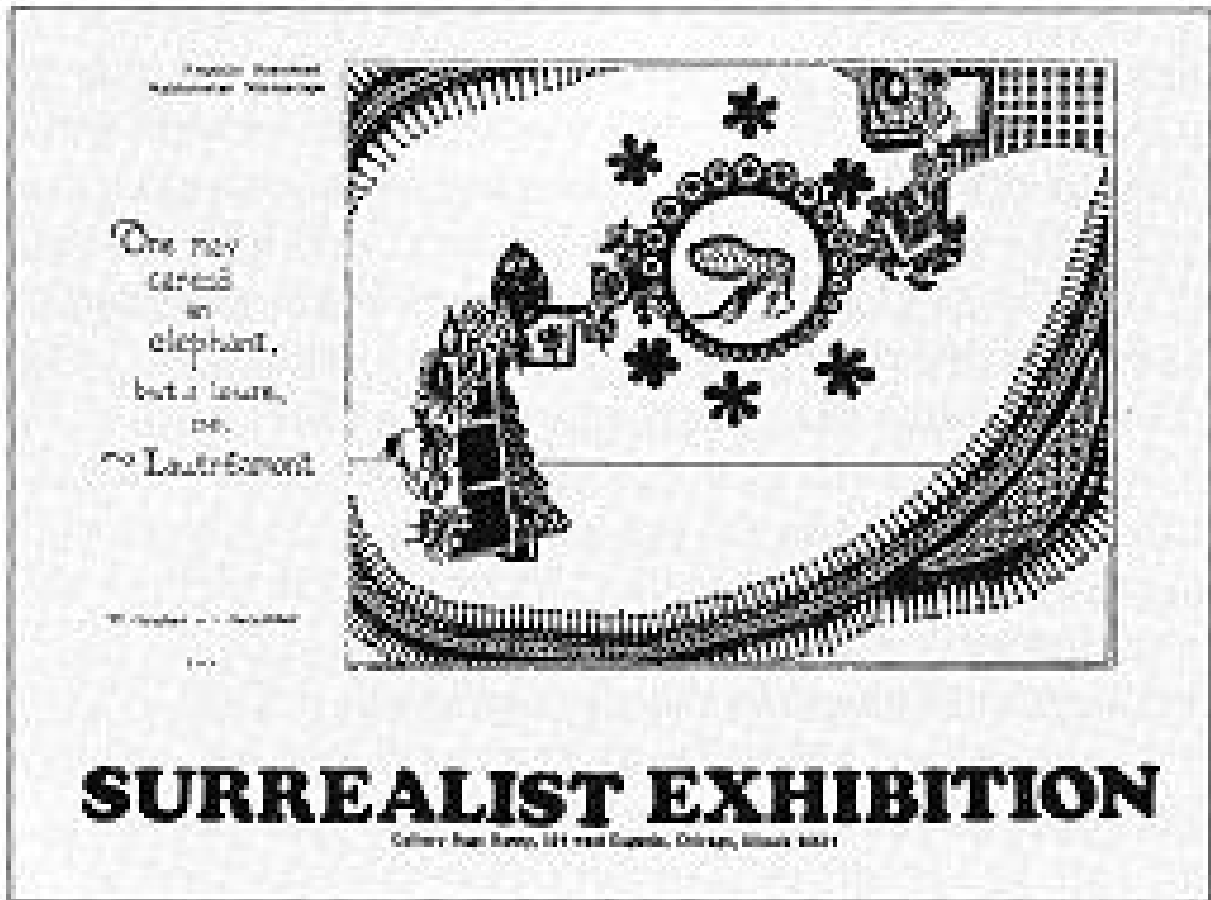


# The World Surrealist Exhibition

Toward the "Order of Sensuousness"

Pat Halley

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Reality, grown so thick with itself, became a fungus years ago with inbred spores and long reaching strands that have become the vampiric architecture of experience on every street in town. Thriving on dampened spirits in the

totally human swamp, the fungus is the protective covering for the swamp, made to keep the animal from moving around in it as it slowly consumes its hosts leaving lifeless automatons where biological entities once thrived.

The fungus was identified by Freud in the early part of the century and termed “the Reality Principle”, though it was only an innocuous growth at one time. Freud despaired that its effects on human potentiality have been increasingly negative as it has driven the animal aspect of human nature—“the pleasure principle” into a dead-end alley, and is slithering along now trying to finish the job.

But little does the fungus know of how many tricks this animal has up the sleeves of its instinct. The animal created the fungus and suspects that it can master it yet, perhaps even cultivate new strands out of its dismal form. The key is one thing all life-forms have in common: instinct. For the reality principle (fungus) is the other instinct driving human beings and is connected to the pleasure principle (Eros) through a relationship that is life itself.

While the one, reality, requires that we reason out our existence by conforming our identities to the existing social system, the other, pleasure instinct, is centered in spontaneity and represents what all creatures—the universe itself—have as the mode of their activity: play. Pleasure is the world playing with itself and its lack or absence in reality is the motive force of all that happens. Desire is created continually and the present socio-political systems in the world represent the ways in which the desire is expressed (pleasure principle) and the ways it is gratified (reality principle).

## **Surrealism and “The Vigilance of Desire”**

When André Breton founded surrealism in 1924 it was with the knowledge, acquired from Freud, of the dialectic between these two great principles that govern life. It was with the understanding that the pleasure principle has been repressed by the existing systems to such an extent that for most people, happiness, freedom and passion were mostly dreams lurking only in their unconscious. In fact, the unconscious is almost entirely comprised of repressed pleasure and the images and memories associated with it.

Breton discovered a means of liberating pleasure instinct by going into the unconscious via poetry. He discovered the key to unblocking repressed unconscious material and that key is the play impulse or spontaneity. He discovered what Zen masters and Taoists, lunatics and looters of Rome noted, that unbridled passion quite naturally transforms the mind and energizes the body—sets you free! He discovered desire and its powers.

Thus Breton realized that the reality principle, with its primacy of intellect over feeling in the individual, had the upper hand in society; through the release of desire, individuals could begin the project of turning on themselves and the world to hidden sources of pleasure. Language, governed and stifled by intellect, could be a liberating force under the influence of the play impulse.

Surrealism, like anarchy, is a conscious project of reintroducing spontaneity into society, and elaborating forms through which people can express and gratify their desires beyond those offered by the repressive and poverty stricken” existent society.

In my opinion, surrealism is the subjective application of anarchic principles first to the individual and then to society through art and literature. By suspending rational control, surrealist poetry (and other forms) creates a playful experience that isn’t so much concerned with educating as it is in driving people out of their repressed selves and expanding sensual fields. As an appeal to Eros, surrealism has reinforcements hidden everywhere at any given time, and its project of abolishing surplus repression in society is the project of humanity realizing itself.

This view is confirmed by Norman O. Brown who in *Life Against Death* says that the unconscious goal of humanity is its return to the state enjoyed in childhood—“the polymorphous erotic.” Presupposing the absence of repression (except basic repression centered around the minimal requisites of survival), polymorphous eroticism is expanded sexuality. Brown elaborates Freud’s theories of infantile sexuality and points out how we achieve genital sexuality at the expense of this polymorphous eroticism, and how the narrowly erotic genital sexuality is the result of repression.

According to Brown, as spontaneity—the playful exuberance of youth—is weeded out of us in the socialization process, libido (sexuality) is allowed only to express itself genitally to insure procreation and the replenishing of the work force. The greater amount of sexuality is transposed into work activity and bogus social games or driven

underground in the form of dreams and neurosis. This form of sexual organization varies and is not biologically determined, but a hideous social fact of contemporary civilization.

The play impulse is diverted into productive or otherwise “purposeful” activity, and the real tragedy is that this process mutates the human (fungus accumulation) so that we can’t even (well barely) feel pleasure even when not engaged in jobs, housework or other religious expressions.

As Wilhelm Reich pointed out, the “character armour” infects us so that we hardly even experience what little sexuality is allowed us through the genitals. (It is the conscious mind with its abstract rationality which learns to divert erotic impulses to “legitimate” channels. The role of rationality or intellect in a balanced personality should be secondary to Eros—as an usher leading us all to the wine table.)

## Genital vs. Infantile Sexuality

Reich’s solution to this desexualization of humanity is not sufficient however, as he advocated an increase in the occurrence of genital sex, and the abolition of (genital) sex-repression in society with a corresponding change in attitude toward sex.

Reich fails to adequately comprehend Freud’s concept of infantile sexuality. For what is repressed is not merely genital sexuality but the polymorphous sexuality (expanded eroticism) of childhood legacy. It is spontaneity itself which is the main victim of repression, and it is spontaneity that is therefore the key to liberation!

Reich is correct in wanting to liberate genital sex, but we must develop means of expanding sexuality into every domain of life. The surrealists understand this and the Surrealist project of “all power to the imagination” implies the spontaneous apprehension of pleasure by abolishing repression, which of course necessitates transforming the present social system and infusing the work ethic with the play impulse. Needless to say this will be done only at the expense of capitalism and any other exploitative statehood which depends on enforced “miserabilism” and the compulsive work ethic.

Against this background there is a passionate equation between crime, magic, revolution, sex, and art. All are expressions of desire attempting to unite persons with their various objects. As Freud said, “the repressed unconscious can only become conscious by being transformed into an external perception, by being projected;” we can see how the pleasure principle is expressed through attachment to objects and images.

Surrealism, in employing the technique of automatic writing, liberates repressed (pleasure) instinct by “letting” the unconscious project itself in random, but associative images. Thus it affects the artist in that it liberates unconscious pleasure, extending sexuality beyond its ordinary bounds, and it extends the imagination in uniting the body with the mind in instinctual fusion. This process was labeled by Breton “pure psychic automatism.” It is the writing of words as they arise without conscious control or interference—letting the “poem” write itself.

Some examples of how images and objects effect people can be seen in Edgar Allen Poe’s work. *The Tell-Tale Heart* for instance has two obsessive images which haunt the protagonist—a glass eye and an ever-beating heart. They have associations in the unconscious, which in the case of this story drove a man to commit murder. Poe also uses the house in *The Fall of the House of Usher* as an instrument of deep emotive conveyance; some have surmised that the house itself may have been a vampire.

Along this line it is interesting to note that Count Dracula may be a surrealist precursor. He was able to force his victims to play music on the piano which they had never learned or practiced. Against their will Dracula made victims play the music which entranced them and drove obscure and death-like associations into their heads. Could this be an early example of a “psychic automaton”?

The experiments with automatic art also affect anyone who perceives surrealism in life, or in art objects. The irrational or “abstract” nature of surrealist art is a direct confrontation (or in surrealist terms, intervention) with the reasoning intellect. They don’t make any sense. They do make sensual impressions but the irrationality of the objects (paintings, sculptures, surreal objects, poems, etc.) challenges the intellect which attempts to reduce phenomena to rational formulas and therefore alienate them from their context. The mind just can’t reduce or categorize surreal phenomena and so it retreats and it is a victory for the pleasure principle which gives near instantaneous

sensory gratification. It is also a victory, if minor, for the emancipation of mankind, since the necessity in this abstract, desexualized world is to transform human society out of the order of reason (to use Brown's term) to the order of sensuousness, a world in which we can feel and affect in which duty and work are subservient to desire and play. As Freud pointed out, we are by nature passionate, and the hyper-rational world of dehumanized technology is the result of instincts being split and turned against each other.

And as Brown also pointed out, the reality and pleasure principles were united once, but were split with the development of civilization. Their permanent reunification (accomplished temporarily sometimes by surrealist art, inspired states, Zen, spontaneous revolution, and like projects) entails the transforming of individuals and the transforming of society along erotic lines to make a world worth living in that doesn't automatically generate the neurotic split of pleasure from reality.

## World Surrealist Exhibition

It is in this context (gasp! at last!) that people of the surrealist persuasion have been staging an exhibition in Chicago, from May 1 to June 19. The exhibition, entitled "The Vigilance of Desire," is as colorful and exotic a scene as could only appear in nature. It does occur in nature, in the same way the Grand Canyon, Lake Superior or eyelashes do, for if the objects and paintings occur "automatically" from the unconscious, then their inherently spontaneous nature corresponds to the universe itself, as a mode of play. There are weirdo objects, trees with green gloves for leaves, collages and mobiles. The Bugs Bunny exhibit has a mailbox, appropriately adorned with Hegel [rhymes with bagel] 's picture, filled with carrots and a six-gun, surrounded by the mad rabbit's cosmic debris. My two favorite pieces are by Jerome Kamrowski: a mobile with multicolored and mysteriously deformed creatures, hilarious objects and inexplicable phenomena, and a piece called "Homage to Marquis De Sade." The De Sade piece features a woman figurine, in a black gown with turtle shell mask that only reveals her eyes, nose and mouth (sensory apparatus). There are wings on the side of the mask and the woman plays a violin...with a whip!

The exhibition may move to other cities allowing more people to get a chance to experience it, but a comprehensive catalogue is available presenting photos of the pieces plus Surrealist poems and essays. (The catalogue and *Arsenal* No. 3—self-styled journal of the "Surrealist Movement"—are available for \$3.50 each and can be obtained by writing Franklin Rosemont at 2257 N. Jansen, Chicago, Illinois 60614.) Any further attempt on my part to describe the exhibition would be ludicrous for reasons which should be obvious by now.

## Surrealist Movement—Political Appraisal

The so-called surrealist movement which is centered in Chicago has the incredible privilege of "hegemony on the cultural plane" of art and literature. The movement is centralized and entertains the ludicrous project of attempting to monopolize spontaneity in the area of artistic expression. How one group of individuals can monopolize or control a sensibility is beyond the range of this imagination and is even comparable to the Christian attempt to monopolize immortality and cosmic consciousness.

The political program of the surrealists expressed as "All power to the Workers Councils" sounds well enough, but in *Arsenal* Nos. 1, 2 and 3, the corpses of Lenin and Trotsky are revived again and paraded as obscene justifications for a "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" which somehow sneaks into the beautiful project of liberating instincts and re-sexualizing society. Lenin and Trotsky merely crushed the workers' councils and demolished the autonomous movements in Kronstadt and the Ukraine during the "Russian Revolution", in their attempts to demonstrate their ineligibility to be so much as respected by revolutionaries, much less worshipped.

But like Lenin and Trotsky who feared and avoided ordinary working people, the *Arsenal* group demonstrates the poverty of their political stance in such arrogant affronts to working class people as a certain revealing part of an article in *Arsenal* No. 3, which was written by Jean-Jacques Dauben entitled "Disarm the Police, Arm the Unemployed."

Though the main idea of the article is fine, Dauber reveals his petty arrogance by telling us how there is a “vast domain of infinitesimals so huge in their tininess that they care not a bit for praying or for having tea with the president or for any other such psychological aberrations so cherished and desired by the average human automaton exceedingly inferior to a flea.”

Dauber merely continues the job of the mass-media in degrading working-class people and making it seem as if they are incapable of organizing themselves or running their own lives. I guess their stupidity justifies the appearance of a Lenin to order them around; I tend to disagree.

Thus the “official” (a hideous term if there ever was one) surrealist movement has the paradoxical and undialectical privilege of attempting the impossible, namely grafting an authoritarian ideology on to an inherently liberating and libertarian movement: the liberating movement of Eros.

Nevertheless we can criticize them and hope that this creative group can come to their senses, step out of the past, and re-orient their political perspectives to correspond with their social function. But we need not only criticize and hope, we need to liberate the unconscious right under our own shoes and weld the surreal into our daily experience.

Down with the fungus!

# fifth Estate

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