

SURREALISM IN LITERARY AND VISUAL ARTS



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INTRODUCTION

The term 'visuality'¹ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'mental visibility; a mental picture or vision'. It was precisely this concept which many Artists identified with the plastic manifestations of Surrealism. They insisted that, rather than represent phenomena taken from 'the external world', painting should rightly devote itself to 'internal representation'. By a peptic act, the external object, as such, would be 'excluded', thus permitting² the plastic form to exist in terms of it's relationship with the interior world³ of consciousness.



Surrealism⁴ is a pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, or otherwise the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality⁵ of certain forms of associations heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dreams, and in the disintegrated play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all other psychic⁶ mechanisms and to its substitution of them in the solution of the principal problems of life. Andre Breton wrote the 'Manifesto of Surrealism'. The pseudoscientific explanation, intended to throw more light on the art movement that Breton dubs "Surrealism", introduces yet another stylistic change in

¹ Elza Adamowicz, 'Surrealism: Crossings/frontiers', (Peter Lang, 2006), 1-15

² Silvano Levy, 'Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality', (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 2-5

³ Kirsten Anderson, 'Pop Surrealism: The Rise of Underground Art', (Last Gasp, 2004)

⁴ David Bate, 'Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent', (I.B.Tauris, 04-Mar-2004), 35-41

⁵ Cathrin Klingsöhr-Leroy, 'Surrealism', (Taschen, 2004), 35-45

⁶ Natalya Lusty, 'Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis', (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 01-Jan-2007), 1-19

ENGLISH PROJECT

the rambling, disjointed manifesto, whose structures defies all logic. A surrealistic thought is subjective thought. The process of surrealism went beyond the realm of the visual.

It was a readymade reality⁷, however different individuals perceive this reality in a different way. The objective of surrealism was the infinite expansion of reality as a substitute for the previously accepted dichotomy between the real and the imaginary⁸. Acknowledging the human need for metaphysical release, the surrealist believed that through exploration of the psyche, through the cultivation of the miracles of objective chance, through the mystique of eroticism, through the diverting of objects from their familiar functions or surroundings, through a more cosmic perspective of life on this earth, and finally through the



alchemy of language that would learn to express this more dynamic reality, man might be able to satisfy the absolute with the confines of his counted number of heartbeats.

⁷ Briony Fer, 'Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars', (Yale University Press, 01-Jan-1993), 17-25

⁸ Simon Baker, 'Surrealism, History and Revolution', (Peter Lang, 2007), 21-65

ENGLISH PROJECT

The surrealist took up the challenge to 'change life' and to put the emphasis in art not on the expression or representation of set norms of reality but on invention and creativity, deeming art not an end towards the attainment of which the life of the artist plays a functional rule, but a means to a fuller fulfillment of that life itself. The process of surrealism was that of creative thought that produced inventions and technology even today and liberated man from his limited environment, to which a limited logic confined him. For the surrealist the notion of 'poet' encompassed all creative activity within the scope of human endeavor; and the advances of science were, particularly for a number of surrealist whose academic training has a large scientific base, a rich source of material for the arts.

SURREALISM AND VISUAL ARTS

The surrealism in visual arts was influenced⁹ by Sigmund Freud's theory of unconscious, Surrealism was concerned with interpreting the dreams, free association or automatism, and was also aligned with revolutionary politics. Surrealism has had an enduring influence on illustration. The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities¹⁰. Symbolism¹¹ is used to represent ideas or qualities. Symbolism is used to describe narrative artwork with psychological, erotic and mystical iconography and themes. The use of symbols to express abstract concepts was also used extensively in surrealism. Surrealism¹² embraces the irrational and celebration of the marvelous was in no sense to be confused¹³ with the pursuit of fantasy for its own sake. Fantasy implies a denial of the real¹⁴; Surrealism demanded a revolution of consciousness, drawing freely on the idea of Freud. It was never the Surrealists¹⁵ intention to seal off imagination from

⁹ Giovanna Uzzani, Scala Group, 'Surrealism: The Visual Encyclopedia of Art', (Welcome Rain Publishers, 16-Dec-2012), 50-56

¹⁰ Renée Riese Hubert, 'Surrealism and the Book', (University of California Press, 1988), 21-24

¹¹ Paul Messaris, 'Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising', (SAGE Publications, 05-Dec-1996), 9-10

¹² R. Bruce Elder, 'DADA, Surrealism, and the Cinematic Effect', (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 21-Aug-2013), 326-28

¹³ Miryam Sas, 'Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism', (Stanford University Press, 1999), 78-79

¹⁴ Cathrin Klingsöhr-Leroy, 'Surrealism', (Taschen, 2004), 25-33

¹⁵ Silvano Levy, 'Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality', (Edinburgh University Press, 1997)

ENGLISH PROJECT

reality, desire from action, or dream from everyday life. It was neither monolithic nor static, and its commitment both to Freud and to Marx provoked complex and difficult debates, defections, and excommunications.



Breton in his first major defense of painting's relevance¹⁶ to Surrealism's project, stressed the importance of what he described as an "internal world": 'In order to respond to the necessity for a total revision of real values, the plastic work of art will either refer to a purely internal model or will cease to exist.' Although a less

than original notion, it was this belief in the primacy of imagination—which could work with any materials—that opened the extraordinary heterogeneous field of visual expression that constitutes Surrealist art. Breton dated the 'external model' in painting to about 1910, with Picasso's so-called Cubism. Surrealist image, the world stands revealed as 'total transparency', thereby deranging the senses, arresting time, and immobilizing the viewer in a 'sort of ecstasy'. Through such purely aesthetic gestures, in which the object is overwhelmed by a superfluity of meaning, Surrealism promotes an 'immobile space' that is in reality, a projection of abstract reason. Accordingly, despite its intentions, Surrealism reinforces instead of supersedes the perennial separation between spirit and matter, mind and body, ideal and reality, time and space.

Hence Breton didn't want use these conspicuous¹⁷ innovations, of which he retained only the most superficial elements. He felt that these juvenile typographies only served to distract the reader from what

¹⁶Elza Adamowicz,'*Surrealism: Crossings/frontiers*',(Peter Lang, 2006), 115-16

¹⁷ Jonathan Paul Eburne,'*Surrealism and the Art of Crime*',(Cornell University Press, 2008), 38-40

ENGLISH PROJECT

was important. He believed that the authority of the typographic signifier as little as possible. His influence allowed the prejudice to have a strong effect, and his prejudice was not original or unique to him, but symptomatic of the widespread refusal to acknowledge the materiality of written forms of language in the literary tradition.

SURREALISM IN LITERATURE

Surrealism offered a very different model of poetic expression, proposing automatic writing as a means to explore dream and unconscious motivation¹⁸, thus illuminating the operations of chance and contradiction that lay beneath the apparently smooth surface of ordinary communication. Furthermore, by the time the movement began to have an impact in England, Surrealism had also developed political ambitions¹⁹, bringing together Marxism and psychoanalysis in a conjunction that signaled the possibility of a social transformation grounded in the imaginative power of dream and art. Such a conjunction was immediately attractive to young writers who felt, a great gap between generation's conception of poetry and their own. This younger generation was born into one war and fattened for another, and it's members sense of crisis and emergency made them receptive to the strange and the foreign. Surrealism aimed aimed to substitute poetry as revelation, as a process of discovery in which meeting literary criteria had no positive contribution. Thus with the elimination of retarding influences originating in the literary aspirations went, in automatic writing²⁰, something the surrealists valued far more highly: liberation, through spontaneously generated images, of imaginative stimuli corresponding to a poetic experience they deemed revolutionary. Therefore, verbal automatism filled a dual function. It short-circuited literary pretensions, confuting the current valued by the surrealist as poetic all the more efficiently because

¹⁸ Laura Marcus, Peter Nicholls, 'The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature' (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 396-98

¹⁹ David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher, Sas Mays, 'Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century', (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 67-79

²⁰ Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, Gloria Gwen Raaberg, 'Surrealism and Women', (MIT Press, 1991), 1-3

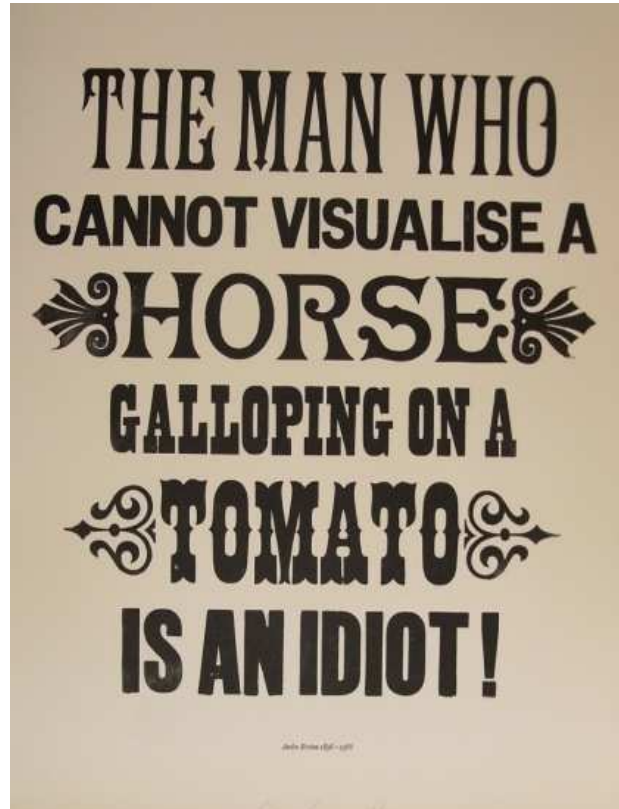
ENGLISH PROJECT

automatic writing removed inhibitions ranging from the rational to the moral. The surrealist writer never turned to automatic writing in hope of getting better. His ambitions was to see better. The imagery liberated through automatism was by no means exclusively visual in nature, of course. All the same, the examples one remembers most vividly frequently owe their effect to their ability to make us see something not seen before, independently of presuppositions born of past experience and outside assumptions fostered by reason. The jolt given the mind by the automatic image²¹ was proof to the surrealists that the latter emits the vital spark they regarded as it's extra literary virtue.

According to the surrealist theory, such a spark cannot be struck when one confines oneself to employing procedures consecrated²² by literature. Hence we may question the surrealist argument

without managing to curtail it's far-reaching consequences for surrealist writing. There is no way for instance, to invalidate the surrealist's interfere that, as a mode of writing, verbal automatism is without a competitor at providing the rarefies atmosphere in which, the spark of the image is transmitted best. The surrealist were never elitist, preaching a doctrine of literary refinement so as to prove themselves better writers than those they condemned and even reviled.

However an approach different from the surrealists' accounts for the reception according surrealism by well intentioned commentators inclination to treat it as literature has led them into confusion. There is



²¹ Timothy Mathews, 'Literature, Art and the Pursuit of Decay in Twentieth-Century France', (Cambridge University Press), 65-67

²² Martin Travers, 'European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism', (Bloomsbury Publishing, 15-Jun-2006), 169-71

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additional reason why automatic writing has suffered, like other expressions of surrealism, at the hands of critics in whom incomprehension of surrealist goals has proved capable of generating insensitivity and even hostility.