Feature articles targeted at range of publications:

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Marcus Jakt/Surrealism website/Surrealism in Advertising/190304

Surrealism in Advertising

Its heyday during the thirties may be long-gone, but Surrealism still has its proponents. The movement is of especial importance within the modern advertising industry.

From 'Evida Dollars' to Silk Cut

Even from the start, the potential of Surrealist imagery to help sell products was explored. Salvador Dali, perhaps the art form's most famous practitioner, was infamously accused of 'selling out' when he agreed to a number of commissions from manufacturers of everything ranging from beer to lingerie. André Breton, the 'father' of the art form, gave him the anagram nickname 'Evida Dollars'.

More recently, M&C Saatchi's posters for Silk Cut and Benson & Hedges have adopted highly successful Surrealist strategies. In these, startling and unexpected images are powerfully contrasted to advertise not so much the product, as the trademark.

Of course, these developments may essentially have been a consequence of legislative pressure – M&C Saatchi weren't allowed to show anyone actually enjoying the tobacco products in question.

Beyond tobacco

To some in the industry, Surrealist or otherwise fantastical imagery is in fact redundant and possibly counter-productive. Matt Collier of JWT, responsible for the current Smirnoff campaign, says "the simpler an ad is, the clearer your message is". He thinks Surrealism in advertising is set to become less important in years to come.

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This is down, he believes, “to everything having the arse researched out of it... research waters everything down to its lowest, most straight-laced form, so Surrealism rarely gets a look in.” In this respect, he acknowledges, the consumer isn’t really trusted to be sophisticated enough anyway –especially when simpler techniques will work well enough.

Given the somewhat scandalous, anti-establishment ideals of the original Surrealist movement, perhaps it is appropriate that the ‘dirty’ industries should have pioneered its use for modern commercial purposes. Where these led though, others followed, and often to some effect.

Take, for instance, the highly successful Tango adverts of recent years, wherein a fat orange man appears out of nowhere and slaps/pinches an unsuspecting bystander consuming the drink. It certainly sticks in the mind –you would hardly catch Coca-Cola adopting a similar strategy!

Using derivatives of René Magritte’s paintings, software companies, producers of red wine, colleges, and even carpet cleaner manufacturers have followed suit. And that is using the work of only one artist! Tony Kaye’s acclaimed Pirelli commercials for television were also heavily inspired by original Surrealist works.

Back to basics?

But many in the industry are sceptical of Surrealist imagery used for advertising purposes. Some would even term the notion a misnomer. Damien Smith of Ogilvy Mathers argues “anything that is odd is actually there to demonstrate a product benefit.” A recent Dunlop car tyre advert,

featuring strange beings and weird objects blocking the path of a car, “may seem surreal… but actually it’s just showing that the tyres are ‘tested against the unexpected’”.

Collier, less dismissive of the concept than Smith, says that Surrealist imagery was only ever adopted because it was “a way of getting around the censors” when the rules governing tobacco advertising began to tighten up.

At the same time it is undeniable that it spread to many other product areas. In fact, those adverts we are most likely to remember are precisely those that are innovative, humorous and –often– surreal. Is it just the adverts we like then, or are we also attracted to the products? Smith is cynical. To him, “the only ads that are surreal are the really bad ones that make no sense –like the current series of Specsavers ads…”.

It may be, after years of Surrealist strategies being more or less imposed on it by tobacco and alcohol legislation, that the advertising industry is experiencing a backlash. Perhaps it wishes to ‘go back to basics’. Tobacco can no longer be advertised, and alcohol may soon be going the same way. As Matt Collier says, “very few adverts need to be that complicated anyway.”

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Marcus Jakt/FlyPast/Interview, BoB veteran/190304

One of "the few"

63 years since the Battle of Britain, **Marcus Jakt** *compares the experiences of recent Channel 4 Spitfire protégé* Dave Mallon *with the real-life war adventures of* Sqn Ldr A. G. McIntyre.

"We were *all* cannon fodder," says Mac. For any pilot, even the experienced ones, 1940 was a hazardous time to be in the air above Britain. Fast forward to present day, and Spitfire rookie Dave Mallon, even with the benefit of hindsight, assures me that is precisely where he would have chosen to fight. Had he been twenty in 1940, rather than join the Army or Royal Navy, he says, "I'd have joined the RAF and volunteered to fly the Spitfire, any day."

The Battle of Britain may have been fought more than 63 years ago but it remains as vivid as ever in our collective folk memory. Recently, Channel 4 screened an emotive look back in 'Spitfire Ace'. The series set out to re-create basic fighter pilot training –1940s style– against a background of historical narrative. From four young pilots of diverse backgrounds one lucky volunteer –Dave Mallon– won through to undertake the experiment.

Through the challenges posed to these modern aviators, the enormity of the effort mounted by the RAF back in 1940 was underscored. Back then, relatively young and inexperienced pilots had to face one of the most potent military machines ever assembled –the battle-hardened Luftwaffe of the Third Reich.

Only 2927 young men participated in the Battle of Britain. Of these 544 died during the Battle itself, and a further 791 were killed during the rest of the war. Today, surviving veterans of the Battle, never particularly numerous in the first place, are few and far between. I met one of them.

Squadron Leader Athol G. McIntyre –or 'Mac' as he likes to be called– is originally from New Zealand, and came over to England shortly after the outbreak of war. Previous to

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volunteering, he was well on his way towards a promising literary career. He had a number of short stories published during the 1930's, as well as plays by him broadcast on New Zealand radio. Seeing that war was inevitable, he joined the RNZAF in early 1939, learning to fly on early biplane models such as the Tiger Moth.

He was one of the luckier ones –at least he had managed to accumulate a few months of flying experience before going into battle. As the authorities became increasingly desperate, some pilots would have received as little as nine or ten flying hours *in total* (on Spitfires or Hurricanes) before being sent to war.

It was such basic training that Channel 4 attempted to re-create for Dave Mallon. The prospect of joining a front line squadron, he says, "would have been very daunting. I would have gone forward and tried my very best but I really don't know how I would have done."

Perhaps it wouldn't have mattered as much as we would like to think. If you could fly the plane reasonably well, and learnt one or two useful manoeuvres, that could get you very far. Tactics, Mac recalls, were practically non-existent: "I asked some of the old hands at my squadron about it. They simply laughed and told me to forget all that stuff. It's just a dogfight up there, they said. And it was. It was like World War 1. Everybody just went for it."

The important thing was to be constantly on the look-out, remaining vigilant at all times. That, and also to hope for the best.

After coming out top of a Spitfire/Hurricane operational training course in 1940, Mac was assigned to 111 squadron, one of the RAF's recognised 'crack' squadrons –a prospect he eagerly anticipated. What he didn't realise was that 111 squadron flew Hurricanes. Having learnt to fly the more modern and advanced Spitfire, Mac was somewhat dismayed!

Dave Mallon understands how he felt. The Spitfire, he says, "is just the nicest thing to fly". Having to make do with the Hurricane would have been to miss out.

The Hurricane did have some distinct advantages though, as Mac soon discovered. “It was a better, more stable gun platform,” he says, explaining that the machine guns on a Spitfire just couldn’t be made as stable as on a Hurricane (they both had eight). Besides, the Spitfire mission was considerably riskier. Its role was to attack the Me109 fighter cover, and leave the Hurricane force to take on the bomber aircraft. In fact, he notes wryly, perhaps it was no bad thing that things turned out as they did.

When I put this to Dave Mallon, that being a Hurricane pilot during the Battle of Britain might have been preferable to flying Spitfires, he rejects the notion. “I’d still sooner have been a Spitfire pilot, easily,” he says, without hesitation. For him, despite the better shooting characteristics and arguably less dangerous mission of the Hurricane, the Spitfire remains the ultimate flying machine. “The only thing that eclipsed the Spitfire –before jets came along– was the Mustang.” And that, he adds, was only on account of bigger fuel tanks (and therefore superior range).

Of course, being easy to fly was not the be-all and end-all of the aircraft of the time – they also had to be good in a fight. From his encounters with veterans, Dave was able to confirm what Mac had to say on the subject. Not only will they have been dealing with incredible closing speeds (and only fractions of a second to get a shot in at the enemy), there was also the issue of firepower. In this respect the Luftwaffe had an undisputed advantage.

The British planes may have had fully eight machine guns each, but the Germans had cannon (usually two each, plus two machine guns). This was clearly much more effective. Just a few hits from cannon fire would entirely disable an aircraft. ‘Lethal density’ with the British machine guns was much harder to achieve. Later on during the war this was implicitly acknowledged, because both Hurricanes and Spitfires were eventually re-equipped with cannon.

Cannon or not, to radically improve your chances of survival, probably the most important thing was to manage to stay alive during the first three or four sorties. Dave figures

that “I would have kept my fingers crossed that I didn't get shot down in the first couple of flights, and then gone on from there.” Statistically, after that, chances of long-term survival improved dramatically.

For Mac, one of the most remarkable aspects of the Battle of Britain was the sheer ordinariness of its participants. There was no elite Guards unit from the army, stuffed full of aristocratic officers, or glamorous Admiral that stood between Britain and the abyss. “In the RAF particularly,” he says, “we were just the sons, and daughters, of what you might call ‘ordinary people’.”

Having started out as a rather cocky, self-sure young man, Mac soon learnt to respect the enemy: “if you weren’t scared, you weren’t going to survive.” He recounts how, on his very first sortie, his flight commander had called back to base for a suitable course to return home on. Loud and clear came the order to “steer 160°!” But the other pilots appeared to ignore the voice. One of them enlightened him: “oh don’t listen to him… it’s a bloody German!” At the time, they were far out over the Channel.

Time and again, Mac underlines the technical and tactical brilliance of the enemy. It was strategy, and the failure to concentrate on key objectives, that lost the Germans the Battle (and ultimately the war). “They were tactically very good but strategically pretty nuts,” says Mac, concluding that, “ultimately, the Battle of Britain was a battle of attrition between fighters; not bombers.” Lacking fighter cover, the bombers could never operate with impunity –not even during the Blitz.

Dave Mallon, commenting on his impression of the Battle of Britain veterans he met, says “when you read about people like them, and you listen to the stories they tell, you realise they are real heroes,” but that “probably the nicest thing about them are that they are so down to earth.” From his own experience, flying at most two sorties in a day, he adds “they must also have been incredibly fit”.

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Flying below 250kts Dave characterises as a fairly benign experience. But moving beyond this, and asking the aircraft to perform more aerobatic manoeuvres, brings on a much more serious tone. "You could feel the aircraft begin to tighten up", he says, "it was a good aircraft to fly 'on the edge', but doing so was hard work."

I asked Dave if he would now like to try out some of the early jets like the Meteor or Vampire that succeeded the Spitfire. Naturally, if asked, he would jump at the chance (Channel 4, pay attention!). In truth, it's rather unlikely of course. Mac though, *was* able to go on to fly these aircraft: the Allied victory meant far from the end of his adventures.

As I left Mac, he told me, almost in passing, how, a few years after the war, he had been part of an exchange programme with the USAF. He had been stationed at Edwards AFB, California. He recalls one day when there had been a lot of excitement at the base. During the evening he was told by a number of his earnest American colleagues that the excitement had been premature. Chuck Yeager had not, in fact, as had been thought, broken the sound barrier earlier during the day.

The thing is, the Americans, when they did manage to break the sound barrier, kept it secret from the rest of the world for the better part of a year. Mac was there in 1947![*]

[*] The sound barrier was broken on October 14, 1947. It wasn't declared to the outside world until later on in 1948.

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Marcus Jakt/G2/It happened to me – tough love/190304

It happened to me – tough love

It was supposed to be a pleasurable pastime. At one with the elements, snug within the confines of my wetsuit. Amazing vistas would pass before my eyes, and I would observe fascinating marine inhabitants in their natural environment.

Or so I thought. It had been like that in the Red Sea, after all. This, however, was the English Channel –Falmouth Bay to be precise. I'd just about managed to acclimatise to the freezing water. You know the sort of thing: an iron grip that seizes any exposed flesh, and then squeezes. And when you think you've just about cracked it, squeezes some more. I looked up, expecting to see the surface.

At six metres it was long gone. I gestured to my brother to slow down. Introducing me to the delights of wintery British waters, I had hoped that he would take things nice and easy to start off with.

But he didn't seem to want to know. Instead he gestured me to follow him down to even murkier depths. Concentrating myself to breathe nice and slowly, to take deep, regular lungfuls of air, only made me do the exact opposite. This was the onset of mild panic. I knew it, I could recognise it. There was only one thing for it: give up and surface.

My brother wasn't amused:

"If we don't dive now the tide will start to flow again, and then we'll *really* have some fun…"

I ignored the sarcasm.

"Yeah, but I couldn't see the surface," I tried, "I can't do it."

"Marcus," my brother stared at me intently, "if you don't dive now, you *will* regret it. Yes it's dark, and yes, it's cold. That's how it is here. It's OK. Really."

I nodded. He made sense, after all.

"Ready?"

I was. We slid below the surface again. This time I managed to suppress whatever previous fears I had held. I even managed to enjoy myself when I got down to the bottom, and soon forgot all about the cold and the murkiness.

That was the first time I ever went scuba diving in British waters. It was my macho brother that made it happen. He had the right approach –if I had given up earlier, I *would* have regretted it.

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Marcus Jakt/Observer/Sunscreen – an imperfect science/190304

Sunscreen – an imperfect science

Avoiding skin cancer has long involved the generous application of sunscreen, but now increasing evidence suggests such products may themselves be to blame for some cases of the disease.

The sun is dangerous. It is powerful, it burns and damages living cells, and it can cause cancer. We've known that for years. The advice has been to avoid unnecessary exposure to the sun, and to use plenty of sunscreen. But there is increasing evidence to show that some types of sunscreen can now be almost equally dangerous.

"The protection afforded by sunscreen creams is not what might be expected," says Professor Roy Sanders of RAFT (Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust), "people tend to over-rely on it".

But how redundant is it? Can we trust it at all, and if not, how then should we protect ourselves?

Skin cancer is now the most common form of cancer, and diagnosed cases are increasing at an alarming rate. The Department of Health estimates that there are 57,700 incidents in the UK each year, meaning that rates have doubled in the last 20 years. 8,000 have died from it during the last five years alone.

It is the UV (ultra-violet) part of the solar spectrum that damages cells. The sun's rays cover the Earth with UV radiation. Most of what is let through by the ozone layer falls within the UVA range, and very little falls within the UVB range (see box).

Since UVB is more intense than UVA, the traditional assumption is that it is also more harmful than UVA radiation. Consequently, sunscreens have tended to concentrate on offering UVB protection, leaving consumers exposed to UVA.

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We now know that our bodies require protection against both forms of radiation. In conjunction, they work a deadly double-whammy. UVB inflicts damage on DNA structures, whilst UVA suppresses the body's defence and repair mechanisms. Clearly some protection is better than none, but the risk is that consumers are being lulled into a false sense of security.

Sunscreen manufacturers have belatedly begun to address both forms of UV radiation. But, just as they have begun to cotton on to the harmful effects of UVA, some of the substances they have long used to protect against UVB are themselves showing worrying signs of being carcinogenic.

Research at Queen's University, Belfast has already established that a molecule called PBSA (2-phenylbenzimidazole-5-sulfonic acid), common to many sunscreens, can damage DNA sequences and thereby act as a carcinogen.

"Our research raises a question mark about this particular chemical," says Dr Jeremy Davies. He urges industry to reconsider it: "sunscreens can be improved by replacing it."

Some scepticism is in order here, because the jump from the laboratory to real life is as yet unconfirmed. But the research is nevertheless of some cautionary value.

Many consumers believe sunscreen to form a tangible but invisible barrier that shields the body from the worst effects of the sun. In fact, it prevents UV light from reaching the skin in one of two ways –by absorbing it or by scattering it.

Compounds such as PBSA absorb UV radiation. Ideally, that energy will be given off as heat. But the molecules can also become energised and chemically reactive instead.

"They cannot destroy that energy, they can only convert it to some other form," notes Dr John Knowland, Oxford University, during earlier research on similar compounds.

The energised compounds may react with other ingredients in the sunscreen. But they may also react with skin cells and generate *free radicals*. Such molecules are known to be carcinogenic by virtue of the potential danger to DNA they pose.

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Compounds that scatter UV radiation would seem to be preferable for sunscreens. Such compounds –titanium dioxide or zinc oxide are two of the more common ones– have the added benefit of protecting against UVA. They are usually included in so-called 'chemical-free sunblocks', and were the main ingredient in the white paste that traditionally was used to protect sensitive areas (such as the nose) in sun-rich environments.

However, these compounds too have their risks. The titanium dioxide particles used in modern sunscreens are much smaller than in the old types (which is why they are also invisible). It is precisely because of this smaller size that some researchers are worrying that the product may be absorbed more readily into skin cells. Once there, titanium dioxide and zinc oxide are also known to pose a risk to DNA structures.

"They don't seem to offer any protection against free radicals either," says Professor Sanders.

With all this controversy, what is the consumer to make of the current state of affairs? It seems that notwithstanding the worrying aspects of some products, the message is certainly not to give up on sunscreen. It is still the case that an overwhelming body of evidence suggests that the value of blocking UV radiation, outweighs the potential dangers of the sunscreen products themselves.

Use it as a last line of defence after T-shirts, hats, sunglasses and staying in the shade. And take stock instead of what a spokeswoman for Cancer Research UK had to say when approached on the subject:

"there is no such thing as a safe tan."

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