Where the surreal experiences real. Postmodern medical relevance of the core sentence of the prophet of Surrealism

Ahol a szürrealis találkozik a valósággal. A szürrealizmus prófétájának kulcsmondatának orvosi valóságtartalma

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Initially submitted June 15, 2022; accepted for publication Sept 1, 2022

Abstract
Comte de Lautréamont (real name: Isidore Lucien Ducasse), the prophet of surrealism, describes a young boy as "beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella in his Opus Magnum," Les Chants de Maldoror (1). The French poet died in Paris, during the German siege in 1870, at the age of 24. Alongside Rimbaud and Baudelaire, he is the main pillar aligned to the surrealist Pantheon, populated by Bunuel, Andre Breton, Salvador Dali, Louis Aragon and René Magritte. The aim of the present analysis lies in decoding the meeting of the three elements and attempting to crack its combination, eliciting a meaningful explanation, in particular, from a medical humanities perspective.

Keywords
umbrella filter, surgical sewing machine, surrealism, medical humanity

Round one: the meeting of objects (around 1870)

Umbrella
The umbrella evolved into a civil commodity in the mid 19th century. The object enjoyed many cameo roles and were depicted as cultural references, from the "Winnie-the-Pooh," written by A. A. Milne, to P. L. Travers’ characterization of Mary Poppins. Umbrellas transcended beyond literature into the realm of visual arts, hopscotching from painting to cinema, including the French classic, "Umbrellas of Cherbourg". Leaving the psychoanalytic symbolism of the umbrella aside (2), it can be stated, the umbrella embraced a special social code representative of middle class, well-off Parisian in the late 1860s (3)
Sewing machine
The American Elias Howe, created and patented the first sewing machine for tailors in 1845. By the early 1860s, many models were on the market, like the Singer and British Chadwick & Jones models. In the 1860s the machines became very common in petit and middle-class bourgeois homes.

Dissecting table
Autopsies and surgeries became a form of public entertainment associated with inexplicable morbid interest during the 19th century. Marble dissection tables in Gothic novels such as, Mary Shelley’s, "Frankenstein,” and Bram Broker’s, ”Dracula,” provided ample platforms in support of haunting plots. Chilling and titillating as it was, the dissection table, the place of the final truth, confronting death head-on, richly annotating the symbolism regarding life and death. The lyrics of the late 18th century blues number, ”St. James Infirmary,” is a superb representative regarding the emotional code of the cold, lily-white, slab of marble (4).
Are the three objects really so shockingly distanced from one another and without real meaning? Here, we attempt at offering an interdisciplinary explanation in which the author’s emphasis illuminates upon the present day medical perspective.

Round two: the meeting objects (cca 2021)

Umbrella
Pulmonary embolism has its more common origin in the veins of the inferior extremities. As the inferior vena cava approaching the heart represents the anatomical pathway of the floating thrombus to enter the lungs via the heart, an old concept aims at blocking the vessel in one way or another. The interruption of the caval lumen was first performed by Homans in 1934. Spencer introduced suture compartmentation of the vessel in 1962. Compartmentation of the inferior vena cava using Russian surgical staplers was reported by Sensenig and later by Ravitch in mid 1960s (5). These surgical methods were replaced using the less invasive endovascular solution by Kozi Mobin-Uddin who published his intravascular filter in 1969(6). The tool featured a mechanism capable of expanding into the shape of an umbrella, therefore, it is so named (6)

Sewing machine
Unifying edges of the wound and creating anastomosis are integral elements in surgical craftsmanship, a per sé manual effort. Automatization and serialization of this mechanical maneuver underwent intense research and development till Petz presented his surgical stapler in 1921 (7). A lengthy story ensued, with the emergence of the Russian staplers in the late 1950s, subsequently followed up with American models in the 1970s (8). Distinctly, the surgical stapler is one of the cornerstones of minimally invasive surgery. Today, no thoracoabdominal operation is imaginable without a respectful nod to the descendants of the original Petz machine, a real sewing machine in the operational theater, poised upon the surgical table.

The dissecting table
Many old mortuaries aligned to various pathological departments exhibited the Latin inscription upon their walls, "Mortui vivos docent,” meaning, ”the place the dead teaches the living person.” This is the third
element associated with the bizarre original image of Lautremont, and the only one, characteristically representing a sui generis medical instance, and does not require further explanation.

**Discussion**

Lautremont intended to shock his readers with a collection of randomly juxtapositioned strange objects. The obvious aim was to mentally paint a picture as morbid and meaningless as possible. Should we try to think outside of our mental box? An obvious and logic solution is offered using the postmodern definitions regarding the objects. All three motifs are interconnected and bear their authentic role in present day medicine, without risking their relations becoming too far-fetched. One might suppose, Lautremont intended to create a conundrum, a sort of, ”what is the commonality regarding the following three things,” type riddle. The strange fact is, the umbrella-type filtering method was antedated by another medical procedure involving stapling the inferior caval vein. The Russian surgical sewing machine, Model UKL-30, operated on the premise in which every second U-formed staple was removed from the jaw prior to firing, performing the desired compartmentalization formerly described. This is the way in which Lautremont’s strange and bizarre idea got a meaning. Whatever method is chosen, there is a chance, in spite of the best medical interventions, the dissection table serves as the final meeting point of the objects mentioned above.

**Conclusion**

A seemingly meaningless shocking épater le bourgeois attitude provoking outrageous imagery, has been effectively decoded, offering key for interconnections among unrelated elements. Hopefully, the experiment presented here is more than merely flexing one’s imagination (9). The methodology applied might help in experiencing out-of-the-box thinking, in which mental training will be a prerequisite when encountering strange symptoms, unusual radiologic images and lab findings are challenging the daily medical practice. This is what makes medicine much as that of an art form; hardly accessible to Artificial Intelligence, thus far...

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