

*From Dada to Infra-noir: Dada, Surrealism, and
Romania*

Trost's Librement mécanique: The Surrealist Experience Confronts the "World"

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Trost's *Librement mécanique*: The Surrealist Experience Confronts the "World"

Françoise Nicol

Librement mécanique, the last book written by Trost¹, was published in 1955 and distributed through Minotaure, the gallery and bookstore at 6 rue des Beaux-Arts in Paris. An online version of this book can be found on the Romanian Cultural Foundation website. The cover lists only the author and the title, without date or place of publication.² The French website devoted to André Breton also contains a copy on whose second page figures a handwritten dedication, "à André Breton," signed "Trost" and dated "Paris, le 22 août 1955."

After publishing this book, the author seems to have vanished into a silence that probably marked the end of his activity as a writer years before his death (purportedly in Chicago). This last publication thus takes on symbolic value in our eyes as the last message emitted by this ardent writer of the surrealist group of Bucharest. Where and when was this text written? The only possible clue is that the story is set in a both ancient and modern port city, which might be Jaffa in Israel, where Trost lived for a while, after leaving Bucharest and before departing for France and later the United States.³ Was *Librement mécanique* written in Jaffa in 1951? Its proximity to another text might confirm this. "L'Âge de la rêverie," penned in Tel Aviv in July 1951, was sent to André Breton with a letter a month later, and remains unpublished. Seventy-six pages long in in-12 format, this text

¹ Dolfi Trost (1916-1966) signed all his known literary works, as well as his correspondence with André Breton, with just his last name. Monique Yaari, who had done several oral interviews that touched on this subject, explained in a 2012 telephone conversation that Trost wished to erase his first name because it brought Hitler to mind.

² However, the last page carries the reference to the famous Minotaure bookstore followed by the date, 1955. The site dedicated to André Breton (<http://www.andrebretton.fr>) contains only three pages of the book (cover page, intermediary page, title page) at this URL: <http://www.landrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100406371>. Consulted on January 25, 2014.

³ One of the oldest ports of the Mediterranean, Jaffa, which became part of Tel Aviv in 1950, welcomed numerous Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe during this time. First Trost and soon afterwards Gherasim Luca were among them.

can be accessed on the André Breton site, where it is found in a file of correspondence between Breton and the Bucharest group. It addresses the “mission” of the woman already broached in *Librement mécanique* from a more theoretical perspective. Did “L’Âge de la reverie” develop out of the passionate encounter that would be recounted in *Librement mécanique*? This is the hypothesis I present here, but only tentatively, given that dating this text to 1951 leaves an unexplained four-year gap between its conception and its publication.⁴ Further investigation would be required for its confirmation. Still, the legitimacy and the feasibility of such an investigation remains in question, for the mystery surrounding Trost between 1951 and 1966 was his own choice: he himself erased the traces of his past. The void surrounding his writings only increases their fascination for us.

Librement mécanique: what relationship between freedom and the machine is suggested by this title, we might ask? Yet, any reader of *Dialectique de la dialectique*, co-authored by Trost with Gherasim Luca and published in 1945, will recognize in this oxymoron the thinking upon which this last work, like all the preceding ones, was based: a thought process that *turns itself inside out like a glove*. Indeed, *Librement mécanique* echoes Trost’s two *plaquettes* in the Infra-noir series,⁵ as well as the collective texts published with the other four members of the surrealist group of Bucharest between 1945 and 1947. It is the poetic trace of a search that aims, under the auspices of surrealism, to rise above the contradictions in which human beings struggle. In 1951, Trost was isolated: his relations with Luca (his very close friend during the 1940s) were tense and ended with a violent break-up in July 1951; Paul Păun had not yet been able to reach Israel, a fact that Trost lamented in a letter to Breton in August 1951: “Je suis très seul car Paul Păun n’a pas encore réussi de venir” (image 12) ‘I am very lonely, for Paul Păun has not yet managed to come.’ But Trost’s relentless desire to rise above persisted, even if his quest for the “surreal” (*Librement* 25) as a horizon might change course in this book, as we will see below.

⁴ Biographical research might be able to elucidate the many aspects of the last two phases of Trost’s life which remain in the shadows, from his departure from Bucharest for Israel in 1948 and his time in France to his death in the United States. Currently, our only reference point can be found in the André Breton Archives: a letter from Trost, addressed to the French poet, dated August 1951, which accompanied the manuscript of “L’Âge de la rêverie,” and which we can assume was written in Israel.

⁵ Trost published *Le Plaisir de flotter* and *Le Même du même* in 1947, in the company of Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, and Virgil Teodorescu, three other members of the Bucharest group who were also active in the Romanian capital between 1945 and 1947. Each of the four wrote two *plaquettes*, and all eight were joined in the Collection surréaliste Infra-noir. The fifth member of the group, Gellu Naum, did not participate in this series.

The sixty pages comprising *Librement mécanique* evoke adventure in all the senses of the term: chance adventure, emotional adventure, adventure in its surrealist dimension. The book could be considered the autobiographical narrative of a passionate love affair, from the first encounter to the break-up. But the very term autobiographical narrative is inadequate, for Trost rejects narrative modalities and autobiographical topoi, as well as psychological expectations, whether of classical psychology (as found in the nineteenth century novel), which is hardly surprising, or Freudian psychology, which is more surprising. More generally, his writing conforms to no particular literary genre. Like the *Infra-noir plaquettes*, this text borrows from introspective autobiography, psychological analysis, and poetry, in addition to esoteric writings and even dream narratives. Thirteen “movements” or sections comprise this unclassifiable text, whose primary structural element is juxtaposition.⁶

Librement mécanique is made up of what appear to be fragments. We can probably attribute its opacity and troubling character to a subtle construction akin to collage, and to the intrusion of groups of words or phrases reminiscent of automatic writing. As always with Trost, we are made to move between sharp analysis—of the effects of the first meeting, in this case —, flashes of poetry, and snatches of narrative. If we read “mécanique” as an adjective, the book’s oxymoronic title might also designate, beyond the general meaning mentioned above, the unnamed woman whom we will not call a heroine⁷ but who seems to be the *subject* of the book. She embodies freedom, rejecting all constraints in her love life. Like earlier texts, *Librement mécanique* blends love and revolution since “l’amour est la méthode générale de la révolution, réelle ou mythique” (20) ‘Love is the very method of revolution, whether real or mythical.’ But this freedom seems unable to take hold, so to speak. We will examine instances of this dialectic further below.

Let us now take a closer look at the text, separating the lovers for the purpose of our analysis.

LUI (HE)

Librement mécanique begins as follows:

En plein soleil, sa chevelure courte s’ornait de l’attrait même des nuits et le visage se laissait éclairer comme si elle avait connu d’avance la fermeté foudroyante de la passion. (9)

⁶ These thirteen sections are indicated by a single typographical sign. No words serve to link them in any logical way. In fact, the sections are most often juxtaposed. When they are related by a term (which happens in four cases), it is one that indicates addition: “enfin” (finally), “ensuite” (next), “et” (and); or else a word suggesting adjacency: “d’ailleurs” (besides).

⁷ The term heroine is rejected in the text (31). “She” could even be an anti-heroine.

In full sun, her short hair was adorned with the charms of night and her face allowed itself to be lit as if she had known beforehand the violent firmness of passion.

These opening lines, written in the imperfect tense (a point we will revisit later), set the stage for a love story: a man is gazing at a woman's face; the word "passion" at the end of the sentence foreshadows the outcome of the amorous encounter. So many novels open with an exchange of gazes,⁸ yet this text has nothing in common with the literary genre reviled by Breton. The imperfect tense is not used merely for the initial depiction of the woman, before quickly moving into the *passé simple* for narration. Instead, the *passé simple* never comes: the entire text is written in the imperfect. Thus, a man gazing at a woman submits to her hold on him and ponders. The use of the imperfect tense indicates that events are less important than this long period of observation reflecting the fascinating and painful amorous adventure which has now ended. Just as in Trost's earlier books, the questioning, in the wake of the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, addresses love and woman as a means of accessing a decompartmentalized world, like the one described in Breton's *Les Vases communicants*, where circulation between interior and exterior or, to use the author's terms, "esoterism" and "exoterism," is possible. The distinction between dream and reality, like the difference between the diurnal and nocturnal aspects of life, is dissolved. These schematic oppositions held little significance for the co-author of *Dialectique de la dialectique*.

Who is the speaker who multiplies the "je" (I) in the text? Is he a fictional character or the author himself? The text provides no answer. Whatever the case, there is a man in the *presence* of a woman whose identity is not revealed. *Librement mécanique* is neither a philosophical meditation nor an autobiographical confession nor a long prose poem, but all three at the same time. Since writing his earliest works in Bucharest, the author's ambition was to capture the *world* in its entirety (not just the "existing world" in the ordinary sense of the term, but the exterior and the interior, the visible and the invisible, without distinction) and without division; to open up all paths, those of psychoanalysis, the occult sciences, astrology, Tarot; to live all experiences, physical and spiritual, together. Indeed, if we were to look for a point of reference in the text itself, we would focus on this last word, "together." Witness the opening of the final paragraph of the book:

C'est donc d'une pareille expérience éveillée qu'il est question: et c'est vraiment le terme d'expérience moins son utilisation scientifique ou littéraire qui convient le mieux, dans laquelle le moi se jette jusqu'aux limites extrêmes de sa virtualité, comme lorsque l'on prononce le nom de l'aimée à haute voix pour voir dans quelle partie où [i.e. du] corps il va

⁸ The following page confirms that this is a first meeting: "Dans cette première rencontre, tout était dit" (10). 'At this first meeting, all cards were already played.'

résonner, sans toutefois rester dans une vision d'où tout rappel devient impossible. (60)

It's a matter, therefore, of such an awakened experience: and experience is the most appropriate term, minus its scientific or literary use, where the "I" is launched to the furthest limits of its virtuality, as when the name of the beloved is uttered aloud to see in what part [of the] body it will resonate, without however being caught in a vision from which all recall becomes impossible.

In the end, *experience* is perhaps the key to this text that eludes all classifications, just as in Breton's *Nadja* or *L'Amour fou*, but more absolutely radical: experience as a sort of active core, since its unfolding reveals all the expectations, all the effects, all the knowledge, the stakes being this globalizing quest already present in the *Infra-noir* texts.

In addition, "nous" (we), implicitly designating the Bucharest group, often replaces "je" (I), thus inscribing *Librement mécanique* in the experience of limits lived in Bucharest at the end of World War II.

À ceux qui, dans la lutte contre le monde existant, avaient usé de méthodes rationnelles et délirantes pour le briser et en trouver les points de contradiction, elle [la femme] opposait un autre risque. Nous avions cherché toutes les lueurs accidentelles, pour nous en servir contre le donné, dans d'irréductibles propositions. L'obstacle nous avait opprimé[s] et nous avons essayé de le rompre dans son accablante diversité. (14)

To those who had used deliriously rational methods in their struggle against the existing world, to shatter it and find its points of contradiction, she [the woman] posed another risk. We had looked for all the chance glimmers of light to hold out against the given in irreducible propositions. The obstacle had oppressed us and we had tried to break it down in its overwhelming multiplicity.

The first and third person plural clearly designate the collective experience begun a few years earlier. But as the last sentence indicates, loyalty to the past is accompanied by acknowledgment of a new stage begun: the speaker emphasizes the failure of the quest under the pressure of political circumstances (as described in letters from the group to Breton during those years) and the ensuing pain. The love encounter thus marks a renewal of the quest, with the hope, if only provisional, of seeing it through.

Let us now return to our comparison with the texts of André Breton. How can we qualify *Librement mécanique* as absolute radicality, compared to chapter IV of *L'Amour fou*, for example, which evokes "la nuit du tournesol" (735) 'the night of the sunflower' (*Mad Love* 67)? First of all, while Breton narrates the night in the streets of Paris, from Montmartre to the Quai aux fleurs, Trost withholds all

references to place and breaks the continuity of the narrative. While Breton describes Jacqueline Lamba's complexion (712), Trost gives us only instants in a cinematographic style which had already interested the Bucharest group when they were writing their collective work titled *Éloge de Malombra* (1947). The text seems to play on the light of this Middle Eastern summer as if a gaffer were moving the spotlight while filming a scene: the violent contrast between the shadowy streets and the woman's face at the moment of the first encounter, evoked in the *incipit*, appears as staged artifice. The point is more to highlight the motif of the encounter at the risk of contradiction, since "l'artifice, le simulacre, elle ne les aurait jamais compris" (*Librement* 23) 'she never would have understood artifice, simulacre.' Similarly, the speaker offers close-ups, even zooms, rather than describing the lover's face as a whole. He observes the sleeping woman like a voyeur to capture "cette crispation nocturne et inviolée du corps" (32) 'this nocturnal and inviolate tenseness of the body,' just as in *Le Plaisir de flotter* (The Pleasure of Floating); he searches for the "pli sur les lèvres" 'the fold in her lips' that could provoke "les pires cares[s]es" (*Librement* 34) 'the worst caresses'; he sees "le cou tremblant, électrisée" 'electrified, her neck trembling' preceding erotic ecstasy and reads in the "taches chromées qui apparaissaient sur le nez" 'the shiny spots that appeared on her nose,' "l'imminence **de cette fuite**" (34) 'the imminence [of this] . . . flight.' Neither verisimilitude nor narrative conventions nor even figurative modalities count for this artist whose art work first begun in Bucharest aimed to shatter the image itself. Of landscapes, back streets of the old city, beach, bedroom, or the face of the lover, the reader will glimpse only shards, which might evoke the title of another of his books, *Vision dans le cristal*,⁹ a succession of splintered images that appear unscribed in any identifiable time or place. And yet, we cannot conclude that *Librement mécanique* was written to give literature a new start. On the contrary. *L'Amour fou* and *Nadja* are really hypo-texts (to use Genette's term) in Trost's oeuvre. More broadly, in his enigmatic treatment, this amorous encounter contains the great encounters of literature, so to speak. We can even read this diffracted, fragmented portrait of the lover as developed against portraits of other lovers: indeed, further on we will see how this figure of the woman is confronted with those populating literature and film. The text can even be read as an inventory of feminine stereotypes that feed the artist's imagination, for this inventory lends insight into the unique nature of this particular encounter. In fact, fictional, even cinematic, scenes are sketched out, then abruptly interrupted to be replaced by others, as if to avoid all the traps of "la misère littéraire" (*Librement* 31) 'literary misery.' However, as *Le Plaisir de flotter* had already shown, this style of composition with its sketches and changes in direction is specific to Trost.

⁹ *Vision dans le cristal* is illustrated with "neuf graphomanies entopiques" (nine entopic graphomanias) by the author.

Psychology, the last bastion to be brought down, also merits our attention. If Trost's rejection of traditional psychology¹⁰ in *Librement mécanique* is not surprising, the expulsion of psychoanalysis is more so, if we again extend the comparison of *Librement mécanique* to his Bucharest writings. Psychoanalysis had already endured a certain number of attacks from Trost and Luca's non-oedipal model. But it still remained a reference point. In *Librement mécanique*, the unconscious, Freud's fundamental discovery, certainly figures among the theoretical assumptions. In fact, psychoanalysis is referred to as "la science de l'inconscient" (35) 'the science of the unconscious.' But it seems to present neither possible escape nor even a potential means for explanation. More than anything else in the Freudian discipline, it was the power of the dream with its connection to desire that the Bucharest group had retained, in accord with French surrealism. But through this text we see that disillusion followed the hope brought about by this discovery. When the love affair breaks up, Trost writes: "Le rêve même me semblait plutôt l'expression d'une douleur refoulée que le déguisement du désir, ainsi que nous l'avions cru pendant longtemps" (51) "The dream itself seemed to me to be more the expression of repressed pain than the masking of desire, as we had long believed.'

We sense the opposition between collective hope during the Bucharest period ("we") versus the negative observations of the solitary writer ("me"). The word "déguisement" 'disguise' betrays a bitterness whose pejorative connotation contrasts with the impassioned pages of *Infra-noir*. In addition, we see the theoretical bases of psychoanalysis devalued, the quest of the "moi suprême" 'supreme ego' favored over the "sur-moi de la psychologie" 'the super-ego of psychology.' This "moi suprême," which remains largely undefined, is probably rooted in occultism, partly recycling the Hindu vision of the body: an "I" composed of a succession of bodies, especially the astral body evoked several times in the text.¹¹ In fact, the lover's quest is centered on the body, or rather bodies, seeking, beyond even erotic pleasure, the interference between the bodies of those who desire each other. Thus, in reference to the voice of the (woman) lover, we read: "Tout arrivait spontanément dans les remous de sa voix, qui travaillaient directement sur les centres du moi suprême" (37) 'Everything happened spontaneously in the eddies of her voice, which worked directly on the centers of the supreme ego.' Even if the Bucharest writings already showed an

¹⁰ As a surrealist, Trost could not write within a rationalist logic. In addition, the first criticism that he made regarding psychology was that it translated reality into abstract and general terms. This criticism also concerned Freudism: the latent content of the dream was, in his eyes, an abstract translation that denied the power of the only interesting part, the manifest content.

¹¹ Hinduism underlies the text, not as a predominant current, but on the same level as other "ways of knowing": astrology, Tarot, laws governing homeopathy, alchemy, and the Kabbala that constantly fed analysis. For example, there is discussion of "mantras" (24).

attraction to the occult sciences, this opposition between two approaches to the "I" marks a clear break.

In the end, and perhaps above all, the radicality of this self-proclaimed revolutionary is evident in his writing. The author would no doubt have rejected the notion of style. Still, this dense prose, at once abstract and sensitive, extremely difficult to understand, is very distinct. Poetry, continually evoked as a place of superior truth, is also manifested in word choice, organization, and rhythm. The report aims to express the feelings and emotions of this experience as *concretely* as possible, from the erotic trance to the wrenching pain of separation, from the hopeless search for the impossible to the chaos caused by absence. But it often crosses over into a distant, almost clinical observation, since the observer is also the very locus of the painful experience, in a sort of fascinating play of inside-outside. The dazzling poetic brilliance emerges and multiplies in the second part of the text (starting in the 7th section), when his lover's increasingly frequent absences foreshadow the break-up. At that point, the world surrounding the couple seems to join in unison, as if accompanying the pain, a *topos* of lovesickness, impossible to escape.

L'air devenait plus sec autour de nous, les déclics plus rapides, des ombres s'agitaient sur les murailles et sur les dalles. La longue nuit de son absence se préparait, à son insu, . . . comme si une heure astrale avait sonné. Absence fatale, l'éloignant non dans des parages à retrouver, mais dans la vulve insondable de la distance mentale, du calme plat, de la fugue astucieuse au-delà de nos terres. (34)

The air grew drier around us, the clicks more rapid, the shadows shook on the walls and stone floor. Unknown to her, the long night of her absence approached, . . . as if an astral hour had chimed. Fatal absence, distancing her not in surroundings within reach, but in the unfathomable vulva of mental distance, of flat calm, of shrewd flight beyond our lands.

In this passage, the echoes between words are unmistakable, between "vulve" and "fugue" in particular (these two five-letter words linked by sonorous echoes, the vowel u, and the fricatives): "la vulve" escapes the domain of the erotic to enter that of the mental; an unexpected adjective accompanies "la fugue."

These echoes, which can only be sketched out here, would merit further study. Trost's writing, which blends so closely the concrete and the abstract, is fascinating for the connections formed through at least two processes that might be termed "slippage" and "collage." At times, terms are linked by mysterious affinities: one word leads to another containing a lexical or sonorous similarity. The play on sounds (in particular, through alliteration or assonance) is added to the regrouping of words, perhaps revealing the intrusion of automatic writing. Well known is the importance of automatic writing to the Bucharest group, mindful of the "fonctionnement réel de la pensée" 'the actual functioning of thought' as described in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*. The following sentence is one example

that seems to be based on sonorous echoes: "Il la rattachait aussi, par ses inhibitions, par ses retors détours, par ses atours dynamiques, au mythe de la femme froide" (27) 'He also associated her, through her inhibitions, her crafty detours, her dynamic attire, with the myth of the cold woman.' In this chiasmus, might we say that the "atours dynamiques" are commanded by the "retors détours," this association by analogy effectively *poeticizing* the sentence? Further on, we read: "Gelée, elle commençait un jeu silencieux" (40) 'Frozen, she began a silent game.' (I have marked the sonorous echoes.) We could give multiple examples of sentences containing slippages of one word to another, leading the reader into the poetry, that is, into the heart of the "tissu capillaire" 'capillary tissue' presented in Breton's *Vases communicants*. Elsewhere, we see assemblages akin to collages. At least, the bifurcations in the story can be interpreted as a modality reminiscent of Max Ernst's work.¹² Indeed, for Trost, the collage was "l'activité plastique la plus onirique" (*Vision dans le cristal* 50) 'the most oneiric visual activity.' Upon further scrutiny, this process reveals new connections between words (for example, a noun and an adjective or a noun and its complement). Evoking a "monde tellement phonétique" (*Librement* 28) 'such a phonetic world,' "l'azur du rut" (30) 'the azure of rut,' or "poussières flatteuses" (41) 'flattering dust' startles the French reader, surprised by the bold combinations. Evidently, Trost and his friends handled the French language with the greatest liberty, after turning their backs on the Romanian language at the end of the war to free themselves from their reviled country. These processes create gaps that open the way to circulation between "des plans différents de la pensée" 'different planes of thought' in Trost's all-embracing search.

We have attempted in this section to give voice to the unnamed speaker whose quest goes hand-in-hand with deliberate, willful transgression.

ELLE (SHE)

Without being a narrative, *Librement mécanique* retraces, in thirteen "movements" or sections, moments in a love story that follows a dialectic movement, first through observation of the other and the self. The book opens with the first meeting of the two protagonists; the next six sections evoke the magnetic connection that develops between them. From the start, it is clear that there will be no way out; but in the seventh section (at the center of the text, p. 33), the woman's eventual flight emerges and the threat of her absence replaces her presence; more and more often she leaves, returning and leaving again in a "pendulaire" (42) 'pendular' movement. The pain grows. The tenth section evokes

¹² See Spies. However, between the writing of Trost and the collages of Max Ernst we can suggest nothing more than analogies. It is not possible to detect actual pictorial processes in poetry, nor literary processes in painting, each art having its own *means*. See on this topic my "Trost ou 'le plaisir de flotter'..."

permanent absence (unless it is just longer than the others), through time spent away from "sa présence" (46) 'her presence.' Yet, in parallel, and in contradiction, the final sections seem to shift progressively from negative to positive (beginning with the ninth, p. 44), with the last two pages foreshadowing a halt in the descent, in a dialectic reversal that seems to take stock of their adventure.

The shared adventure is less important than the celebration of the woman loved. "Elle était là" 'She was there.' Thus begins the sixth paragraph with these few words that sum up the dominant impression. "She" is foremost an all "puissante" 'powerful' presence (the adjective is repeated several times in the text), around which the entire text is constructed. For the observer, "She" occupies all the space (especially in the first half of the text). As mentioned above, she appears in the "clarté du plein midi" 'light of high noon': the light surrounding her form highlights her brown hair, in contrast with the fascination for black that dominated texts written in Bucharest, as well as with the nocturnal setting of the lovers' encounter in Breton's *L'Amour fou*. The pain caused by her absence renders the value of her presence even more palpable. Most of the short paragraphs¹³ are devoted to her and the imbalance in favor of the pronoun "she" over "we" is striking. A solitary man is attempting to circumscribe his fascinating lover by evoking her physical presence (a few traits, a few contradictory behaviors), as well as what she *projects* in the observer's mind and body. This painful study is destined to fail, since her presence is "imprenable" (57) 'unattainable,' since "she" cannot be grasped in her "irréfragable" (46) 'irrefutable' entirety. Yet, from the moment of the first meeting to the final separation, she takes precedence over what could have been a shared destiny.

This presence of "she" is, once again, distinct from the familiar stereotypes in the discourse on love: in fact, "she" is "subject" rather than "object," something also seen in "L'Âge de la rêverie." In this unpublished manuscript, Trost included the surrealist writings themselves in these stereotypes: "Jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans la rencontre amoureuse surréaliste, l'objet d'amour y [sic] est resté objet, sans pouvoir devenir en même temps sujet, pour des raisons structurales inanalysable[s], mais r[e]pérables dans les perturbations de leur orbe" (20, image 32) 'Until today, in the surrealist love encounter, the object of love remains an object, unable to become subject simultaneously, for structural reasons that cannot be analyzed but can be recognized in the disruptions of their orb.' It is the position of "she" as subject that makes, "philosophiquement," "la différence" (*Librement* 18). The word subject can be understood on two levels: first, "she" is a free subject, absolutely detached from all possible influence. Second, "she" is also, paradoxically, the acting subject of the text.

As the book's title suggests, this woman's life falls under the aegis of freedom. In the context of the rejection of narrative discussed earlier, and without clearly

¹³ Most of the paragraphs are between three and thirteen lines long. Only four are longer (16, 16, 19, and 20 lines long).

outlining the scope of this freedom, the speaker offers clues too sparse to develop a character: this woman with short hair, with the “accent étranger de passante” (10) ‘foreign accent of a simple passer-by,’ comes from a far-off “modern place.” It is “la pointe extrême de la civilisation qui l’avait produite” (11) ‘the farthest point of civilization that had produced her.’ Is this a reference to Europe or America? Is she the one who is accompanied by “relents de jazz” ‘hints of jazz’? It is difficult to be certain, except that she does seem to be delivered of the weight of Judeo-Christian tradition.¹⁴ Coming from the city, “ordonnée” ‘commanded’ by “une mécanique immense” (12) ‘an immense machinery’¹⁵, she has not inherited the traditional obedience to man, which enables her to “faire disparaître de l’amour toute forme de soumission” (“Âge de la rêverie” 45, image 57) ‘to make all forms of submission disappear from love.’ As the speaker points out, it is she who undresses herself for love making. “Déroutée et déréglée” (*Librement* 12) ‘lost and unbalanced,’ shifting, she lives in “mouvement perpétuel” ‘perpetual movement,’ a possible allusion to Aragon’s eponymous collection of poetry. Dressed or naked, she moves “avec une désinvolture adroite, formée par les villes lumineuses d’un autre cycle de l’histoire” (11) ‘with a practiced casual air shaped by the illuminated cities of another cycle of history.’ Later on, we learn that she had a painful childhood. Was she a victim of sexual abuse? That is what we are led to believe.¹⁶ But this hidden scar, far from inciting pity, is viewed through two prisms: it allows the woman to relate to the “souffrance primordiale” ‘primeval suffering’ common to humanity, which “tissait la séparation incroyable entre les amants” (26) ‘wove the incredible separation between lovers.’ And above all, it broadens the freedom of the one who, refusing to become attached, entrusts herself to chance. It is this freedom that enables a vision of love at once possible and impossible: “l’amour était la liberté agissante” (43) ‘love was active freedom,’ but for her, enduring love equals oppression.

In any case, these clues are not sufficient for constructing an explanatory psychological model, something Trost would reject. They are mere indications. What is essential is that “she” is detached from both geographical and temporal roots: this modern woman whose past shared in “l’exotérisme le plus scandaleux” (11) ‘the most scandalous exoterism,’ is *outside history*. This is no doubt one of the

¹⁴ For Trost, the transgression of this tradition is an integral part of the dialectic of desire. “She” escapes it: “Comme elle ignorait l’interdit, elle ignorait la sanction des tabous” (*Librement* 18) ‘Since she ignored the forbidden, she also ignored the sanction of taboos.’

¹⁵ Further on, we read: “Inondée par les villes-lumières qui l’avaient produite” (18) ‘Flooded by the cities of light that had produced her.’

¹⁶ “Le souvenir des souffrances anciennes lui revenait; et les poursuites de ceux qui l’avaient cherchée jusque dans sa chambre d’enfant et tous les attentats de l’adolescence” (40) ‘The memory of old pain came back to her; and those who had pursued her into her childhood bedroom and all the attacks of adolescence.’

meanings of the term “mécanique” ‘mechanical.’ This absolute freedom is all the more perceptible in that it collides head-on with the condition of those on whom history has imposed a destiny: the revolutionary group of artists trapped in the Romanian “cage”)¹⁷, who, unable to destroy the powers in place, were subjected to the law of the “obstacle” before finally managing to flee:

Immunisée contre ses périls et ses tentations, ayant tranquillement triomphé de lui, sans même s’en protéger, l’obstacle servait son désir, alors que pour nous il avait été une cause de déroute et d’oppression. (14)

While for us, the obstacle had been a source of disorientation and oppression, for her, the obstacle served her desire, she was immunized against its dangers and temptations, having calmly triumphed over it without even protecting herself.

A final note before concluding: this freedom must be viewed with respect to the rejection of the symbol, already seen in Trost's two *Infra-noir* texts and reiterated here. To counter the reductive and deadening effect of symbols that are the result of generalization and abstraction, the author opposes “le concret” ‘the concrete.’ “She” does not merely represent freedom, but actually embodies it, hence the force of her presence in *Librement mécanique*.

Être aimée . . . la délivrait de la tyrannique angoisse du *symbole*, dont elle n’avait pu accepter la clameur sans se flétrir aussitôt (30).

Being loved . . . released her from the tyrannical anguish of the *symbol*, whose clamor she had been unable to accept without immediately withering.

If an image could express this free presence that characterizes her, it is the image of Duchamp’s “ready-made,” an object produced mechanically, and simply disconnected from its normal function before being shifted. This image was always used positively in the texts on visual art written in Bucharest, as well as in “L’Âge de la rêverie.”¹⁸ In the same way, the woman’s specific presence defeats the very foundation of surrealism, and thus, she sheds her value as object in favor of that as subject. Through her we escape the surreal. Obviously, this marks a considerable departure from the direction collectively adopted in Bucharest, even if Trost was not now necessarily rejecting his search for the “actual functioning of

¹⁷ In contrast, “elle sortait et rentrait dans ces cages sans en apercevoir même les barrières: libre donc, dans l’obstacle même [sic], et avec lui” (14) ‘She went in and out of these cages: free, thus, within-- and with it.’

¹⁸ Trost’s *Le Profil navigable* includes an homage to Marcel Duchamp. See also the exhibition catalogue of 1945, co-signed by Luca and Trost titled, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d’objets*.

thought" mentioned earlier. The paradoxical nature of the following sentence is worth noting:

Ce n'était pas le sur-réel: ce n'était que le réel, mais un réel respirable, ouvert, qui brûlait comme l'oxygène et devenait d'autant plus admirable qu'il ne tirait rien de l'exceptionnel. (*Librement* 32)

It wasn't the sur-real: it was only the real, but a breathable, open real that burned like oxygen and seemed all the more admirable for being nothing exceptional.

The real vs. sur-real opposition dialectically surpasses the one commonly accepted (a real reduced to the rationalist vision rejected by Breton and his friends). But we can measure Trost's attempt both to preserve and to surpass the surrealist project.

The other side of freedom is the void, usually associated with absence but linked dialectally by Trost to presence. Detached from history, "she" offers nothing to grasp. If she "contains" poetry ("son sourire contenait plus de vraie poésie que celle trouvée par les divers procédés" (*Librement* 9) 'her smile contained more true poetry than that turned up by the many processes,' the poet's words are incapable of attaining it: "Elle venait s'offrir, merveilleusement vide" (11) 'She offered herself, marvelously empty.' Further on, we read: "Les paroles poétiques passaient à travers elle" (13) 'Poetic words passed through her.' And: "Tangible réalité poétique, elle niait la poésie" (33) 'A tangible poetic reality, she denied poetry.' Art itself, even in the contesting form defended by Luca and Trost at the 1945 exhibition in Bucharest¹⁹, would be unable to touch her, reducing the artist, like the poet, to helplessness:

L'art, même celui qui a fait fonction d'anti-art, n'était à ses yeux qu'une forme de spoliation immatérielle de la destinée individuelle, à qui [sic] elle devait opposer un refus véhément, sensuel. (28)

In her eyes, art, even art that functioned as anti-art, was merely a form of immaterial despoilment of individual destiny to be opposed with vehement, sensual rejection.

It is possible to see a dadaist dimension in this systematic rejection. Indeed, the very term appears in the text with respect to her:

Jusque dans les moindres contradictions, tout ce qu'elle voulait dire ne voulait dire que le dadaïsme du choix. (30)

Right down to the smallest contradictions, everything she meant only the dadaism of choice.

This void that makes the woman the acting subject of this text is thus paradoxical. Without a past, without future plans, without any other apparent desire than the

¹⁹ See the preceding note.

immediacy of the act of love, she seems to be the very antithesis of Propp's notion of the novelistic character as a "active force." Yet, she exercises this strength negatively. Indeed, the void heightens the impact of her charm. In the lover, it provokes the greatest instability, marked by the twin dimensions of history (the obstacle in the past and the revolutionary project). This void, the negator of history, demands above all to be filled. The speaker attempts to accomplish this by hanging other images, like literary myths, on this woman figure, as if trying all possible outfits on a lover in a dressing room, ever more feverishly, as the effort is futile. This is perhaps the most seemingly incoherent aspect of the text: a series of projections during which the woman seems to change in allure, a little like the dream figures that populated *Le Plaisir de flotter*, barely defined, then already gone and replaced by others. It would be vain to list them in detail, from the Luciferian woman to the "prostituée virginale" 'virginal prostitute,' from the "l'hystérique géniale" 'the brilliant hysteric' to the "femme enfant" 'woman child' or the "femme médiatrice" 'woman mediator.' (These phrases are taken from a sentence in "L'Âge de la rêverie" 44, image 56.) Elsewhere we see tried on "she" the mysteries of Tarot dear to Breton, from seventeen to eleven (*Librement* 28-29). "She" can try on all these outfits, because of the void that resides within her, but none of them really suits her. Thus she undoes all the models normally adapted to the amorous adventure, including those of the Plato's *Banquet* to which the text alludes implicitly (18), since the fusion of the lovers proves to be impossible.

And yet, in the whirlwind of these projections superimposed in a cumulative negativity which seems to grow with the pain felt, we note three points of reference which, as we will see, are simultaneously fixed and mobile, and which enable us to discern this surprising presence and the effects produced. The first reference point might be summed up in the conjunction "et" 'and' and the adverbial "à la fois" 'at the same time': "She" is possible and impossible love. She is matter and spirit, body and "madness" of the spirit (as distinguished from "insanity") (24). She is light and shadow. She shares attributes "à la fois . . . de la pérennité du marbre et de la tendresse de la chair" (51) 'at the same time . . . of the permanence of marble and the softness of flesh.' Through these contradictions, we can measure the share of suffering that they are likely to contain, given the continual back and forth between moments of hope and despair, the activation of the life instinct and death instinct. But we can also surmise that the co-author of *Dialectique de la dialectique* will perhaps be able to escape the sterility of this deadening oscillation. This is what the last part of the text seems to predict (starting at the ninth section):

Bientôt, en réunissant toutes ces réflexions disparates, je commençais à croire qu'elle était vraiment un aspect inconscient et involontaire de la révolution poétique. (*Librement* 44)

Soon, by bringing together all these disparate thoughts, I began to believe that she was really an unconscious and involuntary dimension of the poetic revolution.

The second point of reference corresponds to a recurring theme in Trost's imagination. This modern woman, coming from the lights of the city, is the archetype of a feminine model already seen in *Le Plaisir de flotter*: that of "la jeune fille-femme" (*Librement* 58). For Trost, she represents the contemporary woman, this ideal which, in his eyes, comes into harmony with "l'érotisme profane et mécanique" of the present, a new means for struggling against the obstacle of history. In this regard, "L'Âge de la rêverie" seems to confirm the promise contained in this model:

La jeune fille femme (ou la jeune femme fille) est le produit *ready-made* et trouvé, réplique filtrée du monde extérieur qui nous conduira plus loin. . . . C'est dans son regard ayant décanté l'adolescence (et non plus l'enfance), dans sa simplicité arrogante, dans son indépendance insultante, dans son cerveau mâle-femelle que nous trouverons l'être qui n'est plus l'intercesseur avec le monde extérieur ou le prolongement de notre moi, ou le bouclier de protection symbolique mais le vrai produit simple. ("Âge" 47, image 57)

The girl-woman (or woman-girl) is the *ready-made*, the found object, a filtered replica of the exterior world that will take us further. . . . It is in her gaze having decanted adolescence (and not childhood), in her arrogant simplicity, in her insulting independence, in her male-female brain that we will find the being who is no longer the intercessor with the exterior or the extension of our I, or the symbolic protective shield, but the real simple product.

Thus, the young girl-woman, in her oscillation, which, paradoxically, we cannot help but consider an avatar of the primitive androgyne from Plato's *Banquet*, will find a way to dominate the obstacle and attain the state of authentic subject, by means other than as woman-mediator "intermédiaire entre le poète et le monde"²⁰ 'intermediary between the poet and the world,' and other than that imposed by History. Thus, Trost seems to be constructing a veritable program that echoes *Librement mécanique*.

Finally, the third point of reference, which also seems to be confirmed in "L'Âge de la rêverie," takes shape in the last pages. Trost seems to be opening a new door, this time to the Invisible. In his desperate attempt to deal with the break-up by transforming the painful and deadening oscillation into a positive dialectic,

²⁰ *Librement* 58. Trost thought that this vision, present in the Romantic poets, was also found in surrealism.

the poet reaffirms his faith in poetry (we could also say art) denied by “her” as mentioned above. This crisis of love leads to a rethinking of poetry:

La poésie, cristallisée dans tant d’admirables découvertes, devait redevenir soluble et rentrer dans cet invisible qui se montrait de plus en plus pressant. Il me semblait qu’elle devait se détourner du mal existant et aller plutôt vers l’énigme qui nous entoure de partout, célébrer et illuminer cette énigme, comme l’initiation. (51)

Poetry, crystallized in so many admirable discoveries, had to become soluble once again and return to this invisible state that was becoming more and more pressing. I thought that it should turn away from existing evil and instead turn toward the enigma surrounding us, to celebrate and illuminate that enigma, like an initiation.

These lines, found in the tenth section, remain obscure. Trost’s thinking here is more paradoxical than ever since it is a woman eminently visible in the light of noon (and apparently nothing more) who opens the way to the invisible. In effect, we have moved from the void to the mystery. How are poetry, the young girl-woman, and the invisible related? How does the tragic experience described in *Librement mécanique* come to such a turn? Is this a shift from revolutionary action to a spiritualist approach? If poetry becomes soluble once again, can it still have a recognizable, decipherable form? In any case, this is the same project taken up in “L’Âge de la rêverie,” and then in another book, *Visible et invisible*, published in 1953. Here are three short excerpts from “L’Âge de la rêverie”:

Nous ne pouvons plus trouver de nouvelles sources d’action que dans l’invisible. . . . Car le moment dialectique est à l’invisible, c’est-à-dire à l’inconnu sensible, et dans un sens tous les critères que nous avons puisés dans le connu ne servent plus aujourd’hui qu’en tant que méthode à gagner l’invisible. (4, image 16)

We can no longer find new sources of action only in the invisible. . . . For the dialectic moment is in the realm of the invisible, that is, in the sensed unknown, and in a sense, all the criteria that we have drawn on in the realm of the known serve today only as a means to attain the invisible.

Il ne s’agit . . . pas . . . de se vouer à la découverte de cet invisible symétrique au visible, mais bien de la libération de cet inconnu selon des méthodes exclusivement poétiques. (11, image 23)

The point is not to dedicate oneself to the discovery of this realm of the invisible, the symmetrical counterpart of the visible, but rather to liberate this unknown by means exclusively poetic.

Et plus que jamais, c’est à la femme de nous redonner les moyens de conciliation avec le monde visible et invisible. (16, image 28)

And more than ever, it is the woman who will give us once again the means to reconcile ourselves with the visible and invisible world.

These lines do not respond directly to the questions raised here, which are undoubtedly too rational and reductive. Above all, we must retain the globalizing movement of Trost's thought, which never abandons its dialectic movement, its negations, or the negation of its negation.

In this globalizing perspective, the text reaches a dramatic conclusion:

Et de la sorte, après toutes les fluctuations antérieures, on découvre la vraie image du tarot qui correspond à cette rencontre et qui n'est autre que la dernière, celle dont la substance montre la femme portant le nom du monde. (*Librement* 60)

And in this way, after all the earlier fluctuations, we discover the real Tarot image corresponding to this encounter and which is none other than the last, the one whose substance is showing the woman wearing the name of the *world*.

At the (temporary) exit from this dialectic movement allowing escape from the cage of pain, the unnamed "she" has finally found her true name.

The meaning of this dramatic conclusion remains somewhat mysterious. More detailed study of the relationship between *Librement mécanique* and "L'Âge de la rêverie," two most likely contemporaneous works, would probably offer several hypotheses. However, it is already clear that the year 1951 marked an essential turning point in Trost's life. His quest, which remained central in his eyes, to surpass the dialectic of contradictions, took him on a solitary path that would separate him from his companions in the Bucharest group.

Translated from the French by Lynn E. Palermo

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