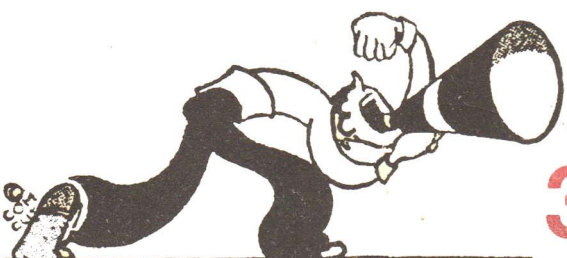
AUTOPSY ON SURREALISM

CÉSAR VALLEJO



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ART ON THE LINE

TO THE SONG OF RESISTANCE
ONLY REVOLUTION DOES JUSTICE

AUTOPSY ON SURREALISM

CÉSAR VALLEJO

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AUTOPSY ON SURREALISM

The capitalist intelligentsia exhibits, among other symptoms of its death throes, the vice of the literary coterie. It is curious to see how the more recent and acute crises of economic imperialism—the war, industrial reorganization, the misery of the masses, the bankruptcies and stock market crashes, the spread of workers' revolution, the colonial uprisings, etc.—correspond, at the same time, to a furious proliferation of literary schools, as makeshift as they are ephemeral. About 1914, Expressionism sprang up (Dvorak, Fretzer). Around 1915 it was Cubism (Apollinaire, Reverdy). In 1917, Dadaism (Tzara, Picabia). In 1924, Surrealism (Breton, Ribemont-Dessaignes). Not to mention already existing schools: Symbolism, Futurism, Neo-Symbolism, *Unanimismo*, etc. Finally, since the surrealist declaration, nearly every month a new literary school bursts in on the scene. Never has social thought been so broken up into so many fleeting formulas. Never has it undergone such frenetic whims and such a need to stereotype itself through recipes and clichés, as if it dreaded its own freedom, or as if it were unable to bring about its own organic unity. A like anarchy and disintegration is to be seen nowhere except among the philosophers and poets in the decadence of Greco-Latin civilization. Those of today, in turn, signal a new spiritual decadence: that of western capitalist civilization.

The last and most publicized school, Surrealism, has just officially died.

In truth, surrealism as a literary school did not make one constructive contribution. It was more a prescription for custom-making poems, as literary schools of *all* times do and have done. Moreover, it wasn't even an original prescription. All the pompous theory and the abracadabra method of surrealism were precipitated out from a few sketchy thoughts which Apollinaire had on the subject. Based on these ideas of the author of *Calligrams*, the surrealist manifestos were limited to the constructing of clever parlor games related to 'automatic writing,' morality, religion and politics.

Parlor games, I have said, and clever also: calculating, I should say, When surrealism came on, through the irresistible dialectic of things, to confront the living problems of reality—which do not depend, exactly, on the belabored abstract metaphysics of any literary school—surrealism found itself in a tight spot. For to be consistent with what the surrealists themselves were calling 'the revolutionary and critical spirit' of this movement, it had to take to the streets and take charge of, among other things, the political and economic problems of our time. Surrealism was then anarchistic—this most abstract, mystical, cerebral form of politics, and the one that best reconciled itself with the ontological and even occultist

character of the coterie. Within anarchism the surrealists could continue getting recognition, since the organic nihilism of the school could live with and even unite with it bodily.

But much later, as things got going, the surrealists came to realize that outside the surrealist catechism there was another revolutionary method, as 'interesting' as what they themselves proposed: I refer to Marxism. They read, they mused, and by a very bourgeois miracle of eclecticism and indissoluble 'permutation,' Breton proposed to his friends the coordination and synthesizing of both methods. The surrealists instantly became communists.

Only at this time—not before nor after—does surrealism acquire a certain social importance. From the simple mass production of poems, it was transformed into a militant political movement, into a truly alive and revolutionary decree regarding what must be done. Surrealism deserved, then, to be taken into consideration and to be judged one of the more vital, constructive literary currents of the period.

Nevertheless, this judgment was liable to be treated with contempt. It had to continue observing subsequent surrealist methods and disciplines in order to know up to what point the content and actions were, in truth, sincerely revolutionary. Even though one knew about co-

ordinating surrealist method with Marxism, it didn't go beyond being a childish outburst or a temporary mystification, yet the hope remained that, little by little, these brand new, unexpected, militant bolsheviks would go on being radicalized.

Unfortunately Breton and his friends, contradicting and belying their strident declarations of Marxist faith, subconsciously, and unable to avoid it, went on being incurable anarchist intellectuals. From the very first, out of surrealist pessimism and desperation—pessimism and desperation that, in its time, was able to activate the conscience of the coterie—there came a permanent, static system, an academic configuration. The moral and intellectual crisis which surrealism was determined to stir up, and which (another failure of originality in this school) might have originated and had its first and foremost expression in Dadaism, became fossilized in writing table psychopathy and in literary clichĕ, despite all the injections of Marx's dialectics and the formal, diligent adherence of the restive youth to communism. Pessimism and desperation must always be stages along the way, not ends to be arrived at. In order to rouse and enrich the spirit, they must be enlarged upon until they are transformed into constructive affirmations. Otherwise, they won't get beyond the status of pathological germs, condemned to devour themselves. The surrealists, evading the law governing the essential shape of things to come, made their famous moral and intellectual crisis academic and were powerless to overcome and go be-

yond it with truly revolutionary forms, that is to say, destructive/constructive forms. Each surrealist did whatever came to mind. They broke with numerous members of the party and with its press organs, and they proceeded, in all, in perpetual breach with the great Marxist directives. From the literary point of view, their productions continued being characterized by an evident bourgeois refinement. Adherence to communism had no reflection whatever in the sense or essential forms of their works. Surrealism was being found, for all these reasons, incapable of understanding and practicing the true and only revolutionary spirit of these times: Marxism. Surrealism quickly lost the only social posture which could have justified its existence—and entered, hopelessly, its death throes.

At the present time, surrealism—as a Marxist movement—is a corpse. (As a mere literary coterie—I repeat—it was like all schools an imposter of life, a common scarecrow.) Its obituary has been issued through two documents by the party concerned: The *Second Surrealist Manifesto* by Breton, and one titled *A Corpse*, directed against Breton and signed by numerous surrealists led by Ribemont-Dessaignes. Both manifestos establish, together with the death and ideological decomposition of surrealism, its dissolution as a group or physical aggregate. This schism or total collapse of the congregation was the most serious, and the last, in an already long series of breakdowns.

Breton, in his *Second Manifesto*, reviews the surrealist doctrine, appearing satisfied with its realization and effects. Breton continued being, up to the last, a professional intellectual, a scholastic ideologue, an armchair rebel, a stubborn pedant, a polemicist in the fashion of Maurras, and finally, a 'village' anarchist. He declares, once again, that surrealism has triumphed, because it has achieved what it was determined to achieve: "to stir up, from a moral and intellectual point of view, a crisis of consciousness." Breton is mistaken. If in fact he had read and subscribed to Marxism, I can't understand how he forgot that, according to doctrine, the role of writers is not to stir up more or less serious or general moral and intellectual crises, that is, not to make revolution 'from above,' but on the contrary to make it 'from below.' Breton forgets that there is only one revolution, the proletarian, and that the workers will make this revolution with action, not the intellectuals with their 'crisis of consciousness.' The only crisis is the economic crisis, and it has been found to be such—as fact and not simply as a notion or as 'dilettantism'—since time immemorial. As to the rest of the *Second Manifesto*, Breton devotes it to attacking, with the outcries and personal abuse of a literary cop, his old associates—insults and hollering that show the bourgeois character, bourgeois to the core, of his 'crisis of consciousness.'

The other manifesto, called *A Corpse*, presents memorable necrological passages concerning Breton. "At one time"—says Ribemont-Dessaignes—"surrealism pleased us: the youthful flings, if one wishes, of household servants. Young boys are allowed to love even the wife of a gendarme (this woman is embodied in the aesthetic of Breton). Phony comrade, phony communist, phony revolutionary, but a veritable and authentic fraud: Breton better watch out for the guillotine. What am I saying!? Corpses don't get guillotined."

"Breton was beating around the bush"—says Roger Vitrac—"scribbling in a reactionary, sanctimonious style about subversive ideas, achieving a curious effect which never failed to astonish the petty bourgeoisie, the small businessmen and manufacturers, the seminarians and the heartstroke victims of the grammar schools."

"Breton"—Jacques Prevert says—"was a stutterer who got everything mixed up: desperation and liver pains, the Bible and the Cantos of Maldoror, God and God, ink and desk, the barracks and the divan of Madame Sabatier, the Marquis de Sade and Jean Lorrain, the Russian Revolution and the Surrealist revolution... A lyrical steward, he passed out diplomas to the lovers who were versifying and, on days of indulgence, to those who were novices in desperation."

"Breton's cadaver"—Michel Leiris says—"makes me sick because, among other reasons, he is a man who has always lived off cadavers."

"Of course"—says Jacques Rigaut—"Breton spoke very well about love, but in life he was a character out of Courteline."

Etc., etc. etc.

It's only that these same assessments of Breton can be applied to all surrealists without exception, and to the defunct school itself. It will be said that this is the clownish, incidental side of these people and not the historical basis of the movement. Well said. Provided that this historical basis in fact exists, which, in this case, isn't so. The historical basis of surrealism is very nearly a void, from whatever angle it is examined.

Thus literary schools pass away. Such is the fate of all uneasiness that, instead of turning into an austere creative laboratory, becomes no more than a mere formula. All the thundering blurbs, the proclamations for the great unwashed, the fullcolor ads, in short, every sleight of hand and trick of the trade turn out to be useless then. Together with the aborted tree, all the verbiage, like too much foliage, suffocates itself.†

†Add that Aragon and Eluard remain communists. *[C.V.]*

LITERATURE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS OR THE WIZARDS OF REACTION

The writer behind closed doors knows nothing about life. Politics, love, economic problems, the unmediated haphazard struggle of man with men, the minute and immediate drama of the conflicting forces and tendencies of objective social reality—none of this even reaches the desk of the writer behind closed doors.

The parlor poet is the direct descendant of the economic error of the bourgeoisie. Landowner, financier, with livings or sinecures from the state or from the family, his bread and the roof over his head are secure and he can escape the economic struggle, which is incompatible with isolation or detachment. Such is most commonly the economic situation of the litterateur. Other times, this scribe feeds his belly by means of a tacit business sense inherited through the psychology of the class from which he comes. Then he is without income, like a vulgar social parasite, yet profits from a disposition that enables him to make a literature that is much in demand. How? "The artist"—writes Upton Sinclair—"who triumphs in an era, is a man who sympathizes with the ruling classes of that era, whose interests and ideals he interprets, identifying himself with them." In a society of tiresome farts and complacent exploiters who, as Lenin says, "are sick with obesity," the most gratifying literature is that which smells of desk moths. When the French bourgeoisie were happier and contented with their empire, the literature held in highest regard was that produced behind closed doors. On the eve of the war, the king of the pen was Anatole France. It's the same today, in countries where the bourgeois reaction appears most stubborn, as in France itself, in Italy and in Spain—to mention only Latin countries—the writers in vogue are Paul Valéry, Pirandello and Ortega y Gasset, whose works embrace, at heart, the sensibility of the drawing room. That mental refinement, that ingenious game, that parlor philosophy, that bookish emotion, wafts in the distance off to the man who masturbates, tenderly, behind closed doors.

THE DUEL BETWEEN TWO LITERATURES

The capitalist literary process cannot succeed, however much its pontiffs and overseers wish, in avoiding the germs of decadence which emerge, after many years, from the social body on which that process rests. This means that the inherent, growing, fatal contradictions with which the capitalist economy struggles, circulate as well through bourgeois art, generating its collapse. This means, likewise, that the resistance those intellectual wheeler-dealers put up against the death of this literature is vain and useless, since we are already in the presence of an accomplished fact, on a strictly objective plane, through nothing less than the forces and forms at the base of economic production, all of which are quite remote and foreign to the sectarian, professional and individual interests of the writer. Capitalist literature does no more, then, than reflect—I repeat, without power to avoid it—the slow, lingering death throes of the society from which it proceeds.

What are the most salient signs of decadence in bourgeois literature? These signs have been made clear enough already without our dwelling on them. They can, nevertheless, all come under one common heading: the draining of social content from words. The word is empty. It suffers from an acute, incurable case of social consumption. No one says anything to anybody. Communication between man and men is broken off. The individual's term for collectivity has been left mutilated and crushed in the individual mouth. In the midst of our incomprehensible wordiness, we are speechless. It is the confusion of tongues arising from the exacerbated individualism which is at the base of bourgeois economy and politics. Unbridled individual interest—to be the richest, the happiest, to be the dictator of a country or an oil baron—has been heaped up with pure egoism. Even the words. Terms are overwhelmed by individualism. Speech —the most human of all forms of social intercourse—has thus lost its very essence and all its collective attributes.

Implicitly, in our everyday life together, we all sense and are aware of this social drama of confusion. Nobody understands anyone. The interests of one person speak a language that the interests of another ignore or don't understand. How are they going to understand one another: the buyer and the seller, the ruled and the ruler, the poor and the rich? We all also realize that this confusion of tongues is not, cannot be, a permanent thing and that it must end as soon as possible. And for this we know that all that is lacking is one common key: justice, the great clarifier, the grand coordinator of interests.

Meanwhile the bourgeois writer continues constructing his works with the interests and selfishness peculiar to the social class from which he proceeds and for which he writes. What is in these works? What do they express? What are people called in them? What is the social content of their words? In the themes and trends of bourgeois literature there is nothing more than egoism, and of course only egoists take pleasure in making and in reading it. The work with bourgeois meaning, or that written in a bourgeois spirit, pleases no one except the bourgeois reader. When another class of people—a worker, a peasant, or even a bourgeois no longer stuck in his or her classbound posture—whenever they set eyes on bourgeois literature they turn away, cold, with repugnance. The play of interests which nourishes such literature speaks, certainly, a language different from, and foreign to, the common general interests of humanity. Words appear, there, incomprehensible or unexpressive. The

words *faith*, *love*, *liberty*, *good*, *passion*, *truth*, *sorrow*, *courage*, *harmony*, *work*, *happiness* and *justice* lie there empty or full of ideas and sentiments different from what such words state. Even the words *life*, *god* and *history* are ambiguous or hollow. Hot air and imposture dominate the theme, the context and the meaning of the work. That reader then shrinks from or boycotts this literature. This occurs, notably, with proletarian readers regarding most capitalist authors and works.

What happens then?

By the same means that the proletariat rapidly assumes the foremost place in the organization and management of the world economic process, so also it creates a universal class consciousness for itself and, with this, its own sensibility, one capable of creating and taking in its own literature, which is to say, proletarian literature. This new literature is springing up and developing in proportions that are correlative and parallel—in extent and depth—to the international working class and to its degree of class consciousness. And as this population today embraces nine-tenths of humanity, and as, on the other hand, proletarian consciousness is winning over nearly half the world's workers, it happens that workers' literature is dominating entirely worldwide intellectual production. "We have something now"—the proletarian German writer Johannes Becher says, modestly—"to put up against the masterworks of bourgeois literature in the

domains of poetry, the novel and even the theatre." But Béla Illés says, more justly: "Proletarian literature is now in a position in many capitalist countries (especially Germany) of competing with bourgeois literature."

What are the most prominent signs of this surging proleterian literature? The most important is that it restores to words their universal social content, filling them out with a new collective substratum, one that is more luxuriant and pure, and endowing them with a more diaphanous, human expressiveness and eloquence. The worker, unlike the boss, aspires to the social understanding of everything, to the universal comprehension of lives and interests. His or her literature speaks, therefore, a language that would be common to all people. For the confusion of tongues in the capitalist world, the worker wishes to substitute the hope of social cooperation and justice, the language of languages. Will proletarian literature carry out this regeneration and this purification of the word, the pre-eminent and the richest form of the human instinct for solidarity?

Yes. It will achieve it. Already it is succeeding. We don't exaggerate, perhaps, in affirming that today the workers' literary production already has artistic and human values superior, in many respects, to those of bourgeois production. I say workers' production, including in this every work dominated, in one way or another, by the proletarian spirit and interests: through the theme,

through its psychological context or through the sensibility of the writer. This is how authors with diverse class origins figure in proletarian literature, authors such as Upton Sinclair, Gladkov, Selvinsky, Kirchon, Pasternak, O'Flaherty and others, ones whose works are, nonetheless, stamped with a sincere, definite interpretation of the world of workers.

On the other hand, what is quite significant in this regard is the attention and respect that proletarian literature awakens in the better bourgeois writers, attention and respect which are evident in the frequency with which they deal with—even if only episodically—in their recent works, the life, the struggles and the revolutionary movements of the working masses. This attitude reveals two things: at times, the 'snobism' characteristic of byzantine 'intelligences' and, other times, the instability and vacillation characteristic of a moribund ideology.

In sum, all these considerations attest, on the one hand, to the arrival and sweeping offensive of proletarian literature and, on the other, to the defeat and rout of capitalist literature.

The crossroads of history are, it's obvious, laid out in this terrain.

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR, BOURGEOIS INFIRMITY

Some writers believe in infusing their works with loftiness and grandeur—speaking, in them, of the heavenly bodies and their rotations, of interatomic forces, of electrons, cosmic storms and cosmic equilibrium—though, in truth, such works aren't inspired by the least sentiment regarding those aesthetic ingredients. At the base of these works are only numbers of things, not the sentiment or creative, deeply felt notion of things.

NEW POETRY

New poetry has been defined as verses whose lexicon is made up of the words 'cinema,' 'airplane,' 'jazz-band,' 'motor,' 'radio' and, in general, every expression of contemporary science and industry; whether or not the lexicon corresponds to an authentically new sensibility is not important. What matters are the words.

But there's no getting around the fact that this is neither new poetry nor old. Nor anything. The artistic materials that modern life offers must be assimilated by the artist and transformed into sensibility. The radio, for example, is destined (more than just making us say 'radio') to awaken jittery new temperaments and more intense emotional insights, amplifying certainties and understanding, and intensifying love. Anxiety springs up, then, and the breath of life revives. This is true culture, bringer of progress. This is its sole aesthetic meaning, *not* stuffing the mouth with brand-new words. Often new voices can falter, yet as often the poem, without saying 'airplane,' nonetheless conveys an airborne sensation in a way that is obscure and implicit, yet effective and human. Such is truly the new poetry.

Other times, one just manages to come up with a skillful combination of these or those artistic materials, and so achieves a more or less perfect, beautiful image. Now in this case, it isn't a question of a 'new' poetry based on new words, but of a 'new' poetry based on new metaphors. But here also there is an error. In genuinely new poetry, new images *can* falter—perfection being a function of ingenuity, not genius—but in such poetry the creator enjoys or suffers a life in which the new relations and rhythms of things and men have become blood, cells, anything which in the end has been vitally and organically incorporated into his sensibility.

The 'new' poetry based on new words or new metaphors distinguishes itself by its pedantic novelty and by its baroque complication. The new poetry based on new sensibility is, on the contrary, simple and human and, at first glance, might be taken for old, or not even invite speculation as to whether it is or is not modern.

ROUNDABOUT ARTISTIC FREEDOM

"I protest"—an ivory tower poet was saying to me—"the artist and writer having to submit to the yoke of any government or social class, even if they be the Soviet government and the proletarian class. The artist and writer have nothing to do with party politics or with classes. They must work at their art with absolute freedom and independence."

"Do you believe"—I argued—"that, from this perspective, at some time in history there have been free and independent artists and writers?"

"Of course. This very day, there's Bernard Shaw, Stravinsky, Picasso, Chaplin."

"Oh? Free from what? Independent of what?"

"From the politics of Chamberlain, Stalin, Chautemps, Roosevelt."

"Stop right there. Let's get this straight. Suppose one day Picasso paints a cubist portrait of Laval, with the Lille police making a sabre charge against the French weavers because they demand a wage increase. What would happen? I'll tell you what...in the first place, neither M. Rosenberg—Picasso's dealer—nor any other Paris art dealer would exhibit that canvas in their galleries; secondly, the 'rue de la Boétie' crowd—the 'chic,' the rich and cultured of fashionable Paris, who can afford the dearest paintings of Picasso—would become indignant and would find the subject matter and even the technique of the painting 'ridiculous,' in bad taste, gruesome and, finally, irritating, particularly as it's not even 'very interesting' (and now we know why!); thirdly, the critics from *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, from *Paris Midi*, etc. would hit the ceiling; and fourthly, the famous M. Chiappe's secret police would pay Picasso a visit one evening, serving him a none-too-agreeable notice. In short, the painter would lose in both his reputation and, following that, in his wallet, not to mention his being subjected to an unspoken, vicious watchfulness, which could end with the artist off in Iran somewhere. So where is his freedom? Moreover it's certain that the subject matter of this painting would not be Picasso's invention, but actually happened in July 1930 when Laval was Minister of Labor. And it's also clear, finally, that tragedies—especially when they are social—contain artistic suggestions of the highest order."

"But that's just it"—the ivory tower poet, somewhat deflated, was saying to me—"the artist mustn't meddle in politics. Picasso would never have painted such a picture and, therefore, what you say never would have happened..."

"Sure. Of course. Picasso and the other 'free' artists don't meddle in politics because: it doesn't pay. They pretend not to know Zola's phrase: 'I cannot keep silent, because I don't want to be an accomplice.' It's most convenient to sit on the fence. What does it matter that these political subjects have, in themselves, extraordinary thematic grandeur? Yet just meddle in them, and goodbye to 'freedom.'"

"But Picasso, like other great artists, is far from doing this out of cowardice or egoism..."

"Now now. It's a matter of unconscious egoism, and an equally unconscious dependency on the bourgeois class and its state."

"Suppose it's as you say. But between that and the fully conscious submission of oneself to a state and a social class—as is done, unfortunately, by Russian writers and artists—there's an abyss, and no comparison is possible."

"Of course. There's no possible comparison. While bourgeois artists and writers are subject to capitalist states and classes—based on the exploitation of the majority by a few parasites, called bosses, and on the most notorious injustice, and on the sharpening contradictions driving these systems headlong into breakdown and irremediable collapse—the Bolshevik artists and writers acquiesce spontaneously, rationally and consciously (just as I've told you) to proletarian dictatorship and to the working class and peasantry, who struggle to bring economic equality and social justice into the world, and who bear in their life-blood the health and wellbeing of humanity. You've bound yourself to a cart that's plunging into the abyss and there's no turning back; we've bound ourselves to one which goes on into the future. As for freedom—which is not absolute, as you conceive it, but relative—it will attain its maximum expression in socialist society, created, indeed, through proletarian revolution."

The ivory tower poet stopped coming around.

"Don't sacrifice men to stones"—Proust affirms—"whose beauty comes precisely of their having, one moment, captured human truths." *Time Regained.* Conversation during wartime with M. Charlus regarding a church that airplanes had destroyed.

REVOLUTIONARY ART, MASS ART AND THE SPECIFIC FORM OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

1 In the present social period—owing to the acuteness, the violence and the profundity evident in the class struggle—the inherent revolutionary spirit of the artist cannot avoid having social, political and economic problems as the thematic essence of his works. Today these problems are posed throughout the entire world so fully and with such bitter anger that they irresistibly penetrate and encroach upon the life and the consciousness of the most solitary of recluses. The sensibility of the artist, perceptive and sensitive by its own definition, cannot avoid them. It is not in our hands to keep from taking part, on one side or the other, in the conflict. Therefore to say 'art' and, what is more, 'revolutionary art,' is equivalent to saying class art, art of class struggle. The revolutionary artist in art implicates the revolutionary artist in politics.

2 Where is one to find the revolutionary front in today's class struggle? Which social class embodies the movement, the idea and the revolutionary force of history? I assume no one would dare consider him or herself as being on the capitalist front, in the bourgeois class. The social revolution is being seeded with the blood and battles of the proletarian class, and the front which embodies that class is none other than that of the Bolsheviks, vanguard of the working masses. In this struggle the place of the revolutionary artist is, therefore, in the ranks of the proletariat, the Bolshevik ranks, among the laboring masses.

3 This being revolutionary art, specifically in terms of class struggle and mass art, what should be the point of departure, the form and content, the social goals of the artwork?

a The strategic and tactical positions which, in the course of class struggle, the international working class adopts in accord with the critical twists and turns imposed by momentary circumstances, must constitute the point of departure for the revolutionary artwork. In other words: the work of art must always be grounded in the most recent incident of the struggle and must start out from the day-to-day necessities and interests of this struggle. Hence the artist and writer must follow closely the directives and guidelines of the Communist Party, and is to keep up, hour by hour, with events.

b The form of revolutionary art must be as direct, simple and spare as possible. An implacable realism. Minimum elaboration. The shortest road to the heart, at point-blank range. Art of the foreground. Phobia of half-tones and shades of meaning. Everything in the rough—angles and no curves, yet heavy, barbarous, brutal, as in the trenches.

c The content of the artwork must be a content of the masses. The stifled aspirations, the turbulence, the common fury, the frailties and the driving thrusts, the lights and shadows of class consciousness, the back-and-forth swaying of individuals within the multitudes, the frustrated potential and the heroism, the triumphs and the vigils, the ups and downs, the experiences and lessons of every working day—in short, all the shapes, gaps, flaws, hits and misses of the masses in their revolutionary struggles. To this end, it is necessary to create and develop throughout the proletarian ranks a vast network of organizations and contacts involving revolutionary art—such as, among others, the factory and farm correspondents, the workers' control within the national sections of the U.I.R.E., and in the organs of the press and the revolutionary publishing houses, the peasants' and workers' reading circles, the 'Blue Shirts' theatre group, the critiques of the masses, the workers' clubs, the fairs for proletarian and peasant artisans, the roving academies, the artists' and writers' brigades in workers' organizations, in the trenches of the civil wars, etc. etc.

d The concrete and immediate ends of revolutionary art will vary according to the changing needs of the moment. One must bear in mind that the audience for this art is multiple: the masses who still are not yet radicalized and who fall into line in the ranks of Fascism or Anarcho-Syndicalism or even the parties of the bourgeois left; the masses without class consciousness; the masses already radicalized and Bolshevik; and, lastly, the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie itself. In this field of action one has to employ tactics which are shrewd, skillful, sharp and flexible, since the practical objective of the artistic or literary work depends on the means used with regard to each audience, and on the needs of the moment. For instance, in dealing with the bourgeoisie in general, the revolutionary end is realized either by attacking it to the death or by winning it over. The 'fellow-travelers'—of whom Romain Rolland speaks—cannot be aroused or won over except on grounds that are straightforward and cordial. And we know already what a great service these liberal or sympathetic artists and intellectuals bring to the revolutionary movement, when, as in many cases, they have not completed being radicalized or even proletarianized. And lastly, we know that the majority of the members belonging to the 'International Union of Revolutionary Writers' are presently 'fellow-travelers.'

FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

from 1929-1930 [the green notebook]

What ideas will those bourgeois intellectuals develop? They believe that humanity is their country, and that human virtues dwell solely in their kings and presidents. Their brain must be really strange. It would be interesting to analyse their works in relation to social reality, which is shaped not only by the bourgeoisie, but, above all, by the proletariat. It's not that they don't have class consciousness, but that their eyes see only their own class, never the working class. Larrea also sees the world through his bourgeois lenses and in this way judges history.†

†Juan Larrea, Spanish writer and critic associated with the Cubists, later served as a relief official during the Civil War in Spain. In the early 20's he had, with Vallejo, co-edited a short-lived literary journal.

How can one speak of spiritual liberation while not having made material and social revolution, and while living in the material and moral atmosphere of bourgeois productive forces and economic relations?

The intellectuals are rebels, but not revolutionaries.

Humanity, suddenly finding itself facing a problem (the worker) containing all other human problems (moral, artistic, etc.), scares itself, being able to solve that problem, through reason and conscience, only on pain of renouncing its bourgeois class rights. It is then that bourgeois thought sneaks away from reason and consciousness into the unconscious, into para-psychology and the Freudian libido. And all because it doesn't have the courage to utilize its reason justly in the solution of the great problem of the worker, which will bring about the solution of all other universal problems.

Everything comes down to knowing: at the moment, what is the greatest and most acute problem? Without doubt, it is the social problem, the worker. Why don't the intellectuals solve it?

Politics penetrates everything now. It is everywhere. Hence the intellectuals meddle in it and no longer continue in indifference as before. For there has always been injustice and the worker has starved to death and they have let it go. And nobody said a thing. But today political consciousness is on the increase, is showing through.

from 1932

The most eloquent image of social solidarity is in the sight of several workers lifting a great stone.

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from 1934

Breton recovers the human in Rimbaud as much as he does the revolutionary. Breton believes that adherence to a revolutionary party does not necessarily make the work of an artist revolutionary. The opposite of Mayakovsky.

It's not necessary to deceive people by saying that the only thing [that matters] in the work of art is economics. No. It must be said clearly that the content of a work of art is multiple—economic, moral, emotional, etc.—but that in these times it's necessary to *insist* above all on the economic—because here lies the whole solution to the problem of humanity.

from 1936-1937(38?)

Gide hopes that the revolution doesn't end simply with the disappearance of misery. "If it ended like that"—he says—"it wouldn't be much. The revolution must conclude by giving great joy to humanity."

Gide is wrong. The revolution must end not only with great rejoicing, but with one great humanity made up of *joy, but also of sorrow and all the rest.* What's happening is that Gide, who is rich, is ignorant, not knowing what a great source of superior humanity freedom from hunger is.

ART ON THE LINE
James Scully, general editor

1 Roque Dalton:
POETRY & MILITANCY
IN LATIN AMERICA

2 César Vallejo:
THE MAYAKOVSKY CASE

3 César Vallejo:
AUTOPSY ON SURREALISM

César Vallejo was born in Peru in 1892. After serving a short jail term (1920-21) in Trujillo for 'instigating' a riot, a frame-up, he left Peru for Paris. He never returned.

While most of Vallejo's friends during his early years in Paris were Surrealists, Cubists or others of the avant-garde, he remained critical of their 'pseudo-new' art and of their drawing room sensibility which, consciously or unconsciously, continued in service to the bourgeoisie.

On 29 December 1928 Vallejo, with others, founded the Peruvian Socialist Party. Deported from France in late 1930 for his militant activities, he joined the Communist Party in early 1931 in Madrid, where he taught Marxism-Leninism in workers' cells. From 1936 until his death, he was in active opposition to the fascist take-over in Spain.

He died in 1938 in Paris.

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A series of essays, interviews, manifestoes &c.
by 20th century artists: socially conscious
&/or politically engaged artists speaking to, or from,
the point where their commitment and art interact.

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