

MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY ART AFTER POST- TRUTH

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Introduction

Post-truth is a term used to describe the modern age in which facts no longer remain important; it is where emotional engagement and social preference overcome truth. Ball (2017) has asserted that this phenomenon has affected society in multiple ways; including art. This thesis investigates whether contemporary artists deal with memory and identity in this context and how they approach this unique perspective of art, which bridges transitions from modernity to postmodernity to the post-truth era. Modernism, postmodernism, and post-truth provide a transition in terms of the relation of art to the social world, narratives, history, and subjectivity. The purpose of this paper is to identify how the contemporary art in the era of post-truth affects the societal perception and how it reconstructs the public memory. This study applies a literature review method and studies artworks that synthesize philosophical, social, and psychological theories to explain art-memory-identity relationships.

Artwork Analyses: modernism

Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" (1917): Duchamp's readymade urinal mounts a challenge to the current view of art and authorship. This provided the foundation for evolving contemporary art, especially in these post-truth times with its ambiguity and contradictory meaning regarding what is told and what people choose to see.

According to Camfield (1991), "Fountain" alters cognitive frameworks, forcing viewers to reevaluate their understanding of art and addressing authorship and originality using a mass-produced object to challenge the cult of the artist-genius (Figure 1).

Diego Rivera's "The History of Mexico": For almost seven years Diego Rivera painted in the National Palace in Mexico City, 'The History of Mexico' murals which give an account of the history of the country (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2020



Figure 2. Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," History of Mexico murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City

Villalón (2020) notes that these murals develop the character of the nation and the way it remembers its past, thus underscoring the importance of public art in articulating national narratives.

Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" (1977-1980): "Untitled Film Stills" is a series of 69 black-and-white pictures by the American photographer Cindy Sherman in which Sherman in various roles and represents scenes of American movies from mid-century America (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" (1977-1980)

Sherman's concerned with identity and the materiality of contemporary constructs of reality. MoMA (2023) notes how her work challenges the limited representation of women in visual culture and the idea of redefining the social agendas of feminism in a more specific approach.

Post-Truth

Nietzsche argued that classical truth concepts are based on authority or religious foundations. He is perhaps most famous for the quote 'God is dead,' in which he suggested that the decline of religion had forever altered Western civilization's idea of truth. This can be explained due to historical and cultural reasons. But it is also has

become more prominent in the present day society and life. Kakutani (2018) notes that the modern society's need for perception over the reality is brought about by the lack of faith in a single truth that is shared by the whole humanity. As traditional sources of authority and information face increasing skepticism, individuals have turned to their own perceptions and subjective experiences to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain information environment. God is dead, and so is the truth.

In the Post-Truth Era that dominates our world today, one of the important roles of art is the fact that the artists today are more critical about truth and existence. They depict a new vision, introduce another version of the story, and create new realities (Figure 4).

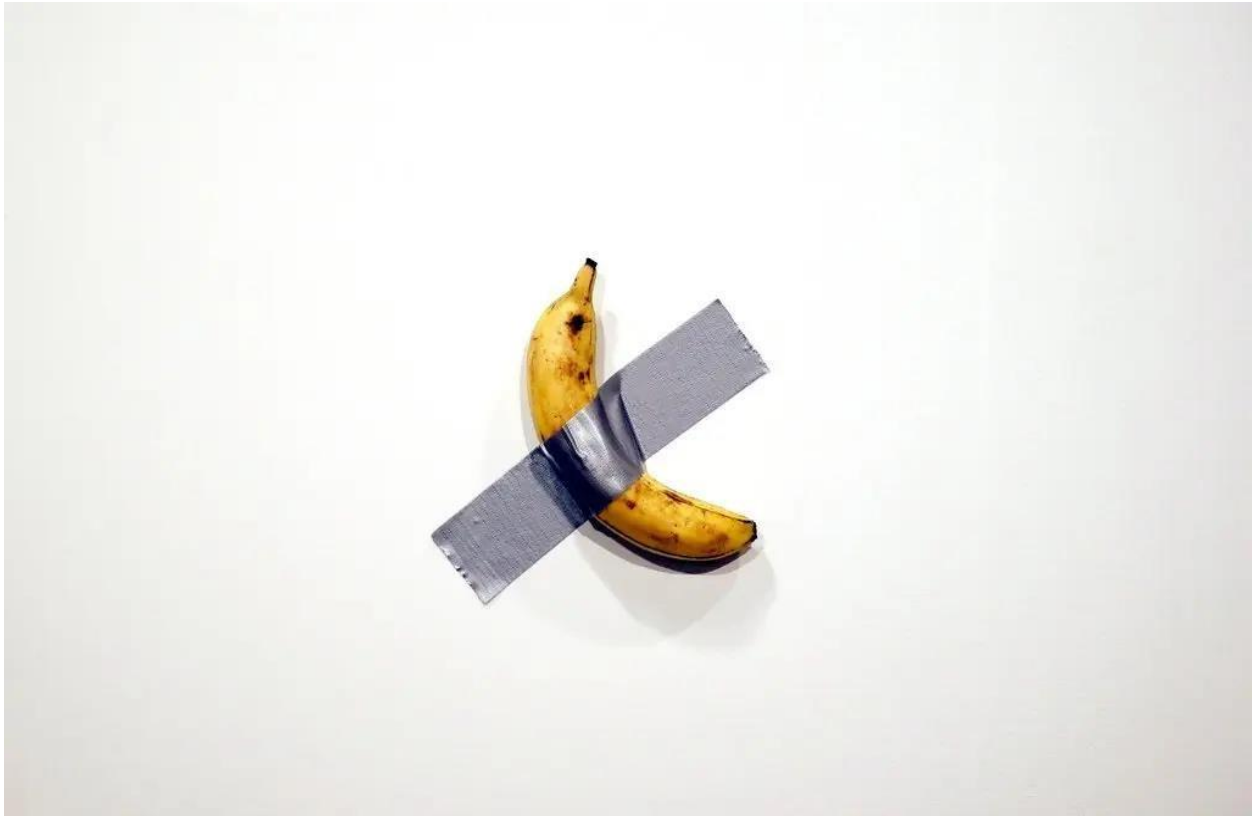


Figure 4. The banana, by Maurizio Cattelan, called "Comedian, Photo: Rhona Wise/EPA, via Shutterstock.

Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan created "The Comedian" in 2019. This artwork, a bananataped to the wall of the gallery, critiques the commodification of art and the vulnerability of truth in the postmodern era (Cascone, 2019).

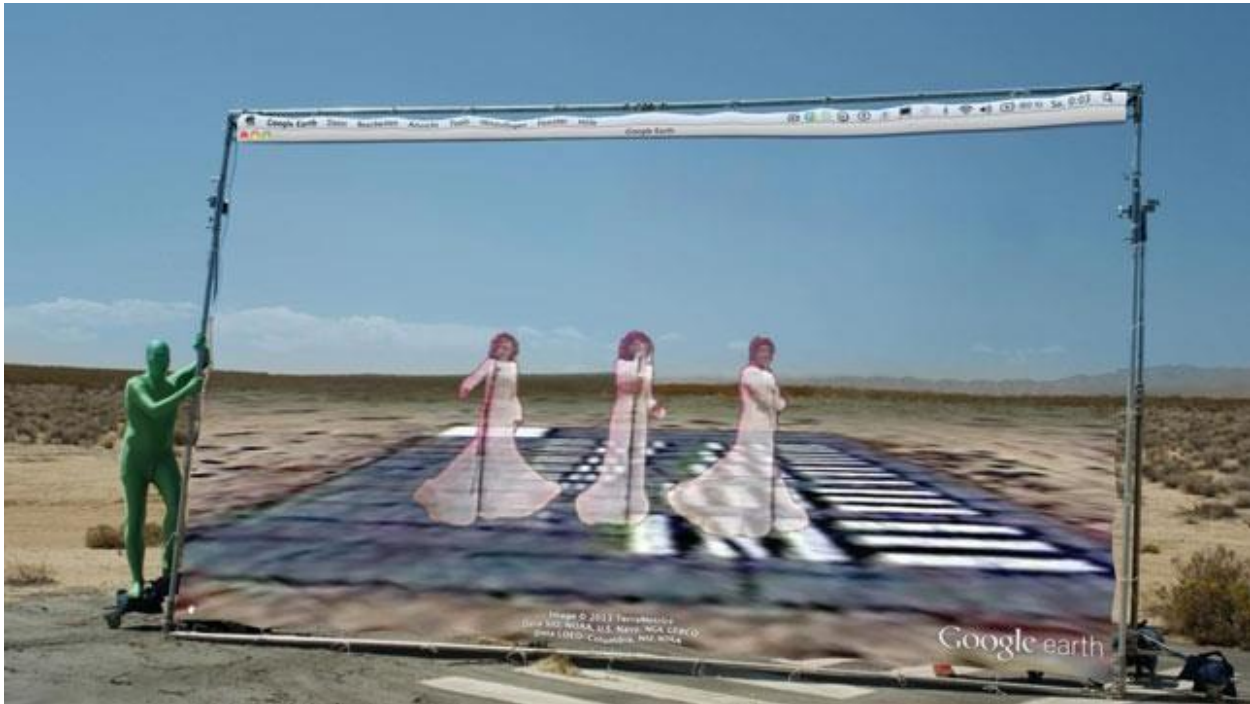


Figure 5. Hito Steyerl. HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File. 2013. Still image, single screen 1080p .mov file, 14min. © Hito Steyerl. Courtesy Wilfried Lentz Rotterdam

Hito Steyerl's "How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File" (2013): Steyerl, a prominent artist and theorist, explores how digital technologies shape our perceptions of truth and identity. This work humorously critiques surveillance and digital visibility, exploring the constructed nature of digital reality. Steyerl (2013) notes that her installation is a commentary on how reality is produced and perceived in the digital age specifically focusing on the illusion of truth and multiplicity of the self (Figure 5).

Findings

Modernist artists like Duchamp challenged traditional aesthetics and representations. Fountain by Duchamp challenged the notion of what art is. Camfield (1991) argued that these works were revolutionary in their time as they undermined conventional ideas of art as well as the expectations of viewers in terms of identity.

In the post-truth era, artists like Hito Steyerl and Maurizio Cattelan engage with digital culture and media to critique societal narratives. Steyerl's "How Not to Be Seen" addresses surveillance and digital visibility, while "The Comedian" challenges notions of authenticity and originality.

Digital media and technology have blurred the lines between reality and representation. Today everything is a representation through digital media and technology and these tools are used by artists to manipulate perceptions.

This discussion can be related to Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* which contains his statement 'God is dead'. Individuals are confronted with the task of creating their own realities as traditional sources of information and authority decline within society. This is reflected in the art of the post-truth era. The prevalence of misinformation and the emphasis on personal belief over objective facts contribute to a sense of nihilism.

Nietzsche argued that to transcend nihilism one must aspire to be the *Übermensch* (superman) and generate his or her own values and meaning. This concept is reflected in contemporary art. Today's artists are living in a post-truth world and trying to define new truths and create new narratives.

Conclusions

In summary, the study underscores the evolving role of art in navigating and overcoming post-truth era challenges, with contemporary artists embodying Nietzsche's vision of the *Übermensch* by creating new values and meanings in a fragmented world. Future research should explore the dynamic interplay between art, technology, and society to provide deeper insights into art's evolving role in contemporary culture.

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