

19th century Romanticism posited the poet as his own hero - in his heightened self-consciousness and lucidity, observing his own psychic processes, then trying to record them.

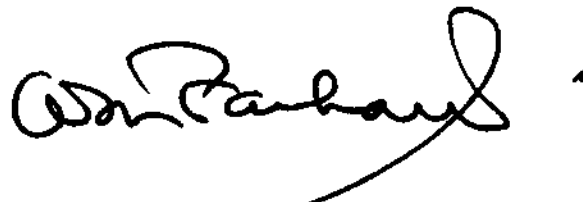
20th century found an extension of this Romantic ideal in Surrealism and Dada -- from Apollinaire who coined the word "surrealism", and Andre Breton who wrote the first SURREALIST MANIFESTO (1920) and described surreal art as "pure psychic automatism ... Diction of thought without any control by reason, and outside any aesthetic or moral preoccupation ..." That was added to later (1929) in Breton's second SURREALIST MANIFESTO when he described:

*... a vertiginous descent within ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden places, and the progressive darkening of all other places, the perpetual rambling in the depth of the forbidden zone ...*

Needless to say, Surrealism and Dada have never been popular mediums in America, where the masses like things upfront in fast foods, DAILY NEWS, and TV game shows. A few managed to perservere: Gertrude Stein echoed back to us from Europe; painters like Dali racked up in galleries and advertizing; on home soil we had Kenneth Patchen, Robert Duncan, Jackson Mac Low, Richard Kostelanetz, Allen Ginsberg in fits - all of them trying for immediate notation, simultaneity of psychic processes, a kind of intuitive cubism in words.

Mind you, to be a Surrealist or Dadist is not merely to put words down on paper in an extra-ordinary way -- go back and see how Breton insists that it is first and foremost an inner process, before it even gets to notation. This means that to be an authentic Surrealist or Dada poet, one has to live one's life in an extra-ordinary way, and one has to see oneself living that life in an extra-ordinary way, also. Without that, any poet's notations on the page will be pretentious impertinence, and it's pretty easy to sniff out the fakers and poseurs who try to get away with simple word placements in a kind of pseudo "experimental" poetry.

Some people will hate authentic Surrealism and Dada, no matter who writes it -- those people can go back to their MacDonald hamburgers. Surreal/Dada poetry has a purity and an innocence and an uncertainty that is beautiful and terrifying, terrifying and beautiful, to behold.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phil Demise". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

from an Introduction to PERIODS, by Phil Demise