

REAL/FAKE FOOTAGE FROM THE KALI YUGA



According to the Surya Siddhanta, Kali Yuga began at midnight (00:00) on 18 February 3102 BCE. ‘Kali Yuga’ literally translates to the ‘age of vice and misery’ or ‘the age of quarrel and hypocrisy,’ and over the duration, the conditions of life are foretold to degrade to such a degree that eventually Mothers are forced to eat their newborn children to spare them the agony of a material existence on the Planet.

The Kali Yuga is the negative phase of the cycle. If we look at the mainstream’s relatively sluggish diagnosis of the ‘fake news’ phenomenon and the subsequent damaging effect on, for example, public health and vaccine uptake - I feel like it’s fair to say that ‘the age of quarrel and hypocrisy’ has totally arrived. But for a strange union of psychoanalysts, conceptual artists and esotericists - this is no revelation. What we are situated within is the meta-condition of ‘Postmodernism,’ as Frederick Jameson described, six years before the Internet writhed into our world out of a tube in the ocean.

I feel like the Hindus prefigured it. (Interestingly enough, Chief Minister of Tripura Biplab Deb asserted that the Internet was actually invented in India thousands of years ago, explaining the events of the Mahabharata in which Sanjay, a blind boy, was able to relay battlefield events kilometres away to Dhritarashtra... ‘This was due to technology. Satellites also existed during that period!’)

‘Postmodernism’ is a multifaceted thing, hard to define almost by nature - here, I am going to use Jameson’s own words from ‘The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’ - ‘Postmodernism is the ‘schizophrenic present.’ Capitalism and its various forces of market-driven necromancy and churning of anachronistic tokens has crumpled the linear passage of history, leading to a contemporary moment of fractured perception, where two or more opposing beliefs can be true at the same time. (Russia is imminently poised to invade Ukraine/ Russia has no intention of invading Ukraine/The man Kyle Rittenhouse shot was a Nazi/The man Kyle Rittenhouse shot was Antifa.) Postmodernism is what happens after the objective guarantor of truth - if there ever was one - has absconded. On a more uncanny level, the present is figuratively schizophrenic, as we beckon hallucinations both benign and terrifying into our everyday via the glowing panels we keep next to our house keys in our pockets.

No matter how minute the correspondence between the trefoil knot of our diet of digital imagery, our imaginations and our direct, sensory perceptions, still it remains true that they collaborate to build reality. This gives us a pretty solid recipe for an age of quarrel and hypocrisy. How can anything that comes off a wire that hot - be a lie? (In the Bhagavad Gita, Verse 12:2:6 - ‘That which is audacious is accepted as truth.’)

For communication, the participants generally rely to a certain extent on a stable platform of referents in order to convey information. In a sense, this is the most malleable Reality has ever been. Prior, reality was explained to us in objective terms by the voices of Power, Control, Capital and The State. But now, we can ponder the Orb and find a deafening chorus of dissenting voices. In a twist, our media massage has at once inoculated us completely against the voice-2-skull programming of The Powers That Be and simultaneously pummelled our psychic shields of scepticism into gossamer membranes of whipped saran. Fuck you, I won’t do what you tell me - until I read it for myself on a skeevy messageboard.

I am definitely no Luddite. The Kali Yuga is a phase that must be traversed, so in some way our present momentary incoherence represents a great deal of progress. We can't crawl back into the water. I am interested in what this means for painting.

Art is a deeply esoteric practice on account of the way it (so gently) leads a viewer to contemplate a sort of dualism. When we look at a painting, we understand that we are not looking directly at the subject of the picture, rather a representation. We have an awareness of the shifting (legitimate and illegitimate) intellectual structure that governs those representations and is often called 'context' and so we experience a type of dislocation similar to the experience of suddenly feeling the strange, voidformed and deferred but nonetheless undeniable correspondence between one's mind and one's body. This is extrapolated intuitively until we have a classification of a Universe split into physical and non-physical elements. This is the condition of looking at Art. Joseph Kosuth's work 'One and Three Chairs,' 1965 consists of a sturdy wooden chair presented next to a to-scale photograph of this same chair on one side and a wall-mounted dictionary definition of the word 'chair'. The three interfaces all represent a different angle of the same unknowable thing, the true essence of 'chair' that is not present, despite all the information about its physical existence that Kosuth provides to us. Every object has meaning as an ingredient; they are long tentacles that poke into our universe from an inaccessible realm of pure being. We only ever apprehend their most proximate tips.

Every representative artwork is about the inherent strangeness of what it is to perceive. Painting has always provided the safest home for representative imagery, and gave humanity its first glimpses of the denizens of Heaven through the same portal. As the great fires of progress raged on, the camera dethroned painting and leant a new timbre to the voice of Fact. Painting never pretended to depict reality until photography made the same claim, and all of a sudden painters were strapping magnifying glasses to their heads and wrestling the notoriously unco-operative wet pigment into various textures from the real world. A walk around the National will convince even the most casual viewer that 'realism' looks different from age to age and in The Kali Yuga, depicting scenes from 'reality' with photographic precision is no longer convincing. This view can only show us a limited, mechanical, single-player vantage. My iPhone tells me that on average last week, I was in its thrall for seven hours each day. That is a significant portion of my hours of consciousness, and whilst shocking, I would wager that yours isn't much lower. Who can blame us? What are we supposed to do, stare out the window at the static, grey krantz of 'Reality'? The pictures that we make must be borne of the glittering, techno-astral plane where we spend our existence.

In practical terms, here's what's next. All is a procession of images. Things that you say with your work are true, even if they are contrary to canonical, traditional facts, logic or physics. Closing one's eyes and making the lights dance in the blackness is, in fact, making art. Standing in front of other works of art is making art. Imagery is connected to imagery through dense, rhizomatic fibres of meaning, and the borders of an image are permeable. Meaning is originated by the entire circuit, a circuit that includes the horrors you witnessed through your phone screen that morning before you went to the studio. Curating the feeds is a creative act. Images are not property. Stealing is impossible - think of pirates commandeering the Ship of Theseus. The Universe is a vast collage that does not end at the border of your artwork. All experience is aesthetic experience. Images are real. Myth-making is a game.