

In the March 1928 issue of "La Révolution surréaliste," the results of "questions and answers" were published: the game in which the respondent did not know the question. Among the reproduced outcomes were nonsensical and absurd sentences ("What is brotherhood?" "Probably an onion"), as well as reflective ones ("What is equality?" "A hierarchy like any other"). This is one of the numerous examples of the Surrealists' interest in games and play, manifesting in both rule-based games and wordplay or black humour. Although these practices have attracted the interest of researchers, they have not been systematically analysed from a game studies perspective.

The goal of this project is to bridge this gap by proposing a research method based on game studies that enables the analysis of works of art. This will make it possible to create a systematic catalogue of surrealist ludic practices, to understand why the Surrealists engaged in these practices, and how they related to Surrealist postulates described by André Breton of freeing the imagination from captivity and extracting thoughts from the yoke of logic.

Surrealistic games fulfil the criteria of play described by the French cultural theorist Roger Caillois (who used to be associated with the Surrealist group for a time): they are not only voluntary, structured by rules, devoid of economic goals, and of uncertain outcome, but also separated from "serious" life and associated with fiction and the work of the imagination.

Significant examples also include the works of Surrealists that incorporate elements of pre-existing games—their rules, materiality, or symbolic significance. This is exemplified by the "Wine Glass Chess Set" by André Breton and Nicolas Calas, which replaces chess pieces with glasses of red and white wine. According to the instructions included with the work, a captured "pawn" was to be drunk by the opponent as "the symbolic blood of the victim." This literal representation of the metaphor "getting drunk on victory," and the mirrored chessboard may be understood as a figure of narcissism. The sentence attached to the board, "It is the game that should be changed, not the pawns," can be read as a critique of the ongoing Second World War.

Ultimately, the project will also examine the presence of Surrealism in contemporary game culture, focusing on online versions of Surrealist games—such as websites created for playing "exquisite corpse"—as well as contemporary surrealist digital games. This term refers to productions that reference the work of Surrealists from the first half of the twentieth century by using elements taken from, for example, paintings by Salvador Dalí or René Magritte, as well as titles focused on free exploration of dream spaces.

As part of the project, a broad definition of "surrealist games" will be proposed, basing on the one hundred years of history of the phenomenon, and a catalogue of Surrealist ludic practices will be created. This will allow for a description of how the Surrealists' interest in games and plays and their application in artistic practice actually influenced their work and what it ultimately resulted in. It will also help answer the question of why the concepts of "surrealist" and "surreal" are so prevalent in contemporary game culture and whether the practices of the Surrealists significantly influenced the digital game creation and usage practices.