

## Philosophy and Surrealism: The Insufficiency of Reality<sup>1</sup>

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*“The author of these pages, not yet twenty-nine years old, already contradicted himself, from January 7 to 10, 1925, the date on which we find ourselves, a hundred times on a capital point, namely, the value that deserves to be attributed to reality [...] Horrible problem, however! Every day I live, every action I perform, every representation that comes to me, as if it were nothing, makes me believe that I commit a fraud”.* André Breton<sup>2</sup>

The expression *le peu de réalité* (the little bit of reality), used by Breton in this homonymous pamphlet, reveals to us one of the main sources of the feeling of the surrealist world and therefore serves us as an aid in understanding its aesthetic and behavioral principles.

It concerns, of course, the uneasiness, the lack of sense, the mechanical and mercantilist use of all things and the extensive mediocrity of the world. Hence the contempt attributed to material reality, in its existential, socio-political and cultural aspects. It, reality, is taken and lived as what I allow myself here to call the "principle of insufficiency": insufficiency of meaning, of imagination, of possibilities of action and pleasure, inevitable place of coercive relationships that

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<sup>1</sup> Text originally published in *The Surrealism*, Perspective Edition, 2008 (organization: Jacó Guinsburg and Sheila Leirner).

<sup>2</sup> Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité, *Point du jour, Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p. 273 (Coleção Pléiade).

ask us for escapes or compensations: "The terrible psychological law of compensations [...] by virtue of which we cannot fail to pay dearly for a moment of lucidity, pleasure or happiness, and - it must also be said - that our worst abatement and our greatest despair would be well worth an immediate revenge". Or even: "Pragmatism is not within my reach" (*Les pas perdus*). In surrealism one wants to realize desire, dream and practice freedom, a word "capable of sustaining, indefinitely, the old human fanaticism," and which responds to "the only possible aspiration [...]" And the truth is that hallucinations, illusions, etc. constitute a considerable source of pleasure [...] Let us say it clearly and once and for all: the marvelous is always beautiful, any kind of marvelous is beautiful, and only the marvelous is beautiful" (*Manifeste du surréalisme*, 1924). One seeks salvation through art, but lived art or the art of living. A way of acting in which the imaginary and the real are connected, in which the imaginary becomes real, by which the usual antinomies are eliminated - "to reduce the oppositions erroneously presented as insurmountable" (*La clé des champs*).

This worldview has laid its roots in modernity and, more properly, in the romantic ideas of the self, of free subjectivity and irrationalism. In the transition of the 18th and 19th centuries, the "philosophy of life", the appreciation of the sensitive and a mystical spirituality reacted en bloc to the "philosophy of reason" and the incipient essays of scientific materialism.

Fichte, the first priest of romantic philosophy, argues that sensitive reality and knowledge are only conceivable from an I, qualified as Absolute or Pure. In other words, there is no way to perceive and pronounce on "reality" (whatever it may be) outside of a thinking activity and, therefore, it is immanent to Thought. In the absence of an "egoity" there are no possible realities and no thought. Thus the

Pure I constitutes simultaneously the formal and material principle of knowledge. It is from it, from its activity, that one can arrive at the perception of a duality - of a particular "I" as opposed to an object or natural entity. Only this second "I," finite and empirical, differentiates itself from the entities of reality on which man acts. Both are fruits of the Absolute I, pure creative activity and self-consciousness beyond space and time, which precedes and conditions the construction of all determined realities.

As for personal freedom, I believe that two opinions are sufficient in this area. The first, of Hegel, inscribed in § 124 of his Principles of the Philosophy of Law: "The right to subjective freedom is the central and inflexion point that marks the difference between antiquity and modern times. This right, in its infinity, is expressed in Christianity and has become the universal and effective principle of a new form of the world. Among the configurations that are close to them are love, romanticism, the search for the eternal beatitude of the individual, and then moral convictions and scruples, and then the other forms in which they stand out in part as principles of civil society and as elements of the political constitution, and in part manifest themselves in a general way in history, particularly in the history of art, science and philosophy".

This characteristic, if it makes modern times superior to the past, also makes them more vulnerable to conflicts, crises and disappointments. Daniel Bell's second reaffirms: "The fundamental idea of modernism, the trend that has spread in Western civilization since the 16th century, is the following: the unity of society is not the

group, nor the corporation, nor the tribe, nor the city, but the individual".<sup>3</sup>

Among its many and recognized characteristics, romanticism exalted the natural and irrational forces of life, consecrating at the same time individualism, especially that in which the exceptional and mysterious impulses of the "genius" (of the *Kraftgenie*) manifest themselves. In defending the subjective freedom of the spirit (but also the objective or political freedom of national peoples), the romantic individual saw himself almost as a creator of himself (the figures of Prometheus and Faust sum up well, and respectively, the yearnings for rebellion and experimentation), and the more authentic he would be the greater his spontaneity would be. In the provinces of art, form and content began to be determined above all by individual interiority. Thus, Friedrich Schlegel, contrasting classical and romantic genres, argued that a classical poet subordinates himself to the theme, while a representative of the second school imposes, by form, his personality to the content, since his will does not obey laws. And the artistic effect on poetry, as Hölderlin proposed in his comments on Oedipus, should be obtained by means of a "catastrophe" or ruin of the usual sense that things have. In all this, there was a preference for fantasy, for dreams, for the unusual, and disdain for the mechanical banality of everyday life and bourgeois utilitarianism, without forgetting the irony, then used as an antidote to the inevitable pains of life.

Schopenhauer's "irrationalism" arises from the idea that existence consists primarily in the blind manifestation of the will (noumenal reality or impulse to simply exist). The exteriorization of this

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<sup>3</sup> *Les contradictions culturelles du capitalisme*, Paris: PUF, 1979, p. 26.

foundation, which unfolds atheologically, without God, and ateleologically, without purposes, varies from a lower degree, constituted by the enormous forces of nature, to the highest, that of human reason. But the knowledge it produces turns out to be, in the end, pure representation or only appearance, since all that exists for thought only exists as perception relative to a subject: "we will recognize that space, like time, and everything that exists at the same time in space and time, in a word, everything that has cause or end, has a purely relative reality [... ...] And Maya is the veil of illusion which, by covering the eyes of mortals, makes them see a world which cannot be said to exist or not, a world which resembles a dream".<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the difference between the irrepressible will, the inexhaustible creator of needs, and the representation of the spirit opens up to an abyss of pain and suffering, to an insurmountable void between desire and the world, from which the feeling of absurdity is extracted. It is useless to want to be saved by progress or civilization. The reality will always be insufficient for the individual, not so much because of its smallness, but because it is infinite.

One can see Schopenhauer's influence on, for example, William James in a work like *Does Consciousness Exist?* In this, the relationship between subject and object (exterior or interior), that is, the phenomenon of consciousness, does not constitute a primordial relationship or is not found among "the first principles". Previously, there had to be the "pure experience," in which the subject-object duplicity does not yet exist. This experience is nothing other than the continuous and immediate flow of life, a torrent which provides the material for the consciousness, necessarily derived. There is only

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<sup>4</sup> *The World as Will and Representation*, portuguese version, Rés Publishing House, Porto, 2001, pg. 14.

experience, therefore, where there is life, but pure experience does not determine the truth or error, the falsity or veracity of the act. Only in the realm of consciousness and knowledge is a court like this established and a choice can be made. That is why consciousness and reason are subordinate to levels and to inferior elements, simply vital, which could be called unconscious.

But going back one last time to Schopenhauer, it is important to remember that for him there are three ways out of the world's pains (*Weltschmerzen*), besides suicide. Not being as abrupt as this ultimate attitude, it is possible and convenient to devote ourselves to justice, compassion (ethics in a radical situation) and art. With this one, the phenomenal appearances, the representations, can be sent back to ideal and superior models of existence. This elevation is possible because the Will, before being objectified in the incessant plurality of individuals, is expressed in general forms, outside time and space. They constitute, therefore, archetypes or "representations of being in general", excluded from the caducity of life and the suffering present in it.

Also as a lenitive, the "medicine" of art is refound in Nietzsche, before reaching surrealism.

Through radical nihilism and *amor fati*, this absolute fidelity to the earth and to the facticity with which we are placed here, the philosopher of aphorisms preached a break with the morality of the flock and resentment, the deconsecration of the norms in force, the dissolution of deceptive appearances and the overcoming of rationality in the name of a vigorous *vital instinct*. After God's death, there is only one solution for humanism - to kill what is human, just as the Judeo-Christian culture built it.

Included in this vitalism is the model of Greek art, whose strength came from two antithetical but intertwined feelings: the apollonian and the dionysiac. The first is the fruit of dreaming; the second, of drunkenness or shuffling of consciousness. In the Apollonian mode, the subject molds the world; in the Dionysian mode, he is moulded by nature.

“The beautiful appearance of the oneiric world, in which each man sees himself as a complete artist, is the matrix of all figurative art and also, as we will see, of an important half of poetry [... ] In the supreme life of this dreamlike reality we have, however, the translucent feeling of its appearance; only when this feeling ceases do the pathological effects begin, in which the dream does not restore and the natural and creative force of its states is interrupted [...] Dionysian art, on the contrary, rests on the game of drunkenness, on ecstasy. Two powers, above all, are those which elevate the natural and naive man to the forgetfulness of himself, proper to drunkenness: the spring instinct and the narcotic drink. Its effects are symbolized in the figure of Dionysius. In both cases, the principium individuationis ends up broken and the subjective disappears in the face of the eruptive violence of the general human and, even more, of the universal-natural [... This combination characterises the culmination of the Greek world: originally only Apollo was an art god in Greece and his power was that which moderated Dionysius, which erupted from Asia, that it was able to bring about the most beautiful fraternal alliance [... ] All the sublime instincts of being (Hellenic) were revealed in this idealization of the orgy”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> La visión dionisiaca del mundo, *El nacimiento de la tragedia*, Madrid: Alianza, 2002, p. 21.

In another passage of *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (§ 7), the author reaffirms that, having known the essence of things, after the lethargic experience, the Dionysian man feels disgusted with the world: "Here, in this supreme danger of the will, art approaches, like a saving sorceress, with her balms; only it is capable of converting those disgusting thoughts about the fright and the absurdity of existence into representations with which to live: the sublime as artistic domestication of the fright, and the comic as artistic relief from the disgust in the face of the absurdity".

Although they owe ideas such as those exposed here from the 19th century, the notions and ideals of surrealism were opposed or kept a clear distance from the main philosophical currents of the early 20th century. And, except for psychoanalysis, it even moved away from the other currents of psychology.

It would be tempting to establish relations between Bergson's vitalism (intuitionism, *élan vital*) and certain radically subjective conceptions of surrealism, such as the "inner model", the "abstraction of reality" or the "automatism of thought", inscribed among the aesthetic principles of movement. However, it would be to confuse Bergson's reservations about scientific thought, or even his anti-intellectualism, with irrationalist postures. What the philosopher claims with these reactions is the importance of consciousness, of immediate intuition, opposed to reasoning or intelligence, predominantly symbolic or linguistic faculties that function by analysis and synthesis. Therefore, in a way external to the beings and from them extracting only a relative knowledge. In his opinion, "intelligence and intuition represent two opposing directions of conscious work: intuition advances in the very sense of life, while the intelligence walks



in the opposite direction".<sup>6</sup> That is, in the inorganic sense. Intelligence was made to think about matter, the solid. It is the main faculty of *homo faber*. "Nature, by denying man preformed instruments, gives him an intelligence, that is, the power to invent and construct an indefinite number of instruments".<sup>7</sup>

Intuition has an irreplaceable value because it springs from life, from immediate experience, and rises to an essence and a totality. It constitutes a vision of the interior and, in fact, ineffable of relationships, processes and objects. We can "distinguish two deeply different ways of knowing one thing. The first implies that we surround the thing; the second, that we enter it. The first depends on the point of view in which we place ourselves and the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second is not tied to any point of view and does not rely on any symbol. About the first way of knowing, we will say that it stops at the relative; about the second, where it is possible, we will say that it reaches the absolute".<sup>8</sup>

This absolute is what lasts or remains, despite continuous changes. And pure duration "excludes any idea of juxtaposition, of exteriority and extension".<sup>9</sup> To the *élan vital* (original impulse, permanent flow, instinct, similar to Schopenhauer's Will) is allied intelligence, this guide to action, so that, fused, one arrives at intuition, a privileged way of capturing the essence of the real, that is, of permanent action and becoming.

But even if Bergson's intuitionism keeps the conceptual activity in the background, it also does not value representation and,

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<sup>6</sup> *L'évolution créatrice*, Paris: Felix Alcan, 1939, p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> *La pensée et le mouvant*, Paris: Felix Alcan, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> *Introduction to Metaphysics*, portuguese version, The Thinkers Collection, Abril Cultural, São Paulo, 1979, pg. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, pg. 16.

consequently, the artistic appearance: "no image will ever reproduce the original feeling I have of the flow of myself [...] To the one who is not able to give the intuition of the constitutive duration of his being, nothing would be able to do so, and concepts even less than images".<sup>10</sup>

The phenomenology, inaugurated with Husserl's Logical Investigations, had the purpose of basing philosophical and scientific investigations in a neocartesian way with maximum precision. For this, the method demands a pure description of reality, understood as that which is offered to the intellectual gaze, being this one here detached from previous prejudices. This search for a verification of the "object itself", in its essential character, not even submitted to time, reaffirms, above all, the irreplaceable primacy of reason. This excludes, consequently, subjectivism and any personal tendencies. Thus, the phenomenology of Husserlian orientation finds in the reality of consciousness and its permanent intentionality the privileged theme of its concerns. If the consciousness is an intention that is directed toward an object, then it is the object itself (and not only its appearance) that is given to the consciousness. Therefore, the consciousness can pronounce itself on the intended object in accordance with its intention, since there is no distinction here between being and appearing. Or yet: being is correlated to consciousness. Being the origin of all meaning, only the consciousness attributes it to the world and makes it appear as a phenomenon (and not the unconscious or the oneiric state). Therefore, the *cogito* is constituted or functions by virtue of a

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<sup>10</sup> Idem, pg. 17.

*cogitatum*, of a sense for itself (which free associations would never be able to consolidate).

It was necessarily against subjective relativism and in favour of a "universal and absolutely valid philosophical science" that the phenomenology manifested itself at first, considering "Philosophy as a Science of Rigour" (*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*). Hence Gaston Bachelard's advice: "Only a philosophy in a state of alert can follow the profound modifications of scientific knowledge".<sup>11</sup>

The search for apparently solid methods or systems of epistemological research, which allowed science, besides the utilitarian aspects, to awaken an enormous intellectual attraction, naturally led to questions such as: what makes the inertia imagined by Galileo, Darwin's evolutionism or Einstein's relativity considered "science", and not metaphysics or art? The new positivists had suggestions to make. And with them, Bertrand Russell said, "a great deal of mysticism, like Bergson's, has become antiquated".<sup>12</sup>

From the beginning to the first half of the 20th century, Russell was perhaps the most prolific and one of the most influential philosophers outside academic circles. With him (and George E. Moore) there was a revival of realism and traditional British empiricism.

Realism is understood as the conception that there are real things, regardless of conscience. But the properties of real things, initially captured by the senses, exist only for a consciousness, which reacts to them in a certain way. In other words, consciousness is a subjective phenomenon and things possess, on their side, an objective character, which stimulates the capture of certain qualities by

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<sup>11</sup> *L'activité rationaliste de la physique contemporaine*, Paris: P.U.F., 1951, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *History of the Western Philosophy*, portuguese version, São Paulo: Nacional, p. 404.

perception. Not only does reality constitute the privileged object of knowledge, but it can be captured in its subjective (in the self) and transsubjective (outside the self) aspects. It is then up to philosophy to focus on the sciences of nature and, freed from metaphysical and idealistic notions, to exercise a critical activity, that is, to submit concepts to the logical analysis of propositions. For example, to determine whether the use of the term appears as a predicate, as an indication of identity or existence, in order to eliminate linguistic ambiguities. With respect to empiricism, this means that knowledge of the matter is not immediately accessible to understanding. It begins before and necessarily in sensations and, at this stage, sensitive data are captured (sense data, which, incidentally, can be differently perceived by different people), and which are linked to each other by relationships of a logical-rational nature (logic is a priori and, at the same time, tautological, only reaffirmative). If it were not so, no distinct idea could be formulated, even though "all human knowledge is uncertain, inaccurate and partial".<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the case, Russell's conceptions and, in general, those of the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle avoid psychological and subjective criteria and want to demonstrate that language and nature are both logical constructions (mathematics is transcribed in deducible logical terms, according to Gottlob Frege) and can therefore be adapted to true knowledge. A proposition, therefore, does not constitute a cognitively meaningful (neither false nor true) assertion unless it is analytically (mathematically developed) or else submitted to the verification of "impersonal" experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: its scope and limits*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948, part IV.

Even existentialism, or, more correctly, existentialisms, do not seem to us to serve as a basis for surrealism, although, as in the case of Bergson, they could suggest some links. For example, the realization that existence is pure subjectivity and, therefore, man would be able to create himself freely, or have himself as a project in his own acts and desires. Or even the feeling that life flows in the midst of resonances of anguish or nausea (the insufficiency of reality).

Beginning with Heidegger, it is known at first that for the philosopher *Dasein* (the human being) never reaches his totality or plenitude, remaining forever unfinished. This source of anguish makes him take refuge, normal and daily, in an impersonality that is at once appeasing, mediocre and alienating. This impersonality arouses the contumacious chatter and serves as a shield to the deeper consciousness (*Gewissen*).

But here's the difference, compared to the surrealistic "escape". The possible way out for Heidegger is a resolute, determined attitude (his *Entschlossenheit*) and consists in *Dasein*'s conscious assumption of the intrinsic temporality and anguish that is pertinent to him. And this act of courageous lucidity occurs in the midst of personal silence and ecstasy.

As for Sartre's work, although it only gained notoriety more than a decade after the first surrealist manifesto, it seems interesting to observe that his thought both conflicts and seems to be in line with the principles of the movement.

In the *Transcendence of the Ego* we find the rejection of the idea of subjectivity, so much appreciated, precisely, by the romantics and surrealists: "The self (ego) is not an inhabitant of consciousness. It is not in the consciousness, neither formally nor materially, but outside,

in the world: it is an entity of the world like the I of another".<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is in the midst of the multiplicity, differences and conflicts of reality that the "I" is perceived in the world. The consciousness is not defined by an immanence, but by its intentionality, or better yet, by a game of "transversal intentionalities", in flux. With this, the aphorism according to which existence precedes essence is already announced. Emotion, even if it expresses itself as a magical modification of the world, in order to ward off the dangers that exist there, does not cease to be an emanation or a way of being of the consciousness, of the being that wishes. The consciousness functions as a kind of manifestation in front of a world that it nullifies. For any object that presents itself to consciousness is no longer consciousness. And the same happens with another consciousness than mine. I must deny the other so that it exists, and vice versa. Now, this game is radically cogitant, reflective, and owes nothing to the unconscious. The always free choice to which I am condemned, my engagement or the construction of a sense for life are conscious phenomena. It is not an unconscious state which moves my desire, but the desirable object. That is why Sartre referred to the "incomprehensible concept of the unconscious" and to every psychic fact as co-extensive to consciousness.

In what concerns more directly artistic conceptions, we can observe, simultaneously, common and opposite traces to surrealist ideas.

It is known that for Sartre art creates a *need*, that is, a previously conceived unfolding or a process under control, as much as a foreseen purpose (at least in artistic works prior to certain modernist

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<sup>14</sup> Op. Cit., Vrin, Paris, pg. 42.

currents, such as random painting or music). In the work of art the "events" or the "forms" are proposed and directed, correcting what, in the immediate scope of what is lived, is always contingency. Thus, the surrealist "automatic writing" either opposes the Sartrean poetic notion, or it does not constitute a true poetic work, remaining only as a transcription of what is felt or emotionally experienced. For example: "The park, at this time, extended its blond hands above the magical fountain. A meaningless castle rolled over the surface of the earth. Next to God, the notebook of that castle was open on a drawing of shades of feathers and irises. The young Widow's Kiss: such was the name of the inn caressed by the speed of the car". (*Poisson Soluble*, 1924). It is clear that in constructions of this nature neither a need nor a meaning like those required by Sartre are imposed. Especially in the field of literature, since for the philosopher "the writer's job is to make sure that no one can ignore the world and consider himself innocent before it" (*What is Literature?*)

From another point of view, however, beauty - in accordance with the text *The Imaginary*<sup>15</sup> - is a value that is not found in reality, but in the realm of imagination, in the unreal, in representation. According to Sartre, there is a difference between image, concept and perception, although they are all forms of consciousness by which an object is given to us. In perception, the object is only offered to me by one of its sides or aspects (in the perception of a cube, for example, I cannot perceive all its sides and angles simultaneously). Even so, through perception we can verify the existence of several possible relations of the object, which will be defined more completely by the concept. Thus, by the concept, I perceive the totality of the object,

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<sup>15</sup> *L'imaginaire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986.

knowing that a cube has six sides, eight vertices and twenty-four right angles. The mental image, finally, is the poorest of the conscious forms. Nothing can be learned from an image that I do not know before. The image, therefore, is a *quasi-observation*, the present observation of an absence that teaches nothing.

Still according to Sartre's understanding, in imaginary life, like those of morbid dreamers, one flees from the real, from the content of the real, from the subordination of our behaviour in the midst of our multiple relationships, from the unpredictability of events, and precisely for this reason one can never reach a satisfactory situation, one of full contentment, given the abyss that exists between desire and reality.

It is precisely through imagination that we reach the surrealistic exit to the insufficiency of the real, because only there can beauty be freely created. Be it the controlled imagination, as Ferdinand Alquié defends it, in *Philosophie du surréalisme*, that is, that of a waking dream, in conformity with the medical spirit of psychoanalysis, or the imagination of irrationality, paranoid, averse to any logical analysis (Dali, Buñuel). "And, undoubtedly, it is difficult to separate, in surrealism, these two conceptions from the imagination: they interpenetrate and never distinguish themselves clearly".<sup>16</sup>

Here, a small digression: although Alquié defends a very close proximity between the Freudian conception of the unconscious and Breton's researches regarding the role of the imagination, Freud himself, in a letter to Stefan Zweig, dated 7/26/1937, opines about the participants of the movement: they are "integral madmen, say 95%, like absolute alcohol".

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<sup>16</sup> *Philosophie du surréalisme*, Paris: Flammarion, 1955, p. 177.



Returning to the topic of imagination, it is good to ask ourselves, even if the answer is concise, about its psychological nature.

Among other possible definitions, it constitutes a sensitive psychic representation, that is, the intelligence that operates by images. Although it can be, obviously, stimulated by the real, by the objective or outside (reproductive imagination), it has as a characteristic not to be subordinated entirely to them (in this case, we have more precisely the memory or the mnemonic image, reproduction of the seen, of the lived, the ear). Imagination, by the freedom with which it manifests itself, gives its own forms to intellectual and affective creation (creative imagination). It represents the world of subjective consciousness and that of (unconscious?) desires, which may include both the abstract aspects of intelligence and those of instinctive-emotional life. The question is whether it is capable of creating images directly from necessity and sensation. So, for example, what image would make homesickness, organic pain or contentment of a presence materialize? None? Any of them? Some? In the last two cases, are they iconic images (modeled on the real), symbolic (arbitrary, such as colors or geometric shapes), or both, indifferently?

A particular kind of imagination, however, has a lot to do with the conflicts between desire and reality: reverie. Its elaboration avoids the dichotomy that comes from dissatisfaction or insufficiency of reality. It postulates itself as a conversion of affective states, of ideas or even of ideals, in a fanciful way, realizing itself in the state of wakefulness as well as in dreams.

If we were to use the Freudian nomenclature here, we would say that it is the "day dream", since its psychic operations act in a similar way to the oneiric state. Literature, for example, would be characteristically a daydream. And in the history of surrealism, we

also know the importance exercised by Spitteler's character - Imago - the woman who satisfies all desires, in substitution of the real beloved, but indifferent to the hero Viktor.

Now, in order for the movement to go beyond artistic manifestations and relate to life in society, the assumption of a philosophy or political ideology would be pertinent. Let us adopt, therefore, as truly important Breton's statement (*Point de jour, L'amour fou*) according to which surrealism remained faithful to the attempt to overcome the antinomies between the real and the imaginary, the objective and the subjective, the conscious and the unconscious. This also means "the penetration of the world through the hidden path", "the detection of a new fantastic", "the lyrical cryptoesthesia of the underworld". The power of the imaginary would be the key to that synthesis sought, since, deep down, Breton "proposes to modify the social condition, and is attentive to the human condition. If he is concerned with language, it is to identify it with man, to make it, as Maurice Blanchot said, human freedom to act, to manifest itself. Or, in other words, those of Octávio Paz, for whom "to find natural language is to return to nature, before the fall and history: poetry is the witness of the first innocence".<sup>17</sup>

If it is from the imaginary sphere that surrealism "proposes to express the real functioning of thought [...] in the absence of any control exercised by reason, outside of any aesthetic or moral preoccupation", then it could be no other than the libertarian utopia of anarchism, a generalized insubmission to ethical and social conventionalisms, to economic logics and domains, to group political interests. Although it presented itself as a philosophically materialist

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Alquié, *Entretiens*, p. 197.

and ideologically anti-capitalist and revolutionary movement, the attempts to approach communism, via the French party, showed profound disagreements of principles and objectives. A convergence that was, however, desired even by Walter Benjamin, but which proved, to say the least, naive: "Reality will be able to overcome itself, as the communist manifesto requires, only when the physical and the imaginary space interpenetrate so deeply in it that all the revolutionary tension becomes a collective nervous-physical commotion, and that all the nerves-physical commotions of the collectivity become revolutionary discharges. At this moment, it is the surrealists alone who understand the demands of the Manifesto (that of Marx-Engels), corresponding to the present day".<sup>18</sup>

From what has been exposed so far, we can form a summary table containing the following aspects:

- 1) the very name "surreal" indicates a refusal and the desire to overcome and reconstruct the material and spiritual realities as they have historically presented themselves, with all their conflicts and limitations;
- 2) this yearning for freedom and for the complete manifestation of the "I" comes, to a great extent, from romantic philosophy and mentality, with the force of subjectivism that characterizes them;
- 3) as needs, the will and the natural impulses are unavoidable; there are, therefore, components that escape rationality or are unconscious in human behavior;
- 4) dreams and the deepest psychological strata, when exteriorized without rational or conceptual injunctions, express the true underlying reality;

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<sup>18</sup> André Breton ou la recherche du commencement, *L'art*, n. 32, 1967.

5) consciousness and intention, in Husserl's phenomenology, are sine qua non conditions of true knowledge. And to realize intention (Erfüllung) requires a rough process of cognitive analysis, which is not the surrealistic perspective.

6) Finally, the contemporary spirits of positivism, pragmatism, analytical realism and applied science, which are so dear to futurists, for example, have been profoundly strange to them.

Consequently, in the surrealistic conception truth is found in a thought (if one can call it that) predominantly unrelated to rational criteria; beauty is expressed above all in sensitive materials of the unconscious and vital impulses; and ethical behavior manifests itself as free, radical subjectivity. Truth, beauty and goodness acquire the contours of ideal daydreams, praiseworthy and even necessary beliefs, even for personal projections, collective engagements and historical utopias.

But what is not realized there is that every fantasy, when converted into reality, tends to acquire the insufficiency, the constraints, the limits and the needs that are inherent to it, that is, proper to the materialization and adoption of a concrete form.

Related to this disagreement (reality versus reverie) are the observations of Adorno recorded in one of his last writings, *Aesthetic Theory*, according to which “absolute freedom in art, which is always freedom in a particular domain, contradicts the perennial state of non-freedom as a whole [...] its autonomy begins to exhibit a moment of blindness, always peculiar to art. At the time of its emancipation, this moment eclipses all others, despite or because of the absence of naivety which, according to Hegel, can no longer be avoided [...] art condemns itself to grant the entity and the existing one a promise in an Other, reinforces the sorcery that the autonomy of art was wanted

to be liberated. The very principle of autonomy is already suspect in such a promise: by pretending to put an external totality, a sphere, closed in on itself, this image is transferred to the world in which art finds itself and which produces it [...] Only by virtue of the separation of empirical reality, which allows art to model, according to its needs, the relationship of the Whole to the parts, does the work of art become Being to the second power. The works of art are copies of the living empiric insofar as they provide them with what is refused abroad and thus free them from what the coexisting external experience guides them”.<sup>19</sup>

To conclude, we feel prone to believe that the notions of art and imaginative action, in the surrealist case, echo with more similarity, although in a modernist way, of course, Schopenhauer's analyses on the metaphysics of beauty.

In his opinion, art has a soteriological capacity, that is, a saving or liberating capacity (*Erlösung*), or even the reconstruction of a world distinct from blind reality or, in the surrealist case, "rational, prosaic". This last attitude, in the group's opinion, is the cause of "horror, the fruit of mediocrity, hatred and creeping presumption" (Manifesto, 1924).

If the aesthetic state, in Schopenhauer, constitutes an intuition of pure archetypes, it is so characterized precisely because it makes the principle of reason disappear. A natural object contemplated or the creation of an aesthetic work stands out from the everyday and ephemerality that is its own, allowing suffering to move away from empirical or immediate consciousness. By detaching itself from the representations that reason builds, in the form of concepts, intuition

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<sup>19</sup> Portuguese version (Teoria Estética), Lisboa: Edições 70, p. 11-15, Coleção Arte e Comunicação.

recovers its innocence and, with it, sensitive pleasure. In the aesthetic state, freedom asserts itself because it strays from the blind Will and thus overcomes it. That's why it's Art, not just Life.

In a surrealist version, we could replace Schopenhauer's intuition with imagination and the unconscious, and both would continue to be vehicles for the same ends. But we will never know if the modernist taste for provocation, scandal, *non-sense*, the illogical, narcissism, *aurait épaté le bon bourgeois*, who was the German philosopher.