A surrealist black and white photograph of a hand holding a cigar, with a grid pattern overlaid on the scene. The hand is positioned at the bottom right, holding a thick cigar. The background is dark, and the grid lines are light and semi-transparent, creating a layered, dreamlike effect. The overall mood is mysterious and intellectual.

Surrealism. 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 other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.

The Philosophy of Surrealism

Gentrain

Monterey Peninsula College

Surrealism (1920s-1950s)

- Artistic movement in the aftermath of WWI
- Influenced by Freud's levels of consciousness → theory that bulk of "mind" was unconscious → the true self is unavailable to the conscious mind
- Artists and philosophers influenced in using automatic drawing, dreams, and other methods to uncover the unconscious
- Works include surprising juxtapositions and *non sequiturs* → meant to free from the viewer from the expected



André Masson. Automatic Drawing. 1924. Ink on paper, 23.5 × 20.6 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Art and Thought

- Art is secondary to the philosophical expression of surrealism → mere artifacts of surrealist experimentation
- Andre Breton explicit that Surrealism was a revolutionary movement
- Influenced by Dadaism in the 1910s
- 1918 Pierre Reverdy: "a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be—the greater its emotional power and poetic reality."

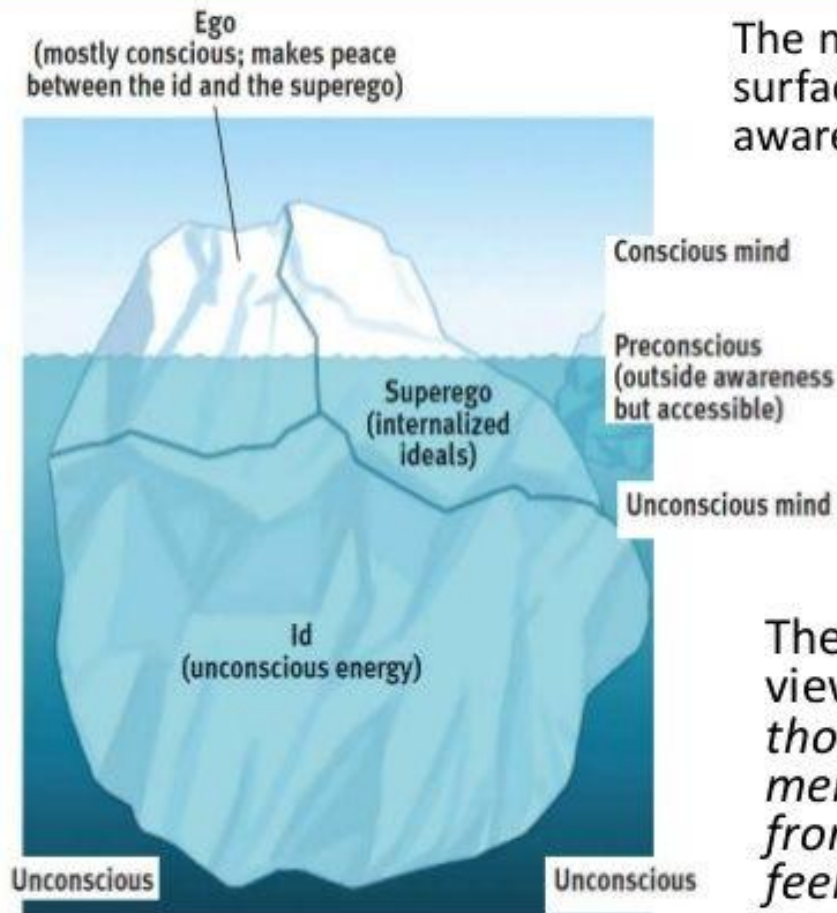
Lobster Telephone



Artist	Salvador Dalí
Year	1936
Movement	surrealism
Dimensions	178 mm (7.0 in) × 330 mm (13 in)
Location	France

Levels of consciousness

Freud's Personality/Mind Iceberg



The mind is mostly below the surface of conscious awareness

Personality develops from the efforts of our **ego**, our *rational self*, to resolve tension between our **id**, based in *biological drives*, and the **superego**, *society's rules and constraints*.

The **Unconscious**, in Freud's view: *A reservoir of thoughts, wishes, feelings, and memories, that are hidden from awareness because they feel unacceptable.*

Dreams

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

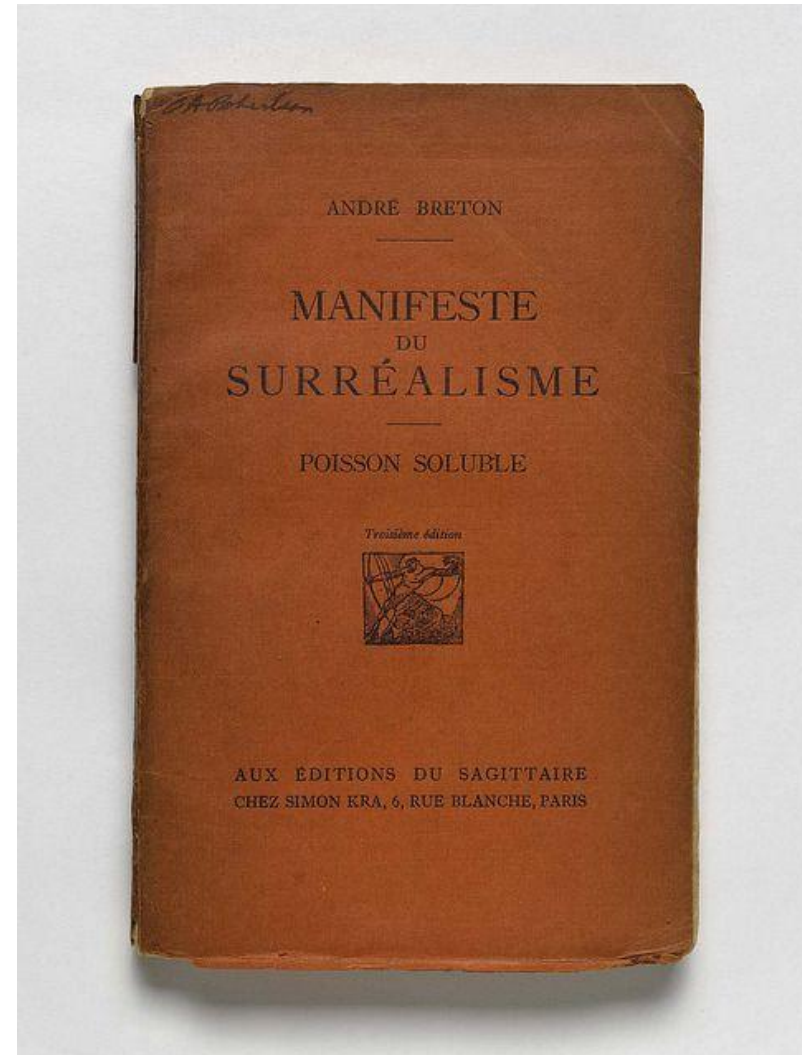
“Surrealism is based on the belief in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought.”



Joan Miró, *This is the color of my dreams*, 1925

Surrealism to uncover the hidden self

“Let us not lose sight of the fact that the idea of Surrealism aims quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden places and the progressive darkening of other places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory, and that there is no real danger of its activities coming to an end so long as man still manages to distinguish an animal from a flame or a stone”

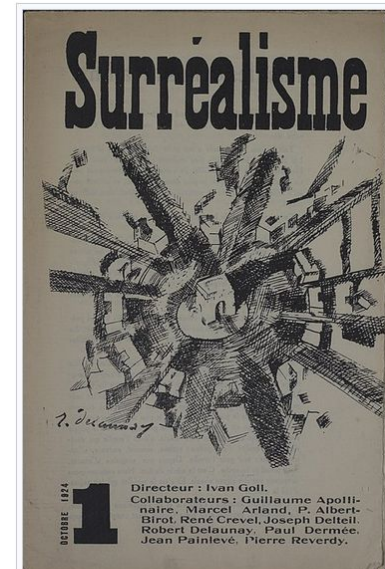


Origin and rival groups

- Term coined by Guillaume Apollinaire (1917): "All things considered, I think in fact it is better to adopt surrealism than supernaturalism, which I first used"
- A rival Surrealist group emerged in 1924 led by Yvan Goll
- Debate over whether the absurdism of Dadaism or automatism was better method for mental and political revolution
- Both groups wanted to revolutionize human experience → free from false rationality and restrictive customs
- Breton: true aim of Surrealism was "long live the social revolution, and it alone!"



Cover of the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, December 1924



Yvan Goll, *Surréalisme, Manifeste du surréalisme*,^[23] Volume 1, Number 1, October 1, 1924, cover by Robert Delaunay

Surrealism and Art

- ▶ Vladimir Kush





Leonora Carrington

- ▶ In the interview, Leonora Carrington tells Joanna Moorhead that she's trying to “intellectualize” art.
- ▶ How can we understand Carrington's warning in terms of the philosophy of surrealism?

