was capable of making as limited and, furthermore, as extraneous to poetic exchange. [...] Rather, what counted was the functional role they ascribed to rational language in certain aspects of human relationships and the reasonable exchange they denied in others.

(Matthews 1991: 17)

This is a more holistic view of surrealist thought, but one that accords more persuasively with our current understanding of language and mind. There are several threads to tease out in Matthews’ argument here. Firstly, he distinguishes between poetry and prose in surrealism not so much by stylistic texture as by their motivation and by their relationship with the unconscious mind. He sets up a correspondence between prosaic communicability and poetic revelation, but of course the effect in producing an act of communication is essentially the same: a reader is given access to something marvellous. The mode of communication is important here, but the fact of communication remains in both instances. Lastly, Matthews makes a point that the surrealists were not against rationality but that they placed the rational and the irrational in their proper places. Reason and the irrational could both be accessed through linguistic means, and those means could include the exercise of the unconscious, metaphor and imagination, and a view of reason that includes emotions and desires. It is an easy matter for me here to blend the surrealists’ views, Matthews’ articulation of them, and the properties of the ‘cognitive unconscious’ set out by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) quoted above.

Most pertinently, modern linguistics is evidential and descriptive. In this sense it chimes with the surrealists’ sense that they needed to engage in active empirical research

in order to explore the unconscious and its patterns of articulation. Their method might be said to be artful rather than scientific: automatic writing and many different ways of generating texts including games and collage were all employed as experimental means of gaining access to unconscious patterns (see [Chapters 4 and 6](#)). However, this methodology is empirical and can be called research because the point of it was exploratory. The surrealists did not know in advance how the end-product would turn out; there was no intentional creative design or plan in these activities. Essentially they were starting off with a hypothesis about language and mind and trying out a variety of empirical means of discovery.

Furthermore, the point of evaluative statements by the surrealists in their journals and critical writing was not to contribute to a history of aesthetics nor engage in prescriptive literary criticism. Rather it was to set an intellectual frame around certain literary products of the mind, treating them less as art and more as data. Literary works as data could offer an insight into the creative mind, and for the surrealists this account was a descriptive one. The surrealist writer on art and literature was writing collectively as a surrealist, not as an individual cultural critic.

As is clear from Matthews' (1991: 17) comments above, the surrealists did not reserve a special literary language, nor regard literariness as a quality in its own right. The prose styles of Breton's anti-novels *Nadja*, or *Mad Love*, or Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant*, for example, swing between wild lyricism and an explanatory reportage style without pause in between. Theirs is an inclusive and integrative view of language, operating around the core principle of communicativeness. This is iconically represented in the core image at the heart of Breton's (1990) *Communicating Vessels*: a piece of scientific equipment in which two chambers are connected with a pipe, such that a liquid will always fill both containers equally and in balance. The emphasis in this image is that the conscious life and the unconscious mind should be treated equally and in communication with each other. Any communication between minds can only rely on stable reference and meaning.

Aiming to divert language from everyday usage within the scope of commonsense communication, surrealists were wary, from the first, of the dangers of incoherence that go with the unregulated technique of leaving 'words in liberty', advocated by Tristan Tzara. [...] The original surrealists [...] seem to have accepted as their point of departure that the underlying laws of grammar are meant to serve the cause of communicability in language and so cannot be set aside without heavy penalty.

(Matthews 1986: 50–51)

As we will see later in this book, even the most experimental and *avant-garde* examples of surrealist writing still remain in communication with the language and rationality of the everyday. In surrealism, meaning exists; meaning can be stable; meaning can be communicated. If these facts, that also underline much modern linguistics, were false, then surrealism could have no power to effect any sort of change, neither material nor psychic.

Part II

Writing Surrealism

4 Automaticity

Origins of automatic writing

In André Breton's possibly mischievous definition of surrealism (from the 1924 *Manifesto* discussed in [Chapter 1](#) above), the exclusive condition for surrealism was 'Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express [...] the actual functioning of thought' (Breton 1969: 27). Expression which was automatic refers to the possibility of articulating speech, writing, a painting, sculpture, and so on without conscious, intentional, or deliberate engagement. In other words, it removes any sort of studied wilfulness underlying craft or technique and it deflects the creative impulse or source elsewhere. The ideology of the particular type of automaticity depends on identifying this source. So the automaticity of spiritualism points to the creativity of dead souls or spirits expressing themselves through a medium; therapeutic automaticity involves early psychoanalytic techniques such as free association or 'the talking cure' as a means of exposing and addressing preoccupations of the unconscious mind. Surrealist automaticity often drew explicitly on this psychoanalytical frame, but in fact had a lot of points of contact with the spiritual automaticity coming out of the previous century.

A confluence of circumstances led to a rise in occurrences of automaticity in the service of spiritualism in the 19th century. Contact between the world's religions as a result of easier travel and trade, and arguments across Christian denominations encouraged a relativistic perception of religion and spirituality. Revisions in biblical scholarship, in the sciences of geology and botany, and the rise of theories of evolution all served to undermine – if not religion itself – then certainly the literal interpretations of scripture. At the same time, mass entertainments in the form of circuses, travelling shows, popular theatre, and music halls provided an arena for thrillingly ghostly, paranormal, and peculiar exhibitions of a range of spectacles such as hypnotism, mesmerism, and conjuring shows. Europe's contact with Africa, West Asia, India, and the Orient created an interest in exotic and mysterious entertainment: in particular, the non-Indo-European languages sounded, to French, English, Spanish, and German-speaking audiences, utterly alien and otherworldly. All of this was happening at the same time as the notion of displaced speech was becoming technologically familiar – in the form of the telegraph and the telephone.

Indeed, machinery (increasingly ubiquitous in ordinary, especially urban lives as the industrial revolution developed) was a prominent feature of spiritualist automaticity. The spirit could only communicate with the everyday world through a mechanism: this usually involved a human agency, but that person was termed a 'medium', suggesting a conduit rather than any active participating agency. The term itself, as used to refer to the human spiritualist, seems to date from the 1850s (OED), and its use in the spiritualist

sense can be seen to fossilise lexically from this point: the plural becomes ‘mediums,’ rather than the original Latin ‘media,’ which diverges in later usage when applied to non-spiritualist contexts (‘broadcast media,’ ‘print media,’ ‘software media’).

The machinery by which the spirit message could be transmitted included planchettes, Ouija boards, the psychograph, and more elaborate contraptions of cranked pistons and hinges that served to separate the hand from the writing. There was something of a *séance* craze in the 1890s in the United States, with planchette production being provided by an expanding range of woodworking companies such as Fuld, Haskelite, Kennard, and Lees. A typical planchette took the shape of a wooden heart on small wheeling casters, upon which the user rested her hand, while holding a pen or pointer through a small hole in the wooden surface. The medium then either inscribed words or shapes through the hole, as it were ‘blindly,’ or moved the planchette over a sheet below, upon which were written letters, words or phrases. The Ouija board (possibly derived from the French and German for *yes*, but anglicised to be pronounced ‘weedjee’ or ‘weedjer’) was produced by the Kennard Novelty Company of Baltimore, atmospherically but falsely claiming its origins in ancient Egypt. It was patented in 1891 (US Patent 446054) as a board with letters, images, and numbers on which an upturned glass could be moved around in the manner of a planchette. Albert E. Downe’s *The Ouija Snitch Baby* (US Patent 1280424) was an instrument resembling a slide-rule that offered a more technological-looking Ouija board. Thomas Lees’ Manufacturing Company’s 1891 *Psychorbrette* was an early version in which the user slid a piece of wood along a ruler with letters and symbols. Adolphus Theodore Wagner’s *Psychograph*, or ‘Apparatus for Indicating Person’s Thoughts by the Agency of Nervous Electricity’ (UK 1854 Patent #173) was little more than a hinged pointer connected to a hair-trigger electric diaphragm and handle, designed to exaggerate hand tremors. It developed into the *Psychophone* – initially also a board with symbols, but later lending its name to an electronic device for hearing recordings of the dead, looking like a phonograph, and (perhaps apocryphally) attributed to Thomas Edison in 1927. The electrical telegraph (appearing first along railway lines from the 1840s) seemed to be a parallel to the other-worldly voices of spiritualism (see Sconce 2000). Early human operators coding the letters of the alphabet were often women: ‘It is no coincidence that the development of telegraphy coincides with the Spiritualist movement, for both kinds of mediumship envision the usually female body as machinic conduit for “messages” communicated across vast distances’ (Thompson 2004: 1–2). At the end of the 19th century, the human medium was removed with the introduction of ‘ticker-tape’ which turned typed letters into telegraphic pulses. However, the notion of a human in the machine, agentless but merely a cog in the mechanism, a medium of other-worldly messaging, became a familiar trope particularly in Dada and surrealist art. The pictorial blending of machines and bodies figured strongly.

Most of these spiritualist techniques were dialogic in nature. The participants (or a theatrical stooze) asked questions of the spirit, and the spirit answered through the medium. Some mediums articulated the reply verbally, making themselves the conduit for communication in place of the instrument. Such displays were often conducted in front of an audience, but smaller, private sessions were also popular. In this more intimate setting, the medium could become apparently possessed by the spirit, and

speak in the spirit's voice. Though the manifestation here claims a dialogue between occult and everyday, the monologic nature of the medium's utterances comes closer to pure automatism. Experiences that were most amenable to an intimate setting – such as trance, crystal gazing, hypnotism, hysteria, and speaking in tongues – were mainly directly verbalised in speech, rather than by pointing at symbols or by writing.

Monologic automatism as in these last examples was much more radical and less amenable to commercial exploitation. The deflection of wilful intention in speaking meant that the responsibility for the content of the utterance was also deflected. This made it the perfect mode for the expression of socially repressed emotions such as extreme joy, grief, frustration, or ecstasy. As Thompson (2004) indicates, automatism could also stand as a veil for the expression of radical politics, anti-church sentiment, women's suffrage, workers' rights, and so on (see also Braude 1989, Owen 1990). The expression of automaticity through writing became a particular technique of turn-of-the-century, pre-Freudian psychological therapy. Patients would be asked to write as fast as possible whatever came into their heads, and the psychologist would have a ready-made transcribed record of their direct thoughts in a way that would have been very difficult and expensive for speech, given the state of recording technology at this early date.

The utterances produced as a result of this automatic writing formed an evidential basis for much of the early psychoanalytical theory. It seemed clear that there was an evident disjunction between an intended, wilful, conscious output and the sort of articulations that were produced when these 'higher' constraints were removed experimentally. The notion that consciousness could not therefore be monolithic seemed obvious; rather, human mentality must be composed of underlying, separate parts. These were sometimes conceived as multiple separate selves, and sometimes as different, perhaps antagonistic facets of subjectivity. The technique of automatic writing was clearly a means of gaining access to that authentic experience, one that was articulated without being distorted by social norms, civilised conventions, or rational protocol. The appeal of this for the surrealists, shorn of its spiritualist roots, is evident. For the surrealists, authenticity replaced authoriality.

Breton, just prior to his deliberately absurd categorical definition in the 1924 *Manifesto*, describes the importance of automaticity to early surrealism:

Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at that time, and familiar as I was with his methods of examination which I had had some slight occasion to use on some patients during the war, I resolved to obtain from myself what we were trying to obtain from them, namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*.

(Breton 1969: 22–3, original emphasis)

However, elsewhere (in *The Automatic Message*, 1933) he is at pains to draw a distinction between spiritualist automaticity and the surrealist method:

It would make sense to establish a clear distinction between 'automatic' writing and drawing as understood in Surrealism, and automatic writing and drawing as regularly

practised by mediums. Mediums, or at least those with exceptionally outstanding gifts, operate by setting down letters or lines in an entirely *mechanical* fashion; they have absolutely no idea what they are writing or drawing, and their hand is as if anaesthetised and guided by someone else's hand. [pp.19-20]

Numerous samples of medium-based automatic writing which have from time to time been offered up for examination have proved far less interesting than drawings purporting to have the same origin, and it must be said that this is largely the fault of the pathetic spiritualist literature with which they have usually been contaminated from the outset. [p.23]

[...] in contrast with the spiritualist's aim of dissociating the medium's psychological personality, the Surrealists' aim is nothing less than to unify that personality. Which means that for us the question of externality of – I repeat for the sake of simplicity – the 'voice' does not even arise. From the start it seemed very difficult, and almost superfluous, considering the extra-psychological element in the goal we were pursuing, to go to the length of dividing writing commonly referred to as 'inspired', which we were inclined to contrast with calculated literature, into 'mechanical', 'semi-mechanical', and 'intuitive', since these categories merely account for a difference of degree. [p.25]

(in Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 19-25)

Automaticity in surrealism is sometimes presented as if intentionality and significance have been completely removed. However, there is a great subtlety in Breton's argument here. The spiritualists regarded their automatic utterances as having been authored by an external spirit; since Breton does not believe in this external spirit, their utterances have no value. By contrast, the surrealist *knows* that his writing comes solely from his own mental subjectivity, so any intention or significance it has is inescapably and directly authentic. Only by aiming for a complete blankness of mind and lack of conventional constraint can the automatic surrealist writer gain access to those pre-rational thoughts and patterns in the moment of writing. However, subsequently, the output of automatism can be regarded as possessing significance, and furthermore such texts can offer a regained access to that authentic thought in the process of reading.

The unification of personality (that Breton claims is achieved by surrealist automatic writing) depends on the conscious mind being aware that the unconscious mind is there, and allowing it to act independently and autonomously. Crucially, though, the conscious mind needs to be wilfully and concentratedly passive.

The psychic capability underling automatic writing is common to all people, according to Gascoyne (1935), writing in *A Short Survey of Surrealism*: 'All that is needed to produce a Surrealist picture is an unshackled imagination (and the Surrealists have often claimed that every human being is endowed with imagination, be he aware of it or not).' The difference that automaticity brings is the self-awareness. Surreal writing, for Gascoyne, is 'a perpetual functioning of the *psyche*, a perpetual flow of irrational thought *in the form of images* taking place in every human mind and needing only a certain predisposition and discipline in order to be brought to light in the form of written words' (Gascoyne 1935: 24). He goes on here to insist that the product of automaticity is 'a universally valid attitude to experience, a possible mode of living'. It underlies 'inspiration': 'this lyrical element of human thought, the source of all authentic poetry, common to

all men did they but realise it'. And he asserts that it is in this respect that the apparent intellectualism of surrealism and its communist attachment to the common man can be reconciled.

Although in principle anyone could engage in automatic writing, there is no doubt that some writers were more adept than others. Robert Desnos and René Crevel, for example, were regarded by their fellow early surrealists as pioneering and virtuoso practitioners of automatism. Thacker (2013) recounts the meeting on 25 September 1922, in Breton's studio on the Rue de Fontaine in Paris, at which Crevel, newly arrived from a spiritualist séance, suggested using the same technique for writing. In a trance, he is questioned and his dreamlike replies are recorded. Desnos managed to write his own replies while in a similarly self-induced trance-like sleep. Both men developed a rivalry for being the most readily able to fall into such a 'sleeping fit' and generate the richest output, in which striking images were often expressed with dense echoic sound-effects of alliteration, rhyme and punning (see Brandon 1999: 199–207). Desnos, in a séance two weeks later, produced the following bursts of writing:

O mon crâne, étoile de nacre qui s'étoile

[Oh my skull, mother of pearl which fades out]

Au paradis des diamants les carats sont des amants ...

[In the paradise of diamonds carats are lovers ...]

Mots, êtes-vous des mythes et pareils aux myrtes des morts?

[Words, are you myths and similar to the myrtles of the dead?]

(translated in Caws 1977: 148)

The phonetic echoes across simple lines are striking: *crâne / nacre; diamants / des amants; mots / myrtes / morts*. The semantic reach of individual words and phrases makes a translation almost impossible: *étoile de nacre* is 'mother of pearl', but *étoile* is a star, and *s'étoile* is a reflexive verb form that can mean both 'fades out' and 'cracked and shattered'. Small alterations in translated sense create a completely different experience: the last example could be 'Words, are you the myths and equals of the myrtles of the dead?' The connotations are altered here, and of course the sound-patterns become highly variable.

The point, perhaps, of such automatism is its immediacy. The experience of the moment of creation is more like listening to a fragment of music than engaging with a string of language. The phonetic aspects are of course musical in this sense, but the echoic semantics might also be regarded as diffuse and purely aesthetic, rather than primarily meaningful (in the sense of their denotational value). However, the surrealists were insistent on creating a record of the verbal utterance, or rendering the almost-illegible handwritten scrawl into a readable, even typewritten form. The three examples from Desnos above were published in *Littérature* in December 1922, among 150 similarly created lines of Desnos' automatic writing, under the name Rose Sélavy (a pun on *eros, c'est la vie*) and usually a pseudonym for Marcel Duchamp. Rendered into writing, the sound qualities of course are backgrounded and the semantic resonances become

more inescapably prominent. It is not perhaps fanciful then to connect 'skull' with the shell (*nacre*), or to 'hear' not *crâne* but *craigne* (fear), or to hear not *Au paradis des diamants* but *Opéra dit des diamants*, or *O père a dit des diamants* and so on. The shift from speech to writing allows for more readerly creativity, and a more reflective, less instantaneous considered response and search for significance. In short, the original experience of automaticity for an audience is fleeting and musical, whereas an encounter with its written record is necessarily more open to interpretation and shaping.

The mediating terms used by Breton to describe automatic experience between 1922 and 1965 – honesty, naiveté, truth, freedom, authenticity, and the notion of the primitive – all refer back to the purity he seeks from psychic automatism. They recall [the] notion that outsider artists are unscathed by culture, as well as the desire Breton articulates in the *Manifesto* to rediscover the sense of wonder linked to childhood. Through surrealism he advocates relocating 'a sentiment of being unintegrated' into civilized culture, a return to the 'real life' to which one is closest in childhood before 'having gone astray' ([Breton 1969:] 40). He evidently seeks terms for automatism that convey its virtue of being as unmediated by Western high culture as possible.

(Conley 2006: 135)

The irony is that the act of writing the automatic utterance down in the first place, making the recording available for reading, instantly renders the surrealist image back into the world of the everyday, back into the world of art and interpretation.

The first experiment: *The Magnetic Fields*

Almost all literary critical commentary on automatic writing focuses on the technique of production, and this natural disciplinary inclination towards the context and culture of creative authorship is encouraged by the huge amount of description and comment on automaticity by the surrealists themselves. For example, Breton's essay, *The Automatic Message*, originally published in 1933, sets out in extremely precise detail not only how early experiments in automatic writing were conducted but also who was involved, who was in the room, at which address exactly in Paris the meeting was held, the date, the effect on the audience, the nature of the writing materials involved, the arrangement of the furniture, the sequence of the conversation or turn-taking at automatic practice, and so on.

I have referred to this piece of Breton's writing as an 'essay', though some of the detail bears the hallmark of a report of a scientific experiment. Indeed, it is as a piece of empirical research into the unconscious mind that the surrealists regarded their early practices. *The Automatic Message* first appeared in the journal *Minotaure* in 1933, and set out an explanation of the development of automatic writing over the previous decade or so. In spite of the precision of its methodological description, the work retains a surrealist sensibility in its texture. Breton's writing style in the piece is syntactically convoluted, hypotactic, complex, and compounded with subordinate, relative, and coordinating

clauses in profusion. His train of thought wanders through long digressions, but is interspersed with short, self-contained anecdotes, often allusions to the lives or events of historical figures: 'In 1816 Herschel succeeded in "producing involuntarily within himself visual images whose main characteristic was regularity"'; or 'The story is often told of Leonardo da Vinci recommending his pupils when looking for an original subject which would suit them, to take a long look at the cracks in a wall'; or 'Drawings by the occultist Comte de Tromelin were presented by Dr. Ch. Guilbert in a 1913 issue of *Æsculape*, in which ...' and so on (in Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 12, 14, 21). These are often precisely located in time and place, complete with citations, but they come across as self-contained templates within the surrounding stream of threaded arguments. They are also not easy to read, as almost every page has a photograph or drawing plate inserted usually in the centre of the text. The Herschel story has a photo of a crystal ball on its stand in a dark square rectangular plate: the text is wrapped on either side – not in columns like a newspaper (which would be easier to read) but with the sentences interrupted across the page. The physical effect of reading involves jumping your eye from side to side, and the intervening plate is large enough to introduce doubt into your mind as to whether you have flicked your eye across to the correct line each time. Each plate is a photograph of a drawing or painting, or is the drawing itself, or a squiggled diagram; it is not always easy to recognise the aptitude or relevance of the image in the context of the page, if indeed there is any correlation.

The Automatic Message was later translated into English (by Antony Melville) and appears as the preface to the standard English edition (Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997) of *The Magnetic Fields* (translated by David Gascoyne) and *The Immaculate Conception* (translated by Jon Graham). Standing as the preface to these two further texts, the difference between Breton's 'expository' writing and the automatic 'expressive' writing of *The Magnetic Fields* is rendered even more starkly. Gascoyne supplies an introduction to his translation, and very like Breton, he focuses on the minute details of the creative methodology and historical circumstances of production. From Gascoyne's own knowledge and his reading of other essays by Breton, we know that *The Magnetic Fields* (originally *Les Champs Magnétiques*) was written in the spring and summer of 1919, and published in 1920. It is a collaboration between André Breton and Philippe Soupault, produced in bursts of automatic writing recorded in notebooks. These passages were composed at speed as monologues. An indication of the preoccupation for methodological precision can be seen in the fact that Gascoyne records (in Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 44–5) seeing one of five special copies, printed on rice-paper, from 1924, and given by Breton to his wife Simone Kahn, in which Breton had underlined, in green pencil, the passages he recalled writing himself, and in red pencil marginal notes on significant passages, and in grey pencil the passages that both authors particularly liked. Furthermore, Breton indicated with a complex notational code the precisely different speeds at which different parts of the text were composed. Gascoyne discusses these speed variations at length (in Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 48–9), but without any evaluative comment on their significance: they are recorded for precision.

Writing in 1924, Breton himself described the first experiment:

[T]he speed of thought is no greater than the speed of speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the fast-moving pen. It was in this frame of mind that Philippe Soupault – to whom I had confided these initial conclusions – and I decided to blacken some paper, with a praiseworthy disdain for what might result from a literary point of view. The ease of execution did the rest. By the end of the first day we were able to read to ourselves some fifty or so pages obtained in this manner, and begin to compare our results. [...] The only difference between our two texts seemed to me to derive essentially from our respective tempers, Soupault's being less static than mine, and, if he does not mind my offering this one slight criticism, from the fact that he had made the error of putting a few words by way of titles at the top of certain pages, I suppose in a spirit of mystification. On the other hand, I must give credit where credit is due and say that he constantly and vigorously opposed any effort to retouch or correct, however slightly, any passage of this kind.

(Breton 1969: 23–4)

It is possible, then, to identify whose hand was responsible for each section within *The Magnetic Fields*. The book is divided into named sections, though both Breton and Gascoyne claim that these divisions were determined simply by the pause in the writing at the end of each day. So, for example, Breton wrote most or all of the first part 'The Unsilvered Glass,' and Soupault wrote most of the fourth section 'In 80 days.' The first four parts of the book have the appearance graphologically of prose on the page, with the occasional single-sentence paragraph standing out:

Absolute equinox.

(from 'Eclipses,' *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 73)

or

Sweating vertebrate superior cathedrals.

(from 'Eclipses,' *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 76)

The fifth section, 'Barriers,' has the layout appearance of a set of 67 short, two-to-three line aphorisms or fragments of conversation:

— No thanks, I know what time it is. Have you been shut up in this cage for long? What I need is the address of your tailor.

(from 'Barriers,' *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 89)

or

— I swear to you that I am innocent. You mistake the burning tip of my cigarette for the pupil of my eye.

(from 'Barriers,' *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 99)

All 67 of these fragments are collected into five parts, enclosed by speech marks.

The following two sections – ‘Let’s Move No More’ and ‘White Gloves’ – return to the extended prose appearance, though the paragraphs are often much shorter than previously. The final two sections are both entitled ‘The Hermit-Crab Says:’ – both are collections of passages that have the textual layout of poems, the first ten by Breton and the second ten by Soupault. The book ends with a final single-page section ‘La Fin de Tout,’ which simply has the boxed sign:

<p>ANDRÉ BRETON & PHILIPPE SOUPAULT</p> <p>WOOD & COAL</p>
--

As Gascoyne explains, this inscription mimics the signs outside bistros, common in Paris at the time, at which fuel was for sale. The meaning seems to be as if, having completed their ‘anti-literary gesture, the collaborators shared a longing to disappear into the quasi-anonymity of running an obscure little back-street establishment’ (in Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 50). It also seems to me that there is a humorous signing-off intent here, that figures the two artists as artisans, and claims that the essence of their art is as basic as human warmth. There is, perhaps too, an unavoidable parallelism that lends some of the associative qualities of wood and coal – whatever they are personally for you – to Breton and Soupault, respectively.

The style of automaticity in *The Magnetic Fields* is immediately striking, especially when it appears directly after Breton’s wandering argumentative polemic in *The Automatic Message*. There, the syntax can be regarded as sharing some characteristics of the most hypotactic of written discourse. By complete contrast, the syntax of *The Magnetic Fields* is generally relatively very simple. Sentences tend to be simple clauses; where they are linked, the linkage tends to be a simple conjunction. It is clear that there is a close affinity between the simple clausal patterns of automatic writing and the characteristic paratactic patterns of speech associated with verbal, spoken automaticity (see Bargh et al. 2012). This means that many passages from *The Magnetic Fields* read with the sound of simple, direct, authentic speech. As in spoken discourse, clauses tend to be constrained by the length of a breath. Though the modern reader is likely to be reading internally (rather than speaking the words aloud), the bodily effect of such short clauses is echoic of living speech, and of course short simple clauses are also iconically strongly associated with narrative urgency and pace (Simpson 2014). The simple syntactic patterning thus contributes to the sense of narrative tellability (Labov and Waletzky 1967, Pratt 1977: 152) – even when the content seems otherwise to resist a sense of narrativity at all.

Here is an extended excerpt:

The corridors of the grand hotels are unfrequented and the cigar-smoke keeps itself dark. A man descends the stairs of sleep and notices that it is raining; the window-panes are white. A dog is known to be resting near him. All obstacles are present. There is a pink cup, an order given and the menservants turn round without haste. The skies’ great curtains open. A buzzing denotes this hurried departure. Who can be running in so leisurely a way? Names lose their faces. The street is no more than an abandoned track.

Towards four o'clock that day a very tall man was crossing the bridge which links up the various islands. The bells or the trees were ringing. He thought he could hear the voices of his friends: 'The bureau of lazy excursions is on the right,' someone called to him, 'and on Saturday the painter will be writing to you.' The neighbours of the solitudes leant out and the wheezing of the street-lamps could be heard all night long. The erratic house loses its blood. We all love conflagrations; when the sky changes colour, it is a dead man's passing. What better could one hope for? Another man in front of a perfumer's shop was listening to the rollings of a distant drum-beat. The night that was hovering above his head came down to perch on his shoulders. Conventional fans were up for sale: they weren't producing fruit any more. Without knowing the results people were running in the direction of the maritime inlets. The desperate clocks were telling the beads of a rosary. The virtuous hives were organising themselves. There was no one passing near those main avenues that are the strength of towns. A single storm was sufficient. Far away or close up the damp beauty of prisons went unrecognized. The best shelters are railway stations since travellers never know which route to pursue. It could be read in the lines of palms that the most fragrant pledges of fidelity have no future. What can we do with the children with well-developed muscles? The warm blood of bees is preserved in mineral water bottles. Sincerities have never been seen unmasked. Well-known men lose their lives in the recklessness of those fine houses which set hearts a-flutter.

How small these rescued tides appear! Earthly delights flow in torrents. Each object offers paradise.

A great bronze boulevard is the most direct way. The magical squares are not good stopping-places. The slow advance is unerring: at the end of a few hours one catches sight of the pretty nose-bleed plant. The consumptives' panorama lights up. All the footsteps of subterranean travellers can be heard. But the most ordinary silence reigns in these narrow spaces. A traveller comes to a halt, perturbed. Amazed, he approaches this coloured plant. No doubt he wants to pluck it but can only shake the hand of another traveller adorned with stolen jewels. Their eyes exchange sulphurous flames and they talk for a long time about their marvellous cries. A dry moon's murmur is thought to be audible, but a glance dispels the most prodigious encounters. Nobody has been able to identify these pale-skinned travellers.

(from 'White Gloves', *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 115–16)

The stylistic challenge here might seem to be to account for the dislocating sense of strangeness. However, the real challenge is in trying to explain how such a passage is readable at all. We can identify the distinguishing features of automatic style partly by understanding what it is that remains regular in this 'thought-writing' (Breton 1969: 24n). To begin with, then, we can note that there is a great deal of linguistic well-formedness in the passage – and in fact in *The Magnetic Fields* as a whole.

For example, the syntax (setting aside the semantic content) of almost every sentence is unremarkable and prosaic. The language in which the text is rendered is standard English (translated here from the equally standard French original); there is no gibberish, nonsense words, non-denotational neologisms, nor attempts at spelling out pure meaningless sounds. There is, indeed, even a localised cohesion. This can be seen in lexical repetition across sentences: the re-iteration of 'travellers' in the passage above, for

example, or the 'plant' that is mentioned twice in the final paragraph. There is additional co-reference: the plant is pronominalised as 'it', and the familiarity of the co-reference is reinforced in the proximal deictic '*this* coloured plant'. Though of course even repeated lexical items are not necessarily co-referential, the default assumption is usually that they are cohesive. So 'the pretty nose-bleed plant' will very probably always be regarded by any reader as referring to the same object as the 'coloured plant' five short sentences later.

Also cohesive are the connections within similar semantic fields. So, at the beginning of the final paragraph, 'A great bronze boulevard' might evoke a landscape in which you could also find 'The magical squares' that are lexicalised in the following sentence. The introduction with an indefinite article ('A') succeeded by the familiar definite reference ('The magical squares') also suggests a normal, part-of-the-whole co-reference. Similarly, in the short paragraph in the middle of the extract, 'Earthly delights' connects with the word 'paradise' in the next sentence. There are associative echoes too, since the first phrase is highly likely to evoke *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, a triptych by Hieronymus Bosch (painted around 1500), often regarded as a proto-surrealistic work.

Even more loosely, there is an evocation of a consistent perspective operating locally at different parts of the text. Examining the first paragraph of the excerpt above, we find a suggested anaphoric reference in the deleted human agency of 'unfrequented' and 'cigar-smoke', so it is easy and natural to connect this agency with the mention of 'A man' in the next sentence, and to regard 'him' in the sentence after that as another co-reference. However, we also track the man's point of view, firstly by being pointed towards his 'sleep', and then through the realisation that 'it is raining' which he 'notices'. The description after the colon ('the window-panes are white') is most naturally a description from the man's perception and focalisation – the colon operating here as it typically often does as a cataphoric extension of the viewpoint of the previous clause. When we are then told 'A dog is known to be resting near him', the passive agent who does the knowing could be the man whose mind we are currently in, or perhaps marginally less likely a generally known fact, with 'him' still consistently as the man. But after that, it is his perception that notices that 'All obstacles are present' (that is, in his vicinity), it is in front of him that 'There is a pink cup', and it is most likely that the 'order' is 'given' by him; the menservants 'turn round' (towards him); he notices the dawn, poetically, as the 'skies' great curtains open'. At this point our telepathic connection with the man's perspective is loosened. Does he hear the 'buzzing', or is it his own 'hurried departure' that we are now seeing from a separate, static vantage point as he is seen 'running' away? The question itself in the passage invites the uncertainty. The readerly doubt over whether we are still with his viewpoint is underlined: 'Names lose their faces', and the street is empty. All this loosening up of the local co-referential priming of the man means that there is no certainty as to whether 'a very tall man' at the beginning of the second paragraph is indeed the same man as in the hotel or not. After all, indefinite reference usually introduces a new, unfamiliar entity, but on the other hand the connecting temporal and very precise locative 'Towards four o'clock that day' suggests a continuity with the man of the previous paragraph, as does the familiar definite references of 'the bridge' and 'the various

islands' – it is as if we are still within the consciousness of the man who recognises these as familiar objects. The strong inclination seems to me to read the rest of the entire excerpt quoted above as being vaguely within or closely associated with the ongoing perception of the same man.

The technique here – and indeed throughout *The Magnetic Fields* – can be understood as the picking up of an indirect proposition and co-referring to it. Where the co-reference is not direct (as are some of the examples of lexical and anaphoric repetition given above), this more associative cohesion is often the primary way in which the text seems to progress. The connection between 'Earthly delights' (with its indirect associative deflection through Bosch as a precursor of surrealist art) and 'paradise' is an example of this. Another example would be 'Conventional fans were up for sale: they weren't producing fruit any more.' Here, there is a strong pragmatic presupposition in the second clause that *conventional fans usually produce fruit*. Obviously, this is not a usual property of these devices in our everyday world, but in the surrealistic world of the excerpt the linguistic form of the presupposition places the association into a readerly mind, as it were, below the radar, or subliminally.

This technique might be understood as a manifestation of what Gratton (1986) has termed a general stylistic pattern of 'runaway' in surrealist writing:

Runaway denotes a creative *élan* everywhere apparent in the fabric of Breton's poetry, an impulse which thrives on critical moments of deflection, or even dislocation, yet releases an urge towards flux and sheer uninterrupted-ness. This material collusion of otherwise opposed forces constitutes runaway as an agent of *radical continuity*.

(Gratton 1986: 31, original emphasis)

We can specify the intuitively apt notion of runaway in terms of the sense of momentum that a passage like this generates. The tone of the stylistic register is generally consistent throughout, for example – again this is maintained largely by predictable or normative syntactic patterns and lexical choices that are not wildly outlandish nor markedly associated with particular specialised domains. Most of the passage above contains declarative sentences of the sort you might typically associate with a sequential narrative. These are also interspersed with direct vocative address and exhortations ('Who can be running in so leisurely a way?', 'What better could one hope for?', 'How small these rescued tides appear!') that seem to involve the reader in a common purpose (similarly, 'We all love conflagrations'). There are numerous examples, like this last one, of generic sentences that have the flavour of proverbs or universal observations – these echo the forms which make up the earlier section 'Barriers' – they are typical explicit markers of narrative tellability. Also as in narrative, there are examples of direct speech attributed to other characters.

This relative ordinariness of syntactic and generic forms occurs, however, in conjunction with semantic deflection and dislocation. The middle paragraph of the excerpt above illustrates several such disjunctions, many of which have the short, aphoristic flavour of the 'Barriers' section, or of the single-lines of surrealist chainpoems (see [Chapter 6](#)):

The desperate clocks were telling the beads of a rosary.
 The virtuous hives were organising themselves.
 There was no one passing near those main avenues that are the strength of towns.
 [...]
 The warm blood of bees is preserved in mineral water bottles.
 Sincerities have never been seen unmasked.
 Well-known men lose their lives in the recklessness of those fine houses which set
 hearts a-flutter.

(rearranged lines from *The Magnetic Fields*, Breton,
 Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 115)

Semantic anomalies here include the assignment of agency (and religious piety) to the ‘desperate clocks,’ or a wilful organisational ability to the ‘virtuous hives.’ In both cases, the emotional or moral pre-modification further enhances the semantic disjunctions – and which in these two cases are highly likely to be resolved as a personification of clocks and hives. For the most part across *The Magnetic Fields*, such personifications are applied to concrete objects, and often objects which are associated with wilful agency at a human or animal scale (as are clocks and hives). Otherwise, the sense of agency is present but appears in a deflected or disguised form: here, in examples that are passivised (‘preserved’) or negated (‘there was no one passing’) or both (‘never been seen’ and ‘unmasked’). Less usually, the target is an abstraction (like ‘Sincerities’) which attains firstly concreteness by receiving the attention of a verb like ‘seen,’ and then a further personification as an object with a face that can be masked and ‘unmasked.’ Most loosely of all, abstractions with an emotional or conscious flavour (like ‘recklessness’) are attached to an object (‘those fine houses’) which are thus weakly personified. The overall effect is of a conscious agency that is always partly offstage and out of immediate attention.

Refined automatism: from *Mourning for Mourning* to *Soluble Fish*

The Magnetic Fields was not well-received, and the products of automaticity for the next few years were restricted to short texts and poetry published in the magazine *Littérature*, which Breton, Soupault, and Louis Aragon had founded in March 1919 – around the time of the first experiments in automaticity that were to find their way into *The Magnetic Fields*. *Littérature* struggled with its circulation, and was intermittently interrupted and relaunched, folding in June 1924 to be replaced in December 1924 by Breton’s new journal *La Révolution Surréaliste*. This was initially edited by Pierre Naville and Benjamin Péret, both experimenters in automatic writing and the authors of *Les Reines de la Main Gauche* (1924) and *Le Passager du Transatlantique* (1921, with Paul Eluard), respectively. Breton took over as editor after four issues, and *La Révolution Surréaliste* then ran for a further eight issues until 1929.

Prominent in these years and in these magazines was the work of Robert Desnos, who was regarded among the surrealists as the foremost practitioner of automatic writing. His poem, ‘Les gorges froides’ (‘The Cold Throats’) appeared in *Littérature* in October 1923.

Les gorges froides

À la poste d'hier tu télégraphieras
que nous sommes bien morts avec les hirondelles.
Facteur triste facteur un cercueil sous ton bras
va-t'en porter ma lettre aux fleurs à tire d'elle.

La boussole est en os mon cœur tu t'y fieras.
Quelque tibia marque le pôle et les marelles
pour amputés ont un sinistre aspect d'opéras.
Que mon épitaphe un dieu taille ses grêles!

C'est ce soir que je meurs, ma chère Tombe-Issoire,
ton regard le plus beau ne fut qu'un accessoire
de la machinerie étrange du bonjour.

Adieu! Je vous aimai sans scrupule et sans ruse,
ma Folie-Méricourt, ma silencieuse intruse.
Boussole à flèche torse annonce le retour.

The Cold Throats

In a hurry yesterday you will telegraph
that we quite died like the swallows.
Postman sad postman a coffin under your arm
take my letter to the flowers to say.

The bony compass you fashioned of my heart.
Some tibia marks the Pole and the hopscotch
for amputees has a sinister aspect of operas.
May a god carve my grave with hailstones!

It's this evening that I die, my dear Tombe-Issoire,
your most beautiful look was only a part
of the strange machinery of greeting.

Adieu! I loved you without scruple or ruse,
my Folie-Méricourt, my silent intruder.
The compass arrow torso announces the return.

(Desnos 1923: 8)

My rough literal translation here loses, of course, the intricate internal patterning of this automatic text, especially the alliteration and regular metrical rhythm. The original appears in a traditional sonnet form, cast in the French heroic metre of Alexandrines (a 12-syllable line with heavy stress on the 6th and final syllables, around a central pause or caesura). It should be apparent that 'Les gorges froides' does not look very much like a spontaneous, unplanned, and unedited text. This is a consequence of Desnos' technique of 'langage cuit' (the phrase, meaning *cooked*, or *fortified language*, was the title of a short 1923 collection of poems, published a few years later: Desnos 1930). The method involved imagining a line, but then casting elements of it as opposites, contraries, or alternatives. Of course, it is possible to imagine that Desnos was a skilled enough technician to be able to render perfect metrical and formal patterns automatically, while mainly paying attention to the disruptions at the level of lexical semantic choice. However, the textual product 'Les gorges froides' then cannot be seen in the same way as the product of a spontaneous exclamation of a 'sleeping fit' such as Desnos, Crevel, and their companions produced in Breton's experiments with automaticity, as described above. There is, in fact, a craftedness in 'Les gorges froides' that is substantially different from the more direct, oral form of automaticity.

Nevertheless, we can still regard a text like this as automatic in a genuine sense: the essence of automaticity is not the final textual appearance of a stream-of-consciousness. Breton, writing in *Surrealism and its Living Works* much later in 1953 (in Breton 1969: 298), is very clear that automatic writing is not the same as the modernist 'inner monologue' as employed by, for example, James Joyce and others:

[They] are radically different at base. [...] Joyce will present a flux and try to make it gush forth from all directions, a flux that in the last analysis tries to be the closest possible *imitation* of life (by means of which he keeps himself within the framework of *art*, falls once again into *novelistic* illusion, and fails to avoid being placed into the long line of naturalists and expressionists).

(Breton 1969: 298)

By contrast, the verbal continuous flow of surrealist automaticity was merely the proof that the psychic process existed. ‘The experiment proved that very few neologisms show up, and that this continual flow brought about neither syntactic dismemberment nor disintegration of vocabulary’ (Breton 1969: 298–9). There is a craftedness in the Desnos poem that might either be editing after the initial composition, or online shaping at the moment of composition – it hardly matters which. The point is that the dreamlike suggestions of the alternative stylistic choices are automatically made, rendering the textual object a product of automaticity.

Whether automaticity in written literature can ever genuinely be automatic in the same sense as the early verbal experiments seems highly doubtful. In the first edition of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Max Morise (1924: 16) argued that painting cannot be automatic because of the time it takes and the necessity for revising the canvas in a linear, sequential pattern. The same argument can apply to written text, since there is a gap between the initial mental articulation and its expression in writing on the page. The written system of a language is not simply a representation of the speech system of a language: it is more appropriate to think of both as representing, in different ways, the more abstract system of the language at hand (Stubbs 1980). This modern linguistic formulation captures the essence of automaticity in Breton’s sense: instant oral composition and elongated written composition are both realisations of underlying psychic activity. And this underlying reality can only be accessed by automaticity in these two forms.

Furthermore, like Desnos, Crevel, Soupault, Breton and others, most surrealist writers were steeped in literate culture and convention, and so their automatic choices are predeterminedly a reaction or alteration of those conventions. This is true whether they were aware of it or not, and whether they admitted it or not. It will be the case even with those texts of surrealist automaticity that are not so apparently artful as poems like ‘Les gorges froides’, such as examples of extended prose ‘anti-novels’. It seems to me also to be true that in general a reader presumes an authorial compositional stance that is more deliberate and intended with poetry than with prose. From a readerly perspective, the intensity of poetry appears artful (poetic, in the everyday sense), while the flow of prose appears relatively artless (prosaic, in the everyday sense). These impressions seem to be generally held, though of course prose-writers can be as meticulous and careful as poets in their stylistic choices.

Desnos’ 1924 anti-novel, *Mourning for Mourning* (*Deuil pour Deuil*) is a piece of extended prose that appears closer to a recording of experimental automaticity than ‘Les gorges froides’.

If [the co-published] *Liberty or Love!* and *Mourning for Mourning* can be considered anti-novels, it is because they go against the grain of both traditional narrative forms as well as the early 20th century vogue for high modernism (à la James Joyce's *Ulysses*). Desnos' books contain no grand master plan, no baroque, structural puzzles, no erudite references or carefully calculated clues. Instead, Desnos offers writing that is half awake, half asleep, wandering and listless in free association, idleness, childhood reverie, and creative boredom. This is a poetics of sleepwalking, poetry as narcolepsy.

(Thacker 2013)

The texture of *Mourning for Mourning* resembles more closely the style of oral automaticity, and is more like *The Magnetic Fields*. It arises from the 'sleeping fit' experiments, but of course its apparent artlessness disguises the compositional lyrical quality of its texture. Here is an excerpt.

Women's teeth are such pretty objects that one should only see them in dreams or at the moment of death. It is the time of night when delicate jaws fasten themselves on our gobs, o poets! Do not forget that a train, having jumped all the signals, is careering towards Kilometre 178 and that, at night, our dreams, on march for many a long year, have been delayed by two naked women talking at the foot of a poplar. Just as truly as we were contained in the first woman, our dreams were contained in the first dream. Ever since birth, we have been seeking one night to walk together side by side, even if only for a moment in time. Our age is infinity and infinity demands that the meeting, the coincidence, takes place today in a railway compartment, hurtling toward disaster. Lock us in together, o poets! The invisible door opens on to countryside and an organ, yes an organ, rises up from the marsh. The fingers of the blonde woman, which I notice for the first time are webbed, ring out on it a joyful hymn. A wedding march of our reflections left behind in the mirror when the woman we ought to have met and never will comes to admire herself in it. A wedding march of hands severed as an ex-voto when death, offering us its basket full of violets, again agrees to read our horoscope. At the sound of the organ, the hangar doors open and throbbingly release voluminous dirigibles into the open sky.

Awoken from his sleep, the pilot buried at Kilometre 178 throws the points thirty seconds before the express arrives and aims them at the moon. The train goes by with its hellish din. It casts a shadow over our satellite and disappears like the song of the liner's engineer heard by mistake on the radio in the middle of a town in the south of France. The fair-haired virgin takes out a needle and sews a tiny purse full of freshly pulled teeth. She throws it at the fleeing stars and the sky henceforth assumes the appearance of a set of enormous, adorable woman's jaws. The same woman who will look into the mirror an hour after me. The pilot goes back to sleep and says: 'I've got plenty of time to waste.' The red star, the red star, the red star will fade at sunrise.

(Desnos 2012: 140)

The text is divided into 24 short episodes that represent different moments in a single-night's dream. The first-person narrator (presumably also dreamer) is involved in the imagined landscape, and has no control over the other characters, especially the 'fair-haired virgin' who reappears throughout. The whole text is dreamlike but not aimless or

chaotic: there are recognisable recurrent themes of a love affair, death and resurrection, and repeated images and motifs such as the shipwreck of a vessel called 'The Marvel'.

Evidence of compositional artfulness occurs throughout the text, for example in the excerpt above. Most obviously there is a narrative consistency and sequence that allows this passage to be interpreted as a scene in which a rail disaster is imagined and then averted. This consistency is a product of sustained repeated reference to the essential elements in the story: the train, signals, the railway compartment, the points, the door, the express, and the hellish din. This semantic domain is located in the countryside at night, where there is a poplar, a marsh, violets, moon, and stars. There is a repetition of hands and teeth, fingers and jaw, and the recurrent figure of the woman and women throughout. There is a religious or spiritual flavour in the first woman, the first dream, infinity, an organ, a joyful hymn, a wedding, horoscope, hellish, and the virgin. There are even precise lexical repetitions in 'dreams,' 'death,' 'side by side,' 'infinity and infinity,' 'an organ yes an organ,' 'a wedding march,' and, across both paragraphs, 'Kilometre 178.'

There is a consistent manifestation of that most common of conventional metaphors LIFE IS A JOURNEY such that birth, marriage, and death are collapsed onto the train journey. However, there is a fractal embedding throughout the passage that is also characteristic of the entire text, and which in later novels we might call a metafictional level. This can be seen in the constant switching of narrative address forms, from the first proverbial sentence, to the second vocative sentence, to the third imperative sentence. The proverbial opening suggests universal and objective observation, but this switches to a complicit general 'we,' and then to a confessional subjective 'I': 'I notice for the first time.' This last instant impression contrasts with the more omniscient perspective of 'who will look into the mirror an hour after me.' These sorts of constant narratological switches raise the textural levels of the passage to readerly awareness. The notion of reflective embedding is captured symbolically in the repeated evocation of the mirror and of doubling ('side by side,' 'two women,' 'infinity and infinity').

In other words, it is apparent that – like the whole anti-novel itself – this passage is richly textured, to the point at which a reader seems to me highly unlikely to regard it as anything other than artfully composed, rather than accidental. Writing retrospectively in 1985, David Gascoyne notes that even the illusion of artlessness in the end-product of automaticity requires a sense of discipline:

The discipline involved in automatic writing is that of vigilantly resisting the temptation to interrupt the stream of consciousness, or to interfere with or in any way alter *post facto* the results obtained 'with laudable disdain as regards their literary quality' [in Breton's phrase].

(Gascoyne, in Breton, Eluard, and Soupault 1997: 48)

Breton himself later acknowledged that pure psychic automatism could not be manifest in text without some sort of transformation: 'I am not afraid to admit that the history of automatic writing in Surrealism is one of continuous misfortune' (Breton 1997: 18). The discipline itself is of course a constraint that is an inevitable condition of the writing process. It may be true that pure automaticity can be attained in the experimental

process, but we must view automatic writing – the written product of automaticity – in more artful terms. And it remains true, as Katherine Conley claims, that

Mourning for Mourning is an example of automatic writing in its most condensed form, mixing romance with fantastic voyage and making the unconscious synonymous with depth and oceanic experience. As a text, it answers Breton's call in the first *Manifesto* for a reaffirmation of the power of the imagination. It also flows directly out of the unconscious, opened up through automatist means, without any kind of pedagogical explanation or philosophical interruption (as one finds more often in Breton and Aragon than in Desnos).

(Conley 2003: 43)

Automatic writing, in this formulation, is the product of the unconscious opened up by the experimental technique of automaticity.

During the earlier period up to 1924, however, Breton remained convinced that automatic writing was the essence of surrealism; he was working on his own extended 'novel' entitled *Soluble Fish* (*Poisson Soluble*). The preface to this, in which he was setting out his theoretical statements, expanded to become the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), and they are now usually published in the same volume (Breton 1969). Like the examples by Desnos discussed above, however, it is clear that *Soluble Fish* is not the product of pure, unfettered direct automaticity: there is a consistency to it that perhaps arises from its single-authored production. And there is evidence that Breton either edited and 'corrected' the text, or composed it more self-consciously carefully and thoughtfully than the earlier experiments in automatic writing.

Soluble Fish appears less fragmentary than *The Magnetic Fields*. It is divided into 32 sections, most of which are a couple of pages long, though the 1st and the 32nd sections are longer (5 and 9 pages respectively). Most sections appear as continuous prose, divided conventionally into paragraphs; only section 31 varies, appearing in the form of a playtext with stage directions and dialogue. On the surface, at least, the text appears more like a consistent 'novel' than earlier automatic texts. Furthermore, there is a thematic unity that was not apparent in the earlier works, focusing on a romantic relationship and the mystical, transformative power of love (a theme that Breton was to return to and elaborate in his later 'anti-novels' *Nadja* (1928) and *Mad Love* (1937)).

It begins:

The park, at this time of day, stretched its blond hands over the magic fountain. A meaningless castle rolled along the surface of the earth. Close to God the register of this château was open at a drawing of shadows, feathers, irises. The Young Widow's Kiss was the name of the country inn caressed by the speed of the automobile and the drappings of horizontal grasses. Thus the branches dated the year before never stirred at the approach of the window blinds, when the light sends the women hurrying to the balcony. The young girl from Ireland, troubled by the jeremiads of the east wind, listened in her breast to the seabirds laughing.

(Breton 1969: 51)

There is the flavour of myth and fairytale in this, broken perhaps only by the intrusion of the anachronistic modern world in the automobile and window blinds. What might initially be read in the first sentence as a picturesque personifying metaphor seems to take on a more literal (surrealistic) sense when a ‘meaningless castle rolled along.’ Although there are such semantic disjunctions throughout, there is the recognisable sequence of a narrative opening. Carter (1984) lists the normative narratological opening as consisting of a set of propositions that denote, in order, an existential evocation of place or person and their naming, followed by the first narrative action. Labov (1972) similarly lists the normative opening of a narrative as consisting, in sequence, of an abstract and orientation, followed by the complex of actions that lead to a resolution, and finally a coda, which ties up the narrative with reference usually to the initial abstract (see, further, Chapter 7). The opening excerpt above establishes a spatial location, populates it with features, and describes the relative positions of each element: it is a parkland or country estate, grand, opulent, with a country inn and a balcony overlooking the view. At the end, the character of the Irish girl is introduced.

Of course this opening is not a normative narrative. It is followed in the book by a paragraph of direct speech, which might be taken for the thoughts or words of the Irish girl, but for the rest of the first section she is never referred to again. Nevertheless, there are just enough conventional indications of a fairytale-type narrative for this to seem a reasonable reading. There are similar narratological patterns across many of the sections of *Soluble Fish*, and many cross-references and internal allusions. On the page after the opening passage featuring the woman on the château balcony hearing birds laughing, ‘A woman is singing at the window of this fourteenth-century château’ (Breton 1969: 52); at the end of the section, ‘the women take unfair advantage of the light in a burst of laughter’ (p.55). In the first section, ‘Great isosceles wasps flew up from below’ (p.53); in section 3 this reappears in a narrative about ‘an enormous wasp that went down the boulevard Richard-Lenoir in the morning singing at the top of its lungs and asking the children riddles’ (p.56). These sorts of echoic internal allusions thread across the whole text.

Though the local semantics and some of the syntax might appear non-normative, overall there is a general consistent recognisability of register. Section 1 above reads like a fairytale. Section 3 is an anecdote about a wasp in the style of a verbal recount. Section 5 has the flavour of a scandalous and breathless stream of gossip. Section 9 is almost entirely exclamatory. Section 12 is identifiably a report of a scientific and scholarly event. Section 19 is a lyric personifying Spring. Section 25 entirely consists of questions. Section 27 has the pattern of a children’s fable: ‘Once there was a turkey on a dike’ (Breton 1969: 93). Section 31 is a playscript. In other words, there is a great deal of carefully crafted and consistent stability across the whole of *Soluble Fish* – just enough sense to sustain the reader on the side of comprehension.

The local texture, of course, is a different matter. The following is the whole of section 8:

On the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève is a large watering trough where at nightfall all the disturbing animals and surprise-plants still left in Paris come to refresh themselves. You would think it was dried up if, on examining things more closely, you did not see

a little red stream that nothing can dry up gliding capriciously over the stone. What precious blood, then, continues to flow in this place, that the feathers, the down, the white hairs, the dechlorophylled leaves that it runs past turn away from its apparent goal? What princess of royal blood thus devotes herself after her disappearance to the upkeep of what is most sovereignly tender in the flora and fauna of this country? What saint with an apron of roses has caused this divine extract to flow in veins of stone? Each evening the marvelous casting, more beautiful than a breast, opens itself to new lips, and the thirst-quenching virtue of the rose-blood is communicated to all the sky round about, while on a milestone a young child counting the stars shivers; in a short while he will take his flock with age-old hair back from the archer or arrow of water that has three hands, one for extracting, another for caressing, the other for shading or guiding, from the archer of my days to the Alsatian that has one blue eye and one yellow eye, the dog of the anaglyphs of my dreams, the faithful companion of the tides.

(Breton 1969: 64–5)

This passage, lyrically beautiful and striking, is framed in a recognisable narrative register, with a central exhortatory sequence and vivid evocative metaphors. Its brevity sets it up as a vignette or moral cameo. Yet the specific local content of the scene threads together travelogue, mythical tale, religious, architectural, and artistic imagery, gothic and antiquated phrasing, and a sequencing of numbers that seem to be symbolically significant but mystical. Taken altogether, the recognisable frame serves principally to prop up the content that is not so much non-sensical as encompassing too many different senses.

Overall, as this short passage illustrates, *Soluble Fish* scaffolds a sustained and recognisable framework around a complex, rich, and strikingly lyrical texture. There can be no question that it is crafted as a literary text, but the imaginative content of the initial composition is thoroughly dreamlike. This is Gratton's (1986: 31) 'radical continuity' that draws the reader onwards. Its impulse lies in automaticity; its literary realisation is automatic writing. It was only five years between the composition of *The Magnetic Fields* and *Soluble Fish*, but already several of the key techniques of surrealist writing had evolved. In particular, the dreamlike progression across non-sequiturs, non-cohesive paradoxes, and associative rather than cumulative images was already being refined. The dissonant effect of these patterns is the subject of the next chapter.

5 Dissonance

From sound to sense

Much surrealist writing depends on the creation and manipulation of *dissonance*. Dissonance has been a hallmark especially of modernist music, perhaps prototypically exemplified by the work of Arnold Schoenberg and his atonal and dissonant compositions between 1908 and the 1930s. In music, dissonance refers to the elements of a harmony, chord, or interval which are perceived by most people as being temporarily unpleasant, accompanied by a desire for the sound to be resolved into a more pleasing consonance (Tenney 1988). Schoenberg himself believed that consonance and dissonance in musical tone and harmony were cultural and learned rather than innate (see Auner 1993).

While dissonance clearly has its origins in our sense of sound, it is a cognitive scientific principle that our cognition of the senses is continuous and linked rather than being separate modules in the mind. Following this principle, the expression of dissonant sound can be regarded as generating a more abstract *cognitive dissonance* – a human capacity which can also be articulated through the other senses and faculties: in our case here, through language (see van Veen et al. 2009, Jarcho et al. 2011). Dissonance necessarily involves a schematic understanding of consonance, of course; and consonance is typically regarded as normal and basic, whereas dissonance is regarded as eccentric, marked, and odd. In language, this patterning of norm and deviance can operate at every linguistic level: we can think of a grammatical rule, and then an example of it being broken; or a regular morphological pattern, and a deviant one; or a semantic relationship between the referents of two words that is normal and expected, and also a usage in a phrase where there is a semantic clash.

Dissonance clearly requires at least two elements. In music, these can be synchronous (as in a clashing harmony or atonal chord) and thus ‘chaotic’; or a related effect can be produced temporally, when one note is followed by an atonal note – in this latter case, the dissonance is rendered by the hearer in short-term memory, rather than being experienced more directly and passively. In language, processing is more linear: words occur in sequence as an input, though their immediate processing involves more hierarchical and integrative perception. In other words, you cannot have two words occurring simultaneously in standard writing, so the norm of articulation in language is the temporal form of dissonance. Synchronous or chaotic dissonance is holistically and simultaneously striking, whereas the sequentiality of temporal dissonance offers a consonant element first, that is then immediately disrupted by an atonal element. In other words, temporal dissonance starts off as something that looks like it is going to be normal, which is then quickly disrupted afterwards.

In written language, it is difficult to achieve the simultaneity of musical synchronous dissonance. It is possible to imagine the phenomenon in spoken language, of course, if two people were speaking at once at equal volume and pitch. Indeed, such activities can be discovered in surrealist meetings (see below). Even here, though, the experience suggests that an audience member will toggle their attention back and forth between the two inputs, rather than experiencing them holistically like an atonal chord. In writing, the two elements constituting dissonance can at best only be presented in very quick sequence, either as a modifier-noun noun-phrase ('electric spider'), as a noun-verb clash ('the door dilated'), or as some other phrasal structure, such as the partitive expression in 'an explosion of geraniums'.

In each of these cases, the image evoked is non-worldly. The first two are science-fictional in origin (from Ray Bradbury and Robert Heinlein respectively), and the other-worldly dissonance is resolved within the context of alien worlds (Mars and the future). The last example is surreal (from David Gascoyne's 'And the seventh dream is the dream of Isis', 1933). The line occurs in the following co-text, at the beginning of the poem's second section:

across the square where crowds are dying in thousands
a man is walking a tightrope covered with moths

2

there is an explosion of geraniums in the ballroom of the hotel
there is an extremely unpleasant odour of decaying meat
arising from the depetalled flower growing out of her ear
her arms are like pieces of sandpaper
or wings of leprous birds in taxis
and when she sings her hair stands on end
and lights itself with a million little lamps like glowworms
you must always write the last two letters of her christian name
upside down with a blue pencil

(Gascoyne 1933: 10)

As is evident from this example, surrealist writing can approach the effect of synchronous dissonance by piling up quickly successive phrasal clashes so that the sense of temporal ordering offered by sequentiality is undermined. The effect can be compared with the multimodal experience of clashing sounds, language, and images that was often characteristic of surrealist events. At the International Surrealist Exhibition in London (June, 1936), André Breton delivered a lecture on 'Limites non-frontières du Surréalisme', while Dylan Thomas toured the room offering teacups of boiled string, asking 'Do you like it weak or strong?' while an electric bell was intermittently sounded. This multiple dissonance approaches the synchronous effect, and the rapid succession of phrases makes it very difficult to toggle attentionally between elements.

The original notion of cognitive dissonance was introduced in 1957 by Festinger (see also 1962). In psychology, dissonance relates to the discomfort involved in trying to hold contradictory ideas, values, or beliefs simultaneously, and the focus of the discussion was on how an individual is compelled to resolve the dissonance. Festinger explored

different forms of dissonance reduction behaviour, but the assumption in the psychological work is that dissonance is uncomfortable and this unpleasantness motivates an action to resolve it. However, more recently the notion of cognitive dissonance has been extended beyond ideational matters of knowledge and into the domain of emotions and vaguer effects (see Bonniot-Cabanac et al. 2012). Musical dissonance seems to be emotional and aesthetic, after all, rather than primarily conceptual in origin. The idea that dissonance is a form of attentional arousal has shifted from its original narrow sense of attentional stimulation to a recognition that dissonance can also be pleasurable in its own right (see Perlovsky et al. 2013). This of course leaves us with the question of whether a dissonant experience is uncomfortable (requiring reduction) or is pleasurable (motivating a desire to prolong the effect).

The answer, it seems to me, can be explored through the dissonance presented by surrealist writing. The sort of surrealist, multimodal assault on several senses that was apparent in the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition event is unusual. More commonly, surrealism in writing manifests cognitive dissonance in syntactic and semantic clashes involving only a couple of elements at a time. Syntactic dissonance will mainly be explored in [Chapter 6](#) as a linguistic collage technique. The semantics of dissonance involves an understanding of how words and phrases normally collocate, how readers normally derive meaning from them, and how non-normal patterns are realised and comprehended.

Melnick (1994) makes a connection between dissonant music and modernist fiction, arguing that dissonance can be understood conceptually as art that is 'de-aestheticised'. In other words, modernist literature was not about the Romantic articulation of beauty and truth, not primarily either art for art's sake nor art for the sake of indulgent enjoyment: art and literature were serious activities, in modernism. And, for all their tactical humour, no one took their activities as seriously as the surrealists. The key to understanding the semantic dissonance of surrealist writing is to take it seriously. Just as in the brief science fictional examples above, the striking, jarring image is not simply an arty metaphor to be beheld and appreciated in the everyday. The point of such disjunctive phrases is to flick the reader's attention into an alternative world – a place where the phrase makes perfect sense (where it is super-real). On Bradbury's Mars, the spiders really are electric; in Heinlein's future, doors really do dilate as a technological feature. In Gascoyne's dreamlike state, geraniums really do explode.

This sort of literalisation corresponds quite well with the psychological claims that cognitive dissonance motivates a search for resolution or rationalisation. In cognitive poetics, a phrase like 'explosion of geraniums' would ordinarily be regarded as a metaphor in our everyday world. The metaphorical meaning would be something like the bright, striking appearance of the flowers, usually pink or purple, and their perceptual effect. In text-world theory terms (Werth 1999, Gavins 2007), a metaphor involves a switch of the reader's attention away from the current matrix text world and into a metaphorical world in which the apparent semantic clash is held as being literally true. So the reader is transported into a surrealist alternative world of incendiary geraniums. At the same time, that reader is aware that the content of the sub-world is related to the text world level in a metaphorical way. The semantic clash can thus be resolved rationally,

consistently, and meaningfully, while at the same time preserving the readerly sense that a metaphor maintains two meanings at once. In this sense, treating a linguistic expression as a metaphor is a form of rationalisation for an instance of cognitive dissonance at the semantic level.

This formulation provides a means of understanding a dissonant surrealist phrase in terms of its rationalisation, but it seems to me that part of the strikingness of ‘an explosion of geraniums’ also lies in an appreciation of it as a pleasurable image. A text-world account can handle this too: the switch of attention into a metaphorical sub-world involves an investment of effort that has a pleasurable return (see Stockwell 2009a). The attempt to resolve the semantic dissonance is accompanied by the satisfaction of having attentionally travelled across world-boundaries. The effect is similar with puzzle-solving, translating, or imagining a hypothetical scenario in order to resolve something difficult and abstract back in actuality. In these and in the case of a surrealist phrase, the semantic dissonance presents a challenge that everyone is cognitively predisposed to resolve, and the ongoing act of that resolution is in itself pleasurable.

There is, though, something additionally going on in the surrealist context. Unlike in both science fictional writing and everyday language, the jarring semantic collocational phrases that appear frequently in surrealist texts are often repeated and unremitting. As in the excerpt from Gascoyne’s ‘And the seventh dream is the dream of Isis’, the striking phrase almost never appears in isolation. Instead, it occurs in the middle of a whole series of similarly jarring phrases, not all of which are cohesively related to each other:

across the square where crowds are dying in thousands
a man is walking a tightrope covered with moths

there is an explosion of geraniums in the ballroom of the hotel
there is an extremely unpleasant odour of decaying meat
arising from the depetalled flower growing out of her ear

The first line and a half of this extract evokes a situation that is at least imaginable in a coherent and familiar, if remarkable scene. However, the addition of the phrase ‘covered with moths’ transports the imagined world into another sort of setting. There is a disjunctive blank line, and then an existential descriptive clause that features the surrealist phrase ‘explosion of geraniums.’ This is followed not by a further statement about the flowers or the hotel ballroom, but by a reference to decaying meat, but then this too is followed by the disjunctive circumstance that the smell arises from a flower in an unnamed woman’s ear. The effect overall is cumulative rather than instant.

The images evoked in each phrase, however, do not appear random. Even if randomness was intended, readers are very bad at acquiescing in randomness, since randomness in an ordered world is an instance of cognitive dissonance which must be resolved. It is for this reason that humans see patterns in numbers, faces in clouds, and constellations in the stars. There are connections to be made across the extract above, even if these semantic links are associative rather than tightly cohesive: *geraniums*, *odour*, *depetalled flower growing*; and

dying, explosion, extremely unpleasant, decaying meat, depetalled; and the square, the ballroom. There are other grammatical echoes: *are dying, is walking, decaying, arising, growing; and there is an, there is an* – as well as phonetic echoes such as *across ... square; crowds ... thousands; there is an ... arising; explosion ... extremely; decaying ... depetalled; flower ... growing.* Viewed at this level of resolution, the passage is dense with connections.

Indeed, the longer extract is primarily characterised by the high density of prepositional phrases that appear to locate, ground, and pin down the images evoked into a precisely specified relationship with each other: *across the square, in thousands, with moths, of geraniums, in the ballroom, of the hotel, of decaying meat, from the ... flower, out of her ear, of sandpaper, of leprous birds, in taxis, on end, with a million little lamps, of her christian name, with a blue pencil.* We seem to have a syntactic sequence of reaching after precision, coupled with a set of semantic associations each of which is very loosely coherent, and a specific set of semantic phrases that are dissonant.

It seems to me that this style of writing is as close as text can get to the synchronous dissonance of a chaotic musical chord or interval. It cannot be achieved by a single semantically dissonant phrase, but the piling up of such phrases comes close to achieving the same impression. In effect, the dissonant elements occur too fast for each one to be resolved adequately, so the unresolved dissonance from the last few phrases persists in recent memory. It is not absolutely synchronous, since writing can necessarily only achieve sequential atonality, but it is as near to it as it is possible to be.

The semantics of paranoia

I will revisit the ways in which readers can derive apparent coherence from highly incoherent texts in Chapter 7. Here, though, we can consider the close mechanics of surrealist dissonance by exploring the lexical semantics of this surrealist technique.

The following poem is by Hugh Sykes Davies, of the London Surrealist Group. The text has been described as ‘among the most powerful of British surrealism’ (Remy 1999: 47). It was originally published in the *London Bulletin* (No. 2) in May 1938:

Poem

It doesn't look like a finger it looks like a feather of broken glass
It doesn't look like something to eat it looks like something
eaten
It doesn't look like an empty chair it looks like an old woman
searching in a heap of
stones
It doesn't look like a heap of stones it looks like an estuary
where the drifting filth is swept to and fro on
the tide
It doesn't look like a finger it looks like a feather with broken
teeth
The spaces between the stones are made of stone

It doesn't look like a revolver it looks like a convolvulus
 It doesn't look like a living convolvulus it looks like a dead one
 KEEP YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF MY FRIENDS USE
 THEM ON YOUR BITCHES OR
 YOURSELVES BUT KEEP THEM OFF MY FRIENDS
 The faces between the stones are made of bone
 It doesn't look like an eye it looks like a bowl of rotten fruit
 It doesn't look like my mother in the garden it looks like my
 father when he came up from the sea covered with shells
 and tangle
 It doesn't look like a feather it looks like a finger with broken
 wings
 It doesn't look like the old woman's mouth it looks like a
 handful of broken feathers or a revolver buried in cinders
 The faces beneath the stones are made of stone
 It doesn't look like a broken cup it looks like a cut lip
 It doesn't look like yours it looks like mine
 BUT IT IS YOURS NOW
 SOON IT WILL LOOK LIKE YOURS
 AND ANYTHING YOU SEE WILL BE USED AGAINST
 YOU

(Davies 1938: 7)

Remy (1999: 47) suggests that this poem's 'singular force comes from an ascending, almost spiralling movement which is hypnotic in its effect [... with a] neutral core which remains unidentifiable and unnameable'. Remy captures the key sense, here, in which the poem seems repeatedly to focus on an object which cannot be precisely defined nor articulated. He goes on:

The text focuses on the search for what kind of object the recurrent, incantatory 'It' represents, and develops through a succession of densely entangled, criss-crossing lines, an almost impenetrable network of phonetic and semantic echoes [...] It is haunted by the notion of resemblance and dissimilitude, but the logic that it tries to establish is soon suspended and destroyed by contradictory statements, in such a way that as the text seems to approach the object in question, it actually edges away from it.

(Remy 1999: 48)

The sense of 'resemblance and dissimilitude' seems to be a common readerly response (certainly among a group of my own undergraduate students who have discussed their readings of the text). It arises from a repetition of syntactic sequencing, within which there is a complexity of semantic content. The form of the first line is repeated: *It doesn't look like x it looks like y* – a negated assertion, followed by an assertion framed positively. This syntactic pattern is conventionally used by a speaker who is grasping to pin down a definition of something that is difficult to describe, and which has no precise lexical item to refer to 'it'. The repetition of the indeterminate 'it' throughout the poem reinforces this perception. In such general usage, the elements in each clause are usually semantically

linked: for example, 'It's not a tree, it's a bush,' 'It doesn't look like a boat, it looks like a motorbike with water-jets,' and so on. In these examples, the two elements share some features in common (trees and bushes are both general terms for plant-types, have leaves and branches, grow in soil, are common garden sights) but, crucially, have one or a few features of difference that make the utterance meaningful and purposive (bushes are usually smaller and more compact than trees). The purpose of the utterance is to represent a refinement of precision in definition, especially when the speaker lacks the specific item of vocabulary (as in the 'jet-ski' example above).

I suggested at the end of the previous section that the sort of synchronous atonal dissonance achievable in a musical disharmony cannot be exactly matched by writing because of its necessary linearity and sequentiality. However, linear text has a variety of means of complicating its own linearity in the process of becoming discourse in the mind of a reader. One such means is presented by repetition, in that the repetition of a sequence is perceived as a reiteration of the same thing rather than an encounter with a new thing. (Repetitions in logical fact are always variable and new, because we have a memory of their previous mentions: any repetition is uniquely the second mention, the third mention, the fourth mention, etc. However, we tend to treat them experientially as recursions, contrary to rational logic.) The Davies formulation presents syntactic repetitions in such quick succession that the apparent linearity is occluded by the focus on the semantic content. The experiential sense of recursion renders the dissonance in a manner that seems quite close to synchronous disharmony. In other words, the syntagmatic pattern corresponds with a repeated sense of striving for precision, while the paradigmatic (semantic) content repeatedly sets up parallel items that are thus placed into comparison with each other.

In general usage, a similar closely related set of semantic relations takes the form: 'It's not a computer strictly, more a complex adding machine,' or, 'He's a farmer, or more exactly, a stockman,' or, 'It's not exactly raining, more drizzling.' In all of the forms mentioned so far, there is an aspect of *synonymy* of various types. While absolute synonymy of different lexical items is very rare (if not impossible, according to Quine 1951 and Goodman 1952), it is possible to speak of *cognitive synonymy*, which can be defined:

x is a cognitive synonym of y if (i) x and y are syntactically identical, and (ii) any grammatical declarative sentence s containing x has equivalent truth-conditions to another sentence s¹, which is identical to s except that x is replaced by y.

(Cruse 1986: 88)

The syntactic form used in the Davies poem sets up a negation, followed by an assertion, which looks at first as if the two elements are being presented as opposites (*cognitive antonyms*). However, as my own examples above illustrate, the two terms are more usually in a relation of *plesionymy*.

Plesionyms are distinguished from cognitive synonyms by the fact that they yield sentences with different truth-conditions: two sentences which differ only in respect of plesionyms in parallel syntactic positions are not mutually entailing [...] There is

always one member of a plesionymous pair which it is possible to assert, without paradox, while simultaneously denying the other member.

(Cruse 1986: 285)

The examples Cruse then goes on to cite begin to look syntactically very like those in the poem: 'It wasn't foggy last Friday – just misty', 'It wasn't a tap I heard – more of a rap', 'He was not murdered – he was legally executed' (Cruse 1986: 285–6). The point is that the syntactic arrangement presented initially by the poem is apparently the same used in general discourse to present the semantic relation of plesionymy (and Storjohann 2009 shows that plesionyms typically occur in a rather fixed set of syntactic patterns; see also Jones 2002).

This goes some way to explaining the initial intuition that the poem frames itself as an act of reaching after definition and refinement. However, the poem is problematic at this point, since the two elements in each of the first few lines of the poem are not in a clear plesionymic relation with each other. The poem uses the customary syntactic form of the plesionym, but presents elements that are semantically incompatible, or at least not easily compatible. The nature of the incompatibility varies: shift of material, species, and manufacture (finger – feather of broken glass); shift of the direction of the verb (eat – eaten); shift from object to action (empty chair – old woman searching); and so on. In each case, the semantic distance can be said to increase. Despite the syntactic presentation, the semantic relation between the two elements seems to move towards non-synonymy.

The line between plesionymy and cognitive synonymy can be drawn with some precision. However, the limits of plesionymy in the opposite direction along the scale of synonymy are more difficult to specify; as the semantic distance between lexical items increases, plesionymy shades imperceptibly into non-synonymy.

(Cruse 1986: 286)

In fact, the first few lines of the poem appear to be similar to the peculiar examples which Cruse then goes on to give to illustrate the area in which plesionymy 'shades imperceptibly' into non-synonymy:

? My father's a policeman – or, more exactly, a butcher.

? Our dog – or, more exactly, our cat – died yesterday.

The important thing in the poem is that there is the form of plesionymy but the actual denial of it. However, in setting up this apparent form, the poem disposes the reader to make an identification of sorts between the uneasily compatible elements. The selection of elements, by their semantic distance from each other, works with the opposite force to disrupt any readerly attempt at identification. In the reader's world, there is little common identifiable semantic ground between what empty chairs look like and how old women searching in heaps of stones might appear. Nevertheless, it is very difficult for readers to abandon a text as absolutely incomprehensible; we all prefer to *make sense* of things. When I have tried out the last two of Cruse's 'odd' examples on small groups of

readers, many people try to make sense of the utterance: your father is a policeman, but rather a brutal one; your dog was somehow cat-like.

The differences between synonymy and the various forms of near-synonymy, plesionymy, non-synonymy, and outright xenonymy (a semantic clash, see below) have been modelled as being along a scale of *granularity* (Hirst and Edmonds 2002). At the absurdly crude end of the scale, all words are linked as referents to things; at the very finely graded end, even synonyms are different because they are at minimum used in different contexts. For example, *skinny/slim* are near-synonyms differentiated by the speaker's attitude, *error/slip* represent differences in formality, *dad/daddy* manifest variation in emotional attachment (Hirst and Edmonds 2002, see also Hirst 1995). The question of principle, here, is in deciding what is the appropriate level of granularity in the context.

An answer can be found by drawing on a cognitive linguistic approach to semantic relations (as suggested by Murphy 2003, and Divjak 2010). Desagulier (2012) argues that two words in a plesionymic relation with each other activate the same cognitive domain but suggest different construals through that domain. Langacker (2008: 44) insists that 'Linguistic meaning involves both imposed conceptual content and the construal of that content', and he also insists that the relationship between domain and construal is integrative: in other words, a particular stylistic pattern that encourages a certain readerly construal can also simultaneously be the vehicle for the particular conceptual domain that the reader needs to interpret the sentence at hand.

In the Davies poem, I have found that most readers with whom I have discussed the text tend to grapple with similar features in the first line, for example. The syntactic form and the non-use of a comma encourage a readerly construction of identity across the elements, and the blend between plesionymy and non-synonymy can only lead such an interpretation into unreality. That is, whatever 'it' is, it is almost impossible to settle on a referent in our real world that both 'doesn't look like a finger' in a specific way worth mentioning, and also 'looks like a feather of broken glass'. This can only be resolved by raising the level of granularity to a point at which entirely dissimilar things in our everyday experience can be perhaps understood to have some similarity in a different, irrational sort of experience.

On the way to this realisation – which is compounded by the repetition of the strategy in succeeding lines – the reader struggling for meaning inevitably passes through a range of idiosyncratic resonances. Some of these that I have recorded in discussion with readers include noticing that fingers and feathers can be seen to operate as digits, and an identification of humans with birds is made. Of course, the 'feather' is not literal here but is a metaphorical figuring of a sliver of broken glass, and readers have said that this places images of cut and bleeding fingers into their minds, or fingers that are broken, or broken wings on birds with dead glassy eyes, and other resonant images. Essentially, the repeated syntactic form motivates a cognitive search for plesionymy, and a reader is forced upwards on a granularity scale until a domain is found that is plausibly common to the two elements of the plesionym.

Further lines increase the difficulty of such interpretations. While there are conceivably some conceptual similarities between fingers and feathers, the points of contact

between 'an empty chair' and 'an old woman searching in a heap of stones' is less direct. One reading connected the empty chair with an imagined domain of an absent husband or son, and a desperate search for the missing person or his grave. Similarly encouraged by the syntactic parallelism in succeeding sentences, readers often generalise the strategy across lines, and this is supported by the repetition of phrases across lines in the poem. So, for example, the grave which is the 'heap of stones' turns out to be the watery grave of one killed at sea, swept into the filthy estuary and echoed later in the image of 'my father when he came up from the sea covered with shells and tangle'.

Dissonant semantic relations begin to find their way into phrases as well. Again, 'it doesn't look like a finger', but now 'it looks like a feather with broken teeth'. Here the figurative feather of the first line has entered the unreal world of reference, but is further given teeth, which have been broken. Following Cruse (1986: 106), we might call such an example in an everyday context a *xenonym*: an odd or irresolvable lexical semantic relation. In the surrealist context, though, these extreme cognitive xenonymies – presented in the form most usually associated with plesionymy – seem to create rich and acceptable domains for readers. Across all of the evocative phrases throughout the poem, readers report a consistent sense of danger, dirt, decay, desolation, things broken or destroyed or abandoned, the aftermath of a disaster or catastrophe. At this general level of granularity, all of the readers in my group had evoked domains of a similar flavour. Though a detailed specification of 'it' was not possible, a vaguer sense of psychological anxiety, unease, and reaction to some unspecified trauma was common to most readers' reported feelings (and see also Connor 1995: 183–4).

In surrealist thinking, the best image or phrase involved the greatest possible semantic distance between elements, the most extreme xenonym, in other words.

The image is a pure creation of the spirit. It cannot be born of a comparison but of the bringing together of two realities, which are more or less remote. The more distant and just the relationship of these conjoined realities, the stronger the image – the more emotive power and poetic reality it will have.

(Pierre Reverdy, translated and quoted in Waldberg 1965: 22)

Hugh Sykes Davies' technique can be seen as a complex development of this basic compositional device. For the surrealists, such cognitive disruptions provided an opportunity for the reader to enter into a creative relationship with the surrealist text, allowing access to a reality undistorted by bourgeois rationalism or authority. The strategy is a dialectical one, as Herbert Read (in the introduction to *Surrealism* in 1936) states:

In dialectical terms we claim that there is a continual state of opposition and interaction between the world of objective fact – the sensational and social world of active and economic existence – and the world of subjective fantasy. This opposition creates a state of disquietude, a lack of spiritual equilibrium, which it is the business of the artist to resolve. He resolves the contradictions by creating a synthesis, a work of art which combines elements from both these worlds, eliminates others, but which for the moment gives us a qualitatively new experience.

(in Read 1963: 250)

Although it is possible to generalise some of the techniques here, the individual reader's experience of the surrealist landscape is also going to be singular and particular to that reader. Among my reading group, there was unanimously a sense that the lexical choices of the poem produced a general sense of broken-down, post-apocalyptic squalor, decay, death, burial, and violence. However, readers reached this general sense through various different experiences of the poem. The repeated xenonymic patterns in each line seemed to have a cumulative effect that in most cases served to draw the unreal elements of the poem into an apparent and thus troubling reality. The details of the resonant images, though, were different among readers. The two noun-phrases in each line always refer to concrete objects, rather than abstractions, and the verb-phrase ('looks like') which governs them foregrounds their *appearance*.

For example, the old woman in the third line of the poem is imagined by most readers to be spindly as the empty chair, and there was a consensus that the image of a chair invoked was old, brown, worn, and wooden, brittle and aged as the woman. The heap of stones is pictured as rubble or a makeshift grave in this line, but the interanimation with the tidal estuary in the next line relocates this heap of stones as wet barren rocks in the polluted seawater. By the next line, the idea of injured fingers, feathered with multiple cuts, is already in mind from the first line, so by this point several readers found it easy to identify birds and humans, and allow the idea of a feather to apply metaphorically to a human face with broken teeth. In 'a feather with broken teeth', the image of real teeth seemed more common among readers than a reading which saw the fibres of the feather metaphorically as teeth – though one or two readers construed the *feathered teeth* domain in this way. In many of my discussions of surrealist texts with readers, and particularly with other Hugh Sykes Davies poems, this notion of metaphors becoming literalised in readers' minds during the reading experience is common: in surrealist terms, this is the poem effecting access into unconscious paranoia.

The line, 'It doesn't look like a revolver it looks like a convolvulus,' involves readers knowing what a convolvulus is. All guessed it was a plant, and some knew that it was a twining species including bindweed. Those who associated these with guns and flowers made thematic connections with war and peace, though the next line with the dead convolvulus led them to interpret this as ongoing war with no peace. One reader connected bindweed with a corpse's winding sheet, with the stony grave of the first few lines, and the tangle around the drowned father later in the poem. What is clear from these various different readerly tracks through a broadly similar mental landscape is that the poem has evoked an atmospheric domain that builds up across each line, and this domain then flavours the actual construals that readers make as the poem progresses. So the war context of the revolver is coloured by the war domain in operation, rather than, for example, by other domains that a revolver could appear in, such as a murder story, detective story, espionage thriller, or non-narratively a police inventory, a gunshop window, or a photograph caption.

In effect, the domains set up by the text successively are vaguely consistent, and the more consistently the reader is able to fit disparate images in each line into that general atmospheric sense, the more reified the domain becomes, and the more *sense* the poem makes. It is, though, a *sense* at a level removed from the everyday, of course. These

patterns seem to train readers into accepting the interplay of surrealist images, so that my readers were more readily able to treat the lines in the second part of the poem as real rather than metaphorical. For example, responses to the line, 'It doesn't look like an eye it looks like a bowl of rotten fruit', invoked in different readers an image of fruit with open eyes, or plums and peaches blinking, or a bowlful of eyeballs, or a corpse's eyes dead and soft as rotting fruit. There are clearly features of eyes and rotten fruit being mapped back and forth across the domains in the lines here. Similarly, accumulated domain features of feathers, fingers, birds, faces, and broken bones all seemed to dispose readers to construe the image 'a finger with broken wings' literally, generating a collaged surrealist image in most of their minds.

There are multiple seemingly significant patterns and parallelisms at several different levels of linguistic organisation. One of the organising principles of xenonymic elements seems to be simply phonological coincidence, linking 'finger - feather', 'revolver - convolulus', 'spaces - faces', 'stones - bone', and the velar and labial plosives and liquid sound repetition in 'It doesn't look like a broken cup it looks like a cut lip'. The repetition of the syntactic pattern, and the phonetic echoes across the poem, and the reappearance of certain elements all serve to create an impression of a text that is tightly cohesive on several levels. The very strong tendency among all my readers was to treat each reiteration of 'It' as referring to the same *it*, rather than being a reinitiated description of a new object in each line. In other words, they were trying to keep a consistently cohesive domain running across the text, and reading the lines additively. Near to the end of the poem, however, a line appears that makes an explicitly comparative *or*-connection: 'It doesn't look like the old woman's mouth it looks like a handful of broken feathers or a revolver buried in cinders'. As Pander Maat (1999) points out, additive relations are unmarked and thus assumed as a default across connected clauses and sentences, whereas comparative connections are more attentionally prominent. Here, the elements in the line have either appeared lexically already ('old woman', 'revolver'), or by phrasal derivation ('broken feathers' from 'feather of broken glass'), or by domain association ('mouth' from a combination of 'something to eat' and 'broken teeth' and 'estuary'), or by a more loose atmospheric flavouring of the domain ('cinders' from the vague general sense of a burned-out landscape). So far, each line represents a re-start, as if the speaker is trying again each time to be precise. Here towards the end, the alternativity presents more of a conceptual problem, since now the object 'it' looks like either this or that, in some way that invites a reader to compare the similarities between 'a handful of broken feathers' and 'a revolver buried in cinders'. In each case there has been a human hand, an agency involved, but that person remains in the background of construal.

Overall, the syntactic structure that is most associated with plesionymic propositions renders a poem that seems to be centrally concerned with specification and categorisation. Yet there are several points at which it seems to disrupt the whole principle of categorisation:

The spaces between the stones are made of stone [...]
 The faces between the stones are made of bone [...]
 The faces beneath the stones are made of stone

The first of these can easily be interpreted as calling into question the idea of separate categories: if even the space beyond the boundary of the stone is itself stone, then the notion of the boundary loses all meaning. The second of the lines invokes skeletal images (and reminded one reader of the heap of stones she read earlier as a grave). The last of these lines seems to have resonances of carved effigies, or petrified people (in both senses), or is a play on 'stony-faced'. By this point towards the end of the poem, the paranoid world of the poem has become so firmly established that definite reference can be made to 'the faces' and 'the stones'. Similarly, phrases which began as suggested similes have by the end become definite references ('the old woman's mouth') or have appeared as real elements in the newly constructed world ('broken feathers', 'a revolver').

Even the apparently determined assertions of identity in the attempts at definition are subject to embedded qualification. Most lines are subordinated to the verb of appearance ('looks like'), which introduces doubt in what you are able to see and whether you can trust what you see. These also render the definitions as similes and negated similes. Unlike a metaphor, the last thing 'it' can be if it only looks 'like' a 'feather of broken glass' is a feather of broken glass. The non-simile assertions of the three 'spaces and stone' lines extracted above are made to seem even more definite and literal by this contrast.

At the end of the poem, the reader is addressed directly, and implicated in what he or she has seen: 'It doesn't look like yours it looks like mine'. The cohesive property of the antonymic *yours/mine* pair makes the rhetorical move seem entirely natural, especially alongside previous pairings such as *mother/father*, *living/dead*, *to/fro*. The consistent but vague atmospheric domain that has been cohesively established across the poem, though, has been interrupted by what seems like another voice, graphologically indicated by capitalisation and a variation in syntactic form. The first of these, with the imperative, the evaluative adjective 'FILTHY', the reference to self and the abuse-term 'BITCHES', makes the capitalisation appear to represent angry shouting. The final section of the poem repeats this capitalisation, with the effect here of an emphatic insistent warning: 'AND ANYTHING YOU SEE WILL BE USED AGAINST YOU'. This alludes, of course, to the old British police caution on arrest ('anything you say may be used against you') but the change of verbal modality alters it from a caution to a threat. Equally, the visual domain that has been evoked throughout by 'looks like' here presents a stylistic form ('see') that strongly disposes a reader to construe the domain as involuntary and passive (compare 'watch', 'look at', or even 'observe', for example). The final effect is to make real the vague but strong sense of paranoia that has been accumulating throughout the poem.

When my readers tried to construct global explanatory narratives – a single coherent domain – to assimilate all of the images, they found none to be entirely satisfactory. Some of their framing contexts arose purely from the textual response: a battered woman in a war zone searches for her dead husband and sons as carrion birds pick over badly buried corpses; a woman's interior monologue represents her world turned around when her husband's drowned body is pulled from the estuary; a condition of endless war and hardship can only be experienced silently and visually in the face of state repression, in which truth and propaganda are interchangeable and uncertain, and nothing is allowed to be what it seems. Some of these narratives were connected by some readers to their

own personal experiences, or their reading of other literary and news media texts. Several readers wanted to find out more about surrealism in order to contextualise the poem historically. The date of composition (published in 1938) generated interpretations that gave the poem an ideological turn, seeing it as a striking pre-war snapshot of impending all-enveloping doom ('SOON IT WILL LOOK LIKE YOURS'), or as an attempt to convey authoritarian Nazism and categories turned upside down.

Dissonance and consonance

Within surrealism, the technique of a quick succession of contraries and xenonyms will dispose the reader to dialectical overload, since any reader will naturally try to make sense of the disparate images. The use of plesionyms and other near-synonyms, coupled with a syntactic phrasing that recalls the register of precision and definition, will most likely encourage most readers to persist in this sense-making effort. While some surrealist works are straightforwardly chaotic, the vast majority have some recognisable forms, patterns, and anchors in everyday experience. Even the most abstract and apparently formless examples of surrealist painting, for example, still use colours and shapes that are recognisably resolvable as composition: they are construable, in other words. In literary surrealism, the raw material is usually in touch with everyday patterns of language: there is little that is ungrammatical or syntactically ill-formed in the Davies poem above. Instead, the effect of drawing an engaged reader into the surrealist landscape is accomplished by a swift turnover of images that appear initially to be comprehensible.

The precise parallelisms evident at the syntactic, semantic, and phonetic levels in Davies' poem after a stylistic analysis all point to an impression of an author deliberately and consciously crafting these techniques in the service of surrealism – this seems to be most readers' impressions, whatever the unattainable biographical and authorial truth of the matter. The author is mind-modelled as a surrealist, and the poem as being the product of a surrealist intent, and so the reader's prior experiential cognitive model of surrealism will naturally be used as a framing device. It is within the conditioning brought by this predisposition that the significance of particular stylistic features will be construed.

Construal in cognitive grammatical terms is a process that aims for resolution in meaning. It presumes a motivation towards such a resolution as a basic predisposition of human cognitive faculties. Most of the argument across this chapter has followed this presumption: readers seem to want to make sense of surrealist texts. Even if their stylistic close-reading leaves an imperfect overall sense, their historicisation of the context allows them to box up a text like the Davies poem as an *example* of surrealism. The exemplification is a form of resolution.

Of course, this returns us to the question at the start of the chapter: is literary dissonance attractive in its own right or is it an irritation that motivates a search for a resolving pattern? Let's also return, then, to Gascoyne's poem 'And the seventh dream is the dream of Isis.' The excerpt quoted at the beginning of this chapter was chosen to exemplify the rapid piling-up of images that serves to approach a sense of synchronous dissonance,

even if an absolute simultaneous disharmony of meaning is unattainable in writing. The poem begins as follows:

**AND THE SEVENTH DREAM IS
THE DREAM OF ISIS**

1

white curtains of infinite fatigue
dominating the starborn heritage of the colonies of St Francis
white curtains of tortured destinies
inheriting the calamities of the plagues
of the desert encourage the waistlines of women to expand
and the eyes of men to enlarge like pocket-cameras
teach children to sin at the age of five
to cut out the eyes of their sisters with nail-scissors
to run into the streets and offer themselves to unfrocked priests
teach insects to invade the deathbeds of rich spinsters
and to engrave the foreheads of their footmen with purple signs
for the year is open the year is complete
the year is full of unforeseen happenings
and the time of earthquakes is at hand

today is the day when the streets are full of hearses
and when women cover their ring fingers with pieces of silk
when the doors fall off their hinges in ruined cathedrals
when hosts of white birds fly across the ocean from america
and make their nests in the trees of public gardens
the pavements of cities are covered with needles
the reservoirs are full of human hair
fumes of sulphur envelop the houses of ill-fame
out of which bloodred lilies appear.

(Gascoyne 1933: 9–10)

Although the progression through images is rapid, like the Davies text there are elements that sustain a set of consistent domains across the poem. There are discernible elements of the domains of religion, violence, disease, death, and motion, for example. The religious domain is evoked in the phrases ‘St Francis’, ‘plagues of the desert’, ‘sin’, ‘unfrocked priests’, ‘cathedrals’, and in the prophetic phrasing ‘the time of earthquakes is at hand’. Once this domain is operating in mind, it also makes it easier to construe other elements within the same religious domain (where in a different context they might be construed differently): I can read ‘sisters’ as nuns, ‘purple’ as both a Lenten colour of mourning and as a symbol of divine royalty in iconographic Christian art, the ‘lilies’ of the field (Matthew 6: 28), ‘white curtains’ as the covering of the tabernacle, ‘hosts’ as communion wafers or groups of angels, ‘white birds’ as the dove after the Flood, and numerous biblical ‘earthquakes’ (such as Ezekiel 38:19, Luke 21:11 and especially Revelations 6:12: ‘I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the

sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood'). This last scriptural quotation seems especially resonant both in the poem's title and towards the end of the excerpt above. Other domains include violence ('tortured', 'cut out the eyes', 'engrave the foreheads', and so on), disease ('infinite fatigue', 'plagues'), death (all of the disease phrases, plus 'deathbeds', 'hearses', covering 'ring fingers', 'bloodred lilies'), and motion ('expand', 'enlarge', 'run into', 'invade', 'fly across the ocean from america'). Of course, all of these domains might be regarded as being interconnected in various ways, and their swift co-occurrence in the poem helps such a blending.

One of the striking features to a stylistician's eye is the predominance of prepositional phrases with 'of' – only three lines in the extract above do not have an *of*-prepositional phrase:

to run into the streets and offer themselves to unfrocked priests
for the year is open the year is complete
when the doors fall off their hinges in ruined cathedrals

Even then, two of these have 'off' (including the embedded 'offer') and one has an echoic 'for'. The partitive *of*-preposition is a productive construction in surrealist poetry (see Martin 1986). Perhaps this is because it allows for a complex construal of a domain that involves a selection of some of the domain elements that are conceptually detached. In other words, a reader has to picture an object (domain), and then imagine part of that domain as a separated element. In cognitive linguistics, the *of*-preposition is understood in its most abstract, purely conceptual sense as a spatial movement that imagines a piece of an object becoming detached from that object. This mental abstraction is represented theoretically as an *image-schema* of an object (see Lakoff 1987, Hampe 2005). Different parts of the image-schema can be profiled, and different profiles are imposed for readers by different stylistic patterns. In a phrase *the x of the y*, to take an abstract example, the phenomenon *x* is understood to have been part of the object *y*, but a process has recently occurred which has caused it to move out from that object. In cognitive linguistics, the original object (*y*) is abstractly known as a *landmark*, and the moving object or element (*x*) that has become the focus of attention is the *trajector* (Clausner and Croft 1999). In a partitive expression of the form *the x of the y*, attentional focus is placed on the first element *x* (which will usually be the headword of the full noun-phrase, waiting for a verb to be attached if it appears in clause-initial position). The second element *y* will typically be a lexicalisation of the general domain within which the *x* is conventionally a part. So, for example, in the everyday expressions 'the door of the car', or 'the eyes of his face', or 'the white curtains of the bedroom', the first element is a specified and focused part of the domain that is mentioned second. This is also the basic structure of metonymy, defined in these terms as a conceptual mapping within a domain (Murphy 1996, Croft and Cruse 2004: 48). By contrast, a metaphor, in these terms, is a mapping between different domains: a source domain and a target domain (Lakoff 1987).

However, the surrealist use of the partitive expression presents the familiar syntactic sequencing of the conventional part-whole relationship, but fills it with semantic elements that would conventionally be regarded as belonging to radically different domains.

Given ‘the white curtains of ...’, we might conventionally have primed up such domains as *the bedroom, the stage, the living-room* – essentially locations; instead the poem presents us with a modified abstraction ‘infinite fatigue’. Similarly in image-schematic structure, we are presented again with ‘white curtains of ...’ so we might expect [*rooms, windows*] but in fact we get ‘tortured destinies’; with ‘reservoirs are full of ...’ [*water, algae, fish*] > ‘human hair’; and ‘cut out the eyes of ...’ [*dolls, masks*] > ‘their sisters’. Some domains remain within the conventional priming: ‘calamities of ...’ [*something bad*] = ‘plagues’, ‘the deathbeds of ...’ [*old people*] = ‘rich spinsters’; ‘cover their ring fingers with pieces of ...’ [*cloth*] = ‘silk’; ‘the pavements of ...’ [*streets, cities*] = ‘cities’, and so on.

With the more disjunctive examples and with the other prepositional phrases, it is clear where the sense of dissonance and disturbance comes from. For example, in ‘the pavements of cities are covered with needles’, the priming is likely to be something like: ‘the pavements of cities are covered with ...’ [*leaves, snow, gold*]. Upon ‘needles’, the domains activated are likely to be those perhaps of intravenous drug-use, or an image of millions of scattered pins and needles. In my own mind, the needles were embedded and facing dangerously and violently upwards. In ‘the reservoirs are full of human hair’, we might be primed for [*water, algae, fish*], so the effect of invoking a domain of human hair is to re-imagine the uncanny or grotesque reservoir itself. In each case, the effect of the domain-association of the final disjunctive word is to modify the domain set up by the initial, ordinary phrase. So these pavements are not ordinary, but dirty or dangerous. These reservoirs are not clean and pure but disturbing.

The syntax of the partitive expression *the x of the y* primes up a familiar and metonymic specification, but the unexpected content of the *y* element is more akin, then, to a striking metaphorical proposition (‘white curtains’ and ‘infinite fatigue’ ordinarily belong to different conceptual domains). In this respect, the end-point has a similar effect as that demonstrated in the Davies poem – interweave expected forms and meanings with dissonant ones. Although the specific stylistic tactic in each case is different, the overall strategy is the same. Dissonance cannot be total, or it would be rendered simply as unreadable. Instead, different forms of xenonymy are presented within a familiar syntax so that the dissonant elements are anchored to the everyday by a framing consonance.

The excerpt from the opening given above ends with a full-stop: ‘out of which bloodred lilies appear.’ (Gascoyne 1933: 10) – one of only two items of punctuation in the poem – the other is a stop right at the end (see below). Otherwise, there is no punctuation in the poem at all. However, most of my readers report being able to ‘read-in’ the punctuation as a result of the clear syntax across the text. Without the line breaks, the opening would be something like this:

White curtains of infinite fatigue, dominating the starborn heritage of the colonies of St Francis – white curtains of tortured destinies, inheriting the calamities of the plagues of the desert – encourage the waistlines of women to expand, and the eyes of men to enlarge like pocket-cameras, teach children to sin at the age of five, to cut out the eyes of their sisters with nail-scissors, to run into the streets and offer themselves to unfrocked priests, teach insects to invade the deathbeds of rich spinsters, and to engrave the foreheads of their footmen with purple signs; for the year is open, the year is complete, the

year is full of unforeseen happenings, and the time of earthquakes is at hand. Today is the day when the streets are full of hearses, and when women cover their ring fingers with pieces of silk, when the doors fall off their hinges in ruined cathedrals, when hosts of white birds fly across the ocean from america and make their nests in the trees of public gardens. The pavements of cities are covered with needles. The reservoirs are full of human hair. Fumes of sulphur envelop the houses of ill-fame, out of which bloodred lilies appear.

Rendering it in this form seems to capture the main intonational emphases that my readers gave the excerpt when they read it aloud. As you can see, it is fairly easy to discern a reasonably straightforward syntax. The opening repetition of 'white curtains...' is simply an appositional noun-phrase waiting for the main verb 'encourage.' There are a series of non-finite dependent clauses which follow: 'to expand,' 'to enlarge,' '[to] teach,' 'to cut out,' 'to run ... and [to] offer,' '[to] teach,' 'to engrave.' After that complex sentence, the sentences which follow are syntactically more and more straightforward, such as the two simple single-clause sentences towards the end.

The fact that the poem looks at a glance very odd (the excerpt of the original text above preserves the original font style and layout), but becomes fairly easily readable once a reader engages it, seems to me to be one source of the pleasure of this text. It is not exactly a puzzle to be solved, and certainly there remains enough semantic dissonance for a plain resolution to be unlikely, but there is an element of satisfactory accomplishment in being able to read it at all. The internal semantics in the repeated partitive expressions seem to me to be part of this relative ease. There are patterns and connections here enough for a reader not to be completely disorientated.

The poem ends on its final page as follows:

so that wreaths of passion-flowers were floating in the darkness
 giving terrible illnesses to the possessors of pistols
 so that large quantities of rats disguised as pigeons
 were sold to various customers from neighbouring towns
 who were adepts at painting gothic letters on screens
 and at tying up parcels with pieces of grass
 we told them to cut off the buttons on their trousers
 but they swore in our faces and took off their shoes
 whereupon the whole place was stifled with vast clouds of smoke
 and with theatres and eggshells and droppings of eagles
 and the drums of the hospitals were broken like glass
 and glass were the faces in the last looking-glass.

(Gascoyne 1933: 12)

It would be much harder to render this passage in familiarly punctuated syntactic form. The conjunctions and connectives make the clausal structure far more complex and embedded. The effect is an exponential complication of the domain-mappings required across the accumulated images. There seems to be a sort of narrative underlying this passage, but there are uncertainties in assigning co-reference to 'them' (passion

flowers? possessors of pistols? various customers?). There is a great deal of prepositional complexity in evidence, which has been increasingly varied through the poem after the initially predominant *of*-prepositional phrases. All of the prepositions (*of, in, to, of, of, as, to, from, at, on, at, with, of* just across the first six lines) generate image-schematic profiling in slightly different ways, and so the conceptual scaffolding of the poem is much more complex and less stable than the opening. This generates more confusion when the semantic dissonances of the disjunctive phrases are also considered. In other words, the poem begins – like the Davies text – with a combination of everyday anchoring and striking images, but it ends with no stability in either dimension. It achieves the shift gradually, though, so that in fact the ending of the poem appears not so much a shock as a natural and inevitable progression from where we started. The four final lines following ‘whereupon’ seem to suggest a resolution, or an overall (‘the whole’) coda, but what appears are rapid phrases from wildly disparate domains. The connections are tenuous (theatrical smoke, eagles’ eggs, dropping shells, military drums, hospital theatre, broken bones) or purely phonetic and echoic (*eggshells eagles, droppings drums*, and the sibilants and liquids and voiced /g/ and unvoiced /k/ in the last line). The final broken looking-glass image is one of the entire poem: reflexive and shattered.

I have focused closely on two poems from the London Surrealist Group in this chapter, with different particular stylistic techniques, but there is a general rhetorical pattern that is characteristic of surrealist poetry. There is semantic disruption at the phrasal, or phonetic levels, but often a relative stability at more prosodic or syntactic levels. In other words, we have a local dissonance but a cumulative consonance, and the combination of the two in different patterns in different poems offers the reader something both discomforting but attractive and compelling.

6 Collage

Collage and its adaptations

The dissonant effect of placing incongruous elements side by side, explored in the previous chapter, can be regarded as a verbal form of the visual technique of *collage*. Literally ‘gluing’, collage became a widespread and highly influential technique far beyond its origins in cubism and in visual art. Collage can be identified as a compositional factor in a great deal of modernist and postmodernist artistic activity, including sculpture, film, and music. It can also be understood as a fundamental compositional technique in surrealist writing. This will be explored in this chapter.

Throughout this book, I have repeatedly noted lines of surrealist thinking in which the surrealist method, the surrealist intention, and the surrealist image have been the key notions, and the particular mode of expression secondary to this overarching frame. This is absolutely not to neglect the specific form of articulation – which of course is essential and central to this book on the language of surrealism – but the notion that the surrealist image underlies all surrealist activity and output allows for ready connections and continuities to be made across different artistic forms. With respect to collage, Sweet (2003), for example, makes the case for correlations between surrealist poetry and the visual collage technique. He emphasises collage as a painterly method, but in this chapter I will consider it as a process that can be applied not only to the placement of paint but also to the positioning of other material and verbal, as well as visual, components. Though automaticity has been privileged as the driving force of surrealism (largely thanks to Breton’s use of the term: see [Chapter 4](#)), collage can be seen as its twin dynamic, with equally wide-ranging effects.

The collage technique has remained at the heart of surrealism throughout its history. Adamowicz (1998: 11) claims that, ‘as a mode of perception or production, it is at the very centre of surrealist activities and thought’. She makes a distinction, here, between collage as a creative technique of production and collage as a creative technique of perception, and she relates these two modes to the differing but complementary approaches adopted by André Breton and Louis Aragon respectively. She claims Breton sees collage as a dialectical resolution, while for Aragon collage remains disjunctive and metaphorical (Adamowicz 1998: 25). This difference will be explored in [Chapter 9](#) in considering the effect of reading surrealism either metaphorically or literally. In this chapter, though, I consider the different correlates of the painterly techniques around collage in relation to poetic writing.

The artistic positioning of elements is the fundamental motivation and method of all art, from handprints on cave walls to the accumulation of marble tiles in ancient Roman

mosaics. Any intervention in the natural geography of the world constitutes an artifice, where the traditional intended effect is an aim at artistic beauty. Even consonance requires two elements to be positioned next to each other such that those elements' differences from each other create a pleasing interanimation or perceivedly apt whole. All such techniques rely on contrasting texture for their pleasing effects: the sculpting of hard marble or bronze to show the softness of the human body, the difference between the foreground and background colours on a carved cameo, the sound-effect of similar word-endings of different words in poetic rhyme. Throughout the history of art, the practice of cutting out shapes and placing them together has been a persisting method. *Découpage* (the technique of pasting a cut-out picture onto a piece of pottery or wooden box) has its origins in 12th century China and in Venice and Florence in the 17th century. *Marquetry* (the creation of mosaic patterns and pictures from intricately cut veneers of different shades of wood) was a Renaissance development of marble and stone *inlays* from antiquity, applied to decorative flooring, wall adornment, and the ornamentation of domestic objects such as boxes, vases, pots, and lamps.

All of these methods aim for an overall pleasing and proportional effect. Surrealistic collage depends, instead, on an initial or surface disjunction between the elements. Surrealism took collage from its precursor movements Dada and cubism, but (like its adaptation of automaticity from the mediums and music-halls) it turned it into its own signature technique. In the hands of cubists like Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso between 1909 and 1914, collage became a means by which a represented object could be segmented and reassembled as it truly was – viewed simultaneously from all angles. Picasso was already incorporating material objects into his paintings; Braque invented the *papier-collé* technique of pasting scraps of paper into the pictures. Working together from the summer of 1911 onwards, they produced a range of paintings that emphasised the artificial flatness and therefore constructedness of the canvas, even while representing an object in simultaneous three dimensions. Cubism working with collage drew attention to the painting as an art object in its own right, while at the same time undermining the single, unique, individual viewpoint of the artist. Between Braque and Picasso, collage began as a collaborative method, but was taken up by a range of other visual artists for their own purposes. It was initially devised as a means of closing the gap between art and reality by borrowing objects themselves. Others, such as Max Ernst, George Grosz, Henri Matisse, Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, and, most successfully, Kurt Schwitters, put metro tickets, newspaper cuttings, concert programmes, and other *objets trouvés* into their paintings. Like such 'found objects' in sculpture, collage resists the glorification of the artist while insisting on the enhanced super-reality of the represented world through the medium of art.

One of Braque's first collage paintings, *Plat de fruit et verre* ('Fruit dish and glass', 1912), contains representations of wood panelling, grapes, and glasses, but also the words 'BAR' and 'ALE' written in charcoal. Collage, then, from the beginning, was multimodal in the sense of bringing together elements from the material and the linguistic domains. Early within surrealism, Max Ernst and Paul Eluard (1922) published *Répétitions*, a collection of 35 poems with 11 illustrative pictures interspersed between them. Though each picture individually is a collage, the book as a whole can be taken as a single complex collage

of picture and language. There are correspondences between picture and text, but the whole seems to appear seamless. There are, as the title suggests, a great deal of repeated phrases throughout the book, but the point of them is to show that each occurrence is a variation, slightly different from the last. The new context for each iteration renders each one new and different. Of course, the same can be said of the collage technique in general: in taking an image or phrase from its original context and placing it in another place, the nature of the fragment is thrown into relief, while both the original and the new frames are brought simultaneously to mind.

Later the same year, Eluard and Ernst also produced *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (The Misfortunes of the Immortals, 1922), this time a more integrated collection of 20 poems and parallel images on facing pages. The front page insists the book is '*révélés par*' Eluard and Ernst, meaning that it has been 'revealed' or disclosed by them, as well as embedding the echoic sense that it has also been 'dreamed' (*rêvé*) by them. Either way, and while denying the difference between reality and dream, the content of the book is presented as a tangible reality in the world which has merely been discovered by the authors. The text in *Les Malheurs des Immortels* was composed by Eluard in response to images he had been sent by Ernst; neither adjusted their own work after seeing the other's.

In the image on the penultimate double-page, *La rencontre de deux sourires* ('The meeting of two smiles'), in a small cubic room, a man in a dress-coat with the head of an eagle leans over a seated bride with the face of a sphinx and a wide butterfly headdress; she holds a large fan like a webbed foot; a salamander or snake threads behind her long dress, and below her feet on the floor is a spread-out newspaper. On the right-hand facing page is the text:

La rencontre de deux sourires

Dans le royaume des coiffeurs, les heureux ne perdent pas tout leur temps à être mariés. Au delà de la coquetterie des guéridons, les pattes des canards abrègent les cris d'appel des dames blanches. Dans la manche du violon, vous trouverez les cris des grillons. Dans la manche du manchot, vous trouverez le philtre pour se faire tuer. Vous serez étonnés de retrouver la splendeur de vos miroirs dans les ongles des aigles. Regardez ces petits serpents canonisés qui, à la veille de leur premier bal, lancent du sperme avec leurs seins. La richesse a tellement troublé leurs ambitions qu'ils posent des énigmes éternelles aux antiquaires qui passent. Ecoutez les soupirs de ces femmes coiffées en papillon.

(Eluard and Ernst 1922: 16)

The meeting of two smiles

In the realm of the hairdressers, the fortunate do not waste their time being married. Beyond the coquettishness of occasional tables, the ducks' feet cut short the cries for help of the banshees. In the neck of the violin, you will find the cries of crickets. In the sleeve of the penguin, you will find the potion to kill yourself. You will be surprised to find the splendour of your mirrors in the claws of eagles. Look at these little saintly serpents which, on the eve of their first ball, throw sperm with their breasts. Wealth has

so disturbed their ambitions that they pose eternal enigmas to the antique dealers who pass by. Listen to the sighs of these women coiffed in butterflies.

The French original is reproduced here in order to demonstrate the echoic sound effects that permeate the passage: 'cris des grillons,' 'manche du manchot,' 'philtre ... faire tuer,' 'ces petits serpents.' These echoic repetitions tie the passage together, and turn idiosyncratic phrases into apparently cohesive units. Similarly, repeated phrases ('Dans la manche du violon ... Dans la manche du manchot') create a sense of cohesive textuality. This last example even creates a parallelism between a violin and a penguin that might invoke a similarity of shape between the two. I have to translate *manche* as the 'neck' of the violin but as the 'sleeve' of the penguin, so of course the English rendering loses the exact lexical repetition. Even though the alliterative sound of 'cris des grillons' is actually better in the English version 'cries of crickets,' in both versions the association of crickets playing their wings like violin bows is rendered possible.

Also, certain phrases have multiple referents, and echo the collage. So 'dames blanches' are literally white ladies, as in the figure of the seated woman in the dress on the facing page, but the phrase also references a French rural myth of malevolent female spirits (I chose 'banshees') who lurk by the roadsides of Lorraine and Normandy. In this way, the seated woman in the picture is given an extra cultural resonance by the facing text. 'Papillon,' meaning 'butterfly' was also the name that surrealists gave to their leaflets and the flyers advertising surrealist events around Paris. Other items that are enigmatic in the illustration are clarified by the text: at first glance, it is difficult, because of the inappropriately large size, to make out that the fan-like object on the woman's lap is a big webbed foot – the *pattes des canards* offer a resolution. Similarly, the scene appears visually very threatening, with a looming eagle-headed man over a delicate-looking woman in a confined space, but the text reconfigures the room as a hairdressing salon.

Ernst's illustrations on the verso pages of *Les Malheurs des Immortels* are often removed and displayed in isolation as examples of surrealist images. However, the collage is not just within the illustrative plates but is the entire combination of text and image on verso and recto together. Eluard's text and Ernst's visuals (and also the font and layout of the text, strictly speaking) need to be considered as a single, interactive unit. Furthermore, the book might look like it consists of 20 separate pages of text and image, but of course the whole thing has the sort of cross-textual references and echoes mentioned above that tie it all together as a unified whole.

As collage developed, the surrealists moved away from Braque's early *papier-collé* technique and rediscovered Picasso's method of gluing in solid material objects, such as oilcloths, brushes, boxes and other items. This was a decisive move away from cubism, since it destroyed the essentially flat canvas and rejected the representational principle in favour of the three-dimensional objects themselves. Surrealism, again, was insisting on reality rather than representation. The Berlin Dadaists and surrealists were especially active in this. George Grosz and Kurt Schwitters in particular used political leaflets, cartoons, and the everyday objects of city litter to make increasingly targeted political

statements against fascism and Nazism. Max Ernst and Man Ray, in Paris, increasingly used *photomontage* as a collage technique in order to use one photorealist picture to shock and convulse another placed next to it. Somehow realist photographs were less representational than figurative painting, and their juxtapositioning served as the entry point to the surreal image.

Other combinatory painterly techniques include *aerography* (spray-painting over a stencil or another object), *frottage* (rubbing a pencil or charcoal onto paper which is pressed against a textured object or plate), and *fumage* – a technique invented by the Austrian artist Wolfgang Paalen, involving the play of candle soot and smoke over a canvas and then overpainting in oil. The ethereal and misty results were exhibited as part of the 1938 International Exhibition of Surrealism at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Paris. Fumage in particular was intended as a painterly counterpart to the accidental and unconscious creations of automaticity, but all of these painterly techniques can also be seen as experiments in the transitions of textured forms. They are all essentially collagistic.

Creative and destructive dialectics

Where the methods mentioned above are combinatory and additive, other collage techniques can be regarded as negational, or requiring a joint process of creation and destruction. Cubist representation developed in surrealism into a *cubomania* – an often frantic cutting into squares of a prior image, leaflet, photograph, magazine, newspaper or painting, and reassembling the outcome, either randomly or in a trance-like state. Cubes (strictly speaking, squares) of paper would be cut, regardless of the boundaries or edges of the image already existing on the paper. Shapes more random than cubes could also be used in this cut-up technique, where square scraps might be regarded as too regulated. Where the prior object was itself a text, the method of *cutups* involved actual cutting with scissors and pasting the text into a random re-order with glue: modern cut-and-paste has become much easier with word-processing technology. The cutup technique was practised by Tristan Tzara, and by Gertrude Stein, whose Saturday evening meetings (literary ‘salons’) at 27 Rue de Fleurus attracted Picasso, Braque, René Crevel, Francis Picabia, Henri Matisse, and of course Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and other modernist writers who were passing through. The cutup technique was later enthusiastically adopted by William Burroughs.

Though never a member of the surrealist group, Stein had also been exploring automatic writing since the 1890s, and had written on these experiments in automaticity while a student of psychology at Harvard (Solomons and Stein 1896, Stein 1898). Her novel, *The Making of Americans*, published in Paris in 1925, sketches out in highly repetitive and incantatory style the histories of two families united by marriage. The narrative often jumps out of sequence, and is interspersed with autobiographical elements, and digressions on writing, fiction, and consciousness itself. These disjunctions can be regarded as narratological collages or cutups. In many respects the narrative and style

is strikingly similar to Breton's anti-novels *Nadja* or *Mad Love*. Here is an excerpt that is characteristic of the final section of the novel:

Any one can begin again doing anything, any one can begin again not doing something. Any one can go on not doing something. Any one can begin not doing something. Any one can have heard everything. Any one can hear everything. Any one can not like anything. Any one can know anything. Any one can go on hearing everything. Any one can go on having been hearing everything. Any one can hear anything. Any one can hear everything.

(Stein 1925: 914)

Barbara Will, commenting on this passage, describes the technique here, in which the possible meanings are

dispersed by an apparatus of repetition that both 'makes' and 'unmakes' its own premises at each new moment of the composition. This is a form of writing that is neither 'progressive' nor epiphanic but stuck in a kind of restless movement of beginning again and again, as though what mattered were not the verbal 'content' but the mechanical process, the hypnotic 'background of sound.' In the end, this writing points to nothing but the rhythms of its own ever-erratic repetitive process.

(Will 2001: 171)

It is certainly true that the passage – and much of the novel around it – can become merely a sound-effect and an incantation, but its associations with surrealism suggest that the meaning and content of the writing should also be taken seriously (indeed, this might also be true even if the novel is read in a modernist-readerly stance).

In this excerpt, each element of the initial sentence is cut out and recombined in a different sequence to render subsequent sentences. At the same time as this syntactic clipping, there is a semantic inversion of the quantifier opposites *any* and *some*, and *some* and *every*, and the opposite verbs *begin* and *go on*. There is a progression through experience: *doing*, *hearing*, *liking*, *knowing*. And there is a turning-over, cubist-like, of tense and aspect patterns to present an experience in a variety of perspectives simultaneously: *hear*, *go on hearing*, *go on having been hearing*. All of these experiential verbs are modalised with *can*, which places them not as active events but as prospective possibilities. The pronoun *anyone* is split into 'Any one', and the difference between the two is a rejection of vagueness and indefiniteness towards singularity and identification. If you do not simply read this for the hypnotic sound, but concentrate on the propositional content, you soon realise that the combination of all of these elements is not, in fact, a simple 'making' and 'unmaking' as Will would have it, but a more cumulative creation, destruction and synthesis that charts a more subtle complexity. In the first sentence, for example, the interplay of *anything/something* together with the second negated clause means that the second clause is not merely the contradiction of the first. This dialectic pattern of progression is sustained throughout the excerpt.

Collage, in other words, involves both destruction and recombinatory creation. The particular cutup technique with respect to writing was set out by Tristan Tzara in his 'Dada manifesto on feeble love and bitter love' in 1920:

VIII

Pour faire un poème dadaïste

Prenez un journal.

Prenez des ciseaux.

Choisissez dans ce journal un article ayant la longueur que vous comptez donner à votre poème.

Découpez l'article.

Découpez ensuite avec soin chacun des mots qui forment cet article et mettez-les dans un sac.

Agitez doucement.

Sortez ensuite chaque coupure l'une après l'autre.

Copiez consciencieusement dans l'ordre où elles ont quitté le sac.

Le poème vous ressemblera.

Et vous voilà un écrivain infiniment original et d'une sensibilité charmante,
encore qu'incomprise du vulgaire.

VIII

To make a dadaist poem

Take a newspaper.

Take some scissors.

Choose from this newspaper an article of the length you want to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Next carefully cut out each of the words that compose the article and put them all in a bag.

Shake gently.

Next take out each cut-out one after the other.

Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.

The poem will resemble you.

And there you are – an infinitely original writer of charming sensibility,
still misunderstood by the vulgar.

This was published in Francis Picabia's Dada and surrealist Magazine 391, and followed a poetry reading by Tzara in which he followed this technique and caused uproar in the audience. Unlike the creative products of the method (examples given below), the instructions are entirely procedural and rational in style until the last three lines, from 'The poem will resemble you' onwards. This is the point at which the technique connects with the surrealist view of access to unconscious identity, rather than being a simple parlour game. The final instruction switches to a heavily sarcastic tone, at odds with the register associated with 'gently' and 'conscientiously'. Tzara's method is also called the *latent news* technique, pointing to the notion that the collaged product was in fact a more objective revelation of the real news, underlying the original newspaper version. The claim is that it is the original news that is the fabrication.

Of course, the set of instructions is often treated at face-value as a method or recipe (a '*recette*') for creating a text. However, at this point we should recall the similar effect of viewing one of René Magritte's variations on his painting featuring an object like a pipe (or apple), with the words 'Ceci ne'est pas une pipe' (*This is not a pipe* – this painting is

entitled 'La trahison des images,' *The treachery of images*, 1929). It is, of course, literally true that the painting of a pipe is not an actual pipe – it is a drawing of a pipe. However, the words "This is not a pipe" are also drawn onto the canvas, so if the image of the pipe is not the literal pipe, then neither are the words the literal words – they too are simply drawings of words. In other words, the entire canvas has to be read as a drawing, and the relationship of the drawn words to the drawn image is not a simple referential one.

In the Tzara text above, the imperatives are not necessarily a set of instructions, but can also be read within the frame of being a poem. After all, the last three lines break the register of a set of instructions in various ways: future aspect, conversational 'there you are' (*vous voilà*), extravagant adjectival evaluation, ending with an ironic reference outward to the world of the reader's society. The line 'To make a dadaist poem' is often treated by anthologies as the title of the text, but in fact it is merely the first line within the poem, which itself appears as item VIII under the title 'Dada manifesto on feeble love and bitter love.' As again with the Magritte painting, the status of the word 'poem' in this line is recursively paradoxical: if the text is a straightforward set of instructions, then the word 'poem' is referential; but if the word is referential, then the text surrounding it is in fact a poem; but if the text as a whole is then a poem, then the word 'poem' is not referential but poetic; but if then 'poetic' is poetic and not referential, then the text is a straightforward set of instructions. And so on.

Attempts by later post-structuralists to account for such recursions largely failed because they were built upon the post-Lacanian misreadings of Saussure (see [Chapter 3](#)). Michel Foucault, for example, produced an extended essay on Magritte's painting in which he tries to explain the paradoxical sense of familiar presence and felt absence in surrealism generally (Foucault 1983). While he captures the double sense of familiarity and oddness in the painting, he tries to account for it by delineating a difference between *resemblance* and *similitude*:

To me it appears that Magritte dissociated similitude from resemblance, and brought the former into play against the latter. Resemblance has a 'model,' an original element that orders and hierarchizes the increasingly less faithful copies that can be struck from it. Resemblance presupposes a primary reference that prescribes and classes. The similar develops in series that have neither beginning nor end, that can be followed in one direction as easily as in another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences. Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar.

(Foucault 1983: 44)

Resemblances, in other words, are referential (from word to thing); whereas similitude is a space in which free-floating and arbitrary signifiers gesture only to each other. Foucault here, with limited linguistics, is trying to capture the paradoxical nature of simultaneous familiarity and oddness. Magritte's drawing of a pipe is like a pipe, but it is an odd pipe, at odds with the words below it, and oddly drawn in a not-quite-photorealist style. But it is not the arbitrariness of reference in linguistics that captures this; instead it is the felt absence of a familiar object that has been removed from awareness at the same time as its

creation. Magritte's 'pipe/not pipe effect,' and Tzara's 'poem/instructions effect' are both examples of a collagistic setting that involves simultaneous creation and destruction.

Le Bon (2005) collected several examples of texts created by this collaging cutup method by a range of surrealists (these 19 examples also appear as an archived footnote to the 1920 journal issue in the current manifestation of *391* at www.391.org):

when dogs cross the air in a diamond like ideas and the appendix of the meninx tells
 the time of the alarm programme prices they are yesterday suitable next pictures
 appreciate the dream era of the eyes
 pompously that to recite the gospel sort darkens
 group apotheosis imagine said he fatality power of colours
 carved flies (in the theatre) flabbergasted reality a delight
 spectator all to effort of the no more 10 to 12
 during divagation twirls descends pressure
 render some mad single-file flesh on a monstrous crushing stage
 celebrate but their 160 adherents in steps on put on my nacreous
 sumptuous of land bananas sustained illuminate
 joy ask together almost
 of has the a such that the invoked visions
 some sings latter laughs
 exits situation disappears describes she 25 dance bows
 dissimulated the whole of it isn't was
 magnificent has the band better light whose lavishness stage music-halls me
 reappears following instant moves live
 business he didn't has lent
 manner words come these people

(Le Bon 2005, and www.391.org)

Collage (unlike much automaticity) thus disrupts the syntax. Several of these texts are anomalous as far as an ordinary sense of well-formed syntax is concerned. However, even here there is an effect in which they seem to make a sort of sense. In 'some sings latter laughs,' a cause-and-effect narrative can be read into the two parts, with 'sings' and 'laughs' being parsed as present active verb forms. In 'joy ask together almost,' a narrative about an unrequited relationship can be interpreted. In 'during divagation twirls descends pressure,' a framing field of an aircraft losing control can be overlaid onto the sentence to make it make sense.

One reason why the cutup technique often produces texts that in some way still hang together is that the original words and phrases will be from a coherent text, and the

coherence of that original text will have been a product of the word-choices it contains, deriving from a consistent semantic frame. So the cutup might reorganise the syntax, disrupting it, but the semantic field associations of the individual words and phrases remain intact and remain echoic of one another. More challenging would be to read all of the examples above, randomly collected here, and try to discern a consistent thread across them. Of course, then, the consistency is the fact of their repeated syntactic disruption.

Methods such as cubomania, cutups, and latent news were being developed alongside painterly techniques that aimed for a similar conceptual effect. *Éclaboussure* (spattering) involved pouring turpentine or bleach over a painted canvas to destroy and distort in fluid patterns the painting underneath: the technique was used to great effect by the surrealist painter Remedios Varo. She is also credited (among many others) with inventing the poetic collage technique the *cadavres exquis*, ‘exquisite corpse’ game (see below). *Decalcomania* involved placing cutup scraps onto wet paint, overpainting them and then removing them to reveal a patchwork of shapes underneath: it was used extensively by Varo’s close friend the fellow Spanish surrealist painter Oscar Domínguez. *Grattage*, or scraping, was invented by Max Ernst in the form of painting over a textured surface and then scraping parts of the paint away to reveal bits of the substrate. *Étré-cissements* or *décollage* is a sort of subtractive collage, in which shapes are cut out of the surface, or objects are excised to leave a gap the shape of the missing object.

Each of these techniques involves the creation of a plane and then its destruction to reveal an underlying texture. In poetic terms, the same effect can be felt in all texts that feature heavy stylistic negations. As I have explored in detail elsewhere (Stockwell 2009b), a strong negational element is central to Dylan Thomas’ surrealist-leaning poetry from this period. The negational experience of poems such as ‘And death shall have no dominion’ (in Thomas 1936) can be identified as a *lacuna* effect, in which the negated element takes on a strong readerly sense of a felt absence. A lacuna is created when a concept is removed from the forefront of consciousness in a text, but of course that negation is itself a foregrounding technique. The effect left in the reader is that a figural hole with the outline shape of the negated element is left very much in conscious awareness. A clear example can be found in the line ‘their words had forked no lightning,’ from Thomas’ (1936) poem ‘Do not go gentle into that good night’. The poem begins:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

(Thomas 1936)

Here, the impression of lightning is left prominently in a reader’s conscious awareness, even at the same time as its disappearance, because of the negational particle. Of course, there is a neat iconic stylistic pattern here too, in that the ‘flash reference’ involved, leaving a trace image of the lightning, is exactly the visual effect of lightning itself.

A lacuna effect can be created by a range of negational stylistic features, including particle negation as in this example, but also by predicate-negation ('Do not go gentle'), qualitatively negative predicates ('burn and rave,' 'Rage, rage ...'), negative conjunctions ('Though'), negatively oriented lexis ('dying,' 'old,' and even 'dark' and 'close'), and other features not illustrated here such as negative exclamations (*oh no*), negative particles (*not, nor*), and negative prefixes (*remove, undo*): see Stockwell 2009a: 36 for an extensive list and discussion. It could also be argued that a lacuna effect is created by any stylistic feature which generates a switch in readerly attention from the existing world in focus to another state of affairs. So modalisations (as in 'Old age should burn and rave') generate a shift in attention from, in this case, what is to what ought to be – and that shift involves the fleeting negation of the first level of existence. In fact, the effect in the poem of this modalisation in this line is precisely to foreground the current situation in which old age is *not* burning and raving at close of day. This is the felt absence of a lacuna.

I have argued, drawing on cognitive psychological evidence (Stockwell 2009a, 2009b), that a conceptual lacuna in a literary work is the same as a negational figure in perception. When some object is perceived as missing, or having been cut out of a framing field of view, then the hole or gap is perceived as a coherent object: a figure (although a negational one) against the framing ground. The hole, in other words, is a definite object, which retains the conceptual properties of the content that has been removed. Negation is a well-known foregrounding effect, and this cognitive linguistic account neatly explains its workings. Furthermore, it is understood that figures (not grounds) have edges, and those edges belong to the figures. In short, readers (and viewers) attend to the figure, even if the figure has been removed, and we treat the missing object as a positively definite object, even at the same time as realising that it is not actually there.

In a 1929 essay, 'La poésie est une pipe,' published in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, René Magritte set out a series of propositions with pictorial illustrations of the relationships between objects, images, and words. Among these are statements such as:

An image can take the place of a word in a proposition.

An object makes one suppose that there are other objects behind it ...

In a painting, words have the same substance as images.

One sees images and words differently in a painting ...

An object never fills the same space as its name or its image.

At first, the visible edges of objects, in reality, touch as if they form a mosaic.

Vague images have a meaning as necessary and perfect as precise images.

(translated from Magritte 1929: 53)

The penultimate assertion in the list above is accompanied by a line drawing in which the profiles of a face, a tree, and a wall seem to occlude different clouds. The boundaries where the cloud meets the foregrounded object share the same single pencil line: the forefront is drawn in two dimensions. Magritte seems careful to point out that this flat mosaic dimension is a surface appearance only ('At first... visible... in reality... as if'), since earlier he draws a brick wall and points out that 'an object makes one suppose that there are other objects behind it.' There are key points here: the common edges of figures and grounds seem to belong to the figure (it has a closed boundary), while the ground is rendered formless by the figuration (see Haber and Hershenson 1980); the

ground is assumed to be continuous behind the figure; and there is a gradation of depth from profile, to cloud, to the blank background. These observations are entirely in keeping with current cognitive poetic understanding. Returning to the Tzara cutup ‘poem/instructions effect’ above, the simultaneous presence and removal of words and their reconstitution can be understood as a positive, definite lacuna.

As a last example of the lacunal effects of persistent surrealist negation, here is a poem by Alice Paalen, published originally in 1936:

A woman who was beautiful
 one day
 removed her face
 her head became smooth
 blind and deaf
 safe from the snares of mirrors
 and from looks of love

amid the reeds of the sun
 her head hatched by a sparrowhawk could not be found

secrets much more beautiful
 for not having been said
 words not written
 steps erased
 nameless ashes flown away
 without marble plaque
 desecrating memory

so many wings to break
 before nightfall

(Alice Paalen 1936: 1-2, trans. Mary Ann Caws 2002: 92)

Characterised by a ‘lyrical sadness [... Paalen’s poetry] produces a feeling of musical disconnectedness and an all-pervading sense of loss,’ according to Colville (1996: 97-8). Indeed, the trope of absence and removal is prominent in this poem. It begins as if conventionally: ‘removed her face’ could be idiomatic for the removal of make-up, and then conceivably the smoothness of her head would be like taking off a wig. However, this literal, rational framing cannot be sustained across the rest of the poem.

The poem moves in its middle parts to a pattern of fleeting references. Noun-references are placed first (‘secrets,’ ‘words,’ ‘steps’), only to be subsequently defeated (‘not having been said,’ ‘not written,’ ‘erased’). Note that the progression here is from predicate-negation (‘not’) to the use of a semantically negational verb (‘erased’). Thereafter, the negational process is syntactically moved up and made more prominent. Premodification makes the ‘ashes’ already ‘nameless,’ even before they are ‘flown away’; we are already ‘without’ the ‘marble plaque’; the memory has already been desecrated.

Of course, the evocation of the woman initially is stylistically highly fleeting: ‘A woman.’ She is given only one lexicalised trait (‘who was beautiful’) which, even in the tense of

its articulation, is rendered into the past. In other words, the positive evocation is rather minimal. However, the sense of the woman by the end of the poem seems to me to be contrastively and surprisingly rather rich, but all of the additional traits and qualities are added negationally. The echoic sense that the woman is either transformed into or is really subconsciously a bird is effected throughout not by direct assertion but by association: 'her head became smooth' like an egg, 'her head hatched' like an egg, there are 'snares', and 'a sparrowhawk', she is 'amid the reeds', ashes have 'flown away', and there are 'wings to break'.

Though the shifting of the woman towards a bird is unremitting and consistent, it is clear that it is a choice that she makes and with which she seems content. She, actively, 'removed her face', as if in order to be 'safe', in order to preserve her 'secrets' and even render them 'much more beautiful'. The final two lines, introduced by 'so', capture her wilful intention – here 'so' is an intensifier (*very* 'many wings to break'), but the word also has an echoic semantics of consequence (*therefore* I will have 'many wings to break').

The opening 'one day' and the closing 'before nightfall', and the journey from egg to death and memorial all suggest the poem encompasses the passage of a day, conventionally presented as the passage of a lifetime. The poem could have been read as a life-changing move towards freedom, casting off social conventions and customs ('the snares of mirrors' and the 'looks of love'), but there is an elegiac tone to the poem, and the 'sense of loss' that Colville (1996) identifies. This is conveyed largely not so much by any single word or phrase (though the final 'fall' in 'nightfall' is both elegiac and echoic of the fall of flight of a bird), but rather by the overall negational technique. Through this, the figure of the woman remains prominent, even as she is in the process of being dismantled and erased. She becomes a figural lacuna, a felt absence. The strongly resonant sense of the woman's unconscious desires and intentions and feelings remains as a result. This is evocative creation out of negation – still recognisably an assembled collage technique, though an inverse, decollaged one.

Collaging authorial intention

With the collage technique in poetry, there can be little appeal to authorial intention. Elements of the collage have an origin and provenance that are recognisably distinct and prior to the composition of the poem in hand. For a reader who is aware of this provenance, the authorial function is one of assembly, rather than judicious artfulness. The game or procedure of the 'Exquisite corpse' (*cadavre exquis*) is the primary example of this. There have been several claims as to the invention of the game, but there are different accounts which show that for several years the surrealists had enjoyed creating random clashes of lines while playing the game *petits papiers* – a French version of the English parlour game 'Consequences'. This involves writing down *a man's name, who met a woman's name, what he wore, what she wore, what they said, what were the consequences, and what did the world say*, each on a folded piece of paper so that the previous line cannot be read by the next author. A similar game can be played by drawing a head, shoulders, arms and torso, legs, and feet on folded paper to create a funny composite

person or creature. In the French version, individual phrases or words could also be chained, as well as narrative sentences (see Kochhar-Lindgren et al. 2009).

According to similar accounts given by both Breton and his then wife Simone Collinet, the first time the surrealist group realised the significance of the game as a means of accessing unconscious thought was at a meeting in 1925 at 54 rue du Château (the precision of such details testifies to the surrealists' serious view of how the game could be used for scientific exploration). Collinet describes how *petits papiers* was being played, when Jacques Prévert suggested abandoning the 'he said/she said' rules and instead simply writing whatever came to mind. Prévert wrote the initial phrase 'Le cadavre exquis,' another wrote 'boira,' and a third wrote 'le vin nouveau' (*The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine*). Prévert's phrase gave its name to the surrealist procedure, which became extremely popular. Collinet, writing in an exhibition catalogue in 1968, recalls the immediate effect:

Even more reliably than with automatic writing, one was sure of jarring amalgams. Violent surprises prompted admiration, laughter, and stirred an unquenchable craving for new images – images inconceivable to one brain alone – born from the involuntary, unconscious and unpredictable mixing of three or four heterogenous minds. Some sentences took on an aggressively subversive existence. Others veered into an excessive absurdity. The wastepaper basket played its part. One tends to forget that.

The fact remains that the suggestive power of these arbitrary juxtapositions of words was so startling and dazzling and validated surrealist theories and inclinations in such a striking way that the game became a system, a method of research, a means of exaltation and stimulus, a mine, a treasure-trove and finally, perhaps, a drug.

(Collinet 1991: 144)

It is clear from her wry comment about the wastepaper basket that, unlike pure automaticity, the effects of *exquisite corpse* collaging required editorial evaluation and filtering right from the inception of the game as a surrealist research method. Different outcomes of the procedure were regarded as more or less successful insights into the unconscious workings of the mind, some of which were more 'startling and dazzling' than others. She suggests here too that some later were to become addicted to the process and the game, rather than engaged more properly with the system that was imagined to underlie it.

Breton, also writing in an exhibition catalogue, in 1948, observed that

what excited us about these productions was the assurance that, for better or worse, they bore the mark of something which could not be created by one brain alone, and that they were endowed by a much greater *leeway*, which cannot be too highly valued by poetry. Finally, with the *Exquisite Corpse* we had at our command an infallible way of holding the critical intellect in abeyance, and of fully liberating the mind's metaphorical activity.

(Breton 1965: 95)

Breton, Char, and Eluard (1930) used the *exquisite corpse* method to create a whole book of poems, *Ralentir Travaux* ('Slow: Roadworks'), composed while on a trip to Avignon.

Issues 9 and 10 of the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* in October 1927 and issue 4 of *Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* in 1931 also included many examples:

The wounded women disturb the guillotine with blond hair.

Caraco is a lovely bitch: lazy as a dormouse and gloved in glass so as not to have to do a thing, she strings pearls to pay the piper.

The avenged topaz shall devour with kisses the paralytic of Rome.

The flame-coloured breast surpasses by one step, one finger, one mouthful, the melodious breasts.

The endless sex sleeps with the orthodox tongue.

(collected and translated by Gooding 1991: 25)

The rules of the game, of course, mean that the products are more orderly than with automatic writing. In these examples, for instance, as with most *exquisite corpse* sentences, an active noun-phrase in the subject role always appears in theme position at the beginning of the clause. The basic patterns of English (and French) dictate that this is almost always followed by an active verb-form, and that this verb agrees morphologically with the initial noun for number, tense and aspect (and gender, in French). The ongoing gaming context also dictates that very few sentences end there, intransitively; instead, there is almost always a further direct object or an instrumental, beneficiary or circumstantial role that follows the main verb. Furthermore, the noun-phrases tend rarely to be simplex (single noun headword), but instead are usually premodified (or postmodified more usually in French) with an adjective ('wounded', 'avenged', 'endless') or adjectival phrase ('flame-coloured'). Many *exquisite corpse* sentences begin with the definite article.

In other words, the rules of the game and the general principles and inclinations of gaming tend towards a certain sort of syntactic patterning for *exquisite corpse* sentences. This patterning is generally positively oriented, declarative, active, and additive in terms of noun-phrase, prepositional phrase, and adverbial phrase complexity. The authorial *chaining* procedure together with this generally additive effect is what makes the *exquisite corpse* an example of collagistic writing. Other 'Chain games', as set out by Gooding (1991: 24-31), include variants of the multiple-author process. In *Definitions* (first appearing in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, issue 11 in 1928), a question is written and then folded, and the second player writes an answer:

What is reason?

A cloud eaten by the moon.

Why go on living?

Because at prison gates only the keys sing.

(Gooding 1991: 26-7)

In *Conditionals* (from the Belgian journal *Variétés* in June 1929), a hypothetical clause is composed, and then a second consequential clause is written in the future or conditional tense (in the French), or using the English modal auxiliary *would*:

If there were no guillotine
Wasps would take off their corsets.

When children strike their fathers
All young people will have white hair.

(Gooding 1991: 28)

In both of these games, a speculative landscape is opened up, and then populated in a form that appears consequentially and logically presented, though there is, of course, a disjunction between the two states of affairs. Gooding (1991) collects a great many more chaining games, and other *echo games* which involve semantic procedures such as finding opposites in written sentences, creating mistranslations or transcribing misheard spoken content, or picking up defined linguistic elements in a text and repeating them with various transformations. In each case, the games remove intentional propositions from being encompassed by a single author, and instead they distribute the semantic consequence across a group of minds.

The ultimate expression of this is in the surrealist *chainpoem*. These were developed especially by the American surrealist Charles Henri Ford, who had been part of Gertrude Stein's circle in Paris in the 1930s and became closely associated with the surrealists; he edited the surrealist-leaning magazine *View* in New York for seven years after 1940. Ford was interested not only in creating a collaborative text across different minds, but also in dispersing those minds geographically across the world. Lines were composed and then, instead of being folded over and passed across a table, they were mailed to a writer in another country, who would add their line and post it on. The dispersal of authorial responsibility was thus a technique that evaded not only the single intentional consciousness but was also aimed at deflecting the influence of a single environment or culture. The collective unconscious was thus exposed in the text that was finally produced, and crucially it could be reconfigured by being read by a single reader located in a single place. Mind and place were consequently made fluid by the technique, and the collective could be intensified within the individual.

International Chainpoem

When a parasol is cooled in the crystal garden,
one spire radiates and the other turns round;
a toad, the Unwanted, counts the ribs' teardrops
while I mark each idol in its dregs.
There is a shredded voice, there are three fingers
that follow to the end a dancing gesture
and pose a legend under the turning shade
where the girl's waterfall drops its piece.
Then balls of ennui burst one by one,
by and by metallic metres escape from ceramic pipes.
Oh sun, glass of cloud, adrift in the vast sky,
spell me out a sonnet of a steel necklace.

(assembled by Ford 1940: 370)

In this example, Ford began the poem from Tokyo with a line each by Takesi Fuji and Katue Kitasono. He supplied the third line himself, after the poem was posted to him in Paris, and lines four and five were added by Dorian Cooke (in London) and Norman McCaig (in Edinburgh). Then it was sent on to the United States for Gordon Sylander (in Madison, Wisconsin), George Marion O'Donnell (in Belzoni, Mississippi), and Parker Tyler (in New York city). Lastly, it was returned to Japan to be completed by Saburoh Kuroda, Nagao Hirao, Syuiti Nagayasu, and Tuneo Osada. The Japanese writers were part of the Vou Club, who can be considered as the inventors of this form of the chainpoem in the 1930s.

The syntax of each clause is far more complex than the simple *exquisite corpse* procedure, or any other of the short-form surrealist games. At a phrasal level, there are dissonant semantic clusters such as 'crystal garden,' 'ribs' teardrops,' 'shredded voice,' 'metallic metres' or 'glass of cloud' and 'sonnet of a steel necklace.' These are similar to the short-form texts. However, at a more textual and discursive level, relationships are set up that challenge conventions: it is the parasol that is cooled rather than doing the cooling, a spire radiates and turns rather than being the centrepoint of a vista, a waterfall drops not water but 'its piece,' and the sun is invited to 'spell out a sonnet.' Where the dissonant phrases invite a metaphorical resolution, these more complex phrases seem to take a familiar aspect of the associated semantic domain and add a metonymic reversal.

Because each line writer has a retrospective view of the previous lines, there is a cohesiveness to the text that evokes a summer ornamental garden, with each item of description adding to the scene which accumulates in a reader's mind. There is a consistency of technique, too, in the roughly balanced line lengths, and in the sequential sense of a narrative being recounted; and there is a consistency of perception in the presence of the observing consciousness. This 'I' observer is passive, whereas the scene is animated and human interference is disembodied ('ribs,' 'voice,' 'three fingers'). In the end, the scene is given emotion ('ennui') and is violently active ('burst'), culminating in the exhortation to action on the part of the sun. Even here, though, it is the animated and addressed sun which is figured as the composing poet, and not the passive observer. The poem ends by presenting an image of its own history of composition, a necklaced sonnet written not by consciousness but by the landscape across the world. This reflexive thematising of its own compositionality is a commonplace of chainpoems.

In this next example, a single poet is responsible for each full stanza: in order, James Findlay Hendry, Norman MacCaig, Nicholas Moore, Mary Woodman, and Henry Treece.

Chainpoem of the New Apocalypse

Wish, and the freckled pebble sprouts a hand;
Sing, and the cow-dropped dung becomes a balm;
Dream, and the fool-flung pebble in the dung
Flares bright like a flaming angel in the book
That tells of manna falling from the hills.

Christ walked slow with a poem in his head;
His fine words fell on the land like wine;
And the oak and the ash like young lambs danced

To the tune that the lord's lips sang as he passed,
And pebble wrote the poem with his nightmare hand.

Do be as slow as destiny, as dull
As the young limbs on the heaven-searching hill:
No wish or song will turn his lips to stone,
Nor the pebbles seek then the weakling in the wind,
But Christ flame as manna for the living.

My freckled fortune, wishing songs in dreams
Lands in a stilted flounce and beats the snail-stone.
He has a handed pebble in his throat
That throttles him with hallelujahs of hunger
And spits out nothing from his hammer-bill.

O still-life lightning is the source of words.
Its river of blood and dreams pours storm upon
The pebbled bones of a Christ, quick and dead,
Whose poem of peace in the war of a cross of swords
Makes innocence of wine and flesh of song.

(convened by Treece 1940: 375–6)

The collection, *New Directions 1940*, contained 20 pages of chainpoems including this text, which is one of *Two Chainpoems of the New Apocalypse*. Four of the contributors were already known as poets of the New Apocalypse (named after the title of a 1939 anthology edited by Hendry), and Mary Woodman was connected by close association with Treece (they married in the same year). Also strongly associated with Dylan Thomas, the poets of the New Apocalypse drew on surrealistic techniques, though all of them maintained a greater or lesser distance from explicit surrealist ideology. Jackaman (1989), commenting on the poem, is rather scathing:

Apart from showing us Dylan Thomas diffracted through five sets of eyes, this chainpoem reveals some typical New Apocalyptic imagery and references. Second only to Thomas is Christ, guest in three of the stanzas. With him he brings the rather unconvincing stage-machinery of 'a flaming angel', 'manna', 'young lambs', 'hallelujahs', and 'a cross of swords'; these are backed by the creaking old gothic reference of a 'nightmare hand', 'still-life lightning', and a 'river of blood'. All in all, this effort could scarcely rank as British export of the year, even in 1940.

(Jackaman 1989: 169)

Perhaps this is a little unfair. Viewed through the lens of surrealism, the point of it is not its aesthetic appeal but its 'convulsive beauty', to reiterate Breton's phrase. It is true that some of the phrasing, with hindsight, looks clichéd, but its immediate effect seems to be more visceral and vivid.

The advantage of the longer form of chaining is that the locally dissonant phrasing of the one-line chainpoems and the *exquisite corpse* texts is backgrounded in favour of a discursive

cohesion, at least on the surface of the text. The poem is edited and worked, in a way that neither automaticity nor short-form collaged texts are. Though there are still dissonant collocations like ‘heaven-searching hill,’ ‘freckled fortune,’ ‘snail-stone,’ ‘river of blood and dreams,’ these are not in themselves as striking as other surrealist phrasing. Some of them have the flavour of conventional poeticisms. The strikingness here instead comes from the transformative use of verbs to convey the surreal image: ‘the freckled pebble sprouts a hand,’ ‘pebble wrote the poem,’ ‘still-life lightning is the source of words.’ Most evidently, there is an opportunity for extended textual cohesion across a range of linguistic levels. There are various echoic phonetic realisations (‘young lambs’ – ‘young limbs,’ ‘weaking in the wind,’ ‘hallelujahs of hunger’) and also repeated words (‘pebble,’ ‘freckled,’ ‘dream’). There is co-reference to a consistent semantic domain (here, a definite descriptive landscape of hills, rivers, cow-pastures, woods, and weather) and also an evocation of a looser, atmospheric domain (this is the source of Jackaman’s (1989) sense of an indulgent gothic tone). Most divergently from single-sentence or single-line assembled texts, the extension of the writing into connected stanzas allows for complex syntax that narrativises the surreal image.

Perhaps it is this last important effect that begins to mark this sort of activity out as being divergent from surrealism proper: the New Apocalypse poets quickly went in different directions (see Gifford 2014) during the 1940s. Their style moved further away from semantic dissonance and towards definite descriptions of striking landscapes and symbolic features. Surrealist narrative itself is explored in [Chapter 7](#).

Accidents and emergences: objective chance

The collaging of different writers, times, and locations evident in the chaining procedures clearly undermines the individuality of a single authorial consciousness, in favour of access to a more subliminal, collective, and underlying cultural mythology. Gooding (1991) calls such surrealist procedures ‘games,’ as in this example, in which the explanatory quotation is taken from Dalí’s (1932) article ‘The object as revealed in surrealist experiment’:

Experiment Relating to Objective Perception

Each participant has a watch with an alarm which is set to an identical time of which the players are ignorant. They carry on their usual activities, but at the instant the alarm goes off, each player notes down his location and what ‘most strikingly impinges on his senses.’ Players meet at an agreed time to compare notes.

According to Dalí, subsequent analysis would reveal ‘to what extent objective perception depends upon imaginative representation (the causal factor, the element of coincidence, symbolical interpretation in the light of dreams etc.). One might find, for instance, that at five o’clock elongated shapes and perfumes were frequent, at eight o’clock hard shapes ...’

(Gooding 1991: 121)

Gooding (1991: 118) comments that this “‘irrational” approach to knowledge is pursued with the po-faced doggedness of conventional scientific enquiries.’ It is true that the

surrealists devised many games, adapted previous games, and repeated their experiences on many different occasions in a manner that resembles the scientific method. They codified the procedures of the games, and recorded many of the outcomes, which were then published in the surrealist magazines or incorporated into longer published texts. In spite of this seriousness, there is unquestionably a humorous or playful intent behind many of the surrealist games and activities, and this aspect is certainly one of its universally appealing features. However, even the fun was not frivolous. Child-like amazement and the pleasing coincidences of chance were both treated as evidence for underlying cultural connections, revealed by surrealist practices.

An example of this is the surrealist adoption of the Dada activity of creating 'ready-mades', the most famous example being the inverted urinal that Marcel Duchamp produced at an exhibition of 1917, signed 'R. Mutt' and entitled *Fountain*. He defended this object to the selection committee of the exhibition, who ultimately refused to admit it:

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He *chose* it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its usual significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.
(Duchamp, quoted in Short 1980: 25)

Fountain is essentially a collaged object, in two senses. Firstly it appears as a result of an object being taken from its usual context and placed into a different setting. Secondly, that recontextualisation also involves another, creative transformation, in this case the inversion and the 'artistic' signature. The recontextualisation turns all the other art objects in the room into elements within the single collage of *Fountain* – it is this environmental effect that disturbed the exhibition curators. Duchamp's object encompassed all the other art in the exhibition, essentially infecting it all and rendering it into the service of Dada.

As early as 1913 I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to a kitchen stool and watch it turn.

A few months later I bought a cheap reproduction of a winter evening landscape, which I called *Pharmacy* after adding two small dots, one red and one yellow, in the horizon.

In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow shovel on which I wrote *in advance of the broken arm*.

It was around that time that the word 'ready-made' came to my mind to designate this form of manifestation.

A point that I want very much to establish is that the choice of these 'ready-mades' was never dictated by aesthetic delectation.

The choice was based on a reaction of *visual indifference* with a total absence of good or bad taste ... in fact a complete anaesthesia.

One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the 'ready-made'.

That sentence, instead of describing the object like a title, was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions, more verbal.

(Duchamp, quoted in Richter 1964: 89)

The crucial thing about ready-mades was their apparent randomness. Such absolute non-determination is very difficult. Though a broken urinal in an art gallery might appear random, of course in that context it has a scornful, demeaning meaningfulness that might be captured by the fortuitous English expression ‘taking the piss’ (which unfortunately, does not have the same equivalence in French). Even so, Duchamp further undoes the randomness by affixing a title which is clearly ironic and therefore relevant rather than arbitrary. In spite of this editorialising, ready-mades continued to be regarded as surrealist objects which evaded deliberate intention and aesthetic creativity.

Individual authorial intention and design were thrown into doubt in this way, not only by employing multiple authors and locations as outlined in the section above, but also by allowing other factors to determine the stylistic choices that produce the text. The closer these other factors could be to apparently random causes the better, because the poetic and artistic product could then stand as an index of the underlying reality of life and the world: only the conventional rational mind perceived connections as random. Any striking coincidence, echo, correlation, distant repetition or resonant image was evidence of the working of objective chance (*hasard objectif*), by which the mechanics of existence could be temporarily revealed to perception.

In the visual field, the surrealists developed many ways of incorporating the accidents of objective chance into their techniques, so that surreal revelations could emerge. For example, the impurities or stains on cheap canvases or paper could be highlighted, coloured in or joined together with lines to accentuate their form – a process known as *entoptic graphomania*, devised by the Romanian surrealist Dolfi Trost (1945). Entoptic phenomena are not simply optical illusions, but are the perception of features present either in the seen object or in the anatomy of the eye itself. Trost also devised *stillomancy*, in which an inkblot was placed in the centre of a sheet and then folded over to create an organic shape. Similar techniques were described and used by Ithell Colquhoun (1952, 1980), including *coulage* (the accidental sculpture of molten material), *bulletism* (shooting ink or paint at paper), *soufflage* (blowing paint around the canvas with a straw), *fumage* (creating ethereal shapes from the smoke and soot of a candle or lamp), *parsemage* (placing paint powder on a liquid surface and skimming the canvas on top of it), or *frottage* (taking pencil rubbings from existing textured surfaces) (see Shillitoe 2010). Trost and fellow Romanian surrealist Gherasim Luca set out similar visual methods, their aim being to return to ‘pure’ automatism, unedited, unworked, uncrafted, and subject only and entirely to the workings of objective chance. They termed their manic method *surautomatism* (Luca and Trost 1945), or *superautomatism* (Trost 1945), and included examples of *indecipherable writing*, text produced so fast and with spasmodic muscle movements that the products could not be made out into conventional words. Colquhoun drew on the technique in her paintings, producing repetitive, rhythmic lines and curves. George Brassai (the pseudonym of Hungarian surrealist Gyula Halász) described a similar method for the manic production of other plastic objects and assemblages as *involuntary sculptures* (Brassai 1933).

Though these practices were sometimes couched in terms of a return to a pure sense of automatism, they are better seen as additive and collagistic. They almost always involve bringing two or more elements together, not arising from the creator’s unconscious mind, but from different parts of the world, and relying on their chance juxtapositioning.

Instead of a collaboration with other writers, these techniques offer a collaboration between different, apparently unrelated aspects of reality, produced through the conduit of the artist. Instead of aiming at a representation of the surreal image (as does automaticity), all of these visual techniques create an actual literal form in reality, bringing the surreal image to immediate perception. For example, Salvador Dalí's *Lobster Telephone* (*Téléphone – Homard*, 1936) consists of a traditional black Bakelite-resin telephone with the handpiece replaced by a lifelike plaster and paper model of a lobster sitting on top of it. The two objects do not occur naturally next to each other, and are not even from the same semantic domains, so their positioning together as part of an apparently seamless single object is all the more striking. The *Lobster Telephone* is both disturbing and amusing, generating a child-like fascination wherever it is displayed, though for Dalí both telephones and lobsters were oddly erotic, and the sexual organs of the lobster are carefully reproduced in the mouthpiece of the handset.

In spite of this personal association and symbolism (indeed, this sort of egocentrism was a principle reason for Dalí's ejection from the surrealist group), the two items are brought together in a collision of objective chance. They arise from a positioning of real elements; they do not arise from the unconscious mind – though of course in revealing an aspect of the objective chance of the world, they produce in the observer a sudden access to his or her own unconscious perceptions. When it comes to textual surrealist collages that exploit objective chance, however, there is a different problem. Taken literally as a lobster and a telephone, the *Lobster Telephone* is an actual surreal object existing fully in the world. With Dalí's own personal symbolism taken into account, however, the sculpture has a referential value that makes it much more like an automatic act rather than a collage of objects. With a sculpture, in other words, the object is literally the object that it is – any meanings that the object has are secondary and interpreted, part of an act of symbolising on the part of the viewer. It is this clash of literals that is undone by Dalí's egocentric claim to erotic meaning (see Dalí 1993). However, with a textual object, there is no literal primary dimension (except of course for examples in which the physical text is sculpted, as in word-shape *calligrammes* and other sorts of *concrete poetry*). In textual surrealism, there is always inherently a primary function of representation rather than simply a sense of the object.

In this respect, it is relatively simple to differentiate automaticity and collage for physical objects, and more complex for representative objects that always have a symbolic potential, like poems, novels, and some forms of painting. After all, as we have seen across all the examples of automatic writing, dissonance and collaging in the last few chapters, truly alien juxtaposition is barely possible, thanks to the natural human predilection for perceiving patterns, connections, and meanings even faced with the knowledge that none were intended. It is necessary, to see clearly surrealistically, to adopt a sort of *paranoiac-critical* stance (in Dalí's phrase that we will consider in [Chapter 7](#)): an approach that simultaneously accepts the reality of clashing references.

In *Mad Love* (*L'Amour Fou*), his 1937 extended meditation on the nature of surrealist love, André Breton invokes the figure of 'the average man,' whose 'faculty of paranoiac interpretation [...] is usually still in an uncultivated state.' But,

if he has kept some freshness of feeling, he takes a candid pleasure in sharing another's illusion. Therein resides a deep source of communication between beings that has only

to be disengaged from everything that is likely to unsettle or overlay it. Real objects do not exist just as they are: looking at the lines that make up the most common among them, you see surging forth – without even having to blink – a remarkable *riddle-image* which is identical with it and which speaks to us, without any possible mistake, of the only *real* object, the actual one of our *desire*. Needless to say, what is true of the complementary graphic image in question is no less true of a certain verbal image upon which any poetry worthy of the name has never ceased to call. Such images, whose best examples are found in Lautréamont, are endowed with a persuasive strength rigorously proportional to the violence of the initial shock they produced. Thus it is that close up, they are destined to take on the character of things *revealed*.

(Breton 1987: 87–8)

Here, Breton sets out the revelatory crux of objective chance. It is first necessary to allow yourself to be open to the perception of juxtaposed difference (the ‘paranoia’, in this sense, avoiding the usual patterns of convention and culture) and then contemplate it (be ‘critical’ of it). There is an insistence that such collisions of meaning are real – objective not subjective. *Mad Love* overall is largely a description of the many events that all seem uncannily to prefigure Breton’s meeting and falling in love with Jacqueline Lamba, such that he sees it not simply as a conventional love affair but as a transcendent and transfiguring moment. This return to spirituality (remember the origins of automatic writing) opened Breton up to criticisms of occultism (Bauduin 2014), especially by contemporaries like Michel Carrouges (1950).

Objective chance is thus an effect, an emergent property of the objects of the world that is available to be perceived by those who are open to it. It is essentially a receptive notion. By contrast, automaticity is a productive process by which the unconscious mind is accessed and brought into the world to be shared. Objective chance is already shared. In this chapter, I have tried to differentiate automaticity from collagism, on the basis of several dimensions. Firstly, collage and collagistic techniques are fundamentally additive and cumulative, rather than the succession of occluding images that is typical of automaticity. Secondly, collage is productive and aims towards a final external object, whereas automaticity is far more concerned with the process of creativity itself. The collaged object is available in the world subsequently for readers to recapitulate the recognition of objective chance; the product of automaticity is more a record of an unconscious experience. In itself automaticity might not be able to recapture that experience for the viewer or reader, but rather stands as a catalyst for a similar experience in the unconscious mind.

When it comes to textual surrealism, in particular, we might be better to see automaticity and collage as two trajectories on the same phenomenon. Automaticity arises out of the unconscious reality that underlies the world of conventional culture; collage allows the reader or viewer to see into that underlying mechanism. In both cases, the effect is immediately striking, even if the techniques are different. Relatively speaking, automatic writing tends to produce syntactic well-formedness but semantic dissonance, whereas the collage technique tends more towards syntactic disruption but a roughly consistent or identifiably nebulous semantic cloud of possible connections. The extent to which this can be rendered into coherence by a reader is the topic of the next chapter.

Part III

Reading Surrealism

7 Coherence

The paranoiac-critical method

Authors create cohesion; readers create coherence. This formulation makes the distinction between the textual property of *cohesion* and the affective property of *coherence*. In text-linguistic terms, cohesion is a feature of a text which includes items such as lexical repetition, repetition of lexical items from the same or associated semantic fields, sustained co-reference, and syntactic parallelism, as well as the use of conjunctions and other transitional elements such as logical connectors, discourse markers, and so on (Halliday and Hasan 1976). Any text that contains some or all of these features is likely to be regarded as highly cohesive. De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 84) define *coherence* as a ‘continuity of sense’, and observe that this feeling involves readerly schematic knowledge, pragmatic and contextual effects (see also Charolles 1983, and Heydrich, Neubauer, Petöfi, and Sözer 1989).

Textual cohesion does not necessarily create a readerly sense of coherence. Many of the *free association* techniques of early automaticity (outlined in both Chapters 4 and 6) have links that might be regarded as cohesive, but they are certainly not immediately coherent. For example, here is Edouard Roditi’s prose-poem, ‘Séance’, which appeared in the surrealist-sympathetic magazine *transition* in 1928:

Séance

The stranger walks into the dark room where the two men sit at the table and talk of travel. The stranger joins in the conversation, saying: ‘I have also traveled’ and the two men look up and seem surprised at his sudden appearance. In the corners of the ceiling there is a sound as of very swift wings, a muttering of motors, and a chattering of thin voices. The stranger disappears. His voice is heard first in this corner, then in that, until it fades away somewhere near the open window. Where the stranger stood the two men find a railway ticket to an unknown destination.

(Roditi 1928: 4)

Here there are a great number of cohesive devices: there is a repetition of ‘the stranger’, and ‘the two men’, and there is a co-reference of ‘talk’ and ‘conversation’, and ‘the stranger’ and ‘his’. There is a consistency of semantic field reference, for example in the fact that ‘the dark room’ is cohesive with its component parts such as ‘the ceiling’, ‘this corner’, and ‘the open window’. There are clausal conjunctions and transitions such as ‘where’, ‘and’, and ‘then’. And there are synonymic and antonymic links across semantic fields as in ‘talk / conversation’, ‘muttering / chattering’, ‘in this / in that’. In an earlier analysis of this text (Stockwell 2003a), I pointed out that there is a narrative consistency

to the passage: not only is there a succession of connected events, but the passage itself repeatedly mentions 'travel', the middle section features a great deal of movement, and the text ends by indicating a railway journey.

Furthermore, the passage neatly moves the focus of readerly attention around the room, by a clever manipulation of perspective. The definite reference, mysteriousness, agency, and topicality of 'The stranger' initially forces a foregrounding of attention, and to emphasise this the room itself is relatively dimmed down ('the dark room'). Ordinarily, this formulation and the definite references to 'the two men' and 'the table' would suggest the perspective of the stranger is being adopted. However, this person is presumably not a 'stranger' to himself, so the choice of this word is odd, more like the perspective of the two men, who are surprised that he has appeared. The visual perspective is then taken by deictic spatial prepositions up to the 'corners of the ceiling', then to 'this corner', and then to 'that', until only the voice remains, and that is faded out so that the (brighter) window becomes foregrounded. In the middle, the perspective adopted is also that of the two men, looking up at the distracting and active sound ('swift wings', 'muttering of motors', 'chattering of thin voices'). While their attention (and ours) is thus distracted, the stranger has disappeared. The narrative conclusion is that there is a ghostly figure of the stranger left behind, with a spatial gesture out and away from the scene: 'away somewhere', 'railway ticket', 'unknown destination'.

The text, in other words, is very tightly cohesive in many respects, but it is not particularly coherent as a naturalistic narrative. Nevertheless, it contains in its cohesive features many of the customary patterns of a narrative, and so it is highly likely that a reader will look for the other features usually associated with a narrative: principally a resolution, and a sense of tellability (see Toolan 2001). Because of this strong cultural convention, the ending tends to be read (at least by my own students) as a gesture towards open-endedness, as if the passage is the beginning of a journey that happens after the text closes. In this sense, the irresolution is itself thematised as the resolving narrative clause. Secondly, the narrative is treated as a tellable narrative because of the conventional features of narrative that it contains, and so the title is taken as a significant guide to the 'point' of the tale. The stranger is regarded as a ghost or spirit that the two men have invoked during their séance, and the fact that he appears and then is removed from the world of the text, leaving a figural hole, is indicative of the feeling of a ghostly absence. In the end, then, the description is a realistic narrative recount of the men's experience.

This sense of surreal realism involves an adoption of a stance that is open to the odd juxtapositions of this world while holding them together at the same time. Roditi outlined this in his manifesto of surrealism, 'The new reality', published in 1929. This pattern was developed by Salvador Dalí as the *paranoiac-critical method*.

Paranoiac-critical activity organises and objectivises in an exclusivist manner the limitless and unknown possibilities of the systematic associations of subjective and objective phenomena, which appear to us as irrational solicitations, exclusively in favour of the obsessive idea. By this method paranoiac-critical activity discovers new and objective 'significances' in the irrational; it makes the world of delirium pass tangibly onto the plane of reality.

(Dalí 1936: 17)

Paranoia, in this sense, draws on the notion of delirium, as experienced in dreams or nightmares, hallucinations, fevers, and psychoses. Typically, two elements are brought to mind in a way which combines them into a new meaning, without either object losing their own original identities.

It should perhaps be explained that Dalí's use of the word *paranoia* does not signify 'persecution-mania' (as the word has come to mean almost exclusively in English); to him, persecution-mania is but an isolated example of paranoia, which is a mental state enabling the subject, with a superhuman swiftness of mind defying analysis, to draw from the objective world a concrete proof, or illustration, of his obsessions, or even of his transitory ideas.

(Gascoyne 1935: 77)

In the paranoiac-critical method, the artist allows their mind to be open to the images arising out of a delirious state, even if this delirium is artificially simulated. Each image must retain its own integrity of (visual) shape or (linguistic) conceptual content. It is in this sense that the images are real. However, the combined effects of this process are not the same as the freeplay effects of automaticity: the next stage in the method is the *critical* application. The presentation of the surreal image must be considered and shaped actively. This active intervention in the images bubbling up from automaticity marked a disjunctive phase separate from early surrealism.

No longer does a surrealist await the message or the image to arise from the vast unconscious residue of experience; he actively imposes the image of his desires and obsessions upon the concrete, daylight world of objective reality; he actively takes part in 'accidents' that reveal the true nature of the mechanism that is life far more clearly than 'pure psychic automatism' could.

(Gascoyne 1935: 95)

The paranoiac-critical method, then, produces realistic images in a delirious combination, and the positioning and presentation of those images is subject to active, creative intervention. This was different from the effacement of intentionality in early surrealism (see Ruffa 2005). 'In the second phase of the surrealist experiment, the experimenters displayed a desire to interfere. This intentional element tended more and more to tangible verification and emphasised the possibilities of a growing relation to everydayness' (Dalí 1932: 200).

Here, for example, is a poem by Ruthven Todd, which appeared in *New Verse* in May 1937.

Poem

I walk at dawn across the hollow hills,
 Throwing egg-shells at the little moon.
 Explosive for my bombs are puffball spores,
 Measured out carefully, with a silver spoon.

Up there the heavy artillery is banked
 To resist the bee that booms along the valley;
 Machine-gun nests are placed among the crags
 In case the eagles dare to make a sally.

Single-seater planes engage the curlew
 Circling above the peat-moss and bog-myrtle.
 The wound the old tup got an hour ago
 Has since, I regretfully state, proved fatal.

Luckily the blind-worm does good work
 And dodges past the enemy's best scout;
 He rallies the wethers and attacks their rear,
 Turning their predicted victory to a rout.

I walk at evening on the shattered moors,
 Placing tea-leaves on the ancient cairns
 In memory of the old tup and the dead plover.
 I walk at midnight on the trampled ferns.

(Todd 1937: 15)

It is clear here that there are the characteristic combinations of oddly dissonant surreal images, but it is also clear that they have been poetically and narratologically worked. The arrangement into regular, measured stanzas, for example, and the almost perfect rhyming patterns of each line 2 and 4 throughout reveals a shaping ('critical') authorial mind. There is a consistent narrative arc from dawn till evening and midnight, and a consistency to the landscape description: hills, valley, crags, peat-moss, moors, cairns, and so on.

In this case, though, the dissonant elements take on a loose association by being placed together. The collision of sense in the punning 'egg-shells' as artillery shells is created not within line 2 itself (where literal egg-shells could be thrown at the moon), but by the next line in which 'Explosive' and 'my bombs' are almost certainly read appositionally and co-referentially with 'egg-shells'. This collaging of natural and military domains is sustained across the poem. The bank of the hills is where the artillery is 'banked'; the eagles are fought off from machine-gun 'nests'. The overall narrative describes a battle between the sheep and the birds, both seeming to possess modern fighting equipment, but the position of the observing narrator remains uncertain: he expresses the sympathetic evaluation of 'regretfully' for the sheep and 'luckily' for the birds, and in the end he places a memorial to both sides.

The personification of sheep and birds, and their natural environment as a battlefield, would perhaps be more easily read as being whimsical and comical, were it not for the tragic and serious properties involved in mapping the WAR schema onto the narrative. This tone, and the personal witness, and the vividness of the descriptions, and the plainly declarative syntax throughout, all suggest a literal, realistic reading rather than an allegorical or metaphorical one. What might be delirious juxtapositions, in other words, are

artfully combined to produce a surreal narrative. The landscape is poetically crafted: a current reader might find an appropriate echo of the Alistair MacLean (1967) war movie and novel in the phrase where ‘eagles dare’, though a 1937 literate reader might find an echo of Shakespeare and a similarly apposite, personifying context:

The world is grown so bad
That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch.
Since every jack became a gentleman,
There’s many a gentle person made a jack.

(*Richard III*, I.iii: 70–73)

Such echoes, allusions, and connections are, of course, often subjective – but this is true of the experiential associations of all semantic domains and schemas of knowledge. Where associations are realised, the surrealist reader should take them literally. So the poetic narrative is not an allegory but a recount, personifications are not metaphors but are literal, and the poetic arrangement is not literary but is an artful arrangement of the conjoined elements that have been deliriously brought together:

Critical activity intervenes uniquely as a developing fluid for systematic and serious images, associations, conjunctions and niceties already extant at the moment when delirious instantaneity is produced, which is momentarily, at this degree of tangible reality, the only thing that paranoiac-critical activity allows to be brought back to objective light. Paranoiac-critical activity is an organisational and productive force of objective chance.

(Dalí 1936, in Waldberg’s 1965: 91 translation)

For Dalí, the paranoiac-critical method was a means of bringing the hidden workings of objective chance (see Chapter 6) onto the surface of perception (see also Dalí 1970, Fanés 2007). This not only marks a development in surrealist practice, it also serves to bring together the apparent randomness of automaticity and the careful conjoining of collage. The risk, for surrealism, is that the products of the paranoiac-critical method can be more accessible to being made coherent than earlier texts. This is suggested in the Todd poem above: the landscape is still weird but is recognisable, and there is a narrative progression that anchors the collection of images. Later in this chapter, I explore the creation of the surreal landscape; first I will deal with the nature of surreal narrative.

Surrealist narrative

Ordinarily, a narrative is a cohesive and coherent text which is recounted in order to recapitulate a particular episode or linked series of events. Where the narrative is fictional, the textual account is neither a recount nor a recapitulation of an actual occurrence, but essentially is the simultaneous creative accounting of an imagined episode, presented in a form which simulates the natural sort of narrative (see Toolan 2001,

Fludernik 1996, 2009). We are quite used to jokes, embellished anecdotes, fictional tales, and literary fictions so we are already used to treating normative natural narrative texts as a set of schematic assumptions that are often adapted or reshaped for imagined, speculated, fantastical, or other non-actual stories. So, for example, an enormous number of imaginative literary fictional narratives are prototypically presented in the simple past tense, in the first person, in a textual sequence that roughly matches the sequencing of the events presented (all of these are usual characteristics of natural narratives), even though any reader will know that the events being recounted never actually happened in the past, to that person, or in any order at all.

Our sense of narrative, then, is schematic and prototypical, and actual narratives we encounter will vary either slightly or quite divergently from a central set of features and characteristics. Structural accounts of narrative (see, for example, Labov 1972, Carter 1984) have suggested that a normative narrative will begin with an abstract or title of some sort, then an initial orientation, location, or grounding of the setting, and this will be followed by a series of propositions featuring the description of events. There will usually be a resolving event, and often a return to the initial orientation or an explicit moral or point asserted at the end. A normative narrative will match the sequence of events in the text with the same sequence from the original occurrence (its temporal *iconicity*), but when events are narrated out of iconic sequence, then some sort of discourse marker or style-shift will make it clear how readers should orientate themselves ('previously', 'some years before these events', 'meanwhile, back at the ranch'). In other words, in a normative, natural sort of narrative, deviations from the norm are usually mitigated in textual ways which help the reader.

Furthermore, a normative narrative involves characters within the story itself, and a narrator who might also be involved in the story or who might be externally recounting the tale. Either way, there is an opinionated conscious perspective involved, and so the strict narrative clauses might be interrupted by evaluative elements or asides. These 'departures from the narrative syntax' (Labov 1972: 375) can be internal (if they recount an evaluation that occurred to the teller at the time it was happening) or external (if they are comments by the teller made at the later moment of telling).

These features of normative narrative can be regarded as the structural components that generate certain characteristic narratological effects: these effects of normative narratives are then consistently regarded as criterial features of narrative as well. So a well-formed narrative is regarded as having tellability, as conveying a viewpoint, and as having a tendency to completion. That is, a narrative has a point to it, has a motivation for the telling, and has a closure rather than being unfinished or open-ended.

Hardly any of this applies to surrealist narrative. Extended surrealist prose texts are often termed 'anti-novels' precisely because they fail to manifest many of the most prototypical features of narrative well-formedness. The short narrative 'Séance', by Roditi (1928), set out above, contains no initial orientation, but begins with a series of definite references: 'The stranger walks into the dark room where the two men sit at the table...' It is as if the reader is already familiar with these people and objects, and has already been introduced to the scene. The text plays with this misplaced assertion of familiarity, of course, in having the first two nouns refer vaguely and mysteriously: *stranger* and

dark room. Furthermore, the emphasis on locational grounding (*into, where, at*) again seems to align with a normative narrative opening, but this sense is undermined in the very next sentence as the two men ‘seem surprised’. Similarly, there is no narratorial evaluation at all throughout the passage. And there seems to be not only no closure, but a gestural open-endedness in the open window and the train ticket to ‘an unknown destination’. There is no resolution nor coda, and the narrative for most readers seems to lack tellability at all.

Of course, many literary narratives also break the normative structures as set out briefly above. It is common for literary fictions to adopt a technique of beginning a narrative amidst the represented sequencing (*in medias res*, in Horace’s original phrase from 13 BC: Hardison and Golden 1995: 11). However, mainstream literary narratives almost always disambiguate the sudden immersion into the world of the fiction by a subsequent explanation of some sort. Even where literary endings are ambivalent or unresolved, it is usually possible to discern or settle on one or a few possible interpretations of the literary work. While an explicit moral, coda, or didactic resolution might have been more common in earlier literary periods, even the more polyvalent or open endings of modernist and postmodernist literature can still be understood in their contexts – most commonly, the absence of closure is itself thematised as the main telling point for the narrative.

This is more difficult for surrealism, partly because of the greater density of deviant features. Where a literary narrative might depart from the normative natural narrative form in one or two ways, a surrealist narrative will more typically misalign right across the board. ‘Séance’ has a cohesive progression but little apparent coherence. The most important factor which tends to be missing from surrealist narrative is tellability, but this in itself is curious in the particular nature of its absence. Surreal narratives often feature strikingly shocking or bizarre images or events, and these are certainly the stuff of tellability, but in themselves unusual events are merely the stuff out of which a tellable narrative can be constructed – this raw material is remarkable but it would be the narrative framing that would confer tellability. In other words, tellability is a narrative feature rather than a matter of mere strikingness. Surrealist narratives often seem to lack tellability – a resolving ‘point’ that a reader can take away at the end. So, for example, René Crevel’s short narrative ‘1830’, originally written in 1926 and published in the journal *84* in 1949, ends with the main character, Athénaïs, falling into a river:

With haggard eyes and making a noise that ceaselessly increased, she drifted towards the sea and at Le Havre she banged against the precious wood of a sailing ship and caused it to capsize and ran aground in the land of icebergs where, it was said, she was beatified by a Laplander archbishop who was also a dwarf.

(Crevel 1949, translated in Richardson 1993: 30)

While this sequence of events would certainly be regarded by most people as strikingly remarkable and newsworthy, the narrative ends like this without a sense of tellability. There is no discernible moral nor coda. It is not clear why this narrative was worth telling, nor how the demise of Athénaïs is significant. The final clause, distanced further

from the principal textual world of the story by hearsay ('it was said'), adds a quick series of incongruous elements, newly introduced right at the end.

The character, Athénaïs, does not even make an appearance in the story until the second page. The first page begins with a rambling exposition of the title, '1830':

Straight lines go too quickly to appreciate the pleasures of the journey. They rush straight to their target and then die in the very moment of their triumph without having thought, loved, suffered or enjoyed themselves.

Broken lines do not know what they want. With their caprices they cut time up, abuse routes, slash the joyous flowers and split the peaceful fruits with their corners.

It is another story with curved lines. The song of the curved line is called happiness. And so, of all the years of the Christian era, 1830 was the best one in which to live. Three out of the four numbers that designated it were round.

(Crevel 1949, translated in Richardson 1993: 27)

The narrative goes on to discuss the fashions and inventions of 1830, before any human character appears: Athénaïs meets her husband Agénor. In normative narrative terms, this long opening cannot even be regarded as an extended orientation or scene-setting, since the location itself is personified in the figure of the year 1830 and its numerals, which receive agentive, emotional, human verbs: 'to appreciate', 'rush', 'to die', 'thought, loved, suffered', 'enjoyed', and so on. The outlandish personification of the numbers of the year 1830 only serves to highlight the lack of a character at the beginning of the narrative.

The central part of the story describes Athénaïs in her 19th century crinoline dress as looking and sounding like a bell. Her husband keeps thinking 'about the story of the bell of St Gregorin': 'One night the clapper of the bell vanished, the devil alone knew how. The following morning, when he pulled the rope and heard not the slightest sound, the sacristan thought he had gone mad. He ran out into the country crying that he would be damned forever for having rung the angelus of silence' (Crevel 1949, in Richardson 1993: 29). On their wedding night, Agénor discovers that Athénaïs only has one leg, a peg beneath her bell-like skirts that explains the chiming in his head. He runs away, and years later Athénaïs is drowned while spinning over a bridge like a bell. The story as a whole contains smaller, embedded narrative sequences like these that seem almost self-contained. The tale of St Gregorin is presented as a story and with an internal evaluative resolution on the part of the sacristan. The end to Agénor's brief marriage to Athénaïs similarly ends evaluatively with his horrified reaction: 'Agénor finally understood the chiming and the reason for his discomfort and fear.' The ending of this mini-narrative is even signalled with 'finally'.

These embedded, self-contained, and relatively well-formed narratives only serve – like the character-less opening – to emphasise the lack of tellability and the non-normativity of the overarching story. Though there is a narrative progression, and even a closure in the form of the death of the main character, this character has been a relatively late arrival in the scene of the story. The narrative resists a consistent sense of any single coherent message or point. Only its association with Crevel, and his

biographical surrealism, might allow a reader to box up the narrative's tellability as an instance of surrealism, and leave it at that. (Crevel himself committed suicide in 1935, suffering from tuberculosis and disillusioned with the communist party's distancing from surrealism. His suicide note consisted of the single word 'Disgusted.' The bathos of his own ending might be taken as having been prefigured in his '1830' story.) However, the disadvantage of taking this line is that all surrealist texts can then be treated merely as instances of surrealism itself: they end up being reduced simply to their generic type, and any particular singularities and individual values are lost. There would be no point in reading more than one surrealist text, in this case.

Although '1830' seems to lack a textually driven tellability overall, it is, of course, possible to frame the story as a satire on the Church. Though this is far from explicit, there are references and allusions throughout to 'the Christian era,' 'St Gregorin,' 'the angelus of silence,' 'beatified,' and the 'archbishop,' so that a case can certainly be made for a subliminal tellability diffused across the narrative. In a similar way, Roditi's 'Séance,' above, can be framed as a ghost story, in which 'the stranger' is invoked during the 'séance' by the two men, and his intangibility and the odd noises and distractions throughout are explainable as his ghostly presence. Again, this is not an explicit resolution for an interpretative frame around that narrative, but it is perhaps even more strongly indicated in the title than '1830.' Todd's poem, above, is titled only as 'Poem,' so there are no thematic cues to be found in that initial orientation, but the text itself clearly sets up the WAR and NATURE schemas so that it is easily possible to derive a thematic interpretation of the all-pervasive compass of war and its destructive power on nature.

Our human capacity for this sort of framing for coherence means that most readers are likely to incline towards these sorts of sense-making strategies. It has long been known that the human mind and perceptual system are very poor at sustaining chaos, meaninglessness, or random patterning; we are much more likely to join dots with imaginary lines, whether they are constellations or Martian canals, and to see patterns and coherence even when we know that the object we are looking at was caused by accident (like found objects), or by mistake (like dreams), or by objective chance, or by a deliberate attempt to evade authorial causation (as in the collages and chainpoems presented in [Chapter 6](#)). In linguistics, this inclination towards coherence is a matter of textual *informativity* (de Beaugrande 1978, 1980: 105–10). A text's degree of informativity is a measurement of the match of real-world expectations against the state-of-affairs presented in the text. A completely naturalistic and realist fictional narrative would be relatively unremarkable at the level of informativity: in de Beaugrande's terms, it would have only a *first-order informativity*. Such a minimal distance between readerly schematic expectations and the world of the text, even with a fictional narrative, is likely to present little challenge to a sense of coherence. Such a text, in fact, would have minimal communicative value since its content, other than its fictionality, would be completely unremarkable.

By contrast, a second-order informativity would attach to somewhat unusual or remarkable elements, and a third-order informativity would be indicated by the

most extreme, challenging, and striking textual event. A text like a surrealist narrative that presented third-order informativity would be a genuine challenge to coherence (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 142–4). It is a text that presents a reader with second-order informativity that has maximum tellability.

The presence of at least some second-order occurrences would be the normal standard for textual communication, since texts purely on the first order would be difficult to construct and extremely uninteresting. Upon occasion, first-order occurrences could be *upgraded* and third-order ones *downgraded* to keep the medium order.

(de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 143–4)

By ‘downgrading’, de Beaugrande and Dressler are referring to a sort of cognitive process of normalisation or rationalisation for an anomalous experience. A paradox, or metaphor, or striking poetic expression, for example, will generate a search for a meaningful resolution that downgrades the anomaly into something that is merely remarkable, but acceptable. Clearly, surrealist ideology, in these terms, would be to create and sustain third-order informativity in a text, presenting elements that resist downgrading for as long as possible. The sorts of disjunction that have been presented in this book represent that surrealist technique, but of course the natural readerly inclination towards downgrading such incoherence is the psychological basis for framing a surrealist narrative for its tellability.

For example, towards the end of André Breton’s novel *Nadja*, written in 1928, there is an embedded narrative which, in any other context, would be regarded as iconic, thematic or symbolic of the overarching novel as a whole:

I was recently told a story that was so stupid, so melancholy, and so moving: a man comes into a hotel one day and asks to rent a room. He is shown up to number 35. As he comes down a few minutes later and leaves the key at the desk, he says: ‘Excuse me, I have no memory at all. If you please, each time I come in, I’ll tell you my name: Monsieur Delouit. And each time you’ll tell me the number of my room.’ – ‘Very well, Monsieur.’ Soon afterwards, he returns, and as he passes the desk says: ‘Monsieur Delouit.’ – ‘Number 35, Monsieur.’ – ‘Thank you.’ A minute later, a man extraordinarily upset, his clothes covered with mud, bleeding, his face almost not a face at all, appears at the desk: ‘Monsieur Delouit.’ ‘What do you mean, Monsieur Delouit? Don’t try to put one over on us! Monsieur Delouit has just gone upstairs!’ – ‘I’m sorry, it’s me ... I’ve just fallen out of the window. What’s the number of my room, please?’

(Breton 1999: 155–6)

The story possesses many of the patterns of a normative narrative: it begins with a sort of orientating abstract as to the content and meaning of the story; it opens with an indefinite introductory reference to ‘a man’ on ‘one day’; there is a sequence of events in a logical order. The narrative has a narrator, but as the story progresses the narrator’s strongly evaluative and emotionally engaged voice gradually disappears among the direct speech: by the end, the narrator doesn’t even bother with a reporting clause,

but allows the man and the receptionist their own free direct speech, as if they have taken over the narrative and he has disappeared completely from any sort of narrative overview. The opening sentence of the narrative features external evaluation, in which the narrator's opinions at the time of the telling are set out in order initially to frame the story. The closing frame never appears, though. The last we hear from the narrator is the description of the man coming in to the reception again, 'extraordinarily upset, his clothes covered with mud, bleeding, his face almost not a face at all'; this is all internal evaluation, a narratorial impression from within the world of the narrative itself. Around this, and thereafter, the narrator is ellipted by em dashes.

The story itself is no doubt remarkable. In itself, and perhaps in isolation as an anecdote, it would generally, I think, be regarded as possessing second-order informativity – as being sufficiently noteworthy to stand normatively as a narrative worth telling. It has tellability as a self-contained narrative, even though it ends with no echo or coda pointing back to the abstract that asserts it is stupid, melancholy, and moving. However, there is little in the preceding co-text to indicate what this embedded story signifies. The story, within *Nadja*, is preceded by a musing over several pages on the feeling of having come to the end of a book, on the changing face of Paris locations, and this preceding text is fragmented with several very long footnotes, and one page is given over to a photograph of Breton himself. There is no coda to the mini-narrative at all: the story is followed by a blank line, then a line of asterisks or dots, and then the text resumes with an extended direct address to an idealised figure of the Nadja character herself as a sort of abstracted ideal woman. The novel itself ends five pages later with a shift to an assertion of surrealist Beauty, 'like a train that ceaselessly roars out of the Gare de Lyon and which I know will never leave, which has not left' (Breton 1999: 160). Within this framing co-text, the Monsieur Delouit story appears more narratorially odd and disorientating. What would naturally be a second-order tellable narrative becomes embedded as an anomalous third-order event that is never properly accounted for, explained, nor rationalised. Oddly, the self-contained second-order narrative has been upgraded to a third-order sequence by its framing among the rest of the discourse of *Nadja*.

The whole of *Nadja* consists of shifts from extended musings on banal and everyday Parisian sights and locations (rather tedious first-order informativities) to striking phrases and eccentric actions by Nadja herself, who is clearly mentally deranged. The narrating Breton character is attracted by the surprising illogicalities of her thought and expression, and it is the recounting of these moments of startling surrealist insight that makes her an attractive character both for the Breton-narrator and for the reader. The rather monotonous first section of the novel (some 50 pages or so) consists of local details and notices of theatre productions, a long description of a play, bookshop purchases, brief meetings with other surrealists, and scraps of conversation. They are mainly of interest to the literary historiographer of surrealism, I imagine, and to few others. This long prelude certainly requires upgrading in informativity, and the natural form of its upgrading would be to regard it as preparatory banal background against which the striking and disorientating first encounter with Nadja appears all

the more powerfully affecting. Overall, then, and as with the case of Monsieur Delouit, the tendency of extended surrealist narrative seems to be one of upgrading across the board, rather than the normative convergence towards a second-order informativity by a combination of upgrading tedium and downgrading anomaly. First-order informativities are upgraded, both because this is the normative tendency in any narrative, and also because in the surrealist text there seems to be a contrastive reason for doing so. But second-order informativities, like the striking embedded episodes within a surrealist narrative, are also upgraded towards being perceived as more anomalous because they are framed within a surrealist sequence that does not easily render any sense or significance to them.

Surrealist mini-narratives have the sort of strikingness that in a normative face-to-face conversation would be a highly tellable (second-order) anecdote. The story of Monsieur Delouit, or the woman who rings like a bell, or the ghostly man in the séance, are all striking and remarkable, and would certainly be the sort of story you might tell to a friend in conversation. However, these narratives appear in print, and embedded inside longer prose co-texts: they have the framing characteristics of literary narratives. This means they are likely to be treated not as simple everyday anecdotes of remarkable things, but as being thematically, symbolically, or otherwise poetically and literarily motivated. If a reader adopts a literary stance upon an encounter with a text which is framed contextually as literature, then apparently banal or prosaic episodes are likely to be treated with greater thematic or poetic significance than perhaps would be the case if those episodes appeared anywhere else.

To sum up, then, we can set out the following formulation. The natural human capacity for sense-making would suggest that anomalous third-order episodes will generate a motivation-search for a resolving frame or interpretative significance, downgrading to a second-order level of acceptable tellability. Typically, in a literary narrative, this would be a perception of a symbolic, or coda-like message, moral or point to the overall literary work. Symmetrically, any banal or apparently commonplace episode is likely to be invested with greater significance and upgraded to second-order informativity as well. The pattern, in other words, for literary narrative in general is for a reader to be motivated convergently towards second-order tellability.

For surrealism, however, we might instead think that there is an inflating tendency always towards upgrading both first-order and second-order episodes. Banal embedded narratives become tellable as instances of scene-setting, as contrastive background ordinariness before the striking element which is to follow, or as examples of ordinary episodes which by their co-occurrence will appear as striking moments of objective chance. More distinctively, ordinarily remarkable and tellable episodes are often stripped of any resolving, plain second-order informativity by their positioning within an overarching prose sequence that offers no easy resolution. Lastly, third-order occurrences either remain at the third-order (and since the natural norm is for these to be downgraded, this stasis should be regarded as an active process of anomaly maintenance), or alternatively their third-order oddity is even further enhanced and augmented.

There is a final caveat to this formulation, however. Although the normative literary tendency towards downgrading is reversed by much surrealism, it could be argued that

the entire text can be globally framed *as surrealism*. In de Beaugrande's (1980) terms, this is *outward* downgrading:

Downgrading could have different *directionality*: (1) if people regress to occurrences of a considerably earlier time to find the motivating pathway, they are doing *backward* downgrading; (2) if they wait and look ahead to further occurrences, they are doing *forward* downgrading; (3) if they go outside the current context, they are doing *outward* downgrading. A text producer who deliberately supplies third-order occurrences may anticipate the directionality and results of the downgrading as part of the plan toward a goal (cf. de Beaugrande 1978). The assumption that downgrading will be done is reliable (Berlyne [1960] suggests that 'cognitive conflict' creates 'epistemic curiosity' to obtain knowledge).

(de Beaugrande 1980: 106)

In effect, reading episodes within a work that has been identified as surrealism is itself a form of motivating context. Searching earlier in *Nadja* for a preparatory (backward) explanation for the Monsieur Delouit story, or waiting for the anomaly to be later (forward) explained, both turn out ultimately to be futile. The only option is an outward downgrading of this and all the striking anomalies of the text, framing them all as surreal in generic terms. We might say that surrealist texts always aim for anomaly and disturbance, but in the end they can all be coherently resolved as examples of surrealism. The irony here is that the readerly stance that recognises the text in hand as surrealist is partly the factor that undermines the maintenance of surrealist incoherence at all.

The surreal landscape

The account of narrative outlined above emphasises episode and event, but of course a major aspect of narrative is also its creation of a world or landscape in which those events happen and in which the narrated characters exist. In [Chapter 8](#), I will discuss in detail the nature of the ambience and texture of the surrealist world; in the rest of this chapter, I will consider the nature of world-building in surrealist works. It seems to me that it is significantly in this landscape aspect of textual organisation that surrealism manages to sustain its third-order sense of anomaly and disturbance.

Salvador Dalí's 1937 painting *Métamorphose de Narcisse* (The Metamorphosis of Narcissus, held in the Tate Gallery, London) is often taken as an archetypal realisation of a surreal landscape (see Jackaman 1989, Rattray 2008). In the foreground is a doubled figure: the youth Narcissus, kneeling with head facing downwards, looking forlornly into a lake, and next to him a large hand carved as if from rock, making the same shape as the youth's bodily pose. The hand is holding an egg, in parallel position as Narcissus' head, and out of the cracked egg a flower is growing that is presumably a narcissus. The background is a mountainous scene that echoes colours and shapes in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch, with naked skeletal figures dancing, a statue on a plinth on a chessboard, mysterious shadows, and glowering clouds.

Dalí (1937) also wrote a poem of the same title to accompany and ‘amplify’ the painting. It begins as follows:

The Metamorphosis of Narcissus

Under the split in the retreating black cloud
 the invisible scale of spring
 is oscillating
 in the fresh April sky.
 On the highest mountain,
 the god of the snow,
 his dazzling head bent over the dizzy space of reflections,
 starts melting with desire
 in the vertical cataracts of the thaw
 annihilating himself loudly among the excremental cries of minerals,
 or
 between the silences of mosses
 towards the distant mirror of the lake
 in which,
 the veils of winter having disappeared,
 he has newly discovered
 the lightning flash
 of his faithful image.
 It seems that with the loss of his divinity the whole high plateau
 pours itself out,
 crashes and crumbles
 among the solitude and the incurable silence of iron oxides
 while its dead weight
 raises the entire swarming and apotheotic
 plateau from the plain
 from which already thrust towards the sky
 the artesian fountains of grass
 and from which rise,
 erect,
 tender,
 and hard,
 the innumerable floral spears
 of the deafening armies of the germination of the narcissi.

(Dalí 1937)

Although the poem is ekphrastic in conjunction with the painting, the images it piles up are vivid enough in their own textual right to be considered for their imagistic, world-building properties. Even without reference to the painting, this opening sequence begins in language which focuses on spatial positioning and the delineation of the landscape. As in most world-building passages, there is an emphasis on locatives that serve

to ground the later foregrounded figures. In this text, the locatives are realised by spatial prepositional phrases and by spatial deictic expressions.

The prepositional phrases in the opening are extremely dense and multiple: 'Under the split in the retreating black cloud the invisible scale of spring is oscillating in the fresh April sky.' The poem begins with a locating expression 'Under the split in the retreating black cloud' that also contains an *in*-preposition: *under* is plainly spatial, but *in* here is more image-schematic, directing readerly attention to zoom into the black cloud. (Image-schemas are the idealised and abstract senses of spatial relationships that lie at the root of all prepositions, and which are generalised in linguistic extensions to allow us to articulate causal, associative, quantifiable, and logical relationships: see Lakoff 1987, Lakoff and Turner 1989, Croft and Cruse 2004.) The *in*-preposition of 'in the fresh April sky' is similarly spatially attention-directing. The *of*-preposition in 'invisible scale of spring' however, is less spatially locative and more metaphorically conceptual: this image-schema points to a claimed property of spring (its balancing scales), in order to detach it attentionally from the whole. In these two ways, a reader's attention is directed towards delineating spatial locative relationships on the one hand and readerly attention is zoomed in to a specific conceptual relationship. In both cases, there is a sense of attentional motion that always accompanies prepositional phrases. In this passage, the attentional motion is reinforced by predicated motion in the verbs, verb-derivations, and motive nouns 'split', 'retreating', 'spring', and 'is oscillating'. Throughout this excerpt, the landscape is more verbally active than the relatively passive, receptive, or reflective god and Narcissus figure.

The doubled patterning continues throughout the passage. Numerous locating prepositional expressions serve to situate the god of the snow 'On the highest mountain', 'over the dizzy space', 'in the vertical cataracts', 'among the excremental cries of minerals', 'between the silences', and so on. Threaded through these are more conceptual prepositional expressions that delineate properties rather than positions: 'of the snow', 'of reflections', 'with desire', 'of the thaw', 'the silences of mosses'. The rest of the passage excerpted above is dense with these two patterns of prepositional phrases, so that the landscape is built from the noun-phrases embedded within these prepositional phrases, and the prepositions in each case serve to situate each noun-phrase referent in relation to each other. The effect is both vividly visual and strikingly conceptual. In both threads, the reader's attention is being drawn around the mental scene, both from place to place and by being zoomed in and out. The zooming attention sensation is largely effected by partitive *of*-prepositions, and their associated *from*-prepositional counterparts. In image-schematic terms, *of* and *from* represent similar spatial trajectories, with the difference being that different parts of the process are profiled; the opposite senses would be carried by *in/into*- and *on/onto*-prepositions. In the excerpted passage of the poem, the text begins with a predominance of highly spatial *in*, *under*, *on*, and *among* prepositions, but moves at the end towards a strong preponderance of *of*-prepositions: 'loss of his divinity', 'incurable silence of iron oxides', 'artesian fountains of grass', and the final line 'of the deafening armies of the germination of the narcissi'. The repeated steps of increasingly zoomed granularity in this series of last *of*-prepositions piles up an embedded series of concepts that are difficult to hold simultaneously in mind.

At the same time, several elements in the excerpt feature strong spatial deictic positioning. The 'retreating' black cloud, for example, positions the observer in a location from which the cloud is moving away, and the readerly mental viewpoint is raised up into the 'fresh April sky'. Up there, the 'highest' mountain is high in relation to the low position of the readerly observing point, and this is where the 'god of the snow' is 'dazzling' and 'dizzy' (note the contrast in brightness from low to high position as well). At this point, we follow the god's viewpoint as he bends, melts, and falls down a vertical cataract towards our position. The single particle 'or', on a line of its own, switches conceptually to an alternative perspective, and sure enough the phrasing of 'towards the distant mirror of the lake' presents a switched deictic position to the god's viewpoint, looking down at the lake in the distance. The next associated verb moves into his perception as 'he has newly discovered' his own reflective image. The rest of the excerpt repeats this oscillation between two deictic positions (principally up/down and near/distant), reinforced by the doubled thread of preposition-types, and further reinforced by the iconic image of the mirror and reflection.

Of course, the surreal landscape is even easier to visualise with the painting at hand (and Dalí's stated intention after all was to 'amplify' the painting with the poem). However, the poem does foreground (in both the spatial and the conceptual senses) certain aspects which the painting does not: the 'god of the snow', for example, is prominent in the poem but is a tiny figure in the distance of the painting; at first glance this body in the same pose as Narcissus looks merely like a rock formation. Though viewers of the painting have their eyes drawn across the space of the landscape, in the poem the readers have their attentional viewpoint drawn across the landscape, zoomed in and out, and are switched in perspective from the lake in the foreground to the mountains in the upper distance. In this respect, at least, the text is more plastic and animated in its effects than the painting.

The central part of the poem outlines the transformation of Narcissus, moving in and out of third-person and second-person address – again delineating the readerly relationship to the poem deictically. At the end, the change is described, again with a preponderance of *of*-prepositions:

There remains of him only
 the hallucinatingly white oval of his head,
 his head again more tender,
 his head, chrysalis of hidden biological designs,
 his head held up by the tips of the water's fingers,
 at the tips of the fingers
 of the insensate hand,
 of the terrible hand,
 of the excrement-eating hand,
 of the mortal hand
 of his own reflection.

When that head slits
 when that head splits

when that head bursts,
 it will be the flower,
 the new narcissus,
 Gala –
 my narcissus.

(Dalí 1937)

Here, the image-schema of the *of*-preposition sustains the complexity of the partitive relationship: part of the whole has moved into attention to become prominent. The sequence of *of*-prepositions in the first part of this excerpt creates an increasingly granular zooming in of attention. However, the piling up of these prepositional phrases can also be read appositionally rather than purely sequentially, so that the reading is not progressive but is recursive and reflective. The natural metonymy of *fingers* and *hand*, together with the lexical repetition of ‘his head’ and ‘hand’ here (and the iconic articulation of ‘his own reflection’) would all indicate such a reading.

The final ‘stanza’ of the poem dispenses with any prepositions altogether, chaining the phrases entirely appositionally (which again supports an appositional reading of the previous section).

The last line of the poem, in which Dalí identifies Gala as ‘his narcissus,’ is compelling. Lomas [1998: 88] notes that there is a less popular variant of the Narcissus myth, cited by Pausanias in his second-century *Guide to Greece*, in which the tragic hero falls in love with his own reflection not because he recognises it as himself but because he sees in his own face the visage of his beloved, deceased twin sister. In identifying his wife Gala as ‘his narcissus,’ Dalí may be fashioning her as his double – a possibility advanced further by his tendency to merge his name with hers. With this in mind, it might be significant that [the painting] *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, like many other works of the period, is signed, ‘Gala Salvador Dalí’.

(King 2007)

The textual doubling of the poem would seem to amplify this as well. Though the poem – and the painting – can be read narratively as a movement of attention drawn across the canvas or around the mental space of the text in the ways I have sketched out above, both artefacts are principally about the relationships of objects in a landscape. The appositional reading of the final excerpt above reinforces this sense of a piling up of images and concepts.

My argument here is that surrealism in general, and this poem and painting in particular, piles up images that overwhelm the readerly capacity for creating local coherence. These images are articulated in such a way as to remain vivid, even when they are part of the background of the surreal object. The quantity of disorientating images, presented as the setting for the textual world that is to follow, presents a processing challenge to a reader. The risk of incoherence is always presented as a significant problem.

Furthermore, the world-building elements in a surrealist landscape are often not simply listed as an inventory, but – as in this poem – they are delineated carefully in relation to one another. These relationships are often complex, and often contradictory

both in terms of spatial inconsistencies and logical paradoxes. Often – again as in the Dalí poem – a reader is explicitly and carefully positioned in relation to the figures in the world of the text, and this positioning is effected stylistically through locative expressions and deictic delineation. The positioning is so careful, in fact, that it is often the case that this readerly positioning occurs at a conscious level of awareness for a reader – certainly if that reader notices the stylistic manipulation that can be highly prominent.

Lastly, surrealist texts often take on the appearance of well-formed coherent structures. In narrative, they might have several of the features of well-formed narrative structure, or they might possess familiar characteristics of narrative informativity or tellability. However, there will usually be something wrong, or not quite right, about the relationship of the surrealist configuration with respect to the normative pattern of a narrative. The tellability might be in the wrong place, or framed oddly. The careful locative positioning of a reader might be set up only to be abandoned later on: address forms might switch without preamble from a narrative voice to a direct readerly address. Introductory locative expressions that might appear to be placed appropriately for a narrative orientation or opening turn out to be illusory, deceptive, or locally incohesive.

By all of these means, third-order informativity is sustained. The persistence of shock in surrealism – whether across a long text or in a reader on multiple repeated readings of the same text – is very largely a consequence of the vivid grounding of the surrealist world, and the manner in which this makes an apparent claim to coherence while at the same time defying it.

8 A m b i e n c e

Atmospherics of dream

The *ambience* of a literary work is its experienced environmental texture. It is how the totality of the literary reading feels, the quality of the sense of immersion. In Stockwell (2014a), I argued that ambience can be considered as a composition of atmosphere and tone. When readers – from literary critics to those offering observations and commentaries in a less professional capacity – talk about the *tone* of a literary work, there seems to be a residual sense in the metaphor of the ‘tone of voice’ of the text. By contrast, the sense when people use the term *atmosphere* seems to be more concerned with the subtle feeling of the world of the literary text that is being presented. Of course, the distinction is not a sharp one: a literary world is always presented, narrated, or perceived by a conscious mind who expresses that world, and any individual voice always belongs to a situated consciousness either within the fictional literary world or presenting it from outside. In both cases, world and voice are implicated in each other. Nevertheless, it can be useful to understand atmosphere and tone as discernible modalities in the creation and sustaining of ambience (see also Stockwell 2014b). Atmosphere pertains to the framing quality of the surrealist landscape; tone pertains to the quality of the medium through which the surreal landscape is expressed. In this chapter, I will first consider the atmospheric frame of surrealism, and then its characteristic tonal qualities. However, the ambient feeling of surrealism is also an effect of the tangible objects that are the focus of atmosphere and tone, and so I will end this chapter with a consideration of the nature of the surreal image itself.

There is very much a common sense of a surreal ambience in a great deal of discourse on surrealism. In atmospheric terms of the feeling of a surrealist world or landscape, the primary quality that is identified is that surreal texts convey a *dreamlike* texture. This notion of course also draws on the explicit surrealist commitment to the seriousness of dreams as a means of untrammelled access to the unconscious mind. In the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton wrote:

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak. [...]

A story is told according to which Saint-Pol-Roux, in times gone by, used to have a notice posted on the door of his manor house in Camaret, every evening before he went to sleep, which read: THE POET IS WORKING.

(Breton 1969: 14)

The textual manifestation of dream involves a set of related features, driven by the readerly sense of a perceived shift across a world-boundary. This dislocated sense of alterity is as much a quality of the shifted textual features as a matter of strict ontology: in other words, the dream-state in literature is as much an ambient matter as an explicit inventory of other-worldly objects and scenes. As a reader it is usually a simple matter to know that you are in a dream-world; the interesting aspect of the texture is what that dream-state feels like. The analytical approach of text world theory (Werth 1999, Gavins 2007) offers a rigorous means of exploring world-switches, and Giovanelli (2013) has demonstrated for dream-visions and nightmarish poetic narratives how text world theory provides a complex account. Most work so far, however, has focused on the cognitive effect of registering a world-switch into a dream-state, rather than on the atmospheric feeling of that dream-state itself.

Dreams, when represented generally in literature, tend to be characterised by perceptual uncertainty but descriptive vividness, and often feature a narratological progression or motion that privileges sequentiality over logicity, with the common rules of physics and nature held in suspension. These patterns lend the dream description a sense of vagueness and unreality, but the status of the passages as dream is usually obvious: the narrating or focalised dreamer often expresses doubt about their own perception or state of mind, or modalises the transition into the dream-world with constructions of appearance (such as *seemed, as if, appeared to be*). These serve to foreground the unreal status of the dream description. Surrealist dream-states tend to be amplified in terms of vivid and striking description, and are often narratologically sequenced with non-sequiturs prominent, but the uncertainty of the narrator is often absent. In its place is an assertive confidence in the description. Surrealist dream-states are thus exceptionally vivid, and exceptionally illogical but sequential, and exceptionally non-natural, but they are often presented realistically.

Hugh Sykes Davies' novel *Petron* is an extended surrealist dream-state that exemplifies these patterns. Published in 1935, the narrative follows Petron as he walks through a landscape encountering a succession of strange people and scenes. In [Chapter 2](#), Petron wanders the countryside, defacing signposts with poetry. An old hedger attempts to persuade him to stop, at first by reasonable argument, which fails; Petron carves a picture of the old man onto the post.

Perceiving his error, the old man entered on another means of dissuasion. He fainted. He lay in the road contorted in the most dreadful antics of epilepsy. He leaned over a gate and vomited blood till the grass was all matted together: he plunged a pointed flint into his forehead: divided each of his fingers with a pruning-bill into a small hand, and subdivided the fingers of these again into smaller hands, and so on until he was possessed of many thousand hands and tens of thousands of fingers. But by all these attempts Petron remained unmoved, depicting them all on the signpost, which grew daily more interesting, and detained an ever-increasing number of onlookers, so that the ordinary business of the countryside suffered serious interruption.

[... For three days the hedger lay in the road to be trampled by cart traffic.]

On the fourth day the old man, seeing his advantage, rose again, and having employed his time in deep meditation, at once hit on the means of converting Petron.

Taking from his pocket a length of string, he passed it through his head, in at one ear, and out at the other. Then he placed his fingers to his nostrils, and drew the string out from them in the form of a loop, one end in each nostril. The loop he took between his teeth, and leering frightfully for a few moments, suddenly swallowed it, so that the ends of the string which had been dangling from his ears were drawn in and disappeared suddenly and utterly.

Quite terrified, Petron seized his belongings, and fled howling down the lane, never more to meddle with signposts.

(Davies 1935: 25)

In text world terms, the atmosphere of dream can be characterised by a prominence of definite and vivid world-builders, each of which are tightly consistent with each other and which build a definite scene: the road, the gate, the grass, the signpost, the pruning-bill, and the lane are all evocative of a rural location. The vividness of these elements is amplified and enhanced by the gothic strikingness and violence of the action that plays out against them. The violence is shocking for its rapid escalation from a standard bucolic scene. This shock is also accompanied by the rapid succession of actions, each of which does not logically relate to the previous one: the old hedger's violent self-harm is not the obvious act of persuasion that he might have adopted. At the same time, non-natural laws of physics, biology, and social conventions are prominent. The extremity of the self-violence does not seem to kill the old man, and the acceleration of the horror is explicitly thematised in the exponential multiplication of hands and fingers created by his self-mutilation.

Nicholls (2004: 407) notes the 'archaising tone' of *Petron* that renders its flavour of a fairy-tale or antique mythology. This sense is also created by the strong narrative sequencing: these are function-advancers, in text world theory terms, and these elements of conceptual structure are not restricted to verb-choices. For example, the long syntactic sequences in most of the sentences serve iconically to move the narrative onwards. In this excerpt, only the single simple clause 'He fainted' constitutes a complete sentence (iconically imitating the curtailing loss of consciousness); elsewhere, the syntax combines multi-clausal sentences with a great deal of circumstantial and adverbial accompaniment.

The archaic atmosphere is carried in this syntactic patterning as well. Prefacing phrases that set the scene for the main verb are common to the folk-tale ambience, such as, in different ways, 'Perceiving his error,' 'by all these attempts,' 'On the fourth day,' 'Taking from his pocket.' These all sound like English constructions from a former, more formal time, and this sort of faux-archaic phrasing has the flavour of an old ballad-song or folk tale: 'The loop he took between his teeth.' Similarly, the archaic setting is suggested by the presence of horses, carts, antique tools, and the outmoded rural occupation of the hedger. Individual phrases have an archaic feel in their elevated register: 'his error,' 'means of dissuasion,' 'until he was possessed of,' 'ordinary business of the countryside,' 'never more.'

Most markedly as a surrealist text, the narrative description is not uncertain but definite and assertive. The narrator of *Petron* has omniscient access to the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of all of the characters. In the passage above, the narrator is certain

that the old man perceives his error, that Petron is at first unmoved, that the old man arrives at a mental solution, and that Petron ends quite terrified. The entire travelogue of Petron's progress (and the echo of Bunyan's 1678 *Pilgrim's Progress* is clear) is presented definitely and in a plainly descriptive sequence. Only at the end is a series of Petron's 'visions' presented, and these visions only draw attention to the realistic texture of the previous dream-landscape.

In a surrealist dream-state description, the landscape itself is a prominent feature. Backgrounded elements in a text world are as significant for creating a subliminal sense of atmosphere as the scenic background in a Miró or Dalí painting. In surrealist dream-descriptions, the landscape can appear particularly animated and remarkable, while still remaining in the background. This is because the foreground is still relatively striking and conceptually attractive: as in the passage from *Petron* above, for the vivid scene to remain backgrounded, the foregrounded characters and actions need to be exponentially even more striking. In effect, the entire picture is amplified.

One way of exploring such an atmospheric effect is through the cognitive poetic notion of *scenic motion*. Developed for literary analysis by Deggan (2013), the feature draws on the cognitive linguistic idea of fictive motion (Talmy 2000, Matlock 2004). This is the linguistic ascription of movement to static elements of scenes, as in *The fence runs round the house*, or *The road goes to Nottingham*, or *The mountain climbs into the clouds*. Deggan notes that a similar effect can be observed in the atmospheric background of literary reading, where dynamic states of various types can be discerned in the scenic surroundings. This includes the explicit personification and animation of natural objects, machines, weather, and so on, but also encompasses a wider range of animating effects. Deggan (2013: 175–6) points out that scenic motion strongly presupposes a 'subjectification' in that a subjective viewpoint or point of attention is presumed, and this sense of a strongly asserted subjective view can be augmented by the addition of evaluative phrases: his example is the enhancement offered by the adverb in 'The uneven scenery rushed *giddily* past' (Deggan 2013: 177). The effect, in cognitive linguistic terms, is a destabilising of the ground.

There are examples of the subjectively psychologised animation of the landscape in the *Petron* excerpt above. The grass 'matted', the signpost 'grew daily', the 'business of the countryside suffered serious interruption'; even 'down the lane' has a directionality that figures Petron fleeing away from and below our observing viewpoint. However, *Petron* already has a strongly eventful structure. Other surrealist texts that are more lyrical or narratologically static or aimless in atmosphere can also be explored from the perspective of their scenic motion, for the quality of their ambient effects. One such example is Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* (*Le Paysan de Paris*, 1926). This piece of extended prose consists of four sections and was published in several instalments, mainly in Philippe Soupault's *La Revue Européenne* between 1924 and 1925, with the fourth section added when the complete text was published by Gallimard in 1926. A passage towards the end of the third section purports to be a letter of complaint from Aragon to the editor, Soupault, asking 'Are you not ashamed to be publishing, month after month, a medley of words lacking the general significance that would make it valid in the abstract eyes of thought?' (Aragon 1994: 183). The text was almost entirely written over two weeks at the

end of 1923: not quite an example of automaticity, but intense and raw nevertheless. (Aragon later turned scornfully against the whole enterprise of automaticity in his *Traité du Style* (Treatise on Style): see Aragon 1991, and Breton 1989.)

The first and the last sections of *Paris Peasant* are a metaphysical musing upon truth and knowledge, and against rationality in favour of poetry and poetic exploration. The central two sections – ‘The Passage de L’Opéra’ and ‘A Feeling for Nature at the Buttes-Chaumont’ – describe actual physical wanderings around these areas of Paris. The arcaded shops of the Opéra district were due to be demolished in the construction of wide boulevards, and Aragon’s long descriptions of the scenes and activities seem at first to be a memorialisation of the area. However, his sarcastic tone throughout places him neither on the side of the doomed shopkeepers nor on the side of the developers: instead, the point seems to be to treat the condemned space as a correlate for a dream-like landscape, one which was in the process of becoming non-existent. Similarly, the Buttes-Chaumont section describes a walk around the municipal park – a space neither rural nor urban – where the Aragon-narrator meets Breton and Marcel Noll, director of the Galerie Surréaliste, and together they wander around, reading notices and signs and looking at the landscape.

Paris Peasant is far less narratological than *Petron*, though it is also an episodic travelogue of sorts. In Aragon’s text, though, the episodes represent an accumulation of vignettes and scenes, with the connections being supplied merely by his wandering around the streets and lanes. Nevertheless, the vestigial narrative sequence was enough for Breton (1932) later to denounce the text as anti-surrealist, and declare Aragon expelled from the surrealist group – though in fact he had already distanced himself from them by this point. Much of the technique of the text is collagistic, especially in ‘The Passage de L’Opéra’ section, where the Aragon-narrator strolls to each establishment and muses on it, or overhears a conversation, or records a notice in the window, or recounts a mini-narrative, visits a hairdresser, a theatre, a brothel. The text is broken up by boxed notices, changes of font, transcripts of conversations set out like play-scripts, reprints of theatre box-office prices, and bar tariffs. The ‘Feeling for Nature at the Buttes-Chaumont’ section is less populated and more descriptive of the moment-by-moment awareness of going for a walk with Breton and Noll through the park, but it too is eventually filled with pasted notices, bills, and signposts. This section is primarily concerned with its own atmosphere, and the musings that are generated by the environment. Towards the end of the walk in the park, a series of transformations are effected on the narrator, and he pulls off his own head which in turn goes through a series of metamorphoses. The section ends:

He who had finally parted company with his thought when far away the first waves had started licking the wounds of the spurned head stirred from his immobility like an inverted question mark. In the pure air, above the charred sierras, at those altitudes where the earth, scraped to the bone, bathes in the diamond sun’s implacable glare, where each stone seemed marked with the hoofprint of an ironshod stellar horse, the decapitated body sent out in great spasms the triple spurt of its most powerful arteries, and the blood formed monstrous ferns in the sparkling blue of space. Their crosiers,

uncurling in the depths, continued in the form of fine suspensions of life, a dotted line of rubies coiling around the last birds in the atmosphere, around the luminous ring of the spheres, around the final breaths of magnetic attractions. The fountain-man, swept along by celestial capillarity, rose up in the midst of the worlds, in the wake of his blood. The whole useless body was invaded by transparency. Gradually the body turned into light. The blood, rays.

The limbs, in the throes of an incomprehensible gesture, grew rigid. And the man was no longer anything but a sign among the constellations.

(Aragon 1994: 189)

This strikingly lyrical passage sets the metamorphosis of the narrator, rendered into the third person and literally disembodied, against an extraordinarily animated surrealist landscape. There are, of course, conventional personifications and animations throughout: 'the waves... started licking,' 'the earth... bathes,' and 'breaths of magnetic attractions.' And the agency of the man has turned into agentive verbs governed by body-parts: 'the decapitated body sent out,' 'the blood formed,' 'the body turned,' and lastly the 'limbs... grew.' However, the passage goes far beyond these conventional literary tropes. Almost every relationship, form of existence, and process in the passage is animated to a greater or lesser degree of activity and violence. The man has literally 'parted company' with his head, but the excerpt figures this as parting company 'with his thought'. All of the passives and the adjectives formed from passives point to agency and animation: 'spurned head,' 'charred sierras,' 'scraped to the bone,' 'marked with the hoofprint,' 'decapitated.' There are also several phrases with continuous verb-forms that lend agency and animation to the background: 'uncurling in the depths,' 'coiling around the last birds.' Even the prepositional phrases profile transformations in process that draw the reader's attention around the landscape: 'In the pure air,' 'in the sparkling blue,' 'in the depths,' 'around the last birds,' 'around the luminous ring,' 'in the midst,' 'into light,' and so on. The proximal and distal deictic elements serve a similar purpose: 'far away,' 'above,' 'those altitudes.'

Deggan (2013: 177–8) observes that such 'scenic constructions tend to destabilise the ground of the narrative' such that 'scenic motion replicates the projection of psychological states onto particular settings'. In the surrealist landscape, the atmospheric effect is amplified, in this case by both the quantity and the extremity of the animation. The animation of aspects of the background would normally be regarded as the textual emergence of a figure against the ground of the textual landscape. In my attention-resonance model of literary texture (Stockwell 2009a), this sort of animation creates a strong attractor for the reader's attention. It is effected by features such as topicality, agency, thematic newness, and so on, and also by a movement along an empathy scale (Stockwell 2009b, Langacker 1991: 305–29). Abstractions, objects, machines, animals, and body-parts can be moved along the scale towards integrated person-ness by the same sort of animating stylistic features that have just been outlined in the *Paris Peasant* excerpt. The irony, of course, in this passage, is that the animation of objects and body-parts occurs as the integrated consciousness of the man is disembodied, diffused and transfigured. The point at which this transfiguration happens – across the paragraph break at the end of the passage – is the point in the text at which the verb-forms shift. Previous violent

activity is replaced by transformation ('is turned into'), and the next verb-phrase is ellipted ('The blood, rays'). The process is frozen 'in the throes of an incomprehensible gesture,' followed by a verb-phrase that indicates stasis ('grew rigid'). The final verb is existential, and negated, as the man ceases to exist and becomes an incomprehensible sign in the night-sky.

Lastly, it must be said of course that the diction of the text has a significant effect on atmosphere. Much of the violence and the dynamic sense of the excerpt above is carried in the lexical choices and register. This is not simply a matter of the individual connotations and semantic associations of words denoting objects like 'blood,' 'bone,' 'arteries,' 'crosiers,' 'rubies,' 'fountain-man,' and so on, nor descriptive words that carry narratorial evaluation and subjectivity, like 'spurned,' 'implacable,' 'monstrous,' and 'useless.' Atmospheric effects are also carried in the syntactic arrangement whereby there is a great deal of circumstantial and accompanying descriptive phrases in all of the four long, complex sentences that comprise almost the whole of the first paragraph of the extract. This has the effect of forming a perspectival filter through which the atmospheric dream-like world is presented. At this point, we have strayed into a discussion of narratorial tone, and so I will pick up the ambient account of diction in the next section.

Surrealist tonalities

The ambient effect of a literary text is a matter not simply of the atmospherics of the presented world; ambience is also affected by the tone of voice through which that world is itself presented. At its simplest, an awareness and semantic account of word-choice and register is the starting point for an analysis of tone in a text. In the excerpt from Hugh Sykes Davies' (1935) *Petron* given earlier in this chapter, the individual lexical choices denote the road, the gate, the grass, the signpost, the pruning-bill, and the lane, and together these denotations draw collectively on a semantic field that might be labelled as an old rural scene. Equally a semantic field of injury and violence might be denoted cumulatively by the word-choices of 'contorted,' 'vomited,' 'blood,' and 'plunged.' Part of the gothic tone in evidence in this passage derives from the evocation of these semantic fields: a rural setting, a distancing into the past, horror, and extreme violence. Furthermore, the place of the word-choices in syntactic form (the lexicogrammar that constitutes the register of the text) also conveys a gothic tone: that which Nicholls (2004: 407) noted as the 'archaising tone' of *Petron* can be identified to the overly formal and old-fashioned phrases such as 'Perceiving his error,' 'the most dreadful,' 'the business of the countryside,' and so on. Taken together, the diction and the register of the excerpt set out the broad tone of the passage.

Nevertheless, this account is rather simple and rests at the level of denotation. In other words, the direct and most prominent semantic meanings of the words, phrases, and syntactic patterns are used to identify the broad semantic fields set up by the text. There is likely to be the most readerly consensus on this level of the account, because the denotations are usually by definition what a speech-community understands as the primary meanings of the items at hand. Most critical responses to *Petron* agree with Nicholls'

(2004) observations on its gothic tone. Kohlmann (2014: 114) notes the ‘English traditions of Gothic and fantasy writing’ evident in the novel. Jackaman (1989: 233) mentions ‘the rapid transitions from one gothic image to another’. Hynes (1976: 306) suggests it ‘might be described as surrealist-Gothic, or surrealist-picaresque, for it recounts the wanderings of a hero who has adventures that are often grotesquely horrible, though they are told in a relentlessly cheerful and accepting tone of voice.’ These agreed senses of the tone of *Petron* are delineated by the agreed denotations of the diction and register, as well as the content.

However, I would argue that ambient effects also go deeper and subtler than this. Every semantic field that is evoked by a particularly denoted element also has a less central set of connotations that might also be shared by a speech-community, and even more loose associations that might be more personal, local, and idiosyncratic. The semantic field of gothic literature that is held in common by a group of readers will be determined by the extent to which those readers are familiar or especially well-read in gothic texts. Their experiential sense of ‘gothic-ness’ will largely be down to individual reading-histories. Other sets of associations are even more specific to the readerly group in question: the ‘most dreadful antics of epilepsy’ might not be a phrase that sits easily in current Western modes of discourse around illness. It sounds antiquated and inappropriate as a description of behaviour. Yet other examples will have individual subjective experiential differences: I have little sense (until I just looked it up) what a ‘pruning-bill’ looks like; others, with a more agricultural or rural upbringing, or with a taste for historical tools, or simply greater gardening knowledge, will recognise it as a bill-hook – a broad-bladed curved tool for hedging, thatching, and cutting thorny weeds. In this case, my own initial readerly sense of the pruning-bill was entirely supplied by what it does in the text of *Petron*.

The gradation from collective denotation through generally accepted connotations to more loose associations and personal experiential senses is usually regarded in cognitive linguistics as a prototype effect. There is a shading from one category to another, and semantic fields themselves are similarly not bounded by rigid edges, but shade into each other as clouds or regions of meaning. This means that the tone of any passage of text can be roughly identified with general agreement, but there will also be further, more subtle, delicate, and personal effects of any particular tonal pattern. The detail of these latter effects will be individual, but the fact of the common gradation towards them can be analysed.

In order to illustrate some of this thinking, here is the beginning of a poem by Paul Eluard, originally published in his collection *La Rose Publique* (The Public Rose, 1934). The translation here appears at the end of David Gascoyne’s *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (from 1935), as one among several examples of surrealist poetry drawn from Breton, Dalí, Péret, Tzara, and others.

What the workman says is never to the point

A winter all branchy and hard as a corpse
 A man on a bench in a street that escapes from the crowd
 And is filled up with solitude
 Makes way for the banal machinery of despair

For its mirrors of lead
 For its baths of pebbles
 For its stagnant statues
 Makes way for the neglect of good
 For the tattered memories of truth
 Black light old conflagration
 With hair lost in a labyrinth
 A man who mistook the landing the door and the key
 So as to know more so as to love more.

(Eluard, in the translation by Gascoyne 1935:108)

It is, firstly, easy to discern the bleak and despairing tone of most of the poem from the common semantic associations of almost all of the lexical choices made right up until the final line. There are many abstractions, which begin gloomily ('solitude', 'despair', 'neglect') and only become more positive towards the end, where even then they are modified negatively ('neglect of good', 'memories of truth'). Alongside these are several more concrete nouns ('man', 'corpse', 'branches', 'bench', 'machinery', 'mirrors', 'baths', 'statues'), though each of these might be said to be de-concretised in a variety of ways: by indefiniteness ('a bench'), by metaphor in a partitive expression ('machinery of despair'), by qualification ('mirrors of lead') and pre-modification ('stagnant statues'). The last two techniques here render the concrete nouns more like qualities (leadен mirrors, pebbly baths) or change their properties (the statue is made at once liquid and even more static with 'stagnant' – a word that usually collocates only with water, retaining its Latin origin as *stagnum* = 'pool'). The cumulative effect of all of these lexical choices and patterns seems to me to be one of gloom, depression, and loneliness. People appear either indefinitely ('a man'), dead ('a corpse'), facelessly collectivised ('the crowd'), by disconnected emotion ('despair'), or by other indirect deflections and metonyms of various sorts (mirrors, statues, memories, hair).

The title thematises the practical and prosaic, only to be followed immediately by this succession of increasingly abstracted moves. There is a scene built up – a city-scape and apartment building interior – but the poem is all about the ambience and particularly the tonal, perceptive filter.

The movement in the poem is effected not by verb-choices but by each line replacing the previous perception appositionally. There is only one main verb in the text ('Makes way' in the fourth line), and even that is ambivalent with regard to its subject. It could grammatically be governed by 'A winter' or by 'A man', though the prototypical agency and strong figural nature of 'man' might make this the most likely connection. Even so, the appositional repetition of the 'for-' phrases that follow serve to undermine the treatment of 'Makes way' as an ordinary verb. The four 'for-' phrases look at first as if they complete the motional verb 'Makes way for..', but of course each 'For' could equally be read in the sense of 'So that..' or 'Because..', detaching each phrase from the verb-phrase that has been left behind, and looking forward into the poem. This further serves to weaken the predicative force of 'Makes way', thematising the sense that one thing is being pushed aside in favour of another just newly perceived – and also anticipating the meaning of 'So as..' emphasised twice in the aspiring final line.

Making way appositionally is in fact the main form of progression across the text, as each line occludes the last and replaces it in perception. And each newly positioned descriptive clip presents not simply the plain denotation but a perception dense with an ongoing and associative attitude. So, for example, a winter scene is set up, but it is coloured tonally. It is the unmentioned trees that are associated with winter which are bare and branchy ('A winter all branchy' is a semantic compression that evokes leafless trees against the dull, cold sky). There is an associative personification of the dead winter or dead trees, but – carried within a simile comparison – it is not completely realised as a full personification, and remains merely associative and suggestive. Likewise, other associations suggest metaphorical replacements, but do not configure them completely: despair is concretised into a machine, but it is a banal one; the mirrors, made of lead, are presumably dull; the baths are full not of water but of pebbles, which are associated with seawater; and statues are stagnant like water, but still, like stagnant water. And of course there are echoic semantic connections and properties between all of these images, some of which will be collective for most readers, and some of which will be individual and personally evocative.

These sorts of consistent connections can be understood as a consequence of the lexical chaining of words and phrases from semantic domains that are at least associated together. Evans (2006) refers to words and phrases inclusively as *lexical concepts*, which provide the reader with access points to more associative and schematic *conceptual models* (Evans 2009). Meanings at the level of lexical concepts tend to be socially shared, whereas more personal flavours can occur at the schematic level. For example, there is something about the tone of the poem that reminds me of Thomas Hardy's (1900) 'The darkling thrush'. This is also a poem about despair, set in mid-winter at the turn of the 19th century, and perhaps it is invoked for me by the common occurrence of words and phrases such as 'corpse' and 'hard,' and parallel tropes such as simile, and branches against the sky ('bleak twigs overhead'):

And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres.

(Hardy 1900: 5)

Both Hardy's text and Eluard's seem to have an ambivalent but tonally similar redemptive ending as well.

Of course, these effects I have just described are almost certainly subjectively allusive only in my sense of the poem – almost definitely not part either of Gascoyne's 1935 translation nor the French original. Even more associatively, the phrase 'machinery of despair' reminds me of the antonymic phrase 'the machineries of joy'. This is the title of a 1964 Ray Bradbury science fiction story, in which it is misattributed to the poet William Blake. In fact, Bradbury himself invented the phrase, though it certainly has a Blakean tone. The phrase 'machinery of despair' also invokes my memory of Dada paintings in which human bodies are blended into mechanical parts and mechanisms (such as,

among many, Francis Picabia's 1917 drawing of gears *That's the Girl Born Without a Mother*, or Raoul Hausmann's 1920 drawing of a man with machines in his head *Tatlin at Home*, or his 1921 sculpture of a mechanical head, *The Spirit of Our Time*). Clearly the Blakean Bradbury echo is anachronistic and personal to me, with the figurative Dada evocation perhaps slightly less idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, all of these associations are for me part of the tonal texture of the poem, just as are those features that are evoked in your own experience of the poem. Evans' (2009) model reminds us that we need to encompass socially shared meanings and effects as well as personal and experiential senses in an account of literary tone.

Surrealist tone, as in the Eluard/Gascoyne poem above, and in the Aragon excerpt, and in Davies' *Petron*, tends to be declarative and certain, even though the content and scenes described are often uncertain, dreamlike, unstable, or transformative. The cumulative associations of semantic domains built up word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase of course create a setting, or scene, or set of characters, or narrative progression, but they also create an ambient sense that clouds around the denotative meaning. In the sketches of the texts in this chapter, these ambient senses are connotative and associative, moving from culturally shared to idiosyncratic and personal. Much of the common talk about atmosphere and tone in literature gestures to its ineffable or delicate nature (see Stockwell 2014a for examples): ambient effects are generally felt to be subtle, delicate, and difficult to articulate precisely. Though it is probably true that the description of any particular ambient effect of a literary reading will rely on impressionistic and lyrical expression, it is possible at least to understand the poetic mechanics of ambience.

According to Evans' (2009) cognitive linguistic framework, lexical items generate the activation of schematic models that are partly culturally shared and partly based on personal experience. Of course, these semantic domains are richer than a mere denotational value for any given word: they include not only the associated meanings but all of the memories of physical and emotional allusions that might have accompanied instances of these elements in the past. It has long been recognised that readers engage naturally in semantic *priming*, in which an incoming linguistic sequence sets up a ready-made assembly of likely semantic contexts so that further interpretation of the next incoming bit of language does not need to occur from scratch. It is possible to use computational techniques across large corpora of texts to discern the socially shared collocates of certain words and phrases, and so work out the most commonly agreed lexical priming within a speech community – a *semantic prosody* for particular phrases (Hoey 2005).

[A]ll the features we subconsciously attend to have the effect of priming us so that, when we come to use the word (or syllable or word combination) ourselves, we are likely (in speech, particularly) to use it in one of its characteristic lexical contexts, in one of the grammatical patterns it favours, in one of its typical semantic contexts, as part of one of the genres/styles with which it is most associated, in the same kind of social and physical context, with a similar pragmatics and in similar textual ways.

(Hoey 2013)

In a similar way, within Cognitive Grammar, Langacker (2008) suggests that a sequence or chain of constructions within and across clauses creates a set of associated potential meanings, only one of which is actually activated. In other words, a word or phrase primes up a set of possible associations and semantic connections in mind, and then (in a coherent and rational text) one of these is taken up and actualised in the next word or phrase, and so on. Each word or phrase or construction (a *reference point*) thus initially has many potential meaningful denotations or associations (its *targets*). 'A particular reference point affords potential access to many different targets. Collectively, this set of potential targets constitute the reference point's *dominion*' (Langacker 2008: 83–4). A dominion at any point of a text is a mental representation of all of the potential meanings associated with that part of the text. It is a sort of cloud of associations, ready to be activated by the subsequent incoming text.

An obvious question is: what happens to all of the potential targets of a particular construction which are not activated, as the text takes a different subsequent line? What happens to the primed but then unrealised meanings? It is at least plausible to suggest (and would be consistent with the psycholinguistic phenomenon of lexical priming and the corpus linguistic notion of semantic prosody and the cognitive linguistic notion of dominion) that these unrealised potential associations resonate in short-term memory at least temporarily. If the aura of associations remains consistently toned across a text (for example as an air of melancholy, or discomfort, or fear, or gothic-ness, for example), then this could easily be regarded as the source for a sense of consistent register and a felt ambient effect of the discourse.

In a surrealist text, such as the Eluard/Gascoyne poem above, the dominion effect is a blend of expected ambient consistency that produces the definite sense of, in this case, the cityscape and apartment atmosphere and the tonal sense of gloom and despair – but also an unexpected set of striking collocations: 'mirrors of lead,' 'baths of pebbles,' 'stagnant statues.' These types of images are not unreadable; as suggested above, there are enough associative semantic connections at least for an evocative link to be made. But the potential targets of these words would, in a non-surrealist text, remain of very low prototypical value, and would be highly unlikely to be activated. Here in the surrealist setting, potential targets at the very edges of the possible dominion are always likely to be the ones that are actually activated by the text. Of course, repeated exposure to this sort of associative semantic patterning seems to have the readerly effect of opening up the realm of possibilities, making a reader more alive to delicate, distant, and difficult semantic connections. In short, the ambient effects of surrealist tone can tune a reader into the surrealist setting, vivifying the image itself.

The surreal image

Ambience in a literary text can only be effective if it operates on an object within the world of the text. Ambience is the sum of the experiential quality of both the setting and environment (atmosphere) and the filtering voice (tone). Of course, the world presented in the text will always have content and a sequence to a great or lesser extent for lyric and narrative

respectively, and the filtering observer or narrator will also be observing or describing a particular object or tangible process. This object in focus, for our context, is the *surreal image*.

As theorised and framed by André Breton (1969, 1990) in the 1924 *Manifesto* and in *Communicating Vessels* (*Les Vases Communicants*, from 1955) and by René Magritte (1978, 1979), the surreal image was a conceptual unconscious phenomenon that existed, and could be brought to the surface of awareness through surrealist technique. These techniques, or mediating forms of communication, could be various, and in some ways the medium itself was not the central issue. A surrealist image could be rendered in writing, speech, music, painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, or any other form (see Dubnick 1980). Repetitions of the same surreal image were common, especially in ekphrastic poetry-of-paintings such as Dalí's 1937 painting and poem *Métamorphose de Narcisse* (The Metamorphosis of Narcissus), discussed in Chapter 7, or the collaged poems and pictures of Eluard and Ernst (1922) in *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (The Misfortunes of the Immortals) discussed in Chapter 6. In these cases, the parallelism of text and image each serves to amplify the other, and renders the encounter with the surreal image even more vivid, striking, personally experience, and *real*.

Though the surreal image is central to any surrealist piece of work, it is of course crucial to point out that the stylistic medium by which that object communicates with the viewer or reader carries an importance for the experience and effectiveness of the encounter. The ambience surrounding the surreal image plays a major part not only in its strikingness, but also in its recognition as surrealist in the first place.

"BLUE BUGS IN LIQUID SILK"

blue bugs in liquid silk
talk with correlation particularly like
two women in white bandages

a birdcage swings from the spleen of ceiling frowning her soul in
large wastes
and a purple sound purrs in basket-house
putting rubies on with red arms

enter the coalman in a storm of sacks
holding a queenly egg-cup
the window stares and thinks separately her hair
impartially embankment
to the flood of her thought in motionless torrent
roundly looking the ladies

there is no formula for disruption of pink plaster
nor emotions to bandage the dead

(Philip O'Connor 1937: 12)

This poem was published in May 1937 in *New Verse*, a left-leaning magazine that enthusiastically featured surrealist writing between 1934 and 1937, only to reject the movement

in favour of the poetry of W.H. Auden and the poetic importance of the 'Mass Observation' social survey project towards the end of the decade. The poem is striking for its succession of encountered surreal objects, following a technique of assembly. The surreal objects and the unexpectedness of each collocation in itself builds up an atmosphere that can be traced (below) through its dominion effects. However, the poem also has a very particular tone which manifests itself between the descriptions of these surreal objects, and which I will also consider afterwards.

What are the dominion effects of the referent points in the poem? In the first line, repeated from the title as set out above, 'blue bugs' is likely to be treated as a single lexical item only by entomologists thinking about the metallic insect *Zicrona caerulea*. For everyone else, 'blue' will be a defining adjectival premodifier specifying a particular colour of bug, already rather unusual or exotic, perhaps. But the image of blueness is likely to persist in dominion, and indeed (in an informal discussion with a small group of a dozen readers) most of my students who read this line say that the silk in the next phrase is also blue. Perhaps this is furthermore because the non-defining adjective 'liquid' might also have associative target traces of water which is typically blue or turquoise in nature. The discomfort that accompanies many people's responses to the idea of bugs is tactile – an embodied disgust – and this priming of the haptic sense seems for many respondents to generate a tactile and textured sense for 'liquid silk' as well. In other words, and for these interleaved reasons, there is a sensual density to the first line, reinforced of course by its repetition from the title. The text was printed with the same title and first line, as reproduced here, so in effect 'Blue bugs in liquid silk' is repeated and its denotational value is reiterated. However, the title appears in small capitals and between doubled quotation marks, as represented above, and the graphic and font change can be seen as tonal: it gestures towards the compositional tone of voice of the writer.

Several of the unrealised target senses in the cloud of possibilities are likely to be prototypically weakened even further by being regarded as anachronisms. So for the referent 'bugs' I undoubtedly have target traces of computer bugs, eavesdropping bugs, bugs as germs, and even the 1960s nickname for the Volkswagen beetle car, but the 1937 framing renders these modern associations surely very weakly in any actual reading. This established 1930s atmosphere, produced by the dominion aura, then certainly has an ongoing constraining effect across the rest of the poem. A couple of my students reported a sense of blue bug-shaped costume jewellery, in a 1930s style, and this was reinforced for them by the mention later on of 'rubies', so that their mental image of a 'queeny egg-cup' was a jewel-encrusted ornament. These sort of subliminal cross-textual effects operate through the dominion traces as a mutually reinforcing network, eventually (as in this case for these readers) coming up to conscious awareness by the perceived reiteration.

Like these anachronisms, some dominion traces are wilfully repressed. For me, the 'two women in white bandages' evokes mummified bodies, which are rendered even more strange by the fact that they talk (and are somehow like blue bugs in liquid silk). The word 'mummies' always has an echo of mothers for me, though in fact I know that the word comes via Latin from the Persian *mūm* (meaning *wax*). Any motherly dominion trace that might subliminally exist, then, is discarded at some point along the way. The women in bandages are more likely injured – although the blue and perhaps

a remnant of the 'hospital bug' trace creates for me a weak evocation of nurses. However, 'bandage the dead' in the final line ultimately represses this evocation, and strongly reinforces the bandaging as swaddling an injury or corpse.

The colours of the first two sections of the poem are particularly atmospherically set up. The initial blue of the bugs (and diffusively the silk) is thrown into relief against the white bandages. The second section primes up redness, but it does it initially subliminally, with target traces associated with the internal organ 'spleen', then 'purple', then 'rubies', until finally the 'red' of the arms surfaces the trace. When I asked my readers what colour the hair in the third section was, without exception they all said it was black. This might be the trace associated with 'the coalman', and it might be reinforced by the repeated invocation of interiority (where it is perceptually dark) carried along with 'enter', and 'in a storm of sacks'. The darkness of this section gives way to the 'pink plaster' of the last two lines. Although it is clear throughout that we are in a room ('birdcage', 'ceiling', 'basket-house', 'window'), the pink plaster of the end seems to carry with it not only literal associations of the wall, but for various readers also evocations of a plaster-cast over an injury, or a metaphor for skin itself. Either way, it is clear where these associations have been traced from in the dominions of colours and bandages throughout.

Aside from these atmospheric matters of the setting, there is also a strikingly odd tone in the poem. A descriptive voice is explicitly alluded to in the quotation marks of the title, and in its self-conscious repetition. Interjected phrases, though, such as 'particularly like', establish a matter-of-fact or fastidious tone of precision from the beginning. The prevalence of adjectives in the first section, where every single noun is premodified, might also then be read as a similar indication of a fussy, precise tone. In themselves, neither of these apparent effects (that were only in fact apparent to me and one of my students) would be strong enough to be easy to articulate, but taken together, they serve to reinforce each other and create this faint tonal effect (at least for us).

Other tonal traces evident in the diction and phrasing include 'enter the coalman', with its syntactic echo of a stage direction. Everyone read this as an inverted verb, with the coalman entering; no one read the phrase as a violent penetration of the coalman. Though there was a faint echo of violence throughout, the tone of the poem is one of the quiet consequences of violence, rather than acts of violence themselves: the initial 'white bandages', the 'red arms', and the final bandaging of 'the dead'. The interjections 'impartially' and 'there is no formula' return to the resigned matter-of-fact tone of the beginning. The whole 'flood of thought' syntax of the long third section can be read tonally as being filtered through the same descriptive filter.

I am very conscious that the foregoing description of ambient effects as possible dominion traces – in spite of the pinning to a small, informal reader-response – is speculative, delicate, and diffuse. The effects being addressed are weak and rarefied. The validity of the effects depends on introspection and an appeal, upon bringing them to analytical realisation, to your own similar intuition. Of course, it is difficult to see how an account of barely conscious effects can be otherwise. And this is compounded by the fact that subliminality – or the surrealist unconscious – is itself a theme in this account as well. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to me that the convergence of notions from different fields of psychology, cognitive linguistics, and some corpus linguistic concepts

at least suggests that my approach here is not completely off the mark. The intricacies of ambient features are described here in such detail that it is, of course, far beyond anything that resembles the moment-by-moment awareness of any actual, live reading, however careful, attentive or intense that reader might be. My suggestion, however, is that the micro-realizations of tonal and atmospheric dominion effects – if consistent, persistent, and repetitive – are represented back to consciousness at the macro-level of a sense of ambience.

The surreal image – in this case, the succession of attention to a series of images, creating a sense of movement in ways similar to those suggested by Deggan (2013) above – gains its essential surrealism here not only from its odd, dissonant denotational value, but also, and perhaps in this case significantly, from the ambience of atmosphere and tone across the poem. In surreal images, says Fowlie (1969: 141–2), ‘everything is comparable to everything else... In the image everything finds an echo and a resemblance... It contains both resemblances and oppositions, and illustrates... the logic of the absurd.’ The force of the surreal image is significantly an effect of its ambience. Together, the atmosphere and tone serve to amplify the surreal image as they mediate it. In doing so, the surreal image is essentially composed out of its positioning and communicativeness, as well as its denotational content. In this sense, the surrealists were wrong: the mediating ambience through which any particular surreal image is presented does have a crucial effect on the reader’s or viewer’s experience. Ambient style in surrealism remains important.

9 Immersion

Metaphorism and literalism

In much of the foregoing discussion of surrealist poetics, I have repeatedly asserted the requirement that surrealism must be taken seriously. In other words, and without denying that there is much that is deliberately pointless and humorous for its own sake in surrealist activity, the political commitment of the original context calls at least for a serious readerly stance. Furthermore, it seems to me that much surrealist writing gains in power if it is not trivialised or diminished by being boxed up as being merely poetic, ornamental, metaphorical, fantastical, or escapist. Central to this readerly prescription is the way in which metaphor is treated in surrealism.

Many of the examples of surrealist writing discussed up to this point can be read in ways which render the surreal images as metaphors – and these metaphorical meanings can be generalised back to the everyday world of the reader: surrealism is metaphorised. So, for example, the metamorphosis of Narcissus (from [Chapter 7](#)) can be read, not as a literal transformation as in the imaginary poetic world, but as a metaphor for transformation itself back in the prosaic world of the reader. The apocalyptic images in the chainpoems in [Chapter 6](#) can be thematised as metaphors for a revolution either in politics or personal identity or both. The ‘it’ that ‘doesn’t look like a finger’ but ‘looks like a feather of broken glass’ (from [Chapter 5](#)) can be read as a repeated metaphor for ineffable anxiety. However, all such interpretations render the surrealist experience relatively safe and unchallenging. They all involve a schematic recasting of the surreal image over on the other side of a fictional, or ontological boundary, from where it can only impinge on our reality by being generalised, thematised, or in some other way rendered as an aesthetic literary object or trope.

Interpreting the surrealist encounter as a boxed-up theme or historicised moment like this is to move from being a reader to being a critical analyst or scholar. This is fine, of course, though in the transition something of the experiential immediacy and impact of the surreal is lost. In this chapter, I explore the nature of the encounter a reader has with the surreal image, firstly considering the differences between a metaphorised and a literalised reading. This experiential effect is a major determinant of the sense of *immersion* in the surreal work, and one of the main characteristics of surrealist immersion is a feeling of disorientation; how such disorientation is sustained across a reading of a text will firstly be explored in the next section.

In [Chapter 6](#), I recalled Adamowicz’ (1998) distinction between collage as a creative compositional technique and collage as a creative technique of perception. She draws here on Louis Aragon’s (1965) distinction, originally written for an exhibition of Max

Ernst's work in 1923, that differentiates cubist collage from surrealist collage in these terms, respectively. In other words, the surrealist experience is located more in the experience of perception than in the historical moment of composition. Aragon (1965: 26) points to Ernst's surrealism as a means of 'deflecting each object [in the collage] from its meaning, in order to awaken a new reality' ('Il détourne chaque objet de son sens pour l'éveiller à une réalité nouvelle').

Both Aragon and Breton [in the same 1923 exhibition catalogue], when distinguishing Ernst's use of collage from cubism's *papiers collés*, foreground the importance of strategies of selection and combination of pre-formed elements, whether photographic reproductions or engravings, as a critique of realism; and both invoke magic and the marvellous when referring to the transformation of reality effected in collage. For Aragon and Breton, Ernst's pictorial practice is based on an aesthetic which is not medium-specific but encompasses both pictorial and verbal modes of expression. While Breton focuses on collage as a combinatory or syntagmatic practice, Aragon foregrounds its paradigmatic or metaphorical mechanisms. [...] Lastly, their positions diverge on the finality of collage. Breton considers collage as a dialectical structure [...] This contrasts with Aragon who considers collage in oppositional terms: deconstructing the so-called 'illusion' on which Ernst's images are built, Aragon emphasizes the alternating vision between reality and appearance, or between the literal and figurative levels of the pictorial metaphor created.

(Adamowicz 1998: 4–5)

Like much critical analysis of surrealism, this has become entangled with later, anachronistic views of language (as I sketched out in Chapter 3). The terms used here are drawn from Roman Jakobson's (1960) closing statement to a conference from 1958, adapted from an address he gave as President of the Linguistic Society of America in 1956 (see also Jakobson and Pomorska 1980, Jakobson and Tynjanov 1971, and, for an overview, Stockwell 2010). He differentiates syntagmatic relationships (sequencing of text) as being metonymic, compared with paradigmatic relationships (lexical and phrasal choices) which he regards as metaphorical in nature. This hugely reductive distinction between combination and selection has the hallmarks of 'high structuralism' (Scholes 1974: 157) that appeared over three decades after early surrealism. Jakobson's position derives more directly from the later diffusion of de Saussure's (1916) ideas. Adamowicz also sets up Breton's orthodox Marxist view of collage as productively and progressively dialectical, against Aragon's view as a 'deconstructionist', though this surely is illegitimately and anachronistically to pre-empt Derrida (1967), who in turn was drawing on Lacan's earlier errors in misreading de Saussure (see Chapter 3).

What Adamowicz is essentially noticing here is a difference between Breton's and Aragon's view of metaphorical force in surrealism. Breton regards access to the surreal world through writing as an additive and cumulative experience, while Aragon sees the surreal experience as a convulsive moment in which reality and dream are placed into immediate, close antagonistic contrast. In fact, both of these positions rely on metaphor, but in slightly different ways: they can be regarded as two perspectives on the same process by which a reader or viewer metaphorises a literary or visual object.

In current text world theory (Werth 1999, Gavins 2007), a metaphor can be described and analysed as a type of world-switch. In other words, a reader engages their attention in a fictional presented world (the text world that is a matrix point of entry to the fictional landscape), and if a metaphor is encountered, that motivates a further, embedded switch of attention to another state-of-affairs (a sub-world) in which the metaphoric elements are imagined literally. In Philip O'Connor's (1937: 12) poem from the end of the last chapter, the line 'enter the coalman in a storm of sacks' could be read metaphorically. In this case, the reader in the middle of the poem has their attention directed within the text world of a room in which 'blue bugs' are talking and a 'birdcage swings from the spleen of ceiling'. Upon meeting the 'coalman' line, one possible resolution for meaningfulness would be to treat the line as a metaphor, generating a new embedded metaphor world in which there is a coalman with some coalsacks and a storm. In this switched world, there is a literal storm and a literal coalman. However, that world is connected back to the matrix text world by a metaphorical relationship that reads the line as a blend of the storm and the sacks and the coalman coming in (from outside). There are several emergent associations of this, such as the implication that the storm is wild enough to blow around heavy coalsacks, or that the storm is at night (because of the association of blackness with coal), or that the coalman is bringing in an overwhelmingly swirlingly large number of sacks of coal, and so on. In Gavins' (2007: 146–64) revised text world theory, the capacity for metaphor to generate a blend of features draws on Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) cognitive linguistic extension of work on metaphor as conceptual integration. In these approaches, a metaphor is a readerly consequence of a search for resolving a piece of anomalous language, but the effect in the reader is itself a newly emergent concept. So a metaphor is neither one nor the other of the original inputs, but can feel like a newly constituted idea that then has an ongoing effect in the continuing matrix text world.

This current understanding of the mechanics of metaphorising lines up rather well with the early surrealist view of what was happening. Metaphor affords a powerful access to new knowledge, rather than being simply ornamental or aesthetically pleasing. Metaphoric resolutions by readers of textual anomalies provide entry to domains of ideology and frames of knowledge that can be striking and new. With Dalí's *Lobster Telephone*, for example, the elements of the lobster and the telephone base are built in a viewer's mind by encountering them in a picture or art gallery. The handpiece has been replaced by the lobster, so a viewer must create a sub-world in which there is no plastic handpiece, but in which a lobster operates as a working telephone. It would be possible to view the lobster telephone merely as a piece of whimsy, as an object that exists only in the dream-world as a sort of fantasy element. As I pointed out in [Chapter 6](#), however, the lobster telephone also exists as what it is in the actual world. In the actual encounter with it in an art gallery, it is literally in front of you. My argument is that all surrealist written metaphor operates across the world-switches in a similar way.

Breton's view of the accumulation of new meaning by a dialectical toggling between metaphor world and text world is not substantially different from Aragon's view that a new blended concept emerges from jarring images. Both are simply different ways of construing the same effect which can be captured in text world terms. The crucial factor in this – to return to the opening argument of this chapter – is that anomalous language

that might motivate a metaphorical resolution in a surrealist text needs to be engaged fully for its full, rich effect. Reading surrealism ornamentally seems not to render its major force. In the following excerpted lines from David Gascoyne's (1936a) poem 'The Cage,' for example, the underlying metaphor is much more striking if it is attended to intensely:

Your face is marked upon the clockface
 My hands are beneath your hair
 And if the time you mark sets free the birds
 And if they fly away towards the forest
 The hour will no longer be ours
 [...]
 Once flown
 The feathered hour will not return
 And I shall have gone away

(Gascoyne 1936a)

The underlying conceptual metaphor here is essentially TIME IS A BIRD, a variation on 'time flies,' and the surreal effect is simply a literalisation of the metaphor, such that a blend like 'the feathered hour' can make sense. 'The feathered hour' is neither simply a bird nor simply the time, but is a blended metonymic derivation of the feathers of birds and the counting of time (in cognitive linguistics, a metonymy is a semantic mapping within a single domain); this is then subjected to a metaphorical blending (a mapping across domains) that produces a new, emergent concept of the feathered hour. In this text, Aragon's sense of a fast combination of jarring images applies, but the mechanism is still metaphorical blending.

Breton's perspective on the same phenomenon can be seen with Gascoyne's (1936b) poem 'The Very Image,' in which a series of jarring images is again presented in quick succession, but they are left to accumulate rather than being explicitly blended. The outcome is the same, and the structure of the text world analysis is consistent, but the stylistic technique is slightly different. The poem begins:

The Very Image

To René Magritte

An image of my grandmother
 her head appearing upside-down upon a cloud
 the cloud transfixed on the steeple
 of a deserted railway-station
 far away

An image of an aqueduct
 with a dead crow hanging from the first arch
 a modern-style chair from the second
 a fir-tree lodged in the third
 and the whole scene sprinkled with snow

(Gascoyne 1936b: 35)

Each of the next few stanzas adds images in a similar way, until the final stanza combines ‘all these images / and many others’ together and places them ‘in model birdcages / about six-inches high.’ Germain (1978) describes the effect:

Faced with the irrefutable incongruities, the unexpected telescoping and astonishing vividness of the images in the poem, the reader may find his mind filled with a sense of wonder, or perhaps an irritating amusement which suggests the images are somehow significant, even though they are obviously products of mental activities with which normal consciousness is typically unfamiliar.

(Germain 1978: 33–4)

My argument throughout is that a reader who reads with a mind open to the transformative effect of surrealist metaphor is likely to be affected more profoundly than a reader who treats the texts merely as ornamental diversions or isolated moments of aesthetic pleasure. This is not to say that these latter aspects are not also part of a reading experience, but it seems to me that the textual extremism of much surrealist writing demands a more intense attention in reading.

Reading non-surrealistically, or without what might be termed a surrealist stance, the surreal text still has a striking power, but its capacity for persistent resonance in the reader’s mind is relatively diminished if it is simply aestheticised. Even such poetic readings necessarily have to partake in the adoption of the surreal image in a surreal landscape, even if only temporarily – otherwise the text cannot be engaged with nor read at all. However, the key to the power of surrealism in any one encounter with one of its objects (poem, novel, painting, sculpture, and so on) lies in the capacity for that object to sustain the world-switch, to the point of readerly immersion.

Sustaining defamiliarisation

It should be clear from several preceding chapters of this book that there are a variety of stylistic techniques for generating a striking image, a shock, or a moment of disorientation. The majority of critical opinion seems to have it that this shock is unique, historicised to a moment in time and culture, and is not repeatable (see Mudie 2013 for an overview). This position seems to originate with Adorno (1991), writing in 1958, who looks back at surrealism before the war and cannot reiterate its strikingness in his own reading; instead of a visceral response, his own reading is cerebral and empty of shock-value. ‘After the European catastrophe the Surrealist shocks lost their force’ (Adorno 1991: 87). Adorno’s failure to regenerate surrealist shock stems from his reading of surrealism that places it precisely and uniquely in its historical moment, so that the shock is not available in a different, later point in time. According to Garcia Düttman (2002), Adorno sees shock as a ‘negative experience’ which is similar to alienation: since literary shock is a startling of the self, Adorno regards it as ‘the experience of non-simultaneity which prevents recognition: the subject can no longer experience itself in its history – in its experience’ (Garcia Düttman 2002: 197). For Adorno, this sense of impotence towards what previous eras regarded as shocking is not particular to surrealism (he applies it

also to the cubist and Dada montages and collages), though surrealism was in its time an extreme example. Nichol森 (1999: 55) points out that 'Adorno's essay on Surrealism is intent on setting Surrealist shocks in a socio-historical as opposed to a psychologistic context.' This, of course, is the problem. Adorno is so focused on historicising surrealism that he neglects to read it. 'Surrealist images are not, [Adorno] says, dream images or symbols of the unconscious. Rather they look both backward in time to the fetishized commodities of the nineteenth century and forward in time to the explosive destruction of cities to come' (Nichol森 1999: 55).

This general critical view seems to me to be wilfully unnatural, and a victim of its own theorising. Shock is not necessarily negative, and not necessarily alienating. As with all historicism, Adorno's view de-emphasises the historicity of his own position: only he knows that the surrealism of the 1930s was about to be followed by the Second World War – the surrealists were neither prophets nor seers into their future. At the same time, he declines to adopt their own view of their own work (as access to dream and the unconscious), in preference to his own selective view of history. More importantly, it seems to me that the scholarly view that denies a persisting shock-value to surrealism is a minority view. It does not recognise the continuing popularity and enthusiasm for surrealism, and it evades the requirement to offer an account of how surrealist shock does actually appear to be sustained in many people's readings. Surrealism is certainly not simply an historical curiosity, in our own time.

So how is surrealist shock repeatable? And how is strikingness sustained throughout a text? Consider the first appearance of Joan Miró's poem-painting 'Le corps de ma brune puisque je l'aime comme ma chatte habillée en vert salade comme de la grêle c'est pareil', in 1925. The painting consists of a dirty beige background, with a thin crossed line in white, which becomes a swirl of white, as if paint or milk has been poured down the canvas. There are small blobs of blue and red and yellow. 'The serpentine body of the loved one consists of a long white blob that rises like a wisp of smoke, undulating gracefully. The double swelling is the breasts. Having risen, the figure declines gracefully again in one last hazy fall of hair' (Dupin 1993: 126). But painted across the whole surface in black are the title words of the painting (which, in my translation, are laid out as follows):

the body
of my dark-haired woman

since I love her
like my kitty
 dressed
 in lettuce green

like the
hail

it's
 all the same

Meisler (1993: 66), in an article entitled 'For Joan Miró, poetry and painting were the same,' quotes Miró himself, saying 'I make no distinction between painting and poetry.' The canvas leads your eye from top right down to bottom left, with the words falling roughly but not exactly along the same trajectory. The swirl of white on the canvas might or might not enact this same movement for every viewer, but the addition of the words in the sentence certainly reinforces the motion of attention. The alignment is not exact, just as the words are not a caption for the image: this is not a figural, realist representation of the dark-haired woman, but a milky white idea of her, with colours that are suggestive of passions and moods, but with no green, nor hailstones to be seen. The point to emphasise here is that a viewer/reader's eye is taken on the same trajectory every time the painting is encountered. Given the contrast of the swirl, and given the impossibility of not reading the words in sequence, the object is, on every new occasion, still its newly generated original effect. It is a reiteration, rather than a repetition. It might be argued that the first encounter is more striking than the second, because the former has the element of newness, but after that, the resistance to an easy alignment of meaning is persistent, sustained, and permanent. I have looked at and read this poem-object hundreds of times, and there is always still the disorientating force of it. This is stylistically because of the many near-alignments, such as between the images and the words as already described. Also, the simple intensity of the parallelisms ('like' and 'like') that parallel things which are incomparable (a woman and cats and hail). Also the near-echo of a formulaic phrase ('vert salade' is nearly 'green salad' = *salade verte*). Also the shifts from my woman to my cat (animate, and familiar 'chatte' *kitty*, rather than 'chat'), but then to 'the hail' without the possessive but still grammatically feminine. And all of these loose connections which wander across the page/canvas are wrapped up in the conversational 'c'est pareil' (*it's all the same*). The casual formulation 'c'est' (rather than 'il est' / 'elle est') evades a co-referential commitment to the gender of the available nouns, neither masculine ('le corps' *body*) nor feminine ('ma brune' *dark-haired woman*, 'ma chatte' *kitty*, 'la grêle' *hail*), nor even possibly a proximal deictic reference to the painting-poem itself: 'all this is the same.'

I am arguing that sustained strikingness lies in the continuing difficulty of perceiving these sorts of misalignments that resist resolution. This irresolvability renews the surrealist encounter every time it is engaged. The shock value would indeed wear off if the misalignment (in whatever form it took, as outlined in my preceding chapters) were to be puzzled and fixed, but that is almost never the case with surrealism. Of course, the Miró object is a single, almost instant encounter – though even here there is a temporal and durative trajectory to be followed. How does a surrealist text sustain its shock and strikingness across a longer span? I think the mechanism remains the same: misalignment of elements that suggest they might actually integrate, but which maintain their disjunction. In previous chapters we have seen this operate as a combination of wild semantics within a prosaic register, or an unremarkable syntax with highly unexpected lexical choices, or an impossible sequence of events within a vividly described naturalistic landscape. At a discourse-level of knowledge structure, this persistence of defamiliarisation can be understood as a consistent but ongoing *schema disruption*.

A schema is an early cognitive psychological model for understanding the organisation of knowledge in mind (see Schank and Abelson 1977, Schank 1982a, 1982b, 1986, Kintsch 1998). The notion of a schema was developed to help explain how the rich psychological effects of a linguistic sequence are underdetermined by the actual content of that sequence: in other words, in literary reading, the world, characters, and events of a text are much richer in mind than the simple denotational value of the words on the page. That extra, richer informational texture is supplied from schematised knowledge that has been built up from prior experience, whether first-hand or vicarious, perhaps from other fictional encounters, for example. In a relatively familiar environment, a person will be able to understand the setting, will be able to say and do the appropriate things, and will have certain probable expectations because that person will be running the relevant schema for the current situation.

Applied to literary reading (for example by Cook 1994, Cockcroft 2002, Stockwell 2003b), schema poetics helps to explain the key literary notion of defamiliarisation, as developed originally by the Russian Formalists after 1917 (see Shklovsky 1965). *Ostranenie* (остранение, usually translated from the Russian as *defamiliarisation* or *estrangement*) gestures towards the notion that a key and defining feature of a literary work is its power to make the reader see everyday phenomena and experiences in a fresh, newly configured, or newly attentive way (see Matejka and Pomorska 1971). This was a matter, not only of the particular stylistic and narratological organisation of the text itself, but also a matter of the effect of that text upon its encounter with a reader with certain expectations of genre, narrative, lyrical description, fictional characterisation, and literariness itself. In Cook's (1994) formulation, literary defamiliarisation operates as a disruption to a schema that is firstly instantiated by a text: a literary work signals by various triggers which schema is most apt, but then disrupts that schema in different ways, so as to render it refreshed or seen anew. Literature is characterised as discourse deviance, in this view. (Incidentally, Cook (1992) also develops this approach to distinguish the sort of striking effects seen in literature (schema disruption) from those seen in some advertising discourse, which he instead regards as schema reinforcing: I will return to this in the next chapter.)

Clearly, the notion of discourse deviance lies at the heart of surrealist writing (much of it appearing around the same time that the theorists of the Saint Petersburg group and the Moscow Linguistic Circle were coming to the notion of defamiliarisation: see Chapter 3). Many of the examples of misalignments in semantics, syntax, register, or narrative sequence mentioned across this book can be regarded as discourse deviance at different, intersecting levels. It might be imagined that if defamiliarisation is the key defining feature of literariness, then surrealism is the most extreme and purest form of literature. However, this is not quite the case, and the difference between what we might describe as prosaic literature and surrealist writing can be found in the capacity of the latter to generate bigger shocks, and – crucially – to sustain them. This ongoing, persistent schema disruption can be seen in almost any surrealist text, but here is an example from André Breton's work *Mad Love* (*L'Amour Fou*, published in 1937). Though it would be a mistake to regard the world in the text as fully autobiographical, the passage is usually taken to describe the narrator's first meeting with the artist Jacqueline Lamba, to whom the book is dedicated.

This young woman who just entered appeared to be swathed in mist – clothed in fire? Everything seemed colorless and frozen next to this complexion imagined in perfect concord between rust and green: ancient Egypt, a tiny, unforgettable fern climbing the inside wall of an ancient well, the deepest, most somber, and most extensive of all those I have ever leaned over, in the ruins of Villeneuve-les-Avignon, a splendid fourteenth-century French town today abandoned to gypsies. This color, taking on a deeper hue from her face to her hands, played on a fascinating tonal relation between the extraordinary pale sun of her hair like a bouquet of honeysuckle – her head bent, then raised, unoccupied – and the notepaper she asked for to write on in relation to the color of the dress, most moving perhaps now when I no longer remember it. She was very young, but her distinctive youth did not strike me at first sight, because of this illusion she gave of moving about, in broad daylight, within the gleam of a lamp. I had already seen her here two or three times, her coming announced before I saw her each time by an undefinable quiver moving from one pair of shoulders to the next, from the door of this café toward me. For me this motion itself, which, as it is disturbing to a common assembly, quickly assumes a hostile character, has always, whether in art or in life, signalled the presence of the *beautiful*. And I can certainly say that here, on the twenty-ninth of May 1934, this woman was *scandalously* beautiful.

(Breton 1987: 41, from 1937: 62)

This passage appears after a discussion of found objects and their revelatory capacity, and immediately preceding it there is a preamble to signal, in philosophical and abstract terms, that a moment of revelation is about to be described. It is not clear, at first, where is the location that the young woman has just entered (and the next two paragraphs begin with a variant of this phrase); we do not know that it is a café until the end of the excerpt. Biographically, it was the Café Cyrano, and in fact Jacqueline Lamba had planned to be there to meet surrealists with the encouragement of the photographer and artist Dora Maar (one of Picasso's partners at the time); Lamba was working as a nude water-carrier at the Coliseum club nearby, and arranged to meet Breton after the show; they stayed in the Café des Oiseaux until 2 a.m., and then walked through nighttime Paris, ending up in Les Halles and imagining the Tour St-Jacques swaying like a sunflower – a poem of that name appears in *Mad Love* a few pages later (see Jenkins 2014: 27). The opening description in fact dispenses altogether with any account of the setting, which is thoroughly backgrounded in contrast with the strong foregrounding of the woman: she is diffused ('swathed in mist'), bright, and dangerous ('clothed in fire'); she transcends the historical moment ('ancient Egypt', 'fourteenth century') and the current place ('Villeneuve-les-Avignon'). The description, though vivid with colour and the minutiae of physical motion ('her head bent, then raised'), renders her ethereal, idealised, and transfiguratively striking.

Given the preceding text and the excerpt above, a reader is likely to be running some version of a schematic expectation that frames a first meeting leading to a love affair. In a literary context, it is likely that this event would be described with exuberance, vividness, and poetic metaphors from a set of expected domains (stereotypically, beautiful features in the natural world). However, in the passage, the metaphors and analogies are unexpected and odd ('ancient Egypt', 'an ancient well'), and the analogies wander off into apparently strange digressions ('today abandoned to gypsies'). In the English, at least,

this digression can be reconnected on reflection (Roma were known as ‘gypsies’ because of a false historical assumption that they originated in Egypt), though this cannot be done in the original French (‘abandonnée aux bohémiens’). The original French has frequent consonances of sound, though (‘la tête se baissait, se relevait, très innocupée’), that the English loses (‘her head bent, then raised, unoccupied’). In both French and English, the text retains its anomalous texture. The perceiving narrator’s overwhelmed perception is iconically realised by a variety of stylistic features: what would be a conventional exuberant love-schema metaphor (‘clothed in fire?’) becomes uncertain by the addition of the question mark; the narrator tries out different analogies (‘swathed in mist – clothed in fire?’), and mixes metaphors that both originate in a love-schema set but are here collocated unexpectedly (‘extraordinary pale sun of her hair like a bouquet of honeysuckle’). At several points, the narrator draws attention to his own overwhelmed senses (‘unforgettable’ / ‘I no longer remember it’) and inarticulacy (‘undefinable’). The woman, however, in spite of this vagueness and the surprising discursal moves, is presented as being simultaneously real and abstract, present both ‘in art or in life.’ Even at the end of the passage, when it seems she is about to be rendered entirely abstractly (‘the presence of the beautiful’ – the original has ‘la présence du *beau*’), the text swiftly returns to the precision of the date, and the explicit testimony (‘I can certainly say’), and the proximal deictics of ‘here’ and ‘this woman.’ The celebrated phrase ‘*scandalously beautiful*’ combines social reality with ethereal abstraction (the French is ‘*scandaleusement belle*’ (Breton 1937: 62).

Throughout this passage, the stereotypical love-schema elements are not far away, but they are slightly misaligned constantly. The disruption to the schema is persistent, but subtle enough, and the text returns to it enough, for the schema at hand to be sustained. This slight misalignment of schematic framing can be seen over and over again throughout surrealism. The schema is disrupted but not lost, so a different schema (which would make sense of the text) is never drawn in as a full replacement. Instead, the constantly disrupted schema in operation lends consistency to a passage while maintaining discourse deviance.

This can be seen, for example, in Breton’s extended 1932 poem to his wife ‘L’union libre’ (‘Freedom of love’) with the lines (translated here by Edouard Roditi in a bilingual publication: Breton and Roditi 1946)

My wife with the hair of a wood fire
 With the thoughts of heat lightning
 With the waist of an hourglass
 With the waist of an otter in the teeth of a tiger
 My wife with the lips of a cockade and of a bunch of stars of the last
 magnitude
 With the teeth of tracks of white mice on the white earth
 With the tongue of rubbed amber and glass
 My wife with the tongue of a stabbed host
 With the tongue of a doll that opens and closes its eyes
 With the tongue of an unbelievable stone [...]

(Breton/Roditi reprinted in Germain 1978: 69)

The technique of elegant repetition sustains the matrix schema (here, 'my wife'), but with a cumulatively constantly disruptive stream of metaphors and analogies. These resist being resolved simply metaphorically because they clash with each other and cannot be easily resolved. How can 'rubbed amber and glass' be resolved with 'a stabbed host', or 'a doll that opens and closes its eyes' or 'an unbelievable stone'? How is the shape of an hourglass similar to 'an otter in the teeth of a tiger'? Clearly there is a resistance to any easily consistent resolution, but again the consistent schema running throughout sustains the disruption without letting it be resolved by a schema replacement (for a full analysis, see Stockwell 1999). The same technique of repetition with elegant variation can be seen in a great deal of surrealist writing: the misalignment of schematic features is neither fully blended consistency nor radical confusion, for the most part; instead, the misalignment is partial, retaining just enough of the framing schema to resist a resolving replacement, but maintaining the disruption. As with Breton's description of the effect of encountering the young woman above, the rapid shifts from one disparate image to another also serve to create a rapid occlusion of concepts, and the shift of perception here gives a sense of attentional motion. Even where surrealist descriptions might risk becoming static and lyrical, in this way the phenomenon is often vivified and animated effectively.

Surrealist immersion

The consistency and reiteration of these sorts of misalignments contribute towards any readerly sense of immersion in the surrealist work. A reader has to engage with the apparent metaphors and seeming contradictions, and this investment of effort itself tends towards a greater felt involvement in the world of the text. As set out in Stockwell (2009a: 56–105), drawing on work by Gerrig (1993), when readers feel highly involved in a literary work, they tend to use metaphors of either transportation, investment, or control to describe their own feelings of self-modification (this last phrase is from Miall 2007; see also Miall and Kuiken 1994, 2002, Kuiken, Miall, and Sikora 2004). Readers describe themselves as being 'carried away', or a text as having a 'good payoff', or as being somehow compelled to read on by a 'page-turner', respectively. Readers here are describing, in slightly different metaphorical ways, the experience of being drawn into the world of the literary text (see Green, Brock, and Kaufman 2004).

This feeling has generally been called *immersion* (shifting to a more liquid or ambient metaphor, but again with similar effects: see Troscianko 2012, and the verse-essay by Bernstein 1980). Wolf (2012: 48) describes a spectrum of immersion, from physical and sensual immersion in a fictional world (as in a theatrical, cinematic, art-installation, or video-game encounter) to conceptual immersion (as in a literary experience in which the imagination plays a larger part). Note that immersion is a textural effect of fictionality and a sense of literariness: as Wolf also points out, reading newspapers or listening to factual radio programmes are less likely to be immersive. Most work on immersion has been done in relation to digital entertainment, virtual reality, and gaming scenarios (see Jennett et al. 2008), towards the physically and sensually immersive end of Wolf's

spectrum. For literary reading, we can also treat immersion as a generic term that covers the whole imaginative experience (see Herman 2004, Ryan 1991, 2001), and clearly any given literary encounter will be more or less immersive, depending on a range of factors from the stylistic efficacy of the text to the disposition of the reader, and the nature of the reading environment. Immersion does not occur upon every occasion of a literary reading, by any means. And as Plantinga (2009) suggests, deep immersion is not necessarily a mark of aesthetic value. If we consider a successful sense of immersion, however, we can delineate three characteristic aspects of the experience: flow, presence, and absorption—each of which involves the others holistically during the actual experience.

The psychological state of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990) refers to that point at which a player is so engrossed in a game (or in their work or other activity) that they seem to operate automatically, without noticing the game parameters, controls, rules, or other physical or conceptual edges and interfaces with the actual world. Flow can induce a state of temporal dissociation (not noticing the passage of time), distraction (not responding to slight events or speech back in the actual world), and emotional and physical symptoms that attach to the storyworld rather than the actual world. *Presence* refers to the sense that a gamer or reader's attention is so end-focused at the fictional point of what I have elsewhere called the *deictic braid* between actual world and text world (Stockwell 2009a: 127–31, 2013) that the gamer or reader feels that they are embodied present in the focused text world. This can translate (as with flow) into displaying physical and emotional effects (twitching, jumping, excitement, sadness, and so on), and the consequence of the attentional focus can also be accompanied by a sense – while engaged – of self-effacement: a reader or gamer is so absorbed in the text world, its implied author, narrator, and characters, that their self-consciousness is set aside temporarily.

Absorption is often used synonymously with immersion, but it might be more useful in talking about literary reading to use it to refer to the stylistic processes by which a reader is drawn into the world of the text. Wolf (2012: 49) describes absorption as 'a two-way process', by which a text draws the reader in, and in turn the reader *absorbs* aspects of the world which is being built in mind. Incidentally, Wolf (2012: 49–50) also describes a point at which the fictional world becomes so rich that there is a sense of increasing *saturation*, and if this feeling of rich texture of the imagined world becomes overwhelming, then a reader might experience a possible *overflow*. In Wolf's discussion, overflow is an essential property of those gameworlds or fictional films or novel-sequences with large fanbases where no single person can hold the rich world in mind at once, and a social network appears to hold the emergent features of the imaginary world. In other words, we might see one of the overflow effects as the formation of a subculture.

How does a text offer opportunities for readerly absorption, presuming a reader who is already prepared to engage with it? One of the principal techniques is to effect a drawing-in of the reader's attention, and this can be realised stylistically as different forms of iconic motion. For example, here is a poem written by the American poet Bravig Imbs. Imbs was closely associated with the surrealists and literary modernists of Paris in the 1920s, publishing a sketch of surrealism for American readers (Imbs 1928), and co-writing and translating a book on Yves Tanguy with André Breton, which was published after Imbs' death in a car accident in 1944 (Breton and Imbs 1946).

Sleep

I

slowly the ponderous doors of lead imponderous
 pushed by a wedging force unthinking opened
 how like a cloud I floated down the dim green air
 unthinking of the soft violence of odorous winds
 the falling plaint of hidden violins
 and eyes
 following

II

doors unto doors unfolded downward
 and I was like unto a sailing ship
 stern downward sailing on a dim green sea
 unmindful of the rich push of flowery winds
 the melting voices of far seraphims
 and arms
 following

III

slowly the ponderous doors of lead imponderous
 lowered above my head in absolute slow closing
 quiet as a shadow on a dim green wall
 I rested in my dark and ivory vault
 the violins were no more eyes nor arms
 hours on hours
 following

(Imbs 1926)

If there is a readerly absorption here, it is clear that it cannot be because of the richness of any initially constructed fictional world – the landscape of the first-encountered text world is sparse. Doors open and close, as the speaker describes sleep as what appears to be a mental ordeal or psychic journey. Everything else happens within world-switches, embedded in this first text world. These are created by negation, predominantly in the form of negative prefixes ('imponderous', 'unthinking', 'unfolded', 'unmindful'). This morphological negation is accompanied by a great deal of all-pervasive qualitative negation in many different forms. For example, there is a downward perspective ('like a cloud I floated down'), downward motion ('falling plaint', 'stern downward sailing'), shadows ('dim green air', 'dim green sea', 'shadow on a dim green wall', 'dark and ivory vault'), slowness ('slowly the ponderous doors', 'absolute slow closing'), heaviness ('lead imponderous'), and a dismantling ('unfolded', 'melting voices') and removal of wilful subjective agency ('pushed by a wedging force', 'I floated', 'I rested').

Aside from all of these negational world-switches within the poem, there are metaphorical switches, firstly explicitly introduced ('like a cloud'), and then less visible in several phrasal metaphors: 'soft violence', 'falling plaint', 'flowery winds', 'melting voices'.

Both the negational and metaphorical world-switches serve to draw a reader's attention into the embedded conceptual structure of the poem, requiring several deictic shifts of attention (Duchan, Bruder, and Hewitt 1995). For a reader at the top discourse world level, simply engaging with the poem involves the construction of a deictic braid (Stockwell 2009a: 127) across the text world and into the several sub-worlds that are set up across the text. Readerly attention is focused at the embedded end of this braid.

So a major means of effecting absorption stylistically in surrealism is the rapid building of a rich world: rich either because of the complexity of the items and properties in it, or else (as in this Imbs poem) because of the complex structure of world-crossing that has to be negotiated in the process of reading. Furthermore, many examples of (especially narrative) surrealist writing mentioned so far in this book also enact their absorbing effects by an embodied sense of imaginary motion as the reader is drawn into the surreal landscape. In other words, the psychic motion is itself thematised, and manifest stylistically. In the Imbs poem, this can be seen across the three main ways that in cognitive poetics we can understand imaginary motion: as iconically real motion (referring to physical movement), as apparent movement (in the form of fictive motion), and as attentive motion (in the form of the sorts of attentional deictic shifts I have just outlined).

There are several obvious denotations of movement, in the opening and closing doors, the floating, the sailing, and the 'rich push'. There are also a few examples of fictive motion (see [Chapter 8](#) for an account): 'falling plaint' and 'eyes following' can be understood as fictive motion. The latter example becomes more abstract, from 'eyes following' and 'arms following' to the particle negation of 'no more eyes nor arms', leaving 'following' in isolation as an abstraction of motion in itself. Even more subtly, all the prepositions across the poem might generate a subliminal sense of movement (as image-schemas: see also the discussion of prepositions in Dalí's (1937) poem 'The Metamorphosis of Narcissus' in [Chapter 7](#)), not just individually, but accumulatively. For example, the first stanza features 'of, by, down, of, of, of', the second stanza 'unto, unto, on, of, of, of', and the third stanza 'of, above, in, on, in, on'. In general, there is a drifting tendency here from the partitive *of*-preposition towards forms of the embedding *in*-preposition (including the archaic 'unto', as well as 'in' and 'on'). This drift can be seen as a conceptual shift from an outward motion to a reversed inward motion (in cognitive grammatical terms, *of*-prepositions profile a trajector movement out of a landmark, whereas *in*-prepositional forms profile the opposite movement of a trajector into a landmark: Langacker 2008). This prepositional, image-schematic drift is paralleled by the perspectival shift in the poem that sees the perceiver move from floating above the doors to having them 'lowered above my head', and it is iconically mirrored by the conventional DOWN metaphor that permeates the negations as outlined above.

All of these absorbing techniques are apparent in a reading of the poem. I present them here not so much as interpretative outcomes that might or might not occur in different readings, but as text-driven features that are highly likely to occur: they are textural patterns that seem to me difficult to avoid for any engaged reading. In other words, they are part of the surrealist texture, and rely relatively less on the disposition of the reader (apart, of course, from a wilfully resistant reader).

The end-focused attention on a rich or multiply embedded world-structure, with a reader being attentive to the other, active, and absorbing end of a deictic braid, would

suggest a strong feeling of self-effacement in this sort of literary reading. Indeed, ‘modernist self-effacement’ has been identified as a key characteristic of literary writing of the 1920s: McHale (1987: 199–200) uses this phrase, in order then to argue historically that ‘Postmodernist fiction has brought the author back to the surface.’ Jaffe (2005) argues that modernist self-effacement in fact is a form of bad faith, and many modernist literary writers sought to ‘insinuate authorship’ and their own celebrity back into ‘the scene of reading’ (Jaffe 2005: 47). Nevertheless, most literary critics seem to agree that authorial presence in modernist texts is diminished, compared with prior and subsequent literary history, in order to focus on the object of the literature itself. Self-effacement in surrealism – contemporaneous with much of this writing – seems to me to offer a rather different form of self-effacement.

For illustration, the last text of high surrealism that I will consider in this book is Nancy Cunard’s (1925) underrated and neglected poem ‘Parallax.’ Cunard was heir to the shipping line fortune, and was one of the few surrealists with wealthy independence. She set up a publishing house, the Hours Press, which was able to produce high-quality books of avant-garde writers. Her collection of poems *Sublunary* (1923) and the long poem in *Parallax* (1925) appeared arising out of her close friendship and love affairs with several surrealists, principally Tristan Tzara and Louis Aragon – though her associations also with literary writers such as Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and others led eventually to her being regarded as a semi-detached surrealist. She was prominent in organising writers against Mussolini’s invasion of east Africa, and against the fascists in Spain, and the conventionality of this activity jarred with the surrealists; Cunard viewed herself as an anarchist both politically and personally, rather than a communist (see Chisholm 1979, Gordon 2007). ‘Parallax’ begins:

He would have every milestone back of him,
 The seas explored, clouds, winds, and stars encompassed,
 All separate moods unwrapped, made clear—
 Tapping of brains, inquisitive tasting of hearts,
 Provisioning of various appetite.
 Midnights have heard the wine’s philosophy
 Spill from glass he holds, defiant tomorrows
 Pushed back.
 His credo threads
 Doubt with belief, questions the ultimate grace
 That shall explain, atoning.
 A candle drips beside the nocturnal score—
 Dawns move along the city’s line reflecting,
 Stare through his rented casement.

Earth, earth with consuming breast,
 Across its ruined waste, its tortuous acre
 Draws out his complex fires, drives on his feet
 Behind imperious rain, and multiplies
 The urges, questions in the wilderness.
 All roads that circle back—he shall tread these

And know the mirage in the desert's eyes
 The desert's voices wait.
 This clouded fool,
 This poet-fool must halt in every tavern
 Observing the crusty wrecks of aftermath,
 Plied by his dual mood—uneasy, still—
 Devouring fever of bone transfused to brain,
 In that exact alembic burned away,
 Made rare, perpetual.

(Cunard 1925: 5)

This poem, of 500 lines, has been both dismissed and praised for its similarities and connections with T.S. Eliot's (1922) 'The Waste Land'. The judgemental comparison of the two is unfair, and in any case the literary criticism of Eliot largely neglects the surrealist stylistic influence in much of his work and phrasing. Indeed, in an early draft of his poem that was cut by Ezra Pound as too vitriolic, Eliot includes a portrait of Cunard as the failed poet 'Fresca':

Women grown intellectual grow dull
 And lose the mother wit of natural trull
 [...]
 And on those nights when Fresca lies alone,
 She scribbles verse of such a gloomy tone
 That cautious critics say, her style is quite her own.

(Eliot 1971: 27)

The connections with 'The Waste Land', perhaps, are partly to blame for a literary critical view of 'Parallax' as derivative, whereas Ayers (2004: 24–38) argues that Cunard was creating 'a new rhetorical form' that took up Eliot's allusiveness and made it political. Young (2012) suggests the relationship with Eliot is the parallax: taking Eliot's modernist allusiveness and intertextuality to its pure conclusion. The focalising perspective across most of the text seems to be a young male poet contemplating life and art as he travels through London and Paris (in a return ironic gesture to Eliot, perhaps). Cunard saw Eliot's poem before publication, in Paris in 1921, and seems to have blended Eliot's modernism with her growing surrealist outlook. The perspective within the poem is 'a quoted voice within a quoted work' (Ayers 2004: 34), and the development from 'The Waste Land' might be regarded as deliberate.

Read either as a surrealist work or as a work heavily influenced by and associated with surrealism, 'Parallax' illustrates several of the patterns of surrealist immersion. Among these is the way that self-effacement is differently handled compared with straightforward modernist writing. The title page of the book bears the epigraph laid out as follows

'Many things are known as some are seen, that is by Parallax,
 or at some distance from their true and proper being'

Sir Thomas Browne.

The poem, in other words, sets the reader up to be alive to the sense that a perspective can be deflected or indirect, and that a true representation of the world lies in looking askance at it. (The quotation is from the 17th-century Christian scientist's book *Christian Morals*: the rest of the sentence continues by emphasising 'the superficial regard of things having a different aspect from their true and central natures' – Browne 1852: 110). This technique of deflection and misalignment as a means of accessing the underlying truth of things is clearly central to surrealism, and it also connects neatly with the notion of a deictic braid that links reader and other character-minds, deflected across the embedded world-boundaries of a fictional experience.

In 'Parallax', there is no overarching narrative voice, nor a representation of different voices collaged together (the latter being Eliot's surrealistic technique for 'The Waste Land', originally entitled 'He do the police in different voices'). Instead, the main focaliser of Cunard's poem is a hybrid voice, shifting from third to first and even occasionally second-person perspective. In the opening excerpt above, the movement from the beginning is expressed as a drawing-in to the character's mind. We are instantly into his regretful retrospection in that first verbal aspect choice, 'He would have every milestone back of him'. And thereafter there are constant orientations into his mental states, his 'separate moods unwrapped', and his subconscious mind 'made clear—'. There is an ongoing and sustained abstraction and depersonification of the main figure throughout the poem, and this figure is passive, or is compelled by other forces, lacking agency and wilfulness. Instead, it is the landscape that is animated in common surrealist fashion. It is the midnights that do the hearing, his 'credo' that actively 'threads doubt with belief', and the candle that actively 'drips.' Meanwhile, the 'defiant tomorrows' are passively 'pushed back', and even his retrospective aspiration to have explored all the milestones of the world is expressed in past participles: 'explored, encompassed, unwrapped'. Even where he has topicality over the verb, the sense is of being compelled to action, and even then the action is not very active: 'This poet-fool must halt.' He holds a glass, but spills the contents, and it is the wine that has the philosophy.

By contrast, the surreal landscape itself has personified agency, mood, and wilfulness: 'earth with consuming breast', 'ruined waste', and 'tortuous acre' that 'draws' and 'drives' the man behind 'imperious' rain. The desert has eyes and voices. There is animated fictive motion: 'Dawns move along', 'all roads that circle back.' What might be metaphorical images are literalised: moods are 'unwrapped', brains are tapped, and hearts are tasted for 'various appetite'. Reiterated single events are compressed into an idealisation, either by pluralising them ('Dawns move along the city's line') or by omitting the definite article for a qualitative timeless sense ('Spill from glass he holds'), or by using present tense and continuous aspect ('tapping, tasting, provisioning, observing'). The shift from the embodied man to an abstraction is thematised by the last couple of lines, as the 'alembic' (a distillation vessel) renders him 'rare, perpetual'. Many of the patterns of sustained surrealist immersion are here.

The ongoing absorption of a reader attentive to the surreal landscape is maintained by this sort of textural complexity throughout the poem. There are very many world-switches across the text, some fleeting in the form of shifts in the deictic positioning of tense and aspect, others more sustained in the form of verse-paragraphs and

typographical shifts. A reader engaged in a flow-like experience of being immersed in the poem is likely to be drawn into the surreal landscape, and the effect certainly feels like you become accustomed to the frequent deictic shifts so that their surreality becomes normal. As a long poem, the text is sustained in a way that is more similar to an extended novel like *Petron* (see [Chapter 8](#)) than a three- or four-stanza poem. There is a habituation of reading so that the surreal landscape becomes the natural background. This would normally encourage an objective construal of the content of the text, with the reader's attention located across the many deflections into the world of the poem – the self-effacement of the reading consciousness would be complete. However, here – as with much surrealism – there are elements that constantly remind the reader that the deictic braid reaches back into your own life. In the excerpt, the figure who is being construed is placed back into proximal conscious awareness by the phrase 'This poet-fool'. The epigraph has already primed us into noticing the compositional level of authorial manipulation. And even the biographical background and complex allusiveness that attaches to this text being by 'Nancy Cunard' are constant reminders of the place of the poem in the actual world.

Surrealist texts achieve immersion by a strong sense of counter-parting along this deictic braid from fictional figures through narrators, personae, and authors to the reader. In this way, there is a constant reminder that surrealist texts are pointed at the actual world (which includes the actual phenomena of dream and the unconscious mind). Surrealist texts sustain immersion by a variety of drawing-in techniques, and vivifications of the landscape. They maintain a resonance in the reader's actual world after the reading has been completed, precisely because this outward-facing reading strategy is socially shared and socially transformative.

Surrealist immersion can be sustained and prolonged, and can enact its strikingness over and over again, even on multiple readings. The experience is not escapist, if it is engaged with fully, and the misalignments resist resolution, even on repeated readings, because the text works texturally every time. The assertion that surrealism must be taken seriously and literally, made at the beginning of this chapter, is not a prescription nor an ideology for reading, but it is a recognition that surrealist texts encourage readers to become absorbed in the surreal, as a matter of poetic technique. The rich paradoxes within surrealism might seem overwhelming, an example of immersive overflow perhaps. But it seems to me that most surrealist writing achieves not overflow but a satisfying sense of saturation of sensation, and this partly explains the political aspiration towards the capacity to resonate immersion beyond the reading and into the reader's world.

Part IV

Diffusing Surrealism

10 Surrealisms

Ideology and technique

During the 1930s, surrealism was already turning into a global phenomenon, and the displacements brought about by the war in Europe and then across the world accelerated the movement of artists and ideas out from Paris, Berlin, Barcelona, and London, especially towards the Americas. André Breton escaped from France in 1941 and lived in New York until 1946. Luis Buñuel fled Spain in 1938 for Los Angeles and New York, settling in Mexico after the war. Salvador and Gala Dalí escaped from Portugal to New York in 1940, returning after the war to the village of Cadaqués in Spain. Yves Tanguy spent the war in Connecticut and became a US citizen. André Masson travelled via Martinique to the United States, returning to Aix-en-Provence after the war. Alice Paalen went to Mexico in 1939 and remained there for the rest of her life. Benjamin Péret was imprisoned in Paris at the start of the war, and fled upon release also to Mexico. Several surrealists ended up on the Mexican side of the border because the US authorities took a dim view of their communism.

Others remained in Europe: Picasso in Paris, Magritte in Brussels, Miró in Normandy and then Majorca. Eluard, Tzara, Aragon, Desnos, and Char worked in or for the French resistance. British surrealists who had been in Paris in the 1930s retreated home: Gascoyne for the duration of the war, before returning to France afterwards; Norman MacCaig was imprisoned in Edinburgh as a conscientious objector, and Ruthven Todd took a similar stand, leaving for the United States after the war and never returning. Tony del Renzio fled from Italy, to Spain, to France, and then to England, where he remained for the rest of his life. Nancy Cunard worked to exhaustion as a translator in London for the French resistance. Emmy Bridgwater, Ithell Colquhoun, E.L.T. Mesens, Edith Rimmington, Conroy Maddox, Henry Reed, and others served out the war between London and Birmingham. Hugh Sykes Davies remained in England and would have stood as a communist candidate in the cancelled 1940 general election. Later, he observed,

When the events finally coalesced with the pattern, and the war became wholly real, I took it for granted that reality was necessarily paramount for the duration; paramount over Surrealism and indeed over every kind of imaginative writing. A parenthesis had opened in our lives, and some dearly cherished activities would have to await the final bracket to be pursued again. This was not a theoretical decision but a purely practical one.

(Davies 1978: 34)

The international diffusion of surrealists and surrealism, of course, ensured that the movement did not disappear after the war. Indeed, core surrealist activities resumed especially in London and Paris. Breton and Duchamp organised a celebratory exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, and the English surrealist group reformed in 1945 with an exhibition *Surrealist Diversity* at the Arcade gallery in London (see Matthews 1964). The presence of surrealists in the United States and especially in Latin America was to prove extraordinarily influential, setting the mould for a series of avant-garde art movements from abstract expressionism to pop-art. Breton and Duchamp again organised an exhibition in New York in 1960: *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain*. William Rubin's huge *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* show at MoMA in New York in 1968 redefined surrealism for a generation. There was an influential exhibition, *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* at Tate Modern, London, in 2001, that focused almost exclusively on desire and barely mentioned any ideology nor politics.

By this stage, however, surrealism as a political movement was losing its popular force, and to an extent was becoming regarded as decorative. Rubin (1968: 7) admitted that his selections of exhibits were aesthetic rather than ideological, 'not simply outside of the concerns of the Surrealist poet-critics, they were utterly alien to their beliefs.' The influence of surrealism on the artistic movements of the 1950s and '60s especially can be seen to be stylistic rather than ideological. Any communist underpinnings of art and writing particularly in the United States became increasingly difficult to articulate safely. Flares of surrealist elements that appeared at revolutionary or resistant moments in European history seem to me to be iconic gestures back to the period of heroic surrealism, rather than thorough reinvigorations: surreal slogans appeared as graffiti during the student riots in Paris in 1968; surrealist humour defused and disguised political resistance in the Orange Alternative (*Pomarańczowa Alternatywa*) in Poland in the 1980s. An anti-Vietnam War demonstration at MoMA in New York in January 1970 bypassed the surrealist art in order for protesters to gather in front of Picasso's *Guernica* and hold up realist photographs of the My Lai massacre: surrealism was regarded by them as being safely and conservatively contained by this great cultural art institution of the US state.

By contrast, surrealism could also be invoked for its disruptive ideology and cultural resistance, almost without reference to its stylistic manifestation. For example, the Situationist International, originating in Paris in 1957 until its dissolution in 1972, represents perhaps the only long-standing movement that was in any way similar to surrealist thinking and action. Early activities (such as an interruption and protest of a public broadcast from Notre Dame in Paris) were endorsed by André Breton, and early material drew explicitly on Dada and surrealist techniques. The movement became more ideological and less artistic, however, with a heavy emphasis on performance and resistant 'happenings'. The turning point was founder Guy Debord's (1970) expulsion of the artists and his theoretical statement *The Society of the Spectacle* (*La Société du Spectacle*, in 1967). Though Situationist International members played a prominent role in the Paris uprisings of 1968, their influence was political rather than leaving any artistic or a literary textual legacy.

In both of these directions, there is a perceived and applied divergence between ideology and technique. Surrealism could be invoked for its revolutionary polemic or

imitated for its stylistic iconography, but the two could apparently be separated for different purposes. As soon as this happens, however, whatever it is that is being discussed is no longer surrealism. Though, in this book, I have focused on the *language* of surrealism, I have been at pains throughout to situate the stylistic account either within its historical moment of composition or within its historical moment of reading, with an inevitable leaning towards the cognitive poetics of the latter. Though there has necessarily been a focus on style and technique (especially in Part II), I have been careful to insist (throughout Part III) that surrealism only works if we acknowledge the ways it is engaged and assimilated. Enthusiasts, adherents, and critics have commonly described this as ‘the spirit of surrealism’ (see, among many who use this phrase, Germain 1978: 52, Henning 1979, Remy 1999: 344, Lusty 2007: 2), by which I think they mean that surrealism proper is neither a set of techniques (as the surrealists also insisted) nor a set of ideological notions alone. It is an integration and interanimation of both.

As surrealism has become diffused artistically, culturally, geographically, and historically over the century since its inception, its different aspects have indeed become diluted and fragmented, such that we can discern isolated threads of surrealist influence appearing in a range of other contexts, such as commercial advertising, branding, promotional material, and other literary movements and genres. Later in this chapter, I will briefly consider some of these other contexts, in the light of the key features of the language of surrealism that I have established across earlier chapters.

One of the primary motivations in writing this book was to see whether what we might call a surrealist poetics could be illuminated in the light of modern stylistics. I was, of course, sufficiently confident in the discipline to know that a descriptive stylistic account of surrealism would be possible, but I was interested to see whether my perceptions of surrealism itself would be enriched by the exploration. Over the course of the book, I have investigated the interaction of text and reading, and there are several conclusions to be drawn. I will return with some examples of each of these points (italicised here) again in the next section.

Firstly, it is pleasingly apparent both as a matter of cognitive poetic principle and as an observable matter of surrealist ideology that *surrealist writing exploits our ordinary language capacities*. In other words, it is not necessary to become steeped in surrealist history or critical theory nor be a knowledgeable literary scholar in order to be able to read surrealism. Nor is it necessary to be aware of a great deal of poststructuralist theory on language (much of which is erroneous, in any case, and only of historical curiosity for the modern stylistician). And though I would argue by contrast that it is absolutely desirable in general to be cognizant of the current state of knowledge of linguistics, this is only necessary in order to produce an analytical account of textuality and texture such as is presented in this book. For an ‘ordinary’ reader, surrealism does not require a special code, training, nor artificial readerly stance. Surrealist writing achieves its effects by building on and exploiting our everyday language capacities for such things as denotation, association, and semantic dissonance; our recognition of idiomatic phrases and appropriacy of register; the ability to connect different domains that are surprising or deviant; the tendency towards coherence and normalisation; our capacity for feeling ambient memory, and so on. Surrealism draws on these common resources to produce uncommon effects.

This is true even of the surrealists and their own contemporary linguistic theory as well. As I suggested in [Chapter 3](#), quite a lot of surrealist thinking about language was rather conservative, and much of it had not yet been distorted by later false innovations in critical theory. Many of their ‘common-sense’ assumptions about language remain everyday intuitions that are still largely valid. People tend to act, for example, as if referring expressions connect to concepts in a motivated and habituated way – non-scholarly readers generally do not behave as if language features are arbitrary. We now know that iconicity in language is very significant in any case, but this is a reconnection of current linguistics with some of the conservative assumptions made by the surrealists. Furthermore, it is not necessary to accept the surrealists’ notions of a Freudian-style unconscious in order for their writings (and all surreal images) to have a powerful subliminal, resonant, and persistent force during and after reading.

Secondly, *surrealism depends on effective communicativeness*. It is not solipsistic, nor an example of a private language, nor is it couched in an esoteric code or allegory that has a symbolic but random key. Again, anyone can read surrealism. The elements that constitute surreal writing are often highly naturalistic, everyday items: fingers, feathers, narcissi, birdcages, animals of various kinds, street scenes, domestic objects, bodies, machines. Many of these are framed in ways that remain relatively timeless, though of course there is an early twentieth-century technological and cultural association that often accompanies them. Equally, the register and syntax and discursive patterns of surrealist writing are often familiar or commonplace. Though a misalignment between these elements is a key factor in surrealism, the basic pieces are usual enough for communicativeness to be assumed and implemented. Breton (1990) insists on this point in his *Communicating Vessels*, and we now know that the assumption in favour of communicativeness is an exceptionally strong feature of natural language disposition. It means that, even if a surrealist writer is being deliberately obscure, difficult, or private (which would be anti-social for a surrealist), then a reader is still likely to derive a sense of communication regardless of the egotistical authorial intention. This may be why it seems to be the case that Dalí’s egotism – that got him expelled as a card-carrying surrealist – nevertheless and in spite of his commercialism still allows him to be generally regarded as a prototypical exponent of surrealism.

Following from the communicative nature of surrealism, it is necessary to recognise that *surrealism works best when it is taken seriously*. This includes accepting a reading of the surreal image that does not regard that object as a metaphor or allegorical token, but as being literally the thing that it is. It is possible to downgrade the oddity of a surreal image or a surrealist sequence by rendering it within a metaphorical frame, and of course where this happens it can produce a coherent and satisfying interpretative resolution. However, something rich and valuable will often be missed in such a strategy. A great deal of surrealist dissonance depends upon the jarring elements being held together as literal items, rather than one being metaphorically mapped onto the other.

Treating the surreal image literally, and accepting it at its referential value, is a major factor in accounting for the fact that *the power of surrealism lies in its capacity for amplification*. We saw, particularly in [Chapter 8](#), how even dreamlike surreal images are articulated not through mistiness nor vagueness but in vivid, striking, and often highly

stark naturalistic forms of presentation. Both the figurative dissonances of Magritte's paintings and the abstract forms of Miró are usually characterised by well-defined edges and recognisable boundaries, and a similar pattern can be delineated in much surrealist writing. Precision of idiom and carefully enunciated syntactic and register patterns serve to vivify the strikingness of the object in focus. The 'plain' syntactic or register background allows the foregrounded surreal image to emerge with even greater contrastive emphasis.

A key characteristic of surrealism is its fragmentariness. *Many surrealist texts work on a principle of misalignment*, in that stylistic and conceptual pieces are not collocated in schematically expected ways. Collage is the most obvious, micro-textual example of this (Chapter 6), but so too at the discourse level is the way in which deviant semantic content is often framed within a plain style or register of narrative (Chapter 7). It might be argued that a persistent or repetitive misalignment or dissonance runs the risk of becoming habituated: in other words, the initial strikingness could lose its strength on repeated experience. However, surrealism mostly avoids this because the misalignments tend to occur across a broad spectrum of aspects of the text. While of course there are examples of surrealist writing in which only one feature or level of language patterning is misaligned (a phonetic jarring, or a simple semantic clash of words, or a syntactic parallelism gone awry, and so on), in fact the most striking and celebrated pieces achieve their power largely because they create misalignments simultaneously on several different levels. So even when the misaligning pattern itself looks set to be repetitive and expected, surrealist writing still succeeds in disrupting readerly expectation.

The combination of misalignment of content with a sharp amplificatory precision is one compelling factor in the observation that *surrealism has a capacity towards immersion*. Surrealist texts have a capacity for quickly drawing a reader into a surreal landscape, and then sustaining the degree of absorption by a variety of stylistic means as set out in Chapter 9. The natural assumption might be that the extreme defamiliarisation that surrealist writing presents would be alienating, and that the estrangement involved would manifest itself as a feeling of alienation in the reader. Of course, this may certainly be the case for many readers (and it might be that these non-enthused readers tend simply not to record their experiences), but immersion seems to be common for most readers of surrealism who record their readings either informally online or in professional publications. In this case, we need to understand estrangement as the making strange of the object, rather than a psychological sense of alienation or distancing. Instead, the form of immersion that surrealist writing provokes involves an amplification of attention and a consequential intensification of the surreal image in focus. The elements making up the surreal image are not defamiliarised in isolation, but by being blended together to create a new object. This object is unfamiliar, but has traces of the familiar and everyday: the surrealist moment is this instant of recognition that Breton (1999: 160) calls the 'convulsive' moment. It is the attraction to strangeness within a recognisable frame that is the principle mechanism of immersion.

A final key feature of surrealism is obviously its dreamlike nature, and *the dreamlike quality of surrealism is largely carried in the transitions across conceptual worlds*. This means that the landscapes available to surrealist writers are expanded beyond

the limits of the naturalistic and the everyday, and the key element in drawing readers into those landscapes lies in the poetic means by which the conceptual boundaries between reality and different fictional worlds are crossed. Sometimes this transition can be jarring, and stand as an example of misalignment at the world level. More usually, elements from a dream-world that would be marked out as explicitly unreal in a more realist text are treated in a surrealist text as having been blended with naturalistic elements. It is thus not always easy to discern a text-world distinction between real and imaginary at all, and this of course is the point. Much surrealist art features a disruption between the presented surface world of the text and the embedded dream or fantasy worlds that are described within the text, painting, or sculpture. This disruption of the worlds presented within the text also stands in continuity with the world-levels in the other direction, reaching out from the text to the reader's reality. Surrealist art thus uses its dreamlike quality, paradoxically, in order to be outward-reaching. And there are lots of examples of surrealism which aim to call attention to their own status as art-objects in the world. In this way, a viewer or reader is confronted with surreality and actively engaged by it, rather than consuming it passively. It is difficult to experience surrealism and not react to it.

Portability of style

Surrealism, after its 'heroic period', remained spectacularly influential in two major ways. Firstly, surrealism proper continued to flourish across a range of new artistic groups and exhibition retrospectives. These core surrealist groups continued to develop techniques along the same principles as in early surrealism, and maintained surrealist politics even in the context of a different, post-war world order. Examples of long-standing associations include the Chicago Surrealist Group (founded in 1965), the Surrealist Group in Stockholm (*Surrealistgruppen i Stockholm*, founded in 1986), Leeds Surrealist Group (founded 1994), and collectives especially in Central and Eastern Europe, such as those in Prague, Warsaw, Tallinn, and Kraków throughout the 1950s to the 1980s and beyond (see Richardson and Fijałkowski 2001). There are currently dozens of smaller-scale websites, blogs, and local groups around the world styling themselves as surrealist. The larger and more famous associations have been criticised for a conservative and fossilised approach to surrealism: Gordon (2004) disparaged 'the aesthetic stasis of the Chicago Surrealist Group's orthodox interpretation.' However, surrealist activity remains widespread and energetic throughout the world.

Secondly, though, surrealist techniques became portable, in the sense that they could be detached from the politics and ideology of core surrealism while being recognisably surrealist in appearance. Breton, from an early moment, regarded this as an undesirable situation:

Perhaps the greatest danger threatening Surrealism today is the fact that because of its spread around the world, which was very sudden and rapid, the word found favour

much faster than the idea and all sorts of more or less questionable creations tend to pin the Surrealist label on themselves.

(Breton 1969: 257)

There is a degree of historical irony involved in the fact that this complaint about surrealist technique becoming divorced from surrealist ideology appeared in a tract of August 1935 entitled 'On the time when the surrealists were right' ('Du temps que les Surréalistes avaient raison') – a statement co-signed by numerous surrealists which definitively marked the separation of surrealism from the communist party.

Nevertheless, there is no question that surrealist styles can be discerned in non-surrealist material. Once surrealism had taught the world's artists and writers that striking, hallucinatory, escapist, fantastical, and mind-altering effects could be generated by the exploitation of ordinary language, the technique became almost ubiquitous. Collaging, sampling, mixing, and mashing together of disparate material has become particularly common in the internet age, with instant access to millions of images and texts, and the easy availability of both visual and creative text programs that allow anyone to produce surrealistic effects. The 'DIY aesthetic' of many art movements and popular subcultures in the post-war period (Hebdige 1979) stems directly from the pattern of composition of surrealist leaflets, flyers, and posters. The objective in all cases is to signify the opposite of slick, corporate culture, whether originally in print or latterly in digital output. The demotic and democratic nature of this use of ordinary language represents an obvious extension of surrealist commitments to communicativeness. Though subcultures in particular exist most often as in-groups, and are defined partly either oppositionally or by those they exclude, the key characteristic of the amateurish appearance is to communicate the symbols, trappings, and styles that are required for anyone to become a part of that community.

By contrast, it might be argued (as mentioned above) that surrealist techniques can also appear within the apotheosis of capitalist and corporate culture in the form of advertisements. It is hard to think of another mode that is so antithetical to surrealist thinking, and yet the key features of strikingness and memorability are common to both. Indeed, a fantastical or supernatural element already existed in the advertising of alcohol and cosmetics on 19th-century posters, and advertising agents from the 1950s onwards increasingly drew on surreal iconography and collaging techniques in designing first poster and magazine campaigns and then television and cinema commercials. The use of surreal images in advertising seems to point to the absolute capacity for portability of technique.

However, it is important to note how advertising diverges from surrealism. Firstly, the surrealistic influence on commercial advertising is primarily visual: the copywriting beneath and around surreal imagery tends to be relatively plain and denotational. It would be too disorienting to include surrealist writing as well as images in a multimodal text, and there would be too great a risk that the key message pointing to the advertised product would be lost. The cases in which surreal imagery is most radical tend to be those products where, for legal, regulatory, or social reasons, the key material effect cannot be explicitly stated: the de-inhibiting effects of alcohol, the addictive or perceived

sexy attractions of tobacco, the vague, subtle, or inarticulate effects of luxury goods such as perfumes, high fashion, or expensive cars – all aspirational goods that benefit by an association with high art. In these cases, the ineffable, and attractively mysterious and desirable qualities of the product, are being communicated by visual amplification – as in surrealism – with the key difference being that the core message in the adverts is always explicit and clearly denoted.

Secondly, there is a cognitive difference in the social framing of adverts compared with surrealism itself. This can be explained drawing on Cook's (1992, 1994) distinction between advertising discourse and literature in terms of schema poetics. Attempting to define *literariness* in terms of 'discourse deviation,' Cook locates textual deviance not so much (or not exclusively) in the linguistics of textual form but in the cognitive linguistic effects of discourse. Literary discourse, he claims, brings about a change in experiential knowledge in the form of a 'schema refreshment' (Cook 1994: 182–92). This might be understood as a psycholinguistic explanation of the notion of defamiliarisation or estrangement developed by the Russian formalists (see Matejka and Pomorska 1971, as mentioned in Chapter 9). A reader's common understanding and experiential feeling for a certain object, image, event, or phenomenon is held as a schematic object in memory, and a literary encounter can serve to revivify, amplify, or 'refresh' that knowledge. By contrast, Cook (1994: 192) argues, advertising discourse is commonly regarded as being merely schema-reinforcing or preserving, even when it deploys striking surrealist techniques. In other words, it is almost always plain, given the context of discourse, that the ideological frame for an advert is commercial and persuasive, and is operating merely by evoking existing messages and associations about the product. In this way, advertising is conservative as a form of discourse, whereas literature like surrealism is radically transformative.

Cook's distinction is a useful way of framing our understanding of how amplification works as a key feature in surrealism. It reminds us that – although surreal technique can be portable – surrealism itself only works holistically if the audience expectations and cultural context are aligned with the textual form. Literariness itself might be more scalar than absolute (as argued by Semino 1997: 175), but surrealist literature might be regarded as being at the radically defamiliarising end of that scale. Crucially, in discourse terms, any portability of surrealist style renders the object no longer surrealist.

This is not to argue against the principle of misalignment as a key feature of surrealism. Remy (1999: 341) argues that surrealism needs to be '*constitutionally incomplete*' if it is to present 'the intensity, audacity and regularity of statement necessary to create an unending circulation of the gaze.' This incompleteness is a function of misalignment within stylistic features of the text, painting, or object. He goes on to complain that various artists

have all been included in recent exhibitions as an attempt to 'reveal' other British surrealists. They offer brilliant examples of 'applied surrealism,' but from outside any concerted, collective action. They also represent the spread of surrealism's questioning, and its disturbing visuality, but also its dilution. In such cases, surrealism becomes a mere reservoir of techniques.

(Remy 1999: 341)

Remy continues his argument by suggesting that a merely imported surrealist technique renders any dreamlike 'constructions into frozen fantasies.' This fossilisation might be initially striking, but 'applied surrealism' does not have the power of the genuine article. It is immersion which is the key, and which also allows us to differentiate surrealism proper from the portability of surreal humour. Remy goes on to make the link between surrealism and its influence on British comedy in the form of BBC radio's 1950s series *The Goon Show*. We might add the surrealist influence on *Monty Python* in the 1960s, and a host of other British television comedies such as *The Goodies* in the 1970s, *The League of Gentlemen* in the 1990s, or *The Mighty Boosh* in the early millennium. In all of these, there is a holistic misalignment of image and language, and misalignments within style, to the extent that *incongruity* can be regarded as their key, dominant feature. It is this incongruity that is the main source of their humour (see Nash 1985, Simpson 2003). However, there is a prominent metatextual aspect in all of these productions that render them more postmodernist than properly surreal: they all draw attention to their own fabric as absurd landscapes of incongruity. In the early broadcast examples, this manifested itself as explicit references to the sound-effects or staging, or the visible inclusion of the camera-crew and set decorators within the frame of the fictional boundaries of the screen. In short, any sustained immersion is actively resisted in these adaptations of surreal humour.

Lastly, of course, there has been a discernible portability of the surrealist emphasis on dream as a key feature of literature. While no doubt certainly not invented by surrealism, the centrality of dream and its theorising became iconically significant in surrealism, and any later attention to dreamlike passages in literary works is inescapably compared with surrealist activity. In particular, a surrealistic treatment of dream and fantasy can be discovered in both the pop art and the beat poetry of the late 1950s and 1960s, and any writing of that time or later that can be characterised as hallucinogenic or psychedelic evidently has a surreal flavour. There are obviously highly surrealistic examples of writing in the work of William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Adrian Henri, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, James Tate, Salman Rushdie and many others. In particular, the surrealist treatment of dream has been a key driving factor in the genre of magical realism. Like surrealism, and unlike fantasy and science fiction for the most part, the literature of magical realism features recognisably realist and naturalistic settings, with jarringly incongruous aspects, people, or events. In surrealism, this dreamlike quality is presented as the realistic fabric of the imagination; in magical realism, the fabulous landscape is presented as naturalistically as possible. In both cases, but in different ways, the target is social convention and established culture. Magical realism has a particularly strong history in Latin America, where its direct lineage can be traced to the surrealists in exile from the Second World War (Bowers 2004), and where its political expression against dictatorship was strongest. In the English-language tradition, magical realism has directed its politics at post-colonialism, and in support of feminism: Angela Carter's work features strongly surrealistic passages. Her 1984 radio play, *A Self-Made Man* (in Carter 1997), is a biography of the modernist novelist Ronald Firbank told through fictionalised conversations of his contemporaries, including Nancy Cunard. Again, though, and as with the portability of surrealistic humour, magical realism resists immersion in favour of a postmodernist self-consciousness and vivid literary artifice.

The portability of different aspects of surrealism, then, can certainly be found in widespread influences across time and across the world. My argument here is that it is the combination of these aspects, and their framing inescapably *as surrealism* in a reader's mind, that render *surrealism as discourse* different from all of the other surrealist and 'applied surrealist' examples of literary art.

Diffusion and significance

Even though André Breton declared in 1942, in the 'Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto', that 'my greatest ambition would be to allow its theoretical import to be infinitely transmissible after I am gone' (Breton 1969: 289), it is evident that the portable and detachable aspects of surrealist influence over the last century have been its stylistic and imagistic dimensions, to a greater or lesser extent divorced from its theoretical underpinning. The cultural diffusion of surrealism has led to an inevitable dilution of its original nature, a fragmentation into many different varieties, and an adaptation of its techniques and patterns for a range of different political and other cultural purposes. The post-war cultural diffusion has generated *surrealisms*. Many of these have spread and diverged over time and geography so greatly that they are hardly even cognates of each other anymore.

Nevertheless, the cultural diffusion of surrealism into almost every part of the world has been its enduring legacy and success. Almost any non-naturalistic art or literature produced currently can barely escape being typed as surreal in some way; collage, sampling, adaptation, and intertextuality are so common and pervasive that they are regarded as standard patterns of music, film-making, art, and writing; any event that is out-of-the-ordinary, unusual, or newsworthy is styled as being surreal in everyday conversation. This diffusion across time and place is not, however, evenly distributed. There remain places where core surrealism continues to be practised, either according to the principles established during its heroic period, or by a principled development of the spirit of those times. There are also many artists and writers who have moved within the influence of surrealism over the years, and drawn on it, or adapted it, or moved away from it again. And there are many who might be barely aware of their antecedents in surrealism, who are nevertheless influenced by a diffused sense of surrealism in their own cultures. Across these three broad areas, we might delineate a scale of cultural diffusion, with core surrealism strongly and tangibly at one end and the pervasive but delicate and diluted influence at the other.

It seems to me the case that surrealism still stands as the exemplar of an avant-garde art movement. Its influence on all subsequent artistic developments has been either direct or diffuse, but it remains implicated even in conservative writing that seeks to sidestep the innovations that emerged in the modernist period. After surrealism, it was not possible to write disruptive prose or dissonant poetry without committing a gesture towards political radicalism, to the extent that stylistic deviation has become synonymous with a cognitive and social challenge in reading. Surrealism, from the beginning, aimed to transcend any single mode of expression – manifesting itself in painting, sculpture, cinema,

drama, architecture, music, and writing. In each of these modes of communication, there are of course particular stylistic patterns and techniques, but they all share with the language of surrealist writing the same compositional principles, the same underlying thinking, and the same psychological, social, and cultural effect.

This has been a book primarily on the language of surrealism. In the course of my explorations, I have discovered a great diversity of writing that shares not only a common purpose but fundamental principles at the level of discourse. The particular stylistic differences of specific texts, closely analysed across the previous chapters, can collectively be regarded as a complex but consistent poetics of surrealism. Surrealism turns out to have been pivotal in the ways in which philosophers of language and critical theorists have thought about language and its functions and effects throughout most of the 20th century; many of these conceptions and misperceptions persist today. Some of our understanding of surrealism itself has been filtered through those later views of language, mind, creativity, and imagination; some of this anachronistically. The surrealists possessed an explicit theory of language and mind that was both wildly ahead of its time – corresponding closely with our current knowledge about linguistics and cognition – as well as being rooted in a basically human and common sense of communicativeness that predates modernism. The language of surrealism stands as an essential exemplar of literariness itself, if the literary can be defined by its power to defamiliarise, resonate in the imagination, maintain its striking impact long after the book has been set down, and find its diffused, adapted way into all manner of other texts.

Surrealism is of course a phenomenon of a specific historical moment, and a modern stylistics of such a literary genre does not ignore this fact. I have tried, throughout this book, to offer a fully contextualised stylistic account that encompasses the creative moments of composition, the reception of the works both contemporary and over time, and the current readerly impact and resonance of surrealism. In going beyond a pure formal linguistic account of text and textuality, in order to include discourse and texture, I also offer this book as an example of a fully developed stylistics as literary criticism. The place of surrealism in literary history is as significant as its place in the history of art; and the place of historical moments of composition and reading are also significant for the currency of stylistics.

In June 1950, André Breton was at the opening of the first *Route Mondiale de la Paix*, a movement for peace established by the internationalist 'Citoyens du Monde'. Dozens of communities along the route east out of Cahors in the south of France committed themselves to peace and in favour of international solidarity. The route initially stretched 30km along the river Lot to the beautiful village of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, perched on the edge of the limestone cliff with its medieval towers and houses piled almost on top of each other. Seeing it for the first time, Breton (writing in the association's guestbook) described its appearance to him 'blazing with Bengal fire' and 'like an impossible rose in the night' (Breton 1951). He bought a house in the village and lived there in the summers until his death in 1966.

Across the valley from Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, striking prehistoric cave paintings had been discovered only three decades previously at Pech-Merle. The drawings of a horse, bison, mammoths, bears, and aurochs date from between 20 and 30 millennia ago, and

include an outline of a wounded man, and incredible three-dimensional paintings of horses that use the curves in the rock to give the appearance of muscle movement. There are numerous outlines of human hands in red paint. The cave was sealed up by meltwater and rock collapses at the end of the last ice age, around 8000 BC; this entombment also preserved in petrified mud the footprint of an adolescent boy.

Breton visited the caves on 24th July, 1952, guided by the local MRP deputy (*Mouvement républicain populaire*) Abel Bessac whose wife owned the concession to the limestone grotto. The paintings were so vivid that, in the middle of the tour, Breton reached out to touch the paint to see if it was in fact fresh. He was warned not to touch the drawing, but pressed his thumb again onto the line of the painting. At that moment, Bessac struck Breton with his walking stick, and a fist-fight ensued that was sufficiently violent to cause crying among children in another visiting group. Mme Bessac brought legal charges against Breton, and – despite the written protests of many celebrated writers and thinkers including Albert Camus and Claude Levi-Strauss, and a campaign of vilification against Bessac – Breton was eventually found guilty in court of defacing an ancient monument. The trial was clearly an attack on surrealism itself, with Breton's war exile called into question and an appeal for a fine of a million francs to be levied; the defence attempted to encourage sympathy for Breton as an artist against the trashy commercialism of the Bessacs (see Souperbie 2014). Breton was fined the nominal amount of 25002 francs, mostly to repair the damage, with 1 franc each for the village and for the State. I have not been able to discover whether the fine was ever paid.

In many ways this entire 'Breton affair' epitomises surrealism. It begins with an accidental encounter that is striking and filled with apparent significance. There is an objective chance across time in the fact that the emergence of surrealism to sweep away the false history of art should coincide with the emergence of these artefacts from the beginning of human time. Surrealism sets itself against civilised art, and here was art that predated civilisation itself. Surrealism reaches out beyond the trappings of mere civilisation into prehistory, and apparently back into a purer psychic state of our species.

The major position of surrealism in the history of human art and expression is placed equivalently with humanity's first extant expressions of artistic communication. The surrealist regards himself as not being subject to the rules and conventions of society, and certainly not constrained by commercialism. Breton was absolutely not going to accept the authority of the official guide, but was determined to undertake his own empirical research into the nature of the painting before him.

The paintings in question are striking but mysterious, and seem to combine recognisable figurative realism with unexplained patterns and pairings; they include a variety of techniques. They appear both elementary and childish at first viewing, and then incredibly innovative and advanced upon reflection. The artists are unknown, but their hand-signatures surround some of the drawings. There is a desire, as in surrealism, for the communication of a universal human experience that might diminish artistic intention, together with an inescapable desire to signal the individual creative mind, and to make a mark. The paintings were presumably painted in almost complete darkness, deep inside the cave and with only very crude lamps, but there is evidently an impulse to leave a trace of the artist's thinking, perceptions, fears, and memories. Images of animals

that would have been seen in different places, and at different times, and from different viewing positions are brought together onto one background: experience is collaged and presented in a single vision. It is not knowable whether the paintings are trophies of past events, or wishful anticipations of future ones.

In the legal process that followed the 'Breton affair' it is apparent that the cultural politics of other people largely determined their view of the movement. If surrealism had nothing to say to those pursuing the prosecution, it was because those people had not engaged with it. There was clearly a fear of everything that surrealism, embodied in Breton, represented. Even years after its heroic zenith, and even in the body of a middle-aged semi-retired anti-fascist literary critic and thinker, it was clear that surrealism as an idea was still powerful. Like the paintings from the beginning of civilisation, surrealist art works on every encounter because both its technique and its context are inseparable and significant and striking. There is no private symbology or secret code other than human language, and to make surrealism work, it is only necessary to read it.

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