

Portfolio of Writing

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Tasks in the order I have completed them:

Task 1: Observational Writing: 472 words

Task 2: Manifesto: 516 words

Task 3: Practice Based Writing: 539



My bed, Tracey Emin (1998)

Femininity is often considered the height of sophistication when represented in art. In this piece I am going to consider how semiotics can affect how we see this, from a societal lens, and also a more personal perspective.

My Bed by Tracy Emin is an unconventional glimpse into what being a woman can look like. It isn't neat and delicate, it's raw and honest. She manages to challenge societies' taboos with the small details within the piece.

In terms of semiotics it is human nature to associate and group ideas together. Ferdinand de Saussure described this as the 'signifier' and the 'signified' (Saussure, 1983).

Displayed on the carpet is a pair of underwear with blood on them. Semiotics is present in how we view everything; it tells us that within art, menstruation is a symbol of new life and rebirth. Emin takes what we are programmed to think and disputes it by adding used condoms and birth control to the piece. This shows that a woman's purpose is more than reproduction and that sex doesn't have to be about creation, and therefore challenges us as the viewer to question our first instinct when reading an image.

Undoubtedly, the piece is challenging to look at. Seeing an untidy space is unpleasant as it is a signifier for a lack of hygiene and sluggishness. However, if we consider Roland Barthes's ideas of semiotics, it can mean so much more than that. He suggests that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (Barthes 1968), meaning that when an artist lets the public view their work it is no longer about the meaning they have created behind it, but the viewer's interpretation. The experience of the viewer will greatly impact how they read this piece. I, for example, see it as an honest look at mental health and femininity. I can empathise with both of these points and therefore will insert my own ideas into her work. A different audience may have an opposite reaction. For some, empty bottles of vodka and cigarette butts will signify a distasteful lifestyle.

I now understand that the piece is what you make of it. It doesn't have to be a feminist piece, nor a social commentary. It is just a snippet into the life of a woman who is merely existing.

In his book *Ways Of Thinking*, John Berges said 'Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at'. Considering what Berges is saying, I think that perhaps Emin knew that her piece would be viewed differently by women. They may see it from a personal place. Men may see it through a male gaze and see it as just a piece of art created by a woman, rather than a look at the female experience.

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Manifesto

1. I will never profit from exploiting those less fortunate than I within my art.
2. What can be considered art is so subjective, therefore I should create whatever I want.
3. I will listen to constructive criticism and use it to better myself.
4. I will acknowledge that access to art materials and resources is a privilege.
5. Disabled creatives deserve more representation in the media.
6. I will use my art to explain what I struggle to say with words.
7. We must recognise that fashion relies heavily on the appropriation of different cultures.
8. Teachers and educators should be given more training to deal with children with invisible disabilities.

I will never profit from exploiting those less fortunate than I within my art



Afghan Girl, Steve McCurry, (1984)

McCurry's *Afghan Girl* graced the cover of National Geographic magazine in June of 1985. It is globally recognised and is considered a masterpiece in portraiture.

Audiences were drawn in by the piercing look of pain in her eyes.

This photo sky rocketed McCurry to fame and earned him appreciation and respect from other photographers and the general public alike. McCurry 'did not care to find out' her name, (Ribhu, 2019). Although her face was everywhere, the model Sharbat Gula made no profit. While his photography skills were obviously integral to the photo's success, Sharbat Gula's beauty and vulnerability is also to thank. McCurry was able to visit a poverty-stricken area and then go back to his comfortable

lifestyle, all the while making money from exploiting someone. It is said in Rbhu's article that when Gula heard of the photo she felt 'anger'.

I hope that I will never find myself in the position of profiting from exploitation, and instead will use my voice to give those less fortunate than I a platform to speak.

What can be considered art is so subjective, therefore I should create whatever I want.



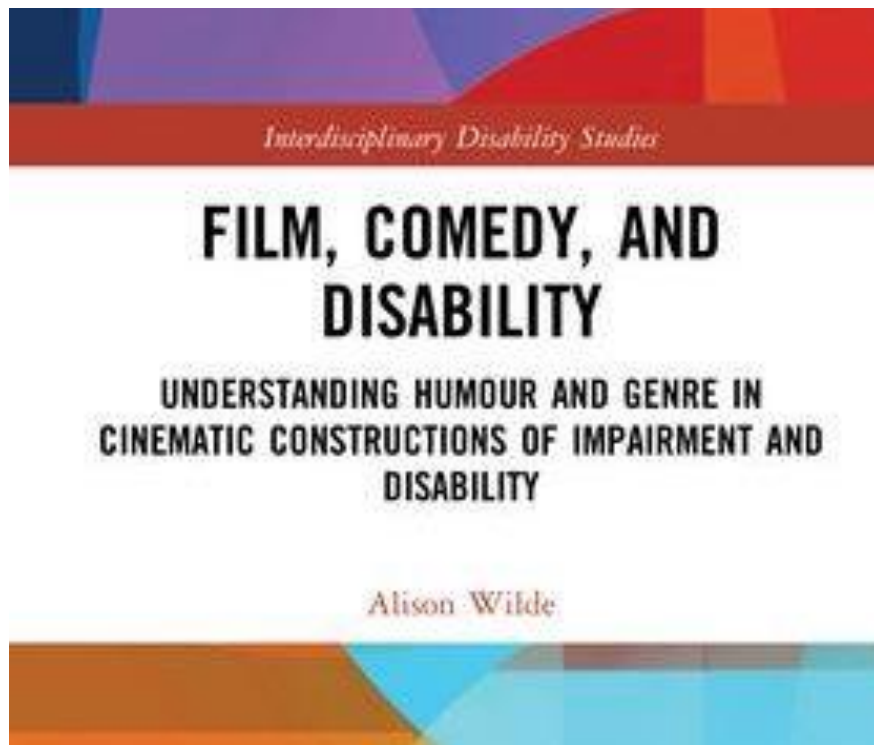
Dada manifesto, Tristan Tzara (1918)

‘A work of art is never beautiful by decree, objectively and for all. Hence criticism is useless, it exists only subjectively, for each man separately, without the slightest character of universality’. (Dada Manifesto, Tristan Tzara, 1918.)

All it takes is a walk around a gallery displaying modern art to understand that there is no one answer for what can be considered a piece of art. When visiting the Tate Modern, you can witness William Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott*, and Yves Klein's *IKB 79* within the same building. These pieces are wildly different and yet both displayed in an art gallery. I always had a rather cynical and black and white idea of what could be considered art so would agree that modern art is rubbish and classic art is a thing of beauty.

I now believe that art is not about what is being presented on a canvas; but how we consume what we are seeing. In the *Dada Manifesto*, Tzara describes how subjective art is, and subsequently, insinuates that to try and critique a piece is pointless. If I can appreciate a piece of art because it evokes emotion in me, rather than how it looks visually, I should be able to view my own art in such a way.

Disabled creatives deserve more representation in the media.



Wilde, (2020)

I was diagnosed with a chronic illness 7 years ago, which means that most of my creative life has been spent balancing sickness and my passion for art. I believe that through creating, I can illuminate my hardships and create something beautiful from them.

I, among other disabled creatives, are facing a problem in our field that is rooted in ableism. Able-bodied actors, writers and artists are using their voices to speak for us, rather than giving us the space to show real representation.

Author Alison Wilde writes about a need to remove “an objectifying ‘non-disabled gaze’ on disabled people” (Wilde, 2019) within the film industry. This means that non-disabled people should not be speaking on disabled people, as they often dehumanize us in the process, intentionally or not.

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Practice Based Writing

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle



(Expert Program Management, 2021)

As I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome at the age of 12, which was around the time I decided I wanted to be an artist. I have been balancing this along with my mental health issues throughout all my creative life.

Upon reflection I have realised that although my poor health has taken away any form of normalcy in my life, it has empowered the way I work. My chronic illness makes life unpredictable for me, one day I can feel fit and healthy and the next I could be bed bound. I can't control much within my personal life, however, I can find a way to create structure through my art. Screen printing, for example, is a

methodical process. There are steps you must follow. There is a structure there. When I'm screen printing, I feel in control, I know the steps I need to take, and I am able to switch my mind off and focus only on the art. Similarly, I do a lot of watercolour paintings. I find the free-flowing lines I create to be calming. I think watercolour is a very tranquil medium as it can be used to make expressive marks. The paintings I create are a form of mindfulness for me. In his book about art therapy called *Art Heals*, Shaun McNiff said that 'art adapts to every conceivable problem' and that it 'lends it's powers to people in need' (McNiff, 2004). This is true for me and so many other individuals. Art is a livelihood and an escape.

An artist I look up to is Frida Kahlo. I find it inspiring and comforting to see someone who was creating while struggling with health. I got to see an exhibition of her work and was able to see some of her personal artifacts. In an article for *British Journal Of General Practices*, Moira Davis praises Kahlo's 2018 exhibition at the V&A and notes her 'great strength and creativity to turn such suffering and misfortune into art' (Davis, 2018).

Because of my approach of treating my art almost like meditation I am reflective. I use the 6 stages of Gibb's reflective cycle to better my understanding of myself and the way I work. He has 6 steps: 'Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion, and Action Plan' (Gibbs, 1988). I think this mode of reflection is useful because of

how versatile it is. While I may use it for my creative work, it could be applied to any situation or practice. In an article called *Reflecting On Events*, an emergency responder details how they use Gibb's cycle when arriving at the scene of an accident. They write that they 'chose Gibbs Reflective cycle because it is well structured and easy to follow' (Pat Lawrence, 2008).

I like to reflect on my work by writing evaluations- step 3 in the cycle. It comes quite naturally to me to step away and assess what I think did and did not go well. It is helpful to go through all the steps in order because you end with an action plan. It is pointless to pick out the flaws of a piece and not further reflect on what will be changed the next time.

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