

# A QUEER FRAME OF MIND

Some thoughts on queer writing, surrealism  
and liberated space, by way of an introduction

The mere word ‘freedom’ is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism. It doubtless satisfies my only legitimate aspiration. Among all the many misfortunes to which we are heir, it is only fair to admit that we are allowed the greatest degree of freedom of thought. It is up to us not to misuse it. To reduce the imagination to a state of slavery—even though it would mean the elimination of what is commonly called happiness—is to betray all sense of absolute justice within oneself. Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction; enough, too, to allow me to devote myself to it without fear of making a mistake (as though it were possible to make a bigger mistake).<sup>1</sup>

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1 Breton, André, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, University of Michigan Press, Anne Arbor, 1982 (Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, trans.), page 4.

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So wrote André Breton in 1924. I read the words over a half-century later and they have stayed with me ever since. So, let me start this short discussion with an unadorned statement of fact. I must dismiss any pretense of scholarly distance concerning the subjects to be discussed here; to do otherwise would be impossible for me. My discovery of surrealism—and the kinds of claims, like the one above, it so often makes—transformed and tormented me.

I stumbled upon the movement in my adolescence, through a circuitous path that wound (and still winds) through some of the dodgier neighborhoods of popular culture. It was not, I admit, an unusual trajectory for a boy faced by both the onrush of his young manhood and the emergence of his artistic—the word is the most serviceable one available—inclinations. I came to it, its ideas and worldview, its practices and products, through the painters first, as so many others have. I saw those landscapes through dazzled eyes: the endless horizons of Tanguy and the teeming worlds of Max Ernst. That was the beginning for me: a glimpse of infinite, volatile, gorgeous other places. Worlds I wanted, but could never get to. Worlds I thought I would have to create for myself if I were ever to land there.

From the artists, I went deeper into the labyrinth of surrealism; I found the writers, the delirious, glittering torrent of words, the poems, the automatic writing and the major statements, those *Grand Grimoires* of the movement: *Nadja*, *Paris Peasant*, *Treatise on Style*, *Capital of Pain*, *Mad Love*. Nothing could have been a more powerful enchantment; these texts told me that language could change everything. In their pages I learned that the dizzying worlds I glimpsed in the paintings were *already here*, inside this one, waiting to be found. Every page was a revelation, a guidepost leading me deeper into the pulsating maze.

And the further I went, the closer I came to the Minotaur at the

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heart of all this wonder—André Breton, a figure that both fascinated and repelled me. There was no escaping him. He presided over the birth of the movement and kept its flame alive, with great tenderness, passion, violence all the years of his life. He was a man of great talent and intelligence, enormous (by all reports) charisma, profound conviction, moral rigor, deep radical commitment, terrible stubbornness and inflexibility, an unfathomable strain of the reactionary and a troubling anti-feminism. Most problematic for me personally at the time of my discovery, Breton was, not to put too fine a point on it, a homophobic prick and I was discovering the many interesting complexities of my homosexuality.



My coming out transformed and tormented me as well. By a curious coincidence (or, perhaps in keeping with our theme here, an incident of *objective chance*) I began to come out at a time quite close to the one in which I was discovering surrealism, which means when I was rather young and at school. Happily, I did so in a large city with several universities, multiple languages, a vibrant cultural scene and a strong tradition of left-leaning politics. This fortunate confluence of circumstances meant that there was a queer youth group to join—one run by men already active in the (then) radical Gay Lib movement. Those men, some of whom remain friends to this day and all of whom I honor as mentors, were my entry point into *another take* on the passion for radical change. They represented for me the culture of desire gay men had begun to create, one that seemed related—somehow—to that proposed by the Surrealists, but unblinkered by Breton's prejudices.

The movement I was introduced to was committed to liberating

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desire and sexuality, sought to create new types of social networks, outside the norms of the family and rooted in fairly radical ideas about elective affection, community and friendship. It—daily—rediscovered the hidden spaces of the city and libidinally revived them. It wanted to change overarching structures to conform more to the need for self-realization—self-creation even—than to an arbitrary idea of productivity. It was informed by the erotic and it was joyous. Needless to say, I loved it.

But even as I was in the midst of my discovery, this strain of liberationist politics was approaching a terrible *detournement*. I caught its final moments of ascendancy, and, though it (like surrealism) still exists in ways both subterranean and somewhat visible, we all know how this part of the story ends: with a gay movement whose principal concerns are marriage and military service. Not quite the *visionary ardor* by which I was thrilled.



Still despite such disappointments, my development as a man and a writer was marked in profound ways by these two radical visions of the world and its possibilities, and it troubled me to acknowledge the contradictions that seemed to exist between them. The more I read, the deeper my discomfort grew. Awareness of Breton's nastiness is widespread and undeniably accurate. The evidence of his homophobia is littered across the historical record; he threatened, for example, to walk out of the now-famous surrealist group discussions on sex if the general tone of support for homosexual activity continued<sup>2</sup>. Still, despite the many

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2 See the "Second Session" in José Pierre, *Investigating Sex: Surrealist Discussions 1928-1932*, Verso, London & New York, 1992 (Malcolm Imrie, trans.).

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issues of its *de facto* “leader,” the movement was volatile and diverse. It hosted a wide variety of struggling viewpoints, saw a lot of schism and hurled accusations, and included queers of all kinds. To name just a few: Rene Crevel, Louis Aragon, Claude Cahun, Pierre Molinier. Moreover, in some ways it was *very queer* in its concerns. Consider for a moment that:

- Surrealism was a movement—like the stream of Gay Liberation that most interests us here—*with desire at its very heart*. And;
- Both were self-consciously interested in subjectivity and the *way the mind operates*;
- Finally, the two movements share an interest in the way these things—subjectivity and desire—*affect the world*.

These similarities, though broad, are significant historically, politically, and in terms of the writing that came out of the two movements, and—certainly—in terms of the writing collected here, which this essay is intended to introduce. Let us, therefore, briefly consider them in turn while looking at a few examples.

Surrealism’s concern with desire and love is one of its most central motifs, trumpeted from the earliest years of its history. In the 1930’s Breton had already pronounced its importance:

I have never ceased to identify the flesh of the being  
I loved and the snow of the peaks in the rising sun. I  
have tried only to know the hours of love’s triumph,  
whose necklace I here clasp about your throat. Even the  
black pearl, the last one, I am sure you will understand

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what weakness attaches me to it, what supreme hope of *conjunction* I have placed on it. I do not deny that love has a difference with life. I say it should vanquish, and in order to do so, should rise to such a poetic consciousness of itself that every hostile thing it meets should melt in the hearth of its own splendor.<sup>3</sup>

The surrealist writers conceived of desire as primordial, transformational and overpowering. Desire was a force capable of uniting opposites and dissolving oppositions. In their work it was a power that unveiled the marvelous and fueled freedom and revolutionary fervor, both fostering and nourishing a capacity to transform the world. It operated at an almost cosmic pitch and was a filter through which they viewed life's tumult of activity. Few avant-garde movements would produce as much love poetry, or as much pornography (albeit published in secret, unacknowledged—at first—editions.) Among their titles are these: *Liberty or Love!*, *Irene's Cunt*, *Libertinage*, *Mad Love*, *The Public Rose* and *Love, Poetry...* a rush of dazzlingly erotic incantations and images in their own right, and books in whose pages the cult of passion is taken to its furthest limits.

Breton would dedicate a volume, *Nadja*, to detailing his obsession with a woman (and his shameful treatment of her.) The strange narrative is an account of how his single-minded passion transformed his experience of life and the city of Paris, while provoking a psychic crisis and releasing a parade of odd, and oddly meaningful, coincidences. Other figures around the movement would write books investigating similar themes as well; the “dissident” surrealist (as he is

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3 Breton, André, *Mad Love*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1987, (Translated by Mary Ann Caws) page 114-116.

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often characterized) Georges Bataille produced astounding erotic texts that develop an idiosyncratic “mysticism” in which the entire universe is conceived of as throbbing with a poetic and erotic energy. A tension he describes as “... the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity.”<sup>4</sup>

The surrealists saw love and eroticism as revolutionary, a matter sufficiently important to be a basis for the new way of life they were developing for themselves. Statements such as this underline the point: “...Love demands the sacrifice of every other value: status, family and honour. And the failure of Love within the social framework leads to Revolt.”<sup>5</sup>

This belief in the political and personal importance of desire is a trait they can arguably be said to share with the early gay radicals. It is apparent in many seminal queer texts, such as John Rechy’s *The Sexual Outlaw*, which argues for the revolutionary significance of promiscuity in opposing conventional morality and repressive legislation. Other writers made even more vehement cases, like this one by Shively:

Release all the armor and the shackles, open all the pores and holes up for sexual communication. No restraint in any way. Multiple loves—amoeba-like as in orgies at the baths—single couplings, perhaps between subway stops or between classes or on the way shopping. We must be open at all times for sexual activity; in fact not make it an in-between action, but

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4 Bataille, Georges, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1986, (Mary Dalwood, trans.) page 25.

5 The “Manifesto on l’Age D’Or,” in André Breton, *What is Surrealism: Selected Writings*, Monad Press, New York, 1978, (Franklin Rosemont, ed.) page 328.

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make every action sexual.”<sup>6</sup>

The surrealists and the authors of the early radical queer milieu, though operating in different eras and from wildly divergent positions, seem in agreement on some basic assumptions: sexuality, desire, passion are powers in the human psyche and the world, and are valid, important ways in which people connect with each other. They overlap in the conception of desire and love as being capable of disrupting and transforming ordinary relationships, social organization and consciousness.

This last term, the question of consciousness, brings us in some ways to another point of similarity. One finds an active investigation of how the mind actually works and an interest in subjectivity—how it is constructed, displayed, deployed—in the writing of both groups. Though a concern of almost all modernist writing, the surrealist group made mental activity a particularly central part of their creative research. This interest begins with the movement’s earliest statements; the first manifesto would launch a definition of surrealism as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought.”<sup>7</sup> This fascination would extend through much, not to say most, work produced thereafter. Operating from such a focus, surrealist texts would follow the movements of the mind precisely: tracking the twists and leaps in verbal consciousness, the sudden focuses and, contrarily, shifts of attention, the way awareness slides across some things and the paradoxical way in which other things

6 Shively, Charley, “Indiscriminate Promiscuity as an Act of Revolution” in *Gay Roots: Twenty years of Gay Sunshine*, Winston Leyland (ed), Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 1991, page 262.

7 Breton, 1982, op cit, page 26.

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suddenly appear in a flash, freighted with enormous “meaning.” They would pursue the concern through their experiments with trance states, automatic writing, the recording and study of dreams, but also through the work they did with their own lives and images (as in the *corpus* of the artist and writer Claude Cahun, for example) a specific practice that connects up with the approaches of many queer creators.

In fact, in some respects, queer authors might have preceded the surrealists in the literary exploration of the nature and activity of the mind (albeit with a somewhat different focus) and although a great deal of prose, historical and contemporary, concerns itself with drawing psychologically compelling portraits, comparatively less of it has so deliberately foregrounded mental activity as a kind of primary content as queer writing. It is possible to speculate concerning the reasons for this; the conjunction of—until quite recently—an awareness that one is psychically *different* from most people with the need for an almost paranoid awareness of the threat of arrest and ostracism might incline one to monitor one’s inner life fairly closely, but for our purposes, the textual artifacts themselves are of more immediate concern. From the earliest periods in which it was even possible to hint at “unusual” mental states or inclinations in publicly circulated texts, queers were creating such artifacts. One need only think of the psychologically and textually dense body of work produced by Henry James, which is certainly the most celebrated case and now firmly ensconced in the canon. But there were others delving into the possibilities of cultivating and exploring the psyche, of tracing the impact of impression and sensation as it passes across a consciousness. It certainly required an established context for Walter Pater to write:

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to

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maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge...<sup>8</sup>

Nor did this queer concern with the nature and possibilities of subjectivity vanish with the turn of the century and the trial of Pater's most famous student, Oscar Wilde. It is a nearly continuous current in what was, until the Sixties, an underground river of gay writing, clearly present in the work of the Beats and their contemporaries. Burroughs' experiments with cut-ups in particular were a self-conscious expansion of the surrealist use of automatism and were undertaken with Brion Gysin, who had briefly been associated with the surrealist group, providing a vital historical link between the two traditions of writing. During the same period, the aforementioned John Rechy's writing appeared, containing vivid passages that suggest a related exploration of subjectivity. The opening of his *City of Night* is telling:

Later I would think of America as one vast City of Night stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard—jukebox-winking, rock-n-roll moaning: America at night fusing its darkcities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness.

Remembering Pershing Square and the apathetic

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<sup>8</sup> Pater, Walter, *The Renaissance*, The Modern Library, New York, no date provided, page 197.

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palmtrees. Central Park and the frantic shadows. Movie Theatres in the angry morning-hours. And wounded Chicago streets... Horror-movie courtyards in the French Quarter—tawdry Mardi Gras floats with clowns tossing out glass beads, passing dumbly like life itself... Remembering rock-n-roll sex-music blasting from jukeboxes leering obscenely, blinking many-colored along the streets of America strung like a cheap necklace from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to Market Street, San Francisco ...

One-night sex and cigarette smoke and rooms squashed in by loneliness...

And I would remember lives lived out darkly in that vast City of Night, from all-night movies to Beverly Hills mansions.”<sup>9</sup>

Here the sense of a mind moving across experience is palpable; slight details loom large, defining whole cities, entire relationships. One feels an intimacy with the narrative voice, tracking its own processes from the initial statement “I would think” that establishes the tone of everything to follow: “think,” “remember,” “remembering” are the operative verbs in the passage, setting all the lavish imagery within a space of subjectivity. Words are compounded, “darkcities” and “many-colored” among them, whose unexpected marriage suggests the breakneck speed of consciousness, an evocation given almost irresistible force by the prose rhythms. Time and space and the travel across or through them are condensed, displaced and mirrored in the tension between a fluid narrative consciousness and the concrete specificity of language.

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9 Rechy, John, *City of Night*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, page 9.

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Rechy's catalogue of places and their emotional and psychic impact takes us to the third point in this (necessarily partial) catalogue of cross-fertilizations. From the mechanics of the mind in itself, we pass to the ways and means by which such subjectivity interacts with, permeates and shapes our lives and the world; a theme, which, in a sense, synthesizes the two others. Taking the mind and its functioning along the vector of desire must, necessarily, demonstrate that mind's *relationship to something*. One of the principal areas explored by the Surrealist Group for such a relationship lies in their ideas about the dream.

A model of dream and reality as interdependent and overflowing into one another is the central focus of Breton's *The Communicating Vessels*. In that book long, winding sentences move from dream images to paintings, from women encountered on the street to those in his imagination. Signs and significances erupt around him as the author moves through his days. It is a book in which, in the words of critic Mary Anne Caws, "Breton shows at some length, the relation of his own dreams to everyday life, the similar structure in each, and how each works towards the 'reconstitution' of himself..."<sup>10</sup> which is to say who he is and how he operates in life—the ways in which dream and waking life have an equal part in *constructing us*.

However, the theme of the mind's relationship to some *other*, of the overlap of physical and psychic life, would be considered by the Surrealists in ways more far-ranging than the correspondences between dream life and waking activity, regardless of how compelling that puzzle would remain for them. The investigation would be extended to the relationship of interior life to the world's physicality itself, its blunt

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10 Caws, Mary Ann, "Linking and Reflections: André Breton and his Communicating Vessels," in *André Breton Today*, Anna Balakian and Rudolf E. Kuenzli (eds), Willis Locker & Owens, New York, 1989, page 93-94.

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facts, and—more often than not—to the city and the urban landscape. The surrealists' practice of aimless wandering through Paris' streets and arcades, their endless hunts through the flea markets in search of some numinous trinket provides a key illustration of this concern in the group's daily activities, but it also occupies a prominent place in surrealist writing. Aragon offers a particularly potent statement of the way in which the mind and the city interact in his *Paris Peasant*:

The whole fauna of human fantasies, their marine vegetation, drifts and luxuriates in the dimly lit zones of human activity, as though plaiting thick tresses of darkness. Here, too, appear the great lighthouses of the mind, with their outward resemblance to less pure symbols. The gateway to mystery swings open at the touch of human weakness and we have entered the realms of darkness. One false step, one slurred syllable together reveal a man's thoughts. The disquieting atmosphere of places contains similar locks which cannot be bolted fast against infinity.<sup>11</sup>

Aragon's readiness to slide across the dividing lines between a street or a building and the world of human thought or the symbolic order points to a key iteration of surrealist ideas about the interplay of world and mind. Here bricks and mortars take "reality," which is to say meaning, through the way in which they respond to, or resonate with, the people moving among them; the way in which they reflect and play out within the arena of their desires. Aragon tackles these themes

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11 Aragon, Louis, *Paris Peasant*, Exact Change, Boston, 1994 (Translated by Simon Watson Taylor) page 13.

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through skewed, detailed meditations on shop windows and the signage of bars. In his carefully constructed paragraphs he demonstrates, with a precision that is almost an embodiment, the dialogue between things and the *experience* of things. The surrealist landscape becomes, in short, a living place—a kind of relationship.

Queer men too have hymned the city and the multifarious life to be found there, writing exceptionally evocative statements about the erotics of streets and parks, subway platforms and alleys. The literature of cruising, for example, is to a significant extent as much about an *experience of time and place* as it is about sex. Edmund White, in his extraordinary *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, writes of time spent in the old piers:

A wind said incantations and hypnotized a match flame up out of someone's cupped hands. Now the flame went out and only the cigarette pulsed, each draw molding gold leaf to cheekbones.

There are qualities of darkness, the darkness of gray silk stretched taut to form the sky, watered by city lights, the darkness of black quartz boiling to make a river, and the penciled figures of men in the distance, minute figures on—is that a second story? What are they doing up there? A cigarette rhymes its glow with my own across the huge expanse that has shattered its crystal lining to the ground.<sup>12</sup>

The passage underlines the mutual permeability of perceiver and

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12 White, Edmund, *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*, Penguin Books, New York, 1980, pages 1-2.

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perceived during the act of observation; the figure takes on a gold that is purely imaginary, the river becomes boiling black quartz in an act that is at once lived experience and takes place entirely mentally. The intensity of the language (which coincidentally enough echoes something of Aragon's concern with varieties of darkness and the way in which they speak to interior life) is given additional power through the longing it both contains and performs, reflecting the eroticism of a place and the infinitely mutable encountering of it. It reveals the way in which the perceiver *takes part* in place itself in a way that strikingly parallels much of the surrealists' writing, making of these two traditions, too, a series of "communicating vessels"; creating a landscape throbbing with desire, a vividly self-conscious universe that seems alive, and endlessly fornicating. As Annie Lebrun, a contemporary surrealist suggests:

If there is such a thing as a surrealist revolution, it is inseparable from the affirmation of desire as a physical intuition of the infinite.<sup>13</sup>

And there are moments in queer life (and art) of which much the same could be said.



At this juncture, it would be pertinent to point out that LeBrun's comment has additional significance deriving from the fact that it is made by a contemporary surrealist; it underlines that surrealism remains a living tradition. Despite the eagerness on the part of official literary

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13 LeBrun, Annie, "Desire—A Surrealist 'Invention'" in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, Mundy, Jennifer (ed), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001, page 308..

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and art history to embalm the movement (and regardless of the dispute about the exact date it “ended:” World War II, the death of Breton in 1966, etc.), the fact is that many are still very much concerned with the central surrealist issues, and continue exploring them with or without a critical *imprimatur*. There are numerous contemporary writers (of all sorts of sexual and identity categories) publishing who make no secret of their surrealist interests and/or affiliations; nor did the particular kind of literary exploration of subjectivity done by queer authors, discussed above, stop mid-century. That tradition, too, continued in the post-Stonewall era and down into our own day. One can see it in the work of the “Violet Quill” group whose tracing of the psychic vagaries of life in the gay ghetto and the psychological stakes of self-presentation are deeply textured by attention to phenomenological detail. One can trace a line (although wandering) from them to someone as distant from their immediate concerns as Dennis Cooper whose investigations of psychological states, particularly extreme ones, and the fine line between “fantasy” and “reality” owe some debt to the nineteenth and turn-of-the century writers<sup>14</sup> already referenced, and which could be linked to at least a few of the concerns of surrealism. Of note in this regard too is the recent novel *Skin Lane* by Neil Bartlett, a writer whose interest in such precursors to surrealism as the Symbolists is well established. In that narrative, the handsome young man who is the object of the protagonist’s desire makes a seemingly literal transition from the realm of dreams to the actual flesh and blood world.

Though the continued vibrancy of surrealism, “official” and “unofficial” alike, and the whole range of queer writing pleases me

<sup>14</sup> An interesting investigation of such a debt can be found in James Annesley’s “Contextualizing Cooper” published in Leora Lev (ed.), *Enter at Your Own Risk: The Dangerous Art of Dennis Cooper*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Madison/Teaneck, 2006.

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mightily, it was the submerged parallels between them that formed and informed my intellectual, literary and political life for so many years. That sheer staying power led to the suspicion that what had so long fascinated me might have equal power for other queer men, other queer writers. I was haunted by the possibility that other people were roaming the nexus of queerness and surreality in *deliberate* ways. I wanted to know if there were any such.

Well, there were. That exploration is precisely what the writers collected here are doing; these texts take the *influence* of surrealism and call back, responding to it as a form of mental adventure, or harmonizing with its focus on desire and the marvelous, or tracing the living activity of the mind, but regardless of the details each of them are aware of the ground on which they've staked their claim. They set out and explore those rich, provocative and radical overlapping worlds with some remarkable results. They clamor for the marvels that lie just beyond—or buried inside—what we see everyday, and they manage to unveil them just a little, each in his own particular way.

Which brings me to a few *caveats*. This book is emphatically *not intended* to be an anthology of “*queer surrealists*” as such—hence the qualifier of the subtitle. The writers collected here may or may not so designate themselves, (to be honest it wasn't a criterion for selection, and I never asked, because that is not the point of the book). *Madder Love* is intended, rather, to look at the way certain themes, concerns, points of view and kinds of literary “material” are common to both literary traditions, and the way in which these resonances affect contemporary writing. Surrealism is, therefore, given its widest possible sense in this book. For that reason some of the work contained here may appear more or less “surreal” at first glance; however, it will undoubtedly prove useful to the reader to bear in mind the truest sense of the “sur” in

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surrealism as meaning a step beyond ordinary perception, and one can as easily reach for that other place by burrowing through the surface of the real as by stretching it out.

Also, I did not fuss over the well-policed borders of genre while reading submissions. *Madder Love* contains a rich diversity of material that will trouble easy categorization. It also, I'm delighted to say, contains work by writers who are equally difficult to classify—publishing work that might generally be regarded as more “literary” on one hand, or more “genre” focused on the other. I believe there is interesting—and excellent—work being done on both sides of that increasingly difficult to maintain boundary and surrealism's influence is felt as much in popular culture as it is in the halls of the academy or the slopes of any self-proclaimed Parnassus. At any rate, such generic divisions are deeply contested, theoretically suspect and of dubious critical value.

I should note as well that I have chosen to focus on men in this anthology simply because that is the literary tradition with which I am most familiar as a writer and an editor. Given the presence of queers of all kinds in both the original surrealist group and related activity since then, there are undoubtedly similar books to be made in relation to women and others, and I encourage those with the necessary expertise to take up the challenge. I will certainly be among such titles' readers if, and when, they appear. Finally this book anthologizes prose and hybrid forms of writing, largely because there have already been several anthologies exploring surrealist-informed poetry.

Looking back now to when I first issued the call for submissions for *Madder Love*, I remember thinking to myself how strange the underlying concept might appear to readers given Breton's notorious homophobia. A number of friends even emailed me asking about this seeming paradox. But the truth is that the paradox itself is an important

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part of this project. This book wants to reclaim—in the small ways it can—what is beautiful, complex and untamed in surrealism for queers and to assert what is beautiful, complex and untamed in queerness for surrealism, because both are vital in a world sliding towards a deadening, market-driven homogeneity.

Between these covers are a group of writers whose work (my own contribution aside) illustrates why the intersection of queerness and surrealism remains so rich and so compelling. I am deeply grateful to the authors, because within this writing lies—thanks to their audacity, imagination and willingness to take risks—a little of the freedom that Breton, for all his contradictions, cared for enough to write of with so much passion. And, let us admit that if we can make some small place for freedom of thought and experience even simply in our writing and the stories we tell each other, that is—at least—a good beginning.

I hope you find some measure of it in your reading here today.

Peter Dubé