

**'If ever one art movement consumed the entire illustration genre,
it was surrealism.' (Heller: p70 2008). Discuss.**

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Course Title: Illustration BA (Hons)

Word Count: 2519

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Introduction

Surrealism's influence on the illustration genre and art in general in the last century is monumental. While artists had been experimenting for years, it was the chain-reaction of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory, Dadaism, Breton's Manifesto of Surrealism and Dali's artwork that pushed the concept: what even is art? Just like dreams, is there a meaning held deep within, or is it just pure, unadulterated nonsense? Rosemont (1975) wrote, "*The obscurity of our utterances is constant. The riddle of meaning should remain in the hands of children.*" Theorists in the early 20th Century pushed this idea to its limit and not only influenced the art styles and movements after it, but also still has a huge effect on the art world today – including illustration. This essay explores the ways in how the Surrealist Movement came to be as well as the impact it had for generations to come.

Freud

In 1900, Sigmund Freud published '*The Interpretation Of Dreams*' which was the catalyst for how Surrealism began. He was dubbed 'Father of the Unconscious Mind'

due to his theories on the deep, confusing ideas that lay dormant within our minds.
(The Dali Museum, 2018).

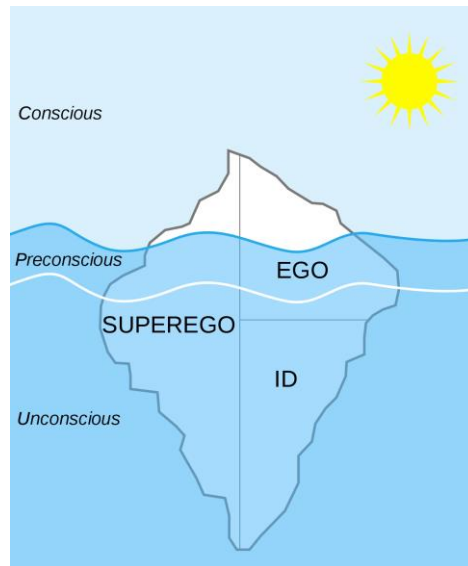


Figure 1: Simply Psychology, 2018. *Psychoanalytic Theory - Iceberg Diagram*. [image]

Freud's teachings also interpreted human behaviors, a theory he called the 'Psychoanalytic Theory' – separating our minds into 'ID' which acts as our pleasure principal, 'SUPEREGO' which is our desire to follow the rules of society, and our 'EGO' which has to somehow incorporate both of these mindsets. Consciously, we're in a state of EGO, but it is through accessing our unconscious mind that we can access the deeper instincts, specifically the ID. (McLeod, 2019). These dark, strange and nonsensical instincts are what lead to Dadaism and Surrealism. Bradley (1997) wrote, *"The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd."*

Dada

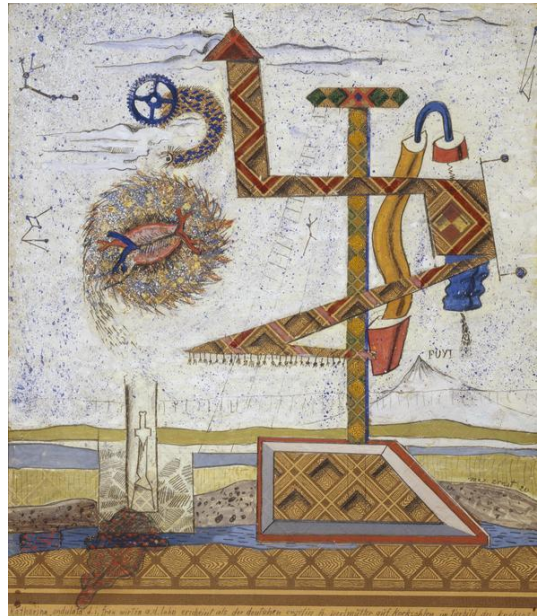


Figure 2: Earnst, M. 1920. *Katharina Ondulata*. [Gouache, Pencil and Ink on Paper].

Dadaism was the artistical rebelling against the time and cultural climate present during World War I. There was outrage against the way that such an apparent 'structured' society could fall into chaos at the hands of war. By questioning the establishment, Dadaism also questioned traditional art foundations and reacted strongly with collage and mixed media, a combination of art style thrown into one. (National Galleries Scotland, 2019). However, while Dadaism was one of the first spins on a Surrealist attitude within the art industry, its supporters were more interested in the political climate and mental attitude rather than a movement in the name of art. (Bradley, 1997).

Breton

Andre Breton from France was the founder of the Surrealism Movement. Like Dadaism, he was also influenced by World War I – he was sent as a medic aged only nineteen. This, understandably, scarred Freud and caused him to question society. He appreciated both Dadaism's way to object rational thinking and Freud's endeavours into the unconscious mind, and in doing so wrote '*The Manifesto of Surrealism*' in 1924. (The Dali Museum, 2018).

Breton believed that we should allow our unconscious, dreamlike state of being to have the ability run wild, as supressing the chaos leads to tragedies like World War I. In Breton's case, he wrote poetry.

"Man must, in all humility, use the little that he knows about himself to reconnoitre what surrounds him. The most effective means he has of doing this is poetic intuition. This intuition, finally unleashed by Surrealism, seeks not only to assimilate all known forms but also boldly to create new forms – that is to say, to be in a position to embrace all the structures of the world, manifested or not." (Breton, 1953).



Figure 3: Magritte, R. 1927. *The Double Secret*. [Oil on Canvas]

Breton's manifesto gained popularity quickly and it wasn't long before artists wanted to get involved with the movement. They were captured by Breton's ideas of weaponising nonsense and combining ordinary things in extraordinary ways – taking the old and remodelling it into something new, bizarre and captivating. Surrealists believed that reimagining ourselves as humans could be the next big step in changing both ourselves and the world for the better. (The Art Assignment, 2017). While Dadaism had began the artistic ball rolling, it was Surrealism that truly kicked artists' imagination and subconsciousness into overdrive. It threw away old, established ways of living life and creating art and instead transformed the ways in which creative minds indulged and expressed themselves.

“Surrealism provided the illustrator with an opportunity for logically illogical, discordant objects to share center stage. Birds could fly on the ground, while statues could move like animate objects, humans could appear as flowers,

and characters could ride someone's eyes as though they were wheels."

(Heller and Chwast, 2008).

Dali

Surrealism wouldn't be what it is today without the famed Salvador Dali. Even if one isn't a fan of his work, it is impossible to deny the sheer impact that he had on the movement both at the time, and its legacy as a whole.

Dali was originally a fan of Freud, not Breton, but it still drove his desire in joining the movement. He moved to Paris in 1926 when Breton was pushing the Surrealism Movement, but he was beginning to focus more so on politics, much like Dadaism. It was Dali's entrance that revived the quirky, experimental and humorous side of Surrealism.



Figure 4: *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929 [Film]

When Dali and Bunuel released '*Un Chien Andalou*' Parisians were shocked and disturbed by the graphic and dreamlike sequences, but they had never seen

anything like it and eagerly anticipated more. It was this film that got Dali noticed by Breton, causing him to recruit Dali to the Surrealist Movement. His enthusiasm for the cause and the artistic potential it held, in a way, brought life back into the movement and allowed it to see itself as something other than a political stance once more. (The Dali Museum, 2018).

“With the coming of Dali, it is perhaps the first time that the mental windows have been opened really wide, so that one can feel oneself gliding up towards the wild sky’s trap.” (Rosemont, 1978).



Figure 5: Salvador, D. 1931. *The Persistence of Memory*. [Oil on Canvas].

Dali left the Surrealists in 1939 as World War II came to a front. He was displeased with Breton’s focus for the movement shifting back towards politics and decided he would move to the United States of America. It was here he began to feed his ideas and art to the rest of the world. He found ways to do this in magazines, film and even

fashion – Dali was a man not limited by means or medium. (The Dali Museum, 2018).

It can be argued that both Breton and Dali are as vital to the Surrealist Movement as each other. Breton's founding and passion for the group was unlike anything seen in recent art movements of the time. He found a way to revolutionise art and literature through the subconscious mind and use it to progress forward within the world and enact change. However, it was this drive to enact change that held him back in an artistic sense. (Matthews, 1975). With Dali's entrance and departure from the Surrealists, he was able to spread Breton's unique and eye-opening ideas to the mainstream and get many creative minds outside of Europe to get involved. It's safe to assume that without Dali, Surrealism wouldn't be what it's known as today.

“Dali is like a man who hesitates (and whose future will show that he did not hesitate) between talent and genius, or, as one might once have said, between vice and virtue. He is one of those who arrive from so far away without saying a word, in a system of interferences.” (Rosemont, 1978).

Influence

The Surrealism Movement's influence on the illustration genre is still very much prevalent today in a myriad of forms. In many ways, Surrealism's foundations and theories has always mattered in the world of art. It stimulates the imagination in a way that helps the mind to conjure up different ideas not thought of before, and it's

these ideas that are influenced by the artist's own point of view. On the other hand, someone viewing the illustration will have their own ideas regarding the piece separate from the artist, as no two people have the same perception. That means that still today, everyone, illustrator and audience alike, have their own thoughts, feelings, dreams and views on the world around them. Therefore, no two people will ever look at the same piece of art or explore an idea in the same way. Art stimulates thoughts, feelings and emotion in the same way any other media would, directly stimulating the subconscious mind and causing us to form opinions before we may have even realised it. (Zalloum, 2018). This is why visual communication is so important, and illustrators are just that – visual communicators.

Editorial

One of the many forms of illustration influenced by Surrealism is journalism and editorial. The conceptual art movement was influenced greatly by surrealism. In the 1970s, The *New York Times* Op-Ed pages began allowing artists inspired by Dada and Surrealism to illustrate within the newspaper. The idea was to encourage illustrators to reflect on the deeper ideas within the articles rather than directly and literally illustrate the passages of text. Surrealism has the unique ability to sell anything in anyway it wants to. (Heller and Chwast, 2008).

While artists of the past, Dali included, dabbled in commercialism, it is in today's world where this is utilised greatly. Social commentary has been depicted in an illustrative format for as long as illustration has existed, but it is especially in today's world of advanced technology and media that surrealism can be used to its full

effect, stimulating an opinionated response from both artist and audience. This is vital in editorial illustration. (Male, 2014).



Figure 6: Metlukh, N. 2013. *Public Transport*. [Digital].

“The messages conveyed by illustrators and other visual communicators are largely coded by way of symbolic, contextual recognition, involving likeness, signification, analogy and metaphor. An audience will be drawn subconsciously to their own cultural - ‘tribal’ - social signifiers, preferences.”
(Male, 2014)

While Breton was known for not appreciating where The Surrealist Movement was heading in an artistic sense and its journey towards commercialism, there are some elements he may have been pleased with. Members of the Surrealists were captivated by the idea of Surrealism reaching greater levels of communication

between humans than the levels reached in our everyday lives. (Bradley, 1997).
Regardless of one's own opinion, every Surrealist believed in and hoped for the same concept – Surrealism would be the creative movement that changed the world.

Fantasy

“Despite the overall dominance of Realism, as well as the venerable desire to re-create nature as the eyes see it, illustration is nonetheless most effective, indeed alluring, when depicting worlds built entirely on imagination.” (Heller and Chwast, 2008).

Fantasy has been prevalent in illustration for as long as folklore and fairytales have existed. However, the style of art took a turn for the macabre and absurd when Surrealism had a chance to get involved. It was able to combine mystery, humour and the unimaginable into one, allowing the illustration to blend into the perfect fantastical image. (Heller and Chwast, 2008).



Figure 7: Clark, A. n.d. (Last decade). *WEIRD SCENES IN THE MEADOW*. [Collage, Acrylic, Photography, Hand Tinted Photographic Print, Digital].

Fictional stories, myths and legends allows an illustrator to access some of the deepest parts of their imagination. They need not be held back by facts, logic and linear ways of thinking. They can instead abandon the truth and feel free to explore fictional worlds in any ways their mind wants to. (Male, 2014) It is by using Surrealist techniques such as transformation, dislocation and juxtaposition that an illustrator is able to create fantastical and magical worlds within their pieces. Artists today are still inspired by the likes of John Tenniel's Illustrations of Lewis Carroll's '*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*' (1865) which were long before Breton's Manifesto of Surrealism was written, but it was the Surrealist Movement which made these ideas of dreamlike imagery more mainstream.



Figure 8: Tenniel, J. 1865. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland – The Caterpillar*. [Wood Block].

Children's Books

As previously mentioned with '*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*', elements of Surrealism have been featured in children's book illustrations for many years. This was, again, popularised by the Surrealist Movement and illustrators became more willing to dive into the depths of the underlying unknown when it came to illustrating the more simple passages that were children's stories.

While the movement was responsible for popularising these ideas, it can be argued that children have always been Surrealists. They do not perceive the world in the same logical and structured way that adults do. Children have an uncapped imagination and sense of wonder, allowing their minds to accept and adapt to any

reality they're interested in. *"Children somehow embrace the absurd more readily, happily, and with a greater sense of wonder."* (Heller and Chwast, 2008).



Figure 9: Ramos, F. 2018. *THE BIRD IN MY HAIR*. [Digital].

Illustrators can allow their own imaginations to run wild and create anything they want in any way they want – much like children. They are not constricted by reality, able to draw from reference, memory or pull new ideas from their own minds. Colour, form, juxtaposition, fantasy, metaphorical - Surrealist illustrators can produce art for children's books however they wish, as long as it still loosely ties into the passage at hand (unless it is a contemporary children's book). Male, (2014) wrote, *"A successful creative solution demands an unimpeded approach to expression and development."*

Conclusion

The Surrealist Movement's impact on the world in general, let alone just the illustration genre, is invaluable and irreplaceable to art's progression through history. Breton's kickstarted endeavours into the weird and wonderful acted as a path for creative minds following in his wake to express themselves in ways never quite thought of before. Artists could access their inner-most selves and depict them in any diverse, mysterious imagery they desired. (Alexandrian, 1970).

“Surrealism began as, and remains, a collective adventure. Breton was the principal spokesman of a movement that had many other spokesmen who count among the most audacious and inspired thinkers and creators of our century.” (Rosemont, 1978)

It is firmly believed by many that without the Surrealist Movement, many forms of artistic expression including editorial, commentary, erotic, fantasy, gothic, children's, conceptual and many other wouldn't have achieved the artistic potential that these styles have reach in the modern day. Art has always been tied to emotions, and it is the thorough visual communication between illustrators and their audience that allows for deeper comprehension. (Zalloum, 2018). Since the initial movement, through the last century and in today's world, Surrealism has time and time again been a vital technique for many artists to illustrate anything they could possibly imagine.

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