Philosophically, Surrealism is an Outgrowth of the Counter Enlightenment

**Enlightenment**

- 17th & 18th centuries (roughly)
- Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Locke, Kant, Diderot (Encyclopaedia), Adam Smith, David Hume, Edmund Burke, George Berkeley, Marquis de Condorcet, Emmanuel Kant, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine,
- Reason, Logic, science, tolerance, “natural rights” (life, liberty, property), freedom/liberty, absolute individualism, the absolute State, progress, the perfection of Man and Society through Reason

**Counter Enlightenment/ Romanticism**

- 18th --21st century
- Hegel, Schopenhauer, Schelling, Herder, Johann Hamann, Nietzsche, Marx, Mill; Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Keats, Shelly, Hazlitt,
- Emotion, intuition, instinct, the IMAGINATION, anti-commercialism, anti-industrial age, poetry as “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” the unconscious, subjectivism, symbolism, anti-rationalism, inadequacies of Reason, EXPRESSIONISM, the march of Science,
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<th>Neoclassical world view</th>
<th>Romantic world view</th>
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<td><strong>All questions can be answered through the proper application of reason.</strong></td>
<td>Some fundamental human questions cannot be answered by reason—spiritual, emotional, ineffable. Reason leaves out the vitality of life, the flow of experience, the feel of things, human desires to love and create, human passion.</td>
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<td><strong>Mathematics/geometry is perfect reason.</strong></td>
<td>Much of what humans experience is outside the material world and beyond rational or mathematical explanation. Reason can’t tell us how to live, what is right or wrong, what is beautiful.</td>
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<td><strong>All true answers to genuine questions must be compatible with one another. No logical truth can contradict another logical truth. All virtues are compatible with one another.</strong></td>
<td>No human ideals are true universally and forever. Some good values are irreconcilable with others. No human ideals apply to every culture.</td>
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<td><strong>Using reason in human affairs will enable us to build stable societies and Utopian perfection.</strong></td>
<td>If scientific rationality were applied to human societies, it would destroy them.</td>
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<td><strong>God is rational; God created Nature, so Nature is rational. Art reveals the inner methods of Nature and the Ideal Forms of everything.</strong></td>
<td>Nature is mysterious, irrational, and amoral. It doesn’t care about humans. It cannot be captured in words. The artist should portray humans heroically struggling against Nature and losing.</td>
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### ROMANTICISM

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<th>Great art leads us to the formal ideal, to true nobility, to perfect symmetry, just proportions, perfect Beauty. <strong>Beauty is a property of the art object.</strong></th>
<th>Great art is about expression, the artist’s expression, the artist’s struggle to express something inexpressible.</th>
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<th><strong>The rational State</strong> must educate people to know their proper purposes and proper behavior or there will be chaos.</th>
<th>Every individual is free and must generate his (or her) own values and ideals from within himself or herself, without coercion. Each human being is an end in himself.</th>
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<th>Civilizing rules, artistic rules, moral rules are more important than the individual Will, which must be bent to the purposes of the community and the State. <strong>The artist must learn the rules and bow to necessity.</strong></th>
<th>The individual Will is more important than the rules. The artist must break the old rules and make his (or her) own.</th>
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<p>| Art entertains, amuses, purges emotions, shows us eternal forms, general truths and ideal beauty. | Art is revolutionary. Art can liberate people from the chains of convention and exploitive authoritarian forces. Art can liberate. |</p>
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<tr>
<th>God, Nature, and the Universe are already perfect.</th>
<th>The Universe is unconscious Will, thrusting itself constantly and blindly into consciousness. God is constantly emerging, unfolding, progressing, coming into being. The artist digs into himself to find and express that unconscious, forward-thrusting Becoming.</th>
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<td>The artist holds the mirror up to Nature.</td>
<td>The Genius is the person who forms himself, creates himself, through great struggle and possibly madness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Genius is the person who sees the unchanging Ideal.</td>
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<td>The prototypical man is the realistic man, the man of taste, good judgment, balance, harmony, wit, proportion, satisfaction and virtue.</td>
<td>The prototypical man is the outcast, the rebel, the exile, the Superman who is contemptuous of bourgeois values and the stupidity of the masses. He can never settle, he can never be satisfied, he can never be happy with the way things are. He would rather die than compromise.</td>
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Manifesto of Surrealism, Andre Breton, 1924

• This imagination which knows no bounds is allowed to be exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of an arbitrary utility [Reason, Logic, language].

• The case against the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, demands to be examined, following the case against the materialistic attitude...[It] is hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loath it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit.

• We are still living under the reign of logic...The absolute rationalism still in vogue, allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends escape us.

• The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights.

• The dream finds itself reduced to a mere parenthesis, as is the night. When will we have sleeping logicians, sleeping philosophers?... Can’t the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?
Breton Manifesto part 2

- I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.

- The marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful.

- SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, *in the absence of any control exercised by reason*, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

- ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy*. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them *in solving all the principal problems of life*. 
Some Surrealist Poets

Louis Aragon (1897-1982) French
Braulio Arenas (1913-1988) Chilean
Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) French
Andre Breton (1896-1966) French
Andrei Codrescu (b.1946) Romanian-American
Garrett Caples (b. 1972)
Teofilo Cid (1914-1964)
George Kalamaras, American
Philip Lamantia (1927-2005) American
Benjamin Peret (1899-1959) French
Franklin Rosemont (1943-2009) American
James Tate (1943-2015) American
John Yau (b.1950)
Dean Young (b. 1955)
 Considered “modernist” but surreal-ish elements in his poetry

 Considered “Imagist”, “modernist”, a Fascist, insane, and very influential

 Considered “Imagist”, “modernist”

 Imagist, modernist, great poet with surreal-ish elements

 Imagist, modernist, analyzed by Freud, close to above poets
Thus, I am inviting you to participate in helping write a large freely flowing river-of-a-poem. Here’s what I invite you each to do:

1. send six poetic lines or sentences, making each as imagistic a line of poetry as possible;

2. number each and list them separately from one another (they need not connect to one another but should read as six individual separate lines of poetry);

3. Not sure where to begin? The following are three different strategies you are free to employ, though you are certainly not bound to follow any of these:
   a. construct the line as noun, verb, object, with intervening words, if you’d like (“The hermit ate some cold biscuits with his tea”); or
   b. you might write a line that includes a color in an unusual context (i.e., “We stepped in from the rain and watched the dieffenbachia in the living room bleed orange milk”); or
   c. you might write a line that includes a paradox (i.e. “So it is that I love pre-dawn night”)

George Kalamaras, Indiana Poet Laureate, 2014-2016
San Francisco Renaissance
Beat Poetry (1950’s)

**Poets:** Kenneth Rexroth, Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti

**Elements**

- Irrationality, spontaneity, strangeness, sometimes obscene
- American idiom
- Jazz rhythms
- Public readings and events, performative
- Direct, confrontive
- Often Ecstatic, sometimes incoherent
- Agonized
- Oral
- Drugs

**Examples:** *Howl, On the Road, Coney Island of the Mind*
Howl

BY ALLEN GINSBERG

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night, who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz, who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated, who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war, who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull, who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall, Etc. etc
New York School


- Strong influence by French experimental writing
- O’Hara’s “Personism”
- Wit, urbanity, daring, AND FUNNY
- “courtly eccentrics”
- Poetry is about FORM—but not traditional forms
- More ego, less unconscious
- No rhyme, little or no punctuation, THE LINE, THE SOUND
- Ashberry “a harebrained, homegrown surrealist whose poetry defies even the rules and logic of surrealism.”
The Black Mountain school
Poets: Charles Olson (died August 2, 2019), Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, countless students

- Projective Verse/open verse: “certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as his listenings.”

- [Energy]Field composition (anti traditional methods of composing poems) a la Ezra Pound: “compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome”; poetic energy shifts from source to poet to reader;

- No received structure to propel the poem.

- “Listen closely to the breath in order to engage speech where it is least careless and least logical.”

- “the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE; the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE.” The line as a unit of breath; each breath is a unit of utterance
Kinda Sorta Surrealist-ish Poets

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Surrealist Novelists

Andre Breton: *Nadja, Mad Love*

Haruki Murakami: *A Wild Sheep Chase, The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, many more*

Rene Daumal: *Mount Analogue, A Night of Serious Drinking*

William Burroughs: *Naked Lunch, The Soft Machine*

Kenneth Patchen: *Sleepers Awake*

Djuna Barnes: *Nightwood*

Kurt Vonnegut: *Slaughterhouse 5, and others*

Donald Antrim, *The Hundred Brothers*

Barbara Comyns, *The Vet’s Daughter*

Grace Krilanovich, *The Orange Eats Creeps*

“Surreal” novels have morphed into categories such as “Magical Realism,” “Science Fiction,” “Speculative Fiction,” “Black Comedy,” “Existentialist,” “Absurdity,” “Fabulation,” and “Graphic.”
Great Sort of Surrealist-ish Novelists

James Joyce—*Ulysses* (banned, 1920’s); *Finnegan’s Wake* (unreadable except for graduate students)

Franz Kafka—“The Metamorphosis,” *The Trial*

Marcel Proust—*Swan’s Way*

Albert Camus: *The Stranger*, (but not *The Plague*)

Vladimir Nabokov: *Lolita* 1962, *Pale Fire*

Alain Robbe-Grillet—*The Voyeur*

Thomas Pyncheon: *V, The Crying of Lot 49*

Henry Miller—*The Air Conditioned Nightmare*, 1945

Jorge Luis Borges—*Labryinths*: “The Library of Babel” 1962

Samuel Beckett—*Molly, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, Waiting for Godot*