

What Talk About When We Talk About Contemporary Art

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Abstract:

This paper investigates which disciplines are relevant to contemporary art by analyzing research papers from Web of Science Core Collection - the world's leading scholarly literature in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities; in order to get a general ideas about what is called 'contemporary art'. A co-word analysis of all topics related to contemporary art were used as a research method. As a result, there are 11 groups of words that are usually go along with contemporary art, namely Aesthetic, Ethnography, Public space, Globalization, Politics, Ecology, Art market, Performance, Materiality, Electronic Art and Photography. This result shows that contemporary art is not only about traditional art but also connect with social, economic, and political conscious than in any previous era before.

Introduction and literature review:

'No idea about contemporary art is more pervasive than the idea that one can – even should – have no idea about it.' (Hal Foster, 2005). Contemporary art is very difficult to comprehensively explain and define because of its wide-range scope. Art21 defines 'contemporary art as the work of artists who are living in the twenty-first century. Contemporary art mirrors contemporary culture and society. Artists today explore ideas, concepts, questions, and practices that examine the past, describe the present, and imagine the future. In light of such diversity, there is no simple or singular way to define contemporary art. Perhaps the most helpful defining characteristic is the most obvious: contemporary art is the art of today.' (Art21, Contemporary Art in context). Another interesting investigation from Terry Smith – an author mostly write about contemporary art, has demonstrated that: there are four changes in definition of contemporary art, which challenge previous interpretation.

- (1) There seem to be more contemporary art than ever before. The visual art- producing institution (art schools, museums, galleries, auction houses, publishers, educators) have ramped up to industrial levels and are putting out more new art, sooner and with less vetting, to booming crowds of consumers.

- (2) It is more diverse than ever before in all its aspects: medium, content, location, affect, effect.
- (3) It is being generated all over the world, not just a limited set of centers. A subset of this concern is the sense that contemporary art is increasingly being disseminated locally, regionally, laterally, and cross-currently, in ways that are beginning to bypass the vertically integrated market and publicity system for international art.
- (4) It is being made by younger artists and exhibited more quickly than before.

In sum, when we talk about contemporary art, no one can say completely and clearly about it even though this term has been used in many contexts with no need of explanation. In an attempt to make the definition clearer, this research has been conducted to investigate the connection between contemporary art and other fields in order to draw a map of co-word between them.

Research Questions

Are there any interesting features we can figure out from these papers?

What are people writing about contemporary art?

Methods

Step 1: Data collection from Web of Science

2709 key words have been extracted from 2669 documents which written about the topic “Contemporary Art”, begin from 1955 until now. After combining the similar keywords, there are 2059 keywords remained.

Step 2: Co-word analysis by using BibExcel

Co-word analysis is a content analysis technique that uses both the frequency of objects and their relationship or existing connections between them (Courtial, 1994; He, 1999). The connections are extracted from the co-occurrences of pairs of words. In other words, selected texts or databases indexes and the frequencies of the co-occurrences are used to measure the strength of these connections. Based on these connections the objects or words are then clustered and drawn in network maps for more qualitative analysis. (Holmberg, K., Huvila, I., Kronqvist-Berg, M. & Widén-Wulff, G. (2009). What is Library 2.0?. Journal of Documentation, vol. 65, no. 4, pp. 668-681.).

Step 3: Data visualization by using Gephi

Gephi was used for data visualization and analysis. Nodes represent keywords in the visualized co-word graphs, and edges between the nodes represent how frequently keywords have been mentioned together. The size of the nodes indicates how often the keywords have been mentioned, and the thickness of the edges

indicates how often the keywords have been mentioned together. The position of the nodes and the distances between the nodes were computed with Gephi's built-in algorithm Force Atlas. (Bastian et al. 2009)

Results and Discussion:

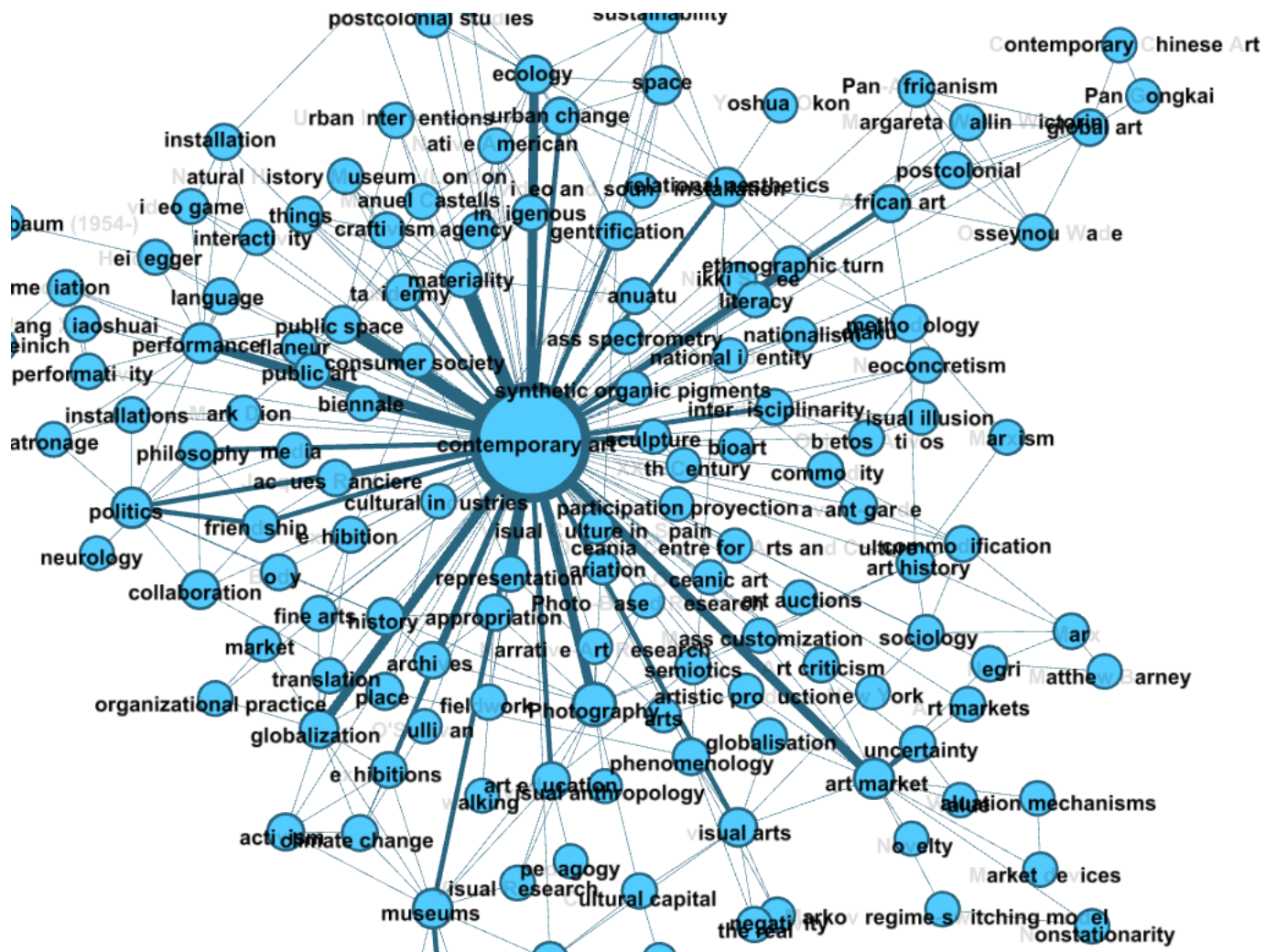
Through the analysis report from 2669 results, we can extract some features:

- (1) Time span: In the result, the first publication paper written about Contemporary Art was in 1955. According to Arthistory.about and other references, Contemporary Art is considered as the art from the 1960s or '70s up until this very minute. Therefore, it somehow helps confirm this statement is true: People have started concerning about Contemporary Art from around the 60's.
- (2) Top five countries in which there are many researchers have written about this topic are USA (12.3%), England (5.8%), France (2.4%), Canada (2.2%) and Spain (2.2%).
- (3) The languages used in these papers are mainly in English (66.8%), French (21.8%) and Spanish (5.1%). Regarding Asian language, there are ten papers written in Chinese and only one in Japanese.
- (4) The top authors are unfortunately anonymous. All of them appear under the name of their magazines - magazines in Art field, such as Connaissance Des Arts, Art in America, Oeil Magazine International D Art, Art Forum and so on.

To answer the second question- what we can say about contemporary art, we firstly collect and have a look at keywords that mostly appear. Besides 'Contemporary Art' and 'Art', which be counted 133 and 46 times respectively, there is a list of top 30 keywords as below.

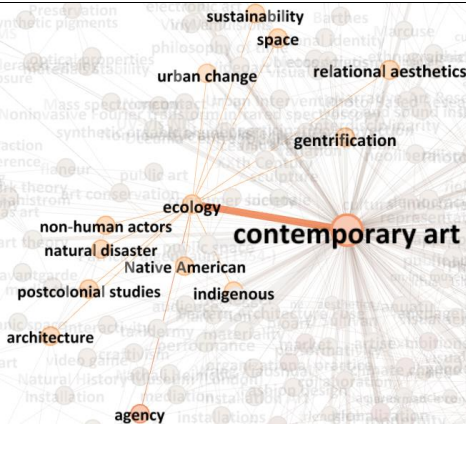
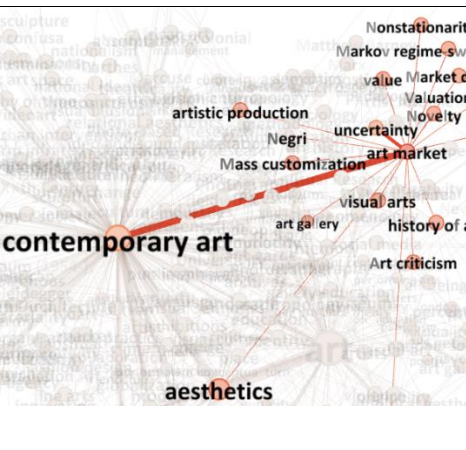
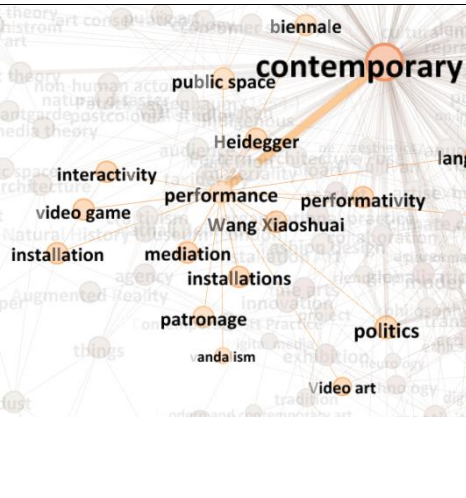
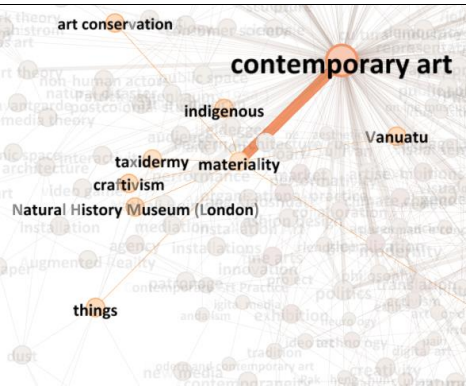
Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word
26	aesthetics	7	creativity	5	modernism
16	visual art	7	ethnography	5	materiality
16	Art history	7	performance	5	globalization
15	education	6	Modern Art	4	space
13	museum	6	event	4	architecture
11	art market	6	landscape	4	ecology
10	photography	5	culture	4	representation
9	politics	5	modernity	4	drawing
8	painting	5	public space	4	cultural heritage
7	sociology of art	5	identity	4	Interpretation

Although we cannot conclude much meaningful result from this table as it does not show the connection and relationship with contemporary art in the context. However, based on these top key words, we can see that contemporary art relates to many fields, not only traditional art like painting, drawing and photography; but also historical, political and social issues as ethnography, globalization, cultural heritage, museums, ecology, and materiality.



To get better understanding, we divide the graph into 11 clusters that have strongest connection with the main topic.

<p>Cluster 1:</p> <p>Aesthetic</p>		<p>The group ‘Aesthetic’ is strongly connected with ‘contemporary art’ and ‘Art’ itself. It combines naturalism, philosophy of art, performance theory, ethnography, digital art (human-computer interaction, visual art, video art) and innovation (Avant-garde concept and new aesthetic). In essence, this Aesthetics is a brand of philosophy that studies the principles of beauty and therefore, cover most of things related to Art.</p>
<p>Cluster 2:</p> <p>Ethnography</p>		<p>Ethnography contains those terms as Anthropology, Identity, Gender, Colonialism, Landscape and Violence. It could easily lead to the concept of study about difference races and cultures over the world. Interestingly, the strongest connection with Ethnography is the term ‘rhetoric’ – the skill of using language in speech or writing in a special way that influences or entertain people. In other words, it manipulates people. From that result, to my personal point of view, contemporary art is trying to include and reveal political issues behind any societies and countries.</p>

<p>Cluster 6: Ecology</p>		<p>‘Ecology’ tells us about the relation of plants and living creatures to each other and to their environment. In this group, term as ‘indigenous, architecture, postcolonial studies, non-human actors, natural disaster and gentrification’ have been mentioned and provoke the feeling about environment protection issues.</p>
<p>Cluster 7: Art market</p>		<p>The strongest connection with this ‘Art market’ is the term ‘uncertainty’. There are many academic papers have written about the risk and uncertainty of Art world these days. It also includes some characteristics and mediums of Art market such as novelty, market devices, art gallery, art criticism, valuation mechanism and mass customization.</p>
<p>Cluster8: Performance</p>		<p>Performance is a practical and crucial process of performing contemporary art. It combines some mediums and approaches of the art of performing, such as installation and performativity. Additionally, the term of public space, patronage (money support), and mediation appear as the financial factors for any performance.</p>
<p>Cluster 9: Materiality</p>		<p>This ‘materiality’ somehow links with art conservation, e.g. indigenous conservation, Natural History Museum and Vanuatu country. Some materials as taxidermy and craft have been mentioned. Bourdieu appeared as the</p>

		philosopher who has written many about Materiality in philosophy.
Cluster 10: Electronic Art		Electronic art is a form of art that makes use of electronic media or, more broadly, refers to technology and/or electronic media. It is related to information art, new media art, video art, digital art, interactive art, internet art, and electronic music. (Wikipedia). This group represents a specific contemporary art mediums which is really popular in today digital world. As the matter of fact, many schools have started teaching interactive media and digital art, many artist immerse themselves in digital painting and drawing, many mobile apps for photos, sound, video editing were born every single days. Due to the internet, art mediums changed. Never before art being everywhere like that.
Cluster 11: Photography		The community 'Photography' lists many factors that influence the art of Photography. However, it is hard to explain all meaning behind those connections without putting in specific contexts. Based on the closeness of the nodes, we only can say that those papers writing about photography and contemporary art also write about art history, education and research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is figure out the terms that mostly linked with contemporary art in academic and research field, in order to get better understanding about what is contemporary art. As the result, eleven groups that have closest relationship with contemporary art have been extracted (Aesthetic, Ethnography, Public space, Globalization, Politics, Ecology, Art market, Performance, Materiality, Electronic Art and Photography). Even the result is just the tip of iceberg, it somewhat helps us grasping the overall view and wide scope of contemporary art. Contemporary art is a collection of all movements, mirrors all things happening in a current society. It is much more socially, economically, and politically conscious than in any previous era before. Perhaps, ten year later when we look back at the present, we could say in the first decades of the twenty-first century, contemporary art began to be an art for the world.

References

Pearce, W., Holmberg, K., Hellsten, I. & Nerlich, B. 2013, "The conceptual landscape of iSchools: Examining current research interests of faculty members", *Information Research*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. e94785.

Smith, T. 2009, *What is contemporary art?* University of Chicago Press.

Website arthistory.about.com/current_contemporary_art/

Website art21.org/teach/on-contemporary-art/contemporary-art-in-context