

Sarah Matthews

Is Our Understanding of Reality Inherently Subjective ?

Discuss 2 variations on the notion of reality and artifice in your world, referencing artists and thinkers discussed over the lecture series.

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For centuries we have interacted with the world around, through limited means of exploration using taste, touch, sight, smell and sound to immerse ourselves in “ *The magic of the concept and the charm of the real*”(Baudrillard, 1994, p.2), but as time has progressed, people have tried to grasp and unravel our understanding of the blur between the notion of reality and artifice of these two opposing worlds.

Technology has been challenging our views on the notion of reality throughout its development in the 21st century, distorting our perception on what is real and fantasy which conveys a sense of a diminishing purpose of the real world which, illustrates the symbolic meaning of the more development into artifice styled realities the less potential we see of ours.

“ It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2)

This task will be demonstrating, explaining and understanding the notion of reality and artifice in its various forms exploring the underlying messages buried in numerous paintings, sculptures, sketches from various points in history. As well as developing an understanding of artists as to how their art is perceived.

Their reality or vision of their world can be distilled in different views of reality that has from the time of Leonardo Da Vinci and his representation of real-life through his paintings and sketches, studying of the human form, to that of filmmaker George Méliès who’s understanding and experimentation of reality which transpire to push the boundaries of what reality is perceived to be, through technical use of illusion, which represents an artifice perspective on films that of “ *Trip to the moon, 1902*”.(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998)

Each artist throughout history has expressed in various forms, each unique in representing their version of their worlds and the stories they tell that “*Dreams can be the beginning of storytelling*”(Segal, 1991, p. 104) distilling between reality and artifice symbolised through every brushstroke to convey the emotion embedded in the artists vision.

Using various notions of colour to represent feelings “ *colour is fundamental to our experience of the world around us*”(Clair, 2016, p. 15) the work of Victor Figol as displayed in Figure 1.

(*Walking in the rain*, oil on canvas) who’s use vibrant colours each resemble an emotive effect on the viewers response to his art symbolised by use of vibrant tones of reds to invoke a sense of

passion, green hues to create a sense of calm reflective perspective as well as use of sombre tones of blue and purple.



“ Colours, therefore, should be understood as subjective cultural creations: you could no more meaningfully secure a precise universal definition for all the known shades than you could plot the coordinates of a dream” (Clair, 2016, p. 26)

Fig.1 Vitor Figol, (unknown) *Walking in the rain* [Oil painting]

Figol has taken the reality of the natural tones of the real world and distorted and altered its perception and delved into how he sees the world

“ *With regard to true creativity into the arts, in other words, a timeless place, no matter where, so long as it is outside the world of reason*” (Alexandrian,1970, p.151) as a mass landscape of diverse colour and composition and enhancing the beauty of the artifice.

As well as this in Figol’s piece Fig 1. walking in the rain, the depiction conveys a message through his use of transferring the perception of reality of the scene in the modern world and converting into a fluoresce of vibrancy of his view of the world he describes through the illustration of how the figure is perceived to be walking through the rain.

Rain symbolises a sad and miserable scenario within this work, by the way, the lone figure walks aimlessly creating a sense of isolation and loneliness as well as the use of variations of pale tones of blue and purple to allude the idea of fragility, how he contradicts this representation through the other hues of colour and depth to conceive a depiction of peace and beauty amongst the array of complementary clashes of colours used to resemble a tranquil scene of figol's view of the world.



In this next piece Fig. 2 Embryo in the Womb 1510-1512, By Leonardo da Vinci, using chalk, ink and pen on paper, Da Vinci's artwork consists on the exploration of the human bodies, engineering, science and his use of optics his work studies, inventions and paintings in its various concepts of reality in the most basic form of the human anatomy, through his drawings of the time which invoke a sense of curiosity and imaginative concepts symbolised by the sketch itself.

Fig 2. Da Vinci, L (1510-1512) *Embryo in the womb* [Sketching]

As well as this the imagery represents a state of innocence and venerably symbolised through the way Leonardo has positioned the foetus in drawing.

As to how the mind of Da Vinci has been able to “*fathom the unfathomable*” (Dube, 1972, p. 21) through his exploration of the human body developed his advanced understanding in human anatomy to beautifully illustrate the development of a foetus by dissecting and broadening his knowledge of pregnancy which in itself represents elements of imagination of this “*expression of a new kind of human being*”(Dube, 1972, P. 21) an unknown truth of reality and the exploration of

new life “*The noblest pleasure is the joy of understanding*” (Medrut, 2018) in such detail unknown to the people of the 15th century of “*the human condition*”. (Unknown, 2011)

A study of the times given the only tools of analysing the natural world through very limited understanding that at the time was the only thing that could be portrayed and expressed through the era of Da Vinci.



In this piece also created supposedly by Leonardo Da Vinci titled *Salvator Mundi* portraying a peaceful depiction of the figure of Christ in a renaissance era symbolised through the resembling the style of clothing of Leonardo's time in the 15th century of robe and cloth attire, as well as the tranquil expression portrayed, and how Da Vinci's use of soft, smokey underlying tones blending and lack of harshness in tone using optics of the subtle use of light on the figure and the orb held in the hand to contrast which, illustrates a sense of calm within the painting.

Fig 3. Da Vinci, L (1490-1500) *Salvator Mundi* [Oil Painting]

“ Paintings of the renaissance artists or old masters benefited as much from a broader range of pigments as they did from realistic representations of perspective and sophisticated ways of dealing with light and shade” (Clair, 2016, p. 25)

In the painting, Salvator Mundi is known as the Latin meaning for “*Saviour of the world*” (Christies, 2017, A) portrayed as Jesus which makes people question in his view into this reality of the conflict if he was real or a fantasy based on religious beliefs of the times of Christianity believed to be the “*saviour of the world*”(Christie’s, 2017, A) or a depiction created for the masses to convey a “*offering a vision of peace which is a complete antidote to day to day life*” (Christie’s, 2017 B) but also illustrates a escapism to those of belief and culture of a figure who is conflicted in the validity of his existence an artifice of reality of worship.

This also highlights peoples views and conflict towards the painting, if it is a true Da Vinci and if so, how much of the painting restoration is the reality of the original hand from its earliest state, conveying a sense of artifice surrounding how the artist who restored the painting, how much of their interpretation of Leonardos vision was used to recreate the painting compared to that of when it was first made in the 15th century.

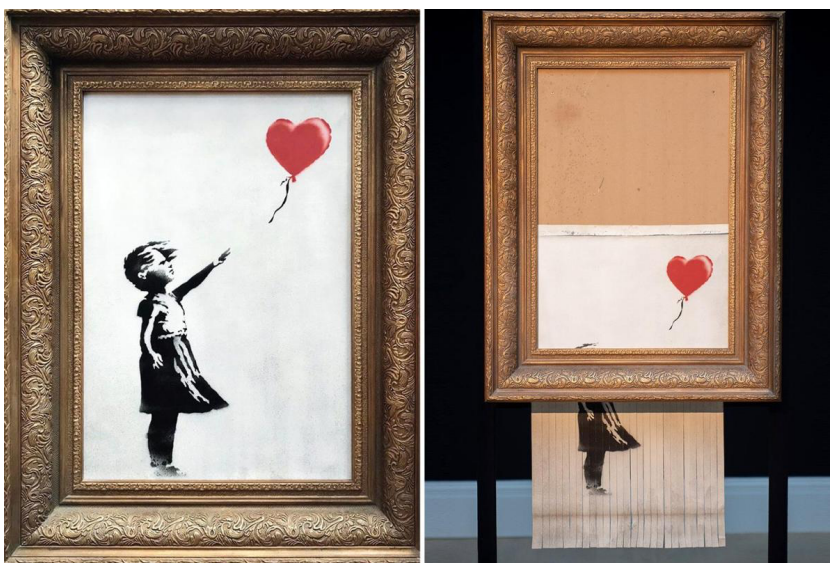
The piece compared to the chaos of everyday life it is “*a really extraordinary memorable picture and it feels as though it could suddenly slip off and back into the shadows at any moment*” (Christie’s, 2017, B) gives the impression of the ephemerality and fragility of peace into the shadows of chaos alike the comparison to that of peoples concept of dream and dreamer in Da Vinci’s art relate to the notion of reality and artifice how he perceives through this silhouette this notion out of the delicate balance of the shadows of artifice symbolising “*at any moment*” (Christie’s, 2017, B) slipping away from realities shadow surrounding and blending around the piece stepping into optical light of reality represented by the illusion of light symbolising hope.

In both classic and modern times artists have blurred visions of where :

“ everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions” (Foster, 1993, p. xviii)

each mind holds these clashing ideals, that surfaced in each artist work through expressionist styles fundamental to their understanding in art practice.

There haven't been many artists in history whose art have created such an impact on the art world as Banksy and Leonardo Da Vinci has with Salvator Mundi sold in Christies in New York created by as quoted *“One of history's greatest and most renowned artists, sold for \$ 450,312,500 / £342,182,751”* (Christie's, 2017, A) making the artwork *“The most expensive painting ever sold at auction”* (Christie's, 2017, A) conveying a powerful response *“ reflecting the extreme rarity of paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci there are fewer than 20 in existence acknowledged as being from the artists own hand”*(Christie's, 2017, A) how precious these paintings can be to own one in our lifetime like holding stardust.



To that of Banksy's self-destructive piece of *“Girl with Balloon”* (Pownall, 2018) being sold at auction for £1,042,000 in Sotheby's London where Banksy claims *“ a few years ago I secretly built a shredder*

Fig 4. Banksy, (2002) *Girl with Balloon* [Stencil, Spray paint]

into a painting. In case it was

ever put up for auction” (Pownall, 2018) therefore after the piece self shredded the original artwork. Causing shockwaves in the art community of the destructive display which later Banksy quotes Picasso “ *The urge to destroy is also a creative urge*” (Pownall, 2018)

In this next piece titled “*Girl with Balloon*” (Pownall, 2018) 2002 or now known as “*love is in the bin*” (Pownall, 2018) created by renowned unknown artist Banksy, whose works have caused controversy all around the world due to his moving graffiti masterpieces creating conflict with the local police for vandalism to property.

His work uses limited simplicity designs, using stencil layering as well as incorporating the use of negative space which “*reveals that the two primary forms of objective chance, the unique encounter and the found object, are not objective, unique or found in any simple sense*”.(Foster,1993, p. xix)

To convey a focus on the resemblance of the object of a balloon, to represent child innocence, a loss of a precious symbol of hope, love, joy of childhood held in a snapshot of still life. The piece perceives a longing to relive our inner child, close to us through memories of youth yet so far symbolised through the expression of the little girl and the notion her small hand reaching out to her younger self of what it was “ *Rather, they are uncanny, and for this degree that they invoke past*

and/ or fantasmatic

traumas” (Foster, 1993, p. xix)

and the notion of letting go and become part of the adolescent world.

This next piece “*seasons greetings*” explores the



Fig 5. Banksy (2019) *Seasons Greetings* [Stencil, Spray painting] boundaries of reality and artifice

how, using the notion of Christmas, which is associated as a time for celebration of the season full of snow, Banksy's twist on these themes surrounding pollution to highlight the reality and issues of today, represented by the flame engulfed bin choking out fire and ash, whereas the boy symbolises the joy of Christmas and the artifice of fantasy using the wall as a divider between the worlds as if two sides of a coin "*and the subject is always caught between these two forces*" (Foster, 1993,



p.11) to allude the idealism of pure winter turned to ash and fire of pollutions effect on the world. As well as his most recent piece, just discovered in Birmingham surrounding the message to promote awareness of the homeless in hopes to whisk them away from this life of poverty.

Banksy (2019) *God Bless Birmingham* [Stencil, Spray paint]



From the still imagery of Banksy's paintings to the earliest moving pictures of film creation at the beginning of cinema, one of the first major pioneers in illustrating stories through film was French filmmaker George Méliès in the 18th century in the earliest stages of capturing the essence of the world.

Fig 6. Méliès, G (1902) *A Trip to the moon* [Film]

Méliès's films were born through his "*fascination with magic and alchemy, with mad love and analogical thought*"(Foster, 1993, p.19) which he incorporates into every film he created, hand painted and "the first to film fictional narratives" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019) expressed through his love of fantasia and the magic in the moving picture.

The film of the time "*were scenes from real life having the novelty of motion, but Méliès saw at once their further possibilities*" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019) through experimenting with the camera to capture the essence of photorealism using knowledge in illusions and special effects "*he*

distorted and exploited the basic camera



tricks: stop motion, dissolve, fade-out,

superimposition and double

exposure" (Encyclopaedia Britannica,

2019) over his hundreds of films he

made the concept of bringing "*the*

reenchantment of a disenchanted world"

(Foster, 1993, p.19) to life in the 18th

century.

Méliès, G (1902) *A Trip to the moon* [Film]

This piece which is known to have survived and resurrected from its photo negative of "A trip to the moon in 1902"(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998) this depiction represents how méliès's vision, of the exploration of the moon and all the possibilities of this unknown environment which, conveys the artifice of his illustration of the subconscious dream.

Méliès portrays an almost humanistic light onto the characters he executes of these mythical atmospheric scenarios throughout the motion picture of the moon features that of the human expression on an inanimate object to show context to this exploring the artifice of reality his way of seeing what others couldn't see, "*This makes imagination richer and more complex than a wish-fulfilling daydream*"(Segal, 1991 p. 104) resembling his way of creating an escape for people in the times of war away from trauma to the fascination of the imaginary.

His portrayal in the film production of Hugo surrounding the story of his life helped to keep his eternal legacy alive, George Méliès and how his films have carved the way for future generations of filmmakers in which have developed how we perceive, and create cinema using special effects, inspired, originated from his trials, aspirations and a drive for passion from an amazing man who brought the love of magic to the stage of cinema we know and admire to this today.

To conclude, throughout all of the artists discussed/featured in this writing, each expressed their unique notions into how they portrayed their reality through both themes in diverse variations of colour, imagination and passion.

So, is our understanding of reality inherently subjective ? Yes, in some ways people might think our understanding of reality is subjective but twists to our reality perusing into elements of artifice due to each artist's unique view, pursuit and aspirations to create upon personal feelings of curiosity and individual discovery due to the various ways our mind contradicts our world to that of the objective reality, and how the subjective is embedded in the narrative of each artists story of their expression.

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