

Modern Art and Deconstructionism

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Abstract: Realism painters often masticated nature, frequently utilizing the lives of the peasantry as a general theme. These true depictions of everyday lives, which require the origin of things without exaggeration, abandon the former genres' imagination of their real lives. In this essay, I connect Deconstructionism and Surrealism paintings, attempting to answer the question: how does Surrealism find its Beatrice? To consecrate the theoretical grounding, I present ideas borrowed from Derrida and Freud. As for case studies, I then elaborate on how specific paintings were influenced by Deconstructionism to conclude the incremental development of art history.

1. Introduction

The worldly aesthetic has been changing dramatically. Originally, An artifact expresses the most primal feelings toward the world, human nature, and society. World War II yet overturned human history from its base, causing severe social problems. These problems exist in politics, economics, even art. Before the advent of World War II, Realism once was the “queen”. In this passage, I will try to connect Deconstructionism and Surrealism paintings, attempting to answer the question: how does Surrealism find its Beatrice? To consecrate the theoretical grounding, I present ideas borrowed from Derrida and Freud. As for case studies, I then elaborate on how specific paintings were influenced by Deconstructionism to demonstrate the incremental development of art history.

Realism painters often masticated nature, frequently utilizing the lives of the peasantry as a general theme. These true depictions of everyday lives, which require the origin of things without exaggeration, abandon the former genres' imagination of their real lives. In Millet's *Des glaneuses*[Figure 1], the painting shows ordinary people gleaning from the ground. Millet shaped ordinary characters with great expressiveness with a generalization of simplicity. Millet's brilliance elaborates the intimate relationship between man and the earth, which in fact, is a simple mission failed by many epic poetries. To be sure, all the other paintings pertaining to Realism depicted the daily scenes accessible for everyone, yet illustrating the original relationships between the humans and their creators.



Fig.1 *Des Glaneuses*, Jean-François Millet (France),1857

After World War II, the main genre began to shift from Realism toward a haunting, highly abstract genre of art--Surrealism. The general style of Surrealism paintings differed largely from the former conventions of paintings. Like a continuous line abruptly changing into a vertical one, the themes, subjects, and the idea behind the Surrealism art changed drastically. This trend of thought was first established in 1924 by the theorist Breton in his *Manifeste du surréalisme* [1], which advocated abandoning rationality and fully awakening the subconscious in the heart. As a former advocate of Dadaism, Breton began to vigorously advocate his new Surrealism in Paris after discovering that Dadaism lost its power. This genre prevailed in the European continent from 1924 to 1945 and later turned to the United States. The new preference of Surrealism abandoned Dadaism before, a process of conversion from centralization to decentralization, applying itself to the trends of historical development.

The historical development at the time was not steady: during that time, Europe was in the midst of World War I and World War II. Shadowed by the war, the middle class was undoubtedly panicked. As a result, the genre acutely criticized the current society. At that time, artists, as the main body of artistic creation, faced unavoidable influences from social turmoil and ideological debates, most of their works exemplified banter, satire, gloom, dream, and absurdity. The subjects in the paintings always seemed to be extorted intentionally. Art, in this strange genre, also reflected the feelings of the painters, indicating that the paintings were the way to express their rage and suffering after being depressed for a long time in the chaotic society. It seems that the influence of Surrealism in the field of literature did not last long, nor did it spread like some art schools, but the word Surrealism still occupies a place in today's visual art field.

2. Theoretical Debates

At this time, painters must answer the question, how to pursue new meanings in their work. Among the Surrealism paintings or artwork, most of them do not follow the conventional genres. The subjects in the work lost their original purposes and functions. Instead, they were covered intentionally by the thoughts of their creators. For example, in the *Object* [Figure 2], from Meret Oppenheim, the subjects—a spoon, a teacup, and a saucer—are covered by fur. The scene, in reality, resembles a daunting combination of grotesque objects and have contrast in textures: fur is meant to delight the touch nor the taste while cups and spoons are meant to be put in the mouth.



Fig.2 Object ,Meret Oppenheim(Switzerland), 1937

It might be helpful to recall Derrida's Deconstructionism to ruminate art objects freely. Derrida's argument gives the 'existence' a new meaning through a hermeneutical way. In Heidegger's view, the history of western philosophy is the history of metaphysics. Its prototype is to define "existence" as "presence". With the help of Heidegger's concept, Derrida calls it "the metaphysics of presence". "Metaphysics of presence" means that there is a fundamental principle, a central word, a dominant force, a potential God, behind all things. This principle produces a series of logos.

All people and things worship under the gates of logos and follow the logic of logos. (logos mean series of dialectical things) Rationality is eternal, which is similar to “God's law”--we cannot avoid rational thinking and serious treatment. Departing from logos means going to fallacy.

2.1 Theory 2.2

Derrida aims to protest against the logos. What they pursued was to break the unitary orders, including the orders in marriage, the orders in social morality-and the orders in art. The signifier, the first impression that the objects should disappears in the work. Derrida was against the thought that logos, the religion and the god, ruled what everything in the world should look like and function in that way. Instead, Derrida encouraged people to utilize their experiences to understand things in their own ways freely (a central idea in Surrealism). In Surrealism, the original appearance of the subjects no longer serves the function of the conventional thoughts, not only the inanimate objects but also humans. In other words, surrealism transcends the importance of reality.

Surrealism paintings manifested Derrida’s ideals ipso facto. The subjects always go beyond reality to reflect the painters' thoughts of their situations. To be clear, transcendentalism matches the “Id” in Freud's psychoanalytic theory. “Id” suggests people's subconscious, people's purest and most primitive consciousness.[2] In a formulaic sense, the subconscious scene (dream) combines with reality to surpass Realism, achieving Surrealism. In the artistic view, the painters try to combine their illusion, a radical expression of their inner thoughts, with reality, the signifier in daily life, to answer the questions in society in a strange way. Every detail in the paintings expresses unease and struggle.

For example, in *The Two Fridas*[Figure 3], from Frida Kahlo, the painter juxtaposed two self-portraits. Frida drew her face on two women connecting through a vein between two exposed hearts on their chests. This style of absurdity and even daunting in the painting suggests many abortions and miscarriages for the painters. In this painting, Frida's sense of absurdity connects to more subjects, provoking more serious thoughts of other things, such as abortion and women. Conclusively, the paintings in Surrealism show Freud's ideas again--helping people to discuss the construction of 'super ego', comprehend practical problems, and construct themselves for the simulated situations.

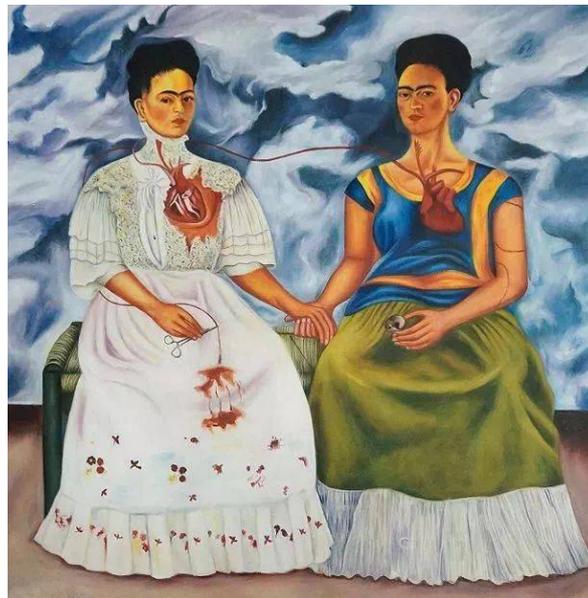


Fig.3 The Two Fridas, Frida Kahlo(Mexico),1939

2.2 Paintings

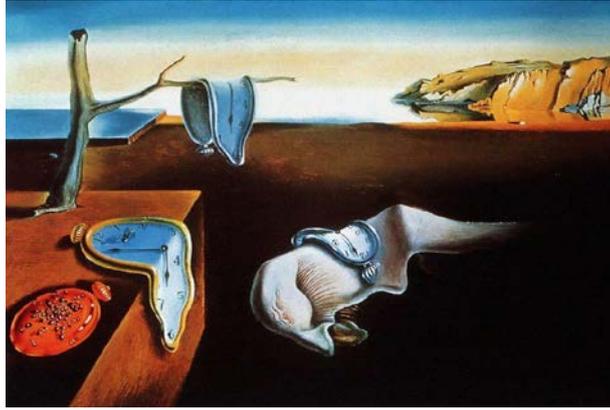


Fig.4 The Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dali(Spain),1931

On a dreadful beach, the distant sea and mountains are bathed in the afterglow of the sun. A A strange creature that resembles nothing with long eyelashes and closed eyes, like a fish and a horse, lies on the beach in front of the view. There is a platform beside the monster. On the platform, there is a dead tree and a metal plate full of ants. It seems that it is being eaten by flies. The most unimaginable thing in the painting is the three clocks. They are intentionally drawn like fluidity, much different from what people conventionally think of clocks. In the painters' eyes, time is strongly distorted and stopped, as if everything has been melted into unconsciousness. When creating this painting, Dali was also influenced by Freud's "subconscious" theory. According to Dali, this painting shows a "personal dream and illusion revealed by Freud". In Dali's eyes, everything in the painting no longer serves the conventional, the supposed functions. Instead, they are the reflection of painter's subconscious. The reality-the original way that a clock should look like-- has been disregarded in the painting. The painter wants to express his idea about what time is like figuratively. To search for the feelings in the subconscious, Dali went to the mental hospital, interviewing the patient there to depict the subconscious.

In the painting, various objects in the painter's works are scattered in disorder and have no fixed position. Especially with the background of that helpless style, the whole painting gives people the feeling of unreal silence and loss. The beach and steps in the background are not on the same plane. Each object has a real prototype, which is irrelevant and illogically organized, showing extreme irrationality and absurdity. Dali shows a sense of imperfection in the painting, in Surrealism's work of art. In this painting, the strong will to draw things against logos is presented-clocks are drawn in a extorted way, 'houses' are no longer what they should look like in convention, and the hill and beaches in the background appear in a strong disproportion. Also, this follows Derrida's idea to illustrate things in people's imaginations-time, in this painting, is flowing yet everywhere on the ground, showing a sense of permanence. In Floyd's theory, the 'ID' of subjects has been surpassed in this painting. Things are not in the original settings as people commonly assume in the reality. Instead, they reflect the deep understanding, the abstract feelings of things, not only the mere reflection of reality.

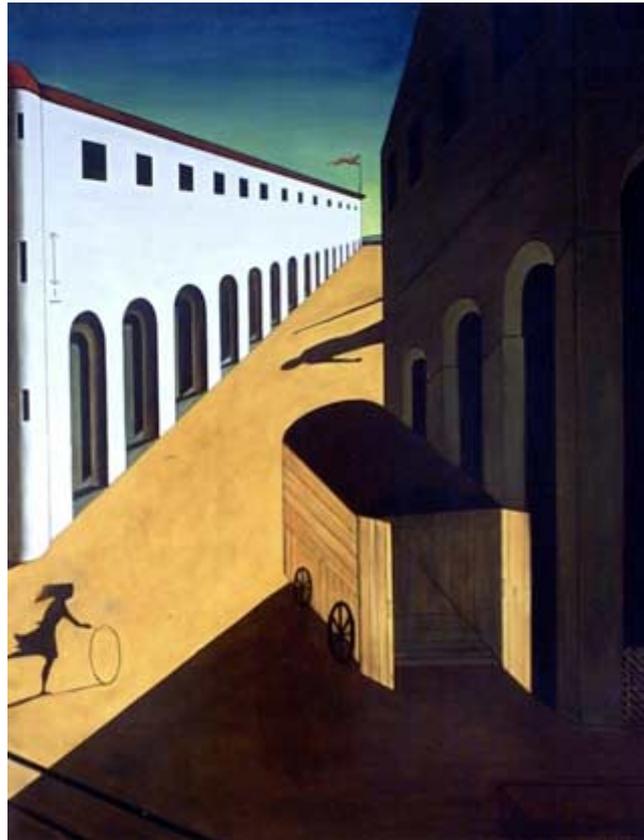


Fig.5 The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street, Giorgio de Chirico(Italy), 1914

In this painting, a little girl rolls an iron ring through an abandoned town, approached by an unknown shadow. The arch of the building extends to the distance at a sharp angle. The buildings in the foreground are dark, with high walls, cutting into the already closed space. The horizon of the picture is much higher than the image of the woman running at the lower left. The picture is divided horizontally. The arched buildings are divided into two columns and are located on the ground with an unreasonable perspective. In addition, the oblique shadow is combined with the bright sunshine and dark sky on the earth and buildings, and it is not a scene visible in real life. Interestingly, Chirico likes to emit a faint light in the distance of the sky, and even makes people mistakenly think that the scene he painted may take place in the evening and the afterglow of the sunset. But the afterglow in the picture is not enough to illuminate the earth and houses so strongly. The painting looks like a peaceful scenery where the young girl plays with the iron ring. However, it is strange in structure: the buildings around the girl intriguingly do not coordinate with each other and the holes, doors on the architecture are strangely repetitive. Also, the mysterious shadows in the background give the whole scenery a sense of mystery. It expresses Chirico's mental world in this painting.

The subjects yet do not have a clear intention. And the peace-seemingly the theme of the painting-essentially contains mysterious silence. It is not an expression of the real world. Instead, it depicts the feelings inside Chirico-a power surpassing Realism. It shows the freedom to articulate the painter's desire, according to Derrida, in this painting-the architectures do not have to follow the rules in the real world, the whole proportion of the painting does not have to fit the conventions-Deconstructionism against logos has been presented in this painting. The most fascinating point of this painting, and Surrealism, is that the painter transports the absurdity and agitation through peaceful scenery. More specifically, this is the power of the painter's subconscious, using brushes to express the deep inside the painter's consciousness.

3. Conclusion

The idea of Deconstructionism has stretched into assorted fields. In architecture, the designers begin to look for space unity and cause the overall view of the architecture to be discontinuous,

apparently against the idea of Structuralism. Also, the rule that the appearance must serve the function has been violated in this kind of architecture--- the surface of the architecture is designed to be unpredictable geometric styles such as the Disney Concert the internal design of which has no pattern for viewers to find but still offer a sense of comfort. In the movie industry, the filmmakers no longer follow the rules of religions. Many films turned out to be against the conventional rules of religion. A special kind of movie called 'cult' emerged. The ideas of logos, the rule of the world, have been overthrown in these films. Deconstructionism is not simply a rebellious form against all the original thinking. Instead, it is a call for free illustration of people's minds, not controlled by the unchanged rules. In the first time art was related to Deconstructionism, the world is still in the shock brought by the World War. At this time, it was reasonable that the need for freedom in expressing people's thoughts and desires emerged in society and took its place in the art genre (Surrealism).

Additionally, today's popular postmodern art abstractize many things far away from reality in the artists' creations. It is not that Realism, or reality, is no longer serving the aesthetic desire of society, but that a new power in people's minds, the strong will to depict their thoughts in their preferred ways, emerges in public. The review of Realism, the revival of Surrealism, and the thinking about modernity lead the trends towards diversified thoughts--the thoughts about multi-culture. With diversified thoughts towards anything, an artist-and human-can achieve Deconstructionism.

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