

Ways of Thinking

Student Name: Stella Hubbard-Smith

Student Number: 1902288

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Tutor: Ryan Moule

Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One: Observational Writing (Ryan's Task) = 504 words

Task Two: Manifesto Writing (Julia's Task) = 521 words

Task Three: Reflective Writing (Jon's Task) = 503 words

Task 1 - Ryan Moule - Observational Writing: semiotic analysis

Since the very beginning, humans have had an obsession with the imaginary, stepping beyond the ordinary through creative mediums. (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2018). Over time, this obsession took many forms within poetry, literature, art and film. But, since the digital revolution this past century it has taken a new capitalist form. The modern image no longer portrays just the imagined, but it tries to convince you that it *is* the reality. This is largely due to 'Consumer Culture' and capitalist schemes which were built through advertisement to shape the way that we think. (Miles, 2015)

"We are trained by our culture to perceive the world in a certain way, and this process is so effective that we can often fail to imagine that alternate perceptions are even possible"
(Morgan / Welton, 1992: 77)

We are taught from a very young age to label everything around us, 'this is a chair, so therefore I am supposed to sit on it.' This is an example of semiotics, the language of symbols; denoting (the literal) and connoting (the perceived), (Barthes, 1964). This is the way we interact with the world and recognise our surroundings.

Semiotics are taught through socialisation, i.e. the way we learn norms, values and beliefs through our surroundings (Ross, 1919). One form of this is advertisement. During this first task I will analyse a controversial cigarette advert from the 1970s, discussing the nature of its messaging and seeing if it holds any relevance in today's consumerist society.

You've Come a Long Way, Baby. Virginia Slims Advertising Campaign, 1971.



In 1971, Virginia Slims launched their '*slimmer fit*' advertising campaign. The product was a slimmer, lighter cigarette which was aimed towards women. Here is an example of a poster they produced. The image shows a young woman posing flirtatiously in a long floral dress smiling directly at the viewer. This implies that she goes against the social norms and expectations put on women to be modest and generally understated. This could also be the brand using her 'independence' as an excuse to sexualise and objectify the model. As stated in Laura Mulvey's theory on The Male Gaze in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly" (1989:

62). This is emphasised through the text branding on the top and sides of the page. It reads '121 brands of fat cigarettes fit men. Virginia Slims are made slimmer to fit you.' Words like 'fat' and 'slim' are repeated many times, ergo encouraging the idea that women are respected only if they are thin.

The brand's slogan "You've come a long way, baby" is in reference to the suffragette movement of the early 20th century. Although, the pet name 'baby' implies that the woman is being spoken to by a partner, most likely a man. This is controversial as it not only sexualises the model, but is condescending, contrasting against the previous messages of empowerment and independence. This is a prime example of Slavoj Zizek's theory on *Cultural Capitalism*, i.e. making profit out of a social issue (Zizek, 2010).

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Task 2 - Julia Lockheart - Manifesto Writing: What do I believe in?

1. The artist should always be aware of their material surroundings;

Where can I push this?

2. The artist should always be aware of others;

Who can I learn from?

3. The artist should always be aware of their voice;

What can I change?

4. The artist should always be aware of history;

What came before?

5. The artist should always be aware of their practice;

What comes next?

6. The artist should always be aware of their location;

What are my surroundings?

7. The artist should always be aware of the impossible;

What if?

8. The artist should always question;

Why?

CHANGE



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart)*, 1983

The artist should always be aware of their voice;
'What can I change?'

For thousands of years, artists have pushed the boundaries of how we perceive our culture, beliefs, identity and humanity. As stated by Thelma Golden in her 2013 Ted Talk, "art is a tool for cultural change." I agree with this statement, as I believe that it is an artist's responsibility to have an understanding of the impact of their voice. Without this voice, there would be nothing to question, nothing to change.

"My aim as a scholar and curator is precisely to ferret out- to tally, to count and throw inequities into high relief laying bare to powerful ideological mechanisms that ensure some artists are celebrated while others are marginalised." (Reilly, 2018:21).

Basquiat's *Defacement* (1983), portrays the violent targeting of minorities through police brutality in America. He poses the question, 'defacmento?' (defacement), asking 'is this erasure, is this violence?' Questions such as these are what push our world towards an awareness of one's thoughts and actions. This is something that I tend to keep in mind in my work. My aim is to bring attention to the inequalities of our world through my creative process. Art is inherently political because of the way our perception is constructed. Our surroundings influence our beliefs; therefore, our beliefs influence our practice.

HISTORY



Ernest Ludwig Kirchner, *Berlin Street Scene* (1913)

The artist should always be aware of history;
What came before?

Contextual research is a key aspect of any artists' journey. Through historical reflection, I'm able to take previous ideas and transform them through my own work, adding another layer of artistic understanding. This could also be the social and political conditions the artists were trying to convey. Nowadays, art is often taken out of context and so it's important to remember the impact it had at the time.

For example, Kirchner's *Berlin Street Scene* is a direct reflection on the Bourgeois society of early 20th century Berlin (Wye, 2008). Kirchner's earlier work was also heavily influenced by the rising fascist government in parts of Europe at the time. As a key part of the German expressionist movement, it's crucial to reflect on his teachings and practices. The purpose of contextual research is to broaden the artist's working practice and open their mind to new and exciting ideas; essentially, the study of what came before often influences what comes next.

THE IMPOSSIBLE



Ana Mendieta, *Creek* (1974)

The artist should always be aware of the impossible
'What if?'

The age-old question 'what if?' resonates with every artist on the planet. It's the question with every answer imaginable. When it comes to my personal practice, I find that asking this question pushes my methods and concepts even further. It's about taking what you see and making it what it could be. This is an extremely hard method to master, as the outcome can often fail or go off in the wrong direction. But its core value is still to look past the surface of an object/image, to initially ignore the impression, and then to build upon it.

Often, things considered ugly possess great beauty, for deterioration and fragmentation create visual variety and richness to materials and objects (Rasmusen / Grant, 1967). This is applicable to every creative medium, it can even be done before the practical creative process begins. The artist's perception of the impossible is key to the exploration of their practice.

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Task 3 - Jon Pugh - Reflective Writing: Do you know what you think?



Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, (1937)

On the 26th of April 1937, the Basque town of Guernica was bombed under Francisco Franco's nationalist government regime. The town had been used as a testing ground for Nazi bombs during the Spanish Civil War. An estimated 153 people were killed in the bombing (Tharoor, 2017). The same year, Picasso painted his masterpiece in honour of the people who perished in the attack. It was created at a time of rising fascism in western Europe – a time of fear, hatred and delusion. Arguably, Picasso's iconography became a

‘profound statement upon the horror and futility of war’ in the twentieth century (Payne, 2001). Guernica holds a certain timeless quality through its provocative discourse on modern war.

This piece is a direct reaction to the senseless murder of the Basque people of Guernica. His grief is made apparent through the grey and white tones used; As Picasso’s paintings are often full of colour, the lack of it here creates a severe, haunting effect. This adds to the otherworldly atmosphere of the painting. Additionally, the shapes of the bodies flow into one another like ghosts, limbs scattered everywhere, emphasising the ephemerality of life.

“The horror of war gives no immunity against its terror. For Picasso that horror and that fear are an obsession” (Boeck / Sabartés, 1961:62).

As someone who grew up in 21st century Britain, I have a very different experience of war compared to someone like Picasso. I am privileged enough to have learnt about the atrocities of war from grandparents and history books. Although, recently the media has developed new ways of hiding the truth through distraction. This emphasises the importance of works such as Guernica, which allows us to see past the façade put in front of us.

His personal reaction to loss of life and culture opens up questions as to why it’s still happening today. Countries across the world are suffering from corrupt governments and terror organisations, but why isn’t everyone talking about it? The wailing of a mother losing her child, the screams of men burning alive, and the emotionless faces of the dead. These are the realities of war, but many of us refuse to face them.

“For war in the end is always about betrayal, betrayal of the young by the old, the soldiers by politicians, and of idealists by cynics” (Suau, 2005:17).

Despite it having been painted 80 years ago, Guernica still holds a strong relevance in today’s political climate. For example, in 1985 a full-sized tapestry of Guernica was hung in the United Nations building in New York. In 2003 the UN held a conference discussing the possibility of waging war on Iraq (Cohen, 2003). During this conference, the painting was covered by a large blue curtain. Columnist Alejandro Escalona suggested that Guernica’s proved to be ‘too strong for articulating to the world why the US was going to war in Iraq’ (2012). This emphasises the importance of works such as Guernica, which remind us of the horror, tragedy and injustice that war invites.

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