

Essays About The  
world Today  
And  
Possibly Tomorrow

By Ryan Foote

Drafts English

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## Prefix

The following document contains a selection of short essays that are intended to instigate and be the basis for a series of decisions held with critical thinkers, philosophers, artists, designers, writers, politicians and expertise in the relevant field the essay discusses.

In the past year and a half I have undergone much of my own critical thinking and analysis of the relevance of my art practice and contribution to society, my art work has always looked at reflecting on society and creating works that encourage interaction and dialogue between people and whilst I feel these were effective and successful in what I set out to do, I had growing ethical concerns within my own art practice and personal philosophy as at times they sometimes contradicted each other.

I would create large artwork that took the form of lavish dinner parties or events that would engage guests, immersing them into the reflected world I created and they filled, and whilst the artworks were not about dictating people or creating tangible things, it was about creating a temporal moment in time where people could interact and engage with each other.

At the same time behind the scenes in my studio I started recycling all the waste and by-products from my studio into other artworks, some that looked at recycling and consumption others that had nothing to do with the topic. I aimed at improving my studio practice to be more sustainable and yet at the end of the day I was still creating artwork like most artists that does nothing more than entertain or engage with a small audience.

The following short essays are intend to instigate philosophical discussion and thinking, the paper will be sent to critical thinkers in their relevant fields and invite them to discuss the paper and topic over a dinner event that I will create, the subsequent event will then be recorded and documented. The essay, discussion, and event will then form the basis for a book as well as podcasts, magazine and newspaper articles also an ebook that is interactive and allows the people to add short essays themselves on the topic, giving the topic life outside just the paper and event whilst using social network theory to spread the debate.

The following essays look at a range of topics from the important debates on sustainability and globalisation all the way through to essays on the topics on philosophy and ethics of food and contemporary aesthetics in the world today.

# What happened to Ethics and Sustainability in Contemporary Art?

by Ryan Foote

Takashi Murakami at Versailles 2010



The art world as we know it from 50 years ago has changed, we now live in an age of overwhelming consumerism which has led to the capitalism we know today, even our artwork and artists have begun to inform and be informed by market trends, with artists like Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami shaping and writing art history of today, the biggest art-ism today is not conceptualism or relationalism but capitalism - welcome to the 'Capitalism Art Movement'.

Throughout art history artists have been at the forefront of commenting on injustice and wrongs in the world from equal rights through to wars, artists have always tried to give a voice to these problems, but today we find in a post Andy Warhol world artists are more interested in 'the artist as identity' and 'conceptual driven work' that responds to their own inner voice! I know this is an extremely broad view but when looking at trends within the art world it is a prevalent trend that stands out but not true in all cases.



Exhibition of Artist Sophie Calle at Palais de Tokyo

Today the artist's voice has never had so much gusto, we find ourselves with a voice more than ever before, and instead of talking about the world, what's wrong with it and how it could be improved, artists are too busy talking about ourselves.

One of the major social issues of today is sustainability, unlike artists of the past artists of today don't seem to be at the forefront commenting on these issues, in fact we could be seen as turning a blind eye on the subject, and adding to the problem!

Is artwork of today anything more than entertainment wrapped up in layers of conceptual rhetoric? With blockbuster exhibitions trying to draw and entertain the masses with high profile shows to create

large ticket sales to justify the Government funding.  
Not that getting more people into the gallery is a bad thing far from it!

Do artists today choose to turn a blind eye because the problem seems too big and complex or are they not even thinking of the problems of today?  
Or is it that we are more interested with our own voice and mortality?  
Or have artist become so much apart of the system that we think the government will solve it and we, as individuals, don't need to make an effort?

Today we have a voice and we need to speak up! I am not talking about pointing the finger at big companies or capitalism - they did that in the 60's, I am talking about looking at ourselves and what we are doing to the world as individuals, we are part of the system how can we as artists come up with creative solutions to the problems at hand!

This dilemma is not the same through all creative disciplines in the fashion industry there are designers that use organic and sustainable materials within their clothing collections. Countless designers, architecture landscapers working on sustainable projects, yet as artists do you know where your paint comes from or how it is made?

Where the pigments in the paint come from?  
Does the timber you use come from tree plantations or from rain forests that have been deforested? That MDF you use might have come from parts of the Amazon that have been deforested cut into wood chips shipped to China processed into MDF then shipped to you!



Where are you materials coming from?

How can we as artists address these issues? I am not saying we should all start making sculptures out of mud and straw or painting using raw ochre's on rocks, I am not suggesting we should stop making artwork, and I am not saying we should base our artwork solely on these themes, but it is more about making informed decisions and choices about how we can improve our practice and ethics within the creative industry!

We should be thinking about these issues and rather than waiting for the government or someone else to make a change, make it for yourself!

# Comparing Capitalism and Communism, Wants and Social Constructs.

By Ryan Foote

In recent years I have become very interested in looking at social models and how they work, maybe my curiosity has been peaked amidst all the drama within the global financial markets where overwhelming consumption, greed and inaction are taking place, is this what capitalism is based on? And how does this compare to Karl Marxist communism, both systems are extremely complex so I thought I would discuss a point we always seem to overlook.

Within a communist structure you basically hand over your Wants to the Government on the provisos that the Government knows what is best for you but also the entire community, it is about communal Wants and goals achieved through equality and enforced by the State, they tell you how to run the market, education and media and so on, and most of all how to live a good life.

With a capitalism system it is very different and we often forget this, it is just a market place structure that in very basic terms says Bring your Wants and Desires and it will fulfil them, but you need to know what you Want!

Which in recent times I feel has been forgotten or never even thought about especially in some of the younger countries, they have forgotten to ask themselves what do I want? What am I working too or for? The beautiful thing about capitalism is you have been left with your autonomy to ask that question what do I Want? and what will I trade to get it?

And I don't mean what do I want for lunch or dinner or I desire world peace.

I mean what sort of achievable world do I want to live in?

What are the important things in ones life?

What sort of future do I want?

What sort of past do I want when reflecting on ones past?

And how do I want to live in the present?

Capitalism is merely a system of free trade that says you can trade this for that, it is not telling you what you Want or how to live, we do that through social constructs with things like family, friends, beliefs, religion, rituals, culture and so on, but

I would argue we have forgotten to look and respect these, whilst critically thinking about questions, instead unconsciously opting for the promise of a better life through dream reality constructed by advertising and achieved through consumption. We have forgotten how to think for ourselves and more importantly how to imagine for ourselves, we now use images given to us via media/ advertising to construct depictions of what we Want, when you think of what you want your family to be, do you think of some TV show that portrays the perfect family?

When you think of what sort of house you want to live in do you think of some image from a Vogue Living?

And what sort of food are you going to be eating with this family in this house?

Will it be some recipe you found in a magazine or on TV?

or will it be at that new restaurant that was reviewed in the newspaper?

We need to stop and think what do I want for and in my future, how do I want to live in the present, and what will my past look like?

STOP... what do you want? (and remember I am not talking about just material things) Why do you want these, that, those, them what made you think you wanted that?

Now you may think I have gone off track, maybe I have, but what I would like to take out of that self reflection is under a communist model we are told what we want by the state, and under a capitalist model today we are told what we want by advertising and media but we are not forced to follow advertising, we need to cognitively regain our critical thinking and ask ourselves what we want in life and what would make it better, if we opted for a capitalist model we can't go on blindly consuming and following, otherwise we are worse off than a communist model.

(note i am still working / researching this paper, mainly to understand the reforms in market and idealistic structures that have happened over time)

We all too often live in and for the future, and the present is all too often used in aspiration for the future, and as a result our conscience is never in sync with any temporal reality, I am not saying to live solely in the present, but one must observe one's trajectory in both forward and backwards narratives and not to dwell on one point in either direction, one's present must engage with one's past, present and future in a balanced scale to obtain one's wants and desires in one's life.

# How food can be used to shape cultures

by Ryan Foote

Through out all societies a common cultures exists, a cultural language that transcends borders, religion, ethnic difference, language, and other forms of cultures boundaries, all around the world this culture can be seen as more prevalent then any other forms of culture, what I am talking about is the act of cuisine and social dining the coming together to drinking, eat and share more then just food, and whilst food can be Seen as a basic necessity of life and the act of communal hunting and gartering was an important step in our evolution, social dining and preparing food goes well beyond the simple necessity of human survival, surly the act of communal eating must be one of the first cultural act we did together and a key step in our evolution.

Today Cuisine and the act of dining together is one of thous amazing facts we all have in common with each other, this act unites all of humanity the gartering and sharing food is present In all cultures, where every you are in the world you will be able to find history of the importance of the coming together and communal eating, it is a time for shearing stories, passing on knowledge, connecting with friends and family and most importantly gives us an understanding of community and others perspectives, Over a meal stories can be told, ideas rased over aperitifs, history can be learnt over aged cheese, heated arguments debated over flaming Bomb Alaska and arguments cooled over bottles of wine the act of eating and drinking together is so very important.



In this age of 12 hour days, power meetings, text messaging, emails and smart phones that ensure we never leave the office are we at risk of losing this common language to microwave food and fast-food eaten on the go?

As I compare culinary cultures to my own I can only feel a slight sense of sadness for what we might have already lost, in France and Italy there rich café life appreciation the simple act of stopping for a few minutes to have a coffee whether it is with a friend for a long drawn out coffee or one standing at the bar conversing with the barista and other people for that quick morning coffee, the presence of a takeaway coffee cup would be sacrilegious in these countries; are we that time poor

these days we can't even stop for a coffee, back home the sight of take away cup in one hand and mobile phone in the other is an all to common sight this is what I call the takeaway coffee cup ethos or TCCE.

In France apart from their rich café scene there is also a very strong culture of dinner parties with friends and family, back home the occurrence of a dinner party was a big deal, in France it was just common place to go to a friends house start with aperitifs then move to the dining room for an entree then a main, followed by a salad course then an array of cheeses and finally dessert and of course numerus bottles of wine and this is just the norm, a special dinner party would involve more courses and more wine, the evening would be drawn out not some quick event, that would be over in 1 hour and like in Spain food and drink would always be consumed together and with people.





Shifting continents to Japan now a culture of complete modernity, where toilets need their own electrical socket, owning more than 2 mobiles is normal, bright signs fill every street and food comes packed in numerous layers of delicate well thought out packaging surely like us they must be losing that sense of communal dining experience? Whilst the younger generation might not have the space for a kitchen in their shoe box size apartments, but nestled between big buildings of 90's modernist architecture are hundreds of little laneways filled with Sushi bars, ramen bars, Yakitori bars, Okonomiyaki restaurants, and numerous other styles of Japan's cuisine fetching long communal dining tables/ bar tops (similar to the Spanish tapas dining) where you are encouraged to sit and face the chef as he cooks for you, and sooner then you know it the chef is more like a dinner party host, has created a dialogue between everyone at the bar, without a doubt the importance of food has not at all been lost, it has changed and shifted from the traditional family meals, but the communal dining and respect for food is still very present.

One of the interesting things that I did note was, that while I expected vending machines to be on every corner which was the case, the vending machines only sold drinks - no food - in fact the act of eating on the streets was not done at all and seen as bad etiquette, this cultural etiquette did two very interesting things which I loved and would like to see adopted more:-

One - it pretty much reduced all litter in the street, the streets were immaculate and public servants who would have been employed to clean the street, empty bins, where greatly reduced saving taxpayers money or allowing money to be spent on more important public services, the other was the heightened respect for food and the act of eating, enjoying food was very present, it was not just seen as protein for the body, which is a common trend in most TCCE cultures you grab your takeaway coffee and your sandwich, wrap, pieces of sushi or any other morsal of food you can eat on the go, we have become obsessed with takeaway and fast food.



Back home people become frustrated if you have to wait more then 15 minutes for your meal and on the other side, restaurants want fast table turnover so they can make as much money as possible, as soon as you finish they last bit of food the bill is upon you, in Paris, Italy, Japan and to some extent China the bill will not come until asked.

In Vietnam the communal act of eating flows out onto the streets with locals choosing to eat outside with friends engaging with passers by, rather than isolating themselves inside, during the day streets which were filled by busy clothing, hardware, phone shops morph in the evenings, filling the

street with a sea of plastic tables and stools, restaurants filled the street and the community comes alive, the restaurants become common spaces to meet, eat and drink, and dine with ones neighbour. The community feel was very prevalent, weaving a strong communal environment where, even strangers were warmly invited to dine with the locals,

In China like everything, things are changing and modernising fast, it is hard to see how their cultural will evolve over time, but historically and currently, food and dining are still very much at the core of the culture and social structures, all you have to do is look at the dishes of food, whether it be Szechwan, Singaporean, dim sum and so on, all around China the common trait is these cuisines are shared dishes and the act of coming together with family and friends and sharing food with each other is imbedded within there culture, maybe that is why communism is still active today, the simple act of sharing dishes builds pathways into thinking about others, whether it be:-

Has everyone tried this dish?

Is there a dish someone does not like?

Do we have enough for everyone?

I hope in this time of rapid modernising they hold onto their rich history and food culture.

In counties plagued with the takeaway coffee cup ethos, there is an increasing disconnect with communities and the other peoples perspectives, the simple act of going to a friends house, dining together, sharing food, taking the time out to respect the meal and the people whom you are sharing with, instead we have less time for drawn out dinner parties and if the TCCE people do dine together it is in a restaurant where they order what they want and get it their way.

The dinner party is dying in TCCE countries, where one used to bring a bottle of wine or dish to the host house, where they have spent the day cooking, cleaning and thinking about there guests likes, dislikes, dietary requirements and guests were offered a portal into the hosts life as well as opportunity to meet new people, it now is replaced with I earn the cash for my meal and I don't need to thank anyone but myself.



From the first culture act that helped us evolve to the complex creatures we are today I feel TCCE countries need to stop and think about, do we want a community that fosters for rich cultural exchanges with friends and family or one that fosters isolated time poor individuals over communities?

Embrace the long drawn out dinner party, the communal act of sharing food and rich social exchange with friends and family.

# Philosopher over Ethicist

by Ryan Foote

In the last few decades there has been a major shift in the titles and descriptive language used for people who make ethical and moral suggestions within society. The declining number of employment roles for the philosopher within Governments, companies, Universities and so on, have all but disappeared, instead job rolls and university courses have been rebranded under ethics.

Where once philosophers were an important part of the social fabric, employed and invited by Governments to assist and raise concerns about society, actions, morals and ethical matters, unfortunately since the rise of the industrial revolution we have seen a shift from Philosopher to Ethicist with boards of people set up to look at ethical concerns within Government bodies, Universities, companies and so on, you may ask in this troubled time of globalization, financial turmoil, global warming and so on we need as many ethicists as possible!

And yes we do need to be having ethical conversations more than ever, but the subtle shift from Philosopher to Ethicist over the industrial revolution was a subtle deliberate act by the powers that be.

Both the philosopher and the ethicist aim at responding with ethical and moral answers but the philosopher role is not only to answer the questions put to pose and consider the questions as well, to ask the hard questions in the first place and look at the critical questions that need to be asked!

Companies don't want philosophical questions slowing capital growth, so when called into moral standpoint about fair working conditions, slave labor, environmental concerns and so on they don't want more questions just the answers they put forward or have been forced to assess.

Governments and industries, employ ethics boards to answer questions, but some times to get the answer they want, it can be as simple as phrasing the questions in a way that will deliver the response they want, it may not be the right question but it gets them the sequential answer they want.

Who is asking the questions today...the politicians who want to be re-elected? The CEO of the company listed on the stock exchange? The university lecturer that has to quantify every minute of the day? Or the journalist who is now asked to deliver articles in sound bites instead of in-depth investigative journalism? And are they asking the right questions in the first place? and what happens if the answer is not what they want?

It is a very rare sight to hear a politician or CEO say I was wrong!

Are we making redundant an entire career path and way of critical thinking? And how is it we are happy to have the present day questions now posed by politicians who may never have had any training in critical thinking, other than how to develop their re-election campaign or defame their opposition.

Should we see a reintegration of the philosopher into our social fabric or are there already enough questions for the ethicist to consider?



# Turning identity into a Product.

by Ryan Foote

One interesting development that has emerged out of the trend culture is our obsession and growth into a voyeuristic society this is exemplified through personal blogs, WebPages, web cams, reality TV shows, and especially you tube.

TV producers feed audiences from a pop culture loving generation, TV shows like Big Brother, Survivor, American Idol and numerous reality TV shows that have been created where not only can we watch these stars but also invite us to participate by auditioning or simply voting on who stays or goes, audiences are presented with real people and real lives, giving people a sense of knowing or insight unlike before.

This voyeuristic society we have created perpetually feeds itself, with producers and prosumers pushing societies boundaries with more and more emotions, nudity and sexual references than last session or to just to keep ratings, feeding viewers with what they think they want.

From the rise of reality TV show identities and media produced celebrities like Paris Hilton, the Osborne kids and not to mention the entire cast of Jersey Shores who are famous for being famous and not for their talent, instead their career has grown from their fame. This growing social phenomenon was fostered from a pop culture era, and today is hyper idolised more than ever before, these socialite celebrities are the new royalty idolised for being famous, and nothing else.

Arguably one of the first celebrity socialite would have been Edie Sedgwick, she is a perfect example of being famous for no other reason than being herself and partying with the right people, her fame was created by Andy Warhol she did come from a wealthy family before she met Warhol but she became a superstar through Andy Warhol's films and involvement with him. Sedgwick was a product of Warhol's art in the same way that Paris Hilton and Kristen Stewart have become celebrities through media channels.

These celebrities go from being people to products where they are hunted by paparazzi, prying into their daily lives trying to capture a photo good or bad, no longer treated like a person with a private life, but more of a public product to be commercialised off, but this commercialisation is not a one way flow this prosumer paradoxes can also lurch them into greater fame and career success.

From reality TV shows, blogs, you tube, to magazines, films, more TV, books, to even fragrances, an individual's name and identity has never been such a big selling factor, this same factor can be seen in numerous industries where an identity's name can sell regardless of the product, look at the contemporary art market ie Jeff Koons, Damian Hirst the name itself will sell at an auction. Almost all of Nike's marketing is done by aligning themselves with the top athletes and put Justin Bieber's name on anything and it will sell!

Identity has become a product.

# Semantics of language, definitions

## **Prosumer**

The Internet has given rise to many influential elements but one of the most influential would have to be the development of prosumer. The 'prosumer' blurs the line between producer/consumer roles allowing them to be one and the same.

This new system differs to the old top-down style management system where Companies, Governments, media agencies and so on made products/ content that we consumed; and were influenced by and were left to consume and keep passively consuming.

Whereas today, with the rise of Internet platforms that blurs the producer/consumer role divide like You Tube, Facebook twitter etc has given everyone the ability to be the producer not only the consumer, allowing the producer & consumer to be one and the same, with so much new information constantly being exchanged a third party mediation of culture has been created, where we create and influence and consume all the same time.

## **Wants / Desires**

When I talk about the word want or wants in the paper Wants, Comparing capitalism and communism I define it as the need, and longing to have something that is obtainable ranging from the mundane things from food, clothing, health, family to money, love, happiness all the way up the spectrum of obtainable things within an achievable reality where as the word desire can be used to convey the similar things but is often at the end of the scale and pertains to things that are often unachievable like wishing for world peace, being a billionaire, craving to be going out with a super model, as much as I desire to live in a utopian world of world peace it is not obtainable by me, I am not saying things can't shift between wants and desire you might very well become a billionaire who goes out with a super model, but I am using the word want in relation to a reality of achievable outcomes.

# Coined terms

## **The information influx effect**

The information influx effect is a term I use in some of my writing, especially in my social observations of contemporary society. It is all about the complex layering of information in our daily lives, our interpretations of the world is not static but one that grows and changes as we do, which is why philosophers have always been interested in the topic of passive representation.

Today we process large amounts of information on a daily level unlike ever before, we comprehend information overlaid by multiple systems and contextual reading this process is similar to how we navigate WebPages or computer systems, what I mean by this is there is not a specific order in which we look at the WebPages we don't even need to look at all the content we pick and choose what information we look at and what we want to take away, we can also be looking at multiple pages at the same time. This multi layering of information is so extensive that we are not talking about a simple linear system of layering, it is more of an x y z axis layering of information that can travel not only back and forth but also left, right and up, down the layers don't even need to relate.

Within society today there are multiple layers and meanings on top of one another which is nothing new but now we also have them not only on top of one another but also side by side in a non linear format, in society today one person can have multiple beliefs, aspirations and personal philosophies that don't relate or gel together, this can also present in a physical way as well, we are now used to talking on the phone, surfing the internet with multiple programs open on the computer desktop all at the same time. It is this unabated amount of information we conscientiously navigate and filter every day that forms the information influx effect.

## **Trend Culture**

The Terms Trend Culture arose from a past essay of mine titled "Trend Culture" this term was used to define current culture development/ movement, it is what I see as the next faze to pop culture as a movement.

Unlike pop culture Trend Culture is not focused on the mass production or popular culture of the time, Trend Culture looks at the emergences of things that could move into the popular culture realm and with an emphasis on the couture and emerging cultures that will eventually influence mainstream culture. Today we are bombarded with so much information that is constantly changing and developing that we have created a society constantly looking for the latest and up-to-date, hungry for the new and next big thing, society now want tomorrow's popular culture yesterday!

To clarify the term I feel I need to point out the difference between the word trend and how this differs to fad, understanding the key difference between the two is important, the dictionary definition of the word trend is a general tendency movement, or direction, the definition of fad is something that

is embraced very enthusiastically for a short time, especially by many people, things can and do shift between trend and fad, but things can only take on the definition of fad in reference to the past, meaning you can only call it a fad if it was a short lived trend and has now passed, where as trend denotes the new and developing direction or movement.

Differences between Trend culture and pop culture is the latter was defined by what was popularised and enforced by mass media, a kind of top-down management system where the consumer is left only to passively keep consuming, but with the emergences of user driven platforms arising from the internet like You Tube, Twitter and Facebook it has enabled us to cut out the mediators between us and the product allowing us to filter large amounts of information, adding, taking and passing on whatever we deem to be of importance.

The Internet has given rise to many influential elements within the Trend Culture movement but two of the most influential would have to be the development of 'prosumer', the 'prosumer' blurs the line between producer/consumer roles allowing them to be one and the same; and the information influx effect is all about the complex layering of information in our daily lives.

Within Trend Culture the layering of connected and non-connected content, with each layer informing independently, allowing people from different ages, cultures, education, experiences and backgrounds, - pathways into understanding the artwork/word around us in the same way pop culture appeals to the masses, Trend Culture embraces the masses by offering something for everyone, a good analogy would be the contemporary computer interface and operating system, for example someone with limited knowledge can understand how to use basic programs like Word and Safari or someone might have a strong grasp and be able to create complex documents, programmes, write computer code, the current computer interface has been created for everyone, Trend Culture operates in a similar way by creating a basic language on the surface but with a vast array of depth and layers that can be unpacked in numerous ways.

Unlike some recent art movements that construct a language that operate in an exclusive and restrictive way to the non art educated, Trend Culture is a movement that is non exclusive, bridging the divide between the art community and the general public by giving a broad scope of entry points into experiencing and understanding the artwork, Trend Culture is not expecting everyone to understand or even see all the layers but it does give people a foothold into a world that could otherwise seem intimidating or exclusive allowing for large audiences to experience and possibly grow to deeper understanding of the layers and concepts behind the work, this is One of the main core elements to Trend Culture.