

THE FORECAST IS HOT!

TRACTS & OTHER COLLECTIVE DECLARATIONS

of the

SURREALIST MOVEMENT

IN THE UNITED STATES

1966-1976

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SURREALISM: THE CHICAGO IDEA

Excerpts from the Introduction to *The Forecast Is Hot!*

Surrealism as an organized movement originated in Paris in the last months of World War I. The first surrealist work properly so-called, *The Magnetic Fields*, by André Breton and Philippe Soupault, appeared in 1919. Breton, the movement's principal theorist, published the first *Surrealist Manifesto* in October 1924. The Bureau of Surrealist Research opened its doors at 15 Rue de Grenelle that same month, and the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* appeared in December. The first title published under the "Editions surréalistes" imprint was issued in January 1925, and in March of '26 the Surrealist Gallery opened at 16 Rue Jacques Callot. Absolute revolt, a no-compromise defense of the Marvelous, and a new, unsettling kind of humor that Breton later characterized as *black*: Such were the hallmarks of the "new vice" that aimed at nothing less than the "total liberation of the mind *and of all that resembles it.*"

That this revolution-in-the-making responded to far more than regional exigencies is indicated by the rapid rise of surrealist groups all over the world. That it was not limited to the immediate post-World-War-I years, or even to the period between the two wars, is further demonstrated by the continuous, uninterrupted development of the movement up to the present.

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Always much more than a mere "ism," exceeding the conventional boundaries of art, literature, philosophy and science, surrealism is truly *epochal* in scope, historically comparable not to any local or transient "school" but rather to such far-ranging and self-renewing currents as alchemy, romanticism, utopianism and anarchism—currents resistant to tight definition, which have stubbornly defied the geographical and chronological limits assigned to them by critics and historians, and which have a way of turning up in new forms and new places when and where no one is looking for them.

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As the revolutionary negation not only of advanced capitalism but of the entire repressive megamachine of Western Civilization, surrealism's revolution has proved to be *permanent*—embarrassingly so for the buyers and sellers of stock in the pollutocratic culture industry. Today more than ever apologists for all forms of existing misery are desperately eager to contain subversive thought and action in their obfuscatory categories. Although their hyper-hypocrisy is as obvious as the absence of real news on TV, their wishful thinking that surrealism, anarchism, communism, and even mass uprisings are "only history" is nonetheless perfectly sincere. Trapped in an ideological theme-park as large and labyrinthine as the megalomania and greed of the exploiting class, those who speak of surrealism only in the past tense are simply doing their best to console their masters and hoodwink the people.

Banned in Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, Franco's Spain, Hirohito's Japan, Mao's China and numerous other dictatorships, surrealism in the increasingly totalitarian bourgeois "democracies" has been by turns ignored, ridiculed, denounced, and at all times falsified in the mainstream press. In the 1980s anti-surrealism became a growth industry. Hostility to living surrealism (often combined with hypocritical homages to the deceased) is a characteristic prerequisite of every repressive ideology in the era of hi-tech prisons, smile-face genocide and postmodern cyberfacism.

Surrealism remains the best-hated and most-lied-about "cultural" movement of our time. Is it surprising that it has been hated most, and lied about most, in the most advanced capitalist society?

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Surrealism as an indigenous collective endeavor started late in the U.S. Typically, "experts" had been pronouncing it dead for more than three decades before it came to life on these shores. In the 1920s and '30s surrealism extended to dozens of countries—to the Iberian peninsula, Greece, Belgium, England and all over eastern Europe as well as to Argentina, Egypt, Martinique and Japan—but did not take root in the U.S. Several Americans had dabbled in Dadaism, but only one—Man Ray—joined his Parisian friends in forming the more subversive movement that succeeded it, and he did so as an expatriate. Later, when the Nazi occupation of France forced André Breton and other surrealists into several years' exile in New York, a few Americans were attracted to the movement and took part in an International Surrealist Exhibition as well as the journal *VVV*. For most of the Americans, however—including painter Robert Motherwell, sculptor David Hare and critics Lionel Abel and Harold Rosenberg—surrealism was but a moment's youthful transgression in their careers, and hardly a trace of it remained in the work that made them famous in the Fifties. Fundamentally, the group around Breton in New York in the 1940s consisted of European refugees; even their meetings were conducted in French. The few exceptions, the handful of Americans for whom surrealism and its emancipatory ideals truly mattered, tended to be loners who left the city when Breton and his friends returned to Europe. Significantly, the most notable among them—Clarence John Laughlin, Gerome Kamrowski, Philip Lamantia—later took part in the activity of the Chicago Surrealist Group.

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Exemplifying the historic continuity of the international surrealist movement today, the Chicago Surrealist Group is not only the outcome of a long, cultural/political development in the U.S., but also a direct, organic offshoot of the original Surrealist Group formed in Paris in the 1920s. Two founders of the Chicago group, Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, had gone to Paris in 1965 to meet André Breton, and took part for several months in the daily reunions of the Paris group at the café Promenade de Vénus. The situation of surrealism in the U.S., and the perspectives and prospects of a group in Chicago were frequent topics of discussion at these meetings and in informal gatherings with individuals between meetings. The Surrealist Group organized in Chicago in July '66 enjoyed the warm encouragement and support of André Breton and the entire Surrealist Group in France, as is movingly demonstrated by the collective letters they sent, published here as Appendices. In the first of these communications, which carried the significant dateline, "1 May 1967, 81st Anniversary of the Chicago workers' uprising," the Paris group expressed its "wholehearted affection" for, and "total agreement" with, the Chicagoans.

As our first publications began to circulate, letters arrived from other countries, with much the same content and tone. Georges Gronier in Brussels, Vratislav Effenberger in Prague, Her de Vries in Amsterdam, Aldo Pellegrini in Buenos Aires, Steen Colding in Copenhagen, Shuzo Takiguchi in Tokyo, Conroy Maddox in London, Mario Cesariny and Artur do Cruzeiro Seixas in Lisbon—that is, the principal spokespersons for surrealism throughout the world at that time—welcomed the advent of the Chicago Surrealist Group as a particularly important development for the movement as a whole. Writing on behalf of the Paris group, Gérard Legrand—frequently described as "Breton's right-hand man"—wrote on 22 June '67:

"We assure you of our passionate support for your venture. The perspectives it offers, as much for yourselves as on the international scale, are the most appealing that have been drawn up for surrealism in a long time."

In a matter of months, Chicago had become a key place on the world surrealist map.

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Surrealism remains an *international* movement, resistant to all national and regional chauvinism. Each country, however, imposes certain cultural and political conditions that inevitably affect surrealism's course of development within it. Like surrealism in Prague, Paris, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Stockholm, London, Leeds, Australia and Puerto Rico—to mention only places where surrealist groups are active today—surrealism in Chicago has certain distinguishing qualities: experiences and emphases that give it a character of its own. Paradoxical though it may seem, the autonomy and diversity of surrealism's particular local manifestations are the *sine qua non* of the global movement's universal unity and coherence. Here are some of the key elements of "Chicago Idea" surrealism:

"Only that
which is an
object of
freedom
can be
called an
idea."
-Hegel



Leopard Frog

(1/5)

"A flash
bridegms the
gap
between
inner and
outer,
causing a
momentary
fusion and
wholeness.
Thus poetry
starts."
-Jean
Toomer



Porcupine