

The Artist-Magician as Filmmaker: Wilhelm Freddie's Films and the New Myth

A woman's tongue cavorts against the backdrop of a painted landscape. A hand draws a mysterious symbol in a puddle of blood, before two men proceed to dig into the insides of a naked woman. A loaf of bread appears, disappears, and then splits open in half. The Danish artist Wilhelm Freddie made the two bewildering short films *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* together with the filmmaker Jørgen Roos in 1949 and 1950. Freddie's sudden foray into film followed upon his participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, which had such a strong effect on him that he entered an "esoteric period." In the talk "Why Do I Paint?," which he gave on Danish radio in 1950, Freddie situates his films, alongside his paintings and sculptures, amid his aims of creating a form of art with mythological life.¹ Freddie only produced five minutes of film, but their imagery, at once playful and opaque, is fraught with occultism and ritual and evokes the surrealist search for a new myth like few others. Like Max Ernst before him, Freddie assumes the role of a magician wielding powers of transformation through art, but this artist-magician is arguably at his most powerful when making films.²

This chapter examines Freddie's films in relation to his participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and the rarely discussed 1949 exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation* in Stockholm, as well as his radio talk "Why Do I Paint?" and an evocative poetic commentary that he published to accompany *Eaten Horizons*.³ Some suggestive claims that Breton made around the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* are particularly telling for

how Freddie decided to approach myth and magic in his films. In the catalogue essay "Surrealist Comet," Breton states that surrealism pursues "[i]nitiation by means of poetry and art," and in "Fronton-Virage," he writes of his ambition to explore the unity of the pursuits of high magic and high poetry.⁴ *Eaten Horizons*, film and commentary together, pursues similar connections between art and initiation, poetry and magic, here extended to a rare interchange between moving images and verbal poetry. Freddie's films also point to the experiential aspect of surrealist magic art, and indicate how the new myth as it takes shape in film seeks to foster a certain sensibility.

These surrealist ideas about magic, myth, and art, however, do not provide a definite key for interpreting Freddie's films. Some of the things that appear to be enigmatic about his films can be deciphered by placing them in this context, but their esoteric allusions are no mere puzzles to be solved. In that sense, Freddie's films are similar to the writings of those poets whose esoteric leanings were so important for Breton's conviction that there is an intimate link between poetry and occultism. Literary scholar Albert Béguin remarks that the surrealist forerunner Gérard de Nerval's poetry does not simply constitute versified descriptions of esoteric symbolism. While the magic that Nerval creates relies heavily on the presence of alchemy and the tarot, it ultimately exceeds them. Hence, in Béguin's view, commentaries that use these elements as a basis for interpretation "*explain* nothing."⁵ As Béguin writes, references to alchemy are not what make poetry alchemical, as it were. It is rather the very poetic process that works as a transmutation, since it changes reality by charging it with symbolic meaning.⁶ Gaston Bachelard writes about the symbolists' ambition to rekindle the symbol and its connection with occultism: "One of the characteristics of the symbol situated thus on the terrain of occultism is its ambivalence. [...] Evidently symbolic powers, occult powers and poetic powers stem from the same source, rise from the same depths."⁷ Surrealist evocations of occultism rely on a similar transmutation of reality enacted by the interpretative impulse triggered by confounding imagery. Freddie explores this connection with characteristic irreverence, visually in *Eaten Horizons*, verbally in his written commentary; together, they heighten this interplay by connecting visual and verbal images, and letting them generate new meaning between them.

WILHELM FREDDIE AND THE SURREALIST SHORT FILM

Freddie's work in film began in 1947, when Jørgen Roos approached him with a request for collaborating on a film.⁸ Over the following five years, Freddie completed a number of film scripts.⁹ Two of them were made into films, while the others joined the fertile surrealist tradition of unrealized film scenarios. Freddie's forays into film took place some fifteen years after he had established himself as a painter, and they are intimately related to his activities as an artist working not only with paintings but with sculptures, objects, and photography.¹⁰

Born in 1909, Freddie was drawn to surrealism in the early 1930s, a time when Wilhelm Bjerke-Petersen and his journal *Linien* were the most important mediators of knowledge on surrealism in Denmark.¹¹ Freddie soon established himself as one of Denmark's most prominent modernist artists, and, in line with surrealism's overall scandalous nature in the interwar period, his work seemed to effortlessly provoke outrage.¹² In a 1935 review, the Swedish artist Gösta Adrian-Nilsson described Freddie as "a fanatic, an anarchist, with bombs in his pocket."¹³ Freddie seems to have embraced these conceptions throughout his career. In a 1946 letter to his friend Steen Colding, about the consternated reactions of a gallery owner faced with his work, he gleefully exclaims, "long live the anarchist-pornographic revolution."¹⁴ By that point, Freddie's propensity for using erotic motifs in his art had generated much hostility. One of Freddie's contributions to the 1936 surrealist exhibition in London, the painting *Psychophotographic Phenomenon: The Fallen of the World War* (1936), did not make it past Customs, due to its perceived pornographic content.¹⁵ In Denmark, his object *Sexparalysappeal* (1936) was confiscated for similar reasons.¹⁶ Freddie also employed his erotomania against the threat of burgeoning Nazism. His painting *Meditation on the Anti-Nazi Love* (1936) displays a contorted and naked couple who embrace in the lower right hand corner, while a Hitler-like figure stands pompously far off in the background of the vast surrounding landscape.¹⁷ The Danish establishment considered Freddie's surrealist critique of Nazism a nuisance. Come the German invasion of Denmark, the hostilities escalated and eventually led to outright threats on Freddie's life.¹⁸ In 1944, the situation had become so dire that he had to escape to Sweden with his wife and son. They eventually ended up in Stockholm, where Freddie gained support from friends and gallery owners.¹⁹ Between the end of the war and 1950, Freddie divided

his time between Stockholm and Copenhagen. During these prolific years, he turned to the film medium, contributed to *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and co-organized *Surrealistisk manifestation*.²⁰ As he entered his self-proclaimed esoteric period in conjunction with the 1947 exhibition, Freddie's motifs and thought underwent marked changes. If his paintings were now shorter on explicitly political satire, he adhered to surrealism's attempts to reconsider radical politics in a freethinking manner, riddled with a more timeless and anarchistic utopianism and receptive to myth and magic.²¹ At the same time, Freddie's irreverent eroticism and oppositional black humour remained intact. All this is also evident in his films.²²

Freddie and Roos made *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* under sparse conditions in Freddie's apartment in Copenhagen.²³ At Roos's suggestion, they based the film on Freddie's 1940 artwork of the same title.²⁴ Freddie's original mixed-media work consists of a wooden panel, on which five circles in a row depict a woman's red lips opening, then closing, in an exaggerated and contorted manner, against a succession of backgrounds of shifting natural scenery. A remediation of sorts, then, the film version of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* is just under one and a half minutes long. Its first part replicates the visual motif of the original work. A woman's painted lips are shown against a stylized landscape in a close-up that is masked to the shape of a circle. The film intercuts still images of collages, where photographs of the lips are pasted onto a painted background, with moving images, where the mouth protrudes from a hole in an organic-looking surrounding material. Still and moving lips alike twist into a series of grimaces, and the mouth opens up like a fleshy cavity in the scenery. The second sequence consists of a single take that shows Freddie's own moustached face in an extreme close-up. He looks nervous and highly strung, and his eyes dart maniacally, almost rotating in their sockets. An off-screen blood-curdling scream and what sounds like swear words in Danish can be heard, and then the film is over.

Eaten Horizons was made under better conditions than the first film, since the production company Cimbria Films in Copenhagen put their studio and materials at Freddie and Roos's disposal.²⁵ At three and a half minutes, the film is more narratively complex and technically advanced than its predecessor. Freddie and Roos now utilize camera movement, cross-cutting, interior and exterior locations, optical printing, and even a brief sequence of stop-motion animation. The scenography may be

sparse, but the film is dense with poetic juxtapositions, bodily and material transformations, and a playful but convoluted symbolism, of both esoteric and mock-religious gravity. The soundtrack, too, is more complex than in the preceding film. Its jarring sounds, including occasional bursts of music, alternately work with and disrupt the rich visuals. Groaning and chanting voices intermittently contribute to create a ritualistic atmosphere, but their grainy and thick sonority render it impossible to make out more than a few specific words.

The credits announce that *Eaten Horizons* is “a film about love and its annihilation in complete happiness.” The film is divided into two sections. Following the credits, it opens on a medium close-up of a woman with her arms stretched out, fettered to a wall with strips of paper or cloth. In a close-up, a hand with a crayfish and a moon painted on it traces two circles and a triangle in a puddle of glistening black fluid, before wiping them out. The second sequence of the film is more eventful. A dissolve leads to a room with two filthy-looking men, seated and talking to each other. One of them raises a glass containing an unspecified drink. The camera tilts and reveals that the other man has one bare, and dirty, foot placed on a loaf of bread lying on the floor. In a centred close-up, a sharp light illuminates the bread until, suddenly, it disappears, leaving the man’s foot suspended in mid-air. Another dissolve transports the camera to an empty street, where a cut reveals a broad, dark, tripartite door, stained with a fluid that the commentary reveals to be dog piss.²⁶ The door is ajar, and the camera pans slowly to the right. In the darkness inside, the bread lies illuminated on the floor. A cut follows to the bread lying on an ornate silver platter, before another cut shows it between the breasts of a naked woman, her torso shown at an angle. With the camera placed in the position of her head, two illuminated white rectangles appear over her raised knees. Next, the two men approach the woman and remove the bread from her chest. They roll her over onto her stomach, and proceed to lift a surgically precise rectangle of skin from her back. Underneath it, a close-up shows that a substance that resembles lava, excrement, or mincemeat bubbles. Using teaspoons, the two men solemnly eat the substance. When they have finished, one of the men pulls up his right sleeve and reaches down into the hole in the woman’s back, from which he pulls out the loaf of bread. A jarring cut follows to what looks like a narrow white room or the inside of a box. A ball bounces frantically, and suddenly photographs of faces of several children appear, pasted to the side and back walls. After a fade to

black, the loaf of bread comes into view through a dissolve. Stop-motion animated, it rotates slightly jerkily in a medium close-up; after a cut to an extreme close-up, it opens in half, and the substance from the woman's back pours out of it.

As these descriptions suggest, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* are enigmatic films. To begin with, they can be related to a heterogeneous lineage of surrealist short films from the 1920s onwards, including Man Ray's *L'étoile de mer* (1928), Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou*, Ernst Moerman's *Monsieur Fantômas*, Marcel Mariën's *L'Imitation du cinéma*, and Ado Kyrrou's *La Chevelure*. As varied as they are, all of these films, too, were made on shoestring budgets, within or in the vicinity of the surrealist movement, and with seeming disregard for wider commercial, artistic, and avant-garde expectations. Freddie's films above all conjure up an uneasy eroticism. Desire and its frustrations and transformations are central in Buñuel and Dalí's canonized films. It extends throughout Moerman's evocation of Fantômas's frustrated pursuit of his object of desire. Desire also permeates Kyrrou's depiction of a man obsessed by the long head hair that he finds, a fetishist enthralled by the metonymic residue of an imagined Eros. Like Mariën's blasphemous and playful *L'Imitation du cinéma*, Freddie's films are also disruptive, sacrificing the sort of skilled montage employed by Buñuel, even at his most disorienting, for a disjunctive poetics. Like Mariën, Freddie also accentuates the female body and, in the case of *Eaten Horizons*, links it to a reimagined religious ritual. Crucially, the films mentioned all feature prominently struggles of desire against the order of law, society, or religion. Freddie's films, however, do not work through such oppositions. There are no police, priests, or patriarchs blocking the flows of desire in them. His films rather appear to be ritualistic conjurations of desire, albeit with ambiguous outcomes.

Freddie's films have much in common with the prevalent eroticism in his art.²⁷ *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* also resonate with Freddie's persistent tendency to depict bodies that transform and intermingle with matter and the surrounding world, as it takes expression in paintings such as *The King of Kings* (1934), *Venetian Portrait* (1942), and *Thalia and Telephonia* (1942). The films, then, do not so much mark a break with as a transformation of themes and topics that had preoccupied Freddie and other surrealists in the interwar era. They inhabit a landscape of ambivalent and often uncanny desire, where bodies act, transform, and want in defiance

of natural and societal limitations, which can bring to mind such other surrealist eroticists as Georges Bataille, Hans Bellmer, Mimi Parent, and Toyen.

The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss is short on narrative content. Its connection of the female mouth and the background scenery postulates a relation between the female body and the changing seasons, but it does little to suggest the specific nature of this connection. And is Freddie's face that of a man driven to a horrible deed because he is unable to accept the woman's rejection of his desire? Or is he in fact the one who rejects the woman, terrified by the unpredictable will of the lips and tongue, frightened by their lack of recognition of the divide between the human and nature? In this chapter, I will suggest some venues for interpretation of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* that do not so much attempt to affix narrative as symbolic, esoteric, and poetic meaning to this brief film.

There is more of a narrative progression in *Eaten Horizons*. The ritual in the first section seems to be directed towards unlocking the mysterious events that unfold. The opening of the woman's eyes signifies an awakening of impulses that play out later. The second section makes the spectator the witness of another ritual: the movements and the subsequent disappearance of the loaf of bread, which is followed by its reappearance when the two men discover it deep inside the woman's body. Freddie's commentary calls the woman's breasts a "dock for my, oh so heavy, bread-ship," and hence makes it abundantly clear that the bread, not so subtly phallic in shape, signifies both the male member and male desire.²⁸ The disappearance of the bread appears to refer to the subtitle's "annihilation of love" in "the absolute happiness" of the sexual climax—the *petite mort* is troubling, and the recovery of the male drive is construed as a rather complicated affair. The sudden cut to a cramped space in which a ball bounces around and the faces of small children appear, seems like an absurd reference to conception: the ball configured as sperm riotously trying to find its way through a cramped space, and eventually causing the appearance of an imposing number of children. The final shot of the loaf of bread revolving and opening so that the lava, excrement, or meat from inside the woman pours out may signal either a revelation of the inmost nature of desire, or its unexpected transformation after the experience of absolute happiness.

This interpretation appears reasonable in the light of such paratexts as the film's credits and Freddie's written commentary. But if it seems

somewhat hollow, that is likely because it does not consider the film's relation with Freddie's esoteric period. Freddie's films may appear narratively thin, but their imagery, their character of mysterious ritual, and the relations they establish between the body and the surrounding world need to be related to surrealism's overall turn to myth and magic. *Eaten Horizons*, in particular, benefits from an interpretation of certain of the first sequence's iconographic elements from the perspective of surrealism's immersion in esotericism. While the second section is even more convoluted, it can be partly understood in relation to surrealism's application of alchemy as a poetics of transmutation. *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* alike can furthermore be discussed in the light of Freddie's and surrealism's professed ambition to restore the magic dimension in art, in which experiential aspects come to the fore.

FREDDIE'S ESOTERIC PERIOD: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

In his radio talk "Why Do I Paint?" Freddie situates his films directly in the context of surrealism's search for a new myth:

Recently I have turned my attention to more esoteric phenomena. In my paintings, sculptures and films made with Jørgen Roos I have concentrated my efforts on creating an organism which is receptive to mythological life.²⁹

Indeed, *Le Surréalisme en 1947* had such an impact on Freddie that it transformed his work over the following years. It started when, in the spring of 1947, he received a letter of invitation from Breton to participate in the exhibition. In the letter, Breton describes the aims of the exhibition to draw up the contours of a new myth, but he also provides a detailed outline of its execution and its structure as a passage of initiation.³⁰ Freddie was particularly enthused with the plan for twelve altars dedicated to mythological beings, and he swiftly responded with a suggestion for a design for the sixth altar, with the theme of the Secretary Bird. But Freddie's reply apparently went missing and never reached Breton; instead, the altar was claimed by the Romanian artist Victor Brauner, and Freddie had to settle for contributing a few paintings to the exhibition.³¹ Attending *Le Surréalisme en 1947* in the summer, the

Danish artist struck up friendships with Brauner and his fellow Romanian exile Jacques Hérold. It was this multiple exposure to surrealism's turn to myth and magic that made Freddie enter his esoteric period.³² Mythological and magical references had been present in Freddie's art before, but now he underwent a marked change in style and a veritable influx of esoteric and mythological allusions and motifs can be seen in his paintings and objects.³³ A decade earlier, Freddie had already considered some of his objects to have a magic effect, but now he was, in Læssøe's words, "under the influence of such initiatory religious directions or forms of thought as astrology and alchemy."³⁴ "Why Do I Paint?" indicates that Freddie also adopted the surrealist conviction that a new myth was a necessary means to heal a war-torn society.

Freddie started to work in cinema under the spell of these intoxicating ideas. His films are not only the earliest but also the most direct examples of the influence of post-war surrealism's reorientation on film. Freddie, like most other surrealists, approaches esotericism as a form of rejected knowledge that cannot simply be recovered, but needs to be exposed to an incessant drive towards playful poeticizing. Wifredo Lam's altar to *The Hair of Falmer* is especially telling for the strategies the surrealists employed to inspire art with magic. Dedicated to a gruesome passage in Lautréamont's *The Songs of Maldoror* (1869), the altar is dominated by a frazzled mass of hair that hangs over four symmetrically arranged plastic female breasts and two mannequin's hands sporting long knives.³⁵ Behind this arrangement is a cross turned upside down, and on the altar, votive gifts and surrealist food offerings are laid out.³⁶ The altar intermingles Lam's Afro-Cuban heritage, his interest in vodun, and his adherence to surrealism and its tradition.³⁷ Lam's evocation of black magic and cruelty is executed in line with a surrealist poetics where myth and magic are close to play.³⁸ The result is not so much syncretic as it is a creation of a ludic, hybrid magic.³⁹ Freddie's films work according to a similar logic.

Significant, too, are the two altars for which Victor Brauner contributed the main elements. The aforementioned altar to the Secretary Bird is dominated by Brauner's painting *The Lovers (Messengers of the Number)* (1947), which combines two figures from the Major Arcana of the tarot deck, The Magician and The High Priestess, with references to the personal mythologies of Max Ernst and André Breton. Hence, Brauner turns these tarot figures into mythical surrealist beings, emblems of the surrealist thinker and artist as magicians and keepers of

unusual knowledge.⁴⁰ Brauner's other altar was dedicated to his own object *The Wolf-Table* (1947), in which the head, tail, and scrotum of a fox are affixed to a wooden table. Dialectically, and with a savage humour, unsettling received distinctions between life and matter, the domesticated and the wild, the *heimisch* and the *unheimlich*, nature and culture, *The Wolf-Table* is a pre-eminent example of surrealist magic art, and it parallels the brute corporeality and unabashed humour that Freddie brought to his own monstrous inventions. It executes its magic through embodiment and the chilling, marvellous *frisson* of unlikely juxtapositions. Brauner's artistic development also provides an illuminating context for Freddie's approach to esotericism.⁴¹ Brauner failed to escape France during the war, and fled to the countryside, where, separated from most of his group of artists and writers, he paralleled Breton's immersion an ocean away in magic and alchemy, myth and "primitive" art. Didier Semin describes how Brauner, much like Breton, perceived "alchemy and magic as a protection against the hazards of the time," and saw the need for a magical rebirth of a society torn asunder by the elevated values of presumed progress and rationalism.⁴² His paintings were increasingly populated with figures and symbols with esoteric and mythological significance, which he exposed to a specifically surrealist poetics. Motifs from various myths, the tarot, and alchemy transform in idiosyncratic tableaux, which act as peeks into potential new myths in gestation.⁴³ Brauner's works, then, exemplify two strategies for the creation of magic art: the incorporation of esoteric references in art, and the use of transformation, corporeality, and juxtaposition in order to trigger an embodied and savage form of experiential magic.

Similar impulses can be seen in Freddie's art from his esoteric period. He, too, incorporated alchemical and astrological iconography in his art, as well as in his films. According to Læssøe, alchemy interested Freddie mainly as "a form of mental room of fantastic otherness."⁴⁴ That is an apt description for both Freddie's films and many of his paintings from his esoteric period. In line with Brauner's approach, Freddie exposes his esoteric allusions to a surrealist poetics of transformation and juxtaposition and lets them form cornerstones in a personal mythology. In his films and paintings alike, esotericism germinates within an atmosphere that is often permeated with erotomania. In his painting *Trauma* (1948), an animalistic, hieratic hybrid figure sports an erect penis, painfully incongruent in a tableaux of angular shapes and twisted body parts. In *The Blood Pocket* (1947), a face that is equally redolent of "primitive"

masks and dystopian angularity extends a long slithering tongue towards a vaginal shape seemingly carved out in stone. Freddie also inscribes the paintings from his esoteric period with enigmatic signs and symbols, equally reminiscent of occultism and vodun.⁴⁵ Under the influence of his newfound friends Brauner and Hérold, as well as several of the other artists and thinkers who participated in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Freddie explored new means to create a myth-generating form of magic art. In *Eaten Horizons*, these strategies can be discerned in the way in which esoteric symbols give way to a corporeal ritual in which a loaf of bread becomes a magical object in a development that playfully veers between the sacred and the profane.

SURREALISTISK MANIFESTATION AND "WHY DO I PAINT?"

In March 1949, Freddie asserted the place of film in his new pursuits, as he set out to explore the magical capacity of art further in a collective forum. Together with the Swedish artist Gösta Kriland, of the surrealist-oriented Imaginisterna artist group, and in collaboration with the exiled Estonian-born poet and critic Ilmar Laaban, he arranged the exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation* at Expo Aleby, the gallery wing of Anders Aleby's Antikvariat, a second-hand bookshop in central Stockholm.⁴⁶ Among the participating artists were Freddie's friends Brauner and Hérold, the surrealists Jean Arp, Max Ernst, and Yves Tanguy, and the Imaginisterna members C.O. Hultén, Max Walter Svanberg, and Gudrun Åhlberg-Kriland. *Surrealistisk manifestation* was indebted to the ideas espoused in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and the exhibition had an extended focus on the magical qualities of the object.⁴⁷ The exhibition design was inevitably less elaborate than Breton's, Duchamp's, and Friedrich Kiesler's at the Galerie Maeght, and the number of contributing artists was diminutive, but the organizers managed to squeeze a large assortment of surrealist artworks in different media into the cramped space.⁴⁸ *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* premiered in conjunction with the exhibition, and was hence posited to be directly connected with its aims.

Technical and spatial constraints, however, meant that it was not possible to screen film in the gallery space. The organizers' search for an appropriate venue for the premiere of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* is in itself revealing for post-war surrealism's continuity with earlier surrealist convictions. Freddie and Kriland first turned

to the Spegeln cinema as a potential venue, but they elected to look elsewhere when the owner demanded that the film be introduced by “some know-it-all.”⁴⁹ Instead, they chose to show the film at the nearby Maxim, where it was given a slot in the middle of the evening’s usual programme. “It felt a bit solemn,” Kriland, in retrospect, describes the world premiere of the short film.⁵⁰ The audience did not share his experience. The majority were there for what Kriland describes as Maxim’s usual repertoire of “kiss kiss, bang bang.”⁵¹ Their reaction to the less than two minutes of surrealist film seems to have been a mixture of bewilderment and hostility.⁵² The choice of venue and the reason for opting out of Spegeln, though, signal the persistent surrealist tendency to avoid the sites of the intellectual establishment. The fleapits and popular films have always been the surrealist choice over official art spaces and self-consciously artistic cinema, from the formative years before the movement’s gestation, to 1949 Stockholm and beyond.⁵³ The context of the exhibition, however, locates the film among those mythically and magically charged objects that Freddie and Kriland sought to explore. The impetus behind them was delineated in the exhibition catalogue.

The slim catalogue for *Surrealistisk manifestation* features a programmatic essay by Ilmar Laaban, in which he explains surrealism’s post-war position. Laaban situates the entire exhibition in the context of the movement’s change in direction, and delineates the surrealist ambition to create a myth as a reaction against the bankruptcy of Christianity and the dried-out, destructive myths of Western society.⁵⁴ He also discusses a related change in the function of the surrealist object. The symbolically functioning object of the 1930s has now been replaced with the magically functioning object, Laaban explains, and the latter is meant to transmit a psychical energy that allows it to interfere in the relationship between the human and the world.⁵⁵ To this end, he relates surrealism’s pursuit of magic art with “primitive” art forms with a magical purpose, but he is careful to distinguish surrealism from the aesthetic primitivism that was prominent at the time. In contrast to that kind of art, surrealism, according to Laaban, simply looks to already existing solutions to the problem of a magically and mythically functioning art.⁵⁶ Hence, presumably, Freddie’s and Kriland’s own appeal to the idea of the “totem” in their collaborative work *Erotototemistic Object* (1949), which was on display at the exhibition. In a later text, Laaban reminisces about the time of *Surrealistisk manifestation*, and recalls that Freddie was the driving force behind the understanding of the magical object that he espoused.

Laaban's argument, even if differing in its "entirely tensely militant approach" in his own opinion, is indeed similar to Freddie's slightly later declaration of intent in "Why Do I Paint?"⁵⁷

In the radio essay, Freddie explicates some of the more profound implications of surrealism's mythological direction and frames it as part of an alternative art history centred around magic. Freddie introduces his talk with the incantation "Puba, Puba, Puba, see the marvellous ...," words that are repeated almost verbatim from his written commentary for *Eaten Horizons*.⁵⁸ He explains that he is currently engaged with "creating an organism which is receptive to mythological life," a process in which the magic properties of art are central.⁵⁹ Freddie delineates a development of such magic and mythological art. In Paul Gauguin's paintings, Freddie claims colour to have a magical value that emanates from the artworks' experiential dimensions.⁶⁰ In the German romantic painter Arnold Böcklin's work, he considers the strong evocation of nature to be no mere imitation, but a "nature cult."⁶¹ And he claims that Vincent Van Gogh's "fevered visions" put him in contact with those forces of nature that can seize and move humans.⁶² It is the task of bringing these very forces into the light that the surrealists are presented with, according to Freddie. But it is not enough to recover them. The surrealists need to direct them and put them at the service of a more wholesome society, one that has the presumed potential to cure modern humanity's rootlessness by providing an intimate contact with the world through the channelling of its desires.⁶³ Revolutionary politics and "the modern picture of the world" can be joined, Freddie hopes, in "a myth that will replace the doomed myths by which contemporary man lives, and which threaten to destroy him."⁶⁴ He finds a vital means towards this goal in occultism. Immersion in "occult sciences such as alchemy, magic, and astrology which were earlier regarded as superstitions" has provided the surrealists with "an insight into the great interconnectedness of things, just as psychological studies of the magical spells and rituals of certain historical and primitive tribes have revealed their common nature and made them accessible paths into the depths of the soul."⁶⁵ If Western society is to change, Freddie considers this needs to be enacted by way of a turn to esoteric and "primitive" experience and knowledge.

Freddie's appeal to esotericism is formulated in general terms, but he explains its function and purpose in surrealism with a rare clarity. Esotericism, here, foremost pertains to the recovery of a worldview structured by correspondences, and this is bound up with rituals in

“primitive” societies. “Why Do I Paint?” points towards some of the different facets of myth and magic in Freddie’s thought at the time. The “nature cult” and those “fevered visions” that Freddie mentions pertain to a form of intuitive, experiential magic, ostensibly capable of enabling access to otherwise hidden “forces of nature.” Freddie’s view that esotericism provides insights into the “great interconnectedness of things” is close to Breton’s valorization of analogy in “Ascendant Sign.” Recall that Breton in that text considers analogy to provide “glimpses from the lost mirror,” the flare of light from which reveals the world to be a vast network where otherwise distant things are connected. For Freddie, these two aspects of magic are united in the fact that they provide access to the detection and experience of correspondences.

The Definite Rejection of the Request for a Kiss has a direct connection with surrealism’s search for a new myth and magic art through its inclusion in *Surrealistisk manifestation*, while *Eaten Horizons* shows the strongest iconographic and thematic evidence of this development. Both films, however, evince a tangible ritualistic atmosphere, which can be related to Freddie’s attempted evocation of an experiential magic, or what we might call an auratic dimension. Freddie’s work in cinema, then, draws attention to several neglected aspects of surrealist practice in general and surrealist cinema in particular.

THE WORLD AND THE SENSES

There was a vital sensory aspect to the magical objects on display at *Surrealistisk manifestation*. Freddie and Kriland’s “fetish” *Erototemistic Object* was constructed as a materialization of desire, provided with two rudimentary hands that signal its coming-to-life through a promise or threat of tactile interaction—a poke, touch, or an embrace—with the spectator.⁶⁶ *Erototemistic Object* hence positions itself as an interaction between the human body and the surrounding world. This both imposing and alluring feature draws attention to the strong corporeality that runs through much of Freddie’s work. The object also points to one way in which *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* extends the exploration of the magic object to the film medium. Freddie’s films, indeed, continue on this bewildering road, at once royal and gravelly, closing up on the spectator with an inappropriate proximity.

The female lips in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* evoke Man Ray’s imposing painting *Observatory Time: The Lovers* (1932–1934),

which depicts Lee Miller's lips, huge and painted in red, hovering in the starry night sky.⁶⁷ The ritualized female body, in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, and its conflation with the seasons, also recall certain of Man Ray's photographs. The treatment of the nude female body in *Eaten Horizons* as an altar of sorts may remind the spectator of Man Ray photographs like *The Prayer* (1930), in which a kneeling woman photographed from behind at a high angle splays her fingers across her naked buttocks, and *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade* (1933), in which the contours of an inverted cross are placed over a photograph of a naked behind. Yet, in line with his esoteric period, Freddie brings a whole other range of ritualistic qualities to his films. These transport them beyond the ambivalent coupling of cult and suggested destruction of woman conjured through Man Ray's references to Sade, and instead make them approach a much more complicated cult of nature, the human, and the world in attempts at invoking an intimate interrelation between them. Here, then, the connection between the body, the senses, and the seasons resonates more with Freddie's search for myth than one might at first assume.

The female tongue in the first section of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* contorts in a way that is clearly obscene, not only because it breaks with social decorum, but also for its violent yet vulnerable assertiveness. If it is not outright pornographic, it points to the strong presence of eroticism in the film. The senses and the relation between the human body and the environment play central parts here. The mouth threatens to emerge from the screen much as it protrudes from the shifting seasons of the landscape. The gymnastics of the isolated mouth also provokes a strong sense of bodily discomfort and transgression. The aggressive movements of the soft flesh and the exposed brittle teeth render it equally violent and vulnerable. Here, Freddie appears close to Bataille's subversive analysis of the residues of fierce animality that come out in certain expressions of the human mouth, otherwise tamed by civilization.⁶⁸ Bataille's ruminations on the mouth were published in *Documents*, and were illustrated with a photograph by Jacques-André Boiffard of an extreme close-up of a wide open woman's mouth, her tongue moving, which is both intrusive and inappropriately tangibly corporeal, much like the mouth in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*.⁶⁹ Where the extended hands of the *Erotototemistic Object* reach out towards the spectator, the mouth, here, is simultaneously inviting and offputting. It exposes too much, at the same time as it seems to lure the spectator in.

But there is also a dimension of magic to this assertive corporeality. Læssøe points out that much as in Freddie's earlier, scandalous works, the sexual connotations that persist throughout his esoteric period can be presumed to shock the spectator. Hence, they contribute to establish an interplay between the spectator's sensibility, including that of his or her nether bodily regions, and what Læssøe calls the "not so fictitious 'life'" of the artwork.⁷⁰ He relates this to Freddie's own retrospective statements about his scandalous object *Sexparalysappeal*: "I sought to create a 'divine image', a magical sexual ritual. In other words a magical operation."⁷¹ Pornographic art like *Sexparalysappeal*, Læssøe states, shrinks the distance between subject and object in its direct effect on the spectator's body.⁷² In this respect, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* situate themselves alongside *Sexparalysappeal*. Læssøe contends that divine and magical images participate in what they depict in a different way from ordinary paintings and sculptures, and he comes to the blasphemous conclusion that this means that their function is closer to that of "pornographic images than with what is conventionally understood as art."⁷³ Hence, if *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* depicts a dissolution, no matter how troubling, of the chasm between human and nature, its strong sense of intrusive corporeality can be taken to bridge the gap between film and spectator. A magic dimension of art is thus ostensibly recovered, one that depends both on what is depicted and the reciprocal relation that the film establishes with the spectator.

The film's references to the senses and the connection of human body and surrounding world indicate that the film relates to the notion of correspondences, in both its symbolic and sensory capacity, as well as to an embodied dissolution of the divide between subject and object. The original artwork for *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* already suggests that there is a connection between the disembodied mouth and the background of changing natural scenery. Remediating the artwork into a film, Freddie adds a close-up of his own face to the work's visual make-up, but structures it into two tableaux following upon one another. He does then not utilize what Breton perceived to be the film medium's privileged capacity to suggest correspondences through the editing together of spatially or temporally distant images. Instead, he lets the movements of the tongue and the temporal unfolding of the seasonal changes anchor the body and the surrounding world in a rhythmic

relationship. In that way, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* nevertheless suggests a magical connection, a correspondence, between the rhythms of the body and those of nature. The connection of night and day that Breton makes central for cinema's potential for uniting opposites is here supplemented with a more diverse chain of changes.⁷⁴ *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* approaches the notion, so prevalent in esotericism, that there is a bond between microcosm and macrocosm, which means that they are intimately connected and affect one another. But if there is such a bond in Freddie's film, it appears to be far from harmonious. The grotesque nature of the mouth combined with the alterations between moving images and inserted collages undercut any tendencies towards an unequivocally benign relationship between the human and the natural world.

There is a productive insight to be gleaned, here, that the human and nature are in a combined state of reciprocity and alterity to one another. This insight can be related to Walter Benjamin's definition of the auratic experience of nature returning the gaze, of being at once distant and near. Ascribing a gaze to nature and the surrounding world means to assign to it a set of characteristics that are beyond human domination and rational understanding. In that sense, the aura is antithetical to positivist knowledge about nature and the instrumental use and exploitation of it. Freddie plays at this ability to return the gaze through the way that he merges the human and the landscape. If a gaze is returned, though, it is not ocular, but a recognition expressed through the gymnastics of tongue and mouth, threatening to break through the screen.

Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences," so important for both Benjamin and the surrealists, pertains to similar notions.⁷⁵ Informed by Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, Baudelaire describes an increasingly rare experience of reality, in which the senses and the surrounding world interact and reverberate in ever-expanding networks of meaning, manifesting what Freddie calls the "great interconnectedness of things."⁷⁶ In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin discusses correspondences as the record of an experience that includes ritual elements.⁷⁷ As Löwy puts it, correspondences hence work as "a reference to a primitive, edenic age in which authentic experience still existed and in which ritual and festivities allowed for a fusion between the past of the individual and the collective past."⁷⁸ These elements of ritual, then, stand in contrast to the collapse of experience that Baudelaire witnessed

in modernity, and to which Benjamin considered his poetry to be such a forceful reaction.⁷⁹ The potential for productive experience that he detected in surrealism's profane illumination rested largely on what he perceived as its ability to effect an innervation through its merging of image and body, which in the post-war period takes on a more explicit ritualistic dimension.⁸⁰ With its darkly humorous confusion of the human and the world, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* resonates with Benjamin's idea of surrealism's profane illumination, which "describes the merging of the self with the world through a dialectical intoxication that is both terrifying and exhilarating."⁸¹ Surrealists have indeed long conceived of the imagination as a means to blur the distinction between subject and object, to, in the words of Aimé Césaire, resolve "the antinomy of self and other and that of the Ego and the World."⁸² *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* can, then, be seen as a playful depiction of an auratic intermingling of the human and the world as well as an invocation of multisensory correspondences and the ritualistic nature of the art that contains them, much as Freddie's propensity for an experiential magic suggests. But in line with Benjamin's insistence on the necessity for artificiality and technological intervention to facilitate such experiences in modernity, if there is an element of experiential magic in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, it relies on the disjunctive, bodily, and uncomfortable way in which the film suggests its correspondences.

If the film also ought to be considered an intervention in mythological life, the myth it gives rise to could possibly be one of a more intimate relation between the human and the world, as suggested by Freddie's belief that esotericism reveals the interconnectedness of all things. The drama of the cosmos and the everyday that plays out in the film, however, does not replicate Freddie's holistic view of the surrealist myth, as he explicates it in "Why Do I Paint?" If there is a myth at work in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, it is shattered and shattering, but from the shards a new image of the world may possibly arise. The relation that *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* posits between the human and the world is fraught with a dark eroticism and a black humour, the roots of which seem to stretch down into the murkier waters of the unconscious. This is even more pronounced in *Eaten Horizons*.

OCCULT ICONOGRAPHY AND PERVERTED POETRY

In “Why Do I Paint?,” Freddie proclaims: “I want to be a priest in a temple in which there is no altar, no god, no sinners and no saints, but where the gospel will be a constant proclamation of the divine in man.”⁸³ The surrealist film critic Robert Benayoun describes *Eaten Horizons* as an “operation of high magic, a sublime rite of which Freddie has made himself the masked priest.”⁸⁴ Much as in *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, there is a tangible ritualistic atmosphere in *Eaten Horizons*. The enigma shrouding the film emanates from Freddie’s irreverent play with religious as well as esoteric allusions; the effect is a taunting one, of meaning at once profound and silly, and the spectator may experience its core as constantly slipping away, impossible to grasp—or possibly as non-existent. Michael Richardson positions both Freddie’s films in relation to the overarching themes of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and concludes that they draw on myths of renewal and are ultimately about regeneration.⁸⁵ However, the films do not necessarily embody this benign goal in any direct manner. They rather contribute to the development of the surrealist relation to myth and magic by intervening in the conceptions about them, not merely illustrating them.

The first sequence in *Eaten Horizons* employs occult iconography in its conjuring of a mysterious ritual. The editing, cutting between the decorated hand that draws a circle in the black fluid and the woman who is opening her eyes, creates a link between these two sequences, so that the actions of the hand seem to be what causes the woman’s eyes to open. This first sequence is visually sparse, but contains two specific esoteric references. Earlier scholarship on *Eaten Horizons* has neglected to identify these iconographic elements. Læssøe and Richardson simply describe the geometrical patterns drawn in the fluid without considering their meaning, and the latter refers to the signs drawn on the hand as a scorpion and “a kind of sun.”⁸⁶ These symbols, however, carry a meaning that is both specific and expansive, allusive and evanescent.

THE MAGIC CIRCLE

In his commentary, Freddie describes the geometrical pattern that takes shape in the puddle of black liquid as “the magic sign, which is the picture of torture—and of delight.”⁸⁷ Similar geometrical figures feature prominently in Freddie’s paintings during his esoteric period. Laaban

suggests that their function is to focus and intensify the artworks' magical and erotic energies.⁸⁸ This purpose rhymes well with the erotic ritual that is *Eaten Horizons*. But here, the "lethal geometry" of Freddie's figures does not just act as an agent of concentration of desire.⁸⁹ As Freddie's description of the pattern as a "magic sign" suggests, it is also a more specific esoteric reference. Its nature can be gleaned by turning to the occultist Eliphas Lévi.⁹⁰ The "magic sign" in *Eaten Horizons* strongly resembles an illustration of a Goetic magic circle in Lévi's book *Transcendental Magic*.⁹¹ The version of the Goetic circle depicted in *Eaten Horizons* is stylized and simplified in comparison with Lévi's illustration, but it retains the central feature of two circles enclosing a triangle. Freddie's written commentary supports the identification of the geometrical pattern as a Goetic magic circle. The Goetic magic circle is intended to enable the magician to call on demons, and the demons catalogued in the *Goetia* all have specific capacities that can be drawn on.⁹² Following his reference to the symbol as a magic sign, Freddie evokes "BAEL, ASTAROTH, FORAS!" Richardson claims that Freddie calls on pre-Christian fertility gods, but the iconographic and textual context indicates that he rather invokes demons.⁹³ For while Bael and Astaroth are the names of two Canaanite gods of fertility, they are also prominent names in demonology, and so is Foras, or Forras. Taking all three names into account, it seems evident that Freddie is appealing to them in their demonic guise. Hence, in *Eaten Horizons*, the magic circle appears to be meant to call forth the demons listed in the commentary.

Freddie, however, is not likely to have intended this ritual to actually help him enlist the aid of demons. Instead, his reference to Goetic magic fills a more polyvalent function. Benjamin places surrealism in a lineage, prefigured by Rimbaud's Satanism and Russian anarchism, of revolutionary appeals to evil employed as insulation against "all moralizing diletantism."⁹⁴ As if heeding Benjamin, in *Mad Love* Breton writes that "the exalted representation of an innate 'evil' will retain the greatest revolutionary value," a belief presumably shared by Man Ray when he placed the contours of an inverted cross over a behind in *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade*.⁹⁵ Freddie, thus, is not the only esoterically inclined surrealist to have ventured into the area of demonology or black magic. Two further examples, Max Ernst and the Romanian writer Ghérasim Luca, can illuminate the import of Freddie's references to demons.

Ernst employs illustrations of some of the numerous demons found in the *Goetia* on a couple of occasions. He culled these images from Collin de

Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal*, which Louis Le Breton illustrated with grotesque and humorous woodcuts of the demons, which are often human-animal hybrids. For the cover of an issue of *View* magazine dedicated to Ernst in 1942, he incorporated Le Breton's illustration of the demon Buer, who has the head of a lion and five goat legs forming a swirling wheel behind its body.⁹⁶ In his autobiographical notes in the same issue, Ernst uses an illustration of the demon Stolas, a long-legged crowned owl who is a prince in hell, thus forming a suggestive reference to his totemistic identification with birds and esoteric interests in one fell swoop. For Ernst, these demons stand as personal totems, markers of an identification with evil against the repressive anti-myth directing the disastrous events of the time. Tearing down the old constructions in order to erect new ones, the maligned forces of darkness become his allies in a playful construction of a new myth to counter the old ones.

Ghérasim Luca's essay *The Passive Vampire* (1945) is another surrealist appeal to demonic forces. As Krzysztof Fijalkowski puts it, *The Passive Vampire* takes the shape of "an extended meditation on the self and the object, with its relations to chance, desire, and magic."⁹⁷ That magic is often black. In a frenzied litany, Luca calls on a host of demons in a way that recalls Freddie's appeal to "BAEL! ASTAROTH! FORAS!":

The dreamer, the lover, the revolutionary are all unknowingly committing demonic acts. For, whatever your name: Sammael, Phiton, Asmodeus, Lucifer, Belial, Beelzebub, Satan, we shall only recognize you, O Demon, in our valid actions and ideas.⁹⁸

Dreamer, lover, and revolutionary: such is the self-identification of most surrealists. Luca, then, like Ernst, draws on these forces in order to mobilize surrealist powers against the disenchanted and repressive present. In a debased civilization, Ernst and Luca imply, all acts of the imagination take the side of "evil." Indeed, Luca considers truth-seekers of all kinds, whether workers, poets, or thinkers, to "carry on the magician's work."⁹⁹ Luca, however, insists on the demonic aspects of this operation. For him, allegiance to magic also means that, "Every dream, every act of love, every riot is a black mass."¹⁰⁰ But surrealism is equally concerned with the relation of this "evil" to the recovery of the rejected knowledge found in esotericism, conceived as a source of inspiration for a more integral outlook on the world. The satanic currents that these surrealists tap into, then, act as shorthand for the overall surrealist appeal to esotericism

for its poetic visualization of hidden relations in the world, but with the added *frisson* brought by blasphemy and the call for demons. With its ritualistic atmosphere and allusions to black magic, *Eaten Horizons* appears as a black mass of the sort Luca calls for, something that José Pierre touches upon when he detects “a provocative and blasphemous analogy between the body of the beloved woman” and the body of Christ in transubstantiation.¹⁰¹

Luca and Freddie do not merely have their references to black magic in common. What Fijalkowski describes as Luca’s “insistence on the materialization of desire and the absorption of objects in a physical act of the denial of antinomies (conscious/unconscious, internal/external, reality/desire)” could almost be a description of what transpires in *Eaten Horizons*.¹⁰² The resemblances between *Eaten Horizons* and *The Passive Vampire* may not be a coincidence. Despite the small edition it was printed in, and its subsequent obscurity, *The Passive Vampire* “circulated with a degree of freedom” in the post-war French surrealist milieu.¹⁰³ Freddie could have been introduced to the ideas in it, if not the text itself, by some of his surrealist friends in Paris around the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. The polyglot Ilmar Laaban may also have been familiar with *The Passive Vampire*: parts of his declaration in the *Surrealistisk manifestation* catalogue of the magical functioning of the object bear striking resemblances to Luca’s “investigation of objects as magical agents.”¹⁰⁴

Luca’s lyrical discussion of a new function of the object charged with a playful form of black magic, then, helps elucidate Freddie’s references to demons. It can also shed light on some of Freddie’s connections between black magic, eroticism, and language. Through delirious associations, Luca finds that, given the right conditions, the object begins to “murmur a black-magical language [...] one that was very close to dream and to primordial language.”¹⁰⁵ Luca connects black magic not only with the object, but also with the surrealist interest in dream and attraction to the notion of a magic ur-language. Conceptions of such a linguistic magic recur throughout Breton’s post-war writings, where they are intimately related to the romantic-occultist notion of language that works directly, magically, on reality.¹⁰⁶ Breton’s valorization of analogy, his interest in alchemy, and his inquests into the relation between magic and poetry all coalesce around this goal.

Much as in *The Passive Vampire*, the black magic in *Eaten Horizons*, then, is bound up with both eroticism and language. The commentary

extends the playfulness inherent in Freddie's references to Goetic magic through a bawdy conflation of ritual and sex, of esotericism and eroticism. This further relates *Eaten Horizons* to both Luca's poetics and a broader surrealist interest in the materiality of language, and the potential for esoteric-poetic meaning to arise from linguistic manipulation.

THE HERMETIC CABALA

In Freddie's commentary for *Eaten Horizons*, the film's ritualistic elements collide with barely veiled erotic imagery of a knowingly crude kind. The written commentary complements the film's visuals in ways that seem more like poetic interpretation and extrapolation than anything else. The commentary is not a conventional film script, nor is it a simple description of what the film shows. Instead, Freddie uses deliberately ambiguous poetic images in the form of analogies, similes, and metaphors in order to bring out, emphasize, and play with both the ritualistic and erotic aspects of the film. This poetics is also informed by magic, not just in terms of the repertoire of motifs that the commentary invokes, but also in its play with double meanings of words and the images they recall. The double images, esoteric allusions, and play with words contribute to suggest a deeper conflation of the erotic and the esoteric in *Eaten Horizons*.

Double or multiple meanings have been a staple feature in surrealism, from all forms of wordplay to the visual images produced by Salvador Dalí's method of paranoia-criticism.¹⁰⁷ Such imagery points to the instability of the ordinary, and the potential to reveal unexpected and enchanting meaning from within the quotidian, exploding dulled everyday perception. But as Benjamin points out, the surrealists' play with words is also a way of recovering a linguistic magic.¹⁰⁸ An early and significant example of this magical quality of wordplay can be found in Michel Leiris's 1925 "Glossary." Criticizing etymological definitions of words, Leiris proposes that dissecting words and considering their malleability with regard to "associations of sounds, forms, and ideas" can change language into an oracle and enable us to discover its hidden qualities and secrets.¹⁰⁹ With the increased surrealist interest in esotericism, this magical quality of poetry took on further significance. In "Fronton-Virage," Breton writes of his attempts to "formulate a law proclaiming the deep unity of the pursuits of high magic and of what I am not afraid to call high poetry."¹¹⁰ Such a statement should not be taken to imply

that there is an absolute identity between magic and poetry, but rather that there is a dynamic interplay between them, one feeding into the other; if there is a unity, it is in their shared revelation of hidden correspondences, and concurrent capacity to, as the surrealists learned from Rimbaud, “change life,” as if by the waving of a magician’s wand. Breton’s ambition, then, is an extension of the longstanding surrealist belief in the necessity to revitalize language in order for it to be able to uncover new aspects of the world and humanity’s relation with its surroundings.¹¹¹ The artist-magician and the poet-magician equally strive to find the keys to an analogical world.

Visual and literary images fuse in several surrealist artworks, but Freddie’s *Eaten Horizons* indicates a largely untapped capacity for the moving image and the literary image to cross-pollinate and produce new offspring, traversing the resulting whole like rowdy homunculi springing from the linguistic alchemist’s laboratory.

In “Fronton-Virage,” Breton elucidates the writings of Raymond Roussel from the perspective of esoteric linguistics. A contemporary of the early surrealists, the novelist and playwright Roussel kept his distance from the movement and instead took his place as one of those “surrealists despite themselves” that comprise such a large part of the surrealist tradition.¹¹² Roussel’s novels *Impressions of Africa* (1910) and *Locus Solus* (1914) are intricate language machineries that generate fantastic events steeped in barely sublimated personal obsessions.¹¹³ In his posthumously published *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, Roussel reveals that he created his bewildering fiction with the aid of an idiosyncratic method based on likeness in sound between words with different meanings. Roussel located an alternative meaning in phrases, for instance by changing just one of the letters in the original, and then let the narrative grow out of the tension between the original and the permuted phrases.¹¹⁴ Not content with this key to Roussel’s linguistic mystery, Breton remained convinced that Roussel’s writings held an even deeper secret. In “Fronton-Virage,” he seeks out encoded alchemical messages and structures in Roussel’s work, inspired in particular by the pseudonymous alchemist Fulcanelli’s definition of the “phonetic cabala.”¹¹⁵

Fulcanelli describes the phonetic cabala as an ancient method of using assonance or homophony to veil the esoteric meaning of a word or expression; these messages are then hidden in plain sight, as it were, innocuous to the average reader but fraught with higher meaning for the initiate.¹¹⁶ This makes the phonetic cabala similar to alchemy, the

enigmatic imagery of which simultaneously conceals and reveals.¹¹⁷ Fulcanelli relates the phonetic cabala, also known as the hermetic cabala, the language of birds, or the green language, to *argot*, in other words slang. In *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (1926), he extends the hermeneutics of the phonetic cabala to an interpretation of symbols in gothic cathedrals, in which he reveals the co-existence of pagan and alchemical images with Christian iconography. Smuggled into the cathedrals in this way, these officially banished images signify a subversive undercurrent, a repository of rejected knowledge, in the midst of official cultural history. Fulcanelli claims that the very *art gothique* style of the cathedrals in question is significant in this respect. When pronounced, *art gothique* sounds like *argotique*, and is hence, for Fulcanelli, intimately related to the argot of the green language. Much like Leiris, then, Fulcanelli opposes the etymological scrutinizing of conventional linguists, instead privileging those “less superficial authors” who have pointed out the similarity between the words “gothic” and “goetic”—as in the magic Freddie alludes to.¹¹⁸ Fulcanelli’s inventive construction of connections against the grain of aesthetic and naturalistic conventions is similar to surrealism’s construction of a contrary tradition. Such a manoeuvre, relating an art-historical current to slang and magic, also says something about Fulcanelli’s joyously playful conflation of high and low, sacred and profane, base and refined. Here, the “high” in magic and poetry that Breton seeks does not designate any ascension from the base, but rather indicates their convoluted and co-dependent co-existence.

Likewise, Freddie’s written commentary is hardly “high” poetry in any sense, much as he gleefully appeals to demonology rather than to “high” magic. Freddie also takes a knowingly humorous stance towards the imagery he employs. This is reflected in the fact that his high-strung tone appropriates the “initiatric style” of many alchemical manuscripts, which, writes alchemy scholar Lawrence Principe, is characterized by the fact that “the author writes in a self-consciously grand manner, speaking as the master of a closed circle and addressing his readers as postulants.”¹¹⁹ Freddie’s commentary, much like many of the iconographic meanings that Fulcanelli reveals, also revels in the interplay of the base and the refined. And similarly to Breton’s analysis of Roussel’s way of disguising alchemical meaning in the seemingly trivial or fantastic, Freddie veils the erotic in the esoteric, and the other way around, in ways that work as much through imagistic similarity as through homophony or assonance. Freddie’s written commentary, then, creates poetic images

that confound and create meaning in ways that can be unpacked according to Fulcanelli's broader hermeneutics. Here, Freddie is also close in approach to Breton's surrealist application of the phonetic cabala as a more general veiling of esoteric content, as in his detection of allusions to alchemically meaningful numbers in Roussel's writings.¹²⁰

On, then, to an examination of some examples of the hermetic cabala as it takes shape in Freddie's commentary to *Eaten Horizons*. A self-explanatory simile can be found in Freddie's explicit description of the naked woman as "an alter [sic] of desire," which pertains to the broader surrealist tendency to treat the female body as an altar. Some of the other literary images are shamelessly obvious, even as they take the shape of metaphors. Freddie's description of the woman's breasts as a port for his "bread-ship" matches the film's imagery of the woman lying down with the loaf of bread between her breasts. The phallic shape of the loaf of bread is here directly equated with the orator's penis. The imagery becomes more complex when Freddie describes iron-clad boots rattling, before: "The chosen one of the night enters with purple-coloured steps into the great room, where the navel is the light in the ceiling, and bread does not stand the light." Through such images, Freddie approaches crucial aspects of the surrealist interest in the connection between language and esotericism, but he does so in a way that is considerably more humorous than solemn. The synesthetic image "purple-coloured steps" brings together ceremonial significance with bawdy humour. Purple is commonly associated with ceremonial magic—but it is also the colour of the erect glans. The steps associated with purple are then, at one and the same time, those of the cloaked initiates entering the ceremonial room, and the male member approaching a whole other sort of metaphorical chamber. For if the great room has a navel, this is not merely a surrealist metaphor for a skylight, but also a literal reference that designates the room a stomach, or, rather, a conflation of the woman's sexual organs and her insides. This interpretation is lent credence by the following paragraph, which states that "the prayer that is uttered is the prayer of a red-hot sword," an unmistakable evocation of a phallic shape driven by sexually aroused eagerness to the point of violence. Freddie's employment of such analogical associations approaches the *double entendre*. They cloak the erotic in the esoteric, and vice versa.

Such an insight into the interrelatedness of the high and the low through unabashedly base analogies makes *Eaten Horizons* appear as a cunningly corporeal take on the hermetic motto, "as above, so below."

It also rhymes well with the American surrealist Franklin Rosemont's remark on the esoteric meaning of wordplay. In an essay on the writer T-Bone Slim's elastic employment of language in the service of puns, he comments:

We may thus reinterpret Shakespeare's celebrated remark about puns being the lowest form of wit: In the light of Fulcanelli and T-Bone Slim, it would seem that "lowest" here means *deepest*—that is, that word-play penetrates to the *physical* foundations of language. The embarrassment [sic] provoked by puns in "polite" society suggests that they do indeed touch something vital and hidden, as has been amply shown, of course, by psychoanalysis.¹²¹

In the linguistic transmutations of the phonetic cabala, then, above and below, in all their senses, are no longer antinomies, but interrelated. Low wordplay becomes high magic; the embarrassing baseness of language corresponds with the lower bodily stratum; that which ought to be hidden is brought into the light. The disorienting and enchanting quality of correspondences here assumes a base corporeality. If Baudelaire's "Correspondences" establishes an analogical relation between trees and the pillars of temples, *Eaten Horizons* erects a male member beside them. Freddie, likewise, shows the erotic underbelly of ceremonial esotericism, the lively unconscious of its solemn repertoire, as it were.¹²² This approach is an integral part of the surrealist poetics in *Eaten Horizons*, where the "below" of the desiring and opened body is put in reverberating contact with the "above" of high magic.

THE ALCHEMICAL IMAGINATION

There is a similar carnivalesque dialectic of the base and refined in the visual imagery in *Eaten Horizons*. It can be seen in the lingering close-up of a dirty foot that rests upon a loaf of bread and the brief view of a piss-stained wall outside the gate that leads to the chamber in which the events in the second section of *Eaten Horizons* appear to take place. But it can also be located in a more dynamic fashion in the dislocations and transformations of the loaf of bread in the film. While Freddie's commentary posits the bread to be a metaphor for the male member, in the film its meaning is less stable. Richardson points out that there is a constant play between inside and outside, of the body and the bread alike, in the film.¹²³ These dynamic operations place the film in the region

of what Gaston Bachelard calls the material imagination. In *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, Bachelard describes the dialectic between inside and outside as a fundamental operation within the alchemical imagination. He claims that alchemy often sets to turn substances inside out, and hence: "If you can put the inside on the outside and [the] outside on the inside, says the alchemist, you are a true master."¹²⁴ Considering the value placed on alchemy in surrealism at the time, it does not seem far-fetched to detect an alchemical poetics in *Eaten Horizons*, which complements the film's parallels with the hermetic cabala. But it needs to be noted that it is hardly any direct depiction of alchemy that takes place here. For the surrealists, alchemy is not just a set of frivolous imagery to be raided, but, as Bachelard also argues, a potent stimulant of the imagination.¹²⁵

In *Eaten Horizons*, Freddie indeed seems to enact an alchemical process that is in line with his poetics of eroticism, the transmutational goal of which remains unclear. Considered from the perspective of Bachelard's ruminations on the alchemical imagination, however, the mystifying adventures of the loaf of bread take on an added significance. In several instances in *Eaten Horizons*, the bread is illuminated by a bright white light, directed exclusively towards it. This whiteness can be interpreted as a reference to a potential alchemical process. If so, the bread in the film is an enigmatic substance exposed to the first stage of alchemical putrefaction, or *nigredo*. At first, it is caught under a dirty foot and then constantly displaced in the dark interior of a mysterious chamber, but it has a potential for alchemical whitening, the intermediate *albedo* stage where matter is refined. The alchemical soul thus engaged is also bound up with another important observation that Bachelard makes about the alchemical imagination: "When matter is still black, we already imagine, or foretell, a bright whitening."¹²⁶

Bachelard detects an alchemical imagination in the baking of bread, where it guides and structures an intensified appreciation of and intimate proximity to matter.¹²⁷ Bread, then, is a highly alchemical food, "a substance composed of three elements: earth, water, and air. It awaits the fourth: fire."¹²⁸ He even compares the working of yeast on bread with the swelling of a belly.¹²⁹ Since the bread in *Eaten Horizons* is recovered from the woman's body in the regions of her stomach, Bachelard's metaphor points to a metonymic relation between the bread and the body in the film. These material allusions to alchemy can be seen as evidence of a longing for participation in the world in its vivid materiality.¹³⁰

Conceptions of participation point to the capacity for the imagination to afford a more intimate, or magical, relation with the world. That may sound all too bright and benevolent when compared with Freddie's noted emphasis on base corporeality and materiality. But Bachelard's glowing valorization of the material imagination as a path towards love of, and intimacy with, the world in its materiality also leaves room for an insight into the necessary dialectics of the base and refined. He points out that the alchemical "image of material sublimation" points in two directions, and does not so much dissolve but encompass opposites: it is at once rising and descending, a depiction of transformation as well as preservation.¹³¹

Bachelard's delineation of the imagination's conception of alchemy, then, rhymes well with the process that the bread is exposed to in *Eaten Horizons*: at once dark and white, it ultimately opens in order to spill out the same matter that was found in the woman's body. Thus transformed and preserved at the same time, the loaf of bread becomes a mystifying materialization of a surrealist conception of alchemy as a process bound up with corporeal desire and the imagination's transformation of material reality. Indeed, for Bachelard, the material imagination is intimately bound up with the experience of correspondences: "*Baudelairean correspondences* are based on a profound harmony among material substances. They bring into being one of the greatest *chemistries* of sensations [...]. A Baudelairean correspondence is a powerful locus of the material imagination. At this locus, all 'imaginary substances' commingle and fertilize one another's metaphors."¹³² As such, the material imagination acts as a generator of sorts of what Benjamin calls the aura. In *Eaten Horizons*, the aura emerges as an affective, re-enchanting shock even as the film is deeply engaged in modernist disruption and dislocation. If *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* pertains to a sense of disjunctive correspondences between the human and the world, in *Eaten Horizons* the remnants of ritual that Benjamin discerns in correspondences are directed towards a more complex and fluid evocation of what Freddie refers to as the esoteric insight into "the great interconnectedness of all things."

Much like *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*, *Eaten Horizons* draws on erotic energies in order to create a corporeal magic art. But here, it largely takes expression through analogically functioning images with esoteric connotations. Surrealists have indeed always valued, and actively brought out, the fantastic and humorous aspects of esoteric

imagery, as evidenced by the playful transformations occult symbols are made to undergo in the works of artists like Brauner, Carrington, and Ernst. Freddie subscribes to a similar attitude in his use of esoteric elements. The priest Freddie aspired to be in relation to his art, then, turns out to rather be a trickster in obscenely purple garb. As much should probably be expected from a surrealist who cheerfully hailed “the anarchist-pornographic revolution.”

THE TAROT AND THE *Vis Imaginativa*

The symbol drawn on the hand in *Eaten Horizons* is not just ritualistically connected with the ominous magic circle. By way of the alchemical imagination, it is also connected with the whitening of the bread. Conceived as a reference to the alchemical *albedo* stage, the whitening of the bread alludes to alchemy’s philosophical mercury, which in turn is related to the feminine moon. These features are interconnected. As mentioned, earlier scholars have claimed that the two signs drawn on the hand in the first sequence in *Eaten Horizons* are a scorpion and a sun.¹³³ Upon closer inspection, however, the stylized animal cannot reasonably be a scorpion, since it lacks a tail. It looks more like a crayfish. With that in mind, the “sun” accompanying the crayfish is more likely to be a depiction of a moon. For the crayfish is a central element in the tarot card the Moon, at the bottom of which it crawls out of murky waters, while the moon itself is often depicted with prominent rays similar to those that emanate from the celestial body on the hand in *Eaten Horizons*. Together, the two signs on the hand form a reference to the eighteenth card in the tarot’s Major Arcana. Freddie’s commentary once again supports this interpretation, since he writes that the ritual enacted by the tarot-painted hand refers to an act of bringing the woman closer to the moon. The whitening of the bread may be understood to be an outcome of this conjuring of the feminine powers of the moon.

In the occultist Arthur Edward Waite’s description, the Moon card signifies the life of the imagination as it is set apart from the guiding spirit.¹³⁴ The crayfish is central here: it scuttles up from the dank waters as a manifestation of unleashed unconscious forces that threaten to destroy order and reason. The moon itself symbolizes mere reflected light, as opposed to the sun’s own luminosity. In Lévi’s occultism, the Moon card and the Goetic magic circle pertain to similar dark forces. If the transgressive elements in *Eaten Horizons*—such as the act of love

depicted as a cannibalistic rite—result from the initial ritual, they draw on the forces symbolized by the Moon card and the magic circle. That would indicate that Freddie employs his esoteric references irreverently, in defiance of the tenets of Lévi's occultism. For Lévi, the imagination needs to be guarded to ensure that it does not call forth disastrous elements: "To preserve ourselves against evil influences, the first condition is therefore to forbid excitement to the imagination," he writes.¹³⁵ It is easy to see why a mischievous surrealist like Freddie, indeed surrealism overall, would turn the signifiers of an excited imagination against such a strict doctrine. But Freddie's appeal to demons and the Moon card does not just oppose Lévi's metaphysical distinction between good and evil forms of imagination. It also means that *Eaten Horizons* departs from the ideals put forward by both Breton and Freddie himself, and so relates in an uneasy and troubling way to the surrealist search for a new myth. This difference is notable when comparing the reference to the Moon card in *Eaten Horizons* with other surrealist uses of the tarot from the time.

The staircase in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* that paired twenty-one cards from the tarot's Major Arcana with spines of books grafted esoteric symbolism to surrealist precursors like Baudelaire and Sade, as well as more recent discoveries in the form of Swedenborg and Johann Valentin Andreae, the presumed author of the Rosicrucian alchemical manuscript *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*. The tarot, here, imparted a sense of the occult and of initiatory progress to the very edifice of surrealism. But surrealists have also employed the tarot to more specific symbolic ends, which seem to clash with Freddie's call on the demonic. Breton's *Arcanum 17*, his most sustained probing of the ideas that would feed into *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, refers to the seventeenth card in the Major Arcana, the Star card, which depicts a woman standing with one foot in the water and one on land, pouring the contents of two jugs into the water and onto land, respectively. In Breton's interpretation, the Star signifies replenishment and rebirth, and he connects it with Victor Hugo's valorization of Lucifer.¹³⁶ Rather than evoking Lucifer for his demonic qualities, however, Breton now appeals to him in his guise as the morning star, whose light designates a revolt guided by a black luminosity to counter the all too bright sheen of the Enlightenment. The Star card, then, becomes the radiant centre around which Breton weaves his construction of a counter-myth.¹³⁷ Against salvation and resurrection bound for a heavenly realm, he posits rebirth as an outcome of an initiatory transformation of being. Osiris, the Egyptian god who was torn

apart, put together, and related with the seasonal rhythms of the Nile land's black soil, counters the Western tradition of transcendence emanating from Christ. Another example is Victor Brauner's 1947 painting, *The Surrealist*. Brauner here transforms the Magician, the first card of the Major Arcana, into a figure embodying the ideals of the surrealist artist as a magician of sorts. In art historian Daniel Zamani's interpretation, Brauner's *Surrealist* is "an almost utopian display of cosmic harmony."¹³⁸ Brauner's interest in the tarot then emerges as a similarly benign vehicle for reintegration in the aftermath of the war.

Freddie's use of the tarot in *Eaten Horizons*, then, diverges considerably from Breton's and Brauner's references to the tarot. Yet, it would be too easy to claim that Freddie thereby constitutes an example of an unwitting discrepancy between surrealist ideals and practice. Surrealist films, poems, or plastic works are not meant to tautologically illustrate or represent ideals put forth in theoretical texts. They need to be seen as experimental interventions in a given field of ideas, stimulating interpretations and new thought rather than conforming to preconceived notions. As W.J.T. Mitchell points out, poetic images, whether literary, still, or moving, cannot be reduced to ideas—they exceed discursive thinking.¹³⁹ Or as the symbolist René Alleau puts it, poetic images cannot be reduced to *logos*, or rationalist discourse.¹⁴⁰ Considered as an intervention in the surrealist search for a new myth, *Eaten Horizons* then needs to be experienced in its ritualistic totality. It is also this experiential aspect that places it in the broader position of magic art. Marcel Mauss describes how the magical properties of an object are bound up with an element in them that "plays the role of a sort of embryonic myth or rite."¹⁴¹

Much like the altars at *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, then, *Eaten Horizons* is lent its mythical potential through the interplay of polyvalent meaning, which emanates from its combination of a skeletal, enigmatic narrative and rich imagery, condensed into a dynamic symbolism. Alleau defines the symbolic function as inseparable from the non-rational and "non-human powers to which myths and rites link the human being, reuniting *anthropos* and *cosmos* by the power of the *logos* that here is not *language*, but *verb* and *speech* resurrected (re-created) beyond the cultural and social sense of the words of the tribe."¹⁴² For Alleau, when the symbolizing powers of the imagination are free from being reduced to utilitarian, doctrinaire purposes, they exceed rationalism in an analogically associative plenitude of contradictory affects and meanings, linking

the human to the flows of life and extrahuman creativity in an immanent universe.

Eaten Horizons does not, then, so much contradict as intervene in the surrealist probing of a new myth. For if the film negates Lévi's caution against excitement of the imagination, it evokes a reintegrating surrealist myth. Its seemingly fraught relation with the immediate post-war surrealist ideas of art as a means towards a utopian rebirth, then, appears to be a more complicated proposition. Some aspects of this problem can be elucidated by turning to surrealism's relation to the esoteric notion of the *vis imaginativa*. As Antoine Faivre explains, the *vis imaginativa* can be "understood as an ability to act upon Nature," and the term hence designates the esoteric understanding of the imagination as being capable of altering the world by creating new conceptualizations of it.¹⁴³ Faivre discusses the Renaissance physician and esotericist Paracelsus's notion of the imagination in terms that are illuminating for surrealism's affinities with esotericism:

Desire and thought incarnate in the image which, once formed, serves as a mold for the soul that pours itself into it, which manifests itself in it. *The imagination functions as a seed*; the images that our soul produces are not the simple modification of this soul, but body, incarnation, thought, and will; they become autonomous and then develop according to their own laws, like the children that we conceive. To conceive is to engender; every concept is organic [...].¹⁴⁴

A few years after *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Breton conceived the workings of all surrealist acts of the imagination in similarly organic terms. Surrealist creation, he claims in "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," is equivalent to the occult operation in which "the name must germinate."¹⁴⁵ Yet, Faivre finds the connections between surrealism and esotericism contradictory. On the one hand, he contends that surrealism compares favourably with the *vis imaginativa* when considering Breton's notion that "the imaginary is that which tends to become real," and his belief that analogy can restore lost connections with the world. But on the other hand, Faivre points out that surrealism's lack of grounding in a fixed religious myth puts it at a critical distance from the esoteric view of the imagination. The esotericists Faivre references, much like Lévi, adhere to an idiosyncratic interpretation of Christianity, and they distinguish between two kinds of imagination: "the true, creative in the noble

sense, which creates works but can also call forth things magically, and the false, the inauthentic and sterile that is sometimes capable of begetting real and concrete monsters.”¹⁴⁶ While the esoteric *vis imaginativa* lauds the creative and magical potential of the imagination, it also builds on deeply ingrained Western fears of its negative powers.¹⁴⁷ In line with Lévi’s urge for caution, the imagination ought then not to be liberated, but constrained and cultivated according to moral dictates.

The surrealist attitude is, however, more complicated than Faivre’s demarcation suggests. Breton makes it abundantly clear in “Ascendant Sign” that he considers poetic analogy an ethical means to strive for increased well-being and a more constructive relation with the surrounding world.¹⁴⁸ While Faivre is right in claiming that surrealism lacks grounding in a pre-established myth, the new myth it sought to cultivate is nevertheless founded on strong ethical convictions. The surrealist myth can be posited as a counter-moral that seeks to dispense with religious morality in order to create what the 1947 tract “Inaugural Rupture” describes as a “non-Moses morality,” or what Breton suggests is an ethics arising out of an imaginative and intimate interaction with the surrounding world.¹⁴⁹ This moral underpinning to the surrealist new myth is apparent in *Arcanum 17*, in which Breton pleads for a reversal of the poles of Western culture, as means to locate some form of hope for humanity.¹⁵⁰ With that said, surrealism does also have a gleeful penchant for calling forth monsters through the imagination. Consider the assemblage of piano and rotting donkeys and priests that forms one of the centrepieces in *Un chien andalou*, the animal-headed creatures that enchant and disrupt Max Ernst’s collages, or Hans Bellmer’s libidinal reconfigurations of the body in the various iterations of his uncanny *Doll*. Alongside Freddie’s films, these examples suggest that the surrealist liberation of the imagination is integral and transcends the distinction between the monstrous and the marvellous—here, the monstrous is the marvellous. That did not stop with the horrors of the war, no matter how much the surrealists sought to direct healing powers through the attempt to form a new myth. Even if the surrealists believed the new myth to be a possible way towards a renewal and rebirth under the sign of more wholesome values, they nevertheless perceived it was necessary to give the imagination free rein. Even the imagination’s monstrous products could contribute to the new myth. To reiterate, it is imperative to distinguish between programmatic expressions of the intended effect of the new myth, and the artistic investigations of its “contours.”

What kind of new myth, then, might take shape in *Eaten Horizons*? The meeting of the tarot Moon card and the Goetic magic circle suggests that it is a myth of the unfettered imagination, but one that is fraught with ritual and magic, not to mention eroticism. The ritualized drawing of the magic circle appears to awaken something in the fettered woman. The connection between the first and the second sequence in the film is, then, presumably precisely this awakening of an unfettered Eros, and the ritualistic atmosphere of a mythically secluded space in the second sequence appears to be a consequence of the unfettering that precedes it. Hence, the myth is also that of an Eros unrestrained by the laws of time and space, and even the boundaries of the body. There is a cruelty at work here, too, a fascination with sexual transgression, that aligns the film with the surrealist cult of the Marquis de Sade. One sign of surrealism's persistent interest in Sade is the fact that his novel *The 120 Days of Sodom* was one of the books in the tarot staircase at *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Thus, even the exhibition that is the most direct manifestation of surrealism's wish to mend the ravages of the war through a more benign rebirth recognizes the fundamental necessity to allow the freedom to imagine the most monstrous acts.

In the wake of the postmodern re-evaluation of surrealism, such monstrous expressions have often been considered evidence of artists being closer in spirit to the "dissident" surrealists around Georges Bataille than the "mainstream" surrealists gravitating around Breton.¹⁵¹ But such a dualism is both ahistorical and simplified. It is ahistorical, since it is based on a development that took place in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Bataille and Breton raged against each other in pamphlets and manifestoes. By the time of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Bataille and Breton had been reconciled. If they continued to disagree intensely with each other on certain points, they would also be preoccupied with many similar questions.¹⁵² The dualism of Bataille and Breton is simplistic because it interprets the surrealist watchwords "love, liberty, and poetry" all too literally.¹⁵³ Again, such ideals should not be confused with a proscriptive statement about the "content" of surrealist films, artworks, or writings. Nor should it be taken to imply that the surrealists did not recognize the necessity of acknowledging and drawing on the darker undercurrents of desire.¹⁵⁴ In his *Conversations* with André Parinaud, Breton clarifies that the surrealist exaltation of love always recognizes the necessary dialectic between purity and perversion, and that "it's this dialectical process that made Sade's genius shine for them like a black sun."¹⁵⁵ If love were only

to stay in the high domains, Breton says, it would become “rarefied.” He continues:

Such a flame’s admirable, blinding light must not be allowed to conceal what it feeds on, the deep mine shafts criss-crossed by hellish currents, which nonetheless permit us to extract its substance—a substance that must continue to fuel this flame if we don’t want it to go out. It’s because Surrealism started from this viewpoint that it has made such an effort to lift the taboos that bar us from freely treating the sexual world, and *all* of the sexual world, perversions included [...].¹⁵⁶

In the light of Breton’s statement, then, *Eaten Horizons* may be construed as a myth of the unfettered imagination and its relationship with eroticism, which it fuels by imagining new constellations of desire. But the surrealist new myth does not merely work through such narrative crystallizations. It is also intended to foster a certain sensibility; the rebirth the surrealists sought for society was meant to liberate analogical thinking. For surrealism, though, the poetic experience has primacy over doctrine, and it is rather an experiential magic that is at stake than an initiation into a “form of thought.”¹⁵⁷

To this end, Freddie’s approach to the tarot is significant. If his ritualized evocation of the monstrous imagination signified by the Moon card goes against the grain of Lévi’s occultism, this also rhymes well with the surrealist artist and esotericism expert Kurt Seligmann’s criticism of the occultist appropriation of the tarot. Seligmann considers the attempt to tie the tarot to an “esoteric doctrine” to be outright “antitarotic,” since the occultists “lack a virtue found in some Tarot cards, namely humour and irony.”¹⁵⁸ Seligmann’s analysis of the function of the tarot is pertinent in this context:

The Tarot figures are stereotypes; but what they suggest is in constant flux. They do not express or lead to an established doctrine. On the contrary, they liberate us from such bonds. [...] they free faculties in us which are suppressed by conventions and daily routine. They stimulate a creative power which appeals to the artist. They are the “poetry made by all” of the surrealist postulate.¹⁵⁹

In line with Seligmann’s definition, Freddie plays dialectically on the tarot card’s symbolic value in order to generate a myth of the unfettered surrealist imagination. But the playful and oblique fashion in which he

references the Moon card also dissociates it from programmatic, doctrinaire meaning, much like his references to the magic circle and his playful approach to ceremonial magic. It does not necessarily need to be decoded in order to communicate, but may as well stimulate the spectator's imagination. The symbolic meaning here is further destabilized in this manner through the editing, the pace and connections of which places it in a disorienting relationship with the Goetic magic circle, with the fettered female body, and with the abrupt transition to the stylistically more diverse and over-determined second sequence.

Freddie's use of the tarot can then be summed up as one where it is simultaneously valorized for its analogical stimulation of the imagination and for its potential to act as an open symbolism, as it were, that can suggest a dynamic framework for a new myth. This argument once again draws attention to the fact that Freddie's films relate to the new myth in a dual manner. They are suggestive of its symbolic functioning, and can hence be seen as seeds of myths of a more integrated human relation with the world, of a counter-force against Christian-capitalist repression, and of the unfettered imagination's absolute freedom to transform the world. But they also point towards its complementary function as a catalyst of experiential magic, and thus strive towards the function of triggering correspondences and enable a more intimate experience of the surrounding world, beyond the chasm yawning between subject and object that Freddie and other surrealists perceived as a characteristic of Western modernity. In this, much like Freddie's radio talk, his films suggest that surrealism tries to recover "participation." In Wouter Hanegraaff's revision of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's concept, participation signifies a perennial capacity for analogical thinking and the experience of a deeper unity with the surrounding world. For Hanegraaff, this would explain how "magic" can survive in a supposedly disenchanted modernity, in which not even the practitioners of magic disavow positivist causality.¹⁶⁰ Significantly, Hanegraaff points out that contemporary magical practice "reflects a deep-seated feeling that, somehow, the language of myth and poetry is more than just beautiful, but must convey something about the real nature of the world."¹⁶¹ Surrealism sought precisely such a function for myth, and in Freddie's films this ambition takes a convoluted expression, which nevertheless points to both the narrative function of myth and to its underlying function of restoring a lost sensibility, of fostering a new sensorium in which perception and the imagination are intertwined.

THE AFTERLIFE OF THE NEW MYTH

Freddie's participation in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* launched him into his esoteric period and transformed his view of art as well as of society. The idea, fostered by the exhibition, that art can have the function of magic and stimulate the emergence of new myths stayed with him long after he considered his esoteric period to have ended.¹⁶² Læssøe quotes two interviews from 1963, in which Freddie sticks closely to the surrealist ideals of creating a new social myth and of the artwork as a carrier of magic energies that can intervene in the relationship between the human and the world.¹⁶³ As late as 1984, Freddie related that he was "still pre-occupied by—esoteric phenomena. That is to say, things that lie on the other side of reason. When I think of the Cabalist texts it is as if—when you penetrate deeply into them—they turn out to be a negotiable path to the deepest layers in man."¹⁶⁴ A telling example of the entwinement of esotericism and Freddie's construction of an identity as artist-magician can be found in an untitled collage from 1959. In it, he combines two photographs of himself, one of his head and shoulders and the other of his legs, so that the torso vanishes and his body appears to be just head, shoulders, legs, and feet. On his feet and shins are drawn geometrical symbols, a waning moon, and a dot. Karen Westphal Eriksen describes the figure as "a subtle, armless mythical creature" and Freddie "as a magician or alchemist with esoteric signs on his feet and a third eye in his forehead."¹⁶⁵

It is hard not to relate this self-mythologization to Freddie's earlier positing of his films as interventions in the surrealist search for a new myth informed by recovered esoteric knowledge. With *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons*, Freddie temporarily substituted film camera and celluloid for paint and canvas, but he used them to enact a similar alchemical operation, where reality is transformed by the imagination and forms magical objects. The films' magical effect may not have been strong enough for them to replace the old societal foundations with a new myth. Nonetheless, they stand as vibrant film examples of a period in surrealism that may have been marginalized, but still resonates within surrealist practice up to the present.

Freddie shared the experience of exile with a number of surrealists of different nationalities. Like so many of them, it was precisely during such a period of upheaval and unrest that he became particularly receptive to myth and esotericism. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron provides some

productive suggestions as to how the experience of exile may play a part in such a development. She argues that exile was not merely an exterior voyage for the surrealists during the war, but that it also had a strong interior component, which means that it can be likened to an initiatory passage.¹⁶⁶ The next chapter, too, treats films that were made in direct extension of the central themes of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, but it puts greater emphasis on the transformations that the movement underwent as a consequence of these experiences of exile, and draws attention to the significant influx of non-Western participants in the movement.

NOTES

1. Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 248.
2. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 2.
3. Freddie's written commentary was first published in Danish in the Swedish film journal *Biografbladet*, as a supplement to an essay on the film by Steen Colding. See Colding, "Spiste horisonter," 49. Freddie's text was reprinted, accompanied by an English translation, in the 1962 volume *Wilhelm Freddie*. See Freddie, "Eaten Horizons."
4. Breton, "Surrealist Comet," 96; Breton, "Fronton-Virage," 185.
5. Béguin, "Poetry and Occultism," 20.
6. Ibid. See also Eliade, *The Quest*, 123.
7. Bachelard, "Victor-Emile Michelet" (1954), in *The Right to Dream*, 143.
8. Raben-Skov, Rung, and Aagesen, "Biography," 219; Krarup and Nørrested, *Eksperimentalfilm i Danmark*, 25–28.
9. Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 138–140.
10. For overviews, see Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*; Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye"; Schmidt, *Wilhelm Freddie – den evige oprører*.
11. Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 123–131.
12. See Caws, "Againstness Wins out"; Bolt, "Freddie's Avant-Garde Strategies"; Pierre, "Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l'humour noir."
13. "en fanatiker, en anarkist, med bomber i fickan." Adrian-Nilsson, "Kubism–Surrealism," 17. Three decades later, Edouard Jaguer praised Freddie for his continued insolence. See Jaguer, "Chocken från den elektriska bågens pilar," 4–5.
14. Raben-Skov, Rung, and Aagesen, "Biography," 219.
15. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 69; Bolt, "Freddie's Avant-Garde Strategies," 130.
16. See Gade, "All That We Do Not Know," 114–116.
17. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 69–70.
18. Ibid., 118–120.

19. See *ibid.*, 126–137; Schmidt, *Wilhelm Freddie – den evige oprører*, 38–41.
20. See Aagesen, “Stick the Fork in Your Eye,” 33–34; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 139–175.
21. See Breton, “Surrealist Comet,” 95–96. See also LaCoss, “Attacks of the Fantastic.”
22. See Pierre, “Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l’humour noir,” 25–29.
23. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
24. Raben-Skov, Rung, and Aagesen, “Biography,” 219.
25. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
26. Freddie, “Eaten Horizons.”
27. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
28. Freddie, “Eaten Horizons.”
29. Freddie, “Why Do I Paint?,” 248.
30. Parts of the letter are published in Breton, “Projet initial.” For the letter in its entirety, see Breton, “Lettre d’invitations aux participants” (1947), André Breton archive, <http://www.andrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100837330>.
31. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 141.
32. See *ibid.*, 139ff.
33. Aagesen, “Stick the Fork in Your Eye,” 33; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 143.
34. “påvirket af sådanne indviede trosretninger og tankesystemer, som blandt andet udgjordes af astrologien og alkymien.” Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 139.
35. For a discussion of Lam’s altar, see Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 126.
36. See Péret, “Une contribution,” 139–140.
37. See also Pierre Mabile’s discussion of Lam’s painting *The Jungle* (1943); Mabile, “The Jungle.”
38. Compare this with the assertion that religion was born out of play in Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 14.
39. See Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 89–90; Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968*, 126.
40. Warlick, “Surrealism and Alchemy,” 167. To Warlick’s analysis, I would like to add a significant detail: the bird-headed High Priestess figure’s open tome displays a pair of scissors, which point to Ernst’s status as the prime exponent of collage for surrealist purposes. Here, his famed utilization of destructive cutting in the service of a surrealist poetics is rendered mythical by insertion in the holy book held by the surrealist High Priestess. As such, Brauner’s painting adds new and subtle layers to the mythologization of surrealism and of the surrealist artist’s harnessing of magical powers of creation, transmutation, and revelation.
41. Raben-Skov, “Biografi,” in *Freddie*, 95.
42. Semin, “Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Movement,” 38.

43. Ibid., 38–39; Montagne, “The Myth of the Double.”
44. “en slags mentalt rum af fantastisk andethed.” Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 146.
45. Ibid.
46. See Holten, *Surrealismen i svensk konst*, 126–128. For overviews of Imaginisterna, see Holten, *Surrealismen i svensk konst*, 125–165; Mezei, “Imaginisterna,” 11–15; Millroth, *CO Hultén*, 46–49.
47. Two texts in the exhibition catalogue discuss the surrealist myth to come. See Laaban, n.t.; Hellman, n.t.
48. For a more extensive discussion of the exhibition, see Noheden, “Expo Aleby, 1949.”
49. “någon förståsigpåare.” Kriland, “Oprør,” 32.
50. “Det kändes litet högtidligt.” Ibid.
51. “pang-pang och puss-puss.” Ibid., 33.
52. Ibid., 32.
53. See Breton, “As in a Wood,” 238–239; Kyrrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma*, 100; Hammond, “Available Light,” 6; Wimmer, “The French Reception of British Cinema,” 167, 172.
54. Laaban, n.t., n.p.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. “i det spänt militantas tecken.” Laaban, “Den tidige Freddie,” 11.
58. Freddie, “Why Do I Paint?,” 244.
59. Ibid., 248.
60. Ibid., 244.
61. Ibid., 245.
62. Ibid., 244.
63. Ibid., 246.
64. Ibid., 246–247.
65. Ibid., 248.
66. See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 156.
67. Ibid., 159.
68. Bataille, “Mouth” (1930), in *Visions of Excess*, 59–60.
69. See Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, 232.
70. “ikke så fiktive ‘liv’.” Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 167.
71. “Jeg ønskede at skabe et ‘gudebillede’, en magisk seksuel ritus. Med andre ord en magisk operation.” Quoted in *ibid.*, 75.
72. Ibid.
73. “pornografiske billede end med hvad man traditionelt forstår ved kunst.” Ibid.
74. See Breton, “As in a Wood,” 238.
75. See Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 181.

76. See Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, 180–181.
77. Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 181.
78. Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 13.
79. Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 181.
80. Benjamin, “Surrealism,” 192.
81. Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 154.
82. Césaire, “Poetry and Knowledge,” 140.
83. Freddie, “Why Do I Paint?,” 244.
84. “opération magique supérieur, d’un rite sublime dont Freddie s’est fait l’officiant masqué.” Benayoun, “Une boulimie de l’absolu,” 73.
85. Richardson, “The Density of a Smile,” 147.
86. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 160–162; Richardson, “The Density of a Smile,” 144.
87. All quotes and references to the written commentary are to Freddie, “Eaten Horizons.”
88. Laaban, “Den tidige Freddie,” 9.
89. “livsfarliga geometri.” *Ibid.*, 11.
90. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 183–184.
91. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 299. A similar magic circle, here described as a “triangle of the pacts,” is also reproduced in another of the surrealists’ sources of knowledge of occultism; see Grillot de Givry, *Witchcraft, Alchemy, and Magic*, 106. For the surrealists’ familiarity with this book, see Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 94.
92. *The Goetia*, 27–66.
93. Richardson, “The Density of a Smile,” 145.
94. Benjamin, “Surrealism,” 186–188, quote on 187.
95. Breton, *Mad Love*, 95.
96. See Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 10.
97. Fijalkowski, “From Sorcery to Silence,” 627.
98. Luca, *The Passive Vampire*, 93.
99. *Ibid.*
100. *Ibid.*
101. “une analogie provocante et sacrilège entre le corps de la femme aimée.” Pierre, “Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l’humour noir,” 29.
102. Fijalkowski, “From Sorcery to Silence,” 627.
103. *Ibid.*, 626n5.
104. *Ibid.*, 634.
105. Luca, *The Passive Vampire*, 44.
106. See Hammond, *Constellations of Miró, Breton*, 120–121.
107. See Balakian, *Surrealism*, 146.
108. Benjamin, “Surrealism,” 184.
109. Leiris, “Glossary: My Glosses Ossuary” (1925), in *Brisées*, 3–4.

110. Breton, "Fronton-Virage," 185.
111. Compare this with Breton's declaration that "language has been given to man so that he may make Surrealist use of it," in Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 32.
112. See *ibid.*, 26–27.
113. See Ford, *Raymond Roussel and the Republic of Dreams*.
114. Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, 3–44.
115. Breton, "Fronton-Virage," 188ff.
116. See Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère de Cathédrales*, 42.
117. Principe, *Secrets of Alchemy*, 143–144.
118. Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*, 42.
119. Principe, *Secrets of Alchemy*, 45.
120. Breton, "Fronton-Virage," 191–195.
121. Rosemont, "T-Bone Slim and the Phonetic Cabala," 23.
122. As Wouter Hanegraaff and Jeffrey Kripal point out, esotericism and eroticism are also often conflated in the public imagination, due to their shared nature of secrecy, and these associations sometimes correspond to actual erotic components of esoteric practice and theory. See Kripal and Hanegraaff, "Introduction." Freddie, then, plays on these associations, but the imagery in his commentary also pertains to the surrealists' ever-present emphasis on desire.
123. Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 146.
124. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose*, 16.
125. *Ibid.*
126. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 265.
127. *Ibid.*
128. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 65.
129. *Ibid.*, 66.
130. *Ibid.*, 251.
131. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 264.
132. *Ibid.*, 50.
133. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 162; Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 144. Læssøe only mentions the scorpion.
134. Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot*, 70.
135. Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 333.
136. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 131–132.
137. *Ibid.*, 109–121, 161–163.
138. Zamani, "The Magician Triumphant," 108.
139. Mitchell, *Iconology*, 41–42.
140. Alleau, *The Primal Force in Symbol*, 41.
141. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 127. See also Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects*, 129ff.

142. Alleau, *The Primal Force in Symbol*, 50.
143. Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 99.
144. Ibid., 103. My italics.
145. Breton, "On Surrealism in Its Living Works," 299. Italics removed.
146. Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 124.
147. See Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*.
148. Breton, "Ascendant Sign," 107.
149. Acker, "Inaugural Rupture," 48.
150. Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 80–81.
151. For a discussion of Freddie and Bataille, see Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 45–55.
152. See Richardson, "Introduction," in Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, 1–3.
153. See Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 16.
154. See Le Brun, "Desire," 308.
155. Breton, *Conversations*, 111.
156. Ibid.
157. Compare this with Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 11–15.
158. Seligmann, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion*, 391.
159. Ibid.
160. See Breton, "On Magic Art," 293–294; Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science*, 63–66.
161. Hanegraaff, "How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World," 377.
162. Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye!," 33, 35.
163. Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 203.
164. Quoted in Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye!," 35.
165. Eriksen, "Freddie and Photography," 172.
166. Chénieux-Gendron, "Surrealists in Exile," 439.

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