

Student Name: Charlotte James

P Number: 2003780

Programme of Study: Documentary Photography and Visual Activism

Module: ADAD4018

Ways of Thinking Lecturer's Name: Ryan Moule

Tasks in the order I have received them:

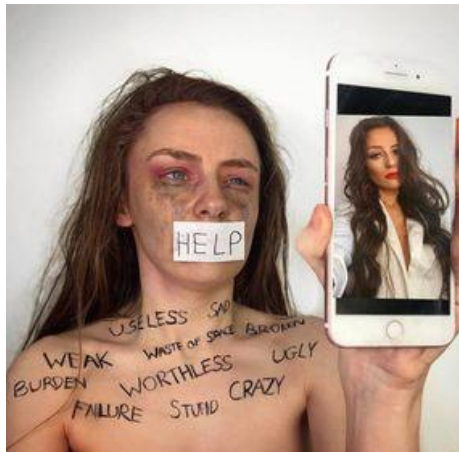
Task 1: Observational Writing= 525 Words

Task 2: Manifesto Writing= 658 Words

Task 3: Practice-based Writing= 500 Words

Total Word Count= 1,683 words

Task 1: Observational Writing:



(Fig. 1, *World Mental Health Day*, [www.instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com/p/CGLQYi4J1up/?igshid=1sj2izcxf2rvf). (n.d.). Login • Instagram. [online] Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGLQYi4J1up/?igshid=1sj2izcxf2rvf> [2020].)

Throughout this text, I will be introducing the concept of Semiotics and how within the image above, we can deconstruct it, by discussing the effects that the image has on us. What are we seeing? What is hidden? What does the artist want us to see?

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbolism. Reflecting on how someone can feel from looking at something such as this. What the brain associates that with. A sign is anything that communicates a meaning. The 'founding father' on this topic was Ferdinand de Saussure, although many other theorists have written on and voiced their opinion on Semiotics, widening the knowledge and impact that signs have on the human brain.

The above image (*World Mental Health Day*) indicates the impact of social media upon society. The subject holds a photo of her social media 'identity'; all dressed up, make up on etc. You can see from her phone screen that she has created an illusion. It is common for people to literally 'hide behind the screen' and avoid displaying their real emotions. Although, many people in society have started to show their true feelings. Mental health has always been taboo and day by day there is a battle to create a space through social media that makes people comfortable enough to express themselves instead of 'putting a mask' on. It shows a perspective of false consciousness, this is how the subject illustrates themselves to the digital world, whereas it could be a possibility that to those who know her personally she is more open with her mental health. The words written on the subject's chest could depict how she feels about herself and/or how others have made her feel. The use of the word 'Help' is very impactful. The word 'help' connotes that she is scared and struggling with these societal pressures that encourage her to hide her feelings and she needs someone to succour her within this time of distress and hardship.

In terms of semiotics, this image shows plenty of signs each working in different ways. The implied message of the image is to show the inflicting damage social media has upon an individual. In spite of an unintended message to perhaps show how the subject thinks of herself and hides behind the mask of the 'influencer lifestyle'. The image contains connotations; both positive and negative. On the one hand, the positives would be that it creates awareness of mental health problems. On the other hand, the negatives would be that some individuals could have a personal connection in turn triggering an upset

reaction. But that is not the intended message. Everything has a negative connection somehow, so ensuring the perfect balance is hard. Separating literalism and symbolism can be difficult, due to the above reasoning of how the viewer can fabricate a thought process triggered by small things within the photograph instead of consuming the intended message. Finally, the use of language does trigger a reaction from the viewer. Each person on the planet gets hurt from words just as they would by violence. So, it shows how we need to rid this toxicity and be kind.

Bibliography:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGLQYi4J1up/?igshid=1sj2jzxcf2rvf>

<https://www.britannica.com/science/semiotics>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4183915/>

Task 2: Manifesto Writing-What I believe in as an artist

1. Family and Friends
2. Trauma, a way of escape
3. The goings-on in the world
4. General Interest
5. Personal battle with the label of 'artist'
6. Challenging societal structures and values
7. What is displayed in the media in comparison to real life
8. The works of Don McCullin and his mindset of showing the 'unshown' and exposing the truths, ridding the world of censorship

3 areas of exploration:

1. How I use photography as a way of escaping from reality:

My childhood was tough, I underwent emotional abuse from a family member. This also involved a domestic abuse situation within my household between my parents. This time of my life was stressful and dark. This is an inspiration, after this dark time it enabled me to see the world differently and admire the small things, I am nicer to people because you never know where life has taken them. Escaping reality using photography has become a way for me to create a place where I can forget, where I can make a story, and artistically compose a world where these events did not happen.

These events greatly impacted my childhood. Restricting my focus, enabling me to not work to my preferred standard. Many points of my childhood are very cloudy, and I struggle to think of positive memories in relation to this family member. I use my work to transport myself into an alternative reality where these events are non-existent.

Art can be used as a tool, just as Alain de Botton explains in his book Art is Therapy that; "...art is a therapeutic medium that can help guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves".

2. What is displayed in the media in comparison to real life.

Since the media became a mainstream process of sharing news within the world, there has always been an act of censorship and appropriateness related to what is shared. This could perhaps be due to how some news is highly shocking, very upsetting, and unpleasant. This does not mean that certain stories should not be shared and completely ignored. There are split opinions regarding important news and non-important news due to how tabloids and celebrity culture, have become so popular over the past few years. I do understand certain boundaries for how graphic stories can be, but people cannot hide from the bad in the world anymore, the world is not all positive and loving as many believe. 'The News-A User's Manual' written by Alain de Botton speaks about the impacts of news on our lives. It says, "We put our lives on hold in the expectation of receiving yet another dose of critical information about all the most significant achievements, catastrophes, crimes, epidemics and romantic complications to have befallen mankind anywhere around the planet since we last had a look." Therefore, society needs to see the truth in order to create solutions for a better world for all of us.

3. My personal battle with labelling myself as an artist

My biggest inspiration within photography is Don McCullin who also does not call himself an artist. He battles with that label and stands by being a photographer and separates the photographer from the artist. I find this really inspiring, despite the artistic connections with photography, he does not care for the label of the artist. He is a War Photographer; He is ready to show the hardships in the world without censorship. Which is what I want to do in my future. I want to be a war photographer. I want to be able to help those in need. My studies might change my mind, I could escape my comfort zone and really interact with my creativity and then maybe consider the artistic label. I know that there is many people who think that the world is positive and happy. But there is a much darker side that we are not being exposed to.

I've always struggled with being artistic, I do not know why. I have just never been able to produce something out of nothing like how other artists do. Whether that be drawing, painting, or sculpting something. Despite this struggle, photography has been the 'gateway drug' to my artistic ability and every day I find a new skill and discover my style and how I work. Every day is a learning curve, and I know not to be too critical with myself so that I can have a mindset that is always improving instead of beating myself up on how to be better.

Bibliography:

Alain De Botton, Armstrong, J. and Rijksmuseum (Netherlands (2014). *Art is therapy*. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum.

Hamilton, H. (n.d.). *Alain de Botton : The News -a User's Manual*. [online] Available at: <https://www.alisonmorgan.co.uk/Books/De%20Botton%202014.pdf> [Accessed 21 Dec. 2020].

Don McCullin Is a War Photographer. Just Don't Call Him an Artist. (2019). *The New York Times*. [online] 4 Feb. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/04/arts/design/don-mccullin-tate-britain.html>.

Tate (2018). *Don McCullin*. [online] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/don-mccullin>.

Task 3: Practice-based writing: A reflection of the works of Don McCullin's exhibition at the Tate Britain (2019).

In the Tate Britain (London) 2019. Don McCullin worked with a team of curators; (Simon Baker, Director of The Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, Shoair Maulian, Director of PhotoWorks, assisted by Aïcha Mehrez, Assistant Curator of Contemporary British Art, Tate Britain.) Together, they brought together 250 photographs, developed by McCullin in his own darkroom. In order to showcase his most impactful work over the last 60 years of his career. The exhibition is temporary but does travel to numerous locations throughout the United Kingdom. The show is solo, and it is arguably a mixture of historical and contemporary pieces.

The exhibition holds a variety of war photographs spanning from McCullin's time in Vietnam, Northern Ireland, and even his recent work in Syria. Although, the exhibition does also contain photographs from England. One section exposing the poverty and condition of the working-class sector in London. It also looks at the North's industrialism. Lastly, it contains the landscape photography of Somerset. McCullin's beloved home. The works in the show are chronological and show an accurate timeline of McCullin's career. Taking the viewer on a journey.

The show was indoors, and the work was presented framed, with a thick white frame to be exact. Contrasting with the monotone photographs give it a sophisticated edge. Although there were items that McCullin used during his career such as a war helmet he wore, with an array of other items. These were kept in big clear display cases in the middle of each room. There were three in total. I cannot find any information regarding what height the images were hung. Although, I would describe them all as being at an average person's eyesight. All in a row and lined up symmetrically.

In terms of this show in relation to my enjoyments of it would be all of it. Seeing this work really inspired me to escape my comfort zones and follow in McCullin's footsteps in order to be the best documentary photographer I can be. I know that this is going to take me a long time and a lot of work, but I am determined to do it. I have always had an interest in his works. But being able to see them up close and reading into the background of what was really happening I found it astounding. I loved how much of an impact that the works had on me. I was shocked, overwhelmed but it created a determination to do the same as what he has. Exposing the truth in the world and although it is shocking and upsetting, still being able to make something iconic and the reason for the change in the world.

When researching this exhibition, I found this quote from the official Tate's website that states: "Tate Britain presents a comprehensive retrospective of the legendary British photographer Don McCullin". I think that this is the perfect way to describe the exhibition. I think that the work gives an interesting perspective to the otherwise censored public.

Bibliography:

Macdonald, F. (n.d.). *Don McCullin: The photos we can't look away from*. [online] [www.bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190212-don-mccullin-the-photos-we-cant-look-away-from). Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190212-don-mccullin-the-photos-we-cant-look-away-from>.

Tate (2018). *Don McCullin*. [online] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/don-mccullin>.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/04/arts/design/don-mccullin-tate-britain.html>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/don-mccullin>

Tate (n.d.). *Don McCullin – Press Release*. [online] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/don-mccullin-0#:~:text=Don%20McCullin%20is%20curated%20by> [Accessed 23 Dec. 2020].