The Wild Medium: Anarchism and Surrealist Cinema

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In his 1944 essay *Arcanum 17*, André Breton writes of a moment in his youth when he came upon an inscription on a gravestone of a "superb motto" in red capital letters: "NEITHER GOD NOR MASTER."[1] For Breton, that spirit of defiance waves above art and poetry like "a flag alternately red and black."[2] The connection between art, poetry, and anarchism or libertarian socialism was at the fore when, after the end of World War II, the reconvened surrealist group of Paris started collaborating with the Féderation Anarchiste.[3] In his essay "Tower of Light," published in the anarchist periodical *Le Libertaire* in 1951, Breton stresses the deep-seated affinity between surrealism and anarchism: "It is in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism, long before it achieved self-definition, first recognized itself."[4] Spurred on by the interactions with the French anarchists, Breton now asserts that anarchism was an incandescent impulse behind the formation of surrealism, with its libertarian calls for freedom and resistance against oppressive common sense and repressive religious morals. While the French surrealists decided to stray away from anarchism in favor of aligning the movement with communism for a few decisive years in the 1920s and 30s, anarchism is a luminous black thread running through the history of the movement.[5] As Ron Sakolsky has demonstrated at length, numerous surrealist groups and individuals have collaborated with and participated in anarchist initiatives.[6] In spite of the fact that many of these collaborations have been fraught with difficulties, anarchism remains a foundational element in the

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surrealist outlook. Can the tower of light overlooking the sea in Breton's essay find a counterpart in the projector illuminating the cinema screen? In this article, I examine anarchist tendencies in the surrealist reception and production of film.

In an earlier article, I placed Breton's "As in a Wood," one of his rare essays on film, in relation to precisely surrealism's renewed contact with anarchism at the time. In that context, "As in a Wood," published in the journal *L'Âge du cinéma* in 1951, reads like an embryonic anarchist-surrealist film theory, which suggests that film has a liberatory, energizing potential, free from stifling cultural hierarchies and with the potential to evoke all the marvels of dream and transformation.[7] The first generation of surrealists started going to the cinema in the early 20th century, before film had stratified into low and high culture, with a chasm separating art from entertainment. When critics and filmmakers in France aspired toward turning film into a respectable art form around 1920, the surrealists believed that they betrayed the promise of the medium's egalitarian, rousing, and near-hypnotic powers. What Breton called "the absolutely modern mystery" of film effortlessly produced poetry on par with the marvelous so diligently pursued by surrealists.[8] The surrealist conviction that moments of surrealism can be found in a wide range of films made without surrealist intent has notable similarities with James Newton's more recent proposal to look for anarchist elements in films that evade the dichotomy of high and low culture.[9] In particular, Newton's detection of "a subversive and anarchic potential to those films that deliver on the promise of the sensational" is similar to the surrealist film critic Ado Kyrou's insistence that an "involuntary poetry" charged with revolt can often be found in the culturally lowest films, including comedy and horror with all their unruly bodies and breakneck events.[10]

From a surrealist perspective, then, film's surrealist potential emerges when the medium is allowed to rein in any pretentions to high culture. Instead, a wild and egalitarian poetry may emerge in slapstick comedy, horror, and other genre productions. In their own films, several generations of surrealists have sought to retain that unpolished potential of the medium. Combined, the surrealist reception and production of film positions it as what I suggest can be called a "wild me-

dium."[11] The present essay starts with an elaboration of that concept in a both historical and film-theoretical discussion of the enthusiastic surrealist reception of mostly popular cinema, which the surrealists approached with an anarchist sensibility. Having established the notion of the wild medium, the essay then proceeds to locate anarchist elements, often founded on a similar appreciation of the wild, in films by Luis Buñuel and Jean Vigo in the interwar era and by Nelly Kaplan and Jan Švankmajer in the post-war period.

Among these filmmakers, Jean Vigo was the most outspoken about his anarchist convictions.[12] However, although the rest of the directors may not have described themselves as anarchists, they were all informed by surrealism's foundational anarchist leanings and their films often express or converge with anarchist perspectives. My approach to discerning these tendencies draws on earlier research on anarchism and film, in which scholars have tended to look for anarchist elements in a wide variety of films, only a minority of which has usually been made by anarchists. In his brief book *Anarchist Cinema*, Alan Lovell suggests that Vigo and Buñuel as well as their fellow filmmaker Georges Franju display a set of anarchist tendencies, which he believes to be shaped by mutual immersion in surrealism. Lovell is less concerned with explicit political intentions on behalf of the directors, and more with the different ways in which their films depict a dynamic world animated by conflicts and the sense that radical change is possible.[13] More recent scholarship, too, reiterates the notion that the presence of anarchism in film is not necessarily contingent upon the filmmakers' personal political convictions. In *The Anarchist Cinema*, Newton engages a wide variety of films and filmmakers, only a few of whom are outspoken anarchists. He even suggests that using film as a vehicle for direct political messages may even risk tempering radical cinema, by shying away from "interpretable images."[14] A similar sense of the anarchist value of rattling the spectator with moments of contradiction underpins the notion of the wild medium introduced in this essay. In his wide-ranging *Film and the Anarchist Imagination*, Richard Porton goes as far as to contend that "films made by non-anarchists such as […] Buňuel [sic] are often more convincingly anarchist in spirit and execution than films made by well-intentioned anarchists."[15] Whether that is accurate or not in

the larger scheme, Porton's statement pinpoints the fact that anarchist sensibilities can be readily detected in numerous surrealist films. If popular cinema often produces an involuntary poetry, so surrealist cinema may purvey an unintended anarchism.

The Wild in the Modern

There is a famous photograph in the surrealist journal *Minotaure* of a train stuck on the tracks and overgrown with sprawling vegetation. The image accompanies Benjamin Péret's essay "La Nature devore le progrès et le dépasse" ("Nature Devours Progress and Exceeds It"), published in 1937, in which the poet evokes nature reclaiming the space from invading technology.[16] A triumphant force, wilderness avenges human attempts at domesticating and controlling the world, its abundant growth directed against a repressive civilization, here symbolized by the train forcing its way into the forest. In his comprehensive study of surrealism and anarchism, Ron Sakolsky points out that ever since the 1920s surrealism sought to transform the human relation with nature, and to that effect the movement came to "embrace the '*sauvage*' (*i.e.* 'wild' in French) in art, and in life, in part for its ability to tap into the palpable poetic power inherent in natural phenomena."[17] Rousing in the delight it takes in technology being overthrown by sprawling nature, Péret's essay might read as proposing a simplistic dualism of nature and culture, if it were not for the fact that the poet proceeds to describe how the locomotive and the vegetation eventually start making love.

Ultimately, then, the train and the vegetation as evoked by Péret encounter each other according to the logic of the surrealist poetic image, which Breton famously described as bringing together "two distant realities," the collision of which produces "the light of the image."[18] In formulating the conditions for the surrealist image, Breton drew on Pierre Reverdy's poetics, which in turn were inspired by the light of the film projector and its display of often wildly diverging imagery in quick succession.[19] In terms of Péret's essay, such a collision is pregnant with dialectical potential, positioning the wild as a feature of not just the forest but also the train. Much as Péret's essay resolves

the dichotomy of nature and culture through an imaginative depiction of erotic congress, so the surrealist reception of film suggests that these radicals believed that the modern technology of film bore with it its own promises of the wild.

To the earliest surrealists, born toward the end of the 19th century, the appeal of film stemmed from the fact that it was ungoverned by aesthetic conventions and existed in the interstices between various forms of popular entertainment, yet exceeded them and so formed something radically new. In a 1921 essay, written when he still participated in Dada, Breton implies that the cinema is on the verge of liberating art from the "three unities," that is, the Aristotelian poetics of the unity of space, time, and action.[20] Against such a restrictive order, Breton lauds the ability of film to accelerate and decelerate time, which he compares with the impact of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity on our understanding of temporality.[21] Freed from the heavy yoke of the conventions of high culture, film shared with modern physics an adventurous undermining of the common-sense view of reality as ruled by neat mechanical laws. The universe was no longer a tidy clockwork, but a place in which time and space bent and causality might be difficult to pinpoint. For Breton, such a splaying open of reality may one day allow us to "escape the principle of identity."[22] In its place one might imagine the drastic subversion of perspective in the collages and overpaintings by Max Ernst, the topic of Breton's essay, which, like film, unsettle received notions of the integrity of space and time. With time stretched out, condensed, and sometimes even reversed in the cinema, gaps and slips appear between cause and effect, so that actions are no longer always tied directly to effects. As though governed by the logic of dreams, the kind of filmed reality Breton evokes is volatile and mutable. It positions the regulative time of the mechanical clock as a mere interlude between the cyclical time of agrarian societies and the elastic Einsteinian time of the future. Here, we may discern a parallel with the anarchist critique of linear progress.

By 1921, the nascent surrealists were passionate cinemagoers and inventive theorists of the new medium; they did not yet make films themselves. As lovers of American slapstick comedies, Louis Feuil-

lade's amoral crime serials, and Georges Méliés's early trick films, they relished in movies that undermined logic and troubled the supposed lines between reality and imagination, as well as waking and dreaming life, so revealing a sense of the wild in the modern. An example of that surrealist attitude to film can be seen in a notice written by Luis Buñuel in 1929 about a Parisian cineclub programme on film comedy. For Buñuel, it is comedies like those on display there, rather than such serious fare as F. W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926) or Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, 1925), that best exemplify "the new poetry," by which he means the spirit of surrealism.[23] While Buñuel exaggerates the contrast between art films and comedies for polemical effect—he later praised Murnau and "argued that *Potemkin* was the most beautiful film in the history of cinema"—the point he makes about locating poetry in the less respectable annals of film has been a persistent feature across a century of surrealist writings on film.[24] In the early 1950s, the surrealist film critic Ado Kyrou expressed his abhorrence for cinema aesthetes such as Robert Bresson—a Christian to boot—and spewed out his loathing for "aristocrats and aristocracies" of class as well as taste, at the same time as he defended the poetry found in popular film with an unmatched fervor and frenzy.[25] Bad taste and idiocy, for Kyrou, sometimes proved that "the marvelous is popular."[26] Closer to our time, the Swedish surrealist Mattias Forshage has mined the horror film for moments of involuntary poetry, taking the opportunity to explain that the surrealist reception of cinema "focuses on anything that manifests and stimulates the poetic spirit, regardless of the quality of the craft, the smartness and brilliance, the cultural value," and so forth.[27] While surrealists across the last century have frequently professed their love of film, their appreciation hinges on often radically different values than those celebrated in the context of more conventional forms of cinephilia. An appreciation for film as wild can be discerned across the past century of surrealism.

What does it mean to think of film as a wild medium? To begin with, the concept suggests an affinity with a Romantic strain in surrealism, which, as political theorist Michael Löwy describes, can be detected in the surrealist admiration of indigenous cultures and means that "'savage' for them meant the opposite of 'civilised,' and it had a re-

bellious and antagonistic meaning."[28] But while Löwy's contention illuminates a persistent surrealist tendency to mythologize the wild as a potent counterforce against a repressive civilization, it evades the fact that surrealists have also often espoused a more dialectical view of the relation between the modern and the wild, as we have already seen in Péret's essay. Rather than ascribing the wild exclusively to what, in the early years of surrealism, was often called "primitive" cultures, the surrealist reception of film suggests that the cinema, which, much as the train, was emblematic of technological progress, also possessed the capacity to uncover the wild in the heart of modernity. Sakolsky emphasizes that surrealism has been uniquely attentive to "the *connection* between the 'modern' and the 'mythic'," which can be extended to encompass the wild.[29] That connection between the modern and the mythic or wild is brought to the fore in the surrealist approach to cinema.

The early surrealist reception of film shares similarities with what film scholar Rachel O. Moore calls the "savage theory" of early filmmakers and theorists including Sergei Eisenstein and Jean Epstein.[30] Eisenstein perceived similarities between film and anthropological theories about sympathetic magic, with montage possessing a power similar to the way in which relations of magical analogy between objects ostensibly produce real effects. Epstein argued that the camera brought a sense of life to inanimate objects, which he likened with what ethnographers described as animism. The concept of animism was coined to be pejorative, redolent of superstition. Tellingly, Sigmund Freud consigned animism to a developmental stage that Western society was supposed to have surpassed.[31] But in Epstein's argument, such notions of civilizational progress are turned on their head, as he perceives how the modern medium of film restores an animistic life to the world of things.[32] It is a fact sometimes forgotten that surrealists were party to these early theoretical conversations. The erstwhile surrealist Louis Aragon expressed something similar to Epstein's animist film theory already in a 1918 essay, and a young Buñuel, too, wrote of the film camera's capacity for animist revelation.[33] These instances of wild theory suggest that there was a widespread notion that film unsettled dichotomies between the archaic and the modern, superstition and science, images made for purposes

of magic and produced by the much-vaunted presumed objectivity of lens-based new media. As film historian Tom Gunning puts it in a related argument, early film rested on a tension between "an ancient magical imagistic tradition" and scientific disenchantment.[34] Surrealism draws on this dialectic of magic and technology as it uncovers the presence of the wild in the modern.

From that perspective, surrealism conceives the wild as a perennial feature of the human mind and a persistent element in cultural practice. While arguably latent in modernity, a resurgence of the wild may be triggered by the cinema as much as by surrealism itself. As the surrealist writer Vincent Bounoure points out, surrealism partakes in a similar evasion of aesthetic realism as well as a preoccupation with transformative initiation as that art and those people that were once called savage.[35] That perceived similarity between surrealism and the wild may be further exemplified by Péret, who asserts "the continuity and universalism of thought across cultures," insisting "that 'thought is *One* and indivisible.'"[36] The surrealist perspective on cognitive continuity between different epochs and regions anticipates Claude Lévi-Strauss's insistence that "wild thought" is no less capable of systematic reason than modern scientific thought. Some of the characteristics Lévi-Strauss ascribes to wild thought line up with the qualities the surrealists admired the most in film. Wild thought "seeks to seize the world, as a totality that is both synchronic and diachronic," in which a "multitude of images forms simultaneously," meaning that it relies on *imagenes mundi*, or pictorial representations of interrelations in the world, as instruments of knowledge.[37] Wild thought is thereby "discontinuous and analogical" and it "transcends the distinction between the real and the imaginary."[38] In these descriptions, there are striking similarities with the surrealist appreciation of film for its undoing of linear time, its associative use of montage, and its inherent capacity to turn the imaginary into photographic reality. Significantly, Lévi-Strauss himself mentions film in a passage on the wild tendency to employ everyday bric-a-brac for creative purposes: "the mythopoetic character of *bricolage* has frequently been noted: be it on the plane of what is called 'naïve' or 'outsider' art; in the fantastical architecture of the villa of the Facteur Cheval; in the film sets of Georges Méliès".[39] Lévi-Strauss's descriptions are apt in relation to the overall

surrealist worldview, with its attraction to creativity as an act of obsession and even possession rather than an aesthetic pursuit, and they resonate in particular with the surrealist appreciation of film.

In the formative years of the first-generation surrealists, the wild medium of film encouraged an unruly behavior, which played into and further intensified its undomesticated qualities.[40] Breton's brief essay on Max Ernst is a vivid example of how the early surrealist appreciation of film tends to emphasize the medium's capacity for disorientation as well as its dissolution of boundaries. As Breton has famously recounted, in their youth he and his friends sought to intensify these powers of disorientation and dissolution by rushing in and out of cinemas without any regard for what was playing, and leaving the theatre at the first sign of boredom. In his autobiographical essay *Nadja* from 1928, Breton writes of his "weakness for the most absolutely absurd French films," and states that he is neither very good at remembering the names of actors, nor at following the narratives of films.[41] In place of an appreciation of craft, narrative, and performance, these days of unruly cinema-hopping would leave him and his friends "'charged' for a few days."[42] The coveted *sur-dépaysement* can be related to Breton's call, in the second surrealist manifesto, for a liberation of the imagination "after centuries of the mind's domestication" by exercising what Arthur Rimbaud described as a "long, immense, reasoned derangement of the senses."[43] As a wild medium outside the confines of good taste and high culture, with an innate propensity for bringing together disparate things and places through montage and editing, film both provided part of the impetus for, and appeared as a response to, surrealism's desperate call for a rupture in the dominant view of reason and psychology, art and poetics. In the first surrealist manifesto, Breton proclaims that: "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."[44] At its best, the cinema attained such a "superior reality," as it offered a magnetizing experience of a world captured by the "blind instrument" of the camera, and then accelerated, decelerated, or chopped up and rearranged by way of montage.[45] The world was first captured, then dismembered, and ultimately pieced together in ways that brought with them new conceptions of time, space, and

causality. Wild in relation to the common-sense reason and religious repression the surrealists abhorred, film, once again, sharpened modern technology into a weapon turned against the logic of modernity itself.

If film sometimes managed to crack open the staid shell of culture to expose the wild core within, the surrealists' disorienting and energetic film-going practice did not prevent them from also thinking of cinema spectatorship as akin to dreaming.[46] Breton writes that the visitor to the cinema sitting down in his seat, about to enter "the fictional world that unfolds before his very eyes," goes through a captivating and entrancing passage that is similar to "the hinge between waking and sleeping."[47] The cinema's ability to combine instilling a sense of heightened energy with creating a near-hypnotic, dream-like state echoes Breton's aspiration to overcome "the depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream."[48] In this web of thoughts on film, dream, and action there is a palpable connection between surrealist film appreciation and anarchism. Rather than equating an anarchist impulse with any simplistic notion of wildness, the surrealist view of film as a wild medium relates to a more subtle questioning of modern ontology and anthropology, as well as their imbrication with a repressive social order. Whether exemplified by the amoral machinations of Fantômas in Feuillade's serial of five films (1913–14), an inebriated Charlie Chaplin navigating between pieces of furniture and taxidermied animals playing tricks on him in *One A.M.* (1916), or Buster Keaton stepping into the film screen as though entering a dream in *Sherlock, Jr* (1924), films appreciated by surrealists tend to instill hope, however ambivalent, that the world could be radically different, the forces of domination toppled on their heads. Here, for all their amoral and hedonistic delight in the disorienting power of film, the early surrealists can be said to share in what Moore describes as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer's mutual belief in the "curative potential of film images," or their capacity for "transforming a society in peril," which rested on the "very technology and mode of production that characterize cinema."[49] Such a trust in film as curative does not necessarily rely on positive messages, but rather emerges from a discerning attention to film's quality of being a wild medium addressing a wide audience with rousing images that some-

how split open the common-sense view of reality.

Luis Buñuel and Jean Vigo: Wild Poetry

When surrealists started making films themselves, however, they can hardly be said to have addressed a wide audience. Instead, they sought to intensify those wild qualities they admired so much in film. The French filmmaker Jean Vigo described Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's first film *Un Chien andalou* (1929) as "wild poetry" ("sauvage poésie").[50] In conjunction with its premiere, Buñuel refuted all aesthetic appreciation of *Un Chien andalou*, instead asserting that the film was nothing less than "a desperate call for murder."[51] The step from fervent film appreciation to the making of films had been an uneasy one for the surrealists. Earlier attempts by Man Ray and Germaine Dulac in collaboration with Antonin Artaud had met with a certain skepticism or even outright derision. It seemed as though the costly and technically demanding medium of film was better suited for the sort of involuntary poetry leaking out of the cracks in commercial film, than as a vehicle for deliberate surrealist exploration. That would change, almost literally overnight, with the premiere of *Un Chien andalou* in Paris in 1929, on a double bill with Man Ray's fourth short film, *Les Mystères de Château du Dé* (1929), to a crowd consisting partly of Parisian surrealists. *Un Chien andalou* draws on those unruly tendencies the surrealists relished in the commercial cinema, but untether them from narrative conventions and instead approximates the wild flow of surrealist automatism.

As he would later describe it, Buñuel had been drawn to surrealism above all for its probing of the abyss of eroticism and its prominent black humor, alongside the fact that it offered a morality that was drastically different from the received one.[52] Transgression and morality, the morality of transgression, tended to filter into the films he made, first in collaboration with Dalí, and then on his own. While Buñuel embraced communism in the early 1930s, Román Gubern and Paul Hammond show that in the 1920s, the same time that he discovered surrealism, he was more strongly attracted to anarchism.[53] His defining surrealist films, the short *Un Chien andalou* and the

feature *L'Âge d'or* (1930), were both made during his anarchist period. In all three of his earliest films—the short documentary *Las Hurdes* (1933) being the third—Buñuel employs contradiction as a means to undermine the repressive mechanisms of the social order. His films contradict logic and instrumental reason, as well as sexual and social mores. Furthermore, they bring contradiction to bear on the filmic conventions that scholars often argue had been well established in so-called classical Hollywood cinema by that point, from which it influenced filmmakers internationally.[54]

Un Chien andalou and *L'Âge d'or* undermine such narrative film conventions as continuity editing, goal-oriented protagonists, and coherence of space, time, and causality. Yet, Buñuel and Dalí subvert such conventions, not through evading mainstream film, but rather by drawing on the commercial film's moments of excess and associative editing, untethering from ordered narrative form. We could say that they were sensitive to what Miriam Hansen identifies as those moments when the classical Hollywood film slips out of its purported measured neoclassicism, to instead take on the guise of a more disjointed and reflexive "vernacular modernism."[55] For Hansen, slapstick comedy in particular acted as an "anarchic supplement" to the Fordist logic of industrial modernity, so that the mass-produced medium of film harbors a physically articulated response to the anxieties of modernity, with its increasing mechanization.[56] As we have seen, Buñuel, like other surrealists, held commercial cinema higher than the art film, which they believed threatened to reduce the wild medium of film to yet another respectable art form.

In *Un Chien andalou*, Buñuel and Dalí utilize elements of conventional film form, but expose them to a radical reordering, which dismantles their neoclassicist pedigree and surrealizes their moments of vernacular modernism. The film includes moments of slapstick, romantic interludes, and altercations caused by conflicting desires, yet these are interlinked by dream-like twists rather than by mechanical or psychological cause and effect. Rather than being motivated by attainable goals, the protagonists are driven by irrational impulses, as they are overtaken by desire or animated by obsessive behaviors. Sometimes the editing lets loose a chain of visual associations. In

a scene that takes place inside the woman protagonist's apartment, the male protagonist discovers a hole in his hand. When the woman walks over to look at the hole, the film starts to drift. A point-of-view shot in close-up shows ants crawling out of the jagged hole in the man's palm. Rather than returning to a shot of the scene of the action, as may be expected, Buñuel cuts to a medium close-up of the hairy armpit of a seemingly sun-bathing woman, which is followed by a cut to found footage of a spiny sea urchin. A match cut links the round form of the creature with an irised shot of a street scene viewed from above, in which an androgynous-looking woman pokes at a severed hand with a stick. The scene is intercut with rapid reaction shots that return us to the two protagonists. In a two-shot, they can be seen looking out the apartment window at the action below. In this sequence of shots, the homely environment is invaded by ants, which incite a chain of associative imagery leading from the interior environment to the exterior of first nature, then the street, with its macabre find of a hand, which ultimately returns the spectator to gazing at the two protagonists through a window.

With animals and hands alike cropping up both indoors and outdoors, *Un Chien andalou* unsettles distinctions between nature and culture, interior and exterior, animal and human. Since the civilized order rests in no small part on the creation and preservation of such dichotomies, the injection of unbidden animality in the modern home functions as an involuntary rewilding of the domestic sphere. While sequences such as this have been exposed to frequent psychoanalytical readings, here I would like to take this extract as an example of how Buñuel at one and the same time unsettles the mentioned modern dichotomies and breaks with the increasing domestication of film form. In doing, so he produces what could be called feral cinema.[57]

The feral is that which has been domesticated and then rewilded. But did film actually ever become domesticated—well, *classical*—to the extent that the notion of classical Hollywood cinema often suggests? Buñuel for one expressed his profound appreciation for Buster Keaton's films, in which functionalism is turned against itself, as the gags line up perfectly but shatter any realistic attitude.[58] With her influen-

tial notion of vernacular modernism, Hansen suggests that numerous examples of the presumably classical film overspills the boundaries of classicism and its emphasis on decorum.[59] Riotous, excessive, passionate—so many films from the classical era delight in an overt plumbing of the unconscious and an attendant anarchic energy. Still, while film retained some of its wild potential, it was indelibly shaped by such factors as regulations imposed by censorship and an increasing commercial pressure to conform to standards of length and narrative predictability. When Breton looked back at the development of film in his 1951 essay "As in a Wood," he lamented above all the fact that the medium had succumbed to a "theatrical type of action," by which he likely meant precisely the tightly controlled style and form in the service of narrative that already early on came to characterize the vast majority of commercial films.[60] As noted earlier, in the early 1920s, Breton had believed that film, with its reconstruction of the world through montage, may offer an escape from the Aristotelian "three unities" of space, time, and action. Thinking of *Un Chien andalou* as a feral film means asserting its reclamation of such a filmic promise; its allusions to and inspiration from genre films then become a way of liberating them from staid conventions and releasing them back into the wild.

L'Âge d'or plays further with unsettling distinctions between nature and culture, the wild and the domesticated. The introduction to the film consists of found footage of scorpions, accompanied with intertitles describing some of the characteristics of these arachnids, which are here presented as "lover[s] of the night," taking refuge under rocks from the scorching sun. Close-ups of pincers and stingers defamiliarize these body parts, so that, rather than straight documentary depictions, they resemble the kinds of natural elements that may crop up in a painting by Max Ernst or a photograph by Man Ray. The intertitles' description of the combative and solitary nature of the scorpion could risk turning the animal into a cipher for a Hobbesian state of all against all. However, seen in relation to what follows, the scorpions rather take on the appearance of contrarian individual anarchists, ready to employ their venom against encroaching powers—here represented by a furious, attacking rat. The two-minute long extract from the scorpion documentary is followed by an intertitle

stating that it is now a few hours later. The ensuing shot transports us to a jagged coastal landscape, in which a man wearing ragged clothes can be seen looking out from a cliff by the sea. Much as *Un Chien andalou*, *L'Âge d'or* employs such transitions to undermine conventional narrative links; however, the transition also suggests an interlinking or similarity between the fierce scorpions and the disjointed narrative that follows.

The remainder of the film centers around the travails of an amorous couple torn apart by a repressive society threatened by the force of their desire. Paul Hammond suggests that the film's comment on the joints of the scorpion's tail mirrors its narrative and thematic structure.[61] The stinger is emblematic of the lovers' relentless attacks on the society that tries to separate them, repressing their amorous drives. Some of the narrative segments in *L'Âge d'or* are more fleshed-out than those in its predecessor, but that, if anything, enhances the film's collage-like assault on cinematic convention. For Kyrou, *L'Âge d'or* manages to clear vision from habits incurred by civilization and the conventions of aesthetic appreciation, and so stimulates a view of reality as at one and the same time stripped to the bone and shimmering with the subversive power of imagination. So *L'Âge d'or*, writes Kyrou, manages to deliver, more effectively than surrealist painting, on Breton's notion that "the eye exists in its savage state," which could also be translated as "its wild state."[62] This is a state in which perception, supposedly, escapes from the fetters of civilized seeing and undoes the objectifying gaze of instrumental relations between people and between humans and the world itself.

The dialectical movement between what is conventionally perceived to be nature and culture that characterizes Buñuel's rewilding of film points to his films' liberatory, anarchist sentiments. As we have seen, both *Un Chien andalou* and *L'Âge d'or* feature characters struggling against the yoke of sexual morality. In the earlier film, the protagonists confined to an apartment are visibly pulled between a civilized demeanor and the onset of desires so strong that they seem delirious. In *L'Âge d'or*, the conflict is more clearly socially situated, between desire-stricken lovers and a repressive society that will not tolerate their flagrant displays of passion. As Kyrou points out, the latter film's

assault on "middle-class domination" means that "Buñuel has given the police, the family, and the army the most vigorous blows they have ever received on the screen."[63]

In relation to such assaults, Buñuel's documentary film *Las Hurdes* may appear positively despondent. But *Las Hurdes* instead performs its political critique by way of a dialectical interrogation of the victims of civilizational so-called progress. Set in a poor mountain region in Spain, *Las Hurdes* documents the ill-fated lives of the Hurdano people. Shot without on-location sound, the film's imagery is instead accompanied by a soundtrack comprised of classical music and a critical, sometimes outright sarcastic narrator. In *Las Hurdes*, it seems that the Hurdano people have largely ceased to struggle against their condition, if they even did so in the first place. According to the voice-over, they simply accept their poverty, malnutrition, and various rampant illnesses. In this film, Buñuel brings the matter-of-factness that marks his approach to even the most dream-like sequences in his collaborations with Dalí, to bear on the harsh conditions suffered by the Hurdanos. As has been widely discussed and debated, he does so with a view that is not merely unflinching, but also appears to be mocking the destitute people in question. Yet, as has also been widely commented on, contradiction emerges through the discrepancy between what is shown and what the omniscient-sounding narrator describes. In one telling scene, a schoolboy is seen writing down a phrase on the blackboard: "Respect the property of others." This may be the most direct indication that Buñuel's unreliable narration is intended to depict the Hurdanos as victims of bourgeois, capitalist ideology. In her reading of the film as fundamentally dialectical, Vivian Sobchack shows that through its grim perspective, *Las Hurdes* depicts oppressive social relations, destroys the conventional view of these relations, and forces a deeper confrontation with the oppression in question.[64] Buñuel's documentary mode, here, is not intended to depict reality veristically or objectively. Instead, he uses it to suggest that the reality of an oppressive system needs to be fundamentally shattered in order for something new to be possible.

Buñuel's use of contradiction across these three early films recalls the surrealist writer Louis Aragon's statement in his 1926 book *Paris*

Peasant: "Reality is the apparent absence of contradiction. The marvelous is the eruption of contradiction within the real."[65] Contradiction demonstrates that reality is not static. It equals the potential for radical change. In a recent book, Todd McGowan puts it in the following way: "As with freedom, equality and solidarity are the political result of an ontology of contradiction."[66] Buñuel's early films display a surrealist use of contradiction in the service of creating a feral cinema. His feral films not only shatter social and aesthetic conventions; they also allow the marvelous, or the powers of imagination, to erupt in and so crack open reality.

A similar sense of contradiction emerges in the films of Jean Vigo. In a talk at the premiere of his documentary debut film *À propos de Nice* in 1930, Vigo defined and defended his politicized, satirical view of the antics of the wealthy visitors to Nice by way of a comparison with *Un Chien andalou*. For Vigo, although it was "an interior drama developed as a poem," Buñuel and Dalí's film "nevertheless presents, in my view, all the qualities of a film whose subject has social implications."[67] Discerning a similarity between Buñuel's creation of "a cinema that deals with provocative subjects, subjects that cut into flesh" and his own adoption of a "social documentary," Vigo points to the significance of the subversive imagination for any film seeking to evade replicating the status quo.[68] Michael Richardson remarks that while Vigo was "never a member of the Surrealist Group [his] films are thoroughly imbued with its sensibility."[69] They are equally imbued with an acerbic anarchist critique and call for revolt, exemplified in particular by his 1933 narrative short film *Zero for Conduct* (*Zéro de conduite*).

If Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* would turn the documentary eye on a desolate mountain region, in *À propos de Nice* Vigo zooms in on the bourgeoisie luxuriating by the seaside. The opening series of aerial shots gives way to a more confined scene in which an animated miniature train arrives by a miniature palm tree. As two well-clad dolls step out on the sand, they are swiftly swept away by a brush and transported to a roulette table. A montage follows of shots of sweeping and brushing movements, including ocean waves lapping at the beach, a pair of tightly synchronized streetsweepers working their way across a cob-

bled sidewalk, and waiters wiping tables ahead of their customers' arrival. The entire world, it seems, is engaged in making reality neat and palatable for the wealthy. But in the midst of these cleaning motions, Vigo cuts to shots of laborers in the act of painting several large figures with exaggerated features and grotesquely large heads. Throughout the film, he uses montage to emphasize the contradictions in the social fabric of Nice, so that the lifestyle of the wealthy visitors is shown to rest on the ceaseless labor of the workers. But as shown by the mentioned montage of waves, streetsweepers, and roulette tables, Vigo is also attentive to the poetic rhythm of otherwise disparate phenomena brought together by editing. In that sequence, he, much like Buñuel, reveals that contradiction can be imbued with poetry, the exposure of social tensions combining with an associative drift. Toward the end of *À propos de Nice*, the painted figures form part of a long carnival train cutting through the luxurious leisure on display. But is this spectacle an anarchist mockery of the wealthy class, or is it merely a confined eruption of a carnivalesque logic? Michael Temple concedes that the film leaves such questions open to interpretation.[70] Perhaps that sense of contradiction, much as in Buñuel, creates a crack in the façade of an oppressive system. Kyrou was unequivocal in his praise for the incendiary qualities of Vigo's film. In *À propos de Nice*, he writes, Vigo created "film-dynamite," marked by "absolute non-conformism, irreverence, truth."[71]

Zero for Conduct is permeated with a similar form of carnivalesque revolt. Porton comments that it "is one of the few noteworthy films that critics unfailingly consign to the ill-defined category of 'anarchist cinema.'"[72] Made under challenging conditions, *Zero for Conduct* is less technically accomplished than Vigo had wished for, but in hindsight its imperfections may be said to work in its favor, as they contribute to the film's elevation of play into an anarchist principle. Set in a boarding school, *Zero for Conduct* hinges on an opposition between the children's mischievous and ludic urges and the oppressive authorities who seek to control them in the name of a stultifying order. The significance of play for the film is firmly established in the opening scene. Two pupils, Caussat and Bruel, meet in a train compartment on their way back to school. Filmed in an overhead two-shot, they play with a series of objects, including a trumpet that Caussat sticks

up his nose to much joy from his peer. The final gag consists of Caussat pulling out some feathers from his pocket and sticking them into his hat and down the back of his pants, so that he plays at being a hen. The scene indicates that creative play comes naturally to the children, and that this play resists the decorum so odiously embodied by the boarding school.

For Kyrou, *Zero for Conduct* stands out above all for its unusual depiction of "poetic revolt by children."[73] In the context of the school system, however, such a ludic drive becomes a problem. In *Zero for Conduct*, the teachers and the headmaster make increasingly desperate attempts at quelling the children's rebellious behavior. However, the children are unrepentant and undeterred by the threat of receiving a failing grade for conduct. In Porton's words, they are "pranksters who would be natural candidates for the 'little hordes' of Fourier's phalanx."[74] That means that the children behave in a prefigurative way, already embodying the prospect of a utopian condition with ample room for creative liberty and play. That playfulness is shared by the film itself, which often approaches comedy in its depiction of resistance against an educational system founded on domination. Temple points out that, "For Vigo, comedy is political, a sign of freedom and a promise of happier times."[75] While Vigo thereby shares with Buñuel an insight in the liberatory potential of comedy, in *Zero for Conduct* the comedic elements occur in a narrative that is considerably more linear than in Buñuel's two collaborations with Dalí. Like Buñuel's early films, however, *Zero for Conduct* is steeped in a spirit of revolt against domination. The moment that is most overtly close to surrealism arrives toward the end of the film. In their dormitory, the children put on their own carnival-like procession, tearing up their pillows so that feathers fly around in the air and fall down on them. The riotous tumult of children playing among falling feathers refers back to the film's opening scene, in which Caussat plays at being a hen. It is as though the drive toward play that he embodies there has finally been allowed to erupt in the confines of the school itself. Turning the world upside down and playing amidst the torrent of feathers, the children embody a hope in the possibility of revolting against domination. Turned feral, they mirror the film's creation of an anarchist wild poetry similar to the ardent spirit of revolt Vigo detected in

Buñuel and Dalí's *Un Chien andalou*.

Vigo proceeded to complete only one more film, the feature *L'Atalante* (1934), before his premature death. For his part, Buñuel did not make another film until he reemerged in Mexico with the comedy *Gran Casino* in 1947. Initially working as a director for hire in the Mexican film industry, Buñuel was eventually able to make a surrealist "comeback" feature in the form of *Los Olvidados* (1950), depicting the lives of children on the streets of Mexico City. In their often unfettered ferocity, the children embody a sense of the feral, familiar from Buñuel's earlier films as well as Vigo's *Zero for Conduct*. In fact, there is something like a subterranean connection between *Zero for Conduct* and *Los Olvidados*. While Buñuel had adopted a more cohesive approach to narration by this point, in *Los Olvidados* he breaks away from the linear narrative with a dream sequence that may very well allude to *Zero for Conduct*. As the protagonist Pedro falls asleep, he dreams that he rises from his bed, Buñuel using double exposure to make the dream self appear to rise from the sleeping body. The sound of clucking hens is prominent on the soundtrack, and a hen is seen flying down toward the floor in ominous slow-motion. Looking under his bed, Pedro discovers the body of his friend Julian, who in waking life had been beaten to death by the violent and amoral Jaibo. As Pedro looks in horror at Julian's bloody face, white feathers fall in slow-motion in the foreground of the shot. The dream culminates with Pedro's mother, all dressed in white and with a terrifying grin, walking toward him with a huge, raw chunk of flesh in her arms, which she hands over to the boy. While the nightmarish quality of the dream sequence is markedly different from the triumphant, carnivalesque eruption of feather-strewn play in *Zero for Conduct*, the falling feathers establish a link between these two oneiric-anarchic depictions of childhood as a state at once beset by ugly events and primed for revolt against societal conventions and domination.

When Los Olvidados was screened in France in 1950 and 1951, Buñuel was lauded by a new generation of surrealist critics and filmmakers, and the film contributed to the resurgence of surrealist cinema in the post-World War II era.[76] As Kyrou puts it, *Los olvidados* displays a "strange and violent world" in defiance of "that terrify-

ing machine, the commercial cinema" of which Buñuel now found himself to be a part.[77] Following Buñuel's return to surrealist filmmaking, a new generation of surrealist directors would start working in the narrative feature film format. They did so in the context of an ever-evolving surrealism that was marked by a closer proximity to anarchism as well as to occultism.

Interlude on Post-War Surrealism

Film-historical accounts of surrealism long tended to look no further than Buñuel's early efforts. However, following World War II there was a resurgence of surrealist film culture.[78] When the Paris surrealist group reformed after the war, they attracted numerous new members, many of whom were devoted cinephiles. The short-lived film journal *L'Âge du cinéma*, with six numbers published between 1951 and 1952, had a marked surrealist bent, and even published an entire special issue devoted to surrealism, which included film-inspired artworks by Toyen and Clovis Trouille. In one of the essays, the critic Georges Goldfayn adopts an anarchist perspective as he describes the cinema as a means toward "the transmutation of life." He defines a body of filmmakers with anarchist tendencies, ranging from Vigo to G. W. Pabst to Henri-Georges Clouzot, and then proceeds to laud the anarchist effect of corrosive humor in films by Buster Keaton, Mack Sennett, and Charlie Chaplin, which "project subversive rays on the world."[79] Goldfayn's emphasis on film as a vehicle of energetic transformation, across genres and cultural hierarchies, continues the surrealist approach to the cinema as a wild medium.

If *L'Âge du cinéma* exemplifies the vitality of surrealist film criticism after World War II, the period also saw a marked resurgence of surrealist filmmaking. Alongside Buñuel's reappearance in the Mexican film industry, surrealist artists including Wilhelm Freddie and Marcel Mariën made low-budget short films that approximated the oneiric undermining of narrative and causality familiar from *Un Chien andalou*. Inspired by Buñuel's attempts at creating surrealist feature films, several surrealist or surrealist-adjacent filmmakers, including Nelly Kaplan, Ado Kyrou, Robert Benayoun, Harry Kümel, Alejan-

dro Jodorowsky, and Fernando Arrabal made forays into feature filmmaking. In tandem with this development, Buñuel eventually returned to making films in France. During this late phase of his career, he combined often dream-like, associative narratives with an anarchic subversion of conventional morality, in films such as *Belle de Jour* (1967), *The Milky Way* (*La Voie lactée*, 1969), and *The Phantom of Liberty* (*Le Fantôme de la liberté*, 1974).

In the following, I will focus on anarchist tendencies in a selection of films by Kaplan and the Czech animator Jan Švankmajer. Before that, we need to examine the relation between surrealism and anarchism in the early post-war period.

In terms of the broader development of surrealism, it was during this period that the French surrealists established new connections with anarchists, prompting Breton's mentioned reflection about the profound affinity between surrealism and anarchism. The surrealist group started collaborating with the Féderation anarchiste, and in 1947 *Le Libertaire* published the surrealist tract "Freedom Is a Vietnamese Word." From October 1951 to January 1953, *Le Libertaire* published a series of "billets surréalistes," meaning that members of the surrealist group, including the film critic Kyrou, became regular contributors to the anarchist periodical.[80] The renewed surrealist interest in anarchism followed upon the group's ruinous attempts at collaborating with the French Communist Party in the interwar period, their deep distrust of Stalinism, and Breton's discovery, during his years in exile in the US during World War II, of the 19th-century utopian socialist Charles Fourier's visionary writings.[81] Fourier's utopianism, steeped in the occult thought of the early 19th century, was attentive to desire, and Breton discerned in it the same search for a "'hieroglyphic' key to the world" as that which characterized the poetry of writers including Gérard de Nerval, Charles Baudelaire, and Arthur Rimbaud.[82] Sakolsky states that from that point onward, Breton "would chart an anarchic utopian future in a mythic language of dreams that resonated with the conceptual framework of Charles Fourier".[83] As Erica Lagalisse has detailed, similar intersections of revolutionary politics and occult or otherwise spiritual thought were prevalent features of the pre-Marxist revolutionary left—including

anarchism, which, too, has occult roots.[84] For Breton, utopian socialism, anarchism, and occultism came together in their promise of providing an opening past "the great obstacle" that was Stalinism.[85] On the other side of that obstacle lay the hope of a revolution acting on the inner as well as outer realms, or what surrealists had long expressed in the watchwords, drawn from Rimbaud and Marx, to "change life" and "transform the world."[86]

Much as Lagalisse remarks that contemporary anarchist movements often find it difficult to accommodate spiritual elements, so the French anarchists quickly found fault with surrealism's attraction to esoteric thought. A few of the "billets" published in *Le Libertaire* were devoted to topics such as the revolutionary potential of occultism, which soon caused some of the anarchists to object against the surrealist appeal to dreams, magic, and poetry. This turned into a full-fledged disagreement, in which the surrealists cautioned against an excessive belief in rationalism, while, conversely, some of the anarchists accused the surrealists of obscurantism.[87] This is not the place to enter into wider discussions of the complexity of this specific debate, and even less so the question of the extent to which it is representative for 20th-century anarchist attitudes overall. Instead, I would like to point to the fact that, as indicated by these disagreements, surrealism became something of a wild element in relation to a persistent anarchist adherence to the Western materialist notion that the world harbors no hidden powers and that agency ought to be driven by rational thought. In contrast, surrealism's emphasis on the unconscious, dreams, desire, and esotericism is invested with a belief that such hidden forces are in opposition to a capitalist-colonialist civilization and can be channeled toward libertarian ends.

In that spirit, Breton quotes the British anthropologist J. G. Frazer in support of the liberatory potential of magic, which "has contributed to emancipate mankind from the thralldom of tradition and to elevate them into a larger, freer life, with a broader outlook on the world."[88] From this perspective, magic does not so much fetter people to the irrational, as it counteracts conservative forces with its energetic belief that what is deemed impossible can in fact become real. In the immediate post-war period, the surrealist documentary

film *L'Invention du monde* (1953), directed by Michel Zimbacca and Jean-Louis Bédouin, exemplified such a liberatory turn to magic. With a narration written by Péret, drawing on his extensive research into American mythology, the film presents a kaleidoscopic vision of poetic universalism. Still and moving footage of numerous non-Western ritual objects and artworks is edited together into a montage structured according to analogical association rather than anthropological classification. Beyond its status as a documentary or essay film, *L'Invention du monde* takes on the form of an incantation against oppressive Western culture. Some of the objects shot in the film were borrowed from Lévi-Strauss's personal collection, and *L'Invention du monde* anticipates his definition of wild thought as an analogically structured, at one and the same time diachronic and synchronic, image of the world. This is wild thought, wild poetry, and wild montage wielded against Eurocentric domination.

Nelly Kaplan and Jan Švankmajer: Magic Against Domination

Kaplan and Švankmajer similarly employ magic against domination in their films. Across her five feature films, made between 1969 and 1991, the Argentinean-born filmmaker and writer Nelly Kaplan depicts women revolting against patriarchal strictures, attempting to create conditions for radical freedom. She consistently associates her women protagonists with magical powers, often in the form of witchcraft or allusions to ancient goddesses. Steeped in the tradition of subversive Francophone poetry, she self-consciously positions herself in a lineage of visionary writers including Nerval, Rimbaud, and Lautréamont, as well as the surrealists. Like many of these "frenetic Romantics," as Kyrou calls them, Kaplan espouses an individualist anarchist ethos, a boundary-breaking exploration of eroticism, and a pursuit of poetry in the name of radical liberty.[89] Her films also share the wider post-war surrealist attraction to Fourier's utopianism as well as to occultism. As a filmmaker, Kaplan started out making documentaries about art and artists, including such defiant figures as the visionary symbolist Gustave Moreau and the surrealist eroticist André Masson. Then, from her feature film debut *La Fiancée du pirate* (1969) onward, she sought to accomplish something similar to

Buñuel's fusing, in Mexico, of a surrealist sensibility with a narrative feature film format.

Kaplan started making feature films in the wake of May 1968. Porton remarks that the surrealists' collaboration with *Le Libertaire* had foreshadowed the utopian, libertarian atmosphere of that moment.[90] The spirit of surrealism was indeed all over the events that spring, and several surrealists, many of whom were close to anarchism, had participated in the protests and actions. A few of the surrealist protesters can in fact be seen in the documentary footage from the events included in Chris Marker's essay film *A Grin without a Cat* (*Le Fond de l'air est rouge*, 1977).[91] However, the ensuing defeat and attendant repression contributed strongly to the feelings of disillusionment that ultimately led to the dissolution of the surrealist group of Paris in the autumn of 1969.[92] While that spelled out the end of the group founded by Breton, who had passed away in 1966, new surrealist initiatives quickly emerged.[93] At the same time, individual surrealists, such as Kaplan, too continued to evoke the incandescent and libertarian ideals of surrealism in art, film, writings, and actions.

In her 2016 autobiography, *Entrez, c'est ouvert!*, Kaplan relates that the idea for *La Fiancée du pirate* came to her in November 1968. "You have to try to live," she writes as she describes the atmosphere following the tumultuous events of May that same year.[94] Probing the continued possibilities of revolt after that disappointing development, she was struck by the idea of a "story of a modern witch who burns the inquisitors instead of being burned herself."[95] All of Kaplan's films demonstrate a refusal to give in to despair; instead, they allow the spirit of rebellion, Phoenix-like, to rise from the rubble. *La Fiancée du pirate* is permeated with what one writer describes as an "anarcho-feminist joy".[96] The protagonist Marie, an outcast in a small-minded village, cultivates her witch-like powers, turning them against her oppressors until, ultimately, she exposes their double standards and burns all of her belongings. The film ends with her walking merrily down a country road, away from the village and toward a future ripe with the promise of utopia.

The women protagonists in Kaplan's films can often be seen nurtur-

ing their own wildness. Her frequent collaborator Claude Makovski points out that *La Fiancée du pirate* joins feminine powers with the forces of Panic nature.[97] Such a pagan sense of the wild is frequently emphasized by Kaplan's depiction of her protagonists as being in close proximity to animals and nature: in *La Fiancée du pirate* Marie's closest companion is a Satanic goat; in *Néa* (1976) the rebellious sixteen-year-old Sibylle has an intimate friendship with the cat Cumes; in *Plaisir d'amour* (1991) the three sisters Clo, Do, and Jo live among wild orchids, while the head of a donkey, mounted like a cuddly trophy on a bedroom wall, comes to mysterious life. Meanwhile, in *Charles and Lucie* (*Charles et Lucie*, 1979), Lucie can be seen releasing her pet squirrel into the wild; opening the cage, she also starts rewilding her own spirit.

The latter film depicts the middle-aged couple Charles and Lucie being thrown out of the predictable routine of their lives when they are conned into destitution by a gang of fraudsters. Without a penny to their name, they end up being robbed even of their clothes. Having to scramble for cash by performing in bars and restaurants, they rediscover a long lost playful creativity. Brought closer together by their trials, the couple eventually also rediscovers a mature form of surrealist mad love. Their outer journey sets them on an inner journey, in line with the surrealist doctor and occultist Pierre Mabille's notion that the search for the surrealist marvelous is predicated on a dissolution of such binaries as interior and exterior, mind and matter, topography and psyche.[98] Rediscovering their love for each other during their trials, Charles and Lucie restore the sort of hope in the possibility of a utopian condition that can perhaps only seem possible under the sway of what Mabille, a writer appreciated by Kaplan, defines as a transformative knowledge enabled by love.[99] As the surrealist writer Nancy Joyce Peters points out, "Kaplan takes the scandalous position of insisting on love."[100] The pair's amorous anarchism harkens back to the desire-driven struggles against repression and domination in Buñuel's early film, but the linear narrative in *Charles and Lucie* demonstrates that Kaplan nurtured a hope that what she called "the adventure of cinema" could take place in a format palatable to popular audiences.[101]

Charles and Lucie are helped on the way by an encounter with the seer Nostradama, played by Kaplan herself under her pen name Belen. An example of Kaplan's depiction of women characters who work "a magic, very real yet beyond the confines of the rational," Nostradama is depicted with humor, but that does not diminish the tangible effects she has on Charles and Lucie. In one scene, Nostradama shares a cigarette rolled with "Transylvanian herbs" with the couple, while they are waiting for the appearance of the atmospheric phenomenon of the "green ray." The green ray, which alludes to Jules Verne's 1882 novel *Le Rayon vert* and Marcel Duchamp's eponymous 1947 installation, finally appears as Nostradama sits down at a folding table with her crystal ball in front of her, the whole scene blazing with green as though the world has been transformed. In a different scene, Nostradama complains to Charles that people who consult her these days are only interested in trivial questions such as whether they will win the lottery; no one cares about *le grand rêve*, the "great dream," anymore. Nostradama's magic takes effect, however. At the end of the film, Lucie tells Charles that he's dreaming when he lists all the far-flung places to which he believes they will be able to take their show. "Dream? Me? That's what life is made of …," he retorts. Diverted from their old habits by what amounts to an initiatory journey, the couple end up pursuing the "great dream," here fueled by an anarchism steeped in love as well as by Kaplan's at one and the same time ironic and sincere portrayal of Nostradama's powers of magic transformation.

Before the couple's trials commence, Charles is characterized by a childish self-absorption, using stomach aches and other ailments as excuses and leaving it to Lucie to take care of their shared responsibilities. Throughout her films, Kaplan relishes in puncturing bloated male egos and exposing the cowardly mechanisms of the patriarchy. Following Marie's wild act of revenge on oppressive men in *La Fiancée du pirate*, Sibyl in *Néa* falls in love with the considerably older publisher Axel Thorpe, only to use her own witch-like powers to take revenge on him when he betrays her. In *Plaisir d'amour*, Kaplan turns her discerning gaze on the womanizer Guillaume de Burlador, a relative of the legendary Don Juan. Burlador takes up a position as a private tutor at the estate Les Orchidées sauvages—The Wild Or-

chids—owned by the three sisters Clo, Do, and Jo, evocative of the mythological Fates and Furies. When he first arrives at the estate, an eccentric gardener is standing on his head amidst the abundant vegetation, in a pose that resembles the tarot card, the Hanged Man. The allusion to the Hanged Man suggests that Burlador enters a world turned upside down, and furthermore that this is a state of separation from the ordinary world and its conventions.[102] Unlike Charles and Lucie, Burlador is hardly receptive to the transformation offered by such a state. Instead, he keeps being floundered by finding himself in an environment in which he is not in control; rather than being able to dominate the women, they use him for their own amorous pleasures.

In an emblematic interaction, a doctor tells Burlador that women are superior to men, due to their ability to orgasm until their dying breath, in contrast to the weakening of male potency with age. The fact that the estate exists under the sign of elevated female forces is emphasized by statues of winged goddesses with crescent moons above their heads that flank the entrance. With features of both the Egyptian goddess Isis and the Greek goddess Artemis, associated with the mysteries of nature, the statues represent the dialectics of healing and the hunt.[103] Burlador turns into an easy prey for the three sisters to toy with. In its taunting of the smug womanizer, *Plaisir d'amour* displays a similar anarcho-feminist joy as Kaplan's debut *La Fiancée du pirate*, shared also with *Néa*. While the film can hardly be said to depict a straightforward anarchist utopia, its world-turned-upside-down ripples with the promise that a very different world is possible. Finally, might the "wild orchids" that have given the estate its name be an allusion to *La Pensée sauvage*, "the wild pansy," which is the original French title of Lévi-Strauss's *Wild Thought*? Sprawling, the vegetation is a reminder of possibilities of wild growth, an abundance beyond the false excess of the capitalist market.

Unabashedly celebrating popular and lowbrow genres, including slapstick comedy, Gothic horror, and softcore pornography, Kaplan's films evoke Kyrou's anti-aristocratic exclamation that the marvelous is popular. Alternately animated by the rapture of mad love and an ethos of individualist anarchism, her films conjure forth possibilities

of a world charged with magic harnessed in the service of radical transformation.

Jan Švankmajer's films share with those of Kaplan a proclivity for what Goldfayn calls the "corrosive humor" of certain film comedies. However, Švankmajer's most original contribution to surrealist film stems from his training in Czech puppet theatre and his use of animation. Removed from the annals of high culture and often deemed a childish form of expression, animation has been lauded by surrealists, including the film critic Robert Benayoun who thought of the form as particularly close to automatism, dreams, and visionary seeing.[104] With their use of animation, Švankmajer's films exemplify the surrealist wild medium in terms of both an evasion of respectable expression and their rehabilitation of an animist sense of life in material reality, allowing things to enact their own kind of revolt. His films are however also marked by the Czechoslovak, and later Czech, political climate, marked first by Stalinist repression and then by an increasingly unfettered capitalism.

In Prague, the spring of 1968 was a time of rare freedom, since the totalitarian communist regime had relaxed its restrictions. The surrealist group of Prague, dating back to the early 1930s but largely confined to acting underground for the then past three decades, took the opportunity to reignite their collaboration with the surrealists in Paris. Together, the two groups organized the exhibition *The Pleasure Principle* in April 1968, and in conjunction with it they wrote the collective declaration "The Platform of Prague." The Czechoslovak political climate had prompted the Prague group to assume a critical stance toward Breton's turn to utopianism, myth, and magic following World War II. From the vantage point of life in a repressive and poor totalitarian state, such hopes seemed lofty. Vratislav Effenberger, the main Czech surrealist theoretician at the time, instead emphasized the necessity for surrealism to be rooted in an unflinching examination of material reality, including those poetic substrates that can be revealed through surrealist play and creativity.[105] In "The Platform of Prague," the Paris and Prague surrealists nevertheless found many common causes, among which were the need to rethink "revolutionary thought and theory […] from top to bottom."[106] Adamant that

it is "necessary to separate what in Marx's thought that has allowed Stalinism possible from what should have made it impossible," the two groups also sought an end to the strategical, ideological demarcations that made Marx and Engels oppose "theorists of the highest order like Stirner, Proudhon and Bakunin" and reject "the fascinating ideas of Charles Fourier."[107] The Paris and Prague surrealists, then, were united in their belief in the need to rehabilitate anarchism, including Stirner's individualist anarchism, and the speculative utopianism of Fourier, so seeking to formulate a radical left politics compatible with surrealism's revolutionary project. However, this moment of belief in the possibility of renewed international surrealist collaboration and hope in surrealism's revolutionary potential was soon eclipsed by the events of May 1968 in Paris and intensified political repression in Prague. While the Paris group dissolved in 1969, the Prague surrealists were forced back into hiding, nevertheless maintaining an incessant collective activity in spite of being unable to exhibit or publish their works.

When Švankmajer joined the surrealist group of Prague in 1970, they had been forced back into an underground existence. By this point, he had already made a series of inventive animated short films that displayed his attraction to surrealism. With their stark black-and-white photography and attentiveness to materiality, already films such as *J. S. Bach: Fantasy in G Minor* (*J. S. Bach: Fantasia G-Moll*, 1965) and *The Flat* (*Byt*, 1968) suggest an affinity with Effenberger's emphasis on the poetic secrets inherent in material reality. But while Švankmajer's subsequent films would be informed by or reflect collective discussions and games in the surrealist group of Prague, he also shared the French surrealists' interest in magic, alchemy, and the art and thought of non-Western cultures. Often collaborating with his wife Eva Švankmajerova, a prolific artist and writer who eventually became something of an informal leader of the surrealist group, Švankmajer has made over thirty films, ranging from merely minute-long shorts to two-hour feature films, across the space of nearly sixty years.[108] His films tend to be considerably less optimistic than Kaplan's, and their often misanthropic view of human behavior means that they hardly live up to Newton's suggestion that one defining characteristic of anarchist cinema is that it ought to present some

sort of positive view of humanity.[109] Then again, neither do Buñuel's films. Like many of those, the affinities between Švankmajer's films and anarchism stem from their opposition to authoritarianism and domination combined with a playful disruptiveness of both conventional morality and filmed reality; in Švankmajer's case, the latter is often effected by surprising events made possible through animation. Švankmajer's filmography is too comprehensive and complex to be covered in any detail in this essay; instead, I will limit myself to a few brief comments on films that display particular affinities with anarchism, with an eye to further demonstrating how he develops the surrealist approach to film as a "wild medium."

In the 1970s, the French and Czech surrealists collaborated in a more subterranean fashion on developing a critique of Western civilization, which resulted in the comprehensive volume *La Civilisation surréaliste*, published in 1976. Švankmajer contributed to the book, and many of his films are marked by a pessimistic view of Western civilization as doomed. A prominent example is his 2005 feature film *Lunacy* (Š*ileni*). Made some fifteen years after the fall of the iron curtain and the introduction of a market economy in Czechia, *Lunacy* is, according to the director, an "infantile" tribute to Edgar Allan Poe and the Marquis de Sade, from whose writings it borrows themes and motifs. Above all, the film is based on Švankmajer's notion, as he explains it in his filmed introduction to *Lunacy*, that an insane asylum can be run according to principles of total freedom or surveillance and control; a third way combines these two systems with disastrous consequences, and it is in that particular insane asylum we now find ourselves. With the Marquis de Sade appearing in the guise of an erotomaniac character in the film, Švankmajer takes the opportunity to pour scorn on Christianity as he delves into the destructive dialectic between freedom and repression characterizing late capitalism. The main characters, including Sade, ultimately find themselves confined to an old-fashioned madhouse. Blasphemy and erotic obsessiveness may be necessary elements in the struggle for liberty, *Lunacy* seems to say, but under the late-capitalist regime they do not in themselves lead to liberation.

In an "explication" of the film, Švankmajer explains his view that "every civilisation (culture) is built on repression […] and manipulation […] as the means by which the majority controls the minority." What remains is "Revolt against the repression inherent in civilisation, against inborn determinism, against one's own Super-ego, against the repressive god – father and his spiritual manipulation, and as a final consequence also against mother nature, who circumscribes the life of a human being."[110] In line with this acerbic critique, Švankmajer remains wary of the possibility of saving "Atlantic civilization," whether by a proletarian revolution or other means; all that remains is a complete negation.[111] As he frequently states, the human domination of nature is a crucial aspect of the sickness of civilization. In an essay written after the fall of the totalitarian Czechoslovak regime in 1989, Švankmajer professes his belief that humanity needs to "renounce its leading role" and pave the way for a return to nature. He proceeds to call on the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Fourier, Freud, Mabille, Lévi-Strauss's *Wild Thought*, and Breton's utopian-libertarian *Arcanum 17*, as he formulates what amounts to an anti-civilizational Romantic anticapitalism.[112] Marx figures here, too, for his "conclusion that humanity has to return to where it came from," although Švankmajer believes that the upheaval of civilization needs to be much greater than what Marx envisioned. In spite of Švankmajer's pessimistic leanings, the envisioned outcome of such a renunciation of human domination over nature is tinged with an anarchist-utopian spirit, as he states that he believes that:

> [humanity] will gain life in a non-repressive society and in this way also a sense of security; it will gain meaningfulness in its actions; a true social justice, and moreover; it will have something to drink, eat and breathe. And last but not least, it will finally rid itself of its damnation, a feeling of guilt for the hereditary sin: the abandonment, desecration, offending and humiliating of its own mother [i.e., nature].[113]

While humans in Švankmajer's films are often trapped, either by social structures or their own patterns of behavior, he often depicts animals and objects revolting all the more energetically against the

strictures placed on them by human civilization. In such passages, he displays new possibilities for film as a wild medium, as he employs both humor and animation to instill feral behavior in the midst of modernity, thereby also continuing the surrealist refusal to adhere to the dichotomy of high and low culture. *Lunacy* offers such glimpses of wild freedom, as the narrative is punctuated with interludes showing parts of slaughtered animals—brains, eyes, skulls, muscles reduced to the status of meat—regaining life through animation. Riotously playful, these animal parts move around, forming new temporary assemblages to the sound of circus-like music, so reversing the reification to which they have been exposed. Like the feather-strewn carnival in Vigo's *Zero for Conduct*, the reanimated animal parts in *Lunacy* enact heightened moments of utopia. Here as elsewhere, Švankmajer's use of animation is unabashedly ludic, delighting in the pleasure of making things move in unexpected ways, energized by an intensified slapstick logic reminiscent of the supercharged humor in *Un Chien andalou*. Hybrid assemblages of bones, feathers, shells, twigs, and other organic materials are often animated in similar ways across many of Švankmajer's films, including *Historia Naturae, Suita* (1967) and *Alice* (*Neco z Alenky*, 1987), where they are made to rebel against the domination of taxonomies as much as commodification. The director, however, does not limit such acts of reanimation to animal and other organic material, but extends it fully to the realm of what modernity assumes to be inert matter. Household objects revolt against utilitarian impositions in films including *The Flat*, *Jabberwocky* (*Žvahlav aneb šatičky slaměného Huberta*, 1971), and *Alice*. Mud, rocks, and furniture gain an expressive form of life in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (*Zánik domu Usherů*, 1980). The Czech surrealist notion that poetry is inherent in the material world is here channeled into a ludic-animist revolt against the dualistic division between human agency and the passivity of the surrounding world, between human as subject and the rest of the world as object, which underpins what environmental philosopher Val Plumwood calls "the mastery of nature" in Western civilization.[114]

For Plumwood, a central aspect of that mastery of nature was articulated by René Descartes, who stated that "there exists nothing in the whole of nature which cannot be explained in terms of purely

corporeal causes totally devoid of mind and thought."[115] That edifice of modern rationalism is one of the aspects Švankmajer seeks to counteract with his insistence that a complementary form of "irrationality" needs to be restored.[116] In that spirit, he understands his own use of animation in terms that relate to the dialectic between the modern and the wild that I have sought to pinpoint as a significant current in surrealism in general and its films in particular. In an interview, Švankmajer states: "Animation is magic and the animator is a shaman. Apparently, our ancestors were able to bring inanimate natural objects to life through the magical power of their minds. We need technology to make this possible."[117] Like the early anarchists and utopianists charted by Lagalisse, he discerns a direct connection between radical liberation and a suprarational ontology. Recuperating animism is at one and the same time an act of resistance against those Western notions of cultural progress that underpin colonialism, and an expression of anti-anthropocentric solidarity with the realms of animals, vegetables, and matter that have suffered from human exploitation. Like certain early film theorists, Švankmajer believes that film has an inherent capacity to reveal and restore such an animist life. The wild medium of film allows him to capture both movement and subjectivity in places where the unaided human eye does not normally detect them.

The result of Švankmajer's shamanistic animation practice is a series of moving *imagenes mundi*, as Lévi-Strauss calls them, new images of the world that reveal the repressed wildness inherent even in a pot, a puddle of mud, or a taxidermied specimen in a natural history collection. As these objects are allowed to escape the confines of the reductive category of inert matter to assume the quality of beings, they take part in a much larger revolt against domination. We can think, then, of Švankmajer's *imagenes mundi* as expressing an anarchist-animist liberation of the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms from the yoke of mind–matter dualism, with wider repercussions for how we think of humanity's place in nature.

The long history of surrealist film, as I have traced it here, emerges out of a radical movement with innate affinities with anarchism. Surrealist cinema also espouses an anarchist sensibility through its

approach to film as what I call a wild medium. Refusing to be domesticated as high culture, the wild medium draws on slapstick and horror, animation and Romantic love, at the same time as it infuses narratives with imagery from dreams and the unconscious. Buñuel and Vigo combine playful comedy with acerbic critiques of domination and repression, while also using montage in associative ways, resulting in what Vigo calls wild poetry. Turning increasingly to magic and occultism during and after World War II, surrealism approached a similar combination of utopianism, occultism, and radical politics as that in which anarchism fermented. Employed to libertarian ends, magic, for the surrealists, is an energetic force capable of questioning common-sense assumptions about the constitution of the world, thereby creating possibilities for radical change. In the films of Kaplan and Švankmajer, such a convergence of an anarchist sensibility with magic, alchemy, and animism underpins their respective depictions of revolt against stultifying orders. Drawing on popular culture and using animation, respectively, Kaplan and Švankmajer demonstrate possibilities of continuing to develop the surrealist wild medium of film, under the dual sign of the red and black flags.

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Notes

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4 André Breton, "Tower of Light," in *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 265.
5 Breton, "Tower of Light," 265–67.
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7 Kristoffer Noheden, "Against All Aristocracies: Surrealism, Anarchism, and Film," *Modernism/Modernity* 27, no. 3 (2020): 567–82.
8 André Breton, "As in a Wood," in *Free Rein*, 237.
9 James Newton, *The Anarchist Cinema* (Bristol: Intellect, 2019), 10–12, 142–144.
10 Newton, *The Anarchist Cinema*, 37; Ado Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Ramsay, 2005), 296. For a discussion of involuntary poetry, see Michael Richardson, *Surrealism and Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 18.
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72 Porton, *Film and the Anarchist Imagination*, 176.
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