

## Surrealist Cross-Pollinations and Confrontations of Image and Text in Paul Éluard and Max Ernst's *Les Malheurs des immortels*

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### Abstract:

This article examines a book of texts and collages by Surrealist poet Paul Éluard and artist Max Ernst composed using a new verbo-visual approach to automatic writing. My analysis of *Les Malheurs des immortels* concerns their collaborative process of making verbal and visual collage. This article argues that *Les Malheurs des immortels*, on the one hand, systematically fuses the thoughts of two writers, and on the other hand, alludes to a fracture of the poetic self, a new way of making poetry using more than one voice and set of eyes. The double, considered as a contextual condition (Ernst and Éluard working together) and compositional device (two media in one book) poses a unique challenge for the reader: the texts, in attempting to re-inscribe a reality that is already expressed by a visual code, initiate a correspondence with the image based on phonetic and graphic associations. By focusing on the scientific imagery of one verbo-visual set entitled 'Entre les deux pôles de la politesse,' I seek to reinvigorate an ongoing conversation about the appropriation of scientific diagrams and language by Surrealist poets. In doing so, this article also stakes a claim for the relationship between popular science and Surrealist poetic practices in order to evaluate Éluard and Ernst's redefinition of automatic writing. To this end, my article fits into a wider research project investigating Surrealist works dismissed as purely nonsensical as well as recently discovered Surrealist poets who worked consistently and collaboratively with artists on poetry collections (e.g., Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, Paul Éluard and Man Ray).

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*Les Malheurs des immortels* [*The Misfortunes of the Immortals*] is a puzzling book of automatic texts and collages that not only cross-pollinates text and image, but also stands apart as an early example of Surrealist collaborative practices. Its authors, Paul Éluard and Max Ernst, met in Cologne in 1921 and established an enduring friendship that in the same year led them to compose their first poetry collection together, entitled *Répétitions*. Seen

as a precursor to *Les Malheurs des immortels*, the collages for the *Répétitions* were selected by Éluard from a group that Ernst had made without knowledge of the poems, whereas with the former, the collages were made first, the poems second.<sup>1</sup> Two important differences distinguish *Les Malheurs* from the original collaboration: firstly, the imagery reveals a distinctly scientific content, and secondly, the layout reveals the image is no longer relegated to an ancillary function as mere illustration. Ernst and Éluard reverse the traditional steps of illustration in which a text is first created then an image is supplied as an accompaniment.<sup>2</sup> Instead of starting with a text that would subsequently need illustration, Ernst would send Éluard collages from which Éluard would then write the texts.<sup>3</sup> The majority of this exchange happened through written correspondence, mainly in the form of postcards, hence the telegraphic speech that makes up most of the poems. Éluard and Ernst first met in print: they both published in Dadaist journals that circulated between Germany and France at the time. The publication of *Les Malheurs des immortels* in 1922 is therefore informed by the transitional period of Dadaism to Surrealism in Paris: the collaboration between Éluard and Ernst, as much as it is an effort to negate the notion of the singular author and create surprising juxtapositions, bears the traces of Dada collaborative projects and its aesthetics of collage.

Of particular interest in this article is the scientific imagery found in four of the fifteen doublets that make up the text. Among the four entries, the most striking example is 'Entre les deux pôles de la politesse' [*Between the two poles of politeness*; All translations are my own] because of its combination of scientific imagery from popular and academic sources. In focusing on a discussion of Max Ernst's original sources for the images the collage, I will argue that the implications of the collaborative process as well as the scientific nature of the images in the collage, place 'Entre les deux pôles de la politesse,' as hinted by the title, into a dialectical framework in which two media (image, text) and two creators (Éluard and Ernst) confront each other without cancelling each other out. Furthermore, the effort to avoid cancelling each other out sets up a state of shuttling between modes of interaction, aimed not at the fusion or merging of two authors into one, but at the interplay between them. The double, considered as a contextual conditioning -

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<sup>1</sup> *Répétitions* has a ratio of one collage for every three poems. It is clear that this earlier work was not yet a full-fledged collaboration with equal ratios of collages to poems. In *Les Malheurs des immortels* the collages and poems form perfect pairs: twenty poems to twenty collages.

<sup>2</sup> See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 91. He writes that 'the 'normal' relations of image and word (in the illustrated newspaper or even the cartoon page) follow more traditional formulas involving the clear subordination [...] of one medium to the other [...].'

<sup>3</sup> Breton and Soupault wrote *Les Champs magnétiques* within two weeks in 1919, whereas Ernst and Éluard used long distance communication. As Ernst scholar Werner Spies acknowledges, the original manuscript of *Les Malheurs des immortels* is currently unavailable, and any evidence of a post-card correspondence between Éluard and Ernst comes from a letter written by Gala Éluard.

Ernst and Éluard working together - and compositional device - two media in one book - is palpable in *Les Malheurs des immortels*: the texts, in attempting to re-inscribe a reality that is already expressed by a visual code, initiate a correspondence with the image based on phonetic and graphic associations.<sup>4</sup>

‘Entre les deux pôles’ alludes to a range of graphic traces produced by automatic procedures related to the major theme of mechanical measuring devices omnipresent in *Les Malheurs*.<sup>5</sup> The dominant image in the collage for ‘Entre les deux pôles’ is a neural map of the human body against a Cartesian plane. It is as if Éluard and Ernst foresaw Breton’s poetic line, ‘la courbe blanche sur le fond noir que nous appelons pensée,’ [*the white contour on the black background we call thought*] which appears in the poem ‘Tournesol’ [*Sunflower*] published just one year after *Les Malheurs*. The imagery of Surrealist automatism like the seismometer in *Nadja*, which functions as an analogy for convulsive beauty, and even the technical device of a photographic camera, whose images show the viewer details hidden when the picture was taken, have long been commented upon by critics.<sup>6</sup> It is intriguing that Ernst anchors his visual vocabulary in two scientific tropes: the graph, a record of a phenomenon that cannot be perceived with the unaided eye and therefore seeks recourse to a graphic representation of that phenomenon, and the anatomical drawing of the nervous system, a visualization of turning the inside out, or making the interior visible.

What is the significance of the scientific illustrations in *Les Malheurs des immortels*? Scholars of Surrealism have addressed the presence of scientific tropes in some Surrealist texts, concentrating mainly on zoology, botany and mineralogy in the multidisciplinary work of avant-garde intellectual Roger Caillois, but until recently, none have seriously treated the appropriation of scientific diagrams by Surrealist poets, nor contextualized Surrealist poetic practices within the scope of contemporaneous scientific discoveries.<sup>7</sup> The work of art historians Gavin Parkinson (*Surrealism, Art and Modern Science*- Yale University Press; 2008) and David Lomas (*Simulating the Marvelous and Modest Recording Instruments: Science, Surrealism, and Visuality*; 2010), among others, has begun to redirect critical attention to an otherwise speculative consideration of the overlap

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<sup>4</sup> See Eliane Formentelli, ‘Max Ernst, Paul Éluard ou l’impatience du désir,’ *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 164 (Oct-Dec 1976), p. 503.

<sup>5</sup> <http://art.famsf.org/max-ernst/entre-les-deux-poles-de-la-politesse-book-les-malheurs-des-immortels-misfortunes-immortals>

<sup>6</sup> The ending line of *Nadja* is ‘La beauté sera convulsive ou ne sera pas.’ [*Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all.*] See André Breton, *Œuvres complètes, tome 1* (Paris : Gallimard-Bibliothèque de La Pléiade, 1988), p. 753. For more on the topics of Surrealist automatism and photography, see Rosalind Krauss, *L’Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985) and Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Boston: MIT Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> See Claudine Frank, *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), for a discussion of Roger Caillois’s role within Surrealism in the 1930s and George Bataille’s College of Sociology.

between scientific diagrams and Surrealist discourse. Expanding the notion of the use of ‘instruments’ in Surrealist writing, Parkinson paints a fuller picture of what has been only conjecture or coincidence: the birth of surrealism also coincided with the popular acceptance of the theory of relativity, the beginning of quantum physics, and new visual models to understand these scientific discoveries. Both Surrealism and the realm of physics faced a similar dilemma: namely, how to visualize that which was previously invisible or inaccessible. Using an *appareil enregistreur*, or recording device, played an integral part in visualizing ‘invisible’ forces such as electromagnetic fields. In these terms, the portrait of André Breton standing over a microscope on a table next to a piece of paper and pen, equating the role of writing with that of other visualizing instruments, is emblematic of how science and Surrealism simultaneously attempted to render unconscious thought and unseen phenomena visible. While the notion of automatic writing in Surrealist poetics entails uninhibited release from aesthetic considerations for the sake of freeing the unconscious from self-censure, it can manifest itself in everyday life via the chance encounter, as in the example of this Surrealist anecdote in which Ernst recounts how he came across the material that would become the major source for his collages in *Les Malheurs*.

Ernst made a radical change in his source of collage material from mixed sources to exclusive use of illustrations pulled from old catalogues shortly before embarking on *Les Malheurs*.<sup>8</sup> In ‘Au delà de la peinture,’ Ernst gives a vivid anecdote of a Eureka-moment he experienced while glancing through a catalog of scientific illustrations.<sup>9</sup> He is struck by the pages of the catalogue showing instruments related to a long list of scientific fields. The headings ‘anthropologique, microscopique, psychologique, minéralogique, paléontologique’ into which the catalogue is organized, begin to obsess him. Flipping between pages creates ‘une succession hallucinante d’images contradictoires’ [*a hallucinatory succession of contradictory images*] which makes the images appear ‘double, triple, et multiple,’ as if Ernst is carrying out a virtual collage without any scissors or glue. Ernst views the images as multiple because the images carry a seemingly limitless range of meaning when they are articulated with other images, like the various scientific instruments featured in the catalogue, cobbled together with pieces and parts from specialized machines. Moreover, the hallucinatory quality of these overlapping images is not only a function of the order in which they appear in the catalogue but also an

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<sup>8</sup> See Werner Spies *Max Ernst Collage: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*. (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1988), p. 271. In a letter to Tristan Tzara dated 1921, Ernst writes, ‘If you come across any old department store catalogs, fashion magazines, old illustrations, etc. kindly make a gift of them to me [...]’

<sup>9</sup> Ernst, *Écritures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 258.

expression of the in-betweenness of the multiple significations they convey for the common reader. This range of meaning is significantly narrower for the specialist, the catalogue's original target audience. But for Ernst, the scientific images are visionary, not instructive. Mysterious to the non-specialist, the scientific images make ideal Surrealist collage materials because they were found through chance. The contingency of relation among the images - based on their placement in the catalog as Ernst flips through it - allows the images to impinge on each other and according to Ernst, give birth to multiple, even contradictory images and meanings.<sup>10</sup>

Ernst also expands his practice of collage to include verbal citation, allowing for associative relationships between collages and texts. Due to its emphasis on the relationships between word and image, *Les Malheurs* arguably fits the definition of a Derridean doubling. As Rosalind Krauss explains in her seminal essay on Surrealist photography, the double 'opens the original to the effect of deferral, or of one thing after another or within another: of multiples burgeoning within the same.'<sup>11</sup> The double as deferral and a 'multiple burgeoning within the same' is applicable to the intertwined visual and verbal doublets in *Les Malheurs* since the echoes between words in the texts of any one doublet produce a delay in understanding for the reader/viewer, not unlike the delay between a reception tower and an electrical signal. What is strange, even complacent, about *Les Malheurs* is that the collage images evoke less a fantasy world than they draw attention to *how* the world is perceived and the very devices that enable signals to be transmitted and, by extension, messages relayed. In joining images gleaned from science such as graphs, gas bubbles, and lightning rods to create a pseudo-scientific image in the form of Surrealist collage, Ernst invents a new visual vocabulary for automatic writing practices that use the image as a point of departure for writing. His misrecognition, or reappropriation of the use value of the scientific diagram, results in new potential for signification.

Even though the doublet 'Entre les deux pôles' most directly readdresses the role of scientific diagrams in Surrealist poetics, critics tend to overlook this particular piece from *Les Malheurs* because it does not fit within a traditional medium-specific narrative of collage, that of ripping and patchwork, of torn paper and frayed, deckle-edged seams.<sup>12</sup> The practice of collage, from the French verb 'coller,' meaning 'to glue,' originated in the

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<sup>10</sup> Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*. (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1988), p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Rosalind Krauss, 'Modernist Myths,' *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> Sonia Assa's reading of *Les Malheurs des immortels* inscribes Ernst's collage practice in a view of collage as a childlike craft activity of cutting and pasting. See 'Of Hairdressers and Kings: Ready-made Revelations in *Les Malheurs des immortels*.' *French Review* 64, no. 3 (February, 1991) pp. 643-58.

popular aesthetic of pasting paper and findings into scrapbooks, and was adopted by Cubists such as Picasso who placed scraps of paper onto the canvas. Dada artists such as Kurt Schwitters incorporated material from everyday life (ticket stubs and sweet wrappers) into collages. Despite Ernst beginning his first collages in the Dada scene in Cologne, Germany in 1920, his collages stand in contrast with the collages of his peers, in which the boundaries between the media are visible to the viewer. For Ernst, it was important that his collages be constructed to give the illusion of seamlessness, therefore he aligned the line directions of lithographs to ensure the boundary between the clippings remained indiscernible to the naked eye. Given these aesthetic concerns, Ernst's version of collage is closer to a surgeon (with precise suturing tools) than a tailor. Yet, studies of *Les Malheurs* tend to focus on the motif of sewing as a metaphor for collage because of the opening doublet entitled 'Les Ciseaux et leur père,' [*The Scissors and their father*] which features two dressmaking forms, one for a child and the other for a woman, wearing nineteenth-century fashions. However, due to the attentive precision Ernst devotes to the creation of a collage in which the constitutive parts are seamless, the work warrants greater attention for how it reveals a surprising connection between the concepts of illumination (revelation) and optics. The inclusion of scientific fields of study in Ernst's anecdote on the discovery of the catalog containing scientific illustrations demonstrates this concern with institutional and popular model-making, or the representation of things which are not visible to the naked eye, and not just for *fashions*.

The source material for the major visual elements of the collage for 'Entre les deux,' which depicts a man and a giant bubble set against a graph on a black background, demonstrates an underlying connection to the practice of making visual models and performing experiments outside of a lab for the sake of mere entertainment instead of institutional research. Ernst conserves the original theme of a bubble and a human figure from a scientific demonstration published in *La Nature*, a nineteenth-century magazine that targeted non-specialists who wanted to learn about scientific advancements. The inevitable, and as some historians have argued, unfortunate, result of the widespread popularity of the magazine *La Nature* was the 'vulgarization of science' in the Third Republic. The bubble illustration that Ernst used in the collage for 'Entre les deux pôles,' comes from a section of the magazine devoted to parlor tricks, or applications of a scientific concept to the realm of cheap entertainment.<sup>13</sup> A caption with detailed instructions for the demonstration accompanied the illustration. Ernst incorporates verbatim the words 'les bulles de savon' [*soap bubbles*] from the original caption of the

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<sup>13</sup> <http://cnum.cnam.fr/CGI/fpage.cgi?4KY28.29/52/100/432/0/0>

article, even though he typically leaves out any direct links between the title of the collage and the text. Though the instructions on how to attach a paper doll to a floating soap bubble appear innocent enough, when Ernst puts the bubble on the same scale as a human figure in the collage, he translates the original document into an unsettling image that distorts perspective and proportion: the paper doll becomes a transparent human figure, a rival to the now imposing size of the soap bubble.

The same effect of disorientation resonates in the text portion of the image-text doublet 'Entre les deux pôles.' Ernst's collaborator Éluard borrows from a range of literary devices belonging to the nineteenth century. Sentimental lamentations form the opening line of *Les Malheurs des immortels*, which reads 'Le petit est malade, le petit va mourir.' The line was probably plucked from a popular nineteenth-century children's book, *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, a collection of moralistic tales about a young girl who disobeys her parents.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, as one might expect in a moralizing children's book, the numbing grammatical repetitions with the preposition 'pour' take a nonsensical turn: 'pour se défendre des vers luisants, pour sarcler les petits pois, pour éviter les courses de taureaux' [*to protect oneself from brilliant verse/worms*]. Sourcing both a literary device and visual material from the same era is just one example of visual punning that mimics its verbal counterpart in *Les Malheurs des immortels*.

Ernst and Éluard also play with homophones in the line 'pour se défendre des vers luisants'. The word 'vers' has two very distant meanings: 'verse' and 'worms.' By interchanging 'verse' and 'worms' Éluard creates ambiguity between which connotation to choose by enmeshing the two meanings. His use of automatic writing questions the very pedestal upon which the long tradition of poetic verse had previously sat: by writing automatically, Éluard eschews premeditated compositional practices that characterize carefully constructed, brilliant poetic verse, rejecting the connotation of poetry as a craft. It could furthermore be argued that their choice to leave the words exposed and little-edited marks a departure from earlier experiments in published automatic writing as in André Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Les Champs magnétiques*, which was highly edited by Breton, despite its status as 'automatic' text.<sup>15</sup> For Éluard, the meaning of 'vers' as 'verse' is placed in the same register as 'vers,' as 'worm'. The second meaning takes shape in the collage as a series of lines on the graph, like the movements of the inchworm, which

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<sup>14</sup> See Sonia Assa, 'Of Hairdressers and Kings: Ready-made Revelations in *Les Malheurs des immortels*.' *French Review* 64, no. 3 (February, 1991), pp. 643-58.

<sup>15</sup> Without access to the original manuscript for *Les Malheurs des immortels*, which may be held in a private collection, it is impossible to verify that no editing of Éluard's automatic writing took place. Any information regarding its whereabouts would help substantiate what must remain for now an educated guess.

correspond to the motif of agriculture and the earth suggested in the line that immediately follows, beginning 'pour sarcler les petits pois' [*to root up the green peas*].

Another example of the oscillation between two meanings of a word in the text where both meanings find a corollary in the collage is the phrase 'promontoires dégonflés' [*deflated promontories*]. At first glance, the desert-like landscape of the collage suggests flatness. A closer look at the horizon reveals a varied silhouette of mesas and basins, topographic features that qualify as 'promontoire[s]'. As an anatomical term, the word 'promontoire' is used when referring to contact points between bones in the human body. Though the human figure in the foreground of the collage does not show bone structure, it does attempt to illustrate the body as a system of interconnected pathways and lines. The complex inner-workings of the body is reduced to a single sub-system, that of the nerves. In a sense, the anatomical illustration reduces the prominence, or importance, of the human to a series of lines; a series of neurological relays constitute the matter of man. The anatomical and geomorphological meanings of 'promontoire' shift the reader between two levels of scale: Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian man and the landscape horizon, between vast systems in the outside world and those contained within the body.

The precariousness of words with double meanings finds graphic expression in the collage, suggesting suspension and dispersion of meanings, making the space between the image and the text function like an echo chamber. Demonstrating a preoccupation with the production of language, the collage portion of 'Entre les deux pôles' shows a sound wave with its characteristic peaks and troughs. In the accompanying doublet, the phrase 'les mots fragiles' [*fragile words*] is repeated twice, followed by 'le doux diapason,' or the tuning fork. The second permutation of 'les mots fragiles' returns in the expression 'le mot: fragile'. The repetition of the line also establishes two poles or axes between the words 'mot' and 'fragile', foregrounding the transformation of the stable, written word to the ephemeral, oral utterance of a word by the human voice. This transformation is alluded to in the collage by the tuning fork and the accompanying sound wave they create represented in line on the graph. Exactly at the intersection of the sound wave with the bubble-like 'goitre', or tumor-like growth that occupies the area around the voice box, we have 'la bulle' [*the bubble*]. The circular form of the bubble at differing angles of intersection with the wave traces the shape of distinct letters of the alphabet that dominate the text: p, d, and b.<sup>16</sup> The bubble becomes a spherical cipher that recurs throughout 'Entre les deux pôles' in the graphic representation of letters as well as images to which the words refer: 'petits pois'

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<sup>16</sup> The concrete shape of the letter on the page, underscored by the intersection of the bubble along the graph, evokes other instances of modern experimental poetry such as the *calligramme*.

(*green peas*; in a pod they appear typographically as ‘ooo’), ‘courses de taureaux’ (*bull-fighting*; held in circular amphitheatres), and ‘goitre’ (*goiter*; a bulbous growth on the thyroid gland). Even the enigmatic ‘chapeaux volants’ [*flying hats*] in the final line ‘personne ne se souvient plus de semences de chapeaux volants en plein hiver’ alludes to a circular structure of the text itself: the ‘chapeau volant’ refers to the only circumflex accent in the word ‘pôles’ from the title, since the circumflex is informally referred to as a ‘hat’ which here hovers over the ‘o’ in the word ‘pôles’. As mentioned previously, suspension and intermediate states are the overarching modes of ‘Entre les deux pôles’. The words in the poem are ‘[d]es mots fragiles’ because they are tenuously held together. The words are also potentially separable because they are made up of fragments— the vowels and consonants, phonemes and syllables that constitute each word and utterance.<sup>17</sup>

The fragile bond that holds together the same words and images of ‘Entre les deux pôles’ is derived in part from the very collaboration between Ernst and Éluard as they developed the prose poems. Their collaboration affirms the process of poetic creation epigrammatized by Lautréamont: ‘La poésie doit être faite par tous, non par un’ [*Poetry should be made by all, not by one*].<sup>18</sup> The collaborative process would become the hallmark of Surrealist poetic co-authorship. Ernst and Éluard demonstrate that the ‘tous’ in Lautréamont’s line points to the necessity of two subconscious minds to create new ways of seeing as opposed to a singular voice of the lyric poet.<sup>19</sup> The interface between Éluard’s textual contributions and Ernst’s textual and visual material in *Les Malheurs* offers a unique example of automatic writing that relies on an artwork—the collage—as a starting point.

Considering that Ernst provided titles as a starting point for Éluard to write the text, the elements of the title irrevocably guide the stylistic choices in the prose poem. The ‘entre’ [*between*] in the title analogizes the process of Ernst and Éluard creating the doublet. For example, in ‘Entre les deux pôles’ the first line ‘Cet acrobate, trempé jusqu’aux os, vous apporte dans son goitre les mots fragiles,’ [*This acrobat, wet/fearful to the bone, in his goiter brings you fragile words*] alludes to the goiter-like bubble that seems to walk the thin line strung out in tight-rope fashion between the left and right sides of the collage. The relationship between the title and the opening line of the poem can be summarized as

<sup>17</sup> The word ‘fragile’ comes from the Latin *fragilis* and *fragmentum*, meaning part.

<sup>18</sup> Surrealists saw Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse) and Rimbaud as model figures because their poetry dealt with the irrational world. See Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 149–88.

<sup>19</sup> Lautréamont justifies plagiarism as a necessary imperative for ‘moving’ poetry forward: ‘Le plagiat est nécessaire. Le progrès l’implique. Il serre de près la phrase d’un auteur, se sert de ses expressions, efface une idée fautive, la remplace par l’idée juste.’ *Poésies II* (1870), (Paris: ed. Librairie Gabriel) p. 6. [*Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It embraces an author’s phrase, makes use of his expression, erases a false idea, and replaces it with the right idea.*]

the distance between two poles or points that the acrobat must traverse. The motif of the pair is even reinforced in 'Entre les deux' through the alliterative repetition of the letter p: 'pôles de la politesse' [*poles of politeness*], 'petits pois' [*green peas*], 'Pierre et Paul', and 'personne ne se souvient plus [...] en plein hiver' [*no one remembers anymore ... in the middle of winter*].<sup>20</sup>

Ernst and Éluard enact a verbal collage as much as Ernst creates a visual collage, yet their collaboration is not as simple as a partnership. The genesis of *Les Malheurs* and the biography of the two authors show a more dialectal, troubled arrangement at play.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the doubling in the title 'Entre les deux pôles de la politesse,' analyzed in my close reading of the same passage, sets up a word-image in which two poles are positioned: the words 'pôle' and 'politesse' echo each other and convey a state of suspension. 'Entre les deux poles de la politesse' is emblematic of Ernst and Éluard's friendship as much as the process of signification they create with text and image: to be in between two poles might mean not being at either one definitively. Through the many grammatical articulations of the double, Ernst and Éluard place the reader 'in between' several interpretations of an image, an interesting anticipation of an early definition of the Surrealist image.

What kind of image do Éluard and Ernst create, if *Les Malheurs* is neither fully a collage, nor fully a poem? And how does their version of a Surrealist image differ from Breton's? In the first Surrealist manifesto, published two years after *Les Malheurs*, Breton characterizes surrealism as a process of image production. Drawing on Pierre Reverdy's definition of the Surrealist image as '[le rapprochement de] deux réalités distantes' [*the coming together of two distant realities*], Breton explains that only when the rapprochement is fortuitous does the spark create a Surrealist image.<sup>22</sup> Breton couches his definition in scientific terms, claiming that the measure of the efficacy of the Surrealist image, its spark, lies in 'la différence de potentiel entre les deux conducteurs' [*the difference of potential energy between two conductors*].<sup>23</sup> Elaborating on the 'electrochemical' property of the image and its relationship to automatic writing, Breton develops the scientific metaphor as, '[...] Et de même que la longueur de l'étincelle gagne à ce que celle-ci se produise à travers des gaz raréfiés, l'atmosphère surréaliste créée par l'écriture mécanique [...] se prête particulièrement à la production des plus belles images'

<sup>20</sup> In 'Les Ciseaux et leur père' [*The Scissors and their Father*], a tall dress-form figure holds another headless figure resembling the model for a girl's dress. In 'Des Éventails brisés' a man rides a water-powered bicycle contraption mounted on an alligator.

<sup>21</sup> While functioning as an overarching poetic motif, the notion of the pair also mirrors the lifestyle of Éluard and Ernst during the early 1920s. More than Max Ernst's patron, Paul Éluard and his wife, Gala, formed a *ménage-à-trois* with him. See Robert McNab, *Ghost Ships: A Surrealist Love Triangle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> André Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme,' *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 337.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

[And like the spark that electrifies rare gases, the Surrealist atmosphere created by automatic writing lends itself particularly well to the production of the most beautiful images].<sup>24</sup> According to Breton, Surrealist images are the precipitates of what appears to be a spontaneous electrical reaction. In other words, the charged atmosphere of automatic writing enables the reaction between disparate terms to take place. However, if Breton's view of the Surrealist image attempts to resolve contrary terms for the sake of a synthesizing 'étincelle' [spark], Éluard and Ernst in *Les Malheurs* desire an undecidable volley of images, word and picture in an electrical storm of verbal and visual collisions.

Deciphering Éluard's text, which is far from a mere caption for the collage, reveals that the reader may be deciphering a work whose very meaning is meaningless itself. *Les Malheurs* was intended to rely heavily on the reaction of the poet to image. Because the images in the collages themselves refer for the most part to far-flung assemblages of scientific models that find themselves pieced together seamlessly on the same plane, it allows the poet to develop associations that Ernst may never have foreseen and therefore conveys a limitlessness of meaning. This malleability of interpretation opens up imaginative possibilities to envision things that have never been seen with the naked eye. Perhaps because of this predilection for the visual shared between Surrealism and science that both seek to 'donner à voir' [*to display; to make something seen*], critic and writer Walter Benjamin, summarizing Apollinaire and Breton, would later assert that because of the avant-garde, 'the conquests of science rest far more on surrealistic than on logical thinking'.<sup>25</sup> But what remains to be seen is whether or not a logic to surrealist logic prevails. In short, can one speak of a scientific aesthetic that underpins one of the hallmarks of Surrealist poetry, automatic writing? Benjamin observes that Breton saw 'mystification' as the 'foundation of scientific and technical development.'<sup>26</sup> While Benjamin is reluctant to champion the mystification of machines by the avant-garde, which he calls 'impetuous' it is worth mentioning that new ways of seeing enabled by machines such as the X-ray had by 1924 become part and parcel of life, whereas before World War I, X-rays were not routine. This is why Apollinaire could exclaim in his artistic manifesto 'L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes' published in 1917, 'Quoi! On a radiographié ma tête. J'ai vu, moi vivant, mon crâne, et cela ne serait en rien de la nouveauté? *A d'autres!*' [*What? We x-rayed my head. I saw for myself my cranium, and that's nothing new?*

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<sup>24</sup> Suzanne Guerlac, *Literary Polemics: Bataille, Sartre, Valéry, Breton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Last Snapshot of the Intelligentsia,' *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Transl., Edmund Jephcott. (New York: Verso Books, 1997), p. 212.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

*Here's to more!*].<sup>27</sup> Apollinaire's exclamation conforms to the popular belief at the time that if X-rays revealed internal structures of the human body so clearly, perhaps there were other hidden realities to be discovered. Indeed, 'Entre les deux pôles' belies a new vision – that of seeing through matter to unveil what lies beneath the surface. As an automatic text, 'Entre les deux pôles' also speculates on the capacity of the image to prompt verbal and visual associations from scientific sources outside the traditional literary domain.

*Les Malheurs* uses scientific systems of representation such as the Cartesian coordinate graph, anatomical drawings of the nervous system, and the X-ray, to create automatic texts, and to this end, rethinks the purpose of the images as pure information. Since Éluard and Ernst are not specialists, they see the images as sources of potential energies where several meanings can collide in a verbo-visual in-between space. The images arouse intrigue and a sense of mystery, two sensations that contribute to Éluard and Ernst's general sense of estrangement from the everyday world. This same estrangement allows them to tap into the subconscious and emerge with new meanings for images gleaned from Ernst's unique approach to collage. Considered in these terms, the series of doubles in 'Entre les deux pôles' can be understood as dialectical arrangements that circumvent any type of absolute duality such as the divide between consciousness and matter, reason and the irrational. *Les Malheurs* is not an integrated image-text. It is instead a series of articulations, even hostile confrontations, between different layers of meaning; for the most part, it remains opposed to concrete understanding. Likewise, the symbiotic relationship between Éluard and Ernst never aimed for fusion. As Éluard affirms, 'Pour collaborer, peintres et poètes se veulent libres. La dépendance abaisse, empêche de comprendre, d'aimer. Il n'y a pas de modèle pour qui cherche ce qu'il n'a jamais vu. À la fin, rien n'est aussi beau qu'une ressemblance involontaire.' [*To collaborate, painters and poets, must consider themselves to be free. Dependence degrades, prevents understanding, loving. There is no model for he who searches for something he has never seen. After all, nothing is as beautiful as an involuntary resemblance*].<sup>28</sup> Instead of interpenetration of text and image, the work of Éluard and Ernst accomplishes an interchange and interaction of disparate fragments of media that cannot necessarily be treated as separate entities, but demand to be viewed as intermedia. *Les Malheurs des immortels* is, on the one hand, an example of systematic collision of the thoughts of two writers, and, on the other hand, alludes to a fracture of the poetic self, a new way of making poetry using more than one voice and set of eyes.

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<sup>27</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, *Œuvres en prose complètes*. Ed. Pierre Caizergues (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p.949.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Éluard, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Dumas and Scheler (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp.882-83.