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AI Acknowledgment

I confirm I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work in this portfolio.

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Identity, Fluidity, Aestheticization

This essay will explore and expand upon the various concepts and interpretations involved in generating a sense of nostalgia within artistic practice, focusing particularly on the themes of **fluidity**, **identity**, and **Aestheticization**. By examining how these concepts influence the emotional and visual construction of nostalgia in art, I aim to build a extensive understanding of their roles in shaping both personal and collective memory. Developing a clear and focused research question will allow me to delve more critically and deeply into my selected theme for my dissertation process. Through vast research and analysis, I intend to uncover a wide range of interpretations and theoretical perspectives. This in-depth investigation will not only broaden my conceptual understanding but will also support a more refined, intentional, and thoughtful approach in the creation of my own artworks. Featuring visual artists Frida Kahlo (Identity), Max Ernst (Fluidity) and David Hockney (Aestheticization). Philosophers Marshall McLuhan (Aestheticization), Jean Baudrillard (Identity).

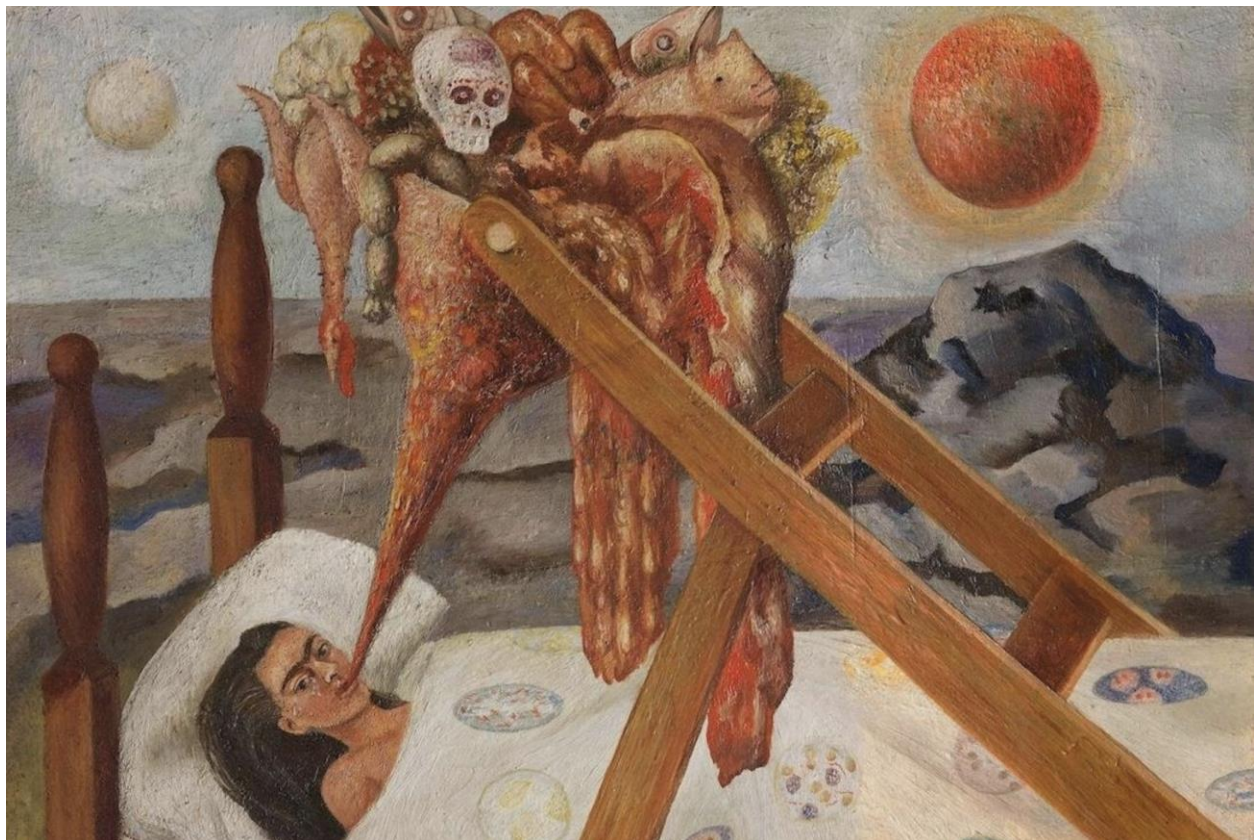
Identity

Artists have examined, enquired, and established identity through their artwork throughout all of history. They have demonstrated that identity is a complex, changing narrative influenced by memory, environment, and emotion rather than a fixed stable concept, whether addressing personal experience, cultural belonging, or political perspectives. Some artists create moments about themselves through their work, making symbolic and often imagined representations of themselves, implying that identity is created rather than discovered. Art serves as a powerful tool to offer new perspectives on the human condition, with themes such as identity and self-discovery deeply rooted in art history. Identity has remained a constant focus for artists, reflecting life's continual changes and the need for self-reflection on the experiences that shape us. In many cases, the exploration of identity in art, acts as a form of rebellion against societal narratives, allowing marginalized voices to create visibility and agency. Furthermore, the creation of fragmented or adapted identities particularly in postmodern and contemporary practices demonstrates how globalization, migration, and technological change continue to influence how individuals perceive and present themselves. Through self-portraiture, performance, installation, and symbolic representation, artists not only document their own evolving identities but also invite viewers to question the assumptions and structures that define identity in wider cultural contexts.

‘ It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real itself’ (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 2)

According to Baudrillard, identity is no longer a fixed, stable idea that stems from genuine self-awareness. Instead, it has evolved into something more performative and adaptable,

influenced by the images and representations that are promoted in society and the media. The idea that representations symbols, signs, and images have progressively substituted and, in certain situations, exceeded the aim they were intended to reflect in modern society is mentioned in Baudrillard's philosophy. This idea is consistent with Kahlo's approach to memory and identity in her artwork, particularly in pieces like 'Without Hope', where traditional identities are replaced by signs of reality, such as physical and emotional suffering.



Without Hope, 1945 by Frida Kahlo.

The idea that our self-concept is adaptable and influenced by the different experiences, hardships, and emotional events that define us is connected to this investigation of identity. According to Kahlo, she painted the pain and suffering that she was unable to express verbally. The painting displays an authentic identity that isn't masked by conventional interpretations of beauty or strength. Instead, Kahlo is demonstrating how trauma, her body, and the associated emotions can produce an ever-changing sense of self. In many ways, Kahlo's artistic investigation of her identity served as an effort to make sense of her own complicated and fragmented experiences. The combination of ideology and practice demonstrates how identity, rather than being a single, fixed essence, it is an ongoing pathway that is constantly reshaped by internal experiences and external cultural forces. Both Baudrillard's theory of simulated realities and Kahlo's deeply personal

imagery demonstrate how memory, trauma, and societal expectations may detach and reconstruct identity, resulting in a layered and evolving self.

Fluidity

The concept of fluidity in painting conveys a sense of transformation, temporality, and the continuous evolution of form and meaning. When examined through the vision of time and memory, fluidity transcends the idea of fixed representation, it becomes a reflection of the shifting nature of human experience. Rather than portraying a moment, it suggests an ongoing process of becoming shaped by emotion, perception, and change. In surrealist art, this approach often manifests through dreamscape, distorted, and multidimensional imagery that obstructs usual narratives. These works generate a haunting atmosphere, exploring themes such as decay, rebirth, and the instability of identity and memory. In this way, fluidity becomes a metaphor for the human condition constantly shifting, reassembling, and redefining itself.



Sanctuary for Furies (1974) by Leonora Carrington

Sanctuary for Furies by Carrington is an example of fluidity in art by breaking down fixed forms, identities, and spaces. The work reflects how the boundaries between different states physical, emotional, or psychological are not constant but constantly in motion. The figures and creatures in Sanctuary for Furies appear to be in a continuous state of transformation. The bodies of the furies themselves are not defined, they start to transform between animal, human, and mythical forms. The painting readdresses the fragmented way memory operates, not linear but as a shifting and often disjointed collection of impressions and emotional buildup. In this way, Carrington's work becomes a visual representation of internal states that defy structure, allowing the viewer to experience a world that, like the mind itself, is in continuous motion.

"Carrington's broader project takes shape as an investigation into alternative practices of social organization and knowledge production that had been lost, destroyed, or

discredited" (Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation Symbolic Death and Rebirth in Little Francis and Down Below, p.g 38)

Leonora Carrington's approach to fluidity and transformation mirrors the larger themes identified in Kristoffer Noheden's analysis of her work. Carrington's creatures and figures in Sanctuary for Furies appear to be constantly shifting, blending the distinction between the physical, emotional, and psychological realms. This reflects the unusual and continuously changing nature of identity and existence which Noheden emphasizes in Carrington's encounters with mythological practices. Feminist surrealism, a movement that challenged gender roles and the hierarchies that uphold them by embracing growth as a tool, is also linked to this fluidity. Using surrealism's dream logic and symbolic language, feminist surrealist artists explored female independence, personal experiences, and a sense of self as constantly changing, rejecting the traditional concept, which frequently objectified women through a male lens. Carrington reinvents the furies, mythological figures associated with retaliation and female rage, as protectors of a transitional space, rather than antagonists. Carrington's imagery, like memory, is fragmented, encouraging the viewer to dwell in uncertainty rather than resolve it.

Cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall argue that identity is not a fixed state but a "production" that is always in process and constructed through representation (Hall, 1996). According to Hall, fluidity is the result of identity being shaped by language, and social structures that reflect our particular beliefs, histories, and power dynamics. It is not something we grow up and learn to become, but rather something we continually discuss and redefine in response to the social and historical contexts in which we find ourselves.

Aestheticization

Aestheticization is the process of the media Romanticizing everyday activities and events to create visually appealing content, which in turn creates an ongoing cycle of comparison in which people are pressured to portray a perfect version of their lives, often at the expense of depth or authenticity. In the context of art, this phenomenon has influenced both artistic identity and practice. Many contemporary artists respond to the social media constructed realities by critiquing the superficiality of online personas or exploring the fragmentation of rawness in their work. Through the exploration of memory and personal experience's impact, the question arises: Do we feel more fulfilled by our memories because of social media's influence in labelling them as either 'good' or 'bad'? Would we find these

memories more enjoyable if social media amplified them, potentially altering our sense of identity in the process?



David Hockney two figures 1976.

During the development of his iconic swimming pool series, David Hockney was struck by the normality of domestic pools in Los Angeles, observing, "I looked down to see blue swimming pools all over, and I realized that a swimming pool in England would have been a luxury, whereas here they are not" (Hockney, cited in Christie's, 2018). This perspective demonstrates the process of aestheticization, where social media and art elevate everyday life and environments into places of desire. In this context, normal features such as suburban swimming pools are reinvented as pieces of luxury, relaxation, and status. Hockney's famous pool paintings embody this process, using bright colours and spatial awareness to turn an average place into a signifier of modern luxury and success, through this his work blurs the boundary between the realistic and the dream, emphasising how the familiar can be reframed as something visually and culturally significant. Hockney's use of technology to create and manipulate images is another example that the role social media plays in recreating memory, making it something more visually appealing and sought after. This concept connects to how we remember moments, sometimes more vividly or idealized, due to external factors. Social media provides tools for enhancing images, filters and editing options, just as Hockney uses digital tools to enhance the quality and impact of his work. However, Hockney's engagement with digital tools and technological

experiments further illustrates how trending media alters the ways in which we perceive and remember reality. His use of iPads and image manipulation reinforces the function of social media in curating memory. Just as Hockney selectively constructs his compositions to create selective emotions or atmospheres, social media users actively curate their digital personas and histories. Filters, editing options, and visual enhancements reshape how moments are presented and recalled, often rendering them more vivid, polished, or emotionally resonant than they may have been. The key similarity between Hockney's use of technology and how social media reshapes memory is that both processes involve active curation.

'The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present' (MacLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. *The Medium is the Message*. P.g 13)

McLuhan argues that artists are 'the only person aware of the nature of the present' because they are deeply tuned into the media and technological changes that are shaping society. Artists are often the first to recognize the subtle shifts in culture, behaviour, and communication brought on by new technology and forms of media. In this way, both Hockney's artistic approach and the way we engage with social media demonstrate McLuhan's idea that new media and technologies incredibly alter our perception of reality. The artist, by embracing and experimenting with new tools, can perceive and communicate the changes in the way we experience the present. Memory is inherently fluid, it's not an exact state of events, but instead, an ongoing procedure that is affected by time, emotions, and external factors. McLuhan's perspective on media suggests that our relationship with technology constantly reshapes the way we process and recall our memories. Social media also reflects this fluidity by continuously providing us with new takes on the past, frequently through glorified lenses which contributes to creating a state where memories are not fixed.

Building on my recent studies around nostalgia, identity, and the recollection of memories, I intend to deepen my exploration into how contemporary media, particularly social and digital platforms influence our self-perception, the way we process personal memories, and how these processes, in turn, affect the development of identity. The central question guiding my research and practice will be: **"Is identity ever fixed in memory, or is it always fluid and reconstructed through the lens of time, emotion, and societal influence?"**

This question stems from an interest in how memory is an evolving, interpretive process influenced by external as well as internal factors, rather than just a simple recollection of past events. Over the course of the next year, I plan to investigate a range of related sub-questions that will help to support and broaden my main inquiry. These include examining how social media platforms shape our perceptions of ourselves and our identity, often pressuring us to have idealized personas and how our constant exposure to aestheticized content creates a culture of comparison and performance that may distort emotional truths, and how digital tools like photograph filters affect how we create, recognise, and even rewrite our own histories. Questions such as **"What is social media's impact on our identity?"** and **"How does the contrast between a lived memory and digitally mediated memory affect our sense of authenticity?"** will be key to this investigation. These inquiries will not only inform the theoretical layout of my research but will also serve as a foundation for my artistic practice. Through my work, I aim to deeply examine how social and digital media shape not only what we remember, but how we emotionally relate to those memories. In doing so, i want to discover the complex yet effective ways that identity is transformed into an ongoing negotiation and changing narrative that is impacted by social expectations, technology interfaces, and emotional reenactments of the past. My creative response will explore the bridge between authenticity and performance, offering a visual language that reflects the fragmented, fluid nature of memory and the self in the digital age.

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