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Documentary Photography & Visual Activism BA

ADAD4018

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Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan's Task) = 525

Task Two: Manifesto (Julia's Task) = 505

Task Three: Reflective (Rob's Task) = 512

Task One: Semiotic Analysis



During the last century, and in particular the 50's and 60's, the British government were involved in several controversial interferences in other countries. This involved incidents such as the massacre's in Kenya during the 50's and the expulsion of the Chagossian people from the island of Diego Garcia by 1973. In Wales, in 1965, it was decided that Liverpool's need for water was so great that a Welsh speaking community would have to make way to construct a reservoir to fill the need "even though

nearly all of Wales's members of parliament voted against it".

(1990: 640)

This is one of my favourite images which portrays a sign near the road leading to the

village of Capel Celyn in the Tryweryn valley taken by Geoff Charles on the 14th of November, 1963

(2004: 125) The irony of this photo lies in the signpost stating that trespassers will be

prosecuted when in reality the Liverpool corporation had trespassed on Welsh land to get the water

in the first place. It shares a strong similarity with the earlier work of Roger Fenton who is known as

one of the first war photographers ([The Valley of the Shadow of Death, 1855 Roger Fenton - Art ...](#)).

His photo "Valley of the shadow of death" shows a bleak landscape during the Crimean War with this

this shot being taken in April of 1855.



Both images share the fact that things in the picture were placed for a particular reason. In Geoff Charles's image the signpost was put there as threats of disruption to the corporation's work grew due to its contentious nature and in Fenton's image the cannonballs were more than likely placed or at least left there for soldiers to collect as ammunition to use later in the war.

The wording of the sign in Charles's image is not the important factor in a sense as described by Daniel Chandler in his book *Semiotics: The Basics* (2002: 69) when describing the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte's painting *La Trahison des Images* (The Treachery of Images) which states that this is not a pipe.



The important thing in Charles's image in reality is the loss and destruction of another Welsh speaking community through no fault of their own just as Magritte's "this is not a pipe" could be construed as meaning that it is a painting of a pipe or whatever purpose Magritte wanted the sentence to mean.

In the Peircean model it could be argued that the sign in Charles's image has a triadic (1999: 21) model which includes a signpost as the *representamen* probably planted in that spot by a worker of the Liverpool Corporation, the *interpretant* of the sign that if anyone trespasses they will be prosecuted by the Liverpool Corporation carrying out the work on the site and the *object* which the Liverpool Corporation want to protect by the planting of the sign being the generator for the reservoir.

In my view, the people of Tryweryn won't be forgotten by generations to come thanks in part to images by Geoff Charles, but as John Berger states "it must be judged against your own Experience" (1972)

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Task Two: Manifesto

1. To try to bring change through images
2. “Even if you are a minority one the truth is the truth” - to always seek the truth in my photography
3. To highlight pressing issues that are not shown on the mainstream media such as migrant crisis/plight of the Chagos islanders.
4. To work in an ethical & moral way.
5. “Life on earth is in crisis” - To highlight the pressing need to take action on climate change.
6. The Crisis of the Cliche - to be original and create unique images that move people to act.
7. To help progress the growing need for media from a Welsh perspective and learn from the National newspapers success in Scotland.
8. To absorb information and techniques from other photographers and artists.

To highlight pressing issues that are not shown on the mainstream media such as the migrant crisis/plight of the Chagos islanders.



The horror of the above image is now recognisable as a consequence of the migrant crisis in

2015. The young boy pictured is now known to be of 3 year old Alan Kurdi from Syria and

was one of 12 Syrians trying to reach the Greek island of Kos in September of that year.

(Smith, 2015)

The image was reported all over the world and was a shocking reflection of the risks people take to try to find safety. Unfortunately after this image was widely circulated the news of the daily boat crossings from Syria and neighbouring countries to Turkey and Greece quietly died down or disappeared completely. During 2019 the Hope Project based on the island of Lesbos along with the Aegean boat report have constantly worked to help and report the news of people crossing the sea's to seek refuge (<https://aegeanboatreport.com/the-story/>)

They have consistently tried to seek help for the many people desperate for it but often feel like their

cries have fallen on deaf ears. The mainstream media in their headlines have failed to report that the situation is now far worse than what it was in 2015 and the European Union don't seem to be offering the help they need. I am eager to travel to Lesbos in 2020 to try to raise awareness of these issues.

2. "Life on earth is in crisis" - To highlight the pressing need to take action on climate change.

In similarity to the previous manifesto point on highlighting the migrant crisis and other important news stories that aren't being covered, this point is probably the most vital of them all because there

is no planet B (<https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/the-emergency/>)

The recent bushfires in Australia have been a stark reminder of what will happen if we don't take seriously the warnings many scientists have given us.

(<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/australian-bushfires-live-coverage-battle-still-on-to-contain-snowy-mountains-megablaze/news-story/87a4a79e43e45ccc5e7344d52da16a90>)

3. The Crisis of the Cliche - to be original and create unique images that move people to act.



The desensitization of people to images like the one shown above that was taken by Kevin Carter in

Sudan (<http://100photos.time.com/photos/kevin-carter-starving-child-vulture>) makes it increasingly

difficult for photographers to gain support for action to be taken to change many things in society

and the environment around them. It is a dilemma that many apparently face, given the difficulties of

being original and dramatic at a time when job security isn't guaranteed

(<https://fomu.be/trigger/articles/the-crisis-of-the-clich%C3%A9>)

Given the fact that war photography especially can be extremely traumatic (as in the case of Kevin Carter), it is even more important that the image taken create an impact on people to take action.

How to achieve this is another problem though in a world where images of war are so often seen on our tv screens and when it is difficult to tell whether the images seen are real or manipulated.

It could be argued that graffiti artists such as Banksy are more relevant now than ever due to their unique way of using humour to portray the dark news happening all over the world. To create an unique image so that people are captivated enough by it to take some kind of action is my aim along with many others. The people such as the Palestinians who are constantly being oppressed rely on this kind of photography to show the world the truth.

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Task Three: Reflective



I was 8 years of age when I first opened my eyes to the world. I was sitting in front of our old hitachi

tv watching the evening news with my parents when I saw the film of a man walking across the street

only to stand in front of a tank to try to stop it in its path. I knew nothing of the protest happening in

Tiananmen Square back then or that the Chinese government were killing hundreds if not

thousands of their own people who were peacefully protesting but it had a lasting effect on me.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/china-1989-tiananmen-square-protests-demonstration-massacre>

The tank man as he came to be known feels like he is now a part of me in some strange kind of way.

The image of him waving his shopping bags to try to prevent the huge display of power by his

country's own government was so startling to me at the time that I cried my eyes out and it is a

memory that will stay with me forever. The protests of 1989 are depicted in one of my

favourite songs, ironically called Hypnotize (which I was by the tv in 1989), by the band System of

Down and I feel that it has led me to the photojournalism course in this university.

Although I was probably already aware of some pressing issues such as the famine in Ethiopia at the

time I feel that the tank man definitely had a part in my interest in helping people through

Photography. It's inspired many of my photographs for the photojournalism course but also led me to

learn of other atrocities such as the eviction of the Chagos islanders from their home on Diego

Garcia. The documentary by John Pilger highlighted it brilliantly and it is a cause I would love to

raise awareness of through my photography work in future

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17OPvurq97I&t=55s>)

Another aspect of the tank man story which I found to be interesting recently and that helped me

see things in a slightly different way was the drama Chimerica on channel 4 which was based on a

play of the same name. It followed a photojournalist that took a photo of the tank man and tried to

hunt him down 20 years later. The interesting spin put on the story in this drama was not that the

tank man was the true hero at the end of the story but more so the tank driver who stopped the tank

due to the repercussions he would also face for stopping.

The main work I am focused on at the moment is bringing some kind of help to the many migrants

crossing the sea's from Syria to Turkey and Greece with many drowning at sea daily.



I am also working on a piece of art to commemorate the 39 Vietnamese nationals that died in the back of a lorry in Essex last year. Upon researching for this piece of work I came across an article stating that another 39 people of Iranian nationality had tried to cross the Channel only a few days later. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-50451968>)



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