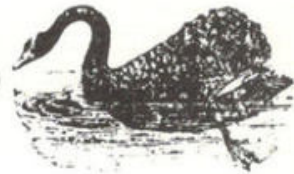


Black Swan Press



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Dear Edouard,

I would like to respond to your letters at great length, and with all manner of detail and digression, but -- alas! -- pressures of all kinds, large and small and old and new, make this impossible for the moment, and require that I write briefly and hurriedly....

First, Penelope and I want to thank you for your wonderful little drawing -- a delightful surprise -- that arrived here, in fact, on Penelope's birthday (the 22nd of January, birthday also of Francis Bacon, Lord Byron and Francis Picabia): and when we note also that she was born in 1942, the year that your drawing also found its way into the world, we realize that we are once again in the presence of an hasard objectif, inexhaustibly fertile field for research and revery. Merci beaucoup, cher camarade!!!

Regarding what we may call the "Matthews Affair": I must begin by saying that, from the moment that we learned that Matthews had been assigned responsibility for the American "entries" to the dictionary, it seemed to all of us an unhappy choice. It is true that as a critic and scholar he is unquestionably superior to the other "leading authorities" on surrealism in this country (Balakian, Caws, Rubin et al.); but his competence is very strictly confined, as he himself readily admits, to the field of French literature. Certainly he has never evidenced knowledge or even special interest in surrealism in the U.S. He has lived in this country for some 15 years, during which he has authored seventeen books and many dozens of articles, but has not yet written even one article -- or even a single full paragraph! -- on American surrealism, past or present. One of his students, Larry R. Smith, has told us that he asked Matthews why he did not write about U.S. surrealism, and Matthews admitted that he lacked both the knowledge and inclination to do so.

It would be no exaggeration, in fact, to suggest that Matthews' obvious and long-standing indifference to surrealism in the U.S. might well include at least a hint -- and perhaps more than a hint -- of actual hostility. Guy Ducornet (who is himself a college professor, as you know, and well-acquainted with the peculiar etiquette of that milieu) has told us that a professor as prominently situated as Matthews could easily, if he wanted to, see to it that two or three hundred university libraries subscribed to Arsenal: all he would have to do would be to write a few lines for one of several academic journals. We asked Matthews about this, but he has never done anything in this regard. You know that we have never met him; he travels widely and often, and has even visited Chicago in connection with university conferences, but has never visited with us. We all expected him to attend the 1976 World Surrealist Exhibition: visitors came from across the country -- dozens from California, from New York City (including Alice Mayoux, who happened to be sojourning there), from Florida, New Orleans, etc., etc., as well as, of course, from many other countries; but Matthews did not come, and did not even send us any sort of letter on the occasion.

I think it is fair to say, therefore, that from our point of view, here, as well as from the point of view of elementary objectivity, Matthews is incapable of doing justice to the task assigned to him.

Let me add that all of us are deeply appreciative of your own vigilance in this regard, and that we have the fullest confidence that you will do all that is possible to make the necessary rectifications.

As for the specific question under discussion, the "rupture" of autumn 1977, we are wholly in agreement with you. Most of those who have, for the moment, withdrawn from our group have done so out of confused loyalty to their personal friends, without any understanding of the principled issues involved. It is certain that they have been victimized by misinformation and falsehood, but we are hopeful that an eventual clarification will develop. Philip Lamantia and Nancy Joyce Peters have reaffirmed their belief that -- perhaps not tomorrow or even next year, but sooner or later -- Alice Farley will resume her activity as a participant in our group. I think I mentioned to you that she gave a performance last fall that significantly was not presented under the auspices of Johnson & Burns. Mado is another who I think has no taste for schismatic attacks on Arsenal. And just the other day Jocelyn Koslofsky, who lives very near the Rothwells and sees them from time to time, told us that they (Brooke and Janine) have broken with the others, and want no part of the Johnson/Burns "faction." So you are entirely right in concluding that we shall have to see what happens, and that meanwhile nothing should be done to prejudice subsequent developments. This has, moreover, been our position from the start, for we have not, as you know, issued any "proclamations" on this subject....

I am sure that Granell will heartily concur with this view; he told us he thought that the "split" could not have been of very great importance because, after all, he saw no notice of it in the New York Times....

And so, on this Dictionary, que faire? Is it possible that we might be able to see the various entries pertaining to the U.S.? We could at least, in this case, be sure that they were historically accurate. When is the "deadline" for the entries?

* * *

On some other matters: We are sending you a copy of Clarence John Laughlin's portfolio, The Personal Eye, from which you may select some representative examples of his work. Soon we shall also send you one or two or three examples of Penelope's "objectively offered photographs" (O.O.P.'s, after the "Objectively Offered Object" signaled by Gherasim Luca in Le Vampire passif), as well as a selection of photomorphs by J. Karl Bogartte....

It is exciting to learn of the book by Savinio, and I would be grateful to you if you would send me a copy par avion, for I am very close to the completion of this little book. I am writing to Philippe Soupault, but I do not have his address; if I complete the letter in the next day or so I will merely send it to you, in an envelope that you can complete & send to him from Paris. But there are so many things to be done in the next few days that I may not get to this, so you may as well send his address when you write next. Do you think it is possible that Pierre Naville might have something to say on this subject (i.e., Isadora)?

I have not spoken of the illustrations for the Isadora book. Most of what I have are more or less "realistic" sketches and portraits by artists who knew her, but I am hoping to be able to include something a bit more "adventurous" than these. Joseph Cornell did a splendid photomontage titled "Hommage à Isadora," but its dimensions are such that I do not think it will reproduce well. Do you have any ideas on this? Might there not be a collage revetu by Anne Ethuin in which the name Isadora figures in the title??? I am intending to use Picabia's "L'Oeil cacodylate," on which Isadora was one of the "collaborators" (& this reminds me: Sanouillet refers to a "special catalogue" or pamphlet on this work, which I would like to see -- could you send a photocopy???)

Thank you for sending the text by Françoise Sullivan. At the "archives of dance" at the New York Public Library, they had only one or two references to her: evidently she was "trained" in the "classical ballet." It would be interesting to know what has become of her. Meanwhile, on the subject of "Refus global," I enclose a clipping from a recent issue of a Trotskyist paper from Montreal....

If Frederick Sommer does not respond to your inquiry, let me know. He has been seriously ill for a long time, and seems to have a reputation for ignoring correspondence. He never answered our invitation to participate in the 1976 exhibition. But there is a book of his work, as well as a catalogue or two, and it is possible that you might be able to obtain permission to reproduce something from these from the publishers, if you do not hear from him. Certainly he should be represented in the book.

Who is writing the listings for Portugal and Spain for the Great Dictionary?

The charming catalogue of Anne Ethuin in Poland has arrived, a ruthless challenge to the new pope....

Did I mention that Philip Lamantia is preparing a volume of selected writings by Samuel Greenberg, one of the most important precursors of surrealism in English, on the poetic plane? This volume should be published later this year by City Lights in San Francisco. My volume of selected writings by T-Bone Slim is almost ready, and should also be published this year -- as well as another issue of Arsenal, hopefully another issue or two of The Octopus-Typewriter, and who knows what else....

Hoping all is proceeding wildly in Paris, & looking forward to hearing from you again soon,

Surrealist salutations,

Franklin

P.S. -- When are you expecting to publish the next issue of Phases?



Did you get
Workers' Defense
Newsletter #2?
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