

Research in context – ADAD5003

Question 3: Outline a pair of opposite discussed in the lecture series. For example ‘weight and light’, ‘silence and noise’, ‘ephemeral and permanent’. Showing examples of 2 artists and 1 writer who have explored these opposites in their work.

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Fantasy and reality are two very different topics that have interestingly found themselves intertwined within one another. This essay is going to explore these two opposites through a variety of artists and authors who compare, combine and manifest themselves in fantasy and reality.

Firstly, it is important to establish what each word means. 'Fantasy' derived from the dictionary is said to be *““a pleasant situation that you imagine but that is unlikely to happen””* (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, 2019) and generally has the understanding that reality has become something of little worry. Fantasy can be a personal escape from the onslaught of everyday life and many artists use it in this way in their practice however, it can also be used with a hidden agenda, perhaps to gently enlighten people on a situation. 'Reality' on the other hand is defined as *““the true situation and the problems that actually exist in life, in contrast to how you would like life to be ”” or ““a thing that is actually experienced or seen, in contrast to what people might imagine””* (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, 2019) Reality is something that everyone must live in, with the current age we are suffering from an ongoing climate crisis, racism, sexism, homophobia, corrupt governments and so much more. This can become overwhelming for many, and art is a place to express oneself or allow others to escape within it. Music, stories, paintings. They all convey a part of history whether its focus is on the truth of the times or the fantastical imagination of a person wanting to bring something into fruition.

J K Rowling is known for her book series, Harry Potter. The series, that began in 1997 looks into the wizarding world in which the main character, Harry Potter, discovers his powers and saves his school from dark magic users.

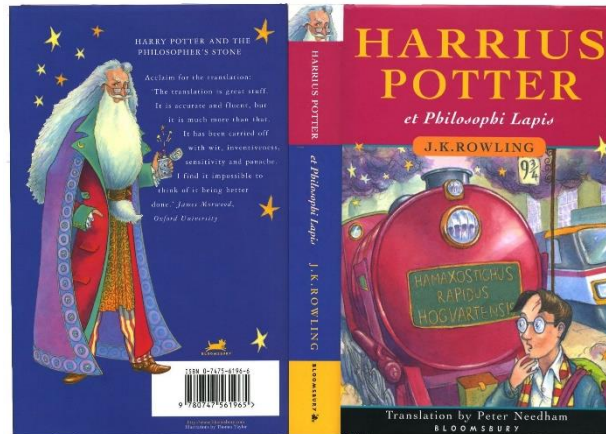


Figure 1

Her books are read by a wide audience and have real life problems discussed within them. Rowling's books may be a favourite of many yet there is a darkness behind them. Those who face pain, grief, trauma and other issues tend to form a world of escape that helps them cope in reality. Rowling suffered from the loss of her mother, the lack of a job, the separation from her husband and the challenging task of raising her daughter, all whilst creating the fictional books we know for their twist on fantasy. The Insider cites, *"I couldn't have written this book if I hadn't had a few years where I'd been really as poor as it's possible to go in the UK without being homeless"* (Rowling 2012), which confirms that struggling may be a large trigger of creating oneself a fantasy. The idea that fantasy mainly comes about when a person is under stress is reinforced by Freud's idea that fantasy *"is a wish fulfilling idea which comes into play when external reality is frustrating"* (Segal & Freud, n.d.) as well as the fact that *"conflicts, instincts, and defences are expressed and contained in an unconscious phantasy"*. In a psychological background, phantasy, which is a variant spelling in terms of psychology and psychiatry, is well researched as it is a big part of mental illnesses. For example, when a person has anxiety, their fight or flight instinct may kick in quite regularly which Segal (1990) notes that Freud emphasised on the operative link that phantasy's form between instincts and mechanisms. To put that briefly, a person may imagine being in a certain place or do something such as draw or write about a fantasy world

with dragons and other mysterious beings that care for one another, although the sad reality of that is that “*in the case of conscious fantasies, day-dreaming, the phantasy is known not to be true*”² (Segal & Freud, n.d.).

Everybody has their own way of masking their true feelings or intentions which has recently been represented in the debates within the 2019 autumn election. Society as a whole is demanding and has many fundamental issues however the face of it all, our government that’s represents us to the world perceives a plethora of fantasies as reality. A campaigning tool that the Conservative Party used against the Labour Party as a way of misleading the country was changing their “*Twitter branding to resemble independent fact-checkers during ITV’s election debate*” (Dodds, 2019) Albeit this being the most recent misleading content, there was also a fake NHS leaflet released to the public in Guys Hospital in Central London suggesting that voting to leave the EU would help “*save our NHS*” (Siddique, 2016) which was distributed by an unknown source, clearly a part of the leave campaign.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Other countries may believe us to be a funny accented, tea drinking posh country whereas the reality of the fact is that we are an anti-immigrant, racist, homophobic society but only under the power of Johnson. As quoted from Simulacra and simulation, “*all societies end up*

wearing masks”” (Baudrillard, 1994). This book looks into what changes have affected the world such as technological advancements.

Baudrillard explains that,

the media represents world that is more real than reality that we can experience. People lose the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. They also begin to engage with the fantasy without realising what it really is. They seek happiness and fulfilment through the simulacra of reality, e.g. media and avoid contact/ interaction with the real world.

(Baudrillard, 1994)

This delves deeper into the lies that are created to sustain the current society that we live in. Newspapers, twitter, speeches. Misinformation spreads like wildfire and becomes the new truth, where “*the secret of theory is that truth does not exist*”” (Baudrillard, 1994) which makes sense considering the truth is simply what we believe we are being told is factually accurate. Its unfortunate that we must seek refuge in ours or others’ fantasies to escape from theses “truths” and despite our best efforts to improve our lives, simply “*we live in a world where there is more information and less and less meaning*”” (Baudrillard, 1994).

Charlotte Edey is an artist that works with fantasy in her practice. She works with several mediums including print, tapestry and embroidery and creates soft and light pieces with pastel colours. Some of the main topics that she researches and explores are myth, mysticism and femininity. From looking at the pieces that she displays on her website, her work is both expressive and subtle with its hidden agendas woven and embroidered into her pastel backgrounds, “*for the positive man, everything that is unreal is alike, the forms being submerged and drowned in unreality*”” (Bachelard, 1964). Edeys embroidered work is simplistic yet meaningful whereas her prints display more detail and intricate designs, and her

commissioned pieces show her skill with her chosen materials. Its curious to see what type of people commissioned her to make work such as New York Times and BBC News as these are companies that spread inaccurate truths.



Figure 4 – Accused – Charlotte Edey

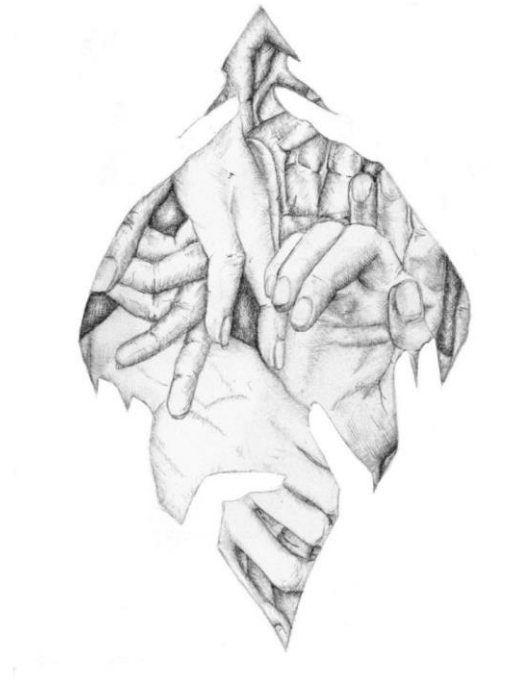


Figure 5 – Twine – Charlotte Edey

When researching Charlotte Edey, these two works came across as a comparative to each other. On the one hand figure 4 “accused” has printed hands on a tapestry all pointed towards each other, playing the victim but also the accuser. The hands are strategically placed yet also overlapping one and other, crowding the tapestry and moulding together as one. There is separation in such a tight space. In comparison to this, figure 5 “twine” has hands interlocked, overlapping in a gentle and subtle manner with its scratchy pencil work and cool colours. Not only is there a difference in mediums and from that a different production of the piece, but there is also a sense of unity in figure 5, a closer bond and a better community. Even the outside of the initial graphite drawing has hands cupping those inside, protecting them from leaving their canvas. Its like a sea of hands, “*this, then, is my ancestral forest.*”

And all the rest is fiction.”” (Bachelard, 1964). The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard looks into the idea of space, and in a recent interview with Edey taken by Alicja Jakeway we find that Edey’s narrative that features symbolism and illusions have a “” *distinctive use of tone represents not only spiritually, but also modernism and feminism.*”” It goes on to say that she is “” *interested in the idea of space, tone and beyond, here is an artist also giving visibility to women of colour and mixed heritage*”” (Jakeway, 2019). Some key words that Jakeway features in her interview with Edey are ethereal, modernist, personal sanctuaries, delicate, textiles, natural, organic, symbolism. Edey partook in a foundation course at Chelsea school of art in 2011 however chose not to move onto a BA and continued to work in the comfort of her own home moving from the bedroom into her living room as it had more space. Edey states that her work is mostly the “” *exploration of the idea of space*”” (Edey, 2019). This ties into Bachelard’s book with description of “” *how our perceptions of houses and other shelters shape our thoughts, memories and dreams*”” with Edey looking into architecture and the fantasy surrounding that its likely that she has explored the contents of his book. Jakeway also notes that Edey has a fondness for symbolism and the significance of objects within her work, these could be mystical, in reference to femininity or catered to a specific audience.

Steve Bell is a representation of satire art with his political cartoons depicting the current times in a comical way. Bell was until recently a main cartoonist for The Guardian however, his controversial art took too great a hit when its readers disagreed with his comic strip and was pulled from the newspaper in July 2019. Wanting to understand the decision made by The Guardian and how Bell felt, an email was sent with some brief questions regarding his work however, was not replied to. In an interview with Bell it was discovered that he majorly takes inspiration for his work by “” *shouting at the radio*”” (Bell, 2019) or in his own words, “” *shouting at the verbiage of politics – the idiot stuff that comes off the radio*””

(Bell, 2019). Originally, he was rejected by The Guardian as they couldn't find themselves using his work in the foreseeable future although, after his visibility grew from his work with 'Time Out' they eventually accepted him. As of the autumn election 2019, more people are becoming aware of their future and that their vote is a major contribution to whichever party they are voting for. This includes underrepresented groups such as woman aged 30 and under and youths who have just turned 18 or above. Looking into the statistics of those most likely to vote for which party, it is intriguing to see that those under 40 years of age are more likely to vote for the Labour and Green parties whereas, those over 40 seem to be giving their votes majorly to the Conservative party *“with 58% of those aged over 70 backing them”* (Curtis, 2019) as well as Lib Dem, SNP and Brexit party. This may be due to those being over 40 having witnessed previous governments run the country and thus having *“more experience”* or that they are ignorant and refuse to think about the future of others. A lot of this information can be stripped and used whether it's from a news article, an interview, or from Bells view, the radio, and used to create a comedic yet serious view. Bell feels that he's *“optimistic about cartooning generally because there's a need for it because politics has become more visual”* (Bell, 2019) which can be taken quite literally as social media currently represents a lot of the misinformation found by different parties who're aiming to get more voters.



Figure 6

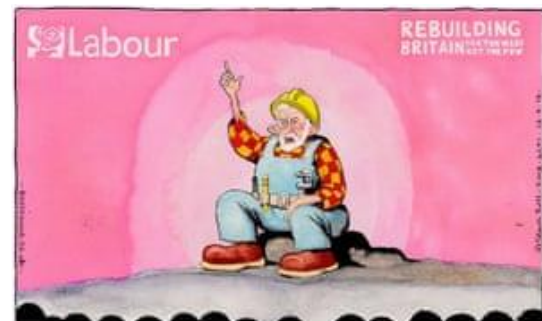


Figure 7

These two pieces are both by Bell, figure 6 being a very recent piece mocking the Conservative's latest advert of the Autumn election, with figure 7 being derived from Jeremy Corbyn's conference speech in September of 2018. It's amusing to see Bell's view of each MP with Johnson looking like a bottom and Corbyn sporting a 'Bob the Builder' outfit, truly representing how he feels about the Conservative and Labour parties. Bell looks into the reality of politics and mocks it rather than taking a fantasy route likely due to his stylistic approach of grotesque caricatures and controversial ways.

Throughout this essay, the exploration of fantasy and reality within artists' work has allowed for the discovery of deeper meanings, with psychology and psychiatry working alongside inspiration for visual and written artworks. It's very important to note that the truth within this world is only the truth because we believe it to be so as we discovered it or believe it to be fact, therefore fantasy can technically be classed as the truth and thus real. The definition of truth from the dictionary is *"the true facts about something, rather than the things that have been invented or guessed"* (Oxford Learners Dictionaries, 2019) or *"the quality or state of being based on fact"*. The urban dictionary, a slang version of the dictionary with words compiled by many users with different meanings suggests that the truth is *"something which would probably upset a great many people if it were known and made public"* – *"truthfully speaking, most people have no idea of what the truth actually is"* (Gerbil, 2004). The truth is very difficult to define because of this, making reality and fantasy sometimes difficult to define and separate. Politicians create false statements posed as the truth and that is the reality of politics. On the contrary, fantasy is a fake, an untruth of what the world could be but usually is more likened to than that of an actual lie. This almost defines a lie as a fantasy which is likely where Steve Bell draws inspiration for his satirical artworks on politics, creating fantasy versions of Johnson and Corbyn with his interpretations of who they seem to be in his eyes. And, why Charlotte Edey's artworks and J. K. Rowling's

stories are seen as gentler pieces of work as they focus on the imagined worlds rather than pinpointing reality directly and discussing it. One can make their reality a fantasy and vice versa, it is only what you believe to see and conceive as real or imaginary.

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