

## THE SURREAL DREAM AND DREAMED REALITY

Dreams have a privileged status among all the images. They do not depend on our will and appear to give evidence of the spontaneous eruption in our life of a power that is beyond us. Their most remarkable characteristic is that they make us believe they contain a mystery, that they open a door onto the reverse side of things, revealing to us an enigma to which we must find the key. The interpretations of dreams may differ, but everyone concedes that they have a power of transcendence with regard to the world of the wake. It is through dreams that the divine power has most frequently chosen to appear to its elected. The signs of dreams (if not of the other images of night, the stars) were considered when the future was to be foretold. But dreams, certainly also, restore to us a past long since effaced from our memory, dreams betray our most secret desires, ignored even by our conscience, and it is hence on dreams that we rely to discover the hidden motivations of our aberrant behaviour. In dreams

Translated by Victor A. Velen.

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things speak to us from a distance, people absent or even dead communicate with us; how many friends and lovers, whom life has separated, find each other every night and experience what Gérard de Nerval calls a second life? We pronounce the word "dream" when we want to describe an event that has astonished us, delighted us, and fulfilled us beyond what we would have dared to hope.

Just a moment of reflection suffices to show us what this infatuation, this confidence and this faith may have that is surprising. For certainly many dreams are anything but agreeable. An especially tenacious misfortune, a series of catastrophies that give us the feeling of fatality, are rightly qualified as nightmares. Sometimes we wake up disenchanted from all too beautiful dreams, filled with bitterness at having been deluded. From nightmares we retain, together with the relief of knowing that our panic was groundless, the uneasiness generated by any unhappy scene and the obsession of a possible premonition. This, however, is not their principal shortcoming. For the beliefs which are tied to them and which, we have already said, result from an act of faith in a way only deny the most apparent, most evident, most universally recognized characteristic of the visions of sleep: that of irreality. We do not at any moment doubt in daily life that all that dreams paint for us is totally devoid of existence. What is dreamed is but a lie. Furthermore, more often it is their incoherence, their absurdity that strikes us, the impossibility of discovering any sense in them, and finally the certainty that they are the product of chance without consequence and associations without import. Devoid of reality, sometimes of beauty, frequently of sense and practical usefulness, why do dreams not cease to amaze us?

Thus on the one hand, the history of religions, superstitions, a good part of literature and psychoanalysis, from the Bible to Jung, assure us of the singular virtue of dreams; on the other hand, simple common sense and a long line of psychologists deny them an equal virtue. Some go so far as to claim that the infatuation which they inspire results from an eccentricity of our mind which cannot be reconciled to finding no sense where manifestly it is lacking. It reveals a morbid taste for enigmas, and, far from being discouraged by the near-certainty

that dreams are impenetrable or insignificant, the mind, on the contrary, irritates and strangely delights in its powerlessness. But scandal or contempt do not affect it. It is thus: recognizing it frankly, in order to perceive the beginning of a possible explanation it is enough to know that dreams charm us precisely by their mystery, extravagance and irreducibility to the norms of our conscious existence, as well as by their absurdity.

There is more to it: all this took place during sleep, as though against our will. The sleeper, to the one who is awake, appears at the same time as himself and another person, the dream as his life and another life. And this diver brings back the debris of his profound discoveries to the shore of waking. Dreams then do not astonish us so much by what they contain: from their content the interest is diverted to *the phenomenon of the dream itself*. It suddenly presents itself as another world, a refuge beyond life, which providentially is open to us. In order to clarify these hypotheses precisely we will first try to determine the characteristics of the dream, to describe, betraying it as little as possible, that which is dreamed.

#### PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DREAM

First, to make an affirmation that everyone will readily admit without trouble: what attracts us in the dream is its *strangeness*. And I understand this word in its two senses: the dream pleases us by its fantastic, surprising, enigmatic and even absurd side; but it also attracts us because it depicts a strange world, not only inhabital but separated from our life, and in which we find ourselves imaginatively invested with the power of escaping reality. In order to convince ourselves, it is enough to recall the dream's most evident characteristics.

The first is its *freedom*, or better, its *extravagance*. The dream develops in a totally unpredictable way, the facts that succeed each other are arranged by no one and I cannot even be certain of having been the hero of these adventures. The second characteristic of the dream, which is opposed to the first but nevertheless linked with it, is its *necessity*, its *fatality*: everything in the dream occurs in a fatal fashion; events follow one another, penetrating each other, and one could say that there is in this world no

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longer a definite interval between the desire and its object, the representation and the thing represented, the will, the action and its sense. The third characteristic of the dream is more essential and more profound. It has less to do with the events which it contains than with their existence itself. That is that the dream is a domain in which questions of truth or falsity, of necessity, of freedom as such, and even of reality or irreality, no longer appear to be posed. Entirely illusory or entirely real, as one wishes, the dream *is*. This paradoxical nature of the dream, which constitutes the subject itself of our research, we call its *surreality*.

The first two characteristics were observed a long time ago, and according to attitudes, were the object of either enthusiastic or scandalized comments.<sup>1</sup>

The illogic, the disorder and the gratuity of dreams may in fact cause us to liken them as well to some products of chance or to morbid deliria, rather than to vistas onto a more profound world, to "visions" analogous to those which the romantics attributed to inspiration. At any rate, we are submerged in a world in which, most frequently, the most solid laws of nature and the mind, up to the principles of causality and identity, are denied: a truly fantastic world. Such a negation certainly possesses a liberating power. It gives us the illusion of escaping the restrictions imposed upon us by time, space and the implacable consequence of phenomena. That these extravagances of the dream may be taken as enigmas, or that one can find in these enigmas the keys to an order purely physiological, psychological or metaphysical is of little importance here.<sup>2</sup> It is enough that they offer us a life analogous to the one we lead, frequently populated by the same objects and the same personages, which,

<sup>1</sup> We refer, for example, to *The Science of Dreams*, by Freud and to the numerous authors quoted by him, particularly in chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> We insist in fact on the point that we do not have in view here the discovery of the causes of these remarkable characteristics of the dream. Whether they are attributable, according to the authors, to a diminution of the superior functions of the mind, to a detachment vis-à-vis the exterior world, to a cleavage between the images and their effective burden, to the displacement and psycho-analytical condensation, or finally to the fascination resulting from a structural simplification of the consciousness, these hypotheses have little to do with our argument, which is to consider the dream as a spectacle, which is given to us, and to understand why it moves us.

however, appear to us entirely different, delirious and incongruous, as fecund in surprising possibilities as our everyday life is niggardly in them.

This same independence vi-à-vis natural laws explains the character of necessity of the dream. Freedom as well as necessity here depend on each other: that which is attached to nothing can only tie itself to everything. Nothing seems to depend on me nor on anyone in my dream: it is the definition itself of fatality.

I love a freakish woman. I discover in the course of a walk a castle, every stone of which I notice is false. I draw back the flaps of my jacket and notice that I have no body. I meet James, but I call him John, and this is neither a slip nor a joke. So much for the facts which I have dreamed (some of them several times), and which in my dream appeared to me as banalities. The unbelievable, which astonished us above, the absurd, the contradictory, appear natural in a dream, logical and obvious. It is enough for two images to succeed each other in order to form a causal link between them, most often fanciful, but which in sleep appears to us necessary. One fact attracts another and is welded to it as if by magic. The succession of events no longer depends on logic; it is rather logic which bows to events. The knife I hold in order to defend myself becomes, at the time I reach the top of the cliff, an umbrella, which providentially serves as a parachute. It is even possible that the dream reverses the time sequence, and the fact that someone has just lit the lamp on my night table suggests to me, at the moment even of awaking, a whole series of adventures which end with a fire breaking out.

Certainly, the events of the dream stay within a certain space and a certain time. But they are, as Sartre has demonstrated, imaginary space and time.<sup>3</sup>

One could describe the dream quite well as the place of beings without coordinates. I am at the same time here and there. I see what goes on behind my back or behind a wall. I discover suddenly that the object which has taken me one hour to reach is a few steps away from me. In my dream, space and time are one with the presence, the essence even of things. The subject

<sup>3</sup> *L'imaginaire: l'objet irréal.*

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and the object are interchangeable. The I penetrates what surrounds it. Thus the link existing between necessity and freedom is clarified: everything here appears fatal because everything is indefinite, or one can say "anticipated," and precisely as we dream it to be. Here we touch upon the third characteristic of the dream: its surreality.

For it is a banal note, but of such great importance that we must now repeat it, that *these characteristics of the dream which we have just described become apparent to us only once we have awakened*. The dream we are speaking of is necessarily always only the dream we remember having dreamed. As long as I slept, neither its extravagance nor its implacable necessity seemed surprising to me. I admitted with the same ease the distortions made of natural and logical laws, as well as the obstinate succession of the events. The fantastic is a state of mind of a man awake: it is now only that my dream appears extraordinary to me. This must be still further clarified: it was not I who "admitted," "found natural," it was the sleeper that I was. It is now I who am aware at the same time of the singular characteristics of the dream, and I recall that these characteristics did not strike the sleeper. It is from this contrast that the dream draws most of its true magic.

Valéry (who despite his distrust of the gifts of chance and of inspiration, reflected on several occasions with great attention on dreams) expressed this, saying, "we know the dream only by the remembrance."<sup>4</sup> It must, however, be added that the memory we have of the dream differs from ordinary remembrances. The latter, in fact, refer to real events, which we are certain (with a few exceptions),<sup>5</sup> of having perceived, lived. On the contrary, the memories of dreams are recollections of unreal events, purely mental images formed in the course of sleep. Common memories bring back to us the reality of the past, altered, deformed inevitably through the role played by forgetting which is involved. Whereas one could almost believe that the recollections of dreams

<sup>4</sup> "Notes sur le rêve," in *Les Cahiers de la Pléiade*, spring 1949: see also *Variété* II.

<sup>5</sup> As demonstrated by Roger Caillois, in *L'incertitude qui vient des rêves*, N.R.F., 1956.

are these dreams themselves, so much so that it could be claimed that they were only imagined, in fact, at the moment of our awaking. That means that we cannot logically speak of the dream, as it was experienced by the sleeper, but as a *postulation*, a *pure hypothesis*, elaborated on the basis of recollections (or whatever appears to us as recollections), but in no case as a reality actually experienced, over which we would possess or have possessed any direct influence and power of control.

This distinction entails a consequence of the greatest import: the dream, as an event which must have taken place, appears *totally separated* from us and from our conscious and awake life. It matters little what it has shown us. It is the dream as a *phenomenon* which is now in question, the same as one may study a painting by Hieronymus Bosch as a plastic representation, without being concerned with the grotesque or hideous figures which it portrays. Thus considered, the dream assumes the character of a forbidden domain, a purely foreign kingdom where it is as improbable that we may have sojourned as the Enchanted Forest, the hallucinating prisons of Piranesi, or the spaces with *n* dimensions of generalized geometries. Two more special characteristics of the dream are yet going to prove this to us.

In fact, we may very well doubt having been the *author* of, as well as the *actor* in, our dreams. Thus, one could try to explain the bizarreness of the dream, making it a product of obscure, transcendent or subterranean powers: the Muses, God, the Genie, the Unconscious. This would be an admission that as conscious and awake beings we do not consider ourselves responsible for it. But that is not without a secret charm for us. Here again the attitude of Valéry, which we referred to above, is significant. One would have said that dreams interested him in the sense that through them spontaneity and inspiration, which (theoretically) he refused to acknowledge, found their revenge. For dreams are what the Gods give us really for nothing. Perhaps the entire conscious and controlled production of the mind alone is valid, in the sense that it surpasses us. What we admire is less what we can do than what we would not have believed ourselves capable of doing.

But if I am not (consciously) the author of my dreams, I may still be permitted to believe that neither am I their actor. Sartre,

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in *L'imaginaire*, rightly distinguishes between the personage whom we see in a dream, accomplishing, in our name, a thousand heroic feats, and the one whom he calls "*l'objet-moi*" of the sleeper, who in his bed imagines himself this personage. Doubtless it seemed to be me, in my dream, at the center of everything that surrounded me, in the same way as in an awake state. Nevertheless the me dreamed acquires for the me awake a very different consistency, quite like that of a *double*. The proof of this is that not infrequently one sees himself in a dream precisely as though he were his double, assisting when he faints, witnessing his own death. I am not "*l'objet-moi*," since I imagine it, believe to perceive it, and hold it to some extent at a distance. Still I am it, since I have the impression of acting, thinking, enjoying myself or fearing. For the feelings, certainly imaginary, which my double experiences, can they not be found also in the sleeper in the form of real feelings? The hands that I imagine to be those of an enraged enemy trying to strangle me, at the moment of awaking, become my own hands which an unconscious movement had closed around my neck. Still, is it a question of the same joy or the same terror? One might as well think that my anguish as the sleeper resembles that of a spectator in the theatre who shares in the feelings of the hero without, however, mistaking himself for him.

Hence neither author really, nor actor: the dream only sustains itself on my disappearance. It is as though drowning, not as divers, that we plunge into the depth of sleep. At best I am the heir of the hero of my dream: he dies, and I note upon my body the traces and the sweat of a life which he alone had lived. On awaking, I suddenly understand that I am totally separated from my dream, that never will I be able to control what had happened in it, since I can no longer penetrate it and since I was not even there to see it. The strange, inevitable phenomenon of surreality follows.

It may be expressed thus: the dream from which we have awakened will appear to us, despite its irreality or because of it, and because it is no more than an uncertain, uncontrollable recollection, suddenly as though possessing a *true* reality. Certainly it is *another* type of reality than that of the awake, foreign, perhaps more pure, let us say: a surreality. A very simple reasoning assures me of this: *that which I cannot control, and to which I*



*have perhaps not contributed, but of which I retain an irrecusable testimony, may appear to me as false, doubtless, but for the same reason as true, as important, as indubitable as I wish.* It goes without saying: all these vicissitudes, which had peopled my night, I now consider to be illusory. But illusory only in what concerns the world of the awake. But nothing compels me to consider this world as the only existing world, excluding any other. Nothing assures me that these events, now fantastic, were not true *then*, and that I have not truly voyaged through an environment all as real as day, which now seems to me a lie, precisely because I have returned from it, and because I have, waking up, penetrated another realm. The life led by the cocoon of the butterfly must not seem to the latter anything else but a dream.

One might say that this is merely an assumption, a gratuitous hypothesis, one more dream. Unquestionably. Only, nothing forbids me from making this assumption, and I would be cheating if I forgot that at any moment I may still be allowed to make it. Finally, the question here is not to affirm a theoretical position, but to explain to us the fascination which the dream has always exercised on us, to show how, in spite of its vanity and its inconsistencies, we may feel that it hides something true, something liberating, something precious.

One last remark. We now understand that the characteristics of necessity and freedom of the dream, without being fascinating in themselves, at the same time provide a proof of its surreality. It is, in fact, that they place *in evidence* its strangeness. They reinforce my belief in its possible existence by showing me that it is not a life like mine. They confirm to me that so many bizarre happenings and marvels can only come from somewhere else. For me, the man awake, a world composed of certainties and illusions exists. A similar world doubtless exists for the hero of my dream. But for this third person who is the sleeper awakened? For him the world of his dream must appear on the one hand as entirely false (according to the criteria of the awake), but also as a bearer of another truth, incommensurable with that of the awake. In the dream, and more generally in the fascinating image, *one would say* that all exists *in itself* and *absolutely*. The surreality is this evidence or this illusion.

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### THE ESTHETIC FASCINATION

The dream fascinates us because it depicts for us a world apart, foreign, where all things could be truly real, surreal. This explanation requires that possible confusions be dispelled. Thus, it may easily be seen that the concept of fascination continues to be ambiguous. The analysis which we have assayed of the power of dreams shows that we must distinguish between two very different kinds of fascination. On the one hand is a fascination, which we will call *physiological*, in which the mind would find itself, as etymology sees it, dominated by its object to the point of being powerless to detach itself from it: this is certainly the case of the sleeper who is unable to escape his dream. However, it is on a very different kind of charm that we have placed the accent in studying the attitude of the sleeper, who awakens and remembers his dream. In this case, we are concerned with an *esthetic* fascination, in which not only is consciousness no longer captive, but which results on the contrary, as we will endeavour to show, from the distance it takes from its object and the lucid interrogation that it subjects him to on the subject of his being.

Jean-Paul Sartre invokes a kind of physiological fascination in *L'imaginaire*, to account for the bewitchment exercised on the consciousness by the images of the dream, of the hallucination or of the hypnosis. The author postulates a kind of simplification of the consciousness which would make it come closer to the object it aims at and make it adhere to it. In the awake state, in fact, my consciousness is dual: consciousness of the object and consciousness of itself. I perceive or I imagine, but I *know* at the same time that I perceive or that I imagine. This second evidence would be dissolved in the dream. Consciousness would lose in it its reflexive dimension, this distance from itself, a sort of interior mirror, which permits it normally to distinguish among the images it produces. Deprived of this mirror, it then takes itself entirely as its object; it is taken in by it and fascinated by it. Hence the feeling of the sleeper of gliding along with the course of things, the facility with which the desire achieves its object, the loss of control and the incoherence that result from it; in short, the characteristics of freedom and necessity that we have ourselves pointed to.

This theory, there is hardly need to stress, concerns the sleeper, and the dream dreamed during his sleep. But this fact itself is totally separate from the esthetic fascination as we understand it. Without argument it demonstrates the remarkable characteristics of the dream. It remains that it is not free of difficulties. In fact, the physiological fascination seems to point to such confusion between the consciousness and the object that it must normally end in the subject's completely forgetting, after his awakening, the visions which had occupied him. This is true most often for hypnosis and hallucinations; it is frequently true for dreams. However, it is not always true, in that we retain memory-images from them. Hence the necessity of postulating a sort of clairvoyance of sleep. Sartre admits, not without contradictions, that the consciousness of the sleeper is a "bewitched spontaneity." That is to say, that this consciousness, in the dream, does not cease being an imagining consciousness; it can therefore under no circumstances take the images that it forms for its own perceptions. Only the simplification that it is subject to impedes it from escaping the unfolding of these images. The mind is incapable of applying to itself the reasoning which would allow it to conceive them as purely unreal: it is captivated by them. "It is this kind of fascination without position of existence," writes Sartre, "which I call belief... This world is sufficient unto itself; it can neither be dispelled nor corrected by perception, since it does not emanate from the domain of the real. It is its unreality even that places it outside of reach and which confers upon it a compact opacity and a power."

In other words, the consciousness of the sleeper no longer questions itself as to the reality or the unreality of its representations. It produces them and submits to them in the same motion. Such a conception has perhaps a descriptive and satisfactory explanatory virtue. In any case, I would like to show that what happens in a dream, in the consciousness of the sleeper, may only be the subject of hypotheses, elaborated on the basis of the memories that we retain of it, and that Sartre's explanation, oddly, results from a projection of the observations of the awake into the forbidden domain of the dream.

What have we learned now from these observations? First of all that the dream is unreal. Then, that this unreality itself is only

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a recollection, which is never known to us directly. But, on the other hand, that the sleeper was a being similar to myself, that he lived a life similar to mine and *perhaps* one as real. These observations can certainly coincide in the awake state. In the dream where we project them, on the contrary, their synthesis shows itself impossible, unless one admits the contradictions that we have pointed out: those of a consciousness which is at the same time spontaneous and bewitched, non-reflective and yet imagining. Here we return to the conclusion reached above: we cannot know what effectively happens in the consciousness of the sleeper, neither if the dreamer possesses a consciousness, nor if it is his own. All that may be admitted is that there exists, in fact, a physiological fascination which we never observe directly. The nature of this fascination, its causes and its mechanism can only be the object of hypotheses, of images that we construct afterward. But these constructions should not be taken as a known quantity of consciousness itself. And it is precisely this very hypothetical character of the profound world which gives it, as we have seen, its surreality.

However, this objection could be made: that the fascination, which we call esthetic, is in reality only the recollection of the physiological fascination. We would then be subject to a nostalgic bewitchment, in the awake state, a pure reflex of that of the sleep. I do not deny that an effect of this kind could not intervene in the attraction that the dream has for us later on. Nevertheless, I believe these two fascinations are essentially distinct. In order to prove this distinction, we still must specify the nature and the conditions of the esthetic fascination.

A first answer to this objection is that, in the dream, as we have seen, and as much as we may know what happens in it, the characteristics of necessity and freedom, which we admire after waking up, we do not feel at all. We are conscious of living a certain life, we are not conscious of the fact that this life is foreign, rich, staggering. We are not conscious of having been fascinated. There is more: we may assume, with some justification, that in the dream the consciousness of the sleeper at least tends to take images for perceptions, the extravagant world which surrounds him for the reality. Thus, our emotions are frequently more alive in a dream than those of the spectator in the theatre. But the

esthetic fascination becomes evident, on the contrary, only when the images of the dream are taken in fact for images. It is then that its remarkable characteristics acquire all their virtue, in demonstrating to us that indeed we are dealing with an unreal world. In this fashion I remember having driven a few days ago by car along a boulevard. A man (whom I thought for a moment I recognized as one of my friends), standing at an intersection, motioned to me: did he ask me to stop? From the end of his arm, extended horizontally, some drops of blood fell to the pavement and immediately coagulated. Why did I pass by without helping him? At the moment that I feel this remorse, the consciousness of this indifference, I realize that this was not an actual recollection, but a dream. Also, at the same moment that I think of these images, which arose mechanically in my mind, they assumed their whole form and became charged with an obscure meaning.

These events fascinate me, at this precise moment, because I know that they are only dreamed events. For unreality is in itself not a sufficient cause of esthetic fascination. Otherwise, one would not understand why dream images are distinguished from all other common mental images. *It is necessary in addition that this unreality become evident.* So evident that, paradoxically, I begin to doubt it. My attention is then centered on the nature of the image. *It is when consciousness questions itself about the reality or unreality of a thing (and this is the opposite of Sartre's thesis) that it becomes a prey to fascination.*

This phenomenon is also true for other images, quite different from those of dreams. Let us give here a simple example, taken from a very different domain, yet an example that is very close to the dream we have described: the deceive-the-eye painting. I enter the Musée Grévin. I approach a guard with the intention of asking my way. As long as I have not realized that this personage is in reality only a wax figure, it is obvious that I act exactly as though it were real. Besides, I hardly took notice of him. It is at the moment when his reality breaks down that he suddenly becomes "present" to me. It is at the moment when I doubt whether he is a figure or a live being that he fascinates me: exactly as though I had suddenly waken up from a dream.

This is the difference between the common image and the

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fascinating image. The first I imagine and I know without any doubt that I am imagining it, but this reflexiveness is to some extent *implicit* in my act of imagining. It becomes *explicit* in the fascinating image. It is implicit when I form an image simply as a means. I am looking for a book of a certain format, a certain color and, in order to help myself in my search, I evoke in a way the image of the book as a sort of negative in the depths of my library. But it does not interest me by itself. Suddenly, I realize that this search is in vain, because I have never owned this book; I must only have dreamed that I owned it. Its unreality emerges, but at the same time it becomes a sort of ideal object; it acquires a bizarre reality. It is then, to me, precious, by its falsity itself. For a brief moment I had caught a glimpse of surreality.

### EXPLANATION OF FASCINATION

What conception of the captivating power of dreams does our analysis permit us to conclude about fascination, about its causes and its mechanism? What import should we give to surreality?

I have, of course, borrowed this last term from surrealism. It may be noted, however, that it has acquired in these pages a somewhat different meaning. André Breton wrote in his *Manifeste*, in 1924: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, in appearance so contradictory, the dream and reality, in a sort of absolute reality, of *surreality*, if one can put it thus. I am moving toward its conquest, sure of not succeeding, but too indifferent to my death not to reckon a little on the joys of such a possession." It is evident that this is a question of a true act of faith in the existence of a transcendent reality in which all the contradictions of present-day life would be solved. Furthermore, surreality is qualified here in the future, end of history, as the absolute for Hegel, or the result of the radical conversion of man. It is hardly necessary to point out that we do not here use the word surreality in such an absolute sense. Surreality comes to us in the image, and as such it is actual, not future. But it is only given to us in the image, which is part of our present life as the dream is part of it. Surreality is then, for us, not an absolute reality, but the

always doubtful *possibility* of such a reality. It is not a real presence, actual or to come, but the *feeling* of such a presence. It is not something that one may reach and possess, but, on the contrary, one that one is obliged to postulate, to invent because one does not possess it and because it recedes out of reach in the effort one makes to reach it. These are the attributes of the surreal, which the experience of the dream has uncovered for us.

We still have to account for this feeling of presence, in order to complete the explanation of fascination which we sketched above. We have uncovered its cause, in fact, in the power of separation, of remoteness that the dream possesses, which thus presents to us a strange, forbidden world, which we are not certain of having visited, whose conditions of existence prevent us in any case from being able to control it: in this fashion everything seems then to exist there absolutely, in a way that is distinct at the same time from the true and the false, the real and the unreal.

One conceives now why the dream appears to romantics and surrealists as richer, truer, more genial, than the awake life, why it seems to constitute for them, as Troxler says curiously, "the serious which nourishes all the games in which life delights."<sup>6</sup> This opinion is in other respects revealing not only in what it expects from the dream, but also in the way it reproaches reality. Thus, André Breton complains, in the text quoted earlier, that the world is not sufficiently real. The world of our life is a blend of true and false, of good and evil, of reality and illusion; it offers us nothing certain, nothing definitive, nothing we could really possess and grasp. The ambition of romanticism and surrealism was precisely to find a truer, more certain, more real world, which would surpass the contradictions inherent in the experienced condition, achieving their synthesis in what is called the Absolute, the Being, the Mind and the Surreality. Now the image can at least put us on the road to reach a similar synthesis, to give us the illusion of such a world finally redeemed from imperfection. Here is how.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Albert Béguin in *L'âme romantique et le rêve*.

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A mysterious phenomenon occurs here which is the core itself of our research; a phenomenon banal but yet inevitable. It could be defined as a *reflex of compensation*. In sum it is the existence of the irreal, of error, of illusion which mars for us what we call reality. The imaginary, and all that it implies, is the cause of all evil. However, this is so because the image exists, because nothing is certain and because the world seems to some extent unfinished; for this reason we at least conserve the hope of finding something better, of escaping from it in some way, of going beyond its contradictions and of realizing ourselves completely. But where do we address ourselves? To reality? There are nonetheless things we can do, things we are certain of, and it is moreover the task of science to constantly reinforce our power with our certainty. Yes, but this conquest is a long-term project. It is characteristic of the real to give us most often in the guise of certainties only appearances, possibilities of action and possession which soon turn out to be illusory. There remains to the contrary the irreal. The irreal acknowledges, itself, what it is and it cannot deceive us. After all, it appears as the only window, the only exit out of our imperfect reality. If perfection exists, it is then through the irreal that it ventures at least to show its outlines.

Furthermore, after all, couldn't the irreal constitute the true reality? The image has precisely the gift of convincing us that all things could be illusory. It is the existence of the dream, for example, which makes us doubt at certain moments whether we are not dreaming even in the middle of our awake life. Assuming Descartes' hypothesis is realized, let us accept the evil genius as a fact, let us admit a universe composed entirely of incoherent dreams and phantasms: it follows unquestionably that this illusory universe is equivalent (as that of the dream while one is dreaming) to an absolutely real universe. If *all* is false, then *all* is true.

The *compensation*, which we have talked about, consists precisely in making instinctively, sentimentally, intuitively through the image this sort of "*jump*," which we have just exposed in its discursive, conceptual form, and which leads us to project the true reality, surreality, on the basis of the evidence of the



irreal. This is certainly the question of a reaction of our whole being, of a kind of basic tendency which must find its reason in the structure itself of the mind and its relations with the world. The conditions in which we began to recognize the phenomenon of fascination now are explained. The irreal in itself is not enough to provoke it; the evidence of it must come to me. I see any ordinary thing (reality or image), I am suddenly aware of its irreal, and it is at this moment that the reversal occurs, that manifest irreal calls forth and precipitates surreality. Hence, all that marks, incarnates, enhances the irreal character of the representation (in the case of the dream, its characteristics of freedom, of necessity, its quality of memory, its enigmatic aspect) increases by the same token the fascination. That is why the doubt expressed as to the reality of the thing represented is essential to it. It is at the moment when the image manifests itself as an image and appears, precisely as in the dream, separated from our life, being the sole guardian of a time and space that are exclusively its own, at this moment this quality of irreal, which at first had condemned it as a fraud, suddenly takes on the consistency of existence, of the true reality, of the absolute.

Doubtless, the absolute of the dream is only a dreamed absolute. It does not give us proof of its present or future existence. It is not real, but surreal. It is perhaps itself nothing but an image. It matters little if the imaginary part of the real is in the last analysis all that is given to us to permit us at least to dream that we are escaping from it. At such moments it seems that the structure of reality breaks down and we take advantage of the rents at the moment they appear to slip out. We count on the dream and the image in the same way some sick people no longer hope to recover except through homeopathy, as one provokes an abscess by fixation, or again as one might throw oneself in the black heart of the flame in order not to get burned.

#### THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

It might be surprising for us to pass from the dream to photography, that is, from the image that we have recognized as

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being twice unreal (memory of a pure phantasm) to that which claims, on the contrary, to restitute to us, feature by feature, pure reality. By transferring thus from one extreme to the other of the gamut of the image, we would like to try to show that these same laws which are valid for the most free imagination may be found in the image most enslaved to the real. Photography, too, manifests to us the surreal: it is a fascinating image because it is reality dreamed.

Just as a painting, a photograph is an imitation, a copy that is not the integral reproduction of the object. It is the result of a conglomeration of conventions, the most important of which are the representation of depth by perspective, the simplification of the scale of values and, in black-and-white photography, the suppression of colors. But it is distinct from painting by what, inherent in these conditions, is automatic, fixed and necessary. The painter varies, as he sees fit, his technical methods of imitation, and it is then said of him that he "interprets." Photography, on the contrary, whoever the photographer may be, applies imperturbably, unerringly the same artifices of reducing. In this sense it may be called an *exact copy*, if every object, every detail is rendered in the same way, that is, with exactly the same modifications. Moreover, in differing from the blueprint or the outline, it lets *no* detail escape; the only limit to this minute reproduction is the varying sensitivity of the grain of the lens, in which respect the camera compares with the human eye, whose power of vision is limited in much the same way. The result of all this is that the photographic image presents itself as unreal, certainly, but an unreal that aspires to have us take its illusion for a reality. Its fascinating ambiguity charms us at the point where these two opposed characteristics, or rather these two opposed groups of characteristics, meet.

That its unreal characteristic is dominant is attested to by the fact that a photograph is never taken for a deceive-the-eye painting. The large mural reproductions, with which it is currently fashionable to adorn the walls of halls or offices, in no way give us the impression that we are looking through a window, even if they are in color, because the most beautiful colors that can be obtained through modern techniques are

never truly natural. Photography is even more “image” than painting or drawing, because its perspective, entirely geometric, is more pronounced than pictorial perspective. In a photograph things appear to move back more abruptly than in a painting or in reality; the lines of flight are more fleeting. The painter, on the contrary, as with human perception, compensates for this exaggeration by rendering the objects farthest away a little bit larger than they should be in their sequence of perspective. If the presence of space and environment, and the immobility of scenes which by their very nature should be animated, are added to these characteristics, one can conceive that from the first glance we always perceive a photograph as an unreal. It copies, whereas a deceive-the-eye painting replaces. It is not production but re-production, as precise as one would want, but whose artifice is always apparent.<sup>7</sup>

Only this reproduction aims to be real, true and truthful: this is the source of its charm. *Photography renders the world visible to us for the reason that it only renders it visible, because it reduces it to no more than a vision.* It is the exact transfer of an impersonal vision, a vision in itself, that of the lens. In this it can easily offer a third dimension, as in stereoscopy, movement, as in cinematography, without perceptibly diminishing its power. The marvel, in fact, is that this unreal is capable of so much objective fidelity. And the most common impression, in looking at a “beautiful” photograph, is certainly that of *surprise*. Not only, by detaching the object from its context, does it point out appearances that we had never before noticed, but even those that we expected astonish us. “How it resembles him! Look at those wrinkles in the skin of his hand! Note these meticulously interlaced ribbons of twigs... and this reed, how its shadow is reflected in the water!” Such perfection truly contains an element of sorcery.

We can then define the essential characteristic of the photographic image: to represent the world to us, not as it is, but as it is *seen* in its essence, surprised and seized in its essence, by it matters not what person. In other words, *photography*

<sup>7</sup> Except, it is understood (and this is one more proof of our contention), when it is a photograph of a painting, because this reproduces a flat image, an object with a structure identical to its own.

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*reduces the world to its mere appearance.* It gives us a feeling all the more of seeing only appearances, that the latter are more faithfully, more exactly, more truthfully rendered. They show us an irreal world, in which we suddenly discover at least the pretension of being identical with reality. It is the true appearance of the world which has engraved itself on this film, which seems to have been *peeled* off the objects themselves. Yet this is only an appearance; we are perfectly aware of this. But the same conditions that turn this datum into a simple appearance are also those which certify, at the same time, to its "reality" by authenticating it.

The more the appearance is exact, the more it is only appearance. In fact, the real is for us a conglomeration of appearances, which cross-check each other, regulate each other, which, you might also say, chase each other. But the appearance of photography, being visible, is neither pursued nor contradicted by any other: it rules alone. The real, for us, is that which changes, that which presents itself as being one thing the moment before and another the moment after. For photography, in this unceasing flux, *catches* an appearance and establishes it within a new duration, in which there is no longer change. The appearance becomes a being, a *being-there*: exposed to our vision, freed from the jugglery of the temporal world. Here is a snapshot of a fishing port: scummy water, in small waves, with bright reflections, in congealed transparencies, giving out a motionless evanescence, while the reflections of fishing boats at their moorings is coagulated in the depths. Here chance has fashioned the architecture. The camera has surprised the most contingent moment and has rendered it necessary. For the principal subject that the photographer puts before us is well this instant. Such a negation of motion renders each thing identical with itself. The painter is in general too penetrated by duration, too much its accomplice to achieve this prodigy: to make us believe in the eternity of what has happened only once. We understand then the importance given by photography, as frequently opposed to painting, to the *accidental*: the reflection on water or a stone, the breaking of a cloud, the grain of some matter, a branch or a street lamp, which, coming from no one knows where, bars the

image and takes on more importance than all the rest. Thus, it throws *its* reality into our eyes.

For the beautiful photograph is not real, it is more than real, like all fascinating images. And one thing *more*, it achieves this effect only because it is a copy, because we are conscious of its irreality. All the more real than what it shows us, it is at the same time more true, more faithful, more exact and more "apparential," these two qualities reinforcing each other. All the more real than what it shows us, it is then more ephemeral and yet immutably transfixed by the image. It plunges us all the more deeply into the essence, that it represents in reality only its most superficial appearances, finally drawing the surreality from the excess of its reality. Photography thus reveals itself as much more captivating as it is more clear, more incisive, but also more barren. Black-and-white is frequently better than color, immobility has frequently more effectiveness than motion. If there is motion, if the leaf starts to tremble in front of our eyes just as in the early days of cinematography, the wings of a butterfly start to quiver, it is then the motion *in itself* which we see, independently of its role in the evolution, of what causes it or what it may produce in its turn. The movement thus registered is not any less inert than the thing itself which is there and which it awakens almost as a dream can agitate a sleeper.

Is it evident now in what way we can compare this image with that of the dream? It is because it also presents for us to contemplate a reality that is detached from our habitual world, separated from it by its entry into new coordinates, existing by itself because it exists only as an image. Certainly, it is *our* reality that it shows us, whereas the dream presents us, on the contrary, with *another* reality. But while the latter suggests to us that we could have experienced this profound reality, photography proves to us that *we do not live* in our intraworldly reality: we only *skim its surface*. Because it assures us that the perceived world is known to us only by its appearances, photography forces us to invent for it a more pure existence, a surreal existence, which it reveals to us in the extent that it hides it from us slyly, naively, seeming to deliver it entirely without life, without duration, detached from all

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possibility of action, transfixed. In avowing to us their entire reality, the objects of this image at the same time confess that they doubt themselves. To be only what one is, brutally, innocently, is in reality the best way of hiding what one could be. It is always the real that testifies in its whole appearance to an enigma, a mystery, a miracle which is a fact.

This is why the image which perhaps most resembles the photograph is that of the mask. It is an image of the hidden, that is, an image which forces us, beyond what it shows us, to project at least the possibility of what it does not show us. The mask is the irony of the image since it offers us a vision, which it warns us at the same time is there only to mislead us. Finally, what photography shows us is certainly the faculty of dissimulation of the real—and it convinces us that this faculty is an integral part of it. The real delivered without life, without duration, without defense, as we have said: yes, it is equal in sum to a mask modeled on one moment of the world. A mask which hides nothing more than what is hidden to us by reality in the ordinary vision, but which does hide it evidently and forever, without hope that we could ever see the being that is presented to us evolve and fulfill itself, since it will lack indefinitely the infinite series of its successive and possible aspects. A mask which coincides with the object it hides, which leads us to conceive also of a banal photograph as the first outline of an image, which carries the same virtuality to a hallucinating power: the cadaver.