

Ego-Death of the Artistic Practice

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

This research paper calls for the removal of the 'ego' within the context of artistic practice, artistic interpretation as well as artistic appreciation. Putting forward ideas from a range of artists and philosophers to form a guide about why and how to move away from an egocentric perspective of the arts.

In the first chapter 'Illustrating the Ego', we do just that. Giving context to the ego, introducing the theory of the 'id', the 'ego' and the 'superego' through Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek. Using the explanations around the topic from Freud and Lacan to highlight key points of the theory, followed by the more colloquial writing from Žižek to ground the idea. To ground the idea further we will look at the 'Avant-Garde' and the 'Kitsch', linking these two forms of art to the id and the ego.

The second chapter of this research paper will explore how postmodernism (as a side-effect of late capitalism) has pushed the ego to the forefront of art making. Particularly in the case of mainstream media, no longer allowing for great developments within art. We will look at writing from Frederic Jameson, Mark Fisher and Susan Sontag to navigate this topic.

In the third chapter we encounter writing from Gabriella De La Puente and Zarina Muhammad (the writing duo from 'the White Pube') and Aria Dean. All writers question the validity of the ego as art, or more specifically, the capitalisation of the ego and the

tokenization of identity that comes along with this. We then look at two exhibitions through this lens of thinking. Giving context and relevance to the points put forward.

The fourth chapter uses the work of Roland Barthes to show a way in which we can begin to act against these prominent, egocentric forms of art practice and art interpretation. Giving reason for this call for an 'ego-death' of the artistic practice. The final chapter acts in a way as a guide for changing perspectives on art practice, Barthes work is accompanied by that of Rick Rubins and an interview text between Clémence Seurat and Dušan Kažić.

Chapter 1 - Illustrating the Ego

1.1 - The Ego

To understand 'Ego-death' we must first understand the ego. If you are to Google the definition of 'Ego', the search result will state it to be; "a person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance.". In the context of psychoanalysis as; "the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal identity." Finally in the context of philosophy as "a conscious thinking subject."

Freud initially put forward the idea of the ego in his writing 'The Ego and the id'. In the essay we see Freud describe the 'id' as our basic immediate needs and interpretation of feeling, the 'ego' is the constructed, socially conscious mediator of the 'id'. In extension of this theory Freud introduces a third element, the 'Superego', a person's 'Superego' is made up of their morality, the 'superego' 'is our critical self-consciousness, enforcing social standards learned through parents and teachers ect. It is important to understand that the 'ego' and the 'superego' are both constructed as a person moves through life. The 'ego' is a mediator of the 'id' and the 'superego', adhering to social circumstances appropriately, maintaining an image, controlling your actions.



Figure 1. - Žižek sitting in the basement of the Mother's house from 'Psycho'

1.2 - Expanding Upon the Ego

In the 2006 film 'The Pervert's Guide to Cinema', directed by Sophie Fiennes featuring modern philosopher Slavoj Žižek, Žižek talks through a number of his writings. The film explores and explains a number of philosophies through film, Žižek tackles Freud's 'Ego and the Id' through Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film 'Psycho'. He relates the architecture of the mother's house in 'Psycho' to the three levels of human subjectivity, the first floor, where his hyper-critical mother rests as the 'superego', the ground floor, where the main character Norman acts relatively normal (regulated), as the 'ego', the basement where he finds his mother to be a corpse, is the 'id'.

In another example Žižek uses the Marx brothers to describe the 'id', the 'ego' and the 'superego', these three brothers appeared in a number of comedy shows throughout the 1930s including 'Duck Soup' and 'Monkey Business'. The first brother 'Groucho', in his "nervous hyperactivity" represents the 'superego', 'Chico' the second brother who is "calculating all the time" is the 'ego'. Finally 'Harpo' the third brother in his "radical ambiguity" is the 'id', in describing 'Harpo', Žižek goes on to say that "this combination of utter corruption and innocence, is what the 'id' is all about". (Žižek, np.) It is important to note that the 'ego' and the 'superego' are constructs of identity.

Jacques Lacan speaks to this in his essay 'The Mirror Stage' (an essay in his book 'Écrits'), in which he suggests that it is only when a child identifies themselves in a mirror, the 'id' and the 'ego' separate. Up until that point the child navigates the world with no constructed identity, no 'ego', they are one with the space they inhabit, directly interpreting their feelings with action. The child embodies this "radical ambiguity", the child develops the 'ego' in its interactions with the world and is thought the 'superego' by those around them.

To bring this a little further we can see the introduction of language to a child as the start of ego development, more specifically, the introduction of meaning. It is once semantics is introduced, the learning of a symbolic language to a child that the ego begins to develop. If the ego is constructed by things we already know, we have to wonder if it is the 'id' that should be leading artistic practice, to innovate and create futures unknown to us.

1.3 - The Avant-Garde

To take this into the context of the artistic practice, we might relate 'id' to our raw creation, and the ego to the factors which influence our work in pursuits of societal acceptance. To illustrate this idea further, we are going to employ the 1953 text from Clement Greenberg 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (published in a book of essays by Greenberg titled 'Art and Culture - Critical Essays'). The text describes the Avant-Garde movement as being first defined by a departure from the Bourgeois society, a rejection of Capitalism and the patronage system which had funded and shaped art for so long. Avant-Garde art has heavily influenced the modernist movement, its utopian values being that of pure art, not shaped by previous literature or social influence. "The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid"(Greenberg, p.6). We might attach the concept of the 'id', to the 'Avant-Garde'. Creation as instinct, as direct feeling, without interpretation, untouched by any knowledge of art history or artistic theory. "Art for art's sake" or "pure poetry" as Greenberg says (p.8).

To continue with this analogy, the 'ego' (and all of its motivations and influences) may be considered 'Kitsch' art. 'Kitsch' in this case is described as "using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits." (Greenberg, p.10) Just as the 'Ego' operates on the 'id', 'Kitsch' is art that is moderated, it is art which has been created in service of

something, whether that is societal approval, or as Greenberg highlights, in pursuit of capital.

Chapter 2 - How Did We Get Here?

2.1 - Postmodernism and the Ego



Figure 2. - Still image from Stanley Kubrick's 'the Shining'

If you are to Google 'Postmodernism', the search result will state that it "is characterised by the self-conscious use of earlier styles and conventions, a mixing of different artistic styles and media, and a general distrust of theories", however in his book 'Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1991) Frederic Jameson states that "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which "culture" has become a veritable "second nature."(Jameson, p.1) Throughout his writings Jameson uses the concept of the 'Pastiche', a phrase first

coined by T.W. Adorno, which can be compared to that of 'Kitsch'. Jameson suggests that 'Pastiche' art was first born at the death of genre "the moment in which the deeper aesthetic vitality of genre comes to consciousness and becomes self-conscious may well also be the moment in which genre in that older sense is no longer possible."

(Jameson, p.2) This is from his text "Historicism in the Shining", in which Jameson is stating that it is the over identification of all things which has caused the death of genre and the birth of 'Pastiche'. The idea being that once a genre has been defined, any artwork or piece of culture aimed at being within that genre, is now purely in replication, it cannot be new as it is purely in reference with the past.

So in saying this Jameson is suggesting that art becomes 'Pastiche' when it is aiming to replicate something which has been created before. In the case of this text Jameson describes a cultural shift in film production as an example of this phenomenon. Similar to Žižek, Jameson uses Alfred Hitchcock as an example here, describing the creative space given to him by the industry at the time, to expand new thoughts and practices in the avant-gardian/avant-gardist manner. Jameson moves on to describe how blockbuster films are now tightly linked to best-selling novels or other branches of the culture industry. Films are funded to be made within the confines of a marketable genre, there is no longer space for a filmmaker such as Hitchcock to operate in their initial years. Yet, when the genre has been defined, films use the pre-given structure as a "pretext for production which is no longer personal or or stylistic in the sense of the older modernism." (Jameson, p.3) Once again, as Greenberg says, 'Kitsch' is the source of its

profits. To attach the same ideology from above, the 'Pastiche' (the 'Kitsch') represents the ego, it is purely constructed and in reference to its context.

“Postmodernism—characterized by its inability to find forms adequate to the present, still less to anticipate wholly new futures—was the “cultural logic of late capitalism.”

- Mark Fisher 'What is hauntology' (2012, p.1)

Here is Mark Fisher referencing Frederic Jameson to define Postmodernism. In this text Fisher identifies that the prevalence of postmodernist thinking has left us unable to imagine a future any different from our present, that with the death of modernism was the death of a whole frame of social imagination. Postmodernist art and culture was unable to imagine new futures as it is created only in reference to past works. Ideas of the future or speculation about utopias have become flattened into being genres within themselves. As Fisher mentions in 'What is Hauntology?', “the futuristic now connoted a settled set of concepts, affects, and associations” (Fisher, p.1). Because of this it becomes seemingly impossible to create a genuinely individual idea of the future, unadulterated by speculations of the past.

2.2 - Against Egocentricity

“interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world. To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of “meanings.” It is to turn the world into this world. (“This world”! As if there were any other.) The world, our world, is depleted, impoverished enough. Away with all duplicates of it, until we again experience more immediately what we have.”

- Susan Sontag 'Against Interpretation and Other Essays' (1967, p.6)

This is an excerpt from Susan Sontag's 'Against Interpretation', her essay written in 1964 highlights the over identification of things within postmodernist art. The text suggests why we have come to suffer the fate suggested by both Fisher and Jameson. The flattening of all things down to meanings and symbols, removing the mysticism of art. This is the commodification of all things that Jameson explores, the need to identify genre to justify funding it. To look at Sontag's essay in a Freudian perspective we can see the 'ego' in a desperate scramble to attach meaning and a need to contextualise and understand an art piece. The 'id' would approach it as it is. Seeing an art piece as its form rather than attempting to read it as if it were a hieroglyphic text. In his books 'Post-Capitalist Desire' and 'Capitalist Realism' Fisher speaks to the fact that it is late capitalism which has caused this craze to interpret, identify and market all things cultural in the pursuit of capital.

2.3 - Capitalist Desires

“ [Capital] has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value”

- Marx quoted by Fisher ‘Capitalist Realism’ (2009, p.10)

This is Marx quoted in Mark Fisher’s ‘Capitalist Realism - Is There No Alternative?’, as an example of this we can explore the commodification of identity. Matt Colquhoun summarises in their introduction to ‘Post-Capitalist Desires’ how even counter-cultures fell victim to postmodernism’s over identification of things. “to artificially implement capitalism’s cognitive capture from within, demonstrating the human organism’s “marked ... tendency to seek out and identify itself with parasites that debilitate but never quite destroy it”(Colquhoun, p.1). Once a counter-culture had been identified it became a husk of itself and those too identified with said counter-culture were now being sold an empty idea. Fisher uses the example of Oasis and the brit-pop movement of the 90s vaguely attributing a psychedelic style echoing the hippies of the 60s. Oasis’s ‘Champagne Supernova’ being placed in contrast with The Beatles’ ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’. A vague appropriation of the past for its aesthetic style, suggesting the sense of revolution that was present in the 60s which was now far from relevant in the 90s. Identity is being used here in the most mundane sense, using the aesthetics of a revolution without any revolutionary action. Fisher goes on to use the example of Tracy Emin’s ‘My Bed’ piece from 1998, comparing it to be a kind of ‘kitsch’ abstraction of

John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 'Bed-ins for Peace' protest in 1969. This is the use of aesthetics from our past to attach an artist's identity to a vague sense of rebellion or protest, a self-marketing tool.

Chapter 3 - What Does this all Look Like?

3.1 - Competitive Victimisation



Figure 3 & 4 - Feminism logo t-shirts from H&M

In a recent essay by Gabrielle de la Puente (of 'the White Pube') the critic calls out this the aestheticization of identity and the reduction of identity politics into meaninglessness that the contemporary art world has perpetuated. The essay titled 'Level One Identity Art' highlights the inclusion of minority identities in culture purely to cultivate a kind of pseudo-wokeness (this being the aestheticization of morals and politics), a stretch to appear relevant. Asserting that while the inclusion of minority identities in culture is important, it must be done in a way which expands culture rather than simply tokenizing said minorities. The quote below expands upon this.

“A thin, definition-basic presentation of identity as the only level to an artwork, or a person, tokenises the subject, exoticises the subject, alienates the audience, and it reduces the very promise of identity politics down into simple imagery and rhetoric. I think it paves the way for competitive victimhood, which the right delights in. I think in its brevity, it is also unsympathetic which goes against the values of the whole philosophy.”

- ‘Level One Identity Art’ Gabrielle de la Puente (2022, n.p)

This is not to say that any inclusion of a minority group in culture is to serve the institution, but instead, it is when the artist creates work which simply identifies the minority they are a part of, it is not interesting or revolutionary. In a conversation with Puente’s co-host (of ‘the White Pube’) Zarina Muhammad, about a previous essay front Puente called ‘Are White Girls Capable of Making Art Not About Themselves’, she references ‘Closing the Loop’, a 2016 essay by artist and writer Aria Dean. Dean discusses the selfie as activism, more specifically “selfie feminism”(A, Dean, n.pg), a phenomenon in which the female image is circulated at large (online) by women themselves, in protest of the male gaze. “Maybe a selfie comes close to proving that you exist – that you are at least firmly situated in time and space — but it proves nothing else conclusive about you”. (A, Dean, n.p) Dean is highlighting the fact that these artworks go no further into the concept of feminism than perhaps if the artist were to simply state the word ‘Feminist’. This artwork is not the revolution in identity politics which it presents itself as, attached to her essay ‘Are White Girls Capable of Making Art

Not About Themselves', Puente attaches the two images featured above (figure 3&4). Alongside a paragraph listing examples of what she calls 'White Girl Art', art which grasps at the strands of a revolution in performative gesture, standing for nothing at all. If we are to relate this to Fisher and Jameson, this is 'Pastiche', this is the empty shell of protest where protest once stood.

It is important to note that it is not purely the artwork itself which has dictated its lack of impact. Dean describes this stating that "THE Internet already flattens subjectivities into networks of branded associations and metadata."(A, Dean, n.p) There is no depth to this kind of artwork, simply because the internet does not allow for that kind of depth. Just like these jumpers and t-shirts in the images above, the works do not expand upon feminism, they do not show feminism a future, they simply appropriate and capitalise on a vague sense of identity politics. As Zarina Muhammad says in the previously mentioned conversation of the essay, "It's profitable to make yourself other - to turn that otherness into subject... subject... or like, art object."(Z, Muhammad, n.p) Zarina is describing the way in which minority identities are flattened down into an aesthetic, a marketable product. Enforcing the fact that the all consuming late stage capitalism, goes even so far as turning the self into a consumable product. We must be conscious that it is often art institutions which perpetuate this in protection of their 'ego'. It is easier for an institution to show a work which suggests a kind of politics, without saying provocative or controversial in the slightest.

3.2 - RDS Visual Artist Awards



Figure 5 - RDS Visual Artist Awards, curator and nominees

Puente points out the lack of depth in this kind of work. Artwork which states the existence of an identity without expanding any further, no critical thought, no alternative perspectives, just a single flat statement. It is often in the hands of the institutions who chose present work in a way which perpetuates this. A recent example of this is the 2022 RDS Visual Art Awards. The Exhibition opened in October of 2022 and was on view to the public for 8 days, 13 recent college graduates were chosen to show work in the RDS Concert Hall. This is a large space at over 600 sqm with high ceilings with

Georgian classical design. The nature and the location of the exhibit lends itself to that of the Salon or a time of bourgeois patronage. There are 5 cash prizes awarded to works shown with a total prize fund of €30,000, the largest of said prizes being €10,000 euros, with the main prize holding great esteem within an Irish art context. As the opening line of their web page states “The RDS Visual Art Awards is the most important platform for visual art graduates in Ireland.”(RDS, n.p) A number of Irish artists and curators visit BA and MA graduate exhibitions from art colleges around the country selecting works to be put forward to a judging panel. The exhibition was curated by artist Aideen Barry. In an interview about the show Barry states that “what you’re seeing is a cutting edge snapshot of what Irish is going to be and what is emerging”. (A, Barry, n.p)

The stakes are high for this exhibition and upon entering this space it feels like quite a big deal, the RDS is a long standing institution and its grand architecture reflects that. The main space has been divided by a set of walls that lead you around the work. The artists have aimed to recreate the work as originally installed at their graduation shows, this feels a little disjointed at first, yet as you walk around and read about each work, a trend forms. This first work is about gender from the artist’s female perspective, this work is about the artist’s non-binary identity, this work is about having a disability and this work is by a working class artist ect, ect. To add some context here are some quotes directly from the RDS Visual Art Awards Web Page; “As a queer person of colour, she has constantly been othered by society...” “As Sadhbh approaches these themes through the lens of her own frustration and vulnerability as a woman...” “As a

visually impaired artist, Orla's aesthetic is informed by..." (RDS, n.p) It feels as though the selection panel had a list of topics to tick off while choosing pieces. This flattening of the artwork to be interpreted through the identity of the artist skews the perception of the work entirely. As Puente writes, "A lot of this art points at identity like a kid telling you a fun fact, except it isn't fun, it's normal information." (Puente, n.p) The works no longer have the space to go any further because they have been presented to us with the artist's identity at the forefront. As Puente continues in the text, this means the artwork doesn't get to take the subject of identity any further, because the identity (something we are already aware of outside the context of art) is simply, the artwork. I am not going to expand upon the individual artworks as it is the curation of the work which is at fault here, our initial encounters with the exhibit and the ways in which the show was marketed which is at fault, not the artists.

3.3 - What Grows in the Heart

An example of an exhibition exploring identity politics successfully was at Catalyst Arts in Belfast with their showing of artist Anton Shebetko as part of the Outburst Arts Festival. The show was titled 'What Grows in the Heart', the show centred itself around Ukrainian queer experiences. The new Catalyst exhibition space is quite small with three white walls and a set of windows facing the street. The artist filled the largest wall with a timeline of Queer history in the Ukraine, this is factual, unemotional and not particularly stylized. Facing the large printed timeline are three box televisions all

playing old broadcasts from the Ukraine. Depicting reality television, queer activism/protests, old film clips and musical performances. All of the footage is in Ukrainian. When you sit down on the bench in front of the televisions there are a pile of stories printed onto coloured paper, none of the stories are signed or dated. They all tell tales of queer youth in the Ukraine. While the televisions set the scene of 90's and 2000's Ukraine, their loudness clashes with the delicate, personal stories being told on the printed sheets, the A4 pages themselves are of a particularly light stock.

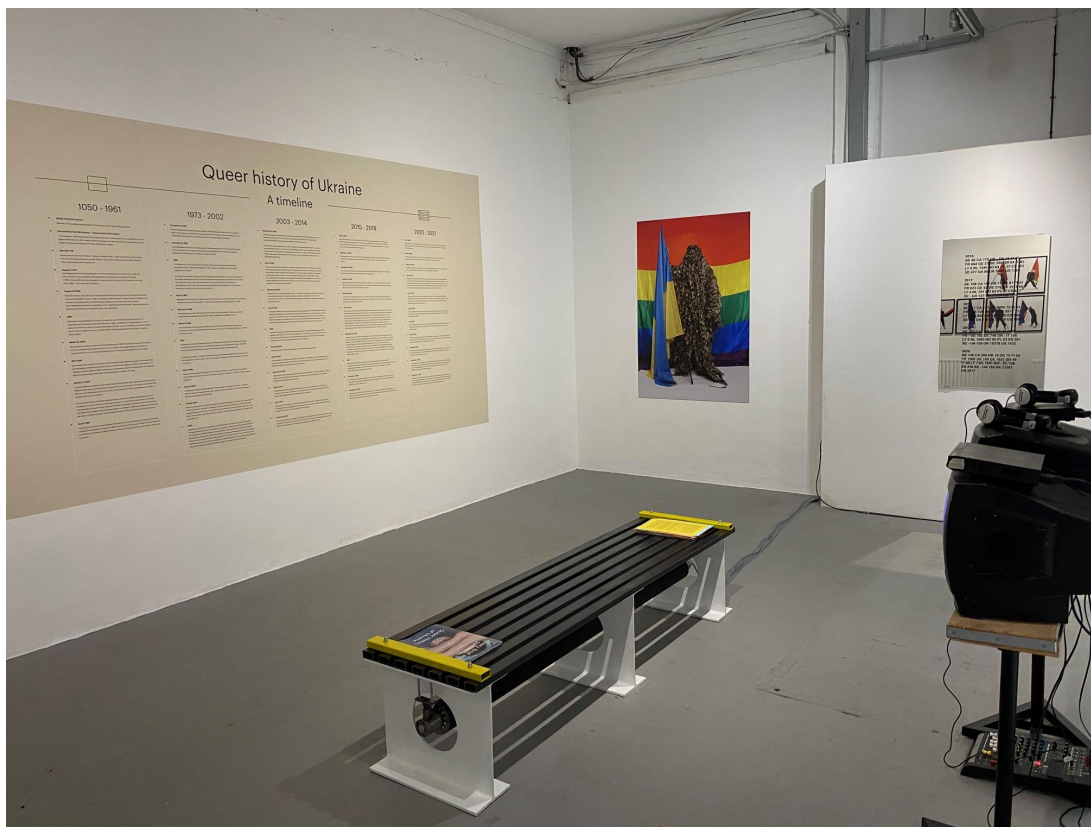


Figure 6 - What Grows in the Heart - Anton Shebtko Exhibit

The footage of naked men engaged in homosocial relations, camp eurovision entries and trans women on talk shows all conflict with the harsh truths told on the timeline.

This is a mush of personal, factual and publicised media from the Ukraine. The anonymity of the stories on the pages leaves you wondering about the faces and genders and races of the people involved. The footage on the television is obviously of people with some fame yet you have no idea who they are or what they're saying. These very subjective accounts of the time, all framed by this timeline on the back wall. This was a curation of Ukrainian queerness, facilitated by the artist. The work is not claimed but displayed, with entries from a community, broadcast media and the history of the country.

Shebetko is not placing ownership, or indulging in the spectacle of queerness. Instead creating a space for the viewer to contemplate and experience in. While the only clear narrative is that of the timeline, the exhibit allows you to sit in between this variety of accounts, rather than clear information the combination of elements leaves you to experience a small look at queer life in the Ukraine. The ambiguity and lack of ownership in this work is what made it so interesting to me, an edge away from the art star, to the art gallery as a reflective space. Curating and facilitating for work to be shown rather than being the owner and producer of said work. Where the RDS show was making a spectacle of identity, Shebetko is delving deep into it, exploring genuine thought and experience.

Chapter 4 - Death of the Ego

4.1 Death of the Author

Roland Barthes speaks to this in his essay 'the Death of the Author', (featured in text 'Image Music Text') an essay which explores the way in which the presence of the author or emphasis on authorship can hinder a work of art or literature (with literature being the primary topic of conversation in this essay). Barthes opens the essay with a prerequisite;

"once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality — that is, finally external to any function but the very exercise of the symbol — this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins."

- R, Barthes 'Death of the Author' in 'Image Music Text' (1997, p.1)

Throughout the essay, Barthes describes a kind of imaginary space, a space of critical thought that both the writer and the reader (or artist and the viewer) enter when they view a piece of work. This space should be as open as possible, the presence of an artist or author merely places confinement on the space, the idea of the person who made it is or was, starts to influence the reader/viewer's perception of the piece. "To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing." Barthes wants a piece of writing to be left open, to

allow for complete imaginary and creative thought. This goes back to Susan Sontag's 'Against Interpretation' in which she condemns the idea that the author is the key to understanding an artwork. For Sontag she means for a move away from interpretation whereas Barthes is calling for a total removal of the artist during encounters with a work, but also in a work's creation.

"...his hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin — or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, that is, the very thing which ceaselessly questions any origin."

- R, Barthes 'Death of the Author' in 'Image Music Text' (1997, p.4)

This is where Barthes comes into direct conflict with the ideas of the 'Avant-Garde' represented by Clement Greenberg in the text cited in the first chapter. The 'Avant-Garde' is to create pure art, without influence, Barthes claims that no work is original, that "the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture." Perhaps it could be contested that the ultimate art without ego is art that is in reference to all things. The way in which Lacan describes the 'id' before the ego in his text 'the Mirror Stage'. The 'id' feeling a part of all things, no different or separate from anything before the 'ego' develops. Perhaps it is the mode not of the avant-garde we should see the 'id' through, but what Barthes is speaking of here. For your artwork to be a product of all of your influences, all of your experiences, as if you are a specific outlet

on a larger line of electricity. Aware that your perspective is unique, but it is a unique mixture of many influences.

4.2 - Producing Role

Rick Rubins speaks to this aspect of Barthe's writing in his recently published book 'The Creative Act: A Way of Being' (2023). Rubins is a music producer and has been a very successful one for a number of years now, producing for huge names in the music industry such as; Johnny Cash, Kanye West, Adele and the Red Hot Chilli Peppers. Although he has cultivated quite a name for himself, a music producer is generally a character who remains behind the scenes, we get a sense of Rubin's value and appreciation of that position in this text.

"It may be helpful to think of Source as a cloud. Clouds never truly disappear. They change form. They turn into rain and become part of the ocean, and then evaporate and return to being clouds. The same is true of art. Art is a circulation of energetic ideas. What makes them appear new is that they're combining differently each time they come back. No two clouds are the same."

- R, Rubin 'The Creative Act' (2023, p.17)

Rubin takes an almost spiritual approach to the act of art making. Stating that creativity is not only art, and art is not only art once it has been made consumable and been capitalised upon. Creativity is within all things, whether it is rearranging furniture or deciding to take a new route while driving home from work. Rubin writes in a call to be a conduit of the universe's own creativity, to be part of the constant cultural evolution of the world. Not to create in pursuit of personal gain but to create in aid and in collaboration with the development of all things. Perhaps Rubin's professional position as a producer can be the reasoning for his thought, a position which requires a huge amount of creativity and skill, but does not call for the same recognition as the position of the artist. Perhaps to relate the text from Barthe's we might think of framing the role of the artist as the role of a producer, shaping and refining their influences. Rubin uses the example of a cloud to this same end.

4.3 - No Has One Ever Produced Anything

To follow on from Rubin we can look at the interview text between Clémence Seurat and French researcher Dušan Kažić. An accompanying text to the art-science research project 'POST-GROWTH' which has been hosted by DISNOVATION.ORG since 2018. The text titled 'NO HAS ONE EVER PRODUCED ANYTHING' was released in 2022, While here we see Dušan Kažić with the theory that we do not produce, highlighting the fact that even just the concept of production only came to be in the 18th century alongside the 'physiocrats', a group of french economists. instead we cohabit with our work and facilitate it.



Figure 7 - Disnovation.org, Post-Growth Exhibition install

“I defend the thesis that farmers have never been in a relation of production with plants and animals, but rather in a relation of co-domestication. In concrete terms, this means that farmers domesticate plants and animals, and, in turn, that plants and animals domesticate farmers.”

- D,Kažić , ‘NO ONE HAS EVER PRODUCED ANYTHING’, (2022, p.7)

The thesis which Kažić is defending here is comparable to that put forward by Rick Rubins as well as Roland Barthes. The idea that we are a part of an ecosystem, we do

not gain or lose, this is a symbiotic system of things, the title using the words “NO ONE”, enforces the fact that no individual ever made anything from nothing. Perhaps this is in direct contradiction with the Avant-Gard, no one can create as if they were God, we facilitate the formation of existing things into something new. As Rubin explains in his text, The artist is a highly sensitive antenna, picking up on, and conducting the energy which forms our culture. Nothing is ever created in a vacuum and Kažić is enforcing this fact. While he defines his practice as “speculative ethnography”(Kažić pg) Kažić clearly states his references, giving an anecdote of a former mentor, explaining where he got his inspiration. This does not mean his ideas can no longer be defined as speculative because he is simply taking and conducting a range of inspirations to create something new, rather than to copy a previous work or aesthetic. This is the decentralisation of the artist as creator, of the ego as producer.

Conclusion



Figure 8 - Georgia O'Keeffe 'Sky above Clouds' (1965)

"WHERE I WAS born and where and how I have lived is unimportant," Georgia O'Keeffe told us in the book of paintings and words published in her ninetieth year on earth. She seemed to be advising us to forget the beautiful face in the Stieglitz photographs. She appeared to be dismissing the rather condescending romance that had attached to her by then, the romance of extreme good looks and advanced age and deliberate isolation. "It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest."

- J, Didion 'The White Album' (1979, p.97)

This is a quote from Joan Didion's 'The White Album', in the text this quote is followed by a short anecdote about the writer taking her daughter to see the work of Georgia O'Keeffe, upon seeing one of the monumental 'Sky Above Clouds' paintings by O'Keeffe, Didion's daughter whispers "who drew it?... I need to talk to her" (Didion, pg.97) It is

this curious little statement which makes didion question the relevance of the author within their work, the position of the child highlights the idea that these ideas are ingrained into our society, the child is not saying this consciously, in mind of postmodernism, late stage capitalism and the extended critical works of Susan Sontag. The statement calls for a need to change the way we create and interpret art, the way in which art is produced, it calls for a kind of ego-death of the artistic practice.

The exclamation by O'Keeffe that "it is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest", (O'Keeffe,/Didion, p97) is a truly egoless statement. This is a rejection of the needs of both the art market and society at large. O'Keeffe is not interested in herself she is interested in her work and the world around her, it is the outward perspective reminiscent of the actions of the 'id' being practised through painting.

Didion's daughter's question of "who drew this?" calls into question our relationship with an artwork, in reference to Sontag and Barthes, it is this postmodernist desire to understand and seek answers to an art piece, to solve it. Accompanied by the heavily marketed idea of the artist as genius, that the artist holds the absolute answer to their work. While the context of the question is quite adorable, it signals that this approach to art is now second nature, it is ingrained.

The simple and direct manner in which O'Keeffe communicates became part of her brand, so in a kind of paradoxical way. Didion references this in the The fact that even

her mode of speaking became a marketable feature of her work is an excellent example of how all-consuming capitalism has become. In relation to the writings from Fisher and Puente we can start to recognise where and when this capitalisation is occurring. What this example proves is that both the artist AND the institution require a kind of ego-death. For if the artist succeeds in this the institution is still in charge of representing the artist a certain way, capitalising upon the artist's identity, misfortune and even their politics as we saw in the RDS Visual Artists Award show.

It is the approach of O'Keeffe, Barthes, Sontag and Rubin which we need to apply if we are to move past this egocentric stage in art history. Employing these theories within art practice, art interpretation and art appreciation. To act in protest of the tokenization of identity, the commodification and polarisation of our differences. Allowing the 'id' to act outside of the ego.

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