THE ROMANTIC FAIRY TALE AND SURREALISM

Marvelous Non-Sense and Dark Apprehensions

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[ABSTRACT] Romanticism and surrealism shared a fascination with the fairy tale. Yet each was beholden to specific historical moments and particular aesthetic demands. What they wanted were not the same. This article considers how the romantic fairy tale nevertheless functions as a 'seed' for surrealists. Contagions, commonalities, and contrasts between the two movements are briefly outlined. A selection of fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen is used to demonstrate how a host of visual reinterpretations including lithographs, photo-collages, and video art by twentieth-century surrealists like Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst, and twenty-first-century avant-garde artists like Åsa Sjöström, have reinterpreted the latent possibilities of non-sense in the fairy tale: the marvelous, the absurd, and the dream-like. The article demonstrates that by evoking the dark-romantic sides of Andersen's works these avant-garde reconceptualizations in visual media predominantly point to shock, violence, war, and ecological disasters.

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KEYWORDS *Avant-garde, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Åsa Sjöström, H. C. Andersen.*

According to Winfried Menninghaus, 'scholarship on Romanticism has ... almost never taken seriously and literally the imperatives of chance, incoherence, and non-sense. In general, they were seen to be merely the function and drawback of that "tendency toward the profound, infinite sense," with which Friedrich Schlegel had characterized Romantic irony and the Romantic project *tout court*'.[1] But how can we 'take seriously' this imperative of chance, incoherence and non-sense in romanticism? One approach to this question would be to lift the matter from its historical moment, and juxtapose it with another moment in cultural history when the inversion of the ordinary, the fight against formal constraints in visual art and language, became an imperative, namely surrealism and the avant-gardes of the twentieth century. What forms of non-sense lie latent in the fairy tale for example? And to what degree can this genre serve as a link between romanticism and surrealism? What does it mean when Menninghaus points to a domestication of non-sense in the romantic literary fairy tale? Does the fairy tale's 'mysterious allegorical ciphers', as he calls it, soften and control the disruptive potential in the production of the marvelous or the irrational?

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A long roster of commonalities can be lined up between romanticism and sur-
realism: the reaction against the hegemony of logic, a shared interest in the sub-
conscious and in dreams, re-enchanting the world, and the infatuation with the
marvelous, the belief in the powers of childhood, fragments, and the collage as
aesthetic potential, and non-sense as a subversive promise. Romanticism and sur-
realism shared a fascination with the utopian and a penchant for the hyperbolic
and kaleidoscopic; both discarded rigid formal frameworks to allow for spacious
aesthetic expressions; both used the manifesto as a starting point. Some, such as
Michael Lowry, even suggest that surrealism 'represented the highest expression
of revolutionary Romanticism in the twentieth century'.[2] Surrealism, he argues,
shares early German romanticism's 'intense and sometimes desperate attempt to
re-enchant the world'.[3]

Clearly, a limited focus on generalized commonalities can overlook important
inflections both of specific romantic-surrealistic connections *and* of disparities;
and they are manifold. Most important are the differences that stem from spe-
cific historical experiences, which also lead to differences in (aesthetic) intention-
ality: while romantics largely reacted to enlightenment values, surrealists reacted
to a world blown asunder by World War I. The romantic aesthetic program was
concerned primarily with literary theory; surrealists were preoccupied with the
politics of aesthetic expression. And while the movements may use similar termi-
nologies, such as the marvelous, the actual meanings of the terms have shifted.

Romanticism did not speak with one voice, neither did surrealism; likewise
what romanticism wanted and what surrealism wanted were not the same. It
is, however, outside the scope of this article to account for all of the complex
modulations within and between the two movements. The aim of this article is
narrower, namely to reflect briefly on contagions, commonalities, and contrasts
between romanticism and surrealism vis-á-vis their shared interest in fairy tales,
the marvelous, and non-sense (a concept linked primarily to Dadaism, albeit
also operative in surrealism), and to consider a few examples of how surrealism
and other forms of avant-gardes recovered and reconfigured what Menninghaus
called 'the imperatives of chance, incoherence, and non-sense' in romanticism.
I will limit my analysis to a selection of fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen
that have been reconceptualized in visual media by surrealists in the twentieth
century, with a single compelling example from the twenty-first century.

Commonalities and Contrasts

In 1799 Novalis believed that the world had to be romanticized in order to recover
and clarify its original meaning. 125 years later, in 1924, André Breton called for a
surrealization of the world. 'I believe', he writes in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, 'in
the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly
so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*'.[4] Breton acknowl-
edged early on in his manifesto a debt to early German romanticism; in fact he
and other surrealists soon drank 'deeply from the underground springs of Ro-

manticism' albeit in selective ways, to borrow Donald LaCross's expression.[5] Contested realities and creation of new realities (often un-real or sur-real) allowed the enchanted and the marvelous special status in both romanticism and surrealism. The marvelous implied something potentially disruptive, outside sense, motivation, or rationale; but also something that could be harmonized or condensed into aesthetic forms. As suggested above, the term is shifty and always historically contingent. Breton was aware of this when he notes that: 'The marvelous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time'.[6]

For the romantics *chance* connoted contingency and the accidental, for the surrealists *chance* was most predominantly tested in automatic writing. Novalis' early dictum *Erzählungen, ohne Zusammenhang, jedoch mit Assoziationen, wie Träume* pointed to the importance of the associative and non-coherent, evocative of, but not identical with the surrealistic call for free flowing automatism. If the surrealists in their celebration of arbitrariness aimed to suspend or negate a stable sense of the physical, romantics in turn used irony to suspend and negate a sense of the real as purely mimetic potential. For surrealists, as Rosalind E. Krauss has noted, mimicry lies as the very epicenter of the 'experience of reality as representation', in fact this experience 'constitutes the notion of the Marvelous'.[7] Endless reproducibility therefore has its own compulsive beauty, to use a favored term by Breton. To romanticists, however, originality is compromised by reproducibility. Where the romantics privileged the singular poet as an exceptional being, the surrealists favored the concept of collectivity (at least in principle if not in practice). Thus the perception of originality differed in the two movements. While the romantics granted the genius privileged access to the aesthetic, the door was presumably open for all in surrealism.

As noted, a mutual inclination in romanticism and surrealism (to a large degree in its affinity with Dadaism) also involved forms of *nonsense* such as the incoherent, chance and so forth. Unlike everyday vernacular where non-sense has negative connotations, suggesting something we do not strictly need, non-sense can also become a gateway for the unintentional and hidden, beyond the realm of logic, but productive for the imagination. Susan Stewart in her study *Nonsense* argues that: 'nonsense depends upon an assumption of sense' and brings this into a formula of opposites:

While sense is sensory, tangible, real, nonsense is "a game of vapours", unrealizable, a temporary illusion. While sense is "common" and "down to earth", nonsense is "perfect", "pure", and untouched surface of meaning whose every gesture is reflexive. … Nonsense always refers back to a sense that itself cannot be assumed.[8]

This tension and interdependency between sense and non-sense allows us to see *nonsense* as a dynamic possibility in aesthetic forms. The etymological meaning

of the word in English is: that 'which is not sense; spoken or written words which make no sense or convey absurd ideas; also absurd or senseless action', but it can also mean 'unsubstantial or worthless stuff or things' or even a 'want of feeling or physical sensation'.[9] Or it can be something that belongs to marginal beings; those who have not yet gained the ability to reason or those who have lost the ability to do so, like the child and the mad; romantic and surrealist staples. It is then as an extended meaning that I will be using the idiom non-sense here, not one that simply connotes gibberish-ness and gobbledygook, but one that includes a variety of forms excluded from common sense: the marvelous, the absurd, and the dream-like.

In the fairy tale, both romantics and surrealists found a genre in which they could celebrate the marvelous. The romantic fairy tale offered a resistance to civilization's hegemony by insisting on the original, the primitive, and the childlike. In fairy tales, a host of *things* could be combined in new ways. Stones, animals, stars could be personified, and differences between consciousness and the unconscious erased. Psychological ambiguities, doubles and shadows, were eagerly contemplated in a genre where a split or fragmented world could be resurrected in new combinations, like the Phoenix. In short, the romantic fairy tale, with its mixture of animate and inanimate, the mystical and magical blended with the real, provided the kind of material that the surrealists were looking for.

Even so, it is 'a misleading simplification', as Marianne Thalmann has pointed out, 'to identity the fairy tale with modern surrealism and to force this enigmatic label upon it'.[10] Yet she maintains that the romantic fairy tale functions as a 'seed' for surrealism. She sums up the commonalities vis-à-vis the fairy tale:

Above all the fairy tale refutes the popular notion that the war generation was sentimentally enraptured by nature. Neither with longing nor serenity did the romantics look upon a panorama of mountains and valleys, rivers, ruins, pavilions, and grazing sheep. What these men [for example Novalis, Tieck, Bentano, and Hoffmann] saw was not a naively natural nature, but mysterious signs which could be singled out and become in this abstraction the means to magical spatial effects. *They did not wish to copy the world. They created it*, responsible to themselves alone. Truth does not depend upon actuality. It must merely fill us with certainty. Through this intellectual selectivity, nature loses nothing of its greatness and the intimacy of its effects, as experience shows. *The world is transformed by it to new realities. Reality which is contested appears again in surrealities*. This new attitude toward the forms of the world around us leads in turn to new relationships between forms which project themselves into the future and have a lasting effect on it.[11]

With its mixture of spontaneity, juxtapositions of conscious-unconscious elements, the fairy tale could transgress genre limitations. The relative elasticity of the genre (in its most artful incarnation) allowed Novalis to see it as anarchy, and Frederich Schlegel as chaos. Yet this kind of marvelous non-sense (chaos and anarchy as being beyond 'sense', in the meaning of reason and so forth) could also include 'affirmative valorization' (Menninghaus' argument) in that it was

often ultimately domesticated under rules of aesthetic principles such as the arabesque. Menninghaus here points particularly to Tieck's fairy tales.[12] Whether Andersen domesticates his version of marvelous non-sense can be debated, as I will illustrate in the following.

Surrealizing Fairy Tales

In 1966 Salvador Dalí produced a series of lithographic interpretations of Andersen's fairy tales, including the famous ones with mermaids, snow queens, and red shoes, but also a few lesser known tales such as 'Pigen der trådte på Brødet' [The girl who stepped on bread] from 1859 and ' "Lygtemændene ere i Byen" sagde Mosekonen' ['The will o' the wisps are in town', said the bog woman] from 1865. 'Pigen der trådte på Brødet', crafted from a traditional folktale, tells the story of a girl whose vanity prompts her to violate the law of proper conduct: 'Du har vel hørt om Pigen, som traadte paa Brødet for ikke at smudske sine Skoe, og hvor ilde det da gik hende. Det er baade skrevet og trykt' [You have heard about the girl, I suppose, who stepped on the bread in order not to get her shoes dirty, and how badly she fared. It has been both written and printed].[13] The question becomes: 'Hvor kom hun hen?' [Where did she end up?][14] Andersen's response is to first bury her in a cesspool with a smell so horrible 'saa at Menneskene maa daane derved' [so that humans would faint by the stench], and then raise the girl from the bog psychologically and spiritually through redemption.[15] Deep in the bog the girl is suspended in a limbo, petrified, in more than one sense of the word, and submitted to the machinations of an uncanny realm.

In Dalí's 'The Girl who Trod on the Loaf' (ill. 1) things are literally turned upside-down. Three buckets of cesspool-connoting materials are placed on a gridded landscape. The bog is lifted, so to speak, to the surface, in pails. The bog is a liminal dark space into which you can sink and disappear forever; the peculiar materiality of the bogs, their in-between-ness, allows matter and psyche to merge in strange ways. In Dalí's lithograph two legs stick out of the top bucket, the feet are shoeless; the torso, arms and head buried deep in a substance oozing toxic-yellow fumes. Crow-like birds and stick-like figures inhabit the landscape, and a pagoda-like structure suggests perhaps a ceremonial stage. But the scariest detail lies in the bloody footprints or body-prints in the foreground, indicating a violent deed of sorts. The young girl's tenure in Andersen's bog realm is gruesome for sure, but to Dalí her tumble to the underworld seems to be less of her own doing and more a consequence of ritual sacrifice. A terrifying vision of a mutilated body! The upward and predominantly vertical flow of the lines does not seem to suggest the potential for divine salvation, as Andersen imagined, but gives the image of the fairy tale a sinister inflection. If Andersen's elevation of the girl from the bog can be seen as his way of lifting folk-tales into the presumed higher form of the romantic fairy tale (his own argument), Dalí's surreal vision seems to push the girl into a topsy-turvy world of non-sense: her head in the bucket is absurdly hilarious, but also alarming. Dalí does not illustrate but offers a reinterpretation

Ill. 1 [Salvador Dalí, *The Girl who Trod on the Loaf,* 1966. Colored lithograph on paper based on Dalí's original gouaches illustrating Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, 65.4 x 50.5 cm. © Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation/billedkunst.dk 2014.]

Ill. 2 [Salvador Dalí, *The Will o' the Wisps,* 1966. Colored lithograph on paper based on Dalí's original gouaches illustrating Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, 65.4 x 50.5 cm x 50.5. © Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation/billedkunst.dk 2014.]

in which Andersen's fictive world has changed; the fairy tale plot of vanity and moral redemption, but also of dark romantic uncanniness, has been overridden by a vision of another order that does not take the question of character (in several meanings of the word) into consideration. To Dalí the girl is no longer a girl but a gender-neutral stick figure stripped bare of its humanity.

This menacing potential is also noticeable in Dalí's examination of '"Lygte-mændene ere i Byen" sagde Mosekonen'. The story plot in Andersen's text concerns the loss of the 'fairy tale' personified. It had vanished, we read, pushed into hiding by the terror of reality. 'Der var en Mand, som engang vidste saa mange nye Eventyr, men nu vare de slupne for ham, sagde han; Eventyret, der af sig selv gjorde Visit, kom ikke mere og bankede paa hans Dør; og hvorfor kom det ikke?' [Once upon a time there was a man who knew many new fairy tales. But now they had disappeared, he said. The fairy tale that used to visit, no longer came knocking on his door. Why not?][16]

Published a year after Denmark's catastrophic war with Prussia and Austria in 1864, with a massive Danish loss of territory, Andersen used the brutality of warfare, the horror of the real, the many dead young men, to scare away the 'fairy tale'. The bog woman warns the storyteller that in the present time no one has time for frivolous fairy tales any more. Everyone has grown out of fairy tales so

Ill. 3 [Salvador Dalí, *The Sandman,* 1966. Colored lithograph on paper based on Dalí's original gouaches illustrating Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, 65.4 x 50.5 cm. © Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dali Foundation/billedkunst.dk 2014 & Hans Christian Andersen's House /Odense Bys Museer.]

to speak; the boys need cigars, the girls need crinolines. No more fairy tales. Fairy tales along with other forms of literary fiction are therefore bottled in the bog woman's apothecary, a veritable surreal cabinet of wonders, including a bottle with Andersen's own 'Pigen der trådte på Brødet'. Some bottles are full of non-sense, like the one containing comedy; some are full of 'smudgy' liquids, like the scandal bottle. But the will o' the wisps' are loose, they have not been bottled up and they can take the shape of humans, and create a chaotic world. In Andersen's story it is the bog woman's tales of these creatures that eventually restore the storyteller's ability to tell tales. She knows that if you have seven four-leaf clovers in your pocket, one of which has six leaves (like Andersen's story-teller here) you are deeply imbedded in the realm of the marvelous, and in a world of non-sense that makes sense in its own right.

The subversive aspects of Andersen's fairy tale take a different form in Dalí's interpretation (ill. 2). If the red figure behind the massive door to the storyteller's dwelling is meant to be the personified fairy tale hiding, this romantic fairy tale personage has become a dangerous being with blood-stained hands. The red color stands in stark contrast to the deep blue night outside the door, with a floating umbrella (a nod to the sandman that brings sleep to the children's eyes). The night stars stare uncannily, as seen in another of Dalí's (paranoid) interpretations of Andersen's 'Ole Lukøje' [The Sandman] from 1841, in the shape of eyes hovering above the rooftops of a cityscape (ill. 3). The umbrella, an icon for sleep and dreams, both happy and dark in Andersen's storyline, is repeated by Dalí perhaps as a suggestion of protection from (potentially uncanny) elements of the night, but also as possibility of a new reality that can only be accessed via dreams.

For Andersen, childhood often functioned strategically as a disguise under which he could display illogical and absurd aspects of adult minds and behaviors. In contrast, Dalí's surrealist vision seems to produce a gloomy adult scenario from the childhood dream worlds, nightmarish, with elements of dark romanticism.

In 1969 Salvador Dalí also illustrated Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. The appropriation by surrealists like Dalí, but also Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, and others of Carroll's fiction and the visual representations of Alice's strange world has been extensively analyzed in scholarship and I will merely note here that the pre-surrealist and magical underworld of nonsense functions precisely to test Alice's sense – common and otherwise – in ways that echo the surrealists' use of the potentialities of non-sense.[17]

Collage as Shared Aesthetic Practice

Andersen's implicit evocation of the horrors of war in a fairy tale resonates in some small measure with surrealism's later reprocessing of fairy tale elements as a way to articulate problems of the real, including experiences of war. Max Ernst's 1920 photomontage 'The rossignol chinois' [The Chinese nightingale], a title borrowed from Andersen's 1847 fairy tale 'Nattergalen' [The nightingale], thus

Ill. 4 [Max Ernst, *Le rossignol chinois* [The Chinese nightingale], Photomontage de Max Ernst (1891-1976). Private collection. © Max Ernst/Billedkunst 2014 & © 2014. White Images/Scala, Florence.]

brings into play both sinister and strangely playful connotations of violence (ill. 4). If Andersen's tale addresses the clash between the real and the artificial and suggests two competing aesthetics, Ernst's collage in turn makes use of a bomb; ripped from its original setting in a scientific book of weaponry it becomes, in Dietmar Elger's words, 'a chimera of man and beast'.[18] Underneath Ernst's theatrically staged and anthropomorphized contraption, furnished absurdly with a beak, an eye, arms, a scarf, and a fan serving as a tuft of feathers, we find the emblem of the war machine 'deprived of its lethal effect by being transformed into a peaceful "Chinese nightingale" '.[19]

The launch of surrealism came from a specific political moment, the First World War, and Ernst's nightingale illustration is a response to his first-hand experience from combat: a hybrid bomb-bird that draws on a romantic fantasy to make non-sense out of warfare. But Ernst's collage also reminds us that there is a certain shock effect at play. The romantic period was similarly marked by the Napoleonic war's brutality, or by other wars, like the Prussian-Danish war of 1864, used, as we saw above, by Andersen in ' "Lygtemændene ere i Byen" sagde Mosekonen'. For both romantics and surrealists the need to find release from the nervous agitation and the traumatic experiences that the chaos and catastrophic violence had caused was imperative. If romanticism largely seems to have funneled war experiences into journalism, gothic novels, and romantic nationalisms, or sublimated suffering to a purely subjective experience, surrealism displayed a willingness to embed war experiences more directly into the aesthetic. Case in point is Ernst's interpretation of Andersen's romantic nightingale, as demonstrated above, absurdly visualized as a response to the shocking and nauseating non-sense of war. When the world falls apart, it is the mission of romantic art, such as Andersen's work suggests, to tie the separated parts back together, connect the concrete and the abstract, and favor the naive, the marvelous, and so forth. But when the world falls apart, the fairy tale is also seemingly caught or dislocated from its proper place.

Ernst described his collage technique as 'the systematic exploitation of the chance or artificially provoked confrontation of two or more mutually alien realities on an obviously inappropriate level', which is to create a mutual 'poetic spark'.[20] Andersen's own well-known interest in the collage (ill. 5) is described by Mogens Davidsen in similar terms: 'It is remarkable that Andersen sixty years before Max Ernst used a similar technique and related compositions, whose meaning and explanation lies [*sic*] in the dark areas of the mind'.[21]

A host of other scholars have pointed to a similar correlation. Hanno Möbius suggests in *Montage und Collage* that Andersen along with Victor Hugo experimented with the collage without attaching a claim for artistic expression to the visual production. He nevertheless sees Andersen's large screens from 1873–1874 as early forms of the collages of the twentieth century and as precursors for a non-illusionistic photomontage.[22] Diana Waldman, in her monumental study of the *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*, gives Andersen pride of place early on in her introduction and sees him as an influence on both Max Ernst and Joseph

Ill. 5   [Hans Christian Andersen, *Agnetes Læse og Billedbog* [Agnete Lind's picture book], 1857. 23 x 17,5 cm. Hans Christian Andersen's House/Odense Bys Museer.]

Cornell. Jens Andersen sees Andersen as a 'paper-twist-reader' cutting both with pen and scissor creating visual collages and written montages. He offers a historical setting for Andersen's collage production and sees him as a 'forerunner' of cubist, Dadaist, and surrealist collage art: 'More than fifty years before the Cubists and Surrealists began cutting and pasting with newspaper fragments, colored paper, labels, and photographs, Hans Christian Andersen was actively making collages'.[23] Klaus Müller-Wille, however, and I agree, argues, along with Torben Jelsbak, that although Andersen's collage production between 1850 and 1874, and his use of materials such as newspapers, resemble later avant-garde collages and resonate with collage practices by Picasso and others, we cannot automatically assume that his works speak to an imagined modernity. Rather his collage works are fundamentally contingent on the heterogeneity of visual print culture that surrounded him at the time. Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam also agrees in her book *Surrealistiske Collager* and briefly notes that Andersen's collages should not be attributed to a genuine critical nerve in the avant-garde sense.[24]

It is worth noting that Andersen's work with the large collage screens is seen by himself as a substitute for fairy tale production at a time when illness prevented him from writing: 'Jeg har søgt at lægge en poetisk Idee eller en historisk Fremstilling ind i hvert Blad og man siger at det Hele er som et stort broget Eventyr. Men hellere vilde jeg med Pen og Blæk have bragt et saadant paa Papiret end

her kun at udklippe Billeder og stille disse sammen i min Tankeforbindelse' [I have tried to include a poetic idea or an historical representation on each screen and one could say that the entire concept should be seen as a complex fairy tale. But I would rather have produced a fairy tale with pen and ink on paper than merely cutting images as I do here and combining them in my imagination].[25] Andersen's use of collages, then, although resembling later avant-gardism's techniques, is marked by a different intentionality than the one we see in Ernst's nightingale.[26]

Mermaids and Eco-Aesthetics

Andersen's most celebrated fairy tale figure, the mermaid, is also a shared favorite in the romantic and the surreal catalogues, but again colored by dissimilar objectives. When Andersen wrote his famous fairy tale in 1837, mermaids had long been marked by cultural fascination, a favored creature (a kind of fatal female) by romantics as we see in La Motte Fouqué's Undine or in Johan Wolfgang Goethe and Walter Scott's versions of Mélusine. The surrealists saw in mermaids the potentiality for reconsidering both the morphology and the (often fatal) mentality of women. Breton's Nadja for example sees herself as Mélusine, a chimera. In the novel Max Ernst is asked, but refuses, to paint her portrait because he has been forewarned that she will harm him. 'With great skill' the narrator notes: 'she gives the striking illusion of reality, she briefly evokes the elusive character of Melusina. Then she asks me point-blank: "Who killed the Gorgon, tell me, tell"'[27]. Mélusine embodies the mythological personality precisely because 'she seems to have felt closest to herself'.[28] But Nadja grows mad, of course, and the mermaid association consequently becomes an example of the *convulsive beauty* with which Breton concludes his novel.

Consider also René Magritte's well-known 'L'invention collective' [Collective invention] from 1934 (ill. 6). Here a fish's head has provocatively substituted the tail of the mermaid. The song of the siren has been silenced, the myth inverted; in a non-sense process the mermaid is reversed, and things are turned upside down. The mermaid has been ironically re-imagined, but also fatally beached.

If we agree that surrealist art production is not bound to a specific historical time period, but continues to be a productive mode of contemporary artistic expressions in present times, we can include the Swedish film artist Åsa Sjöström's five-minute short trick-film called *Dea Marina* from 1997 in our reflections (ills. 7–9). Sjöström uses surreal elements and visual quotations to offer an uncanny rendition of Edvard Eriksen's iconic statue of Andersen's little mermaid in Copenhagen harbor. In her renaming of the mermaid to Dea (the Greek word for goddess) Marina (the Latin word for 'of the sea') the filmmaker signals that the romantic fairy tale statue has taken on a larger cultural inflection. Sjöström's Goddess of the Sea comes alive with a song, not as Ariel's in the Disney version with a longing for a human and not least a material world, but as a forewarning of a pending ecological disaster. Dea Marina sings about human connections
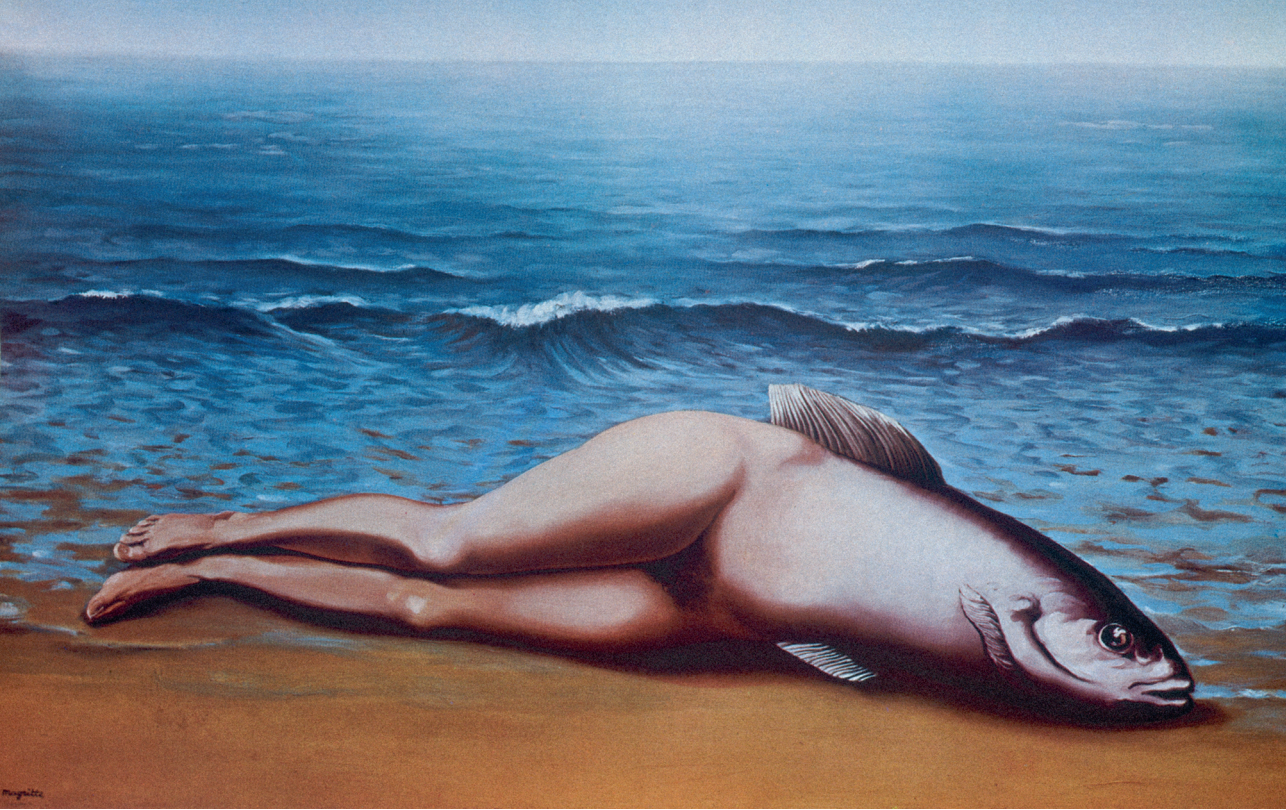
Ill. 6 [René Magritte *L'invention collective* [Collective invention] 1935. Oil on canvas, 73 x 116 cm. Private Collection. © Rene Magritte, The Estate of Magritte/billedkunst.dk 2014 & © 2014. Bl, ADAGP, Paris/Scala Florence.]

with the surrounding sea, while an increasingly ominous sky looms above her; her eyes widening and staring directly and insistently at the spectator, a daunting signal of doom. The eyes are closed demonstratively again before she freezes back into immobility.

Sjöström's mermaid film also turns things around and draws heavily on surrealist vernacular with thick quotes from Magritte's other paintings (sky-blue doves marked with white clouds that fly around the mermaid and identical men in bowler hats photographing the mermaid) and from Dalí (melting clocks that drip down the mermaid's lap) or from other well-known pre-surrealist visual imageries, such as baroque artists Pieter Breughel (multiple Towers of Babel float down around the mermaid) and Hieronymus Bosch (grotesque figures from his paintings are cut out as floaters). All are thanked in the film credits. If Andersen's romantic mermaid vision challenged gravity as part of a spiritual quest, the surrealist vision in Sjöström's adaptation tests gravity differently; with numerous floating objects, figures of all sorts, fish, cups, dolls, and so forth, icons well known from the surrealistic catalogues. The mermaid is the only stable object; she never moves from her stony-plinth. But her life is nevertheless in danger.

As seen next page (ill. 9), the transparency of the iconic Magritte doves brings fresh air into a polluted present, darkened by an ecological disaster that has already entirely blackened the mermaid herself. She resembles creatures of the sea

contaminated by oil spill. The innocence of the romantic protagonist (here in the shape of Eriksen's sculptural rendition) is compromised, not by abject desires of the mermaid, but rather by the lost purity and innocence of nature itself. Nature and its ocean creatures (mermaids) are figuratively raped by the dark and demonic powers of pollution. We observe here, I would argue, both a romantic trope re-imagined and a surrealist vision re-considered. The surreal vernacular is used ironically, but also with a gesture of sincerity and urgency to counter the threat of the ecological disaster. That is to say: the icon (offered by the early twentieth century's sculptural idealization and domestication of Andersen's much more complex tale) is about to succumb to pollution, but is simultaneously and ironically surrealized (wiped clean by Magritte's doves) and potentially saved. Thus, in this instance, the surreal makes more sense than the non-sense of modern industrial toxic waste and smog.

Conclusion

Surrealists like Dalí, Ernst, and Magritte did not repeat what romantics like Andersen articulated. They offered new visions beholden to new sensibilities contingent on new historical experiences. Many aspects of Andersen's core and essence are stripped bare. Similarly, Sjöström's video art is far removed from the romantic fairy tale; in fact, it reflects not on the written text at all, but on the icon in the harbor, the logo of Copenhagen.

Nevertheless, the value of the romantic fairy tale to surrealism and other avant-gardes and the shared interest in an elastic relation between mind and matter allowed for new and marvelous (strange and fantastic) worlds to surface; realities have been tested and often subverted, and poetic language had to break free of conventions, mimic innocence, and be instinctive and improvisational. The 'emotional flexibility of language discovered by the romanticist', as noted by Anna Balakian, could turn into 'sudden, unexpected image[s]' in surrealism.[29] Surrealism, then, took seriously the question raised by Menninghaus above, regarding romanticism's 'imperatives of chance, incoherence, and non-sense' and discovered in romanticism a source of creativity that could be dislodged or liberated from the mastery of form that most romantics ultimately subscribed to. Surrealists and other avant-gardists could 'extract the unknown from the known, and let the sur-reality of concepts rise above the reality of objects' as Thalmann notes, and under 'the guise of unpretentious fairy tales' such as Andersen's, surrealists found the 'freedom to distort and deform'.[30] Here they discovered a way to maintain a measure of marvelous non-sense, but also dark apprehensions.

Notes

1   Winfried Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense: Kant and Bluebeard*, trans. Henry Pickford (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 38.

2   Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 9.

3   Ibid.

4   André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1972), 14.

5   Donald LaCross, 'Introduction: Surrealism and Romantic Anticapitalism', in *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), viii.

6   Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* 16 (italics added).

7   Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1996), 112.

8   Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 4.

9   Stewart, *Nonsense*, 4.

10   Marianne Thalmann, *The Romantic Fairy Tale: Seeds of Surrealism*, trans. Mary B. Corcoran (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 14.

11   Ibid., 125–6 (italics added).

12   Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense*, 39.

13   Hans Christian Andersen, 'Pigen der trådte på Brødet', in *Samlede værker*, ed. Klaus P. Mortensen, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2003), 254. Translations of Andersen's texts are my own.

14   Andersen, 'Pigen der trådte på Brødet', 255.

15   Ibid.

16   Hans Christian Andersen, ' "Lygtemændene ere i Byen" sagde Mosekonen', in *Samlede værker*, ed. Klaus P. Mortensen, vol. 3 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2003), 59.

17   For an excellent discussion of Alice's strange world and her importance for the surrealists, see for example Renée Riese Hubert's *Surrealism and the Book*, particularly the chapter called 'Surrealism and the Nineteenth Century' (pp. 149–88).

18   Dietmar Elger, *Dadaism* (n.p.: Taschen, 2004), 74.

19   Ibid., 74.

20   Here cited from Elger, *Dadaism*, 74.

21   Mogens Davidsen, 'Hans Christian Andersen and the Image', in *Hans Christian Andersen. A Poet in Time. Papers from the Second International Hans Christian Andersen Conference 29 July to 2 August 1996*, eds. Johan de Mylius, Aage Jørgensen, and Viggo Hjørnager Pedersen (The Hans Christian Andersen Center, Odense University Press, 1999), 433.

22   Hanno Möbius, *Montage und Collage. Literatur, bildende Künste, Film, Fotografie, Musik, Theater bis 1933* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000), 210.

23   Jens Andersen, *Hans Christian Andersen*, trans. Tiina Nunnally (New York, Woodstock, London: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 503.

24   Camilla Skovbjerg Paldam, *Surrealistiske collager. Underfulde billeder i kunst og litteratur* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2011), 31.

25   Hans Christian Andersens brev til Mimi Holstein [Hans Christian Andersen's letter to Mimi Holstein] (March 17, 1874), accessed August 30, 2014, http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/brevbase/brev.html?bid=15623&oph=1.

26   Jens Andersen, in his biography, goes as far as to say that Andersen anticipated both Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Breton's surrealist manifestos. Also, Jette Lundbo Levy has argued, by way of Gunnar Ekelöf, that Andersen made use of a pre-surrealist imagination in his object tales and compares them to the surrealists' infatuation with *l'object trouvé*, cf. Jette Lundbo Levy, 'Om ting der går i stykker. Ekelöf og Andersen', *Edda* 3, (1998): 259–68. Finn Hauberg Mortensen, however, warns against a simple comparison between Andersen and surrealism, because Andersen maintains the notion of a higher metaphysical order that organizes the manifest fragmentation of things. Finn Hauberg Mortensen, 'Ting og relation', in *H. C. Andersen. Modernitet & Modernisme*, eds. Aage Jørgensen and Henk van der Liet (Amsterdam: Scandinavisch Institut. Universitet van Amsterdam, 2006).

27   André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 106.

28   Ibid., 129.

29   Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 142–3.

30   Thalman, *The Romantic Fairy Tale*, 128.