

Portfolio of Writing

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Tasks:

Manifesto

Word Count: 539

Observational Writing

Word Count: 495

Practice-Based Writing

Word Count: 516

Manifesto:

1. The state of the world is dire. We are headed towards societal collapse and irreversible runaway climate change that will kill and displace billions before the end of the century. There is a genocide going on that our government is complicit in. Same as the genocides that came before. The systems of power that dominate are destroying lives, our futures and our freedom.
2. Rest and healing are a form of resistance. I am exhausted from traumatic experiences that are common place in our societies and are part of a greater context of oppression. Capitalistic values demand my near constant productivity and I say no.
3. Creating is something inherent to human beings. It has been suppressed by the pillars of oppression that are foundational to modern societies and the dominant culture. Capitalism devalues what cannot be quickly and efficiently produced for profit, patriarchy devalues what cannot be 'rationally' and accurately measured and recorded- people's subjective experiences when looking at a piece of art for example, and white supremacy that values uniformity of culture and values and enforces this through suppression of cultures through forced assimilation, colonisation and genocide. Most peoples no longer have access to the means of their production nor the value they produce.
4. Modernity has severed many people's connection to community, land and nature. We are living and producing in a manner of extreme disbalance in which the global North exploits the global South.
5. We can learn, and have a remembering of different ways of being by observing indigenous cultures both historical and present. The majority of human evolution has been spent living in tribes of 50-100 living with deep knowledge and connection to place.
6. The idea of humanity progressing is propaganda. People living as hunter-gatherers were not primitive or 'less than'. They lead complex lives, rich with ceremony, and a deep understanding of the ecosystems they were a part of. I believe that we have a lot to learn from them. This superiority complex is a tenant to the culture and ideas that encourage domination over each other and other-than-human beings.
7. We are all traumatised. The environments we live in are not conducive to sustaining healthy lives, we are chronically disconnected from the world around us and forced to rely on systems that exploit without having the full capacity to comprehend our actions.

8. Explore creation as a form of spiritual practice and as a way to reconnect to nature by using ritual, ceremony, contemplation and use of natural tools and materials. Flow states associated with creating art soothe our dysregulated nervous systems and provide a healing modality for traumatic stress.

Living in modern industrial-consumer societies is inherently traumatising. Wonderfully and terrifyingly our brains have adapted to protect us through dissociation. (Fisher, 2017). This is re-enforced by the systems of oppression that disconnect us from the things that sustain us, deliberately weaken our resourcefulness and force us to rely on systems that exploit us.

Many modern humans are lost in pursuing grandiose individualism- something that wounds us and leaves us empty. The majority of us are stuck in a stage of arrested development due to our cultures not being healthy enough to sustain individuation and maturing into healthy adulthood. We cannot heal ourselves without reconnecting to the whole of what we are, part of nature, part of an interconnected network of life. Healing includes resting, expression, connecting to nature, finding community and showing up in solidarity for the others, both human and non-human, who are being harmed by systems of oppression through loving, courageous action (Plotkin, 2013).

Our lives are dominated by an anthropocentric culture that worships speed, technological progress, profits and convenience post-industrial revolution (Marinetti, 1909). This culture of oppression is fundamentally traumatising and as a result many people have wounded parts of themselves and have adapted to conform and survive (Schwartz, 2023).

The industrial-consumer period of human history is but a blink of an eye in the grand scheme of things however, as the vast majority of human evolutionary history has been spent as hunter-gatherer peoples leading complex lives, rich with ceremony, and a deep understanding of the ecosystems they were a part of. I want to tap into something inherent to our natures by learning from indigenous artists (whilst maintaining humility and an understanding of a history of colonial appropriation) as often art was inherently tied to many aspects of their lifestyles. Part of this includes creation as a form of spiritual practice and as a way to reconnect to nature by using ritual, ceremony, contemplation and use of natural tools and materials. I want to help myself and other's connect to something greater and harness the healing that comes with this.

This might mean running clay workshops for people, helping them create art imbued with power and individual meaning. Flow states associated with creating art soothe our dysregulated nervous systems and provide an important healing modality for traumatic stress (Porges, 2011). I also want to encourage people to discover parts of themselves that may have been repressed through the expressive medium of art (Schwartz, 2023) and immersion in a culture of connection and respect of land to facilitate different modes of being (Plotkin, 2013), both things that can trigger transformational change in people.

For example helping people make clay artworks using only the available tools in their local area, using native plants to impress patterns into clay, digging for clay on local land or using the ash of fallen wood to create glazes. Doing these things allow people to connect in a way they otherwise may never have done so to the other-than-humans that surround them geographically.

By further exploring the intersections of trauma, culture, art, and ecology I wish to deepen my own understanding of these complex issues and contribute to meaningful social and environmental change as well as helping others to do the same.

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Observational Writing:



Fig 1: Meta Quest 2 Billboard Advertisement for Virtual Reality Headset.

To conduct a semiotic analyses of the above image, I will be focusing on the signified- the meaning intended from a signifier, the code- a system used to create meaning, where semiotics, values and social structure connect, and the myth- the way in which certain signs contribute to certain ideologies in our societies. (Barthes, 1957).

The 3D billboard with the arm reaching out towards you and the space-travel theme portray a futuristic theme. The spaceman tied to a box portrays a likeness to being tied by an umbilical cord, reborn, leaving behind our mortal nature and mortal reality to become something new.

In recent years, advancements in technology have raised the possibility of extending human lifespan or even achieving digital immortality through technologies like cryonics, genetic engineering, and mind uploading. The transhumanist movement explores the potential for humans to transcend their biological limitations and achieve a form of immortality through technological means (More and Vita-More, 2013). The aggressive outreaching of the hand grasping towards the viewer to me communicates the idea of the inevitability of human progress and being pulled into a new reality- a transhumanist one.

White is the most prominent colour in the image, a colour often associated with cleanliness, simplicity, and technological advancement. In modern design and architecture, white spaces are frequently used to create a sense of minimalism and sleekness (Gage, 2009).

There are no living things in this image- even the spaceman is faceless, the helmet could be empty, a new frontier for the viewer to project themselves onto. This is a reflection of the notion in Western culture of nature and humans being separate instead of being one and of the same thing (Kesebir and Kesebir, 2017). This is closely tied to anthropocentrism and the ideology of conquering and 'taming' nature for human use (Machada de Olivera, 2021).

Space exploration is a code in and of itself – it is the very representation of the ideology of human progress. This idea of leaving our planet to conquer space as the epitome of achievement reveals deep set ideologies of colonisation (Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

The brand name Meta Quest signifies the myth of heroes, grand men who single-handedly save humanity, promoting an individualistic lens. The idea of transcendence of the individual player through technology, becoming something else, something of a different world through virtual reality.

Meta means to be self-aware. It can also mean to be situated beyond, more specialised or transforming (Merriam Webster, 2024). While I see this advertisement as an epitome of the disconnect that technology creates from nature, the cord tying the spaceman to the box could be likened to plugging

into a new reality. New beginnings, reborn to start afresh leaving your old life behind to live a new life in a different world. Something that may appeal to people who seek to escape a stressful life, of which there is an abundance of in our capitalist societies which are plagued by poor mental health (Mind, 2024).

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Practice-Based Writing:

I have chosen to look at how the word 'modernity' relates to this image of this ancient clay figure from Jomon period Japan. Modernity to me encapsulates the cultures, ways of thinking and ideologies that have built our modern societies. In the context of making this means mass-production, prioritising convenience, automation, worship of technological advancement, and in the larger context it means a society built upon and reliant on fossil fuels, domination over nature and environment and an extractive way of looking at things, built-in hierarchies and systems of oppression, supremacies of many kinds (anthroposupremacy, white supremacy, male supremacy, etc) and materials using concrete, metals, plastics, and electronics (Bendell, 2023).

The figure is from the late Jomon period Japan, a time before agriculture and rice-farming where people lived hunter-gatherer lifestyles. These people formed semi-permanent settlements in times of abundance and despite there being evidence of long-distance trading between communities, there is sparse evidence of conflict (Kobayashi et al, 2003). Hunter-gatherers live difficult lives and rely on a deep knowledge of flora and fauna as well as a direct reliance on the people around them, forming the basis of stronger communities and a societal structure that is egalitarian and non-hierarchical, something that contrasts modern societal structures. I feel inspired by this to connect more to the land that directly surrounds me and the people in my local communities.

I have expanded my practice to involve finding wild clay and I ran a clay workshop at an event as part of the Save Kilvey Hill campaign in Swansea, allowing the local community to make art out of clay dug from the hill itself.

The dogu figure below was made by one artist from start to finish and would have taken many hours of intricate work, despite the demands of a laborious lifestyle. To me it seems the process was potentially a personal form of worship and that the final piece has a spiritual significance. Mindfulness is the practice of developing awareness and can allow the space in your brain to slow down, contemplate and tune-in to the bigger picture. Art is considered by some as a mindfulness practice (Greenhalgh, 2015) and I try and connect mindfully to what I'm doing as I create.

The Jomon artist would have used natural materials from the earth- rope cords made of plant fibres and wild clay to be pit fired. An item that last millennia instead of being designed to break so a consumer will have to repurchase. This highlights the role of mindfulness and connection to the natural world in artistic practice, contrasting with modernity's focus on productivity, output and consumption. I feel strongly that in modernity nothing is sacred except perhaps profits. Not human life, not future generations, certainly not the objects we brazenly throw into landfill. I think we have a lot to gain from learning about Jomon lifestyles and the potential to learn respect for land and connection to our surroundings by doing so. By exploring and understanding ancient cultures like the Jomon, contemporary societies may find inspiration for more sustainable and harmonious ways of living.

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Fig 2: Dogu 'goggle-eyed' figurine, found in Kamegaoka, Aomori Prefecture from the late Jomon Period (Kobayashi et al, 2003).



Fig 3: Processing of wild clay dug from Kilvey Hill.



Fig 4: Sculpture I made using coil-building technique.



Fig 5: Jomon flame-pot inspired piece that I made.



Fig 6: Save Kilvey Hill wild clay workshop.