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Bridging East and West: Czech Surrealism's Interwar Experiment

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Bridging East and West: Czech Surrealism's Interwar Experiment

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2003

For my parents
whose dialectical union made this work possible

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express heartfelt thanks to my advisor Hana Pichova from the University of Texas at Austin for her invaluable advice and support during the course of my writing process. I am also indebted to Jiří Brabec from Charles University in Prague whose vast knowledge of Czech Surrealism and extensive personal library provided me with the framework for this study and the materials to accomplish the task. I would also like to thank my generous benefactors: The Texas Chair in Czech Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, The Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin, The Fulbright Commission and the American Council of Learned Societies without whom I would not have had the financial wherewithal to see this project to its conclusion. And, finally, I am indebted most of all to Maria Němcová Banerjee of Smith College whose intelligence, insight, generosity as a reader and unflagging faith in my ability made my effort much more than an exercise in scholarship; Maria, working with you was a true joy. To my family and dear friends Daniela Pastina, Karen Enegess, and Marita Schneider; for their unconditional love I owe them more than I can say. And to the memory of those I hold forever in spirit: Marion and Milton Spatz and my grandmother, Esther Gliber.

Bridging East and West: Czech Surrealism's Interwar Experiment

Publication No. _____

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2003

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Bridging East and West: Czech Surrealism's Interwar Experiment is a cultural and intellectual history of the Czech Surrealist movement from 1934-1938. This work traces the movement's development from its avant-garde beginnings in the 1920's represented by Devětsil, an aesthetic program that united Soviet constructivism and the Czech poetism, to the point in 1934, when poet Vitezslav Nezval announced the formation of the Prague Surrealist group. The study goes on to examine Czech Surrealism in relation to France and the Soviet Union. Although they looked to Paris and Moscow for direction, not being from the center afforded the Czechs the freedom to integrate ideas from a variety of sources without having to answer to a higher authority. As citizens of a small nation, the members of the Czech group were able to bridge the divide between politics and poetry that kept the Surrealists from attaining the sought after united

front to combat fascism. Because of their special cultural position off-center and geographic location at the heart of Europe, they became the bridge linking East and West, a center in their own right.

The study focuses on the Czech movement's key figures, Vítězslav Nezval and Karel Teige. Teige's and Nezval's dialectical union of criticism and lyric functioned as the dynamic force that made Czech Surrealism one of the most highly original and vital expressions of the interwar avant-garde. But as external events exerted pressure on the group, its center could not hold. As Teige turned away from Moscow because of the Communist Party's assault on free expression and Nezval turned away from Paris to embrace Stalin and socialist realism, the first wave of the Czech Surrealism came to its end. Their bitter polemic on art and politics doomed the movement from the start, reflecting in microcosm the contradictions inherent to the avant-garde as a whole. However, the end proved to be a beginning; Czech Surrealism in its next manifestation managed to survive war and communism. Despite the preeminence of France in the history of Surrealism, it is off-center, in Prague, where the experiment still lives on as testament to the genius of its founding members.

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INTRODUCTION

Surrealism, noun, masc. Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

Encycl. Philos. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life.

To André Breton:

At the international Congress in Kharkov, Devětsil, the avant-garde group of Prague poets and intellectual practitioners, had the opportunity to demonstrate their accord with the surrealists in the matters of Marxist-Leninism and dialectical materialism... Our movement, which has endured since 1921 and has, during the course of its respective dialectical development has come ever closer to the development of the Surrealists; it is in the same position with regard to the official leadership of the Communist Party and the Left Front as it is to the Surrealist movement...

In solidarity with the revolutionary activities of the Surrealists whose basic concept we share, by means of this communication, we initiate the first step towards our concrete collaboration.

Vítězslav Nezval for Devětsil

Beautiful...like the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table!

Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont

In his meditation on the new millennium, Czech writer Jiří Kratochvil characterized the twentieth century as “the Surrealist century.”¹ Kratochvil attributed Surrealism’s importance to its imagination, symbolized by a “burning heart” (hořící srdce) that embraced the greatest contradictions of the time such as Freud and Marx.² That Kratochvil summed up an entire century with the adjective “Surrealist” attests to his contention that no other avant-garde movement had a greater impact on the social history of the age. And yet, as we continue into the second millennium, it is still difficult to assess the lasting contribution of a specific philosophical approach to representation formulated by a marginalized

¹ “On the Burning Heart (O hořícím sdrci)” *Lidové noviny* (The People’s News). 9 February 2000, 1.

² ...to byl především surrealismus, který se pokusil spojit vůli po absolutní svobodě s orwellovským světem...Freudem a Marxem a mýtus věčného mládí surrealismu s mýtem permanentní revoluce...Ibid.

group of intellectuals and artists that has been assimilated into the jargon of pop culture. Surrealism in its adjectival afterlife lives as a spirit in the unsettling *dépaysement* of the *Twilight Zone* and in the strange close encounters that mark our own perception of what is real to transform the way we view our culture and ourselves. As in the case of Chinese telephone, Surrealism's original message about integrating dream and reality to revolutionize has been hopelessly distorted upon its transmission to the mainstream. This contradiction has allowed Surrealism to endure not as canon practiced by its disciples, but as a spirit, the pervasive struggle for human consciousness to transcend its limited grasp of the external and internal world.

For the purposes of this study, Surrealism does not signify the generalized sense of the bizarre, contradictory or uncanny that it has come to mean over the years. Instead, my definition of Surrealism is restricted to a specific theoretical concept of representation and social change associated with the movement founded by André Breton in 1924 (the movement's name is a neologism borrowed from the late Guillaume Apollinaire) whose tenets were set forth in the *Manifeste du surréalisme* (The Surrealist Manifesto) and later revised in the *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (Second Surrealist Manifesto) in 1930³.

³ The text that originally appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* (The Surrealist Revolution) in December 1929, was revised and published in book form by Simon Kra in 1930. See André Breton, *André Breton: Œuvres complètes* (André Breton: Collected Works), eds. Marguerite

Although the first manifesto focused on its aesthetic claims, the second manifesto endowed Surrealism with a social program based on dialectical materialism that drew on Hegel rather than Marx. This programmatic shift from revolutionary aesthetics to social change was also reflected by Breton's changing the name of the Surrealist organ from *La Revolution surréaliste* (The Surrealist Revolution) to *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (Surrealism in Service of the Revolution). Although the term “revolution” is significant in both titles, the relation of Surrealism to the notion of revolution has been transformed. In the former, revolution and Surrealism are synonymous; in the latter, Surrealism has become revolution's handmaiden, enlisted in the service of a cause greater than herself. Breton's revised understanding of Surrealism as a social movement allowed for the possibility of a much broader collaboration with other like-minded members of the avant-garde⁴ in the West and with the Soviet Union. After 1930, Surrealism's push for aesthetic innovation coupled with its social agenda extended the scope of its influence well beyond the boundaries of its Parisian center; its revolutionary aspirations could be exported on the wings of an

Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Étienne-Alain Hubert and José Pierre. Vol 1 Paris: Gallimard, 1988: 1593.

⁴ Since an exhaustive analysis of the theory of the avant-garde and its relationship to Surrealism is not possible given the limits of this dissertation, I am choosing to use the word to refer to those groups who applied the term to their collective. For Teige, the label was crucial as it transcended borders and was progressive aesthetically and politically. For Breton, coming from a nation as large as France and a tradition equally glorious to be labeled as a member of an amorphous avant-garde was less compelling; for Breton, Surrealism said it all, a term that distinguished his group from all the others on the Left who attempted to revolutionize representation.

internationalist message promoting the proletariat and the struggle against fascism. It is this specific historical and intellectual context for Surrealism that serves as the basis for this study.

Although it is tempting to view international Surrealism in the context of the relationship of center to periphery, or great nation to small nation, a paradigm that depends on subordination does not always prove useful for Surrealism as it was practiced abroad. With Breton functioning as the Pope of critical response in Surrealism's Holy See of Paris⁵, one can miss the enormous freedom gained by practicing beyond the immediate scrutiny of the center (in particular when language was a barrier as was the case with the Czechs). Moreover, by limiting the discussion to a group's relationship to Paris, one overlooks the specific cultural conditions at home that engendered a unique take on the Surrealist identity. When it comes to the group of artists and writers who announced the foundation of the Czech Surrealist group in 1934, too strong an emphasis on Paris in an analysis of its contribution would be misleading. Perhaps the most important aspect that determined the movement's development was not the four year period the group functioned as acknowledged Surrealists, but the ten year gap between Breton's *First Surrealist Manifesto* and poet Vítězslav Nezval's public

⁵ Many of Breton's detractors (some of whom were former Surrealists themselves) used this metaphor to criticize Breton's firm control over the leadership of the French Surrealist group. The irony here is that Breton despised the Catholic church as institution almost as much, if not more, than bourgeois capitalism. For Breton many of society's gravest ills could be traced directly to the tyranny of Rome.

declaration of Surrealism in Czechoslovakia. During the course of this ten-year period, the Czechs had been busy at work on their own cultural and aesthetic experiment under the rubric of Devětsil (literally meaning “nine powers” but also the Czech for the native herb butterbur), an eclectic group of artists, writers, playwrights, composers, actors and architects that had been founded four years prior to French Surrealism. Few groups of the Western intellectual avant-garde could compete with the extent and breadth of Devětsil’s activities; sections were devoted to the visual arts, architecture, literature, criticism, music and theatre. However, because some genres were interdisciplinary in nature,⁶ Devětsil often emphasized collaborative efforts over the individual.

The group’s aesthetic aims focused on the dialectical relationship of the literary program of their own creation “poetismus” (poetism) and Soviet constructivism that informed their programs of visual and architectural design. Although Devětsil like many groups of the interwar avant-garde claimed to have successfully liquidated art as an institution, the tradition they claimed to overcome was quite different from the cultural continuity which defined France or Imperial Russia. Neither Russia (which gave rise to Soviet constructivism) nor France

⁶ Of all the sections of Devětsil, its theater wing ,the *Osvobozené divadlo* (The Theatre Unchained) led by the comic team of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich was the most influential and had the most wide-spread and lasting popular appeal. Of all Devětsil’s endeavors this was the most highly collaborative in nature, combining the talents of writers, actors, composers, artists and designers into a light-hearted yet brazenly satiric expression of its love affair with the modern age.

(whose “new age” served as the basis for Czech modernity)⁷ had suffered the loss of language, political power and cultural identity as the Czechs had under the Habsburgs. In the French avant-garde, everyone knew whose art had to be liquidated, who had sculpted the beautiful heads that had to roll. In the Soviet Union where real heads were about to fall, the question was how to create an aesthetic that could express the proletarian revolution and the vitality of modern life in a social order. In terms of representation, for the French and Soviet avant-garde national identity, language and traditions were not in question; however, in the newly-established Czechoslovak Republic, there was the need to establish a legacy that could circumvent the Empire’s official German tradition as a new basis for representation.

With the greater freedom of transport that marked the turn of the century and, later, the inter-war period, Czechs could travel abroad to the great cultural empires East and West to create their own modernity for this eclectic mix. By incorporating the “great” into their own “small” national legacy, the Czechs could transcend borders as equals to France and the Soviet Union to operate on the world stage. The Czechs’ genius for using translation as a means to rise above their lowly status is evident in the case of their treatment of poet Guillaume Apollinaire. Although Apollinaire was of Polish origin and had adopted France as

⁷ The influence of the new literary traditions associated with French modernism on the Czech avant-garde will be discussed at length in Chapter Two. I also touch on Apollinaire later in this study.

his homeland, because of Karel Čapek's translation of his poem "Zone," Apollinaire has been enshrined as the father-figure of Czech modernity.⁸ By emphasizing Apollinaire's connection to Prague and adapting his approach to poetic language to create a new vernacular, Čapek single-handedly dispensed with the self-conscious diction of the previous generation of Czech symbolists. Using the process of translation, Čapek constructed a language and a father figure worthy of the new democratic age out of completely foreign elements. Now "Pásмо" (the translation) is regarded as the basis of modernity and considered as an original of its own. Čapek's tinkering with "Zone," however does not betray Apollinaire; because of the importance of the translation, he gains a greater stature in Prague than history provided for him in his beloved Paris. In the city of light, he remained a foreigner to tradition, influential, but an outsider nonetheless. In Prague, Apollinaire had found his rightful place on the top of Olympus, thanks to a Czech.⁹

Although one might like to consider the Czech contribution to the avant-garde as less important because of their dependence on outside sources and a public that was limited due to language constraints, not having to live up to a

⁸ Čapek is much better known abroad for being one of the most influential Czech writers of his generation. However, he began his career as poet and translator. His anthology *Francoúzská poesie nové doby* (French Poetry of the New Era) that introduced the great poets of turn-of-the-century Paris to Czech readers is still considered the modern benchmark for literary translation.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of Čapek's translation of "Zone" and its influence in Czech modernity see my article "Karel Čapek's 'Pásmo' and the Construction of Literary Identity through Translation" which will appear in an up-coming issue of *The Slavic and East European Journal*.

great tradition allowed them the freedom to experiment by means of diversity. Since history's gaze is enamored of the grand scale, one often misses the tiny ripples that eventually set off the Big Bang. Being relegated to the margin in this case was not a handicap; the position gave Devětsil the advantage of being able to slip invisibly across borders, cloaked in the monolithic shadows of Paris and Moscow. Once they had purloined the necessary elements from their influential neighbors, they could do what they wanted with their booty without anyone suspecting (or caring). Their brilliant gift for adaptation and synthesis is what made their contribution to the avant-garde so notable despite their diminutive stature, disrupted tradition and the linguistic limitations.

In the case of the Surrealist movement, the Czechs' strategy of building culture by assimilating and adapting foreign elements was successful in bridging contradictions the French Surrealists could not. André Breton could never overcome the cultural and political divide separating socialist realism and Surrealism because he always insisted on Surrealism's right to complete autonomy in representation; however, Czech Surrealist critic Karel Teige could see what the two approaches had in common; where they could connect. In the fortuitous union of the sewing machine and the umbrella on the dissecting table the Comte de Lautréamont's¹⁰ startling image that Breton emblazoned on the

¹⁰ Lautréamont was the pen name of writer Isidore Ducasse (1846-1870). Ducasse was born in Montevideo but of French parentage.

Surrealist banner, the Czechs proved better than Papa André at marrying the distant realities of culture. After all, French and the Soviet culture were not rivals on the neutral soil of Czechoslovakia. Because of their geographical position between East and West, the Czechs could mediate the contradictions inherent in both societies. Thus, the fortunes of the international movement reached its apex on location in Prague during the Surrealist conference organized by the Czech Surrealist group. Here, Breton delivered critical speeches on Surrealism's philosophical positions toward the object (dream) and politics (reality) in halls filled to capacity with admirers from a broad spectrum of the non-Surrealist public. In Prague, Breton could lecture to members of Levá fronta (The Left Front) which had strong ties to the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), even when his relationship with the French Communist Party (PCF) had been acrimonious at best.

Although the notion of the collective defined the avant-garde experiment during the inter-war period as a cure for *l'art pour l'artisme* that emphasized individual genius and mastery, certain members asserted their authority over the direction of the group. In the case of French Surrealism, the cliché of Pope Breton was not far from the mark despite his rejection of Rome. Surrealism's cultural genealogy was a hierarchy whose line ended squarely at Breton's feet. His allegiances, banishments, excommunications and pronouncements shaped the

ultimate direction Surrealism took as well as the face of the collective. Similarly, in the Soviet Union, Stalin had become the final arbiter of meaning expressed by the phrase characterizing the writer as the “engineer of human souls.” However, in this case, opponents were not just exiled (like Trotsky), they all too often paid the highest price for daring to challenge Stalin’s authority (like Trotsky).

In the Devětsil collective that was more flexible in its make-up and more tolerant of difference, hierarchy still played an important role; there were those members whose critical opinions and activities influenced the group more than others. Here meaning was controlled by the individuals who represented Devětsil’s two distinct currents. First there was Karel Teige, the group’s theoretician and founder, whose criticism in the field of architecture and social evolution represented constructivism the collective program adopted from abroad. Then there was Vítězslav Nezval, the genius of Czech poetism¹¹ who joined the group in 1922. Nezval’s poetism attempted to expand the boundaries of lyric expression by exploring the depths of an individual’s creative imagination. The vital counterpoint of Teige’s criticism and Nezval’s poetry stimulated development instead of serving as a road-block to progress. The movement’s lack

¹¹ In the catalogue to a 1993 Surrealist exhibition at the Památník národního písemnictví (The National Literary Archive), Nezval’s *Podivuhodný kouzelník* (The Wonderful Magician) was characterized as “nejslavnější poetiskou básně.” (the most famous poetist poem) *Magnetická pole/Les Champs magnétiques: André Breton a skupina surrealista v Československu (1934-1938)* (Magnetic Fields: André Breton and the Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia). (Prague: Památník národního písemnictví: Institut Français de Prague, 1993), 15.

of a clear figurehead gave Nezval and Teige the freedom to pursue their interests with a fairly free hand. Within a relatively short period, they produced numerous collections of poetry, prose and theatre, volumes of criticism and a flowering of journals on topics ranging from modern art and architecture to social history enjoyed broad popular support considering its avant-garde status. When similar groups disbanded over personal or ideological disputes, Devětsil continued on its inexorable course toward Surrealism.

Teige and Nezval's relationship during the period of their collaboration that lasted from 1922 to 1938, represents the struggles of the collective interwar avant-garde in microcosm. Yet, the very qualities that made the group so successful in its endeavors: the tension between the Teige's brilliant critical intellect and Nezval's love for irrational and lyric doomed the collective from the start. As external conditions became more urgent in the mid-thirties, the contradictions between the two could no longer be rectified even by a mediator as adept as Teige. Yet, the fact that the core group¹² stayed together for as long as it despite all odds did testifies to their vision. Nezval and Teige's commitment to

¹² Devětsil/Surrealism's core group is represented by: Karel Teige (critic), Vítězslav Nezval (poet), Jindřich Štyrský (painter/graphic artist/photographer) and Toyen (pseudonym for Marie Čermínová – painter/graphic artist). The group was not immune to the disputes and defections that plagued other avant-garde groups. At the end of the twenties, Teige and Štyrský had a major falling out over the question of the group's political engagement that had to be patched up later by Nezval. In terms of aesthetic, the core group's interests were so diverse they could operate with relative autonomy, circumventing potential conflicts over the creative process.

their collective experiment represents an enormous success no matter what its outcome.

Both were born in 1900, children of the new era; however, age is where the similarity ends. Karel Teige¹³ was raised in Prague, the son of Josef Teige, the city's archivist. He later went on to gymnasium where he met many of the people who would become members of Devětsil, notably Adolf Hoffmeister¹⁴ the caricaturist and novelist Vladislav Vančura. To say Teige was precocious in his ability for criticism would be something of an understatement. At sixteen, he launched his literary career by helping to found the first of many journals devoted to modern art. He also organized his first exhibition. By eighteen he had been named the art editor for the journal *Ruch* (Hurly Burly) even before graduating from high school. Once Teige entered Charles University, his critical career blossomed. He produced a prolific body of work on the topic of the new generation of Czechoslovak artists that made him one of the most influential commentators on the international contemporary art scene despite his youth. In the same year (1919), Teige also published an article on Čapek's translation of

¹³ I am indebted to Rumjana Dačeva's chronological overview of Teige's life in *Karel Teige/1900-1951: L'Enfant Terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-Garde*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 348-382.

¹⁴ Hoffmeister's wonderful caricature has a seated Teige with the line "Je sais tout" (I know everything) above him. The fact that the tag is in French emphasizes Teige's cosmopolitan erudition.

“Zone” which he characterized as the “uproarious globetrotting rhapsody”¹⁵ (hlučná globetrotterská rhapsodie) of the new age. Teige’s commentary on Apollinaire reflected his own “globetrotting” cosmopolitan nature; in the review he seamlessly switched from Czech and French sources as if it were understood that readers would be equally fluent in both languages as he obviously was.

Teige’s agile mind, his inability to remain intellectually settled in one place, was a motivating force behind his desire for unity of like-minded intellectuals in their efforts. Because of the restlessness nature¹⁶ that informed every aspect of his multi-faceted career, Teige constantly needed to expand his horizons by making personal and professional connections through his journeys abroad. His first trip to Paris in 1922, where he met the world-famous architect Le Corbusier, was significant because it marked beginning of his love affair with modern architecture and constructivism. After being made editor of *Stavba* (*Construction*) in 1923, his critical works on architecture introduced the Czech public to Bauhaus in the journal that served as “single-minded proponent of

¹⁵ Karel Teige. “Guillaume Apollinaire: Několik poznámek k českém překladu ‘Pásma’” (Guillaume Apollinaire: Some Notes To the Czech Translation of ‘Pásma’). Parts 1 and 2. *Kmen* 3 (Tribe or Trunk) (June 1919), 51. This was the first of three major articles Teige produced on Apollinaire’s legacy between 1919 and 1935. The last article remained unpublished. Teige sums up his admiration for Čapek’s accomplishment by writing “Karel Čapek přeložil ‘Pásma’ přímo vzorně. Toť téměř, co se dá říci.” (Karel Čapek translated ‘Pásma’ directly as the model. That’s about all that needs to be said.) Ibid. Teige’s unadulterated praise belies his bitter polemic with Čapek that became more divisive as the political situation developed.

¹⁶ When describing his first meeting with Teige, Nezval writes that he found Teige’s restlessness disturbing – a presentment. See note 106 in Chapter Two.

modern architecture and propagator of international purism and constructivism.”¹⁷

Ultimately, Teige’s passion for architecture, his belief in its power to revolutionize social relationships through the reorganization of space (as opposed to material) brought him to the Soviet Union on a cultural exchange. As a result of his visit to the one place where he believed the dead weight of bourgeois art no longer oppressed the masses, Teige firmed up his commitment to the struggle for social change by means of transforming representation. In addition to being one of the most observant critics of modernity and one of the most active participants in the propagation of “new” art, Teige served as cultural ambassador for the avant-garde by introducing Czech audiences to cultural innovations taking place across Europe and elsewhere. The content and form of the numerous journals he edited represented a UN in print; articles in Czech would be juxtaposed to poems or criticism in Russian, German or French depending on the topic and often titles were printed in multi-lingual translation.¹⁸

Teige’s restless search for international unity was an integral part of the evolution of his career; however, another equally influential aspect of Teige’s intellect functioned as its dialectical foil: i.e., his critical eye. Because he refused

¹⁷ Karel Teige/1900-1951. 355.

¹⁸ Looking at *ReD* (Revue Devětsilu) 1 (1927-1928), no. 7 (April 1928), the caption for the collage illustrating the cover is written in three languages: first Czech then French and finally, German. The feature story on the Devětsil’s *Osvobozené divadlo* is also in all three languages. The German here is not the German of what would turn into the Reich, but a representation of the group’s multi-cultural and cosmopolitan aspirations.

to accept any aspect of modern culture without reflection, Teige mistrusted anything that smacked of monumentality. Monuments, he argued, do not allow viewers interpret meaning on their own terms. The fact that early on Teige had rejected the values of his comfortable bourgeois milieu (which had accepted centuries of imperial domination) in favor of Marx (a German who overturned the capitalism's hierarchical order) reflects his desire for opposition to promote movement. The contradiction of Teige's ambivalent relationship with the Czech Communist Party signified his refusal to allow any political authority to impose meaning at the individual's expense.¹⁹ Because Teige refused to have his activities restricted for the sake of ideology, he could easily associate with many diverse groups from the Left who shared either his beliefs. Thus he was able to satisfy his collective urge without losing hold of his autonomy. Teige's revolutionary consciousness resided not in the Party as a social manifestation but in the dialectic it embraced which had launched the West on an inexorable course toward the more egalitarian society represented by advent of the Soviet Union. Parties had their function in this process, but their actions were always subject to the supreme law of the dialectic and to the scrutiny of their informed critics.

¹⁹ I have yet to discover if Teige ever joined the KSČ. There are conflicting accounts but no real evidence. Since Teige's papers were destroyed upon his death, the record is scanty. When I asked Professor Rostislav Švácha, the leading scholar on Teige's critical contribution to modern architecture, he admitted that he did not know definitively, but that Teige probably had never been a card-carrying member.

Teige's always counterbalanced his desire for unity with its dialectical contradiction, discontinuity. As a result, his vision for the collective never signified the conformity symbolized by Soviet society in the thirties under Stalin. Despite the fact Teige believed in the need to collectivize, individual freedom always lay at the heart of his vision for mass society. When Moscow showed an increasing tendency to eschew constructivism's spare approach to architectural space in favor of neo-classicism's monumental scale, Teige openly criticized the trend. Teige's utter rejection of architectural practices he believed betrayed the human element of the proletarian revolution marked a shift in his affinities from Moscow to Paris, from his preoccupation with construction to Surrealism. Although Teige's critical position threatened to cut him off from the culture he loved, free speech could not be compromised even as war became imminent. Without an individual's freedom to express views without fear of reprisal, the dialectical process would come crashing to a halt.

Because Teige saw individual freedom as the driving force of the dialectic, social restructuring such as collectivization could not be imposed on the masses before they were psychologically and intellectually ready to accept it. For this reason, as well, Teige could not accept the push to silence all opposition to Stalin's party leadership. When the first Moscow trial ended in 1936 in the summary execution of all of the defendants, Teige publicly criticized the outcome

at the expense of his relationship with the KSČ and the united front he had fought so desperately to maintain. However, Teige did not question the guilt of the accused or take exception to the trial's proceedings (despite the fact it could easily be proven that evidence had been manufactured); rather, he could not reconcile capital punishment with his absolute faith in the dialectic that represented the eternal progression toward a higher stage of human consciousness and social development. When asked to choose between Moscow and the hard won alliance on the Left he was trying to preserve at home, Teige had no other option; he had to side with the greater force: the dialectic, or life itself.

As freedom of expression in the Soviet Union was summarily curtailed, Teige's habit of conflating independent terms made his thoughts about Stalin evolve. Since Hitler and Stalin leaders used the same repressive rhetoric to justify the complete censorship of free speech, he concluded something impossible: they were one and the same.²⁰ This conclusion alienated him forever from some of his colleagues in the intellectual avant-garde who believed the greatest threat to the Soviet Union's existence was not Hitler but internal dissent. Although for the sake of unity Teige had previously been able to mediate the differences that Breton and Moscow could not, this time even his brilliant reasoning could not overcome depths of this contradiction.

²⁰ Teige's view of Stalin corresponded closely to that of writer André Gide. His scathing portrait of Stalin in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* (Return from the USSR) sent a shock wave through the intellectual avant-garde East and West. The "Gide Affair" is discussed at length in Chapter One.

Teige's slow evolution from the Soviet constructivist to French Surrealist, from his interest in the architectural reorganization of society to Surrealism's internal revolution in human consciousness proved the rift was irreconcilable. Although ideological differences with former colleagues from outside the Surrealist group should not have unduly affected their collective, these differences presented troubles from within. Teige's dialectical opposite came in the form of Vítězslav Nezval, the lyric poet whose physical presence was almost larger-than-life. He was the creative force behind Devětsil's conversion to Surrealism, a conversion that resulted from his fascination with André Breton. Prior to 1936, the intellectual and philosophical divide between the two served as the driving force that had kept the group together despite their differences. However, as Teige's position brought him closer to Breton ideologically, and as Nezval fell in love with Moscow after his 1934 visit, Nezval and Teige were set on a collision course.

Unlike Teige, Vítězslav Nezval was an outsider to Prague having been born and raised in the Moravian countryside far from the capital. Nezval's parents were from the provincial middle-class rather than the urban intellectual elite to which Teige's family belonged. However, the fact that Nezval's father was a school master made the two somewhat analogous since both worked in education rather than in the production of goods. In this case, the difference was one of

degree in addition to location; Teige's father was an accomplished scholar while Nezval's was a teacher who introduced Nezval to the joys of great literature (we are even treated to photos of the family bookcase in the autobiography).

According to Nezval when mother informed of his father of her pregnancy, his father "secretly hoped that he would be a son who would be a poet whom he would name in honor of the singer of Evensongs.²¹ Whether Nezval's version of the story is true is not important. What matters most is the myth that he had to validate through art. Yet, Nezval did not relate his poetic genesis to the reader in the traditional chronological progression from youth to adulthood. Instead, he presented them with what he labeled a gloss,²² scraps of memory, bits and pieces of a life loosely patched together and illuminated at various moments within the architecture of his memoir. However Nezval was well aware that there is method in his discontinuity. The fragments, like trickling streams pooling together in the vessel of the author's imagination, created untold depths.²³ For Nezval, condensation, "the ability to express in a small area a great expanse," (schopnost vyjádřit na malé ploše velké prostory)²⁴ served as his definition of art. Thus, in each poem, Nezval returns to his point of origin (the village limits of Šamikovice)

²¹ ...přál si tajně (neřekl to ani matce), aby mu dala syna, který byl básníkem a kterého by z úcty k pěvci Večerních písni nazval jeho křestním jménem. Vítězslav Nezval. *Z mého života* (Prague: Československý spisovatel), 13.

²² Ibid., 16.

²³ Nezval uses the metaphor of the river collecting streams from everywhere that spill into the banks of the riverbed deepening the waters. Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

like the prodigal son who uses the souvenirs he has picked up on his travels to relate to the tribe what has taken place in the great world.

The image of the wanderer who served as protagonist in much of Nezval's work represents a contradiction. Although Teige could wander the world with his multi-lingual globetrotting intellect, Nezval for all his love of Prague was not a cosmopolitan at heart; nor did he aspire to be (in his letters to Breton he constantly complained about the limits of his French and in his autobiography he makes it clear he was not proficient in German either). Although his poetic persona longed to voyage to the distant ends of the earth like the Wandering Jew of Apollinaire's famous short story *Le Passant de Prague* (The Prague Passerby) whose title borrowed for the last volume of his Surrealist trilogy, the road invariably led him back to his childhood and the village where, unlike the Jew, his friends and family were anxiously awaiting his return. Thus, Nezval knew he eventually had to bid farewell to his beloved Prague whose mystery and beauty he celebrated throughout the course of his literary career. At heart, he was not a creature of the great metropolis; he was a boy from the country. From the beginning it was inevitable that Nezval would reject Lady Prague's sophisticated ways. He would turn his back on Breton whom he idolized, on Teige and on the Surrealist movement he had single-handedly founded. By 1938, something was already calling him back to the people: the bells in the Kremlin tolling the chords

of the song that had once given him solace and hope that, from out of chaos, the world would be saved. The International's lyric was the only international that Nezval ever understood. It was the counterpart to the tune rising from the old church in his native village. Within the secure confines of Šamikovice, living among the simple ordinary folk, there was no place like home.

When Nezval publicly announced he had disbanded the group in early 1938, not even four years after its inception, the avant-garde experiment from Devětsil to Surrealism had come full circle. Teige, the once reluctant Surrealist and arbiter of Soviet culture, was leading the struggle to keep Surrealism alive against Moscow. Nezval, the driving force behind the move to Surrealism who had joined Devětsil two years into its existence, had traded his pin-up of Breton for Stalin. Although the break up was attributed to political differences, the real cause lay deeper. Nezval's innate longing for the sanctuary and permanence of myth clashed with Teige's rational faith in the vitality of life lived among mortals in the present moment. Nezval wished to strum the lyre on Mount Olympus surrounded by Gods; Teige had no greater aspiration than to be human. Once flowing in parallel, yet mutually beneficial directions, Teige and Nezval's currents were inexorably thrown together because of external pressures on the group to take sides on the international front. This division was exacerbated by Teige's increasing authority within the group as the critical arbiter of Czech

Surrealism. Teige's power over their critical activities alienated Nezval who wanted to be free to create poetry in whatever form he pleased, even if it meant the fixed rhymed meter that Teige despised. When it came to what he considered to be Nezval's fondness for academic versifying, Teige, the heroic defender of free expression had no tolerance whatsoever. In the wake of their polemic, no one emerged victorious. The shadow of war out of which their union had arisen returned to have its final bloody say.

Despite its focus on the collective nature of production in the new age, the history of Czech Surrealism has less to do with the group effort than the struggle between these two diametrically opposed visions of reality. Try as he might to mediate external contradictions, Teige could not overcome his own prejudice and intellectual arrogance for the collective's sake. While Teige was trying to get a foothold in the thick of things, Nezval was elsewhere, on the road home. Once again in the bosom of his Moravian homeland, he would shed his Surrealist raiment to be born again in the guise of a Czech Gabriel to his new god, Stalin. And the world would be saved from all harm while the angels, freed from the oppressive bondage of critics, would lift up their voices to sing. Thus, the story of Czech Surrealism is not really about manifestos and proclamations, pronouncements and claims about representation; it is the tragedy of two brilliant

men, the critic and the poet, whose genius determined the group's meteoric rise and inevitable fall.

Yet, it would be a mistake to view their efforts as culminating in failure. During their brief tenure as Surrealists, Teige, Nezval and the other Czech Surrealists did more to promote the cause of international Surrealism despite their position off center. Because of their unique ability to translate Breton's Surrealist message, they were able to produce a body of work whose originality and daring rivaled that of Breton's and Dali's. Teige and Nezval's struggle to provide a broader forum for the Surrealist message through mediation achieved what the Breton's hierarchy could not: the marriage of Breton's umbrella to Moscow's sewing machine. Prague represented the best hope for international Surrealism to achieve its collective social aspiration by transcending Parisian ethnocentrism. Under the influence of his Czech comrades whom he greatly respected, Breton came closer to reconciling his philosophical differences with the communists who had stood in the way of a united front. However, the marriage brokered by Prague did not last; the divorce took place on a Parisian street just a few short months after Breton's return home. The Czechs had a hand in that too. If Nezval had not pointed out Ilya Ehrenburg to Breton who responded by smacking his arch nemesis, perhaps the conciliatory atmosphere and the Surrealist experiment could have lasted a little while longer. Fate, however, was against it.

On some level, the struggles of Nezval and Teige off-center represent the misfortunes of the inter-war European avant-garde as a whole. While trying to expand the limits of human consciousness, the avant-garde was hopelessly enslaved by the taskmaster of negation that defined their critical response to modernity. By functioning as the foil to tradition, their message was restricted to the framework of the bourgeois culture they aspired to liquidate and, thus, could not transcend the original thesis. Despite some groups' egalitarian pretensions about bringing the masses into their fold, their marginalized status²⁵ vis-à-vis official culture precluded the possibility of a popular following for their movements. Popularization, in the West before socialism, would lead to bourgeois kitsch. However, in the Soviet Union where the dictatorship of the proletariat had been established, it led to socialist realism where the joyous liberty of the avant-garde was mowed down by the collective's *traktorista*.

Yet, popularity was not the point despite all claims to the contrary. Broad acceptance by the public would mean the loss of their privileged position as visionaries, the demise of their avant-garde identity. In addition, as Renato Poggiali points out, the dialectical nature of the avant-garde necessitates a particular group's being overcome by its own progress.²⁶ In the case of the

²⁵ Renato Poggiali discusses the state of alienation of the avant-garde at length in his critical analysis *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

²⁶ *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 220.

relationship of Teige and Nezval, Teige's critical mind made it difficult for him to embrace any doctrine that would force him to submit to the will of the crowd. Nezval, on the other hand, could not get beyond his need to belong, the need to have admiring readers to throw garlands at his feet for his elegies to great men. Their irreconcilable interpretations of the Surrealist identity make the story of Czech Surrealism so compelling. Although they did not succeed in their claims to transform human consciousness and society, their Surrealist legacy is still very much alive in its dialectically altered state, as Kratochvil's homage proves.

One note regarding my choice of structure: I have organized my chapters around the works in Nezval's Surrealist trilogy: *Neviditelná Moskva* (Invisible Moscow), *Ulice Gít-le-coeur* (the name of a Parisian street, but literally "The Street Called the Resting Place of the Heart") and *Pražský chodec* (The Prague Passerby). These three narratives, companion volumes to Breton's trilogy: *Nadja*, *Les Vases communicants* (Communicating Vessels) and *L'Amour fou* (Mad Love) function as the lyric embodiment of Nezval's love affair with Paris, Moscow and Surrealism. Although the romance ended with Nezval betraying Breton for Stalin, the novels provide a useful chronological and geographic framework for my discussion of Czech Surrealism's legacy vis-à-vis the cities that formed the anchor each end of a metaphorical bridge that for one fleeting moment reconciled the divisions between East and West.

All translations included in this work are mine except where otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER ONE – Invisible Moscow

I visited several dwellings in this highly prosperous kolkhoz. In each, the same ugly furniture, the same portrait of Stalin, and absolutely nothing else, not the smallest object, not the smallest personal souvenir. Every dwelling is interchangeable with every other; so much so that the kolkhozians (who seem to be as interchangeable themselves) might all take up their abode in each other's houses without even noticing it. But can this depersonalization, toward which everything in the U.S.S.R. seems to tend, be considered progress? For my part, I cannot believe it.

André Gide

The people do not have a fixed relationship to the particular building styles of the past: the people have a certain notion of stylistically undifferentiated monumentality, the splendor and grandiosity they enjoy from these erected monuments in whose shadow they have lived for an entire generation. Their consciousness and subconscious are, to a certain extent, marked by the crushing pressure of these architectural Bastilles built by feudal and capitalist slave traders. This is the cursed legacy that must be overcome; here, in architecture's superstitious and traditional ideals, in the stylistic and monumental hypnosis, are

the Bastilles and Vendôme obelisks that must be demolished by means of a revolutionary assault: the critical revision of cultural legacy makes one comprehend the progressive and revolutionary force and value that have been overlooked, to turn them like a weapon against the anachronisms of past slavery, against the impoverished and dark phantoms of the cursed legacy of the past, against “the anachronisms of capitalism in the consciousness of the people”...academic architecture is the obstacle to unrestrained development and a free life and this realization is transformed into action, in the creation of new, international socialist architecture.

Karel Teige

On August 13, 1934, I crossed the Soviet border

Vítězslav Nezval

A Slap in the Face of Socialist Realism

On June 14, 1935, an encounter took place in the early evening on a rain slicked street in Paris not far from the café Closerie des lilas on Boulevard Montparnasse; the painter Toyen, a member of the Czech Surrealist group, noticed Soviet writer and critic Ilya Ehrenburg exiting the same café and mentioned her observation to her companion and the group’s founder Vítězslav

Nezval. The two had recognized Ehrenburg because his previous visits to Prague where he had been in contact with the avant-garde since 1923¹. Had they been alone that day, the event would probably have passed unnoticed without incident. However due to fortuitous circumstances, they were in the company of André Breton, Surrealism's illustrious founder. As soon as Breton heard Ehrenburg's name being mentioned he asked, "Where is he?" and subsequently waylaid the writer in the middle of the street. Like a scene out of a chivalrous adventure, Breton (who considered himself an injured party) announced to the unsuspecting Ehrenburg, "Sir, I'm going with you to settle the score," (Jdu s vámi zúčtovat pane) then he slapped him in the face².

The score Breton was referring to was Ehrenburg's column in the *Литературная газета* (Literary Gazette) from June 17, 1933, on the state of contemporary literature in France. Under the rubric "The Surrealists," (Сюрреалисты), he delivered a scathing attack on the French group. Apart from accusing them of being indolent bibliophiles, he claimed they were merely dallying with Marx in public to mask their penchant for Sadism and sexual perversion. According to Ehrenburg, the real Surrealist program consisted of: "masturbation, pederasty, fetishism, exhibitionism and, finally, bestiality."

¹ Ehrenburg was introduced to the members of Devětsil through Roman Jakobson. In *Memoirs: 1921-1941*, Ehrenburg goes into a lengthy and moving commentary on Nezval and his poetic gifts, one that belies the events that launched the slap in the face in 1935.

² Vítězslav Nezval. *Ulice Gît-le-cœur* (Prague : František Borový, 1935), 14.

(онанизм, педерастию, фетишизм, экзигбиционизм, даже скотоложество)³

To characterize the true face of the Surrealists, Ehrenburg compared them to Charlie Chaplin who, playing a gourmand in the film “A Woman of Paris,” coveted a moldering pheasant because it was deemed a delicacy. For Ehrenburg, it was plain that something was rotten in French Surrealism.

When a translation of Ehrenburg’s article appeared soon after in the Communist organ, *Tvorba* (Creation),⁴ the Soviet writer was denounced by key members of the avant-garde who had been collaborating with Ehrenburg since the twenties. Their angry rejoinders to Ehrenburg’s attack were published in an issue of *Volné směry* (Free Directions),⁵ a review of the arts that was politically independent (as was definitely not the case with *Tvorba*). The rally of support for Surrealism in the Czech avant-garde took place even before the foundation of the Prague Surrealist group; however, it is important to note that Nezval had already taken a major step to this end by writing to Breton on May 10th 1933, expressing the group’s intention to pursue a “concrete collaboration” (*konkretní spolupráci*)⁶ with Paris. At the time, Breton thought the letter significant enough to publish it

³ Ilya Ehrenburg. “Сюрреалисты.” (The Surrealists) Литературная газета (The Literary Gazette) 5, no. 28 (17 June 1933), 2.

⁴ Ilya Ehrenburg. “Surrealisté.” *Tvorba* 8, no. 41, 645-646. The translation was by Ilya Bart.

⁵ *Volné směry* 30(1933-1934).

⁶ “Surrealismus v ČSR” (“Surrealism in Czechoslovakia”) published in *Vítězslav Nezval Dilo(Works)*. Vol 25. *Manifesty, eseje a kritické projevy z let 1931-1941* (Manifestos, Essays and Speeches from the Years 1931-1941), 70.

in *Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (Surrealism in Service to the Revolution).⁷

In his letter to Ehrenburg whom he addressed as “Dear Friend,” (milý příteli)⁸ Karel Teige tried to set the record straight regarding the Surrealists and their movement. He disputed Ehrenburg’s parody by arguing that Surrealism was “the most important focal point of vital poetic thought and revolutionary art in dark Western Europe.” (nejdůležitějším ohniskem živé básnické myšlenky a revolučního umění v temné západní Evropě)⁹ Despite Ehrenburg’s claims to the contrary, the Surrealists had not committed a cardinal sin from the point of view of dialectical materialism. They had not transcended into the realm of metaphysics. Instead, Teige countered that Surrealism had nothing to do with spiritual transcendence since “the surreal is the poetic moment of the real, one of the aspects of reality, its poetic aspect.” (nadreálno je básnický moment reálna, jeden z aspektů reality, a to její aspekt poetický)¹⁰ Moreover, he defended the Surrealists’ right to express erotic themes in art, since human sexuality was an integral part of the reality governed by dialectical forces that been violently

⁷ Vítězslav Nezval. “Correspondence à André Breton.” (Letter to André Breton) *Surrealisme au service de la revolution* No. 5 (1933), 41. Having his letter published within the pages of *Surrealism au service*, Nezval joined the ranks of cultural luminaries such as Sigmund Freud whose correspondence with Breton was published in the same issue.

⁸ Karel Teige “Milý příteli Iljo Ehrenburgu.” (Dear friend Ilya Ehrenburg). *Volné směry* 30, 139. Teige’s choice of address is an appeal to the warm relations they had established as a result of Ehrenburg’s visits to Prague in the twenties. See note 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. 144.

suppressed by the bourgeois morality of family and Church. If the Surrealists were guilty of being bibliophiles it was only because they were being held hostage by a capitalist book market that reduced their revolutionary eroticism to mere brown paper wrapper pornography¹¹.

Nezval, in his response, also made a link between Ehrenburg's method of attack with those of the enemy, the capitalist status quo:

Wouldn't it be a true shame if in the name of "cooking" the unique light of works like *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* were to be forgotten. Wouldn't it be stupid to desire practical training and only practical training. Wouldn't it be against the spirit of dialectical materialism to content ourselves with works like "The General Line" and "The Road to Life"¹² in the future, not wanting from film the same thing we want from poetry: new structure, new expression; is it possible to overlook the fact that in the end the aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat should be the complete

¹¹ Public suppression of erotic representation was a sore point with the members of Devětsil during this period, in particular with Jindřich Štyrský who had to self-publish and distribute works such as the *Erotická revue* (Erotic Revue) and *Emilie přichází ke mne ve snu* (Emilie Comes to Me in a Dream) due to the explicit nature of their sexual content.

¹² Nezval is referring to two very influential Soviet films, *Генеральная линия* (The General Line) by Sergei Eisenstein and *Путевка в жизнь* (The Road to Life) by Nikolai Ekk. *Генеральная линия* was the original title of Eisenstein's film. However, Eisenstein gave it an alternate title *Старое и новое* (The Old and the New) suggested by Stalin.

liberation of the individual and not his regimentation. Is it not a pathetic misunderstanding to demand something as problematic as ‘socialist realism’ of poets who have stood upright under the banner of dialectical materialism? Is it not contrary to the spirit of Marxist ideology to enslave the poet. Is it not enough that this enslavement was the very prerogative of the bourgeoisie?¹³

Nezval’s comment regarding the “problematic” nature of socialist realism is interesting since his criticism preceded its rise to prominence during the The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (Первый всесоюзный съезд советских писателей) that was held in Moscow 1934. Nezval participated in the Congress as a delegate and his journey to the Soviet Union served as the basis of *Neviditelná Moskva*, the first book in a trilogy that would be patterned on André Breton’s.¹⁴ In the second chapter from which the work gets its name, the reader is given Nezval’s thoughts and impressions of the “miraculous country” (zázračná

¹³ Nebylo by opravdu škoda, kdyby se zapomíhalo pro “kastroly” na jedinečné světlo, jež mají díla jako je 18. brumaire Ludvíka Bonaparta a Leninův “Materialism a empiriokriticism”, nebylo by stupidní, chtít praxi a jen praxi, nebylo by to proti duchu dialektického materialismu, což se máme spokojit do budoucna s díly jako je “Generální linie” a “Cesta do života” a nechtít od filmu právě tak jako od poesie novou strukturu, nový výraz, což je možno odmyslit si, že konec konců cílem diktatury proletariátu má byti úplné osvobození individual a ne jeho zreglementování, což by nebylo ubohým nedorozuměním žadat od básníků, kteří se bez výhrady postavili pod prapor dialektického materialismu něco tak problematického jako je “socialistický realismus”, což není proti duchu marxistické ideologie zotročovati básníka, což není na tom dosti, že toho zotročování bylo právě výsadou buržoasie? Vítězslav Nezval. “K Ehrenburgovu útoku proti surrealistům (On Ehrenburg’s Attack Against the Surrealists) *Volné směry* 30 (1933-1934), 148.

¹⁴ See p. 25 of the Introduction regarding the two trilogies.

země)¹⁵ where the spirit of friendship acted as a balm for the pervasive loneliness of Western society. Nezval not only expressed his admiration of the captivating beauty of Soviet women and the precociousness of the children; he also spoke rapturously of the masses who were taking an active role in the cultural life of the nation. In the Soviet Union, Nezval attended public concerts and readings that drew audiences by the tens of thousand that would be restricted to a small bourgeois elite in the West. In Moscow, Nezval witnessed the genius of Beethoven, the composer whom he loved above all others, set free from his capitalist prison as if the city were his Fidelio. Once liberated from the elite, Beethoven took his rightful place in the hearts and minds of the proletariat where he belonged:

The orchestra played the Egmont.¹⁶ What could this composition have been to the Viennese nobility who were completely absorbed in their social duties; what was it to fifty thousand Soviet male and female workers who, having left the factory two hours before, with its sounds still ringing in their ears, were enthralled, exulted and moved to tears by the work of someone who dreamt of the joy of millions... never have I listened to music with such great

¹⁵ Vítězslav Nezval. *Neviditelná Moskva*. (Prague: František Borový, 1935), 55.

¹⁶ The Egmont Overture by Beethoven (1810). This work is based on a historical drama of the nobility by Goethe, hardly the material of the avant-garde. Yet this choice is telling given Nezval's preoccupation with the romantic period and music, a medium that his hero, Breton, disliked. For Nezval, Beethoven's art represented the highest musical equivalent of the lyric voice.

admiration it made me burst into tears as the time I heard my dear old Egmont hypnotize the avant-garde millions.¹⁷

The contradiction of the government's promotion of Beethoven and the proletarians' love for a composer from the time of Empire reveals the complex relationship governing representation in the Soviet Union of the 1930's. The tension between modernity and tradition also engendered the less than harmonious timbre of Breton's hand striking Ehrenburg's cheek. Thanks to Nezval's serendipitous intervention, the slap became the theme in the battle being waged for control of aesthetics once the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (Российская ассоциация пролетарских писателей - RaPP) had been disbanded in 1932.¹⁸ RaPP's demise set in motion the process that culminated with socialist realism being enshrined as official doctrine despite the objections of those who distrusted the use of "realism" in the equation. Under the auspices of socialist realism, the writer would no longer be a mere creator of literature;

¹⁷Orcheatr hrál Egmonta. Čím mohla být tato skadba vídeňské šlechtě, zaujaté zcela společenskými úkoly, a čím byla padesáty tisícům sovětských dělníků a dělnic, kteří přede dvěma hodinami opustili závod a ještě s továrnou v uchu přišli se nechat podmaniti, rozjásat a rozplakat skadbu toho, jenž snil o radosti miliónů...nikdy jsem neposlouchal hudbu s větší obavou, že propuknu v pláč, jako když jsem slyšel svého známého Egmonta hypnotizovat avantgardu milionů. Nezval, *Neviditelná moskva*, 88. Nezval had previously described his reactions to hearing the Egmont in "Pozdrav z Moskvy" (Greet from Moscow), his speech broadcast in Czech by Radio Moscow on August 29, 1934. In *Manifesty z let 1931-1941*, 663 and "Moskevský sjezd," (The Moscow Congress) a speech given to the members of Levá fronta on September 26, 1934 Ibid., 651.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of the emergence of socialist realism as the official line of the Soviet Writer's Union and the Communist Party, see Régine Robin's *Le Réalisme socialiste une esthétique impossible (Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic)*.

instead, he would shape the hearts and minds of the masses as an “engineer of human souls.”¹⁹

The Sewing Machine and Umbrella – Socialist Realism and Surrealism

As Ehrenburg had predicted,²⁰ Breton’s emotional outburst had serious consequences with regard to Surrealism’s relationship with Moscow and its supporters in the West. Although he may have gained some brief satisfaction from the gesture, in the long run, his timing could not have been worse, since the confrontation took place a few short days before Le Congrès international des écrivains pour la défense de la culture (International Writer’s Congress for the Defense of Culture) convened. The Congress had been organized by the Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires (The Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists – AÉAR) as a forum to discuss how artists in the West could respond to the growing threat of fascism in Europe. Although

¹⁹For as famous as this maxim is, I have yet to find its proper attribution. In the notes to Breton’s “Position politique de l’art d’aujourd’hui” (The Political Position of the Art of Today) from *Position Politique du surréalisme* (Political Position of Surrealism) published in his Collected Works makes the editors make reference to “le phrase célèbre de Stalin” (Stalin’s famous phrase) Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1583 in relation to an essay by André Malraux. According to the note, the expression dates from 1932, but it offers no details except the fact that the slogan has two versions: “Les écrivains sont les ingénieurs qui savent construire les âmes humaines” (writers are the engineers who know how to construct human souls) and “Les écrivains sont les ingénieurs des âmes” (writers are the engineers of human souls) Ibid. The first reference I have found to it comes from A.A. Zhdanov’s speech to the Congress in 1934. It is after the Congress that the slogan became enshrined as a slogan and ideologically significant.

²⁰ According to Nezval, after having been assaulted, Ehrenburg warned Breton, “It’s not good you’ve done that.” (*Není dobré, že jste to udělali*) Vítězslav Nezval. *Ulice Gît-le-cœur* (The Street Called the Resting Place of the Heart). (Prague : František Borový, 1935), 14.

Breton had been slated to give a speech, he was barred from the proceedings for having done bodily harm to a Soviet delegate, an act complete defiance of the Congress's spirit of brotherly solidarity. The incident terminated Breton's relationship with AÉAR which was closely associated with the French Communist Party many of whose members (some of them former Surrealists like Louis Aragon) shared Ehrenburg's contemptuous opinion of Surrealism. Although Breton was to defend the importance of Surrealism's role in the West which he characterized as still "ultra-imperialist" (ultra-impérialiste)²¹ because of his temper, neither he nor Surrealism ever had a chance.

In the address he was not allowed to deliver to AÉAR's rank and file, Breton stressed the need for France and the Soviet Union to collaborate despite the developmental differences of their political systems. He made a clear distinction between the role of artists in France under capitalism and in the Soviet Union, which was already well on the road to socialism. According to Breton, bourgeois society had forced the revolutionary writer from the West to live as an exile because his art posed a threat to the status-quo.²² In the Soviet Union where the capitalism no longer ruled, artists could serve the needs of the proletariat and a revolution which was still unfolding. Breton's opinions regarding the different conditions facing artists in the West and East echoed Nezval's earlier observation

²¹ André Breton. "Discours au Congrès des écrivains" (Speech to the Writer's Congress). In *Oeuvres*, 2: 451.

²² Ibid., 452.

about the “problematic”²³ nature of socialist realism. Since each believed the artist had to remain free to pursue the “emancipation of the spirit and man,” (émanicipation de l'esprit et de l'homme),²⁴ no civil authority could mandate the terms of that quest. Although art and politics were related, the dividing line separating them had to be preserved at all costs. The autonomy of art vis-à-vis politics advocated by Breton and the Czech Surrealists during the thirties belied Breton’s habit of dialectically conflating terms to create unity out of division. The most memorable example of this tendency was represented in the text no one had a chance to hear because of the Ehrenburg fiasco.

In his speech, Breton argued that the two great currents of the nineteenth century, communism (governing society) and romanticism (governing representation) were not, despite all appearances to the contrary, antithetical. To prove his point, Breton cited Marx’s slogan: “Transform the world” (transformer le monde) and Rimbaud’s: “Change life.” (changer la vie)²⁵ as representing the twin aspects of revolutionary thought. In the twentieth century dialectical forces had made these currents converge. Out of their confluence, Surrealism was born. Breton symbolized the child of Marx and Rimbaud with a simile he borrowed from *Les Chants de Maldoror* (The Cantos of Maldoror) by the Comte de

²³ See note 11.

²⁴ Breton, “Discours,” 458.

²⁵. The entire quote reads: “Transformer le monde”, a dit Marx; “changer la vie”, a dit Rimbaud: ces deux mots d’ordre pour nous n’en font qu’un.” (Marx said: Transform the world;” Rimbaud said, “Change life:” these two watchwords for us are one) Ibid., 459.

Lautréamont who Breton had almost single-handedly pulled from posthumous obscurity.

At the beginning of the sixth canto, the hero Maldoror has his first fateful encounter with the youth Mervyn whose beauty Lautréamont's narrator tries to capture using a string of similes. However, these images are not conventional poetic depictions of the beloved. They are somewhat clinical descriptions taken from less aesthetically pleasing representatives of the animal world (rats, birds of prey, etc). At the end, Lautréamont dispenses with nature altogether to arrive at something even more shocking and, consequently, more memorable; above all Mervyn is beautiful "like the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table!" (comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!)²⁶ Lautréamont's erotically charged image illustrated "the bringing together of two more or less distant realities" (le rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées) a concept Breton had borrowed from poet Pierre Reverdy for his *Manifeste du surréalisme* (The Surrealist Manifesto).²⁷ Lautréamont's metaphor that Breton had stumbled upon evolved into the symbol of the Surrealist experiment, the marriage of Marx's sewing machine and Rimbaud's umbrella (or vice versa).

²⁶ Comte de Lautréamont [Isidore Ducasse]. *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In *Les Chants de Maldoror Isidore Ducasse poesies* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1992), 217.

²⁷ In Breton, *Oeuvres* 1, 324. According to the notes to this page, Reverdy's passage came from an essay called "L'Image" (The Image) that appeared in the journal *Nord-Sud* (North-South). Ibid, 1354.

Unfortunately for Breton who desired to extend the experiment to Moscow and beyond, this union was not one that had been sanctioned in socialist heaven. As socialist realism rose to prominence in the wake of the Moscow Congress, it became clear that its proponents would not allow for co-habitation of any kind, in particular as concerned relationships with artists who blatantly refused to submit to the authority of the Party. Politics in the Soviet Union, as Stalin's iron fist would prove, hung poised above writers' heads like the hammer and sickle that could descend at any moment for no clear reason. In the eyes of the leaders of the Soviet state, politics bowed to no one, not even to the most brilliant poet. Even given Lautréamont's ability to reconcile an umbrella a mechanical seamstress, no one proved capable of healing the divide between Breton's Surrealism and Stalin's socialist realism to continue the dialectical line. However, this conclusion proved less than accurate because of the intervention of important critics: Nikolai Bukharin and Karel Teige. Teige's reading of socialist realism that he based on Bukharin's speech from the 1934 Soviet Writer's Congress provided a philosophical bridge (the dissecting table as it were) where union could take place.

To understand how Teige pulled off the reconciliation that Breton could not, a little background history is necessary. Even before Surrealism enlisted in the service of the revolution at the end of the twenties, Breton had clashed with

the PCF²⁸ over whether artists owed their loyalty to the revolutionary cause or to the cause as imposed by the Party orthodoxy. After Breton embraced dialectical materialism as the basis of Surrealism's social program, although the terms had changed to dialectical materialism, the problem still persisted because Breton's views were primarily informed by Hegel rather than Marx. To circumvent the authority of the PCF so they would be able to call the shots when it came to matters of representation, Breton rationalized that conditions in the West necessitated that artists remain independent, so they could launch a guerrilla attack on capitalism from the margins wielding their most powerful weapon: art. In the Soviet Union where revolution had been achieved and the Party had complete authority over the government and art had been completely politicized, the situation was altogether different. However, according to Breton, different did not necessarily mean better. In the second volume of Breton's Surrealist trilogy *Les Vases Communicants* (Communicating Vessels) that appeared after his

²⁸As Marguerite Bonnet in her discussion of the Surrealist tract from 1926 "Légitime défense" (Legitimate Defense) points out, even prior to Breton's joining the party in January 1927, the necessity of establishing Surrealism's relationship to literature and revolution was paramount. Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1457. The dynamic nature of this relationship was reflected in Breton's critical works emphasizing dialecticism already mentioned and by the decision in 1930 to change the name of the Surrealist organ from *La Révolution surréaliste* to *Surréalisme au service de la révolution*. This substitution made clear that Surrealism as an ontology had been given a back seat to social revolution which it was, to serve out of philosophical necessity. For a detailed commentary on the Surrealist's relationship with Communism and the PCF vis-à-vis their literary and political conflicts, see Jean-Pierre A. Bernard. *Le Parti communiste français et la question littéraire 1921-1939*. (Grenoble: Presse Universitaires de Grenobles), 83-112.

Second manifeste du surréalisme (Second Surrealist Manifesto), Breton made it absolutely clear he did not think much of the official art being produced under the tight scrutiny of the Party:

I'm thinking of the Russian films that are now shown in France, not without having been cut first, it's true, but from here, they reveal themselves to be so superficially optimistic, in terms of substance so below par. What fix isn't one forced to apply to find them moving and beautiful!..In effect, almost nothing is shown or comes through to us about the grip of a new reality in these productions, doubly betrayed by the censor and an unsettling feeling that is at once physical and moral. I don't believe I am alone in thinking that, in revolutionary terms, their value as propaganda is more worthy of debate. One could say as much about too large a number of the literary or photographic documents that have come before our eyes over the course of the past ten years.²⁹

²⁹ Je pense aux films russes qu'on passé en France, non sans les avoir châtrés, il es vrai mais qui, vus d'ici, se révèle si superficiellement optimists, si médiocrement substantiels. Quelle correctif n'est-on pas obligé de faire intervenir pour les trouver émouvants et beaux! Presque rien ne passe, en effet, ne parvient jusqu'à nous de l'étreint d'une nouvelle réalité à travers ces productions doublement trahies par la censure et le dépaysement à la fois physique et moral. Je ne crois pas être tout à fait seul à penser qu'au point de vue révolutionnaire leur valeur de propagande est des plus discutables. On pourrait en dire autant d'un trop grand nombre de documents littéraires ou photographiques qui, depuis une dizaine d'années, nous ont été mis sous les yeux. In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2:192-193.

The watershed for what turned into the all out struggle over representation between the Surrealists and the supporters of the socialist realism was the First All-Union Soviet Writer's Congress. Here in the hall under the general din “an attentive ear could have counted the 288 times the notion of socialist realism occurred and the 297 references to Stalin.” (une oreille attentive aurait pu compter les 288 occurrences de la notion de ‘réalisme socialiste’ et les 297 mentions de Stalin)³⁰ Although socialist realism emerged as the only approach to representation thanks to the dictatorship of the Party’s official Writer’s Union, the speeches at the Congress by its leading proponents (most notably Maxim Gorky, A.A. Zhdanov, Karel Radek and Nikolai Bukharin) belie the censorship and repressive measures later associated with its imposition. Their texts represent a vital dialogue on the role of literature that did not impose rigid definitions of what socialist realism as an approach to representation entailed. As a result of the lively, open nature of the discussions in the wake of RaPP’s demise, the gathering was a turning point in the relationship between art and Soviet society. Sadly, as the decade progressed, the rigid and narrowly defined version of socialist realism envisioned by Stalin prevailed; those who had advocated a more liberal approach were either executed or shipped off to the camps.

³⁰ Régine Robin. *Le Réalisme socialiste: une esthétique impossible*. (Paris: Payot, 1986.), 38.

For the Czech Surrealists, the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers also marked a turning point. The event marked the first opportunity they had to express their views on literature to an international forum as Surrealists. Even though the Congress was organized to decide the right relationship of literary methodology to revolution, Nezval intended to use his speech as a forum to defend André Breton who was still under attack for being bourgeois and counter-revolutionary. As an acknowledged friend of the Soviet Union, Nezval acted as Surrealism's intermediary. By using Marxists terms to discuss *Les Vases communicants*, Nezval maintained that Breton never transgressed the critical dividing line between human reality and metaphysics:

Contrary to the opinions of idealists, there is nothing transcendental in dreams. If we perceive of dream and the waking-state as a dialectical union of contradictions, as a necessity that is not a useless one, we rightly understand the essence of fantasy and emotionality in dreams. In poetry as in dreams there exists a dialectical union of reality and imagination.

As materialists we know that symbols in poetry and in dreams do not symbolize, as the symbolists understood, a transcendental world that does not exist, but rather the interests of human instincts which the consciousness's censorship does not let loose naked into

the world; instead it expresses them as symbols not easily intelligible to reason but easily intelligible to feeling.³¹

Nezval made it perfectly clear to the delegates that in thought and deed, Surrealism had no higher purpose than to serve the revolutionary cause for which the Congress had been convened:

We Surrealists, standing without exception behind the revolutionary world view of Marxist-Leninism, are equally mindful of our obligations to poetry that safeguards the richness of human feeling just as we are of our obligations to revolutionary activity that should make a higher stage of real life possible.³²

Nezval's "greeting" to the members of the Congress served two important purposes: it publicly reconfirmed to an international audience the vow of fidelity he and the Czech Surrealists made to Breton in 1933, while at the same time acknowledging their long-term adherence to the principles of the October Revolution. Nezval's call for friendship in the spirit of the dialectic represented the Czech's commitment to reconciling not only ideological contradiction, but

³¹Oproti názoru idealistů není ve snu nic transcendentálního. Nazíráme-li sen a bdění jako dialektickou jednotu protikladů, jako nutnost, která není bezúčelná, pochopíme právě na snu podstatu té fantazie a té emocionality. V poezii I ve snu je dialektická jednota skutečnosti a imaginace.Jako materialisté víme, že náznaky v poezii i ve snu nesymbolizují, jak to chápali symbolisté, transcendentální svět, jehož není, nýbrž čistě lidské pudové zajmy, které cenzura vědomí nepropouští naze na svět, nýbrž které podává v náznacích těžko srozumitelných rozumu a lehko srozumitelných citu. Nezval, "Pozdrav z sjezdu," *Projevy z let 1931-1941*, 103.

³²My, surrealista, stojící bezvýhradně na stanovisko revolučního marx-leninského světového názoru, jsme si vědomi, stejně tak svých povinností k poezii, jež střeží bohatství lidských citů, jak k revoluční aktivitě, která má umožnit vyšší stupeň reálného života. Ibid. 104.

ideological adversaries. His words functioned as the “wireless” connection whose lines had become crossed by the ideological prejudices of two cultural forces.

One of most decisive speeches on socialist realism at the Congress was not given by a writer or literary critic. Nikolai Bukharin’s “*O поэзии, поэтике и задачах поэтического творчества в СССР*” (Poetry, Poetics and the Problems of Poetry in the U.S.S.R) illustrated the broad conceptualization³³ some influential members of the Party leadership envisioned for socialist realism. Bukharin, who had been known for his hardline approach to economic development, stressed the dynamic nature of the rise of Soviet culture and the problems facing literature in the period he deemed “the most interesting era in the life of mankind.” (*самой интересной эпохи в жизни человечества*)³⁴ Although he acknowledged that the novelty of his views could elicit “violent objections» (*ожесточества возражения*)³⁵ from the audience, he begged them to hear him out. Bukharin argued that even the works of authors representing an idealistic world view should not be dismissed because their message fell short of serving the proletariat.

³³ In the catalogue to the 1993 exhibition on Czech Surrealism at the Nation Literary Museum (Památník národního písemnictví) in Prague, *Magnická pole 1934-38.*, Růžena Hamanová characterizes this breadth of conception as “boundless.” (bezbřehé), 20.

³⁴ Nikolai Bukharin. “Poetry, Poetics and the Problem of Poetry in the U.S.S.R.” In *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers’ Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 187. I am using this 1935 translation of the original Russian text. The translator is not credited. The Russian original comes from a 1990 reissue of the original notes from the proceedings from 1934 Nikolai Bukharin. “Доклад Н И Бухарина о поэтике и задачах поэтического творчества в СССР.” In *Первый всесоюзный съезд советских писателей.*(The First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers) (reprint, Moscow: Художественна литература, 1990), 480.

³⁵ “Problems,” 187. “О поэтике,” 480.

According to Bukharin these works exposed the traditional contradiction of body and soul: the artificial divide that separated rational from emotional experience. Because of this contradiction, feeling (spirit) and intellect (reason) were equally legitimate dialectical elements to be utilized in literature.

Yet, Bukharin did not believe that matter and spirit had to be forever relegated to opposite sides of the philosophical fence as they had been in the past. All that was needed was for the dialectic to smash the barrier that existed between them:

But it would be entirely and essentially wrong to make an absolute mechanical subdivision of the so-called “spiritual life” into water-tight compartments of feeling and intellect, or of the conscious and the unconscious, or of the directly sensory and the logical. These are not separate domains of the abstract categories. They are dialectical magnitudes composing a unity.³⁶

Since Bukharin felt poetry's task was “to assimilate and transmit experience and to educate character to reproduce definite group psychologies,” (усвоение и передача опыта и воспитание характеров, воспроизведение определенных

³⁶ Было бы по существу совершенно неверно абсолютное механическое рассечение так называемой “духовной жизни” на замкнутые сферы чувства и интеллекта, или сознательного и бессознательного, или непосредственно чувственного и логического. Это - не отдельные домены абстрактных категорий. Это- диалектические величины, составляющие единство. Ibid.,191., Ibid, 481.

групповых психологий)³⁷ the dialectic nature of experience precluded the possibility of new forms generating from a *tabula rasa*. Therefore, Bukharin could not advocate prohibitive measures that would cut the writer off from the literary past.³⁸ To do so would mean denying the dialectical process that governed representation under socialism. Instead, he did not banish pre-socialist literature because socialist writers were the inheritors of its rich and diverse legacy:

The better we are able to show the diversity of this life, the more thoroughly we grasp these fundamental historical arteries – and this will be achieved by the point of view not by impoverishing the content – the better and the higher will be the standing of our literature and our poetry...

If we do not do this, we shall be threatened with the danger of poetic work becoming departmentally alienated from life and bureaucratized, orders being issued by the People's Commissariat of Ways of Communication, by the Transport Workers' Trade Union, by the Wood-Working Industries Trade Union and so on.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 197. Ibid., 483

³⁸ As he says “People approach a problem from different angles until broad generalizations are found. “Prohibitive” measures are therefore absurd. Ibid. 248. (Люди подходят с разных сторон к проблеме, пока не найдут достаточно широких обобщений. Почему, мне кажется нелепы “запретительные” меры) Ibid., 499.

³⁹ Ibid 247. Ibid. Bukharin's comments regarding the bureaucratic threat to poetic expression seem prophetic in hindsight given the eventual victory of the version of socialist realism that reigned under Stalin. Bukharin's tireless advocacy for diversity as the prerequisite for art born of the

All the diversity of our remarkable era, with all its contractions,

should serve as material for poetic creation.⁴⁰

Bukharin's expansive vision extended equally to the “problem of socialist realism”(проблем социалитического реализма),⁴¹ that he discussed in detail at the end of his speech. For Bukharin, socialist realism, the “great style or method” (единым большим стилем или методом)⁴² unified divergent literary currents much in the way the dialectic did human experience. Since both were inherently grounded in the real, hence the return to “realism.” However, once again, Bukharin mediated what were considered to be contradictions among genres even when socialist realism should serve as the overarching methodology for art under Socialism. He achieved this end by conflating it with the antithetical genres of “revolutionary romanticism,” “realism” or “naturalism” born out of bourgeois society in the nineteenth century. Bukharin rejected the notion that in revolutionary romanticism the poet’s eyes were inexorably turned to God. In his

dialectic also sadly foreshadowed the fate that awaited him before a Soviet firing squad four years later.

⁴⁰Чем лучше мы сумеем показывать многообразие этой жизни, чем лучше мы будем ухватывать эти основные исторические жилы, - что покупается точкой зрения, и не обеднением содержания, - тем лучше и тем выше будут стоять наша литература и наша поэзия.

Если мы этого не сделаем, то перед нами возникает опасность ведомственного отчуждения, бюрократизации поэтического творчества, когда заказ дается Наркомпросом, НКПС, профсоюзом транспортников, профсоюзом деревообрабатывающей промышленности и проч.

Материалом поэтического творчества должно служить все многообразие нашей замечательной эпохи со всеми ее противоречиями единство...(emphasis in original text)

Ibid., 248. Ibid., 499.

⁴¹ Ibid. 249. Ibid. 500.

⁴² Ibid., 500.

view, revolutionary romanticism substituted God for Man, a move that shifted the reader's gaze to the mortal hero, a representative of the People. The major difference between socialist realism and bourgeois realism (as represented by the difference in their form and content) was the *tense* of the representation. The reality of Zola's bourgeois present *telle, qu'elle est*, its development fixed for eternity like photographic image on the page. Where realism in the past subscribed to Plato's version of mimetic reality, socialist realism brought realism to a higher stage of being, portraying reality transformed, a vision of the future.⁴³ The socialist realist writer Bukharin envisioned dared to create poetry that would represent the great march toward socialism, capturing for one fleeting moment "a lyric which gives poetic shape to the spiritual experience of socialist man who is now coming into being." (поэтическое оформление душевных движений рождающегося социалистического человека)⁴⁴

What is so striking about Bukharin's definition of socialist realism as it related to Surrealism in the 1930's on analysis, is how very close the two were despite the historical antipathy on the part of the Soviet political and literary elite for the latter and Breton's mistrust of the former (or at least politically tendentious art such as *Front rouge*).⁴⁵ After the *Second manifeste*, Bukharin's contention that

⁴³ I am indebted to Maria Němcová Banerjee for the details this comparison.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 255. Ibid., 502.

⁴⁵ In fact, despite the vigorous and rancorous nature of the debates over Socialist Realism in 1930's in which Breton was a major participant, one is hard-pressed to find a direct reference to

socialist realism's "philosophical basis is dialectical materialism" (*философской предпосылкой социалистического реализма является диалектический материализм*)⁴⁶ could equally have been said of Breton's Surrealism; both were programs adopted a lineage that began with Hegel who begat Marx and Engels who begat Lenin. According to Breton and Bukharin, true literature and art (under the auspices of their corresponding methodologies) served as a kind of dialectical accelerator for the enrichment of reality. In the laboratory of dreams, the forced collision of internal and external forces caused by art's fleeting unions of antithetical elements resulted in new products that had never been imagined; in their wake, human consciousness grew and expanded to encompass this greater understanding of the world. For the process to thrive, external or self-censorship had no place. In fact, Bukharin provided for the possibility that "the new erotics" (новой эротики)⁴⁷ could be the "province of Socialist art." (область социалистического искусства)⁴⁸ Since sexuality functioned as one of the integral states of the new man's consciousness, it could not be made off limits to the artist if social evolution was to endure. Although Bukharin did not emphasize the representation of eroticism as a major area for aesthetic exploration, the fact

the term in his polemical writing of the time. The omission is revealing since other members of the avant-garde either at conferences or in publications did not refrain from using Socialist Realism. Breton employs "proletarian literature" as what might be considered a cognate.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 250. Ibid., 500.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 255. Ibid., 502

⁴⁸ Ibid., Ibid.

that he acknowledged its relevance in Socialist art served as a corollary for the Surrealists' view that uncensored depictions of sexuality were a potent means to attack the bourgeois status quo in the West.

Ultimately, Bukharin argued that representation remain free to depict all the manifestations of human experience because socialist realism (a child of the dialectic) was in its nascent stage and had to continue to evolve. On a very deep personal level, Bukharin and Breton shared the belief that the dialectic, removed from all political ideology, functioned as the primary force governing the creative process; thus, despite the recriminations and polemics coming from other sections of the Communist Party, Breton was closer than it appeared to gaining a foothold for Surrealism in Moscow because of this affinity. Bukharin's contention that "socialist realism dares to "dream""(соалистический реализм смеет и должен "мечтать")⁴⁹ signified how much he had in common with Breton (and, as it turned out how very little he had in common with his comrade, Stalin.

Yet, it is also important here to acknowledge a very tangible difference between Breton and Bukharin's respective views. Within the Soviet tradition, nineteenth-century realism represented another branch of revolutionary expression, a socialist complement to romanticism, not its antithesis. Realism became the basis of Russia's golden age after Pushkin's romanticism and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 253. Ibid., 501.

represented for Bukharin (and others) an earlier stage of revolutionary development in style that, in the twentieth century, had borne the fruit of its seed after the October Revolution. In France, realism had competed with revolutionary romanticism for the attention of the public trapped under the weight of its bourgeois yoke. French realism that did not function to reconfirm bourgeois society's self-satisfaction, at best, represented an appeal to mend the excesses of capitalism. Toppling oppressive institutions did not figure into the equation.⁵⁰

The proximity of Bukharin and Breton's visions of socialist realism and Surrealism as the true inheritors of revolutionary representation brings us back to Nezval. His preoccupation with friendship and harmony convinced him that the Surrealists and the socialist realists as servants of the proletariat could and should be friends despite their disagreements. In this respect, Nezval represented the emotional bridge between the two, the good-natured busom buddy who cajoled his feuding comrades to apologize and shake hands. During his 1935 visit to Prague,⁵¹ in his famous speech to the members of Levá fronta called "The Political Position of the Art of Today" (*Position politique de l'art d'aujourd'hui*),

⁵⁰ Once again I am indebted to Maria Němcová Banerjee for pointing out the fact that nineteenth-century realism was considered revolutionary by early Russian socialists. As such, it belonged to the revolutionary tradition and was not considered reactionary by the Soviets.

⁵¹ On the invitation of the Czech Surrealists, Breton, his wife Jacqueline and Paul Éluard arrived in Prague on March 27, 1935. They stayed in Czechoslovakia until April 10. The visit was marked by a series of influential lectures on Surrealism organized by Levá fronta and Charles University vis-à-vis the cultural and political situation that had an enormous impact on the movement as a whole. It was the last time any of the Czech and French Surrealists would meet.

Breton made it clear who in Moscow he approved of; Bukharin in his estimation understood that Surrealism and socialist realism were not rivals or in opposition. They were, by definition, two sides of humanity's coin, fraternal twins representing revolutionary creation in the East and West. This occasion was one of the rare instances in which Breton referred to socialist realism by name and it is interesting that Breton used his Prague visit as the venue to argue for their mutual co-existence:

Yet, it can only be the best omen to see expressed in Moscow in 1934, the prevailing tendency to the deepening of the human question in all its form; it can only be reassuring to observe attentively certain characteristic aspects of the Congress. While in other countries poetry is condemned to live almost shamefully in the margins and can only aspire to be a faraway echo (outside of the framework of the poet's existence); it is a *sign of the times* (Breton's emphasis) a Soviet political leader, Bukharin, a *dialectician* (again, Breton's emphasis) of the first order, has taken it upon himself to present a lecture on poetry to a first writer's congress and it is also a sign of the times that this lecture comes to the conclusion that the 'new eroticism' is not antagonistic to the

framework of a ‘socialist realism’ that can have no other objective than man himself.⁵²

The uncompromising praise for Bukharin Breton expressed in Prague is important since he used similar language to that Nezval had already employed to describe Bukharin’s message after attending the Moscow congress. According to Nezval, Bukharin, the learned Marxist (vzdělaný marxista)⁵³ and brave Bolshevik, (statečný bolševik)⁵⁴ proved himself to be a more profound interpreter of literary development in the Soviet Union than the writers themselves. Nezval predicted that Bukharin’s insights regarding socialist realism would “have the greatest influence on the next productive expansion of Soviet poetry” (bude mít největší vliv na další plodný růst sovětské poezie)⁵⁵ and that “his appearance has and will have momentous significance.” (jeho vystoupení má a bude mít epochální význam)⁵⁶ Nezval viewed Bukharin’s contribution to the Congress as an indication of the changes taking place in political and literary circles in the Soviet

⁵²Toutefois, il ne peut être que du meilleur augure de voir s’exprimer à Moscou, en 1934, une tendance prépondérante à l’approfondissement du problème humain sous toutes ses formes, il ne peut être que réconfortant d’observer attentivement certains aspects caractéristiques du congrès. Alors que, dans les autres pays, la poésie est condamnée à vivre en marge, presque honteusement, et ne peut aspirer qu’à un écho lointain (hors du cadre de l’existence du poète), c’est un *signe du temps* qu’un dirigeant de la politique soviétique, Boukharine, qu’un *dialecticien* de premier plan se charge de présenter à un premier congrès d’écrivains le rapport sur la poésie, et c’est aussi un signe des temps que ce rapport conclue au non-antagonisme du “nouvel érotisme” dans le cadre d’un “réalisme socialiste” qui “ne peut avoir d’autre objectif que l’homme lui-même. “Position politique,” 434.

⁵³Vítězslav Nezval, “Kolem sjezdu sovětských spisovatelů v Moskvě” (On the Congress of Soviet Writers). In *Manifesty z lety 1931-41*, 112.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., 113.

⁵⁶Ibid.

Union. Bukharin's prominence at the Congress indicated the reversal of his political fortunes after having been out of favor for a number of years. Nezval attributed Bukharin's past political troubles to "certain political aberrations whose errors, by the way, he acknowledged." (jisté politické úchylky, jejichž nesprávnost ostatně uznal)⁵⁷ Once Nezval had rehabilitated Bukharin as a figure, he could use his authority as a dialectician (as Breton did in 1935) to argue that Western Surrealism and socialist realism in the East were co-joined at the heart, at the dialectic:

Military song and elegy are just not enough. The union of heterogeneity arises from the union of style and method. Here Bukharin arrives at quite a singular precis for the chimerical notion of that up to the present has been so called 'socialist realism.' I cannot expand upon it here; I am merely pointing out that according to Bucharin 'Socialist Realism is a creative method that answers to dialectical materialism.' We are convinced that Surrealism, too, answers to dialectical materialism.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁸ Nestačí přece jen elegie a vojenská píseň. Jednota různorodosti vznikne jednotou stylu a metody. Zde se dostává Bucharin k dosti osobité precizaci tohoto chimérického pojmu, jímž byl dosud takzvaný "socialistický realismus". Nemohu se zde o tom šířit; podotýkám totiko, že podle Bucharina je "socialistický realismus" tvůrčí metoda, která odpovídá dialektickému materialismu. Jsme přesvědčení, že i surrealismus přesně odpovídá dialektickému materialismu. Ibid. 115. It is important to note in terms of audience that this work is not the address Nezval gave to the Congress in August 1934 but an article published the following month in *Doba: časopis pro kulturní, sociální i politický život* (Age (or Era) Magazine for Cultural, Social and Political Life)

Nezval understood what Breton arrived at only later; Nikolai Bukharin had paved the way for a crossroad where Surrealism and socialist realism meet. To aid in the mediation process, Nezval transformed Bukharin from a flesh and blood politician into a father figure for the dual approaches to dialectical materialism – East and West. By publicly reconciling Bukharin and Breton, Nezval accomplished something Breton, the father of Surrealism, had refused to do. He acknowledged the legitimacy of socialist realism instead of pretending to ignore its existence. However, mediation was, after all, in the Czechs' best interest. They felt the threat Hitler's presence exerted on national security far more than Paris or Moscow because of their proximity to Berlin and their diminutive size.⁵⁹ Their past had taught them the valuable lesson that when numbers were few unity had to be promoted at all costs.

While the discussions and determinations made by delegates at the Congress had enormous impact within the Soviet Union, the import of the First Congress and Bukharin in the development of Czech Surrealism cannot be underestimated. Despite the fact the Congress was labeled “Soviet,” the two-week

the “cultural, social and political” magazine edited by Karel Teige. According to Teige (or the editorial board) the magazine was to be “the organ of modern and progressive tendencies and opinions in art as well as science, philosophy, sociology and politics.” (orgánem moderních a pokrokových tendencí a názorů v umění i ve vědě, ve filosofii i v sociologii a v politice) *Doba* 1, no. 1 (11 February 1934), 1. In essence, *Doba* served the platform for Levá fronta that sought to unite the various movements of the international intellectual avant-garde that is “připravena k obraně proti kulturní reakci a proti fašismu.” (ready to defend against cultural reactionism and fascism) Ibid. Nezval’s article predated Teige’s complete conversion to Surrealism.

⁵⁹ Although I make this point in my introduction more generally, Maria Němcová Banerjee brought my attention to its relevance here.

conference united writers from all corners of the Soviet Union and abroad, including some of the great politically progressive writers of France (such as Malraux and Aragon⁶⁰) and other well-known writers from Germany whose future had been made uncertain by Hitler's rise to power.⁶¹ As for Bukharin's role, he provided the foreign delegates to the Congress who had been in with conflict Stalin, with the theoretical, political and aesthetic justification for the existence of other trends in art such as Surrealism. Although all representation would fall under the auspices of socialist realism, Bukharin's broad definition allowed for autonomy and the optimism that unity could be achieved despite difference.

The Moscow conference also changed the course of Soviet and Progressive literature by rejecting "proletarian literature" as envisaged by delegates at the Kharkov Congress in 1930, when according to literary historian Jean Pierre Bernard, RaPP's power and influence were at their height.⁶² Striking RaPP and the "proletarian" from the equation paved the way for the rise of the less concrete methodology of socialist realism. Its definition adopted by the Writer's Union testifies to the fact that Bukharin was not the only one who believed socialist realism was defined by possibility not limitation; socialist

⁶⁰ By the conference L'Affaire Aragon had already caused the rupture between the poet and the other Surrealists. See note 18.

⁶¹ *Robin*, 38.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 61.

realism's horizon extended as far and wide as the Soviet Union could reach and the mind could see:

Socialist Realism, the fundamental method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands from the sincere writer a concrete historic presentation of reality in its revolutionary development. In this way the truth and historically concrete aspect of artistic representation must unite in the task of the ideological and educational change of workers in the spirit of socialism. Socialist Realism insures creative art of the extraordinary possibility to make manifest *all artistic initiatives and a choice of forms, genres and styles.* (my emphasis) The victory of Socialism, the impetuous growth of the forces of production, never seen before in the history of humanity, the increasing process of the liquidation of class, the suppression of all possibilities for the exploitation of man by man and the suppression of the contrasts between city and country, finally, the progress of science and culture create limitless possibilities for a qualitative and quantitative growth of the

creative forces and for the genesis of *all genres of art and*

literature.(again, emphasis added)⁶³

Nezval proved not to be the only Czech interested in how to reconcile Surrealism with socialist realism. After Nezval brought back the good news from Moscow, Karel Teige (who was still in the process of deciding whether to declare himself a Surrealist) weighed in on the critical front. On November 14, 1934, Levá front which served as the umbrella group for the diverse elements of the avant-garde Teige had founded in 1929 (to deal with Devětsil's lack of a social program), convened an evening of lectures on socialist realism to address the issues brought up by Moscow Congress. In 1935, the group published the anthology *Socialistický realismus* (Socialist Realism), a collection of three essays which discussed the role of socialist realism vis-à-vis the Czech avant-garde and revolutionary art based on the evening's discussions.⁶⁴ Leading off the anthology

⁶³ Le réalisme socialiste, méthode de base de la littérature soviétique et de la critique littéraire, exige de l'écrivain sincère une présentation historiquement concrète de la réalité dans son développement révolutionnaire.. Ainsi la véracité et l'aspect historiquement concret de la représentation artistique de la réalité doivent s'allier à la tâche d'un changement idéologique et de l'éducation des travailleurs dans l'esprit du socialisme. Le réalisme socialiste assure à l'art créateur une possibilité extraordinaire de manifester toute initiative artistique et un choix de formes, de styles et genres variés . La victoire du socialisme, la croissance impétueuses des forces productives, jamais encore vues dans l'histoire de l'humanité, le processus grandissant de la liquidation des classes, la suppression de toutes les possibilités d'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme et la suppression des contrastes entre la ville et la campagne, finalement, les progrès de la science et de la culture créent des possibilités illimitées pour un accroissement qualitatif et quantitatif des forces créatrices et pour l'élosion de tous genres d'art et de littérature. Robin, 40. Based on this definition the room for interpretation was enormous, a fact that belies the repressive nature of its final implementation.

⁶⁴ A reprint of the 1935 edition was issued in Würzburg in 1973 with a Forward in German by George Bouron and Heinrich Kunstmann (from the University of Munich). They characterize the

was the Czech translation of Bukharin's "Poetry, Poetics," followed Czech theoretician Kurt Konrad's lecture "On Surrealism" (O surrealismu). The closing essay was Karel Teige's "Socialist Realism and Surrealism," (Socialistický realismus a surrealismus), the only in-depth attempt at the time to compare in great detail the two major aesthetic currents promoted by the international avant-garde. Even though the title ostensibly points to socialist realism as being its major theme, according to the Levá fronta the book was conceived of as a companion volume for other critical texts on Surrealism:

The anthology *Socialistický realismus* is a publication analogous to that of the anthology *Surrealismus v diskusi* published in the fall of 1934 by the library of Levá fronta. Both of these anthologies are edited to complement one another.⁶⁵

By drawing attention to the fact that the publications were to be taken as one integral whole, Levá fronta made clear to the audience their belief in the inherent

aim of *Socialistický realismus* as follows: Die kardinale Frage der Diskussion war, welche Züge des sozialistischen Realismus als allgemeingültig und welche nur als zeitweilige Angelegenheit der aktuellen sovietischen Praxis betrachtet werden müssten, mit anderen Worten: inwieweit der sozialistische Realismus der Situation revolutionärer Kunste in der Tschechoslowakei entsprach und zur heimatlichen künstlerischen Tradition passte. The cardinal question of the discussion was which currents of Socialist Realism should be considered as universal and which as only a temporary concern of Soviet practice of the time. In other words, to what extent the Socialist Realism corresponds to the revolutionary situation of art in Czechoslovakia and passes as native tradition.. *Socialistický realismus*. (reprint, Würzburg: Jal-reprints, 1973.III.

⁶⁵ Sborník "Socialistický realismus" je publikací, obdobnou sborníku "Surrealismus v diskusi", který vyšel na podzim r. 1934 v knihovně Levé fronty. Oba tyto sborníky jsou redigovány tak, aby se vzajemně doplňovaly. Ibid.,182.

affinity of two currents considered to be contradictory and antithetical by Breton and his detractors.

Despite Breton's passionate arguments regarding the ability for Surrealism to exist within the context of socialism and proletarian revolution, he refrained from conceding socialist realism was an equally authentic means to create art. Being the founder of Surrealism, Breton could not envision the possibility that any other form of representation could offer a credible challenge to Surrealism's preeminence. However, in all the other spheres not governed by Surrealist practice, Breton made it clear (at least until 1935) that co-existence was, at least, possible. But in this case, a gulf of enormous proportions remained between them because Breton never saw the need to acknowledge socialist realism's legitimacy. In the realm of art, only Surrealism's unbridled attempts to expand humanity's consciousness through automatism and dialectic had any relevance, morality and truth. For Breton, whose opinion was informed by his French reading of literary history,⁶⁶ the Soviet Union's return to realism, an art of imitation, was a step in the completely wrong direction.

In his 1935 interview with *Haló noviny* (Hello News)⁶⁷ that coincided with his trip to Prague prior to the altercation with Ehrenburg, Breton made it clear that Soviet art had failed to penetrate the vast reaches

⁶⁶ See note 43.

⁶⁷ The organ of the Czech Worker's Union. The interview took place on April 9, 1935 and was published on April 14. See notes to interview in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2:1586.

of man's inner existence in order gain a foothold in the imagination. Only Surrealism signified the area where dream and reality could join forces to serve the revolution on the front of representation. Breton's expulsion of his fellow Surrealist Louis Aragon from the group over his politically tendentious poem "The Red Front" (*Le Front rouge*)⁶⁸ reflected the depths of Breton's convictions. Any attempt to direct the artistic consciousness even while "in service of the revolution" failed its spirit. Breton reconfirmed this view in his response from the same interview to the question of the Surrealists' position vis-à-vis other approaches to avant-garde literature:

Surrealism can only adopt a critical attitude toward them. Under the fascist menace one can consider a certain respite to the ideological battles with the reservation that the application of the effort of these other disciplines is specifically the fight against fascism and war. But these other disciplines are, to tell the truth, potential ones and it is individual behaviors that can be questioned, in particular, outside of Surrealism. In the current period, our

⁶⁸ Their falling out over the poem came as the result of the Kharkov conference. Aragon, thereafter, became a faithful adherent to the PCF and Breton's political enemy.

primary critical task must be to sort out what is *authentic*⁶⁹ (Breton's emphasis) in avant-garde art from what is not. A part of the authentic art of today is tied to revolutionary social activity: it (authentic art) just as revolutionary social activity tends toward confusion and the destruction of capitalist society.⁷⁰

Based on his critical writing, it is doubtful that Breton ever imagined that there were other authentic methodologies able to realistically compete with Surrealism. In the realm of representation, Surrealism's authentic was the only authentic.

However, Teige still not a convert to Surrealism responded to the contradiction much as Nezval had. In *Socialistický realismus a surrealismus* he argued passionately for reconciling the opposing sides for the sake of the united front. However, Teige (ever the dialectician), unlike Nezval, came to unity by acknowledging and embracing the social

⁶⁹ The ability to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic becomes the lynchpin of Teige's later defense of critical debate among the ranks as the only means to perpetuate the dialectical evolution of the Left Front.

⁷⁰ Le surréalisme ne peut adopter envers elles qu'une attitude critique. Sous la menace fasciste, on peut envisager une certaine trêve aux luttes idéologiques, sous réserve que le point d'application de l'effort des ces autres formations soit bien précisément la lutte contre le fascisme et la guerre. Mais ces autres formations sont, à vrai dire, virtuelles et c'est de comportements individuels qu'il peut surtout, en dehors du surréalisme, être question. Notre tâche critique principale, dans la période actuelle doit être de démêler dans l'art d'avant-garde, ce qui est *authentique* de ce qui ne l'est pas. L'art authentique d'aujourd'hui a partie liée avec l'activité sociale révolutionnaire: il tend comme elle à la confusion et à la destruction de la société capitaliste. "Interview de Haló noviny" (Interview from *Haló noviny*) from *Position politique du surréalisme* (The Political Position of Surrealism) in *Oeuvres*, 2: 442.

contradictions inherent to each. Teige observed that in the capitalist West where market still controlled representation, socialist realism had to be considered in terms of its opposition to Western (French) realism:

The slogan ‘socialist realism’ is for the Soviet man above all the indicator of the classless society’s new positive social and human reality. The revolutionary in the West has, as we have stated, a negative relationship towards the social reality of his milieu. If here in the West, we want to answer the slogan ‘socialist realism’ in the affirmative, we would have to make a noun of its adjective. Laco Novomeský wrote that socialist realism means the negation of all that we imagine to be under the notion and word ‘realism’ in the nineteenth century, namely the negation of dry, descriptive, statistical realism. It would be possible for us to concur with this comprehensible socialist realism as well as the concept of socialist realism as the rejection of bourgeois realism.⁷¹

⁷¹ Heslo “socialistický realismus” je pro sovětského člověka především ukazatelem na novou, kladnou, sociální i lidskou realitu beztrídní společnosti. Západní revolucionář má k sociální realitě svého postředí, jak jsme uvedli, negativní poměr. Cheeme-li u nás, na Západě, zodpovědětí heslo “socialistický realismus” kladně, musili bychom pro sebe učinit podstatným jeho přídavé jméno. Laco Novomeský napsal (viz “Šíp” r. 2., č. 1), že socialistický realismus známená popření všeho, co si představujeme pod pojmem a slovem realismus v 19. století, totiž popření toho suchého, popisného, statického realismu. – S takto chápáným socialistickým realismem, totiž s pojetím socialistického realismu jako popření realismu měšťáckého, bylo by nám možno souhlasiti. Karel Teige. “Socialistický realismus a surrealismus.” In *Socialistický realismus*, 138-9.

In his exegesis of socialist realism Teige shifted the semantic emphasis from “realism,” (the noun) the fixed photograph of society as it arrested in development to the adjective “socialist.”. When Teige deemphasized the noun (which was incompatible with Surrealism’s understanding of its revolutionary legacy) to promote its dependent adjective, Teige created a communality for the two within the framework of socialism. By subtly discounting the linguistic importance of realism, Teige performed a consummate Czech Surrealist move. He transformed the contradiction by transforming its terms. Once realism took second place to socialism, he no longer had to defend the Surrealists by launching an adversarial assault on the Soviet Union’s official concept of representation. Teige showed that both methodologies were capable with the principles of socialism.

However, Teige’s calculations were informed by his western interpretation of realism role in the historical record book. For the Russians, realism and revolution were not mutually exclusive. Writers from the realist tradition were not reactionary apologists for the Empire as they were thought to be by those in the western avant-garde (such as Breton). They had carried the torch that had finally cast a harsh light on the social and economic contradictions inherent to Russian society in the nineteenth century. Realism had paved the way for proletarian writers like Gorky once socialism had prevailed. By contrast in France,

romanticism was revolution's dark disturbing child who flourished in the dimly lit recesses of the artistic imagination. Rimbaud and Lautréamont snuffed out the gaslights burning in the bourgeois parlor so that the terrifying power of the unconscious could take over. Their revolutionary power came from being marginalized by polite society. For Breton alienation was an essential component of their cultural identity and the source of their visionary message. Despite the fact that they were promoting revolution, realizing the dream in their tradition would have presented them with an identity crisis of the highest order. What to do once they held the keys to the gasworks?

In terms of legacy, Teige's negative view of realism revealed his preference for the revolutionary tradition of France (as least in terms of literature), evidence of his growing closer to Breton critically as well as ideologically. Teige's choice also showed the necessity to get around the realist tradition in Czechoslovakia: the realism associated with Vienna and that of its ideological rival, the Czech National Revival whose idealistic kitsch Teige equally rejected.⁷² Although he acknowledged that economic and sociali conditions in East and West were not comparable, Teige's choice clearly revealed his reading of history and his bias. He ignored or downplayed the revolutionary legacy of realism in Russia

⁷² This topic will be discussed in Chapter Three.

because he could not reconcile them with Surrealism whose account was comparable to his own.

The debate regarding socialist realism and Surrealism in the Czech context boiled down to a critical issue: the question of the position of artists vis-à-vis the status quo. Were they antagonists or champions. The Surrealists made the distinction that as artists in the West their role was to use aesthetic representation as a means of attack. With this goal in mind, the major task of the artist to effect revolution at home to thwart fascism through international political, cultural and social alliances abroad. Thus, the Surrealists could argue for a an approach that owed nothing to nineteenth century realism or naturalism (since attempts by Western artists to render reality *telle qu'elle est* was a façade that tarted up the contradictions in bourgeois society to preserve the social order – at best, window dressing, at worst a crime against the proletariat).

Teige's preference for the romantic tradition served to circumvent the stale epilogue of their nineteenth century. However, it is important to point out that romanticism was not considered by Teige (or the Czech Surrealists) as a monolithic term. The tradition was divided into several categories (reactionary, bourgeois and revolutionary) for which the precise terminology qualifying them

shifted over the course of the critical debate.⁷³ The romanticism which engendered the Surrealist line was revolutionary romanticism which, on the political level, rebelled against bourgeois morality and socialist enlightenment which was understood to be realism's legacy by the twentieth century Surrealists.⁷⁴ On the literary level, it offered a potent challenge to the ideological hegemony of capitalist realism and positivism's compromise. Revolutionary romanticism shattered art's mimetic mirror, speaking in the visionary lyric of a Cassandra. Yet, unlike the decadents or anarchists who also rejected the world as it was, the revolutionary romantics did not promote hermetic isolation from reality as in the case of Huysman's effete hero Des Esseintes; nor did they venerate its lack of coherence like Dada. Surrealism had its own special legacy composed of writers such as the Ducasse/Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud and Alfred Jarry whose work had been vilified by official circles because their writing posed a threat to the reigning conventions and morality of the day. After choosing a "romantic" lineage grounded in the lyric tradition over that of the novel, the

⁷³ The topic of "romanticisms" will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Three, "The Prague Passerby."

⁷⁴ Again, this analysis depends on the Surrealists' historical perspective. During its rise, realism was not considered reactionary but a threat to the status quo. Maria Němcová Banerjee uses Flaubert's being condemned by the bourgeois press and courts as a result of *Madame Bovary*. In this sense, his work is akin to *Maldoror* in Prague that was also condemned. However, Flaubert's "revolution" was restricted to content. The Surrealists, as dialecticians, demanded the revolution be manifest in form and content.

Surrealists converted their chosen ancestors to the cause of revolution, arising from the dead to defend the Republic.

In the thirties Breton's portrait of Rimbaud at the barricades and Lautréamont as the misunderstood genius who had been reviled by society served as cornerstone for the Surrealist myth. Breton often pointed to these Surrealist predecessors to prove the group's revolutionary credentials (within the Western tradition) were genuine and of long-standing.⁷⁵ These figures also show the distinction the French made between the poet-revolutionary Rimbaud, who was on the barricades but whose poetry, nonetheless, was almost devoid of political content, and the revolutionary poet Lautréamont whose art, in its form and content, was synonymous with revolution. Maintaining the absolute division between the production of art and political action was crucial for the Surrealists to justify their contention that revolutionary art did not have to speak openly of revolution to be authentic.

Once the Czechs had declared their conversion to Surrealism, they automatically adopted the lineage provided by France.⁷⁶ However, this

⁷⁵ Early on in the Surrealist movement, Breton was somewhat ambivalent about the figure of Rimbaud as a revolutionary because of his relationship to Catholicism during the last years of his life. Later, Breton's position changed. He vigorously condemned Catholic writers and critics who tried to beatify Rimbaud by passing tales about his deathbed conversion. The figure of Rimbaud cum Communard in Surrealism grew as the political situation in Europe became increasingly volatile in the 1930's. It is the rehabilitated Rimbaud who Breton speaks of so passionately in "La Position politique." The issue of legacy and the Surrealist will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

⁷⁶ This notion will be taken up in detail in the next chapter.

“overnight” conversion was not immediate; the process had been taking place for years. Devětsil acknowledged its profound debt its program owed to these French predecessors as is reflected in Teige’s 1929 translation of Lautréamont’s *Maldoror*,⁷⁷ Jindřich Štyrský’s writing on the Marquis de Sade and other projects. In this regard, the members of Devětsil were Surrealist *avant la lettre*. However, until Breton proved that Surrealism was faithful to the theory of dialectical materialism as represented by the line of Hegel, Marx, Engels and Lenin, the conversion could not take place. Although one would think that this process was initiated by Breton’s *Second manifeste*, *Les Vases communicants* was more influential for the remaining members of Devětsil.⁷⁸ The work was not just a tract, but a work whose title was even a metaphor for the dialectic: the “vessels” were place where Marxist revolution, Freud’s dream and Rimbaud’s vision commingled. Once Breton had accepted both the lineage of the art of revolutionary romanticism and the social revolution of Marx the time was ripe for a “concrete” collaboration to take place.

⁷⁷ This translation was summarily confiscated and banned by the government. See Chapt. 3 note .

⁷⁸ Although a portion of the *Second manifeste* appeared in *Zvěrokruh* (Zodiac) in translation, Nezval and Honzl’s *Spojité nadoby* (the Czech translation of *Vases*) merited its own volume with cover design by Toyen. The translation was done by Honzl and Nezval. The notion of “communication” in the work that Bonnet and Hubert labeled “un troisième manifeste” (a third manifesto) In the notes to *Vases*, Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1351) was more appealing to the Czechs than the Second manifeste’s revision of the Surrealist canon. Here, the personal attacks are kept at a minimum with the exception of Breton’s audacious claim that Freud was guilty of plagiarism. Perhaps Breton’s willingness to mix Hegel (that appealed to Teige) with his own dream analysis (that appealed to Nezval so much he copied Breton) is what resonated in the Czechs’ consciousness.

Although Breton acknowledged the inter-related nature of these two lines and necessity to bring the two together, Teige's close connections to the Soviet Union allowed him to close the divide between divergent currents of the past (romanticism and realism) in *Socialistický realismus* by once again redefining the terms of the debate. Drawing upon his interpretation of Bukharin's discussion of "revolutionary romanticism," Teige united the Western Romantic line and Moscow in the figure of Bukharin (as Nezval had done before):

All leading theoreticians of Socialist Realism stress that
revolutionary romanticism is an integral part of Socialist Realism
(Teige's emphasis) Red romanticism dovetails into the complex of socialist realism: "the contradiction of romanticism and socialist realism is devoid of all meaning.⁷⁹

Since Bukharin's expansive view of the nature of socialist realism was not necessarily the prevailing interpretation at the time (as evidenced by the vigorous discussions on the theme in Moscow), Teige's claim that "all leading theoreticians" had stressed the connection, one must wonder whether Teige was

⁷⁹ Všicni vůdčí teoretikové socialistického zdůrazňí, že revoluční romantismus je integrantí součástí socialistického realismu. Rudý romantismus zapadá do komplexu socrealismu: "protiklad socialistického realismu a romantismu nemá žádný smysl. Karel Teige, "Socialistický realismus a surrealismus," 159. For the sake of consistency, I have used the English translation for Bukharin's quotation from Bukharin, *Problems of Soviet Literature*, 254. No translator is credited since the work was published originally in the USSR.

generalizing to validate his argument. Using Bukharin's ideas as a springboard,

Teige took up the topic of legacy where Bukharin had left off:

If we are allowed to sum up the entire contents of romanticism and realism into one figure, we would say that *the realists wanted to understand and interpret the world, while the romantics as a utopian movement wanted to change the world.* (Teige's emphasis); for this reason, romanticism, as a movement that was revolutionary and utopian, developed the imaginary sphere of the human psyche with which it could compensate for life's wretched deficiencies under capitalist conditions; the imagination became its most sovereign and poetic reality...At the time, if realism wanted to understand the world and romanticism wanted to change the world, it is clear why socialist realism as a dialectical materialist art would want to be in a certain sense the *synthesis of realism and romanticism.* (Teige's emphasis)⁸⁰

Although on the surface, Teige seems to be reiterating Bukharin's proposition regarding the development of socialist realism: socialist realism = realism and

⁸⁰ A kdybychom směli shrnouti všechno obsah romantismu a realismu do jedné šifry, řekli bychom, že realisté chtěli svět poznávat a vykládat, zatím co romantikové chtěli svět změnit; proto také romantismus jako hnutí utopicky revoluční rozvíjel fantasijní sféru lidské psychiky, čímž chtěl kompenzovat mrázou defektnost života v kapitalistických podmínkách; imaginace se mu stala nejsvrchovanější a nejpoetičtější skutečností...Jestliže tedy realismus chtěl poznávat svět a romantismus chtěl svět změnit, je jasno, proč sovrealismus, jako umění dialektickomaterialistické chce být v určitém smyslu syntesou realismu a romantismu. Ibid.,160.

romanticism, Teige used his interpretation of the past to reconcile socialist realism and Surrealism in the present. However, in order to accomplish this task he had to perform two very delicate and contradictory operations. He had to deal with the “realism” in Bukharin’s equation that still posed a problem for the Surrealists because as it was completely incompatible with their approach to representation. On the other hand, because of the political exigencies of the time he could not blithely do away with the term provided by the Soviets either.

Bukharin’s analysis that shattered the ideological barriers which had hitherto separated Western romanticism from socialist realism within communism paved the way for Teige’s interpretation. Borrowing Bukharin’s equation: socialist realism = romanticism and realism as a stepping stone, he created a dialectical “synthesis,” that rendered the contradictions between the two latter elements irrelevant. He retained only romanticism because realism (based on his western understanding of it not Bukharin’s) had no value in the creation of the tradition (except, perhaps as romanticism’s foil). Thus Teige presented readers with a line that began with the revolutionary romanticism of Rimbaud and Lautréamont. Yet, Teige once again tinkered with the semantics of the equation by substituting a noun (realism) for an adjective: socialist realism (present) = revolutionary romanticism (past) to conclude the operation. As a result, Teige transformed Soviet socialist realism by shifting its historical context to the west,

joining Marx and the French literary traditions in one neat dialectical package.

However, Teige could not stop at the juncture of past and present; as a dialectician his analysis was dependent on the inexorable march to present.

When Teige cited that “the romantics wanted to change the world,” he was alluding to Marx’s dictum from the ninth thesis on Feuerbach (an allusion that Teige’s audience would have understood). In this work, Marx reproached the philosophers of the time for merely providing a static interpretation of external reality, stating: “Philosophers have merely interpreted the world in different ways, but what needs to be done is to transform it.” (*Les philosophes n’ont fait qu’interpréter le monde de différentes manières, mais il s’agit de le transformer*)⁸¹ Once again, Teige conflated Marxist philosophy and literary criticism. According to Teige’s definition, the realists were the literary counterparts to Marx’s failed philosophers and the romantics, as transformers, are revolutionaries. As such it is they, not the realists, who beget the line of Socialist Realism (the realists now completely irrelevant to the equation).

However, Teige was not just using Marx to prove his point on the development of socialist realism to an audience from the Czech avant-garde; he was also referring to André Breton. In his discussion of the history of aesthetics

⁸¹ The French translation for the German original is from the 1945 edition cited in note 2 to page 108 of *Vases in Breton, Oeuvres*, 2: 1377.

and the dialectic in the first part of *Vases communincants*,⁸² Breton coined the hyphenated “must-live” (devoir-vivre) to reconcile the notion of inner dream and external reality (also referred to by Breton elsewhere as the contradiction of dream and action) whose origin Marguerite Bonnet and Étienne-Alain Hubert traced to Hegel.⁸³ After Bukharin’s speech, no ideological impediments could bar Breton from reconciling Marx (as seen through the prism of Hegel) and Rimbaud⁸⁴ along the lines of dialectical materialism and revolutionary romanticism.⁸⁵ No impediments except Breton’s temper, that is. Breton had merged the great creative forces of the nineteenth century East and West into a new ontological approach to reality, but because of the fallout over Ehrenburg he never had the chance to go public with his what he had accomplished. His attempt at mediation came too late.

Teige’s reference to Breton in his discussion of the officially sanctioned line of Marx and Rimbaud provided him with the means to finally bring the

⁸² The work’s title serves as the great metaphor for his attempts to heal all conflict through the poetic intercourse of distinct physical properties to transform them, through their union into something more marvelous than what one would predict in their isolated state.

⁸³ See footnote 4 for page 104 in Breton, *Oeuvres 2*: 1376. Breton had a far greater affinity for Hegel’s idealist dialectic than Marx’s historical materialism which was a stumbling block to being tolerated by Marxist critics. Obviously Breton’s “must life” is predicated on Hegel’s aesthetic hierarchy where poetry sat reigning at the pinnacle of the pyramid. For Marx the poetry of the internal contradictions of the individual artist vis-à-vis society were not as pressing an issue. Hegel, however, placed poetry above all.

⁸⁴ See note 25.

⁸⁵ In essence, Papa Marx provides the Soviet political blood line (up to the present) of Hegel, Marx, Engels and Lenin and Momma Rimbaud, the Gallic of de Sade, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Jarry and Vaché. One may question whether these experiments in socio-aesthetic genetics if, by extension, there is the implication that the line extends past the early part of the century to the natural inheritors of the two currents: Stalin and Breton.

opposing forces of Surrealism and Socialist Realism together in the present in theory and practice:

The question of the relationship of Surrealism to Socialist Realism (Teige's emphasis) will be answered differently in the realm of art theory and in the practice of artistic creation, and for this reason, in Socialist Realism up to now there has remained a discrepancy between its theory and practice. *Surrealism in theory is not in conflict with socialist realism.*⁸⁶

However, Teige launched once again into a detailed historical critique to prove that realism, not Surrealism, had thrown the spanner in the works, thus preventing a true proletarian means of expression from developing. Realism threatened to factionalize the western avant-garde from each other and from their ideological allies in the Soviet Union that would prevent the creation of a united front that could prevail over Hitler's menace. However, the leftist slogan "defense of culture" that rose to prominence in 1935, signified more to Teige than than struggle against Nazi fascism; in terms of representation, culture had to be shielded from the forces of reaction that were trying to use realism as a wedge to split the union.

⁸⁶ *Otzáza poměru surrealismu k socialistickému realismu bude zodpovědena jinak v oblasti umělecké teorie a jinak v oblasti praxe umělecké teorie a jinak v oblasti praxe u umělecké tvorby, a to z toho důvodu, že v socialistickém realismu dosud trvá diskrepance mezi jeho teorií a praxí. Surrealismus není teoreticky v rozporu se socialistickým realismem.* Teige, "Socialistický realismus a surrealismus," 164.

At the end of his dialectical journey in “Socialistický realismus a surrealismus,” Teige arrived at the equation that would make a broad coalition of the Left extending from Paris to Moscow possible. Teige reasoned that: Surrealism in the West equals socialist romanticism (or realism) in the East. In the yin and yang of this calculation, Surrealism was a destructive social force, the spirit of the commune striving to bring down capitalism that kept human consciousness in chains. By contrast, socialist romanticism was a constructive force endowing the proletariat with a cultural legacy that they had been denied. However an obstacle still remained that was preventing Soviet artists from reaching their potential through the radical renewal of art. The socialist “realists” who venerated the past (as it *was*) threatened to rob the revolution of its potential by arresting its dialectical force. Here the question was one of tense: whether in the present to exalt the past or future:

In the USSR where reality is, for us in the West, a utopia, a prospect, a vision, neither artists, architects nor poets up to now have had enough courage to recognize that ‘the Communist revolution is the most radical break...and in its development it diverges most radically with traditional ideas’ (Communist

Manifesto) – and persist in the imitation of antiquated classicism, academism and realism.⁸⁷

Once the trend toward historicism had been overcome, the contradictions that had hitherto divided life and art would only have significance in terms of necessity: the driving force of the dialectic. Once Soviet artists could recover their revolutionary romanticism thereby embracing their Surrealist brothers, they would march hand in hand into the promise of the future:

In a society where the unrestricted development for the individual will be the condition for the unrestricted development for all, Lautréamont's prediction and the Surrealist conviction that '*everyone will write poetry and not just the individual!*' will come to be.⁸⁸ When the barrier between East and West we spoke of at the beginning no longer exists, the new Soviet poetry will unite with the new poetry of the West into the one lyric current of socialist life.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ V SSSR, kde je realitou to, co pro nás na Západě jen utopí, perspektivou a vidinou, neměli dosud ani malíři, ani básníci, ani architekti dosti odvahy uvědomit si, že komunistická revoluce je nejradikálnější zlom... a rozchází se ve svém vývoji co nejradikálněji s dochovanými ideami (komunistický manifest) -- a setrvávají při imitaci strojbylého klasicismu, akademismu a realismu.) Ibid., 171.

⁸⁸ The original reads: La poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un. Comte de Lautréamont, *Poésies II* (Poetries II). In *Les Chants de Maldoror ; Isidore Ducasse poésies.*, 280.

⁸⁹ Ve společnosti, kde "svobodný rozvoj každého bude podmínkou pro svobodný rozvoj všech" uskuteční se proroctví Lautréamontovo a víra surrealismu, že poesii budou dělati všichni a ne jen jeden! Až nebude mezi Západem a Východem existovat ona přehrada, o které jsme mluviti na

However, Teige overlooked an intractable contradiction that still remained: the division between theory and practice that could not be mediated for long. For Bukharin the critic it was easier to argue for tolerance when he was not directly involved in the production of art. For Breton, Bukharin's dabbling in literary theory posed no threat to his having control over form and content. As already noted, Breton was not known for tolerance when it came to his artistic rivals and manifestos; after all, they were written to lay down the artistic law and were sacrosanct (until revised by Breton himself).

Contradictions notwithstanding, no one can underestimate the great achievement of Nezval and Teige, who did what the famous men could not. In Prague, if for only a moment, they bridged Moscow and Paris to pave the way to an international political and social alliance that might have proven strong enough to defend against the greatest threat known to culture, the Nazi onslaught. Tragically, for all of the Czechs' critical and theoretical insights, they failed to recognize Stalin would never allow his Engineers of Human Souls to construct a lyric to the specifications of Bukharin's expansive vision. Shortly, after Teige's

začátku, spojí se nova sovětská poesie s novou poesíí západní v jediný proud lyricismu socialistického života. Teige, "Socialistický realismus a surrealismus," 181.

speech, the Moscow trials that launched the bloody purges began. Any hope for reconciliation died along with Bukharin.⁹⁰

The Living Room – Teige’s Minimum Dwelling

Peter the Great asked an old hitherto faithful manservant why he had conspired to kill him. “Because the mind loves space,” was the reply, “and you cramp me.”

After the Moscow conference, the controversy over representation and the relation of the artist to the party became more divisive (and deadly). Although they had placed their hopes in Bukharin, Nezval, Teige and Breton, for all their theoretical brilliance had seriously misinterpreted the political climate in Moscow. Stalin’s push to power from the late twenties on led to the political show trials of the mid-thirties and the purges that reached beyond mere issues of aesthetics.

After the slap and the canceled appearance, all-out war had been declared with Stalin and his supporters on either side of the geographic divide. The Czechs, despite the strong bonds that had been established during Breton and Éluard’s visit to Prague, were still unwilling to take sides as they had in 1933. Given their country’s diminutive size and proximity to Hitler, it was in their best interests to preserve unity even at Surrealism’s expense. They deferred from signing Breton’s

⁹⁰ Ivan Pfaff points out the irony of that the decision regarding Bukharin was handed down by the Soviet court the same day as the Austrian Anschluss. In *Česká levice proti Moskvě 1936-1938* (The Czech Left Against Moscow 1936-1938). (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1993), 24-25.

response to the organizers of the Congress in Paris “Du temps que les surréalistes avaient raison,” (From the Time the Surrealists Were Right) a tract that stated in no uncertain terms their complete and utter opposition to Stalin and his “*idolatrous cult*” (culte idolâtre) (Breton’s emphasis).⁹¹

Nezval explained to Breton their reasons for not signing in a letter from August 1935:

A while ago Teige sent me the manuscript of your manifesto with his commentary in which he expressed doubt about the correctness of certain formulations in the manifesto on Soviet politics and assured me that he had written you. In his letter he stressed that some of our friends agreed with him about the fact that the Czech group could not sign the manifesto in the form you had given him considering the very good relationship between the group and the Communist Party⁹² which guaranteed it freedom of opinion and he assured me that he had replied in turn requesting that you make some small stylistic amendments in certain lines: I, personally,

⁹¹ Breton, “Du temps que les surréalistes avaient raison,” *Oeuvres*, 2: 469. The tract ends with the Surrealists’ complete and utter rejection of Stalin and Communist Party rule, proclaiming to the world: “To this regime and leader, we can only formally advise them of our defiance.” (Ce régime, ce chef, nous ne pouvons que leur signifier formellement notre défiance) Ibid. 471

⁹²In the late twenties the KSC had suffered from an ideological split over political representation that led to several members from Devětsil leaving the group.

would not dare bring about anything that could be the eventual cause of disputes within the Czech group...⁹³

In his account of the events, Nezval conveniently places the blame for the group's decision on Teige's shoulders in order to absolve himself of any guilt. Despite the fact that Breton was usually unforgiving toward those who did not stand in solidarity with him in France, his answer to Nezval from October 10th, reflected a surprising lack of ill will. He immediately allayed Nezval's worries that their refusal effectively produce a rift between Paris and Prague. Breton reassured him: "Have no fears about me. The main thing is that I have gotten the news from you that Štyrský is quickly recovering⁹⁴ and that you are about to return to Prague." (nedělejte si se mnou žádnou starost. Hlavní je, že dostavám od Vás zprávy, že se Štyrský rychle uzdravuje a že se chystáte vrátit do Prahy)⁹⁵

Breton's conciliatory tone, his refusal to take the rejection personally at a critical point in time attests to the profound depth of their bond. Instead of banishing the

⁹³Před časem mi Teige poslal rukopis Vašeho manifestu s komentářem, v němž zpochybňuje správnost určitých formulaic v manifestu, týkajících se politiky SSSR, a ujišťuje mě, že Vám napsal. Ve svém dopise zdůraznil, že někteří z našich přátel souhlasili s ním v tom, že česká skupina nemohla podepsat manifest v té podobě, kterou jste mu dal vzhledem k dosti dobrým vztahům mezi skupinou a komunistickou stranou, která skupině přiznává svobodu názoru, a ujistil mne, že se na Vás obratil a požádal Vás o některé male změny ve stylizaci určitých vět manifestu já osobně bych se neodvážil podniknout něco, co by mohlo dát podnět k eventuálným neshodám uvnitř české skupiny. *Depeše z konce tisíciletí: Korespondence Vítězslava Nezvala* (Dispatch from the End of the Millennium: The Correspondence of Vítězslav Nezval) (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1981), 85.

⁹⁴The painter Štyrský had become gravely ill during his visit to Paris in 1935, and there was some question at the time about whether he would survive. Nezval had to leave him behind to recuperate in the hospital.

⁹⁵Nezval, *Depeše*, 86.

Czechs from the fold, the punishment of choice that defined his intrapersonal dealings in the Paris group, Breton chalked up the crisis to forces beyond anyone's control. Breton's humble tone showed his belief that in the long run, the bonds between them would withstand the test:

These transient disagreements obviously stem from the different conditions we must adapt to in the countries where we live; even so there are still many things which unite us before you have to assure me or I, you and your friends, of our complete trust...
I have not been feeling quite well these days and that is why I cannot respond to you in depth. Please forgive me. Yet, I cannot put off any longer telling you that I am and will be with you with all of my heart no matter what happens.⁹⁶

Although true affection may have played the great role in Breton's conciliatory attitude toward the Prague group in this political matter, he also undoubtedly had in mind the goal of maintaining the cohesion of the international collective even at his own personal expense. Had the transgression been of an esthetic nature or a genuine threat to his central authority, Breton probably would have shown

⁹⁶Tyto přechodné rozpory vyplývají samozřejmě z rozdílných podmínek, kterým se musíme v zemích, kde zíjeme, přizpůsobit, ale i tak zůstává stále mnoho věci, jež nás spojují, než abyste museli o tom ujišťovat Vy mě, nebo abych já musel ubezpečovat Vás a Vaše přátele o své plné důvěře...

Necítím se v těchto dnech docela zdrav a nejsem schopen to rozepsat se Vám dlouze. Odpusťte. Ale nemohu již déle odkládat, abych Vám řekl, že jsem a budu celým srdcem s Vámi, ať se stane cokoliv. Ibid. 86-87.

himself to be less tolerant. However, in this instance, Breton and Teige's positions were similar; when faced with the threat of fascism neither wished to rock the boat. Teige struggled to hold on to the cohesion of Levá fronta. Breton was clinging to the integrity of international Surrealism.

As far as Breton's personal feelings toward Teige, it is clear from the correspondence that Breton and he did not share the same intimate relationship with him that he had with Nezval. In fact, according to the correspondence, Nezval often functioned as Breton's intermediary. When trying to pursue the question of the manifesto, Breton specifically asked Nezval to intercede on his behalf regarding Teige's amendments to the text.⁹⁷ This distance between the two is understandable even in light of the Prague trip given Teige's previous critical reservations on the question of the French Surrealists' commitment to the cause of social revolution. However, Teige's personal reservations had, in the past, prevented his signing the crucial tract "Surrealismus v ČSR" and his becoming a member of the Surrealist group at its inception in 1934. At the time, he was too preoccupied with architecture and his direction of Levá fronta that Marguerite

⁹⁷Breton never received the amendments in question from Teige. The only negative emotion Breton expressed with regard to the decision was a sense of disappointment. He told Nezval, "čekali jsme s tiskem, neboť jsme doufali, že telegram přijde, ale marně." (we waited on the printing since we had hoped that the telegram would arrive, but in vain) Ibid., 87. I am not sure exactly what Breton meant by "waited on the printing" since the manifesto appeared in August. He also informed Nezval that he had asked Toyen to intervene with Teige as well.

Bonnet characterized as a “propaganda effort” (*un effort de propaganda*) for the intellectual avant-garde based on Mayakovsky’s *Lef*.⁹⁸

Although Teige decided to remain independent in spite of his close connection to Nezval, the critical divide that had kept him from embracing Breton and the Surrealist was, nonetheless, knitting shut. Teige’s reservations about Surrealism had far more to do with politics than aesthetics⁹⁹ and Breton’s continued appeal to internationalism on the political front had done much to assuage Teige’s doubts. In addition, Breton’s staunch refusal to accept censorship of any kind (except his own) matched Teige’s position that the defense of culture boiled down to the matter of free expression. This cause (under which all intellectuals on the Left could unite) was rapidly becoming the primary theme on his political agenda. The defense of free speech was essential because Bukharin’s liberal conception of socialist realism had come under attack by Stalin in his bid to gain control over the Party. Eventually, the Writer’s Union’s version emerged as the only show in town.

⁹⁸ Bonnet attributes the form the organization took as a direct result of Mayakovsky’s influence on the Czech avant-garde after his 1927 visit to Prague. See note 2 to p. 416 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1576. I also believe Teige’s approach to *ReD* was influenced by *Lef* (the journal).

⁹⁹ It is important to remember that Teige published his Czech version of *Maldoror* several years before Nezval wrote his letter to Breton. As an outsider preoccupied with architecture (Bauhaus and constructivism), Teige’s affinity for Surrealist aesthetics was evident even under Devětsil.

As Stalin's hard-line stifled debate in the political and cultural arena, Teige saw his decade-long relationship with Moscow¹⁰⁰ fall apart over their differing visions about the dangers facing Europe. For Teige the architectural critic and historian, the material barriers popping up all over that restricted freedom of movement were a symptom of a greater problem – nationalism:

Today's world, today's Europe are filled with contradictions.

States mark out high custom barriers, borders that earlier you effortless crossed in the international train; today they are building real borders; they are not only lines on a map but something really tangible. It is the end of cosmopolitanism.”¹⁰¹

Teige's sad pronouncement on the impending tragedy of a world carved up and stowed behind impenetrable fences and walls reflects another aspect of this deep and abiding love for unimpeded movement and expression. At every juncture, Teige fought attempts by his own government to limit literary and political free speech and as time progressed that censure extended to Moscow and the debate over socialist realism. However, problems for Teige and Moscow

¹⁰⁰ Teige's month-long trip to the Soviet Union in 1925 as “a member of a delegation of Czech intellectuals belonging to the Společnost pro hospodářské a kulturní sblížení s novým Ruskem (Society of economic and cultural friendship with the new Russia)” (*Karel Teige 1900-1951*, 360) certainly had an enormous impact on Teige's relationship with Moscow. Judging from the delegation's name, even in 1925, Teige's was deeply concerned with crossing boundaries to mediate cultural and economic differences.

¹⁰¹ Dnešní svět, dnešní Evropa, jsou plny protikladů. Státy vytyčují vysoké celní hradeby, hranice, které jste dříve lehkomyслně míjeli v mezinárodním vlaku, stavají se dnes opravdovými hranicemi, nejsou to jen čáry na mapě, ale cosi, co reálně pocíťujete. Je konec kosmopolitismu. Karel Teige, “Philippe Soupault v Praze” (Philippe Soupault in Prague), *Doba* 1, no. 1 (14 June 1934), 155.

started not with the issue of literary representation but with architecture, the medium that had preoccupied Teige for much of the twenties and early thirties. Teige viewed architecture as the means to demolish the artificial barriers constructed by bourgeois society to segregate the population and preserve its power over the proletariat. Teige's architectural concerns formed the primary focus of his critical writing from the mid twenties when Devětsil promoted an aesthetic program that hinged on the interplay of native poetism and constructivism borrowed from the Soviet Union through Futurism. Teige's passion for architecture was also strongly influenced by architects from the West. His contact with Bauhaus and Walter Gropius and, in France, Le Corbusier were instrumental in the formulation of views on the role of modern architecture in society.¹⁰²

Teige's love for the medium of architecture distinguished him from Breton who, like Hegel, believed that poetry reigned supreme in representation. Because Teige rejected hierarchy, poetry and architecture were equally valid expressions of human consciousness, although poetry (as a metaphor) served as the principle governing human life. However, architecture held power poetry did not; Teige

¹⁰² Teige's preoccupation with architecture was established through his close relationships to the architects in Devětsil whose participation in *Bauhaus Exhibition on International Architecture* in August 1923, brought him in contact with Walter Gropius. As Rumjana Dačeva writes "Teige acquaints the Czech public with Bauhaus philosophy and its creative tendencies." (*Karel Tiege 1900-1951*, 355) Later, Teige became the conduit for communicating to the Czechs architectural trends from the East where social relationships have already been unfettered from their bourgeois prisons. Once again, Teige extended the hand of critical collaboration and mutual understanding.

believed that the dialectical restructuring of space would revolutionize the relationship of the individual to society. Modern architecture would be the wrecking ball that would level the field and open up space for living. Non-functional embellishment would vanish when architects no longer had the task of buttressing the financial interests of the status-quo with tons of bricks and mortar.

In *Nejmenší byt* (The Minimum Dwelling), Teige's fundamental treatise on architecture from 1932 and in his related articles devoted to communal housing, architecture was not just a creative medium; it embodied a “social act.”¹⁰³

In his critique of architectural practice in the West, the primary target of Teige's censure was the bourgeois family whose members were barricaded behind an architecture that perpetuated the unjust social contradictions inherent to capitalism. Behind the bars of their husbands' gilded palaces, wives were tied by their apron strings to kitchens and nurseries forced by social convention to act as sexual and domestic slaves. Space and consciousness had to be liberated from the

¹⁰³ Eric Dluhosch, “Teige’s Minimum Dwelling as a Critique of Modern Architecture,” In. *Karel Teige 1900-1951*, ,148. According to Eric Dluhosch, Teige’s book was the result of participation in the third International Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (International Congress of Modern Architecture - CIAM) in Brussels (November 22-26, 1930) and his critical view of the proceedings. (Dluhosch 142) Teige’s lecture to the Congress was entitled “Die Wohnungsfrage der Schichten des Existenzminimums (The Question of Housing for the Existential Minimum). The concept of the minimum dwelling had already been discussed at the Second CIAM in Frankfort in 1929 and was, according to Teige the primary theoretical task of the architectural avant-garde. Karel Teige, “Kolektivní byt na západě a v SSSR” (The Collective Flat in the West and in the USSR), *Magazin DP* (Magazine of the Druzstevní práce – Magazine of the Work Cooperative) 2, no. 2 (1934-1934), 53. Teige’s critical stance toward the CIAM represents his refusal to view the crisis in modern architecture merely in terms of form and aesthetic abstraction. As always, for Teige, the physical manifestation of architecture represents an inherently political act and must be addressed accordingly.

oppressive weight of capitalist architecture so that all individuals could reach their human potential:

The gainfully-employed working woman cannot devote her time to the housework; she must be liberated from the kitchen and from taking care of children: for this reason, public cafeterias, laundries and children's homes should be the necessary complement to this housing without households.¹⁰⁴

In the West, Teige was highly critical of attempts to solve the housing crisis in Depression era Europe by means of subsidies for projects that offered workers dwellings that were miniature replicas of their bosses' villas. Teige considered such reforms to the system as a band-aid masking the economic wounds of a class society that thrived on inequality. His censure of Vienna in *Nejmenší byt* is a case in point. Although the government was offering housing to those who had none, Teige felt that their action did not stem from an altruistic urge; these acts of public welfare were merely a front used by the capitalists to mask a more self-serving purpose:

Heavy taxation is introduced in order to build cheap housing; threatened by such taxation, industry cuts back on production and unemployment becomes a serious threat; subsequently, help is

¹⁰⁴Výdělečně pracující žena nemůže se věnovat péci o domácnost, musí být osvobozena od kuchyně i od dozoru nad dětmi: proto veřejné jídelny, prádelny a dětské útulky byly by nutným doplňkem takovýchoho bytu bez domácnosti. Ibid.

offered to industry and commerçy by lowering rents. By such a trick, instead of benefiting the workers, the lowering of rents work to the advantage of capital, thus effectively creating an export premium while at the same time paving the way for a further lowering of wages.¹⁰⁵

Teige believed only a radical redistribution of architectural space would smash the class contradictions inherent in capitalist society to bring real change. And the only means to rid society of the architectural hierarchy of palaces, manor houses, villas, apartments and slums was through collectivization, minimizing and simplifying space to meet everyone's basic needs. In Teige's collective housing estate private life would not be completely done away with; each individual would be provided with his or her own "residential cell" (obytná buňka) of 8m² x 20m³,¹⁰⁶ the minimum area scientifically determined "according to sanitary norms." (podle sanitární normy)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ ...byly zavedeny značné daně , abz bzlo mono stavět levné byty, daněmi ohrozenz průmysl a obchod vegetuje a hrozí endemická nezaměstanost ačež byla poskytnuta pomoc průmyslu a obchodu tím způsobem, že levné činže, misto aby byly prospěchem dělnictva, staly se tímto manevrem prospěchem kapitálu, vývozní premii neboť připouštěly snížení mzdy. Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*. Translated and Introduced by Eric Dluhosch. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002), 89. From original version, Karel Teige, *Nejmenší byt*. (Prague: Václav Petr, 1932), 90.

¹⁰⁶ Karel Teige, "Byt pro existenční minimum." (Dwelling for the Existential Minimum) *Žijeme: Organ svazu československého díla* (We Live: the Organ of the Union of Czechoslovak Labor) 2, no. 7, 202.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

In the West, Teige's vision for the egalitarian minimum remained "an unattainable dream" (nedosažitelným snem)¹⁰⁸ because social revolution had not yet been achieved. However, in the Soviet Union where private property had already been abolished, the chance presented itself through constructivism.

Yet, in the Soviet Union constructivism had not yet prevailed over the past; even after the revolution, its implementation had proved to be problematic. In "Konstruktivismus a nová architektura v SSSR" (Constructivism and the New Architecture in the USSR)¹⁰⁹ Teige criticized the practice of early constructivists who saw aesthetics, not the rational application of engineering principle, as the guiding force behind architecture:

Constructivism conceives of far-reaching projects. The Tatlin Tower, monument of the Third International should be taller than the Parisian Eiffel Tower: a multi-spiraling steel structure. It's a shame that it has not been possible to date to realize the project, but at the same time it's a shame that this project was not logically thought through.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ In *Stavba* (Construction) 5. Parts 1 and 2 (1926-1927). Published October 1926 – therefore before the expulsion of Trotsky (this comes in later in my discussion of his comments on Trotsky.
¹¹⁰ Konsruktivismus koncipuje dalekosáhlé projekty. Tatlinova věž, pomník III. Internacionály, jež měla být vyšší než paříká Eiffelka Mohutná spirálová železná konstrukce. Škoda, že dodnes není možnosti realisovati tento project, ale škoda rovněž, že tento project není racionálně domyšlen. Teige, "Konstruktivismus a nová architektura," 31.

To establish architecture's proper relationship to society under socialism, architects had to rescue it from its ivory tower. Tatlin's design failed constructivism (and, by extension, the revolution) on two prominent levels. A design that was not designed to be built represented an empty exercise in aestheticism. Moreover, Tatlin's form (the towering structure) reduced function to an expression of nationalist superiority. For Teige, towers were the anachronistic manifestation of capitalism and its institutions that sought to transcend the human scale to reach the heavens. Therefore, Tatlin's monumental conception, built along the lines of Eiffel, was reactionary, a thing of the past:

Today it is necessary to relieve art of its symbolic meaning, abandoning outdated artistic disciplines to make a *tabula rasa* out of the past, violently striking into the whirlwind of life and organizing its current. To make life beautiful means to create from life, from the living material of art. International and universal art becomes a product of things that serve life not rhetoric and embellishment.¹¹¹

Despite false starts and dead ends, Teige believed that constructivism would ultimately prevail over time because of the dialectical process driving society ever closer toward socialism. Once the needs of the proletariat governed

¹¹¹ Ibid., 25.

architecture, buildings would be constructed to reflect the new social order. Here, buildings would be liberated of their superfluous mass and adornments to expose the living room beneath.

However time proved Teige's prediction wrong. His enthusiasm for theory prevented him from seeing the practice – the proverbial writing on the wall. The tower as a form proved quite resilient when it came to the wrecking ball. Tatlin was no blind alley. When given the chance to apply the revolution to construction, those in charge showed a strange fondness for the same monumentality as the capitalists that had preceded them. In *Nejmenší byt*, Teige openly expressed his disappointment at Soviet architects' reticence to revolutionize their practice:

What, then, should one say in the twentieth century when in the land of the dictatorship of the proletariat, buildings are still being designed whose frontal facades and portals are conceived as propagandistic sculptures and decorative bas-reliefs, just like the portals of cathedrals? Don't these architects understand that the expression of tradition by monumentality and grandeur, of piety and glory by style, is – as we have shown – tied to the class enemies of the proletariat: the nobility, the court, the church and the bourgeoisie? The fact that *monumentality is intrinsically an*

asocial phenomenon, that it is an expression of exploitation

(Teige's emphasis), makes it essential to break with this tradition once and for all.¹¹²

The theoretical divide driving a wedge between Teige and the Soviet Union came to a head over the competition for the Palace of the Soviets in 1932, whose outcome gave Teige "a real shock."¹¹³ In his article on the competition, "The Cultural Palace in Moscow," (Dvorec sovětov v Moskvě) Teige did not hide his contempt for the competition's outcome:

The decision of the Construction Union provokes bitterness and disappointment because among those designs awarded higher prizes only two that are works of the modern spirit and high architectural quality: the Vopra brigade project and the Dodice and Duskina project whereas all three projects awarded in the highest category are *academic works, architectural trash, especially*

¹¹² Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 24. The original reads: Co však říci ve 20. století, v zemi diktatury proletariátu, tomu, že jsou dosud navrhovány budovy, jejichž půdorys má formu srpu a kladiva, jejichž průčelí a portály jsou agitačními plastikami, jako portály katedrál? Nechápou takoví architekti, že tradice vyjadřovatí monumentalitou a slohem velikost, zbožnost a slávu, je, jak jsme uvedli, spjata s třídami proletariátu nepřátelskými, se šlechtou, dvorem, církví a měšťanstvem? Ze *monumentálnost je vůbec asociální, že je výrazem vykořisťování*, a že je tedy nezbytno zlomiti nadobro s touto tradicí. 33.

¹¹³ Rostislav Švácha, "Before and After the Mundaneum: Karel Teige as Theoretician of the Architectural Avant-garde" In *Karel Teige 1900-1951*, 129.

Zholtovsky's project (Teige's emphasis), some sort of bizarre

copulation¹¹⁴ of Coliseum and Kremlin Tower.¹¹⁵

Instead of stripping structures to their rational economic minimums, the Soviets in charge of construction seemed more interested in erecting shrines to overshadow those of their capitalist predecessors. Although the regimes had changed, in essence, the discourse of construction had remained the same: a language where sign and signifier were locked in reductive embrace. Dialectical necessity demanded that architecture be set free to bring individuals together under one roof. The only higher authority that architecture had to answer to was

¹¹⁴ This is no mistranslation – Teige's novel use of the noun in this context reflects his sardonic imagination.

¹¹⁵ Rozhodnutí stavebního sovětu vyvolává rozhořčení a zklamání, protože mezi projekty, oceněny výšímí cenami jsou tolíko dva dílem moderního ducha a vysokých architektonických kvalit, totiž projekt brigady Vopra a projekt Dodice a Duškina, kdežto všecky tři projekty, odměněné nejvyšší kategorií cen, jsou akademické práce, architektonické veteš, zejména pak projekt Žoltovského, bizarní kopulace jakéhosi Kolosea s kremelskou věží. "Dvorec sovětov v Moskvě" (The Palace of the Soviets in Moscow), *Žijeme* 1, no. 1 (1932), 21. Zholtovsky's design ultimately won the competition, but could not be constructed because of its grandiose plan ignored the limitations of engineering practice and did not take the science of construction into account (much as in the case of Tatlin's tower). As architect and critic Jiří Kroha pointed out in 1936 in his discussion of the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects (analogous to the 1934 Congress in Moscow for writers "...pro první soutěž na Palác Sovětů byly kladeny podmínky, žádající tak obrovské sály, jimiž by procházely demonstrující průvody, že by jejich uskutečnění bylo velice těžkým oříškem pro nejvyspělejší západní stavební techniku." (...for the first competition for the Palace of Soviets, conditions were proposed that required halls gigantic enough for processions to pass down them that made their realization a tough nut to crack even for the most advanced construction techniques in the West) Jiří Kroha "Dnešní problémy sovětské architektury: Předběžné poznámky k I. Vsesvazovému sjezdu sovětských architektů" (Current Problems of Soviet architecture: Preliminary Notes to the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architecture), *Praha-Moskva: Revue pro kulturní a hospodářskou spolupráci ČSR a SSSR* (Prague-Moscow: Review for the Cultural and Economic Cooperation of the Czechoslovak Republic and the USSR) 1, 4-5 (July-August 1936), 128.

“human factor” (lidský faktor)¹¹⁶ that “was not concerned with the machine but the worker.” (Nezaměstnává se strojem, ale dělníkem)¹¹⁷

Even before the discussion of socialist realism, Stalin revealed he was not interested in representation on the human scale. He wanted to build greater bastions that could withstand the transitory nature of human existence. In literature, he mandated that the engineers of human souls construct heroes marching inexorably into the socialist sunrise. However, Teige wished to bring representation down from its pedestal to promenade the city’s avenues among the masses. Stalin, on the other hand, celebrated the verticality of the pedestal that drew the spectator’s eyes up to the heights, a spacial hierarchy that distinguished mortal from immortal. In grammatical terms, the struggle over architecture boiled down to which tense would win out: Teige’s present continuous (the dialectical process made material) or Stalin’s immutable past perfect whose heft, like a great road block, would cause the whole process to come grinding to a halt. As Teige considered all monumentality as “intrinsically an asocial phenomenon,”¹¹⁸ this approach to construction was tantamount to society’s being entombed under tons of concrete. Despite the fact that Teige had placed his hopes in the future of Soviet Union, his love affair with Moscow was quickly turning into the life and death struggle to save the dialectic.

¹¹⁶ Karel Teige, “Konstruktivismus a nova architektura,” 28.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 24. See note 110.

Inevitably, the outcome of the Palace of the Soviets competition did not herald the beginning of the end of the affair. It simply represented what Jean-Louis Cohen calls one of the “defining moments”¹¹⁹ in Teige’s intellectual development, a turning point that eventually sent him into the beckoning arms of Surrealism.¹²⁰ In terms of the battle over architectural representation, Tatlin and the Palace of the Soviets were just the tip of the iceberg because Teige considered the major issue governing construction was not how to erect bigger and better monuments to ideology (better products), but how to collectivize (a process).

Although the Soviets and Teige believed in building communal residences to end the housing crisis they arrived at their views from a completely different set of assumptions. Even though Teige longed for the moment the minimum dwelling would become a social reality, he did not believe collectivization could be imposed before the public was psychologically prepared for change. As a social manifestation of dialectic, collectivization had to grow out of the evolution of social consciousness transformed by the dialogue between individual and

¹¹⁹ From Jean-Louis Cohen’s Introduction to *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia and Other Writings*, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2000, 19. In this case Teige aligns himself with other western critics including Le Corbusier who also found the results marked a “reactionary” trend. Ibid. Teige’s decision to stand against Soviet policy along with those he had once been so critical of is a harbinger of his later acrimonious break with the Soviet Union.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Cohen points out the irony that Teige splits with Moscow over architecture, the very thing that had attracted him to the Soviet Union in the first place. Teige’s increasing disaffection with the Soviet Union is reflected in a corresponding decrease in articles devoted to the subject in the mid-thirties. Teige’s declining interest in architectural concerns also corresponds to his increasing affinity for Breton’s Surrealism (and subsequent publications on the topic) which ultimately replaced Soviet constructivism and poetism in his affections.

society. Just as he refused to allow tendentious symbolism to rob individuals of their right to navigate the vast reaches of human existence, Teige refused to impose collectivization on the public before they were ready to embrace its brave new vision of society. Restructuring the living environment from above would inevitably lead to rejection and failure. In “The Collective Flat in the West and in the USSR,” (Kolektivní byt na západě a v SSSR) from 1934 (the same year as the Moscow conference), Teige urged for restraint:

In the first upsurge of construction in the first five-year plan collective houses were found among new residential projects in a relatively marked percentage: modern architecture did not even wish to hear of residential forms other than commune houses.

Architects assumed that the Soviet economy had developed all conditions for the resulting and instantaneous adoption of socialist conditions for life and dwelling and the most radical of them proposed that the shift from individual, private and domestic conditions into socialist form had to be enacted by decrees and enforced by the administrative path. They proposed as necessary the liquidation of households and food preparation, artificial foundations of housing communes; they wanted to speed up the realization of socialist, living and dwelling forms whose universal

victory could not be attained as soon as they expected.

Government and Party condemned switching to the idea of collective dwelling (same as the necessary collectivization in agriculture and the artificial shift from kolkhoz to communes) as an ultra-leftist deviation and for good reasons given the real cultural and economic situation. The resulting collectivization of housing that socialism demands is only possible at a certain degree of development of the forces of production and only then when the vast strata of the population are, through propaganda and cultural education, ready for this kind of dwelling.¹²¹

¹²¹ Ve stavebním ruchu 1. pětiletky uplatnily se kolektivní domy mezi obytnými novostavbami poměrně značným procentem; moderní architektura o jiných obytných formách než o domech-komunách ani nechtěla slyšet. Architekti předpokladali, že v sovětském hospodářství už dozrály všecky podmínky pro důsledné a okamžité zavedení socialistických způsobů života a bydlení a nejradikálnější z nich navrhovali, aby přeměna životních způsobů, z individuálních, privátních a rodinných v ryze socialistické, byla nařízena dekrety a vynucena administrativní cestou. Navrhovali nucenou likvidaci domácího hospodářství a vaření, umělé zakládání bytových komun; chtěli předčasně urychlit uskutečnění socialistických životních a bytových forem, jejichž všeobecné vítězství se nedostavilo tak brzy, jak očekávali. Vláda a strana odsoudily takové přepínání myšlenky kolektivního bydlení (podobně jako nucenou kolektivizaci v zemědělství a umělé přeměnování artělů-kolchozů v komuny) jako ultralevou úchylku, a to z dobrých důvodů dáných reální situací hospodářskou a kulturní. Důsledná kolektivizace bydlení, kterou socialismus vyžaduje, je možna jen na určitém stupní rozvoje výrobních sil a jen tehdy, kdy široké vrstvy obyvatelstva jsou propagandou a osvětovou činností pro takové formy bytu připraveny. Karel Teige, "Kolektivní byt," *Magazín DP*, 2 (1934-35), 54. Teige's call for the use of propaganda in the collectivization effort could be considered inimical to his free thinking strategies. However, Teige's propaganda does not serve a particular ideological master; instead, it is a tool in a particular social effort that would ultimately benefit the proletariat by educating them on an issue of public concern.

Yet, Teige did not criticize the Soviet government for its failure to provide adequate housing through the auspices of the first five-year plan.¹²² Rather he attributed the problem to the power struggle being waged between extremist factions of architects on both sides of the ideological fence. Teige argued that these fanatics’ “rash application of collective forms of housing without the full material and cultural preconditions,” (překotné zavádění kolektivních forem bydlení bez úplných materiálních a kulturních předpokladů)¹²³ threatened to betray constructivism for political exigency. As a result, the ultra-left had played into the hands of what Teige calls “conservative elements in the architectural community,” (konservativní živly v sovětské architektonické obci)¹²⁴ who were waiting in the wings to take over once constructivism had been overcome. However, Teige was still optimistic that, given the right philosophical framework, collectivization would arise as the natural result of social evolution in the Soviet Union. Due to dialectical necessity, it was already too late to turn back.

However, Teige assumed that collectivization would be achieved by acknowledging that “the full and free development of the individual will be the condition for the development and life of the collective.” (plný a volný rozvoj

¹²² Teige puts great emphasis on the problem of “cooking” (vaření – in the previous quotation), how to distance the individual (especially women) from the oppression of the traditional kitchen, the hearth. Teige complains that instead of distancing the individual from cooking facilities, architects made the situation worse by placing the kitchen in the residential cell, turning the meditative space into a galley. Ibid, 56.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

individual bude podmínkou rozvoje a života kolektivity)¹²⁵ The minimal dwelling could, therefore, not be achieved “through the path of uniformity.” (cestou uniformity)¹²⁶ In order for the new architecture to foster real change, architects had to respond to the ever increasing complexity of the relationship between man and his world. Teige’s vision for the minimum dwelling was, therefore, neither sterile nor impersonal, the vast and dismal residential areas where one block of flats could not be distinguished from the other. Under socialism construction embraced and responded to human affective needs and offered a place where individuals could meet to perpetuate the interplay of social evolution.

Even though Teige subscribed to the view that form followed function, Teige’s brand of functionalism transcended a slavish application of functionalist principle at the individual’s expense. Function was only “the raw material with which to synthesize,”¹²⁷ never an end in and of itself. Since the dialectic was a process, its nature was the contradiction between the eternal stream continuity and disruption. Because Teige saw the residential cell as the most perfect expression of the communal space in microcosm, its space was not a monk’s hermetic refuge from the trials of every day existence, a place of isolation and escape. Nor was its design intended as a pure response to function, a place for sleeping and performing personal ablutions. As the material expression of the dialectic Teige

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Dluhosch, “Teige’s Minimum Dwelling,” 152.

required that “even the most minimal residential area should have access to air and sun by means of big windows (and perhaps even a balcony). To make them light, they will also be brightly painted.” (*Obytné prostory, byť nejmenší, mají být velkým okny (a možno-li i balkonem) přístupny vzduchu a slunci. Aby byly světlé, budou i světle vymalovány*).¹²⁸ Although windows and balconies could have been considered an extravagance during a time of economic crisis, for Teige whose preoccupation was human consciousness, these features were essential. The light of the dialectic had to penetrate the architectural equivalent of the eye, the window, so the resident could interact with the external world. Since the contradictions that had alienated man from his environment were in the process of being overcome, external reality would no longer the dark oppressive place it had been, but an extensive laboratory filled with light.

Teige’s rethinking of the architectural space as a living room departed radically from the traditional concept of housing as shelter and a safe haven; in the revolution’s brave new world, architects designed spaces of maximum exposure to the environment, fostering the process where individual, collective, nature and industry collided. In the minimum dwelling, man was no longer the master of his castle, but a scientist who conducted experiments in the art of existence.

¹²⁸ Karel Teige, “Byt pro existenční minimum,” 203.

Teige's contention that functionalism "does not exclude psychological, or even poetic factors"¹²⁹ and that "function combined with social needs determines the architectural solution"¹³⁰ illustrate his faith in a dialectic perpetuated by the freedom for individuals to think independently. By the laws of the dialectic they had been endowed with the right to free association to make more and more connections to expand their consciousness and by doing so, society's as a whole. Just as in case of trying to impose collectivization before social conditions were ripe, restricting civil liberties would arrest social evolution in a premature stage of social development; or worse, it would cast humanity back into the dark ages.

Just as Teige's vision for architecture differed on the theoretical level from the Soviets, his view of the architect differed substantially, as well. Moscow's "architect-technician"¹³¹ created structures whose function was inexorably bound to form; Teige's architect was a creator "not of new forms but of new contents."¹³² In the former case, the architect's design represented a fixed solution to a particular problem; in the latter, the architect's solution the question of form was informed by an every changing process that demanded space. Although Teige's architect was a creator, he was not a slave to aesthetics since beauty was not embodied by a fixed object. Beauty was manifestation of the

¹²⁹ Dluhosch, "Teige's Minimum Dwelling," 152.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

dialectical process. It was poetry, life itself. Teige's approach to the architect as creator does not correspond to the antiquated notion of Artist with a capital A who had replaced God to give birth to artistic works divorced from their social context.¹³³ Even though no one could accuse Teige of lacking in the very idealism he despised, his architect/creator was human, a functionalist concerned with how to design space to promote living. Like the Soviet architect-technician, Teige's architect was also an engineer, not of steel, but of human consciousness.

Teige's definition of the architect was, in many ways, analogous to Stalin's "engineer of human souls." However, Teige was not interested in the "souls," a term that smacked of metaphysical oppression of the Church and the great beyond. By engineering the transformation of society through architecture, Teige sought to improve life here on Earth. The social engineer Teige envisioned foreshadowed the ideological conflict that turned him from Moscow once Stalin had consolidated his power over the government. In "Konstruktivismus," to support his assertions regarding social engineering and construction, Teige did not mention Stalin once. Instead, he tipped his hat to the great political engineer, Trotsky, a man whose name, only a short while later, became synonymous with

¹³³ The well publicized polemic between Teige and the architectural titan Le Corbusier over Le Corbusier's Mundaneum is a reflection of Teige's refusal to put aesthetics first. For a detailed analysis of Teige's position vis-à-vis the project see Švácha's "Before and After the Mundaneum" in *Karel Teige 1900-1951*.

the term “an the enemy of the people.” As a practitioner he recognized the right relation of the engineer to society:

Trotsky, himself an engineer, gave an interesting speech at the Congress of Soviet Engineers on the technical problems in the construction of the socialist state, in which he emphasized that the problems of socialization cannot be solved without the participation of modern technology, that social revolution is, after all, a “scientific enterprise.” He states that the modern engineer carries out a significant service to the revolution through his professional expertise, rather than participating in politics; the Soviet government does not ask of its Russian engineers to be communists, in effect, that the better communists they are the better engineers they will be; but rather that the results of good professional practice are the most substantial support for the socialist order.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Trocký, sám inženýr, pronesl na jednom sjezdu inženýrů SSSR zajímavou přednášku o technických problémech výstavby socialistického státu, v níž zdůraznil, že problémy socialisace nejsou řešitelný bez účasti moderní techniky, že sociální revoluce vůbec je “vědeckým podnikem.” Konstatuje, že moderní inženýr prokazuje revoluci významné služby svou prací odbornou, spíše než účastí na politici, že sovětská vláda nežádá od ruských inženýrů, aby byly komunisty, vědouc, že jsou tím lepšími komunisty, cím lepšími budou inženýry, neboť výsledky dobré odborné práce jsou nejvydatelnější podporou socialistického rádu. Teige, “Konstruktivismus a nová architektura,” 27.

The notion that engineers should be given free reign to transform society independent of party control turned out to be absolutely inimical to Stalin's vision of Socialist realism that prevailed over Bukharin's where writers' efforts were not restricted by the party, only by the limitations of their imagination and their craft . Teige was on the wrong side of the ideological fence from the onset. His relationship with Moscow paralleled the increasing alienation of socialist realism as it was dictated by the Writer's Union from Surrealism and other literary movements of the avant-garde of its kind.¹³⁵ It is no coincidence that Teige also turned to Bukharin years before the Writer's Congress and socialist realism to legitimize his interpretation of constructivism. In 1926 Teige wrote that Bukharin was the one who understood the "the whole meaning of constructivism" (celý smysl konstruktivismu),¹³⁶ that the rational application of the engineer's scientific techniques vis-à-vis social reconstruction would lead to the "liberation of humanity's creative and spiritual forces for new cultural expansion." (uvolnění

¹³⁵According Jiří Kroha the year 1932 marked the end of the Constructivist and Functionalist experiment in the Soviet Union, the methods that had once dominated architectural practice being "teměř oficiálně odmínuty." (almost rejected officially) Kroha went on to point out that architects were given a new slogan : "vytvořit nový sovětský stavební sloh v duchu socialistického realismu" (to create a new Soviet style of construction in the spirit of socialist realism) to serve as the guiding principle for their efforts. Kroha criticized the fact that L.M. Kaganovich advocated that socialist realist architecture (not inherently revisionist in itself) come as close as possible to the aesthetic norms of ancient Greece and Rome thus striking the death knell for the methods consistent with forward looking avant-garde. In his article, Kroha, as Teige in *Socialist Realism and Surrealism*, observed the problematic nature of the term "realism" in the equation that implied architects had to tip their hats to a bourgeois anachronism. Kroha, "Dnešní problémy sovětské architektury," 127-128.

¹³⁶Karel Teige, "Konstruktivismus a nová architektura," 30.

tvořivých a duchových sil pro nový rozmach kulturní)¹³⁷ In 1934, only the terms had changed; constructivism could be replaced with socialist realism.

Teige's contention that politics and technology were equal partners in effecting social change (a view he backed up by the references to influential politicians) also mirrored Breton's position in the late twenties and early thirties. This philosophical contradiction engendered the rift between the Surrealists, the PCF and Moscow. Because Breton, like Teige, believed that individual actions answered to the dialectic process and not a political institution, he argued passionately for the possibility of a mutually beneficial co-existence. Over and over again, Breton pleaded to the PCF and their contacts in Moscow for the Surrealists to be given the freedom to engage in the revolution by doing what they did best: experimenting in representation to set free human consciousness.

In the long-run, Teige did not betray either constructivism or socialist realism; he simply transcended the artificial limits imposed upon the processes by the party line. After the mid-thirties, Surrealism alone provided the one theoretical approach to representation firmly grounded upon Teige's understanding of dialectical principle. Finally, Teige's voluminous writings on constructivism do not represent the chronicle of his love affair with architecture; instead, they speak of the beautiful spaces Teige discovered existed between the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

walls and in the wide-open expanses of urban streets: a beauty defined by the creative imagination and human liberty. Architecture was Teige's living room where the world of the individual and collective were meant to collide freely without the danger of reprisal. Teige's passionate relationship with architecture served as the introduction to his enduring romance with Surrealism that supplanted constructivism and poetism as his metaphor for living. For Teige, Surrealism, like the ever-changing face of society, was a work in progress.

The Point of No Return

Humanity is not uniform; we must accept this fact and any attempt to simplify, to unify, to reduce it from the outside will always be odious, ruinous, and disastrously grotesque...

André Gide

Lenin's teachings on cultural heritage show that spiritual evolution is not a mechanical elevation, gradation, alternation or repetition of cultural styles... Cultural revolution is not an ancestor cult and piety for the heritage of the past: it is dominating and prevailing over this heritage through the power of revolutionary criticism. The dawn of international socialist culture is symbolized

by the cannon fire from “the Aurora” which reminds one that culture does not endow; culture conquers.

Karel Teige

Despite the fact that Teige had been disillusioned by the revisionist trend in Soviet architecture, he remained hopeful about the future. He directed the focus of his intellectual efforts away from the issue of social construction to culture as the sphere where East and West could unite. Despite the fact Teige had abandoned Soviet architecture for Surrealism, he continued to struggle to achieve the broad reconciliation on the Left he always dreamed of. Teige’s unwillingness to support Breton’s tract testified to his willingness to compromise for this goal no matter the immediate cost. Yet, while the revolution had its obvious external enemies (such as Hitler and capitalism), there were also adversaries who were set on destroying the movement from within. Because these opponents could hide their bad intentions under the cover of friendship, they were more difficult to pinpoint and, thus, presented a potentially greater threat. How to determine the identity of the enemy from within and how to deal with him once his duplicity had been exposed became the essential to the Left’s discourse on the defense of culture.

Teige's response to the question of defense came in the form of two articles in *Praha-Moskva*¹³⁸ where he argued that cultural development (defined by the drive to socialism) in both East and West were inherently linked. For this reason the perpetuation of culture depended on debate and cultural exchange. In order to strike down "the border, dividing the country of socialist constructivism from the other five-sixths of the globe," (hranice, oddělující zemi socialistického konstruktivismu od ostatních pěti šestin globu),¹³⁹ Teige concluded, quoting Roman Jakobson, that "the difference in ideological assumptions must not be an obstacle." (rozdíl ideologických předpokladů nemusí být překážkou)¹⁴⁰ After all, difference informed the process of cultural transformation and as such did not represent a threat at all.

Teige kept returning to the discussion of cultural legacy he began with his analysis of Surrealism.¹⁴¹ For Teige the dialectical critic, the strategy for interpreting experience was dissonance. No social element could be taken for

¹³⁸ Edited by Teige and published by Společnost pro kulturní a hospodářské styky s SSSR (The Society for Cultural and Economic Relations with the USSR), it began publication in 1936. The journal was subtitled "revue pro kulturní a hospodářskou spolupráci ČSR a SSSR." (Review for cultural and economic collaboration of the Czechoslovak Republic and the USSR) The choice of title and the journal's stated purpose shows clearly that Teige still believed that exchange was still possible, if not a necessity given the Europe's charged political climate after the onset of the Spanish Civil War. The hyphen in the title served as a typographical handshake between the two great cities that sealed their collaboration.

¹³⁹ Karel Teige, "Otázky kulturní součinnosti Sovětského svazu se Západem" (Questions of Cultural Collaboration of the Soviet Union with the West), *Praha-Moskva* 1, no. 6 (October 1936), 161.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁴¹ See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of Teige's analysis of cultural heritage and Surrealism.

granted since the culture depended on dissent for its survival. Teige felt that anyone who attempted to stifle open debate was a threat to culture no matter what side of the political divide:

Neither the aesthetic avant-garde, fundamentally antitraditionalist, nor the group of the so called “proletarian artists,” the Soviet and western supporters of Proletkult and RaPP could manage properly to appreciate and utilize the vital active powers of Lenin’s conception of cultural legacy.¹⁴²

What avant-garde critics had not understood was that, although the revolution necessitated a radical break with tradition, art could not be completely cut off from its past, since the past engendered present. Any program (such as Proletkult and RaPP or Dada) that did not offer a dialectical alternative to rise in tradition’s stead was a meaningless exercise in anarchy, Dada’s nonsense. Giving into anarchy and irrationality would mean the utter destruction of the dialectical principle passed down by Hegel, Marx and Lenin:

G.W.F. Hegel has already shown that the whole history of philosophy appears as a collection of nonsense if the development

¹⁴²Ani umělecký avant-gardy, zásadně antitradicionalisticky orientované, ani skupiny tak zv. “proletářských umělců”, sovětských i západních stoupenců Proletkultu a RAPPu, nedovedly správně ocenit a použít průbojně akční sily Leninovy koncepce kulturního dědictví. “Sovětská kulturní tvorba a otázka kulturního dědictví” (Soviet Cultural Creation and the Question of Cultural Legacy), Sovětská kulturní tvorba a otázka kulturního dědictví” *Praha Moskva* 7/8 (November-December 1936), 260.

of philosophical thought took place by a second philosopher relying on the first and the third, the second. However, to overcome a particular philosophical system does not mean simply rejecting it, rather it means developing it further to its antithesis, relieving it of its positive moments; in this way Hegel managed the synthesis of historical evolution and philosophy and then Marx expanded further on Hegel's philosophy by overcoming his idealism and turning its dialectic on its head: there the dialectic became materialist and materialism dialectical that meant a reversal in the history of philosophical thought.¹⁴³

Teige's analysis supports a theory of cultural legacy whose stance toward the past is not "lapidary" (lapidarium), but "vivendi" (vivarium),¹⁴⁴ a never-ending process where artist, work and the public interact. However, Teige did not conceive cultural continuity as flowing uninterrupted stream – it had its ripples and cross currents. Rather Teige reasoned that dialectic continuity had to embrace fluxations and disruption because "*cultural continuity* is a condition for *social*

¹⁴³ Už G.W.F. Hegel na to, že by celé dějiny filosofie vyhlížely jako sbírka nesmyslu, kdyby vývoj filosofické myšlenky se děl jen tím, že druhý filosof popírá prvního a třetí druhého. Avšak překonat nějaký filosofický systém neznamená jej prostě odmítout, nýbrž vyvíjet jej dale až do jeho protikladu, vybavit z něj jeho positivní momenty; tak Hegel provedl syntesu historického vývoje filosofie, a tak Marx rozvinul dále Hegelovu filosofii překonáním jejího idealismu a postavením její dialektiky "z hlavy na nohy"; dialektika se tu stala materialistickou a materialismus dialektickým, což znamenalo převrat v dějinách filosofické myšlenky. Ibid, 192.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 266.

discontinuity" (kulturní kontinuita je podmíněna sociální diskontinuitou) (Teige's emphasis).¹⁴⁵ Revolution's destructive force (social discontinuity) embraced its opposite in order to forge a new means of living represented "a cultural creative act."(kulturním, tvůrčím aktem)¹⁴⁶ Comrised of fits and starts, culture evolved embracing "advancement and by no means inertia" (vzestup a nikoliv setrvačnost)¹⁴⁷ by means of disruptions to its continuity. In this view of cultural development that served as correlative to Teige's earlier views of architectural development, critical negation functioned as the driving force behind the whole process. Without criticism, the spark that destroyed culture at the moment of creation became immured in the dead weight of an idealized and monumental past.

In 1936, the debate over "the defense of culture" grew more contentious. The controversy sparked off by the publication of André Gide's memoir, *Return from the USSR* (Retour de l'URSS) is a case in point. Prior to the book's publication, Gide had been widely recognized as one of the most prominent supporters of the Soviet Union abroad. In a marked contrast to his treatment of the Surrealists, Ehrenburg had lauded Gide because he was "ready to give his life for

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 190.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

the USSR” (prêt à donner sa vie pour L’U.R.S.S).¹⁴⁸ Although he was geographically an outsider, Gide as a true compatriot of the proletarian cause understood the monumental nature of the Soviet Union’s struggle to achieve the goals of social revolution. For Ehrenburg, Gide symbolized a prime example of Socialist virtue who “illuminates the full responsibility and difficulty of our task.” (met un lumière toute la responsabilité et toute la difficulté de notre tâche)¹⁴⁹

Gide’s *Retour*, like Nezval’s *Neviditelná Moskva*, provided the western reader with a detailed first-hand account of life in the Soviet Union. In Nezval’s case, the travelogue resulted from participating in the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Gide’s book stemmed from a sadder event: the death of Maxim Gorky in 1936, the most prominent literary figure at the Moscow Congress.¹⁵⁰ Despite similarities: glowing descriptions of parks and cultural events, the earnestness of the people, Gide’s narrative reflected the fact that times had changed. At almost the moment Gide was making his way across the country the internal struggles within the Soviet Communist Party culminated in the first

¹⁴⁸ Ilya, Ehrenburg, *Duhamel, Gide, Malraux, Mariac, Morand, Romains, Unamuno Vus par un écrivain d’U.R.S.S.* (Duhamel, Gide, Malraux, Mariac, Morand, Romains, Unamuno Seen by a Writer from the USSR) (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), 218. The French translation of Erenburg’s essay in which he excoriated the Surrealists appeared in this volume.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 219.

¹⁵⁰ How sad indeed if one takes into account the fact that Yagoda was later charged with his poisoning. The question still remains whether Stalin ordered the murder which would make sense because it would have been difficult to drag Gorky to court given his popular reputation. Since Stalin often charged his opponents with his transgressions of his own. I’m thinking of the pact he was concluding with Hitler as he prosecuted Bukharin for collaborating with the Nazis. One only had to put two and two together.

political trial and the summary execution of sixteen of Stalin's political rivals who were accused of participating in Kirov's assassination. While Nezval celebrated the warm friendly faces he encountered, during a walk in the Caucuses, Gide stumbled into the woods, into a forest of cultural contradictions beyond his wildest dreams:

Ah! Had I simply come as a tourist! Or as a naturalist delighted to discover a bounty of new plants, to recognize on the high plateaus the 'Caucasian scabious' of my garden... But that's not at all what I had come to the USSR to find. Man is what matters to me; men and what can be done with them and what has already been done. The frightfully dense forest that attracts me there, the one in which I get lost, is the forest of social questions. In the USSR they petition you, press upon you and oppress you from all sides.¹⁵¹

Instead of discovering "the land where Utopia was in the process of becoming reality," (une terre où l'utopie était en passe de devenir réalité)¹⁵² Gide encountered a depressing conformity that pervaded Soviet society on every level.

¹⁵¹ Ah! Que n'étais-je venu simplement en tourist! Ou en naturaliste ravi de découvrir là-bas quantité de plantes nouvelles, de reconnaître sure les hauts plateaux la "scabieuse du Caucase" de mon jardin... Mais ce n'est point là ce que je suis venu chercher en U.R.S.S.. Ce qui m'y importe c'est l'homme, les hommes, et ce qu'on en peut faire, et ce qu'on en a fait. La forêt qui m'y attire, affreusement touffue et où je me perds, c'est celle des questions sociales. En U.R.S.S. elles vous sollicitent, et vous pressent, et vous oppriment de tout parts. André Gide, *Retour de l:U.R.S.S.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 31.

¹⁵² Ibid., 17.

Nowhere was this oppressive feeling more tangible than in his description of the communal housing. Although the commune was prosperous and affordable housing was available, Gide believed the proletariat had paid an enormous price for these social gains; individuality and humanity (Gide's main preoccupation as per his previous comment), man's inner light had been sacrificed to collectivize:

I would like to convey the bizarre and depressing impression that comes from these 'interiors': that of a complete depersonalization; in each of them, the same vile furniture, the same portrait of Stalin, and nothing else, not the slightest object, the slightest personal memento. Each dwelling is interchangeable... Who could ask for more? Happiness for all can only be obtained at each individual becoming depersonalized. Happiness for all can only be obtained at the individual's expense. To be happy, conform.¹⁵³

Once confronted with what he considered to be the hypocrisy of communal life at the kolkhoz, Gide found himself in a deep morass of doubt. He wondered if, given the enormity of the cost, the process had been worthwhile and asked readers: "But can this depersonalization toward which everything in the Soviet Union seems to

¹⁵³ Je voudrais exprimer la bizarre et attristante impression qui se dégage de chacun des ces 'intérieurs': celle d'une complète dépersonnalisation. Dans chacun d'eux les mêmes Villains meubles, le même portrait de Stalin, et absolument rien d'autre; pas le moindre objet, le moindre souvenir personnel. Chaque demeure est interchangeable... Que peut-on souhaiter de mieux? Le bonheur de tous ne s'obtient qu'en désindividualisant chacun. Pour être heureux, soyez conformes. Ibid., 43.

tend be considered progress? For my part, I cannot believe it.” (Mais cette depersonalization, à quoi tout, en U.R.S.S., semble tendre, peut-elle être considérée comme un progress? Pour ma part, je ne puis le croire.)¹⁵⁴

Gide’s depressing portrait of communal housing was a far cry from the light airy spaces that Teige had envisioned in *Nejmenší byt*. In fact, Gide’s description makes it clear that the Soviets had altogether dispensed with the residential cell, the most perfect expression of the minimum dwelling. In the Soviet version, self-individualization had no place; workers were given a bed in a dormitory to sleep in because sleeping was a function that did not require a personal solution to the problem of space; one bed was as good as the other, just as each worker was indistinguishable from any other. Furniture and human being had been reduced to pure function, making them completely interchangeable.

Although he viewed the wholesale depersonalization of the individual as a threat to culture, Gide did not consider the collectivization process to be the root of the problem; it was merely the symptom of a greater ill. Since Gide made it a point to emphasize that “the USSR is ‘in construction’ (L’U.R.S.S. est ‘en construction’),¹⁵⁵ he believed (as did Teige) that cultural development had to be viewed as a work in progress and that change would only happen by acknowledging internal contradictions and amending them before their continued

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 15

presence became a potential threat. It is this critical approach to culture that Gide, at Gorky's funeral, promised to defend¹⁵⁶ against the dangers of those “enemy parties” (partis ennemis) whose “love of order gets mixed up with their partiality for tyrants.” (l'amour de l'ordre se confond avec le gout des tyrans)¹⁵⁷ Gide made it clear who among the unnamed tyrants was primarily responsible for threat to Soviet culture:¹⁵⁸

One encounters Stalin's effigy everywhere; his name is on everyone's lips; in all addresses his praises are inevitably sung.
This is particularly true in Georgia, in every single inhabited room that I entered, even the most humble and sordid I couldn't help noticing the portrait of Stalin hanging on the wall, undoubtly in the spot one used to find the icon. Adoration, love or fear, I don't know; always and everywhere he is there.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ In Gide's own words: “Le sort de la culture est lié dans nos esprits au destin même de l'U.R.S.S.. Nous la défendrons.” (The fate of culture is in our spirits tied to the very destiny of the U.S.S.R. We will defend it). Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 18. Gide's reference to “the love of order” is actually a quote from de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (De la Démocratie en Amerique), an interesting choice given the subject matter.

¹⁵⁸ Gide relates a telling incident regarding the correct protocol to address Stalin. When in Gori, Stalin's birthplace, Gide was moved to send him a message regarding the warm welcome he had received. However, the translator objected to Gide's use of “you” to address Stalin. They would not let him send the message off without adding an expletive that spoke to Stalin's elevated position. Some of the suggestions: “leader of the workers” (chef des travailleurs) or “master of the peoples” (maître des peuples) Ibid., 65. Gide found such attempts at flattery “absurd” (absurde). Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ L'effigie de Staline se rencontre partout, son nom est sur toutes les bouches, sa louange revient immanquablement dans tous les discours. Particulièrement en Géorgie, je n'ai pu entrer dans une chambre habitée, fût-ce la plus humble, la plus sordide, sans y remarquer un portrait de

Although Gide's comment provided for the possibility that the universal admiration was genuine, an anecdote he included regarding a certain artist "X," made his position clear fear was the clear motivation behind all the praise. In the lobby of Gide's hotel, while discussing the state of Soviet art with a certain artist known as "X," "X" vigorously defended party doctrine. He argued in support of the official line, announcing for all to hear that "art today must be popular or nothing," (*l'art d'aujourd'hui doit être populaire, ou n'être pas*).¹⁶⁰ When Gide objected to X's argument because he felt that political restrictions on artists would lead to conformity or silence, "X" accused Gide of bourgeois formalism. However, Gide questioned whether X's opinions were indicative of his real views since Gide had gotten the distinct impression that the delivery had been rehearsed.¹⁶¹ His suspicions were later confirmed when, in the privacy of Gide's hotel room, X reassured his friend that he agreed with Gide's point of view but that in the Soviet Union private and public expressions of opinion were two very different matters: "Oh, sure! I'm well aware. But, just now we were being listened to and....my exhibition's set to open soon." (Oh! Parbleu! Je sais bien. Mais *on*

Staline accroché au mur, à l'endroit sans doute où se trouvait autrefois l'icône. Adoration, amour ou crainte, je ne sais; toujours et partout il est là. *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶¹ Gide observes that X "seemed to be giving a lecture or reciting a lesson" (*il semblait faire un cours ou réciter un leçon*.) *Ibid.* 75.

nous écoutait tout à l'heure et ...mon exposition doit ouvrir bientôt).¹⁶² The very fact that Gide would not print X's name spoke volumes. Gide realized that if it were known who had spoken frankly about life in the USSR to a foreigner of Gide's stature, he would certainly suffer the consequences for speaking the truth.

This anecdote coupled with Gide's disturbing observations about everyday life in the Soviet Union convinced him about the urgency of extending the defense of culture beyond the limits of Nazi Germany. Gide realized that artists had to be protected from censorship no matter where violations to free speech occurred. As a result of his trip, Gide concluded something that would have once been thought inconceivable; Hitler and Stalin were two sides of the self-same coin:¹⁶³

What is asked for now is compliance and conformism. What is desired and demanded is the approval of everything being done in the USSR; the attempt is made to guarantee that this approval is not resigned but sincere, even enthusiastic. The most astonishing thing is that it has been successful. On the other hand, the slightest

¹⁶² Ibid., 75. Gide used the general third pronoun “on” (one) as the agent doing the listening (a construction difficult to render in the active mood in English). The fact Gide emphasized “on” is chilling because it suggests that anyone could be in the employ of the government as a spy and that anyone who would dare express a dissenting opinion in public could be subject to reprisals.

¹⁶³ Ironically, in *Retour*, there is the sense that Hitler comes out better than Stalin since Hitler's effigy had not replaced the religious icon above the family's hearth. While the Nazi dictator is ever-present in the background of Gide's discourse, Gide does not accuse him of aspiring to divinity through his cult of personality constructed on universal fear.

protest, the slightest critique is subject to the worst punishments and furthermore, is immediately suppressed. And I doubt whether in any other country today, even in Hitler's Germany, that the spirit is less free, more bowed down, more fearful (terrorized), more vassalized.¹⁶⁴

Gide's conclusion could have been more devastating or devisive. Despite the fact he had traveled to the Soviet Union hoping to discover a more humane and just society, the experience had opened his eyes to a great contradiction; in the only place on earth with socialism had been achieved, under the thin veneer of comaderie and happiness, the populous was systematically being terrorized and oppressed by "the Leader of the Workers." (le chef des travailleurs)¹⁶⁵ Stalin's betrayal of the proletariat was more egregious than Hitler's because he had traded the ideals of the revolution to gratify a personal lust for power. Gide reminded readers about the revolution's social covenant: "we were promised a *dictatorship of the proletariat* (Gide's emphasis). We are far from the mark. Dictatorship, yes, obviously; but of a man no longer that of the united proletarians, of the Soviets."

¹⁶⁴ Ce que l'on demande à présent, c'est l'acceptation, le conformisme. Ce qu'on veut et exige, c'est une approbation de tout ce qui se fait en U.R.S.S.; ce que l'on cherche à obtenir, c'est que cette approbation ne soit pas résigné, mais sincere, mais enthousiaste même. Le plus étonnant, c'est qu'on y parvient. D'autre part, la moindre protestation, la moindre critique est passible des pires peines, et du reste aussitôt étouffée. Et je doute qu'en aucun autre pays aujourd'hui, fût-ce dans l'Allemagne de Hitler, l'esprit soit moins libre, plus courbé, plus craintif (terrorisé), plus vassalisé. Ibid. 60-61.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 65.

(*Dictature du prolétariat* nous promettait-on. Oui: dictature, évidemment; mais celle d'un homme, non plus celle des prolétaires unis, des Soviets)¹⁶⁶ After his return, Gide completely abandoned his illusions about the Promised Land. After his return, the Left was never the same.

The publication of Gide's stunning indictment of Stalin shook the progressive world East and West. The controversy over Retour's publication blew the debate over cultural legacy and defense wide open; the controversy expanding the divide between those, like Breton, for whom "defense of culture," was synonymous with the right for artists and intellectuals to express themselves freely even under the dictatorship of the proletariat¹⁶⁷ and those who believed that any criticism of the Soviet Union (internal or external) was tantamount to treason. It became increasingly difficult to maintain the united front to fight fascism since factions had become polarized over events in the Soviet Union. As Gide was traveling through the Soviet Union, the fear associated with "Trotskyism" (trotzkisme)¹⁶⁸ within and the external threats from Hitler culminated in the first political show trial and its deadly dénouement. Trotskyism became the blanket epithet Stalin and Party used to squash the opposition, a practice that Gide

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁶⁷ Gide makes a distinction between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of Stalin's cult of personality which ruled by fear of law.

¹⁶⁸ André Gide, *Retour*, 68.

considered “an invitation to terrorism,” (*l’invitation au terrorisme*).¹⁶⁹ For Gide, the show trial was another nail in Stalin’s coffin.

Ultimately, the controversy in the Left over the “Gide Affair” and the Moscow trial (later trials) became linked as the debate over cultural defense continued. In Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere, the political fallout in the wake of its Czech translation was rapidly destroying broad support for cultural and political policies of Levá fronta. Even though Teige had previously opted for neutrality in 1935, attacks on Gide’s right to express his views and the tragic outcome of the Moscow trial forced him into the fray. On January 13, 1937, Klub Přítomnost (Club Přítomnost – an organization not affiliated with the avant-garde) organized an evening of discussions centered on the critical reception of *Retour*. The panel of participants was divided up into two sides, Gide’s detractors and its supporters, Teige being among the latter.

In his speech to the gathering, Teige made it clear that he believed Gide’s criticism stemmed from the best of intentions; *Retour* was not an attack on Socialism by a dangerous foe as its detractors had argued, but a book “inspired by the deep and frank sympathy for the world’s first proletarian state. (inspirovaná hlubokou a upřímnou sympatií k prvému dělnickému státu světa)¹⁷⁰ According to

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷⁰ The text of the speech is included in Karel Teige’s *Výbor z dila*. Vol. 2, *Zápasy o smysl moderní tvorby: Studie z třicátých let* (Selected Works, Vol. 2. Struggles on the Meaning of Modern Creation: Studies from the Thirties). (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1969), 626.

Teige, *Retour* “is a book in which love and critical friendship are evident.” (je kniha vidoucí lásky a kritického přátelství)¹⁷¹ However, Teige did not believe all criticism was valid; one had to “distinguish progressive and friendly criticism from reactionary criticism” (odlišit pokrokovou a přátelskou kritiku od kritiky reakční)¹⁷² to determine how to respond. Although censure from the enemies of socialism had to be fought tooth and nail, constructive criticism from within the socialist camp was the prerequisite for its continued existence.

In Teige’s view preserving culture boiled down to the matter of maintaining solidarity within the ranks despite superficial disagreements on certain issues. Any other approach would negate the dialectical polarities that ensured the individual growth and diversity culture depended upon. According to Teige dissent was not only essential, it was the “backbone” (páteří)¹⁷³ of the Socialist movement. However, for once, he turned to an interesting source to back up his point of view. He reminded the audience that “at the April Conference of the Russian Communist Party in 1917, Stalin said ‘A party without dissent is a party without life.’” (Na dubnové konferenci ruské komunistické strany roku 1917 prohlásil Stalin: “Strana bez rozporů je strana bez života”)¹⁷⁴ By going back in the historical record, Teige created a contradiction between the identity of Stalin the

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 628.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 630.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 631.

revolutionary and the Stalin the fascist whose cult of personality was threatening Soviet society. Informed criticism from a friend to socialism such as André Gide, therefore, provided the best defense against reaction no matter where it had surfaced East or West:

In order that our judgment not to be taken advantage of by reaction, we cannot silence critical voices or put the damper on them out of fear. It is not possible to prevent attempts by reactionaries to use socialist criticism against the socialist cause as long as the reactionary press exists... This holds true in the case of Gide: the socialist cause demands that we lead the fight against those who would misuse Gide's criticism and not Gide, the legitimacy or fallibility of whose criticism can be examined, who wants to and can bring success to the socialist cause and render it worthy service.¹⁷⁵

Tiege's vigorous defense of Gide and *Retour* corresponded to his 1936 article "Moskevský process" (The Moscow Trial) that appeared in *Praha-*

¹⁷⁵ Nesmíme z obavy, aby našich osudků nezneužila reakce, kritické hlasy vůbec umlčovat nebo jim nasazovat sordinu. Snahám reakce využít socialistickou kritiku proti socialistické věci není možno zabránit, pokud existuje reakční tisk... To platí i v případě André Gida: věc socialismu vyžaduje, abychom vedli boj proti těm, kdož zneužívají Gidovy kritiky, a nikoliv abychom bojovali proti André Gideovi, jenž svou kritikou, jejž správnost či nesprávnost je třeba bedlivě zkoumat, chce a může přinést socialistické věci prospěch a vykonat pro ni platnou službu. Ibid., 627.

*Moskva*¹⁷⁶ just after the verdict against the defendants had been handed down and the punishment abruptly carried out.¹⁷⁷ In his article, Teige reminded readers that two of the main defendants, Zinovev and Kamenev, had already been convicted of being enemies of the State while Lenin was still alive. However, Teige pointed out that under Lenin, despite the severity of their crimes, “the revolution nonetheless managed to be magnanimous” (revoluce však dovedla být velkomyslná)¹⁷⁸ and their lives were spared. Later both went on to make contributions to the intellectual struggle for socialism.

Just as the case with architecture and literature, Teige believed that socialism’s path was not a progression down the straight and narrow, but a bumpy route of potholes and disruptions. The philosophical potholes caused by diversity of opinion kept society and the individual from falling asleep at the wheel, hypnotized by soporific incantations of orthodoxy:

History shows that each revolutionary movement which over the course of its development passes in myriad fashion through changing situations must tractably change its tactical and strategic methods. At each bend of the road, before each crossroad, more

¹⁷⁶ Vol. 1, no. 6 (September 1936). I am using the text in *Zápasy o smysl* from Teige’s *Výbor z dila*. Vol. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Teige points out unforgiving nature and swift execution of Soviet justice: “Milost nebyla udělena: za několik hodin po rozsudku byli všichni obžalovaní zastřeleni...” (Pardon was not given: a few hours after the verdict all the accused were shot...) Karel Teige, “Moskevský process,” 336.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

often than not conflicting views arise regarding the different direction to take. Opinions about the rightness of this or that path or this or that tactic often diverge. Pointed disputes and lively discussions unfurl.¹⁷⁹

In “Moskevský process” Teige included the same quote by Stalin he later reused (Teige often recycled portions of his work in other projects) to back up his argument: because discussion and life were synonymous, allowing debate to take place could not threaten culture. In fact, any society that did not promote critical consciousness, the ability to transform the external and internal world through art and exploration, was a dead society. In an open society, there was no room for fear and intimidation the emotion appealed to a less advanced stage in humanity’s evolutionary history. By relying on violence to deal with dissent, the Party had regressed to the time when blood ruled the French Revolution, to a period before humanism had emerged from the revolution’s belly to alter man’s consciousness forever:

... This revolution that fought against its real and presumed enemies using hard, merciless and unyielding terror, sent aristocrats and supporters of the revolutionary line to the

¹⁷⁹ Dějiny ukazují, jak každé revoluční hnutí, které v průběhu svého vývoje prochází mnohotvárně změněnými situacemi, musí pružně měnit své taktické a strategické metody. Na každém obratu cesty, před každým rozcestím vznikají v otázce volby směru rozličné, namnoze protichůdné nazory. Mínění o správnosti té či oné cesty, té či oné taktiky se často rozcházejí. Rozvíjejí se ostré polemiky a živé diskuse. Ibid., 341.

guillotine; this revolution which, during the time of serious conflicts, used terror as an instrument of its struggle and revolutionary power, proclaimed the *rights of man* of which the most fundamental right is after all the *right to life*, and it gave birth to the *ideals of democratic humanism*. Humanism resolutely rejects capital punishment.¹⁸⁰

From the bloody lesson of the French revolution society had moved beyond the need for terror to achieve its aims. After Thermidor, it was no longer an issue of getting rid of one's enemies by appealing to Thanatos because humanism meant the ability to transform and evolve, by allowing for the possibility that the enemy could cross over. By choosing death over life, Teige implied that those in charge of the trial had betrayed more than one of the revolution's basic principles – humanism. Since Marx had proclaimed that “communism was “*humanism realized*,” (komunismus je *reálnym humanismem*)¹⁸¹ they had betrayed communism, as well.

Despite his criticism of how the trial was handled, Teige, unlike Gide, refrained from attacking Stalin. Instead, he used him to justify his dismay over the

¹⁸⁰ ...tato revoluce, která bojovala tvrdým, nemilosrdným a houževnatým terorem proti svým skutečným i domnělým nepřátelům, posíala na gilotinu aristokraty i stoupence revolučních stran, tato revoluce, která v době vážných konfliktů užívala teroru jak nástroje svého boje a revoluční moci, proklamovala *práva člověka*, z nichž nejzákladnější je přece *právo na život*, a zrodila idily demokratického humanismu. Humanismus odmítá rezolutně trest smrti. Ibid. 345.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 346.

recent events. Because Stalin had once proclaimed that “the most valuable capital is man,” (nejcenějším kapitálem je člověk)¹⁸² Teige explained that progressives in the West had expected Stalin to respond in a more evolved way. They expected mercy. And, in the two faces of Stalin, the contradiction between his revolutionary thoughts and his bloodthirsty deeds, a tragedy of epic proportions was unfolding.¹⁸³ However, once the purges had begun, Moscow was left to her fate.

Nezval, too, had sensed the danger looming in the distance. At the end of *Neviditelná Moskva*, at home once again, he discovered that the joyful countryside of his youth had been plunged into the dark desparie of the Great Depression. In Prague, however, there was even greater evidence of something ominous on the horizon. As Nezval walked the streets, he saw the hand of fate playing with lovely women as if they were “puppets” (loutky)¹⁸⁴ whose inhuman mechanical beauty Nezval

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Pfaff made it clear that the article was not a critical attack of the Soviet Union (as Gide’s book had obviously been), but an opportunity to mediate the tragedy of what had happened, a reflection of the slings and arrows of Teige’s dialectical beliefs: “Není to sice ještě žádný jasný osudek, ale zřetelně z něj mluví potíže, s nimiž se Teige pokoušel přijmout process kladně a s nimiž se marně namáhal překonat pochybnosti.” (Still, there isn’t a clear condemnation, but visibly in the article difficulties are expressed with which Teige attempted to accept the trial as a positive thing and with which he struggled in vain to overcome the doubts) Ivan Pfaff, *Česká levice proti Moskvě 1936-1938* (The Czech Left Against Moscow) (Prague: Naše Vojisko, 1993.), 32.

¹⁸⁴ Nezval, *Neviditelná*, 160. Nezval uses the image of the puppet/woman over and over again in his Surrealist works, an image that blurs the line between animate and inanimate, object and subject, the transformational quality, a defining element of Surrealist technique.

characterized as a “trap.” (past)¹⁸⁵ Yet, despite the fact Nezval witnessed the *Deus ex Machina* marching to wage war in Vienna, France and Spain, he held firmly to his faith that chance’s coin-toss would come out heads up – “all the laboratories of the world” (všecky laboratoře světa) as well as Surrealism would somehow be spared. For Nezval, the crisis of loneliness and destruction he had witnessed on the intellectual and emotional journey that led inexorably to Moscow, was, despite all evidence to the contrary, being reconciled. In contrast to Gide, whose return from the Soviet Union represented a closing door, an end to his intimate relationship with Moscow, Nezval’s homecoming symbolized the renewal of the covenant among men. And its savoir was born in the East.

Above the spires of Prague, Nezval did recall the sound of the guillotine but the International’s sweet strains that resounded over Moscow, “over Lenin’s mausoleum like a joyful Christmas carol.” (nad Leninovým mausoleum jako radostná vánoční píseň.)¹⁸⁶ In the darkness before the dawn, the thought of Moscow’s bell tolling out its glorious news gave Nezval precious hope. At the end of the novel, he proclaimed:

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 161.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 171.

“The world will be saved. Mman will be happy. Poetry, will be born.”

(Svět bude zachráněn, člověk bude šťasten, poesie se zrodí)¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 172.

CHAPTER TWO – The Street Called “The Resting Place of the Heart” (Paris)

The poet of yet to come will overcome the depressing idea of the irrevocable
divorce of action and dream...

Breton

You must be *clairvoyant*; you must make yourself clairvoyant.

Arthur Rimbaud

You are in a garden at a pub in the outskirts of Prague

You feel quite happy a rose is on the table

And instead of writing your short story in prose

You study the beetle sleeping in the heart of the rose

Guillaume Apollinaire from “Zone”

Who Am I?

If one is to accept Nezval’s account in *Neviditelná Moskva*, his first meeting with André Breton on May 9, 1933, and the creation of the Czech Surrealist group was a matter of fate, pure and simple. On the day of their departure for Prague, Nezval and director Jindřich Honzl made one final effort to meet with the Surrealists. They went in search of Breton at his home on rue Fontaine. But when they arrived, they were informed they had just missed him; he

had gone out. Nezval trudged off back onto the streets of Paris “heart-broken.”¹ However, just before they were about to bid adieu possible forever to the City of Light, the exhausted Nezval suggested they stop at a local café for some refreshment before the long journey home. There at the café, by pure chance, they stumble into the object of their search; Breton, it turned out, was sitting at the very next table with the other members of the Surrealist group. Nezval, overcome by the coincidence joyfully announced to Breton, “It’s like a scene from Nadja.” (Je to jako scéna z *Nadi*)²

It was, however, no coincidence that Nezval referred to Breton’s 1928 prose memoir cum novel, the first in his Surrealist trilogy that was followed by *Les Vases communicants* and *L’Amour fou* (Mad Love – 1937). Breton discarded the convention of the novel as a work of psychological realism.³ The first book in Breton’s trilogy was real enough in the sense it embraced the genre of memoir; however, Breton also used the work as a means for phenomenological and philosophical exploration and aesthetic criticism. Nadja also had a visual

¹ Nezval, *Neviditelná*, 16. The actual quote: “*Jsem unaven. Jsem zdrcen.*” (I’m exhausted. I’m heartbroken).

² Ibid..

³ As Marguerite Bonnet pointed out in her essay on the conception and reception of Nadja: *Nadja* est incontestablement un récit autobiographique où tout s’efforce non seulement à la vérité, mais à l’exactitude...derrière le morcellement et l’hétérogénéité de ses éléments, que peut retenir avant tout une première lecture, sa cohérence profonde, non linéaire, et son ordre où se coagule progressivement une causalité sentie comme nécessaire quoique non déchiffrable (*Nadja* is incontestably an autobiographical narrative where everything strives not only for reality but for exactitude...behind the division and heterogeneity of its elements that above all one can hold on to after a first reading, its profound, non-linear coherence, and its order where a causality sensed as necessary albeit indecipherable, progressively congeals. In Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes* 1, 1496-7.

component: photographs (some from other sources, some his own), reproductions of paintings and Nadja's drawings accompanied the text as illustrations. In fact, Nezval's style and layout in *Neviditelná Moskva* published seven years later mirrored Breton's almost perfectly. And, as Breton had done, the author made it clear once the three books had been written that they were not to be read independently, but as an ensemble.⁴

Nezval's brief reference to Breton's novel served an extremely important function within the context of his narrative, accomplishing several things at once: the remark showed that Nezval was familiar enough with Breton's work to feel comfortable to see to its relevance to the situation, a gesture of respect from a knowledgeable admirer. In addition, by quoting the earlier novel within the body of the later work, Nezval made the association between Breton and himself; he, too, was an avant-garde writer of non-traditional prose narratives like his mentor, the

⁴ According to the notes on *Nadja*, "...cet ouvrage bat littéralement comme une porte, en ce qu'il anticipe sur d'autres livres essentiels de Breton: *Les Vases communicants, L'Amour fou.*" (...this work literally strikes as if a door in its anticipating Breton's other essential books: *Les Vases communicants, L'Amour fou*). Note 2 to p. 751, Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1:1560 And Nezval makes the relationship clear at the end of the final volume *Pražský chodec*: 'Pražský chodec' tvoří s knihami 'Neviditelná moskva' a 'Ulice Gít-le-coeur' volnou trilogii. (The Prague Passerby comprises a loosely connected trilogy with *Neviditelná Moskva* and *Ulice Gít-le-coeur*) *Pražský chodec*, 198. However, for Breton it is the visual element that links the works: Breton, il donnera des illustrations, que ne comportait pas l'édition original de 1932, pour une réimpression des *Vases communicants*: "Ainsi portrait être obtenue en partie l'unification que je souhaite render manifeste entre les trois livres. (Breton, he will add illustrations that were not included in the 1932 edition of *Vases communicants*: 'In this way the unity I wish to obtain in part will be made manifest among these three books') Note 2 to p. 751, Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1560 - whereas in Nezval, the thematic issues bound up with his relationship to the avant-garde, the Surrealist movement and the Moscow, Paris, Prague axis comprised the semantic thread that united the three works.

famous (or infamous) father of Surrealism, André Breton. More important, however, was the question why Nezval had specifically chosen *Nadja* as the symbol of his connection to the influential Surrealist *Nadja* was Breton's account of his accidental meeting in 1926 with a mysterious young woman on a Paris street. Briefly they become emotionally involved, but Breton breaks with her early the next year. Through the experience of Nadja's disturbing "convulsive"⁵ beauty, Breton's relationship to art, love and life were inexorably transformed.⁶ On a deeper level, the fact that this relationship, according to Nezval, owed its existence to a fortuitous happenstance resonated with Lautréamont's famous line from the sixth chant in *Maldoror*: "beautiful as the chance encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella" (beau...comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!)⁷ Although Nezval did not refer to Lautréamont specifically in the text, the simple mention of "náhoda"⁸ coupled with the reference to *Nadja* at proved to his affinity for and knowledge of Breton's French Surrealism. In addition, Nezval's ability to quote at will from Surrealist cannon showed his solidarity with movement. Nezval's attributing the meeting to chance also gave

⁵ The book ends with Breton's famous imperative "La beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou elle ne sera pas." (Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be) Breton, *Nadja* 753.

⁶ Breton tells us that it is Nadja is the name she has chosen for herself because according to her, "in Russian it's the beginning of the word hope." (686) The Slavic connection regarding hope would not be lost on Nezval.

⁷ Lautréamont, *Maldoror* 217

⁸ Nezval, *Neviditelná*, 17.

weight to the portentous nature of their subsequent relationship: fate or “hazard,” a kind of external necessity of the unconscious Breton characterized in *Amour fou* and in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Abbreviated Dictionary of Surrealism).⁹

Subsequently, Nezval’s reference to a literary work by Breton set off a string of associations based on necessity that diminished the cultural and linguistic distance between the two narratives, and by extension, the two authors. Because of Nezval, they were brought together by fate to change the face of Surrealism forever; one could only speculate about who was umbrella and who, sewing machine on the marriage bed/dissecting table of Lautréamont’s imagination. However, in *Neviditelná Moskva* Breton and Nezval trade places; with the help of Nezval’s poetic alchemy, the real Breton is transformed into a figure much like his Nadja, into the looming phantom-like presence who comes to haunts the pages of all three novels in Nezval’s trilogy. Yet, despite the figurative correspondences devised by Nezval, Breton’s Nadja and his Breton represent very different figures indeed.

⁹ Breton’s definition in *Amour fou* is as follows: “Hazard would be the form of the manifestation of external necessity that clears a path in the human unconsciousness.” He goes on to say, “to boldly attempt to interpret and to reconcile Freud and Engel on this point” (my italics). Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2: 690) This parenthetical comment is more important than Breton allows since it reflects his role as the chief mediator of psychoanalysis and Marxism through the use of dialectical materialism and Surrealist experimentation. In essence, Breton is the consummate dialectician who can poetically join two distant realities philosophical and scientific realities through of Surrealism.

When Breton informs us that Nadja possesses psychic powers,¹⁰ he is, in essence, endowing her with the fantastic qualities that would make her a worthy subject of his narrative. In fact, Breton suggests that without Nadja's intervention, there would be no novel at all. In this respect, Nadja, as the external catalyst for Breton's phenomenological and aesthetic exploration, becomes his muse. However, Nadja's ability to prophesize and her role as muse does not mean her figure extends into the realm of metaphysics. Such an appeal would be anathema to the Surrealist approach to representation as "dépaysement," a cognitive and emotional displacement that alters the perception of the real external world. Surrealism's stance regarding the primacy of reality precludes all possibility of a state of being defined by God that is beyond human grasp.

In Nadja, Breton provides us with the portrait of a heroine who is not physically beautiful or particularly remarkable in the traditional sense of the

¹⁰ The notion of clairvoyance in art is a theme that Breton returns to often in his work and a Surrealist hallmark. The appeal to be visionary is borrowed from Rimbaud's famous comment in a letter to Paul Demeny, "I insist that you have to be clairvoyant, to make yourself clairvoyant. (The poet makes himself clairvoyant by a long, immense and reasoned dissolution of all senses." (Je dis qu'il faut être voyant, se faire voyant. Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens.) (Rimbaud , Arthur. *Poésies; Une saison en enfer; Illuminations*. Second Edition Revue. Collection poésie, vol. 87. Paris: Gallimard), 202) In *Nadja*, the protagonist's gift of prophecy is reflected by her mysteriously disturbing comment to Breton on October 12, "André? André? ... You will write a novel about me. Believe me. Don't say no..." (André? André?...Tu écriras un roman sur moi. Je t'assure. Ne dis pas non) (Breton, *Nadja*, In *Oeuvres*, 1: 707-8). Breton, by including this passage blurs the borders between the autobiographical and the literary text since, he has proved her prediction true through the power of art.

word,¹¹ but who possesses eyes the like of which Breton has never seen.¹² Nadja's enigmatic eyes are not the only qualities that set her apart from the people on a crowded Parisian street; according to Breton's description, Nadja moves *à rebours*, against the grain¹³ with poignant dignity even though it is clear that she numbers among the impoverished masses. In this respect, Nadja can be viewed as the 20th century feminine counterpart to Huysman's aesthete Des Esseintes. However, Nadja does not shut herself up to escape the external world by constructing an artificial environment so she can find true vision. Nadja is a creature of the *trottoir* who vanishes into multitudes from whence she came once she has performed her service as muse. On one level she reflects the marginalizing forces of the urban bourgeois society, and for that reason Breton treated her with compassion, with a tender human touch.¹⁴

¹¹ Upon suddenly seeing Nadja for the first time on October 4, 1926 on rue Lafayette near the church St. Vincent de Paul (*Oeuvres*, 1:1542), Breton tells us: "... je vois une jeune femme, très pauvement vêtue, qui, elle aussi, me voit ou m'a vu... Curieusement fardée, comme quelqu'un qui, ayant commencé par les yeux, n'a pas eu le temps de finir, mais le bord des yeux si noir pour une blonde." (... I see a young woman very poorly dressed coming from the opposite direction. who also sees me or has seen me...curiously pale, like someone who having started out with the eyes did not have the time to finish, but the ring around the iris so dark for a blonde.) Ibid., 683.

¹². "Je n'avais jamais vu de tels yeux ." (I've never seen such eyes.) Ibid., 685.

¹³ ...en sens inverse...Elle va la tête haute, contrairement à tous les passants. (...from the opposite direction...she walks head held high in the opposite direction from the other pedestrians.) Ibid., 683

¹⁴ Although one might question the humanity of Breton's treatment of Nadja through his literary intervention which is potentially the cause of what finally pushes the troubled young woman over the edge. Ironically, Breton rejected an intimate relationship with Nadja as her increasing agitation became apparent. At the end, he finds true love, the unidentified 'tu' to whom he addresses the final chapter, but this is not Nadja. The woman who has made this discovery possible for all her efforts winds up in the mental hospital, alone and abandoned.

Although Breton's Nadja is touchingly human, Nezval's Breton had been transformed into something divine.¹⁵ The father of Surrealism first appeared on the stage as a figure who is larger-than-life, endowed with powers akin to those of a force of nature. One might imagine Nezval with a lyre sitting at the foot of mount Olympus where Breton sits flinging lightning from the distant peak. Yet, when it comes to clairvoyance in *Neviditelná Moskva*, Nezval reserved the role of visionary for himself. Breton merely made a guest appearance in his premonition.¹⁶ As Nezval's powers of storytelling built, Breton receded into the background, residing between the border of external world and the kingdom of dreams constructed by dint of Nezval's imagination. The fact that Nezval obtained his vision from Breton whom he knows already through his work and dreams legitimized the bond between the French Surrealists and himself (and the Czech Surrealist group by extension) from the very first moment they laid eyes on

¹⁵ Nezval's penchant for hyperbole where Breton is concerned in reflected his identifying Breton as the one "bez něhož by byl můj život nekonečně chudší a smutnějsí...." (without whom my life would be ceaselessly more poor and sadder.) *Neviditelná Moskva* 16-17. His is physical description of the poet challenges our willingness to suspend disbelief: "Jeho hlava je blesk, blesk, jenž tkví od chvíle, co se vynořil, na jednom místě a jehož zvuk bude slyšet po celé století. Jeho oči svědčí o tom, že básník bude mí na světě moc, jakou má žena. Jeho ruce jsou měkké a co jimi svírá, je prostota. Jeho vlasy jsou blesk blesků. Žel nikdy si je nedovedu představit bílé." (His head is a flash, a flash that consists of moments that's surface in one place and whose sound will be heard for the entire century. His eyes attest to the fact that the poet will have power in the world, like that of a woman's power. His hands are soft and what he holds in them is simplicity. His hair is the flash of flashes. Alas, I can never imagine his hair white). *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ Nezval ended his portrait by shifting from a description of Breton's exterior to his own interior dream world: "On se neopřel ve mně tomu, přicházet do mých snů a dát mi takto najevo, jak na něho myslím. Jednou se mi o něm zdálo po dvě noci, Ráno mně odevzdal listonoš jeho knihu. Věděl jsem přesně, kdy mně nese jeho dopis." (He is not against coming into my dreams to show me I am thinking of him. Once I dreamed about him two nights in a row. The following morning the postman delivered his book. I knew exactly when he would bring his letter.) *Ibid.*, 18

each other. Nezval's comment to Breton, "We are just like you," (jsme totež, co jste vy)¹⁷ sealed the pact in terms of identity. Because Breton's reputation as one of the most prominent figures in the French avant-garde was indisputable, Nezval's contention that their identities were the same suggested his position (and that of his colleagues) was equal to Breton's in France. Thus, Nezval revealed he considered the relationship one of equals despite the obvious disparity in their cultural status.

Nezval's attempt to meld Devětsil's identity into that of the French Surrealist group at a point prior to the group's having been established (within the contexts of the narrative) suggest that the union was inevitable. Nezval's account provided Czech Surrealism with a legitimate identity *avant la lettre*. Since the only readers of the account would have been Czech, few would have been able to challenge Nezval's contention, in particular given the autobiographical nature of the text which reinforced his authority as a reliable witness. Yet all these moves stake out an identity vis-à-vis Paris before we even arrive in Moscow touches upon the primary ontological theme of both novels. In the end, identity is the unifying theme.

Although *Nadja* functioned as Breton's muse and protagonist, he waited almost forty pages in the narrative to introduce her. Instead Breton begins his

¹⁷ Ibid. 17.

novel with the question: “Who am I?” (*Qui suis-je?*)¹⁸ From the very first moment, Breton placed the reader on unsteady ground of Surrealism’s *dépaysement*, caught in the grip of a phantom-like narrator who could not be relied upon since he seems not to even know who he is. The tenor of this “haunting”¹⁹ inquiry resounds through the flow of *Nadja* like an incantation. Even after we discover that the disembodied voice belongs to Breton there is still the question of the other, the “you” being appealed to from out of Breton’s literary twilight. This tension between the haunter and haunted implied by the proverb²⁰ and the *double entendre* have significance in terms of the definition of self (*moi*) in relation to the enigmatic other who may be haunt in the famous glass house that Breton had built.²¹ Breton’s description of his fictionalized persona lends credence to Nezval’s version of Breton’s identity since the Czech writer has been one of the lucky recipients of Breton’s phantasmagorical visitations.²²

¹⁸ Breton, *Nadja*, 647.

¹⁹ According to the notes Breton is citing the proverb: “Dis-moi qui tu hantes et je te dirai qui tu es.” (Tell me who you frequent/haunt and I’ll tell you who you are) Breton’s play on words fuses the narrator’s identity with that of some other whose has resides in some supernatural state of being. See note 2 to p. 647, Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1523.

²⁰ See previous note.

²¹ Pour moi, je continuerai à habiter ma maison de verre, où l’on peut voir à toute heure qui vient me rendre visite, où tout ce qui est suspendu aux plafonds et aux murs tient comme par enchantement, où je repose la nuit sur un lit de verre aux draps de verre, où *qui je suis* m’apparaîtra tôt ou tard gravé au diamante.” (As for me, I’ll continue to live in my glass house where one can see at every hour who visits me, where everything that is suspended from the walls and ceilings, stays up as if by enchantment, where at night I rest on a bed of glass on glass sheets, where *who I am* will appear to me sooner or later engraved by a diamond.) Breton, *Nadja*, 651

²² see note 16. One might wonder whether Nezval intends us to imagine that he receives Breton’s nocturnal visists within the walls of a glass house of his own. In any event, it is telling that Breton leaves his glass house to seek out Nezval.

In each of these novels, the question of identity is complicated by the authors' use of autobiographical detail. Yet, while the characters are based on fact, Nezval and Breton transform them into something more evocative and "surreal." Touched by the artists' imagination, they and the reality they had been enslaved to have been set free; pedestrian reality shimmers with an authenticity that masks the fiction. Breton felt he could tamper with identities and facts because he believed authors who based their characters on identifiable external reality were more legitimate than realistic authors who subverted the reality of the figures they purported to depict by means of illusion²³ to produce a kind of literary homunculus, a bastardization of the real thing. In the transparent framework of his novel, *Nadja* was no cut up collage of women he had known reduced to her bare essence; she was a real and Breton assured the reader of her authenticity because he had not changed the names to protect the fiction.²⁴ Since Nezval's narrative was patterned after Breton's, his account also had to be based on real sources who the Czech reader of avant-garde literature would easily recognize and accept as being valid reflections of external truth.

How Breton and Nezval employ the tension between their fiction and reality in these trilogies fulfills a very important function in terms of their

²³ Breton criticized the traditional fiction writer for the following reason : "D'un personnage réel, duquels ils croient avoir aperçu, ils font deux personnages de leur histoire; de deux, sans plus de gène, ils en font un." (From one real character they believe they have seen, in their story they make of it two; from two without further embarrassment, they make one.). Breton, *Nadja*, 651.

²⁴ Breton asserted: "Je persiste à reclamer les noms..." (I persist in reclaiming the names...) Ibid.

narrators' identities (ostensibly the authors themselves); because the events are made credible by the fact they can be verified, the author/narrators gain the readers' trust.²⁵ As a result, the fictional element of their narrative still retains its patina of fact, as do their subjective judgments. Although Breton and Nezval applied the same technique to construct literary identity, their treatment of the Surrealist identity differed. Breton did not set out to prove he was a legitimate Surrealist; after all, he had founded the movement. Instead, he made the case for Surrealism's legitimacy within the uninterrupted evolution of French culture. Even though Breton subverted the cultural line by replacing tradition with Surrealism, the cultural chain remained unbroken. Breton had used this approach in the *Manifeste du surréalisme* when he included a list of writers he maintained could "pass for Surrealists." (passer pour surréalistes)²⁶ Although the living could refute Breton's claim, the dead could not. As a result, Breton could convert them to a philosophical approach to representation they could not have subscribed to during were they still alive.

Father Figure

²⁵ These claims for credibility are backed up by visual testimony, photographs of various people, scenes, objects and paintings that accompany the texts. Nezval's are often his own photos which make his observations even more believable since he provides his own evidence that proves he was there.

²⁶ Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme* (Manifesto of Surrealism). In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1 : 328.

Identity presented an altogether different set of problems for Nezval and the Czechs. Once they had signed on to Surrealism, they were forced to adopt identity dependent on Breton's interpretation of the cultural record. However, they were not as reliant on Breton and the French as one would first assume. Because they had been active in the avant-garde for over ten years prior to becoming Surrealists, they could draw upon a wealth of experience and a legacy of their own to construct an identity. Whatever claims they would make for themselves would escape the scrutiny of France because none of the Surrealists spoke Czech. For this reason, in Prague, they were free to invent themselves from within the confines of the Surrealist framework as originals in their own right to suit the needs of the domestic audience. This method of constructing legacy by assimilating elements from abroad to create a new distinctly Czech version of the cultural record defined the evolution of culture during the modern period. In ascribing to the virtues of this process, the Surrealists were no exception.

In his article “Deset let surrealismu” (Ten Years of Surrealism) Karel Teige traced the development of French movement and Devětsil beginning with the early twenties. Teige observed that the Devětsil's manifesto actually pre-dated Breton's despite the overwhelming prominence of the latter.²⁷ By linking the

²⁷ On the topic of the first poetist manifesto, Teige wrote : “Bylo na jaře 1924, kdy byl v Praze publikován první manifest poetismu, (totiž můj stručný článek, který byl brán za manifest tohoto nového směru. Téhož roku, skoro současně, o několik měsíců pozdě, vychází v Paříži André Bretona “Manifeste du surréalism.”) Poetismus a surrealismus jsou tedy vrstevnická hnutí, až na

histories of the two movements (even claiming poetism anteceded surrealism), Teige created a groundwork that legitimized both the prehistory of Surrealism in Bohemia that led to and the ultimate blending of the Czech and French elements to create a hybrid offspring of Lautréamont's contradictory lovers. To Teige's critical estimation, the union was inevitable based on the mutuality of their past development; therefore Czech Surrealism for Teige had been a relationship written in the stars just as it had been for Nezval.²⁸

Teige's view of the legacy of the Czech avant-garde mirrored the point of view Vítězslav Nezval expressed in his letter to André Breton of May 10, 1933,²⁹ when he announced Devětsil's commitment to collaborate more closely with the French while maintaining their autonomy. Nezval used the occasion of his letter

to, že počátky poetismu, které ostatně můžeme klásti už do r. 1922, jenž je rokem almanachu "Devětsil" a Nezvalova "Podivuhodného kouzelníku", jsou tedy poněkud rannějšího data." (It was in the spring of 1924, when the first manifesto of poetism was published (that is my short article which was taken as the manifesto of this new movement. The same year, a few months later, almost at the same time, André Breton's *Manifeste* appeared in Paris. Poetism and surrealism were contemporary movements, to the point that the beginnings of poetism which, for that matter, we can already place in 1922 that is the year of the *Devětsil Almanac* and Nezval's *Amazing Magician* there were a certain measure of earlier data.) Karel Teige, "Deset let surrealismu." In *Surrealismus v diskusi* (Surrealism in Discussion), Knihovna Levé fronty. Vol. 8. (Prague: Levá fronta, 1934) 11

²⁸ Dnešek surrealismu je možno characterisovat jako třetí etapu jeho vývoje. Koncem druhé a začátkem třetí etapy nastává tak značné sblížení cest surrealismu a poetismu, jež se na této etapě spojují, třebas že surrealismus ve svém minulém vývojí se bral jinou dialektikou k cílům, které jsou společny poetismu i surrealismu. " (Surrealism of today can be characterized as the third stage of its development. Through end of the second stage and the beginning of the third, the rapprochement of the paths of surrealism and poetism come so close that in this stage they merge. It is necessary that surrealism in its previous evolutionary form took a different dialectic that led to the goals which surrealism and poetism share.) Ibid., 29.

²⁹ Published in French translation in *Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 5 (1933), 31. The letter was later included in the article published to announce the formation of the Czech surrealist group "Surrealismus v ČSR."

to inform Breton about Devětsil, to validate their status as authentic participants in the intellectual avant-garde, backing up his claim by pointing out that their activities had predicated Surrealism's by three years. Yet, the Czech movement "had come ever more contiguous with the development of the Surrealists," (se stýká stále více s vývojem surrealista³⁰)³⁰ the truth of this condition Teige later reconfirmed in his essay. For this reason, Nezval wrote to propose a mutually-beneficial collaboration among equals, not just to praise Surrealism's accomplishments. Breton was impressed enough by Nezval's message that he published a translation of the letter in *Surréalisme au service de la révolution*.³¹ By seeking out the connection with Breton who found it advantageous to print his letter (perhaps to use as evidence that Surrealism had transcended Paris to become international), Nezval introduced Devětsil to the world, rescuing the group from Bohemian obscurity.

Despite the fact Nezval portrayed Devětsil to Breton as being the Czech equivalent of Surrealism ("we are just like you"), the characterization was not quite accurate in terms of the family tree. The most striking example of this critical divide in terms of lineage is the treatment of Guillaume Apollinaire from

³⁰ Nezval, "Surrealismus v ČSR," 69.

³¹ This was one of the few times a correspondence was thought important enough to include in translation. Nezval's letter ranks with that of the illustrious Freud whose correspondence with Breton also showed up in the pages of the same issue (p. 10).

whom Breton purloined the neologism “Surrealist” to coin the name for his movement.

Before his untimely death in 1918, Apollinaire had been Breton’s correspondent and mentor. During his lifetime, Breton wrote about Apollinaire, the individual who had done more than anyone to promote the career of his younger protégé, in glowing terms. In the opening of his essay “Guillaume Apollinaire,” Breton expressed his deep admiration for the poet by acknowledging the influence his work would have on future generations. Even before his death, it seemed Breton was hard at work composing Apollinaire’s obituary:

In many years from now, those among us who will have aged sufficiently for memory to impose itself on them will speak of Guillaume Apollinaire. To have known him will be considered a rare blessing. Young people will come up with the naive line: I came too late. They will fix the image of the poet who they will have kept in tact at the price of a great love.³²

Breton’s monumental diction was inappropriate given the fact that Apollinaire was still quite alive, only thirty-eight and had not yet succumbed to

³² Dans bien des années, ceux d’entre nous qui auront assez vieilli pour qu’on les impose de souvenirs, parleront de Guillaume Apollinaire. L’avoir connu passera pour un rare bienfait. Des jeunes gens retrouveront ce mot ingénue: Je suis venu trop tard. Ceux-là fixeront l’image du poète, qui l’auront gardée intacte, au prix d’un grand amour. Breton, “Guillaume Apollinaire.” From *Les Pas perdus* (Lost Steps). In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 203.

Spanish Influenza. This contradiction was not lost on the critic André Germain, who felt Breton's praise was not motivated by selfless admiration but by the desire to see the last of his illustrious competitor. After Apollinaire had so conveniently given up the ghost, Germain wondered if “the cruel and subtle André Breton has already meditated on the death of his Master?” (Le cruel et fin André Breton médite-il déjà la mort de son Maître?)³³ Even if Breton had not intended to praise Caesar while burying him alive, the fact Apollinaire died so soon after Breton's prediction lent his words a prophetic air. Breton's putative gifts as a seer became significant because Surrealism's reliance on the interaction of vision and fate as the primary means to expand human consciousness. Few texts figured as prominently in the Surrealist canon as Rimbaud's “Letters from a Clairvoyant” (Lettres dites du voyant)³⁴ where the poet “makes himself *visionary* by a long, immense and rational *disruption of all senses*,” (Rimbaud's emphasis) (Le poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens).³⁵ Yet, Breton's interest in clairvoyance extended beyond the role of vision in the creation of art; he was fascinated by all aspects of the occult (including alchemy and fortune-telling).

Although Breton owed much to Apollinaire, by the time he had written the *Manifest du surréalisme* his attitude regarding the older poet's contribution had

³³ In note 5 to p. 215. Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1 : 1242.

³⁴ see note 10.

³⁵ Rimbaud, In *Poésies*, 202.

changed. Breton's increasingly ambivalent (and somewhat negative) view of the person who had been so influential early in career surfaced in the tract that defined the movement. Even though Breton paid homage to Apollinaire by acknowledging his debt to him for coining the term "surrealist, he qualified his gratitude by adding that Apollinaire's successors had "generally prevailed over its Apollinairian reception." (prévalu généralement sur son acceptation apollinaire)³⁶ Because Apollinaire had possessed "only *the letter*, still imperfect of Surrealism," (que *la lettre*, encore imparfaite du surréalisme)³⁷ the Surrealists had solved the ownership issue by making a vaguely-conceived adjectival neologism into a concrete noun to symbolize their revolution.³⁸

Surrealism, noun, masc. Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function

³⁶ Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 327.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Breton had already addressed how to transform Apollinaire's amorphous reference into a precisely defined term they could call their own. In "Entrée des médiums" (Entrance of the Mediums) from *Les Pas perdus*, he wrote: "On sait, jusqu'à un certain point, ce que, mes amis et moi, nous entendons par *surréalisme*. Ce mot, qui n'est pas de notre invention et que nous aurions si bien pu abandonner au vocabulaire critique le plus vague est employé par nous dans un sens précis. Par lui nous avons convenu de désigner un certain automatisme psychique qui correspond assez bien à l'état de rêve, état qui est aujourd'hui fort difficile de délimiter." (To a certain point one knows what my friends and I mean by *Surrealism*. This word that is not our invention and that we very well could have abandoned to the vaguest critical vocabulary, is used by us in a precise sense. By it (Surrealism) we have agreed to designate a certain psychic automatism that corresponds quite well to the dream state that today is extremely difficult to define) In *Oeuvres*, 1: 274.

274. Breton was more successful at defining the term the second time around in the *Surrealist Manifesto* where he expanded his definition from a method to "philosophy."

of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted

by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

Encycl. *Philos.* (Breton's emphasis) Surrealism is based on the

belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association

heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of the dream and in the

disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction

of all other psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for the in

the solution of the principal problems of life.³⁹

As was the case in his earlier depiction of Apollinaire, Breton's praise was tinged

with a strong dose of critical distance and opportunism. By claiming to have

improved on Apollinaire, Breton gained the cultural legitimacy for Surrealism. In

this instance, yet again, the poet's untimely death made the appropriation

convenient. Once Breton had co-opted the name for his own purposes, there was

no further need to appeal to the original; a few pages after his brief "homage" to

Apollinaire, Breton omitted the poet's name from the list of "Surrealists" whose

family tree began with the likes of Dante and Shakespeare. Although Apollinaire

³⁹ Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 72. I am using Patrick Waldberg's translation. The French original reads: Surréalisme, n.m. Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique ou morale. Encycl. *Philos.* Le surréalisme repose sur la croyance à la réalité supérieur de certaines formes d'associations négligées jusqu'à lui, à la toute puissance du rêve, à jeu désintéressé de la pensée. Il tend à ruiner définitivement tous autres mécanismes psychiques et à se substituer à eux dans la résolution des principaux problèmes de la vie. Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 328.

did not figure on Breton's list of those who cleared the way for Surrealism, Breton had seen fit to include Chateaubriand and Hugo whose revolutionary legacy was, at best, questionable.

Even though Apollinaire posthumously made a major contribution to the creation of Surrealism, Breton did not feel that he qualified as pre-surrealist akin to Dante's Virgil, the virtuous pagan damned to the first ring of hell because he had the misfortune of being born too soon. These illustrious predecessors were not true Surrealists because they had stuck to their "preconceived notions" (*idées préconçues*) about art because "they not *heard the Surrealist voice.*" (ils n'avaient pas *entendu la voix surréaliste*)⁴⁰ Breton attributed their failure to hear to Surrealism's music to their naiveté and the fact "their instruments were too proud which is why they did not always deliver a harmonious sound." (C'étaient des instruments trop fiers, c'est pourquoi ils n'ont pas toujours rendu un son harmonieux)⁴¹ But Apollinaire did not number among their ranks. Here, the sin of pride here seems minor in comparison that of naiveté, the inability to fully grasp the ingenious of one's own creation.

The reverential, yet critical attitude Breton expressed toward those he deemed the forefathers of Surrealism extended to Rimbaud whom Breton labeled as "Surrealist in the practice of life and elsewhere." (*surréaliste dans la pratique*

⁴⁰ Ibid., 329.

⁴¹ Ibid.

de la vie et ailleurs)⁴² Although Breton had kept a safe critical distance from the poet because of his alleged death-bed conversion to Catholicism, Breton later took up the cause of saving Rimbaud's soul from the likes of Church enthusiasts such as Paul Claudel who had claimed the poet for Rome. In the thirties as fascism posed an increasing threat to avant-garde art in certain parts of Europe and the depression plunged the population into despair, Breton rescued Rimbaud from the Catholics and then placed him on the barricades to fight side by side with the workers who were ready to die for the sake of the Commune.⁴³ Although Breton once had reservations about including Rimbaud,⁴⁴ as time progressed he became a key figure in the shaping of the Surrealist identity.

Although Breton gave Rimbaud a place in Surrealism's prehistory, one glaring omission from the genealogy is Lautréamont, the figure who ultimately garnered the loftiest position in the French Surrealist pantheon of elders. Breton had written about *Maldoror* in *Les Pas perdus*. In his short essay, he did not focus on the author (which would have been problematic since Breton was more interested in the fictitious Comte) but on the work itself which he had

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Breton speaks at length about Rimbaud's participation in the struggle for the Commune in his speech "Position politique de l'art aujourd'hui," (Political Position of Today's Art) given in Prague on April 1, 1935, at an evening organized by Levá fronta .

⁴⁴ In an essay on his late friend and grand guignol Jacques Vaché whose reputation as a cultural figure Breton had single-handedly manufactured, we learn that Vaché did not have a high opinion of the great Rimbaud. According to Breton, there was no love lost between Vaché and Rimbaud whom he "detesta tourjours." (always detested). Breton, "La Confession dédaigneuse." (The Scornful Confession). From *Les Pas perdus*. In *Oeuvres*, 1: 199.

“discovered” in 1918.⁴⁵ Breton’s other important discoveries, including the *guignols* of black humor like Jacques Vaché and Alfred Jarry, merited an essay and figured among those on the list. Yet, the omission did not mean Breton felt Lautréamont was less significant, just less developed as a figure. Once Breton’s portrait of the past evolved, Jarry and Vaché’s presence receded into the background as Lautréamont’s star burned ever brighter to illuminate the Surrealist heavens. On the other hand, Apollinaire, the cultural giant whose name Breton chose to omit, did not fare as well as the obscure Lautréamont; the exclusion signaled the law of diminishing returns in terms of his prominence.

Although one might find Breton’s harsh judgment of Apollinaire’s legacy puzzling or even disloyal given the great debt he owed his friend, the critical attitude makes complete sense given the dialectical process that defined his surrealist practices. In order to transcend what he considered to be Apollinaire’s deficiencies, Breton was forced to reject the aesthetics proposed by his mentor to overcome its limitations to create something that would be considered truly original. He had to strike out on his own by toppling his father’s reign à la Oedipus. Once he disposed of the old king, Breton could rule Surrealism unchallenged. Yet, Breton was still dependent on Apollinaire for the seed, or *Logos*, the word. Even though Breton exposed Apollinaire as a flawed genius

⁴⁵ See the notes to Breton’s article “Les Chants de Maldoror par le comte de Lautréamont.” (The Cantos of Maldoror by the Count of Lautréamont) Breton, *Oeuvres* 1:1254.

after his death in order to assert his own legitimacy as successor, he could not reject him outright. Breton could take Apollinaire out of Surrealism but not the Surrealism out of Apollinaire. Instead of getting rid of Apollinaire, he assimilated his message and transformed it into a high form: a movement.

For the Czechs, however, Apollinaire was not a figure who had to be challenged or overcome. At the time, he was already being transformed into the figure that would come to symbolize Czech modernity as Jan Rubeš has pointed out.⁴⁶ Unless one believes the numerous legends surrounding Apollinaire's 1902 voyage to Prague, the cultural community had no personal experience of the Apollinaire and certainly not of the Czech Surrealists who were born on or after the turn of the century. However, Apollinaire's work was known in Bohemia before the First World War. His first collection *Alcools* (Alcohols), published in 1913, captured the attention of a young Karel Čapek who, the following year, wrote a positive review of it in the journal *Přehled* (Digest) in January 1914 which introduced Apollinaire and his work to the Czech public.⁴⁷ However, his

⁴⁶ For Rubeš's comments on Apollinaire's relation to Czech modernity, see "Constructing Modernity: Karel Čapek's translation of French poetry." In *Karel Čapek: A Michigan Slavic Colloquium* (Ann Arbor: Slavic Publications, 1992.)

⁴⁷ The first published translation of Apollinaire's poetry by Emanuel Lešehrad appeared without attribution in early 1912 (Lešehrad was listed as the poem's author). Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire známy a neznámý: Výbor z básnického díla* (Apollinaire Known and Unknown: Selections of the Poetic Work) 13.

emergence as a cultural icon did not take place until after the war and the poet's death thanks to Čapek's translation of the poem "Zone." ("Pásмо")⁴⁸

Apollinaire's extraordinary influence on the Czech inter-war avant-garde and Surrealism dates back as far as Pásmo's first edition in 1919. Shortly after Čapek's version appeared, the nineteen-year old Karel Teige launched his career as a literary critic with his review of the work in the journal *Kmen* (Tribe or Trunk). Teige praised Čapek's for producing "the pious Czech elegy for the late poet," (pietní česká panychida za zesnulého básníka)⁴⁹ characterizing the work as "a light, a beacon." (světlem, majákem)⁵⁰ Apollinaire had shone through the darkness during the period when contact between Prague and Paris had been severed because of the War. Teige viewed the poem as the literary benchmark dividing representation in the Old World from the New because "Zone" was "Apollinaire's first work that was not tied in anyway with the deadweight of tradition and risking everything:" (první práce Apollinaireva, nesvazující s přítěží tradice a odvažující se všeho)⁵¹ To a member of the modern generation like Teige, Apollinaire was not just a brilliant poet; he was a brave explorer who had cut lose his ties with the past to venture out into dangerous uncharted waters:

⁴⁸ See Introduction, note 8. For a detailed analysis of Čapek's "Pásmo" and the genesis of the Apollinaire myth in Bohemia see my article "Karel Čapek's Pásmo and the Construction of Literary Identity Through Translation" to be published in *The Slavic and East European Journal*.

⁴⁹ Parts 1 and 2. *Kmen* (Tribe or Trunk) 3 (June 1919), 51.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

...before us we see the vast possibilities for the poetry of the new generation, undreamed of spaces into which Apollinaire flings himself with joy and amazing abandon. As a result of Pásma's first verses, we immediately find ourselves in a completely new poetic world: it is not an intelligible world; the lyric, dramatic universe speaks to us in a loud, fragmented and urgent voice: at the beginning, only inadvertently, as the poet is remembering his weariness for the antiquated world, we are then immediately face to face with the innumerable concrete manifestations of every-day life and its lyricism...⁵²

Although Teige gave the credit for the discovery of the new poetic universe to Apollinaire, in the *Manifesto Breton* bestowed the title of the new “Columbus” upon himself:

I would spend my life inciting the secrets of madmen. These are people of a scrupulous honesty and whose innocence has no equal

⁵² ...vidíme před sebou otevřeny širošíře možnosti mladé poesie, netušené prostory, do nichž se Apollinaire vrhá s radostí a divou vervou. Ihned prvními verši “Pásma” stojíme v básnickém světě zcela novém: není to svět inteligidibilní; lyrický, dramatický vesmir, jenž k nám mluví řečí hlasitou, kusou a naléhavou: jen mimoděk vzpomíná básník na začátku únavy starobylého světa, již ihned jsme tváří v tvář jarým, nesčíslným konkrétům všedního života a jeho lyričnosti... Ibid.

save mine. Columbus had to leave with madmen to discover America.⁵³

In the Czech context that Teige's criticism reflected, Apollinaire's "Zone" was a demarcation line between past and present and Apollinaire, the main trailblazer into the future; however, for Breton Lautréamont was the one figure who evoked the "definitive apocalypse," (apocalypse définitive)⁵⁴ the feeling that defined the new age. By comparison Apollinaire was out-dated even though he was born almost ten years after Duchesse's death. As an artist and innovator, Apollinaire had fallen into the trap of allowing his huge ego get in the way of his vision. Even before Surrealism, Breton viewed Apollinaire's contribution as a mixed bag. Apollinaire had possessed only a hazy premonition of the future, a vision minus the apocalyptic big bang:

I won't go so far as to reproach him for his ridiculous attitude during the war. All the same, Apollinaire sensed some of the reasons for the modern evolution and one must acknowledge that he always reserved an enthusiastic welcome for new ideas. The fact that his love of scandal caused him to defend the most dubious

⁵³ Les confidences des fous, je passerai ma vie à les provoquer. Ce sont des gens d'une honnêté scrupuleuse, et dont l'innocence n'a d'égale que la mienne. Il fallut que Colomb partît avec des fous pour découvrir l'Amerique. Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 313. For other claims regarding the quest to explore new ways of being see Ibid., 319 where Breton describes his quest to reconcile dream and reality like a knight errant.

⁵⁴ In the note to "Les Chants." In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1255.

innovations such as certain completely insignificant onomatopoeic poems that he made a great deal of at the end of his life; the fact that he, moreover, showed himself to be stupidly enamored by erudition and trinkets does not succeed in concealing from me the horror he showed for stagnation in all its forms and particularly in himself; at least his whole life he avoided rewriting the same poem...⁵⁵

Breton and Teige's rhetoric reflects an aesthetic divide between them that did not resolve after the founding of the Czech Surrealist group out from out of the remaining members of Devětsil. In the context of French Surrealism Apollinaire as a figure could not negotiate the waters to engender a new line. In the long run, Breton did not need Apollinaire for legitimacy; he could arrive at Surrealism even through Gérard de Nerval's supernaturalism:

...without a doubt we could have seized upon the word

SUPERNATURALISM used by Gérard de Nerval in the dedication to *Les Filles du feu* (Daughters of Fire). It seems, in

⁵⁵ Je n'irai pas jusqu'à lui rapprocher son attitude ridicule pendant la guerre. Apollinaire a tout de même pressenti quelques-unes des raisons de l'évolution moderne et il faut reconnaître qu'il a toujours réservé aux idées nouvelles un accueil enthousiaste. Que son amour du scandale l'ait entraîné à défendre les innovations les plus douteuses, comme certains poèmes onomatopéiques tout à fait insignifiants, dont il faisait, sur la fin de sa vie, grand cas; que par ailleurs il se soit montré stupidement épris d'érudition et de bibelots, cela ne parvient pas à dissimuler cette horreur qu'il montra de la stagnation sous toutes ses formes et particulièrement en lui-même, lui qui au moins a évité de refaire toute sa vie le même poème... Breton, "Caractères de l'évolution moderne" (Figures of the Modern Evolution). From *Pas perdus*. In *Oeuvres*, 1: 303.

effect, that Nerval had an excellent possession of *the spirit* we invoke, Apollinaire having only *the letter*, still imperfect, of Surrealism and having shown himself impotent to provide a rhetorical outline to engage us.⁵⁶

In the Breton's estimation of the cultural record, Apollinaire was powerless in the underworld. He needed Breton to interpret the significance of the *word* he had stumbled upon; he depended on Breton to transform his fleeting notion into a philosophy. However, the Czechs reconstructed an Apollinaire in their image; a great figure, the ultimate explorer of modernity who introduced the marvels of the Czech capital to the world in his short story "Le Passant de Prague" (The Prague Passerby) and "Zone." The Czechs returned the favor by crowning Apollinaire the father of Czech modernity. This relationship was mutually beneficial; Czech criticism recovered (at least at the banks of the Vltava) Apollinaire's tarnished reputation and the avant-garde of the small nation found a point of origin from a great cultural center. Resurrected by his acolytes, the Prague Apollinaire functioned as the bridge linking Prague and Paris and the beacon about which Teige had written.

⁵⁶ ...sans doute aurions-nous pu nous emparer du mot SUPERNATURALISME, employé par Gérard de Nerval dans la dédicace des *Filles du feu*. Il semble, en effet, que Nerval posséda à merveille *l'esprit* dont nous nous reclamons., Apollinaire n'ayant possédé, par contre, *la lettre*, encore imparfaite, du surréalisme et s'étant montré impuissant à en donner un aperçu rhétorique qui nous retienne. Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 327.

In Bohemia, Apollinaire's significance within modernity was not limited to aesthetic innovation (i.e., the complete suppression of punctuation and violent, shocking imagery he was famous for). Apollinaire was celebrated for embracing areas of cultural life that had been considered by convention as not worthy of art like the depiction of the hustle and bustle of everyday life in the streets of Paris and modern technology. These themes had been banished by the academy to languish on the periphery. In Bohemia, Apollinaire's estrangement from the French literary establishment extended to the existential condition of his life as an exile. As an immigrant with a Polish background and a somewhat sketchy paternity, Apollinaire was the perpetual outsider. This state allowed him to reconcile the contradictions between tradition and modernity, center and periphery that an insider to French culture could not. Thus, as a Slav and modernist on the cutting edge of expression, Apollinaire's position in France served as symbol for Czech avant-garde's alienation from the status-quo and from the great civilizations of Europe (such as France).

Although most of the Gallic members of Breton's pantheon had condemned themselves to internal exile because of the nature of their rebellious, counter-culture message, Ducasse's Frenchness was suspect (he had been born in Montevideo) but not totally suspect (of French parentage). Although he had immigrated to France from Montevideo, his parents were French immigrants and

the fact that the details of his short life were unknown provided Breton free reign in creating his posthumous identity. Such tinkering would have been almost impossible to do with Apollinaire whose paternity and early history were equally an enigma. Apollinaire was too well known in France for one person to be able to mythologize him.

In many respects, the positions of Lautréamont in French Surrealism and Apollinaire in Czech modernity are analogous: the Czechs, by means of translation, resurrected Apollinaire in the figure of a Slav much in the same way Breton had recovered Isidore Ducasse for posterity, a point not lost on Karel Teige:

The authentic descendants and true re-discoverers of Lautréamont
are the Surrealists... The Surrealists had to discover Lautréamont
because Lautréamont had discovered their world for them...⁵⁷

In Teige's criticism (and in the writings of other critics from the time), Apollinaire's position in Czech modernity (and in the avant-garde) was analogous to Lautréamont's in French Surrealism. His life and work also symbolized the visionary qualities represented in France by Rimbaud. However, the Czech and French viewpoints differ in terms of the location and tense of the artists' eye.

⁵⁷ Autentickými potomky a vlastními znovuobjeviteli Lautréamont jsou surrealisté... Surrealisté musili objevit Lautréamonta, poněvadž Lautréamont objevil jim jejich svět. Karel Teige, *Výbor z díla* (Selected Works). Vol. 1. *Svět, stavby a básně* (World, Buildings and Poems), (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966), 433.

Rimbaud saw into the future from within tradition and Apollinaire assimilated an eternal present, embracing from without. By consolidating two important roles into one, the Czech avant-garde had bolstered Apollinaire's position as a figurehead before Surrealism came to Prague at a time when his reputation was waning thanks to new cultural developments such as the advent of Surrealism.

As time went on Apollinaire continued his meteoric rise above the spires of Prague's Castle District. On the tenth anniversary of his death, Teige and Devětsil devoted an issue of *ReD* to commemorate the fallen poet. In an essay "Guillaume Apollinaire a jeho doba" (Guillaume Apollinaire and His Time), Teige again employed language that emphasized his larger-than-life qualities, some of which transcended aesthetics; Apollinaire was "a great inventor" (*velikým vynálezcem*)⁵⁸ and "the only great poet of the world." (jediný veliký básník světa)⁵⁹ In his analysis of Apollinaire's legacy for his Czech audience, Teige concluded:

Apollinaire is our symbol of this "new spirit" for whose victory we have been fighting in his shadow ever since. Apollinaire for us is the axis of all modern poetry: his work is the turning point from which we date the new era of modern creation, the era of the present in which we work and live. At today's crossroads we

⁵⁸ Ibid., 402.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 403.

invariably meet up with his spirit and work. In the defensive and offensive struggles against the reigning academicism and the passé, against traditionalist and professorial superstitions, we are convinced that we are fighting his fight. In Paris as well as Prague, in the cities that live in his poetry, in art's liberated and innovative springtime, we encounter his visage and smile everywhere.⁶⁰

Within the context of Devětsil, the figure of Apollinaire symbolized art in the new age: cubism, orphism and the newest art of all, film. This concept, one that seemed to shatter the symbolist myth of art-for-art's sake by bringing the possibility of art to the masses, actually carried on the romantic tradition of a poetic life. However, in modernism, the notion was taken one step further to the point where the whole concept of art as a separate entity no longer had any meaning. Quoting the Soviet Writer Ilja Ehrenburg in his essay "Konstruktivismus a likvidace "umění" (Constructivism and the Liquidation of Art) Teige ecstatically announced: "*NEW ART STOPS BEING ART*" (NOVÉ UMĚNÍ PŘESTANE BÝTI UMĚNÍ)⁶¹ By claiming art was dead (art that was

⁶⁰ Apollinaire je nám symbolem toho "nového ducha", za něhož vítězství dosud v jeho stínu bojumeme, Apollinaire je nám osou všeho moderního básnictví: jeho dílo je mezníkem, od něhož datujeme novou éru moderní tvorby, éru přítomnosti, v níž pracujeme a žijeme. Na křížovatkách dnešních cest stále se setkáváme s jeho duchem a dílem. V defenzivních i ofenzivních zápasech proti vládnoucímu akademismu a paséismu, proti tradicionalistickým a profesorským pověram jsme přesvědčeni, že bojujeme jeho boj. V Paříži i v Praze, ve svobodného a tvořivého jara umění, všude setkáváme se s jeho tváří a s jeho úsměvem.) Ibid.

⁶¹ "Konstruktivismus a likvidace 'umění," In Karel Teige, *Výbor z díla*. Vol. 1. *Svět, stavby a básně*, 131.

defined by its academicism that was removed from life) Teige created an aesthetic where poetry embraced all art, where poetry and life were synonymous and where popular culture inspired the artist instead of the other way around. Here, Apollinaire functioned as the figurative soldier who triumphed over the sterility and pure aestheticism that had segregated art from society, the “we” in his argument Teige invoked.

Although Teige argued that Apollinaire’s fight was being waged equally on the shores of the Seine and the Vltava, the remark was not really accurate. The “We” Teige referred to did not and could not imply “nous.” By promoting the Franco-Czechoslovakian alliance against academism that he had constructed to the Czechs, Teige married his countrymen off on the arm of papa Apollinaire to their French bridegroom. Although Teige restricted his argument to poetist aesthetics,⁶² his martial rhetoric served as a rallying cry for the republican ideals of France during the War. For the sake of the Republic (his adopted homeland), Apollinaire had been willing to lay down his life. Even though he did not die on the battlefield, the fact his death came almost simultaneously with Armistice linked his fate with that of the War. Picasso, in his drawings, had immortalized the image of the wounded Apollinaire. His head swathed in bandages, he

⁶² See “Báseň, svět, člověk” (Poem, World, Man) *Zvěrokruh* 1 (November 1930), 12.

presented no problems for the Czech avant-garde consciousness; whereas Breton believed that Apollinaire's crass militarism had corrupted his poetic gifts.

Yet, as time passed, Teige's opinion of Apollinaire's legacy evolved substantially. In the unpublished, "Historie Guillaume Apollinaire," (The History of Guillaume Apollinaire) an up-dated version of "Guillaume Apollinaire a jeho doba"⁶³ and the original article on Apollinaire in *Kmen*, Teige evaluated Apollinaire through the prism of Surrealism,⁶⁴ to which he was a recent convert. In this work, Teige employed much the same reverential language he had done in the past. Apollinaire was once again portrayed as Columbus, but in this version his explorations extend to the heavens as those of a modern Galileo.⁶⁵ "Everywhere, the dialectic impulse to unify distant realities informed Teige's reading much in the same way it had earlier where he depicted the locus of all modern movements in the figure of Apollinaire. In order to legitimize the historical development of Czech modernity within the context of French Surrealism, Teige reconciled the two, appropriating his identity much as Breton

⁶³ Teige's manuscript is comprised of printed portions cut out from his 1928 essay and pasted into his revised handwritten text.

⁶⁴ It is important to point out that Teige did not sign the initial leaflet announcing the formation of the Surrealist group in March 1934 since he had reservations regarding the philosophical aims of the movement. Once he was convinced that Surrealists embraced dialectical materialism and that their movement was not an empty exercise in aesthetics, he became committed to cause.

⁶⁵ Guillaume Apollinaire je veliký objevitel, novodobý Kolumbus, jenž objevil nový svět POESIE, Galileo Galilei, který tvrdošijně tvrdil: A přece se točí..." (Guillaume Apollinaire is a great discoverer, a new-age Columbus who discovered the new world of POETRY, Galileo Galilei who stubbornly proclaimed: 'But it revolves just the same...' "Historie Guillaume Apollinairea" AMs. 1935. Památník národního písemnictví v Praze (National Literary Archive in Prague), Prague, Czech Republic, 57.

done in the case of Lautréamont and Rimbaud. Teige's revised interpretation of Apollinaire's legacy showed the poet was indispensable even to the French movement because they were all his natural-born offspring:

Apollinaire's poetic opus is classified in the line of development that leads from revolutionary romanticists and from Rimbaud to Surrealism; it is the line of the sole pathway of poetic thought that will continue into the future, the notion whose whole reach and significance as well as its amplitude up to the present we do not yet know. Apollinaire, perhaps "the last great poet in the most universal sense of the word" (quoting Breton) could sketch a rough outline for the future of since it is impossible for one man to turn on all the lights that can illuminate the whole realm of lyricism: these lights will blaze until everyone will make poetry.⁶⁶

Teige's invocation of the aphorism from Isidore Ducasse's *Poesies* closed the circle on a legacy for Surrealism that included Apollinaire: from past, to present to the collective future, and back. Thanks to Teige's matchmaking, in the inter-

⁶⁶ Apollinaireovo básnické dílo řadí se do linie vývoje, která vede od revolučních romantiků a od Rimbauda a Surrealismu; je to linie cesty jediné básnické myšlenky, která bude pokračovat do budoucna, myšlenky, jejíž celý dosah a smysl i její výkyvy dosud neznáme. Apollinaire, jenž je snad "poslední velký básník v nejvšeobecnějším smyslu toho slova" (Breton) mohl jen ve hrubých rysech načrtout nárys budoucí poesie, neboť není možno, aby jednen člověk rozsvítil všechna světla, která je mohla ozářit celou oblast? : tato světla vzplanou, až poesie budou dělati všichni. Ibid., 61.

marriage of Paris and Prague's distant realities: Breton alongside Apollinaire could prosper and endure.

Everybody's Doing It

It is telling that Teige selected the quote from *Poesies* to link Lautréamont and Apollinaire. According to Surrealism's genealogy, the fictional Count was more famous for having created the maxim of the meeting of sewing-machine and umbrella⁶⁷ than the real Ducasse. Even though Teige had translated into *Maldoror* into Czech,⁶⁸ when writing on legacy, he often returned to this idea. Teige's preference for this line of Ducasses's makes sense in terms of his overarching interest in using his criticism to discuss the evolution of Czech Surrealism and its relationship to the French movement.

In Paris in the late 1920's a dispute erupted among critics over the question of Lautréamont's identity. Breton and the Surrealists became involved in the polemic in order to prevent his posthumous conversion by the disreputable "pigs" (porcs)⁶⁹ who had beatified Rimbaud after his death.⁷⁰ The row over this

⁶⁷ Ducasse took the pseudonym Lautréamont from a novel by Eugène Sue of the same name.

⁶⁸ With Jinřich Hořejší. Nezval in his review said the translations "read like an original work." (se čtou jako původní dílo. From "Review of *Maldoror*, by the comte de Lautréamont and translated by Jindřich Hořejší and Karel Teige." In Vítězslav Nezval, *Manifesty z poetismu*, 499) the same language he later used to describe Čapek's translation of "Zone."

⁶⁹ Breton, "Response à l'enquête du "disque vert" : le cas Lautréamont" (Response to the Questionnaire from *Disque vert* (Green Record): the Lautréamont Affair) From *Alementours III* (Vicinity III). In *Oeuvres*, 1: 916.

cause célèbre became more heated when Philippe Soupault published a new edition of Lautréamont with his own introductory essay. Soupault had been a founding member of the Surrealist movement but as a result of political differences he was expelled from the group in 1926.⁷¹ In “Lautréamont envers et contre tout” (Lautréamont In Spite All Opposition), Breton, Eluard and Aragon publicly attacked Soupault for his handling of the details of Lautréamont’s life (in essence a fiction since Ducasse was real figure in question). They charged that in portraying Ducasse as a socialist revolutionary, he had confused Isidore Ducasse with a certain Felix Ducasse, a *blanquiste* who had used his public lecture in 1869 to “cite the epistles of St. Paul.”⁷² According to the authors, Soupault had committed the cardinal sin of betraying Lautréamont for the sake of the money he received from his publisher Sans Pareil; Soupault preferred lucre over the fidelity he owed to “the one party perhaps he should not betray” (la seule partie où il se devait peut-être de ne pas tricher).⁷³ However, they viewed Soupault’s ranking Lautréamont within the French tradition as an equally egregious transgression:

⁷⁰ In Breton, “La force d’attendre” (The Power of Waiting). From *Aulentours III*. In *Oeuvres*, 1: 918-919. Breton elaborated on what he considers Ernest Delahaye’s conversion of Rimbaud fifty years after his death.

⁷¹ For details of Soupault’s expulsion see the notes to “Au Grand Jour” (In Broad Daylight) in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1717.

⁷² From *Aulentours III*. In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 944.

⁷³ Ibid.

We oppose and continue to oppose Lautréamont entering into history,
one's assigning him a place between Such and Such and So and So*
between Baudelaire and Rimbaud for example.”⁷⁴

The rift between Soupault and the Surrealist group had serious
repercussions in Prague as well. Because of his friendship with the émigré painter
Josef Šima, Soupault had been the only member of the Surrealist group who had
close ties with the Czech avant-garde. Up to that point, Soupault had been “the
French patriarch of Czech or” or as “the Czech consul of Paris.”⁷⁵

In May of 1927, just after the dispute between the Surrealists and Soupault
came to a head, Soupault went to Prague to lecture on the most recent
developments in modern French literature. He began his remarks by
acknowledging the deep bonds that had united the Czechs and the French in
modernity, ties that offered hope for the future of the entire avant-garde:

...I am bringing the message from young French writers to young
Czech writers. Among these writers in Prague I have found the
same atmosphere of struggle and youth; here, I do not feel like a
stranger. Through my efforts of mediation, I would like the
Parisian and Prague Left to put pressure on the Right.

⁷⁴ Nous nous opposons, nous continuons à nous opposer à ce que Lautréamont entre dans l'histoire, à ce qu'on lui assigne une place entre Un Tel et Un Tel* Par exemple, entre Baudelaire et Rimbaud). Ibid., 945

⁷⁵ Lenka Bydžovská and Karel Srp. “The Lautréamont Case” *Umění* (Art) 43, no. 2 (1995), 149.

The literary left of Paris lives in isolation and is hounded by derision. In Prague several hundred kilometers to the east, I find the same militant and, perhaps, more fortunate youth.⁷⁶

Although Soupault represented the French avant-garde (but no longer Surrealism), his message of unity was perfectly consistent with that of his Czech audience who, like Teige, saw the two groups as not being mutually exclusive. In this case, however, the young Czechs were in a more enviable position than their French comrades because they had gained wider acceptance in the population as a whole.

Like Apollinaire before him, Soupault had acknowledged the vital role Bohemia played in modernity that went against the grain of Surrealist criticism. Soupault also confirmed Teige's characterization of Apollinaire as the father of modernity whose discovery of Prague initiated the relationship that had changed both cultures for the better. For both reasons, the French owed Apollinaire an enormous debt. He told the audience: "My friend Guillaume Apollinaire who discovered the new world of French poetry also discovered Prague for us." (Můj přítel Guillaume Apollinaire, který objevil nové světy francouzské poesie, objevil

⁷⁶...vyřídím vzkaz od mladých spisovatelů francouzských mladým spisovatelům českým. Shledávám v Praze mezi nimi tutéž atmosféru boje a mládí a necítím se tu být v cizině. Chtěl bych, aby mým prostředkem pařížská a pražská levice si stiskly pravice. Pařížská literární levice žije v isolaci a je pronásledována výsměchem. V Praze, několik set kilometrů na východ, nacházím totéž bojovné a možná že státnější mládí. Philippe Soupault, "Pozdrav z Paříže." (Greetings from Paris) *Kmen* 1, no. 9, 209.

nam i Prahu)⁷⁷ Because Soupault had had a personal relationship with the poet during his life, he set himself up in the essential role as the Czechs' medium, a conduit that could connect them to the historical Apollinaire whom they had never known. The gratitude Soupault expressed to Apollinaire for having given him the gift of Prague took on a more human dimension given his friendship with the dead poet. Yet, the gratitude also placed Soupault in the enviable position of being Apollinaire's *porte-parole* for an admiring public.

Teige published French and Czech testimonials to the friendship that resulted from Soupault's visit in *ReD*. Representing the French viewpoint, Soupault contributed the poem "Do Prahy" (To Prague) whose Czech title and French text symbolized the spiritual covenant between the two cultures. Soupault paid homage to the magic of Prague he discovered in the company of his Czech friends as they followed hand-in-hand in steps of the immortal Apollinaire. In the end, Soupault portrayed the spirit of Apollinaire as a force of nature joining East to West in an unbroken circle of expression:

You still have to give me your hand/ from time to time
when you see

⁷⁷ Ibid.

a large house all new/ when you hear the wind/ that comes from the West/
and from Paris.⁷⁸

Vítězslav Nezval provided the Czech perspective in “Poème pour Philippe Soupault” (Poem for Philippe Soupault) published immediately following “Do Prahy” and on the same page as Teige’s translation of Apollinaire’s war poem “14 juin 1915.” (June 14, 1915) Once again, Apollinaire appeared as the Holy Ghost in the union of great nation and small where Soupault functioned as medium for his hosts:

Tell Guillaume Apollinaire
That you saw a spider’s web in the agates of Saint-Vitus
It covers our *little* (emphasis added) eternity
that his breath had touched at the century’s start⁷⁹

Teige placed an interesting editorial note between the poems in which he informed readers that the Parisian *L’Intransigeant* (The Unyielding) was going to publish a notice with the caption “Mladí Češi a my” (The Young Czechs and Us) that read:

Mr. Vítězslav Nezval wrote a poem dedicated to Philippe
Soupault, a poem written in beautiful modern form and joyous

⁷⁸ Soupault, “Do Prahy,” *ReD: Měsícník pro moderní kulturu* (Revue Devětsil: Monthly for Modern Culture) 1 (1927-1928), no. 1, 3 (5:1-7).

⁷⁹ Vítězslav Nezval, “Poème pour Philippe Soupault,” *ReD: Měsícník pro moderní kulturu* (Revue Devětsil: Monthly for Modern Culture) 1 (1927-1928), no. 1, 6 (6:1-7).

The poem was translated from the Czech by the actor and member of Devětsil Jiří Voskovec.

invention – Apollinaire and Soupault who sojourned to Prague twenty years apart planted the seed that is blossoming here in friendship.⁸⁰

Even though these pieces offered variations on the Apollinaire of Prague, the essential theme was the continuity of the relationship perpetuated by Soupault as the emissary of French culture for Devětsil and other factions of the avant-garde. And the rewards were enormous; the deep admiration Soupault expressed for Bohemia garnered him the enviable reputation as a modern-day Apollinaire and the Czechs got a rare mention in the French press. In 1927, it was evident that Soupault, the ex-communicated Surrealist, had much more in common with Devětsil's view of the past than Breton.

Soupault's visit came at a critical moment in the history of the inter-war avant-garde as the battle waged in France over Lautréamont. Although Soupault touched upon Lautréamont in his Prague lecture, he did not make mention of him as a revolutionary. Instead, he avoided the issue of politics, sticking instead to his importance in the development of French modernism. Because of their discovery of Lautréamont, both Surrealism and Dada had “turned their backs on the whole literary past.” (obrátili se zády k celé literární minulosti)⁸¹ Yet, his

⁸⁰ Pan Vítězslav Nezval napsal básně, věnovanou Philippu Soupaultovi, básně krásné formy a veselé invence. – Apollinaire a Soupault, pobyt v Praze, v časové vydálenosti dvacet let od sebe, zasili zrna, jež tu vzkvétají v přátelství. Editorial Note in *ReD* 1, no. 1, 4.

⁸¹ Soupault, “Pozdrav z Paříže,” 210.

characterization of Surrealism as “a rib from a Dadaistic body” (žebrem z dadaistického těla)⁸² had political overtones since Soupault was arguing that the genesis of Surrealism was dependent on Dadaism. However, Breton had split with Dada early on after judging its anarchic nonsense incompatible with his view of the new spirit of the age. Had Breton been in the audience, he would have considered the claim as egregious as his depiction of Lautréamont in the article *Maldoror*. However, if one reads between the lines, the comments Soupault expressed about Surrealism and Lautréamont (comments that might not make their way to Breton) revealed something greater than literature was at stake. Politics and personality were at the heart of the matter. Soupault told the admiring audience:

The authors of this group (the Surrealists), Louis Aragon, André Breton, René Crevel, George⁸³ Desnos arrive at some curious results, a broad pictorial style. A rift of a *political nature* (emphasis added) has taken place among the Surrealists. Some tied the Surrealist revolution to the Communist revolution. They abandoned the literary world and set themselves up in the service of the Communist movement. Even this caused a controversy with

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ I am assuming that this is a typo and the text should read “Robert.”

the older generation of Communist literati – while others have

continued in their apolitical literary experiments.⁸⁴

Soupault used the occasion of the speech as a forum to fight on the eastern front against the politicizing of what had been essentially an “apolitical” aesthetic movement. Although he avoided circumventing a direct political discussion, he alluded to the fact that political militancy and external dissent reflected in the Surrealist collective posed a threat to poetry’s very existence. However, in the end, he was mindful to leave the public with an optimistic message for the future:

The poetic current, begun by Baudelaire and continuing through

Lautréamont and Rimbaud will not vanish in today’s confusion. It

is still has not ended and continues toward tomorrow’s miracles.⁸⁵

In making his case to the Czech avant-garde, Soupault failed to recognize that the personal and political battles that had divided the Surrealists from the French Communist Party were also working away at the cohesion of Devětsil. At the end of the twenties, the group that had experienced its internal struggles of its own over its connection to the Czech Communist Party. But in time, Soupault

⁸⁴ Autoři této skupiny, Louis Aragon, André Breton, René Crevel, George Desnos, dospívají tak k zvláštním resultátům, k širokému obrazovému slohu. Mezi surrealisty nastala roztržka politické povahy. Někteří spojili surrealisticou revoluci s revolucí komunistickou, opustili svět literatury a postavili se do služeb komunistického hnutí. I zde došlo ke kontroversím se staršími komunistickými literáty – kdežto druzí pokračují ve svých apolitických literárních experimentech. Soupault, “Pozdrav z Paříže,” 210-211.

⁸⁵ Proud poesie, započatý Baudelairem a pokračující přes Lautréamonta a Rimbauda, nemizí ve zmatku dneška, je neukončený a pokračuje k zítřejším Zázrakům. Ibid., 211.

lost his bid for the hearts of the Czech avant-garde despite his initial success. Teige and Nezval were turning away from an aesthetic that could only respond to the world in terms of light-hearted poetic gestures. In a world where freedom of expression was under attack from all sides, stronger measures were becoming necessary.

The banning and confiscation of Teige and Jindřich Hořejší's translation of *Maldoror* (dedicated to Soupault) was a case that had a profound impact on the Devětsil. The work was censured because a court had determined "its lascivious acts grossly offend modesty and decency in a way that has caused a public scandal." (smilnými činy mravopočetnost a stydlivost uráží hrubě a takovým způsobem, že se tím zdavala příčina k veřejnému pohoršení)⁸⁶ Because of Devětsil's ties with the French avant-garde, word of the Czech government's action made it to Paris. Once again Soupault showed his solidarity with the Czech by stepping forward to defend their right to free expression. However, the increasing political pressure brought to bear on Devětsil from the status quo made the purely aesthetic approach to the problem advocated by artists and critics such as Soupault untenable. At the time Breton decided to publish a second manifesto where automatism was overshadowed by Hegel and Marx, the Czechs were also

⁸⁶ *ReD* 3: 1, 4.

turning to dialectical materialism as the primary means to mediate the intractable contradiction between art and society.

In terms of legacy, Apollinaire could not serve as the standard-bearer for dialectical materialism. He had not been a revolutionary but a defender of Capitalist France. In addition, all descendants of Czech modernity had claims on Apollinaire, even Devětsil's bitter rivals such as Čapek. However, in Czechoslovakia, Lautréamont/Ducasse was theirs alone. In his figure, reality and myth had merged to create the dialectical tension between the art of Lautréamont's *Maldoror* (the sewing machine and the umbrella) and life of Ducasse's *Poésies* (Everyone should write poetry). Where Ducasse symbolized poetism's conflation of life and art, Lautréamont embodied Surrealism's distant realities. When out of dialectical necessity (a point argued by Teige) Devětsil and Surrealism were thrown together these maxims symbolized the two independent currents that had finally become one.

Communicating Vessels

Although Breton, along with other members of the Surrealist group, joined the French Communist Party in 1927, Breton's association proved as bitter and divisive as his break with Soupault. The philosophical divide between Breton and the Party was mirrored within the ranks of Surrealism over the movement's

relationship to political struggle for social change. Pierre Naville⁸⁷ specifically addressed the issue of Surrealism's engagement in the proletarian cause in his 1926 article “La Révolution et les intellectuels. Que peut faire les Surréalistes” (Revolution and Intellectuals. What Can the Surrealists Do) While Naville threw in his lot with the Communists, Breton soon gave up his membership, refusing to place the Surrealists' ontological and aesthetic activities under the control of the Party's hierarchy. Breton believed that no external power had the right to prevent the Surrealists from doing what they did best: exploring the vast reaches of human consciousness and expanding its breadth through art. Since the Party did not possess expertise in the realm of artistic representation, it could not restrict their activities; they needed to be free to pursue their Surrealist experiment as they saw fit.

Even though Breton failed in his bid to cooperate with the Communists, the attempt reflected the fact that the “Surrealist Revolution” was undergoing a transformation. Once preoccupied with aesthetic concerns, the Surrealists were now interested in attaining a more expansive goal: the union of the dream (the

⁸⁷ The house at 15 rue Grenelle which belonged to Naville's father and had served as headquarters for Le Bureau de recherches surréalistes (1924-25) became, subsequent to his defection to Communism, the editorial offices of *La Lutte des classes* (The Class Struggle). In the notes to *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1 1606. In the *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton challenged the authenticity of Naville's Communism given his family's bourgeois pedigree and wealth. Breton cited the contradiction of this residence being used as the location for a Communist organ because it was the former residence of the dukes de La Rochefoucauld. Needless-to-say he neglects to mention the minor detail of the residence's former connection with Surrealism. Breton, *Second manifeste du surréalisme*, *Oeuvres*, 1: 799.

internal world) and reality (the external world) to serve the proletarian cause. This conceptual shift was reflected in Breton's *Second manifeste du surréalism* (The Second Manifesto of Surrealism) and also in their decision to change the name of the Surrealist organ "La Révolution Surréaliste" that had ceased publication in 1929, to "Surréalisme au service de la révolution."

These developments showed on the one hand that Breton had become more humble about his view for Surrealism and, on the other, more ambitious. By vowing to serve a revolution that was no longer defined as "Surrealist," Breton had made a concession to a higher ideal: social change. However, Breton's concept of "service" clearly did not mean the Surrealists would have to submit to Party scrutiny. Breton's analysis in the *Second manifeste* proved that the only external authority he had to answer was a heavy dose of Hegelian dialectics read through Engels and Lenin with some Marx thrown in to make it credible.⁸⁸ Because of Breton's idiosyncratic interpretation of dialectical materialism, Surrealism had become "progressive" movement, striving for the "sublime point" where the major contradictions of thought and life cancel one another out." (point

⁸⁸ The critical basis of Breton's dialectical attitude is reflected in his reference in the Forward to the edition of *Second manifeste* to Marx's 'The Misery of Philosophy, Engel's *Anti-Dühring* and Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. In these works the authors vigorously attack the their predecessors' philosophical and scientific positions much in the way Breton does in le *Second Manifest*. This note figuratively serves to legitimize the vitriolic tone of Breton's invective against some of his former friends within the context of the dialectical tradition. See note 2 to p. 837. Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1629.

sublime” où s’annulent les contradictions majeurs de la pensée et de la vie)⁸⁹ Breton’s revised conception for Surrealism was analogous to the vanishing point of poetry and life advocated early on by Teige and Devětsil. The emphasis on dialectical progression now became the driving force of both movements. This new philosophical framework of synthesis and contradiction brought them ever closer to union.

Although medieval alchemy, the transmutation of matter by magic, clashed with Marxist materialism, Breton used his interpretation of materialism to resolve the historical contradiction to arrive at what he believed was a more evolved state of consciousness. Breton applied Rimbaud’s alchemy to “Change life” on the individual level and Marx’s materialist dialectic to “Transform the world” on the grand scale to arrive at a new conception that would, by necessity, also change. However, Hegel’s less progressive conception of the dialectic appealed to Breton more than Marx’s because Hegel framed his dialectic around art. Despite the many invectives Breton had launched against the metaphysical idealism of other avant-garde groups such as Le Grand Jeu (whose members included the Czech painter Josef Šima who had extremely close ties to Devětsil), Breton had his idealistic tendencies that sent him, like a knight errant, on a moral quest to right the wrongs of the world. For the sake of his Lady “Convulsive

⁸⁹ See the notes to the *Second manifeste* in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1584.

Beauty,” Breton transmuted lyric through the alchemy of the verb in order to yield a precious precipitate from life’s baser elements. Yet, this idealistic bent did not conflict with his humanism. Breton was never interested in divinity, things not of this world. To turn base matter into gold did not require the physical world be transcended; alchemy was a science, a rational attempt to wrest control of human affairs from God’s hands. Surrealism’s occult suffused version of dialectics never quitted reality, rationality and dream. It did not need to because reality’s borders could be extended indefinitely through experimentation and were as infinite as the heavens. Breton took his interest in alchemy (expressed in the *Manifeste du surréalisme*) to make it modern science in *Les Vases communicants*.

More than any Surrealist work before it, *Les Vases communicants* did more to convince the remaining members of Devětsil to join the Surrealist fold. The connected vessels in the Czech context could be interpreted as the critical and lyric approach to aesthetics and social revolution represented by Teige (the critic) and Nezval. However, Nezval was driving force behind the move to found a Czech Surrealist group and Teige did not join initially because of his “reservations” regarding Surrealism’s ideological estrangement from the Left.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Teige’s explained his reasons for not signing Nezval’s tract “Surrealismus v ČSR” (Surrealism in the Czechoslovak Republic) that announced the group’s foundation by writing : “Jestliže nejsem členem surrealisticke skupiny a nepokládám se býti surrealistou, jestilže jsem přesvědčen, že má činnost není rezultátem surrealisticke duchovní disposice“, není to proto, že bych se surrealism nesympatizoval, ale proto, že se neztotožňuji s jeho ideologií.” (If I am not a member of the Surrealist group and do not consider myself to be a Surrealist, if I am convinced that my

Nezval's increasing affinity for Surrealism was evident in the journal *Zvěrokruh* (Zodiac) for which served as a major contributor and editor. In *Zvěrokruh*, Nezval abandoned what had been Teige's eclectic mix of articles on topics ranging from architecture to film in order to focus on the psychological, theoretical and social implications of art. The issue was a sampler from French symbolism and modernity (Mallarmé, Proust, Baudelaire, Cocteau) to Freud, Jung and Marx. Although Nezval made the disclaimer that the magazine "is not a Surrealist review" (není revuí surrealisticou),⁹¹ Surrealism's influence is evident on almost every page. Nezval published Surrealist texts by Eluard, Aragon, a translation of a poem by Tristan Tzara as well as reproductions by Max Ernst and Giorgio de Chirico.

Nezval also included excerpts from Miloš Hlávka's Czech translation of Breton's *Nadja*. However the portions he selected (such as a literary portrait of Robert Desnos) were out of sync with Surrealism's recent developments. Although Breton used a Man Ray series of Desnos in one of his famous Surrealist trances as an illustration for *Nadja*, the only appearance Desnos made in the *Second manifeste* was as an object of Breton's wrath (placing him in Soupault's esteemed company). While admitting "Desnos had played a necessary role in

action is not the result of a Surrealist spiritual condition, it is not because I do not sympathize with Surrealism, but because I do not identify with its ideology) Quoted in commentary to *Zápasy o smysl* 596.

⁹¹ Nezval's Editorial Note. *Zvěrokruh* 1, (November 1930), 1

Surrealism” (Desnos a joué dans le surréalisme un rôle nécessaire),⁹² he went on to accuse him of being an opportunistic journalist whose narcissism bordered on megalomania. Breton was also scandalized by the fact Desnos, the Surrealist poet had betrayed was now reciting alexandrines (*des alexandrins, des a-le-xan-drins!*) underneath Cuban stars.⁹³ Like Soupault before him, Desnos’s greatest transgression involved defiling the sacred memory of Lautréamont. When Desnos paid a visit to the night club named for Lautréamont’s hero Maldoror: “the only name thrown against the centuries which constituted pure challenge to all that is stupid, base and disgusting in the world,” (le seul nom jeté à travers les siècles qui constituât un défi pur à tout ce qu’il ya de stupide, de bas et d’écourant sur terre),⁹⁴ he had equated Surrealism’s icon to a “squalid bar” (bar immonde)⁹⁵ in Montparnasse.

Just when Surrealism had been looking to the dialectical future, Nezval, in this interim period, was looking at Breton’s work in retrospect. His own contributions to *Zvěrokruh* showed a marked tendency for the romantic and elegiac. While he did play with Surrealist themes, attempting to expand the limits of the novelistic form as Breton had done in *Nadja*, Nezval took the experimentation a step further. Into the reportage and criticism, he mixed prose

⁹² Breton, *Second manifeste*, 811.

⁹³ Ibid., 813.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 814.

poems, dialogue and verse. However, Nezval's experimentation in form did not extend to his content. The themes he addressed in *Chtěla okrást Lorda Blamingtona* (She Wanted to Steal from Lord Blamington), a work that could only loosely be termed a novel, evoked winter and death, subjects that were more representative of symbolism rather than poetism or Surrealism. Yet the affinities with the latter were very much there and the novel was Nezval's try at imitating an influential trend that excited his creative imagination. Although Nezval once again used the book's Afterword to deny that he was "a follower of Surrealism" (stoupencem surrealismu),⁹⁶ Surrealism hovered in the background like a phantom presence, as a light illuminating the text. Nezval's preoccupation with the conscious and unconscious world of the psyche in this work revealed a profound connection to Breton despite claims to the contrary. Yet, in one respect, Nezval in his "pre-Surrealist" phase was more Surrealist than Breton. Nezval published an analysis of his own dream in *Chtěla* before Breton's that appeared in first part of *Communicating Vessels*,⁹⁷ a work which Nezval translated into Czech.

Even though Nezval freely experimented in these pre-Surrealist works with form and content, *Zvěrokruh* showed that he had no real intention of making a complete split with aesthetic convention as per Teige's mandate. Nezval never really ascribed to the notion that art had been liquidated. In his mind convention

⁹⁶ Vítězslav Nezval, *Chtěla okrást Lorda Blamingtona*. (Prague: Odeon, 1930), 113.

⁹⁷ On one level, Breton published his analysis as a critique of Freud's methods. Breton felt Freud was far too properly bourgeois hold his own dreams up to public scrutiny.

served as a developmental tool for those endowed with poetic gifts. In the selection from his poem “Jan v smutku” (John in Mourning), Nezval eschewed free verse in favor of fixed prosody to show off the ease with which he composed complex rhyme schemes within the strict limits of form. Indeed, Nezval’s theme of death and the maiden had more in common with nineteenth romanticism than poetism’s celebration of urban modernity. However, the counterpoint Nezval constructed out of these contradictory fragments represented its own special unity between the forces of past and present, conscious and unconscious. Even though the free verse joys of modern life had captured Nezval’s imagination during poetism, in the thirties he became increasingly fascinated with the theme of death and meter.

In his critical essay in *Zvěrokruh* “Poem, World, Man” (Báseň, svět, člověk), Teige also brought up the topic of death, but only in terms of an extinction; like a stuffed Dodo, bourgeois art had been relegated to a place in history “beside extinct philosophies, overblown moralities, washed out metaphysics, mythologies and religion in the archive of history...” (vedle odumřelých filosofií, zvetštělých morálek, vybledlých metafysik, mytologií a náboženství nenávratně do archivu historie...)⁹⁸ He focused on how art had penetrated all aspects of the social sphere through the dialectical processes of the

⁹⁸ Karel Teige, “Báseň, svět, člověk.” *Zvěrokruh* 1 (November 1930), 9.

class struggle necessitating the demise of academism and idealism. His earlier formulation about art having been liquidated had been, more or less, borrowed wholesale from the Soviet Futurists. During the twenties, Teige's message on the topic of social transformation remained vague because he was too busy celebrating the frenetic joys of modern life, constructivist architecture and the newest means of representation, film.

However, as Teige's thinking developed political and social concerns began to take precedence. Gradually, he came to believe that the aesthetic concerns that had occupied much of his critical work were secondary to the question of how art and society could be transformed through Freud and dialectics. As a result of his evolving view on the nature of art's relationship to society, Teige realized poetism's mandate had fallen short of the mark (much in the way Breton found the Surrealist Revolution had been lacking) and had reached a developmental dead end (unlike the case of Surrealism). In his essay, Teige published its obituary: "the theory of art that we have called poetism above all arising from the knowledge that endowed artistic forms that were qualified by artisanship (craft) in our age are already dead." (Teorie umění, kterou jsme nazvali poetismem, vychází především z poznaku, že zděděný útvary umělecké, jež byly podmíněny řemeslem, jsou v naší době již mrtvý.)⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Ibid. 12.

Teige's primary concern was no longer in recreating the beauty of life as art. He wanted to build a new society through social revolution to eliminate the inequality of class contradictions. In the wake of poetism's demise, Teige revised his appeal for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the major amendment that defined poetism's second manifesto) to the total man whose life would be completely integrated with his world because the remaining barriers and contradictions between the individual and society had been obliterated. Here the title "Báseň, svět, člověk" as envisioned by Teige symbolized a harmonious partnership among equals that would engender art through infinite course of dialectical progression. Such art would finally have the power to liberate man's consciousness:

This is the vanishing point of poetism's perspective. This is the vanishing point of Nietzsche's philosophy: 'Where the state ends, only there does man begin.' And similarly: '...associations where the free development of each individual will be the condition for the free development of all'... that is the vanishing point of the perspective of Marx's dialectical materialism.¹⁰⁰

Because of his increasing reliance on dialectical materialism as the catalyst for art, Teige was closer to Breton than even he may have suspected.

¹⁰⁰ To jest úběžníkem perspektivy poetismu. Totéž je úběžníkem filosofie Nietzscheovy: ...Tam kde stát končí, tam teprve začíná člověk." Totéž: "...asociace, kde volný rozvoj každého bude podmínka pro volný rozvoj všech"..."...jest úběžníkem perspektivy dialektického materialismu Marxova. Ibid., 15.

Les Vases communicants, Breton's dialectical work in three acts: thesis, antithesis and synthesis, represented a departure even from the *Second manifeste*. In the first chapter, a critical analysis of Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, Breton attacked Freud for being hopelessly bourgeois and a hypocrite. Although he happily catalogued the erotic details of his neurotic patients' dream life, out of bourgeois modesty, he never dared bring up the topic of own his sex life. Breton considered Freud's conclusion that neurosis was at the root of the sexual content manifest in dreams to be a false characterization based on his class identity:

The author remembers in time that he is married, the head of the family and this same petit bourgeois Viennese who has aspired for a long time to be made a professor. From there springs one of the most embarrassing contradictions of his work: the sexual preoccupations apparently play no role in his personal dreams¹⁰¹, while they contribute clearly in a preponderant manner to the elaboration of the other dreams he attempts to deliver to us. Yet, the second obstacle psycho-analysis comes up against is precisely

¹⁰¹ The editors note that Freud supplies more details of his personal life than he is given credit for. However, it is Breton's contempt for Freud's refusal to go where angels fear to tread that is essential. See note 6 to p. 117 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1384.

the fact that these last dreams are in general the dreams of the

ill...¹⁰²

However, Breton made an even worse accusation against the scientist and scholar whose work had played such a critical role in the formation of Surrealism. He accused the father of psychoanalysis of plagiarism for not making reference to a certain Volkelt even though he had clearly drawn upon his ideas. Despite the criticism, Breton sent a copy of *Les Vases* to Freud anyway, a fact we learn from correspondence Breton appended to the text. In his reply to Breton's "gift," Freud's tone remained cordial and supportive, far more respectful of Breton than Breton had been of him. Yet, Freud had no reason to start a cause célèbre with Breton who had neither Freud's expertise nor social standing. In Breton's case, a lot was riding on his treatment of the "old man." While Breton had previously rejected Apollinaire for being a solider and a slave to French nationalism, he now rejected Freud (the other famous personality with whom he had a relationship) for keeping Eros locked away as bourgeois society's dirty little secret.

To show the world he dared travel where the great Freud could or would not tread, Breton gave readers an uncensored analysis of his own dreams, the

¹⁰² L'auteur se souvient à temps qu'il est marié, père de famille et ce même petit bourgeois de Vienne qui a longtemps aspiré à être nommé professeur. De là, une des contradictions les plus gênantes de son ouvrage: les préoccupations sexuelles ne jouent apparemment aucun rôle dans ses rêves personnels, alors qu'elles contribuent d'une manière nettement prépondérante à l'élaboration des autres rêves qu'il entreprend de nous soumettre. Or, le second obstacle sur lequel vient buter la psychoanalyse est précisément le fait que ces derniers rêves sont en général des rêves de malades... Breton, *Les Vases communicants*. In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2:117.

dreams of a normal heterosexual male (as seen from Breton's point of view).

Although Breton interpreted most of the latent content in his dreams through the prism of sexuality, he did not view sex as physical love, but rather the romantic union of the Lover with his Beloved, a union defined by mutual regard not economic necessity. Dream imagery was not neurotic. It was the wildly creative expression of the human psyche that could be tapped into as a source for art and interpreted as such. Breton explained that F.W. Murnau's vampire *Nosferatu* had appeared in his dream because he had become obsessed with the line from the film: "When he crossed to the other side of the bridge the phantoms came to meet him." (Quand il fut de l'autre côté du pont, les fantômes vinrent à sa rencontre)¹⁰³ The title (the film is silent) referred to hero Jonathan Harker's walking over a bridge that led from the peasant village to Nosferatu's castle. Harker's crossing symbolized the juncture between the kingdom of day (rationality) and night (madness) where the bridge for Breton clearly served as a sexual symbol.¹⁰⁴

Breton observed that the cinematic bridge image had appeared earlier in the dream as a real object, the "Pont-de-Soleils." (Bridge of Suns) Breton's having sexualized the image placed it in somewhat the same category as Lautrémont's dissecting table/marriage bed that Breton the author had devised as an attack on bourgeois family life and its morality. The bridge also symbolized

¹⁰³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Breton's rebellion against Freud. Dreams could not be relegated to the sphere of neurosis or psychosis because they belong to everyone. Dreams were a consummate expression of the human as creator, a source we all had access to.

Even though Breton used *Les Vases* as a public forum to discuss the legacy of Marx, Engels and Lenin, dialectical materialism and social revolution, he closed his work with the poet (poetry being the apex of Hegel's hierarchy) whose creation healed shut the divide between "action and dream;" (action et rêve)¹⁰⁵ The poet possessed the power to use art to bring the world from darkness to light:

The poetic operation will from now on take place in broad daylight...They (individuals) will be already outside, mingling with others in full sunlight and they will not have a more knowing and intimate gaze than those for the truth while she (the truth) comes to shake her locks flowing with light in their dark window.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 208. Here we are told Breton is referring to Baudelaire: "Yes, as for me I will leave satisfied/ by a world where action is not the sister of dream" (Certes, je sortirai quant à moi satisfait/ D'un monde où l'action n'est pas la soeur du rêve) "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre" (The Denial of Saint Peter) from *Les Fleurs du mal*. See note 6 to p. 106 in *Oeuvres*, 2: 1376.

¹⁰⁶ L'opération poétique, des lors, sera conduite au grand jour...Ils seront déjà au dehors, mêlés aux autres en plein soleil et n'auront pas un regard plus complice et plus intime qu'eux pour la vérité lorsqu'ell viendra secouer sa chevelure ruisselante de lumière à leur fenêtre noire.Breton, *Vases communicants*, 208-209.

L'Amitié, L'Amour

As previously mentioned, Teige had not been as quick to embrace the Surrealists as Nezval. In his essay "Surrealistická revoluce" (The Surrealist Revolution) begun in 1926, and finished in the spring of 1930, he portrayed the Surrealists as being limited by their fondness for madness and suicide, preoccupations that Teige found as being contrary to life's principle, decadent and nihilistic. Based on his knowledge of the movement at the time, Teige believed Surrealism's message had failed the avant-garde on two levels, that of reality (Marx) and that of the dream (Freud). The Surrealists were not only egocentric nihilists who dabbled in social revolution, they were incompetent theorists promoting pseudo-Freudianism, a bastardized version of the real thing:

The rebellious libertarianism of the Surrealists had little in common with Communism that is with Marxism and Leninism.

The Surrealists' ideology is the ideology of an outcast group, produced by the disintegration of the old social alliance and isolation of the individual: the Surrealist revolution ostensibly has all the markings of individual anarchism.

Freud not Marx is the symbol of Surrealism. And not Freud but often vulgar Freudianism: Freud poorly understood and disfigured.¹⁰⁷

Teige refuted the claim that Surrealism was a revolution. Based on the record, it had showed itself to be just an “ism” in the long line of “isms” that had preceded it, an aesthetic school incapable of effecting a change in human awareness. Because the Surrealist group did not have a firm grasp on the theoretical basis of the avant-garde, they threatened to corrupt its message. Teige’s antagonistic stance toward the Surrealists belied his staunch defense of the group after Ehrenburg’s attack in 1933. His characterizing Surrealism in terms of Dada had much in common with the viewpoint Soupault expressed in Prague a year later. Although poetism was, on the evolutionary scale, far ahead of Surrealism, Teige understood that they shared a common existential fate in bourgeois society. Here, Surrealist and poetist alike were suffering the slings and arrows of being marginalized and reviled. In his Afterword to *Svět, který voní* (The Fragrant World) in which “Surrealistická revoluce” appeared, Teige argued that the two were not completely at odds:

¹⁰⁷ Revoltující libertérství surrealistů mělo s komunismem, tedy s marxismem a leninismem málo společného. Ideologie surrealistů je ideologie deklasované skupiny, daná rozpadnutím sociálního svazku starého a atomisací individua: surrealistická revoluce má zjevně všechny znaky individualistického anarchismu. Nikoliv Marx, ale Freud je symbolem surrealismus. A nikoliv Freud, nybrž často vulgar freudismus, Freud špatně pochopený defigurovaný.) Karel Teige, “Surrealistická revoluce.” In *O humoru, clownech a dadaistech: Svět, který voní* (On Humor, Clowns and Dadaists: The Fragrant World) (Prague: Odeon, 1931. 168.

Despite the profound differences that remain between Poetism and Surrealism, the two world views share a common fate: they are indiscriminately and universally anathematized by pseudo-revolutionaries or revolutionary pseudo-intellectuals as spiritual games, like bourgeois pastimes and flowers of decadence and slime, like rococo confections, like poison and abomination unleashed. In the chapter discussing Surrealism, the author has attempted, through the many reservations and objections he has formulated against early Surrealist ideology, to show that the question here is really one of revolutionary destructive power, gradually solidifying out of its original chaos: the stages of the Surrealists' gradual revolutionary awareness can be seen in Breton's group joining the French Communist party, although they were always harshly dismissed by the Party's bourgeois intellectuals and moralists...¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Přes hluboké rozdíly, které trvají mezi poetismem a surréalismem, mají tyto názory společný osud: jsou pseudorevolučními intelektuály či revolučními pseudointelektuály šmahem a paušálně prolínány jako spiritualistické hry, jako buržoasní kratochvíle, jako květy dekadence a bahna, jako rokokové cukrovi, jako jed a ohavnost spuštění. V kapitole pojednávající o surréalismu snažil se autor, přes mnohé výhrady a námítky, které proti ranné surréalistické ideologii formuluje, ukázati, že zde jde o skutečně revoluční destruktivní silu, která, z první chaoticnosti, se postupně zoceluje: etapy postupujícího revolučního uvědomění surréalistů lze viděti v tom, že se Bretonova skupina přihlásila ke komunistické straně Francie, ačkoliv byla vždy maloměšťáckými intelektuály a moralisty této partaje zle odmitána... Teige, *Svět, který voní*, 239-240.

In the 1930's, the social exile that defined Surrealism and poetism became the point of departure from which their union would take place:

In the wake of world-wide depression, the avant-garde in France and Czechoslovakia were increasingly concerned with how to extend the influence of the October Revolution westward. However, rival factions from within the left intelligentsia made consensus practically impossible. No one could agree on how to implement the struggle for social equality. Were groups forced to submit to the authority of the Soviet Union or would the social alienation of the avant-garde in the West necessitate a distinctly western response. The question of what political action the Left should take became even more contentious after Hitler's rise to power; now the issue was how to fight a war on two fronts: against capitalism and fascism. The political pressures brought to bear on the Left caused tiny fissures within its ranks that in time widened into fault lines; given a quake of the appropriate magnitude, the whole front threatened to crumble.

Yet in the case of the French Surrealists and the Czechs things were coming together; after Breton's publication of *Second manifeste* and *Les Vases*, the philosophical rift separating Breton and Teige had almost knit shut. Each of them deeply believed in the need to achieve the revolution by means of dialectical materialism's drive toward a society where class contradictions had been eliminated. As was the case in collectivization, Teige was wary of change being

imposed before its time. Although Breton never really addressed this theoretical issue, his views on art's relationship to the Party were analogous to Teige's on architecture. For both men, political parties and their infrastructures could not be the primary source of social change; transformation would occur through enlightenment. Only a reasoned and knowledgeable application of the dialectic could "transform the world" as Marx had demanded.

In his comparative study of Surrealism and poetism "Deset let surrealismu" (Ten Years of Surrealism) written on the occasion of Nezval's founding the Czech group, Teige once again exposed the philosophical contradictions that had plagued early Surrealism which he claimed "had emerged from the reactionary aspects of its *Hegelian idealism*, not without its elements of mysticism." (vycházel ranný surrealismus z *hegeliánského idealismu*, nikoliv bez prvků mysticismu)¹⁰⁹ Because Teige felt the Surrealists had dabbled in metaphysics and idealism, the movement still had not attained an authentic understanding of dialectical materialism. During this early stage, the Surrealists read Marxist philosophy as if it were "Hegel's interpretation or like the interpretation of the young Marx in Hegel's clothing." (výrok Hegelův nebo jako výrok mladého Marxe v hegeliánského rouše)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Teige, "Deset let surrealismu," 16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

However, Teige refused to conclude that the Surrealists were on the wrong track altogether. He tempered his censure with praise for the group's engaging in a bona fide (but limited) fight against the bourgeois positivism that had a chokehold on representation. This was a struggle they had common to Devětsil. For Teige, the publication of the *Second manifeste* marked the turning point where Surrealism abandoned its idealism and Hegel's false materialism to evolve into a radical interpretation of external necessity based on Marx.¹¹¹ Based on the *Second manifeste*, the Surrealists genuinely belonged among the revolutionary ranks of the avant-garde.¹¹² Later in the essay, Teige again defended the Surrealists against Ehrenburg's invectives because the Surrealists had proven to all who knew the facts that the Surrealists "were more and more decidedly, openly and resolutely calling for the revolutionary front." (přihlašují se surrealiste čím dálé tím důsledněji, otevřeně a resolutně, k revoluční frontě) Teige argued that since their hearts (and minds) had always been in the right place, the Surrealists had to be given the opportunity to find their own way: "Surrealism's development toward dialectical materialism needs to be followed as a process, naturally

¹¹¹ For me it is difficult to understand how Teige arrived at this conclusion based on the *Second manifeste*. Breton's conception of the dialectic in this work was no less Hegelian than elsewhere. Perhaps the political climate forced Teige to make concessions when it came to his interpretation of Surrealist philosophy. In the thirties, Breton never abandoned Hegel whose presence was always more visible in his criticism than Marx's

¹¹² The change in Teige's attitude toward Surrealism and its position in the avant-garde must have played had a role in his vigorous defense of the group in 1933. However, Teige was probably motivated more by his ardent belief in dialogue and free expression.

unfinished to-date but positive.” (Vývoj surrealismu k dialetickému materialismu je třeba sledovat jako proces, přirozeně *dodnes neukončený, ale pozitivní*)¹¹³

Teige’s view of Surrealism as a process, as the organic unfolding of its philosophy that had brought the *movement* (my emphasis since movement implies the journey) from bourgeois aestheticism to proletarian revolution made up for past mistakes. According to Teige, the Surrealists’ refusal to become fixed in their efforts to explore external and internal reality served as proof that their commitment to the dialectical transformation of society and human consciousness was genuine no matter what their detractors might claim. In 1934, Teige’s plea for unity within Levá fronta became more impassioned because many of his close friends and colleagues had converted to the Surrealist cause and he was on the verge of doing so himself. Teige urged the members of Levá fronta to keep their minds open so the question of Surrealism could be debated openly and fairly, a viewpoint reflected in his chosen title for the collection in which “Deset let” appeared, *Surrealismus v diskusi*. The free exchange of ideas was the best insurance that the dialectic would continue on its inexorable march to a more safe and equitable world.

In the long run, the greatest threat to the Left was not Surrealism’s shortcomings on the road to Marx, but those forces (on either side of the political

¹¹³ Teige, “Deset let,” 38.

fence) that sought to restrict, reduce or limit the possibility of the dialectic to carry out its mandate of social transformation. In terms of art's role vis-à-vis this process, Teige (undoubtedly drawing upon Bukharin) argued against reducing representation's vast expressive potential to simplistic propaganda. Art in service to the revolution had to be free to employ all means at its disposal even idealism:

He who seeks and finds subjective idealism, metaphysics,
mysticism Freudianism and God knows what else in Breton,
Eluard or Nezval's novels or poems can find in the remarkable
masses and in works of André Gide and maybe Romain Rolland,
Barbusse and Gorky: however, do not forget that the idealism
found in *les belles lettres* is not the same idealism as philosophical
works and that Lenin in a letter to Gorky said that it is quite
possible for a revolutionary writer in his poetic work to inspire
through idealist philosophy, that definite, apparent or real idealistic
moments in a poetic work do not necessarily lessen its
revolutionary content. It is possible to learn from Marx's
relationship with the notorious deviant Heine how a real
revolutionary approaches a true poet.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Kdo hledá a nalézá subjektivní idealismus, metafysiku, mystiku, freudismus a čert ví co ještě v románech, či básních Bretonových dávkách i v dílech André Gidea a třebas i Romain Rollanda, Barbusse a Gorkého: necht' však nezapomíná, že idealismus, který našel v beletrie, není totéž jako idealismus ve filosofické knize, a že Lenin v kterém s dopise Gorkému, že je zcela možné, aby se

Teige's vision of Marx was expansive enough to embrace Heine because he believed a revolution in man's consciousness could only take place when contradictions had been engaged and overcome. Levá fronta's contribution to the discussions on Surrealism, *Surrealism v diskusi*, was a six-part variation on the theme on the theme of tolerance. The counterpoint of the authors' divergent takes on Surrealism resolved into collective harmony. Teige journeyed through Surrealism's progression where the intercourse between disparate objects and ideas represented the primary means to establish a society where life and poetry were synonymous. In the quest for this end, dialectical materialism had dragged poetism from its hermetic aestheticism into the world of the living, into the collective. At the end of his discussion of Surrealism's first decade, Teige reached Lautréamont's aphorism that "poesie se budou dělati všichni" (everyone will make poetry),¹¹⁵ convinced that no force could stand in the way. No one could deny creative individuals the freedom to express their ideas and their art, not in fascist Germany, not in the Soviet Union and certainly not in the French and Czechoslovak Republics. Teige abhorred the fact that censorship was very much a reality in even in these democratic nations founded upon revolutionary ideals.

At the juncture of the inner world of dream and the external world of the

revoluční spisovatel, ve svém básnickém díle, inspiroval idealistickou filosofii, tedy že určité zdánlivé či skutečné idealistické momenty v básnickém díle nezmenšují nutně jeho revoluční hodnotu. Z Marxova poměru k notorickému úchylkáři Heniemu lze si vzít poučení, jak se staví opravdový revolucionář k opravdovému básníku. Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

dialectic's revolution stood Breton and Teige, two vessels connected by their critical intellect, the Parisian parasol and the Bohemian Singer on the lab table of the imagination sewing.

If Teige represented the experimental, critical and collective side of Breton's philosophy within the context of Czech Surrealism, Nezval was obsessed with its inner antithesis – the dream. Although literary Surrealism is often associated with poetry, prose was at its dreamy heart, a prose patterned after dreams narratives (where “individual images link up apparently arbitrarily” (ve snu se zřetězují jednotlivé obrazy, zdánlivě libovolně)¹¹⁶ whose individualism was tempered by reality (autobiography, manifesto and criticism). In all of Breton's volumes, poetry made up a small fraction of his massive output as it does the body of Surrealism's literary corpus as a whole. The major part of his writing was devoted to variations on prose genres and criticism. As Nezval grew closer to making his open declaration of “sympathy” for the “revolutionary activity of the Surrealists”¹¹⁷ the day after his fortuitous encounter with Breton at a Parisian café, prose had become one of the poet's growing preoccupations. During Surrealism, this interest blossomed into a full-fledged obsession. Nezval did little to hide his imitation of Breton's form and content. However, plagiarism did not always represent a horrible crime against an author that Breton considered it to be

¹¹⁶ Vítězslav Nezval, “O Surrealismu” (On Surrealism). In *Manifesty z let 1931-1941*, 144.

¹¹⁷ From Nezval's May 10, 1933 letter to Breton published in *Le Surrealisme au service de la révolution* 5 (1933), 31.

(reflected in his censure of Freud). It was an activity Lautréamont approved of.¹¹⁸

Ultimately, the trilogy's culmination marked the fateful end of his personal love affair with Breton. By turning his back on Surrealism and bidding adieu to past friendships forged in prose, Nezval was paving the way back to the lyric that served him after the war.

Despite Nezval's references to dialectical matters in his letter to Breton, he was not terribly troubled by theoretical issues. Instead he was interested in the problem of how to find more novel approaches to literary representation that did not rely on realism and that could explore the inner reaches of the writer's consciousness. The sheer volume of Nezval's output during the interwar period reflects the enormity of his drive to experiment freely with genres and forms (as was the case with *Chtěla*) aspiring to walk in the footsteps of his idol, Breton. Although poetry still played an enormous role in this quest, by the end of the twenties, Nezval had abandoned poetist lyrics that had celebrated the whimsical joys of modern life. Increasingly his work focused on hybrid forms, an eclectic blend of prose and drama that explored the darker side of the human imagination, journeys informed by mystery, violent sexuality, transformation (but not transcendence) and death.

¹¹⁸ In *Poésies II*, Lautréamont wrote: "Le plagiat est nécessaire. Le progrès l'implique. Il serre de près la phrase d'un auteur, se sert de ses expressions, efface une idée fausse, la remplace par l'idée juste." (Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It follows closely the author's line, makes use of his expressions, erases a false idea and replaces it with something right), 275.

In truth, Nezval and Breton had connected long before the fortuitous encounter in 1933. They had met long before over the pages of the “roman noir” (or, Gothic novel, an English genre of the late 18th century) and the alchemy that Breton had written of at length in the *Manifeste du surréalisme*. However, Breton was primarily interested in how the marvelous, as a literary quality that could transform a pedestrian genre into something greater. Breton believed that “in the literary domain, the marvelous alone is capable of engendering works that spring from an inferior genre such as the novel.”(dans le domaine littéraire, le merveilleux seule est capable de féconder des œuvres ressortissant à un genre inférieur tel que le roman)¹¹⁹ Breton advocated *roman noir* because the genre rescued the marvelous from the nursery (to which it had been relegated in the form of fairytales) to bring it back to the adult world.

To illustrate his views on the marvelous, Breton used Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, an eighteenth-century gothic tale of a charismatic monk who, after giving into lusts of the flesh, conspires to corrupt a beautiful young woman. He praised Lewis’s ability to express the passions driving each of his characters noting “if a character is not a temptation, then what is he?” (si un personage n’est pas une tentation, qu’est-il)¹²⁰ In terms of character, Breton reserved special praise for Matilda whose illicit passion for Ambrosio drove him from his state of

¹¹⁹ Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, 320.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

holy grace. Breton was attracted to tales of this kind, not just because they offered the writer (and the reader) a venue to explore the oneiric and “convulsive” qualities of human sexuality, experience that was not visible to the eye, but real nonetheless. Thus, the appeal of the fantastic did not mean succumbing to the charms of transcendence. Breton made it clear that, in his definition, the marvelous was marvelous because its art began and ended with human experience: “What is admirable in the fantastic is that there is the fantastic no more: there is only the real.” (Ce qu'il y d'admirable dans le fantastique, c'est qu'il n'y a plus de fantastique: il n'y plus que le réel)¹²¹ Breton's fascination for the *Monk* also had a political component; Lewis's profane depictions of the earthly passions that corrupted God's representatives were an assault everything bourgeois society held sacred: the Holy Family and Church whose morality Breton despised.

Breton's affection for this kind of historical genre (neo-historical, actually) represented a contradiction; how could the leader of an influential avant-garde movement such as Surrealism promote the use of a form that evoked images of medieval castles and Gothic cathedrals. How could the use of such a genre revolutionize culture and representation when its images and themes were so removed from those of modern life? For Breton, the question of historicism in this

¹²¹ Ibid.

case was a non-issue. Even with its turrets, broken arches and ramparts, the marvelous (as embodied in works like *The Monk*) possessed the potential for its external manifestations to change with time:

The marvelous is not the same in all eras; it participates obscurely in a kind of general revelation of which only its detail manages to reach us: they are romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin* (Breton's emphasis) or any other symbol suited to moving human sensibility.¹²²

Breton's love for the genre makes sense because his idiosyncratic definition of the *roman noir* subjected the form to the dialectical process. The modernist reading Breton imposed on the genre meant the signifiers of the marvelous could never be reduced to one universal immutable sign.

Yet, on some level Breton's interest in a form engendered by architectural historicism contradicted Rimbaud's imperative that the poet be a visionary. In promoting the virtues of the pseudo-Gothic, Breton exalted a view of a feudal past whose crumbling ruins, phantoms and heroes and heroines damned to the fires of eternal Hell could equally serve early 19th century romanticism or (even more appropriately because of its unholy alliances) fin-de-siècle decadence. Once again, the image of the Gothic posed no contradiction.

¹²² Le merveilleux n'est pas le même à toutes les époques; il participe obscurément d'une sorte de révélation générale dont le détail seul nous parvient: ce sont les *ruines* romantiques, le *mannequin* moderne ou tout autre symbole propre à remuer la sensibilité humaine durant un temps. Ibid., 321

Although Breton's Surrealism was associated with the enchantments of interwar Paris, Breton's Surrealist landscape did not reside among the skyscrapers within the city limits; in the *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Breton wrote: "in a chateau that belongs to me...in an agrarian setting not far from Paris."¹²³ (ce château m'appartient, je le vois dans un site agreste, non loin de Paris). In his work, Breton rejected the architecture of urban life, its raucous multitudes and disruptions. Even if one takes into account his fascination with Parisian street life (where he stumbles into Nadja), Breton's imagination was irresistibly drawn to the protective confines of the castle walls. Within the walls of his glass house where phantoms real and imagined haunt his dreams, he was safe from the corruptions of the outside world. In his dreams, Breton found the open expanses of the urban zone as terrifying as Nadja's madness and the people whom he encounters, dangerous. Like Des Esseintes before him, Breton admitted that "I detest the world and its distractions." (Je déteste la vie et ses distractions)¹²⁴ In his travels around Paris, Breton was no carefree *flaneur*.

Breton's interest in the symbol of the castle (albeit taken out of context and transformed by Surrealism) reveals the chivalrous and hermetic quality of the love he expresses toward the Beloved. In Nadja, Breton withholds the identity of the woman of his dreams from the prying minds of his readers even though he

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Breton, *Vases communicants*, 150.

plasters Nadja's name all over countless copies of his book. Nadja, a demi-monde of the streets, could be Breton's muse but never a serious object of his affections because of her base origins. By his own admission, Breton was "not really capable of resorting to vulgar intoxications." (pas très capable de recourir aux environs vulgaires)¹²⁵ Despite the primacy of Eros and Thanatos in the Surrealist prescription for art, Breton's depiction of human sexuality is strikingly idealistic (and chaste). The image of the Beloved is revered like an icon and degenerate behavior of all kinds is despised.¹²⁶

As Breton rejected the pleasures of hashish, he also emphatically ruled out the erotic delights of prostitution:

I have *never* (Breton's emphasis) slept with a prostitute, on the one hand, because I have never loved - and do not believe I can love - a prostitute; on the other hand, because I am a firm supporter of chastity when I do not love.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid., 150.

¹²⁶ In his dream from April 5, 1931, Breton says he has come to the castle "for hashish." (pour le haschisch). Ibid., 144. However, lest we think he is addicted to illicit drugs, he qualifies the comment by adding (as a footnote): "In reality, I have tried hashish only many years ago and only a small amount." (Je n'ai pris en réalité de haschisch qu'une fois, il y plusiers années, en très peu quantité) Ibid.

¹²⁷ Il m'est *jamais* arrivé de coucher avec une prostituée, ce qui tient, d'une part, à ce que je n'ai jamais aimé – et à ce que je ne crois pas pouvoir aimer – une prostituée; d'autre part, à ce que je supporte fort bien la chasteté, quand je n'aime pas. Ibid., 150.

Breton justified his position with a strong does of Engels;¹²⁸ however, there is something prudish, even naïve about his disdain for sexual relations not predicated on the purest of human emotion. Idealism notwithstanding, his idealistic view of love had its dark side; it condemned Nadja to her fate.

Even considering Nadja's street-urchin appeal, Breton held her at arm's length, horrified by the depths of her soul's darkness, its degradation and madness. Even though Nadja's fantastic appearance sets off the chain of events that made him proclaim: "beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be," (la beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas,)¹²⁹ once having served her role, Breton abandoned her to her fate. She was swallowed up by the city, reclaimed by the anonymity of its alienated masses. After Breton's intrusion into her life the real Nadja was forced into obscurity because of the profane nature of her being could not inspire feelings of romantic love in a man with Breton's poetic sensibilities. In Breton's updated narrative of courtly love, the real heroine of the

¹²⁸ In *Vases communicants*, quoting Engels, Breton expressed his hope that the day would come when the capitalist market that governed intercourse between the sexes would be overcome. At that time, society would finally know the free and natural love of a man for a woman: A generation of men who would never in their lives have the chance to buy with money or any other social power a woman's abandon; and a generation of women would never be in the position of delivering themselves up to a man by virtue of any other considerations than real love, or to refuse their lover for fear of the economic repercussions of that abandon. (Une génération d'hommes qui jamais de leur vie n'auront été dans le cas d'acheter à prix d'argent, ou à l'aide de toute autre puissance sociale, l'abandon d'une femme; et une génération de femmes qui n'auront jamais été dans le cas de se livrer à un homme en vertu d'autre considérations que l'amour réel, ni de se refuser à leur amant par crainte des suites économiques de cet abandon) Ibid. 186-187. The original comes from Engels' *Origin of the Family*.

¹²⁹ Bretin, *Nadja*, 753.

roman was not the romantic lead, Suzanne Muzard; she was her antithesis, an anti-heroine, Nadja.

Breton's conventional moral view of sexual behavior and gender belied Ehrenburg's interpretation of the Surrealists as sexual deviants, at least where Breton was concerned. His answers showed that he considered himself as a "normal" (not deviant) male heterosexual. In 1928, the Surrealists published a somewhat scandalous survey on sexuality in *La Révolution Surréaliste*. When Peret asked Breton his opinion of pederasty, Breton emphatically replied:

I accuse pederasts of being guilty of having made it a point to
defile human tolerance, offering only spiritual and moral filth,
striving only to join them into some system that, however, cripples
all action that I esteem.¹³⁰

Moreover, although he reluctantly agreed that masturbation had its purposes, he proscribed homoerotic images as a source of self-arousal.¹³¹ Bestiality, an abomination against nature, was completely out of the question. The only erotic object that could inspire a man to create art was the female form.

¹³⁰ J'accuse les pédérastes de proposer à la tolérance humaine un déficit mental et moral qui tend à sériger en système et à paralyser toutes les entreprises que je respecte. "Recherches sur la sexualité: part d'objectivité, déterminations individuelles, degré de conscience" (Research on Sexuality: The Role of Objectivity, Individual Determinations, Degree of Conscience). *La Révolution surréaliste* 4, no. 11 (15 March 1928). The article resulted from two evenings of discussions, January 27 and 31, 1928. Štyrský published a Czech translation of the article in *Erotická revue* (The Erotic Review).

¹³¹ He wrote: Masturbation to the extent one can become reconciled to it must be accompanied by images of women. (L'onanisme, dans la mesure où il est tolerable, doit être accompagné de représentations féminines.). Ibid., 33.

Breton's puritan attitudes toward sex, intoxication and other earthly delights did not reflect the views of the other Surrealists who were more far more tolerant of indulgence. Over and over again, Breton proved his concept of Surrealism was based on a profound love of reason, enlightenment and a highly developed moral code of his own.¹³² In his personal love life, Breton was a serial monogamist who did not indulge in the free love and physical carnality represented by the Surrealists' fascination with figures like the Marquis de Sade. Breton made an exception of de Sade because "everything is permitted to men such as the Marquis de Sade whose freedom from morals was a question of life or death." (*Tout est permis par definition à un homme comme le marquis de Sade, pour qui la liberté des moeurs a été une question de vie ou de mort*)¹³³ However, Breton did not view De Sade's sexual excesses and cruelty as immoral perversions, they were revolutionary weapons that struck at the heart of the social injustices perpetuated by monarchy, family and Church. De Sade's sexuality was such a threat to the feudal state that it earned him long stays in the Bastille before the masses tore the prison down. In this instance, Breton found that all was fair in sex and revolution. But in affairs of the heart that can lead to true representation of beauty, woman holds the key to his castle.

¹³² Breton was always criticizing his detractors for being slaves to bourgeois morality. In truth, his moral code differed little from theirs.

¹³³ "Recherches sur la sexualité," 33.

Breton's feelings regarding the representation of space, sexuality and affairs of the heart reveal the vast imaginative divide separating him from the Czech Surrealists. This distinction is particularly striking in the case of Nezval whose love for Breton bordered on hyperbole. Even during *Devětsil*, Nezval's confined his poetic universe to the city landscape, strolling through Prague like Apollinaire's Wandering Jew in his story "Le Passant de Prague" (The Prague Passerby). Like Apollinaire's narrator, Nezval's object of desire was not a woman, but Prague, the miraculous setting of so many fantastic encounters that are not restricted to the enclosed architecture of castles or palaces of yesteryear. Compared to Breton's ramparts, Nezval's Prague was thoroughly modern.

Yet, Prague was not one-dimensional symbol. She was a complicated woman who could play the role of dissecting table or the sewing machine, the muse or the Beloved. Although the Nezval reveled in the joys of modern life, Prague's past gave the city an air of mystery that was missing in the new age. Because of her history, Prague was the vanishing point where past, present and future commingled. In human terms, she was both a damsel in distress and a desirable dame. Nezval was always aesthetically most at home in the middle of the fray, on the city streets or in a café with his Surrealist friends where the shocks of modern life and the mystery of ancient alchemy move him to sing of the

convulsive beauty modern man was heir to. Unlike his idol, Nezval only had a passing interest in chivalry and little interest sexual convention.

Nezval's depiction of Eros substantially diverged from Breton's because his approach was not burdened with conventional morality. Before he became a Surrealist, Nezval indulged in frank depictions of Prague's sexual underworld also reminiscent of the streetwalkers in the Jewish Quarter in "Le Passant." Nezval suspended moral judgment in order to blur the erotic borders between the beautiful and profane. *Sexuální nokturno: příběh demaskované iluse* (Sexual Nocturne: The story of Illusion Unmasked) was Nezval's elegy to his coming of age. *Nocturno* was no love story, but a bawdy picaresque adventure more in the vein of *Tom Jones* than *Nadja*. In his quest to find the Holy Grail of his manhood, Nezval's mantra was the verb: *mrdat* (to fuck), an expletive he describes with an almost reverent tenderness:

The word fuck is diamond-like, hard, piercing, classic. As if it were a brooch made from the noble alexandrine, having magical powers because it is forbidden. It is one of the Cabalistic's condensations of erotic juices and I love it.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Slovo mrdat je diamantové, tvrdé, průsvitné, klasické. Jako by vypadlo jako šperk z ušlechtilého alexandrine, má, poněvadž je zapovězeno, magickou moc. Je jedním z kabalistických zkratek erotického flujda a já je miluji. Vítězslav Nezval, *Sexuální nokturno:* (reprint; Plzeň: Vladimír Kuncitr, 1988), 26.

Mrdat was beautiful in its being illicit. Where Breton loved the vague sexual connotations of the word “convulsive,” Nezval considered profanity as a primary weapon in the poet’s arsenal. Profanity could be used as effectively as the picture of a naked woman to arouse desire. Throughout *Sexualní nocturno*, Nezval rolls “fuck” on his tongue as if it were a stone found in the desert to quench his thirst Yet, “fuck” was not the only expletive whose sound Nezval transformed into a oral object of desire. He tells the reader: “My great passion was fixed on two words. On the word “fuck” and the word “bordello.” (Má veškerá vášeň se upínala ke dvěma slovům. Ke slovu mrdat a ke slovu bordel)¹³⁵ Nezval’s coupling of “fuck” and “bordello” tells the reader to leave Breton’s illusions about romantic love behind (hence the novel’s subtitle). Romance is dead, long live “fuck.”

Nezval understood that “fuck” not “love” was at the heart of Eros’s power to liberate art from its cultural yoke; losing his virginity in a bawdy-house, Nezval launched the violent assault on bourgeois morality that Breton had advocated but, because of his *pudeur*, could not consummate. When it came to the sound of Nezval’s first orgasm in the arms of an anonymous prostitute, Breton’s convulsions paled in comparison. His eroticism transcended the use of sex to fulfill social, financial or romantic obligations; sex, even when it came with a

¹³⁵ Ibid., 28.

price tag, was free for all, an unbridled celebration of the pleasure principle, the dialectical force of life itself and always most human.

Although Breton dallied with free love, he always returned to the beauty of the romance whose freedom was predicated on the deep spiritual connection between two equals that neither Church nor state could tear asunder. Explicit depictions of sexuality, in the long run, had little to do with Breton's aesthetics. His novels, poems and Surrealist objects were suggestive in their eroticism, like the coitus of an umbrella and sewing machine. Nezval's *Sexualní nocturno*, on the other hand, was so brazenly graphic in its text and illustrations by artist Jindřich Štyrský that it had to be published by Štyrský's vanity press, Edice 69 (69 Editions) because it never would have made it past the censor. Even the name of the publishing house made it clear that sex was at the heart of the endeavor, a sex that would never be sanctioned by polite society; however, sex did not mean pornography, gratuitous sex or sexual imagery with the specific purpose to arouse. The erotic counterpoint of Nezval's language and Štyrský's collages that were as politically shockingly irreverent as anything the Surrealists ever dreamed up.

In sharp contrast to Breton's coy depictions of romance, the Czechs reveled in "sex" (in the French sense of the word): penises and vaginas unburdened of the body's oppressively rational *Gestalt*; this pre-Surreal aesthetic

turned body parts into independent actors who had lives of their own. And their uncensored encounters were not only deeply subversive, they were funny. When the Czechs decided to come to Surrealism, they came endowed with a ribald humor that Breton, who seemed to lose his sense of humor after his friend Vaché's untimely death, lacked. Breton rediscovered *humor noir* much later; his *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Anthology of Black Humor) was published after the Czech group had disbanded.¹³⁶ While Breton may have regained his taste for erotic comedy and satire from his union with the Czechs, the Czechs lost a good deal of their exuberance for having converted to Surrealism; in addition, they lost the gender equality in eroticism that Breton would not dream of. Objects of desire depicted were representative of male heterosexuality – no penis and a lot more breast. Although explicit images of women remained, the male genitalia that had animated so much of the art during the period between the Depression and the rise of Hitler all but disappeared. Afterward, the world had become a serious place. When faced with the prospect of war, men needed pin-ups not phalluses.

In terms of Eros, the Czechs owed more to their understanding of eroticism and its representation in art to Georges Bataille, one of Breton's rivals. There was a profound connection between Devětsil and Bataille's base

¹³⁶ In his notes to the *Anthologie*, Étienne-Alain Hubert writes that Breton conceived of the work in early 1935. Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1746. This date is interesting because it corresponds to the time when Breton was busy preparing his trip to Prague, a time when the connection between the two groups was at its strongest. The timing of Breton's discovery of *l'umour noir* suggests that influence not have been a one-way street when it came to the Czechs.

materialism. Extracts from his journal *Documents* were published in Prague by Nezval in *Zvěrokruh* and Vít Obertel's *Kwart* (Quarto)¹³⁷. In the *Second manifeste*, Breton chastised Bataille for reducing the human spirit to an image of a "crow whose beak is plunged into the flesh of a human head." (le courbeau dont le bec est plongé dans la viande d'une tête humaine)¹³⁸ For Breton , Bataille's love affair with the dung heap was as disgusting as sexually deviant behavior; neither could engender true art :

Mr. Bataille loves flies. We do not: we love the miter of ancient evocators, the miter of pure linen with a golden strip affixed to its reverse side where flies did not alight because one had done ablutions to chase them away.¹³⁹

The polemic between Breton and Bataille was significant in that the formation of the Prague Surrealist group represented a union of both positions; their work embraced the occult manifestation of Breton's ideal¹⁴⁰ represented by occult

¹³⁷ For an discussion of the influence Bataille had on the Czech Surrealist movement see Lenka Bydžovská's excellent article "Vidíte něco?" *Zeptal se Poussin...: Informe, Bataille a čeští surrealista* ("Can You See Anything?" Poussin Asked...Inform, Bataille and the Czech Surrealists). *Umění* 45, no. 5 (1997).

¹³⁸ Breton, *Second manifeste*, 826.

¹³⁹ Monsieur Bataille aime les mouches. Nous, non: nous aimons la mitre des anciens évocateurs, la mitre de lin pur à la partie antérieure de laquelle était fixée une lame d'or et sur laquelle les mouches ne se posaient pas, parce qu'on avait fait des ablutions pour les chasser. *Ibid.* 825-826.

¹⁴⁰ The editors of the *Collected Works* point out that Breton is making reference here to a paragraph from medieval alchemist Corneille Agrippa's work *La Philosophie occulte* (The Occult Philosophy) on the chapter called "From the Evocation of the Spirits" (*De l'évocation des esprits*), Agrippa's work, critical to Breton's thinking at the time. See note 1 to p. 826 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1623.

alchemy (the quest to purify matter to a higher manifestation) and Bataille's base matter's of Gnosticism, the "bestial obsession"¹⁴¹ that Bataille claimed "by its incongruity and by an overwhelming lack of respect, permits the intellect to escape from the constraints of idealism."¹⁴²

No matter how Breton employed his reading of dialectical materialism to deny the possibility of idealized transcendence, his abhorrence for representations of the fly, prostitute, scatological subjects and other sordid visions of human waste, revealed a gaze that ruled out the world of base materiality as a means to transform consciousness. He served Surrealism's Holy Spirit in the pristine vestments of the Pope whose *logos* and manifesto he had replaced with his own.

Breton's anti-materialist outlook is paradox. Given his ambition to liberate man's consciousness by liberating the libido from externally imposed morality, one would think Breton would employ uncensored representations of eroticism as subversive weapons. Yet, not all the French Surrealists subscribed to Breton's idealized view of matter, In the late twenties and early thirties, Dali populated his paintings with graphic images of deformed bodies, phalluses, excreta, and masturbation. Dali's paintings had a profound impact on artists such as Štyrský whose depiction of matter changed after he became a Surrealist. The influence of

¹⁴¹ Georges Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," Trans. Allan Stoekl, with Carl R. Loovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. In *The Bataille Reader* (Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 162.

¹⁴² Ibid., 164.

Dali was reflected in his 1934, the series of drawings, “Záznam skatologického snu,” (Record of a Scatological Dream), “Kořeny” (Roots), and paintings such “Tekutá panenka” (Liquid Doll) and “Člověk-sepie” (Man-Cuttlefish). However, Štyrsky’s fluid depictions of human flesh and excreta took Dali’s figurative representation of onieric imagery one step further. These works which verged on abstraction (Bataille’s notion of *informe* or “unclassifiable”¹⁴³) lacked the generative human element Breton deemed essential in Surrealism (the suggestion of the dreamer as creator and viewer). These works portrayed the fluidity of the borders separating the animate and inanimate worlds that the artist could freely transgress with his imagination. Štyrsky’s merged natural forms to create a visual language that was not informed by humanism’s rational laws; the objects could be viewed as either severed branches or tortured human sinew: dispossessed landscape or phantasmagoric still life. They could also be considered as examples of Dali’s “hallucinatory object-spectors” (halucinatorní objekty-fantomy) or “hallucinatory object-phantoms” (halucinatorní objekty-fantomy)¹⁴⁴ that were so influential to mind of the Czech artist. These specters were not the ethereal phantoms that haunted Breton’s dreams; they were mutants, wonderful monstrosities.

¹⁴³ Bydžovská, “Vidíte něco?,” 477.

¹⁴⁴ Lenka Bydžovska and Karel Srp. “Halucinatorní, virtuální a mentální objekty: Jindřich Štyrský Toyen Karel Teige” (Hallucinatory, Virtual and Mental Objects: Jindřich Štyrský Toyen Karel Teige). In *Český surrealismus: 1929-1953* (Czech Surrealism: 1929-1953) (Prague: Argo: Galerie Hlavního města Prahy), 114.

Although Nezval identified with Breton's version of phantoms, ghosts, vampires and the occult, he embraced in his work what Breton would not – death, darkness and decomposition that took place in the open where there was no protection. His works, like those of the Czech decadent poet Karel Hlaváček, were twilit, taking place where the spirit world of dream and reality intersect to become truly marvelous and worthy of the reader's attention. Even the filth of the Jewish quarter, the wild underbelly of Prague, “darker than all cities with scornful lips or with boastful blether”¹⁴⁵ (tajemnější než všecka města, s uštěpačnými rty anebo s chvastavou žvanivostí!) could be transformed into things of beauty by the poet's pen, his magic wand.

For Breton, night had no real attraction except in its relation to the dream state. However, Breton counted on the knowledge that day finally would break and light would once again reign. Breton's love of light is evident at the end of *Nadja* where Breton found the object of his quest – dawn, a “great sky-blue sign that had on it these words: LES AUBES” (une vaste plaque indicatrice bleu ciel portent ces mots: LES AUBES)¹⁴⁶ Moreover, Dawn later came to represent the culmination of his Surrealist trilogy. Breton's daughter Aube (Dawn) was

¹⁴⁵ Vítězslav Nezval, *Pražský chodec* (Prague: František Borový, 1938), 70.

¹⁴⁶ Breton, *Nadja*, 749. In the notes we are told that the sign corresponds to a restaurant outside of Avignon (a southern city) where his new love, Suzanne Muzarde ,the “tu” of the final chapter gives him the ultimatum of “all or nothing” (tout ou rien) referred to earlier in the novel. The editors point out the inclusion of this detail is a symbolic gesture “dawn” in a southern sky of blue, the bright beginning of new love. See note 4 to p. 749 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1559.

engendered by of the convulsive love of his union with his wife Jacqueline Lamba. At the end of *Amour fou*, Breton no longer searched high and low for the other – he had already found her. Now it remained for Aube to grow a woman strengthened by her father’s paternal blessing that she “be loved madly.” (d’être follement aimée)¹⁴⁷ Breton was captivated by the sun and comprised associated with light (i.e., sunflowers or the crystals) whose radiance illuminated our way home to those we loved.

While Breton leaves us with the beginnings of romantic love in bright southern sunlight, Nezval is forever bidding his friends adieu savoring sweet poignant sorrow of the knowledge that each time one takes leave of a friend or loved one it may be the last, mortality being the essence of the human condition. At the end of *Ulice* he takes leave of his Surrealist friends in Paris, the city of light:

I waved with my handkerchief. I waved to all those dear beings
who had come to give me relief by the stars of their hearts for the
moment I take my leave of the city where I have left a piece of my
heart. And I imagine the eyes of my missing friend who
presumably just this moment in sleep had seen some of the
miraculous adventure that make dream merciful even to the sick

¹⁴⁷ Breton, *L’Amour fou*. In *Oeuvres*, 2: 785.

and dying. To those eyes I am sending a greeting from the car
which now resembles the street called “The Resting Place of the
Heart.”¹⁴⁸

Over and above all the other various themes Nezval touched upon during the heady (and prolific) inter-war period, farewells and death define his vision of a world predicated on friendship and its inexorable loss during a time of upheaval. The romantic heterosexual love Breton sought and ultimately won in the pages of his trilogy took a backseat to the joys of friendship. In Nezval life and love only take on meaning when they are cast in the long shadow of the angel of death. At dusk, he wanders far and wide through Prague in the rain, passing haunted cemeteries where living and dead unite in a dance bathed in the queer and uncanny twilight. Where the world (rational reality) and underworld (irrational dream) meet, Nezval’s imagination finds the potential to transform the both spheres of human existence without straying into metaphysics or becoming a romantic fool.

However, this elegiac pathos that defines many of his poems does not represent his whole body of work as a Surrealist. In addition to extolling the

¹⁴⁸ Mával jsem šátkem. Mával jsem všem těmto drahým bytostem, které přišly, aby mně ulehčily hvězdami svého srdce okamžik odjezdu z města, kde jsem nechal kus srdce. A představil jsem si oči přítele, které tu chyběly, které patrně právě v této chvíli viděly ve spánku některé z těch zázračných dobrodružství, jimiž je sen milosrdný I k nemocným I k umírajícím. Posílal jsem těmto očím pozdrav z kupé, které se nyní podobalo ulice “Gît-le-coeur” Vítězslav Nezval, *Ulice gît-le coeur* (Prague: František Borový, 1935), 121. Again the ending connotes death; the street (that really exists) is the eternal resting place for separated lovers and their lost affections.

beauty of loss, Nezval's Surrealism functioned (much as it did in the case of Štyrsky) as a dialectical tension between the spiritual and material world. This thematic contradiction had its denouement in *Absolutní hrobař* (The Absolute Gravedigger) published just before his break with Breton.

Nezval characterized the poems in this last collection as “attempts at irrationally subjective spontaneous systematic objectification and concretization from the automatism’s association of images welling up. (úsilí o spontánní a systematickou objektivaci a konkretisaci iracionálně subjektivních, z asociativního automatismu, prýstících obrazů)¹⁴⁹ To Nezval these were works that evoked in the reader the *dépaysement* that brought on altered states: “a kind of spontaneous maniacal activity that enraptures you by its bizarrely modified appearance of reality.” (druhem spontánní maniakální, která působí, že člověk, uchvácený bizarně uzpůsobeným vzhledem vnější reality)¹⁵⁰ As the illustrations for the text, Nezval included his own “decalcomania” (a visual representation of the automatic text) that were completely “artless,” instead of “artful,” non-composed images that circumvented the rational mind to appeal directly to the emotions.

Here in the graveyard, delirium, not pathos, rules. There are no laws, no rhyme or reason. Nezval set matter and spirit into constant state of flux as death

¹⁴⁹ Vítězslav Nezval, *Absolutní hrobař: Básně* (The Absolute Gravedigger: Poems) (Prague: František Borový, 1937), 199.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 198.

changed flesh into dust and dust into spirit. He portrayed existence as a interrelated web of creation and destruction like the old-fashioned counting songs that ended when all subjects had been consumed. In such an aesthetic, nothing material could be too sacred to touch; everything serve as material for the artist's imagination. Here there is neither high-brow nor low, sacred or profane because all life is in the process of being tranformed . The poet's coming and going across the border between physical and mental states of being represented Nezval's solution to question of dialectical materialism: one that is neither romantic nor idealized (as it was in his works of elegy). In this respect Nezval thematic content harkened back to an earlier date, to Baudelaire's "Charogne" from *Les Fleurs du Mal* yet, with one major difference. Baudelaire used poetic form to transform the stinking rotten carcass into a thing a beauty through his rational alexandrines and end-stopped rhymes. Nezval, on the other hand, worked in free verse that provided no relief from the shocking depravity of his lyric decompositions.

The last poem entitled "Pyrenenská moucha" (The Pyrenean Fly) returns us to Bataille's garbage dump, the very symbol of human putrefaction Breton reviled. Yet, the fly does not rule the dung heap as a conqueror; it, too, falls prey (as it must) to death, being swallowed by the spider whose fate is to feast upon its natural prey. No one manifestation of being emerged as an absolute victor; even the fly is "cowering between colonnades of three buildings at land's end across

from the small margarine factory from where the workers have just left” (scholený Mezi kolonádami tří budov na koncik pevniny naproti malé továrnice na magarin z niž právě odcházeli dělníci).¹⁵¹ The fly’s existence is threatened by the departing workers, the humans upon which it (or others like it) will feast at the juncture of civilization and nature, a landscape much like the location of the bridge that captured Breton’s imagination in *Nosferatu*. Nezval’s graveyard stretched from the world of light to the world of darkness and back again.

Although, one might fault Nezval for falling prey to his over-indulgent imagination obsessed with the sordid and base details of existence, given the political climate of the time where war once again seemed imminent, Neval’s apocalypse resonated more truthfully than Breton’s protected world of chivalrous love, morality and reason. When Thanatos was wielding his sickle to break Eros’s arrow, one could only remember the time when so many lay dead and dying on the battle fields of Europe. From the very beginning Nezval and Breton had been walking in opposite directions as they had been the day they accidentally met on the Pont du Carrousel, the fateful place where Maldoror found his Melvin. Nezval’s *Hrobař* represented the nature of all Surrealist unions. As Nezval composed his 1933 letter to Breton, he was already preparing the plaque

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 223 (2-5)

memorializing their friendship – the street sign that indicated “the final resting place of the heart.

Nezval did not turn to accompany Breton to the other side of the bridge. Instead he walked into to the bosom of his family Apollinaire and Prague. Here, alone again in the city he loved, Nezval shed his Surrealist skin to become the Prague Passerby, an outcast and exile “whose fate was to find himself and wander, to find himself by the fact he is wandering,” (jemuž se stalo osudem nalézat se a bloudit, nalézat se tím, že bloudí).¹⁵² In this twilight, everything becomes possible.

¹⁵² Nezval, *Pražský chodec*, 197.

CHAPTER THREE – The Prague Passerby

You don't like rhyming in your poems

Even your name can't be set to rhyme

Your figure's all wrapped up in smoke

That sadly drifts off after a while

From “Karel Teige” by Vítězslav Nezval

Let Nezval's next production turn out however it may; let it lend truth or not to the hopes of those purveyors of the past and conservatives who are enthusiastic over the majority of verses from *Mother of Hope*... Surrealism and the activities of the members of the Prague Surrealist group from now on and even more resolutely without the fetters of compromise will succeed in pressing onward against the current.

From “Surrealism Against the Current” by Karel Teige

Immediately the next day after dinner in the Café Tumovka I saw Karel Teige who, because of his restless bearing and loudness of his laughter, used to make me feel afraid.,,

Vítězslav Nezval

In constructing the ideal play, there is the tendency to make the curtain for the last act fall on an episode that gets lost behind the scenes...

André Breton

“Adieu Wandering Jew, happy traveler with no destination!” Your optimism is extraordinary and those who portray you as a sullen adventurer haunted by remorse are mad.”

Guillaume Apollinaire from “The Prague Passerby”

Adieu, Adieu

Soleil coup coupé

Guillaume Apollinaire from “Zone”

Free Union

Around the time Nezval published his convulsive celebration of the absolute gravedigger and was turning back the clock to embrace Apollinaire in *Pražký chodec*, Breton had finished the third work in his trilogy, *L'Amour Fou* (Mad Love). Although the work's title would give the impression that Breton, too, had abandoned his love of light for the pleasures of the psyche's irrational underworld, the title is misleading. Once again, Breton was seeking the light of the philosopher's stone that would transform the world, hovering at the precipice of a new conflagration). In fact, Breton used the memory of his Prague trip to

symbolized the “one love” (*le seul amour*)¹ he was looking for by Hvězda (Star).

Hvězda was the renaissance summer palace built by Ferdinand in 1555, in the magical shape of a six-pointed star (Breton’s using Hvězda is another example of his preference for feudal architecture²). For Breton, this potent symbol of alchemic art represented the potential for transformation at the brink: “At the flank of the abyss, built in philosopher stone, the castle/star opens.” (À flanc d’abîme, construit en Pierre philosophale, s’ouvre le château étoile)³ However, Breton had already moved on physically from Prague. He had traveled to Tenerife just after leaving Czechoslovakia and Breton’s description of his trip to the

¹ Breton, *L’Amour fou*, 762. Actually, as the editors point out in the notes, in Breton, the platonic ideal paradoxically does not demand that the object of desire remain fixed; instead Breton’s conception is linked to Hegelian dialectics “as if love proceeded by successive approximations, each time coming a little closer to the opaque figure desire calls for.” (si l’amour procédait par approximations successives, arrivant chaque fois un peu plus près de la figure opaque appelée par le desire). See notes to the work in *Oeuvres*, 1: 1694-95. This theoretical viewpoint would be consistent with Breton’s habit of serial monogamy which opposed the hypocrisy of fidelity imposed on men and women by bourgeois morality that reduced human sexuality to a commercial transaction.

² See the picture of Breton from 1931, standing before postman Cheval’s “Palais ideal” (Ideal Palace) in Breton, *Vases communicants*, 204. The palace that Breton visited with Valentine Hugo was “the materialization of a dream and shows with brilliance the indissoluble union of dream and life.” (la matérialisation d’un rêve et démontre avec éclat l’indissoluble union du rêve et de la vie). See note 1 to p. 204 in Breton, *Oeuvres* 2: 1416. There is a Prague connection here, too. Breton uses the “postman’s” dream palace as an example of “concrete irrationality” (irrationalité concrete) in his influential speech “La Situation surréaliste de l’object – Situation de l’object surréaliste” (The Surrealist Situation of the Object – The Situation of the Surrealist Object) from March 29, 1935 in Prague. For Breton, the case of a mere postman constructing a palace that defied all architectural norms out of the sheer force of his imagination is shown as proof of the adage from Ducasse’s *Poésies* that the Czechs had employed well before Breton as a slogan, “Poetry must be done by everyone.” Breton’s invocation of this imperative reveals his knowledge of the Czech Surrealists’ discourse and must have resonated greatly with the audience in Prague.

³ Breton, *Amour fou*, 763.

Canary Islands takes up a substantial portion of the narrative of the chapter that was named for Hvězda.⁴ Prague was only alluded to in passing.

Instead of looking for collective solution to the problems that were tearing the avant-garde and the world apart, in *Amour fou* Breton made it clear that salvation lay in embracing romantic love that, in dialectical fashion, would engender a new dawn. In this case, as previously observed, Breton was literally anticipating Dawn in *Amour fou* which was the testament to his love affair with Jacqueline,⁵ the second Mrs. Breton (it is Jacqueline who accompanied Breton to Prague along with the Eluards). Their affair culminated with the birth Aube who was born on December 1935.⁶

⁴ According to the notes, the book is made of up seven chapters, five of which were published as autonomous entities and were not compiled until later. In Breton, the note to *Amour fou*, 1692. The fifth chapter about the trip to Tenerife was originally published in June of 1936 under the title “The Palace in the Shape of a Star” (Le Château étoilé) and was accompanied by a drawing by Max Ernst that transposed Hvězda with a mountain that represented the volcano on the island. In this way, the two locations are forged together – the natural forge and the intellectual and spiritual animus that gave birth to alchemy.

⁵ Breton’s fourth chapter published in *Minotaure* in 1935, “La Nuit du turnesol” (The Night of the Sunflower) is devoted to Breton’s fortuitous encounter with Jacqueline on May 29, 1934, at a Paris café that Marguerite Bonnet characterizes as the “triumph of Eros.” (triumph de l’eros) (In notes to *Amour fou* in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1696) that was prophesized by his 1923 poem “Sunflower” (Tournesol) (*Ibid.*) . Breton’s meeting represents a foil to Nezval’s description of his encounter with Breton on May 9th, the previous year and shows clearly their imaginations were obsessed by very different objects of desire..

⁶ Is there the possibility that Aube was conceived in Prague? Depending on the dates, this is a possibility. She was already pregnant in late April according to a letter from Breton to Jacqueline in which it is clear he is in agreement about keeping the child, characterizing becoming a parent as “la nécessité naturelle.” (the natural necessity) See the note 1 to p. 779 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1735.

In the book's last chapter he addresses a letter to his "dear Hazel Squirrelnut"⁷ imagining Aube sixteen years in the future when she has begun her transformation into womanhood. Although he had confessed to Jacqueline that he had thought it "the worst folly was to give life." (la pire folie était de donner la vie),⁸ Breton's invocation of "Dawn" sixteen years later in 1952, as a blossoming adolescent for whom his greatest hope for her is that she "be loved madly," (d'être follement aimée)⁹ was actually his hope for all of Europe. That its tomorrow would be transformed into the fecundity of a new day, that the star's magical amalgam of love would make the sun rise once again in the heavens.

By calling to some distant time in the future, Breton's gifts of prophesy allowed him to save his daughter from the danger of the period that seemed to be inexorably leading to war. Breton's solution to the madness of the conflict already unleashed in Spain was neither political nor collective in its conception. For Breton, the cure for social upheaval was to be found in passion's embrace behind Hvězda's reinforced walls. The Star provided a buttress against the onslaught and, after the death and destruction were over, new life would emerge from out of its open door.

⁷ Breton is showing his playful side here now that he has become a papa. The French is "Ecusette de Noireuil," a neologism created by switching around the words: écureuil (squirrel) and noisette (hazel nut). I use Mary Ann Caws translation (*Mad Love*. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press), 111) which comes as close as you can get to the original play on words in English.

⁸ *Amour fou*, 779.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 785.

In Prague, however, the pledge of friendship that had been frequently expressed by members of the group for one another and for their French colleagues could not last as the guiding force of the Czech Surrealist experiment. The turning point came in 1935, in late March and early April 1935, when Breton and Eluard finally made it to Prague (the trip had originally been planned to coincide with the first Surrealist exhibition in Prague that began in January but had been postponed). The two frenetic weeks that followed their arrival (it was the first visit for both) were filled with lectures, tours and interviews that were organized to introduce Breton to the Czech audience and promote the Surrealist cause. Because of his interest in the history of alchemy, Prague already held a special place in his imagination. After visiting Prague, Breton told Nezval that the city (complete with its shining Star as covenant) was, indeed, the “La Prague de nos rêves.” (the Prague of our dreams)¹⁰

Although the much-anticipated encounter in Prague, represented the ecstatic culmination of the Czechs’ love affair with Surrealism, the event turned out to be the beginning of the end for the Surrealist movement. After the conference’s brilliant success, only two months later Nezval’s meddling (like some prankster *Deus ex machina*) set off the chain reaction that ended with everyone’s bitter disappointment. Breton’s fateful encounter with Ehrenburg and

¹⁰ Lenka Bydžovská, “Le surréalisme dans la Prague de nos rêves.” (Surrealism in the Prague of Our Dreams). In *Prague 1900-1938: Capitale secrète des avant-gardes* (Prague 1900-1938: Secret Capital of the Avant-Gardes) (Dijon: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon, 1997), 263.

the political fallout further isolated the French Surrealists from the ranks of the Left. This rupture would have repercussions within the group as well. It eventually led to Eluard's break with Breton. Eluard traveled left and Dali, the most influential figure for Štyrský and Toyen, was soon to be caught on the wrong side of the ideological fence concerning the civil war in his homeland, Spain. In addition, the internal and external pressures that had prevented the French from maintaining good relations with other groups on the Left or among themselves were also working to unravel the fabric of the Czechs' collective. Although the bonds had withstood the test for almost two decades, the intensity of the polemics among members became too great to mediate.

That Breton's Prague lectures became essential to Surrealist canon during a time of internal and external upheaval reflects the unifying influence of Czech Surrealism on the movement as a whole. In addition, no other location outside of the Parisian center produced as rich and varied a body of works devoted to or serving the cause of promoting the movement on an international level¹¹. In

¹¹ Although other groups were extremely active outside of Paris, none could rival the Czechs' output in terms of the full spectrum of Surrealist inquiry in such a short period. In four years, the Prague group produced theoretical essays, critical editions, translations, two exhibitions, magazines, lectures and seminars, novels and poetry collections, graphic design and other works of visual representation. The only speech given by Breton outside of Paris that had lasting importance in the history of Surrealism was "Qu'est-ce que le surréalisme" (What is Surrealism) given in Brussels in 1934. It is interesting that in *Minataure* vol. 3 (1936-7) there are three collages under the rubric of "Le Surréalisme autour du monde" (Surrealism Around the World) made up of book, pamphlet and tract covers from international publications. Although the first collage indicates that the works are from England, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia, the majority are from Prague (including the translations of Breton's speeches

“Situation surréaliste de l’objet: situation de l’objet surréaliste” (The Surrealist Situation of the Object: the Situation of the Surrealist Object)¹² and “Position politique de l’art d’aujourd’hui,”¹³ Breton discussed in depth the two primary, yet disparate, currents of Surrealism: poetry (or rather representation) and politics. Much in the way Teige had argued for the reconciliation of Surrealism and socialist realism, Breton made a bid to reconcile the contradictions that had heretofore proven inimical. As the political pressure increased, Breton realized that the only way to achieve a united front against fascism was to put aside the ideological and aesthetic differences separating Surrealism from the rest of the intellectual avant-garde.

In “Situation surréaliste,” an explication of Surrealist aesthetics in light of social revolution, Breton discussed Surrealism’s relationship to external and internal reality. He proposed that art had to collapse the contradictions of id and ego (*moi et soi*) in order for “the pleasure principle to predominate more and more distinctly over the reality principle.” (prédominer de plus en plus nettement le principe du plaisir sur le principe de réalité)¹⁴ Representation had to express the

from Prague and Brussels, *Nadja* and *Les Vases communicants* as well as original publications too numerous to mention).

¹² This speech was given on March 29, 1935, at the Mánes Society.

¹³ The speech was given April 1, 1935, and was organized by *Levá fronta*.

¹⁴ Breton, “Situation surréaliste,” 490. It is interesting that Breton appeals so much to Freud here considering his attack on him in *Vases communicants*, however, he needs to use Freud’s status to shift the discussion to aesthetics and to allow Freud’s theory to be extended out of the realm of neurotic behavior to the very basis of the artist’s creative impulse. This move allows for modes of

dynamic force of the union of inner reality in order to unburden the *soi* and *moi* from external constraints to “multiply the paths of penetration into the deepest mental layers.” (à multiplier les voies de penetration des couches les plus profondes du mental)¹⁵ The means to produce the greater framework for representation still hinged upon the psychic automatism of the *Manifeste*. However, Surrealism had substantially evolved the course of the decade. Breton now coupled automatism with Dali’s paranoic-critical method which was defined as “the spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.” (méthod spontanée de connaissance irrationnelle basée sur l’objectiviation critique et systématique des associations et interpretations délirantes)¹⁶

The incorporation of Dali’s method with automatism allowed for shocking, uncensored depictions of the oneiric impulse that revealed Surrealism’s a subtle shift from Breton’s romanticism to the base materialism of his rival, Bataille (a blood and bone equivalent to the futurist love affair with mechanical force that Breton and the Czechs had rejected). By embracing Dali’s violence,

creation that extend the possibilities for newer, more original and more fertile sources to use for inspiration.

¹⁵ Ibid., 491.

¹⁶ Ibid. This definition originally appeared in the George Bataille’s publication *Documents* in June 1934. Despite the often bitter polemics between Breton and Bataille, they were to join forces in 1933, in “Contre-attack” (Counter Attack). Although their relationship has been portrayed as antagonistic, their collaborations attest to difficulty of placing Bataille’s interest in the *informe* and base materialism against Breton’s idealism.

Breton allowed for the possibility of madness, but only within the framework of art and mediated by the artistic consciousness. The “paranoiac” state represented madness (a sterile state) transformed into a state of awareness that could engender art. Even though Nadja could draw, she needed Breton to act as medium to interpret the meaning of her images for the outside world. Nadja lacked the rationality of art, its critical distance to redeem her from the lonely prison of her madness. It was the rational mind that made an object’s doppelgänger¹⁷ materialize by means of paranoiac-critical activity. This process gave rise to a whole chain of images engendered by the potential for paranoia in all of us. However, only an artist’s critical mind could turn madness’s self-referential nonsense into thing of beauty.

In this respect, the Surrealists’ attempt to transform madness into art was analogous to their desire to use dream imagery as a basis for representation. Breton departed from automatism, an approach that could be applied collectively (as in the case of the *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) in order to return to the artist as sole creator. Working alone, a Surrealist married features of dream and waking life into a new synthesis that rendered ordinary life extraordinary. Although there was a greater emphasis on the individual, Breton’s revised Surrealism was far more inclusive than it had been in its previous version; the

¹⁷ Breton uses the illustration here of the image of a horse that at the same time serves as an image of a woman. The union of the two images, in dialectical fashion, produces a third which continues the process. Ibid., 492.

new inclusivity showed that Breton had been open to assimilating elements into Surrealism which were not his own.

In Prague, Breton's discussion of Dali's paranoiac-critical process and the Surrealist object¹⁸ showed how important it was for Breton to span the divide gap between dream and reality. From their vessels of objective and subjective reality, Breton distilled the physical manifestation of delirium and Eros was into a rare essence that worked as a balm for a world that had become increasingly violent. The vessels were Breton's best (and last) chance to establish a united front to defend culture. Despite the emphasis on "paranoia," all sources for representation were still restricted to external reality in order for Breton to once again circumvent speculation and metaphysics.

By employing new Surrealist methods which appealed to the darker side of the convulsive beauty, Breton presented a Surrealism that was more in tune with the times and with the Czechs. Štyrský, in the short years prior to his becoming a Surrealist, had been heavily influenced by de Sade (one can only think of the violent eroticism of his works from 1930-33 published by Edice 69 (69 Editions), after his conversion, the influence of Dali's works starting with "Le Grand Masturbateur" (The Great Masturbator) and Bataille's base materialism is

¹⁸ Breton defined the Surrealist object as defined as: "un object qui se prête à un minimum de fonctionnement mécanique et qui est basé sur les phantasms et représentations susceptibles d'être provoqué par la réalisation d'actes inconscients." (an object that lends itself to a minimum of mechanical function and that is based on phantasms and representation capable of being provoked by the realization of unconscious acts) Ibid., 494.

particularly apparent in his series of painting and drawings from 1934.¹⁹ Drawing upon Dali's vocabulary of human waste, he came up with frank scatological images of "Záznam" and the semantically ambiguous, yet tortured visions of "Kořeny" that contrasted with Breton's idealized love.²⁰ Although the figures resembled the last remnants of a dismembered corpse or the artist's last meal, they resonated with the beauty of an inner life all their own. One has to ask the question whether the Štyrský would have signed on to Surrealism had Breton not allowed for Dali's irrational, delirious methods that embraced the darker aspects of the human psyche. At the same time, his collages turned mechanically produced images into "humour noir,"²¹ visual puns based on the principle of distant realities. Their optical humor functioned by blurring the line between the animate

¹⁹ Again, there is the issue of how the Czech mediate the contradictions inherent to Breton and Bataille's stormy relationship and approach to representation (although one cannot put them in absolute opposition as there were plenty of other individuals who inspired Breton's complete and utter enmity)

²⁰ I'm thinking here of paintings such as "Teknutá panenka" (Liquid Doll), "Hlava, který myslí" (The head that thinks), "Člověk nesený větrem" (Man Carried by the Wind), the series of drawings "Záznam skatologického" (Scatalogical Record), "Člověk-sepie" (Man-Cuttlefish) and, finally, the series of paintings "Kořeny" (Roots).

²¹ Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* originally appeared in 1940 but was banned by Vichy. I can't help but think that the Czechs understood the nature of this burlesque that was the flip side of their light hearted efforts during poetism well before the very "Ernest" Breton whose humor was not readily apparent (in contrast to Ernst, Dali and certainly Duchamp who was influential). It is of note that Kafka is given a place in the anthology whose work Breton felt above all worked against the notion of God's metaphysical transcendence and moral code, the "le monde invisible des réparations solennelles où tout se dévoilera, s'expliquera. (the invisible world of official compensation where everything will be revealed, explained") In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1099. "No other work fights as much against the admission of the principle of an external sovereign...Ibid. Breton had been interested in Kafka dating back to 1935 and his correspondence with Nezval. At one point he must have asked Nezval to get a photo of the dead writer. Nezval said he had asked Pavel Eisner (who translated Kafka into Czech) to ask Max Brod for a photo but since Brod didn't have one, Nezval said he would try again through a contact who knew the Kafka family. There is never a confirmation that he was successful. See Nezval, *Depeše*, 89.

and inanimate world in order to create a work of art that exposed the hypocrisy of bourgeois life.

The revised Surrealism Breton introduced in Prague revealed the Czech Surrealists' influence over his thinking, as well. One clear example of this influence surfaced in his interpretation of poetry's relationship to the other arts:

It (poetry) is disadvantaged beside painting, sculpture with regard to the expression of sensual reality, the precision of exterior forms; it is disadvantaged beside music²² in terms of the immediate, invasive indisputable communication of feeling.²³

Just as Breton pointed out the emotional inferiority of poetry in terms of its language, he reminded listeners that according to Hegel, poetry was not inferior, but the pinnacle in the hierarchy of genres:

The fundamental error of such an attitude seems to me to reside in the under-estimation of the primordial virtue of poetic language: above all, this language must be universal. If we have never ceased to claim with Lautréamont that *la poésie doit être faite par tous* (Breton's emphasis), and if this aphorism is the same as the one we

²² Breton, in contrast to Nezval who wrote frequently about his love of Beethoven and the lyric impulse in all its forms, had no great love of lyric and his writing is driven by its imagist roots and the visual legacy of the sewing machine and umbrella.

²³ Elle est désavantagée auprès de la peinture, de la sculpture en ce qui regarde l'expression de la réalité sensible, la précision des formes extérieures; elle est désavantagée auprès de la musique en ce qui regarde la communication immédiate, envahissante, incritiquable du sentiment.. Breton, "Position Politique," 479.

had wanted to engrave among all others on the façade of the Surrealist edifice, it goes without saying that for us it implies this indispensable counterpart that *poetry must be understood by all* (again, Breton's emphasis).²⁴

Although Breton appealed to Lautréamont's (or rather Ducasse's) catchphrase that he lifted out of context from *Poésies*,²⁵ the true proponents of this maxim had been the Czechs. From the time they encountered Lautréamont during the late twenties through Maldoror's confiscation and their discovery of the artist behind the myth, Ducasse had been their own. When Breton argued that this slogan be emblazoned on Surrealism's glass house as its creed, he was, in effect, tipping his hat to Teige and Nezval by using their criticism to support his argument.

The adoption of this aphorism from *Poésies* as part of the Surrealist canon again reflected that Breton was aware of the details of their critical discourse. In

²⁴ L'erreur fondamentale d'une telle attitude me paraît résider dans la sous-estimation de la vertu primordiale du langage poétique: ce langage, avant tout, doit être universel. Si nous n'avons jamais cessé de prétendre, avec Lautréamont, que *la poésie doit être faite par tous*, sic et aphorisme est même celui que nous avons voulu graver entre tous au fronton de l'édifice surréaliste, il va sans dire qu'il implique pour nous cette indispensable contrepartie que *la poésie doit être entendue par tous*. Ibid.

²⁵ In *PoésiesII* Ducasse discusses the question of poetic legacy in the age after the image of God no longer has an aura, when "Elohim est fait à l'image de l'homme" (Elohim is made in the image of man) (Rimbaud, *Poésies*, 279) and "le plagiat est nécessaire" (plagiarism is necessary) (Ibid., 275) for the continuation of the line toward artistic truth - (il) efface une idée fausse, la remplace par l'idée juste. ((it erases a false ide, replaces it with the proper idea), Ibid. 275. Ducasse sets up his exploration at times in terms that suit both the internal and external imperatives of Surrealism such as "Rien n'est faux qui soit vrai; rien n'est vrai qui soit faux. Tout est le contraire de songe, de mensonge." (Nothing is false that is true; nothing is true that is false. Everything is the opposite of dream, of illusion (lies)" Ibid., 286.

this instance, however, he co-opted the aphorism by substituting the real writer's name with his pseudonym. Breton's reference to Ducasse/Lautréamont's aphorism, however, showed a very different understanding of its significance to art. Breton did not believe (like Teige did) that Ducasse literally believed that everyone was capable of writing a decent poem. Instead, he interpreted the line as meaning that we shared the universal ability to understand and appreciate the poet's message. Breton put the onus on artists to take the reader into account in order to find an international language that was not dependent on sound and the embellishment of rhyme that the Symbolists relished. Breton, instead, argued for the primacy of visual signs and gesture – Mallarmé's “a throw of the dice will never bring to an end chance.” (*un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard*)²⁶ Poetic gesture, like Chaplin's little tramp, could turn the world on its head.

For the Czechs, the notion of “poetry for all” meant liberating the image from the artisan to hand production over to the machine which leveled the playing field. The loss of the notion of handcraft subsequently allowed for mechanical techniques of production and reproduction of original works of high aesthetic standards that were, by price, accessible to a mainstream audience. Even workers could potentially afford the many books and magazines the group produced, the aesthetic aura was no longer a stamp of the Holy Grail that would bring art to the

²⁶ Breton, “Position politique,” 480.

masses in order to raise culture to a higher level. Since the Czechs had gained a wealth of experience in reproduction during Devětsil, they carried on this tradition under Surrealism. The Czechs' interest in mass production proved to Surrealism's detractors that not all Surrealists were effete bibliophiles.

In addition to book production, the Czech Surrealists also pursued a genre that the French Surrealists were not terribly interested in, theatre. Under the auspices of comedians Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, the Osvobozené divadlo and its mix of music hall, pantomime, the grotesque and strong dose of sharp political satire became as popular in Czechoslovakia as Chaplin. Although the theatre section did not continue during the Surrealist period, Nezval was a playwright and the director Jindřich Honzl and composer Jaroslav Ježek all made the transition from poetism to Surrealism. In addition, while the French Surrealists created films that were not easily accessible to the mainstream audience, Devětsil's films were well-received comedies. It was the Czech Surrealists who staged the only production of Breton's Surrealist play "Le Trésor des jésuites," (The Treasure of the Jesuits) in May 1935, complete with the subheading: "kino feulliton" (cinema-feuillton).²⁷ Although the Surrealists did not

²⁷ Notes to *Trésor* in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 1: 1748-1749. The play was directed by Honzl with sets by Štryský. Étienne-Alain Hubert characterized the production as "une oeuvre moins théâtrale que cinématographique dans son essence: ressusciter un genre que l'évolution sociale et culturelle des années vingt avait conduit à l'extinction mais qui avait su amener ses spectateurs à la prise de conscience de "la grande réalité de ce siècle", comme le dit le prologue, et qui avait incarné dans son contenu ainsi que dans sa forme...un naïf mais irremplaçable esprit de liberté. (a work less

produce films, they brought popular genre of cinema to the theatre. There the ancient tradition of the theatre merged with the mechanical child of the modern age to express even the most serious themes of the time.²⁸

Although Breton's comments about art were important, the feelings he expressed for his Czech colleagues provide insight into his view of their identity and legacy vis-à-vis the center. At the very beginning of his speech, Breton praised the Czech group for their combined efforts on behalf of Surrealism, claiming that the Prague movement had even reached a level comparable to that in Paris (no faint praise coming from Surrealism's pater familias). Although he recognized the group's main participants (such as Toyen and Štyrský), Breton attributed the extent of Surrealism's success in Czechoslovakia to Nezval and Teige, whose ideas he claimed were "in perfect communion" (*en parfaite communion*)²⁹ with his own. Their distinct contributions to the evolution of the movement represented Surrealism's twin currents of politics (dialectical materialism and anti-fascism) and aesthetics (automatism and paranoiac critical activities). According to Breton, Surrealism had flourished in Prague as a direct result of Teige's having used his critical genius to interpret the movement's

theatrical than cinematic in its essence: to resuscitate a social and cultural genre of the twenties brought to extinction but that knew how to bring viewer to the awareness of "the century's great reality," as the prologue says and that embodied in its content as well as its form...a naïve, but irreplaceable spirit of liberty." Ibid.

²⁸ See previous note.

²⁹ Breton, "Situation surréaliste," 473.

development “in the most vital manner” (de la manière la plus vivante),³⁰ in conjunction with Nezval whose poetic gifts subjected Surrealism to “an all-powerful lyric impulse.” (à une impulsion lyrique toute-puissante)³¹

The communion among them that Breton acknowledged spanned the yawning divide between Surrealist theory and practice, politics and poetry that the French group had not been able overcome. As a result, the remained in their isolated position vis-à-vis the greater avant-garde as a whole. The interesting choice of the term “communion” and its religious connotations suggests a holy trinity for Prague Surrealism with Breton as the Father (and his symbol the star, the light of love), Nezval as Christ and Teige as the Holy Spirit. Despite his complete and utter enmity for the Church, Breton often used its language to supplant its reactionary message with an evangelical message of his own.

The fact Surrealism’s illustrious founder, an outsider to the group, credited the success of Surrealism in Czechoslovakia to the marriage of Teige’s criticism and Nezval’s lyricism attests to the enormous power of their combined visions. Although Štyrský and Toyen were actively involved in producing works of art,³² they were not as active as Teige or Nezval in creating the critical

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Štyrský was very involved in the early thirties before the Surrealist group was founded in producing critical texts. From 1930-33, just as Devětsil was making the transition to Surrealism, his vanity press Edice 69 (69 Editions) published several important works of a highly erotic nature that would never have made it past the censor, including *Sexualní nocturno* and *Emilie přichází k*

framework for Czech Surrealism. The many non-Surrealist affiliated publications Teige edited or contributed to show just how important it was for him to not remain exclusive. Nezval's contribution to the collective was in serving as the motivating force behind the movement's foundation and in acting as the Czechs' representative at two critical international congresses that helped to decide the fate of the inter-war avant-garde. It is significant that the Prague meeting took place between these two events on neutral territory at the juncture of East and West.

Although Breton's remarks showed his great respect and faith in Teige and Nezval's leadership, his insight into the group's dynamics revealed the tensions building beneath the surface that would later serve as a fault line. The evidence of this weakness was already apparent in "Position politique" where Breton made it clear which side he supported regarding the Soviet Union, art and revolution. Breton used the historical examples of Rimbaud and painter Gustav Courbet to prove that art and revolution, although inherently linked, functioned independently from each other. Breton pointed to Rimbaud's participation on the barricades during the Paris commune, yet his revolutionary activities did not translate into poems³³ with overtly political content. Rimbaud's revolution was

mně ve snu (Emily Comes to Me in a Dream). He also published a biography of Rimbaud and the Marquis de Sade. For more details see my discussion in the previous chapter.

³³ Breton accounts for only four poems that Rimbaud wrote on the subject of the Commune: "Les mains de Jeanne-Marie" (Jeanne-Marie's Hands), "Le Coeur volé" (The Stolen Heart), "Paris se

embodied in the manner in which he transformed poetry through the force of his vision into political and cultural action. (i.e., Rimbaud's role as "voyant," also a topic in "Situation surréaliste")

Thus, art and politics, although linked through Hegelian dialectics were independent areas for experimentation. Because of their dialectical relationship, neither could do without the other, nor could either factor exert its prominence over the other. They were Siamese twins joined at the heart. The element that governed both was neither party nor union, but the dialectic process alone. The view that Breton expressed reflected the same stance which Teige had taken ten years prior to meeting Breton. In his analysis of constructivism, he used Trotsky and Bukharin to argue the case that engineers should not be obliged to belong to the party. They were responsible to the proletariat to use their skills in service of the revolution (to use Breton's terms). Ten years later, speaking to an audience that had close ties to the Communist Party,³⁴ Breton also employed Trotsky (whom many considered to be a political traitor) and Bukharin (soon to be

repeuple" (Paris Repopulates) and "Chant de guerre parisien" (Song of the Parisian War). He mentions that two others have apparently been lost. Breton, "Position politique," 424.

³⁴ The notes to "Position politique" make the important point that Breton was speaking to members of Levá fronta which made it imperative that he not directly attack either the Party or Stalin, a move which would have alienated the French Surrealists from another potential ally. See note 3 to p. 434 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1583. However, the "Defense of Culture" debacle became the point of no return. Breton no longer attempted to mediate his antagonistic position. However Teige would not give up on his Left Front. He did not come to Breton's defense in "Du temps" because he did not want to jeopardize the integrity of the united front or the Soviet Union.

charged with treason) as the politically appropriate examples that proved party and poetry were equal partners in the dialectic of representation.

Although he did not provoke the audience by attacking the firm grip Stalin had applied to art, he did not refer to him directly. This approach was in direct contrast to his treatment of Trotsky and Bukharin, Stalin's political rivals who were promoted as properly. They were promoted as the virtuous examples of politicians who understood the correct relationship of poetry to party. He reminded the audience that in times of revolution there was equally a need to secure food for the stomach and for the soul, or in Trotsky's words "to win for all men the right, not only for bread, but for poetry" (*conquérir pour tous les hommes le droit, non seulement au pain, mais à la poésie*).³⁵ Turning to Bukharin whom he called "a *dialectician* (Breton's emphasis) of the first order," (un *dialectician* de premier plan)³⁶ Breton characterized his speech in Moscow as "a sign of the times"³⁷ (*signe des temps* – Breton's emphasis) that boded well for the future of poetry. As Bukharin had found, poetry did not have to be marginalized or oppressed by ideology. Under socialism, poetry and politics were not rivals because they both served humanity. To use Bukharin's words, "the non-antagonism of the image (recourse to the irrational) and the idea, to the non-

³⁵ See note 2 to p. 434 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1582. This quote comes from a translated extract of a letter from Trotsky in Benjamin Goriely's *Poètes dans la Révolution russe*. Ibid., 1582.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Breton, "Position politique," 434.

antagonism of the “new eroticism” and “the sense of the collective” within the framework of a “socialist realism” that “has no other objective than man himself.” (non-antagonisme de l’image (recours à l’irrationnel) et de l’idée, au non- antagonism du “nouvel éroticisme” et du “sens de la collectivité” dans le cadre d’un “réalisme” socialiste” qui “ne peut avoir d’autre objectif que l’homme lui-même).³⁸

Making one of his rare references to socialist realism, Breton tried to do what Teige had already done in his lecture “Socialistický realismus a surrealismus” (about which Breton had more than likely been informed). He reconciled the two methodologies by arguing that they both drew on psychic and social sources for inspiration. The only real difference between them was that economic realities of production in East and West created a completely different set of conditions for representation. Obviously, Bukharin’s comment sanctioning eroticism (that had often been suppressed in the West) as material fit for the new man lent itself nicely to Dalí’s prominence in Surrealist visual aesthetics of the time.

Despite Breton’s fondness for quoting from Soviet politicians, in his Prague speeches he did not mention Stalin which was not surprising because he almost never referred to him. However, he did allude to Stalin by citing a third

³⁸ Ibid. Breton is using the translation of Bukharin’s speech that appeared in *Commune* in September-October 1934.

party. Right after his comments on Bukharin, he quoted from a long passage from André Malraux's speech "L'art est une conquête" (Art is a Conquest)³⁹ where he said "if 'writers are the engineers of (human) souls do not forget that the greatest task of engineers is to invent." (Si 'les Écrivains sont les ingénieurs des âmes', n'oubliez pas que la plus haute fonction d'un ingénieur est d'inventer).⁴⁰ Breton took advantage of Malraux, a prominent figure in the Left with close ties to Moscow, to serve as his mouthpiece to prove Stalin wrong using his own words. Later, in his speeches about Gide and the Moscow Trials, Teige employed a similar strategy.

Yet Breton's argument about the "artist/engineers" calls to mind Teige's commentary about architect/engineers at a time when the political discussion this matter was far more open to debate. In terms of political slogans for the ultimate victory of art over its enemies (from whichever camp), Breton's rallying cry from the Congress was Marx's call for "more consciousness" (plus de conscience)⁴¹ from *Capital*, also referred to by Malraux, but clearly attributed. When Breton argued that, for the Surrealists, Marx's "more consciousness" should serve as the Congress's watchword (and not Stalin's engineer of human souls),⁴² he offered a

³⁹ This speech, according to the notes, also appeared in *Commune* under this title. See note 3 to p. 434 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1583.

⁴⁰ Breton, "Position politique," 435.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Breton writes: "More consciousness,' as such, in effect, is the watchword that we like to remember above all from Marx and that we would like to remember from this first congress.

slogan that neatly embraced the social and psychological implications of the term “consciousness.” Breton’s approach to his argument reconciled the contradictory philosophies Marx and Freud since the idea was put forth by Malraux whose political credentials were not in dispute. Using officially sanctioned authorities such as Marx and Malraux gave Breton the means to disprove Stalin and prove that art and society are one and yet many, just as the relationship of individual to the collective that is also non-hierarchical and egalitarian.

At the end of his lecture, Breton turned from the dream world of the individual consciousness to the collective and its social manifestation, action, or rather Surrealist’s aspiration to create “a collective myth” (*un mythe collectif*).⁴³ Breton’s discussion (via Malraux) of the *mythe collectif* killed two birds with one stone; it offered a rebuttal to Surrealism’s detractors among the party faithful such as Ehrenburg and reinforced the case for the against socialist realism without naming names:

Contrary to the tenants of a narrow socialist realism, Malraux had pointed out that great modern writers and artists came to creation, in their work, by way of their own myths. The notion of “collective myth” applied to Surrealism allows Breton to maintain the rights to personal creation while still being mindful that Surrealism could be

(‘Plus de conscience’, tel est, en effet, le mot d’ordre que nous aimons par excellence retenir de Marx et que nous aimerions retenir de ce premier congrès). Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 439.

accused of returning to individualist or bourgeois art. Objectivity redeems itself in the collective myth.⁴⁴

Breton's use of Malraux takes Teige's argument supporting Bukharin's liberal approach to socialist realism one dialectical step further. By showing it to be equally valid in the eyes of a famous politician (Bukharin) and a celebrated writer (Malraux), Breton justified the view while drawing on criticism from the highest aesthetic and socially committed circles of the Left. Breton drove the point home by reminding the audience that even Hitler could see what Stalin and Surrealism's critics could not; the Left's united front of revolutionary art and dialectical social change presented the greatest threat to the fascist hold on power and the Left's best defense and greatest hope for the future:

Hitler and his acolytes have, alas, understood only too well that to suppress leftist thought even for a time, he not only had to persecute Marxists but also impose a ban on all avant-garde art. It remains for us to oppose him with this invincible force that is of

⁴⁴ Contre les tenants d'un réalisme socialiste étroit, Malraux avait rappelé que la liberté des grands écrivains et artistes modernes passait par la création, dans leur œuvre, de leur propre mythe. La notion de ‘mythe collectif’ appliquée au surréalisme permet à Breton de maintenir les droits de la création personnelle tout en rappelant que ne peut être accusé de revenir à l’art individualiste ou bourgeois. L’objectivité retrouve son compte dans le mythe collectif. See note 2 to p. 439 in Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1585.

the *should-be* which is that of human *becoming*. (Breton's emphasis)⁴⁵

The urgency of Breton's internationalist appeal for unity to the members of Levá fronta, an organization comprised of a broad coalition from the Left reflected the chance that the ideal of unity could be achieved despite ideological divisions away from the centers of political power. However, Breton had not really reconciled the two currents as Teige had done since he had almost completely ignored socialist realism and the official circles that had proscribed Surrealism.

Breton avoided practice in the Soviet Union to get at the theory. All methodologies based on the principles of dialectical materialism had to answer to the higher authority of Hegel (rather than Marx) and his version of the dialectic as the life force of the Left. However, for the Czechs, maintaining a good relationship with the Czech Communist Party whose members had been in attendance was still one of their primary aims. When Nezval's published the tract "Surrealismus v ČSR," it comprised two parts: his 1933 letter to Breton and a letter to the agitprop section of the Czech Communist Party. Even before the debate in Moscow took place at the writers' congress, it was apparent to Nezval that poetry and politics had to be reconciled. Through the alliance of Surrealism

⁴⁵ Hitler et ses acolytes ont, hélas, fort bien compris que, pour juguler même un temps la pensée des marxistes mais encore frapper d'interdit tout l'art d'avant-garde. À nous de lui opposer un commun cette force invincible qui est celle du *devoir-être*, qui est celle du *devenir humain*. Breton, "Position politique," 440.

and the Czech Communist Party, this diplomatic effort for the sake of dialectical materialism could be achieved. To his comrades in the Party he wrote:

On the one hand being aware of the necessity for solidarity that concerns all who have aligned themselves on the side of the class struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, we do not intend to needlessly set up polemics against the practice of those writers standing on the side of proletarian revolution who exploit expression, speech above all, using conventional means; on the other hand, however, we believe in maintaining the right for our experimental methods to be independent, invoking Stalin's speech at the 17th All-Union Congress where, in the name of Marxist-Leninism, he took a stand against the egalitarian tendency of "leftist dimwits."

We consider the first achievement of Surrealism in Czechoslovakia to be the enlistment of some members in the class struggle of the proletariat who, up to now, have looked indifferently on Marxist-Leninist ideology and revolutionary activity.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Jsouce si vědomi na jedné straně nutnosti solidarity, která zavazuje všecky ty, kdož se postavili na stranu třídního boje revolučního proletariátu, nehodláme se stavěti zbytečně polemicky proti praxi těch spisovatelů, stojících na straně proletářské revoluce, kteří těží výraz, o němž je shora řeč, způsobem konvenčním, na druhé straně však si miníme zachovati právo na nezávislost svých experimentálních metod, dovolávajíce se Stalinovy řeči na XVII. Sjezdu VKS(b), kde se postavil ve jménu marx-leninismu proti egalitářským tendencím "levých tupohlavců."

In this respect, the Czech movement was conceived of from its inception as the child of the union of action and dream, East and West, with Prague serving as the dissecting table.

Although it is impossible to assess the impact of Breton's visit in terms of advancing the cause of international Surrealism, in Czechoslovakia, at least, Surrealism had found fertile ground for its message of unity. The Czech Surrealists promoted the message by publishing concurrent with the visit the "Mezinárodní bulentin surrealismu/Bulletin international du surréalisme," (International Bulletin of Surrealism) a bi-lingual tract and the first of its kind in a series of four.⁴⁷ The bulletin was comprised of a compendium of extracts from the Prague lectures, interviews and previous studies on Surrealism.

However, the Bulletin served a greater purpose than being a showcase for International Surrealism. Another essential function was to show the communist parties in Paris and in Moscow that the KSČ (which had very close ties to Stalin) had accepted the Surrealists. During Breton's stay, they had work together and freely exchanged ideas about how to promote revolution and defend against fascism. Most of the texts printed originally appeared in Communist party organs such as *Haló noviny* (Hello News) and *Rudé právo* (Red Right) or were written by

Získavše pro třídní boj proletariátu některé členy, kteří se dosavad dívali indiferentně na marx-leninskou ideologii a revoluční aktivitu, pokládáme to za první úspěch surrealismu v ČSR. Nezval, "Surrealismus v ČSR," 70.

⁴⁷ The other three were published in conjunction with visits and exhibitions later that year in Tenerife, Brussels, and in 1936, the Surrealist exhibition in London.

Záviš Kalandra,⁴⁸ the communist theoretician and journalist and close associate of the Surrealists. His commentary in the communist press supported the Surrealist claim that Surrealism and Marxism were not incompatible because each used man as the basis for ontological inquiry:

In the lines quoted about the ‘capillary tissue’ between the real individual and the real class-based world of men, between existence and human consciousness is the point of convergence of André Breton’s Surrealist conceptions and, in addition, part of what his *Vases communicants* contributes to the repayment of the debt Engels left us that we have already spoken about in this article several times.⁴⁹

But Kalandra was not the only one in official communist circles to understand that Surrealism’s presence in Prague had been welcomed by the Communists and

⁴⁸ Kalandra’s fate was sealed in 1936 when he was openly critical of the show trials that the Party firmly supported. His name, which had often appeared on the pages of *Tvorba* (Creation), disappeared and after the war he paid for his outspokenness with his life. The famous incident in 1950, in which Breton appeals to his former friend Eluard to intervene in order to save Kalandra’s life is fictionally reconstructed in Kundera’s *Kniha smíhu a zapomnění* (The Book of Laughter and Forgetting). Eluard responded to Breton’s open letter in the publication *Action* writing “Jsem příliš soustředěn k neviným, kteří prohlašují svou nevinnost, než abych se mohl zabývat viníky, kteří prohlašují (!) svou vinu.” (I am too preoccupied with the innocent who state their innocence to concern myself with the guilty who state (!) their guilt) Czech translation by Vratislav Effenburger quoted in “Otevřený dopis Paulu Eluardovi” (Open Letter to Paul Eluard), *Analagon* 1 (June 1969), 67. Kalandra was summarily executed on June 27, 1950.

⁴⁹ V uvedených větách o ‘kapilárních tkanivech’ mez skutečným individuem a skutečným třídním světem lidí, mezi bytím a vědomím člověka je úběžník surrealických koncepcí André Bretona a tím i suma toho, čím přispívají jeho *Spojité nádoby* k splacení onoho dluhu, jejž nám zanechal Engels a o němž jsme v tomto článku již několikrát mluvili. *Mezinárodní Bulletin surrealismu/Bulletin international du surréalisme* (Prague: Skupina surrealistů, 9 April 1935), 5.

the *Levá fronta* with open arms. According Rudé právo's account of the "Position politique" lecture which was also cited: "the audience which completely filled the hall of the City Library reacted to the four representatives of revolutionary art from the two nations with an attentive interest and warm applause." (Obecenstvo, které úplně naplnilo sál Městské knihovny, odpovídalo všem čtyřem představitelům revolučního umění dvou národů pozorným zájmem a vřelým potleskem)⁵⁰ Here in the center of Europe, the Surrealists had gained the acceptance that had eluded them at home and in Moscow.

Perhaps the most important reprint in the *Buletin* was Breton and Eluard's interview from April 14, 1935, that had been published in *Haló noviny* (noted as the "organ of the worker's unity" [organe de l'unité ouvrière] in the French translation). The French translation of the interview was later published by Breton in "Position politique du surréalisme" in which his Prague lectures were anthologized. Obviously, the editors of *Haló noviny* felt that the Surrealist positions on art, Hitler and their relationship to the Soviet Union were of interest and importance to the proletarian readership. Although in the interview the Surrealists did not hide their critical attitude toward other factions in the avant-garde, they made it clear that a united front was essential. Now that they had been

⁵⁰ Ibid. 7.

endorsed by the Left, the most important task that remained was to collectively distinguish friend from foe:

Under the fascist threat, one can image a certain respite in ideological struggles with the reservation that the one our principle critical task in the current period must be that these other formations must apply their effort to the fight against fascism and war. But these other formations are, to tell the truth, virtual and its individuals' behavior outside of Surrealism that above all can be in question. Our principle critical task in the current period should be to untangle what is and isn't authentic in avant-garde art. A part of the authentic art of today is linked with social revolutionary activity; it (art) like social activity tends toward confusion and the destruction of capitalist society.⁵¹

The idea of “free union,” (to use the title of Breton’s most famous poem) became essential to the argument for Surrealism’s dream in the greater context of the avant-garde. Just as in the Mânes speech, Breton used to the collective myth

⁵¹ Sous la menace fasciste, on peut envisager une certaine trêve aux lutes idéologiques sous réserve que le point d’application de l’effort de ces autres formations soit bien précisément la lutte contre le fasciste et la guerre. Mais ces autres formations sont, à vrai dire, virtuelles et c’est de comportements individuels qu’il peut surtout, en dehors du surréalisme, être question. Notre tâche critique principale, dans la période actuelle, doit être de démêler, dans l’art d’avant-garde, ce qui est authentique de ce qui ne l’est pas. L’art authentique d’aujourd’hui a partie liée avec l’activité sociale révolutionnaire; il tend comme elle à la confusion et à la destruction de la société capitaliste. Ibid. 8.

to symbolize the value of social union he had discovered thanks to the Czech's reading of Ducasse:

If as Heraclites said thought is common to all, Surrealism works to understand and reduce the differences that exist among men by bringing to light in an insouciant and sovereign manner this communal treasure buried too long.

For this reason, poetry should be done by all. Not one alone. Only the proletarian revolution let's us hope that Lautréamont's⁵² expression will be realized.⁵³

Elsewhere in "Bulletin," Lautréamont's more frequently quoted maxim played an important role in communicating the Surrealists' internationalist collective message. Figuring prominently on the cover page was Štyrský's collage "Sen 1935" (Dream 1935) that had originally appeared in his 1934 series of collages "Stěhovací cabinet" (Vanity Case) included in the first Czech

⁵² Breton, like the Czechs, used Lautréamont despite the fact that Breton who first published the two volumes of *Poésies* in 1919 in *Littérature* did so under Isidore Ducasse. It is interesting that thereafter his pseudonym was preferred over his real name. In his note to *Poesies* Breton points out the contradiction of the aesthetics of *Chants* and *Poésies* which "follow and refute *Les Chants de Maldoror*." (qui suivent et réfutent *Les Chants de Maldoror*) Breton, "Note to the publication of *Poésies* by Isidore Ducasse," *Littérature* 1 2 (2 April 1919), 2.

⁵³ Si, comme l'a dit Héraclite, la pensée est commune à tous, le surréalisme travaille, en amenant au jour, d'une façon insouciante et souveraine, ce trésor commun trop longtemps enfoui, à comprendre et à réduire les différences qui existent entre les hommes.
Pour cela, la poésie doit être faite par tous. Non par un. Seule, la révolution prolétarienne nous laisse espérer que cette parole de Lautréamont se réalisera "Bulletin" 9.

Surrealist exhibition in January 1935.⁵⁴ The collage was made up of two images: an enlarged reproduction of a Wertheimer sewing machine and “Le Rêve” (The Dream) a work by the French military painter Edouard Detaille (1848-1912) that represented “the French yearning for retaliation for the lost war of 1870-1871 during which France lost Alsace-Lorraine: the army on maneuvers dreams of the triumphant victories achieved by their predecessors in Napoleon’s army.”⁵⁵ The superimposition of an enormous German sewing machine in the foreground of Detaille’s homage to nationalist aspirations (that had been dashed by the Germans), the Napoleonic legions winging above the soldiers in ethereal splendor served as Štyrský’s dark visual pun on the theme of militarism and nostalgia in capitalist France and fascist Germany. The image’s politically charged message came in the form of a wedding invitation where Lautréamont’s sewing machine, represented the bride⁵⁶ (i.e., the Futurists’ idealization of the machine that the Surrealists rejected) and Thanatos, the death wish for Europe driven by the nationalists’ lust for power, the groom.

In Štyrský’s version, Lautréamont’s dream of beauty and eroticism had been turned into nightmare, the presentment of the holocaust to come. The image functioned as historically-based political satire (the notion of Surrealist art being

⁵⁴ In the last Surrealist show in 1938 the collage also appeared and was listed in the catalogue as being owned by Breton. *Štyrský a Toyen* (Štyrský and Toyen) 198.

⁵⁵ Bydžovská and Srp, “The Lautréamont Case,” 155.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 156.

historically situated was essential to Breton's argument that the movement was not in contradiction with Marxism).⁵⁷ On the political level, there was another message. The image expressed the expansionist dreams of Germany (the machine) and France (the army) by an artist from a small nation, suggesting that all militarism, whether waged by the new war machine or by legions represented a palpable threat to be feared. On the historical level, Detaille's dream resonated with the destruction of wars past (i.e., Franco-Prussia and, most recently, the First World War). "Sen" provided an apocalyptic premonition of the terror to come in the manner of Rimbaud's *il faut être voyant*. In addition, the use of collage and mechanically reproduced images destroyed the aura of Detaille's original oil painting that had served the political status-quo of its time. Thus, Štyrský's satire harkened back to Devětsil's call to liquidate art and private ownership which governed the capitalist art exchange. Art, for the avant-garde, could not be bartered as a commodity to be bought and sold like guns and butter.

But the image was more complex than satire. Štyrský's use of a "dream" image appealed to the collective myth that Breton had spoken to in relation to Ducasse. The allusion to myth lifted the collage out of its historical yoke (which had only been imposed in this instance – by 1938, Štyrský had removed the year

⁵⁷ For an explanation of the notion of "situation" in Breton's lexicon see note 1 for page 805 of the *Second manifeste* in *Oeuvres* 1: 1609.

from the collage's title) to make its message more universal and more profound.⁵⁸

Štyrsky's fantasy depicted the fortuitous intercourse of irreconcilable partners – Lautréamont/Ducasse, Eros and Thanatos, death-wish and pleasure principle, communism and surrealism, the collective inner dream-life and historical reality; Among the factions of the avant-garde, only Surrealism could embrace all the contradictions to engender an object of concrete irrationality resonant with convulsive beauty whose mysteries could not readily be revealed.

In addition to thematic union represented in "Sen," Štyrský's sardonic reworking of an image from French canon alluded to Dali's paranoiac-critical versions of Millet's masterpiece *Angelus*, "the monument to bourgeois good taste." (monument du bon goût bourgeois)⁵⁹ One variation on *Angelus* was the illustration for the sixth canto of the 1933 version of *Les chants* where he "conceived it (*Angelus*) as a figural scene (the plowed field was marked as the operating table, the umbrella was transposed to the figure of a man and the sewing machine became the figure of a woman)."⁶⁰ By alluding to Lautréamont, Dali

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Jean-Luc Rispail, Christian Biet and Jean-Paul Brighelli, *Les surréalistes: Une génération entre le rêve et l'action* (The Surrealists: A Generation Between Dream and Action) (Découvertes Gallimard. Paris: Gallimard), 91. The painting shows a man and woman on a field at dusk standing reverently over their potato harvest, the man with his hat in his hands and head bowed, the woman with her hands clasped and head tipped as if in prayer. The bourgeois good taste again rests in the nostalgia for the bucolic agrarian past and paying homage to the Church's religious piety the Surrealists despised.

⁶⁰ Bydžovská and Srp, "The Lautréamont Case," 155.

eroticized a bucolic scene of holy grace to expose its religious hypocrisy of its realism.

Štyrský, on the other hand, was satirizing vainglorious displays of patriotism. In his version of the dream, death, in the form of a German sewing machine (a variation on Lautréamont), had seduced the whole lot of unsuspecting soldiers lying on the battlefield cum dissecting table. The allusion to Lautréamont linked the two artists in more ways than one. Four years before Dali illustrated a new edition of *Maldoror*, Štyrský had provided the illustrations for the Czech translation that was later confiscated by the government. Since these images were produced during Štyrský's period of artificialism (the reigning aesthetic for Štyrský and Toyen before Surrealism and the closest the two came to visual abstraction) his drawings were far closer to *informe* that the Surrealists had rejected. Štyrský's unabashed and sexually uninhibited representation of eroticism made Dali's heavily stylized and overly symbolic depictions of the latent content of dreams pale in comparison.

Despite the Surrealists' appeal for a Left alliance, their hopes were not fulfilled. The military build up and political maneuvering of the major European powers (as in the case of Franco-Soviet pact the Surrealists rejected) ultimately led to conflagration. No matter how the intellectual avant-garde tried to reconcile its feuding factions, resolving conflict proved increasingly difficult because of

contradictions inherent to the interested parties who disputed the question of whose culture and what kind of defense. In terms of the Czech Surrealists, conflict inspired Nezval's intervention that sealed Surrealism's fate with the PCF and Stalin. With Breton's gauntlet the war for the avant-garde war began in earnest; what followed was exclusion from the Congress and the suicide of his friend René Crevel who had argued in his defense.⁶¹

On one hand, Nezval's instigating Breton's impulsive act may have been destructive, but on the other, his bearing witness to the event elevated his status of relative obscurity to the international stage.⁶² In one gesture, Nezval set into play the sequence of events that destroyed everything Teige had attempted to accomplish in Prague: the founding of Levá fronta and in his efforts to mediate the theoretical and political positions of the Soviet Union and the Surrealists. The collaborative tension between these two forces, lyric and critical, that propelled Czech Surrealism into the international limelight now worked to bring about the movement's swan-song.

A Tale of Two Currents: Neither Swan Nor Moon

⁶¹ See note 1 to page 462 of "Du Temps les surréalistes avait raison" for details on Crevel's intercession on the part of Breton with members of AÉAR and note 3 on Crevel's subsequent suicide. In Breton, *Oeuvres*, 2: 1593.

⁶² After all even the editors of *Oeuvres* turn to Nezval's account of the incident in the French version of *Ulice* which was translated in 1988. See note 4 in the notes to "Position politique" in Breton, *Oeuvres* 2: 1568.

And the bright suns of other worlds
Streaked across the bands of sky-blue
Burning like tears of love
And the worlds that glitter in the sky
Like true love's cathedral they arose
Until from love for each other they heat up
Changing to sparks they die out
Wandering like lovers they took their leave.

Mácha's *Máj* (May)

Although upon conversion to Surrealism, the Czechs had adopted the lineage handed down by Breton, as previously discussed, they freely altered the French-based legacy to suit their own cultural imperatives as in the case of Apollinaire. Even though Apollinaire was a Slav, his figure as patriarch left an enormous gap in the Czech genealogy in terms of their own literary tradition. This history was critical for the formation of an uninterrupted line of cultural development from the period of the National Revival that marked the re-emergence of Czech as a literary language after almost two centuries.

The French Surrealists were quite aware of who they were in relation to the cultural status quo they were attempting to subvert. They did not have to

focus on the issue of the contradiction of national identity and language since French had been the literary language since the early renaissance and the vernacular for centuries before and would continue to be. For the Czechs, whose language had been suppressed under the official German of the Habsburgs and whose country was a cultural stew of different ethnicities, finding a Czech language predecessor for their revolutionary aspirations would accomplish two things. It would tie their social history to the democratic ideals of the French revolution, reminding them of their age-old struggle against the German language that represented empire, defeat and tyranny whose modern representative was the Third Reich.

By finding a Czech ancestor for their movement, the Czech Surrealists could also elevate their position vis-à-vis the French. The discovery of a Czech pre-Surrealist would lend prestige to the message they were trying to get out to sympathetic members of the avant-garde that Surrealism was not just about Paris. Although Apollinaire could easily serve as a father figure for literary modernity, he did not represent a suitable choice for Czech Surrealism. Apollinaire had been a contemporary whom Breton had rejected because his posthumous figure symbolized the same vainglorious military aspirations as Detaille's "Le Rêve." In addition, Apollinaire, though a Slav, could not link the Czechs back to their romantic traditions in order to circumvent the need for symbolism. Without a

nineteenth century predecessor, there could be no basis on which to construct a new tradition and identity once the old corrupt tradition had been supplanted and no dialectical source for its continued development had been found. Due to chronological fortuity, the hundredth anniversaries of Karel Hynek Mácha's Máj and the poet's untimely death, the Czechs found in Mácha a progenitor, a Czech Lautréamont who had died in Litoměřice a full ten years before Ducasse's had been born in Montevideo.

Karel Hynek Mácha (1810-1836) remains the spiritual embodiment of Czech romanticism and the most important poet of the new period which began with the resurrection of Czech as a literary language. His prose, poems and journals expressed the existential crisis of romanticism: "modern man's uncertainty and disenchantment, the conflict between reality and dream." (nejistoty a rozčarování moderního člověka, konflikt mezi skutečnosti a snem)⁶³. The publication of his lyric Máj (1936) heralded a transformation in the use of poetic language that still resonates in the works of Czech poets today.⁶⁴ Mácha's *Máj* deals with the underworld of brigands, incest, violence and death that are all

⁶³ Bohumil Svozil and Blanka Svadbová, *Česká literatura ve zkráce* (Czech Literature in Brief). Vol. 2. Období od 80. let 18. století do 80. let 19. století (From the Period of the 1780's to the 1880's) Knížní klub. (Prague: Brána, 1998), 92.

⁶⁴ The poem's opening quatrain affirming the life-giving beauty of spring is still on the lips of everyone each May 1st: Byl pozdní večer – první máj/ večerní máj – byl láský čas/ hrđličin zval ku lásce hlas/ kde borový zaváněl háj. (It was the late at night the first of May – evening May – it was the time of love, A turtle dove called out to love where the grove smelled sweet of pine) Karel Hynek Mácha, *Máj: Báseň od Karla Hynka Máchy* (May: A Poem by Karel Hynek Mácha) (Prague: Nakladatelství Vojtěch Šeba), 9 (1:1-4) This powerful evocation of romantic love helps erase the memory of the obligatory May Day processions under communism.

transformed through the immortal power of love. Although Mácha drew upon many foreign sources for his romanticism (such as Byron), his work was neither formulaic nor imitative; his poetry was an original and indigenous response to the particular social and cultural conditions at play in Bohemia. His premature death and his position as a social outcast from the mainstream made Mácha the perfect symbol for the Czech Surrealists of their revolutionary-romantic tradition.

As was the case with Devětsil's publishing the first manifesto of poetism prior to Breton's first Surrealist manifesto, Mácha's having fortuitously predated Ducasse implied that the Czechs had been even ahead of the time of the most avant-garde thinkers from an intellectual and cultural giant such as France. Moreover, the varied nature of Mácha's literary endeavors – his poetry, prose and diaries allowed his work to be interpreted dialectically using as the same contradiction between dream and reality symbolized by *Maldoror* and *Poésies* and Lautréamont/Ducasse's bipartite identity. By embracing Mácha, the Surrealists recovered what they had lost when they adopted Breton's line that did not include any Czechs. In this way, they recovered their cultural past in order to forge an identity unique to themselves that took them from out of Paris' shadow.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Teige and Nezval's commentaries on legacy in *Ani lábut'* should be read in relation to their earlier joint article "Význam Wolkerova odkazu" (The Meaning of Wolker's Legacy) that responded to the official handling of the tenth anniversary of the death of poet Jiří Wolker. Wolker, the poet whose name is most closely associated with the notion of "proletarian" poetry was a close friend of Nezval's and had once been a member of Devětsil. In 1934, Nezval and Teige joined together to defend Wolker from what they claimed were attempts by the conservative

How to create an independent lineage for Czech surrealism given its particular historical, social and cultural conditions became a priority after “Surrealismus v ČSR” announced the Surrealist experiment had arrived in Prague.⁶⁶ In May *Doba* (Era or Age), edited by Karel Teige,⁶⁷ published the article “Máj” (May) by Nezval on the legacy of Mácha’s lyric masterwork. Prior to 1934, Mácha had not figured in the pursuits of Devětsil. In Teige’s selected works from the twenties, Mácha was only cited once in the index whereas Lautréamont merited his own thirty-page study (in addition to other references elsewhere). In Nezval’s “Manifestos, Essays and Critical Speeches from Poetism” (Manifesty, eseje a kritické projevy z poetismu) again, *Maldoror* was the topic of an article as well as the writers Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Proust and even Dostoevsky. Despite the lack of interest in Máj and its creator in the light-hearted days of poetism, the publication of an article devoted to Mácha marked a turning point in the Surrealists’ understanding of their cultural heritage:

press to “officialize” (oficializovati) (Nezval and Teige in Nezval, *Manifesty z 1931-1941*, 81) his work despite its clearly proletarian content and Wolker’s membership in the avant-garde. I believe this is the only critical article they co-wrote.

⁶⁶ In *Neviditelná* Nezval laments the mutual tragic fates of Lautréamont and Mácha who were condemned to obscurity after death: “I never cease to regret that he two poets whom I love above all others, Lautréamont and Karel Hynek Mácha, are hidden behind the better or worse flights of fancy of painters’ imaginations, that their likeness is forever lost to those who feel admiration for them.” (Nepřestávám litovati, že dva básníci, které milují na prvním místě mezi všemi, Lautréamont a Karel Hynek Mácha, se skrývají za výplody lepší čím horší fantazie malířů, že pro ty, kdož k nim cítí obdiv, jejich podoba navždy ztracena) Nezval, *Neviditelná Moskva*, 78-79.

⁶⁷ *Doba* was an autonomous publication and not a Surrealist organ. At the point “Máj” was published, Teige still had joined the movement despite the fact he was sympathetic to their aspiration.

Vítězslav Nezval's article on Mácha's May printed by us here was read by the author on Prague Radio on May 1, 1934 (May day being the temporal setting of the poem – my note). Despite the brief nature of the fifteen-minute radio address, Nezval's study is an important and concise contribution even to Marxist literary theory; in its main respects, it signifies a new appreciation of the literary legacy of the Czech past...this article about Mácha seeks a genealogy for new poetry in the last century.⁶⁸

In this article, Nezval created legacy by setting out to define the “real Mácha” (skuteční Mácha),⁶⁹ whose official image was as “uncertain as his official portrait” (nejistý jako jeho oficiální portrét).⁷⁰ He built an identity for the poet by interpreting his work in light of what he characterized as the three currents of nineteenth-century European romanticism: “aristocratic restoration” (aristokratický restaurační) romanticism represented by Chateaubriand, “liberal” (liberální) romanticism represented by Hugo and the “rebellious” (buřický)⁷¹ romanticism of Lautréamont. Nezval argued that Mácha fell into the latter

⁶⁸ Článek Vítězslava Nezvala o Máchové Máji, který zde otiskujeme, byl autorem prosloven v praském rozhlasu 1.5.1934. Přes svou stručnou formu čtvrt-hodinové rozhlasové přednášky je Nezvalova studie důležitým a výstižným přínosem i marxistické literární teorii, naznačuje v hlavních rysech nové hodnocení literárního odkazu české minulosti...tento článek o Máchovi hledá v minulém století rodokmen nové poesie. This was an unsigned editorial note that introduced the article more-than-likely written by Teige. *Doba* 1, no. 9 (May 24, 1934), 129.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

category (the one associated with Lautréamont) because his romanticism rejected the metaphysical idealism and nihilistic tendencies of the first two. Nezval also pointed out that Mácha had avoided the pitfalls of the other literary current of the time such as realism that served up its “reality” with a large dose of bourgeois morality. In contrast to the other forms, Mácha’s aesthetic unified the authentic aspects of romanticism and realism without inheriting their weaknesses; he infused dreamy romanticism with non-transcendent humanity and positivist realism with the haunting evocation of dream.

According to Nezval, the union of dream and reality that lay at the heart of Mácha’s art prefigured Surrealism making the Czech Surrealists his true inheritors. Nezval’s Mácha had nothing to do with the false image of the poet concocted by the status quo to suit the official romantic or realist traditions. The real Mácha was elsewhere. He was surreal *avant la lettre*:

...Mácha is a contrast to the bourgeois idyll where in everything and everywhere he is treated like text-book ghost. The real Mácha is neither the dreamer, smiling at us from from Petřín, nor the bearded respectable forty-year old they made of him for us; the real Mácha is in the most serious conflict with everything that was taken away from him for everyday needs: the real poet of “Máj”

was and will be for we, surrealists,⁷² the Czech Petrus Borel or

Lautréamont, one of those whom we proudly acknowledge as we

do our most legitimate predecessors.⁷³

Even though Nezval interpreted Mácha's legacy as being analogous to Lautréamont's in France, the two authors while "very closely related" (velice příbuzné)⁷⁴ were not the same. Although Mácha and Lautréamont were "Surrealist" in their use of language and imagery, Nezval labeled Lautréamont and Borel as examples of "rebellious" romanticism while he characterized Mácha's romanticism as something more politically charged. Mácha's mix of dream and reality in "Máj" was revolutionary, "in every aspect an experiment, something new, shocking, immense" (po každé stance experimentem, něcím novým, pobuřujícím, nesmiřlivým).⁷⁵ Nezval delineated a history for European revolutionary romanticism that preceded Lautréamont by a decade. The revolutionary romantic tradition whose uncompromising spirit for freedom and convulsive vision struck out against the aesthetic tyranny of the time began with

⁷² Nezval uses the term "nadrealisty" (Surrealists) instead of "surrealisty" to describe the "we." The former term is more suitable for describing Mácha's descendants since "nadrealista" is the literal Czech translation of the term devised by Apollinaire, transformed by Breton and not the calque the world borrowed from the French, including the Czechs.

⁷³ ...Mácha, jenž ve všem všudy kontrasstem městského idylismu, je traktován jako čítankový duch. Skutečný Mácha, to není ten snílek, usmívající z nás s Petřina, ani onen vousatý počestný čtyřicátník, kterého nám z něj udělali, skutečný Mácha je v najvášnivějším rozporu se vším, co z něho bylo odvozeno pro každodenní potřebu; skutečný básník "Maj": byl a bude pro nás, nadrealisty, českým Petrusem Borelem či Lautréamontem, jedním z těch, k nimž se hlásíme pyšně jako ke svým nejlegitimnějším předkům), Nezval, "Máj," 129-130.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 131.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 132.

Mácha’s “Máj” and not *Maldoror* if one uses Nezval’s article as the basis for its timeline.

In “Deset let,”⁷⁶ Teige (who still had not joined the group) also acknowledged that Mácha’s “Máj” was ground-zero in the Czech literary tradition. He then compared the Prague movement’s evolutionary history beginning with Mácha to the French tradition, depicting them as two separate currents drawing ever closer to one another until they converged in 1934 as fate had planned:

In the moment when Breton, with the second manifesto, concluded the first and began the second period of Surrealism, the distance between Surrealism and poetism was, in essence, less than it was in 1924. Notice that the *Second Manifesto of Poetism* arises from the Czech poetic past of the poet of “Máj,” and that poetism ranks from within the same lineage of revolutionary romanticism (Teige uses “revoltní” instead of “revoluční”) and *la poésie maudite* that Surrealism subscribes to. It was clear to us that, in the nineteenth century, there existed two arts and poetries existing alongside and opposite one another: in the line of avant-garde and revolutionary poetry we have mentioned the names: Borel, Nerval, Bertrand,

⁷⁶ Teige speech was given the same day Nezval’s article appeared in print.

Mácha, Baudelaire, Cros, Corbière, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Jarry, Apollinaire, Tzara, Eluard and Breton: both surrealism and poetism subscribe to this line as their lineage, and we have placed this line in opposition to official classicism, parnassianism, academism, realism and naturalism.⁷⁷

By associating Mácha with later poets such as Rimbaud, Teige elevated the Czech Surrealists position vis-à-vis Paris in a way that would have been impossible had they chosen to adopt the French Surrealist line wholesale. Even though Teige lists the poets in chronological order with Mácha taking forth place, Mácha actually took first in Prague. Here where Devětsil's cultural record diverged from Paris's because of its poetist past, the line Mácha engendered was their only true heritage.

Although Nezval's and Teige's conceptions of Mácha and France were comparable, as Teige came closer to embracing Surrealism, his thinking about Mácha's influence evolved as a result of his relationship with Moscow. In the wake of the First Soviet All-Union Writer's Conference, Bukharin's speech and

⁷⁷ V tomto momentu, kdy Breton druhým manifestem uzavírá první a zahajuje druhé období surrealismu, je distance mezi surrealismem podstatně menší než byla r. 1924. Všiměte si, že druhý manifest poetismu z dědictví české básnické minulosti vyzdvihuje jedině básníka "Máje", a že řadí poetismus do linie téhož revoltního romantismu a prokletlé poesie, k níž se hlásí surrealismus. Bylo nám jasno, že v 19. století existuje vedle sebe a proti sobě dvojí umění a dvojí poesie: linii avantgardní a revoltní poesie jsme označovali jmény: Borel, Nerval, Bertrand, Mácha, Baudelaire, Cros, Corbière, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Jarrz, Apollinaire, Tzara, Eluard a Breton; k této linii se hlásil i poetismus i surrealismus jako ke svému rodokmenu, a stavěli jsme tuto linii do oposice proti oficiálnímu klasicismu, parnasmu, akademismu, realismu a naturalismu) Teige, "Deset let," 24.

the emergence of socialist realism, the revolutionary element of Mácha's legacy became more important. By promoting Mácha as a precursor to Marx (rather than Lautréamont), Teige maintained that socialist realism and Surrealism were compatible, countering Surrealism's detractors who insisted that the two currents could never be reconciled. By tracing the two currents back to revolutionary romanticism, Teige performed the impossible. The concept of revolutionary romanticism became crucial to Teige's strategy in his struggle to preserve Levá fronta's unity. Without revolutionary romanticism, there could be past point of convergence and no potential for a united front in the present.

Teige also split the romantic tradition into three parts in his speech “Socialistický realismus” from November of 1934; however, Teige terms differed substantially from Nezval's. The first current of romanticism was categorized as “reactionary-feudal” (reakčně-feudální), represented again by Chateaubriand; the second as “bourgeois republican” (buržoasně-republikánský) current with Hugo still serving as its representative, and finally, the “left-revolutionary wing” (levé, revoluční křídlo) that replaced “rebellious romanticism.”⁷⁸ Teige reserved Borel and Lautréamont as examples of poets belonging to this tradition, but added Rimbaud to the list. Teige employed standard Marxist terminology instead of Nezval's vague expressions because the speech was addressed to the members of

⁷⁸ Teige, “Socialistický realismus,” 159.

Levá fronta. Moreover, Teige's choice of the term "wing," a term commonly associated with political parties distinguished revolutionary romanticism from the various and sundry "isms" associated with aesthetic schools. As a wing of the revolutionary Left, this third form of nineteenth-century romanticism and its a group of creative intellectuals was a precursor to Teige's avant-garde alliance. Although it would be difficult to argue that Borel and Lautréamont were social revolutionaries, placing them in the company of Rimbaud who had fought on the barricades, suggested that apart from being aesthetic innovators, they were social transformers as well. When Teige expanded the scope of revolutionary romanticism to encompass a social message, he also extended Surrealism's legacy to the diverse membership of Levá fronta.

Although Mácha was not mentioned on Teige's list, his name showed up later when Teige contrasted the Surrealist's concept of revolutionary romanticism with that of the late Soviet critic A.V. Lunacharskii. Teige used this comparison to show the origin of the conflict in Moscow and Prague over the role of revolutionary romanticism in the history of the Revolution:

Where we think of Nerval, Mácha, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Lunacharskii probably thought about images of the barricades, the romance of revolutionary themes, perhaps

Delacroix's "Liberty who leads the people to battle" or Victor Hugo.

A similar misunderstanding can arise from the ambiguous terms "romanticism" or "realism". Since one cannot draw a line of demarcation between realism and naturalism, similarly one cannot delineate romanticism and realism.⁷⁹

Teige continued his argument into the present by once again changing the terms.

He transformed realism from being a form of bourgeois narcissism into a valid ontological inquiry whose purpose was "to know the world" (svět poznávat).⁸⁰

Relieved of its republican and aristocratic baggage, romanticism emerged as a dialectical movement that aspired to transform art and "change the world" (svět změnit).⁸¹ Thus, Teige paved a way for the lines finally to merge while maintaining the integrity of their historical context.

⁷⁹ Kde my myslíme na Nervala, Máchu, Baudelairea, Lautréamonta, Rimbauda, myslil Lunačarskij asi na obrazy barikád, na romantiku revolučního tématu, snad na Delacroixovu "Svobodu, která vede lid do boje" nebo na Victora Huga Podobné nedorozumění může vyniknouti z nejednoznačnosti názvu "romantisimus" či "realismus". Jako neleze vésti demarkační čáru mezi realismem a naturalismem, také nelze podobně rozhrančit romanticismus a realismus. Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 160. Teige's paradigm for nineteenth century representation is similar to Breton's appeal to the Congress for the Defense of Culture (the speech which he never gave) to subscribe to the Surrealist unity of Marx's "transformer le monde" and Rimbaud's "changer la vie. Il n'en font qu'un" Breton, "Discours au Congrès," 459. Once again, the Czechs have a theoretical jump on the French when it comes to mediation; Teige gave his speech before Breton attempted to give his. In addition, Breton's terms do not include a reference to realism since he did not feel the need to address socialist realism since he never felt it could compete with Surrealism as a method of representation. He just had to reconcile Rimbaud with Marx to justify the Surrealists membership in the left avant-garde. Both currents are based on a dialectical approach to reality with Rimbaud functioning as the head of his own line. Teige places revolutionary romanticism which he

At the time, if realism desired to have knowledge of the world and romanticism wanted to change the world, it is clear why Socratics as dialectical-materialistic art wants to be, in an explicit sense, a synthesis of realism and romanticism.⁸²

By uniting trends from the past under the same umbrella, Teige created the potential for a broader alliance in the present based on an internationally-based standard of human rights. The goal of achieving social coalition functioned as the motivating force of Teige's sixty page speech. Returning to Lautréamont who Teige placed in the company of Marx, Teige concluded:

In society where “where the free development of each individual will be the condition for the free development for all” (who's is this? Marx) Lautréamont's prophesy and Surrealism's belief that “poetry will be written by everyone, not just the individual! When the obstacle between East and West that we spoke of at the beginning no longer exists the new Soviet poetry and the new poetry of the West will unite in one lyric current of socialist life.”⁸³

associates with Rimbaud within a Marxist framework. In order for Teige to achieve his goal of reconciling socialist realism and Surrealism, he must deal with the realism that Breton has no interest in.

⁸² Jestliže tedy realismus chtěl poznávat svět a romantismus chtěl svět změnit, je jasno, proč socrealismus, jako umění dialektickomaterialistické, chce být v určitém smyslu syntesou realismu a romantismu. Teige, “Socialistický realismus,” Ibid.

⁸³ Ve společnosti, kde “svobodný rozvoj každého bude podmínkou pro svobodný rozvoj všech” uskuteční se proroctví Lautréamontovo a víra surrealismu, že poesie budou dělati všichni a ne jen jeden! Až nebude mezi Západem a Východem existovat ona přehrada, o které jsme mluviti na

While Nezval promoted Mácha as the link between Czech Surrealism and revolutionary romanticism, up to that point Teige had been far much more interested in Lautréamont. However, in 1936, the hundredth anniversary of Mácha's death, a battle began in Czechoslovakia over who were the true heirs to Mácha's legacy.

The conflict that ensued over the official celebrations honoring Mácha provided the Czech group with a cause célèbre comparable to Breton's mission to rescue Rimbaud from the Catholics. The controversy allowed the Czechs to turn away from the international front to attend to matters closer to home. After the Mácha affair, the Czech Surrealists were forced to defend their cultural legacy from the hands of those nefarious individuals who would desecrate it. To this end, the Surrealists published *Ani lábut' ani līna* (Neither Swan Nor Moon), an anthology of critical essays, art work and poetry that were variations on the theme of Mácha-Revolutionary, to safeguard him in the present as the status quo worked to co-opt him as their symbol of patriotic bourgeois nationalism.

In *Ani lábut'*, Nezval and Teige again split their critical efforts to continue their dialectical dialogue on the theme of dream and action. Teige launched an attack on the socio-political front, assailing the critics a hundred years after Mácha's death who were hell bent on making a positivist out of him. He argued

začátku, spojí se nová sovětská poesie s novou poesíí západní v jediný proud lyrismu socialistického života. Ibid. 181.

that the official camp had no right to claim Mácha as its own. According to the Czech Surrealists' interpretation of cultural history, the line that begat Mácha's official supporters in 1936, had actually been engendered by Mácha's detractors during the Czech National Revival. He characterized the work of Mácha's contemporaries such as F. L. Čelakovský, Jaromír Erben and Palacký⁸⁴ as being representative of a literary style popular in Austria at the time known as "Biedermeier."⁸⁵ Biedermeier, in Teige's opinion, was a load of worthless German kitsch.

Although these writers were traditionally depicted as heroic patriots fighting for the cause of the Czech nation, according to Teige, their literary efforts had not borne fruit because they had reduced the complexity of art to a simple matter of God and homeland. As usually, Teige did not refrain from expressing his frank (and dissenting) view regarding the official literature of the period:

Biedermeier, the woeful mixture of watered-down classicism and romance...

⁸⁴ Later in the anthology, Záviš Kalandra does a detailed analysis of the relation of Mácha to Palacký which he characterizes as the contradiction of latter's "*subjective idealism of the revolutionaries*" (subjektivní idealismus revolutionářů) to the former's "*objective idealization*" (objektivním idealisacím) (Kalandra's emphasis). Záviš Kalandra, "Mácha a Palacký." (Mácha and Palacký) In *Ani labut' ani lůna*, 62. Kalandra sets up this opposition in order to show the two lines of development within the nineteenth century tradition, one beginning with Mácha whose true inheritors were the Surrealists (also reviled and marginalized by official circles) and Palacký whose modern descendants were the official critics who were scurrilously attempting to steal credit for Mácha's revolutionary line. Although Kalandra write of "idealism," this is to be understood dialectically, that is in terms of movement. "Objective idealization" reflects a perfect state where no development is possible.

⁸⁵ Teige, "Revoluční romantic K.H. Mácha," In. *Ani labut' ani lůna*, 18.

The idyll of this so called second petit-bourgeois rococo,⁸⁶ rococo without expression and without the baroque spirit, petit bourgeois romance, adoring of nature and the warmth of the family hearth, professing love for fatherland and reverence for laws, morals, priests and anachronism, old-fogeyish soft rationalism, a mixture of antagonistic voices whose antitheses, however, were dulled and made uniform, concoctions of loyal patriotic Catholic and Hussite sentiments; the peasant woman who bows under the chasms of passion, conformism and subdued progress, conformity, restricted life experience, provincialism, town and village picturesque people are fond of in folklore, etc. Biedermeier literature imbued with the didacticism and morality of devotion to God, country and emperor is the authentic ideological expression of the loyal and constitutional attempts at snout-nosed revival of the Czech nation.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Once again Teige shows his genius for inventing literary terms. I am indebted to Maria Němcová Banerjee for having pointed this out.

⁸⁷ Biedermeier, žalná směs rozfeděného klascismu a romantiky... Idyla tak zv. druhého měšťacká rokoka, rokoka bez výrazu a bez barokního ducha, maloměšťáská romantika, milující přírodu a teplo rodinného krbu, vyznávající lásku k otčině a úctu k zákonům, k morálce, ke kněžím a k přežitkům minulosti, fotrovský papučový racialismus, směs protichůdných hlasů, jejichž protiklady byly však otupeny a nivelirovány, odvary vlasteneckých loyálných, katolických a husitských citů; selanka, která se klená nad propastmi vášní, konformismus a umírněný pokrok, přizpůsobenost, obmezená životní zkušenost, provincialismus, malastranská a vesnická malebnost, záliba ve folklore, etc. Beidermeirovská literatura, prosycená didaksí a morálkou oddanosti bohu, vlasti a císaři, je authentickým ideologickým výrazem loyálných a státoprávních snaž holubičího probuzení českého národa. Teige, "Revoluční romantic," 18-19.

Then Mácha appeared “in the midst of this Biedermeier idyll” (uprostřed této biedermeieru idylly)⁸⁸ carrying with him a poem that was “revolutionary in the sense of storming of the Bastille” (revoluční v tom smyslu jako dobytí Bastilly).⁸⁹ By merging the revolutionary content of Mácha’s “Máj” to the anti-feudal aspirations of the French revolution, Teige created a literary heritage that was radical socially and aesthetically. Teige pointed out that Palacký, the nationalists’ true *pater familias*, never appreciated Mácha’s talent as a entry in the poet’s diary revealed:

Today we met with Palacký at the Pospíšils’ where we did not agree on some aspects of poetics. He judged that I “have an excellent imagination and that I am excellent at depiction, but my major mistake was the necessity for the Idea was not apparent in them.” I don’t understand him, because I am of the opinion that it is precisely the Idea that is developed as much as possible in each of my poems. I would personally conclude that he is a *German* (my emphasis) poet and that he looks for philosophy as the most important thing in poems; for example it (philosophy) isn’t in national songs, but yet poetry is in them (the songs).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid. 19.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ráno jsme sešli s p. Palackým u Pospíšilů; tam jsme se něco neshodli stranu básnictví.; on o mně soudí, “že mám výbornou fantasi a že výborně maluji, ale prací mých hlavní že je chyba, že

Teige's use of Mácha's diary proved Mácha very clearly understood the contradiction separating his approach to representation from Palacký's. This difference could not be readily brushed aside by critics because it called into question the very notion of Palacký's fidelity to the Czech cause. By refusing to go along with the official school that demanded the artist's imagination be enslaved by the "Idea," Mácha was the true revolutionary who had smashed the bastion of Biedermeier. Teige's argument implied that Mácha recognized Palacký (and his followers) for what they were – German speakers who were aware of their privileged position in society. Thus, the "German" Teige referred to resonated with its layers of negative connotations. German was the language of the oppressor under Austria; German in twentieth-century Europe devised the discourse of fascism.

However, Teige made a distinction. There was German and then there was *German*. Although Teige found the German in the context of the Revivalist generation reactionary, he did not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Teige needed modern German the language of Hegel, Marx and Engels (rather than reactionary Austrian) to serve as the basis for Surrealism's social and aesthetic program. Teige rectified this contradiction opposing the French revolution to the

v nich nevysvítá jakási nunost idey". Já mu nerozumím, nebo mám za to, že právě v každé mojí básni Idea jest co nejmožněji rozvedena. Vlastně bych ale soudil, že on jest básník německý, a že hledá filosofii v básních, jakožto nejnuttnejší věc; to n.p. není v písních národních a přece jest v nich poesie". Ibid. This is a direct quote from Mácha's diary entry from September 25, 1835.

German philosophical tradition whose confrontations engendered the “explosions of proletarian uprisings” (výbuchy proletářských povstání)⁹¹ that propelled the world on its dialectical course to social change. In addition, Teige contrasted the French and German traditions where revolutions had been attempted or carried out with the record of the Czech National Revival which had not been able to affect political change. Despite the patriotic myth that had made the Revival the sacred cow of the status-quo, Teige exposed the movement as a false myth and its supporters as provincial cowards fleeing from modernity, the great philosophical and social truth of the age:

...but the Czech bourgeoisie’s fear of the most advanced German industry and the petit-bourgeoisie’s fear that the nation would expire in the German sea, fear that oriented its course in a reactionary and counter-revolutionary direction.⁹²

Only revolutionary romanticism⁹³ represented by Mácha’s irrational, hallucinatory and uncensored approach to poetic language and imagery could topple Austria, thereby setting the Czech culture free from its Germanic yoke.

⁹¹ Ibid. 21.

⁹² ...ale strach českého buržoasie z vyvinutějšího německého průmyslu a strach maloměšťáctva, které se bálo, že národ zanikne v německém moři, orientoval jeho cestu reakčním a kontrarevolučním směrem. Ibid., 16.

⁹³ Here Teige, never one to be pinned down by previous definitions, changes terms again. Now all three trends are collapsed into two “wings” (křídla): official (oficiální) and “revoltní” (revolutionary) also termed “radical” (krajním). Both aristocratic and liberal romanticism fall under the firsts heading with its obverse being represented by “Borel, Bertrand, Nerval, the post romantic beacons Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Jarry, Apollinaire and Surrealism” (Borel,

However, Teige did not see the key to Mácha's legacy as the evocations of phantoms and monsters. Mácha's revolution was embodied by his rebellious soul that had transcended the social, political and aesthetic conventions of his time. Teige's likening the razing of the Bastille with Mácha's poetry reflected Teige's habit of employing the discourse of architecture as a metaphor for social liberation. Constructivism, the architectural counterpart of revolutionary romanticism in the twentieth century had taken their sledgehammers to academic embellishment to free the human soul.

For Teige, the Czech and French revolutionary genealogy developed out of the need for love⁹⁴ to unify the dialectical forces of the vast universe of human experience. Love was the metaphor for romanticism, communism and Surrealism: “life and death, desire and reality, dreams and wakefulness, man and nature, fate and freedom, stemmed from the metaphorical action of its (love’s) latent tension.”⁹⁵ In the end, Mácha’s legacy of love endowed the present with harmony and everlasting hope. No matter the age, love would conquer all:

Bertrand, Nerval, postromantickými majáky Baudelairea, Lautréamonta, Rimbauda, dále pak Jarrym, Apollinairem a surrealismem) Ibid. 23. In modernity, the line evolves beyond its marginalized individuality to be replaced by a collective movement, Surrealism. Again, Teige deals specifically with aesthetic legacy projected into a social context. The philosophical legacy is the German line that is represented by dialectical materialism.

⁹⁴ Teige quotes Mácha to define this great imperative: “Love is without end” (Bez konce lásky je). Ibid. 28.

⁹⁵ Života i smrti, touhy a skutečnosti, snu a bdění, člověka a přírody, osudu a svobody, rozvinula metaforický děj svého latentního napětí. Ibid. Teige is quoting from an article by critic Jan Mukařovský “Příspěvek k dnešní problematice básnického zjevu Máchova” (Contribution to the Current Problem of Mácha’s Poetic Manifestation).

Today, one-hundred years since the death of the poet of “Máj,” we live in a period that can unravel its contradictions in no other way than what Majakovskij called “a May first December” that will be “Máj’s” poetry, the poetry of endless love, negated, *negated like a grain of wheat*, so that it becomes *transformed and amplified* (Teige’s emphasis) into higher phases of humanity and poetry, (becoming) the dream projected into the reality of the extraordinary days and nights of the Kingdom of Liberty to be transformed into a living act, into essential joy, becoming life itself...⁹⁶

From out of Mácha’s dialectical longing for poetry (that still was equated with life) expressed in the poet’s line: “Love is without end! – In vain!” (Bez konce láска je! – Zklamánať láska má)⁹⁷ a new socialist tradition emerged in which “everyone will write poetry” (budou všichni dělati poesie)⁹⁸ and where “the distant horizon of socialism within arm’s reach’(quoting Pasternak) will amend this verse of Mácha’s to signify hope.” (Teige’s emphasis - vzdálený obzor

⁹⁶ Dnes, sto let od smrti básníka “Máje”, žijeme doubu, která nemůže jinak rozuzlit své protiklady než tím, co vyslovil Majakovskij jako “prvního máje prosinec”, kterým bude poesie “Máje”, poesie bezkonečné lásky, negována, negována jako obilní zrno, aby se, proměněna a zmnohonásobena, stala, ve vyšší fázi lidstva a poesie, snem, promítnutým do reality nevšedních dní a nevšedních nocí Říše Svobody, aby se proměnila v životní akt, v podstatnou radost, aby se stala životem samým. Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid. This line comes from the end of the second to last verse of “Máj.” A literal rendering of the couplet: Who gives some solace to such a heart?/Love is without end! – In vain my love.” See Mácha, “Máj,” 54, 4(11: 7)

⁹⁸ Teige, “Revoluční romantic” 28.

socialismu je na dosah ruky (Pasternak) bude korigovat tento Máchův verš ve smyslu naděje).⁹⁹ When Teige cited Pasternak in his discussion of Ducasse, he reconciled the great expanse of space and time that separated them. Teige's essay was the bridge linking Ducasse's Paris of the past and Pasternak's Moscow of the present in the timeless center of it all – Mácha's Prague.

While Teige used Mácha's legacy to promote his efforts to expand the alliance trying to defend culture from the Czech status quo and fascism, Nezval's commentary focused on Mácha's artistic consciousness, to the concrete irrationality that distinguished his life and work from that of the mainstream. Like Teige, Nezval approached the problem by collapsing the boundary between life and art (returning to the Devětsil's discourse) to compare Mácha's contribution to his Revivalist contemporaries. Despite the common heritage, Mácha did not resemble his fellow countrymen. At home, Mácha lived a marginalized existence as the unsung local hero of a tradition represented by Mácha's contemporaries, Byron and Mickiewicz, poets who struggled for revolution by day and poetry by night.

Even taking into account the time that had intervened between Mácha and the Surrealists for whom the visible manifestation of the dream had become more

⁹⁹ Ibid. Teige cites Pasternak making a connection between the Czech romantic past and the Soviet present.

concrete, whether in 1830 or 1936, the means for negotiating reality's murky waters were, according to Nezval, one and the same:

...the Surrealist of the twentieth century will most likely dream about the slot of a one-armed bandit whereas the romantic of 1830 dreamt about the less concretely defined creatures of sepulchral chinks. But, the question boils down to the fact that it was Mácha, not Čelakovský or Erben who declared a fateful fervor for so-called Byronism; that he and no one else declared himself to be susceptible to the new world of the great romantics, standing against everyone at a price and all for the simple reason that Byronism had marked his way: how to master the technique with which he could grasp the world, a technique more tangible than rhetorical because Byron's technique was still too literary, a technique that while awake plunges into the deepest dreams, into the world of the unconscious, into the world of concrete irrationality and into the expanse of which the romantics never dreamed.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ ...surrealista XX století bude snít mnohem pravděpodobněji o štěrbině forbesu tam, kde snil romantik z. let 1830 o konstruktivně méně přesných otvorech hrobových puklin. Avšak, jde o to, že to byl právě Karel Hynek Mácha a nikoliv Čelakovský nebo Erben, kdo projevil osudné nadšení pro tak zvaný byronismus, že on a nejiný se projevil citlivým k novému světu velikých romantiků za cenu stát proti všem, a to z toho prostého důvodu, že mu byronismus naznačil cestu, jak se zmocnit techniky, kterou by uchopil svůj vlastní svět, techniky jistější než byla retorická,

Nezval's Mácha had even greater power as a cultural figure than Byron with whom the romantic tradition had become synonymous. Mácha's social alienation and poverty (Byron was from the nobility) pushed him ever further from the safety of polite society into the deep troubling waters of sexual passion and death. Freud charted seventy years later when he looked to dreams as a symbolic representation of unfulfilled desire. And Nezval rediscovered Mácha in the dark hallucinatory world that the poet had unleashed when, out of his isolation, he turned inward to his unconscious for the source of his inspiration and then made this vision concrete in his work. Like the Surrealists a hundred years later, Mácha drew upon a source hitherto proscribed because of convention because he had nothing to lose. And he paid the price during his lifetime only to suffer again at the hands of Biedermeier's progeny.

Unable to stand by in silence, Nezval recovered Mácha's soul by letting us witness first-hand the poet's romantic *pietà*. Nezval, as if he had been present at the deathbed, gave his rendition of the poet's final moments. Surrounded by the false images of "capitalism, the idea of country, family, religion" (kapitalismem, ideou vlasti, rodiny, náboženství)¹⁰¹ symbolized by the bourgeois ethnic Germans of Litoměřice, Mácha was leaving his mortal life to greet eternity. Beside him

ještě příliš literární Byronova technika , techniky houžit se při bdění do nejhlubších snů, do světa nevědomí, do světa konkrétní iracionality a v míře, o jaké se nesnilo oficiálním romantikům.
Vítězslav Nezval, "Konkrétní iracionalita v životě a v dílech K.H. Mácha." (Concrete Irrationality in the Life and Works of K.H. Mácha) In *Ani labut' ani luna*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 41.

stood the priest¹⁰² whose presence had been forced upon him and the neighbor's wife who begged the poet to pray even though his work and life symbolized a refutation of Christian values. In the final moment, Nezval, the narrator, tells us, Mácha "plucked at the featherbed three times" (pohnul tříkráte peřinou)¹⁰³ and gently expired. However, this departing gesture was only the physical end to Mácha, in life reviled by the petty critics and condemned to destitution, anonymity and a premature death. Yet, a century later, Nezval, his spiritual inheritor, rescued Mácha from the hypocrisy of his Revivalist myth. Then dusting him off and placing him on the Surrealists' mantle, Nezval proudly proclaimed the good news to the world: "*Mácha was a surrealist by his life, dreams, poetry and death...Long live surrealism!*" (Emphasis added – Mácha byl surrealistař Životem, sny, poesíí i smrtí...at' žije surrealismus!)¹⁰⁴ In Surrealism he had been born again.

Like Teige, Nezval used his interpretation of Mácha's legacy to legitimize the Surrealists' claims as a bridge linking past and present. However, Teige's bridge was suspended by the force of creative freedom and collective love that

¹⁰² Nezval's account of the deathbed attempt to bring Mácha to Christ recalls the time, in 1935, René Crevel's family tried to give him a Christian funeral after his suicide. In that instance, the Surrealists were around to intervene to preserve the integrity of his memory. Nezval gives his version of the events he witnessed while in Paris for the infamous Congress for the Defense of Culture in *Ulice*.

¹⁰³ Nezval, "Konkretní iracionalita," 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. There is great irony in the last part of Nezval's proclamation. In less than two years, he would summarily try to put an end to the Czech Surrealist experiment.

endured by dint of the endless process of becoming that carries no passport. Here one individual or nation did not really matter. Once socialism would be attained, Ducasse's prophesy that "everyone" would participate in the creative process would come true and poetry's love would rule. Despite the fact Nezval gave lip service to Teige's favorite aphorism of Ducasse's, deep down, Nezval did not really believe that everyone and sundry could not write a poem. Poetry had been reserved for those who had been touched by the Muses like Mácha and himself. Poets were a race apart. Mácha had been a seer whose vision predated Rimbaud and Lautréamont. The groundbreaking techniques he employed in "Máj" resonated with the same automatism, the irrationality of objective chance symbolized the image of the sewing machine and the umbrella before it had been dreamed by Lautréamont. Nezval's legacy hinged upon the Creator, a being who could transcend the lyric conventions of his time.

In Nezval and Teige's analyses of Mácha's cultural significance, there was an inescapable contradiction between them. They assessed Mácha as a figure very differently when it to the question of his cultural identity. For Teige, a critical tradition of dialectical impulse served to perpetuate art created by mortals in its endless cycle. For Nezval, the issue was to immortalizing past genius in order to gain access to Olympus where poetry's indestructible palace towered over all other forms of literature. For Nezval, figure (or rather, personality) meant

everything. Without the personality, the living poet had no one to exalt with the beauty of his lyrics. Without the potential to elegize great men, the poet lost his best chance of being enshrined in turn by one of his kind after he had passed through the porthole of human existence. Although death played an integral part in Teige and Nezval's thinking, for Teige, death served to engender the rise of another generation to struggle against the mores of its predecessor. For Nezval, however, death freed the personality from its earthly shell so that the poet could sing of the soul's immortality. Teige always remained focused on the beauty and multiplicity of transient life. In the thirties, Nezval became increasingly obsessed with the representation of death and its transformative afterlife (like the death scene in his essay on Mácha). Teige's argument was based on eternal conflict and motion,¹⁰⁵ while Nezval's embraced the Idyll (proscribed by Surrealist practice).

¹⁰⁵ The spatial contradiction between the two is borne out by Nezval's vivid and rather strange description of his first meeting with Teige in his posthumously published autobiography (Teige had died seven years earlier). Nezval tells us that Teige did not make him feel at ease; instead, he claimed that his "restless countenance and loud laughter evoked fear in me." (svým neposedným počináním a svým hlasitým smíchem vyvolával ve mně strach) Vítězslav Nezval, *Z mého života* (From My Life) (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1959), 89. Nezval also went on to say that Teige's urge for perpetual motion made him seem like a "sparrow on one leg" (vrabec na jedné noze) or, gesticulating with his ubiquitous pipe and swiveling in his café chair, "some kind of Futuro-Cubist still-life." (jakési \kubofuturické zátiší) Ibid. As far as it concerned Teige, Nezval obviously suffered from a bad case of motion sickness brought on by his need to stay in one place. Despite the uncomfortable initial impression, Nezval's encounter with Teige left him with the sense that these profound differences were not a barrier to understanding but the very basis of the relationship that endured for many years. He observed: After the boredom of the monotonous literary entertainment that often came through my discussions with literary neophytes, with Teige I was overwhelmed by something boundless that complemented my nature. (Po nudě jednotvárné literární zábavy, která často plynula z mých rozhovorů s adepty literatury, přívalilo se na mě se Teigem něco bezbřhého, co se doplňovalo s mou povahou). Ibid., 90. In

As was the case with architecture, the matter boiled down to a matter of life and death: Teige's unfettered dance or Nezval's Grecian urn¹⁰⁶.

As external conditions in Europe grew more contentious (the show trials, the fallout over the Defense of Culture, the question of anschluss and Spain's civil war), the opposing, yet heretofore compatible currents of Teige's dialectical criticism and Nezval's lyric, became increasingly more difficult to reconcile. The tension was evident as well in Nezval and Teige's critical contributions to the review *Surrealismus* (Surrealism), edited by Nezval and published just before *Ani lábut'*. Nezval had been working on producing the journal for quite some time and, according to his letters to Breton, their publication almost did not make it to press because of continual delays. The magazine was a varied selection of critical essays, poetry, prose and original artwork representative of the international Surrealist movement.

In *Surrealismus*'s two issues, Nezval contributed many small articles on a variety of topics of interest to the movement. However, his article that just preceded Teige's "Poesie a revoluce" (Poetry and Revolution – a substantial study

Surrealism as Lautréamont's slogan shows opposites do indeed attract (although the question comes up again who is umbrella, who the sewing machine).

¹⁰⁶ When it came to personality, Nezval did not discriminate between the living and the dead; in *Neviditelná Moskva*, he spoke admiringly of the Soviets' concept of the "museem lidí" (The Museum of the People" (museem lidí) (Nezval, *Neviditelná Moskva*, 78) that moved representation out into the street among the masses. He praises the statues of those contemporary figures who best represented the "ducha Sovětského svazu" (the spirit of the Soviet Union) (*Ibid.*) such as Stalin whose likenesses he saw all over Moscow.

compared to Nezval's dubs and drabs) was interesting because at the end of the short piece Nezval returned to two very important points: the figure of Apollinaire in Surrealism and, more significantly, an argument for the use of formal meter in Czech Surrealism. Nezval rationalized that fixed meter was still necessary in the Czech context. Poetic language had not had a chance to mature in comparison to French. The French had a vernacular tradition that had lasted centuries from the renaissance to the present. The Czechs had gone through what was somewhat comparable to a renaissance during the previous century. Nezval claimed that in the less systematic framework of poetism rhyme had already advanced to the point where it no longer functioned merely as a "decorative means," (dekorativním prostředkem)¹⁰⁷ a useless embellishment. As a result, rhyme (and other literary techniques as well) were not superfluous convention, but an integral part of the poet's message, "a direct means for constructing a work." (přímý stavebný prostředek díla)¹⁰⁸ analogous to Cubist practice in the plastic arts.

To make his case, Nezval retraced his steps to the beginnings of poetism in order to show the precedent for a formal approach to language that could be compatible with Czech Surrealism. In the first poetist manifesto, Nezval pointed out that rhyme had the task of "bringing close distant voids, times, races and castes through the harmony of the word." (sblížovati vydálené pustiny, časy,

¹⁰⁷ Vítězslav Nezval, "V čem se poetismus stýkal se surrealismem" (How Poetism Relates to Surrealism), *Surrealismus* 1 (February 1936), 41.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 42.

plemena a kasty souzvukem slova) While the discourse in the manifesto that Nezval referred to was reminiscent of Reverdy's distant realities, Nezval did not focus was not on the image (as had been the case with Breton's use of Reverdy). Instead, he was concerned with the affective possibilities of poetic language, rhyme as "a direct means of the poet's consciousness with his imagination." (přímý spojovací prostředek básníkova vědomí s jeho obrazotvorností)¹⁰⁹ Without rhyme, the poet was a figure divided, a consciousness that could not communicate with the dream. Nezval argued that rhyme was the direct expression of the Czechs' love affair with their language that had been as hard won and as dear to them as the Republic. Czech represented their freedom, to speak, sing and to play in a language that belonged to them and no one else.

Nezval made an important distinction between the poetic traditions that engendered French Surrealism and those governing aesthetic creation in the Czech tradition to justify the fact that under certain cultural conditions rhyme can be compatible with Surrealist practice:

Almost without exception (až na vyjimky) the Surrealists did not use either rhyme or assonance assuming they were an obstacle to the unrestricted movement of fantasy. In France, this has its own meaning. In France where there was a rich poetic tradition all

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 43.

words had been rhymed and cannot be the means of unconscious revelations. In Czech literature where tradition is much more impoverished, with the new poetic rhyme and assonance's help, it went out on the adventurous angling of the imagination. Never before used rhymes and assonance were particularly good tackle for fishing for fantasy and new novel poetic images.¹¹⁰ Nezval's argument depended on one crucial subject: literary development. Because the French had gone through continuous development, their literary tradition was more advanced. However, the Czechs' comparative lack of development did not necessarily mean they were inferior. On the contrary, since the French did not have to suffer the Habsburgs' tyranny and the subsequent loss of their language as a means of expression, the fact the Czechs could overcome adversity to make a meteoric rise to the ranks of international Surrealists in such a short time was no small feat. To advocate for this separate, yet equal identity, Nezval argued against a blanket approach to development and, by extension, identity. Each nation's cultural traditions and the methods associated with them

¹¹⁰ Surrealisté až na výjimky neužíval ani i rýmu, ani assonance, pokládajíce je za překážky volného pohybu fantasie. To má ve Francii svůj zvláštní význam. Ve Francii, kde je bohatá básnická tradice, byla již všecka slova zrýmována a nemohou být prostředkem bezděčných objevů. V české literatuře, kde je tradice mnohem chudší, slovo pomoci nových rýmů a asonancí vycházet ještě na dobrodužný lov do fantasie. Nové nikdy před tím nepoužité rýmy a assonance byly zvlášť dobrou udící na lovení fantasie a nových nebyvalých básnických obrazů. Ibid.

had to be acknowledged and respected within a collective movement such as international Surrealism.

Yet, Nezval did not end his discussion by asking that Surrealism bend the rules in this instance. After pleading the case for meter, he immediately moved from lyricism to Apollinaire. While under the influence of Paris, Apollinaire had been relegated to the lower ranks of the Surrealist pantheon. However, Nezval viewed Apollinaire's less critically formed version of "Surrealism" as being analogous to the poetists' underdeveloped theories on representation. Although the two represent earlier stages on the road to Surrealism, less did not really mean lesser. Nezval judged Apollinaire's use of hyperbole, his lack of a well-defined critical program for representation (that Breton criticized) and the mystery of his language and imagery as the source of his genius. And this dynamic unstudied immediacy was the quality that made Apollinaire and the poetists one and the same. They both represented "Surrealism in a latent stage." (byly surrealismem v latentním stavu).¹¹¹

However, when Nezval advocated for a more advanced Surrealism, he was in fact moving in reverse (like the hands of the clock on the Jewish Town Hall) to redeem Apollinaire and poetism from developmental obscurity, neglect and

¹¹¹ Ibid.

“liquidation” they suffered in Surrealism’s shadow. Nezval once again made a phoenix rise from the ashes:

Therefore, the evolution of some poetists to integrated Surrealism was expression of necessity – and the *liquidation* (my emphasis) of poetism, the expression of recognizing this necessity. Those poetists and their students who set down other paths were being led down them under the direct influence of reactionaries who had taken them for a ride. However, abandoning the necessity for discretion sooner or later means death. Poetism did not become *extinct* (emphasis added). It survived in the surrealist platform in a newer higher form.¹¹²

That Surrealism represented an advanced form did not matter really matter to Nezval. The essential thing was to proclaim to the intellectual avant-garde at home that the reports of poetism’s demise were premature. Its lyric lived on. Although some had argued for its elimination in Surrealism to attain a higher form of expression, poetism and Apollinaire were the element that acknowledged Czech cultural difference that made their legacy unique. Yet, Nezval had not caved into reaction by appealing to the past. He was doing what the avant-garde

¹¹² Proto vývoj některých poetistů k integrálnímu surrealismu byl výrazem nutnosti – a likvidace poetismu výrazem poetismu výrazem poznání této nutnosti. Ti z poetistů a jejich žáků, kteří se dali jinými cestami byli na ně přivedeni pod přímým livilm reakce, které padli na lep. Avšak deserce od nutnosti k libovůli je pomalejší nebo rychlejší smrt. Poetismus neodumřel. Znovu ožil na platformě surrealismu v nové vyšší formě. Ibid.

had to do, protecting culture, in this instance, Czech culture. Even though he identified as a Surrealist, Nezval asserted his right to sing about Prague and the beauty of her special “little” heritage however he saw fit.

Teige’s article “Poesie a revoluce” (Poetry and Revolution) which immediately followed Nezval’s presented a contradictory version of Apollinaire. While Nezval had returned to him, Teige had left Apollinaire behind. Instead of celebrating Apollinaire’s life and work as he had done in 1928,¹¹³ when poetism’s embryonic approach to the problems of representation did not yet include a social program, he practiced a bit of Surrealist revisionism of his own (à la Breton in the 1920’s). Teige tore off Apollinaire’s halo of bandages. Because he had chosen to promote the struggle for nationalism instead of poetry, Teige accused him of having squandered his genius:

The most tragic instance of inconsistency, the most fateful misunderstanding, the cruellest contradiction is Guillaume Apollinaire, from the time of “Alcools” until his death, the greatest European poet. Out of his mouth the slogan “Surrealism” was accepted and received as the designation of a certain poetic

¹¹³ In many respects Teige’s treatment of Apollinaire is the yardstick of his changing views on legacy and avant-garde representation, testament to Apollinaire’s lasting significance despite Teige’s need to discredit him. His first published criticism was, after all, on “Zone,” and in 1935, Teige still felt strongly enough about Apollinaire to rework his 1928 article from ReD from a Surrealist viewpoint. Although Teige and Nezval’s finally falling out was over Stalin, the primary figure at the heart of their discord was Apollinaire.

approach and movement (that from the beginning was not identical to how the poet of *Calligrammes* and *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* understood Surrealism) merely to pay homage to the memory of deceased poet. In Apollinaire's case, it is not possible to accuse Apollinaire of being inauthentic, this revolutionary poet who, during the years of the World War was a patriot, a chauvinist, a militarist who longed for war medals and the Legion of Honor. Claudel fabricated Rimbaud; Chirico deserted and committed artistic suicide through political betrayal. Marinetti was not a modern poet, only a rhetorician and histrionic; but Guillaume Apollinaire was authentic poet, a great poet, the greatest poet of his time whose initiative and influence decided the fate of all poetry for an entire decade!¹¹⁴

While one could rationalize the reasons why others had failed, Teige could not reconcile Apollinaire the poet with his nationalist pretensions.

¹¹⁴ Nejtragičtějším případem rozporu, nejosudnějším nedorozuměním nejkrutější kontradikcí je Guillaume Apollinaire, od dob "Alkoholů" až do své smrti největší evropský básník. Z jeho úst bylo převzato heslo "surrealismus" a bylo přijato jako pojmenování určitého básnického názoru a hnutí (které od počátku nebylo totožné s tím, jak "surrealismu" rozměl básník "Kaligramů" a "Prsu Tiresiových") jen proto, aby byla vzdána pocta zesnulému básníku. V případě Apollinaireově není možno proti tomuto básnickému revolucionáři, který v letech světové války byl patriotem, šovinistou, k militaristou, který toužil po válečných vznámenáních a po stužce cestné legie, vésti obžalobu z neautenticity. Claudel fabrifikoval Rimbauda, Chirico desertoval a politickou zradou spáchal zároveň sebevraždu jako umělec. Marinetti nebyl moderním básníkem, ale jen rhetorem a histerionem; ale Guillaume Apollinaire byl autentický básník, velký básník, největší básník své doby, jehož iniciativa a vliv rozhodly na desiletí o osudu celé poesie! Karel Teige, "Poesie a revoluce." *Surrealismus* 1 (February 1936), 45-46.

By allowing himself to be used as a spokesman for the French government's self-serving nationalism, Apollinaire betrayed poetry and revolution equally.¹¹⁵ Teige felt that because Apollinaire represented an anachronism in the context of Surrealism, his image had to be taken down from the Surrealist wall of legacy. Despite Teige's rejection of Apollinaire, he believed the poet had fulfilled an important function as a negative role model, the cautionary tale of what Surrealists must not do if they were to gain a higher level of cultural and social consciousness. Without Apollinaire's fall from grace, Devětsil's aestheticism would not have evolved into Surrealism's revolution:

Surrealism could overcome this distance and contradiction that we have seen in such a fateful form in Apollinaire only because in the course of the whole evolution of its activity it could carry out rigorous self-criticism and apply its (criticism's) knowledge even at the cost of disputes with literary opportunists within its own ranks.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Teige contrasts Apollinaire's case with that of Henri Barbusse's who fails not because of the revolution, but because of the conventionality of his poetry. They are two sides of one coin: Apollinaire's poetic revolution betrayed by his reactionary politics and Barbusse's revolutionary politics betrayed because of his reactionary aesthetics – Teige adds that, in the Soviet Union, Maxim Gorky's shortcomings are analogous to Barbusse's. In this way, Teige deals with reaction on both the political and personal levels, discrediting the notion that socialist content in bourgeois package can truly represent the drive toward socialism (Barbusse/Gorky) or reactionary content in a revolutionary package (Apollinaire).

¹¹⁶ Tuto vzdálenost a tento rozpor, který jsme v tak osudné formě viděli u Apollinaire, podařilo se surrealismu překonati jen proto, že ve průběhu celého vývoje své activity prováděl přesnou

Nezval and Teige's opposing views of the significance of Apollinaire's legacy during Surrealism presented a contradiction that Teige's skills as diplomat could not rectify in a political climate where the world was coming apart at its seams. Basically, the question boiled down to Nezval's rhyme over reason or Teige's reason over rhyme, where the elements were no longer complementary and one was forced to take sides. Nezval's focus on the integrity of individual creation within a national tradition at the collective's expense and Teige's advocacy of unity and internationalism at the expense of creative freedom and national pride heralded the parting of the waters.

Lyric Springs Eternal – Robert David

The year before Nezval published *Absolutní hrobař*, a book of sonnets called *52 hořských baladů věčného studenta Roberta Davida* (52 Bitter Ballads of the Eternal Student Robert David) written in the style of François Villon appeared. Robert David, the putative author, was an unknown who had sent his manuscript to the publishing house through the mail. However, in the letter from David to the publisher which accompanied the submission, there was a clue to the poet's identity: "If I could I would do everything possible to make your eyes stumble upon on the manuscript in the street one day of *52 Bitter Ballads of the*

autokritiku a uplatňoval její poznatky i za cenu roztržky s literárními oportunisty ve vlastních řadách. Teige, "Poesie a revoluce," 48.

Eternal Student Robert David so that you would have to pick it up. On the back I have written: ‘The faithful finder questions whether he should keep the discovery to himself, whether he should dispose of it according to his conscience.’¹¹⁷

Although critics debated the question of the real author’s identity, the mystery was not solved definitively until much later.¹¹⁸ But the tell tale signs were everywhere. Given David’s linguistic dexterity, the sonnets’ political content and his desire that the manuscript be fortuitously stumbled upon in a Prague street, in retrospect, the answer seems obvious that Nezval was responsible.¹¹⁹ Taking the guise of “the eternal student” whose verses were dedicated to a poet not on the official Surrealist list, Nezval freed himself from Teige in order to do what came naturally to him, i.e., to plumb the depths of his lyric genius using every means at his disposal. Teige’s invectives against the evils of conventional verse and, worse, elegies (the poetic equivalent of a mausoleum) made it impossible for Nezval to

¹¹⁷ Kdyby to šlo, udělal bych leccos, abyste zaklopil jednoho dne na ulici o rukopis “52ti hořských balad věčného studenta Roberta Davida” a byste jej musel zdvihnout. Píši na jeho rub: “Poctivý nálezce se žádá, aby nález nehlásil a aby s ním naložil podle svého svědomí. Vítězslav Nezval, 52 hořských balad věčného studenta Roberta Davida (Prague: František Borový, 1937), Dedication page.

¹¹⁸ Nezval wrote two other collections in the guise of Robert David, exploring new forms and identities with each. In the second volume *100 sonetů zachránky věčného studenta Roberta David* (100 Sonnets to the Woman Who Rescued the Eternal Student Robert David 1937) he writes variations on the love sonnet. In the final collection *70 básní z podsvětí na rozloučenou se stínem věčného studenta Roberta Davida* (70 Poems from the Underworld in Farewell to the Shade of the Eternal Student Robert David 1938), he has returned all the way back to the roots of poetry by writing in the persona of the first of all bards, Orpheus.

¹¹⁹ The sonnets are in the style of Villon’s ballads from *Le Petit* and *Le Grand testament* (The Little and Great Testament – 1456 and 1461) which were made up of regular verse, eight lines of eight syllables. Villon, like Nezval, employed a pseudonym, taking his last name from his patron Guillaume de Villon.

use his own name. And Breton would hardly have approved. By creating an alter-ego, Nezval solved the problem. The decision to write using a pen name had the additional benefit of associating Nezval with the great Ducasse/Lautréamont whose dual identity¹²⁰ symbolized Surrealism's dream and action. Moreover, the hubbub that resulted from keeping his identity a secret must have deeply appealed to Nezval because his imagination thrived on the mysterious, fanciful and inexplicable.

However, in the end, Nezval opted for anonymity for a more practical reason. Nezval was worried about how the collection would be received. He was probably extremely concerned about how critics would react to his attempt at imitating poet Villon. For a poet of Nezval's stature, taking the risk could have been disastrous if critics determined that his lyric technique was not up to the task or if the content did not suit his avant-garde comrades. By posing as an "eternal student," failure on the formal level could be easily chalked up to his being an apprentice, lapses in politics, to the folly of his youth.

Nezval's instincts paid off. Some critics were not at all kind. S.N. Neumann labeled the collection as "literary mystification." (literární mystifikace)¹²¹ Although he argued that the poet was obviously no beginner, he

¹²⁰ Villon was also a *nom de plume*. He was born either François de Montcorbier or de Loges and then changed his name to honor his patron Guillaume de Villon.

¹²¹ Neumann, Stanislav K. "Literární mystifikace." Review of 52 hořských baladů věčného studenta Roberta Davida. (Literary Mystification) U: *Čtvrtletník skupiny BLOK* (U: The Quarterly

felt the collection was deeply flawed because it had failed to live up to its promises either aesthetically or politically. According to Neumann, the lyric stylization that informed all aspects of the work distanced readers from its proletarian message. To make matters worse, the ballads were artless imitations of the original. They were “only the borrowed and worn-out off-shoots and the swift-tongued fulfillment of his (Villon’s) scheme repeated fifty-two times.”¹²² For Neumann, no amount of proletarian imagery could hide the fact that the motivation behind the work which was revolution but (quoting a review by Karel Čapek) Robert David’s “delight with rhymes.” (rozkoš z rýmů)¹²³ In conclusion, Neumann offered a more sinister motive for the author’s decision to maintain his anonymity. The pseudonym was “a mere advertising trick” (jen reklamní trikem)¹²⁴ to promote sales, not literature.

Čapek, a critic from the staunch Republican side of the ideological fence, was less interested in the author’s politics. In his review, he established a

of Blok – U BLOK) 2, n. 1 (March 10, 1937), 69. *U Blok* which started publication in 1936, was the organ of the group Block. The quarterly served as a forum to unify those in Czechoslovakia who served the cause of socialism through their literary works in sympathy with AÉAR’s activities in France and the Soviet Union. See *U Blok* 1, no 1. (1936) 99-100, for the details of their program and reason why the journal’s original title *Blok* had to be changed because of a competing publication of the same name with a different message. Ibid.

¹²² Literary...neběží o českého Villona, nýbrž jen o vypůjčené a otřelé kulisy a o výřečné vyplnění jeho schematu dvaapadesátkrát opakováného. Neumann, “Literarní mystificace, 69.

¹²³ Ibid. 70. Neumann is quoting Čapek’s review in *Literární noviny* (The Literary News). See notes 26-35.

¹²⁴ Ibid. If this was the case, the trick worked well since the book had already gone into a fourth printing by 1937. Had the collection been published under Nezval’s name and its quality taken to task who knows how many copies would have been sold. For Nezval, I doubt money was the motivating factor, but gaining as wide an audience as possible.

systematic method (half-tongue in cheek) with which to approach the “search for David.” (honiti Davida)¹²⁵ He imagined the system to be like a guessing game “along the lines of ‘Twenty Questions.’” (na způsob “hádej, hádej, hadačí”)¹²⁶ He drew up nine points and addressed each of them methodically based on the information providing in the text. Under the first heading, he concluded that despite the sonnet’s autobiographical content, the events were “the literary alibi of its guide.” (literární alibi svého průvodce)¹²⁷ The image of the narrator/author as a poverty-stricken “great poetic wanderer” (velkého básnického tuláka)¹²⁸ was merely a formal device used by the writer to show off his knowledge of Villon and his techniques.

Based on his poetics, Čapek, like Neumann, knew that David was not some starving novice because “his rich and consistent language, his formal confidence, his delicacy and expressiveness point to an individual who has already written a lot.” (jeho bohatá a vyzkoušená řeč, jeho formální jistota, jeho lehkost a výmluvnost ukazují člověka, který už mnoho napsal)¹²⁹ He also cleverly inferred from the poet’s novel use of the “nalezou” (a variation on third person plural indicative of the verb: nalézt, to find) that he had to be Moravian: “As far

¹²⁵ Karel Čapek, “Zatykač na věčného studenta Roberta Davida” (A Warrant for the Eternal Student Robert David). In *Karel Čapek spisy* (Karel Čapek Collected Works). Vol. 17. *O umění a kultuře III* (On Art and Culture) (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986), 714.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 715.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

as I know I have only heard “nalezou” at the fruit and vegetable market in Brno.”

(Pokud vím, slyšel jsem tvar “nalezou” jenom na Zelném trhu v Brně)¹³⁰

However, the author was not someone who remained at home. Čapek found evidence from other language clues that the writer had spent time in Prague as well.

In terms of the author’s social, cultural and political affiliations, he guessed that the real author was between thirty and forty and politically engaged on the Left.¹³¹ Čapek hit the nail on the head when he argued that the evidence of Freudian symbolism was “the footprint of Surrealism” (stopa surrealismu).¹³² However, Čapek judged all contextual considerations secondary to the one thing that Neumann took exception to, the fact the collection was motivated by the author’s “delight with rhyme” (rozkos z rýmů).¹³³ This fact led Čapek to come to the insightful conclusion that “this classic, rhymed form through and through is in contradiction with the esthetic doctrine which by which his other works are known.” (tato klasická, skrz naskrz rýmovaná forma je v rozporu s etetickou dokrínou, kterou vyznává svým ostatním básnickém dílem)¹³⁴ Although Čapek chose not to spoil the fun by divulging the author’s identity, Nezval was the only one who fit the bill on all counts. In the end he merely suggested that the matter

¹³⁰ Ibid., 716.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. 717.

be brought before the critical jury most of all “for the wanderer.” (pro tu potulku)¹³⁵

Although Čapek’s observations and Neumann’s criticisms were far from being off the mark, the relative literary merits of the ballads were not the point. Because Nezval had refused to take responsibility for the ballads’ authorship, the primary issue became the question of identity; how the reader could solve the riddle of Robert David using the clues provided (as Čapek had bothered to do). With each subsequent verse a clearer portrait of the poet emerged, shedding light on the mystery of who the real “wanderer” could be.

In the opening ballad that set the tone for the whole collection, the eternal student directly calls out to Villon to express his desire to write in the master’s style. David laments his lost happiness and the sad state of affairs on earth that have made him suffer: “Oh, once I could enjoy myself/I’m a victim of my century, I, the eternal student Robert David.” (Ó, kdysi uměl jsem se bavit./Jsem oběť svého století,/já, věčný student, Robert David.)¹³⁶ Yet, the narrator feels deliverance may still be a possibility because “they will celebrate me after my death.” (po smrti mě budou slavit)¹³⁷ Even on the garbage heap, life has its enchantments: “the dream that takes off like a butterfly to cross the forbidden

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Nezval, *52 horškých balad*, 11 (1, 6-8).

¹³⁷ Ibid. 11 (1,14).

enclosure.” (sen jak motýl přeletí pres zakázanou ohradu)¹³⁸ The narrator stands observing the children who, like the dream/butterfly, have made it to the other side. (tu civím tupě na děti)¹³⁹ Yet, all is not lost. At the ballad’s end, in death, Robert David sheds his burden of mortality. He expires sweetly “with his nose in a flower bud.” (s nosem v poupečti)¹⁴⁰

The fifty-one remaining ballads represent variations on the theme of the human condition that could only have been attributed to Nezval: songs of life, death, horror, love, poverty, friendship, fame, hope, luck, the plight of the worker, and even the appeal for the “united front.” In this regard, Nezval did not see critical discussion as the most important element in achieving unity. Only youth’s eternal optimism could purge the collective of its critics: Leaders why are your hands so hopelessly soiled?/Unite children of the revolution!/Unite socialists! (Vůdcové což jsou vaše ruce/tak beznadějně nečisté?/Spojte se, děti revoluce!/Spojte se, socialisté!)¹⁴¹

In all three collections in the Robert David series, the poet looked to the past to heal the present’s the mark of Cain.¹⁴² For Nezval, this seal symbolized the

¹³⁸ Ibid. 12 (1,19).

¹³⁹ Ibid. (1,21)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., (1,27).

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 52 hořských baladů, 88 (39,25-28)

¹⁴² Nezval in his letter to the publisher in *100 sonetů* writes “perhaps you will allow me for at least a little while longer (it is necessary, believe me!) to bear the mark of Cain of “anonymity” that the world explains in so many different ways. (A snad mi dovolíte, abych ještě alespoň nějaký čas (je to nutno, věřte mi!) snášel to Kainovo znamení “anonymity”, které si svět tak různě vysvětluje).

anonymity that the poet had to suffer after having been thrown out of his lyric paradise. These verses that resonate with the happier times of the poet's youth, stand in stark contrast to Nezval's authorized collection of the time *Absolutní hrobař* whose apocalyptic vision never strayed from the wonders of the graveyard and junkheap. However, with *Absolutní hrobař* Nezval had gone as far as he could in the exploration of his Surrealist impulses, the automatism, the paranoiac-critical, the distant realities and the darkness that did not have a silver lining. As a member of the Surrealist group, an internationalist collective, Nezval was burdened by having to abandon the identity he felt so keenly, that of the boy from a small Moravian village who had made good in the big city, but who never really fit in with his sophisticated friends like Teige who had been born and were raised to inherit the urban cosmopolitan milieu of inter-war Prague.

Teige and Nezval's opposition boiled down to their disparate affinities where time and motion were concered. Teige believed that there was no time like the present and that motion represented the life force in action. Nezval, however, possessed a deep nostalgia for the past and an idealized image for the future. His horizon, therefore, was fixed at some distant point that evaded the present moment. Yet, on another level, there was another contradiction that stood between Teige and Nezval's vision for Czech Surrealism – Nezval's parting

Vítězslav Nezval, *100 sonetů: Zachránkyni věčného studenta Roberta Davida*. 3rd. ed. (Prague: František Borový, 1937), Dedication page.

gesture that hovered like a phantom on each page of works like *Sbohem a šáteček* (Adieu and a Hanky 1934). Nothing was as poignant as Nezval's image of the Surrealists' farewell at Prague's main station at the end of *Ulice*. As Nezval waved goodbye to his Parisian friends, the locomotive pulled out. Breton and Eluard disappeared into the distance never to return. In reality, Nezval loved unions only because he needed them to suffer the sweet sorrows of adieu. Once the farewells had been said, he happily continued on his journey through the streets and villages of his beloved native land. All he needed was the company of his beautiful memories. Memory for the poet was all that ever remained.

By March 1938, Breton was on his way to meet Trotsky during his extended stay in Mexico. According to his correspondence with Nezval, he had also been considering Prague, but the return trip never materialized.¹⁴³ Bukharin had been just been put on trial for counter-revolution and would be executed.

With Nezval itching for the beauty of the consummate parting gesture and Teige

¹⁴³ See Breton's letter from August 25, 1936 where he tells Nezval: "Uvažuje se o tom – poněvadž má finanční situace se stále nevyjasňuje – že by mě poslali na několik let do Prahy (nebude-li to do Mexika), abych tam vedl kurzy... Nebylo by to nádherné, kdybychom se mohli sejít na tak dlouho dobu? Ani Vám nemusím říkat, že jsem dal okamžitě souhlas." (It's being considered – because my financial situation still hasn't cleared up – that they'll send me to Prague for a few years (my emphasis) (if it isn't to Mexico) to teach some courses... Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get together for such a long period of time. I don't need to say either that I immediately gave my approval. Nezval, *Depeše*, 95. Nezval responds on October 16: I can't describe my regret over not being able to write to you at the end of August on the day your letter arrived in Prague (Nezval was in Moravia on holiday for the summer) to tell you what your long-term stay would mean for me and my friends. (Nemohu Vám vylíčit svou lítost, že jsem Vám nemohl napsat koncem srpna, v den, kdy Vás dopis přišel do Prahy, abych Vám řekl, co by Vs dlouhý pobyt v Praze znamenal pro mne a pro mé přátele Ibid. Since there is no written record of Nezval's reaction to the news that Breton would not be coming, one can only imagine the depths of his disappointment and wonder what impact the canceled trip had on his subsequent decision to split up the group.

trying desperately to hold the whole avant-garde together with the world coming down around their ears, by March something had to give.

The Center Cannot Hold

What else is left but to laugh

At your sorry way of life!

What was once cannot return

And the swan will sing its adieu¹⁴⁴

Robert David

Ironcially, an evening of friendly discussion (like so many before it) set in motion the sequence of events that brought Czech Surrealism to an end. This time the debate had turned ugly. On March 7, while in the wine bar U Loucha, Nezval and some of the other Surrealists had argued about recent events in the Soviet Union and Stalin. Nezval had come to the conclusion that the trials were not purges, but a necessary means to protect the proletarian revolution from the dangers of internal opposition. In the time since the Gide affair and the closing of

¹⁴⁴ In “Literarní mystifice,” Neumann summed up the content of the 43rd ballad “O lábutím zpěvu (On Swan Song) as “homosexualní” (homosexual, Neumann, “Literární mystificace,” 70. Although Neumann’s reading is plausible, I take the ballad’s content at face value given its context, the breaking up of the Surrealist group. This swan song motif was just another one of Nezval’s variations on bidding Surrealism adieu. As for homosexual love, Nezval kept love among and between men platonic (i.e. his deep admiration and affection for Breton).

Vsevolod Meierhold's theater in Moscow, Teige had become increasingly vocal about his opposition to the suppression of artistic freedom and open debate in the Soviet Union and within the KSČ.

In terms of how these events effected Prague, the debate centered around Teige's opposition to Neumann's attack on Gide in *Anti-Gide* and elsewhere in the communist press. Like Ehrenburg, Neumann characterized the aesthetic avant-garde as inherently “decadent” (dekadentní)¹⁴⁵ and formalist. At that time, the use of the term “decadent art” by critics on the left resonated with suppression of artistic expression in Nazi Germany under the rubric of *Entartete Kunst* (decadent art). For Teige who could not help but draw analogies, Neumann's discourse that parroted Moscow's official line differed little from Goebbel's invectives¹⁴⁶ in Berlin. The similarity of the discourse used to attack the art of aesthetic avant-garde in Berlin, in the Soviet Union and in the communist press at home (such as in *Anti-Gide*) made cultural defense the heart of the matter. Teige's

¹⁴⁵ Jiří Brabec, Vratislav Effenberger, Květoslav Chvatík and Robert Kalivoda, “Historická skutečnost a falešné vědomí aneb Karel Teige bez pověr a iluzí” (Historical Reality and False (bad?) Conscience or Karel Teige Without Superstitions and Illusions), Parts 1 and 2. *Orientace 3*, no. 1 (1968), 68. The article's title is an allusion to Neumann's 1937 tract attacking André Gide's *Retour: Anti-Gide: Nebo-li optimisus bez pověr a ilusi* (Anti-Gide: Or Optimism Without Superstitions and Illusions) which is being quoted here.

¹⁴⁶ Later in *Surrealimus proti proudu* (Surrealism Against the Current), Teige's definitive response to Nezval, he equates Goebbel's discourse about “zvrhlým uměním” (degenerate art) in Germany with Kerzhencev's “zrůdným formalismem” (perverted formalism) in the Soviet Union. Neumann's “hnilobným plodem decadence” (putrid fruit of decadence) completes the triangle of repression East, West and Center. Karel Teige, *Surrealimus proti proudu* (reprint: Prague: Společnost Karla Teiga, 1993), 19. Teige refuses to allow Neumann to revise the record, reminding readers that, before his ideological conversion to communism, Neumann had been a major proponent of Czech decadence, the very art he would now proscribe.

conclusion that the Stalinist line and National Socialism were two sides of the same dirty nickel when it came to censorship placed him on the side of Gide who had come to the same conclusion in *Retour*. Nezval, however, refused to accept the analogy. He could not equate Stalin, the great leader of the people with a Brown Shirt.

Two days after the dispute, Nezval contacted *Haló noviny* to inform them that he had disbanded the group. On March 11, reports of Nezval's action appeared in both the communist and fascist press (much to the surprise of the other Surrealists). The remaining members got together on March 14 to discuss how to respond. They decided to resolve the crisis by addressing the following points: 1) their position toward his attempt to split up the group, 2) his subsequent expulsion from the group, 3) the text of a letter to be sent to Breton, 4) the publication of another *Mezinárodní bulentin surrealismu* and 5) a formulation of the group's political position.¹⁴⁷

In addition, they criticized Nezval for the caliber of the members he had recruited to sign on to Surrealism in 1934. Either they were "dilettantes" (dilettanti) or had "nothing in common with Surrealism." (nemá nic společného se surrealismem)¹⁴⁸ The next day, the group placed an announcement in the *Ranní*

¹⁴⁷ See the commentary to *Surrealismus proti proudu* in Teige, *Zápasy o smyslu*, 661. The editors are quoting from the meeting's minutes preserved in the literary archive.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 661-662.

noviny (The Morning News) denying the reports of Surrealism's demise.¹⁴⁹ They argued that because Nezval acted unilaterally, he did not have the authority to disband the group. On the contrary, the group had kicked Nezval out:

...all the members of this group contend that Mr. V. Nezval does not have the right to liquidate the Prague Surrealist group which will last from here on out and continue in its activities with the cooperation of the international Surrealist movement. This collaboration was supported by the participation of Štyrský and Toyen in the recent international Surrealist exhibition in Paris. Mr. V. Nezval was unanimously expelled from the Prague Surrealist group.¹⁵⁰

The two factions continued to air their grievances against one another in public instead of resolving the matter in private. An urgent letter was dispatched to Breton in Paris who was getting ready to leave. Teige published “K případu Vítězslava Nezvala a surrealisticke většiny” (Concering the Case of Vítězslav Nezval and the Surrealist Majority) in *Ranní noviny* on March 17, detailing the points covered on March 14. Nezval then published his version of the story.

¹⁴⁹ “Surrealistická skupena není rozpuštěna,” (The Surrealist Group Has Not Been Split Up) *Ranní noviny* (Morning News), 15 March 1938, 4.

¹⁵⁰ ...konstatují všichni členové této skupiny, že p. V. Nezval není oprávněn likvidovat pražskou surrealistickou skupinu, která nadále trvá a bude prokračovat ve své činnosti a ve spolupráci s mezinárodním surrealistickým hnutím. Tato spolupráce byla osvědčena i účastí Štyrského a Toyen na nedávné mezinárodní výstavě surrealisticke v Paříži. Pan V. Nezval byl z pražské skupiny surrealisticke jednomyslně vyloučen. Ibid.

According to Nezval, since the group *he* (emphasis added) had founded in 1934 had not lived up to expectations either politically or aesthetically, he had the right to take any action he saw fit. Because of the political opinions expressed by some members with regard to the Soviet Union and the united front were “wrong” (nespravné) and “dangerous” (nebezpečné),¹⁵¹ he had to put a stop to the whole thing before any real damage had been done. He left the question of whether his actions had been justified to be decided by “those who have followed the activity of the group and my role in it.” (kdo sledovali činnost této skupiny a mou úlohu v ní)¹⁵² Julis Fučík, however, did not need to speculate about who was in the right in this instance. In his article published alongside Nezval’s he made it clear that no one had a greater right to do so than the movement’s founder and leading personality.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Vítězslav Nezval, “Nezval o likvidaci skupiny surrealistů,” (Nezval on the Liquidation of the Surrealist Group) *Tvorba* (Creation) 13, no. 12 (18 March 1938), 132.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Next to Nezval’s explanation for the breakup publishing on March 18 in *Tvorba*, Julis Fučík defended Nezval’s right to disband the group because he was its creative and spiritual leader: “Vždyť Nezval přece není jen “nějaký pan Nezval”, i kdyby to bylo tisícekrát opakováno rozhořčenými rozpuštěnci vždzt’ je to přece nejvýraznější tvůrčí osobnost bývalé skupiny surrealistů a vůbec básnická osobnost tak silná, že se na jejích křídlech dovedla propašovat na jakési “kulturní postavení” i lecjaká naprosto netvořivá a naprosto neplodná nula, mohoucí existovat jen v Nezvalově stínu.” But Nezval is not just “some Mr. Nezval even if it were repeated 1000 times by those exasperated individuals who have been disbanded; precisely because he is the most conspicuous creative personage of the former Surrealist group, not to mention the poetic personage who was so strong that on his wings he managed to smuggle in as some kind of “cultural figures” even all sorts of completely unoriginal and fruitless nothings who could exist only in his shadow) Julis Fučík, “Nezvalův projev” (Nezval’s Speech), *Tvorba* 13, no. 12 (18 March 1938), 132. If this characterization of Nezval doesn’t smack of the cult of personality, I don’t what does. Yet, personality is key here in terms of the conflict. Ironically, Fučík posthumously aquires a cult of his own. After the war, he became the symbol of communist

And so the controversy continued. On March 18, Breton responded to the Surrealist's telegram to him by writing a letter to his "dear friend" Nezval to compel him to reconsider for the sake of the collective, for the others. He appealed to Nezval's sense of Prague's importance in the defense of culture during a troubled time. "When every one here is afraid that each minute in Prague can decide the fate of civilization," (kdy se zde všichni obávají, že se v Praze může každým okamžikem rozhodovat o osudu civilzace)¹⁵⁴ Breton told him. To break would not just spell disaster for Czech Surrealism. Nezval's action could herald the end of civilization and culture. In order to persuade Nezval to retract his decision, Breton also appealed to Nezval's sentiment. He told him how he had just been looking at a little photo of the two of them wandering arm in arm through the Prague of their dreams. After viewing such a photo, Breton refused to believe that the intellectual and emotional bonds that kept them together had failed. He hoped that Nezval would realize that "in the face of all the unfavorable circumstances something unshakable certainly still unites us." (co navzdory všem nepříznivým vlivům nás určitě zase spojí)¹⁵⁵ Finally, he appealed to Nezval's vanity and sense of fairness. He begged him to be "magnanimous" (velkomyslný).

martyrdom during the Nazi occupation. Unfortunately, he did not have the opportunity to enjoy the honor as Stalin had since it was bestowed upon him posthumously.

¹⁵⁴ Nezval, *Depeše*, 97.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Although Breton urged Nezval and to respond immediately because of Breton's imminent departure to Mexico, the plea went unheeded.

However, the post-script to Breton's letter sheds light on why the heartfelt emotional appeal did not persuade Nezval to rethink the matter Breton's mistake was to conclude that Nezval was still interested in pursuing a relationship with him and the others. He had already packed up and was long gone. Now was not the time to schedule a reunion. But his biggest mistake was to bring up the question of Nezval's poetics. After all the cajoling, Breton abruptly changed his tune and told Nezval flat-out: "I don't have to tell you that I resolutely reject your poems: July 4, 1937, Three Elegies and The Twentieth Anniversary. *I request that without further ado you most categorically renounce them*" (Nemusím Vám říkat, že rozhodně odmítám Vaše básně: 4. červenec 1937, 3 smuteční básně a XX. Výročí. Žádám Vás, abyste je bez jakýchkoli okolků co nejkategoričtěji popřel).¹⁵⁶ In addition, he also made it clear that he would not allow Nezval to reform the group minus the members whom Nezval found objectionable, beginning with Teige. Breton's demand that Nezval disavow his work and make concessions to Teige must have been received like a slap in the face coming from someone Nezval idolized and called a friend. Breton would never have even known about the poems to make the demand had Teige not mentioned them. From

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 98.

the language of the post-script, it was obvious that Breton had taken Teige's side without even giving Nezval the benefit of the doubt. Nezval had been banished. Teige had seen to that. Teige, the unyielding advocate for free speech, had put on his hat as the official Surrealist censor. And to make matters worse, Breton was on his way to Mexico.

Why Breton felt he had to add this post-script at such a crucial time can be explained by the form and content of the poems in question. The first two were elegies written in memory to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic to mark the occasion of his death. In "4.VII. 1937," the Surrealist who had struggled for the dictatorship of the proletariat, extolled Masaryk, the great leader of a bourgeois state, for being the Son of the "Old Lord" (Starý Hospodář), "liberator" (osvoboditel) of the Czech nation.¹⁵⁷ His language in Three Elegies' rhymed quatrains was equally effusive and laced with nationalist symbolism. Here, Nezval addressed Masaryk both as the Czechs' immortal liberator and as his "departed Countryman (also from Moravia)," (zemřelý Venkovane) a man of the people, their savoir:

Your hat before us and Your Prudence

Gathers us together under the banner beating for Rusalka,

That is Your Fatherland, departed Countryman,

¹⁵⁷ "4. VII. 1937," In Vítězslav Nezval. *Dílo*. Vol. 37. *Pozůstalé básně* (Unpublished Works), 363 (1, 1) and (4, 9)

To whom the most shining among cities paid tribute.

We are under Your protection, under the protection of Your star.¹⁵⁸

The strong dose of patriotism Nezval distilled from Masaryk's legacy offered the right mixture to cure the ills of the republic. This was a more potent medicine than Lautréamont's revolutionary romanticism and Teige's constant criticism. He had created a Masaryk who could defy death, and who like the mythical knight sleeping under the magic mountain Říp would rise up again to save the day.

Masaryk's greatness had made Nezval a true believer in transcendence:

When necessary the Lord of the dead will arise

So that even those of little faith can see him

Just like this one of Your own, Liberator.¹⁵⁹

In his monument to the fallen statesman, Nezval had found a home among the Czech people who were mourning the loss of their great leader. Therefore, he spread the news about Masaryk (who had arisen) by publishing the poems, written in traditional meter, in the mainstream press where he would get a wider audience for his work as part of the official state obsequies. This strategy assured him

¹⁵⁸ Tvůj klobouk před námi a Tvoje rozvaha/nás svolá pod prapor bítí se za Rusálku,/jíž je Tvá otčina, zemřelý Venkovane,/kterému vzdala hold nejzářivější z měst./Jsme pod Tvoou ochranou, pod ochranou Tvých hvězd. Nezval, "Tři smuteční básně," (Three Funeral Odes). In Vítězslav Nezval. *Dílo*. Vol. 37. *Pozůstalé básně* (Unpublished Works) III (3, 1-3), 365. The symbol of the star is a chillingly portent of things to come.

¹⁵⁹ Až bude potřeba, Hospodář z mrtvých vstane/i pro malověrné, aby Ho viděli/jak tento jeden z Tvých, Osvoboditeli. Ibid. 4 (1-3).

greater exposure for his work, a broader audience he had ever hoped to have access to as a poet from a marginalized avant-garde group.

Yet, in his lyric pursuits, Nezval proved to be an equal opportunity troubadour. Nezval had published the third poem Breton had objected in the official anthology that celebrated triumph of the Russian Revolution. In this short poem, Nezval addressed as the Stalin the man of steel as “the great piano tuner” (veliký ladičí piana).¹⁶⁰ Once again Nezval walked off humming the “International” as he had at the end of *Neviditelná Moskva*. Stalin was the lyricist and socialism was the music that ensured the world would be saved and happiness would reign supreme. For Nezval, the “man of steel,” was a figure who could transform people who “break under the changeable temperatures” (praskají pod vlivem proměnlivé temperatury)¹⁶¹ into beings who emerged from Stalin’s forge tempered, brilliant, voices lifted in song.

Despite the fact Nezval chose short, disjointed lines of free verse to reinforce Stalin’s modernity and the fragmented nature of the moment the poem was no less conventional in intent than the Masaryk elegies. The contexts and forms may have been different, but in both cases Nezval employed his penchant for making historical figures larger than life whether the subject was a bourgeois

¹⁶⁰ “Báseň k dvacátému výročí říjnové revoluce” (Poem for the Twentieth Anniversary of the October Revolution) In Vítězslav Nezval. *Dílo*. Vol. 37. *Pozůstalé básně* (Unpublished Works), 367, (2) Another chilling metaphor in retrospect intended as the highest praise. Stalin becomes the human embodiment of universal harmony.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. (11-12).

or communist, among the living or dead. Politics were beside the point. What mattered to Nezval was greatness. Greatness for Breton and Teige was another matter completely. Anyone who used art to monumentalize leaders by concealing their flaws under a thick coat of lyric embellishment committed a cardinal sin against Surrealism and against culture.

Rather than to Breton, Nezval took his case to the youth of his country.¹⁶² On March 24, to a packed audience, he gave his reasons for calling the Surrealist experiment in Prague to a halt. Although Nezval claimed he had disbanded the group because he did not want his good name to be associated with enemies of Stalin, the real problem was Teige. Despite the fact Nezval had founded the Czech Surrealist group while Teige, from the sidelines, looked on, Teige was now in control. He had incrementally taken hold of power until he became the Surrealists' presumptive spokesman and leader. As far as Nezval's having once served a movement inimicable to Moscow, Nezval justified himself by arguing

¹⁶² Nezval does address the issue of Breton's post-script but not to Breton directly. When he gives his version of the events associated with the break up later that year in *Pražský chodec* he questions why the group has gone behind his back to complain about these specific Czech poems when Breton who is "very little informed the political and cultural history of Czechoslovakia" (je velmi málo zasvěcen do politické a kulturní historie Československa) Nezval, *Pražský chodec*, 73. Obviously, Nezval felt Breton was no fair judge of their merits. Here, he adds that he wrote two letters in response to Breton , one superficial and friendly the other advising him that his decision to disband the group was irrevocable. Ibid. 74. Nezval mentions that he weighed the matter greatly before writing. I have not found a record of these letters. They are not in the National Archive and were not published in *Depeše*. However in *Český surrealismus* there is a note that says Nezval did not respond by the time Breton had stipulated, April 8 (his departure date for Mexico) and that his response to the conflict came in the form of a letter to the rest of the French group, addressed to Benjamin Peret. Ibid., 92. The second letter that Nezval claims he wrote to Breton may be the letter to Peret since he mentions Peret's response in the following paragraph.

that he had been poorly informed on the issues. However, Teige was completely unrepentant. In January 1938, without asking anyone's permission, Teige had inserted a flyer into the exhibition catalogue for Štyrský and Toyen's show for which Nezval had contributed the Forward and Teige, the Afterword. Teige's essay transcended its subject. Rather than writing about the art and artists in question, he used the publication as anti-Stalinist propaganda:

In the crusade against independent art, against international avant-garde art currently launched in Berlin and Moscow, during the time when in Munich with the bombasts' screeching racket and with its success that upset the organizer of the exhibition Die entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art), when a substantial purge dumps the works of authors from the Left Front of Russian art from the Tret'akovskiy (get the Romanization) Gallery in Moscow and when the most well-known locus of theatrical poetry, the Meyerhold Theatre, falls victim to the the unscrupulousness of cultural reaction, it is no wonder that a wave of terror directed against work that is called "degenerate art" in Germany and "perverted formalism" in the Soviet Union, arises even in an environment where cultural life has heretofore carefully developed with a kind of uniformity and moved timidly through the opportunistic middle-

ground, in the heads of the adherents of venerable ideals of
academism that warrant suspicion. In this situation, old-timer
artists and the conservators of by-gone beauty believe that their
moment will still come, that the day will arrive when the
“perverted and pathological isms,” especially the fictive monster of
“formalism” and “the product of dregs and hysteria” that is
surrealism will wind up upon the pillory.¹⁶³

In this case, Teige’s genius for analogy outraged Nezval who resented the
fact Teige had dragged him into the conflict without asking his permission.
However, the problem went deeper than the matter of whether Teige had used the
show’s catalogue, a collective effort, to serve a political agenda of his own.
Because Nezval believed the world’s fate rested on Stalin’s shoulders, Teige had
committed a moral and intellectual error in “tossing Berlin and Moscow into one

¹⁶³V křížáckém tažení, které bylo proti nezávislému umění, proti mezinárodní avant-gardě vyhlášeno současně v Berlíně i v Moskvě, v době, kdy je v Mnichově s vřeštivým řečnickým povykem a s úspěchem, který byl s to zneklidnit pořadatele, uspořádána výstava Die entartete Kunst, kdy důkladná čistka vyhazuje díla autorů levé fronty ruského umění z Tret'jakovské galerie v Moskvě a kdy bezohlednosti kulturní reakce padá za oběť nejvýznamnější ohnisko scénické poezie, divadlo Vsevoloda Mejercholda, - není divu, že vlna teroru, namířeného proti té tvorbě, která se zve v Německu “zvrlhým uměním” a v Sovětském svazu “zrůdným formalismem”, vzbuzuje i v prostředí, kde kulturní život se až dosud opatrně rozvíjel v jakémusi příměří a pohyboval se bázlivě oportunistickým středocestím, v hlavách stoupenců staroslovanských ideálů akademismu naděje dosti podezřele. V této situaci domnívají se umělečtí penzisté a knozervátoři zašlých krás, že zase nadešla jejich chvíle, že přichází den, kdy “perverzní a patologické ismy”, zejména fiktivní obluda “formalismu” a ten “product kavárenské ssesliny a hysterie”, jímž je surrealismus, budou přibity na pranýř. Brabec, Effenberger, Chvatík and Kalivoda, “Historická skutečnost,” 72.

sack.” (hodit Berlín a Moskva do jednoho pytle)¹⁶⁴ By daring to act as official spokesman, Teige had not only betrayed Surrealism’s relationship with proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union, he had betrayed the spirit of Ducasse’s basic tenant of Surrealism. As Nezval reminded the students, using the maxim Teige was known for, Surrealism “is not just for one; it’s for all.” (není jen pro jednoho, je pro všecky)¹⁶⁵

According to Nezval’s view, once Surrealism’s populist message had been corrupted by Teige’s individualism, he could not let the movement continue in its present form. In order to preempt Teige’s bid for complete control, he had disbanded the group to prevent any future destruction. Now that even Breton was against him, Nezval had to fight for Surrealism on his own. The only place he could turn to for help was East where Stalin’s armies were preparing to strike against Hitler.¹⁶⁶ In less than four years, Teige and Nezval’s positions had come full circle. Teige, standing fast, was defending International Surrealism against its enemies and Nezval, his back turned to Paris, was walking off to Moscow, alone.

But the bitter polemic over Surrealism did not end with the accusations and name-calling in the press. Since the remaining Surrealists had decided to continue whether Nezval consented or not, the issue had not been settled. After

¹⁶⁴ Nezval, “Řeč k studenstvu o roztržce se skupinou surrealistů,” (Speech to the Student Body About the Split-Up of the Surrealist Group). In *Projekty z let 1931-41*, 380.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 384.

¹⁶⁶ The great irony was, that just at the moment when Stalin was purging the Party of those who were supposedly working for Nazi Germany, he was concluding his own pact with Hitler.

some months, the opposing sides took the debate back to the public so they could have the final word in print. First, the Surrealist Group of Prague published a tract called *Surrealismus proti proudu* (Surrealism against the Current) in which Teige told his version of the break-up, once again arguing that Nezval had no authority to split up the group. Teige's *Proti proudu* presented a clear and present danger that, through dialectical analysis, had to be set right.

Teige painted particularly unflattering portraits of all his detractors from the Left. However, he was harshest of all in his treatment of Nezval whom he characterized as reactionary in Surrealist clothing. By exposing Nezval as a hypocrite when it came to Surrealism, Teige proved that he was the last person qualified to determine its fate. In the tract, Teige dealt with his own objections to the poems that Breton had told Nezval to renounce. In Teige's opinion, the poems pandered to Nezval's chauvinist tendencies and were completely inimical to Surrealism's internationalist proletarian message.¹⁶⁷ Nezval's desire to mythologize heads of state or military leaders was no better than exalting the carnage of war undertaken for the sake of the God and fatherland as the futurists and Apollinaire had done to everyone's detriment. However, Teige argued that the poems were not just incompatible with Surrealism because Nezval celebrated the dictator who had orchestrated "the execution of Lenin's former colleagues"

¹⁶⁷ Teige goes on for five pages about Nezval's literary transgressions. Teige, *Proti proudu*, 40-45.

(popravy někdejších Leninových pracovníků).¹⁶⁸ The poems were objectionable because they failed the spirit of poetry on the contextual *and* (emphasis added) formal levels. Their conventional meter and heavy-handed symbolism were no more than a twentieth-century version of Biedermeier kitsch.

In the context of Teige's criticism, Nezval came out worse than Apollinaire.¹⁶⁹ Although Apollinaire had not been a social revolutionary in his spirit, he had been revolutionary at least in his technique. In his argument, Teige reduced Nezval to a political revisionist whose poetics went counter to everything Surrealism stood for. But what made matters worse was the insurmountable contradiction of works like "July 4" and *Absolutní hrobař*, which Teige considered to be an authentic expression of Surrealism and Dali's paranoiac-critical methods. Because of Nezval's obsession with his personal aesthetics coupled with his need for public approval, he had lost the critical judgment that had defined his best Surrealist efforts. Moreover, when it came to the matter of Nezval's bad poetry, Teige, at least, has not been fooled by the eternal student's *nom de plume*. To anyone in the know (such as Čapek),¹⁷⁰ it was obvious that "Nezval is hiding behind the pseudonym Robert David" (že za pseudonymem Roberta Davida se skrývá Nezval).¹⁷¹ Moreover, he concluded that even if the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 45.

¹⁷⁰ Teige also picked up on the "moravianisms" (moravismus). Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

poems had merit, they were of no consequence because “they obviously have nothing to do with Surrealism” (nemají ovšem nic společného se surrealismem).

Yet, Teige did not let Nezval off the hook for being a bad poet. One of the most serious accusations that he made against Nezval was that, in addition to being a bad poet, he was a very bad man – a chauvinist and, worse, an unrepentant anti-Semite. According to Teige’s account of the argument on the fateful evening that initiated the crisis, Nezval accused the Jews of responsible for the trials because they were behind intrigues carried out by spies like Bucharin and Meyerhold. The trials were the appropriate political response to “an international Jewish plot” (něco mezinárodní židovského).¹⁷² By calling attention to Nezval’s anti-Semitic tendencies, Teige implied that Nezval was no better than Hitler

Although Nezval may have hated the Jews who he believed were plotting against Stalin, his work displayed no evidence of hatred for Jewish culture. On the contrary, Nezval wrote more about Jewish figures and themes than just about any other contemporary Czech writer. He celebrated the mystical quality of the Jewish Graveyard and the ghetto’s vulgar underworld of misfits and outsiders, for their otherness. What Teige failed to understand was that, on the lyric level at least,

¹⁷² Ibid. 34.

Nezval identified with the Jews. Like the chosen people, he was fated to live life as a social outcast, reviled and unloved.

In the last book of his Surrealist trilogy, *Pražský chodec*, Nezval reminisced about his four years as a Surrealist. Like the hands of the clock on the Jewish town hall in Josefov Nezval turned back the clock to a time before Surrealism's modernity. There he wandered through Prague whose enchantment "creates a peculiar union of very archaic charms with the modern spirit" (tvoří zvláštní spojení velmi archaických půvabu s moderním duchem),¹⁷³ a bridge between Old World and New. In his solitude, he explored the mystical landscape populated by ghosts, back in a time where Teige could not get at him. Nezval consoled himself with his optimism. Life would go on; the world was not falling apart. Stalin, who appeared before Nezval "like a peremptory and redeeming damper on the speculative, problematic abstraction, like the directive for reality, the directive for peace" (rázné a spasitelné zabrzdění spekulativních abstraktnost, jako povel k realitě, jako povel k míře)¹⁷⁴ would see to it. The man who watched over the innocent souls of children had taken up space residence in Nezval's heart after Breton's abrupt departure. Nezval was fascinated by the depth of his feeling for "the man who seemed closer to my heart just now (how strange!) when so many heads are falling, have to fall." (ten muž se zdá být blízkým mému sdrci

¹⁷³ Nezval, *Pražský chodec*, 190.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 14.

právě ted' (jak je to zvláštní!), kdy padá, kdy musilo padnout tolik hlav)¹⁷⁵ On some level, Nezval identified Stalin as his *semblable*. He, too, had to be ruthless when it came to Surrealism in order to make way for the next wave because “a great new realism, prepared by Surrealism is coming, is on its way, is being born” (A veliký nový realismus, připravovaný surrealismem, přijde, je na cestách, zrodí se).¹⁷⁶ Nezval knew a higher phase in the evolution of the experiment had begun.

And in this new manifestation of his poetic existence, Nezval was neither Robert David, nor the Absolute Gravedigger. He had become the Prague Passerby whom he identified as every man whose love for the eternal, immortal city of Prague would redeem her no matter what the outcome. It is the Prague Passerby, who Nezval shows illustrated in a photo, his back to us carrying his bags, departing. This figure does not hate his Jews; he loves them. After all he has journeyed arm and arm with the greatest traveler and Jew of all, Isaac Laquedem, the Wandering Jew. It is Laquedem who, in 1902, acted as young Guillaume Apollinaire's tour guide in the magical twilight that turned even the ghetto squalor into a thing of beauty. It is Laquedem who is immortalized along with the Czech's capital in Apollinaire's prose story and his poetry of “Zone.” Here, in the company of the Jew Nezval found the transcendence he had been seeking, the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 109.

resurrection that would cure the terminally Surreal. The Jew had to die so that he could rise again:

The time has come. Every ninety to one hundred years a terrible illness strikes me. But I recover and then I possess the necessary strength for a new century of life.¹⁷⁷

And in Nezval's version of the story, Surrealism, like Christ, had to be born again. And in Nezval's version of the myth, there are the conspiracies and betrayals, the Pharisees and Judases he had to suffer to become a *savoir*. In the end, Surrealism, by sheer necessity, had to be put to the sword. Yet, as the optimist's cliché goes, when one door closes, another one opens. Even as he is leaving, he offers the hope that the human condition does not depend on Adam being forever banished from the Promised Land. Like the prodigal son he will return home in a different more beautiful manifestation. Such is the existence of a Prague passerby whose fate is “to discover oneself and wander and by wandering discover oneself” (*nalézat se a bloudit, nalézat se tím že bloudí*).¹⁷⁸ In the magical twilight before dusk, Surrealism would begin again.

¹⁷⁷ Le temps est venu. Tous les quatre-vingt-dix ou cent ans, un mal terrible me frappe. Mais je me guéris, et possède alors les forces nécessaires pour un nouveau siècle de vie. Guillaume Apollinaire, “Le Passant de Prague,” In *Hérésiarque et cie.* (Heratic and Co.) (Paris: Stock, 1948), 25.

¹⁷⁸ Nezval, *Pražský chodec*, 198.

EPILOGUE

In 1938, the troubles that led to the dispute between Nezval and Teige and Nezval's ideological defection attested to problems that extended beyond the scope of Czech Surrealism. When he was in Paris for the International Writers' Congress for the Defense of Culture (the Congress he had so sharply criticized in 1935), Nezval did not visit Breton to make amends. Instead, he visited Eluard and Aragon.¹ Nezval's decision to end Surrealism anticipated the rupture between Breton and Eluard that took place only a few short months later, and after that Breton's fallout with Dali. Once again the break-up was attributed to differences over the question of the Soviet Union and Surrealism's position toward the Communist Party. When forced into an ideological corner by Breton, Eluard chose Moscow at Breton's expense. Just three years earlier, the two had celebrated together with Teige and Nezval the pinnacle of Surrealist unity in Prague. Within the course of the intervening years, Teige and Breton were left holding the Surrealist umbrella as storm clouds loomed.

Although Teige had promised that the Czech Surrealist group would "forge ahead more resolutely against the current," (resolutněji postupovat proti proudu)² the year that had come in with such controversy ended quietly with Nezval having the final say. *Pražský chodec* (revised as a result of his polemic

¹ See the corresponding chronological note in *Český surrealismus* under July 25, 93.

² Teige, *Surrealismus proti proudu*, 67.

with the Surrealist group), Nezval's Surrealist swan-song, appeared in the fall. Its publication put an end to any possibility for reconciliation with Breton. At home, Teige's confident claim that Surrealism would continue again the current was difficult to fulfill given the fact that after Nezval's departure, there was no one left of his stature to direct the group's literary efforts. Although an attempt was made in late 1938, to publish another journal called *Lykantrop*, the project was never realized.³ This failure is not surprising. The journal *Surrealismus* had almost not seen the light of day. Nezval's letters to Breton attested to the problems and numerous delays that stood in the way of its publication.

The failure of group to carry on without Nezval reflected that fact that he had always been the force behind their literary experiments. Despite the fact that Teige had become the primary arbiter of Czech Surrealism's message, Nezval's poetry and prose (which was already well known from his Devětsil days) had gained a wider audience for its approval. And so the contradiction. Where Surrealism had attracted a new generation of young Czech artists (such as Ladislav Zívr, Zdenek Rykr, František Gross and František Hudeček), there had been no corresponding development on the literary front to pick up the pieces after Nezval's departure.⁴ This lack of continuity coupled with the unfavorable

³ See chronology in *Magnetická pole*, 23.

⁴ Poet and artist Jindřich Heisler joined the group in late 1938. His collaborations with Štyrský and, especially Toyen during the occupation and later were significant. However, the fact that

external conditions (censorship under the protectorate) made the situation almost impossible, but not quite. As was the case with Nezval's *Pražský chodec*, the movement, in fact, did not die. It went on to exist in another manifestation.

Ultimately, Czech Surrealism continued despite the limitations imposed on it by Hitler and war. Perhaps the reality of an external enemy made it easier for the Surrealists to focus on the fact that collaboration as the only hope for survival during a dangerous time. Although their activities were curtailed by their having been forced underground, several works of note were produced.⁵ In addition, the harsh climate made it all the more necessary for individual to compromise for the sake of the collective. With the younger generation came liberation from the strong personalities that had defined the fortunes of the first wave which had contributed to its tragic demise. After all, anyone who would try to exert his or her influence too visibly could have an invitation waiting for them to visit the authorities.

Autonomy afforded the next wave of Surrealists the possibility to explore the significance of the movement on their own terms in order to create a movement that would be able to survive occupation and war. Where the first

Surrealism was driven underground after 1939 made it impossible for Heisler's reputation to rise to that of Nezval's whose was established during the heady days of the First Republic.

⁵ I am thinking of Štyrský's book of drawings and text *Sny* (Dreams) from 1940 which did not appear in its entirety until 1970 and his collaboration with Heisler *Na jehlách těchto dní* (On the Needles of These Days). These works combine text and image in a seamless counterpoint of expression. Underground, the Surrealists continued their experiments in the visual arts. This included Teige who shifted his attention to the making of collage (a practice he began in 1935) when his critical activities were almost completely silenced.

wave's revolution had danced like a precocious child on the margin of bourgeois society, once outlawed, its pulse radiated to multiple locations. It was in this state Czech Surrealism was forced to operate for decades with few exceptions even after the Nazis threat had been overcome. Although the end of the war saw a brief, yet vital revival of international Surrealism in Prague, Klement Gottwald's⁶ successful putsch decided the country's attitude toward Surrealism in the post-war world. As Teige predicted, Stalin's policies toward Surrealism differed little from Hitler's.

Despite danger and repression, most of the most active Surrealists were able to survive the occupation with the exception of Jindřich Štyrský and Jaroslav Ježek. In Štyrský's case, the alcoholism that had destroyed his health⁷ finally caught up to him in 1942. Ježek went into exile in New York and died of natural causes. Heisler who decided not to register with the authorities as a Jew (a decision which would have certainly led to his deportation and death) lived in hiding until the end of the war. However, it was more difficult to survive the

⁶ Klement Gottwald (1896-1953) was the head of the Czech communist party who orchestrated the putsch against the democratically elected government in 1948. One of Stalin's most ardent supporters in the Soviet Bloc, Gottwald, in the early fifties, settled pre-war scores with show trials similar to those that took the life of Bukharin in the late 1930's. Záviš Kalandra, the Surrealist critic, became one of Gottwald's victims during this period. Gottwald proved incapable of surviving without his hero; he succumbed on the heels of Stalin's death.

⁷ During his stay in Paris in 1935, Štyrský's was stricken and hospitalized. Nezval was forced to leave him in Paris to recuperate. According to Nezval's account in *Ulice*, Štyrský's condition was grave and there were doubts about his survival. After his return, the group still worried about the fragile state of his health and whether he would be able to begin work again. Fortunately, his recovery marked the beginning of a renewed vitality in his creative efforts.

second winter that set in the wake of the putsch. After 1948, Toyen and Heisler fled to Paris as well as the group's psychology expert Bohuslav Brouk⁸. Kalandra paid the highest price for his pre-war opposition to Stalin's regime; in 1950, he was sentenced to death by the government for crimes against the state and executed despite Breton's attempt to intervene.

As for Teige, his fortunes after liberation did not much improve. But the fact that he did not chose exile after the Communist take-over meant a great deal in terms of Surrealism's continued existence. Just before February 1948, under his leadership Teige formed a new Surrealist group made up of a new generation of artists committed to its philosophy.⁹ However, Teige suffered greatly for not going abroad. For political reasons, he was unable to work or publish the criticism that had always served as the focal point of his life. In 1950, at the same time Kalandra was being delivered to his fate, a campaign was launched against him in the press where he was brutally denounced for his avant-garde activities before the war.¹⁰ Sadly, his former friend Nezval who had become under the Communist a leading literary figure joined in on the side of Teige's detractors. The next year at fifty-one, Karel Teige, the leading theorist and interpreter of the Czech

⁸ Brouk (1912-1978) eventually wound up in London. Toyen stayed in close connection with Breton until his death in 1966.

⁹ *Karel Teige 1900-1951*, 380. According to Eric Dluhosch Teige was marked with the label "Trotskyite degenerate," a malady from which few opponents of the regime ever recovered. Teige, *Minimum Dwelling*, Translator's Introduction, xi.

¹⁰ Ibid.

vanguard, was dead of a heart attack.¹¹ After his death, his personal papers were confiscated by the secret police. When Teige's state security file was finally opened after the Velvet Revolution almost nothing of Teige's manuscripts, correspondence and other papers remained.¹² One can only imagine the enormity of this loss.

Although Nezval fared far better as the Communists' leading man of letters, his work did not. Nothing he wrote after 1938, ever achieved the originality, vitality and sheer volume of the poetry, prose, drama and criticism he produced as a Surrealist. In some way, Nezval paid dearly for the popularity and adulation he had so desperately desired.¹³ Yet even after his defection to socialist realism, Nezval did not relinquish the ties to his Surrealist past. Surrealism's subversive unions were as much a part of his lyric imagination as his penchant for generals, flowers and children. For this reason, even though the movement had officially been officially proscribed, Nezval's enormous influence on the first generation of post-war ensured its official survival, albeit between the lines.

¹¹ Initially Teige's death was shrouded in controversy as rumors spread of his having committed suicide. Although proven not to be true, the scandal (which was useful to Teige's detractors) persisted. The scandal surrounding his death was given fuel for fire because of the suicides of Teige's wife Jožska Nevařilová and his companion Eva Ebertová shortly thereafter. The three had been living together since 1941. The unorthodox nature of the Teige household proved that his views regarding the destruction of the oppressive bourgeois family were not just lip-service; he actually practiced what he preached. Such non-conformist behavior could hardly have been approved of by the Communist authorities.

¹² *Minimum Dwelling*, Translator's Introduction, xi.

¹³ Teige's identity as a critic precluded the need for the outside recognition that sustained Nezval's ego.

Sadly, Nezval's having been immortalized as the Poet Lauriat of socialist realism and poet to the gods did not ensure he would have a long life. Like Teige, he died relatively young, at the age of fifty-eight.¹⁴

In the end, it would be simple to conclude that Teige and Nezval's avant-garde journey from Devětsil's joyous beginnings to the convulsive current of Surrealism ended in tragedy with the contradictions forever unresolved. Yet, in Nezval and Teige's case, theirs was a tragedy transcended. From opposite sides of the ideological fence, each tried in his own way to the seeds that would, in a more favorable climate, would blossom and bear fruit. Ultimately, Surrealism did not give up its ghost even after Breton's death in 1966. The experiment continued in Prague as it had all along. Despite censorship, wars, occupations, and revolutions, Czech Surrealism lives on, testimony to the power of its creative legacy.

¹⁴ Longevity was certainly not a Surrealist trait; most died young. Only Toyen in her Parisian refuge lived to the ripe old age of seventy-eight.

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