

Narrative Themes...?

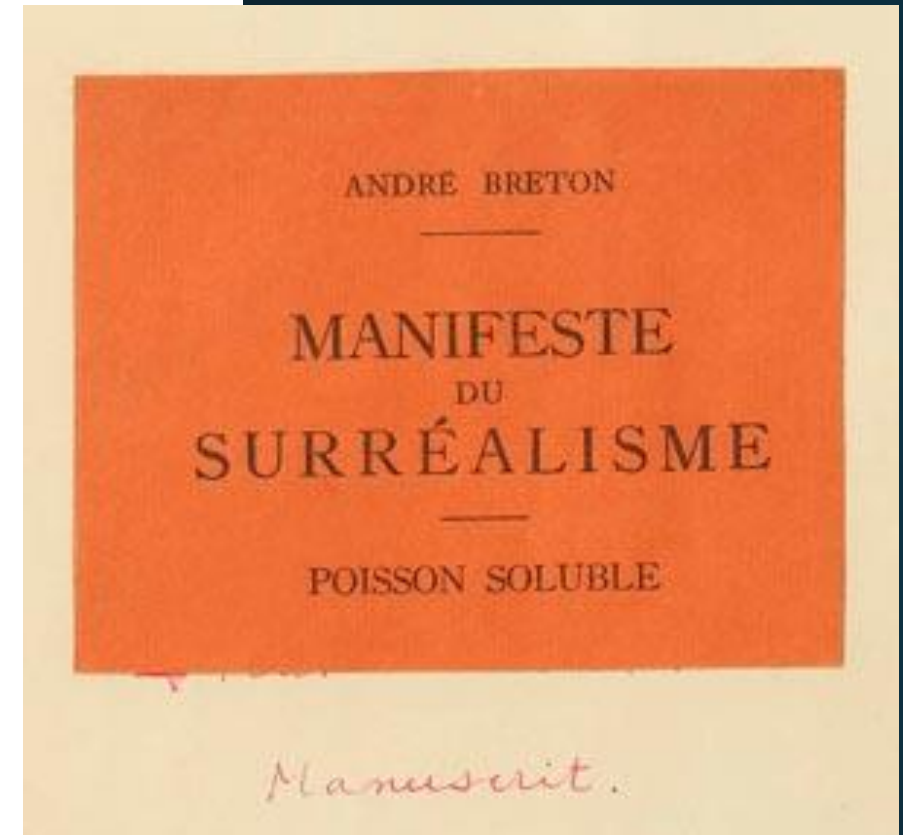
The Surface vs.
What Lies Beneath

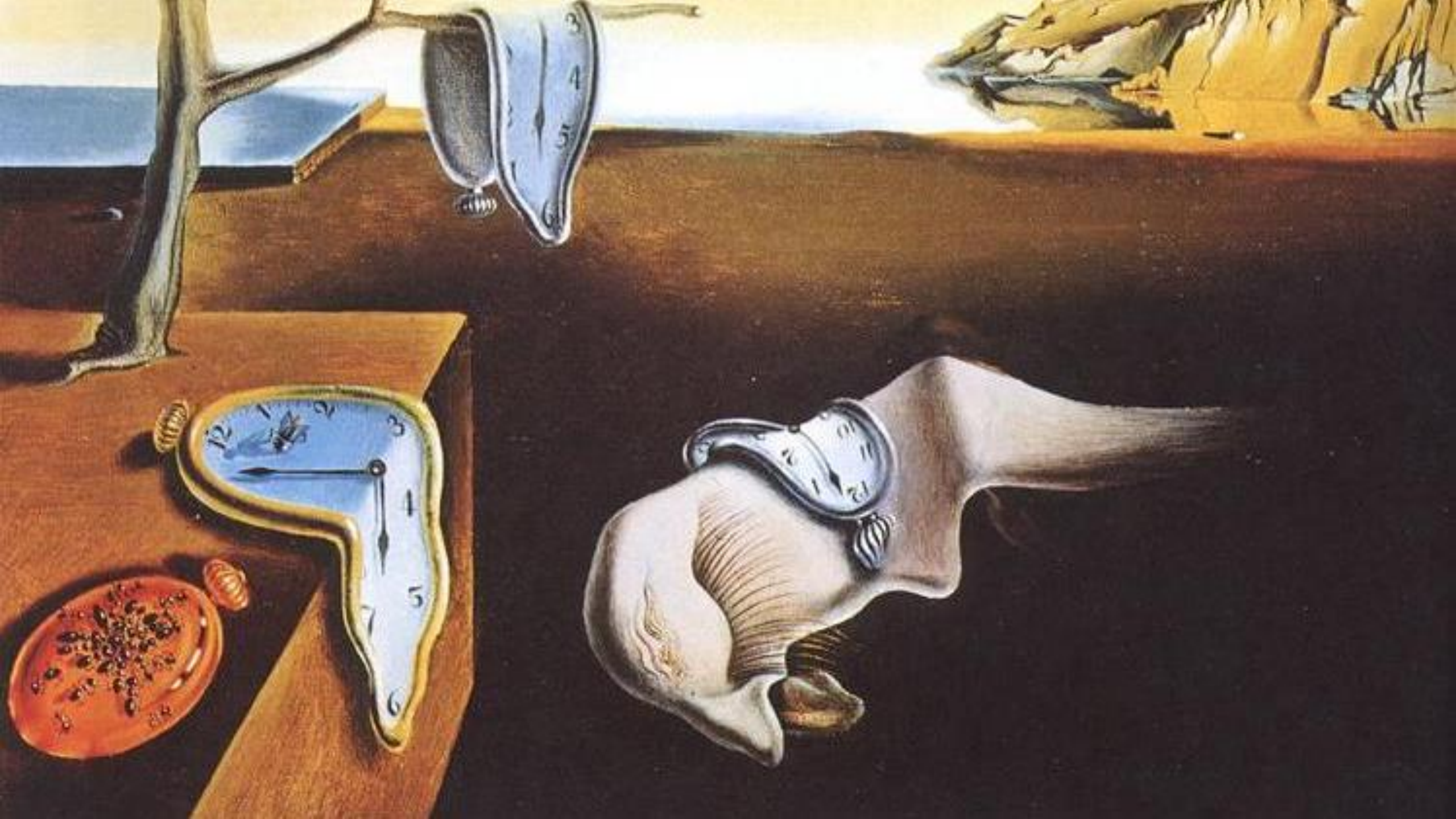
What happens
when we look
closely...?



Surrealism on Film

- **Context: Surrealism's Core Philosophy**
- Surrealism (born in the 1920s) was not just an artistic style but a **revolutionary philosophy**, rooted in:
 - **Freud's psychoanalysis** (dreams, the unconscious)
 - Rejection of logic, linearity, bourgeois reality
 - Belief that **truth lies in the irrational**, not the rational
 - (Breton):
 - "The marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful."





Surrealism

- “For the Surrealists the cinema was an enchanted place a threshold between reality and fiction, waking life and a dream.” - Surrealism and Film – Dawn Ades



Dorothea Tanning – *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (1943)





David Kaufmann-Greif, Institut für Arbeitsmarktforschung, der Fachhochschule Nordostschweiz, CH-9400 St. Gallen, Switzerland; e-mail: david.kaufmann@fhn.ch
and Institut für Arbeitsmarktforschung, der Fachhochschule Nordostschweiz, CH-9400 St. Gallen, Switzerland; e-mail: david.kaufmann@fhn.ch
and Institut für Arbeitsmarktforschung, der Fachhochschule Nordostschweiz, CH-9400 St. Gallen, Switzerland; e-mail: david.kaufmann@fhn.ch

COLIN FARRELL RACHEL WEISZ JESSICA BARDEN OLIVIA COLMAN ASHLEY JENSEN
ARIANE LABED ANGELIKI PAPOULIA JOHN C. REILLY LEA SEYDOUX MICHAEL SMILEY BEN WHISHAW

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- *The Lobster* (Yorgos Lanthimos 2015)

- Film premise: In a dystopian society, single people are sent to a hotel and must find a romantic partner within 45 days - or be turned into an animal of their choice.



1. Absurd Concept Presented as Mundane Reality

- **What happens:**
The Lobster presents its absurd concept - turning single people into animals - as mundane reality, highlighting the surreal logic of societal pressure to couple up.
- **Surrealism:**
This takes a hyper-logical system and applies it to a deeply irrational human emotion: love. That contradiction - treating love like a cold science - is surreal in a Bretonesque sense.



2. Robotic Dialogue and Flat Acting

- **How it plays out:**
Everyone speaks in a monotone, emotionless manner, even when discussing desire, heartbreak, or desperation.
- **Surrealism:**
The effect is dreamlike and uncanny - people seem familiar, but their emotional detachment makes them feel alien, like actors in a Freudian dream.



3. Dark Comedy Through Bizarre Logic

- **Example line:**
“If you do not find a suitable partner, you will be turned into an animal.”
- **Surrealism:**
The concept is completely irrational but delivered with bureaucratic seriousness. This is pure surrealist humour: laughing at the rational systems that hide emotional absurdity.



4. Sterile Environment + Clinical Cinematography

- **Visuals:**
The hotel is bland, grey, and overly structured. Symmetrical shots and wide angles make everything feel too controlled, dehumanizing.
- **Surrealism:**
The world appears normal - even overly familiar - but the emotional content is drained, turning it into a surreal dream of social alienation.

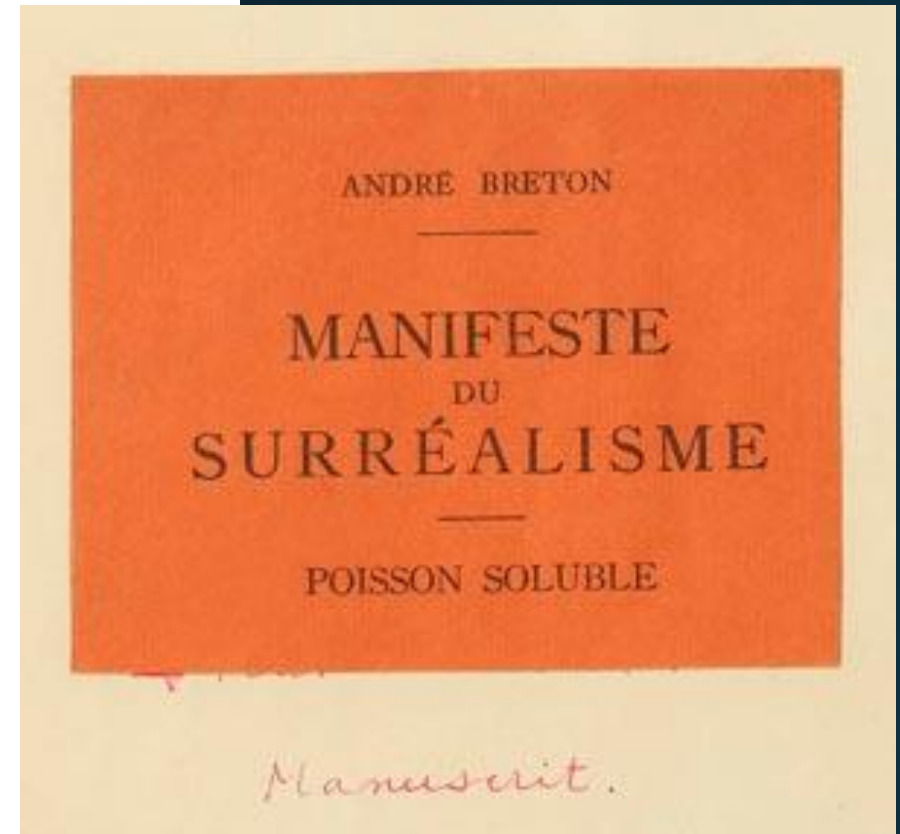


Why This Reflects Breton's Surrealism:

- Breton's surrealism was about **exposing the unconscious beneath everyday life** - often through contradiction, irrational logic, or emotional dislocation. Lanthimos achieves this by:
- Using **absurd premises** as metaphors for real societal norms
- Draining affect from his characters, revealing how **emotion is often repressed**,
- And treating **irrational systems as normal**, which makes the viewer question what we accept as normal.

"Love is a matter of survival here - but everyone has forgotten how to feel."

modern surrealism?



LOST HIGHWAY





**“We’ve met
before,
haven’t we?”**





1. Irrational Dialogue That Disrupts Reality

- The Mystery Man says, smiling:
- **“We've met before, haven't we?”**
“At your house... I'm there right now.”
- He then hands Fred a phone and says, **“Call me.”**
Fred dials his home number - and the Mystery Man's voice answers on the phone, from inside Fred's house.
- **Surrealist Logic:**
This impossible moment is treated matter-of-factly. It collapses space and identity, evoking the **unconscious fear** of being watched or split in two.

2. Uncanny Atmosphere

- The party is lively, but the **sound design mutes background chatter** once the Mystery Man appears - isolating Fred and pulling viewers into a **dreamlike subjective experience**.
- The man's face is caked in white makeup, smiling inhumanly - not quite a clown, not quite a corpse.
- **Surrealist Device:**
The uncanny figure embodies the subconscious - a walking contradiction: polite, terrifying, familiar, alien.





3. Breakdown of Rational Identity

- Fred is visibly disturbed - his sense of reality and safety is **shattered in real-time**.
- This encounter foreshadows Fred's **later transformation into a completely different man**, suggesting that **identity is unstable**, or even **illusory**.
- **Breton-esque Idea:** Surrealism seeks to erode fixed identity and rational certainty, exposing the fluidity between dream, self, and reality.



4. Ambiguous Use of Technology

- The phone becomes a **symbolic portal**, not a tool. It connects to a **non-local, irrational space** - a surreal twist on everyday technology.
- Later in the film, **videotapes arrive mysteriously**, showing Fred sleeping. Again, the **camera is surrealized** - it becomes an eye of the unconscious, not a literal device.
- **Surrealism through tech:** Everyday objects (like a phone or camcorder) become vessels for the irrational, uncanny, or subconscious.

Surreal, Not Just Mysterious:

- This scene doesn't build suspense in a traditional thriller sense - it **disorients** the viewer's grasp on **reality itself**. There's no explanation, no follow-up, no resolution - because the point is to **evoke the irrational**, not to clarify it.
- *Breton described surrealism as the "resolution of dream and reality into a kind of absolute reality - a surreality."* This scene **is** that moment - dream and waking life bleeding into each other.

