

André Breton and Vladimir Mayakovsky: Poeticising politics and politicising poetry



Fig. 1. Mayakovsky in *He was not born to money* (1918)
Reproduced in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no. 1, July 1930

Much has been written on the creative use of photography in French surrealist journals and the focus has been on the publications of the inter war period, particularly *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924 – 29, 12 nos.). Georges Bataille's review *Documents* (1929 – 30, 15 nos.), often defined as a 'surrealist' journal and *Minotaure* (1933 – 39, 13 nos.), a luxurious art review under the editorial control of

the surrealists, have also been closely examined.¹ In all of these journals texts are interspersed with illustrations and in *Minotaure* they are lavishly produced. Far less attention has been paid to the second Surrealist journal, *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (1930 – 33, 6 nos.) in this respect. This is understandable; the illustrations are relatively few and economically placed together at the back of the journal, usually separated from the text that they allude to. They are mostly photographic. For the surrealists and the commercial press alike photographs became, at this time, an indispensable tool of communication used with intention. Whereas the commercial press used photography to seduce the reader and to provide 'documentary' evidence to support text, the surrealists delighted in the instability of the photographic image and how it could trigger uncontrollable associations in the mind of the viewer. The surrealists' use of photography was often elegant and incisive, providing images which offered a challenge to the viewer and were open to various interpretations. 'Photographs are always photographs of something' Roland Barthes said, and the Surrealists were adept at exploiting the potential of the two planes of the image that he identified as 'studium' and 'punctum'.² The viewer learns something from the photograph but it also 'works' on their sensibilities as they are affected by details. Although the second surrealist journal differs from the first, the relationship between text and image remains a key feature and the use of photographic illustrations is shrewd and creative, evidence of Breton's mastery of editing. The launch of the new politically charged journal was important in 1930 as it came at a crossroads for the group following the publication of the 'Second Manifesto' in 1929; in retrospect, Breton considered it to be the peak of Surrealism. In 1952 he stated that of all the surrealist journals, *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* was

... by far the richest, in the sense that mattered to us: the most balanced, the best put together, as well as the most fully alive (with a thrilling and dangerous life). It was in this magazine that Surrealism burned with the most intense flame.³

The focus here is on the first issue of the journal and specifically the way in which Breton used the death of the Russian Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky in a dialogue about love, suicide, and the role of the artist in society and politics. Mayakovsky hardly needs introduction being "one of the most theatrical, spectacular and controversial figures on the twentieth-century Soviet Russian cultural stage and definitely the most *visible* Soviet poet in the west".⁴ He was canonised by the Russian Communist Party immediately on his death (his brain is preserved in the Moscow Brain Institute) and has been, and continues to be mythologised by a wide range of writers, including Breton.^{5 6} As editor of *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, Breton demonstrates his understanding of the potential of photographic images and makes good use of them in this issue to render the surrealists' declaration of support for Soviet Russia at the front of the journal equivocal. The

complex play of text and image produces myriad associations and helps Breton to establish a distinct position for his group, politically and culturally, presenting them as rigorously intellectual, ferociously political and culturally radical.

The recent death of Mayakovsky dominates this issue, he committed suicide in April 1930 and the journal was published in July of that year. Mayakovsky was extolled by Breton who identified with the poet politically, as a writer, as a modern myth-maker, and personally as one who valued love highly and was tormented by it. Mayakovsky is mythologised by Breton, as Svetlana Boym says, and in the process the surrealist group

exposes their own complexities and contradictions, particularly the tensions between politics and poetics in the relationship between Surrealists and Communists. It also forces us to re-examine some vital issues of avant-garde poetics, particularly the conjunction between poetry and revolution⁷

Boym's detailed analysis of the flexibility of Mayakovsky as a figure is fascinating, (her analysis of Louis Aragon's connection to him is illuminating) but she does not mention the illustration that accompanies the text in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. This discussion is focused on the full page reproduction of a photograph of the poet in the journal which, as both homage to Mayakovsky and a synthesis of Surrealist ideology is, arguably, deliberately and magnificently poetic *and* political. (Fig. 1)

The turbulent relationship between the French Surrealists and the Communist Party is well documented. Despite a violent hostility towards the leadership of the French Communist Party, Breton and his group were drawn to Communism because, like many, they were inspired by the Russian revolution of October 1917. The catalyst for the political radicalisation of the group was the Rif rebellion in Morocco in 1925, the same year that Breton was enamoured of Trotsky's book on Lenin. Although the production of the journal is generally understood as signifying a shift towards placing the movement at the service of the Communist Party, tension is evident at the outset and the published response to Mayakovsky's death by suicide particularly denotes discordance. From the start the Communist Party was mistrustful of this group who were insistent on autonomy. In *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1925 Paul Éluard had reported an unfounded optimism amongst delegates at a conference organised by *Philosophies*, part of a left-wing alliance which included the surrealists and *Clarté*, concerning the extent of revolutionary change in Soviet Russia.⁸ Éluard suggested that the nature of Russian society may have changed but that it was nevertheless characterised by 'inequality, disorder and madness'.⁹ Éluard's concerns about the period of reaction in Russia following the defeats suffered by

revolution on an international scale, notably in Germany, and Lenin's death in 1924 were crudely expressed but shrewd. Eluard's fundamental support for the Revolution, his distance from the Party and his naivety facilitated this insight. At this time, when the international bourgeoisie were willing the Soviet state to falter and the left were reluctant to voice concerns, the fact that the surrealists were critical of Russia was extraordinary. The surrealists maintained an affinity with the ideas and protagonists of 'October' at a time when most were falling in behind the Party apparatus in Moscow and moving rapidly to the right. By 1930 the surrealists knew that they were staring into the abyss of Stalinism. The 'Kharkov conference' later that year would establish a hard-line Communist Party position on 'proletarian literature' being the only acceptable kind and condemn Breton's position in the Second Surrealist Manifesto (1929) where he reiterated his belief that such a thing was not possible.¹⁰

The first issue of the new surrealist journal famously opens with a reproduction of a telegram to the surrealist group from the *Bureau International de Littérature Révolutionnaire* in Moscow which demands clarification on the position Breton would take should 'imperialism declare war on the soviets'.¹¹ The collective response (written by Breton and Louis Aragon) states that the surrealists would follow the directives of the Third International. It then offers intellectual services as their 'particular forte'. A positive answer then, declaring loyalty to Moscow, but also candid. The friction between the 'revolution' of the Communist Party and that of the surrealists is further illuminated by the reaction to Mayakovsky's death. This first issue of the journal devoted seven pages of text (out of forty-eight pages in total) and a full page photographic illustration to the poet. The illustration appears on the last page of the journal, in direct opposition to the telegram from Russia. The text consists of a long essay by Breton entitled 'Liubovnaia lodka razbilas' o byt' (Love's boat has smashed against the daily grind), a phrase from Mayakovsky's poem *About that (Pro eto)* (1923) which also appears in his main suicide note. Breton's text is spread across the seven pages, flanked (in the following order) by reproductions of Mayakovsky's three suicide notes; the obituary published in *Komsomolskia* (the youth division paper of the Russian CP) written by Petr Neznamov and Vasily Katanyan, Mayakovsky's *Lef* comrades; an extract from *About that*; Mayakovsky's poem *Notre Dame* (1925); and finally three press reports, all dated June 1930. These include an article from the French Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanité* about Aragon's response to an abusive article about Mayakovsky by André Levinson in *Nouvelles Littéraires*. Aragon had turned up at Levinson's house and punched him. The published response from Levinson and an article applauding Aragon's aggression in *Canard Enchaîné* were also reprinted.

The surrealists believed themselves to be in a position to effectively contribute to a live debate on the issue of freedom in both political activism and in cultural production. Both the text and the photograph reveal the difficulties in

negotiating a route between poetic freedom of thought and channelling the imagination to practical effect. Breton's surrealist text presents a forceful argument about love, revolution and suicide as well as lambasting the political exploitation of the poet's death in the mainstream press in France as well as the Communist press.

On the surface Mayakovsky and Breton appear to have much in common in addition to their political perspective. They were both great editors and writers.¹² They both had enormous egos. As writers they were fond of self-centered lyricism. They had immense faith in the power of love: in his work Mayakovsky often links the destiny of the world with the destiny of his love, he unites love and revolutionary politics in a fight for "the only happiness".¹³ Extraordinary and intense love, 'mad love' as Breton calls it was central for Surrealism in the inter-war period any beyond as it was understood to express

the entire power and hope of surrealism to remake the world through the emotions and through the confidence that the relation between the exterior or natural world and the interior or human world can reveal more about both than the rational mind can possibly detect. At some moments, this relation takes on a political aura, at others, a purely personal one, and at still others, a mystical one; but the basic confidence remains identical.¹⁴

Both men personally invested heavily in love and felt badly let down. Mayakovsky had fallen in love with Lily Brik at first sight in 1915 and a longstanding *ménage-à-trois* involving her husband Osip Brik ensued. Mayakovsky loved Lily as long as he lived and wrote countless verses for her but he was periodically tormented by their highly charged relationship.¹⁵ Mayakovsky also had several intense and difficult relationships with other women.¹⁶ In 1930 Breton's long standing relationship with Suzanne Muzard was imploding; he met her in late 1927, they ran away to Toulon together, leaving their respective partners (she was living with the writer Emmanuel Berl) and for three years they had a passionate but torrid love affair. In 1930 Breton eventually divorced Simone so that he could devote himself to Suzanne, only to find that she had married Berl. Even after this their entanglement continued for over a year before finally ending in 1931, Breton was in deep emotional despair during this time and this is evident in his writing, not least in this essay. At one point Breton superimposes his affair with Muzard onto Mayakovsky's with Tatyana Yakovleva.¹⁷ Love is in the foreground. Breton even provides a footnote to the fragment of *About that* to inform the reader that 'that' is love.¹⁸ Even the great Russian revolutionary poet had nothing in his arsenal to deal with the power and danger of 'woman' he says.¹⁹ This surrealist text reveals an open wound; it is delirious, in parts a rant. However, this lack of restraint is not accidental, it facilitates and illustrates Breton's contribution to the live debate about 'individualism', on how much of a writer's personal life was permissible or valid in their work or in their realisation of literary characters. For Breton of course freedom

was paramount and his text emphasises the inevitability and fruitfulness of the convergence of the personal, the political and the poetic.

Furthermore both men understood suicide as a viable option in a world where life became unbearable: it is a regular motif in Mayakovsky's work. "There is no other way out for me" Mayakovsky had written in his suicide note to his 'mother, sister and comrades'; Breton had regarded suicide as a touchstone of revolt since the death of his friend Jacques Vaché in 1919.

Breton and Mayakovsky had met briefly in Paris in 1928, introduced by Lily Brik's sister Elsa Triolet who was soon to marry Louis Aragon, however meaningful dialogue was unlikely and the meeting went unrecorded in the Russian poet's letters home.²⁰ Mayakovsky was perceived by Breton as a free thinker, imbued with terrific revolutionary energy and wholly committed to Bolshevism but who believed that in a sense, art should be free from 'politics' and be revolutionary in spirit. Stalin's decree in 1932 eventually deemed that the arts must serve and represent the state as a tool of propaganda, but the cultural debate about the role of art had raged since 1917 and Mayakovsky had increasingly come under attack. He was seen by the Communist Party as being too individualistic and too powerful because of his popularity; his plays were delayed in publication and harshly criticised and he was publicly denounced as a 'bohemian'.²¹ In 1929 he was denied an exit visa.²² His self-curated solo exhibition *Twenty Years of Work* (January 1930) was planned and produced by Mayakovsky with little help and although the opening night was attended by a few close friends and a large crowd of young people, none of the prominent writers or high ranking state and party officials that he invited turned up, to his obvious dismay.²³ The poet was increasingly isolated from the literary world but also from his comrades in *Lef* whom he abandoned, without consultation in 1930, to join the semi-official group RAPP (Revolutionary Association of Proletarian Writers). According to Viktor Shklovsky, the last time he saw his friend was at the House of Writers where Mayakovsky was attending a RAPP meeting to be 're-educated'.²⁴ Towards the end, Shklovsky says, Mayakovsky "found himself in a stagnant bay."²⁵ Mayakovsky's suicide was attributed to his personal angst but also to his literary and political alienation.²⁶

Mayakovsky's second suicide note addressed to his RAPP comrades explains his dilemma.²⁷ The poet asks that his comrades do not consider him weak but understand that he saw no alternative. He then asks them to relay a message to Vladimir Ermilov, critic, RAPP leader and party hack : 'Tell Ermilov I'm sorry I took the slogan down, we should have fought it out', presumably referring to an incident that took place a month earlier. Mayakovsky's *Bathroom* (1930), a direct assault on the cultural bureaucrats of the regime was declared to be unacceptable by the theatre

copyright committee; it was subsequently edited and failed badly when staged. Criticism was harsh. Even before the premier Ermilov had suggested, in *Pravda*, that the poet was a Trotskyite. Mayakovsky had responded by adding a poster to the display of large anti-bureaucracy banners hung in the Meyerhold theatre for the premier, it read:

You can't immediately steam out the swarm of bureaucracy.
There wouldn't be enough bathhouses or soap.
Besides, the bureaucrats are aided by the pen of critics like Ermilov.

Ermilov protested and RAPP ordered that the poster be removed.²⁸ Mayakovsky complied and understood that in 1930, with Trotsky's deportation, the suppression of the opposition and the arrest of many leaders of the revolution, the struggle of ideas within the Party had been won by those who had abandoned the principles of 'October'.

At the end of his essay Breton berates the 'scum', represented here by Augustin Habaru writing for *Monde* (a French international Communist review founded by Henri Barbusse) and *Le Soir*, for taking the poet's death as an opportunity to vent a deep hatred of those who, like Mayakovsky "proclaim the absolute inanity of literature with proletarian pretensions".²⁹ Breton also attacks *L'Humanité* which presented the poet as a 'bourgeois individualist' who had no understanding of the working class and who had been exposed as a fraud through his resorting to suicide. There is no explicit criticism of the Russian Communist Party but Breton's sustained focus on the question of 'proletarian literature' and on Mayakovsky's characterisation as an exemplary 'proletarian poet' are antagonistic to say the least. Through a Central Committee decree in 1928 Stalin had made his intentions clear regarding writers' creative freedom

"Literary art must be developed, its social contents must be made deeper, it must be made completely understandable for the masses, its circulation enlarged etc. We must struggle for the hegemony of proletarian literature."³⁰

The obituary written by Mayakovsky's *Lef* comrades commends him as a 'revolutionary poet', emphasising his contribution to literature and to the class struggle, arguing that he was indeed a great 'proletarian poet' as everyone is saying, not because he chose the proletariat as his theme, but because he shared their goal and consistently wrote 'for the revolution', despite coming under attack. Breton uses the reproduction of this Russian obituary to emphasise the chasm between Mayakovsky's work and 'proletarian literature' but also to sound an alarm. Breton

aligned himself with Trotsky whose dismissal of 'proletarian art' in *Literature and Revolution* (1924) was widely known. As was Victor Serge's article entitled 'Is a proletarian literature possible?' written in Soviet Russia in 1925 but directed at French readers, warning of the dangers of literary constriction. The surrealists were actively countering attempts, orchestrated by Barbusse and supported by the Comintern, to establish a 'proletarian literature' in France. Breton's text concludes with a denial of "any possible existence to poetry or art that would adopt the extreme simplification – *à la* Barbusse – of ways of thinking and feeling. We are still waiting for someone to show us a "proletarian" work of art" he says.³¹

Breton's skill as an editor is evident in the composition of the article, and in his choice of an unusual image of the Russian poet as the illustration. We know that Breton was a scrupulous editor, that he sought illustrations for inclusion in surrealist reviews and that he provided instructions pertaining to design and page layout.³² One of Rodchenko's portraits of Mayakovsky would have been an obvious choice for the illustration, if a simple homage was required. Instead a film still was chosen from Mayakovsky's 1918 adaptation of Jack London's *Martin Eden* (1909).³³ (Fig. 1) Breton's text is thus supplemented by an image so rich in connotation that an intention to advance the dialogue on the implications of Mayakovsky's death in an imaginative way is clear. The relationship between the texts and the image advances Breton's argument in a way that language alone would have been able to do. Here, Mayakovsky is presented playing the role of a writer contemplating death: the photograph, together with the caption which identifies Mayakovsky playing Ivan Nov, the main protagonist in his film *Not for money born* (1918) sets up a series of dichotomies; between individualism and political allegiance, love/poetry and revolution, life and death and social classes.³⁴ The reader of the journal understands that the photograph represents Mayakovsky as an artist but intertextuality sets off associations.

A reader who was unfamiliar with the film or the novel on which it was based would find the image rich in associations, but knowledge of the narratives adds layers of meaning. The protagonists in both are, like Mayakovsky and Breton, consumed by love: in the novel Eden explains that he is powerless to resist as

Love was too fine and noble, and he was too loyal a lover for him to besmirch love with criticism. What did love have to do with Ruth's divergent views on art, right conduct, the French Revolution, or equal suffrage? They were mental processes, but love was beyond reason; it was super-rational. He could not belittle love. He worshipped it. Love lay on the mountain-tops beyond the valley-land of reason. It was a sublimated condition of existence, the topmost peak of living, and it came rarely. Thanks to the school of scientific philosophers he favoured, he knew the biological significance of love; but by a refined process of the same scientific reasoning he reached the

conclusion that the human organism achieved its highest purpose in love, that love must not be questioned, but must be accepted as the highest guerdon of life.³⁵

The novel *Martin Eden* is presented by Jack London as an attack on individualism and a critique of personal ambition; the central character is a poor sailor who falls in love with Ruth Morse, a middle class girl, and sets out to educate himself and become a writer so that he can rise to a position to marry. He denounces socialism personally and in public meetings. He does find success and becomes rich but too late, Ruth abandons him just before this happens. He becomes disillusioned with his fame and money and commits suicide. Mayakovsky, filled with revolutionary zeal, wrote *Not for money born* shortly after October 1917 with David Burliuk. Mayakovsky cast himself as the male lead in the film. Indeed Mayakovsky played the principal part in all of the three films he made in 1918. This particular film still, which shows him dressed in a top hat and smoking a fat cigar, echoes contemporary accusations of his questionable class consciousness. However, the narrative of the film after this point develops in Nov rejecting material wealth.

Mayakovsky's protagonist, like London's, is from a poor background and when he falls for a middle class girl he also decides to become a writer to impress her. When he becomes a famous and rich Futurist poet she eventually shows an interest in him but he suspects that she is simply after his money and cannot accept her love. He plays with a revolver, contemplating suicide (ironically given that Mayakovsky will shoot himself in the heart with the same weapon), but decides instead to fake his death by dressing a skeleton in his fine clothes and setting fire to it before walking away dressed in his old working clothes to resume his ordinary life.³⁶ Mayakovsky liked to think of himself as a young, Russian version of Jack London.³⁷ An important link between them is that they had both become disillusioned with the organisations they had committed to; London had joined the Socialist Party in the USA after being inspired by *The Communist Manifesto* but had resigned in 1916 "because of its lack of fire and fight, and its loss of emphasis on the class struggle."³⁸ Mayakovsky's death was partly attributable to the fact that he was committed to a struggle for freedom that he felt had slipped away.

Mayakovsky identified with the semi-autobiographical aspect of London's novel, his intermingling of politics and life. The work of the Russian poet is characterised by a mixture of the personal, poetic and political; even his suicide notes are a complex mesh. His first note for example includes four lines from his poem *About that*, the narrative of which involves a man who shot himself and left a note but died with 'a love song on his lips'. The film still used to illustrate Breton's

essay raises questions about the dissolving of boundaries between life and art, between the personal and the collective at a time when both Mayakovsky's and the surrealists' tendency to do was under attack. The surrealists highlighted Mayakovsky's diverse talent and modernity in choosing a film still and also aligned him to Luis Buñuel. The first four illustrations in the issue are from Buñuel, the first an unidentified photograph of a bishop fondling the breast of a young woman and three stills from *L'Age d'Or* (1930). *Not for money born* was similar to *L'Age d'Or* in that it focused on the theme of frustrated passion and bridged poetics and politics. Indeed Marina Burke observes that watching *Not for money born* "one is struck by the foreshadowing of the Surrealism of the early Bunüel, an impression reinforced by the stills that show Ivan Nov talking to a skeleton, that he bought in a shop and took home".³⁹

Our understanding of the intellectual content of the photographs published by the surrealists benefits from an approach that considers them not in isolation, aesthetically or as exclusive to surrealism, but in their historical specificity in relation to contemporary concerns and journalistic practices. Vincent Gille emphasised the need for political history in scholarship on surrealism as well as a focus on the movement as 'a passionately human adventure.'⁴⁰ Svetlana Boym's contribution to an understanding of Breton's response to Mayakovsky's death is insightful; his zeal is evident and the complexities of the political background do melt into mythology. But Breton was one of those who believed that 'Mayakovsky's life and work are at the core of the Revolution's meaning'.⁴¹ Breton's mythologizing is purposeful and the relationship between this image and the text in the surrealist journal is far from simplistic. The surrealist journals often included photographic images that were simply reproduced without alteration, commandeered so to speak. Breton understood the power of the image as argument but also subverted this by wrestling the visual from the realm of language and asserting its independent power. He was interested in the 'visual' of visual images and these pictures often defy linguistics and thus solid meaning to a great extent, allowing the group, in this instance to shake the hand of the Russian Communist Party and stick two fingers up at it simultaneously.

Breton uses Mayakovsky's death to analyse the central friction between the surrealists and the Communist Party around the issue of the relationship between individual freedom and political allegiance. The journal opened with what appeared to be an unequivocal statement of support for the Party, but this is tested in articles throughout the issue and counterpoised on the last page of the journal.⁴² The photograph raised myriad concerns, reflected the complexity of the relationship between free thought and directed cultural production and hailed Mayakovsky as one who was able to produce work which was both poetic and political. Breton's proficiency as an editor facilitated the addressing of these issues productively using a synthesis of image and text. If we consider the illustration, its allusions and its complex relationship to the texts, we can see that the treatment of Mayakovsky's

death in the journal is simultaneously and successfully political and poetic. Breton does not just highlight Mayakovsky's revolutionary poetic mission, but arguably demonstrates it in the first issue of the aptly titled new journal. Shklovsky said of Mayakovsky that "he surrounded his death like a disaster area with warning lights": it seems that Breton picked one up and ran with it as far as he humanly could.⁴³

¹ See Ades, D. (1978) *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, London: Arts Council; Ades, D. & Baker, S. (Eds.) (2006) *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, Cambridge MASS: MIT Press
Bate, D. (2004) *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, London: I B Tauris and Walker, I. (2002) *City gorged with dreams: Surrealism and documentary photography in interwar Paris*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

² The first half of Roland Barthes book *Camera Lucida* is devoted to distinguishing between two planes of a photographic image. The 'studium' is informative or educational, it is the manifest subject, meaning and context of a photograph. From a photograph we can gain knowledge; Barthes uses the example of a photograph by William Klein of Mayday in 1959 in Moscow and notes details of how Russians dressed, something he had not known about previously. The 'punctum' is subjective, it is the aspect of a photograph (usually a detail or details) that arrest (or 'prick' as Barthes says) the viewer and work on them. Barthes, R. (2000) [1980] *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage Books.

³ Breton, A. with Parinaud, A. *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, translated by Polizzotti, M., New York: Paragon House, 1969, p. 120

⁴ Boym, S. (1991) *Death in quotation marks: Cultural myths of the modern poet*, Cambridge: MASS, p. 123

⁵ Mayakovsky, V. *Klop, Stikhi, Poëmy*, Indiana University Press, 1975, p. 48 and see http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/a-visit-to-moscows-brain-institute (Accessed 5/8/15)

⁶ Svetlana Boym explores this in depth in her book *Death in quotation marks: Cultural myths of the modern poet*.

⁷ *Death in quotation marks: Cultural myths of the modern poet*, p. 158

⁸ The French war in the Rif region of Morocco (Spring 1925 – Spring 1926) led to a mass anti-Colonial campaign led by the French Communist Party (PCF) and galvanised the left in France. *Philosophies* was the name of a journal founded in 1924 by a group of young intellectuals, including Henri Lefebvre, Georges Friedmann, Paul Nizan, Georges Politzer, Pierre Morhange and Norbert Guterman. René Crevel as well as Philippe Soupault collaborated on issue 2 of the journal. *Clarté* was a bi-monthly review launched in 1919 by a group founded by Raymond Lefebvre, Paul Vaillant-Couturier and Henri Barbusse as an 'International of the Mind'.

⁹ Paul Eluard's report from the conference of May 18th 1925 was published in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 4, July 15, 1925, p. 32

¹⁰ The Second International Conference of Revolutionary Writers was held in Kharkov in the Ukraine in November and December of 1930. The majority of the delegates were members of the Communist Party and the surrealists were represented by Louis Aragon and Georges Sadoul. Both publicly renounced their association with the surrealists at the close of the conference. Breton railed against the Kharkov resolution and the subsequent promotion of 'proletarian literature' in a lecture given under the auspices of the Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers at the Salle de Frand-Orient, parts of which were published as 'On the Proletarian Literature Contest sponsored by L'Humanité' in 1933. The text is re-published in *Break of Day*, pp. 78 – 87. See 'The Second Manifesto of Surrealism' in Breton, A. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Seaver, R. & Lane, H. R., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 154 - 157

¹¹ The International Bureau of Revolutionary Literature was a group that attempted to organise 'proletarian literature' on an international scale following the First Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers in Moscow in 1927.

¹² Mayakovsky edited *LEF* (1923 – 25) along with Osip Brik and *Novy LEF* (1927 – 29) along with Sergei Tretyakov. In the inter-war period Breton edited *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924 – 29) from issue 4 onwards, *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (1930 – 33) and *Minotaure* (1933 – 39) with Pierre Mabille.

¹³ Shklovsky, V. (1972) [1940] *Mayakovsky and his circle*, translated and edited by Lily Feiler, London: Pluto Press, p. 84

¹⁴ Breton, A. (1987) [1937] *Mad Love [L'Amour fou]*, translated by Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. xiii

¹⁵ For a summary of Breton's relations with women see Mark Polizzotti's introduction to *Andre Breton: Selections* (2003), Berkley: University of California Press, pp. 21 - 24. Viktor Shklovsky offers an account of Mayakovsky's investment in love in *Mayakovsky and his circle*.

¹⁶ For details of Mayakovsky's affairs with Tatiana Yakovleva, Veronica Polonsky (Nora) and Elly Siebert see Jangfeldt, B. (2014) [2007] *Mayakovsky: A biography*, translated by Harry D. Watson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ Essay translation in Breton, A. (1999) [1934] *Break of Day [Point du jour]*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, p.58

¹⁸ Breton's footnote reads *C'est a dire: De L'amour, Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no. 1, (July, 1930), p. 18

¹⁹ Breton, *Break of day*, p. 56

²⁰ Polizzotti documents a meeting between Breton and Mayakovsky in his preface to *Break of Day*, p. xii and p. xiv. There is no mention of a meeting with Breton in Mayakovsky's letters to Lily Brik, edited and published by Bengt Jangfeldt as *Love is the heart of everything: Correspondence between Vladimir Mayakovsky and Lili Brik 1915 – 1930* (1987), Manchester, New Hampshire: Olympic Marketing Corp.

²¹ For an overview of Mayakovsky's work and contemporary reception see Mayakovsky, V., El Lissitzky, and Railing, P. *For the Voice*, (3 volumes), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. For an account of Mayakovsky's revolutionary activities from 1922 until his death and documentation of the criticism he suffered see Volume 3, Railing, P. (ed.) 'A Revolutionary Spirit' in *For the Voice: Voices of Revolution: Collected Essays*, pp. 15 – 30

²² Brown, E. J. (1988) *Mayakovsky: A poet in the revolution*, New York: Paragon House Publishers, p. 350

²³ *Mayakovsky: A biography* p. 490

²⁴ *Mayakovsky and his circle*, p. 200

²⁵ *Mayakovsky and his circle*, p. 97

²⁶ The responses to the suicide are outlined in *Mayakovsky: A biography*, pp. 541 - 550

²⁷ In 1928 VAPP (the All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers) was renamed RAPP (the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers). Mayakovsky's second suicide note is translated into French as *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* as 'Ne m'appellez pas lâche. C'est sérieux, il n'y a rien à faire. Salut. Dites à Ermilov que c'est dommage d'avoir abandonné le mot d'ordre, il fallait vaincre. V. M. *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no. 1, (1930), p. 16

²⁸ Patricia Blake recounts this story in her introduction to Mayakovsky's *Bedbug*. Blake, P. (ed.) *Vladimir Mayakovsky. The Bedbug and Selected Poetry*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975, pp. 43 – 44

²⁹ Breton's essay in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, issue 1, (1930), p. 21 (author's translation)

³⁰ Garrard, J. G. (1990) *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union*, London: I B Tauris, p. 29

³¹ Breton's essay in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, issue 1, (1930), p. 22. This translation is from *Break of Day*, p. 63

³² Breton's photographic collection included prints ordered from agencies and museums as well as individuals. The image of Mayakovsky was not in his collection but he retained many of the prints that were published in surrealist journals until his death, facilitating an insight into editorial decision-making. His collection, held at his apartment at 42 rue Fontaine, was documented before the sale of contents in 2003 by L'Association l'Atelier André Breton and is available to view at

<http://www.andrebretton.fr/#>

³³ Jack London's semi-autobiographical *Martin Eden* was published in 1909. It tells the story of a poor worker intellectual who falls in love with a bourgeois woman and becomes a novelist in order to 'improve' himself and rise to a position where he would be a suitable husband. Despite his literary success, his project ends in alienation and Eden commits suicide. The novel deals with the difficulties faced by writers and issues of individualism versus socialism.

³⁴ *Nye dlya deneg radivshisya* (Not for money born) (Nikandr Turkin, 1918) was written by Vladimir Mayakovsky and David Burliuk. The cast: David Burliuk, Margerita Kibalchich, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Yanina Mirato. Cinematography by Yevgeni Slavinsky.

³⁵ London, J. (1957) *Martin Eden*, New York: Macmillan, p. 176

³⁶ The film has not survived, only a few stills only remain, but *Mayakovsky: A biography* offers a synopsis, see p. 115

³⁷ *Mayakovsky: A poet in the revolution*, p.118

³⁸ Manguel, A. (2008) 'Engine of Destruction', *The Guardian*, Review section, April 12, p. 21

³⁹ Burke, M. (2007) 'Mayakovsky: Film: Futurism' pp. 133 – 151 in Graf, A. & Scheunemann, D. *Avant-Garde Film*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, p. 140

⁴⁰ Gille, V. 'Surrealism today: two books, a few questions and the mood of the times', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 3, spring 2005, book reviews.

<http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal3/index.htm> (Accessed 30/12/15)

⁴¹ This phrase is used by Michael Holquist, but only generally, not in relation to Breton. 'The Mayakovsky Problem', *Yale French Studies*, no. 39, Literature and Revolution. (1967), pp. 126-36

⁴² For instance Dali's 'L'Ane pourri' contained conflicting attitudes to political commitment pp. 9 – 12, on pages 10 and 11 the feature 'Le Sottisier Surréaliste' ridiculed the dissident surrealists and attacked Desnos' apparent support for Social Realism in his review of Eisenstein's *La Ligne Générale* published in *Documents*, no. 4, 1930, p 220, while texts such as Breton's 'Il y aura une fois' pp. 2 - 4 and Rene Char's 'Le jour et la nuit de la liberté' p 23 attempted to marry art and politics in an innovative form.

⁴³ *Mayakovsky and his circle*, p. 202