



Instructions for use: Why Reality is a Mask

Read all of this leaflet carefully before you start viewing this video

- Keep this leaflet. You may need to read it again.
- If you have any further questions, ask someone who knows nothing about art.
- This video has been prescribed for you. Do not pass it on to others. It may harm them, even if their symptoms are the same as yours.
- If any of the side effects becomes serious, or if you notice any side effects not listed in this leaflet, please contact your local art critic.

1. Before you view Why Reality is a Mask: an exercise in art criticism

AP: Take a trash object out of your pocket or your bag or your bin and describe it as if it's an art object. Don't mention what the object is. Just describe it as accurately as possible by looking carefully at its details: its size, form, material, colour; the way the light shines over it; the sound it makes (if any). Try to stay as close as possible to the object. If you think you have seen it all, look at it once more.

MB: This trash exercise reminds me of a conversation I had at the dinner table the other day. One friend who likes to build wooden furniture, asked me: „How do you know if something is art? If I make a chair, is it art?“ I said: „Well, one definition of art could be that it can't be used for anything. So if it's useless, it might be art.“ My other friend added that art in exhibition spaces is often destroyed by cleaners who don't recognise it as such. I wondered if this was an urban myth and looked it up. There were two documented cases of Josef Beuys' work being treated as trash, and one recent installation near Stuttgart where gold foil sheeting belonging to an installation was found in the trash can after a visit by their cleaning company. I have an artist friend who is constantly picking up bits of coloured paper from the street. Another who collects old sticks. In fact, when I think about it, every artist I know in some way utilises what other people would call trash, whether it's collecting envelopes, taking pictures of a deflated balloon, or even just noticing things that people with office jobs are too busy to notice. So this trash exercise is not only an exercise in art criticism, but an exercise in making art.

2. What is Why Reality is a Mask, and what is it used for

MB: I contacted a couple of neurologists about writing a piece of art criticism about this video. Unfortunately the neurologists seemed stumped: they couldn't see the connection to Donald Hoffman's theories. I wondered if the video was too trashy for them. One of the advantages of being an artist is that you see connections between so many things.

AP: I guess artists are interested in things that are overlooked: like trash. The trash exercise often leads to poetry. When we then move on to the description of an art work, the poetry tends to disappear. We feel less inhibited writing about trash because there's no value attached to it. Artists can do the impossible: create things of value without any money.

3. How to use Why Reality is a Mask

AP: Maybe your video is seen as "dilettante" by specialists in the field of neurology. "Amateur" is also a nice word. It comes from "amatore", Latin for "lover". It means "someone who does something for love rather than money" or "someone motivated by love rather than money". Or maybe they would use the word "silly"?

MB: I was taken aback at your idea of my video being called "silly", but the more I think about it, the more I like it. Silly is something that doesn't conform to our expectations of the seriousness of art. „Don't be silly," someone could have said to Duchamp when he put a urinal in the exhibition space. Or to Meret Oppenheim when she covered a teacup with fur. Or to Pipilotti Rist when she made her "Pickelporno", or Rirkrit Tiravanija, when he started cooking in the art gallery. So if the neurologists did think my video silly (I should have asked them), it would be a good sign. It would be a sign that it made them uncomfortable, and discomfort is a fruitful state.

An artist friend asked me if the video is ironic, but it's not. It's only as ironic as the fact that we run around for

eighty years trying to achieve all kinds of things, and wind up dead at the end of it. It's only as ironic as the fact we spoon fresh food into an orifice at one end of our bodies and it comes out as smelly waste from another. And it's only as silly as the fact that, as Hoffman reminds us, "physics and evolution point to the same conclusion: spacetime and objects are not foundational," yet we persist in organising our lives and societies around them.

4. Possible side effects: a second exercise in art criticism

AP: In 1905, Vernon Lee (the pseudonym for Violet Paget) published her 'Gallery Diaries'. Vernon Lee's personal research into the day-to-day changes of looking at art, and how it can change depending on mood swings, weather, circumstances, tourists, crowds and so on, started with the realisation that she often relied on 'borrowed feelings' when contemplating artworks. The diaries were a way of unlearning that borrowing tendency. Nevertheless, a considerable part of the diaries is rather about the hindrances to or the impossibility of entering an artwork. Is there an artwork in a public space in your neighbourhood? Like Vernon Lee, visit it 'at several goes', keep a diary and don't shy away from uncomfortable feelings.

MB: The way we approach art is in many ways parallel to the way we approach reality: through our senses, we try to notice as many details as possible. In "The Case Against Reality," Donald Hoffman says that the elements we use to describe the reality we live in, are in fact inadequate. "The problem is not that our senses are wrong about this or that detail. It's that the very language of objects in space and time is the wrong language to describe objective reality."

I would say that the elements we use to describe reality are fictional, making reality- and art- fiction.

Just as we make up reality as we go along, we make up contemporary art as we go along. Perhaps Joseph Beuys was as right about art as the janitor who scrubbed away his butter stains.

"After reading a poem out loud to an audience, Robert Creeley was asked, 'Is that a real poem, or did you make it up?' He made it up, of course; it was a real poem. Real things are made things. Are you a real person, or did your parents make you up? Is that a real mountain, or did the forces of the universe make it up? Is the virtual reality of the internet real or did imaginative people like Steve Jobs make it up?" (Mary Ruefle: "On Imagination")

AP: "I work mostly in poetry because it claims to be neither fiction nor non-fiction," the poet and translator Sawako Nakayasu says in Hyperallergic, "because it acknowledges the gap between what really was or is, and what is said about it. Is the woman really in a box? It depends on who you ask, how they see it, or what constitutes a box. I like to claim that all of my poems are 'true.'"

Do you know there is a genre called "non-fiction fiction"? Basically, it is journalism turned into an art form. Its inventor was Lillian Ross, a journalist for The New Yorker, who published in 1952 The Picture, an account of the making of the film The Red Badge of Courage. It is said to be the first reportorial piece written in the form of a novel. It was this book that inspired Truman Capote to do the same and write his non-fiction novel In Cold Blood. When Ross died, a homage was published in The New York Times. It said: "While she has her own way of seeing things, one never doubts that what she sees is the truth."

5. How to store Why Reality is a Mask

MB: "While she has her own way of seeing things, one never doubts that what she sees is the truth." What a lovely paradox. I'm sure Lillian Ross saw her own version of the truth. But one thing that we can be sure of, according to Hoffman, is that our own way of seeing things is definitely not the truth: "we may want truth, but we don't need truth." In order for humanity to survive, our senses need to prevent us from seeing the truth.

This is something to keep in mind when looking at art, as well as when thinking about reality.

6. Further Information

Why Reality is a Mask is a video project by artist and writer Mia Bailey. Why Reality is a Mask and all related materials, was funded as part of the Neustart Kultur programme of the BBK.

www.miabailey.net
www.reality.miabailey.net
<https://www.innovative-kunstprojekte.de/projekte>

Instructions for Use is a collaboration between artist Mia Bailey and artist and art critic An Paenhuysen. An Paenhuysen selected the two featured exercises from her book I Am An Art Critic, published by AAAAA P P P P P Publishing in the series Lehrmaterial in 2022.

www.anpaenhuysen.de