Surrealist cinema
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Surrealist cinema is a modernist approach to film theory, criticism, and production with origins in Paris in the 1920s. Related to Dada cinema, Surrealist cinema is characterised by juxtapositions, the rejection of dramatic psychology, and a frequent use of shocking imagery. The first Surrealist film was The Seashell and the Clergyman from 1928, directed by Germaine Dulac from a screenplay by Antonin Artaud. Other films include Un Chien Andalou and L'Age d'Or by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí; Buñuel went on to direct many more films, with varying degrees of Surrealist influence.

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Theory

In his 2006 book Surrealism and Cinema, Michael Richardson argues that surrealist works cannot be defined by style or form, but rather as results of the practice of surrealism. Richardson writes: 'Surrealists are not concerned with conjuring up some magic world that can be defined as 'surreal'. Their interest is almost exclusively in exploring the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence. Surrealism is always about departures rather than arrivals. Rather than a fixed aesthetic, Richardson defines surrealism as 'a shifting point of magnetism around which the collective activity of the surrealists revolves.'

Surrealism draws upon irrational imagery and the subconscious mind. Surrealists should not, however, be mistaken as whimsical or incapable of logical thought; rather, most Surrealists promote themselves as revolutionaries.

Surrealist works cannot be defined by style or form, but rather as results of the practice of surrealism. Rather than a fixed aesthetic, surrealism can be defined as an ever-shifting art form.

History
Surrealism was the first literary and artistic movement to become seriously associated with cinema, though it has also been a movement largely neglected by film critics and historians.

The foundations of the movement coincided with the birth of motion pictures, and the Surrealists who participated in the movement were among the first generation to have grown up with film as a part of daily life.

Breton himself, even before the launching of the movement, possessed an avid interest in film: while serving in the First World War, he was stationed in Nantes and, during his spare time, would frequent the movie houses with a superior named Jacques Vaché. According to Breton, he and Vaché ignored movie titles and times, preferring to drop in at any given moment and view the films without any foreknowledge. When they grew bored, they left and visited the next theater. Breton's movie-going habits supplied him with a stream of images with no constructed order about them. He could juxtapose the images of one film with those of another, and from the experience craft his own interpretation.

Referring to his experiences with Vaché, he once remarked, "I think what we [valued] most in it, to the point of taking no interest in anything else, was its power to disorient." Breton believed that film could help one abstract himself from "real life" whenever he felt like it.

Serials, which often contained cliffhanger effects and hints of "other worldliness," were attractive to early Surrealists. Examples include Houdini's daredevil deeds and the escapades of Musidora and Pearl White in detective stories. What endeared Surrealists most to the genre was its ability to evoke and sustain a sense of mystery and suspense in viewers.

The Surrealists saw in film a medium which nullified reality's boundaries. Film critic René Gardies wrote in 1968, "Now the cinema is, quite naturally, the privileged instrument for derealising (sic) the world. Its technical resources... allied with its photo-magic, provide the alchemical tools for transforming reality.

Surrealist artists were interested in cinema as a medium for expression. As cinema continued to develop in the 1920s, many Surrealists saw in it an opportunity to portray the ridiculous as rational. Cinema provided more convincing illusions than its closest rival, theatre, and the tendency for Surrealists to express themselves through film was a sign of their confidence in the adaptability of cinema to Surrealism's goals and requirements. They were the first to take seriously the resemblance between film's imaginary images and those of dreams and the unconscious. Luis Buñuel said, "The film seems to be the involuntary imitation of the dream."

Surrealist filmmakers sought to re-define human awareness of reality by illustrating that the "real" was little more than what was perceived as real; that reality was subject to no limits beyond those mankind imposed upon it. Breton once compared the experience of Surrealist literature to "the point at which the waking state joins sleep." His analogy helps to explain the advantage of cinema over books in facilitating the kind of release Surrealists sought from their daily pressures. The modernity of film was appealing to as well.

Critics have debated whether "Surrealist film" constitutes a distinct genre. Recognition of a cinematographic genre involves the ability to cite many works which share thematic, formal, and stylistic traits. To refer to Surrealism as a genre is to imply that there is repetition of elements and a recognizable, "generic formula" which describes their makeup. Several critics have argued that, due to Surrealism's use of the irrational and on non-sequitur, it is impossible for Surrealist films to constitute a genre.

While there are numerous films which are true expressions of the movement, many other films which have been classified as Surrealist simply contain Surrealist fragments. Rather than "Surrealist film" the more accurate term for such works may be "Surrealism in film."
Surrealist films and filmmakers

Films of the original movement

- **Entr'acte**: a 22-minute, silent, black and white French film, written by René Clair and Francis Picabia, and directed by Clair, released December 4, 1924.[6]
- **Le fantôme du Moulin-Rouge**: a 90-minute, silent, black and white French film, written by René Clair and Walter Schlee, and directed by Clair, released in February 1925 in the USA and March 1925 in France.[6][8]
- **The Seashell and the Clergyman**: (Released in 1928) a 31-minute, silent, black and white film, written by Antonin Artaud, and directed by Germaine Dulac.
- **L'Étoile de mer**: a 21-minute, silent, black and white French film, written by Robert Desnos and directed by Man Ray, released in 1928.[6]
- **Un Chien Andalou**: a 16-minute, silent, black and white French film, written by Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel, and directed by Buñuel, released in 1929.[6]
- **L'Age d'Or**: a 60 minute, monaural, black and white French film, written by Dali and Buñuel, and directed by Buñuel, released in 1930.[6]

Later films


In 1946, Dali and Walt Disney began work on a film called *Destino*; the project was finally finished in 2003.[9]

Works of American filmmaker and television director David Lynch such as *Twin Peaks* (1990–91), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), or *Inland Empire* (2006), among others, have been considered to be surrealist.[10][11]

See also

- New French Extremity
- Theatre of Cruelty

References

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Categories: Movements in cinema

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