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Tasks in the order I received them:

Task 1: Observational Writing = 547 words

Task 2: Exhibition Writing. = 542 words

Task 3: Manifesto Writing = 511 words

Task 1: Observational Writing

Semiotics in Politics

Every official political image that is released to the public has been carefully constructed to make us think and feel a certain way (Curtis, 2020).

Politics has taken on the powerful tool of Semiotics to manipulate the public, but we can use that tool ourselves, to dissect the political images we are presented with, and find the true meanings to the political images that we are bombarded with every day.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their use and interpretation.(Johansen and Larsen, 2002) The main ideas of Semiotics, the relationship between signs and the World, were explored by Plato and Aristotle. Semiotics, as we now call it, was founded by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, in the late 19th Century. Peirce worked on his ideas of Signs and Semiotics all of his life. In one of his many definitions of a sign, Peirce writes:

“I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the later is thereby mediately determined by the former.” (Atken, 2010)

Semiotics looks at the signifier and what is signified. The signifier is the physical form of a sign, such as a sound, word or image that creates communication. The signified is the concept that a signifier refers to. (Chandler, 2019) A blue face is the signifier and the signified could be that they are cold. The signified can change depending upon your culture. Humans connect feelings and memories to words, things, sounds, touch and smells. This is used in advertising and politics.

This is a photo of Boris Johnson from the 10th May 2020. He is announcing a lifting of lockdown measures to the Coronavirus.



Figure 1 Boris Johnson, 2020

The image shows a dishevelled Prime Minister standing at a podium placed in an open door of a wooden, panelled room, behind him two Union Jacks, in front, a very prominent incongruous sign. Johnson's dishevelled appearance is intentional and connotes a leader working very hard and being very concerned for his country, personal grooming has taken a step back, right down to his crooked tie. The flags connote loyalty to one's country. The panelled room signifies 'The Establishment,' order, education, a higher knowledge, imposing and quiet power.

The positioning of the podium in front of open doors, often seen in recent political images, may signify honesty and having nothing to hide. The sign at the front has a jumble of messages bordered with green (Dan Sabbagh 2020). The green is a metaphor for GO, go out, Stay alert, Control the Virus, Save Lives but mostly GO OUT. Green is the easiest sign on the board to translate.

The study of photography and Semiotics helps us to realise that all political images have been carefully crafted, to send us messages that, quite often, are not actually the messages spoken or written. The use of colour, signs, items in the foreground or background are used as

metaphors and signifiers; nothing is there by accident. By learning to deconstruct these images in a Semiotic way, we are empowering ourselves to understand what is being said to us through these political images.

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Task 2 – Exhibition Writing

The Tyranny of Consciousness

The Tyranny of Consciousness, by American Film maker and Video artist, Charles Atlas, is an installation on show at the Glynn Vivian in Swansea, as part of their Swansea Pride Exhibitions. (Glynn Vivian, 2020) Charles Atlas' long career has spanned over 40 years. He is well known for his experimental work with dance and film, creating a new language of his own called 'Media Dance,' which involves the camera moving in sequence with the dancer (Brown, 2016).

We are justified in being critical of Modern Art which only speaks of middle-class self-indulgence and superiority (Boyd, 2019). Realising that I am an artist, producing my own art and also studying art, is beginning to change my view on this. I entered this installation with low expectations.



Fig 1. The Tyranny of Consciousness by Charles Atlas, Glynn Vivian, (2020)

The room is dark, but for a large screen showing 44 sunsets, all setting at different times with waves lapping. There is a large digital clock, to the side of the screen, counting down from 18 minutes, which is also projected onto the floor. I sat on the long bench provided for viewers. A soundtrack is played of long harmonious notes and interspersed in this, there is a dialogue by Lady Bunny, a well-known New York Drag Queen. She talks about Feminism, the environment, but mostly she talks about poverty and how this is the real thing we should be fighting against. I strongly agree with this statement, which influenced my appreciation of the piece.

I sat through the whole piece and was deeply moved. The mix of the visuals on the screens with the dark backdrop and the sounds and musings, was very powerful. The counting down of the clock, reminded us of our fleeting unimportance. The intimate conversation from Lady Bunny were as the musings from an old wise woman and the beauty of the sea and the sunset spoke of the power and longevity of the Earth. Berger wrote:

“The relation to what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the Earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight” (Berger, 1972, p.7)

The installation engulfed me, sitting there I felt protected, accepted and hopeful. Gregg and Seigworth talk of how one is affected viscerally by things not just as solid facts but as potentials. (Seigwoth and Gregg, 2010)

For writing this essay, I watched the piece in different galleries on Youtube. (Youtube, 2020) How Glynn Vivian has presented this piece enhances it. It was in its own room, with no distractions and I was in there on my own. In other galleries, people were walking in front of the screen, talking, kids screaming. The power of the piece was getting emotionally lost in it. It took over all my senses, to the point that I was sad to leave. I am unsure if that impact would have been made in the other art galleries I saw videos of.

The Tyranny of Consciousness is a beautiful insight into thoughts of humanity and mortality but also our inconsequentiality. I strongly recommend everyone goes and sits with it for a while.



Fig 2. Lady Bunny, New York Drag Queen (2017)

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Task 3: Manifesto Writing

Sarah Grounds – An Artist's Manifesto

- 1. It's an artist's duty to be the voice for those who have no voice**
- 2. Emotional honesty is the foundation of all good art**
- 3. All exploration enriches my work for the better**
- 4. Photoshop is not photography**
- 5. Perfection is the thing that is flawed**
- 6. An artist is not their equipment**
- 7. Never follow, always lead**
- 8. When you no longer love what you do, stop**



A Manifesto is a valuable tool of clarification for artists. Many famous artists have written Manifestos, helping their audience to understand a little more, the intentions and visions of the artist (Harriot Baker, 2015)



Figure 2. Red Alen's Manifesto, Grayson Perry RA, 2014

My personal Manifesto is bold and firm. I try not to be overly rigid in my views but I have, for a few years, had pretty strong ideas behind my work. I have found writing a manifesto challenging; this is a side of myself that I try not to show.

Exploring 3 of my beliefs from my Manifesto

1. It's an artist's duty to be the voice for those who have no voice.

There is a strong history of art being used as political propaganda. I am particularly interested in the rise of Dada as a reaction to the First World War and the injustices of modern society. (Bru, Sascha, 2006) Art can highlight struggles that people are going through. The ethics of how this is done are much debated. I am interested in collaboration with the subject, like Anthony Luvera's work with people who have experienced homelessness (Turnball, Gemma-Rose, 2014). I am also interested in interactivity. By involving the audience in an art piece, the message of the work has a greater impact. The strongest impact my work could have is as

a direct response to political action, not representing any specific group, but being the voice of generally accepted ethics.



2. Emotional honesty is the foundation of all good art.

Alan de Botton said that Art can be a “communion around the dark elements of our lives” (De Botton, 2016). Sharing intimate moments of our lives through our art, we share the imperfections of life with our audience. John Ruskin’s suggestion that Culture should replace Scripture, in our increasingly secular world, rings true (Shrimpton, 2020). Our stories, songs, pictures and dances have always been ways of remembering the paths we have travelled and of guiding future generations. In British society we have lost our stories and songs, we have lost any moral compass from religion. People feel isolated, different, ashamed, alone; I feel isolated, different, ashamed, alone. Through art we can share that emotional load, artist and audience.



3.Perfection is the thing that is flawed.

“In reality there is nothing in the universe which is completely perfect or completely still; it is only in the minds of men that such concepts exist” (Juniper, 2003).

I hold the ideals behind the ancient Japanese art of Wabi Sabi. All of nature is beautiful, the disintegration and regeneration of nature, and life, is beautiful. There is no such thing as perfection in our natural World and so it is perfection itself which is fake. The fashion in photography at the moment is to strive for perfection. Editing technology allows the editor to create perfect fictions. Such photography has lost sight of the true beauty of the World and humanity. Because of this, I try to create my images, as much as possible, in camera and with minimal post editing.



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All other images are my own.