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Mapping the Unconscious: Freud's Psychoanalysis between Culture, Art, and Modern Thought

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Abstract

Delving into Freud's concept of the psyche, the impact of culture on the human psyche (post–Industrial Revolution), the rise and influence of Surrealism on culture and the arts, and related interdisciplinary areas is a study of particular interest; however, understanding how these phenomena interact in modern society through the reading of this paper is an even more significant undertaking. This paper revisits and discusses Freud's theory of the psyche, notably the Ego, Superego, and Id, along with its societal, cultural, and artistic implications. Furthermore, it examines the metamorphosis of the psyche through the Surrealist movement, both as a transformative force and as a new artistic factor that profoundly influenced a particular historical epoch. Lastly, it acknowledges the contribution of different scientific fields to the study and understanding of questions concerning the psyche.

Keywords: Freud; Psyche; Ego–Superego–Id; Theory of the Psyche; Psyche and Culture; Surrealism and Psyche; Surrealism and Artistic Creation; Psychology and the Contribution of Other Sciences

1   Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century was a period of profound change that affected every aspect of human life. Alongside the horrors of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, which radically transformed European attitudes, scientific discoveries also had a decisive impact on humanity's understanding of the universe and human nature itself. The discoveries of Einstein in physics and Freud in psychoanalysis, combined with rapid technological progress, ushered in new conceptions of reality (Lipovacz, 2010; Freud, 1994). Consequently, these political and social transformations triggered large-scale upheavals in ideas, creativity, and culture, which sought visual and auditory forms of expression to articulate the rapidly changing human condition.

Freud was a radical figure in psychological research, and he introduced three major divisions of the human mind: the Ego, the Superego, and the Id. These three forces, closely interrelated yet frequently in conflict with one another, lay at the core of psychoanalysis, as the tensions between them revealed the diversity and instability of the human psyche (Freud, 1977; Kranaki, n.d.; Scarsella, n.d.). In his 1923 work *The Ego and the Id*, Sigmund Freud revised earlier models, arguing that repression is not a singular defense mechanism but one among many unconscious processes operating to alleviate anxiety. He further suggested that repression could be understood both as a source and as a consequence of psychic conflict (Freud, 1977/1994; Konstantopoulou, 2018). This conceptualization of the mind—often referred to as the "second topography"—offered a new perspective not only in psychology but also in literature, philosophy, and the arts.

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In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud further developed this framework by identifying manifestations of separation anxiety in art, mythology, religion, and philosophy. In doing so, he extended psychoanalysis beyond the confines of the clinic into cultural and artistic domains, introducing new dimensions of interpretation (Mihailidis, n.d.; Hopkins, 2004). According to Freud, human culture was intimately linked to the psyche: on the one hand, civilization functioned as a defense against primal instincts, while on the other, it became a source of profound suffering, as repression and guilt led to the internalization of the Superego (Freud, 1994). This dual conception—culture as both protection and suffering—became a central theme in twentieth-century intellectual debates.

Freud's thinking has always had a strong philosophical foundation. Many scholars argue that Freud drew heavily on Plato's conception of the soul as consisting of three parts—reason, spirit, and appetite. In constructing his model of human behavior, Freud employed a classical method of interpreting internal conflict as the determining factor of human conduct (Scarsella, n.d.; Tsitsigkos, 2001). Plato, through his vision of the ideal state, emphasized the supremacy of reason and the harmonious balance among the three parts of the soul. Freud's perspective, however, portrayed a more dramatic and enduring struggle, in which even apparent victory does not preclude defeat, with repression remaining a constitutive feature of human existence. Psychoanalysis may therefore be understood as a continuation of ancient philosophical anthropology, albeit with a radical transformation of its premises.

Recent studies have further strengthened these connections. Braunstein (2023) argues that Freud's discovery of the unconscious was not only a landmark in the history of psychology, but also a turning point in modern conceptions of subjectivity, which no longer identified the self solely with Enlightenment rationality. In addition, neuropsychoanalytic research has sought to reconcile Freud's structural model of the mind with contemporary neuroscientific findings, correlating unconscious processes with neural systems governing emotion, memory, and reward (Solms, 2020). Such interdisciplinary approaches demonstrate that Freud's model remains far from obsolete, continuing to offer valuable tools for understanding consciousness, cognition, and affect.

Moreover, Freud's work exerted a profound influence on the arts, particularly on Surrealism. The first Surrealist Manifesto (1924/1969) by André Breton explicitly referenced Freud's psychoanalysis as a pathway toward new forms of artistic creation grounded in dreams, repression, and the unconscious. Techniques such as automatic writing, dream imagery, and free association were deeply shaped by psychoanalytic thought (Chiotinis, 2011–2012; Empeirikos, 2009).

Art historians have increasingly emphasized that the relationship between Freud and Surrealism was not unidirectional. While Freud's ideas inspired Surrealist artists, the movement itself highlighted the revolutionary creative potential of the unconscious, demonstrating how artistic practice could extend psychoanalytic insight beyond the clinical setting (Hopkins, 2004). This reciprocal dynamic illustrates the deep interconnection between psychoanalysis and culture.

Freud's concept of repression remains central in contemporary psychology, though it has been significantly revised through research on memory, trauma, and emotion(Solms, 2018).. While clinical psychology has at times challenged Freudian notions of repression and the unconscious—particularly in trauma studies—it has also reinterpreted these ideas, leading to new theoretical developments (Erdelyi, 2006; Levy & Anderson, 2008).

For instance, Freud associated repression with the exclusion of anxiety-provoking thoughts, whereas modern cognitive neuroscience investigates "motivated forgetting" as an active neural process. Such findings lend empirical support to Freud's early hypotheses, demonstrating the ongoing dialogue between psychoanalysis and empirical science.

Freud's influence extends well beyond psychology into cultural theory. Through his analyses of guilt, desire, and repression, Freud has been critically reexamined by feminist and postcolonial theorists, who have both deconstructed Freudian masculinity and reappropriated his concepts for analyses of power, identity, and desire (Mitchell, 2000; Chodorow, 1999). While viewing subjectivity and language as constructed, these thinkers nevertheless recognize Freud as the first to articulate the fundamentally conflicted nature of the human self. Accordingly, psychoanalysis persists as a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1970), through which culture, ideology, and art are critically interrogated.

Freud's legacy is also evident in the contemporary cultural landscape, shaped by digital media, globalization, and rapid social change. Fabbri and Borges (2020) highlight the usefulness of psychoanalytic tools in analyzing the emotional dimensions of digital communication, where virtual identities emerge through desire, fantasy, and projection. In literature and film, psychoanalytic concepts such as the unconscious, repression, and dream imagery continue to structure narratives of trauma, alienation, and desire (Artsy, 2022). Thus, Freud's early twentieth-century ideas remain deeply embedded in contemporary cultural production.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory represents a moment of profound transformation in intellectual history, combining empirical observation, philosophy, and cultural critique. Although specific aspects of the theory have been revised, the structural model of the mind—Id, Ego, and Superego—retains its explanatory power, not only in psychology but also in literature, philosophy, and the arts. Engaging in dialogue with both ancient philosophy and modern science remains essential for understanding the complexity of human existence (Riga, 2016; Konstantopoulou, 2018). Consequently, the reintroduction of psychoanalysis into cultural analysis opened the way for Surrealist innovation, while the unconscious emerged not merely as a clinical concept but as a creative source and a site of cultural conflict and transformation. As contemporary studies continue to demonstrate, Freud's concepts remain vital for understanding the intersections of psyche, culture, and modernity—a testament to their enduring relevance amid the persistent mystery of the human mind.

2 Development of Freud's Basic Theory

One of the very first concepts that emerged from Freud's psychoanalytic theory was his model of the mind, which explained both the richness and the confusion of the human psyche (Fountoulakis, 2024). Through his idea of the Id, Ego, and Superego as three major agencies of the mind, he attempted not only to explain the scope of human behavior but also to trace the very roots of culture and art (Fonagy & Target, 2019; Kernberg, 2016). His view revolved around the Oedipal complex, which he used to depict the genesis of neurosis and, consequently, the primary source of art, myth, religion, and philosophy (Freud, 1977; Blass &Carmeli, 2022). Freud's work combined clinical observation with cultural analysis, bridging the gap between psychology and philosophy in a manner that continues to influence contemporary thought (Lipovacz, 2010; Eagle, 2017).

2.1 The Oedipal Complex and the Foundations of Culture

According to Freud, the Oedipus complex is the root and nucleus of neurosis, as well as the source of art, mythology, religion, philosophy, therapy, and, more broadly, human civilization. In this context, unconscious family conflicts emerge as the symbolic foundation of culture, while the most widespread form of creative expression becomes their sublimated release, through which buried tension is resolved (Freud, 1994; Mihailidis, n.d.; Blass &Carmeli, 2022).

2.2 The Id, Ego, and Superego

2.2.1 The Id

The Id is present from birth. It is an unstructured and non-intentional aspect of the psyche. Governed by the pleasure principle, the Id demands immediate gratification, without concern for reality or future consequences. It is a largely inaccessible region of the psyche, far removed from rational thought and the logic of space and time. Only through the interpretation of dreams and evidence from neuropsychology can it be indirectly approached (Freud, 1977; Solms, 2021).

2.2.2 The Ego

Gradually, the Ego emerges as the mediator between the demands of the Id on the one hand and the realities of the external world on the other (Greenberg & Mitchell, 2020). Freud often depicted it as a defensive agency in the conflict between desire and action, whose function is to mediate achievement rather than pleasure. In this way, the Ego replaces the pleasure principle with the reality principle, thereby providing the individual with greater stability and integration (Freud, 1977; Kranaki, n.d.; Lemma, 2015). Nevertheless, what primarily distinguishes the Ego from the other agencies is its association with perception and consciousness, the sensory faculties of the psyche. The Ego thus introduces the Id to external reality, protecting the individual from potential internal and external harm (Konstantopoulou, 2018).

2.2.3 The Superego

The Superego stands in opposition to the Ego and, in Freud's view, functions as its judge. It encompasses self-monitoring, moral conscience, and internalized principles, which originate from parental authority and prohibitions during childhood (Freud, 1994). Initially, the child lacks moral constraints and internalizes parental authority through fear of punishment and the desire for love. Gradually, external control is transformed into internal regulation, and the Superego assumes the role of a new parental authority. Freud emphasized that the Superego generates the Oedipal conflict, directing the child toward authoritarian values that establish moral boundaries and socially accepted norms (Tsitsigkos, 2001).

2.3 Plato's Tripartite Soul and Freud's Theory

Freud's model shares significant similarities with Plato's theory of the tripartite soul, as both depict internal conflict among distinct parts of the psyche. The two approaches, however, differ in emphasis, while agreeing that internal struggle constitutes a defining feature of the human condition. For Plato, the human condition was characterized by conflict between the rational and irrational aspects of the soul, whereas Freud interpreted such antagonisms as a central feature of psychic pathology (Scarsella, n.d.; Konstantopoulou, 2018). The parallels between characters in psychoanalytic theory and philosophers from different historical periods indicate that psychoanalytic thinkers did not detach themselves from philosophical tradition, but rather rearticulated it in light of modern psychological research (Lipovacz, 2010; Eagle, 2017).

3 Surrealism and Freud

The interwar period was marked by upheaval, disillusionment, and profound social and cultural change. These conditions formed the backdrop against which Surrealism emerged as both a creative and philosophical movement, aiming to liberate the human spirit from the constraints imposed by reason, morality, and conventional aesthetic norms. Although its central theme was the irrationality produced by war and social crisis, Surrealism nevertheless incorporated contemporary intellectual currents, most notably Freud's psychoanalysis, which offered a systematic exploration of the unconscious, dreams, and repressed desire. Thus, the adoption of Surrealism was not merely a stylistic shift in art, but a radical reconfiguration of human imagination, engaging with the most disruptive aspects of the mind.

The relationship between Surrealism and Freud was reciprocal rather than unilateral. Freud's ideas on repression, the unconscious, and dream symbolism inspired Surrealist writers and painters to experiment with automatic writing, dream imagery, and radical artistic forms. Conversely, Surrealism provided a tangible, visual, and literary manifestation of Freud's theories, facilitating the expansion of psychoanalysis from the clinic into the cultural sphere. As will be discussed in the following sections, the integration of Freud's psychoanalysis with Surrealism transformed not only avant-garde artistic expression in Europe and Greece but also broader conceptions of civilization, morality, and human freedom.

3.1 Does Surrealism Precede or Follow Freud?

As both a painterly and intellectual response to war, the absurd, the inhuman, and the irrational constituted the fundamental conditions for the emergence of Surrealism. However, Freud's psychoanalytic theory had already been established and exerted a dominant influence on cultural and intellectual life, extending beyond avant-garde movements such as Dada and encompassing Surrealism itself (Hopkins, 2004; Chiotinis, 2011–2012). Consequently, not only the Surrealist understanding of the unconscious but the very concept of the unconscious articulated by Freud became the starting point for many of the movement's aesthetic and philosophical concerns (Empeirikos, 2009).

Recent research has highlighted that Surrealists did not simply adopt Freud's theories wholesale but actively reinterpreted them, challenging rationalist traditions and exploring political and artistic freedom beyond established norms (Adams, 2022; Greeley, 2016; Lomas, 2020).

3.2 Freud's Concept of Civilization and Culture

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*), Freud examined the condition of European modernity and contrasted it with so-called primitive cultures. His analysis addressed not only the individual psyche but also civilization as a collective social formation (Freud, 1994). According to Freud, culture consists of "the achievements and institutions through which humanity overcomes its natural heritage," protecting individuals from nature while simultaneously regulating social relations (Lipovacz, 2010).

Freud regarded the transition from individual authority to communal authority as a decisive moment in the development of civilization. The killing of the "primordial father," the emergence of an omnipotent father figure, and the rise of religious and political dogma functioned as symbolic narratives promoting universal love and solidarity. At the same time, however, these structures generated deeply divisive forces. As a collective moral authority, the Superego not only imposed restrictions on individuals but, in its most extreme and repressed forms, could also give rise to totalitarian tendencies (Konstantopoulou, 2018).

Modern scholars argue that Freud's social theory anticipated later critiques of modernity, particularly those advanced by the Frankfurt School concerning power, domination, and repression (Jay, 2019; Marcuse, 2017/1964; Žižek, 2021).

3.3 Cultural Malaise and the Dynamics of Civilization

Freud considered humans not to be inherently good, arguing instead that envy, jealousy, and strife were persistent mechanisms of human nature, capable of transforming religions and ideologies into ambivalent sources of universal love and solidarity (Freud, 1994). Additionally, the condition of cultural malaise is, in Freud's view, a symptom intrinsic to civilization itself. Periods of crisis are consistently followed by new beginnings, thus mirroring a dialectical process of death and rebirth embedded within culture (Lipovacz, 2010).

He further noted that the cultural unease of modern and postmodern societies manifests itself through the flattening of values and the mechanization of social life (Riga, 2016). In such circumstances, individuals must acknowledge guilt and negativity, while simultaneously integrating these realities into a unified existence.

Several studies demonstrate that this cultural malaise is reflected today in debates surrounding digital alienation, ecological crisis, and global inequality, thereby illustrating the continued relevance of Freud for contemporary social critique (Illouz, 2019; Rosa, 2020; Stiegler, 2018).

3.4 Aggression, the Superego, and Guilt

Ultimately, Freud addressed the question of how civilization might manage the destructive forces inherent within it. His response was that aggression becomes internalized, redirected from external conflict toward the self. This aggressive energy is thus absorbed by the Superego, which, as moral consciousness, directs antagonistic impulses back against the subject (Freud, 1994). As a result, the conflict between the Ego and the Superego is expressed through feelings of guilt and the consequent need for punishment, revealing cultural malaise as a structural condition present in all societies and ultimately inescapable (Tsitsigkos, 2001).

3.5 What Does Surrealism Teach?

Surrealism was not merely a creative movement seeking to transcend reality. One of its central aims was the complete liberation of instinct and the unrestricted flow of thought, employing innovative practices such as automatic composition, free verse, and non-objective art. Thus, Surrealism represented not simply a stylistic development, but a new worldview, profoundly connected to human history and the evolution of nature itself (Breton, 1924/1969; Hopkins, 2004).

The introduction of psychoanalysis into Western intellectual life was swiftly followed by its integration into literary and cultural history. In Greece, in particular, psychoanalytic ideas spread not primarily through medicine, but through writers and scholars in the humanities (Mihailidis, n.d.; Empeirikos, 2009). Literature thus played a decisive role in connecting Freud's theoretical concepts with surrealist aesthetic principles.

3.6 Origins and Artistic Principles

Surrealism emerged as the moment when war-torn France encountered Freud's ideas, triggering a broader artistic transformation that extended across literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture (Chiotinis, 2011–2012). The figure of the "poet-artist" became emblematic of this synthesis, integrating psychoanalysis and art and giving rise to an avant-garde movement that radically rethought cultural tradition and artistic continuity.

The term "Surrealism" was first employed by André Breton in his *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924). Drawing on a term originally used by Guillaume Apollinaire in *The Breasts of Thérèse* (1917), Breton defined Surrealism as pure psychic automatism—the direct expression of thought in writing or other forms without the regulation of reason or moral constraint (Breton, 1924/1969; Contact, 2015–2016). Influenced by Dadaism and the horrors of war, Surrealist artists turned to dreams, fantasy, paranoia, and the subconscious as sources of creativity itself. Their aim was to mediate between reality and non-reality, constructing a "surreality" in which the careful combination of absurd elements could generate new meaning (Hopkins, 2004; Kamushadza, 2014).

Many Surrealists experimented with hypnosis and psychoactive substances as means of accessing this altered state, in which the boundary between conscious and subconscious experience was deliberately blurred. Surrealism, therefore, was not simply the depiction of fantastical imagery—such as Salvador Dalí's melting clocks or René Magritte's paradoxical scenes—but rather a fundamentally subversive and emancipatory project (Chiotinis, 2011–2012).

3.7   Global Influence and the Rise of Irrationalism

Although Surrealism was officially launched in Paris with the publication of Breton's manifesto, it soon extended beyond Europe, reaching cities such as Osaka, Bogotá, Mexico City, Manila, and Cairo, thereby demonstrating its global resonance (Hopkins, 2004). Following the Second World War, Surrealism contributed to the emergence of irrationalist and metaphysical currents, closely related to existentialist and nihilistic thought.

Philosophers such as Albert Camus employed irrationalist perspectives to articulate the absurdity of human existence. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argued that confronting life's apparent meaninglessness leads not to resignation but to rebellion, affirming that life must nevertheless be lived (Tsitsigos, n.d.).

3.8   Surrealism in Greece

In Greece, the 1920s marked the flourishing of Surrealism. While much of Europe was already immersed in Dadaism, Futurism, and Cubism, Greece faced ongoing political and economic instability, conditions that rendered Greek literature receptive to avant-garde experimentation (Riga, 2016). Young Greek writers studying in Paris rapidly absorbed surrealist influences.

Greek Surrealists remained deeply connected to classical heritage and historical continuity. Freud himself, frequently referencing classical antiquity, acknowledged the Greek fascination with the unconscious, evident in tragedies such as those of Euripides. Building on this tradition, poets such as Odysseas Elytis and Nikos Engonopoulosblended Surrealist aesthetics with ancient symbolic themes (Kamushadza, 2014; Siaflekis, 1991).

In 1983, Govostis Editions published *Surrealism A*, marking the first group exhibition of Greek Surrealist artists, led by Nikos Engonopoulos. Literature remained the dominant field of Surrealist activity in Greece. The movement's origins are commonly traced to 1935, with the publication of *Ypsikaminos* by Andreas Empeirikos and the presentation of Elytis's poetry in *Nea Grammata*. Other prominent contributors included Nikos Gatsos, Eleni Vakalo, MiltosSachtouris, Takis Sinopoulos, ManolisAnagnostakis, Tasos Livaditis, KleitosKyrrou, Yannis Ritsos, and Yannis Skarimbas (Empeirikos, 2009; Riga, 2016).

4   The Relationship between Freud and Surrealism

The exchange between Freud's psychoanalytic theory and the Surrealist movement represents one of the most productive intellectual dialogues of the twentieth century, encompassing psychology, philosophy, religion, and art. Both psychoanalysis and Surrealism emerged as responses to the crises of modernity—war, the collapse of established values, and the growing awareness of unconscious dimensions of human experience. Freud's exploration of the mind, repression, and dream symbolism sought to articulate the ineffable, while Surrealism pursued artistic forms capable of rendering these forces visible through literature, painting, theatre, and the visual arts (Freud, 1977/1994; Hopkins, 2004).

Moreover, psychoanalysis proved influential beyond psychology, significantly impacting theological discourse and patristic thought, where themes of soul, sin, and moral conflict parallel Freud's concepts of repression and defense mechanisms (Tsitsigos, 2001; Konstantopoulou, 2018). This convergence demonstrates that the search for meaning and interiority became a shared concern across disciplines.

Surrealism and Dada incorporated Freud's insights into the unconscious as a central aesthetic principle. Through automatic writing, symbolic imagery, and irrational juxtapositions, artists sought access to hidden psychic layers. Freud's theory of dreams provided Surrealists with the conceptual framework necessary to translate unconscious experience into artistic representation (Riga, 2016; Kamushadza, 2014).

Consequently, the relationship between Freud and Surrealism was mutually reinforcing. Psychoanalysis enabled artists to articulate resistance to rational domination, while Surrealism offered psychoanalysis a cultural stage on which its ideas could operate concretely. This chapter traces these connections, moving from theology and psychology (4.1), to patristic thought (4.2), modernist movements (4.3), and finally dream theory and surrealist aesthetics (4.4).

5   Epilogue

This epilogue serves as a synthesis of the complex interaction between Freud's psychoanalytic theory, twentieth-century cultural transformation, and contemporary psychological challenges. Throughout this study, Freud's concepts

of the Id, Ego, and Superego have been shown to function not only as foundational psychoanalytic constructs but also as powerful metaphors for artistic creation and cultural critique. The engagement of psychoanalysis with philosophy, theology, and the arts highlights the enduring interdisciplinary nature of Freud's legacy (Chodorow, 1999; Ricoeur, 1970).

Furthermore, the trajectory from Freud to contemporary psychology reveals both continuity and innovation. Developments in positive psychology, neuroscience, and interdisciplinary research illustrate the ongoing evolution of psychological inquiry. As Freud emphasized the importance of cultural sciences, contemporary psychology continues this path, integrating insights from genetics, bioethics, political science, and literary theory (Erdelyi, 2006; Fabbri& Borges, 2020).

5.1   Positive Psychology and Seligman

In the twenty-first century, culture remains a focal point of critique, often identified as a source of dissatisfaction. Positive Psychology has emerged as a distinct field, advocating a shift from pathology to human flourishing. Martin Seligman, its principal proponent, argued that psychology should focus on positive emotions, virtues, character strengths, and social well-being (Seligman, 2021; *Pursuit of Happiness*, n.d.).

Positive psychology has influenced disciplines ranging from economics and education to medicine and the arts, reshaping professional practices toward well-being and resilience. Central to Seligman's framework are happiness, virtue, wisdom, courage, love, justice, temperance, spirituality, and transcendence as core dimensions of human fulfillment (Seligman, 2021).

In parallel with these developments, digitally assisted mindfulness and self-regulation practices have become increasingly prominent within contemporary approaches to well-being. These interventions emphasize the cultivation of attentional control, emotional regulation, and reflective awareness, aligning with positive psychology's focus on resilience and psychological flourishing. Recent research on emerging technologies indicates that digital training techniques may support cognitive, emotional, and behavioral balance, contributing to enhanced self-regulatory capacity (Drigas, Mitsea, & Skianis, 2022).

 From a psychoanalytic perspective, such practices may be interpreted as modern techniques for strengthening regulatory functions traditionally associated with the Ego, while also moderating internal psychological pressures. The use of digital platforms for mindfulness and self-regulation thus reflects a broader cultural shift toward technologically mediated forms of self-care.

5.2   Freud, Culture, and Psychoanalysis

Freud's work consistently emphasized the indispensability of cultural sciences to psychoanalytic understanding. Moving beyond the clinic, he examined repression, morality, and the internalization of aggression as key cultural processes. Although psychoanalysis achieved institutional success, attempts to refine it through purely sociological methods often encountered limitations (Lipovacz, 2010; Konstantopoulou, 2018).

5.3   Surrealism, Dadaism, and Cultural Rebellion

Dadaism (1916) and Surrealism (1920s–1940s) emerged as interwar movements of rebellion, rejecting academicism and rational order in response to imperialist war. Both movements aligned closely with Freud's emphasis on the unconscious. Surrealism integrated psychoanalytic notions of desire and reality dualism with Marxist critiques of capitalism, advocating cultural and political transformation (Hopkins, 2004; Empeirikos, 2009).

5.4   Consciousness and Neuroscience Challenges

Consciousness remains a central problem in psychology and neuroscience. Freud's distinction between conscious and unconscious processes inspired research into perception, dreaming, desire, and automatic regulation. Contemporary science continues to grapple with the "hard problem" of consciousness, raising questions that extend beyond empirical explanation into philosophical inquiry (Scarsella, n.d.; Lipovacz, 2010).

Recent developments in social and cognitive neuroscience have expanded the study of consciousness by emphasizing Theory of Mind, defined as the capacity to attribute mental states to oneself and to others. This capacity is fundamental to interpersonal understanding, empathy, and moral reasoning, and may be interpreted as a contemporary extension of Freud's concern with the limits of conscious self-knowledge. While Freud highlighted unconscious motivation and

internal conflict, contemporary approaches stress the dynamic interaction between individual awareness and social cognition. Empirical research indicates that Theory of Mind is shaped by executive functions, language, and environmental mediation, with information and communication technologies introducing novel contexts for the attribution of intentions, emotions, and beliefs (Bamicha & Drigas, 2022).

Advances in neuroscience have further demonstrated that the brain is characterized by a high degree of neuroplasticity, enabling continuous structural and functional reorganization in response to experience. This perspective resonates with Freud's dynamic model of the psyche, in which psychic structures are shaped and reshaped through conflict, adaptation, and developmental processes. Contemporary technologies, including virtual reality and other emerging digital systems, provide experimental and therapeutic environments in which perceptual, emotional, and cognitive processes can be systematically modified. Research suggests that such technologies can actively support cognitive and emotional rebalancing, highlighting the extent to which subjective experience may be transformed through mediated interaction with artificial environments (Drigas, Mitsea, & Skianis, 2022).

5.5   Theology, Modern Society, and Existential Questions

Modern psychology's autonomy across cognitive, emotional, and moral domains has reduced the dominance of traditional religious frameworks. Theology has often struggled to keep pace with advances in neuroscience, genetics, and bioethics. Globalization has intensified pluralism, generating tension between holistic religious worldviews and fragmented modern identities (Tsitsigos, 2001; Konstantopoulou, 2018).

5.6   Psychology as an Evolving Discipline

Psychology has evolved as a dynamic and adaptive science, responding to cultural transformation through its interdisciplinary character. By integrating insights from art, religion, literature, and science, psychology continues to pursue human balance and inner coherence, demonstrating resilience in addressing the enduring questions of human existence (Freud, 1977; Mihailidis, n.d.).

The evolution of psychology as a discipline is also evident in the growing emphasis on metacognition, understood as the capacity to reflect upon and regulate one's own cognitive processes. This focus bears conceptual similarities to classical psychoanalytic concerns with Ego functions, particularly in relation to self-observation, reality testing, and the regulation of internal states. Empirical studies demonstrate that immersive technologies, such as virtual reality, can be employed to enhance metacognitive training in both educational and clinical contexts (Drigas, Mitsea, & Skianis, 2022)

6   Conclusion

This study has examined Freud's psychoanalytic theory as a foundational framework for understanding the modern psyche and its deep entanglement with culture, art, and intellectual history. By tracing the development of the structural model of the mind—Id, Ego, and Superego—and situating it within broader philosophical, artistic, and social contexts, the paper has demonstrated that psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to a purely clinical doctrine. Rather, it constitutes a comprehensive interpretive system that reshaped modern conceptions of subjectivity, creativity, morality, and cultural conflict.

At its core, Freud's model of the psyche articulates a vision of the human subject as fundamentally divided. The tension between instinctual drives, rational mediation, and internalized moral authority reflects a structural condition of psychic life rather than a temporary disturbance. This understanding challenges Enlightenment ideals of transparent rationality and stable selfhood, replacing them with a dynamic and conflictual conception of the self. The enduring relevance of this model lies precisely in its capacity to illuminate the paradoxes of modern existence: the simultaneous pursuit of freedom and security, pleasure and restraint, individuality and social conformity. In this sense, Freud's theory functions not only as a psychological framework but also as a cultural diagnosis of modernity itself.

The analysis has further shown that Freud's engagement with philosophical traditions, particularly the Platonic conception of the tripartite soul, situates psychoanalysis within a much longer history of reflection on human interiority. While Freud transformed these classical ideas through clinical observation and modern scientific discourse, the continuity between ancient philosophical anthropology and psychoanalytic theory underscores the perennial nature of questions concerning internal conflict, moral struggle, and the governance of desire. Psychoanalysis thus emerges as both a rupture and a continuation: a radical reconfiguration of inherited concepts within a modern scientific and cultural horizon.

A central contribution of this study has been the exploration of the reciprocal relationship between psychoanalysis and Surrealism. The Surrealist movement did not merely adopt Freud's ideas as theoretical inspiration; it translated psychoanalytic concepts into aesthetic practices that rendered the unconscious visible and experientially accessible. Through automatic writing, dream imagery, and irrational juxtapositions, Surrealist artists transformed the unconscious into a creative resource, challenging conventional boundaries between reason and fantasy, art and pathology, reality and imagination. This artistic appropriation of psychoanalysis extended Freud's influence far beyond the therapeutic setting, embedding it within the visual, literary, and cultural fabric of the twentieth century.

At the same time, Surrealism also reinterpreted and, in certain respects, radicalized Freud's insights. While Freud viewed the unconscious primarily as a site of conflict, repression, and compromise formation, Surrealism emphasized its emancipatory and revolutionary potential. In this artistic context, the unconscious became not only a repository of repressed material but also a source of imaginative freedom capable of subverting social norms and established hierarchies. This tension between the clinical and the artistic interpretations of the unconscious highlights the flexibility and cultural productivity of psychoanalytic concepts. It also demonstrates how psychoanalysis became a shared language across disciplines, enabling dialogue between psychology, philosophy, literature, and the visual arts.

The study has also emphasized Freud's broader theory of culture and civilization, particularly his analysis of repression, guilt, and aggression as structural features of social life. Freud's conception of civilization as both protective and oppressive captures a central paradox of modern societies: cultural institutions provide security and order while simultaneously generating dissatisfaction, anxiety, and internal conflict. The internalization of aggression through the Superego, leading to guilt and self-punishment, reveals how social control operates not only through external authority but also through internal psychic mechanisms. This insight remains crucial for understanding contemporary experiences of moral pressure, identity conflict, and emotional distress within highly regulated and performance-oriented societies.

Within this framework, Surrealism appears not simply as an artistic movement but as a cultural response to the psychic burdens of modern civilization. Its emphasis on irrationality, dream life, and instinct can be interpreted as an attempt to counterbalance the excessive rationalization and moralization of modern social life. By foregrounding fantasy, desire, and the unconscious, Surrealism sought to recover dimensions of experience that had been marginalized by instrumental reason and rigid social norms. In this respect, the movement can be seen as a cultural experiment in psychic reconfiguration, testing the limits of freedom, creativity, and self-expression.

The Greek reception of Surrealism further illustrates the culturally specific ways in which psychoanalytic and avant-garde ideas were integrated into national and historical contexts. Greek Surrealism, deeply informed by classical heritage and historical continuity, demonstrates that the encounter between Freud and Surrealism did not produce a uniform aesthetic or ideological outcome. Instead, it generated diverse syntheses in which ancient symbolic traditions, modern political realities, and avant-garde experimentation coexisted. This case underscores the importance of viewing psychoanalysis and Surrealism not as monolithic systems but as adaptable frameworks that are reshaped by local intellectual and cultural conditions.

Beyond the historical and artistic dimensions, this study has also highlighted the continued relevance of Freud's ideas for contemporary debates in psychology, neuroscience, and cultural theory. While many aspects of classical psychoanalysis have been revised, critiqued, or empirically challenged, the fundamental insight that much of human mental life operates outside conscious awareness remains widely accepted. Contemporary research on emotion, memory, self-regulation, and unconscious processing confirms that the mind is not fully transparent to itself. In this sense, Freud's legacy persists not necessarily in the form of specific clinical doctrines, but in a broader epistemological shift: the recognition that subjectivity is shaped by forces that exceed conscious control and rational deliberation.

The engagement with positive psychology and modern approaches to well-being further complicates the legacy of Freud. Whereas Freud emphasized conflict, repression, and cultural discontent, contemporary frameworks often focus on flourishing, resilience, and positive functioning. Rather than viewing these perspectives as mutually exclusive, this study suggests that they can be understood as complementary. The Freudian emphasis on conflict and limitation provides a critical counterpoint to overly optimistic models of human psychology, reminding us that suffering, ambivalence, and contradiction are not merely deficits to be eliminated but structural dimensions of human existence. Conversely, modern approaches to well-being highlight possibilities for growth and integration that extend beyond Freud's more pessimistic cultural outlook.

The interdisciplinary scope of this study underscores a central conclusion: psychoanalysis, Surrealism, and modern cultural theory collectively reveal that the psyche cannot be isolated from its historical, social, and symbolic environments. The mind is shaped not only by biological and developmental factors but also by artistic forms, philosophical traditions, political structures, and cultural narratives. Freud's enduring significance lies in his recognition of this complexity and in his insistence that psychological life must be understood within a broader cultural and interpretive framework.

In sum, this article has argued that the dialogue between Freud's psychoanalysis and Surrealism represents a pivotal moment in the intellectual history of modernity. Through this dialogue, the unconscious emerged not merely as a clinical construct but as a central cultural category, shaping artistic production, philosophical reflection, and social critique. The structural model of the psyche provided a powerful language for articulating the tensions of modern life, while Surrealism transformed these tensions into visible, experimental, and often provocative artistic forms.

Ultimately, the enduring value of Freud's theory does not reside in the uncritical preservation of its original formulations, but in its capacity to generate ongoing reinterpretation and interdisciplinary exchange. As this study has shown, Freud's concepts continue to offer a rich framework for exploring the intersections of psyche, culture, and modernity. In an era marked by rapid technological change, shifting identities, and persistent cultural anxieties, the fundamental insight that human beings are shaped by unconscious forces, internal conflict, and symbolic structures remains as relevant as ever. The persistent mystery of the human mind, far from being resolved, continues to invite new forms of inquiry, interpretation, and creative expression—confirming the lasting significance of the Freudian legacy within both psychology and the humanities.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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