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The Intersubjective Cyborg as Producer of Surreal and Autonomous Graphic Design Doctoral Symposium

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This research considers the influence of collage and surrealist techniques upon the practice of contemporary women graphic designers participating in visual culture today. The study poses two theoretical models: the intersubjective cyborg that extends and develops the analysis and legacy of female Surrealist artists in their recent resurgence, and the Mobius Strip analogy that encapsulates and assists in uniting collage, automatism and Surrealism through digital and analogue processes. Although the primary focus for this research is practice and the process of collage, it poses a framework to be used as an interdisciplinary tool that promotes the intersubjective cyborg as a producer of surreal and autonomous graphic design.

Purpose of the Research and its Relevance in the Field

In the last ten years there has been a resurgence in British curatorial engagement with women artists and Surrealism and a re-imagining of their legacy: *Angels of Anarchy* (Manchester Art Gallery 2009), *Dreamers Awake* (White Cube 2017), *Lee Miller and Surrealism in Britain* (The Hepworth 2018), *Dorothea Tanning* (Tate Modern 2019), *Dora Maar* (Tate Modern 2019) and more recently *Phantoms of Surrealism* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2021). The legacy of women artists and Surrealism had been previously overshadowed by André Breton's *Second Manifeste du Surrealisme* in which he declared "the problem of woman is the most marvellous and disturbing problem in all the world" (Breton, Seaver and Lane 2008). In re-appraising the importance of women in the Surrealist oeuvre, a significant focus has been placed upon the reawakening of female practitioners and their unconscious processes. This focus liberates women from the societal and political constraints of Surrealism at the time, and signifies a conceptual shift where women associated with the movement are no longer labelled as muses but rather artists in their own right. This re-imagining initiates new conversations in appreciating the legacy of a once overlooked feminist and Surrealist practice with a particular interest in a performative uncovering of the self and other.

The purpose of the research is to build upon this recent re-engagement by extending the legacy to contemporary practice, such as graphic design, where 2D, 3D and 4D collage are unrivalled forces for exploration of the unconscious. This approach also reimagines the way in which design processes are utilised as a way to uncover the self and other. My research proposes two new theoretical foundations; the intersubjective cyborg and the Mobius Strip analogy. The intersubjective cyborg rejects gender-specific binaries and seeks a new kind of totality (Haraway 1985). Through the act of un-gendering in performative design where the practitioner also becomes the subject of their own work (Jones 1998) and the associated creative outputs become an extension of the self (McLuhan 1964) the research develops intersubjectivity. The Mobius Strip analogy advances the idea that 'automatic processes' associated with Surrealism have been developed, utilised and referenced by contemporary female designers – and that techniques associated with collage and creative play (accessing the unconscious mind and exploring dream-like states) have allowed the medium of collage to traverse a Mobius Strip – moving between an analogue plane to the virtual and back.

These theories are explored within my own creative practice, where new advanced software such as Processing (Fig. 1) and Cinema 4D (Fig. 2) become a vessel for spawning autonomous collages and provide a platform to transgress design boundaries through contemporary technological translations of analogue and digital working.

Brief Survey of Background, Description of the Proposed Approach and Current Progress

The research poses two new theoretical approaches: the intersubjective cyborg that is used as a tool for understanding female Surrealist artwork and its application in contemporary culture, and the Mobius Strip analogy that suggests how Surrealist techniques of contemporary and autonomous collage can be applied and ‘read.’

The Intersubjective Cyborg Extension

The intersubjective cyborg extension is a theoretical model that surrounds the legacies and re-imaginings of female Surrealists posed by this PhD.

The Surrealist artist Leonara Carrington, whose artwork explores the notion of the self through unconscious animalistic representations with an added sense of autonomous and alchemic mysticism, is used as an exemplar. Carrington reconfigures the male gaze by placing the self as a focal point in her artwork. She embarks on a journey of individuation by utilising visual extensions of the self, that in turn undergo ungendered cyborg transformations by removing bodily signifiers that stereotypically represented women in other Surrealist artworks of the time.

In developing the intersubjective cyborg I argue that there are opportunities for this theoretical framework to be applied to contemporary culture and in particular graphic design. To date there has been limited exploration of the relationship between Surrealism and the graphic disciplines, particularly from a feminist or intersubjective perspective. One of the most notable contributions came from art critic Rick Poynor, who wrote *Dark Tools of Desire* (Poynor 2007) for Eye Magazine, and curated the exhibition *Uncanny: Surrealism and Graphic Design* at the Moravian Gallery, Czech Republic in 2010. Although Poynor’s research encompasses all aspects of design, my research highlights a specific feminist intersubjective approach that considers technique as well as aesthetics. Therefore, my practice currently explores the integration of the ideas foregrounded

in the analysis of female Surrealists within contemporary culture, furthering a performative extension of the self/myself/other as a graphic practitioner.

My research believes that the intersubjective cyborg is already deeply embedded within mainstream contemporary culture. This can be seen, for example, in the graphic representations orchestrated by musician, Claire Boucher, also known as Grimes, who not only transgresses boundaries through live music performance, but considers ungended and intersubjective extensions of the self through graphic interpretations including album covers, tour posters and promotional material.

The Mobius Strip Analogy

The Mobius Strip analogy is the underlying methodological approach of this research. The analogy encapsulates all three theoretical underpinnings: Surrealism (as seen in M.C Escher's *Mobius Strip II* (1963)), non-binary intersubjectivity and the relationship between theory and practice-based research. The strip signifies movement and is used to explore the continuity between different theories; The Mobius Strip as extension of traditional Surrealist technique of Exquisite Corpse, the Non-binary Mobius Strip through fluidity and ungending in practice and the Mobius Strip as a pathway to unlock infinite 3D/4D spaces within Graphic Design.

There are two sides to the Mobius Strip analogy: the analogue plane and the digital plane. When using collage as the prime example, the analogue plane pays homage to the traditional Surrealist

technique of automatic drawing; a methodology used to promote unconscious practices that suppress conscious or rational control during the process of making where “[the author] is no longer a bicycle of their senses” (Aragon, 1924). This particular technique can be seen in Madame Fondrillion's Mediumistic Drawing (1909) a piece that was reproduced in the Surrealist publication *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1925).

My practice is currently situated within the digital plane, that considers a virtual type of automatism introduced through new technical translations of design. Although cut and paste techniques are still present, the new digital translation traverses through multiple realities by utilising modern software such as Cinema 4D and Processing, that encourages practitioners to consider new aspects of design that were not readily available before, such as volume, compression,

texture, material and moving image. Although they exist on separate planes, this research acknowledges their co-existence. It presents an interchangeable, hybridised process of analogue and digital working, which creates a space for new forms of curation. The combination of these planes demonstrates a way that practice can move forward, and although the research primarily focuses on the process of collage, the framework lays a foundation that can be adapted to fit other creative disciplines. By ‘tapping into’ 4D realities, where the audience’s sensory perceptions are altered due to transgressed boundaries, this research presents new realities for automatist graphic design.

Through a close analysis of a selection of graphic works by female designers and a consideration of their unconscious imaginings and workflow, this research shows how their collages may be ‘read’ (Fig. 3). It is of material interest to this study that the fluid digital tools available to a designer coincide with the physical process of collage, and therefore the adoption of these tools support the Mobius Strip analogy. For example, a simple cut and paste motion is a conscious decision of creating fluidity in a composition but through a process of trial and error combined with the unexpected (whether this is through an analogue or digital process) becomes an unconscious design methodology. This process is seen in the work of graphic designers Jessica Walsh and Leta Sobierajski who have adopted these techniques and whose personal work also aligns with notions of the intersubjective cyborg. In this sense the research argues that the language of collage has become a universal tool, yet what makes the works by all of these designers so compelling and powerful is their ability to become producer and subject of autonomous design whilst delving into their own surrealities.

Expected Contributions

This research aims to lay new theoretical foundations in graphic design by utilising the intersubjective cyborg model and Mobius Strip analogy as vessels for unleashing and understanding the self and other in graphic design practices. Additionally, the analysis initiates new conversations around Surrealism, performance and design through experimentation with automatist and curative collage that considers the capabilities of technologies such as processing, coding, 3D and 4D modelling where technologically advanced techniques such as volume, material and texture have contributed to spawning ‘automatic processes’ associated with Surrealism. These ‘automatic processes’ reimagine and rethink the Surrealist legacy in relation to Graphic Design and computational aesthetics.

Progress Towards Goals

This practice-based research is in the final year of completion. It constantly reflects the intersubjective cyborg extension and the Mobius Strip analogy through personal practice linking theoretical approaches to emergent processes. This study understands a need to look back in order to move forward and consider new ways of expressing the individual self. My practice currently explores a digital archive that encompasses both sides of the Mobius Strip analogy, where analogue and their digital translations and contemporary digital processes work in tandem with each other. The archive is translated through Processing, where code is fundamental in spawning contemporary automatic processes that are then translated through Cinema 4D as a way of uncovering my personal self where there is a freedom to become a producer of surreal and autonomous graphic design (Fig. 4 & Fig. 5).

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Fig. 1 Czolacz, *Automatism* (2021). Example outcome from the Processing code that generates autonomous collages every 3 seconds based on personal sigil designs and .PNGs.

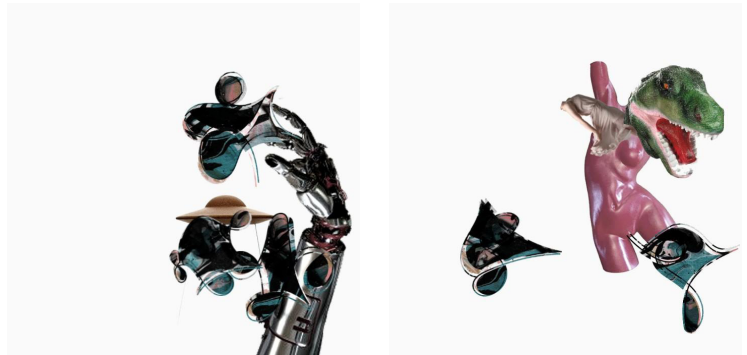


Fig. 2 Czolacz, *The Curative Body* (2020). Exploration of using 3D objects in Cinema 4D, using Surrealist methodologies.

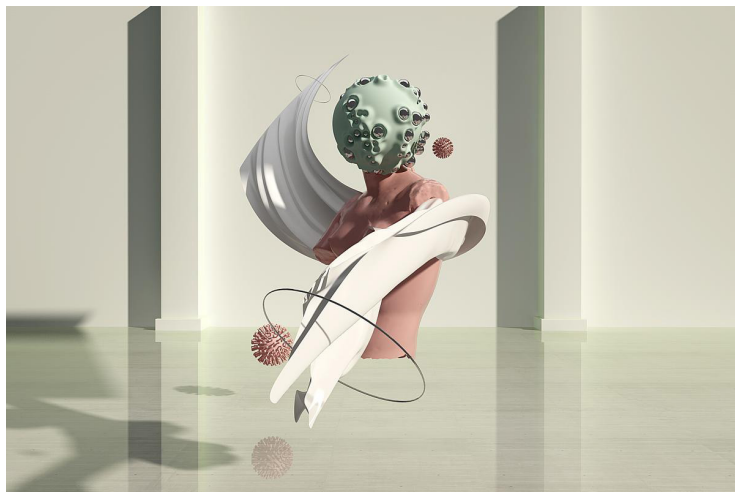


Fig. 3 Czolacz, *The Curative Cloth* (2020). Further exploration of the intersubjective extension using cloth and colliders within Cinema 4D to create texture and depth.

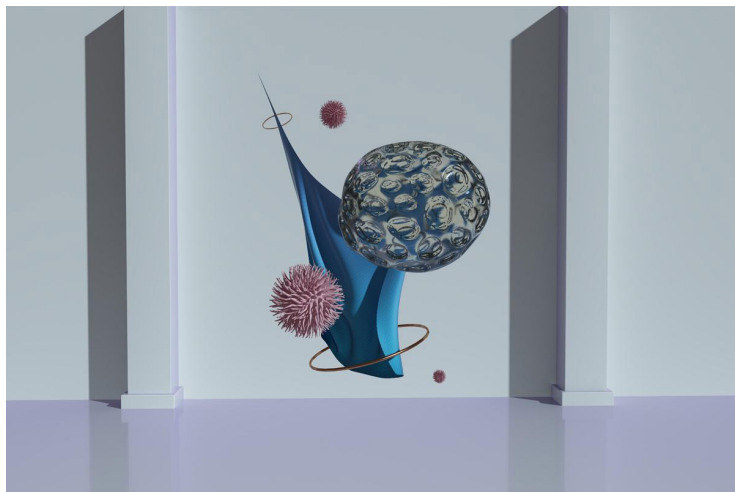
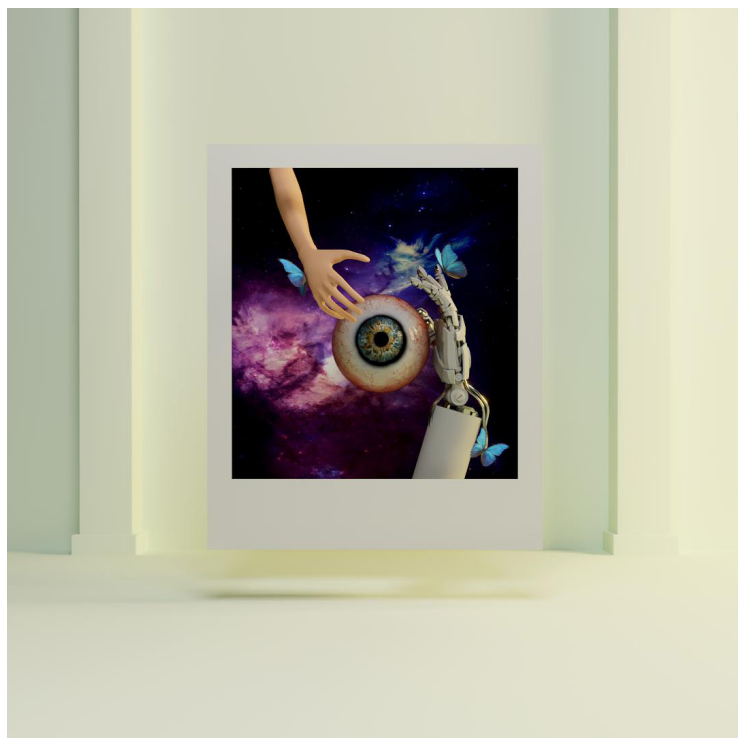


Fig. 4 Czolacz, *The Marble Effect* (2021). Beginning to use animation and camera effects to alter sensory perceptions. <https://vimeo.com/511804564>.



Fig. 5 Czolacz, *Integration* (2021). Beginning to use animation and camera effects to alter sensory perceptions. <https://vimeo.com/534802241>.



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