SURREALISM IS NOT DEAD:

A LOOK AT SURREALISM IN CONTEMPORARY MASS COMMUNICATION

VIA ANALYSIS OF MODERN POPULAR FILMS

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Abstract

This study examined three modern films - *Toy Story 3*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Iron Man 2* - to understand the place of Surrealism in contemporary communication. The thesis began with a review of literature regarding Surrealism's revolutionary propensities and its flow into the mainstream. The review's basis was postmodernist philosophy rooted in Roland Barthes's and Umberto Eco's semiotics and Stuart Hall's cultural studies. This underlying philosophy asserted the complexity and mutability of signs and styles, a media role in acceptance and mutation of signs/styles, and endurance of ideas through cultural shifts. Semiotic analysis was crucial methodology in this study as it had been used previously to investigate sign systems in various media forms but never used to determine whether Surrealism was dead or alive. This study discussed and uncovered the presence of Surrealism in modern mass communication but also provided insight regarding the influence of art and revolutionary movements on culture and communication.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Importance of the Study

Throughout history, people have risen to confront the issues of their times, question life itself, and propose answers to the imperfections they perceived. These moments of confrontation and questioning, these movements, had lasting impacts on human communication. The 18th century Age of Enlightenment produced ideas on human rights, equality, and reason that broke from the dogmatic and superstitious belief systems that had ruled. The ideas of this era live on today in laws, social practices, human rights policy, and treaties between nations. Growing use of steam power in industrial printing processes during the Industrial Revolution facilitated an expansion of newspaper and book publishing. Art has also played a crucial role in affecting the human condition and communication via singular works, collaborations, and whole movements. One such movement occurred in the early years of the 20th century.

In 1917, writer Guillaume Apollinaire coined a term to describe his aesthetic which was “a question of realism surpassing mere surface reality and physical appearances, concentrating on the basically interior (experiential) nature of reality.” (Bohn, 1977, p. 201) Another writer, André Breton, along with friend Philippe Soupalt, co-opted the term in 1924 “to describe the literary and artistic practice of himself and his 'friends.'” (Bradley, 2001, p. 6) In adopting Apollinaire's invention, Breton launched and became de facto leader of a radical endeavor that would grow to be international in breadth. The term, Surrealism, has been called an artistic movement, a political movement, “a collective adventure,” “a serious point of view” in several fields of
thought, and “a state of being as much as a particular visual aesthetic.” (Conekin, 2007; Clancy, 1949, p. 271; Bradley, 2001, p. 6; Wood, 2007, p. 2) For decades since its inception, the word has been defined, re-defined, stretched, shrunk, grabbed, held tightly, and applied liberally. It has been used to describe fine art, literature, film, fashion, architecture, other areas of design, people, and mental and emotional states. Whatever it was labeled and served to label, Surrealism took its place in the human lexicon and quickly grew to be an influential force on human thought and expression.

Statement of the Problem

There is consensus on the beginning of Surrealism, but scholars place its end at various points in time. Some hold the position World War II brought the demise of Surrealism as European Surrealists faced a diaspora to escape fascist hostilities. (Voorhies, n.d.) Others say it “effectively died with André Breton in 1966.” (Bradley, 2001, p. 73) Still others might claim it ended with the death of Salvador Dali in 1989, as Dali proclaimed he WAS Surrealism. However, these arguments attempt to perform postmortem analysis on a living entity. Surrealism lives. While it was (and is) Breton, Dali, and the many influential figures within the early 20th century “adventure,” Surrealism has come forward into the 21st century wherever we see “the cry of a mind turning back on itself” or “images of concrete irrationality.” (Bradley, 2001, p. 32) It continues to provide us with artifacts in the fields of fine and decorative arts, design, broadcast and electronic media, print media and other forms of expression. At present, Surrealism informs how we communicate on a broad scale. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to acknowledge the vitality of the subject and conduct a vivisection on
Surrealism and modern culture to synthesize research that explores Surrealism's impacts on communication and mass media.

Definition of Terms

Defining and Understanding the Term Surrealism

There have been many attempts to define and decipher Surrealism. When he officially announced the movement in 1924 via the first Manifesto of Surrealism, Breton offered to define the term “once and for all” with the following:

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Breton, 1972, p. 26)This definition, in whole or in part, is often cited as a springboard for discussion on the movement in general, its products, or its players – particularly Breton. (Bradley, 2001; Durozoi, 1997) Yet while Breton proposed his definition as the ultimate answer to the question “What is Surrealism?” he presented a simultaneous ambivalence about and commitment to the term itself. In prefacing his definition he suggests they could have just as easily appropriated the word Supernaturalism (a term of Gerard de Nerval’s) to
mark their “new mode of expression.” (Breton, 1972) However, they opted to take Apollinaire’s term Surrealism and make it their own because, in Breton's words, “the word had no currency before we came along.” (Breton, 1972) In this instance Breton himself indicates (and other literature does not contradict) the very word that marked this new movement transforming from the sign of a denotative sign system to the signifier of a connotative sign system.

A point of inquiry regarding Surrealism is recognition. How do you know it when you see it? What are the signifiers of Surrealism? Or perhaps, of what is the word _Surrealism_ the signifier?

Making such identification is difficult because as the movement aged, even in the first decade or two after Breton's first Manifesto, understandings of Surrealism diversified. Current literature tends to show that practitioners' expressions spread into multiple media, factions arose, characters were “expelled” from the movement, and those internal and external to the movement experienced confusion, contradiction, and shifting ideas regarding what/who qualified. (Dali and Parinaud, 2008; Man Ray, 1963; Breton, 1972) As Walter Benjamin noted, in the late 1930's the situation became that “rather than being a testimony to the facts of a lived experience - one that reduces the outer world into a coherent realm of identification and sameness - Surrealist narrative is the disruption of lived experience so that the outer world resists the drive of identification.” (Hertz, 2010)

Overall, the current literature makes the case that the term Surrealism first signified expression unobstructed by reason. It further points to the idea that as Surrealism grew the word came to signify the disruption of conventional, rational
signification. This is important to this study as we have to come to some functional understanding of the movement before proceeding to diagnosis.

*Other Terms Used*

In addition to Surrealism, other terms are used throughout this study to refer to Surrealist processes or qualities and literary devices. Terms relating to Surrealist processes and qualities are *oneiric, paranoiac (or paranoid) critical method* and *psychic automatism*. Oneiric – a term used to describe Surrealist activity, process, and products – is defined as follows:

*oneiric*: of or relating to dreams ("Oneiric," 2011)

Dali stated, “I define the paranoiac-critical method as a great art of playing upon all one's own inner contradictions with lucidity by causing others to experience the anxieties and ecstasies of one's life in such a way that it becomes gradually as essential to them as their own.” (Dali and Parinaud, 2008, p. 11) As stated in Breton's definition of Surrealism, he viewed pure psychic automatism as means to access the “actual functioning of thought.” (1972, p. 26) Based on the artists' statements, these two terms are defined as follows for the purpose of this study:

*paranoiac critical method*: immersion into illogical, delirious, less consciously-controlled, or alternative reality states of mind followed by lucid critical interpretation of the irrational phenomena experienced.

*psychic automatism*: a practice of free association in which the aim is to directly access the materials of the unconscious mind.

Terms referring to literary devices include *irony, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche,* and
trope. For the purpose of this study the following definitions of these terms – drawn from Merriam-Webster's definitions (2011) - is provided:

irony: (1): incongruity between the expected and what actually happens or is produced (“Irony,” 2011)

metaphor: “an object, activity, or idea” denoting one kind of object, activity, or idea “but used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.” (“Metaphor,” 2011)

metonymy: “a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated.” (“Metonymy,” 2011)

synecdoche: “figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole, the species for the genus, the genus for the species, or the name of the material for the thing made.” (“Synecdoche,” 2011)

trope: “a word or expression used in a figurative sense”; a common theme or device. (“Trope,” 2011)

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

This thesis consists of five chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 lays forth the philosophical/theoretical framework for the study and reviews some of the relevant literature regarding Surrealism and its revolutionary and popular aspects. This review leads to the research question at the end of the chapter. Chapter 3 discusses the scope of the study and methodology used in conducting the research. Chapter 4 includes three case studies based on three popular films examined for Surrealist presence. Chapter
5 provides a discussion of the limitations of the study, ideas for further research, and conclusions.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter will explore current and relevant literature regarding traits and trends in analysis of Surrealism. After a discussion of theoretical and philosophical assumptions of this study, the chapter is organized into two sections: (1) Surrealism as rebellion, resistance, revolution, and (2) Surrealism as fashionable and appropriated. Each section concludes with a discussion of the relevance to this study and research question. Following the two sections will be a summary, discussion of gaps in the literature, and the research questions.

Philosophical Assumptions

Revolution, by its very definition, is about drastic change in patterns of thought and behavior. It is facing convention with critical questions and proposing some bold substitution(s) of one or any myriad of possibilities in the place of what is. Surrealism – by its definition – was from the beginning a revolution of thought. It grew almost immediately into a revolution of processes and behaviors with intent to take its toll on societal norms. As Benjamin noted, it was the “disruption of lived experience.” (Hertz, 2010, p. 90)

A crucial absence in defining revolution is a time criteria. Revolutions are not bound by deadlines. Nor are they fully required to take effect in obvious ways. This is true in the case of Surrealism which “does not take immediate effect upon us and subvert our view of the world – but rather enjoys working slowly upon us, like a slow poison.” (Brown, 2009) This study assumes it may be possible (and purposeful) for a revolution to occur in more subtle manners, penetrating mainstream society - often unnoticed – and
turning it. In this process, the culture morphs according to the revolutionary aims and what once was resistance to the mainstream becomes a key defining force of the mainstream.

The philosophical underpinnings of this study is a postmodernist stance that asserts the following: (1) all events and symbols are open to multiple (perhaps infinite) interpretations, (2) relationships between signifiers and the signified are fluid and mutable, (3) media facilitate appropriation and transformation of styles, (4) ideas may fall from vogue or prominence but they do not cease to exist. These assertions grow out of the postmodernist theory in Roland Barthes’s and Umberto Eco’s semiotics and Stuart Hall’s cultural studies.

Theoretical Basis

**Semiotics**

Semiotics provides the first piece of theoretical framework for this study. André Breton's 1935 lecture *Surrealist Situation of the Object* set the stage for such an approach when he quoted Hegel:

“The art object [...] lies between the sensible and the rational. It is something spiritual that seems to be material. Insofar as they address themselves to our senses or to our imagination, art and poetry deliberately create a world of shadows, of phantoms, of fictitious likenesses, and yet for all that they cannot be accused of being powerless and unable to produce anything but empty forms of reality.” (Breton, 1972, pp. 255-256)

Here, Breton spoke of the signifier (the object) and the signified (the shadows, etc.) – the
form and the meaning that combine to create signs.

Bal and Bryson established a basis for semiotics’ utility in analyzing Surrealism as a collection of artistic occurrences in their article *Semiotics and Art History*. They proposed “semiotic analysis of visual art” seeks to “investigate how works of art are intelligible to those who view them, the processes by which viewers make sense of what they see.” (Bal and Bryson, 1991, p. 184) In addition to analysis as an artistic movement, Surrealism should also be investigated as a sub-culture and social phenomenon expressed in various media forms. Umberto Eco asserted that all social phenomena “can and must be studied from a semiotic point of view.” (Lagopoulos, 2010, p. 184) Other researchers provided compelling arguments for semiotic study of consumer media and multimedia forms, as each is “interconnected with other elements of culture and can be used as an analytic tool for examining various aspects of cultural significance.” (Kuruc, 2008, p. 193; Sykes, 2009)

*Cultural Studies*

Hall's cultural studies is also an attractive option for viewing this subject as it questions power relationships and the development/acceptance of societal conventions. This theoretical frame about the *power* to make meaning is a fitting complement to semiotics – the study of *how* we make meaning. Surrealism's plight against bourgeois attitudes, distributions of power, and dominant ideologies makes it a prime subject for cultural study. (Breton and Rosemont, 1978; Dali and Parinaud, 2008) Though Surrealism was associated to varying degrees with different political ideologies – Marxism, Communism, Anarchism, etc. - they saw the movement as a banner under which those of
many aesthetic, political, and philosophical belief systems could find common ground and unite with “unshaken fidelity.” (Breton and Rosemont, 1978, p. 246) This union of stubborn artists and revolutionaries would be the only thing that could liberate art and the human condition. In other words, like Hall, the Surrealists believed in “the possibility that the powerless may be equally obstinate by resisting the dominant ideology and translating the message in a way more congenial to their own interests.” (Griffin, 2009, p. 342)

Surrealism as Rebellion, Resistance, Revolution

From the beginning, Surrealism sought the subversion of all codes by exploding – or rather, outplaying as Barthes might have stated it - the relationships between signifiers and the signified into a world of possibility that was, for the most part, unexplored by the conventional, conscious mind. (Iversen, 1989; Breton and Rosemont, 1978; Breton, 1972) Its practitioners considered themselves, their processes, and their creations as revolutionary and opposed to the constraints of petit bourgeois realism. (Breton and Rosemont, 1978; Dali and Parinaud, 2008) They lectured, wrote, designed, gathered, and created works across a variety of media to “take up arms against logic” and “baseness of Western thought.” (Breton, 1972, p. 128) As stated in the previous section, the movement did this first by approaching reality with an irrational (or perhaps “extra-rational” would be more apropos terminology), non-conformist, yet passive approach. This was strongly in connection with the process of psychic automatism (which will be addressed further later). It then grew toward more controlled, disruptive action and processes.

One of the major disruptive processes of the movement was the psychic automatism presented in Breton's definition. This process took advantage of oneiric and
delirious states (via hypnosis, sleep deprivation, dream analysis, etc.) and was an effort to bypass conscious control and pull directly from the creative unconscious. Literature regarding this method trends, first, toward only giving psychic automatism a cursory glance – even as it questions the authenticity of the method and the artists' commitment to it. (Peyre, 1964) Secondly, research on psychic automatism tends to focus more on the literary aspects of it – as did Breton in the early years. (Clancy, 1949; Peyre, 1964; Breton and Rosemont, 1978; Jenny and Trezise, 1989; Szekely, 2005) This approach, while certainly understandable as choice in the realm of literary analysis, is insufficient to the aim of greater awareness of the complex and various sign systems of the movement, particularly as regards this disruptive process. It downplays the importance of nonverbal and multimedia signs in this aspect of the movement and perpetuates “the habit to see in verbal communication the main or even the only form of the communicative contact and to equate the picture text with the verbal one.” (Priimagi, 2002, p. 739)

The other major standout, revolutionary approach of the movement was Salvador Dali's paranoiac-critical method. Dali's method grew out of dissatisfaction with psychic automatism and its passivity. Paranoiac-criticism involved thrusting himself into a simulated paranoid state then applying critical intelligence to record and concretize the visions of his paranoia. The difference between psychic automatism and the paranoiac-critical method was the latter married rapidly experienced hallucinatory states and lucid states, or extra-rational and rational. (Dali and Parinaud, 2008; Durzoi, 1997) Rather than bypassing, it relied upon an element of conscious control.

There currently exists a major deficit of critical scholarly study regarding
paranoiac-critical method. Finkelstein (1975) did offer a study devoted solely to Dali's method, and this work highlights the artist's loose theory and sense of play encouraging unconventional or alternative signifier-signified relationships. In his article, Finklestein noted “the power of suggestion of the hidden factor [...] is a necessary element in the communication of the interpretative structure arrived at in any paranoiac-critical activity.” (p. 70) Here he presented reference to Dali's disruption of codes and placing upon signifiers multiple simultaneous responsibilities.

Trends present in analysis of the previously mentioned revolutionary processes of the movement also persist in analyzing the resistant propensities of the movement as a whole. As an example of the bias toward the verbal, Peyre, while acknowledging that Surrealism was not purely a literary or philosophical phenomenon stated the movement “concentrated on three targets which we may define as ethics and religion, the social and political realm, and literary conventions.” (1949, p. 26) From this we must assume the movement's other modes of expressing resistance are to 1) fall under the headings of ethics/religion or social/political, or 2) be treated as secondary to the literary and considered only in relation to this category. Again, this trend succumbs to diminishing the potency of visual signs and commits a disservice to the interdependent relationship of visual and verbal sign systems. (Priimagi, 2002; Somov, 2010)

The preceding information is important as it points to a lack of analysis – particularly through the lens of semiotics – of the crucial rebellious threads of Surrealism. There is not a sufficient body of work directly addressing signs and myths of this aspect of the movement or the movement's role in perpetuating and/or deconstructing myths in
its pursuit of revolution. The literature also fails to present a balanced view of the relationship between verbal and nonverbal elements of sign systems. Without more exploration of the resistance facet and how it performed and changed, it is presumptuous to announce Surrealism's demise.

Surrealism as Fashionable and Appropriated

The argument may be made that even in its rebellion and anti-capitalist visions, Surrealism possessed the raw materials to propel it into mass culture acceptance as well as commercialism. Literature strongly supports the assumptions the movement, its works, and its people were about the magic and fantastic, dreams, the impossible, the absurd, the unexpected, contradiction, humor, well-exercised imagination, inspiration, creation and re-creation, combination, unification, liberation, and transformation. (Clancy, 1949; Man Ray, 1963; Breton, 1972, Breton and Rosemont, 1978; Powers, 2001; Crawforth, 2004; Conekin, 2007; Wood, 2007; Sylvester, 2009; Dali and Parinaud, 2008; Brown, 2009)

With so many attributes and definitions, it had something to appeal to everyone – even those unaware they were appreciating or consuming Surrealism.

Ghislaine Wood, curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition Surreal Things: Surrealism and Design, draws attention to the fact that it was a mutual crossing of boundaries between “official” Surrealists (if such persons ever existed) and those outside of Surrealism (again, if such persons existed). (Wood, 2007) The literature tends to corroborate this claim. It shows that, Man Ray, Meret Oppenheim, Rene Magritte, Joan Miro, and many other Surrealists across the world had forays into and/or enduring relationships with photography (including fashion photography), interior and fashion
design, film, and advertising. Even Breton engaged in commercial activities designing gallery exhibitions. In the fashion world, designers Elsa Schiaparelli and Coco Chanel had close ties with the movement. In magazines *Time* and *Vogue* were two magazines that developed relationships with the Surrealists, featuring the artists and their works. Dali had by the end of the 1930's become perhaps the biggest celebrity waving the banner of Surrealism (even after expulsion from the movement!). In several realms – gallery shows, magazines, television, interior and fashion design, film work, and stage productions - he fed a seemingly insatiable hunger for Surrealist commodities and the spectacle of his personality.

Conversely, the literature also tends to point back to the conflict between these commercial actions and Surrealism as a radical, non-conformist, anti-capitalist vector. (Clancy, 1949; Bradley, 1997; Wood, 2007; Breton, 1972; Breton and Rosemont, 1978) In particular, research portrays Dali as both the gospel spreading deity and the money hungry anti-Christ of Surrealism. Franklin Rosemont (founder of the Chicago Surrealist Group) states Dali's efforts capitalized on his reputation in America and the name of Surrealism. He argues Dali “carefully extracted the revolutionary essence” while “diluting and debasing its fundamental positions.” (Breton and Rosemont, 1978, book 1, p. 93) These commercial actions on the part of Dali and all the others were, according to one line of thought, violative to Surrealism. However, Breton himself wrote in 1953 – roughly two decades after the integration into popular culture began – that Surrealism sought “to assimilate all forms” as well as “embrace all the structures of the world, manifested or not.” (Breton, 1972, p. 304)
A third trend in the literature regarding the movement's shift into mass culture is to focus on Surrealism's intrinsic and transformational relationship with cinema. This trend acknowledges two connections:

1. Between film creation and the Surrealist desire to meld reality and the fantastic to the point where they are indistinguishable, and

2. Between Surrealism's pursuit of alternative consciousness(es) and the oneiric (or dream-like) qualities of a spectator's film experience.

(Rascaroli, 2002; Richardson, 2006)

Furthering these ideas from a rather contemporary perspective (given the technology addressed), Brown argued that digital cinema with its mixture of oneiric/real and temporal/spatial and employment of photorealistic effects, “challenges the spectator's conscious” and performs subversively. (2009, p. 28) He goes so far as to say potential for Surrealism is inherent to cinema. A final important mark of current research is pointing to semiotic analysis as relates to film theory – particularly psychoanalytical analysis of oneiric metaphor in film.

This section is relevant to the research questions as it establishes the plurality of the movement further (Surrealism was never just one thing). It also explores the popularity of Surrealism – in conflict and in conjunction with the revolutionary strains – and its global dissemination. This sets a foundation for exploring the movement as a mass communication and multimedia phenomenon as well as a foundation for arguing the transition into popular culture was not an act of murder. Via the literature regarding film it also establishes a basis for looking at signification in that medium. What is lacking is
study building upon these foundations to establish that Surrealism is not something purely past or distant but is something very present for us – right now.

**Summary of Gaps in Literature**

Given Surrealism’s 80-plus year history (or 90-plus if we considered the years before its formal announcement and as it grew up from another movement), the body of work on it has been relatively small. It has been even smaller if we narrowed focus to explicit investigation of sign systems and production of meaning in the movement. What was missing was akin to a crucial understanding of anatomical function of a body. Without such an understanding, we did not have a foundation to declare a body dead – not when we were unaware of how to look for signs of life.

Semiotic investigation served well to help fill in that gap and provide a diagnosis. Multimedia analysis – specifically, film analysis - was an attractive option for this study because it considered multiple types of sign systems converging and coinciding. This allowed for a development of a diagnosis that took into account the interconnected nature of cultural signs. Additionally, analysis of several artifacts was necessary to show this interconnectedness across texts and prove any Surrealist presence was not anomalous but rather commonplace.

**Research Questions**

Based on the literature reviewed and gaps perceived and taking into consideration the postmodernist philosophical stance and semiotic framework for analysis, the following research questions were posed for this study:

**RQ1**: Is Surrealism an on-going mass-media phenomenon?
RQ2: Can semiotic analysis of modern popular film provide evidence to support a claim that Surrealism is still alive in contemporary culture?

It was hypothesized that data collected would confirm the present activity of Surrealism within mass media and the survival of it in contemporary culture. In the next chapter I will discuss methodology used to answer these questions.
Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

Scope

The scope of this study was to examine the presence of Surrealism in contemporary Western culture and mass media. It was limited to the study of recent popular films. Other forms of broadcast/electronic media and print media could have also provided compelling evidence of Surrealism's modernity; however, these media were not included in the study for practical reasons. The films analyzed were: *Toy Story 3*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Iron Man 2*.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Surrealism was viewed as a banner under which people of different styles, backgrounds, and belief systems could unite. It was always more than one thing. With that in mind, it was necessary to analyze multiple films to show diverse perspectives while simultaneously uniting the underlying messages of different production teams, casts and crews, and studios represented by the works. However, it would have been impossible to acquire every artifact regarding Surrealism and contemporary mass communication. Therefore it was necessary to establish practical limitations for data collection and evaluation. In general, film was chosen as the medium for analysis because it is a multimedia format – it contains multiple modes of coding in the forms of visual, verbal, and audio. The selection of these three films specifically was based on modernity, popularity, and accessibility to artifacts. Each of these films had American cinema runs beginning in 2010, the most recent full calendar year. This satisfied criteria of being modern. Next, these films were the top three grossing films (domestic and worldwide) of that year. This met the popularity criteria. Finally, films
were selected based on accessibility to the text. Each of these films was available on home video at the time of the study and therefore repeatedly accessible to the researcher.

The study was divided into three case studies – one devoted to each film. Each study explored historical/political/social context of the signs, sign systems, major rhetorical tropes, and significance. The studies each concluded with a discussion of if/how Surrealism is represented within the respective film. This will, I hope, provide insight regarding the research questions in the previous chapter.

Methodology

Multiple methods of textual research were used in this study. Specifically, content analysis, critical/cultural criticism, and semiotic analysis were approaches utilized. Content analysis was performed to “learn something about message content and about those who produce the messages.” (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, and Peele, 2010, p. 217) This was useful in gaining a necessary grasp on recurring themes, signs, and sources within Surrealist art, media, and thought. It also helped lay a foundation for the following methods of research. Critical/cultural criticism was used in this research to “interpret and to evaluate communication events” of Surrealism and search for any significant Surrealist influence in modern American mass communication. (Rubin et al., 2010, p. 215) Finally, semiotic analysis was used because this approach fit with the semiotic theory used as a framework for this study. As previously mentioned, this approach provided a means to understand how meaning is carried within sign systems and how dominant values and hierarchies are reinforced or subverted. Semiotic analysis also allowed for the exposure of “latent content of a film” and investigation of certain aspects of film and the cinematic
apparatus.” (Rascaroli, 2002, par. 3)

The process by which critical/cultural and semiotic analysis took place was as follows:

1. Established each film to be decoded
2. Mapped out the overall historical/cultural/political context in which the signs appeared and the film was made
3. Determined what major signs were and what/how they mean via analysis of setting, plot, characters, dialogue, archetypes, symbols, etc.
4. Addressed the following questions about master rhetorical tropes to guide the analysis:
   - Are there Surrealist metaphors in the film?
   - Are there Surrealist metonymies in the film?
   - Are there Surrealist synecdoches in the film?
   - Is there Surrealist irony in the film?
5. Analyzed the film's current social significance
6. Discussed how the film represented Surrealism

The data to answer questions 3-6 was gathered via watching the films on DVD format. Audio was rendered through a Logitech G35 headset with Dolby 7.1 Surround Sound technology. This technology and hardware was used due to quality of picture provided, translation of the audio mix, accessibility to the researcher, and overall suitability for the study.
Chapter 4: The Study

I. Toy Story 3

Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

*Toy Story 3* was the sequel to 1995 film *Toy Story* and 2000 film *Toy Story 2*. Created by Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios, it followed the path of all Pixar films beginning with the original *Toy Story* in that each film produced by the studio has been successful both critically and commercially. In a 168 day run in theaters, the film grossed $415,004,880 domestically and $648,166,729 in foreign markets for a worldwide gross of $1,063,171,609. (“Toy Story 3”, 2011) It became one of only seven films in history to surpass a billion dollar worldwide gross.

The film went into pre-production in May 2006 and began production 2007. The period of 2006-2007 was an era of key technological advancements in consumer electronics. In December 2006 Nintendo introduced its Wii gaming system. This console brought “three-dimensional gestural and optical technologies” and a “user-friendly, participatory aesthetic” to home gaming. (Paley, 2009, p. 110) Its main controller, the Wiimote was a “hand-held wand [that] allows for a more physically active, intuitive ‘feel’ to video game experiences than with most traditional keypad controllers.” (p. 110) The Wiimote allowed players at bat in a baseball game, for example, to swing at a pitch rather than merely press combinations of buttons on a controller. Additionally, a Wii player could create an avatar – known as a “Mii” - designed to their own specifications to represent them within the Wii universe. These innovations allowed the player to become more involved in the visuals in this other reality. Within the world of home video gaming,
the Wii interface narrowed the gap between real and virtual experiences.

The next month, Apple, Inc. introduced its first iPhone in January 2007; it went on the market later that year. This multimedia-enabled smartphone shifted mobile phones further into computer and Internet technology with its browsing capabilities, programs (such as its iTunes media player), apps store, and 8-GB drive that could store thousands of files. The iPhone also boasted its multi-touch technology that understood complex gestures of the fingers. (Grossman, 2007) Software and hardware of the phone allowed for an experience combining aural, visual, and haptic in new ways and making the phone experience more engaging to the users' senses.

Another important cultural event of the period was the release of the final book in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, released in July 2007, was the seventh book of Rowling's wildly popular series. The books' successes lie in part in the blend of real and fantastic elements (including wizards, magical creatures, and superhuman powers) to create “intensely absorbing” stories. (Knapp, 2003, p. 80) Readers were so engaged by the series they lined up outside stores awaiting midnight launches of the books. On the day of the Deathly Hallows release, 8.3 million copies were sold in the U.S. contributing to a world total of over 15 million copies. The book set (and still holds) a Guinness World record for fastest selling book of fiction in 24 hours for its U.S. sales. It contributed to the entire Harry Potter series’ worldwide sales of over 400 million copies. The level of engagement for fans of the series extended beyond buying and reading books, however. It grew into Internet communities, conventions, fans dressing as the characters, live action role playing (including a real sport based on the
fictional, magical sport Quidditch), musical movement known as Wizard rock, and, of course, the lucrative Harry Potter film franchise. In multiple ways the fans of Harry Potter brought the series further off the pages and into their own visual, audio, and overall realities.

A major cultural and political development for the United States 2007 was the burst of the housing bubble in October. The previous year housing prices peaked and began to decline. (Knox, 2006) Many homeowners across the nation found themselves in a state of negative equity where they owed more on their mortgages than the houses were worth. The burst of the housing bubble led to a significant amount of home foreclosures. By March 2007, this caused a collapse of the subprime mortgage industry, which in turn contributed, to more economic decline that led to the 2008 economic crisis.

In addition to these difficulties, the country was in the midst of two wars after invading Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. War was prominent in the minds of Americans in the run-up to the 2006-midterm elections. In August that year 35 percent of adults polled by CNN favored the war while 61 percent said they opposed it. A poll conducted by The New York Times and CBS News days before the election found the war was the most important issue affecting people's votes. The poll also found just 29 percent of Americans approved the administration's handling of the war. The image of the Bush administration, its party (Republican), and attitudes about the war contributed to an overall victory for the Democratic Party. The Democrats gained control of the House of Representatives, a majority of state governorships, and tied with Republicans 49-49 for seats in the Senate. In polls and at the ballots, voters made known their dissatisfaction
with reality as it was.

Overall, this context highlighted a trend toward immersion in virtual or alternative realities that did not boast of neatly defined borders between themselves and reality. Additionally, this information showed significant levels of disapproval with the status quo. The lean toward more immersive experiences – particularly appealing to touch, sight, and sound - may have been an effort to cope with that undesirable reality. It may have been a sort of paranoiac critical activity of thrusting oneself into a state beyond rational, applying critical interpretation to these experiences, and recreating the world so “delirium actually becomes reality.” (Dali and Parinaud, 2008, p. 151)

Major Signs

*Toy Story,* was first feature length film made entirely with computer-generated imaging. Its sequel, *Toy Story 2,* was the “first film in history to be entirely created, mastered, and exhibited, digitally.” (Pixar, 2011) Following the franchise's path of setting firsts, *Toy Story 3* was the first film of any genre to have original 7.1 audio in theaters. This technology uses seven speakers and a sub-woofer rather than the previous 5.1 setup of five speakers and a subwoofer. The additional two speakers allow for more precise direction of sound. Dolby Laboratories' 7.1 sound system for theaters was developed at the urging of Pixar Studios who desired a more immersive sound experience for their films. While films had been frequently remixed to 7.1 audio for Blu-ray releases, none before had been originally released in a 7.1 mix for theaters. In seeking and developing this technology, the goals of the companies were creating a “rain of sound” and “putting the viewer in the middle of the action.” (Flinn, 2010)
Toy Story 3 as it exists would not have been a reality without the innovative technologies behind it. The first of these was Pixar’s PhotoRealistic RenderMan technology that animators employed to create the visual aspects of the film. Pixar bills RenderMan as “the gold standard for the VFX [visual effects] industry” that “has been used on every Visual Effects Academy Award Winner of the past 15 years.” (Pixar, 2011) RenderMan combines geometric algorithms, photography techniques, and art theory to create realistic, detailed animations. Since 1984, this rendering tool has been used to add special effects or create whole characters and scenes – or whole films, as is the case of the Toy Story movies.

The goal in using these technologies was not to draw attention to the tools but rather create a more engrossing experience that kept audiences involved in the story. In an interview John Lasseter stated “at the core [of Pixar movies], it’s gotta be about the growth of the main character, and how he changes.” (John Lasseter, 2007) The applications of the audio and visual technologies helped create a sense of simultaneous fantasy and reality that allowed the audience to maintain focus on the development of characters and stay in the action. The blending of extra-real stimuli applying to real senses helped keep the audience within the Toy Story world. With that in mind, audio and visual sign systems were vital to the film in pioneering ways. Thus these were systems explored for Surrealist tropes. In particular, the sequence chosen for analysis was in the latter portion of the film. This sequence began with most of the main toy characters - Buzz Lightyear, Woody, Jessie, Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head, Bullseye, Hamm, Slinky Dog, Rex, the Squeeze toy aliens, and the antagonist Lots-O’-Huggin’ Bear - in the back of a
garbage truck entering Tri-County Landfill.

Surrealist Tropes

As the garbage truck passed through the landfill entrance, the sound began faint then quickly grew louder as the truck came into full view. That was where its sound effects peaked in intensity. While the truck traveled away from the viewer, its sound faded. The sound also passed gradually from focus on left audio channels to right channels, indicating the slightly right-slanted path the truck traveled. Next the truck emptied its contents— including the toys — into the landfill. The sound of this action was scattered across channels. This represented the various items banging against each other and impacting the ground with different intensities at different locations.

Shortly after the toys were dumped from the truck, bulldozers approached from different direction, shoving the refuse on the ground (including the toys) toward a conveyor belt. As the first bulldozer approached the center of the scene and passed in front of toys from the left, its sound morphed from a low, hollow roar to a louder, deep rumbling sound. It also moved from left channels to right channels. In the same moment that bulldozer passed, a second one quickly approached the toys from behind and pushed them and other garbage forward. The loud, deep rumbling sound was more immediate and lies across all audio channels. This represented the proximity of the machine and its imminent danger to the toys.

The toys (all but the alien trio who wandered away) were not able to escape the bulldozer's path and were shoved onto a conveyor belt filled with trash. They soon noticed a shredder down the line of the conveyor belt. Slinky Dog's metallic coils had
caused him to be attracted to a magnetic belt hanging above the conveyor belt and out of reach of the shredder. The toys quickly scrambled for metal items to hold onto as they were pulled to the magnet. Buzz grabbed a lunch box. The sound whooshed and clanked up the right channels. Woody grabbed a doorknob. It dinged lightly in left and right channels as it hit the magnet. Jessie grabbed a belt buckle that landed with a thick metallic smack – concentrated mainly in the right channels - against the magnet. Hamm climbed into a pot that hit with a hollow clink in mostly the left channels. On it went with different metal sounds moving across the channels until all the toys were pulled up from the danger of the shredder. However, they would soon face more danger.

On the other side of the shredder, the toys jumped down back onto the conveyor belt. But the end of the line was a massive incinerator. The sound rumbled low and loud with intermittent in waves across the channels. Crackles were interspersed throughout the rumbling noise. Moments of combustion were represented by hollow whooshing sounds that intensified and faded almost in the same instant. As the toys fell toward the fire, these sounds remained in all channels while varying in intensity across the channels. This represented the pulsing of the fire and the ever-present high levels danger and anxiety of the scene.

The entire soundscape was an aural metaphor. There was no garbage truck traveling, no trash and toys falling into a landfill. Never did a bulldozer rumble by pushing trashed items. No metal objects were attracted to the pull of a magnet. No fire roared and threatened. These sounds were signifiers intended to evoke sensations of experience. Their purpose was to excite the imagination of the viewer to conjure up
experiences from past contexts. The viewer heard the light clink of metal hitting another metallic object and connected that to a past experience with the sound of a fork. The viewer heard the moderately heavier and deeper sound of metal impacting metal and conjured up memories of pots and pans. The sounds of many different objects of different textures seemingly falling across audio channels caused the audience to connect that sensation with a past experience. Perhaps they recalled the sounds of their trashcans being emptied at pick up or the bouncing noises of garbage from a ripped bag spilling onto the floor. The sounds signified whatever memories each viewer connected to them. In that sense, each sound block contained countless connotations in play simultaneously. Each was important as it helped pull the audience into the story and hold them captivated. Each helped them connect to the characters' journeys – even into a fire.

The toys frantically tried to climb away from the fire, but soon realized it was to no avail. In resignation to their fate, they joined hands and waited to be burned. As they closed their eyes and prepared for the end, a bright light suddenly shone from above. In that light was a five-pronged object. The number five is a significant number in various religions. (Holweck, 1912; Hooker, 1999; Pennington, 2009; Sikh Dharma International, 2011; Flesher, 1997) In Christianity, Jesus Christ had five piercing wounds at his crucifixion. In Judaism, The Torah consists of five holy books. In Islam there are five pillars of the faith and practitioners pray to Allah five times a day. In Sikhism there are five sacred symbols. In various Buddhist traditions the number five is important as it refers to the five elements, five precepts, five states of existence, etc. Thus the five-pronged figure emerging from a light above, breaking focus from the toys' impending
doom, was a visual metonymy for divinity, salvation. Later, it was revealed the trios of Squeeze toy aliens (not seen since wandering off before the bulldozers) were responsible for this salvation. The striking visual difference between the aliens and the rest of the toys was the aliens possessed three eyes. In some mystical/spiritual traditions the third eye represents enlightenment and higher consciousness. The aliens also had three fingers on each hand, making three a recurring theme. Three is important in several religious traditions – such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Mahayana Buddhism - that believe in holy trinities or triple deities. All of these elements of repeated three combined to make the aliens a metaphor for liberation via broken norms.

The five-pronged object was actually a mechanical claw. The realistic and detailed lighting of the animation helped to reveal yet obscure what the claw was to briefly build a new layer of suspense. Added to wondering if the toys would escape the fire was the question of what the object in the light was. Yet, while wondering, the audience had already been implanted with the sense this object was good because of the divine metonymy. As it was good, it was desired. Therefore the claw before the reveal was also ironic (obscured by the light) and a metaphor for desire.

The Surrealists treasured desire and enjoyed playing with images and expressions of it. Breton referred to “the omnipotence of desire, which has remained, since the beginning, surrealism's sole act of faith.” (Breton and Rosemont, 1972, book 2, p. 183) Luis Buñuel co-wrote and directed a Surrealist film titled That Obscure Object of Desire about an aging man's frustrated desires. Several of Dali's paintings – Invisible Sleeping Woman, The Dream Approaches, and Soft Self-Portrait with Fried Bacon, for example –
explored themes of desire. The tension in the image of the claw, unknown but yearned for, hanging above toys come to life would have fit well within the Surrealist canon.

The claw after it emerged from the light and descended to pick up the toys would have also fit well in that canon. The scene was rendered with such detailed coloring, shading, and attention to light; the claw appeared to be an authentic piece of machinery captured on film. Just as Rene Magritte had declared in his late 1920's painting *The Treachery of Images* that the image of a pipe was not a pipe, the Toy Story 3 animators would have had to assert, “This is not a claw.” Therefore the claw became a visual synecdoche for photorealism – painting (in this case digital painting) that appears realistic like a photograph.

**How the Film Represented Surrealism and Current Social Significance**

*Toy Story 3* represented Surrealism through the seamless blend of the real and extra-real along with the expressions of acceptable norm breaking, desire, and salvation. The creators used these techniques and the audio/visual technologies to pull the audience toward immersion in the film and the audience's own imaginations. *Toy Story 3* was not just entertainment to be watched; it was an experience in which the viewer became a part.

The film's social significance was that it drew on the setbacks, innovations, and harsh realities of its time period and challenged people to find solutions and salvation in abnormal or extra-real sources. It said it was all right to imagine and explore the neglected regions of your own inner world because there was probably something useful there. It suggested manipulation of reality using the tools of marvelous delirium. *Toy Story 3* presented the overarching ideology that we can build from our dreams and re-
create the world.
II. Alice in Wonderland (2010)

Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* was released March 5, 2010. In a 126 day run in theaters, the film grossed $334,191,110 domestically and $690,108,691 in foreign markets for a worldwide gross of $1,024,299,801. (“Alice in Wonderland”, 2011) Like *Toy Story 3*, it became one of only seven films in history to surpass a billion dollar worldwide gross.

Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* was based on Lewis Carroll's books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). Carroll lived in Victorian England and set these two books in that era. However, in adapting the literature for this film version, screenwriter Linda Woolverton chose to adjust Alice by aging her from a young girl to a teenager and pitting her against the concept of acceptable behavior for a woman of the era. Woolverton “did a lot of research on Victorian mores, on how young girls were supposed to behave, and then did exactly the opposite.” (Rohter, 2010, par. 5) Lead actress Mia Wasikowska confirmed her character to be “a different Alice” who at the start felt awkward because she “doesn't fit into the society she's a part of, and doesn't like what's expected of her.” (Salisbury, 2010, par. 12) However, as the story progressed, this updated Alice rediscovered herself and the strength to be confident in that self when she returned to her world. Despite expectations of what she could/could not and should/should not do due to her age, gender, etc., Alice's experiences in Underland taught her she could defy expectations, make her own path, and even repair the world of Underland.
While audiences first viewed Burton's film in 2010, it began production a year and a half prior in late 2008. The cultural and political climate of the time was heavily influenced by the United States' 2008 presidential election. The major candidates in this election sought to gain esteem with the American electorate by distancing themselves from the incumbent administration of Republican President George W. Bush. The administration's approval rating had dropped to 27% by September of 2008 and continued to fall. This decline was strongly tied to the financial crisis (a recession significantly rooted in the 2007 housing market correction and subprime mortgage crisis) and the government's response to it. Over the course of two terms since 2001, American's overall satisfaction with the way things were going in the nation dropped from 56% in January 2001 to 10% in December 2008. Though, both major party candidates attempted to assert their independence from the Bush administration and its policies, Democratic candidate Barack Obama was most successful in this endeavor and in the election overall. According to a Gallup poll conducted in October 2008, supporters for Obama stated they were most motivated to vote for him because he was the most likely to bring about change if elected. Additionally, specific reasons these voters mentioned as reasons for support included “his plans for dealing with the economy, the fact that he would work for the working/middle class, and his approach to health care.” (Newport, 2008)

By October 2008, 73% of Americans believed Senator Obama understood the problems American's faced in their daily lives, while only 48% believed the same of his opponent Republican Senator McCain. These perceptions coupled with the Obama campaign's slogans “Change We Can Believe In” and “Yes We Can” to portray a message
of hope and defiant optimism. The latter slogan was itself an English translation of the United Farm Workers union slogan “Si Se Puede” coined and made famous by Latino American civil rights activists Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Chavez and Huerta developed the phrase in 1972 while Chavez was committed to a 25 day fast to “protest a law that denied farm workers the right to strike and/or boycott for better working conditions.” (The Cesar E. Chavez Foundation, 2008) In the decades since “it has become a rallying cry for both farm workers and millions of Latino activists.” (United Farm Workers, 1998) The Obama campaign's adoption of the phrase sought to incorporate this grassroots, every-man-a-champion spirit. In his speech after the 2008 New Hampshire primary, candidate Obama told supporters:

The reason our campaign has always been different, the reason we began this improbable journey almost a year ago is because it's not just about what I will do as president. It is also about what you, the people who love this country, the citizens of the United States of America, can do to change it. […] Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can repair this world. Yes, we can. (Obama, 2008)

These words and messages of the campaign strove to defy the dominant attitudes (defined here as socioeconomic control and influence rather than majority agreement) that had prevailed in recent years. It strove to affirm that all Americans – regardless and inclusive of backgrounds and expectations – have the power to make changes and shape themselves and the nation.

Major Signs

Characters, their dialogue, and visual/physical properties were major signs of
Alice in Wonderland. The three major characters of the film were Alice, Mad Hatter, and the Red Queen. Alice was the first of the trio introduced. She was first seen briefly as a child recounting a strange recurring nightmare to her father. The young girl was worried and asked her father if she had gone crazy. Her father told her “I'm afraid so. You're mad, bonkers, off your head. But I'll tell you a secret – all the best people are.” (Burton, 2010) This interaction – the nurturing acceptance of abnormality – set the foundation for the restless and somewhat rebellious teenage Alice to follow. That older Alice refused to wear a corset and stockings, challenged notions of propriety, daydreamed about women wearing pants and men in dresses, and thought about supposedly impossible things. Still, she struggled to fully resist convention and expectations during a party celebrating (to her surprise) her soon-to-be engagement to Lord Hamish. Her initial response to Hamish's proposal echoed the statements and sentiments of other characters rather than Alice's true feelings: “Well... everyone expects me to. You're a Lord. My face won't last. And I don't want to end up like [she looks to her old maiden Aunt Imogen]...” (Burton, 2010) Torn between her desires and expectations, Alice did not reject Hamish but rather told him and engagement party attendees that she needed a moment. Then she ran off to follow the White Rabbit. This began the adventure and growth of the (initially reluctant) anti-establishment character.

Red Queen was the next major character encountered. She was first met in her castle screaming and questioning subjects of her court about missing tarts. Once she discovered the frog responsible she refused to listen to any of his pleas – including that he was hungry and he had a family to take care of – and yelled her oft stated command “Off
with his head!” She followed this with an order to a subject to go to the frog's house and get his children because she enjoyed tadpoles on toast. Here, the filmmakers established the cruel, oppressive, selfish tyrant who expected all to serve her every whim. While she demanded her wants and needs to be met, she had little to no respect for others' freedom, expression, or needs. She was the establishment who cares nothing for the struggle of others.

Mad Hatter was first encountered at a tea party with the March Hare and Malyumpkin the dormouse. He had been having this tea repeatedly for years in anticipation of Alice's return to Underland. Upon Alice's arrival, Hatter became excited that she had come to slay the Red Queen's monster Jabberwocky and lead to the White Queen's restoration to power. He even told Alice they had waited so long for her that Time itself became offended and stopped ticking, but all would be set right now. Though Hatter was presented as a lunatic character prone to adopting a Scottish accent when angry, raving uncontrollably, and stomping across the tea party table in enthusiasm, he was also simultaneously shown to be an extra-rational hero who made sense even when he did not make sense. In this, his support of Alice, and his opposition of the Red Queen's regime, Mad Hatter was thus a revolutionary figure much in the vein of Surrealism.

All three characters came together for the first time in one scene roughly halfway through the movie. Alice – who had eaten a pastry that caused her to grow and led the Red Queen to believe she was a giant named Um from the land of Umbrage – was sitting in the throne room with the Red Queen. Mad Hatter had been taken prisoner. He was brought before the queen to be questioned on the whereabouts of Alice so the queen
might capture Alice and prevent her from slaying the Jabberwocky. It is primarily this scene that was examined in the next section for Surrealist tropes.

Surrealist Tropes

The Red Queen's oversized head led to characters of the resistance often referred to her using the synecdoche “The Bloody Big Head.” This label was also a metonymy in two ways. First, “bloody” is an intensifier meaning, “damned.” But it also stood for the queen's violent and destructive traits. She literally called for bloodshed whenever she shouted “Off with his head!” Second, “Big Head” was meant in reference to the physical properties of her head. But the term also served as a metonymy for her exaggerated sense of self-importance. As such, the Queen's head represented violence and oppression.

The Red Queen invited Alice to join her because, having an over-sized head herself, she identified with Um's (Alice's) large dimensions. Alice's giant size while at the castle was a metaphor for covert subversion. It was also ironic. The viewer expectations that Alice's size would cause her to stand out were defied; it actually allowed her to blend in that environment. This largeness was but one of the forms Alice took on in the film (she transformed to and from her normal size, giant size, and miniature size several times), and in this case it served to get her into the court of the enemy and closer to the resources she needed to accomplish her goal. Adopting her size was an act of assimilation – even if accidental - that led to her infiltrating and eventually overthrowing the Red Queen.

Prior to the Hatter's entrance in the castle, the Queen's right hand man and love
interest Stayne requested the name of the Queen's guest. When the Red Queen replied “Um,” Stayne took this to mean the Queen had forgotten the name. “Um” is traditionally disfluency, filler for the unknown or forgotten, and it served that purpose as Alice uttered it while hesitating a response. However, in that instance “Um” also served a metonymy for Alice's hidden identity in two ways. Her true name was unknown to the villains, but also Alice had not yet fully rediscovered her true self and strength because she had not fully freed herself from the restrictions of conventional logic and expectations.

Hatter entered this scene bound in chains as a prisoner of the Red Queen. However, he was able to stroke her ego and pique her interest by suggesting he would like to hat her – that is, design and provide hats for her. He appealed to her big head in multiple senses of the phrase. Red Queen then commanded Stayne to free Hatter’s hands because “How can he work if his hands are bound?” (Burton, 2010) Hatter had seduced his way to free hands. In this scene Hatter served as a synecdoche (part referring to a whole in this instance) for art operating within restrictive or oppressive systems. He first came bound and guarded, only able to move as allowed. Following his desire for freedom, he used appeals to the Red Queen's desires (for attention, objects, praises, etc.) to obtain a greater range of motion to operate, more room to create and influence. As such, he also served as a metaphor for desire unbound. This liberation of desire is a key concept of Surrealism as Breton wrote:

> Human desires seem to me the medium through which nature generally makes itself known to man, affecting him relation to what is (and at the same time, to what is not), and through which it expresses itself spontaneously to him as the
fully formed imperative, encompassing all beings, real or potential, at the same time. (Mundy, 2001, p. 16)

Hatter unbound, as well as giant Alice, also paralleled the irony of Surrealism's relationship with the mainstream and commercialism. Though opposed to the Red Queen's regime, Alice and Hatter had to operate with and within the incumbent system, adjusting to and being accepted by it at points to meet their revolutionary goals. So to, Surrealism had to accommodate and be accommodated by the bourgeois, capitalist system to which it was opposed in order to grow and still be a vital force. It had to weave itself throughout that system to continue its revolutionary efforts.

Hatter's madness developed from poisonous exposure to mercury in the hat-making profession. The mercury not only affected the character's mind but also his physical properties as it changed his hair, eyes, skin, etc. His hair was bright orange, his eyes were lime green, and his skin was pale, powdery white. His attire also displayed the tools of his trade with thimbles, bits of fabric, and measuring tape scattered about his person. Hatter's physical and psychological appearance is a metaphor for being consumed and transformed by one's passion. His passion had literally made him mad. However, the storyline always allowed for a sense of connection to and sympathy for Hatter (such as when he saved the White Queen while witnessing the destruction of his village by the Red Queen's forces). Thus, Hatter was also a metaphor for self-acceptance. In feeling connection to the character Mad Hatter, the audience had to feel a connection to their own madness and eccentricities. In wishing for Hatter (as well as his allies) to be freed and emerge ultimately triumphant, the audience had to embrace their madness and wish for it
to be free and shine victorious.

How the Film Represented Surrealism and Current Social Significance

Surrealism was represented in the film as it offered characters and scenarios of acceptable, even mandatory, madness and rebellion. Red Queen was presented as force of evil against which all good characters must stand. She was the exploitative private owner (capitalist) of everything she set her mind on and saw fit to claim. The rebellion existed because she had to be thwarted. The revolution had to come to pass because she needed to be replaced with a better alternative (The White Queen). Thus, Underland and the film audience were given revolutionary figures such as the Mad Hatter, Alice, and friends. Though he was consistently insane and often nonsensical, Hatter was always presented as a likable and admirable character that valued standing up for his beliefs, resisting the status quo and tyrannical forces, and being an agent of positive change. His insanity was, as the Surrealist's approaches were/are, extra-rational yet purposive. He exploded the myth of madness as a negative trait. Finally, Alice - in growing to embrace the impossible and the harmonious meshing of the fantastic with realistic - became a more confident and capable character. Because of her rebellious propensities, she not only liberated herself but all of Underland in this process.

The social significance of this film was that it encouraged inversion of norms and reality that serve as impediments to progress. It championed nonconformity and acts of subversion in the service of liberation. It suggested infiltration as a viable path to revolution. It called each person – characters in the film and the movie audience – to accept that it is often crucial to diverge from the prescribed path in order to forge a higher
path. The updated Alice character meshed with the spirit of the time period during which
the movie was in production. In their own way, Alice and the resistant denizens of
Wonderland experienced realizations of “Yes We Can.” The Surrealists wrote “the
imagination must escape from all constraint and must under no pretext allow itself be
placed under bonds.” (Breton and Rosemont, 1978, book 2, p. 245) With this in
consideration and given the preceding examples, the overarching ideology of Burton’s
Alice in Wonderland was this: Resistance is necessary. Whatever the methods or
adjustments are, resistance is necessary for true freedom.
III. Iron Man 2

Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

Iron Man 2 was the sequel to 2008 blockbuster film Iron Man that grossed $585 million. Production on the second film began April 5, 2009, and it was released May 7, 2010. In a 105-day run in theaters, Iron Man 2 grossed $312,433,331 domestically and $309,623,643 in foreign markets for a worldwide gross of $622,056,974. (“Iron Man 2”, 2010)

The Iron Man movies were based on Marvel Comics' Iron Man comic series. The main character Tony Stark was first introduced in the comic Tales of Suspense #39 in 1963. He then continued in the Marvel universe, particularly in the Iron Man series. Stark was characterized as an engineering and science prodigy (he earned two master's degrees before the age of 20), a wealthy playboy, and a man fraught with conflict. He used his vast intellect in his company Stark Industries to develop defense tools and weapons but later abandoned this focus due to guilt about his creations' impact on innocent people. Across the Tony Stark/Iron Man time line, the character has shifted from being a capitalistic/anti-communist of the Cold War Era to a warrior against terrorism and corporate crime in the present day.

Though the social and political focuses of the character and story lines have changed throughout Iron Man's history, all incarnations have involved themes of technology and national defense. Such motifs are par for the course in comics. As Hogan noted in his study of comics as a symbolic environment, “the relationship between humanity and technology is a dominant theme” of the comics. (2009, p. 201) Hogan's
observation proved to be true in Iron Man. Tony Stark was shown as a man of genius level intellect who used his intelligence toward a variety of technological developments, most notably munitions and weapons. His relationship with technology became further complicated after an attack left shrapnel embedded in his chest, threatening his life. He had to invent a method of attracting the shrapnel away from his heart to keep himself alive. This led him to develop the technology that ultimately became the Iron Man suit.

Just as the comics and 2008 film adaption did, Iron Man 2 took on these themes when the film went into production on April 2009. Principal photography wrapped 71 days later in July, keeping the production and much of post-production of Iron Man within the year 2009. Some key pieces of cultural and political landscape of the time period included a new American President, a continuing economic recession, a viral pandemic, and the death of a cultural icon.

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th President of the United States. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Obama campaigned on a message of change, hope, and re-imagining/redistributing power. This attitude was a response not only to the dreams of the nation but also to the struggles it had to endure. In his inaugural address, President Obama enumerated some of the challenges he and the nation had to face:

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new
age. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly, our schools fail too many -- and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

(Obama, 2009, par. 5)

These assessments were partly based on his taking office in the midst of a recession that had been sparked by the economic meltdown of 2006-2007. Not only was the recession detrimental to America but to other countries as well as they suffered financial imbalance and economic downturn of the global economy. The picture of the nation – and world - in crisis was perhaps reminiscent of Breton's view of the world in 1938 when he wrote that artists saw “all avenues of communication choked with the debris of capitalist collapse.” (Breton and Rosemont, 1978, book 2, p. 246)

A challenge the President could not foresee but one that would also affect the nation and global community was the outbreak of a new strain of influenza virus. In April 2009, the H1N1 flu virus was first detected in America. The virus was “a unique combination of influenza virus genes never previously identified in either animals or people,” and as such most people – especially young children and infants - had little to no immunity to the strain. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010) In July 2009, the World Health Organization declared H1N1 to be a global pandemic, and over 70 countries had reported cases of the infection. In September that year, the Center for Disease Control reported 477 H1N1-related deaths from April to August. The virus would go on to cause thousands of deaths worldwide.

In addition to economic problems and the pandemic, the year also saw the loss of
one of the most popular and successful entertainers in the world. On July 15, 2009, Michael Jackson died. Jackson – nicknamed the “King of Pop” - had sung, danced, and entertained for over four decades. He received numerous awards, his album *Thriller* was (and is) the best-selling album of all time, and his total record sales exceeded 750 million. Over his career he amassed a large fan base spanning the globe. After the initial report of his death, news spread quickly via the Internet, social networking sites, television, text messages, and other media. Within an hour of the star being pronounced dead, Internet sites became inundated with queries about Michael Jackson. This flood of searches caused several sites to slow or even crash. Fans also scrambled to websites and retailers to buy Jackson's music. Though the music industry suffered from album sales that had “plunged 52% in a decade,” in the nine months following his death, Sony Corp. sold 31 million of Michael Jackson's albums. (Smith, 2010)

The year during which *Iron Man 2* was created was, as the President stated, a time of crisis. Americans and world citizens sought ways to un-choke the paths of communication and solve their dilemmas. Perhaps choosing to be lost in the music and memories of a beloved entertainer, creating a science fiction film about a comic book superhero, or jumping into any engrossing diversion helped people soothe the aches of sickness and struggle and find answers. Perhaps within these distractions and the moments of lucidity around them, people saw signs that were revelations of, as Dali would say, “the secrets of the world.” (Dali and Parinaud, 2008, p. 160)

**Major Signs**

Given the relationship between technology and comics – *Iron Man*, in specific – it
is no surprise the creators of *Iron Man 2* made the movie laden with technology as signs. The most prominent of these was the Iron Man suit. The suit, as previously mentioned was developed by Tony Stark (in the first *Iron Man* movie) as a means to keep him alive. Since the introduction of his creation, Tony used the suit to escape from terrorist captors, return and destroy that terrorist group, and thwart a corporate enemy who was attempting to take over Stark Industries and kill Tony. After these events, Tony briefly attempted to hide his superhero identity from the world before announcing in a press conference “I am Iron Man.” (Favreau and Feige, 2010) That is where the first movie ended and also where *Iron Man 2* began. The second movie picked up the story showing the aftermath of Tony's revelation as well as continuing to explore the relationships of Tony/Iron Man and humanity/technology. Since the first movie, Tony had used his suit as a nuclear deterrent and a means of fostering world peace. Due to the power of the suit he also spawned a technological lust both in America and abroad. The Senate Armed Services Committee sought to get the suit turned over to the government. (Tony refused.) Forces in other countries tried, unsuccessfully, to reproduce the Iron Man suit. Tied to both of these groups, a new corporate rival also emerged in the form of Justin Hammer. This new antagonist was CEO of Hammer Industries. Hammer had also made unsuccessful efforts to copy the Iron Man technology. Additionally, he was the primary weapons contractor for the Department of Defense. As he held those contracts, the turnover of Iron Man technology to the U.S. government would have amounted to giving Hammer access and power over Iron Man.

The villain character Ivan Vanko first introduced major new technology to the
movie. Ivan was the son of Anton Vanko, a former partner of Tony's father Howard Stark. Though Anton and Howard had worked together on the original arc reactor (the device Tony used as a basis to design the miniature arc reactor that kept him alive), ideological differences caused a permanent rift in the partnership. The elder Stark saw the technology as “a stepping stone to something greater” and an early aspect of “an energy race that was going to dwarf the arms race.” (Favreau and Feige, 2010) Anton Vanko, however saw their technology as a means to wealth. This led to Howard having Anton deported to Siberia, which in turn led to Vanko passing his hatred for Howard Stark – and Tony by association – down to his son Ivan. Thus, upon the death of his father and seeing Tony successful and flaunting technology based in part on his father's work, Ivan became enraged. Using his father's designs, Ivan created a weapon based around a miniaturized arc reactor for revenge on the Stark legacy.

Ivan Vanko used his weapon to attack Tony publicly. After a brutal fight, Tony was able to defeat and disarm Vanko. However, Vanko's revenge plot was more complex than winning a fight. He wanted to show the world Iron Man was not invincible then watch the world devour and destroy him. He furthered this plot by joining forces with Justin Hammer, thus gaining access to Hammer Industries resources. Both Stark and Vanko continued to develop and struggle with technology and in their adversarial relationship throughout the movie.

Technology played a prominent role in Iron Man 2 – particularly technology associated with Tony Stark and Anton Vanko. Therefore, it was appropriate to analyze these characters' creations as signifiers. Specifically, Tony's Mark IV/Mark VI armor,
Tony and James Rhodes's Mark II/War Machine armor, and Vanko's two Whiplash suits of armor were explored for Surrealist tropes.

Surrealist Tropes

Tony's main red and gold suits in *Iron Man 2* were his Mark IV and Mark VI armor. The Mark IV was an update from the Mark III armor (Tony's first red and gold suit) used in *Iron Man*. Tony was the only character that used any suits with that color scheme in the film. The color red in Western culture carries many different connotations such as passion, desire, anger, sin, excitement, danger, courage, violence, blood, energy, heat, strength, and power. Gold carries connotations of wealth, royalty, excellence, superiority, and illumination. These colors worked together in the Marks IV and VI to present Tony/Iron Man as faulty yet overall heroic. He was exciting, willing to engage in dangerous (sometimes reckless) actions, and able to stand against and defeat villains. He was so powerful; his one defeat in the film was not truly a defeat. When the drunken Tony Stark in his Mark IV suit fought his best friend James Rhodes in Tony's Mark II design, the fight ended with Tony on the ground and Rhodes flying away in the Mark II. However, Tony's inebriation left him at a disadvantage to the sober Rhodes. It was also revealed shortly after that Tony *let* Rhodes take the Mark II. Though Tony tried to argue that he didn't give Rhodes the suit, Agent Romanoff pointed out security features of the armor included “redundancies to prevent unauthorized usage.” (Favreau and Feige, 2010) Tony could have stopped Rhodes if he wanted.

A major difference between the Mark IV and VI was the core of the reactor that powered the suit. The arc reactor powered by the palladium core was a part of every Iron
Man suit until Mark VI. In each suit this reactor maintained a circular design. The circle – a shape with no corners or end – represented continuity and completion. It was a shape and technology brought forward from Tony's father's work. Tony was continuing and finishing what his father had started. However, this continuation was killing him as the palladium poisoned him. The reactor of the Mark VI was based on the new (fictional) element vibranium Tony discovered and synthesized during the film. Unlike the palladium core of the previous suits, the vibranium core did not poison Tony and was more powerful. Departing from its predecessors' designs, the vibranium-based reactor was triangular. The triangle represented sturdiness and strength. The new core was superior and more dependable than the palladium core because it could provide more power to the suit and did so without poisoning Tony.

On a deeper level, the Mark IV and VI Iron Man suits were metaphors for personal and creative autonomy. They were designed to appeal to the child within who didn't wish to grow up and become a slave to a capitalist system but rather be free to be any and everything. This child had a bright and passionate imagination, boundless energy, and an indomitable spirit. This child came from his parents and learned from them and other voices, but ultimately his/her own voice speaking on behalf of a truly liberated self was the strongest and most life giving.

The Mark II suit was an earlier design. As such it was not as advanced as Tony's Mark IV and VI. Unlike the later suits, this suit was not painted and retained a stainless steel appearance all over. Because the material is strong and corrosion-resistant, stainless steel offers connotations of strength, durability, and discipline. Its metallic appearance
offers connotations of coldness, industry, and aggression. Though the suit was Tony's, it was worn by Lieutenant Colonel James Rhodes and eventually became property of the U.S. military after Tony's fight with Rhodes. This meant it was also subject to access by Hammer Industries. The connotations provided by the Mark II's appearance represented the structure and conformity of the military and the cold, ruthlessness of corporate culture.

Once in the hands of the military and Hammer Industries, the Mark II was re-outfitted into the Variable Threat Response Battle Suit (VTRBS) or “War Machine.” War Machine featured more weapons, heavier armor plating, and military markings. This enhanced the sense of aggression, dominance, and conformity. Though Rhodes manned War Machine, after it became accessible to Hammer Industries it became subject to external control. At Hammer Industries Ivan Vanko was able to remotely manipulate the suit and a fleet of drones against Tony. Rhodes was left powerless within War Machine until Agent Romanoff infiltrated Hammer Industries and rebooted the suit. After the suit rebooted, Rhodes was again able to control the suit. However, he found its technology was not all he expected. Though Rhodes assumed the additions to his suit and its size made it superior to Tony's Mark VI, the Mark VI actually proved more effective in combat. As Tony stated, “You have a big gun. You are not the big gun.” (Favreau and Feige, 2010)

The Variable Threat Response Battle Suit was titled ironically. Until Romanoff rebooted the system, the suit was part of the threat and Rhodes was unable to change it or respond to danger. As a machine of war, it turned out to be less advanced and capable than the Mark VI. The Mark II/VTRBS/War Machine also served in multiple metaphors
for 1) the dangers of excessive conformity, and 2) a lost then found sense of originality and self. In the case of the first metaphor, though Rhodes was only following orders by surrendering and manning the suit, that conformity led to his involvement in actions against his purpose and values. Regarding the second metaphor, his conformity led to him becoming a drone with no independent control. Only through a reboot – an overthrow of the system – was he able to regain true power and independence.

Ivan Vanko's Whiplash armors were based on his father's arc reactor blueprints. The first design involved the bare minimum structurally with just enough materials to support and power the electrified whips. The only colors present were silver metallic and black. The metal finish, again, gives connotations of coldness, industry, and aggression. Black connotes seriousness, secrecy, grieving, death, darkness, power, emptiness, and opposition. These colors and Vanko's sparse design symbolized the bitterness and hatred toward the Stark family inherited from his father; Ivan's grief over his father's death; the Vanko family's lack of fulfillment; and his secrecy and distance even from his ally Justin Hammer. The whips added to this symbolism as they were tools of aggression but they allowed him to attack from a distance.

Vanko's first suit was rendered powerless when Tony removed its arc reactor, and authorities confiscated the remainder of the suit. However, when Vanko began to work within Hammer Industries, he was provided the resources to create many things – including another Whiplash armor. Hammer was not aware of Vanko's entire plan or that he had developed a second suit for himself. This second suit was of a more comprehensive design with bulky, all-over body armor. Consisting of a dark metal and
also involving electrified whips, it continued the symbolism of the first suit. The bulky appearance of it (it was taller and heavier than the Iron Man suits and War Machine) represented heightened aggression and dominance. Despite his new technology and intimidating presence, Vanko was still defeated by the combination of Tony in the Mark VI and Rhodes in the War Machine. A final element to the suit, revealed upon this defeat, was a self-destruct mechanism. This was signified by his arc reactor glowing red – representing emergency or danger. Though he intended to destroy Tony with this as a last ditch effort, he died unsuccessful in the attempt as Tony and Rhodes both escaped.

Vanko's armors were metaphors for a sense of isolation – and ultimately destruction - brought on by a purely capitalist mindset. The reason Anton Vanko had been deported was he wanted to use the technology being developed merely for the accumulation of wealth. He was not interested in freedom or betterment of the human condition via an energy race. Because of this attitude, he spent the rest of his life angry and in exile. He passed his attitude and knowledge on to Ivan who sought vengeance for what his father never had. However, Ivan died surrounded only by his failed creations, trapped in his anger and defeated by his and his father's lust for power.

How the Film Represented Surrealism and Current Social Significance

_Iron Man 2_ represented Surrealism in that it presented the excellence of creative autonomy over the isolation and ultimate powerlessness of excessive conformity and bourgeoisie values. Though each character and technology was highly gifted and highly flawed, it was the nonconformist Tony - with his youthful passion, energy, courage, and creativity - and his Mark VI suit that ultimately proved to be the best.
In his first manifesto, Breton wrote, “At an early age children are weaned on the marvelous, and later on they fail to retain sufficient virginity of mind to thoroughly enjoy fairy tales.” (Breton, 1972, p. 15) The film took its viewers back to that place of a young, excited mind. It afforded the audience an ability to become lost within a familiar world where they could run faster than anyone, face and overcome any challenge, and achieve the impossible. In a time fraught with crisis and seemingly unceasing struggle, *Iron Man 2* offered this ideology to combat the pain and undo restraints of conventional adult logic: A liberated imagination is good. The social significance of this message was that it told the audience that within and because of their dreams they could be free.

In Chapter 5 the messages and ideology of this case study will be brought together with those of the previous two case studies. The chapter will summarize and discuss the findings of all three studies and present ideas for expanding upon this. It will also provide conclusions regarding Surrealism and communication based on this research.
Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions

The three film case studies uncovered themes and tropes of Surrealism. Redistributions of power, blends of dream/fantasy with reality, liberated desire, boundless imagination, nonconformity, and other Surrealist elements were present throughout the films. These three films collectively garnered billions of dollars in revenue. This money represented hundreds of millions of tickets sold and thus time spent in movie theaters. Todd Gitlin wrote, “Crucially, who we are is how we live our time […] We vote for a way of life with our time.” (Gitlin, 2002, pp. 19-20) If we accept this to be true then we must accept that based on signification and popularity of these films, millions of Americans moviegoers are at least a little Surrealist – even if they don't know it.

In a broader sense, all film is a Surrealist medium because of its play with time and space, reality and fantasy and its challenge of our “conscious understanding of reality.” (Rascaroli, 2002; Brown, 2009, p. 28) This idea is supported by Brown who noted the following:

Some surrealists went so far as to argue that all cinema was surrealistic, since all cinema was like a dream (Benayoun 2000: 107; Goudal 2000: 84–94; Kyrou 1963: 9–23). Thanks to its lack of respect for the laws of physics (cutting through time and space), cinema was thought to involve a shocking sense of disorientation (Matthews 1971: 2), taking us to a place where dream could not be separated from waking. (p. 20)

Because film holds these oneiric qualities, we are able to thrust ourselves into that alternate realm, into the delirium, and thrust our inner worlds outward. In that state of
blended existences, we are able to explore unlimited possibilities and even impossibilities. Then the credits roll, the lights come up, and we emerge into lucidity, hopefully able to organize our mad experiences into something purposeful. If we can achieve this, we may be able to find answers previously unknown, innovate, uplift humanity, and re-create the world into a better state. As Breton put it, “Human life would not be for many of us the disappointment it is if we constantly felt ourselves capable of accomplishing acts above our strength. It seems that miracle itself can be within our reach.” (Peyre, 1964, p. 36)

Limitations and Ideas for Further Study

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study was limited to analysis of three films for practical purposes. While these artifacts were rich with signs to explore, the criteria for inclusion necessarily excluded all other films not meeting all three criteria. To that point, the almost invisible criteria tied to popularity and accessibility was for the films to have been exhibited in American theaters. This excluded films from foreign markets that were either not available or less popular in America, yet were perhaps influential in other regions. The scope also excepted other modes of mass communication such as television, radio, Internet, radio, music/recording audio, books, newspapers, magazines, and other electronic/broadcast and print media. Additionally, this study neglected to include other forms of interpersonal and group communication as a basis for analysis of Surrealism's persistence.

Future study regarding Surrealism's impact on modern mass communication may focus on areas neglected by these limitations. For instance, research on television might
look at Surrealism in modern cartoons. Many of these programs involve non sequitur and action and dialogue outside of conventional rationality. Examples might include Cartoon Network’s *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*, a show about a boy raised by a talking whale. Or study might even consider cartoons for more mature audiences such as *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* – an animated show about a carton of fries, a meatball, and milkshake living together - and others in the Adult Swim lineup. Research might even look at Surrealist influence in live action shows. There are many options to explore in the medium of television.

Another option for further research is to build on Crawforth's (2004) study of the relationship between late 1930's to early 1940's fashion magazines and Surrealism by exploring Surrealist signification in modern magazines. Continuing from Crawforth’s ideas researchers might, for instance, look for Surrealist tropes in contemporary editions of publications such as *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*. They may even branch out from the fashion genre to look at publications with different foci.

Studies might also focus on contemporary music/artists that flout norms and so-called common sense in the pursuit of “total freedom to be and the right to absolute dreaming.” (Dali and Parinaud, 2008, p. 201) Inspired by the contexts in which the films and signs occurred, research might look into Surrealism in politics, consumer electronics, or other aspects of culture. There is a plethora of options for understanding Surrealism and mass communication within the contexts of each other.

In response to this thesis’s exclusion of micro-communication, a viable solution is researchers may observe modern interpersonal/small group practices for evidence of
Surrealism. After all, the Surrealist movement was initially a small group effort that grew into a large phenomenon. Additionally, it might prove interesting and purposeful to question if and how interpersonal/small group communication informs mass communication toward Surrealism and vice versa. That could be particularly fruitful in this digital era as social networking, blogging, and other media, in true Surrealist fashion, facilitate/encourage “breaking down of the distinction between public and private, artist and viewer.” (Bradley, 2001, p. 73)

Conclusions

The philosophical basis of this study was that events and symbols are open to multiple interpretations, signifier-signified relationships are fluid and changeable, media facilitate transformation and appropriation of styles, and ideas do not cease to exist though they may fall from vogue. The theoretical basis in Semiotics and Cultural Studies questioned how people make sense of what they perceive, power relationships, and societal conventions. Analysis of the three films in Chapter 4 provided evidence of elements with multiple connotations and reinforcement and/or challenging of contemporary myths. It also showed the films as enabling acceptance of Surrealist styles and attitudes. Through all this, the analysis displayed explicit and/or narrow application of the term Surrealism – especially purely toward visual art endeavors – may have decreased since the first decades of the movement, but the idea of Surrealism retains vitality in contemporary culture.

As the analysis offered so many examples of Surrealist tropes within the films, it proved semiotic analysis was a viable option for developing a diagnosis regarding the
vitality of Surrealism. This diagnosis also provided answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 2. Yes, Surrealism is an ongoing mass media phenomenon. Surrealist presence existed in all three recent and very popular and profitable films. This assessment led to the answer of the second research question: Yes, semiotic analysis of modern popular film provided evidence that Surrealism is still active in popular culture.

In 1966, Andre Breton said, “Surrealism existed before me, and I am confident that it will continue after me.” (Breton and Rosemont, 1978, p. 471) Analysis of modern communication phenomena shows that within at least one possible interpretation, Breton's prediction rings true. Surrealism was not just an isolated collection of art events over the course of a few decades. “It was and is a metaphysical perception of the tragic sense of human life and a desperate attempt to leap beyond the bounds usually assigned to human reason.” (Peyre, 1964, p. 33)

Surrealism continues to weave itself within modern life and communication, exploding signification relationships and challenging how we communicate and live. Media has aided this by making Surrealist ideas and products accessible on a broad scale thus facilitating the acceptance of Surrealism (even if unwittingly) and, accordingly, the transformation of our thoughts and behaviors. To honor this analysis, the work done under the banner of Surrealism over the span of roughly 70 years in the 20th century should not be assumed to be the totality of Surrealism. We continue to hear the cries and see the evidence of minds turning in on their own selves yet simultaneously stretching toward unbound desire and liberation of existence. So long as this persists, the movement lives.
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