

Portfolio of Writing

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Programme of Study: B.A. Illustration

Module: Ways of Thinking (ADAD4018)

Tasks in the order I received them:

Task 1 – Reflective Writing: Do you know what you think?

(Jonathan Pugh) = 603 words

Task 2 – Observational writing: Identify an image and write a semiotic analysis.

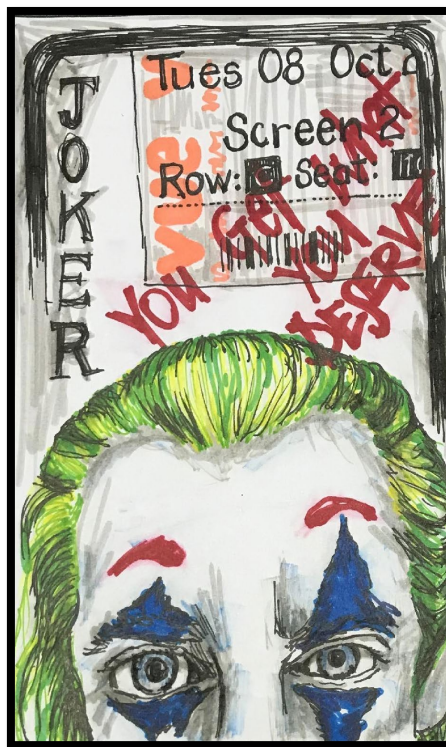
(Ryan Moule) = 561 words

Task 3 – Manifesto Writing: “What do you believe in?”

(Julia Lockheart) = 585 words

Contextual Practices Seminar Tutor: Martin Bush

Task 1 – Reflective Writing: Do you know what you think? (Jonathan Pugh's task)



Bullet Journal task, 'Things you've done this week'. Marker pen workshop.

K.McRobbie, October 2019

In this essay I will discuss how the character of the Joker has been reimagined in the film *Joker* (Todd Phillips, October 2019) using a structure inspired by Kolb's model for reflection. I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how this process of learning can inform creative practice.

When considering factors influencing the creation of this film several antecedents need to be examined. In *Batman Begins* (C. Nolan 2005), we see the origin story of Batman. *Joker* (T. Phillips, 2019) redresses an imbalance, developing an origin story for one of his main arch-enemies. Commercial

motivating factors would be the lucrative nature of the origin story market. On a creative level, it would be a highly appealing, career pinnacle challenge to recreate such iconic characters.

Looking specifically at the character of the Joker, the appeal of this character was perhaps initially underestimated by writers:

When the Joker first appeared in the pages of Batman on April 25, 1940, he was intended to be little more than a throwaway villain for the hero to face. Since his debut, the Joker has appeared in countless comics, TV shows, and films. He has become a cultural icon unlike any other and is recognized around the world.

(Ewald. 2017)

The Joker has certainly been among my favourite characters, having watched *Batman* (Lorenzo Semple Jr., William Dozier, 1966 – 1969) as a child and read graphic novels in later years. Illustrations by Dave McKean in Grant Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* (1990) are particularly inspirational, contributing to my desire to study Illustration. He's an anarchic character, dressing unconventionally and behaving outrageously. It's interesting to observe how he's been portrayed and how the key elements of this character have been developed.

In *Joker* (T. Phillips, 2019) we see Arthur Fleck's metamorphosis into the Joker. We watch Arthur's struggle as he attempts to integrate and be accepted by a society that abuses and rejects him. Pheonix's performance was a powerful portrayal of mental illness, revealing the depths of this protagonist and the circumstances which shaped him.

One effective aspect is the compelling narrative behind Joker's laughter, an iconic aspect of the character. We observe his inappropriate Tourette's like outbursts with increasing uneasiness. It's tortuous, uncontrollable, clearly causing Arthur pain. Aware of its' disparaging offensiveness, Arthur hands out well-thumbed cards explaining that he has 'a condition'. As the narrative unfolds, we appreciate that this maybe a remnant of a coping mechanism developed to deal with his childhood abuse.

The multi-faceted, complex development of the character and how that narrative unfolds is inspirational. This is not the betrayed mobster that fell into a vat of acid, or Cesar Romero's pantomime portrayal (*Batman*. Semple Jr. and Dozier, 1966 – 1969). The writers seem to have taken Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, revealing that Arthur's need for safety and security or love and belonging were not met. Inevitably leading to his self-actualisation as Joker.

Reflection and analysis helped me to consider the film on a deeper level. I've come to understand the enduring appeal of such characters, becoming modern day myths, representing good and evil. They have a longevity and perennial appeal, able to withstand reinterpretation.

Although there is little doubt that the Joker is often presented to the reader as the villain, or at times the sympathetic monster, this character bears an uncanny morphability.

(Ewald. 2017)

On a creative level, I've learnt the importance of retaining key elements of a character in maintaining continuity of the narrative. Audiences must recognise him; his styling must be familiar. The clown make-up, the maniacal smile, the signature outfit are all present despite having a new twist. As a burgeoning illustrator it's exciting to think that characters and narratives such as these are still open to future representation and development.

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Task 2 – Ryan Moule – Observational writing: Identify an image and write a semiotic analysis. 561

For my Semiotic analysis I have chosen to look at an illustration by John Holcroft. Holcroft is a successful illustrator who's created images for magazines and newspapers that include The Economist, Radio Times and The Guardian. He is highly successful and well-renowned for his provoking satirical images that comment on issues within today's society. His illustrations tackle issues such as inequalities in wealth and income, homelessness, election hacking and gender inequality. His work is instantly recognisable, using an orthographic projection layout, a muted colour palette and style reminiscent of vintage advertisements.



The image I've chosen was an uncommissioned, untitled editorial illustration found on his website, accompanying caption: "*Editorial illustration about how addictive 'likes' can be*". The image is in portrait format, focussing our attention on a group of objects on a table, lying diagonally across the illustration. The layout is in alignment with the rules of a triangular composition. A similar composition layout can be seen, employed landscape format in *Dogs Fighting in a Wooded Clearing*, by Frans Snyders (1650).



On first reading Holcroft's illustration shows blister packs and a bottle of tablets spilling out on a blue table. The colour of the bottle, its' lid and label emulate those seen on the traditional medicine bottles he's attempting to denote. This is also true with the blister packs of tablets. All objects have been

portrayed three-dimensionally, using shapes and designs we're familiar with. They lie, scattered on the surface, as they would, scattered over a table. Holcroft has used a predominantly complimentary colour combination. The colours have a grainy texture, akin to that of sugar paper. They're relatively desaturated and hues are somewhat muted, tinted towards white. This serves to flatten the image to a degree, emulating the style of posters from the 1950's such as Erberto Carboni's poster (see below), advertising Barilla pasta (1952).



On closer inspection we see that the tablets are in the shape of the Facebook 'like' symbol. Holcroft utilises the familiar prescription label format on the bottle, but here the medication's name is 'Facebook Likes', treating 'chronic low self-esteem', to be taken, 'as needed'. What's connoted here is that low self-esteem can be medicated with the artificial high of Facebook 'likes'. As a culture the addictive nature of social media is prevalent. We're more aware than ever before of the dangers of overuse, with studies finding,

...that greater use of the internet is associated with a decline in participants' communication with their family, a decline in the size of their social circle, and an increase in depression and loneliness.

(Kraut. 1998)

Universal Principles of Design, states that, "Generally desaturated colours are perceived as friendly and professional" (Lidwell et al. 2003). The 'friendly' nature of Holcroft's colour palette belies the message implied by the illustration. The scattered tablets and uncapped bottle symbolize the desperation of an addict, a metaphor for their need to get a 'fix'. Through analysis of the signs and metaphors we interpret the meaning of the illustration in the context of our sociocultural vocabulary of signs. If as Pierce states, "a sign is something by knowing which we know something more", the

signs here would be the facebook-like shaped medication and the ‘something more’ we know, would be the addictive nature of social media. Were we able to view this image in a pre-facebook decade, the facebook-like shaped tablets would be insignificant and meaningless.

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Art chakra manifesto

8. CROWN CHAKRA: I UNDERSTAND

According to Motoyama, the crown chakra represents “Spiritual, divine connection and higher consciousness”.

Inspiration and the drive to create are divine, spiritual gifts which we honour and embrace respectfully. We create in celebration of inspiration, in awe of its limitless, constantly evolving creativity.

7 THIRD EYE PINEAL CHAKRA: I SEE

The third eye chakra represents “clarity, openness and imagination”.

Education, the application of our skills and experiences with media are all key in developing imagination and openness to the artwork evolving a life of its own. Our skills, our abilities and the mastery of our craft become a vehicle for the expression of our ideas and emotions. We recognise that meaning and emotion can be developed on an unconscious level during the production of an artwork, often going beyond the artist’s original intentions, elevating the relevance and meaning of an artwork in a deeper, more universal realm.

6 THROAT CHAKRA: I SPEAK

The throat chakra represents “clear, effective communication”.

Interactions within sociological paradigms are in constant flux. Although we are products of our sociological, temporal ‘Thrownness’ (Heidegger); the values and ideas instilled in us by the societies from which we originate are not definitive and fixed. We aim to create artworks that are inclusive and considerate; nurturing cohesive ideals and values that promote enlightened co-existence, happiness and fulfilment.

5 THYMUS HIGHER HEART CHAKRA: I INTEND

The higher-heart chakra represents “intention, compassion and truth”.

We love Art and are in awe of its transformational power, to touch and change lives. We believe in using Art to transform ourselves, to free us from negative

patterns, situations and emotions. We are all for realising our potential and our ambitions; in using Art and inspiration to help us to find our true path, our meaning and purpose in life.

4 HEART CHAKRA: I LOVE

The heart chakra represents “love, self-love and relationships”.

We love learning, soul nourishing friendship, kindness, laughter, good times, conversation, providing hospitality and sharing. Sharing ideas, inspirations and spiritual learning with others on a similar path nourishes our soul's intention to be compassionate beings, on a lifelong journey of growth, expansion and self-actualisation.

3 SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA: I FEEL

The solar-plexus shakra represents “self-esteem, will power and personal responsibility”.

Cohesive society is a co-creation. We wish to promote this in our artworks. We will not work for employers involved in exploitation, racism and inequality. We aim to encourage and contribute in our own humble way to the personal transformation and self-actualisation of others by contributing our time to relevant projects and by contributing 5% pf our profits to fund a bursary for mature students seeking to reinvent themselves and reorient their lives through the study of Art.

2 SACRAL SHAKRA : I DO

The sacral chakra represents “the emotional body, creativity and sexual energies”.

Our consciousness, our experience, our journey through life is conducted on many planes that include the physical, spiritual and mental plane. We seek to enhance our progress on this journey, our creativity, our wellbeing and the wellbeing of others through spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation and yoga to focus, to connect, to awaken, inspire and evolve.

1 ROOT CHAKRA : I AM

The root chakra represents our “foundation, safety, security and stability”.

We love our magnificent planet; the diversity of its lifeforms, its natural environments and the beauty of nature's cycles are ever inspiring. Creating artworks that contribute in every way possible to maintaining the long-term health and in promoting a flourishing future for our planet and every living thing is of fundamental importance to us.

In composing my manifesto, I researched many artists that considered the spiritual nature of art. These included Kokoshka, Kandinsky, to the more contemporary Stuckist, and Holstee manifesto. However, it's the clarity in the words of Dr Wayne Dyer, a humble spiritual teacher of our time, that grabbed my attention,

I think of the word *inspiration* as meaning "being in-Spirit." When we're in-Spirit, we're inspired...and when we're inspired, it's because we're back in-Spirit, fully awake to Spirit within us. Being inspired is an experience of joy: we feel completely connected to our Source and totally on purpose; our creative juices flow.

(Dyer, 2006)

The format for the presentation of my manifesto points was inspired by Gilbert and George's, 'X Commandments', 1995. Initially I considered a prayer format to emphasise the spiritual aspect. However, I struck upon the energy centre structure, inspired by my daily meditation practise. It seemed the ideal format

to present my manifesto points, using the qualities each chakra represents to define each point.

I resonated powerfully with the words of Johannes Itten. In his work, *Analyses of Old Masters*, Itten states that,

Since the experience of Art is dependent upon [the] spiritual resonance of the soul, and since we cannot grasp the nature of the soul or spirit, we must say that this is a gift of God...a path through which He may communicate the divine breath to the human soul.

(Itten, 1921)

The crown art chakra statement aligns with this idea but is expanded upon in relation to creative practise. To act upon inspiration while the idea is fresh in our minds 'honours' the communication from the divine. In doing so, divine purpose unfolds the next step of our journey.



Watercolour of Medusa inspired during a meditation. K.McRobbie

The root art chakra refers to a love of nature and our planet. I see our role as respectful temporary inhabitants of our planet, and our personal responsibility must be to, “contribute ... to maintaining the long-term health ... of the planet”.

As an artist I will make every effort to use resources fully, avoiding wastefulness and the use of polluting products and harmful chemicals in the production of artworks. Wherever possible I aim to use recycled materials. In addition, this art chakra is a statement in deference to nature’s inspirational beauty.

“The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower” is a poem by Dylan Thomas (1952), that illustrates how nature has inspired both poetry and art. Inspired by this poem Ceri Richards created a series of painting and lithographs that represent the cyclical process of nature, the force of life that animates every living being.



(Richards, 1965)

The heart art chakra expresses our journey to self-love and the realisation of our potential.

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualisation.

(Maslow, 1968)

This art chakra alludes to the importance of relationships in facilitating our personal growth and development through the sharing of ideas; a hallmark of creative groups. Marinetti conveys the joy and excitement experienced from developing ideas with friends in the very opening of the Futurists manifesto, “We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose brass cupolas are bright as our souls...” (Marinetti, 1908)

For us however, it speaks about kindness in how we treat others, our love of companionship; sharing learning, laughter and love.

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