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Seaweed
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One of the most ubiquitous expressions in surrealist writing is the word ‘marvellous’, a term which harkens back to Andre Breton’s original declaration. In the first Surrealist Manifesto of 1924, the founder of the movement wrote ‘Let us not mince words, the marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful.’

With this in mind, what does the aphorism “Nature is the marvellous that the surrealist seeks”, from my book “Dancing and Digging, proverbs on freedom and nature,” mean? Most of the adages in the book were intended to be provocative and not have a single correct answer. And I must admit that my own use of the word marvellous, as a surrealist term, might be considered idiosyncratic, or even, a misuse. But let me thread a weird little web that might capture your interest and help you understand the maxim.

The surrealists have typically expressed themselves artistically - in paintings and poetry, etc. And while there are deep political, philosophical and psychoanalytic roots to their explorations, beliefs and experiments, they tend therefore to be largely situated

within the art and literary milieus. This makes a lot of sense for a number of reasons. One of them being that surrealism rejects the notion that humans are uniquely and essentially rational beings in a rational cosmos. And what better spaces to look for the non-rational than within artistic ones?

But if Breton wanted to help us escape the prison camp of reason as the defining characteristic of human selfhood, then advocating for a reconnection with a landscape-as-home, for an embrace of the natural world in all its chaotic, convulsive beauty, seems like the best place to start, rather than in the universities and art galleries of cities. Because in my view, and, apparently, in the view of many surrealists, the non-civilized have the easiest and most direct access to the marvellous. Breton believed for instance that the lifeways of 19th century Caribbean peoples led to a natural contact with the extraordinary by virtue of their implicit rejection of rationalist belief systems in favour of a surrealist utopia of a constant and organic immersion of the senses in their magical landscape of occult religion, mystical beings and thriving flora and fauna.

Throughout its history there have been many observations made by surrealists that note how the non-industrialized "colonised", "the primitive", etc, lived lives unencumbered by the constraints of bourgeois life, by the cages of rationality and belief in a simplistic cosmology based around monotheism and causality.

Breton's personal collection included many ethnographic artefacts he considered strange and wondrous originating from cultures outside of modernity and capitalism, for example North American indigenous masks, a small statue from New Guinea, Aboriginal markings on bark parchments and an amulet from the Solomon Islands, all indicative that being embedded in nature leads to cultures that are filled with expressions of the marvellous.

The surrealist of history was an activist wanting to overthrow the regimes of order, obedience and alienation, and the resulting boredom and miserabilism, that rule the lives of the modern citizen, regimes that have sovereignty not only over entire countries,

but over cities, neighbourhoods and individual bodies. The subconscious became a source of an unfettered, raw and authentic reality. A single person could use techniques like automatic writing or drawing to access the subconscious and discover a truer, freer aspect of one's Self and to explore suppressed or latent landscapes that were out of reach from the long repressive arms of the law and morality.

As the overthrow of capitalism, or modernity, became less and less likely, surrealism focused on artistic experimentation and convivial nights among comrades as the means to access the marvellous. Creative processes and art shows, games, experiments, drugs…I've personally explored all of these myself, some in excess, as part of my personal tactic of survival and resistance against the police and priests in and out of my head. But what I have rarely come across were exhortations and attempts to not simply withdraw your psyche, for limited time periods, from urban civilization, but to withdraw your body as well. As Breton and others clearly pointed out, the so called primitive, the un-modern, the one who still lives among gods and spirits, who obeys no political authority, who has no banks or landlords or police or bosses, who lives embedded in a habitat, they are the ones who experience the marvellous the easiest and, in fact, seem to be perpetually immersed in the wonderments that the surrealist seeks. Therefore it would make sense if surrealists were more vocal in advocating a withdrawal from city living and its domesticated culture and be fierce advocates of various primitivisms in order to live existences that are filled with the marvellous.

It is my view that the less domesticated we are, the more marvellous we become. Let me rephrase a now famous slogan - "beneath the pavement is the marvellous". In other words it is in tearing up and destroying cities, with their massified, repressed lives, utterly disconnected from nature, that the marvellous - the spirits, the monsters, the unknowns and the dreamlands will have space in which to return. Cities intrinsically crush and erase the mar-

vellous, not make space for it. In this sense, a rediscovery of our kinship with nature is the easiest path to lives filled with the singular and fantastic, not merely a passing art exhibit, evening with friends or artefacts on our wall, not that this is the surrealist practice or vision, I am speaking here to all of us who reject the precepts of modernity, who seek raw truth and more beauty.

We need to see ourselves as marvels within habitats of marvels, for this is the gift of the cosmos we have been given. Every aspect of nature is a breathtaking wonder. I seek a world in which we delight in the uniqueness of each other and of every iota of the planet we live on, not only of specific creations of human culture. We can move in this direction by withdrawing from civilization's stunted world and forming unions of imaginative beings embedded in landscapes in which we daily interact with all of its marvels.

I've often noted how boring humans seem to think we are compared to other creatures, and yet we are as wondrous as any of the myriad other curious and bizarre beings that populate our landscapes.

Many surrealists have been enamoured with insects, leading one commentator to describe them as "totemic" within Surrealism. This is another example of how nature has always been viewed by surrealists as inherently marvellous and the primary place we should be seeking it. Cities are boring, civilization is boring, work is boring, school is boring…but what the earth has birthed is anything but. Who can deny the awesomeness of bear claws, of the scent of pine needles, the shriek of eaglets, the snake hissing nearby, the flavour of maple syrup…if one seeks a cabinet of curiosities, one need only walk along any shoreline or through any woodland.

Un-domesticating ourselves will lead to our renewed ability to experience what is marvellous about each separate aspect of the planet and cosmos we inhabit…its flora and fauna, its sun and towering mountains, its hurricane funnels…dreams, sexual encounters, psychedelic adventures…the clouds, the stars, the galaxies…even darkness and light and the foggy unknowns in between. Embracing the chaos, with its surprises and mysteries, of undomesticated realms, including our own inner ones, will lead us to lives populated by the marvellous at every turn. Un-domesticating ourselves helps us see the miraculous improbability and singularity of every moment.

Even the marvellous needs a habitat. I speak of nature not as a place that one would seek out in order to temporarily experience the marvellous only to return to the planetary work-machine refreshed, but to destroy the planetary work-machine so that the marvellous can expand, can find new places to take root, can once again be as much a part of daily life as drinking water is. In fact the simple act of drinking water, and the sensation of water itself, can return to us as supernatural experiences.

The marvellous is most easily found where the a-rational resides and in sensual wisdom, by having such deep connections to a habitat that we can commune with its spirits, ghosts, hidden secrets and secret languages; it is accessed by being free to self-create and explore without constraints.

We can resist the tyranny of the belief systems that crush and deny and render extinct the intangible marvels of our landscapes. Let us heed the Surrealist call to demand the impossible, and let us do so by adapting to nature rather than capitalism, and in so doing, make ourselves marvellous, for it is in the realm of the undomesticated and organic where the unfettered spirit of Surrealism flourishes the easiest.