

ANDRÉ BRETON

**TWO INTERVIEWS WITH
ANDRÉ PARINAUD**

TRANSLATED BY MARK POLIZZOTTI

ON SOME MISPLACED HOPES. IN PARIS, SURREALISM MUST OVERCOME VARIOUS OBSTACLES. PROOF OF ITS VITALITY.

ANDRÉ PARINAUD: Before starting in on the main part of this interview—Surrealism's positions since the Liberation—I'd like you to tell me what symbolic and personal reasons induced you to choose the title of the book that bridged two periods: *Arcane 17*.

ANDRÉ BRETON: The title *Arcane 17* is a direct reference to the traditional meaning of the tarot card called "the Star," symbol of hope and resurrection. As I was saying at the end of our last interview, the new dawn promised by the liberation of Paris, as it seemed from the extremely excited news I had of it, would alone have inclined me to place my book under this sign. But it is certain that, in my mind, it was overdetermined by the presence of an infinitely dear person by my side, whom I knew had lost all reason for living shortly before we met—and whom I therefore wanted more than anything to "bring back to life."¹ It was to this exceptional conjunction of such distinct emotions that I appealed for an elucidation of the other meaning of that Arcanum 17," which, for occultists, is none other than sensitivity as the seed of intellectual life. As to the intellectual life that was soon to be reborn—free of constraints, or so we hoped—we had to know what renewed sensitivity was liable to carry it forward, once its original powers were restored. At the end of summer in 1944, when my eyes opened on the coast of the Gaspé peninsula—with its island, so invitingly named Bonaventure, in the distance circumstances favored my exploring the outermost bounds of those lands of desire that had been devastated for so long, but that were suddenly allowed to flower again, and that had never stopped calling to me, even when they seemed most out of reach: poetry, love, freedom.

AP: What were your hopes and emotions on the eve of your return to France? Did you still feel the enthusiasm and the will to struggle that had driven you twenty-five years earlier?

AB: At the end of the last war, which in many ways had been the most demoralizing of all,

¹ This was Elisa Bindhoff, who became Breton's third wife in 1945.

I believed (and I'm sure I wasn't alone) that the world could now make a jump that would put it back in its orbit—an orbit from which centuries of so-called "civilization" seemed to have removed it more and more. In any case, it seemed impossible that certain all-too-costly illusions, which had managed to sustain themselves right up to the outbreak of the war, would not be refuted. The devil take me if we could reasonably have expected, even knowing how short human memories are, that the old political parties, all of them more or less bankrupt through either their acceptance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact or their deference to the Vichy government, if not through out-and-out collaboration with the occupier—would be called upon at war's end to rebuild themselves, bringing to power the same men who had already proven so unequal to their task.

AP: More specifically, what did you hope to see from human government, for example?

AB: One could at least hope for the systems to be recast, and for men of *character*—which at the time only the so-called Resistance movement seemed to include—to be elected. My recent disputes with him notwithstanding, I'd like to say how right the articles that Albert Camus was then publishing in *Combat* sounded from afar, and how they went to the heart of the matter. In one stroke, the air seemed to have become breathable again. We told ourselves that the time was perhaps not far off when we would begin hearing proposals as audacious as they were generous. We know all too well what became of such hopes.

AP: Were you interested in a particular form of government?

AB: Of government? No, but let's say in a less unreasonable *management* of human interests. It seemed to me that one could, at least for a large part of the world, have called for the constitution of a new kind of States-General, in which the three old orders would have made way for three new ones, such as (pending a deeper study of the problem): technicians and scientists, educators and artists, and urban and agricultural workers. I have in fact become convinced, notably by reading Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, that the States-General, even in their original way of functioning, had the enormous advantage of promoting the social over the political; that, by their own means—keeping a daily "record of grievances," and, in certain cases, addressing "remonstrances" to the constituent powers—they were the only ones able to surmount the *mortal* dualism of governors and governed. I also favored returning to the source of aspirations toward a balanced and harmonious world; and I favored people taking

the time to study, without prejudice, Fourier's *Théorie des attractions* and Father Enfantin's theses on the emancipation of women.

AP: In any case, it was at this time that you composed your *Ode to Charles Fourier*. What were the circumstances?

AB: I wrote the *Ode to Charles Fourier* during a trip to the western United States, which allowed me to visit Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. I spent a long time contemplating such ghost towns as Silver City and Virginia City, vestiges of the "gold rush," with their abandoned houses and banging doors, their theaters still showing posters from the last century. Most of all, I was able to satisfy one of my greatest and oldest desires, which was to meet the Indians-particularly the Pueblo Indians (Hopi and Zuni), whose mythology and art held a special attraction for me. I haven't abandoned the idea of relating the very vivid impressions I experienced in their villages (Shungopavi, Wolpi, Zuni, Acoma), where I became utterly convinced of their inalienable dignity and genius, which contrasted so sharply and movingly with their miserable living conditions. I don't understand how the streak of justice and reparation that sometimes carries the white man toward the black and the yellow, more and more often neglects the Indian, who has given so many proofs of his creative power and has been, by far, the most despoiled.

AP: Before returning to France, you spent several months on a lecture tour in Haiti and Martinique. What were the notable events of this trip?

AB: Thanks to my friend Pierre Mabille, who at the time was the cultural attache in Port-au-Prince and who had good contacts there, I was able to witness a number of voodoo ceremonies and observe up close the phenomenon of "possession," which has always constituted one of Surrealism's poles of interest. It's worth noting that this phenomenon is considered, by Haitian specialists in the matter, to be the syncretistic product of certain Dahomean and Guinean traditions on the one hand, and on the other of mesmeric practices that were imported to Port-au-Prince by Martinez de Pasqually in the eighteenth century.

AP: What were your prognostics at the time for the state of intellectual life following the Liberation?

AB: When I left America in the spring of 1946, I didn't have a very clear idea of the intellectual situation in Paris. For a long time, in fact, I'd believed that everything that had been upheld between the two wars would be gone over with a fine-toothed comb, and that even Surrealism would not be spared. Whence the tone, which some consider reticent, of my 1942 speech to the students of Yale;² whence also a title—from the same period such as “Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not.” Of course, since the Liberation, the letters I've received and various works I've been sent make me clearly understand that, intellectually speaking, the winds hadn't changed all that much. In New York, I also had long conversations with Camus, then with Sartre, who gave me a glimpse of the state of mind here. I remember that Sartre particularly stressed the “terror” that the Stalinists waged over the literary world. As he told it, it was extremely unwise to openly dispute the poetic merits of the Aragon who had written *Le Crève-cœur* [Heartbreak]: you ran the risk of not waking up the next morning ...

AP: What emerged from the events you then witnessed?

AB: In Paris, I soon realized that if Sartre had employed somewhat romantic terms, what he was describing was nonetheless real. The Stalinists, the only group that had been powerfully organized during the clandestine period, had managed to occupy almost every key post in publishing, the press, radio, the art galleries, etc. They were quite determined to stay there, using methods they had adopted long before, but which they had just had an opportunity to perfect experimentally. Even though I had long been aware of these methods, I admit that their application constantly surpassed my expectations. One heard the staunchest antimilitarists upholding the most chauvinistic viewpoints, brandishing “black lists,” howling for sanctions, while secretly agreeing to overlook certain things in exchange for solid guarantees: the technique called “clearing someone's name.” Naturally it was of the utmost importance for them to neutralize, stifle those intellectuals who might denounce such an operation and penetrate its true motives. Via countless infiltrations into every organization liable to influence public opinion, the Stalinist apparatus managed, at least to a large extent, to muffle the voices of such men, even as it tried to discredit them in its own press by repeated slander.

2 An English version was published in Yale French Studies, Fall/Winter 1948, as “The Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars.”

AP: Did this sort of threat affect Surrealism?

AB: Surrealism, of course, was one of the troublesome obstacles. First of all, we knew too much about some of the intellectuals that the Stalinist party had promoted to stardom. Secondly, they had at all costs to keep Surrealism from appearing as an ongoing movement, faithful to its original precepts, which would have ruined the spurious argument that events had passed it by. This was all the more difficult in that part of the younger generation continued to support us, and that we were constantly gaining new members. Were it not for a subtle network of influence, which deprives them of their means of expression (notably a regular, collective periodical), figures such as Jean-Louis Bédouin, Adrien Dax, Jean-Pierre Duprey, Jindřich Heisler, Gérard Legrand, Gherasim Luca, Nora Mitrani, Jean Schuster, Dolfi Trost, and Michel Zimbacca (but I won't list all my friends) would long ago have become prominent. Luckily, the signs are that this situation is nearing an end.

AP: How did Surrealism continue to develop?

AB: Because of hidden obstructions placed in its path, Surrealism these last six years has affirmed the continuity of its message only in individual works. It's quite obvious, moreover, that after some thirty years of existence, and precisely because of the influence it has exerted in fairly distinct waves, Surrealism cannot be limited to those who willingly fill its current ranks. Today any number of works, without being strictly Surrealist, share more or less deeply in its spirit. To my mind, there is no intrinsic difference between what might inspire the lyricism of Jean-Pierre Duprey and that of Malcolm de Chazal. In the theatre, two recent works of very high caliber, Julien Gracq's *Le Roi pêcheur* [The Fisher King] and *Monsieur Bob'le* by Georges Schehade, must by the same token be considered fully Surrealist.

AP: Couldn't you just as well include some recent films?

AB: I could indeed: in this domain, even if Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* demonstrates a formal break with *Un Chien andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*, such a film, when compared with the earlier two, nonetheless shows the continuity of Buñuel's spirit—which, like it or not, is a constituent part of Surrealism. Furthermore, what we're saying about theater or film could be applied to other forms of expression. The poems of Georges Schehade and Octavio Paz,

Jean Ferry's *Le mécanicien* [The Mechanic], and Maurice Fourré's *La Nuit du Rose-Hôtel* [A Night in Rose-Hotel] are Surrealist in the same way, and destined to take the elevated place reserved for them in the history of the movement. A choice will no doubt be made, moreover, among many other works in which the Surrealist spirit comes through in diffuse form.

AP: And in the sphere of visual arts, how would you characterize the situation?

AB: It's obviously more complicated. During the same period, all kinds of plots were hatched against Surrealism's expansion in the visual domain. Some people, on Moscow's orders, tried to kill imaginative art once and for all, and to substitute a kind of painting and sculpture called "Socialist realism," which simply means putting a few academic rudiments in the service of state propaganda and agitation. Others—and this mainly concerns American interests—tried to depreciate Surrealist visual art to the benefit of so-called "nonfigurative" art, whose authenticity, through its successive demonstrations, has proven to be more dubious with each passing day.

As to that, money was apparently no object, since a large Parisian gallery offered to stage an international Surrealist exhibit, featuring a "rain room" and a "maze" designed by Marcel Duchamp; a "superstitions room" entrusted to architect Frederick Kiesler, whom they had purposely brought over from New York; as well as twelve "altars," each of which was to be devoted to "a creature, a category of creatures, or an object liable to be endowed with mythic life." But the organizers' good will ended there. What am I saying! As if it had been planned in advance, the gallery's owner seemed to want to join the ranks of his worst detractors, since he allowed tracts, signed by his main partner at the time and attacking the exhibit, to be handed out at the entrance. With him, we were as far as we could be from the constant affability with which Georges Wildenstein had put his "Beaux Arts" gallery at our disposal for an exhibit of the same type, in 1938.

AP: Two important Surrealist works—whose tone was not unlike the manifestoes of the early years—stirred some comment shortly afterward: I'm speaking of *A la niche les glapisseurs de dieu* [Back to Your Kennels, You Curs of god] and *Flagrant délit* [Caught Red-Handed]. Could you explain what was so interesting about them?

AB: In point of fact, during the same period Surrealism also had to defend itself against a bold attempt at monopolization and confiscation by religion's henchmen: their goal was no less than to show that Surrealism's aspirations were, if not shared by, at least compatible with certain Christian views. The same operation had already been led against Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and would be continued against Sade and Lautréamont. With the collective pamphlet entitled *A la niche les glapisseurs de dieu*, my friends and I think we've thwarted that siege tactic for some time to come.

A final assault, which I was forced to confront, was launched surreptitiously (I suppose in the name of hackneyed rationalism) by the author of a certain *History of Surrealism*, which was not devoid of merit but was often based on unreliable information, and which furthermore contained a certain number of inaccuracies and some rather alarming gaps. Where the fundamentally malevolent spirit of...this makeshift historian shows through is at the end of the book, where, after having tried—he wouldn't be the last—to set my oldest and dearest comrade-in-arms, Benjamin Péret, against me, he decrees on his own authority that “all that remains is to draw up the death certificate of the Surrealist movement.”³ You've never seen such a rushed biographer. As I was still in New York when the book came out, he'd taken the liberty of following this declaration with a venomous postscript about me, founded on the basest hearsay. Nonetheless, I was perfectly willing to believe that he'd simply been misled, and didn't hold it against him on my return. I was finally moved to react only after he seized upon the pretext of Antonin Artaud's death to incriminate me for still being alive, which according to him conclusively proved my lack of authenticity. The profound ties that had bound me to Artaud, the unforgettable signs of attachment that he himself had shown me (as the publication of his correspondence will attest), and the effect his shattering and gruesome end had on his friends made such an expedient particularly grotesque. The man who had resorted to it, moreover, was soon laughing out of the other side of his mouth. Shortly after that I was given the best possible opportunity for rebuttal when he endorsed a text attributed to Rimbaud, the falseness and poverty of which were glaring. I related the ins and outs of that episode in *Flagrant délit*, which gives some idea of the rout he suffered. In earlier times, such a rebuke would have kept a critic from ever taking up his pen again.

3 This sentence, which figured in the 1945 edition of *Histoire du surréalisme* by Maurice Nadeau, was deleted from subsequent versions; it does not appear in the English translation of the work.

AP: So all things considered, you feel that Surrealism has not exhausted its historical necessity or lost any of its spirit?

AB: None at all. That's why I insisted, for this last session, not only on underscoring the new strengths that Surrealism has acquired, but also on showing who it has run up against. If it were truly dead, as those who take their desires for realities have repeated every year since its foundation, I'd have trouble understanding why the offensives launched against it have only intensified in recent years. Far from saddening us, these constantly reiterated offensives are our surest sign of Surrealism's deep penetration in to the ground on which we walk, and of its hardy nature.

**SOME FINAL BACKWARD GLANCES. HAPPINESS? THE MAIN
THING IS NOT TO HAVE "GIVEN IN." THE FLOWER OF THE
MOORS.**

AP: Having reached the end of these broadcasts, Mr. Breton, I'd like you to answer one question: do you feel that what you've told us has really let us gain some specific knowledge of Andre Breton as a human being?

AB: I'd say I'm the last person who could judge that ... From the first questions you asked me, I naturally understood that the subject of these interviews was Surrealism and not myself. Given that I was invited to describe the chronological development of a spiritual adventure that was and remains collective by nature, I was forced to erase myself somewhat. Above all, I had to be as objective as possible. By definition, I was not free to skate over any of the facts that profoundly concerned the history of the movement, and I was also bound by the need to show how events were linked together. In this regard at least, I had to strive to be impartial and, up to a certain point, leave the stage. But I don't believe I completely avoided making judgments and comments that would allow someone to pinpoint my distinctive features, if he so desired. I've often regretted that people generally expect me to make the sort of statement that pushes me into the shadows rather than into the light—which frankly, especially in the long run, goes against my personal desire and inclination. But what can I say? This must be the price of any life that has largely been absorbed by the affirmation of a certain ideal.

AP: Allow me to push further ahead with my question. By deliberately refusing to adopt a formula for these interviews that would have consisted in asking you about your attitudes toward life (such as my colleague Robert Mallet, for example, so brilliantly did with Paul Leautaud), and by preferring to approach you via the history of Surrealism, to which every day of your life adds a page, I believed that objectively we would gain a deeper, more complete sense of you. But haven't I left out equally essential, albeit less apparent, aspects of yourself? Do you feel that these interviews missed their target, which was above all to show who you are?

AB: Not at all. The way the interviews with Paul Léautaud were conducted, while quite appropriate to the person he is, would hardly have been suitable for me. For one thing, Léautaud is a wit, which I'm not. Also, his adventure has been purely individual, and he can therefore indulge every whim, take any detour, and say whatever comes into his head. I can't claim to have the detachment that his age and natural skepticism grant him. I can admire the outward freedom conferred by this skepticism, without sharing it in the slightest degree. As far as your interviews with me are concerned, the alternative was the following: either they would be about me alone, or they would be about Surrealism via my life. You opted for the second possibility, and it would have been presumptuous of me to find fault with that.

AP: Your answer lets me limit my next questions to two other essential points. First of all, what is your opinion of yourself, considering the intransigence that you've always brought to the defense of Surrealism?

AB: To...the defense of Surrealism? You see how we come back to Surrealism in spite of ourselves. Oh, I'm well aware that intransigence is no longer in style! Our vocabulary has been so undermined and sabotaged in the last few years that you say "intransigence," and people think of absolutism and dictatorship. What does that mean: the intransigence I've brought to the defense of Surrealism? I went with what I believed was right, what I believed was liable to make the human condition less unacceptable. To the extent that others—a fair number of others, as we know—had expressed the same concerns, I believed that in the case of a breach of contract on their part, even an implicit one, they should be called to account for their change of heart. As you can imagine, I'm rather pleased to have maintained Surrealism's initial postulates, against all odds!

It's not hard for several people to fundamentally agree on a given body of ideas in their youth, but we mustn't ignore the fact that life is quite adept at breaking up forces that were once united. You see what happened to Saint-Simonianism, for example. And besides, material demands become more pressing as time goes on. And then there are women... In short, everything happens as it does in Victor Hugo's lovely poem, "La Chanson des aventuriers de la mer." If fate wishes one to take the helm after, as he said,

*In Malta, Olfani became a monk
And Gobbo a harlequin...*

it's clear that one must guide this helm with a firm hand.

AP: Of course. But what is your feeling about yourself, considering the battle you've waged, the long series of hardships and rifts-and sacrifices , too?

AB: Well, I feel that I've lived up to my youthful aspirations, and to my mind that's already quite a lot. My life has been devoted to what I thought was beautiful and right. All things considered, I've so far lived as I had dreamed of living. In the battle I've waged, I've never lacked for companions just as determined as I; thanks to them, I've never been deprived of human warmth. It's true that I had to part from some individuals who were dear to me, and that others have left me. There are those whose memory long haunted me, whose memory still assails me at certain times of the day, and I won't deny that it's like a wound being reopened every time. But I believe this was necessary in order to preserve the initial stakes, and that this was the price if any thing was to be won. And to a large extent, the battle has indeed been won. I don't wish to sound conceited, but it's fairly commonly admitted today that Surrealism contributed much toward shaping our modern sensibility. Furthermore, it managed, if not entirely to impose its scale of values, at least to make these values be taken very seriously. If we refer back to the title of a magazine like *La Révolution surréaliste*, which at the time seemed hyperbolic, it's no exaggeration to say that such a revolution did take place in men's minds. Just think, for example, of all the figures from the past that Surrealism brought out from the shadows, and who today are recognized as *lantern bearers*; and of all the false lantern bearers that it pushed back into the shadows. On this score, we couldn't have hoped for any thing more.

It was in another domain that enormous obstacles blocked our path. Which domain? The one in which we felt bound to participate actively, yes, to contribute, from our specific position and with our specific resources, to the social transformation of the world. History will tell if those who've claimed a monopoly on that transformation are really working toward man's liberation, or whether they 're condemning him to an even worse form of slavery. The fact remains that Surrealism, as a defined and organized movement, in trying to respond to the greatest possible will toward emancipation, could find no point of entry into their system. Even if this must be counted as an indisputable failure and in some ways represents a lot of lost time, perhaps it wasn't pointless. First of all, it was important that we attempt the experiment, and report our findings as they happened, from 1925 to 1950. And besides...Surrealism, that little particle of free thought, when compared to many forms

of subjugated thought (and without prejudice to the outcome of the struggle), is rather like David and Goliath, you know...

AP: We can obviously trust in the judgment of history, but do you believe that Surrealism's current audience reflects its true importance?

AB: I have no complaints on that score. Eminent men have died, having every reason to believe that obscurity would forever be their fate; for others it took eighty years of posthumous neglect before the ears able to hear them even existed. Without putting myself on their level, I believe I can consider myself more favored than they: perhaps I had a luckier star, who knows! But twenty years ago, I was already asking how certain people could believe they were participating in the Surrealist spirit while still being concerned about their status in the world. Surrealism's current status? I don't know if it's been given its due, but I have no objections; and if its status were less prominent, I still wouldn't mind. In the word "status," there's always an aspect of official consecration that bothers me. I've already had occasion to say that, by temperament as much as or more than by reasoning, I fell in with the *opposition*; I was ready, come what may, to join an indefinitely renewable *minority* (so long as it aimed toward greater liberation, of course). This is scarcely compatible with the imperialistic designs that apply to the many academic theses I've forbidden.

For my taste, it's already too much that they've begun teaching Surrealism in schools—no doubt in order to diminish it. When I was young, what helped me understand Baudelaire or Rimbaud as they should be understood was the fact that they weren't on the syllabus...

AP: Allow me a gratuitous question: if Surrealism had been discovered in 1951, would you have thrown yourself into the fray with the same enthusiasm?

AB: There's always something pointless about that kind of speculation. To answer with some measure of pertinence, I'd have to take into account both the changes that some thirty years have produced in myself, and the changes in the world during the same time. On top of which, it's clear that my own changes depended on the changes in the world, and on a certain number of other factors. At twenty or twenty-five, one's will to struggle is inspired by the most offensive and intolerable things one sees around oneself. In this regard, the sickness that the world exhibits today differs from the one it exhibited in the 1920s.

In France, for example, the mind was threatened back then with coagulation, whereas today it's threatened with dissolution. All kinds of major fissures, which affect the structure of the globe as well as human consciousness, had not yet appeared (I'm thinking of the implacable antagonism between the two "blocs," of totalitarian methods, of the atomic bomb). It's perfectly obvious that such a situation calls for different reactions from today's youth than the ones provoked in us, in our youth, by another situation. At the same time, I believe that this in no way invalidates Surrealism's principle theses on poetry, freedom, or love. What has to be rethought on the basis of new data is the social problem. In this regard, and if only to indicate what I considered right, I'd like to stress that I didn't hesitate to look behind Marx, and, in my *Ode to Charles Fourier*, to call for a reevaluation of those parts of his work that are still valid. Moreover, I was one of the first to join the "Citizens of the World" movement, whose goals seem to me the only ones with sufficient breadth to meet the circumstances. Whatever difficulties such an action inevitably encounters, I still have complete faith in Robert Sarrazac and those around him, who inspired and organized it.

AP: But how do you feel about your former comrades-in-arms, some of whom abandoned you—even betrayed you?

AB: I've already gained enough distance to be able to make this judgment as dispassionately as possible. I was deeply impressed by the opinion that my friend Ferdinand Alquié expressed on this subject in his study on "Surrealist and Existentialist humanism." Pondering the division that has occurred in Surrealism, as earlier it occurred in Romanticism, between those who have opted for "social action without dreams" and those who prefer "an attitude that least repudiates their initial ideals, but also implies the least commitment," he believes he can state that both sides were equally sincere and faithful, and that, in short, it's neither side's fault if "the moral dimension and the historical dimension" cannot be reconciled. Insofar as I've always been an active participant in this debate, it would obviously be too much to ask me to subscribe to this opinion; but objectively, it seems very wise. I admit that Surrealism's inclination was twofold, that there were and—as recent splits have shown once again—that there still are reasons for tearing away from it. Above and beyond anything that might have separated us, and the passions that got in the way (some of which have never died down), my desire would be to attain that point of serenity from which one contemplates the jointly followed path without remorse; from which one gives unreserved thanks to what fervently united a certain number of individuals around the same cause, even if the individuals themselves changed from time to time...

AP: I don't believe any Surrealist inquiry ever took happiness as its subject. Could you tell us what role it has played in your life?

AB: We'd first have to be clear on what we mean by "happiness." A certain degree of satisfaction, stemming from various ideas and the reactions these ideas might have elicited, cannot be equated with lasting well-being. But I believe that some people, myself among them, aspire more than anything to that kind of satisfaction, even if the cost is high. I've already said that the worst drawback of an activity such as the one I've engaged in resides in the fact that the emotional ties it creates between those involved can't withstand significant ideological divergences. So this happiness is of the most checkered sort. But I think there's something truly happy in being able to say that the landscape of one's youth has not silted up in middle age, that the same inalienable expanses are still uncovered every time the wind brings the accents of poets and a few others, who were once the great sources of exaltation.

Speaking of happiness, I can still hear Gide reading us a text he'd written—I was with Aragon and Soupault—which began with the words: "All of nature surely teaches that man was made for happiness..." That's rather debatable, I said to myself. It isn't happiness I sought in love, either: it was love.

AP: Even though you might refuse to answer this question, I'd like you to clarify what promise Surrealism holds today for various techniques: film, radio, etc.

AB: As early as the first *Manifesto*, I purposely stated that future Surrealist *techniques* didn't interest me. This is all the more the case, it goes without saying, for applications of Surrealism to a given technical means of expression. And moreover, in what category would you put certain of Duchamp's works? Do some canvases by Max Ernst, Magritte, or Brauner concern poetry any less than they do painting? Can cinematographic criteria exhaust the content of a film such as *L'Age d'Or*? This kind of discrimination would be petty. No more petty than to wonder, about those of our friends who developed a taste for solo navigation, such as Miró or Prévert, to what extent they are or aren't Surrealists. We need only transpose the problem to Romanticism, or even to Impressionism or Symbolism, to see how inane it is ...

AP: This series of interviews, which has highlighted your activity and that of the Surrealist movement for more than thirty years, naturally leads us to ask toward what horizons you're now steering your spirit and your action?

AB: If it's true, as I've admitted, that Surrealism, which for so long was a tumultuous river rushing under an open sky, has more recently followed a rather prolonged underground channel, I repeat that this is an entirely external impression, which is due only to the present lack of a group periodical. With all due respect to those who, as you know, have dug Surrealism's grave two or three times yearly for the past quarter century, I maintain that the principle of its energy remains intact. I can think of no better proof than this recent declaration from May 1951, which is all the more precious to me in that I owe it to seven of my youngest friends: "Up to now, only Surrealism seems to have defied the processes of petrification that spare neither systems nor men. To tirelessly alert that which has not yet been struck by aphasia, to constantly demolish the economic and moral dogmas that mire men in secular oppression..., and to seek the untried remedies required by the extent and virulence of the disease: these are the imperatives that ensue from the principles that have always been Surrealism's own... You have constantly defined the trajectory between the conscious and unconscious aspects of mental life, between revolutionary action and the exaltation of desire, between materialism and idealism. Starting at the point at which you have intersected it, we can only travel this trajectory, which is the very trajectory of Surrealism, from the outset, and make it ours in its totality." One can imagine that for me, at the end of an account encompassing the-already exceptionally long-existence of a movement with which no one can deny that my life has formed one body, nothing can equal such a testimony.

AP: If you wouldn't mind, let's end our conversation with this question: what sustains your faith in the remarkable human adventure on which you've embarked?

AB: Speaking in America in 1942 to the students of Yale University, I underscored the fact that "Surrealism was born of a limitless affirmation of faith in the *genius* of youth." For my part, I have never renounced this faith for an instant. Chateaubriand says superbly: "As a son of Brittany, I like the moors. Their flower of indigence is the only one that has not wilted on my lapel." I, too, come from those moors; they have often torn me apart, but I love that light of will-o'-the-wisp that they keep burning in my heart. To the extent that this

light has reached me, I've done everything in my power to pass it on: all my pride comes from the fact that it hasn't yet gone out. At stake, as I saw it, were my chances of not failing the human adventure.