

Taking the idea discussed by
Nicholas Bourriaud, that an
artist's role should be a
'translator between worlds',
what is the role of the
artist/collaborator in the 21st
Century and how might this role
change in the next 10 years?
Discuss your ideas with
reference to two of the
practitioners or thinkers
discussed in your lecture
series.

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2452 words
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The Artist as a Translator Between Worlds



Figure 11 "A Sign", David Shrigley, 2009

"Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist"

(Hopper, E., 1953)

During the early 20th Century, the artist named Wassily Kandinsky discovered a new way of translating spiritual experiences through art. He no longer found satisfaction in representation of the material but rather aimed to express his inner life through his art.

He envied “the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts [...] achieved this end.” and inspired by this, began to implement this idea in his own work- becoming the abstract artist he is so well known for. (Kandinsky, W., “Concerning the Spiritual in Art”, 1912)

Commented [1]:
The artist

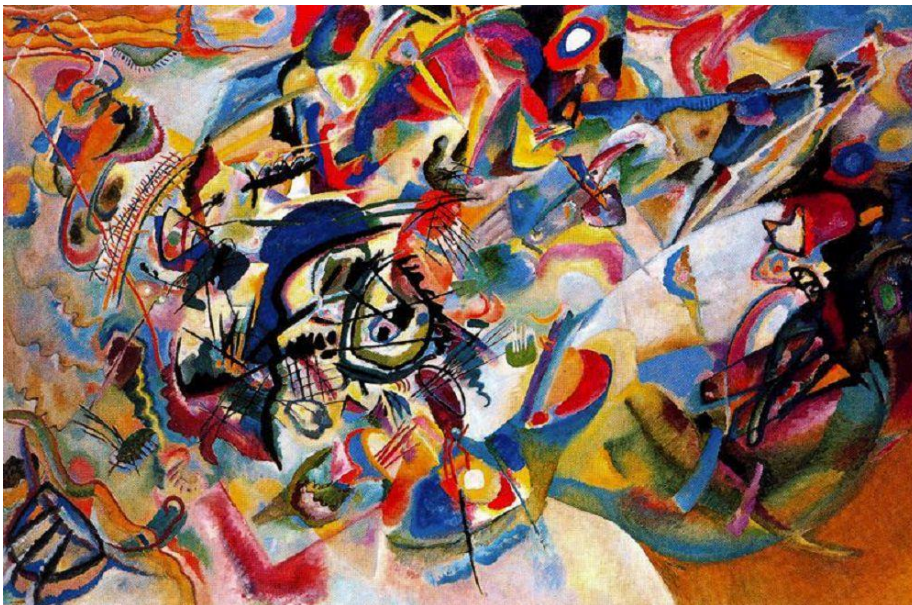


Figure 2 Wassily Kandinsky, Composition VII, 1913

For Kandinsky, abstraction provided a vehicle for direct expression, circumventing language. He believed that colour and form possessed their own affective power, acting on the viewer independently of images and objects.” (Dupêcher, N., 2018, MoMa.org)

“I value those artists who embody the expression of their life.”

This is a false quote commonly incorrectly attributed to Kandinsky. However, it provides a good segue to the next segment.

The notion of an artist embodying their work has become increasingly dominant over time with the rise of abstract expressionism incorporating the artist's action into viewers' consideration and then even more directly with "performance art", a term that became widely used in the 1970's (although artistic performance-based acts can be traced back to the 1910's in the futurists and Dadaists)

Notable examples of pioneering performance artists include Marina Abramovic, Yves Klein and Carolee Schneeman.

"Performance art is going to be the future. Plays on Broadway are so restricted. But performance art is like haikus, just one line thing. And it's more casual but more interesting." Yoko Ono

Yoko Ono was given her first solo show in New York in 1961 by founder of the "Fluxus" group of experimental artists, composers, designers and poets- George Maciunas. In the first 11 years of her extensive art career, Ono moved between New York, Tokyo, and London, and has served a pioneering role in the international development of Conceptual art, experimental film, and performance art [www.moma.org].

Her art began radically breaking down the boundaries that separate art and it's recipients by creating a series of instructional pieces such as "Voice Piece for Soprano", 1961 and "Cloud Piece", 1963 which featured among many other similar pieces in the 1964 book entitled "Grapefruit". Pieces like this directly ask the audience to *imagine*.

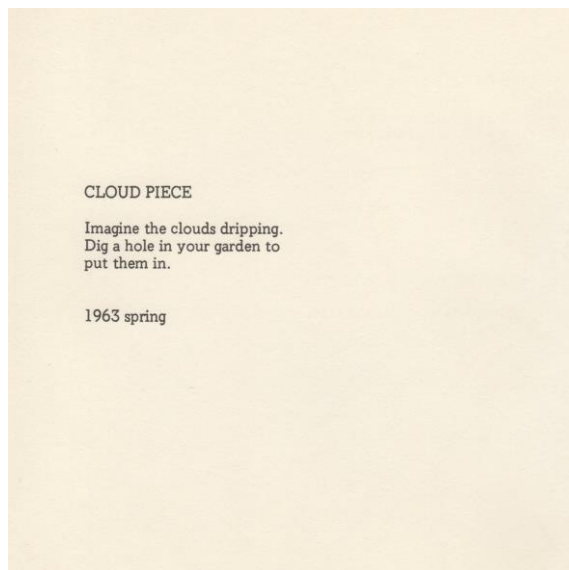


Figure 3 Cloud Piece, 1963, Yoko Ono (Grapefruit instructional series)

It could be argued that in these examples of performance art, the art is no longer purely in the work itself but rather the work acts as a portal through worlds- where the viewer of the art work gains value through the understanding and relation of the artist's thought processes or feelings.

VOICE PIECE FOR SOPRANO

Scream.

1. against the wind
2. against the wall
3. against the sky

1961 autumn

In 2010, Ono performed the above piece live at MoMa where she screamed into a microphone.

It went viral on the internet, but although gathering over 5 million views it also received thousands of “hate comments”, calling it “unbearable” and “pretentious”.

It can be said that a powerful piece of art is one that challenges the audience’s conceptions of the way things are. However, what if the majority of the audience simply react in disgust and feel isolated by their lack of understanding?

Comedy

If a great artist is one who is a translator between worlds- an amazing artist might be one who communicates their inner world in such a way that they don’t even see it as translating. These are

artists who are not converting feelings into images nor are they really translating their feelings into words- but these people become their inner world- act as though they imagine, say what they think and embody different elements of themselves through the use of characters- absolving the need for a consistent personal presentation. However, these people may not even be called artists by many people.

"[...] the internet has changed everything. Not only does the web 2.0 allow for new forms of participation and redefine the definition of an active audience, it has also changed the way we think, act and perceive." – Donna Schons, 2017, www.sleek-mag.com

We have entered an era where once exclusive art forms such as video have become mainstream and anyone with a mobile phone can post "performance art" online. From youtube, to twitter to tiktok, hundreds of people are making and uploading their "art", even if they do not call it that.

One example of this is a man called Brian Limond, aka, Limmy.

Limmy began posting videos online in 2002 on his own website, Limmy.com, making him somewhat of a pioneer of the medium, but it was his BBC Scotland series entitled "Limmy's Show" that got him to be a household name (in Scotland) and eventually winning him two (Scottish) BAFTAs.

The relationship between comedy and art is an interesting one as comedy relies on the person watching empathizing with the character or situation for it to work. Often this is done regarding situations involving multiple people, or observations of happenings involving other people however, Limmy has a more introspective approach that is quite "stream of consciousness" at times.

He is an example of a comedian who does not rely on solely on interactions with others but instead makes comedy out of thoughts he had or using characters that emerge from within him such as DeeDee, who is a character formed of Limmy's past experiences with being unemployed and lacking purpose in life.



Figure 4 Screenshot of the sketch "Yoker" from Limmy's Show,

Through his comedy, he highlights topics such as mental health and what environmental/financial factors influence it, and just being open and honest about the way his mind does work more effectively communicates important ideas about life more than many other art forms because it's so playful and all it asks of you is to enjoy.



Figure 5 Very Important, postcard, David Shrigley

"Comedy is about anarchy and making people laugh, and saying what you're not supposed to say." – David Shrigley, 2018

A visual-art comparison to be made would be the work of David Shrigley, which also has the appeal of being immediate, intuitive and playful and in the same way communicates very directly his thought processes and, in turn, his beliefs about the world.

"I think the best kind of humour is the kind of humour where you don't quite understand what you're laughing at – you intuitively know that there's something there that's both funny and 'other'."

Although having his work exhibited on the Fourth Plinth in London, Shrigley's work shines on the platform "Instagram" as its immediate reflection can be posted in a daily feed. It could even be argued that his Instagram feed is a durational piece in itself, documenting his daily thoughts and experiences in the context of *right now*.

He translates the complexities of his human experience with little snippets, helping us make sense of the world in a deeper and more nuanced way whilst remaining playful and comedic and ultimately easy to receive as a viewer.

This is particularly important in the LGBT community as valuable traits such as loving, open expression have become reduced to external characteristics of simply being gay” but, in the case of Brian Jordan Alvarez, there exists a plethora of personalities and inside him and he is not far removed from these more “normal” people. By empathizing with him, we see that we can choose to be more loving and accepting ourselves.

Brian Jordan Alvarez is probably best known as an internet “content creator”. He is also a Tennessee-raised, 33 year old Columbian-American comedy writer, actor and producer known for perhaps his largest accomplishment “The Gay and Wondrous life of Caleb Gallo”.

His videos on YouTube and Twitter mostly consist of shorts of two minutes or less where he intuitively “plays around”, Shrigley style, with ideas using accents in a way similar to Limmy where the intention is not to mock a cultural stereotype but more so to explore different characters that emerge from his mind- expressing them in the way that they exist internally, almost. There are also consistent characters such as “Marnie T.”, an exploitative spiritual guru who also could be said to be an expression of his own thoughts and experiences with so-called “spiritual” thought and the awareness that “preaching” such ideas can be morally questionable.

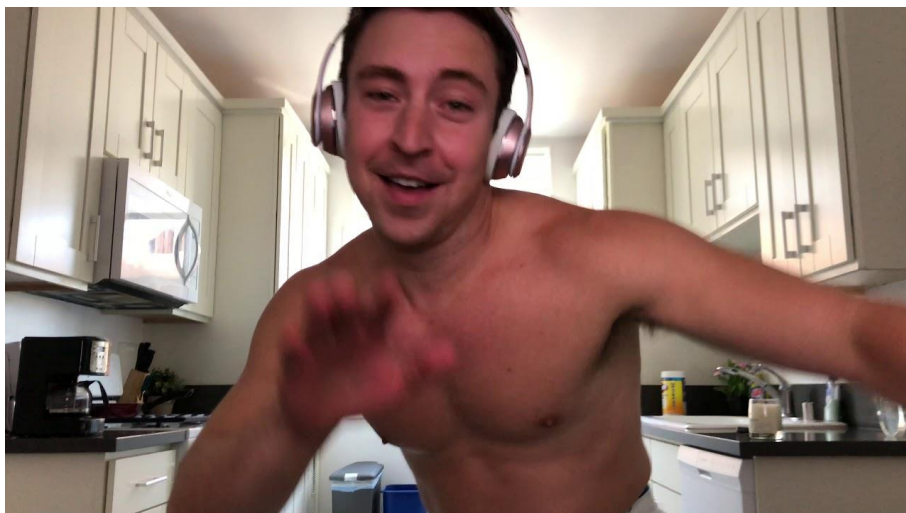


Figure 6 Screenshot from a video from Brian Jordan Alvarez's self-titled channel on Youtube.com

In all of his videos, but most notable perhaps, his “Dancing to[...]” videos where he simply dances to songs he likes. What makes them so well-enjoyed is the openness and fun he has – there a clear

message of self-love and acceptance and in “The Wondrous Misadventures of Caleb Gallo”, an open exploration of varying expressions of love in the queer community. The character “Freckle”, who is an artist and performer in their own right, provides an extremely complex and realistic example of someone who is *gender-fluid*.

"I don't identify as anything other than the present moment"- Jason Greene, AKA “Freckle”, 2020

These people are all just playing themselves, but it is who they are and what they believe that bring such value to their content. By honouring themselves through their acting, these people bring their worlds and the worlds of their viewers together.

If a great artist is one who is a translator between worlds- an amazing artist might be one who communicates their inner world in such a way that they don't even see it as translating. These are artists who are not converting feelings into images nor are they really translating their feelings into words- but these people become their inner world- act as though they imagine, say what they think and embody different elements of themselves through the use of characters- absolving the need for a consistent personal presentation.



Figure 7 Screenshot from the video "Freckle Loves You", 2020

“There are no plays, only authors”

This quote by early 20th century French novelist and playwright, Jean Giradoux inspired director and film critic Francois Truffaut who “tentatively” formed the term “politique de auteurs” – more commonly known today as “Auteur Theory”.

In the 1950s, Truffaut controversially critiqued films made by teams that strived for “realism” as opposed to “cinema d’auteurs” whom he praised for “the expression of [their] personalit[ies] in their work[s]”.

Andrew Sarris greatly expanded on the “politique de auteurs” in the 1960’s. In his Notes on the Auteur Theory (1962), Sarris stated the auteur theory as being comprised of three parts: “The outer circle as technique; the middle circle, personal style; and the inner circle, interior meaning.”

It could be said that unlike standard filmmaking, performance art and amateur internet videos prioritise interior meaning, which is arguably the most important element of art- and this can all be done with less materials, less “stuff” than more traditional forms of art such as painting and sculpture. A suitable medium for a time where overconsumption is killing our planet, for sure!

Beyond Comprehension

The Occult is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as “relating to magical powers and activities, such as those of witchcraft and astrology” however here it will be used to refer to any activities relating to the practice of traditional or modern “magick” where unconventional beliefs are used as tools to accomplish artistic goals.

In his essay entitled, “The Other Side”, art historian and curator Lars Bang Larsen talks about an “occultist vogue” in art, pointing to the twin towers event to explain “why so many artists have been turning to the unseen as a means of short-circuiting the spectacle.”

He said “we now hover in a kind of limbo where no real development or change can take place because society represses the past and fears the future” in 2009, but this seems even more relevant today in 2020 where a the future has become incredibly unknown.

“most contemporary artists are not ironic or nostalgic in their use of the occult in art: rather, they see it as a means by which to opt for new ways to communicate and make things happen”, Lars Bang Larsen states.

He also cites literary critic Fredric Jameson, who talked about “the waning of affect”, by which he argued that “the late capitalist world had converted everything into surface” in his book “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, 1991. Larsen proposes that the value of Occult art is that it causes real “witnessing an increase of affect and inhabiting somatic states of heightened preparedness” as it tests our self-understanding as reasonable, rational people. He calls this response “Affect”, inspired by Michael Foucault’s “bio-politics” and argues that this is energy transfer if the true currency of art.

An example of such art is a piece by German/Polish artist Maria M. Loboda called “*The Grand Conjunction of Lucifuge Rofocale* (2006)” in which she follows a Satanist anti-love spell, presented as an installation where each of the ingredients is laid out. Thankfully, for the couples seeing the work, the spell was never activated. However, this post-conceptualist art becomes a portal to something much bigger than one person’s feelings- but opens recipients up to the vast unknown and not-fully-understood forces that are above and amongst us.

However, occult influences also seem to be on the rise in popular music with artists such as Drain Gang who member Bladee speaks of as “draining the night of it’s essence” to make music in 2018, as well as many other artists of varying genre who have hinted at occult inspiration such as Death Grips, Anna Von Hausswolf and more obviously in a plethora of metal bands and witch house.



Figure 8 "Untitled 13" 2020 by artist Claire Barrow

So, where is this all leading? What are we, as artists, working towards?

In his 2019 essay on [frieze.com](https://www.frieze.com), Nicholas Bourriaud refers to the Anthropocene as a “geological phenomenon that symbolizes a collective conscience taking hold”, that the “most important artists in our era are moving towards a choral art, a polyvocal one” which stems from multiple sources- objects, animals, computers, plants, as well as humans. He states that we are moving towards an “amplified humanism [...] in which the human being is no longer central”.

We are not simply translators between each other’s inner worlds- but the worlds in every definition. The physical world, the spiritual world, the online world, the micro world, the macro world.

Perhaps, in order not to destroy our world, we must understand it better- and it is the artists’ responsibility to learn, understand and translate that understanding to our fellow person and find harmony between the emotional and the physical, to continually elevate what is important.

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