



Reality as Mystery: A Theoretical Study on Rene Magritte's Surrealist Vision

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Abstract:

Surrealist's quest for absolute reality anchored around the relation between the reality and its representation. They were well awarded that the Real and the reality are mutually differing from one another. Although the Real exceeds the rational comprehension, it exists in and reveals itself from the reality. Surrealists' works of art are the elusive snapshots of the Real. The irrational aspect it produces is the manifestation of the Real fused with reality. Rene Magritte understood this aspect of scurrility in terms of mystery. He interpreted this mystery is not one of the aspect of it but it is the innate character of the reality to exist. He discloses this mystery in his paintings by exposing the arbitrariness lies between the reality and representation, image and object and word and meaning. This article brings forth the play of mystery in the domain of reality and its revelation from Magritte's three distinguished series of painting.

Keywords

The Real, Reality, Unconscious, Mystery, Linguistics, Signifier, Signified, Arbitrary relation, Surrealism, Rene Magritte



Introduction

The real and the reality are different entity. When the Real exist in the objective world the reality exists the subjective experience of it. We experience the world through perception by which we gather, organise and analyse the sensory data of the objective world. So the reality would be the projection of our psychic reality onto the visible world. The assimilative process of the visible world happens through the language, indeed. The lived experiences of our being-in - the world are precipitate into the psychic depth as if language elements. Every experiences demands to be grasped into linguistic meanings. The language elevates the human being to a superior position among other species. The perceptual existence of being in the world by the lens of language is called reality. On the contrary the real encapsulates the reality as part of oneself. Our language system has not capable to capture the complete dimensions of the real, since it follows the rational prerequisites. This incapability of our language defines everything that exceeding its boundary are irrational things. Even though the real and the reality coexist simultaneously we cannot distinguish one from another by the rationality of the language. Moreover we are not certain that whether the real exist or not since it exceed the rational framework. The rational mind is limited and nurtured by the socio-cultural necessities. The unstructured real floats out of its parameters.

Reality through perceptions

The reality comes to exist when we access the real through the perception. The perception composes the real in linguistically meaningful order. Although the reality visible by the perception, yet it exist independently of our perception. Maurice Merleau PONDY defines "the perception is not a science of the world it is the background against which all act stand out" (Merleau PONDY 2002, p. xi). Perception can be precisely defined as the interpretive mechanism through which sensory evidence is translated into meaningful experience. The experiences metamorphose into linguistic meanings.

The reality as groundless construction of language

Nietzsche argues that what we call truth is "a mobile army of metaphors" (Nietzsche 1979, p. 84) and that "there are no facts, only interpretations" (Nietzsche 1968, p. 267), thereby implying that reality is accessible only through linguistic and conceptual mediation. Apart from language nothing will justify him that he is humankind. It is not an overstatement that human is a language being. The role of meaning in the language system is mediation between the real and the reality. The linguistic meaning represents neither the real nor the reality, but expresses the mutual understanding among the members of a society. The relation between the language and the reality are arbitrariness. For Saussure language is system of sign which has two interdependent parts. He named it as signifier and signified as respectively. If the signifier is the sound image of the word and the signified is the concept of it. "The linguistic sign unite not a thing with a name but a concept with the sound image" (Saussure 2011, p.66). The word tree is not the tree itself that lies outside the linguistic sign. Our general misconception is that the link between the signifier and the signified is rational or logical. This misunderstanding leads us to perceive the reality as what actually it is not.

Surrealism is initiated primarily against the primacy of western rationalism. They proclaimed to re-evaluate everything impartially that protect the western rational worldview. They strongly believed that the rational thinking itself brought the catastrophe of the world war. The triumph of rational nearly killed or suppressed the pure instinct of humanity. Therefore the Surrealist poet and its theoretician Andre Breton thus defined once and for all: "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 (Breton 1946, p-26)". Freud called this psychic as the unconscious mind. The unconscious is the lower stratum of the mind that contains thoughts, desires, memories and feelings. Although these are not directly accessible by consciousness, yet controls the person's behavior and personality. Surrealists identified that the unconscious is the antidote for rationality. They decided to bring out the unconscious to challenge the rational order of things. The surrealist's ultimate aim is to liberate of the mind from the constraints of the rational inputs. Surrealist views the reality is part and parcel of the absolute reality which transgresses the boundaries of language. Surreality is rationally uncensored version of the reality. "Surreality would be embodied in reality itself



and would be neither superior nor exterior to it” (Breton 1972, p.46). The Belgian surrealist painter Rene Magritte's complete oeuvre is evidence for Breton's statement.

Mystery against transparency

Realism is grounded in the assumption that the reality exists independently from the perception and can be represented with relative fidelity through empirical observation and rational description. The realist therefore believed that reality can be represented transparently by the image. Rene Magritte questioned this transference and explicitly destabilise the illusion of reality by exploring the interrelation between the reality and its linguistic and visual representation. For Magritte the visible world is mysterious, because “An object hints at others behind it” (Magritte 2016, p.33) and "Visible things always hide other visible things” (Lisa Lipinski 2019, p.71) We assimilate the world of things into knowledge not as what it is but utterly what it is not.

The consequence of the language a transparent screen has appeared between us and the reality. The reality in its becoming has to pass from the perceptions into the linguistic meaning. In our everyday life we perceive only the transparent screen of reality not the transparency of it. The screen is woven by the elements of language. The signifiers of the language projects the reality to us in the guise of transparency, instead. When we look at a tree we perceive not the tree in itself but the concepts of the tree which has chosen from our empirical language. In this sense, reality is not given but mediated and constructed by the language. It is remarkable that the language only represents the reality instead of exposes to us. Magritte views this illusion of reality in the sense of mystery. Through mystery we perceive the reality and communicate ourselves. Magritte writes thus, “Mystery is not one of the possibilities of reality. Mystery is what is absolutely necessary for reality to exist” (Magritte 2016, p.195) the inevitability of mystery translates the real into reality. We can interpret this mystery as the expression of arbitrary bond occurs between signifier and signified. Magritte's mission is to reveal this mystery of the reality which revolves around this arbitrariness.

Treachery of images



Magritte's Treachery of images attempted to demonstrate the paradox which lies between the image and the word. The canvas depicts a painted pipe which is treated in a realistic manner. The linguistic caption 'This is not a pipe' is written beneath the pipe. By juxtaposing image of the pipe with the word that negates its presence startle the viewer. The juxtaposition of the image and the caption this is not a pipe evokes numerous questions about the relation between word and image. This combination of word and image gives us way to interpret this painting in numerous perspectives. Such as, the painted pipe is not the real pipe, the text this is not pipe itself is not pipe itself, the image of the pipe is not real pipe since we cannot smoke it, this painting is not pipe....etc. The indeterminacy hovering over this painting finally resolved into thus that the caption 'this is not the pipe' means it is mere representation of the pipe and not more. The real pipe and its representation are connecting one another by convention not naturally.



The human condition



In this series of paintings are accomplished by using the technique of *mise en abyme*, which describes a visual technique where a work of art contains a representation of the work itself. The painting depicts the interior of a room where a window opens onto the exterior landscape. At first glance it seems a seamless landscape, but while later will reveal that there is a painted canvas placed on the easel in front of the window. In the canvas a landscape is painted in a realistic manner that depicts the exact part of the exterior view where the canvas hides. The philosophical connotation of this painting disrupts our usual perception of the reality. This painting conveys us that the reality we perceive outside of ourselves is our mental representation indeed. We project our psychic or inner reality onto the outside world. There is nothing absolutely objective reality. The reality is always subjectively constructed and linguistically mediated. We are unable to distinguish where the subjective reality ends and the objective reality begins. As soon as we perceived the reality then it is subject to rationalize what it is in the sense of linguistic meanings. Whatever linguistically understood will lose its objectivity. Magritte always tries to illumine on this mysterious aspect of the reality. By exploring and exposing the mystery through his paintings Magritte constitutes a new modality of surrealism. This series serves as a visual manifestation to the linkage between the reality and its representation are not mutually transparent but obscured by our psychic input. The belief that the reality we see outside of ourselves is truly our mental representation. And like the function of the painted canvas the reality is mediated not given.

Key of dreams



This series of paintings structured grid like composition. In each cabin an object is depicted with a caption below to it. But the image and caption are juxtaposed incongruously to one another. For instance, the image of the horse is with



the caption of the door. When look at image along with the caption that will shock the viewer. “Offering the shock of derailment from habitual patterns of cognition and recognition, the simulacrum produces a feeling of liberation” (Lisa Lipinski 2019, p.70). This paraphrases the Saussurean theory of linguistic arbitrariness in visual paradigm. And this overtly disharmony between word and image undercuts the viewer’s usual expectation of meaning. These canvases create on the viewer the cognitive crisis. Although at first glance it looks like a schoolboy learning chart, it intentionally suppresses the authentication of the roll of language. By confronting the bafflement the viewer get aware about the absolute truth that the mystery exists in reality itself that is surreality. And he realises about the bonding between the word and thing is neither natural nor stable.

Conclusion

The mystery Magritte reveal in his paintings is to perceive the Real order of things unequivocally. Its ultimate aim is to liberate the mind from constrains of rationality. It gives us awareness about that the language system and the visual paradigm we utilise are constructed by convention not as innate nature of reality. Magritte’s works of art are the epitome of Jacques Lacan's theory of the Real that argues it is impossible to express in and through the symbolic order of the language. Magritte’s connotation of mystery transfigures into sensible meaning by the process of rationalization. Consequence of this study we can conclude thus, if the mystery is the state the reality, the rationalization is the condition in order to exist in reality.

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